

By BEN FRANK



Mr. Hopkins started to rise, but Sheriff MacLoyd barked, "Set down!"

# Doc Swap's Homecoming Rumpus

*The tradin' hombre builds an old tin can into an iron-clad trap for bank robbers*

**L**EANING forward in the red plush seat as if that would make the train go faster, old Doc Swap reckoned that if he didn't get a glimpse of Dry Bluffs pretty soon, he'd explode with eagerness. And then he saw his beloved town nestling against the big sandy bluff. The faded yellow depot. The one dusty street with its false-fronted buildings. The few scattered houses beyond. With a wide grin plastered on his round whiskery face, the oldster shoved to his feet, wrapped fat

fingers about the handle of a battered suitcase and headed for the coach door.

For long months, Doc Swap had been in the East, not because he'd wanted to be there, but because his sister, Ursula, had been ill, and he had had to look after her. But now she was well, and Doc was home.

The train lurched to a stop. Doc clamped on his fancy pearl-gray Stetson—he'd swapped a wind-broken old horse for the big hat and considered this deal one of the highlights of his stormy career—and

waddled down the steps to the sun-splashed platform.

“Hi, Doc! Welcome home!” voices shouted.

There they were, old friends clustered about to greet him. Cy Pulley, the barber. Jeff Weber who ran the general store. Lou Loomis, Pee-wee Miller. They crowded around Doc, slapping him on the back and shaking his hand until he thought his arm would come loose from his shoulder.

Happily Doc looked about at the familiar faces. Wes Shotwell, the blacksmith. Johnny Goodland who worked in the bank. Just about everybody—and then Doc felt a touch of anger. The one person whom he had been most eager to see wasn't there. Sheriff MacLoyd!

For forty years, Doc and the sheriff had been rivals in the two occupations dearest to Doc's heart—swapping and fiddle playing. For as many years, they had been in a constant wrangle, each trying to outswap the other. Outwardly they seemed to be bitter enemies. Deep in their hearts, they felt a great fondness for one another. A fondness which they kept well concealed from the citizens of Dry Bluffs. Since the sheriff never missed meeting the afternoon train, his absence now was nothing more nor less than a direct insult.

“Ding-dum!” Doc muttered under his breath.

“Doc,” Pee-wee Miller said, a wide grin on his monkeylike face, “I'll bring your bay team around this evenin'. Reckon you're bustin' to go on a swappin' spree.”

Everybody laughed and shook hands with Doc again.

At last the old swapper broke away from his friends and headed down the street. Getting home sure made a man feel fine. But dad-blast Sheriff MacLoyd, who had failed to meet the train. Doc walked past the cracker-box jail without a glance.

Not for a million dollars would he let on that he'd missed hill old friendly enemy.

SAFELY past the jail, Doc lifted his eyes. Dry Bluffs seemed the same as when he had left it. Then he observed a sign which said, “R. R. Hopkins, Real Estate Office.” A new business had come to town while he'd been away.

When he came to Ginny Flag's lunchroom, Doc slowed his pace. Ginny made the best blueberry pie in the world, and there was a chance that the sheriff might be inside, drinking a cup of coffee. Hopefully, Doc waddled into the neat little lunchroom.

MacLoyd wasn't there. But two smug looking, well-dressed strangers were sitting at a table. Paying them no mind, Doc mounted a counter stool and called, “Hey, Ginny.”

Ginny hurried from the kitchen. She was young and pretty, with golden hair and blue eyes. Without a word, smiling, she reached into the pie case, lifted out half a blueberry pie and set it in front of the old swapper.

“Ginny,” he said happily, “you're gettin' prettier every day!” He took a bit of pie. It melted in his mouth. “They don't have food like this in Philly. They don't know—”

At that moment, the strangers arose and stepped to the cash register. After they had departed, Doc asked, “Who're them?”

“Mr. Hopkins, the real estate man,” Ginny answered, “and a Mr. Dunlap, who came here day before yesterday. Mr. Hopkins believes that Dry Bluffs can be made the prettiest town in the West. Mr. Dunlap is a specialist in city improvement. He's come here to give Dry Bluffs a face lifting.”

