

# The Pony Rider Boys in Montana

Frank Gee Patchin

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by Frank Gee Patchin  
(#3 in our series by Frank Gee Patchin)

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THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN MONTANA

BY FRANK GEE PATCHIN

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## CHAPTER I

### FITTING OUT FOR THE JOURNEY

"Forsythe!" announced the trainman in a loud voice.

"That is where we get off, is it not!" asked Tad Butler.

"Yes, this is the place," answered Professor Zepplin.

"I don't see any place," objected Stacy Brown, peering from the car window. "Where is it?"

"You'll see it in a minute," said Walter Perkins.

"Chunky, we are too busy to bother answering all your silly questions. Why don't you get a railroad guide? Town's on the other side. It's one of those one-sided towns. Use your eyes more and your tongue less," added Ned Rector impatiently.

With this injunction, Ned rose and began pulling his belongings from the rack over his head, which action was followed by the three other boys in the party. Professor Zepplin had already risen and was walking toward the car door.

The Northern Pacific train on which they were riding, came to a slow, noisy stop. From it, alighted the four boys, sun-burned, clear-eyed and springy of step. They were clad in the regulation suits of the cowboy, the faded garments giving evidence of long service on the open plains.

Accompanying the lads was a tall, athletic looking man, his face deeply bronzed from exposure to wind, sun and storm, his iron gray beard standing out in strong contrast, giving to his sun burned features a ferocious appearance that was not at all in keeping with the man's real nature.

A man dressed in a neat business suit, but wearing a broad brimmed sombrero stepped up to the boys without the least hesitation, the moment they reached the platform.

"Are you the Pony Rider Boys?" he asked smilingly.

"We are, sir," replied Tad, lifting his hat courteously.

"Glad to know you, young man. I am Mr. Simms the banker here. I was requested by banker Perkins of Chillicothe, Missouri, to meet you young gentlemen. Funds for your use while here are deposited in my bank ready for your order. Where is Professor--Professor---"

"Zepplin?"

"Yes, that's the name." "This is he," Tad informed him, introducing the Professor.

"If you and the young men will come up to the bank we will talk

matters over. I would ask you to my house, but my family is spending the summer at my ranch out near Gracy Butte."

"It is just as well," said the Professor. "We are not exactly up here on a social mission. The boys are crowding all the time possible into their life during their vacation. I presume they are anxious to get started again."

Leaving their baggage at the railroad station, the party set off up the street with the banker, to make final arrangements for the journey to which they looked forward with keen anticipation.

Readers of this series will remember how, in "THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN THE ROCKIES," the four lads set off on horseback to spend part of their summer vacation in the mountains. The readers will remember too, the many thrilling experiences that the boys passed through on that eventful trip, between hunting big game in hand to hand conflict, fighting a real battle with the bad men of the mountains, and how in the end they discovered and took possession of the Lost Claim.

Readers will also remember how the lads next joined in a cattle drive, and their adventures and exciting trip across the plains in "THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN TEXAS."

It will be recalled that on this expedition they became cowboys in reality, living the life of the cattle men, sharing their duties and their hardships, participating in wild, daring night rides, facing appalling storms, battling with swollen torrents, bravely facing many perils, and tow eventually Tad Butler and his companions solved the Veiled Riddle of the Plains, thus bringing great happiness to others as well as keen satisfaction to themselves.

After having completed their eventful trip in Texas, the boys had expressed a desire to next make a trip of exploration to the north country. Arrangements had therefore been made by the father of Walter Perkins for a journey into the wilder parts of Montana.

None of the details, however, had been decided upon. The boys felt that they were now experienced enough to be allowed to make their own arrangements, always, of course, with the approval of their companion, Professor Zepplin.

As a result they arrived in Forsythe one hot July day, about noon. Their ponies had been shipped home, the little fellows having become a bit too docile to suit the tastes of the lads, who had been riding bucking bronchos during their trip on a cattle drive in southern Texas. They knew they would have little difficulty in finding animals to suit them up in the grazing country.

"And now what are your plans, young men?" smiled the hanker, after all had taken seats in his office in the rear of the bank.

The lads waited for Professor Zepplin to speak.

"Tell Mr. Simms what you have in mind," he urged.

"We had thought of going over the old Custer trail," spoke up Walter.

"Where, down in the Black Hills?"

"No, not so far down as that. We should like to go over the trail he followed and visit the scene of his last battle and get a little mountain trip as well---"

"Are there any mountains around here?" asked Stacy innocently.

Mr. Simms laughed, in which he was joined by the boys.

"My lad, there's not much else up here. You'll find all the mountains you want and some that you will not want---"

"Any Indians?" asked Chunky.

"State's full of them."

"Good Indians, of course," nodded the Professor.

"Well, you know the old saying that 'the only good Indian is a dead Indian.' They're good when they have to be. We have very little trouble with the Crows, but sometimes the Black feet and Flat Heads get off their reservations and cause us a little trouble."

Chunky was listening with wide open eyes. "I--I don't like Indians," he stammered. "None of us are overfond of them, I guess. Since you arrived I have been thinking of something that may interest you."

"We are in your hands," smiled the Professor.

"As I said a short time ago, I have a ranch out near Gracy Butte."

"Cattle?" asked Tad, with quickened interest.

"No, sheep. I have another up on the Missouri River. I am getting in five thousand more sheep that some of my men are bringing in on a drive. They should be along very shortly now."

"You deal in large numbers in this country," smiled the Professor.

"Yes, we have to if we expect to make a profit. I intend to send these five thousand new sheep to the Missouri River ranch. It will be a long, hard drive and we shall need some extra men. How would you boys like to join the outfit and go through with them? I promise you you will get all the outdoor life you want."

"Well, I don't know," said Tad doubtfully. "I don't just like sheep."

Mr. Simms laughed.

"You've been with a cattle outfit. I can see that. You have learned to hate sheep and for no reason--no good reason whatever. Sheep are a real pleasure to manage. Besides, they are wholesome, intelligent little animals. The cattle men resent their being on the range for the reason that the sheep crop down the grass so close that the cattle are unable to get enough. They try to drive us off."

"By what right?" interrupted the Professor.

"Right of strength, that's all. On free grass we have as much right as the cattle men. Have you your own ponies?"

"No; we expect to purchase some here. Can you recommend us to a ranch where we can fit ourselves out? We have our saddles and camp outfit, of course," said Tad.

"Yes; I'll take you out to my brother's ranch just outside the town. He has some lively little bronchos there. He won't ask you any fancy price, either. If you buy, why, you can give him an order on my bank and I will settle with him. You know you have funds here for your requirements. What do you say to the sheep idea?"

"Will you let us think it over, Mr. Simms!" asked Walter.

"Why, certainly. You will have plenty of time to visit the Rosebud Mountains as well. I have arranged for a guide. You will find him at the edge of the foothills where he lives. You can't miss him. When do you plan to start?" asked the banker.

"We thought we should like to get away today," replied Tad.

"I see you are not losing any time, young men. We may be able to fix you up so you can start this afternoon. You will want to camp out, I imagine, and not make the journey in one day."

"Oh, yes, we are used to that," interjected Ned. "We have slept out of doors so long now that we should not feel comfortable in a real bed."

"I understand. I have been a cowboy as well as sheepman, and have spent many weeks on the open range. It was different then," he added reminiscingly. "We will drive out to my brother's ranch now, if you are ready."

The boys rose instantly. They were looking forward to having their new ponies, with keen anticipation.

After a short drive they reached the ranch, and a herd of half wild ponies was driven into a corral where the lads might look them over and make their choice.

"I think that little bay there, with the pink eyes "will suit me," decided Tad. "Is he saddle broken?"

"After a fashion, yes. He's been out a few times. But he's full of ginger," announced the cowboy who was showing the horses to them.

"That's what I want. Don't like to have to use the spur to keep my mount from going to sleep," laughed the boy.

"You won't need the irons to keep this pony awake or yerself either."

"You may give me the most gentle beast on the premises," spoke up the Professor. "I have had quite enough of wild horses and their pranks," a speech at which the boys all laughed heartily.

"Me too," agreed Chunky.

"You'll take what you get. You couldn't stay on any kind of horse for long at a time. Why, you'd fall off one of those wooden horses that they have in harness shops," announced Ned Rector witheringly.

"I can ride as well as you can," retorted the fat boy, looking his tormentor straight in the eyes.

"Chunky means business when he looks at you that way," laughed Walter. "Better keep away from him, Ned."

"Think I'll take the pink-eyed one," decided Tad. "Pink-eye. That will be a good name for him. Got a rope?"

"Yes, kin you rope him?"

"I'll try if you will stir them up a bit," answered the freckle-faced boy.

"You might as well pick out our ponies, too," observed the Professor. "You are the only one of our party who is a competent judge of horse flesh."

Tad nodded. His rope was held loosely in his hand, the broad loop lying on the ground a few feet behind him, while the cowboy began milling the biting, kicking animals about the corral.

Now Pink-eye's head was raised above the back of his fellows so that Tad got a good roping sight. The lariat began curving in the air, then its great loop opened, shot out and dropped neatly over the head of the pink-eyed pony. Tad drew it taut before it settled to the animal's shoulder, at the same time throwing his full weight on the rawhide.

He would have been equally successful in trying to hold a steam engine. Before the lad had time to swing the line and throw the pony from its feet, the muscular little animal had leaped to one side.

The sudden jerk hurled the boy through the air.

"Look out!" warned the cowboy.

His warning came too late.

