

The FEUD at SINGLE SHOT

By Luke Short

SIXTH INSTALLMENT

"Turner" he began. "I've killed men for less than that. And sudden."

"I bought that water," Hammond said slowly, "paid for it in hard cash. I need it to mine with and I'm goin' to take it. The map shows it's on the section I bought, and I'll use very drop of it if I have to drink it!"

"And I say you won't use a drop of it if I have to build a raft and live on the lake to see that you don't," Dave said.

"Don't make a move," the sheriff said softly. "We've got the papers for that land," Dave said. "Come up and take a look for yourself some time."

"You can go into Phoenix and look in the Land Office files of the year 1893. Whoever sold you that land was runnin' a sandy on you, from the ground up. And if you think you can take it with a bunch of killers—"

Hammond, in his rage, forgot he had guns. He lunged at Dave's throat as Dave leaped to meet him, his face contorted with fury. As soon as the sheriff saw that Rosy was trying to part them, he holstered his guns and stepped in. It was a full minute before Dave and Hammond were separated, the sheriff pushing his grunting bulk against Hammond and forcing him against the desk. Rosy held Dave's arms. Hammond's eyes were murderous.

"Turner, I'll kill you like a damned coyote the next time I see you."

"If I don't hunt you down first, Hammond," Dave rasped, his voice hoarse with fury.

Hammond lunged, only to be held by the sheriff. Dave struggled with Rosy.

NOTICE OF SALE
North Carolina, Wilkes County. Wilkes County vs. John H. Yale and wife, Mrs. John H. Yale.
Under and by virtue of a judgment made and entered in the above-entitled cause in the Superior court of Wilkes county, dated June 6, 1938, the undersigned Commissioner will, on the 6th day of July, 1938, at 12:00 o'clock, Noon, at the door of the Wilkes county courthouse, in Wilkesboro, North Carolina, sell at public auction to the highest bidder for cash, subject to the confirmation of the court, the property hereinafter described, located as follows:

Being 55 acres, more or less, in Traphill township, listed in the name of John H. Yale in 1934, and being all the land owned in Traphill township by John H. Yale in 1934. For further description reference is made to descriptions found in book —, page—, in the Register of Deeds office of Wilkes county.
This 6th day of June, 1938.
W. H. McELWEE,
Commissioner

6-27-40 (M)

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"Get him out!" the sheriff ordered.

They left the trail at the notch an hour after noon, heading more west than the trail would have taken them. Rosy had not spoken since they mounted at the Draw Three. Dave had ridden off his anger.

"I reckon I lost my temper," he said.
"Flumb," Rosy said briefly. "I figured you'd be sorry if you done anything to the old man. After all, we didn't have no proof."

"It took me a long time to see that," Dave said slowly. "We haven't proof that he paid the man. All we can do is guess. He didn't take to the idea much, did he?"

"He took to it so danged little that I'm wonderin' if we ain't shou'in' down the wrong barrel."

"What beats me, Rosy, is how Hammond knew I was comin' home. How'd he know I'd get off the train at Soledad instead of at Single Shot?"

"I been wonderin' when you'd think of that," Rosy said slowly. "How would Hammond know you'd be passin' there in that draw at that time of night? How'd he know about it?" He crooked a leg over the saddle-horn and looked at Dave.

"Well, Harmon or Finnegan could have picked it up around Ted or Mary and then went to town and got a couple of drinks under their belts and spilled it."

"They could," Rosy admitted. "So maybe it wasn't Hammond at all. Maybe it was some one that wanted it to look like Hammond done it. Say, them nesters."

"I'm hopin' it isn't them," Dave said seriously.
"I'm hopin' those nesters are reasonable people."

"Here's the scheme. I thought of it last night, but didn't say anything until I'd seen Pearson. He gave me a ninety-day extension on the paper he's holdin' against the spread."

"Well?"
"Those nesters are in good black land," Dave continued. "They're probably pretty good farmers. I can get a crew of Mex's to ditch water down to them from the creek. It runs about a mile from that bottom land, but it's shut off by a low hill." He looked at Rosy. "Let those nesters raise alfalfa on shares with plenty of water."

"You turnin' farmer?"
"No. But look. There's a bunch of mines around here, besides these two towns. With water we could get three crops of alfalfa in the summer. Contract some of it, hold the rest and get skyhigh prices for it later. In ninety days, I'll have enough from that to clean off the paper and start in stockin' the place."

A two hours' ride brought them to the lip of a grassy hill and they reined up. At the bottom of the basin lay orderly checkerboards of fields, now fallow, waiting for the spring plowing.

Small in the distance, at the base of the cliff, lay a cluster of buildings.

They rode point to the cabins, skirting the fields a little. There were six houses that Dave could see, log shacks. As they approached the first shack, Dave saw a man step out the door. He noted passively that the man was so tall he had to stoop to get through the door. He was unshaven, hatless, wearing dirty bib overalls and a flannel shirt.

