

HOME RANCH

By WILL JAMES



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Author: Will James

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by

Will James

Illustrated by The Author

TO THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER

By
WILL JAMES

ILLUSTRATED
BY THE AUTHOR



CLEVELAND



NEW YORK

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PREFACE

This is the story of a regular ranch and cow outfit and of regular range folks and cowboys. It's of one ranch and holdings from the start of when the range was free up till now in 1935 when the range land is still mighty open in parts but no longer free.

In this writing I might be doubted by some as to there being any more such ranches as I tell of, of the range men and women and honest to God cowboys that are in these pages. But them that do have a very narrow backyard or a well travelled route and never get out of it, and partly for that reason I have such people who invite themselves to this particular ranch, and they find out a lot of things they didn't learn in their trips "abroad."

But they don't take the book, the work goes on on ranch and range, and the ideals, plays, works and worries, and loves of the range people.

I've never hunted, or used any others' material for my writings. If I write of things that are of before my time it's from riding a considerable with old timers that rode at them times, and now it seems to me like I've always known. I write of what I've seen and lived and thought out, and shaped the life into my work as that. But I'll be frank to say that, in this story I've had some help in correct English, for some of the people in this story are supposed to speak correct English, and there I was stumped.

I've never been to school, and I of course make some mistakes in my writing, but the reader can feel sure they re not made a purpose. It's just the way things come to me and I put 'em down that way, the same as it is of the life I'm writing about. It's all I know and I do the best I can, and if my readers can follow me I'm satisfied.

I always figured you can see more and further when you say "I seen." That's the way it comes to me and that's the way I put it down. "I saw" seems to stop right there and as tho nothing had been or was seen.

I don't know what is meant by "lingo" as some call my writing. It seems to me that mine is only natural writing of any man that don't live in a dictionary. I've never had one. And I think if my writing or talk is classed as lingo that it should be the same with any man in any

other profession. The aviator's talk should also be lingo then, when he talks of his flying and his plane, and the sailor too with his sailing and his ship, and that way with any man in any profession he lives. I should think that the mincy talk in tea rooms is more of a lingo.

As far as cowboy lingo, what I've read that's called such makes me think more of coming from the slums, which I've seen none of but imagine, anyhow it's sure not cowboy talk.

It seems to me like people has fell into a hard set idea of cowboy talk, his work and actions, maybe from some popular western books of long ago, also some of today. I guess very good books but away off the trail. I've read a few of 'em myself in scattered cow camps, and I liked 'em too because they was romantic. But the writer didn't know anything about cows.

I claim to know something about cows, herds of 'em, and cow horses and the folks that's in the country they range in, and if you'll excuse my way of writing you can be sort of repaid by being sure that there's no mistakes in what the writing is about.

Will James



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drouths

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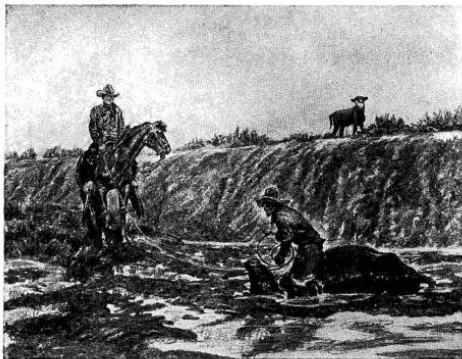
CHAPTER I - Riding Bog

"Who in samhill was it said how the cowboy's life was so grand and glorious?"

"I don't know, but I think it was the same feller who said something about beautiful snow."

"Well, whoever it was has never pulled bog [*] and never rode in wet snow."

[* Getting cattle out of bog holes.]



"Who in samhill was it said how a cowboy's life was so grand and glorious?"

"Who in samhill was it said how a cowboy's life was so grand and glorious?"

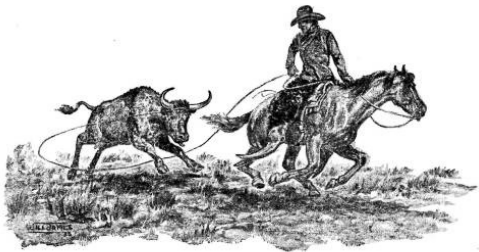
This kind of talk was going on between two cowboys. There was about thirty feet of rope between em. One was on his horse at one end of the rope and the other, the loop end in his hand, was knee deep in sucking slushy black mud trying to find the horns of a cow

that had bogged down.

He wanted to put his loop end of the rope around them horns. The cow had been fighting in trying to get out after having her drink, and the sucking mud had got her deeper as she fought, till only about half of her body showed. The cow being on the "prod" (fight) as they usually are when bogged down that way had fought at the sight of the two riders and tried to get at em, with the result that she got on her side, threw her head until, in her struggling, she'd throwed it back and there she layed breathing hard, both her horns stuck deep in the mud.

There wasn't a part of her showed where a loop could be throwed so it would catch a hold. So there was nothing to do but for one of the cowboys to wade in the mud, get her horns and place the loop around em. Then as her head was straightened and she struggled some more to get at the cowboy who was near her, the other cowboy on the bank pulled with his horse, and all together she was soon brought to solid ground, there to show her gratitude only by trying to hook the men and horse that had saved her life.

But that's the nature of the range critter and the cowboys didn't pay much attention to that, there'd been such doings all day long. The cowboy who'd pulled her out rode safe of her horns' reach, left the slack of his rope drag, and as she run into it he speeded his horse and the mad cow soon found herself upside down to lay.



The cowboy who'd pulled her out rode safe of her horns' reach and left the slack of his rope drag.

The cowboy who'd pulled her out rode safe of her horns' reach and left the slack of his rope drag

By that time the other cowboy had got on his horse, rode to where the cow had been layed, took the rope off her head and rode on. As the two looked back after they'd rode a ways, they seen that the cow was up and shaking her horns at 'em but they was now too far away for her to bother taking after em.

"Doggone it, Sol," says the cowboy who'd took the rope off the cow, "I been in the mud three times today and here you are riding high and dry as a mesquite bean."

The cowboy, Sol, grinned, "Shows that you re a better hand on foot than you are on a horse," he says.

The two, riding along the creek, was headed for the ranch. Their day's work was about done, for about half a mile ahead of 'em em was the first fence surrounding the ranch and they didn't think there'd be any more bogged cattle on the way to that fence, from there on "inside" riders was doing the work.

It was early spring, heavy clouds hung low, a cold wind was blowing over a blanket of four inches of snow which come sudden after a couple of weeks of summer-like weather. It had been cold before, and the cattle being hardened to it had weakened when the warm weather came. Snows melted, and the watering places that had been solid footing along the creeks and water holes had turned soft and boggy and many weaker cattle layed in the bogs until riders come to pull 'em out. If none came they would stay there.

That's what such riders as Sol and the other had been doing for the past two weeks, riding every day and "pulling bog." Then come the spring snow and more cold, but the bogs was still mighty soft, and the cold made the work all the harder.

Sol looked at the shivering rider alongside of him.

"Try and keep your eye-teeth in, Gat," he says, "you'll soon be alongside of some fire."

Gat just grinned a little and says, "nice weather, ain't it?" and kept his horse on a stiff trot (riding at a trot is more warming than riding at a

lope, especially against a cold wind).

The heat of home fires wasn't bothering Gat much, nothing ever bothered him much, for it was all in a day's riding. He'd done many of em, and when he'd remarked, while at the bog and up to his knees in mud, "Who in samhill was it said the cowboy's life was so grand and glorious," it wasn't with the feeling that he was disgusted or tired with the life, it was the joke of it that struck his funny bone, and if it'd been a lot worse he'd grinned and most likely passed some other such like remark. For, with the true cowboy, the old saying is "if you don't like it pick up and quit." Gat hadn't quit in all his life of riding.

But even tho Gat and Sol took it all as in a day's riding, they'd figured they'd done that day's riding well, and the sight of the top poles of the corral gates over a low ridge sure looked mighty good to em. For the top poles of the corral gates they was seeing was the first signs, from that direction, of the headquarters of the outfit they was riding for, the Home Ranch of the old Seven Xs.

Topping the low ridge a spread of corrals and buildings come to sight, and sort of stringing along the big cottonwoods that growed natural along the near river-size creek was a row of low dirt-roofed log buildings, some scattered here and there, and to one side, sort of by itself was the low, rambling main ranch house where old John B. Mitchell, the builder and owner of the outfit, lived with his wife and little family of a grown daughter and son, and the son's family of a wife and little boy of ten. There was also a very full grown female cook. The whole gathering of buildings and all was the size and had the appearance of a small town.

Gat and Sol rode on in, into a big corral and to a long log stable where they fed their horses good hay and unsaddled. They'd feed 'em grain later, for these was "winter horses," and being there was only two for each rider, one horse for one day and the other for the next, and plenty of hard riding every day they had to be hardened in, kept under good shelter and well fed.

They was better taken care of than the cowboys, who worked just as hard as they did, with no day's rest between, and took many chances besides, for when Sol and Gat rode it was, as with about every day, middle afternoon when they got back and they would have to wait till supper time before they would get anything to eat. Their horses would be filling up on good blue joint hay in the meantime.

But a cowboy sure never begrudges that, and as Gat and Sol walked into the cold bunk house and started a fire it was with the contented feeling that their horses was storing up feed and resting for when they'd need 'em again. As for themselves, the going without the noon meal didn't bother them any. They was used to that, for while riding from the ranch or different line and cow camps they started of mornings for a certain work to do and didn't return till that work was done. The average day's work from ranches or cow camps is from sun up till middle afternoon, and the cowboy don't pack no lunch nor canteen; if one did he'd just as well ride bare headed, roll his sleeves, and say "my gracious" when he's mad. He'd be snickered at and look as out of place as an orchid amongst cactus blossoms.

As riders are very much cut down in numbers during winter months there was only four other riders at the home ranch besides Gat and Sol, two riding bog on the outside and two sort of old pensioners riding the big pastures that went to make up the ranch. There was, of course, a few more riders scattered at different winter camps over the range, also at ranches where hay was put up and where the riders culled out weaker stock and brought 'em in for hay shovelers to feed.

The two old cowboys who rode the pastures wouldn't be back till near supper time, for their daily rides didn't take 'em many miles away and they could be at the ranch for their noon meal and siesta, so they rode later. The other two outside riders would ride zig zag and pull bog on to a near winter camp, fifteen miles away, where they'd stay for the night and then ride back to the ranch, covering every bog hole again on the way.

The ranch hands would also be out at their work with teams and hay forks till about supper time, so Gat and Sol was alone in the cowboys bunk house and warming it up. There was another bunk house for the ranch hands. A hunk of pitchy pine in the box-stove and it wasn't long when the two riders turned their backs and took a step away from it. Gat's water soaked boots was oozing muddy water and he'd liked to change to another pair, but he didn't have another pair, he'd overdrawed on his wages when he'd went to town and celebrated the fall before and then he'd bought a new saddle which set him back so that the old boots, most always wrapped in gunnysack while riding, had to do for the winter. But wages or no wages he'd have to have a new pair of boots before round up started, and being, like all

cowboys, he wore made to order hand made boots and it would take a month to get them, so he decided that late afternoon, while his feet was cold and wet, that he would write out an order right after supper and hand it to old John B. to have it mailed when the first chance come. Another half a month's wages shot.

On account that the cook house, which was held down by the round-up cook, was quite a few hundred yards away, Gat had never thought of pulling his boots off. It would of been quite a job anyway, being they was so wet, specially putting 'em back on, and he sure didn't want to walk thru the snow to the cook house and back in his stocking feet. That might be all right for them who dive in icy pools during winters but the cowboy wouldn't see much sense to that, he gets plenty of weather anyway without hunting for it.

The order for the new pair of boots was made up after supper that evening, and being the two old riders was around by then and with their usual joking remarks to keep the air from getting stale one of em, after watching Gat taking his foot measurements with a tape, asks:

"What size do you wear, Gat?"

"I don't know," says Gat. "I don't put down the size when I order boots, just measurements, you know that. But I bought a pair of shoes once, daggone 'em anyhow, I was in town for a winter, and I think they was six and a half."

"Yeh," the old cowboy says, sort of dry, "six hides and a half a keg of nails."

Regular good bunk house joking went on for a while and till the order was about made up, then the other old rider chirps up:

"Expect you'll be ordering fancy inlaid tops on 'em and wearing 'em outside your pants so's you can show 'em off to June when she gets back from her school learning."

"You bet," says Gat, looking up from his order, "and there won't be no cock-ankled broomsticks inside of 'em either."

The old rider couldn't let that pass. "Well," he says, looking down at his legs, "it's better to be a has-been than a never-been, and if your

legs ever get around as many tough horses as these have you'll wonder how come they ain't plum gone or all twisted up." He went on before Gat could say a word to that. "Anyway, you won't be here when June gets back, you'll most likely be with the wagon (riding on round up outfit) and the pretty tops of your boots will get all dirty. What a shame that will be."

"Yeh, maybe that's all so," says Gat, "but she don't like things that's new and pretty, she likes what's been around some, had experience and knows something and where the beauty lays deep. Of course," he adds on, "I have some of that on the surface too."

He stuck his nose to the order blank and didn't try to compete with the remarks he'd brought on to himself.

They came three ways, for Sol had joined in with the old cowboys, and they fitted to where he was about as beautiful and useful as the shadow of a burro on a pile of tin cans.

Gat could only grin, and he didn't say a word till one of the old riders sort of changed the subject a bit by saying how John B. didn't want his girl galivanting around with no cowboys anyhow. He'd heard him say so, how he wanted her to be refined and fitting to refined company.

Gat was kind of surprised and got hot under the collar of a sudden and he didn't want to hear no more of that. "Yeh," he says, sarcastic, "I've seen some of such refinery, all combed and slicked up and trained to manners, but the manners I've seen some of 'em use with wimmen if they ever get 'em to one side would either make you want to hunt a hole for shame or perforate their slick hides with a forty-five, but cartridges are sort of expensive to waste on such land."

"Now, now," Sol chips in, half grinning at Gat's peeved talk, "Don't let yourself get away from yourself. What does June care what you think of the kind that's been curried below the knees? Besides you know yourself there's some mighty fine fellers amongst the stiff collared gentry, as fine as you'll find anywhere."

"Sure," says Gat, cooling down some, "but I'm afraid of the skunks among em, for her sake. Because June is a mighty fine girl and I don't give a good godamighty doggone if she wouldn't even spit or look at me, I'd always think the same of her and act according."

"Them's mighty fine sentiments, cowboy," says one of the old riders, "and I hope no woman ever spoils em."

The talk getting kind of sentimental and serious that way didn't set so well with the other old rider and he kind of mumbled to the stove during a quiet space of time. "What's the use of Gat worrying about June, he's got less chance with her than I have with the moon. Just imagine, a forty-dollar-a-month bog rider with no eddication, never even a school book and learned to read only by brands on hides of critters, having the nerve to even think of that young lady, June, the daughter of old John B hisself. Why old John B would shoot any cowboy on sight if he thought for one second that cowboy had any inkling that way concerning that daughter of his. Besides," he went on, like it had just come to him, "you might never see her again, because John B. said something not so long ago about sending her to some place in Europe to finish her, or have her finished or something like that, whatever that means."

Gat lost his peeved feeling as the old rider talked. He knowed that it all was to stir him up and that about the girl going to Europe was most likely made up, so he hardly listened to what was said. He seen that, from past experiences, the only way to fight such talk was with the same, and with a grin. He raised his eyes to the smoked up ceiling and putting a hand over his heart he done his best to look soulful while he said "Love will find a way."

That near bucked the old rider off his chair, for he'd looked for Gat to get peeved again. But Gat did get half serious after his piece of acting, and as he sealed his boot order he turned to the old rider.

"What is old John B. to be so huffed up about so he don't want a cowboy to look at his daughter? The old son of a sea cook had nothing but a saddle and a 'long rope [*] when he started, and even tho he's been good since he come north and built this spread, you all know that he don't dare go back to Texas and pack the same name he did there."

[* Term for cattle rustling, long rope, reaching out of his territory for somebody else's cattle.]

That was all agreeable, but there was another opening.

"Well," says one of the old riders, "he done hisself proud anyway,

and I sure don't blame him for not wanting his daughter to take interest in any reckless and drifting cowboy like he was at one time." As a good dig to Gat he went on to remark, "not many cowboys ever amount to anything anyway."

Gat wasn't slow taking up that opening and he aimed at both the old riders as he spoke.

"Like you two for instance," he says. "Here you are, you old decrepits, four times old enough to vote, all stove up, and you still ain't got nothing but wore out saddles and still wearing five and a half size hats."

That sort of riled the old boys up some, and Gat and Sol sort of leaned back to enjoy the show of emotion they knowed would come. The old riders realized, but too late, that they'd left Gat too good an opening, and now it took 'em a spell to get their wits stringing out for a good come back. When they spoke their first words come together.

But one of 'em finally got the lead on the other, and after calling Gat a few cuss names and winding up on such as "pigeon-toed scorpion" and the like he went on. "Why I had three good holdings in my time. Two of them holdings was saloons, and goldern good ones too. I made a good stake and went back to cows, bought me a good outfit, then a hard winter come and cleaned me out."

"Overgrazed your range, I bet," Gat managed to edge

The old rider didn't seem to hear him. "I mortgaged my ranch and what little stock I had left to the hilt then and stocked up again, and bought more cattle on shipment payment. I done fine for a few years and got to running up to five thousand head when another hard winter come on the tail of a mighty dry summer, and I was cleaned out again. We didn't cut or stack up any hay in them days, but we done a lot of riding."

Another good opening for Gat. "Yep, rode all winter with your feet against the stove."

The old cowboy flared up a little at that, even tho he knowed well that Gat was only egging him on. "No, by gad," he says, "I rode every daggone day that winter and some nights too, when sometimes I

couldn't see my horse's ears for sixty mile an hour winds pushing thick hard snow.

"My men worked hard too, but, well, when spring come I just turned my outfit over to the bank. I'd only paid off a little of the mortgage on account I'd been stocking up instead of paying on it. I wanted to count my cattle on my ten fingers, one thousand head to the finger. I'd been satisfied then and be a-sitting near as good as old John B. is sitting to day."

"And then you'd wanted ten thousand more," from Gat again.

"But," the old rider went on as a wind up, "if there'd been a daughter in my married life I wouldn't of let her marry a cowboy either if I could help it, they re born too durn free."

"Well," says Gat, getting to reason a bit on the subject, "there's cowboys and cowboys. You had about the same chance old John B. did, and then," he went on, "who is our governor and senator but a couple of born-in-the-leather cowboys who didn't know there was anything but cattle and horses on this earth till they was near thirty!"

That sort of stumped the old rider. He rolled a cigarette and all was quiet for a spell, a quiet that hinted for the other old rider that now was his chance to start telling what he'd done for hisself. But what all had just been said had got him to thinking things over, he'd got to thinking he didn't do so well with the chances he had either, and he wondered if he should tell of 'em.

It was Sol that finally spoke up and started him out. "Well, Lou, how many cows[*] did you steal in your time?" he asks.

[* "Cow" is the common and general name for all cattle of all ages and sexes in the cow country.]

The old rider, Lou, didn't smile when he said, "Just enough for beef," and he went on from there. "But I have made some pretty good stakes, boys, and that's no corral dust. Mine was on horses, good horses. I'd picked up a few good bunches during a stretch of years when times was mighty hard, during a panic, and a dollar wasn't worth two bits, you couldn't sell or give a horse away and few bothered with branding 'em, but I figured there'd be a need of 'em some day and I gathered me some for keeps.

"Well, as I'd figured, it wasn't so very many years when the East begin to swarm over parts of the West, and by japers I got to selling some three-year-old unbroke colts for \$400 a span. Of course they was big horses, and by that time I was running close onto eight hundred head of 'em.

"I sold out in fine shape and took a few years' time doing that. I didn't keep a hoof because I figured again that horses would go down in prices soon as the emigrating rush was over, and they did.

"Well, boys, I sure made me a stake, the biggest one I thought I'd ever make and big enough for any man, yes, any man with two families and for two life times. But I never was a family man. I went into horses again then, not good big draft horses like I had before and which run on the range the year around, but slim-bodied, spindle-legged, mesquito-looking daggone things that had to have private apartments, had to be washed and rubbed and coaxed to eat, and they'd pass a cow without seeing 'er, but boys how they could pass, pass most anything. They was race horses.

"I took my horses to wherever there was big races, in U. S. A. here, Mexico, the Island, and even England. I made fifteen thousand on one of my horses in one race and turned around and sold him for twenty thousand. I figured I had others coming up that was just as good or maybe better. It turned out that I did have.

"I done better than well for some years, my stake swelled up and I made so much money that it got to mean nothing to me. I had good stables and trainers and raised good fast horses. Them horses and me was well known with all the racy folks, and there was plenty of doings set up for me wherever I went, society circles and all kinds of circles and capers. It was sure a steady round of pleasure, and being I don't like to do things half ways, I didn't over-look none.

"But my most satisfying pleasures was being with my horses and I was with them as much as I could. But again, with the steady rounds of doings which I felt sort of obliged to take on on account they'd be in my honor and so on, I didn't get to do many things I really wanted to, and even tho I got sort of bloated on all of that and tried to squirm out many times there was many such doings I couldn't squirm out of.

"I was raised a horse's height from the ground, not on hardwood floors, and as I got to hitting the 'soogan[*] at about the end of the

grave-yard shift [**] every night, year after year or doings after doings, that begin to tell on me, because I'd already spent thirty years or so with the habit of crawling in during cocktail hours [***]. Cocktail hours have a different meaning with race horse folks, or any other folks for that matter, than ours have. It can be any hour in the twenty-four, all depending on your craving and capacity."

[* Quilts, bedding.]

[* From midnight till two A. M.]

[* Between five and eight in the evening, before first guard on night herd. These terms are used when with round-up wagons, which are out on the range eight months in the year with some big outfits, and the year around with some others.]

"Well, as I already said, that begin telling on me. I'd chopped off too quick on plenty of action and hard riding, went to riding the easy overstuffed riggings instead, and to using my rope arm to hoist a glass in place of a rope.

"Finally come a time when I didn't care to be with my horses or see how they was being trained any more, and when a cowboy gets that far gone he's sure far gone. I got to where I didn't want to do anything but go galivanting around and play nighthawk in swallow tails. I done that well and got to thinking I was some smart because my horses kept a-winning pretty steady, then I figured I wasn't needed at the stables any more.

"That went well with me at the time. I went on to betting on my horses, and drinking the way I was, I naturally thought I was wise when I really didn't know what the samhill I was doing. Consequences is I was gypped right and left, my jockeys was bought to pull my horses to lose, and I was gypped out of some of my horses too.

"Then come the big bet, covering every horse, stables and all I had. I hadn't seen my horse, the one I'd staked everything on, for months. I went to see him, but I don't remember seeing him. I guess I just sort of identified him in my mind and, being it was him, felt sure I would win.

"Well I didn't."

The old cowboy was quiet for a spell, he just sat and stared at the stove, then he raised his head, and looking at the three other riders

he added on, "and by gad I'm durned glad I didn't."

Somehow, thru Lou's talk, neither Gat nor Sol looked or thought for any opening to chip in a joking dig at him. Maybe it was because the story had to do with horses. Besides, even tho the old cowboy was mighty sincere in the telling of making and losing his big stake, he seemed too ready to take on a joke good-natured if one came his way. That had taken the hanker to joke out of em.

But, according to them, the story hadn't ended quite right as to their idea of how it should. Old Lou sort of sensed that as he looked at 'em, and he just about figured what remark to expect from either of 'em. He grinned.

"About the old race track loser's saying, 'slow horses and fast wimmen,' that combination has sure enough ruined many a man. Some of them fast ticks stuck around me aplenty too, they got a lot of fun out of me and I got a lot of fun out of them, it was a fifty-fifty break there. But I'll tell you what did buck me off, boys, and made me lose my stake, the only thing that did. It was old John Barleycorn."

Well, that was more of an ending, and, as old Lou figured, a sort of warning to Gat and Sol. Them two riders took it that way too, but they wasn't worried much about that or losing any stakes, for they hadn't made nothing but wages so far and they'd never thought of hitting on the trail of making a big stake. That could come later, and all they cared about for the time being was to perfect themselves in their riding and roping and knowing of the cattle game, which all always leaves room for more learning and improving, no matter how experienced a man a cowboy might be.

The talk got to thinning down, remarks got further apart as wits begin to dull. Gat yawned a couple of times, rolled another smoke and begin pulling his boots off. His first try proved that that was going to be a hard job on account of them being wet and soggy and sticking to his instep and heels like they was his own hide.

The cowboy don't bother making boot jacks or packing one around with him. His regular boot jack is his spurs which he keeps on his boots steady, and by pressing down on the shank with one foot he can usually get his boots off pretty well.

But that didn't work with Gat on days when his boots got wet, and no

boot jack of any kind would of worked. At such times, Sol would help him out, straddle one of his boots, and grabbing it with both hands, Gat would push on his hind quarters till, with a lot of straining and twisting, the boot would come off.



With a lot of straining and twisting the boot would come off.

With a lot of straining and twisting the boot would come off.

When that was finally done that night, all of the four riders was ready to hit the soogans. Sol went outside, the whole ranch was dark, a wet snow was falling and the cold wind of that day was still blowing.

"Br-r-r-r," Sol shivered as he came back in and closed the door tight. "I'd hate to be bogged down to night You'd ought to've kept your boots on, Gat, because they re going to be hard to put on in the morning and mighty hard to pull off again tomorrow night, and with this fresh wet snow, I'm thinking there'll be some slippery bogs to pull tomorrow."

But it was only an average March night, and the next day would only be an average March day on the old Seven X range, average, all but for the unexpected which sometimes comes and happens mighty

fast, any time, anywhere.

CHAPTER II - First Herds and New Ranges

It had snowed and blowed pretty well all day along, and Gat and Sol and all of John B.'s riders, including John B.'s son, Austin, who rode from and to ranches and camps and kept two good eyes on cattle and range conditions and had a slippery wet day of it. But old John B. himself had been warm and dry, and even tho he sometimes rode with Austin and his men in much rougher weather, he'd stayed inside that day, all on account of that when he walked into a room he used as his office he noticed a slip of paper, yellowed with age, sticking out of some old ledger.



JOHN B.

John B

He'd smiled as he seen that against his wishes, his wife Mae had again been cleaning and arranging things "so it takes me a month to find anything again" as he'd say. He'd pulled out the slip of paper and, squinting hard at the paled writing on it he seen it was his own. There was no date on the paper, but by the writing and brands and

earmarks that was put down on it, and after scratching under his hat brim a few times while looking up at the ceiling and then down at the paper again, it finally came to his memory, and all at once.

He'd then remembered the year, the month, and even the day and place, when and where he'd wrote what was on the slip of paper he was holding. He remembered he'd been a-horseback, and with the same slip of paper, which had then been in a tally book, he'd rode thru a herd of longhorns, all of which was resting and grazing. It had been that herd's first night's drive from their starting point, and as he rode thru the cattle he'd marked down the brands, earmarks, wattles, and all such which would identify every head in the herd. That herd, many long months later, had turned out to be John B.'s foundation herd and start of the Seven Xs, now called the old Seven Xs.

John B. was old now too, bordering seventy-five, but the rough life he'd led had hardened him so that years hardly bent him, only some in the legs, and his hide was leathered and scarred. But his eyes was still good and young, his heart was the same and he still et beef and potatoes and coffee three times a day. He always claimed that he had indigestion only once in his life and that was on account somebody had slipped mutton in his stew while in town one day.

Holding the yellowed slip of paper in his hand, Old John B. had stood by the window of his office room, and as he fingered the paper there was a whole lot of them times with the gathering of his first herd came back to his mind, from the range away to the south to the range away to the north he was now settled on, and looking out at the wet falling snow he'd mumbled:

"By Golly, fifty-four years. Fifty-four years since I left there and first unsaddled here. Sure don't seem that long."

He'd been ready to go out that day but the slip of paper had brought recollections to him which put him in the past again and he'd forgot the present. Soon he'd got in the thick of the old books the piece of paper had been sticking out of. They hadn't been disturbed, only to be dusted, for more than thirty years, and amongst scraps of papers and writings he'd went to living on the back-trail of the past.

It was near the end of the "seventies," and John B. was close to his twenties when he was chased out of Texas for appropriating one or two herds too quick. They'd of rather caught him but he chased

better, for John B. figured there was always too many at a time on his trail. But he'd come back, worked slower, safer and quieter, and gathered another herd before he left that territory. It was John B.'s ambition, seemed like as soon as he could ride, which was before he could walk, to have a good cow outfit of his own and he wasn't going to waste no time getting it.

He'd already went as far north as the Canadian line a couple of times with the first big herds that had been pointed in that direction, and he figured he knowed the country well enough then so he could pick out his own trail, and when he finally left Texas with the last herd he'd done well in appropriating, he'd also took along some good horses which he thought he'd feel better riding if they was a few states to the north.

He had to have some help too with all his stock, and the cowboys that rode along with him had also took some stock for themselves.

It had been a spooky outfit of men, who drove their stock by night for the first few hundred miles and dodged the main trails. They'd had mighty tough times on long dry stretches and at river crossings that was new to all trail drivers. They'd have "palavez" with the Indians too and had their horses stolen a few times, their cattle stampeded and bunches of them come up missing. But that outfit of riders was no home guards, they was wild and tough as a cross between wild cats and wolverines, and when, months later, they got to the country of tall grass and plenty water, they had more horses and cattle than what they'd started out with.

But even tho kind of free with their appropriating stock, they was good men and honest in their makeups, only the country they was in was wild, the cattle was wild, the horses was wild, and so was they, and the ambition of each of them men was to start an outfit of their own from the hundreds of thousands of cattle, many unbranded, which run in the southern plains, regardless of who all they belonged to.

They did get their start, but they sure had to drift with that start, and the further north they drifted the better, they thought. They drifted plenty far and into an out of the way country from where the big herds came thru or scattered, and then in their out of the way country they found ranges where creeks, grass, shelter, and timber was aplenty and settled down with their herds, each on his own particular range,

each with his own outfit and all as neighbors.

John B. had the biggest herd and, as trail boss of the outfit, of course took the best range, but there was lots of it and there was no arguments as to that among 'em. They couldn't think of arguing anyway because they'd been thru enough hell, fire, and high water getting the cattle, and driving 'em the long trail to the north to sort of bind 'em together, and even tho they was thirty miles or more apart as neighbors, it was later believed that one could of hollered once and the others would of heard him and come a-running.

There'd been no trail brand put on the cattle as John B. and his riders, or pardners, started from the south. Them boys was in too big a hurry to be on the move anyway. Besides, a trail brand would of only implicated 'em more if they'd been caught up with. John B. ranged his cattle, and a year afterwards his thousand head came out of his corrals with a fresh.



7-X brand on their left ribs. That was the start of the outfit.

It went well from the start, cattle accumulated and soon enough good beef shipments was loaded for the East. It was a six-hundred mile trailing south to the railroad shipping point but there was plenty grass and water along the way and that made it good. Some years went by with things going well and averaging that way, good log buildings and pole corrals was built at the home ranch, also line camps over the range, and then, when John B. went to Chicago again one year with a special trainload of steers, he came back with a long haired pardner. Mrs. John B. Mitchell.

Things went well some more, but like with anything else, even if they

go well there's always other things mixing along to make a feller appreciate the things that do go well. Like for instance, there was long hard winters which made John B. and his cowboys ride all day and sometimes most of the night with turning the drifting herds off windy long ridges towards shelter, then the breaking of trails thru drifts to free snowbound cattle, and all such work which goes to make it a hard winter, hard for both man and stock.

Along with the hard winters off and on, there was such other things as the crowding of ranges that came and sure wasn't so well, but John B. didn't pack his 45 as ballast, besides many of his riders were getting fighting wages. They was the kind that was glad to fight, specially for John B. and the wages he was giving them. He held his range.

He held his cattle too when the rustlers got thick and sort of organized, and when the rustler war broke out he wasn't in it, so there was no wondering nor mixing of him with the rustlers or honest cattlemen. He was just John B. Mitchell, and that year young John B. was born. The year of the rustler war.

Young John B. didn't know about that war, and didn't care right then, but later, with that big outfit, he was going to see another war when him and his dad had to fight a considerable so as to hold all of their range. In the meantime blattin' bands of sheep was covering the country like woodticks. John B. fought well against 'em and lost only one man, but he never would believe that man was killed because his horse and saddle had never been found.

"He was just riding a daggone good horse of mine," John B. had said, "and he just got to hankering for new territory of a sudden, that's all."

But there'd been some bands of sheep found wandering and scattering without herders, bands of sheep somehow run over steep cliffs and piled up, wagon tongues was tied to tops of sheep wagons and given a push down steep countries, 30-30's spoke, and even tho not all of that was on John B.'s range nor was of John B.'s, or his riders doings he held his range against the weed packers' sheep.

A man's range is pretty well respected amongst cowmen but other breeds don't seem to have such respects. Well, the country was free and wide open, and then the nester came in, some even before the

sheep did. John B. couldn't fight them very much because he knewed that according to law they had as much right to the land as he did, all excepting some few hundred acres here and there which him and some squatters he'd hired could hold with buildings on the land, but what was a few thousand acres when there was fifteen thousand head of cattle to range? About the same as one peanut to an elephant.

But, as usual, John B. had been wise, he'd hired more riders to "squat" [*] on the most valuable parts of his range and the nesters that drifted in to look it over sort of found poor pickings. Still, nesters have a way of edging in, and some mighty good parts of John B.'s range was lost to 'em. They'd located on creek bottoms, farmed a little and run little bunches of cattle. That sure didn't help John B.'s range any.

[* "Squatter," first on property, giving right of ownership of land buildings are on, 160 acres.]

He had to cut his herds down some, for John B. was careful not to overgraze his range, he wanted tall winter feed for his stock. Things went on pretty well for some years and he scared the nesters to eating their own beef pretty well instead of his.

Then came another cloud over his holdings. The end of free range. The land was being surveyed. But if John B.'s first sight of the cloud struck him as another calamity to prepare against, it didn't take him very long to see thru that cloud, and as he figured and planned, he welcomed it as tho his range was parched and it was bringing rain. It was bringing security and peace.

John B. was a few miles ahead of others once more. He hired a man that was handy with pencil and figures and could ride a little, and sent him out with a surveyor. They was out for months, quartering and putting down figures on John B.'s range, and when some years later it come that all lands had to be leased in order to run stock on them, John B. was there with his figures and the first bidder. Consequences was the nesters that had crowded in on his range found themselves sitting on only three hundred and twenty acres, just enough to run a few milk cows and chickens on, and starve to death. John B. had leased all the good land around 'em and pinched 'em in.

He soon bought most of 'em out at his own price, and now he could

control his range. He'd also leased all the lands along the creeks and wherever there was water, and didn't bother much with bench land. No sheep could bother him now for they'd have to water and he sure wouldn't let them have a drop of his. He had plenty of riders to see to that.

John B. felt mighty satisfied with himself, and everything in general. But sometimes, sitting with his wife by the big fireplace and all was quiet and he got to thinking of how he'd squeezed the nesters out off his range, that bothered him a little. It wasn't his conscience that bothered him, it was that he might be kind of hoggish, as tho he was giving nobody else a chance to live, and nobody likes a hog.

It was at one of these times that he got up off his comfortable chair and begin pacing the floor. Then of a sudden turning to his wife who'd been peacefully sewing on something, he begins without a warning.

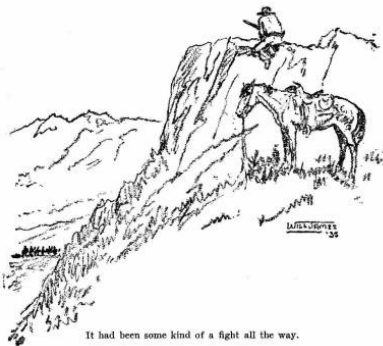
"Why dammit, they had no business here. This is my range, by rights of all rights. They had the same chance of getting this range as I did but their hat brims was too low over their eyes and they couldn't see it. If they had they'd crowded me out the same as I did them, only maybe worse, I might of stole a few cattle in my time but I'd have more respect for a man's holdings than to set up my chicken coops by his doorstep and turn my horse in his garden." (By doorstep he meant anywheres to within thirty miles of it, and garden meant good parts of his range.)

"I wonder," he went on, "how many of 'em, if they'd been in my place would of loaned me a wagon if I was nesting on their range? I've loaned 'em wagons, harnesses and horses, and by God there was many a time I had to send a man out to get 'em back. Most of 'em et my beef too, and I didn't care so much with them that had families and few cattle, but most of them had plenty of cattle, and they let 'em accumulate right here on my range, my country, which by laws of right belongs to me, as much as any discovered country belongs to any man that discovers it, and I was the first to make use of it. None of my people can say I'm not treating 'em right and every man of 'em is ready to fight for me any time, any place. I take good care of my little country, raise good cattle on it, and I'm helping furnish the outside with the best that goes on their table, good beef."

John B. felt relieved now and like he'd done unloaded well. He'd

smiled at his wife and rolled a cigarette while she'd smiled back at him, she'd more than agreed in all he'd said.

But John B. had forgot to mention a few important facts why his little country should be his by all rights. By a lot more rights than it should be any other man's or men's. He'd blazed a trail all the way up from Texas to get to it, a trail that'd been followed afterwards and where a few men never come thru at the river crossings and two herds was lost to thirst in the desert. It never was tried again. He'd forgot to mention his fighting start from Texas, and how he had to hide till things cooled down before he gathered his cattle and put 'em on trail, his fights along the way with Indian parties, and all. It had been some kind of a fight all the way.



It had been some kind of a fight all the way.

It had been some kind of a fight all the way.

He didn't mention his squabbles with bands of Indians that'd jumped the reservation during the first years on his range, nor the fighting against the crowding of his country. He didn't mention the rustler war, and even tho he didn't get into it, he done just as well by getting them who crossed his line. He'd held it against 'em, against sheepmen and finally against nesters, and by all laws of right that country

belonged to no man nor men but John B. Mitchell.

John B. never stopped to think why it should belong to him but he sure felt that it did, and, to him, it was all that was necessary. He'd hold it.

When the railroad cut thru the country going from East to West and went by to within sixty miles of John B.'s range, that didn't interest him much. He'd rather trailed his beef further and not had the railroad so close. John B. wasn't against progress but he figured the country was stocked up to full capacity as it was, and the railroad would only bring in more nesters to edge in on range already being used, and overgraze it to dust beds and weeds.

There was a rush come sure enough, but by more good maneuvering, John B. still held his range, and right on.

CHAPTER III - Cowboys Old and New

John B. had got so he liked fighting and maneuvering to hold his range, and even tho he rode with his heart in his throat once in a while, the pleasure he'd got to be one mile ahead in turning what would have swarmed him down, sort of made up for that.

With the end of the free range, and when he maneuvered to hold his country some more and all the safer, came a blow to him that he couldn't fight against or maneuver around. It was the sickness and death of his wife. Austin was only a youngster of eight at the time, and of course, John B. took great consolation in him, but it was quite a few years and the fuzz on Austin's face was beginning to stiffen to whiskers before he begin to laugh with his riders again.

It was along about then, and when Austin got to thinking he could ride anything on four, or any amount of legs, when a new brand of locust more dangerous than any of the others before, begin to threaten to eat up John B.'s little country. There'd been boosting for farmers to "COME WEST WHERE OPPORTUNITY LIES IN RICH PRAIRIE SOIL" and such like advertising in the papers, with strips of writing on each side telling how the eastern and foreign farmer, all the way from Russia, would soon be migrating west by the trainload.

John B. shivered as he read some of the papers. He had visions of ranges being tore up, cattle disappearing, and farmers starving to death in a country that should of been left to cattle, instead of to weeds. He'd had no idea how them visions of his would come true, and he didn't at first prepare against the attack of sod-busting weed growers, for being that the nearest line of his range to the railroad was sixty miles and a lot of rough country between, no sod buster would be fool enough, he thought, to come to his country to farm the big benches that was on his range; it would be too far to the railroad to haul grain and make the raising of it pay.

He felt sort of safe that way, also mighty sorry for other good ranges that happened to be near the railroad.

"With all this boosting," John B. had said to one of his Texan neighbors, "them sod busters'll come and plow up anything. It's a

disease with 'em anyway."

John B. rode and watched, and as he went to town every few months he seen where the sod busters had sure enough come and was spreading fast, like a bunch of hungry stock on new range. He'd grinned and remarked as he'd got near to town once how he was surprised they hadn't already plowed of that flat topped rocky butte which was on the outskirts of it. But he didn't grin when a couple of years later he seen some patches of land plowed up on his way to the ranch and thirty miles from town, bum roads in between and the country fit only for cayote runs, as far as farming it was concerned.

But for a couple of years that seemed to be as far as they would get, and then the next year some corporation jumped forty miles from town to a long wide strip of bench land and started tearing it up with tractors and repeating plows. The north rim of that bench was only to within a few miles of the edge of John B.'s range and on one of his neighbors' ranges; one of the cowboys who'd come up trail with him from the south.

Another year or so, and John B. heard the first of a rumor that made him saddle up and hit for town in a high lope. The rumor, from good authorities, was that a spur was to be added to the railroad which would reach to within a few miles of the big bench land strip where the farming corporation was tearing things up. More sod busters had joined in here and there, and old John B. didn't wait for the echo of that railroad spur coming in over half ways to his range, nor for the rumor to start spreading.

He hunted up the man who years before had gone with the surveyor when the range was first squared up and numbered, and with him he went over the plat of the range he knewed so well and marked Xs on quarter sections, halves and whole sections, until he'd took up most all farmable lands and where there was creeks or springs, and told the man who was handy with pen and figures to start right in and get the deed for all that land marked with the Xs, he could, such as every odd numbered section of state land on the south border of his range, also railroad lands and scripts, then there was his squatters, lands.

The land was cheap because it had been classed as only grazing land, but there was good strips of bench and rolling lands there too, where the grass was near stirrup high, and being there was another long and wide strip of bench land on John B.'s range not so many

miles to the north of the bench where the farming corporation was tearing up the sod, and also being that leasing couldn't hold that land against farmers, he proceeded to buy it, right quick, and before the rumor of the railroad spur begin to spread.

With deeds to most all farmable lands to the south of his range he made a mighty barrier to all invading sod busters. For, with that strip of deeded land and the rough country beyond which couldn't be farmed, the invader would have to jump twenty-five miles from the farming corporation's lands to other bench lands on John B.'s range. That was to the north and John B. wasn't afraid of them doing that. It would have been too much of a jump and there was too much rough country, with two high ranges of mountains in between.

He wasn't afraid of any invasion for that north either, because it was a hundred and fifty miles to the first railroad and town in that direction. It was near twice that distance to any railroad or town in the east and west directions, so he sure was safe there.

John B. felt pretty well fortified and able to hold his range, and the two, now old pensioner cowboys, Lou and Hie, who had started riding for him before then, and ever since, figured that he'd done mighty neat and fast work.

But one of John B.'s neighbors that come up from Texas with him didn't do so well. John B. had warned him but he hadn't acted, and consequences was he was pretty well cleaned out of his range, like over night, soon as the rumor about the railroad spur to be built begin to spread. John B. came to his rescue then, also the other Texans whose ranges connected and turned slices of their range over to him so he could still run a pretty fair spread.

But the sod busters also got a scare, for with John B.'s quick acting and closing the land to the north, the railroad spur come near not being built and, as it was, the Texan's land connecting to the west and other lands to the east is all that made the building go on, sort of half-hearted.

There was satisfied years as all was quiet once more, and shipping another train-load of prime beef, John B. came back to the ranch sporting a brand new top buggy and a pretty black driving team. In the buggy beside him was the second Mrs. John B. Mitchell. Mae. She was a native of the state, her dad being a cowman himself, and

when John B. and her married and figured on ways of getting back to the ranch, he was for trying one of these new fangled gasoline wagons. She decided a good saddle horse would be better, but John B. had only his own with him, and knowing it would please her he decided on the buggy and team. The saddle horse was tied behind and that went well.

Austin liked his new mother, everybody that knowed her in the whole country liked her, and many wondered how come she hadn't been tied to long before, and how come John B. to be the lucky man when there was so many others after her. But that last wasn't news to none, for John B. had long ago been known with the good reputation of always being a mile ahead.

John B. and Mae was married a couple of years and then a child was born. It was a girl, and to sort of follow up after Mae she was named June. John B. thought it was a right pretty name, but Austin only cussed the luck when he heard it was a girl and took his feelings out on an ornary bronc.

Outside of some rough weather and some dry spells which any country can be afflicted with, things went on smooth with the Seven Xs. The sod busters hadn't crawled an inch on John B.'s range from any direction. There'd been a time, when the railroad spur was first opened that things looked threatening for the north of John B.'s range on account that there was a few good and extraordinary wet years about that time and everything growed over size, better than it ever had in the home state or Russia, and that had brought on more emigrants from such thereabouts to look at John B.'s southern barrier of bench land with envy.

"How they'd like to tear that up," John B. had often said.

But the wet years was only freakish, and after that, year after year the sod busters only made average labor wages for the hard labor and worries of seeding and harvesting (if there was no hail), hauling and selling their grain. Some years they didn't make average wages, some years they'd do well enough and then again there'd be some years where what little money they might of made was spent for seed grain and grub, and no crop came. With some few such dry years, many finally left their farms, and after losing what savings they might of had on the farm and going in debt afterwards to keep it seeded, live and so on, many didn't have the price to get out of the town they'd

walked into.

That was the vision come true that John B. had had many years before. Good range sod that cattle grewed fat on had been turned over and left to weeds, frame shacks was left to pack rats and prairie mice, expensive implements for chipmunks to play on, fences down and barb wire stringing everywhere for good range horses to get into and cut sometimes to the heart, or crippled for life with cut muscles on the legs.



Good range sod that cattle grewed fat on had been turned over and left to weeds.

