

Wildcat Represents

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RHODES

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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 to 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 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 his 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 Canyon 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 officeholders, who held unquestioned sway for thirty years. His bitter sarcasm 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 was 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 Pas-

cadero, 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 any one 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 headway 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 *pelones* 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 acute lead-poisoning, the wounds being invariably made by .45-120-480 bullet that just fitted Pablo's 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 in two bitterly contending factions, 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 Yturvide, 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 bedevilment on hand? Lots of good people are reeking with animosity. Why so hostile?"

I indicated the hovering waiter to him, and then when that functionary had retired, laid the situation before him.

"And Hurley's just engaged to your chum Elsie," I concluded. "Steve, we must buy a stack and sit in."

Steve dropped his napkin, groped for it under the table, and emerged wearing his best poker face.

"What's the defense, Foamy?" he asked. "Can't he prove an alibi or something?"

In my eagerness I had dwelt more on my fears of a mob-rising than on the evidence. This I recounted.

"They were good and careful to make no war talk till after Joe left. And some that didn't want a lynching went home and crawled under the bed, setting an absurdly high value on their lives. Only for Pablo Wiggins, the snake-charmer, the pot would have boiled over before. D'ye reckon you and me and him can stand 'em off now?"

"Snake-charmer?" questioned Steve. "How's that?"

So I told him about Pablo's abilities in that line. To my consternation, this seemed to distract his attention entirely from Hurley's plight.

"You don't mean to tell me that he catches and handles live rattlers?" he said. "I'm from Show-me City, Missouri. Funny I never heard about it till this very now. Say, I see him standing on the corner, didn't mean no harm, in front of the Gadsden Purchase, as I came by. I'm goin' to make a drag for him. Let's organize him and sublet him to parties afflicted with D. T."

And he arose and reached for his sombrero.

As we went up the street to the Gadsden Purchase I kept up a running fire of remonstrance, but Steve had his mind set on investigating the snake-charming industry forthwith.

At the Gadsden Purchase Searchlight was vehemently haranguing a crowd around the bar.

"Motive?" he said loudly, darting a nasty glance at Steve as we threaded our way through the jam. "Motive enough. Hadn't that gray-eyed Brandon girl been playing him against Lyons, and Lyons against him, for a year? The chances are that the tenderfoot got wise to some double-dealing, and him bein' scairt to tackle Johnnie like a man, why, he waylays him and shoots him in the back like a dog. Now he thinks his money'll buy him out. Hangin's too good for him, I say! Here's bad cess to him. Drink hearty!"

I got my back to the wall at this, thinking Steve would not stand for the slur on Elsie Brandon. It was she who had taken him in hand and semi-civilized him until, indeed, I had sometimes fancied that he felt more than mere friendly admiration for her. But now he gave the group a careless nod and passed on to where Pablo was bucking the monte game.

I overtook him and put my hand on his shoulder.

"Why, Steve," I said, "you surely ain't going to leave old Hurley up against it like this, are you? I thought you'd throw in with me for the little chum's sake, if not for Danny's and mine. She's been mighty good to you. Why, when I saw you coming I thought God Almighty 'd taken a hand sure. You ain't going to cut out from us in a tight, are you?"

Wildcat turned an expressionless, uninterested face to me.

"Gawd," he repeated. "If Gawd's got any interests in Las Uvas, he'd better represent."

Amazed, indignant, stunned, I went out the side door, slamming it behind me in an agony of disappointment, disgust and despair.

I had leaned upon a broken reed, and it had pierced my hand.

Steve had failed me. Whom could I ever trust again after that?

CHAPTER II

SNAKES

AS the afternoon wore on Las Uvas resumed its normal aspect of slumberous calm.

I began to hope that the agitation had ended in talk. Steve and Pablo were nowhere to be seen, so I went to the jail to consult with Hurley, but was refused admission. My intention had been to ask him if he didn't think it well for me to go to the Bar Cross round-up, up the river, and get some of the Dundee peelers to come down and night-herd the jail.

