Barnes Will Croft

Tales from the X-Bar Horse Camp: The Blue-Roan «Outlaw» and Other Stories

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Will C. Barnes
Tales from the X-bar Horse Camp: The Blue-Roan «Outlaw» and Other Stories

To My Mother:

Who shared with me many of the dangers and hardships of the old days on the ranges of the Southwest, these stories are affectionately dedicated.

Washington, D. C.
September 1st, 1919.

SUNRISE ON THE DESERT

Towards the east, the God of day,
Like some great red-eyed dragon, tops the rugged range.
Before his golden beams, the gray
Of dawn creeps slowly backward, till the magic change
Sweeps night away.

The desert stirs, and wakes.
Strange-fashioned things come slipping into sight.
High overhead a buzzard idly wings,
A lonely raven robed in shades of night
"Caws" hoarsely to its mates.

Perched on a nearby stone,
A lizard, swift as light, and clad in colors gay,
Pumps slowly up and down.
A horned toad, with crown of thorns, comes slithering by,
And then is gone.

Atop of yonder rocky hill
A lone coyote, skulker of the desert wastes,
Greets the first beams with shrill
And piercing "yips," then hastes
To find his morning kill.

A wandering honeybee,
Drunk with nectar from a Palo Verde's yellow bloom,
Goes stagg'ring by.
The air is heavy with the desert's sweet perfume
From flower and tree.

THE BLUE-ROAN "OUTLAW"

A Tale of the "Hashknife" Range

By permission *The Breeder's Gazette*, Chicago, III

"Say, Bill, there's that old blue-roan, droop-horned cow that allus runs over on the Coyote wash. Reckon she ain't got a calf somers' hereabout?"

"Like as not," replied Bill, "an' I'll bet it's a blue-roan, too, for she's raised a blue calf reg'lar fer these last four or five years. There's a little hole of water clos't to where she's a-grazin' an' it's a sure shot the calf's hid away in that tall grass down there clos't to it."

The two cowboys rode slowly down the gentle slope toward the cow, which watched them eagerly, but with the cunning of the brute made no sign or motion to show where her baby was hidden. When, however, one of the boys played the time-worn trick on her by barking like a dog, it was too much for her peace of mind. With a mad bellow of defiance she raced toward the spot where the little fellow was hidden, exactly as the boys knew she would.

The calf, with the instinct of the brute already working in his little four-day-old brain, did not move, but lay there as quietly as if he were dead, and, not until the horsemen rode almost onto him in the deep grass, did they discover his hiding place.

The mother, with the fear of man too strong in her heart to stand by her guns, ran off a few yards from the spot and the calf followed, bawling loudly, the already awakened man-fear strong within him.

"He's a sure blue-roan all right," said Bill. "Say, won't that old Hashknife iron loom up big on them ribs some day?" he asked, for a brand on a roan animal shows much more plainly than on a hide of any other color.

"It sure will," replied his companion; "better leave 'em here till tomorrow an' we can swing around this a-way an' git 'em."

So the boys rode on across the prairie, and the droop-horned blue with her baby rested in peace that day and night.

It was here, away out on the "staked plains," those mysterious regions of the great Southwest, and far back from the thin line of settlements that fringed the Pecos River, in southeastern New Mexico, that the "blue-roan outlaw" first saw the light.

Early next morning the leaders of the roundup party, engaged in gathering up the cattle on the range, swung across the prairie in a great semicircle, sweeping before them in one huge drive, everything of the cow kind. As they divided up into couples to work down the country, the leader said: "Bill, you look out an' catch that ole blue-roan we seen yistiday. The old man wants all them cows to throw into that Arizony drive, an' her an' the calf will make it in all right, I reckon."

So, as they rode along, Bill swung across a little draw toward the water hole they had seen the day before. He picked up the blue-roan, who, with her young son beside her, trotted off, following the rest of the cattle already working down the trails toward the round-up grounds. The two animals fell in with more of their kind as the trails converged until, by the time the roundup ground was reached, there were more than fifteen hundred cattle of all ages and sexes gathered in one great bunch.

The blue-roan's baby kept close to his mother's side; the dust that settled over the herd like a pall, choking him, while the constant bawling of the cattle, fairly deafened him.

Once, when two huge bulls, fighting fiercely, drove through that portion of the herd where he and his mother were, and separated the little family, he added to the din by raising his voice in pitiful outcry for his protector.

Outside of the herd the cowboys rode slowly around, turning back into the center any stragglers that tried to escape.

Gradually the bunch began to stop "milling" and as cow after cow found her calf, the bawling stopped. In half an hour the herd was fairly quiet and the wagon boss dropped off his horse to "cinch up" a little, preparatory to the work of cutting out.

Having reset his saddle, the boss mounted again and, calling to two other men near him, said, "Jack, you go out there a ways and hold 'em up, and Charley and I will get out the cows and the calves." So Jack rode off about one hundred yards from the herd in readiness to receive the "cut" as they came out; while the boss and Charley rode slowly into the mass of cattle.

"What you want out?" he asked of the boss. "The old man wants every Hashknife cow and calf that will stand the trail trip to Arizony," he replied. "We got to get two thousand for the first herd if we can, so cut 'em close."

"There's that ole blue-roan we seen yistiday," the boss remarked, "let's throw her out first thing, she's a good one to start a bunch on."

Now starting a "cut" is always some little trouble until you get half a dozen head together, because the instinct of the animal is to endeavor to either get back into the herd or to run clear off on the range. In starting a cut, if possible, they pick out some old, sedate cow, and in this case the blue-roan was known to be a good one for the purpose.

So our youngster found himself being followed up by a great fierce-looking man mounted on a small wiry "Paint" pony that kept right at his mother's heels, no matter which way she turned or twisted.

The cow dodged and wound through the herd, while that object behind kept close to her, never hurrying, never crowding, but always, in some inexplicable manner, seeming to force her to the outer rim of the herd.

With the dim hope that possibly she could escape his presence by a break from the herd she worked past half a dozen steers standing idly on the edge and, with a quick dash, broke from the herd out toward the free open prairie, the calf racing at her side.

The man who had so persistently hung to her flank made no further attempt to follow her, but turned his pony and was lost in the mass of the herd.

As she widened the distance from the edge of the herd Jack, who, up to this time had been sitting sideways on his pony some distance from the herd, straightened up, a movement which caught her eye, so she stopped to inspect him and decide what new danger was about to present itself.

To her surprise Jack seemed satisfied with her stopping and made no attempt to come near her. The calf ranged along side of her and began preparations for a lunch, so she, being a sensible animal, decided to stay where she was for a time.

A moment later a second cow and calf were also shot out of the edge of the herd. As she charged across the open space Jack again took interest enough in the proceedings to ride out and turn her over toward the blue-roan, which received her with a short bawl. The two calves eyed each other for a second and then busied themselves with their dinner operations.

The second cow, being young, and with her first calf, was inclined to run off and leave the spot, but in some way every time she did so she met Jack and his pony, who, the instant she turned toward the blue cow, seemed satisfied and took no further steps to interfere with her liberty.

Soon a third and fourth cow joined them and, now that there was a nucleus formed, every new animal turned out of the herd chased straight for the little bunch, which stood quietly for the next three hours, their calves sleeping at their feet paying little attention to the uproar that was going on in the main herd.

Having cut out some three hundred cows and calves, the "choppers" rode out of the herd, and the "cut" was slowly driven off to water at a near-by windmill, while the main body of cattle was allowed to drift out onto the range at their own pleasure.

That night the blue-roan and her calf, together with the rest of the cut, were "bedded down" near the round-up camp. All night long two men rode around them and any cow which tried to escape was promptly turned back into the herd by the watchful riders.

The next day this bunch was called the "day herd" and three herders looked after them all day long. They were allowed to graze over a piece of open range where the herders could watch them and see that none of them escaped. At noon they were driven into a great prairie lake to water.

That evening another large bunch of cows and calves were brought out to the day herd and turned into it so that they made quite a respectable herd that night.

At the end of ten days' work they had over the required number to make up the "trail herd," and the wagon boss announced one evening that he would send them into the main ranch on the following day to start for the long trail trip to Arizona.

