

Rodeo

By ARTHUR
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Fighting to regain his self-respect, Hi Lowe, rodeo star, finds that it helps a lot when you help somebody else

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

FROM star rodeo performer to rodeo bum was the descent made by Hi Lowe in two years of drinking and carousing. He started on the downward trail when he thought he got

a raw decision from a rodeo judge, and he paused only when his pal, Sixty Jones, went to the hospital after being thrown by a bronc at the Cheyenne, Wyoming, rodeo.

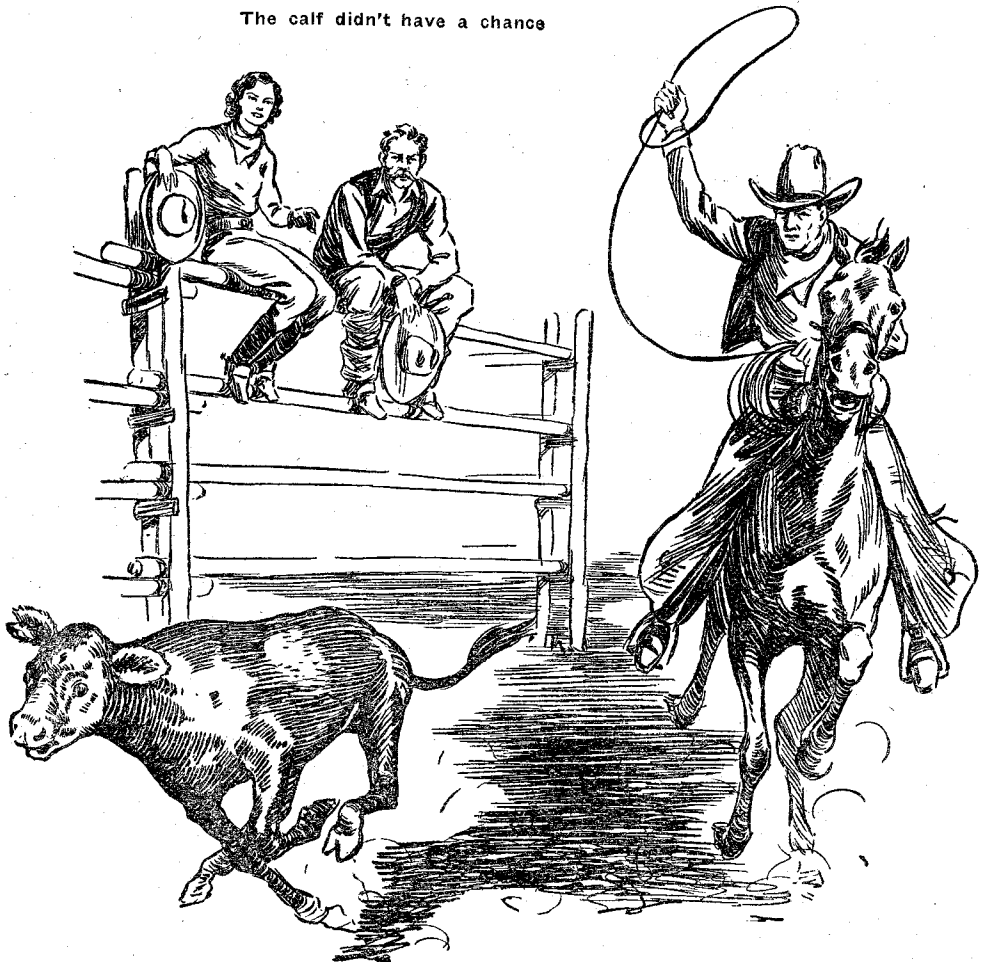
Old Andy Wallace, stockman, agreed to get the best medical help, in an attempt to save Sixty's life, on the condition that Hi straighten out and try to remake himself into a man.

Hi went to the Wallace ranch to work as a cowboy.

There he met Steve Capps, foreman, and was warned by Capps that he must stay off a certain distant part of the range, under Andy Wallace's orders.

Hi obeyed that injunction—until he got lost in a snowstorm and found himself in the forbidden territory. Then he discovered a tombstone that set him to thinking furiously. He was going to demand a showdown with Wallace, but Dawn, Wallace's daughter, persuaded him it would not be wise to ask about the tombstone at the present time.

The calf didn't have a chance



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CHAPTER XIII.

"YOU'LL ROPE!"

"NOW, take it easy, baby," ordered Cross-bar Cameron. "Listen, Honey, take it easy!"

He bit Honey's ear, playfully, and with purpose.

"Sing," advised Mel Myers. "Sing, an' we'll all start fightin' our heads."

"If he sings," said Hack Nash, "I'll go mad an' have to be shot."

"Ladies an' gentlemen," sing-songed Mel as he swept his hat wide and bowed toward the corral poles, "we have in the arena a wild bronc named Honey, an' a wild hombre named Cross-bar Cameron. You'll know Cross-bar 'cause he wears boots."

The little audience perched on the top pole grinned; there were all three Wallaces, and Hi Lowe. Sixty Jones was trying out some wild horses. Andy had to have more broncs, wild pitchers, that would make men ride when they were poured into the arena. The four on the fence were passing judgment, along with the others, as to whether the horses rated or not.