Right off, Doc disliked the two strangers heartily. “Why, dad-blast it!” he exploded. Dry Bluffs is already the

prettiest town in the West!”

Ginny chuckled. “Calm down, Doc, and eat your pie.”

When Doc came to his neat, white cottage at the edge of town, he felt a great warmth flood through him. Whistling happily through his white whiskers, he unlocked the front door and stepped inside.

Everything was just as he'd left it, except for the thick dust on the furniture. Flinging his suitcase to one side, he rushed into the bedroom, kicked out of his store clothes and got into something comfortable—a faded shirt, an old pair of corded pants baggy at the knees, a worn pair of boots. Still whistling, he headed for the kitchen.

At the door, he came to an abrupt halt. Someone had tossed a rock through the kitchen window, and glass lay scattered all over the floor.

Swearing fiercely, Doc stamped out through the back door and began a search for clues, although he didn't really expect to find any. The ground was cement hard—no footprints. He came to the back fence and saw where the rock had been pried out of the ground. Then an object caught his eye. He picked it up, turned it over and over in his fat fingers. Eyes smoldering, he dug an old envelope from a pocket and deposited the object carefully inside.

“Exhibit A,” he muttered. “When I find out who lost this—”

Then a new thought struck him. He now had an excuse to visit Sheriff MacLoyd. Suddenly grinning, he headed uptown.

**B**Y THE TIME he reached the jail, he was puffing like a leaky sawmill engine. He climbed the three steps to the jail and barged into the dingy two-by-four

office. Ham Brady, MacLoyd's deputy, sat behind the spur-scarred desk.

“Howdy, Doc.” Ham shoved to his feet and pawed the tail of his squirrel-skin cap out of his eyes. Winter or summer, day or night, Ham wore that motheaten old cap.

“Where's MacLoyd?” Doc demanded.

“Talkin' with some of the city officials about beautifyin' Dry Bluffs,” Ham replied.

“Beautifyin'—craziest thing I ever hear of. Go tell the ole bag of bones I got a complaint to make.”

Grinning, Ham shuffled outside.

Alone in the office, Doc glanced about. The rusty iron safe. The sagging chairs. The fly-specked window. The unswept floor. Doc's eyes fixed on an object lying across the top of a filing case, a long-bladed sword in a black leather scabbard.

Curious, Doc pulled the sword from the scabbard. The blade was as shiny as a new dollar and as keen as a razor. Doc's blue eyes brightened. The weapon would look mighty pretty, dangling from a peg above the native rock fireplace in his front room. Doc had a weakness for old guns and swords and—

The door opened behind him. Turning, he saw Sheriff MacLoyd, a fierce scowl on his long bony face.

“You fat ole toad,” the sheriff roared, “put down that sword 'fore you cut off your head, or somethin'!”

Doc ignored the insult. “This your'n?” he asked mildly.

“Shore it's mine. A gen-u-wine Civil War officer's sword. Wouldn't take a hundred dollars for it.”

Feeling a tremor of excitement, Doc carefully returned the sword to its scabbard. Anything that MacLoyd possessed and valued, Doc never failed to attempt to get, one way or another.

“Wouldn’t want it around my place,” he said, shrugging an indifferent shoulder. “A feller might fall on it, or—”

“Heh, heh!” MacLoyd cackled meaningfully.

Doc stiffened slightly, for it suddenly occurred to him that the sword was swapping bait. He felt a trickle of sweat working through his left eyebrow. Then he glanced at the sheriff again and realized for the first time that MacLoyd was wearing a faded red shirt with faded red buttons.

“Ding-dum!” he exclaimed.

MacLoyd ignored both the “ding-dum” and the startled look on Doc’s fat, red face. “So, like a bad penny, you come back. Thought mebbe we’d got rid of you for good. Well, what’d you want to see me about, you ole swindler?”

Unperturbed, Doc told about the broken window.

Looking disgusted, MacLoyd filled his mouth with a fistful of fine-cut. “So what?” he demanded. “Think I ain’t got nothin’ more important to do than worry about a busted window?”

“What’ve you got to worry about that’s so important?”

MacLoyd dead-centered the battered spittoon. “I’m on the committee that’s plannin’ to make Dry Bluffs the most beautiful town in the West.”