But apparently the hotheads had subsided, and, anyway, I reasoned, if they should make a break it would most likely be that night, and the

* A cow-man is said to "represent" when he sends a hand to a round-up given by another outfit.

reinforcements could not arrive in time; moreover, it seemed probable that Las Uvas had expended too much enthusiasm on the gabfest to have any left for a lynching-bee.

But when, at supper, I received a pressing invitation to a social function, my alarm went to ninety in the shade. I had learned with pain to fear the Greeks bearing gifts. Such unwonted cordiality seemed portentously like a device to get me out of the way.

I left my meal and hurried down to the jail. In the deep shadows of the giant cottonwoods bordering the plaza I ran plump into a crowd of men silently waiting for me. In a moment I was seized, manhandled, disarmed. Then they let me up, and I felt a chilly circle pressing just behind my ear.

"Be plenty quiet, you!" remarked the man behind the gun.

I was.

"Lead him out into the starlight, two of you boys, and let's see who he is."

They came out, a hundred or more grim forms, all masked. I would have spoken, but the man holding my arm struck me in the face.

"Oh, it's you, is it? I thought so. Bring him along, you two. If he cheeps, put out his light. Where's the rope? All right. Quiet, now!"

Stealthily, we filed across the plaza and collected in the shadow of the courthouse. My face was bleeding profusely where I had been struck, my heart pounding at my ribs. Overhead, a mocking-bird sang the song of life insistently, clear, full-throated, exultant. And Danny, yonder, listening, dreaming.

At the corner next the jail they halted, perplexed and apprehensive. From the upper story of the courthouse a light streamed down upon the narrow pathway leading to the

jail. The men paused, dubious, whispering.

Something dropped quietly from nowhere at all into the lighted semi-circle -- a whip, apparently. It squirmed and coiled. B-z-z-z-z-z! B-z-z-z-z!

The blood-curdling castanet thrilled through a ghastly silence. The lynchers huddled together, wavering and breathless. My heart chilled with unreasoning terror; the hair prickled on my head.

Another dropped close to us. B-z-z-z-z-z-z-z! B-z-z-z-z-z!

For a moment we gazed in fearful fascination, with chattering teeth and clutching hands; then altogether the crowd recoiled, collided, and turned.

Down from the darkness of the jail-roof a voice floated casually, calm and gentle—the voice of Wildcat Thompson!

"Let me hasten to reassure you, gentlemen. Far be it from me to shake your faith in the efficiency of the Keeley Cure. This is not a relapse, but the real thing, the common or garden rattlesnake; *Crotalus Horribilus*, as Frank John says the bug-sharps call them; *viveros* in paisano talk.

"We've got 'em planted copious, all over the grounds; staked with baling-wire by my esteemed amigo Pablo, the great and only. Our idea was to induce you to come out in the light, so we can see to shoot you. I've got a Winchester Express, with nice expanding bullets; Danny has a sawed-off ten-gage, nine buckshot to a shell; and Pablo's got snakes—just snakes. Who'll be the first? I pause for a reply.

"Oh, yes, another thing. If you go up in the courthouse you will command our position. That will occur to you presently. It did to me. So it is only fair to tell you that there

is a fifty-pound box of dynamite behind that lamp.

"Now, you are all justly proud of your new courthouse. It cost thirty-five thousand dollars, and is worth fifteen thousand anyhow. If I should fire into that box a few times I am convinced that it would occasion much chagrin to any taxpayers who chanced to occupy the building at the time.

"I have said, *concuidados*. The lynching is hereby adjourned. You lynch any one? You? Why, you cowardly, sneaking, backbiting, white-livered, night-loving, sauff-dipping, dram-drinking, bribe-taking, jury-packing, corpse-robbing, liver-lipped, aforesaid *ghouls!*"

He paused for breath.

"Damn it, don't be so obtuse. Can't you take a hint? Go home! Hand 'em out a few, Pablo!"

A snake came sailing through the night and wrapped neatly around the neck of the man on my right. I have always thought that was how he came to let me go. He pawed wildly at his head as he ran, screeching like a quartet of panthers. I think he was scared.

Bullets went whistling over our heads most neighborly. Flesh and blood couldn't stand it.

