

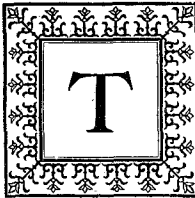
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—Page 490.

Smoky—A One-Man Horse

At Work

BY WILL JAMES

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR



HE fine, cool, and sunshiny days of fall was making a last stand, rains begin to come, and as time was a-crawling toward early winter, them rains got colder and then

turned to a wet snow. Mud was where dust had been, the hard-twist throw ropes had turned stiff as steel cables, saddles and saddle blankets was wet, heavy, and cold, and the shivering ponies met the feel of them with a hump and a buck.

The cowboys, all a-packing long, yellow slickers, was beginning to tally up on how much wages would be due 'em, as the end of the fall round-up drew near, and as they waded through slush and mud from the chuck wagon to the rope corral, not many was caring. Wet socks, damp beds, two hours of shivering on night

guard, saddling ornery ponies in daytime and when a feller can't even get a footing, and then riding 'em a-wondering if them ponies will stand up as they beller and buck on the slick and muddy ground, all left a-hankering only for a warm dugout somewheres, where there's a stove, a chair to set on, and a few magazines to read as Mother Nature does her best to make the outside miserable.

The last of the beef herd had been turned over to another "wagon" of the Rocking-R and shipped and Jeff's (the cow foreman) main herd was from then on made up of cows with big weaner calves, and all stock that'd need feeding through the winter.

"A couple of weeks more now and we'll be seeing the gates of the home ranch," says Jeff one day, but it was a long three weeks before the stock was tended to and when the wagon was loaded for the

last time. The wet snow had got flaky and dry by then and six inches of it was covering the ground.

"Now hold on a minute, Smoky, and give a feller a chance, won't you?"

It was Clint a-talking, and trying to hold Smoky down till he got his foot in the stirrup. The cowboy, being all bundled up, couldn't handle himself as he'd like to, the little horse was cold, crusted snow had to be rubbed off his back before the saddle could be put on and he was aching to put his head down and go to bucking so he could warm up.

Clint was only half ways in the saddle when that pony lit into it, but the cowboy didn't mind that, his blood was also a long ways from the boiling point and any excuse to get circulating good was welcome.

Around and around him Smoky went and all in one spot, all the fancy twists of a bucking pony was gone over and the rider met him all the way, and as Clint rode and fanned and laughed, he'd get fast glimpses of other riders and other horses a-tearing up the white landscape and getting down to the earth underneath.

It was the last day of the round-up, all the work was done, the cook climbed on his seat, grabbed the lines the boys handed him, and letting out a war-whoop scared his already spooky team into a long lope towards the home ranch.

Eight long months had went by since Smoky was run in the corral at the horse camp. In that time he'd went from a green bronc, skipped over the first grade as a "circle horse" on to the "day herd" class and was fast getting up amongst the high eddicated cow horses. The reason for his fast learning that way was first due to the amount of brains he had, and afterwards the liking that'd got to grow in him for Clint, the cowboy who broke him.

There wasn't a rider on that range more fit to bring out qualities in such a horse as Smoky, and as had often been remarked, "Clint could take a raw bronc and in two months time make that pony spell cow." With that kind of a man to coach him, there was no limit as to how high the mouse colored horse would climb, and Clint all het up with his liking for the pony and wanting to make him the best

cow horse of the country had quit breaking horses, and when riders came to claim all the ponies he'd started breaking to use for round-up work, Clint saddled up Smoky and joined to round-up wagon. . . . No other man was going to ride that horse.

That's how come Clint and Smoky worked the Rocking R range together that summer. Smoky had been one of the twelve horses that was in Clint's string and there wasn't a horse more favored than Smoky had been, for Clint was going to take his time with that horse, he was going to make him one in a million.

The sight of the big gates was a mighty fine one to all as the outfit clattered in, specially with the sky a-threatening the way it was, the old cow horses had their ears pointed towards the big pole corrals, they knowed what the sight of them meant at that time of the year and none tried to break away as the wrangler run 'em in. They was turned out in a big pasture that night and the next day a couple of riders came, bunched 'em up, and took 'em through another gate leading out of the ranch.

Clint had took it onto himself to be one of them riders, he wanted to get another look at Smoky before letting him go to the winter range and find out for sure just what condition that range would be in. The outskirts of it was reached that noon and as Clint rode along back of the remuda he was more than satisfied to notice the tall feed that the six inches of snow couldn't hide, he noticed the breaks and the shelter they would give, then the thick growth of willows along the creek bottom which meant more shelter.

Clint stopped his horse and the two hundred ponies was left to scatter, his eyes run over the well-known backs for a last time, he wouldn't be seeing them again till spring round-up started and he watched 'em slowly graze away, many was in that bunch that he'd broke and named, and starting from the meanest fighting bronc of the rough string, and taking all the ponies on up to the best cow horse of the foreman's string there wasn't one that Clint didn't know and know mighty well as to tricks and good or bad points

A big old sorrel with a kinked neck and by the name of Boar Hound caught his eye, and Clint remembered how that pony tried to commit suicide rather than be rode and how he'd now changed to wanting to commit murder instead and kill a few cowboys; then a smile spread over his face as he spotted a tall Roman

and scattered that dark cloud of memories from hell to breakfast, Smoky had showed himself from behind other horses and not over fifty feet from where Clint was setting on his horse.

The cowboy's face lit up with a smile at the sight of the pony, and getting down off his saddle he made tracks his way, but



Feed was aplenty and the little pawing that had to be done to reach it was like so much exercise and only kept his blood in good circulating order.—Page 490.

nosed gruller who'd never made a jump till a rope got under his tail, and who'd took a sudden liking to bucking from then on and made hisself a reputation at that which scattered over four counties.

Every horse Clint looked at brought to memory some kind of a story, and there was a variety of expressions which changed with every horse that came under his eye. A big shaggy black looked his way and snorted, and with the sight of him Clint remembered how that horse had reached ahead one time and kicked to pieces a cowboy that'd been unsaddling him.

His expression was mighty solemn at the thought of that, but it didn't last long. Like a ray of sunshine, something shot out

he didn't have to go all the way, for soon as Smoky spotted him he left Pecos, his running pardner, behind, and nickering came to meet Clint.

"A feller would think to see you act that you're a sure enough sugar eater," Clint remarked as the little horse came up to him and stopped. He rubbed a hand on the pony's head and went on:

"Well, anyway, Smoky, I'm glad to see that you've got a mighty fine winter range to run on, with all the feed I see here and the shelter that's with it you hadn't ought to lose an ounce of fat." Clint felt for the pony's ribs and grinning resumed, "And if you ever get any fatter than you are now you'll be plum worthless."

