Owners Up

W.A. Fraser

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CLATAWA had put racing in Walla Walla in cold storage.

You can't have any kind of sport with one individual, horse or man, and Clatawa had beaten everything so decisively that the gamblers sat down with blank faces and asked, "What's the use?"

Horse racing had been a civic institution, a daily round of joyous thrills—a commendable medium for the circulation of gold. The Nez Perces Indians, who owned that garden of Eden, the Palouse country, and were rich, would troop into Walla Walla long rolls of twenty−dollar gold pieces plugged into a snake−like skin till the thing resembled a black sausage, and bet the coins as though they were nickels.

It was a lovely town, with its straggling clap−boarded buildings, its U.S. Cavalry post, its wide−open dance halls and gambling palaces; it was a live town was Walla Walla, squatting there in the center of a great luxuriant plain twenty miles or more from the Columbia and Snake Rivers.

Snaky Dick had roped a big bay with black points that was lord of a harem of wild mares; he had speed and stamina, and also brains; so they named him "Clatawa," that is, "The−one−who−goes−quick." When Clatawa found that men were not terrible creatures he chummed in, and enjoyed the gambling, and the racing, and the high living like any other creature of brains.

He was about three−quarter warm blood. How the mixture nobody knew. Some half−bred mare, carrying a foal, had, perhaps, escaped from one of the great breeding ranches, such as the "Scissors Brand Ranch" where the sires were thoroughbred, and dropped her baby in the herd. And the colt, not being raced to death as a two−year−old, had grown into a big, upstanding bay, with perfect unblemished bone, lungs like a blacksmith's bellows and sinews that played through unruptured sheaths. His courage, too, had not been broken by the whip and spur of pin−head jocks. There was just one rift in the lute, that dilution of cold blood. He wasn't a thoroughbred, and until his measure was taken, until some other equine looked him in the eye as they fought it out stride for stride, no man could just say what the cold blood would do; it was so apt to quit.

At first Walla Walla rejoiced when Snaky Dick commenced to make the Nez Perces horses look like pack mules; but now had come the time when there was no one to fight the "champ," and the game was on the hog, as Iron Jaw Blake declared.

Then Iron Jaw and Snaggle Tooth Boone, and Death−on−the−trail Carson formed themselves into a committee of three to ameliorate the monotony.

They were a picturesque trio. Carson was a sombre individual, architecturally resembling a leafless gaunt−limbed pine, for he lacked but a scant half inch of being seven feet of bone and whip−cord.

Years before he had gone out over the trail that wound among sage bush and pink−flowered ball cactus up into the Bitter Root Mountains with "Irish" Fagan. Months after he came back alone; more sombre, more gaunt, more sparing of speech, and had offered casually the statement that "Fagan met death on the trail." This laconic epitome of a gigantic event had crystallized into a moniker for Carson, and he became solely "Death−on−the−trail."

Snaggle Tooth Boone had a wolf−like fang on the very doorstep of his upper jaw, so it required no powerful inventive faculty to rechristen him with aptitude.

Blake was not only iron−jawed physically, but all his dealings were of the bullheaded order; finesse was as foreign to Iron Jaw as caviare to a Siwash.

So this triumvirate of decorative citizens, with Iron Jaw as penman, wrote to Reilly at Portland, Oregon, to send in a horse good enough to beat Clatawa, and a jock to ride him. Iron Jaw's directions were specific, lengthy; going into detail. He knew that a thoroughbred, even a selling plater, would be good enough to take the measure of any cross−bred horse, no matter how good the latter apparently was, running in scrub races. He also knew the value of weight as a handicap, and the Walla Walla races were all matches, catch−weights up. So he wrote to

Reilly to send him a tall, slim rider who could pad up with clothes and look the part of an able−bodied cow puncher.

It was a pleasing line of endeavor to Reilly—he just loved that sort of thing; trimming "come−ons" was right in his mitt. He fulfilled the commission to perfection, sending up, by the flat river steamer, the Maid of Palouse, what appeared to be an ordinary black ranch cow−pony in charge of "Texas Sam," a cow puncher. From Lewiston, the head of navigation, Texas Sam rode his horse behind the old Concord coach over the twenty−five miles of trail to Walla Walla.

The endeavor had gone through with swift smoothness. Nobody but Iron Jaw, Death−on−the−trail, and Snaggle Tooth knew of the possibilities that lurked in the long chapp−legged Texas Jim and the thin rakish black horse that he called Horned Toad.

As one spreads bait as a decoy, Sam was given money to flash, and instructed in the art of fool talk.

Iron Jaw was banker in this game; while Snaggle Tooth ran the wheel and faro lay−out in the Del Monte saloon. So, when Texas dribbled a thousand dollars across the table, "bucking the tiger," it was show money; a thousand that Iron Jaw had passed him earlier in the evening, and which Snaggle Tooth would pass back to its owner in the morning.

There was no hurry to spring the trap. Texas Sam allowed that he himself was an uncurried wild horse from the great desert; that he was all wool and a yard wide; that he could lick his fighting weight in wild cats; and bet on anything he fancied till the cows came home with their tails between their legs. And all the time he drank: he would drink with anybody, and anybody might drink with him. This was no piking game, for the three students of get−it−in−big−wads had declared for a coup that would cause Walla Walla to stand up on its hind legs and howl.

Of course Snaky Dick and his clique cast covetous eyes on the bank roll that Texas showed an inkling of when he flashed his gold. That Texas had a horse was the key to the whole situation: a horse that he was never tired of describing as the king−pin cow−pony from Kalamazoo to Kamschatka; a spring−heeled antelope that could run rings around any cayuse that had ever looked through a halter.

But Snaky Dick went slow. Some night when Texas was full of hop he'd rush him for a match. Indeed the Clatawa crowd had the money ready to plunk down when the psychological pitch of Sam's Dutch courage had arrived.

It was all going swimmingly, both ends of Walla Walla being played against the middle, so to speak, when the "unknown quantity" drifted into the game.

A tall, lithe man, with small placid gray eyes set in a tanned face, rode up out of the sage brush astride a buckskin horse on his way to Walla Walla. He looked like a casual cow−puncher riding into town with the laudable purpose of tying the faro outfit hoof and horn, and, incidentally, showing what could be done to a bar when a man was in earnest and had the mazuma.

As the buckskin leisurely loped down the trail−road that ran from the cavalry barracks to the heart of Walla Walla, his rider became aware of turmoil in the suburbs. In front of a neat little cottages the windows of which held flowers partly shrouded by lace curtains, a lathy individual, standing beside a rakish black horse, was orating with Bacchanalian vehemence. Gathered from his blasphemous narrative he knew chronologically the past history of a small pretty woman with peroxided hair, who stood in the open door. He must have enlarged on the sophistication of her past life, for the little lady, with a crisp oath, called the declaimer a liar and a seven−times misplaced offspring.

The rider of the buckskin checked his horse, threw his right leg loosely over the saddle, and restfully contemplated the exciting film.

The irate and also inebriated man knew that he had drawn on his imagination, but to be told in plain words that he was a liar peeved him. With an ugly oath he swung his quirt and sprang forward, as if he would bring its lash down on the décolletéd shoulders of the woman.

At that instant something that looked like a boy shot through the door as though thrust from a catapult, and landed, head on, in the bread basket of the cantankerous one, carrying him off his feet.

The man on the buckskin chuckled, and slipped to the ground.

But the boy had shot his bolt, so to speak; the big man he had tumbled so neatly, soon turned him, and, rising, was about to drive a boot into the little fellow's rib. I say about to, for just then certain fingers of steel twined themselves in his red neckerchief, he was yanked volte face, and a fist drove into his midriff.

Of course his animosity switched to the newcomer; but as he essayed a grapple the driving fist caught him quite neatly on the northeast corner of his jaw. He sat down, the goggle stare in his eyes suggesting that he contemplated a trip to dreamland.

The little woman now darted forward, crying in a voice whose gladsomeness swam in tears: "Bulldog Carney! You always man—you beaut!" She would have twined her arms about Bulldog, but the placid gray eyes, so full of quiet aloofness, checked her.

But the man's voice was soft and gentle as he said: "The same Bulldog, Molly, girl. Glad I happened along."

He turned to the quarrelsome one who had staggered to his feet: "You ride away before I get cross; you smell like the corpse of a dead booze−fighter!"

The man addressed looked into the gray eyes switched on his own for inspection; then he turned, mounted the black, and throwing over his shoulder, "I'll get you for this, Mister Butter−in!" rode away.

The other party to the rough−end−tumble, winded, had erected his five feet of length, and with a palm pressed against his chest was emitting between wheezy coughs picturesque words of encomium upon Bulldog, not without derogatory reflections upon the man who had ridden away.

In the midst of this vocal cocktail he broke off suddenly to exclaim in astonishment:

"Holy Gawd!"

Then he scuttled past Carney, slipped a finger through the ring of the buckskin's snaffle and peered into the horse's face as if he had found a long−lost friend.

Perhaps the buckskin remembered him too, for he pressed a velvet, mouse−colored muzzle against the lad's cheek and whispered something.

The little man ran a hand up and down the horse's canon−bones with the inquisitiveness of a blind man reading raised print.

Then he turned to Carney who had been chatting with Molly—in full dignity of Walla Walla nomenclature Molly B'Damn—and asked: "Where the hell d'you get Waster?"

A faint smile twitched the owner's tawny mustache, chased away by a little cloud of anger, for in that land of many horse stealings to ask a man how he had come by his horse savoured of discourtesy. But it was only a little wizen−faced, flat−chested friend of Molly B'Damn's; so Carney smiled again, and answered by asking:

"Gentle−voiced kidaloona, explain what you mean by the Waster. That chum of mine's name is Pat—Patsy boy, often enough."