The blue-roan calf had by this time become a seasoned traveler, and found little difficulty in taking care of himself in the herd. A day or two at the ranch and the preparations for the trip were over.

One fine morning about four o'clock the cook, who had been up in the cool morning air since half-past two, awoke the sleepers about his wagon with a long "roll out, roll out, r-o-l-l-o-u-t" which brought the sleepers in the camp beds scattered about the wagon to the campfire in short order.

By sunrise the herd was strung out on the trail for the West. In the lead was the old blue-roan with her blue calf marching steadily along, grazing when the herd was held up for that purpose, resting when the outfit stopped to rest, and altogether behaving themselves remarkably well.

One night as the crew sat about the campfire with the herd resting quietly not far from the wagon, the wagon boss said to one of the boys near him: "Jim, I wish you'd take your hoss in the mawnin' and go ahead and see how the river is. We got to cross it before long and I'm afeard it's going to be pretty high, if all them clouds up toward the head is good for anything."

Late the next night Jim returned with the information that the river was indeed high and that it would be necessary to swim the cattle, or wait for it to run down.

Four days later the herd was bedded down in the valley of the Pecos River, a mile or two back from the stream. About noon the next day, when the cattle were thirsty, the whole herd was drifted down to the river at a place picked out by the wagon boss where the banks were broken down so the cattle could reach the water. On the opposite side the bank was low, making a good "coming out" place.

The river here was half a mile wide and running swiftly. It was, however, not swimming all the way across, and the place was known as a safe ford because of an underlying rock ledge, which made good footing for the cattle in a river where quicksand was almost everywhere present.

The water was muddy and red and, as the first cattle, eager for a drink, waded out into its depths, the old blue in the lead, the men carefully pointed them out into the stream, keeping them moving.

The others followed, calves bawling, men shouting, the animals plunging and tearing through the swift waters. Soon the leaders were swimming and, as the water deepened, the old blue touched her baby on the nose and told him something in cow language which made him immediately get on the upstream side of her and stay there as they swam across the river. The swift water forced the little fellow against her side, where he hung like a leech, while his mother swam, strong and steadily, for the opposite bank. If the leaders had any desire to turn downstream they met a horseman on that side, swinging his slicker, and shouting with all his might, and keeping just far enough back of the leaders to stop them from turning downstream, and still not check them in their swimming toward the other side.

Soon the old blue and her comrades found footing and she and her little one were among the first to scramble up the muddy bank and stand on dry land on the western side of the Pecos. The

whole herd, including a thousand calves, crossed safely. After the saddle horses had swum the river, and the wagon had been floated over, all the beds and plunder were carried across in a small boat, and the westward journey to Arizona was continued.

The day after their arrival on the Arizona range the cattle were turned out to graze early in the morning. When the calves had all found their mothers and settled down quietly, the boss "cut off" some three hundred cows, each with her calf. These the boys drove to a great stone corral about a mile away, which was almost as large inside as a city block. In one corner a fire of cedar logs was built, into which was stuck a lot of iron affairs with handles three or four feet long, which were the branding irons belonging to the outfit. As he watched the irons in the fire reaching a white heat, the boss remarked that the old man was going to run the same old Hashknife brand and mark in Arizony as he did back in Texas. Finally the boss, throwing away his cigarette, said to the ropers, "Irons hot, fly at 'em boys." Two men on their horses, rode into the mass of cattle crowded against the far side of the corral and, with swift, dextrous throws, began catching the calves. As soon as the rope settled about the neck of one, the horse was turned toward the fire, and as the rope was short and tied to the saddle horn, the unwilling, bawling calf was dragged up to the vicinity of the fire. There two husky cowboys ran out to meet the rider and, following up the rope to the calf dancing and bawling about at the end of it, one of them seized him by the ear or head with one hand and the flank with the other and, with a quick jerk, threw him upon his side. The instant he struck the ground, the other man seized a hind leg and pulled it straight out behind the calf, while the first man, throwing off the rope, sat on the animal's neck and head, and another seared the tender hide with the famous "Hashknife" brand. Still another man with a knife cut off the point of the calf's right ear and took out a little V-shaped piece from the under side of the left ear. This was the company's earmark. In an instant the operation was over and the calf running back to its mother.

The blue-roan calf was determined he should not be branded. He watched the riders as they rode into the herd and buried himself deep in the middle of the mass, worming under the larger cattle and hiding behind them, until he began to believe he would escape after all.

All morning long the men worked away with the herd until the poor animals were half mad with fear and hunger. As the blue-roan dodged to avoid the whirling, snakelike rope that suddenly shot out from the hand of a man he had not noticed, he felt it draw up on his hind legs. Before he knew it, he was lying on his side and being dragged across the rough ground toward the fire, where he was to receive a mark for life.

"I snared that blue-roan that's been so smart," said the rider as he passed the other man. "Burn him deep Dick," he said, "for he's a roan and it will show up fine when he gets grown."

Released from his torture, the roan staggered back to his mother, who gave him all the comfort she could. His side was bruised and sore where he had been dragged over the rough ground, and the great burn on his ribs pained him beyond measure.

Soon after that the bunch was turned out to graze and, sick at heart, the calf crawled miserably under the shade of a small ironwood bush, while his mother went to water, leaving him alone in his wretchedness. From this time on, the blue-roan became a hater of men. The object on horseback was to him the source of all his suffering and pain – a thing to be avoided, and upon which to wreak vengeance some day, if possible.

The country in Arizona was very unlike the old range upon the staked plains in Texas, being rough and rocky, with none of those great grassy stretches they had been accustomed to back in their old home. There were trees here, too, a thing they had never known on their old range, and the cows buried themselves deep in the thickets of cedar and piñon. There they found many tanks or reservoirs of rain water, and unless the water gave out they seldom left their hiding places.

Here, the blue-roan calf and his mother made their home, until one day, when he was about a year old, he was accidentally separated from her and never saw her again. Two years of life in the thickets made him shy and wild as a deer; he learned to watch for objects upon horseback, which

were his one great fear. Once in the winter before he lost his mother a trio of wolves followed them through the cedars for a whole day, sneaking up on them as closely as they dared, even nipping at their heels. His mother would turn upon them with a bellow of defiance and charge toward the tormentors, head down, returning quickly to the little bunch of friends that stood together, heads to the foe, their calves within the circle.

A two-year-old heifer, with more pluck than judgment, weak from a long winter of short grass and poor range, made a dart toward the wolves, and turning to join the circle of cows, stumbled and fell to her knees. In a moment the wolves were upon her. While they were busy over their feast, the other cattle slipped away from the fearsome place, and a new danger crept into the blue-roan's life.

Three years had passed. The blue-roan was beginning to be a noted character upon the range. He was broad of horn, and the great black Hashknife, outlined against the blue hide, could be seen for a long distance. The sight of a horseman, no matter how far away, was sufficient to send him plunging down the roughest mountainside, into the depths of the cedar brakes, and over rocks and lava flows, where no mounted man could follow. He was too fleet of foot for the older cows, and the roan soon found himself alone in his glory. He then became what is known to the cowboys of the western ranges as an "outlaw," an animal, either horse, bovine, or even human, that, deserted by all its friends, runs alone and has little to do with the rest of his kind; a "cimarron," the Mexicans call them. Such animals are seldom forced into the roundups that take place at regular intervals upon the ranges, and when caught by that dragnet, are very hard to hold in the herd long enough to get them to the stockyards and shipped out of the country.

The next spring, when it was time to start on the roundup, the wagon boss told the men to keep a sharp lookout for that blue-roan outlaw, and "get him or bust him," if the opportunity offered.

It fell to the lot of the boss and another man to run into the blue-roan a few days later. They were working down a grassy draw in a thick cedar country, when out from the trees on one side of it there burst a great blue animal with a grand spread of horns, and fleet as a deer. In an instant the two men had their ropes down and were after him in full pursuit. "Cut him off from the cedars!" shouted the boss to his partner, who happened to be closest to the cedars, and the boy spurred his pony toward the steer, which now was doing his best to gain the friendly shelter and protection of the trees.

