

VACATION, and No Mistake



A BOO BOO BOUNCE STORY

**What with Black Horse Harry and
a houseful of nieces and nephews,
Hopewell is just fit to be tied!**

By BEN FRANK

IT IS about noon on a very fine day with the breeze smelling no little fresh and balmy through the jail windows, and I am thinking I should ought to be stirring around and about and going home to dinner when Boo Boo Bounce begins to twiddle his fat thumbs very energetic. Even though

his eyes are still shut, the thumb twiddling tells me he has something on his mind, so I set back in my chair and wait.

"Hopewell," he says, opening one eye to look at me, "it cannot be said by friend or foe that I, the sheriff of Coyote County, U.S.A., do not do my duty."

"Indeed no!" I say, me being the deputy sheriff and inclined to agree utmost hearty with Boo Boo, my boss.

"Also," he says, opening the other eye, "although No-work Norton is far from the desperado type, nonetheless he is a prisoner. So long as a sheriff has got a prisoner on his hands, voters should ought to be satisfied."

"True, and no mistake!" I agree.

And I cast a glance toward the cell door behind which we have got "No-work" Norton locked up, him being a vagrant which us citizens of Polecat frown upon letting run loose. Not that No-work objects to being locked up in jail so long as he is fed three times a day.

I see that he is sound asleep on the bunk, with his shoes off. However, a big toe is twitching, and I know in a moment he will be awake and asking for his dinner, which reminds me I must be ambling along to home, or my dear wife will be no little put-out if I am late.

"Therefore, Hopewell," Boo Boo goes on, "everything seems very rosy in the sheriff business for us at the moment with us having a very gentlemanly prisoner such as No-work Norton. But there is one fly in the ointment."

"Such as?" I ask.

Boo Boo's three chins quiver no little violent.

"Black Hoss Harry!" he says hoarse.

I feel a slight chill move up along my spine, for "Black Horse Harry" is indeed a tough-looking fly to be in anybody's ointment, with numerous black whiskers and glittery eyes. He is somewhat of a stranger in Polecat, him having rid in on a coal-black horse only some three days previous from parts unknown. Also, it is rumored around and about that he is very handy with his fists, the twin Colts he carries, and a deck of cards.

"Boo Boo," I say hopeful, "leave us not

cross no bridge before we come to it. After all, Black Horse Harry as of to date has broke no law. So long as he behaves—"

THERE is a slight commotion from No-work Norton's cell as he gets to his feet and shuffles to the door.

"Boys," he says, "ain't it about time I et my dinner?"

Boo Boo nods absently, but he is still worrying about Black Horse Harry, for his fat red face is no little unhappy.

"Deputy," he says, "leave us keep in mind that all strangers such as Black Hoss Harry should be treated with kindness and not crossed."

"Do not worry," I say, putting on my hat. "I am not one to be unkind to a stranger. Especially to one who carries two guns and stands some six-odd feet in his socks."

I go outside and head for home, crossing the courthouse yard and turning the corner by "Nail-head" Nutter's general store. And who should I meet coming out of "Jigger Joe's" Emporium but none other than Black Horse Harry himself. Now, meeting such as he would not be bad if I had not stubbed my toe on a loose board in the walk and thusly stumbled against him.

He frowns no little severe and drops a big right hand to the butt of a sixgun.

"Gruumpp!" he says. "Can't yuh see where at yuh are goin'?"

And then his glittery eyes fix on my law badge utmostly hostile.

"A sheriff, huh?" he says. "I hate sheriffs, an' no mistake!"

"Kindly do not class me with such low-down citizens as sheriffs," I say, very brisk. "I am a mere deputy."

"Deputy – sheriff – all the same to me," he says, brittle. "And henceforth leave us remember that I do not want yuh goin' around and about, bumpin' into me! Step to

one side whilst I pass, or I will push yore face out from betwixt yore ears!"

I make haste to move out of his way, and he goes on. As soon as I get some strength back into my legs, I hurry homeward, thinking indeed here is a no little fly in Boo Boo's ointment. Mine, also.

