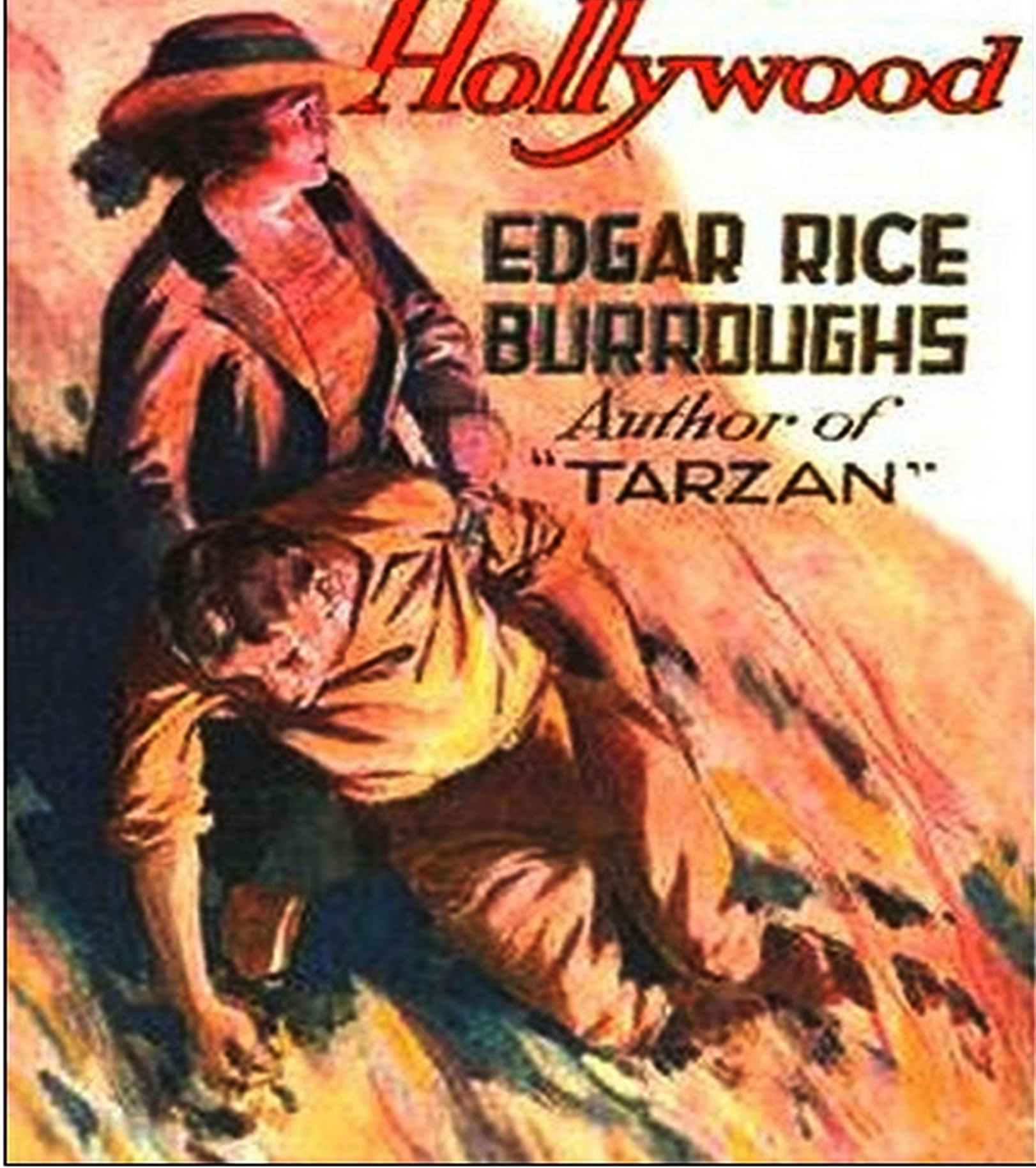


The Girl from Hollywood

**EDGAR RICE
BURROUGHS**

Author of
"TARZAN"



The Girl from Hollywood



The director's eyes snapped...
"Only a camera-man and myself are here," he said.

