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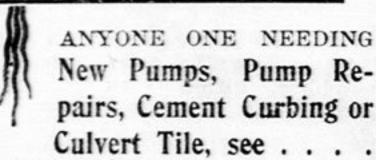
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CLIVE PHILLIPPS WOLLEY

(AUTHOR OF "GOLD, GOLD IN CARIBOO," ETC.)

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> CHAPTER IX. A Ride for Life

"Where are you going to, Jim?" ask-

ed the Bosa, who had followed Combe out of the sick room. Jim came back from his dream with start and turned a very white and haggard face to his old friend.

ou can spare me." had a bite of food to-day, and after all, afford to worry about trifles, and as

be so very serious." "Can't tell. She might lose him." There was something strangely pitiful in the way in which all Jim's mind thing. turned upon what she might suffer,

hardest blow of his life. take her chance like the rest. I in-

Jim, with a queer laugh, "you can put that Valuable Hotel Property | some cold grub and a little whiskey in a cartridge bag for me. I can eat when the horse plays out."

"What do you mean to ride? We've ridden the tails off the best of the This property consists of a large two- stock. Will you take that big hunter? Anstruther's?'

> "No. I'll take the young roan. He's the only horse that could make it." "That devil! He isn't broken and never will be.'

Jim grinned. "May be," he said "this will break him. It'll break him or me," and he went over to the stables calling to the men to help him saddle a beast which no one else had attempted to handle, a young stallion as beautiful as Lucifer and as tractable.

When Rolt hurried out to him with the cartridge case and the flask, four men were trying to hold as perfect a emon as ever wore hide.

The wind shrieked around them, the cose litter of the yard rattled about the frightened horse's feet, and the lashed his blood red flanks. rode impressed itself upon him. ANYONE ONE NEEDING Within a radius of twenty or thirty feet of his flying heels it was unsaf

for any living thing to come, but the pairs, Cement Curbing or men hold on to the ropes, hoping that in time he might quiet down a little. Cinch the bag on for me good and ight, Boss. It might get shook off."

Relt obeyed, and Jim shook himself to try the fastenings.

"Nothing loese is there? Now, teady, you devil," he went to th horse's head, which bared its teeth, laid its ears down, and backed away from him across the corral, dragging the four men with it.

For a quarter of an hour Jim tried vain to approach near enough to mount the roan, but by striking, biting and kicking, the savage brute frustrated every effort. "Guess we'll have to throw him after

all, but it's a pity to take anything out of him that way," and then suddenly Jim's voice came from a higher level. "Gee whiz! Let him go."

The chance had come whilst he was speaking, and with a tiger-like spring the cowboy had taken it, dodging the flying heels like a miracle.

It was done so quickly that no one was not enough time for the spectators that offered.

But it was a magnificent sight for those who were safe from the mad

In spite of Jim, the horse had got its head down. Its back was arched so that there seemed nothing in front of endurance of his horse. the saddle except space, and even that receded as soon as the brute shot up the compass in turn. But this was not good enough to shake off Jim Combe.

"Them's baby tricks," he muttered, and as if the roan heard him, it reared until those at the window saw nothing in the driving rain but the vast figure of a horse rampant, like the supporter of an heraldic shield.

The man was invisible until the great beast, jerked backwards by its rider, crashed heavily to earth. Then, for a moment, they saw Jim on his feet, his cigarette, one only sign of his horseman's vanity, still between his teeth, the next he was again astride he was holding a yellow-haired child of the rising beast.

was in him, and the panic stricken holding court amongst innumerable beast rushed blindly from the corral. it, luckily only of light poles, set up to | pitched drawl; or again he was back keep in young calves.

horse to rise at a fence. Certainly it she had grown grass high and reading never occurred to that maddened roan. With a rending crash he went through the young pine poles, shattering them like match stalks, and so was gone, the on his head that Combe came back

lowing up horse and man. In winter upon the northern ranches ther he realized that he must give the evening comes early, and on this day horse rest even if he needed none himof storm it seemed to come upon the | self. heels of midday, so that as im Combe dashed out of the corral it was already

The storm swallowed him up; so drove against him that he sat bowed in the hard earth, tied a knot vigilance and his eternal patience traits of Their Majesties in existit seemed to flow through him. Yet he dug, replaced the soil he had taken out his life-long battle with the wild growing in value year after year. had no time to feel the misery of it and stamped it in firm and hard with things around him. The beasts' senses great void, out of which from time to

out of his way, and alongside nim, though he could barely see it as he raced past it, ran three and twenty miles of the fencing of the winter pas-

