

Lewis Alfred Henry

Faro Nell and Her Friends: Wolfville Stories



Alfred Lewis

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I

DEAD SHOT BAKER

"Which you never knows Dead Shot Baker?"

This, from the old cattleman, with a questioning glance my way.

"No? Well, you shore misses knowin' a man! Still, it ain't none so strange neither; even Wolfville's acquaintance with Dead Shot's only what you-all might call casyooal, him not personally lastin' more'n three months.

"This yere Dead Shot has a wife. Thar's women you don't want to see until you're tired, an' women you don't want to see until you're rested, an' women you don't want to see no how—don't want to see at all. This wife of Dead Shot's belongs with the latter bunch.

"Last evenin' I'm readin' whar one of them philosophic sports asserts that women, that a-way, is shore the sublimation of the oncertain. That's how he lays it down; an' he never hedges the bluff for so much as a single chip. He insists that you can't put a bet on women; that you can bet on hosses or kyards or 'lections, but not on women—women bein' too plumb oncertain. As I reads along, I can't he'p feelin' that somehow this philosophic party must have knowed Dead Shot's wife.

"The first time we-all ever sees Dead Shot, he comes trackin' into the Red Light one evenin' jest after the stage rolls up. Bein' it's encroachin' on second drink time, he sidles up to the bar; an' then, his manner some diffident an' apol'getic, he says:

"Gents, do you-all feel like a little lickin', that a-way?"

"It bein' imp'lite to reefuse, we assembles within strikin' distance of the bottles Black Jack is slammin' the len'th of the counter, an' begins spillin' out our forty drops. At this he turns even more apol'getic.

"Which I trusts,' he says, 'that no one'll mind much if I takes water?"

"Of course no one minds. Wolfville don't make no speshulty of forcin' whiskey onto no gent who's disinclined. If they prefers water, we encourages 'em.

"An' for this yere reason,' expounds Boggs, once when he undertakes to explain the public attitooode towards water to some inquirin' tenderfoot—'an' for this partic'lar reason: Arizona is a dry an' arid clime; an' water drinkers bein' a cur'ous rarity, we admires to keep a spec'men or two buck-jumpin' about, so's to study their habits.'

"As we picks up our glasses, Dead Shot sets to introdoocin' himse'f.

"My name, gents,' he says, 'is Baker, Abner Baker. The Wells-Fargo folks sends me down yere from Santa Fe to ride shotgun for 'em.'

"The name's plenty s'fficient. It's him who goes to a showdown with them three road agents who lays for the stage over in a spur of the Black Range back of San Marcial, an' hives the three. That battle saves the company \$200,000; an', they're that pleased with Dead Shot's industry, they skins the company's bankroll for a bundle of money the size of a roll of blankets, an' gives it to him by way of reward. It's the talk of the two territories.

"While we-all knows Dead Shot when he speaks his name, none of us lets on. It's ag'inst ettiquette in the southwest to know more of a gent than what he tells himse'f.

"So water's all you samples?' puts in Texas Thompson, as we stands an' drinks.

"It's like this,' explains Dead Shot, appealin' round with his eye. 'You see I can't drink nosepaint none, an' drink successful.'

"'Shore,' observes Faro Nell, who's takin' her diminyootive toddy right at Dead Shot's elbow; 'thar's gents so organized that to go givin' 'em lickin' is like tryin' to play a harp with a hammer.'

"That's me,' exclaims Dead Shot; 'that's me, Miss, every time. Give me a spoonful, an' I deemands a bar'l. After which, thar ain't no se'f respectin' camp that'll stand for my game.'

"'I savvys what you means,' says Tutt; 'I reecalls in my own case how, on the hocks of mebbby it's the ninth drink—which this is years an' years ago, though—I mistakes a dem'crat primary for a Methodist praise meetin', an' comes ramblin' in an' offers to lead in pra'r. Which I carries the scars to this day.'

"'Which is why, Dave,' interjecks Cherokee Hall, in hopes of settin' Tutt to pitchin' on his p'litical rope, him bein' by nacher a oncompromisin' reepublican that a-way—which is why you always holds dem'crats so low.'

"'But I don't hold 'em low,' protests Tutt. 'Thar's heaps to be said for dem'crats, leastwise for the sort that's pesterin' 'round in the country I hails from.'

"'What be your dem'crats like, Dave?' Texas urges. 'Which I wants to see if they're same as the kind I cuts the trail of down about Laredo.'

"'Well,' returns Tutt, 'simply hittin' the high places, them dem'crats by which I'm born surrounded chews tobacco, sw'ars profoosely, drinks mighty exhaustive, hates niggers, an' some of 'em can read.'

"'That deescription goes for Laredo, too,' Texas allows. 'This yere jedge, who gives my wife her divorce that time, an' sets the sheriff to sellin' up my steers for costs an' al'mony, is a dem'crat. What you says, Dave, is the merest picture of that joorist.'

"'I expects my wife'll come rackin' along *poco tiempo*,' Dead Shot remarks, after a pause. 'I'm yere as advance gyard to sling things into shape.'

"'It's as good as a toone of music to see how softly his face lights up. He's as big an' wide an' thick an' strong as Boggs, an' yet it's plain as paint that this yere wife of his, whoever she is, can jest nacherally make curl-papers of him.'

"That mention of a wife as usual sets Texas to growlin'.

"'Thar you be, Dan!' I overhears him whisper, same as if he's been ill-treated; 'the instant this Dead-Shot says "Water" I'm onto it that he's a married man. Water an' matrimony goes hand in hand.'

"'Now I don't see why none?' retorts Boggs.

"'Because water's weakenin'. Feed a sport on water, an' it's a cinch he falls a prey to the first female who ropes at him.'

"'Thar's Dave,' Boggs argyoos, noddin' towards Tutt. 'Ain't he drinkin' that time he weds Tucson Jennie?'

"'Dave's the exception. Also, you-all remembers them circumstances, Dan. Dave don't marry Jennie; Jennie simply ups an' has him.'

"'All the same,' contends Boggs, 'I don't regyard Dead Shot's sobriety as no drawback. Thar's lots of folks who's cap'ble of bein' sober an' sociable at one an' the same time.'

"These yere low-voiced wranglin's between Texas an' Boggs is off to one side. Meanwhile, the gen'ral confab proceeds.

"'You ain't been long hooked up?' says Doc Peets, addressin' Dead Shot.

"'About a year. She's in the stage that time I has the trouble with them hold-ups in the Black Range, an' she allows she likes my style.'

"'We-all hears about that Black Range battle,' remarks Enright.

"'It's a mighty lucky play for me,' says Dead Shot; 'I don't ree'lize it while I'm workin' my winchester, but I'm winnin' a angel all the time. That's on the level, gents! I never puts my arm 'round her yet, but what I go feelin' for wings.'

"'Don't this make you sick?' Texas growls to Boggs.

"'No, it don't,' Boggs replies. 'On the contrary, I'm teched.'

"'Gents,' goes on Dead Shot, an' I sees his mustache tremble that a-way; 'I don't mind confessin' she's that angelic I'm half afraid to marry her. I ain't fine enough! It's like weddin' gunny-sack to silk—me makin' her my wife. Which I shore has to think an' argyoo with myse'f a whole lot, before I gets the courage. Ain't you-all ever noticed'—yere he appeals 'round to Peets—'that every time you meets up with a angel, thar's always some smoke-begrimed an' sin-encrusted son of Satan workin' double-turn to support her?'

"Peets nods.

"'Shore! Well, it's sech reflections which final gives me the reequred sand. An' so, one evenin' up in Albuquerque, we prances over before a padre an' we're married. You bet, it's like a vision.'

"'Any papooses?' asks Tutt, plumb pompous.

"'None as yet,' confesses Dead Shot, lookin' abashed.

"'Which I've nacherally got one,' an' yere Tutt swells. 'You can put your case *peso* on it he's the real thing, too.'

"'Little Enright Peets is certainly a fine child,' remarks Nell. 'Dave, you're shore licensed to be proud of him.'

"'That's whatever,' adds Boggs. 'Little Enright Peets is nothin' short of bein' the No'th Star of all hoomanity!'

"'Mebby a week passes, an' one mornin' Dead Shot goes squanderin' over to Tucson to bring his wife. An' nacherally we're on what they calls in St. Looey the 'quee vee' to see her. At that, we-all don't crowd 'round permiscus when the stage arrives, an' we avoids everything which borders on mob voylence.

"'Dead Shot hits the street, lookin' that happy it's like he's in a dream, an' then goes feelin' about, soft an' solic'tous, inside. At last he lifts her out, an' stands thar holdin' her in his arms. She's shore beautiful; only she ain't no bigger 'n a ten year old youngone. Yellow-ha' red an' bloo-eyed, she makes you think of these yere china ornaments that's regyarded artistic by the Dutch.

"'They're certainly a contrast—him big as a house, her as small an' pretty as a doll! An' you should see that enamored Dead Shot look at her!—long an' deep, like a man drinkin'! Son, sometimes I fears women, that a-way, misses all knowledge of how much they're loved.

"'She ain't sick,' says Dead Shot, speakin' gen'ral; 'only she twists her off ankle gettin' out at the last station.'

"'Dead Shot heads for the little 'dobe he's fitted up, packin' his bloo-eyed doll in his arms. What's our impressions? No gent who signs the books as sech'll say anything ag'in a lady; but between us, thar's a sooperior wrinkl'n of the little tipped-up nose, an' a cold feel to them bloo eyes, which don't leave us plumb enthoosiastic.

"'It's like this,' volunteers Enright, who stacks in to explain things. 'Every gent's got his ideal; an' this yere wife of his is Dead Shot's ideal.'

"'Whatever's an ideal, Doc?' asks Boggs, who's always romancin' about for information.

"'Which an ideal, Dan,' Peets replies, 'is the partic'lar gold brick you're tryin' to buy.'

"'At the time Dead Shot's standin' thar with his fam'ly in his arms, Nell comes out on the Red Light steps to take a peek. Also, Missis Rucker an' Tucson Jennie is hoverin' about all sim'lar. After Dead Shot an' his bride has faded into their 'dobe, them three experts holds a energetic consultation in the street. Of course, none of us has the hardihood to go j'inin' in their deelib'rations, but from what's said later we gets a slant at their conclloosions.

"'Dead Shot's a mighty sight too good for her,' is how Missis Rucker gives judgment. 'It's peltin' pigs with pearls for him to go lovin' her like he does.'

