

# Texas Guns

by L. P. HOLMES

### FIRST INSTALMENT

Silas Spelle gripped his black stogie more firmly between his yellow teeth and, leaning across Ed Starbuck's desk, pounded a huge fist upon the caken top to add emphasis to his words.

"By God, yuh've got to do something, Starbuck," he snapped harshly. "You know and I know and everybody else knows yore damned bank is on the verge of going under. Yuh couldn't pay off yore depositors now, not four-bits on the dollar. I'm offerin' yuh a fair proposition. As I told yuh before I'll buy up the mortgages yuh hold and I'll pay every cent yuh loaned on them plus interest to date. That's a damn good offer—yuh know it is."

"Perhaps," replied Starbuck quietly. "But it ain't enough, Spelle. Those mortgages represent more than just collateral to me. They represent faith—faith in me and my bank by the men who gave them. In time they'll be taken up. Present conditions won't last forever. The price of beef is beginning to climb. The drought is broken. No, Spelle, yuh or no other man has got enough money to tempt me to double-cross my friends."

"Faith—faith hell," snorted Spelle. "Yuh'll starve to death while yuh're rantin' about faith. Yuh're a hell of an excuse of a business man. Yuh better consider my proposition, Starbuck. If I have a tip off the bank examiner in Westhaven he'll put the skills under yuh pronto. But I don't want to do that. My offer stands. I'll give yuh until this time next week to think it over. I'll be back for an answer then."

Spelle stood up, a big, thick-set man whose loose, thick lips and close set eyes mirrored plain the consuming passion of his life. Greed, Greed and selfishness.

"Remember," he bit out, stepping to the door of Starbuck's office. "By this time next week I'll expect yuh to get back to common sense. If yuh won't talk turkey then why— He finished with a significant gesture, which consisted of holding out one grimy, hairy hand then closing it slowly as though to crush whatever lay within it.

"Wait!" Ed Starbuck was now on his feet, a tall, gaunt, leathery faced man whose drooping, lanky mustache bracketed a pair of grim, tight lips. Beneath his faded, bushy eyebrows his eyes looked out clear and blue and cold. His left sleeve hung empty for the arm was off at the shoulder, a reminder of an old rustling war when he himself had been a cattleman. But the lean right hand was sound and with it he lifted a heavy, worn Colt revolver from the drawer of his desk and laid it on the scarred surface before him.

"Yuh've had yore say, Spelle," he drawled, his words dripping contempt and scorn. "Now I'll have mine. What I just told yuh stands, this week, next week or any other week. Yore damned money ain't worth hell room in this bank. Faith—no, yuh don't know the meaning of the word. Greed is yore war-cry."

Thick blood congested Spelle's

beefy features. His lips parted in a snarl. He tried to match looks, but failed. Those icy blue eyes of the valiant old banker seered like live flames and the implacable courage behind them was unmistakable. Spelle cursed venomously and left.

Ed Starbuck stood for a long time after Spelle had gone. The fire in his eyes slowly faded and hopelessness took its place. He sank back into his chair like an old man who was suddenly very weary. Ed Starbuck had always been a man who faced facts squarely, regardless of what those facts might be. He faced them now. Spelle had told the truth. The Cattleman's Bank of Carillon was on the narrow edge. True, Starbuck held mortgages that would more than put him on his feet should he sell them out. But this, according to Starbuck's standards, would be breaking faith with men he had known all his life and who trusted him. Still he had to have money—cash. There was only one thing to do. He would ride around to the different cattle outfits and put his problem squarely up to the owners. They all stood to stand or fall together. If they could somehow help his bank to weather through they would have Spelle whipped. If they didn't—Starbuck sighed, reached for his hat and went out into the street.

The little cowtown of Carillon was drowning in the heat of mid-afternoon. The single, dusty street lay white and glaring in the sun, and was deserted save for a barefoot Mexican or two and a pair of cow-ponies slouching at the hitching rail before Jake Butterfield's Emporium. Starbuck angled across the street toward the livery stable and corral at the northern end of town.

