



Me and Wintergreen figgers we'll clean up teachin' these Eastern dudes how to be cowpokes in ten easy lessons. Then we meet up with Omaha!

Omaha takes my six-gun in both hands like he is chopping wood with an axe, squeezes the trigger, and blasts a hole through Wintergreen's hat-brim!

EASY MONEY

BY BEN FRANK

MONEY BEING something we can always use here on the WL range, it is my old saddle-mate and partner, Wintergreen Wilson, who thinks up the idea of us learning dudes to be cowboys by a correspondence course. So we raise all the cash we can and advertise in the big city Sunday papers. *HOW TO BE A COWBOY IN TEN EASY LESSONS BY MAIL*, the ads say. *SEND TEN DOLLARS CASH, PRONTO!*

Wednesday morning at the breakfast table, Wintergreen sops up the last of his molasses with a biscuit and says, "Lywell, leave us up and be going to pick up the answers to our ads."

Looking, as usual, like he is about to fall apart,

he ambles from our ranch house, which also looks like it will fall apart; and I follow. We rope our broncs and begin to saddle. "Lywell," he says, "when yuh stop to think how many dudes there is who wish to become cowboys at ten smackers a head—"

"Easy money," I say, climbing aboard my cayuse.

"Wait," he says. "I forgot somethin' to get our mail in."

He bow-legs it into the house and returns with an empty flour sack. "This oughta hold most of it," he says.

He swings into the saddle, and we head along the trail for Putantake at a easy lope. "Lywell," he

says, smiling happy, “only a man with brains would have thunk up this easy way to get rich an’—oh, oh, ain’t that Orv an’ Neff Paschal cuttin’ our trail?”

“Yes,” I say, uneasy, for the Paschal brothers are two gents who own the Double-X and go around well-armed and with chips on their shoulders. “But who is the third gent?”

Puzzled, Wintergreen shakes his head, almost losing his hat, which is so big it would fall down over his face if his ears did not stick out like handles on a beer mug.

Presently the Double-X outfit angles up to us. “Hello, boys,” Orv says, squinting at us under shaggy red eyebrows. “Goin’ places, or travelin’?”

“Going to town,” Wintergreen says polite.

“What yuh doin’ with that flour sack?” Neff asks curious.

“It’s to put our mail in,” Wintergreen replies.

“Mail?” the black-haired, beady-eyed stranger says. “You hombres must have a lot of girls writin’ you if—”

“We are not getting letters from no girls,” Wintergreen says dignified. “Lywell and me are learning people to be cowboys by mail, and—”

“By mail! How’n thunder can yuh learn ‘em by—”

“Curly,” Orv says to the beady-eyed gent, “Wintergreen an’ Lywell have likely been out in the sun without their hats.”

Laughing fit to bust a button, they ride away from us. Wintergreen’s face, I see, has turned somewhat pink. “Them coyotes,” he says indignant, “won’t feel so smart after we have took in our first million bucks.”

ARRIVING in Putantake, we ride straight to the post office and hurry in.

“Mr. Simmons,” Wintergreen says business-like to the postmaster, “kindly put our mail in this here sack and—”

“What mail?” old man Simmons asks unfriendly.

“The mail for the WL Correspondence School.”

“I don’t know what yuh’ve been drinkin’, Wintergreen,” Simmons says, “but there ain’t even a postcard for you mavericks.”

Somewhat dazed, Wintergreen and I stagger outside.

“Lywell,” he says husky, “do yuh suppose our ads ain’t writ right, or—” His voice chokes off, and

his eyes widen. “Look!” he gasps.

A stranger has stepped out of the Putantake Hotel. He is tall, bony and loose-jointed, with spectacles astraddle his long nose, and a orange shirt and new Levis held up by a silver studded belt. Seeing us, he seems pleased and removes a fancy, pearl-gray Stetson from slicked-down straw-colored hair. If ever a dude hit Putantake, this gent is it, and no mistake. “Mr. Wilson and Mr. Lilly, I believe,” he says pleasant.

“How’d yuh know?” Wintergreen asks flabbergasted.

“The proprietor of the hotel pointed you out. Gentlemen, I am”—he lowers his voice to a whisper—“Percival Octavius Ogram the Third, but,” and he raises his voice for one and all to hear, “just call me Omaha.”