THE
GIRL FROM HOLLYWOOD

BY
EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS
AUTHOR OF "TARZAN OF THE APES," THE
RETURN OF TARZAN," ETC.

FRONTISPIECE BY
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THE GIRL FROM HOLLYWOOD A CONTEMPORARY REVIEW

FROM *THE SPECTATOR*, LONDON, APRIL 5, 1924

MR. BURROUGHS, having exhausted the apes and the Martians, has now brought his pen to bear on one of the most interesting and sordid sections of mere humanity. The interest of Hollywood is natural enough; its sordidness, according to accounts, is mainly due to the herding together of actors and actresses whose salaries are, for the most part, grotesquely disproportionate to their abilities. Mr. Burroughs keeps away from personalities, but spares us no detail of the general scene: drug-fiends and vampires advance from his pages almost as realistically as, in their professional moments, they loom from the screen. A powerful foil is needed for these distressing disclosures; the dramatic values and the popular voice alike demand one. Mr. Burroughs obliges by importing into the milieu of his story a palpably healthy breeze from the adjacent West, an indisputably strong man, and an ingénue whose "innocence," though it might captivate Tarzan, would certainly seem suspect to Freud. It will be interesting to see if "The Girl from Hollywood," which, like its predecessors, has obvious merits as a *succès de sujet*, will come to share their enormous vogue. The path is clear, and it would be as unfair as futile to attempt any further influence on the popular verdict.

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CHAPTER I

THE two horses picked their way carefully downward over the loose shale of the steep hillside. The big bay stallion in the lead sidled mincingly, tossing his head nervously, and flecking the flannel shirt of his rider with foam. Behind the man on the stallion a girl rode a clean-limbed bay of lighter color, whose method of descent, while less showy, was safer, for he came more slowly, and in the very bad places he braced his four feet forward and slid down, sometimes almost sitting upon the ground.

At the base of the hill there was a narrow level strip; then an eight-foot wash, with steep banks, barred the way to the opposite side of the cañon, which rose gently to the hills beyond. At the foot of the descent the man reined in and waited until the girl was safely down; then he wheeled his mount and trotted toward the wash. Twenty feet from it he gave the animal its head and a word. The horse broke into a gallop, took off at the edge of the wash, and cleared it so effortlessly as almost to give the impression of flying.

Behind the man came the girl, but her horse came at the wash with a rush—not the slow, steady gallop of the stallion—and at the very brink he stopped to gather himself. The dry bank caved beneath his front feet, and into the wash he went, head first.

The man turned and spurred back. The girl looked up from her saddle, making a wry face.

"No damage?" he asked, an expression of concern upon his face.

"No damage," the girl replied. "Senator is clumsy enough at jumping, but no matter what happens he always lights on his feet."

"Ride down a bit," said the man. "There's an easy way out just below."

She moved off in the direction he indicated, her horse picking his way among the loose boulders in the wash bottom.

"Mother says he's part cat," she remarked. "I wish he could jump like the Apache!"

The man stroked the glossy neck of his own mount.

"He never will," he said. "He's afraid. The Apache is absolutely fearless; he'd go anywhere I'd ride him. He's been mired with me twice, but he never refuses a wet spot; and that's a test, I say, of a horse's courage."

They had reached a place where the bank was broken down, and the girl's horse scrambled from the wash.

"Maybe he's like his rider," suggested the girl, looking at the Apache; "brave, but reckless."

"It was worse than reckless," said the man. "It was asinine. I shouldn't have led you over the jump when I know how badly Senator jumps."

"And you wouldn't have, Custer"—she hesitated—"if—"

"If I hadn't been drinking," he finished for her. "I know what you were going to say, Grace; but I think you're wrong. I never drink enough to show it. No one ever saw me that way—not so that it was noticeable."