Good range sod that cattle grewed fat on had been turned over and left to weeds

Some of that wire was gradually picked up by the stockmen, coiled and thrown into ravines where no horses would get into it. All this time the winds and snows was scattering buffalo grass seeds over the weedy fields and it was gradually taking root again. But it was slow.

"And," says one of John B.'s Texan neighbors one time, as he and another Texan looked over a strip of abandoned range land that'd been tore up and left to barb wire entanglements and weeds, "Uncle Sam will never know and appreciate how much good range John B. and a few of us saved him from ruin."

Buffalo grass was half way back to its own when the railroad spur to the main line wasn't used no more, and a short while later the rails and ties was carted away, and even that grade would in time be covered with buffalo grass again. The booming to come west and farm on the rich prairie lands had long ago died down. The sod

busters that did stay and done well was them that moved down to the river bottoms and farmed under irrigation and where they belonged, not on range land.

John B. wasn't afraid no more of any sod busters crowding in on him in anyway, they was cured. But to protect himself against 'em he had a lot of deeded land which he had to pay taxes on and now could of leased without fear of anybody edging in. To that, John B. figured that the protection he'd had was well worth the price of the taxes. For without that deeded land his range might of been tore up and left to weeds plum up to his door step, like the country to the south of him. As it was he had good range, as nature intended it to be and he'd kept it that way, no time over-grazing it.

But now there was more expenses besides taxes to hold his range in the good shape it was. Other ranges being in poorer condition on account of the crowding sod busters, cattle got to drifting on his, and he seen that instead of putting on more line riders to keep 'em off, the only thing to do would be to build line and drift fences. There was miles and miles of them built, some as long as twenty miles at a stretch, and he had to keep the line riders just the same, to keep the fences up and to bring back or take out any stock that broke thru.

It was about then when Austin begin to take holt on the Seven Xs. He'd gone to school of winters and then, for the fun of it, he let his dad send him to college, but he couldn't learn to read brands there, how much percent of a calf crop he could expect on different conditions and ranges, how much a steer weighed on the hoof by a glance at him, nor a lot of other things he was interested to perfect himself at. So, when he got back to the ranch one spring he gave one more college yell and told his dad that that was the last of it. From then on he put on chaps and spurs and rode.

He rode and roped reckless for a couple of years and then he got to his senses and settled down to real cow work, like graduating from a fighting bronc to a useful cowhorse. He begin to notice the drift and line fences, tallied up the expenses on that along with taxes, wages, and all expenses of running the ranch. He seen that the outfit was doing fine but that with more expense, for the time, he could near double the returns on the cattle in a couple of years, and keep that up, not that that was necessary at all, but Austin had took a holt and he figured on making things hum still better, if his dad would let him.

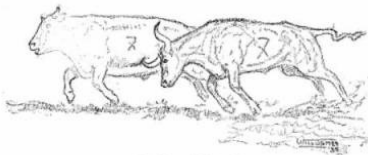
John B., being mighty pleased to see Austin take a holt the way he did without a word from him, was glad to let him "go to it." Austin went to it. First he bought two carloads of registered white faced bulls to take the place of the most average bulls that had been with herds, then he hired a ranch foreman that would have nothing to do but ride from one Seven X ranch to another and see other foremen with men under 'em about putting up the hay and keeping the ranches up in shape and in good running order. The ranch foreman had no say about the handling of the cattle, just the ranches. Austin, with his straw-bosses, took care of the cattle.

With that going on, and while John B. shook his head and grinned, Austin layed out a plan for cross fences in parts of the range. Some more big expense, but with the cross fences there'd be more than double use of the range, at the right times of the year and so it'd be less apt to be overgrazed in one place and not touched in another. The cattle could be graded and divided as to where they ought to be, and that way more stock could be run at less risk and, of course, to a bigger profit.

For a couple of years, John B. rode like he was afoot. Everywhere he went on his range was something new and sort of strange. Some things looked kind of unnecessary and even foolish to him, like for instance damming the creeks at so many places and running ditches along good side hills to carry water on the flats so more hay would grow. He'd always had plenty of hay excepting for a winter or two, besides he didn't believe in feeding range stuff much, they get too fat and don't breed so good. They ain't used to it anyhow and once they are used to it they beller at the first snowflake and run for a haystack, sure spoils 'em from rustling.

"Well," Austin would say to that, kind of cheerful-like, "I'm not going to raise all horns like yours used to be and some still are, I'm going to raise very little horn and all beef."

"Yeh," John B. came back at him once, "there might of been lots of horn to my cattle, but they come thru places and times where these things you re going to raise and which look more like a cross between a hog and a rhinoceros than cattle, could take a first step thru. Besides," he went on, "them long horns built this outfit."



"Them long horns built this outfit."

"Them long horns built this outfit."

John B. was mighty sensitive about his longhorn cattle, just as sensitive as Austin was proud of his thick bodied herefords. They still showed the longhorn strain but that would in time disappear with straight breeds of hereford bulls, and once in a while a little durham. But with all the arguments John B. and Austin would have about the old time cattle and the modern and different ways of handling 'em and doing this and that, John B.'s sensitiveness was only on the surface for Austin, and underneath there was only great pride and gratefulness for his boy. It was only hard sometimes for him to change from the old which he'd made such a good go of, to the new which sort of left him a stranger in the cow game, and to wondering. But he had confidence in Austin.

Austin, too, was mighty proud of his dad, and in his arguments with him he'd only smile down deep at his sensitiveness and admire him for the stand he'd take. Austin would of liked mighty well to've run the cattle the way his dad had, but there was no more free range now and a man couldn't take his herds and drift to any country, find a likely range and say "I'll locate here." The range was all taken up and controlled, the holdings marked down in black and white and in the recorder's office. Range boundaries wasn't guessed at by miles as in John B.'s time, but marked down to within an inch by surveyor's monuments. There was some big ranges, some taking in a hundred miles at a stretch, but the owner knowed to within that inch where his boundary line was, and inside of that line was his own.

It was up to the owner then, like in John B. s, or Austin's fix to get the best out of what they controlled. There was taxes, and to take care of on their range there was fences to build, hay to put up and wages to

pay, and so, to meet the higher cost of raising cattle, the cattle had to be of a better grade, with more beef on the hoof, and handled according.

There'd been no hay put up or fed to the cattle when John B. first turned his first herd loose to range, nor for many years afterwards, no fences, nor ranches, just a few cow camps, and no ranch hands to pay wages to. The land was free to take or leave, none to buy and pay taxes on, and none needed to be leased. It was open free land, as free to the stockman as it was to the Indian. John B.'s only expense was for a few riders and grub, and if he sold his steers for ten dollars a head he made big money. Now, with all the expenses on land, machinery and men, it cost at least fifty dollars to raise a four-year-old steer, and to make a little money, by the time that animal was delivered and sold to market, it would have to sell for eighty dollars.

That was the way things was when Austin took a holt. John B.'s four-year-old steers was only bringing eighty dollars. John B. had a lot of money cached away and all was going well and he was satisfied but Austin wanted to raise cattle for more than the fun of it. It wasn't always fun.

But Austin liked it any way it come. It was his life, with the spirit inherited from his dad and a natural born instinct at the game. He would make a go of raising cattle the same as his dad did of getting 'em and holding the range they run on. There wouldn't be so many hardships for him maybe but he would have to be a cowboy all the way thru just the same, know cattle and range well, and his hardships would come with the times, which is often worse than facing blizzards. He'd have to face blizzards too.

CHAPTER IV - Hard Winters and Dry Summers

There was good white faced stock on the Seven X range and three-year-olds was selling up a hundred dollars and over when comes a dark cloud heavy with rumors of war, the World War. Austin was too busy riding to think of war or going away across the waters only to get a black eye, but he was called, and turning the reins of his horse over to his dad, he went to report. He hoped he could take along his 30-30 carbine and 45 six-shooter with him instead of having to use the awkward contraptions he figured he'd be handed.

But the first awkward contraptions handed him was a pair of brogans, fatigue shoes, stiff as wooden shoes and which fitted him so he nearly had to step a yard ahead to feel the toe. Quite a contrast to his neat fitting hand made boots. He bore the uniform along, even if it did bind at the wrong places, like at the knees for instance and where a feller needs the most freedom. The wrapping and unwrapping of yards of cloth around the legs had him grinning. "What," he often thought, "if a feller got real scared and one of them wrappings come undone? he'd sure get tangled up in the slack."

Austin didn't get to get acquainted with the army rifle much. The first couple of weeks was only of him being herded with other recruits to get shots in the arm, learning discipline, how to salute, peel potatoes, and sing "Over There" of evenings. A few weeks of drilling and target practice, and just about when he got used to being only one in a herd, like the cattle he'd handled at home, and herd-broke to turn or swap ends at a command, he was switched over to Headquarters as a mounted scout. He was on horseback again and some happier. But he was still happier and near his real self when, as he heard that they was short of riders to break horses at the remount and he applied to be transferred there, his application was accepted.

Breaking horses with other good cowboys there (they had to be good) struck him just fine to pass the time away. That's all he cared about while there, to just pass the time away, for he had no ambition to get anywhere in the army. His ambition was on the range and amongst the herds he'd started building up.

He didn't get to go "across," he hadn't lost no cattle over there. So, when the armistice was signed and, after near a year in the army, it was finally time for him to go back to where he came from, there was no medals or war decorations on his chest for him to strut about, and even tho he should of been decorated for riding some of the outlaw horses he did at the remount he sure wasn't worried about that, all he wanted was to be turned free and to be loose on the Seven X range.

The Seven X outfit and goings on there was about the same as they'd been when he left. The folks all looked fine and was glad to see him, and they hadn't changed, none but the youngest of the outfit, June, who'd shot up some and was now riding on her sixth year, freckles and all.

The war hadn't made as much of a dent on the Seven Xs as it had with other outfits, but John B. had lost two of his best cowboys to the cause.

"Damn shame, too," he'd said, "to have such good men and so necessary to the nation go and get shot. You might get along without gold but you sure can't get along without beef."

Austin erased one year out of his life and went on from where he left off. He grinned some when he seen some bulls that should of been culled out and replaced. His dad wasn't so strong for breeding up a herd. But cattle prices was up, looked like they was going to stay up for a long time and so Austin decided to build up a thoroughbred herd and raise his own bulls. That was another big expense. So was two percheron stallions for breeding good work horses, and three morgan stallions to cross with light mares and raise better saddle horses.

John B. shook his head a bit at that but his confidence wasn't shaken any, and when three or four years later, Austin sold enough bulls to make up for what he'd put out on the thoroughbred herd, and some fine percheron colts took to the collar, and fine morgan threes and fours lined out under the saddle, John B. felt proud of his son's good judgment and ways of handling things. He knowed that with his old time ways he couldn't of done near as well.

Without a word from his dad, Austin had took it onto himself to be superintendent of the Seven Xs, over every one there but his dad, and went to work that way without any thought of wages or what it

might lead to. He kept what money he wanted from the stock he sold, and used that money for what he needed, on the outfit. He'd made it a point to ask for none that had been put away and to spend no more in his buying registered stock and improving the outfit than the returns from the sale of beef steers would allow him. He was crimped some at first but it wasn't many years when he handed his dad a big cheek every fall, which was the over of what he needed. John B. would grin and cache it away with some of the money he'd got from his very first shipment and which had been accumulating ever since with every shipment. His cache had been his cartridge belt at first, then a tin box at the ranch, and now a big bank in a big town.

There was a string of years when all went as well with the Seven Xs as could be expected with any outfit. One full round-up crew of sometimes twenty riders and remuda of two hundred saddle horses worked the range from eight to nine months every year. There, Austin was wagon-boss and relieved by John B. when sometimes he would have to be at some other parts of the range or in town and taking care of things in general.

John B. liked them times when he was boss over his own men and cattle again, and again sometimes he'd also welcome the sight of Austin riding into camp when some new ways of handling the high priced "hot house stock," as he called the well bred herefords, stumped him. Then he was glad to ride to one side, roll a smoke and watch.

But there was still more times, when Austin was left alone with the round-up works that he was also glad to see his dad ride back. For cattle, after all, is only cattle, and the sound advice of John B. often came mighty handy, even with the bred up herds.

"I wonder if it'd hurt the little dears to dab a line on 'em," he'd often grin and ask Austin during calf brandings, "and gently bring 'em to the fire to be marked with the Seven X on the left ribs? not brand 'em, mind you, just burn the hide a little so we can see the iron again next year."

John B. was always on hand with his rope whenever any such thing was to be done, either roping or cutting out or riding circle. He wouldn't hold a herd or a "cut" (cut out cattle) or stand day herd, but he would get on night guard with the rest of the boys if the herd was big and hard to hold, if it was stormy and the shifts was doubled and

long.



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The old cow-boy was never lonesome while on round-up with his men and herds, not even, as he'd often remark, "that he'd lost his job." He was with the wagon from the time it pulled out in the spring most always, excepting for short spells now and again, until it pulled in late in the fall.

The routine of the outfit was so even along with the everyday goings on that years rolled on, seemed like, without ruffling, or graying a hair. The only marker of time was June who kept a-shooting up rough and not getting any better looking. She'd been sent to school a few winters and she didn't like that much, so when she'd get back to the ranch she'd more than make up for it. She'd be wearing overalls and boots, and on horseback or afoot she'd be apt to bob up most anywhere, hair a-flying, a happy grin on her face and looking sometimes like she'd rolled in the corral.

She was thirteen when Austin near had to tie her down to take her to school again when fall come, and he had to do a lot of talking to make her realize that after all she was a girl, that it might be all right for a man to be ignorant but wouldn't set so well with a girl, and she'd better take her medicine.

June had started to take her medicine but not without making a face.

She'd stood it along all right but Austin come near upsetting the cart when he come to town a month or so later and took her pet school teacher away to make her Mrs. Austin Mitchell. That teacher had been the only one that had made school bearable. She'd only been teaching school two years and hadn't got to strict ways as yet, and her and June had got along in fine shape.

June had near kicked over the traces when she thought of her teacher going to the ranch and she'd have to stay in school and study under a new teacher. She wouldn't like that new teacher, she was sure of that, she wouldn't like her on a bet. But the new teacher, very wise, and understanding June's spirit, soon enough found a way to get a holt on the girl's heart strings. It was with leather.

For June's weakness, specially while away from the home ranch, was to cut up on leather and make things, and the teacher finding that out had her play with different leathers and teached her to make designs in carvings and such like at times while other pupils was learning how to use the needle or hammer and saw. June took to the carving pretty well, she learned to braid rawhide too, while at the saddle shop after school, and by the time spring come she'd made herself a pair of hand carved saddle pockets, two belts, a headstall, a pair of spur straps and a hackamore.

She'd got along fine with the new teacher that way, and in other ways got to liking her a whole lot and listen to her well, so well that when she went back to the ranch it came to her that she might try to be more of a lady when next school term come. Some dresses, she'd got to thinking, did look kind of nice, so did high heel slippers, but high heel slippers wouldn't do so good, because she'd ought to wear silk socks with them, and her long winter underwear would bunch up at the ankles and show. Maybe she could cut the long underwear off at the knee.

But she didn't worry no more about that when she got back to the

ranch. When she first got there she pranced around her ex-teacher, now her happy sister-in-law, called her just plain Dot, short for Dorothy, and proceeded to raise perticular heck in general, and as before, around the old home ranch.

She stacked her school books in a dark corner of her bedroom and picking up the leather work she'd done at school, she was soon down to the stables and corrals, fitting her things on her horse and saddle. And Dot, laughing most of the time at June's actions, kept well beside her.

John B. and Austin was on round-up, but they'd make it for one and then the other to be at the ranch more than usual, specially Austin, and then specially John B., for that daughter of his was a lot of pleasure to him and his wind scarred face always cracked up into a grin the second he'd see her, or even when he thought of her, most always with leather or a rope in her hands and a horse at the other end of it. He was only afraid that she might be trying to ride some horse some day that she shouldn't. He caught her speculating that way a few times, and a couple of times with her rope on horses that had to be snubbed to a corral post before it could be taken off of 'em.

"You'll never be no lady acting that way," he told her once as she was slapping the corral dirt off herself after a yearling steer which she'd been trying to ride had throwed her off. "You ought to be more like your mother and have manners and be sort of refined, or like your sister, Dot, and act like you have something else in your head besides horses and rawhide." He somehow looked at Dot as more than a sister-in-law to June.

"I haven't got time and am having too much fun to be a lady just yet, Dad," she'd laughed. "There'll be more than plenty of time when that time comes."

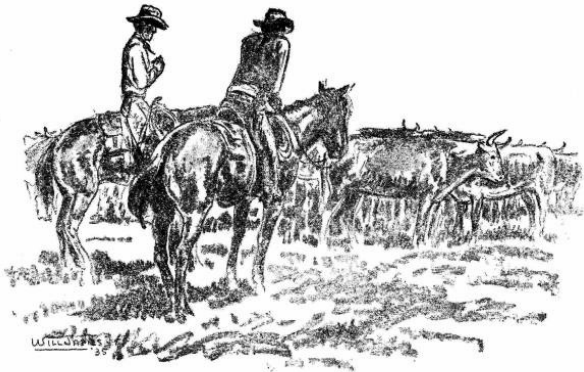
June had a great time all that summer. She even took her one pole teepee, and her and Dot went and joined the round-up wagon off and on for a few days at a time. That went well with John B. and Austin but kind of tough on the cowboys with their natural way of talking, also tough on the soap, and the cook remarked he'd never seen it disappear as it did that summer, nor had he ever seen so many clean shirts.

Time for school, and June begin to recollect the intentions she'd had the winter before, how to become a lady. She didn't know how she'd like any teaching on that but the new teacher had seemed to be interested and thought she should learn. So had her dad and mother, and maybe everybody else too if they only could of said so. Anyway, June figured, that learning manners and how to be a lady wouldn't be any worse than the rest of the schooling, and if she was going to take one she'd just as well take all and have it over with.

Her dad took her to school that fall, and leaving her in the care of Mae's sister he drove back to the ranch feeling that June had seriously thought on the subject of being a lady. At least she'd talked that way, and John B. was pleased.

When he got back to his range and then joined the round-up again a few days later he found Austin busy cutting out good beef steers for shipments. There was a kind of sorrowful look on Austin's face.

"Dammit, Dad," he said after the cutting was done out of the day's drive, "there's some two and three-year-olds in that cut I sure hate to ship. All they need is one more year and we'd near double the money on 'em. But I've got to ship all I can because I'm sure getting overstocked. It's either ship or get more range."



"It's either ship or get more range."

"It's either ship or get more range."

"Ain't there some old or barren fat cows that you can ship in the place of 'em?" asks John B., acting as tho he didn't know.

Austin looked at the herd, all well bred and uniform cattle and not a barren or old cow amongst 'em. For he'd been getting rid of them steady the last years so as to make room for the good young stuff that came to replace them. They'd multiplied fast, and it was hard to get rid of good young she stuff when it was near a cinch all was in calf.

John B. looked at Austin and in a dry way says, "Yep. That's just the way I've seen outfits spread plum down to Mexico, or either overgraze and lose half their stock during winters, by hating to sell young she stuff and overstocking."

"But it's the same thing about the young steers, they need another year and I don't know whether to let them or some of the fat heifers go."

"Let 'em both go. Cut down to the size your range can handle and you'll have a heap less worry and a lot better cattle, also make more money in the long run."

But, as many a good cowman has done, Austin took a chance. He'd rather worry than ship any of the young heifers, and he also cut back many of the two and three-year-old steers.

That winter was a good lesson for Austin. He worried a-plenty and wished long before spring come that he'd listened to his dad's advice. The summer before had been dry, the usual amount of hay hadn't been put up and, as often happens, a pretty hard winter followed. The winter and deep snows alone took ten percent of his cattle, the bogs took another five percent, and the calf crop was five percent lower than the average. Besides he had not a spear of hay left over in reserve and in case the following summer was also dry.

But the herds was cut down now, cut down twenty percent and to where they should of been cut the fall before, at a profit then instead of a total loss and worry. And that goes to show, Austin had said to himself in remembering what his dad often said, that no matter how much you know about the cattle game there's always plenty more to learn. Other cattlemen had made the same mistake that winter, but it wasn't altogether a mistake, it was more of a gamble, like it is with most everything.

John B. didn't let on anything or say any "I told you so" as he seen how things wound up when spring come. He had sort of predicted it the fall before, and now he figured that the loss of the cattle was well worth the lesson for time to come.

The lesson had went home with Austin in fine shape, and for fear of another dry summer and then a hard winter following he dickered for a good hay ranch and range adjoining the Seven Xs. The price was high on account that cattle was high and hay was scarce, and even tho the owner wanted to sell, figuring there'd be no better time, he wanted to sell for all he could get. Austin bought it and even tho the price was steep he felt better.

"And the first thing you know," John B. had said to that, "you'll be spreading out with more ranches, maybe making more money but only bringing you more troubles and cares and you'll be riding a desk chair and getting gray headed figuring out things instead of riding a

good horse and airing your brain."

But Austin wasn't going to spread. He'd grinned and said he wanted that ranch for his boy.

John B. had squinted at him. "How do you know it's going to be a boy?" he'd said.

And it was a boy. It came and let out its first holler just a little while before it was time for June to go to school again and there was great rejoicing on the Seven X home ranch. John B. was now a granddad and he was as proud of the little parcel of humanity as Austin and Dot was, and made more so when the couple decided to call him John B. John Byron Mitchell, right after his own self.

"But what do you want to buy a ranch for the boy for?" John B. had asked Austin afterwards. "Ain't there enough room and range on the old Seven Xs for him to romp on?"

"Yes," Austin had answered, "there sure is, but there's calves that need room to romp on too. I want to keep the cattle to the number they are now and I wanted to make double sure I could do that by getting that extra ranch and range."

Austin made mighty good use of the ranch he'd bought, and being the summer had not been much better in moisture than the summer before the hay that was cut off the place helped considerable. He'd had the thoroughbred herd held on the range there too, also some steers to be shipped that fall. It was also a good place to hold and feed weaners (weaned calves) thru the winter, and all put together the place would pay for itself in a few years if the prices of cattle held up and Austin didn't overstock.

Austin didn't overstock. He kept the herd to the size it had been cut down to, and regardless of a little sacrifice he shipped good cows and heifers, and even a few steers that should of been held another year in order to hold the herds down to the size to fit the range.

It helped him some too when he begin to ship his steers when they was long yearlings (year and a half old) instead of three and four years old. There wasn't so many steers to hold over from year to year then, and he realized he should of done that sooner but it was hard for him to get to that. For he liked nothing better them to see big four-

year-olds, and he'd been just as hard headed in wanting to hold steers over that way as his dad had been in hanging onto his longhorns and cross breeds. The other stockmen had been shipping their steers when long yearlings for quite a few years.

Austin done that gradually, and when the time come he was shipping straight yearlings his she stuff had accumulated until the herds numbered the same as it was before, and with the high price of land and the raising of cattle, he done better by feeding his weaner calves during one winter and shipping 'em the following fall, than he would of by holding 'em until they was three and four.

Austin was lucky. The prices of cattle held up and even went higher for two or three years more, and he figured that the ranch he'd bought, as he'd said for his boy, had well paid for itself in many ways, and he still had it, like to the good.

Then come the year when Wall Street met its Waterloo and the crash come (1929). Cattle went down, but not so low until the next year. They was to come down still more a couple of years later, and yearling steers that had brought ninety and a hundred dollars per head was doing well to sell at thirty.

That was the doings of the depression after the crash of course, but the stockman had to contend with more than that. There was three dry years in John B.'s country, and then come the drought (1934), a real dry year with swarms of grasshoppers and crickets, and when what little grass come curled up and went back into the ground, if the insects didn't get it first.

Springs dried up that John B. and other old timers had never seen dry and thought never would dry. Cattle died by the thousands from thirst and starvation in most every range state, and with the prices of them being so low the stockman felt pretty discouraged, for stock cattle that couldn't be bought for sixty dollars per head only a very few years before, now couldn't be sold for twenty. Nobody had any feed to give 'em.

The government stepped in then, the first time, it seemed like to the cowmen, that it had ever gave them a thought. It had before thought only of and been for the sheepman and farmer or anybody that cut into their range. When finally come the cowman's turn to get help, the government bought millions of cattle out of the drought stricken

states at an average of thirteen dollars a head, good cattle and needing water only and grass. There was government slaughter and packing houses put up here and there and the cattle was put into cans for keeps.

The cowman was helpless. He couldn't fight the hot winds and keep the springs from drying, nor the swarms of insects from covering his range, and rather than see his cattle die he sold out for what he could get, and the government was the only buyer.

Some sold more than they should of for fear of the coming winter, with no grass and no hay up. For, excepting in irrigated parts there was hardly one ton could be cut on the same land that twenty tons had been cut off of only a few years before. Some cowmen practically sold everything and took a chance of keeping only enough she stock to start a new herd. It was a good thing they did.

Many dryland farmers which had somehow raked up a living before had to turn tail and quit too. Then come rumors that a lot of such farmers was going to be put in regular farming country where they belong, and the country they'd tore up and left to weeds was to be turned back to grazing land.

That sounded good, mighty right and sensible, said many a cowman. It should of been done thirty years before and the farmer not allowed to come on the range in the first place. But better late than never, and it's good that the value of range is at last appreciated as valuable for range only, and not worth anything for farming.

The Seven X range didn't suffer as much as most ranges, and not at all as compared to some ranges of other states. No cattle starved or suffered from thirst on it, and instead they stayed in good shape and made beef, Austin was glad that he'd kept his herds down to the size his range could handle, also glad again he'd bought the ranch and range adjoining. As it was, he seen where he could winter his stock without fear of much loss. He had quite a bit of hay from the years before and some grass, and when fall come he cut his herds down some more, shipping all of his yearling steers and even some fat cows which he hated to part with. The price he got for them was like giving them away as compared to what he'd got for the same stuff just a few years before, but he didn't want to be caught with so many cattle and so little grass and hay if a severe winter come. He'd had one lesson that way.

It felt good to skins and hides when finally fall come with its cooler weather. The Seven X riders was busy shifting herds so as to make use of what feed there was before winter come, and June, at the home ranch, was piling things in her wardrobe trunk preparing to go to school some more, college now, and in some big city a couple of days ride on the train.

John B. and Mae hadn't given up on her education. They was bound to make a refined lady of her in spite of herself, and being game to what all her parents wished, she made a hand of herself and took her medicine.

But June was now a lady, as perfect a little lady as one could be. She'd long ago lost her spindle legged kid ways, and even tho she was still married to saddle leather and horses and sort of made her home in the stable and corrals, she'd manage to come to the table at meal time without too much corral dust sticking to her. She'd even quit saying "Goldern," "dadgum it" and such words, when there was anybody around, and even tho she still rode reckless and happy she carried herself like an all around little lady, and rider.



She carried herself like an all-round little lady, and rider.

She carried herself like an all-round little lady, and rider.

And to the surprise and pride of all, she grewed to be a good looking girl too, a mighty good looking girl. It seemed a miracle, like she'd stuck her face in a perfect mask form and come out with it all regular that way, freckles and rough skin all smoothed out, and with her boughten manners she could of sit down as a queen where all other queens would of had to stand and pay honor.

But she didn't lead or break no records at any special thing while at

school or college. She just sort of skipped over things and barely managed to make time grade at times so she'd be allowed under the roofs of education. The last year or two, and to kind of get her interested in sort of elevating things, Mae had talked her into taking fashion designing. That would get her in higher circles maybe, and to mingling with that kind.

Mae had talked to John B. of her secret ambition that sometime June would meet up with some nice young man of good family and high standing and then marrying that kind. That ought to be easy enough with a girl like her, she thought.

It would of been easy enough, June had said when she got the hint of that, but she couldn't get interested. "Take 'em away from their parents, care," she'd said, "and they re like a new calf away from its mammy, only more helpless."

The talk and education of such kind was of abroad, everything was of abroad, and June would say when she'd get peeved "what the hell is the matter with the U. S.? It's good enough for them to make their money in. But they don't even know their own country. Some think the West is still wild and woolly, as they call it, and over-run with buffalo and Indians, and others say that it's all cut up in little plots and farmed, and that there's no more range or cowboys. What ignorance for educated people. They might know a Rembrandt or a Whistler or a Poe, and all about Vienna or Monte Carlo and foreign lands but they don't know much of Mark Twain, and never seen the sun rise on the bad lands. They ve never been deep in our Rockies and still they say that the Alps has got them beat, because it's only fashionable to go there.

"Give 'em a horse and point to a herd and they wouldn't know 'sic 'em but give 'em a straw in a glass and some cake and they can sure make a hand of themselves."

"But they re not all like that," her mother had interrupted.

"No. I will say that there's some good and worth while young men. I've met and got to know some, but, I don't know, they just don't seem to know or talk my language. They re not my breed, and I can't get interested."

Mae had just looked at John B. at that. She hadn't said anything but

her eyes had done that a-plenty in hopelessness. John B. had just shook his head and grinned to himself.

"But you like fashion designing, don't you?" her mother had finally asked.

June had laughed a little. "Fairly well," she'd said. "I have made some good designs for riding skirts and jackets."

Then John B. sort of cleared his throat. "Too bad," he'd said, doing his best to look serious. "Here your mother and me had planned on sending you to Europe to really finish up on your education and carry on with your designing and sort of see the world."

That had near took the pins out from under June. She'd sat down on the edge of the porch, and without saying a word looked away across the valley to the mountain ranges. When she'd finally spoke she didn't look happy.

"What am I," she'd said, "that I have to be sent away to places I don't care for and stuffed with education that don't mean two burned beans to me? Then to be exiled in moth-eaten foreign countries when I want to be here, where I belong and amongst all that's my life?"

She'd stopped for a minute, then looked straight at her dad. "My heart is as much here as yours is, Dad, and how would you of liked to've been sent away to college, let alone foreign parts, when at my age and as you started to build this outfit? I have something to build too, my life."

"But you re a lady, June."

"That's no fault of mine," she'd said, "and that's no reason why I should be made to suffer for it."

There'd been no more said on the subject, and when June went to college again that fall, John B. and Mae hoped that with the simmering of all that had been discussed she would see things their way and agree with 'em. John B. wasn't so strong for punishing his daughter that way, but Mae had made him think it would be best and most worth while for her, and that in time she would get to like more refined things and ways of living and would thank them for what they now was doing for her.

John B. was of course mighty anxious to see her have the best in life and he would do all he could towards that, but he was mighty doubtful of any highfaluting refinery ever taking her away from her home on the range. He couldn't picture her mincing words and cookies and doing a lot of nothings.

June had been gone only a few days when a good rain come. It lasted for days, then cleared up warm for a couple of weeks, then come two more rains separated only by a day, and when it cleared and turned warm again the country greened up and grass grewed till it looked as good as it had the spring before. It was a fine long warm fall and the ranges came to life and relieved the stockmen of considerable worry for the winter to come. Trees begin to bud and leafed out some in middle November and there was a few spring flowers blossomed out.

John B. had never seen such a fall, and he warned his wife not to mention anything of the weather when she wrote to June, or that girl might be apt to quit the college flats and hit for the ranch on a high lope.

The round-up wagon stayed out until December that fall. The weather kept clear and the grass growed some till near Christmas, then it come cold, with a little snow. The coldest of the winter didn't come until after New Year's, and then, when it usually was thirty below it only got down to fifteen. There was little flurries of snow but no stock had been fed on the Seven Xs as yet and there was still quite a bit of standing feed (grass).

The winter stayed open that way, and even tho the stockmen was relieved of a hard winter they now feared a following dry hot summer and crickets. The Seven Xstock was in good shape and some near prime beef could of been shipped out of the herds right at that time. February was good and warm. Then March come along, like a lamb at first but it soon turned out like a lion. One heavy snowstorm come and covered up the range with a white twelve-inch blanket. Austin done his first feeding of the winter. Then the snow melted away and another storm come, and before it melted there come another one. And Austin kept on a-feeding, for there was hardly any more grass left and what there was was buried under snow.

But he was happy to see the ranch hands feeding the stock good hay. For with the storms there was promises of a good moist spring

and summer ahead and the long drought being broken. The ranges of Western and middle Western states being all cleaned out of surplus cattle the summer before threatened a shortage of beef and stock cattle and prices had already gone up to near double of what they'd been the year before.

"And," John B. had said, "they're going to go up some more too, I'm thinking. Stock cattle can hardly be bought right now, and lucky is the man who was able to hang on to his. People has got to eat, and there's nothing can take the place of beef when you're hungry and when you're not."

That's the way things was with the Seven Xs, now the old Seven Xs, as we first seen the two cowboys, Sol and Gat pulling bog, and the day's work and their talk of the evening in the bunk house was the average goings on of that time with them. Still riding the old range that many a cowboy had rode before 'em, and that old range still in one piece after it had been disputed for, and fought for, from the time of Indian spears, and other breeds to the plow share. Old John B. had held it against all. Now him and Austin would hold it against drought and depression, strikes, floods, and rumors of wars. People would have to eat beef to stand up, even if they did mill around like a crazy herd, and with his seventy-five years, John B. could still ride a-plenty and keep on producing cattle, minding his own business and letting the rest of the world go by. He was a lot more than doing his duty by that world.

CHAPTER V - Spring and Round-Ups

It was another middle afternoon and it was a fine day this time as Sol and Gat was returning to the ranch from their daily ride of the bogs. The skies had cleared just a couple of days before, and even tho there was still snow on the ground it was melting fast under the warm sun, and the cowboys got their first whiffs of what really smelled like spring air. It was April.

"You'd better sniff good while you ve got the chance," says Sol, seeing Gat sticking his nose up in the air, "because I'm thinking we'll be sniffing some more snow again before long. I feel like we re going to have a wet spring."

"I hope so," says Gat, "and that you have to pull bog and get in the mud every day for talking like that when it's weather like this."

The two had been pulling bog for over three weeks, not a job that any cowboy likes much, but on this day it had all been fair, the bogs like with the weather, and Gat didn't have to get off his horse and get in the mud to help or pull a critter out, not once. There was few cattle bogging down now because most of 'em was being fed and away from boggy places.

The ground was slippery under snow. The horses slipped and slid on and off trails, up the low rise near the ranch and down into the swollen creek near the corrals. The swift running water was near to the saddle skirts at the crossing there.



The ground was slippery under snow.

The ground was slippery under snow.

Riding into the corrals and to the long stable, Old John B. was there, just a-tinkering around with a marlin spike and some whang leather and looking down country over the corral bars every once in a while.

"Haven't seen anything of that boy of mine anywhere, have you?" he asks as Sol and Gat rode near.

By "that boy of mine" the riders well knowed who he meant. It was that little light haired boy of Austin's, young John B. He was now called just Johnnie, and along with other names which went according to his actions he was also called "the spoiled colt of the outfit" by old John B.

Young Johnnie, now near ten years old, had gone out riding just a couple of hours before noon time, that is, his saddle and the horse he used had disappeared about then, like it often would, for he'd sometimes take a streak of going riding by himself and without saying a word to anybody. Nobody worried much about that because Johnnie was a good little rider for his age and he was too wise and used to the country and stock to get into any jack pot or mix-ups of any kind.

But he was usually pretty good getting in at mealtime, and this day he hadn't showed up. Now it was middle afternoon and he still hadn't showed up. Old John B. was getting fidgety.

"Want me to go hunt for him?" Gat asked.

"No. I'll just wait a while. He'll most likely show up any time now."

The riders unsaddled, turned their horses in the feed corral, and went to the bunk house, to stretch out and prepare to even up for the noon meal they'd missed. Old John B. stuck around the stables and fidgeted and kept a-looking down country where he figured Johnnie had went.

He'd just about decided to saddle up and go hunt for him when, taking another look around, he seen a small figure coming slowly across the cow pasture and packing something. After a while he seen it was Johnnie packing his saddle, and Old John B. felt relieved even tho wondering some how come the boy to be afoot.

As Johnnie came nearer, John B., peeking thru the corral bars, noticed that the boy was sobbing, and in a very much hurt way.

"Well, what the samhill now, Son?" says John B., climbing over the corral to meet him.

Johnnie, sort of caught by surprise, stopped his sobbing. He didn't want to be seen doing that. He didn't seem to want to answer either, or talk in any way.

Old John B. left him be. He knowed what had happened but he wanted to know how it come about, but as he heard the boy sobbing again in a dark corner of the stable he just waited his time and thought of ways to soon make him forget his hurt.

After a while, Johnnie, red eyed but over with his sobbing, came near his granddad who'd been waiting for him by the stable door. John B. didn't ask no questions, just squinted at the boy and smiled like in sympathy. Johnnie could talk now.

"Old Badger," he says, getting straight to the point. "He died."

"Just like that?" asks John B.

"Yes, just like that," says Johnnie as he snapped his fingers.

"Well. I'm glad to hear of that in a way. I was afraid he might of broke a leg or got crippled up somehow. I'd sure hated to had to shoot that old pony."

"No. I was just riding him along at a walk and looking around when he just sort of quivered a bit and went right down under me. I think he was dead before he hit the ground."

Johnnie came near breaking to sobbing again, but he caught himself and after a while went on.

"I stayed with him a couple of hours thinking maybe he'd come to, but he didn't move a muscle from the time he went down. It was of no use I know because his eyes was glassy, he hadn't drawed a breath and his ears was cold. But it surprised me so that I couldn't believe it. He'd felt so good all this morning and till he droppeded."

As Johnnie stopped talking, John B. asked him, "You didn't over-run him or get him too hot, did you, Son?"

"No," says Johnnie, "I hardly took him out of a walk. I did run him a little to move a few head of cattle that had broke into the horse pasture but that didn't turn a hair on him."

"Well," says John B. after a while, "he was a pretty old horse, over twenty, I know, and he died just like the good cowhorse he was, packing his rider well till the last minute. He had to go, his old heart just quit, and I'm glad to see him go that way, fat, sound as a cricket and feeling good to his last breath and no hurt when the end came.

"And now," he went on, trying to ease Johnnie's hurt, "don't you feel bad, that pony is in horse heaven now, on tall grass, plenty of shade

and water and with no work to do, not even pestering flies to swish his tail at." Then, to turn all thoughts away from Badger, he says, "And I suppose you forgot all about that little black horse I was going to have broke for you this spring."

Johnnie came to life at that and his eyes brightened. "Oh no I haven't," he says, "I sure haven't."

"That's good," says John B. "I'm going to have him started right soon now and you better be thinking of a name for him, because you'll have to name him yourself, you know. In the meantime you can ride Chub. He's good and gentle now and a young enough horse, and even if he don't savvy the cow as some horses do, I think you'll get along with him and like him fine."

That pleased Johnnie very much. He'd long ago wanted that horse and once asked his dad for him, but his dad had said that the horse wasn't safe, that he'd buck.

That would of been all right with Johnnie but his dad couldn't see it that way. The buck had been taken out of Chub since, and now his granddad said he could have him. That was all that was necessary, for he figured his granddad, John B., to be the supreme boss of the outfit in everything and everybody concerning it, and Johnnie was happy.

April wore on with Sol and Gat and Lou and Hie and other Seven X riders riding bog while ranch hands played nurse and carted hay and water to the stock that had been chilled in bogs before being pulled out on high and solid ground. A few would never get up, then some that did would go right back, like the fool cattle they are, and bog right down again in near the same place they'd been pulled out of.

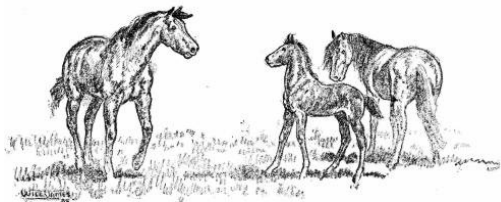
But, considering the wide marshes on creeks and big springs, not many cattle was lost to the bogs, and soon enough, with rains that come, water got to running instead of standing to seep in marshy places and there was a solider bottom where the cattle come to drink. The snow had all gone, grass was growing and cattle was strong. Riding bog was over for that year.

Cowboys was getting restless all over the range from staying in one camp every night and riding the same country every day, and they was glad to quit riding bog and gather at the home ranch to start on

horse round-up. Half a dozen riders from different Seven X winter camps and ranches gathered there, the others would stay at their camps and go on riding line on the cattle that had been turned back on the range until the round-up wagon pulled out for calf branding.

The old home ranch was very busy preparing for the spring works. The head ranch foreman and his foremen was around with their ranch hands and right on hand with the divvying up of the work horses that was run in off the range for the summer's work. The horses had run on the range and not not been fed one pound of hay during the whole winter. No horses was ever fed or needed to be fed hay or grain on the Seven Xs, none but the few winter horses that was kept up and used steady, and many old saddle and work horses didn't know what grain was. But there was many horses, none was overworked, and living natural as they was, always outside and most of the time free on the range, they lived to old ages and stayed sound and in good shape the year around.

Hundreds of horses was run in, and even tho it was always planned to turn the horses out in the fall so the saddle and work horses would run separate and not mix with the stock horses (mares and colts), the range they run on was open and being it was more fitted for horses than cattle on account of it being rough and rocky and kept pretty well for horses, they would naturally hit for where they spent their colthood days and was raised, and there they all mixed up pretty well. When the mound-up work and shipping would be all done in the fall and the remuda was turned loose on good range to winter, most of the horses would hit back for their country. Broncs and well broke cow horses would get there to find their mammies with another colt which had been born while they'd been away and run in for work on spring roundup. Some old saddle horses would sometimes find their mammies getting decrepit and with no colts, and sometimes they'd be missing, their bones gone back into earth.



Find their mummies with another colt.

Find their mummies with another colt.

It was the same with the heavier work horses, of course, and with all the kinds of horses mixed up that way, big bunches had to be run in in order to separate the saddle and work horses from the stock horses. That can't be done on the range like with cattle, for it would take a lot of running to single a horse out of a bunch, and if it could be done, he couldn't be held separated. He'd be sure to break back, so they had to be run in by whole bunches and corralled where they was separated from one corral to another and another, then each bunch had to be taken out one at a time.

Few of the saddle and work horses would stay on the range they was turned onto when the summer's work was done, for, on account that over half of the Seven X range was still open, without cross fences and very little drift fences, they was free to roam to where their instinct called 'em inside of that range. They didn't care or try to get outside of it, for on that range was where they was born and raised. Besides, all the natural runs out or into that range was pretty well closed with line fences.

But sometimes bunches of outside horses would stray in over mountain ridges or acrost deep washes and down steep rims. There was quite a few such stray bunches amongst the horses that was gathered. There would also be many stray cattle seen when round-up started, and Austin figured strong on sometime fencing the whole range around tight, also putting in some cross fences to keep the

horses on their right good ranges during winters, and from mixing.

Austin had already done quite a bit of such fencing, but it was mostly around the ranches and on meadows, and he figured he should do quite a bit more, and across the range.

The only thing that had kept him from doing that was the size of the range and the big expense of the work. For the Seven X range was no little one, and with the ranch and range he'd bought ten years or more before, it was now sixty miles long and over forty miles wide, taking in big creeks, two ranges of mountains, foothills with a spring in near every draw, rolling country, big strips of bench land, and flats ten to fifteen miles at a stretch. A big river cut deep and across one end of the range, leaving about one-fourth of it on the other side. That river made a good cross fence, but it was more of an impassable barrier at times when it was high and ice floated down it during spring, and at its lowest, all stock wanted on either side would have to be swum across. The closest bridge was a couple of hundred miles away.

There hadn't been much thought as to the size of the range when John B. first brought his herd to the country. He only wanted plenty of room and there was plenty of it at the time. It wasn't until other cattle and horse men come that he begin to line out a boundary and to holding the range inside of it. His herd had multiplied so that according to range laws, made on the range and without interference of politicians, he had a right to it.

Now there was more cattle run on the Seven X range than John B. ever run before, but the putting up of hay by the hundreds of tons and quartering the range so as to get full benefit of it, is what made that possible. There was now near twenty thousand cattle on the Seven X range and close to a thousand horses. That was the number Austin and John B. had decided to keep running, and being now that they was shipping steers and yearlings, and holding 'em over only one winter instead of three or four as before, there was more cows, and the calf branding averaged up to about eight thousand head a year.

So the old Seven Xs is a pretty fair sized outfit and keeping right busy pretty well the year around. Austin was more than busy himself and seen the time when he had to put one of the old boys as cowboss over the whole herds, also a bookkeeper that could ride and keep tab of things on ranches and range, and mark 'em down on

books, and for income taxes. Austin had plenty to do just overseeing the whole spread. He was near as much in a car going here and there as he was on horseback, and when he went on horseback he now rode good sensible cow horses and not wild-eyed snorty broncs like he used to like to ride. He'd long ago got over that stage and he'd sometimes shudder at the thought of the horses he'd rode. But there was work for him to do now, and that couldn't be done along with wild and reckless riding.

And old John B. had had it sort of easy as a fairly well silent owner. About his only comments on running the outfit was when his advice was asked or when, seldom, he seen thru his long years of experience, that a mistake was being made.

He didn't go to jumping around from here to there in no automobiles. He'd leave the crazy speed to the young folks, as he'd say. He hadn't missed them contraptions in his life, a good horse had been plenty fast enough and a lot could be done with him. And you'd be sure to get there too, rain or shine, mud or dust.

So, he sort of lived his life the way he was used to and like the king he was. He was happy with the little kingdom he'd built and which his son was adding touches onto. He was happy with Mae and the whole family, comfortable and still mighty hale and hearty, and even tho there was little, very little, ruffles now and again with June or Austin that was life and all interesting, and he was mighty proud of them and the good spirit they showed.

And in his tinkering around, as he called it, riding when he wanted to and doing what he wanted to do, seeing calves grow into beef, grass greening up and good herds grazing in good feed, it all seemed mighty complete and to his liking. He couldn't ask for more.

The horse round-up took the riders to different camps and ranches on the Seven X range. John B. and Johnnie went along, one by force of habit and interest, and the other by force of curiosity, also a heap of interest, and when that round up was over, the work horses divided to the different ranches and stock horses turned loose again, the remuda was put into a big pasture, there to stay on good feed for a while and until cattle round up and spring branding started.

