

She went back and crept into her bed, sick at heart with an unnamed fear and a hurt that went deep into her soul. She gave a little, dry sob or two and lay very still, her face crushed into a pillow.

But Mary V was not born to take life's hurts passively. Presently she dressed and went straight down to the bunk house, where she knew the boys would be at their breakfast — unless they had finished and gone to the corral. She walked into the old-fashioned, low-ceiled living room where she had first learned to walk, and stood just inside the door, smiling a little.

Bud had just finished eating, and was rolling a cigarette before he got up from the long table. The others were finishing their coffee and hot biscuits, and they said hello to Mary V and went on undisturbed.

"Hello — what's all that racket I heard as I was getting up?" Mary V inquired lightly. "My good gracious, I thought you boys had started a sawmill — or maybe somebody had overslept down here and was snoring. It sounded like Aleck."

They laughed, and Curley spoke. "That there was Skyrider. He has flew —"

Bud, fumbling for a match, had a fit of genius. He grinned, cleared his throat, and began to warble unexpectedly.