

Starbuck came over and enter-ed. "Well?" he demanded. "What did Loyale an' Blue want?" The lawyer fumbled nervously for a black stogy, snapped the tip off and lit it. "Loyale tried to get me to sell the Dot H Dot mort-gage to him. I'm afraid they are beginning to get wise, Starbuck."

"I know damned well they are," grunted the sheriff. "They shore hung me over a barrel just now. I healthy for a lot of folks I can name, if things shape that way too strong." Arthur looked puzzled. "I don't exactly understand." "I mean that Brockwell is get-tin' too raw," exploded Starbuck.

breaking forth in full fury. "Him breaking forth in full fury. "Him an' his crowd are clumsy as a bunch of oxen. Start from the be-ginning an' count up the slips he's made. tin' too raw," exploded Starbuck, the anger he had been subduing

"Yuh an' me put Slim Loyale in Jarillo, knowin' Bart Loyale would be daid before Stim got out. Then the question of a parole for Slim came up. Brockwell promised us that he had influence enough to block that parole. He fell down an' Slim got out.

"In the meantime he was gonna see that Dakota Blue was put outa the way. The best he could do about that was to miss a good shot at Blue one day along Nig-ger Ridge. Since then Blue's been too wary to be got. Sarg ain't been able to pull down the Dot H

been able to pull down the Dot H Dot herds fast enough to keep the Hall girl from payin' her in-terest on that note yuh hold. "Why, I hear that he was even dickerin 'to buy up some of her stuff. Course he'd have robbed her, give her only half what the stock was worth, but had the deal cone through she'd have had gone through, she'd have had more money to stall yuh off. Brockwell is so damned greedy hole blind " he's blind.

he's blind." "Anyway, last night he had a chance to get Slim Loyale on the trail between the Circle L and the Dot H Dot. Loyale got through Clean with the help of Roy O'Brien. Before the night was over, O'Brien plugged Rango Deale over, Deale.

"Deale an' Cinder Alton were pals. So what does that crazy Al-ton do but try to wipe out Loyale again just now up in the Wild Horse. Loyale didn't even have a gun on him. Alton got upset an' his guns were taken off him. An' Loyale an' Blue are all through turnin' the other cheek.

"Loyale's puttin' on his guns. He told me straight that, parole or no parole, he's gonna start throwin' lead. He also said that if I tried to take him into custody

he

even though he duff. Weil, keep a stiff upper lip. Ten day's time is ten days' time. Mebbe somethin' will turn up." "No, Abe; nothing will. That's the trouble. I've been waiting too long now for some good break to come along. They just don't; that's all. If I had stepped out with ruthless hands and 'forced my own breaks, things would be different now." "Mebbe," nodded Fornachon.

my own breaks, things would be different now." "Mebbe yo're right, Well, I'll tell the boys, An' some day I'm gonna cook up a reason to punch that lawyer jasper to a tall, thin peak." Mona went back to the house. As soon as she disappeared, Abe saddled a bronco and rode off, apparently in search of the Dot H Dot punchers, to give them the bad news. But as soon as he was out of sight of the ranch build-ings, he headed straight for the Circle L. He rode rapidly, and about halfway between the two places overtook another rider, a tall, keen-eyed man of middle age, dressed in dusty, worn range hab-iliments. The stranger's hair was

lliments. The stranger's hair was bleached to a straw yellow, as was bleached to a straw yellow, as was the long drooping mustache that bracketed his thin, strong mouth. At sound of Abe's approach, the stranger turned in his saddle and stopped. When Abe came up he nodded. "Amigo," he drawled, his voice deep and slow, "mebbe yuh can tell me where I can locate a feller named Arthur — George Ar-thur." na get over a second time. Nope, I'm keepin' my coat tails in the clear from now on. Yuh can tell Brockwell that, an' to hell with both of yuh!" Saying which, Jigger Starbuck stalked out of the door and croseed to the solitude of his own of-fice.

hear there was trouble along the trail last night." understood he owned a ranch hereabouts—the Dot H Dot Ranch.'

