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St. Vincent
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Painted by J. Knowles Hare

Old Man Crabtree Tackles Marketing Swindles

TO THE LAST MAN

By Zane Grey

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK SPRADLING

XXII

COLTER—where—oh, where are you takin' me?" she found voice to cry out.

"By heaven, I don't know," he replied with strong, vibrant passion. "I was a fool not to carry you off long ago. But I waited. I was hopin' you'd love me! An' now that Isbel gang has corralled us, Somers seen the half-breed up on the rocks. An' Springer seen the rest of 'em sneakin' round. I run back after my hoss an' you."

"But Uncle Tad! We mustn't leave him alone," cried Ellen.

"We've got to," replied Colter grimly. "Tad shore won't worry you no more soon as Jean Isbel gits to him."

"Oh, let me stay," implored Ellen. "I will save him."

Colter laughed at the utter absurdity of her appeal and claim. Suddenly he set her down upon her feet. "Stand still," he ordered. Ellen saw his big bay horse, saddled, with pack and blanket, tied there in the shade of the spruce. With swift hands Colter untied him and mounted him, scarcely moving his piercing gaze from Ellen. He reached to grasp her. "Up with you! Put yo' foot in the stirrup!" His will, like his powerful arm, was irresistible for Ellen at that moment. She found herself swung up in front of him. Then the horse plunged away. What with the hard motion and Colter's iron grasp on her, Ellen was in a painful position. Her knees and feet came into violent contact with branches and snags.

HE GALLOPED the horse, tearing through the dense thicket of willows that served to hide the entrance to the side cañon, and when out in the larger and more open cañon he urged him to a run. Presently, when Colter put the horse to a slow rise of ground, thereby bringing him to a walk, it was just in time to save Ellen from a serious bruising. Again the sunlight appeared to shade over. They were in the pines.

Suddenly, with backward lunge, Colter halted the horse. Ellen heard a yell. She recognized Queen's voice.

"Turn back, Colter! Turn back!"

With an oath Colter wheeled his mount. "If I didn't run plumb into 'em," he ejaculated harshly. Scarcely had the goaded horse gotten a start when a shot rang out. Ellen felt a violent shock, as if her momentum had suddenly met with a check, and then she felt herself wrenched from Colter and the saddle and propelled into the air. She alighted on soft ground and thick grass and was unhurt, save for the violent wrench and shaking that had rendered her breathless. Before she could rise Colter was pulling at her, lifting her to her feet. She saw the horse lying with bloody head. Tall pines loomed all around. Another rifle cracked.

"Run!" hissed Colter, and he bounded off, dragging her by the hand. Another yell pealed out. "Here we are, Colter!" Again it was Queen's shrill voice. Ellen ran with all her might, her heart in her throat, her sight failing to record more than a blur of passing pines and a blank green wall of spruce. Then she lost her balance, was falling, yet could not fall because of that steel grip on her hand, and was dragged and finally carried into a dense shade. She was blinded. The trees whirled and faded. Voices and shots sounded far away. Then something black seemed to be wiped across her feeling.

It turned to gray, to moving blankness, to dim, hazy objects, spectral and tall, like blanketed trees, and when Ellen fully recovered consciousness she was being carried through the forest.

"Wal, little one, that was a close shave fer you," said Colter's hard voice, growing clearer. "Reckon yo' keelin' over was natural enough."

HE HELD her lightly in both arms, her head resting above his left elbow. Ellen saw his face as a gray blue, then taking sharper outline until it stood out distinctly pale and clammy, with eyes cold and wonderful in their intense flare. As she gazed upward Colter turned his head to look back through the woods, and his motion betrayed a keen, wild vigilance. The veins of his lean, brown neck stood out like whipcords.

Two comrades were stalking beside him. Ellen heard their stealthy steps, and she felt Colter sheer from one side or the other. They were proceeding cautiously, fearful of the rear, but not wholly trusting to the fore.

"Reckon we'd better go slow an' look before we leap," said one whose voice Ellen recognized as Springer's.

"Shore. That open slope ain't to my likin', with our Nez Percé friend prowlin' round," drawled Colter as he set Ellen down on her feet.

Another of the rustlers laughed. "Say, can't he twinkle through the forest? I had four shots at him. Harder to hit than a turkey runnin' crossways."

This facetious speaker was the evil-visaged, sardonic Somers. He carried two rifles and wore two belts of cartridges.

"Ellen, shore you ain't so daid white as you was," observed Colter, and he chuckled her under the chin with familiar hand. "Set down heah. I don't want you stoppin' any bullets. An' thar's no tellin'."

Ellen was glad to comply with this wish. She had begun to recover wits and strength, yet she still felt shaky. She observed that their position then was on the edge of a well-wooded slope from which she could see the grassy cañon floor below. They were on a level bench, projecting from the main cañon wall, which loomed gray and rugged and pine fringed. Somers and Colter and Springer gave careful attention to all points of the compass, especially in the direction from which they had come. They evidently anticipated being trailed or circled or headed off, but did not manifest much concern. Somers lit a cigarette. Springer wiped his face with a grimy hand and counted the shells in his belt, which appeared to be half empty. Colter stretched his long neck like a vulture and peered down the slope and through the forest aisles up toward the cañon rim.

"LISTEN," he said tersely, and bent his head a little to one side, ear to the slight breeze. They all listened. Ellen heard the beating of her heart, the rustle of leaves, the tapping of a woodpecker and faint, remote sounds that she could not name.

"Deer, I reckon," spoke up Somers.

"A-huh! Wal, I reckon they ain't trailin' us yit," replied Colter. "We gave 'em a shade better'n they sent us."

"Short an' sweet!" ejaculated Springer, and he removed his black sombrero to poke a dirty forefinger through a bullet hole in the crown. "Thet's how close I

come to cashin'. I was layin' behind a log listenin' an' watchin', an' when I stuck my haid up a little—zam! Somebody made my bonnet leak."

"Whar's Queen?" asked Colter.

"He was with me fust off," replied Somers. "An' then when the shootin' slacked—after I'd plugged that big, red-faced, white-haired pal of Isbel's—"

"Reckon thet was Blaisdell," interrupted Springer.

"Queen—he got tired layin' low," went on Somers. "He wanted action. I heerd him chewin' to himself, an' when I asked him what was eatin' him he up an' growled he was goin' to quit this Injun fightin'. An' he slipped off in the woods."

"Wal, thet's the gun fighter of it," declared Colter, wagging his head. "Ever since thet cowman Blue braced us an' said he was King Fisher, why, Queen has been sulkier an' sulkier. He'll do the same trick as Blue tried. An' shore he'll get his everlastin'. But he's the Texas breed all right."

"SAY, do you reckon Blue really is King Fisher?" queried Somers.

"Naw!" ejaculated Colter with downward sweep of his hand. "Many a would-be gun slinger has borrowed Fisher's name. But Fisher is daid these many years."

"A-huh! Wal, mebbe, but don't you fergit it—thet Blue was no would-be," declared Somers. "He was the genuine article."

"I should smile," affirmed Springer.

The subject irritated Colter, and he dismissed it with another forcible gesture and a counter question.

"How many left in thet Isbel outfit?"

"No tellin'. There shore was enough of 'em," replied Somers.

"Anyhow, the woods was full of flyin' bullets. Springer, did you account for any of 'em?"

"Nope—not thet I noticed," responded Springer dryly. "I had my chance at the half-breed. Reckon I was nervous."

"Was Slater near you when he yelled out?" asked Colter.

"No. He was lyin' beside Somers."

"Wasn't thet a queer way fer a man to act?" broke in Somers. "A bullet hit Slater, cut him down the back as he was lyin' flat. Reckon it wasn't bad. But it hurt him so thet he jumped right up an' staggered round. He made a target big as a tree. An' mebbe them Isbels didn't riddle him!"