Tad was thrown with great force full against the heels of another broncho.

"He'll be killed!" cried Professor Zepplin.

Up went the pony's hind feet and with them Tad Butler. The pony came down as quickly as it had gone up, but Tap kept on going. He had been near the wire corral when he was jerked against the animal's feet.

The pony kicked a clean goal and Tad was projected over the wire fence, landing in a heap several feet outside the corral.

The lad was on his feet almost instantly. When they saw that he had not been seriously injured the boys set up a defiant yell.

"Hurt you any?" grinned the cowboy.

"Only my pride," answered Tad, with a sheepish smile. "I never had that happen to me before."

"Other ponies got in your way so you couldn't throw your rope down on the pink-eyed one and trip him. I'll get him out for you."

"You will do nothing of the sort. I can rope my own stock."

After having obtained another lariat, Tad, not deeming it wise to attempt to try to pick up the rope that the animal was dragging about the corral, once more took his station, while the cowman began milling them around the enclosure by sundry shouts and prods.

There was much kicking and squealing.

"Now cut him out!" shouted Tad.

The cowboy did so. Pink-eye was beating a tattoo in the air with his heels. He was occupying a little open space all by himself at that moment.

The rope again curled through the air. Tad gave it a quick undulating motion after feeling the pull on the pony's neck, and the next moment the little animal fell heavily to his side.

"Woof!" said the pony.

"Come out of here!" commanded the lad, jerking the animal to its feet and starting for the exit.

The pink-eyed broncho followed its new master out as if he had been doing so every day for a long time.

Tad picked out a spotted roan for Stacy Brown, to which he gave the appropriate name of "Painted-squaw". Bad-eye, was considered an appropriate name for Ned Rector's broncho, while Walter drew a dapple gray which he decided to call Buster.

After choosing a well broken animal for the Professor, and picking out a suitable pack horse, the boys announced that they were ready for the start. An hour or so was spent in getting provisions enough to last them for a few days, all of which, together with their camp equipment, was strapped to the backs of the ponies.

It was now three o'clock in the afternoon. Ahead of them was a thirty mile journey over an unknown trail.

"I think we had better have a guide to take us out to the foothills until we shall have found our permanent guide," said the Professor.

"No, please don't," urged Tad.

"We are plainsmen enough now to be able to find our own way," added Ned. "It's a clear trail. We can see the Rosebud Range from here."

That's it over there, isn't it, Mr. Simms?"

"Yes," replied the banker. "All you will have to do will be to get your direction by your compass before you start, and hold to it. You will not be able to see the mountains all the time, as the country is rolling and there are numerous buttes between here and there."

"Any Indians?" asked Stacy apprehensively.

"You may see some, but they will not bother you," laughed the banker. "I shall hope to have you all spend next Sunday with us at my ranch; then we can discuss our plans for your joining my outfit."

"How far is it from where we are bound?" asked the Professor.

"Not more than twenty miles. Just a few hours' ride."

Filled with joyful anticipations the little party set out, headed for the mountain ranges that lay low in the southwest, some thirty miles distant. Contrary to their usual practice, they had taken no cook with them, having decided to rely wholly on their own resources for a time at least, which they felt themselves safe in doing after their many experiences thus far on their summer vacation.

The little western village was soon left behind them. Turning in their saddles, they found that it had sunk out of sight. They could not tell behind which of the endless succession of high and low buttes the town was nestling. Tad consulted his compass, after which the lads faced the southwest and pressed cheerfully on.

The Pony Rider Boys were fairly started now on what was to prove the most exciting and eventful journey of their lives.

## CHAPTER II

### YAWNS PROVE DISASTROUS

"Yah-h-h hum." Stacy Brown yawned loudly. "Yah-hum," breathed Walter Perkins, half rousing himself from his nap.

"Ho-ho-hum," added the deep bass voice of Professor Zepplin.

"Yah--see here, stop that!" commanded Ned Rector, suddenly raising himself to a sitting posture. "You've done nothing but stretch your mouth in yawns ever since we reached Montana. See, you've waked up the whole camp."

"Ho-hum," said Chunky.

"Say, what ails you?" demanded Tad, putting down by supreme force of will, his own inclination to yawn.

"I--I guess--yah--it must be the--the mountain air. Yah-hum," yawned the fat boy.

Pink-eye coughed off among the cedars.

"What means all this disturbance, young gentlemen?" demanded the Professor.

"It's Chunky and the bronchos yawning," Ned Rector informed him.

"So did you," observed Stacy Brown.

"Did what?"

"Yawned. See, see! Your mouth's open now. You're going to yawn this very second You----"

His taunts were lost in the shouts of the Pony Riders. Ned Rector's face was set determinedly, a vacant expression having taken full possession of his eyes.

"He is going to yawn," announced Walter solemnly. "Stake down the camp."

In spite of his determination not to yield to the impulse of the moment, Ned's mouth slowly opened to its extreme capacity, accompanied by a deep intake of breath.

"Y-a-h-h-h-hum!" he exploded.

"Got you that time. He--he----" Walter's words died away in a long-drawn, gaping yawn.

Ned waited to hear no more. With a yell he projected himself at the fat boy. Stacy, however, observing the move, had quickly rolled to one side. Ned struck the ground heavily.

Stacy was rolling over and over now as if his very life depended upon getting away. He could not spare the time to get up and run, so he continued to roll over and over, making no mean progress at that.

"Go it, Chunky!" shouted Walter in high glee.

The scene, dimly lighted by the smouldering camp-fire, was so ludicrous as to send the boys into shouts of laughter. All were thoroughly awake now. They had made camp at sunset on the banks of the East Fork, of what was known as Fennell's Creek, a broad, deep stream which, joining its companion fork some ten miles further down, flowed into the clear waters of the Yellowstone. Here they had cooked their supper after many attempts, made with varying degrees of success and much laughter. Later they had rolled themselves into their blankets and gone to sleep.

They had been awakened by Stacy Brown's yawns. In a moment each had taken his turn at yawning, but all took the interruption good-naturedly, save Ned Rector. By this time he had grown very much excited. No sooner would he pounce upon the spot where Stacy appeared to be, than the fat boy by a few swift rolls would propel himself well beyond the reach of his irate companion.

"It'll be the worse for you when I do get you," cried Ned.

At that moment Ned tripped over a limb, and, plunging headlong, measured his length on the ground.

The sympathy of the camp was with the rolling Chunky.

"Get a net," shouted Walter.

"No, rope him, Ned. That's the only way you ever will catch him," jeered Tad.

Both boys were dancing about their companions, shivering in their pajamas and uttering shouts of glee.

"He's a regular high roller," said Tad.

"No, not a high roller," answered Walter.

"Here, here!" admonished the Professor. "Stop this nonsense. I want to go to sleep. I don't mind you young gentlemen enjoying yourselves, but midnight is rather late for such pranks, it strikes me. Into your blankets, every one of you."

It was doubtful that the boys even heard his voice. If they did, they failed entirely to catch the meaning of his words, so absorbed were they in the mad scramble of Ned Rector and Stacy Brown.

"Roll, Chunky, roll!" urged Walter, jumping up and down in his bare feet.

"Good thing he's fat. If he weren't so round he could never do it," mocked Tad. "I'll bet he was a fast creeper when he was a baby."

The ponies, disturbed by the noise and excitement, had scrambled to their feet and were moving about restlessly in the bushes where they were tethered.

"Master Stacy, you will get up at once!" commanded the Professor sternly.

"I can't," wailed the fat boy.

"Then I'll help you," decided the Professor firmly, striding toward the spot where he had last heard the lad's voice.

"Look out for the river!" warned Tad, as the thought of what was below the boy suddenly occurred to him.

"Help, help! I'm rolling in," cried Stacy.

"There he goes, down the bank! Grab him!" shouted Walter.

"Where?" demanded Ned, not fully grasping the import of the warning.

"There, there! Don't you see him? Right in front of you. He's going to fall into the river!"

Stacy had forgotten that they were encamped on the east shore of the fork and that the broad stream was flowing rapidly along just below him. The banks at that point were high and precipitous, the water almost icy cold, being fresh from the clear mountain streams a few miles above. In spots it was deep and treacherous.

Frantically grasping at weeds and slender sprouts, as he rolled down the almost perpendicular bluff, Stacy yelled lustily for help. From the soft, sandy soil the weeds came away in his hands, without in the slightest degree checking his progress.

Tad realized the danger perhaps more fully than did the others. In the darkness the lad might slip into one of the treacherous river pockets and drown before they could reach him.

Grasping his rope which lay beside his cot. Tad sprang to the top of the bluff, swinging the loop of his lariat above his head as he ran.

He could faintly make out the figure of his companion rolling down the steep bank.

"Hold up your hand so I can drop the rope over you," shouted Tad, at the same time making a skillful cast.

His aim was true. The rawhide reached the mark. Chunky, however, feeling it slap him smartly on the cheek, brushed the rope aside in his excitement, not realizing what it was that had struck him.

"Grab it!" roared Tad, observing that he had failed to rope the lad.

With a mighty splash, Stacy Brown plunged into the stream broadside on.

"He's in! I heard him strike!" cried Walter.

With a warning cry to the others to bring lights, Tad, without an instant's hesitation, leaped over the bluff and went shooting down it in a sitting posture.

"Tad's gone in, too," shouted Walter excitedly, as their ears caught a second splash. It was more clean cut than had been Stacy's dive, and might have passed unnoticed had they not known the meaning of the sound.