At the dinner table, my wife says, "Hopewell, you look pale. Are you sick? Which reminds me of my sister in Cedar City, with six children, who is not well and I should no doubt visit. Hopewell, I believe I will go see Sister Isabella for a week. In fact, I will go today on the four o'clock train."

I am still worrying about Black Horse Harry, which slows down my thinking. So it is after I have et and am halfway back to the jail that I see that my wife's going to visit her sister is nothing more or less than fate patting me on the back. Also, I see Black Horse Harry leaning against the front of "Ton-thumb's" butcher shop, smoking a cigar and giving me the evil eye. So I tip my hat utmostly polite and cross over to the other side of the street.

When I go into the jail, I go in on tiptoe, for this is Boo Boo Bounce's nap time, and he does not like to be disturbed. However, he is not asleep, but is in the cell with No-work Norton, and they are eating dinner very chummy. This is fate again, for after eating, Boo Boo is always in a good humor.

I wait until I hear Boo Boo sigh content, then I say:

"Boo Boo, although it is nigh onto a month before my vacation is due, I would like to take it now."

A slight frown creases his fat, red face, but it does not remain, on account of he is feeling good.

"Why now?"

"You being a bachelor, may not understand," I say, "but my wife is leaving

for Cedar City today to be gone a week. If I should take my vacation while she is gone, I can get in some sleeping and fishing. If I take it when she is to home, she will keep me busy cutting weeds and such."

"Hopewell," Boo Boo says, shutting hrs eyes, "although I am free and single, I understand exactly. Yuh are now on yore vacation for a week. And to show my appreciation of yore fine service as deputy, here is five smackeroos bonus."

Very grateful, I take the fiver and stuff it into a pocket. Then I put on my hat and depart, but I do not go home, for home is no place for me until after the four o'clock train has went. I wander into "Chin-nick" Chancy's barbershop and there is "Forty-rod" Frye, who I get into a game of checkers with.

WHEN four o'clock is past, I bid Forty-rod good-by and head for home. I feel very content indeed, for I have not one single worry in the wide world. No wife to tell me what to do. Being on a vacation, I do not have to consider Black Horse Harry as a fly in the ointment. Besides, in my pocket very cozy is the five-dollar bill.

Home looks calm and peaceful as I approach, but when I step up on the front porch, I feel a sudden warning of danger, which hesitates me just outside the door. From inside comes a faint rattle of a pan, I feel numerous chills creep over me. I wish utmostly that I had my double-barrel shotgun along for there is no telling what may be making a noise in a empty house. I am about to hurry elsewhere, when there is much blood-curdling screaming and a rush of feet.

Before I can move, a rope whistles through the air and circles my neck. There follows a snapping sound and a sharp pain in my back. The rope tightens and I topple over, but before I can see what is going on,

I am blinded by some warm, sticky stuff being plastered over my eyes. Simultaneous, my hair is pulled, and I feel numerous kicks on my ribs. Last of all, there is a sharp pain in my right leg, and I know I am being bit by a mad dog.

Then the rope loosens, and I hear childish voices saying:

"Hello, Uncle Hopewell! Surprise! Surprise! Surprise!"

I set up and claw the sticky stuff off my eyelids and see six happy, innocent faces smiling down at me. I realize that here are my wife's sister's six kids. Also, I realize, it was Maggie, age thirteen, who lassoed me with her jumping rope, and that Snapper, age eleven, shot me in the back with his bean shooter. The sticky stuff on my eyes, I know now, is nothing more than Sally's bubble gum, who is nine. It was Speck, age seven, who kicked me in the ribs, and Dolly, five, still has some of my hair in her hands. Also, I was not bit by a mad dog. Little Joe, age three, done that.

Then I lift my eyes and see Isabella, my wife's sister, standing in the doorway, frowning no little severe at me.

