

A LONG SHOT.

By W. BUCKLEY.

THE scenery between Bull's Toe and Jaggersville is not beautiful, its principal feature being a deep canyon running perilously near the railway track and intersecting a broad stretch of broken country, dangerous even in daylight, because the gaping pits and fissures, half-hidden by long, rank herbage, marking the site of the once-famous Bull's Toe Claims are the tide of perennial dupes with which the Old World so lavishly supplies the new had drifted away to other hunting-grounds.

Gold there never had been at Bull's Toe; but, nevertheless, it could boast an attraction nearly as potent, at this period of its decline, in the

taught Sally to manipulate the banjo.

But what is a banjo to the bicycle which it had been Jackson's privilege to introduce to her notice. For if the mere instructing of a pretty girl in the one accomplishment constitutes an "opportunity," what pen can do justice to the glorious possibilities involved in teaching her the other?

Sally's performances on the saddle, and the "vivacities" accompanying them, presently excited much comment, that finally bore its ripened fruit in a pointed allusion to "rocks of scandal" from the Rev. Mr. Dewberry some Sundays later, and Mr. Jackson was henceforth regarded as fair game for the local gossips—a circumstance which seemed only to give him fresh claims on the young lady's consideration, while his rivals, in-

erous admirers in absolute contempt of Government regulations. Mr. Jackson had been admitted to a considerable degree of intimacy, and, indeed, had occupied a week or two before his transfer to Jaggersville the position of accepted suitor, for Rosie, though not an English maid, had mastered thoroughly the invaluable "engagement" system. Since his promotion she sent him several rallying messages over the wires, and judging from his replies that he meditated defection, the enterprising damsel, supported by her mamma, quietly made a voyage of discovery to Jaggersville, and descended one fine morning upon the unhappy clerk as he was engaged revising the before-mentioned signal code.

Prudence as well as politeness caused Peter to feign rapturous delight, and from that moment until the blessed one two evenings later when his visitors took their departure, he was in close attendance upon the Big Timbers' divinity, showing her over the flourishing town, and unfolding for her the natural beauties of Dead Dog Canyon.

Rosie professed herself much pleased with the trip, and they parted tenderly, though had Peter seen the look upon her face as the last Jaggersville signal-post glided past the darkening carriage-windows, he would not have felt quite so self-satisfied when flashing, five minutes after, to Bee Ranch: "Big freight. Detained on business again."

Intelligence of this visit having reached Miss Dubleek's ears, she promptly felt aggrieved, though with feminine subtlety she dissembled her indignation, and contrived presently to pick quarrels on various flimsy pretenses, the gulf widening between Peter and herself until its dimensions were but faintly shadowed forth by those of the great canyon. Finally, to further mark her displeasure, she

Considerably surprised, for no passengers left or arrived by that train, Mr. Jackson went to the door with the intention of making inquiries, but was spared the trouble by the rapid development of subsequent events.

The door was pushed open at that very instant by a firm, stealthy hand, and half a dozen masked armed men silently entered the small apartment. They were led by one who removed his disguise and, lifting his slouched hat, bade the telegraph clerk "Good evening" in carefully modulated accents. Mr. Jackson stared at him blankly and then, recollecting the clean-shaven face, recognized him as a quiet, rather unctuous clergyman who had called at the station that morning with a code telegram for Big Timbers and had received almost immediately a similar reply. He was apologetic and exceedingly affable, and lingered on the platform chatting with Jem, the porter, about his duties and responsibilities for nearly ten minutes, leaving that worthy a dollar tip when he took his dignified departure. Mr. Jackson set his teeth.

"Young feller," began the other, replacing his hat, "you an' me have met before today, so there ain't no need of any introduction. I'm mighty obliged about that telegram—see? There's no time for chat, but me and my rards here are willin' to give you a fair chance. There's been a bad old plant on ye, sonny. We have information a train's expected here tonight, but we're not so sure about the hour, an' we just want you to tell us or find out. We won't trouble you to go to that machine there, for my pard, Wily Bill, will work the wires for any message you care to send—see? My name's Nebraska Ben—perhaps you've heard it afore—an' tonight I'll be a man or a mouse, an' so'll every chap who sees me through! Will you stand in with us? Mr. Jackson was not a hero, and I



"THE BICYCLE WAS FOUND LYING RUINED."

person of Miss Sarah Dubleek, a treasure far above nuggets, the sphere of her influence extending even to Jaggersville with its twelve dwelling-houses and railway station, through which no fewer than three trains ran daily.

