

were all looking at him, and he passed his rifle to the nearest man. In a moment the two charges were withdrawn.

"Now give 'em back," ordered Gabe. "We'll do the rest. Understand," he added, looking at the group about the store steps, "this is to be a fair fight, jest between Turkey an' me. If he does the killin', as seems to be likely, none o' my friends are to take it up an' pester him. It's to end right here. An' if I git the best o' Turkey it's to be the same. You all witness."

"Yes, yes, we'll look out for that. If either one or t'other tries to keep it goin' we'll pitch in an' make a feud of it an' run him into the ground or out of the country. It shall end right here. We witness!"

"All right," Gabe stepped to his place, and suddenly grasping his rifle by its barrel and swinging the stock high above his head, he cried: "Swing up your gun, Turkeyfoot, quick! I'll give ye two seconds. We'll fight with guns, butt ends!"

Turkeyfoot half raised his rifle, his eyes bulging. Then his real nature asserted itself, and he whirled and sped frantically up the mountain path, followed by the jeers of the loungers.

Frank H. Sweet.

The Bolt of Blue Lightning.

"CHUCK ready?"

The girl kneeling before the stove turned a flushed, unsmiling face over her shoulder, and regarded the speaker severely.

"There's some bread in that box on the table," she told him.

"Bread?" with a curious drop in his voice.

"I said bread," returned the girl tartly. "I speak English, and I think I speak loud enough for folks who are not deaf to hear me. Bread!"

"The last time, you gave us doughnuts. Your brother said you made 'em."

"Well, I didn't make any to-day." The girl rose to her feet with a single lithe movement, and turned toward him. Even in that critical moment, with her eyes blazing unjust and unreasoning anger upon him, the cow-puncher's heart throbbed acknowledgement of the tall, pliant, reed-like grace before him. "I'm not going to stand over a hot stove and cook horse-feed!"

"Bob's been telling you about my feeding that doughnut to Blue Lightning. I can't help it; Blue Lightning's the only

friend I've got—sometimes. And he never goes back on me like—like some other folks!"

"So you want me to fry doughnuts for him? Well, Mr. Jim Bradway, it's lucky I found out in time what you'd expect of a woman!"

Jim looked disconsolately from the window of the little ranch-house to where Blue Lightning—innocent cause of this particular storm in his tempestuous love affair with his partner's pretty sister—stood patiently waiting.

"I can't go back on Blue Lightning, for anybody—not even for you, Lodora. He's helped me through more tight places than a girl like you even dreams of. His eyes dwelt lovingly on the pony's sleepy little bulk. He lacked words to say what he felt.

"There's been a plenty o' times in these 'leven years I've had Little Blue, when—well, when I don't know *what* I'd 'a' done without him. He got me a job—an' kep' it—an' earned both our livin's. He's sure a good horse; nothing I've got is too good for Blue Lightning," the big, helpless fellow concluded.

Lodora, herself born and bred on a ranch, knew perfectly what Jim was trying to express. She knew that Blue Lightning, the most notable cutting pony in San Miguel County, had more than once been his owner's sole stock in trade, had more than once saved that owner's life; and she would have despised Jim if he had failed in gratitude and affection toward his equine partner. But the perversity of the spoiled coquette was strong within her.

"H'm!" she began. "I reckon if he's such a wonderful horse, he's too good for me. You share everything you have with Blue Lightning—but you wouldn't let me ride him, when I wanted to the other day!"

Jim looked at her dumbly; so sweet, with the little damp curls which her work over the stove had loosened around her forehead, her cheeks glowing pink, and the brightness of an unholy triumph in her already bright eyes.

"I don't know how it is, Lodora," he began dismally. "You treat me all right when I first come in, and just as I'm going away you pick a quarrel with me!"

Innocent Jim! He was not aware that the feminine mind understands perfectly that it is at these parting moments the greatest concessions are always made. And Lodora, deep in her heart, felt the final great concession approaching. She knew herself ready to capitulate, and instinctively laid about her for some ex-

treme cruelty wherewith to signalize her surrender, to make it both costly and memorable.