A few moments later he emerged from the livery stable, leading a saddle horse. He swung into the saddle and headed south along the street. As he did so two punchers clanked out of Butterfield's and forked the two cow-ponies. They also headed south. The horses of the two punchers looked somewhat jaded and Starbuck soon overtook them. The elder of the riders looked up. He was a wiry, leathery faced man, past middle age, clean shaven and with innumerable wrinkles about the corners of his mouth and eyes. The mouth seemed harsh yet a humorous quirk lingered about it somehow. The eyes were clear, fleckless gray, capable of either warmth or abysmal chill. The wide, weather-beaten sombrero rested on a mane of silvery hair. One of the real old timers, decided Starbuck.

The other rider was young somewhere in his early twenties. Well set up, with flat muscled, powerful shoulders. His face was smooth and tanned, his eyes blue, his hair curly and brown. Gay, sparring youth lay over him like a mantle. A clean, lusty, carefree kid, in love with life and hungering for all its wonders. Their clothes were those of the range, worn but substantial. Both carried a heavy gun, slung at the right hip.

The elder of the two nodded to Starbuck.

"Howdy," he drawled. "Wonder could yuh show us the trail to the

Box D outfit? Gent back in the store told us mebbe they could use a couple of hands out there."

"Sure," replied Starbuck. "Glad to. Fact is I'm riding out there myself. Glad to have company."

"You ain't San Juan Delevan by any chance?"

"No, I'm Ed Starbuck. I own the Cattleman's Bank, back in town."

"Shore I'm glad to know yuh, I'm Tex Whipple. This chuckle-headed cub is Johnny Clehove. Kid, shake hands with Mister Starbuck."

Introductions over, the three jogged steadily south. Tex and Starbuck brought up the rear, gazing with lazy eyes over the neat shimmered sage.

"That big plateau straight ahead is the Box D range," said Starbuck presently. "One of the finest holdings in the country. Lots of water, fine pasture and a stand of pine trees what gives the lie to this damned desert. I shore envy ole San Juan, livin' up among those cool trees."

"Runs a pretty good spread, does he?" asked Tex.

"Yeah. Ordinarily it's A-1. He's had some hard luck lately though. Two months ago he was drivin' a thousand head of prime Herefords across the upper end of the Kanab Desert to the shippin' pens at Sawtelle an' they sprung a stampede. 'Tween the desert an' some rustlers he lost better'n eight hundred head. It was a damn heavy jolt. They was prime stock, the pick of his herd. Then he got his spine hurt in the stampede besides. Hoss tripped an' threw him. Doc says he's due to sit in a wheel chair for the rest of his days."

"Shore that's tough," nodded Tex. "Mebbe the kind an' me'll have our ride for nothin'."

"Can't say as to that. Punchers do a lot of driftin' this time o' year. Delevan may be able to use yuh."

It was a deep game Spelle was playing. His determination to smash Ed Starbuck was only a step towards the fulfillment of a long thwarted hate. Spelle's real objective was that immense expanse of valuable plateau range controlled by San Juan Delevan. There lay the water and grazing which Spelle could find good use for during the dry, torrid summer months. As for the other smaller ranchers, they also would sink if Starbuck's bank went under. But Spelle gave them little thought. Small fry, he told himself contemptuously.

There was another motive to Silas Spelle's hatred of San Juan Delevan. It dated back many, many years. It began the day Martha Wingate had married Delevan after scorning Spelle's advances. Her death, three years after the marriage, when she gave her life to bring a baby daughter into the world, caused Spelle to gloat. What he could not have himself, he wanted no other man to have. And he had never forgiven Delevan for winning the woman he himself had set his heart on.

The lamp in Spelle's office glowed yellow. In its light Spelle was like a bloated poisonous thing, intent upon his plotting. The night wind mourned about the silent ranchhouse. Once or twice the windows rattled. A dim form stole from the darkness outside and crossed the patio. The side door to Spelle's office swung slowly back. The flame of the lamp wavered and flickered. Spelle turned. His face blanched and his jaw dropped slightly. Fear lay stark in his eyes. He was like a man gazing upon a ghost. He ran a thick tongue over his lips.

