

running. Could he afford to turn aside in a wide half circle and give the maid the advantage of a straight run? But could he let Rena make the detour?

"You keep straight on ahead," he commanded, suddenly. "I'll ride around and turn him back toward the level."

For a full minute the maid wavered. Bert was already circling off to the left, leaning low in his saddle, watchful, determined. She twitched Baby's rein and followed him. If she won, it must be fairly. She would not allow his chivalry to give her an advantage, just because she was a woman. It must be as man to man.

Bert, hearing hoof-beats behind him, turned his head just as the maid raised her whip and struck Baby the first blow she had ever given him. Again they rode side by side, neither speaking, but both understanding that it was not the coyote—it was a trial of speed between them.

The coyote halted long enough to observe this new tactic, stretched his tense muscles, lowered his head and swung regretfully away from the refuge for which he hungered. He was full from feasting and his speed was past. He took to dodging and turning this way and that, in a vain effort to shake off his pursuers. His head drooped lower, his bushy tail dragged in the crisp, prairie grass. He heard the man give a shrill, exulting whoop, and terror gripped his heart. He wheeled short off and dove into a shallow, grassy coulee. There were great deserted badger holes in the clay banks on the farther side. He would creep into one—back, back into the hill, where it was dark and cool and silent.

But the coulee was wide and the nearer rim but a gentle slope, down which the horses thundered like a whirlwind—and Flopper was holding his own and, having found his second wind, was holding it without visible effort. The maid could understand now how the cowboys felt when they saw Bert saddling Flopper to lead circle. Baby was straining every muscle to keep alongside, and the whip had stung his flank many times in the last half mile.

The gray streak had resolved itself into a tired, panic-stricken animal, crouching nearer to earth and running heavily. The man straightened in his saddle and widened the loop in his rope, holding the coiled surplus loosely in his left hand and with the free end tied securely to the saddle horn.

"He's our meat now," he remarked with much satisfaction, and spurred Flopper nearer. The coyote ducked warily and whirled away, but to the horse trained to dodge back and forth in a herd cutting out cattle, this was but child's play. He wheeled and kept pace with the quarry.

The man's arm uplifted and the loop circled, slowly at first, then faster, cutting the air with a subdued "who-o-o, who-o-o," till, with a sudden swish, it shot through the intervening space and settled relentlessly over the slim gray body and tightened as the man turned his horse away and braced himself—but not on account of the coyote. He must meet Flopper's inherent distaste of being pressed into service as a temporary anchor.

Horses, like men, have individual peculiarities of temperament, and Flopper was no exception to the rule. He would run until his knees weakened under him, and do it gladly. He would dodge and turn an animal and think it good fun, though his sides were wet with perspiration. He would not settle back as a good rope horse should do, to hold captive even a jack rabbit. He had a way of expressing his objection which was forcible and convincing, and Bert Rogers knew it, but he took the chance. Even Flopper could not always buck, and when he had finished there would still be the coyote fast in the loop—perhaps. As I said before, Bert Rogers took the chance. And there was the maid, sitting upon her panting chestnut, watching him intently. "Oh!" The maid did not know of Flopper's prejudice, and was not pre-

pared for his acrobatic outbreak. She retreated a short distance up the slope and waited respectfully while he vented his spleen at the fancied indignity, and watched the superb horsemanship of the man with eyes and quick, indrawn breaths, while the coyote was yanked unceremoniously this way and that, passively yielding.

And then Flopper did an unforgivable thing. He reared straight up and went careening recklessly over backward, and with him went the man. The maid gave a sharp, horrified cry and dashed forward, just as Flopper picked himself up and shook himself with guilty defiance. He walked off a few steps and stopped, eyeing his master inquiringly.

He had not meant to kill the fellow, but he meant to convince him once for all that he was not a rope horse. Even a horse cannot have a dozen specialties, and his specialty was speed and endurance. He hoped Bert Rogers would remember that fact hereafter. The coyote raised his head and gazed stupidly at the group, too weary and disheartened to think of escape.

The maid knelt and lifted the man's head in her arms. He was not "deathly pale," as is proper to fallen heroes—but then, he was so dreadfully tanned. And his forehead, when she pushed back the mass of damp hair, did look rather white. The maid bent impulsively and kissed the white streak. Then, seeing he did not move, she grew bolder and laid her lips upon his—once, twice.

The man opened his eyes and looked quizzically up at her and the maid blushed furiously. His eyes did not hold the shadow of death, or even of pain silently borne. There was amusement—and something beside.

"Are you hurt?" She could think of nothing else to say.

"Er—yes, I think I am." The man lied, and she knew it. She would have withdrawn her arms indignantly from around his neck, but the man held them there. And he was not noticeably weak. "Rena," he said, solemnly, "if it wasn't for that cussed money of yours I'd ask you to marry me."

"I—you—maybe I can get pa to take the rest," said she, demurely, looking away to where Flopper was staring haughtily at the coyote, which was striving furtively to creep away. Flopper was so incensed at the effrontery of the beast that he settled back and was holding the rope taut of his own accord, which is added proof that some horses come near to being human.

"I wish to goodness you would," said the man, still holding her hands tightly in his. "I wondered, just as I was going over, if you would care if I got killed—so I laid still till I found out. Oh, you can't get loose!" "But the coyote will," ventured the maid, evasively.

"If it wasn't for the money," persisted the man, "if I had asked you two months ago, would you—"

"Yes, I would—so there!" flashed the maid, tempestuously. "And I don't care for the old money, anyhow. And I don't want to go East and ride in any old automobile, or wear straight front dresses—or anything."

The man's eyes smiled up at her. "The home range is good enough, eh?"

He threw her head gently downward till their lips met.

—X—X—X—

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