



# The FEUD at SINGLE SHOT

By Luke Short

## SEVENTH INSTALLMENT

**Synopsis**  
With his partner, Rosy Rand, Dave Turner is on his way to his ranch at Soledad. Both men are returning from prison where they have served sentences for unjust convictions. On the train, which is carrying a large sum of money, Rosy's quick action and straight shooting foils a hold-up while Dave saves the life of Martin Quinn, a gambler, who is being threatened by a desperado. Stopping at Single Shot, the sheriff tells Dave he is not wanted. Quinn defends Dave but Dave and Rand go to Soledad to meet Mary, Dave's sister, and proceed on horseback to the ranch. Mary reveals she is married and tells Dave that the ranch is doing poorly, being beset by nesters and involved in a claim dispute. Suddenly a shot from the darkness topples Dave from his horse. Rosy fires and kills the unknown assailant and they rush to the ranch to treat Dave's severe scalp wound. Next morning at breakfast Dave and Rosy discover that Mary is now cooking for the ranch hands—a bad sign. After discussing financial matters with Mary Dave and Rosy saddle horses and leave for Single Shot to deliver a corpse to the sheriff and see the town banker. Identity of corpse reveals him to be ex-employee of Hammond's. Dave, Rosy and the sheriff immediately confront Hammond with facts. Fight between Hammond and Dave prevented by sheriff. Dave plans to raise alfalfa on his land and use money to pay off mortgage.

The lake was no more. Nothing but this black pit of slime, a small pool at the very bottom mirroring the sky, left to mark it.

Dave's face was paper white. "Damn Hammond!" His voice clogged with fury.

He wheeled his horse and rode the hog's back up to the wedge, then dismounted. Rosy at his side. Close to it, the gap was terrific.

"Springs blown underground, too," Dave muttered bleakly. "Since grand-dad's time, that lake level hadn't varied three inches. That creek out of it ran the whole length of our range,

watered all our stock except some scattered water holes. Now the spread isn't worth the paper that covers it," he finished savagely.

"He knowed dynamite," Rosy said tonelessly. "He had this planned a long time," Dave said slowly. "He didn't have time to learn about that irragatin' scheme of ours, but he'd had it planned. He had to single-jack holes in that rock, drill them. It'd take time. Plenty. Lots of nightwork." Pausing, he looked at Rosy, pain in his eyes. "We was sleepin' two of them nights, Rosy. And I could have killed him yesterday."

"Well, let's go. The sooner I meet him and kill him the better I'll feel."

Rosy took a last look at the slime-covered rocks and cursed again, long and passionately. He mounted, squirmed until his slicker was settled and nosed his bay down the hog's-back, paying no attention to the reins. The horse was spirited, too, and wet. The bay edged off the trail of Dave's tracks a way, then, Rosy not responding, he headed for the shelter of a tall jackpine. Under it he stopped, and Rosy roused from his reverie.

Suddenly his glance fell to the carpet of pine needles. There he saw a cigarette butt. It was a tailor-made.

Rosy dismounted. As he stooped to pick up the cigarette, he saw a track, which brought a low whistle from him. It was fresh, made during the night, and had not been washed out by the rain. It had the sole of a boot and the heel of a shoe. It was a freak track, one seldom seen in that country. He scowled over it for a minute, measured it roughly with his hand, and mounted again.

He had no doubt that Hammond had squatted under this tree to set off the charges of dynamite—Hammond, or one of his understrappers. A small pile of fuse scrapings near the trunk of the jackpine confirmed this.

Dave was waiting for him beside the trail. Together, they rode into the notch, the sky out over the valley gray as death.

Shed Martin fumbled with wet hands in his pocket and drew out a moist plug of tobacco. He stood lost in the black vellum of night, listening to the ore rattle in the wagons, watching the rain channel off his hat brim, almost ob-

scuring the lighted window of the office of the Draw Three.

He lifted reluctant feet and made for the office door.

Hammond looked up from his desk when the door opened.

"Hullo, Shed," he greeted the figure that slammed the door.

"How're you doin'? Have it cleaned up by seven o'clock?"

"I reckon," Shed said. "Look here, Buck. If this ain't a hell of a night to—" he finished savagely. He couldn't do it. A man couldn't refuse Buck Hammond anything.

"What's the matter? Anything wrong?"

"Naw. I just came in for a knife. You gotta have a knife to cut this dark if you git anywhere," Shed growled.

Hammond reached wearily for a bottle which was in the depths of a bottom desk drawer. It was followed by a glass. He indicated them both to Shed.

"Have a drink."

Shed accepted enthusiastically, eyeing Hammond closely. He tossed off the drink, smacked his lips and set the glass down with a clatter.

Hammond's grave eyes sought Shed's and he shook his head slowly. "Ever been called a murderer, Shed? A bushwhacker, or the man that hired a bushwhacker?" Ever been called a water thief?"

"I got called all of them this afternoon," Hammond said quietly.

"Who?"

"Young Turner up at the D Bar T. Claimed I hired Freeman—remember him?—to take a pot at him last night from a dry gulch. He thinks I done it to get that lake up there we been quarrellin' about.

"He looks like a decent kid, young and hot-headed, but clean." He looked up at Shed.

"What hurts me, Shed, is that he believed it himself. He believed I was everything he called me and was willin' to back it up."