Jim halted a moment; then he countered with sudden astuteness.

"You don't belong to me," he said. "When you do—when you do—" The promise came hard; but the girl's laughing, challenging eyes were upon him.

"Will you give him to me for my saddle horse?" she broke in eagerly. Lodora saw the issue squarely ahead of her; and she told herself that she meant to make the conditions so difficult that the harmless, necessary quarrel might be maintained yet a little longer.

Jim set his gaze where Blue Lightning cropped the short, rich plains grass. Then he glanced irresolutely to where his wicked, adorable sweetheart laughed over his indecision.

"No," he said, doggedly, "I can't do it. Blue Lightning has his notions, just like a person. He'd be as apt as not to kill you, first time you tried to ride him!"

Wilful, spoiled coquette Lodora was, who had driven her four-in-hand of adorers since she had put on long skirts and looped up her curls; but she had found out her own heart at last, and it fluttered wildly at Jim's words. It warned her that she might lose this one lover for whom she really cared by pursuing the methods which had enslaved the others. But it was ever the last ditch with Lodora. The fear at her heart only lifted her proud little head.

"Well, Mr. Bradway, perhaps you'd like to make some doughnuts for Blue Lightning? I shall be pleased to give you the benefit of my advice, or my recipe—but cook for a horse I will not!"

This admirable arrangement would keep poor Jim in sight until she could eventually dictate her own terms of surrender. And he was nothing loath; he would have apologized, and with any degree of abjectness; but one cannot offer soft speeches over a sieve of Triple X flour, nor suggest sentimental arguments while spooning lard into a kettle. The cow-puncher was, like most men of his calling, a very fair cook, and the first doughnut which came out was crisp, brown, and toothsome.

"I'll take that to Blue Lightning," said Lodora wickedly; and she hung it upon a small, pink-tipped forefinger and sallied out.

Jim looked after her almost smiling. Why would she torment him, when she could make him so absolutely happy? He turned once more to the bubbling kettle

upon the stove, and the exacting business of dropping doughy rings into its molten contents, watching them sink, plump up, float, and turn brown, and fishing them out upon a long fork. Suddenly something like lightning whisked past the one window, and an agonized voice screamed:

"Jim! Oh, Jim!"

Lodora had mounted Blue Lightning, and the pony had bolted with her!

Bradway ran out with his doughnut fork in hand; but he was helpless and afoot! He cast the fork from him, and reached for a small pistol which luckily chanced to be carried in his hip pocket—an unusual thing with a cow-puncher.

He looked at the little weapon with a sort of sob. There was no other way!

Had he been mounted, there might have been a chance of heading the pony off, since it circled at no very frightful speed around toward the left. Jim ran in a straight line, to the left, also,—moving in a sort of chord to the bolting horse's wide circle, hoping to get near enough to Blue Lightning and his precious burden to dare a shot.

"Kick your foot loose from the stirrup—be ready to fall free—I'm going to shoot him!" he shouted, hoarsely.

"Oh, don't! Oh, don't!" came back the startled cry.

Jim's hand shook at it went slowly up with the weapon. It was like shooting at a dear friend—it *was* shooting at a dear friend! But a soul wrought up to the sacrifice made firm the trembling hand and unsteady arm.

"You'll have to just understand, old man," he whispered. "You've got to die for her, same as I would, if 'twas me!"

Then the report rang out. The pony suddenly whirled, and came toward his master at a gentle trot, while a long curl, from Lodora's flying tresses, floated away and settled gently upon the grass. Instead of turning the pony away from danger, as she intended, the girl had wheeled him directly into its path.

Yes, the girl had turned him; for in spite of her pretended helplessness and terror, it was with Blue Lightning well in hand that Lodora came up to her lover.

"Oh, Jim!" she cried, precipitating herself into the arms outstretched to receive her. "I wanted to scare you a little; but I didn't think you'd believe that anything on four legs, even Blue Lightning, could run away with me!"