Why that especial branch of the Grand National had ever been constructed few could tell. It is just possible it may have owed its existence to a pathetic faith in the golden promise of the time, but more probably it was simply an added feature in the gigantic farce which had ruined thousands and filled the pockets of the New York swindlers. However, it proved useful sometimes by relieving the main line of freight traffic for about two hundred miles, the length of its winding course, until it joined the Grand National again a little below Topeka.

Mr. Peter Jackson, the gentleman who discharged the duties of telegraph clerk and station-master, was naturally a person of considerable leisure, and as soon as he made the acquaintance of Miss Dubleek, he quite as naturally spent much of the time in which he was so rich at Bee Ranch, a farm run by Seth Dubleek and his fascinating sister, under the supervision of their widowed mother, whose husband had been the straightest shot and toughest citizen of the Bull's Toe district, before a regrettable misunderstanding with an equally eminent celebrity, Nebraska Ben, obliged him to make a hurried, though dramatic, exit from the little stage whereupon he had played so strenuous a part.

An acquaintance of this nature ripens rapidly into intimacy beneath the genial skies of Kansas, and so evident were Mr. Jackson's attentions that the sports of Jaggersville began to lay heavy odds on the probability of an early marriage: for it was clearly seen that he was first favorite outdistancing even Kiah Dewberry, the minister's son, who had

censed beyond measure, openly mentioned bowie-knives in this connection; and no one expressed the least astonishment when, one dusky evening, the offending bicycle was found lying hopelessly ruined on the Jaggersville road, beside the body of its insensible owner; a lasso, still tightly stretched across the way, eloquently explaining the situation.

If Sally's other suitors were responsible for this, it simply accelerated the catastrophe they wished to avert, because, even before Mr. Jackson's arm was out of splints, it became generally known that the belle of Bull's Toe had at length chosen a mate, and that his first name was Peter.

The bicycle lessons were not resumed, but the bicycle lamp, having escaped the general wreck, suggested to the ingenious clerk another amusement, quieter, and more suited for the lengthening September evenings. It consisted in a flash-signal method of communication based upon a carefully-prepared code which Miss Dubleek learned rapidly, and ere long they were enabled to exchange soft nothings literally over their neighbors' heads, across the good half-mile of impracticable country separating them whenever the inclemency of the weather or the eccentricities of the train service kept Mr. Jackson a prisoner at the station.

From this point onward all should have gone merry as the marriage-bell, if the course of true love had not been damned by one of those misunderstandings which make, if not the fortunes, at least the stock-in-trade of novelette writers.

Some short time before, when Mr. Jackson was operating at Big Timbers, he, with many other prominent citizens, offered incense at the shrine of the local beauty, one Miss Rosie O'Grady, a girl of kingly and turbulent antecedents. She was employed on the telegraph service, and spent most of her time ringing up her num-



"HE FELL SENSELESS."

ceased even the signals they were accustomed to exchange every evening by the aid of the domestic paraffin-lamp.

Pride, and the consciousness that Miss O'Grady possessed painfully compromising documentary evidence, withheld Mr. Jackson from making the "explanation" of tradition, and the odds against Kiah Dewberry sensibly diminished.

Things were in this posture when one evening, about half an hour before the arrival of the last train from Denver, as Mr. Jackson was quietly finishing his eighth pipe by the stove, he caught sight of a swift, sudden, shadowy procession of figures outside the window of his little two-story house, standing close to the track and about 400 yards above Jaggersville.

fear I have inaccurately described him as a gentleman. He belonged to a type which forces the fact of its existence upon one in every tram-car and trottoir from San Francisco to New York; he is ground up by machinery, crushed by lifts, and cut asunder by electric cars all over the States with perfect impunity, for he is a cheap man, and there is only a small amount to pay for killing him "accidentally." At this especial moment, however, and in this lonely station, his representative rose to a courage as admirable, though certainly not picturesque, as that displayed by the famous General Dillon on the scaffold, when he gaily stepped to the guillotine, out of his turn, so that the timid woman at his side might see how easy it was to die.