The mob executed a retrograde movement, cursing, sobbing, screaming, yelling, but unanimous. Such complete harmony of purpose is rarely seen. Withal, there was no formality. Those that didn't hit the gate went through the fence; and those that stumbled or were knocked down were trampled underfoot.

In the confusion I got away and ran to the north side of the plaza.

"Steve! Oh, Steve!" I shouted. "What shall I do? It's me, Foamy White. Shall I come to you?"

"Um—no—not unless you've got a pair of stilts, I wouldn't," said Steve. "You'd better pull your

freight up to the Bar Cross wagon and tell the boys, 'Help!' I need it! They're up beyond Tonoco, somewhere on the flat. These whipped curs are liable to be troublesome at long-range target practise 'bout daylight.

"All right," I yelled; "I'll be back before then."

And I lit out, got a horse from a Mexican friend nearby, and in five minutes had started. Scattering shots told that the siege of the jail had begun, but above the uproar I heard Steve chanting in gay defiance:

"Ada! Ada! Open that do'!

This mawnin'!

Ada! Ada! Open that do'!

I'll open it with a fohty-fo'!

This mawnin'!"

I rode hard, but the campfire at the wagon had died down, and it was nearly one before I found it. I woke Cole and told him the essentials. Every one had a night-horse staked and saddled, and there was no delay.

John Yeast, being a family man, was left in charge, with the four men on guard and the day-herders.

The stray men selected were Ross, of Hermosa; Calhoun, for Cuchillo Negro; Bojarquez and "Pink" Murray, of the John Cross outfit; Lon Roberts, of the Bar W, and Bert Mossman, of the Bar A, Bar. The Dundee men were seven—Cole, Dallas, Frank Hill, Hiram Yoast and Summerford, of the Bar Cross, with Martin and Foster, of the 7 T X—thirteen resolute and competent men.

There were not guns enough at the wagon for all, but we stopped at Summerford's shack and got enough to fill out.

At four we clattered through Doña Inez, and as dawn streaked the east with violet and gold turned into the Alameda and heard the distant popping of rifles at the jail. We

thundered along, shouting: "Bonnie Dundee."

The Las Uvas men did not wait for our arrival, but Wildcat and Pablo met us where the courthouse gate had been. Pablo wore a grin that stuck out on both sides of his mouth like a mustache, but Steve's face, in the gray dawn, was haggard.

"Good mawnin'!" said Summerford. "We heah yuh've done quit the Bar Cross for a now outfit?"

"Why, no, I haven't. Who told you so?"

"Foamy, heah. He allowed yuh was now representin' for the Old Man." And he jerked a thumb skyward.

"Oh!" Wildcat flushed. "Not exactly. But He didn't have no one here, and I thought it would be neighborly to help Him out some."

"Can you give us the latest quotations on snakes?" inquired Cole casually, leaning over on his horse's neck.

Pablo giggled.

"I had all the *muchachos* in town lookin' for 'em with forked sticks yesterday evenin'," he said. "Mister Steve, he paid 'em two dollars a snake and a dollar apiece on the side whether they found any or not."

"Snakes is up," said Hiram.

"Oh, my money don't cost me anything—I work for it," explained Steve. "I didn't get but six, anyway. That was all a bluff about havin' the plaza stocked up with 'em."

"Let's all go in and see Danny," I said.

"Hello, Foamy; that you? Feeling any better? Danny? Oh, he's gone. Turned him loose last night at dark and hit him with the bridle-reins. Gone. I was lyin' for the moral effect of it about him bein' here with a shotgun."

"Why, you old fool, you," said Tom Ross, "do you mean to tell me

you've woke me up out of my nice warm bed to come down here to protect a man that's done got into Old Mexico?"

Steve wiggled an admonitory finger at him. "Sh-h; there's a hen on. I wanted Dan to get a good start. That's one. And I wanted to show these damned yelpin' coyotes they don't lynch nothing. That's two. And if I should get the man that really killed poor Johnny, you all bein' here will make the *gente* more docile and biddable-like. Besides——"

"Steve's onto his job," I interrupted. "I follow him blind from now on. But why didn't you let me take potluck with you?"