Ned Rector stood as if dazed. He knew that somehow he had thoughtlessly plunged his companions into dire peril.

"Wha--what is it?" he stammered.

"They're in the river! Don't you understand?" answered Walter sharply, moving forward as if to follow over the bank in an effort to rescue his companion.

"Keep back!" commanded the Professor. "You'll all drown if you go over that bank."

The Professor, with more presence of mind than the others, had sprung up and rushed for the camp-fire, from which he snatched a burning ember.

At any other time the sight of his long, gaunt figure, clad in a full suit of pink pajamas, dashing madly about the camp, would have excited the lads to uproarious merriment. But laughter was far from their thoughts at that moment.

"Use your eyes! Do you see him?" demanded Professor Zepplin, peering down anxiously into the shadows.

"No. Oh, Tad!" shouted Ned. There was no reply to the boy's hail. "Thaddeus!" roared the Professor. Still no answer.

Down the stream a short distance they could hear the water roaring over the rocks, from where it dropped some twenty feet and continued on its course. The falls there were known as Buttermilk Falls, because of the churning the water received in its lively drop, and more than one mountaineer had been swept over them to his death in times of high water. Between the camp and these falls there was a sharp bend in the river, and ere the boys had recovered from their surprise, their companions undoubtedly had been swept around the bend and on beyond their sight.

"Do--do you--do you think----" stammered Walter.

"They have gone down stream," answered the Professor shortly. "Run for it, boys! Run as you never ran before!"

Ned dived for the thicket where the ponies were tethered. It was the work of a moment only to release Bad-eye. Without waiting to saddle him, Ned threw himself upon the surprised animal's back, and with a wild yell sent the broncho plunging through the camp.

He was nearly unseated when Bad-eye suddenly veered to avoid stepping into the camp-fire, which Ned Rector in his haste had forgotten.

The lad gripped the pony's mane and hung on desperately until he finally succeeded in righting himself, all the while kicking the pony's sides with his bare feet to urge him on faster.

They were out of the camp, tearing through the thicket before the Professor and Walter had even gotten beyond the glow of the fire. Ned was obliged to make a wide detour instead of taking a short cut across the bend made by the river. There were rocks in his way, so that a few moments of valuable time were lost before he reached the stream on the other side of the obstruction.

"Come, we must run," urged the Professor. "I'm afraid both of them may have gone over the falls."

"Oh, I hope he is not too late!" answered Walter, with a half sob, as they ran regardless of the fact that sharp sticks and jagged stones were cruelly cutting into their feet.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE BOYS RESCUE EACH OTHER

Ned swung around the bend at a tremendous pace. He was able to see little about him, though as he once more reached the bank he could tell where the river lay, because the river gorge lay in a deeper shadow than did the rest of the landscape about him.

"Oh, Tad! Tad!" he shouted.

A faint call answered him. He was not quite sure that it was not an echo of his own voice.

"Tad! T-a-d!"

"Hurry!"

It seemed a long distance away--that faint reply to his hail.

"That you, Tad!"

"Y-e-s."

"Where are you!"

"Here."

"Where? I don't see you."

"In the river. Just below the bend."

Hurriedly dismounting and making a quick examination of the banks he discovered that they were so nearly straight up and down that it would be impossible to get his companions out at that point.

"I can't get you out here. You'll have to wait a few moments. Are you swimming?"

"No, I am holding to a rock. It's awful slippery and I'm freezing too."

"All right. Is Stacy with you?"

"Yes, I've got him. "

"Good! Have courage! I'll be with you," said Ned encouragingly.

"You'll have to hurry. I can't hold on much longer. The falls are just below here and if I have to let go it's all up with us."

Ned had no need to be told that. He could almost feel the spray from the falls on his face, so close were they to him and their roar was loud in his ears, so that he was obliged to raise his voice in calling to his companions.

Leaping to the back of Bad-eye, Ned was off like a shot, tearing through the brush, headed toward camp. On the way he passed Professor Zepplin and Walter, nearly running them down in his mad haste.

"Got a rope?" he shouted in passing. "No," answered Walter. "Then get one and hurry around the bend. You'll be needed there in a minute. I'm going down into the stream from the camp."

The Professor, seeming to comprehend what Ned had in mind, turned and ran back to the camp.

Without an instant's hesitation, Ned Rector, upon reaching their camping place, put his pony at the bank where the two boys had gone over.

The little animal refused to take it. He bucked and the lad had a narrow escape from following where Tad and Chunky had gone a short time before.

"I've got to have a saddle. That's the only way I can stick on to drive him in, and we'll need it to hold to as well," he decided.

Every moment was precious now. Whirling the animal about, Ned drove him into the thicket where the saddles lay folded against trees.

It was the work of seconds for him to leap off and throw the heavy saddle on Bad-eye's back. The boy worked with the speed and precision of a Gattling gun. Yet he groaned hopelessly when he realized that his delay might mean the death of two of his companions.

Professor Zepplin arrived at the camp just as Ned had finally cinched the girths and swung himself into the saddle.

"Where--where is he?" gasped the Professor, now breathing hard.

"Below the bend. Get back there with a rope and be ready to toss it to him if he lets go."

Ned and his pony crashed through the brush. He had no spur with which to urge on the animal, but Ned had thoughtfully picked up a long, stout stick, and once more they drove straight at the high bank.

"Stop! I forbid it!" thundered the Professor.

Ned paid no more attention to him than had he not spoken. It was a time when words were useless. What was necessary was action and quick action at that.

"Hurry with that rope!" commanded Ned.

The pony slowed up as they approached the bank of the river, but Ned was in no mood for trifling now. He brought down the stick on the animal's hip with a terrific whack.

Bad-eye angered by the blow, squealed and leaped into the air with all four feet free of the ground.

"Hi-yi!" exclaimed the Pony Rider sharply, again smiting the animal while the latter was still in the air.

Ned's plan was to enter the stream at that point and swim down with the pony until they should have reached the boys and rescued them from their perilous position. While the bluff was sandy at the point where they had fallen in, down below, where Tad was now desperately clinging to the rock, the stream wound through a rocky cut, whose high sides were slippery and uncertain, especially in the darkness of the night.

Bad-eye needed no further goading to force him to do his master's bidding. With another squeal of protest the little animal plunged for the bank. No sooner had his forward feet reached over the edge of it than the treacherous sands gave way beneath them.

The pony pivoted on its head, landing violently on its back. Ned had dismounted without the least effort on his part, so that he was well out of the way when his mount landed. He had been hurled from the saddle the instant the pony's feet struck the unresisting sand.

But Ned clung doggedly to the bridle reins. He, too, struck on his back. He heard the squealing, kicking pony floundering down upon him, its every effort to right itself forcing it further and further down the slippery bank. Now on its back, now with its nose in the sand, Bad-eye was rapidly nearing the swiftly moving creek. Ned had all he could do to keep out of the way, and on account of the darkness he had to be guided more by instinct than by any other sense. However, it was not difficult to keep track of the now thoroughly frightened animal.

Ned leaped to one side. An instant later, and he would have been caught under the pony.

The animal hit the water with a mighty splash, with Ned still clinging to the reins. As the pony went in, Ned was jerked in also, striking the water head first.

He could have screamed from the shock of the icy water, which seemed to smite him like a heavy blow.

For a moment boy and pony floundered about in the stream. It seemed almost a miracle that the lad was not killed by those flying hoofs that were beating the water almost into a froth.

As soon as he was able to get to the surface Ned exerted all his strength to swim out further toward the middle of the stream. Even when he was under water, he still kept a firm grip on the rein. To let go would be to lose all that he had gained after so much danger in getting as far as he had.

By this time, both boy and pony had drifted down stream several rods.

The pony righted himself and struck out for the bank. Ned was by his side almost instantly, being aided in the effort to get there by having the reins to pull himself in by.

Bad-eye refused instinctively to head down stream. There was only one thing to do. That was to climb into the saddle and get him started. Ned did this with difficulty. His weight made the pony sink at first, the animal whinnying with fear.

Fearing to drown the broncho, the boy slipped off, at the same time taking a firm grip on the lines.

Bad-eye came to the surface at once. Ned's right hand was on the pommel, the reins bunched in his left. He brought his knee sharply against the animal's side.

"Whoop!" he urged, again driving the knee against the pony's ribs.

Under the strong guiding hand of his master, the animal fighting every inch of the way, began swimming down stream.

"I'm coming!" shouted the boy.

Before that moment he had not had breath nor the time to call.

"I'm coming!" he repeated, as they swung around the wide sweeping curve.

"Are you there, Tad?"

"Yes," was the scarcely distinguishable reply. "I've got to let go."

"You hold on. Bad-eye and I will be there in a minute and the Professor is hurrying down along the bank with a rope."

"I'm freezing. I'm all numb, that's the trouble," answered Tad weakly.

Ned knew that the plucky lad was well-nigh exhausted. The strain of holding to the slippery rock in the face of the swift current was one that would have taxed the strength of the strongest man, to say nothing of the almost freezing cold water, which chilled the blood and benumbed the senses.

"You've gone past me," cried Tad.

"I know it. I'm heading up," replied Ned Rector.

Ned had purposely driven his pony further down stream so that he might the easier pick them up as he went by on the return trip.

"Are you all right down there?" called the Professor, who had reached a point on the bank opposite to them.

"Yes, but get ready to cast me a rope," directed Ned.

"I'm afraid I cannot."

"Then have Walter do it."

"He is not here. I directed him to remain in camp in case he was needed there."

"All right. You can try later. I'll tell you how. I'm busy now."

