CHRISTMAS and NEW YEAR'S

GREETINGS FROM KING'S COUNTY

The Pony Express

by
S. C. GEORGE

He was 14, a good age for a boy, but far too young for the responsibilities of a man. At least that is what the officials of the Pony Express at Sacramento had told him, and what "Snake" Hicks, storekeeper, postman, trader and deputy sheriff, was telling him now in the log store that he had reached down the Rocky Mountain trail a couple of hours ago.

The boy was as tall as the storekeeper. His long hair, plaited like an Indian's, fell over the collar of his leather hunting-shirt. He carried a gun, and a hunting knife, and he wore deerskin leggings and bead-trimmed mocassins. His face was tanned, and his unwavering eyes held those of the impatient storekeeper.

"Even if you was a man," Hicks said, "I still wouldn't loan ye a hoss. I don't trust Injuns—or half-breeds."

"I've told you already who I am," the boy said patiently. "My name is William Frederick Cody, and if you say once more that you don't believe me I'm liable to get riled."

Hicks grinned at that. "Well William Frederick Cody," he said, "maybe you'll find a handier name one day, but it still don't persuade me lend ye a hoss. How do I know I'd get it back?"

"Because I've said so."

"And where are ye heading?"

"Denver."

"That's the best part o' 50 miles. Know anyone there?"

"John Smith of Cherry Creek."

"First man in Denver," Hicks said chattily. "Settled there three years back in the Fall of 57 with his Sioux wife, Wapoola. Good cook, Wapoola."

"That's why I want a horse," the boy said. "It's Christmas Day tomorrow, and I don't want to miss her dinner."

Hicks put his hands on the counter and stared at the boy.

"You kiddin'?" he asked.

"There's all next year for trapping," said the boy, "but I don't want to wait till the end of it for Wapoola's Christmas dinner. Elseways, I'd walk."

"Blest if I wouldn't let ye have a hoss for your cheek — if I had one," said Hicks, "but I ain't, so that's that."

"I've seen two in your stable," the boy said coldly.

"They belong to the Pony Express, Know what that means, young Cody?"

"The Pony Express! Gee!" Bill's eyes glittered. "I tried for a job with them, but they said at Sacramento they'd let me know later. I guess they always say that when there's nothing doing."

"I guess so," Hicks agreed. "You may have the spirit, but it takes a man to cover 75 miles before passing his pouch to the next guy on the trail — even if you do have a relay of three hosses. From the Pacific to St Joseph — that's nigh on 2000 miles in eight days. Pretty smart going. That 'minds me — what's happened to Smokey Joe? He's hour late already. That ain't like the Pony Express." He squinted from the door of his shack up the snow-covered trail. "Tell ye what, Bill," he said. "I ain't cook like Wapoola, but you're welcome to share my meal tomorrow."

"Thanks, Mr. Hicks, but I'll be on my way. I can't expect you to let me have an Express horse, but you could have told me soon-er." Bill said reproachfully. "There's more snow coming, and I don't want to get caught in the hills. If Smokey Joe is running a spare horse, maybe he'll give me a lift when he overtakes me."

"Hold on," Hicks said suddenly. "There's a hoss a-comin down now, but I ain't see no rider."

"There's a man slumped across it," Bill said, his keen eyesight revealing details not yet visible to the storekeeper.

A moment later the rider sat up, swaying in the saddle. All his will-power must been have bent upon reaching the staging-post for, when his horse pulled up outside the store, Smokey Joe collapsed into Bill's arms.

They carried him inside, and Bill took from him the leather mail-bag stamped: Leavenworth and Pike's Peak Express Company — the famous Pony Express.

"What happened, Smokey?" Hicks asked as the man groaned and opened his eyes.

"The mail!" Smokey Joe muttered, trying to rise.

"That's safe. Take it easy, Smokey," Hicks said. "Where's your other hoss?"

A landslide had swept Smokey's second horse off the road into the torrent below. A falling rock had broken his leg, and it was a miracle that his mount was uninjured. But for that, he would have died of exposure in the mountains. It was clearly impossible for him to ride further.

"The mail must go through," he said desperately.

Bill seized his chance.