"THET was when I got my crack at Bill Isbel," declared Colter with grim satisfaction. "When they shot my horse out from under me I had Ellen to think of an' couldn't git my rifle. Shore had to run, as you seen. Wal, as I only had my six-shooter, thar was nothin' fer me to do but lay low an' listen to the sping of lead. Wells was standin' up behind a tree about thirty yards off. He got plugged; an', fallin' over, he begun to crawl my way, still holdin' to his rifle. I crawled along the log to meet him. But he dropped about halfway. I went on an' took his rifle an' belt. When I peeped out from behind a spruce bush then I seen Bill Isbel. He was shootin' fast, an' all of 'em was shootin' fast. Thet was when they had the open shot at Slater. Wal, I bored Bill Isbel right through his middle. He dropped his rifle an', all bent double, he fooled round in a circle till he flopped over the rim. I reckon he's layin' right up thar



"Shore I Won't Stay Heah," Declared Ellen. "The Place Seems Haunted"

somewhere below that daid spruce. I'd shore like to see him."

"Wal, yu'd be as crazy as Queen if yu tried thet," declared Somers. "We're not out of the woods yit."

"I reckon not," replied Colter. "An' I've lost my hoss. Whar'd you leave yo's?" "They're down the cañon, below thet willow break, an' saddled an' none of 'em tied. Reckon we'll hev to look 'em up before dark."

"Colter, what're we goin' to do?" demanded Springer.

"Wait heah a while, then cross the cañon an' work round up under the bluff, back to the cabin."

"An' then what?" queried Somers, doubtfully eying Colter.

"We've got to eat; we've got to hev blankets," rejoined Colter testily. "An' I reckon we can hide thar an' stand a better show in a fight than runnin' for it in the woods."

"Wal, I'm givin' yu a hunch thet it looked like yu was runnin' fer it," retorted Somers.

"YES, an' packin' the girl," added Springer. "Looks funny to me."

Both rustlers eyed Colter with dark and distrustful glances. What he might have replied never transpired, for the reason that his gaze, always shifting round, had suddenly fixed on something.

"Is that a wolf?" he asked, pointing up to the rim. Both his comrades moved to get in line with his finger.

"Shore, thet's a big lofer," declared Somers. "Reckon he scented us."

"Thar he goes along the rim," observed Colter. "He doesn't act leary. Looks like a good sign to me. Mebbe the Isbels have gone the other way."

"Looks bad to me," rejoined Springer gloomily.

"An' why?" demanded Colter. "I seen thet animal. Fust time I reckoned it was a lofer. Second time it was right near them Isbels. An' I'm damned now if I don't believe it's thet half-lofer sheep dog of Gass Isbel's."

"Wal, what if it is?"

"Ha! Shore we needn't worry about hidin' out," replied Springer sententiously. "With thet dog Jean Isbel could trail a grasshopper."

Manifestly such a possibility put a different light upon the present situation. The men grew silent and watchful, occupied by brooding thoughts and vigilant surveillance of all points. Somers slipped off into the brush, soon to return, with intent look of importance.

"I heerd somethin'," he whispered, jerking his thumb backwards. "Rollin' gravel—crackin' of twigs. No deer! Reckon it'd be a good idee for us to slip round acrost this bench."

"Wal, yu fellars go an' I'll watch heah," returned Colter.

"Not much," said Somers, while Springer leered knowingly.

Colter became incensed, but he did not give way to it. Pondering a moment, he finally turned to Ellen.

"YU WAIT heah till I come back. An' if I don't come in reasonable time yu slip across the cañon an' through the willows to the cabins. Wait till about dark."

With that he possessed himself of one of the extra rifles and belts and silently joined his comrades. Together they noiselessly stole into the brush.

Ellen had no other thought than to comply with Colter's wishes. There was her wounded uncle, who had been left unattended, and she was anxious to get back to him. Besides, if she had wanted to run off from Colter, where could she go? Alone in the woods she would get lost and die of starvation. Her lot must be cast with the Jorth faction until the end.

Her strained attention and suspense made the moments fly. By and by several shots pealed out far across the side cañon

on her right, and they were answered by reports sounding closer to her. The fight was on again. But these shots were not repeated. The flies buzzed; the hot sun beat down and sloped to the west; the soft, warm breeze stirred the aspens; the ravens croaked; the red squirrels and blue jays chattered.

Suddenly a quick, short yelp electrified Ellen—brought her upright with sharp,

her and she had been dragged away she had not recovered from fear of the Isbels. But calm consideration now convinced her that she could hardly be in a worse plight in their hands than if she remained in Colter's. So she started out to find the dog.

The wooded bench was level for a few hundred yards, and then it began to

him, attesting to his fall from above. He had on neither coat nor hat, and the position of his body and limbs suggested broken bones. As Ellen hurried to his side she saw that the front of his shirt, low down, was a bloody blotch. But he could lift his head—his eyes were open, and he was perfectly conscious. Ellen did not recognize the dusty-skinned face, yet the mold of features, the look of the eyes seemed strangely familiar.

"Yu're—Jorth's—girl," he said in faint voice of surprise.

"Yes, I'm Ellen Jorth," she replied. "An' are you Bill Isbel?"

"All thet's left of me.—But I'm thankin' God somebody come—even a Jorth."

ELLEN knelt beside him and examined the wound in his abdomen. A heavy bullet had indeed, as Colter had avowed, torn clear through his middle. Even if he had not sustained other serious injury from the fall over the cliff, that terrible bullet wound meant death very shortly. Ellen shuddered. How inexplicable were men! How cruel, bloody, mindless!

"Isbel, I'm sorry—there's no hope," she said low voiced. "You've not long to live. I can't help you. God knows I'd do so if I could."

"All over!" he sighed, with his eyes looking beyond her. "I reckon—I'm glad. But yu can—do somethin' for me—will yu?"

"Indeed, yes. Tell me," she replied, lifting his dusty head onto her knee. Her hands trembled as she brushed his wet hair back from his clammy brow.

"I've somethin'—on my conscience," he whispered.

The woman in Ellen understood and pitied him then.

"Yes," she encouraged him.

"I stole cattle—my dad's an' Blaisdell's—an' made deals—with Daggs. All the crookedness—wasn't on—Jorth's side. I want—my brother Jean—to know."

"I'll try—to tell him," whispered Ellen out of her great amaze.

"We were all—a bad lot—except Jean," went on Isbel. "Dad wasn't fair. How he hated Jorth! Jorth, yes, who was—yo' father. Wal, they're even now."

"How so?" faltered Ellen.

"Yo' father killed dad. At the last—dad wanted to—save us. He sent word—he'd meet him—face to face—an' let thet end the feud. They met out in the road. But someone shot dad down—with a rifle—an' then yo' father finished him."

"AN' THEN, Isbel," added Ellen with unconscious, mocking bitterness, "your brother murdered my dad!"

"What!" whispered Bill Isbel. "Shore yu've got—it wrong. I reckon Jean—could hev killed—yo' father. But he didn't. Queer, we all thought."

"Ah! Who did kill my father?" burst out Ellen, and her voice rang like great hammers at her ears.

"It was Blue. He went in the store—alone—faced the whole gang alone. Bluffed 'em—taunted 'em—told 'em he was King Fisher. Then he killed—yo' dad—an' Jackson Jorth. Jean was out—back of the store. We were out—front. Thar was shootin'. Colmor was hit. Then Blue run out—bad hurt. Both of 'em—died in Meeker's yard."

"An' so Jean Isbel has not killed a Jorth!" said Ellen in a strange, deep voice.

"No," replied Isbel earnestly. "I reckon this feud—was hardest on Jean. He never lived heah. An' my sister Ann said—he got sweet on yu. Now did he?"

Slow, stinging tears filled Ellen's eyes, and her head sank low and lower.

"Yes—he did," she murmured tremulously.

