

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer Bebel Proust
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke George
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Langbein Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Schiller Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Strachwitz Claudius Schilling Kralik Bellamy Gerstäcker Raabe Gibbon Tschechow
Katharina II. von Rußland Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Vulpius
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Gleim Goedicke
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke
Nestroy Marie de France Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
Nietzsche Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz
Marx vom Stein Lawrence Irving
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The Saddle Boys of the Rockies Lost on Thunder Mountain

James Carson

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER

- I. ACCEPTING A CHALLENGE
- II. THE STRANGE ACTIONS OF DOMINO
- III. OLD HANK COOMBS BEARS A MESSAGE
- IV. A NOTE OF WARNING AT THE SPRING HOLE
- V. THE VOICE OF THE MOUNTAIN
- VI. A SECOND ALARM
- VII. THE "RUSTLERS"
- VIII. A STARTLING DISCOVERY
- IX. WHAT HAPPENED TO PEG
- X. THREATS OF TROUBLE
- XI. THE BLACK NIGHT
- XII. LOSING THEIR BEARINGS
- XIII. THE SMOKE TRAIL
- XIV. A CALL FOR HELP
- XV. SPANISH JOE DROPS A HINT
- XVI. THE VENT HOLE IN THE WALL
- XVII. FRANK HOLDS THE HOT STICK
- XVIII. A GUESS THAT HITS THE BULLSEYE
- XIX. THE WORKING OF THE GOLD LODE
- XX. TRAPPED IN THE CANYON
- XXI. A CLOSE CALL
- XXII. ONCE MORE AT CIRCLE RANCH—CONCLUSION

THE SADDLE BOYS OF THE ROCKIES

CHAPTER I

ACCEPTING A CHALLENGE

"Hello! what brought you here, Frank Haywood, I'd like to know?"

"Well, I reckon my horse, Buckskin, did, Peg."

"And who's this with you—your new chum; the boy from Kentucky?"

"That's who it is, Peg—Bob Archer; and he's come out West to see how life on the plains suits him."

"Oh! a greenhorn, eh?"

"Perhaps some people might call him that, though he knows a heap about horses. But seems to me, Peg, 'twasn't so very long ago that you yourself dropped in on us here. Since when did you climb up out of the tenderfoot class, tell me?"

The boy who answered to the name of Frank Haywood was a rather chunky, well set-up lad of about sixteen. He had blue eyes, that were usually sparkling with mirth; and a mop of yellow hair; while his skin was darkened by long exposure to sun and wind.

Frank was the son of a rancher, who not only owned a large tract of land with many herds, but had interests in paying mines located among the mountains of the Southwest. Of course he knew more or less concerning such things as cowboys practice; though never a day passed on which Frank could not pick up new ideas connected with life in the open.

His companion, Bob Archer, was considerably taller than Frank, straight as an Indian, though rather inclined to be slender; but with a suppleness that indicated such strength and agility as the panther displays.

Coming from Kentucky, Bob could at least boast of long familiarity with horses; and his cleverness in this line promised to make him

a crack horseman when he had picked up a few more of the tricks known to range riders.

Both of the boys were especially fond of roaming the country, mounted on their favorite steeds; and indeed, they were becoming known far and near as the "Saddle Boys" because of their being seen so frequently, dashing over the prairies at top-notch speed.

Peg was the nick-name which had followed Percy Egbert Grant all the way from the Chicago suburb, where, for some years, he had played the part of both dude and bully. His father was very wealthy, and Peg always had more money than was good for him.

When he came to the great X-bar-X ranch, not so very far distant from the Haywood home place, Peg had adopted the same tactics that had carried the day for him in the past. The cowboys belonging to his father's estate seemed to knuckle under to him from the first. However much they might ridicule Peg behind his back, they cringed when he gave orders; because he was a liberal paymaster, and no one wished to incur his enmity.

So it came to pass that Peg actually began to believe himself of great importance in the community. He assumed airs that ill became one who was really ignorant of many things connected with ranch life.

