

# Leathered Guns of Circle L by Harry Westbrook

## SEVENTH INSTALLMENT

SYNOPSIS: Slim Loyale is 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 Brockwells 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.

Slim discovers that Jigger Starbuck has joined that plot against him. With the help of Dakota Blue and his cowboys, Slim Loyale defies the land-grabbers to do their worst.

"Oh, nothin' in particular," grunted Spud, "ceptin' they're gonna open that government land along the Kicapoo River up north. The paper here says the final date of openin' ain't been quite decided on yet, but that it'll probably be the fifteenth of next month.

"Shore, there's gonna be a wild scramble over it. There's a lot of powerful good range up there an' humans are funny about free land. Go just as crazy over it as though it was gold. Here's a long article about it by George Arthur. Reckon if the editor of this newspaper up at Vasco knew Arthur like we folks know him, he'd never have printed it.

"Arthur claims it'll shore boom this range. Says a lot of cattlemen down in the Big Bend country are gona pull stakes an' bring their herds up through here to the new range. Understand that sheep interests have got 'em just about licked down in the Big Bend. Sounds good; but me, I don't take much stock in what George Arthur says. He kin lie faster'n a good hoss can run."

Slim nodded, rather absently. The proposed opening of the government lands along the Kicapoo River had been a much discussed item for several years that he knew of. It was a subject that had grown cold to him. And besides, just now he was wondering what angle of approach to use on George Arthur about that mortgage.

Dakota Blue, however, with a suddy gleam in his eyes, pulled the paper to him and began reading it carefully. Slim rolled a cigarette, lit it, then went over to the pool table and began idly punching the balls about.

Presently came the thud of hoofs and a lone puncher rode down the street, stopping before Jigger Starbuck's office. He dismounted and went in, to reappear about five minutes later and cross to the saloon.

He was a diminutive, shriveled-up crooked-legged fellow, with a pair of flaring bat-wing chaps so enormous as to make him appear almost square. He had a pair of beady, button, black eyes, set in a wrinkled, mahogany-brown visage. Half hidden by the flare of his chaps, a pair of big black Colt guns dragged at his waist.

As the newcomer stepped into the room, Dakota Blue turned to half face him, his eyes wary, his right hand dropping until his thumb was hooked in his belt. The newcomer grinned crookedly.

Go on with yore readin', Blue," he remarked in a thin, whispery voice. "All I'm after is a shot of liquor, providin' Dillon will sell it to me. I understand he told my boss an' Leo that their money wasn't any good. How about it, Dillon? Does that apply to the whole Half Diamond B outfit?"

"Not if they mind their business, Cinder," growled Dillon. "What'll it be?"

"Burrbon," announced the puncher, rocking up to the bar. "Blue, will yuh an' Loyale have one with me?"

Dakota shook his head. "Thanks. We just turned Spud down on the same offer."

Cinder Alton shrugged. "Okay. Lots of fellers don't care for

liquor before noon. Me, I'm different. Any again he smiled that crooked, twisted smile.

When Alton finished his drink he turned, leaning his shoulders against the bar, hooking a negligent heel over the bar rail. As he rolled and licked a cigarette, his eyes rested steadily upon Slim. "Don't know where the Half Diamond B could pick up a new foreman, do yuh, Loyale?" he asked. "We lost Rango Deale last night."

"Now!" exploded Spud Dillon before Slim could answer. "Yuh don't mean it? How'd it happen Cinder?"

"Stoped a slug. It broke Rangos' neck, clean as a whistle."

Dakota smiled thinly. "That's tough. Some fellers seem born to stop lead. Yuh'd thought Deale would have learned that, long time ago."

"Yeah," agreed Alton "yuh would at that. How'd yuh get the hole in yore hat, Loyale?"

A subtle change came into Alton's voice at this question. He grew flat and toneless to a degree. His hands had dropped to his hips with the words and his eyes were hard as obsidian. Suddenly Slim knew he was looking straight into the eyes of death, but he did not quail. He squinted carefully along his cue, made the shot and dropped the six ball into a corner pocket.

