

TIGER EYE

By B. M. Gower



Fourth installment

The kid's name was Bob Reeves, but back home on the Brazos they called him Tiger Eye, because one eye was yellow—the eye with which he sighted down a gun barrel. His other was "Killer." Reeves, but he did not want to kill. If he had his home he would have to carry his father's feud, so he headed for Texas, toward and entered Nate Wheeler, who drew a 45 and fired just as Tiger Eye shot. The kid did not want to kill a man, only to cripple him, but his gun must have been wild, for Wheeler dropped from his horse. Babe Garcer came riding up. Wheeler was a "nester," he said, and had come to tiger. Tiger Eye rode to Wheeler's cabin to notify the dead man's widow.

The kid breaks the news of Nate's death to his widow and then goes out and brings to his body, discovering he had not missed his shot to disable Wheeler but had broken the arm, while another shot had killed the man. A man of strangers rides up. One of them insults Mrs. Wheeler by coupling her name with the stranger. The kid shoots a hole in each of the ears of Pete Gorham, who hurled the insult, making his escape in the confusion.

Learning that the "nester" plan to draw the Poolo riders into a trap, the kid informs Garcer, telling him at the same time he had learned it was the latter's shot that killed

Wheeler and not his own. Garcer is grateful and gets the boy a job riding range for the Poolo outfit. The kid sees a lone rider attack a man and a girl driving in a wagon and wounds the assailant, and then finds out he is Wheeler.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

Old man, all right. Her old puppy shot without a chance in the world to help himself. Didn't even have a gun on him. Old farmer, by the look of him. Flat-headed and little and old man like him.

The kid investigated his head injury. Didn't seem to be any crack in the skull, but still you couldn't fight with an old man like him.

The kid got up and looked in the wagon. A sack of flour was there, and a box of groceries, all jammed together, and a demijohn lying on its side. The kid hoped it held whiskey. He reached a long arm into it. Shout enough—old pappy lifted his eye opener when he got up in the morning, and was talking home a night. The kid caught the eye opener now, holding the old man's head up and tilting the jug to the lady lips plinched in together in the long board. Then he poured a little in his palm and rubbed it on the blue lump in the thin grass hair, and after that he trickled a pungent little stream on the bullet wound, front and back. The man's faded blue eyes opened and he stared vaguely up into the kid's face.

"Reckon you'd frotha' some hot-tail whiskey," the kid said jovially. "Hight smaht crack on the bald, but the whiskey'll keep down the swelling." And when the old eye still questioned, the kid offered further encouragement. "Bullet dug itself a trail in your'lls side, but it ain't deep, no how."

The old man opened his mouth and moved his lip uncertainly, trying to speak. His eyes never left the kid's face.

"Where's Nellie?" The old man was still dazed, but at least he could speak a little more. The kid gave a sigh of relief.

"Why, sah, she—" he turned and looked back toward the hill "she is remainin'. She'll be back directly."

"I don't recollect the old man a little, but he seemed to have only a vague idea of what had taken place. "Team run away," he mumbled. "Thro'out me out. Where's Nellie? She was in the wagon when the team run away."

She came, her long yellow hair pulled forward over her left shoulder. Her face was pale and her mouth drooped at the corners, and her eyes were glazed with terror, but the kid thought she was beautiful and he blushed a dark red as he tipped his hat to her.

"The girl sank on her knees beside the old man. "Pete shot you, didn't he?" "Yes," the kid said. "The horses run away. Guess they thrashed me out. Where was we goin', Nellie? Wasn't we goin' some place?" "We were coming home, Pa." She was kneeling there, looking at the blue lump on her father's head, and from there her staring eyes turned to the bullet wound in his side, which the kid had left uncovered ready for further abrasions of raw whiskeys. "Then you remember when Pete Gorham took in after us, after Nate Wheeler's funeral, and you remember you didn't get your gun back from the bartender before you left town?"

"Pete Gorham! Who's he? I don't remember any—"

The kid's head left its slow stroking of the horse's sweaty jaw. He walked over and stood looking at the kneeling girl, bashful but determined.

"Sense me," he said diffidently, gazing at his hat when she looked up. "Did you see Nate Wheeler's funeral in yaller place yesterday?"

"Why, of course it was—" she checked herself abruptly, one swift, troubled glance going to her father on the ground. "You must be a stranger in the valley if you don't know—" She cast a swift, suddenly wailing glance upward, and then you one of them Poolo rim riders."

"I happened to be up thakin' when Pete Gorham shot you pappy," he said, with slow meaning. "I take it upon myself to stop Pete before he could carry out his plan."

"What? Wasn't you rim rider on the valley?"

"I just happened to be there at the time."

"You're a Poolo rider, ain't you?"

"Poolo! Poolo rider!" The old man scrambled to a sitting posture, his face working furiously as memory came back with a rush. "One of them Texas killers, I betcha! Was it you dry-gulched my son, Ed? Where's my gun? He clawed it right at his hip, where no gun was bothered."

"No, sah, it wasn't me."

The girl gave an involuntary shudder and closed her eyes for a second.

"Even if he's a Poolo rider, Pa, he—did us a big favor," she said, a little color staining her cheeks. "We've got to be grateful for that."

"Are you the fellow that shot Pete in the ears? They were talking about that yesterday at Nate Wheeler's, she caught herself up, biting her lip.

"Nate Wheeler's funeral," the kid finished softly. "Elks," he had the pleasure of exclaiming. "Pete the old evenin'."

"Then you're one of those Texas killers," they said it was a Texas killer done that. Pa, ain't you set to get in the wagon? I can drive, if you can sit and ride."

