



Sheriff MacLoyd had undergone a remarkable transformation

DOC SWAP'S PSYCHOLOGY

By BEN FRANK

*When Sheriff MacLoyd returns from the East a changed man,
it's up to the tradin' hombre to take plumb drastic steps!*

THE sun shone happily through the window into old Doc Swap's spotless kitchen. It fell across the table where Doc sat eating his noonday meal, touched his round whiskery face and glistened on his pink bald head.

For the hundredth time that day, Doc's bright blue eyes went to the clock behind the stove. Inside, he felt a warm glow of excitement, for in less than a half-hour, the west-bound passenger would pull into the

little cowtown of Dry Bluffs. On that train would be Sheriff MacLoyd, returning home after a month's visit with relatives in the East.

"Dad-blasted, ornery ole hoss thief!" Doc said, thinking fondly of MacLoyd. "About time he was gettin' back. Ain't had no excitement since he went away."

Only to himself would Doc admit that he had missed Sheriff MacLoyd, his bitter rival in the two occupations dearest to

Doc's heart—swapping and fiddle playing. To anyone else, he made it quite evident that he considered the absence of the tobacco chewing, pale-eyed, swearing sheriff of Bluff County a fine thing.

For forty years, Doc Swap and Sheriff MacLoyd had been apparent enemies, each trying to get the best of the other in any kind of a swap. Now that MacLoyd was due to return, Doc had his plans well made. Right off he'd start dickering with the sheriff for his prize saddle pony. Not that Doc had any need for the pony. In fact, he didn't especially want the animal. What he wanted was a good roaring wrangle with MacLoyd over the merits of the pony.

The old swapper grinned in anticipation as he thought of the insulting remarks he'd make about MacLoyd's horse. In his mind, he could see the sheriff's long fingers twist at his handlebar mustache, while his bony face turned red with anger. Yep, Doc reckoned, today would be a day long to remember. He chuckled and reached for another slice of ham.

A KNOCK at the back door of his cottage made him forget the ham. He shoved to his feet, waddled across the room and flung the door wide. A tall thin young man with deep-set greenish eyes looked down at him sadly. Behind the man, tied to a tree, stood a bony old saddle horse. The young man pulled a battered hat off a shock of sweat-plastered sandy hair and cleared his throat, making his Adam's apple jump up and down in his scrawny neck.

"Howdedo," he said humbly. "I come to yore house because it is the nicest lookin' one I've saw for many a day. Indeed, since I left college."

For the moment, Doc forgot that MacLoyd's train was due in a few minutes. Strangers always fascinated him, even a skinny jasper like this whose tattered clothing spoke of hard luck.

"Do tell?" Doc murmured.

"A fact," the stranger said. "I says to myself, 'Brainy, the man what owns a nice place like this has got hisself a very kind heart indeed. He's the sort of a hombre who'd likely give a man a square meal an', mebbe, a job.'"

"Come in," Doc invited, still fascinated. "I can furnish the meal, but ain't so sure about a job."

The young man stepped in, and his eyes fixed on the food.

"People call me Doc Swap," Doc murmured.

Eyes still on the food, the young man stuck out a bony paw.

"I'm Oliver Wadsworth Babcock. Brainy, people call me. Brainy is the right name, too, and no mistake indeed, for there is very little I do not know. But right now I'm in the midst of a very long streak of hard luck, an'—"

"Set down an' help yoreself to some grub," Doc offered.

"Brainy" Babcock hung his battered hat over the doorknob and lowered himself to a chair by the table. The sadness went out of his face to be replaced by a wide, hungry smile.

"Doc, yuh are indeed a gentleman and a scholar. Fact, yuh remind me of a college perfessor. College perfessors is very fine people, and no mistake."

"No doubt," Doc agreed. "Have some ham an' biscuits."

Brainy loaded his plate brimful.

"I see yuh are wonderin' why I am down to the status quo of a saddle bum? It's psychology, Doc, knowin' what other people is thinkin'."

"Do tell?" Doc said.