It was but a short distance, and the steer had much the best of the race, but the boy had his pony alongside the animal before he could get his rope into shape for a throw. The steer, with the keen instinct of the hunted, crowded the pony over toward the trees and, just as the rider was ready to drop his rope over the animal's wide-spread horns, an overhanging branch caught the loop, jerking it from his grip. In a vain attempt to turn the steer from the trees into the open, he crowded his pony close up onto the huge bulk of the outlaw. The man's right knee was fairly touching the animal's shoulder, while he rapidly coiled his rope for another throw.

Following them came the boss, cursing his rope, a new "Maguey" which had fouled in his hands and was a mass of snarls and knots, which in his eager haste he only made worse instead of better. At this instant, the blue-roan turned suddenly. With a quick upward thrust of his head, he drove his nearest horn deep into the side of the pony, which was crowding him so closely, tearing a cruel gash in his side and throwing horse and rider into a confused, struggling heap on the ground.

In a moment the steer was lost in the trees, while the boss dropped off his horse to assist his companion, who was working hard to free himself from the body of the pony, which lay across his leg. The boy cleared himself from his saddle-rigging, and the pony struggled to his feet. It was very evident, however, that the animal was wounded to the death; so the boss, with tears in his eyes, drew his six-shooter and put the poor animal out of its misery.

From that day the "blue-roan outlaw" became a marked animal upon the range, and the story of how he killed "Curly Bill's" pony was told around many a campfire on the round-ups that summer.

Thus the roan outlaw added to his reputation and triumphs until his capture was the dearest hope of every cowpuncher upon that range. The word had gone out not to kill him unless absolutely necessary, but rather to capture him alive just for the satisfaction of the thing.

That fall, when the round-ups were working through the country in which he was known to be, every man was ambitious to be his captor. Around the campfires each night plans were laid for the job and stories told of his prowess and ability to escape from his hunters.

One fine morning, as the riders were working through a country covered densely with cedar and piñon trees, with occasional open glades and grassy valleys, the wagon boss and the man with him heard shouts off to their right. Pulling up their horses they waited to locate the sound, when suddenly from the thicket of trees along the valley there emerged two great animals, a black, and a blue-roan steer. It was the famous blue, together with a black, almost as much an outlaw as himself.

The wagon boss, who had just been lamenting the fact that he was riding a half-broken horse that day, was nearest to the blue, and professional etiquette, as well as eagerness to be the one to capture the noted steer, drove him straight at the big fellow. The pony he rode was a green one, but he had plenty of speed, and before the steer could reach the shelter of the cedars the rope, tied hard and fast to the horn of a new fifty-dollar saddle, was settling over the head of the outlaw. Unfortunately, however, the rope did not draw up close to the horns, or even on the neck, but slipped back against the mighty shoulders of the steer, giving him a pulling power on the rope that no cow-pony could meet. Then, to quote the words of the man with the boss, "things shore did begin to pop."

Knowing full well that if he crowded the animal too hard he would turn on him and probably kill another horse, the boss made a long throw and consequently had but little rope left in his hand with which to "play" his steer. The jerk that came, when the steer weighing twelve hundred pounds, and running slightly down hill, arrived at the end of the rope, tied to the saddle-horn, was something tremendous. As soon as the strain came on the cinches the pony threw down his head and began some of the most scientific and satisfactory bucking that was ever seen on the Hashknife range, which is compliment enough.

When the boys were gathered about the fire that evening "Windy Bob," who had been with the boss, related the affair.

"Ye see, fellers, me and Ed was a-driftin' down the wash, not expectin' anything pertickler, when out from the cedars busts the ole blue, and a mighty good mate for him.

"'The blue's mine, Windy,' ses Ed, and I, not hankerin' a bit fer the job, bein' as my shoulder I broke last fall won't stand much funny business, lets him have the big blue all right, and I takes after his mate; which was plenty big 'nuf fer me and the hoss I was a-ridin'.

"I made a good throw and, everything going first rate, had my steer on his side in half a minute, makin' a record throw and tie. Jist as I got my hoggin' rope onto his feet all safe I heered a big doin's up towards Ed's vicinity, and lookin' up seen his hoss jist a-pitchin' and a-sunfishin' like a good feller.

"Ed, he rides him fer about three or four jumps and then, as the saddle was a crawlin' up onto the pony's neck, from his cinches a-bein too loose, and it a-tippin' up behind like a old hen-turkey's tail, runnin' before the wind, Ed, he decides to unload right thar and not go any farther.

"The pony, he keeps up his cavortin' and the steer stripped the saddle right over his head. Away goes Mr. Blue into the thick timber, draggin' that new Heiser Ed got up in Denver over the rocks and through the trees, like as if it want but a picket pin at the end of a stake rope.

"When Ed hit the sod, his Winchester drops out of the scabbard, an' he grabs it up an' sets there on the ground a pumpin' lead after the blue as fast as he could pull the trigger. He never stopped the steer at all, an' when we were trailin' him up, we found the saddle where the rope had dragged between two rocks. The saddle got hung up, but the steer was a runnin' so hard that he jist busted the rope and kept on a goin' an' I reckin is a goin' yet."

"Imagine Ed's shots hit the steer, Windy?" inquired one interested listener.

"Reckon not," was the reply, "but one of them hit the saddle and made a hole clean through the tree, which didn't help matters much with the boss, I'm here to tell you. You'd orter heerd Ed talk when he sees that there new hull of his all skinned up an' a hole shot plumb through the fork." And Windy grinned at the memory of it.

Not long after this adventure, the blue-roan stood on a high ridge overlooking a valley. Out in that valley was the salt ground where great chinks of pure white rocksalt were placed, not only to satisfy the cravings of the salt-loving brutes, but to coax them out of the cedars into the open where the wilder ones could be captured.

The roan was salt-hungry and, after a careful survey of the surroundings, started down the trail for the salt grounds. Away off to the left, and quite out of his sight, half a dozen cowboys were driving a bunch of cattle down a draw between two ridges. One of them rode up on top of the ridge to take a look over the country. Some distance below him, and well out into the valley, was a single animal. It took but a short look to satisfy the rider that it was the blue-roan. The boy was riding his best rope-horse that morning and, with a wave of his hat to his comrades, he loosened the reins on old "Greyback" and tore off down the valley toward the steer.

He had not gone fifty yards before the roan saw he was pursued, and wheeling out of the trail in which he was traveling struck back towards the sheltering trees on a long swinging trot.

A couple of miles' hard run, and the boy rode his horse out of a deep wash, to see, across another valley, the blue-roan hurrying majestically up the ridge, the sheltering trees but a few hundred yards away. He spurred his horse down the rocky side of the ridge, across a flat at the bottom, and up the steep side opposite, reaching the top just as the blue was passing. His horse was winded, but the boy "took a long chance" and drove after the animal with his rope down ready for a throw. For an instant the steer hesitated, then plunged off the ridge, down the steep side, just as the boy's rope dropped over his horns. It was a fearful risk to rope a steer such as this, with a badly winded horse; but tenfold more dangerous to do it just as the great animal was starting down the steep slope. The boy knew his only hope was to keep the steer from tightening the rope, for if that happened, no horse on earth could hold the weight of the brute at the end of it, plunging down hill as they were.

"Turn the rope loose," you say? Oh no; he wasn't that kind of a cow puncher. Come what might, he meant to hang onto that steer to the bitter end.

Half way down the hill was a lone piñon tree about twenty feet high, and true to his nature the steer headed for it. The rider realized his danger and tried to keep from straddling it with his rope, but, just as the roan reached the tree, instead of passing it on the same side with the horse, he dodged around it. This brought the horse and man on one side, the steer on the other; between them a fifty foot "Tom Horn" rope fastened firmly; one end to a twelve hundred-pound steer, the other, to a saddle cinched to a thousand-pound horse.

The tremendous force of the pull, when the rope drew up on the tree, uprooted it. This prevented the rope from breaking, but there was sufficient jerk upon it to bring both horse and steer to the ground in a struggling heap.