"Pat nothin'! nor Percy, nor Willie; he's just plain old Waster that I won the Ranch Stakes on in Butte, four years ago."

"Guess again, kid," Carney suggested.

"Holy Mike! Say, boss, if you could think like you can punch you'd be all right. That's Waster. Listen, Mister Cowboy, while I tell you 'bout his friends and relatives. He's by Gambler's Money out of Scotch Lassie, whose breedin' runs back to Prince Charlie: Gambler's Money was by Counterfeit, he by Spendthrift, and Spendthrift's sire was imported Australian, whose grandsire was the English horse, Melbourne. D'you get that, sage−brush rider?"

"I hear sounds. Tinkle again, little man."

Molly laughed, her white teeth and honest blue eyes discounting the chemically yellow hair until the face looked good.

The little man stretched out an arm, at the end of it a thin finger levelled at the buckskin's head:

"Have you ever took notice of them lop ears?"

"Once—which was continuous."

"And you thought there was a jackass strain in him, eh?"

"Pat looked good to me all the time, ears and all."

"Well, them sloppy listeners are a throw−back to Melbourne, he was like that. I've read he was a mean−lookin' cuss, with weak knees; but he was all horse: and ain't Waster got bad knees? And don't he get that buckskin from Spendthrift who was a chestnut, same's his dad, Australian?" This seemed a direct query for he broke off to cough.

"Go on, lad——"

"Excuse me, sorry"—Molly was speaking—"this is Billy MacKay. My old school chum, Bessie, his sister,

wished him on me a month ago to see what God's country could do for that busted chest."

The little man was impatient over the switch to himself—the horse was the thing.

"If it wasn't for them dicky forelegs—Gawd! what a horse Waster'd been. And if his owner, Leatherhead Mike Doyle, had kept the weight offen him he'd 've stood up anyway, for he was the truest thing. Say, Bulldog,—don't mind me, I like that name, it talks good,—Waster didn't need no blinkers he didn't need no spurs; he didn't need no whip—I'd as lief hit a child with the bud as hit him. He'd just break his heart tryin'. Waster was Leatherhead's meal ticket, dicky knees and all, till he threw a splint. It was the weight that broke him down; a hundred and thirty−six pounds the handicapper give him in the Gold Range Stakes at a mile and a quarter; at that he was leadin' into the stretch and finished, fightin', on three legs. He was beat, of course; and Leatherhead was broke, and I never see Waster again. A trombone player in a beer garden would have known the little cuss with them hot−jointed knees couldn't pack weight, and would 've scratched him."

Carney put a hand caressingly on Jockey Mackay's shoulder, saying: "You stand pat with me, kid—your heart is about human, I guess. What was that hostile person's game?"

Molly explained with a certain amount of asperity:

"He comes here to−day, Bulldog—Well, you know——"

Carney nodded placidly.

"He'd seen me down in the Del Monte joint, and thought—well, he was filled up on Chinese rum. He wasn't none too much like a man in anything he said or done, but I was standin' for him so long as he don't get plumb Injun."

"Injun? Cripes! An Injun's a drugstore gent compared to that stiff, Slimy Red," Billy objected.

"Yes, that's what started it, Bulldog,—Billy knew him."

"Knew him—huh! Slimy Red was the crookedest rider that ever throwed a leg over a horse. He used to give his own father the wrong steer and laugh when the old man's money was burnt up on a horse that finished in the ruck."

"He comes in here palmin' off the moniker of Texas Sam, a big ranch guy that sees blood on the moon when he's out for a time," Molly helped with.

"I didn't know him at first," the little man admitted, "his face bein' a garden of black alfalfa, till I sees that the crop is red for half an inch above the surface where it had pushed through the dye. Then he says, 'I'll bet my left eye agin' your big toe,' and I'm on, for that's a great sayin' with Slimy Red Smith—he was Slimy Red hisself. And politely, not givin' the game away, but callin' him 'Texas,' I suggests that me and Molly is goin' to sing hymns for a bit, and that he'd best push on."

"Soon's Billy warbles, 'Good−bye, stranger,'" Molly laughed, "this Texas person goes up in the air. Well, you see the finish, Bulldog."

The little man had wrestled a coughing spell into subjection and with apparent inconsistency asked, "Did you ever hear of it rainin' bullfrogs, Mr. Carney?"

Carney nodded, a suspicion flashing upon him that the weak chest was twin brother to a weak brain in Billy the Jock.

"Well, it's been rainin' discard race−horses about Walla Walla."

"Much of a storm?"

"They're comin' kind of thick. There's yours, Waster, and Slimy Red has got Ding Dong; he's out of Weddin' Bells by Tambourine."

"Are you in a hurry, Bulldog?" Molly asked, fancying that Carney's well−known courtesy was perhaps the father of his apparent interest.

"I was, Molly, till I saw you," he answered graciously, a gentle smile lighting up his stern features.

"Oh, you gentleman knight of the road—always the silver−tongued Bulldog. There's a bottle inside with a gold necktie on it, waitin' for a real man to pull the cork. Come on, kid Billy."

The boy looked at Carney, and the latter said: "It's been a full moon since I pattered with anybody about anything but fat pork and sundown. We'll accept the little lady's invitation."

"I can give Waster four quarts of oats, Mr. Carney; I've been ridin' in the way of a cure."

Carney laughed. "You're a sure little bit of all right, kid; the horse first when it comes to grub—that's me; but I'll feed Pat when he's bedded for the night. "

Inside the cottage Molly and Bulldog jaunted back over the life trail upon which they had met at different times and in divers places.

But Jockey Mackay had been thrown back into his life's environment at sight of Waster. He was as full of racing as the wine bottle was full of bubbles; like the wine he effervesced.

"You been here in Walla Walla before?" he asked Carney, breaking in on the memory of a funny something that had happened when Molly and Bulldog were both in Denver.

"Some time since," Carney replied.

"D'you know about Clatawa?"

"Is it a mine or a cocktail, Billy?"

"Clatawa's a horse."

"I might have known," Carney murmured resignedly.

Then the little man narrated of Clatawa, and the fatuous belief Walla Walla held that a horse with cold blood in his veins could gallop fast enough to keep himself warm. He waxed indignant over this, declaring that boneheads that held such crazy ideas ought to be bled white, that is in a monetary way.

Carney, being a Chevalier d'Industrie, had a keen nose for oblique enterprises, but up to the present he had enjoyed the little man's chatter simply because he loved horses himself; but at this, the Clatawa disease, he pricked his ears.

"What is your unsavory acquaintance, Slimy Red, doing here with Ding Dong?" he asked.

A cunning smile twisted the lad's bluish lips as he lighted a cigarette.

"Slimy Red is padded," he vouchsafed after a puff at the cigarette.

"Padded!" Molly exclaimed, her blue eyes rounding.

"Sure thing. That herrin' gut can ride at a hundred and twenty pounds. He's a steeplechase jock, gener'ly, though he's good on the flat, too. He's got a couple of sweaters on under that corduroy jacket to make him look big."

Carney laughed. "That explains something. When I pushed my fist against his stomach I thought it had gone clean through—it sank to the wrist; it was just as though I had punched a bag of feathers."

"But the upper cut was all right, Mr. Carney; it was a lallapaloosa."

"Why all the clothes?" Molly asked.

"I've been dopin' it out," the boy answered. "It's all match races here, catch weights; there ain't one of them could ride a flat car without givin' it the slows, but they know what weight is in a race; they know you can pile enough on to bring a cart horse and a winner of the Brooklyn Handicap together."

"I see," Carney said contemplatively; "Slimy Red, if he makes a match, figures to get a big pull in the weights."

"Sure thing, Mike; Walla Walla will bet the family plate on Clatawa; they'll go down hook, line, and sinker, and then some. They'll fall for the clothes and think Slimy weighs a hundred and seventy. D'you get it?"

"Fancy I do," Carney chuckled. "The avaricious Mister Red is probably here on a missionary venture; he aims to separate these godless ones from the root of evil through having a trained thoroughbred, and an ample pull in the weight."

"Now you're talkin'," Jockey Mackay declared. Then he relapsed into a meditative silence, sipping his wine as he correlated several possibilities suggested by the rainfall of racing horses in Walla Walla.

Carney and Molly drifted into desultory talk again.

After a time Billy spoke.

"It ain't on the cards that a lot of money is comin' to Slimy Red—he don't deserve it; he ought to be trimmed hisself."

"He sure ought," Molly corroborated.

"Hell!" the little man exclaimed; "nobody could never trim Red, 'cause he never had nothin'. I got it! Somebody in Walla Walla is the angel; and Red'll get a rakeoff. He don't own Ding Dong; he couldn't own a lead pad; booze gets his."

"Billy," Molly's face went serious; "I can guess it in once—Iron Jaw! Oh, gee! I've been blind. Iron Jaw, and Snaggle Tooth, and Death−on−the−trail ain't men to cotton to a coot like Slimy Red; they're gamblers, and don't stand for anything that ain't a man, only just while they take his roll. They've been nursin' this four−flusher. It's

been, 'Hello, Texas!' and 'Have a drink, Texas.' I've got it."

"Fancy you have, Molly," Bulldog submitted.

"Gawd! that's the combination," Billy declared. "I was right."

"And Iron Jaw has got a down on Snaky Dick that owns Clatawa over some bad splits in bets," Molly added.

