



WILD KING SAVAGERY

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*Dal Baldwin and His Young Wife Face Bitter Hardships as They Strive
to Carve a Home for Themselves Out of the Wilderness!*

DAL BALDWIN CAST A GLANCE at his young wife on the wagon seat beside him. Mary Baldwin's face was pinched-looking, and no wonder, he thought. Theirs had been a long trail down from Montana. Three hundred miles they had come in search of a homestead.

"It'll be a valley, honey," Dal had so often told Mary.

"A valley of good grass, a trout Crick runnin' through. Mountains, and spruce so's I can build us the best little cabin yuh ever saw. There'll be wild hoss bands in the hills, and game for the shootin' and varmints to trap. And just about everythin'."

This dream of Wyoming was not without a sound basis of foundation, for Dal's father had seen such valleys between the foothills and ranges, valleys

that could produce everything, almost, that a settler required.

For weeks the Baldwins had rolled down a dimming trail along the Big Horn. Their wagon wheels had made the first such tracks in a new land.

Dark clouds shut the sun from view, but the atmosphere seemed no cooler.

"Thought I heard a rumble of thunder, Dal," Mary said, looking up at the sky.

"Hope to cross the crick before it breaks," he replied. "Got a hunch we're headin' into the country Dad spoke so much about after he was down buyin' wild hoss stock."

Mary smiled wanly. For days Dal had expected to find his homestead "just over the next rise." But always there had been more rock and jackpine. More creeks to ford. In which they might lose some of their precious supplies.

Dal called to his team—a rangy dark bay gelding and a sweat-covered little filly, a black, barely three years old. The little mare had been too green for this trip and yet she was a big part of Dal's planning for the future. He intended to hunt the hills for a big stallion and start a spread of his own. Naieta, the little mare, was of good blood.

The ground dipped, and the tugs slackened as the horses broke into a trot. Dal had hopes of a natural wild animal ford.

The sudden crash of thunder panicked the little mare. She reared, and her nigh legs kicked outside the tug. In another moment she might have damaged herself badly as she lunged into a further entanglement with her harness.

Dal dropped to the ground and reached her head.

He beckoned to Mary, who got down. They unhitched and rehitched the filly. Dal spoke softly to her until finally she quieted down.

HE PICKED up the lines and motioned Mary to the seat. He gave her the lines, then leaped aboard himself. But the team was barely in motion again when a vicious flash of jagged forked lightning hissed down the bole of a near-by tree. The thunder was appalling, but Dal held a firm grip on the lines and called to the team. They rolled down the bank to an elk crossing.

The filly hung hesitantly at the water's edge, but her steadier team-mate moved on. A smile touched Dal's lips for it seemed that at last they had struck a hard bottom ford. At a third the way across the stream the water barely reached the horses' knees.

All at once the gelding lunged down, over his belly. The little mare dropped to her withers. They had struck a sump hole. The wagon rolled in and water commenced to seep in over the floor boards.

Mary Baldwin clutched her husband's arm. It seemed to her as if the devil himself conspired to foil them.

The filly was badly bogged and Dal was fearful of quicksand. He handed the lines to Mary and swung back over the seat to fish out block and tackle.

"Keep their heads up, honey!" he yelled. "Soon's I anchor the block I'll be back to unhitch."

He was cut short by a deafening crash of thunder. He dropped into the water and began to swim with vigorous strokes.

Shortly he reached hard gravel bottom and clambered up the far bank. He made fast the block to a tree bole and returned to the wagon, almost blinded and deafened by flash upon flash of lightning and the merciless barrage of thunder.

Naieta, the filly, whickered softly. Dal floundered to the double-tree and attempted to pull out the kingbolt. The filly backed on him, almost submerging him. Mary cried out sharply.

Rain pelted down—a deluge. The high craglands echoed the thunder in monstrous reverberations as Mary sat soaked and quivering with fright. Their food supplies were being threatened, and their meager supply of seed corn and oats was in danger of being utterly spoilt.

A tug chain dropped, a second, third and fourth.

"Drop the lines now, Mary!" Dal sang out.

