

# Texas Guns

by L. P. HOLMES

## FIFTH INSTALMENT

The town of Carillon seemed yet asleep despite the climbing sun of a new-born day, when the little cavalcade, turned into the single street, Jake Butterfield and Tobe Hansen were the only humans in sight, the former swung wide the doors of his general store while Hansen was lazily heaving up and down to the creaking accompaniment of the rusty pump at the watering trough in front of his stable. Pink Crosby set the brake of the buckboard and skidded the two broncos to a stop at the hitching rail in front of Butterfield's store, hopped out and tethered them. Tex and Johnny dismounted there likewise and tied their mounts.

"Suppose we get right over to the hotel, Miss Ronny," Tex suggested. "I'll give us a chance to get our business over with before Spelle knows what it's all about. If we can't it'll save a heap of argument and trouble."

"Just as you say, Tex," nodded Ronny. She jumped lightly to the ground and divested herself of the duster. "I'm ready."

They crossed the street to the single story, false-fronted hotel. Tex and Ronny in the lead and Johnny and Pink Crosby bringing up the rear. Johnny was chuckling.

"Bright boy, friend Jake is," he snickered.

Pink grinned widely. "Ore, Jake means well, but he's done poured melasses so long his brain's got the same kind o' movement. Yuh gotta give Jake time. On a snap judgment he can't tell the difference between a can o' corn an' a box o' thirty-thirties, but yuh gotta give him time. I member, a Sogewian sheep herder comin' in to Jake's fer snuff one time an' Jake hands him out some flea powder. The sheepherder couldn't read English but the first sniff he took o' that bug killer shore put him on edge. He chased ole Jake about two miles with a single-tree. He'd a got him too, only he got to sneezin' so bad he couldn't see where he was goin'.

He fell into a barrel cactus an' got stuck there. When we pulled him out he had other things to think of beside his nose. He Jake come through the ordeal all in one piece. But he's done figgered it out that it's safer to keep the bug killer on the other end of the shelf from the snuff."

Johnny snorted with glee. "Ain't he a wonder?" he sighed.

They climbed the low step to the porch of the hotel and entered the dingy hallway just in time to meet a paunchy, spry, important little individual dressed with meticulous care. His low cut tan shoes were polished to a glass-like glow, the creases in his trousers were like knife edges, his tie faultless. He had three chins, a puffy mouth and a tiny blonde mustache. But the eyes behind the heavy rimmed glasses gave the lie to the rest of his appearance. Those orbs had a cold, crafty gleam. The look he bent on Ronny caused the hot blood to flame in Johnny's face and his fists to clench.

"Yuh're the bank examiner, I take it," drawled Tex.

"I am," was the crisp report. "My name is Lange. But if you have business with me you'll have to wait. I have not breakfasted yet. I'll be at the bank in an hour."

He started to push by Tex brusquely but the old puncher blocked the way.

"Yuh're wrong there, Mister Lange," drawled Tex. "Our business can't wait. Yuh're goin' down to the bank with us now."

Lange drew himself up to his full height of five feet four.

"Don't be ridiculous, my man," he snapped. "You cannot pull one of your cowcountry bluffs on me. I'll be at the bank at ten o'clock."

"Some gents are shore hard to convince," remarked Johnny casually, stepping close to Lange. "Pink, you get him by the seat o' the pants an' I'll grab his collar. He'll be plumb surprised to find how quick he can get to the bank."

"Why—why," stuttered Lange. "That is ridiculous. Don't you dare lay hands on me."

"Yep," drawled Johnny. "It shore will be re-edulous. Don't know when a man looks like a bigger fool than when he's gittin' the bum's rush. But yuh're shore slated for it, kess'n yuh use yore laid."

The bank examiner looked around in some trepidation. He saw no sign of relenting in the faces of his visitors. Even the slender, extremely pretty girl seemed cool and unconcerned.

"I—very well, I'll come," he rumed. "But mark my word—you'll pay for this."

In all his ruffled dignity he marched down to the bank and unlocked the door. The others followed him in and Tex went immediately to the business at hand.

"Yuh hold a ten thousand dollar mortgage here against Jim Delevan of the Box D outfit," stated Tex. "We're here to clear it up. Trot it out. It'll be paid in full."

"I—ah—why that is very irregular. In fact it cannot be done," sputtered Lange. "You are too late. Mr. Spelle is taking over all the bank's assets including all outstanding paper. You will have to do your business with him. He will be here shortly. I have an appointment with him here this morning."

"Has he closed the deal?" snapped Tex coldly. "Turned over the money to you an' all the rest of it?"

"Why—er—no, not exactly. But in behalf of the bank's creditors I have agreed to his proposition. I must confer with him before I do anything farther."