Smoky followed Clint as he turned and

went to where he'd left his horse. "I wonder," says that cowboy, "if you've got the hunch that you won't be seeing me no more till next spring? . . . that's a long time ain't it? But never mind, old horse, I'm the first cowboy you're going to see when spring does break up."

Clint was about to get on his horse and ride away, but he stopped, and felt of Smoky's hide once more.

"Well, so long, Smoky, take care of yourself and don't let anything drag you down."

Smoky watched him ride away and nickered once as the cowboy went over the point of a ridge and disappeared. He watched a long time even after that and till he was sure Clint was gone, and finally turning went to grazing back till he was by the side of Pecos again.

The winter came and hit the range with the average amount of snow, freeze-ups, and cold winds. The cayotes howled the hunger they felt, for there was no weak stock to speak of for them to feed off of, and outside of small varmints they could get once in a while, pickings was mighty poor. Horses and cattle was and stayed in fine shape and the stockman could hit his bed after the long day's ride knowing that he could go to sleep right off and not lay awake a-wondering what he could do to pull his stock through.

Smoky met all what the weather had to hand him, with a good layer of fat, a thick skin, and a long coat of hair. He lost a few ounces but he could of spared many pounds and felt as good, feed was aplenty and the little pawing that had to be done to reach it was like so much exercise and only kept his blood in good circulating order.

The winter months wore on, the ponies drifted from ridge to ridge, from shelter to shelter and nothing much came to disturb the quiet of the land, nothing much excepting when a big shaggy black tried to throw in with Pecos, the same black that'd kicked the cowboy over the Great Divide. But his interfering and butting in was welcome though in a way, Smoky and Pecos had so much good energy going to waste that they'd been just aching for some excuse to use some of it for some good.

It came about that the big black had took a liking to Pecos, and at the same time a dislike for Smoky. Pecos was neutral for a while and wondered what the black was up to when he tried to chase Smoky away from him. Smoky wouldn't chase worth a damn but he was getting skinned up considerable a-trying to hold his ground. Things went on that way for a day or so and every once in a while the black made a dive for Smoky like he was going to tear him to pieces, his intentions was good, but Smoky sure was no invalid, and when the snow settled again where he'd held his ground the little horse hadn't give away one inch.

But the black was twice as old as Smoky, more up to the game of fighting, and heavier by a hundred pounds. All that begin to tell on the mouse colored hide, and there might of come a time when Smoky would of had to hightail it, only, as the scraps was repeated off and on, Pecos begin to notice and realize that that black was taking too much territory, and he didn't like him nohow.

So, that's how come, that when the black put down his ears and made another grand tearing rush for Smoky that something struck him from the off side and upset him and his plans of attack all to hell, he found hisself jerked off his feet and rolled plum over the top of Smoky and he lit head first on the other side. When he picked hisself up out of the snow his spirits was dampened some in wonder, and more so when he shook his head and was able to see and noticed that there was *two* mighty vicious looking ponies a-waiting for him to come again. He shook his head once more at that, and as Smoky and Pecos bowed their necks and came his way the black turned tail and started a looking for other company which would appreciate him more.

But wether it was orneriness or just plain thick headedness the black tried to butt in again the next day; maybe he just wasn't convinced, anyway, Pecos noticed him first and before the black could even get to Smoky. War was started right there, but Pecos was no match for the black and even though he wasn't for quitting, the worst of the battle was on his side. It was about when the crusted snow was flying the thickest that Smoky,



The black was jerked off his feet, rolled plum over, and he lit head first on the other side.—Page 490.

who'd been off a ways, noticed the commotion. He seen his pardner down on his knees and the black a-chewing away on him, and right about then the standing Smoky was transformed into a twelve-hundred-pound bombshell. The explosion came as he connected with the black and then black fur begin to fly and soar up above. . . . Somehow or other the black managed to gather enough of his scattered senses to know what had happened; them senses told him to act, and act quick, and he did. He tore himself away from the pressing, tearing mixture

of flying hoofs and sharp teeth and split the breeze making far apart tracks to where horseflesh wasn't so thick.

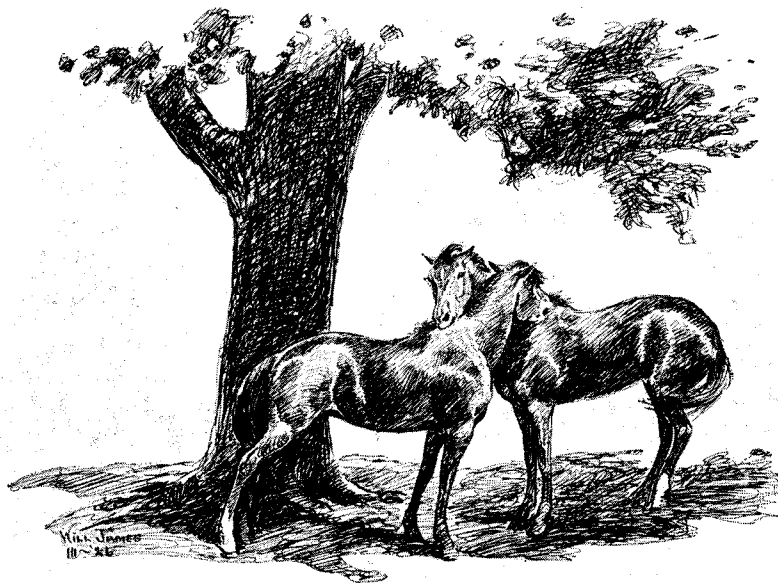
The next day he was seen with Boar Hound, the kinked necked sorrel, the Roman-nosed gruller, and a few more ornery ponies of the "rough string." A company bunch more fitting to his kind.

The days was getting longer and warmer, the snow begin packing and melting some, and pretty soon bare patches of ground showed in plain sight. Smoky and Pecos' hides begin a-itching and the

two was often busy a-scratching one another and starting from the neck to the withers along the backbone to the rump. Big bunches of long winter hair begin a-slipping and falling to the ground as they scratched, and came a time when as they rolled, more of that hair was left till finally patches of short slick satin like hair begin to show.

Then green and tender grass begin to

Clint had wintered at one of the outfit's camps and drew his wages regular, and when the range land begin to get bare of snow and the watching out for weak stock was no more necessary he put his bed on one horse, his saddle on another, and headed for the home ranch. He was one of the first riders to reach that place, and when the horse round-up started he was one of the first to have his horse saddled,



Smoky and Pecos' hides begin a-itching and the two was often busy a-scratching one another.—Page 491.

loom up and plentiful, and that finished the work of ridding the ponies' hides of all the long hair that was left, creeks was swelling from the waters of the fast melting snows, spring had come and the sunshine and warm winds that came with it was doing its work.