"A fact! What I don't know about psychology ain't worth mentionin'. The minute I seen yore face I knowed yuh was indeed very happy and excited about somethin'. But to get back to the subject. I

ain't exactly cut out to be a cowboy. Give me a good suit of clothes an' twenty five dollars an' I would turn myself into a business man indeed. While I was at Yale—"

Yale made Doc think of jail, and jail reminded him that Sheriff MacLoyd's train was due.

"Brainy," he said, "yuh go right ahead an' eat. I have got to go meet a train pronto."

"I knowed it," Brainy said, taking a second slice of ham. "When I seen yore face, I says, 'Brainy, this gent is about to go meet a train with someone on it which he loves very dearly indeed.' That is what yuh call psychol—"

"I," Doc said darkly, "am about to meet a ole hoss thief who I ain't got no use for a-tall!"

Brainy's Adam's apple did a jig in his throat.

"Why," he sputtered, "that is indeed hard to believe. I would of swore that yuh was goin' to meet a friend."

"Friend, phooey!" Doc snorted. He grabbed up his fancy pearl gray Stetson—he'd swapped a wind-broken old horse for the hat and considered the trade one of the highlights of his career—and clamped it over his head down to the tips of his red ears. "If yuh wasn't a stranger, Brainy, I'd consider that a insult."

WITH that, the old swapper hurried out into the sunshine and waddled along Dry Bluff's one street toward the depot. Doc wanted to be on hand when MacLoyd arrived. Right off, he'd make a nasty crack about the sheriff's saddle pony and offer to swap a coon dog for it. He grinned happily as he thought of the cuss words MacLoyd would use. Life certainly looked mighty bright to old Doc Swap at the moment. In the distance, the train whistled, and Doc increased his puffing pace.

The train and Doc arrived at the same

time. Doc stopped at the far end of the depot to catch his breath, and glued his eyes on the coach platform. A porter stepped down with a shiny suitcase. Doc shook his head. That first passenger wouldn't be MacLoyd, for the sheriff's suitcase always looked as if it had been through a cyclone.

A tall, well dressed man, smoking a long black cigar, followed the porter and picked up the suitcase. Doc caught a glimpse of the man's face, noted the neatly trimmed mustache, the stiff white collar below a powdered chin, the natty red and gray necktie. The man strode along the side of the depot toward Dooley Dobson, the agent. His expensive store suit fairly glittered in the sun, and his tan shoes had a shine that you could see your face in.

Doc turned his attention back to the train. He saw the porter climb up the steps and realized that there were no more passengers for Dry Bluffs. A wave of disappointment swept over him, and he began to swear softly through his ragged whiskers.

"Dad-blamed ole cuss," he muttered worriedly. "Like as not he ain't got brains enough to get off!"

"Hello, Sheriff," he heard Dooley Dobson say.

Doc spun around. Dooley was shaking hands with the tall man in the fancy store clothes.

"Howdy, Dooley." The voice belonged to Sheriff MacLoyd!

Doc blinked and rubbed his eyes and looked again. Sure enough, he was staring at Sheriff MacLoyd. A Sheriff MacLoyd who had undergone a remarkable transformation.

"Nice to get home," MacLoyd said. "See yuh later, Dooley."

He went on along the street toward the cracker-box jail.

A weakness settled in Doc's fat legs, and he had to lean against the depot for

support. He'd never dreamed that he'd live to see the day when the sheriff of Bluff County would look like a city dude. Following the weakness came a great fear. Maybe, Doc thought, not only was MacLoyd changed on the outside, but he might be changed on the inside. Maybe MacLoyd would no longer be interested in swapping.

"By cracky," Dooley said, his voice filled with awe, "a month in the city shore made our sheriff into a mighty handsome cuss!"

"Looks like a store window dummy," Doc growled.

"Even smokin' cigars instead of chewin'," Dooley went on.

Doc watched MacLoyd disappear into the jail office. Teeth clamped, cold sweat working through his whiskers, Doc moved up the street. He had to know the worst. He had to find out if MacLoyd was still a swapper.

Two minutes later, Doc climbed the three steps that led to the door of the sun-warped jail. He shoved into the two-by-four office and stopped just inside. The sheriff sat at his battered desk, smoothing the creases in his trousers. Always before, MacLoyd, the scarred desk and the cluttered office seemed to go together, but now the sheriff looked out of place.