"It is always noticeable to me and to your mother," she corrected him gently. "We always know it, Custer. It shows in little things like what you did just now. Oh, it isn't anything, I know, dear; but we who love you wish you didn't do it quite so often."

"It's funny," he said, "but I never cared for it until it became a risky thing to get it. Oh, well, what's the use? I'll quit it if you say so. It hasn't any hold on me."

Involuntarily he squared his shoulders—an unconscious tribute to the strength of his weakness.

Together, their stirrups touching, they rode slowly down the cañon trail toward the ranch. Often they rode thus, in the restful silence that is a birthright of comradeship. Neither spoke until after they reined in

their sweating horses beneath the cool shade of the spreading sycamore that guards the junction of El Camino Largo and the main trail that winds up Sycamore Cañon.



Grace and Custer ride out.

It was the first day of early spring. The rains were over. The California

hills were green and purple and gold. The new leaves lay softly fresh on the gaunt boughs of yesterday. A blue jay scolded from a clump of sumac across the trail.

The girl pointed up into the cloudless sky, where several great birds circled majestically, rising and falling upon motionless wings.

"The vultures are back," she said. "I am always glad to see them come again."

"Yes," said the man. "They are bully scavengers, and we don't have to pay 'em wages."

The girl smiled up at him.

"I'm afraid my thoughts were more poetic than practical," she said. "I was only thinking that the sky looked less lonely now that they have come. Why suggest their diet?"

"I know what you mean," he said. "I like them, too. Maligned as they are, they are really wonderful birds, and sort of mysterious. Did you ever stop to think that you never see a very young one or a dead one? Where do they die? Where do they grow to maturity? I wonder what they've found up there! Let's ride up. Martin said he saw a new calf up beyond Jack-knife Cañon yesterday. That would be just about under where they're circling now."

They guided their horses around a large, flat slab of rock that some camper had contrived into a table beneath the sycamore, and started across the trail toward the opposite side of the cañon. They were in the middle of the trail when the man drew in and listened.

"Some one is coming," he said. "Let's wait and see who it is. I haven't sent any one back into the hills to-day."

"I have an idea," remarked the girl, "that there is more going on up there"—she nodded toward the mountains stretching to the south of them—"than you know about."

"How is that?" he asked.

"So often recently we have heard horsemen passing the ranch late at night. If they weren't going to stop at your place, those who rode up the trail must have been headed into the high hills; but I'm sure that those whom we heard coming down weren't coming from the Rancho del Ganado."

"No," he said, "not late at night—or not often, at any rate."

The footsteps of a cantering horse drew rapidly closer, and presently the animal and its rider came into view around a turn in the trail.

"It's only Allen," said the girl.

The newcomer reined in at sight of the man and the girl. He was evidently surprised, and the girl thought that he seemed ill at ease.

"Just givin' Baldy a work-out," he explained. "He ain't been out for three or four days, an' you told me to work 'em out if I had time."

Custer Pennington nodded.

"See any stock back there?"

"No. How's the Apache to-day—forgin' as bad as usual?"

Pennington shook his head negatively.

"That fellow shod him yesterday just the way I want him shod. I wish *you'd* take a good look at his shoes, Slick, so you can see that he's always shod this same way."

His eyes had been traveling over Slick's mount, whose heaving sides were covered with lather. "Baldy's pretty soft, Slick; I wouldn't work him too hard all at once. Get him up to it gradually."

He turned and rode off with the girl at his side. Slick Allen looked after them for a moment, and then moved his horse off at a slow walk toward the ranch. He was a lean, sinewy man, of medium height. He might have been a cavalryman once. He sat his horse, even at a walk, like one who has sweated and bled under a drill sergeant in the days of his youth.

"How do you like him?" the girl asked of Pennington.

"He's a good horseman, and good horsemen are getting rare these days," replied Pennington; "but I don't know that I'd choose him for a playmate. Don't you like him?"

