

Texas Gums

by L. P. HOLMES

FOURTH INSTALMENT SYNOPSIS:

Silas Spelle, highbanded, low-principled cattle baron, is out to smash the local bank and force foreclosure on the small ranchers of the Kanab desert country so that he can seize their range lands. He is opposed by Ed Starbuck, president of the Cattlemen's Bank, and by San Juan Delevan, prominent rancher who has been crippled by a fall from his horse. Johnny Clehoo and his partner, Tex Whipple, are cowpunchers employed by San Juan Delevan to fight the rustlers and protect his interests.

Now Go On With the Story

A week after they had gone on their quest Tex Whipple and Johnny Clehoo rode slowly up out of the gulf of the Kanab Desert, to where the San Juan Plateau loomed dim and purple in the violet dusk. They were gaunt, hollow-eyed and weary. Their faces, their clothes, their horses were gray with dust and the grime of the desert. Their eyes were bloodshot; their lips cracked and raw from the bite of alkali dust. In front of them, slow and ponderous, moved the cattle they had regained from the rustlers. It had been a terrific task to nurse exhausted and fainting brutes across the torrid wastes but the job was nearly done now and the cattle were traveling faster, having smelled the water in the troughs on the slope above.

Arriving at the corrals Tex and Johnny turned their charges over to Pink Crosby and Pod Fortune, all that remained of the Bex D punchers, then unsaddled their horses, turned them into the pasture and walked with stiff, awkward strides up to the ranchhouse.

San Juan Delevan and his daughter Ronny were on the veranda.

"We brought yore cows back, San Juan," said Tex wearily. "Had to bump off two of yore former punchers to get 'em. But they're all here, every dang hair."

"Good boys," rumbled San Juan. "By God, it's a relief to find men yuh can trust. Ronny, yuh go help Chang rustle grub for Tex an' the kid. Set it on this table. Tex, yuh an' Johnny go wash up an' then while yuh eat yuh can give me the story."

A good wash and plentiful food made new men out of Tex and Johnny. Johnny ate until he nearly fell out of the chair and until even Ronny was moved to remark about it.

"Goodness Tex, don't yuh ever feed this child of yours? It seems impossible to fill him up."

"Miss Ronny," drawled Tex, "I'll apologize for him. Ordinarily I'd be plumb ashamed of him but I gotta admit he dang near earned the right to eat his foot hair off this trip."

Johnny was quite shameless and unabashed. He yawned and grinned and rolled a smoke.

"Ain't often I get service like this. Gotta make the most of it, y'betcha. An' yuh know yuh'd feel offended if I didn't eat yore cookin'," he ended, addressing these words to Ronny. "I could do with that kind of cookin' the rest of my life, I'll tell a man."

"Haw! Haw!" rumbled San Juan as Ronny blushed and fled. "Kinda sudden, that kid, eh, Tex?"

"He's purty dang fresh if yuh ask me," chuckled Tex. "I'n he don't mind his manners I'll work him over with a quirt."

"Huh," snorted Johnny. "Jest try it, yuh frazzled out ole tie string. Now to show yuh I'm a gentleman I'm goin' in an' help Chang wash the dishes."

"Heh-heh," sniffed Tex scornfully. "Gettin' mighty considerate of that Chink seems to me. Wonder if yuh think yuh're foolin' anybody. I hope the little lady smacks yore face with a dish rag."

When Johnny had gone the levity slipped immediately from Tex's face. He turned to San Juan.

"Sorry the kid an' me had to

salivate those gents with the cattle." "I'm not," bit out San Juan savagely. "Shore they had it comin' the 'damned double-crossin' coyotes. Things trailed out jest as I figgered they would at the Springs. They wa'n't no marks of any stampede was there?"

"None whatsoever," answered Tex. "The sign showed they just cut out that bunch an' headed 'em north-west."

"I knew it. Ever since I got hurt I been figgerin' Wade an' his crowd was crooked. Pink Crosby an' Pod Fortune are good boys but the rest was workin' with Wade. Yuh know Tex, I'll tell yuh somethin' about how I got hurt. I was drivin' a thousand haid of my prime stuff to the railroad at Sawtele. We had the herd hedded down at Skelton Springs. The night was quiet, no wind or nothin'. I was sound asleep when the break came. Fust thing I knew they was a lot of bellerin' an' shoutin' an' when I got outa my larp I saw the cattle was on the run. I chucked a hull on a bronc an' forked him an' lit out to try an' turn 'em so they'd take to millin'. It was dark as the ace of spades an' everybody was ridin' hell-catoot. They was men ridin' on both sides of me."

"All of a sudden on plain level ground my hoss turned a somersault. O' course I hit hard an' my light went out. When I came to it was jest breakin' day. My back was hurtin' like hell an' I seemed dead from the waist down. My bronc was lyin' jest as he fell, with a broken neck. They was a canteen tied to the saddle an' as I was dryer'n hell I drug myself over to him to get a drink. While I was restin' I got to figgerin' it was kinda funny that hoss should have fallen thataway on level ground. I looked him over an' jest above the fetlock of the near front leg I found where he'd been burned with a rope."

"Hell!" burst out Tex. "Yuh don't mean to tell me one of them dang snakes roped yore hoss an' throwed him arripose?"

"Tex, that's jest exactly what happened!"

"Then the whole thing was a set-up—stampede an' all?"

"I figger it was. An' they run off with eight hundred haid of my stock. I couldn't do nothin'. I was a dang sick man. Wonder yet why I didn't die. Loosin' them cattle jest about broke me. I got a mortgage I was gonna clear up with the sale of that herd. An' it's taken the last of my ready cash to bring in that last herd what I bought over on the Simon's Gulch range across the desert. I shore am travelin' on the ragged aidge right now. An' I don't know how the hell I'm gonna take up that mortgage. I can't stall off Ed Starbuck much longer, an' still keep my self-respect. Ed was over to see me the other day yuh know, that was him yuh rode in with. Ed's one white man, but he can't run his bank on nothin'."