"Don't run me down," warned Tad Butler.

"Keep talking then, so I'll know where you are. Just say yip-yip and keep it up."

Tad did so, but his voice was weak and uncertain.

Ned swam the pony alongside of them, pulling hard on the reins to slow the animal down without exerting pressure enough to stop him.

"Is Chunky able to help himself?"

"Yes, if he will."

"Then both of you grab Bad-eye by the mane as he goes by. Don't you miss, for if you do, we're all lost."

"The pony won't be able to get the three of us up the stream," objected Tad.

"I know it."

"Then, what are we going to do?"

"I'll stay here and hang on. You send Walter back with the pony as soon as you get there. Better call to him to get Pink-eye or one of the others saddled as soon as you can make him hear. We'll save time that way. I'm afraid Bad-eye won't be able to make the return trip."

"Now grab for the rock," cried Tad.

Ned did so, but he missed it.

Tad still clinging to Chunky fastened his right hand in the broncho's mane. All three of the boys were now clinging to the overburdened animal. Ned began swimming to assist the pony, for he realized that they had dropped back a few feet in taking on the extra weight.

"Work further back and get hold of the saddle," Ned directed.

Tad followed his instructions.

"I'm afraid he'll never make it," groaned Ned. "I---"

At that instant his hand came in violent contact with a hard, cold object. It was the slender, pillar-like rock that Tad had been clinging to for so long in the icy water.

"I've got it," exclaimed Ned.

He cast loose from Bad-eye and threw both arms about the rock. The pony freed from a share of his burden, struck off up stream against the current, making excellent headway.

"I don't like to do this," Tad called back. "I wouldn't, were it not for Chunky. He couldn't have stood it there another minute."

"You can't help yourself now. How's the kid?" called Ned.

"He's all right now."

"Professor, are you up there?"

"Yes."

He had heard the dialogue between the boys, and understood well what

had been done.

"That was a brave thing to do, Master Ned."

"Thank you, Professor. Suppose you try to cast that rope to me. I'm afraid I shall never be able to hold on here alone as long as Tad did. B-r-r-r, but it's cold!" he shivered.

The Professor tried his hand at casting the lariat.

"Never touched me," said Ned, more to keep up his own spirits than with the intent to speak slightly of the Professor's effort.

"Take it up stream throw it out, then let it float down," suggested Ned.

Professor Zepplin did so, but the rope was found to be too short to reach, and at Ned's direction, he made no further attempt.

Soon Ned heard some one shouting cheerily up the stream. It was Tad Butler. He had dashed up to camp immediately upon reaching shore, and the exercise restored his circulation. Walter, who was in camp had Pink-eye ready and saddled for an emergency, and Tad mounting the pony, forced him to take to the water. He was now returning to rescue his brave friend, who was clinging to the rock. He had been unwilling to trust the perilous trip to anyone else.

"I was afraid Walt would go over the falls, pony and all," he explained, wheeling alongside Ned Rector and picking him up from the rock.

"I'll run a foot race with you when we get ashore," laughed Tad.

"Go you," answered Ned promptly. "The one who loses has to get up and cook the breakfast."

## CHAPTER IV

### SURPRISED BY AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

"I'm sorry I was to blame for your going into the creek," apologized Ned Rector, bending over the shivering Stacy.

"I fell in, didn't I?" grinned the fat boy.

"No, you rolled in. My, but that water was cold!"

"B-r-r-r!" shivered Stacy, as the recollection of his icy bath came back to him. "Di--did you win the race?"

"Tad won it. I've got to get up and cook the breakfast, and it wasn't my turn at all. It was Tad's turn."

"Yab-hum," yawned Stacy, "I'm awful sleepy."

"So am I," answered Ned, uttering a long-drawn yawn.

"See here, Master Ned. Get out of those wet pajamas, rub yourself down thoroughly and put on a dry suit. I can't have you all sick on my hands to-morrow," commanded the Professor.

"Don't worry about us," laughed Ned. "It takes more than a bath in a cold creek to lay us up, eh, Tad?"

"I hope so," answered Tad Butler, who had rubbed himself until his body glowed. "But I thought once or twice that I was a goner while I was holding to that rock. I could not make Chunky try to support himself at all. He just clung to me until he fagged me all out."

"Come now, young gentlemen, down with this coffee and into the blankets."

Professor Zepplin had prepared the coffee, with which to warm the lads up, and had heated in the camp-fire some good sized boulders, which he wrapped in blankets and tucked in their beds. Chunky was the only one of the boys who did not protest. Ned and Tad objected to being "babied" as they called it, and when the Professor was not looking, they quickly rolled the feet warmers out at the foot of their beds.

Early next morning they were aroused by the cook's welcome call to breakfast. None of the lads seemed to be any the worse for his exciting experiences in the creek, much to the relief of Professor Zepplin, who feared the icy bath might at least bring on heavy colds.

Tumbling from their cots, they quickly washed; and then sprinting back and forth a few times, stirred up their circulation, after which the boys sat down to the morning meal with keen appetites.

Ned had cooked a liberal supply of bacon and potatoes and boiled a large pot of coffee.

Stacy opened his mouth as if he were about to yawn.

"Don't you dare to do that," warned Ned, waving the coffee pot threateningly. "The first boy who yawns to-day gets into trouble. And Stacy Brown, if you fall in the river again you'll get out the best way you can alone. We won't help you, remember that."

"This bacon looks funny," retorted Stacy, holding up a piece at the end of his fork. "Kind of looks as if something had happened to it."

"Just what I was going to say," added Walter.

"Yes, what has happened to it? It's as black as the Professor's hat."

All eyes were fixed upon the cook. "I don't care, I couldn't help it. If any of you fellows think you can do any better, you just try it. Cook your own meals if you don't like my way of serving them up. It wasn't my turn to get the breakfast, anyway."

"Our cook evidently has a grouch on this morning," laughed Walter. "Doesn't agree with him to take a midnight bath."

"The bath was all right, but I object to having my cooking criticised."

"The bacon does look peculiar," decided Professor Zepplin, sniffing gingerly at his own piece.

Ned's face flushed.

"What did you do to it to give it that peculiar shade, young man?"

"Why, I soused it in the creek to wash it off, then laid it in the fire to cook," replied Ned.

"In the fire?" shouted Tad.

"Of course. How do you expect I cooked it?" demanded the boy irritably. "I cooked it in the fire."

"I could do better'n that myself," muttered Stacy.

"Didn't you use the spider?" asked Walter.

"Spider? No. I didn't know you used a spider. Do you?"

"He cooked it in the fire," groaned Tad.

"Peculiar, very peculiar to say the least," decided the Professor grimly. "Gives it that peculiar sooty flavor, common to smoked ham I think we shall have to elect a new cook if you cannot do better than that. However, we'll manage to get along very well with this meal. If we have to get others we will hold a consultation as to the latest and most approved methods of doing so," he added, amid a general laugh at Ned's expense.

Breakfast over, blankets were rolled and packed on the ponies. About nine o'clock the Pony Riders set out for the foothills, after first having consulted their compasses and decided upon the course they were to follow to reach the point, some fifteen miles distant, where they expected to pick up the guide.

"Seems good to be in the saddle once more, doesn't it?" smiled Walter, after they had gotten well under way.

"Beats being in the river at midnight," laughed Tad. "Bad-eye looks as if he needed grooming, too. Ned, I take back all I said about the bacon this morning. You did me a good turn last night. If it hadn't been for you, Chunky and I wouldn't be here now. I couldn't have held to that rock much longer."

"Neither could I," interjected Stacy wisely.

Ned gave him a withering glance.

"You are an expert at falling in, but when it comes to getting out, that's another matter."

"How blue those mountains look!" marveled Walter, shading his eyes and gazing off toward the Rosebud Range.

"I hear there are some lawless characters in there, too," Tad answered thoughtfully.

"Where'd you hear that?" demanded Ned.

"Heard some men talking about it in the hotel back at Forsythe."

"Mustn't believe all you hear. What did they say?"

"Acting upon your advice, I should say that you wouldn't believe it if I told you," answered Tad sharply. "These men are a kind of outlaws, I believe. They steal horses and cattle. Probably sell the hides--I don't know. Somehow the Government officers have not been able to catch them, let alone to find out who they are."

"Indians, probably," replied Ned. "The country is full of them about here, so I hear."

"Mustn't believe all you hear," piped up Stacy, repeating Ned Rector's own words, and the latter's muttered reply was lost in the laughter that followed.

It was close to twelve o'clock when they finally emerged on a broad table or mesa. Before them lay the foothills of the Rosebud, rising in broken mounds, some of which towered almost level with the lower peaks of the mountains themselves.

"I don't see anything of our guide's cabin," said Tad, halting and looking about them. "What do you think, Professor!"

"We will go on to the foothills and wait there. I imagine he will be waiting for us somewhere hereabouts."

"Yes, we have followed our course by the compass," answered Tad.

However, the lad had overlooked the fact, as had the others, that in order to find a suitable fording place, they had followed the banks of the East Fork for several miles. This served to throw them off their course and when they finally reached the foothills they were some six miles to the north of the place where the guide was to pick them up.

As they rode on, the ground gradually rose under them, nor did they realize that they were entering the foothills themselves; and so it continued until they finally found themselves surrounded by hills, narrow draws and broad, rocky gorges.

"Young gentlemen, I think we had better halt right here. We shall be lost if we continue any farther," decided the Professor. "This is a nice level spot with just enough trees to give us shade. I propose that we dismount and make camp."