The round-up cook was once again scrubbing on the chuck box that was on the end of the long wagon, and the cowboys one by one begin a-drifting in from parts near and far anxious to be starting on the spring works again. Some came from the different cow camps of the Rocking R range, a few of the riders that'd been let go when work was done the fall before never showed up, but others rode in and after a few words with Jeff took the places of them that was missing.

topped off, and lined out to sashay in all of the ponies that could be found on the horse range.

Smoky had been feeding on the sunny side of a butte, and for no reason other than to be looking around he raised his head, only his ears and eyes showed as he looked over the top of that butte, but that was enough for him to see a rider coming his direction, and see him before that rider ever had a hunch any horses was around anywheres near.

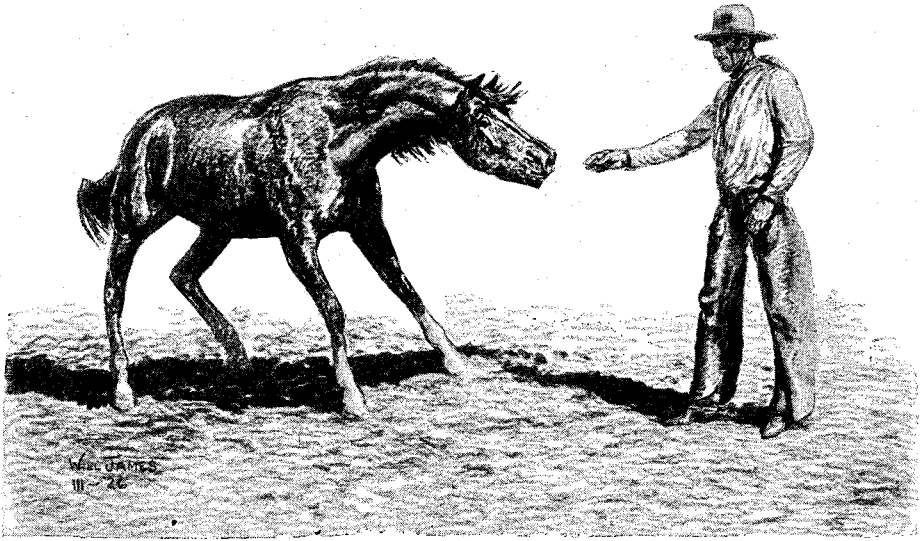
Smoky snorted and hightailed it down the side of the butte to where Pecos and a few other ponies had also been feeding, and the way he acted left no doubt in their minds but what they should be on the move, they all was at full speed the minute he landed amongst 'em, and when the rider topped the butte where they'd been

a few minutes before, they had the lead on him by near a mile.

But the ponies wasn't wanting to get away near as much as might of been thought, it was only that Smoky had got spooked up at the sudden sight of the rider, and him and all the others feeling good as they did wasn't needing much excuse. The cowboy fogged down on 'em and a little to one side so as to turn 'em,

bill far as running was concerned, and when the long wings of the pole corrals at the home ranch was reached the rider was right on the ponies' tails and on the job to keep 'em going straight ahead into the corral, then the big gate closed in on 'em.

"Guess you don't know me no more," says Clint to Smoky as he stood afoot in the corral and watched the pony tear around, then to himself:



Slow and easy Clint raised a hand and held it to within a few inches of his nose, Smoky stretched his neck, sniffed at it, and snorted.—Page 495.

they turned easy enough even though the rider was a long ways behind, and making a big circle that rider finally had 'em headed towards the big corrals of the home ranch.

A big grin spread over the cowboy's features as the sun shined on the slick back of the mouse colored horse at the lead of the bunch, and even though there was a half a mile between him and that horse, *that cowboy* knowed daggone well it was *him*, for the sun never reflected on no other horse's hide as well as it did on Smoky's, and besides, there was no mistaking the good feeling action of that pony's.

"Told you I'd be the first to see you when spring broke up," says the cowboy as he held his horse down to a lope.

The twenty-five mile run from the time Smoky had been spotted kinda filled the

"Maybe he don't know it's *me* that's watching him."

Clint was right, the long winter months of freedom without seeing one human had kind of let him get back to his natural wild instinct, and the first sight of Clint had been of just a human, and it'd spooked him up till he'd have to calm down some before it'd come to him just *who* that human was.

The cowboy spoke to him as Smoky, wild eyed, snorted and hunted for a hole, but Clint kept a-speaking, and as the pony tore around and heard the voice, something gradually came to him that seemed far away and near forgot. He stopped a couple of times to look at the cowboy, and each time his getting away was less rushing, till, as the voice kept a-being heard, things got clearer and clearer in that pony's brain.



Old Tom didn't even get well set that time, Smoky bowed his head and went out from under him leaving him come down on the other side.—Page 498.

Smoky had stopped once more, and neck bowed, ears straight ahead, and eyes a-sparkling, faced across the corral to where the cowboy, still and standing, was talking to him.

"Daggone your little hide," says Clint, "are we going to have to get acquainted all over again? . . . come on over here and let me run my hand over that knowledge bump of yours, and maybe I can get your think tank to functioning right again."

Smoky didn't come, but he held his ground and listened to the talk. Clint

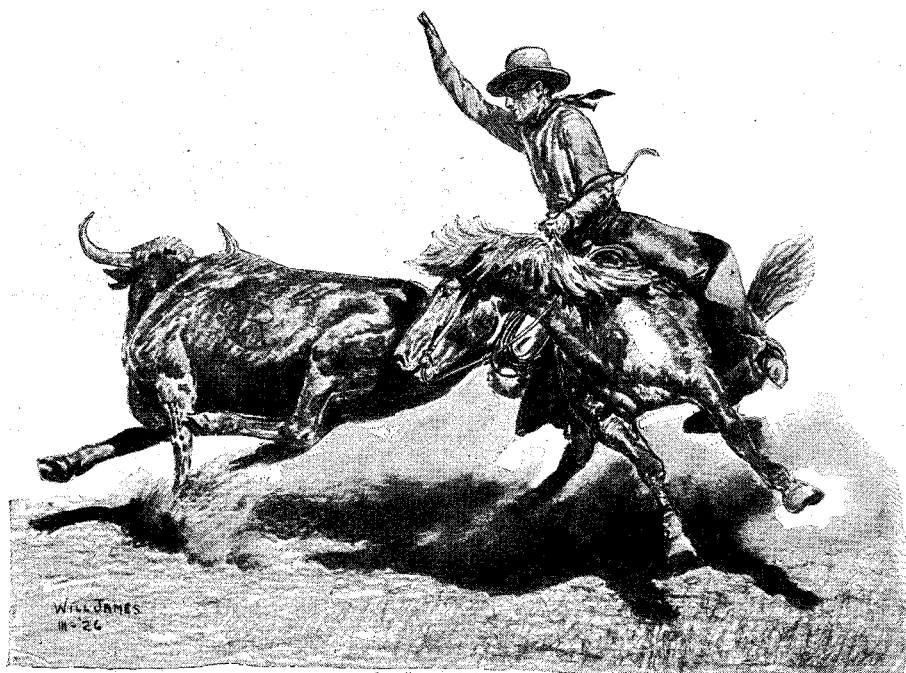
talked on and watched him till the horse lost some of his wild look and then slow and easy started walking his way. Something and away in the past seemed to hold Smoky as the cowboy slowly came nearer and nearer, his instinct was all for him a-leaving the spot he was holding but that something which stuck in his memory was the stronger and sort of kept him there.

