

***EUGENE MANLOVE
RHODES***

A photograph of a desert landscape. In the foreground, there is a flat, sandy area. In the middle ground, there are rolling sand dunes with distinct ridges and shadows, suggesting a low sun position. The background is a clear, solid blue sky.

***STEPSONS
OF LIGHT***

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Stepsons of Light

EAN 8596547359531

DigiCat, 2022

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THE END

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“Why-Why had been principally beaten about the face, and his injuries, therefore, were slight.”

—*The Romance of the First Radical.*

“A fine face, marred by an expression of unscrupulous integrity.”

—*Credit Lost.*

The lady listened with fluttering attention. The lady was sweet and twenty, and the narrator—myself—was spurred to greater effort. Suddenly a thought struck her. It was a severe blow. She sat up straight, she stiffened her lips to primness, her fine eyes darkened with suspicion, her voice crisped to stern inquiry.

“I suppose, when Sunday came, you kept right on working?”

It was an acid supposition. Her dear little nose squinched to express some strong emotion—loving-kindness, perhaps; her dear little upper lip curled ominous. She looked as though she might bite.

“Kept right on working is right. We had to keep on working,” I explained. “We couldn’t very well work six days gathering cattle and then turn them all loose again on the seventh day—could we now?”

The lady frowned. The lady sniffed. She was not one to be turned aside by subterfuge. She leaned forward to strike,

and flattened her brows in scorn. She looked uncommonly like a rattlesnake. She said:

“I suppose you couldn’t put them in the barn-yards?”

And I learned about readers from her.

Cattle were once grazed to the nearest railroad—say, a thousand miles—yes, and beyond that railroad to Wyoming grass; or Montana. No one who saw those great herds forgot them or ever quite refrained from speech of those stirring days, to children or grandchildren. That is why so many think—not unnaturally—that range cattle were always held under herd. But it is a mistaken impression. Cattle do not thrive under herd.

Cattle on the free range—everybody’s cattle—were turned loose and mixed together. There were no fences except as deep rivers counted for such; the Panama Canal was yet undug. Twice a year, in spring and fall, everybody gets together to work the cattle at the rodeo, or round-up. They brand the calves; they take into the day herd all strays, all steers or cows to be shipped, and nothing more. From cattle gathered each day steers and strays are cut out and thrown into the day herd; all the others, the range cattle, are turned loose with a vigorous shove in that direction most remote from to-morrow’s round-up.

Again, your ranch was that land to which you had either title or claim; its purpose was to give a water right on stream or lake or to hold spring, well or tank. But your range was either Texas land or Uncle Sam’s land as far as your cattle would range from your various water rights—say, twenty-five miles in each direction. Your range was that

country where you were reasonably sure your cattle would not be stolen by strangers.

Here was the way of the Bar Cross round-up; with slight variations it was the way of any round-up. The Bar Cross Company, running the biggest brand on the Jornada range, supplied one foreman, one straw boss, three top hands and the captain of the day herd; one horse wrangler, who herded the saddle horses by day; one night wrangler, who herded them by night; and mounts for these eight. The Bar Cross also furnished one red-headed cook; one chuck wagon and the chuck—chuck being grub—and one bed wagon to haul bed rolls from camp to camp, and also to haul wood and water between times. Item: Four mules for the chuck wagon, and two for the bed wagon. The night wrangler drove the bed wagon; night wranglers were not supposed to sleep.

Other ranchmen, co-users of the Bar Cross range, sent each a man and his mount to represent. A man with many cattle might send two or more men; the 7 T X—next to the Bar Cross the biggest brand on the Jornada—sent four. Each man or each two men brought tarp and bedding on a pack horse.

From north, south, east and west came the stray men, each with mount and bed. Stray men stayed with the outfit as long as it pleased them. When they were satisfied they cut out from the day herd their own cattle, together with those of their neighbors, and drove them home. As a usual thing, three or four would throw in and drive back together. If by chance some man was homeward bound and alone,

the Bar Cross detailed a man to help him home; a friendly and not imprudent custom.