"A-huh! Wal, thet accounts," replied Isbel wonderingly. "Too bad! It might hev been. A man always sees—different when—he's dyin'. If I had—my life—to



Ellen Did Not Recognize the Dusty-Skinned Face, Yet the Mold of Features, the Look of the Eyes Seemed Strangely Familiar

listening rigidity. Surely it was not a wolf, and hardly could it be a coyote. Again she heard it. The yelp of a sheep dog! She had heard that often enough to know. And she rose to change her position so she could command a view of the rocky bluff above. Presently she espied what really appeared to be a big timber wolf. But another yelp satisfied her that it really was a dog. She watched him. Soon it became evident that he wanted to get down over the bluff. He ran to and fro and then out of sight. In a few moments his yelp sounded from lower down, at the base of the bluff, and it was now the cry of an intelligent dog that was trying to call someone to his aid. Ellen grew convinced that the dog was near where Colter had said Bill Isbel had plunged over the declivity. Would the dog yelp that way if the man was dead? Ellen thought not.

No one came, and the continuous yelping of the dog got on Ellen's nerves. It was a call for help, and finally she surrendered to it. Since her natural terror when Colter's horse was shot from under

heave in rugged, rocky bulges up toward the rim. It did not appear far to where the dog was barking, but the latter part of the distance proved to be a hard climb over jumbled rocks and through thick brush. Panting and hot, she at length reached the base of the bluff, to find that it was not very high.

The dog espied her before she saw him, for he was coming toward her when she discovered him. Big, shaggy, grayish white and black, with wild, keen face and eyes, he assuredly looked the reputation Springer had accorded him. But sagacious, guarded as was his approach, he appeared friendly.

"Hello—doggy," panted Ellen as the animal halted. "What's—wrong—up heah?"

He yelped, his ears lost their stiffness, his body sank a little and his bushy tail wagged to and fro. What a clear, intelligent look he gave her! Then he trotted back.

Ellen followed him round a corner of bluff, to see the body of a man lying on his back. Fresh earth and gravel lay about

live over agin! My poor kids—deserted in their babyhood—ruined for life! All for nothin'. May God forgive —"

Then he choked and whispered for water.

Ellen laid his head back and, rising, she took his sombrero and started hurriedly down the slope, making dust fly and rocks roll. Her mind was a seething ferment. Leaping, bounding, sliding down the weathered slope, she gained the bench, to run across that and so on down into the open cañon to the willow-bordered brook. Here she filled the sombrero with water and started back, forced now to walk slowly and carefully. It was then, with the violence and fury of intense muscular activity denied her, that the tremendous import of Bill Isbel's revelation burst upon her very flesh and blood, transfiguring the very world of golden light and azure sky and speaking forest land that encompassed her.

Not a drop of the precious water did she spill. Not a misstep did she make. Yet so great was the spell upon her that she was not aware she had climbed the steep slope until the dog yelped his welcome. Then, with all the flood of her emotion surging and resurging, she knelt to allay the parching thirst of this dying enemy whose words had changed frailty to strength, hate to love and gloomy despair to something unutterable. But she had returned too late. Bill Isbel was dead.

XXIII

JEAN ISBEL, holding the wolf dog Shepp in leash, was on the trail of the most dangerous of Jorth's gang, the gunman Queen. Dark drops of blood on the stones and plain tracks of a rider's sharp-heeled boots behind covets indicated the trail of a wounded, slow-traveling fugitive. Therefore Jean Isbel held in the dog and proceeded with the wary eye and watchful caution of an Indian.

Queen, true to his class, and emulating Blue with the same magnificent effrontery and with the same paralyzing suddenness of surprise, had appeared as if by magic at the last-night camp of the Isbel faction. Jean had seen him first, in time to leap like a panther into the shadow. But he carried in his shoulder Queen's first bullet of that

terrible encounter. Upon Gordon and Fredericks fell the brunt of Queen's fusillade. And they, shot to pieces, staggering and falling, held passionate grip on life long enough to draw and still Queen's guns and send him reeling off into the darkness of the forest.

UNARMED and hindered by a painful wound, Jean had kept a vigil near camp all that silent and menacing night. Morning disclosed Gordon and Fredericks stark and ghastly beside the burned-out camp fire, their guns clutched immovably in stiffened hands. Jean buried them as best he could, and when they were underground, with flat stones on their graves, he knew himself to be indeed the last of the Isbel clan. And all that was wild and savage in his blood and desperate in his spirit rose to make him more than man and less than human. Then for the third time during these tragic past days the wolf dog Shepp came to him.

Jean washed the wound Queen had given him and bound it tightly. The keen pang and burn of the lead was a constant and all-powerful reminder of the grim work left for him to do. The whole world was no longer large enough for him and whoever was left of the Jorths. The heritage of blood his father had bequeathed him, the unshakable love for a worthless girl who had so dwarfed and obstructed his will and so bitterly defeated and reviled his poor, romantic, boyish faith, the killing of hostile men, so strange in its after effects, the pursuits and fights and loss of one by one of his confederates—these had finally engendered in Jean Isbel a wild, unslakable thirst, these had been the cause of his retrogression, these had unalterably and ruthlessly fixed in his darkened mind one fierce passion: to live and die the last man of that Jorth-Isbel feud.

At sunrise Jean left this camp, taking with him only a small knapsack of meat and bread, and with the eager, wild Shepp in leash he set out on Queen's bloody trail.

Black drops of blood on the stones and an irregular trail of footprints proved to Jean that the gunman was hard hit. Here he had fallen, or knelt, or sat down, evidently to bind his wounds. Jean found

strips of scarf, red and discarded, and the blood drops failed to show on more rocks. In a deep forest of spruce, under silver-tipped, spreading branches, Queen had rested; perhaps slept. Then, laboring with dragging steps, not improbably with a lame leg, he had gone on, up out of the dark green ravine to the open, dry, pine-tipped ridge. Here he had rested; perhaps waited to see if he were pursued. From that point his trail spoke an easy language for Jean's keen eye. The gunman knew he was pursued. He had seen his enemy. Therefore Jean proceeded with a slow caution, never getting within revolver range of ambush, using all his woodcraft to trail this man and yet save himself. Queen traveled slowly, either because he was wounded or else because he tried to ambush his pursuer, and Jean accommodated his pace to that of Queen. From noon of that day they were never far apart, never out of hearing of a rifle shot.

The contrast of the beauty and peace and loneliness of the surroundings to the nature of Queen's flight often obtruded its strange truth into the somber turbulence of Jean's mind, into that fixed columnar idea round which fleeting thoughts hovered and gathered like shadows.

EARLY frost had touched the heights with its magic wand, and the forest seemed a temple in which man might worship Nature and life rather than steal through the dells and under the arched aisles like a beast of prey. The green and gold leaves of aspens quivered in the glades; maples in the ravines fluttered their red and purple leaves. The needle-matted carpet under the pines vied with the long lanes of silvery grass, alike enticing to the eye of man and beast. Sunny rays of light, flecked with dust and flying insects, slanted down from the overhanging, brown-limbed, green-matted foliage. Roar of wind in the distant forest alternated with soft breeze close at hand. Small dove-gray squirrels ran all over the woodland, very curious about Jean and his dog, rustling the twigs, scratching the bark of trees, chattering and barking, frisky, saucy and bright-eyed. A plaintive twitter of wild canaries came from the region above the tree tops, first voices of birds in their pilgrimage toward the

South. Pine cones dropped with soft thuds. The blue jays followed these intruders in the forest, screeching their displeasure. Like rain pattered the dropping seeds from the spruces. A woody, earthy, leafy fragrance, damp with the current of life, mingled with a cool, dry, sweet smell of withered grass and rotting pines.

Solitude and lonesomeness, peace and rest, wild life and Nature reigned there. It was a golden-green region enchanting to the gaze of man. An Indian would have walked there with his spirits.

EVEN as Jean felt all this elevating beauty and inscrutable spirit his keen eye once more fastened upon the blood-red drops Queen had again left on the gray moss and rock. His wound had reopened. Jean felt the thrill of the scenting panther.

