READING SIGN



By Kenneth B. Clarke

The Man from Arizona and the Girl from New York Couldn't See Around the Big Bend in the Trail, But They Read the Clew and They Took the Chance Together.

ANHAM, the owner of the Broken Trigger, It was an incongruous business, for Lan-ham was tall and large handed and the thing he was bent upon so seriously was repairing a diculously little pair of overalls.

His foreman leaned over the back of a tilted chair watching the operation interestedly. Across the big knee was spread the seat of the diminutive garment, scarred with a three-cornered tear which had been raised into hard welts by overhand strokes with saddle thread, nulled tight.

'She reads like a Lazy Labrand," the foreman declared. "An' she sure sets in the right

Lenham went on with his task, unrespon-sive. He was pushing the needle through a puckered ridge of the coarse material with the end of an empty rifle cartridge.

"You'ah young offspring's goin' to feel like he's settin' on a rawhide rope," the foreman suggested. "Let me take 'em down to the blacksmith shop an' flatten them seams some on the

A jerk of the thread loosened an avalanche of assorted stuff from the small pocket into Lauham's lap. Curiously he fingered the collection and spread the exhibits upon his broad pane. There was a little wad of red wool yarn, the wheel from a broken spur, the dried head a horned toad, a Mex silver dollar, and a ut glass stopper from a bottle.

Lanham went on with his task, unresponhad become of that," he said quietly. "It was hers, you know." There was a peculiar gentle emphasis in the way he said "hers." "Belongs to a bottle that always stood on her bureau. It held lilac water."

His big hand closed tightly upon the boy's treasure. The foreman lowered his eyes and stared at his boots.

"Lilacs grew where I brought her fromand were sort of strung along with our

Lanham rocked the bit of glass on his palm and watched the changing colors gleaming from its facets.

"Little Don probably hooks her memory up pretty close to that bottle, like a pup holding a reent. She used to let him wet his nose with the stopper."

He restored the stuff to the boy's pocket when his sewing was finished, and, taking the lamp with him, went off to his bedroom, Standing over the cot in a corner across from his own bed, the father lowered the lamp beside the siceping boy's face. An anxious frown clouded the little lad's expression, as though he were not resting peacefully. Lanham crouched down upon his heels and softly touched the small hand flung limply across the blanket. At once the hand tightened upon his finger, the child's frown gave way to the relaxation of happy surprise and the smiling lips drowsily whispered, "Muvvy!"

Two years of solely masculine attention had molded domestic matters at the ranch crudely awry. Lanham noted that the little hand about finger was grimy in its creases, that the corners of the boy's mouth were caked with rife. There was naught beside. The effort to dried syrup, that the tucking of the bed covers play up to his big father's expectations was was bunchy and haphazard. The whole room had an air of dispirited unwelcome. Lanham's steady gray eyes roved over the desolate, silent. place. They came to rest again, tenderly, upon he boy's face. He gripped the small hand softly and rose to prepare for sleep.

The regular ranch routine went on with unchanging demands upon the father's attention and with unrelieved monotony for the boy until early in December, a sudden impulse seized upon the cow hands to "make a Christma's for the kid." It caught them collectively, like a spreading epidemic, and a stir of stalking mystery, another. enveloped the outfit.

By day the brawny, bowlegged horsemen trailed little Don off, singly, and with studied and cunningly indirect questioning sought to arrive at conclusions as to the small lad's secret longings. By night, baffled and uncertain, they secretively thumbed over the bulky mail order catalog from Chicago, straining for suggestions. The spirit of competition was rife.

Eventually, one by one, they sent away letters with enclosures of money as each narrowed a list of tentative selections to his final choice of a gift pre-eminent-and each with an enlarged air of clation. Then, as certain notices legan to arrive in the mails, they stole away one to the express agent at the railroad. half-day's ride out, and rode in after dark. each craftily hiding a package in a place of inviolate seclusion.