"I want to be in Denver," he said quickly. "Can I take it?"

"Who's he?" Smokey asked.

"He's workin' fer John Smith at Cherry Creek. I guess it's irregular, Smokey, but I'm the Company's agent here, and I aim to take a chance on him. When can ye start, Bill?"

"Now," he said, already slinging the mail-pouch across his shoulder. "Bring me your best horse."

"Here, gimme a receipt." Hicks protested as Bill vaulted into the saddle and was about to ride off. "The next post is 15 miles, an' if anything happens to that Christmas mail."

"I know," Bill called cheerfully. "I'd best clear out of America."

clattered down the trail.

A heavy leaden sky and the smell of snow made the boy anxious to get clear of the mountains. He had no watch, but a good sense of time told him that he had covered half the distance when the first light flakes drifted down. Unless it fell heavily he would leave a trail that anyone could follow, but if it snowed hard enough to cover his tracks it might be impossible to get through.

He was glad to reach the next staging-post, where he had to explain who he was, and be curt with the stage-keeper who wanted to gossip, for he still had 35 miles to go. That meant he would be riding after sundown for the last two hours. Fortunately there was a full moon.

"I'd so-ner it was you than me," the stage-keeper said laconically as Bill was leaving. "The Cheyennes have just shot up the telegraph gang. Keep your hair on," he grinned callously, returning to his warm cabin.

That was certainly serious. Moreover, it had stopped snowing again, leaving his tracks clear behind him. His eyes sled warily from side to side, and every moment he expected to hear the shrill war-whoop of the Cheyennes. Instinctively he had counted the telegraph posts whose wires would one day supplant the Pony Express. Knowing the distance between them he calculated that he had only five miles to the next post. He drove his mount hard now, and at the next staging-post pulled up, his horse steaming with sweat. The sun, a dull copper ball, hung low in the sky. Only 20 miles to Denver now — one long, last stage and he would be safe.

"Watch out for the Cheyennes," the stage-keeper warned him.

Eight miles of hard riding and he was almost out of the Rockies. He turned a moment in his saddle. The sun hung red and menacing in a snow-covered world. And then he saw them silhouetted against the dying light — a score of Cheyenne horsemen. Motionless they sat gazing down at him from the heights. Only the manes of their shaggy horses stirred in the wind, and the feathers in their hair. Then they broke into violent action as one of their number rose in his saddle and shook his buffalo robes, a sure sign of enmity. Bill wasted no time as the whooping and yapping broke out. Bending low over his horse's neck, he rode for his life.

He was almost out of the foothills when snow fell again. His horse was reasonably fresh, and there was a good chance of escape when Lone Wolf, a Cheyenne scout saw him. Lone Wolf was not a good shot, and he did not want to fire lest he should miss and the warriors behind him should snap up his prize.

Snow muffled the hoof-beats, and Bill was unaware of Lone Wolf closing in for the kill. Lone Wolf licked his lips: he would take no chances this time. Bill had a premonition of danger. Glancing to his right he saw Lone Wolf in full war-paint riding him down, and an arrow drawn to its head at point-blank range.

And then it happened. Ten feet of rippling muscle launched itself from a rock and sank its teeth into the neck of Bill's horse that was flung by the impact, screaming and plunging, against Lone Wolf's mount. Both animals crashed, throwing their riders, with the mountain lion snarling on top of them. Bill's gun had gone. He had only his hunting knife. Momentarily, the beast was more to be feared than the Indian who lay groaning in the snow. Pounding down the hillside, the Cheyennes saw what had happened, their war-whoops changing to yells of triumph. The blood of Bill's gallant horse stained the snow, and he knew it was dying.

Such fury swept him that, heedless of his danger, he hurled himself on the mountain lion and buried his razor-keen knife in its neck. As Lone Wolf staggered to his feet, Bill leapt back, leaving his knife in the flailing beast. Lone Wolf had lost his weapons in the fall, but he dared not let his enemy escape now. As he rushed forward, still half-dazed, Bill struck him on the point of the jaw. Lone Wolf dropped as though pole-axed.

