

Leathered Guns of Circle L

Third Instalment

SYNOPSIS: Slim Loyale is in the clearing a fire glowed and over it crouched a tall, leathery-faced old timer.

Slim Loyale was trembling as he left the prison behind him.

paroled from prison after serving 18 months for a crime he did not commit. He returns to his Circle L ranch to find his father dead and sinister forces at work, trying to make him violate his parole so that he can again be railroaded to prison.

The Brockwell's and their gang are plotting to gain possession of Circle L ranch and the property of Mona Hall, a neighbor and lifelong friend of Slim Loyale.

For just a moment a wary film seemed to shadow Starbuck's eyes. Then he gripped himself. "Well, what's wrong then?" he demanded. "Who did that shoot-in?"

"I did—part of it," answered Dakota. "I just nickered Sarg, darn the luck. He blew a hole in Spud's floor."

"Yeah, I can see that," snapped Starbuck testily. "But how'd the trouble start? Who's responsible for this?"

"He is," bawled Spud Dillon, still bubbling with wrath and pointing at Leo. "He made a dirty crack at Slim. He did it just on purpose I'm bettin', to try to get Slim to make a gun-play, knowin' that if the kid did, his parole would be busted sky-high. But Dakota stepped in an' walloped him one. Then Sarg pulled his gun first. He'd 'a' got Dakota too, if Joe Rooney hadn't tripped him up with a cue. Joe I'm raisin' yore wages for that."

"Listens good," growled Starbuck, stepping over to Slim. "Lemme see yore guns, Loyale."

"Let him have 'em, Slim," cautioned Dakota. "Shore, I'm be-ginnin' to see through lots of things."

"Meanin' just what, Blue?" Starbuck whirled and faced Dakota, his head thrust forward.

"What's it mean to yuh?" retorted Dakota easily. "Don't get the too touchy, Starbuck, or folks will begin thinkin' things."

Starbuck licked his lips, then turned to Slim. One after the other he twitched out Slim's

guns, punched out the shells and squinted through the barrels. As he returned them, he frowned at Sarg Brockwell. "Go easy on the way home from our Je-startin' things, Brockwell," he ordered. "An' tell that cub of yores to button his lip. I won't stand for trouble around here—none whatever."

Dakota, watching Sarg and Starbuck carefully, thought he caught just a glint of under-standing pass in the quick glance they exchanged. Brockwell nodded. "Call it our fault this time," he growled. "But we ain't got gettin' at no time. An' that goes for yuh an' yuh," he finished, indicating both Spud Dillon and Joe Rooney.

"See if we care!" yelled Spud. "I got somethin' off my chest what's been gaggin' me for some time, Brockwell. I shore read yore walkin' papers. As for Joe, well, I allus knew re was a good man. He shore demonstrated it today."

Rooney's wrinkled face creased into a grin and he gnawed a piece off a plug of tobacco. "Me, he twanged, 'I've lived a long yuh got the right idee, Dakota. time, and I've allus found that the wolf with the longest howl packs his tail the lowest. Slim, how are yuh?" And he stepped over to deliberately wring Slim's hand.

No longer in doubt as to how the feeling was running in the Wild Horse just now, Sarg Brockwell herded Leo through the door ahead of him. When they were gone, Jigger Starbuck hesitated a moment before leaving.

"Remember, Blue; the law swings just as wide a loop for yuh as anybody else."

"Aw, hell!" snorted Dakota. "Allus prattlin' about yore gobl-blasted law. Who's breakin' it anyhow? Just remember yoreself Starbuck—yuh may be sheriff, but yuh ain't Gawd Almighty. An' that self-same loop yuh speak of would fit yore shoulders as well as mine. C'mon Slim, Joe Spud; I buyin' a drink."

Being left this pointedly out of the invitation, Jigger Starbuck cursed softly beneath his breath, then left the place.