“Phooey!” Doc snorted.

“We got us a expert on city improvement. Name’s Dunlap. A friend of Mr. Hopkins, our new real estate man. Goin’ to put in fancy store fronts. Fix up the streets. Plant trees an’—”

His voice trailed off, for Doc had again picked up the sword.

“Might swap that to you,” the bony man murmured.

Doc hastily put down the sword. It was a tactical error to show interest in

something which he wanted to get from the sheriff.

“Ain’t got no use for a sword,” he said.

MacLoyd grinned wickedly. “Was goin’ to suggest I might swap it to you for yore fiddle an’—”

Doc shuddered slightly. For years, the sheriff had been trying to get his hands on Doc’s beloved red-gold fiddle.

“—an’,” MacLoyd continued, “for one of your bay hosses to boot!”

That was adding insult to injury. A great anger swept over Doc.

“Keep your pig-sticker,” he yelled, “you bony ole—ole—”

When Doc got riled to a certain point, he never could think of the right thing to say. Pulling his fancy Stetson down to his red ears, he kicked a chair across the room and went out, slamming the door violently behind him.

THAT evening, the runty Pee-wee Miller, ex-cook and roustabout, came with Doc’s team of fat sleek bays, which he had cared for during the old swapper’s absence. Doc looked his horses over and allowed that he’d never seen them in better condition.

Pleased pink, Pee-wee squatted on his heels and began to bring Doc up to date on the latest happenings. “Mr. Hopkins come here about three months ago. Opened his office an’ made hisself a bigshot. Nice feller. Thinks Dry Bluffs is a good town. Wants to make it the garden spot of the West.”

Doc snorted and expressed an unprintable opinion of Mr. Hopkins and his ideas.

“Mr. Dunlap come here a couple days ago,” Pee-wee continued. “Got a suitcase full of pictures of how a town oughta look. Says if the citizens’ll back him, he’ll beautify Dry Bluffs an’—”

"Sounds kinda fishy to me," Doc growled.

"Most people is in favor of beautifyin' things, Doc. Especially MacLoyd."

"MacLoyd is an old fool!" Doc opined disgustedly.

After Pee-wee had departed, Doc ambled to the Palace Saloon for his nightly bottle of favorite beverage—strawberry pop. The talk there was about making Dry Bluffs the garden spot of the West. Disgusted, Doc went home. Dry Bluffs suited him just like it was.

"Garden spot, phooey!" he snorted. Then he remembered Sheriff MacLoyd's sword. And the broken kitchen window.

He pawed the envelope from a pocket and stared thoughtfully at Exhibit A. Suddenly he knew there was but one thing for him to do. Tomorrow he had to go on a swapping spree through Sugar Valley.

Nesters were settling up the valley, and nesters were swappers. Swapping sharpened Doc's mind, and he certainly needed a sharp mind in order to get the sheriff's sword and, maybe, figure out what Hopkins and Dunlap were really up to. Carefully he tucked Exhibit A back into a pocket.

The next day, Doc was on his way along the Sugar Creek Trail before sunup, sitting on the sagging spring seat of his old covered wagon in which he hauled his swapping goods. It was spring, the country was fresh and green. Doc felt fine and began to whistle softly between his teeth.

But suddenly he remembered something that stopped his whistle. He'd left home in such a hurry that he'd plumb forgotten to bring any swapping goods along.

Cussing softly, he stared about searchingly. The rising sun glittered on an object beside the trail, a discarded tincan. He pulled the bays up short, climbed down and got the can.

Eyes gleaming, the old swapper returned to the spring seat. If he could turn that tincan into a load of goods and get the sheriff's sword to boot, he'd know for sure he hadn't lost his swapping touch. Whistling again, he drove on.

An hour later, Doc came to Ike and Millie Johnson's homestead. Ike had gone to his corn field to hoe weeds, but Millie was in the kitchen, a milk-curdling scowl on her red, bony face.

Upon answering Doc's knock, she stared out at him with open disapproval. "Heard you was back," she snapped, "but didn't expect to see you around so soon."

"Just had to get out an' visit ole friends," Doc smiled.

"Well," Millie said, "nice to see you again, Doc. Good-by."