"The old game," Carney laughed. "When thieves fall out honest men win a bet. It would appear from the evidence that Iron Jaw Blake—I know his method of old—has sent out and got some one to ship in a horse and rider to trim Clatawa, and turn an honest penny."

"You're gettin' warm, Bulldog, as we used to say in that child's game," Molly declared. "I know the pippin; one Reilly, at Portland. I heard Iron Jaw and this Texas talkin' about him."

Carney turned toward the little man. "What are we going to do about it, Billy—do we draw cards?"

Billy sprang from his chair, and paced the floor excitedly. "Holy Mike! there never was such a chance. Waster can trim Ding Dong to a certainty at a mile and a quarter. See, Bulldog, that's his distance; he's a stayer from Stayville; but he can't pack weight—don't forget that. If you rode him—let's see——"

The little man stood back and eyed critically the tall package of bone and muscle, that while it suggested no surplus flesh, would weigh well.

"You're a hundred and seventy−five pounds, and you ride in one of 'em rockin' chairs that'll tip the beam at forty pounds. What chance? Slimy'll have a five−pound saddle; he could weigh in, saddle and all, a hundred and twenty−five. You'd be takin' on a handicap of ninety pounds. What chance?"

"I might get an Indian boy," Carney suggested.

"You might get a doll or a pet monkey," Billy sneered. "What chance?"

"And they all work for Iron Jaw," Molly advised; "they'd blow; he'd bribe them to pull the horse."

"What chance?" Billy repeated with the mournful persistency of a parrot. "Guess I'll go out and tell Waster to forget he's a gentleman and go on pluggin' among the sage brush as a cow−pony."

Carney rose when Billy had gone, saying, "Fancy I'll drift on to the rest joint, Molly. I rather want to hold converse with a certain man while the seeing's good, if he's about."

"Good−bye, Bulldog," Molly answered, and her blue eyes followed the figure that slipped so gracefully through the door, their depths holding a look that was beautiful in its honest admiration. "God!" she whispered; "why do women like him—gee!"

Billy was tickling a lop ear on the buckskin.

"Mr. Carney," he said in a low voice, one eye on the cabin door, "you heard what Molly said about Bessie wishin' me on her, didn't you?"

"Uh−huh!"

"Let me give you the straight info. Molly sent the money to Bessie to bring me here; we was both broke. Then I found out Bessie had been gettin' it for a year from her, 'cause I was sick and couldn't ride. I hadn't saved none, thinkin' I'd got Rockefeller skinned to death as a money−getter. It was the wastin' to make weight that got me. I don't have to sweat off flesh now," he added pathetically; "I'm a hundred and two."

"That's Molly Bur−dan" (her right name) "all over—I know her. But don't worry kid. I haven't got anybody to look after, and having money and no use for it makes me lonesome. You give me Bessie's address, and don't tout off Molly that you're doing it."

"I can get the money myself, Mr. Carney—you just listen now. I didn't spring it inside 'cause Molly 'd get hot under the collar; she'd say that if I rode in a race I'd bust a lung. Gee! ridin' to me is just like goin' by−bye in a hammock; it 'd do me good."

Carney put a hand gently on the boy's shoulder, saying: "The size of the package doesn't mean much when it comes to being a man, does it, kid? Spring it; get it off your chest."

Billy made a horseshoe in the sand with the toe of his boot meditatively; then said:

"Slimy Red, of course, will be lookin' for a match for Ding Dong. Most of the races here is sprints, the old Texas game of half−a−mile, and weight don't cut much ice that distance. He'll make it for a mile, or a mile−and−a−quarter, 'cause Ding Dong could stay that distance pretty well himself. If you was to match Waster against the black, and let me ride him, I'd bring home the bacon. He's a fourteen pound better horse than Ding Dong ever was; a handicapper would separate them that much on their form. Gee! I forgot somethin'," and Billy, a shame−faced look in his eyes, gazed helplessly at Bulldog.

"What was it dropped out of your think−pan, kid?"

"The roll. I've been makin' a noise like a man with a bank behind him. A match ain't like where a feller can go into the bettin' ring if he knows a couple of hundred−to−one chances and parley a shoe−string into a block of city houses; a match is even money, just about. And to win a big stake you've got to have the long green."

"How much, Billy?"

"Well, the Iron Jaw bunch, bein' whisky men and gamblers, naturally would stand to lose twenty thousand, at least."

"I could manage it in a couple of days, Billy, by keeping the wires hot."

"Before I forget it, Mr. Carney, if you do buck this crowd make it catch weights. Slimy Red don't own a hair in Ding Dong's tail, of course, but he'll have a bill of sale right enough showin' he's the owner, and as he can ride light they'll word it, 'owners up'".

Carney was thinking fast, and a glint of light shot athwart his placid gray eyes.

"Happy thought, Kid; we'll string with them on that; we'll make it owners up."

"I said catch weights," Billy snapped irritably.

Carney answered with only a quizzical smile, and the boy, turning, walked around the horse eyeing him from every angle. He lifted first one foot and then the others, examining them critically, pressing a thumb into the frogs. He pinched with thumb and forefinger the tendons of both forelegs; he squeezed the horse's windpipe till the latter coughed; then he said:

"Please, Mr. Carney, mount and give him half a furlong at top speed, finishin' up here. Make him break as quick as you can till I see if he's got the slows."

As obedient as a servant Bulldog swung to the saddle, centered the buckskin down the road, wheeled, brought the horse to a standstill, and then, with a shake of the rein and a cry of encouragement, came tearing back, the pound of the horse's hoofs on the turf palpitating the air like the roll of a kettle−drum.

"Great!" the boy commented when Carney, having gently eased the horse down, returned. "He's the same old Waster; he flattens out in that stride of his till he looks like a pony. His flanks ain't pumpin' none. He'll do; he's had lots of work—he's in better condition than Ding Dong, 'cause Slimy Red's been puttin' in most of his trainin' time at the bar. I got a three−pound saddle in my trunk that I won the 'Kenner Stakes' at Saratoga on. Slimy Red will be givin' me about ten pounds if you make the match catch weights; it'll be a cinch—like gettin' money from home. But don't tell Molly."

"We'll split fifty−fifty," Carney said.

"Nothin' doin', Mister Mug; you cop the coin for yourself—how much are you goin' to bet?"

"Five or ten thousand."

"Well, you give me ten per cent of the five thousand—five hundred bucks, if we win. That'll square Molly's bill for bringin' me up here."

"Come inside, kid," Carney said; "I want to write out something."

Inside Carney said, "Molly, I'm going to give Pat to Billy for a riding horse——"

"What?"

But Billy's gasp of astonishment was choked by a frowning wink of one of Bulldog's gray eyes.

"Pat's getting a little old for the hard knocks I have to give a horse," Carney resumed; "that's partly what I came to Walla Walla for, to get a young horse. Let me have a sheet of paper and a pen; it doesn't do for a man to own a horse in this country without handy evidence as how he came by him; and though this is a gift I'm going to make it out in the form of a bill of sale."

Carney drew up a simple bill of sale, stating, that for one dollar, paid in hand, he transferred his buckskin horse "Pat" to William Mackay. Molly signed it as witness.

"I'll have to keep Pat for a day or two till I get a new pony." Bulldog declared; "also rather think I'll leave this bill of sale with a friend in town for safe keeping, Billy might lose it," and a wink closed one of the gray eyes that were turned on the boy's face.

As Carney sat the buckskin outside, he whispered, "Do you get it, Billy—owners up?"

"Gee! I get you."

The little man had been mystified.

"Don't be in a hurry over the race," he advised; "make it for one week away. That'll give me a chance to give

Waster a few lessons in breakin' to bring him back to the old days. I'll put a heavy blanket about his neck for a gallop or two and sweat some of the fat off his pipes. I can get a set of racin' plates made for him, too, for a pound off his feet is four pounds off his back. We'll give him all the fine touches, Mr. Carney, and Waster 'll do his part."

The little man watched the buckskin lope down toward Walla Walla, then he turned in to the cottage where he was greeted by Molly's:

"Ain't Bulldog some man, Billy?"

"Will you tell me something, Molly?" the boy asked hesitatingly.

"Shoot," she commanded.

"Is he—was he—the man—Bessie told me something?"

"There ain't no woman on God's footstool, Billy, can say Bulldog Carney was the man that fell down. That's why we all like him. There ain't a woman on the Gold Coast that ever lamped Bulldog that wouldn't stake him if she had to put her sparklers in hock. And there ain't a man that knows him that'll try to put one over—'tain't healthy. He's got a temper as sweet as a bull pup's, but he's lightnin' when he starts. He don't cotton to no girl, 'cause he was once engaged to one of the sweetest you ever see, Billy."

"Did she die, Molly?"

"The other man did! And nothin' was done to Bulldog 'cause it was comin' to the hound."

Carney rode on till he came to the Mountain House. Here he was at home for the proprietor was an old Gold Range friend.

First he saw that the buckskin had a worthy supper, then he ate his own.

When it had grown dark and the gleaming lights of the Del Monte Saloon were throwing their radiancy out into the street, he put the bridle on his buckskin and rode to the house of "Teddy the Leaper," who was Sheriff of Shoshone County.

The sheriff welcomed Carney with a differential friendship that showed they stood well together as man to man; for though Bulldog's reputation varied in different places, and with different people, it stood strongest with those who had known him longest, and who, like most men of the West, were apt to judge men from their own experience.

Teddy the Leaper admired Bulldog Carney the man; he would have staked his life on anything Carney told him. Officially, as sheriff, the County of Shoshone was his bailiwick, and the County of Shoshone held nothing on its records against Carney. "Always a gentleman," was Teddy's summing up of Bulldog Carney.