"'Shore; bein' ladies that-a-way, Missis Rucker, Tucson Jennie an' Faro Nell all visits Dead Shot's wife. But the feelin' is that they finds her some stuck up an' haughty. This yere notion is upheld by Nell callin' her a 'minx,' while Tucson Jennie alloodes to her as a 'cat' on two sep'rate occasions.

"Dead Shot an' his doll-bride, in the beginnin', seems to be gettin' along all right. It's only when thar's money goin' over, that Dead Shot has to buckle on his guns an' ride out with the stage. This gives him lots of time to hang 'round, an' worship her. Which I'm yere to reemark that if ever a white man sets up an idol, that a-way, an' says his pra's to it, that gent's Dead Shot. Thar's nothin' to it; prick her finger, an' you pierce his heart.

"It'd be beautiful if it wasn't awful,' says Faro Nell.

"It ain't a month when events lifts up their p'isin heads, which goes to jestify them comments of Nell's. Thar's been a White House shift back in Washington, an' a new postmaster's sent out. He's a dapper party, with what Peets calls a 'Van Dyke' beard, an' smells like a ha'r-dresser's shop.

"Now if affairs stops thar, we could have stood it; but they don't. I abhors to say so, but it ain't two weeks before Dead Shot's wife's makin' onmistak'ble eyes at that postmaster. Them times when Dead Shot's dooties has took him to the other end of the trail, she's over to the post office constant. None of us says anything, not even to ourselves; but when it gets to whar she shoves you away from the letter place, an' begins talkin' milk and honey to him right under your nose, onless you're as blind as steeple bats, an' as deaf as the adder of scriptoore which stoppeth her y'ear, you're shore bound to do some thinkin'.

"Which if ever a gov'ment offishul,' exclaims Texas, as he comes t'arin' into the Red Light one evenin', deemandin' drinks—which if ever a gov'ment offishul goes organizin' his own foonerat that a-way, it's this yere deeboshed postmaster next door!"

"Thar's nothin' said, but we-all knows what's on Texas's mind. That wife of Dead Shot's, for the fo'th time that day, has gone askin' for letters.

"She writes 'em to herse'f,' is the way Missis Rucker lays it down. 'Also, it's doo to the crim'nal besottedness of that egreegious Dead Shot. The man's shorely love-blind!"

"You ain't goin' to t'ar into him for that, be you?' Nell asks, her tones reproachful. 'Him lovin' her like he does shore makes a hit with me. A limit goes in farobank; but my notion is to take the bridle off when the game's love.'

"But all the same he needn't get that lovin' it addles him,' says Missis Rucker. 'In a way, it's Dead Shot's sole fault, her actin' like she does. Instead of keepin' them Mexicans to do her work, Dead Shot ought to make her go surgin' round, an' care for her house herse'f. Thar ain't nobody needs steady employment more'n a woman. You-all savvys where it says that Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do? Which you bet that bluff means women—an' postmasters—every time.'

"Missis Rucker continues along sim'lar lines, mighty inflexible, for quite a spell. She concloodes by sayin':

"You keep a woman walsin' round a cook-stove, or wrastlin' a washtub, or jugglin' pots an' skilletts, same as them sleight-of-hand folks at the Bird Cage Op'ry House, an' she won't be so free to primp an' preen an' look at herse'f in the glass, an' go gaddin' after letters which she herse'f's done writ.'

"We-all can't he'p hearin' this yere, seen' we're settin' round the O. K. dinin' table feedin' at the time; but we stubbornly refooses to be drawn into any views, Enright settin' us the example. That sagacious old warchief merely reaches for the salt-hoss, an' never yeeps; wharupon we maintains ourselves stoodiously yeepless likewise.

"Things goes on swingin' an' rattlin', an' the open-air flirtations which Dead Shot's wife keeps up with that outcast of a postmaster's enough to give you a chill. We sets thar, powerless, expectin' a killin' every minute. An' all the time, like his eyes has took a layoff, Dead Shot wanders to an' fro, boastin' an' braggin' in the mushiest way about his wife. Moreover—an' this trenches on eediotcy—he goes out of his path to make a pard of the postmaster, an' has that deebauchee over to his shack evenin's.

"Dead Shot even begins publicly singin' the praises of this office holder.

"'Which it's this a-way,' he says; 'what with him bein' book-read an' a sport who's seen foreign lands, he's company for my wife. She herse'f's eddicated to a feather-edge; an', nacherally, that's what gives 'em so much in common.'

"Thar's all the same a note in Dead Shot's voice that's like the echo of a groan. It looks, too, as though it sets fire to Texas, who jumps up as if he's stung by a trant'ler.

"'Come,' he says, grabbin' Boggs by the shoulder.

"Texas has Boggs drug half-way to the door, before Enright can head 'em off.

"'Whar to?' demands Enright; an' then adds, 'don't you-all boys go nigh that post office.'

"'All right,' says Texas final, but gulpin' a little; 'since it's you who says so, Sam, we won't. Me an' Dan yere'll merely take a little *passear* as far as the graveyard, by way of reecoverin' our sperits an' to get the air. I'll shore blow up if obleeged to listen to that Dead Shot any longer.'

"'I sees it in his eye,' Enright explains in a low tone to Peets, as he resoomes his cha'r; 'Texas is simply goin' to bend his gun over that letter man's head.'

"'How often has I told you, Dan,' asks Texas, after they gets headed for Boot Hill, an' Texas has regained his aplomb, 'that women is a brace game?'

"'Not all women,' Boggs objects; 'thar's Nell.'

"'Shore; Nell!' Texas consents. 'Sech as her has all of the honor an' honesty of a Colt's-45. A gent can rely on the Nellie brand, same as he can on his guns. But Nellie's one in one thousand. Them other nine hundred an' ninety-nine'll deal you the odd-kyard, Dan, every time.'

"When Texas an' Boggs arrives at Boot Hill, Texas goes seelectin' about, same as if he's searchin' out a site for a grave. At last he finds a place whar thar's nothin' but mesquite, soapweed an' rocks, it's that ornery:

"'Yere's whar we plants him,' says Texas; 'off yere, by himse'f, like as if he's so much carrion.'

"'Who you talkin' about?' asks Boggs, some amazed.

"'Who?' repeats Texas; 'whoever but that postmaster? Dead Shot's got to get him soon or late. An' followin' the obsequies, thar ain't goin' to be no night gyards neither. Which if them coyotes wants to dig him up, they're welcome. It's their lookout, not mine; an' I ain't got no love for coyotes no how.'

"'Thar ain't no coyote in Cochise County who's sunk that low he'll eat him,' says Boggs.

"Like every other outfit, Wolfville sees its hours of sunshine an' its hours of gloom, its lights an' its shadders. But I'm yere to state that it never suffers through no more nerve-rackin' eepock than that which it puts in about Dead Shot an' his wife. She don't bother us so much as him. It's Dead Shot himse'f, praisin' up the postmaster an' paintin' the sun-kissed virchoose of his wife, which keeps the sweat a-pourin' down the commoonal face. An' all that's left us is to stand pat, an' wait for the finish!

"One day the Wells-Fargo people sends Dead Shot to Santa Fe to take a money box over to Taos. Two days later, Dead Shot's wife finds she's got to go visit Tucson. Likewise, the postmaster allows he's been ordered to Wilcox, to straighten out some deepartmental kinks. Which we certainly sets thar an' looks at each other!—the play's that rank.

"The postmaster an' Dead Shot's wife goes rumblin' out on the same stage. Monte starts to tell us what happens when he returns, but the old profligate don't get far.

"'Gents,' he says, 'that last trip, when Dead Shot's—'

"'Shet up,' roars Enright, an' Monte shore shets up.

"It comes plenty close to killin' the mis'rabile old dipsomaniac at that. He swells an' he swells, with that pent-up information inside of him, ontill he looks like a dissipated toad. But sech is his awe of Enright, he never dar's opens his clamshell.

"It's a week before Dead Shot's wife gets back, an' the postmaster don't show up till four days more. Then Dead Shot himse'f comes trackin' in.

"Faro Nell, who's eyes is plumb keen that a-way, lets on to Cherokee private that Dead Shot looks sorrow-ridden. But I don't know! Dead Shot's nacherally grave, havin' no humor. A gent who

constant goes messin' round with road agents, shootin' an' bein' shot at, ain't apt to effervesce. Nell sticks to it, jest the same, that he's onder a cloud.

"Dead Shot continyoos to play his old system, an' cavorts 'round plumb friendly with the postmaster, an' goes teeterin' yere an' thar tellin' what a boon from heaven on high his wife is, same as former.

"Faro Nell shakes her head when Cherokee mentions this last:

"That's his throw-off,' she says.

"One evenin' Dead Shot comes trailin' into the Red Light, an' strolls over to whar Cherokee's dealin' bank.

"What's the limit?' he asks.

"At this, we-all looks up a whole lot. It's the first time ever Dead Shot talks of puttin' down a bet.

"Cherokee's face is like a mask, the face of the thorough-paced kyard sharp. He shows no more astonishment than if Dead Shot's been settin' in ag'inst his game every evenin' for a month.

"One hundred an' two hundred,' says Cherokee.

"*Bueno!*' an' Dead Shot lays down two one-hundred dollar bills between the king and queen.

"Thar's two turns. The third the kyards falls 'ten-king,' an' Nell, from her place on the lookout's stool, shoves over two hundred dollars in bloo checks. Thar they are, with the two one-hundred dollar bills, between the king an' queen.

"Does it go as it lays?' asks Dead Shot, it bein' double the limit.

"It goes,' says Cherokee, never movin' a muscle.

"One turn, an' the kyards falls 'trey-queen.' Nell shoves four hundred across to match up with Dead Shot's four hundred.

"An' now?' Dead Shot asks.

"I'll turn for it,' Cherokee responds.

"It's yere that Dead Shot's luck goes back on him. The turn comes 'queen-jack,' an' Nell rakes down the eight hundred.

"Dead Shot's hand goes to the butt of his gun.

"I've been robbed,' he growls; 'thar's fifty-three kyards in that deck.'

"Cherokee's on his feet, his eyes like two steel p'int, gun half drawn. But Nell's as quick. Her hand's on Cherokee's, an' she keeps his gun whar it belongs.

"Steady!' she says; 'can't you see he's only coaxin' you to bump him off?' Then, with her face full on Dead Shot, she continyoos: 'It won't do, Dead Shot; it won't do none! You-all can't get it handed to you yere! You're in the wrong shop; you-all ought to try next door!' An' Nell p'int with her little thumb through the wall to the post office.