She started to close the door, but Doc's foot was in the way.

"Millie," Doc said, "you seem sorta upset about somethin'."

"Am upset, she admitted. "Started to grate some hoss-reddish and can't find my grater."

By now Doc was safely inside the house. His eyes fixed on an old claw hammer and a bulging sack of nails. "Got just what you need, Millie," he declared.

"Doc, if you got a grater, I'll buy—"

"Ain't for sale," Doc said hastily. "Might swap it for that hammer an' them nails to boot."

**M**ILLIE considered briefly and nodded her head. Doc picked up the hammer and the sack of nails and waddled to his wagon. It took him less than a minute to make a grater out of the tincan by punching a series of nail holes in it.

Millie gave the improvised grater a whirl on a horse-radish root. It worked fine. Smiling happily, she said, "Doc, I'm sure glad you've come back to God's country again."

"Millie," Doc said fervently, "I'm sure glad to be back!"

He made his next stop at Ad Trotter's run-down, tar-papered shack. Ad, an old bachelor who spent as much time as possible sitting in a rickety rocking chair in the shade of his one unhappy oak tree, was on the roof of his shack, attempting to weight down the paper roofing with a dozen sizable rocks.

Leathery face dripping sweat, he stared down morosely at the fat old swapper. "Trouble, trouble, trouble," he said sadly. "The blasted wind blowed my roof loose t'other day, an'—"

"Why don't you nail that paper down?" Doc asked.

"Nail it down!" Ad swore furiously. "I been so blamed busy weightin' it down, I ain't had time to go to town for nails."

Doc drew a handful of nails from the paper sack. "Intended to use these myself, but—"

"Doc, hand me them nails. I'll pay you a later for—"

"Ain't for sail," Doc said quickly. "Might swap—"

Doc drove away from Ad's place without the nails. But for them he had received two gallon jugs, smelling suspiciously of home-brew, an old oil can with oil in it, a roll of window screen and a rusty harness buckle to boot. Not that Doc needed the buckle for the bays' harness, but he always demanded boot in a trade.

A little later, he came to Indian Springs. Here he washed the jugs and filled them with cold, crystal clear water. After letting the horses drink, he packed the jugs in a nest of wet grass and went on his way along the trail. That cold water would be mighty nice to have, he figured, for the day had turned hot.

Coming up over a low hill, he saw a horse and buggy, which he recognized as belonging to the Bean Livery Barn. The

buggy stood empty. Then Doc spied two men out in Loop and Puney Porter's corn field, shoveling dirt into a hole. They were Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Dunlap. Curious, Doc pulled up to watch.

A few minutes later, the men returned to the buggy and climbed in. Strangers always fascinated Doc, especially any who wanted to beautify Dry Bluffs.

Smiling, Doc swept off his fancy hat and bowed deeply. "Fine day, gentlemen. My name's Doc Swap, at your service."

Mr. Hopkins, the real estate broker, was a baldish, heavy-set man with a gold watch chain across his plump middle. He eyed Doc rather coldly.

Mr. Dunlap, a tall, thin man with a hook-nose, returned Doc's smile and introduced himself and Mr. Hopkins.

Then Mr. Hopkins said, "Mr. Dunlap likes this country so well he's going to buy a farm. I have the Porter place for sale and brought Mr. Dunlap out to show him how rich the soil is."

"So that's why you were diggin'," Doc murmured. He had slid to the ground and now approached the buggy. He noticed that the wheels were dabbled with yellow clay, but didn't think anything about it at the time. "How'd you like the soil, Mr. Dunlap?"

"Fine, fine," Mr. Dunlap said. "I—"

At that moment, Mr. Hopkins let out a hoarse cry and began to fan the air with both hands. "A honey bee!" he croaked fearfully. "Help! Help!"

"A bee won't hurt nobody much," Doc soothed.

"A bee sting makes me deathly sick," Mr. Hopkins said through gray lips. "I'd as soon be bit by a rattlesnake as stung by a bee. You see, the poison—"

"Howdy, gents," a voice interrupted, and they turned to see Deputy Ham Brady, squirrel skin' cap and all, sitting astride a knock-kneed paint. Ham had ridden up

unnoticed during the excitement over the honey bee.

