



CHAPTER V—Continued

St. Marie did not answer; he had retreated into the stolidity possible to his darker forbears.

Kentucky, stepping to the edge of the bunk, smoothly lifted the six-gun from St. Marie's side and tossed it into another bunk. The music stopped short.

Kentucky said, "Now—you—talk!" Joe St. Marie slid his high heels under him, bunched himself as if he were going to start his music again; then the harmonica dropped to the floor as he uncuffed and sprang.

Kentucky dropped into a crouch and laced out with a long upcutting wallop. Two seconds later St. Marie was on his back between the stove and the wall, while Kentucky held him down with a knee on the bronc rider's chest. "Now you be good," he said. "By G—d, you fool with me, I'll snap you like a whip!"

St. Marie made a desperate effort to



St. Marie Made a Desperate Effort to Rise.

rise. "Jones, there's somebody coming!" "I don't care if there's a regiment coming. You're going to sit quiet and pretty until we talk this over."

"Then take my gun! Take my gun yourself," Joe St. Marie urged him. "You want to die?" The honest fear in Joe St. Marie was not for Kentucky, he now recognized; undoubtedly it was for the approach beyond the door. "All right," said Kentucky disgustedly. He left the bronc rider, recovered St. Marie's gun, and stuck it negligently in his waistband. There was a low tapping at the door.

"Come in!" The door opened quickly, but not wide, and Jean Ragland slid in. She shut the door and leaned against it, her hands behind her upon the latch. She wore no coat. "What's the matter here?" she demanded.

"Joe and I were wrestling," said Kentucky. "What's broke loose, Miss Ragland?" "Nothing's broke loose." Her blue eyes looked almost black, but the yellow lamp light turned her hair into a glowing smolder, as if there were fire in it. "All right, Joe—I can't stay here forever; what happened tonight?"

Joe St. Marie dropped his eyes and swayed from side to side like a steer belted by a fence. "Aw, Miss Ragland—"

"Come out with it now!" Joe St. Marie squirmed. "You wouldn't believe—"

"Never mind that." "I see a ghost! Miss Ragland, I swear to heaven, I seen the ghost of John Mason, as plain as I see you stand there now!"

The girl was silent a moment, astounded by St. Marie's idiotic answer. "For heaven's sake, Joe, pull yourself together! If some rider has been into this layout I want to know—"

"Miss Ragland," St. Marie insisted, "I've got good eyes. I don't forget. You think I don't remember how Old Ironsides used to set, half crooked in the saddle with his shoulders hunched—'you think I wouldn't know him out of a thousand men—'"

It was Jean Ragland that Kentucky Jones was watching; and now he saw that comprehension had come to her. She seemed to stiffen, and her eyes looked even darker than before.

"I saw it twice," Joe St. Marie was rushing on now. "The first time sitting out there on the hump; and again when I went out to feed my horse, farther out, going down the trail. I fired at it—and it disappeared."

"All right, Joe. Was that all you saw?" "Good G—d, Miss Ragland, wasn't that enough?"

Jean Ragland drew a deep unsteady

breath. "Yes—I expect it was. You'd better keep this to yourself, Joe, if you know what's good for you." She added, "Both of you." She sent Kentucky Jones a glance that might have been an appeal; then suddenly turned and let herself out the door. Kentucky Jones hesitated and opened his mouth to ask Joe St. Marie a question; then, changing his mind, he followed her.

At the sound of the door Jean turned and waited; he fell in beside her and walked with her to the house. "Miss Ragland," he said, "who, besides yourself, knows what Joe St. Marie saw tonight?"

She turned on him quickly. "Listen," she said. "Listen. I've got to tell you this: When I—when I gave you that bullet—I swear I didn't know you had been here the day—the day Mason was killed. If I'd thought there was the least chance of your getting bogged down in this thing—"

"Am I bogged down?" "Can't you see what Floyd Hopper means to do? Right or wrong—he'll see somebody roped. And that means more than just the sheriff against—the man he picks. All Wolf Bench will rise up to back the sheriff's play, without justice, without mercy—"

"We won't worry about that, just yet." "But I tell you, Kentucky, if I'd only known—Is it true that he can show you had a reason to kill Mason?" He considered. "Yes," he said. "What can I say?" Her whisper came to him brokenly. "What can I say?"

"How did you first know that Mason was murdered?" he asked. "She said in a smothered voice, 'I can't tell you now.' 'Did you know that Zack Sanders was dead?'"

"No! I didn't know! I never guessed—"

"Then—"

"Don't! Don't ask me any more. I can't—I can't—"

"Child," he said gently, "you don't need to tell me anything you don't feel like telling me, now or any other time. If there's anything I can do to make things go any easier for you, I want to do it. And I don't blame you for wishing I was out of this. But—"

"No," she said in a small voice, "no, I want you to stay here."