"Hopewell," she says, icy, "I do not like this, you playing so rough with my children. If I thought you'd be a bad influence on my little lambs, I'd go home tomorrow instead of staying a month."

"Yes, indeed!" my wife says over Isabella's shoulder. "Hopewell, I am ashamed of you. Get to your feet and act your age around the children."

I stagger to my feet and clutch the porch post for support.

"I do not understand it," I say, feeble. "I thought you was taking the four o'clock train to visit—"

"I intended to," my wife smiles happy, "but Isabella and the children came on the three o'clock train for a surprise visit. Now that you are home early, you can help me with—"

This is when I remember that I am on my vacation and I like to fall in a dead faint. I take one quick gander at the six kids. They are all looking at me, their eyes no little bright.

Then Maggie stops skipping her rope and begins to fashion a noose in it. Snapper loads his bean-shooter with a marble, and Sally is chewing a fresh wad of gum. Dolly and Speck wink at each other very wicked. As for Little Joe, he is baring his teeth.

Right then, Black Horse Harry or no, I realize I do not want no week's vacation, for when a deputy is on his vacation, he has no excuse to go to work in order to get away from home.

"I have got to go back to the jail," I say, hasty. "I owe the citizens of Coyote County a duty that—"

At that moment, Little Joe reaches for my left leg. I turn and run, which is a good thing, for Maggie's rope almost gets me around the neck again. Just as I think I am safe, there is a thud, and my hat goes flying into the air. Snapper, I realize, is a dead shot with the bean shooter, and no mistake!

Breathless and trembling, I rush into the jail office, forgetting to not let the door slam. This wakes Boo Boo up.

"Hopewell," he says, angry, "never, never slam a door whilst I am in the arms of Morpheus! How many times must I warn . . . Hey, what is the matter with yuh?"

I explain how it is that my sister-in-law and her six kids have come to visit us, and that it is impossible for me to take a vacation at this time.

A LOOK of great sympathy comes to Boo Boo's fat face.

"This is indeed a calamity for you, and no mistake. Howsomever, I am glad yuh have decided to end said vacation now, for after yuh left, I happen to remember we have a tough customer in town, namely

Black Hoss Harry. I now rescind yore vacation."

At that moment, the door whams open no little noisy, and six pairs of innocent eyes stare at Boo Boo Bounce.

"Look't the funny fat man," Dolly says.

"He's the sheriff," Maggie says, and skips her rope. "Uncle Hopewell is the deputy."

"I wantta be a deputy like Uncle Hopewell!" Snapper yells.

"Me, too!" they all scream.

There is a sudden rush of feet, and Maggie swings her rope. The rope settles neat about Boo Boo's fat carcass, pinning his arms to his sides. Snapper cuts loose with the bean shooter and gets a bull's-eye with a mud ball on Boo Boo's big nose. Sally and Dolly leap into his lap, and Sally blows a gum bubble the size of a watermelon, which busts with a pop, spattering Boo Boo's white face no little sticky.

Dolly eyes Boo Boo's bald head in disgust, and says, "There ain't no hair to pull."

Speck hauls off and gives Boo Boo a kick on his right shin.

"Make us deputies, or else," he says. At that moment, Little Joe sinks his teeth into Boo Boo's fat left leg.

Boo Boo lets out a howl that can be heard for twenty-odd miles, and then some.

"Get away from me!" he bellows. "I'll make yuh deputies! All of yuh! I promise!"

They all back away and line up against the wall, looking happy as well as innocent as a basketful of kittens.

"Now," Boo Boo pants, "yuh are deputies."

"Hooray!" Snapper yells. "We are deputies like Uncle Hopewell!"

Boo Boo staggers to his feet. His face is now as red as a dog's tongue, while his three chins quiver no little much.

"But," he snarls, "yore Uncle Hopewell ain't a deputy at present. As long as yuh kids stay here in Polecat, yore uncle is takin' his vacation!"

The kids turn their eyes on me, and I feel myself turn cold.

"Goody, goody!" they say. And Snapper loads his bean shooter with another mud ball while Little Joe bares his fangs.