"I'm afraid I don't His eyes give me the creeps—they're like a fish's."

"To tell the truth, Grace, I don't like him," said Custer. "He's one of those rare birds—a good horseman who doesn't love horses. I imagine he won't last long on the Rancho del Ganado; but we've got to give him a fair shake— he's only been with us a few weeks."

They were picking their way toward the summit of a steep hogback. The man, who led, was seeking carefully for the safest footing, shamed out of his recent recklessness by the thought of how close the girl had come to a serious accident through his thoughtlessness. They rode along the hogback until they could look down into a tiny basin where a small bunch of cattle was grazing, and then, turning and dipping over the edge, they dropped slowly toward the animals.

Near the bottom of the slope they came upon a white-faced bull standing beneath the spreading shade of a live oak. He turned his woolly face toward them, his red-rimmed eyes observing them dispassionately for a moment. Then he turned away again and resumed his cud, disdaining further notice of them.

"That's the King of Ganado, isn't it?" asked the girl.

"Looks like him, doesn't he? But he isn't He's the King's likeliest son, and unless I'm mistaken he's going to give the old fellow a mighty tough time of it this fall, if the old boy wants to hang on to the grand championship. We've never shown him yet. It's an idea of father's. He's always wanted to spring a new champion at a great show and surprise the world. He's kept this fellow hidden away ever since he gave the first indication that he was going to be a fine bull. At least a hundred breeders have visited the herd in the past year, and not one of them has seen him. Father says he's the greatest bull that ever lived, and that his first show is going to be the International."

"I just know he'll win," exclaimed the girl. "Why look at him! Isn't he a beauty?"

"Got a back like a billiard table," commented Custer proudly.

They rode down among the heifers. There were a dozen beauties—three-year-olds. Hidden to one side, behind a small bush, the man's quick eyes discerned a little bundle of red and white.

"There it is, Grace," he called, and the two rode toward it

One of the heifers looked fearfully toward them, then at the bush, and finally walked toward it, lowing plaintively.

"We're not going to hurt it, little girl," the man assured her.

As they came closer, there arose a thing of long, wobbly legs, big joints, and great, dark eyes, its spotless coat of red and white shining with health and life.

"The cunning thing!" cried the girl. "How I'd like to squeeze it! I just love 'em, Custer!"

She had slipped from her saddle, and, dropping her reins on the ground, was approaching the calf.

"Look out for the cow!" cried the man, as he dismounted and moved forward to the girl's side, with his arm through the Apache's reins. "She hasn't been up much, and she may be a little wild."

The calf stood its ground for a moment, and then, with tail erect, cavorted madly for its mother, behind whom it took refuge.

"I just love 'em! I just love 'em!" repeated the girl.

"You say the same thing about the colts and the little pigs," the man reminded her.

"I love 'em all!" she cried, shaking her head, her eyes twinkling.

"You love them because they're little and helpless, just like babies," he said. "Oh, Grace, how you'd love a baby!"

The girl flushed prettily. Quite suddenly he seized her in his arms and crushed her to him, smothering her with a long kiss. Breathless, she wriggled partially away, but he still held her in his arms.



Quite suddenly he seized her in his arms.

"Why won't you, Grace?" he begged. "There'll never be anybody else for me or for you. Father and mother and Eva love you almost as much

as I do, and on your side your mother and Guy have always seemed to take it as a matter of course that we'd marry. It isn't the drinking, is it, dear?"

"No, it's not that, Custer. Of course I'll marry you— some day; but not yet. Why, I haven't lived yet, Custer! I want to live. I want to do something outside of the humdrum life that I have always led and the humdrum life that I shall live as a wife and mother. I want to live a little, Custer, and then I'll be ready to settle down. You all tell me that I am beautiful, and down, away down in the depth of my soul, I feel that I have talent. If I have, I ought to use the gifts God has given me."