Carney drew an envelope from his pocket, saying: "Will you take care of this for me, Sheriff? Inside is a bill of sale of my horse."

"What, Bulldog—the buckskin?" Teddy's eyes searched the speaker's face; it was unbelievable. A light dawned upon the sheriff; Bulldog had put many a practical joke over—he was kidding. Teddy laughed.

"Bulldog," he said, "I've heard that you was English, a son of one of them bloated lords, but faith it's Irish you are. You've as much humor as you've nerve—you're Irish."

"There's also a note in that envelope"—Carney ignored the chaff—"that directs you to pay over to a little lad that's up against it out at Molly's place, any money that might happen to be in your hands if I suddenly—well, if I didn't need it—see?"

"I'll do that, Bulldog."

"Think you'll be at the Del Monte to−night, Sheriff?" Carney asked casually.

Teddy's Irish eyes flashed a quizzical look on the speaker; then he answered diplomatically: "There ain't no call why I got to be there—lest I'm sent for, and I ain't as spry gettin' around as I was when I made that record of forty−six feet for the hop−step−and−jump. If you've got anything to settle, go ahead."

Carney rippled one of his low musical laughs: "I'd like to line you up at the bar, Sheriff, for a thimbleful of poison."

Teddy's eyes again sought the speaker's mental pockets, but the placid face showed no warrant for expected trouble. The Sheriff coughed, then ventured:

"If you're goin' to stack up agin odds, Bulldog, I'll dress for the occasion; I don't gener'ly go 'round hostile draped."

Again Carney laughed. "You might bring a roomy pocket, Sheriff; it might so turn out that I'd like you to hold a few eagle birds till such times as they're right and proper the property of another man or myself. Does that put

any kink in your code?"

"Not when I act for you, Bulldog; 'cause it'll be on the level: I'll be there."

Next Carney rode to the Del Monte and hitching the buckskin to a post, he adjusted his belt till the butt of his gun lay true to the drop of his hand.

As he entered the saloon slowly, his gray eyes flashed over the bar and a group of men on the right of the gaming tables, for there was one man perhaps in Walla Walla he wanted to see before the other saw him. It wasn't Slimy Red—it was a tougher man.

Iron Jaw was leaning against the bar talking to Death−on−the−trail, and behind the bar Snaggle Tooth Boone stood listening to the conversation.

As Carney entered a quick look of apprehension showed for an instant in Iron Jaw's heavy−browned eyes; then a smile of greeting curled his coarse lips. He held out a hand, saying: "Glad to see you, Old Timer. You seem conditioned. Know Carson?"

"Yes."

Carney shook hands with the two men, and reached across to clasp Boone's paw, adding: "We'll sample the goods, Snaggle Tooth."

Boone winced at the appellation, for Carney did not smile; there was even the suspicion of a sneer on the lean face.

"How is Walla Walla?" Carney queried, as the four glasses were held toward each other in salute. "Racing relieved by a little gun argument once in a while, I suppose. Chief Joseph threatening to let his Nez Perces loose on you?"

"Racin' is on the hog," Iron Jaw growled. "There's a bum over yonder pikin' agin the Wheel that's been stung by the racin' bug, but when he calls for a show−down some of 'em will trim him. Hear that?"

Iron Jaw held up a thumb, and they could hear a thin strident voice babbling:

"Walla Walla's a nursery for tin horn sports. There ain't a man here got anythin' but a goose liver pumpin' his system, and a length of rubber hose up his back holdin' his ribs."

Somebody objected; and the voice, that Carney recognized as Texas Sam's snarled:

"Five birds of liberty! You call that bettin'—a hundred iron men?"

"Want to see him?" Iron Jaw queried. "I can't place him. Texas Sam he comes here as; seems to be well fixed; but he's a booze fighter. I guess that's what gives him dreams."

Quiescently Bulldog followed the lead of Iron Jaw and Death−on−the−trail across the room where, with his back to the door, at a roulette table sat Texas Sam. He was winning; three stacks of chips rose to a toppling height at his right hand.

Carney noticed from the color that they were five dollar chips. Knowing from Molly that Texas was a stool pigeon he understood the philosophy of the high−priced counters. It was easier to keep tally on what he drew and what he turned back in after the game, for the losings and the winnings were all a bluff, and the money furnished him for the show had to be accounted for. Iron Jaw trusted no man.

"The game's like roundin' up a bunch of cows heavy in calf," Texas was saying as they approached; "it's too damn slow. I want action."

He placed five chips on the thirteen as the croupier spun the wheel, bleating:

"Hoodoo thirteen's my lucky number. I was whelped on Friday the thirteenth, at thirteen o'clock—as you old leatherheads make it, one A.M."

The little ivory ball skipped and hopped as it slid down from the smooth plane of the wheel to the number chambers. It almost settled into one, and then, as if agitated by some unseen devil of perversity, rolled over the thin wall and lay, like a bird's egg, in a black nest that was number "13."

"By a nose!" Texas exulted. "Do I win, Judge?"

The croupier's face was as expressionless as the silver veil of Mahmoud as he built into pillars over eight hundred dollars in chips, and shoved them across the board to Texas.

The noisy one swept them to the side of the table, and called for a drink.

It was a curiously diversified interest that centered on this play of the uncouth Texas. Iron Jaw and Death−on−the−trail viewed it with apathetic interest, much as a trainer might watch a pupil punching the bag—it didn't mean anything.

Carney, too, knowing its farcical value, looked on, waiting for his opportunity.

Snaky Dick sat across the table from Texas, dribbling a few fifty−cent chips here and there amongst the numbers, also waiting. To him the play was real; he had seen it in reality a thousand times—a man loaded with bad liquor and in possession of money running the gamut. Behind Snaky Dick sat others of the Clatawa clique waiting for his lead. Their money was ready to cinch the match as soon as made.

Iron Jaw watched Snaky Dick furtively; the time seemed ripening. They had arranged, through some little vagaries of the wheel, vagaries that could be brought out by the assistance of the croupier, that apparently Texas should make a killing.

Now the croupier called out: "Make your bets, gentlemen." He gave the wheel a send−off with finger and thumb, his droning voice singing the cadence of: "Hurry up, gentlemen! Make your bets while the merry−go−round plays on."

"For a repeat," Texas shrilled, dropping the chips one after another on to the thirteen square until they stood like a candle. Impatiently the croupier checked him:

"Mind the limit, Mister."

"When I play the sky's my limit," Texas answered.

"Not here," the croupier admonished, sweeping three−quarters of the ivory discs from thirteen.

The little ball of peripatetic fate that had held on its erratic way during this, now settled down into a compartment painted green.

"Double zero!" the croupier remarked, and swept the table bare.

Texas cursed. "There ain't no double zero in racin'; there ain't no green−eyed horse runnin' for the the track—everybody's got a chance. Here! I'm goin' to cash in."

He shoved the ivory chips irritably across the table, and the croupier, stacking them in his board, said: "A thousand and fifty."

As methodically as he had built up the chips, from a drawer he erected little golden plinths of twenty−dollar pieces, and with both hands pushed them toward the winner.

Texas put the palm of his hand on the shiny mound, saying:

"I'm goin' to orate; I'm gettin' plumb hide−bound 'cause of this long sleep in Walla Walla. To−morrow I'm pullin' my freight down the trail to the outside where men is. But these yeller−throated singin' birds says I got a cow−hocked whang−doodle on four hoofs named Horned Toad that can outrun anything that eats with molars in Walla Walla, from a grasshopper's jump to four miles. Now I've said it, ladies—who's next?"

A quiet voice at his elbow answered almost plaintively: "If you will take your paw off those yellow boys I'll bury them twice."

At the sound of that drawling voice Texas sprang to his feet, whirled, and seeing Carney, struck at him viciously. Carney simply bent his lithe body, and the next instant Iron Jaw had Texas by the throat, shaking him like a rat.

"You damn locoed fool!" he swore; "what d'you mean?—what d'you mean?" each query being emphasized by a vigorous shake.

"He simply means," explained Carney, "that he's a cheap bluffer—a wind gambler. When he's called he quits. That's just what I thought."

"Give him a chance, Blake," Death−on−the−trail interposed; "let go!"

Iron Jaw pressed Texas back into his chair, saying:

"You've got too much booze. If you want to bet on your horse sit there and cut out this Injun stuff."

Snaky Dick had jumped to his feet, startled by the fact that Carney was about to break in on his preserve. Now he said: "If Texas is pinin' for a race Clatawa is waitin'—so is his backin'."

Carney turned his gray eyes on the speaker:

"There's a rule in this country, Snaky, that when two men have got a discussion on, others keep out. I've undertaken to call this jack rabbit's bluff, and he makes good, or takes his noisy organ away to play it outside of Walla Walla."

Texas Sam had received a thumb in the rib from Iron Jaw that meant, "Go ahead," so he said, surlily: "There's my money on the table. Anybody can come in—the game's wide open."

"That being so," Carney drawled, "there's a little buckskin horse tied to the post outside, that's carried me for

three years around this land of delight, and he looks good to me."

He unslung from his waist a leather roll, and dropped its snake−like body across the Texas coin, saying:

"There's two thousand in twenties, and if this cheap−singing person sees the raise, it goes for a race at a mile−and−a−quarter between the little buckskin outside and this cow−hocked mule he sings about."

"I want to see this damn buckskin," Texas objected.

"You don't need to worry," Iron Jaw commented; "the horse is pretty nigh as well known as Bulldog."

