

Bulldozer and me see that wild horse  
put up the scrap of the century



Sourdoughs, place your bets! With a horse that looks like a long-haired moose and with a porcupine for a mascot, No-Shirt McGee is set to make racetrack history in the sweepstakes of Hungry Creek. A complete novelet of the North.

I

**B**ULLDOZER CRAIG takes a look into the meat cache and smiles all over. "Well, No-Shirt," he says, "we're settin' pretty. Look at that mountain sheep meat; the moose meat and the caribou steaks we've got in that cache. Now turn your head and take a gander at the woodpile. No matter what comes we'll be warm and have plenty to eat this winter. Let the blizzards blow, say I!"

"Well, I don't say any such thing," I tell him. "Mrs. McGee's boy No-Shirt hasn't spent the biggest part of his life in Alaska for nothin'. We've got enough for ourselves, but not enough for guests."

"Who's comin'?" he asks, curious.

"I don't know," I admit, "but when it gets noised around that Craig and McGee have got plenty of grub and a keg of hootch, we'll have visitors. The North's full of folks ready to trade their doubtful charms for a winter's grub."

# McGee on Horseback

By

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"Tin Money," etc.

"What's it got to do with me?" Bulldozer asks.

"You've got to take your musket, go into the hills and knock over a moose or two," I tell him. "And listen, don't kill 'em five miles from the cabin like you done the last time. Drive 'em in close, then shoot 'em. Always let your meat bring itself in on the hoof."

"I'll remember that," Bulldozer says. "And if I can't drive my bull to the cabin, I'll hang the meat up in trees and let our guests pack it in when they come."

"No, you can't do that," I answer. "The wolverines will get it."

"The wolverines will get the guests or the meat?" he asks.

"None of your smart cracks," I tell him.

Well, he fills his pockets full of cartridges, some dried caribou meat, a handful of prunes and a loaf of sourdough bread, and clears out. I don't see him for two days, then he comes in pop-eyed with excitement.

"Hey, No-Shirt," he yells, "I've just seen a herd of long-haired moose—couldn't get close enough to 'em for a shot. And, say, you should've seen 'em travel. Hey! What in the hell's the matter with you? Why're you lookin' at me in that tone of voice."

"You've been drinkin' wolverine milk again," I accuse him.

Now wolverine milk is a potent drink made by sourdoughs. The secret is handed down from father to son. Durin' a long, dry spell Bulldozer got hisself adopted by

a childless sourdough and learned the secret of buildin' wolverine milk.

It ain't a drink that's brewed or distilled. It's built. You start with a empty keg, potato peelin's and prune juice and you go on from there.

"Honest, No-Shirt," Bulldozer insists, "I ain't had so much as a snort of wolverine milk. My head's clear as a bell. And I saw long-haired moose."

"I suppose the bulls had green moss on their horns, too?" I sneer.

"That's another funny thing about it," he says, "there ain't a bull in the lot—just cows."

"How many?" I ask.

"May be twenty or thirty," he answers. "I couldn't count 'em. The herd was movin' through the timber too fast."

Well, that is reasonable enough. The timber is kinda bad around here, but I'd never seen a couple of dozen cow moose runnin' together in one band.

"Can you find this band of long-haired moose?" I ask.

"Sure," he answers. "I've got to find 'em if I expect to winter with you."

"You'd better find 'em," I tell him, "or I'll have a jury of six lookin' you over and askin' funny questions." A jury of six men is always called to judge a man's sanity.

"I've heard that old wheeze about there bein' three sides to Alaska—Inside, Outside and Morningside—where they send the insane. But Morningside or not, I saw long-haired moose," he says.

WE SET off bright and early the followin' mornin' and that night we camp in the snow on the rim of a long, narrow valley. "The herd's down there," Bulldozer says. "May be we'll hear 'em."

I'm too tired to do anything more'n crawl into my sleepin' bag, but around midnight Bulldozer starts shakin' me. "Hear 'em," he yelps excitedly. "Listen to 'em go."

I can hear something pounding down the valley. Moose might have made a noise like that. But long-haired moose! I shake my head again. Then suddenly I hear a new sound—the cry of the wolf pack. The poundin' of hoofs gets louder. I can hear brush and small trees crackin', then a high-pitched scream followed by snarls.

"They got one of 'em down," Bulldozer says. "The rest've gone on."

"Listen, you sucklin' babe," I sneer, "did you ever hear of horses? They're animals with four corners and there's a leg on each corner. They have heads and tails, and men line 'em up, and make 'em race, and the man who puts his money on the nose of the winnin' horse gets his money back and a lot more with it."

"Tryin' to be funny, eh?" Bulldozer growls. "Whoever heard of a long-haired horse? And there ain't no horses in this part of the country anyway."



"Maybe you're like my friend Murphy down in Seattle," I suggest. "Murphy had a knife-sharpenin' outfit, which he hauled around with an old horse named Chinese Cent because he wasn't worth much. One day Chinese Cent ran away, busted up the wagon on a fireplug and scattered knives and whetstones from hell to breakfast. Murphy made a report to the police and the desk man says, 'Hell, Murphy, it must've taken a lot to scare that old plug.' And Murphy says, 'It did. He got the fright of his life—he saw another horse!'"

"Meanin' I ain't seen horses before," Bulldozer growls. "Those ain't horses down there. They're long-haired moose."

We go back to sleep, but as soon as it's daylight we're up again. By the time the sun's up, we're through eatin'. We work along the ridge and pretty soon we spot a place where the snow's tramped down and crimson. There's a lot of hair and bones scattered about. We go down and I can see the bones are from a horse and wolf.

"That horse got a wolf," I tell Bulldozer, "before the pack got him."

"So it is a horse," he says, his voice full of doubt.

"Every stampede the North has ever known," I tell Bulldozer, "has brought in a bunch of horses and dogs. In the early days there was everything from lap dogs to Newfoundlands. Amongst the horses you found tough little slickears to thoroughbred racin' stock—nags that weren't good for the track any more and had been sold for what they'd bring. The stampede sent the price up and horse dealers bought 'em and shipped 'em North."

"Where they growed beards," Bulldozer sneers.

"Some of them would get away from pack-trains," I patiently explain, "or an owner would be killed and the whole train have to find range or die. With the cold makin' their hair grow, and nobody to clip it, I've seen horses with manes and tails draggin' in the brush."

"But don't take it to heart, Bulldozer. You ain't the first man who figgered he'd seen a long-haired moose. It's a natural

mistake in a country where you expect to see moose instead of horses."

"It's a horse on me," Bulldozer says, "and that ain't no pun. I suppose the wolves got on the band's trail and chased it into our country."

"That's about the size of it," I answer. "And the wolves will hang onto the trail until they've killed the last nag. I'm for campin' in these parts and wipin' out the pack."

"A swell idear," Bulldozer agrees. "And what's the matter with gettin' ourselves a couple of pack-horses and packin' our meat in, as long as it can't be drove to the cabin on the hoof?"

"I'm all for it," I tell him. "Watchin' you catch a horse and break it to the pack-saddle is goin' to be better'n a three-ring circus."

## II

NOT knowin' where we'd go, me and Bulldozer are packin' our outfits on our backs as we work along the rim of the valley. We make slower time with a load, but we know we won't have to back-track for our sleepin' bags and grub. Every little while we stop, rest and listen.

Us McGees never believe in doin' unnecessary work and I'm the family leader in that school of thought. My ears has saved me many a mile. In a few minutes my ears tell me we can keep a-settin' instead of crossin' a gulch that's arm-pit deep with snow. The band's comin' back down the valley again.

We hear the main bunch go crashin' through the brush on the opposite side. Then a lone critter—cut off from the rest of the band—is headin' our way.

The critter busts into the open a quarter-mile away a few seconds later. He ain't the biggest horse I've ever seen, but he's the homeliest. He's a kinda of a paint horse. If he was a dog you'd call him a alley mongrel. He's as brave as a lion, smarter'n a fox and meaner'n sin. I know horses, havin' once owned a medicine show and three or four runnin' horses.

The wolves are a couple of hundred yards behind him, and comin' strong. He looks back, and I can see he ain't scared. He's just mad clean through. He's got his ears laid back and his ears are showin'. His tail—matted with burs and clay—is bouncin' in the snow behind him, and his mane is whippin' along like a sheet hung on a clothesline. The rest of his hair is long, too.

Just as the wolves close in, he suddenly turns and goes into deeper snow. "The damned fool," Bulldozer says. "Now they've got him."

"Oh no, they ain't," I says.

The snow's almost up to his belly which means his feet are still on the ground, and the wolves feet ain't. They're breakin' through to their bellies and can't move around fast. A couple get in behind to hamstring the horse, while those in front go for the throat.

They jump, but the snow gives way when they start the jump, and they fall short. As they hit, the horse rears up and drives his hoofs into the nearest wolf. Them front hoofs are plenty sharp. We can see the wolf almost break in the middle. He rolls over and crawls away, while the others keep at the horse.

We move closer and can see the plumes of vapor spurtin' through their white fangs, and we know from the gusty way the vapor comes out, they're breathin' hard.

One makes a long leap and opens a old wound on the horse's shoulder, then spills into the snow. The horse whirls, kicks out and lifts the wolf ten feet into the air. The uproar, with the stallion screamin' and the wolves snarlin', is enough to make a man's blood run cold.