To sum up: The Bar Cross paid nine men, and provided good grub for all comers; in return it had the help of twenty-five to forty men in working the range; the rodeo, or round-up.

During the weeks or months of that working, wherever some other outfit gave a round-up—east, west, south or north—there, with mount and bed, went either a Bar Cross man or one from some other brand of the Jornada people, bringing back all Jornada cattle.

A word about horses. In the fall, when grass was green and good, a mount was eight to thirteen head. One must be gentle; he was night horse; every man stood guard at night two and a half to three hours; all night in case of storm. For the others, the best were cutting horses, used afternoons, when the day's drive was worked; the poorest were circle horses and were ridden in the forenoon, when the round-up was made. But in the spring it is different. Grass is scant and short; corn is fed, and four horses go to a mount; the range is worked lightly.

So much was needful by way of glossary and guide; so partly to avoid such handicap as we meet in telling a baseball story to an Englishman.

It is a singular thing that with the Bar Cross were found the top ropers, crack riders, sure shots—not only the slickest cowmen, but also the wisest cow ponies. Our foremen were “cowmen right,” our wranglers held the horses, our cooks would fry anything once. But you know how it is—your own organization—firm, farm or factory—is doubtless the best of

its kind. No? You surprise me. You have missed much—faith in others, hope for others, comradeship.

It is laughable to recall that men of other brands disputed the headship of the Bar Cross. Nor was this jest or bravado; the poor fellows were sincere enough. Indeed, we thought this pathetic loyalty rather admirable than otherwise. Such were the 101, in Colorado; the X I T, in the Panhandle; the Block and the V V, between the Pecos and the Front Range; the Bar W, west of the White Mountain; the V Cross T, the John Cross, the Diamond A and the L C, west of the Rio Grande. Even from Arizona, the T L, the Toltec Company—Little Colorado River way—put forth absurd pretensions.

The Bar Cross men smiled, knowing what they knew. That sure knowledge was the foundation of the gay and holdfast spirit they brought to confront importunate life. No man wanted to be the weak link of that strong chain; each brought to his meanest task the earnestness that is remarked upon when Mr. Ty Cobb slides into second base; they bent every energy on the thing they did at the joyful time of doing it. In this way only is developed that rare quality to which the scientific give the name of pep or punch. Being snappy made them happy, and being happy made them snappy; establishing what is known to philosophers as the virtuous circle. The nearest parallel is newspaper circulation, which means more advertising, which boosts circulation, and so onward and upward.

In that high eagerness of absorption, a man “working for the brand” did not, could not, center all thoughts on self; he trusted his fellows, counted upon them, joyed in their deeds.

And to forget self in the thought of others is for so long to reach life at its highest.

The Bar Cross had worked the northern half of the range, getting back to Engle, the center and the one shipping point of the Jornada, with fifteen hundred steers—finding there no cars available, no prospect of cars for ten days to come. To take those steers to the south and back meant that they would be so gaunted as to be unfit for shipment.

So the wagon led on softly, drifting down to the river, to a beating of *bosques* for outlaw cattle and a combing of half-forgotten ridges and pockets behind Christobal Mountain. It was a work which because of its difficulty had been shirked for years; the river cattle mostly came out on the plains in the rainy season, and got their just deserts there. Waiting for cars, the outfit was marking time anyhow. Any cattle snared on the river were pure gain. The main point was to handle the stock tenderly. From working the *bosques* the outfit expected few cattle and got less.—The poets babble about the bosky dell; *bosque*, literally translated, means “woods.” Yet for this purpose if you understand the word as “jungle,” you will be the less misled.

Johnny Dines sat tailor-wise on his horse at the crest of a sandy knoll and looked down at the day herd, spread out over a square mile of tableland, and now mostly asleep in the brooding heat of afternoon. About the herd other riders, six in all, stood at attention, black silhouettes, or paced softly to turn back would-be stragglers.

