

BAT WING BOWLES

was begging him to come back, and her folks were reading her letters. She couldn't *write* it to him—she had to *tell* him—and he never showed up at all. Please don't apologize for him, Mr. Bowles; I'm sure there's not a word to be said."

Mr. Bowles bowed his head and felt very humble indeed, as if he, too, in some inexplicable way, had erred and been rebuked.

"And now," said Dixie at last, "Father'll make Mr. Brig his wagon-boss, and they'll get married and live at the ranch. Simple, isn't it?"

"Why, it seems so," admitted Bowles; "but how do you know he will?"

"How do I know?" repeated Dixie, rolling her eyes on him. "Why, Mr. Bowles, have you been around the Bat Wing for two months and failed to note who was boss? Right after you and Brigham Clark left I went down and *fired* that Hardy Atkins—so you don't need to be bashful about coming back."

Her voice trailed off a little as she ended, and Bowles started and looked at the ground. New worlds and vistas appeared before him, and visions and sudden dreams—and then he was back by her side, and the road was passing by.

"I'm sorry," he said at last. "It's *my* own fault—I should have explained at the beginning. But now your mother has written to her sister, and she has told my aunt, and so I've got to move