He caught the lines and, mounting to the tongue, flicked the filly sharply on the rump. The little black lunged, and sank deeper. Dal yelled to her sharply, flicking her again with a line end. He clipped the gelding lightly. The older, steadier horse lunged forward, dragging the filly with him. For a few yards they swam, then their feet touched solid gravel bed again. Dal returned and dragged out the double-tree hitch.

Quickly he rigged the hook of his tackle into a logging chain looped through the ring of the tongue.

As the storm raged with smashing violence, he called to the team. It was a long haul, with the wagon badly bogged down. At first the team strained against their collars with little or no effect, but Dal encouraged them.

"Hang tight, honey!" he sang out to Mary. "She's rollin'!"

The wagon dipped alarmingly, and the team lunged and stretched sharply. The wagon came up, up. The wheels at last touched the hard bed and Dal Baldwin chuckled.

On the bank, then on the safety of higher ground, he turned to con the peaks that were still juggling ragged forks of lightning. Then he reached up for one of Mary's cold, wet hands.

"Nothin' could be worse than that, hon," he called. "From now on, it'll be downhill for us."

Mary smiled as she watched Dal unhitch his tackle, stow it and re hitch his team. Thunder crashes were receding, grumbling along the far canyons. By the time the wagon wheels were again rolling there was a definite rift in the angry cloud masses. . . .

The Baldwins topped a rise of land as the sun finally burst through and shone down on a gently undulating valley—the valley Dal Baldwin had dreamed of.

Dal halted his team and threw an arm about his young wife's shoulders.

"It's almost as Dad told me, Mary," he said softly. "And look at the hay land from the spruces to the crick. Look at them spruces, honey! There's where we build—the first cabin ever to be built in these parts. Land ain't surveyed yet, but that'll come, and we'll have squatter's rights."

MARY looked beyond the valley, surveying the grandeur of the mountains. It was awe-inspiring, grandly beautiful, terrifyingly beautiful she thought, attempting to calculate the distance between this new home and the last settlement they had passed.

In the sunlight, grass land and foliage became dazzling jewelry. Birds sang. A trout broke water in the creek, flashing silvery in the sunlight.

"It—it's beautiful, Dal darling," Mary said softly. "And it's ours."

She shook out her hair to dry and snuggled closer to Dal as the team swung along to the valley below.

There was no need to look farther. Dal was already visualizing the plowing and cropping to corn and oats a few acres of the bottomland. The plowing could be done this fall. And he was estimating the spruces for his and Mary's home.

But there was work ahead, and loneliness, and the Baldwins had little save their youth and strength and ambition and their meager equipment. Neither was new to pioneer life, but never had they been so alone. Before them lay a large share of God's

beautiful wilderness—theirs for the taming, but each understood that the taming of a wilderness was no easy task, nor for one family of settlers alone. Other pioneers would have to come in.

Suddenly the little black mare came to a halt and flung high her head. And from the far hills came the bugle of a wild stallion. In a flash the Baldwins glimpsed the magnificent form of a gray wild stallion king.

"Mary! Look, honey! He's the rest of my dream come true!"

The filly whinnied and Dal flicked her gently with a line end. The big gray wild one had bounded to cover, but Dal's eyes were still glued to where the wild one had hurled his challenges at these intruders, man creatures whom he feared more than the creatures of the wilds.

Reaching the spruces, the Baldwins unhitched, then Dal built a good fire. He rigged up a pole for drying out their clothes. Mary began to mix a batch of baking powder bread while Dal took a fishline to the creek. In twenty minutes he was back with enough trout for their supper.

They ate their meal almost in complete silence, as if overwhelmed by the vastness and beauty of their surroundings—surroundings, of riotous grandeur in the setting sun.

Taking his ax, Dal commenced hacking off boughs for their bed, and for a shelter. Mary was alone in this wild land whose very silence hummed in her consciousness. But when Dal's ax began to ring, she smiled and set about cleaning the tin plates and cooking pans.

Suddenly she spun. For again had come the ringing bugle of the wild stallion leader. Mary saw the filly lunge to the limit of her tether.

The wilds had already presented sign of romance. For that wild call of the stallion echoed with fierce compelling majesty.