They reined up before him and

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have let his eyes wander casually around the place before he brought them to bear on the nester.

"Howdy," he said amiably. The nester spat noisily. "Lookin' for some one?" he growled.

"Six of you," Dave said laconically.
"I'll do," the nester retorted. He was staring into the barrel of a Colt in Dave's hand.

"Close that door," Dave said softly. "You got a gun there just inside the door, so move slow."

The nester continued to stare insolently at him, his hands in his hip pockets.
Dave's gun exploded and a chip of wood behind the nester's head splintered off.

Dave saw the nester's face set a little as he leaped away from the door. He reached in and got the rawhide latching and swung the door shut.

"Now step out here," Dave said. He leathered his gun and the nester stepped close to his horse. Dave folded his arms.

"I'm Dave Turner," he announced.
"How would you like to clear off my land?" he asked softly.

With the quickness of a cat, the nester drove his fist into the nose of Dave's horse. The horse jerked his head high, reared, and Dave slid out of the saddle. The nester turned and ran toward the house. Dave tripped him and the nester crashed into the door.

Dave stood a little ways off from him, unbuckling his cartridge belt and holster, letting them fall to the ground.

"Get up and take a beatin'," Dave said softly, kicking the guns out of reach.

The nester rushed in, head down. Dave stepped aside and straightened him up with a looping left to the mouth. Dave let him walk into a straight right arm three times, then avoiding a low kick and flailing arms, he sank a body swing to the nester's stomach, doubling the heavier man up.

Dave stood over him, breathing heavily.
"If you want any more, stand up," Dave said.

"Not me. That's enough."
"Look what I got in the round-up," Rosy's voice said from the corner of the house.

Dave turned and saw four men standing sullenly before Rosy, who had dismounted and made the rounds of the other shacks while Dave was fighting.

"Get in the house," Dave said. "I got some turkey to talk."
The beaten nester threw open the door. The house consisted of one room, a double-decked bunk at one end, a stove and table at the other. Four home-made chairs and a shelf comprised the rest of the furniture.

"Sit down," Dave ordered, standing in the middle of the room.

"I reckon you know why I'm here."
They nodded.

"I can run you off this land right now and burn your shacks. I reckon you know that."

"Sure," one of the nesters, a small wiry man in middle age replied.
"All right," Dave answered. "I got a proposition to make. You can take it or leave it. You five can farm on an alfalfa crop. Startin' tomorrow, you can break up all the land you can. I'll get a crew to put in ditches. In a week and a half you can be ready to put in the crop. With plenty of water, we'll get three crops this summer and a market for the hay with all the horses there are in these two towns and the mines. Suit yourself. Stick here and take a forty per cent share and work, or clear out—way out."

"You mean you're puttin' water down here?" the middle-aged man asked.

"That's it."
The nester gave a brief glance at his companions.

"I dunno about the rest of 'em, but I'll stick and glad of it. Damn

glad of it. My son-in-law—he owns the place on the other side of me—will too. He ain't here, but I'll swear he will."

"I'll stay," the big man said. "Some here," the other two joined in.

"If this goes right," Dave said, "There's no reason why this arrangement can't go on. It's up to you all. You've got more good bottom land here than you can ever farm. You've got water—or will have it. I'll have the seed ordered in Single Shot and delivered to Soledad and you can haul it up from there."

"I don't feel right about this," the middle-aged nester said. "I never have. I've usually paid for what I took, but this here spread had so danged much land—that I reckon I hated to see it go to waste. But from now on, Turner, I'm payin' my debts. You'll get nothing from me but work. My name's Rourke."

"All right," Dave said, grinning. "Let it ride that way, Rourke. If there's anything you need, and I can give it to you, come up to the house."

By lantern light—for it was past ten when they reached the ranch—Rosy rubbed down the horses, grained them and was forking some hay.

The stable door swung open and Winters stood in the doorway, his dark face scowling against the light.

"Oh, it's you," he said amiably, when he saw Rosy. "Mind forking down some hay for my horse?"

"Sure," Rosy answered.
Winters led the horse in, a big bay with a Roman nose, still breathing heavily, his sides wet with sweat. Rosy was about to speak, but held his tongue. If the hombre didn't know enough to walk a horse after lathering him, then let him lose a couple of horses in the process of finding out.

"Look over the range today?" Winters asked.
"Took that Jasper into town on his horse," Rosy answered.

"What did you find out?"
"Name of Freeman. Used to work for Hammond."

Winters snorted, then smiled knowingly. "I don't suppose Dave has told you what Hammond's trying to do about the lake up here."

"He told me," Rosy said. "We saw Hammond too."
"What did he say?"

"He's shootin' on sight at next meetin'," Rosy said dryly.

A dim roll of thunder came to their ears. The first tentative slaps of rain, dull and widely

(Continued on page eight)

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ELECTRIC REFRIGERATION

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