



CAST YOUR PLUG *Upon the WATER*

By FENTON W. EARNSHAW

*A boy fisherman baits his hook with fleas
to catch the big fish of the underworld!*

ITOLD the magazine feller yesterday there wasn't nothing for me to write about. The newspapers already wrote the whole story. Those headlines "FARM BOY BATTLES BULLETS" and "HARRIS MOB MASSACRED" and the stuff that went with them don't leave much for telling. But the magazine feller promised me a new Heddon Deluxe rod with a hand-checked walnut grip, a Pflueger Supreme reel and enough Black

Oreno silk line to work Current River for ten-twelve seasons, so here I go.

It's like the papers say. They was a lot of coincidents. But, shucks, they wasn't any clever detective stuff like in Charlie Chan or the Phantom Detective. Tell the truth, if it wasn't that Hank had fleas and I was afraid of carrying my casting rod out in the open, nothing would have happened. But I'd better start at the beginning.

Last month I see in the Poplar Bluff

paper where they was having a big plug casting contest out in California. Having fished Black and Current Rivers since I was wearing pants I know a fair amount about throwing a plug. Shucks, not that they wasn't five-six other fellers in Wayne County just as accurate as me. But I'd had a hankering to see California for a long time. 'Sides, school had closed and Pa wasn't drinking so heavy and Bud, my brother, had got hisself a job at a gas station in Piedmont.

So one Sunday night I tell Ma I'm going to California and I pack a suitcase. Bud even lets me take his old overalls on account of with his new job he could buy new ones. Pa didn't object much to my hitting out. He just made me promise not to git mixed up with no show girls and that sort of stuff. I said I'd be back in two-three weeks.

Hank wanted to go with me but he had a bad leg from a snake bite he got in April. Hank's my dog. He set around while I built a tackle box that'd hold my casting rod. Golly, he sure was sad! Just 'fore I pull out I give him a big hug. Now maybe Hank wanted to send something of his'n along with me. Anyhow, that is when I pick up the fleas.

I git a ride over to Joplin that night on a truck, figuring to hitch south and finally git a ride out to California. That's where they was the first coincident. Next morning I'm thumbing on the road when a shiny blue coupe goes by and something drops *kerplung* onto the road. I walk over and find it's a flat black leather case, kind of like a big wallet.

I open it and my eyes, which are blue, get dazzled. Inside is a whole flock of diamonds stuck in little slots and wrapped in tissue paper. I figure they must be worth a couple hundred dollars anyhow.

This is the point where the papers write about the "inherent honesty of the Missouri

country boy." Shucks, I don't know about that inherent business, but Pa always fanned my britches if'n I talked about stealing things, even apples. So I aimed to git those diamonds back to that feller.

I STAND out in the middle of the road and the next car just has to stop or run over me. I tell the feller I got to catch a car up ahead and he says okay. Fifteen minutes later we catch up. We have to practically run the feller off'n the road. And when I jump out he lays a gun on the window of his car and says: "Stand clear or I'll blow your head off!"

I stand clear quick, but shoving out the leather wallet I say:

"Golly, mister, you dropped this on the road back apiece and I was just trying to catch you."

Well, by golly, the feller's eyes git wide and he pulls his gun off'n the window and climbs out of the car quivering like a bird dog on a point. Next minute he's hugging me like sixty almost with tears in his eyes. After a bit I catch on that he sells these diamonds and they's worth close to twenty thousand dollars! By golly!

When he calms down he asks me who I am and where I'm going.

"California, eh, Hmmm!" he says. "Hitchhiking, eh? Hmmm! The heck you are! You are going on the finest train that runs west!"

So thirty minutes later I am back in Joplin climbing on the K. C. & S. with a first-class ticket to Los Angeles by way of Kansas City. And I got a hundred dollars in my pocket to boot! Boy, do I feel good!