Clint came on a few steps at a time, and then stopped, and talking the while, took his time till he was within a few feet of Smoky. A little flaw of any kind

right then in that human's actions could of spoilt things easy and sent the pony a-skeedaddling away from there in a hurry, but Clint knowed horses and specially Smoky too well to do anything of the kind. He knowed just what was going on between that pony's ears, and how to agree with all that mixed in there.

wards Smoky was following the grinning cowboy all around the corral.

The round-up wagons, all cleaned and loaded, was ready to pull out, the remuda was all accounted for and each string pointed out to each rider, and Jeff giving the whole outfit another look over



Many a cowboy had remarked it was worth the price of a good show to watch Smoky outdodge the critter.
—Page 500.

Finally, Clint got to where by reaching out he could near of touched Smoky. Slow and easy the cowboy raised a hand and held it to within a foot of the pony's nose, Smoky looked at it and snorted, but pretty soon he stretched his neck and mighty careful took a sniff of the human paw, he snorted again and jerked his head away from it but it wasn't long when he took another sniff, then another and another, and each time the snort grew less to be heard, till at last, Smoky even allowed that paw to touch his nostrils, the fingers rubbed there easy for a spell and gradually went on a-rubbing along his nose along on up to between his eyes and pretty soon between his ears to that knowledge bump. Five minutes after-

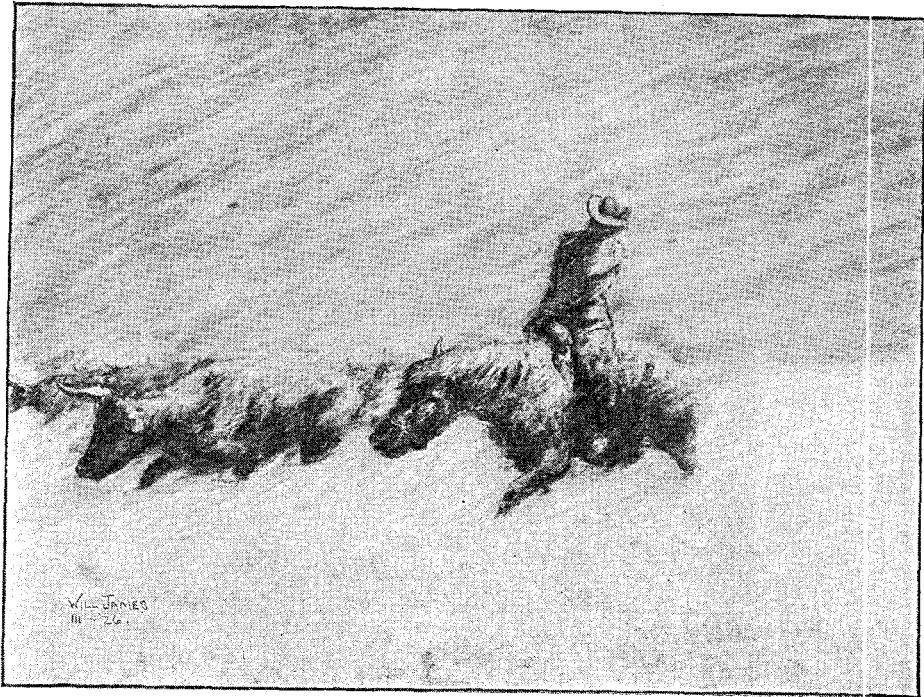
waved a hand, the pilot reined his horse into a bucking start, all took up his lead and through the big gates of the home ranch, wagons, riders, remuda, and all lined out, the spring round-up had started.

Smoky broke the record for learning that year, and when the fall round-up was over and the saddle was pulled off him for the last time before being turned out on the winter range, there was two little white spots of white hair showed on each side of his withers and about the size of a dollar, saddle marks they was, and like medals for the good work he'd done. There was a knowing spark in his eyes for the critter too, for the little horse had got to savvy the cow near as well as the

old cow horses that'd been in the same remuda that year.

There was only one thing that could of been held against the good record of that pony, and that was his bucking, he just had to have his little buck out every morning, and sometimes he bucked harder than other times, that all depended on

Clint felt that the eyes of Old Tom was on Smoky the minute that cowboy rode him to the edge of the herd, and an uneasy feeling crawled up his backbone as he noticed that that Old Grizzly seemed to've lost his eyesight for anything else but his Smoky horse. Clint knowed Old Tom's failing for a good horse, and he'd



The next day Clint was busy bringing the weak stock closer to the ranch.—Page 502.

how cold the weather was, but Clint didn't seem to mind that at all, if anything he tried to perserve that bucking streak in the pony, and he was often heard to remark:

"A horse aint worth a damn unless that shows up some."

But Clint had other reasons for keeping the "buck" in Smoky's backbone. . . . Old Tom Jarvis, owner of the Rocking R, had joined the wagon for a few days that summer and wanted to see his cowboys work his cattle for a spell. Him being an old cowman and from away back before cattle wore short horns made all the working of a herd all the more interesting and to be criticised one way or the other. He was present steady on the cutting grounds, and so was Smoky one day.

heard of how many a time that same failing had come near putting the cowman in jail for appropriating some horse he couldn't buy, of course them times was past, but the failing was still in the old man's chest, and *Smoky belonged to him*.

