

INTO THE SUNSET

BY JACKSON GREGORY



NINTH INSTALLMENT

Barry Haveril leaves his Texas home to see the country, meets a man who has just been shot who turns out to be a cousin of his, Jesse Conroy. When they part, Barry leaves for home and comes across the mangled body of his brother, Robert. Barry starts searching for the murderer and is befriended by Judge Blue and his daughter, Lucy. Judge Blue tells him that a gun Jesse gave him is the gun of a murderer known as the Laredo Kid. The Judge invites Barry up to visit him and there Barry meets Jesse. He accuses Jesse of killing his brother and of being the Laredo Kid. Judge Blue comes up from behind, knocks Barry unconscious. Barry escapes, however, and meets an old man named Timberline, who also is gunning for the Laredo Kid. Barry finally goes to Red Rock where, going through a valley, he sees three men attempting to capture a beautiful girl. Barry rescues her and finds she is Lucy Blue. At the house he meets a man called Tom Haveril whom he accuses of being his cousin Jesse. In a barroom Tom Haveril accuses Barry of being the Laredo Kid. Barry tells the strangers there that his sister Lucy, who works at a lunch counter in town, can identify him. They search for her but she's missing. Barry, and a new friend of his, Ken March, go looking for her and find her in a cabin with Sarboe and two other men. Tom Haveril, the Judge and others then come, after Ken has been shot, and hang the men in the cabin. When they leave Barry stays on and finds Sarboe isn't dead but has lost his ability to talk. Tom Haveril returns and Barry shoot at each other but neither is killed. Recovered, Barry meets his sister and Ken March, who tell him that Lucy Blue is about to marry Tom Haveril. Barry rushes to the Blue home to try to stop the marriage.

"Have it your way," said the Judge.

That puzzled Barry. He said, "What the devil do you mean?"

"She's married him already. A good hour ago."

"Married already?" Barry stared at him incredulously. The Judge merely nodded and looked back at him in frank curious interest. "Where is she now?"

"Gone," the Judge said with a flick of malice. "On their honeymoon."

"Damn you!" cried Barry.

"Certainly," smiled the Judge. Then his voice hardened and at last his eyes grew expressive of a purely murderous anger. "And now you can get the hell out of here!"

Barry shook his head. "No, not yet. Pretty soon, Judge. First I am going to tell you something. After that you are going to tell me where they have gone."

"I know that you came to Tytersville about twelve years ago, and that you were a rich man when you got there."

"I know that you came from Laredo, and that you came on the jump!"

The Judge's eyes became mere shadowed slits between narrowed lids. He didn't make any retort.

"The Laredo Kid too came from Laredo," said Barry coolly. "When he found you again at Tyters, he found a gold mine! You have been afraid of him ever since. And I happen to know why, Judge Blue!"

"You're a damn liar," said the Judge.

Barry laughed.

"The Kid has made a ring-tailed baboon out of you. You lost something, didn't you? A flat steel box with about five hundred pictures in it! And the pictures nicely wrapped up in an old newspaper, more than a dozen years old now! And you thought, damned old jackass that you are, that Laredo still had all that! Well, he hasn't got it, and he doesn't know where it is—and you've let him browbeat you into stealing Lucy!"

Slowly as the Judge's jaws bulged, his face whitened.

"You'd better spill all you know, Kid," he said harshly.

"I've got that box and everything in it," snapped Barry.

"If you've got that, Barry," said the Judge, eyeing him, "I'll give you fifty thousand dol-

lars—"

"You'd give the shirt off your back damn you! Now, where's Lucy? Where's the man you let her marry?"

"I'm going out and kill him," said Judge Blue. "And I'm going right now."

Barry caught him by the shoulder. "I'm in a hurry, man! Do you think I want to wait? Look here, Parker Blue; I've got that box and all that's in it; I've got you over a rain barrel, like Laredo used to have you! And I say: Where are they now?"

"Go with you," said the Judge.

"He's taken her to his ranch," said the Judge as their two horses jumped under them.

"Hello, who's there?"

