

Certain words uttered by the shrewd Sheeny Ben came back to the memory of Hog Eye, and he drank no more that day. Here, then, was chance! He turned his steps toward the houses fronting the railroad; and so the keeper of the Racquet Store that day had the pleasure of company. Suffice it to be said that a week later, Hog Eye Forbush appeared on the scene revamped, a trader, if you please, captaining an industry of profits. He drove in, that day, as happy as you please, sitting in a sway-bellied wreck of a buck-board, and behind two dejected, worldly-wise army mules, lately sold at a rummage sale.

"Yes, gentlemen," he remarked ostentatiously to the crowd of loungers loafing on the hitching rail, "I've gone into tradin', an' hopes for yer well wishes. Now anything in the general line, sich as—"

"Oh, hell's bells!" interrupted Ropesey Hawspeke, who was riding range that summer on the western edge of the reservation; "you go tell that to the agent, mebbe. That job o' yours has been offered freely to every dead-broke hobo on this here cattle country, but there ain't none would touch it. What's the tariff on that store goods o' yours? What's it cost a gurgle?"

Thus it was the wickypups and hovels of the reservation, the rufous children of the Great White Father made pleasaunce by day and day; and there was many a sound of revelry by night. In the gut of a nearby coulee lay the sway-bellied buck-board and the dissipated mules, while to and from this base of supplies traded Mr. Forbush, carrying his liquid entertainment among the grateful people of the plains. If any buck or squaw had the price, there was Hog Eye accommodating — a little less than kin and more than kind. It was not often in this world that a man might find his chance—his level; a level chance so easy. But along toward the coming of the snows, the end befell.

At nightfall, Pinto Sawbell, loping in from the calf-camp, where the winter feeding had begun, was aroused from his reveries by a sound of wheels, and there was Hog Eye Forbush, making haste. He swept past at a gallop, laying on the whip, and never even hesitated to pass the time of day.

"Oh, if it ain't Hog Eye—hullo, Hoggy!" said Mr. Sawbell, loping alongside; "say—hol' up there and give us a trade."

But Hog Eye, shaking his head savagely, said he hadn't time.

"Oh, me! Oh, my!" exclaimed Pinto, grabbing a nigh-side bridle, and hooting derisively, as it was his wont; "now don't you be in no sich stampede, honey. Gimme a yard an' a half o' gurgles an' a pint o' chaser, an' wrap 'em up nicely so's I c'n take 'em home to the lady." To insure prompt attention, Sawbell dragged the mules to a halt, and rounding his cow-pony across the

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"It was Easy, Oh, so Easy"

trail, threw a leg nonchalantly across the saddle-horn.

"For God's sakes, Mr. Pinto!" gasped Hog Eye, looking backward wildly along the road; "please to let me go on!" He clucked to the mules and slapped the reins sharply across their haunches; but Pinto sat unmoved while they reared and kicked in the traces.

"Please, don't you ride me down," said Pinto mildly, but with a gleam in his eyes that admitted no mistake; "please to give me my dry goods, an' you can bring up the change. I expect a trader to be obligin'."

With a look of despair, Forbush leaped from the wagon and ran around to the tail. Under his awkward, hurrying fingers, the strap buckle jammed, and he swore at it in savage rage.

"Once agin for the ladies an' little chil'ren," suggested Pinto, whimsically; "ah — there y're now—dinn't I guess it!" For Hog Eye had drawn a heavy jug out of the wagon-box, and thrust it into his hands. "Sure it ain't for the hair or yer wagon-body?" inquired Pinto, releasing the bridle; and at that Forbush took a flying leap to the seat, swatted the mules and was off at a gallop toward the hills.

Pinto withdrew the jug from his lips and grunted. "Pizen," he exclaimed, spitting out the liquor; "or hoss paint—the taste don't leave ye nawthin' to guess by an' takes away the smell. Hey—"