"And on our right," continued Mel grandly, "is Sixty Jones, the kid from Sundance. He's been trained on bob-wire an' rattlesnake oil; an' this bronc here's been rationed on nettles an' loco weed. Watch chute thirteen, people; watch chute thirteen!" Mel talked through his nose and made a clownish burlesque of arena announcing.

"Honey, take it easy," insisted Cross-bar, and chewed the bronc's ear just to give Honey something to think about while Sixty, grinning, and doffing his hat to the four-person audience; swung up.

"Jerk the blind," ordered Sixty, and settled into the saddle.

Hack Nash spun loose the nose twister, Cross-bar jerked away the blindfold they had been forced to put over Honey's eyes while the saddle was being cinched at the snubbing post, and Steve Capps, who was pick-up, spurred his horse ready to get Sixty if the kid sky-rocketed.

"Pour 'em out; out of chute thirteen!" yelled Mel.

There was no chute, but they could play there was.

Honey, a yellowish wild one, quivered, crouched, blinked, and then started sky-hooking until Hi Lowe could see tops of alfalfa stacks under the tawny bronc's belly.

"Powder River!" yelled Cross-bar, fanning his hat. "He's a wild wolf."

"Take him, Steve," shouted Andy. "Don't let that bronc believe he can be ridden."

Steve rode, caught Sixty from the saddle, let the kid slide to safety on the far flank of Steve's own horse, and then the foreman rode to catch the dragging hackamore rope, so Honey could be snubbed down, hazed to the snorting post, and the saddle shucked off.

Sixty came running toward the four on the fence. He grinned.

"There's one for the buckin' string, Mr. Wallace," he called to Andy. Then to Hi, "I can ride Wildcat, fellow. That Honey's got the same shoulder whip that Wildcat had. Hi, I know I can ride Wildcat."

"Kid, you can't eat up saddle punishment after bein' in a hospital bed—" began Hi in anxious protest.

"Aw, six months ago," scoffed Sixty. "I'm all bone an' gristle now."

"From eatin' a lotta pie," said Hack Nash. "Gristle comes from fodderin' on custard pie."

"You let Mom Peters hear you say that," challenged Mel. "She'll feed you rat poison in your pie. Not a bad idee at that, is it, Cross-bar? Bulldoggers ain't nothin' worth savin'."

"You know danged well," said Hack Nash, "that bulldoggers an' ropers—"

"Are the aristocrats of the arena," chided Mel. "Yeah, they say that; but it's the clown, boys, that gets the laughs. An' stidy money. Me, an' Buttercup."

"You an' the other jackass," said Hack Nash. "Sometimes I agree with Andy that Buttercup's the most sensible—"

Mel made a flailing swipe at Hack, the bulldogger ducked, and Mel, as Hack was bent over, got astride him. Hack, willing to keep up the rough fun, bucked Mel off into a particularly dirty corner of the corral. Mel was making faces and dusting his pants.

"Stay there," said Hack. "You've reached your level."

"How about lettin' me have a whack at Wildcat, Mr. Wallace," suggested Sixty. "I want to show myself I can ride 'em."

"Casey and Irby'll be in next week with three cars more of wild range stuff," said Andy. He was just home from selling his beef and a scouting trip in Colorado after bad horses. "I need a real top twister to try out this new batch. Bust your neck later if you want, but wait until we get enough good buckers sorted out."

"Two more broom-tails in here, Sixty," said Cross-bar from the cutting corral.

"Snub 'em an' we'll slap leather on 'em," called Sixty.

"Easy, kid," Hi called after Sixty. "Don't try to ride the world."

"Son," called Sixty, "we're ridin' the world."

"You two are good for each other," said Dawn to Hi.

"He's all right, Sixty is," agreed Hi. He thought of the day Sixty had ridden right at death trying to get back Hi Lowe's saddle. Long new trail since that time; long new trail with the end hazy and uncertain and—what at the end? Hi Lowe didn't know. He'd followed many hazy trails on a gamble. He'd find out what was at the end of this one when he got there. Sure. He always had found out.

"Those broom-tails won't buck," said Andy Wallace with a little disgust as he saw the last two of a carload of range horses. "It takes warm blood in a horse to make him buck. Old Steamboat, for example."

Hub Wallace slid from the corral fence. "I'm going to try a little roping; day's too nice not to limber up."

"Get the stop watch," said Andy to

Dawn, and she slid down on the outside to go to the house for the watch. She glanced at Hi. She was leaving him with Andy so there could be man-talk between them.

"You saw Steamboat buck," suggested Hi Lowe. There was a common ground on which he and Andy Wallace had found meeting place. They talked rodeo business without restraint in their words. Whatever else lay between them, they were arena men.

"Yes," said Andy. "Yes, I did. I saw Steamboat ridden; when Otto Plaga did it. Only time." He watched the men at the snubbing post putting a blindfold on one of the two horses. "Those little old fourteen-hand pelters can't pitch a man," scoffed Andy. "Ain't got it in 'em. No warm blood. Got to have warm blood. Steamboat had long fetlocks. Morgan, he was, partly. Fetlocks showed it. Spirit comes with the warm blood; just like warm blood in men decides whether they quit or not."