THE DEPUTY slid to the ground, and his saddle slid along with him. Ham swore fiercely. Then he turned toward the buggy and said, "The Dry Bluffs bank was robbed last night!"

A stunned silence met his announcement.

"Somebody opened the bank safe like it was a sardine can. Got away with right at ten thousand dollars. MacLoyd's runnin' in circles an' tearin' his hair. Sent me out here on a wild goose chase to see if anybody has saw any suspicious strangers. Well, have you?"

Doc and the two men shook their heads emphatically.

Ham turned back to his horse and swore again. "Busted my cinch strap buckle an'—"

"Got a buckle I might swap you," Doc said hastily.

For the buckle, he managed to get a fair saddle blanket, an old pair of pliers and a jackknife to boot. Still swearing, Ham mounted the paint and rode on his weary way.

Mr. Hopkins mopped his pale brow and sighed deeply. "Too bad about the bank. You know, that digging made me hot and thirsty. What I wouldn't give for a cold drink of water!"

"We brought along food but forgot water," Mr. Dunlap said.

Doc hefted one of the jugs from its nest of wet grass. "Got some spare water, gents. Water is right precious here, but—"

"We'll pay you for it," Mr. Hopkins offered eagerly.

Patiently Doc explained that he was not one to sell things. "But," he added, "I might do some swappin'."

For the jug of water, Doc got Mr. Hopkins' very fancy necktie, a sizable

portion of the lunches and Mr. Dunlap's drawing pencil. Hastily he drove away from the two men before they discovered that the Porter house, where they could obtain all the water they wanted free, was just over the next ridge.

Doc was on the point of sinking his teeth into a juicy ham sandwich when he came in sight of Ed Lunt's homestead. Remembering the excellence of Minnie Lunt's cooking, he returned the sandwich to its wrapper and tucked it away for the future.

When Minnie opened the door to Doc's persistent knocking, the mouth-watering smells of cooking food struck Doc like a blow. Suddenly he was famished.

Bowing deeply, he whipped off his fancy Stetson. "Minnie," he said pleasantly, "it's nice to see you lookin' so happy an' carefree. "

"Well," Minnie said darkly, "I ain't happy an' carefree. This is Ed's birthday, and I forgot to get him a present."

Without a word, Doc waddled to his wagon and got the fancy necktie.

"I don't reckon Ed would like this. Besides, I figure on wearin' it myself. It's a gen-u-wine imported tie, an'—"

Minnie clutched at the tie. "Doc, name your price."

Doc wiggled his nose. "Might eat a bite of that birthday dinner. Would have to have some boot, though."

Doc not only got his dinner and two slices of birthday cake, but also a loaf of bread, a dozen eggs and a broken-down clock.

Stuffed to the gills, he drove to the shade along Sugar Creek, found a soft grassy spot and prepared to take his noonday nap. But the rattle of a buggy made him sit up and look about. The driver was none other than Sheriff MacLoyd, his tin star pinned to his faded

red shirt.

The deep worried scowl on the sheriff's bony face gave Doc a certain feeling of pleasure. Any time MacLoyd ran up against trouble, anything was likely to happen, and Doc knew it.

"Fine day, Sheriff," the old swapper called pleasantly.

MacLoyd pulled his sweaty horse to a halt, puckered his thin lips and sent a stream of tobacco juice with uncanny accuracy into a knothole of a cottonwood some fifteen feet distant.

"Fine day, my eye!"

"You seem a mite disturbed," Doc said innocently.

**M**ACLOYD swore with an expertness that comes only from long and frequent practice. "To begin with, somebody w busted into the bank safe last night an' took a wad of money."

"Do tell!" Doc said, pretending surprise.

"Then I made a fool of myself."

"That ain't nothin' unusual."

"I suspicioned the two newest hombres in Dry Bluffs."

"Me an' who else?" Doc asked, round eyed.

MacLoyd snorted. "Not you. You wouldn't have brains enough to bust into a safe. Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Dunlap."

"They're likely guilty."