But Texas, having been born in a very nest of iniquity, having been stable boy, tout, half−mile−track ringer, and runner for a wire−tapping bunch, was naturally suspicious.

"I don't match against an unknown," he objected; "let me lamp this Flyin' Dutchman of the Plains; it may be Salvator for all I know."

"Let him get out the door," Carney sneered "it will be good−bye—we'll never see him again."

"And if we don't," Snaky Dick interposed, "I'll cover your money, Carney."

Bulldog swung the gray eyes, and levelled them at the red−and−yellow streaked beads that did seeing duty in Snaky's face:

"You ever hear about the gent who was kicked out of Paradise and told to go scoot along on his belly for butting in?" Then he followed the little crowd at Texas Sam's heels.

In the yellow glare of the Del Monte lights the buckskin looked very little like a race horse. He stood about fifteen and a quarter hands, looking not much more than a pony, as, half asleep, he had relaxed his body; the lop ears hanging almost at right angles to his lean bony head suggested humor more than speed. He stood "over" on his front legs, a habit contracted when he favoured the weak knees. As he was a gelding his neck was thin, so far removed from a crest that it was almost ewe−like; his tremendous width of rump caused the hip bones to project, suggesting an archaic design of equine structure. The direct lamplight threw cavernous shadows all over his lean form.

Texas Sam shot one rapid look of appraisement over the sleepy little horse; then he laughed.

"Pinch me, Iron Jaw!" he cried; "am I ridin' on the tail board of an overland bus seein' things in the desert, and hearin' wings?"

He pointed a forefinger at the buckskin. "Is that the lopin' jack−rabbit that runs for your money?" he queried of Carney.

"That horse's name is Pat," Bulldog answered quietly, "and we've been pals so long that when any yapping coyote snaps at him I most naturally kick the brute out of the way. But that's the horse, Buckskin Pat, that my money says can outrun, for a mile−and−a−quarter, the horse you describe as a cow−hocked cow−pony, the same being, I take it, the horse you scooted away on when I palmed you on the mouth this morning."

Texas Sam was naturally of a vicious temper, and this allusion caused him to flare up again, as Carney meant it to. But Iron Jaw whirled him around, saying:

"Cut out the man end of it—let's get down to cases. We ain't had a live hoss race for so long that I most forget what it looks like. If you two mean business come inside and put up your bets, gentlemen."

Iron Jaw abrogated to himself the duty of Master of Ceremonies. First he set his croupier to work counting the gold of Texas Sam and Bulldog Carney. There were an even hundred twenty−dollar gold pieces in the belt Carney had thrown on the table.

"You're shy on the raise," Iron Jaw remarked, winking at Texas.

"I'll see his raise," the latter growled. "You've got more'n that of mine in your safe, Iron Jaw, so stack 'em up for me till they're level. I might as well win somethin' worth while—there won't be no fun in the race. That jack—that buckskin,"—he checked himself—"won't make me go fast enough to know I'm in the saddle."

"You let me in that and I'll furnish the speed," Snaky Dick could not resist the temptation to clutch at the money he saw slipping away from him. "Make it a three−cornered sweep, Mr. Carney," he pleaded; "I'll ante."

"It would be some race," Iron Jaw encouraged; "some race, boys. I've seen the little buckskin amble. I don't know nothin' about this Texas person's caravan, but Clatawa, for a sauce bottle that holds both warm and cold blood, ain't so slow—he ain't so slow, gents."

The idea caught on; everybody in the saloon rose to the occasion. Yells of, "Make it a sweep! Let Clatawa in! Wake up old Walla Walla with something worth while!" came from many throats.

Bulldog seemed to debate the matter, a smile twitching his drab mustache.

"I've said it," Texas cried; "she's wide open. Anybody that's got a pet eagle he thinks can fly faster'n my cow−pony can run, can enter him. There ain't no one barred, and the limit's up where the pines point to."

Snaky Dick had edged around the table till he stood close beside Bulldog, where he whispered: "Let me in, Carney; I've been layin' for this flannel−mouth. I don't want to see him get away with Walla Walla money. You save your stake with me, if I'm in."

Carney pushed the little wizzen−face speaker away, saying:

"Any kind of a talking bird can swing in on a winning if he's got a copper−riveted, cinch bet. But sport, as I understand it, gentlemen, consists in providing excitement, taking on long chances."

"That's Bulldog talkin'," somebody interrupted; and they all cheered.

"That being acknowledged," Carney resumed, "I feel like stealing candy from a blind kid when I crowd in on this Texas person. A yellow man wouldn't know how to own a real horse; that money on the table is, so to speak, mine now; but as Snaky Dick is panting to make it a real race, purely out of a kindly feeling for Walla Walla sports, I'm going to let him draw cards. Clatawa is welcome."

"The drinks is on the house when I hear a wolf howl like that!" Snaggle Tooth yelled. "Crowd up, gentlemen—the drinks is on the house! Old Walla Walla is goin' to sit up and take notice; Bulldog is some live wire."

Chairs were thrust back; men crowded the bar; liquors were tossed off. Sheriff Teddy the Leaper, who had come in, felt his arm touched by Carney, and inclining his head to a gentle pull at his coatsleeve, he heard the latter whisper, "Stake holder for my sake." That was all.

Then the crowd swarmed back to the table where the croupier had remained beside the mound of gold.

"You give Jim, there, a receipt for a thousand, and he'll pass it out," Iron Jaw told Texas.

Jim the croupier took from the safe behind him rolls of twenty−dollar gold pieces and stood them up in Texas's pile. He removed a few coins, saying, "The pot is right, gentlemen; two thousand apiece."

"Hold on," Snaky Dick cried; "it ain't closed yet—I draw cards."

"Not till you see the bet and the raise," Carney objected. "Nobody whispers his way into this game; it's for blood."

"Give me a cheque book, Snaggle Tooth," Snaky pleaded.

"Flimsies don't go," Carney objected.

"Nothin' but the coin weighs in agin me," Texas agreed; "put up the dough−boys or keep out."

Snaky was in despair. Here was just the softest spot in all the world, and without the cash he couldn't get in.

"Will you cash my cheque?" he asked Iron Jaw.

"If Baker'll O.K. it I figger you must have the stuff in his bank—it'll be good enough for me," Iron Jaw replied.

There was a little parley between Snaky Dick, his associates, and Baker, who was a private banker. The cheque was made out, endorsed, and cashed from the gambling funds, Iron Jaw being a partner of Snaggle Tooth's in this commercial enterprise.

When the pot was complete, six thousand on the table, Texas said:

"We've got to have a stakeholder; put the money in Blake's hands—does that go?"

Snaky Dick coughed, and hesitated. He had no suspicion that Iron Jaw had any interest with Texas Sam, but knowing the man as he did, he felt sure that before the race was run Iron Jaw and Snaggle Tooth would be in the game up to the eyes.

The drawling voice of Carney broke the little hush that followed this request.

"You're from the outside, Texas; you know all about your own horse, and that lets you out. The selecting of a stakeholder, and such, most properly belongs to Walla Walla, that is to say, such of us interested as more or less live here. The Sheriff of Shoshone, who is present, if he'll oblige, is the man that holds my money, and yours, too, unless you want to crawfish. Does that suit you, Snaky?"

"It does," the latter answered cheerfully, for, fully believing that Clatawa was going to show a clean pair of heels to the other horses, he wanted the money where he could get it without gun−play.

"That's settled, then," Carney said blithely, ignoring Texas completely. He turned to Teddy the Leaper: "Will you oblige, Sheriff?"

The Sheriff was agreeable, saying that as soon as they had completed details they would take the money over

to Baker's bank and lock it up in the safe, Baker promising to take charge of it, even if it were at night.

"Just repeat the conditions of the match," the Sheriff said, and he drew from his pocket a note book and pencil.

Carney seized the opportunity to say:

"A three−cornered race between the buckskin gelding Pat, the black gelding Horned Toad, and the bay horse Clatawa at one mile and a quarter. The stake, two thousand dollars a corner; winner take all. To be run one week from to−day."

"Is that right, gentlemen?" the Sheriff asked; "all agreed?"

"Owners up—this is a gentleman's race," Texas snapped.

"Satisfactory?" the Sheriff asked, his eyes on Carney.

The latter nodded; and Iron Jaw winked at Snaggle Tooth.

Snaky Dick could scarce credit his ears: surely the gods were looking with favor upon his fortunes; the other riders would be giving him many pounds in this self−accepted handicap.

At Sheriff Teddy's suggestion the gold was carried over to Baker's bank, a stone building almost opposite the Del Monte; the bag containing it was sealed and placed in a big safe, Baker giving the Sheriff a receipt for six thousand dollars.

Then they went back to the Del Monte for target practise at the bottle, each man implicated buying ammunition.

At this time Carney had taken the buckskin to his stable, going back to the saloon.

Snaggle Tooth made a short patriotic speech, the burden of which was that the saloon was full of men of eager habit who had not had a chance to sit into the game, and to ameliorate the condition of these mournful mavericks he would sell pools on the race, for the mere honorarium of five per cent.

Fever was in the men's blood; if he had suggested twenty per cent it would have gone.

Snaggle Tooth took up his position behind a faro table and called out:

"The pool is open, with Clatawa, Horned Toad, and Pat in the box. What am I bid for first choice?"

"Twenty dollars," a voice cried.

"Thirty," another said.

"Forty."

"Fifty."

A dry rasp that suggested an alkaline throat squeaked: "A hundred. Is this a horse race, or are we dribblin' into the plate at the synagogue?"