"Midnight's fetlocks were long," said Hi after a moment.

"Yeah, Middy was another that had warm blood in him," agreed Andy. "Fool idea people get sometimes, that these are trained buckers. Why, hell, they've just got it in 'em. Just won't let any man ride 'em."

"Story went around that Midnight was gentle enough in harness," said Hi.

"I heard that," agreed Andy. "Might be so. Fact is, I've been around that black devil. Never knew when he was going to swing his head and knock the breath out of you. Just ready to fight it out with a man, those broncs that are worth their salt, any time they get a chance. Always on the fight. People would get a better slant on the bucking contests if they knew that; knew they're always a contest between rider and animal."

The two broom-tails didn't buck. They ran, like mice. All right for a wild horse race, or surcingles could be put on them, and those boys who were trying to break

in might be given a chance to ride 'em. But for the top hands there had to be real sunfishing, sky-rolling broncs; devils that pitched and wouldn't quit.

There's tradition back of this; like traditional range rivalry is back of every rodeo contest. In the old days big outfits ran maybe two hundred wild horses into the corrals after fall rounding. During the winter months the outfit's bronc peeler was supposed to break out seventy-five or a hundred saddle animals. But broncs were found that couldn't be ridden. The outfit took them to roundup. And bets were laid when the peeler of some other outfit said he could ride that one, or any other wall-eyed, spavin-brained son of a stallion. Broncs got reputations; and peelers got proud of their prowess. Just as ropers had pride in their speed and accuracy, and bet their pay and hat on their skill. Every true rodeo contest has its foundation in business of the open range.

"All right, Hub," said Andy as Dawn came with the stop watch. "Let's find out if you, or your rope, have ossified."

There was a little corner of the Wallace corrals that was fitted as a standard roping chute; barrier, foul line, and all. It was another clear indication of how keenly Andy Wallace looked toward a day when practice here would land Hub high money in arena contests.

A CALF was turned loose. Mel Myers held the barrier. Hub yelled and his pony charged when the calf was past the thirty foot mark.

"Give 'em a necklace," yelled Hack Nash encouragingly.

Hub went leaping to make the tie.

Hub looked toward Andy. The old man's features were not very encouraging.

"You threw a community loop," said Andy shortly. "Too large. Took you two seconds to take the slack out of it. Your time was twenty-three and eight tenths, Hub. You've got to keep the loop small for calves. Hey, Steve, you demonstrate."

Steve Capps hesitated. Then took his place back of the barrier that Mel held.

"Watch," said Dawn.

Hi Lowe was watching; Capps, lean, dark, loose-seated on the horse, both animal and man seemingly pulled down, ready for trigger release. Steve made a little loop, held, half-loose, in his hand.

"Pour out the calf," ordered Andy.

There wasn't a hair's width between Capps' roping horse and the barrier when it flipped. The calf wasn't a dozen jumps beyond the thirty-foot mark before the little loop cinched in and Steve Capps was flying down the rope, hand over hand, to the calf. He made the tie and signaled.

"Speedy," said Hi, under his breath.

"He always is," said Dawn, a touch of admiration in her voice.

"There," bawled Andy at Hub. "See that loop, son? No false motions; no lost time. Steve did that in twenty and five."

"Twenty and five tenths seconds?" Hi turned on Andy. The old man's eyes smiled a little, but his face was masked as he nodded.

"That's good in any arena," said Hi.

"I know it," said Andy gruffly. "The darned fool says he's a rancher, not a circus man."

Hi sat and saw Hub loop another calf. Better time. Andy was mollified; but he yelled at Hub on the next two catches. Yelled and growled, like an old wolf teaching his cub to cut down meat.

"I'd like to toss a few," suggested Hi.

"Go to it," directed Andy.

Hi's heart beat up in rhythm as he saddled Punch, his horse. While he had roped a lot this fall, it wasn't like this contest roping where all speed has to be put into every move. Capps hadn't contest-roped either, and that time he'd made was good.

Andy Wallace came to where Hi was saddling Punch; walking in that careful way that always reminded that whatever the old man did had to be without violent twists.

"You dallie or tie hard fast?" asked Andy.

"Dallie," replied Hi.

"Good," approved Andy. "We all dallie."

There's tradition back of this, too. Northern ropers, who rode the plains, tied their lariats hard-and-fast, by bringing the rope up through the forks of the saddle and around the pommel. The Texan learned to make a loose hitch, a dallie, around his saddle pommel, for if he tied into a mean longhorn, and his horse shied or came uncorked, the loose-tied rope would slip and both animals would be free to go their way instead of getting desperately snarled in mesquite or scrub oak. Horse and cow critter could be picked up later if the free hitched rope were used.

It was a hard-and-fast tie that had wreaked such damage on Andy Wallace when he was almost reaching to take the roper championship; and he insisted, because of this bitter experience, that his men must dallie. Either tie is allowed in the rodeo except where roping had been refined by people who insist cowhands must be polite to calves and steers.

Hi formed a loop as small as the one Capps had made.

"Pour 'em out," he ordered.

He had to rein hard to keep Punch from fouling the barrier. But then they were away. The calf was a fast one; more spry than the one Capps had caught. But the loop was small, and true. Hi dodged the calf's feet, made the hog-tie, jumped free, throwing his hand high as a signal.