"Also," Boo Boo goes on, businesslike, "if said uncle does not stop you kids from comin' around and about my office, he will keep on havin' a vacation—without pay!"

"Boo Boo," I say, desperate, "I have give the best years of my life to you, and now you—"

"I have spoke!" Boo Boo thunders, pointing a fat, trembling finger at the door. "Outside, Uncle Hopewell! And all!"

I am too stunned to move, but not Isabella's kids. There is another rush of feet.

Maggie loops her jumping rope about my knees, and says:

"Come, Uncle Hopewell."

The other five grab the rope and pull. The next thing I know, I am sliding out the door and down the jail steps no little bouncy. Halfway home, I get my feet untangled from the rope, but am hardly in no condition to walk. I stagger around the corner of Nail-head Nutter's store and bump into something which says, "Gruumpp!"

One look tells me that here is Black Horse Harry who I have bumped into, and no mistake.

"You again!" he says.

I do not stop to say yes or no, but hurry on home with the six kids tagging very content behind me.

"Hopewell," Isabella says, frowning severe, "I hope you are not teaching my lambs no bad habits?"

And my wife says, "Your eyes are bloodshot, Hopewell. Have you been in Jigger Joe's Emporium again?"

I escape to the barn and lock all the doors. Then I set down on a bale of hay to think.

"Hopewell," I say to myself, "leave us be calm. Remember, where there is a will there should ought to be a way."

And then I remember No-work Norton and the five dollar bill I have in my pocket.

THAT night after everyone is asleep, I sneak out of the house and go to "Bing-bong" Beemer's blacksmith shop. After feeling around in the dark, I find an old buggy axle, which I balance across one shoulder and head on down the street with. Presently I come to the jail and stop at the outside window of No-work Norton's cell. I manage to wake him by punching him with the buggy axle, and he comes to the window.

"Hopewell," he shudders, "bein' waked in the night is bad for my nerves. What do yuh want, nohow?"

"No-work," I say pleasant, "I have come to help yuh escape from the horrors of prison life."

"I don't mind the horrors of prison life," he murmurs, "so long as the grub is fair to middlin' an' regular. Besides, why would yuh want me to escape from jail?"

"Should yuh break out of jail," I explain, "Boo Boo will be forced to look for yuh. Bein' inclined to let others do his work, he will no doubt end my vacation. Home life is no longer pleasant for me, and no mistake, No-work, and if I am to survive the next few weeks, I must get away from it all."

"Sorry, friend," No-work sighs, "but there is numerous reasons why I do not care to break from jail. First, I have no place where at to sleep, and—"

"Yuh can sleep in my barn."

"Second, I would have to work, or starve."

"I will see to it that yuh don't starve."

"Besides, it is no little effort to bust out of jail."

"I will do the bustin' with this buggy axle," I say.

"Lastly, Hopewell, what is there in it for me?"

"Five smackeroots," I say.

"Leave us see yore money," he says, quick.

I light a match and show him the picture of Abe Lincoln, and he licks his lips, and a certain gleam comes to his eyes.

"Also," I continue, "bustin' out of jail is a no little offense. As soon as Isabella and the kids have gone home, I will arrest yuh, and Judge Jackson will likely give yuh six months. That will safely see yuh through the winter."

"Hopewell," he says, no little grateful, "yuh are without doubt a gentleman and a scholar, and no mistake. Leave us shake on the deal. Also, I will trust yuh with the five ringers, which I will ask yuh to kindly exchange for a few odd bottles of Jigger Joe's snake medicine and bring it to yore barn where at I will repose for the next few weeks."

We shake hands solemn, and then I pry the bars from the window with the buggy axle. Soon I have No-work Norton safe in the haymow of my barn and once again myself am back in bed, feeling no little content at a good night's work well done.

Just as I expect, the sun is no sooner shining than Boo Boo Bounce comes at rushing up and pounding on the front door, which I go answer pronto.