MacLoyd let out a gust of cigar smoke and crossed his bony, bowed legs with great care.

"Well, well," he said, "if it ain't my ole friend, Doc Swap, lookin' as run down as a tenement house an'—"

"Leastwise," Doc bristled, "I don't look like no cigar ad what has lost his mind an'—"

"Set awhile, Doc," MacLoyd said gently. "Nice to see yuh, even if I am used to bein' around some mighty fine folks. What's on yore mind?"

Doc dropped weakly on a protesting

chair, took off his fancy hat and wiped his shiny bald head.

"Sheriff," he asked, "what has come over yuh?"

"Over me?" MacLoyd frowned slightly. "Doc, I have climbed out of a very deep rut."

"Do tell?" Doc gurgled.

"Bein' in the city an' seein' how other folks live has done things to me. I am a changed man. To make a long story short, I have made myself over. From now on, yuh will not see MacLoyd, the rough an' ready sheriff of Bluff County. Yuh will see only MacLoyd, the gentleman and very refined. Also, I am goin' to retire from office an' move to the East an' go into some kind of genteel business."

MacLOYD daintily flicked ashes from his cigar with a little finger on which gleamed a gold ring with a red stone.

"Yes, indeed. As the fellers in the city say, a man lives only but once, so he has got to make the most of it. Also, these fellers offered to sell me a interest in their business."

"What kind of business?" Doc managed faintly.

"Stocks an' bonds, or somethin' like that."

"Phooey!" Doc snorted. "The only business yuh know anything about is bein' sheriff, an' yuh don't know much about that!"

MacLoyd neither got mad, nor bothered to make a retort. Instead, he smiled sadly and twisted at his trim mustache.

Doc felt his own anger rising, and behind the anger lay a feeling of calamity. He gripped the edge of his chair and made the final test.

"Sheriff," he said, "I been thinkin' about yore saddle pony. Of course, he ain't much of a hoss, but I might swap off that flea-bit yellow hound for him if yuh'd throw in

some boot.”

The smile remained on MacLoyd's bony face.

“Why,” he said dreamily, “after I get set up in business, I will likely run for Congress. A man with my understandin’—”

It was too much for Doc Swap. He slapped on his Stetson and fled. Outside, he leaned against a hitchrail and stared with unseeing eyes along the street. His mind was in a whirl, and he had a feeling that the world was about to come to an end.

Also, he knew that MacLoyd was fitted neither for city life nor a business career, and like as not, some city slickers were about to take the sheriff for a one way ride. Although he wouldn't admit it even to himself, Doc didn't want his old friendly-enemy to make a rash move that would bring him trouble. Somehow, Doc reckoned, he had to do something to stop MacLoyd. Maybe the problem called for a swapping spree in Sugar Valley.

“Doc,” a voice said, “yuh look like somebody has knocked yuh down an' then stomped on yore face.”

With a start, Doc turned and found himself facing Oliver Wadsworth Babcock.

“That's exactly the way I feel,” Doc admitted.

Brainy looked pleased. “I knowed it. Psychology told me that the minute I seen yore face that—”

“Brainy,” Doc cut in, “what does this here psychology tell yuh to do for a sheriff who has gone plumb crazy?”

“That's easy,” Brainy answered airily. “Yuh allus have to agree with a crazy man. Yuh make him think he is smarter'n yuh are, an—”

The wheels in Doc's head had begun to turn.

“Brainy,” he grinned, “not only have yuh earned yore dinner, but I reckon goin' through college has shore made yuh right sharp!”

With that, he left the goggle-eyed young man and headed back into the jail office.

MacLoyd glanced up and smiled condescendingly through a haze of smoke.

“Yes, sir,” he said as if their conversation hadn't been interrupted, “I reckon I'll resign an' go East. As for that saddle pony, I wouldn't swap him off, but I might sell him for \$300.”

“Sheriff,” Doc said, “I have just realized what a smart man yuh are. Yo're right about goin' East. Absolutely! Dry Bluffs is too small for a man of yore caliber. The thing for yuh to do is resign right now. I'll even help yuh write yore resignation an' mail it for yuh. Where's some paper an' a pencil?”

MacLoyd's pale eyes bugged.

“Now, Doc,” he hedged, “I never was no hand to rush.”