Bill had no time to search for his gun, and his horse was already stiffening in the snow, but Lone Wolf's horse shivered there in the growing darkness. Tamely it let Bill mount, and the confidence of the rider flowed into the horse as he urged it forward, still out of range of the Cheyennes thundering behind him.

Gradually Bill increased his lead, but snow had obliterated the track, and, despite the darkness, his trail gleamed plain for his pursuers. However, he was able to keep on his course by the line of telegraph posts. Then his horse stumbled, and though it recovered it galloped more slowly. Inevitably he must be overtaken, and another scalp would dangle from a Cheyenne belt. But he would not give in.

It was snowing harder, and the wind rising, screaming over the plain, filling up his tracks and increasing to a blizzard. A wild hope surged in Bill's breast. There was still a chance. He turned aside and let his horse have the reins. At last, in darkness, with the blizzard raging about them, Bill knew that he had thrown off the Cheyennes, but his plight was no better, for he was lost, and both he and his horse would perish of exposure if they did not soon find shelter.

Suddenly, as they stumbled through the blinding storm, Bill glimpsed a dim yellow light, and was soon thawing himself out by the log fire in El Dorado, Denver's one hotel.

When the weather eased somewhat, he took his mail-pouch to the staging-post, obtained a receipt, and enquired the way to John Smith's.

"Cody, you said your name was?" the man asked as he glanced through the mail. "William Frederick Cody? Well, if you ain't brought a letter for yourself! From Sacramento, too," he said, examining the address on the back. "And a letter for John Smith."

"I'll take them," Bill said.

"Rules is rules," said the staging-keeper reprovingly. "Post office ain't open till mornin'. Ye'll have to collect then."

Bill's welcome at Cherry Creek compensated him for all the perils of the road, and while Wapoola plied him with food, he related his adventures, ending with the refusal to let him have their mail.

"That ornery ol' cuss," Smith laughed. "He could ha' winked at the reg'lations in your case. You sure earned it. Well, we'll fetch 'em tomorrow."

Christmas morning dawned bright and clear, and the Rockies gleamed white in the background from Pike's Peak in the south to Long's Peak in the north.

"Ain't you interested?" Smith asked as Bill slipped his unopened letter into his pocket.

"It will only say I'm too young for the job," Bill said. "I might as well read it, though."

Then he whooped his delight and executed a war-dance in the post office.

"Must be some Christmas present," Smith commented.

"Listen to this," Bill grinned. "'Dear Mr. Cody — that's me — During your interview with us you said that if you were unsuccessful you intended to make your own way to John Smith, your father's friend, at Denver. If you should collect this letter there, we consider that you will have proved that you have the initiative and the sense of responsibility which we suggested your youth still lacked. If you present this letter at our headquarters in St. Joseph we shall therefore be pleased to take you into our employ."

"You'll be known as the youngest rider of the Pony Express," Smith congratulated him.

But even he could not guess that the boy was later to win world-wide fame as Buffalo Bill.

BRINGING IN THE BOAR'S HEAD

Sonnet

Let's waste no words of lyrical preamble
Wherein most sonnets get involved and stall;
My dear, this grim perennial shopping scramble
Is getting you and me nowhere at all.

Faithfully every year, like everybody,
We do our shopping during Christmas week
When cheeks and bank-book balances are ruddy
And store-proprietors grow fat and sleek.

For once, let's listen to the voice of reason
Expressed not by the heart but by the head:
Would you object, my sweet, if just this season
We send each other greeting-cards instead?

Not that my love for you is less extensive,
But just that everything's so darned expensive.

J.E.P.

CARLOADINGS DECLINE

OTTAWA (CP) — Number of cars of railway revenue frieght loaded in Canada in the first 11 months of this year declined to 3,782,046 from 4,094,344 in the corresponding period of last year. The Bureau of Statistics reported that loadings in November fell to 334,551 from 370,313 in November of 1956.

Christmas Joy

The snowflakes softly, gently fall
The fire is burning bright,
The holly hangs upon the door
Again 'tis Christmas night.

The happy children gather round
And gaze with wondering eyes
These stockings soon by Santa filled
With many a glad surprise.

The merry bells are chiming out
Through air that's crisp and clear,
The age old story of Christmas
The giving of good cheer.