The sun set; twilight gathered; night fell. Jean crawled under a dense, low-spreading spruce, ate some bread and meat, fed the dog and lay down to rest and sleep. His thoughts burdened him, heavy and black as the mantle of night. A wolf mourned a hungry cry for a mate. Shepp quivered under Jean's hand. That was the call which had lured him from the ranch. The wolf blood in him yearned for the wild. Jean tied the cowhide leash to his wrist. When this dark business was at an end Shepp could be free to join the lonely mate mourning out there in the forest. Then Jean slept.

Dawn broke cold, clear, frosty, with silvered grass sparkling, with a soft, faint rustling of falling aspen leaves. When the sun rose red Jean was again on the trail of Queen. By a frosty-ferned brook, where water tinkled and ran clear as air and cold as ice, Jean quenched his thirst, leaning on a stone that showed drops of blood. Queen, too, had to quench his thirst. What good, what help, Jean wondered, could the cold, sweet, granite water, so dear to woodsmen and wild creatures, do this wounded, hunted rustler? Why did he not wait in the open to fight and face the death he had meted? Where was that splendid and terrible daring of the gunman? Queen's love of life dragged him on and on, hour by hour, through the pine groves and spruce woods, through the oak swales and aspen

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Scarcely Had the Goaded Horse Gotten a Start When a Shot Rang Out



The Time Came When Jean Espied Queen, Far Ahead and Above, Crawling Like a Black Bug Along the Bright Green Slope

TO THE LAST MAN

(Continued from Page 15)

glades, up and down the gorges, round the windfalls and over the rotting logs.

The time came when Queen tried no more ambush. He gave up trying to trap his pursuer by lying in wait. He gave up trying to conceal his tracks. He grew stronger or, in desperation, increased his energy, so that he redoubled his progress through the wilderness. That, at best, would count only a few miles a day. And he began to circle to the northwest, back toward the deep cañon where Blaisdell and Bill Isbel had reached the end of their trails. Queen had evidently left his comrades, had lone-handed it in his last fight, but was now trying to get back to them. Somewhere in these wild, deep forest brakes the rest of the Jorth faction had found a hiding place. Jean let Queen lead him there.

ELLEN JORTH would be with them. Jean had seen her. It had been his shot that killed Colter's horse. He had withheld further fire because Colter had dragged the girl behind him, protecting his body with hers. Sooner or later Jean would come upon their camp. She would be there. The thought of her dark beauty, wasted in wantonness upon these rustlers, added a deadly rage to the blood lust and righteous wrath of his vengeance. Let her again flaunt her degradation in his face and, by the honor and faith she had forsaken, he would kill her and so end the race of Jorths!

Another night fell, dark and cold, without starlight. The wind moaned in the forest. Shepp was restless. He sniffed the air. There was a step on his trail. Again a mournful, eager, wild and hungry wolf cry broke the silence. It was deep and low, like that of a baying hound, but infinitely wilder. Shepp strained to get away. During the night, while Jean slept, he managed to chew the cowhide leash apart and run off.

Next day no dog was needed to trail Queen. Fog and low-drifting clouds in the forest and a misty rain had put the rustler off his bearings. He was lost, and showed that he realized it. Strange how a matured man, fighter of a hundred battles, steeped in bloodshed and on his last stand, should grow panic-stricken upon being lost! So Jean Isbel read the signs of the trail.

XXIV

THROUGH the foggy, dripping forest Queen circled and wandered until he headed down into a cañon. It was one that notched the Rim, and led down and down, mile after mile, into the basin. Not soon had Queen discovered his mistake. When he did so night overtook him.

The weather cleared before morning. Red and bright the sun burst out of the east to flood that low basin land with light. Jean found that Queen had traveled on and on, hoping, no doubt, to regain what he had lost. But in the darkness he had climbed to the manzanita slopes instead of back up the cañon, and here he had fought the hold of that strange brush of Spanish name until he fell exhausted.

Surely Queen would make his stand and wait somewhere in this devilish thicket for Jean to catch up with him. Many and many a place Jean would have chosen had he been in Queen's place. Many a rock and dense thicket Jean circled or approached with extreme care. Manzanita grew in patches that were impenetrable except for a small animal. The brush was a few feet high—seldom so high that Jean could not

look over it—and of a beautiful appearance, having glossy small leaves, a golden berry and branches of dark red color. These branches were tough and unbendable. Almost every bush had low branches that were dead, hard as steel, sharp as thorns, as clutching as cactus. Progress was possible only by endless detours to find the half-closed aisles between patches, or else by crashing through with main strength or walking right over the tops. Jean preferred this last method, not because it was the easiest, but for the reason that he could see ahead so much farther. So he literally walked across the tips of the manzanita brush. Often he fell through and had to step up again; many a branch broke with him, letting him down; but for the most part he stepped from fork to fork, on branch after branch, with the balance of an Indian and the patience of a man whose purpose was sustaining and immutable.

ON THAT south slope under the Rim the sun beat down hot. There was no breeze to temper the dry air, and before midday Jean was laboring, wet with sweat, parching with thirst, dusty and hot and tiring. The doggedness and tenacity of life shown by this wounded rustler amazed him. The time came when under the burning rays of the sun he was compelled to abandon the walk across the tips of the manzanita bushes and take to the winding open threads that ran between. It would have been poor sight indeed that could not have followed Queen's labyrinthine and broken passage through the brush. Then the time came when Jean espied Queen, far ahead and above, crawling like a black bug along the bright green slope. Sight then acted upon Jean as upon a hound in the chase. But he governed his actions if he could not govern his instincts. Slowly but surely he followed the dusty, hot trail, and never a patch of blood failed to send a thrill along his veins.

Queen, headed up toward the Rim, finally vanished from sight. Had he fallen? Was he hiding? But the hour disclosed that he was crawling. Jean's keen eye caught the slow moving of the brush and enabled him to keep just so close to the rustler, out of range of the six-shooters he carried. And so all the interminable hours of the hot afternoon that snail-pace flight and pursuit kept on.

Halfway up to the Rim the growth of manzanita gave place to an open, yellow, rocky slope dotted with cedars. Queen took to a slowly ascending ridge and left his bloody tracks all the way to the top, where in the gathering darkness the weary pursuer lost them.

ANOTHER night passed. Daylight was relentless to the rustler. He could not hide his trail. But somehow in a desperate last rally of strength he reached a point on the heavily timbered ridge that Jean recognized as being near the scene of the fight in the cañon. Queen was nearing the rendezvous of the rustlers. Jean crossed tracks of horses, and then more tracks that he was certain had been made days past by his own party. To the left of this ridge must be the deep cañon that had frustrated his efforts to catch up with the rustlers on the day Blaisdell lost his life, and probably Bill Isbel too. Something warned Jean that he

was nearing the end of the trail, and an unaccountable sense of imminent catastrophe seemed foreshadowed by vague dreads and doubts in his gloomy mind. Jean felt the need of rest, of food, of ease from the strain of the past weeks. But his spirit drove him implacably.

Queen's rally of strength ended at the edge of an open, bald ridge that was bare of brush or grass and was surrounded by a line of forest on three sides and on the fourth by a low bluff which raised its gray head above the pines. Across this dusty open Queen had crawled, leaving unmistakable signs of his condition. Jean took a long survey of the circle of trees and of the low, rocky eminence, neither of which he liked. It might be wiser to keep to cover, Jean thought, and work round to where Queen's trail entered the forest again. But he was tired and gloomy, and his eternal vigilance was failing. Nevertheless, he stilled for the thousandth time that bold prompting of his vengeance; and, taking to the edge of the forest, he went to considerable pains to circle the open ground. And suddenly the sight of a man sitting back against a tree halted Jean.

He stared to make sure his eyes did not deceive him. Many times stumps and snags and rocks had taken on strange resemblances to a standing or crouching man. This was only another suggestive blunder of the mind behind his eyes—what he wanted to see he imagined he saw. Jean glided on from tree to tree until he made sure that this sitting image indeed was that of a man. He sat bolt upright, facing back across the open, hands resting on his knees, and closer scrutiny showed Jean that he held a gun in each hand.

