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Sale of Real Estate

Under and virtue of the terms of a certain mortgage deed executed and delivered to the highest bidder, the following described land and premises, to-wit: in the city of Burlington, Alamance county, to secure an indebtedness evidenced by a certain note therein described, default having been made in the payment of said indebtedness, the undersigned will, on

MONDAY, FEB. 10, 1917.
 at 12:00 o'clock at the court house door in Graham, N. C., offer for sale to public entry to the highest bidder, the following described land and premises, to-wit: in the city of Burlington, Alamance county, to secure an indebtedness evidenced by a certain note therein described, default having been made in the payment of said indebtedness, the undersigned will, on

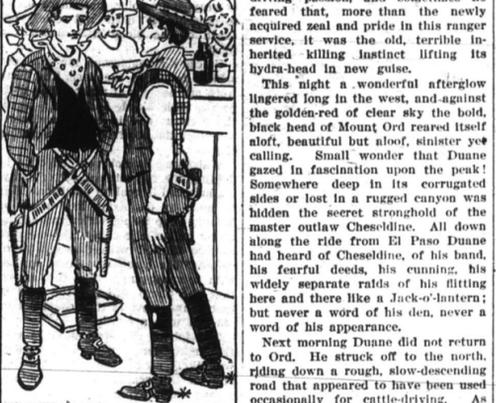
The LONE STAR RANGER

A ROMANCE OF THE BORDER
 BY ZANE GREY
 AUTHOR OF "THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS" "RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE", ETC.

"Well, this heah's—" Fletcher wheeled to the stranger. "What'd you call yourself?"

"I'd hate to mention what I've been callin' myself lately."

"Any business here?" he queried, curiously. When he spoke his expressionless face was in strange contrast with



"Any Business Here?"

"None," replied the stranger.

"Know anybody hereabouts?"

"Nary one."

"Just ridin' through?"

"Yep."

"Slop'n' for back country, eh?"

"There came a pause. The stranger appeared to grow a little resentful and drew himself up disdainfully."

"Well, considerin' you all seem so damn friendly an' oncrulous down here in this Big Bend country, I don't mind sayin' yes—I am in on the dodge," he replied, with deliberate sarcasm.

"From west of Ord—out El Paso way, mebbe?"

"A-huh! That so?" Knell's words cut the air, stilled the room.

"You're comin' way down the river. That's what they say down there—'on the dodge'."

"Stranger, you're a liar!"

"With swift clink of spur and thump of boot the crowd split, leaving Knell and the stranger in the center. The stranger suddenly became familiar to him. His eyes held a singular piercing light that danced like a compass-needle."

"Sure I lied," he said, "so I ain't takin' offense at the way you called me. I'm lookin' to make friends, not enemies. You don't strike me as one

of them four-fushes, achin' to kill sombody. But if you aere go ahead an' open the ball. . . . You see, I never throw a gun on them fellows till they go for theirs."



Here Colonel Webb Exploded.

"It's damnable, sir, and unbelievable. Not rustling any more, but just wholesale herd-stealing, in which some big cattlemen, supposed to be honest, are equally guilty with the outlaws. On this border, you know, the rustler has always been able to steal cattle in any numbers. But to get rid of big bunches—that's the hard job. The gang operating between here and Valentine evidently have not this trouble. Nobody knows where the stolen stock goes. But I'm not alone in my opinion that most of it goes to several big stockmen. They ship to San Antonio, Austin, New Orleans, also to El Paso."

"Wholesale business, eh?" remarked Duane.

"Who are these—big stock-buyers?"

Colonel Webb seemed a little startled at the abrupt query. He bent his penetrating gaze upon Duane and thoughtfully stroked his pointed beard.

"Names, of course, I'll not mention. Opinions are one thing, direct accusation another. This is not a healthy country for the informer."

When it came to the outlaws themselves Colonel Webb was disposed to talk freely. The great names along the river was Cheseldine, but it seemed to be a name detached from an individual. No person of veracity known to Colonel Webb had ever seen Cheseldine. Strange to say of an outlaw leader, as there was no one who could identify him, so there was no one who could prove he had actually killed a man.