Another rider, seeming in haste like themselves, was bearing down on them. Old Timberline's voice piped up: "Hi, you fellers! One of you Barry Haveril?"

"I'm in a hurry, Timber," said Barry, pulling down reluctantly. "What's wanted?"

"Where you goin' Barry? Who's that with you?"

"It's Judge Blue. We're riding over to Tom Haveril's ranch. He has taken Lucy over there."

"An' you two was goin' without me," muttered Timber reproachfully.

"Come ahead then," said Barry, and again he and the Judge shook out their reins.

Their way led them through the notch just above Red Rock, along the high ridge and down into the first of several parallel valleys. The Judge led the way and, though Barry was forced to follow, he could find little fault with the pace that was set. Timberline, doing his best to keep up, began to lag.

When they came under the cottonwoods in the shade of which the ranch house had been built, the Judge was ahead. He had dismounted, when Barry came up with him.

He went up the steps, his spurs jingling, his high boots thumping. He knocked and called joyfully:

"Hey, you young folks! It's the Judge, bringing you a wedding present he ought to have thought of sooner. Open up, Tom. Open, Lucy."

Tom Haveril's voice rang out sharply. "Who's with you?"

"One of the boys. He's helping me tote your surprise, Tom."

The door opened only a little; the Judge's bulk thrust it farther back as he shoved on in. And close behind him came Barry.

Incredibly quick, Tom Haveril placed himself behind Lucy.

"I thought so!" he said in cold anger. "You and Barry Haveril, huh?"

When the Judge laughed, "It's nothing, Tom; just a friendly visit, Lucy came near fainting with cold horror."

"Tom!" screamed Lucy. "They've come to kill you!"

"Sure," said Tom Haveril. "Sure." His gun was in his hand now, nosing past Lucy's waist; his eyes, burning with rage and hate, gleamed over Lucy's curly head.

"You cowardly rat!" Barry roared. "Step out like a man."

"No!" screamed Lucy, and threw an arm backward, trying to get it around Tom Haveril. "No, Tom! They'll kill you. They are onwards—"

He just laughed, but he remained as watchful as a tiger about to pounce.

"You two come at me in double harness," he said. "That means you've got together about things, don't it?" He laughed again.

"What he got," said Tom Haveril, "was a lot of pictures and an old Laredo newspaper! I guess he told you that? Well, that's a loss that might lose you a nice pot of money, but it wouldn't stretch your neck, would it? Might lose you the money, I said—but wouldn't if you played along with me! String your chips with Barry Haveril, and where are you?"

"You started out like you were going to speak quite a piece, Tom. Bugged down, though, didn't you? I don't hear anything that makes much sense."

"You're listening for it though!" jeered Tom Haveril.

"Your ears are wide open, and you're beginning to think already that you came pretty close making a bad mistake! Well, you did. Barry got those things—but he didn't get the ace I have in the hole. You bet I've still got it. And if you had the bad luck to burn me down tonight—well, it would be just too bad for Judge

Parker Blue, formerly of Laredo! You'd hang, just as sure as crab apples grow on a crab apple tree."

"You talk big, Tom Haveril, and ever did," scoffed the Judge, but sounded uneasy.

"You've got nothing to gain here tonight, Judge," said Tom Haveril swiftly, "and everything to lose. I might get killed—Lucy might get killed—and where would you be?"

Right there Barry knew that Tom Haveril had as good as won the trick.

The Judge cleared his throat. He said gravely, "Here, let's talk this thing over."

"Sure," said Tom Haveril. "How about it, Cousin Barry? Want to call the party off for this time?"

"I've been looking for you more than two years, Laredo," said Barry angrily. "I've followed you all the way out to California and back. Come into the open and fight it out."

"On my wedding night?" grinned Tom Haveril.

"Let me have a half dozen words alone with Tom Haveril," put in the Judge swiftly. "We'll step into the next room. You can tell Lucy whatever you want to. All right, Tom?"

Without the least hesitation Tom Haveril answered: "Anything you say, Judge. Sure it's all right with me. Suit you, Sundown?"