The man who was "riding for a fall," with both feet out of the stirrups, in anticipation of just such a wreck, flew off into space, landing in a pile of rocks twenty-five feet away by actual measurement. The horse fell with his head under him in such a way that his neck was instantly broken.

When the other men who were following reached the scene, they found the man just regaining his senses, badly cut about the head, but otherwise unhurt. The blue, in falling, had landed flat on his back, his hind feet down the steep hill, both his long horns buried to the very skull in the ground. Thus he was absolutely helpless and unable to regain his feet, no matter how hard he struggled. To "hog-tie" him in this position, was the work of but a moment, and at last the blue-roan outlaw was a captive.

It was no trouble to roll him down the steep hillside to the level ground below, and inside of half an hour the rest of the men arrived on the scene with the bunch of cattle they had been driving.

In the bunch was a large steer which they roped and dragged up to where the outlaw lay, and, in cowboy parlance "dumped" him on top of the outlaw. They then proceeded to "neck" the two steers together with a short rope they cut for the purpose. Having done this to their satisfaction they untied the hogging ropes and allowed the steers to gain their feet. As this was done the bunch of cattle they had driven up was carefully crowded around the two animals. After a few minutes of pulling and fighting the outlaw sulkily allowed himself to be dragged along by his unwilling mate, with the rest of the cattle, and was eventually landed safely in the main herd.

Great was the rejoicing in camp that night over the capture, and the guards about the herd were cautioned not to let the two escape under any circumstances.

At the end of the week the herd had been worked down to the river for shipping. As the country was open and the herd easily handled the "twins," as the boys called them, came apart when the old rope wore out and were not necked up again.

That night one of the men, who had a family in town, hired a town kid to take his place on herd, while he went up and spent the night at home. As the boy rode his guard around the edge of the herd which lay quietly in the cool night air, he found a big blue steer standing at the very edge of the bunch looking off toward the mountains in a dreamy, meditative mood. Kidlike, he could not withstand the temptation to play the "smarty," so, instead of passing him by or gently turning him into the herd, the boy took off his hat and swung it into the steer's face.

It was a distinct challenge to the old warrior, and he rose to the occasion. Gathering himself for one mighty plunge he struck the pony the boy was riding with his powerful head, knocking him flat. Away he dashed over horse and rider, while the herd broke into a mad stampede which carried them five miles in the opposite direction before they could be "milled" into a bunch and held up again. Two men were left with them, the rest returning to camp.

Daylight showed the blue-roan missing, and the wagon boss swore a solemn oath that, if ever again he was captured, he would be necked and also have his head tied down to a foot until he was safely inside the stockyards.

Four weeks later a party of cattle men, gathering steers in the mountains, ran across the blue outlaw, right on the brink of a deep, rough cañon. He was seen, with the aid of a glass, across a bend in the cañon lying under the rim rock in fancied security. Near him were several other steers, and it was determined to make the attempt to capture the lot.

Carefully driving their bunch of gentle steers as close to the place where the outlaw was lying as they could, with the thought that, if he ran up the trail, he would see the steers and possibly go to them and stop; three men rode into the cañon some distance below and started up the trail toward where he was lying.

The instant the blue-roan saw the horsemen he jumped to his feet, hesitated a moment, and instead of taking the smooth trail out, dove down the steep, rocky sides of the cañon where neither horse nor man could follow.

Surefooted as he was, he misjudged his agility and strength, and plunged into a mass of loose rock, which gave him no foothold. The walls of the cañon were frightfully steep and in the loose rock, sliding, slipping, and rolling, he was swiftly hurried towards the edge of a cliff two hundred feet high, over which he dropped to death and destruction. Tons of loose rock followed him to the bottom, making a roar like a thousand cannons. It was the end of the road for the blue-roan.

When the men climbed down the trail to see just what had happened they found him dead and half buried in the mass of fallen rock.

The cliff was an over-hanging one, smooth and soft enough to show markings, and one of the men, taking a piece of hard flintrock, spent half an hour cutting deep into the smooth, white wall the words:

"Here died the Blue-Roan Outlaw. He was a King."

CAMPIN' OUT

A Bit of Family Correspondence

Camp Roosevelt, September 5th.

Dear Daddy: I promised to write every day, if I could, while we are on our vacation; so here goes: My, but we had a hard time getting out here. Say, Dad, did you ever pack a burro? Haven't they got the slipperiest backs? Our pack turned over about twenty times and scattered the stuff all over the country. The sugar spilled out of the bag and wasted. Billy says that don't matter, though, for we can use molasses in our coffee, like the miners up in Alaska.

He kept running into all the open gates along the road (the burro, not Billy). The way he tramped up some of the gardens was awful. Billy got so mad he wouldn't chase him out any more, 'cause once they set a dog on to him as he was chasing the burro out of a frontyard.

Billy says burros is the curiest things ever.

We tried leading him (the burro, not Billy), but he wouldn't lead a single step. He ran away last night. Billy hopes he never comes back again.

We are camped under a big fir tree, with branches that come down to the ground just like an umbrella. The creek is so close to camp that we can hear it tumbling over the rocks all night. I think it's great, but Billy says it's so noisy it keeps him awake. Billy makes me tired, he does; for it takes Jack and me half an hour to wake him up in the morning to build the fire. That's his job.

We called it "Camp Roosevelt." Billy wanted to name it "Camp Bryan," because his father's a democrat, but me and Jack says nothin' doing in the Bryan name, 'cause this camp's got to have some life to it, and a camp named Roosevelt was sure to have something lively happening all the time.

We are sure having a fine time here.

Your affectionate son,
Dick.

P. S. Tell mother that tea made in a coffee pot tastes just as good as if it was made in a tea pot. She said it wouldn't.

Dick.

P. S. Pa, did you ever useto sleep with your boots for a pillow out on the plains? Cause if you did I don't see how you got the kinks out of your neck the next day.

Dick.

Camp Roosevelt, September 7th.

Dear Pa: My, but the ground's hard when you sleep on it all night. We all three sleep in one bed, 'cause that gives us more to put under us. I'm sorry for soldiers who have to sleep on one blanket. We toss up to see who sleeps in the middle, for the blankets are so narrow that the outside fellow gets the worst of it.

The first night the burro ran off, and next morning Jack had to walk two miles before he found him. Jack's the horse-wrangler. Isn't that what you said they used to call the fellow who hunted up the horses every morning on the round-ups?

We staked him out the next night (the burro I mean, not Jack) and we all woke up half scared to death at the worst racket you ever heard in all your life. And what do you think it was? Nothing at all but that miserable burro braying.

Say, Pa, you know that quilt mother let me bring along, the one she said you and she had when you first got married? Well, do you s'pose she'd care if it was tore some? You see, on the way out the burro ran along a barb wire fence and tore it, the quilt I mean. Lots of the stuffing came out, but it don't show if you turn the tore place down.

This morning I woke up most froze, 'cause Billy crowded me clear off the bed and out on to the ground. It's sure great to sleep out of doors and see the stars and things. We put a hair rope in the foot of the bed last night. Gee, but Jack jumped high when his bare feet hit it. He thought it was a tarantula.

My, I wish we could stay here a year.

Lovingly,
Dick.

P. S. The little red ants got into our condensed milk and spoiled it; leastways there's so many ants we can't separate the ants from the milk. Billy left the hole in the top of the can open.

Camp Roosevelt, September 9th.

Dear Pa: You know Billy's dog Spot? Well, Billy said there was a wildcat about camp, 'cause he saw the tracks. So I went down to a house below on the creek and borrowed a steel trap they had. It was a big one with sharp teeth on the jaws.

I wanted to set it on the ground, but Billy he says, "No, sir; set it on the log acrost the creek, 'cause the cat would walk on the log and couldn't help getting caught.

Besides, he said if we set it on the log and fastened it, when the wildcat got caught he'd fall off into the creek and get drownded and then we wouldn't have to kill him. Billy says that's the way trappers catch mushrats, so they can't eat their feet off, when they get caught, and get away.

Well, sir, we set the trap and tied Spot up so he wouldn't get into it.

In the night we heard the awfulest racket ever was and the biggest splashing going on in the water. It even woke Billy up, and that's going some, as Uncle Tom says.