"Let's give that boy a hand," Bulldozer says, his nerves crackin' under the strain.

I know how he feels. It's like a fight crowd yellin', "Stop the fight!" Only this horse is a long way from bein' groggy. Bulldozer's afraid they'll get him down.

"You take those on the right," I tell him, "and I'll open up on those on the left." Then we commences to blaze away.

We don't miss, because I've learned Bull-

dozer how to shoot straight in a country where you count your ca'tridges as just so many pounds of grub. Straight shootin' was one of the first things I learned on the trail forty years ago.

THE snow's covered with squirmin' wolves while the first shots are still echoin' amongst the peaks. We both put a bullet through the last wolf, then stop and watch that stallion go. Maybe the noise scared him worse'n the wolves did, because he wasn't really scared of the wolves. Maybe he'd been shot at before. I don't know, but I do know I've never seen horseflesh on the track or range go faster.

He uncorks a burst of speed that's nothin' less than greased lightnin'. "I wish he was on one of them California tracks," I yell, "and I had five thousand dollars right on the nose."

"He'd probably turn out to be a lead nickel," Bulldozer answers. "Maybe you've won a bet in your time, but I never did. I got desperate once and bet, even money, a hundred-to-one-shot horse would come in last and the damned thing finished out in front and my worst enemy had a hundred dollars ridin' on the nag's nose."

The homely little stallion clears a rock half covered with snow and vanishes into a thicket. Five minutes later my heart quits poundin' with excitement. "I've changed my mind about wantin' pack-horses," Bulldozer says. "It's less work and safer to pack our meat in on our own backs."

"Those nags look tough, eh?" I suggest.

"Tough. I've never seen a tougher bunch at a bulldozers' picnic," Bulldozer answers. "And mostly the lads who now drive bulldozers and tractors are the sons of the toughest of the old-time teamsters and mule skimmers."

Now it happens Bulldozer Craig is one of the toughest men I've ever known, which will give you some idear how we both felt about that little stallion. We'd have one hell of a time trappin' that band and a worse time breakin' 'em in for work. Me and Bulldozer go down and skin the wolves.

There's a bounty on their heads and their pelts are good for a fair-sized pack of bacon and beans at any tradin' post.

What with our foolin' around and takin' things easy, four days have passed and we're out of grub when we see our cabin again. There it is, on a little bench overlookin' a creek that's supposed to have gold-bearin' sand. And there's smoke comin' out of the chimney.

Bulldozer looks at me and says, "Visitors."

"Yeah," I answer, fearin' the worst, but tryin' to keep up my spirits, "maybe they ain't moochers. They might be trappers just goin' through the country. Or miners goin' down to the tradin' post for grub."

"If they're moochers, figgerin' to eat off'n us all winter long," Bulldozer says, "we'll put 'em to work capturin' Lead Nickel and his bunch."

"Why do you call that stallion Lead Nickel?" I ask, gettin' kinda mad, but not as mad as I'd get if I'd owned the horse. "Why don't you call him Buzzsaw or John L. Sullivan?"

"He may look like Man o' War to you, No-Shirt," Bulldozer answers, "but that homely hunk of wolf bait looks like a lead nickel to me."

I understand what's back of Bulldozer's feelin's. Usually he's generous, and admires the kind of courage that stallion's got. But he figgers the stallion tricked him into thinkin' he was a long-haired moose and nobody feels kindly toward things that make 'em look like a sucker.

We push our way through the snow to the cabin. Fifty yards from the door we stop dead in our tracks. Men—damned old lads with high-pitched voices—are singing *Sweet Adeline*, and the bass is havin' a tough time droppin' down to the low notes. "They've found your wolverine milk, Bulldozer," I tell him.

"Let's go in and save the keg," he snarls, "at least I can smell the air inside."

I'm sympathetic as possible.

"You won't need to sniff at the inside of the keg to get the familiar odor," I tell him. "The cabin will be full of it."

AS SOON as we open the door I'm all for puttin' out the fire to keep from havin' a explosion. The air reeks with alcohol. Standin' in the middle of the room, with their arms across each other's shoulders and their heads close together as they try to harmonize, is three fellows with so much hair they look like Santa Claus and a fourth who ain't got a spear of hair from his neck up.

I know 'em—Mike and Ike Hardy, eighty-year-old twins; Solo Sandburn, and Billiard Ball Casler. They was good men in their day—forty years ago. None of 'em had ever kicked a dog or refused a drink, which is a fair test in any man's country.

But they'd never struck it rich. Each winter they moved in on some unfortunate devil. Their intentions was good. They didn't intend to mooch. With the faith of miners who're sure they're goin' to strike it rich next season, they figgered the grub they et was just borrowed.

They broke off their song and shook hands with me and Bulldozer. As usual, Billiard Ball Casler done the talkin'. "I was comin' out of the Beaver Creek country," he explains, "and I saw smoke and went over there and found Solo Sandburn. We figgered we'd come out together. On the way out we meet up with the Hardy boys. I guess we ain't as young as we used to be. Seems like we petered out when we saw your cabin. The Hardy boys was limpin'."

"Both in the same leg," I suggests, knowin' they usually caught colds the same time.

"Yep," Ike pipes. "The left leg. Knee keeps slippin' off'n the joint."

"Make yourselves to home," I says. "Plenty of grub in the cache."

"So we noticed," Casler says. "We'll throw in our grub. As soon as we can make the grade we'll go out and get some meat. And when we get in shape we'll pull our freight."

"You don't need to do that," I say.

"Nope," Bulldozer insists, "we'll be sore if you even think about goin' on. Me and No-Shirt are sick of lookin' at each other.



Another week and we'd have cabin fever."

Them four old boys relax right before our eyes. That afternoon we add two bunks, makin' six, then me and Bulldozer go into executive session. It's plain there ain't grub enough for all of us. And it's equally plain if them four oldtimers try to push on to town they'll get caught in a cold snap and die.

"Why don't they go to the Pioneer's home at Sitka," Bulldozer complains. "They treat 'em swell down there—warm rooms, good food, and others who talk their language."

"When you're that old," I tell him, "you'll savvy. They come from a breed that's always taken care of itself. Them four lads don't want to be nursed along. They want to keep right along prospectin'. They want to strike it rich and see the world."

"Oh, I ain't kickin'," Bulldozer answers, "but for their own good it seems to me—"

"Do you know what I'd do if I had the money," I interrupt.

"I suppose you'd build the McGee Miners' Home," Bulldozer answers, "and stock it with old timers. You'd have a creek runnin' past the door so they could prospect and you'd salt the creek with gold so they could strike it."

"You ain't quite hit it," I says, "but almost. I'd build up a McGee Grubstake Fund of twenty thousand dollars or so. Any oldtimer who needed a grubstake could have it for the askin'. Now every sourdough has got his pet creek he'd like to pan. He's sure if he had a chance he'd strike gold there. I'd send 'em to their pet creeks."

"You'd prob'ly have a thousand applications the first year," Bulldozer says, "and figgerin' each outfit to cost around five hundreds dollars that means the fund would be exhausted by the first forty men."

"Suppose one of 'em made a big strike," I argue, "the fund would get half. That's the grubstake law. And if several of 'em hit it why—"

"Keep your shirt on, No-Shirt," he advised. "First thing you know you'll be

talkin' about buyin' an addin' machine to keep track of the fund." He's thoughtful for awhile, then says, "Well, what're we goin' to do next?"

"Bring in a lot of meat," I answer. "It looks as if we'd have to trap them wild horses after all."

"If we don't we'll have to use our own backs," he says. "Them four lads ain't skookum enough to pack in loads through deep snow. Damn it, I wish I had a good tractor, I'd bring in a year's supply in one trip."

### III

ME AND Bulldozer spend the next two days makin' ropes out of raw moosehide. The oldtimers ask a lot of questions and help us with the ropes, but we admit exactly nothin'. In fact I don't admit to Bulldozer what's goin' on in the back of my mind because I'm afraid he'll overpower me and hold me for a jury of six. It's a fool idear, but like lots of fool idears a man can make or lose a lot of money backin' it.

But the more I think of it, the more it looks to me like the motion picture people and others in California might contribute twenty grand or so to the McGee Grubstake Fund for Tottering Sourdoughs.

The two of us head for the horses on the first promisin' day, but before we leave, Bulldozer hides his cask of wolverine milk. We make fair time, considerin' we're draggin' moosehide ropes and what not on a handsled. It takes us two days to make it to the valley and that night around the campfire, Bulldozer says, "Well, out with it."

"Out with what?" I ask, lookin' guilty.

"What you've been thinkin' about the past two days," he answers. "You've been sniffin' the smoke of battle. I can read signs when I see 'em. Maybe you've got an idear you'll enter Lead Nickel in that hundred thousand dollar horserace at Santa Anita and cop the dough."

"I ain't no such fool as that," I answer. "But there's some five and ten thousand

dollar races he might win. Then if I bet an ounce or two of dust on his nose and long odds—"

"You're crazier'n a loon," he snorts. "Besides, what makes you think there'll be long odds?"

"One look at him," I answer, "and the smart boys will put him down as a long shot, then cover every dollar that's bet on him, figgerin' it's sucker money."

"And that's just what it will be," Bulldozer predicts. "Sucker money. Count me out."

"What you doin'?" I ask, "lettin' me down?"