He and Frank had never become friends. There was something about the fellow that the saddle boy could not tolerate. More than once they had almost come to blows; and, only for the peace-loving nature of Frank, this must have occurred long ago.

The two chums had taken the long gallop to the town on the railroad on this particular day to do a little important business for Mr. Haywood, who was associated with Bob's uncle in certain large mining enterprises. And it was while entering the town that they met Peg, who, with his customary assurance, had halted them with the question that begins this chapter.

When Frank give him this little cut, the face of Peg Grant showed signs of anger. He knew very well that he was making wretched progress along the line of becoming an accomplished rider and cowboy. And the easy manner in which the other boys sat their saddles irritated him greatly.

"What does it matter to you, Frank Haywood, when I left the greenhorn class and moved up a pace? All the boys of the X-bar-X outfit say I'm full-fledged now, and able to hold my own with nearly any fellow. It'll be some time, I reckon, before your new friend can say the same. But I will own that he's got a horse that takes my eye, for a fact."

"That's where you show good judgment, Peg," said Frank, laughing. "He brought that black horse with him from Kentucky. And he can ride some, you'd better believe me. When he gets on to the ways we have out here, Bob will hold his own against heaps of boys that were born and brought up on the plains."

"Say, I don't suppose, now, you'd care to sell that animal, Archer?" asked Peg, as he eyed the handsome mount of the Kentucky boy enviously. "Because I fancy I'd like to own him more than I ever did that frisky buckskin Frank rides. If you'd put a fairly decent price on him now —"

"I raised Domino from a colt, I broke him to the saddle, and we have been together five years now. Money couldn't buy him from me," replied the tall boy, curtly.

It was not Bob Archer's habit to speak in this strain to anyone; but there seemed to be a something connected with Peg Grant that irritated him. The manner of the other was so overbearing as to appear almost rude. He had had his own way a long time now; and thus far no one connected with the big ranch owned by his father had arisen to take him down.

"Oh! well, there are plenty of horses just as good, I guess," Peg went on; "and some people don't appreciate the value of money, anyway. But see here, Frank, you let your eyebrows travel up when I mentioned the fact that I'd graduated from the tenderfoot class. I could see that you doubted my words. Now, I'm going to tell you something that will surprise you a heap. Are you ready for a shock?"

"Oh; I can brace myself for nearly anything, Peg," replied Frank, easily; "so suppose you tell us your great news. Have you entered for the endurance race at the annual cowboy meet next month; or do you expect to take the medal for riding bucking broncos?"

"Any ordinary range rider might do that, even if he lost out," Peg went on; "but my game is along different lines; see? I'm on my way right now to run down the mystery of Thunder Mountain! I understand that for years it's puzzled the whole country to know what makes that roaring sound every now and then. Many cowboys couldn't be hired to spend a single night on that mountain. As for the Indians, they claim it is the voice of Great Manitou; and steer clear of Thunder Mountain, every time. Get that, Frank?"

"Well, Peg, you have given me a jolt, for a fact," answered the saddle boy, as his face expressed his surprise. "I allow that you show a lot of nerve in laying out such a big plan; and if you only find out what makes that trembling, roaring sound, you'll get the blessing of many a range rider who believes all the stories told about Thunder Mountain."

Peg stiffened up in his saddle, as though he realized that he was engineering a tremendously important thing; and had a right to be looked up to as a hero, even before the accomplishment of the deed.

"Well, that's always the way with you fellows out here, I find," he remarked, loftily; "you leave all the big things to be done by fellows with real backbone. But then, I don't mind; in fact I'm obliged to you for neglecting your opportunities so long. Just you wait, and you'll hear something drop. Couldn't I induce you to name a price on that black beauty, Archer?"

"Domino is not for sale at any price," replied the other, quietly.

"Oh! all right then. So long, Frank. Go back home, and wait till I send you word about what I've found out!" and with a careless wave of his arm Peg whirled his horse around, and galloped off.

"Now, I wonder did he mean that; or was he just bluffing?" said Frank, as he turned to his chum.