He said to himself, "Good Lord, she means to use me yet!" Aloud he said, "Then that's all right."

She spoke with difficulty. "This—is the meanest thing I ever did in my life!"

"What is?" She did not answer him; but instead she unexpectedly crooked an elbow around his neck, pulled down his head, and kissed his mouth.

When she was gone he stood for a moment or two in the snow, considering. Far off somewhere a timber wolf howled, the first he had heard in half a dozen years.

CHAPTER VI

Had it stood alone, the shooting of Zack Sanders, a crippled ranch cook, might have passed with little notice. But the obvious—and at the same time extremely elusive—connection between the killing of Sanders and the death of John Mason stirred new war talk throughout the length of the rimrock.

Even while it was generally supposed that Mason had died by the accidental discharge of his own gun, the temper of the rimrock cattlemen had been stormy and insecure. Now suddenly they were asked to accept the news that Mason's death had been no accident; that the redoubtable Old Ironsides had been murdered by parties unknown.

Twenty-four hours after Lee Bishop discovered the body of Zack Sanders under the snow, the whole rimrock knew both the discovery and its meaning. Fully as many people swarmed into Waterman for the inquest upon the shooting of Zack Sanders as had gathered for the Mason inquest. But this time the people showed a different mood. The death of Mason had left the cattle people irritable, but dazed and uncertain. The proof of murder turned them ugly. Sheriff Hopper had expected this revelation to arouse a certain amount of criticism and dispute; but he had underestimated the difficulty of his position at least 75 per cent.

And there had sprung up among the cattlemen themselves an even more uncertain situation. The circumstances of Mason's murder had already made

the Bar Hook the focal point of the general disaster. The incredibly prompt and bold decisions of Bob Elliott's threatened 88 now promised to make the Bar Hook the focal point of the sequel. Whatever could be said against Bob Elliott, he was proving now that he could make a decision that popped like a blacksnake whip. The 88's first drive of cattle was already spread all over the middle of the Bar Hook range, cutting heavily into the feed that the Bar Hook Herefords would need long before the spring.

Yet, now, at all times in his career, Campo Ragland chose this to go into what appeared to be a black and hopeless funk.

The boss of the Bar Hook was habitually red-eyed now, and the curve of his forehead was no longer a bland majestic sweep. He looked as if he might at any moment spit red hot pebbles. Campo's unaccountable vacillation was breaking the morale of his riders.

The day after the inquest Kentucky Jones got back from the morning's work before the rest. He found Jean in the kitchen.

Her eye quickened instantly as Kentucky Jones came in. "Are the others back?" "Not yet."

"Come here," she commanded. "I have to talk to you."

"Just a second." He went to the phone and belled the gunsmith at Waterman. Old Mark Ferris, Wolf Bench gunsmith for more than twenty years, knew most of the guns in the Waterman rimrock; and Kentucky had talked to him the day before in an effort to trace the ownership of the gun found in Zack Sanders' hand. It had seemed to him odd that Zack, who owned no gun belt, should have been carrying a gun; and he had been led to wonder if Zack could have been forewarned, and had perhaps borrowed the weapon. If this were true, he wanted to know whose gun Zack had borrowed. Therefore he had set Ferris searching through his records for the serial number of the questioned gun, in the hope that the old gunsmith could recall to whom the gun had been sold.

Presently Mark Ferris' voice came over the wire, querulous and faint. "I can't find any record of that gun," he said. "I don't believe I ever sold that gun, Kentucky."

"You must have sold it," Kentucky insisted. "Look here, Ferris—this is no joke! Look again, will you?" "All right."

Kentucky hung up and went to sit opposite Jean at the table where she was at work. "I suppose by this time," she began, "you have no end of theories about what happened here."

"I used to know an old lion hunter, name of Old Man Coffee," Kentucky told her. "Whenever a killing or something had everybody else bailed up, they used to send for Old Man Coffee. He didn't always unravel the trail; but he seemed to see through a lot of things that fooled other folks. And once I asked him how he did it."

"He said he made things easy for himself by never having a theory—he just kept hunting up facts, and when he had enough to give him the answer, there wasn't any theory about it—he knew. Me, I think Old Man Coffee's way was a good way."

She stopped work and studied him. "I can't make you out," she said at last. "You mean—you have no idea of your own who killed Mason—or Zack Sanders—or why?"

"Child," he said, "how long is it going to be before you tell somebody—anybody—what you know?"

She looked at him suddenly as she answered; and he knew that she lied to him, bravely, and with open eyes. "I haven't the least idea what you mean," she said.

"All right. But I ought to tell you this—if I stay here much longer, I'll know who killed Mason—and why."