"I'm with you to the finish when it comes to catchin' that long-haired moose and trainin' him to run," he answers, "but I ain't puttin' any of my money on Lead Nickel's nose. Now listen to your Uncle Dudley," he continues, gettin' serious. "We made a little money out of a tin mine."

"Right," I says, goin' modern in my slang.

"And another hunk of money buildin' a jetty," he adds.

"Right," I echo.

"And everybody knows it," he continues, "and the money wolves has tried to work all kinds of gags to get hold of it, and you've been too smart for 'em. But, No-Shirt, if you go down to Hollywood with a horse, you're sunk. If you ain't touted out of your roll you'll be tricked out of it."

"And what'll you do?" I ask him.

"Buy you a square feed and give you a new start in life," he answers promptly. "You give me my start, didn't you?"

It ain't more'n I'd expect of the big tramp, but I liked to hear him say it.

**T**HE next mornin' we put on snowshoes and work along the ridges hopin' to find the band. It's spittin' snow and there's a raw wind blowin' which makes the goin' mighty tough. Around noon Bulldozer sends up a smoke signal and I know he's found the band's trail.

I make my way to the fire and he's got some hot tea ready. It looks to him like we're in for a storm and that the horses

know it. They've all gone up a gulch that'll shelter 'em. We follow the trail a half mile, then hear 'em millin' amongst the low trees and brush.

We climb a ridge and work along, keepin' downwind from 'em until we can see that paint stallion. He's tougher and uglier'n I figgered he was. We're close enough to see his scars and he's got plenty of 'em.

"It's plain to see he's the head man hereabouts," Bulldozer says. "But he'll never get to the big California tracks, No-Shirt. It'd been too much like a man livin' on the wrong side of the railroad tracks tryin' to crash the four hundred."

"He's a lot of horse for his weight," I says after sizin' up the things that count. "A throwback, like as not, to some thoroughbred that got lost on the trail."

A dozen plans are runnin' through my mind on the little matter of trappin' the horse. If the trees was bigger we could drop 'em across the gulch and stop the band from escapin'. Even then we'd be a long ways from puttin' moose meat on his back. I'm thinkin' about another fool plan when Bulldozer breaks the silence.

"Why not walk out of that cabin and tell them oldtimers everything's theirs? That'll save all this meat huntin' business."

"It'd hurt their feelin's," I tell him. "They'd feel that they'd run us out of our own home. Besides the more I look at that paint horse the bigger my ambitions get. I come here thinkin' Lead Nickel might go to the California tracks. Now I know he's goin' there."

"You're askin' for it," Bulldozer groans, "and when a man's your age he's a stubborn old goat. Argument runs off his back like it does off'n a duck's feathers."

The storm hits that night. We can hear trees breakin' off now and then, but we're sheltered from everything except noise as long as we stay below the rim of the gulch. I stick my head out and when the fine snow hits it I think somebody's cut loose with a charge of rock salt from a ten gauge shotgun.

I'm just dozin' off when Bulldozer

shakes me. "Now's the time to get a rope on that Lead Nickel," he says. "We can sneak up on him. The snow's pretty deep down there and he can't move so fast. If we wait until daylight he's liable to spot us."

My first thought is to argue the point. Then I decide if Bulldozer is in a mood to tackle the job, I'd better cheer him on. "All right," I answer, "when shall we start?"

"Right now," he says.

It takes us about five minutes to get out of the sleepin' bags and pull on snowshoes. There's plenty of noise to muffle our movements, but there's always the chance a shift in the wind might carry our scent, or one of the nags will spot us. Bulldozer gives me a long rope and takes one himself.

"We'll get two ropes on him," he says, "then go in opposite directions and snub the ropes on trees. We'll hold him so he can't get at either of us."

"Then what?"

"He'll calm down, then we'll decide what to do," Bulldozer explains. "Come along," he adds, leadin' the way.

**W**E TAKE plenty of time. The fresh snow muffles all sound and we're into the band before we know it. They're standin' around, with their heads down and their backs blanketed with snow. They act like they expect days to pass before the storm ends. It was sure a lesson in patience to see 'em.

The stallion suddenly lifts his head and looks around. For a minute I think maybe they're goin' to stampede; then he relaxes again. Bulldozer gets within ten feet of his head, then he gets the rope ready. A bush keeps the horse from seein' him. And when Bulldozer gets up, he does it so slow that he's standin' there as still as a tree. He's covered with snow, too, and that helps.

Suddenly that rope flashes and settles around the stallion's neck. Then all hell breaks loose. Two horses go past me so fast they're a blur. The stallion whirls and makes a plunge for safety. I see the bot-

oms of a pair of snowshoes that are leavin' me like twin comets. They're Bulldozer's snowshoes and they're still on him.

He hits the snow, almost disappears, then goes down the gulch like a toboggan. The snowshoes come off and his big feet leave a pair of furrows in the snow. "Get a rope on him," he bellows, his voice partly muffled by snow, "and—snub it."

Get a rope? Hell! I can't even keep up with the stallion. Besides, I'm havin' my hands full dodgin'. A couple of horses that tried to climb straight up a wall has tumbled back and the others are millin' around 'em. I climb the bank and run along the ridge. The snow's almost blowed off, and I'm in moccasins so I can make pretty good time. Sooner or later the stallion's going to flounder in a drift and I want to be on the job when it happens.

I spot a drift and run down to it, and as he tries to fight through I drop my rope around his neck and snub it to the nearest tree. Now we've got him. That is, we've almost got him. He tramps the snow down and gets ready to strike with his front feet and kick with the rear.

Bulldozer's all in, and one hand's bleedin' from a rope burn. "Damn his hide," he snarls, "he knowed what he was doin' when he drug me through them boulders. Tomorrow I'll be black and blue from head to foot."

I fix up his hand and we settle down to wait for more light. That stallion is a mighty stirrin' sight. His teeth are bared and his head's held high. He's sure breathin' defiance to the world.

The snow lets up a hour after sunrise, but the sun don't break through the clouds so there's no danger of us goin' snow blind while we're gettin' the stallion to the cabin. The other horses are stampedin' around, still scared over the night's doin's and that starts a bull moose movin'. Bulldozer drops the bull a half mile from the stallion and goes down and dresses him out. I try my wiles on Lead Nickel, but I don't have any better luck than when I try said wiles on the wimmin. Like the wimmin, he's got it figgered my intentions ain't the best.



I can't get within a mile of the brute. He don't show no fear. He don't know the meanin' of the word. He's just mad clean through.

Bulldozer comes back and says, "I've butchered that moose. Why ain't you got the horse ready to haul it in?"

"You know damned well why I ain't," I answer. "Suppose you help me get on his back."

"You ain't goin' to ride him?" he yells.

"You don't bust horses by readin' 'em poetry," I answer.

"You're loony," he growls. "But let's get it over with."

**I** MIGHT tell you about the kick Bulldozer got in the stomach; the hunk Lead Nickel bit out of my arm; and the long hours it took to get a make-shift bridle over his head. But I won't. Fin'ly everything was ready and I got on his back. I had a rope around his middle and a good hand hold, but no saddle or stirrups. Very gently Bulldozer un-snubs the ropes from the trees, takes one off'n the stallion's neck and coils up the other, which he hands to me.

"It'd be safer if you had a anchor on the end of that rope," Bulldozer says. "Then you could drop it and moor the cuss when he drops his pilot. Me bein' the pilot."

"Yank off that blindfold," I tell him. "Then get a dustpan and broom and sweep up the pieces."

Off comes the blindfold, but Lead Nickel don't do nothin'. He looks over his shoulder to see what's on his back, and when he sees, he sneers. And I can tell by his eyes he's thinkin', "This is going to be good."

"He's quittin' cold," Bulldozer yells. "You've got the Indian sign on him."

"He ain't got nothin' on me, not even hisself," Lead Nickel tells himself. Then he steps slowly down the gulch. I think he's lookin' for a hard place to dump me. The gulch widens out into a windswept flat, froze solid, and studded with rough stones. Then the stallion stops.

He leaps into the air and comes down

stiff-legged. It seems like I'm goin' to be split in half and fall on both sides of him, but I hang together. My heart settles a inch and a kidney slips a moorin'. Up he goes and down he comes. Spots float before my eyes, and I feel sick. I don't have time to think how sick because he's in the air again. He twists and I come down off center. I'm hangin' onto the rope with both hands and manage to stay on.

He looks around like to say, "How'd you like some more of them apples?" Then he gives 'em to me.

"You fool," Bulldozer yells, "he's breakin' you into bits. Your face is green. Unload!"

Down he comes again, and I must've kinda passed out for a second. The next thing I know I'm hangin' on by sheer instinct and he's racin' for a tree. I duck, but the limb scrapes a furrow in my back. I look up and he's headin' for another limb, a little lower. He ducks his head, but I yank it up. My timin' is perfect. He gets a bang that staggers him and some of the fight oozes out. I make the most of it, makin' him gallop, at the same time diggin' my heels into his flanks.

He's breathin' hard when I turn him back towards the flat, but I don't give him no rest. We circle wide and end up with three miles behind us.

"He's licked for today," I tell Bulldozer.

"And so're you," Bulldozer says. He watches the nag's front feet and grabs him by the head. I slide off and that ain't all I do. I pass out completely.

Pretty soon I wake up hearin' a familiar voice sayin', "Who's loony now?" It's mine.