Ten minutes later, Slim Loyale and Dakota Blue rode north out of Pinnacle. A survey of the street showed that Sarg and Leo Brockwell had evidently pulled out ahead of them. Jigger Starbuck stood in the doorway of his office, his face expressionless, his eyes cold.

For several miles Slim and Dakota rode in silence. Slim was thoughtful, his eyes steadily upon the trail ahead. Finally he shifted in his saddle and looked up.

"Dakota, just what were yuh drivin' at with those remarks yuh made to Starbuck?" he asked.

Dakota grunted. "Just prospectin' some an' seein' if I couldn't turn up a little pay dirt."

"What kind of pay dirt?"

"What kind d'yuh suppose, Slim? Look at it this way. Yuh as me know yuh were framed. Well, somebody did that framin'. If they did it once they'll try an' do it again. It might have been Starbuck, and it might have been Brockwell. Then again, it might have been somebody else.

"Whoever it was had some reason for doin' it. It might have been just to find a goat an' cover up his own tracks. Then again they might have been schemin' deeper. Whatever the reason was, it'll pay us to find out as much as we can.

"One thing shore, yuh gotta figure on standin' for a lot of in-sults until that parole of yores is finished. Didn't yuh take notice how quick Starbuck jumped at the conclusion that yuh were in trouble, the second he stick his haid in the Wild Horse? It looked kinda funny to me."

"Jigger Starbuck has been sheriff in these parts a long time Dakota. An' all in all, he's been a pretty fair sheriff."

"Yeah, he has been. Lately, though, he seems to be slippin'. Yuh notice the Pasco stage is bein' held up pretty regular. An' the Dot H Dot is still losin' cat-torted Dakota easily. "Don't get the too touchy, Starbuck, or folks will begin thinkin' things."

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Stoney Sheard was a middle-aged puncher, silent, still-featured, gruff and unsmiling who had probably been closer to old Bart Loyale than any of the other punchers. The fifth of the group was Oscar Olson a big, lumbering Swede with a shock of unruly tow hair. Oscar was the cook, and a better one never stirred a pot of beans.

Beyond a quiet, "hello boys," Slim said nothing, and the punchers were wordless in their stifled emotions. Slim went directly to the ranch house alone.

Dakota Blue turned to the rest. "Pretty badly cut up. Slim is," he said gruffly. "He's home now, an' Bart ain't here to meet him. Don't speak of the Ole Man to him unless Slim brings up the proposition first."

Roy O'Brien's eyes were all squinted up. "The pore laddy," he muttered. "Shore an' me heart aches fer him. He's a fine lad, Slim is, and he'll be after carryin' on man-size."

Dakota nodded. "Sarg an' Leo Brockwell tried to stir up trouble in town just now. They know damn well the kid is on parole, an' they ain't gonna overlook a chance to get him to make a break that'll bust it. So, any time for the next year an' a half, if yore with Slim an' yuh run into somethin' where there's fightin' to be done, I want yuh to shove Slim aside an' take over the quarrel yoreselves. Savvy?"

Roy flexed his big shoulders. "An' won't we though!" he barked. "Shore an' does either of them Brockwell's try an' start somethin' when I'm around an' I'll shove me fist clear down their gutlets!"

Steve Owens laughed. "I guess Roy's statement goes for all of us, Dakota. What happened after the trouble started in town?"

Dakota outlined the events since he and Slim had struck Pinnacle. When he finished, Stoney Sheard nodded. "Allus did have my doubts about Jigger Starbuck," he drawled. "Too self-centered, duty-struck an' cold-blooded to my way of thinkin'. Time's comin' on this range when hell is gonna pop. I've told yuh somethin'."

"Let 'er pop," said Charley Quinn. "I an' Steve can do a little poppin' ourselves when necessary."

Roy snorted. "Cheeky young cubs, yuh are. Should a spavined jack-rabbit kick yuh in the pants, yuh'd come runnin' home here to Roy for help."