"If we'd stayed together the surprise-party would have been spoiled," said Steve. "They'd have smelled a mouse. And I wanted the boys down here for today. I may want to use them."

"Bah Jove, Mister Tawmpson!" said Sum, "yuh suhtenly air a wondeh. Let's go ordah breakfas'. I feel keen-set. Get up behin' me, suh. My hawse is plumb gentle."

"Jump up, Pablo," said I.

We paraded that humble village with fine insolence. This time we sang "Bonnie Dundee" clear through, with unseemly variation, and there were none to molest or make us afraid.

The landlord of the Yturbide was white-faced and nervous, and I noticed that he fought mighty shy of Pablo. That gave me an idea. He was an unusually large man, so had been the man who had mashed my face in the plaza. There was a long limber quirt on Bob Martin's saddle, and I slipped it in when the landlord wasn't looking. I watched my chance and sort of tossed it round his neck from behind. He lit in the middle of the table, yelling right

earnestly. I don't see what made him do that.

Summerford pulled him off and silently, solemnly kicked him over to Cal. Then we took turns till we kicked him out the front door. Sum rang the bell and ordered new dishes.

By the time we had finished breakfast a number of citizens had gathered in front of the hotel, where our horses were standing.

"Well, Thompson," said Cole, "here's the outfit. Which way do we make a drive?"

"Guess we'll go round to the stable and put the horses up. No, hold up; here comes José."

It was indeed the sheriff coming up the street in company with the district attorney, Brown, J. P., Searchlight, and several others.

Joe walked up to Steve and held out his hand.

"Mr. Thompson," he said earnestly, "you have done me a great service, and I thank you for it. I never dreamed of an attempt at lynching. I got back as far as Doña Inez, and heard the boys when they came through, and so I came on down." He looked around at the rest of us. "I know you are all sensible men, and will take pains not to provoke a collision. May I ask you, as a favor, not to drink any on this trip?"

"Sure," said Cole. "I never did care to smoke in a powder-house."

The sheriff tangled his hand in the mane of Cal's horse and looked up at Steve, laughing. "Say, Wildcat, can't I get your *brujo* to round up your rattlesnakes? The women-folks are all having hysterics."

"Sure we'll round 'em up. There wasn't so many. Pablo'll take 'em 'way back on the sand hills and turn 'em loose on parole. It wouldn't be just right to kill 'em—would it, now?"

"By George! I plumb forgot your

jailer, Silvester, what's-his-name. He's hog-tied and gagged in number six. Here's your keys. Say, José, that's a plumb good man, that jailer. He'll do to take along. He fought Pablo and me like a tiger. Wish now I'd trusted him, but I didn't know, and, of course, it wouldn't do after he got his mad up. Tell him I'm sorry, will you?"

"Hurley owes you a heavy debt," observed the sheriff dryly. "Where is he?"

"Hurley?" said Steve casually. "Oh, him? Why, he's in Mexico, I guess."

The sheriff flushed and drew back.

"You let him run away?" he queried sharply.

"Run away! I had to drive him away. He didn't want to go a little bit. Felt hurt because I wouldn't let him stay for the lynchin'."

The sheriff spoke gravely. "Steve, I know you too well to doubt that you had good reasons, but this is a serious matter. You surely know that it is my duty to arrest you—my sworn duty."

"Why, sure, sheriff," assented Steve cordially. "That's all right. You go on and do your duty. It's what I expect. Me, I'm goin' to disperse to my several places of abode. Adíós, all!"

He lifted his reins and rode slowly up the street.

José's voice rang out in no uncertain tones. "I call on all good citizens to help me arrest that man!"

It was Lon that showed us the way out. He spurred up, drawing his six-shooter. "You, Thompson! Halt! Halt, I say!" And he fired twice—into the barber-pole. We followed suit, peppering the barber-pole and hay-scales impartially.

It was like a dream. Wildcat rode on at a snail's pace, and we followed him at the same sedate and solemn gait, spreading out as we rode,

gravely abjuring him between volleys to surrender.

