

RODEO ROD

Illustrated by
Henrietta McCaig Starrett

By **PHYLLIS MOORE**
— **GALLAGHER** —

ROD BRAXTON tied an orange bandana round his surnburned neck, anchored his chaps to his narrow waist and gave his spurred boot heels a jubilant click. There was nothing, he told himself gayly as he slouched his ten-gallon hat over his young blue eyes, that he liked better than a rodeo. That was unny, too. You'd think he'd get enough of bronc busting, calf tying, steer riding and all the other range-dust stuff on the B-Q Ranch, where he was a cowhand.

"Maybe it ain't just the rodeo," he thought, studying his lean dark face in the warped mirror of his shack. "Maybe it's what a rodeo does to the town. The crowds! The excitement!"

Rod cast an appreciative eye at his reflection. He was 23, gritty, hard-packed, steely-strong and tall. Girls liked him. That is, practically every girl he had ever known outside of that school teacher up to Cowtown.

When he had first seen Lois Walters he had wanted to herd her right into marriage. Her eyes were so beautiful and dark, her bobbed hair had such a fine sorrel glint. But after those first few dates, when Lois had talked horses in a man's lingo, when she had done trick riding that was champion stuff—bronc busting and flash twisting—he had begun to think she was hardly a girl at all and certainly not one to be rushed into double harness with him. A man wants a feminine dame for a wife, and Lois Walters was no clinging vine nor spurter of lady-like tears for all her beautiful eyes and her silky curls.

ROD'S dark eyes began to gleam. Maybe at this year's rodeo there'd be a girl, a soft and gentle one.

He began to dream. He saw himself ranching on his own; gray-blue smoke curling in lazy tendrils up to the sky from his chimney; a lovely girl waiting for an evening; soft red lips raised for a curled shyly around his broad shoulders. And behind all this beautiful picture was security. He still had the money that his father, the best cowhand in Wyoming, had left him. He had some money he had managed to save on the infinitesimal wages he earned at the B-Q.

"Gosh," mumbled Rod, and still in a daze he turned out of the cabin, sprang nimbly onto the saddled pinto grazing by the fence and started on his way.

In town, Rod hitched his pinto to the pine rail before Kimbrough's Dancing and Eating joint and kicked the loose range-dust from his heels. He stood a moment in the dark outside the door, studying the few figures in the long, brilliantly lit room. A crowd of punch-drunk, whiskey-meat and looking for trouble, were stinging like a pack of Coyotes found a rabbit.

He Might Tame Bucking Mustangs With Ease, but He Had a Lot to Learn About Women

Lois. Only you gotta promise you won't laugh at me."

Lois promised, and he told her all about Lolita.

"Some one," said Lois, "ought to organize an expedition to take you away from that menace before it's too late."

At 1 o'clock in the afternoon the show was on. Horses' hoofs thundered, steers bellowed, pistol shots cracked out and drowned some of the boys. Half professional, half amateur, it was a thrilling institution of the romantic past revived in the vital present. The first day of the rodeo had begun in full blast.

ROD won himself the name of "ace contestant" that first day. The next, he did even better. He rode Fireboy, the maverick of many ranges, and was still on him when the whistle blew.

He tried his hand at cow tying and roping and steer riding. He became a celebrity. Wranglers hailed him with deference as he walked the streets. Punters crowded around him and clapped him on the back with, "Fine work, kid. That was some ride. You're going to be the champ of this show, all right. Hoot had better watch out for his Hollywood contracts!"