Christmas does not come to the high, horiron-wide mesas of Arizona--it has to be intrigued. Three days before Christmas Andy Ames. the runt of the outfit, rode away toward the mountains, an unladen packborse trailing behind him. He returned after dark on Christmas Eve to find that his bunkmates had plucked the cotton stuffing of his quilt all into little pieces o make snow for the tree he was bringing

The Chinaman's kitchen mirror had been broken into small bits and tied into a festoon of glittering brilliants. Empty brass shells of assorted callbers, with tin stars and hearts and crescents fashioned from cans, had been strung nto dangling garlands. Candles had been spiked to clothespins, and their fervor had become so emotional that a suit of underwear of Bud Sellers had been sacrificed in an attempt

to extract the dye to stain the candles red. After the boy had been herded to bed and the tree had been set up and dressed, the men disappeared in a body, only to return, one at a with cautious backward glances and hoarse whispers. Each slipped a package from under his coat and passed it to Lanham in suppressed excitement. They gave their varied in-

structions: "Open her up. Clint, an' stack her under the

tree for His Nibs." "Peel her down, Chief, an' set her where the

light will hit her good." "Be sure an' tell him this here's from me. The instructions differed, though all bore

the same note of unconcecaled pride; but the packages were strangely alike in shape and size and weight. Eight of them lay in a row, and Lanham curiously tore open the ends of the wrappings, one after another, and pecked in. Before going to bed he dug out a package

of his own, tossed it on the table, and stared it it in helpless perplexity. It varied from the eight others in no particular of shape, size or weight. He held it in his hands for a moment. hinking; then he east it indifferently into the cobwebbed space behind the woodbox and crossed softly to the doorway of the bedroom. For ten minutes or longer he stood somber and quiet, gazing toward the shadowy corner where

the little boy lay asleep. In the morning, when word came to bunkhouse that little Don was finishing his preakfast and that the big moment of showing him the tree was at hand, the punchers softfooted through the kitchen and dining room to closed door of the big room. There, by kneeling eroughing, leaning and tip-toeing they with the door frame, and at the sound of Lan-



Lanham found himself out on the veranda with Barclay's crumpled figure hanging tortured in the wrenching grasp of his hands. Futilely he wondered what to do with the man.

ham's voice calling to Don they opened the door

Slowly the expectant grins on the brown races stackened and hung loosely like slits in mail pouches. Their eyes, glinting in the candicwidened and remained fixed in fishlike stares. For there, ranged under the tree like a tack in an army, stood eight small rifles-eight little .22 Winchesters, as alike as gauge tests could make them.

The boy came in with Lanham's hand about his shoulder. For a long moment his gaze took in the lighted tree with its barbaric adornments. The surprise was complete, but mystification was his outstanding emotion. And then his eyes dropped to the array of small firms.

The spread of gifts began and ended with manly and firm, but no word nor action came to allay the rising lump in his throat. In the end the child in him won over the insecure groundings of manhood. His arms went about the long leg at his side. His face dropped against Lanham's hip, and the stroking touch upon his shoulder loosed a desolate sob frem his quivering lips.

The door closed silently before the string of masks peering from the gloom of the dining room. And silently the men straggled back to the bunkhouse, noticing anything but one

In the big room, with their backs to the tree. Lanham and little Don sat entangled together in a great leather chair. The lingering last shudders of long sobbing were still shaking the little frame encircled in Lanham's arm. "What dld you want? What would you like,

my old son?" he asked gently. 'I don't know. I d-don't know what." the child quavered. "Only-something!"

But the second of the second of the Late one evening of the following spring, when the checking over of the herds had been completed and the range was promising fair Lanham sauntered over to his foreman's small cabin and asked him to step outside a minute.

The two men leaned over a gate in the faint light from the open door, Lee Winton waiting for Lanham to speak. A horse whickered softly across the corral, and a dark body loomed to ward them through the cool dusk. Presently the nibbling lips of a great brown head were thrust into Lanham's hand and the confiding animal nudged him to provoke a fondling. Lanham stroked the velvety nose inattentively.

"I want to speak of something I've been thinking about since last Christmas," he said, and seemed to be choosing a beginning with special care. "About my boy," he added. Winton smoothed a cigaret paper in regardful

"I find the little fellow is not part of us here. He is lonely. Lee-damned lonely. does not stiffen to the life on the ranch. He needs something to direct his interests or rather some one to direct them; and pretty soon he will need book schooling." Another silence tollowed, and the foreman rolled and re-rolled the tobacco of his cigaret.

"If we were to have a woman here-Lanham continued, and halted, "the right kind of a woman—some one to take the place of the mother that left him——" His fingers slowly combed through the tangled mane of the big roan, and he abandoned this beginning as too

'What I've had in mind." he continued presently, "is some one young enough to be understanding and companionable to him-some one interested enough to love him-some one nice in the ways that this outfit lacks. But there's on obvious difficulty."