"Dead Shot stands thar the color of seegyar ashes, while Cherokee settles ca'mly back in his cha'r. Cherokee's face is as bar' of expression as a blank piece of paper, as he runs his eye along the lay-out, makin' ready for the next turn. Thar's mebbly a dozen of us playin', but not a word is spoke. Everyone is onto Dead Shot's little game, the moment Nell begins to talk.

"Matters seems to hang on centers, ontill Nell stretches across an' lays her baby hand on Dead Shot's:

"Thar ain't a soul in sight,' she says, mighty soft an' good, 'but what's your friend, Dead Shot.'

"Dead Shot, pale as a candle, wheels toward the door.

"Pore Dead Shot!' murmurs Nell, the tears in her eyes, to that extent she has to ask Boggs to take her place as lookout.

"Four hours goes by, an' thar's the poundin' of a pony's hoofs, an' the creak of saddle-leathers, out in front. It's the Red Dog chief, who's come lookin' for Enright.

"They confabs a minute or two at a table to the r'ar, an' then Enright calls Peets over.

"Dead Shot's gone an' got himse'f downed,' he says.

"'It's on the squar' gents,' explains the Red Dog chief; 'Dead Shot'll say so himself. He jest nacherally comes huntin' it.'

"It looks like Dead Shot, after that failure with Cherokee in the Red Light, p'int's across for Red Dog. He searches out a party who's called the Lightnin' Bug, on account of the spontaneous character of his six-shooter. Dead Shot finds the Lightnin' Bug talkin' with two fellow gents. He listens awhile, an' then takes charge of the conversation.

"'Bug,' he says, raisin' his voice like it's a challenge—'Bug, only I'm afraid folks'll string you up a whole lot, I'd say it's you who stood up the stage last week in Apache Canyon. Also'—an' yere Dead Shot takes to gropin' about in his jeans, same as if he's feelin' for a knife—'it's mighty customary with me, on occasions sech as this, to cut off the y'ears of—'

"Dead Shot stops short, by reason of a bullet from the Bug's pistol which lodges in his lungs.

"When Peets an' Enright finds him, he's spread out on the Red Dog chief's blankets, coughin' blood, with the sorrow-stricken Bug proppin' him up one moment to drink water, an' sheddin' tears over him the next, alternate.

"The Red Dog chief leads out the weepin' Bug, who's lamentin' mighty grievous, an' leaves Enright an' Peets with Dead Shot.

"'It's all right, gents,' whispers Dead Shot; 'I comes lookin' for it, an' I gets it. Likewise, she ain't to blame; it's me. I oughtn't to have married her that time—she only a girl, an' me a full-growed man who should 'av had sense for both.'

"'That's no lie,' says Peets, an' Dead Shot gives him a grateful look.

"'No,' he goes on, 'she's too fine, too high—I wasn't her breed. An' I ought to have seen it.' Yere he has a tussle to hang on.

"Peets pours him out some whiskey.

"'It's lickin', ain't it?' Dead Shot gasps, sniffin' the glass. 'I'm for water, Doc, lickin' makin' me that ornery.'

"'Down with it,' urges Peets. 'Which, if I'm a jedge, you'll pack in long before you're due to start anything extra serious, even if you drinkt a gallon.'

"'Shore!' agrees Dead Shot, as though the idee brings him relief. 'For a moment it slips my mind about me bein' plugged. But as I'm sayin', gents, don't blame her. An' don't blame him. I has my chance, an' has it all framed up, too, when I crosses up with 'em recent over in Tucson, to kill 'em both. But I can't do it, gents. The six-shooter at sech a time's played out. That's straight; it don't fill the bill; it ain't adequate, that a-way. So all I can do is feel sorry for 'em, an' never let 'em know I knows. For, after all, it ain't their fault, it's mine. You sports see that, don't you? She's never meant for me, bein' too fine; an', me a man, I ought to have knowed.'

"Dead Shot ceases talkin', an' Enright glances at Peets. Peets shakes his head plenty sorrowful.

"'Go on,' he says to Dead Shot; 'you-all wants us to do—what?'

"'Thar you be!' an' at the sound of Peets' voice Dead Shot's mind comes creepin' back to camp. 'She'll be happy with him—they havin' so much in common—an' him an' her bein' eddicated that a-way—an' him havin' traveled a whole lot! An' this yere's what I wants, gents. I wants you-all, as a kindness to me an' in a friendly way—seein' I can't stay none to look-out the play myse'f—to promise to sort o' supervise round an' put them nuptials over right. I takes time by the forelock an' sends to Tucson for a sky-pilot back two days ago. Bar accidents, he'll be in camp by to-morry. He can work in at the funeral, too, an' make it a whipsaw.'

"Dead Shot turns his eyes on Enright. It's always so about our old chief; every party who's in trouble heads for him like a coyote for a camp fire.

"'You'll shore see that he marries her?—Promise!'

"Thar's a quaver in Dead Shot's voice, Peets tells me, that's like a pra'r.

"'Thar's my hand, Dead Shot,' says Enright, who's chokin' a little. 'So far as the letter man's concerned, it'll be the altar or the windmill, Jack Moore an' a lariat or that preacher party you refers to.'

"Dead Shot's gettin' mighty weak. After Enright promises he leans back like he's takin' a rest. He's so still they're beginnin' to figger he's done cashed in; but all at once he starts up like he's overlooked some bet, an' has turned back from eternity to tend to it.

"'About Cherokee an' his box,' he whispers; 'that's a lyin' bluff I makes. Tell him I don't mean nothin'; I'm only out to draw his fire.'

"After this Dead Shot only rouses once. His voice ain't more'n a sigh.

"'I forgets to tell you,' he says, 'to give her my love. An' you say, too, that I'm bumped off like snuffin' out a candle—too plumb quick for her to get yere. An' don't blame her, gents; it's not her fault, it's mine.'

"It's the week after the fooneal. The postmaster's still in town, partly by nacheral preference, partly because Enright notifies Jack Moore to ride herd on him, an' fill him as full of lead as a bag of bullets in event he undertakes to go stampedin' off.

"In the Red Light the seventh evenin' Enright rounds up Peets.

"'Doc,' he says, 'a month would be more respect'ble, but this yere's beginnin' to tell on me.'

"'Besides,' Peets chips in, by way of he'pin' Enright out, 'that preacher sharp corraled over to Missis Rucker's is gettin' restless. Unless we side-lines or puts hobbles on that divine we-all can't expect to go holdin' him much longer.'

"Enright leads the way to the r'ar wareroom of the Noo York store, which bein' whar the stranglers holds their meetin's is Wolfville's hall of jestic. After licker is brought Enright sends Jack Moore for the postmaster, who comes in lookin' plenty white. Missis Rucker brings over the divine; an' next Dead Shot's widow—she's plumb lovely in black—appears on the arm of Peets, who goes in person.

"Thar's a question in the widow's eye, like she don't onderstand.

"'Roll your game,' says Enright to the preacher sharp.

"It's yere an' now Dead Shot's widow fully b'ars out that philos'pher who announces so plumb cold, that a-way, that women's the sublimation of the onexpected. Jack Moore's jest beginnin' to manooover that recreant public servant into p'sition on the widow's left hand, so's he can be married to the best advantage, an' the preacher sharp's gettin' out an' openin' his book of rooles, when the widow draws back.

"P'intin' at the bridegroom postmaster, same as if he's a stingin' lizard, she addresses Enright.

"'Whatever's the meanin' of this?'

"'Merely the croode preelim'naries, Ma'am,' Enright explains, 'to what we-all trusts will prove a fa'rly deesir'ble weddin'.'

"'Me marry him?' an' the onmitigated scorn that relict exhibits, to say nothin' of her tone of voice, shore makes the postmaster bridegroom feel chagrined.

"'You'll pardon us, Ma'am,' returns Enright, soft an' depreecatory, tryin' to get her feelin's bedded down, 'which you'll shore pardon us if in our dullness we misreads your sentiments. You see, the notion gets somehow proned into us that you wants this party. Which if we makes a mistake, by way of repa'rin' that error, let me say that if thar's any one else in sight whom you preefers, an' who's s'fficiently single an' yoothful to render him el'gible for wedlock,'—yere Enright takes in Boggs an' Texas with his gaze, wharat Texas grows as green-eyed as a cornered bobcat—'he's yours, Ma'am, on your p'intin' him out.'

"'Which I don't want to marry no one,' cries the widow, commencin' to sob. 'An' as for marryin' him speshul'—yere she glances at the bridegroom postmaster in sech a hot an' drastic way he's left shrivellin' in his own shame—'I'd sooner live an' die the widow of Dead Shot Abner Baker than be the wife of a cornfield full of sech.'

"Everybody stares, an' Enright takes a modicum of Old Jordan.

"'You don't deeserve this none,' he says at last, turnin' to the postmaster bridegroom. 'Onder the circumstances, however, thar's nothin' left for me to do as cha'rman but deeclar' this yere weddin' a misdeal.'

"Texas is plumb disgusted.

"'Don't some folks have nigger luck, Dan?' he says.

"'Later, after thinkin' things up an' down in his mind, Texas takes ombrage at Enright's invitin' Dead Shot's widow to look him an' Boggs over that a-way, an' take her pick.

"'Which sech plays don't stand ace-high with me, Sam,' Texas says—'you tryin' to auction me off like you does. Even a stranger, with a half-way hooman heart, after hearin' my story would say that I already suffers enough. An' yet you, who calls yourse'f my friend, does all that lays in your callous power to thrust me back into torment.'

"'Texas,' replies Enright, like he's bore about all he can, 'you shorely worries me with your conceit. If you-all won't take my word, then go take a good hard look at yourse'f in the glass. Thar's never the slightest risk, as everybody but you yourse'f sees plainly, of that lady or any other lady takin' you.'

"'You thinks not?' asks Texas, plenty incensed.

"'Which I *knows* not. No lady's lot ain't quite that desp'rate.'

"'Well,' returns Texas, after a pause, his face expressin' his soreness, 'I'm yere to say, Sam, I don't agree with you, none whatever. You forgets that I've already been took in wedlock bonds by one lady. An' while that Laredo wife of mine is hard an' crooel, all Texas knows she's plumb partic'lar. Also, no one ever yet comes pirootin' up the trail who doubts her taste.'

"'It's the evenin' before the preacher sharp goes back to Tucson, when Enright edges him off into a corner of the O. K. dinin' room.

"'Parson,' says Enright, lookin' like he's a heap bothered about somethin'—'parson, in addition to your little game as a preacher that a-way, you don't happen to be up none on table-tippin' or sperit rappin', same as them mediums, do you?'