"He looked as if he might be in dead earnest," replied Bob; "but you know him better than I do, and ought to be able to say whether he'd have the sand to take up such a job as that."

"Oh! nobody doubts his grit, when it comes to that," Frank went on, as though trying to figure the matter out. "And he seems to want to do something everybody else lets alone. You know what I told

you about Thunder Mountain, Bob; and how it has been a mystery ever since the country hereabout was settled by people from the East?"

"Yes," the Kentucky boy replied, "and somehow, what you told me seemed to shake me up as I don't ever remember being stirred before. It was like a direct challenge—just like somebody had dared me to look into this queer old mountain, and find out what it all meant."

"That's just it," said Frank, watching the face of his chum with a show of eagerness. "It struck me the same way long ago, and I can remember often thinking what a great time a few of the right kind of fellows might have if they took a notion to go nosing around that old pile of rock, to see what does make all that row every little while."

"And you tell me nobody knows what it is?" demanded Bob.

"Why, don't you understand, the cowboys all keep away from Thunder Mountain as much as they can. They're worse than the Injuns about it, because while the reds say that is the voice of Manitou talking, these fellows just up and declare the mountain is haunted. Lots of 'em couldn't be hired to spend a night on the side of that big uplift."

"But Frank, we don't believe in any such thing, do we?" pursued Bob, as if he had begun to suspect what all this talk was leading up to, and wished to draw his chum on.

"We sure don't, and that's a fact," declared Frank. "Twice, now, one of our boys has made out that he saw a ghost, but both times I managed to turn the laugh on him. All the same, if you offered a lump sum for any fellow to go and camp out half-way up the side of Thunder Mountain for a week, I don't believe he could be found, not at Circle Ranch, anyhow."

"I've seen the same kind of men myself; and the coons around our old Kentucky home always carried a foot of a graveyard rabbit, shot in the full of the moon, as a sure talisman against ghosts. I've seen many a rabbit's foot. No use talking to any of them; it's in the blood and can't be cured. But about that offering a sum for any fellow to go and camp on the side of that old fraud of a haunted mountain, if

you happen to hear about such a snap you might just think of me, Frank."

The other saddle boy smiled broadly. He believed he knew Bob pretty well by this time, and could no longer doubt what the Kentucky lad was hinting at.

"Say, look here, would you take me up if I proposed something right now?" asked Frank, his face filled with sudden animation.

"If you mean that we try and beat Peg Grant at his own game, and learn what the secret of Thunder Mountain is, I say yes!" answered Bob, steadily.

"Shake on that!" he exclaimed. "I'm just primed for something that's out of the common run; and what could be finer than such a game? I saw Billy Dixon in town; and we can send back word to father that we've gone off for a big gallop; so he won't worry if we don't turn up for a few days. Is it a go, Bob?"

"Count on me," replied the other. "I don't know how it is, Frank; but it strikes me that I'd like to cut in on that boaster in this thing. If we managed to find out what makes that fearful booming in the mountain, and told about it before he got a chance to blow his horn, he'd feel cheap, wouldn't he?"

"He sure would, now," Frank said. "And when you look at it, he just the same as gave us the challenge direct, because he hinted that we didn't have the nerve to attempt such a big thing as this. Bob, we'll call it a go! Wonder what Peg will say when he runs across us out there in that lonely place? Wow! I reckon he'll be some mad."

"Let him," remarked Bob, carelessly. "He has no claim on Thunder Mountain; has he? And we want to call his bluff, if it was one. So just make up your mind we're in for a new experience. It may pan out a heap of fun for us. And it will be worth while if we can settle the question that has been giving these superstitious cowmen the creeps all these years."

"Then let's get through with our business, send word by Billy, though not telling what we've got in the wind, and then pick up a few things we might need on a trip like this. After that we can drop out of town, and take our time heading for the mountain; because I

think I'd like Peg to get there first, so that he couldn't say we'd stolen his thunder."