Mary shrugged and continued with her chores, realizing that a pioneer life was a life of tomorrow, always tomorrow, when Destiny and Fate were allied in stern challenge to all new wilderness settlers. . . .

Dal Baldwin planned his home site with thought for the future. Stripped to the waist, he skidded his logs and built them into a cabin with neatly dove-tailed corners. By using the notch-and-saddle method he could have speeded up his work, but he was building something more permanent with his spruces which Mary had peeled.

Finished, the log house stood on a rise near the spruce belt for protection against cold winter winds. It was close enough to the creek to ensure a short water haul, yet out of danger should the creek overflow in spring flood.

A stable of logs followed the erection of the house.

In a near-by meadow Dal cut several tons of hay with a scythe. As he mowed it, he visualized a day when this same meadow would give him two, perhaps three good crops of alfalfa a season.

Mary watched him with pride as he worked from daylight till dark. There was so much to do before winter set in. Weary though he was, Dal often took time in the evenings to help Mary pick wild fruit which grew in abundance in the thickets.

WHEN Dal discovered grizzly tracks he said nothing. There was no sense in alarming Mary, but casually he cautioned her about the possibility of bears.

"It's not what the varmints would do, honey," he told her. "It's the scare they might give yuh. In early spring yuh might happen across a couple of cubs—cute little devils. Just about the time you started to pick one up somethin' like a pile-driver would crack down on yuh. That would be the mother bear's way of sayin' 'hand's off,' only you wouldn't know much about it."

At last came the morning when Dal's twelve-inch breaking plow turned the first black ribbon of sod in the bottomland. And nothing he had done yet so well illustrated promise as this first broken sod. The objective Dal had set was eight acres this first fall.

He was resting his team and leaning on a plow handle when Mary drew alongside.

"Looks great, huh, Mary?" he asked. "But just wait. Some day yuh'll see me head into this acreage with a gang plow. Four-horse hook-up, and I'll be doin' three acres or more a day. It—"

He broke off. The horses had flung up their heads. The filly whickered softly as she glimpsed a small pinto trotting toward them. The rider was a squat, dark-visaged man.

"Half-breed, I reckon," Dal said softly to Mary.

"How's?" he called out, but the stranger seemed not to hear.

His glance was glued on the little mare. He grunted, then shot a swift glance Mary's way.

He dropped from his cayuse and strolled up, to run a hand along the nigh flank of Naieta.

"Nice li'l mare," he said gruffly. "Want sell?"

Dal shook his head.

"No sale, mister. That what yuh rode up here for? Didn't know any folks knew we were settled here."

"I get about the hills. Trap and hunt. Seen you when you first come in. Want the mare. Sell?"

"Nope!" Dal's tone was sharp. He hadn't taken to this stranger. "But yuh can eat a bite with us if yuh've mind to."

The man scowled and shook his head. With a grunted farewell, he mounted and rode off.

"Don't look so scared, honey," Dal said to Mary. "His kind are loco about hosses and—uh—well, they're just that way."

"But, Dal, did you see the way he looked at me with those black devil's eyes? Do you suppose we've got to have him for our first neighbor?"

DAL frowned, then forced a smile. He hadn't taken to the half-breed any more than Mary had, but he must try to shake off her fears.

"This is a wilderness country, honey. We're its first white settlers. As time goes on, we must expect neighbors. There'll be the unwanted kind come in with the good folks, but it seems to take all kinds to make a communitiy. If that breed gets tough, reckon I can dress him down. You go fix up a bite of food. I'll make a couple more rounds, then tie up for a rest.

"Come sundown, I want yuh to come up to the heights with me. I'll show yuh a country grander than yuh could dream about. And I'm hopin' we might catch a glimpse of him again—the big gray feller. I have a hunch that's what the breed is doin' in these parts.

He's a hoss trapper. But Mary, I want that big gray."

Dal called to the team and the plow wheel began its rhythmical song—a song which has been the prelude to the development of more than one pioneer community. . . .

Sunset! Dal Baldwin squeezed his wife's hand as they stood on a flat boulder in the craglands and watched the gorgeous play of shifting lights across the canyon.