"You!" he croaked harshly. "The papers said yuh were dead. They found yore body ground to pieces along the track of the S. W. & P."

"Yeah," snarled the newcomer. "They think they did. I out-foxed them that's all. What they found was a damned hobo with my prison clothes on him. Well—don't sit starin' at me like I was a ghost. I'm real—damned real. Why don't yuh greet yore long lost son like a father should?"

"Yuh're no son of mine," rasped Spelle hoarsely. "I—"

"Oh yes I am," cut in the other. "Not accordin' to law mebbe—but like the highbrows say—I'm a natural son. Not that I'm proud of my parents. My mother a Ute squaw—my father a damned crooked skunk what would betray his own flesh an' blood. I came back—I told yuh I would, yuh sniveled' hypocrite. I didn't ask to come into the world, God knows. Yuh're responsible for me an' by God yuh're gonna take care of me. I want food and I want whiskey an' a bunk to sleep in. I crossed the Kanab Desert on foot to get here—an' here I stay. If yuh try to set the flatties on me I go out shootin'—an' yuh get the first bullet. Think it over."

Silas Spelle paled at the words and manner of his illegitimate, half-breed son. When he had read of that son's escape from the State Penitentiary road-gang stark terror had struck him. Then when another dispatch came through that his son's mangled body had been found by a track walker on the railroad he had sighed with relief. It meant the last tie to an embarrassing past had been severed. But the dispatches were wrong, and here was the son in flesh to mock him.

Unconsciously Silas Spelle stood up. "There's whiskey on the shelf over there. I'll go to the kitchen an' rustle yuh some grub."

Continued Next Issue

### LEAVING COUNTRY IF F.D.R. IS ELECTED

"I don't think Roosevelt's going to win, but if he does I'll leave this country in a minute," was the emphatic comment by Julian T. Bishop, prominent Wall Street broker and owner of extensive North Carolina properties, to the queries of startled and inquiring friends who noticed his striking advertisement in the latest issue of "Game Breeder and Sportsman."

The notice read in the event that Roosevelt is re-elected at the coming November election the entire horseshoe quail farm, located near Carthage, North Carolina, will be offered for sale due to the fact that the owner will immediately move to Canada. The property is complete, with sufficient equipment in good condition to raise between five and six thousand quails, large log cabin with bedroom, living room and kitchen fully equipped, fine dog kennels recently built to accommodate twelve dogs, also six thorough broken quail dogs, Ford station wagon, twelve guns-beat and fishing equipment. Leases for shooting privilege on 20,000 acres of land will also be for sale. Full description on request.

### Julian T. Bishop, Carthage, N. C.

Mr. Bishop, who also owns a home in Greenwich, Conn., and who claims descentancy from a long line of Democrats, is 46 years old. His grandfather, William D. Bishop, was president of the New York New Haven and Hartford Railroad for many years. Formerly associated with the firm of Charles D. Darney and Company, stock brokers of 14 Wall Street, he now maintains an office there.

Extension workers at State College point out that now is the time to prepare to seed alfalfa and other legumes this fall.

Stokes farmers, who have not been able to buy cowpeas and soybeans to seed their full amount of soil conserving acreages express delight at the recent ruling permitting them to plant Sudan grass or sorghum on this acreage.

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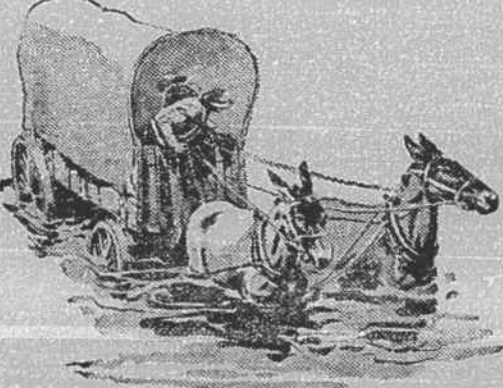
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