She was speaking very seriously, and the man listened patiently and with respect, for he realized that she was revealing for the first time a secret yearning that she must have long held locked in her bosom.

"Just what do you want to do, dear?" he asked gently.

"I—oh, it seems silly when I try to put it in words, but in dreams it is very beautiful and very real."

"The stage?" he asked.

"It is just like you to understand!" Her smile rewarded him. "Will you help me? I know mother will object."

"You want me to help you take all the happiness out of my life?" he asked.

"It would only be for a little while—just a few years, and then I would come back to you—after I had made good."

"You would never come back, Grace, unless you failed," he said. "If you succeeded, you would never be contented in any other life or atmosphere. If you came back a failure, you couldn't help but carry a little bitterness always in your heart. It would never be the same dear, care-free heart that went away so gayly. Here you have a real part to play in a real drama—not make-believe upon a narrow stage with painted drops." He flung out a hand in broad gesture. "Look at the setting that God has painted here for us to play our parts in—the parts

that He has chosen for us! Your mother played upon the same stage, and mine. Do you think them failures? And both were beautiful girls—as beautiful as you."

"Oh, but you don't understand, after all, Custer!" she cried. "I thought you did."

"I do understand that for your sake I must do my best to persuade you that you have as full a life before you here as upon the stage. I am fighting first for your happiness, Grace, and then for mine. If I fail, then I shall do all that I can to help you realize your ambition. If you cannot stay because you are convinced that you will be happier here, then I do not want you to stay."

"Kiss me," she demanded suddenly. "I am only thinking of it, anyway, so let's not worry until there is something to worry about."

CHAPTER II

THE man bent his lips to hers again, and her arms stole about his neck. The calf, in the meantime, perhaps disgusted by such absurdities, had scampered off to try his brand-new legs again, with the result that he ran into a low bush, turned a somersault, and landed on his back. The mother, still doubtful of the intentions of the newcomers, to whose malevolent presence she may have attributed the accident, voiced a perturbed low; whereupon there broke from the vicinity of the live oak a deep note, not unlike the rumbling of distant thunder.

The man looked up.

"I think we'll be going," he said. "The Emperor has issued an ultimatum."

"Or a bull, perhaps," Grace suggested, as they walked quickly toward her horse.

"Awful!" he commented, as he assisted her into the saddle.

Then he swung to his own.

The Emperor moved majestically toward them, his nose close to the ground. Occasionally he stopped, pawing the earth and throwing dust upon his broad back.

"Doesn't he look wicked?" cried the girl. "Just look at those eyes!"

"He's just an old bluffer," replied the man. "However, I'd rather have you in the saddle, for you can't always be sure just what they'll do. We must call his bluff, though; it would never do to run from him—might give him bad habits."

He rode toward the advancing animal, breaking into a canter as he drew near the bull, and striking his booted leg with a quirt:

"Hi, there, you old reprobate! Beat it!" he cried.

The bull stood his ground with lowered head and rumbled threats until the horseman was almost upon him; then he turned quickly aside as the rider went past.

"That's better," remarked Custer, as the girl joined him.

"You're not a bit afraid of him, are you, Custer? You're not afraid of anything."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," he demurred. "I learned a long time ago that most encounters consist principally of bluff. Maybe I've just grown to be a good bluffer. Anyhow, I'm a better bluffer than the Emperor. If the rascal had only known it, he could have run me ragged."

As they rode up the side of the basin, the man's eyes moved constantly from point to point, now noting the condition of the pasture grasses, or again searching the more distant hills. Presently they alighted upon a thin, wavering line of brown, which zigzagged down the opposite side of the basin from a clump of heavy brush that partially hid a small ravine, and crossed the meadow ahead of them.

"There's a new trail, Grace, and it don't belong there. Let's go and take a look at it."

They rode ahead until they reached the trail at a point where it crossed the bottom of the basin and started up the side they had been ascending. The man leaned above his horse's shoulder and examined the trampled turf.