Ikey Lowenstein, dealer in bad clothes and good money, had been regarding us curiously down the street. He went in the store to see about something, leaving his hat. We concentrated our fire on that, and in seconds even Ikey would have sold it at cost.

A shot came from behind us.

Wildcat's hat sprang from his head, spun round and fell. Dundee whirled as one man. Behind us a dozen townsmen were madly struggling to disarm the one who had fired, lest a worse thing befall them.

Wildcat rode easily back to us, his hands high above his head, the sunlight in his sunny hair. I stared, but this time I did not doubt.

"All right, Joe—I give up," he said pleasantly to the puzzled sheriff. "Reckon I can give bail?"

"I guess so. Come into Judge Brown's and we'll fix it up. Oh, put down your hands, you silly donkey!"

"You boys had better not take a snooze yet," said Steve. "Put up the horses and sort of keep your eye on the indicator. Cole, you and Foamy come with us. You come, too, Bert." This last to Bert Spring, his hereditary foe.

We followed silently.

CHAPTER III

WILD JUSTICE

IN the office, Wildcat seated himself on a table, clasped his hands over his knee, and surveyed us amiably.

"Your deal, Thompson," said Joe, when the silence became awkward, "I judge you have something up your sleeve."

Steve answered dreamily.

"Poor old Johnny! I knew him when he first came here from Canada and hadn't got out his civilization papers yet. Don't know exact-

ly where he did come from—'way up somewheres so far North the sun never went down till after dark.

"I remember once him and me were in Tombstone together and he got into a fuss. There was a low-down skunk there—a Las Uvas man—and he makes a blackguard talk about a girl—a Las Uvas girl. He'd tried to marry her and she wouldn't have him. Johnny knew the girl, so he slugs this liar up against the wall. He goes down after his gun, and Johnny beats him to it. Say, he just natcher'ly pounds this feller's head nearly off before we pulled them apart."

During this recital Benard, the district attorney, had been quite fidgety. He was a nice little four-eyed man from down East who wore flannels and played lawn-tennis. He represented us in the Legislature—about as accurately as a Maltese kitten would represent a den of mountain lions. He spoke up some snappish.

"Did we come in here to swap stories, Mr. Thompson, or to make out a bond for you?"

Wildcat cocked a contemplative eye on him. There was a compelling note in his voice.

"Neither, Mr. Benard. This is a court of last resort, from whose decision there will be no appeal, sitting to hear the evidence against the man who treacherously murdered John Lyons—and tried to get Dan Hurley lynched for it.

"Don't crowd the mourners; that's only the preamble. Hasn't it ever occurred to you that there are men in the valley whose character would fit that kind of a murder much better than Hurley's? I admit that Hurley took the road to his home yesterday instead of one that led to somewheres where he didn't want to go; but that by itself ain't conclusive evidence of his guilt; he often

travels that road. If he had really killed Lyons, he wouldn't 've ridden on through that lane to advertise himself as the murderer. Would you?

"That he did go on is the strongest evidence of his innocence. If you had done the killin' you would've lit out presto and let suspicion fall on some one else. That is just what the murderer did. And Danny is the one on whom suspicion fell—or was thrown.

"Is he to be hung because he had a forty-five? I've got one; why not exhibit me? You'll find my maunders have a purpose. I am presenting the evidence that it's your business to hunt up. See that you give it attention. It will be a plain case. Like Columbia's celebrated stunts with the egg and the New World, it's easy after some one shows you how.

"You all keep it in your mind that this man slandered the girl and had a score against Johnny. Think of him as Mr. X for the present. I'll write his name on this piece of paper, fold it, and give it to Mr. Brown.

"Yesterday a certain person took the trouble to explain exactly the reasons Danny had for killin' Lyons. He insinuated things against Dan's promised wife. Curiously enough, this was the same girl the Arizona man had slandered. Foamy heard this har lie, over in the Gadsden. Write down the har's name, Foamy."

I obeyed, a great light breaking upon me. We hung on his words with breathless interest now, swept on by the intensity of his resolute purpose. Yet his next remark seemed an irrelevant digression.