At this moment there came the clink of a shod hoof against rock.

Tex was instantly alert. "Hoss comin'," he pronounced softly.

Through the dim murk a rider approached, coming in along the Carillion trail. There was the sound of a stumble and then a volley of curses in a harsh, Scottish brogue.

Delevan grinned and leaned back. "Okeh Ter," he chuckled. "That's Doc McMurdo. Tough ole Scotchman but pure gold underneath. Comin' out to take a look at this damned back of mine I suppose."

The rider dismounted before the veranda with another rumble of profanity.

"Light down Doc, light down," called San Juan. "Yuh seem to be havin' yore troubles."

"Tis the dommed trail, mon," rasped McMurdo. "An' this crazy, drunken baste I've been r-r-riding. Twice he na'threw me. How's the back, Delevan?"

"About the same Doc, no better—no worse."

"Lucky ye ar'r-e to be alive. Delevan—I've had news for ye. The bank's been r-r-opped. Starbuck, Stinson and Bur-r-ney are dead, poor-r devils."

"What?" exploded Delevan. "The bank robbed—Starbuck daid—an' the rest? I—hell—when did it happen, Mc?"

"Thursday afternoon. The dom thins'es got clear away. The sheerif has come and gone w/out doing a thing. 'Tis a wor-r-thless mon he is. An e-ex-aminer is on hand and declares the bank insolvent. 'Tis r-rumored has it that that scheming gr-rasping Silas Spelle is taking over all the bank's paper and mortgages."

Delevan laughed harshly, hopelessly. "That means I'm finished. Spelle will foreclose on me the first damn thing he does. He's been wantin' my range for a long time. Tex, I reckon yore job won't last long

now." Tex was thoughtful for a moment. "How much is that mortgage worth?"

Ten thousand dollars. O' course I could cover it if I wanted to sell off all my stock. But without stock, what good would the range do me?" "That's right," nodded Tex. "San Juan, would you consider goin' in pardners?"

"Who with?" "Me—me an' the kid." "Tex—I'd jump at the chance. It'd be the best thing whatever happened to me. Bein' tied to this damn chair the way I am I can't get around an' take care of my spread like I should. With yuh an' the kid in with me we could make things hum—but, wait a minute. We're forgettin' Spelle an' that damn mortgage."

"Not a leetle bit, we ain't," snapped Tex. "I been lookin' for a chance like this. Johnny's old enough now to start settlin' down an' gettin' his spurs hooked into somethin' permanent. I got a pretty stake saved up for the kid an' I know where I can get more. Together it'll be plenty to squelch Mister Silas Spelle. An' we'll make the kid foreman. San Juan, He needs some responsibility now, somethin' to make him forget his kid stuff an' turn man. Yuh got a sweet range here—the kind I been lookin' fer a long time. Is it a go?"

"Tex—it shore is. Yore talk puts some strength in this damned, worthless ole carcass of mine. Shake!"

Daylight the following morning found Tex far out on the Kanab Desert, pounding along at a steady lope. He had three horses and was changing from one to the other every two hours. In this way he did not have to halt to rest them. All through the scorching day he rode steadily. At evening he halted for half an hour at a brackish, green scummed water-hole. While the horses were drinking and resting Tex wolfed down a couple of powdery sandwiches, took a long drink at his canteen, rolled a smoke, then resumed his steady ride.

The pale moon rose, arched and descended. The black heart of the dawn took form, hovered—lightened

—and was gone. The sun came up. And with it's rising Tex rode up to the shipping town of Sawtele. It was rails end of a spur the S. W. E. P. had thrown up along the western edge of the Kanab Desert to tap the cattle ranges of the district and sporadic outbursts of activity.

Tex went direct to the railroad station. He was greeted at the ticket window by a yawning, heavy-eyed agent.

"When's the next train out?" demanded Tex. "Nine fifteen. Ticket? Where to?" "Sevier."

The agent selected a strip of paste board, pounded dates on it, and slipped it through the wicket. "Twelve dollars and forty-two cents." Tex folded up the ticket and stowed it away and tossed a golden double eagle on the counter. "Keep the change a minute," he adjured. "Can I send some telegrams from here?"

"Sure. Here's the pad. Write 'em out."

To Be Continued.

BRIDAL SHOWER

Misses Madge and Maude Williams entertained a number of friends at their home last Tuesday afternoon with a bridal shower honoring Mrs. Tom Smathers, the former Miss Dorothy Norris.

Contests were enjoyed by all, the winners being Misses Mary Alice Baird and Clarcia White. Mrs. Smathers received many useful gifts.



\$1.50 PACKAGE, now \$1.00
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Refreshments consisting of sandwiches, pickles, cake and lemonade were served to the following guests: Mesdames Bert Mast, Bill Fletcher, Dock Dishman, I. G. Hodges, Robert Mast, Charles Miller, E. S. Williams, Iva Wilson, Boyd Wilson, Edward Baird, Lloyd Seehorn, Misses Ruby Oliver, Clarcia White, Mary Alice Baird, Edith Thomas, Mae Reese, Jewell Miller, Louise Williams and Ruth Hodges.

Members of the newly organized 4-H calf club in Cabarrus County have been selecting good calves and plan to raise a fine group of animals this year, the county agent reports.

In Robeson County 3,665 work sheets had been signed by the first of August. The county agent also reported distribution of 2,496 cotton adjustment checks totaling \$88,180.



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