It was 'most daylight and I sat up in bed, and there in the water was something making a dreadful fuss. Billy he looks at it a minute and says: "Why, it's Spot. Who let him loose?" Then we all jumped up, and sure enough there was poor old Spot in the trap by one front-foot. The chain to the trap was just long enough so he didn't drown, but was hanging in the water by one leg.

Billy, it being his dog, crawled out on the log, unfastened the chain and tried to pull Spot up. Some way he lost his balance and fell into the creek right on top of the dog. Billy was real mad 'cause me and Jack laughed so hard we couldn't help him a bit, Spot was pretty mad too, for he grabbed Billy's leg in his teeth and tore a big piece out of them – out of Billy's pajamas I mean.

Then Billy let go of the chain, and Spot climbed out of the water on to the bank and tried to run off with the trap. Billy waded ashore too, and we just laid down on the ground and hollered like real wild Indians. Billy he said it wasn't any laughing matter and to come and help him get Spot out of the trap.

Say, Dad, did you ever try to open a big steel trap – especially one with a spotted dog in it? Spot wouldn't let us come near him. Billy coaxed and coaxed, but, no siree, he wouldn't do anything but just snap at us like a sure enough wild cat. Meantime Spot he howls something dreadful.

Then Jack he remembers how once in a storybook a man caught a mad dog, so he runs to the bed and gets a blanket, and while Billy and me talks nice to Spot from in front, Jack he sneaks up behind and throws it over him. Then Jack grabbed the blanket and wrapped it around the dog's head so he couldn't bite, and we both stood on the trap spring and managed to get it open wide enough so Billy got his foot out (Spot's foot I mean, not Billy's).

Has he come home yet? 'Cause he's gone from here. My goodness, but camping out's sure fun.

Your loving son,
Richard.

P. S. Billy says he don't care anyhow, for Spot had no right to chew the rope in two and get loose so as to get into the trap.

Dick.

P. S. The wasps are thick here. One stung Jack on the neck and he hollered awful over it. I made a mud poultice for it like you told me once you used to do on the plains.

Camp Roosevelt, September some time.
We forget what day it is.

Dear Pa: It rained last night real hard. We didn't get much wet, and anyhow Jack says camping out wouldn't be any fun unless you slept in wet blankets once, like the cowboys and soldiers do on the plains. Billy says his Uncle John says a wet bed is a warm bed, but I don't believe him, for we 'most froze.

Pa, what makes the red come out of the quilts where they get rained on? Jack says we belong to the improved order of Red Men now, and if my face looks as funny as his does, with red streaks all acrost it, I'd be afraid to go home.

You'd ought to see the fun we had drownding out a chipmonk what ran into a hole in the ground. We packed the water in our hats from the creek. Bimeby, the chipmonk, came out, and I ran after him. He was so wet he couldn't run fast and I made a grab at him and caught him – no, he caught me for he bit my finger horrible hard and I couldn't let go, or else he wouldn't, I'm not sure which.

Billy and Jack laughed at me as if it was a good joke, but I couldn't see where it was so very funny.

Do chipmonks have hydryfoby? Billy says he bets they do.

Your son, Dick.

P. S. Jack dropped the box of matches out of his shirt pocket into the creek, and I had to go to a house about a mile away to get some more.

P. S. You can't make a fire with two sticks of wood, for we tried it for an hour. All we got was blisters on our hands. The Indians must of had lots of patience if they ever did it.

Camp Roosevelt, Thursday.
The man told us.

Dear Daddy: If the burro comes home please shut him up in the lot. He's gone somewhere and we can't find him. Anyhow it don't make much difference, for Jack says he'd rather carry his share of the stuff on his back than bother with a pack burro again. There ain't going to be much grub to take back anyhow. The man down the creek gave us some more bacon for what the hogs ate up and said we were welcome to all the green corn we wanted from his field. We had just corn for supper last night and breakfast today. The salt all got wet in the rain and melted up, so we didn't have any, but Billy says lots of times on the plains people didn't have any salt for weeks at a time. I'll bet they didn't have nothing but green corn to eat, though.

Please tell mother that I burned a hole in one of my shoes trying to dry them out by the campfire. Also about six inches off the bottom of one leg of my pajamas. They were hanging on a stick by the fire drying while we made the bed. Billy said he smelt cloth a-burning, but we never saw where it was till the harm was done.

If mother won't mind I'm sure I won't, for Billy says no soldier or cowboy ever wore pajamas. It was my old pair of shoes anyhow, and they always hurt my heel when I walked, so they don't matter either.

Camping out's sure lots of fun.

Your loving son,
Dick.

P. S. The man down the creek says he's going to town pretty soon and if we want to ride in with him we can. I wonder what made him think of it.

P. S. A wasp stung me on the lip yesterday. He lit on an ear of corn just as I went to bite. It don't hurt at all, leastways I'd be ashamed if I made as much fuss about it as Jack did when one bit him. Besides a wasp bite on the lip's lots worser than one on the neck – that's what the man down the creek says.

Camp Roosevelt.

Dear Daddy: Yesterday we sure had a great time playing "Pirates" without any shirts on – for Billy says pirates always dress that way – just their trousers on, "naked to the waist," he says.

I was the pirate chief, and Billy was my crew. Jack he was the captain of the vessel and stood on the log to defend the gangway of his ship.

We had cutlasses made out of lath and when we told Jack to surrender he called us cowardly pirates and dared us to step on board his ship.

Then we went for him and was having a great old time when Jack's foot slipped and he fell off the log into the creek. He got mad at me and Billy, 'cause we laughed at him when he bumped his head on the log as he went down.

I wisht we could camp out here forever.

Dick.

P. S. What's good for a burnt finger where you burnt it trying to pick the coffee pot off the fire to keep it from boiling over?

Camp Roosevelt.

Dear Dad: If there's a funny smell to this letter it's on account of the skunk. The man down the creek says if we bury our clothes in the ground for two or three days the smell will all come off.

We are coming home tomorrow in his wagon. We're going to leave the bed clothes hanging in a tree. The man said he wouldn't take them home if he was us. Anyhow it don't matter much for a spark blew onto the bed one day and burnt a hole right through them all clear down to the ground.

We put it out when we smelt it. It didn't hurt very much, for we changed the blankets 'round so the holes didn't all come together, and let in the cold, and it was all right.

Please kiss Mother for me and tell her most of the red's come off my face and arms.

Billy cried last night 'cause he was homesick and wanted his Ma. He's a sissy girl, Billy is. I'll sure be glad to see you and Ma, but I wouldn't cry about it. Please kiss Ma for me.

Your affectionate son, Richard.

P. S. Say, Pa, do skunks out on the plains look like little kittens? The one we caught sure did.

POPGUN PLAYS SANTA CLAUS

By permission of *The National Wool Growers' Magazine*

"Salute yer pardners, let her go,
Balance all an' do-se-do.
Swing yer gal, then run away,
Right, an' left an' gents sashay."

"Whoa, Mack, there's a letter in the Widow Miller's box."

The pony sidled gingerly toward the mailbox nailed to the trunk of a pine tree, his eyes and ears watching closely the white sheet of paper that lay on the bottom of the open box, held by a small stone which allowed one end to flutter and flap in the wind in a way that excited his suspicions.

When the Widow Miller wished to mail a letter she placed it, properly stamped, in her box and the first neighbor passing that way took it out and mailed it for her, she being some miles off the regular mail route.

"Gents to right, now swing or cheat,
On to the next gal an' repeat."

He chanted the old familiar frontier quadrille call as he tried to force the pony close to the box to reach the paper without dismounting.

"Stand still, you fool," he spurred the animal vigorously, "that there little piece of paper ain't going to eat you."

But the more he spurred the farther from the box went the animal. "Beats all what a feller will do to save unloading hisself from a hoss," he threw the reins over Mack's head, swung to the ground and strode toward the box.

"Balance next an' don't be shy;
Swing yer pards an' swing 'em high."

He sang as he lifted the stone and picked up the paper beneath it, which proved to be a large-sized sheet of writing paper folded three times. A one-cent stamp evidently taken from some old letter was stuck in one corner and beneath it was scrawled in a childish, unlettered hand the words:

"Mister Sandy Claws

The North Pole."