But in striking contrast to this mystery was the person, character, and cold-blooded action of Poggin and Knell, the chief henchmen. They were familiar figures in all the towns within two hundred miles of Bradford. Knell had a record, but as gunman with an incredible list of victims, Poggin was supreme. If Poggin had a friend, no one ever heard of him. There were a hundred stories of his nerve, his wonderful speed with a gun, his passion for gambling, his love of a horse—his cold, implacable, inhuman wiping out of his path any man that crossed it.

"Cheseldine is a name, a terrible name," said Colonel Webb. "Sometimes I wonder if he's not only a name, but a name whose does the brains of this gang come from? No, there must be a master craftsman behind this border pillage; a master capable of handling those terrors, Poggin and Knell. Of all the thousands of outlaws developed by western Texas in the last twenty years these three are the greatest. In southern Texas, down between the Pecos and the Nueces, there have been and are still many bad men. But I doubt if any outlaw there, possibly excepting Buck Duane, ever equaled Poggin. You've heard of this Duane?"

"Yes, a little," replied Duane quietly.

"I'm from southern Texas. Buck Duane, then, is not known out here?"

"Why, man, wasn't his name known?" returned Colonel Webb.

"I've kept track of his record as I have all the others. His fame in this country appears to hang on his matchless gun-play and his emnity toward outlaw chiefs."

"Has Cheseldine's gang been busy lately?" asked Duane.

"No. Probably all the stock that's being shipped now was rustled long ago. Cheseldine works over a wide section, too wide for news to travel inside of weeks. There are some people who think Cheseldine had nothing to do with the head-hunter, and that he had up during the last few years in this country. But that's poor reasoning. The jobs have been too well done, too surely covered, to be the work of greasers or ordinary outlaws."

"What's your view of the outlook? How's all this going to wind up? Will the outlaw ever be driven out?" asked Duane.

"Never. There will always be outlaws along the Rio Grande. All the armies in the world couldn't comb the wild brakes of that fifteen hundred miles of river. But the way of the outlaw, such as is enjoyed by these great leaders, will sooner or later be past. There's talk of Vigilantes, the same that were organized in California and are now in force in Idaho. So far it's only talk. But the time will come. And the days of Cheseldine and Poggin are numbered."

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and a number of loungers greeted him loquaciously.

"Beat the stage in, hey?" remarked one.

"There she comes now," said another. "Joel shore is drivin' to-night."

Far down the road Duane saw a cloud of dust and horses and a lumbering coach. Presently it rolled up, a large mud-spattered and dusty vehicle, littered with baggage on top and tied on behind. A number of passengers alighted, three of whom excited Duane's interest. One was a tall, dark, striking-looking man, and the other two were ladies, wearing long gray ulsters and veils. Duane heard the proprietor of the inn address the man as Colonel Longstreth, and as the party entered the inn Duane's quick ears caught a few words which acquainted him with the fact that Longstreth was the mayor of Fairdale.

Duane passed inside himself to learn that supper would soon be ready. At table he found himself opposite the three who had attracted his attention.

"Ruth, I envy the lucky cowboys," Longstreth was saying.

Ruth was a curly-headed girl with gray or hazel eyes. "Tin crazy to ride bronchos," she said.

Duane gathered that she was on a visit to western Texas. The other girl's deep voice, sweet like a bell, made Duane regard her closer. She did not resemble the Colonel, who

"Come out with it!" he said, harshly, reaching for her.

"Don't dare touch me," she cried, her eyes ablaze. She did not move. She had nerve. She eluded two lunges the man made at her. Then his rough hand caught at her waist, and with one pull ripped it asunder, exposing her beautiful shoulder, white as snow.

She cried out. The prospect of being robbed or even killed had not shaken Miss Longstreth's nerve as had this brutal tearing off of half her waist.