"Horses," he said. "I thought so, and it's been used a lot this winter. You can see even now where the animals slipped and floundered after the heavy rains."

"But you don't run horses in this pasture, do you?" asked the girl.

"No; and we haven't run anything in it since last summer. This is the only bunch in it, and they were just turned in about a week ago. Anyway, the horses that made this trail were mostly shod. Now what in the world is anybody going up there for?" His eyes wandered to the heavy brush into which the trail disappeared upon the opposite side of the basin. "I'll have to follow that up to-morrow—it's too late to do it to-day."

"We can follow it the other way, toward the ranch," she suggested.

They found the trail wound up the hillside and crossed the hogback in heavy brush, which, in many places, had been cut away to allow the easier passage of a horseman.

"Do you see," asked Custer, as they drew rein at the summit of the ridge, "that although the trail crosses here in plain sight of the ranch house, the brush would absolutely conceal a horseman from the view of any one at the house? It must run right down into Jackknife Cañon. Funny none of us have noticed it, for there's scarcely a week that that trail isn't ridden by some of us!"

As they descended into the cañon, they discovered why that end of the new trail had not been noticed. It ran deep and well marked through the heavy brush of a gully to a place where the brush commenced to thin, and there it branched into a dozen dim trails that joined and blended with the old, well worn cattle paths of the hillside.

"Somebody's mighty foxy," observed the man; "but I don't see what it's all about. The days of cattle runners and bandits are over."

"Just imagine!" exclaimed the girl. "A real mystery in our lazy, old hills!"

The man rode in silence and in thought. A herd of pure-bred Herefords, whose value would have ransomed half the crowned heads remaining in Europe, grazed in the several pastures that ran far back into those hills; and back there somewhere that trail led, but for what purpose? No good purpose, he was sure, or it had not been so cleverly hidden.

As they came to the trail which they called the Camino Corto, where it commenced at the gate leading from the old goat corral, the man jerked his thumb toward the west along it.

"They must come and go this way," he said.

"Perhaps they're the ones mother and I have heard passing at night," suggested the girl. "If they are, they come right through your property, below the house—not this way."

He opened the gate from the saddle and they passed through, crossing the *barranco*, and stopping for a moment to look at the pigs and talk with the herdsman. Then they rode on toward the ranch house, a half mile farther down the widening cañon. It stood upon the summit of a low hill, the declining sun transforming its plastered walls, its cupolas, the sturdy arches of its arcades, into the semblance of a Moorish castle.

At the foot of the hill they dismounted at the saddle-horse stable, tied their horses, and ascended the long flight of rough concrete steps toward the house. As they rounded the wild sumac bush at the summit, they were espied by those sitting in the patio, around three sides of which the house was built.

"Oh, here they are now!" exclaimed Mrs. Pennington. "We were so afraid that Grace would ride right on home, Custer. We had just persuaded Mrs. Evans to stay for dinner. Guy is coming, too."

"Mother, you here, too?" cried the girl. "How nice and cool it is in here! It would save a lot of trouble if we brought our things, mother."

"We are hoping that at least one of you will, very soon," said Colonel Pennington, who had risen, and now put an arm affectionately about the girl's shoulders.

"That's what I've been telling her again this afternoon," said Custer; "but instead she wants to—"

The girl turned toward him with a little frown and shake of her head.

"You'd better run down and tell Allen that we won't use the horses until after dinner," she said.

He grimaced good-naturedly and turned away.

"I'll have him take Senator home," he said. "I can drive you and your mother down in the car, when you leave."

As he descended the steps that wound among the umbrella trees, taking on their new foliage, he saw Allen examining the Apache's shoes. As he neared them, the horse pulled away from the man, his suddenly lowered hoof striking Allen's instep. With an oath the fellow stepped back and swung a vicious kick to the animal's belly. Almost simultaneously a hand fell heavily upon his shoulder. He was jerked roughly back, whirled about, and sent spinning a dozen feet away, where he stumbled and fell. As he scrambled to his feet, white with rage, he saw the younger Pennington before him.