Wintergreen blinks bewildered. “You from Omaha?”

“Boston,” the gent whispers, “but I don’t want it nosed around.”

“Don’t blame you,” Wintergreen says, eyeing the dude thoughtful. “Did you, by any chance, read our ad in—”

“Exactly,” Omaha says, a big smile coming to his bony face. “I’ve dreamed all my life of becoming a cowboy, and realizing the value of personal training, I’ve come here, instead of writing.”

“Comes higher this way,” Wintergreen says hopeful. “Fifty dollars in advance.”

“Cheap enough,” Omaha says, pulling out a wad of bills and peeling off fifty without batting a eye.

Recovering from shock, Wintergreen stuffs the money into a pocket. “Load Omaha on behind your saddle, Lywell,” he says husky, “an’ leave us go home.”

“Omaha,” Wintergreen says that evening, “the first thing a cowboy learns is to wash dishes.”

Omaha blinks unhappy at the dirty dishes, but he wants to become a cowboy something furious. So he sets to work.

“Wintergreen,” I say in a whisper, “leave us not crowd our pupil too much. He might get discouraged and pull out.”

“Who cares?” Wintergreen smiles. “We got his money.”

This is a point, indeed, so I say nothing further.

Later, Wintergreen says, “Omaha, lesson number two is learning to play poker.”

“Poker?” the dude says, blinking. “What is

that?"

"Get out your money, an' I'll show yuh," Wintergreen says.

Omaha digs out his roll, and Wintergreen runs down a deck.

"Oh, a card game," the dude says, looking pleased. "Back home I held the 'flinch' championship. But you'll have to tell me about these cards. What's this funny-looking fellow?"

"That's a jack," Wintergreen explains. Then he tells Omaha about pairs, straights, flushes and so on.

"Dear me," the dude says, shaking his head. "Sounds frightfully difficult; I hope I can catch on."

"You'll catch on," Wintergreen says, dealing.

WINTERGREEN is right about that, and the way the aces keep turning up in Omaha's hand beats anything you ever saw. When Wintergreen has lost ten dollars, he sighs deep and says, "I reckon you've learnt enough cowboy stuff for one day, Omaha."

After the dude has gone to his room, Wintergreen stares at the cards with a deep frown. "Lywell," he murmurs, "yuh don't reckon this jasper knows more'n he lets on?"

"No," I say positive. "He's too dumb to come in out of the rain. He just had a run of beginner's luck tonight."

Wintergreen looks some relieved. "I got thirty ringers left. Maybe tomorrow—"

The next day, we teach Omaha how to ride a horse by himself. The first time, he gets into the saddle backwards. The second try, he kind of gets the hang of it and rides around the corral.

"What do you know!" he says, looking surprised. "Won't be long until I'll be a cowboy."

"Sure," Wintergreen says. "With us learnin' yuh, you can't miss."

Omaha smiles happy. "Certainly glad I came out West and happened to see your ad. Always wanted to be a—"

"Time to learn to shoot," Wintergreen cuts in, not caring to listen to Omaha run off at the mouth.

The dude has never shot a gun. He takes my six in both hands like he is chopping wood with a ax, squeezes the trigger and blasts a hole through Wintergreen's hat-brim. I grab the gun before he can take a second shot; and Wintergreen, his face pale, says, "That's enough six-gun practice for one

time."

That evening, Omaha wins another ten dollars at poker. For about half the night, Wintergreen lays in his bunk, cussing. "Lywell," he says, "that hombre's beginner's luck is bound to run out. Tomorrow, I'll win back my money, or my name ain't—"

"Shut up and go to sleep," I growl. "Teachin' that nitwit to handle a lariat has wore me to a nubbin'."

The next day is somewhat like the others, only worse. The dude just don't have what it takes to be a cowboy. Once, he throws a loop at a fence post, gets Wintergreen by the neck instead, and likes to choke him to death. Later, when we are showing him how to brand a calf, he takes a red-hot iron and puts it against the seat of Wintergreen's pants. Wintergreen lets out a howl and jumps over a six-foot gate.

The dude looks like he is about to cry. "Seems like I never will learn this cowboy business," he says in a quavery voice.

That same afternoon, the Paschal brothers ride up, bringing along this beady-eyed gent they call Curly.

"Heard there was a stranger in the country," Orv says belligerent.