"That so?" yelled Charley. "C'mon, Steve; let's get him, the red-haired, stuck-up ape."

Instantly there was a tangle of arms and legs and the three punchers were on the ground, mauling and tugging and laughing. "I'll show yuh," grunted Roy. "Gang up on ole Roy, will yuh? I'll knock a lick o' sense into yuh."

Sure enough in about a minute Roy was on top of both of them. He cuffed their hair over their eyes and spanked them resoundingly with open palm, when ever a tight-stretched area of blue jean overalls showed.

"Enough," yelled Steve. "Ow! I'm plumb blistered. Won't be able to sit down for a week. Lemme up, yuh wild buckaroo. Dog gone yuh, yuh got a hand like a fence board. Oscar help! Pull him off."

Oscar grinned, grabbed Roy by the shirt collar and the slack of the pants and lifted him clear, much as an ordinary person lifts a kitten. "Now yuh bane nice boys or I lick all of yuh," he boomed.

Roy squinted up at the cook, his blue eyes twinkling. "'Tis a whale of a man yuh are, Oscar, he approved. "Should we combine Ireland an' Sweden we'd be after lickin' the world."

Oscar grinned wider than ever. "We bane make a dent in somebody. Now I go to work. Dinner bane ready in half an hour."

Dakota had watched the mauling match with a contented grin. Even grave-faced Stoney Sheard had a glimmer of amusement in his eyes. There was nothing wrong with the morale of the Circle L Ranch. It was a happy family if there ever was one and Slim Loyale was assured of plenty of backing in his forthcoming battle for exoneration and respect.

Slim spent that first afternoon alone. He never left the house, in fact. He drifted from one room to another, and in every one there were memories that dug and hurt. The house was vacant, yet somehow it was peopled—fil-



Helen Keller Visits Japan

By Frazer G. Poole
ON WINGS OF SONG
Part III

It is evening. From the cool depths of the tamarack swamp comes the pungent, resinous odor of balsam. The stillness is broken only by the occasional song of a cricket. Then, like the opening words of an evening prayer, there steals from the depths a flute-like melody. Now rising to a crescendo, now falling, every sequence ascends higher than the last "until the singer reaches almost impossible vocal heights."

Then he drops his tone, only to follow it again with the same performance. No two strains, however, are exactly alike. Finally the song fades away like the tinkle of a silver bell, and the Hermit Thrush is still.

Both the Hermit and the Mocker are gifted songsters, but their songs are different. The thrush's voice has a mellow flute-like quality that is without equal—except perhaps in his gifted relative the Wood Thrush. The words of the great naturalist John Burroughs express, more beautifully than any others, the wonderful spirit of the Hermit's voice, when he writes: "Mounting toward the upland again. I pause reverently as the hush and stillness of twilight comes upon the woods. It is the sweetest ripiest hour of the day. And as the hermit's evening hymn goes up from the deep solitude below me, I experience the serene exhalation of sentiment of which music, literature and religion are but the faint types and symbols." The Hermit, too, is at his best during the breeding season. But even into August his voice can be heard issuing from the northern swamps.

Song, as we have noted above is normally the expression of the male at the season of mating. But it must not be thought of as solely connected with sex and

ed with the shadowy presence of Bart Loyale.

(Continued Next Issue)

Helen Keller Visits Japan



NEW YORK. Miss Helen Keller sails on April 1 for Japan where she will begin a series of lectures in Japan, Korea and Manchukuo on behalf of the blind and handicapped of the Orient.

Holstein-Guernsey Cow Presents Rare Twins



SEATTLE, Wash. . . . Twins in the bovine world are almost as rare as quadruplets or quintuplet human babies. "Lady," a Holstein-Guernsey cow, gave birth to twins here a week ago. They have been named "Jack and Jill."

At the end of several feet of rope, the undergarment waved from a pole erected recently for a corona-

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