Queen! At the last his nerve had revived. He could not crawl any farther, he could never escape, so with the courage of fatality he chose the open, to face his foe and die. Jean had a thrill of admiration for the rustler. Then he stalked out from under the pines and strode forward with his rifle ready.

A WATCHING man could not have failed to espy Jean. But Queen never made the slightest move. Moreover, his stiff, unnatural position struck Jean so singularly that he halted with a muttered exclamation. He was now about fifty paces from Queen, within range of those small guns. Jean called sharply, "Queen!" Still the figure never relaxed in the slightest.

Jean advanced a few more paces, rifle up, ready to fire the instant Queen lifted a gun. The man's immobility brought the cold sweat to Jean's brow. He stopped to bend the full, intense power of his gaze upon this inert figure.

Suddenly over Jean flashed its meaning. Queen was dead. He had backed up against the pine, ready to face his foe, and he had died there. Not a shadow of a doubt entered Jean's mind as he started forward again. He knew. After all Queen's blood would not be on his hands. Gordon and Fredericks in their death throes had given the rustler mortal wounds. Jean kept on, marveling the while. How ghastly thin and hard! Those four days of flight had been hell for Queen.

Jean reached him—looked down with staring eyes. The guns were tied to his hands. Jean started violently as the

whole direction of his mind shifted. A lightning glance showed that Queen had been propped against the tree; another showed boot tracks in the dust.

"By heaven, they've fooled me!" hissed Jean, and quickly as he leaped behind the pine he was not quick enough to escape the cunning rustlers who had waylaid him thus. He felt the shock, the bite and burn of lead before he heard a rifle crack. A bullet had ripped through his left forearm. From behind the tree he saw a puff of white smoke along the face of the bluff, the very spot his keen and gloomy vigilance had descried as one of menace. Then several puffs of white smoke and ringing reports betrayed the ambush of the tricksters. Bullets barked the pine and whistled by. Jean saw a man dart from behind a rock and, leaning over, run for another. Jean's swift shot stopped him midway. He fell, got up and floundered behind a bush, scarcely large enough to conceal him. Into that bush Jean shot again and again. He had no pain in his wounded arm, but the sense of the shock clung in his consciousness, and this, with the tremendous surprise of the deceit and sudden release of long-dammed, overmastering passion, caused him to empty the magazine of his rifle in a terrible haste to kill the man he had hit.

THESE were all the loads he had for his rifle. Blood passion had made him blunder. Jean cursed himself, and his hand moved to his belt. His six-shooter was gone. The sheath had been loose. He had tied the gun fast. But the strings had been torn apart. The rustlers were shooting again. Bullets thudded into the pine and whistled by. Bending carefully, Jean reached one of Queen's guns and jerked it from his hand. The weapon was empty. Both of his guns were empty. Jean peeped out again to get the line in which the bullets were coming; and, marking a course from his position to the cover of the forest, he ran with all his might. He gained the shelter. Shrill yells behind warned him that he had been seen, that his reason for flight had been guessed. Looking back, he saw two or three men scrambling down the bluff. Then the loud neigh of a frightened horse pealed out.

Jean discarded his useless rifle and headed down the ridge slope, keeping to the thickest line of pines and sheering round the clumps of spruce. As he ran his mind whirled with grim thoughts of escape, of his necessity to find the camp where Gordon and Fredericks were buried, there to procure another rifle and ammunition. He felt the wet blood dripping down his arm, yet no pain. The forest was too open for good cover. He dared not run uphill. His only course was ahead, and that soon ended in an abrupt declivity too precipitous to descend. As he halted, panting for breath, he heard the ring of hoofs on stone, then the thudding beat of running horses on soft ground. The rustlers had sighted the direction he had taken.

Jean did not waste time to look. Indeed there was no need, for as he bounded along the cliff to the right a rifle cracked and a bullet whizzed over his head. It lent wings to his feet. Like a deer he sped along, leaping cracks and logs and rocks, his ears filled by the rush of wind, until his quick eye caught sight of thick-growing spruce foliage close to the precipice. He sprang down into the green mass. His weight precipitated him through the upper

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branches. But lower down his spread arms broke his fall, then retarded it until he caught. A long, swaying limb let him down and down, where he grasped another and a stiffer one that held his weight. Hand over hand he worked toward the trunk of this spruce; and, gaining it, he found other branches close together down which he hastened hold by hold and step by step, until all above him was black, dense foliage and beneath him the brown, shady slope. Sure of being unseen from above, he glided noiselessly down under the trees.

Passing on to a gray-lichened cliff, overhanging and gloomy, he paused there to rest and to listen. A faint crack of hoof on stone came to him from above, apparently farther on to the right. Eventually his pursuers would discover that he had taken to the cañon. But for the moment he felt safe. The wound in his forearm drew his attention. The bullet had gone clear through without breaking either bone. His shirt sleeve was soaked with blood. Jean rolled it back and tightly wrapped his scarf round the wound; yet still the dark-red blood oozed out and dripped down into his hand. He became aware of a dull, throbbing pain.

NOT much time did Jean waste in arriving at what was best to do. For the time being he had escaped; and, whatever had been his peril, it was past. In dense, rugged country like this he could not be caught by rustlers. But he had only a knife left for a weapon, and there was very little meat in the pocket of his coat. Salt and matches he possessed. Therefore the imperative need was for him to find the last camp, where he could get rifle and ammunition, bake bread and rest up before taking again the trail of the rustlers. He had reason to believe that this cañon was the one where the fight on the rim, and later on a bench of woodland below, had taken place.

Thereupon he arose and glided down under the spruces toward the level, grassy open he could see between the trees. As he proceeded, with the slow step and wary eye of an Indian, his mind was busy.

Queen had in his flight unerringly worked in the direction of this cañon until he became lost in the fog; and upon regaining his bearings he had made a wonderful and heroic effort to surmount the manzanita slope and the Rim and find the rendezvous of his comrades. But he had failed up there on the ridge. In thinking it over Jean arrived at a conclusion that Queen, finding he could go no farther, had waited, guns in hands, for his pursuer. And he had died in this position. Then by strange coincidence his comrades had happened to come across him and, recognizing the situation, they had taken the shells from his guns and propped him up with the idea of luring Jean on. They had arranged a cunning trick and ambush, which had all but snuffed out the last of the Isbels. Colter probably had been at the bottom of this crafty plan. Since the fight at the Isbel ranch, now seemingly far back in the past, this man Colter had loomed up more and more as a stronger and more dangerous antagonist than either Jorth or Daggs. Before that he had been little known to any of the Isbel faction. And it was Colter now who controlled the remnant of the gang and who had Ellen Jorth in his possession.

THE cañon wall above Jean, on the right, grew more rugged and loftier, the one on the left began to show wooded slopes and brakes, and at last a wide expanse with a winding willow border on the west and a long, low, pine-dotted bench on the east. Somewhere in this vicinity was the hiding place of the rustlers.

Thereupon Jean proceeded with the utmost stealth, absolutely certain that he would miss no sound, movement, sign or anything unnatural to the wild peace of the cañon. And his first sense to register something was his keen smell. Sheep! He was amazed to smell sheep. Next he heard faint tinkle of bells, and at length, when he could see farther into the open enlargement of the cañon, his surprised gaze fell upon an immense, gray, woolly patch that blotted out acres and acres of grass.

Thousands of sheep were grazing there. Jean knew there were several flocks of Jorth's sheep on the mountain in the care of herders, but he had never thought of them being so far west, more than twenty miles from Chevelon Cañon. His roving eyes could not descry any herders or dogs. But he knew there must be dogs close to that

immense flock; and, whatever his cunning, he could not hope to elude the scent and sight of shepherd dogs. Turning at once he started to glide back. But almost immediately he was brought stock-still and thrilling by the sound of hoofs.