The foreman ground the glowing end of his match into the gate rail and reflectively exhaled a thin drift of smoke

"I reckon any female old enough to escape the stigma of we-all cow waddies." he comment ed, "would of pretty nigh outlived her useful-ness to little Don." He glanced toward the sound of men's low laughter beyond a lighted doorway at a little distance.

"If there were another way to secure the right person for the boy I would choose it in preference." Lanham stated after several minutes, and his voice came strangely devoid of its usual gentle modulation. "As it stands, I am going to ask a young woman to marry me."

To the foreman, who knew the feeling with which Lanham held to certain memories, the announcement struck with an almost physical

There is only one woman I can think ofand why I should think of her I do not know. I met her only once, and talked with her less than ten minutes. Why I think any fine woman might consider the proposal I have to make is herond understanding-a proposal of marriage with the factor of love deliberately crossed out?

But I believe this woman might, in all sincerity. I am going twenty-two hundred miles to find out. I'll think it over a bit." And he walked slowly away toward the house. He did think it over for several days more:

and then he and little Don left for the east. There were times during the long train journey when Lanham groped desperately for an alternative plan that would make it possible for him to turn back. Then at other times be searched methodically behind the general motive of plain impulse for the exact point that had drawn him forth to seek this one woman scarcely better known to him than any of fifty others with whom chance or necessity had occasioned the exchange of a few words.

Brought down to a final analysis, he thought he found the underlying point in a memory of the way a the gird had spoken the

He had met her in the offices of a firm that looked after his interests in a northern mining property. They had been introduced by Barlay, the secretary of the company, and she had taken his dictation of a few letters. As he signed the letters they had talked, briefly and impersonally. She had questioned him interestedly about the west. "Arizona! How I love the sound of it!" she

had said softly. In the morning the executives bad not

arrived at the office when Lanham came in. boy was sorting mail in a far corner and a bookkeeper was opening the safe. Miss Maitland stood beside her desk removing her gloves. Lanham had been watching distantly the entrance of the building, and had followed her up in the next elevator.

"Mr. Lanham!" the girl cried out softly in pleasurable surprise as the big fellow stepped loward her hesitantly. She gave him her hand impulsively, as to an old friend that had returned. In her eyes was a look as though she were seeing "Arlzona."

"We were not expecting you. Mr. Barclay has not come down yet.' "I will see him later," Lanham replied. "I

came this morning, Miss Maitland, to see you to ask if I might see you alone, later. Possibly this evening, when the office closes"

The first thought to flash into the girl's mind was that he wished to question her privately about something to do with his business affairs in which he did not wholly trust the She dropped the thought quickly. A man with his sort of gray eyes would not deal indirectly, and through a woman. Then it occurred to her that possibly this meant the offer of a secretarial position in his employ-probably in the west-possibly on his ranch. The surmise gave her a little thrill of excitement and of adventure knocking.

"I should like to impose one condition," she replied with an engaging note of challenge in her voice, "that you talk to me again about the

"I shall talk to you about Arizona," Lanham answered, smiling, but with a peculiar tone of seriousness that rather tended to confirm the girl's hasty speculation.

It was arranged that he should call for her at five o'clock. He came a little early and talked with Barclay, but left when she was ready, and they went uptown on top of a Fifth avenue-bus. As they rode above the crowds and the traffic the girl kept up a running fire of gay, satirical comment on people and the phases of city life bout them which she felt must strike humorously. Lanham found himself being genuinely entertained.

At Fifty-ninth street they left the bus and walked through the park, up and across to the street of the girl's little apartment. Lanham talked of roundup days on the range, of the country where his ranch lay on the Broken Trigger, and of how to roast wild turkey over an open fire. Responsive to the girl's eager interest, he talked well and found many half-forgotten things of unexpected interest to himself. But of the thing he had come to speak to her about he could not talk at all; and the girl knew that something had slipped. She wondered if ier manner had been too social to impress him favorably as one suited for secretarial duties. Upon leaving her at the steps of the apart-

ment Lanham managed a vague beginning. "My little boy is with me. He is more lonely than any boy should be, I should like mights well to have you know him, if you could-that is, if you would care-

And now the girl understood it all, she hought. Busy man-in town for few days-no triends-week-end coming, and boy on his hands. But why this seeking of a private interview and this elaborate leading up to so simple

"Tomorrow is Saturday," she answered, inerestedly: "let me have him for the afternoon. We can go to see the animals at Bronx park and have no end of a good t'

"That's good of you," Lanham said, grasping her hand, and again there was that peculiar carnestness in his manner as he added, "I hope you will find him likable and-good company."