Dal felt Mary quiver. He had been here and seen the splendor of the sunset before. As now, his throat had become parched with sheer exhilaration.

There was a hush on the wilderness, as if all creatures had declared a halt to watch the awe-inspiring splashing of color against the rugged mountain sides.

Suddenly, the golds gave way to orange-tinged scarlet, then swiftly plum-colored veils sifted down

in an attempt to screen the whole effect, but here and there a vagrant shaft of blazing light pierced the veil to set up new riots in the craggy slopes.

THEN from beyond the canyon came the startling scream of a wild stallion. Dal squeezed his wife's hand tighter. His lips were compressed as he watched the rise of a magnificent head.

The big gray stallion king came up into a blaze of sunlight as if to pose as a piece of animate statuary in a spotlight. Not a single muscle moved as he stood there—the most magnificent horse Dal had ever seen.

"He—he's like a king, the king of the wilds," Dal whispered hoarsely. "No mustang, that one, but blooded. Mary, he's the one I want for—for Naieta."

As suddenly as if he had heard, the big stallion reared and whirled on his hind hoofs. But a shot rang out to bellow along the canyons.

"That breed!" Dal gasped. "Took a shot hopin' to crease the gray. It's an old hoss hunter's way. Stuns 'em if the shot is good. Kills 'em if it ain't. The sneakin' . . . Mary, if I can fetch up with him, I'll fix him!"

Dal's big form shook with anger but Mary caught his arm.

"Careful, Dal dear," she breathed softly. "There must be nothing of that sort here. Remember, Dal, that one would kill. He has the brand in those eyes, in his twisted mouth. Shall we go now, honey?"

Dal smiled at her.

"Yuh're right, Mary. But I'm still goin' after that gray some day. You know his capture would give us the start we want."

Mary nodded and together they moved off along the old game trail which led down to their valley. Mary was thrilled. She had seen on almost every hand the panorama of a great land, a land of promise, but a land of tomorrow—beautiful, productive, although terribly lonely and a bit foreboding even when Dal was close beside her.

A sharp piercing cry startled her.

"Cougar!" Dal said sharply.

Acheeta, the big cougar tom, had begun his nocturnal hunt. Dal knew only too well that before morning some of the gray stallion's young stock would be cut down.

In the twilight as the Baldwins strode on to their cabin, they said little, each overwhelmed by the vastness of the country from which they had set out to carve a home for themselves and their children to come. Each was aware of potential dangers which lay ahead and that they were handicapped by having only meager supplies,

yet each daring to have faith enough to meet every challenge the wilderness could offer, and to hope. . . .

The plowing was done! Dal had rigged up a crude drag harrow with heavy spikes he had brought with him, spikes bolted into timbers hewn out of birch. His dragging of the newly-turned sod was not a pretty job, but the frost and snow of winter, and the rain of early spring would do a lot to break up the sod. In the spring, before seeding, he would give the acreage another dragging, when the sods had been loosened by the weather.

Autumn had closed in on the Baldwins, that period of such great beauty and yet sadness. Beauty that cannot fully be caught on canvas when the first frosts have touched the more tender foliage, tinting it with a mad riot of coloring. Sadness because soon the trees and shrubs would lose their leaves, leaving the limbs sere and naked.

There was a winey tang in the air, the blend of pine and spruce, frosted high-bush cranberries and the wild mint from the hay meadow.

One day Dal was deep in the timber cutting poles for his first corral fence. Mary was packing down fruit and drying out deer meat.

It was drawing close to sundown when again he heard the scream of the wild stallion. He had been calling intermittently the past two days. Naieta had answered. The filly was growing restless. But this time there was no answering whicker from Naieta.

Mary walked around the cabin and cast a glance along the meadow. Naieta was gone! She hurried to the tether rope—the rawhide—and discovered that it had been cut by a knife.

Tears filled the girl's eyes. Naieta was a big part of their hopes. Mary swiftly made off through the timber. She must get Dal on the trail at once!