Almost reverently Gibson unfolded the paper, feeling he was about to have some youthful heart opened to his curious eyes.

"Deer Sandy Claws," it began, "please bring me a train of railroad cars, an' a pair of spurs an' a 22 rifle to shoot rabits with, an' a big tin horn. An' Sandy, Mary wants a big Teddy bare an' a real doll what shuts her eyes when she lays down. An' Minnie she's the baby, Sandy, so pleas bring her a

pictur book an' a doll an' a wolly lam an' bring us all a lot of candy an' apples an' oranges an' nuts, for since Dady went away, we ain't had none of them things much. Mother she says you know jist where we live so don't forgit us for I've tride to be a good boy this year.

"James Simpson Miller, 7 years old."

Gibson felt a lump rising in his throat, and took refuge in song to hide his embarrassment.

"Bunch the gals an' circle round;
Whack your feet upon the ground.
Form a basket break away,
Swing an' kiss, an' all git gay."

He wiped something out of the corner of his eyes with the back of his buckskin glove, and blew his nose savagely. "Hm, Shucks, seems like I'm a gittin' a cold in my haid," he remarked sort of confidentially to the pony.

Once more he read the letter.

"Hm, Shucks, wants a railroad train, hey? An' a gunchester to kill rabbits, an' a tin horn, an' Mary wants a Teddy bear, does she, an' apples an' oranges an' candy for all of 'em. Say, Bill Gibson, it's up to you to play Santy Claus for these kids an' if you handle the job right maybe you can convince their Aunt Nancy that she'd ought to say 'Yes' to a man about your size an' complexion." Again he broke into song.

"Aleman left an' balance all.
Lift yer hoofs an' let 'em fall.
Swing yer op'sites; swing agin,
Kiss the darlings – if ye kin."

"Git up, Mack, les git along to camp and let the bunch in on this Santy Claus game. Hm, Shucks, Nancy said she wanted a watermelon-pink sweater – whatever color that may be – to wear to the New Year's dance up on Crow Creek. Reckin the thing won't cost more'n a month's pay. I'll jist get her one if it takes my whole roll." Once more he dropped into song.

"Back yer pardners, do-se-do.
Ladies break, an' gents you know.
Crow hop out, an' dove hop in,
Join yer paddies an' circle again.
"Salute yer pardner, let her go,
Balance all an' do-se-do.
Gents salute yer little sweets,
Hitch an' promenade to seats."

That night around the table in the bunk house of the Oak Creek Sheep Company, four or five men watched the foreman write a letter to the owner, Mr. Barrington, who was wintering on the coast. Briefly he explained how the letter to Santa Claus fell into their hands and the desire of the men at the ranch to furnish the children with all the things they asked for, and more.

Miller, the foreman explained, had been accidentally killed a couple of years before and his wife was putting up a hard fight to stay on the piece of land he had homesteaded long enough to get title to it from the government.

There were three kids, he continued, James, the oldest, seven years, and two girls, Mary, five, and Minnie, the baby, two.

"The boys ain't a-limiting you in the cost, so please get anything else you and Mrs. Barrington thinks would please the kids and let me know the cost and I'll charge it up to the boys' pay accounts.

"Also Bill Gibson wants that Mrs. Barrington should pick out what he says is to be a 'watermelon-pink' sweater for Mrs. Miller's kid sister, Nancy. Bill says Nancy is just about Mrs. Barrington's size, and what'd fit her will fit Nancy all right.

"Bill he says he reckons Mrs. B. will savvy what a watermelon-pink sweater is, which is more than any of us do."

Three days before Christmas Bill Gibson set forth for the railroad, twenty-five miles away, to bring back the expected Christmas stuff. There was two feet of snow on the ground and the roads were impassable for wheels; so Bill took with him two pack animals, a horse and a mule.

He figured he would be one day going and one coming and that on Christmas eve, after marking and arranging all the presents, some one would ride down to the cabin and leave the whole business on the porch of the widow's cabin where she would be sure to find it early Christmas morning. At the railroad Gibson found the trains all tied up with snow to the west, and the packages had not arrived.

"Hm, shucks," was his terse comment. "Now wouldn't it jist be hell if the plunder didn't come in time for them kids to have their Christmas tree?" But late that night a train came through which brought the package he had come for.

By unpacking the stuff from the box in which they were shipped Gibson managed to get everything in the two kyacks carried by the mule while upon the horse he packed a load of provisions for the camp.

Barrington and his wife had added liberally to the list of toys and, knowing well the conditions at the sheep ranch, had marked or tagged each article with the name of the child for which it was intended. Even Mrs. Miller had been remembered generously.

The sweater was there, packed carefully in a fancy box. Bill loosed the ribbon that fastened it and slipped a card into the box on which he had laboriously written, "To Miss Nancy, from her true friend, Bill."

But the storm broke out again and it was long after noon the next day before he dared start, for the wind blew great guns and the air was filled with icy particles that no one could face.

Leading the pack horse with the mule "tailed up" to him, Gibson started for home, but made poor progress through the drifted snow. It was almost two o'clock the next morning when he passed the letterbox at the trail to the Widow Miller's place. The moon had gone down behind the trees to the west and it was quite dark, but here the wind had swept the ground bare of snow, and his progress with his rather jaded animals was much better.

Sleepy and tired from his long ride Gibson reached the ranch and rode into the warm stable to unsaddle. There to his great surprise he found he had but one animal behind him, the rope which had been around the mule's neck still dragging at the pack horse's tail, a mute evidence of what had happened.

"Hm, shucks," he commented grimly, "won't them there boys in the bunk house give me particular hell for this night's work?"

Wearily he unsaddled and unpacked the horses. Still more wearily he dragged himself up the path to the house, stirred the fire in the fireplace into a blaze, and when the coffee was hot drank a cup, ate greedily of the food which the cook had left for him, crawled into his blankets and in ten seconds was dead to the world.

In his dreams he was swinging a rosy cheeked girl through the steps of an old-fashioned quadrille, she being attired in a most gorgeous watermelon-pink sweater.

"Swing yer pardners, swing agin;

Kiss the darlings – if you kin."

He essayed the kiss only to be awakened on the verge of its attainment by a heavy hand on his shoulder, followed by a voice which demanded in no soft tones, "Where's your Christmas plunder?"

He sat up in bed half dazed by his night's experience.

"Come alive, Bill; come alive, an' tell us about the things for the kids. We can't find them nowhere."

Gibson yawned and rubbed his eyes in a vain attempt to delay the castastrophe which he knew would encompass him when he told of the loss of the pack mule.

Before he dropped off to sleep he had planned to get an early start in the morning back on his trail to try to find the lost animal. Popgun had been bought from the widow soon after her husband's demise and he shrewdly guessed that the tired, hungry mule would most likely strike direct for his old and nearby home.

He sprang from bed and grabbed his clothes.

"Hm, shucks," he began. "I reckon I done lost the mule coming home. Had him tailed up to old Paint and just about the time I passed the trail into Widder Miller's place Paint set back on the lead rope and like to pulled the saddle offen old Mack, me havin' the rope tied hard and fast to the nub. He let up in a minute and come along all right and I'm a figuring 'twere just about there that Popgun gits loose, he probably havin' been leaning back on the pack hosse's tail a right smart causing Paint to pull back hisself. Popgun likely stripped the rope over his head and being about all in turned off down the trail to the widder's and it's dollars to doughnuts he's a eating hay in her shed right now. Me being tired and sleepy I never sensed the loss till I gits here with the mule's rope a dragging along still tied to Paint's tail. Hm, shucks, I'll find him or bust a shoe string."

"An' to think they have to go all the way back to Afriky to git ivory when there's such a lot of it to be had nearer home," was the sarcastic comment of the foreman.