In Kansas City, which is the first time I was there, I buy a brand new suit for twenty-four dollars, mail fifty bucks to Ma and have a whopping chocolate soda. Then I git on the train and, by golly, they give me a room all to myself! A porter keeps coming in and brushing me off and

changing towels and making the bed. If it hadn't been for Hank's fleas I reckon I'd a felt just like a college feller.

That night I eat in the dining car. I eat everything. I even drink both glasses of water—the one in the regular glass and the one they put in a bowl after dinner. Then I go back to the back of the train where they has the magazines free to read. I'm setting there in a corner when the conductor comes in.

"Telegram for you, Mr. Wright," he says, shoving it out.

"Not me, Mister," I answer. "I'm Larry Cotton from Missouri. I'm going to California for the plug casting contest."

"That dialect almost fools me," he winks. "If I hadn't just punched your ticket before dinner I'd swear you—" and he breaks off laughing. He drops the telegram in my lap and walks out.

I'm so surprised I just set there. Finally I'm gitting to my feet when a feller walks in. He gives me a quick look and for a minute I think I know him. But I can't place him. He sets down opposite me and picks up a magazine. In a minute he stares hard and I stare right back.

"Mister," I say, "do I know you? I'm Larry Cotton from Mill Spring."

He is quiet so long I think he's deaf. Then he says:

"Larry Cotton, huh? I don't make you by that handle, pal. But your face is familiar. Been in Chicago?"

I shake my head and in shaking it I git a whopping surprise. At the end of the car is a mirror and I see myself in it. I turn back to the stranger.

"Look!" I holler. "Look in the mirror!"

He looks and his jaw sags. We git up and walk to the mirror together. Two faces enough alike to be twin brothers' grin back at us. Yessir, 'cepting for the extra colors I got in my new suit we're spitting duplicates!

"You must be Mr. Wright!" I yell.

"Well, by golly! And this is your telegram!"

He grabs it and rips it open. Then, shoving it into his pocket, he shakes his head and hurries out of the car.

FIVE minutes later we pull in at a station and I see Mr. Wright git off. He must of had bad news, I figure. I am sorry. I was hoping we'd git together and talk some. Maybe git pictures taken together in Los Angeles to show folks back home.

And that, of course, was coincident number two.

Next morning the conductor comes into my room and says:

"It's none of my business, Mr. Wright, but how *did* you get back on the train? And why have you got two rooms?"

"I never got off," I tell him. But I can see he doesn't believe me. "I'm Larry Cotton and I'm going to California for the plug casting contest. Do you know any other fellers who're going to be in it?"

He wiggles his tongue around his cheek and winks.

"Oh yes, loads! Wouldn't be surprised if they have a reception committee waiting for you, too. You know, Hollywood celebrities and all that."

Golly, that was sure exciting! And that was the reason I wasn't surprised when Wednesday night as we was gittin' near Los Angeles a feller comes busting into my room. He is a short pale feller with a red carnation in his buttonhole.

I am kind of embarrassed. You see, as he steps in, one of Hank's fleas sinks its teeth in me just over the heart. I dig a hand inside my coat and the feller drops flat to the floor.

"Don't, Larry! Don't!" he cries. "The boss sent me!"

I grin at him, wondering if he's an acrobat. He climbs off'n the floor,

trembling.

"Larry," he says, weakly. "That's the fastest reach I ever seen."

"Well, if you got bit once you'd—"

"I know, I know," he interrupts, swallowing hard. "Everyone knows your reputation."

I feel mighty proud and of course realize that he's sort of the welcoming committee.

"Shucks, the stuff I've done with a rod ain't so much. They's plenty of fellers a lot better'n me. Say, what's your name?"

"Mac. Mac Gleeper. The boys call me Gaspipe," he replies, sheepish, "but I don't imagine you ever heard of me."

I shake my head. "I didn't expect nobody to meet me on the train."

He gets serious. "When we heard you was coming we had to tip you off. There's liable to be a crowd at the L. A. station—and cops! The boss figured it'd be better if you slip off the train at East Los Angeles."

"Why can't the cops handle the crowd, Gaspipe?"