"'Which I shore don't,' replies the preacher sharp, archin' his neck, indignant. 'Likewise, I regyards them cer'monials you alloodes to as satantic in their or'gin.'

"'Doubtless, parson,' returns Enright, some disapp'inted, 'doubtless. Still, if you-all but counts the rings on my horns, as givin' some impression of the years I've lived an' what troubles I've probably gone through, you'll onderstand that I ain't takin' Satan no more serious than a empty six-shooter. But the mere trooth is, parson, I'm pestered by them promises I makes deeceased. Which I'd give a yellow stack to get put next to Dead Shot's sperit long enough to explain concernin' them nuptials, an' make cl'ar jest how me an' the Doc falls down.'"

II

OLD MAN ENRIGHT'S UNCLE

"Which you'll excoose me," and the old cattleman replaced his glass upon the table with a decisive click, "if I fails to j'ine you in them sent'ments. For myse'f, I approves onreserved of both lies an' liars. Also, that reemark goes double when it comes to public liars tellin' public lies. Which, however se'fish it may sound, I prefers this gov'ment to last my time; an' it's my idee that if them statesmen back at Washington ever takes a hour off from their tax-eatin' an' tells the people the trooth, the whole trooth an' nothin' but the trooth of their affairs, said people'll be down on the sityooation instanter, like a weasel on a nest of field mice, an' wipe the face of nacher free an' cl'ar of these United States."

The above was drawn forth by my condemnatory comments on the published speech of a Senator, wherein the truth was as a grain of wheat in a bushel of mendacious chaff.

"Shore," continued the old gentleman, with the manner of one who delivers final judgment, "lies is not only to be applauded, but fostered. They're the angle-irons an' corner-braces that keeps plumb the social fabric, wantin' which the whole frame-work of soci'ty would go leanin' sideways, same as that Eyetalian tower you shows me the picture of the other day. Why, if everybody in the world was to go tellin' the trooth for the next hour ninety-nine folks in every hundred would be obleeged to put in the rest of their lives hidin' out.

"Do I myse'f ever lie?

"Frequent an' plumb cheerful. I bases life on the rooles laid down by that sharp who advises folks to do unto others as others does unto them, an' beat 'em to it. Believin', tharfore, in handin' a gent his own system, I makes it my onbreakable practice to allers lie to liars. Then, ag'in, whenever some impert'nent prairie dog takes to rummagin' 'round with queries to find out my deesigns, I onflaggingly fills him to the brim with all forms of misleadin' mendac'ty, an' casts every fictional obstruction in his path that's calc'lated to get between his heels an' trip him up. I shore do admire to stand all sech inquiren' mavericks on their heads, an' partic'ler if they're plottin' ag'in me.

"An' why not? A party that a-way, as I some time ago instructs you, ain't got no more right to search my head than to search my warbags, an' a gent who may lock a door may lie. Which, if you'll go off by yourse'f an' think this yere over, you'll see that it's so, an' so with a double cinch.

"Thar's statements, too, which, speakin' technical, might be regyarded as lyin' which don't in jestice class onder no sech head. For spec'men, when Dick Wooten, upon me askin' him how long he's been inhabitin' the Raton Pass, p'int to the Spanish Peaks an' says, 'You see them em'nences? Well, when I pitches camp in this yere gully them mountings was two holes in the ground,' I don't feel like he's lyin'. I merely remembers that he steals the bluff from old Jim Bridger, grins an' lets it go at that.

"Likewise, I'm sim'larly onaffected towards that amiable multitoode who simply lies to entertain. These yere latter sports in their preevar'cations is public ben'factors. You-all can spread yourse'f out in the ca'm shadow of their yarns, same as if it's the shade of a tree, an' find tharin reefreshment an' reepose.

"While the most onimag'native of us, from Peets to Cherokee, ain't none puny as conversationists, the biggest liar, ondoubted, who ever comes romancin' into Wolfville is Enright's uncle, who visits him that time. Back in Tennessee a passel of scientists makes what this yere relative of Enright's deescribes as a 'Theological Survey' of some waste land he has on Gingham Mountain, an' finds coal. An' after that he's rich. Thus, in his old age, but chipper as a coopful of catbirds, he comes rackin' into town, allowin' he'll take a last look at his nephry, Sam, before he cashes in.

"His name is Stallins, bein' he's kin to Enright on his mother's side, an' since thar's nine ahead of him—Enright's mother bein' among the first—an' he don't come along as a infant ontill the heel of the domestic hunt that a-way, he's only got it on Enright by ten years in the matter of age.

"No, I shore shouldn't hes'tate none to mention him as a top-sawyer among liars, the same bein' his constant boast an' brag. He accepts the term as embodyin' a compliment, an' the quick way to get his bristles up is to su'gest that his genius for mendac'ty is beginnin' to bog down.

"For all that, Enright imparts to me, private, that the old gent as a liar ain't a marker to his former se'f.

"'You've heard tell,' Enright says, 'of neighborhood liars, an' township liars, an' county liars; an' mebbly even of liars whose fame as sech might fill the frontiers of a state. Take my uncle, say forty years ago, an' give him the right allowance of baldface whiskey, an' the coast-to-coast expansiveness of them fictions he tosses off shore entitles him to the name of champion of the nation. Compar'd to him, Ananias is but a ambitious amatoor.'

"It's the second evenin' old Stallins is with us, an' Enright takes him over to Hamilton's Dance Hall, whar Boggs an' Texas—by partic'lar reequet—uplifts his aged sperits with that y'ear-splittin' an' toomultuous minyooet, the 'Love Dance of the Catamounts.' Which the exh'bition sets his mem'ry to millin', an' when we gets back to the Red Light he breaks out remin'scent.

"'Sammy,' he says to Enright, 'you was old enough to rec'llect when I has that location over on the upper Hawgthief? Gents,' he goes on, turnin' to us, 'it's a six-forty, an'—side hill, swamp an' bottom—as good a section as any to be crossed up with between the Painted Post an' the 'Possum Trot. It's that "Love Dance of the Catamounts" which brings it to my mind, since it's then an' thar, by virchoo of a catamount, I wins my Sarah Ann.

"'She's shore the star-eyed Venus of the Cumberland, is my Sarah Ann. Her ha'r, black as paint, is as thick as a pony's mane; her lips is the color of pokeberry juice; her cheeks—round an' soft—is as cl'ar an' bright an' glowin' as a sunset in Jooly; her teeth is as milk-white as the inside of a persimmon seed. She's five-foot-eleven without her mocassins, stands as up an' down as a pine tree, got a arm on her like the tiller of a scow, an' can heft a full-sized side of beef an' hang it on the hook. That's fifty years ago. She's back home on the Hawgthief waitin' for me now, my Sarah Ann is. You'd say she's as gray as a 'possum, an' as wrinkled as a burnt boot. Mebbly so; but not to me, you bet. She's allers an' ever to me the same endoorin' hooman sunburst I co'tes an' marries that long time ago.'

"Old Stallins pauses to reefresh himse'f, an' Texas, who's been fidgetin' an' frettin' since the first mention of Sarah Ann, goes whisperin' to Boggs.

"'Can't some of you-all,' he says, plenty peevish, 'head this yere mushy old tarrapin off? This outfit knows what I suffers with that Laredo wife of mine. An' yet it looks like I'm to be tortured constant with tales of married folks, an' not one hand stretched out to save me from them reecitals.'

"'Brace up,' returns Boggs, tryin' to comfort him. 'Thicken your hide ag'in sech childish feelin's, an' don't be so easy pierced. Besides, I reckons the worst's over. He's comin' now to them catamounts.'

"Texas grinds his teeth, an' old Stallins resoomes his adventures.

"'My Sarah Ann's old pap has his location jest across the Hawgthief from me. Besides him an' Sarah Ann, thar ain't nobody but the old woman in the fam'ly, the balance of 'em havin' been swept away in a freshet. Shore, old man Bender—that's Sarah Ann's pap's name—has fourteen children once, Sarah Ann, who's oldest, bein' the first chicken on the domestic roost. But the other thirteen is carried off one evenin' when, what with the rains an' what with the snow meltin' back on Gingham Mountain, the Hawgthief gets its back up. Swish comes a big wave of water, an' you hear me them children goes coughin' an' kickin' an' splutterin' into the misty beyond.

"'Which I says thirteen only because that's whar old Bender allers puts his loss. Zeb Stiles, who lives on the Painted Post, insists that it's fifteen who gets swept away that time. He allows he counts them infant Benders two evenin's before, perched along on old Bender's palin's like pigeons on a limb. Thirteen or fifteen, however, it don't make no difference much, once they're submerged, that a-way.

""Mebby I've been co'tin' my Sarah Ann for goin' on six months, givin' her b'ar robes an' mink pelts, with now an' then a pa'r of bald eagle wings to bresh the hearth. Nothin' heart-movin', however, comes off between us, Sarah Ann keepin' me at arm's len'th an' comportin' herse'f plumb uppish, as a maiden should. She's right; a likely girl can't be too conserv'tive techin' what young an' boundin' bucks comes co'tin' at her house.

""Old Bender sort o' likes me in streaks. After he gets bereft of them thirteen or fifteen offspring he turns morose a whole lot, an' I used to go 'cross in my dugout an' cheer him up with my lies.

""Could I lie?

""My nephew, Sammy, thar'll nar'ate how I once lies a full-grown b'ar to death. The cunnin' varmint takes advantage of me bein' without my weepens, an' chases me up a tree. I ensconces myse'f in the crotch, an' when the b'ar starts to climb I hurls down ontrooth after ontrooth on top of him ontill, beneath a avalanche of falsehood, he's crushed dead at the base of the tree. Could I lie, you asks? Even folks who don't like me concedes that I'm the most irresist'ble liar south of the Ohio river.

""While I'm upliftin' the feelin's of old Bender mendacious that a-way, he likes me; it's only when we gets to kyard-playin' he waxes sour. He's a master-hand to gamble, old Bender is, an' as shore as I shows up, followin' a lie or two, he's bound he'll play me seven-up for a crock of baldface whiskey. Now thar ain't a sport from the Knobs of old Knox to the Mississippi who could make seed corn off me at seven-up, an' nacherally I beats old Bender out of the baldface.

""With that he'd rave an' t'ar, an' make like he's goin' to jump for his 8-squar' Hawkins rifle, whar she's hangin' on a pa'r of antlers over the door; but he'd content himse'f final by orderin' me out of the shack, sayin' that no sech kyard-sharpin' galoot as me need come pesterin' 'round allowin' to marry no child of his'n. At sech eepocks, too, it looks like Sarah Ann sees things through the eyes of her old man, an' she's more'n common icy.