"Yes, we haven't had the tents up since we were in the Rockies," replied Ned. "We shall be forgetting how to pitch them soon if we do not have some practice."

On this trip, besides their small tents, the Pony Riders had brought with them canvas for a nine by twelve feet tent, which they proposed to use for a dining tent in wet weather, as well as a place for

social gathering whenever the occasion demanded its use. They named it the parlor.

In high spirits, the lads leaped from their ponies and began removing their packs. Stacy Brown began industriously tugging at the fastenings which held the large tent to the back of the pack pony.

"I can't get it loose," he shouted. "What kind of hitch do you call this, anyway?"

"Young man, that's a squaw hitch. Ever hear of it before?" laughed Tad.

"No. What kind of hitch is a squaw hitch?" asked Chunky.

"Probably one that the braves use to tie up their wives with when they get lazy," Ned informed him.

"I know," spoke up Walter. "It's a hitch used to fasten the packs to the ponies. Mr. Stallings explained that to me when we were in Texas."

"Right," announced Tad, skillfully loosening the hitch, thus allowing the canvas of the parlor tent to fall to the ground.

While Tad and Walter were doing this, Professor Zepplin with Stacy had started off with hatchets to cut poles for the tents.

The sleeping tents were erected in a straight row with the parlor tent set up to the rear some few rods, backing up against the hills nearest to the mountains.

In front of the small tents the ponies were tethered out among the trees so as to be in plain view of the boys in case of trouble. Profiting from past experiences, they knew that without their mounts they would find themselves helpless.

In an hour the camp was pitched and the boys stood off to view the effect of their work.

"Looks like a military camp," said Ned.

"All but the guns," replied Walter. "We might stack our rifles outside here to make it look more military like."

"Let's do it." suggested Tad.

Laughing joyously, the lads got out their rifles, standing them on their stocks, with the muzzles together in front of the small tents. Not being equipped with bayonets the guns refused to stand alone, so they bound the muzzles together with twine wrapped about the sights. This held them firmly.

"There!" glowed Ned. "Where's the flag? Somebody get that and I'll cut a pole for it," suggested Tad Butler.

In a few moments Old Glory was waving idly in the gentle summer breeze and the boys, doffing their hats, gave three cheers and a tiger for it, in which Professor Zepplin joined with almost boyish

enthusiasm.

"I always take off my hat to that beautiful flag," said the Professor, gazing up at it admiringly.

"How about your own country's flag?" teased Ned.

"That is it. I am an American citizen. Your flag is my flag. And now that we have done homage to our country and our flag, supposing we consult our own bodily comfort by getting dinner. Of course, if you young gentlemen are not hungry we can skip the noon---"

"Not hungry? Did you ever hear of our skipping a meal when we could get it?" protested Walter.

"For a young man with a delicate appetite, you do very well," laughed the Professor. "It was less than two months ago, if I remember correctly, that the doctors thought you were not going to live, you were so delicate."

"Almost as delicate as Chunky now," chuckled Ned maliciously.

The midday meal was more successful than had been their breakfast. They ate it under the trees, deciding to dine in the parlor tent just at dusk.

The afternoon was spent in shooting, at which the boys were becoming quite proficient. By this time, even Stacy Brown could be trusted to manage his own rifle without endangering the lives of his companions.

"Is there any game in these hills?" asked Ned, while he was refilling the magazine of his repeating rifle.

"Plenty of it, I am told," replied the Professor. "There is big game all over the state."

"What kind?"

"Bears, mountain lions and the like."

"W-h-e-w. That sounds interesting. May we go gunning to-morrow?"

"Better wait until the guide joins us. It will be best to have some one with us who understands the habits of the animals. As you have learned, hunting big game is not boys' play," concluded the Professor.

"Yes, I remember our experience in hunting the cougar in the Rockies. I guess I'll wait."

During the afternoon, the boys made short trips along the foothills hoping to find some trace of the guide, but search as they would they were unable to locate him. Nor did they dare stray far from the camp for fear of being unable to find their way back. The foothills all looked so alike that if one unfamiliar with them should lose his way he would find himself in a serious predicament.

"I guess we shall have to camp here for the rest of the summer,"

Professor Zepplin said, while they were eating their supper. "We must be a long distance from our man if he has not heard our shooting this afternoon."

The boys were enjoying themselves, however; in addition, there was a sense of independence that they had not felt before. They were alone and entirely on their own resources, which of itself added to the zest of the trip.

The supper dishes having been cleared away and the camp-fire stirred up to a bright, cheerful blaze, all hands gathered in the parlor tent for an evening chat.

Above them swung an oil lantern which dimly shed its rays over the little company. Professor Zepplin was poring over an old volume that he had brought with him, while the boys were discussing the merits of their new ponies, which by this time had developed their individual peculiarities.

Chunky, growing sleepy, had crawled to the rear of the tent, where he sat leaning against the closed flap, nodding drowsily.

Finally they saw him straighten up and brush a hand over the back of his head.

"He's dreaming," laughed Ned. "Imagines he's rolling down the river bank again."

Suddenly they were aroused by the fat boy's voice raised in angry protest.

"Stop tickling my neck," he growled, vigorously rubbing that part of his anatomy. "Funny, you fellows can't let me alone."

"You must be having bad dreams," laughed Ned. "We are not bothering you. We're all over here."

"Yes, you are. You've done it three times and you woke me up," answered the fat boy, settling back and closing his eyes preparatory to renewing his disturbed nap.

He was asleep in a moment, not having heeded the laughter of his companions, nor their noisy comments.

But Stacy dozed for a moment only. He sat up quickly and very straight, while a shrewd expression appeared in his eyes. Had they been looking they might have observed one of his hands being drawn cautiously behind him, as if he were reaching for something. The boys were too busy, however, to pay any heed to the lad, and the Professor was deeply absorbed in his book.

"I've got you this time! Tell me you weren't tickling my neck? I'll show you Stacy Brown's not the sleepy head you----"

The boy paused suddenly and scrambling to all fours turned about on his hands and knees, intently gazing at the flap against which he had been leaning.

"What's the matter, gone crazy over there!" called Tad. "Anybody

would think you had from the racket you are making."

Stacy did not answer. He had not even heard Tad speak to him. His eyes, bulging with fear, were fixed on the flap. What he saw was a long black snout poked through the slit in the canvas, and just back of that a pair of beady, evil eyes.

"Y-e-o-w!" yelled Stacy. The lad leaped to his feet and dashed from the tent, bowling over Walter and Tad as he ran, shouting in his fright and crying for help. Knowing instinctively that something really serious had happened, the others sprang up, peering at the other end of the tent. For a moment, they could see nothing in the flickering shadows; then as their eyes became more accustomed to the half light, they discovered what filled them with alarm as well.

"Run for your lives!" shouted Tad, bolting from the tent in a single leap, followed almost instantly by Ned Rector and Walter Perkins.

The Professor with one startled glance, hurled his precious book at the object he saw entering the tent at the back, and bolted through the front opening, taking the end tent pole down with him in his hasty flight.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PURSUIT OF THE BURNING BEAR

What is it?" cried Walter breathlessly, slowing up when he observed that the others were doing likewise. "It's a bear, I think," replied the Professor. "I only saw the head so I can't be sure. Keep away. Where is Stacy?"

"I--I think he's running, still," answered Ned, his voice somewhat shaky.

"There goes the other tent pole down!" shouted Tad.

"He's wrecking the place. That's too bad," groaned Walter.

"Are the provisions all in there?" asked the Professor anxiously.

"No, most of them are over in my tent, where I took them from the pack pony," Ned informed him.

"We are that much ahead anyway. I think we had better get a little further away, young gentlemen. We had better get near trees so we can make a fairly dignified escape if that fellow concludes to come out after us."

"He's too busy just now," announced Tad, with an attempt at laughter.

"Get the guns," ordered the Professor.

"I can't," cried Tad.

"Why can't you? I will get them myself."

"They are all in that tent there with the bear," groaned Tad.

"There's a box of shells in there, too," added Walter. "I put it there myself."

"Then, indeed, we had better take to the trees," decided Professor Zepplin.

"Wait," warned Tad. "He won't get out right away. See, he has pulled the tent down about him."

"Yes, he's having the time of his life," nodded Ned. "I hope he never gets out. If we had our guns now!"

And, indeed, Mr. Bruin was having his own troubles. Angry snarls and growls could be heard under the heaving canvas as the black bear plunged helplessly about, twisting the tent about him in his desperate struggles to free himself.

They could hear the clatter of the tinware as he threshed about, and the crash and bang of other articles belonging to their equipment.

"Look! What's that light?" exclaimed Walter.

"Fire!" cried the Professor.

"The tent's on fire!" shouted Tad.

"Quick, get water!" urged Ned.

"What for? To put out the bear?" laughed Tad.

"I had forgotten about the lantern. That's what has caused the fire. When the tent collapsed the lantern went down with it, and in his floundering about he has managed to set the place on fire," the Professor informed them.

"There goes the parlor tent. That settles it," said Walter.

The other two boys groaned.

"Has he-ha-ha-has he gone?" wailed Chunky, peering from behind a tree.

"No, he hasn't gone. He's very much here. Don't you see that tent! What do you suppose is making it hump up in the middle, if he isn't there? And the tent's on fire, too," answered Ned, in a tone of disgust. "This is a bad start for sure."

"I didn't fall in that time, did I? I fell out," interrupted Stacy. "Lucky for me that I did, too. I would have been in a nice fix if that tent had come down on me and that animal at the same time." He shivered at the thought. "What is it, a lion?"