"Good time," said Andy. "Two-tenths of a second short of what Steve made. Try it again. Watch, Hub; now watch."

Things went haywire the second try; the calf busted himself, and according to rules, Hi had to allow him to get to his feet, then throw him. They all were laughing by the time that tie was finished.

"A slow freight catch," declared Crossbar.

There was another calf in the chute. Hi tried again. It was a tenth of a second above Steve Capps' time, and that was good.

"Gee, Hi," said Hub, "tell me your secrets."

"Lean a clean life, don't bet two nine-spots when a man opens with jacks against you, and keep your loop small," said Hi, and there was a lot of soberness in his speech, though he was laughing.

He looked up to see Andy tramping away, head down. Turned to see Steve Capps' dark eyes studying him intently; something like the day they had looked over a rifle that Capps held in his lap and suggested that if Hi really wanted to know if Capps would shoot, all he had to do was ride on and find out. Hi got away from the group that were chattering around the roping chute. He put his saddle in the shed, came around the corner, and ran directly into Steve.

"That was good time," drawled Capps in a noncommittal way.

"You made good time yourself," stated Hi.

"I've made better," said Steve Capps.

"Then why don't you enter in some arena?"

Steve rolled a smoke thoughtfully, moodily.

"Thought I would, once," he said.

"Andy coached me for all he was worth. He knows roping, every trick, every split second, both thirty-foot line roping, and lap-and-tap. The old man coached me, and I guess maybe it was bred into me besides. He held the watch on me just like he's coaching Hub now. The old man was getting me ready to go in and startle the shows."

"You never contested."

"Yes. But light came to me. You know how Andy's got his heart all set to see Hub, the king of all ropers."

"Plain as day. Sticks out all over the old man."

"Sure. Well, I saw it in time."

Steve looked up, with that trick of squinting over a match flame just struck.

"Hub was coming up," he said. "I roped in a few short grass shows that nobody ever heard about. And it got into my blood. You know, the cheering, and the kick you get out of being top man in an arena contest."

"I know," Hi Lowe drew a deep breath. "I knew I couldn't stop, once it took hold of me," said Steve soberly.

"Thought the kid could beat you?"

Steve Capps whipped his gaze back from the far horizon over in the grassy hills country. "No," he answered steadily. "I knew I could beat him; that I'd always be able to. Andy's done so dog-gone much for me I couldn't get in the kid's way. Hub can go to the top in ordinary company."

"You could have done your bit, then pulled out," said Hi.

Steve shook his head soberly. "'Tain't in the Wallace creed," he said. "The old man'd known after I'd won a few times. So I got interested in ranching; just awful interested."

"And cleared the track for Hub."

Steve nodded, and struck a second match.

"Andy's done a heap for me, too," observed Hi.

Steve squinted over the match. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah."

The foreman nodded again, almost to himself. Hi was quiet.

"I thought," said Steve slowly, "you'd be wondering why I wasn't roping in some of the arenas, and figured it was best to give you the facts first hand. Since—we're both sorta somewhat in the same boat, in a way."

Steve stood a minute, then went into the barn, whistling; a little off key, if Hi had noticed.

He didn't notice any sound. There was too much churning around in his thoughts. He didn't notice when Andy Wallace caught up with him and walked along, out into the open barnyard, to where nobody could possibly hear what they said. Then Andy stopped Hi.

"I just heard what Steve Capps said," stated Andy as he faced Hi. "And I want to tell you that I had his play figured out but couldn't prove it. And listen, you," and Andy began shaking his finger into Hi's face, "if you listen to Steve Capps, and figure that you've got some obliga-

tion to meet that'll best be paid out by you staying out of the arena contests where Hub'll be roping his year— Say! I want to tell you, right now, that if you ever expect to measure up, and pay off to me, anything like what I want in pay for anything I've done for me, you'll rope! I'll never get over it, never, if Hub doesn't show up; I want him to make the championship. But I don't want him to make it by someone better laying down. Do you hear? Well—then— By the Eternal, if you feel any obligation to me, you'll rope. And if you don't— I'll feel you've sold me out and smeared me with common disgrace."

Andy's chin was shaking with emotion. There was the queer glitter in his eyes.

"That's plain, isn't it; plain as anything Capps said just now? All right, you rope, or by the Lord I'll want to know why!"

Andy whirled and stumbled away.

Hi Lowe stood, dazed.

Any way it added, this didn't figure up. Something missing, some important figure. And it wouldn't add up right until he found it.

But there was no use questioning. It didn't figure out. Some day it would. He'd play the game, remember his promise to old Andy Wallace, keep his eyes open. ears alive, head up, and play the game.

CHAPTER XIV.

SHORT GRASS SHOW.

THOSE who sit in the amphitheaters at a rodeo see a show; a great number see nothing more. Particularly in those shows staged in great eastern coliseums, or in the famous big-time western arenas, the rodeo takes on the appearance of a spectacle. Those bigger shows, with their fat purses, are the Major League games, the rangeland Olympics, highly organized and efficiently directed. There the top hands fight it out to see which is the best bulldogger, the slickest roper, the most able bronc twister.