"I didn't think you could do it, No-Shirt," Bulldozer says. "It's a wonder you ain't dead. You bled from the mouth and nose after you passed out."

"I busted a lot of 'em in my younger days," I tell him, "and it looks as if I had one more good ride in me."

I ain't much help, because your uncle No-Shirt is a pretty sick man. We don't want to give the stallion time to think about fightin' some more, so Bulldozer gets

busy with the ax and ropes and rigs up a couple of long shafts on which he builds a platform. One end of the shafts are hooked onto a collar; the other ends drag in the snow. Bulldozer loads me onto the platform and drives down to the moose. We load on five hundred pounds of meat and head for the cabin.

## IV

AS SOON as we arrive at the cabin we put the oldtimers to work buildin' a barn out of light trees. After that we tell 'em they've got to rustle feed for the horse.

"What're you goin' to do with him?" Billiard Ball Casler asks. "You can't keep him for a pet. He nipped a piece out of my stern when I bent down to pick up a stick. A man can't trust hisself with such a critter, unless you work him to death."

"We're takin' him down to California," I tell 'em, "in the hope of pickin' up some smart money. If we do, we'll grubstake each one of you boys. This comin' winter you can have the cabin to yourselves."

"Sure we ain't runnin' you out?" Casler asks suspiciously.

"Nope," I lie. "Me and Bulldozer have been lookin' for a excuse to go to California and now we've got it. As soon as the ice on the river gets thick enough to travel, we'll pull our freight."

We can see the oldtimers are tickled pink. They'd evidently talked it over amongst theirselves and figgered six was a crowd and they'd better go on to town.

As soon as me and Bulldozer got rested up, we exercised the stallion. We did our best to get on the good side of him, but he wouldn't go for us. He seemed to remember we'd caught and brought him there. He didn't lose none of his spirit, but he stopped kickin' and bitin' us whenever we got around him.

At the end of the second week me and Bulldozer commenced to worry. Somethin' was wrong with the stallion. "He mopes around like a homesick kid," Bulldozer says. "You'd think he'd never been away from his folks before."

"He hasn't," I answer. "You don't suppose a hardboiled cuss like Lead Nickel can be homesick, do you?"

"Somethin's wrong with him," Bulldozer answers. "Say, I read once that race horses have mascots—something to live with 'em, and sleep in their stall, like a dog, cat or rooster. I believe that poor so-and-so is lonesome. What we need is a mascot for him."

That night we introduces him to a Malemute dog. The dog figgers he was some kind of a moose and tries to hamstring him and Lead Nickel kicks the dog through the roof. And that's that.

The next week he gets worse, and Bulldozer goes down to the river and cuts a hole in the ice to see if it's thick enough for travel. It ain't. I'm thinkin' maybe I'd better turn the horse loose before he dies on us, when suddenly he's contented.

We watch the dogs, figgerin' one had made up to him. But they hadn't. "Maybe one of the Hardy twins is sleepin' in his manger," Bulldozer suggests.

"That ain't funny," I answer. "Lead Nickel is the kind of a horse that makes the best of things. He's fought it all out with hisself and won a victory."

Bulldozer ain't convinced. He thinks maybe ptarmigan or grouse are roostin' in the stable. I hope they ain't because that'd mean we'd have to take 'em along. It's better to have no mascot at all than to take away one a horse likes.

EARLY in the fourth week I go into the barn to feed Lead Nickel and I hear him nickerin' like he was talkin' to his best friend. He ain't hungry and greetin' me. It's somethin' else.

"I've got it," I yelps in triumph, "there's a pack-rat down in that straw." I haul off and give the straw a kick, so the rat will scamper out and—

Did you ever grab hold of a live wire and feel an electric shock go up your arm? Or better still, did you ever back into a cactus? It felt to me like I'd kicked a cactus charged with electricity. I howled like a moon-struck Malemute, and grabbed

my foot. Then I yelled some more and wondered what had stabbed my hand.

Bulldozer comes rushin' in. "What's wrong, No-Shirt?" he yells. "Somebody murderin' you in cold blood?"

"Take a stick," I answer, "and uncover what's in that hay."

"Stick hell," he sneers. "What're feet for?" And before I can stop him, he kicks up the hay. Something goes swish and he howls like a stretcher case. I catch a glimpse of a porcupine's tail.

"Porcupine!" I yell.

"I'll kill the blasted thing," Bulldozer bellers. He catches up a club, but I grab his arm.

"You can't kill it," I argue. "He's Lead Nickel's mascot. He's the reason the horse has suddenly got contented."

"You blitherin' idiot," Bulldozer fumes, "who ever heard of a porcupine mascot? How're we goin' to pack him around with us from race meet to race meet? If you think I'm goin' to spend this winter and spring jabbed by an animated cactus you're crazy."

"Keep your shirt on, Bulldozer," I admonish. "This will come out all right."

"Yeah, but them porcupine quills won't come out all right—they'll work out," he grumbles. He gazes at the porcupine which is movin' into the stallion's manger. I suppose the salt we'd gave the horse attracts it. Lead Nickel lowers his head and nickers. I suppose he's seen 'em on the range plenty of times, and they take away the homesick feelin'. They're somethin' he's used to.

The Hardy twins help us into the cabin and then set to work pullin' out the quills—that is, them that don't break off in our hides.

Bulldozer don't say much that night. The idear of takin' a wild horse and porcupine over a frozen Alaska river don't look good to him. He's broodin'. The future looks dark. Well, I can't say I'm any too chipper myself. But when us McGees make up our minds to do somethin', we go through with it, even if it's the wrong thing.

Animals are funny. Smart, too. In no time that porcupine knows nobody's goin' to bother him. He comes into the cabin and eats away at the ax handle, and any wood that's salt from bein' touched by sweaty hands. We're always havin' to watch our step to keep from gettin' stuck.

One of the twins names him Cactus Pete. I suppose we could've found a better name, but me and Bulldozer are too discouraged to think one up. Our quill wounds are hurtin'.

WHEN the ice gets thick enough our wounds have healed and we've made a harness for Lead Nickel and a sled for our outfit. On the sled is a box for Cactus Pete. Bulldozer's made a pair of tongs for handlin' him.

Just as we're about to leave the cabin, Billiard Ball Casler comes up. "No-Shirt," he says, "you said suthin' or other about grubstakin' a lot of us old ruins if Lead Nickel won a wad of prize money. That's a fine idear, and you're goin' to make a lot of old buzzards happy, because they can pan the sands of the crick they dreamt about before they die.

"We've scraped up some dust between us—a hundred dollars' worth. We'd like you to bet it on Lead Nickel's nose sometime when the odds are again' him."

With that he gives me a little poke. In the bottom is gold, mixed with tobacco crumbs and the heads of a couple of matches that had busted off when they scratched 'em.

"Sure, it goes right on the nose," I promise. We shake hands all around, then start.

Bulldozer is the picture of health, but I can see he fears the worst. "I got a hunch we're takin' a trail leadin' to financial disaster," he moans. "Racin' down in the states ain't our game. Our game's Alaska. But I'll see it through."

"I'm a fatalist, Bulldozer," I answer. "Fate will head us off if it ain't meant we should go Outside."

"Sure, we'll prob'ly fall through a overflow in the river ice and drown," he growls.

It takes us a week to reach tidewater and we no more'n stop when half the town comes out and looks us over. "What do you want for that horse?" a miner says. "Give you a hundred dollars."

"Give you two!" yells another.

"Let's cut out this penny-ante biddin'," yells a third. "Here's five hundred dollars, No-Shirt. I'll lead the horse away, and no questions asked about where you got him."

"We're takin' him Outside," Bulldozer says, "and figger to clean up on the wise money boys at the big tracks. He ain't for sale at any price."

"Where'd you get him?" several yell.

I kick Bulldozer's shin and he swears, but keeps his mouth shut. We tie Lead Nickel in a sheltered place and go to a log hotel.

"What did you kick me on the shins for," Bulldozer snarls. "Tryin' to start somethin'? Any time you think you're good enough to choose me, No-Shirt, I'm ready."

"Shut up," I warn. "There's a stampede brewin'. I can smell it. The location of the new gold strike isn't generally known yet, but everybody's gettin' ready for it. When it's known everybody will be off. That's why they wanted to buy Lead Nickel."

"Oh boy! Oh boy! Oh boy!" Bulldozer whispers gleefully, "and we know where there's a band of wild nags."

"The trip Outside is all off," I tell him. "We're horse dealers."

"But if we turn around and head back," Bulldozer argues, "they'll smell a rat. They'll wonder what made us change our minds, and some smart cuss will figger we're after more horses. Enough will trail us to upset our plans."

"I'll have to figger a way to beat that," I answer.

**E**ARLY the followin' mornin' there's a newspaper man knockin' at the door. He wants to buy me a feed, and when a newspaper man wants to buy a man a meal he's lookin' for a story, or else it is his day off and he wants to howl a little.

He's heard I've found a throwback horse that'll raise hell with the thoroughbreds on

the big tracks Outside, and he wants to know what it's all about. Before we can go down to eat, Bulldozer gives him a snort of wolverine milk on an empty stomach and takes one himself. An hour later the two of 'em are tryin' to take the buildin' apart.

The marshal comes on the dead run. He's an old friend. "No-Shirt," he says, "if you don't calm down that Cheechako newspaper man and Bulldozer I'll have to put 'em in the skookum house."