"The cattle business is curious. There's a deal of branding of mavericks that ain't mavericks, being no more than long-ear ten-months-olds. But some of the boys is that illiter-

ate 'twould surprise you what they overlook in the way 'o misstatements jotted down on a heifer's west side. And a company waddy mostly tells his Rod about any literary lapses that-a-way, mebbe, in cases where an absent-minded party cools off his iron on his neighbor's stuff too frequent.

"Then the foreman uses his judgment about reportin' the incident to the ex-owner. If he does, mebbe the injuree makes a rough-house; mebbe he lets it go to square off for one he stole yesterday or two he aims to get tomorrow."

"But really, Mr. Thompson," protested Benard, "this is most unusual and unprecedented. You are a prisoner, and you say you want bail. This is no time to discuss the habits and customs of cow-men. Their vagaries may be interesting—to those who like that sort of thing—but this is scarcely the time and place for such a lecture. I have an appointment at nine, and my time is valuable."

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Benard," responded Wildcat genially; "just sit still."

Still talking, he walked over and stopped the clock, Benard regarding him in stupefied fascination.

"All this bears on the case of *The People versus John Doe*. Just keep your shirt on. You've been promoted from district attorney to one of the people, and, as you're not used to it, all this is for your special instruction and benefit. It's important that you should know how the cattlemen feel about the cow-stealing business. You've been driving the harrow; I want you to know how it looks to the toad.

"The point I want to make clear to the jury is this: that the waddies ain't special shocked by plain un-ornamental cow-stealing, with no frills attached, but when an old-

timer registers a squeal there must have been extra-coarse work, or else some personal feeling.

"My idea is that Johnny came to Las Uvas for some such reason, 'stead of going to Danton.

"Speaking of cow-stealing, José, you was called away yesterday to look into the killin' of one of Old Man Kerr's critters, wasn't you, in the hills where the trail goes from Broad Canyon to Danton?"

"Tally, both times," said the sheriff. "You must have killed it yourself, or else you're a good guesser. I didn't tell you, and my informant insisted on secrecy."

"Neither one. I just sort of felt it. Now, the next thing is to find out who had it in for Old Man Kerr. Cole, did any of your bog-pullers or bosque men mention that some one had been putting decorations on Kerr's calves other than K E R, under half-crop and left, sharp the right?"

"Yes; Sum and Hiram both told me they judged the old man was changing his brand."

Steve pushed the paper over to him. "Give Mr. Brown the name of Mr. Kerr's silent partner.

"Now, *caballeros del jurado*, we have a definite starting-point. Some one had been stealing K E R calves in Greenhorn Bosque; some one killed a K E R yearlin' day before yesterday, on the trail Johnny Lyons was taking, and about the time he was due there.

"Most likely the man who plucked the mavericks also gathered the beef. That's reasonable. Most any one would turn a cow for Old Man Kerr. No one ever bothered his stock till this man got to working on it lately. But after killing the beef he left it——"

"Partly skinned," interrupted the sheriff.

"Just so. Seen somebody, likely.

Cowboys is awful superstitious that-a-way. They go out for meat; see some one on the sky line, think it's a sign of bad luck, and just do up their ropes and go back. They are so set in their habits. Why, I've known men who could skin beef like an artist by starlight, but by day used a skinnin'-knife like an ax.

"There are two ways of thinkin' and shootin' revolvers. One is hand-to-hip, click-click-bang. You don't aim nor nothin', but your bullet or your thought goes home as easy and certain as a carrier-pigeon. And you can't tell anybody how to do it. Either you can or you can't, that's all.

"The other way is slower, and mebbe surer. You look at the thermometer, get the distance by triangulation, allow for windage, altitude, and the number of drinks under your belt, hold your breath, take a long sight, and let go. That's the army style of shooting, the logical style of thinking, and it's mighty good. I've seen some dead-center bull's-eyes done that way. Me, I like snap-shootin'.

"When Foamy first told me about Johnny cashin' in, I suspects Mr. X, wunst of Arizony, right off. I knows all these things I've told you, some more I'm going to tell you, and then some. I thinks of 'em all at once—or, rather, feels 'em, just as you know the sun is shinin' without lookin' at it.

