

***B. M. BOWER***



***THE HAPPY  
FAMILY***

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# **The Happy Family**

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# ANANIAS GREEN

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Pink, because he knew well the country and because Irish, who also knew it well, refused pointblank to go into it again even as a rep, rode alone except for his horses down into the range of the Rocking R. General roundup was about to start, down that way, and there was stock bought by the Flying U which ranged north of the Bear Paws.

It so happened that the owner of the Rocking R was entertaining a party of friends at the ranch; it also happened that the friends were quite new to the West and its ways, and they were intensely interested in all pertaining thereto. Pink gathered that much from the crew, besides observing much for himself. Hence what follows after.

Sherwood Branciforte was down in the blacksmith shop at the Rocking R, watching one Andy Green hammer a spur-shank straight. Andy was what he himself called a tamer of wild ones, and he was hard upon his riding gear. Sherwood had that morning watched with much admiration the bending of that same spur-shank, and his respect for Andy was beautiful to behold.

"Lord, but this is a big, wild country," he was saying enthusiastically, "and the people in it are big and—"

"Wild," supplied Andy. "Yes, you've just about got us sized up correct." He went on hammering, and humming under his breath, and thinking that, while admiration is all right in its time and place, it is sometimes a bit wearisome.

"Oh, but I didn't mean that," the young man protested. "What I meant was breezy and picturesque. Things can happen, out here. Life and men don't run in grooves."

"No, nor horses," assented Andy. "Leastways, not in oiled ones." He was remembering how that spur-shank had become bent.

"You did some magnificent riding, this morning. By Jove! I've never seen anything like it. Strange that one can come out here into a part of the country absolutely new and raw, and see things—"

"Oh, it ain't so raw as you might think," Andy defended jealously, "nor yet new."

"Of course it is new! A commonwealth in the making. You can't," he asserted triumphantly, "point to anything man-made that existed a hundred years ago; scarcely fifty, either. Your civilization is yet in the cradle—a lusty infant, and a—er—vociferous one, but still an infant in swaddling clothes." Sherwood Branciforte had given lectures before the Y.M.C.A. of his home town, and young ladies had spoken of him as "gifted," and he had come to hear of it, and to believe.

Andy Green squinted at the shank before he made reply. Andy, also, was "gifted," in his modest Western way.

"A country that can now and then show the papers for a civilization old as the Phenixes of Egypt," he said, in a drawling tone that was absolutely convincing, "ain't what I'd call raw." He decided that a little more hammering right next the rowel was necessary, and bent over the anvil solicitously. Even the self-complacency of Sherwood Branciforte could not fail to note his utter indifference to the presence and opinions of his companion. Branciforte was accustomed to disputation at times—even to enmity; but

not to indifference. He blinked. "My dear fellow, do you realize what it is that statement might seem to imply?" he queried haughtily.

Andy, being a cowpuncher of the brand known as a "real," objected strongly both to the term and the tone. He stood up and stared down at the other disapprovingly. "I don't as a general thing find myself guilty of talking in my sleep," he retorted, "and I'm prepared to let anything I say stand till the next throw. We may be some vociferous, out here twixt the Mississippi and the Rockies, but we ain't no infant-in-the-cradle, Mister. We had civilization here when the Pilgrim Fathers' rock wasn't nothing but a pebble to let fly at the birds!"

"Indeed!" fleered Sherwood Branciforte, in a voice which gave much intangible insult to one's intelligence.

Andy clicked his teeth together, which was a symptom it were well for the other to recognize but did not. Then Andy smiled, which was another symptom. He fingered the spur absently, laid it down and reached, with the gesture that betrays the act as having become second nature, for his papers and tobacco sack.

"Uh course, you mean all right, and you ain't none to blame for what you don't know, but you're talking wild and scattering. When you stand up and tell me I can't point to nothing man-made that's fifty years old, or a hundred, you make me feel sorry for yuh. I can take you to something—or I've seen something—that's older than swearing; and I reckon that art goes back to when men wore their hair long and a sheep-pelt was called ample for dress occasions."