"No such thing!" The sheriff pinpointed the knothole again. "They'd left town early this mornin', so I searched their rooms at the hotel and busted into Mr. Hopkins' office and searched it. Didn't find a thing suspicious. Now I'm lookin' for 'em. Want to apologize. Dad-bust it, Doc, I should've knowed better—"

His voice ended in a croak, for Doc had hauled the lunch into view. MacLoyd had the appetite of a starved coyote.

"Doc," he wheezed, "I ain't et since early mornin'."

"Sorry," Doc said coldly, "but this is my supper, an'—"

"Let's do some swappin', Doc."

For a moment, Doc considered trying to trade the lunch for the sword, but decided that the time was not yet right. However, he did do some swapping—the lunch for an old spade, a box of fishing tackle and an old pair of hip boots.

After the sheriff had consumed the food, Doc said, "Oh, I almost forgot to tell you. I seen Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Dunlap this mornin'. They was in the Porter corn field. Looked like they might be buryin' somethin' or other."

MacLoyd's pale eyes bugged slightly at this news. "Mebbe they was buryin' the bank loot," he said hoarsely.

"Too bad you ain't got a spade so you could go dig—"

"Doc, I'll use your spade." Doc shook his head. "Never loan anything. Might swap—"

In vain MacLoyd argued and swore and threatened. Doc stood firm. At last, they made a deal. For the return of his bait-digging spade, MacLoyd parted with his buggy whip and a sack of fine-cut tobacco. Not that Doc chewed tobacco, but he always had to have boot in a trade.

Doc trailed the sheriff back to the corn field and sat in the cool shade of his covered wagon, while MacLoyd worked in the broiling sun, digging in the rich black earth. He found nothing. Tired, hot and fuming, he waded from the field and tossed the spade angrily into his buggy.

"Doc," he said, "if you'd kept your big mouth shut—why in thunder didn't you stay in Philadelphia?"

Inwardly Doc felt as happy as a kid with a new water pistol. Outwardly he appeared deeply hurt.



"Them words comin' from you," he said sadly, "make me feel bad."

"Fine!" MacLoyd ran a bony hand into a hip pocket. It came out empty. "Hey," he yipped, "I've lost my eatin' tobacco!"

"No," Doc reminded gently, "you swapped it to me."

For the sack of fine-cut, Doc got back the spade and an old lariat to boot. The old swapper like to laughed himself sick after the sheriff had driven on.

Late that afternoon, Doc visited Homer Prutt's place. Homer, a bachelor, farmed in a haphazard way for a living and spent most of his time in his lean-to workshop, inventing contraptions that never worked. Sitting in the doorway of his shop, he was so engrossed with his thinking that he didn't see Doc until the old swapper's shadow fell over him. Startled, he looked up at Doc suspiciously through thick-rimmed glasses.

"You look somewhat fussed, Homer," Doc said.

Homer blinked his tired eyes. "Doc," he said huskily, "I'm about to save the ranch owners a million cowboy-hours."

"Do tell!" Doc murmured. "That's wonderful, Homer!"

"Ever stop to figure out how much time all the cowboys in the world waste rollin' their cigarettes?"

Doc shook his head.

"A million hours. Mebbe more. I'm about to invent a pocket-size cigarette roller. Push a button, an' you've got yoreself a cigarette, all lit an' ready to go."

"Just what the world needs!" Doc declared.

"Only hitch is, I need some small cogwheels an'—"

Doc held up the broken-down clock, and an ear-to-ear smile lit up Homer's thin face.

For the clock, Doc received a peck of potatoes, a pound of coffee, a paper bag of

sugar, a can of peaches—Doc was thinking seriously about his supper—and a garden rake to boot. Not that Doc could eat the rake, but he had to have boot.

Late that afternoon, the old swapper made camp at his favorite camping spot on the right bank of Sugar Creek. With the aid of the sheriff's fishing tackle, he caught a fine mess of fish. Later he dined royally on fish and potatoes baked in the hot embers of his camp fire and topped the meal with canned peaches.

That night, rolled snugly in his blanket, his eyes fixed on the bright stars, he reviewed the day's happenings with satisfaction. For a tin can, which he had found, he had become the possessor of a great many articles, including two very tasty meals. He guessed he hadn't lost his swapping touch, after all.