Of these riders Neighbor Jones alone was a Bar Cross man. He was captain of the day herd, a fixture; for him

reluctant straymen were detailed in turn, day by day, as day herders. Johnny represented a number of small brands in the north end of the Black Range. His face was sparkling, all alive; he was short, slender, black-haired, black-eyed, two and twenty. He saw—Neighbor Jones himself not sooner—what turmoil rose startling from a lower bench to riverward; a riot of wild cattle with riders as wild on lead and swing and point. As a usual thing, the day's catch comes sedately to the day herd; but this day's catch was *bosque* cattle—renegades and desperates of a dozen brands.

Jody Weir, on Johnny's right, sat on the sand in the shadow of his horses. This was not ethical; seeing him, Yoast and Ralston, leading the riot, turned that way, drew aside to right and left, and so loosed the charging hurricane directly at the culprit.

Weir scrambled to saddle and spurred from under. The other riders closed in on the day herd, stirring them up the better to check the outlaws. Half of the round-up crew followed Yoast to the right of the now roused and bellowing day herd, bunching them; the others followed Ralston on Johnny's side of the herd.

Cole Ralston was the Bar Cross foreman. Overtaking Johnny, he raised a finger; the two drew rein and let the others pass by. Cole spoke to the last man.

"Spike, when they quiet down you ride round and tell all these day-herder waddies that if any of 'em want to write letters they can slip in to the wagon. I'm sending a man to town soon after supper."

He turned to Johnny, laughing.

"Them outcasts was sure snaky. We near wasted the whole bunch. Had to string 'em out and let 'em run so they thought they was getting away or they'd ha' broke back into the brush."

"Two bull fights started already," observed Johnny. "Your Sunday-School bulls are hunting up the wild ones, just a-snuffin'."

"The boys will keep 'em a-moving," said Cole. "Dines, you ride your own horses, so I reckon you're not drawing pay from the ninety-seven piney-woods brands you're lookin' out for. Just turning their cattle in a neighborly way?"

"Someone had to come."

"Well, then," said Cole, "how would you like a Bar Cross mount?"

Slow red tinged the olive of Johnny's cheek, betraying the quickened heartbeats.

"You've done hired a hand—quick as ever I throw these cattle back home."

"Wouldn't Walter Hearn cut out your milk-pen brands as close as you would?"

"Sure! He's one of the bunch."

"Your pay started this morning, then. Here's the lay. Tomorrow we work the herd and start the west-bound strays home. Walt can throw in with the S S Bar man and I'll send Lon along to represent the Bar Cross. Hiram goes to the John Cross work, at the same time helpin' Pink throw back the John Cross stuff. So that leaves us shy a short man. That's you. Send your horses home with Walt."

"I'd like to keep one with me for my private."

“All right. Leave him at the horse camp. Can’t carry any idlers with the *caballada*—makes the other horses discontented. You drift into the wagon early, when you see the horse herd coming. I’m goin’ to send you to the horse camp to get you a mount. We’ll cut out all the lame ones and sore backs from our mounts too. I’ll give you a list of fresh ones to bring back for us. You go up to Engle after supper and then slip out to Moongate to-morrow. We’ll be loadin’ ’em at Engle when you get back. No hurry; take your time.”

He rode on. Behind him the most joyous heart between two oceans thumped at Johnny’s ribs. It is likely that you see no cause for pride. You see a hard job for a scanty wage; to Johnny Dines it was accolade and shoulder stroke. Johnny’s life so far had been made up all of hardships well borne. But that was what Johnny did not know or dream; to-day, hailed man-grown, he thought of his honors, prince and peer, not as deserved and earned, but as an unmerited stroke of good fortune.