The next evening Lanham waited for them at the subway station. They raced down the platform toward him with a burst of happy laughter. Helen Maitland's eyes were bright. "Adorable!" she breathed in a whisper, with a nod toward the small head hugged under her arm. And then, aloud, "We're going back tomerrow to finish up."

They dined together, and afterward took the to the Hippodrome. His body was limp with fatigue, but his eyes were still alight and sparkling as Lanham helped him unbutton and unbuckle for bed.

"How do you like Miss Maitland, cld son?" Lanham spoke quietly, seemingly with the most caspal interest, in order that the answer should not be colored to meet any suggestion of ex-

"O. I can't tell you how much, dad! She st makes you feel glad, sort of." "About this racket tomorrow, son-did you

speak of it first, or did she?" "Well, I don't know exactly. We stood looking back toward where the monkeys were, and then she looked at me and I looked at her, and then she laughed that glad way and I laughedand then I reckon we both said it right together.

sort of-'Eet's come again tomorrow!" At their meeting to start the expedition the following day Lanham asked to join with them. At the zoo he loaded Don with peanuts and turned him loose upon the monkeys, taking the girl to himself. A sudden panic had seized him to have the affair over with as quickly as possible; either to declare himself fairly squarely before this unsuspecting young creature and to face her probable amazement, or to abandon the idea forthwith. He had decided. abruptly, to see it through,

Leading her to a bench in the open, where the least attention would be attracted, he leaned forward with his elbows on his knees and waited before speaking until a jumpy pulse beat in

his throat subsided. "In the west, Miss Maitland, a man gets into a way of 'reading sign,' as it is called out there, wherever he goes. His welfare, sometimes his life, depends upon his ability to see and re member little things he runs across on a trail. The depth of a hoof print, the way a twig has been bent, the look in a man's eye-anything may be sign to him and tell him things he needs to know. From sign he comes to pretty definite conclusions about things he can't see around the bend. Sometimes he's put where he will stake a good deal on his judgment, and take

lot of responsibility." Lanham raised his eyes from the walk and gazed off vaguely beyond the distant groups of

holiday folk. "I met you a long time ago," he continued. "Our trails crossed just once; but I read sign then, and now, after three years, I've come 2,000 miles to ask you something that may just stir up that lively sense of humor of yours and pile me on the back of my head, or it may draw

down scorn and anger upon me." He hesitated, but fearing that stopping would mean weakening he caught himself up

"It has taken a good deal of thought to decide if this would be a right thing to do, and a good deal of nerve to get to the point of askng you. And all I have to go on is what I've up out of impressions-sign. But I'm staking a good deal on my judgment that at least you would be understanding."

"I would like to be," the girl replied, "Maybe will be vet-if we give us both time." She was smiling in genial amusement; he was so like an wkward boy inviting his teacher to a pienici did look like the offer of a job after all; but wondered that there should be so much Lanham felt her smile upon him and was

conscious that he had been circling about the issue. At least he could turn and look the girl "This is different, Miss Maitland. Not many

women would be understanding. You're the only one I know that might be both understanding and interested, and-well-" They both smiled now. Lanham couldn't help it, after she had. And then with earnestness, but with regained assurance, Lanham continued:

"I've tried to make it easy. I fear I can't. concerns my little son. He hasn't any mother, and he needs one desperately out there in that bungling, man outfit. I've come to ask you to go back with us and be a mother to

This was different. But for the moment all other significance was dulled for the girl by the bright promise of the words, "go back with She felt enly "Arizona" calling. Lanham

gazed at her, amazed by the sparkle of delight in her expression. 'I suspect you do not understand after all-

There wouldn't be another woman within eighteen miles; not another gentlewoman within eighty. There would be no seclusion from daily contact with a dozen lone men shut away in a life of their own making. The problem would entail being married to me-going back under the claim of my unquestioned protection."

The girl started, involuntarily. Her lips were parted and her eyes were wide in amazement; but she was not bewildered by the prorosal so much as struck by a startling remembrance. She recalled thinking on the day when Lanham sat dictating by her desk, "What eyes to be trusted!" And as he turned away to leave her, "What a back to rest behind for shelter!" Here were the thoughts returned in a proffered actuality-the call to trust-the protection offered. She turned upon him a look of quiet

"Forgive me, if you can!" Lanham spoke "I intend only respect. In return for what I ask I am prepared to give you all that I have left to give." He looked away; then added gently: "That would mean everything but love. Please know I care enough for your feelings to spare you any implied effrontery of that sort, after a day and a half acquaintance."