Then he remembered the broken kitchen window and the envelope, Exhibit A, in his pocket and frowned slightly. Also, there was the matter of Hopkins and Dunlap. And the robbery of the Dry Bluffs bank. And Sheriff MacLoyd's sword. Maybe he hadn't lost his swapping touch, but the wheels in his head weren't turning very fast. He still had some problems to solve.

**D**OC awoke with a start. It was morning. He sat up and gazed about. It seemed that during the night, some loosely connected ideas had been trying to get together in his head. Such ideas as buggy wheels, creek banks, the two strangers and Loop and Puney Porter. Bewildered, Doc put on his boots, built a fire and made his breakfast.

That morning, he drove to Loop and Puney's farm. He found the two Porter cousins with welts on their seamy faces and a tired, defeated expression in their eyes.

"Can't sleep for the blasted

mosquitoes," Loop said.

"Screens all rusted out on the bedroom windows," Puney explained.

Immediately Doc showed them the roll of screen wire. They were more than willing to swap for it—two sections of iron pump rods, a screen wire fly trap, and for boot, an old buggy wheel.

"Goin' to sell your farm?" Doc asked.

"Listed it with Mr. Hopkins," Loop said.

Doc sighed. Maybe Mr. Dunlap was looking at the soil yesterday, after all. Doc started to load the buggy wheel into his covered wagon. There was dried mud on the spokes, and suddenly the wheels in Doc's head began to spin.

"Got to be goin'," he said hoarsely, leaped to the sagging spring seat and headed the bays at a fast clip back toward the place where he'd caught the mess of fish. Doc had just remembered the yellow clay on the wheels of the buggy which Hopkins and Dunlap had rented from the Bean Livery Barn.

"Ding-dum!" the oldster exploded disgustedly. "Might've knowed them two jaspers was lookin' at the Porter farm just as a excuse for drivin' out into the country early in the mornin'."

Arriving at the creek, he leaped to the ground and began to search along the yellow clay bank. Presently he discovered the tracks of a buggy. Swearing softly, he returned to his wagon, got out the sections of pump rods, screwed them together and fastened them securely to the garden rake with a length of the old lariat. After donning the hip boots, he waddled back to where he'd found the buggy tracks, waded into the creek and began to fish about with the long-handled rake.

After an hour's patient and tiresome work, he had acquired quite a collection of chisels, drill bits and queer looking gadgets known to the safe cracking trade

as "burgular" tools. These he put into the sheriff's tackle box with a feeling of deep satisfaction.

But driving along the Sugar Creek Trail toward Dry Bluffs at a fast pace, his satisfaction vanished. Maybe he could prove that Hopkins and Dunlap had visited the creek, but he couldn't prove they had dumped the burgular tools into the water.

"Ding-dum!" he fumed. "Can't even prove that these tools was used to bust into the safe. If I only had found the money, or—"

He lifted his eyes and discovered that he was approaching Dad Blamit's side-hill shack. Old Dad Blamit, his long white beard flying in the breeze, stood in the middle of his vegetable garden, not far from a hive of bees. He looked unhappy.

"What's troublin' you, Dad?" Doc asked cheerfully.

Dad Blamit straightened his perpetually aching back and glared up at Doc. "Busted my dad-blamed rake. Ain't got nothin' to break up the dad-blamed clods with. A man can't raise no dad-blamed garden worth shucks unless he's got a—"

Doc held up the garden rake. "Got a hankerin' to own some of your honey bees, Dad."

Doc brought out the fly trap and baited it with some syrup made of sugar and water. It wasn't long until he had quite an army of bees buzzing around angrily inside the trap. For boot, he got an old rusty pair of tinsnips.

"Doc," Dad Blamit said, "you're gettin' cheated. Them bees won't make no honey without a queen."

"It ain't honey I'm after," Doc returned, grinning.

Arriving in Dry Bluffs, Doc drove straight to the livery barn. But just as he had feared, the buggy Hopkins and Dunlap had used the day before had been washed.

"Remember what kind of mud was on them buggy wheels?" he asked Willie Bean.

The kid shook his head. "Didn't pay no attention."

Sighing, Doc drove on to the jail.

MacLoyd sat slumped behind his desk, his bony face filled with a woeful expression. Seeing Doc entering with the tackle box, his expression turned to one of deep indignation.