The herd, suddenly roused, became vociferous with query and rumor; drifted uneasily a little, muttered, whispered, tittered, fell quiet again, to cheerful grazing. The fresh wild cattle, nearing the periphery, glimpsed the dreaded horsemen beyond, and turned again to hiding in the center. Cole and most of his riders drew away and paced soberly campward, leaving ten herders where they found six.

Jody Weir rode over to Johnny.

“Old citizen,” he said, “the rod tells me you are for Engle, and if I wanted to send letters I might go write ’em. But I

beat him to it. Letter to my girl all written and ready. All I had to do was to put in a line with my little old pencil, telling her we'd work the herd to-morrow and start home next day. She'll be one pleased girl; she sure does love her little Jody."

Johnny knotted his brows in puzzlement. "But who reads your letters to her?" he said wonderingly.

"Now what you doin'—tryin' to slur my girl? She's educated, that child is."

"No; but when you said she—she liked her little Jody—why, I naturally supposed"—Johnny hesitated—"her eyesight, you know, might be—"

Weir slapped his leg and guffawed.

"Thought she was blind, did you? Well, she ain't. If she was I wouldn't be writing this letter. Most of it is heap private and confidential." His face took on a broad and knowing leer as he handed over the letter. It was fat; it was face up; it bore the address:

MR. J. D. WEIR, HILLSBORO, N. M.

Johnny put the letter carefully in his saddle pocket.

"Don't you think maybe you're leaving an opening for some of the cattle to slip out?" he said, twitching his thumb toward Weir's deserted post.

"Let them other waddies circulate a little—lazy dogs! Won't hurt 'em any. Cattle ain't troublin', nohow. Cole, he told me himself to slide over and give you my letters. Darned funny if a man can't gas a little once in a while." He gave Johnny a black look. "Say, feller! Maybe you don't like my talk?"

“No,” said Johnny, “I don’t. Not unless you change the subject. That young lady wouldn’t want you to be talking her over with any tough you meet.”

Jody Weir checked his horse and regarded Dines with a truculent stare. “Aw, hell! She ain’t so particular! Here, let me show you the stuff she writes, herself.” His hand went to his vest pocket. “Some baby!”

“Here! That’s enough! I’m surprised at you, Jody. I never was plumb foolish about you, but I suhtenly thought you was man enough not to kiss and tell. That’s as low-down as they ever get, I reckon.”

“You ain’t got no gun. And you’re too little for me to maul round—say nothing of scaring the herd and maybe wasting a lot.”

“All that is very true—to-day. But it isn’t a question of guns, just now. I’m trying to get you to shut up that big blackguard mouth of yours. If you wasn’t such a numskull you’d see that I’m a-doin’ you a good turn.”

“You little sawed-off, bench-legged pup! I orter throw this gun away and stomp you into the sand! Aw, what’s a-bitin’ you? I ain’t named no names, have I? You’re crowdin’ me purty hard. What’s the matter, feller? Got it in for me, and usin’ this as an excuse? When’d I ever do you any dirt?”

“Never,” said Johnny. “Get this straight: I’m not wanting any fight. It’s decency I’m trying to crowd on to you—not a fight.”

“I can’t write to my girl without your say-so, hey?”

“Now you listen! Writing to a girl, fair and above-board, is one thing. Writing unbeknownst to her folks, with loose talk about her on the side, is another thing altogether. It’s

yourself you're doing dirt to—and to this girl that trusted you.”

Jody's face showed real bewilderment. “How? You don't know her name. Nobody knows her name. No one knows I have more than a nodding acquaintance with her—unless she told you!” His eyes flamed with sudden suspicion. “You know her yourself—she told you!”

“Jody, you put me in mind of the stealthy hippopotamus, and likewise of the six-toed Wallipaloova bird, that hides himself under his wing,” said Dines. “I've never been in Hillsboro, and I never saw your girl. But when you write her a letter addressed to yourself—why don't your dad take that letter home and keep it till you come? How is she going to get it out of the post office? She can't—unless she works in the post office herself. Old man Seiber is postmaster at Hillsboro. I've heard that much. And he's got a daughter named Kitty. You see now I was telling you true—you talk too much.”