'Please don't be so concerned over my feel-Her tone was without rebuke, and not at all ironic. "They are buried deep. You see, I have worked for years in an office, where men are habitually unconcerned. And besides, you know, you are staking your judgment on my understanding."

Lanham smiled again. "Well, frankly," he declared with an undefinable sense of relief, "I held a memory of you, and you seemed to characterize the sort of things I would like to have surrounding my boy. I came directly to you in my trouble. I thought of you here, alone, and not happy. You seemed not to have found the things you desired and, in a way, to be resigned to less. I found myself desolate, and left with a problem that was beyond me. With difficulty and a sort of bafflement in both of our lives, it seemed as though possibly we-!"

"So you suggest that we pool our misfortunes and work out a partnership of wretchedness! I'm not sure that I should enjoy that." "I fear I put it badly."

"I think you put it gloomily. Now, assuming you wish to induce me to come, why not offer the inducements instead of dispiriting me over the prospect?" Lanham looked up quickly. But there was

no flippancy in the girl's quietly humorous gaze. After all, the suggestion was obviously logical; he was not presumed to be making love to her. "I really mean to offer all that I have to give," he said. "You would be leaving every familiar association and giving your life's hap piness into our keeping. I would try to make it secure. Love you would have, I know, from little Don. I would give you every material comfort and all kindly consideration in my power. I would protect you in every way, you would know the feel of sweeping distance, clean air and sunlight, and the sweetness o purple evenings-the things I believe you said

must mean to you 'Arizona.' I'm afraid that is "That is much." The girl spoke with quiet feeling. She looked off over the treetops and color from aroused emotions tinged her cheeks. Silence fell between them, but it was a pause that held Lanham tense as he watched her.

"How strange," she said, speaking as in a reverie, "how different from any way I had thought of it as coming!" She turned to face Lanham and the light of excitement was in her eyes. "The way of 'Arizona!" "

"You must see-" he interposed. "I do see. It isn't that I am confused or bewildered; it is the thrill of having to decide one's action in a big way, on what lies unseen

around a great bend in the trail. To stake one's

whole future on a single cast of judgment!" But I never meant-you do not have to "No, I don't want it spoiled by waiting to ponder over it. Our trails crossed but once, and now as they cross again you hail me and beckon to follow on. Something in me cries out to just the way of it. I didn't know anything ever

could be like that. It may never be again. And

that must be the way of my answer."

girl's hands were clasped tightly upon her knee, and again she looked off over the treetops. "Six years ago, when I was twenty," she continued, "with one quick thrust Fate struck at me to crumple up my happiness-took away . father, home, comfort, and a carefree sense of trust-and a man who had talked love, but who disappeared when it was found there was no wealth. And now it is mine to strike back and retake the gladness of living.

"At twenty-six with disillusionment behind one-well, one is content to find happiness in simples realities. You bring those to me, honestly, generously-and love is neither offered nor asked. I could feel honored and safe in your care always. So let me have my big mo-ment of decision now." She dropped her hand into Lanham's and their fingers closed together. "I will go with you-around the bend," she said,

The handclasp between them had only the solid quality of binding an agreement, but it was not until the girl released her fingers that Lanham relaxed his hold upon her hand and roused from unnoticing abstraction. At the close of the day Lanham brought

back confused impressions in which monkeys and elephants and his boy's laughter and the girl's flushed cheeks were intermingled as in a dream. It seemed as though their talk on the bench must be a dream also, and that he must await some confirmation from her before accepting it as a reality.

At the apartment steps again at parting Lanham watched the girl as she knelt before little Don with her arms about him to say good-night -and then he knew. "You will have many things to do, of course.

How long-do you think?" he asked her. "A few clothes, some books to pack-a week, ten days-what does it matter? Why wait?" she asked. "And when shall we-" Lanham faltered

and stopped, confused. But the girl answered

lightly and steadily, "On the day you may plan to leave. At, least I will hold to that much womanly reserve. From the pastor's study in an inconspicuous little church they went directly to the train; and in the early evening, three days later, Lan-

ham brought the buckboard around to the adobe station for the drive to the ranch. Darkness fell before they reached the ranch, and as they drew into the folds of some low hills they encountered a blackness of night that made Helen wonder at the calm assurance with which Lanham sent the horses on at an unchecked rapid pace. She could hear the slap and creak of harness ahead of her, but not a thing could she see of the team or the road. Instinctively she cowered low on the seat and clung closely to the little lad beside her, as though to ward off a mysteriously palpable

something that continuously threatened to close in and immerse her. Quietly Lanham's voice came out of the day to soothe her unspoken misgiving.