Squirrels chirred and scampered across her path. She was afraid as the woods became denser. When a young muledeer doe rose from a thicket and stood staring at her with large expressive eyes, Mary thought she would drop. But the doe bounced off and Mary went on her way.

SHE called to Dal, then heard his striding toward her. He caught her to him. Her eyes were still tear-filled.

"Steady, hon," he said. "Yuh've had a scare. That breed, Mary?"

She nodded.

"But not me, Dal. It's—Naieta. She's gone. Tether cut. I didn't see him. Didn't hear him. I was busy."

Dal released her and clenched his fists, his mouth twisting fiercely.

"He's stole the little gal, Mary. I know what for. He's goin' to use her to bait the king stallion into a trap. By glory, I'll—"

He broke off and looked at his wife.

"There'll be lots of light for trackin', Mary," he said. "I'll have a bite to eat, then move off. I've an idea where that half Indian will set the bait. A box canyon up close to where we were when we watched the sunset."

"But you'll be powerful careful, Dal dear?" Mary's voice was scarcely audible.

"Yeah, I'll be careful, honey. I'll take the old Winchester along, but I ain't goin' to start trouble. I want the little gal back and I aim to get her back. Hurry with the supper so's I won't lose her trail, huh?"

As Dal hurried with his meal of cornbread, venison and coffee, he assured himself that his conjecture was right. The breed had been awaiting his opportunity to steal the little black, when she responded to the wild calls of the gray stallion.

Dal scraped back his pine block seat and reached for his Winchester. Mary's eyes widened as she watched him. She caught his arm.

"You'll remember, Dal? You'll be careful?"

He nodded and kissed her warmly.

"Not all the hosses in the world, honey, could make me forget that we—we need each other."

He crossed the meadow where he picked up Naieta's trail. He moved cautiously along it, never for a moment trusting the half-breed. Now and then when some small wild creature broke deadwood in a thicket, Dal froze and jerked his rifle to the ready.

Then he commenced to climb. The trail became more and more difficult to follow, but Dal was fairly sure of the direction the breed had taken. Dal was also well enough versed in woodcraft to make a circle as he approached the small box canyon.

Reaching it, he sat down on a moss-covered boulder in the cover of a small jackpine belt.

Dusk sifted silently, but swiftly down, and suddenly Dal was startled by the ringing bugle of the wild stallion. Almost instantly there came a reply from Naieta.

Dal's first impulse was to dash from cover, because the filly had sounded so close in. She meant so much in his scheme of things, so much in his and Mary's desire for conquest of the wilderness. But he put a curb on the impulse and stood watching, waiting.

A cold sweat covered his body when he heard the strong clatter of powerful hoofs, the hoofs of the wild horse king drawing closer, closer.

Dal, peering through branches, could glimpse Naieta in a small pole corral at the end of the canyon. Ahead was the trap, open at its westerly end, a gate up and ready to drop at a touch from the concealed trapper.

Naieta snuffled softly as if all her fear of captivity had gone with the coming of the big wild one. Dal could hear the throaty snuffling of the stallion now. Turning his head slightly he at last glimpsed the big one mincing cautiously toward his doom.

Step by step, half-step by half-step, the great one advanced, whickering, snuffling in reply to Naieta's calls.

Then suddenly he leaped, but almost simultaneously whirled as that pole thing crashed down at his rear. He reared, and lashed out fiercely with his strong forehoofs.

Dal Baldwin caught at a tree bole for support. In the next few moments he saw a demonstration of savagery such as he had never dreamed could be possible, as the trapped stallion in fear and anger struck and battered at the poles which held him.

A half-moon lazed above the peaks, lighting the trap zone and casting grotesque shadows on the battering stallion.

SUDDENLY the big king paused, then reared at a man-made voice sound. Dal started as a human head rose up over the top pole of the high corral. He saw the leering face of the breed, uglier than ever in the moonlight. The man was chuckling, taunting the quivering wild creature.

He uncoiled a rawhide lariat from about his shoulder. The stallion screamed, reared, and struck, but as he came within range the man also struck, slashing him across the eyes.