I bet Bulldozer he can't tear a deck of cards in two with his bare hands, then I tell the reporter he can't tear a half deck in half. An hour later I look in. They're both dead to the world, and there're cards all over the floor. But I haven't lost any bets.

That afternoon I look up Petty, an old-timer. "What do you want to be a red herring to be drug across a trail?" I ask.

Petty's dead broke. "A grubstake," he answers.

"I'll give you one," I offer, "for a short trip. You're to tear out of her three o'clock tomorrow morning. Pretend you're tryin' to make a sneak of it. They'll think you've got the lowdown on this new strike, and follow."

"And you'll hit the trail for the real thing," Petty sneers. "No dice, No-Shirt."

"I give you my word that I'm not goin' on any gold stampede while your back is turned," I tell him. "Us McGees are men of our word. Or ain't we?"

"You are," he answers. "It is a deal."

There's a strange silence in camp the next mornin'. I go down and the hotel keeper says, "No-Shirt, you were asleep at the switch. There's been stampede in the air for days. Nobody knew just where it was, but Old Man Petty got a tip from somebody. He tried to sneak out last night, but somebody saw him. Now the stampede is on."

Me and Bulldozer hit the trail for the wild horses that afternoon. Nobody follows us. As soon as we show up at the cabin, Billiard Ball Casler smells a rat. "We thought we'd pick up a couple more

horses," I tell him, "and maybe develop 'em into runnin' nags."

He looks me right in the eye. "I wasn't borned yesterday, No-Shirt," he says. "You figger to sell a bunch of them hayburners right here in Alaska. Where's the stampede?"

"If I knew, I'd be on it," I answer. "Now, listen, you old ruin. Even if there is a stampede, it'll be a winter one. And you're too old."

"Sourdoughs a hundred years old have gone on winter stampedes," he hotly declared. "And they've struck it, too."

I changed the subject. The next mornin' me and Bulldozer go up to the valley where them wild horses are hangin' out. It ain't so hard runnin' 'em down now. Lead Nickel's got it on most of 'em. I do the ropin' and Bulldozer does the bustin'. There ain't no foolin' on his part. He rides 'em rough until they calm down; then he goes on to the next one.

There's one stallion, a sleepy-lookin' bay that Lead Nickel can't catch. The first time I think it's a accident. The next time I put it down as plain hard luck, but when we chase him the third time and he gets away I know he's plenty fast. As I figger it, he's developed speed because Lead Nickel used to chase him away from the rest of the band on account of not wantin' a rival around.

With Bulldozer's help on another horse, we fin'ly run the bay down. He's a couple of handfuls when it comes to kickin' and bitin'. Bulldozer busts him, but only after he's been tossed into the brush a couple of times.

It ain't the easiest thing in the world but we finally herd the nags down to our cabin. Billiard Ball Casler and the others have gone. It ain't no mystery, either. They've smelled stampede and have hit the trail, takin' most of our grub with 'em.

## V

**T**HREE weeks from the day we leave tidewater, we're back again. The boys have learned to their sorrow it was a waste

of time to follow Old Man Petty. They're all back, ready for the real thing. And that ain't all. Three steamers are unloadin' stampedeers from the Outside. Great heaps of freight are piled up on the beach and Cheechakos are millin' around tryin' to find gold in the town creek. It makes me think of the old days.

A cuss comes around, looks over our horses, and when he squats down with his back again' a stump and starts whittlin' I know he's an oldtime horse trader. "You've got twenty-five nags there," he says, "I'll give you twenty-five hundred dollars spot cash for the bunch, includin' the one you call Lead Nickel, and the sleepy-lookin' bay."

"Who wouldn't?" Bulldozer roars, wantin' to hit him.

"Keep your shirt on, Bulldozer," I warn, "this here's a gent of the old horse-tradin' school. Brother," I says to the horse trader, "I'm goin' to spoil your day by refusin' to dicker. First, we're keepin' Lead Nickel, the bay and three others. We're goin' on this stampede ourselves. You can have the twenty for two hundred dollars apiece. That's dirt cheap."

He starts to roar and beat his breast, so me and Bulldozer walk away and put up a sign sayin', *Pack Horses For Sale*. That turns the trick. The trader comes over and peels off four thousand dollars. He'll double his money inside a week and he knows it. I cache the money in The McGee Grub-stake Fund For Totterin' Sourdoughs. Then I ask Old Man Petty where the real stampede is.

"It's on Hungry Creek," he answers.

"Hell," I snort, "that's a long ways from here, and it's hungry ground. There was a stampede there years ago."

"Somebody found the bedrock that the miners struck on the first stampede," Petty answered, "is a false one. There's real pay under it. Only a few have got the lowdown, so the sooner you hightail it out of here, the better."

Me and Bulldozer were gettin' our outfit together when another steamer drops anchor in the bay. Fifteen minutes after it



arrives Bellowing Bill Staley lands on the beach. He was an early-day newsboy in the gold camps. As usual he's loaded with the latest Seattle papers.

He's yellin', "All about it!" when he spots me. "All about No-Shirt McGee, the millionaire turfman," he adds.

"Hey, you tramp," I growl, "what you talkin' about?"

"Buy a paper and find out," he answers.

So I buy one, and sure enough the cuss who sends news out of the camp has wrote a yarn about Lead Nickel. He sure laid it on about the horse's speed and the wealth me and Bulldozer had wrested from the bosom of the frozen North. It concluded by sayin' we'd take the horse Outside and win the Kentucky Derby only we figgered to make more on this new stampede.

A rat-faced kid had come ashore in the same boat with Bellowing Bill and Bulldozer nudges me and says, "That's the first time I ever saw a rat that looked like the McGee tribe. Haw! Haw! Haw."

I'm about to work him over when the kid comes up. "I just heard you called No-Shirt McGee," he says, "I'm your cousin Horace's son."

"Come on over to the tent," I says. I didn't want anybody to see him. Everybody has relatives and us McGees are no exception. It takes only one rotten apple to spoil a barrel. And while maybe Horace's offspring ain't rotten, at least I can see signs of dark spots.

UP HERE in the early days, Horace was called Moocher McGee, and you won't get no headache tryin' to figger out the reason. Besides always moochin' for the price of a meal or a drink, he was thoughtless in other ways. And it would be just like him to get married and bring a duplicate of hisself into the world.

I remember I saved him from bein' lynched once. He'd been caught robbin' a cache durin' a stampede. So this was his brat.

"What's your name, cousin?" I ask as soon as I've got him in the tent.

"Horace Junior," he answers. "And the

Old Man said you are swell. Said you saved his life once—pulled him out of White Horse rapids."

You don't knock a father to his son, so I let him think it was the river and not a mob I saved his father from. "How'd you find me?" I ask.

"Read in the paper you had a fast horse," he answers. "The Old Man says, 'Son, you're just the man Cousin No-Shirt needs!' So I stowed away in the cargo and here I am, none the worse for washin' dishes all the way to Alaska. I'm a jockey. You need one. Am I hired?"

"Nope," I answer. "You don't need a jockey on a stampede. You need skookum men to handle horses, packs, break trail and shovel dirt."

He looks pretty sad. "The Old Man said, 'Blood's thicker'n water and No-Shirt never failed a McGee yet,'" he says.

"I got no need of a jockey," I tell him. "But I'll stake you to a feed and good clothes—trail clothes."

"I got a way with horses," he argues. "Why don't you let me look this Lead Nickel over? If he's good, we'll take him Outside and clean up at the big tracks."

"Nope," I growl. Then I take him over to the tradin' post and get him outfitted.

When I come out, Bellowin' Bill Staley is waitin' for me. "No-Shirt, you'll prob'ly knock my block off for sayin' this, but if you've got a horse don't let Cousin Horace hang around it. He's got a way with horses. They like him. The owner fires him, then he can't do anything with the horse, so they have to hire him back again. That ain't all. He ain't got no standin' with the big-time owners Outside."

"Crooked ridin', eh?" I suggest, "and the stewards sent him down?"

"He's smart," Bellowin' Bill explains. "They ain't ever been able to catch him yet. Now you're warned."

I thank him, then I continue to get ready for the stampede. The first thing I know Cousin Horace is foolin' round our five horses. Lead Nickel nickers every time he sees him. The sleepy bay horse playfully nips his arm, and the others get all het up.

He's sure got a way with him. Even Cactus Pete thinks he's a swell cuss.

"Now Horace," I say, "you've got to clear out and get yourself a job. We're leavin' tomorrow mornin'."

He looks pretty sad. "I've a hunch I'm the difference between success and failure to you," he says.

"Cousin Horace," I answer patiently. "I agree. If we take you along we'll have grief. It seems like it ain't meant for McGees to travel in pairs."

Well, he was dead right, but I didn't realize it at the time. The first faint suggestion was when we start to pack the horses. They raise hell. Horace goes amongst them, and they're meek as kittens. Then we try and leave Cactus Pete behind. Nobody ever packs a porcupine on a stampede. There's more hell to pay. Lead Nickel—the horse I figger to ride—won't budge an inch. So we put Pete in a box and lash him onto the back of the horse ahead.

When we get goin', Horace comes along, too. The spirits of me and Bulldozer are so low by that time we ain't got the heart to protest.

"I guess you're hired," I tell him. "But remember, you're workin' for wages. You ain't a pardner."

"I knew you wouldn't turn a McGee down," he says.