"Sold!" Snaggle Tooth yapped, knowing well that excitement begat quick action. "Which cayuse do you favor, plunger?"

"The range horse, Clatawa."

The croupier at Snaggle Tooth's elbow took the bidder's five twenty−dollar gold pieces and passed him a slip with Clatawa's name on it.

"A hundred dollars in the box and second choice for sale," Snaggle Tooth drawled, his prominent fang gleaming in the lamp light as he mouthed the words.

Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty was bid like the quick popping of a machine gun; at seventy−five the bids hung fire, and the auctioneer, thumping the table with his bony fist, snapped, "Sold! Name your jack rabbit."

"Horned Toad!" came from the bidder of the seventy−five.

"A hundred and seventy−five in the box," Snaggle Tooth droned, "and the buckskin for sale. What about it, you pikers—what about it?"

There seemed to be nothing about it, unless silence was something. The hush seemed to dampen the gambling spirit.

"What!" yelped Snaggle Tooth; "two thousand golden bucks staked on the horse now, and no tinhorn with sand enough in his gizzard to open his trap. This is a race, not a funeral—who's dead? Bulldog, you laid even money; here's a hundred and seventy−five goin' a−beggin'. Ain't you got a chance?"

"Ten dollars!" Carney bid as if driven into it.

"Ten dollars, ten dollars bid for the buckskin; a hundred and seventy−five in the box, and ten dollars bid for the buckskin. Sold!"

The first pool was followed by others, one after another: the roulette table, the keno game, and faro were in

the discard—their tables were deserted.

It soon became evident that Clatawa was a hot favorite; the public's money was all for the Walla Walla champion.

Noting this, the Horned Toad trio hung back, bidding less. Clatawa was selling for a hundred, Horned Toad about fifty, and the buckskin sometimes knocked down at ten to Carney, or sometimes bid up to twenty by someone tempted by the odds.

At last Carney slipped quietly away, having bought at least twenty pools that stood him between three and four thousand to a matter of two hundred.

In the morning he rode the buckskin out to Molly's cottage and turned him over to Billy.

The boy's voice trembled with delight when he was told of what had taken place.

"Gee! now I will get well," he said; "I'll beat the bug out now—−I'll have heart. You see, Mr. Carney, I got set down in California a year ago. It wasn't my fault; I was ridin' for Timberleg Harley, and he give the horse a bucket of water before the race; he didn't want to win—was lettin' the horse run for Sweeney, layin' for a big price later on. He had an interest in a book, and they took liberties with the horse's odds—he was favorite. He didn't dare tell me anything about it, the hound. When I found the horse couldn't raise a gallop, hangin' in my hand like a sea lion, I didn't ride him out, thinkin' he'd broke down. They had me up in the Judges' Stand, and sent for the books. It looked bad. Timberleg got off by swearin' I'd pulled the horse to let the other one win; swore that I stood in with the book that overlaid him. I was give the gate, and it just broke my heart. I was weak from wastin' anyway. And you can't beat the bug out if your heart's soft; the bug'll win—it's a hundred−to−one on him. First thing I'm goin' to give Waster a ball to clean him out, give him a bran mash, too. He must be like a currycomb inside, grass and hay and everything here is full of this damn cactus. A week ain't much to ready up a horse for a race, but he ain't got no fat to work off, and he knows the game. In a week he'll be as spry as a kitten. I'll just play with him. I'll bunk with him, too. If Slimy Red got wise to anything he'd slip him a twig of locoe, or put a sponge up his nose. Do you know what that thief did once, Mr. Carney? He was a moonlighter; he sneaked the favorite for a race that was to be run next day out of his stall at night and galloped him four miles with about a hundred and sixty in the saddle. That settled the favorite; he run his race same's if he was pullin' a hearse.

"That's a good idea, Billy. There's half−a−dozen Slimy Reds in Walla Walla: it's a good idea, only I'll do the sleeping with the buckskin. I'd be lonesome away from him."

The boy objected, but Carney was firm.

Billy was not only a good rider, but he was a man of much brains. There was little of the art of training that he did not know, for his father had been a trainer before him—he had been brought up in a stable.

Fortunately the buckskin's working life had left little to be desired in the way of conditioning; it was just that the sinews and muscles might have become case−hardened, more the muscles of endurance than activity.

But then the race was over a distance, a mile−and−a−quarter, where the endurance of the thoroughbred would tell over Clatawa. Indeed, full of the contempt which a racing man has for a cold−blooded horse, Billy did not consider Clatawa in the race at all.

"That part of it is just found money," he assured Carney. "Clatawa will go off with a burst of speed like those Texas half−milers, and he'll commence to die at the mile; he hasn't a chance."

As to Ding Dong it was simply a question of whether the black had improved and Waster gone back enough, through being thrown out of training, to bring the two together. Anywhere near alike in condition Waster was a fourteen−pound better horse than Ding Dong. It might be that now, his legs sounder than they had ever been when he was racing, Waster might run the best mile−and−a−quarter of his life.

Of course this might not be possible in a three−quarter sprint, for, at that terrific rate of going, running it from end to end at top speed, a certain nervous or muscular system would be called upon that had practically become atrophied through the more leisure ways of the trail work.

The little man pondered over these many things just as a man of commerce might mentally canvas great markets, conveying his point of view to Carney generally. He would map out the race as they sat together in the evening.

"Of course Snaky Dick will shoot out from the crack of the pistol, and try to open up a gap that'll break our hearts. He won't dare to pull Clatawa in behind; a cold−blooded horse's got the heart of a chicken—he'd quit. Slimy'll carry Ding Dong along at a rate he knows will leave him enough for a strong run home; but he'll think

that he's only got Clatawa to beat and he'll pull out of his pace—he'll keep within strikin' distance of Clatawa. I'll let them go on. I know 'bout how fast Waster can run that mile−and−a−quarter from end to end. Don't you worry if you see me ten lengths out of it at the mile. Waster won all his races comin' through his horses from behind—'cause he's game. When Clatawa cracks, and I'm not up, Slimy'll stop ridin' he'll let his horse down thinkin' he's won. You'll see, Mr. Carney. If a quarter−of−a−mile from the finish post I'm within three lengths of Ding Dong and not drivin' him you can take all the money in sight. I'll tell you somethin' else, Mr. Carney; if I'm up with Ding Dong, and Slimy Red thinks I've got him, he'll try a foul."

"Glad you mentioned it, little man," Carney remarked drily.

The buckskin was given a long steady gallop the day after he had received the ball of physic; then for three days he was given short sprinting runs and a little practise at breaking from the gun. Two days before the race he was given a mile and a quarter at a little under full speed; rated as though he were in a race, the last half a topping gallop. He showed little distress, and cleaned up his oats an hour later after he had been cooled out. Billy was in an ecstasy of happy content.

Nobody who was a judge of a horse's pace had seen Waster gallop his trial over the full course, for the boy had arranged it cleverly. Texas Sam and Snaky Dick both worked their horses in the morning, and sometimes gave them a slow gallop in the evening. Billy knew that at the first peep of day some of the Clatawa people would be on the track, so he waited that morning until everybody had gone home to breakfast, thinking all the gallops were over; then he slipped on to the course and covered the mile−and−a−quarter without being seen.

The course was a straightaway, one hundred feet wide, lying outside of the town on the open plain, and running parallel to the one long street. The finish post was opposite the heart of the town.

The week was one long betting carnival; one heard nothing but betting jargon. It was horse morning, noon, and night.

Carney had acquired another riding horse, and the Horned Toad cabal laughed cynically at his seriousness. Iron Jaw could not understand it, for Bulldog had a reputation for cleverness; but here he was acting like a tenderfoot. Once or twice a suspicion flashed across his mind that perhaps Bulldog had discovered something, and meant to call them after they had won the race. But there was Clatawa; there was nothing to cover up in his case, and surely Carney didn't think he could beat the bay with his buckskin. Besides they weren't racing under Jockey Club rules. They hadn't guaranteed anything; Carney had matched his horse against the black, and there he was; names didn't count—the horse was the thing.

Molly had heard about the match and had grown suspicious over Billy's active participation, fearing it might bring on a hemorrhage if he rode a punishing race. When she taxed Billy with this he pleaded so hard for a chance to help out, assuring Molly that Waster would run his own race, and would need little help from him, that she yielded. When she talked to Bulldog about it he told her he was going to give the whole stake to Billy, the four thousand, if he won it.

And then came the day of the great match. From the time the first golden shafts of sunlight had streamed over the Bitter Root Mountains, picking out the forms of Walla Walla's structures, that looked so like a mighty pack of wolves sleeping in the plain, till well on into the afternoon, the border town had been in a ferment. What mattered whether there was gold in the Coeur d'Alene or not; whether the Nez Perces were good Presbyterians under the leadership, physically, of Chief Joseph, and spiritually, Missionary Mackay, was of no moment. A man lay cold in death, a plug of lead somewhere in his chest, the result of a gambling row, but the morrow would be soon enough to investigate; to−day was the day—−the day of the race; minor business was suspended.

It made men thirsty this hot, parching anticipation; women had a desire for finery. Doors stood open, for the dwellers could not sit, but prowled in and out, watching the slow, loitering clock hands for four o'clock.

One phrase was on everybody's lips: "I'll take that bet."

Numerically the followers of Clatawa were in the majority; but there was a weight of metal behind Horned Toad that steadied the market; it came from a mysterious source. Texas Sam had been played for a blatant fool; nobody had seen Horned Toad show a performance that would warrant backing.