"You—you're sure of that?" "The facts I have are very few," he said. "I don't know where they lead. But already I know they lead a clear straight trail. The facts are too distinct and clear to be pointing more than one way. Those two men killed at the same time, but by two different callibers of guns; this house being searched; the fact that the two were killed at almost the same time, but were found lying nearly sixty yards apart—each thing stands out sharp as the slot of a deer in the snow. When those facts are finally fitted together nobody will ever be able to blur them so that there's any doubt."

"If you're going to turn yourself into a spy—" Jean began hotly. She stopped, checked by the steadiness of his regard.

Kentucky Jones said gently, "Who are you shielding, Jean?" She straightened and stood looking out through the clear space in the middle of the frosted pane. Her face was passive, but her head was up with a fine proud carriage, and her hair was smoky flame. "I'm glad it's over with," she said at last. "Sooner or later you were bound to ask that, of course."

"Of course," he repeated. He could not see that there was any sign of faltering in this girl. It was as if she could expect her whole world to come down around her in a rattling avalanche if ever she lost her grip.

She drew a deep unsteady breath. "I—I was trying to talk to you about something else."

"I'm sorry, Jean." She looked at him hard. "It's nearly noon," she said. "In a few minutes the riders will be coming in. Tell me this, Kentucky: If you were boss of the Bar Hook, could you save the brand?"

"I only know one way. It's a way that most men would hesitate to take." "And what is that?" "To feed Elliott his own medicine. It would mean more riders; all of them tough, trouble-hunting men. It would be their job to run those 88 brand cattle back where they came from; and run them again next week, and the week after, and every time they come—run them till their bones rattle, and half of them are muzzled-down in the snow. But if a man thinks he might be squeamish about seeing empty saddles come in—then he might better hesitate some, before he takes that way."

"Would you?" she asked him. "Would you hesitate?" "If it was my brand—no." "Listen." She leaned toward him, her hands on the table. "My father isn't going to fight."

"Not now, you mean?" "Not now, nor later, nor ever."

"Jean," said Kentucky, "is it you that's keeping him from making his fight?"

She hesitated, as if she truly did not know how to answer. "Yes," she said uncertainly at last. Then after a moment she changed it. "No," she said. "I kept Campo out of a fight once; maybe it was a fight that he should have made. But it's out of my hands now, Kentucky."

"You sure don't give me much to go on," Kentucky said. "But I'll say this: if ever he's going to make his fight, now is the time; every day that he puts it off makes it harder in every way. If he puts it off long enough Elliott will have every chance to win."

A look of forlorn desperation came into her face. "If the Bar Hook was in your hands—do you think you could make a fight that would stand Elliott off?"

"Are you trying to sell me the Bar Hook?" "What good would that do? There isn't a cattlemen in the world who



"Are You Trying to Sell Me the Bar Hook?"

would be fool enough to buy the outfit now. But even if we did sell it, that would be almost as bad as to lose it altogether. Campo is rooted too deep in Wolf Bench cattle. If he loses the Bar Hook he'll never amount to anything again. You can't understand that, for you've never taken root. But Campo—I'd almost as soon see him dead."

"Then—"

"Listen," she said intensely. She dropped her elbows to the table, bringing her face nearer his; and her words came tumbling out in an intense whisper. "I own a fifth share of the Bar Hook, in my own name. There's no question of selling the brand. But I could sell you my fifth share. Take it in the form of so many hundred grade steers—you to make the cut; or in any form you want. Would you take it?"

He stilled for time, puzzled. "How much are you asking?" he said. "One dollar," Jean answered. He stared at her. "And a string to it?"

"This: delivery will not be until next spring; and the cut will be based upon the valuation of the cattle on the range at that time."

He rolled a cigarette, considering. "See if I get this straight," he said. "You're offering me your share of the Bar Hook to make the fight that your father won't make—or can't make. Is that it?"

"Yes," she said. She was very pale. "Lee Bishop can't do anything—he's just a hired foreman and can only carry out Campo's orders. But if you own part of the cattle, with winter grazing rights on the Bar Hook range—then you're justified in protecting your own interests, even though Campo doesn't defend his. I don't think Bob Elliott will fight; I think he'll let his cattle drift back to their home range. But first he has to know he's up against a man that will fight him clear into the ground."

Kentucky sat studying the slow blue tendrils of smoke from his cigarette. "The deal won't be questioned," Jean said. "You're known to have enough money to buy into a brand if you want to. And nobody can look at you without knowing that whatever you set your hand to you'll fight through some way—maybe just for the love of fighting, for all I know."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL Lesson

By REV. P. B. FITZWATER, D. D., Member of Faculty, Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, & Western Newspaper Union.

Lesson for July 14

NAOMI

LESSON TEXT—Ruth 1:14-22; 4:14-17.