The cowboy had started Smoky to cutting out, a work where all the good points of a cow horse have a chance to show up, and Smoky sure wasn't hiding any. Old Tom's eyes was near popping out of his head as he watched the mouse colored gelding work, and finally, as Clint noticed all the interest, he figgered it a good idea to get out of the herd and hide Smoky somewhere before the old cowman came to him and suggested swapping horses, the cowboy was afraid he'd already showed too much of that horse,

and as he come out of the herd he made a circle and took his stand away on the opposite side from where Old Tom was holding.

But Old Tom was owner of that outfit and he could be any place he wanted to on that range any time. A steer broke out, Old Tom took after him, circled him around the herd, and when he put him back in and brought his horse to a standstill, there was only a short distance between him and the horse he'd had his eye on.

Clint was scared and he cussed a little, he tried to keep Smoky down whenever a critter broke out that needed turning, and even tried to let a couple of 'em get away, but he couldn't do it without making it too plain to see, and besides, Smoky had ideas of his own about handling them critters.

The cowboy was worried all the rest of the day and lost some sleep that night a-wondering how he was going to dodge Old Tom, he knowed the old cowman would be around with some proposition to swap him out of Smoky and that was one of the last things the cowboy would do, there wasn't a horse in the outfit or anywheres else he'd trade Smoky for.

It's took for granted on any real cow outfit that whenever a horse is swapped or borrowed out of a cowboy's string and handed to somebody else, that that cowboy is requested to quit or be fired, in other words it's an insult that makes any real cowboy want to scrap and then ask for his wages.

Clint was a valuable man to the outfit, but with Old Tom, one cowboy more or less didn't matter, that is if that cowboy stood between him and a horse he wanted. He walked up to Clint the next day, and not hesitating any he says:

"I'm going to try that mouse colored horse you was riding yesterday" and thinking it'd please Clint to hear, he went on, "and if I like him I'll trade you my brown horse Chico for him, he's the best horse I got at the home ranch."

But all that only made Clint get red in the face, and fire showed in his eyes as he spoke.

"Hell, you can't ride Smoky."

"Why in hell can't I?" asks Old Tom also getting red in the face.

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"Cause you can't," answers Clint, "why you couldn't even put a saddle on him."

Clint was for quitting the outfit right there and hit for some other country, but the thought of leaving Smoky behind kinda put him to figgering another way out, if he could get Old Tom sort of peeved and let him handle Smoky while he was feeling that way, most likely that pony would do the rest.

"I'll show you wether I can saddle that horse or not," says Old Tom frothing at the mouth, "why I've handled and rode broncs that you couldn't get in the same corral with, and before you even was born."

"Yep," says Clint grinning sarcastic, "that was too long ago, and you're too damned old now for that kind of a horse."

Old Tom glared at Clint for a second, and not finding no ready comeback done the next best thing and got busy. He went to his saddle, jerked his rope off it, and spitting fire, shook out a loop that could be heard a-whistling plum to the other side of the corral.

Smoky was surprised into a dozen cat-fits as that same wicked loop settled over his head and drewed tight and sudden around his neck, he bellered and bucked through the remuda a-dragging Old Tom with him. The old cowman made a motion and two grinning cowboys went and helped him.

Clint stood on the outside and watched the performance, he rolled cigarette after cigarette and tore 'em up fast as they was made, not a one was lit. He seen Smoky brought to a choking standstill and that cowboy felt like committing murder as he noticed the fear in that pony's eyes as he faced the strangers, but there Clint noticed something else and which he gradually recognized as *fight*, there was more fight than fear, and at the sight of that the cowboy took hope.

"Since when does a cowboy get help to rope and saddle his horse?" he hollered as Old Tom was sizing up Smoky. "Pretty soon you'll be wanting one of us to top him off for you."

It worked just right, and Old Tom's answer was only a jerk on the rope that held Smoky. The old cowman knowed better than to handle a horse that way

and as a rule was always easy with 'em, but he was mad, mad clear through and rather than shoot himself a cowboy he was taking it out on the horse.

And Smoky by that time was fast catching up with the spirit of all that went on, he was like a raw bronc that'd never seen a human or a saddle, and when he was finally brought up alongside the saddle, there was all about him to show he wasn't safe for anybody coming near. But Old Tom, even though it was a long time ago, had handled many mean horses, he knowed he was past handling 'em any more, but this time was different and he'd do his best to carry it through.

The two riders that'd been helping him was waved away, he'd show Clint and the rest of the young fellers that he could still do it. He then spread a loop and caught both of Smoky's threatening front feet. Smoky knowed better than to fight a rope and he stood still knowing he'd soon have another chance, rawhide hobbles was fastened on his front legs, a bridle put on his head, and then the saddle was reached for and put on his back and cinched to stay.

"Better say your prayers before you climb up," says Clint, still prodding Old Tom, at the same time hoping that he would stop before he went too far, but there was no stopping him, he pulled up his chap' belt, set his hat down tight, and still mad enough to bite a nail in two, loosened the hobbles, grabbed a short holt on the reins and climbed on.

Smoky looked back at the stranger that was a-setting on him, and soon as a touch of the rein on his neck told him that all was set, things started a-happening from there. He bowed his head, made two jumps, and was just getting started good when he felt the saddle was empty, he made a few more jumps just for good measure, and then stopped.

Clint was grinning from ear to ear as he walked up to Smoky and put his hand on his neck.

"Good work, old boy," he says, . . . and then turning to Old Tom, who was picking himself up, "want to try him again?"

"You bet your damn life I do," says that old cowboy.

"All right," answers Clint, getting

peevied some more, "go ahead and break your fool neck, there's plenty of buffalo wallows around here we can bury you in."

Old Tom walked over and jerked the reins out of Clint's hands and started to get in the saddle again, but he didn't even get well in it that time, Smoky bowed his head and went out from under him leaving Old Tom come down on the other side.

It was as the old man was about to try Smoky once more when Jeff Nicks interfered and told his boss how he'd rather not have him try that horse any more.

"That horse bucks every time he's rode," says Jeff.

Old Tom knowed he'd come to the end of his string but that didn't ease his feelings any, and he was looking for some way of letting some of them feelings out before they choked him, when he spots Clint a-standing to one side and by Smoky.

"You're fired," he hollered, pointing a finger at him, "I'll get somebody to take the buck out of that horse, and the sooner you're off this range the better I'll like it."

Clint just grinned at Old Tom, which made him all the madder, and about then Jeff spoke.

"I'm doing the hiring and firing on this outfit, Tom, and as long as I'm working for you I'll keep on a-doing it."

Old Tom turned on him like a wild cat. "Fine," he hollered, "you can go too."

The old cowman had went as far as he could, and as he walked away to catch himself another saddle horse, he had a hunch that he'd also went further than he should, that hunch got stronger as he went on saddling, and as he gave the latigo a last yank, it all developed into plain common sense that he'd sure enough went too far.