"Are you crazy, man?" Sherwood Branciforte exclaimed incredulously.

"Not what you can notice. You wait whilst I explain. Once last fall I was riding by my high lonesome away down next the river, when my horse went lame on me from slipping on a shale bank, and I was set afoot. Uh course, you being plumb ignorant of our picturesque life, you don't half know all that might signify to *imply*." This last in open imitation of Branciforte. "It implies that I was in one hell of a fix, to put it elegant. I was sixty miles from anywhere, and them sixty half the time standing on end and lapping over on themselves. That there is down where old mama Nature gave full swing to a morbid hankering after doing things unconventional. Result is, that it's about as ungodly a mixture of nightmare scenery as this old world can show up; and I've ambled around considerable and am in a position to pass judgment.

"So there I was, and I wasn't in no mood to view the beauties uh nature to speak of; for instance, I didn't admire the clouds sailing around promiscuous in the sky, nor anything like that. I was high and dry and the walking was about as poor as I ever seen; and my boots was high-heel and rubbed blisters before I'd covered a mile of that acrobatic territory. I wanted water, and I wanted it bad. Before I got it I wanted it a heap worse." He stopped, cupped his slim fingers around a match-blaze, and Branciforte sat closer. He did not know what was coming, but the manner of the indifferent narrator was compelling. He almost forgot the point at issue in the adventure.

"Along about dark, I camped for the night under a big, bare-faced cliff that was about as homelike and inviting as a charitable institution, and made a bluff at sleeping and cussed my bum luck in a way that wasn't any bluff. At sun-up I rose and mooched on." His cigarette needed another match and he searched his pockets for one.



"What about the—whatever it was you started to tell me?" urged Branciforte, grown impatient.

Andy looked him over calmly. "You've lived in ignorance for about thirty years or so—giving a rough guess at your age; I reckon you can stand another five minutes. As I was saying, I wandered around like a dogy when it's first turned loose on the range and is trying to find the old, familiar barn-yard and the skim-milk bucket. And like the dogy, I didn't run across anything that looked natural or inviting. All that day I perambulated over them hills, and I will say I wasn't enjoying the stroll none. You're right when you say things can happen, out here. There's some things it's just as well they don't happen too frequent, and getting lost and afoot in the Bad-lands is one.

"That afternoon I dragged myself up to the edge of a deep coulee and looked over to see if there was any way of getting down. There was a bright green streak down there that couldn't mean nothing but water, at that time of year; this was last fall. And over beyond, I could see the river that I'd went and lost. I looked and looked, but the walls looked straight as a Boston's man's pedigree. And then the sun come out from behind a cloud and lit up a spot that made me forget for a minute that I was thirsty as a dog and near starved besides.

"I was looking down on the ruins—and yet it was near perfect—of an old castle. Every stone stood out that clear and distinct I could have counted 'em. There was a tower at one end, partly fell to pieces but yet enough left to easy tell what it was. I could see it had kinda loop-holes in it. There was an open place where I took it the main entrance had used to be; what I'd call the official entrance. But there was other entrances besides, and some of 'em was made by time and hard weather. There was what looked like a what-you-may-call-'em—a ditch thing, yuh mind, running around

my side of it, and a bridge business. Uh course, it was all needing repairs bad, and part of it yuh needed to use your imagination on. I laid there for quite a spell looking it over and wondering how the dickens it come to be way down there. It didn't look to me like it ought to be there at all, but in a school geography or a history where the chapter is on historic and prehistoric hangouts uh the heathen."

"The deuce! A castle in the Bad-lands!" ejaculated Branciforte.

"That's what it was, all right. I found a trail it would make a mountain sheep seasick to follow, and I got down into the coulee. It was lonesome as sin, and spooky; but there was a spring close by, and a creek running from it; and what is a treat in that part uh the country, it was good drinking and didn't have neither alkali nor sulphur nor mineral in it. It was just straight water, and you can gamble I filled up on it a-plenty. Then I shot a rabbit or two that was hanging out around the ruins, and camped there till next day, when I found a pass out, and got my bearings by the river and come on into camp. So when you throw slurs on our plumb newness and shininess, I've got the cards to call yuh. That castle wasn't built last summer, Mister. And whoever did build it was some civilized. So there yuh are."