Horses were coming in the direction he wished to take. They were close. His swift conclusion was that the men who had pursued him up on the rim had worked down into the cañon. One circling glance showed him that he had no sure covert near at hand. It would not do to risk their passing him there. The border of woodland was narrow and not dense enough for close inspection. He was forced to turn back up the cañon, in the hope of soon finding a hiding place or a break in the wall where he could climb up.

Hugging the base of the wall he slipped on, passing the point where he had espied the sheep and gliding on until he was stopped by a bend in the dense line of willows. It sheered to the west there and ran close to the high wall. Jean kept on until he was stooping under a curling border of willow thicket, with branches slim and yellow and masses of green foliage that brushed against the wall. Suddenly he encountered an abrupt corner of rock. He rounded it, to discover that it ran at right angles with the one he had just passed. Peering up through the willows he ascertained that there was a narrow crack in the main wall of the cañon. It had been concealed by willows low down and leaning spruces above. A wild, hidden retreat! Jean decided to steal on a little farther.

The golden-green gloom suddenly brightened. Light showed ahead. Parting the willows he looked out into a narrow, winding cañon, with an open, grassy, willow-streaked lane in the center and on each side a thin strip of woodland.

HIS surprise was short-lived. A crashing of horses back of him in the willows gave him a shock. He ran out of the willows, along the base of the wall, back of the trees. Like the strip of woodland in the main cañon, this one was scant and had but little underbrush. Jean slackened his pace to look back. He could not see any moving objects, but he still heard horses, though not so close now. Ahead of him this narrow gorge opened out like the neck of a bottle. He would run on to the head of it and find a place to climb to the top.

Hurried and anxious as Jean was he yet received an impression of the singular wild nature of this side gorge. It was a hidden, pine-fringed crack in the rock-ribbed and cañon-cut table-land. Above him the sky seemed a winding stream of blue. The walls were red and bulged out in spruce-greened shelves. From wall to wall was scarcely a distance of a hundred feet. Jumbles of rock obstructed his close holding to the wall. He had to walk at the edge of the timber. As he progressed the gorge widened into a wilder, more rugged aspect. Through the trees ahead he saw where the wall circled to meet the cliff on the left, forming an oval depression, the nature of

brought the same pell-mell rush of sensations that had driven him to wild flight scarcely an hour past. His body jerked with its instinctive impulse—then quivered with his restraint. To turn back would be risky; to run ahead would be fatal; to hide was his one hope. No covert behind! And the clip-clop of hoofs sounded closer. He glided along the front of the cabin.

Here he saw that the cabin adjoined another. Reaching the door he was about to peep in when the thud of hoofs and voices close at hand transfixed him with a grim certainty that he had not an instant to lose. Through the thin, black-streaked line of trees he saw moving red objects. Horses! He must run. Passing the door his keen nose caught a musty, woody odor, and the tail of his eye saw bare dirt floor. This cabin was unused. He halted—gave a quick look back. The first thing his eye fell upon was a ladder, right inside the door, against the wall. He looked up. It led to a loft that, dark and gloomy, stretched halfway across the cabin. An irresistible impulse drove Jean. Slipping inside he climbed up the ladder to the loft. It was like night up there. But he crawled on the rough-hewn boards and, turning with his head toward the opening, he stretched out and lay still.

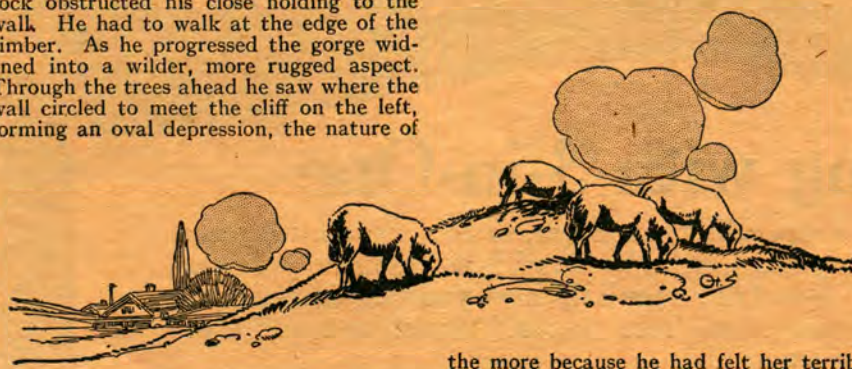
WHAT seemed an interminable moment ended with a trample of hoofs outside the cabin. It ceased. Jean's vibrating ears caught the jingle of spurs and a thud of boots striking the ground.

"Wal, sweetheart, heah we are home again," drawled a slow, cool, mocking Texas voice.

"Home! I wonder, Colter, did you ever have a home—a mother, a sister, much less a sweetheart?" was the reply, bitter and caustic.

Jean's palpitating, hot body suddenly stretched still and cold with intensity of shock. His very bones seemed to quiver and stiffen into ice. During the instant of realization his heart stopped, and a slow, contracting pressure enveloped his breast and moved up to constrict his throat. That woman's voice belonged to Ellen Jorth. He had stumbled upon the rendezvous of the Jorth faction.

Hard, indeed, had been the fates meted out to those of the Isbels and Jorths who had passed to their deaths. But no ordeal, not even Queen's, could compare with this desperate one Jean must endure. He had loved Ellen Jorth, strangely, wonderfully, and he had scorned evil repute to believe her good. He had spared her father and her uncle. He had weakened or lost the cause of the Isbels. He loved her now, desperately, deathlessly, knowing from her own lips that she was worthless—loved her



the more because he had felt her terrible shame. And to him, the last of the Isbels, had come the cruellest of dooms—to be caught like a crippled rat in a trap, to be compelled to lie helpless, wounded, without a gun, to listen and perhaps to see Ellen Jorth enact the very truth of her mocking insinuation. His will, his promise, his creed, his blood must hold him to the stern decree that he should be the last man of the Jorth-Isbel war. But could he lie there to hear, to see when he had a knife and an arm?

XXV

THEN followed the leathery flop of saddles to the soft turf and the stamp of loosened horses.

Jean heard a noise at the cabin door, a rustle and then a knock of something hard against wood. Silently he moved his head to look down through a crack between the boards. He saw the glint of a rifle leaning against the sill. Then the doorstep was darkened. Ellen Jorth sat down with a long, tired sigh. She took off her sombrero, and the light shone on the rippling dark

brown hair, hanging in a tangled braid. The curved nape of her neck showed a warm tint of golden tan. She wore a gray blouse, soiled and torn, that clung to her lissom shoulders.

"Colter, what are you goin' to do?" she asked suddenly. Her voice carried something Jean did not remember. It thrilled into the icy fixity of his senses.

"We'll stay heah," was the response, and it was followed by a clinking step of spurred boot.

"Shore I won't stay heah," declared Ellen. "It makes me sick when I think of how Uncle Tad died in there alone—helpless, sufferin'. The place seems haunted."

"Wal, I'll agree that it's tough on yu. But what can we do?"

A long silence ensued.

"SOMETHIN' has come off round heah since early mawnin'," declared Colter. "Somers an' Springer haven't got back. An' Antonio's gone. Now, honest, Ellen, didn't yu heah rifle shots off somewhar?"

"I reckon I did," she responded gloomily.

"An' which way?"

"Sounded to me up on the bluff, back pretty far."

"Wal, shore that's my idee. An' it makes me think hard. Yu know Somers come across the last camp of the Isbels. An' he dug into a grave to find the bodies of Jim Gordon an' another man he didn't know. Queen kept good his brag. He braced that Isbel gang an' killed those fellars. But either him or Jean Isbel went off leavin' bloody tracks. If it was Queen's yu can bet Isbel was after him. An' if it was Isbel's tracks why shore Queen would stick to 'em. Somers an' Springer couldn't follow the trail. They're shore not much good at trackin'. But for days they've been ridin' the woods, hopin' to run across Queen. Wal, now, mebbe they run across Isbel instead. An' if they did 'an got away from him they'll be heah sooner or later. If Isbel was too many for 'em he'd hunt for my trail. I'm gamblin' thet either Queen or Jean Isbel is daid. I'm hopin' it's Isbel. Because if he ain't daid he's the last of the Isbels, an' mebbe I'm the last of Jorth's gang. Shore I'm not hankerin' to meet the half-breed. That's why I say we'll stay heah. This is as good a hidin' place as thar is in the country. We've grub. There's water an' grass."