Hammond sighed, and suddenly smiled a weary smile. "Years ago, Shed, I reckon I wouldn't have cared. Now I'm old, and I've lived as square as a man can in these times. It—hurt like hell."

Shed made an awkward gesture of sympathy.

Hammond got a hold on himself and straightened up. "Think you'll get her finished tonight?" he asked.

Shed raised a hand and they listened to the ore crashing out into the wagons. Shed smiled.

"We'll make it," he said grimly, "but damn me if I don't think we'll have to swim the last load into Single Shot."

"Boggy?"

"Plain hell," Shed said. "Ever try to drive a six-horse hitch through a danged swamp in the rain? It ain't no fun."

"I know it," Hammond said. "I'm sorry I had to work the men through tonight, Shed, but you know how I stand. If I have to pay demurrage on those cars, I wouldn't be able to meet next month's wages."

Shed turned to the door and yanked it open. Standing just outside was a slim, slickered figure. He peered at it silently.

"What in tarnation are you doin' out on a night like this?" he asked sternly, but not unkindly.

Shed guffawed and held the door open for her.

"Hello, Dad," she called to Hammond, swinging a dripping saddlebag onto his desk.

Hammond looked at the clock on the wall. "Four o'clock. What are you doin' up and prowlin'?"

She drew off her Stetson, revealing an unruly mass of corn colored hair, the edges reflecting beads of rain.

"I couldn't sleep, Dad. After the man came in with your message that you'd stay out all night, I thought I'd get a long sleep. I ate supper alone and went to bed and couldn't sleep. Then I thought you might be hungry, so I decided to get up and bring you out some sandwiches and coffee."

Hammond laughed in spite of himself. He watched her seat herself on the desk top, extract a huge bundle of sandwiches and a whiskey bottle full of coffee from the saddlebag and lay them on the desk. Suddenly, his eyes were grave.

"Do you mind bein' poor, Dorsey?" he asked gently.

Her hands paused and she regarded him soberly. "Of course not. Why do you ask, Dad?"

Hammond told her about Dave and Rosy's visit, omitting the accusations Dave had made and the ensuing struggle.

"It looks like we'll be crowded," he finished. "It looks like I can't get the water without a court fight and I haven't the money for one. My water," he added bitterly.

A sullen, sudden gathering rumble shook the building.

A second detonation, louder than the first, came rocketing to their ears.

Hammond strode to the door and opened it.

"Shed!" he called.

"Yeah?" a voice called out of the dark.

"Was that blasting?" Hammond asked.

"Dunno. It sounded like light-

nin' hitting. You could hear the rock movin' up the hill.

"Who'd be blasting now?"

Three more earth-shaking, coughing roars came to them in quick succession.

"That's dynamite," Shed said. He was standing in the doorway now before Hammond and Dorsey.

As the echo died out, a sullen, dim roar rose over the patter of the rain. They listened in silence a full minute, looking at each other.

"Sounds like water," Shed ventured.

"The lake!" Dorsey cried.

Hammond whirled, raced across the room for his slicker.

"Shed, get these teams away from the buildings. Drive for high ground anywhere outside of this wash!" Shed disappeared and he turned to Dorsey. "Honey, you get Pancho and make your way up the hill here. Be sure and stay out of the arroyo. And hurry."

He plunged out into the night. In the dark, Hammond made toward the mine shaft. Six men down there, working night-shift. He cursed bitterly, striking blindly through the dark. Then something cut him savagely across the shins, checking his speed with a crushing pain. He fell forward on his face in a mass of cable. The winch, he knew now.

"Shed!" he called out into the night. "Shed! Oh Shed!"

"Where are yuh?"

"Here. Come here." He could hear Shed slog across the stretch of mud. Could see the freighters in the inadequate, rain-slanted light given off by the lanterns, fighting their six-horses in an effort to get them turned.

"There's men down in the shaft, Shed. Six of them. I've broken my leg—I think. Shed—can you reach them?"

But Shed had already gone

down the slanting shaft. Hammond could hear his great voice roaring, calling the men, dimmer now as the seconds passed. Thank God, the shaft went horizontally into the hill side and not vertically. They might have a chance to get out.

Then the full force of accident hit Hammond.

"Dave Turner," he said aloud, and then he cursed viciously.

When he was calm again, he knew he would have to move, get out. The whole damned lake was coming down the hill from the sound of it, and he'd be caught. He crawled painfully on his hands and knees through the slime. He heard a horse gallop away and dimly realized that it was Dorsey fleeing.

When he came to the diversion ditch, he knew the water was only a few inches from the top. He had to crawl through it and its chill seemed to clamp every muscle in his body to its nearest bone. He rested on the other side.

The sound, the rumble, was closer now, more ominous. He began crawling again, feeling the sharp stones on his knees almost a relief from the pain that was stabbing up from below. The rocks were bigger now, giving him some sort of hand hold and leverage as he lifted himself among them fighting his way up the hill.

"Shed'll be lost," he thought miserably. "Lost, drowned. Seven of them, like rats."

Then the noise, a great wailing roar, seemed to charge out of the night.

It opened up, this howling, furious bedlam. The unleashed lake had jumped the watercourse, lifted itself in a mighty surge over the surrounding land. He dimly saw the light wink out in the office, heard and felt the

timbers of the building crash and scrape.

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