""One day old Bender goes weavin' over to Pineknot, an' starts to tradin' hosses with Zeb Stiles. They seesaws away for hours, an' old Bender absorbs about two dollars' worth of lickin', still-house rates. In the finish Zeb does him brown an' does him black on the swap, so it don't astonish nobody to death when next day he quiles up in his blankets sick. Marm Bender tries rekiverin' him with yarbs, an' kumfrey tea, an' sweet gum sa'v. When them rem'dies proves footile she decides that perhaps a frolic'll fetch him.

""It's about second drink time in the afternoon when Marm Bender starts out Fiddler Abe, givin' notice of the treat. I hears the old nigger as, mule-back, he goes meanderin' along, singin':

Thar's a smoke house full of bacon,
An' a barrel full of rum.
For to eat an' drink an' shake a laig
You've only got to come.

""As soon as Fiddler Abe starts singin' the girls an' boys begin comin' out of the woods like red ants out of a burnin' log, headin' hotfoot for old Bender's.

""Do I go?

""It ain't a hour after candle lightin' when, with mebbly it's a pint of baldface onder the buckle of my belt, I'm jumpin' higher, shoutin' louder, an' doin' more to loosen the puncheons in the floor than any four males of my species who's present at that merry-makin'. It he'ps old Bender, too, an' inspired by the company an' onder the infloence of four or five stiff toddies, he resolves not to let that hoss trade carry him to a ontimely grave, an' is sittin' up in his blankets, yellin', "Wake snakes; an' Gin'ral Jackson fit the Injuns!" in happy accord with the sperit of his times.

""Fiddler Abe strikes into the exyooberant strains of "Little Black Bull Come Down the Mountains," an' I hauls Ten-spot Mollie out of the gin'ral ruck of calico for a reel. We calls her Ten-spot Mollie because she's got five freckles on each cheek. All the same, when it comes to dancin',

she's shore a she-steamboat. Every time we swings she hefts me plumb free of the floor, an' bats my heels ag'in the rafters until both ankles is sprained.

"Sarah Ann falls jealous, seem' me an' Ten-spot Mollie thus pleasantly engaged, an' to get even goes to simperin' an' talkin' giggle-talk to Mart Jenkins, who's rid in from Rapid Run. Jenks is a offensive numbskull who's wormed his way into soci'ty by lickin' all the boys 'round his side of Gingham Mountain. At that, he's merely tol'rated.

"Seein' Sarah Ann philanderin' with Jenks, I lets go of Ten-spot Mollie, who goes raspin' an' rollin' into a corner some abrupt, an' sa'nters across to whar they're at. Leanin' over Sarah Ann's off-shoulder, bein' the one furthest from that onmitigated Jenks, I says, "Sweetheart, how can you waste time talkin' to this yere hooman Sahara, whose intellects is that sterile they wouldn't raise cow-pease?"

"This makes Jenks oneasy, an' getting up, he reemarks, "Dick Stallins, I'll be the all-firedest obleeged to you if you'll attend on me to the foot of the hollow, an' bring your instrooments."

"At this I explains that I ain't got my instrooments with me, havin' left both rifle an' bowie in the dugout when I paddles over to the dance.

"Jenks makes a insultin' gesture, an' reetorts, "Don't crawl, Dick Stallins. Borry old Bender's nine-inch bootcher, an' come with me."

"To appease him I says I will, an' that I'll j'ine him at the before named slaughter-ground in the flicker of a lamb's tail. Jenks stalks off plumb satisfied, while I searches out Ben Hazlett, an' whispers that Jenks is askin' for him some urgent, an' has gone down the trace towards the foot of the hollow to look him up. Nacherally, my diplom'cy in this yere behalf sends Ben cavortin' after Jenks; an' this relieves me a heap, knowin' that all Jenks wants is a fight, an' Ben'll do him jest as well as me.

"Which them was shorely happy days!' he continyoos, settin' down the bottle wharwith he's been encouragin' his faculties. 'Troo, every gent has to sleep with his head in a iron kettle for fear of Injuns, an' a hundred dollars is bigger'n a cord of wood, but life is plenty blissful jest the same.'

"Was you afraid of this yere Jenks?' asks Boggs.

"No more'n if he's a streak of lightnin'. Only, I've got on a new huntin' shirt, made of green blanket cloth, an' I ain't none strenuous about havin' that gyarment all slashed up.

"To proceed: After I dispatches Ben on the heels of Jenks that a-way it occurs to me that mebbby I'm sort o' tired with the labors of the evenin', an' I'll find my dugout, ferry myse'f over to my own proper wickyup, an' hit the hay for a snooze. I'm some hurried to the conclooosion by the way in which eevents begins to accumyoolate in my immedyit vicin'ty. Bill Wheeler announces without a word of warnin' that he's a flyin' alligator, besides advancin' the theery that Gene Hemphill is about as deeserv'dly pop'lar as a abolitionist in South Caroliny. I suspects that this attitooode of mind on Bill's part is likely to provoke discussion, which suspicion is confirmed when Gene knocks Bill down, an' boots him into the dooryard. Once in the open, after a clout or two, Gene an' Bill goes to a clinch an' the fightin' begins.

"It ain't no time when the circumf'rence of trouble spreads. Bud Ingalls makes a pass at me pers'nal, an' by way of reeprisal I smashes a stewpan on him. Bud's head goes through the bottom, like the clown through them paper hoops in a cirkus, the stewpan fittin' down 'round his neck same as one of them Elizbethan ruffs. The stewpan ockyooopies so much of Bud's attention that I gets impatient, an' so, tellin' him I ain't got no time to wait, I leaves him strugglin' with that yootensil, an' strolls off down to the Hawgthief whistlin' "Sandy Land."

"It's dark as the inside of a cow, an' somehow I misses the dugout; but bein' stubborn, an' plumb sot about gettin' home, I wades in an' begins to swim. The old Hawgthief is bank full, but I'd have made t'other side all right if it ain't that, as I swims out from onder the overhangin' branch of a tree, somethin' drops into the water behind me, an' comes snarlin' an' splashin' an' spittin' along in pursoot. I don't pay much heed at the jump, but when it claws off my nigh moccasin, leavin' a inch-deep gash in my heel, I glances back an' perceives by the two green eyes that I've become an

object of comsoomin' int'rest to a pa'nter, or what you-all out yere calls a mountain lion, an' we-uns back in Tennessee a catamount.'

""But a panther won't swim,' reemonstrates Tutt.

""Arizona catamounts won't,' returns old Stallins, 'thar bein' no rivers to speak of. But in Tennessee, whar thar's rivers to waste, them cats takes to the water like so many muskrats.

""When I finds that thar's nothin' doggin' me but a catamount, I heads all casyooal for whar a tree's done been lodged midstream, merely flingin' the reemark over my shoulder to the catamount that, if he keeps on annoyin' me, he'll about pick up the makin's of a maulin'. As I crawls out on the bole of the lodged tree, I can hear the catamount sniggerin', same as if he's laughin' me to scorn, an' this yere insultin' contoomely half-way makes me mad. Which I ain't in the habit of bein' took lightly by no catamount.

""Drawin' myse'f out o' the water, I straddles the bole of my tree, an' organizes for the catamount, who's already crawlin' after me. T'arin' off a convenient bough the thickness of your laig, I arranges myse'f as a reeception committee for visitin' catamounts, an' by way of beginnin' confers on my partic'lar anamile sech a bat over the snout that he falls back into the drink, an' starts to swimmin' fancy an' goin' 'round in circles, same as if his funny-bone's been teched.

""Every time he gets in reach I jabs him in the eye with the splinter end of the bough, an' at last he grows that disgusted at these formal'ties he swims off to the bank. Thar he camps down on his ha'nches, an' glares green-eyed at me across the ragin' flood.

""Shore, I could have raised the long yell for he'p, but am withheld by foolish pride. Besides, I can hear Ben an' Jenks tusslin' an' gruntin' an' carryin' on over in the mouth of the hollow, as they kyarves into each other with their knives, an' don't want to distract their attention.

""As I sets camped thar on my lodged tree, an' the catamount is planted on the bank, I hears the lippin' splash of a paddle, an' then a voice which sounds like a chime of bells floats across to ask, "Dick Stallins, you ornery runnigate, wharever be you?"

""It's my Sarah Ann, whose love, gettin' the upper hand of maidenly reeserve, has sent her projectin' 'round in search of me. She's in my dugout.

""The catamount identifies her as soon as me; an' thinkin' she ought to be easy, he slides into the water ag'in an' starts for the boat. It's that dark I ain't shore of his deesigns ontill I sees him reach up, tip the dugout over, an' set Sarah Ann to wallowin' in the rushin' torrent. The dugout upsets on the catamount, an' this so confooses him that, by the time he's got his bearin's, Sarah Ann's been swept down to my tree, an' I've lifted her to a seat by my side. The catamount don't try to lay siege to our p'sition, recognizing it as impregnable, but paddles back to the shore an' goes into watchful camp as prior.

""For myse'f, I'm so elevated with love an' affection at havin' Sarah Ann with me, I dismisses the catamount as a dead issue, an' as sech beneath contempt, an' by way of mollifyin' Sarah Ann's feelin's, cuts loose an' kisses her a gross or two of times, an' each like the crack of a bull-whacker's whip.

""Old Bender hears them caresses plumb up to his house—as well he may, they're that onreeserved an' earnest—an' thinks it's some one shootin' a rifle. It has the effect of bringin' out the old Spartan with his Hawkins; an' the first word of it that reaches me an' Sarah Ann is him, Marm Bender an' the whole b'ilin' of folks is down thar on the bank, tryin' to make out in the gen'ral dimness whatever be we-all lovers doin' out thar in the middle of the Hawgthief on a snag.

""They don't deetect my catamount none, which sagacious feline slinks off into the shadows covered with confoosion; all they sees is us. An' the spectacle certainly excites old Bender. "Gen'ral Jackson fit the Injuns!" he exclaims, as all of a sudden a thought strikes him; "that measly excoose for a Union Democrat out thar is seekin' to eelope with our Sarah Ann."

""The old murderer starts to get a bead on me with the Hawkins. "Father," yells Marm Bender, pullin' at his sleeve, "you shore must be mistook."

"Old Bender won't have it. "Maw," he returns, strivin' to disengage himse'f, "I was never mistook about nothin' in my life but once, an' that's when I shifts from baldface whiskey to hard cider on a temp'rance argyooment. Let me go, woman, till I drill the miscreant an' wash the stain from our fam'ly honor."