She was in a hurry to get away from him, even though he had saved her from walk, dance you, the buckshash so the team could be turned around.

He worked swiftly, surely, his capable hands never winking a motion, never uncertain of the thing they should accomplish. The team was restless, wanting to go home, and the kid turned to the girl.

"If you'll would be so accomodatin' as to come home, these horses a minute," he said stiffly. "I'd be shoal pleased to tote you pappy oval and lay him in the wagon."

"If you walk dance you, the old fellow cried pettishly. But he couldn't, except with the help of the kid's arm under his shoulders, as he lifted all the weight of the wobbly old legs.

"We're much obliged," the girl said gratefully, after he had lifted the old man into the wagon. "Even if you are a rim rider for the Poolo, I want to thank you for all you've done."

Then she looked at Pete Gorham, who sat cowering beside a sage-brush, took her front down off the hub, and came over to where the kid stood striking the nose of the horse he was holding by the bridle. "If you don't kill Pete Gorham, he'll kill you," she said in a fierce undertone.

"Reckon I'll be a right smaht while before he's able," the kid did not look at her.

She glanced again toward the undulating murmur of her dad's voice. "You better quit the Poolo and get outta the country," she said hurriedly. "The valley folks'll kill you."

She seemed to think that was saying more than she dared, for she turned sharply away and drove off. He went over to Pete Gorham, lifted him to his feet and faced him toward the valley.

"Go hunt yousef a coyote den and crawl into it," he advised harshly, and started back up the hill, climbing like one in a great hurry.

The kid's lips thinned and straightened when he remembered that girl running for the hill, Pete Gorham after her with his rope. Any other man would have shot to kill. But somehow the thing of killing it was plumb easy to do, but you'd never could not hit the back in a man once you'd shot it out.

Funny about the nesters being wild as Poolo rim riders.

That funeral was another strange thing. They buried Nate Wheeler yesterday, she said. Then what did they want to carry out a coffin and start another funeral for? The kid couldn't see any sense to that.

The kid turned his glance on the new distant wagon and looked for Pete. Might as well make shoah he wasn't trying to trail the girl. No, Pete was going straight across the flat, making a beeline for Becker's corral, as nearly as the kid could judge. Satisfied, he turned his glances again upon the wagon.

"Shoah was a pretty girl," the kid never had seen such yellow hair in his life. What's more, she had that darned stuck-up girl back home that had made fun of his yellow eye. This girl, Nellie, never noticed his eye.

He sighed and gave another sweeping glance at the valley. Shoah was a funny thing about that funeral. Reckon they were just trying to fool him with it, like the girl hinted. Maybe they wanted to go all in a bunch somewhere and couldn't figure out any way to keep from being seen, and maybe they just had a fake funeral to fool any Poolo rim rider that happened to be keeping cases. Plumb foolish. Enlistin' was was to send somebody along over here to bushwhack him. The kid gave a sudden grunt of understanding. The nesters had sent somebody all right. Or they thought they had. They'd sent Pete Gorham. And Pete had kinda got sidetracked, thinking he could kill off that old man and get the girl.

The kid's face darkened at the simplicity of the scheme. Pete had thought he could do and lay it to the Poolo. They'd blame the Poolo, and they'd so running after them

harder than ever. But Pete didn't make it stick. The kid had come along and fixed Pete good and plenty.

There was something in her voice that was like her hair. Something like gold. Of course, you all couldn't say a voice was yellow, or had a shiny sound, but you could kinda imagine it was like gold. That girl down in Texas—her voice was like a tin pan. Funny about voices—they say more than words, sometimes. More than a person wants their voice to say. Here did. Here said she'd shoah hate to have anything happen to a rim rider.

Waiting just in case she might need help or something. Girl like that didn't belong with no nester outfit. She oughta have some big rich cattlemen for a pappy and ride around on a nice, gentle horse.

The wagon finally turned into a shallow depression and was seen no more from the rim. The kid marked the place where she lived; marked it with a special significance in his mind.

Now and then he swept the valley with a perfunctory glance, but most of the time he was staring at the ridge which hid her home. A thin line of cottonwoods ran up along a creek there. There were places here on the tops of the trees showed above the ridge. One place, where the ridge dipped a little, the kid thought he could make out a part of

the roof of a building. Might be rocks, but it shoah did look like a roof.

The kid stirred uneasily and let the glasses drop from his eyes. A long, oddly attenuated shadow was sliding stealthily down the rocks beside him, a big hat and a pair of shoulders growin' longer as he looked. The kid sprang up like a startled deer, his gun in his hand and pointing straight at the man who stood looking at him. Then suddenly the kid smiled sheepishly and tucked the gun back in his holster.

"Come alive like a rattler, didn't you?" Babe Garcer grinned. "You been asleep?"

"No I been watchin' the valley." "Huh!" Babe's tone, sounded skeptical. "See anything?"

"Saw a fume! oval to Nate Wheeler's place."

"You didn't report it to the

Poolo." Babe charged grimly. "What was the matter? Paralyzed so you couldn't get to the place?"

"No, sah, I was right busy soon after," he said mildly.

"Doin' what?"

"Shootin' a nestah!"

"Hell! Why didn't you say so?" Babe's tone had warmed amazingly. "Some one tryin' to dry-pitch you, Tiger Eye?"

"I reckon he was aimin' that-away, Babe."

(Continued Next Week)

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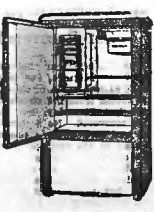


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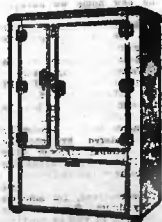
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