But Old Tom wasn't for giving in, not right then anyway. He got on his horse and riding close enough so Jeff could hear, says:

"You and Clint can come to the ranch and I'll have your time ready for you," and then to another rider, "you handle the outfit till I send out another foreman."

A lot of orneriness was scattered to the winds as Old Tom covered the long fifty miles back to the ranch, and as he opened the big gate leading in, a brand new feel-

ing had come over him, . . . he was for catching a fresh horse the next morning early and hightail it back to the wagon to sort of smooth things over best as he could.

He unsaddled and turned his horse loose, and was mighty surprised as he came up to the big ranch house to find both Jeff and Clint already there and waiting for him. Not a hint of the good resolutions he'd made showed as he walked up to 'em, and after some kind of a "howdy" Old Tom heard Jeff say:

"All the boys sent word in by me, that as long as you're making out my check you'd just as well make theirs out too. I'm sorry for that," went on Jeff, "and I tried to talk 'em out of it, but it's no use, they're all for quitting if I go."

The old cowman never said a word as he led Jeff and Clint in the big house, he walked to a big table in the centre of the living-room and there he turned on his two riders. A smile was on his face and he says:

"By God, Jeff, I'm glad to hear that," then Old Tom still pleasant, but serious, went on, "for no man does his best work unless he's doing it with somebody he likes and has confidence in, yes," he repeated, "I'm glad to hear that, but the question is now, you're fired and free to go ain't you?" he asks.

"Yes," says Jeff, "soon as I get paid off."

"Well, how's chances of hiring you over again? I can't afford to let a foreman like you go, Jeff."

Jeff seemed to figger a while and then looked at Clint, and Old Tom guessing what was on his foreman's mind, went on, "and of course, being that I have no say in the hiring and firing of your riders, Clint wasn't fired at all and he can keep on riding for you."

Finally hands was shook all around, and as Jeff and Clint started back for the wagon the next morning Old Tom was on hand to see 'em go.

"And don't worry about that daggone mouse colored horse of yours, Clint," he says as him and Jeff rode away, "I'll never want him:"

The riders reached the big gate leading out of the ranch, and there Jeff remarked as he got off his horse to open it:

"I guess Old Tom didn't have to say that he was sorry."

And Clint more than agreed.

The remuda was in the big corrals of the home ranch once more, and after a few "winter" horses was cut out, the rest was hazed towards the winter range, and let go. . . . Four long winter months went by, then one day the round-up cook begin to get busy cleaning the chuck box, meadow larks was a-tuning up on the high corral posts, and along with the bare patches of ground that could be seen, no better signs was needed that spring had come.

Clint was again the first to spot Smoky that spring and notice the amount of tallow that pony was packing, he was in fine shape for whatever work that'd be his to do that summer, and soon as him and the cowboy got through with their first "howdys" they both went to work like they never had before.

Smoky took up to where he'd left off the fall before and kept on accumulating science in ways of handling the critter till that critter would just roll up an eye at the sight of the mouse colored pony and never argue as to where he wanted to put 'er, she'd just go there.

Spring work went on, middle summer came, and some time after, the fall round-up was in full swing again. Thousands of cattle was handled, cut out, and culled. Big herds of fat steers was trailed into the shipping point and loaded in the cars, and when the weaning was done and the old stock was all brought in close to the cow camps, Jeff headed his wagon towards the home ranch once more. The work was over, the remuda was turned out and the riders that was kept on the pay-roll saddled their winter horses and scattered out for the outfit's different camps.

Winter came on and set in, then spring bloomed out green once again, and with it the cowboys spread out on the range once more. Season after season followed one another without a ruffle that way, the same territory was covered at the same time of the year, the wagon rolled in at the same grounds and the rope corral stretched at the same spot, old riders disappeared and new ones took their place, like with the ponies, the old cow horses

was replaced by younger ones and the work went on, season after season, year after year, the same outfit rambled out of the home ranch and combed the range like as if no changes was taking place.

Jeff, the cow boss, the round-up cook, Clint, and a couple more riders was all that was left of the old hands as the wagon pulled out one spring, the others'd cravings for new countries and went and throwed their soogans on some other outfit's wagons.

Five years had went by since that day when Clint, riding Smoky, had joined the wagon, five summers was put in when every time Smoky was saddled and rode Clint was the cowboy that done it, not another hand had touched Smoky's hide in that time, excepting when Old Tom had *tried* to appropriate the horse for his own string, and since that day there hadn't been any excuse for Clint to worry about anybody taking Smoky away from him. There wasn't a cowboy in the outfit who didn't more than want the horse, and if Clint ever failed to show up when the spring works started there'd most likely been some argument as to who should get him, but he'd always been the first to ride in at the home ranch at them times and none had the chance to lay claim on the horse.

In them long summers, and as Smoky was rode off and on, the little horse had got to know Clint as well as that cowboy knowed hisself, he knowed just when Clint was a little under the weather and not feeling good, at them times he'd go kinda easy with his bucking as the cowboy topped him off. The feel of Clint's hand was plain reading to him and he could tell by a light touch of it wether it meant "go get 'er," "easy now," "good work," and so on. The tone of his voice was also mighty easy to understand, he could tell a lot of things by it, specially when he was being got after for doing something he shouldn't of done, his eyes was wide open at them times, his neck bowed, and he'd snort sorta low, but when Clint would tell him what a fine horse he was, Smoky was some different, he'd just take it all in the same as he would warm sunshine in a cold fall day, and near close his eyes for the peace he was feeling at the sound of the cowboy's voice.

The way Smoky could understand the man who rode him through and around the big herds had a lot to do in making him the cow horse he'd turned out to be, his strong liking for the rider had made him take interest and for learning all about whatever he was rode out to do. There'd come a time when Smoky knowed the second Clint had a critter spotted to be cut out, and the pony's instinct near told him which one it was, till nary a feel of the rein was needed and the dodging critter was stepped on and headed for the "cut."

The same with roping and where Smoky could do near everything but throw the rope that caught the critter. There he shined as he did anywhere else under the saddle, he'd keep one ear back, watch out, and follow the loop leave Clint's hand and sail out to settle around a steer's horns, and the slack was no more than pulled when that pony would turn and go the other way, he knowed how to "lay" the critter, and none of the big ones ever got up, not while Smoky was at the end of the rope.