"Go to the office and get your time," ordered Pennington.

"I'll get you first, you son of a——"

A hard fist connecting suddenly with his chin put a painful period to his sentence before it was completed, and stopped his mad rush.

"I'd be more careful of my conversation, Allen, if I were you," said Pennington quietly. "Just because you've been drinking is no excuse for *that*. Now go on up to the office, as I told you to."

He had caught the odor of whisky as he jerked the man past him.

"You goin' to can me for drinkin'—*you!*" demanded Allen.

"You know what I'm canning you for. You know that's the one thing that don't go on Ganado. You ought to get what you gave the Apache, and you'd better beat it before I lose my temper and give it to you!"

The man rose slowly to his feet. In his mind he was revolving his chances of successfully renewing his attack; but presently his judgment got the better of his desire and his rage. He moved off slowly

up the hill toward the house. A few yards, and he turned.

"I ain't a goin' to ferget this, you—you—"

"Be careful!" Pennington admonished.

"Nor you ain't goin' to ferget it, neither, you fox-troddin' dude!"

Allen turned again to the ascent of the steps. Pennington walked to the Apache and stroked his muzzle.

"Old boy," he crooned, "there don't anybody kick you and get away with it, does there?"

Halfway up, Allen stopped and turned again.

"You think you're the whole cheese, you Penningtons, don't you?" he called back. "With all your money an' your fine friends! Fine friends, yah! I can put one of 'em where he belongs any time I want—the darn bootlegger! That's what he is. You wait—you'll see!"

"A-ah, beat it!" sighed Pennington wearily.

Mounting the Apache, he led Grace's horse along the foot of the hill toward the smaller ranch house of their neighbor, some half mile away. Humming a little tune, he unsaddled Senator, turned him into his corral, saw that there was water in his trough, and emptied a measure of oats into his manger, for the horse had cooled off since the afternoon ride. As neither of the Evans ranch hands appeared, he found a piece of rag and wiped off the Senator's bit, turned the saddle blankets wet side up to dry, and then, leaving the stable, crossed the yard to mount the Apache.

A young man in riding clothes appeared simultaneously from the interior of the bungalow, which stood a hundred feet away. Crossing the wide porch, he called to Pennington.

"Hello there, Penn! What you doing?" he demanded.

"Just brought Senator in—Grace is up at the house. You're coming up there, too, Guy."

"Sure, but come in here a second. I've got something to show you."

Pennington crossed the yard and entered the house behind Grace's brother, who conducted him to his bedroom. Here young Evans unlocked a closet, and, after rummaging behind some clothing, emerged with a bottle, the shape and dimensions of which were once as familiar in the land of the free as the benign countenance of Lydia E. Pinkham.

"It's the genuine stuff, Penn, too!" he declared. Pennington smiled.

"Thanks, old fellow, but I've quit," he said.

"Quit!" exclaimed Evans.

"Yep."

"But think of it, man—aged eight years in the wood, and bottled in bond before July 1, 1919. The real thing, and as cheap as moonshine—only six beans a quart. Can you believe it?"

"I cannot," admitted Pennington. "Your conversation listens phony."

"But it's the truth. You may have quit, but one little snifter of this won't hurt you. Here's this bottle already open—just try it"; and he proffered the bottle and a glass to the other.

"Well, it's pretty hard to resist anything that sounds as good as this does," remarked Pennington. "I guess one won't hurt me any." He poured himself a drink and took it. "Wonderful!" he ejaculated.

"Here," said Evans, diving into the closet once more. "I got you a bottle, too, and we can get more."

Pennington took the bottle and examined it, almost caressingly.

"Eight years in the wood!" he murmured. "I've got to take it, Guy. Must have something to hand down to posterity—" He drew a bill fold from his pocket and counted out six dollars.

"Thanks," said Guy. "You'll never regret it."