

the Blue Top road; and Eastman was there.

"He stole my boy!" the father called out furiously. "I'm going to kill him!" He lunged himself forward.

The man with the revolver pushed him back. And, "No! No!" expostulated the doctor. "Eastman! You're makin' a mistake!"

The prisoner gave a loud, hard laugh. "You bet your life he's making a mistake!" he declared.

"We got you just the same," said the man with the revolver triumphantly.

"Put him on a horse," ordered Eastman, maddened more than ever by the taunting laugh. "He'll take me to my boy or I'll kill him."

The captured man ignored the father. His look was on the doctor, and it was full of hate. "Ah, h—!" he exclaimed disgustedly. "I could kick myself! Last night I had my finger on the trigger. But like a fool—"

Eastman was sobbing in baffled rage. "Oh, my baby!" he cried. "Four days with this brute! Think of it!"

"No more monkey business." The man with the revolver was speaking, and he gave his prisoner a rough poke in the side with his boot.

"You're in the hands of the sheriff, and you're going to take us out to that canon. We start right off."

"No, we don't," was the answer. "You've trapped me, the three of you. Send me up if you can. My word's as good as this doctor's, and I don't have to take you anywhere to hunt for evidence against me."

"Get up," commanded the sheriff. He unbuckled the irons from his prisoner's legs.

The man with the scar rose. "Nobody'll ever find that cabin or what's in it," he said doggedly. "And when Bill dies—"

"Oh, my God!" It was the father. The doctor was leaning in the doorway. "What'd you do this for, Mr. Eastman?" he asked.

The tears were streaming down Eastman's face. "We thought the sheriff ought to come," he faltered. "The boy's mother is frantic. And this seemed the surest way."

The doctor shook his head. "I'm afraid we've lost our best chance," he said.

"See here, Doc," broke in the sheriff. "I made the capture. And I want you to understand that when we find the boy I'm entitled to the reward."

The other turned astonished eyes upon him. "Reward?" he repeated.

"You mean to say you didn't know there's five thousand offered?"

"So that's why you done this," said the doctor, and shrugged his shoulders. "You know, I've heard tell of fellers that put their foot in it. You've got your'n in plumb to the knee."

"I'll come out all right," retorted the sheriff boastfully. "I'll send for dogs. There's three in Sacramento. I can have 'em here in eighteen hours."

"If I don't git to Bill," said the doctor. "he'll be dead before that." He looked at the man with the scar.

"Eighteen hours!" repeated Eastman miserably.

Now the sheriff advanced upon his prisoner. "You're going to take me to that cabin," he said threateningly. "You don't think so now, but I can make you change your mind. Come along." He seized his prisoner by a shackled arm and jerked him toward the gate.

Eastman started after the two, pleading incoherently. But half-way to the gate he stopped. A girl blocked the walk. It was Letty.

"Depend on the doctor," she said. "He took his life in his hands to find the boy. He was going to risk it again to bring him to you. And he didn't even know there was a reward."

Eastman turned and went stumbling back.

"But he doesn't know the way," he protested. "He said he didn't."

In answer, the doctor took his arm and led him down the street to the wide gate opening into Bobby's corral. "I'll have a horse here for you in a minute," he said. "I'll ride this one. You see, there's another scheme. But it really don't depend on me—it depends on this little bronc."

When Bobby was saddled and bridled Letty put her cheek against his soft

nose. "Do your best," she whispered; and to his rider: "Don't fall!"

The doctor took both her hands in his. "I'm a-goin' to make it," he declared. "Stay with the boy's maw, little gal, till we come."

Bobby was eager to be off, pawing as the doctor mounted and backing in a circle when his rider held him in to wait for Eastman. The reins loosened, the little horse sprang forward at a brisk canter, leading the way out of town.

It was at the forks of the road that the first halt was made. Here the doctor, having first tied the bridle reins to his pommel assumed the exact position in the saddle that he had twice been compelled to take, and laid his hands on his saddle-horn.

"Now, Bobby," he said, touching the mustang gently with his heels, "here we are. Go on."

Bobby moved forward, but hesitatingly, and, when he had gone a few steps, stopped, looking about him.

Again the doctor urged him kindly. "Want your supper, Bobby? Come, now."

The little horse made forward at a brisk walk then, travelling straight south along the road that followed the track. Presently, however, he turned sharply to the right and entered the brush.

"Do you think he's going right?" called out Eastman anxiously.

"Wal," answered the doctor, "he acts like he means business. You see, for two days I ain't gived him a bite to eat except when he was out yonder in that canon."

Bobby was taking a westward course that was almost at right angles to the road he had just come down. He wound through scrubby liveoaks and bristling chaparral, evidently along no path. Behind him the other horse had to be urged constantly, for the undergrowth was heavy and hung across the way. But soon the brush parted to leave a straight, open track, so narrow, however, that it seemed only a path. The doctor got down and lit a match. They were on a trail that showed recent use. Upon it, stamped plainly in the dust, were the round, eastward-pointing hoofprints of a mule.

"Are we right?" asked Eastman.

"So far."

Now both horses were pushed to a canter—until the path grew rough and steep. The doctor recognized this descent and listened for the sound of the rushing stream he had crossed both times under the guidance of the man with the scar. When the stream was washing the hoofs of their horses the doctor reached out to lay a hand on Eastman's shoulder.

"My friend, we're half-way!"

Eastman would have pressed ahead then, but the doctor would not permit it. "Leave it to Bobby," was his counsel. "Mr. Nick didn't blindfold Bobby."

The path ascended the long slope of a hogback. Pine needles covered the slope, and though the doctor dismounted a half dozen times no path could be seen. But each time, as he stepped into the saddle again, the little horse went forward eagerly.

The hogback ended abruptly. Bobby turned to the left. The trip had seemed so short that now, as the doctor looked into the darkness below him, he could scarcely credit his senses.

"Eastman!" he said. "See below there!"

It was a spot of light.

From then on it was a wild ride. The horses did not leave the steep path; but they stumbled, slid or scrambled for a footing down the whole of the blue descent. The doctor kept his eyes on the light. Eastman, divided between joy and fear, shouted out frenziedly toward the nearing shanty.

At the edge of the clearing both men flung themselves out of their saddles, then ran. Eastman led. And as he entered the low door he still hoarsely called: "Laurie! Laurie! Laurie!"

A faint cry answered. It came from beyond the bed, on which lay a quiet form. The doctor reached to shove at the boards forming the blind door. They gave, disclosing a small inner room.

The next moment a little figure in soiled rompers came out of the darkness of the room, toddling unsteadily on

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