"Another mile and you will see our at the Broken Trigger, but it will take than half an hour to reach them. You all of this very beautiful in the morning

The foreman and the Chinaman we only ones to offer a welcome when they are the men reticently kept to the bunkhouse. Helen it was as though she had been cal blindfolded and placed upon a dimly lit strangely set and cast for some fantastic

The Chinaman grinned and ducked e ried away with a slap-slap of cushione prepare a supper. Lee Winton carried to Helen's room and shyly gave her ha mighty pump in acknowledgment of his duction; then his high heels clacked w across the veranda floor and he slippe into the dark. And so Helen Lanhan herself around the great bend, with I beating queerly.

Coming from her room the n she found Lanham waiting for her, stan

fore the wide fireplace. "It looks pretty rough and tou indicating the big room. "I'm seeing it through your eyes, and I'd no idea it was quite so awful. But you will know what it needs. When you're ready I'll give you a few of the boys and you can hold a little roundup in here,'

But Helen was not noticing the room. Her eyes were upon Lanham, bright with wonder, Booted and clothed for the saddle, he seemed to be even broader of shoulder and taller by inches. In gray doeskin breeches and a soft leather vest edged with a narrow band of Indian beadwork, a dull blue scarf knotted loosely about his throat, and silvered spurs at his heels, he seemed to have regained his native element. The lithe power and gentle, dominant poise of the man stood forth with a touch of primitive splendor. She had not thought of him as handsome until

Feeling her gaze upon him, he glanced down at his boots and explained: "I've been trying out horse I wired Lee to break in for you. After breakfast we'll see if you are pleased with him. There is a little butte three miles from here, where I would like you to meet 'Arizona.'

"I feel that I am just meeting you." Helen answered. "I wonder if I, too, can ever become like that!"

The following day Helen held her roundup. She could wait no longer to lay her hands upon the possibilities of the big room with its Navajo rugs and its general spirit of frontier homeliness and rugged comfort. The boys came at Lanham's command, shy and blundering before the sweet voice and laughing dark eyes of the little "herd boss." Their embarrassment took the form of wild-eyed, plunging rushes to do her will. They seized upon furniture or swept up indiscriminate armfuls of anything loose at the mere pointing of her finger, and hurtled into one another in mad dashes for the door and

veranda with their burdens. With quick intuition Helen promptly called them by their first names and with a comradely touch that at once relieved a feeling of tension and dread the men had been under since the receipt of Lanham's telegram. Deftly she drove them with a firm hand and lured them from their shells with a winsome gayety that gradually reduced the outfit to a state of willing servitude and adoration.

Stooping over the woodbox with a broom Bud Sellers prodded a dust-laden package from the narrow space next to the wall. The sixe and weight and shape of the package seemed to awaken memories in Bud. Stripping back a little of the torn wrapping from the end, he identified the contents exactly. Lanham's name, as consignee, lettered boldly on the label, completed the story.

But erouched on hands and haunches, and tilting his chin to the heavens, he loosed a long, desolate howl-and another, and another, rising anguish. The sounds brought Helen from her investigation of Lanham's root "What in the name of mercy has happened

now?" she asked. "What is it?" Bud solemnly handed her the package. happened a long time ago, ma'am," he answered. "I reckon the Chief had ought to tell you. I just can't. Ask him when the little fella ain't around," he added, guardedly.

When Lanham returned in the evening he stood in the doorway and gazed. The big room was marvelously altered in arrangement, order and cleanliness. Entiding welcome reached out to him-from every point with a sort of peacegiving benediction. Flowers and richly colored groupings of wild shrub branches brightened dull corners, and in the lamplight at the center table Helen sat reading to Don. She was gowned in something that fell softly in blue silken folde, and a light scarf lay about her shoulders and over her bare arms. Don had a look of recent and thorough scrubbing and brushing that brought a self-conscious but happy smile to his lips as he gazed up at his father.

Lanham unbuckled his spurs and dropped them on the veranda by the door; and for the

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