"Before the old hom'cide can get to launderin' the fam'ly honor in my blood, however, Sarah Ann has interposed. "Don't go to blazing away at my Dickey, pop," she sings out, "or I'll shore burn every improvement you got, an' leave you an' maw an' me roofless in the midst of the wilderness."

"This goes a long way towards soberin' down old Bender, because he knows my Sarah Ann's the Cumberland hollyhock to put them menaces into execootion. He lowers the muzzle of his old 8-squar', an' allows if I promises to marry the girl I can swim ashore an' be forgiven.

"Thus the matter ends mighty amic'ble. We'all goes trackin' up to the house, a preacher is rushed to the scene from Pineknot, an' them nuptials between Sarah Ann an' me is sol'mnized. Shore, Jenks an' Ben is thar. They're found by a committee of their friends scattered about at the foot of the hollow, an' is collected an' brought up to the weddin' in blankets. Dave Daniels, who surveys the scene next day, says you could plant corn whar they fit, it's that plowed up.

"Followin' the cer'mony Marm Bender an' the old gent takes me into their hearts an' cabin like I'm their own an' only son. He's a great old daddy-in-law, old Bender is, an' is ven'rated for forty miles about Gingham Mountain, as deevoted heart an' soul to baldface, seven-up an' sin in any shape.

"That match-makin' catamount?

"We hives him. Me an' my new daddy-in-law tracks him to his reetreat, an' when we're through he's plumb used up. I confers the pelt on my Sarah Ann; an' she spreads it on the floor over by her side of the bed, so as to put her little number sevens on it when she boils out of a winter's mornin' to light the fire, an' rustle me my matoot'nal buckwheat cakes an' sa'sage."

III

CYNTHIANA, PET-NAMED ORIGINAL SIN

"This yere specific heroine is a heap onconventional, so much so as to be plumb puzzlin' to the common mind. Jest the same, she finishes winner, an' makes herse'f a gen'ral source of pride. She don't notify us, none whatever, that she intends a Wolfville debou; jest nacherally descends upon us, that a-way, as onannounced as a mink on a settin' hen. All the same, we knows she's comin' while yet she's five mile out on the trail. Not that we savvys who she is or what she aims at; we merely gets moved up next to the fact that she's a lady, an' likewise no slouch for looks.

"We reads these yere trooths in the dust old Monte kicks up, as he comes swingin' in with the stage. Which it's the weakness of this inebriate, as I tells you former, that once let him get a lady aboard, it looks like it's a signal for him to go pourin' the leather into his team like he ain't got a minute to live. It's a p'lite attention he assoomes, in his besotted way, is doo the sex.

"It's the more strange, too, since it's the only attention Monte ever pays 'em. He never looks at 'em, never speaks to 'em; simply plants himse'f on the box, as up an' down as a cow's tail, an' t'ars into them harassed hosses. If the lady he's complimentin' that a-way was to get jolted overboard—which the same wouldn't be no mir'cal, considerin' how that dipsomaniac drives—it's even money he leaves her hunched up like a jack-rabbit alongside the trail, an' never thinks of stoppin' or turnin' back. He's merely a drunkard with that one fool idee of showin' off, an' nothin' the stage people's ever able to say can teach him different. From first to last you-all could measure Monte's notion of the pulcritooode of a petticoat passenger by the extent to which he lams loose with his whip. Given what he deems is a she-sunburst, he shorely does maltreat the company's live stock shameful.

"'If,' observes Peets, as a bunch of us stands gossipin' round in front of the Red Light that time, watchin' the dust cloud draw nearer an' nearer—if it's poss'ble to imagine the old sot as havin' a Cleopatra to freight over from Tucson, it's a cow pony to a Mexican sheep he'd kill one of the wheelers.'

"Thar ain't none of us knows who this yere Cleopatra the Doc refers to is, onless it's Colonel Sterett, who edits the *Daily Coyote*. Still, the compar'son is plenty convincin'. Accordin' to the Doc himself, this Cleopatra's a meteoric female party, as lively as she is lovely, who sets a passel of ancient sports to walkin' in a cirkle back some'ers in the mists of time. Also, it's bloo chips to white, an' bet 'em higher than a cat's back, the Doc knows. The Doc is ondoubted the best eddicated gent that ever makes a moccasin track between Yuma an' the Raton Pass, an' when he onbuckles techin' any historic feachures, you can call for a gooseha'r pillow, an' go to sleep on it he ain't barkin' at no knot.

"Thar's a feeble form of young tenderfoot pesterin' about the suburbs of the crowd. He's one of them hooman deficits, so plumb ornery as to be useless East, which their fam'lies, in gettin' rid of 'em, saws happ'ly off onto a onprotected West. This partic'lar racial disaster's been on our hands now mebbe it's six months, an' we-all is hopin' that in some p'intless sort o' way he'll brace up and do overt acts which entitles us to stampede him out of camp. But so far he don't.

"This yere exile comes wanderin' into the talk by askin'—his voice as thin as a curlew's:

"'Who is this old Monte you're alloodin' at?'

"'Whoever he is?' says Boggs. 'Which if you-all'd struck camp by way of Tucson, instead of skulkin' upon us in the low-down fashion you does along of the Lordsburg-Red Dog buckboard, you wouldn't have to ask none. He's the offishul drunkard of Arizona, Monte is. Which the same should be notice, too, that it's futile for you to go ropin' at that p'sition. I says this, since from the quantity of Old Jordan you've been mowin' away, I more'n half infers that you nourishes designs upon the place.'

"The feeble young shorthorn smiles a puny smile, and don't lunge forth into no more queries.

"Texas, who's been listenin' to what Boggs says, squar's 'round an' half-way erects his crest for an argyooment. Texas has had marital troubles, an' him ponderin' the same constant renders him some morbid an' morose.

"From your tone of voice, Dan,' remarks Texas, 'I takes it you holds Monte's appetite for nose paint to be a deefect. That's whar I differs. That old marauder is a drunkard through sheer excess of guile. He finds in alcohol his ark of refooge. I only wish I'd took to whiskey in my 'teens.'

"Boggs is amazed.

"Texas,' he says, plenty sorrowful, 'it wouldn't astonish me none if you finds your finish in a wickeyup deevoted to loonatics, playin' with a string of spools.'

"That's your onthinkin' way. Do you reckon now, if I'd been a slave to drink when that Laredo wife of mine first sees me, she'd have w'irled me to the altar an' made me the blighted longhorn you sees now? She wouldn't have let me get near enough to her to give her a bunch of grapes. It's my sobri'ty that's my ondoin', that an' bein' plumb moral. Which I onerringly traces them divorce troubles, an' her sellin' up my stock at public vandoo for cost an' al'mony like she does, to me weakly holdin' aloof from whisky when I'm young.'

"Which I shore,—an' Boggs shows he's mighty peevish an' put out—'never meets up with a more exasp'ratin' conversationist! It's because you're sech an' egreegious egotist! You-all can't talk ten minutes, Texas, but what you're allers bringin' in them domestic affairs of yours. If you desires to discuss whiskey abstract, an' from what the Doc thar calls a academic standp'int, I'm your gent. But I declines to be drug into personal'ties, in considerin' which I might be carried by the heat of deebate to whar I gets myse'f shot up.'

"I sees your attitood, Dan; I sees your attitood, an' respects it. Jest the same, thar's an anti-nuptial side to the liquor question, an' bein' a drunkard that a-way is not without its compensations.'

"But he's bound to be so blurred,' reemonstrates Boggs, who by nacher is dispootatious, an' once started prone to swing an' rattle with a topic like a pup to a pig's y'ear: 'That drunkard is so plumb blurred.'

"Blurred but free, Dan,' retorts Texas, mighty firm. 'Don't overlook no sech bet as that drunkard bein' free. Also, it's better to be free than sober.'

"Goin' back to Monte,' says Boggs, returning to the orig'nal text; 'half the time, over to the O.K. Restauraw when Missis Rucker slams him down his chuck, he ain't none shore he's eatin' flapjacks or rattlesnakes. The other day, when Rucker drops a plate, he jumps three feet in the air, throws up his hands an' yells, "Take the express box, gents, but spar' my life!" It's whiskey does it. The old cimmaron thinks it's road agents stickin' him up.'

"Dispoote is only ended by the stage thunderin' in—leathers creakin', chains jinglin', bosses a lather of sweat an' alkali dust, Monte cocked up on the box as austere as a treeful of owls. He's for openin' the door, but Peets is thar before him. Let it get dealt down to showin' attentions to a lady, an' the brisklest sport'll have to move some sudden, or the Doc'll beat him to it. Which he certainly is the p'litest drug sharp of which hist'ry makes mention!

"The Doc offers his hand to he'p her out, but she hits the ground onaided as light as any leaf. Nacherally we looks her over. Take her from foretop to fetlocks, she's as lovely as a diamond flush. She's got corn-colored ha'r, an' eyes as soft as the sky in Joone. Peets calls 'em azure—bein' romantic. As for the rest of us, we don't call 'em nothin'. Thar's a sprightly look about 'em, which would shore jestify any semi-proodent gent in jumpin' sideways. Likewise, she's packin' a Colt's .45, an' clutchin' a winchester in her little claw, the same contreebutin' a whole lot toward makin' her impressive as a pageant.

"How are you, sports?' she says, tossin' her disengaged hand a heap arch. 'I gets word about you-all up in Vegas, an' allows I'll come trundlin' down yere an' size you up. My idee is you needs regen'ratin'.'

"'Is thar anything we-all can he'p you to, Miss?' asks Enright, who takes the play away from Peets. 'If aught is wanted, an' thar's a lariat in the outfit long enough to reach, you-all can trust Wolfville to rope, throw an' hawg-tie the same accordin' to your wishes.'

"'Yes,' adds Peets, 'as Sam says, if thar's any little way we-all can serve you, Miss, jest say the word. Likewise, if you don't feel like speakin', make signs; an' if you objects to makin' signs, shake a bush. All we reequires is the slightest hint.'