But out in the stock country, on the range, there are home-made rodeos, hay-wire and hilarious, that break out like a rash when warm weather hits the hills, and somewhere, round about, a local show will be going even after harvest moon has waned. Some of these build up a recognized place in the Association shows. Others remain bush league and sand lot rodeos; pumpkin shows, short-grass events, staged for the local people, by local people. They're the places the arena men start from after they've outgrown the home ranch.

If you really want to yell, here's the real place. Sure, you can yell at Cheyenne, or Monte, or Pendleton, or Calgary; sure you can. But you do it like a lady or gent.

At a short grass show you cut loose and whoop. Who cares?

Take the Tall Pine Roundup. Something to shout about. Rodeo? Hell, brother, it's a riot. Batten down your boots and hitch up your breeches, and "Tell 'em at Tall Pine!"

"I'm a wild wolf. My night to howl!"

That's the stuff. That's the real McCoy!

McCoy? Who was he? Well, I'm a slue-foot Sioux. You didn't know he was a cattle-buyer at Dodge when trail herds still were driven in there; and that so many chiselers got trading on his name he made up the slogan; that he was the *real* McCoy. Sure; that's it.

History. Oh, hell; who cares? Today counts at Tall Pine!

"I'm a wild wolf. I'm curly!"

That's the stuff. Stretch yore lungs. Ain't she goin' grand?

Dust smoked on the track of Tall Pine's Roundup. Arena officials, with big blue ribbons printed black with the word "Committee" choused around, yelling at each other.

"Let's get the buckin' goin', Bill."

"Charley said he'd tend to that."

"Well, where in sin's Charley."

"How in hell should I know where Charley is."

"Let's get the buckin' started."

"No, it's time fer calf ropin', Slim."

"Can't start that. Dode Kethley's in both that an' the relay race. They're linin' up in the relay right now."

"Well, where's Charley; let's get the buckin' goin'. Hell, we're still goin' to be here at midnight."

"Who cares?"

Hi Lowe sat humbly, in the dust, beside Sixty Jones near the bucking chutes. The whole Wallace outfit was here, even including Mom Peters, Irby Paul and Casey Owens.

Streaking back at Hi Lowe came remembrance of last season, when he had sat thus at Cheyenne; and beyond that he remembered those little pumpkin-circuit rodeos he had roped in before he entered the bigger arenas. Here's where you saw them on their way; the boys going up, the has-beens coming down. Cross roads, these short grass rodeos; where comers and goers passed.

"Pete, see if you can scare up Charley. Let's get the buckin' started." The committeeman was getting exasperated.

"Boys seem to be sorta millin'," observed Cross-bar as he hunkered down beside Sixty and Hi. "I might sing to keep the crowd quiet if they ask me, but they ain't asked me."

"They know better," said Mel Myers, who had heard.

"Why does Andy Wallace bring his outfit to this little show?" Hi asked of Cross-bar.

"He gets his season's luck at this show," said Cross-bar sagely. "Here's where he won his first ropin' money, an' here's where he started his rodeo contractin', an' he allus starts the season here just for common an' general luck. An' say, she's a ring-tailed wonder, this show, ain't she?"

Luck again; an arena man's luck. Hi Lowe starting up from the pumpkin circuit, headed for the top, without his old Pendleton saddle.

"Hello," called Dawn. They saw her break away from a group that included

Andy, Hub, and some strangers. Dawn came running.

"Who are the dudes?" asked Cross-bar after first talk had passed.

"They're New York men," said Dawn. "The good-looking one, talking to dad, is Louis Dittmore. Got money. Mason Drake, the short, dark man, follows the race horses. Both say they're interested in the show in New York next fall."

"They officials back there?"

"No; I guess just interested. Chalky Hewitt, you know, of the Cross Ox dude ranch, introduced them to dad. Dittmore and Drake are guests at the Cross Ox. They said they wanted especially to meet all our bunch because we're going to the Garden show this fall. Come on over."

Dawn ragged them along. There was talk. Dittmore made smooth remarks. It didn't capture Dawn's attention as he wished. But Hub was talking big and handsome. His breath was stiff with liquor. Hi edged closer to Dawn and whispered confidentially.

"Who said no saloon in Tall Pine?" he asked.

"There isn't; Hub got it from that Drake." Dawn turned troubled eyes. "That pair have a flask in every pocket."

"They're puttin' themselves out to be agreeable."

"Yes, and that kind never does that without some purpose. They're city men—and they're too neighborly."

A COMMITTEEMAN yelled, "Here's Charley, Slim. Here's Charley. He was drinkin' pop with Baldy Rinker. Now let's start ropin'."

"Shake it up, you ropers."

"I'll herd Hub over to the chutes," suggested Hi.

"Hi, please keep him out of trouble," begged Dawn. "I don't think dad realizes Hub's been drinking. Dad's too busy with the stock."

Hi Lowe grinned, sourly, as he tramped toward roughly made chutes. Andy Wallace had jerked a man named Lowe out of the gutter for some unexplained reason,

and now this Lowe was asked to block the way when Andy's own son started hell raising.

Hub wasn't much older than Sixty Jones. But Sixty had been through rougher territory than Hub, and knew trails and signs along 'em. Hub's roping skill had gone to his head just a little; and that wasn't good. Made Hub fight his head sometimes. Hub was an all right kid, but he was only a sprout. Needed seasoning.