Jim stood pale and gasping, staring across to where that tell-tale curl fluttered upon the grass. But he found presence of mind to take advantage of

the situation. Lodora with a hysterical tendency to put her arms around his neck and beg his forgiveness, was a delicious novelty.

"You ought not to run such awful risks—I might have shot you!" he remonstrated.

"Jim, honey," urged the tearful and penitent Lodora, "I had no more idea that you'd shoot at Blue Lightning than anything in the world!"

"You don't know a thing about how much I love you," said Jim simply.

"And you'd have shot Blue Lightning for my sake!" she went on, as they moved back to the ranch-house, hand in hand, the astute pony following. "Well"—she paused long, looking down; then continued, as they once more stepped forward: "I said I wouldn't accept a divided heart—and that's why I—why I—"

"Oh, is *that* why you've been tormenting me all this time?" exclaimed her lover. He turned suddenly, and the little derringer flashed in his hand. Jim had had a gleam of enlightenment. "Then I'll shoot him anyhow!" he said, affecting to aim at the pony.

"No you won't!" cried his sweetheart, and closed a resolute hand over the weapon. "I just love Blue Lightning. I'm going to have him for my saddle-horse when we—when—"

Some moments later she plucked herself, rosy and disheveled, from her lover's close-clasping arms, and with one look up into his glorified countenance, cried:

"My goodness, those doughnuts are burning to a cinder—just smell them!" And she fled like a deer toward the house.

Grace MacGowan Cooke.

With a Price on His Head.

Big, flaring posters, scattered far and wide, offered a reward of two thousand dollars. "Dead or alive," the posters read, but no one expected that the man would be anything but dead when the boys had finished with him. It had been a particularly atrocious murder, and the added charge of horse-stealing had not helped matters. Indeed, horses were more valuable than men in Beaver Creek.

Bill Haydon, the man whose name trailed across the posters in huge black letters, was comparatively a newcomer. He was not a favorite in the town. He drank little, talked less, and had an air of aloofness that the boys did not like. He neither told stories himself, nor laughed at those of others' telling. Most

of the miners had come to hate him with a hatred that was as intense as it was unreasoning.

The sheriff did not lack for helpers in his man-hunt. Half the town turned out and swarmed up and down the mountain-side. The lonely hut that some one had pointed out as Haydon's home was visited by scores. The miners did not expect to find Haydon himself there; they had long ago learned that the man had been warned by an unknown friend; but they gloated over the signs of a hasty flight. Then they eased their wrath and fed their revenge by a wholesale wrecking of the poor little hut and all that it contained.

One, two, three days passed, and Haydon had not been found. Most of the searchers went back to Beaver Creek and to work, but a few still kept up the hunt. Among these last was Jim Thatcher, at the head of a little company of men on the north side of the mountain. Jim was at the edge of a small opening in the forest when he found that he had out-distanced his companions, and was alone. He stopped for a moment and listened intently.

A leaf fluttered slowly down, and glinted like gold in the flickering sunlight. A bird chirped softly, and was answered from a neighboring tree. Then to the right sounded the rustling swish of dry leaves and the sharp snapping of a twig. There was some one else in the forest. Jim Thatcher slipped behind a convenient tree and waited breathlessly, his finger on the trigger of his revolver.

Nearer and nearer came the sound, and then—the weapon almost dropped from Jim's hand. A little girl, sunny-haired and bright-eyed, and with her arms full of broken twigs and branches, was threading her way among the trees. A moment more, and the small feet stumbled and the child lay prone almost at his side.

With a smothered exclamation Jim pocketed his revolver and sprang to her aid.

"Well, well, my little gal—up she comes!" he cried gaily, lifting the child to her feet.

She did not speak nor cry out; but her eyes were big and tear-dimmed as she held up to view a tiny wrist, down which ran a crimson line marking the path of a sharp-pointed twig.

"Well, now, that's too bad," murmured the man helplessly.

From a diminutive pocket the small