

Andy was up and away, spry as anything, now on one knee to shoot, now up and going it again."

North visualized the thing in his mind: the rifle, blue in the sunshine, gleaming like a bar of glass; thick whiffs of smoke shredding into webs and dissolving wraiths.

"Winnie rode toward him," Mrs. Ross affirmed. "Didn't come back with the cattle. We screamed for her to come; we yelled ourselves hoarse. She wouldn't, though. Wild, reckless, harum-scarum girl! She wouldn't come, however much we yelled."

The rest need not have been told. North anticipated everything, knew it before it was spoken: how Andy got into the buffalo wallow with Matt; how Winnie rode there, too, spurting along at a frantic pace, and how the two men and the girl defended themselves, effectively beating back the Indian assailants until the supply of cartridges had been shot away.

"Doug Davis called for volunteers," Mrs. Ross concluded. "I give him credit. Got men together, and led them.

"A little slow to get started. There was the trouble." Her voice suddenly dropped to an unintelligible muttering, something about "lock barn door . . . horse stolen. Too late, you see! Too awful late!"

North filled his lungs. His right hand had suddenly shut upon the woman's shoulder, gripping with a painful and even a bruising force.

"Don't say it," he demanded. In his eyes glared such a strangeness, such a fanatical determination as to frighten her. "*Not* too late," he went on. "Can't be. It mustn't be. I won't have that."