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Four years now this lonesomeness of the wilderness had been hers, had grown to be the most intimate thing in life. It had stamped an indelible mark on her mind. Hilma Ring, at nineteen, lived solely within herself. She sought sympathy, communion in thought and understanding with no one. Her father was the only person who came near invading this hard barrier of self-sufficiency. Perhaps she loved him; Hilma did not know. More often than not she considered him merely a shrunken little man with a bad temper with whom she must work in order to live. His Danish burr of speech was a dull irritation.

So it was into the selfish sphere of this narrow life that the smiling and impudent stranger had shot, comet-like. Reason enough for Hilma's disliking him. But because he had taunted her with her poor shooting, defied her to kill him if she could, she hated him. Because, too, he was of the cattle clan — that caste deeming itself superior and demanding for itself subservience of all others — she hated him. Hated him, also, because he had run off with four misbranded yearlings which Zang Whistler had left in their secret corral under a working agreement with her father.