"Me—stay heah with you—alone!"

The tone seemed a contradiction to the apparently accepted sense of her words. Jean held his breath. But he could not still the slowly mounting and accelerating faculties within that were involuntarily rising to meet some strange, nameless import. He felt it. He imagined it would be the catastrophe of Ellen Jorth's calm acceptance of Colter's proposition. But down in Jean's miserable heart lived something that would not die. No mere words could kill it. How poignant her silence! How terribly he realized that if his intelligence and his emotion had believed her betraying words his soul had not!

BUT Ellen Jorth did not speak. Her brown head hung thoughtfully. Her supple shoulders sagged a little.

"Ellen, what's happened to yu?" went on Colter.

"All the misery possible to a woman," she replied dejectedly.

"Shore I don't mean thet way," he continued persuasively. "I ain't gainsayin' the hard facts of yo' life. It's been bad. Yo' dad was no good. But I mean I cain't figger the change in yu."

"No, I reckon yu cain't," she said. "Whoever was responsible for your make-up left out a mind—not to say feeling."

Colter drawled a low laugh. "Wal, hev thet yo' own way. But how much longer are yu goin' to be like this heah?"

"Like what?" she rejoined sharply.

"Wal, this standoffishness of yours?"

"Colter, I told you to let me alone," she said sullenly.

"Shore. An' yu did thet before. But this time yu're different. An', wal, I'm gettin' damn tired of it."

Here the cool, slow voice of the Texan sounded an inflexibility before absent, a timbre that hinted of illimitable power.

Ellen Jorth shrugged her lithe shoulders and, slowly rising, she picked up the little rifle and turned to step into the cabin.

"Colter," she said, "fetch my pack an' my blankets in heah."

"Shore," he returned with good nature.

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The He-Is-One-of-Us Club

Few men are better judges of human nature than reporters are.

Their work puts them in contact with men of all kinds. They interview small men pulled unexpectedly into the white glare of publicity and big men who have become famous so suddenly as to arouse the intense curiosity of the public.

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When the samples arrive, scrape out your pipe, fill it with Edgeworth, light up, and qualify for membership in the He-Is-One-of-Us Club.

Edgeworth is sold in various sizes to meet the requirements of many different customers. Both Edgeworth Plug Slice and Edgeworth Ready-Rubbed are put up in pocket-size cans, in attractive tin humidor and glass jars, and in various quantities in between those sizes.

For the free samples, address Larus & Brother Company, 23 South 21st Street, Richmond, Va.

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Jean saw Ellen Jorth lay the rifle lengthwise in a chink between two logs and then slowly turn, back to the wall. Jean knew her then, yet did not know her. The brown flash of her face seemed that of an older, graver woman. His strained gaze, like his waiting mind, had expected something, he knew not what—a hardened face, a ghost of beauty, a recklessness, a distorted, bitter, lost expression in keeping with her fortunes.

But he had reckoned falsely. She did not look like that. There was incalculable change, but the beauty remained, somehow different. Her red lips were parted. Her brooding eyes, looking out straight from under the level, dark brows, seemed sleet black and wonderful with their steady, passionate light.

Jean, in his eager, hungry devouring of the beloved face, did not on the first instant grasp the significance of its expression. He was seeing the features that had haunted him. But quickly he interpreted her expression as the somber, hunted look of a woman who would bear no more. Under the torn blouse her full breast heaved. She held her hands clenched at her sides. She was listening, waiting for that jangling, slow step. It came, and with the sound she subtly changed. She was a woman hiding her true feelings. She relaxed, and that

strong, dark look of fury seemed to fade back into her eyes.

Colter appeared at the door, carrying a roll of blankets and a pack.

"Throw 'em heah," she said. "I reckon you needn't bother coming in."

That angered the man. With one long stride he stepped over the doorsill, down into the cabin, and flung the blankets at her feet and then the pack after it. Whereupon he deliberately sat down in the door facing her. With one hand he slid off his sombrero, which fell outside, and with the other he reached in his upper vest pocket for the little bag of tobacco that showed there. All the time he looked at her. By the light now unobstructed Jean descried Colter's face, and sight of it then sounded the roll and drum of his passions.

"Wal, Ellen, I reckon we'll hev it out right now an' heah," he said, and with tobacco in one hand, paper in the other he began the operations of making a cigarette. However, he scarcely removed his glance from her.

"Yes?" queried Ellen Jorth.

"I'm goin' to hev things the way they were before—an' more," he declared. The cigarette paper shook in his fingers.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Yu know what I mean," he retorted. Voice and action were subtly unhooking this man's control over himself.

"Maybe I don't. I reckon yu'd better talk plain."

The rustler had clear, gray-yellow eyes, flawless, like crystal, and suddenly they danced with little fiery flecks.

"The last time I laid my hand on yu I got hit for my pains. An' shore thet's been ranklin'."

"Colter, you'll get hit again if you put your hands on me," she said, dark, straight glance on him. A frown wrinkled the level brows.

"Yu mean thet?" he asked thickly, after a fleeting pause.

"I shore do."

Manifestly he accepted her assertion. Something of incredulity and bewilderment, that had vied with his resentment, utterly disappeared from his face.

"Heah I've been waitin' fer yu to love me," he declared, with a gesture not without dignified emotion. "Yo' givin' in with-out thet wasn't so much to me."

At these words of the rustler's Jean Isbel felt an icy, sickening shudder creep into his soul. He shut his eyes. The end of his dream had been long in coming, but at last it had arrived. A mocking voice, like a hollow wind, echoed through that region—that lonely and ghostlike call of his heart which had harbored faith.

(TO BE CONCLUDED)

Crabtree Baita Hook

(Continued from Page 7)

New York, talking with you. It's wonderful to have an education like yours. I s'pose you could buy and sell us fellows out here."

Ridlapp was still talking when they got off the train, and Old Man Crabtree let himself be drawn off to one side of the station by his companion.

Finally Caleb said abruptly, "I don't know but I could do something for you. Do you want to join the club?"

"Oh, do you think you could, Mr. Crabtree?"

"I don't know. Naturally, I couldn't promise anything. Why, I'm not even a member myself."

"Oh, but you could have anything you wanted out there. I can see that."

"Well, maybe. But understand, I promise nothing. Absolutely nothing. It would all depend. I don't know much about clubs—never had time for them—but I dare say the way the thing is done is to take the membership committee and the most influential people in the club out and dine them and grape-juice them, and make them feel inclined to be good natured and then gently bring to their notice —"

"I know!" nodded Ridlapp. "Why, the expense is nothing. I've got plenty of money. I make money pretty easy."

"I believe it," said Crabtree. But Ridlapp didn't notice the tone.

"However, wining and dining costs a lot of money these days," suggested Crabtree. "And you might be throwing your money away. You can't be sure of getting elected."

"I'll take a chance. I don't want you to spend a cent. Why, I'd pay you for your—I mean if you'd let me. Just say —"

"A thousand dollars for expense money should cover it," said Crabtree bluntly. "My time would cost nothing, on condition I could put the money where it would do the most good."

RIDLAPP winced. He had figured on putting up liberally, but a cool thousand gave him pause. For an instant Crabtree was afraid he had overplayed his hand. But after a moment Ridlapp came back strongly. "Done!" he exclaimed, "and I'll write you a check if you'll come inside the station. How can I thank you, Mr. Crabtree?"

"I don't want you to thank me—and perhaps, later, you won't want to," was the cryptic reply.

After they had parted Caleb Crabtree stayed around the railroad station until Cormier came for him.