"Hopewell," he pants, "No-work Norton has busted out of our jail!"

"So what?" I say cold. "I am on my vacation."

Boo Boo's three chins quiver, indignant.

"This is no time to talk of vacations," he says. "There is work to be done. Leave us lace up yore shoes and come with me. Yore vacation is over as of now!"

Just then Maggie comes into the room, skipping her rope. Following her is Snapper, Sally, Speck, Dolly and Little Joe. Little Joe bares his teeth, and I do not bother about lacing my shoes, but rush outside and shut the door very firm.

"Run for yore life!" I say to Boo Boo, and head down the street.

Regardless of his size, Boo Boo is fast on his feet in a emergency. He beats me to the jail by a good ten paces. At the door, we both glance back. The kids are not following us, so we set down in the office to rest and catch our breath.

"Deputy," Boo Boo puffs, "things are indeed in a pretty mess. Our one prisoner is gone. Black Horse Harry is around and about, makin' dirty cracks to one and all concernin' the lawmen of Coyote County. And to boot, yore wife's sister's six offsprings are a menace to life and limb, and no mistake! Why, I would just as soon be in a cage with six wildcats as to . . . Hopewell"—he fixes his eyes on me very unpleasant—"we have more flies in the ointment than yuh can shake a stick at!"

"I cannot help it," I say, quick. "It is not my fault."

"And Hopewell," he goes on, severe, "I have a feelin' you are the biggest fly of all. Incidental, if things do not work out satisfactory, yuh are the same as fired!"

"Boo Boo," I say, miserable, "yuh are utmosty unjust to me."

"Leave us not argue the point," he says, cold. "Leave us move around and about Polecat, searchin' No-work's old haunts for the man himself."

SO WE go here and yon about Polecat where at No-work is in the habit of hanging out previous, but naturally we to

do not find him, for he is hid in my barn, where at Boo Boo does not think to go look.

Along toward dinner time, Boo Boo heaves a sigh and murmurs: on "No-work must of left town. This afternoon, I reckon, there is nothin' for us to do, but saddle up and ride around and about the ranches, lookin' for him. I utmosty wisht I knew who helped him bust out that window. I'd like to twist said person's head loose from his shoulders."

I feel many fingers of cold massaging my spine, but I look Boo Boo in the eye very direct, and say, "Me, too!"

On the way back to the jail, we stop at the post office. There is one letter for Boo Boo, but he does not open it, for he has his mind on eating dinner and does not want to get his mind on anything else.

"Leave us not waste the taxpayers' money by you takin' time to go home to eat dinner, Deputy," he says. "Instead, we will go to the jail and wash up slightly, then go to Stinky Joe's to put on the feed bag."

This suits me fine, and I say so.

When we step into the jail, I have a feeling that all is not quite right, but to a glance about the office does not confirm this. Boo Boo lays the letter on his desk, pours water into the washpan and begins to splash it over his fat face.

The uneasy feeling still persists, and again I look here and yon, but everything seems to be as of previous. I guess maybe my nerves are upset from at the humorous experiences I have had of late.

Boo Boo finishes washing and is feeling blind for the towel when a voice says out of nowhere:

"Boys, ain't it about time I et my dinner?"

I am so astounded I cannot move. Boo Boo drops the towel and upsets the pan of water. We both stare at the door of No-work Norton's cell. Through the bars we

can see none other than No-work himself, setting on a bunk in his sock feet. Then Boo Boo and I rush to the door for a better look. It is still No-work Norton behind bars, but he is not in no wise the same as when I last saw him.

His eyes are bloodshot, and the left one is black and blue. There is some blood on his shirt front. A considerable amount of hair is missing from his scalp, and his face is spattered with a substance which I recognize as bubble gum.

"No-work," Boo Boo bleats, "why have yuh busted back into jail after bustin' out?"

"Because it is the only safe place I know of," he answers.

"No-work," I gurgles before I think, "yuh are a traitor!"