Getting back to the home ranch, the round-up cook now had given up his job to another at the cook house. He had the chuck wagon close

by and with brush and broom and a bucketful of hot lye water, he was scouring away at the chuck box and cleaning it up after the winter's accumulation of dust and dirt. He was making it ready for the round-up works which would soon start. Kettles, dutch ovens, skillets, tin dishes and all was scoured, put where they belonged and made ready, also all parts in the wagon where grub and beef would be kept for the hungry cowboys that would come a-riding in between rides on circle and work on branding.

Such a sight as the round-up cook puttering around and getting the chuck wagon ready that way is always a sight to gladden the cowboy's heart. The cowboys might be just as glad to see the home ranch buildings and corrals when fall comes and the last herds are being handled under cloudy and snowy skies, and all on the ground is muddy and stiff with cold, socks are frozen and bedding is damp, after standing long night guards and all. But somehow with the sight of the chuck wagon being made ready there's a call to drift. It means spring, the topping off of the horses that haven't been rode since the fall before and now shied off slick with green grass. It means the rounding up of big herds, the branding with the whistling of ropes and the smell of burning hair, the belling of the cattle mixing in with the riders joking, while the showing of skill in riding and roping goes on, for every once in a while some horse "breaks in two" (goes to bucking) while roping, some bronc.[*]

[* Unbroke range horse or one just started.]

Anyhow, with all the goings on with the round-up wagon and outfit and works, the company of many other riders, the happenings, most always on new range every day and new camp by night, all go mighty well with the spirit that's in the makeup of every cowboy, and it takes long months of that, averaging three changes of horses and sixteen hours of riding out of every twenty-four, and the fall storms to come down a-howling around him, before his thoughts begin to meander towards the shelter of the long bunk house at the home ranch or some dirt-roofed log-walls of the cow camps.

May come and "the wagon" was ready to pull out. "The wagon" was made up of three wagons, one for grub and kettles and all that goes for the round-up cook's uses, along with his roll of bedding and belongings, also maybe the round up boss, bed roll, and a mess tent. The cook drove the four horse team on that. Then there was the bed wagon which carried not much more than the cowboys bed rolls and

few belongings, also the big coiled cable for use as rope corral. That was drove by the "nighthawk," the rider who herds the remuda at night. The moves of camp are pretty quick, not often taking over a couple of hours, and the nighthawk can sleep all the rest of the day. A move of ten and fifteen miles would be made in that couple of hours, for the wagon teams was put to a trot when possible, and sometimes to a lope.

The third wagon was the wood and water wagon. It comes in necessary when making dry camp on the middle of some big flat where no wood or water can be had for the cook and men. Such camps are made pretty well on the move. The cook's flunky drives that wagon.

With what's called "The wagon" also takes in the remuda (the saddle horses) which is drove from camp to camp and taken care of, herded and corralled by the wrangler during the day. There's an average of ten horses to each rider and that's what goes to make up the "remuda," or "cavvy" (caviada) as it's called in some states. The horses are corralled three times a day, at meal times and for a change to fresh horses for the riders.

So, when a cowboy says he's going to join such and such a wagon, that's the kind of an outfit and works he's getting into, amongst plenty of other riders, horses, cattle and work, day and night, and where there's no unions or strikes. A cowboy just has to be a cowboy to fill the place, that's all.

With the starting out of "the wagon" from the home ranch there was quite a bit of goings on. Horses and cowboys was in every corral, the spooky teams was harnessed and hooked up by the cowboys, the cook handled the "ribbons" (lines), and as the pilot, the rider taking the lead to the camp grounds, gave a sign the whole outfit started out like it'd been held down too long. The three wagons followed one another, then came the remuda of two hundred saddle horses hazed by the wrangler to follow the last wagon, and flanking the whole outfit was eighteen riders, some still having it out with the fresh and kinky horses they was riding.

Old John B. watched the outfit go. A right pretty sight, he thought. He was proud of that outfit, and he had a right to be, for there wasn't anything half ways or barb-wiry about it. The men, horses, wagons and all was sound and true, and he could of put it up with any outfit on

any range for works and looks and not took second. He'd kept the outfit up to old time standards and when the cow game was adjusted and in running order, and when the cowmen got to really knowing what all would be needed, not over the necessary, to make up a real round-up spread. All was in place and there was a place for everything on the wagons. The men had the rules with their work which they would know if they ever worked for a well run "wagon" on any outfit, John B. had that kind, and not a word of an order needed to be told 'em.

Things seemed mighty quiet, dead quiet all of a sudden as "the wagon" left. There'd been the bustling of getting everything and horses together for the start, then all at once, it seemed like "the wagon" topped the low rise on the way out of the ranch and all disappeared over it.

John B. rolled a smoke and looked around, like as if he'd of a sudden woke up alone and in the middle of the desert. Looking towards the corrals he seen Gat there fooling around with a little black horse, and Johnnie by the stable watching.

He then looked towards the house. The women folks had been standing on the porch there while the outfit started out, but now they was all inside, and but for the smoke coming out of two chimneys the house looked deserted. Austin had also gone in the lead with "the wagon."

But old John B. felt all at peace. He would join the wagon later, and now there was something for him to attend to at the ranch. There was the breaking of horses to be started, and then, being there was considerable stock around the ranch which would need to be handled, and some shoved to other ranges, him and his two old pensioners, as he called Lou and Hie, and who had stayed behind, would be busy for quite a spell. By that time maybe June would be back, it would be June by then.

And that reminded him. He'd have to send Gat after a certain cowboy by the name of Rod Sothern to help with the breaking of horses, and if he remembered right, June had acted as tho she a little more than liked that cowboy when he'd been at the ranch to break a few horses a couple of years before. John B. liked Sothern and he would of kept him at the ranch more if it hadn't been for that. But that couldn't be helped now, for many of the horses in the remuda

was getting old, some would have to be pensioned and replaced, and being there was many good young horses now of age to be broke that would have to be done, and Sothern would be needed for that.

There would be a good bunch, more than had been broke in one summer on the Seven Xs. There'd be near a hundred from four-year-olds on up, and he figured on Sothern and Gat of doing the job breaking 'em. Sol had gone with the wagon.

The good reason John B. wanted Sothern was that he'd never seen any man break horses as much to his liking as he had. That cowboy had long ago done his wild riding on broncs and settled down to teaching 'em something instead of trying to find out how hard they could buck, and the broncs he'd started a couple of years before had most all "finished" (broke in) as well behaving horses, some of 'em getting to be top cowhorses.

Now, with this bunch of good broncs coming up, the makings of as fine a bunch of saddle horses as any man could want, John B. wanted good men to start 'em, and there's where Sothern would be very necessary. Gat would be a good man too, they'd be a good team. Besides, as John B. got to figuring, he would like to see if June had changed the last two years, and it would be a good chance to find out with Sothern around and in the corrals.

Sothern had rode for John B. off and on for quite a few years, sometimes hitting plum down to the Mexican border of winters and then coming back in the spring. Besides knowing how to break horses well, and being from New Mexico, there was other things John B. liked about Sothern, he was always on the job on time and a good all around cowboy. "Too bad too," John B. often thought, "if he was the right good man he is and not a cowboy, I might let him look at June, but, as old Lou would say, cowboys are born so derned free. It's hard for 'em to settle down in one place and make a home, and that way it's also hard on the woman that marries one sometimes."

Gat was gone for a couple of days, found Sothern at one of the Seven X cow camps and came hack with him and his bed and "thirty years, gatherings" (belongings) on a pack horse. Sothern was glad to get the summer's work of breaking horses, for he liked that better than any, he didn't think of the bigger wages it would pay.

The broncs to be broke had already been gathered and separated from the others during the horse round-up and they now was in a handy pasture with only a few broke saddle horses, and there was work going on again as the first bunch of broncs was run in to be broke.

Little Johnnie had very much wanted to go with the wagon when it started out, but that would be a mighty busy outfit and no place for kids, nor anybody else that don't know the work, for no matter how a feller, new to that work, might try to keep out of the way, he's most always doing something to be in it, and he's of no use in any way. Johnnie was sort of lonesome while Gat was gone. He didn't care to ride with his granddad and old Lou and Hie, they was too finicky about ways of handling cattle and all they talked about while riding was old times. If he could of rode with his granddad alone that would of been different.



SOTHERN —

Sothern

But he was made happy again when, after Gat got back with Sothern, they went to work at breaking horses. The little black which his granddad had given him was of course the one first caught again, and being that Gat had already started him and broke him to lead he

went with breaking him from there on.

Sothern had caught another horse, the first one he looked at before he let his loop sail, and Gat helped throw him. A strong halter was slipped on that bronc's head, then he was let up to be hazed into another corral where he was tied high enough so he couldn't paw over the rope that held him. That was the start of breaking 'em to lead, and all of the twelve horses in the corral was tied up that way to get their head fighting over with. Later on they'd be taken one at a time and pulled on one way, then another, till they would get to understand what was wanted of 'em and would lead up.

The first saddling came on another day, after all the twelve horses got to leading well, and at that first saddling is where Johnnie was "Johnny on the spot" in watching the goings on.

Gat took Johnnie's little black and started to take the rough off of him, and that black, even tho little but still plenty big enough for any good man, was mighty wild and so wiry as to make it interesting for the cowboy. He was quick as a flash and bounced here and there like an antelope.

But ropes, in the hands of a man who savvies how to handle 'em, have a way of holding such horses down to earth, and soon enough, Gat had the little black's front feet tied together. Then a big soft rope was tied around his neck, loose like a collar, a loop was made with the rest of that rope and as the horse stepped in it with a left hind foot that foot was drawed up ahead and raised just a couple of inches off the ground and so he couldn't kick much with it, or put on too much action with the others, then the hobbles was taken off his front feet.

Gat took more pains with that little black horse than he would of with an ordinary bronc. He wanted him to turn out good for Johnnie and he'd grin sometimes as he'd see that kid watch his and the horse's every move like a hawk.

First he proceeded to "sack him." With a gunny sack in his hand he came towards the little black, and holding his head so as to face him, he begin to wave and swish the gunny sack around that pony's front legs. That little horse liked to blowed up at the first swishing of the gunny sack around his front legs. It was a mighty scary looking thing to him, and about all that kept him from slamming into the side of the corral and maybe jerking away from Gat was his hind foot being tied

up and hindering his action.

Gat kept a swishing the gunny sack kind of easy like and come a time when the little black, seeing there was no hurt to it, sort of stood his ground and only flinched. Then the sack was gradually brought up to swish on his chest, up along his shoulder, that way along his back till finally the swishing of that sack around his hind legs didn't faze him much. He seemed to even get to enjoy it, like the swishing of his own tail.

After a while the saddle was brought on. The little black spooked at that some more, but the education of the "sacking" had sort of helped that way. Gat let him smell of the saddle good, then, along with the gunny sack, like as to let him know the saddle wouldn't do him no more harm than the sack did. He slipped it up on his back without a saddle blanket underneath. There's seldom a saddle blanket used on first saddling because the bronc is not rode long enough.

With the gunny sack still playing, like a sort of a blind, Gat reached for the cinch, and as the little horse felt it come up under his belly he put on some more action. But Gat knowed that would come and he held the saddle in place. For a bronc can easy be spoiled by having him throw a saddle off at first saddlings.

By easy moves the cinch was brought up again, the black had quieted down after his last acting up, and then the latigo (cinch strap) was put thru the cinch ring and drawed up, not tight, just tight enough to hold the saddle in place.

Gat tightened it up some more later as he prepared to ride, and as he did is when the little black bogged his head and sudden, and even tho handicapped with one hind foot tied up, he done his at bucking. What he couldn't do in action he done in bellering.

That over with, Gat let the foot-rope loose, and while the horse still didn't know he was free on all fours, he stuck his foot in the stirrup and eased in the saddle, so easy and light that the horse hardly spooked at him a-setting up there on top of him. Gat got down off of him and then back in the saddle again without the horse moving, just watching. So was Johnnie.

Gat looked at Johnnie as he got off the horse once more. That boy

was tense and his eyes was plum round. The cowboy pulled up his chaps a little, pulled his hat down hard, and grinning at Johnnie, he says, "I'm going to move him out of his tracks now. You watch close and see how much you can see of him after that."

Gat eased in the saddle again, the little black stood still, just looking back at him, then reaching along one of the hackamore reins he pulled the horse's head to one side.

That seemed to act like a match to fire works. The little black didn't turn to the pull of the rein, he just jerked his head plum down near to the ground, let out a beller, and at the same time his body came up like as tho he'd been standing over a back firing pile driver which shot him up and sort of twisted him out of shape up there.



That seemed to act like a match to fireworks.

That seemed to act like a match to fire works.

As Johnnie had been told to watch and see how much of the horse he could see, it come to him afterwards that he'd seen all of that horse in every shape and every angle, up high and spinning and

down low, squatting, but that he hadn't really seen the horse at all. It was only a whirling, snapping, too-quick-for-the-eye-to-see mixture of steel coils wrapped in black horse hide, then chap and jacket leather which sure must of helped some in keeping Gat together. How that cowboy wasn't scattered all over the corral was past Johnnie.

That was the first saddling. After the little hunk of black dynamite held his head up again, went to trotting around the corral, and Gat stopped him and got off and on him a few times to make sure of no more bucks in him for that time, he got off of him, unsaddled him and tied him up in another corral. He would picket him out on grass later.

"Well," he says to Johnnie as he rolled a smoke, "I wanted to get the buck out of that horse, that's why I didn't move him out of his tracks before I got on him, and I guess that some buck came out sure enough. But I think he's got plenty more where that came from."

"And I just thought of a name for him, too," says Johnnie, grinning a little "Whirlwind."

"Whirlwind?" says Gat, also grinning. "Why you couldn't of thought of a better name for him. That sure fits and identifies him."

In another corral, Sothern was on his first saddling on a second bronc. That cowboy hadn't checked up on his work only when Gat and the black was having it out, and he'd grinned satisfied at such fine work from both horse and rider.

He hadn't had no more trouble with saddling and riding the first bronc as could be expected with any ordinary bronc. The second one, and as horses do, acted a little different but no more wicked, just a good natural amount of fighting and bucking. They was good broncs, and with such men as Sothern and Gat to break 'em they would turn out to be fine horses, the likes of which would tally up mighty well with any good judge of such.

The horse breaking went on in fine shape, and to John B.'s great satisfaction. Johnnie's little Whirlwind horse had never bucked no more after that first saddling. "Queer about some horses that way," Gat had said, "but I guess he must of got it out of his system all at once." And as it was the little black had took to the rein like a natural one, and the same with what little cow work was done with him. "He's a whirlwind in everything he does," Gat had said.

The first string of broncs well started, a cowboy rode in from the wagon and took them away to be divided up amongst the cowboys there and go on "finishing up" on round-up and with cow work. Then another string of fresh broncs was run in for Sothern and Gat to go to work on.

The cowboy from the wagon said everything was fine over the range, cattle all in good shape and new calves was showing their little white faces most everywhere. There would be a lot of 'em.

John B. sent a note to Austin by the rider that he might be along to join the wagon in a few weeks, that all was going fine at the home ranch, how him and Lou and Hie was riding steady enough, and the stock was all where they belonged around and outside the ranch. That Johnnie would soon have a new horse and all the wimmin folks was getting fat and sassy.

So, all was going well that way one fine day, and as John B. and Johnnie was on their way from the house to the corral after a good noon meal, and too much pudding for Johnnie, a long streak of dusk soaring high, and looking like it was being stirred a mile a minute, appeared over the little rise on the way into the ranch. John B.'s natural thoughts was that of a bunch of fast running horses. Then he heard the purr of an automobile and about that time a long nosed blue roadster showed up on the rise, came down and hit the creek with a big splash which scared all the broncs in the corral.

The car stayed there, in the middle of the creek. For the creek was still high and the fast pulse of the motor had been stopped sudden by the water.

There was two persons in the car, and as it was stalled it didn't stop one person who, letting out a glad war whoop, jumped knee high into the water and splashed the rest of the way acrost to come up a-running and laughing to where John B. and little Johnnie was standing, too surprised to move. That splashing and happy person was June, June herself, and home quite a few days before she had been expected.

CHAPTER VI - Longhorns for Keeps

Somehow the old home ranch sort of woke up from its sleepy peace and came to life with a quiet and happy smile as June first splashed in on it at the creek crossing.

John B. was just surprised and derved happy all over to see her, and he didn't stop to wonder about her coming home ahead of the time she was supposed to until his wife, Mae, sort of brought up the subject a couple of days later, only in a smiling and interested way. She'd kind of suspected and hoped that June had come home earlier so as to maybe prepare for a long trip abroad.

But June hadn't no more than got wind of that from Dot when she put a stop to her parents, high ambitions and worries as to her future, and one fine evening, as she found her mother alone with her dad in his office room, she couldn't of found a better place and time to speak her mind and ease theirs once and for all time.

They both looked as tho they expected her to speak as she came in the room. That made it still easier, and smiling, she started in without any preliminaries.

"I just as well have it out," she begins. "I just packed up my things and left college without waiting to hear that I would not qualify for a diploma this year, and I'm not going back there again nor to any other college. I'm not going to Europe either. I can eat frankfurters and spaghetti right here if I want 'em, and be comfortable doing it, but I'd rather have beef any time, and if I'm going foreign I'll take to tamales and tortillas as my first choice.

"But I doubt if I'll even go to our little one horse town unless I get hungry for a bowl of chile and need some winter underwear." She kept on smiling and went on, mighty serious under her smiles, "I'm going to stay right here on these grounds. You won't need any fences to hold me in and I won't drive off, or be bought off, or bribed off, with any crown. My crown is going to be a high crown with a wide brim that can take honest sweat and stand the weather. So you'd better forget about making any plans for me, and instead get used to having me around, because I feel that my city contracted bones and

brain need relaxing and I will have to be here a life time to get back to normal and stay that way."

With that she bowed an ending and walked out, like a colt that's just shed off a saddle and going thru an open corral gate to open country.

Mae watched her daughter walk out. She'd been so surprised she hadn't been able to speak. She'd just sort of stared, unbelieving and now, after June had gone and she turned to look at John B., his head was down, seeming mighty intent on rolling a smoke. He'd seldom ever looked at a cigarette as he rolled 'em before, and she suspicioned a smile on his face.

"What do you think now, John?" she asked, feeling alone and like needing sympathy and help.

John B. looked up, and only had to laugh at his wife's worried look. "Why," he says, "I think it's goldurned fine."

Mae come near crying or getting peeved at that or both, then John B. came near her.

"Yes," he says, serious, "we ve both done our best and failed. We ve failed in one way but we ve won more than we ve failed in every other way, Mae. She's happy here, we have her with us and I think we should be very happy too."

"I guess so," says Mae, trying to smile. "But she could be so much and she has such a great chance, it's a shame to waste it all."

"But she's not wasting anything at all," says John B. "Happiness and contentment is what counts. That alone is the greatest success any person can have, I think. It's not medals or diplomas or gold that makes a person happy, it's the every day life the way that person wants to live it, and that person is successful if he or she succeeds in doing that whether that he or she is in the limelight and swamped with laurels, or a so-called nobody."

"Why, John B.," says Mae surprised, "how you can talk."

John B. laughed. "Yes," he says, "I figured that out long ago and from watching big fat four-year-old steers. You don't see them getting gray headed over any worldly worries."

Mae also laughed then. "No, but they miss a lot in life."

"So do we. We all ought to know a heap more than we do. But I do know one thing. I might have a few millions, yachts, limousines and mansions, swallow tails and evening doings every evening, but I would only starve at that, shrivel up and blow away, starve for just what I've got right here, and the life I'm living. The same with you too, Mae, and I think we ought to understand and admire June's stand more and be very happy about it. She's happy enough here to be classed as what might be called right successful, and let's not spoil that."

Mae didn't spoil that. The more she thought of what John B. had said about what all went to make up success, the more she got to realizing how true that was. She also thought of worth while success along with a person being happy and contented but, there again, she got right back to where she started because first a person, according to John B., would have to be happy and contented to be successful and other successes would have to jibe along with that, if not there wouldn't be no real success.

It all simmered down to one thing, that a person who is happy and contented is really a successful person any way you looked at it, with or without brains, ability or ambition. June had a full share of all them, and they was with a strong leaning to the ranch, as much so, if not more, than was with Austin Her love was for the life of it, and nature which she admired and wanted to be in the thick of whether it was sleet and slush or sunshine and blossoms She would be happy, very happy.

And now that it was all settled and June had made herself plain, Mae seen for sure that it would only cause disagreements to bring up anything beyond the boundaries of the home range, and as she resigned herself to that she somehow felt relieved, and then also happy. It came to her how she'd missed her daughter and how she'd looked for her letters, how she'd sacrificed her love and sent her away to try and make her what wasn't in her to be, an admired and successful young lady on a pedestal. June was an admired and successful young lady on a pedestal, but her pedestal was most always a saddle or corral bars, and even tho there wasn't many on hand to admire her, them few made up for thousands of others with their appreciation of her and understanding.

It had made June very happy to see the attitude her dad and mother had taken after her straight to the point talk with them. That had surprised her too, for she'd expected 'em to act at least a little disappointed with her, but it had been just the opposite and they seemed to think more of her than ever before. There was no more feeling of chasing her off, instead it was all for holding her now, and keeping her near them.

June didn't stop to wonder at why their attitude, she accepted and enjoyed for all it was worth and went her way free and happy. John B. had just went to his work with a satisfied look on his face and said to the breeze, "Well, that's settled," and rode on also happy.

As he rode on now and again, he'd seen her down at the corrals pretty often, watching Sothern and Gat at breaking horses, and he'd at first wondered about her and Sothern again, but he gave that up with a grin and shrug of his shoulders.



W.J.
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He'd seen her down at the corrals pretty often.

He'd seen her down at the corrals pretty often.

"What the samhill is wrong with her liking Sothern?" he asked himself. "I guess I ought to be glad she takes up to his kind because he's sure not worthless. He's of her breed and both have a religion which sure don't need no preaching to."

Everybody thought it was fine to have June around, and to stay, and wherever she showed up faces somehow broke into smiles. Her and Dot having some same likings and ideas, was often seen riding

together or, while in the house, worked on things together when Mae would often join them.

The cook, Isabel, would even sometimes join in at whatever might be going on. But as she'd get in the kitchen and sometimes hear them laughing and enjoying themselves, she'd get to feeling unnecessary there with three women, two much younger than herself and one about her own age, doing nothing much but a little house work and enjoying themselves while she done the cooking for all. And now that she'd heard that June would be at the ranch to stay, that made her feel all the more unnecessary there, with them three women that could easy do all the work.

She kept a-thinking on the subject until she sometimes layed awake at night. Then one day, while the three women was out on the lawn and she heard John B. come into the house and going to his office room, she headed him off and cleared her mind on the subject.

"I've been working here a long time, Mr. Mitchell," she begins, "ever since your first wife died. I took good care of Austin and everything in general about the house. I was needed then, but I got to thinking lately that since June is here to stay and there's three healthy women here now, you won't be needing me any more."

John B., sort of surprised, didn't get no chance to speak before she went on.

"Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Mitchell," she says, placing her hands on her hips. "I'm not quitting and you won't fire me. I've been here too darned long and I'd be lost if I was to go away any place. Besides I have no place to go to. You can cut off my wages if you want to, but I'm staying right here, and I thought I'd just tell you in case you have other ideas in mind."

John B., relieved, begin to grin. "Are you thru now?" he asked.

"Yes," she says, sort of waiting to hear what he'd have to say about it.

"Well, that's good. But it's too bad you had to worry about being let go. That wasn't at all necessary, even if there was ten women around here. You was hired to cook and take care of things that way, and it shouldn't be any of your worries as to who is in the house and what

goes on. Your work is in the kitchen and minding your own business there, and taking interest is what I appreciate. That's what you're working for and not to wonder about our doings, and as long as you get your wages you should worry only about your work. You'll get a heap further that way.

"Now forget about me letting you go, I have no such idea in mind. Just don't burn the roast or put salt in the sugar bowl and everything will be fine."

Isabel now sort of wished she hadn't said anything, but she was glad to have things off her chest and settled. "Thanks, Mr. Mitchell," she says, "and I'll do my usual best."

She turned and went back to the kitchen, and as John B. looked after her he rubbed his chin, and grinning, says to himself, "Daggone these wimmen. I think I'll hit out for the wagon for a while."

Austin rode into the ranch a few days later and that gave John B. a good excuse. He'd take his place till he got back and he would tell him not to rush back.

Another day and he'd caught up with the wagon. The work was going on right along, and the outfit had just well started with calf branding. There's where old John B. was happy, at roping and bringing calves to the wrasslers to be throwed and held down for the branding. The time seemed like no time and it was good to be on roundup again. He'd seen a lot of house since the last time he'd unrolled his bed on the ground when night come, to feel the cool night air playing around his ears, see the twinkling stars and the depth of the sky, all in cahoots, seemed like, to make a feller feel mighty little also glad and peaceful to be just that and alive.

After all winter at the home ranch or under a roof every night wherever he might go, John B.'s first night at the round-up camp was always more than enjoyed. The good old usual talk of the riders that was kept up near the fire until dark, then the gradual dwindling away of 'em till only two or three of 'em was left to talk low for a spell, and them also getting up after a last cigarette to find their tarpaulin covered soogans for a quick sound sleep. Then all quiet excepting maybe for a coyote's howl or the hoot of an owl, a critter belling away off in the distance, the nicker of a horse from the remuda along with the faint sound of bells on a few of the horses.

On his first night with the wagon that way, that all would always stir John B.'s memory to thinking many years back, of happenings and goings on, even to the times when he was in Texas and rode with the first herds, when he'd left his home down there at the age of fourteen just to be a-roaming, and many things from such times on up until such as that night when he'd be laying there on the sod, looking up at the stars, and listening to little soothing familiar sounds.

He's laid awake on his first night with the wagon, enjoying the backtrail of his memory that way until riders got up, went to their picketed horses and rode out to stand their guard on "graveyard shift" (midnight) around the herd that was being held to be shoved on to other ranges for the summer. There was always herds being held and moved along with the round-up and there was guard to be stood most every night from the time the wagon pulled out in the spring till it pulled in late in the fall.

John B. heard the relieved riders ride back from the herd and hit for their soogans for the rest of the night. That reminded him of a lot of things too, and he finally went to sleep thinking of em.

The nights was short, but it was not daybreak yet when he was woke up by the sound of the cook grinding coffee in the coffee grinder fastened to the chuckwagon. Most cowboys always heard that, and even tho it was a mighty early sound, it sounded good to them, because it meant that they could sleep some more, for over half an hour, and there'd be strong and hot coffee for 'em when they got up.

John B. then heard the crackling of the cook's fire and he turned over in his bed to look at it, and the light on the busy cook, the chuck wagon and pots. It was sure good to look at and the sight reminded him of many days of hard riding that had been ahead, now past. He'd seen them fires when it was quiet-like and warm as it was that morning, then a wild "norther" would come a few hours later and freeze some cattle and horses before night come. That had been in Texas. He'd seen them fires quiet-like again when the men in camp slept with their boots and cartridge belts on, six-shooters handy and a hand on their rifles, ready for raiding Indians and other breeds. Then again he'd seen them fires when sleet or rain or snow would pound the blaze into the earth or scatter it over the country. But there'd be another built, and he didn't remember when there was no coffee so long as there was coffee beans in the sack.

The fire reminded him of a lot of happenings that way, some sad and many funny. It reminded him of a lot of riders too that he'd knowed, like with the sound of frying meat and potatoes, the grating of dutch oven lids, the pot hook dropped on the rack and all, made them riders parade to his vision as with tin plate and cup they made the round from one pot to another and then to the chuck box to season their grub more, and then scatter out for a place where they squatted cross legged, there to talk very little because there's so many points towards a cowboy to be the first thru eating, to catch his horse and be ready to go, specially of mornings.

It was just getting daybreak when the cook broke thru John B.'s thoughts with his morning's holler. "Roll out. Roll out, you beef guzzlers, and come and get it before I burn it up."

There was stirrings here and there and rustlings of canvas on the scattered tarpaulin covered beds, mumblings and snorting, and hollers from the livelier. It was only a short while when the cowboys begin to hit for the creek, there to splash good cold water on their faces, rub dry and then amble for the chuck box, coffee pot and victuals.

Old John B. was right along with the "drags" (slow ones). He was taking his time, for he'd done a life time of riding and now he could afford the time to breathe and take in what he enjoyed.

The remuda was drove in and corralled by the nighthawk as the riders was having the first meal of the day. Then the wrangler relieved him soon as he was thru eating and took charge of the horses for the day.

Soon the cowboys, thru eating, about fifteen minutes time for a good cowboy, was headed to catch their "circle horses" for the morning's ride. (Circle horses are not good cow horses, they re mostly just good tough drifters, a few reprobates and some broncs just started, as Sothern and Gat was doing at the home ranch.)

According to John B.'s good old time round-up rules of well run "wagons" only two riders was allowed in the cable rope corral at a time to catch their horses. The orneriest broncs was roped from the outside of the corral by a rider already on his horse, and brought out with the help of the saddle horn where the cable was let down, the

gate which the wrangler manipulated.

John B. always keeping a few good horses with the remuda, as well as at the home ranch, and them horses being very much respected that way by the cowboys, wasn't short on good horseflesh when he dabbled his "line" (rope) on a little brown bald-faced horse which he called Cortez, one of the few southern blooded horses which he'd managed to keep breeding in spite of Austin's idea of better saddle stock, which, according to John B.'s ideas, wasn't as good and didn't get to savvy the cow so natural. The little bay, Cortez, was sired by a strain of the first horse that hit Mexico and then America, and which had been brought over on a boat from Spain by a Spanish conqueror by the name of Cortez. John B. was mighty proud of riding horses that was of the blood of the first ones that touched Texas and American soil.

He wasn't much in the drags to roping and saddling his little bay, and not at all in the drags to be on him and ready to go. But most of the cowboys had anything but gentle horses to saddle and top off, and John B. just sat in his saddle and watched the goings on.

That's about all he'd do on his first day at the wagon, just watch the goings on. He would go along when the wagon-boss would take the lead for the morning's circle (round up of cattle), and he might even take the "inside circle" (shortest ride, and for men on broncs not as yet hardened in). He just wanted to sort of enjoy the feeling of not doing anything only what he wanted to do and maybe make a fair hand of himself while just moseying and turn a few bunches of wild-eyed critters to "drives" [*] headed for the "cutting grounds."

[* Driven herds.

Where the herds are held for cutting out or branding.]

John B. wasn't to giving any orders to the wagon-boss. He was there as just one of the boys, only with the privilege to do as he durned pleased, and if he did say a word as to the works, it was when the wagon-boss asked him, for it's never wise to meddle with a foreman's work if he knows that work. If he doesn't, fire him or keep him for a pet and get one that does.

There was the usual bronc fighting with the early morning saddling up, just daylight. There was some broncs that would never gentle, and with them always a few older reprobates that sort of livened

things up in good shape with the starting out on the circle. The boss started out with John B. alongside of him, and then the riders coming along in rows of three or four. Nobody riding in front of one another excepting on narrow trails, for that's bad range riding manners to cross or ride in front of another rider. It's more so while driving a herd.

The riders was quite a few miles away from camp when the sun came up over far away ridges. A few more miles and the boss and John B. rode up on a high pinnacle overlooking quite a bit of country, and there he stopped his horse and looking around him begin "scattering the riders." Most of the riders got off their horses, as is usual at that time, and reset their saddles, aired their ponies[*] backs and cinched up again, prepared for the ride to be done.

[*All horses are called ponies by cowboys in some countries, even tho some of them "ponies" might stand up to six feet at the withers and weigh over twelve hundred pounds. The average good sized saddle horse on the range weighs ten-fifty or eleven hundred pounds.]

"You, Idaho and you, Triangle Dot take to the upper Squaw Creek and the Wild Horse Springs above there." The wagon-boss was scattering his riders, by twos and to comb that country and shove all cattle there to the cutting grounds near the round-up camp. The cowboys on the wagon was pretty well all named after the states or locality they came from or by their actions and appearance, like Spooky, Hungry, Hippy or such like names. There was no questions asked as to a man's name or past, all that counted was how good a hand he was, and the present, and that's how come the nicknames was fastened onto 'em, like Sothern. He went along by the name of Soapy for a long time on account that the first day he rode for the Seven Xs there was dry soap in his ears which he hadn't got to wash out. Another went by the nickname of Highpockets on account of him being long legged and the height of his hip pockets being so high off the ground. One went by the name of "Splafoon," a made up name for feet, on account of his feet being big. Something kind of rare amongst cowboys.

The "reps" (representative riders for neighboring outfits who joined the wagon to gather and get their outfit's stock back to their own range) went pretty well by the names of the outfits they worked for. In John B.'s earlier times the reps wore "blabs," a piece of stiff leather tied to their necks, something acting the same as the "dog tag" for

our soldiers during the World 'War, and on that piece of leather was cut or burned the main brand of the outfit they represented. That being in plain sight they would be called by the name of the brands they was packing, some sort of cut short. There was Lazy Two and the name was cut to Lazy whether that cowboy was lazy or not. There was Mill for Mill Iron, Ox for Ox Yoke, Bear for Bear Paw Pool outfit, and so on. Of course, this was with different northern outfits but the names of the Seven X riders and reps went along about the same that way. The reps was seldom ever known by any other name than the brand on the blab they was packing, and the Seven X men was also seldom known by their regular names until time a check was made out to them when fall come and round-ups was over. Then it was of course necessary for the bookkeeper to ask for their names so the checks could be properly marked down and cashed. But in the books their nicknames was also entered and their regular names seldom got out.



7X



HAT



LAZY 2 B



MILL IRON



OX YOKE



TRIANGLE-DOT

BRANDS

Let's insert here a compendium of the various brands. He didn't draw one for Bear Paw Pool.

The Seven X wagon-boss himself was named after a horse. The horse wore a hat brand and being he was on that horse when he first rode onto the Seven X range he was called after the brand his horse wore, Hat, and Hatty later on. His regular name, according to the time books, was Halleck Jones but after twenty years on the Seven Xs he was still known only as Hatty to the country and the riders

there.

Hatty scattered his riders by twos until all of the eighteen of 'em had their territory to ride and comb down to the cutting grounds. Then watching 'em go, some of 'em topping off their ponies a second time, he turned and looked around at John B., the only rider he hadn't "scattered."

"Well," he says, getting off his horse and looking at his saddle, "I don't know where to send you, John B., unless it's back to the shade of the chuck box at camp and rest your old bones."

"Old bones yourself," says John B., snorting out a cigarette and rolling another one. "Why, you old hat rack, I'll ride the outside circle with you any time and get to camp to bring you stretchers to ride on the rest of the way."

"All right then, you old buzzard," says Hatty, grinning as he pulled up on his latigo, "go fall to pieces and mosey around any daggone way you please. I'll ride acrost the drives a bit and I'll see you with a plate on your knee near the chuck wagon, if you can ride that far back."

"You'll be there ahead of me and still there after I'm thru eating, you old drag," says John B., as Hatty got on his horse.

He grinned as he watched the old cowboy ride away. "Durn his hide anyway," he says to the breeze after him. "I couldn't duplicate him in a thousand years."

John B. got off his horse and squatted down on the knoll. The little bay, Cortez, smelled of his hat brim and looked acrost country, like the conquistador he was named after.

Circles are made mighty fast, on high lopes and runs, and soon enough there begin to appear dark dots of cattle in bunches and coming out of coulees, draws, and timbers to show up on ridges and run down onto "sags" (slopes), where the bunches get into drives to be turned by riders there and headed for the cutting grounds. Every once in a while John B. would hear shots in the still morning air. The shots was from the cowboys, forty-fives, they was "Smoking" the cattle out, scaring 'em out of their hiding places in the brush, and Cortez, his ears perked towards the sounds, snorted sort of low, as tho to say he'd like to be there to "pop" the cattle out of the brush. He

would stick his nostrils close to John B.'s hat brim at such times and no words was ever made any plainer.



He would stick his nostrils close to John B.'s hat brim at such times—

He would stick his nostrils close to John B.'s hat brim at such times.

Outside of appreciating the low snorts, John B. didn't pay much attention to Cortez, for his was just good cow-horse talk asking him to ride on. John B. wasn't wanting to ride on, and he sort of pacified the little bay by reaching back and putting a hand on his ankle. Them was understanding nerves.

As the cattle, bunch after bunch, was smoked out and their tails popped in hitting for other bunches and then drives, like for protection in numbers, John B. just hardly puffing on a cigarette for watching, Cortez snorting on his hat brim and looking on, it all looked like too pretty a sight to spoil with a stir. John B. sat on his spurs and watched. He seen Hatty's dust cut thru above the drives, make a big

circle and take the outside. "A cowman," says John B. to Cortez.

The dust of stirring up the cattle from bunches to drives soared high, the soaring of it and all headed for the cutting grounds. John B., knowing the works so well and how that dust had been stirred and how it come to settle on the tails of the drags, just sat on his spurs some more.

When the dust of the drives had gone with 'em, John B. looked back at the country that had been rode and combed out of cattle, and as pretty and green as it was, it gave him a sort of desolate feeling, for, to a cowboy, a good cow country without any cattle in sight strikes him like a ghost country, something dead. He seen a coyote trotting along at a distance and that animal sort of made John B. feel more that way, as tho that animal was making a sure cleaning up of the leavings in that country.

But that was just a thought, for most of the cattle rounded up would be turned back on the same range after the calf branding was done. He stood up. He would catch up to one of the drives and ride on into camp with it. Then as he looked the country over once more his farseeing eyes spotted two dark specks, looked like critters, but acting wild and which had been wise enough to hide at the sight of the first rider and sounds of shots and then came out to investigate when all quieted down.

They'd come out of a brushy ravine, and as John B. watched their actions he got to wondering as to what they was. They reminded him some of the wild stock which he'd run on this range many many years ago, and the watching of their actions set him back to them times.

With such good old time spirit in him, John B. thought of playing it to the limit and get the most out of it he could. He didn't get on his horse on the tall pinnacle because, while happy in playing the part that them two specks was really wild cattle, they would see him from that distance and hightail it for the brush again. So, he led Cortez down on the blind side of the pinnacle. Then he got on him, skirting around the pinnacle and towards where the specks of what he played to be sure enough wild stock was, being careful of not having them see him first.

John B. didn't ride on in the lower foothill country, he rode up a long draw to where the first timber took root, and amongst that, to where

he could see well below. He was well hid from there, and he rode on till he figured he was just above the "wild cattle." Then, as he came to a clearing and there was only a narrow strip of scrub pine to a good view of the country below he rode into that, and looking thru the last of the piney branches he seen a sight that made him doubt his eyes.

For below him and as he'd judged the "wild cattle" would be was two of sure enough wild cattle and holding up the finest heads he had ever hoped to see, even in the years while he was in the thick of such kind. They was the longhorns, and a better spread and color with the shape that packed them long snaky like horns would more than match any imagination of such kind. And seeing such kind, after his trying to get used to the modern white faced stock was like a miracle had just been performed, like the dead and what was history come back to life.

The little bay, Cortez, seen the cattle thru the pine limbs as quick as John B. did, and he stood in his tracks, as quiet and watching as John B. sat in the saddle. The sight of the longhorns was new to Cortez but there was a sense of kin to them, for them cattle was descendants of the same breed that had been brought along with the horses of his breed and all together dumped overboard to swim ashore from the ship that had brought them from Spain to Mexico some four hundred years ago. They was the start of the first cattle in America. They'd got wild and spread north into the Texas prairies and there's where our longhorns came from, the same breed of cattle as the two John B. was now staring at, unbelieving. They re what's called the "Mossy horn" or "Moss back" of the brush countries of the south and they re mighty wild looking when coming out of the thick thorny brush and as cutting thru little clearings they head on for more thick brush with filmy long strips of moss a-streaming from their long horns and onto their backs. They'd get that moss going thru the thick brush and from the low hanging live oak limbs. To the north, the Texans who'd took 'em up trail sometimes called 'em Yaks (Yaguis), Sonora Reds, or buckskins.

It was like being in a dream for John B. to see the two longhorns. He'd heard some of his riders say how they'd seen such cattle now and again, but like ghosts, and for only a mighty short glance, and he'd only half believed it. For he figured that with Austin's upbreeding of Herefords, and his and the cowboys steady riding, there'd sure be no more of his kind, John B.'s, left, the longhorns.

From where him and his horse was hid in the jack pines he was less than a quarter of a mile from the critters, and the air being clear and the sun being bright, he could near tell how many rings was on their horns. From their size and well developed shapes of the animals he figured they was at least ten years old, and how they missed being brought in on round-up in all that time was now no mystery to him. For, looking at that steep, rocky, and brushy country they was running in he seen that a big herd of them could scatter out and hide, and if they was wild and wise enough nothing of them could be seen but their tracks by watering places. The two John B. was now watching had been plenty wild and wise enough and dodged roundups, or Austin would had shipped 'em long ago.

And John B. wouldn't of seen 'em now, only they'd come out of hiding to look around and satisfy themselves that the rounding-up cowboys had done their work for that time and wouldn't have much fear of seeing any more riders for a long time to come. And no rider had ever hung back and just sat on his spurs and watched as John B. had.

Any other time they would never showed themselves in the open, but at such scary times when riders would pop into their country and after hiding till they figured they was safe, sometimes hardly breathing as they hid and while a rider passed within only a few feet of 'em, it sure was no more than natural and of a great relief to them to make sure afterwards that the riders had gone with the cattle they'd rounded up.

Them wise wild cattle even knowed at what time of the year they could expect riders rounding-up in their country and would act according. But as a rule they grazed in open country only at night. Even moonlight nights would make 'em keep close to the brush, and in day time they hid in cool shades or shelter of rocky crags and heavy brush.

John B. sawvied them well, and he figured as he often did, that it often pays for a feller to take his time; for if always in a rush there's many good things being missed, like with this one instance he'd never seen these wild cattle if he'd of rode on in trying to make the biggest circle, getting the most cattle and in the shortest time.

And his "playing" at the first sight of them, from a long distance, they was wild cattle, and then the good surprise that they really was, pleased him to where he'd gladly missed many a day not to have

missed seeing them.

Looking down thru the pines at 'em, the watching of their every move, took him many years back. "How they'd make a rope sing," he says to Cortez's ears, and in that time of happy reminiscing it was more time added on that kept him from aging.

As he watched, and at the distance he was from them, he seen that one was a deep red in body, a mighty wiry looking longhorn, just fat enough and plenty stronger, a picture of freedom. The deep red of the center of the body run to dark brown at the shoulders and hip bones, then to near black along the neck and head, and from hip to tail bone. The nose and the tail was pure black. It went the same with the legs, running to pure black at the toes, and John B. figured there couldn't be a blotch of a white hair on him nowheres.

The other critter was a mottled mixture of all the colors of the rainbow, like a half done Spanish omelet well splashed on a dobie wall and bordered with bluish-green tortillas. The horns was ivory white, one swooping down to about level of the nose and the other soaring up to the skies, a wicked and good right horn.

The sun was shining just right, and John B. could faintly see stiff hairs stand out on their slick sides. They was from the scar of his brand. And watching them close he'd mumbled thru his white mustache at Cortez's ears:

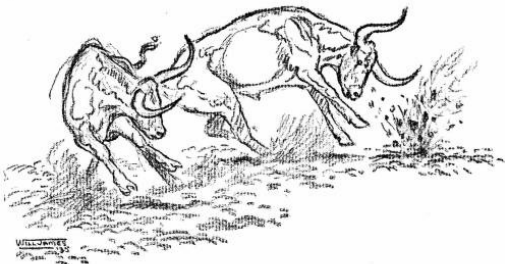
"Well, there's still a few of us left, ain't there, Cortez?"

If John B. had been like some stockmen, or like most men that's all for riches and what they can get out of the earth, he'd got all riled up at the sight of the two longhorned wild ones, hit for camp, got his 30-30, rode back on a fresh horse and shot 'em down. For such cattle don't bring no prices at the market and they lead young stock to stray wild, as wild as them longhorns themselves was.

John B. thought of that as he looked at the two staggy animals and mumbled to Cortez's ears again, "That's what makes cowboys good."

He then unlimbered his forty-five, seven-inch barrel six-shooter. It was down country from where he was, there was no wind and a bullet would carry if he aimed right.

He aimed right, and even tho the bullet landed on good green earth, there was a dust stirred off the top which wasn't any too far from the nose of the dark red steer, and then the report of the forty-five coming along sure put him and the other on the move, and a bunch of antelope or as good and fast a cowhorse as Cortez was would of been slow as compared to them when they hit for the deep brush of the ravine and rough country they'd come out of.



Which wasn't any too far from the nose of the dark red steer.

Which wasn't any too far from the nose of the dark red steer.

"Stay wild, you old moss-headed, line-backed reprobates," hollered old John B. out of the jack pines, "and don't let me catch you showing yourselves in such careless ways again or I'll burn the tails off of yez." That came with the report and echo of his forty-five.

John B. watched 'em go. They'd stay wild if he would have anything to do with it, and he made that to cinch tight when he mode down out of the pines on a high lope, caught up with one of the drives, rode on thru three or four more of them and found Hatty squatted in the shade of the chuck wagon with a plate on his lap and eating.

"Thought I'd catch you at it, you old wolf," was his first words. "Always eating, and stuffing yourself up till you spring your stirrups."

"ain't seen you do anything Today," says Hatty, as he lifted a hunk of good beef off his tin plate, "and I got to eat to have strength to catch

up on some of the things you don't do nor see."

Right then was a made-to-order time for the two longhorns to be brought up. Something that Hatty didn't see. "And understand now," says John B. telling about 'em mighty serious, and feeling right in giving an order, "I don't want none of the boys taking a shot at 'em or trying to run 'em down or salt 'em to traps. I want them steers left as they be, and I'll tell Austin the same."

Hatty more than appreciated that, and all he said in answer was: "I'm remembering. Grab yourself a plate and squat close to my grass. We ve got to make another circle and then brand this afternoon."