"Now, I'm going to try and tell you how my conclusions about Mr. X arrived at me. Keep in your mind that Lyons and Mr. X was crosswise since Tombstone, and likewise what Frank John calls the shockin' state of the cowboy's immoral on the burnin' question of a man's exclusive ownership of his own property.

"The beef-killer sees Johnny in the middle distance, and he makes a sneak. Johnny comes down, sees the

cow was a K E R, and has a pretty good idee who done it, anyway. He's been workin' Greenhorn Bosque himself, and he's mad 'cause Kerr might suspect him. His heart was bad at the man he misdoubted, anyhow, and he started in here to notify the sheriff.

"Now, I'd stake my life—I have staked my life—on the theory that the beef-killer watched Johnny start, guessed his intentions, outrode him, passed him somewheres out of sight, and waylaid him in the old river-bed. He saw the meeting with Hurley. If he had any grudge against Hurley—if, for instance, Hurley was going to marry the girl he couldn't get himself—then that meetin' decided him to kill Johnny. Here was a chance to kill one enemy and get another hanged for it.

"After the murder, his nerve failed him. The facts were so plain to him that he felt sure Hurley's trial would bring the crime to light. Then came the talk of lynchin'. If Hurley was mobbed, it would be less exertion for the public mind to assume that he was guilty. Investigation would be stopped.

"But the sheriff of Dofia Inez was known to be hard to shoe behind. He must be got out of the way. If the murderer gave information about the yearlin' layin' half skinned where he left it he would have a clear field for a lynchin', and it would account for his presence in town. If he said nothing, the yearlin' would be found, he would be suspected of killin' it, and then it was but a step to connecting him with killin' Johnny.

"José Benavides, we want the name of the man who put you onto the beef case. I didn't. It wasn't Old Man Kerr—he's in bed with the exclamatory rheumatism, and his two boys are at the Danton work. Write down his name."

Steve turned to Bert Spring.

"Bert," he said, "you are my enemy. But I believe you're an honest man—thick-headed, narrow, prejudiced, easily led—but for all that a man that wants to do right. Who egged on and led that mob last night?"

"I'll write you his name," said Bert. "But—I—Mr. Thompson—I have misjudged you all along. Can't we bury the hatchet?" Steve rung his hand, their eyes met frankly, and an old feud was ended.

"One more point," resumed Steve. "My last play didn't turn out according to specifications. I didn't want to get shot none—my life ain't insured. I figured out that no one would risk bringin' on a general battle without some powerful motive. But if Mr. X, the beef-killer, Johnny's murderer, and the man who led last night's entertainment, were one and the same, then he might try to square accounts with me while the law was on his side for a minute.

"So, I thought I'd let him have a chance to give himself away. Of course, I didn't suppose the Dundee boys would let him actually shoot at me. I never dreamed they would be so prompt to uphold the law. Why, I was really in danger. Suppose one of their bullets had glanced?

"And I didn't think Joe would shoot me—duty or no duty—me ridin' slow and meditative that-a-way. But—some one shot my hat off. I don't think it was you boys. Did you see who it was, Mr. Benard?"

The district attorney wrote and folded the paper with hands that trembled.

Wildcat shoved it over to Mr. Brown. "Shuffle and deal, judge. Face up. The money is all in. Bob-tails are no good in a show-down. The cards must all be green to win." Silence.

"I find," said the judge, with grave deliberation, "that on each of these slips is written the same name, that of——"

He paused. With a sigh of relief five men completed his sentence—"Searchlight Wilson!"

The sheriff roused up.

"Make out the warrant, judge, and we'll all swear to it. Mr. Thompson, allow me to congratulate you."

When the general hand-shaking was over, Steve spoke up again.

"Will you let me serve that warrant, Joe? You folks are all satisfied that this man is guilty of murder most foul. But if I step over there where Wilson is drinkin' and braggin' how he made Steve Thompson weaken, and if I just mention, casual-like, to nobody in particular, 'I arrest you for the murder of John Lyons,' then what happens?"