Andy took a last, lingering pull at the cigarette stub, flung it into the backened forge, and picked up the spur. He settled his hat on his head at its accustomed don't-give-a-darn tilt, and started for the door and the sunlight.

"Oh, but say! didn't you find out anything about it afterwards? There must have been something—"

"If it's relics uh the dim and musty past yuh mean, there was; relics to burn. I kicked up specimens of ancient dishes, and truck like that, while I was prowling around for fire-

wood. And inside the castle, in what I reckon was used for the main hall, I run acrost a skeleton. That is, part of one. I don't believe it was all there, though."

"But, man alive, why haven't you made use of a discovery like that?" Branciforte followed him out, lighting his pipe with fingers that trembled. "Don't you realize what a thing like that means?"

Andy turned and smiled lazily down at him. "At the time I was there, I was all took up with the idea uh getting home. I couldn't eat skeletons, Mister, nor yet the remains uh prehistoric dishes. And I didn't run acrost no money, nor no plan marked up with crosses where you're supposed to do your excavating for treasure. It wasn't nothing, that I could see, for a man to starve to death while he examined it thorough. And so far as I know there ain't any record of it. I never heard no one mention building it, anyhow." He stooped and adjusted the spur to his heel to see if it were quite right, and went off to the stable humming under his breath.

Branciforte stood at the door of the blacksmith shop and gazed after him, puffing meditatively at his pipe. "Lord! the ignorance of these Western folk! To run upon a find like that, and to think it less important than getting home in time for supper. To let a discovery like that lie forgotten, a mere incident in a day's travel! That fellow thinks more, right now, about his horse going lame and himself raising blisters on his heels, than of—Jove, what ignorance! He—he couldn't *eat* the skeleton or the dishes! Jerusalem!" Branciforte knocked his pipe gently against the door-casing, put in into his coat pocket and hurried to the house to hunt up the others and tell them what he had heard.

That night the roundup pulled in to the home ranch.

The visitors, headed by their host, swooped down upon the roundup wagons just when the boys were gathered together for a cigarette or two apiece and a little talk before rolling in. There was no night-guarding to do, and trouble winged afar. Sherwood Branciforte hunted out Andy Green where he lay at ease with head and shoulders propped against a wheel of the bed-wagon and gossiped with Pink and a few others.

"Look here, Green," he said in a voice to arrest the attention of the whole camp, "I wish you'd tell the others that tale you told me this afternoon—about that ruined castle down in the hills. Mason, here, is a newspaper man; he scents a story for his paper. And the rest refuse to believe a word I say."

"I'd hate to have a rep like that, Mr. Branciforte," Andy said commiseratingly, and turned his big, honest gray eyes to where stood the women—two breezy young persons with sleeves rolled to tanned elbows and cowboy hats of the musical comedy brand. Also they had gay silk handkerchiefs knotted picturesquely around their throats. There was another, a giggly, gurgly lady with gray hair fluffed up into a pompadour. You know the sort. She was the kind who refuses to grow old, and so merely grows imbecile.

"Do tell us, Mr. Green," this young old lady urged, displaying much gold by her smile. "It sounds so romantic."

"It's funny you never mentioned it to any of us," put in the "old man" suspiciously.

Andy pulled himself up into a more decorous position, and turned his eyes towards his boss. "I never knew yuh took any interest in relic-hunting," he explained mildly.

"Sherwood says you found a *skeleton!*" said the young old lady, shuddering pleasurably.

"Yes, I did find one—or part of one," Andy admitted reluctantly.

"What were the relics of pottery like?" demanded one of the cowboy-hatted girls, as if she meant to test him. "I do some collecting of that sort of thing."

Andy threw away his cigarette, and with it all compunction. "Well, I wasn't so much interested in the dishes as in getting something to eat," he apologized. "I saw several different kinds. One was a big, awkward looking thing and was pretty heavy, and had straight sides. Then I come across one or two more that was ornamented some. One had what looked like a fish on it, and the other I couldn't make out very well. They didn't look to be worth much, none of 'em."