**W**E'RE amongst the first to arrive on Hungry Creek, but who do you think we overtook on the way? Right. Billiard Ball Casler and his ancient pardners. They're pluggin' along with a team of moth-eaten dogs. I give 'em back the money they'd give me to bet on Lead Nickel's nose, then kept goin'.

Me and Bulldozer stake our ground, then we show Cousin Horace where to stake a claim. He's tickled to death. "I'll never forget this," he says, "even if I don't take a ounce of gold from it."

Me and Bulldozer move into one of the best cabins left by the former stampeders. It's a log buildin', set up on high ground and it's in good shape. A former packer owned it, and there's a log barn in back,

and plenty of grass growin' in a clearin' nearby.

A week or so after the miners had hit Hungry Creek, the gamblers, sure-thing lads and the dancehall girls arrive. After the girls comes a couple of birds on good horses. They're Cheechako horses brought up from Outside. The boys are ridin' the two best nags and packin' their equipment on three others.

They look over the creek, can't find any good ground, so they buy a claim. One of 'em is the tall, dark and handsome type. The girls who dance and sell drinks on a percentage basis are willin' to dance with him for nothin'. He's got 'em all dizzy, but he pays well. His name is Dravus. The other fellow is smallish and blond. He's so nervous he makes me think of a June-bug. His name is Hawkins.

On Sundays Hawkins comes out in his glad rags—yellow shoes, purple pants and coat, yellow shirt and red necktie. He looks like a Filipino cannery hand headed for a white girls' dancehall.

There's a flat back of the camp and the first thing we know Hawkins and Dravus are runnin' races with their horses. They make a trail that's about a mile long, then call it a day. The miners commence to get what the smart boys call "horserace conscious."

This runnin' goes on for a couple of Sundays. Then Dravus gets a crowd together and says, "We're all working too hard, boys. We need a little recreation. True, there are plenty of lovely girls for us to dance with, but we need something competitive. Why not have some horse races? We'll find out how fast the best of the lot can go, put the slow ones ahead and race for prizes. I'm not in the money yet, but I'll put up a hundred dollars for a race next Sunday. Winner to take the money."

He gets a cheer for that. When Sunday rolls around, the best horses in the country are gallopin' around the track. That is, except Dravus' two, and McGee's Lead Nickel and the bay.

Bets are made, but Dravus and Hawkins don't take any part. "We haven't struck

it yet," they explained. "When we're in the money we'll give our luck a run."

The first mail comes in after the camp had been goin' a month. Everybody knocked off. They was tired of thawin' ground with fire. They was losin' interest in the races, too, because the weather was too cold to get the horses properly warmed up.

Me and Bulldozer got our share, but there was one from Solo Carrigan. As soon as I saw his name scrawled on the corner of the envelope I growled, "I'm in for another touch."

It reads:

*Dear No-Shirt:*

*Ha! Ha! I fooled you. I don't need no money. Got on the right horse's nose and cleaned up. You've done me a lot of favors now I'm goin' to prove it pays to cast bread on the water. When the news got around you was bringin' a wild horse down, the smart boys got ready to take you. Then comes this stampede. Two of 'em figgered they'd drift from camp to camp and take the honest miners, hook, line and sinker.*

*Then somebody says that if a race-horse made the tour of mining camps the miners would smell a rat. It's some-thin' that ain't natural, like it would be down here where horses are raised.*

*You can't head off two smart crooks, so they decided to be miners. In their pack-train are two horses faster'n lightnin'. They plan to clean up after the miners have cleaned up on the stampede. This is goin' to hurt, No-Shirt, though I may be dead wrong. But I think your young cousin, Horace is in with 'em.*

*Best of luck,*

*Solo Carrigan.*

He didn't mention any names, figgerin', no doubt, they'd change 'em any way. But it wasn't hard for me to dope out who they was—Dravus and Hawkins. They was the only pair in the stampede whose horses were better'n average.

ALL this time Cousin Horace is laborin' mightily on his claim and he ain't found even wages. "Wait'll the ground thaws, then go after it," I says. Fin'ly he decides there's something to my advice and he comes to town.

With Solo's warnin' in mind, I'm watchin' Cousin Horace the first time he sees Hawkins and Dravus. Dravus' eyes meet Horace's and he barely shakes his head, plainly sayin', "We ain't supposed to know each other."

After awhile we go down and watch some of the best horses in camp run. "Do you know," Horace says, "I think Lead Nickel can take any horse in camp."

"How about the bay?" Bulldozer asks.

"He can take the bay, too," Horace predicts.

"We're miners," I tell him, just to see what effect it has, "not horse racers."

We separate, but I'm keepin' my eye on Horace. It ain't long until he's settin' in a booth with Hawkins and Dravus drinkin' beer.

"Now get this," Dravus is sayin' and he ain't the charmin' cuss the camp loves any longer. "You know what you're supposed to do—build up McGee and Craig for a big race. Get them to thinkin' their two nags are world-beaters. Understand."

"Sure," Horace answers meekly, "make McGee and Craig think Lead Nickel and the bay can beat the best horses in America. And just watch my smoke. It won't be hard. They don't know it, but that's the way they feel right now. They should be pushovers."

I was sweet on Lead Nickel the first time I saw him. But both me and Bulldozer has got sweeter as the weeks have passed.

A couple of weeks later I see a pack-horse comin' in to Dravus' camp. A strange, hard-boiled lookin' white man is with the horse and when he eases a small pack to the ground I can see it's plenty heavy. "What do you make out of that, No-Shirt?" Bulldozer asks.

"That pack's got gold or lead in it," I answer. "It looks damned queer Dravus would be bringin' gold into this country, but then nothin' he's done so far makes much sense. When it's all over with, though, it'll make plenty of sense."

The warm weather comes, the ground thaws and the miners commence to take out gold a few weeks later. The camp's

wide open, with plenty of gamblin' if you want it. And most miners do. Dravus and Hawkins have laid off'n the racin' for weeks. but now they revive it again, knowin' the camp has tasted it, been denied it and will want it again.

They organize what they call the Hungry Creek Free-For-All. They think pretty well of their own horse, and back it.

"Why don't you enter a horse, McGee?" Dravus asks. He asks when there's plenty of people around, too, and there's a sneer in his voice. "That bay of yours isn't what you'd call Man Of War, but—I'll bet he's a good pole boat."

Everybody laughs at his wit, and I turn kinda red. I know from now on the bay horse will be called Pole Boat. A pole boat, you know, is one of them flat bottomed affairs you pole up rivers. There ain't nothin' beautiful or dignified about 'em.

"You've got the edge on the rest of us," Dravus continues. "Your cousin Horace is a jockey."

"Maybe that's why we ain't enterin' a horse," I answer. "We don't want to take unfair advantage. Lead Nickel and Pole Boat as you call him are the fastest horses in camp."

"I wouldn't be quite that certain, McGee," he answers with a mockin' smile.

"Easy," Bulldozer whispers in a hoarse warnin'. "He's settin' a trap for you."

"That's the way I feel about it," I tell him.

The Hungry Creek Free-For-All costs Dravus and Hawkins a cool five thousand dollars. They back the horse and it runs a poor third with Hawkins in the saddle. Dravus pays off in gold and does it so cheerfully he makes a lot of friends.

Cousin Horace comes around and starts puttin' the heat on me. "Cousin No-Shirt," he half whines, "they're callin' you a short sport because you won't run your horses. Accordin' to the Old Man no McGee was ever a short sport."

"Your old man was right," I answer.

"Then you'll run Lead Nickel or Pole Boat?" he asks. He's too damned eager. "I'd like to trim them buzzards," he adds.

"Okay," I answer. "Get Lead Nickel in shape."

Bulldozer starts groanin'. "You're askin' for it," he says.

"No," I answer, "Dravus and Hawkins are askin' for it. I'm acceptin'."

"They must've hit it on their claim," Bulldozer says. "They paid their losses in nuggets."

"I checked on the size of their dump," I answer, "and know the ground didn't produce that much. That heavy load they brought in was gold—gold to make the miners think they've got rich ground. And with them it's easy come, easy go. They're squarin' off for the big cleanup."

"Hah!" Bulldozer yells. "That's what I've been tryin' to pound into your thick skull right along. And still you're all for walkin' into their trap."

## VI

SEVERAL days later I'm in the Pastime Saloon enjoyin' a honest snort of squareface. Hawkins comes up to me, a snarl on his face. "If your horses are so damned good," he says, "why don't you run 'em?"

I say somethin' and he says somethin' and the first thing we know we're both hollerin' insults. It's then that Dravus steps up.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" he says loudly. "There's no call for this. After all, we're here to mine gold, not hold a race meet. The horse running and betting are incidental. Just to break the monotony of hard work. If the gentleman wants to run his Lead Nickel against my Sea Foam, well and good. And if he wants to bet I'll accommodate him. However, if he feels otherwise, that's his business."

"Keep your shirt on, No-Shirt," Bulldozer warns in a hoarse whisper. "This is it."

I ignore the warnin'. I pretend to get mad. "Sky's the limit," I yell.

"For a man who's been around," Bulldozer whispers, "you're sure the south end of a horse goin' north."

"I'm afraid," Dravus says, "we'll have to put a limit on your sky, Mr. McGee. After all, we can't bet more than we've got. Our mine is doing well, but it isn't a mint." He wasn't goin' to let me put him in the hole, so he turns to the boys. "If a man bets all he's got, he can't do better, can he?"