"Yeah," Neff says. "Always like to look strangers over."

"Is that him?" Curly asks, pointing at Omaha who is all tangled up in a lariat.

"Omaha," Wintergreen says, "meet Orv and Neff Paschal. They own the Double-X, first ranch south of us."

"Howdy, Dude," Orv says scornful. "Hey, be careful—"

But Omaha's lariat settles about Orv's neck and shuts off his wind. The next thing we know, Orv hits the dust with a thud and a bounce. Cussing, he untangles his throat and stands up.

"Sorry," Omaha croaks, "but I'm not very adept at roping."

"Mebbe yuh're better at dancin'!" Orv bellows.

He pulls his six and begins to blast away at the dude's feet, and Omaha does a Highland Fling like nobody's business.

AFTER THE Double-X outfit rides away, Wintergreen says, "Omaha, them boys ain't to be fooled with. After this, be careful."

Omaha says nothing. He just wipes the clammy

sweat off his bony face and stares where the bullets chewed up the ground.

That night, Wintergreen loses his last ten dollars. "Blast it, Omaha!" he yells. "That's no way to play poker!"

"You mean I don't play the game right?"

Cussing, Wintergreen climbs into bed and pulls the covers over his head.

The next day, we are showing Omaha how to shoot a rifle when a cowboy rides up and tells us the Putantake Bank has been robbed.

"Three masked men did it," he says excited. "Headed straight for the badlands. Reckon the posse won't be able to find 'em once they get into that country. Five hundred reward offered for 'em, dead or alive!"

"Goodness me!" the dude hollers. "Such excitement!" And he cuts loose with a blast of the rifle that likes to scare the cowboy out of his pants.

"Hold that feller while I get outa here," he yells, and spurs his horse into a dead run.

Looking discouraged, Omaha hands the rifle to Wintergreen. "Seems like I never do anything right," he says and ambles unhappy-like into the house.

"No use talkin'," Wintergreen growls, "that idiot ain't cut out to be a cowboy; maybe we ought to get rid of him before he kills somebody."

While we are pondering this question, Omaha comes out, all shaved and powdered up as pretty as a field of daisies. "Now," he says, "I wish to continue my riding lessons."

"Hop to it," Wintergreen grunts. "But don't get lost."

After three tries, Omaha gets aboard the horse we have saddled for him and rides away, looking like an overdressed scarecrow.

Presently, Wintergreen and I go into the house to start supper. Laying on the dining table, scattered about on an old newspaper, is Omaha's fancy shaving outfit.

"Hum," Wintergreen says, feeling the stubble on his chin, "maybe I had ought to borrow these tools an'—"

His voice ends in a gurgle, and I see he is staring pop-eyed at the newspaper. I also stare at the paper and see a picture of a gent. This gent, it seems, has served five years in prison for robbing the U.S. mails, and has been released recent for good behavior. It mentions that his name is William Black.

I glance at Wintergreen and see his jaw muscles twitching. "Orv an' Neff Paschal call him Curly," he says husky.

"William, or Curly," I say, also husky, "it's him."

"Once a crook, always a crook," Wintergreen says, tearing the picture out of the paper and sticking it into a pocket.

"Them three gents who held up the bank," I murmur, "likely had a change of horses hid in the badlands. They would likely hide the loot and ride back to the Double-X on different horses."

"Five hundred dollars reward," Wintergreen gurgles. "Easy money if we got the drop on 'em while they was asleep, Lywell."

I UNLEATHER my gun and examine it closely. Wintergreen does likewise with his six, and then picks up the rifle. Without a word, we go to the corral, saddle our horses and ride south. We take our time, so it is pleasantly dark when we leave our mounts and cut through the cottonwood timber that surrounds the Double-X buildings. All is quiet; not a light anyplace.

"Maybe they ain't home yet," Wintergreen whispers nervous.

"Maybe they have gone to bed," I whisper also nervous.

We ease up to a side window and peek in, but see nothing whatsoever, for it is darker inside than out, which is very dark, indeed.