"Rango Deale put it there with a .45, Alton," he drawled.



"What's this I hear about yuh pluggin' Rango Deale last night, Loyale?"

"It was rotten shootin'."

"Yeah," agreed Alton coldly, "it was. Me, I allus could outshoot Rango. Don't move, Blue, or I'll spatter yuh against that bar like a rotten tomato."

By some uncanny legerdemain Alton had slipped one of his guns free and now held it bearing directly upon Dakota's belt buckle. He flicked out the other and coughed it at his hip, the muzzle looking Slim directly in the eye.

"Ragno should have put his slug just about four inches lower," he observed with a chill laugh. "That's where I aim to put mine." He flared in sudden fury, his thin lips peeling back over his teeth in a grimace of hate.

"Damn yuh!" he whispered. "Yuh killed Rango—killed my pal. Did yuh think I'd let yuh get away with anythin' like that? Not by a jugful. I'll give yuh now, in about ten seconds what yuh gave to him."

Spud Dillon's voice broke in a little thick and wheezy, but very determined. "What yo're gonna do, Cinder, yuh poison whelp, is drop them guns, now!" And with the beginning of his words, Spud shoved the gaping muzzle of a bulldog revolver against the back of Alton's neck.

The leer on Alton's face persisted, a frozen grimace. His eyes flickered. "Yuh ain't got long," reminded Spud.

Alton dropped his guns, shrugged and laughed "I don't think yuh had the nerve to butt in, Dillon," he observed, "knowin' all the time, o' course, that yo're signin' yore death warrant."

"Yore thinkin' is plumb outa order," observed Spud sturdily.

"I don't scare worth a whoop. From now on, what I told Sarg an' Leo Brockwell goes for their whole dangd outfit. None of yuh are wanted in this saloon. Next of yuh to show in here, I meet with a sawed-off shotgun. Now rattle yore hocks."

Again Alton shrugged, then sauntered to the door and out. Without a backward look, he crossed the street, swung into his saddle and rode off. Spud Dillon replaced his weapon on his shelf behind the bar. "Gimme bis guns, Dakota," drawled Spud.

"I wanta keep 'em as souvenirs—souvenirs of the time fat, ole Spud Dillon got the best of one of the wickedest gun-slingers in this neck of the woods."

Dakota nodded gravely and was about to pick the weapons up, when Jigger Starbuck stepped into the place. His cold eyes flickered around and saw Alton's guns.

"Yuh fellers seem to be rushin' the Half Diamond B boys around pretty heavy," he observed. "What's this I hear about yuh pluggin' Rango Deale last night, Loyale?"

"News to me," answered Slim. "I ain't seen Rango Deale since I got home. An'," he added pointedly, "I ain't shot a gun, either. Yuh notice I ain't even packin' any. Yet Cinder Alton flipped his guns just now with the intention of killin' me. He would have, too, except that Spud discouraged him."

"Now lemme tell yuh somethin', Starbuck. I got my eyes open at last. Certain folks railroad me to prison for somethin' I never done. An' me, gettin' a parole they never figgered on, arrived back home before they

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For some time Starbuck was silent, his face unreadable. "I could arrest both of yuh for that kind of talk," he observed presently.

Dakota laughed sarcastically. "Try it, an' yuh go outa here on a board. Funny yo're allus talkin' about arrestin' Slim or me. Why don't yuh exert some of yore precious authority on that Brockwell gang? Why don't yuh trail along after Cinder Alton an' throw him in the jug for a time? He tried to start the argument in here."

"Yuh can't tell me my business," snapped Starbuck.

"Okay," shrugged Dakota. "An' yuh can't tell Slim an' me ours. We've kept faith with yuh, so far, but yuh ain't returned the compliment. From here on out the Circle L rides its own trail in its own way. 'No trespassing' signs are hangin' on every one of us. C'mon, Slim; I just saw that law-shark go past the office."