They yell their approval, then look at me. "Make your terms, Dravus," I agree.

His eyes narrow. He's havin' a hard time to keep his feelin's to hisself, but he manages it. "I'll bet Sea Foam against your Lead Nickle or Pole Boat, Mr. McGee, whichever you think the faster. I'll place in the hands of a betting commissioner the sum of five thousand dollars in nuggets. You may cover as much as you wish."

"I'll be glad to be stakeholder," Riley Jones offers. I've a hunch he's a Dravus man, but he'll be strictly on the level in payin' off bets in a tough minin' camp. I tell Jones he's okay with me.

The camp goes to work on the track the followin' Sunday and puts it in shape. Holes are filled, the track's widened, they put up a pole rail, and horses drag it with logs lashed together to form a triangle.

Horace smiles all over. "That track's goin' to be plenty fast," he says.

There're a couple of stopwatches in camp besides the one Dravus has got. The rail birds hang around and watch the workouts. Hawkins is ridin' Sea Foam and I can see he knows his business. So does Horace.

It's a toss-up which horse is faster if you can believe a stopwatch. Naturally the old-timers favor the Alaskan-born horse. They're a pretty loyal bunch. The race is to be held on Sunday, but the Friday before, Bulldozer comes to me lookin' puzzled.

"There's plenty of Sea Foam money," he says, "but the funny thing about it, it's bein' spread around. All the miners backin' Lead Nickel are gettin' a piece of it. But if anybody wants a chunk, Riley Jones says he hasn't got it, but will let 'em know if more Sea Foam money comes in."

I figger it is a smooth move on Dravus' part to build up general interest. Billiard Ball Casler shows up with his pardners the day before the race. "We want that money we give you to bet on Lead Nickel. We're doin' our own bettin' on account of us bein' on the job."

"Takin' any money out of your mine yet?" I ask.

"Nope, or we wouldn't be askin' for our bettin' money," Casler explains. "But we'll hit her sure in a day or two."

**E**VERYBODY came in for the race. The slope above the track made a good grandstand, and Riley Jones, wearin' a pair of six-guns, was on hand with all the gold in the country. It wasn't much yet, maybe twenty thousand dollars, but it was all the boys had.

A miner who had been a starter at a big track years ago got the startin' job. Several small races was run between miners who figgered their ridin' horses was pretty fast. The horses and a little money changed hands; then Dravus leads Sea Foam out with Hawkins up. And I bring out Lead Nickel. Cousin Horace is on his back.

Both riders, I happen to know, have got their orders from Dravus—to make a close race of it. Horace has been told to pull Lead Nickel on the turns if he shows signs of winnin'. But I got a hunch the man don't live that can pull Lead Nickel.

They make two bad starts and are called back, then fin'ly the starter lets 'em go. At the half they're neck and neck, then Lead Nickel stumbles. It looks like the real thing, but I ain't sure. Cousin Horace has done trick ridin' for the movies where the rider throws a horse off balance. Maybe he's done it now instead of pullin' the stallion. Maybe he ain't. The horse don't go down, but he loses three lengths while tryin' to get his balance. And he never does get back his even, flowin' stride.

It just about breaks my heart to see him try to overtake Sea Foam. He loses by four lengths. I can tell Dravus is plenty irked. He wanted a nose to nose finish with Sea Foam's nose a foot in front.



"Fortunes of war, McGee," Dravus says. "My horse might have been the one to lose his stride. If you ever want revenge—"

"I'll see what Pole Boat can do," I answer, "then we'll talk about another race."

"Well, we're cleaned out of all the gold we brought with us," Bulldozer moans, "besides what we've took from the mine. If you go after revenge it'll be over my dead body."

I don't make no answer. I know Bulldozer. He'll be yellin' for revenge as loud as the next one. Casler comes down the track about that time. "How'd you come out?" I ask.

"That's a dirty insult," he snaps. "You know doggoned well we'd bet on the Alaska horse."

Bulldozer is pretty blue when he sees Dravus leadin' Lead Nickel away. "I fell in love with that nag," he growls, "and of course Cactus Pete, the mascot, had to go along, too. And he's always good for a laugh."

Well, miners are funny, and it wasn't long before they were all howlin' for revenge. They weren't whining over their losses, you understand. They're good losers, but as they figgered it, Dravus had some of their money, and they wanted it back, along with some of his. And I guess that was the way Dravus sized up the situation. That was why he made Riley Jones spread the Dravus money around—so all of the boys would be nicked. And want revenge. In the meantime, gold was pourin' from the sluice boxes.

One by one the boys came around and said, "No-Shirt that Pole Boat horse of your'n is right fast. Don't you figger he can take a race from Sea Foam or Lead Nickel."

"Pole Boat is kinda lazy," I answered, "and it takes something special to make him go."

But they hung on.

"We know you ain't very long on brains, No-Shirt, but it does seem like you could figger a way of takin' Dravus," they argued.

THERE must've been a hundred thousand dollars in new gold in camp when I started Cousin Horace to givin' Pole Boat a daily workout. "Ain't thought much about racin' him," I lied when folks asked questions. "Just seein' what he can do."

Workin' through Riley Jones, Dravus began droppin' hints regular he would give the boys revenge any time they asked for it. He was buildin' up for the killin'. Me and Bulldozer both saw the signs. Gradually Bulldozer commences to pack water on the other shoulder. At first he was all for lettin' well enough alone.

Now he would say, "No-Shirt, it seems to me you should be able to outfox that slicker. If you can't, it's because you're gettin' old and your mind don't spark no more."

Then I got mad! And a mad McGee is a dangerous McGee. "I'll figger out somethin' to make that lazy nag move," I promise. It takes me a week, but you'll die laughin' when you hear about it.

When I shows signs of wantin' revenge, Dravus gets cautious. He don't want anything goin' wrong. I kinda hang around, seemin'ly beyond earshot, but close enough to get the drift when Dravus puts the pressure on Cousin Horace. "McGee," he says, "you're crooked down there, and you're goin' to be crooked up here. I'll make it worth your while."

"And if I don't string along with you?" Horace asks.

"If you aren't mobbed by the miners up here, you'll be kicked out of racing forever down below," he says softly. "Because I'll frame you."

"What's there in it for me?"

"Ten percent of what we win," Dravus answered. "I want you to trick No-Shirt into making a time run. I'll be on hand with a stopwatch, but I won't be in sight. I want to see just what Pole Boat's got. When that's done, I'll give you the rest of your orders."

When Horace comes around to me, suggetin' a time trial, I say, "Sure. I'm kinda curious to know what that nag can do myself."

I'm on hand with a borrowed stopwatch, but Bulldozer is back in the brush. Pole Boat makes a good enough showin' to convince Dravus the race is in the bag, specially when he can swing a club over Horace.

Bulldozer comes out of the brush, all grins. "Dravus clocked the horse," he says, "and I saw him and Hawkins shakin' hands. They're feelin' pretty good over the whole business."

I know what'll happen next: Dravus will start something when I'm at the Pastime takin' a little snort for my stomach's sake. And sure enough he does.

"I'll bet Sea Foam against Pole Boat," he offers, "and as much of a side bet as you want to make. My mine's beginning to pay. I'm not quite so hard up as I was the other race."

"You shouldn't be," I remind him. "You had most of the gold in camp when the race was over."

"I've bought the ground adjoining your claims," he says to me and Bulldozer. "I'll bet my claim against yours. If I win, then I'll have a nice piece of ground with your claims and the ones I bought. I can work on a large scale."

I want to say, "Brother you're workin' on a large scale right now." But I said, "The claims me and Bulldozer own are worth more'n your's. But I'm no hog. We'll bet our claims against yours if you throw Lead Nickel in, besides."

Everybody's crowdin' around us. Gettin' the bettin' fever. And that's what Dravus wants. I see him give Riley Jones a high sign, then Jones says, "I'll act as betting commissioner again, if you boys want it that way."

"Okay by me," I answer.

**T**HERE'S a hundred thousand dollars worth of new gold in camp, and Riley Jones is holdin' it all the day of the race. Men have come for miles to bet their money and see the fun. The dust remainin' in their pokes goes to the dance-hall girls and the saloons. The business men are all pullin' for Pole Boat. They've

been quietly investigatin' and have learned Riley Jones is frontin' for Dravus. If Pole Boat loses, that money goes out of the country and business falls flat on its face.

The president of the Hungry Creek Chamber of Commerce—as good a dive-keeper as ever lived—goes personally to Dravus. "This race had better be on the level, Dravus," he warns, "or else you'll be to your ears in trouble."

"If No-Shirt McGee's crooked," Dravus answers, pretendin' not to understand, "I want him exposed. I'm a sportsman, and I want to win under fair conditions."

"We aren't worried about McGee," the other says. "But your importin' all that gold, and lettin' on like it come from your claim, looks bad. That's all."

I'm stickin' pretty close to Horace. When he's in the barn with Pole Boat, I'm up in the loft with my ear to a knothole. I'm there when Dravus comes from the Chamber of Commerce president. "Can you dope Pole Boat?" he asks.

"I won't doublecross a horse," Horace answers.

"I suppose pulling him isn't double-crossing him?" Dravus sneers.

"I won't dope him," Horace answers.