From the windows of the Widow Miller's cabin the whole world seemed wrapped in a mantle of white. Down along the creek in the meadow the rose bushes and willows poked their heads above the snow. Changing their skirts for overalls, she and Nancy soon picked a couple of quarts of the brilliant red berries or fruit of the rose bushes. That night as soon as the children were safely in bed they started in on their Christmas tree preparations. Several days before Nancy had slipped out into the timber and cut a small spruce which she dragged to the stable and hid under some loose hay, and with an empty canned goods case and some stones they managed to make a very satisfactory base for it. Over the coals in the fireplace they popped a huge dish-pan full of corn and worked late into the night stringing popcorn and the rose berries with which to festoon the tree.

"I've seen my mother use cranberries for the same thing," she told her sister, "but these rose berries look quite as well I think."

From the pages of a mail order catalogue they cut figures from the brilliantly colored fashion plates which, pasted upon stiff cardboard and hung to the tips of the branches, made famous decorations.

Festooned with the long strings of rose berries and popcorn, with these gaily painted ladies of fashion dangling from every bough, it made a very satisfactory Christmas tree. After placing upon it the presents for the children which they had been able to buy or make, together with a few apples and oranges, some stick candy, each done up separately in paper, "just to make it seem more," Nancy said, the two women retired for the night.

How long she had slept or what awakened her, Mrs. Miller could not tell, but as she strained her ears for the slightest sound, she imagined she could hear outside the footfalls of some heavy animal. She knew it could be no bear, for whatever it was the snow was crunching under its feet, nor was it a human, for the steps were those of a four-footed object.

The moon, that earlier in the evening had flooded the valley until it was almost as light as day, was now just dipping behind the mountain to the west, throwing the stable into deep shadow, from which the sounds now seemed to come.

There was a bare possibility of its being some range cow, although they had all long since drifted down into the lower country, but she finally decided it must be one of the big bull elks which regularly wintered on the wind-swept sides of the mountain above them and sometimes came down to the ranch seeking feed during times of heavy snow.

Shivering with the cold she crept back to bed realizing that daylight would soon come. Rudely her dreams were broken by a sound that at first froze the very marrow in her bones, but which with immense relief she instantly realized could come from the throat of but one animal and that, a mule.

Fortunately the children slept through it all, and dressing as quickly as they could, she and Nancy started for the stable, Mrs. Miller armed with her automatic.

No sooner had they stepped from the porch than the mule that had been hanging about the stable trying to get in spotted them and greeted their coming with a series of brays and nickerings that showed his joy at seeing some human being.

It was Popgun, the pack still on his back. Leading him to the cabin the women quickly loosened the diamond hitch, took off the canvas pack cover and piled the kyacks upon the porch after which he was placed in a vacant stall in the stable and fed.

To the women versed in frontier ways and signs the solution of the visit from their long-eared friend was simple, and they sized up the situation almost exactly as it had occurred. Therefore they felt certain some one would be on his trail before very long.

The rattle of the pack rigging on the porch aroused the children, and when the women returned from the stable the two older ones were investigating the pack.

Bidding them not to meddle with the things, Mrs. Miller and her sister went inside the house to get breakfast leaving the kids on the porch. Childish curiosity could not well be stifled, especially on such a day as this. They had been told stories of the coming of Santa Claus and while Jimmie had learned that a reindeer looks very much like a bull elk he had once seen, he also knew that all sorts of things could be packed in a pair of kyacks and knew no reason why Santa should not have availed himself of that means of transporting his gifts under certain conditions.

To loosen the straps that held the kyack covers was an easy matter. To lift up the heavy canvas covers was still easier and the first thing that met the eager eyes of both children was a long tin horn nested down in some excelsior. As he pulled at it a fluttering tag caught his eye. On it he read: "For James – Merry Christmas." One wild shout of delight and he gave a blast on the toy that brought both women to the door just in time to see Mary drag from the kyack a huge Teddy Bear. On this was another tag marked: "To Mary – Merry Christmas."

Before his scandalized mother could collect her senses enough to stop him Jimmie had dropped his horn and gone on a voyage of exploration into the depths of the two kyacks. One of his first discoveries was the box containing the sweater. The tag tied to it cleared up in a measure the doubts which Mrs. Miller had had as to the propriety of thus making free with other people's property, and that Santa had been sent by the men at the sheep camp.

An hour later a man rode down the trail back of the house and quite out of range of its windows. Tying his horse at the side of the stable away from the house he crept to the corner of the building and cautiously peeped out.

The smoke was curling briskly from the cabin chimney and in the tense stillness he could hear noises which indicated very plainly that the letter to "Sandy Claws" had borne fruit, for the most ear-splitting sounds were coming from the cabin, sounds which he knew to be the natural results of three tin horns in the mouths of three delighted kids.

As he stood there a door slammed, and a girl stepped out on the porch arrayed in the most gorgeous sweater he had ever imagined. On her head was a jaunty cap of the same color and material

as the sweater, while in her hands she held a tin bucket in which most unquestionably was the breakfast for the chickens which were making loud demands for release from their log coop near the stable.

In his inmost heart Bill Gibson knew that if ever a man was blessed by the Gods with the one opportunity of his life, it was facing him at this very moment. Nancy came tripping down the snowy path a perfect picture of girlish beauty and happiness. Gibson drew back so she could not see him until she had turned the corner of the stable. As she did so and met his eyes the song turned into a maidenly shriek. Her cheeks were blazing like two peonies, she tried hard to speak, but the words died on her lips. Mechanically she set the bucket of feed on a small shelf where the chickens could not reach it. Bill interpreted the move as meaning either a fight or complete surrender. He believed it was the latter and took a step toward her.

"Christmas gift, Nancy," he said. His voice had an odd quaver in it. "Old Santy seems to have brung you the sort of sweater you wanted." He was gaining confidence.

"He sure did," she replied, striving in vain to keep her eyes from meeting his.

"Nancy," he demanded, "ain't you got nothing for me this grand Christmas morning?"

"What you wanting mostly?" her eyes fairly dancing with mischief and telling what her lips dared not.

A look of triumph swept over the man's bronzed face.

"You – an' I'm a-going to take it right here." He took a step toward her; she turned to run but with one bound he was at her side, caught her in his arms and fairly smothered her with kisses.

He drew back his head and looked deep into her eyes. "How about it?" he demanded.

"About what?" very archly.

He kissed her a dozen times before she replied. Nor did she seem to object to the action.

"You know the Christmas present I most want, Nancy."

He drew her closer to him, her arms found their way about his neck. "Bill," she whispered in his ear, "you're an old darling, let's go up to the house and tell the news to sister."

"JUST REGULARS"

In the dark depths of an Arizona cañon, with no light but that which came from the stars, a string of shadowy figures slowly worked its way through tangles of thorny mesquite and cat claw, over rocks and past great bunches of cactus which pierced hands and limbs wherever they touched.

If you looked closer, you saw that the figures were those of men, also horses and mules, most of the men leading their mounts, and here and there the yellow chevrons on some sergeant's blouse, or the broad yellow stripe on an officer's trousers showed them to be cavalry.

There was no talking or unnecessary noise. At times they were fairly on their knees fighting their way up some rocky steep; again they dropped down into the darkness, the well-trained animals following like goats.

At the head of the line, an officer, young in years but old in this kind of work, whispered occasionally to the veteran guide at his left.

Just ahead of him an Apache scout, stripped for the fight, a band of red flannel about his forehead, his body naked except for the white cotton breechclout ("the G string") about his waist, the peculiar moccasins of his tribe on his feet, led the way, like some bloodhound on the trail.

Out of the darkness ahead came the weird hoot of an owl. Three times did it sound. The scout listened till the last echo died away, and then, with his hands gathered about his mouth, answered the call.

Quietly he slipped away into the night, the command stopping where they were as the whispered order flew back along the line, each man sinking down to the ground, glad of the chance for the moment's rest.

The night was cold, although it was midsummer in a region where at noon the earth is baked and burned with the heat.

An hour passed, and out of the darkness the Apache returned.

The quarry which they sought was not far ahead, and it was best to leave their animals and go the rest of the way without them.

Turning to the tall Sergeant behind him, the officer gave the orders for the movement, and back down the shivering, scattered line went the instructions: "Number fours hold the horses, every one else take all extra ammunition and their canteens and follow the column on foot."