He laughs so hard the carnation pops from his coat.

"Boy, that's a hot one! Wait'll I tell the boys! I'll bet you'd like the publicity."

"Sure," I answer honestly. "Coming in with a crowd and policemen would be swell."

"That spirit is what makes you a big-shot, Larry. I'm proud to meet you!"

I shake his hand. He is a pretty nice feller, I think, except he needs some sunshine and exercise to build him up. I begin to git a different picture of this plug throwing contest, too. Sending a man out special to meet me must have cost plenty.

"Say, Gaspipe, when does the boss want me to do my stuff?"

"That's up to you. Course, the sooner the better."

I reach down and pat the box my rod and gear is in.

"This is Wednesday, ain't it? Well, it'll all be over by Friday," I say, remembering the announcement of the contest dates in the Poplar Bluff paper.

GASPIPE whistles.

"Suppose I try tomorrow morning around ten o'clock," I suggest.

"Anything you say."

Lights from autos on a road beside the track flash by. The old engine whistle keeps moaning as we sweep over crossings. Gaspipe presses his face up to the window.

"We're coming in to East L. A. now. I'll carry your stuff."

"Not this," I say, picking up my tackle box. "My rod's in it."

He gulps like something's stuck in his throat.

We slide off the train and three men come out to meet us. Big men with overcoats and hats even though it ain't cold. The middle feller is wearing dark glasses like a movie star.

"Here he is, Boss," Gaspipe says. "Larry, this is the boss—Guts Harris."

The feller shoves out a hand. I find he has a nice grip and I squeeze right back until he says:

"Okay, Larry, glad you got here."

"Sure nice of you fellers to meet me," I say as we walk to an auto near the station. "Mighty friendly!"

Boy, and that was some car. Big and roomy. And, you know, when the windows were rolled up you couldn't hear a sound outside.

"Guess you didn't get my wire," Mr. Harris says suddenly.

"Why, no. Is something wrong?"

"Not much—not much for you, anyway. But Barney Blake heard you was coming. He's tough. I thought maybe you'd want to call it off."

"Blake? Who's he?"

"The guy you're supposed to handle."

“Shucks,” I laugh, “I don’t mind competition. But I wonder how this Blake feller knew I was coming. I’ll bet my pals in Missouri wrote some letters.”

Harris snorts. “I’ll bet!”

I’m looking at the streets and autos and big buildings. “You just drop me off at a hotel,” I say, “and I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Don’t be foolish. You’re staying with me. Everything’s set.”

Now if that wasn’t nice of these fellers, I thought. Living in the country a feller doesn’t know how swell they treat strangers out west.

“Larry says he’d like to make a try tomorrow morning,” Gaspine puts in. “He even set the hour—ten o’clock!”

Mr. Harris takes a deep breath.

“I always heard you work on schedule, Larry.”

“That’s just because I get up around nine at home, and I use my rod best just after breakfast.”

Mr. Harris stretches his collar.

“Well, maybe we can arrange the time,” he says. Then he points out the window. “There’s my hangout—in that apartment.”

I’d been watching the road all the way. It was broader than the baseball field back of Mill Spring. The building Harris points to goes up and nearly out of sight. It’s just like something in a movie.

We drive into a garage in the apartment and pile out. Mr. Harris leads me to an elevator and we go whizzing upstairs.

His apartment is really beautiful. Big soft chairs and sofas like they have in Grebner’s Funeral Parlor. And the rugs is softer than rabbit fur. I don’t look too long at the pictures on the wall. They is of gals and mighty pretty gals, too. Ma would wash my mouth out with soap if’n she knew I’d run into pictures like those.

WELL, first thing, we all git comfortable and Mr. Harris brings out a bottle and glasses and ice. While he’s mixing drinks I git a good look at the others. They wasn’t happy looking fellers. The one called Scaly had a big scar across his cheek. Herbie was a husky feller about my age, but his face was powerful ugly. He just sat there cracking his knuckles like he had arthritis.