Caleb showed the check to his host, who gazed upon it chuckling. "You were right, Mr. Crabtree," he said. "You found the right kind of bait. Now come home with me and we'll have a quiet smoke on the veranda, figure on how to land your fish and serve him up with the right kind of sauce. I've been thinking it over myself, and I believe I've got a corking notion."

The third evening Ridlapp got a note from Crabtree. It said simply: "Be at the Creston Club to-night at nine o'clock sharp, without fail. Ask the hallman to show you to the grill room on the lower floor. Mention Mr. Cormier's name.—Crabtree."

With excellent promptitude Mr. Ridlapp obeyed. He arrived in his best limousine, dolled up like a bridegroom—like a bridegroom with exceedingly bad taste. When he came into the grill room he faced, through whirligigs of tobacco smoke, about twenty-five men, a bright-faced, intelligent, decent-looking crowd, among whom sat Old Man Crabtree and Herbert Cormier, side by side.

Cormier rose as Ridlapp came forward.

"YOUR name has been proposed for membership in a certain club, which I need not mention at present," began Cormier. "I won't bother, Mr. Ridlapp, to introduce you to all these gentlemen. Will you please be seated. In the first place, perhaps you would be good enough to answer a few questions, of a formal kind. Just what is your business?"

"I'm a commission merchant."

"You buy farm produce from farmers, I believe, and sell it on commission. Am I right?"

Ridlapp nodded.

"Now, Mr. Ridlapp," said Cormier in his most ingratiating and suggestive manner, "you're among business and professional men, so you needn't be afraid to talk freely. We know very little about your business, but we all have something to buy and something to sell, I suppose. We understand you are very successful. If I may say so, you seem to be at the head of your trade. We don't want to know your secrets. But you must have definite principles—a definite conception of business. That is very interesting in times like these."

Ridlapp was almost perceptibly swelling with pride. To be asked about his business ability by a man like Cormier—in the presence of Mr. Huzzey and Mr. John Gould Blair and the others! He laughed shortly.

"Oh, I don't claim any great credit," he said. "I deal with a bunch of easy marks, I s'pose. They don't know what their goods are worth, and I tell them where to get off. My principle is, Treat 'Em Rough! I advise you men to adopt that principle. That's the way to put it over."

The assembly looked at one another in disgust, but Mr. Ridlapp didn't see the expressions as disgust. He saw only himself delivering an important message to big men.

"That will do," said Cormier, rising again and taking a roll of paper from his pocket. "We rather thought those were your methods. We only wanted to hear it from you in your own inimitable way."

I shall now read you the following resolutions:

Whereas, Mr. Benjamin Ridlapp had expressed a desire to become a member of our club;

And, whereas, he seems to have the requisite natural and acquired qualifications for membership in a club of our kind;

Be it resolved, that from this hour Mr. Benjamin Ridlapp is to be known as a member of our club, with all the rights and privileges that pertain thereto.

"This resolution, Mr. Ridlapp, is signed by the secretary of the well-known Down and Out Club, of Bunkville, and one of your first privileges is to go out and hang yourself, using this to do it with."

As he spoke, Cormier picked up a coil of rope and tossed it over toward the bewildered Ridlapp. He tossed it rather farther than he intended to, with the result that it struck the big man on the shirt front and rested there, nicely coiled like a serpent.

Ridlapp staggered to his feet, speechless with purple rage. He pointed a fat, shaking finger at Cormier, tried to shout, and merely squeaked like a rat. Finally he shook his head and started toward Crabtree like a mad bull. "You—you old thief!" he squawked.

SEVERAL men lunged for Ridlapp, thinking he meant mischief. But Old Man Crabtree waved them aside. "I've got something to give him," he said, taking an envelope from his pocket and shoving it in Ridlapp's face. "Look this over when you get a chance, Ridlapp. This is one dollar and eight cents you paid a Berryville farmer for a carload of apples. You —"

"Let me go, you fools!" bawled Ridlapp.

A dozen strong hands had him in a firm grip. "You listen to what Mr. Crabtree has to say. Then you can go, and go blamed quick," said a menacing voice.

"I haven't got much to say," resumed Crabtree. "I just want you to know, Ridlapp, that when Harry Harvey, of Berryville, sent you those apples, which meant weeks of work out of his blood and bone, he relied on your promise to make good. And you bilked him. I'm sorry I had to soil my hands on you—I feel contaminated, indeed—but I want you to know that the one thousand dollars I got from you, to perform something that I couldn't do if I wanted to, and wouldn't if I could, and didn't even promise you to do, and if you hadn't been a vain fool you'd have known it—that money is already in the hands of the Berryville men you've swindled in times past. Perhaps you'd like to bring suit against me to recover your money?"

"Wait a minute! I find I didn't spend quite all that thousand. After deducting charges for freight and packing, there's a small balance coming to you. Here it is. One dollar and eight cents."



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CHAFF

The Rear Guard

DORIS was rather backward in her studies. One day when her father was inquiring into her standing at school, she admitted that she was the lowest in her class. "Why, Doris," he exclaimed, "I am ashamed of you! Why don't you study harder and get away from the foot?" "It isn't my fault at all," flashed Doris, in tones of injured innocence. "The little girl who has always been at the foot has left school."

Seasonable

RASTUS: Dis heah watch yer sold me last week loses time badly. PEDDLER: It ain't the watch dat's goin' slower. It's the days what's gettin' longer.

The High Cockalorum

SAID Rooster of the barnyard, To Cock of weathervane: "When clocks go back to sun time, No more shall I complain. The old Town Clock up yonder, Has made the folks believe That I have crowed behindhand, At morning and at eve."

Said Cock up on the steeple, To Rooster in the yard: "I do not wonder, brother, Your feelings have been jarred. But I am far more lucky, No Town Clock worries me; It can't turn winds a second, The turning's left to me!" —Blanche Elizabeth Wade.

Incredible

"ONE half of the world knoweth not how the other half liveth," quoted the philosopher. "Gee," cried the skeptic, "I didn't know there were so many people in the world who minded their own business."

Almost Perfect

MOVIE FAN, after reading the names of the author, scenario writer, adapter, director, supervisor, photographer, artist and property man on the screen: "Now if I knew the name of the man who sweeps out the studio or who brings the onion for the star's tears, I could set right back and enjoy the picture."

A Long Parting

HE: Why are you so sad, darling? SHE: I was just thinking this is the last evening we can be together until to-morrow.



Incomplete

"I HAVE here a letter of recommendation from the pastor of my church," the applicant for a position said with satisfaction. "Yes, that's all right in its way," the employer responded, "but, after all, I shouldn't want you on Sundays, so suppose you bring me some indorsements by people who know you the other six days of the week."

Just One Regret

A DENVER man had occasion to visit New York. He remained for two weeks longer than his original intention, and, in writing to his wife of his experience, he said: "New York is a great city; but I do wish that I had come here before I was converted."

His Definition

"FATHER," asked the young son, "what is a lawyer?" "A lawyer? Well, my son, a lawyer is a man who gets two men to strip for a fight and then runs off with their clothes."

Consider Sid

FRESH milk and greens give vitamins Enough for little Sid, So he at least will need no yeast— A real self-raising kid.

His Indifference

"PARDON me, sir," began the gent with the professorial air, "but do you recall the date of the battle of Brandywine?" "No, sir," replied J. Fuller Gloom. "I take no interest whatever in rows over the enforcement of the Volstead Act."

The Better Way

WHEN you observe your neighbor's hens Are calling every day, Don't let your angry passions rise— Make nests for them to lay.

News Service

"DO YOU take a daily paper?" asked the visitor in Poke Ridge.

"No'm," answered Hank Darby's wife, "we don't need to. We live right next door to old Miss Peabody. She brings in all the neighborhood news oncet a day, and if anything speshul happens, she puts on her sun-bonnet and gits out an extra edition without delay!"



PUP: Say, Pig, How Do You Manage to Keep Your Tail Curled in This Damp Weather?

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