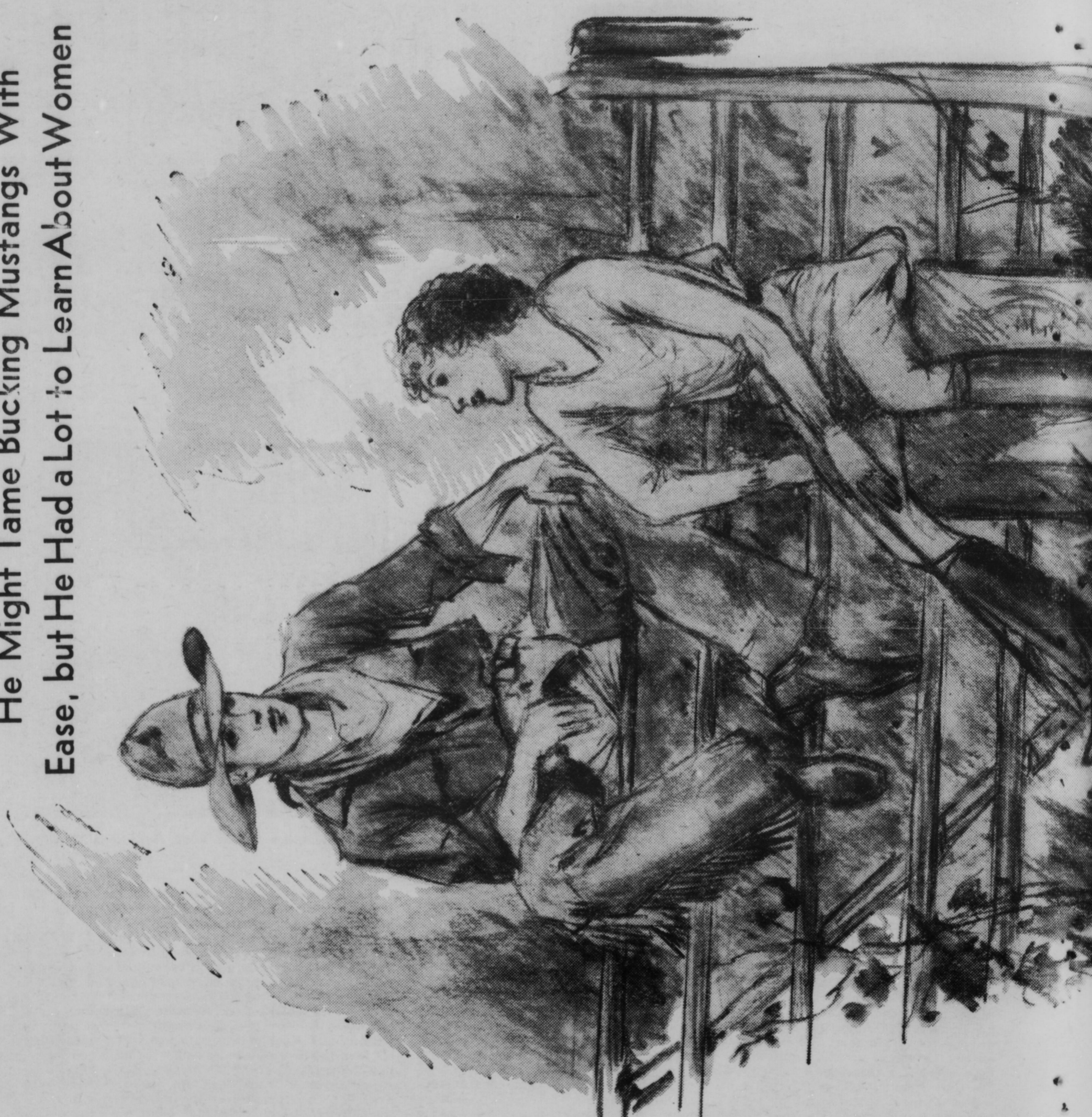
On the third and last day of the rodeo Rod was out of bed at 7 A. M. He hurried down to the final drawing at the top-horse tent and found that the miracle had happened. "You're the guy," said the clerk, proffering the hat. "Everybody's drawn, 'cept you. This is the last slip. It's Dynamite you're drawing!"

"Whoopsee-e-e," screeched Rod. "Boy, I'm gonna ride Dynamite!"

"You only think you are," said the clerk, glumly. "That's a plumb nutty boss feller. He's killed and hurt more guys than the World War!"

Three o'clock finally came. The announcer was yelling, excitedly: "Get ready, ladies and gents! Out o' Chute Ten in just one minute comes Dynamite, the famous killer, the worst hoss rodeo ever knowned. An' Rodeo Rod—Rod Braxton, folks—is gonna try an' ride him!"

Dynamite was everything his name implied and then some. From the moment the doors swung open Dynamite cut loose. His back arched to the stiffness of whalebone, with a whiplash convolution at the end of each bound that jarred Rod's insides. Dynamite wasn't any ordinary buckler; he landed at all angles; he pawed the air; he reared skyward, then toppled straight backward in an attempt to crush Rod and roll on him. Over and over Rod came near plunging from the saddle. Over and over broad swags of daylight showed under him. Rod never knew how long it lasted nor how many homicide tricks



He only knew that