John B. gathered his victuals and squatted. His words had been well heard, and they would be well heeded.

CHAPTER VII - Strangers to Camp

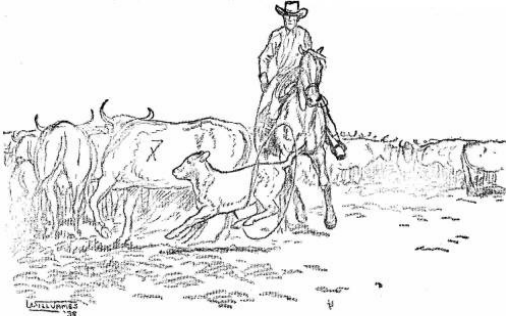
John B. had been with the wagon a couple of weeks. After his first day with the spread, riding his short circle, and his spree of seeing and watching the two wild longhorned stags he settled down to riding a little and making more of a hand of himself. He'd some days start out on inside circles and wind up away on the outside, all depending as to how he might of felt like doing, and a few times, as he caught up with Hatty or Hatty caught up with him, the two would have a sort of a duel as to which one had done the biggest ride and how one was going to get into camp without the other having to drag him in or get stretchers. That duel most always would up at the chuck wagon where the two would contest as to how much they could eat in how little time and catch fresh horses and be ready to work again.

Sometimes, at such contests, John B. would tell Hatty he wasn't trying, and he would show up at the round-up grounds quite a while afterwards for roping at calf branding, after Hatty and a couple of his ropers had already brought many a calf to the fire. And at the sight of John B. grinning and shaking a loop like he was going to show him up, there'd be another duel started or going on.

"One leg don't count," Hatty would say.

"Then you don't count," John B. would answer, "because you can't catch two."

That was only a starter, and the two, with long, full of confidence grins on their faces, would try to outrope one another and bringing the husky calves to the wrasslers with both hind legs drawn tight in their loops. If the calf jerked one leg out in his wild scramble to get away, that would count against the roper as "no catch" and the calf would be turned loose for another throw at him to catch both his hind legs.



For another throw at him to catch both his hind legs.

For another throw at him to catch both his hind legs.

The duel would go on that way all thru every branding, which lasted some hours most every day. But the duels really started from the time the early morning sun broke thru the skies, made its high circle thru the day, and hit for the western ridges when evening come. It went on some more even after that, and by the evening fire for a while.

But with all the duelling the two kept up for the fun of show of skill and knowledge, there was no tally kept as to which one won or lost, and if one was too much the winner at any certain thing he'd be apt to renig on himself so as to make things more equal. And with all this play, joking and duelling there was many serious talks and understandings; and one certain look on either John B.'s or Hatty's face and the two would sudden get down to hard facts and face whatever problem come up together, strong and with mighty serious minds when necessary.

As the days went past and run to a week, John B. begin to look for Austin back at the wagon most any time, and as it run on and another week went by, he got to thinking it was high time Austin should be back. Things was going fine with the round-up works and John B. was happy in making a hand of himself as he durned pleased, and

even tho Austin wasn't needed there right then, he sort of wondered about him staying away so long. Maybe he was taking advantage of his being told not to rush. But, anyway, he should of been back to the wagon before then. Something was most likely holding him and he just naturally wondered what it was.

The two weeks was hardly more than up when, in a surprising way, he found out. The wagon had moved camp every day in covering the range until it was only thirty miles from the Home Ranch on that day. It was near middle afternoon, and John B. was riding on a second circle on another one of his southern blooded horses which he'd named Comet, after one of the Spanish conquistador, Cortez's stallions. "Butcher knife would of been a better name for him," Hatty had said, on account of the horse being so narrow chested. But there was few better and more natural born cowhorses, either at cutting or roping, than Comet was. He was near an equal to the little bay, Cortez, and either one of them was too good a horse to be rode on circle where a horse don't have to know very much so long as he was a good drifter. Such good horses as Comet and Cortez should of been kept for cutting out or roping, and such work as calls for knowing horses with handling the herds at the cutting grounds.

But in his private string of ten horses which he'd always kept and renewed on there was no such other kind of horses as Comet and Cortez. They was all good ones that way, and it was with the older horses that he gave the lighter work at the cutting grounds. When some got old, and even tho they was still sound, he pensioned 'em on good range for the rest of their many days still to come, and not a horse out of his string would he ever sell. When they died they died fat and of good old age, not from any overwork. For John B. never liked to ride a tired horse, and since his first herd was left go to range he seldom had to, because he had plenty of horses and a change could most always be had.

And now, with riding of good cowhorses as he was, on circle or on cutting grounds he wasn't depriving his men of any such like, nor skimmed the remuda of the best for himself. There was plenty more good cowhorses in the Seven X remuda and John B. kept his own string built up by taking on well behaving good young horses with the makings of good cowhorses in 'em and finished 'em up to a turn. He'd been careful to keep a stud bunch[*] of the southern horses, so as to never run short of the breed, that was so much to his liking, like

Cortez and Comet.

[* Bunch of mares and colts that a stallion herds and holds, in one bunch, averaging twenty head.]

"Besides," he'd often said while riding one of his good cowhorses on circle, "I like to ride horses that know something wherever I be or with whatever I do. Let the young fellers ride the road runners."

On Comet, that day of his wondering about Austin, he was near to the cutting grounds with a drive when he seen a dust off at a distance and then a fast coming car making it. It was coming on an old wagon road used to haul logs and wood from the mountains to the home ranch, and that road was right by where the round-up wagon was camped, in a little creek bottom.

The car came on, at regular boulevard speed, and Comet, sighting it at the same time John B. had, got behind the drive and in the dust it was making. John B. was agreeable. He didn't want to see no automobile rushing in on his peace either.

In a short while the drive was run in with others and all to milling at the cutting grounds. John B. seen Hatty thru the dust, and riding alongside of him he just said, "I'll stay for one and hold herd."

Hatty took one glance at John B. and understood. John B. just didn't want to meet the car he'd seen coming. There'd been some curious tourists and town folks bothering on the Seven X range lately, leaving gates open and stock to mix, fishing out the streams, starting fires with their long burning tailor made, cigarettes or camp fires not being put out, littering places with papers and cans and bottles, and doing no good to the country in any way.

He'd fed and sheltered many of 'em off and on during the last twenty years and sent men and teams to pull their cars out when some storm would catch 'em there. Then, he'd given gas and oil to many more so they could get back to town, car broke down, or they didn't think they'd gone so far, and so on. So a speed burning automobile wasn't much of a welcome sight no time.

Hatty rode around the milling but quieting herd, looked at one rider and another holding 'em, and that look along with a slight move of the hand to every rider went the same as to say either "come or hold." When he rode away from the big herd of bawling cows and calves

and mixed stuff there was eleven riders alongside of him, all headed for the rope corral and a change of horses from the remuda the wrangler had run in for them there. He'd left four riders to hold herd with John B. until the change of horses was made.

The eleven men that rode into the little creek bottom and towards the rope corral along with Hatty was a mighty fine bunch of cowboys, the kind that was of the first breed of 'em and hadn't got to know much of railroads or planes, paved highways or tailor made cigarettes, chewing gum or hair lotions. But they did know their game and many things that makes a man worth while being called a man.

They seen the car stopped by the chuck wagon. They seen the people standing out of it and gawking at 'em like they was wild animals, and even heard such words as "picturesque" floating along the breeze. The cowboys had seen them long before the motor travelers had, but there was no sign being showed that they had, and when one of the boys happened to catch the word "picturesque" he grinned and said to another one alongside of him without a look to give himself away as he talked, "Yes, ain't she a picture? the one by the fat heifer." The other cowboy had already spotted that one, and looking straight ahead at the rope corral he mumbled back, "I seen her first."

The cowboys, a wild looking outfit to the people who'd drove in, rode on to the rope corrals. Hatty was a little by himself peacefully unsaddling for a change to another horse and not at all thinking or interested of the people by the car, when his horse scared at something. He looked around, and there a few feet from him was the smiling fatty figure of a man in tan britches and puttees.

"I beg your pardon," says that feller, "but are you Mr. Mitchell?"

Hatty grinned a howdedo to him. "Not by a damsight, mister," he says, turning back to his unsaddling. "I wouldn't be that ornery gun fighting cuss for anything I could wish for."

The stranger reared back a little at that, surprised. "Why I'm sorry," he says, then went on, "It's very strange I've heard so much good of him."

"Well, I'll be doggoned if I ever could find any in him," says Hatty, "and I ought to know too because I been trying to teach him how to

punch cows for the last fifty years, and he still ain't worth a whoop."

The stranger didn't know what to do. Hatty went to unsaddling his horse, led him into the rope corral where he let him go, roped a fresh one out of his string and when he came back to where he'd laid his saddle to saddle up again, the stranger was still there where he'd left him. Hatty noticed a very puzzled look on his face but never let on as he grinned to himself.

"I hardly believe what you said about Mr. Mitchell," says the stranger as Hatty went to saddling his horse.

Hatty sort of liked him for that, but his gruff answer sure didn't give no such a hint. "You don't have to," he says. "Find him out for yourself."

"But where can I find him?"

"Durned if I know. He's most likely with the herd, if he didn't get in the way of 'em. He's most always in the way of something or other."

The stranger didn't know how to digest that, and he didn't try to. Instead he just reached in his vest pocket and pulled out a card and handed it to Hatty who took it as he cinched up. Then he read it and he was surprised, for, according to the card, that fat feller was the president of some corporation of some kind which represented many millions of dollars. Hatty had heard of him somewhere, maybe thru the radio at the home ranch the winter before. But as he looked at the card and even at the blank back as tho he couldn't make out the meaning of it, no stranger could ever guessed that he knew.



Handed it to Hatty who took it as he cinched up.

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He handed the card back and asked, "What's that for?"

"Why that's my name and business card," says the stranger, all in wonder at such primitive ignorance.

"Well, I sure wouldn't advertise it," says Hatty, acting unconcerned and getting on his horse. "Sometimes you might do something that ain't quite right and you might want to change that name, and as for your business, you better keep that to yourself and mind it well. That always pays."

The stranger had never been talked to that way before, and being that Hatty seemed so natural, sincere and ignorant in what all he said, he couldn't help but laugh to himself. He would tell that as a joke on wild cowboys when he'd get back to the city. That would bring a laugh at the club.

"Here," the stranger says as Hatty started to ride away. "I have a note here I wish you would deliver to Mr. Mitchell. It's from his daughter, June."

Hatty perked up his ears at that but there was no twitch in 'em that the stranger could notice. He took the note and sticking it in his shap pocket rode away just saying, "It will be delivered, sir," leaving the stranger scratching his head and wondering.

Broncs and good cowhorses had been roped and saddled, and all popped ready for work, the broncs ready for education, as Hatty rode away from the rope corral and towards the herd. The sudden action that took place right then sort of took the stranger's thoughts away from wondering about Hatty or any cowboy. His car was not so far away and he figured he could make it there before, as he feared, he would be tromped down by hoofs.

After the broncs was topped off and then sort of hazed to line out by riders on good cowhorses, Hatty rode on with his men to the bench across the creek and where the herd was being held. The herd had quieted down and the cows having found their calves after they'd lost 'em during the driving, was now sort of settled. A fire had been started with the wood the wrangler had "snaked" (dragged with saddle horse) over for that purpose and the branding irons was getting hot.

Hatty seeing John B. on the far side of the herd rode straight for him and handed him the note the stranger had given him. "I done my best to make that feller think you wasn't worth seeing or talking to," he says, "but I thought he was just one of them cruising leaches. Now he hands me this note from June to you and I guess he'll be all right. But he'll bump into you when you go change horses. You won't have to look for him."

John B., wondering, opened the envelope and glanced at the note from June. It read: "This will introduce Mr. Samuel Graften and family, people I met while at college last year. The West is all new to them and they came to visit us for a while. Austin says he will come to the wagon when you come back to the ranch with them."

CHAPTER VIII - Ants in the Syrup

John B. sitting on his horse near the herd read the note which Hatty had handed him. He read it twice and then grunted, for he seen by the note from June that the people she introduced in it wasn't hers or any one of the family's perticular friends. If they was, June would of sure come along with 'em, and then there was Austin's words added on in the note, like saying that he wouldn't come back to the wagon while they was there. So he wasn't hankering for their company either, and him and June had shoved 'em off onto him, most likely to get rid of 'em at the home ranch.

"The scalawags," John B. mumbled at the note. He could near hear them laughing as to how he would feel about it, and he grinned at that.

But there was nothing for him to do but go and meet the strangers and do the best he could. He had to go to the corral and change horses anyway.

He started to ride away from the herd to do that, so as to be on hand for branding, when he heard the car start up at camp. He couldn't see it from where he was but he heard it cross the creek on the old wood road crossing and then come up the bank on the same side the herd was on. It came up to sight so sudden and so close to the herd that that herd just spooked into a quick run and they left the cutting grounds to the automobile.

The cowboys riding hard to turn 'em, John B. rode towards the car waving a hand for the driver to stop and then riding on close he says to him: "You'll have to go back somewhere out of sight of these cattle, this is not automobile parking grounds but grounds to handle cattle on."

The car was turned and headed back down acrost the creek and to camp again, John B. following and feeling like he shouldn't of spoke the way he had. But it had made him sort of peeved at the ignorance of the people to bust in towards a herd the way they had. The herd had been nicely settled too, every calf was by its mother's side and so that when it would be roped to be branded, the roper could see the mother's brand and the calf branded the same. For there was other cattle in the herds rounded up besides Seven Xs, and the only

way it could be told as to what brand to put on the calf was by checking up on the one the calf's mother wore. But the calf would have to be near its mother so the checking up could be done.

As it was now the whole herd, in running, being turned to milling and then drove back to the grounds again, had got all mixed up, and it would take some little time before the cows would find their calves again, holding up the branding and riling things up in general for a spell.

The car was drove back to the round-up camp not far from the chuck wagon, too durned close for the wimmin folks to be, thought the cook, and when John B. rode near the corral to change horses the stranger, Graften, was there waiting for him.

"I'm sorry about scaring the cattle," said Graften, after John B. sort of nodded a howdedo. "I had no idea they could be so wild, very different from the cattle we have in the East."

"Yes, they are," says John B.

"I presume you re Mr. Mitchell," Graften says. And when John B. said yes, and yes again when he was asked if the note had been delivered to him, he went on to remark about Hatty, "Sort of a rough and coarse person," he says, "most likely one of your roustabouts."

John B. squinted at him and surprised him a considerable by saying, "No. He's one of my best men."

That made Graften wonder as to what the others would be like, and as John B. went to turn his horse loose and catching a fresh one, he wondered if it would be well for his wife and daughter to be near the camp of such men. But he would see. They'd wanted to come and see the wild West and now that they was there and had a good chance, they would make the best of it.

As John B. came back to saddle his fresh horse, Graften sort of opened up on him. "You have a very fine daughter," he begins, speaking of June. "My son is very fond of her and we had the pleasure of meeting her at a couple of college socials. It's unfortunate that my son couldn't come with us, but as much as he wanted to, he had to go to Europe again this year. He insisted we should come, and being we'd never been in our West we decided to

come and surprise your daughter June with a visit. Your daughter then suggested our coming to see you here while at this interesting work, and here we are."

If gall was cash, thought John B., some people would sure be rich. He wondered how Graften would like it and how he would act if he, a plum stranger, was to drop in at his office while he was at his busiest, lay his bed roll on the floor and say he'd come to visit for a while, "while at his interesting work."

"Well," was about all John B. could say to Graften's self-invitation, then he added on afterwards, "that's fine, glad to see you, make yourself to home."

"Thanks," says Graften. "We have our tents and blankets and we'll be quite comfortable I'm sure, but," he sort of hesitated, "we have none for the chauffeur, and I'm wondering if--"

John B. was wondering too. Every cowboy had their own bed rolls and none like to double up. Then he thought of the night-hawk who used his bed only in daytime, maybe he would let the chauffeur use it at night. John B. thought he would and Graften was satisfied at that.

"You must sort of excuse us," says John B., as he got on his horse. "We won't be much for company. We re right busy while we re out on round-up," he grinned, "and our style is more cramped with work than it is with social functions, such as June tells us of having to attend a few times. No work no beef, no beef no eat."

There wasn't the usual joking grin on John B.'s face as he rode up to the herd and unlimbered his rope for his steady contest with Hatty. The herd was restless and still milling around some and many cows and calves hadn't as yet found one another. Hatty, riding along the edge of the herd and close enough to John B. to notice the look on his face remarked as he went to ride by,

"It's going to storm."

John B. was quick in catching the meaning of the remark, most likely about the dark look on his face. "Go on and tend to your knitting, you old roustabout," he says. He had to grin at the thought of the last word.

"Well, well, such fancy words," says Hatty, stopping his horse. "Is that what the punch bowl called you?"

"No," says John B. grinning some more. "That's what he thought you was."

Hatty acted sarcastic: "I suppose you straightened him up on that."

"I sure did," lied John B. "I told him you was just a crazy lost sheepherder."

The two went on sparring that way until their spirits was again the same as it had been before the interruption of the automobile. They both shook out loops and went to roping calves that had found their mothers, and soon the wrasslers and men with hot irons was kept busy.

In the creek bottom the newcomers was busy setting up their tents and cots, blowing up their air mattresses and getting things all set to make their "roughing it" comfortable. At the advice of the cook who'd seen 'em start at that, they'd picked a spot where their camp would be a good ways from the chuck wagon and sort of hid by a clump of willows, and there they went to work to settle themselves as tho they would be camped at that one spot for maybe a month. The chauffeur was put to work doing this and that, and there being no big enough trees around for good shade, he was also put to work at building a frame of willows and with leafy limbs of the same on the top to make a shade big enough for a camp table and three folding chairs.

While the chauffeur was busy at that, Graften and his wife and daughter went to moseying around afoot, just to get a close-to-the-earth acquaintance with this untamed country. They walked along a little clearing of the creek bottom. The grass was green and of a good length and many kinds of wildflowers was everywhere, flowers of all shapes and sizes, and with colorings to fit any taste or imagination. They could hardly believe their eyes at seeing such flowers outside of flower shops. Some was even prettier than they'd ever seen there.

Graften's wife and daughter both picked a big bouquet each in a short time, while Graften went along the creek. He'd seen a few trout dodging here and there and that had stirred his interest. He'd fished for big fish off yachts in the deep waters of the ocean but he'd never

thought of small fish in mountain streams, and that it might be any sport catching 'em, and now, as he seen good sized speckled and rainbow trout dodging between the rocks in the clear water, he wished he'd brought some fishing tackle with him.

His wife and daughter having picked all the flowers they wanted, Graften took the lead down the creek and towards the chuck wagon. He would ask the cook about some fishing outfit he could borrow, but there he was only grinned at when he asked.

"I've been cooking on this spread for quite a few years now," says the cook, "but I've never seen a fish hook nor a cowboy fishing in all the time I've been here. Not much time for that."

"Well, that's surprising," says Graften, "not much sport going on around here then, eh?"

The cook looked up from a batter he was mixing. "I don't know just what you call sport," he says, "but I think if you'd drop your rope on a mad cow while you re riding a spooky bronc, that you'd find plenty of excitement, and need a heap more skill in playing your line so's it won't get round you and cut you in two, than any skill needed to land a poor fish."



"But I think if you'd drop your rope on a mad cow while you're riding a spooky bronc, that you'd find plenty of excitement."

But I think if you'd drop your rope on a mad cow while you re riding a spooky bronc, that you'd find plenty of excitement.

Graften's wife laughed. She couldn't get the full meaning of what the cook had said but just enough so she could see the difference between roping mad cows on wild horses and catching a poor fish,

as the cook had called it, and landing it. The only likeness of the two would be of both men catching something with a line, one with a hook on the end of it and the other with a loop. But the both was sports.

"I'm afraid, Samuel," she says to her husband, "that that would be too wild and dangerous to be called sport, don't you think?"

"I would like to see some of that being done," said Graften. "I often had the chance to go to rodeos. There's one held in our town every year, but I never went because I thought there was no more cowboys and that the performers would be only actors playing cowboy. For that reason I didn't think it would be interesting to see, but I will certainly go and see the next one I hear about."

"We can see some of that now, Father," says his daughter, pointing towards the sounds where the herd was being held and the branding going on, "better than can be seen at any rodeo and right in its own setting. More cattle, out in the open and the cowboys at their regular work."

"Yes," Graften says, "I never thought of that. Let's go and watch them for a while."

But the cook hearing that advised mighty strong against their going.

"I sure wouldn't get in sight of the herd if I was you folks," he says. "Not on foot, because these cattle ain't used to seeing anybody afoot and that would spook 'em and make 'em hard to hold, and what's more some of them might be on the prod and would sure like to see somebody afoot that way."

"What would they do?" asks the daughter, disappointed.

"They'd do enough to make you wish there was a tree close to climb up on."

"You mean they'd charge a person?"

"Yes, and catch up with it quick and scatter the carcass till there'd be no remains to be found," says the cook, half peeved at such ignorant questions, even if they was from a pretty fair looking young lady.

Well, there was nothing much they could do now. They walked away

and sort of talked of the cook's and others, ways of expressing themselves. They sure done that well, they thought, mighty plain and short and leaving no doubts as to what was meant. But, they also come to figure out, it was all for their own good.

Mother and daughter went to their tents to put away the flowers they'd picked. That seemed unnecessary to do with so many all around 'em. Then with Samuel they walked around some more. They walked past where the cowboys, beds was rolled up or laid spread out for sunning, and they wondered how they could sleep in them on the ground. It must be hard and uncomfortable, and then shivers run along their spines as they talked of bugs and spiders and snakes maybe crawling in between the blankets. The thought of that was enough without them talking about it, so they walked on and changed the subject, glad they wasn't cowboys.

They walked on to the rope corral and there wondered how one single cable about three feet above the ground and held up by forked sticks could hold such wild and mean acting horses as some they'd seen the cowboys saddle that day. They'd of given that up as a mystery if it hadn't been for the horse wrangler who came along about then. He'd come to get the horses that would soon be rode in and turned loose from the afternoon's work, just to be sure they'd get with the remuda that was grazing around the point of a ridge not far away.

The wrangler was just a young feller of about sixteen and taking more to listening than he was to talking, specially with strangers from towns, and when Graften asked him to explain about the corral he just said, "Why, on account that the gentler horses don't like to be crowded, they stay close to the rope and they won't jump over, and the broncs, being wild, like to stay in the center and sort of hide amongst the others in there." That over with he rode on to the chuck wagon, leaving Graften and family not much the wiser, for they didn't know horse nature.

They walked on, not much more to see, they thought, but what they had already seen, the spread of the camp, the cowboys, a glimpse of the herd and the country around. Soon they started walking back towards their camp and as they went around that way they got up on bench land and on a level to where they could see the herd on the other bench land acrost the creek. They was plenty far enough away so the cattle wouldn't notice 'em and so they could also see the

cowboys at work fairly well.

The branding was near over, and after that there come the cutting out of dry stuff and some cows and calves to be shifted to other ranges, also mixed strays which the reps would take out when near their range. The ones cut out from the day's round-up would be put into the "main herd," the herd that's being loose herded by shifts of two or three riders during the day and held close on "bed grounds" by nightguard shifts during the night. With such work thru the long spring and summer days the cowboy seldom gets over six hours of sleep out of twenty-four, and even that is split with the couple of hours shifts on nightguard. Outside of a couple of hours for eating, most of that spent for a little sitting around of evenings, all of the other fourteen or fifteen hours are well spent in the saddle and with enough riding for the cowboy to tire three or four changes of horses a day, good tough horses.

But Graften and his family had no idea of the cowboy's work as they sat and watched 'em from their safe distance and, as Gat had said in his remark at the bog, they thought it grand and glorious. The cowboy also thinks it's all right or he wouldn't be living the life, but it takes a cowboy at heart to do that. For the every day work is not so rosy and sunshiny as it was that day while Graften and his family watched.

The three enjoyed watching the cutting out of the cattle by ones and twos from the drive, the dodging, twisting and running of the critter not wanting to be cut out from the drive, then the dodging and twisting to get back while the good cowhorse done his fast work to out-dodge and outtwist and outrun the critter from the drive, and head 'er for the "cut,"[*] that all was very interesting and remarkable in action to the folks sitting on the edge of the bench land. The daughter, sort of excited, once remarked that she wished she had one of the horses she rode at the academy at home so she could be close to the herd and watch everything, she would ask for one tomorrow. Her dad and mother had shook their heads at that. Their daughter could go riding if she wanted to, but they wanted to be delivered from riding on any such horses as they seen the cowboys line out to work on that afternoon. Even the gentlest was a long ways from gentle.

[* Out out cattle being held a short distance from the herd.]



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The cutting out of the cattle over with the biggest part of the herd was turned back to the range where they'd been rounded up from that day, shoved a ways, and there left to scatter. The "cut" was then shoved on another direction and put in with the main herd near a mile from camp to be held by the three riders on dayherd shift. That done, the cowboys rode back for camp. It was time for the evening meal.

The family came down from the bench at the sight of them riding back, and was on hand not far from the corral when the cowboys rode in to unsaddle. John B. and Hatty rode in side by side and unsaddled side by side, the cowboys along with 'em, and when all the saddles was pulled off there was a good row of 'em laying on their sides close to the outside of the corral. The horses was turned loose to be watched by the wrangler, and then all the riders started for the chuck wagon to do justice to whatever the cook had for them there.

John B. seeing the stranger folks, stayed behind and went towards em. He was made acquainted to the woman folks and then he went on to say,

"You folks pitch right in at the chuck wagon and gather yourselves something to eat any time you want now, and if you want to get along with the cook like we all have to" he grinned a little "you better eat

while it's ready. There's no tables and nobody waits on one another here unless it's somebody with a couple of broken legs and arms. So get right to it and don't be bashful."

There was some thanks from the family, and as they said something about going to wash up first, John B. left 'em and went to join the boys that was making the rounds from the chuck box to the ovens and coffee pot.

"Sure queer stuff to handle," he says to Hattie as he grabbed himself a plate. "A feller don't know what the samhill to do for 'em or how to act near 'em."

About half of the riders had got thru eating when the family and their chauffeur got there. John B. was thru and when he seen 'em coming he went to show 'em where and what everything was, and then him and the cook even rolled up their own bed rolls for the ladies to sit on while they et.

"Not so bad at waiting on ladies," says Hatty as John B. caught up with him at the corral afterwards.

"Yes, you old crowbait, you'd been there a mile ahead of me if you wasn't so stiff in the joints and could of got up from under your plate."

The remuda was being drove into the corral by the wrangler. It was their fourth corralling for that day. It had been a big day, two circles and a branding, and now the night horses was to be caught and picketed out to graze thru the night, all excepting for the time when rode on nightguard.

Graften and his family would of liked to've been near the corral instead of sitting where they was while the roping and the picketing of the horses was going on. Of course the horses the cowboys caught for the night was much gentler than the ones for the day, but it would all be interesting to watch close, they thought, and hearing different remarks. They could of been there if they'd come to eat on time. But they was also very much satisfied to be eating, in such a new and interesting way, and what was in their plates wasn't near as hard to take as they'd imagined it would be. The grub, to their surprise, was "delicious," and being "out of doors" as they had that day, they was "simply ravenous." So being they couldn't be both at the corral and near the chuck box at the same time, they made out

fairly well where they was. They helped themselves to quite a few helpings of steak and potatoes and canned corn, and it was remarked that they'd never before tasted such good "morsels" of beef.

It was young beef raised natural, and on all the grass and their mothers, milk they wanted, not veal nor corn fed baby beef, but good four and five month old calves. The kind that's not on the market and of course can't be bought in butcher shops.

The Graften family, all appetites well satisfied now, looked forward for an interesting evening with John B. and the "queer" Hatty and the cowboys. The few cowboys that had been still eating when they first came near the chuck wagon had got thru and left soon after they'd got there, caught their horses, and picketed em. Three riders had rode away from the corral on a high lope and the family wondered where they was going. Graften asked the cook, who answered that they was going to relieve the men on dayherd.

"Relieve?" the girl wondered. "Are they suffering?"

"Yes, mam," says the cook, grinning, "from empty stomachs."

It wasn't so long afterwards when the three "relieved" riders loped up at the corrals, unsaddled, caught their night horses, picketed 'em and headed for the chuck wagon. They seemed to be three mighty carefree and happy men, and the family remarked about 'em as they came along. They hadn't seen them before and they looked like they'd be more company and livelier than the others. Then the three riders, coming around the chuck wagon, of a sudden noticed the two women a-sitting on the bed rolls in the shadows of willows and just a little ways off, and no cowboys ever lost their carefree or happy looks any quicker than them three did at the sight of them. They just stiffened up, tipped their hats and said howdedo and felt as tho they was on cactus as they went to get plates and cups and to gathering their victuals. That done they went a ways, sat cross legged on the ground and begin to eat, hardly looking at 'em.

Graften and his family was puzzled and a little disappointed. They'd never seen such people as these cowboys, just the opposite and so different in every way from the people in their home country. For there, the family's main trouble had been to keep people from tagging at their heels and making a fuss over them, specially with the

daughter. There didn't seem to be no introduction needed for men to talk to her and gather around her at whatever party or place to visit she went to. Most young ladies liked that. She did too, but there was times when she wished they would leave her alone. There was many times when her dad and mother also wished people wouldn't bother 'em so.

But they didn't get to wish that at the round-up camp. They got to sort of wishing just the opposite there and would liked to mixed company, even tho they might all be in an average of what Graften thought Hatty to be. That would at least satisfy their curiosity and it might be interesting to know them.

They seen John B. and Hatty sitting with a few of the cowboys by the bed wagon by the rope corral, John B. not at all acting the part of a host, they thought, and like he'd forgot all about 'em. They didn't realize that John B. had no reason to ever think about 'em. He didn't invite 'em there and would rather they hadn't come. For he didn't like to be bothered either, much less by strangers who invite themselves, with no respect to a man's rights of private home and range and with no thought but what it was perfectly all right.

There'd been quite a few of such kind since the coming of the automobile. People coming out by the car loads and making free of everything on ranches, as tho all the stockman owned had been given to him and for them to go ahead and help themselves, take his hospitality to the limit, ride his horses, eat his grub which they don't figure cost him anything to raise, but which all cost him twice as much as to the town man because he has to haul it many miles, and gas and tires and time is not free. The eggs and cream and beef are not free either, not with the price of the lands, buildings, wages and all that it takes to grow so as to raise them.

When an automobile load of them self invited people come to a stockman's place they'll stay for days and sometimes weeks and enjoy themselves plum content, but when the stockman comes to town he stays in a hotel and eats there, and it's might seldom that the people who invite themselves to his home and make themselves very much at home there will ever invite him to even one meal with them, and more seldom when a room and bed is offered even for one night.

The stockman wouldn't of course accept such invitations because he

feels as tho he's putting somebody to extra trouble if he did. Besides he wouldn't be interested to visit. For when he comes to town it's to get some business attended to, get whatever supplies he wants, have his fun the way he wants to if he's inclined that way, and then get back to the ranch with no strings on him, no obligations to nobody.

That was the way with John B. But he was a real host, and his home and horses and range was, to the people he or his family invited. He only tolerated the uninvited strangers, like with the Graften family, and he couldn't think much of 'em for doing to him exactly what they would never tolerate him doing at their own home, uninvited and making himself to home there, not as a stranger, like they was to him.

John B. wasn't thinking of that as he stood up amongst his men by the bed wagon, stretched, and then came towards the lone Graften family. He was thinking of his daughter June. He hadn't seen her for quite a while now, and being a little lonesome for her he thought it'd be nice to talk about some of her days while at college with the folks who claimed to've knowed her there.

He was greeted with smiles as he got near and invited to sit on his own ground, and before he'd got to sit, Graften and his wife both begin to tell him of the "beautiful and rugged invigorating country" his was, of "the pure air and clear skies, all so big and open and so wonderful and inviting to the weary." John B. had heard that same kind of talk many times and till he near knowed the words by heart. He stuck and had to hear it again and when they'd come to about the end of their ropes on the subjects and getting short of breath he edged in a few words about June.

"Oh, June is simply divine," the girl blurts out before her dad and mother could speak. "Of course I didn't get to know her very well, only met her a couple of times while with my brother Rodney at parties. But all of us wanted so to know her more." She giggled, "especially poor Rodney who tried his best to see her time and again afterwards, and with no success."

No meaning looks nor hinting coughs could stop the girl. She'd wanted to talk, which she sure did, and let the cat out of the bag in fine shape. And John B. even tho a little peeved at Graften for giving him the idea that his gamily knowed June some, had to laugh to himself how he'd been made a liar out of by his daughter's words.

He was more pleased as to how Graften's son, Rodney, didn't get such a stand in with June, and he figured that Rodney didn't at all insist or even know about his folks coming to the ranch where June lived or he'd sure tagged along. The girl's talk gave a good hint to that.

Thinking them things over quick, John B. hardly heard Graften's smoothing over his daughter's talk about their knowing June. Then the subject was changed sudden by a question from Mrs. Graften. John B. didn't hear it at first and it had to be repeated. There was more questions come right along after that and of the usual kind that's asked from most people not familiar with the cow country. There was such questions as what makes the horses so wild, the cattle too. What do you do with them when it storms. Why do you brand them. Why the ropes on the saddles, and such queer saddles. Why the high heels on the cowboys boots, the "leather pants." And many such questions which are asked more for plain curiosity than thru any real interest.

John B. had answered many such questions many times before. It always had been hard and aggravating work for him because he knowed that most all that was asked could only be found out by living the life, and not only for a few months. The questions would fill many books to give an understanding hint in answer to them. It would take time, and so he wasted few words as he answered the questions because few people would understand much of 'em after he'd explained. His length of answers depended a whole lot on what kind of questions was asked him, how much sense there was to them.

The answering of questions about the cowboys, the stock and the work soon begin to tell on John B. He got fidgety and got to looking for a break when he could politely get away and without having to make a run for it. For it seemed like there was nothing coming from the Graftens but questions, and on account of their lives being so different than his no other subjects could be brought up and discussed so as to make an interesting conversation, not from John B.'s side.

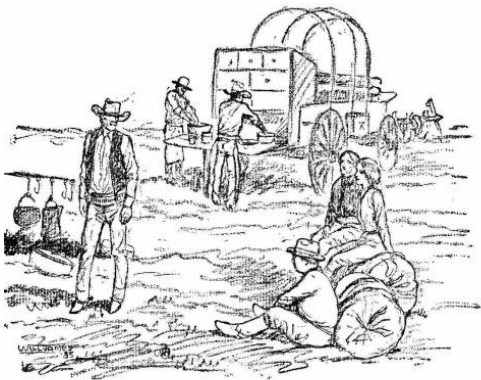
It was getting near sundown, and John B. seeing Hatty and a couple of the boys going to their saddled night horses figured that a good excuse to break away. He stood up.

"Well," he says, "I've got to go help the boys on cocktail and get the herd on bedground."

He didn't get away so easy there, for he'd left himself open for more questions.

Graften had smiled, like from a joke. "Cocktail," he says, "that's a new one on me for out here."

"But it's an old one on round-up," says John B. "This kind of cocktail comes in an hour glass, meaning the evening hours from supper time till time for first guard, about three hours and while the herd is still held out to graze. There it's brought to the bedground to be bedded for the night."



"But it's an old one on round-up," says John B.

"But it's an old one on round-up," says John B.

That last brought another surprise and a question. "Bedded? bedded with what?" asks Mrs. Graften, "and what kind of ground is a bedground?"

John B. had to grin at that. "Just good grassy sod," he says. "What we call a bedground is just a good open place to hold the herd on at night so they can't get away into brakes and brush during the night and before you can see or hear 'em. Bedding 'em down is just holding the herd close in one spot and riding around 'em quiet until they settle down. If the weather is good and the cattle are not hungry or thirsty, and all is quiet, many of them will be laying down about the time the first guard shift comes on," and he started to walk away when the last of the Graftens spoke up, the girl.

"Why do you have to stand guard over them?" she asks. "Is there danger of something getting them?"

"Yes. Boogaboos," snorted John B. Then he added on more serious, "We stand guard on the herd because we don't want to lose any. The herd is of cattle that's picked out from every day's round-ups and to be drove, and then left on other ranges more fitting to that kind, as we go along. By that time we have another herd picked out from more round-ups to be shoved on to other ranges, and so on."

While nobody interrupted with another question he went on as a wind up, "And that reminds me," he says, "we re moving camp in the morning. Breakfast is at three-thirty and we'll be getting out of here a little after four o'clock. Just thought I'd tell you."

With that he turned and went before any more questions came his way, leaving the Graften family, only to wondering what the cowboys do for sleep, for it seemed like they rode all day and all night.

CHAPTER IX - Hold Your Horses

The cook's special warbling and loud holler of that early morning sounded mighty unearthly to the Graften family. They jumped up in their beds, stared in the spooky pitch of darkness and realizing where they was, in a flimsy tent instead of the thick and solid walls they was so used to, in the thick of wilderness, amongst wild cowboys, and maybe panthers and wolves prowling around, they dodged back under the covers, there to shiver and try to figure out just what kind of ghost or wild animal that unearthly holler could of come from. It sounded like anything, from a panther's scream to the choking beller of a bull calf. There'd been no human tone to it they could of recognized.

There was some rustling and moving around outside the tent. The Graftens shivered some more. They'd liked to spoke to one another but they was afraid to do that for fear of attracting the monster, but Samuel being the bravest finally spoke up, sort of quiet like. "Is that you Jeffers?"

"Yes, sir." Jeffers was their chauffeur. "The cook has just said something about come and get it," he says. "I guess he means breakfast is ready."

It was a great relief for the Graften family to hear Jeffers voice, even if there was signs of scare in it. Then Samuel asked him,

"What do you mean, Jeffers, about the cook saying something and breakfast being ready? Do you mean it was him who made that awful noise just a minute ago?"

"Yes, sir. I'm sure, sir. I was closer and I could make out a few words. As tho he was going to burn something up if we didn't come and get it. He said something about hungry catamounts too, sir. So I thought I'd better get up, sir."

"All right, Jeffers." There was an uneasy tone to Graften's voice. Could there be hungry catamounts prowling around? Then his wife managed to ask, "but what time could it be, Samuel? It's so dark." She didn't know what a catamount was.

Samuel reached for his flash light and looking at his watch it said

twenty minutes after three. "What an ungodly hour to get up," he says. "It seems as if I'd just got to sleep."

His daughter had come back to her wits by then and to agree with him. "And what," she says, "if you'd had to get up and ride a couple of hours thru the night on guard around the cattle?" She shivered some more, and added on, "Excuse me, but I'll take the beach for mine."

The Graftens, well awake now by the scare the cook's "holler" had given 'em, got up and dressed by a couple of flash lights, the mother and daughter muttering about the inconvenience of things and unnecessary of roughing it just to see this old wild west. They'd rather been in Naples or the Riviera. Their spirits was sort of low and they had no ears for the chirping of hundreds of birds greeting the coming of the new day.

Excepting for a very faint streak to the east it was still dark as they came out of their tent. But thru the willows they seen the cheerful blaze of the cook's fire. They heard the voices of the cowboys and then, away off, the bells of the remuda. The nighthawk was bringing in the horses, and to the Graftens it seemed that the cowboys had never quit work.



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Jeffers had gone to join them, and the Graftens decided not to wait either. A busy bunch of men was helping themselves out of the ovens and skillets around the fire as they got there, and the cowboys seeing 'em, gave 'em plenty of room and calmed down some on their joking remarks at one another. John B. greeted the family with a nod and a grin as he was heading out with a plateful of fried beef and potatoes and told 'em to "dig in."

They dug in, and made good hands of themselves at all the skillets and ovens that was there, the cook replacing the lids they'd left off, and soon settled down to get away with all they'd gathered on their plates. They balanced 'em well and they didn't miss the fruit juices or

napkins, nor look to see if their tin plates and cups had been well cleaned, and they didn't mince around much either. They just et, et like they never et before or enjoyed it as much.

By the time they'd got away with about half of what was on their plates and washed that down with good strong coffee, the ladies begin to perk up some and their spirits to liven up. They got to looking around a little at the cowboys scattered here and there, two and three together sitting cross-legged and talking low. Then one and another got up, dropped plates and cups and utensils in the "round-up pan" (wash tub) and rolling smokes went to get their picketed night horses to unsaddle and turn loose. For it was getting near daylight, and the remuda, after being held near the creek to drink, was being drove in the corral.

Soon all the riders, along with John B. and Hatty, was thru eating, dropped their plates in the round-up pan and gone to the corral, and it was a wonder to the Graftens how little time it took 'em to do that. They was just getting well started with their breakfast and there was the cowboys, at the corral and already catching their horses.

Well, there was no hurry for them that they could see, so they went on enjoying their meal and also enjoying watching all the camp's busy goings on at the same time. They'd forgot about the moving of camp until they seen some of the cowboys leading bigger horses than their saddle horses and coming to different wagons where the harnesses hung on the tongues of 'em and started to harness 'em from there. Spooky, wild acting big ponies.

But the Graftens hadn't really forgot about the moving of camp, they just hadn't given it any thought, like it made no difference to them. They'd just go along and enjoy themselves all they could. That's what they'd come west for.

After the saddle horses was caught and saddled, and the harness horses all harnessed and tied up, the remuda was left loose to graze, then the rope corral was let down, coiled up and put in the bed wagon. All the riders pitched in at that and whatever there was to be done to break camp and get it going to the next as fast as possible. The feller that gawked around while that goes on is no cowboy, and so is not wanted around round-up camps.

Each rider helped the other get his bed roll loaded in the bed wagon

and helped others do the same, and everything that went to make up the camp was picked up that way and put in the right place in the right wagon in short time. Even the nighthawk and wrangler helped, and with all hands that way the outfit is soon ready to move on.

While the cowboys was at that, the cook and flunky was busy with pots and pans and grub at the chuck wagon and putting that all away. That was their territory and nobody helped 'em there.

Their work was done in good time too, but the cook and flunky didn't have to bother with catching, harnessing and hooking up the six horse team. Two cowboys done that for the cook and when he'd jump up on his wagon seat, the lines would be handed to him with a grin of joking respect by a cowboy, while another one or two held some of the spookiest horses. For the Seven Xs had a fast moving round-up outfit, and from the time of the cook's holler at twenty minutes after three, there'd been the eating, the catching and saddling and harnessing of many horses, the breaking up of camp and all, and now the outfit was ready to move for another camp site at four o'clock, forty minutes from the time the cook hollered.

The Seven X outfit often broke camp, the wagons going across country at near runaway speed for ten miles or more to the next camp site where the camp would be set up again and the cook would have his fire going and pots boiling before the sun would come up.

There's only four men at setting up a camp, the pilot, the cook, the nighthawk and the flunky, the riders all being out on circle starting from the last camp site and would be at the new camp with drives from the morning's circle by ten or eleven o'clock, which is the noon meal time during round-up.

That's the average speed of good round-up works and no laggard or anybody in the way is allowed around such outfits. Every man is up on his toes, knows what to do and none wants to be the last in anything that's done.

The cook had always prided himself to be the first on the wagon seat and ready to take the "ribbons" (lines) of his six horse team.[*] But that morning he wasn't there as he always had been when the cowboy was ready to hand him the ribbons. Something had sure gone wrong, and the cook was going around the wagon madder than

a hornet and with a cuss word for every blade of grass he tromped under, and when the cowboys found out the cause they near had fits for laughing, which made the cook all the madder. Besides, the other two wagons was now ready to start and waiting on the cook to take the lead, as the cook always does. The pilot was also waiting to scout him across the range for good crossings, and all the other riders was waiting for the ones holding the horses and lines, even old John B. and Hatty who sat their horses, wondering. The whole outfit was held up and waiting for the cook to get on The wagon seat and take his lines and start.

[* Round-up cooks have to be good four or six horse skimmers as well as cooks, and they re usually mighty good outside cooks.]

And the cause of all this breaking the set rules of the round-up works, holding up the whole outfit of riders and wagons and disgracing the cook for being the last one ready, was none other than the society elites, the Graften family. For they was still eating, and plum ignorant of what a stir they was causing.

The cook had been good enough to tell the flunky to hold off washing the skillets and such as had hot grub in until the folks was thru eating, but he seen what was coming and after asking the folks if they wanted another helping he pitched in with the flunky to wash and put 'em away, all but the coffee pot and a few things on the chuck box's drop board such as canned milk and sugar.

And while the Graften family went on eating (they always took an hour for breakfast, you know), all interest at watching and talking about how odd and interesting this and that, the cook had stomped away to where he could cuss well without being heard by them. But the cowboys, laughs hadn't helped him much there.

Finally he couldn't stand it any longer, and if it had been John B.'s most liked kin or the President he'd of done the same as he proceeded to do, for there was no excuse, he figured. Nobody was high enough to break the rules of the round-up works, much less the cook's.

He stomped over to the fire, grabbed the coffee pot and doing his best to hold his temper went to the Graften family.

"Here, folks," he says, holding up the coffee pot, "hold your cups and

I'll fill 'em up."

They done that without thinking if they wanted any more or not, or right at that time. He filled their cups to the brim then threwed the rest of the coffee on the fire and put the pot away as it was. Then brushing everything off the drop board into the chuck box he closed it tight, went to the front of the wagon, jumped up on the seat, grabbed the ribbons the laughing cowboy handed him, and kicking the brake loose at the same time he let out a war whoop.

The six spooky horses started all as in one and hit the creek crossing on the jump, the chuck wagon whipping and dancing behind on one wheel and then another. The cook sure took the lead and made the pilot ride to get out of his way. The bed wagon then come a-trying to follow, then the wood wagon, all in the dust the chuck wagon had stirred, acrost the creek, up on the bench land and then down country towards the next camp site.

John B. and Hatty, watching the cook take the lead and then disappear over the bench, looked at one another and grinned. "Something sure must of bit him," says Hatty.

The two and their riders didn't cross the creek but angled off for rolling hills on the side they was, to ride on the morning circle.