Doc had found a sheet of paper and he pulled a gold-tipped pencil from MacLoyd's vest pocket. He spread the paper in front of the bean-pole sheriff and shoved the pencil into his hand.

“Just write that yuh resign with deep regrets,” he said. “Yuh might mention that yuh have outgrown yore job an' feel that stocks an' bonds is yore future.”

“Hold yore hosses,” MacLoyd sputtered. “I ain't quite—”

“Heh, heh,” Doc chuckled. “Don't tell me yuh was just bluffin' about resignin', yuh windy ole baboon.”

SHERIFF MacLOYD'S face turned a bright pink. “No such thing,” he declared angrily. “I'm gonna resign, but tomorrow's soon enough.”

The next thing he knew, he'd written a letter of resignation to the county commissioners, and Doc had folded the page and stuck it into a pocket.

“I'll see that it gets mailed pronto,” Doc said innocently.

MacLoyd blinked and wondered vaguely how come he'd written a letter,

which he'd intended to write a week or so later, at this particular moment.

While he was puzzling over this, Doc waddled into a back room in which the sheriff kept odds and ends, including his belongings. A moment later, the old swapper came back into the office with the sheriff's boots in one hand and his corded pants, gray shirt and gravy-spotted vest draped over the other arm.

"Knowed yuh wouldn't want these togs no longer," Doc said blandly, "so figured yuh'd give 'em to me."

"Doc," MacLoyd said faintly, "ain't yuh kinda rushin' things along. Of course, yuh can have my ole clothes, but I figure there's plenty of time."

"Time's flyin'," Doc said. "Also, a big business man never hesitates. He does things in a hurry. Are yuh leavin' tonight on the train?"

"Doc, yuh know I can't get things packed an' leave today."

"So yuh'll be around a day or so yet," Doc frowned. "That's nice. Wish I had the time, I'd take yuh up to Sugar Lake for one more fishin' trip. But I'm too busy to do that."

"Doc, yuh never was busy, an' yuh know it. Ain't no reason why yuh couldn't take me fishin' if yuh wanted to."

"Well," Doc muttered, "I suppose I could let my work go, seein' as how yuh won't be here much longer."

MacLoyd swore. "Yuh just don't want to take me."

"Do to!" Doc declared stoutly. "Only I can't get away."

"Yo're goin' to take me fishin', or I'll—"

"Well," Doc weakened, "seein' as how yuh want to go, mebbe if we was to start at sunup tomorrow mornin', I might be able to make it."

"I knowed it!" MacLoyd gloated. "I knowed yuh'd have time to go if yuh wanted to."

"All right," Doc sighed, heading for the door. "I'll drive by for yuh about sunup."

"Wait a minute," MacLoyd called. "I might want to wear my ole clothes to fish in."

Doc turned at the door and held out the old clothes.

"Heh, heh," he chuckled triumphantly. "Yuh ain't changed a bit. Yuh still like these ole clothes. Yo're the same ole buzzard."

"I am a changed man!" MacLoyd roared. "An' I wouldn't be caught dead wearin' them ole rags. Take 'em along!"

"See yuh in the mornin'," Doc said quickly, and scooted through the door before the sheriff had time to realize that he had been out-maneuvered.

Grinning, the old swapper ambled across the street toward Inky Irwin's printing office. Just as he reached the front door, Brainy Babcock came up, a grin plastered on his thin face.

"Doc," he observed, "yuh look like a changed man indeed."

"It's psy—what-yuh-call-it workin'," Doc returned.

"Psychology," Brainy allowed, "is powerful stuff. When I was at Harvard, I learnt—"

"Brainy," Doc interrupted, "yuh mentioned somethin' about wantin' a job. I reckon I've got one for yuh now."

"Fair pay an' no cows to punch?" Brainy asked anxiously.

"No cows," Doc told him. "Just a skinny ole maverick. As for pay, say about \$25 an' a new suit of clothes."

"Doc," the young man croaked, "who do yuh want me to shoot?"

"Tomorrow I'm goin' on a swappin' spree through Sugar Valley," Doc said. "Allus go there when I got somethin' on my mind. Nesters are beginnin' to settle up the valley, an' they is swappers. Swappin' allus helps me work things out. With my

swappin' an' yore psychology, I reckon we can make things hum."