Chalky Hewitt and Mason Drake caught up with Hub and Hi at the tie rack where roping horses waited. Hi got a good look at Drake. Bristly hair, beady eyes, a smile that only stretched his mouth without his beady eyes changing a particle. Hi didn't like Drake any more than he liked Chalky Hewitt.

Hewitt was a good roper. There's been talk of shady deals in arenas in which Hewitt figured, but no proof. Contests thrown for money, so the rumor ran. It was a cinch Hewitt's record wasn't quite clean. The way Hewitt duded up in pink silk shirts and yellow kerchiefs, fawn-colored breeches and light tan boots with purple inlaid hearts on 'em, didn't take the curse off his unpleasant features; his catfish mouth, with too much wrinkled cheek on either side, his round-ended nose, and that too-thin web between eyes that were cold.

"Where's Dittmore?" asked Hub. "He said he'd talk to me here."

"I'll talk," said Drake huskily. "Ditt's chasing another skirt; that ash blond kid, with the oh-daddy eyes and swell legs. Soompin' to chase, eh, buddy?"

"That's my sister." Hub's face was pasty white.

"Easy, Hub," said Chalky. "Drake didn't know."

"No offense meant," said Drake hastily. "Sure not. She's a swell dame. It's no offense to say she's got a swell figger. Nice girl. Sure nice. Ditt's a swell fellow. Picks thoroughbreds. Get me? Here, just to show no ill feelings, buddy." Drake offered a flask.

"Leave it alone," ordered Hi.

"Well, who in hell invited you into this?" demanded Drake.

"I'm hornin' in," said Hi levelly.

"You and who else?" said Drake beligerently. "When a guy's asking a gent to drink just to show there's no hard feelings. Drink up, kid."

HUB started to raise the flask. Hi got hold of it, jerked, got it free, threw it beyond the horses.

"Why, you damn punk!" blared Drake. "You lousy chiseler—"

"Fight," yelled someone over by the roping chutes. "Fight."

Hi held himself. Drake had started for him, but Hewitt held the dark-faced city man. "Don't go startin' trouble," said Hewitt. "Easy, now. Or this proposition of ours might get upset. Hold everything, Drake."

"What's the idea?" Hub demanded angrily of Hi.

"You're ropin', kid; first contest of the season," said Hi steadily. "I've proved a number of times you can't rope and get drunk at the same time. Take my word for it. This show's our luck. Don't spoil it with gin."

"Hub Wallace, you're up next," yelled the man named Charley.

"Smart guy, eh?" sneered Drake. He planted himself cockily, his short, stout legs spread in front of Hi Lowe.

"Don't pick trouble, Drake," advised Chalky. "Lowe here might figure in our plans. He's one of the Wallace crowd. Want to make some money, Lowe? Easy money?"

"I'll make money," said Hi. "But it'll not be your kind. And probably not so easy, either. What I do get I'll be able to spend without washing my paws afterward."

"Smart guy, eh?" Drake said again. "Tall Pine wise guy. And pure. Too smart and pure to even talk about making some easy money. Go to hell, then."

"He's been kicked out of arenas before," said Chalky Hewitt insinuatingly. "Just as well not fool with him, maybe. He's

done as a roper anyway; he'll not last the season."

They turned away, toward the roping chutes. Hi heard the announcer call Hub's roping time. Twenty-one and two-tenths. Pretty fair.

Hi watched Hub come over to talk with Drake and Hewitt. He didn't go close enough to get into that talk. It would have boiled up more trouble. Then Hewitt was called to rope.

"Didn't you talk yourself out of some sure money?" he flung at Hi as he passed.

"What money I get'll be hard and clean," said Hi. He'd never like Hewitt. The fellow was too greasy smooth.

"Listen, you bum," said Hewitt, squaring away. "You're a sweet specimen to get sassy. You must think you're goin' to be high, like the smokes of hell, way you talk. King of all ropers this year, maybe." Hewitt's catfish mouth pulled back into his meaty cheeks.

"It wouldn't surprise me a particle," Hi countered.

"It'll give the world heart failure, though," sneered Hewitt. "Watch my time, guy, and see if you can beat it."

Hewitt shaved three tenths off Hub's time. A couple of local boys roped, then Hi was called.

First time into the arena without his saddle luck. He wondered what bad would happen. Something, without his luck.

He was too anxious; his first loop was too small and the calf stumbled so that loop missed. A yell went up, derisive. Hi used his second loop. He was only four tenths of a second slower than Hub. But calf roping is decided by tenths of seconds.

Saddle luck. He'd lost it. Saddle hands, of a man now dead, Bagwell, had fixed it so Sixty near lost his life instead of winning a championship at Cheyenne. Rodeo game had to be kept clean, or it would go to pot; never last if it turned rotten.

What in hell were Hewitt and this Drake mutt cooking up with Hub Wallace? Nothing straight.

"The smart guy—but not so smart with that kind of a performance," Drake threw

at Hi. Hi said nothing. He was an arena man without his luck.

"Hub," called Hi. "Can I speak to you a minute?"