It seemed no time since the cook got up on his wagon seat till the whole outfit of wagons and riders disappeared, and there wasn't a sight of 'em nowheres when the Graften family sort of come to and realized they was still standing where the cook had poured coffee to 'em and left 'em, still holding their plates and cups.

They looked around in wonder at the sudden disappearance of what a minute before had been a busy round-up camp. It all was so still now, the disappearance was so quick, and not a movement nowhere in sight. They finally looked at one another with a vacant stare, then sort of foolishly at the plate and cup they was holding. The round-up outfit had moved so sudden that at the sight of plate and cup in his hand, Graften come near hollering for the cook. He waved 'em in the air as tho he was still near, and then realizing, he looked all the more foolish and just said, "He forgot the dishes."

But the cook hadn't forgot the dishes. As far as he was concerned they could eat them, and right about that time he was a mile away

from them and not at all thinking about the dishes, nor them either. For his six-horse team was running away. When he started the team, his being on the peck and starting 'em on the jump made 'em spookier than they already was, and after crossing the creek and going down country he'd let 'em run on as they pleased, not caring how fast they went. He was that peeved. And such round-up teams, always fat and spooky and being broke to moving wagons at good speeds, was always ready to run, and a good runaway and scattering of the wagon all over the country and then the breaking up of harnesses, was all to their hearts, content and ways of enjoyment.

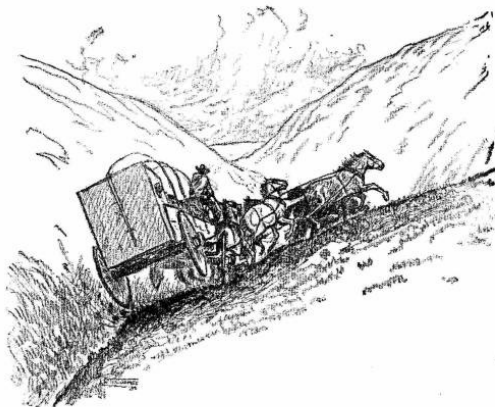
The cook let 'em run at good speed for a ways, crowding the pilot, who was enjoying it all, and leaving the other two wagons away behind. Then the breeze begin to cool him down and he drew up on the ribbons to steady the team down to a slower gait. That, right then, seemed to act only as a signal with the spooky good feeling horses, for instead of slowing down, they tore loose from there and with everything they had in 'em. He was now thinking very much of something else besides the dishes and the Graftens. The team was running away and it looked like it would be a good runaway if he could head 'em right. But some of 'em had got tangled up in the traces from the start and he could no more hold 'em than fly, or not as much. Then right ahead he seen a turn he'd have to make or the team and wagon would go right down the steep banks of a ravine that run crossways from the hills and towards the creek, and even if he could turn the team, he more than doubted if the wagon wouldn't upset and roll over into the ravine anyway, at the speed it was going.

It wound up just about like that only even better than the cook expected, for there was a lot of swing and snap to it. Thanks to the help of the pilot for that, because if it hadn't been for him it would of been a straight down drop, a stacking up of horses one on top of the other and the wagon on top of 'em, for the cook hadn't been able to turn the team.

As it was, and when the pilot seen that the team was sure enough serious in their running away, seen that the cook couldn't hold or turn 'em and also seen the wash ahead, he let the team pass him a bit, then caught up to the "nigh" (left) leader, grabbed the heavy line, and taking a couple of turns around his saddle horn went to try and point him and the other leader up the draw and to one side of the ravine.

All would of been well, maybe, if the wash had been twenty feet

further on. But it wasn't, and when the pilot sort of jerked the leaders off their feet and turned off the ravine the swing team didn't follow so well and the wheelers hardly any, but all just enough to make a whip lash out of the fast running teams and a popper out of the wagon.



To make a whip lash out of the running teams and a popper out of the wagon.

To make a whip lash out of the fast running teams and a popper out of the wagon.

It popped high and over the bank, the wheel team having no ground under 'em went down too, turning over the swing team and dragging the leaders down after 'em, also the pilot and his horse, for it seemed like that rider hadn't been able to get away on account of the team coming so fast and all going so fast after that.

When the dust cleared a little there was only one left on the bank and that one was the cook, just laughing at the rider scrambling away from his horse in the brush below while that horse was fighting to get his footing. The team was just as they'd been hooked up and as they

belonged but in all positions excepting right side up. The wagon was the only part of the outfit that was right side up, and after it had turned over a couple of times it looked ready for the cook to come to as in camp and start cooking. That's what had made him laugh, along with the sight of the scrambling rider.

It was about a fifteen foot drop to the bottom of the ravine and where the outfit had landed, and the cook sliding down to the bottom, begin untangling his team, and the pilot, after untangling his horse and leaving him to where he could stand up, came along to help him.

"Well," says that rider as he stuck his grinning head thru the brush, "that wasn't a bad runaway."

"Couldn't of been done in better style," says the cook, now good natured, "you swung 'em just right so they'd lay good."

Unhooking and untangling the horses one by one they pulled each one around to where he could get some footing so as to get up and stand. The brush had saved 'em from hard falls and none was hurt, only sort of shaky and more spooky than ever.

The two other wagons had pulled up above 'em before then, and the nighthawk leaving his four horse team in the care of the flunky who drove only two, slid down the ravine to also help in straightening up the outfit.

It was good that the wagon was right side up, for that would of been a mighty awkward and heavy contraption to handle in the narrow space. And that wagon didn't seem to be much worse for the tumble. Everything had been well tied down in it on account of runaways to always look forward to, and fast going even at regular speed. So the bows to hold up the canvas cover and the seat is all that was broke.

Now, getting the wagon out was the next problem, and there was only one way to that, pull it down the ravine to the creek bottom and where the wood road went thru. They could get back on bench land on that same road and then branch off to the camp site they was headed for.

But getting the wagon down that ravine would be some job. The ravine was narrow and brushy and big boulders was along it and there was near a quarter of a mile of that to go thru to get to the creek bottom. Besides, the wagon was headed up the ravine and it

would have to be pulled backwards for quite a ways before it could be turned around.

The cook and the other two didn't fret or study the situation long, they just went to it without wasting any time, for that wagon had to be up at camp, and grub ready when the cowboys rode in. That cook had never failed with the chuck wagon yet, not with all the runaways he'd had, and now that he'd been the last one ready to pull out of camp that morning, and for the first time, that had been enough disgrace to do him for one day, or any amount of days. He'd never once been late in having the grub ready when it was time for it to be ready, and that once wasn't going to happen now, not if he could help it.

The cook, like most all round-up cooks, had been a good cowboy in his younger days and savvied how to handle any kind of horses well. He picked out the gentlest two of his team, big rangy horses, and with the help of the pilot and nighthawk, soon had 'em hooked onto the back end of the wagon. And with him handling the ribbons and the other two on the tongue to steer the wagon, he started the team over brush and boulders down the steep ravine.

It was a good thing the ravine was steep because the two horses, even tho big and strong, couldn't of pulled it. Over brush and boulders the wagon went, sometimes tipping over till it upset, then the team would be hooked on the side to straighten it up again. Wheels had to be tied to act as locks in some places on account of the going being so steep, then other places where it was still steeper the wagon had to be snubbed to a tree or boulder and slack gradually given to let it go down easier, all the while the two men on the wagon tongue being whipped back and forth as a front wheel would come against rocks or washed out places. There was brush to be cut in some places, boulders to be moved with the team, and all put together the three was having more than a busy time.

"I sure don't mind a good runaway," says the cook once, while wiping the sweat of his brow, "but I sure hate the picking up of the pieces afterwards and the patching things up."

It was some relief when a place was finally reached where the wagon could be turned around and the team hooked on the tongue where it belonged, and as the cook seen by the hills that the sun was now up, he worked all the harder to keep the wagon moving and down towards the creek bottom. He should be at the camp site right now,

he thought, and things started to cooking.

"Goldern them pilgrims anyhow," he'd said once, meaning the Graftens. He blamed the fix he was in on them, for, as he figured, if they hadn't held him from getting his start from camp he wouldn't of got on the peck, and if he hadn't got on the peck he wouldn't of got so careless maybe and let his team run away and be in such a fix. And now if he didn't get in camp in time he'd blame that onto 'em too.

With a lot of figuring, straining, sweating and some cussing, the wagon was finally got down in a little clearing in the creek bottom. It would now be fair going from there to the road, and tying the team to a tree they all started back up the ravine to get the other horses. The nighthawk knowing the way to the camp site went on with his wagon, the flunky following him, and with orders from the cook to get a good fire going and have some good coals ready when he got there because there'd be no time to waste getting the chuck to cooking. Then the cook and pilot started down the ravine leading the horses in single file.

They made it back down to the wagon in good time and the team was soon hooked up and ready to go again. The pilot held the leaders while the cook got up in the wagon with his six lines. He missed his seat there, for it would be hard to handle the six horses while sitting on nothing much to give him any leverage, then it would be hard to handle his brakes. So he stacked up his and John B.'s bed roll, tied 'em to stay, and straddling 'em like on a horse and bracing his feet against the dash board, he figured he could ride fairly well and handle his team the same. But he would have no more runaways now if he could help it, no more foolishness that way because he had to get to the camp site now and have the grub ready.

The cook all set, the pilot let the leaders go. They started like a good fresh stage team, and then the pilot getting on his horse went in the lead again, and to piloting the best way out thru or around clumps of trees and marshes to the wood road. That was made in fine shape and then the going being pretty good, the cook let his team ramble along in a lope for a ways. Time had to be made up.

All was going along fine that way, and the team, now sort of satisfied from their play and running away, was rambling along good and with no other intentions but to get to the other end, have the harness

pulled off of 'em and turned loose to roll.

And the cook was even whistling a tune, when, of a sudden, and like right in his ear came the loud scream of an automobile horn. At the same time he was near bucked off his bed roll seat and a-hanging on the ribbons for all he was worth. For at the sudden noise of the horn the team had jumped as tho they'd been stuck with electric prods, all as in one and to near jerking the gear out from under the wagon box.

The team lit to running again, and worse than they had the first time because there was not just rough play in this runaway and no kicking over the traces, they was scared plum out of their wits and they was running to get away, and at the speed they was running they could get away from most anything, even the automobile that had come up so close behind the wagon and scared 'em with its sudden scream.

The cook not wanting any more runaways that morning handled his ribbons like he never had before, and even tho handicapped by not having his regular wagon seat to brace himself from, he done well on the bed roll and rode it like he was on some old buckner and where it was a case of either ride or walk a long ways. He rode, and with one foot on the brake lever and the other on the dash board, he handled his ribbons like a master stage driver and kept his team in line and on the road.

That road, even tho winding a considerable, was a good thing because horses, either scared or just drifting, will take to a trail or road and stay with it rather than hit cross country. And as good luck would have it there was no very sharp turns on that road and none ahead that he could see as yet.

The team had run for over a mile and they wasn't yet under control, but there was a straight stretch for a ways and the cook took a chance to looking back on trying to get a glance of the car that had spooked his team. He wanted to see that car so he could recognize it. He was lucky there and it took him just a glance to do that, and even the car was near half a mile behind. He'd looked as the car showed up near broadside in making a turn and he recognized the color and build of it. It was the Graften car.

"Why, the daggone pot licking jinxes," he says, gritting his teeth as he turned back to his runaway team. He was too peeved for more

words, and enough so he now again enjoyed the clatter and rumble of the running team and swaying wagon. He even hardly paid much attention when he seen a sharp turn ahead and where the road left the creek bottom to wind up on bench land again, and he hardly noticed the fast riding pilot up ahead waving him a warning.

So it was with only little reasoning that he kept his team on the road instead of letting 'em go straight on at the turn and bang up into the creek and heavy brush. The wagon swayed, hardly in the road half of the time, and when it come to the turn it was a miracle to the watching pilot how the wagon ever kept on its wheels. It whipped off the road there by many yards to land on only one wheel, when a breath would of tipped it over to rolling, then to be straightened up by a jerk from the team and to do near the same wild whipping on the other side of the road.

By another miracle, the pilot thought, the team stuck to the road and took to the climb like good ones, the wagon still whipping mighty dangerous behind 'em on the sidling road. How the cook stuck to his bed roll seat was more miracles, one right after another, for there was plenty of times when the front or back wheels of the wagon was a couple of feet off the ground and landed crooked, and at that speed the pilot figured it would be easier to ride a bucking horse any time.

It was a relief to see the team take to the climb and stick to the road there, for that would wind 'em some and maybe quiet 'em down so they'd quit their running out of control. They did slow down, and by the time the level of the bench land was reached they was just at a good lope. They could of been brought down to a trot, the pilot figured, but the cook hadn't seemed to try, and when they was on bench land again and headed for rolling country, they went to running some more and that cook still wasn't seeming to try and hold 'em down. Just sort of steadying 'em so there'd be no mixup, and letting 'em line out.

But they wasn't running as fast nor was they near as scared as they'd been when they first started. They was now running more to sort of ease their feelings that way, than from scare or for the fun of it.

Once the pilot caught the cook as he was looking back over his shoulder to see if the automobile was still coming. No such was in sight, and he'd grinned to himself in realizing he was trying to get away from it. So, to help him, he piloted off the wood road and

headed for hilly country, a rougher and straighter cut to the camp site, and there was no road. That had seemed to suit the cook fine and he'd let his team follow the lead of the pilot at a high lope.

Getting into the first low hills the team slowed down in their lope some, and the cook easy had control of 'em, for they wasn't running away no more. He let 'em ramble as they pleased, and when they got deeper into the hills and climbing along long draws and coulees, they soon settled down to a trot and then a walk, before they'd get to the top. But they was ready to ramble on some more after reaching the top, and getting their wind while going downhill, they soon lined out into a trot, then a lope and finally to pretty good running again.

It was that way all the way into the camp site, without any more trouble, and the cook still riding his bed roll and handling the ribbons. He'd lost his peeved look as he drove his team there and stopped in the same spot where the wagon had been stopped many times for many years before, and a long grin spread over his face as he seen that the nighthawk and flunky hadn't got in with their wagons yet. For he'd went quite a ways around from where he left the ravine, near twice as far as the nighthawk and flunky had to go, and still he'd beat 'em to the camp site.

That made him some happy, like kind of making up for being the last one ready that morning. He turned his lines over to the pilot, and as that rider went to unhooking the team, he got busy to building a fire out of the wood that was already there from the last time, and as that burned down to coals he got a couple of buckets of water from a closed in spring close by, dug his kettles out, layed the cover board of the chuck box flat on its one leg and soon was in the thick of his cooking.

Kettles and pots and pans was a little more dented and sort of mixed up some. A few things was broke, and some leaked, and others shook out in the wild and rough ride and as the wagon turned over, but there was few things carried along in the chuck wagon that would break or leak or shake out and such things was always pretty well packed and tied down to stay. So the cook had no trouble much in finding everything he wanted to use, and still in good shape, and even tho there'd been a couple of hours spent in getting the chuck wagon out of the ravine, besides getting to the camp site in a round about way, he still had made good time and he could have a fair bait cooked up and ready by the time the riders came in from the

morning's circle.

That's all he cared about, and now he could near forgive the Graftens for holding him back that morning, also for the second runaway they was all the cause of, for, after all, with that second runaway he now figured that only boosted him to get to camp quicker, and to getting the grub ready on time. He didn't think of how near he come to turning the wagon over a few times on the way.

His fire had burned down to a long bed of good cooking coals and the water in a couple of his kettles and coffee pot was near boiling as he heard the two wagons coming. They'll be surprised, he thought. And the nighthawk and flunky was surprised as they drove in. More than that, for they hardly believed their eyes when they seen the chuck wagon there, the team all unhooked and unharnessed and the cook with his fire going and busy at the chuck box, like he'd been there all the time.

The nighthawk drove the bed wagon along the same grounds where the rope corral had always been stretched, unhooked his team and tied 'em up, and went to unloading his bed roll and dragging it where there'd be shade for all the day. Then he came to the chuck wagon for a bite of whatever might be handy, and some of the coffee the cook always had ready first. He looked into the coffee pot and seeing it had already boiled and was now simmering on a few coals, he says, "Must of been rambling some."



"Must of been rambling some,"

"Must of been rambling some."

"Rambling wasn't in it," says the cook, cutting on a hunk of beef, "I just touched the blue ridges getting over here, and they was far apart ridges too."

After taking on a couple of hunks of "huckydummy" (baking powder raisin bread) and as many cups of black coffee, the nighthawk rolled a cigarette and talked to the cook a while. He'd kind of missed out on his sleep that day on account of helping with the wagon in the ravine, but he'd catch that up before the day was over.

He looked at the sky as he rolled a second cigarette. "Sure looks like rain," he says.

The cook hardly glancing up answered, "Let 'er come. We was here first."

"Well," the nighthawk went on, "it's been quite a spell since we had a good rain, and another one right now would sure do the range good."

"Yes, it would, and I'd sooner it'd come while we re here on account there's plenty of good wood and shelter."

"There is that," says the nighthawk, "and I wouldn't mind if the wagon stayed here for a month. It's sure a good country and easy to hold horses in. I think this is one of the prettiest and best spots on this range, and I'm glad we always stay a couple of days every time we come to this spot."

It was, as the nighthawk said, a pretty spot, and the country around was just as pretty and as good as it was to look at. Below where the wagon was camped was a clear mountain stream tumbling over boulders and fringed on one side with a narrow strip of pines, then along the stream was big cottonwoods and groves of quakers and willows. The ground was a thick carpet of grass with boulders scattered here and there, and as high as a man on horseback. Then there was high solid reddish rock rims shooting up thru the green earth, which the eye could follow plum up to a high range of timber covered mountains not far away.

The timber being heavier in that part of the range made it harder to get the cattle rounded up, and that's why the wagon camped there longer than at most other places. And sometimes, when the work wasn't too rushing, the outfit would also stay there longer than usual or necessary so as all could catch up at washing a few clothes, resting some and shoeing a few horses.

The nighthawk went to where he'd left his bed roll, looked around some and then lifted it on his shoulder. He'd seen a cool and shady spot by a rimrock and under a pine, and took it there where he would be out of the way of coming or going riders and where the sound of their voices wouldn't reach. There under the tall pine and on pine needles, he unrolled his bed, unsnapped the tarpaulin and opened it up to air out good, for he'd let Graften's chauffeur sleep in it the night before, and being the bed had no rest that way, he figured it needed an airing.

He spread the bed out well, then stretching out on one end of it he smoked another cigarette while looking up at the sky and watching clouds roll by thru the far reaching limbs of the pine. They was heavy dark clouds, coming along slow and with a light cool breeze that made the nighthawk feel he would sleep well. He got up, took all of his clothes off but his shirt and underwear. layed 'em inside the tarp, and getting under one blanket, he brought the other part of the tarp over to cover himself and his clothes and belongings with the waterproof canvas. If it rained there was nothing of his out to get wet, nothing but his two private horses, backs, and that would do them good. He'd already throwed his saddle on high ground and covered it with his slicker.

The flunky, a young feller, after taking care of his two horse team the same way the nighthawk had, was now doing his best in helping the cook, cleaning and straightening things up in that pot box, taking the dents out of some with a hammer and straightening handles on others.

"Sure is a good thing you wasn't among these," he says to the cook once as he held a battered heavy tin kettle.

The cook looked at it and grinned. "Yes," he says, "I don't think the boys would like me for hash."

The young feller had come from parts east with strong intentions of becoming a cowboy, and confident as most young fellers of his age are, that he could be a good one. He'd come to the town where the Mitchells done their trading and stuck around there, mostly at the saddle shop until he made a sort of nuisance of himself there while waiting for some cowman to come in that would give him a job. He'd had no success that way because at first he'd wanted a job as a rider, or a cowboy, as he'd said, and none of the cowmen that came could see any cowboy in him. He soon realized that he was taking on a heap too much territory in asking for a job as a cowboy from the start, for when a cowman hires a cowboy, that's just what he wants, not one that thinks he is or just wants to be one. Realizing that, he then changed his tactics and decided he would go out and do anything for a starter, even wash dishes, just so he could get out on a ranch.

So when Austin came into town one day and the saddle man gave the young feller a wink and he struck Austin for a job, he was very

mild in talking of his ability as a rider. Instead he'd said he'd do anything, "even wash dishes," and that got him a job, for Austin did want a flunky, and even tho he'd bumped into some other young fellers wanting jobs on ranches, he'd picked on this one because he'd seemed honest in telling of what little he could do but wanted to work and learn.

The young feller was called "Suds" soon as he washed his first kettle on the Seven Xs, and he hadn't been with that outfit over a day when he was glad he didn't get hired as a cowboy, not when he seen the kind of horses he'd had to ride and the work that had to be done with 'em. He seen he'd have to know a considerable more about horses before he'd start to handle a half rough one, and do a lot of watching so as to get onto the ropes. He done plenty of watching, and in the meantime he dug in his work like a good one and made a hand of himself right from the start, even if it was at peeling potatoes, washing pots and pans and dishes, and helping the cook in general. His hankering to be with the cowboys and riding didn't keep him from doing that work well, and if he was at the corral often or mixing with the cowboys while they was roping and saddling horses, he didn't neglect what was to be done around the chuck wagon.

The cook, usually cranky, liked him for that. He liked him better than most any flunky he'd ever had, and one day he told Hatty about him.

"Yes," he'd went on to say, "that kid's got the makings of a good hand in him I think. He's sure a willing little cuss and he makes a hand of himself at whatever he does, even if he hates the job, and since he got that saddle he had me order for him, and got to riding around some with the wrangler, he shows that he has the knack and catches on quick."

"What are you trying to do," Hatty had acted suspicious and said, "shove him on to me? I've got to have cowboys, besides I'm more than full handed."

"Don't worry, old timer. I'm not trying to shove Suds on anybody, and you'd better not try and get him before the wagon pulls in this fall either."

"I agrees not to, old boy, yourself," Hatty had said, acting pleased. Then he'd went on like he meant it, "I noticed that boy too, and can't help but like him the way he goes at things. Again like around the

corral, he's never in the way nor asks fool questions, but just quiet-like and watching. I might put him on at some winter camp this fall if too many of the boys hit south, maybe with some old hand like yourself that ain't no good no more but puttering around and giving advice. That is if he'll stay that long."

"He'll stay that long, and if he takes any advice from me and hands it to you, you'll know something."

The cook, sort of keeping up with the runaway pace of that morning, had things cooked up so he was satisfied all would be ready by the time the riders came in. The wrangler had come in, left the remuda to graze on, turned all the wagon horses loose and hazed 'em in with it. Later on there was the dust and far away bellers of the main herd to be held to graze, and in an hour or so now the drives from the morning's circle could be expected in to the cutting grounds, and the cowboys to ride in at the wagon.

But ten o'clock come, then eleven o'clock, and no dust of drives showed up anywhere, and then the cook began to fret and get peevish again, for, to sort of make up for being the last one ready that morning, he'd went to some extra trouble to fix up an extra good bait. He'd even made a batch of son-of-a-gun-in-a-sack (dried fruit rolled in dough, sewed in flour sack and boiled) and other things the boys liked, just to show all around that he could be late to start out, have two runaways and a turn over, besides going in a round about way, and still have a lot of good chuck hot and ready in time. And now the outfit was late getting in.

"Must of went away high on the mountain," says the wrangler who'd left the remuda to graze, not far from the corral.

He'd hardly spoke when strings of dust begin to spurt up along one timbered mountain ridge and then another, and by the look of them dusts the cattle was sure travelling. Them cattle was pretty wild. It wasn't long when the dusts made by the drives blended into one at the point of the ridges and the cattle now all in one herd was drove to a big open park where the cutting grounds was.

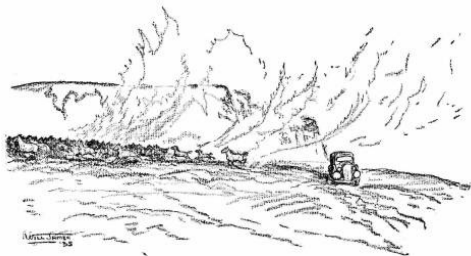
A short while afterwards all the riders on that morning's circle, excepting the few left to hold the herd, rode in to the corral on a high lope, unsaddled and turned their horses loose, and when they come along to the chuck wagon and begin to fill their plates, the cook was

ready for the first joking remark he figured would come on account of his being late to start out that morning. It did come, in the way of how he sure showed a guilty conscience and must be wanting forgiveness bad by putting out such a good spread of grub as he had.

"But I at least show some sense of self-preservation," says the cook to that. "I might be late going out but would never be late when grub's ready."

That was of course just opposite of the cook's caliber, and the riders knowed it. But it had its turn on 'em for being late when grub was ready. He well realized that they couldn't drop their herd or whatever they was doing just to be on time for meals, and that cowpunching can't mix with clock punching. It was only his way to quiet the remarks some.

But the joking went along pretty well that way as the riders et, and as all was still for a minute, like the stillness before a storm, there come sudden tearing commotion from the corral. The whole remuda had spooked and picked up like a bunch of quail, and stampeded thru and out of the corral, leaving the big cable all twisted up as they took it along with 'em a ways. Every rider at the wagon dropped his plate to the ground and jumped up at the commotion and some started running for the corral, wondering. Then the dust stirred by the stampeded remuda cleared, and there near about where the corral had been, shining and as big as life, was the Graften car.



Shining and as big as life, was the Graften car.

Shining and as big as life, was the Graften car.

CHAPTER X - Cloudy in the West

All hands stood stock still and like petrified at the sight of the car, and where the remuda had just been, but there was plenty of action in their minds as they digested the surprise, specially in John B. s, and the cook's and Hatty s.

The car had stopped where it was first seen, and the cook was the first to break the stillness. It was with a loud laugh that kept a-running, ringing and echoing as he slapped the top of the wagon table with the flat of his hand and made things dance there.

That laugh more than broke the tense stillness. It got to be catching and all hands got to laughing, even John B. and Hatty, who'd been pretty peeved at their first surprise, had got to grinning.

They'd all somehow got the cook's angle of looking at the fresh and sudden appearance of the Graften outfit. Sort of always butting in with a bang and disturbing things, or doing other things they hadn't ought to. Like with their first appearance in stirring up the herd, making the cook late the next morning, the runaway they'd partly caused, then the second one where they was all at fault, all thru their ignorance. And Suds, as little as he'd got to know about range etiquette, and even tho the Graftens was from his own part of the world, had only contempt for their making such a nuisance of themselves and upsetting things in such a busy place as a round-up camp, the last place where they ought to be. But he'd had a laugh too.

And now here they'd busted in again and stirred another rumpus, scattering the remuda by coming into sight too quick and too close.

The laughs came in with the folks, sudden and stirring appearances that way, like they might pop up most any place and do anything at the wrongest times. There was no dodging 'em, the road and rough country they'd just come over sort of proved that, and they sure hadn't been invited or was expected to follow. But here they was, like the jinx, to stay and stir up the outfit and make it pop. That's what had struck the cook's funny bone at the sight of the car, them people with blank faces, meaning no harm but always creating a commotion in their ignorance of the range and its life. They struck him like awkward clowns getting into something that's not on the program for 'em to get

into, and that's the angle the riders had caught from the cook, and which had got the whole outfit to laughing. It was so useless to do anything else.

But the unnecessary stirring, running or corralling of saddle horses don't go with a well run round-up outfit, for their strength is kept as much as possible for the work that's to be done, and Hatty, priding himself on his running that wagon, couldn't see as much to laugh about as others did.

He soon got serious and then started for the automobile, and John B. seeing by the look on his face what he was up to, warned him a little to hold on.

Hatty turned on him, and mighty peeved, he says, "Who in tarnation is running this outfit?"

Knowing that his feelings was against the Graftens, John B. only grinned a little. "I wouldn't go talk to any strangers with a face like you're packing," he says. "You'll scare the folks to death. You've even got me shaking in my boots."

Hatty stopped and gave up at that. "Why goldern their hides," he says, squatting down and reaching for his plate again, "what in the samhill are they pestivating round here for anyhow? This ain't no dude outfit."

All hands went back to eating and paid no more attention to the car. But it didn't take 'em long to finish up on the cook's good meal. A few more bites, the coffee drunk up, and they was done. John B. was the first thru and he headed for the car that was still where it had stopped. The folks there was now out of it, watching the running horses and all interested, like not at all seeming to realize that they'd been the cause of them breaking away.

John B. didn't say anything about that when he come near them. All he said was that dinner was ready and they'd better go and get it while it was still hot. "And get your car out of here and hide it somewhere," he'd added on.

Some of the cowboys had gone to get the corral by then and soon Hatty and the rest had it up and ready again. Then the spooked up remuda was brought in by the wranglers and corralled once more.

But riders had to be around on the outside, and they took turns to catching their horses and watching, because the horses would of broke out again at any spooky sound, and it took 'em a while to quiet down. The cowboys, having all caught fresh horses and rode out to the cutting grounds for the work of branding and cutting out, the wrangler tied the corral rope and went to finish his interrupted meal. The Graftens wasn't at the chuck wagon as yet, they was at their car which was hid as they'd been told to do with it, and washing and cleaning up.

But they came soon enough, with Graften in the lead and Jeffers bringing up the drags, and the wrangler had to laugh when Graften came to the cook with a howdedo and handed him the dirty plates and cups and says, "You forgot these, I believe."

The cook looked only at the tin dishes. "No. I don't believe I did," he says. "I just thought you wanted to keep 'em as souvenirs."

"Tin plates as souvenirs?" and Graften laughed. So did the cook grin, to himself.

Then Graften seen the wrangler a-sitting off a ways. "Well, young man," he says to him, getting to feel like he could joke some, "I see your corral didn't hold the horses very good today."

The wrangler looked at him for a long spell, then he says, "I don't think you'd stay in a tent either if a grizzly walked in on you, not even if the tent was warm and it was sixty below outside."

Graften laughed. "What has that got to do with the horses not staying in the corral?"

"The same as it would have to do with you not staying in the tent if a bear came in. That automobile of yours coming a-busting around scared 'em as much as a bear would of scared you, and it would of took a good pole corral to hold 'em."

"I never thought of that," says Graften.

And he didn't seem to care as him and his family went on to helping themselves with dishes and filling them up. They also helped themselves to the cook's and John B.'s bed roll to sit on while they et, and as the cook kept a-getting compliments as to how good this and

that was, he figured it a good joke on himself for cooking the extra good meal, like for them, because with their interruption the cowboys sure didn't get to enjoy it.

The relieved riders on the herd from cutting grounds, also the others on the dayherd rode in, et, caught fresh horses and rode on out again, and the Graftens was still eating, making the cook wonder if they'd be done by supper time. Then Suds, not waiting for their dishes, went to snaking in limb wood on one of the wrangler's horses. He liked to do that, anything to be riding or handling a rope, and he was also helping the wrangler out, for bringing in wood is part of the wrangler's work.

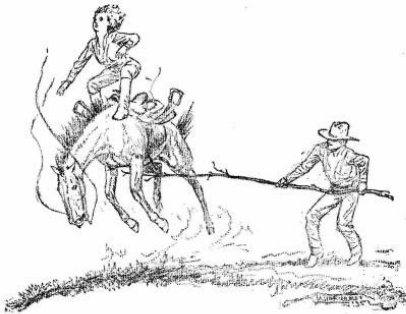
He'd brought in quite a few jags of limbs before he noticed that the Graftens had finally got thru eating and left, all but the girl, who watched him ride in with another jag, and then, as he'd got off his horse to get the rope off of 'em, the girl came up, remarked about how heavy looking and odd the western saddles was, and asked if she could ride his horse for a while and try it.

The way she'd went ahead and took the bridle reins and started to get on went to show that she'd seldom if ever been refused of anything by anybody. The wrangler might of let her on his horse, but Suds was used to girls and their ways. He'd come from where there was plenty of 'em.

"You can't ride that horse," he says, "the wrangler'll hang you."

She kept one foot in the stirrup, and looking at Suds as tho he was very nervy and only a cook's helper after all, she stuck her nose up, and saying that she could ride him if he could, she climbed in the saddle.

That made Suds mighty peeved and quick, and he acted according. He picked up one long limb, and the girl was just about to sit in the saddle when he drug the small end of that dry stiff limb under the horse's belly, and that done the work well. The girl didn't get to set in the saddle, the cantle came up and met her with a bang as the horse made a scared and quick buck jump and she was boosted over his head to sprawl on the ground.



She was hoisted over his head.

She was boosted over his head

Before she'd got to looking around, Suds had caught hold of the horse and climbed into the saddle, and as she sat on the ground and then turned, wondering what had happened, he stuck his nose up at her as she had at him and says, "I told you you couldn't ride this horse," and he rode on unconcerned.

The cook, having heard and watched the whole proceedings had to laugh at the way the girl looked at Suds as he was riding away. He seen that she'd learned something, and as she turned quick and caught him laughing, he had to laugh all the more at her expressions. He'd been caught laughing anyway and excusing himself would only made things worse right then, he thought.

"I don't think it's a bit funny," she says, getting up and brushing herself.

"Well, you didn't see it the way I did." Then he got serious and added on as she started to walk away, "You got to excuse me. When anybody gets throwed off I have to laugh even if they was to break their necks."

Cooled down some at the apology she stopped. "Why I haven't seen

anyone thrown off here yet," she says, "and I've seen a few of the horses buck."

"You just ain't been here long enough. It happens once in a while, and the best of riders get throwed sometimes."

Well how is a person going to know if a horse will buck?"

"Getting on 'em is the surest way to find out," he says, laughing again.

She thought for a while, and then she says, "But I would like to ride while I'm here. I will ask Mr. Mitchell for a good horse."

The cook had plenty of thoughts as to that but no answers, and as Graften and his wife showed up from the direction of their camp about then, he figured that the talking they'd do would be plenty enough. He just kept busy at his work.

Mrs. Graften started it as she came to join her daughter. She didn't get no hint of what had just happened.

"What a gorgeous country this is," she begins. "It reminds me of Switzerland, and what a lovely camping place. I could stay here forever."

"Wait a while," says the cook pointing a spoon at the dark clouds still piling up.

"Why, do you think it's going to rain and spoil this beautiful weather?"

"Rain is what makes this weather beautiful, and this country beautiful too."

"Does it rain much here?"

"Yes, quite a bit, and when she starts she's liable to last for a month."

"Why, my gracious," she says looking up at the sky, "how could we get back to civilization if it does?"

"Get going before it starts is all I can advise. This country here sure gets mucky and soft after it rains on it for a spell, and an automobile can't get nowheres in it. It'll even bog down a saddle blanket."

About then Graften edges in. "We could get back with a team and wagon," he says, smiling.

His wife sort of reared up at that, gave him a stare and just said, "Why, impossible."

"Sure you can," he went on, "and in quick time too. Didn't you see the cook here this morning? He made better time than we did even on the road, and after he left it we couldn't see him to keep up."

"Yes," says Mrs. Graften, raising her eyebrows, "but who would care to ride in a wagon?"

Graften didn't seem to hear the remark and went on to ask the cook, "Do you always travel from one place to another at that speed?"

"Yep," says the cook, feeling he was cornered to answering questions. "Sometimes worse."

"But what's the hurry?"

"To get to the other end and get things to cooking, the noon meal comes early."

"Do all round-up outfits travel that fast?"

"No, but most good ones travel pretty fast, all depends to the ways of the country. Some outfits take half a day to break camp, move fifteen miles and set up camp again. But this ain't that kind of a outfit."

"Well, well, how interesting," says Graften. "Do you know this is quite an experience for us. Our friends back home won't believe us when we tell them that horses hitched to wagons left us in their dust. Jeffers is a good driver too, and he tried to keep up with you but he simply couldn't. Then the experience of following your wagon tracks up and down such steep places as they took us was very thrilling, scary in the least in some places and we had to go around them. We burned the brakes badly but it was worth the experience, indeed."

"You was trying to follow me, eh?" says the cook, pounding away at what he was mixing. "I wouldn't try to do that any more if I was you, specially honking that horn at a team, any team."

"Why?"

"Oh, it might cause runaways, and besides you might get hurt."

"Hurt. How?"

The cook just looked at him at that. There was no use of answering.

After a few more questions the family went to strolling along to look at the "beautiful" country. It was more than that but they could see only the surface and not at all the heart, for they'd never lived in the depth of it. There w as flowers there too, more than there had been at the last place and of different kinds again, and they wandered around the big granite rocks, picking em, and noticed where horses and cattle had tromped some down. They thought it was a shame. They didn't know that some of the prettiest flowers they picked was very poisonous to stock. But even tho stock would eat flowers along with the grass, they wouldn't usually touch the poisonous ones unless the feed was short and they was the only thing standing.

They'd had quite a bouquet gathered up, and Graften, moseying along by the bigger and deeper pooled streams, was now wishing again that he'd brought his fishing tackle, when he felt a big rain drop splatter on his hand, then another, and as he looked up he seen that the sky was over half covered with dark heavy clouds and near to the sun that was on its clown circle to the western ridges, his wife and daughter also felt a few drops, and when they looked up towards the mountains, they couldn't see them for the heavy sheet of rain that was coming, and about then there was a flash of lightning that near blinded 'em and scared 'em bad. They'd never been in the open that way and amongst all that nature hands out, and what little lightning they'd ever seen had been far away and thru windows of steel and stone buildings, and dimmed by smoke.

But now it seemed right before em, at their very feet, and if they was scared then, it was only a starter, for there come an ear splitting thunder clap that made the earth under 'em shake, and they covered their heads with their hands like as if the heavens was going to fall on 'em. When the rumbling thunder sort of faded away and they opened their eyes, it had got near dark and there was a spooky look to everything around 'em, like as if the end of the world had come sure enough.

They dropped their bouquets of flowers and started to run for their camp, and they'd just got started when the sheet of rain come over 'em, and so heavy that it was near like swimming as they run on. There was no stopping for breath in that, for they felt they'd drown if they did, and to speed 'em on there come another blinding streak of lightning followed by an earth shaking, deafening roar of thunder. Then the rain got even heavier.

The three was soaked thru long before they reached their camp. The marcelles had straightened out on the ladies, and Graften having lost his hat was getting a good rain water soaking on the few hairs on his head. If their camp hadn't been along the stream they'd most likely lost their way, but there again, if their camp hadn't been so close to that stream they'd found a dryer camp when they got there, for with the sudden and near cloudburst the stream had already raised so as to cover the ground the camp was on by quite a few inches of muddy churning water, and there was more coming.



Mrs. General.



Пухляккин.



Mr. G. K. K. K.

The three was soaked thru long before they reached their camp.

The three was soaked thru long before they reached their camp.

With gusts of wind backed by heavy rain, the tent had been blown down, and as the family got there, Jeffers, also soaking wet, was pulling the tent pegs loose to move it and camp outfit on higher ground. It was lucky for them that the bedding was on cots or it would also get wet thru. They had no tarps.

That was the wet sight that greeted the family. But they didn't ponder long as to what to do, for a string of lightning flashes like all around 'em spooked 'em to move before the thunder come, and there was only one way to move, that was to help Jeffers get the tent up on higher ground and get in the shelter of it. That was the only shelter they could think of besides the car, but the car didn't look safe, for the water was already lapping over the running board of it.

The rain had let up some but it was still a-pouring down when the tent was finally set up again. All had been in the way of one another, and

trying to do the same thing. The bedding and other things got wet a considerable, with packing that out of the tent and leaving it out till it was set up again. Then in their hurry and excitement everybody, even Jeffers, had forgot about the car, and when Jeffers looked at it the water was near to the top of the wheels, and up to the cushions inside. There would be no starting it now to move it out of there, that would have to be done with a team, later.

The Graftens, at last in the shelter of their tent, and shivering as much from fear of thunder and lightning as from being wet and cold, got busy and to digging into their bags for the dry clothes which they was mighty thankful to have, and Jeffers, now wondering for a place of shelter, decided to go to the round-up camp. There would be some shelter there, he thought, even if it would be under a leaky wagon.

Neither Jeffers nor the Graften family had thought of watching the skies and preparing for the rain, nor of making camp in a safe place, and when it begin to pour, none thought of the natural shelters that was all around 'em in the rim rocks close by, and where the winds and snows of ages had made caves big enough there to shelter a dozen head of stock (in some of the caves). A few dry limbs grabbed on the run towards one of them caves, and a fire built in the shelter there, would of been comfortable and cheerful until the worst of the rain was over, where a tent was only dreary damp and cold.

But they'd been used to man-made shelters and that's what they hunted for at the break of the storm, the tent or the automobile.

But there was no thoughts of such shelters for the cowboys on the cutting grounds with the herd. They'd seen the storm long before it come and had prepared for it, with man-made things of course, but they was only their long yellow slickers. They'd kept on branding until the hair got too wet on the hides, cooled the irons quick, and there was danger of blotching the brands and making 'em unreadable afterwards by the irons slipping or scalding. Then the branding had to be stopped, but the herd still had to be held. So the riders untied their slickers from behind their saddles and put 'em on, ready for the storm that came, and prepared to ride some more. The herd had of course got spooky and hard to hold when the heavy rains and thunder and lightning come, but it had to be held because the branding wasn't all done, and there was also the cutting out. The cowboys stood the worst of the storm in the saddle and to holding the fidgety herd, while to within a few hundred yards of 'em was the

shelter of the dry caves in the rims. Even John B., who was free to do as he pleased, stayed with the herd and his men, partly as a force of habit to "never quit the herd," and again feeling that he had no right to hunt for shelter while the men he was with rode in the storms.

The few men on dayherd had it easier. They grazed the cattle to a long sheltered coulee where they wouldn't be wanting to drift from when the storm come, and when the storm did come they was holed up in crags and caves in other rims of that country, and from where they could see the herd. The main herd was easier to hold than the herd made up the day's round-up, for the cattle in the main herd are more used to being held and herded, and being a little tired from being trailed on from camp to camp and to other ranges, are more satisfied to stay wherever there's grass and water, and shelter during storms.

The horse wrangler, also being watchful for storms, was prepared when it came. He didn't bring the remuda near camp for him to shelter there, he done the same as the men on dayherd had, drove his horses to good shelter from the hard hitting rain, and also holed up high and dry there, and where he could watch his horses rump to shelter and graze.

The cowboy seldom gets under pines or any pitchy tree during a thunder storm, for them are the likeliest trees for lightning to hit. The nighthawk had got under a pine to take his day's sleep but he'd figured the dark clouds he'd seen when first crawling into his bed that morning might bring only rain, and no lightning. And as the first loud crack of thunder woke him up and he felt the earth shaking, the first thing that came to his mind was that he was under a pine tree, and right then he figured that he'd had enough sleep for that day. He might of slept a little longer if the thunder had sounded far enough away, but as it was he could tell by the sound of it and the vibrations of the earth under him that the lightning was playing too close for comfort, for a man under a pine tree.

The rain was pouring down at its best by then. He put on his boots and dressed under the protection of his tarp, coat, hat and all, then he jumped out, rolled his bed up quick as he could and drug it on dry ground and up against the rimrock where very little rain would touch it. That done, he hightailed it for the chuck wagon where he figured shelter had been put up.

Shelter had been put up there, but it wasn't for the cowboys to pesticate around under, it was for the cook, and where he could mix his mixtures without them being diluted with half rain water. The shelter was a wide canvas fly that spread from the top of the chuck box, over the drop board of it which made a table when opened, and on near halfways to the fire.

The fire was being put out and soaked by the heavy rain, but the heavy lidded cast iron kettles and ovens that held the grub there didn't let in a drop and they'd keep warm until another fire was started, when the heaviest rain would pass on. There was dry pitch wood beside the wagon and under the fly, and it takes a mighty heavy rain to put such a fire out. The first rain was that heavy.

The nighthawk didn't stop to grab his slicker as he went past his saddle on his way to the shelter of the chuck wagon. He had a short leather jacket on which would shed a lot of rain, and he figured the slicker would do more good on his saddle right then, so the lining and the saddle tree wouldn't get wet to warp up when drying, causing sore backs on horses and twisting the saddle skirting. In time it would do that.

But he got some wet on the way to the chuck wagon, plum to the hide below his leather jacket, and when he hit for under the shelter of the fly he was on a high lope. He shook himself and stomped there a bit as the cook passed a grinning remark that no dogs was allowed there. Then there come flashes of lightning which the cook said afterwards mixed right in with the biscuit dough he was working on, then a crash of thunder that made the pots and pans rattle and near made the handle of the coffee grinder spin around. At the same time there was another crash which sounded right close, and the wrangler and the cook and Suds all three looked the direction it came. But there was no use looking, for it was so dark like and the sheets of rain was so heavy that just the little ways to the pots by the dead fire was as far as they could see.



"Old man weather sure must be dropping everything up there," says the nighthawk.

"Old man weather sure must be dropping everything up there," says the nighthawk

"Old man weather sure must be dropping everything up there," says the nighthawk pointing up towards the sky's ceiling.

"Yeh," says the cook. "Sounds like he'd dropped his gun belt and the gun exploded and he threw his boots after it."

Suds wasn't so much for joking about the lightning and the way it acted. It struck him mighty serious and dangerous, but there was nothing could be done about it, and the joking of the cook and nighthawk more than eased the helpless and spooky feeling he had. He felt that lightning was so close he could dig some out of his ears and pockets.

And it had been close. For when the rain went on, like a heavy curtain, and the three could see some distance from their canvas fly, the nighthawk pointed to where he'd been sleeping that day and says, "Don't tell me there ain't some supreme power watching over the ignorant and the dumb."

The cook and Suds looked the direction the nighthawk pointed, and

there the big pine tree that had stood so tall over his bed was smashed down to splinters like squashed by a giant sledge hammer, plum down to a man's height off the ground and where the trunk was three feet thru. The upper part of the tree was split and scattered to lengths, and along with the heavy limbs, covered the ground where the bed had been by quite a few feet of the heavy timber.

The cook had studied the pile of twisted timbers for a spell and then looking at the nighthawk he says, "Why you ain't only ignorant and dumb, but you re dead. Just wait till you walk around a bit and you'll find yourself missing."