The little buckskin was looked upon as a sacrifice to his owner's well−known determination, his wild gambling spirit, that once roused, could not be bluffed. They pitied Carney because they liked him; but what was the use of stringing with a man who held the weakest hand? And yet when somebody, growing rash, offered ten to one against the buckskin, a man, quite as calm and serene as Bulldog Carney himself, looking like a placer miner

who worked a rocker on some bend of the Columbia, would say, diffidently, "I'll take that bet." And he would make good—one yellow eagle or fifty. It was almost ominous, the quiet seriousness of this man who said his name was Oregon, just Oregon.

"Talk of gamblers," Iron Jaw said with a spluttering laugh, and he pointed to the street where little knots of people stood, close packed against some two, who, money in hand, were backing their faith. Then the fatty laugh chilled into a cold−blooded sneer:

"Snaggle Tooth, we'll learn these tin−horns somethin'; tomorrow your safe won't be big enough to hold it. But, say, don't let that Texas brayin' ass have no more booze."

"If you ask me, Blake, I think he's yeller. He's plumb babyfied now because of Carney—sober he'd quit."

"Carney won't turn a hair when we win."

"Course he won't. But you can't get that into Texas's noodle with a funnel—he's hoodooed; wants me to plant a couple of gun men at the finish for fear Bulldog'll grab him."

"Look here, Snaggle, that coyote—hell! I know the breed of them outlaws, they'd rather win a race crooked than by their horse gallopin' in front—he just can't trust himself; he's afraid he'll foul the others when the chance flashes on him. You just tell him that we can't stand to kiss twenty thousand good−bye because of any Injun trick; the Sheriff wouldn't stand for it for a minute; he'd turn the money over to the horse that he thought ought to get it, quick as a wolf'd grab a calf by the throat."

That was the atmosphere on that sweet−breathed August day in the archaic town of Walla Walla.

It was a perfectly conceived race; three men in it and each one confident that he held a royal flush; each one certain that, bar crooked work, he could win.

The sporting Commandant of the U.S. Cavalry troop had been appointed judge of the finish at the Sheriff's suggestion; and another officer was to fire the starting gun.

It was a springy turf course; just the going to suit Waster, whose legs had been dicky. On a hard course, built up of clay and sand, guiltless of turf, the fierce hammering of the hoofs might even yet heat up his joints, though they looked sound; his clutching hoofs might cup out unrooted earth and bow a tendon.

An hour before race time people had flocked out to the goal where would be settled the ownership of thousands of dollars by the gallant steed that first caught the judge's eye as he flashed past the post. Even Lieutenant Governor Moore was there; that magnificent Nez Perces, Chief Joseph, sat his half−blooded horse a six−foot−three bronze Apollo, every inch a king in his beaded buckskins and his eagle feathers. The picture was Homeric, grand; and behind the canvas was the subtle duplicity of gold worshipers.

At half−past three a hush fell over the chattering, betting, vociferating throng, as the judge, a tall soldierly figure of a man, called:

"Bring out the horses for this race: it is time to go to the post!"

Clatawa was the first to push from behind the throng to the course where the judge stood. He was a beautiful, high−spirited bay with black points, and a broad line of white, starting from a star in his forehead, ran down his somewhat Roman nose. Two men led him, one on either side, and a blanket covered his form.

Then Horned Toad was led forward by a stable man; beneath a loose blanket showed the outlines of a small saddle. The horse walked with the unconcerned step of one accustomed to crowds, and noise, and blare. Beside him strode Texas Sam, a long coat draping his form.

Behind Horned Toad came the buckskin, at his heels Bulldog Carney, and beside Carney a figure that might have been an eager boy out for the holiday. The buckskin walked with the same indifference Horned Toad had shown.

As he was brought to a stand he lifted his long lean neck, threw up the flopped ears, spread his nostrils, and with big bright eyes gazed far down the track, so like a huge ribbon laid out on the plain, as if wondering where was the circular course he loved so well. He knew it was a race—that he was going to battle with those of his own kind. The tight cinching of the little saddle on his back, the bandages on his shins, the sponging out of his mouth, the little sprinting gallops he had had—all these touches had brought back to his memory the game his rich warm, thoroughbred blood loved. His very tail was arched with the thrill of it.

"Mount your horses; it is time to go to the post!" Judge Cummings called, watch in hand.

The blanket was swept from Clatawa's back, showing nothing but a wide, padded surcingle, with a little pocket either side for his rider's feet. And Snaky Dick, dropping his coat, stood almost as scantily attired; a pair of

buckskin trunks being the only garment that marked his brown, monkey−like form.

Horned Toad carried a racing saddle, and from a shaffle bit the reins ran through the steel rings of a martingale.

At this Carney smiled, and more than one in the crowd wondered at this get−up for a supposed cow−pony.

Then when Texas threw his long coat to a stable man, and stood up a slim lath of a man, clad in light racing boots, thin white tight−fitting racing breeches and a loose silk jacket, people stared again. It was as if, by necromancy, he had suddenly wasted from off his bones forty pounds of flesh.

But there was still further magic waiting the curious throng, for now the buckskin, stripped of his blanket, showed atop his well−ribbed back a tiny matter of pigskin that looked like a huge postage stamp. And the little figure of a man, one foot in Carney's hand, was lifted lightly to the saddle, where he sat in attire the duplicate of Texas Sam's.

With a bellow of rage Iron Jaw pushed forward, crying:

"Hold, there! What the' hell are you doin' on that horse, you damn runt? Get down!"

He reached a huge paw to the rider's thigh, as though he would yank him out of the saddle.

His fingers had scarce touched the boy's leg when his hands were thrown up in the air, and he reeled back from a scimitar−like cut on his wind−pipe from the flat open hand of Carney, and choking, sputtering an oath of raging astonishment, he found himself looking into the bore of a gun, and heard a voice that almost hissed in its constrained passion:

"You coarse butcher! You touch that boy and you'll wake up in hell. Now stand back and make to Judge Cummings any complaint you have."

Snaggle Tooth and Death−on−the−trail had pushed to Iron Jaw's side, their hands on their guns, and Carney, full of a passion rare with him, turned on them:

"Draw, if you want that, or lift your hands, damn quick!"

Surlily they dropped their half−drawn guns back into their pig−skin pockets. And Oregon, who had thrust forward, drew close to the two and said something in a low voice that brought a bitter look of hatred into the face of Snaggle Tooth.

But Oregon looked him in the eye and said audibly: "That's the last call to chuck—don't forget."

Iron Jaw was now appealing to the judge:

"This match was for owners up."

He beckoned forward the stakeholder:

"Ain't that so, Sheriff—owners up?"

"That was the agreement," Teddy sustained.

"Wasn't that the bargain, Carney?" Iron Jaw asked, turning on Bulldog.

"It was."

"Then what the' hell 're you doin' afoot—and that monkey up?" And Iron Jaw jerked a thumb viciously over his shoulder at the little man on Waster.

Carney's head lifted, and the bony contour of his lower jaw thrust out like the ram of a destroyer:

"Mr. Blake," he said quietly, "don't use any foul words when you speak to me—we're not good enough pals for that; if you do I'll ram those crooked teeth of yours down your throat. Secondly, that's the owner of the buckskin sitting on his back. But the owner of Horned Toad is sitting in a chair down in Portland, a man named Reilly, and that thing on Ding Dong's back is Slimy Red, a man who has been warned off every track in the West. He doesn't own a hair in the horse's tail."

Iron Jaw's face paled with a sudden compelling thought that Carney, knowing all this, and still betting his money, held cards to beat him.

The judge now asked: "Do you object to the rider of Horned Toad, Mr. Carney?"

"No, sir—let him ride. I'm not trying to win their money on a technicality, but on a horse."

"Well, the agreement was owners up, you admit?"

"I do," Carney answered.

"Did this boy on the buckskin's back own him when the match was made?"

"He did."

"Is there any proof of the transaction, the sale?" Major Cummings asked.

"Let me have that envelope I asked you to keep," Carney said, addressing the sheriff.

When Teddy drew from a pocket the sealed envelope, Carney tore it open, and passed to the judge the bill of sale to MacKay of the buckskin. Its date showed that it had been executed the day the match was made, and Teddy, when questioned, said he had received it on that date, and before the match was made.

"It was a plant," Iron Jaw objected; "that proves it. Why did he put it in the sheriff's hands—why didn't the boy keep it—it was his?"

"Because I had a hunch I was going up against a bunch of crooks," Carney answered suavely; "crooks who played win, tie, or wrangle, and knew they would claim the date was forged when they were beat at their own game. And there was another reason."

Carney drew a second paper from the envelope, and passed it to the Judge. It was a brief note stating that if anything happened to Carney his money, if the buckskin won, was to be turned over to the owner, Billy MacKay.

When the judge lifted his eyes Carney said, with an apologetic little smile: "You see, the boy's got the bug, and he's up against it. Molly Burdan is keeping both him and his sister, and she can't afford it."

Major Cummings coughed; and there was a little husky rasp in his voice as he said, quietly:

"The objection to the rider of the buckskin horse is disallowed. This paper proves he is the legitimate owner and entitled to ride. Go down to the post."

A yell of delight went up from many throats. The men of Walla Walla, and the riders of the plains who had trooped in, were sports; they grasped the idea that the gambling clique had been caught at their own game; that the intrepid Bulldog had put one over on them. Besides, now they could see that the race was for blood. The heavy betting had started more than one whisper that perhaps it was a bluff; some of the Clatawa people believing in the invincibility of their horse, had hinted that perhaps there was a job on for the two other horses to foul Clatawa and one of them go on and win; though few would admit that Carney would be party to cold−decking the public.