CAREFULLY, Doc explained his plan, and Brainy Babcock listened, and his grin grew wider.

"Doc," he said, "I reckon I'm yore man, me havin' been through three colleges. Besides indeed for \$25 an' a new suit of clothes, I would even punch a few cows if I had to."

"See yuh tomorrow," Doc said, and stepped into the printing office. Here he made a deal with his old friend, Inky Irwin, the printer.

"Come back about nine o'clock," Inky grinned, "an' yore posters'll be ready for yuh."

On the way to his neat little cottage at the edge of town, Doc went through the pockets of MacLoyd's old clothes. The sheriff's jackknife turned up in a pants pocket. Chuckling, Doc dropped the knife into his own pocket. He figured that the knife, if handled right, might furnish the grub for the proposed fishing trip.

Bright and early the next morning, Doc and MacLoyd were jolting along the Sugar Creek trail in Doc's old covered wagon in which he hauled his swapping goods. On the floor of the wagon lay MacLoyd's expensive fishing gear and Doc's two-bit cane pole. Beside the fishing tackle rested a pile of old clothes, the ones the sheriff had given to Doc the evening before. Of course, Doc hadn't bothered about bringing along any food except a small bag of flour. As usual, he planned to live off the country.

It was a fine day. The sun shone, and a gentle breeze blew out of the south, warm and soft. Doc whistled softly as he urged his sleek bay team along. MacLoyd sat very stiff and straight on the sagging spring seat, looking somewhat uncomfortable and out of place in his city clothes.

A mile out of Dry Bluffs, Doc pulled his

team to a stop beside a gnarled cotton wood, reached under the seat and came up with a large handbill and a claw hammer.

"Now what?" MacLoyd growled.

"That tree looks like a good place to put up a notice," Doc murmured, sliding from the wagon.

He waddled to the cottonwood, dug tacks from a pocket and proceeded to tack up the handbill. The sheriff leaned forward on the spring seat and squinted at the huge black letters. They said, VOTE FOR DOC SWAP FOR SHERIFF AT THE SPECIAL ELECTION.

MacLoyd forgot he was a made-over man and began to cuss with all his former expertness.

"Doc" he fumed "yuh back-bitin' ole goat, so that's why yuh rushed me into writin' that letter last night!"

Doc looked up innocently. "Resignin' was yore own idea. I'm just takin' advantage of it. Figure I might as well have a chance at that easy money since yo're goin' into business."

MacLoyd leaned back in the seat and said no more, but his pale eyes burned, and the scowl clung to his bony face.

They made their next stop at Loop and Puney Porters' homestead. Loop and Puney stood on the front porch of their log cabin, shaking fists in each other's faces.

Doc slid to the ground and ambled up to the two men.

"Fine day," he observed happily.

Loop swore fiercely and glared at Doc. "Fine day, yore eye!" he snorted. "Puney's done gone an' lost our only parin' knife. Can't have no apple pie without a parin' knife. No fried potatoes for dinner, neither."

"I didn't lose it!" Puney yelled. "Loop's the biggest liar this side of Hades! He took the knife out to—"

"Boys, keep yore shirts on," Doc said blandly. "They is other knives beside the one yuh ain't got. Now, take this here

jackknife, for instance.”

“Hey,” MacLoyd yelled, “that looks like my—”

Doc seemed not to hear him. “By the way,” he went on, “MacLoyd’s quittin’ the sheriff job. Reckon there’ll be a special election soon, an’ I’d like for yuh boys to vote for me.”

MacLoyd forgot all about his jackknife, and his bony fingers clutched the spring seat. Loop and Puney nodded their shaggy heads.

“Why,” Loop allowed, “I reckon we might vote for yuh, Doc, especially if yuh was to sell us that jackknife.”

Doc shook his head sadly. “Ain’t for sale, Loop. Might work us up a swap, though.”

WHEN Doc and MacLoyd drove away from Loop and Puney, Doc left the jackknife behind. For it he had a peck of potatoes, a small slab of bacon, a dozen eggs and an old water sprinkler. For boot, Doc had extracted a promise from the Porters to vote for him at the special election.