"Wrong," corrected Tex. "That mortgage is right here in this vault and he hasn't paid a cent on it yet. Well, we're here to pay it in full. Maybe there might be some pica-yinish point o' law somewhere in the thing but that'll have to be talked over afterwards."

Tex reached inside his shirt and lifted out a heavily padded money belt. "There's the ten thousand," he asserted. "Trot out that mortgage."

The bank examiner bit his lips and stalled. "Are you James Delevan?"

"No—I'm not. But this young lady is his daughter an' Jim's au-

thorized her to represent him. I'm still waitin' to see that mortgage."

"What proof can you offer that the young lady is James Delevan's daughter?"

"Aw-w," burst in Johnny. "Lemme work on him, Tex. That Jasper has been hangin' around Spelle an' the rest of a yin' outfit so long he don't know the truth when he hears it. He's jest stallin' fer time. Comb his hair with yore gun. That'll get action."

Tex ignored Johnny's outburst. "Jest tell this tin-horn who yuh are Miss Ronny," he said. "An' then if he wants to doubt a lady's word, let him say so."

"I am Ronel Delevan," state Ronny quietly. "My father, as you no doubt know is a cripple. He was unable to be present so he sent me in his place."

Tex turned a cold eye on Lange. "Satisfied?" he drawled, his voice dangerously soft.

"Yu-yes," gulped Lange. "Very irregular as I said before. But I'll get the mortgage. I won't be responsible for what happens over this. She should have her father's power of attorney."

"Don't know what one o' them things," stated Tex. "But her word is good enough fer me."

"Yeh—an' me too," chimed in Pink Crosby.

"That makes it unanimous," declared Johnny.

Lange went reluctantly to the vault and began spinning the dial. He was very much perturbed—very much indeed. His dignity was badly ruffled. He wished devoutly that Spelle would show up. Lange knew the history of the Delevan mortgage, knew it very well indeed. And he knew that was the one piece of paper held by the defunct bank that Spelle wanted to get his hands on above all else. He hated to think what Spelle's outburst would be on finding that his chance to take over the San Juan plateau had slipped between his greedy fingers. But apparently there was nothing further he could do. So presently the vault door swung open and Lange came out with the Delevan mortgage.

Tex opened the money belt and began tassing bundles of big denomination bills on the table.

"Count it," he ordered.

"Interest for three months is also due," stated Lange as he laid aside the last bill.

"How much?" growled Tex, digging into his pocket.

"One hundred and fifty dollars."

Between the three of them Tex and Johnny and Pink Crosby dug up a hundred and forty-five dollars.

It was Ronny who opened her purse and brought to light a final five dollar bill to complete the total.

"Correct?" asked Tex. "All right then—stamp it paid. An 'sign yore name an' official title as well. We don't want any comebacks on this thing."

Helpless to do otherwise, Lange obeyed. Tex could scarce conceal his eagerness and satisfaction as he picked up the precious mortgage, folded it and stowed it in his pocket. On second thought he took it out and handed it to Ronny.

"It's yores, young 'un," he smiled. "Hang on to it."

Ronny was tremulous as she snapped her purse shut about the paper. "Let's go," she murmured. "I won't feel safe until this is in daddy's hands."

At that moment a low ejaculation caused them to turn. In the doorway stood Silas Spelle.

Spelle glared around the room suspiciously, his features pulled into a hard, nasty scowl. But for the moment he did not speak. It was Tex who assumed immediate mastery of the situation.

"Pink, take Miss Ronny down to Jake Butterfield's," he snapped. "Looks like an argument is goin' to bust around here. The kid an' me'll take care of this end of it. Spread out, Johnny."

Johnny skipped lightly to one side, his eyes unwinkingly upon Spelle. Pink Crosby took Ronny's arm and started for the door. Spelle squared his bulk in the doorway, his scowl deepening.

"What's the rush?" he snarled. "What is this anyway—a hold-up? Nobody leaves this place until I get an explanation."

Pink Crosby's cheeks paled slightly, but his blue eyes grew hard and bright. He stepped ahead of Ronny and advanced on Spelle. His right hand hovered above his gun.

"The-so?" he drawled. "Since when? Git outta the way, fore I mow yuh down at the hocks."

"Atta' boy, Pink," chimed in Johnny. "Make a phony move Spelle an' I wreck yore belt buckle complete."

"An' what the kids start I finish," added Tex. "Go ahead Miss Ronny, he'll be good."

Ronny was very pale but her little chin was high as she stepped to the door. Spelle wavered. His nerve was slipping. He stepped to one side and Ronny went by him.


"The Delevan mortgage," cackled Lange excitedly. "That girl has—"

The rest of his words were muffled by the hard smack of Johnny's fist. The elegant Mr. Lange went backwards over a chair to light on his shoulders with a crash.

Continued Next Issue

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