The ruffian was only turned partially away from Duane. The gun was still held dangerously upward close to her. Duane watched only that the fellow made him look his head. Colonel Longstreth stood in the doorway in a magnificent rage. He had no weapon. Strange how he showed no fear! He belted something again.

Duane's shifting glance caught the robber's sudden movement. He seemed stricken. The hand that clutched Miss Longstreth's torn waist loosened its hold. The other hand with its cocked weapon slowly dropped till it pointed to the floor. That was Duane's chance.

Swift as a flash he drew his gun and fired. Then the robber's gun boomed harmlessly. He fell with blood spurting over his face. Duane rushed out of the room, across the patio, through the bar to the yard. In the gloom stood a saddled horse, probably the one belonging to the fellow he had shot. His comrade had escaped. Returning to the sitting-room, Duane found a condition appropriate to a pandemonium.

The innkeeper was shouting to find out what had happened. Joel, the stage-driver, was trying to quiet the men who had been robbed. The woman, wife of one of the men, had come in, and she had hysterics. The girls were still and white. The robber Bill lay where he had fallen. Like a cogged lion, Longstreth walked and roared. There came a quiet moment in which the innkeeper shrilly protested:

"Man, what're you ravin' about? Nobody's hurt, an' that's lucky. I swear to God I hadn't nothin' to do with them fellows!"

"I ought to kill you anyhow!" replied Longstreth. And his voice now astounded Duane, it was so full of power.

Upon examination Duane found that his bullet had furrowed the robber's temple and had glanced. He was not seriously injured, and already showed signs of returning consciousness.

"Bring him out of here!" ordered Longstreth; and he turned to his daughter.

Before the innkeeper reached the money and gun taken from him; and presently recovered the property of the other men. Joel helped the innkeeper carry the injured man somewhere outside.

Miss Longstreth was sitting white but composed upon the couch, where lay Miss Ruth, who evidently had been carried there by the Colonel. The Colonel, now that he finally remembered his womanfolk, seemed to be gentle and kind. He talked soothingly to Miss Ruth, made light of the adventure, said she must learn to have nerve out here where things happen.

"Can I be of any service?" asked Duane, solicitously.

"Thanks; I guess there's nothing you can do. Talk to those frightened girls while I go see what's to be done with that thick-skulled robber," he replied, and, telling the girls that there was no more danger, he went out.

"Oh, no!" cried Ruth, very low. "Ray, do you hear?"

"Thank you; we'll be careful," said Miss Longstreth, gratefully. The rich color had faded in her cheek. "I saw those men, watching you from that door. They had such bright black eyes. Is there really danger—here?"

"I think so," was Duane's reply. A soft swift step behind him preceded a harsh voice: "Hands up!"

No man was quicker than Duane to recognize the intent in those words! His hands shot up. Miss Ruth uttered a little frightened cry and sank into her chair. Miss Longstreth turned white, her eyes dilated. Both girls were staring at someone behind Duane.

"Turn around!" ordered the harsh voice.

The big, dark stranger, the bearded one who had whispered to his comrade in the bar-room and asked Duane to drink, had him covered with a cocked gun. He strode forward, his eyes gleaming, pressed the gun against Duane's hip, and with his other hand dived into his inside pocket and tore out his roll of bills. Then he reached low at Duane's hip, felt his gun, and took it. His comrade stood in the door with a gun leveled at two other men, who stood there frightened, speechless.

"Get a move on, Bill!" called this fellow; and he took a hasty glance backward. A stamp of hoofs came from outside. Of course the robbers had horses waiting. The one called Bill strode across the room, and with brutal, careless haste began to prod the two men with his weapon and to search them. The robber in the doorway called "Rustle!" and disappeared.

Duane wondered where the innkeeper was, and Colonel Longstreth and the other two passengers. The bearded robber had wheeled once more. Duane had not moved a muscle, but stood perfectly calm with his arms high. The robber strode back with his bloodshot eyes fastened upon the girls. Miss Longstreth never flinched, but the little girl appeared about to faint.