Half an hour later the saddle boys, having finished their business, and sent the Circle ranch cowboy galloping homeward bearing the message to Mr. Haywood, were moving slowly through the main street of the town, heading toward a store where they could pick up a couple of blankets, a simple cooking outfit, and some of the substantial in the way of bacon, coffee and the like, when they came upon a scene that instantly attracted their attention.

It was a terrified cry that reached their ears at first, and caused both boys to pull in their horses. Glancing in the direction whence the sound of distress seemed to spring, they saw a small Mexican girl struggling with an over-grown fellow, garbed in the customary range habit, even to the "chaps" of leather covering his trousers.

Both Frank and Bob jumped from their saddles, for the little affair was taking place in the courtyard of an inn that fronted on the street. Whether the brute was simply playing the bully, and trying to kiss the girl; or meant to strike her for getting in his way, Bob Archer did not stop to inquire.

His warm Kentucky blood on fire, he made a swoop for the fellow, and managed to give him a tremendous blow that toppled him over in a heap.

"Lie there, you coward!" he exclaimed.

And then, as the fellow whom he had knocked down struggled to his knees, to stare up at him, Bob discovered, not a little to his surprise, and satisfaction as well, that he was looking into a familiar face.

It was Peg Grant!

CHAPTER II

THE STRANGE ACTIONS OF DOMINO

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Frank; which remark showed how much surprised he was to recognize the youth whom his chum had sent to the ground.

"What do you mean by hitting me like that?" snarled the rich man's son, as he managed to scramble to his feet again, though he seemed a bit "groggy," and one of his eyes was already turning dark, as if it had come in violent contact with a stone when he struck the ground.

"What do *you* mean, hurting that poor little Mexican girl?" demanded Bob, who stood on his guard, as though he might not be averse to trying conclusions with the bully, if so be the other felt like seeking satisfaction for his upset.

"She sassed me when I ordered her to get out of my way, that's what she did;" declared Peg, wrathfully, "and I'd look nice now, wouldn't I, letting a little greaser kid talk back to me? So I was just giving her a good shaking when you broke in. Guess you didn't know who you were hitting when you did that, Bob Archer!"

"Perhaps I didn't," replied the Kentucky lad, calmly; "though that wouldn't have made any particular difference. Any cur who would lay his hands on a child like that ought to get knocked down every time. I'd do it again if you gave me the chance!"

Peg stared at him. Perhaps he had never been treated in this manner before. All his life his acquaintances had truckled to him on account of the great wealth of his father, and the liberal way he himself, as a boy, rewarded those who were allowed the privilege of being his cronies or mates.

"You—would, eh?" he gasped, as if hardly daring to believe his ears. "Even if you knew it was Peg Grant you'd treat me that way; would you? I'll remember that! I'm not the one to forget in a hurry. Some day, perhaps, you'll wish you'd never tried to play the hero part, and hit me when my back was turned. I've got a good notion to teach you a lesson right now; that's what!"

"All right," remarked Bob, coolly. "Suppose you begin. I was never in a better humor for trouble. Somehow I seemed to just know we'd hit it up sooner or later if our trails crossed. I give you my word, my friend here won't put a finger on you, if so be you get the better of the row; will you Frank?"

"I should say not," declared the lad, instantly, adding: "and unless I miss my guess there won't be any need of it, either."

"Are you coming on, Peg?" asked the Kentucky lad, temptingly.

From under his drooping eyebrows Peg observed how easily the other had assumed a position of self-defense. Somehow Peg did not fancy the athletic build of his antagonist; for, while Bob was rather slender, he had the marks of one accustomed to exercise; possessing at least ordinary ability to take care of himself.

"It'll keep, and be all the better for the delay," Peg grumbled, as he clenched one fist furiously, and used the other hand to feel of his injured optic. "Besides, I don't feel fit to fight right now, with this bunged-up eye. But just wait till the right time comes, and see what you get then for doing this."