"'Be ca'm,' says the young lady, her manner as se'f-confident as if she's a queen. 'Thar's nothin' demanded of you outlaws except to tamely listen. I'm a se'f-respectin', se'f-supportin' young female, who believes in Woman Suffrage, an' the equality of the sexes in pol'tics an' property rights. Which my name is Bark, baptized Cynthiana, the same redooed by my old pap, while yet alive, into the pet name of Original Sin. It's my present purpose to become a citizen of this yere camp, an' take my ontrammed place in its commercial life by openin' a grogshop. Pendin' which, do you-all see this?'—an' she dallies gently with a fringe of b'ar-claws she's wearin' as a necklace, the same bein' in loo of beads. 'That grizzly's as big an' ugly as him.' Yere she tosses a rose-leaf hand at Boggs, who breaks into a profoose sweat. 'I downs him. Also, I'll send the first horned-toad among you, who pays me any flagrant attentions, pirootin' after that b'ar. Don't forget, gents: my name's Bark, Cynthiana Bark, pet-named Original Sin, an' thar's a bite goes with the Bark.'

"'Havin' conclooded this yere salootatory, Miss Bark, givin' a coquettish flourish to her winchester, goes trapsein' over to the O. K. Restauraw, leavin' us—as the story-writer puts it—glooded to the spot. You see it ain't been yoosual for us to cross up with ladies who, never waitin' for us to so much as bat an admirin' eye or wag an adorin' y'ear, opens neegotations by threatenin' to shoot us in two.

"'Thar's a young lady,' says Peets, who's first to ketch his breath, 'that's got what I calls *verve*.'

"'Admittin' which,' observes Enright, some doubtful, havin' been thrown back on his hocks a whole lot; 'some of you-all young bucks must none the less have looked at her in a improper way to start her ghost-dancin' like she does.'

"'Enright's eye roves inquiren'ly from Boggs to Texas, an' even takes in Tutt.

"'Not me!' declar's Texas, plenty fervent; 'not me!—more'n if she's a she rattlesnake!'

"'As the husband of Tucson Jennie,' observes Tutt, his air some haughty—which he allers puts on no end of dog whenever he mentions his fam'ly—as the husband of Tucson Jennie, an' the ondoubted father of that public ornament an' blessin', little Enright Peets Tutt, I do not regyard it as up to me to cl'ar myse'f of no sech charges.'

"'Sam,' says Boggs, his voice reproachful, 'you notes how she makes invidious compar'sons between me an' that b'ar, an' how she beefs the b'ar? After which gratooitous slur it's preeposterous to s'ppose I'd go admirin' her or to takin' any chances.'

"'Then it's you,' says Enright, comin' round on the puny tenderfoot. 'Jack,' he continyoos, appealin' to Jack Moore, who's kettle-tender to the Stranglers, of which arm of jestic Enright is chief—'Jack, do you reemark any ontoward looks or leers on the part of this yere partic'lar prairie dog, calc'lated to alarm a maiden of fastidious feelin's?'

"'Sir,' breaks in the feeble young tenderfoot, an' all mighty tremyoolous, 'as shore as my name is Oscar Freelinghuysen I never even glances at that girl. I ain't so much as present while she's issuin' her deefiances. I lapses into the Red Light the moment I observes how she's equipped, an' Black Jack, the barkeep, will ver'fy my words.'

"'All right,' warns Enright, plumb severe, 'you be careful an' conduct yourself deecorous. Wolfville is a moral camp. Thar's things done every day an' approved of in Noo York which'd get a gent downed in Wolfville.'

"'That Miss Bark mentions she's Woman Suffrage, Sam?' observes Boggs, in a questionin' way, as we stands sloppin' out a recooperative forty drops in the Red Light.

"'Shore!' replies Enright. 'The Doc yere can tell you all about 'em. As I onderstands, they're a warlike bevy of women who voylently resents not bein' born men. Thar's one thing, however; I sincerely trusts that none of you young sports'll prove that forward an' onwary as to go callin' her by her pet name of Original Sin. Which she might take advantage of it. Them exponents of women's rights is plumb full of the onexpected, that a-way, an' it's my belief that all who ain't honin' to commit soocide'll be careful an' address her as Miss Bark.'

"'Be they many of that Woman Suffrage brand?' persists Boggs.

"'Herds of 'em,' chips in Peets. 'The Eastern ranges is alive with 'em. But they don't last. As a roole they gets married, an' that's gen'rally speakin' the end of their pernicious activ'ties. Wedlock is a heap apt to knock their horns off.'

"Faro Nell, Tucson Jennie an' Missis Rucker don't take to this Miss Bark's Woman Suffrage views.

"'She's welcome,' says the latter esteemable cook an' matron, 'to her feelin's; but she mustn't come preachin' no doctrine to me, wharof the effects is to lower me to Rucker's level. I've had trouble enough redoocin' that ground-hawg to where he belongs, an' I ain't goin' to sacrifice the work of years for no mere sentiments.'

"'Which I shore agrees with you, Missis Rucker,' says Nell, lookin' up from some plum preeserves she's backin' off the noonday board to consider Cherokee, who's settin' next; 'a woman has enough to do to boss one gent, without tryin' to roole broadcast over whole commoonities.'

"At this exchange of views Cherokee softly grins like a sharp who can see his way through. As for Rucker, who's waitin' on the table an' packin' in viands from the kitchen, he takes it as sullen as a sorehead dog. Personal, I ain't got no use for Rucker; but between us, Missis Rucker, one way an' another, does certainly oppress him grievous.

"Before the week is out we knows a lot more about Miss Bark than we does when she first comes prancin' out upon us from Monte's stage. Not that thar's aught ag'inst the lady. It's doo to Enright, who begins recollectin' things.

"'Which I knows her pop,' explains Enright, 'now my mem'ry's assertin' itse'f, I knows him when he first comes bulgin' into the Pecos Valley, eighteen years ago. This Original Sin daughter an' her maw don't show up none till later. Thar's no more innocent form of tenderfoot than Bark ever comes weavin' into the Southwest. He's that ignorantly innocent, wild geese is as wise as serpents to him. But he's full of a painstakin' energy, all the same, an' mighty assidyuous to learn.'

"'Whatever does he turn to?' asks Texas.

"'He hires out to a peach ranch. An' this'll show you how industrious, that a-way, this Bark tarrapin is. The peach ranch party has a measly bunch of sheep. He keeps 'em nights in a box-tight board corral, so's the coyotes can't get to mingle with 'em none. Days he throws 'em loose to feed. The first evenin' the peach ranch gent tells this yere Bark to corral the sheep, an' then come in for supper. "An' be shore," says the peach ranch party, "you gets 'em all in."

"'An hour goes by, an' the peach ranch party is about through his feed, when this yere Bark drifts up to the table. His face is flushed, but he's w'arin' a look of triumph. "I hives 'em," says he, some exultant; "only one lamb does shore force me to extend myse'f a lot. I'll gamble I runs a hundred miles before I rounds him up."

"'Next mornin' the peach ranch party goes out to throw loose them sheep. As he cranes his neck over the corral fence to count the bunch he's amazed to see a jack-rabbit galumpin' about among 'em. "Gin'ral Jackson fit the English!" he exclaims; "however does that jack-rabbit get himse'f mixed in with them sheep?" An' he p'int's it out to Bark.

"'That ontooterred person is all astonishment. "Jack-rabbit!" says he. "Why, I hopes next fall to vote the reepublican ticket an' die disgraced if I don't put it down for a lamb! That's the anamile which makes me run my laigs off roundin' of him up!"

"Which, as you says, Sam,' reemarks Tutt, signin' up to Black Jack to set out the bottles, 'in the face of sech a showin' that Bark party must have been plenty ardent.'

"I should shore yell!" coincides Boggs.

"But he learns in time, of course?" questions Nell.

"Learns, Nellie?" repeats Enright; 'it ain't three years before he identifies himse'f with the life about him to that degree he bumps off two kyard sharps who tries to cold-deck him in a poker game, an' finds besides his steady employment stealin' old John Chisholm's calves, tharby assistin' in plantin' the toomultous seed of what comes subsequent to be called the Lincoln County War.'

"What's the finish of this interestin' crim'nal?" asks Cherokee.

"Lynched," returns Enright. 'They puts him over the jump at Seven Rivers. You see this Rattlesnake—they calls him Rattlesnake Bark in them later years—is bunked down in one of these yere jim-crow, barn-board hotels. Thar's a resoundin' form of guest in the adjoinin' room, snorin' to beat four kings an' a ace. Rattlesnake tries poundin' on the partition, an' sw'arin' at him, an' callin' him a hoss thief. It's no avail. The snores of that boarder sounds like sawin' planks, an' fa'rly rocks the shack—they're that stormy. Final, when Rattlesnake's burdens gets to be more'n flesh an' blood can b'ar, he reaches for his .45, an' bombards that sleeper good an' plenty through the wall. It turns out it's the new jedge. In the mornin', when this joorist is discovered too dead to skin, the public is that mortified it takes Rattlesnake out as soon as breakfast's over, an' strings him to a limb.'

"Don't this pore Rattlesnake get no hearin'?" asks Nell.

"You see, Nellie," Enright explains, 'what with maverickin' the Chisholm calves, an' a stage or two hold-up which p'int to him, the close season's been out as to this Rattlesnake person for mighty like a year. Not but what he might have made preperations. Thar's a reeligious party present who asks Rattlesnake if he wants to pray some. "Which you'll cross the dark river all the easier," expounds the reeligious gent. But Rattlesnake reefuses his ministrations. "I'm what I be," he says; "an' as for that dark river you refers to, I ain't lookin' for no shallow ford."

"This Rattlesnake," continyoos Enright, 'is willin' to learn to the last. It's his way. Spring a new game on him an' he's out instanter lookin' for information an' advice. That's why he comes on so fast. Thar bein' nothin' to stand him on for the purpose of bein' lynched, the Stranglers posed Rattlesnake a-top of a stack of hay, which is heaped up onder the tree they're yootilizin'. When the lariat is round his neck, an' he's disposed of the reeligious party who attempts to turn the business into a pra'r meetin', Rattlesnake looks at the chief of the committee an' says, "This yere bein' hanged from hay-cocks is plumb new to me entire, an' tharfore I'm obleeged to ask whether you-all expects me to jump off or slide?"

"Well," comments Jack Moore, drawin' a deep breath, 'the old murderer's game—misguided, mebbly, but game.'

"That may be as it may," observes Boggs, plenty thoughtful, 'but after all I regyards these yere details which Sam onfurls as chiefly valyooable as sheddin' a ray on this Miss Bark. On the chance that she takes after her old man, from now on I'm goin' to walk 'round her like she's a swamp.'

"It's ten days after Miss Bark hits camp that things begins to focus. An old Mexican, the color of a blacksmith's apron, an' his wife, who's the same prosaic tint, comes creakin' along with a six-mule team—two wagons, lead an' trail—loaded to the gyards with stock an' fixtures. Said par'feralia havin' arrived, Miss Bark busts in the door of the old deserted Lady Gay, an' takes possession. Armstrong, who runs the Noo York store, is the owner of the Lady Gay, but onder the circumstances he allows it'd be the act of a barbarian to interfere.