Twice he grazed it, so dark had the day become, and cach time he left a fragment of his clothing behind him to mark his course. On the second occasion he struck hard against a project-"To Soda Creek to fetch Protheroe if ing bar, and his left leg seemed to lose consciousness. But he sat down and "But you can't go yet. You haven't rode as steadily as ever. He could not Anstruther's injuries do not appear to it grew darker every minute, he realized that there were no precautions that he could take to minimize his risk. He had to stop or chance every-

could not see where he was go-The undersigned has received instruct the woman who had just dealt him the ing, perhaps the roan could, and even if he could not, Jim was not going to "Oh, nonsense, man, she has got to take a pull at him yet. As long as the horse stood up and kept going, the sist on your having something before miles were taten under his feet. That was all that mattered. Time was of "Well, if you insist, Boss," replied the essence of Jim's contract.

His partner Fate was playing his hand now for him, and he refused to interfere in the game. As long as it lasted it was excellent to fly through the dark stinging sleet, and as to the end he cared nothing. When the roan first bolted, the wildness of the storm, all the splendid energy of the crazy beast between his knees got into Jim's blood, and he became intoxicated with the madness of his ride.

horse reeled and slithered, and almost lost his feet, but the man only laughed as they staggered and went on.

ther he broke his neck or not at first, but as the pace and distance began to tell upon the horse, the beast's tamed mood began to communicate itself to the man, so that instead of the glory of the strife, the misery of those infinite waste places through which he

revealed to him and almost frightened him. He had known the prairies all his life, but this aspect of them had never struck him before.

less of Jim Combe.

and barren life, without rest, without But he had taken the plunge, and since it was too late to reconsider it, he not be robbed of his reward.

She would be happy even if her long soft hair round it, as to the origin happiness was bound up in that of another man, and therefore at last he took a pull at his horse and begun to ride more cautiously.

It was then that he felt how much he had so far eaten nothing. He had done work enough to kill an ordinary man, and unless he was much mistaken the boot on his left leg was slowly filling with his own blood.

had time to see how Jim scrambled now. With the other he contrived to even before the quarrel in their camp extract the sandwiches and flask from they had been sullen and silent, and the cartridge bag, which still rode sel then there had been the reappearance to seek shelter in the first doorway curely on his back, and reducing his of Davies' murderer and that unlucky pace to a lope he ate and drank as quarrel.

He supposed that the night must have commenced, though there were none of the ordinary signs of time t guide him, and he marvelled at the

Fortunately the savage wind had not suffered the sleet to lie sufficiently into the air, coming down again stiff upon the plateau over which he rode legged and sudden at every point of to seriously deteriorate the going. The ground rang hard as iron and as the fever of excitement died out Jim rea lized that the night had turned bitterly

For half of that night Combe hardly knew that he was riding. A man sa in the saddle in the heart of a grea darkness, swaying in time to his horse's stride, and at the proper time lending such assistance as the rider can to the ridden, but that was not Jim Combe.

Jim himself was away, sometimes in one place, sometimes in another. Now up on his shoulder so that she could Then he vanished from the corral see over the corral and watch old Al lassoing a wild cow; now he was back As the roan rose again on its hind in England in places of purely imagilegs, Combe drove the long rowels nary magnificence, where a young home with all the cruel force that there | queen with that child's features was Anstruthers who moved slowly and There was a fence at the far end of spoke in Book-English with a lowin the sick-room looking into the It never seems to occur to a prairie heart of the girl he had loved since in it the name of another.

Twice the roan "pecked" badly, and the third time so nearly came down rain-lashed ocean of dim prairie swal- from his mental wanderings, pulled up and dismounted. If he would ride far-

The fence of the pasture had long since been left behind; it was too dark replace his broken weapon. to look for a stake; there was nothing For the first half hour of his ride he bigger than a clump of sage brush to had no time to think. Nature provided the to, and tired as the roan was, he their hams around Combe, like wolves sheet, size about 18x15 inches,

Taking out his jack knife, he dug a but those so vigilant that they seemed deep hole in the hard earth, tied a knot to follow his very thoughts. It is his petent judges to be the best porknot at the bottom of the hole he had which enables the Indian to win in ence, and will become historical

moved lumberingly and unwillingly fear of losing his horse so fastened.

CHAPTER X.

Close Quarters For over an hour Combe lay where he was, watching the horse and think ing, whilst the blackness of the night paled and grew even more weird and ghastly from the grey that had crey.