Weir's face went scarlet with rage.

“Here's a fine how-de-do about a damn little—”

That word was never uttered. Johnny's horse, with rein and knee and spur to guide and goad, reared high and flung sidewise. White hoofs flashed above Weir's startled eyes; Johnny launched himself through the air straight at Jody's throat. Johnny's horse fell crashing after, twisting, bestriding at once the other horse and the two locked and straining men. Weir's horse floundered and went down, men and horses rolled together in the sand. From first to last you might have counted—one—two—three—four! Johnny came clear of the tangle with Jody's six-shooter in his hand. He

grabbed Jody by the collar and dragged him from under the struggling horses.

“We can’t go on with this, Jody!” he said gravely. “You’ve got no gun!”



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“She is useful to us, undoubtedly,’ answered Corneuse, ‘but she does us an injury by ruining us.’”

—*The Elm Tree on the Mall.*

The Jornada is a high desert of tableland, east of the Rio Grande. In design it is strikingly like a billiard table; forty-five miles by ninety, with mountain ranges for rail at east and west, broken highlands on the south, a lava bed on the north. At the middle of each rail and at each corner, for pockets, there is a mountain passway and water; there are peaks and landmarks for each diamond on the rail; for the center and for each spot there is a railroad station and water—Lava, Engle and Upham. Roughly speaking there is road or trail from each spot to each pocket, each spot to each spot, each pocket to every other pocket. In the center, where you put the pin at pin pool, stands Engle.

Noon of the next day found Johnny nearing Moongate Pass, a deep notch in the San Andreas Mountains; a smooth semicircle exactly filled and fitted by the rising moon, when full and seen from Engle. Through Moongate led the wagon road, branching at the high parks on the summit to five

springs: The Bar Cross horse camp, Bear Den, Rosebud, Good Fortune, Grapevine.

Johnny drove his casualties slowly up the gentle valley. On either hand a black-cedared ridge climbed eastward, each to a high black mountain at the head of the pass. Johnny gathered up what saddle horses were in the pass and moved them along with his cripples.

At the summit he came to a great gateway country of parks and cedar mottes, gentle slopes and low rolling ridges, with wide smooth valleys falling away to north and south; eastward rose a barrier of red-sandstone hills. High in those red hills Johnny saw two horsemen. They drove a bunch of horses of their own; they rode swiftly down a winding backbone to intercept him. He held up his little herd; the two riders slowed up in response. They came through a greenwood archway to the little cove where Johnny waited. One was a boy of sixteen, Bob Gifford, left in charge of the horse camp; the other a tall stranger who held up his hand in salute. Young Bob reined up with a gay flourish.

"Hello, Dinesy!" He took a swift survey of Johnny's little herd and sized up the situation. "Looks like you done signed up with the Bar Cross."

"Oh, s/! Here's a list of horses Cole sent for. I don't know 'em all, so I brought along all I saw."

Bob took the scrap of paper.

"Calabaza, Jug, Silver Dick—Oh, excuse me! Mr. Hales, this is Johnny Dines. Mr. Hales is thinkin' some of buying that ornery Spot horse of mine. Johnny, you got nigh all you need to make good your hospital list. Now let's see. Um-m!

—Twilight, Cyclone, Dynamite, Rebel, Sif Sam, Cigarette, Skyrocket, Straight-edge, and so forth. Um! Your mount, that bunch? Sweet spirits of nitre! Oh, cowboy! You sure got to ride!”

“Last man takes the leavings,” said Johnny.

“You got ‘em.” Bob rolled his eyes eloquently. “I’ll tell a man! Two sticks and eleven catawampouses! Well, it’s your funeral. Any rush?”

“Just so I get back to Engle to-morrow night.”