"Oh! well, suit yourself," returned Bob, with a laugh. "If the little brown-faced girl hadn't vamoosed I declare if I wouldn't feel like making you get down on your knees, and asking her to excuse you. Bah! you're not worth bothering about, Peg. Get out!"

The other moved away. He did not like the manner in which Bob said this; and he seemed to be afraid that perhaps the other might yet decide to press some further indignity on him.

When, however, he had reached the door of the inn, so that he could have a way of escape open to him in case of need, he stopped and shook his fist threateningly toward the saddle boys.

"You're both going to pay dear for this little fun, hear that?" he called, his voice trembling with passion. "I'll find a way to get even, see if I don't! And when Peg Grant says that he means it, too! Just you wait till I— —"

And then, as Bob started to advance toward the hostelry Peg retreated in a panic, slamming the door after him.

"Well, what d'ye think of that?" asked Frank, who had been an amused observer of this curious scene.

"He's turned out just what I thought he would," remarked Bob, as he once more gained the side of his comrade, a grim smile on his face. "Whenever you run across a fellow who likes to boast of the way he does things, make up your mind he's a rank coward, every time. No matter what he claims he will do, there's a yellow streak in him *somewhere*, and sooner or later it's bound to show."

"I believe you're just about right, Bob," said Frank; "and it agrees with my own opinion exactly. Still, that fellow can be dangerous if he wants."

"So can a rattlesnake; but at any rate the reptile is honest, for he gives plenty of warning before he tries to strike; and that's more'n Peg would do, if I read him straight."

"You must keep an eye out for him after this, Bob. He'll never forgive you that crack. My! but didn't it drop him, though! Just like a steer would go down when the loop of a lariat closes on his foreleg. That fellow will lie awake nights trying to get even with you."

"Let him," remarked Bob, carelessly; "next time perhaps I'll put a little more steam back of my fist, if he pushes me too hard. That's the way they treat cowards back where I was brought up; and they call anybody by that name who will put his hand in anger on girl or woman. But see here, Frank, is this little affair going to force us to change our plans?"

"Whew! I forgot all about that," said the other, with a whistle, and an uplifting of his eyebrows. "If we go poking around Thunder Mountain, and Peg is there, with a couple of the tough cowboys he has trailing after him most of the time, Spanish Joe and Nick Jennings, perhaps we'll run up against a peck of trouble."

"Well, how about it?" asked Bob, with a shade of annoyance on his face.

"What do you say?" asked Frank, in turn.

"Go, by all means," came the quick response. "You don't think so mean of me as to believe I'd be frightened off by the bare chance of running across that fellow's trail out there; do you, Frank?"

"All right, call it a bargain, then. I'm with you through thick and thin, Bob. Let Peg have a care how he meddles with us. We're going to pay attention to our own business, and he'd better do the same. But what became of the little Mex? I thought I'd seen her face before, somewhere, but she skipped out before I could take a second look. Some cowboy, or cattle rustler's child from beyond the Rio Grande, I reckon. Well, come along, let's get in the saddle again, and finish our shopping. Then we'll go out to the country along the river, and put in a day waiting for Peg to have his chance at finding out what makes Thunder Mountain groan and shake just so often, and scare the Injuns out of their seven senses."

As the two chums swung themselves into their saddles, and cantered away, a head was thrust cautiously out from behind a pile of boxes near by; and then, finding the coast clear, the small girl who had been the cause of all the trouble darted across the courtyard, vanishing beyond the gate.

Frank and Bob went about making their purchases, first fastening their horses to a rail in front of the general store, where everything they needed could be bought.

More than one cattleman in passing would cast an envious eye toward those two splendid mounts, for they could not fail to catch the attention of anyone accustomed to judging horseflesh, as these Western men were. Still, it would be a bold man indeed, white or Indian, who would dare attempt to steal a horse in broad daylight, in a country where such a thief was treated to a rope when caught.

Frank had had considerable experience in roughing it, while his comrade was, in a measure, new to such a life. Consequently it was Frank whose judgment was called into play when making a selection of the things that would be essential to their comfort when on this new campaign.