GOLDEN TEXT—A woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.—Proverbs 31:30. PRIMARY TOPIC—A Happy Family. JUNIOR TOPIC—Making a Happy Home. INTERMEDIATE AND SENIOR TOPIC—Living Our Religion. YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULT TOPIC—Making Religion Attractive.

In teaching this lesson it will be necessary to cover the entire book of Ruth.

I. Naomi's Sojourn in Moab (Ruth 1:1, 2).

On account of famine in the land of Judah, Naomi with her husband and two sons emigrated to the land of Moab. It is strangely inconsistent for a man whose name means "my God is King," who has a wife whose name is "the pleasant one," and who lives in a town which means "house of bread," to sojourn in the enemy's country on account of famine at home.

II. Naomi's Bereavement (Ruth 1:3-5).

After the death of her husband, her two sons married Moabitish women. In a short time, her sons also died. This is a dreary picture—three widows in the same home in a short time.

III. Her Return to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:3-22).

Having heard that the Lord had visited his people in Judah in giving them bread, Naomi decided to return to her home land. After she had experienced chastisement she returned.

1. Ruth accompanies her. When the time came for Naomi to go from Moab, Ruth and Orpah accompanied her for a distance. She frankly placed before them the difficulties which would confront them, and repeatedly urged them to turn back.

a. No chance to marry again. She reminded Ruth and Orpah that she had no more sons for whom they could wait.

b. Their heathen gods must be renounced (v. 15). She made it quite clear to them that idolatry could not be practiced in the land where God's people dwelt.

c. Though Orpah went back, Ruth stood the test. Her mind was fully made up. She was willing to accept as her God the One who was able to produce in his subjects the nobility of character she observed in Naomi.

2. Naomi's reception. Her arrival made a stir in Bethlehem. The people recognized her and perceived a marked change wrought in her. Ten years of such trials would make a noticeable change even outwardly, but the change was mainly inward. She asked that her name be changed to Mara.

IV. Naomi's Gracious and Tactful Behavior (Ruth 2, 3).

1. She remembered her wealthy kinsman (ch. 2). In the case of a forfeited possession, it was incumbent upon the nearest kinsman to redeem it. Boaz was a kinsman. It was necessary for both Naomi and Ruth to have food. Barley harvest afforded that opportunity. The divine provision was made for the poor when the harvest was gathered (Lev. 19:9, 10; 23:22; Deut. 21:19). The matter was talked over between Naomi and Ruth, and arrangement was made for Ruth to glean in the field of Boaz.

2. Naomi seeking rest for Ruth (ch. 3). This rest was to be in the house of a husband. Other things being equal, such is the only real place of rest for a woman. Naomi instructed Ruth as to her toilet preparations so as to be attractive and then also as to presenting her claim upon Boaz to perform the duty of a kinsman in redeeming the forfeited estate because of the sojourn in Moab. The redemption of the estate involved not only the ability to pay the price of the forfeited possession, but also the marrying of the woman.

V. Naomi's Reward (4:14-17).

1. Blessed by the women of Bethlehem (vv. 14, 15). The birth of a son to Ruth was the occasion of this blessing. It meant the perpetuation of the line of kinship, and looked forward to the true Redeemer, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

2. She became the nurse for her grandson (v. 16). This not only provided her with a home and living, but with the opportunity of helping on the purpose of God in the coming redemption.

3. The baby given a name (v. 17). "Obed" means "servant of God." Ruth thus became a link in the ancestral chain of our Kinsman and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. The introduction of the Gentile into this line indicated the outreach of the redemptive purpose of God, which extends to the peoples of the whole world.

Progress A marked characteristic of the progressive man is that he is always improving something somewhere. He has a horror of possible deterioration, and he knows the demoralizing, disintegrating power of familiarity with inferiority.—O. S. M.

Children A child is trained much more by example than precept. Parents should therefore be most careful to act up to what they profess; and to let their actions be a reflex of their words.

TRIBAL TERMS TWISTED

Careful revision of translations of American Indian texts in the Mo-hawk, the Cayuga and the Onondaga languages by J.-N. B. Hewitt ethnologist, has revealed, says the annual report of the bureau of American ethnology, that many historical deductions previously made from these writings are incorrect.

In writings of many historians of the tribes of the Iroquois there is a constant occurrence of the terms

"elder" brothers, tribes, and nations; These phrases, Hewitt points out, have often been employed to show the tribal or racial descent of one Iroquois tribe or people from another. But Hewitt was able to demonstrate that the eldership or juniorship of tribes or nations or political brothers among the Iroquois peoples has quite a different significance, these terms being courteous forms of address of an institutional nature, which bars completely the historical inferences or deductions so frequently made from them.

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