Slim nodded to Spud and Joe Rooney, but walked past Jigger Starbuck as though he did not exist. Dakota followed suit to the letter.

"But my dear man," expostulated George Arthur, rubbing his thin hands together, as he paced back and forth across the narrow width of his office. "Don't you understand that I cannot transfer the mortgage on Miss Hall's property to you without her consent? It would not be regular—not at all regular. Besides, I wish to hold that mortgage myself."

"Oh yeah?" drawled Slim. "That's kinda funny. If yo're so satisfied to hold the mortgage why in hell are yuh pressin' Hall for the money? Can it be that what yuh want is the ranch and not the money?"

The lawyer's pale eyes narrowed. "My affairs are my own," he snapped. Definitely and finally that mortgage is not for sale. Good by gentlemen. He went to the door and held it open.

Slim laughed coldly, as he stepped out. "Yo're deludin' yoreself, Arthur. Yo're shore draggin' yore rope if yuh figger to steal the Dot H Ranch. Yuh'll never do it. An' the next time yuh hit Miss Hall up for the money, she'll surprise yuh by handin' it over. C'mon, Dakota. I'm sick of talkin' to side-winders and polecats. Let's ride and get some fresh air."

George Arthur watched them until they had disappeared, joggin' easily out of town. His thin lips were writhing with an-athema, his long, pointed nose quivering, his hands clenching and unclenching. He saw Jigger Starbuck slouching across to his office and hailed him.

Continued next issue

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### The Cooking Clinic



QUESTION: What makes muffins stick to the pan?

ANSWER: There are several causes for muffins sticking to the pan. It may be that the pans are not well greased. Or, there may be too much sugar in the recipe. Always use a tested recipe and measure accurately.

QUESTION: What makes a butter cake dry?

ANSWER: Too much flour or too much sugar may cause a butter cake to be dry. Always use a tested recipe and measure accurately. Beating the egg whites until they are too dry or baking the cake at too low an oven temperature for too long a baking period may also cause dry cakes. The Hotpoint heat and moisture-controlled electric oven accurately maintains the desired temperature and humidity.

QUESTION: How much grease should one put on the griddle when making griddle cakes?

ANSWER: Ordinary griddles should be greased lightly each time the batter is added. However, with the new griddle pan of the Hotpoint range (which also serves as a drip pan in the broiler) one needs only to grease it lightly at first. It is not necessary to grease it between "fryings."

QUESTION: What is the best way to remove an angel food cake from the pan?

ANSWER: Allow the cake to cool (inverted) until lukewarm, about 1 hour. Then cut around the edge and tube, invert, and tap on the bottom of the pan briskly, or if necessary, slip the hand between the cake and the edge of the pan and loosen it gently with the fingers.

### A WORD TO THE WIVES



To Chop Nut Meats

An easy way to chop nut meats is to place the nuts in a paper bag and roll the rolling pin over the bag. This breaks the nuts quickly without scattering them.

Insure Whiter Rice

Adding a teaspoon of lemon juice to the water in which rice is boiled will insure whiter, fluffier rice.

Decorate Lettuce Leaves

Lettuce leaves for salads can be decorated attractively by dipping the tips of the leaves in a bowl of water over which a little paprika has been sprinkled.

New Use for Potato Ricer

When preparing hot applications, place the cloth in an open potato ricer and hold under the hot water faucet, letting the cloth become saturated. Then squeeze together the handles of the potato ricer and the cloth will be wrung out without burning the hands.

Cardboard Pattern for Cakes

To cut fancy cakes from a layer cake without using a special cutter, make a cardboard pattern of the desired shape and, placing it over the cake, cut around it with a sharp knife.

A large number of Wayne County farmers are treating their cotton seed with Ceresan this year. Good results obtained by others have convinced them of the value of this practice.

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