"Ain't no such thing!" No-work flares. "When I made that deal with yuh, I didn't know that six wild Injuns would find me in yore barn and try to scalp me. Also, I might add, yuh didn't bring me not one single bottle of Jigger Joe's snake juice."

"How could I bring you a bottle when I was—"

And then it comes to me that both No-work Norton and myself have let the cat out of the bag, so to speak. One look at Boo Boo's red face is enough to freeze my blood.

He doubles both fists and shakes one under my nose.

"Ah, ha!" he says fierce. "I smell a smelly rat!"

"Now, Boo Boo," I say, weak, backing against the wall, "leave us remain calm while I explain why I busted No-work out."

"Leave us keep our mouth shut whilst I do the talking," he says, gritty. "So, Hopewell, yuh are the kind who bites the hand that is feedin' yuh!"

"Boo Boo," I say, "I did it to end my vacation."

"Speakin' of vacations," he says, grinning no little wicked, and then some,

"yuh are on one! Permanent! In plain English, you're fired! Kindly walk through yon front door and do not never return, or I will—"

HE DOES not say for sure what he will do, for at that precise moment, the door opens, and in walks three prominent Polecatters, namely: Ton-thumb Tucker, Nail-head Nutter and Jigger Joe Jirous. They are all looking no little stony-faced, and no mistake.

Ton-thumb Tucker, the butcher, so called on account of it is estimated that his thumb has added a good ton of weight to the various cuts of meats he has sold around and about Coyote County, steps forward, looking very determined.

"Sheriff," he says, "we three gents, more or less the backbone of the community, have come to inform yuh that a certain newcomer by the name of Black Hoss Harry is a undesirable an' unwelcome citizen in our midst."

"Yes indeed!" says Nail-head Nutter. "He has bought some dozen-odd cigars from me without payin' one single cent of cash money."

"He is a no little nuisance in the Emporium, also," Jigger Joe adds, harsh. "Not only has he forgot to pay for numerous beers, but he is fleecin' the customers by cuttin' high card nine time out of ten, or oftener."

"To make a long story short," Ton-thumb puts in, "it is time yuh was tellin' Black Hoss Harry to move elsewhere, Boo Boo. In fact, we demand action!"

Boo Boo's face is completely without color, except for his eyes, which he is blinking rapid.

"Gents," he says, feeble, "leave us not rush to condemn a stranger such as Black Hoss Harry. Leave us be full of neighborly kindness an'—"

"Boo Boo," Nail-head says, brittle, "I

wish to make it plain that numerous other Polecatters have had enough of Black Hoss Harry's presence besides us. It is either up to you to send said jasper on his way, or we will get us a sheriff who will do his duty!"

Boo Boo swallows audible and squares his shoulders.

"Gents," he says, "leave it never be said that Sheriff Boo Boo Bounce did not do his duty. I will see to it that Black Hoss Harry shakes the dust of Polecat off'n his feet pronto, and no mistake!"

Somewhat mollified, Nail-head, Jigger Joe and Ton-thumb depart. Boo Boo turns and points a fat finger at me.

"Hopewell," he say, "load yore shotgun with buckshot."

A great weakness settles in my knees, for I remember Black Horse Harry's unfriendly attitude on two previous occasions. Also, I recall the quick way he has of dropping his hands to the handles of his twin Colts. But just before I faint, I remember something else.

"Sorry, Boo Boo," I say, "but I am no longer the deputy of Coyote County. Yuh just got through firin' me. I have none other than No-work Norton to witness to that."

"Also," Boo Boo says, "yuh have No-work to witness that I have just hired yuh back. How would yuh like to have yore wife know that yuh got fired and then refused to take yore job back?"

I glance at No-work Norton. He looks sad and shakes his head.

"Hopewell," he murmurs, "bein' a prisoner of the sheriff and dependin' on him for three meals per day, it seems as how it is prudent for me to be a witness to anything he wishes."