"Yeh," says the nighthawk, serious like, "I guess I'll need the ax to dig myself out and give me a decent burial. I'll need my bed too."

It had been some time later when Jeffers, some scared and plenty wet, came in under the shelter of the fly and joined the three there, and the cook couldn't help but pick on him a little as he did.

"Why don't you honk your horn when you come in?" he says.

Jeffers, even tho cold and shivering, had to laugh at that. "I'm afraid there's no spark there right now," he says. "The water is halfway up the car."

"Too bad," says the cook, joking some more. "It should be all the way up and over it."

The thunder and lightning had got more and more distant and followed along to wear itself out with the heavy clouds, and the rain thinned down quite a bit as the afternoon wore on, but it didn't show no sign of stopping, and what kept a-coming steady was very wetting. The Graftens, having brought only light rain coats, didn't go out of their tent. There was no place to go anyway, not in this "miserable" weather, and Graften had only looked out the tent flap a couple of times to see if his car was still there or if it had been carried on down in the stream that had swelled to be near a high raging river. The swollen waters had gone down to half when he looked a second time, and the once shiny car was still there, but now coated with mud and badly dented by drifting timbers that had butted against it. One of the heavy timbers had crashed thru one of the side windows, stuck out there and had collected more limbs and such from the swirling muddy waters.



To see if his car was still there.

To see if his car was still there.

Mrs. Graften, feeling a little chilly and very uncomfortable at everything being wet and clammy around her, wasn't in the best of humor, and when she got to see the car, the once fine big black limousine, now looking like it had been washed down the muddy mountain side, then to sit there as tho to catch all the drift wood, that all put another damp weight on her already low spirits, and they went down to bedrock.

She relieved her feelings some by putting all the blame on her husband for ever thinking of coming West. "To this wild country of wild animals and wild people."

"Yes, and even wild flowers," Graften interrupted.

"And wild people," she went on, "when we could have gone to so many interesting and civilized place and mingled with our class."

That went on for quite a while, seeming to take little effect on Graften, and it wasn't until she wound up by deciding to be leaving the awful country as soon as possible, and Graften agreeing to that, that she sort of let up on the subject.

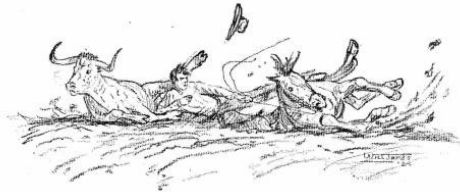
"And my supply of cigarettes is getting low also," the daughter had added on.

Their civilization was fast calling them.

CHAPTER XI - Hell and High Water

Out on the wet and slippery cutting grounds, John B. and Hatty had started working the herd again, for, with the rain thinning down as it had, they could now see well enough to cut out what stock was to be thrown in the main herd, and being there could no more branding be done that day, the unbranded calves and their mothers that was left was also cut out to be thrown in the main herd and to be held till next branding time.

It was muddy and slippery work for such quick action as the cut horses had to use so as to get the dodging critters out of the herd and headed for the cut. It was slippery for every animal that moved fast, some horses slid and fell and many cattle too, broadside and to slide on a ways. But the work was done, the herd was throwed back to the range they'd been rounded up from to scatter again, and the cut was drove to be put in the main herd. The day's work was over until relief for men on cocktail and night-guard come, and the yellow slickered riders wiping the rain off their faces headed for camp.



Some horses slid and fell and many cattle too.

Some horses slid and fell and many cattle too.

"I wonder if that Graften feller walks in his sleep?" Hatty asks John B.

as the two was riding together, and knowing John B. wouldn't answer such a foolish question, he went on, "The reason I wondered," he says, "was on account that the herd is likely to be pretty spooky tonight and hard to hold, and if Graften was to show up near and wearing them loud pijammers which I figures he wears, and a streak of lightning come along about then to show him up plain why we wouldn't have no herd, cowboys or no cow-boys."

"Sure enough," says John B. grinning straight ahead. "Maybe you better tie him down before first guard, if he ain't already drowned by now."

Getting into camp the boys didn't go straight to the corral, instead they went to looking for dead standing timber, and putting their ropes on trees they could pull down by the saddle horn, they each come to center of camp, halfways between the chuck wagon and the corral, with some wood for a big fire to warm up and dry by, and eat and drink coffee until time for their shifts, or to crawl into their beds for the night.



"An honest to God cowboy."

"An honest to God cowboy."

The remuda had just been brought into the corral, and rumps to the rain and wind stood plum still until the cowboys come near to unsaddle and then catch and saddle their night horses and picket 'em out in sheltered grassy spots. Then they lined out for the chuck wagon to crowd the cook in his shelter there, while they filled their plates with all the necessities. It was past the average supper hour

but the cowboys made up for that, and after getting their supply of victuals and coffee, they hightailed it to their own and big fire which had been started and blazed high, and there, making sure to push their hats back a little so the rain water in the wide rolled brims wouldn't run in their plates, they squatted on their heels and inside their long yellow slickers on the wet sod.



Picket 'em out in sheltered grassy spots.

Picket 'em out in sheltered grassy spots.

It was a wet and rainy supper at the round-up camp. But it was cheerful around the big popping and blazing fire. It kept things warm and to dry even tho the rain kept a-falling, and the joking that went the rounds as the boys et showed that their spirits wasn't at all dampened.

John B. eating along with his riders, passed the joking to going right on as it come his way. That was his life and he was his usual happy

self, even tho his boots was soaking wet and rain pattered into the black coffee by his side.

Thru eating, he rolled a cigarette mind stuck it between his lips without wetting it. He never wetted a cigarette and many of the younger cowboys tried to do the same without much success. While smoking, he looked around like something was missing but couldn't figure out what, and Hatty, noticing him, pointed a thumb while saying, "Better go see if they re drowned."

John B. grinned, stood up, and taking his plate and cup to the round-up pan on the way, he went to the Graften camp.

"Supper's ready, folks," he says, standing outside.

There was an "Oh, thank you," from inside the tent and John B. went back to the chuck wagon for another cup of coffee, soon to be followed by the family. As they come he noticed their light rain coats, mighty pretty but not much good when it rained, and getting under the shelter of the fly with his coffee, he took off his and offered it to Mrs. Graften Then the cook followed suit and offered his to the girl, and after they'd been made sure that the long yellow ones was the only thing, they both accepted, with many thanks. Then John B. told 'em to hit for the fire when they had their plates filled, that it wasn't half bad there.

And to their surprise, it wasn't half bad there. It was "really grand," and of much comfort in this beastly weather, also, isn't it thrilling?

They stood up to eat their meal this time, everything was so wet, and as they talked in trying to join in with the cowboys conversation, or having the cowboys join in with theirs, that talk didn't get to mix and make the rounds with the cowboys, talk much. For the cowboys couldn't make much out of it, like with such as their remarking about the fire being grand, which was good, the weather being beastly, which was bad and then the whole thing being thrilling, which mixed everything up as a puzzle to them. There was also such remarks as they et, about this or that being "terribly good," and the cowboys couldn't figure out how anything could be terrible and still be good.

Their whole line of conversation was sort of that way, and even tho the cowboys would of liked to've took the leads that was given 'em to get in the conversation, them leads didn't give 'em nothing to follow

up on. It'd be strange and headed for nowheres in particular, like riding a horse without a head or a tail. So they usually kept quiet or talked low amongst themselves, with the result that the Graftens thought 'em stuck up, snobbish and inclined to liking themselves a whole lot, like as if nobody else was as good as them.

The average tenderfoot gets that idea from the real cowboy when first coming west. He doesn't seem to realize that the cowboy's life is very different than his, that there's no colleges or clubs or steady mixing with thousands of people each day and all talking the same language, a language of near the same that the cowboy uses only the difference in the life and what is talked about is what makes it different. And that life being so different is what makes the cowboy care very little to speak when near some people, for when he does, there's a bunch of questions comes his way. Questions from wise people in their own life but which sometimes make the cowboy wonder if the person asking them is full grown only in body, for some of them questions sound like they re from two-year-olds.

Of course such questions asked are only on account that the life is so strange and maybe interesting to the tenderfoot, and the cowboy wouldn't mind so much answering them if they was only understood afterwards. The most aggravating tenderfoot to the cowboy is the one who has a little idea of the West and thinks he really knows all about it, making the folks back home think he sure enough does, and twisting things in his stories so he's got folks believing he's got it all over the cowboy, in his own territory, and of course that bragging goes on only in the home parlors.

Graften struck the cowboys as being a little of that kind, and for that reason they didn't care to talk to him much even if he did make a stab at conversation with 'em. He'd be the kind, they figured, who would go back home and tell his friends at clubs how the cow business could be improved and how his suggestions had helped in many ways as to how this and that should be done and handled on ranch and range. He'd seen just enough of the life to be able to speak a little about it, he could also add on plenty more, and his friends not knowing anything at all about it, would swallow it all, hook and sinker.

As to the ladies, their talk struck 'em as about an inch deep, just good big words being wasted to float on without any meaning for them to catch onto.

They often wondered what the samhill they was talking about, and when questions come, they sometimes had a hard time keeping serious faces at the queer uselessness of 'em. Like Mrs. Graften asking one of the cowboys that evening, "What do you do for pastime?"

The cowboy who'd been the target couldn't help but laugh at that, because there was no such thing as just passing time away, but he'd answered, "We play polo when we have the chance."

"Why, how surprising, and what do you call your team?"

Not expecting to be believed, he was caught without knowing how to answer. He looked at the boys around him but they was only looking at the fire and laughing at his predicament. Finally, thinking of a way out, he says.

"Well, you see, we don't play regular polo. We use ropes instead of them long handled hammers, and--"

"You mean to say you lasso the ball?"

"No, mam," says the cowboy, "steers."

So, with such as that it was no wonder that the cowboys kept their conversation amongst themselves pretty well. But some conversation went on between them and the Graftens, kind of jerky and with spaces of time in between, and being that none of the cowboys asked any questions or knowed anything about their game and ways of living or ideas on anything, and couldn't discuss things with 'em very well, they never opened up on any subject. They figured it was best all around to keep their talk to themselves and not have the Graftens make wrong of what they might say, and there's where the Graftens made the mistake of thinking 'em "snobbish" and not at all sociable. They'd had to give the leads to all starts at conversation and that didn't get 'em nowheres, and the cowboys didn't return any leads of their own to keep that conversation going. They done that well amongst themselves, and the Graftens would of liked to been brought into their joking but they didn't know how that could be done, no more than the cowboys knowed how to get into theirs.

So there was a kind of a wall between the two classes that way, one

class as good as the other maybe, and both as wise and smart in their own interests, only they each had very different kinds of teachings and bringing ups and beliefs, and both kinds led such different lives that neither could find much in common to talk about to stir and keep the interest of the other. It was all the hardest for the Graftens because they was the ones interested in the cowboys, lives. The cowboys wasn't at all interested in the Graftens, lives.

But if the Graftens had got to know the ways of the cow country people and acted according, it wouldn't of mattered at all how much and where they'd been educated or traveled, or if they made their living amongst millions of starch collared people. They'd of felt at home and been took in as one of them. But, then again, if they'd known the ways of the cow country, they wouldn't of invited themselves to the home ranch and to the busy round-up camp in the first place, let alone making nuisances of themselves. Graften wouldn't have thought of going to a busy man's office and taking his time and upsetting the ink bottle, but with the thought of the big Seven Xs, he felt free to come there and do that very thing, and as he pleased. Like it would be perfectly all right there.

John B. was generous and hospitable to all people, but the lack of consideration and respect for the privacy of his home and range showed by most people, had him to wishing sometimes that the Indian fighting days was back. He'd preferred that to gawking strangers and campers starting fires. But it wasn't so often that he was pestered, and even tho it wasn't so often, he'd rather a whole lot it was none at all, for he hated to be disappointed and having to see wrong in any man that way.

He of course wasn't at all pestered by tourists (the Graftens was a big exception) because them tourists stuck pretty well to the highways and stopped at tourist camps. It was the people from neighboring little towns that done the pestering, the ones who knowed of the good fishing and hunting in the pretty Seven X country. They'd come out by families to spend time end of the week and make themselves to home there, and John B. and his men didn't try to keep them out, only warned the careless about their fires.

At the round-up camp the fire kept a-blazing as good sized dead trees was burned in two, and then the ends picked up and throwed on when necessary to keep the blaze up. It was now near dark, soon time for first guard, and a steady drizzle kept a-falling. The Graftens

used to staying late of nights, was still by the fire and sort of given up keeping a conversation going with the cowboys that kept going and coming.

All but four of 'em had been there for a spell after the herd had been bedded down. They'd brought a full pot of coffee and many cups by the big fire and all went to drinking cup after cup of the strong black coffee, even the Graftens. But the talk that went on from there was pretty well only amongst the cowboys, and being there was seldom times when the Graftens, talks would of fitted in, the three listened and remarked about this and that amongst themselves, sometimes wanting to ask questions about what they'd hear, but hardly daring to.



All went to drinking cup after cup of strong black coffee.

All went to drinking cup after cup of strong black coffee.

They got to wondering finally, as the cowboys begin leaving for their beds, where John B. and the cook was, not at all realizing that they had their slickers and couldn't very well come and enjoy the fire without 'em, for they'd sure get wet. So the two had stayed under the fly by the chuck wagon and got some heat from the fire there. Then

Hatty had joined 'em, laughed at 'em for loaning their slickers to the ladies and leaving the provider to go unprotected, and then the talk went from there to more serious subjects, like with the work of that day and for the days to come, also other things which would of surprised the well learned and traveled Graftens.

Then, as the talk slowed down and the cook's alarm clock said eight-thirty, the three decided to go unroll their beds and get between the soogans and blankets which the heavy tarps had protected and kept dry from the rain. It was chilly so high up in the hills and close to the mountains, and they would keep warmer in their beds.

Soon the whole camp had hit for the soogans, all but the Graftens who stayed close to the fire for quite a while longer. They stayed until the men on second guard got up and rode away to relieve the men on the first guard, who soon rode in, picketed their horses, and then hit for their beds. Graften looked at his wrist watch. It was ten o'clock.

"I guess we had better retire," he says, "if we re to get up in time for breakfast and get out of here. You know they move very early."

"Yes," says his wife, "this camping out, as you call it, is killing me."

Then the daughter added on, "There's nothing to do here anyway," she says, "excepting walking around and getting in the way, but it would be fun if I could get a horse to ride, and it's very peculiar when one can't borrow or hire one here, where they have so many."

She'd asked John B. for one that evening as he'd loaned her mother his slicker, and all he'd said to that was that he was sorry but that the horses was all being used pretty steady, and besides, there wasn't an extra saddle on the outfit. The girl didn't know that the cowboys, string of horses is carefully made up of different kinds necessary for each man's work. That to the cowboy such a string is the same as his own, while he's riding for the outfit. He has the say over them, and taking one horse out of his string would be the same as hinting for him to quit, or he'd be fired. John B. could of course asked one of the boys to loan a horse to the cause, and that would of been all right if the cowboy liked the person the horse was borrowed for, but, anyway, John B. didn't want to do that. As for his own string, he wouldn't of let his own daughter, June, ride any of them, not unless she was afoot and she had a long ways to walk. The average cowboy would hesitate more to loaning his horses than the town man

would his new automobiles, for they re all necessary to him and not for pleasure. And the horse is not a machine, and with strangers he'd feel peeved at the ignorance of 'em for asking. It's not selfishness with the cowboy it's necessity and sentiment. Besides a good horse can be spoiled in a short while by the wrong person riding him sometimes, or crippled.

As to the saddles, that's the cowboy's own, ordered to suit and fit him, stirrup leathers to right lengths and mighty hard to change, not just a strap and buckle as ranch and contest saddles are and where all hands uses 'em, but laced tight and more to stay, and whether using 'em steady or not, the cowboy doesn't care to loan it, for he makes his living on that rig and it means as much to him in that respect as the private desk does to the busy business man.

The night had turned warm as the Graftens started for their camp. It had near quit raining, the air had got heavy and still, and as they opened the flap of their tent, the girl seen and remarked about some lightning flashes away off down country and lighting up the heavy dark clouds above and around.

"It must be this afternoon's storm going on," she says. "Thank goodness it's far away."

But the storm wasn't going on, and even tho it was far away it was coming back, and the rumble of thunder slowly and gradually got louder.

It was still far away and the lightning flashes was hardly noticed as the Graftens got into their beds, and being tired from the day's action, excitement, fresh and plenty rainy air, it didn't take 'em long to get to sleep, satisfied that the storm was over and gone, and all was restful. Even the scare the cook's holler had given 'em the night before had been forgotten, and as the cook had said that there was no wild animals or anything to be afraid of, nothing excepting of sleeping too long, they felt pretty well at ease to rest for the night.

The lightning flashes got closer and brighter as the three slept on, the rumbling of the thunder got louder and louder, and they slept on some more. All the time, the clouds was piling up instead of thinning down, and the closer they come to the mountain, the bigger and darker they got, and lightning played pretty steady among 'em up there.

Then it seemed that the lightning jumped some few miles all at once, a long crooked streak flashed near over the camp, and the loud report of the thunder that followed sat the Graftens up in their beds as tho they'd been laying on steel coils released sudden. They was scared and trembling before they was really awake and it took another bright lightning flash which lit up every shadow in the tent, to wake 'em enough so they could see that the world was coming to an end, sure this time.

Graften had started to pass a remark as the crash of thunder come and his voice, chopped off by the loud report, sounded as from one already departed. Then Mrs. Graften screamed with fright, and that didn't help things any.

The girl throwed the covers back at that, snapped a spot light and trembling with fear begin to dress. She wasn't going to be caught dead in bed, it would be better to get under it, think up of a way of escape if possible, and be ready if one showed up. But she couldn't think much as lightning flashes which made the spot light look like a candle in the sun kept a-flashing, and the roar of thunder kept a-repeating like a string of cannons close to her ears, and it was more with instinct and fear, than thought, that she wanted to get under something or deep into a hole as she crawled under the cot, making herself as little as possible there and trembling on the wet grass and earth.

The older Graftens wasn't much braver, for it also was their first close acquaintance with mother nature when she turned loose and went wild, and they never felt closer and more in the thick of anything as they did to Mother Nature right then. The earth quivered with every crash of thunder and it felt to the Graftens as tho the tall mountain was crumbling. They could easy imagine big boulders tumbling along with the mountain side and coming down to crush and bury them. It was all a deafening confusion of roaring thunder and crashes, and with the lightning playing steady, it all made things ghostly with light that was as bright as day. Then a heavy rain come, sudden, and with the wind that was with it, it sounded like heavy waves dropped from the skies, drift wood and rocks mixed with 'em.

The tent seemed mighty flimsy against all of that, and to the Graftens, so used to sound proof and solid walls, it seemed as tho they was near without shelter and protection. The ridge pole bent scary in

holding the sagging and flapping canvas against the pressure of the storm, and it was a good thing, Graften thought, that the tent had been moved into shelter and pegged down as good as was possible. But as Mrs. Graften once looked at the straining tent well lit up by lightning, she screamed again and didn't look no more, for the next second she'd stuck her head under her pillow, pulled the blankets over it, and closing her eyes tight and sticking a finger in each ear, she done her best to bury herself from all sights and sounds.

Graften done a little better. He laid with his eyes wide open and only flinched once in a while, and then he, like his daughter, also got up and dressed, made ready for any emergency, and went to smoking on a cigar to sort of quiet his nerves. He would also be ready to quit the flats and start back for civilization as soon as possible. And then, when he looked at his daughter's empty cot, that spooked him some more, and it was only with the same instinct as hers that made him look under it to find her there.

He reached under and touched and spoke to her, and all he got in answer was to leave her alone, that she was all right and felt safer there.

So, puffing hard on his cigar between lightning flashes and thunder claps, he sat up, feeling alone, and prayed some.

CHAPTER XII - "When the Cows Come Home"

Right in the country surrounding the camp is where Mother Nature sort of turned loose that night and let the elements run free to play, with the dark heavy clouds that had sort of piled up to meet at the top of the mountain, seeming like from all directions, and there to bump and pull off the fireworks.

That's at least the way it looked like to the cowboys on nightguard and at the first sign of the storm, they'd prepared to hold the herd for anything that might come, even to deciding on the direction to try and turn the herd if they started to run. The storm come fast and furious, and split like all at once, with the first close flash of lightning. That was during the graveyard shift, between midnight and two o'clock, the spookiest time of the night, and instead of four riders coming to relieve the four on guard, the whole outfit turned out, John B. right along with em, and the four riders on guard stayed on to help hold the herd.

For, as Hatty had said the evening before, the herd would be hard to hold. It had already started to run once, but the leaders had been turned to bump against a tall rimrock, and by good manouvering they'd be held to mill there, scared stiff and not a beller out of 'em. They'd be apt to pick up and turn loose at a wink any time, and as the herd numbered to upwards of fifteen hundred head of mostly yearling steers, that would be a mean herd to hold, for there's no critter easier spooked and ready to run than a good feeling yearling steer.

For fear of the loud echo of the thunder against the rimrock wall, the herd was being moved away from it, when, maybe from the heavy rain and wind or the shaking of the earth, some few pebbles got loose from the top of the rimrock, hit here and there acrost the face of it and made an echoing noise that sounded like a landslide, and along with the lightning and thunder and everything seeming like tearing loose, that's all the spooky cattle needed to get to moving. A quiver run thru the whole herd, and the ones fartherest from the rimrock moved as quick as the ones close to it, all like a flash of the lightning that played above 'em and on the run in one jump.

The riders caught in the lead of 'em had to run right with 'em, for there

was cattle on both sides and all around 'em before they knewed it, and they had to run to keep the herd from splitting and having two or three herds to try and handle instead of one.

Lightning, and then pitchy darkness, both blinding men and stock, the roar of the thunder mixing with the rumble of the stampede, sparks of electricity playing along horns and stiff hairs of neck and withers, all made a fine combination to spook any animal, and even some of the cowboys, horses went to stampeding under 'em. It was scary for the men too, for the wet soddy earth was as slippery as soap on ice, and horses was very apt to fall or slide down to turn over in the bottom of a ravine. Then there was the rims here and there with from twenty to fifty foot drops that couldn't be seen until close to the edge, and when no lightning played, there was no telling when the whole herd and riders would come to one and plunge down.

With the help of the lightning flashes, the riders went to try and turn the leaders the direction they'd decided on in case of a stampede. In that direction was a box canyon, wide at the mouth and rimrocked at the head, and there was enough brush and boulders up along it to check the herd so they would slow down and get to milling before they'd get to the end.

But there was quite an incline getting up to the mouth of that canyon, and being that, in stampeding, the cattle always take to a downhill run when there is any, they'd took to that from the first jump. There was a rim which the whole herd barely missed going over the edge of, but as the herd turned to run alongside of it, it was seen by flashes of lightning that a few of the cattle had been crowded over the edge, looked like a rider had gone down with 'em too. But there was no chance to make sure right then nor make a count of the riders by the lightning flashes, for everybody had to ride.

The bunch left the edge of the rim and headed for another, and as the rims sort of formed a big stairway-like up the mountain, that rim was up like a wall and then's when the leaders was crowded so as to get 'em to milling if possible. But a streak of lightning spoiled all attempts of that as it seemed to land right in the middle of the herd. (Cattle heated from running and sweaty horses draw lightning.) The cattle seemed to squat with hoofs in mid air as the lightning struck, and when they lit to running again they was plum past handling. All the riders could do was stay to the side and try to hold 'em together,

and that wasn't easy, for they'd wanted to scatter, and each head hit out by itself.

But by letting the herd run to where it wanted to, that was finally done, and then it was stampeding for the timber and brush by the swollen stream. There was no chance of turning 'em, for the country was against the riders and all for the herd, and even with John B. and some of the riders shooting close to the leaders to scare 'em to turning, the herd got in the edge of the timber along the stream and where the lead couldn't be crowded to turn. And there they run on, headed down country and right for the Graften and round-up camp.

The Graftens having heard the shooting between thunder claps and then the crashing of timber and rumbling of hoofs above the beating of rain and churning waters, more than now wondered as to what was up. They could only figure one thing, and that was that the noises was from men and animals, that they was earthly and not from the heavens. But the sounds of that wasn't at all reassuring. It was as tho everything alive had picked up and was running away, running away from and amongst destruction, and they was more scared than ever, if that was possible.

It didn't take long for the rumbling of hoofs and crashing of brush to get close to them, just a minute seemed like, and then they felt like they was hemmed in the middle of the herd. They could hear the heavy breathing of cattle crowding and running against one another and like to within a couple of feet of 'em, and near dead with fright the Graftens was stary eyed and couldn't budge, for it was as tho the whole herd was on 'em.

Then they recognized the sounds of running horses, heard the jingling of spurs and a cowboy swore, so close that it seemed inside the tent, and the swearing sounded like the most wonderful music they'd ever heard right then. The human voice so full of life and with no fear in it sort of snapped 'em out of their fright and like to bring 'em back amongst the living again.

Graften started up at the sound of the voice, and like to go to the flapping tent flap when there was a tearing sound and the corner of the tent went down over his head. He put his hands out to hold it away from him and he shrunk back with more fright as his hand brushed the body of a wild running critter as it went by, and then he seen where hoofs was pounding away on the corner where the tent

was down. He thought of his wife and daughter, one covered with blankets and the other still under the cot, but he couldn't speak. Then there was another tearing sound, at the other corner of the tent, but the tent didn't go down there. For, with some of the crowded cattle getting their legs tangled up in the tent ropes, the ropes were jerked loose and the wind picked the tent to send it sailing upwards, the scary soaring sheet scared the stampeding cattle to more desperate crowding away from it, and in a lightning flash Graften seen a solid bank of wild-eyed horned heads coming down on him, looking a heap more scary than a ten-foot wall of cloudburst waters rushing down a wash.



Looking a heap more scary than a ten-foot wall of cloudburst waters.

Looking a heap more scary than a ten-foot wall of cloudburst waters.

He put his arms up over his face like for protection, for there was no use running. He let out a squeak like it'd be his last one and then a

heavy body bumped against him and he didn't see no more lightning flashes.

The lights went out for Mrs. Graften too, and as her bed was turned over by one scared critter which struck as tho it was a thousand, she laid there under the protection of the bed and in bliss.

The daughter was the only one that stayed to, but the lights was so dim with her that they'd just as well snuffed out because she hardly realized what went on for fright. Mud was splashed all over her under the cot by critters that checked up to crowd away from the sudden and scary sight of the cot and camp. The ones too crowded jumped over the cot to splash mud on her from the other side, and that way she was well plastered on both sides.

But as scared and plastered as she was, she was the first one to realize it when the conglomeration of whatever all it was, had passed over, around and under, and that it was now maybe safe to squirm out from under the cot and take a look around. Another flash of lightning come as she stuck her head up over the wrecked, mudded-up camp, and as she was past blinking at the lightning, she looked down country in time to see the last of the stampeding herd hightailing it away from the stream and around the point of a rock rimmed ridge. It had just missed the round-up camp.

With the going of the herd also went the storm which soared above and kept a-pouring down rain along with the fireworks, thunder and wind keeping pace, and it was now still and quiet at the Graften camp and it had quit raining there, but, excepting for the lightning flashes that was fast getting dimmer with distance, it was very dark, and the spot lights was scattered in the mud around the open camp somewhere.

The girl, now being sure she was still alive and all together, begin looking for one of the spot lights. With the help of more flashes of distant lightning she finally found one, and then as she begin looking around with it, and seen the form of her dad laying on the muddy ground, she come near screaming at the sight of him, for he was nothing pretty to look at. She didn't know what to do, then thinking of her mother she turned to look at the upturned and mussed up bed and that wasn't a cheerful sight either. She jumped over to pull it right side up and her spot light flared right into mighty scared looking but still seeing eyes. The girl spoke and the mother at that just said,

What happened?"

About then Graften stirred and raised a muddy face and the Graften family, not much the worse for wear, came to life and was united again.

And when the cook come a-rushing up just a couple of minutes later, to see what was left of the Graften outfit as soon as he could, he found 'em all a-standing up, the girl holding the spot light and all huddled together a-comparing notes on the just past awful experience. Getting into the light and seeing that everybody was up on their own feet and not needing any care, only maybe a little cheering up, he says, "Well, it wasn't a bad little stampede, was it?" That was better, he thought, than asking a lot of foolish questions.

But the Graftens had nothing to say to that, for they couldn't understand the cook saying that it wasn't a bad little stampede, as tho it was only a little excitement to look forward to once in a while. To them it was a "terrifying experience" and Graften finally managed to say so.

The cook laughed. "Why this is just like hot peppers on your grub," he says, "makes things good. But you re lucky it was only a little slice of the herd that touched you."

Then he went on to tell of a stampede that was a real one, where two cowboys and their horses got killed and near half a herd stacked up to broken carcasses as they run over a high cliff.

That was not as well listened to by the Graftens as it would of been other times. They was still mighty shaky and hadn't felt of themselves yet to see if they was all together, besides they figured the cook to be making up the story to make 'em feel that their last experience wasn't worth mentioning, maybe only to make 'em forget it.

But the story was sure enough true, only the Graftens couldn't picture any worse experience than the one they just had,

The cook didn't stay long, and turning to go, he says, "It'll be daybreak in another hour or so. I'll be starting a fire and putting on some coffee right away and you all better come and dry and warm up after a while."

None of the three had any words of thanks as to that. They hadn't got their wits to running smooth as yet and they was far from over their fright. For with their thoughts of the experience that kept a-reacting on 'em, they could only mumble and tremble, and with only the spot light for light, camp all mud and scattered and the roaring of the swollen stream waters, they wasn't in any atmosphere of calm and peace, and their nerves wasn't at all for quieting.

They stood there in the center of their wrecked camp, just a-mumbling, shaky and not caring to move, and they might of stood there that way until daylight, with no thoughts of doing anything to break the spell if it hadn't been for the sound of the crackling of a big fire by the round-up camp and seen the blazes a-shooting high. Then Graften spoke up for his wife to try and find something dry and get dressed, they would go to that fire.

Being it all had been so still and peaceful the evening before, the cases had been left open, and now most all the clothes that had been in 'em was pretty well scattered and tramped in the mud, some even hanging in the bushes where it'd been carried on some steers, horns. But with Graften helping some fairly dry "outing" clothes was found. The daughter, as muddled up as she was, didn't bother to change, she wasn't interested right then and neither was Graften, who was also covered with mud.

All but for Mrs. Graften the three made quite a muddy appearance at the big fire. The cook wanted to laugh but he didn't have time, and the wrangler, who kept up no night horse, and the flunky, was the only two there to grin a wink at one another. Then Jeffers came into the light of the fire, and Graften seeing him looking so fresh and dry, and kind of resenting that, asked him where he'd been, like as tho he should of been up to help, at he didn't know what, but he also should of got mussed up somehow.

"I was in bed, of course, sir," says Jeffers. "I've just been to your camp and found it somewhat disturbed then came here to look for you. Quite a storm we had, sir."

Graften only grunted and says, "We'll prepare to leave and start back as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir," says Jeffers, standing stiff.

The wrangler, watching the chauffeur, grinned and whispered to Suds, "That feller sure neckreins well."

"Yes," says Suds, "there ain't a buck in him. But that's the breed of 'em." He snickered, "I wonder how long Graften would last as a wagon boss."

In a short while the coffee came to a boil and then the cook let it be known. Graften was the first one there, and filling three cups to the brim, he came back to the fire and handed his wife and daughter each a cup of the black stimulant. That went well, well enough for another cup, and then they felt a little better. The three was sitting on the stump end of a dead tree that'd been drug up and sipping on some more coffee, when the yellow slickered figure of a cowboy come walking up to the fire. In one hand he held a boot, and he supported himself from too much weight on one bleeding and muddy bare foot, by using a piece of dry limb like a crutch.

The wrangler who'd also been drinking coffee by the fire took one look at him and hightailed it for the chuck wagon to come back soon enough with a pan of warm water, a bottle of "dip" (creolin) and a cup of hot coffee, while the Graftens, all full of curiosity again, only thought of asking questions, as to what all and how it happened and the rider answered with only one word, "Lightning." Then he looked at the wrangler as he came back, winked and stuck the bleeding muddy foot in the water, some dip was diluted into it, and while his foot soaked he went to drinking his coffee and talking to the wrangler and Suds.

"Ain't none of the boys got back yet?" he asks, and when he was told that none had, he went on. "Maybe the herd is still going, they sure wanted to ramble. But we pretty near had 'em to milling a couple of times. The second time is when I got hit."

He pulled his slicker back a little and showed where the lightning hit. It had started at the shap belt and followed the front seam of the angora shaps all the way to the bottom, cutting the threads like with a razor edge knife, then it went thru his foot, riddling it. He held up the boot and it looked like it'd been hit with shots from a shotgun.

"And you walked in," says Suds. "Did your horse get hurt too?"

"Yes, the lightning killed him," he says. "I had to walk about two

miles."

The Graften girl, listening, shivered. "Weren't you scared?" she asks.

"No, I didn't have time," says the cowboy.

The cowboy, after washing his foot and greasing it with melted carbolated tallow, was having the wrangler wrap it with clean strips of flour sacks when some of the cowboys rode into camp. John B. and Hatty rode up to the fire. They didn't get off their horses, and as the white bandaging was the first thing to draw their attention, Hatty asked the rider getting bandaged up, "A fall, or lightning?"

"Both," says the cowboy, "and a dead horse."

"Hurt bad?"

"Nope, about a week on the bed wagon." [*]

[* The bed wagon is what the crippled cowboys ride on when moving camp and lay in the shade of during the days to mend and recuperate. "A week on the bed wagon" means that he wouldn't be able to ride for about that long. No cowboy takes advantage of "riding the bed wagon," laying off.]

"We got the herd held up about four miles down the creek. Sure gave us a run, about a hundred got away and there's one boy missing, Sol. Hasn't showed up here, has he?"

When he was told "no" to that, Hatty remarked that he knowed just about where to find him, where some of the cattle had been crowded over the edge of the rim, and him and John B., taking the lead once more, was followed by the cowboys to scatter out and search for Sol. It was getting near daybreak by then, and it was good daylight when they found him, not so far from camp and not by the rims where Hatty thought he'd be, but at the bottom of a wash in a deep brushy ravine, and pinned under his horse there. Both was very much alive and kicking, specially the horse, but neither could of got out of there without plenty of help, for the horse was wedged in the narrow wash on his back and the rider had one leg twisted under him to near breaking and he was also wedged so he couldn't budge.



The horse was wedged in the narrow wash on his back.

The horse was wedged in the narrow wash on his back.

In that cramped position, Sol had been in great pain. Not a pleasant kind of death to face, he'd thought, as he'd laid wedged in there, hardly able to breathe or to holler. So it was lucky that he was found so soon or at all in the thick brush and by so early light of the day. The horse would of died in a couple of more hours too because a horse will die in three or four hours laying on his back that way.

They'd been there near two hours, and the way their predicament come about was easy enough. Sol had rode too close to the edge of the ravine while trying to turn the stampeding herd, and the ground being slippery and giving no footing, the horse had slipped over the edge, and at the speed he'd been going, had rolled over to come down in the bottom of the wash that way. Sol, thinking the horse would land on his feet had stuck, for no cowboy quits his horse unless he has to, specially during a stampede when all riders are needed.

A few shots was fired soon as Sol was found and then, before all the

other searching riders gathered there, two ropes was placed on the horse, one on his head and the other on his hind feet, then he was pulled out of the wash by two strong night horses. Sol made faces for a while as he was freed and straightened his cramped leg, then he peg-legged around some, while his horse done the same. But being right end up the both was soon in shape again, and it wasn't long afterwards when Sol, riding the horse he'd spent part of the night upside down and in the wash with, reached camp, both as good as new, one craving coffee and the other a good roll and grass.

All hands was now accounted for as the nighthawk came in with the remuda and corralled it. The horses had spooked and run too during the night, and the nighthawk had to do some tall riding to keep 'em together, but as horses don't stampede as bad as cattle do, don't run as long, and are easier checked, he'd lost only one bunch out of the remuda and he'd found it at daybreak that morning.

On that account he was a little late getting the horses to camp, but everything was a little late that morning, by about half an hour.

The first meal of the day went on as quick as usual, only the coffee pots got more punishment than usual. There was two of the big ones being hoisted pretty steady by one rider and then another, and little talk went on about the night's stampede, some recollecting of wild ones they'd been in the thick of. There'd been a few falls, and John B. had a good one when his horse and him slid broadside for quite a ways, as his horse slipped and fell while at full speed on the slippery earth. But as it is with most stampedes, it was a wonder that during such a night there wasn't more men and horses hurt.

The sky was still cloudy and threatening and there was smell of more rain or heavy showers in the air. The Graftens, sniffing at the air and with scary looks at the skies, didn't enjoy their breakfast so well that morning. Things that might of been delicious was hardly tasted, and they didn't think so much of asking questions as the cowboys talked, for their talk while kind of "fascinating" was scary, and that and the skies above made 'em feel sort of numb and fidgety at the same time. Their thoughts went to one mighty important and pressing thing as they nibbled, looked and listened, and that was to get back to civilization before they perished in this wilderness.

They was about thru eating, and in much shorter time than ever, when Jeffers came to Graften to report that the automobile was a wreck.

"It looks like all the cattle went over it last night, sir," he says, "and it will have to be towed in to a garage for repairs. The oil has been washed out of the crank case and is nearly filled with dirt, also other parts of the engine, then there's a jagged hole in the gas tank, made by a floating timber I presume."

Well, that was that, and Graften couldn't eat any more. Mrs. Graften also dropped her plate like it was hot. "But we must get out of here some way and as soon as possible," she says, all spooked up.

"Yes, but how?" says Graften. "We have to get the car in too."

They both looked at Jeffers for help that way, and all that feller could do was spread his hands and shrug his shoulders in a helpless way. Then he says to Graften, "I would say, sir, that the only and best way would be to borrow a team to get us back at the ranch, then from there we could telephone for a tow car to come out and get us."

After some thought, Graften agreed that would be the best and only way all around. He looked up and towards the corral, and seeing John B. saddling a horse there, he started that way, a rain drop on his cheek speeded him on as he went.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Mitchell," he begins as he stopped near John B. "But we've decided to leave, if we can. The weather hasn't been very pleasant and besides I have a lot of work calling me back to my office and I would like to go as soon as possible."

John B. went on saddling. "Well, it's too bad you have to go," he says, acting also sorry, "but business before pleasure is what sticks."

"Yes," says Graften, "but we are in a predicament. My automobile is practically wrecked from the high water and mud of the stream and it can't get out on its own power. We will have to be pulled out, with a team I suppose, as far as the ranch, and I wonder if--"

"Why, sure," interrupts John B. "I'll see that you get back to the ranch in good time. I don't know where you left your car or I could of told you of a better place for it maybe. Anyway, you get your stuff together and ready to load. I'll have a team ready to take you in in a few minutes."

Graften smiled his thanks and hot-footed it back to his family, there

to stir 'em into action, and what action they put on so sudden more than surprised the cook and Suds who looked at one another in grinning wonder. Even Jeffers had to step some to keep in pace with 'em.

John B. then rode to the chuck wagon and told the cook to make up a list of what grub he needed from the commissary at the ranch. The wood wagon was being emptied and that would be used to hook the team onto to pull the Graftens, car in and haul the grub back.

"We re going to have to camp here for a few days anyway," says John B., "so there won't be no time or use of team lost. I'm going to use one of your teams for leaders because it'll need six good horses to go to the ranch and pull that heavy car on in, but you don't need to worry about 'em because I'm going to have Slick do the driving."

Slick was a good old cowboy who was proud of the fact that for two winters he drove six on a stage in the roughest and wildest stage line in the Rockies, and that he'd been rated as the best driver that stage line ever had. "Feed 'em the ribbons" was his motto.

The way the Graftens went to work at breaking up camp and packing things, it looked more like they was exterminating it. But there wasn't much use in trying to fold things in packing 'em, for everything was wet, muddy and scattered, and there was no sorting of things. Jeffers was given orders until he didn't know which way to jump, then he finally hightailed it with the good excuse that he had to clean up the automobile.

The stream was now back to near natural size and it left the car to stand axle deep into fresh oozy mud. Jeffers waded into that, and when he got to the car and opened the doors, there was a layer of sifted mud which reached halfway up to the seats, there was also some of that onto the seats along with pieces of drift wood, which all made a mighty plain water mark on the fine upholstery. The way it all looked, Jeffers wouldn't of been surprised to've found a couple of steers in there, or a mess of trout.

Borrowing the cook's shovel, he done his best to clean out what he could of the mud, then he wound up with a whisk broom and some rags, until a person could get in the car but not without getting some mud on 'em, for there was no getting it out of the cushions and upholstery, and like with the bumps and dents, mud filled engine,

broken glasses and all other things, that all would have to be done at a good garage.

The Graftens came along with some luggage to put into the car but they changed their minds as they stood ankle deep in fresh mud and looked inside it, and they was disappointed again, because they'd natural-like figured on riding back in the car and as they'd come.

They was standing there in the mud, holding their luggage and wondering where they was going to put it and where they was going to ride, when there was the clatter of a wagon and harness and sounds of running hoofs, and into their sight came a good six-horse team making the wagon they was hooked onto dance like a toy trailer. The team was brought to make a good turn, but shying at the automobile and people, the wagon couldn't be brought closer than to within fifty yards of the car, and there was no backing such a team because all they knowed was to go ahead, run wild and plenty fast.

But now there come most of the cowboys, and getting off their horses, one took to each two horses and the others at the wagon wheels to pull it back near enough to the car so as to fasten a chain onto it.

That was now a little exciting to watch, and the Graftens got on dry ground to do that. Hatty rode near 'em there as the work went on and told 'em they'd best put their stuff in the wagon when all was ready to go.

"But where are we going to ride?" asks Mrs. Graften. "It's impossible to ride in the car because it's all muddy inside."

"Well, I guess you'll have to ride in the wagon then too and just let your driver steer the car and handle the brakes."

So the wagon would have to be it. "But I don't see only one seat," says Mrs. Graften.

"You can sit on your bundles there if you want," says Hatty, pointing to their luggage, "but you know there's no springs to a wagon, and I think you'll find that standing up is the most comfortable."

"Why that will be so rough and tiresome."

"Sure, so is walking."

The girl had to giggle a little at that. "But," she says, more serious, "how is the cowboy with the hurt foot going to stand it? He will have to come in town and have it taken care of, won't he?"

"You mean Mac, the boy that got struck by lightning? Why no, he ain't going to town. He'll be riding again in a few days."

"But isn't it swollen and doesn't it hurt him?"

"Yes, but it's only his right foot and he uses his left to get on a horse with. Besides there's a spring up the mountain here a ways that'll cure and heal anything. It's called Medicine Spring and it'll cure and heal T. B.'s, D. T.'s, gun wounds and cuts, and even broken hearts. It's better than any town doctoring a feller can get, and he'll be riding up there this morning to give his foot a good soaking."

It only took a few minutes by all hands to get the team and wagon back so the chain would reach to the car, then it was fastened, and Jeffers taking his place by the steering wheel, the team was left to Slick on the wagon seat, then things moved. For as the six horse team was let go by the riders, they hit the collar all at once and not slow and easy like the old farm work horse, and even tho Slick tried to make the start easy, there was no holding 'em back, and wagon and heavy automobile was brought up on dry ground with a jerk. Then the team was stopped and held while the loading of the Graftens and their belongings went on, and soon enough the outfit was ready to go.

Graften, standing in the wagon box with his family and belongings, looked around for John B. Then seeing Hatty close, he asked him where he was, that him and his family wanted to say goodbye and how they appreciated his hospitality.

"I don't know where he can be," says Hatty to that. "He's always kind of shy at saying goodbye to folks, he misses 'em so. But I'll tell him what you said, and that'll do just as well."

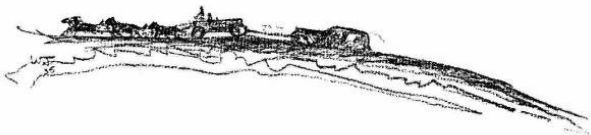
He waved a hand as all final and Slick shook the ribbons, starting the outfit with another jerk and making everybody grab something. The chauffeur grinned at all hands as the car was pulled on by reliable and good six horse power, and the whole outfit was on its way.

It was an hour or so later when John B. and Hatty and all the riders, excepting the three on dayherd and two to locate the hundred head that had got away during the stampede, rode up on a long ridge of the mountain and stopped there to let their horses breathe. They was out on their morning's circle, to make another round-up for a good afternoon's branding and work, along with the branding of the calves which had been throwed in the dayherd the afternoon before and wasn't branded on account of the wet. The hides would now be dry. It had been a hard climb to where the riders now was and from there they could well see the country spreading below for a long ways.

The heavy clouds of the early morning had broke and was moving on to the west, leaving a clear blue sky and a bright sun shining on the freshened country. All was mighty clear, sweet and chirping. It was as good to be in the deep of Mother Nature's bright mood, and to the cowboys, such wild elements as she'd turned loose on 'em that night before was only a break so as calm and sunshine on all the hills could be appreciated.

John B., looking down country to a strip of bench land some miles away seen a long winding object following the wood road and stringing along towards the ranch. It was the six horse team, wagon, and Graften automobile.

He grinned as he looked at the winding outfit, and then looking at the far away and fast disappearing dark clouds he remarked to Hatty who was close by, "I've seen things made to order and I ve heard of godsend, but what them there clouds done has all such beat to a frazzle. Yep, the storm them clouds brought was a mighty good relief all around, it freshened the range, filled the water holes, and washed away the scum."