Abe stiffened. "There must be "Slim's all right," broke in Abe gently. "Brockwell's crowd was layin' for him, but between him long since was it yuh got that

layin' for him, but between him an' Roy O'Brien they foxed 'em. There was one casualty. Rango Deale got rocked off by Roy. Shore, there's bad trouble brew-in'." Mona nodded, her eyes tragic. "I've sensed it piling up on this range, Abe, for a long time. Ever since they sent Slim to prison I've felt that sinister cloud hanging above us all. I'm afraid, Abe — afraid."

baking ginger

bread apple beans nam

afraid." Abe stared somberly out of the window. "Don't go to losin' yore courage, Miss Mona. I admit there's a lot of polecats on this range, but there's quite a count of white men also. No, I wouldn't worry too much, was I yuh." Still later that morning, almost noon, in fact, a buckboard rat-tiled up to the Dot H Dot. George Arthur, dressed in a voluminous linen duster and a narrow-brim-med Stetson got out of it. There afraid."

med Stetson got out of it. There was a sharp, nervous impatience in his eyes, his thin lips were set. Mona met him on the porch, murmuring a perfunctory greeting. Arthur wasted no time in getting

to the purpose of his visit. "Miss Hall," he rasped, "are you prepared to settle the note I hold against your ranch?" Mona's heart sank. She shobk

Mona's heart sank. She shokk her head. "No, I'm not, Mr. Ar-thur—at least, not immediately. But with a little more time—" Arthur halted her with uplifted hand. "Impossible," he snapped. "I regret this, of course, but con-ditions are such that I can actend

ditions are such that I can extend you no further time, I hall have to foreclose immediately." "B-but you said—" Mona was fencing rather fantically, but Ar-

"What I may have said in the past has absolute

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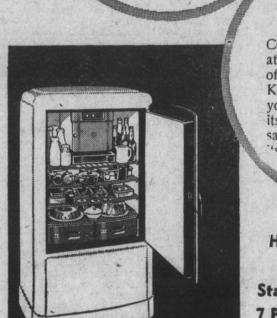
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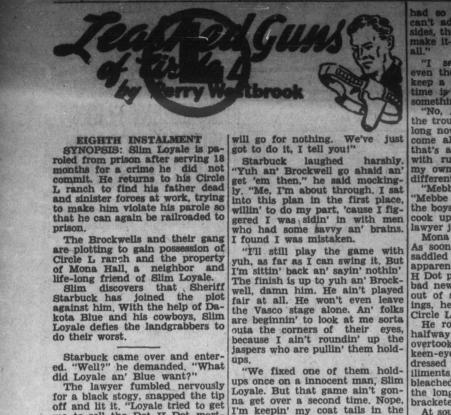
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how!'

Starbuck had talked so fast and with so much pent-up anger, that he was breathless when he finish-

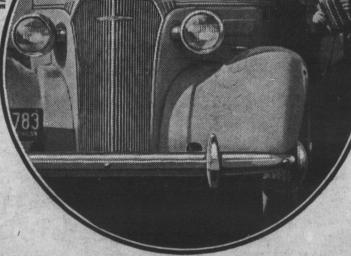
he'd salivate me. An' Dakota Blue an' the whole Circle L outfit is backin' Loyale to a finish. Damn Brockwell an' his crowd for a bunch of knot-haided fools, any-how!'

will take possession. Good day." He was gone before Mona could collect her wits, leaving her feel-ing more desolately beaten than which so breathless when he finish-ed. George Arthur had begun pacing about his office again, his thin lips pursed, his forehead wrinkled with agitated thought. "Things have been badly mess-ed," he agreed jerkily. "But of course if the worst comes to the worst, we can stage a raid on the Circle L some night and clean up the whole nest." Starbuck laughed scornfully. "Yuh gone crazy too?" he de-manded. "Yuh sound like it, talk-in' that way. Listen here, Arthur. Only a idiot underestimates his opponent. Slim Loyale is a scrap-pin' fool; he comes from that kinda stock.

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