"There's fifty men there, say. Forty-nine of them don't do nothin'; one of them pulls his gun. That's his dyin' confession, signed and sealed by his guilty and unsleeping conscience. We can give out part of the facts, but Miss Brandon's name needn't appear, and won't be banded about by all the foul-mouthed blackguards in the county."

Benard rose indignantly. "Really, this is too much. This passes all bounds. My dear sir, do you realize that you are proposing to six citizens, including three officials sworn to enforce the law, to become your accomplices, accessory before the fact to a foreplanned murder?"

"Mr. Benard, suppose your wife were in Miss Brandon's place?"

"If you take the law into your own hands," the other broke in, "how are you any better than the lynchers? As to Miss Brandon, it is very unfortunate. We may be able to convict Wilson without bringing in her name. And at any rate, if I

understand you correctly, she is to marry Hurley, and not you?"

Wildcat's eyes narrowed to pinpoints. He reached out a sinewy hand, jerked Benard to him, twined his fingers in the legal coat-lapels, and began shaking him.

"Your understanding is all right, Mr. Benard. Discretion is what you lack mostly. Can you see no difference between a hundred masked cowards going in the dark to mob one man, locked up and unarmed"—a shake for emphasis—"and one armed man going in broad day to arrest another armed man in a crowd of his friends and backers?"

Here he batted the legislator's head against the wall to assist his mental vision. "If he don't resist, there'll be no shooting; if he does, there'll be no murder. Can't you see that Wilson is a desperate man and will resist arrest in any case? All I propose is to arrange it so that his resistance will be an open and palpable confession that no one will question. I will not have Elsie Brandon's name dragged through the mud. Even if you was to catch Wilson napping and get him without a fight, he is vile enough to get up and swear her good name away for revenge.

"To prevent that, it will be necessary for some one to shoot him in open court and be subsequently hanged, which might be inconvenient. The question is, are you going to voluntarily help me to protect a pure and innocent girl, or am I going to have to use violence on you?"

And he jammed the luckless official down in a chair.

Benard caught his breath. To his lasting credit be it recorded, that he forgot his ruffled dignity in view of the greater issues involved, and there has been a warm spot in my heart for the little man ever since.

No, he was not influenced by Wildcat's threatened violence. I have seen a good many men scared. Benard was not scared. He was awakened from a lifelong dream to realize that hard-and-fast rules do not cover all the contingencies of life.

"I was wrong," he said. "It has been long agreed that there are worse evils than death. You have shown me that there are things infinitely worse than the takings of life. I agree to this man's death, and will share the responsibility with you, here or hereafter!"

"Steve," said Cole softly, "hadn't you better let me and the sheriff go over there with you? I understand, all right, that it has come to a showdown between you and Wilson, but we'd better hold herd for you."

Wildcat grinned. "They won't forget that Bonnie Dundee is to reckon with. That's why I sent Foamy to bring them. No friend of mine will interfere. This is the Judgment of Battle. You all needn't look so solemn. This is not my day for dying. So I won't say 'Good-by,' only 'Excuse me one moment.'"

As he went out in the hallway Benard, the mild, refined, and polished, went into the adjoining room, opened a drawer, took from a dainty box a most elegant pearl-handled

gun, and thrust it into his coat. All of which contrary to the statute made and provided and the peace and dignity of the Territory.

In that brief interval his civilization had fallen from him as a garment. It was a primitive man, fierce-eyed and gray-faced, that joined us at the window—a Borderer, eager, confident, unhesitant, who watched his leader go to doubtful combat, ready alike to cheer his victory or to avenge his fall. Benard was no longer an alien.

Steve crossed over to the Gadsden Purchase and stepped in. There was a confused murmur, followed by a silence through which we heard the beating of our own hearts. Then Steve's voice floated to us, clear, serene, and unhurried.

Two shots rang out together.

A pane shivered in the door and fell tinkling to the sidewalk.

Then Wildcat Thompson stood framed in the doorway, calm, inscrutable, his back turned contemptuously to the foes behind him. He put up his gun deliberately and let the door swing to, still not turning his head. He looked up at the sun under his open palm, saw us standing at the window, and called to me:

"Start the clock, Foamy! The case is closed!"