Then there was Burke. He kept jerking his head and sniffing the back of his hand. I already told you about Gaspine.

Mr. Harris was funny. I didn’t like to call him Guts, although I figured it was a German name. He looked like he’d pitched plenty of hay when he was a young feller. Big shoulders, a square face and a nose that he must have broke playing football. He had a way of looking at me and smiling quick-like, then sobering up as if he just remembered something that was very sad.

Everyone, including me, got unloosed after a drink. I’d never had whiskey mixed with water, but I didn’t say nothing. City fellers got lots of strange ideas.

“Well, I’ve put a tail on Blake.” Mr. Harris says. “We’ll find out where he goes tomorrow morning. Do you like to work on an open road from a car?”

I laugh. “Gosh, I couldn’t hit a barn door from an automobile.”

“Well, what do you prefer?”

“Water.”

“Water?” he says.

“Well, a lake or a stream or even the ocean is okay.”

He stops squirting fizz-water in the second round of drinks.

“Are you kidding?”

“Well, golly!” I answer. “Does Blake use his rod on dry land?”

“Once a week and twice on holidays,” Gaspine puts in.

“Then I can, too,” I say. “I’ll do it right in front of this apartment if you want.”

“That’s out!” Harris roars, on his feet. “Look—you wait until Blake is just where you want him. Take a couple of weeks.”

I shake my head. “Got to be back home by then. A friend of mine is going up the river and I promised to—”

“Oh, a crash-out, huh? Okay, we’ll make it sooner.”

“Make it tomorrow morning, no matter where Blake is,” I say recklessly. “I want to git it over with.”

Mr. Harris clenches his teeth.

“Right!”

Then my eyes pop as he pulls a roll of bills from his pocket. He peels off some and hands ‘em to me. “There’s a thousand. The balance after you’ve taken care of Blake.”

“Golly! I—I—you don’t even know I’m better than Blake. And he isn’t the only feller, is he?”

“No. But Blake’s the only one that matters. Get him and the rest will run for cover.”

“But I’d just as soon have a few shots with the other fellers. For practice, I mean. Then I’ll take on Blake.”

Harris stares at me a minute, then wipes his forehead with a handkerchief.

“No, Larry,” he says huskily, “you just handle Blake and you’ll earn your money.”

Shucks, this was easier than I ever dreamed. And this prize money! I didn’t think it’d be so much.

“But, listen,” I say, remembering something. “I got to make some changes. If this isn’t going to be done on the water I got to git to a sporting goods store.”

Mr. Harris glances at my tackle box.

“You’re a strange bird, Larry. But don’t worry about equipment. I got everything.”

HE CROSSES the room to a bookcase, pushes on it. It swings back and inside they’s a bunch of rifles and pistols. Shucks, they’s more than Sheriff Radtke’s got at

Greenville. I figure Mr. Harris is quite a hunter.

He pulls a box down and hands it to me.

“These are forty-five slugs. Will they work?”

I open the box and look at the shells. You see, I wasn’t going to wreck my fancy plugs casting ‘em on bare ground. I’d figured to pick up some practice plugs at a store or even some lead sinkers. But I can bust the bullets away from the casings and use ‘em.

“They’s okay,” I say, “but I’ll have to work on ‘em.”

“And now maybe you’d like to turn in.” He grins. “Bedroom’s across there. All to yourself.”

By golly, I was tired. And thinking about the contest tomorrow, the thousand dollars prize money in my pocket and all the rest left me kind of weak.

“Swell,” I say. “Well, good-night, fellers, and thanks very much for everything.”

I take a hot bath and git in my nightgown. Sitting down on the bed I pull the lead ends off the bullets with my teeth. Using a jackknife I split the end of the lead. I can run my fishing line in the crack, then crimp it to hold the line in place.

I’m fixing several bullets this way when I hear a noise at the door. I laugh to myself when I see the door closing softly. The fellers are interested in seeing how I’m fixing the sinkers, I figure. Sneaking over I put my ear to the panel. I hear Gaspape’s voice.