"Hoped you'd got lost," he said sourly.

Smiling pleasantly, Doc set the tackle box on the battered desk. "Come to swap your old tackle box for that sword."

"Git!" MacLoyd gritted. "I got somethin' else to do besides listenin' to you run off at the mouth. With folks yappin' their heads off about the bank robbery, I—"

Doc dumped the burgular tools on the desk with a clatter.

MacLoyd's pale eyes popped. "What's them?" he husked.

Doc explained. He told about seeing the yellow mud on the buggy wheels and how he had raked the tools out of the creek.

"I knowed them jaspers was guilty all the time!" MacLoyd declared, leaping to his feet and grabbing up his six-gun. "I'll show the varmints a thing or—"

"Only trouble is," Doc interrupted placidly, "you can't prove it. All you got are these tools, which don't mean a thing. Even the mud's washed off the buggy wheels."

The sheriff slacked his six feet of skin and bones back into his chair. He looked as if he'd lost all his relatives, including a rich uncle who had forgotten to mention him in his will. He swore feebly and hopelessly.

"Of course," Doc went on, "if you're willin' to swap that Civil War sword for your tackle box an'—"

"Doc," the sheriff said hoarsely, "if you can help me get the bank's money back an'—"

**B**RIEFLY Doc outlined his plan. A few minutes later, the two old cronies, Doc lugging a contraption covered with a horse blanket, and MacLoyd carrying a pump rod, the lariat and a rusty pair of tinsnips, walked without knocking into the real estate office of R. R. Hopkins.

Mr. Hopkins glanced up with a look of surprise, which quickly turned to alarm upon finding himself staring into the business end of Sheriff MacLoyd's six-shooter.

He started to his feet, but MacLoyd barked, "Sit down!"

Mr. Hopkins sat down. Doc took the lariat and tied the man firmly to his chair. Then he removed the horse blanket from the contraption he'd been carrying. It was the fly trap swarming with outraged and angry bees. Mr. Hopkins' face went white.

"Remembered you said you'd rather be bit by a rattler than stung by a bee," Doc said. "Bee stings poison you, an'—"

"Take 'em outa here!" Mr. Hopkins said hoarsely.

"Mr. Hopkins," Doc went on grimly. "I'm goin' to cut the bottom out of this fly trap. Then the sheriff an' me'll step just outside the door an' I'll upset the trap with this pump rod. Them bees are shore plenty riled."

Doc took the tinsnips and approached the trap.

"They'll sting me!" Mr. Hopkins husked. "They'll poison—"

"Maybe," Doc said, "you'd like to tell us where you an' your partner hid the bank's money."

He began to cut the bottom of the fly trap with the snips.

"I'll talk!" Mr. Hopkins bleated. "Just

stop cuttin' that screen an' listen. You'll find Dunlap in his room at the hotel, takin' a nap. I'll show you where we hid the money."

An hour later, the money recovered and the two strangers safely locked up, MacLoyd and Doc sat in the dingy two-by-four jail office.

"Doc," the sheriff said, "it's shore nice to have you back home. I shore missed you when—"

His voice trailed off, for Doc had dug an envelope from his pocket and was fishing something from it.

"Sheriff," Doc said smugly, "I want some boot along with that sword. A pane of glass for my busted kitchen window."

MacLoyd sent an angry, sizzling stream of tobacco juice into the battered spittoon. "Doc, you can go straight to—"

"Found this where the feller stood who tossed a rock through the window." Doc

laid a faded red shirt button on the desk. "I call it Exhibit A. I reckon you lost it when you was pryin' that rock loose to throw through my—"

"Doc," MacLoyd roared, "why didn't you stay in Philadelphia the rest of your life, you fat, schemin', no-account, hoss stealin' ole—"

He ran out of breath and had to stop. Then a slow grin spread across his bony face. "Well," he added, "I had to do somethin' that'd give you an excuse to come here so's we could get into a swap without losin' any time."

Doc threw back his head and haw-hawed.

"Just forget about that window pane, Sheriff," he said. .

Then, after looking carefully about to make sure no one was observing them, Doc Swap and Sheriff MacLoyd stood and shook hands warmly.