"Green," said his employer steadily, "*was* there such a place?"

Andy returned his look honestly. "There was, and there is yet, I guess," he asserted. "I'll tell you how you can find it and what it's like—if yuh doubt my words." He glanced around and found every man, including the cook, listening intently. He picked a blade of new grass and began splitting it into tiny threads. The host found boxes for the women to sit upon, and the men sat down upon the grass.

"Before I come here to work, I was riding for the Circle C. One day I was riding away down in the Bad-lands alone and my horse slipped in some shale rock and went lame; strained his shoulder so I couldn't ride him. That put me afoot, and climbing up and down them hills I lost my bearings and didn't know where I was at for a day or two. I wandered around aimless, and got into a strip uh country that was new to me and plumb lonesome and wild. "That second day is when I happened across this ruin. I was looking down into a deep, shut-in coulee, hunting water,

when the sun come out and shone straight on to this place. It was right down under me; a stone ruin, with a tower on one end and kinda tumbled down so it wasn't so awful high—the tower wasn't. There was a—a—"

"Moat," Branciforte suggested.

"That's the word—a moat around it, and a bridge that was just about gone to pieces. It had loopholes, like the pictures of castles, and a—"

"Battlement?" ventured one of the musical-comedy cowgirls.

Andy had not meant to say battlement; of a truth, his conception of battlements was extremely hazy, but he caught up the word and warmed to the subject. "Battlement? well I should guess yes! There was about as elegant a battlement as I'd want to see anywhere. It was sure a peach. It was—" he hesitated for a fraction of a second. "It was high as the tower, and it had figures carved all over it; them kind that looks like kid-drawing in school, with bows and arrows stuck out in front of 'em, threatening."

"Not the old Greek!" exclaimed one of the girls in a little, breathless voice.

"I couldn't say as to that," Andy made guarded reply. "I never made no special study of them things. But they was sure old. And—"

"About how large was the castle?" put in the man who wrote things. "How many rooms, say?"

"I'd hate to give a guess at the size. I didn't step it off, and I'm a punk guesser. The rooms I didn't count. I only explored around in the main hall, like, a little. But it got dark early, down in there, and I didn't have no matches to waste. And next morning I started right out at sun-up to find the way home. No, I never counted the rooms, and if I had, the

chances are I'd have likely counted the same one more'n once; to count them rooms would take an expert, which I ain't—not at counting. I don't reckon, though, that there was so awful many. Anyway, not more than fifteen or twenty. But as I say, I couldn't rightly make a guess, even; or I'd hate to. Ruins don't interest me much, though I was kinda surprised to run acrost that one, all right, and I'm willing to gamble there was warm and exciting times down there when the place was in running order. I'd kinda like to have been down there then. Last fall, though, there wasn't nothing to get excited over, except getting out uh there."

"A castle away out here! Just think, good people, what that means! Romance, adventure and scientific discoveries! We must go right down there and explore the place. Why can't we start at once—in the morning? This gentleman can guide us to the place, and—"

"It ain't easy going," Andy remarked, conscientiously. "It's pretty rough; some places, you'd have to walk and lead your horses."

They swept aside the discouragement.

"We'd need pick and shovels, and men to dig," cried one enthusiast. "Uncle Peter can lend us some of his men. There may be treasure to unearth. There may be *anything* that is wonderful and mysterious. Get busy, Uncle Peter, and get your outfit together; you've boasted that a roundup can beat the army in getting under way quickly, now let us have a practical demonstration. We want to start by six o'clock—all of us, with a cook and four or five men to do the excavating. Bring it to pass!" It was the voice of the girl whom her friends spoke of as "The life of the party;" the voice of the-girl-who-does-things.

"It's sixty-five miles from here, good and strong—and mostly up and down," put in Andy.

"'Quoth the raven,'" mocked the-girl-who-does-things. "We are prepared to face the ups-and-downs. Do we start at six, Uncle Peter?"