“I’m telling you guys, he’s dynamite! He’s in there refilling the casings with special powder. And you know what else? He’s splitting the lead—making dum-dums! They leave a big hole coming out!”

I am kind of puzzled about what Gaspape says. But I decide city fellers has a funny way of expressing themselves.

Now, this is the place where the newspapers say I got wise. They tell how I figured out I'd stumbled into a nest of desperate criminals. Next morning they say I went on playing their game but laying plans. But I wasn't. I didn't know nothing.

I have breakfast with Guts Harris and Gaspibe and set around reading the papers until nine o'clock. Then the phone rings and when Mr. Harris gits through talking he looks like Pa when he heard they was going to pay him for not raising corn again.

"Grab your outfit, Larry!" he yells. "Herbie phoned that Blake is heading for a cabin at Lake Arrowhead. We'll get him there."

"Lake Arrowhead," I echo happily, and I run for my tackle box. "Oh boy, water!"

We drive sixty-seventy miles an hour that morning. Mr. Harris, Gaspibe, Herbie and me. Pretty soon we're snaking up a mountain road and all the stucco houses and orange juice stands is below us. We come out in a little village fronting a good-sized pond and Mr. Harris says:

"This is the place—Lake Arrowhead.

"My fingers is itching to git my rod unpacked," I say. "But I guess they's no use hurrying things."

He nods. "Blake's cabin is on the other side of the lake. There's a side road around to it. Let's go, Herbie."

We bounce down a dirt road. I set wedged between Gaspibe and Mr. Harris in the rear seat. Ten minutes later Herbie puns off the road and parks.

"The cabin," Mr. Harris says, pointing, "is up ahead five hundred yards. We'll wait here."

"Wait here?" I repeat, surprised. "Shucks, don't you want to see me do my stuff?"

GASPIBE shakes his head.

"Thanks, no!"

"You're on your own," Mr. Harris says tightly. "There'll be some of Blake's boys around, so be careful!"

"Shucks, I git along swell with kids. Say, I got an extra River Runt plug in my box. Suppose I let 'em have it, just to remember me by?"

Mr. Harris wipes his mouth quickly.

"Suit yourself, but I'm not paying for it."

I was about to tell him he wouldn't have to, but just then one of Hank's fleas took a nip. I reach to scratch.

"All right!" Mr. Harris shouts, backing away. "I'll give you fifty bucks for each of the boys!"

Now, that was pretty nice of him, I thought. I climb out of the door which Gaspibe opens quickly. The flea hits again and I dig inside my coat. Then I smile apologetically at Mr. Harris.

"Don't do that!" he raps. "My heart ain't what it used to be."

"I'm sorry," I say. "Old Hank give 'em to me when I left Missouri."

"Them?" Mr. Harris echoes. "You mean you're packing more than one?"

I grin. "Shucks, I got 'em all over me. Wouldn't be surprised if they's a dozen in my tackle box."

Gaspibe slams the door.

"Gee!" he exclaims. "He's a walking arsenal!"

I pick up the tackle box and start walking. "See you when I'm finished."

Mr. Harris stops me. "Just one thing. You may not get close to your target. Can you work long ranges?"

"No difference," I answer. "Golly, I hit a fish right between the eyes at fifty yards once back at Cape Girardeau."

"I believe it!" Mr. Harris snorts, rolling up his window. "Well, good luck!"

This is the place where the newspapers say I walked bravely into the rival

gangsters' camp pretending I was a bewildered fisherman.

But that's not true. I *was* bewildered.

The cabin set well back in a grove of tall trees, surrounded by a high barbed-wire fence. Halfway down the private driveway a feller comes out from the trees. He has a rifle in his hands, and he's aiming at me.

"Hey!" I yell. "Don't point that thing at me! That's how hunters git kilt during deer season."

"This ain't deer season," he replies. "What do you want?"

"I'm looking for Barney Blake."

Well, the feller puts the muzzle of the rifle in my back. "Start walking, bud. To the cabin," he orders. "I'll show you Barney Blake."