"Lion! No, you ninny, it's a bear. B-e-a-r," spelled Ned, with strong emphasis. "Do you understand that?"

"Y-y-e-s. I-I-I thought it was a lion. I did, honest," he

muttered. "And it tickled my neck with its paw, too. Wow!"

Stacy instinctively moved further away from the tent.

Disturbing as their situation was at that moment. the lads could not repress a shout of laughter over Stacy's funny words. But Stacy's face was solemn. He saw nothing to laugh at.

"Lucky for both of you that you didn't yawn. The bear might have fallen in," jeered Ned.

"Might have been a good thing for us if Chunky had yawned. Maybe the bear would have got to yawning at the same time, and yawned and yawned until he was so helpless that we could have captured him," laughed Walter.

"Not much chance of that," answered Tad. "Bears don't yawn until after a full meal. I guess our bear over there hasn't had one lately or he wouldn't have been nosing about our camp when we were all there."

"Keep back there, boys. Please don't get too close. He is liable to break out at any time. He is a small bear, but there is no telling what he may do in his rage when he emerges," warned the Professor.

"We're not afraid," answered Ned.

The boys, having no weapons, had armed themselves with clubs, prepared to do battle with their visitor should he chance to come their way.

"What's that racket over there in the bushes?" demanded Ned, wheeling sharply.

"It's the ponies," answered Tad, darting away.

At last the little animals had discovered the presence of the bear in camp and were making frantic efforts to break their tethers.

"Come over here, some of you. The bronchos are having a fit. I can't manage all of them at once," called Tad in an excited tone.

"What's the matter--are they afraid?" called the Professor.

"I should say they are. They'll get away from me if you don't hurry."

Leaving the bear to his own desperate efforts, the boys rushed to the aid of Tad Butler. They were not quick enough, however.

"There goes one of them!" cried Tad.

A pony had broken the rope and with a snort, had bounded away. Tad, leaped on the bare back of his own pony, first having caught up his lariat, and set out after the fleeing animal.

Luckily the runaway broncho had headed for the open and Tad was able to overhaul him before they had gone far from the camp.

Riding up beside the little animal it was an easy matter to drop the loop over his head and bring him down.

"There, that will teach you to run away," growled the boy, cinching the rope and dragging the unruly pony back to camp.

In the meantime the others, after considerable effort, had succeeded in securing the other plunging bronchos, more rope having been brought for the purpose, while Tad, breathing hard, staked down the frightened animal he had roped.

"Now we'll see how Mr. Bear is getting along," announced the Professor, as they turned back toward the camp, where the bear was still fighting desperately with the smouldering tent.

As they reached the scene they observed Professor Zepplin hurrying to his tent. He was back again almost at once.

"Just happened to think of my revolver," he explained.

"Think you can kill him with that?" asked Tad.

"I don't know. I can try. It's a thirty-eight calibre."

"Won't even feel it," sniffed Ned. "I've read lots of times that it takes a lot to kill a bear."

The Professor raised his weapon and fired at the spot where the tent appeared to be most active.

Though he had pulled the trigger only once a series of sudden explosions followed, seemingly coming from beneath the tent itself.

"What's that!" demanded the Professor, lowering his own weapon, plainly puzzled.

"Guess the bear's shooting at us," suggested Chunky wisely.

"No. I know what it is," cried Tad.

"You know?" demanded Ned.

"Sure. It's our cartridges exploding. The fire from the lantern has got at those pasteboard boxes in which we carried the shells."

Now they were popping with great rapidity, and instinctively the boys drew further away from the danger zone, though the Professor told them the bullets could not hurt them, there being not sufficient force behind to carry them that distance.

The Professor stood his ground as an object lesson and again resumed his target practice. The tough canvas resisted the bear's efforts, and the fire was burning slowly. However, the tent seemed to be ruined and the boys feared their rifles would share a similar fate.

"He's breaking out!" yelled Chunky, who was some distance to the right of the others, now dancing up and down in his excitement. "Look out for him!"

With a last desperate effort, the animal had succeeded in forcing his way through the stubborn canvas.

"Look, look!" yelled Walter Perkins, greatly excited.

The spectacle was one that for the moment held the boys spellbound. A mass of flame separated itself from the ruins of the tent. With snarls of pain and rage the mass ambled rapidly away in a trail of fire.

"The bear's on fire!" shouted Ned Rector.

"Help!" screamed Chunky.

Blinded by the pain and the flames that had gotten into its eyes, the animal not seeing the lad, lurched heavily against him and Stacy Brown went down with a howl of terror.

The boy, who had not been harmed, was up like a flash, running from the fearful thing as fast as his short legs would carry him.

"Oh, that's too bad!" exclaimed Tad.

He did not refer to the accident to his companion, which he considered as too trivial to notice, but rather to the sufferings of the animal. Tad felt a deep sympathy for any dumb animal that was in trouble, no matter if it were a bear which would have shown him no mercy had they met face to face.

"Professor, let me have your revolver please," he cried.

"What for?"

"I want to put the brute out of his misery. Please do!"

"There are no more shells in it."

"Then load it. I'm going to get Pink-eye. Hurry, hurry! Can't you see how the miserable creature is suffering?"

The lad darted away for his pony, while Professor Zepplin, sharing something of the boy's own feelings, hurried to his tent and recharged his weapon.

He had no more than returned when Tad came dashing up on Pink-eye.

"Where is he? Do you see him?"

"Over there, I can see the fire in the bushes," answered Ned Rector.

"Quick, give me the gun," demanded Tad.

"Wait, I'll go with you," said Ned.

"No, remain where you are," ordered Professor Zepplin. "Some of you will surely be shot. Thaddeus, remember, you are not to go far from camp."

Tad was off in a twinkle. Putting the spurs to Pink-eye, the animal

leaped from the camp and disappeared among the trees.

"I am afraid I should not have allowed him to go," announced the Professor, with a doubtful shake of his head. But it was too late now for regrets.

Tad found the going rough. He soon made out the flaming animal just ahead of him. The beast was down rolling from side to side in a frantic effort to put out the fire that was burning into his flesh.

Tad could not understand why the fur should make so much flame. He spurred the pony as near to the animal as he could get. Then he saw that the bear had become entangled in the guy ropes, and that he was pulling along with him portions of the burning canvas, attached to the ropes. It was this which made the animal a living torch.

The pony in its fright was rearing and plunging, bucking and squealing so that the lad had difficulty in keeping his seat.

"Steady, steady, Pink-eye," he soothed.

For an instant the broncho ceased its wild antics and stood trembling with fear.

"Bang!"

Tad had aimed the heavy revolver and pulled the trigger.

Instantly the pony went up into the air again and the lad gripped its sides with his legs, giving a gentle pressure with the spurs.

"Whoa, Pink-eye! I hit Mm, I did. I aimed for his head, but I must have merely grazed it. I wish I could kill the brute and put him out of his misery," said the lad more concerned for the suffering animal before him than for his own safety.

No sooner had he fired the first shot, than the bear sprang to its feet and sped away up a steep bank. Tad noticed that the bear's rolling had extinguished some of the fire, but he knew that it was still burrowing in the beast's fur, causing him great agony.

"I am too far away to hit him. I've got to get closer," decided the boy. "Pink-eye, do you think you can make that climb?"

The pony shook its head and rattled the bits in its mouth.

"All right, old chap, try it."

A cluck and a gentle slap on the broncho's flanks sent him straight for the steep bank. At first his feet slipped under him; he stumbled, righted himself and digging in the slender hoofs fairly lifted himself up and up. In the meantime Mr. Bruin was making better progress. He seemed unable to escape from the fire, but he could get away from this new enemy, the gun in the hands of the boy on the horse.

Every little while as he found he had gained on his pursuer the bear would throw himself down, and with snarls and angry growls, take a few awkward rolls; then be up and off again.

Once more the lad thought he was near enough to take another shot.

Releasing the reins and dropping them to the pony's neck, he steadied the hand that held the gun with the left and fired.

"Oh, pshaw, I missed him!" he groaned. "That's too bad. I'm only adding to his misery. Next time I'll get nearer to him before I try to shoot."

He went at Pink-eye, applying every method with which he was familiar to increase the pony's speed. Pink-eye responded as best he could, and began climbing the hill that had now developed into a fair sized mountain, making even more rapid headway than the bear himself.

"Good boy," encouraged Tad. "We'll overhaul him if you can keep that up. Steady now. Don't slip or you'll tumble me down the hill and yourself, too. Steady, Pink-eye. W-h-o-e-e!"

"Bang!"

The bear was running broadside to him and the lad could not resist taking another shot at it. Like the previous effort, however, he had failed.

Tad tittered an exclamation of disgust and put spurs to the pony.

"I never did know how to handle a revolver," he complained. "I'll begin to practise with this gun to-morrow if I get out of this scrape safely."

He had failed to take into consideration that a bear was an extremely difficult animal to kill, and that frequently one of them could carry many bullets in its body without seeming to be bothered at all.

But the lad was determined to get this one. He had not thought of where he was going nor how far from camp he had strayed. His one desire now was to get the animal and put a quick end to it.

This time Tad was enabled to get closer to Bruin than at any time during the chase. He drove the pony at a gallop right up alongside of the animal.

Leaning over he aimed the gun at the beast's head, holding it firmly with both hands.

Tad gave the trigger a quick, firm pressure. A sharp explosion followed.