Dal Baldwin had hoped to trap the stallion himself. He could have gained possession of the gray King now, for the half-breed was under his gunsights and he had stolen the filly. Law had not reached this wild country as yet. But as he watched the man slash time and time again at the stallion's eyes a fierce desire to set the wild king free dominated all other thoughts in Dal's mind.

He came more into the open, for the man was talking.

"We 'ave our leetle fon, no?" he grunted. "Mebbe a lot of fon firs' I begin to tame you, though. I tame you

so you follow me all places. You eat out of my 'and, den I sell you. Some beeg breeder. D' filly I keep. She will 'ave young wan, jus' lak you, mebbe . . . I catch more of yo' band, mebbe a son. Ah-h-h!"

As the stallion rose again, the man slashed him terribly across the eyes.

Dal could stand no more of this. He took off his shoes and, circling about at the back of Naieta, started to let himself down to the level of the top rail of the trap. The level was a wide ledge.

He dropped lightly to the ledge and for a moment froze, as the wild king seemed to pick up his scent.

The big one held his head high, and Dal quivered, fearing that the breed would sight him. But nothing happened. He could hear the man talking again, talking thickly, as if he had been drinking.

Dal crept in, laid his rifle down carefully. He wished he could take time to unsling his boots from about his neck and get them on. He would feel better, surer of himself then.

He flexed his muscles as he came up from his knees. In a crouch he hung there, watching, hearing the mad crash of battering hoofs. The stallion's anger was all cut loose now, and Dal saw the breed jerk back several times from a high plunging forehoof.

Dal saw the stallion rear. He yelled. The half-breed turned, off balance momentarily as a powerful hoof struck in a high arc. With a half-scream the man toppled to the ledge. Dal rushed in, realizing that the breed had not been seriously hurt. Fear of falling backward more than anything else had prompted his cry.

Dal caught him by the shoulders of his deerskin jacket and jerked him to his feet.

"Yuh cussed varmint!" he yelled. "I'm goin' to beat yuh worsen yuh've ever been beat up before. I got no use for a hoss thief, and less for a feller that'll abuse a hoss as you was doin'!"

Dal shook the man fiercely. But suddenly the breed twisted in his grasp. A knife flashed in the moonlight, and Dal ducked just in the nick of time as the blade slashed through the loose fold of his shirt under the right arm, barely grazing his skin.

Dal forgot his promise of caution to Mary. He was a big man, and this half-breed had attempted to kill him. With a fierce snarl, he lifted the breed from his feet and hurled him smashing to the rock. But the man was tough. He rose to a crouch, and he still had possession of the knife.

Dal suddenly leaped backward until one of

his stockinged feet touched his rifle. In a flash he recovered the Winchester, leaped to one side as the breed lunged for him. As the fellow overshot his mark, Dal swung the stock of his rifle, bringing it crashing down in a sideswipe on the man's gun arm.

With a howl of pain, the breed rocked forward almost to his face. The knife had spun from his grasp. Dal crooked the Winchester in his left arm, and stepped in, to grasp the man by a wrist with his right hand. He turned and twisted the arm until the ugly face became a mask of pain in the moonlight. Then Dal let go and drove a smashing uppercut to that heavy chin.

The breed dropped in his tracks and lay still. Dal watched him carefully. Then the form stirred. The half-breed rubbed his chin, making thick, inarticulate sounds.

"Get to yore feet!" Dal clipped. "Up on yore feet. Yuh ain't had enough yet. I'm goin' to thrash yuh so's yuh'll be glad to hightail out of this country and never come back!"

The half-breed made a sudden move to retrieve his knife, but Dal caught him flush to the face with another massive right fist which snapped his head back. He followed with another, another—vicious jolting hooks which finally dropped the man like a partly filled sack of cornmeal. . . .

WHEN the half-breed came to, he was whining. Dal had got into his boots and stood menacingly over the heavy-set fellow.

"All right," he growled. "Vamose—nitchi. And if I ever so much as hear yuh're still in this part of the country I'll come huntin' yuh up. Go on now, before I change my mind and tear yuh apart . . . No, wait a minute. I got a job for you. The gate. You know the fix of the rawhides. Get 'em loose and let the big feller go free."