Now, I figure maybe I've stumbled into a bunch of moonshiners. But I'm not worrying because I git along swell with 'em back home.

On the front porch they's two men. They git on their feet quick as we it troop in. One feller with a red bandanna around his neck steps out.

"What's this, Mike?" he asks.

"He's looking for Barney Blake."

The feller looks me up and down. "I'm Blake."

"I'm Larry Cotton," I answer, "and tell your friend to put that rifle down. I've come for the plug casting contest."

His eyes git narrow.

"You been out in the sun all day, bud?"

I don't understand that. The man behind me says:

"Look at that box he's carrying, Chief."

Blake looks at the box. "What's in there?"

I am confused, but I answer:

"My rod, of course."

"Louis, beat it to the gate. This sounds like a gag. Guts Harris probably sent this screwball in here to get us off guard."

"Guts!" I exclaim. "Why, he's waiting down the road in his car."

Mike, who is behind me, says:

"He's nuts, Chief."

Blake motions with a finger.

"Come here and sit down. And open that box."

Now I begin to worry. It's pretty plain that Guts hasn't told Blake I'm coming. Blake doesn't have any fishing tackle ready. And they isn't any judges around. Unless the fellers with the guns is judges.

But I unpack my fishing rod and assemble it. Blake watches me attach the reel and feed line through the agate guides. I reach in my pocket and am pulling out the lead bullet sinkers when the guns go off.

BLAM BLAM BLAM!

Before I can move, Blake hauls off with his fist, smack to my jaw.

I think I come to pretty quick but it must be minutes later. They's two strangers laying on the floor and Blake is standing over 'em with a revolver.

"You came to the right place, coppers!" he growls. "And this mug belongs to your outfit, too, huh?"

One of the strangers stares at me.

"Never seen him before. But you can't get away, Blake. The road around the lake is blocked. There's fifty men closing in on the cabin."

Blake cusses and turns to me.

"Listen, dummy, whatever the gag is, I don't care! But one thing—is Guts Harris really down that road? Talk fast!"

I fumble with my rod.

"Sure," I answer. "He and Herbie and Gaspie."

He turns to Louis.

"This is a trap, by—, but we got to take a chance. With fifty Federals closing in maybe Guts will forget our beef. Run down

WELL, Blake jerks his head to the third man.

there, Louis, and get Guts. Tell him what's happened."

"But, Chief, Guts is after your scalp."

"And the coppers are after his—and mine. He'll throw in with me to fight coppers."

Now all this time I am thinking things over. But not like the papers say. I am not figuring how to help the cops make a capture. I am thinking of taking a pop at Blake for hitting me. In Missouri we don't take that stuff laying down.

Blake motions the policeman off'n the floor and the sweep of his revolver includes me.

"The three of you get inside! When the rest of the Federals get here we'll use you for hostages. Move!"

We go in the house. Blake locks us in a back room.

"And who the devil are you?" one of the cops shouts as soon as we're alone.

I tell 'em who I am and why I come to California.

"But something's wrong!"

"Wrong!" he yells. "Do you know what Blake is? Do you know who Guts Harris is?"

I shake my head.

"Blake and Harris are the two biggest gangsters west of the Mississippi. We've been after Blake for months."

"But, I—"

The other feller says, "Wait—your face is fresh . . . sure! You're Larry Wright, the Chicago torp!"

This is where I really caught on, but the newspapers say this is where I organized our escape. Anyhow, I explain to the cops what happened on the train and they believe me. One is Steve, the other Pete.

"But these fifty other cops," I say. "When'll they git here?"

"Never!" Steve says. "It was a gag. Pete and I are alone."

"Yeah, and it looks bad," Pete adds

soberly. "We're going to taste lead, Steve. You, too, Cotton!"

"You mean they'll kill us?"

"With ice picks. That's all Guts Harris uses."