Big herds of Mexico longhorned steers had been bought by the Rocking R and shipped up into that northern country, they got fat on that range and wilder than ever, and there's where Smoky showed he had something else besides the knowing how. Them longhorned critters are too fast for the average cow horse to catch up with in a short distance, but not with Smoky, he had the speed to go with what he knowed, and Clint would have time to whirl his rope only a few times when the little horse would climb up on the long legged steer and pack the cowboy to within roping distance.

Many a cowboy had remarked that it was worth the price of a good show to watch Smoky work, wether it was around, in or out of a herd, and many a rider had let a cow sneak past him just so he could see how neat that pony could outdodge a critter, and when after the last meal of the day and the cowboys stretched out to rest some, talk, or sing, none ever had any argument to put up and no betting was ever done against whatever Clint said Smoky could do or had done, they all knowed and admired the horse, and came a time as these cowboys came and went

that Smoky begin to be talked about in the cow camps of other cow outfits. One whole Northern State got to hear of him, and one cowboy wasn't at all surprised when hitting south one fall and close to the Mexican border to hear another cowboy talk of "Smoky of the Rocking R."

The owner of a neighbor outfit sent word by one of his "reps" one day that he'd give a hundred dollars for that horse. Smoky had been broke only two years then. Old Tom laughed at the offer, and Clint got peeved. The next year that offer was raised by the same party to two hundred, and Old Tom laughed again but Clint didn't know whether to get mad or scared this time. Anyway things went on as usual for a couple of years more, and then a big outfit from across the State line sent in an offer of a cool four hundred dollars for the mouse colored cow horse.

Good saddle horses could be bought by the carload for fifty dollars a head about that time, but there never was no set price on a good cow horse, and as a rule that kind can't be bought unless an outfit is selling out. The biggest price that was ever heard offered in that country for any cow horse had never went over two hundred, and when rumors spread around that four hundred had been offered for Smoky many figured that whoever offered it had a lot of money to spend, but them who figured that way had never seen Smoky work.

Old Tom came up to Clint that fall after the wagon had pulled in and showed him the letter offering the four hundred. Clint had heard about the offer and he just stargazed at the letter not reading, instead he was doing some tall wondering at what Old Tom was going to do about it. He was still stargazing and sort of waiting for the blow to fall, when he felt the old cowman's hand on his shoulder, and then heard him say:

"Well Clint, I'll tell you," . . . then Old Tom waited a while, maybe just to sort of aggravate the cowboy, but finally he went on, "if my cattle was starving, and I needed the money to buy feed to pull 'em through with, I might sacrifice Smoky for four hundred, but as things are now there's no money can buy that horse."

The cowboy smiled, took a long breath, and grabbed the paw the old man was holding for him to shake.

"But I'm hoping," resumed Old Tom, "that some day soon you'll get to hankering to drift to some other country and quit this outfit so I can get Smoky for myself, I'd fired you long ago, only I'd have to fire Jeff too, and somehow I'd rather get along without the horse till one of you highbinders quits."

Clint had kept a-smiling all the while the old man was speaking, then he gave his hand another shake and walked away. He knowed Old Tom had said that last just to hear how his voice sounded.

As usual, Smoky was turned out on the range along with the remuda for that winter. Clint had helped haze 'em to the breaks as he'd always done, and noticed as he stopped and let the ponies graze and scatter that the feed was mighty short and scarcer than he'd ever seen it. The whole summer had been mighty dry and the range short on grass, but this little scope of country that was the saddle horse range had always been good, and the ponies had always wintered there better than if they'd been in a warm stable and fed grain.

Clint thought some of taking Smoky back with him and keeping him up for a winter horse, but then he'd have to turn him out when spring works came on, and the cowboy didn't want to think of going out on spring round-up without his "top horse."

"No," he decided, "I'm going to let you run out this winter, but I'll be out to see how you're making it and don't lose too much tallow. You're getting to be too valuable a horse to take any chances of losing," he says to him as he scratched him back of the ear . . . "but," he went on, "you're not half as valuable to the outfit as you are to me, old pony, even though Old Tom won't consider no price on you."

Clint was on his way back and had no more than got sight of the buildings of the ranch when Old White Winter hit him from behind and made him clap his gloved hands over his ears.

"By god," he whistled through his chattering teeth, "she's sure starting ferocious."

And she had . . . the first initiating blizzard of the season was more than just a snowstorm with a wind, it was a full grown blizzard drifting over the country, covering up the feed with packed snow, and freezing things up. It kept up for two days and nights, and as it cleared up, the thermometer went down. The next day Clint was busy bringing in the old stock closer to the ranch and where they could be watched, and as another blizzard hit the country again a few days later that cowboy was *kept* on the jump bringing under the sheds and next to the haystacks all the stock he'd hunted up.

Clint was in the saddle all day every day and sometimes away into the night. A month went by and in that time two feet of snow had accumulated on the range, more was threatening to come, and all the cowboys that was kept on the Rocking R pay-roll more than had their hands full. The ranch hands would roll up their eyes at every bunch of stock the riders brought in to be fed, for as they figured they already had all they could handle, and if this kept up, Old Tom would have to hire more hay shovellers and buy more hay.

Clint had worried some about Smoky and figured to hunt him up sometime, but as on account of the deep snow he couldn't get his horse out of a walk he never could make it, besides there was always a bunch of cattle somewheres on the way and amongst 'em there'd be a few that needed bringing in.

But with all them drawbacks, Clint finally reached Smoky's range late one day, the gray sky was getting darker and night was coming on as the cowboy topped a ridge and spotted a bunch of ponies, amongst the bunch was a long haired, shaggy looking, and lean mouse colored horse, and Clint could hardly believe his eyes or keep from choking as he rode closer and recognized his Smoky horse.

The cowboy was for catching the horse right there and bring him into the ranch, he wondered if Smoky could travel that far, but as the horse raised his head out of the hole in the snow where he'd been pawing for feed, and spotted the rider coming towards him, Clint was surprised to see so much strength and action. Smoky hadn't

recognized the cowboy, and before he'd took a second look, he'd hightailed it from there in a hurry.

Clint watched him and smiled as he seen that the horse wasn't in near as bad a shape as he'd first thought.

"But I'm going to take you in just the same, you little son of a gun, for God knows what you'll be like in a few weeks from now if this weather keeps up."

He started on the trail Smoky and the other ponies had left, it was good and dark by then, but the trail in the deep snow was easy enough to follow. He wondered as he rode if he could get Smoky to stand long enough so as the horse would recognize him under all the disguise of his winter clothes, for at night specially he looked more like a bear than anything, then again, horses are spookier and harder to get near at that time, Clint had his doubts if he could catch him, and he figured he'd most likely have to take the whole bunch along in order to get him to the ranch.