As they turned into the Sugar Creek trail again, Doc glanced over his shoulder. In the distance, he saw Brainy Babcock trailing along behind. Doc smiled behind his ragged whiskers and glanced at MacLoyd. The bean-pole sheriff, he noted, looked mighty unhappy. Doc’s smile widened.

At noon, they stopped in the shade near Sugar Creek. While MacLoyd gathered wood and started a fire, Doc took a handful of election posters and tacked them to trees along the trail. MacLoyd said nothing, but his scowl would have soured milk.

While they were eating, Brainy Babcock rode up, slid to the ground and helped himself to a plate of grub.

“Sheriff,” Doc said solemnly, “meet Oliver Wadsworth Babcock, who’s been through three colleges an’ knows more

about psychology than the feller who invented it.”

Brainy and the sheriff shook hands.

“Yore face, Sheriff,” Brainy observed, “tells me yo’re mighty worried. Could it be because yo’re losin’ yore job?”

“Ain’t losin’ it,” MacLoyd snapped. “I quit. The reason I’m lookin’ this way is because these tan shoes hurt my feet.”

“I got yore ole boots,” Doc murmured. “Might swap.”

For the old boots, Doc got the tan shoes and the sheriff’s gold-tipped lead pencil.

After dinner, Doc and MacLoyd drove on. Brainy stayed behind, saying he guessed his horse needed a rest.

That afternoon, whenever Doc came to a likely looking tree, he would stop and put up one of the posters. At each stop, the scowl on MacLoyd’s face grew more bitter. At the fifth stop, he could no longer hold himself. He began to turn the air blue with a series of well chosen cuss words.

“Doc,” he roared, “I thought we was goin’ fishin’, not sashshayin’ around on a election campaign!”

Doc turned on his innocent baby-faced expression.

“Why, we are goin’ fishin’. Figured I’d kill two birds with one stone. Put some my posters while—”

“Mebbe,” MacLoyd rasped, “I’ll change my mind about leavin’, an’ there won’t be no special election.”

Doc shook his head as he pounded another tack into a poster.

“Have yuh forgot that letter yuh writ last night to the commissioners, tellin’ yuh’re too big a man to be sheriff!”

MacLoyd choked over a cuss word and slumped down on the spring seat. His face looked a little pale.

An hour later, Doc drove his bays up to Ike Johnson’s place, slid from the wagon and waddled up to the door. MacLoyd, not wanting to miss out on anything, slid from

the wagon and trailed up to the door behind Doc.

Doc found Ike and his wife, Millie, in the midst of a heated argument. It seemed that they'd sent to a mail order house for a set of dishes, but there'd been a mixup, and the mail-order house had sent some tin knives and forks. Millie allowed that the mail-order people didn't have brains enough to fill a peanut hull, while Ike declared that Millie likely made a mistake in making out the order.

Doc smiled happily. Get two people in an argument, and you could make almost any kind of a swap if you played your cards right.

"Why don't yuh write 'em a letter an' give 'em a piece of yore mind?" he suggested.

"Only one reason I don't," Millie fumed. "Ike lost our only lead pencil."

"I did not!" Ike bellowed. "I ain't seen that pencil since yuh used it to write the order two weeks ago!"

"Ike," Millie flared, "do yuh mean to stand up there an'—"

Doc had pulled the sheriff's gold-tipped pencil from a pocket. Neither Millie nor Ike were in any mood to quibble over the value of the pencil, and in less than three minutes, Doc had swapped it to them for two loaves of bread, a pound of butter, and half an apple pie. For boot, he obtained Ike's promise of a vote at the special election.

ONCE back on the spring seat, MacLoyd sighed and wiped the sweat from his bony face, and cast a longing look at his comfortable old clothes on the floor of the wagon.

"Doc," he murmured unhappily, "these here store clothes is made of wool, an' they're scratchin' me somethin' fierce now that it has turned hot."

Immediately Doc offered to swap the old clothes for the new.

"Doc," MacLoyd bleated, "besides bein' a crook an' a man without principles, yuh're dishonest. In the first place, them ole clothes belong to me. In the second—"

"Yuh give 'em to me, so they're mine," Doc said flatly. "Take 'em, or leave 'em."