Many articles they could do without; but a blanket apiece was absolutely necessary, as was a frying pan and coffee pot, two cups, as many platters, as well as common knives, forks and spoons such as prospectors and cattlemen use.

For food they took some bacon, coffee, dried meat, hard-tack in place of bread, a can of condensed milk, and several other things which would carry well.

"We must make them up in two packs," Frank went on; "so that each of us can fasten one to his horse, back of the saddle. And, as I'm an old hand at this business, just watch me get a hustle on. Next time you'll know how to go about it for yourself, Bob."

The Kentucky boy always studied everything his comrade showed him, for it was his ambition to excel in the many little tricks connected with the free life of the plains. Things were done so differently here from what he had been accustomed to in his old Kentucky home, before his father died, that they often puzzled him; but Bob was a persistent boy, and would never rest content until Frank could teach him no more.

Neither of them suspected what was going on outside, while they busied themselves in purchasing the supplies needed for the little campaign in the neighborhood of the mysterious mountain. And yet all was not as quiet as it might be.

The saddle boys had hardly been inside the general store ten minutes before a slinking figure might have been observed drawing nearer and nearer to the horses ranged along the bar. There were several besides the animals of our two young friends; but, somehow, the handsome black seemed to attract the entire attention of this shadowy form.

Twice he stopped, and assumed an attitude that would indicate his utter indifference to such commonplace things as horses. Then, finding that it must have been a false alarm, he would edge closer.

Finally he was beside the black horse, uttering low words such as cowboys make use of to soothe a restive steed when they mean to throw a saddle across his back, and cinch the girth.

Two men came out from the store, and drew near. The slim figure, finding it out of the question to flit hurriedly away, without attracting attention, which was just the thing he wished to avoid, commenced stroking the sleek side of the big black Kentucky thoroughbred, as though he might be a cowboy connected with the far famed Circle ranch of Frank's father.

Casting just one casual glance toward him, the men threw themselves into their saddles with the rapidity and grace of true plainmen, and went galloping off.

Two minutes later the shadowy figure of the man flitted away from the line of horses that remained. If his purpose had been to steal the black he must have changed his mind, for there was no break in the chain of horses that stood there, impatiently scraping the ground with their forefeet.

A little later out came Frank and Bob, each bearing a compact bundle which they quickly fastened back of their saddles.

Bob was the first to mount, and this action was hurried because he hardly knew what to make of the restless actions of Domino. The animal seemed to be dancing up and down as though he had stirred up a hornet's nest, and the little insects were charging his exposed legs.

No sooner was Bob in the saddle than the horse gave a shrill neigh, and dashed off like a crazy creature. Indeed, a less experienced rider than Bob would have been instantly thrown by the sudden and unexpected move, something that Domino had never been known to attempt before.

Frank looked up in astonishment. His practiced eye told him in an instant that the sudden violent dash had not been engineered in the least by his chum; but was altogether the result of fright on the part of Domino. Why, the big and powerful black acted as though he had gone wild, jumping madly about, now fairly flying off to one side, only to whirl and dance and leap high in the air, until every one within seeing distance was staring at the strange spectacle. And this, too, in a town where bucking broncos were a common sight.

Frank had gained his saddle, and was chasing after his friend, but just then the black had taken a notion to run, and apparently nothing in that country could overtake him while his present savage mood held out.

"What ails the beast?" Frank asked himself, as he drew rein and watched the other passing beyond range of his vision among the stunted mesquites outside of the edge of the town. "He acts like a locoed horse; but there isn't a bit of the poison weed growing within

twenty miles of here. And why was Peg Grant standing on the stoop of the tavern grinning as I rode past? Can he have had a hand in this sudden crazy spell of the black? Spanish Joe knows all the tricks of putting a thorn under a saddle, that will stab the horse when the rider mounts. Is that the trouble now? If it is then it's lucky my chum knows as much as he does about managing a horse, or he would never come back alive from that mad ride. And all I can do is to sit here, wait for his return, and watch Peg Grant and his cronies!"