He was riding along on the trail and trying to get sight of the ponies, when to his left just a little ways and out of the snow came a faint beller, it sounded like a critter in trouble, and Clint stopped his horse, the beller came again, and he rode towards the sound. . . . All curled up, shivering, and near covered with snow, a little bitty calf was found . . . couldn't been over two days old, figured the cowboy, and he wondered how the poor little cuss could still be alive.

"Where's your mammy, Johnny?" says Clint as he got off his horse and came near the calf.

But the words was no more out of his mouth when a dark shadow appeared and belling tried to get to the cowboy with her horns before he could get on his horse. In making his getaway, Clint noticed tracks of more cattle, and following 'em a ways come across another cow and with another calf, only this second calf was older and more able to navigate.

"These two wall-eyed heifers must of been missed during last fall's round-up," Clint figured, "and just as luck would have it they both have winter calves. . . . Well, Smoky," he says as he looked the direction the ponies had went, "I guess that leaves you out, *this time*."

It was near noon the next day when Clint showed up at the ranch packing a little calf on the front of his saddle. He found Jeff by the big sheds where the cattle were sheltered and fed, and told him:

"I had to leave this little feller's mammy out about ten miles, there's another cow and young calf with 'er, and maybe you better send a man out after 'em before this storm that's coming catches up with 'em. Me, I'm going to eat the whole hind leg off a beef and roll in between my soogans."

The storm Clint had spoke of came sure enough, and seemed like to want to clean the earth of all that drew a breath, the snow piled up and up till, as the cowboy remarked, "the fence posts around the ranch are only sticking up about an inch, and soon won't be visible no more."

That storm would of meant the death of all the cattle that was on the range, and most of the horses too, but as the tail of it came, a high wind sprung up, the snow drifted and piled high in the coulees, and at the same time took the depth of it down considerable wherever that wind hit. When it all finally quit raging, there was many patches where the grass was buried only a few inches and them patches the wind had cleared was what saved the lives of the range stock that winter.

Clint had worried about Smoky as the stormy weather came on, he'd tried time and time again to get to him, but always some helpless critter made him branch off and finally turn back. "To-morrow,"

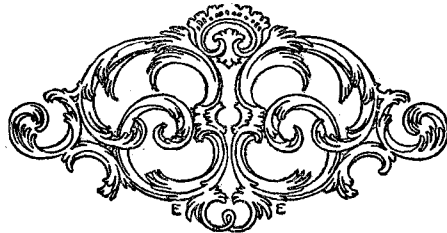
Clint kept a-saying, but the "Tomorrows" came and went and the cowboy always a-fretting hadn't got near Smoky's range.

The great liking Clint had for the mouse colored horse made him fret and worry more than was necessary, that liking made him imagine a lot that was nowhere near true, and many a time that cowboy rolled in his bunk, tired and wore out, and dreamed of seeing Smoky caught in a snow-bank, weak, starving, and wolves drawing near.

Smoky had sure enough lost considerable fat, and his strength was reduced some too, but he was nowhere weak, that is, not so weak that he couldn't get up easy once he layed down or be able to travel and rustle for his feed. The last big storm had took him down some more, but he was still able to plow through the snow-banks that'd gathered on the sides of the ridges and get on the other side where the feed was easier reached.

If it didn't snow too much more there was no danger for Smoky and the bunch he was with. Him and Pecos had got to know that range so well, they knowed where the best of shelter could be found when the winds was cold or the blizzard howled, and then again, they knowed of many ridges and where the snow was always the thinnest. They had a spot to fit in with or against whatever the weather had to hand out, and whether the next on the programme was to be sunshine or more snow they was still well able to enjoy or compete with either.

["Smoky—On Other Ranges" will appear in the June number.]

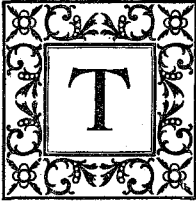


Landlocked

BY STELLA BEEHLER RUDDOCK

Author of "Taggin' Ship"

ILLUSTRATIONS BY REGINALD BIRCH



THEY were coaling ship. Two huge lighters, piled high with the glittering black mass, had been towed out the evening before and were moored on either side of the white cruiser. It was mid-afternoon now, and the men had been working since sunrise. One lighter was empty, the other more than half finished. The summer sun was scorching. The men, stripped to the waist, streaming perspiration and grimy with coal dust, had lost the early morning zest and were plodding along in dogged silence. Coal dust lay thick over everything—on the usually spotless decks, on the ports, on men's faces—and outlined their eyes like mascaro.

Lieutenant David Kent stood at the rail directing the men at work. A nice-looking youngster, you would say, in spite of the blue dungarees and the unflattering dust. Brown hair curled up close to his head by perspiration. Brown eyes alight with interest—a wide-awake, boyish face.

He was intent on the job below him. Some of the men were filling big canvas bags with coal, others were hoisting them on the deck; but the work was lagging.

"Poor devils," he thought, "I don't blame them this hot day; but we've got to get the coal on board."

Suddenly he ran down the gangway on to the lighter and grabbed up a shovel.

"Come on, boys!" he cried, starting to work. "Let's get this stuff on board before dark."

The effect was instantaneous. One of the men started singing a popular song. The ship's band awoke from its afternoon siesta and took up the tune. Soon the whole crew was singing and working away with a will.

The captain met the young lieutenant

as he started toward his room. "Good work that, Kent," he said, "the way you pitched in and inspired those men. Keep it up."

David went to his room, whistling. He was hot and dirty and frightfully tired, but it took more than that to cloud his horizon.

He loved the navy, loved the nice shading of the mechanical and personal in the work on board ship; loved the camaraderie between the officers—and more than that, some restlessness in his blood, some inheritance of adventure and romance, was kept appeased. For although months and years went by with no break in the rather monotonous routine of one Atlantic port after another, still, there was always the possibility of foreign lands and action. Romance was ever before him.

There was a special reason for David's elation on that particular day. He had just received orders for Asiatic duty—his first foreign service, the duty he had been asking for ever since his graduation from the Naval Academy five years before.

There remained now the prospect of telling Lucille of his orders. She would demur, of course, at his urging such a hasty marriage, but he was sure he could win her over. There was no real reason for the long engagement that she seemed to feel was a necessity. They could have all that trip from New York to China as their honeymoon. Who could resist such plans!

David went down by train the next afternoon from the sweltering heat of New York to the McNairs' attractive Long Isl- and home.

The adjective that would best describe Lucille McNair was "exquisite"—from the sudden glory of her tawny hair and the grace of her figure, to the minutest detail of dress and charm of manner. In all of her twenty-two years her first love had