MacLoyd took them. In his old clothes, he looked comfortable and more like his old self. He fished out a cigar, lit it and swore softly. Doc smiled to himself. He reckoned that MacLoyd was wishing he had a chew of cut plug. He glanced back along the trail. Brainy Babcock could be seen in the dim distance.

From time to time, Doc pulled his bays to a halt, climbed down and tacked a handbill to a tree. MacLoyd scowled and puffed furiously at the cigar, but said no more about hurrying on to Sugar Lake to fish. In fact, fishing seemed to be far from his line of thinking.

Late that afternoon, they drove up to Homer Prutt's tar-papered shack. Homer spent most of his time inventing things which never worked. At the moment, he was in his lean-to shop, tinkering with an array of hoses and pipes.

He glared at Doc through thick-rimmed spectacles. Homer had an inborn mistrust of all people, believing that everyone was trying to steal his inventions.

"Ain't got no time to swap," he said coldly.

Doc smiled blandly and whipped off his fancy hat.

"Ain't doin' much swappin'," he said. "We're on our way to Sugar Lake to go fishin'. Just stopped by to ask yuh to vote for me for sheriff. MacLoyd's quittin'."

"Mebbe I will change my mind," MacLoyd put in.

"Forget that letter again?" Doc asked.

MacLoyd cursed under his breath.

"Homer," Doc asked, "what're yuh inventin'?"

Homer frowned. "A fire extinguisher.

Kinda stumped, though. Need somethin' to spray the water instead of gushin' it out all in one stream."

Doc hurried to the covered wagon and returned with the old water sprinkler. Homer's red-rimmed eyes lit up. In no time at all, Doc had swapped the sprinkler for an old straw hat, a plug of tobacco, a pound of coffee and a sack of dried prunes. Also, for boot, Homer promised his vote to Doc at the special election.

As they bumped along the rutted trail toward Doc's favorite camp site on the bank of Sugar Creek, MacLoyd cast longing eyes on the pocket in which rested the plug of chewing tobacco.

"Doc," he muttered, "yuh might give me one little bite."

"Might swap yuh the whole plug," Doc murmured.

MacLoyd tossed his cigar into the dust and swore weakly.

"Name yore price, Doc."

For the plug and the old straw hat, Doc got MacLoyd's expensive narrow-brimmed felt hat and a promise to wash all the dishes during the fishing trip. Now, except for his trim mustache and city haircut, MacLoyd looked exactly like he had looked before he'd gone to the city. Doc, knowing that the mustache and the hair would soon grow, had a mighty satisfied feeling. He reckoned that a swapping spree in Sugar Valley couldn't be beat when it came to straightening things out.

THAT evening, there was no missing the expression of contentment on MacLoyd's bony face as he sat by the camp fire, his long, thin nose sniffing the appetizing odors of boiling coffee and sizzling bacon. Just as they started to eat, Brainy Babcock rode up. He slid to the ground and stared at the sheriff.

"Sheriff," he exclaimed, "psychology tells me yuh are indeed content with life! At

noon yuh looked like yuh was about ready to hang yoreself."

MacLoyd took a huge bite of cut plug, took aim and showered a knothole in a tree some fifteen feet distant. He ignored Brainy's comment and turned toward Doc.

"Yuh know," he muttered, "I ain't been so downright comfortable for three weeks. Kinda wish yuh hadn't rushed me into writin' that letter. Kinda wish I was goin' to keep on here at Dry Bluffs like as usual."

"When I was at Harvard," Brainy mumbled, "I heared a feller say that a man was a fool to try to change hissself after he was past forty. Or did I hear that at Yale?"

"Brainy knows ever'thing," Doc said. "He's a tophand at this psychology stuff, too."

"Yes, indeed," Brainy agreed quickly. "Ask me anything, sheriff, an' I'll give yuh the right answer, an' no mistake!"

MacLoyd drew a deep, quivering breath, turned his pale eyes on the sandy-haired young man.

"All right," he rasped, "if yo're so smart, tell me how I can keep on bein' Sheriff of Bluff County?"

Doc could have yelled out loud, but he didn't.

"Now, hold on," he sputtered. "I'm goin' to be sheriff."