Team and wagon pulling car

CHAPTER XIII - "A Different Kind of the Same Breed"

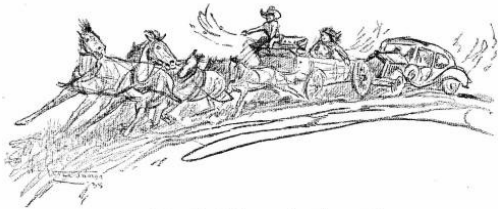
The storm was clearing, heavy clouds drifting away like dark curtains pulled back to let the warm sun shine on the fresh green earth, grass, wild flowers and leaves sparkling with rain drops still on 'em, meadow larks and all birds singing and chirping, and all of Mother Nature's wonders showing off to the limit wasn't much appreciated by the Graftens on their way back to the ranch. Their minds was all with visions outlined with skyscrapers and windowed canyons and herds of two-legged white faces and to getting amongst all of that, where they belonged.

Glances of the dark clouds in the distance only made 'em shiver with the thoughts of the awful night before. They would never forget that dreadful night, and with the steady fear that them clouds might come back and play over 'em again as they had before, they had no eyes nor admiration for what all spread around 'em to see, hear, and inhale. A handy taxicab and a noisy exhaust smelling and crowded street would of looked a heap better and safer to 'em right then.

So the ride back to the ranch, in a mighty rough going wagon, wasn't at all enjoyed and they only wanted to get there as quick as was safely possible and still all together. For it was impossible to sit down in the wagon and be in any way comfortable, and they felt like they'd be shook to pieces even while standing up. They would of liked to got up on the seat, as Slick had invited 'em to, but there was room only for one besides him there, and none wanted to take it on account of being setting so high up and scary to look over the backs of so many horses.

They kept looking hack at the car which rolled so smooth behind the wagon and the older Graftens finally decided to ride inside of it, mud or no mud. That would be better than falling apart. So, as Slick slowed his team down for a creek crossing, they asked him to stop until they removed themselves to the automobile, and spreading a couple of damp blankets on the muddy seats they had it so they was fairly off the mud there. All they feared now as the team started again was that the car might ram into the wagon when going down a rough and steep place, for the brakes had been badly burned out and didn't

hold very much. Then again, when there was slack in the chain and the team pulled up sudden, that would cause a jerking the Graftens got to fear, and with watching the rough road, the wagon ahead and the slack in the chain, their already shook up nerves done everything but quiet down. Jeffers, doing his best in handling the car, was also made some nervous by the two back seat drivers who kept exclaiming and harping, and he wished they'd stayed in the wagon.



Jeffers, doing his best in handling the car, was also made some nervous—

Jeffers, doing his best in handling the car, was also made some nervous.

The girl had stayed in the wagon, and she'd seemed to even enjoy things there, it was all so strange and new to her, only Slick drove mighty fast and reckless, she thought, and sometimes she was real scared, and after hours of that traveling she was also mighty tired and shook up, and glad when finally, in the middle of the afternoon the little knoll overlooking the Seven X home ranch was reached.

The spread of the ranch buildings looked mighty good to 'em, for it was at least an outpost of civilization, where they could recuperate from the hardships they'd gone thru, and where they wouldn't be at the mercy of the elements and bugs. Graften himself couldn't hide his pleasure at being there, like one who'd been out on a rough sea hanging onto a plank and finally being washed to port.

Mae was the only one to come out of the big house onto the lawn to greet them, for June and Dot and a new visitor, a young man from college, was out riding, and as Mae seen the mud-spattered

Graftens there was nothing for her to do but invite 'em in and give them the two spare rooms. She expected a visit from her folks who she hadn't seen for many months, but other accommodations would have to be made for them until the Graftens left, for she seen by their clothes and muddy bedding and belongings that they couldn't very well camp out in their tent, which was also all muddled up and tore.

The Graftens dropped everything the minute they landed on the home ranch lawn, like they'd just got to their own home from a long hard cruise, and they took on the two rooms Mae gave 'em, packing mud in 'em and without a thought of tracks they made over the house, leaving doors open like a butler would attend to them, and Jeffers to packing in the luggage.

"I don't know what we re going to do," says Mrs. Graften, after she'd tried to fix up some, and coming back out on the lawn where Mae was attending some flowers. "Practically everything we have is soiled and unfit to wear and we must have a change of linens and things before we can go to town."

The going to town part cheered Mae up some. "Why that's easy," she says. "There's a wash house by the kitchen and you can wash and iron everything there. I will show you inside."

But Mrs. Graften just sort of throwed up her hands. "Why I ve never washed clothes in my life," she says. "Neither has my daughter and we wouldn't know how to begin. Haven't you a laundress?"

"No," says Mae, surprised. "It's easy to wash clothes, just rub 'em in good suddy water until they re clean, hang 'em out to dry and then iron them."

Graften came up about then, remarking to his wife that he'd sure like to take a bath and have a change of clothes. Then the girl came a-trotting along with about the same remark.

Mrs. Graften looked at Mae sort of helpless like at that, and all Mae could say after looking 'em over was that she was sorry but there was no clothes on the ranch that would fit 'em in width, not unless it was some from the ranch hands. The cook, Isabel, might have something that would fit Mrs. Graften, and June would most likely have an outfit for the girl, but as for Graften himself, there was no clothes in the house that was bigger than thirty-four at the waist and

he was forty-two, so that left him out.

The daughter broke in on Mae's wondering there by saying that she was plenty hungry and that she thought the bathing or changing of clothes could wait until after they'd et something.

Mae sort of excused herself saying that it was so close to supper time she hadn't thought of having anything fixed for 'em. She started for the house and Mrs. Graften made a bluff at stopping her, that she shouldn't bother, and so on, but with that talk there was as much as to say "please do," and the looks on Graften's and the girl's faces meaning about the same, she went on to the kitchen.

While they was eating, Jeffers was doing his best to wash the car with a hose from the piped spring. He'd been plum forgot by the Graftens and he wondered if they'd thought of telephoning to some garage for a tow car. They had forgot, and it wasn't until Graften, after eating, and full as a tick, came out of the house again, and then seeing Jeffers busy with the car down below the lawn, that he thought of it.

He looked around for Mae, and with the coaching of the cook, Isabel, he found her in the wash house showing Mrs. Graften and his daughter the works in there and how to manipulate 'em. They wasn't very interested but they seen where they had to face such things and make use of 'em if they wanted clean clothes. Such inconvenience, no laundress, and when Graften asked for the use of the telephone there was another inconvenience, for there was no telephone.

"The closest one is at The Spur," says Mae, "the railroad spur, and that's forty miles away."

Graften was very much put out. He then told her what he wanted to phone for and, Mae glad to hear of that, was very obliging and said she would have one of the boys ride over on the next day and telephone for a tow car, or maybe Austin would go over in his car and the tow car would be at the ranch on that same day. That would be better.

Graften only thought of the inconvenience of that as he walked away without a word, leaving his women folks to feeling very common and ordinary at having to wash clothes, and they didn't like the idea of even Mae knowing about it. Then Isabel came along to coach 'em a

bit and break 'em in to the work, and that didn't go well with their initiation of such, for Isabel wasn't backward in telling 'em what to do and what not to do, and they felt like they was taking orders from a servant. But the clothes had to be cleaned before they dared show themselves away from the ranch, so they swallowed sweaty drops along with their pride and worked for once in their lives.

Isabel had to laugh as she finally left 'em, remarking to herself that this world wasn't divided right, that it was all work with one part and none at all with the other. "But," she says out loud as she walked into the kitchen. "I'd hate to've done so little work so's to be as helpless as them two crethures. God deliver me."

Graften, walking along in the fine late afternoon and going across the lawn to where Jeffers was working on the car, kind of forgot about the inconvenience of things as he walked slow and looked around at all that was so pretty and homy everywhere he looked. The lawn and the fine big trees, shrubbery and flowers, would grace any mansion he'd ever seen. Of course a little landscaping would help some but he felt a homyness about it all that he never experienced in all the fine landscaped lawns he'd ever walked onto.

Like the long and rambling log house near in the center of the big lawn and backed by a piney hill, it had the room and took the space of a fair sized mansion, but it wasn't so uppity stiff and cold looking. It made a stranger feel welcome and at home with no dodging around for fear of breaking things or spilling a few cigar ashes.

And now that his stomach was full, that he'd seen there would be a good comfortable bed for the night, under a good roof and between four solid walls, there would be no fear nor discomforts of the two nights before. It came sort of sudden to him that he liked it here and he didn't care much right then if the telephone was forty miles away. Everything was being taken care of at his offices as usual and he liked this better, for a change, than the steady round of social doings his wife and daughter kept a-leading him to. He wouldn't of course care for any more of such as it was while with the round-up wagon, but here at the home ranch it was different, he felt safe, comfortable and contented, and he could well get the atmosphere and life of the West right from where he was. He heard the rumbling of the running waters of the big creek, and here he could also maybe find some fishing tackle. Surely someone must of come here at one time and brought some, a few hooks would do.

Lighting a fresh cigar he walked along to where Jeffers was still working on the car and trying to clean it up as much as he could. It was good to watch somebody work in a good day like this, like industry and peace arm in arm. Then looking up and past the corrals, he seen three riders coming, and as they got off at a corral gate he recognized June and Dot. He'd never met the third rider but he figured him to be that young man from college which Mae had spoke about, and he was kind of anxious to meet him because Mae had said he came from the same state he did. Graften would have somebody to talk to now who understood his language.

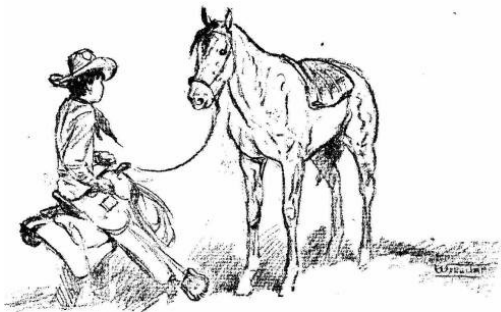
But he was a little disappointed when some time later he got to meeting the college man. June had introduced him. Dale Warmer was his name, and Graften right soon recognized him as one of the big favorites of a steady winning football team. He'd seen his picture and name in the papers many times as one near as popular with his touchdowns as Babe Ruth was with his home runs.

But that didn't make no perticular hit with Graften, for he felt as important and popular in his own game, and the way he was disappointed a little was that Warmer was so professional in his football that he couldn't or wouldn't talk much of anything else, and even tho Graften was from his state and the both was now far West, that didn't stir no brotherly love of far away from home strangers in Warmer. Instead he seemed a heap more interested in these Westerners and that aggravated him some.

But Graften couldn't let any little thing like that worry him for long, if he had he wouldn't of invited himself to the Seven Xs in the first place, nor stuck so long afterwards. So, after some little talk with him and June and Dot on the lawn, just long enough, and till the three scattered and each went their own way, he then strolled back by Jeffers and the car and on down to the blacksmith shop. There he was made happy, for the blacksmith was of a blond fish eating nation and seen that he got his fish as often as he could. He had rough but good fishing tackle and Graften got to borrow some from him.

He fished until supper time, with pretty fair luck, and then, after another good meal, as tho he hadn't eaten just a couple of hours before, he hit back to his fishing, for the evenings was long and he enjoyed that time there until near dark.

There was more than the usual hustling around at the home ranch when the next morning come. Slick, his wagon loaded up at the commissary the day before, was hooking up his six horses, Sothern and Gat helping him. Austin would leave that same morning and be at the round-up camp that day too, and he would take another bunch of broncs that Sothern and Gat had took the rough off of and now was ready for work. The ranch hands was also busy catching and hooking up their teams, Old Lou and Hi, who'd take turns to wrangling and had brought all the horses in before breakfast as usual, was saddling up for the forenoon's ride, and even little Johnnie had caught up his horse, Chub, planning as always, on a thousand things to do that day, and all around the ranch was a busy place.



Even little Johnnie had caught up his horse, Chub.

Even little Johnnie had caught up his horse, Chub.

Under the roofs the Mitchell women was busy cleaning up, arranging and dusting the big house, and Isabel was scrubbing in her kitchen. Down in the cook house near the bunk houses there that cook was busy with his pots and pans, and then by the stable and cowbarn the choreman was at his work with milk cows, pigs and chickens, and helping him at that like for his morning exercise, was Dale Warmer, the football star. That was all he could be trusted to do on the ranch

and he had to be watched a-plenty at doing that. But that was what he wanted for the time being, plenty of work to keep in training, and he done that grinning.

With all the busy goings on and the pretty morning it was, the Graftens was the only ones still very much asleep, and they would still be very much asleep for a couple of hours longer. Maybe they could be excused on account of their scary experiences at the round-up camp, also maybe that they hadn't been brought up to such hours as was kept at the ranch, but, anyway, if any of the three blinked an eye at the crow of the roosters or the beller of cows that morning, they sure never woke up to it, not even the noise that Isabel made a purpose with pots and pans and slamming of doors to wake 'em had any effect. They slept on.

Her small share of the house work done, June hit out for the corrals and stables. She wasn't much of a hand for house work as yet, and about all she took charge and care of was her bed room. If she was to do any puttering around after that she'd do it outside, and there, in taking care of things in many ways, like closing gates that careless ranch hands would leave open, running stock back that had gone thru, and so on, she more than made up for what she didn't do in the house. Mae and Dot realizing that, would often joke and tell her to get out so they could take care of it and do things right, that she was more extra work around there than help. They liked to putter and change things around, make curtains and sew on a thousand things, also taking care of the many flowers and such like outside.

Dot often went riding with June but seldom unless her important work inside was done. She didn't take interest to doing things that June did. When she rode she just rode, and couldn't see much fun when June would go thru one bunch of cattle after another and go to counting 'em to seeing how a cow lost her calf or how a calf lost its mother, and all that goes with the caring of stock.

June would notice slack wires and leaning posts while riding along a fence and do all she could about that, and she'd never pass up a hole where stock might go thru without patching it up in some way. Old Lou and Hie rode to do all of that around the big ranch pastures and meadows, and they done that well, but no matter how hard a man works there's most always some things overlooked, and June had a knack of running onto such things.

But June wasn't riding to be fault finding, it was just that she was interested and wanted to have something to ride for, and there's always plenty such reasons on any big ranch. She liked to hunt up missing stock best, and being that the stock kept around the ranch was the most valuable, it made the hunting worth while, and all the more interesting when some stock would break out to open range, for then there'd be tracking to be done, or figuring out which way they went, also good riding to find 'em.

And she wasn't short of good horses to do that riding with. She had four, one of 'em she'd picked out of Austin's string and which he'd hated to part with, and now she was having Sothern break out two fine colts for her, a bay and a blaze-faced black. Both of them colts she'd picked out of John B.'s southern blooded stud bunch, and John B. couldn't do nothing but agree to that and call her a little horsethief.

"Yep," she'd smiled in answer, "just a chip off the old block."

But she wasn't thinking of horses or riding as she hit for the corrals and stables this busy morning. She had some thing sort of pressing on her mind and she went there to find Dale. She looked quite a while and when she finally found him he wasn't at all, as she thought, in a place and position his fans would ever dream of seeing their football hero. He was in a pig pen, and on all fours, facing to within a few feet of a big boar he'd got to one dry corner, and there, all set for a tackle.

June just stood where she was, very still, and she wondered afterwards how it was she didn't scream out with a laugh, for it was sure in her chest and aching to come out. But she'd caught herself just in time as she seen that what was to come would be at least as funny as the first sight of him there all crouched.

The big boar, weighing about four hundred pounds and very active, had seemed just the thing for Dale to keep up his tackling practice on, and no more than thought of than tried. The boar finding himself cornered, was just still for a few seconds as June came up on the scene, like puzzled about the human on all fours in front of him, and he was ready for a break out of his corner, either around or thru the human, and that was just the kind of practice Dale wanted to keep up on, good, quick and tough work.

He got it. The boar, seeing he was blocked at every move he made,

just whoofed in Dale's face and came on, and Dale tackled.

June just had to laugh from there as she seen Dale spring to meet the boar. Dale didn't find no shoulders nor legs to tackle, just the long snout of the boar which uprooted him, stood him up on end and, as Dale circled his arms around the thick jaws with all his strength, he was carried wrong end up that way for a few fast yards to "low bridge." The low bridge was the opening into the shed in the corner of the pen. It wasn't any too big for the boar alone, and when he wooshed full speed into the opening his tackler slambanged on the shed and was left there to come down to earth with a bump.



Carried wrong end up for a few fast yards to "low bridge."

Carried wrong end up for a few fast yards to "low bridge."

He'd no more than landed when June hollered, "Look out, he's coming right out again."

Dale jumped at June's voice and scrambled away from the shed door. Then looking back for the boar and seeing he'd been made fun of he stood up, brushed himself some, and then coming towards her

says, grinning, "Well, it was worth trying anyhow."

"You bet it was," says June, hardly able to speak for laughing. "It was worth the price of two good shows to see you trick ride on that boar."

"I wasn't trying to trick ride, Miss Snoop, I was practicing tackle."

"Well you better tackle on something else," June says, "a bear or a stack of wild cats." Then she went on, more serious, "Don't you know that that boar could have ripped you wide open very easy with his tusks? I don't think any animal would dare attack him, only fools and strangers."

"I'll have you know I'm no stranger, Miss Mitchell," Dale acted very uppish.

June laughed. "All right," she says, "you win." Then thinking of what she'd wanted to see him for, she went on. "I've got something for you to tackle this morning if you will, and that's to take the small car and drive Mr. Graften to The Spur. Mother said last night that he wanted to telephone to town for a wrecker to come out and get his car to repair. I think you can tackle that without hurting yourself."

Dale bowed. "With the greatest of pleasure," he says, "and won't you, fair lady, consent to accompany me there and back? Your gracious presence would be most inspiring to your lowly servant on this lonely voyage."

"Begone, swine tackler," says June acting haughty. "I have other missions. Besides," she laughed, "that's about all you re good for around these diggings, is driving a truck."

She turned and walked away towards the horse corrals before Dale could think up an answer to what she'd just said. And Dale wasn't trying to think up no answer as he shook his head, smiled and watched her go.

Dale had come to the ranch a couple of days before, uninvited, but his coming uninvited somehow didn't twist any ropes on the Seven Xs. Him and June had had perfect understandings while at college, where they'd met quite a bit and got to know one another well thru the many friendly arguments they'd had. He didn't like girls, as he'd said,

to him they was only head shaking, necking or posing females and a man shouldn't waste a heart on 'em. If he ever growed a heart he'd plant it where it would grow, on a rock, that would at least be something solid.

June'd had many returns as to that, with such as that his head was only a big football, needed a good kick so it'd crack like a cocoanut and leave it air out. "It's hide bound," she'd said, "I can tell that by your low foretop."

That was in some of the ways the two had got acquainted. Dale liked June for her square give and take, right off the shoulder and with enough sarcasm along for spice, and June liked him for his reckless and still so thoughtful ways. He near reminded her of the cowboys at home, and the arguments the two could bring up, both halfways grinning, about nothing in particular made the both of 'em laugh with just the first glance at one another.

Dale would joke her about the cowboys. "Just something in flopping pants," he'd say, and June would come back at the football men. "Just a lot of beef wrapped up in pads, afraid to get bruised."

With things going on that way, and Dale whistling away to himself after each meeting, he'd got to thinking about these cowboys, for the way June bristled up every time anything was mentioned against 'em, he'd got to thinking something of 'em. Her attitude that way, in one word, meant a heap more than all the co-eds could ever said, diploma or no diploma.

So one day, coming acrost to where June was looking at only lawn grass, very thoughtful, he figured he'd catch her off her guard and he asked, acting very serious, "Where can I find some of these cowboys? I thought they'd all gone with Buffalo and Bill."

June had looked up from imagining she was on good prairie sod. "You'll find plenty of 'em if you re not afraid to lose connection with the railroad," was all she'd said.

June being so serious at that time, and him thinking so much of her opinion, specially at such a time, hunted up some circulars pointing West. He'd found dude ranches advertised, and they'd all struck him too close to the railroad and with too many accommodations, and when he'd asked June about them on another day she'd said, "You

can get as rough or gentle as you want there and there'll be good cowboys to take care of you, if you go to a good dude ranch."

Dale had gone to a dude ranch that spring and enjoyed himself to the limit, and then he was so interested that after June had got home from her last winter "at any college," as she'd said, he wrote to her and said in his letter, "Now I want to go to a real ranch, not a dude ranch."

June's answer made him ponder a while as she wrote back, "Don't you know that you re making a dude ranch out of a real ranch the minute you put a foot on it? Other people will come along, see you, and certainly say, why this is a dude ranch."

There was no way of coming back at that, not by letter, and knowing June as he did, he went her one better and a few days later he arrived at the Seven Xs as big as life.

"Well, here's your dude," he says to the surprised June as he stepped out of the car that had brought him from town, "and this is now a dude ranch."

CHAPTER XIV - "One Up and Three to Go"

Dale had been at the ranch only a couple of days when he overheard hints, without his listening for 'em, how the Graftens wasn't wanted on the ranch, and why. And when June came to ask him that morning to drive Graften to The Spur so he could telephone, he was mighty glad to help that way.

The sun was high and the forenoon was half gone before the Graftens stirred and had their breakfast over with, and then Dale took it on his shoulders to inform Graften that he was ready to take him to the nearest telephone. He done that with his first peek of him as he showed himself on the lawn and lit a fresh cigar, and the first thing Graften knowed he was sitting in the small car besides Dale and on his way to The Spur.

Mae, hearing the sound of the motor and looking up from watering some plants, seen the car and the two in it and smiled. Now she would see to the ladies, how they'd got along with the washing of their clothes. They should be ironing them this morning.

Graften didn't get to talk much on the road to The Spur. The road was rough, the grades was mighty steep and the wicked speed Dale was going over it, with the light and open car such as Graften wasn't at all used to, about all he done was watch the road, the same as he'd done while Slick was driving the six horse team, and now he wasn't enjoying the ride any more.



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Graften didn't get to talk much on the road to The Spur.

Dale didn't talk much either, and when he did it was something about the coming football season, which didn't at all interest Graften right then. Then in time the car come in front of the General Store at The Spur, the phone was located there, and Graften went on using it to locate the garage he wanted, while Dale bought a few things, and a box of candy for June.

It was while Dale was shopping that way and sort of looking around at everything in general, that he overheard a few words Graften said over the phone which made him do his looking at things closer to where the phone was so he could overhear some more. Graften had talked of the condition of the car and what would have to be done to it, then he repeated the words the garage man had said.

"Over a week to get the job done? Why that will be all right. I'm in no special hurry. I'll send my chauffeur in with you and he will come out

and get us when the job is done All right. G bye."

He hung up all satisfied, seen Dale examining some things on a counter, went to him and told him he would be ready to go as soon as he got a supply of cigars and cigarettes. Dale looked up.

"Fine," he says, "I'll be at the car waiting for you."

He had the engine running as Graften came out with a few bundles. It looked like he'd bought some clothes too, and rubber boots and what looked like a fishing outfit.

"Sure you haven't forgot anything?" Dale asked as he looked at the bundles.

"No. I'm sure," says Graften smiling.

Dale put the car in gear and started out, and then after he'd drove a little ways, and without a word to Graften, he turned the car in the middle of the deserted street and went back to the store.

"But I forgot something," he says to him as he got out. "You wait here a minute and watch the natives and I'll be right back."

Graften waited more than five minutes, and when Dale came back there was a satisfied smile on his face also.

"All set," he says.

Dale kept a-grinning every once in a while on the way back to the ranch, and Graften noticing that and while the driving was low and up a steep grade, asked him what was the joke.

"Too good to give away right now," Dale says. "I've got to do a little polishing on it first."

Graften didn't fret so much as to Dale's driving on the way back. He'd figured him to be a good driver by then, and the thoughts of the good peaceful times with his fishing tackle had him also grinning with the coming pleasure.

It was just a little after noon when the ranch was reached. The women folks was just coming out on the lawn after the noon meal, and as Graften got out of the car with his bundles and came towards the

house, Mae told him that Isabel was keeping things warm for him and that he'd better go on in and eat right away before things got dry. That gave him a good excuse to rush on past his wife who seemed inquisitive about the bundles. He smiled, mysterious like and went on. Dale had put the car away and gone to the cook house.

With the help of Mae and Dot, Mrs. Graften and her daughter had got their ironing started and finished that forenoon, just the most necessary things. Mae had seen that they would have to be helped because neither of 'em seemed to know which end of an iron should go first. They'd already scorched some clothes and they was about to give up when Mae and Dot came. Isabel had refused to help, saying she wasn't the one to encourage helplessness, and being that June was gone to her usual riding, Mae and Dot had to do the work.

Mrs. Graften was very grateful, of course, and jabbered along about how "marvelous" Mae and Dot could do such "intricate" work as ironing, as wonderful as it was in making Spanish lace, she thought.

Mae and Dot listened to that and went on ironing, looking at the lace on smaller things and wondering how they wasn't stretched some places. Then come a time when Mrs. Graften, figuring that her compliments would have some effect as to a foundation of what more she wanted to say, went on talking some more, feeling on solid footing, as to what quality lady she was. She talked of her friends, her clubs, her social functions and all, just to make Mae and Dot understand how superior she was, and that she couldn't be expected to know anything about ironing.

The daughter had run out of the wash house before then and hit for the corrals. She was glad to escape by the help of her mother's talking and sort of romp, careless from work. She'd went down to the corrals, a dust had attracted her down there and as she found her way to it, going thru and over corral poles to where the dust had been stirred (there was no dust but the parts of earth that was sent up a-flying seemed like dust) she seen two cowboys, Sothern and Gat, hard at work on fresh broncs, and as she got into the corral to watch she'd stuck around plenty long enough to learn, to her surprise, that her blond curls, straighter now, had no wiles in ways of cornering these cowboys, even in the corral. It wasn't at all according to what she thought simple country boys should act, and these being wild cowboys, she'd figured they'd be easier.

But all they'd done as she showed her head into the corral was hang on to their ropes and keep on handling their broncs, and when they did glance her way a few times as they worked, it was as tho she was a pole that'd just fell off the top of the corral and spooked the broncs. They'd looked at her only as a disturbance and not at all as a grace to femininity.

As she'd stuck around she'd wondered what was the matter with em, paying so little attention to her. She'd never been treated that way before, and then, she got to wondering what might be the matter with her.

There'd been one time when Gat, after shoving back the shirt tail that had worked out, glanced at the girl and he took just a little time away from ropes and broncs to roll a smoke near where she was standing, apologizing for ways shirt tails have of crawling out.

She didn't mind seeing high or low bathing suits, she was used to that, but she couldn't stand the sight of a shirt tail showing, and before Gat got to finishing his smoke she'd got back out of the corral.

"It's your personality, Gat," says Sothern, as Gat come by him, "the sight of you scares 'em."

"Well," says Gat, grinning as he picked up his hackamore rope, "that's why I like horses best. Break a horse and you ve got something."

Up at the ranch house, Graften was "devouring" what Isabel had kept warm for him, and while she wondered what scraps she'd have left for the pet hen, cat, and dog, all mothering young ones, Graften thought of how much grub he could get away with and of the trout he would catch that afternoon.

Out on the big lawn the women folks had gathered and was discussing women folks, things until Graften got thru eating. It took him a long time to get thru, and in that time there was many things discussed. But sort of one-sided. Mrs. Graften had got over the disgrace of having to even try to do a washing and ironing by then, changed to clean clothes, thanks to Mae and Dot's help on 'em, and even the daughter sat up stiff and prim as any good debutante. Mae and Dot didn't have no chance, all they was was themselves and

targets for questions. June had disappeared again, and the only break in the talk was Isabel's slamming of the kitchen door while Graften was there. Mae figured new hinges would have to be put on that door, while Mrs. Graften thought something sure should be done about that servant.

One of the main noises in the discussions, or talk, started with Mrs. Graften asking Mae, "But what do you do to pass the time away, away out here on a solitary ranch?"

Mae couldn't answer for a while, it struck her as such a blank question. Then she says, shrugging her shoulders, "I don't know, only that the day always ends too soon."

Mrs. Graften looked at her daughter and smirked some, she'd of winked if she'd thought she wouldn't of got caught at it. Then she turned to Mae again.

"But what about the clubs and societies," she says, "but I expect there's no such organizations away out here." Then she went on, "It seems such a waste of time and it must be very lonesome to be so isolated from civilization. There certainly must be some high ideals stirring your hearts," she asked looking at Mae then at Dot.

"There certainly is," says Dot, looking acrost the valley to high peaks. "These hills are our elevation, and they would get a lot of people out of muck if their ideals was to that altitude and as open."

Dot smiled at Mae, then looking straight at Mrs. Graften, "There's gold in them thar hills," she says, using an old time prospector's remark, "and they don't bow to riches nor foolish things."

The kitchen door slammed again, and out of another door onto the porch, Graften came out, lit his cigar and went to unwrapping his bundles, satisfied with the world. In a short while he interrupted the women folks, conversation by coming on the lawn all rigged up in his fishing outfit and rod.

"Why, Samuel," Mrs. Graften greeted him. "How ridiculous. We re prepared to leave."

Samuel stopped long enough on his way to the creek to smile and just say, "We can't very well leave for a while, my dear, the car will

have to be fixed first."

"These men," says Mrs. Graften, looking after him and sort of apologizing to Mae, hardly looking at Dot, "all they seem to think of is fishing the minute they get away from the office."

"And with their women it's clubs and bridge, and no office," says Dot. "And no home."

Dot was kind of on the warpath and wished June was with her, Mae was so dern kind and obliging.

Then June come into sight, but down by the corrals, and with Lou and Hie, bringing in a bunch of cattle. Dot went into the house and a few minutes later came out dressed in her riding skirt and boots and spurs, headed for the corrals.

"Can I go with you?" says the Graften daughter as Dot went by.



Then June come into sight.

Then June come into sight.

"Sure you can," says Dot without looking at her, and the debutante followed at her heels. Then later on Mae and Mrs. Graften came,

Mrs. Grafton asking something about what the excitement was. To which Mae only said that some cattle had been brought in and some calves to be branded and that was all.

Down by the corrals, Sothern and Gat had let up on the new broncs. Sothern had caught one of the two colts he was breaking for June, and Gat the little black he was breaking for Johnnie, and sitting on them two ponies the riders was going to give them a little education with the ways of a rope.

For there would be some roping to be done that afternoon, some calves that'd been born the fall and winter before, and which with their mothers had been culled out of the main herds and held close to the ranch, and now they was good sized. John B. and Austin was plum against their cattle winter calving but that happens with the best of regulated herds, and the Seven Xs had mighty few as compared to most outfits.

Lou and Hie figured it was high time to brand 'em, before the flies got bad and that with the help of Sothern and Gat the work could easy be done. June and Johnnie had helped gather and bring them in and now the outfit was set to go to work. The branding fire was good and the irons was getting hot. June was filling the vaccine syringe[*] and would do her work with it, besides tallying up on what was being branded. She would rope too once in a while. Johnnie was the "iron boy," packing the branding irons to the wrestlers and packing 'em back afterwards, also keeping the fire going good.

[* To vaccinate against "blackleg" disease which affects cattle.]

Of course Lou and Hie both wanted to rope, so did Sothern and Gat so as to get their broncs used to the ways of them ropes, and there's where some hitch came in. They couldn't all rope, somebody would have to do the wrassling and branding, so, it was while the 1880's and the 1900's was discussing over the subject that Dale vaulted over the corral, real athletic and just says, "I'll do the wrassling."

Well, that come near knocking four cowboys off their horses right then, but they hung on to themselves for all they was worth, and finally old Lou says in his dry way, "Sure. You can wrassle us a water bucket, that would help some."

Dale wasn't going to be set back at that, but seeing that he wasn't

being paid no attention to, he finally figured it would be best to just wait and see for a spell, and a glance at June by the branding fire made him feel that he'd better because she looked like she was ready to laugh at him again.

"Another thing," old Lou says, as Dale was going to one side of the corral, "it'd be a dirty shame for that awning you're wearing to get dirty." Dale was wearing a kind of white and sporty outfit. He'd put it on that morning after he got thru with his boar tackling and to go to The Spur with Graften.

The cowboys went on with their discussing, and finally, it came to a draw where one 80 and one 1900 would rope while the other 80 and 1900 would do the wrassling and branding, and change about that way every so often.

To end the argument and start things going, Gat got off his colt and says to Hie, "Come on Pop, let's you and me take the first shift at wrassling and I'll bet we can beat the other team at that and at roping too."

That was agreeable to Hie, and that way the outfit started to work, just about when Dot came into the corral.

Her coming kind of stopped things for a while. The ropers held their ropes and the wrasslers looked around. Dot came to June, brushed an elbow against hers, said "Damn" and went on to the side of Dale. Dale, wondering why such a lady should say such a word, looked back of him thru the corral poles, and seeing Graften and his daughter there he just grinned and remarked, "I'd be mad too." Graften had lost his interest for fishing for the time and stopped to watch the roping.

The roping started. Lou caught the first calf and brought it to the fire while Sothern brought his rope to play, educating June's bronc as to the tricks of it. Gat took the lead in wrassling the calf that had just been brought in. He knowed which side of the calf to get, and before Hie could blink, that calf was on his back and with all four feet stiff in the air, then hanging onto a front leg, Hie run on to put a figure eight on his two hind ones. That calf was a husky, not of the dairy kind.

June was on the spot to inject the vaccine and Johnnie trailed her up with white hot branding iron. Lou took it while Gat held the calf down,

and right quick there was the smell of burning hair and a thick smoke come up.

"Why they re burning the poor animal," says Mrs. Graften, who by then had got to the corral with Mae and was watching from the outside.

Mae laughed. "That's mostly hair burning." Then the calf let out a loud beller. "Terrible," says Mrs. Graften, shuddering, "it must hurt the poor beast something awful. There should be a stop to such cruelty."

"I guess it doesn't feel good," says Mae, "but I don't think it hurts them any more than us having a tooth pulled, and they have the best of us because they have no imagination. I think the dread of pain is as bad as the pain itself."

"But does this awful branding have to be done? It's so cruel."

"This branding is not awful, Mrs. Graften," says Mae, a little stiff like at such ignorance and her making a mountain of a mole hill. "It's only awful necessary, and as for cruelty, it's only that it's so strange to you."

"Indeed," says Mrs. Graften.

A little ways along the outside of the corral, Mrs. Graften seen her husband and daughter and went to them, leaving Mae alone, and Mae was glad of the chance to get away. She went into the corral and joined Dot and June.

Sothern, on June's bronc, brought another husky calf to the fire by the time one Lou had brought in was branded, earmarked, vaccinated, and turned loose. June's bronc, with the handling of Sothern, worked fine and took to the rope like a good one. Sothern and Lou would be a hard team for Gat and Hie to beat when it come their turn to rope.



Sothorn, on June's bronc.

Sothorn, on June's bronc.

Calves was roped and brought to the fire in plenty fast enough time

so there was always another calf ready for the wrasslers when they turned one loose, and that way the work was going smooth.

Dale, watching Gat throw calf after calf, wanted to get in on the wrassling of 'em. He watched so as to get onto the hang of it, and then when he figured he had it down pat, he came up as Lou brought in another calf and says to Gat, "Let me have that one."

Gat grinned as he said, "Sure," and watched Dale go after the calf, like he was going to eat him up. Dale went to reach for the calf as he'd seen Gat do, figuring on twisting him down simple as Gat had done, but he must not of applied the right twist because the calf just went by him, bucking and bellering, and kicked him as he went past, leaving an initiating smear on his light colored pants.

"Careful of them Palm Beaches there, young feller," Lou hollered at him.

Dale grinned and went after the calf some more. He tried Gat's ways a few times without any more success than the first, then seeing that wouldn't work he dropped all tactics and went to tacking and catch as catch can. He was going to get that calf down or eat him up right there.

But the calf seemed to have a heap more say about that than Dale did, for right soon Dale was tangled up with more calves and ropes than he'd ever seen in his life, and found himself twisted up in the shape of a pretzel while the calf bucked and bellered and jumped all over him. It looked like the calf would soon make hamburger out of Dale. But the calf was only trying to get away, and all that kept him at that one place was the rope that was around his neck and tied hard to Lou's saddle horn.

Dale squirmed out of the entangling rope once and out of the reach of the calf's pounding hoofs, and by then his light sporty outfit was all the colors of the corral.

"My gawd, man," says old Lou bending over his saddle with laughing, "let up a little, will you, till I get my breath."

Dale looked at him, he wasn't grinning so much this time and he wanted some breath too. Then glancing around and seeing that everybody was laughing near as much as Lou, June even more, he

was now determined more than ever to wrap that calf around his thumb and shake him. The calf about six months old didn't look so big, and Dale couldn't of guessed that there was four hundred pounds wrapped up in his slippery red hide and all on four legs, which he didn't stand on, but used to all advantages to move on. Dale could of handled a three hundred pound man easier than he could of handled that calf, and as he dived into him again he realized some more that atheletics didn't help much in this case. He found out the same thing one time when Sothern let him try to handle a half way spoilt bronc, and now he was finding out some more, that this cowboy's work called for a lot different action than with atheletics. A cowboy couldn't maybe jump two feet off the ground, but a champion pole vaulter couldn't begin to get on one of his spooky broncs. Both men could be champions at their own game but neither could compete at the other's game, not without they trained for such, and then the cowboy would still be a cowboy and the athelete an athelete, the cowboy an athelete in his own way.

Dale, as short a while as he'd been at the ranch, soon found that out and to respect that cowboy's way. It had all looked so easy to him, and him being powerful and mighty active, he'd figured that what they done would be only child's play to him, but his opinion got to changing about men in high heel boots, tall crowned hats and wearing batwing shaps, and that it took a good man to have the right to wear such outfits. Clothes didn't make the man there.

With his determination to get the calf down, and Dale realizing that he'd sure tackled something again this time, he seen that there was nothing for him to do but stay with it and do it with a grin, or else crawl away and give it up as a bad job. He stuck and grinned, when he could, and all the while the calf done a good job of making him the laughing stock. Gat would of come and helped him but the show was too good to spoil and he wouldn't make a step that way until June quit laughing. June wasn't quitting, and then finally, Dale got the calf down.

Dale got the calf down but he was underneath the calf, and there he laid, out of breath, but grinning and hanging on the calf for dear life. He wasn't going to let that calf get up, even if he was underneath. But he'd have to manage around somehow so he could hold the calf down and still get out from under him.



Dale got the calf down, but he was underneath the calf.

Dale got the calf down, but he was underneath the calf.

Gat, seeing how much it meant for Dale to hold the calf down, and that the calf would be sure to squirm and kick himself free again if Dale loosened a hold to get himself out from under, stepped up to the calf, took one front leg, stuck his knee on the calf's neck, and holding him down to stay, he announced the bout over and named the winner. "Underneath," he says.

Gat thought the show had gone far enough, and Dale feeling sort of at ease that he'd got the calf down, squirmed out of under, not all proud, but satisfied and grinning.

He was quite a sight as he stood up, his sporty outfit made to look all the funnier by the condition it was, tore here and there as tho he'd been drug thru the corral in it and turned over a few times the while. His face wasn't much cleaner, nor his hair, which would sure need a cleaning and combing. Outside of that he was all right, and after getting his breath and taking the jokes that come his way while he brushed himself some, he was ready to tackle another calf. He couldn't look any worse anyway, and now he could have some fun.

That's what the boys liked about Dale, there was no quitting in him and the rougher things come the better he seemed to like it, and

there was no whining no time nor looking for help nor favors. If he got in the way sometimes a holler from one of the boys would send him scrambling, and with him and them there was a good friendly feeling, spiced with plenty of joking. Some of the jokes would kind of stump him on account of their witty odd style, but he'd always come back for more and with some of his own.

When he was ready for more calf wrassling he didn't take it on single handed no more. He wanted to get onto the hang of that, and with Gat to take the lead and coach him at times he got to doing pretty well. When half the calves was branded and Gat and Hie got on their horses to take their turns to roping, and Sothern and Lou came to take theirs at wrassling, Dale was right on hand to work with Sothern. That was just the kind of practice he wanted and even tho he made hard work of it, there was no tiring him. That would get him later, in stiff muscles.

The afternoon was over half gone, the branding work was going on smooth and soon would be done. Graften, watching, interested in the branding as well as the joking, had stuck around and forgot all about his fishing. His daughter had stuck by him and both had climbed on the corral to sit on the top pole and watched from there. Sometimes Graften would have one of his witty remarks to pass which didn't get nowheres much and his daughter a question that didn't get no further.

Jeffers, after he'd done all he could with the car and his clothes, had also come to the corrals and watched thru the bars. He didn't think nor cared to come into the corral and pitch in on the calf wrassling as Dale was doing, and it was just as well all around that he didn't if the branding was to be done that afternoon. One tenderfoot at a time is a plenty.

Mae had gone back to the house after a spell of watching, and Mrs. Graften had soon followed her there, joined her where she sat on the lawn, remarking that she'd seen enough branding for the rest of her life, and how restful it was on the lawn.

Over half of the afternoon had wore on that way when the purr of an automobile was heard, then near the corral came a heavy tow car, then back of it a ways came another automobile, it was a big passenger car. The driver of the tow car, seeing the people at the corral, drove close to there as he dared and stopped, and Graften, seeing it was the tow car he had phoned for, got down off his perch

to meet the driver. But he didn't expect the tow car that afternoon.

He didn't expect the passenger car either, none at all, but there it was, and he wondered. Dale had quit his learning at wrassling calves the minute Graften went to meet the driver of the tow car, and close to the corral he listened to the conversation of the two.

Graften went on to say to the driver that it was all right about the tow car to come out and that he could take the limousine back any time. But he hadn't expected it until the next day, and as for the big passenger sedan, he hadn't expected nor ordered it, that he wouldn't be ready to go until his own car was fixed and fit to travel. "You told me," says Graften, "that the car wouldn't be ready for a week or ten days and I said I'd stay here and send my chauffeur with you to bring it back when it was ready. I didn't say anything about bringing a passenger car to take us out."

"Well, I might of misunderstood you," says the driver, "but I'm sure you said afterwards for me to bring a passenger car along to take you and your family back. You said you wanted to get back to town as soon as possible, that you wanted to do that at any cost and for me not to pay any attention to you if you seemed to change your mind, to take you and your family in regardless." The driver spit out his chew of tobacco, "and I'm here to collect," he says.

"But I'm not ready to go," says Graften, wondering, and then getting a little hostile, "I ordered the tow car but I didn't order the other. If you misunderstood that's your misunderstanding."

Graften was going to go on some more, and the driver was ready for his say when here come Mrs. Graften all smiles and a-flutter with joy.

"Why, Samuel," she says, "how thoughtful of you to have that sedan brought along to take us back." Then she turned to the driver, still smiling, "And how soon would you be ready to take us back?"

"Any time you say, mam," says the driver, now wondering.

She started back for the house at the same pace she came, and then stopped short in her tracks and turned to ask the driver, "What time do you think we can be in town?"

"It all depends how soon we leave here," he says. "If we leave in half

an hour we can easy be in town by eight."

"Good," says Mrs. Graften. Then to her husband:

"Now, Samuel, pick up your fishing things and put them in the car, and you, Jeffers," she says to the chauffeur who was close by, "you can get our luggage in a few minutes." Then she looked around for her daughter. She was in the corral by Dot.

"Alexandrina," she hollered high, "Alexandrina."

"Alex," says Dale, "your mother wants you." The daughter scared the cattle getting out of the corral, but she got out, and joining her mother the two went to the house to pack their things up. The daughter was near as agreeable to that as the mother.

Graften had throwed up his hands at the whole goings on, they'd been going so fast. Then he asked of the driver, "Are you trying to break a record? I had no intentions of going back today and for many days." He pointed at his high boots and fishing tackle for proof.

The driver grinned. "I'm sorry but them was the orders, Mister." Graften throwed up his hands again, picked up his fishing tackle and started for the car with 'em.

In a short enough while the sedan was loaded, Jeffers packed case after case to it, loaded 'em in and stood by. He had orders to drive the sedan on in, for the Graftens was cured of other drivers, besides the limousine wouldn't need any. The branding went on unflurried in the corral, and even tho Dale seemed interested with the goings on outside of it nobody noticed it but June. Mae, at the house, was taken by surprise and the only way she showed it was by surprising Mrs. Graften and daughter by helping them with their packing, and sort of getting back at 'em by saying how sorry she was they was leaving so soon.

And Isabel, hearing and seeing of the hustle and bustle, only hummed a tune, plum content.

There was little good-byes and no tears as the Graftens got in the sedan and Jeffers stood ready to take the wheel. When he did take the wheel, it was with a wave of the hand at Dale and the general direction of the corral. Graften was looking the direction of the creek,

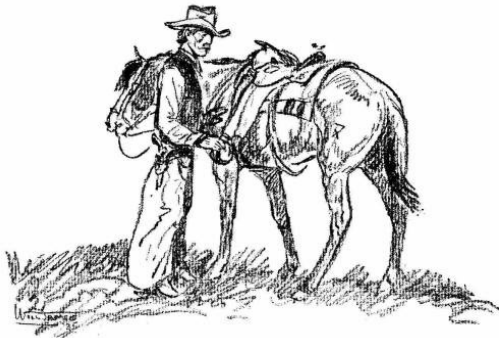
the daughter was looking no special direction and Mrs. Graften was looking straight ahead, smiling.

CHAPTER XV - "Regular Ranch vs. Dude Ranch"

The Graftens had been gone a couple of days when one fine evening John B. rode into the home ranch. He'd left the round-up wagon just to kind of visit around a bit, the calf branding was about over with anyway and some of the boys would soon be going back to their line camps, so, before that time come he just wanted to visit some at the ranch, gad around with the wimmin folks, old Lou and Hie, Sothern and Gat and just sort of perambulate here and there on the old ranch sort of aimless like.

He was happy as he rode in that there was no sight of the Graftens nor their car nowheres, for he sure didn't want them to spoil his peace by their tagging at his heels, asking foolish questions and bumping into 'em every move he made while he perambulated. He wanted to be at home when he was home and with his own kind of folks. He'd had enough of such as the Graftens to do him for another life time.

He felt at peace that way when he rode into the corral by the stable and went to unsaddling, for there'd been no signs of anything strange. Then as he pulled the saddle off his horse and swung around to take it in the stable he got sight of the strange looking figure of Dale who'd happened to just come to the stable door, and John B. near dropped his saddle at the sight of him.