I feel like weasels is running around my stomach. But I start thinking. Down in Mill Spring we used to play cops and robbers. And once the fellows playing cops locked me in Ham Henley's barn. So I set fire to the barn and when they come to stop the fire I slugged 'em.

"Gimme a match, Steve," I say.

THEN I pile some boxes in front of the door and light 'em. I push Steve and Pete on the floor 'cause they wasn't any windows in the room.

"That's swell!" Steve coughs. "What are we going to do when they open the door?"

"Just wait," I yell back, crossing to the far corner of the room.

I hook a lead sinker on my line. Then I make a couple of practice casts and my eye ain't bad. That old lead sounds like a bullet hitting the wall.

Pretty soon they's shouts outside. And then the door blasts open. Framed in the blazing doorway is Barney Blake. He's got a gun.

"You rats!" he says. "I'll—"

Then, just as the newspapers say, I used my rod. It was as pretty a side-cast as I ever made. The wrist snap sends the lead slug streaking out fer Blake. My reel purrs, and of course they ain't no back-lash.

The lead catches him plumb in the right eye. Howling, he drops his gun and staggers. Steve is off the floor laying one on Blake's chin. Blake goes down in a heap but then they's another feller, Mike, barging at us.

But I've reeled in and am ready for him. The old line hisses as the lead snakes out. The cast is a trifle wide but that's

because I put my shoulder back of it. The bullet hits Mike on the temple and he doesn't even make a sound. He drops on top of Barney Blake.

Well, Pete gits Mike's gun and we jump for the porch. Of course the papers say I knew the fire would only burn the boxes and trash, not the house itself. That's why Blake and Mike wasn't roasted. But, I really wasn't sure then.

We hit the front porch just as the others is arriving. I see Guts Harris, flushed and puffing, a gun in his fist, as he comes pounding down the driveway.

"Drop those guns!" Pete calls out.

Well, Harris, Gaspie, Herbie and Louis spread like buckshot. Bullets come a-ripping and a-whipping into the porch all around us. It's just like being out quail shooting with city fellers. Steve and Pete keep shooting back and pretty soon Gaspie comes rolling out, clutching his stomach.

GUTS HARRIS and the others hang back in the trees, swearing something awful. I know then what kind of fellers I been hanging around with. It makes me mad; and I want to git 'em.

Steve's own gun is lying on a table where Blake had put it. I grab it, crawl over to the door, belly down the steps and ease up to the edge of the house, snake-like.

The first time I fire that automatic I think my arm is busted. It leaps back over my head on the recoil. But it's a good shooting iron. Herbie, who is behind a tree twenty yards away, lets out a beller and staggers into the clear where Steve pinks him in the leg just to make sure he won't run no further.

My second shot don't scare me. It tunnels Louis in the calf of his leg which sticks out from behind a tree. When he draws back, howling, his other leg pops out, and I shoot that one.

Which makes Guts Harris turn and run. That is a mistake. Why, a big man like him running through the trees is a heck of a lot easier to hit than a squirrel. 'Sides, a squirrel is colored like the bark of trees.

They's only one place to hit Mr. Harris from the rear without killing him, and they's where I hit him. He stops stock still, grabs his trousers and hollers.

Steve, Pete and me round 'em up. Meanwhile, on account of the smoke and gunfire somebody nearby has phoned Arrowhead. Policemen begin arriving by the carload.

Now, the newspapers say that Pete and Steve claim that I deserve all the credit. But that's not so. Hank's fleas, the jewelry salesman, Larry Wright and a whole lot of people, including Pete and Steve, deserve credit.

But that part about me being driven to the trout stream where they held the plug casting contest is true. I was driven there in a U. S. Government car with Steve and Pete and their boss from Washington. And it's also true that I won first place and the thousand dollars prize money. What with that and the thousand Guts Harris give me for something I didn't do and the thousand the government give me for something I did do, I went back to Mill Spring kind of a hero.

I cleared the mortgage on our house and everything's going just swell now. Course Pa's drinking again pretty heavy but, as Ma says, he's mixing it with water.