"Now, what'll we do?" Wintergreen whispers. "Slip in an'—"

There comes a sudden noise from behind, followed by a dull thud and a groan from Wintergreen. Before I can get my gun from the holster, my head explodes, and I see numerous stars whirling around and about. The next thing I know, I am in a lighted room with my hands tied behind my back very uncomfortable. Glancing about, I observe Wintergreen propped in a corner, his hands also tied behind his back. He is somewhat pale and staring fearful beyond me. Turning slightly, I see what he is looking at. Orv and Neff Paschal and Curly Black. Curly is scowling at a piece of newspaper, which I recognize as the picture of himself, and feel a slight chill creep along my spine.

"Ain't no question about it," Curly says harsh, "they're on to us. That's why they was snoopin' around."

“Can’t understand why they’d bust out a window an’ wake us up, an’ then hang around till we caught ‘em,” Orv says.

“What’re we goin’ to do with ‘em?” Neff pipes up.

“If a couple dimwits like them have caught onto our game,” Curly says, “no reason why others won’t see my picture in a newspaper an’ catch on, too. Ain’t safe here for us no longer.”

“The thing to do,” Orv nods, “is get out while the gettin’s good. We’ll pick up the stuff an’—”

“What’ll we do with these baboons?” Neff persists, eyeing us in a way that ties my insides into knots.

“Take ‘em as far as the badlands an’ let ‘em have it,” Curly says. “No one’ll likely find ‘em there.”

“Killin’ never appealed to me,” Orv says with a shudder. “Even when Neff an’ I was helpin’ you before yuh got arrested an’ sent up, I was always against killin’.”

“That ain’t neither here nor there,” Neff says. “We can’t leave these two snoopers go back to Putantake an’ tell the law—”

“I ain’t squeemish about killin’ ‘em,” Curly says.

They haul Wintergreen and me to our feet and push us out into the cold darkness. Soon we are all mounted and on our way.

DAYLIGHT finds us riding into the badlands and winding through great washes and gullies and climbing over landslides.

I look at Wintergreen, and he looks at me and sighs deep. “Lywell,” he says faint, “leave us resolve never to earn a fast dollar without working honest for it. Never again will I take advantage of a dude, or—”

“I’ll say yuh won’t,” Curly pipes up, chuckling unfunny. “Hold it; this is the place. Fall off your hosses, boys.”

Wintergreen and I dismount, and Neff slides from his saddle and digs two old spades from a pile of dead brush. The next thing, we know, they have taken the ropes off our hands, and we are digging what looks like our graves. But it turns out we are digging up the bank loot, which they buried here. All too soon, we have uncovered a wooden box wrapped in an old slicker.

“Thanks, boys,” Curly says, pulling his gun. “Now that we no longer need you, I’ll—”

“Hold it!” a voice says grim.

Turning, who should we see but Percival Octavius Ogram sitting astraddle his horse, holding twin black-handled sixes in steady hands.

“The dude!” Orv says, and makes a grab for his gun.

But there comes a blast from Omaha’s right gun, and Orv forgets all about going for his weapon. In fact, all he can think about is the bloody hole in his right hand.

“Take those ropes and tie the varmits up, boys,” Omaha says calm. “And much obliged for helping me pin something on the Paschal brothers. Always before, they’ve been too slick for us. This time, it’ll be a different story.”

“But—but—” Wintergreen gurgles.

“Sorry I had to fool you,” Omaha says, “but when I ran across your ad, I saw a chance to live close to this nest of skunks without arousing suspicion. Brought along that old newspaper, thinking maybe I’d want to show Curly’s picture to someone. As soon as I heard about the bank holdup, I guessed these coyotes had done it; but had no way to prove it; so I left the paper where you’d be sure to see it. Figured you’d make a try for the reward. Rode to the Double-X ahead of you. Aroused the sidewinders by throwing a rock through a window. Wanted ‘em to find you and get scared. Followed you out here where the loot was hidden, and—”

“Just who are you?” Wintergreen manages to wheeze.

“Percival Octavius Ogram, Special Deputy Marshall, but just call me Omaha for short.” Then, grinning cheerful, “Too bad you boys didn’t capture these owlhooters so you could collect the reward.”

IT IS THE next day, and Wintergreen Wilson and I are sitting at the breakfast table, sopping up molasses with our biscuits. It is Wintergreen who breaks a long, gloomy silence.

“Right decent of Omaha to give me the money he won in them poker games,” he says.

“Easy money,” I murmur.

Wintergreen chokes slightly, hangs his big hat on his beermug ears and walks out, cussing.