Brainy batted his eyes and scratched his head.

"Everywhere I been today," he muttered, "I seen signs which said, VOTE FOR DOC SWAP FOR SHERIFF AT THE SPECIAL ELECTION. Also, I understand yuh have resigned. I reckon there's only one answer to yore question, sheriff. Yuh'll have to forget about bein' sheriff, unless yuh can make a deal with Doc."

"I spent considerable time electioneerin'," Doc sighed. "Besides, I had them posters printed. Also, there's that letter we sent to the commissioners. Too bad about that letter."

MacLoyd scowled. "I'd give a bit if I hadn't got rushed into writin' that blasted letter," he mumbled.

"Things're shore messed up," Doc said. His hand came out of a pocket with a letter, and his voice trailed off, while his eyes widened in shocked surprise.

"Whatta yuh know!" he blurted. "I plumb forgot to mail yore letter. Brainy, how about yuh ridin' pronto to Dry Bluffs to mail this for me?"

MacLoyd leaped to his feet.

"Hold on!" he said hoarsely. "I'll take that letter!"

"Might swap it to yuh," Doc murmured. "Kinda had my eye on yore saddle pony the last few—"

"It's blackmail!" MacLoyd roared. "Doc, yuh planned this whole thing so's to get my hoss. I see it all now. Yuh mangy ole skunk, I wouldn't swap my pony to yuh for nothin'."

"Keep yore shirt on," Doc said, "an' mebbe we can work somethin' out, the three of us. Brainy, here, wants a fancy suit of clothes. Also, he wants to start up a little business of his own, him bein' no hand to punch cows beside goin' through three colleges. Yuh want this letter, an' yuh want to keep on bein' sheriff. Brainy, what does yore psychology tell yuh we should ought to do about all this mix-up?"

Brainy's Adam's apple wobbled in his scrawny throat.

"Why, yuh give me them fancy clothes yuh got from the sheriff for my day's work. The sheriff gives yuh thirty dollars instead of his pony for the letter, an' yuh, bein' a swapper an' havin' no need for money, give the thirty bucks to me as kind of a loan. I pay five of the thirty to the printer for them posters, an' keep the twenty-five to start up in business with, which indeed I will likely never pay back."

"Them are wise words from a man who knows his psychology backwards and

sideways," Doc said. "What do yuh say, sheriff?"

HIS face slightly pale, MacLoyd pulled out a battered pocketbook and began to count out the money. After he'd given thirty dollars to Brainy, Doc dropped the letter into the fire. Grinning happily, Brainy stepped up to the fire and pulled wads of papers from his pockets and tossed them on the fire along with the flaming letter.

"Yuh shore yuh didn't miss none of them posters I tacked up?" Doc asked anxiously.

"Didn't miss a one," Brainy declared. "Took 'em down as fast as yuh put 'em up. Also, I told all them people yuh talked to that yuh was just playin' a little joke on the sheriff. That he wasn't quittin', an' there wouldn't be no special election."

Stunned, MacLoyd swallowed half a cud and nearly choked.

Still grinning, Brainy gathered up the bundle of new store clothes, climbed into his scuffed saddle and turned to ride away.

"Brainy," Doc called, "I been aimin' to ask yuh somethin'."

"Ask me anything," Brainy said, "an' I'll answer it."

"What college did yuh go through besides Yale an' Harvard?"

Brainy looked slightly embarrassed.

"Doc, that's a sticker indeed. To be honest, I plumb don't recollect. Yuh see I spent a couple of hours, or so, goin' through Yale an' Harvard. But that third college, well, I was in a hurry an' took only about fifteen minutes to go through. In fact, I went through so fast I never did see what they called it."

Oliver Wadsworth Babcock kicked his old horse in the ribs and rode on into the gathering darkness.

Sheriff MacLoyd began to cuss with a careful exactness that was music to Doc's ears.

“Psychology,” Doc murmured happily, “is more powerful stuff. I wonder if it will work on them fish in Sugar Lake.”

MacLoyd’s thin lips puckered, and a brown stream hissed through the air, neatly

dead-centering the knothole in the tree.

“Wouldn’t surprise me none if it did,” he admitted reluctantly. “Especially if there’re suckers in the lake.”