“Easy as silk, then. All them you ain’t got here will be in to water to-night or to-morrow morning, ‘cept Bluebeard and Popcorn. They run at Puddingstone Tanks, down the cañon. You and me will go get ‘em after dinner.”

“Dinner? Let’s go! Got any beef, Bobby?”

“Better’n beef. Bear meat-jerked. Make hair grow on your chest. Ever eat any?”

“Bear meat? Who killed a bear?”

“Me. Little Bobby. All alone. Three of ‘em. Killed three in the yard the very first morning,” said little Bobby proudly. “I heard them snuffin’ and millin’ round out in the water pen in the night, but I thought it was stock. Then they come up in the house yard. Soon as it come day I got up to drive ‘em out—and behold you, they was no stock, but three whoppin’ brown bears. So I fogged ‘em. Killed all three before they could get out of the yard.”

“Good Lord!” said Johnny. His face drooped to troubled lines. The man Hales glanced sharply at him.

“Heap big chief me!” prattled Bobby, unnoting. “Two bully good skins—had to shoot the last one all to rags to kill him—and twelve hundred pounds of good meat. Wah!” He

turned to the stranger. "Well, Mr. Hales, do you think that little old plug of mine will suit you?"

"Oh, I reckon so. Beggars mustn't be choosers—and I sure need him. Thirty dollars, you said?"

"Wouldn't take a cent more. I'm not gougin' you. That's his price, weekdays or Sunday. He don't look much, but he ain't such a bad little hoss."

Hales nodded. "He'll do, I guess."

"You done bought a horse!" said Bobby. "And Johnny, he's got a mount to make him a rep—if they don't spill him." He broke into rollicking song:

*They picked me up and carried me in;
They rubbed me down with a rolling pin.*

*"Oh, that's the way we all begin,
You're doing well," says Brown;
"To-morrow morn, if you don't die,
I'll give you another horse to try."*

"Oh, can't you let me walk?" says I—

Here he cocked an impish eye at Dines, observed that gentleman's mournful face, and broke the song short.

"What's the matter with you now, Dinesy? You can ride 'em, of course. No trouble after you first take the edge off."

"It isn't that," said Dines sorrowfully. "I—I—you ain't a bit to blame, but—"

He stopped, embarrassed.

"What's the matter, you old fool? Spill it!"

Johnny sighed and drew in a long breath.

"I hate to name it, Bob—I do so. Hiram Yoast and Foamy White, the blamed old fools, they orter told you! They'll be all broke up about this." He looked Bob square in the eye

and plunged on desperately. "Them bears, Bobby—Hiram and Foamy had been makin' pets of 'em. Feedin' them beef bones and such ever since last spring—had 'em plumb gentle."

"Hell and damnation!"

Johnny's eyes were candid and compassionate. "Anybody would have done just the same, Bobby. Don't you feel too bad about it. Rotten durned shame, though. Them bears was a bushel o' fun. Jack and Jill, the two biggest ones, they was a leetle mite standoffish and inclined to play it safe. But the Prodigal Son, that's the least one—grewed a heap since last spring with plenty to eat that way—why, the Prodigal he'd never met up with any man but Foamy and Hi, so he wasn't a mite leery. Regular clown, that bear. Stand up right in front of the door, and catch biscuit and truck the boys threw to him—loll out his little red tongue and grin like a house afire. He was right comical. How he did love molasses!"

"How come them fools didn't tell me?" demanded the crestfallen hunter, almost in tears.

"Pretty tough luck," said Hales commiseratingly. "I killed a pet deer once. I know just how you feel."

"I don't know who's to break it to Hiram and Foamy," said Johnny, grieving. "It's goin' to hurt 'em, bad! They set a heap of store by them bears—'special the Prodigal—poor little fellow! I feel right bad myself, and I was only here two nights. Make it all the worse for them, being all on account of their cussed carelessness. I can't see how you're a bit to blame. Only I do think you might have noticed your night