"Besides, the attitooede of the young lady herse'f is plumb discouragin'.

"I'd shore admire," she remarks, as, with the aid of her Mexicans, she goes tossin' things into p'sition, 'to see some male felon try to run a bluff about him havin' title to this Lady Gay structure, an' becomin' my landlord. Men have tyrannized a heap too long as it is over onprotected women, an' thar's one at least who's took in patient silence all she will.'

"When Miss Bark's organized, she tacks up over the door a sign which the painter at the stage station preepar's. It reads:

VOTES FOR WOMEN SALOON

"'Only get it straight,' says Miss Bark when she has us close-herded at chuck time in the dinin' room of the O. K. Restauraw; 'I ain't openin' this saloon none with a view to sordid gain. I got money enough right now to buy an' burn this yere deboshed town of Wolfville, an' then prance over an' purchase an' apply the torch to that equally abandoned outfit, Red Dog. What I'm reachin' for is the p'litical uplift of this camp. Recognizin' whiskey as a permanency an' that saloons has come to stay, I aims to show folks how them reesorts should be run. I hopes to see the day when every s'loon'll be in the hands of ladies. For I holds that once woman controls the nose paint of the nation the ballot is bound to follow.'

"Once it's started we-all manages to patronize the Votes For Women S'loon for a average of three drinks a day. Enright advises it as safer.

"'Otherwise she might resent it,' explains Enright, 'an' armed to the teeth like she is, an' possessin' them perfervid idees, thar's no tellin' whar she'd end.'

"None of us feels like hangin' out thar. The atmosphere is too plumb formal. Besides, this yere Miss Bark has rooles. No kyards is permitted; an', moreover, you've got to go outdoors to sw'ar. As to drinks, the soberest among us can't get lickier oftener than every other time, while Monte can't get none at all. That Votes For Women S'loon, considered as a house of call, is, an' put it mildest, certainly depressin'.

"When I speaks of us patronizin' Miss Bark for three daily drinks, that a-way, thar's exceptions. Monte, as I states, is barred by the lady personal on the grounds of him bein' a slave to drink; while Tutt is forbid by Tucson Jennie. Tutt chafes some at them mandates of Jennie's; but bein' keenly alive as to what's comin' to her, as well as what she's cap'ble of, in her triple rôle of woman, wife an' mother, he yields.

"As for Texas, while he subscribes to them three diurnal drinks, he allers insists that he has company.

"'It's all right,' Texas'd say; 'I ain't intimatin' that this Miss Bark goes cherishin' designs. But it's my onbreakable roole, since them divorce experiences, to never enter the presence of onmarried ladies onless attended by witnesses.'

"Owin' to which, some of us allers trails in along with Texas when he visits the Votes For Women S'loon. Even when thus protected he onflaggin'ly confines his observations to 'Licker, Miss, please!' an' stops thar as dumb as graven images. Once the lickier's before him he heaves it into himse'f same as if it's drugs, an' instantly pulls his freight a heap speedy, breathin' hard. An' all as scared as a jack-rabbit that's heard the howl of a wolf.

"Does Miss Bark go proselytin' 'round concernin' them Rights of Women? Which she shore does! You may say she omits no oppoortunity. It's before Wolfville gets that effete it mixes drinks, an' any one who knows water from whiskey can 'tend bar. Wharfore, Miss Bark stands watch an' watch with her old Mexican, Pancho. The times she herse'f is min'sterin' to our needs she's preachin' Woman Suffrage incessant. Also, not bein' plumb locoed, we bows in concord tharunto. Enright an' Peets both concurs that it's the thing to do, an' we does it.

"'Whatever difference does it make?' says Enright; 'the price of steers remains the same, three-of-a-kind continyoos to beat two pa'r, thar's still fifty-two kyards in a faro deck, an' every other law of nacher survives onteched. My notion is to agree with this Miss Bark, verbal, an' trust to Wolfville's unbeatable luck to pull us through.'

"This counsel sounds good to us, an' we follows it. When Miss Bark sets forth her woman's rights fulm'nations along with her nose paint, we murmurs a hearty assent, an' drinks down both

impartial. Boggs, who's 'motional an' easy worked on, even gets to whar he gives it out he's actchooally a convert.

"Miss Bark has been on the map for mebbly it's a week, then thar occurs a eeposide which, while it makes no profound impression, deceased bein' a Mexican, shows she ain't packin' her pap Rattlesnake's old Colt's .45 in a sperit of facetiousness. It's about third drink time one evenin' when thar's the dull roar of a gun from over in the Votes For Women S'loon. When we arrives we finds a dead greaser carelessly quiled up near the door, an' Miss Bark snappin' the empty shell out of her six-shooter.

"'He was roode,' is the only explanation she vouchsafes; an' Enright, after lookin' at Peets a spell, who's lookin' at the ceilin', says it's s'fficient.

"'Only,' says Enright, when we're all back safe in the Red Light, 'I sincerely trusts she won't get her hindsights notched up to whar she takes to bumpin' off *Americanos*. I shore don't know whatever in sech case we could do, vig'lance committees, in the very essence of their construction, possessin' no joorisdiction over ladies.'

"'That's right, Sam,' says Peets, plenty grave; 'if it ever gets to whar this Miss Bark turns her artillery loose on the camp permis'cus the only hope left would be to adjourn Wolfville *sine die*.'

"Miss Bark, however, never does grow homicidal toward any of us, an' the only effect of her puttin' that Mexican over is that it inclines folks gen'ral to step high an' softly on what occasions they're found plantigradin' about in her s'ciety.

"One week, two weeks, three weeks goes by, an' since a dead Mexican more or less ain't calc'lated to leave no onefface'ble scars the incident is all but forgot, when a second uprisin' takes place in the Votes For Women S'loon. This time it's that sickly curlew-voiced Oscar who's the shriekin' center of eeents. Most of us is jest filin' out of the O. K. Restauraw, pickin' our teeth after our matootinal reepast, when we beholds this yere Oscar boilin' fo'th from the Votes For Women S'loon, all spraddled out. As he goes t'arin' down the street Miss Bark seelects a graceful p'sition in the door, an' ca'mly pumps three loads at him out of her winchester. When I says she pumps them bullets at Oscar it's to be took conserv'tive; for none of 'em hits him, but only tosses up the dust about his flyin' feet. At the last shot Oscar cripples down in a shiverin' heap; an' with that Texas an' Boggs, not knowin' the extent of his injuries, rolls him onto a blanket an' packs him to his room over at the O. K. House, so's Peets can prospect his frame all scientific locatin' the lead.

"Thar bein' no lead, as rerelated, Peets rereports final to that effect.

"'Only,' says Peets, 'he's scared up to sech extents that if our Joan of Arc had dusted his gaiters with so much as two more bullets he'd have been beyond medical skill.'

"Followin' the foosilade Miss Bark sends for Enright.

"'It's this way,' she goes on, when Enright arrives. 'That shorthorn Oscar comes lurchin' in, an' asks for nosepaint. As he stands thar, puttin' it onder his belt—me meanwhile swabbin' off the bar—he mentions that his paw's rich, an' his step-maw's jest died, leavin' him an' his paw alone. Then he calls attention to the presence in camp of that strayed sky-pilot, who preaches an' passes the hat the other evenin' over in the wareroom of the Noo York store. It's now, havin' got the bar tittivated to my taste, I has time to look this Oscar person's way, an' I finds him gloatin' over me in form an' manner not to be mistook. "Whatever be you leerin' at?" I deemands, bein' I'm in no mood for insults. Tharupon, he cuts loose a mouthful of platitoodes concernin' wedlock, an' about me bein' the soul of his soul. Havin' stood it a while, an' findin' my forbearance makes him worse, I grabs my winchester whar it's repositin' ready for eemergincies on the dripboard, an' you knows the rest.'

"'With your free consent, Miss,' says Enright, 'I'd like to put one query. Was you aimin' to down, or to simply skeer this Oscar?'

"'I was only skeerin' him up some,' replies Miss Bark coyly. 'W'y, if I was reely out for his skelp, I'd have shore got it a heap. You can pin a patch the size of a dollar on that disparin' lover's coat, an' I'll cut it nine times in ten, offhand, at a hundred yards.'

"'Tests is not reequiired,' Enright interposes, plenty hasty; 'it's part of the organic law of this yere camp that a lady's word, even about her age, is to be took onchallenged.'

"'Which I'm flattered,' says Miss Bark. 'Now, is thar anything else?'

"'Only this,' returns Enright. 'As long as he gives you cause, an' you can shoot like you says, why ever don't you down him?'

"'Which I confesses,' says Miss Bark, a blush mantlin' her brow, 'that sech is my orig'nal intentions when I reaches for my weepson. But jest as I sees that Oscar through the sights it comes upon me that thar's nothin' in bein' preecip'tate, an' mebbly I'd better give myse'f the needed time to think his offer over.'

"Enright shakes his wisdom-freighted head; when he relates his talk to Peets, the Doc shakes his head sim'lar in sapient yoonison.

"'Which I'll bet a hatful of yellow chips,' says Boggs, who's stood listenin', 'ag'inst a handful of whites, that this yere Miss Bark makes herse'f an' that Oscar shorthorn man an' wife.'

"'Now I wouldn't wonder none,' observes Peets, replyin' to the look in Enright's eye. 'That shootin' needn't count. A troo affection is freequent boisterous, that a-way.'

"'An' in case,' says Enright, 'the kyards do fall in favor of matrimony, it'll most likely be the end of that Votes For Women S'loon. I begins to see how this yere ongrateful outfit may yet get deep in debt to that egreegious Oscar.'

"None of us ever says so, but it's the common belief that Texas connives at this yere threatened Oscar's escape. In any case, the next mornin' Oscar goes catfoot out of the O. K. House before folks is up, an' takes to hidin' out. The fact is he's layin' for Monte an' the stage, about ten mile no'th of camp. Leastwise, he's thar a heap when Monte comes along, an' deemands that he be took up an' carried to Tucson.

"It ain't first drink time before this Oscar's missed, an' by second drink time the news has drifted over to Miss Bark. It's Peets who informs her, an' he tells us, when reelatin' the incident, that the way that deeserted lady knits her brow is a caution to philos'phers.

"'So,' she says at last, 'that onmitigated seedoocer thinks to leave me in this heartless way. He'll find before he's through that it's no light matter to charm into fervent life a love like mine.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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