I give this some careful thought and come to the conclusion that must I choose between trouble with my wife and with Black Horse Harry, Black Horse Harry is much the safer to have trouble with. Also,

there is a chance that his bark is worse than his bite, which is not true of my wife.

"Boo Boo," I say, "once again I will take up the cause of law and order."

BOO Boo smiles, satisfied, and no mistake.

"Fine, Deputy," he says. "Load with buckshot."

"Leave us not fly into this business of runnin' Black Horse Harry out of town without considerin' all angles," I say, quick. "As anyone knows, a sixgun will out-distance a scattergun two to one. I would not have a chance against him should he see me comin', which he is likely to do."

"True," Boo Boo agrees. He drops down on his easy chair by the desk and twiddles his thumbs. "On the other hand—"

"Now, take yore forty-four," I go on. "It would be a match for them twin Colts."

"Hopewell," Boo Boo says, happy, picking up the letter, "I never once thought of my forty-four." He puts the unopened letter into a shirt pocket and digs his six-gun from the drawer where at he keeps it, him being no little gunshy. "Hopewell, take my forty-four and go run Black Hoss Harry out of town."

"Wait," I say, not liking this. "Leave us look at it this way. It is unlikely that Black Horse Harry would shoot a unarmed man. Should you and I go talk to him together, unarmed, possibly we might persuade him to leave town as a gentleman should. Kind words are mightier than the sword, so to speak."

"Hopewell," Boo Boo nods, "I am lucky indeed to have a deputy who instead of flyin' off the handle, sets down and thinks things out. We will go see our good man, Black Hoss Harry, unarmed."

"Boys," No-work Norton says, "before yuh go to see him, mebbe yuh should ought

to bring me my dinner. Just in case somethin' might happen, and yuh would not return."

"Nothin' will happen," Boo Boo says, heaving himself to his feet. "Come, Deputy, leave us go have a friendly understandin' chat with our man."

We put on our hats and walk over to the Emporium. One glance tells us Black Horse Harry is not here.

"We have come to tell Black Horse Harry to leave town," Boo Boo says to Jigger Joe. "Where at could we locate him?"

Jigger Joe shakes his head.

"I don't know, but I am no little pleased to know yuh are doin' yore duty, Sheriff. Should I see Black Hoss, I'll tell him yuh are lookin' for him."

We go on, but do not find Black Horse Harry. At last, we come to "Stinky Joe's" eating place and pause at the smell of onions and steak.

"Hopewell," Boo Boo says, "perhaps our man has already left town. Anyway, leave us snatch a bite of dinner before goin' further. Also, perhaps I should ought to read my mail."

He tears open the envelope and unfolds a sheet of paper. He begins to read, and his face becomes the same color as the paper.

"Hopewell," he says feeble, "I fear we have misjudged the amiability of Black Hoss Harry. This letter is from Sheriff Prize of Northfork. It says a gent by the name of Black Hoss Harry is wanted there for a killin', and should we chance to meet such, kindly hold same in jail until Prize can come after him."

"Oh, oh!" I say, and look about no little quick.

What I see coming from behind paralyzes me utmostly, for it is none other than Black Horse Harry himself with his two hands very close to his twin Colts.

"Also," Boo Boo goes on, not seeing

Black Horse Harry, "Sheriff Prize says to get the drop on him, and if he makes a move, shoot to kill. Don't run any chances with the coyote."

"Who is a coyote?" Black Horse Harry says, gritty. "And who is it yuh are goin' to get the drop on? Incidental, what is this I hear about yuh goin' to run me out of town?"

The letter flutters from Boo Boos fat, limp fingers.

"Now, my good man," he squeaks, "yuh would not shoot two innocent unarmed men in the back, would yuh?"

At that moment, there is a patter of feet, and who should come along, jumping her rope, but Maggie, thirteen. Behind her is Snapper, eleven, Sally, nine, Speck, seven, Dolly, five, and Little Joe, three.

"Uncle Hopewell," Maggie cries, "we come looking for you. Dinner is ready and on the table and waiting."