"But *M'sieu*, I . . . *Mon Dieu!* He kill me as he go out!"

"It wouldn't be any more than yuh deserve, yuh cussed thief!" Dal shot back. "Do as I say. Get goin', before I go to work on yuh again."

The man muttered something under his breath, but Dal could not make it out. The breed was moving to the gate, hesitantly, for the stallion scented him and began to scream and lunge.

Dal Baldwin handed the man his own hunting knife so that the thongs tying the gate poles could be cut. But he held the muzzle of the Winchester close

enough to the fellow's body so that any false move would have sent the breed crashing headlong to the canyon bottom, a slug through his body.

One pole after another dropped clattering to the rocks. Then Dal was satisfied. He took the knife back and blasted an order to the breed to clear out.

"And remember what I'm warnin' yuh!" His voice shook with fury. "Show up again and I'll—well, yuh've got some idea."

The man crouched and moved off into the shadows.

Dal turned and yelled at the big gray. The stallion spun and reared, but Dal laughed softly.

"This-a-way, feller," Dal called low, gently.

He moved toward the open gateway, ready in an instant to leap to one side.

The stallion reared again, shrilling his blasting battle cry. With all his force he lunged forward at that shadowy man shape.

But Dal leaped deftly to one side as the great one bounded out to freedom.

Pausing only to stamp his great savage hoofs on the rock and toss his wild head magnificently high, the stallion bounded forward to the cover of the shadows, to the great freedom he had enjoyed all of his adventuresome life.

Dal watched him until the shadows closed about him, then he turned. He sighed deeply, for he might never again have an opportunity to be so close to the creature he wanted so much.

He rubbed his right hand, and a frown puckered his face. His hand pained him. It was swelling, but flexing the joints he was sure no bones were broken.

He strode over to the corral and commenced to cut away the poles that held Naieta captive. He talked softly to her the while.

"We've made a bad start, gal," he said. "I'm not so shore that breed'll do what I told him. He may be back, and I can't always be facin' the same way. He's liable to hurt you, or Mary, or me. Well, now, let's go home."

A candle's light glowed in the open doorway of the cabin as Dal led the filly down through the bottomland strip. Mary heard them and hurried to meet them.

"Dal, darlin', I've been so worried!" she called out. "I've been hearin' all sorts of things, and imaginin'

more, I reckon. The—the other. The man, Dal. What happened?"

Dal breathed on his right fist in the darkness.

"Wait till I tether out the little gal, Mary. I'll give yuh the whole story."

With the little black staked out again, closer to the cabin, Dal picked up his rifle and slipped an arm about his wife. Carefully punctuating his story he gave Mary some of the details of his experience at the canyon trap.

"I'm pretty shore he won't come back, honey," he said. "But we must watch for him. Yuh can never tell. Anyhow, that's the story, and that's the first bad experience we've had in our homestead life. I hated to let the big feller go, but after what he'd been through, I thought I would. Some day, when he gets used to our scent, and sees that we mean him no harm, he may come down in close. Then my turn'll come. If I get him, mebbe I won't keep him longer than necessary. Once we get some of his stock, he can hang on to his job as king of the wilds."

They entered the cabin, where Mary had the coffee hot. She turned her face up to be kissed, a lovely face, radiant with thanksgiving that the night had not brought tragedy to her.

They sat close together as the wilderness night closed in fully about them. Dal began to talk softly.

"I'm beginnin' to realize now, honey, just what truth and meanin' there was in the stories Dad and Grandad told us kids of their experiences pioneerin'. The wilderness is big, powerful big, and it's untamed, like the great savage stallion king I saw in action tonight. In order to do any tamin', folks—pioneer folks, like us, and especially first settlers—have got to keep our heads. That's what we'll do, honey—keep our heads and use the sweat and strength and common sense God gave us. We—"

Dal's voice trailed off. His chin sank. He was asleep.

For a long moment Mary watched him in the stillness of the great night. Her lips moved, but no sound came, nor did she intend to utter a sound. One didn't need to on such occasions, as she framed a prayer for their safety in this new land, the future program of which might depend entirely on the welfare of these, the land's first pioneer folk.