But accident had thrown the cards all on the table; it was to be a race to the finish, and the stakes represented real money.

Before they could start quite openly Carney stepped close to the rider of Horned Toad, and said, in even tones:

"Slimy Red, if you pull any dirty work I'll be here at the finish waiting for you. If you can win, win; but ride straight, or you'll never ride again."

"I'll be hangin' round the finish post, too," Oregon muttered abstractedly, but both Iron Jaw and Snaggle Tooth could hear him.

The three horses passed down the course, Clatawa sidling like a boat in a choppy sea, champing at his bit irritably, flecks of white froth snapping from his lips, and his tail twitching and swishing, indicating his excitable temperament; Horned Toad and Waster walked with that springy lift to the pasterns that indicated the perfection of breeding. Indians and cowboys raced up and down the plain, either side of the course, on their ponies, bandying words in a very ecstasy of delight. Old Walla Walla had come into its own; the greatest sport on earth was on in all its glory.

After a time the three horses were seen to turn far down the course; they criss−crossed, and wove in and out a few times as they were being placed by the starter. The excitable Clatawa was giving trouble; sometimes he reared straight up; then, with a few bucking jumps, fought for his head. But the sinewy Snaky Dick was always his master.

Atop the little buckskin the boy was scarce discernible at that distance, as he sat low crouched over his horse's wither. Almost like an equine statue stood Waster, so still, so sleepy−like, that those who had taken long odds about him felt a depression.

Horned Toad was scarcely still for an instant; his wary rider, Texas, was keeping him on his toes—not letting him chill out; but, like the buckskin's jockey, his eye was always on the man with the gun. They were old hands at the game, both of them; they paid little attention to the antics of Clatawa—the starter was the whole works.

Clatawa had broken away to be pulled up in thirty yards. Now, as he came back, his wily rider wheeled him suddenly short of the starting line, and the thing that he had cunningly planned came off. The starter, finger on trigger, was mentally pulled out of himself by this; his finger gripped spasmodically; those at the finish post saw a puff of smoke, and a white−nosed horse, well out in front, off to a flying start.

The backers of Clatawa yelled in delight.

"Good old Snaky Dick!" some one cried.

"Clatawa beat the gun!" another roared.

"They'll never catch him!—never catch him! He'll win off by himself!" was droned.

Behind, seemingly together, half the width of the track separating them, galloped the black and the buckskin. It looked as if Waster raced alone, as if he had lost his rider, so low along his wither and neck lay the boy, his weight eased high from the short stirrups. A hand on either side of the lean neck, he seemed a part of his mount. He was saying, "Ste−a−dy boy! stead−d−dy boy! stead−d−dy boy!" a soft, low monotonous sing−song through his clinched teeth, his crouch discounting the handicap of a strong wind that was blowing down the track.

He could feel the piece of smooth−moving machinery under him flatten out in a long rhythmic stride, and his heart sank, for he knew it was the old Waster he had ridden to victory more than once; that same powerful stride that ate up the course with little friction. He was rating his horse. "Clatawa will come back," he kept thinking: "Clatawa will come back!"

He himself, who had ridden hundreds of races, and working gallops and trials beyond count, knew that the chestnut was rating along of his own knowledge at a pace that would cover the mile−and−a−quarter in under 2.12. Methodically he was running his race. Clatawa was sprinting; he had cut out at a gait that would carry him a mile, if he could keep it up, close to 1.40. Too fast, for the track was slow, being turf.

He watched Horned Toad; that was what he had to beat, he knew.

Texas had reasoned somewhat along the same lines; but his brain was more flighty. As Clatawa opened a gap of a dozen lengths, running like a wild horse, Texas grew anxious; he shook up his mount and increased his pace.

The buckskin reached into his bridle at this, as though he coaxed for a little more speed, but the boy called, "Steady, lad, steady!" and let Horned Toad creep away a length, two lengths; and always in front the white−faced horse, Clatawa, was galloping on and on with a high deer−like lope that was impressive.

At the finish post people were acclaiming the name of Clatawa. They could see the little buckskin trailing fifteen lengths behind, and Horned Toad was between the two.

Carney watched the race stoically. It was being run just as Billy had forecasted; there was nothing in this to shake his faith.

Somebody cried out: "Buckskin's out of it! I'll lay a thousand to a hundred against him."

"I'll take it," Carney declared.

"I'll lay the same," Snaggle Tooth yelled.

"You're on," came from Carney.

And even as they bet the buckskin had lost a length.

Half−a−mile had been covered by the horses; three−quarters; and now it seemed to the watchers that the black was creeping up on Clatawa, the latter's rider, who had been almost invisible, riding Indian fashion lying along the back of his horse, was now in view; his shoulders were up. Surely a quirt had switched the air once.

Yes, the Toad was creeping up—his rider was making his run; they could see Texas's arms sway as he shook up his mount.

Why was the boy on the little buckskin riding like one asleep? Had he lost his whip—had he given up all idea of winning?

They were at the mile: but a short quarter away. A moan went up from many throats, mixed with hoarse curses, for Clatawa was plainly in trouble; he was floundering; the monkey man on his back was playing the quirt against his ribs, the gyrations checking the horse instead of helping him.

And the Toad, galloping true and straight, was but a length behind.

Watching this battle, almost in hushed silence, gasping in the smothered tenseness, the throng went mentally blind to the little buckskin. Now somebody cried:

"God! look at the other one comin'! Look at him—lo−ook at him, men!"

His voice ran up the scale to a shrill scream. Other eyes lengthened their vision, and their owners gasped.

Clatawa seemed to be running backwards, so fast the little buckskin raced by him as he dropped out of it, beaten.

And Horned Toad was but three lengths in front now. Three lengths? It was two—it was one. Now the buckskin's nose rose and fell on the black's quarters; now the mouse−coloured muzzle was at his girth; now their heads rose and fell together, as, stride for stride, they battled for the lead: Texas driving his mount with whip and spur, cutting the flanks of his horse with cruel blows in a frantic endeavor to lift him home a winner.

How still the boy sat Waster; how well he must know that he had the race won to nurse him like a babe. No swaying of the body to throw him out of stride; no flash of the whip to startle him—to break his heart; the brave little horse was doing it all himself. And the boy, creature of brains, was wise enough to sit still.

They could hear the pound of hoofs on the turf like the beat of twin drums; they could see the eager strife in the faces of the two brave, stout−hearted thoroughbreds: and then the buckskin's head nod− ding in front; his lean neck was clear of the black and he was galloping straight as an arrow.

"The Toad is beat!" went up from a dozen throats. "The buckskin wins—the buckskin wins!" became a clamor.

Pandemonium broke loose. It was stilled by a demoniac cry, a curse, from some strong−voiced man. The black had swerved full in on to the buckskin; they saw Texas clutch at the rider. Curses; cries of "Foul!" rose; it was an angry roar like caged animals at war.

Carney, watching, found his fingers rubbing the butt of his gun. The buckskin had been thrown out of his stride in the collision: he stumbled; his head shot down—almost to his knees he went: then he was galloping again, the two horses locked together.

Fifty feet away from the finish post they were locked: twenty feet.

The cries of the throng were hushed; they scarce breathed.

Locked together they passed the post, the buckskin's neck in front. Their speed had been checked; in a dozen yards they were stopped, and the boy pitched headlong from the buckskin's back, one foot still tangled in the martingale of Horned Toad.

Men closed in frantically. A man—it was Oregon—twisted Carney's gun skyward crying: "Leave that coyote to the boys."

He was right. In vain Iron Jaw and Death−on−the−trail sought to battle back the tense−faced men who reached for Texas. Iron Jaw and Death−on−the−trail were swallowed up in a seething mass of clamoring devils. Gun play was out of the question: humans were like herrings packed in a barrel.

Major Cummings, cool and quick−witted, had called shrilly "Troopers!" and a little cordon of men in cavalry uniform had Texas in the centre of a guarding circle.

Carney, on his knees beside the boy, was guarding the lad from the mad, trampling, fighting men; striking with the butt of his pistol. And then a woman's shrill voice rose clear above the tumult, crying:

"Back, you cowards—you brutes: the boy is dying: give him room—give him air!"

Her bleached hair was down her back; her silk finery was torn like a battered flag; for she had fought her way through the crowd to the boy's side.

"Don't lift him—he's got a hemorrhage!" she shrilled, as Carney put his arms beneath the little lad. "Drive the men back—give him air!" she commanded; and turned Billy flat on his back, tearing from her shoulders a rich scarf to place beneath his head. The lad's lips, coated with red froth, twitched in a weak smile; he reached out a thin hand, and Molly, sitting at his head, drew it into her lap.

"Just lie still, Billy. You'll be all right, boy; just lie still; don't speak," she admonished.

She could hear the lad's throat click, click, click at each breath, the ominous tick tick, of "the bug's" work; and at each half−stifled cough the red−tinged yeasty sputum bubbled up from the life well.

The fighting clamor was dying down; shame−faced men were widening the circle about the lad and Molly.

The judge's voice was heard saying:

"The buckskin won the race, gentlemen." And he added, strong condemnation in his voice: "If Horned Toad had been first I would have disqualified him: it was a deliberate foul."

The cavalry men had got Texas away, mounted, and rushed him out to the barracks for protection.

"Get a stretcher, someone, please," Molly asked of the crowd. "Billy will be all right, but we must keep him flat on his back.

"You'll be all right, Billy," she added, bending her head till her lips touched the boy's forehead, and her mass of peroxided hair hid the hot tears that fell from the blue eyes that many thought only capable of cupidity and guile.