At the same instant, Pink-eye in a frightened effort to get clear of the bear, leaped to one side. The lad, leaning over from the saddle, was taken unawares, and making a desperate effort to grasp the saddle pommel, Tad was hurled sideways to the ground.

"Whoa, Pink-eye!" he commanded sharply as he was falling. But Pink-eye refused to obey. The pony uttered a loud snort and plunged into the bushes. There he paused, wheeled, and peered out

suspiciously at the boy and the bear.

Tad's shot had gone home. His aim had been true. Yet the sting of the bullet served only to anger the bear still further. With an angry growl, it turned and charged the lad ferociously.

In falling, the plucky boy had struck on his head and shoulders, the fall partially stunning him. For an instant, he pivoted on his head, then toppling over on his back, he lay still.

Powerless to move a muscle, the lad was dimly conscious of a hulking figure standing over him, its hot breath on his face. His right hand clutched the revolver, but he seemed unable to raise it.

A loud explosion sounded in Tad Butler's ears, then sudden darkness overwhelmed him.

## CHAPTER VI

### LOST IN THE ROSEBUD RANGE

"Whoa, Pink-eye!" muttered the lad, stirring restlessly. "I'll get him next time. Look out, he's charging us. Oh!"

The boy suddenly opened his eyes. The darkness about him was deep and impenetrable and he was conscious of a heavy weight on his chest. What it was, he did not know, and some moments passed before he had recovered sufficiently to form an intelligent idea of what had happened.

All at once he recollected.

"It was the bear," he murmured. "I wonder if I am dead!"

No, he could feel the ground under him, and a rock that his right hand rested on, felt cold and chilling. But what of the pressure on his chest?

Cautiously the lad moved a hand toward the object that was holding him down. His fingers lightly touched it.

Tad could scarce repress a yell.

It was the head of the bear that was resting on him, and he had no idea whether the animal were dead or asleep, awaiting the moment when the lad should stir again to fasten its cruel teeth into his body.

The boy was satisfied, however, that by exerting all his strength he would be able to pull himself away before the beast could awaken, even, providing it were still alive.

First he sought cautiously for his weapon, his fingers groping about over the ground at his right hand. He could not find it. Undoubtedly it had fallen underneath the bear.

Tad determined to make a desperate effort to escape. He felt as if

his hair were standing on end.

With a cry that he could not keep back, the lad whirled over and sprang to his feet. As he did so he leaped away, running with all his might until he had put some distance between himself and the prostrate animal.

Realizing that he was not being followed, Tad brought up sharply and dodged behind a tree. There he stood listening intently for several minutes.

Not a sound disturbed the stillness of the night. The leaves of the trees hung limp and lifeless, for no breeze was stirring.

"I wonder if he's dead," whispered the lad, almost afraid to trust his voice out loud. "Maybe that shot finished him. I must find out somehow."

Tad searched his clothes for matches, finally finding his match safe. Next he sought to gather some sticks with which to make a torch, but the only wood he was able to find was of oak and so green that it would not burn.

"That's too bad," he muttered. "I'll have to try it with the matches."

Lighting one he picked his way carefully toward the place where he had been lying, peering into the shadows ahead of him suspiciously as he went.

"There he is," breathed Tad.

He could faintly make out the figure of the bear lying half on its side as it had been before, the only difference being that the animal's head was stretched out on the ground instead of on the lad's chest.

"I believe he's dead. He must be or he'd have been after me before this," decided the boy. "I'm going to find out."

Mustering his courage, Tad continued his cautious approach, lighting match after match, shading the flame with his hands so that the light would not get into his eyes and prevent him from seeing anything ahead of him.

It required no little courage for a boy alone in the mountains to walk up to a bear, not knowing whether the animal were dead or alive. Yet when Tad Butler made up his mind to do a certain thing, he persisted until he had accomplished it.

He reached the side of the animal, that is, close enough so that he could get a good view of it.

The bear never moved and Tad drew closer, walking on his toes that he might make no sound. There seemed no other way to make certain except to stir the animal.

"I'll do it," whispered Tad.

Cautiously lighting another match he drew back his left foot and administered a sound kick to the beast's side.

Thinking that the bear had moved under the blow, Tad whirled and ran tittering a loud "Oh!"

He waited, but could hear no sound.

"I believe I am afraid of myself. That bear hasn't stirred at all. I'm going back this time and make sure."

He did. But this time, steeling himself to the task, Tad stood still after he had prodded the beast with his foot again. There was no movement other than a slight tremor caused by the impact of the kick.

"Hurrah, I've shot a bear!" cried the lad in the excess of his excitement. "I wonder what the boys will say. The next question is how am I going to get him back to camp?"

Tad pondered over this problem some moments.

"I know," he cried. "I'll hitch a rope to him and make Pink-eye tow him out. But where is that pony?"

All at once the realization came to him that the pony had thrown him off. That was the last he had seen of Pink-eye.

Tad whistled and called, listening after each attempt without the slightest result.

"He's gone. I've got to find my way back as best I can. The worst of it is I may be a long way from camp, but I guess I can find my way with the compass all right."

The compass, however, was nowhere to be found. The lad went through his pockets twice in search of it.

"Pshaw! Just my luck. I'm as bad at losing things as Chunky is in falling in. I'll get the gun anyway, for the Professor will be provoked if I go back without it. Ah, there it is."

Tad picked up the weapon joyfully.

"I've got something to defend myself with, at least," he told himself. A moment later when he discovered that the weapon held nothing but empty shells, the keen edge of his joy was dulled.

"Well, it's better to pack back an empty gun than no gun at all," he decided philosophically. Let me see, I think we came up that way. They'll build a big fire so I can see it and I ought to be there within half an hour at least."

The lad struck out confidently. He had been lost in the wilderness before, and though he felt a slight uneasiness he had no doubt of his ability to find the camp eventually.

He walked vigorously for half an hour. Then he halted. The same impressive silence surrounded him.

"I think I have been going a little too far to the left," he decided. He changed his course and plodded on methodically again.

Another half hour passed and once more the lad paused, this time with the realization strong upon him that he had lost his way.

Placing both hands to his mouth Tad uttered a long drawn "C-o-o-e-e-e!" He listened intently, then repeated the call.

The sound of his own voice almost frightened him.

"Oh, I'm lost!" he cried, now fully appreciating his position.

The panic of the lost seized him and Tad ran this way and that, plunging ahead for some distance, then swerving to the right or to the left in a desperate attempt to free himself from the endless thicket, bruising his body from contact with the trunks of the trees and cutting his hands as they struck the rocks violently when he fell.

"Tad Butler, you stop this!" he commanded sternly, bringing himself up sharply. "I didn't think you were such a silly kid as to be afraid of the dark." But in his innermost heart the lad knew that it was not the shadows that had so upset him. It was the feeling of being lost in an unknown forest.

Instead of being in the foothills as he had supposed, he was penetrating the fastnesses of the Rosebud Mountains themselves.

"There is no use in my going on like this," he decided finally. "I'll sit down and wait for daylight. That's all I can do. I surely can find my way back to camp when the light comes again."

The next question was where should he go-- where find a safe place to stay until morning. Tad remembered with a start that there were bears in the range. He knew this from his own recent experience. How many other savage beasts there might be in the woods he did not know. He had heard some one speak of mountain lions, and having seen these before, he fervently hoped he might not have another experience with them, unarmed as he was.

"If this gun only were loaded, I should feel better."

After searching around for some time, Tad found a ledge that seemed to rise to a considerable height. Up this he clambered. It would give him a good view in the morning anyway, besides protecting him from any prowling animals that might chance in that part of the forest.

Tad ensconced himself in a slight depression, and with a flat rock for a resting place, leaned back determined to make the best of his position.

A gentle breeze now stirred the foliage above his head and all about him until the sound became a restless murmur, as if Nature were holding council over the lad's predicament.

The lost boy did not so interpret the sounds, however. He made a

more practical application of them.

"It's going to rain," he decided wisely, casting a glance above him at the sky, which was becoming rapidly overcast. "And I haven't any umbrella," he added, grinning at his own feeble joke. "Well, I've been wet before. I cannot well be any more so than I was last night. I'll bet the rainwater will be warmer than the waters in the East Fork. If it isn't I'll surely freeze to death."

Fortunately he had worn his coat when he left the camp, else he would now have suffered from the cold. As it was, he shivered, but more from nervousness than from the chill night air.

"Yoh -- hum, but I'm sleepy," he murmured drowsily. A moment more and his head had drooped to one side and Tad Butler was sleeping as soundly as if tucked away between his own blankets back in his tent in the foothills.

## CHAPTER VII

### ALMOST BETRAYED BY A SNEEZE

Tad awakened with a start.

His first impression was that he smelled smoke, and for the moment he believed himself back in camp. A movement convinced him of his error. A jagged point of rock had cut into his flesh while he slept. He almost cried out with the pain of it, and as he moved a little to shift his body from it, the wound hurt worse than ever.

The lad was still surrounded by an impenetrable darkness. It all came back to him--but standing out stronger than all the rest was the fact that he was lost.

"Wonder how long I've slept," he muttered. "Seems as if I had been here a year. Lucky I awoke or I'd been stuck fast on that rock, for good and all. Whew! B-r-r-r! I think it's going to snow. Thought it was going to rain just before I went to sleep. Wonder if they have snow up here in the summer time. Have almost everything else," continued the lad, muttering to himself, half under his breath.

Slowly rising he shook himself vigorously and rubbed his palms together to get his circulation stirred up.