Uncle Peter glanced sideways at the roundup boss. To bring it to pass, he would be obliged to impress the roundup cook and part of the crew. It was breaking an unwritten law of the rangeland, and worse, it was doing something unbusiness-like and foolish. But not even the owner of the Rocking R may withstand the pleading of a pretty woman. Uncle Peter squirmed, but he promised:

"We start at six; earlier if you say so."

The roundup boss gave his employer a look of disgust and walked away; the crew took it that he went off to some secluded place to swear.

Thereafter there was much discussion of ways and means, and much enthusiasm among the visitors from the East—equalled by the depression of the crew, for cowboys do not, as a rule, take kindly to pick and shovel, and the excavators had not yet been chosen from among them. They were uneasy, and they stole frequent, betraying glances at one another. All of which amused Pink much. Pink would like to have gone along, and would certainly have offered his services, but for the fact that his work there was done and he would have to start back to the Flying U just as soon as one of his best saddle horses, which had stepped on a broken beer bottle and cut its foot, was able to travel. That would be in a few days, probably. So Pink sighed and watched the preparations enviously.

Since he was fairly committed into breaking all precedents, uncle Peter plunged recklessly. He ordered the mess-wagon



to be restocked and prepared for the trip, and he took the bed-tent and half the crew. The foreman he wisely left behind with the remnant of his outfit. They were all to eat at the house while the mess-wagon was away, and they were to spread their soogans—which is to say beds—where they might, if the bunk-house proved too small or too hot.

The foreman, outraged beyond words, saddled at daybreak and rode to the nearest town, and the unchosen half turned out in a body to watch the departure of the explorers, which speaks eloquently of their interest; for cowboys off duty are prone to sleep long.

Andy, as guide, bolted ahead of the party that he might open the gate. Bolted is a good word, for his horse swerved and kept on running, swerved again, and came down in a heap. Andy did not get up, and the women screamed. Then Pink and some others hurried out and bore Andy, groaning, to the bunk-house.

The visitors from the East gathered, perturbed, around the door, sympathetic and dismayed. It looked very much as if their exploration must end where it began, and the-girl-who-does-things looked about to weep, until Andy, still groaning, sent Pink out to comfort them.

"He says you needn't give up the trip on his account," Pink announced musically from the doorway. "He's drawing a map and marking the coulee where the ruin is. He says most any of the boys that know the country at all can find the place for yuh. And he isn't hurt permanent; he strained his back so he can't ride, is all." Pink dimpled at the young old lady who was admiring him frankly, and withdrew.

Inside, Andy Green was making pencil marks and giving the chosen half explicit directions. At last he folded the paper and handed it to one called Sandy.

"That's the best I can do for yuh," he finished. "I don't see how yuh can miss it if yuh follow that map close. And if them gay females make any kick on the trail, you just remind 'em that I said all along it was rough going. So long, and good luck."

So with high-keyed, feminine laughter and much dust, passed the exploring party from the Rocking R.

"Say," Pink began two days later to Andy, who was sitting on the shady side of the bunk-house staring absently at the skyline, "There's a word uh praise I've been aiming to give yuh. I've seen riding, and I've done a trifle in that line myself, and learned some uh the tricks. But I want to say I never did see a man flop his horse any neater than you done that morning. I'll bet there ain't another man in the outfit got next your play. I couldn't uh done it better myself. Where did you learn that? Ever ride in Wyoming?"

Andy turned his eyes, but not his head—which was a way he had—and regarded Pink slantwise for at least ten seconds. "Yes, I've rode in Wyoming," he answered quietly. Then: "What's the chance for a job, up your way? Is the Flying U open for good men and true?"

"It won't cost yuh a cent to try," Pink told him. "How's your back? Think you'll be able to ride by the time Skeeker is able to travel?"

Andy, grinned. "Say," he confided suddenly, "if that hoss don't improve some speedy, I'll be riding on ahead. I reckon I'll be able to travel before them explorers get back, my friend."

"Why?" dimpled Pink boldly.

"Why? Well, the going is some rough, down that way. If they get them wagons half way to the coulee marked with a

cross, they'll sure have to attach wings onto 'em. I've been some worried about that. I don't much believe uncle Peter is going to enjoy that trip—and he sure does get irritable by spells. I've got a notion to ride for some other outfit, this summer."

