

WILDCAT REPRESENTS

By Eugene Manlove Rhodes

How one man played prisoner, witness, defending lawyer, judge, and executioner

A NOVEL—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

Chapter I.

THE BODY IN THE LANE

At two in the afternoon, Johnny Lyons, foreman of the T-Tumble-T, loped through the little Mexican settlement of Los Ranchos de Marfil and turned eastward into the three-mile lane which led through the alfalfa-fields of Las Uvas, the county seat.

A little later the Mexicans heard a shot from that direction. Shortly afterward, Dan Hurley came out of the lane and passed through Los Ranchos on the way to his home in Marfil.

About three o'clock a half-dozen of the Mexican boys saddled up and started to Las Uvas to play *pelote*. On the way they met Johnny's horse, and at the crossing of the lane and the old river-bed they found Johnny, quite dead—shot from behind.

Within an hour after the alarm was given half the populace of Las Uvas were at the scene of the murder. A coroner's jury was impaneled, and on examination it was found that no one had entered the lane that afternoon except Hurley and the dead man.

Hurley was sent for and questioned. He said that he had met Lyons just west of the river-bed; had spoken to him, but had not stopped; had heard the shot, but thought nothing of it. In his gun, a .45, was found an empty shell, apparently freshly fired. This Hurley said, he had fired at a hawk, which he had missed.

Upon the suggestion of "Searchlight" Wilson, erstwhile deputy sheriff and a two-gun man, a thorough search was made, and the fatal bullet was found. It was a .45.

Hurley stoutly protested his entire innocence. But things looked black for him, and the jury promptly found that Lyons came to death at his hands. He was put in durance and his request for bail denied.

That night, Clark Hurst came in from up the river. He said that Johnny had left the Broad Cañon Camp after breakfast, intending to go to the Diamond A round-up at Danton to help Tom Hall throw back. He was unarmed, and took only one horse, expecting to ride some of Tom's mounts. Hurst said that he could not imagine what had made him come to Las Uvas instead.

Dan Hurley was feared and disliked in Las Uvas. Perhaps he was the most unpopular man in the vicinity. I am aware that this is high praise, but he deserved it, being a straight, square man.

He had made himself particularly obnoxious to legal and political circles by resisting exorbitant and unequal taxation, by merciless and convincing exposure of graft, and in fighting against the persecution, through complaisant courts, of political and personal enemies of "the ring." He was one of the first rebels against the tyranny and oppression of the New Mexican office-holders, who held unquestioned sway for thirty years. His bitter sarcasms had cut deeply, and his enemies, eager for revenge, now had their coveted opportunity.

Searchlight pointed out that Lyons had been a persistent wooer of Miss Elsie Brandon, now engaged to marry Hurley. Jealousy was a sufficient and probable motive for the murder; and from that moment the tide set against the prisoner.

I gather that there was no just man found in Sodom and Gomorrah. Therein lay one of the differences between those cities and Las Uvas. For the sheriff of Doña Inez, José Benavides, was a just man and a fearless, beloved and respected of all factions. He was well educated, of an old and honorable family, and it was known that he would “stand without being tied.” So Dan’s foes made no move that night.

But in the morning José was called away to investigate a beef killing and stealing case above Pascadero, and soon the long, straggling main street was thronged with knots and clusters of excited citizens, the suppressed fervor of whose eloquence was like the hum of angry bees. Conspicuous in the buzzing groups were Searchlight, Levi, Slick Johnnie, the Tall Sycamore, and the California Column.

To anyone familiar with New Mexico, the conjunction of these portentous names formed an acrostic which spelled Trouble. For these were the leaders of the political gang that ruled the County of Doña Inez with an iron hand—Jacks in office, professional stirrers-up of strife, which at this time and place was largely superfluous. It had an ugly look. It was clear that Dan’s ill-wishers were stirring up the evil passions of Las Uvas with intent to make appeal to mob-law.

Danny was my friend, and I firmly believed him innocent and quite incapable of the infamous deed with which he was charged. I strove to make head-way against the growing feeling, and in this I was seconded by Pablo Wiggins, a half-breed whose father had been lynched near Paraje.

This circumstance had somewhat prejudiced Pablo against mob-law, the more so since his father had been entirely guiltless of the crime imputed to him, but as the latter had been dead for some weeks before his innocence was proved, his exoneration must have given him comparatively little satisfaction.

Pablo’s voice carried much weight, for he was viewed with superstitious awe by the *peiones* in his capacity as a snake-charmer. He would handle the most vicious rattlers with impunity, an art and mystery he had learned during a five years’ sojourn among the Navajos; also, after the death of the elder Wiggins it was noticed that a surprising number of deaths occurred in the crowd that had lynched him. The symptoms pointed to lead poisoning, the wounds being invariably made by a .45-120-480 bullet that just fitted Pablos’ gun. After seven had been killed, it excited some remark; in fact, it was solely on this account that Pablo thought best to make his visit to the Navajos’ country.

He was a formidable accession, but as it was round-up time the other local pillars of our strength were all absent. For Doña Inez was divided into two bitterly contending faction, called, for the sake of convenience, Democrats and Republicans, but being, in reality, stockmen and their allies, on one hand, and on the other the “law-to-order” party, comprising pretty much every one else, and headed by the court-house gang and their henchmen.

Our efforts were met with increasing hostility as it became apparent that we stood alone, our opponents’ attitudes changing from mere incivility and surliness to ominous politeness. My anxiety and dismay grew hour by hour.

Then it was that I became aware of Wildcat Thompson in gala attire riding his top horse jauntily down the street and replying to the hundred frowning faces bent darkly upon him with the sweetest and most endearing of smiles.

His progress was devious, for at every feverish group old Jugador shied in affected alarm. As he bounded sidewise Wildcat’s supple body flowed in soft, sinuous curves as he unconsciously adapted himself to the erratic motion.

The long eagle-bill *tapideros*, the spotless fringed gauntlets, the saddle-strings and gay neckerchief floating out behind him as he came; the lithe figure, poised lightly as a hawk; the smooth oval face, berry-brown, eager, joyous; the uplifted head; the steady eyes beneath turned up sombrero—all in all, he was as bright and debonair a man as ever rode blithely down greenwood or sunset trail.

Of all men beneath the sun, this was the one I most desired to see. Proved, resourceful, daring—one whose cool and exultant courage had become a proverb—in this emergency his prestige would be as invaluable an ally as the man himself.

I hailed him joyously into the Hotel Yturbide, and ordered dinner.

“Friend White, I observe a certain air of perturbation and unrest, as it were,” said Thompson, drawing off his gloves. The natives seem to have hay on their horns. Is there any special devilment on hand? Lots of good people are reeking with animosity. Why so hostile?”

*All Story*  
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