A look flashed from Tom Haveril to Judge Blue. Barry read it aright. Tom Haveril was simply making sure that the Judge would keep out of it; if the Judge nodded ever so slightly, if his guarded eyes said, "Yes," Tom Haveril was hair-trigger set to start shooting. He could not have failed to kill Barry, nor could Barry possibly have fired back.

It was just then a board creaked in the room beyond the kitchen—as a door opened from behind Tom Haveril's back.

Barry, fascinated, watched the door open; he saw the barrel of a shotgun thrust into the lamp-light; he saw old Timberline's shrewd eyes squinting along the barrel.

"I been listenin' a coupla minutes," said Timberline acidly. "Seems like it was about time a man with a shotgun showed up. Am I right, pardner?"

"If you're wrong no man was ever right!" cried Barry. "Now, you listen to me, Tom Haveril!"

Tom Haveril's lean jaws bulged from the strain he set on them, and his eyes glittered feverishly out of a slowly whitening face.

"Any man who shoots is sure to kill Lucy," he said quickly.

"Hell, no," said Timberline, and the boards creaked again as he came a step nearer. "I can shove the muzzle close up to the back o' your head, snugglin' it up, say, under your left ear—"

"Call him off, Sundown!" yelled Tom Haveril. "Quick, or I start shooting—and I'll get you if I die the next minute!"

Barry was tempted then to shout to his old friend, "Blow his damn head off, Timber!" But Lucy had spun about and her arms were around Tom Haveril, and her two hands were lifted to protect the back of his head. So what Barry said was:

"Hold it, Timber! These two want a word or two together. Let them have it, out in the kitchen! Kill the first one that bats an eye. And I'll have two words here with Lucy!"

Tom Haveril freed himself from Lucy's arms, called, "Come ahead, Judge," dropped his guns to the floor and moved into the kitchen. Timberline backed off slowly, always keeping him covered.

A moment later she and Barry were alone, and Timberline was guarding his two prisoners in the kitchen. She stood with her hands down at her sides, her face lifted defiantly, her eyes blazing into Barry's.

"If you've got anything to say to me," she said hotly, "please say it—and go!"

"Lucy," he pleaded earnestly, "I've come here just to save you, can't you see?"

She scarcely flicked her eyes scornfully at him; there was nothing but contempt in her bitter smile.

"You've got to believe what I'm going to tell you!" he blurted out, his own temper uncertain.

"I'll never believe a single word you ever say! If you're waiting for that time to come—Oh, why don't you go!"

In the next room he could hear the Judge and Tom Haveril speaking hurriedly; he could not see them but saw Timberline, his shotgun gripped with hard, competent hands. He thought: "If I could just make her listen to me! If I tell her the whole thing—"

He gathered up the weapons which the Judge and Tom Haveril had "shed" at Timberline's staccato command, and threw them as far as he could out through the door into the dark. (Continued Next Week)

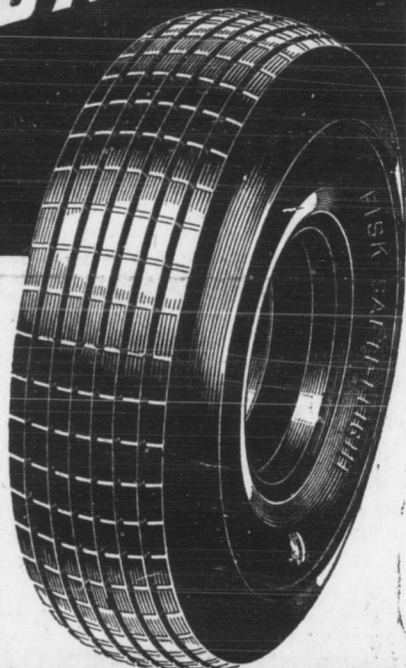
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GOOD CORN CROP

Although the total acreage of corn in Craven county is apparently smaller than that of last year, the crop is growing exceptionally well, reports Farm Agent L. G. Mathis.