"Was that the reason you throwed your horse down and got hurt, that morning?" questioned Pink, and Andy grinned again by way of reply.

"They'll be gone a week, best they can do," he estimated aloud. "We ought to be able to make our getaway by then, easy."

Pink assured him that a week would see them headed for the Flying U.

It was the evening of the sixth day, and the two were packed and ready to leave in the morning, when Andy broke off humming and gave a snort of dismay. "By gracious, there they come. My mother lives in Buffalo, Pink, in a little drab house with white trimmings. Write and tell her how her son—Oh, beloved! but they're hitting her up lively. If they made the whole trip in that there frame uh mind, they could uh gone clean to Miles City and back. How pretty the birds sing! Pink, you'll hear words, directly."

Directly Pink did.

"You're the biggest liar on earth," Sherwood Branciforte contributed to the recriminating wave that near engulfed Andy Green. "You sent us down there on a wild-goose chase, you brute. You—"

"I never sent nobody," Andy defended. "You was all crazy to go."

"And nothing but an old stone hut some trapper had built!" came an indignant, female tone. "There never was any

castle, nor—"

"A man's home is his castle," argued Andy, standing unabashed before them. "Putting it that way, it was a castle, all right."

There was babel, out of which—

"And the skeleton! Oh, you—it was a dead *cow!*" This from the young old lady, who was looking very draggled and not at all young.

"I don't call to mind ever saying it was human," put in Andy, looking at her with surprised, gray eyes.

"And the battlements!" groaned the-girl-who-does-things.

"You wanted battlements," Andy flung mildly into the uproar. "I always aim to please." With that he edged away from them and made his escape to where the cook was profanely mixing biscuits for supper. All-day moves put an edge to his temper. The cook growled an epithet, and Andy passed on. Down near the stable he met one of the chosen half, and the fellow greeted him with a grin. Andy stopped abruptly.

"Say, they don't seem none too agreeable," he began tentatively, jerking his thumb toward the buzzing group. "How about it, Sandy? Was they that petulant all the way?"

Sandy, the map-bearer, chuckled. "It's lucky you got hurt at the last minute! And yet it was worth the trip. Uh course we got stalled with the wagons, the second day out, but them women was sure ambitious, and made us go on with a packadero layout. I will say that, going down, they stood the hardships remarkable. It was coming back that frazzled the party.

"And when we found the place—say, but it was lucky you wasn't along! They sure went hog-wild when they seen the

ruins. The old party with the pompadoor displayed temper, and shed tears uh rage. When she looked into the cabin and seen the remains uh that cow-critter, there was language it wasn't polite to overhear. She said a lot uh things about you, Andy. One thing they couldn't seem to get over, and that was the smallness uh the blamed shack. Them fourteen or fifteen rooms laid heavy on their minds."

"I didn't say there was fourteen or fifteen rooms. I said I didn't count the rooms; I didn't either. I never heard of anybody counting one room. Did you, Pink?"

"No," Pink agreed, "I never did!"

Sandy became suddenly convulsed. "Oh, but the funniest thing was the ancient pottery," he gasped, the tears standing in his eyes. "That old Dutch oven was bad enough; but when one uh the girls—that one that collects old dishes—happened across an old mackerel can and picked it up and saw the fish on the label, she was the maddest female person I ever saw in my life, barring none. If you'd been in reach about that time, she'd just about clawed your eyes out, Andy Green. Oh me, oh my!" Sandy slapped his thigh and had another spasm.

Sounds indicated that the wave of recrimination was rolling nearer. Andy turned to find himself within arm's length of Uncle Pete.

"Maybe this is your idea of a practical joke, Green," he said to Andy. "But anyway, it will cost you your job. I ought to charge you up with the time my outfit has spent gallivanting around the country on the strength of your wild yarn. The quicker you hit the trail, the better it will suit me. By the way, what's your first name?" He asked, pulling out a check-book.

"Andy," answered the unrepentant one.