He felt at peace that way when he rode into the corral and went to unsaddling.

He felt at peace that way when he rode into the corral and went to unsaddling.

But he didn't drop his saddle, he just held it stiff, and looking hard at Dale he says, "What the hell are you doing here?"

Dale felt like he'd been tackled four ways at once by such a sudden greeting, only worse, and he had no mind as to what to say.

He just stood to one side of the door, and as there was no words coming from him, John B. just brushed past and went on in to hang his saddle, mumbling about laws against shooting some people, when there ought to be a bounty on 'em instead.

John B. looked as tho he might easy of done that anyhow, and when he came out of the stable again, Dale had vanished. He'd gone to the bunk house. He was hurt bad and a little peeved. He couldn't understand, and he would pack up and leave the first chance he got. Maybe June would take him in as far as The Spur, if not he'd walk.

if Dale was hurt and peevish that was easy as compared to the way John B. felt. Here he'd all prepared to enjoy the peace and comforts of his home for a few days, very glad the Graftens was gone so he could do that, and the first thing he bumps into was another of their breed gawking and there to make him feel uncomfortable. That was enough to make any man see red if there was any red in him. His home wasn't his, it was a museum for anybody to come and use and pesticate the life out of him.

John B. had lost all the peaceful feelings he'd had when he first rode in. He stuck around in the stable for a while to cool down some, and when he went up to the house he was near his happy self again. That is, he acted that way.

There was no Mae nor June nor any of the others as he came in the house, and that was all right, it'd give him a chance to clean up some before they did come. But he didn't have much chance there, for soon, Mae, coming from the garden and hearing his footsteps in the bedroom came in on him. He was changing shirts.

John B. didn't mention seeing Dale as she came in smiling, surprised, and he only smiled right back at her in his old natural way. He'd decided he wouldn't say anything about the stranger, he'd let the wimmin speak, and he'd find out soon enough.

He did find out soon enough, and from June after her and Dot had rode in that evening. She'd come up to her dad, hugged and kissed him and after a while she'd asked, smiling a little,

"What did you do to Dale, Dad? I mean the young man you met as you first rode in."

John B. squinted at his daughter. "Why nothing," he says, "I only asked him who the samhill he was."

June laughed and let it go at that for the time being.

Then as cool showery clouds covered the sun after supper that evening and the family gathered on the lawn, she brought up the subject again.

"I know how you felt when you first saw him," she says, "after meeting the Graftens, but he's really a nice young man."

"Sure," says John B. looking down towards the corrals. "I guess he's a nice enough young man. But I've got a damn fine place here, and if all the nice people came along on it I'd just have to turn it over to 'em. There'd be no room for us." Then he added on, "Why in samhill don't them kind of people go to dude ranches and quit pestivating us."

"Oh, you know what they say, Dad. They want to go to a real ranch."

John B. snorted. "Why most dude ranches are real ranches. I don't go to any stock sale or stockmen's convention, but what I run acrost good old cow and horse men who run dude ranches. Some of 'em run and own plenty of stock and range and run regular round-up wagons, they re real outfits. The only difference between them and us is that they re prepared to have guests and we re not. They have extra houses for 'em and entertainment and extra riders to take care of their guests and plenty of good horses they can ride. That's all looked out for with such outfits and they want guests, where with us we re prepared for only stock and we don't want guests only our own."

"That's all very true, Dad," says June, "but many don't seem to know that. They say they want to rough it on a real ranch, live like the cowboys do and not be pampered like they are on a dude ranch."

John B. grunted. "Why people that say that have only been to resorts and riding academies. They might of seen some little one-horse dude ranch with some would-be cowboy holding up a shingle and selling pop on the side and called that a dude ranch, figuring all was like that. But if they'd strike a real dude ranch they could rough it as much as they want to and live like the cowboys as much as they want to, and not be petted either if they don't want to be. Then the good privilege at a real dude ranch is they wouldn't have to hurt themselves at something they don't know they can't do, and they could get all the care and petting they wanted by just letting out a holler if the roughing it got too rough, where here we'd just let 'em holler and go on with our riding. We'd be busy with our stock."

"But a lot of people can't afford to go to a dude ranch."

"Well, and the regular ranches can't be running 'Poor Farms either."

"Dale has been to a dude ranch," says June. She laughed, "and I guess he knows the difference by now. I think he realizes that the

difference between a regular ranch and a dude ranch is that one is a private home and estate no matter how big it is and that the other is open to paying guests and where they're welcome."

"What makes you think he knows that?" asks John B.

"He came to meet me at the corrals as I rode in, and he said he was going back to one as soon as he could get somebody to drive him to the railroad." He acted pretty much ashamed, said something about that he should have gone to a dude ranch in the first place, that he didn't realize he was imposing here, and so on, and that's what made me think you'd run into him and maybe spoke a little too quick."

"Maybe I did that," says John B. "But dangone it anyhow I thought I was relieved of one carload and could have peace, and here he pops up."

"Well, he won't bother you long," says June. "He said he'd be all packed and ready to go by early morning, and I thought I'd have one of the boys drive him in. Sothern can drive a car I think."

All was silent for a while. Mae hadn't said a word thru the whole conversation, she'd just sat on her wicker chair and listened and smiled, and Dot had done the same.

Then June spoke again. "But, as I've said before," she says, serious like, "he's a nice young man, Dad, very different than the other ones I've met at college, and he done you and us a big favor."

John B. turned to look at her. "A favor?" he asks. "What favor?"

"Well," June smiled, "if it hadn't been for him the Graften family would still be here, and for at least another week." John B. blinked, sort of unbelieving, and she after a while went on, "Yes, he drove Mr. Graften to The Spur the day after they got here from the wagon. Then when he'd overheard him talk on the phone about getting a tow car, he understood that it would take a week or ten days to fix the car and that that was perfectly all right with Mr. Graften. He and his family would stay at the ranch and only the chauffeur would go in."

"As Dale told me he had a good hunch that we wanted 'em to go, and after Graften got thru telephoning he took a chance of helping us

out and telephoned right back to the same garage that the tow car had to be out that very same day and to bring out a sedan to take out the Graften family, and if they could be got back to town by that night there would be a twenty-five dollar bonus for him."

June laughed, and John B. started grinning. "Well, the cars came, Graften protested, but the whole outfit went out that same evening."

All was quiet for a while, then John B. turned to her and says, "Did he tell you all that?"

"Yes, but I was already suspicious that he had a hand in the Graftens going so sudden, and I made him tell. He thought it was a good joke anyway, and when he saw I was pleased, why that made it all the better. He also thought it was a pretty good joke on us because, as he said, it took a dude like him to drive the other dudes out. He said he wanted room for himself."

John B. grinned. "That's one on us as well as the Graftens," he says. "That Dude Dale wins."

Somehow or other, as June said to Dale the next morning, there wasn't anybody on the ranch who could drive a car. She couldn't go herself because she would be very busy that day. Maybe she could go the next day. In the meantime he'd better catch a horse and come and help her drive out a bunch of cattle that had broke in some big hay meadow. Dale had kind of fidgeted, remarking that he would walk to the railroad, that he felt guilty of staying where he hadn't been invited and wouldn't care to have her father see him around.

June had laughed at that. "Why, Dad only thought you were a patent medicine salesman," she lied. "He's bothered with them so much every year."

Dale had to laugh at that too, then he'd said, "Then it makes a difference that I'm a college man?"

"Not any. The last word of that will do with him."

Dale had flushed mighty pleased. That sure made a difference, and even tho he'd felt that some excuses had been made, he was pleased that they'd went to the trouble of making them. That was

proof enough they didn't want him to jump right out and go, and that was enough to keep him from starting out afoot. He seen he'd only be making a fool of himself doing that now.

He figured the best and only thing to do would be to stay and watch for a first chance when a car went in, and now he would take June's invitation to go riding with her and drive the cattle off the meadow. That would show good reasoning, but he still dreaded the thought of meeting John B. face to face again.

June had saddled her horse and gone up to the house, saying she'd be back in a short while. Dale saddled his and proceeded to wait. He was by his horse, thinking, when he seen John B. coming from another corral. He felt a little like dodging him but he couldn't now, he'd been seen. He would just act as tho the meeting of the evening before hadn't been thought of.

But John B. had other ideas. He came straight to Dale and says "Good morning, young man." There was a kind of a stern grin on his face.

Dale, surprised, said, "Good morning, sir," and then John B. went on.

"I didn't know you was a friend of June's or I wouldn't of spoke like I did last evening." Then the stern look went away. "I guess I should be more polite to strangers, but my ornery nature has to crop out once in a while."

Dale smiled, pleased. "Why I think I understand just how you meant what you said last evening, Mr. Mitchell."

Then all serious, he went on, "And after thinking it over I certainly don't blame you. I should have realized, and I'm sorry I butted in here the way I did. I was not invited, and worse than that, your daughter warned me not to come." He smiled again. "She wrote me that she didn't want no dudes here, and that's what decided me to come. We always played jokes on one another at college and I couldn't let this one pass.

"But I see now it was no joke to begin with. I will be leaving as soon as I have the opportunity."

John B. scratched his head and grinned to himself. He could play

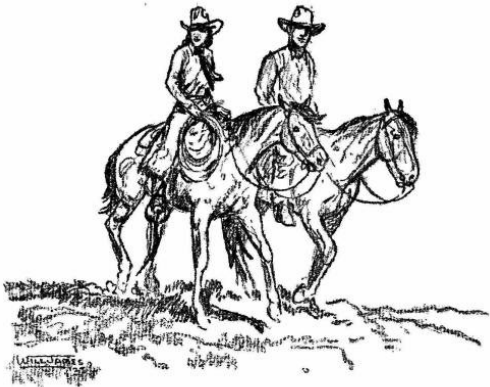
jokes too. "I'm thinking it'll be a long time before that opportunity comes," he says. "We're not much for going to town out here, and it might be this fall, about shipping time, before you'll have the chance."

Dale looked a little scared at that. He realized again that he was on a regular ranch and not on a dude ranch where transportation and other conveniences are always at hand.

John B. squinted at him under his long white eyebrows. "But if it'll make you feel more comfortable," he says, like final words, "I'm offering you my invitation now, and with pleasure, for you to stay and make yourself to home."

With that he walked away, leaving Dale all puzzled and like up a tree, but happy and grateful down deep.

It was a couple of hours later when Dale and June was riding in the big meadow together to get all the cattle off that had broke in on it, but there was no cattle nowheres in sight on the big meadow, and as June rode on, not at all seeming surprised about it, Dale got to wondering and then to finally understanding. It had just been another trick to get him to forget about his going and that way smooth over the hurt he'd felt the evening before. He more than appreciated that, and he made no joke about there being no cattle where there was supposed to be.



Dale got to wondering.

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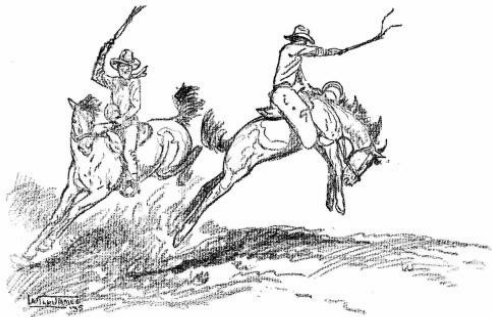
And as for his being accepted at the ranch and the invitation from old John B. himself, Dale couldn't understand that. He sure knewed it wasn't because he was a football star, a college man and the son of a very well-to-do business man. He laughed when as a last straw, he thought of his looks and personality and then he gave the whole thing up.

John B. hadn't thought of none of them points as he gave Dale the good invitation to stay at the ranch. June had known him and said he was all right and that was good enough for him. On that account he'd only been sorry for the way he'd greeted him the day before. As for Dale getting rid of the Graftens, he appreciated that, but he appreciated a heap more the fact that Dale had noticed that the Graftens was only grievances to his family, and how he'd took it on his shoulders to relieve his family of them. John B. appreciated that a heap more than Dale could of appreciated the invitation.

So, John B. was at peace again, and he went to moseying around from one building to another, glancing at the machinery which was all uninteresting to him and only as a modern necessity, on to different sheds and bunk houses. He remembered the building of every one of them, and each one was as a monument bringing memories of different happenings and times. Austin was born while the old bunk house, now a tool shed, was being built. June was born a little while after the long addition to the horse stable was finished, where she now kept her saddle and outfit. Johnnie came while some of the corrals Sothern and Gat was now working inside of was tore down and put up new, and all wherever he looked at heavy logs or poles and stone reminded him of many things of many years.

He went to talk to Ole, the blacksmith, for a while and greeted him with the same remark he usually greeted him with, and that was if he was still prophecising weather. Ole grinned as always and came back with the same answer and shake of his head, just "No." Ole had claimed to be quite a weather prophet when he first come to the Seven Xs. He'd stuck it out for all he was worth for one whole summer and he'd prophecised the weather so wrong most always that towards the end he throwed up his hands and said, "This fool Coontre, I no can tell it wedder." But nobody had let him forget.

John B. then went to the feeding corrals and sheds and then on to the corrals where Sothern and Gat was handling their broncs. He talked to them a bit about this and that colt, and watched 'em do their work for quite a while, then he went on seeming all at peace. And he was, for everything was in order and as it should be on a well run outfit.



Where Sothern and Gat was handling their broncs.

Where Sothern and Gat was handling their broncs.

He went out of the corral and to mosey on some more. Sothern and Gat slid off their broncs to let them digest their saddling, and went to a little shady part of the corral to roll a smoke and rest for a spell.

"Old John B. sure acts like all the world was at peace with him and he was at peace with it," says Gat, looking the direction he went.

"And why shouldn't he," says Sothern, "he's sure got it by the tail."

"Yep," agrees, Gat. "He sure has, and now he's even got a rich man's son with a ready loop of gold for his daughter's finger any time she says the word."

"I don't think it's that serious," says Sothern, grinning to himself. He felt that Gat was up to his old tricks again, which was often.

"Well, she sure don't seem to be hazing your broncs near as often as she did before Dale come, and he sure manages to keep in her way. They re both out riding right now and if that ain't putting two and nothing else together I'd like to know what is."

"You do the worrying about that if you want to, Gat. I know June."

Gat near choked with a laugh at that, "Ye ladies, man ye," he says, "how do you know you know so much about June, or any woman?"

"And you old woman hater that you ain t, how come you know so much about women that you think none can be believed in? You sure must of run acrost a few of the kind that tickled your chin, took your purse at the same time and then tromped on you."

Gat had come to the end of his string there, for he couldn't recollect of any woman that had treated him that way or in any way bad. There'd been a few while in short stops in towns that would of liked to, but he'd jumped too much from one another at such times for any of 'em to get any holt on him.

"I hate to grieve you, old boy," he finally says, "but there's never been no woman ever tromped on me. I'm too wild, and even tho I'd like to linger for their kindness once in a while the orneriness that's back of it keeps me on the jump." Then after a while he added on, "But there is good women, I know of one."

"How do you know you know?" says Sothern, getting back at him.

"You lose," says Gat, "and I'll prove to you that I know. I'm meaning June."

But if Sothern and Gat had seen June at the time they was talking about her, they'd been mighty surprised and both felt very much the losers, for under a big cottonwood tree and sitting very close to her was Dale, and it looked like he was sure enough making violent love to her. He was holding both her hands and she seemed very happy and contented to have him hold them and listen to what he was saying.

Once he was saying, "June, do you love me more than anyone else?"

The way that come about was while June seemed to be riding aimless. There'd been no cattle to drive off the big meadow, and she didn't seem to have any place in mind to ride to, nor any reason to ride for, only to be riding. Dale took that all as a soothing syrup for him and he appreciated June more than ever for her consideration.

He liked to ride, more so with June than anyone he could think of, but that morning he didn't care to ride so much, and coming to a big cottonwood tree near the tumbling waters of the big creek, he asked June if she'd care to sit down in the shade of the tree with him. He'd like to talk to her.

She'd said something to the effect that that could very well be done while they was riding, but with Dale remarking that the jarring chopped his words she stopped her horse in the shade of the big tree and dismounted.

She'd sat down on the grassy earth and Dale sat right close by her. To June's surprise then he took both her hands like there wasn't a second to be wasted and he said:

"June, I think I have a lot of nerve."

June, round-eyed, started to laughing, "I think so too," she says.

"Yes, holding your hands too. But what I mean is I had a lot of nerve coming over here to your home and stay, uninvited, and I see now that if it hadn't been for you I might have been kicked out the first day I came."

"Oh, I don't think so," she says. "We might have suffered you along."

She tried to pull her hands away, "Wait a minute," he says, "I'm not thru yet." He swallowed, and June prepared, then he says, "Do you love me more than anyone else?"

June just smiled, sort of patiently. "Why, I don't love you at all, Dale."

Dale still held her hands. "That makes a difference," he says, "and I'm glad you don't, at this time. But I want you to know this, that if I ever love anyone it will be you, June, and if you'd said you loved me now I would love you now too. Right now and with all my heart."

He pressed her hands and then let go of 'em. "I just wanted to tell you this, June, so you would know."

The two was quiet for a spell, then June said, "I appreciate what you told me, Dale, and I appreciate you as a very good friend. I wish you would think the same of me, and never more than that."

"There's someone you already care for?" he asks, quiet like.

"Yes."

"Do I know him? Oh, yes, I know. Bill Sothern."

"Yes."

Dale prodded the earth with a stick for a while, then he says, "I should of thought of him before. But there seemed to be so little going on between you two that I don't think anyone else but me would notice it."

"I've known him for three years and more," says June.

"And you ve cared for him all that time?"

"Yes, all that time."

"Well, it's no wonder you gave everybody the cold shoulder at college and that you didn't care for diplomas. Your heart wasn't there."

June, saying they'd better be riding back, started to get up, but Dale asked her to wait a little while longer, that he wanted to talk to her some more.

"I'll be leaving in a few days now, June, and I may not have the chance to talk to you like this much more, specially now that I know." Then he laughed a little. "But your dad said that I might not be able to leave before fall shipment because nobody is likely to go to town until then."

June also laughed at that, and that sort of broke the serious tone of the talk. "Why, there's always someone going in at The Spur at least once a week to get the mail, and I didn't tell you before, but one of the ranch hands can drive the little car well and he will take you in any day you say. But," she added quick, "I hope you won't take advantage of that now."

"Thanks, June, I won t. But I will have to go in a few days and start into serious work."

There was a little quiet spell when Dale prodded on some more with his stick, then he went on sudden but quiet like. "I like Sothern, June,"

he says looking at the ground and still poking with his stick, "but has he got anything?"

June was sort of taken by surprise. "What difference does that make?" she says. "I haven't got anything, nothing that I've earned."

"But that's not it. You should have the things you're accustomed to and a home you could go to when you're married."

"You talk like I was a spoiled and pampered pet, Dale, or an old lady that I should have the things I'm accustomed to. Why it's everything to have something you've worked for, no matter how little it is. But Bill bought a little ranch, is stocking it up with every cent he makes and he has an old cowboy take care of it for him while he works. All I want is a little house and my saddle horses. We'll be starting out better than my dad did, for all he had was a few saddle horses that wasn't his, and a long rope."

Dale smiled. "You're certainly fine, June, and Sothern is very lucky to have a girl like you. When are you two going to get married?"

"I don't know," June smiled. "We haven't said anything about it yet."

"What?" Dale raised his head so quick it near popped. "You two have all planned on this, and he's stocking up a ranch and fixing a home for you and you don't know when you're going to get married?"

"We never made any plans. He just told me what he was doing and that he'd soon have a little ranch all stocked up and a good little home on it."

"Well, I'll be How do you know he's doing all that for you?"

June smiled. "I know," she says.

Dale gave it up. He prodded at the earth all the harder, then he says, "Has he ever made love to you, kissed you and said he loved you?"

"No, but he don't have to. I know, a woman feels such things, and that's surer than words, such words are so easy said."

"Yes, but what's the matter with him? If I loved a woman I'd tell her and be sure to let her know, regardless if I knew she loved me a thousand years before. How does he know you love him?"

"He must know or he wouldn't be doing what he's doing for me. We ride together often, and he tells me the grade of cattle he's getting, what his range looks like and all such things. There was only one time he asked me a question and that was--"

"What was that, quick," Dale interrupted, stopping his digging.

"That was," June went on, "if I like goat's milk. There's lots of goats down in New Mexico you know. That's where our ranch is."

The simple and country-maid way June said that made Dale look at her with mouth wide open, and unbelieving.

He threw his stick away and scratched his head. Then June laughed.

"Don't be alarmed," she says, "I think I'm all right. Besides he hates goats."

"I hope that you are all right," he says, "please go on."

"Well, I'll tell you, Dale," she says, serious, "the reason he hasn't spoke to me of love. He figured I would know and understand, which I do. Besides he doesn't feel as tho he has a right to because he has so little as compared to what my dad has. He wants to have something to show before he'd feel right in speaking of love to me. He's that way, very proud, and he would never want to have it said that he wanted me for my share of my dad's cattle or any money I might inherit."

"That's all very fine," says Dale, "but if he feels honest about it I don't see where you should let thoughts of money stay between you two. How do you think your father would feel about it?"

"I have no fear of any trouble from Dad because Dad likes Bill very much and I think he would be happy to consent. The only thing is he would not want me to go so far away as New Mexico. Dad is getting pretty old you know, and Bill will of course want to take me there."

"Why that's easy. That would give your father all the more excuse to start him out here, have him sell down there and buy up here. But it looks like the way things are going it will take a long time. Do you want to wait that long?"

"I've thought of that, and I don't know," says June, standing up. "But what can I do?"

"Why, hell, speak to him. It will tickle him to pieces, it would me."

"I may," June laughed, then she added on as he also stood up, "You must not have wanted me very badly, Dale. You seem so anxious to see me married."

Dale grinned. "The fact that I can't have you is the reason. I want to have it over with and know that you re happy, June." He took her hand and pressed it. "And here I am, the first to congratulate and wish you happiness. You will be happy, June."

They got on their horses and started back for the ranch.

CHAPTER XVI - Home Ranch

A few days went by when Dale felt sort of lost as to what to do, and a little lonesome. Nothing was so very interesting no more, and he couldn't find anything to do or watch being done that would take that lonely and restless feeling away from him. He didn't look for anything tough to tackle any more, and the work he'd done with pleasure and for exercise had turned out to be just plain work. He'd go to the corrals once in a while and watch Sothern and Gat at their horse breaking. The action put on there was as good as always but he didn't appreciate the goings on between fighting broncs and the two riders as he had before, and when either Sothern or Gat sent some joking remarks his way there was no ready returns from him much, only half-hearted grins.

It wasn't that Dale was down-hearted or gloomy, and it wasn't that he wasn't made to feel at home and welcome by everybody. June was as nice and nicer than ever and John B. had took him in as one of the family, but with all of that, the bottom of the Seven X home ranch had fell out for him, and for something he couldn't account for as a reason but it was the reason just the same. That was that he'd got to liking the folks there too well.

It begin when John B. made him conscious of his and other people's lack of respect for a man's home and range. That had been smoothed over in fine shape of course, but he was now more conscious than ever in his appreciation. Then the sudden knowledge that June didn't care for him only as a friend, when before he never stopped to wonder if she cared or not, only brought him to realize the fact that he cared for her, and had cared for her for a long time.

She hadn't been with Sothern any more than usual since he'd had the talk with her, but he felt that she was only being kind to him and would wait until he was gone. That made him all the more restless to go, and in the last few days he'd gone riding with her only a couple of times, once when she'd asked him to. He felt so conscious when he did, and even tho he tried, he wasn't quite the happy Dale he'd been before.

Everybody was good to him at the ranch, even the cranky cook at the cook house, but that didn't help things any, it only made him feel

worse and he sort of wished they would be sort of ornery with him. It would make it easier, easier for him to leave.

He was ready to leave now, he'd been ready for a couple of days but every time he'd mentioned going he'd been made to feel like a criminal for just the mentioning. But he'd finally made up his mind to go. He'd told June that day under the big cottonwood that it was on account of some serious work that had to be done, but there would be no serious work for him for a while yet. He'd planned to go to a dude ranch as he'd told her before where he would belong and be glad to pay for the privilege. He wouldn't feel obligated then nor be stepping on a good will of people he liked and admired. For, after all, he was still only a stranger on the Seven Xs.

There'd been nobody gone to the Spur after the mail for quite a few days, and being he didn't want a special trip made to take him in, he was waiting until the time when a car was sent in. Then a Sunday come, and that afternoon a light car drove in with two men in it. They was men who'd been fishing the creeks since the evening before and they'd stopped at the ranch for some tire patching.

Dale was on the job at the sight of the car, and learning from the men that they was on their way to town, that they had room for him and his stuff and would take him in, he made a hurry round of everybody he could find to say "good bye." There was no time for explanations nor for demonstrations and he was glad of that. He was also glad that June had gone riding as usual, with Sothern this time. He'd write her a good long letter, he said, and rushed out to get his stuff. A few minutes later he was on his way and feeling a little more gay. With a change of scenery he'd soon be himself again.

"Well, I guess the ranch is our own again," says John B. that evening as him and his family gathered on the porch. "Nobody here but the ones that belongs here. That seems kind of strange, and I wonder how long it's going to last."

Mae shrugged her shoulders, afterwards she said, "But we ve not been bothered so much tho, John. I don't expect any more such interruptions for a long time. But I didn't mind that boy, Dale. If anything I'm going to miss him."

"I got to liking him myself," says John B., "after I got to know him."

The conversation went on idle for a while and then, June who'd been looking over the last papers, got up from her chair and went to John B. "Look, Dad," she says, holding the paper for him to see. "Here's a picture of Dale in his football uniform. It says under it that he's out on some ranch in the wild West and 'Busting broncos as part menu of his training."

John B. took the paper from June and squinted at the picture. "Looks fine there, don't he?"

"Yes, he does," says June.

John B. turned to squint at her. "You kind of liked him pretty well, didn't you, June?"

"Why," she says, sort of embarrassed, "why, of course, who wouldn't?"

"Didn't you just more than like him now?" he grinned.

"Of course not."

Then John B.'s grinning squint turned serious all at once. "Then who in samhill is it you more than like, there must be somebody?"

"Yes, Dad, there is," she answered, smiling. "It's Bill."

John B. turned to stare at the paper. "I thought so," he says, grinning to himself. "You would pick on the best man I've got."

To June's and Dot's surprise, John B. didn't say any more on the subject. It was like he knew all the time only he wanted to hear June say so. To himself he was mighty pleased. For he'd changed his tune about not wanting June to marry a cowboy on account they was born too free. He wasn't wanting Sothern to be anything else no more now, only the good cowboy he was, he'd be a good cowman some day. He'd been a little afraid her heart might of gone to Dale. Dale was a good boy and he liked him, and he wouldn't of said anything against June caring for him if such had been the case because he had all confidence in his daughter's judgment. But he couldn't see where she could of been near as happy with Dale, living the way she didn't care to, as she would with a good one of her own kind. Sothern was a good one of her own kind and one who could help in making

her happy.

Mae had had other ideas. She'd picked Dale as her choice for June, so June would be "somebody," but that had been gone over before, and since seeing such as Mrs. Graften and her daughter, it was easy for her to forget about that, for she wouldn't want June to have to mix with that kind. Of course there was plenty of the good kind and real, but that other kind would have to be taken along too, like the bitter with the sweet.

John B. rattled his paper. "The only thing I've got against a man like Sothern getting married," he says, keeping his face inside the paper, "is that it sure ruins 'em."

"How?" asks June, expecting what she was afraid might come.

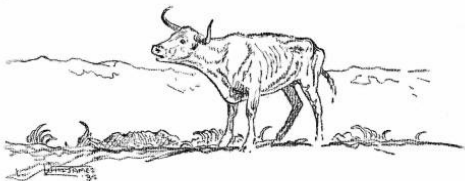
"Well, his wife'll keep a-telling him to be careful every time he gets on a bronc, be careful of this, be careful of that. Then he's reminded of his responsibilities and the first thing you know he is careful, so darn careful that he gets scared, scared of his own shadow, and mention a bronc to him after that and he'll hunt a hole. I'll sure hate to lose Sothern because he's the best all around cowboy I ever had, specially at breaking horses," he grinned behind his paper. "But thank the Lord I'll still have Gat. I don't think any girl will ever want him."

"Don't be too sure, Dad," says June, relieved and smiling, "it isn't always the looks that count you know."

"Yes, I know that." He looked at his wife and grinned, "So does Mae."

He went back to his paper, leaving June wondering, then rattling it once more, and as tho to make it an end to the last conversation and have it understood as settled for good, he spoke again and on a very different subject. "It seems mighty queer," he says, "how people are kicking at the price of beef. There's a piece about that in most every paper. The people don't seem to realize that everything else went up in proportion. But they'll kick and stinge on beef, and the most necessary and healthy part of food, then they'll turn around and spend twice as much on darn foolish things they don't need, and think nothing of it. Why, a little hunk of good beef is worth more than everything else on the table, and I think they re darn lucky and ought

to be dum thankful to have beef at any price after these last years drouths."



Durn thankful to have beef at any price after these last years' drouths.

Durn thankful to have beef at any price after these last years, drouths.

Neither Mae nor June said anything to that. June was only still surprised and puzzled at how he'd took the news of her caring for Sothern. She'd dreaded mentioning that to him and expected a little fuss when she did, but now it was done and all over, settled and at peace like all at once, and her senses was running wild.

Another rustling of the paper near made her jump. John B. grunted. "And what do you know about this?" he says, looking at the paper. "They re building some big state building in the east that's costing millions, and all out of imported marble. Them gazabos sure must be ashamed of the marble and good materials we have in our own country, and for one of our government buildings too. I suppose we ought to be proud to look at that building and say all the material that went to build it was from other soil, like ours wasn't good enough."

He was quiet for a while, then he went on, "I wouldn't be surprised to raise some of our American buildings and read under em, Made in Shangkoko or Fritzawiski or something like that. Then they say 'Buy American.'"

He snorted. "Good old adobe was plenty fine for the men who fought at the Alamo. It was plenty fine for men of action, and there was as many intelligent decisions made by them walls as there'll ever be. It wasn't imported marble that inspired Lincoln and others of his breed

an4 made 'em the men they was."

"They might have had some reason for wanting that imported marble," says Mae.

"They might of, but with this whole durn country on relief with drought and dust storms and floods, it looks like our own marble or dirt or logs would of been plenty good at this time, plenty good any time, and it would of put our own people to work. But that's only one small item, I guess."

He rattled the paper once more as a wind up on that, glanced around at other queer things people do, such as, as he said, "paying a hundred thousand dollars for a broken heart that was steady palpitating to be broken again," and other things, and then he had enough. He went to reading the comics for a rest and maybe a laugh.

As usual, John B. was up at daybreak the next morning. It was always the best part of the day to him, and he liked to be standing and facing towards the sun as it first peeped over the ridges. He felt like he was showing his appreciation of it as he greeted it that way and that it wouldn't shine quite as well on him and his for the day if he didn't.

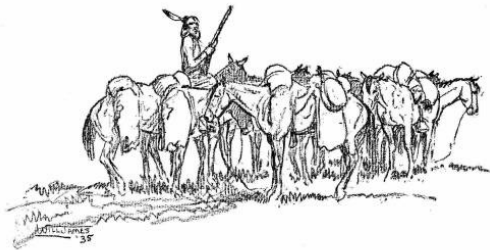
He watched the first rays of it tip the mountain peaks and come down amongst crags and timbers till the tops of the tall cottonwoods he was standing amongst begin to sort of twinkle and rustle at the light as the rays came down to them.

He felt mighty good to be up and alive and strong, and in the thick of what all he loved. He stood and faced the sun as the rays, line came down the cottonwoods and touched him, and he stood like in prayer and salute, resting on one leg and rolling a cigarette. For that was his way of praying and saluting, showing peace and contentment. That, he figured, is what would please the sun God to shine on him, not mourning nor begging.

Standing on the lawn, he looked at his shadow that stretched plum acrost it to stand against the house, and for the thousandth time he looked at that house for all it meant to him. From the first part that was built, to the additions that was put on and made the rambling house it was. The sight when he was in such a mood as that

morning, brought back many memories of what had gone on inside them heavy log walls, with the first building and then the additions.

It was peaceful looking that morning. It had been peaceful for many years, but he well remembered the time when it was scary. There'd been bands of Indians come on the porch he was looking at, they'd leave their ponies where he was now standing. It was no lawn then, just good virgin prairie sod covered with buffalo grass. The Indians would be out for plunder, but he'd fed 'em well and showed good sense by helping them help themselves to what was in sight, but he always kept a cache and there was seldom much in sight at them times. The Indians burned other ranches, but no fires had been set to John B.'s. When they'd leave they wasn't so warlike, but for the reason that with his show of friendliness there was no fear in him, and 'they felt that at the wink of an eye he could have a bunch of hard riding cowboys on their hides. That had happened to a few bands of the renegades, other bands had soon got wind of it, and after a while, John B.'s ranch and stock was pretty well left alone.



They'd leave their ponies where he was now standing.

They'd leave their ponies where he was now standing.

Looking at the main door of the house which entered what was now the living room, he remembered when a dead man opened that door. The man had been a stock detective and was shot dead while he reached for the latch, and he'd opened the door as he fell and slid down against it. Rustlers had shot him during the rustler war.

There was another time, when two riders had met inside there. There'd been a long grudge between 'em and it came to the top when one bet the other that he could beat him to the draw. The stake he put up was his life and his horse and saddle, and the other put up the same. When the black powder smoke cleared, one of 'em was dead and the other was dying. He lived only long enough to tell John B., who came running in, the story of the shooting.

There'd been other scrapes and near scrapes in that house and John B. had been the center of some of 'em, protecting his interests and his word, sometimes with his six-shooter but most always with his pen.

It had been a ticklish job holding his outfit, and even tho now it was all secure he was still in cow country and there was still men free with the rope. It had been only a year or so before when there was a good ring of rustlers operating around and partly on his range. He knowed 'em all by sight, a few of 'em had little outfits of their own, and it was only regular that they stop to eat or rest their horses either at the home ranch or round-up wagon. All was friendly, and it wasn't surprising to see one of the rustler boys eating a meal right alongside of the stock detective that was out to get evidence, on him. But all was friendly while there was no evidence, and now, as John B. thought of 'em, he shook his head, for most of them boys was now looking at this bright morning thru prison bars. The few that had been left of that ring had hit out for other range countries. But there was still others.

No, the old West wasn't gone. There'd be many parts of it hold out for another generation, regardless of what may come.

John B. wasn't for thinking so much of the happy events and every day life that house reminded him of that morning. He felt good enough as it was and he was more for harking back to the rough side of what the house had been a witness to, inside and outside.

He was glad that house had been built on good stone foundation and high from rot. It would be a long time, and little Johnnie would be an older man than him before the heavy timbers of that house would show any sign of crumbling.

By then why people might be living in. His thoughts was interrupted by a young holler from one corner of the house, and here come little

Johnnie all washed up, hair combed and ready for when breakfast would be ready.

"Well, how's my boy this morning?" John B. greeted him.

"Chirp as a chipmunk," says Johnnie, grinning up at him. Then he went on, "I'm going to ride my horse, Whirlwind, today. Gat said he'd be all right for me to try now."

"You want to more than try him, son. You want to ride him."

"I'll ride him all right," says Johnnie, feeling confident.

"That's better," grinned John B., looking down at him. He wondered if he wished he could be that age again, the sight of Johnnie often made him wonder that, and again he came to the same conclusion, that he'd had a mighty full and good share of life and there was plenty more to come. That would be good enough for one man, and besides if he was to be so young again he'd have to change to fit the times that was ahead. He'd been cut out for one period, he'd used that period well and he didn't want to change to fit another period, for he didn't think he could, and he didn't see much of interest for what was ahead, not for another period, and not unless he could find some new range country where he would be the first one there. Then it would be different, but as it was he was very satisfied to be just as he was.

He sometimes only felt sorry for the young fellers, for being brought up into such an old world. But, he figured afterwards, being they don't know of any other they'll be happy too.

John B. squatted on the lawn. "Have you ever thought of what you want to be when you get big, Johnnie?"

Johnnie looked at him, wondering, then grinned. "Just like daddy, I guess," he says. "He said I'd sure have to get in and ride pretty soon."

"I know that, but what would you like to be if you didn't have anything to do and could be anything you wanted to?"

Johnnie thought for quite a while. "Why I don't know," he finally says, "but I think I would like to be an aviator, I would like to fly and

explore."

John B. grinned and thought to himself, he's sure fitted for the times. Then he says, "How would you like to have a nice ranch and a good bunch of cattle and horses of your own when you get bigger?"

Johnnie's eyes lit up. "Gee, that'd be swell," he says, not at all hesitating.

John B. grinned some more. He'll fit anywhere, but mostly here I guess.

"How do you like school?" he asks then.

"Oh, I like school fine. I'm in the fifth grade now and I've been studying some since I come home so I can get to the sixth grade soon after I go back to school this fall."

"What's all the ambition to learn so fast?"

"It's fun and I like it. I like geography and history the most."

Well, that was news to John B. the first Mitchell that ever liked schooling. Maybe Johnnie took after his mother, anyway his mother and Austin was mighty proud of that, and John B. was also proud to know. He sort of wished that Austin and June had liked schooling more, but they'd had enough.

What sort of stumped John B. was that Johnnie seemed to like most everything. He liked to watch the tinkering around automobiles when some was being done. He liked his horses very much, was good to 'em and had the knack of handling 'em, also his rope. He liked to work cattle, he took great interest in that and was good at reading strange brands and guessing the age and weight of a critter. John B. told him he could go to the wagon with him the next time he went, and the boy was as pleased as any boy could be.

But what stumped John B. the most was the boy's craving for education. He couldn't understand his studying his school books when he didn't have to, and specially while on vacation at home on the ranch. I guess he's just a live boy, that's all, is what he finally come to decide.

Mae called from the house and the two went in to breakfast.

John B. spent his morning with Johnnie who tried out his little sorrel and rode him. The two rode to the ranch where the thoroughbred herd run, the ranch that Austin said he'd bought for Johnnie. They rode thru the fine fat straight white faces, all marked and looking as much alike as any one kind of thoroughbreds can. Whirlwind acted like a top and Johnnie had no eyes for cattle that day, only the little sorrel that was under him.

They got back by noon and then they seen that Austin had got in. He'd been to one of the other ranches and come in driving one of the big ranch trucks. His bookkeeper was with him to look over the supply of grub and necessary machinery parts in the commissary and he'd be driving on into town in the afternoon to supply up on all the necessary, for the haying would soon be starting at different ranches and he would need to be prepared. He would have to hire more men too, a hay crew for all the ranches, and the ranch superintendent would be going along. Everything was fine on the range, Austin said, Hatty had sent some of the riders to different line camps and he'd keep about ten on the wagon for the summer. (All hands would be on round-up again when fall come. There'd be the branding of the calves that'd come since the spring round-up and missed during the summer, then the driving of herds to different winter ranges, and the gathering and shipping of fat steers.)

The calf crop would be a little short of normal, Austin thought, maybe on account of the cows being on the late green grass the fall before, then the green grass in the spring, and not a blade of old grass mixed in to ease them to the new grass. But the condition the range was now, after all the spring moisture and more coming, would more than make that up in fat beef long before fall. That spring was more like the ones that had been three or four years before and sort of promised that grass would be stirrup high all over the range by July. There would be plenty of hay in the meadows too, and Austin was going to see that all of that would be put up that could be and build up the reserve stacks that had to be used the last two winters.

It was a very promising year all around, the long drouth was broken and the prices of cattle was good, and, as John B. noticed, everybody he seen seemed happier for the times, like the weather, was getting normal.

Austin had kept with the times and handled the outfit according and

with hardly any loss. John B. was proud of the way he done it, the same as he was proud the way he done everything in meeting up with the change of things to modern ways of raising and shipping cattle and handling the range and ranches.

John B. couldn't of pictured himself doing what Austin had done. He'd of kept with the old styles and the old stock most likely, at least for as long as he could, and he couldn't picture himself riding in a truck, figuring ahead for a hay crew and all such. He'd be with the round-up wagon, most likely, and had just a plain ranch foreman take care of things.

But Austin was sure doing things right. There'd be no falling down of the outfit with him, on the job, and it was necessary things was done the way he done 'em. He smiled, as right after the noon meal, Austin and Dot got in his sedan with his ranch superintendent and bookkeeper and all hit for town. A ranch hand drove the big truck on in.

Johnnie didn't want to go to town, he was going to ride Whirlwind a little again that afternoon. June wasn't going to go riding that afternoon. She said something about how it looked like it might rain, and John B. had to grin to himself. Since when did rain or sleet keep her from riding? But it seemed that she was going to help Mae at something, or maybe Mae was going to help her, anyway there was a lot of material piled up and some cut, then some needles and yarns. It looked like a sewing bee was going to take place.

"Going to make some more riding skirts?" asks John B. dubious.

Mae smiled. "Not this time," was all she said.

He couldn't get no information by looking at Mae, for all she done was smile the same as June. He heard Isabel whistling and humming in the kitchen. Then he went out, grinning and saying to himself, "Too dum peaceful for me around here."

There was more fighting action down by the breaking corrals. Sothern and Gat was each giving two fresh broncs a first saddling, and even old Lou and Hie had stuck around a bit before doing their afternoon's ride. He talked to them a while, listened to the joking remarks between them and Sothern and Gat, pitched in a few himself and then went to saddling one of his tops. It was Cortez.

He hadn't rode Cortez for quite a few days now. That pony was turning out to be about the best of his tops, and for that reason he was saving him, saving him just because it was an old force of habit of his to always save the best, for when there might be ticklish work to be done.

But there wouldn't be no ticklish work for John B. that afternoon. He was just going to mosey around the old home ranch and enjoy everything, and he wanted a good horse to enjoy it on, one that savvied.

He rode out in one of the big hay meadows feeling happy at the stand of grass that was there, always a glad sight to a cowman. John B. hadn't seen no such a stand for quite a few years now, and it seemed quite a few years longer. Then he rode into an irrigated meadow, and by the happy looks on the man who turned the water over it from the ditches he must of been satisfied with the amount of water he had to work with. That meadow was all alfalfa, a couple of hundred acres in that patch of deep green now knee high to Cortez. John B. had got to respect that as feed.

He rode thru meadow after meadow, field after field, seen the ranch hands working here and there, fixing ditches and fences or making new ones. There was no stock in the fields now, all was out on the range and up the mountains for the summer. He rode up one of the long ridges that led up a close mountain range. A good thunder shower met him on the way, he put on his slicker and rode on. He liked them showers, it made everything so fresh and clean, the air so clear and sweet, the birds to singing and the growing things to sparkle and reach for the sun as it comes thru the clouds afterwards.

The shower passed on, and riding high up on the long ridge he passed bunches of grazing fat cattle that run, bucked and bellered and played, all slick and shiny and full of life. He reached heavy timber, and coming to a high rocky ledge he circled around until he got to the top of it. From there, away below him spread the valley leading to the home ranch, the big creek winding down thru the center and flanked by a strip of tall cottonwoods. That big creek and a few other little creeks that run into it here and there irrigated the meadows, watered the stock and in some places down below flooded big scopes of range when it was high, and filled water holes that lasted near thru the summer.

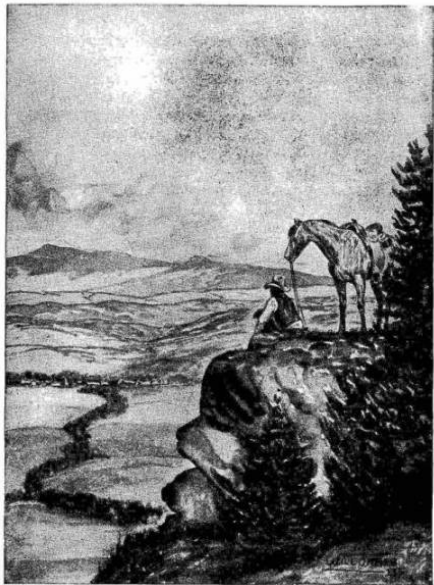
On both sides of the valley and starting from the mountain was low ranges of grass covered hills, patches of scrub cedar here and there, brush and box elders and quakers in the coulees and draws, and a running spring in near every one of 'em.

John B. felt mighty proud as he looked down on his main ranch, his home ranch. He'd seen many ranches and many ranges but he felt there was no better and prettier ranch and range in no land as the one he was now gazing over. It was no wonder he fought to hold and keep it. Now it was his and his family's for keeps, and his heart was happy with the love of it and the love for it for his family to enjoy always.

He could see the comfortable, homey and sheltered setting of the buildings and corrals. He remembered when he first come there with his first herd and there was no buildings. He'd turned that herd loose in the valley he was now looking at the first night. There'd been no guard stood on the cattle that night and for the first time since they'd been started from Texas, and they'd stayed well. They'd stayed in that valley the rest of the summer and wintered there that winter, all coming out fat and wild in the spring, when John B. put the Seven X on every one of 'em. They hadn't strayed far from that country from then on.

Now the valley was all squared off in patches of meadows. John B. had got used to that for the necessity of 'em and the change of cattle from the longhorns he'd trailed up to the stocky white faced herefords he was raising on it.

This was only a small part of his range he was looking at. He could see a mountain forty miles away that was on his range. There was his ranches, some near as big as the home ranch, here and there to that mountain and one on the other side. The ledge he was sitting on was his mountain, and like a king, but in overalls and shaps and squatted on his spurred heels and not afraid of being dethroned, he surveyed his domain with a proud and satisfied smile.



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This was only a small part of his range he was looking at.

He watched the shadow of the thunder cloud that had passed over him play over his valley, over the home ranch, to make it dark and then come to sight clear and bright again. The shadow played over his range, making every hill it passed over stand sharp and dark, and with every outline from the home ranch on there was happy

memories of the days that was. Then the shadow finally disappeared over the far away mountain, and looking down at the old home ranch again he was very happy, very happy for the days that are.

THE END