Let's not forget the message
That joyfully they bring,
And sing a song on Christmas day
To Jesus Christ our King.

—Contributed.

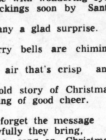
Santa Claus

O'er the earth comes Santa Claus
When the earth is sleeping,
Up and down the chimney tops
He comes softly creeping.

On the roof his reindeer wait
The lights around burn low,
And Santa waits to warm his hands
On the fireside's ruddy glow.

With a dash old Santa's on his way
He fills the world with cheer,
He keeps alive the spirit of
The day we hold so dear.

—Marjorie MacDougall.



To Our Many Customers and Friends
A JOYFUL CHRISTMAS and a HAPPY NEW YEAR

VUOZZO'S BARBER SHOP
MONTAGUE

For you — we spell out our wish for a bright and festive Yule season, and hope your good health and good fortune will continue.

Montague Dairy
C. S. STEWART,
Proprietor.

Merry Christmas
and
A Happy New Year
TO ALL

Preston D. MacLure
Electrical Contractor
Office next to Doug's Service Station
MONTAGUE

May this Christmas be one you will remember long with happy recollection. And may the New Year be good to you.

BELL'S SERVICE STATION
MONTAGUE

SEASON'S GREETINGS
To All Our Customers and Friends

With the passing of another year, we wish to express to you our sincere appreciation of the cordial relations existing between us as well as to convey the season's best wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy and Prosperous New Year.

BUD'S AUTO ACCESSORIES
MONTAGUE PHONE 127-2

GREETINGS!

To our friends and customers at this merriest of Seasons. May your Christmas Cheer be the best ever and continue throughout the New Year.

HILCHEY & VanIDERSTINE
Furniture — Self Service Groceteria
MONTAGUE PHONE 80

"THE GOD OF LOVE AND PEACE SHALL BE WITH YOU"

THE HILLSIDE INN
(MONTAGUE)

Wishes to extend Warmest Greetings of the Holiday Season to its Patrons and Friends.

At Yuletide Good Wishes for a most enjoyable Christmas

BROOKVIEW White Rose Service Station
MONTAGUE
RODERICK MacKENZIE, Proprietor.

MERRY CHRISTMAS and HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL

BELLE'S DRESS SHOP
Montague
Mrs. L. H. Poole
Phon 68

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS AND A BRIGHT NEW YEAR

DUVAR'S RADIO SERVICE
MONTAGUE

Holiday Greetings

Among all the gentle joys Christmas brings to everyone
We wish for you an extra share
Of peace and festive fun.

MacDOUGALL'S BARBER SHOP
MONTAGUE

Holiday Cheer

To all your friends and customers — may you enjoy the happiest holiday season ever!

Montague Garage
MONTAGUE

TO ALL OUR CUSTOMERS AND FRIENDS
A MERRY CHRISTMAS and A HAPPY NEW YEAR
May the Yuletide Season bring you every Joy and the New Year a Fulfillment of Every Wish.

King's Lumber Mill
MONTAGUE

Good wishes without number to you and yours as the happy feast of Christmas approaches. May it bless you with peace and with lasting joy.

Robert Machon PLUMBING and HEATING
MONTAGUE

GREETINGS!

Christmas means so many things a gaily decorated tree, brightly wrapped packages, a warm fire burning in the fireplace, stockings being hung for Santa Claus, beloved old carols . . . but most of all a spirit of love and peace . . . the glorious message of that first Christmas. May all these joys be yours.

MONTAGUE ELECTRIC
GILBERT R. CLEMENTS

Taking this opportunity to express our keenest appreciation of your good will and patronage. May the New Year further our pledge to serve you to the utmost of our ability.

McLEOD and GREEN
Plumbing & Heating
MONTAGUE

BEST WISHES FOR A MERRY CHRISTMAS

We Hope Santa Is Good To You!

We do hope you have an old-fashioned and delightful Christmas! And may 1958 be a year of health and prosperity for you in all your ventures.

McGOWAN MOTORS LTD.
MONTAGUE

GREETINGS!!

Our Sincere Thanks For Your Loyal Patronage This Past Year

MONTAGUE COLD STORAGE LTD.