"Don't yep, there!" he said, low and hard. He thrust the gun close to Ruth. Duane had a little gun in his pocket. The robber had missed it. And he began to calculate chances, ordered the ruffian to force open the door.

Miss Ruth collapsed. Then he made at Miss Longstreth. She stood with her hands at her breast. Evidently the robber took this position to mean that she had valuables concealed there. But Duane fancied she had instinctively pressed her hands against a throbbing heart.

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told the incident from his point of view.

"Cousin," said Miss Longstreth, thoughtfully, "it was fortunate for us that this gentleman happened to be here. Papa scours—laughs at danger. He seems to think there was no danger. Yet he raved after it came."

"Go with us all the way to Fairdale—please!" asked Miss Ruth, sweetly offering her hand. "I am Ruth Herbert. And this is my cousin Ray Longstreth."

"I'm traveling that way," replied Duane, in great confusion. He did not know how to meet the situation. Colonel Longstreth returned then, and after bidding Duane a good night, which seemed rather curt by contrast to the friendliness of the girls, he led them away.

Before going to bed Duane went outside to take a look at the injured robber and perhaps to ask him a few questions. To Duane's surprise, he was gone, and so was his horse. The innkeeper was dumfounded. He said that he left the fellow on the floor in the bar-room.

"Had he come to?" inquired Duane.

"Sure. He asked for whisky?"

"Did he say anything else?"

"Not to me. I heard him talkin' to the father of them girls."

"You mean Colonel Longstreth?"

"I reckon. He sure was sore riled, wasn't he? Jest as if I was to blame for that two-bit of a hold-up!"

"What did you make of the old gent's rage?" asked Duane, watching the innkeeper. He scratched his head dubiously. He was sincere, and Duane believed in his honesty.

"Wal, I'm doggoned if I know what to make of it. But I reckon he's either crazy or got more nerve than most Texans."

"More nerve, maybe," Duane replied. "Show me a bed now, innkeeper."

Once in bed in the dark, Duane composed himself to think over the events of the evening. Why had that desperate robber lowered his gun and stood paralyzed at sight and sound of the mayor of Fairdale? This was not answerable. There might have been a number of reasons, all to Colonel Longstreth's credit, but Duane could not understand.

Next morning Duane walked up the main street and back again. Just as he arrived some horsemen rode up to the inn and dismounted. And at this juncture the Longstreth party came out. Duane heard Colonel Longstreth utter an exclamation. Then he saw him shake hands with a tall man Longstreth looked surprised and angry, and he spoke with force; but

Duane could not hear what it was he said. The fellow laughed, yet somehow he struck Duane as sullen, until suddenly he espied Miss Longstreth. Then his face changed, and he removed his sombrero. Duane went closer.

"Floyd, did you come with the team?" asked Longstreth, sharply.

"Not me. I rode a horse, good and hard," was the reply.

"Hump! I'll have a word to say to you later," then Longstreth turned to his daughter. "Ray, here's the cousin I've told you about. You used

to play with him ten years ago—Floyd Lawson, Floyd, my daughter—and my niece, Ruth Herbert."

Duane always scrutinized everyone he met, and now with a dangerous game to play, with a consciousness of Longstreth's unusual and significant personality, he bent a keen and searching glance upon this Floyd Lawson.

He was under thirty, yet gray at his temples, dark, smooth-shaven, with lines left by widowhood, dissipation shadows under dark eyes, a mouth strong and bitter, and a square chin—face strangely losing the hardness when he smiled. The grace of a gentleman clung round him, seemed like an echo in his hollow voice. Duane doubted not that he, like many a young man, had drifted out to the frontier, where rough and wild life had wrought stony but had not quite effaced the mark of good family.

Colonel Longstreth apparently did not share the pleasure of his daughter and his niece in the advent of this cousin. Something hinged on this meeting. Duane grew intensely curious, but as the stage appeared ready for the journey, he had no further opportunity to gratify it.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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