"Beat it, you kids," Black Horse Harry says, raspy. "I am about to finish off a big, fat sheriff and his deputy, which is not a sight fit for small young'uns to watch."

"Oh, yeah?" Snapper says. "We're deputies, too."

He ups his bean shooter and lets fly a marble. The marble gets Black Horse Harry square on the Adam's apple. He lets out a surprised squawk and staggers back a step.

AT THAT moment, Speck kicks Black Horse on the shin, and at the same time, Maggie twirls her rope and pins Black Horse's arms to his sides. Before he even has time to get out one good cuss word, Snapper takes a running leap and rams him in the bread-basket, upsetting him no little hard over Speck, who had squatted down behind him.

Right then, Sally goes to work with her bubble gum, dabbing his eyes shut until he is as blind as a dead skunk. Dolly grabs a handful of hair with one hand, a clump of

chin whiskers with the other and pulls. Little Joe lets out a happy squeal, locks his arms about Black Horse Harry's right leg and goes to work with his teeth.

This is more than Black Horse Harry can take. Besides uttering numerous swear words, he screams something fierce, and no mistake, and says:

"Sheriff—Deputy, save me!"

As soon as Boo Boo and I recover from the shock of what is happening, we save Black Horse Harry from a bloody and horrible end. We do this by dragging him to the jail, where we lock him up very tight indeed behind bars where at he is safe from further harm. After this, I round up my wife's sister's six kids and take them home.

"Mamma," Maggie yells to Isabella, "Uncle Hopewell let us help catch a outlaw for him!"

"Boy, it sure was fun!" Snapper says, happy.

"We're deputies the same as Uncle Hopewell," Sally says, popping her gum and making me jump three feet into the air.

"You should of heard the man swear," Speck says, his eyes as big as duck eggs. "He said—"

"Look," Dolly says proud, "I got a whole handful of black whiskers."

"I can bite like a dog," Little Joe says, baring his fangs. "Bow-wow!"

Isabella's face turns pale, and she clamps a shaking hand over her heart.

"How terrible awful!" she wails. "I knew Hopewell would be a bad example to my little lambs. I'm going to pack up this very minute and we'll take the four o'clock train to Cedar City."

"I don't blame you," my wife says, her voice shaking with indignation. Then she turns on me. "Hopewell, I am ashamed of you, and no mistake! I am going home with Sister Isabella, who is not well, and her darling lambs. To punish you, I will stay two weeks instead of one!"

At all this, I am no little astounded. Also, I do not say nothing, for I am afraid should I open my mouth to say one single word, I will spoil everything. So looking as unhappy as possible, I go into the house, set down at the table and eat my dinner with gusto.

It is the next day, and I am setting by the cell in which we locked up Black Horse Harry, but he is no longer there, for Sheriff Prize of Northfork has come and took him away. Boo Boo is setting in his easy chair by the desk with his eyes shut.

"Hopewell," he says, opening one eye to look at me, "it cannot be said by friend or foe that I, the Sheriff of Coyote County, do not do my duty."

"Indeed no!" I say.

"Boys," No-work Norton murmurs, "ain't it about time I et my dinner?"

"Deputy," Boo Boo goes on, ignoring No-work, "everything is very rosy in the sheriff business for us at the moment, with us having a very gentlemanly prisoner such as No-work Norton. Now there is no flies in the ointment."

"Unless," I say sudden, "it is that my wife is gone for two weeks, and this would be a lovely time for me to take my vacation, which I am not doin' at present."

Boo Boo smiles no little kind and closes his eyes.

"Leave it never be said that I, Boo Boo Bounce, do not appreciate the services of a fine deputy such as you, Hopewell, who is also the uncle of six very fine children. As of this instant, yuh are on a two weeks' vacation. Good-by, and kindly do not slam the door noisy as yuh depart."

I put on my hat and leave quiet.

It is indeed a very fine day to begin a vacation, and no mistake, with the sun shining handsome, the breeze smelling fresh and balmy, and the birds singing no little chipper.