Then it seemed to him that some

thing heavier than a coyote moved

among the sage brush on the ridge t his left. He listened, but the nois was not repeated. Jim was too goo a plainsman to persuade himself tha his ears had played him false becaus he could not understand their mes sage, and beside, the red roan ha heard it too. The horse was standin, with his ears pricked, watching as h yould never have watched for coyote: n spite of the cowboys' constant at ention those vagabond thieves were ar too numerous on the home ranc! or the roan to pay much attention to them. Still watching the ridge, which vas as yet but a vague line in the fog Jim saw at last what he took to be two coyotes moving slowly along it. A onger scrutiny showed him four, no

ive indistinct objects passing jus above the line, and at last he knew hem for the heads of riders passing. as they believed, unseen on the further side of the ridge. He could see how the heads rose and fell with the move ments of the horses beneath them, and then for a moment the riders came plainly into sight where a dip occurred n the ridge.

In the mist and darkness he might never have noticed them at the distance at which they passed, so vague and so silent were they, if his ears had not warned him of their coming; but they saw him, of that he felt sure, though he had not stirred in his lair of wet sage brush, and curiously enough his horse had not whinnied.

For a moment he thought of calling to them, but men do not hail every passer-by on the prairie, and he changed his mind. He did not want anything of them, so he lay still, whilst they, without a pause or turn of the head, rode silently past him and disappeared in the mist.

"Indians, of course," he muttered 'they must have seen the horse." And He cannoned into the flank of one of then he fell to wondering why they the great Hereford bulls, half seen for had made no sign and why they were Tan and Freckle Lotion a moment in the gloom, so that his riding at that hour in the morning towards the Risky Ranch.

In the ordinary course of things though they would have passed by in It was absolutely immaterial whe- silence, and near enough to satisfy their own curiosity.

expedition of the posse had accomplished nothing unless it were to prove that the Chilcotens had broken up their camp and left the country, probably for an early winter hunt towards Tatlo Lake, and in all the years that he had The homelessness of the prairie was lived on the plains and in B. C. Jim had never had any serious trouble with Indians.

He had become so used to them indeed as peaceful neighbors, that he He had committed suicide, and he had almost forgotten the red stories knew it, not an unjustifiable cowardly of which the plains used to be full: act, but the voluntary killing none the legends of burnt ranches, of men and women murdered across their own Henceforth the world as he now saw thresholds, and brutally mutilated in it would be typical of his own grey order that their long hair might trim a chief's robe. But those stories were warmth, without the light of hope. of Sioux and Apaches. He doubted whether the Indians of B.C. had ever taken scalps until he remembered a made up his mind at any rate he would | hideous dancing mask which hung in the Boss's library that had tufts of

of which he had never hitherto trou-

Now everything seemed changed. There was a terror abroad on the ranch lands, not so much seen as felt, his own strength had waned. That day and though he scoffed at presentiment, he was conscious of it himself.

The cattle had been disappearing as they had never disappeared before; there had been no friendly visits from the Chilcotens as there used to be. He could ride the roan with one hand Whenever he had met any of them,

Jim would have liked it better if the Indians had visited the ranch to demand compensation for those broken rifles, and would almost have been in clined to listen to their claims, bu

they had made no sign. Just then the roan snorted, and Jim turned his head in the nick of time. The five figures which had passed him ten minutes earlier like shadows, stood almost at his back, arrested in their stealthy approach by his sudden movement. He could see, though they had paused, how the leading figure gripped a short bludgeon which he carried, and he knew Davies' murderer and understood the look in that sullen animal face; but though his heart seemed to give a jump and then stand still, Combe did not attempt to rise or show any sign of surprise.

He understood why these five had crept up behind him, through the misty dawn in this featureless waste, but his hand only closed over the revolver which was sheltered in the breast of his coat, and he rolled leisurely over so as to face the five and bring his left elbow across the rifle which he had taken from his saddle before pick eting his horse.

"Oh, Jim, Jim! You dear old Jim! Come quickly; we want you so badly,' was what he seemed to hear; though as the five squatted silently round him they uttered no word.

Except for that bludgeon they were none of them armed, a curious thing Jim thought for Indians who carry rifles as townsmen carry walking canes, nor was he much less puzzled when he realized that these were the very five whose weapons he had smash ed against the pine trees. Rifles were not as common then as they are to-day amongst the Indians, but as one of these was Khelowna, the chief, he at ily Herald for the same period for

For what seemed like an hour the five savage figures crouched upon him with that panacea of man's pain, dared not leave him loose, as he would limbs motionless only their ever all most convenient size for framing. have done with any ordinary cow pony. limbs motionless, only their eyes alive, They are acknowledged by comare keener than those of his pursuers Then he lay down on the frozen and he loves life, but the tireless pa- you both papers until January 1st

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