"He's a lazy horse," Dravus says, "and I'm expecting to win this race on the level, but if he gets hopped up and starts to take the lead—pull him. And do a good job of it, or I'll take it out of your hide. And do it so you don't get caught or the crowd will take it out of *our* hides."

"I'm between the devil and the deep blue sea," Horace grumbles.

"Exactly. And do you know how much money's up? A hundred grand, plus the value of the McGee-Craig claims, and Pole Boat," Dravus says. "Figure what ten percent of that is, and you'll know what your cut will be." He gives a few more orders, then saunters out. I don't let Horace know I'm listenin'.

But early the mornin' of the race I drag a box up to the barn and put it behind Pole Boat's heels. It's several minutes before he realizes what's in the box, and he sure does come to life. He snorts, paws

and tries to kick down the stall. I take the box away. And he quiets down.

Fifteen minutes before the race I bring the box in and leave it there. When I lead Pole Boat onto the track, he's sweatin' nicely and is glowin' all over. He's got some of the same thoroughbred strain in him that Lead Nickel has, but I've never seen it show so plain until now.

I help Horace into the saddle, then I look at Dravus. He gives me a fishy glance. He's like a man who smells a rodent and don't know where the odor's comin' from. Bulldozer goes out the back way of the barn, takin' the box with him, and sneaks, unobserved into a clump of brush on the left turn. There's a nice breeze blowin' from that direction towards the finish, to help the horses on their way home.

By that time, everybody's ready for the race.

"Pole Boat's too fine," somebody says. "If I didn't know otherwise I'd say McGee has given the horse a shot."

He don't know the half of it. That's just what McGee's done. And oh what a shot! I've done such a good job I'm almost hoisted on my own petard, as the feller says.

THE starter's bell rings and the crowd yells, "There they go!" But the crowd's only half right. Pole Boat takes a couple of bounds, then looks around like a prize fighter sizin' up the gate. His eyes are blazin' with fire, and plumes of vapor are comin' from his nostrils. Then suddenly he lunges ahead. He's six lengths behind Sea Foam.

Most everybody was watchin' the two horses, but I'm watchin' the jockeys, specially Cousin Horace. All he's got to do is to whip the horse and yell. He can make a real effort to win and still lose. To win ten thousand all he has to do is ride, and nobody can say a word again' him.

But Horace commences to show what he's got. He spreads that nag's strength over the entire mile. Slowly and surely he cuts down Sea Foam's lead. At the half there're two lengths separatin' them. Dra-

vus is cussin' a blue streak. He knows Horace is tryin' to win that race.

At the three-quarters mark Pole Boat can just hold his own. He's spent plenty in overcomin' that lead. Inch by inch Sea Foam gains a half length more.

Suddenly somebody says, "What was that? It sounded like a wolf's howl to me?"

Nobody answers. They're watchin' Pole Boat. He's got strength and speed in his body he's called on before. That howl brought home the old days when as a wild horse he was chased and occasionally nipped by wolves.

The miners have gone crazy. They're yellin', "Come on, Pole Boat! Come on!" They're jumpin' up and down, plumb crazy. Some of the old ones look as if they might have a stroke. They're like men who have writ home for money, figgered they'd been turned down, then sudden discover the mail's late and the check's in the letter.

There's only a length between 'em now, then Pole Boat's nose is even with Hawkins's body. There's plenty of space between 'em, and no chance for Hawkins to do any dirty work in a jam. I held my breath for a second. I thought sure Sea Foam would nose him out, but Pole Boat shot across the finish by a good head and neck. Then he kept right on goin' scatterin' the crowd right and left. He dives into a thicket and nearly knocks Horace off'n his back. It's ten minutes before the jockey gets Pole Boat back to the barn.

"I'm finished, Cousin No-Shirt," he says. "Dravus and Hawkins get anybody they go after. And they'll be after me now. Say, did you think I was crooked?"

"No, I didn't figger you was crooked," I answer, "but I was curious as to how you'd stand up under pressure. The world's been pretty rough on you. But you stood up swell."

"This ain't easy to say," he continues, "but my father never fooled me. I knew he was a four-flusher and moocher. People concluded I was a chip off'n the old block and wherever I was known there was two

strikes against me at the start. Even when I wouldn't have no part of dirty racin' down below, raw stuff was pulled off and I was the goat."

"That happens," I agreed.

"I got so I hated people," he continues. "Animals were different. They didn't give a damn who my old man was." I felt plenty sorry for the cuss. "So I liked animals and they liked me. There were times when I wondered if any of the McGee tribe was on the level, then I heard about you, and your wild horse, so I stowed away. And you know the rest."

A COUPLE of shadows darken the door. They belong to Dravus and Hawkins. "You dirty, doublecrossing—" Dravus starts in on Horace McGee, then he sees me and Bulldozer and chops off the rest of it.

"That's just the trouble," Bulldozer growls. "You played him for a crook, and us for suckers and lost. We know you packed in gold to cover our bets. We know you tried to swing a club over Horace. We know plenty, and we're passin' it on to the miners if you get tough. You know what that means."

Dravus sees the handwritin' on the wall, and what's more he can read it. "You own Lead Nickel again," he says, "and I'm here to make you an offer. It was sheer accident he lost the first time. I'd like to buy him—"

"And take him to the big California tracks and surprise a lot of people," I cut in. "That'll be a lot of fun. In fact we had it in mind until this stampede headed us off. We may do it yet."

"But Pole Boat," Dravus says, "he isn't that fast, and yet he beat Sea Foam after a poor start."

"Go on and say it," I challenge, "'And Sea Foam is a ringer!'"

"Sea Foam is good," he admits, "but where did Pole Boat find that speed?"

"Take a look at his rump some time," I answer. "you'll see scars. That's where wolves nipped him when he ran wild. Well, I traps a wolf and put the box in

Pole Boat's stall this mornin'. That woke him up. He was ready to go places. Built up a lot of nervous energy.

"Then I notice at the three-quarter mark on the track there's a clump of brush. The wind was right so I had Bulldozer and the wolf cached there. Pole Boat got the scent just as he was tirin'. That started him, but what really made him go to town was Bulldozer howlin' like a wolf.

"Well, gents, mushin's good, you've got three pack-horses and one saddle horse left. You'd better get goin', and I can't say we're sorry to see you go, though we're glad you come."

They go down the trail mutterin' to theirselves and plottin' revenge, which leaves me and Bulldozer facin' Cousin Horace. "What'd you get out of the race?" I ask him.

"Nothin'," he answers, "but the satisfaction of beatin' those buzzards. But they'll frame me with the big tracks Outside."

But it is not in my mind to see this happen to any McGee, even when his name happens to be Horace.

"I had ten thousand dollars ridin' on Pole Boat's nose for you," I tell him, "at even money. So you're worth ten grand. If you can't go south and make the race-track stewards listen to reason with all that money to hire a good lawyer, then me and Bulldozer will show up down there and tell 'em what happened up here."

"I'll start as soon as I can sell my minin' claim," he answers. "I want to ride big-name horses again. And if you ever come south I want the leg up on Lead Nickel in his first race."

"You're in the saddle right now," I tell him.

Then me and Bulldozer go outside again. Riley Jones is payin' off bets as fast as he can, and the Chamber of Commerce members are expectin' the boys to lift the lid tonight.

I figger everybody should be happy until I see Billiard Ball Casler and his

pardners. They're down in the dumps, so I try to cheer 'em up.

"Seems like we struck the only hungry ground on Hungry Creek," Casler says. "We didn't have a ounce of gold to put on that nag's nose. But . . ." And it strikes me he ain't quite as confident as he was a few months ago, though he ain't bowin' his head none. "But we'll find a creek and . . ."

"I'm turnin' the Dravus-Hawkins claims into the McGee Grubstake Fund For Toterin' Sourdoughs," I tell 'em. "You'd bet-

ter take over right now and start workin' that claim."

"And what're we goin' to do, No-Shirt?" Bulldozer asks. "Here we are with a minin' proposition that's payin', plenty of gold won in a honest race, not to mention a three-horse racin' string and a porcupine mascot."

"We're goin' to work that claim, brother," I tell him, "until the freeze-up. Then we're headin' south with the geese, ducks, our three-horse racin' string and—a porcupine."

## Kid Tarzan

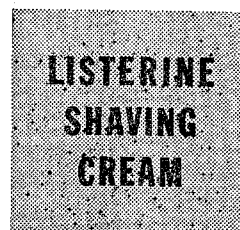
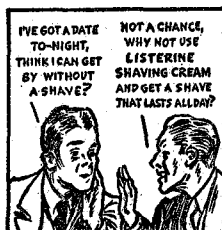
SOONER or later, of course, actual life always gets around to imitating fiction. And this time it's ARGOSY's writer, Edgar Rice Burroughs, who has set the style for what turns up in South Africa—a twelve-year-old boy who was raised by baboons.

The story, vouched for by Professor Raymond A. Dart of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, is like a page from "Tarzan of the Apes." This Negro boy lived the life of the baboons who had kidnaped him: hunted with them, walked about on all fours, and slept in the bush—always entirely naked. He ate crickets, ostrich eggs, prickly pears, green mealies (corn), and wild honey.

The little brother of the baboons has been named Lucas and taught to speak South African Dutch. When he was captured by policemen he could make only the guttural sounds of the anthropoids which had raised him. According to anthropologists, this is apparently the first case known of a human adopted and reared by anthropoids—that is, outside of the pages of the ARGOSY.

—Charles Dorman

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