Hub came, slouching. "If you've got any preaching," warned Hub, "get someone to lend you a pulpit next Sunday. I'm white, free, and twenty-one. You get me, don't you?"

"*Bueno*," said Hi with sudden heat. "Just go to hell if it looks that good to you. Just go on, and go to hell. You'll have fine company with Drake and Hewitt."

He spun away, angrily, and walked. Suddenly he was sorry. Shouldn't have antagonized Hub. He thought it over, and decided he'd better find Hub, smooth this over, and talk to the kid. But Hub, Hewitt and Drake had gone away from the roping chutes.

"Where's Hub?" Dawn asked as she came up with Sixty. "Is he with Hewitt and that Drake fellow?"

"Hub was with 'em a minute ago," said Hi. "Disappeared now. Come on, Sixty, let's round him up."

"Hub on the wild?" asked Sixty as they walked away.

"In bad company," replied Hi tartly.

They didn't find Hub around the arena before the wild horse race. That race snarled up and one rider got kicked senseless, which was more excitement than racing the wild ones, and stopped the race. In that turmoil the ponies got away and the arena events of the Tall Pine Roundup bumped to a finish.

"You didn't find him?" Dawn asked as she met Hi after people began leaving the grounds. She was alone and Hi knew she was hunting her brother. Andy and the other men were busy with stock and Dawn wanted to get Hub corraled before Andy might find him half drunk and bear down on him; something that might break open bitter rift between father and son.

"I'll trap him for you," Hi promised.

He'd gone the length of Tall Pine's dusty main street before he sighted Dittmore, Drake and Hewitt as they came from the

town's frame hotel. A fourth one in the party was Hub; but he separated from the others immediately, and Hi caught up with the kid as Hub was climbing into one of the Wallace autos.

"Now where you headin' for?" asked Hi mildly.

"That's none of your damn business," said Hub.

"But supposin' it was," suggested Hi easily. "Where would you say you were headin'?"

"I'm going out to the Cross OX ranch and what of it?" Hub was all excited and warlike. "And maybe you want to know everything all at once. Well, listen, I'm signing a pool and split agreement with Chalky Hewitt, Tim Gillette and four or five other top ropers, and if you hadn't blown off so to Drake today, you might have been in this. But you've only made him sore, sore as a boiled owl. And he's going to use this bunch that's pooling and splitting to see that you get beat, plenty. That's what blowing off got you. Drake and Hewitt have worked this out, and no matter who wins, we'll all make a good season's money. I'm tired of this wet-nursing I've had for the past few years. I'm going to show all of you."

Hub stopped; he'd said too much. He realized it. Hi stood, his silence accusing. This was something that would tear old Andy Wallace in two when or if he found it out.

"What you got to say about it, you sweet-scented prodigal?" burst out Hub.

"What you got to say, huh?"

"No contest," said Hi slowly. "You've sold yourself out to some slickers, and it's no contest."

Some rodeo men did that, but not the best ones. The poolers all knew what their own time might be. They froze out all others in the preliminaries and then loafed into the big money of the finals, and split the pot among them at the end. Some rodeo men had done just this thing, but they were the Chalky Hewitt kind, who didn't claim a ranch as a permanent home.

"I suppose this Dittmore and Drake are

New York sporting men that think they'd like to make the arena contests pay," suggested Hi. "Fix a few contests and get some bets on 'em."

"What of it?" said Hub. "It's just a show, that's all. What's wrong with gambling? You've got no license to talk."

"Here," said Hi as Hub flipped the ignition switch, "where do you think you're going?"

"Cross OX, and to hell with you."

"Just won't listen to reason," sighed Hi, as Hub reached to release the brake.

"Naw, I just won't listen," said Hub.

"Then listen to this," said Hi softly.

Hub didn't realize it was coming. Hi hit squarely with solid fist. Hub jerked, and slumped. Hi caught him, then heard the exclamation behind him. He turned.

Dawn stood, frozen in unbelief. Then came, tearing Hi aside, and reached to straighten the unconscious Hub in his seat.

"What made that necessary?" she demanded hotly.

"Maybe it wasn't necessary," replied Hi, as though thinking to himself. "But the kid was selling out Andy; bound and determined to drive out to the Cross OX and sign a pool-and-split agreement with Hewitt, these New York sports and other ropers they've lined up. It sounds crooked. Guess it wasn't necessary, maybe; but I had to stop him quick and certain—and I was thinking of his dad—I guess."

Dawn turned, staring. "Let's get in the car here, get Hub between us, and head for home," she said huskily.

They saw Sixty leading a string of hackamored horses; told him they were leaving Tall Pine; for him to advise the others. Hub recovered, and was sore and ready to fight. Dawn tore into him with bitter accusal; Hi sat stolidly.

"If you'd thought twice," said Dawn, "you'd never have considered such an offer."

"Say," flared Hub, "I thought three times. Listen, you two." Hub still was liquor wild. "Listen, I've already signed up, and Drake's got the contract. All we

were going to do was celebrate at the Cross OX. How do you like that, both of you?"

The car tore along for a little way, then Dawn stopped it.

"You've got to drive, Hi," she said. "I can't see the road." Hi knew tears had bleared her vision. "I wouldn't trust Hub with the wheel right now." More accusal.