Then came whispered pleadings from the unfortunate "number four men" doomed to remain behind to guard the horses and the rear while the others went on into the darkness to – what? Perhaps death, perhaps a wound from a poisoned arrow; in any event plenty of hardship and suffering.

How those cavalrymen begged for the privilege of getting a hole shot through them. They urged the officers to cut down the rearguard and leave but a couple of men to look after the packs and horses.

"Very well, Sergeant," the commanding officer replied, well pleased when told of the men's desire to go with the fighting force, "leave three or four men to guard the animals and let the rest come on; God knows we are very likely to need them."

Then the Sergeant, knowing his men as a schoolmaster his pupils, left behind: fat Corporal Conn whose asthmatic wheezings and puffings had already brought forth many a muttered curse upon his head; Private Hill who couldn't see an inch beyond his nose in the dark and who had fallen over every bush and rock in the trail since they entered the cañon; and two other men whose physical condition was such that he doubted their ability to make the climb which he knew was ahead of them.

Not one of these accepted the detail without as vigorous a protest as soldierly duty made possible. Bless you no! Each of them felt himself an object of especial pity, fat Conn even claiming that the higher he climbed the less the asthma troubled him.

Then the command once more drove into the blackness ahead, following the lithe Apache up a mountain side which seemed almost perpendicular.

Each man carried two belts of cartridges about his waist with a third swung from his shoulder. Most of them wore the Apache moccasin which gave forth no sound as they moved along.

At last they reached the summit of the mountain breathless and tired. Before them was a mighty cañon, the cañon of the Salt River. To their left four granite peaks, the "Four Peaks" of the maps, pierced the skyline like videttes on guard over the cañon.

From its bed, two thousand feet below, the dull murmur of the river, as it dashed along its rocky way, came softly to the soldiers' ears.

It was the dawning of December 27, 1872. The soldiers were a detachment of the Fifth United States Cavalry, Major Brown in command.

At a little spring some twenty miles away they had left their supplies and pack train.

Their Christmas holidays had been spent in pursuit of several bands of Apaches, and the scouts had reported that a large band of them was located in a cave on the Salt River cañon.

A pack mule had died in camp that day, and the Indian scouts were allowed to make a great feast upon its remains that they might set out on the expedition with full stomachs.

For years efforts had been made to concentrate the Apaches, who had been the scourge of Arizona and the Southwest, upon one or two reservations where, under guard, they could be watched and kept in bounds.

In the summer of 1872 General George Crook, after having held numerous councils with the Apaches, issued an ultimatum to the effect that, if those who were outside of the reservation did not return by the fifteenth of the coming November, active operations would begin against them. After that date every Indian found outside the reservation was to be treated as a hostile and dealt with accordingly.

The Apaches knew Crook only too well, for the "Old Grey Fox," as they called him, had always kept his word with them in the past.

Promptly on the day set General Crook took the field against the outlaw Apaches and hunted them down relentlessly day and night.

The region in which these operations took place is one of the roughest in the United States. It is located on the western side of the great "Tonto Basin" in central Arizona, and consists of ragged mountain ranges, and isolated peaks, while the whole area is cut and seamed with deep box cañons impassable for miles.

About fifty miles from the city of Phœnix, as the crow flies, and near the great Roosevelt irrigation reservoir and dam, four granite peaks pierce the sky.

Here Nature is found in one of her most inhospitable moods, and in the fastnesses of these "Four Peaks" several bands of the hunted, harassed Apaches took refuge.

In its mighty cañons the Indians knew of caves and cliffs where they had lived in safety from their old enemies for many years; there they believed no white man could possibly reach them.

Crook and his soldiers matched wits with the Indians and beat them at their own game. Wherever the Indians went there the troops followed them. They chased them on foot when their horses played out, lived on the scantiest possible allowance of food, slept in the deep snows with but a single blanket and without fires lest the telltale smoke give the Indians warning of their presence.

It was to surprise the occupants of one of these caves that Major Brown and his men were making this night march.

There the Apaches had fled, carrying into the cave great quantities of food and other necessary supplies, leaving their ponies behind to shift for themselves.

The cave itself is not a cave in the strict sense of the word, but rather a great weather-worn shelf, similar to those used by the ancient cliff dwellers for their habitations all over the Southwest.

At the outside edge the opening is about fifteen feet high from floor to roof, and sixty feet wide. The roof slopes back into the cliff for some thirty feet to a point where the rear wall is not over three feet high.

At the front, the floor of the cave projects some little distance beyond the overhanging cliff forming a sort of platform. Entirely around this platform the Apaches had raised a stone-wall several feet high, inside of which they rested in fancied security.

On top of the mountain Major Brown's command, which numbered but fifty men and officers, with two civilian guides, waited while the two scouts wormed their way into the blackness of the cañon's depths in an attempt to make sure that the Indians did not have any pickets outside the cave to guard against surprise.

The cool night breeze made the soldiers' teeth chatter. Some dropped off to sleep, while others huddled together under the lee of the great rocks whose surface still gave off some slight warmth stored up during the day. Meantime they cursed, with a soldier's vehemence, the slowness of the scouts in returning.

Finally they came, dropping into the midst of the men as if from above, so quietly did they move.

Five minutes of whispering followed between the guide, the Major and the Indians, and then Lieutenant W. J. Ross and a dozen men crawled away into the darkness with one of the Indians to guide them.

Again, those soldiers had begged to be taken as one of the party. No use to call for volunteers, they were all volunteers and envied the fortunate ones whom the tall First Sergeant named for the trip.

Ross was to endeavor to locate the entrance to the cave in order that the rest of the command might be posted in the most advantageous positions. His party dropped into the cañon and was quickly swallowed up in its sombre shadows. Down they crept, stumbling over rocks, treading on the "Cholla" cactus balls that covered the ground everywhere, and whose sharp needles will often pierce the heaviest buckskin gloves, moccasins or even leather boots. A misstep meant death far below in the cañon, while every minute they looked for the crash of the Indians' rifles.

As they felt their way carefully along, they saw the faint gleam of a campfire. Ross worked his men up as closely as he could, placing them in safe positions behind rocks scattered about. By the light of the fire, they made out some fifteen Indians standing about it while a lot of squaws were preparing food for them. The fire was but a few feet from the cave which could be seen dimly in the background, and it was quite evident the hostiles felt very secure in their retreat.

Scarcely daring to breathe, each picked out a brave for a target and at a whispered signal, fired. Those of the Indians who were not killed fled into the cave, while the report of the carbines quickly brought the rest of the command down into the cañon.

Major Brown placed his men about the cave so as to prevent the escape of any of the Indians, waiting for daylight before attempting further operations.

One Apache managed to work his way out of the cave and through the cordon by some means. He was seen after he had passed clear through the lines, standing for an instant on a great rock, his figure boldly outlined against the sky. His recklessness in his fancied security was his undoing, for one of the crack shots in the regiment, Private John Cahill, took a hasty shot at the form, and it came tumbling down the steep side of the cañon.

After Major Brown had formed his lines about the cave he called on the Indians to surrender. This they answered with cries of defiance, followed by a few scattering shots which did no harm. Later on Brown again called on them to surrender, or if not that, to send out their women and children, promising no harm should come to them. Again the Indians refused to accept the offer. They heaped epithets, dear to the Apache heart, upon the soldiers, taunting them with cowardice, and assuring them that they would soon be food for the buzzards and ravens. "May the coyotes howl over your grave," is a favorite Apache expression of contempt, which they hurled at their opponents many times during the fight.

Daylight came slowly, and then the siege was on in earnest. Brown again renewed his offer of protection to the women and children, but to no purpose. Of arrows and lances, as well as fixed

ammunition for their rifles, the Indians seemed to have an unlimited supply. They showered arrows upon the soldiers by hundreds, sending them high into the air, so they would fall upon the men lying behind the rocks scattered about. Lances were also thrown in the same manner, but they were unable to inflict any damage upon the besiegers by such tactics. The Indians also played all the tricks belonging to their style of warfare. War bonnets and hats were raised upon lances above the wall with the intention of drawing the fire of some soldier and getting him exposed to a return shot. But Brown warned his men against all such schemes, and no harm was done by them.

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