"Hello, what's that? I remember now, I smelled smoke or thought I did."

Tad sniffed the chill air suspiciously.

"It is smoke," he decided. "Maybe I've set the woods on fire with my matches. Guess I'll climb down and investigate."

He started to move down the side of the ledge when it occurred to him that perhaps it would be better to investigate from where he was; he did not know what danger he might be running into if he were to climb down without first having made sure that it was perfectly safe to do so. Just what he might meet with he did not know. But he

felt an uneasy sense of impending danger.

"Often feel that way when I first wake up, especially if I've been eating pie the night before," he confided to himself, in order to urge his courage back to life.

Bending forward he peered from side to side, but was unable to find a single trace of light, anywhere about him. If it were a fire it must be some distance away, he concluded.

"If it were some distance away, I wouldn't smell it. The wind has died down. No, the fire that smoke comes from is right near by me," he whispered.

The sense of human habitation near him caused his pulses to beat more rapidly. The question that remained for him to decide, was who was it that had started the fire?

Tad Butler determined to find out if possible, and at once.

He crept cautiously to the right, feeling his way along the ledge, not being sure how near he was to the edge. He found it more suddenly than he had expected, and narrowly missed falling over head first.

"Whew! That was a close call," he muttered. "I must be more careful."

There was no sign of either smoke or fire below him, as he observed after getting his balance again. He drew back cautiously and worked his way to the side that he had been facing, yet with no better result than before.

There yet remained two sides to be investigated--the one he had climbed up and the other that lay to the left of him. Tad chose the latter as the most likely to give him the information he sought. However, he found that the edge lay some distance away. The table of rock was much wider than he had imagined, when he first ascended to it.

The way was rough. Once the lad's foot slipped into a crevice. In seeking to withdraw it he gave the ankle a wrench that caused him to settle down on the rocks with a half moan of pain. His shoe had become wedged in between the rocks so that he had difficulty in withdrawing it at all, and the injured ankle gave him a great deal of pain as he struggled to release himself.

"Guess I'll have to take off my shoe. Hope I haven't sprained my ankle. I'll be in a fine mess if I have," he grumbled.

The ankle gave him considerable trouble; but he rubbed it all of ten minutes, and he found that he could endure his shoe again. He was full of curiosity as well as anxiety to learn the cause of the smoke, which, by this time, seemed to be coming his way in greater volume.

After having relaced the shoe and leggin, Tad started on again, this time on all fours, not trusting himself to try to walk, feeling his way ahead of him with his hands, which he considered the safer way

to do.

"There's somebody down there," he whispered, after a long interval of slow creeping over the rocks. "I wonder who it is? Perhaps they are looking for me. I'll give them a surprise if they are."

The surprise, however, was to be Tad's.

At last he reached the edge of the little butte. Slowly stretching his neck and lying flat on his stomach, he peered over.

A cloud of black smoke rolled up into his face, causing the lad to withdraw hastily.

"Aka-c-h-e-w," sneezed Tad, burying his face in his hands.

"Whew, what a smudge! I'll bet they heard that sneeze."

"What's that?" demanded a gruff voice below. "Sounded like somebody sneezing."

"No, it's an owl," replied another. "I've heard that kind before. Sometimes you'd think it was a fellow snoring."

"Must be funny kind of a bird," grunted the first speaker.

"He's right. That's exactly what I am," growled Tad, who had plainly overheard their conversation. Yet he was thankful that the men below had not realized the truth. Tad was quite willing to be mistaken for a bird under the circumstances.

After making sure that the men were not going to investigate the sound, the boy crept again toward the edge, working to the right a little further this time, so that the smoke might not smite him full in the face as had been the case before.

There were four of them--strangers. The boy observed that they were dressed like cowboys, broad brimmed hats, blue shirts and all. From the belt of each was suspended a holster from which protruded the butt of a heavy revolver.

"Cowboys," he breathed. "At least they ought to be and I hope they are nothing else."

The lad's attention was fixed particularly on one of the party. He was all of six feet tall, powerfully built, his swarthy face covered with a scraggly growth of red beard, and with a face of a peculiarly sinister appearance.

"When do they expect the herd?" asked the first speaker.

"Be here the day after tomorrow I reckon," answered the man with the red beard.

"How many?"

"They say there's five thousand sheep in the herd, but it's more'n likely there'll be ten when they git here."

"Huh!" grunted the other.

"There'll be less when we git through with them."

"You bet."

"Boss Simms will be mad. He'll be ripping, when we clean him out."

Two of the men rose at the big fellow's direction and stalked off into the bushes to attend to their ponies, which the lad could hear stirring restlessly, but could not see.

"Simms!" breathed Tad. "What does this mean? Those men are up to some mischief. I know it. I must find out what it is they are planning to do."

Tad learned a few moments later, but in his attempts to overhear what the plans of these strange men were, he nearly lost his own life.

## CHAPTER VIII

### INTO THE ENEMY'S CAMP

"Has Simms been warned that he'd better keep them out of this here territory?" asked one.

"Yes."

"Who told him?"

"Bob Moore, who owns the Double X Ranch on the west side of the range. I saw to that," announced the man with the beard.

Tad decided that he was the leader of the party, but it was not yet clear what they were planning to do. Yet he knew that if he listened long enough something was sure to be dropped that would give him a clue to the mystery.

"Bob's mad as a trapped bear over it. Swears he'll kill every sheep in the country before he'll let Simms drive in the new herd and graze it here."

"Suppose you put it into his head proper like to do something?" laughed one.

"Well, I did talk it over with him a bit," admitted the leader. "But he wasn't hard to show."

"When is the thing coming off?"

"We haven't decided yet. We four will talk that over. Perhaps the same night they get in. They'll be restless then and easy to start."

"But won't the foreman corral the sheep?"

"Don't think so. Haven't room. They haven't fixed up a new corral, because they expected to graze the sheep on north. That many will clean up the range right straight ahead of us for more'n a hundred miles, so that we cattle men won't have half a chance to graze our cattle," grinned the spokesman of the party.

His companions laughed harshly.

"I reckon," answered another. "We'll have all the cattle men on both sides of the Rosebud range so stirred up that they will pitch into that flock like hyenas who haven't had a square meal since snow fell last. When they break loose there's going to be fun, now I tell you. That's the time we get busy. We ought to be able to get a thousand of them anyhow. Before next morning we'll be so far down toward the Big Horn range that they won't catch us. And besides, after the cattle men get through killing mutton, a thousand more or less won't be missed. It'll make a nice bunch to add to our flock. If we work that a few times we'll have enough to make a shipment worth while."

"So that's the game is it?" muttered Tad Butler. "Well, they won't do it if I can help it." Yet he realized how powerless he was at that moment to defeat their nefarious plans.

Somehow they were going to urge the real cattle men to use highhanded measures to destroy Mr. Simms's flock. They were going to scatter them, and then these men were going to make off with all they could drive away. It did not seem to the listening boy that such things were possible; yet Mr. Simms was authority for the statement that such acts were not unknown in this far northern state.

There were still many points that Tad was not clear on, but he had heard enough to enable him to give the rancher a timely warning of what they proposed to do.

The lad knew what that meant. It meant trouble. His sympathies had been largely with the cattle men--he had looked down on the sheep industry and for the reason that he knew only what the cattle men had told him about it.

At that moment Tad Butler was experiencing a change of heart. That they could plan ruthlessly to slaughter the inoffensive little animals passed his comprehension. A remark below him caused the lad to prick up his ears and listen intently.

"As I came over the Little Muddy this afternoon, I thought I saw some sort of a camp in the foothills," said a voice. "Thought mebby that might be the outfit, though I couldn't see what they were doing on that side of the range."

"Oh," laughed the big man, "I know the one you mean. Yes, I took a look at that outfit myself."

"Oh, he did, eh? Wonder we didn't see him," grunted Tad, realizing that the men referred to the camp of the Pony Riders. "There was something besides bears around there, I see."

"Find out what it was!"

"Yes, it seemed to be a camp of boys. There was only one man in the bunch so far as I could see. He was a tall gent with whiskers that hadn't been shaved for two weeks o' Sundays."

Tad could not repress a laugh.

"I wish the boys could hear that," he said, laughing softly. "That hits off the Professor better than a real picture could do."

"Huh! What were they doing!"

"You can search me for the answer. I haven't got it," laughed the big fellow. "We don't need to bother about them. They're out here with some crazy idea in their tops. They can't interfere with our plans any."

"You'd better not be too sure about that," chuckled Tad. "Perhaps one of them may if he has the good luck to get out of here without being discovered."

"What's the plan, Bluff?"

"So that's his name? I'll remember that," muttered Tad.

"That's what I wanted you boys to meet me here for. I want you to see all the ranchers before to-morrow night on both sides of the Rosebud. Understand now, no blunt giving away of the game. You want to start by telling them you hear Boss Simms is bringing in ten thousand head of sheep, and that he's going to graze them up the valley all the way over the free grass to the north. Tell them that it'll be mighty poor picking for the cows and so on until you get 'em good and properly mad----"

"Yes, what then?"

"Better let the ranchers make threats first, then you can say that you hear the others are going to teach Boss Simms a lesson and stampede his flock to-morrow or next night. Say you hear the word will go out when the mine is ready to touch a match to. You'll know how to work it?"

"Sure thing, Bluff. Who do you want us to see?"

"I want you and Jake to take the west side of the mountains. Lazy and I will take the east. Work it thoroughly and don't you go to making any bad breaks. Right after the job is over, besides the s

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