"For cripes sake," burst out Hub. "You'd think I'd ruined our family and gone plumb to hell, the way you talk."

"If we don't get that contract from Drake maybe you've started doin' both them things," Hi drawled. "If this leaks out you'll carry a black eye into every arena in America. That'd about crack the old man's heart in two. This isn't playing the game his way."

"Oh, Hub!" Dawn turned away, to cry softly.

Hub sat sullenly for miles, then said hotly, "I'm grown up!"

"I wish you weren't," countered Hi. "I'd paddle you proper."

Dawn hurried to the dark ranch house when they arrived. Hub stood, awkwardly, uncertainly. Hi saw the boy's profile against the bright window after Dawn had lit a lamp. Prodigal—and home.

"Haven't I brought honor and fame to the family now," said Hub meanly, as though he was caught in the same thought stream as Hi. "Just possible you knocked a little sense into me when you clouted me on the jaw. Try it again, for luck."

"You'll get plenty of wallops without my help." Hi rubbed it in a little. "Some of 'em heavy enough to hurt the others."

Hub's breath dragged in between clenched teeth in a ragged shudder; something like gusty breath after childhood tears. Hub was over twenty-one right enough, but the old man had done too much thinking for him, probably. He was a whipped kid right now.

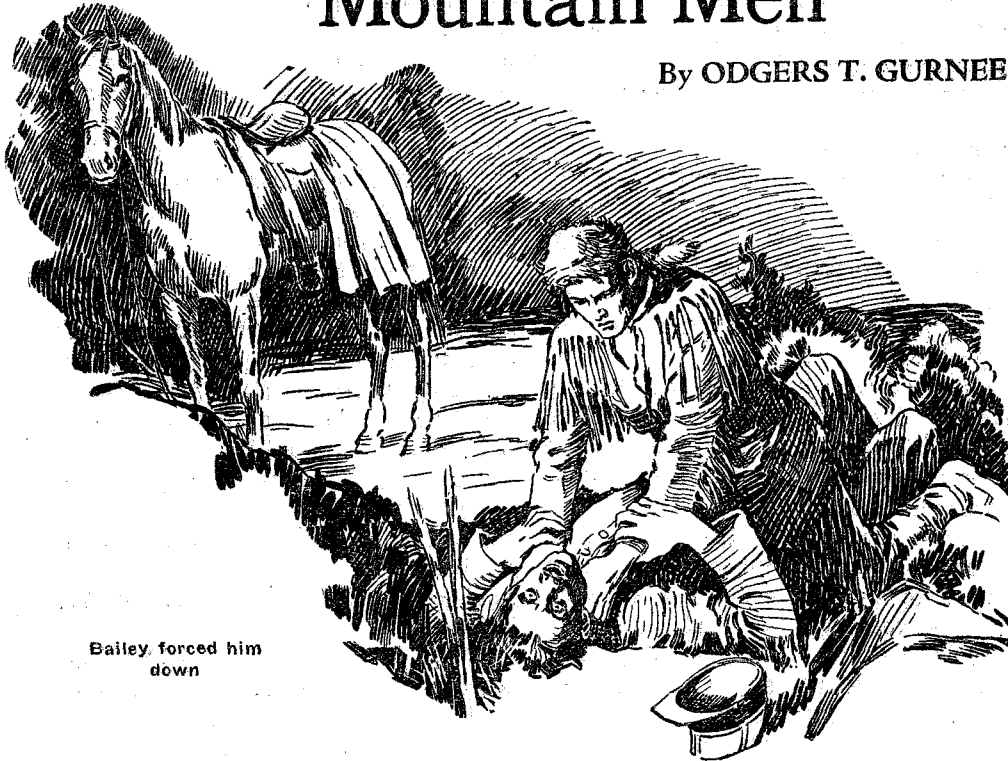
"Oh, go walk the hell out of you!" said Hi roughly.

Hub turned toward the hills, hesitated, then tramped away, furiously, up the meadows of Andy's Fork.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Taos Men Were Mountain Men

By ODGERS T. GURNEE



Bailey forced him down

Bailey Galt wanted to be a stalwart Mountain Man—an ambition which was to lure him into the very jaws of death

WHEN Bailey Galt's grandfather came up from tidewater Virginia in 1790, he paused at the Falls of the Ohio and looked north and south and west and stopped there.

Now, fifty years later, young Bailey stood at the Falls and looked north. There Marquette had gone to the black Wisconsin. He looked south. There Crockett had crossed the Trace to Natchez and Mississippi. He looked west. There Carson had threaded to St. Louis, the Cimarron and the Arkansas and the Purgatoire—the River of Lost Souls.

A hand seemed to press against his shoulders and a voice spoke out of nothing.

"Catch up," it said, in the tongue of the Mountain Men. "Get on."

He laughed and caught up his pack and his long rifle and mounted the gangplank of the river packet, Washita, bound for St. Louis and the golden fleece.

St. Louis was a new world. The terraced city where Chouteau had built his fort swarmed with men from north and east and south and west—voyagers from the bateaus, keel boat men, New Orleans creoles, buffalo hunters and trappers from the plains and mountains beyond.

It was the Mountain Men young Bailey sought. And in that first night ashore he found them. A fur brigade of Bent and