



The FEUD at SINGLE SHOT

By Luke Short

FIFTEENTH INSTALLMENT

"He's wild!" Reilly yelled. "Let go and ride up."

Crazed with pain, the horse jarred down stiff-legged again, humped its back for another pitch and Dave savagely rubbed the raw flesh. Halfway up in its arc, the horse started a sunfish, and when it landed Dave felt as if he were going to be ripped out of the saddle with the sudden fall.

The horse had gone over the trail edge.

With Dave's weight on its back, the horse started to plummet down the steep slope. Dimly, Dave realized that in the quick descent, Lew, who had held to the rope trying to fight the horse down, had been swept from his saddle by the swift yank on it.

"Steady, steady," he muttered soothingly and part of his calm was communicated to the horse, who stopped, trembling.

He had to be quick. Closing his eyes he pulled savagely at the things binding his wrists to the saddle horn. A sickening rip of skin and one hand was free. Soon the other was able to help him as he turned in his saddle, struggled to free his slicker.

The slicker free, Dave unrolled it swiftly and found the gun Hank had given him. Then, reaching down and seizing the bridle as reins, he spurred the horse slowly from behind the rock, looking up at the trail. He listened for the sound of horses in the canyon bed.

They were coming, both cursing savagely, at a gallop. Dave pulled his roan close in to the rock and balanced his gun lightly in his bloody palm, his eyes thin, flinty slits in his face.

Lew was the first to charge by, and Dave yelled, Reilly, close on Lew's heels, lunged into sight.

Dave wheeled his horse broadside, in a high arc, slowly, crashed and bucked up. Reilly screamed as he catapulted from his saddle across his horse's neck and to the ground.

"Two," he muttered thickly. Spurring his horse over, he looked down at the two men. Lew was dead, drilled through the head. Reilly was dying, if not dead. He stared at the men dully, sunk in a stupor of pain and fatigue and thirst.

He shook himself. The knots

to the ropes were under the horse's belly where he could not reach them; so, loading his gun again, he shoved the muzzle of his Colt against the rope beside his foot and cut it with a shot.

Dismounted, he was so weak his legs gave way under him.

"I've got to drink," he thought dazedly, sitting on the ground. Crawling over to Lew's horse, he pulled the canteen from the saddle horn. After the first slow drink he paused, then took a deep draught, which strengthened him. Then he lay down in the shade of the rock, tore the slicker into strips and, after washing his wounds, bound them.

He considered the two dead men. He pulled them over to the opposite side of the canyon. Laying them side by side, he piled a cairn of stones over them.

Then he turned to the horses standing in the sun. Dave mounted Lew's pinto and cut Reilly's horse across the rump with his rope. Dave had no idea where the cabin lay, but he knew if given their heads the horses would make for it.

Then he settled down, keeping his eyes and ears alert, riding close to Reilly's horse. His own mount followed wearily behind.

As the time went on, he became more weary and moved closer to the lead horse, watching it. When he heard it whinny and saw it increase its pace, he spurred his horse and headed it off.

Dismounting, he halted the horses to the ground, laying heavy rocks on their reins. He looked around. Ahead of him, the land rose, broken and rocky, to the lip of a ridge.

Directly below Dave lay the barn nestled snugly against the rock out of the wind. In the corral adjoining it, he counted six horses, but Mary's was not among them.

Watching the house and seeing no signs of life, he decided that no one was likely to come out and surprise him.

He looped the lariat around a point of rock, tested it, then let himself down hand over hand to the barn roof. Flipping the rope loose, he let himself down to the ground behind the barn.

His eyes roved the barn, settling on a bearskin lying in a far cor-

ner. A plan formed slowly in his mind.

Going out into the corral again, he moved toward the gate, which consisted of loose poles. The horses watched him.

In the barn again, Dave picked up the bearskin and went to the stable door.

He sailed the bearskin out into the middle of the corral, then dodged back quietly for the back of the addition.

The horses, smelling the bearskin, milled wildly out the gate in a stampede.

They fled past the south end of the house, heading down a narrow canyon to the east. Dave crawled softly around the north end of the shack. At the corner he stopped, listened.

"God-damn, it's them horses scatterin'. Who left that corral gate down?"

Dave did not recognize this voice, but he did the voice that answered. It was Sayres.

"You did, Ed, damn you!"

"But I never," Ed protested.

"Shut up and round 'em up," Sayres ordered. "You help him too, Lufe."

Dave edged his head around the corner of the house in time to see two men file out and head down the canyon afoot.

He gave them time to get out of sight, then he edged around the front door on his hands and knees. He heard two men, one of them Sayres.

"Fell' send word where the posse's headin' for. He'll have some one in the posse, don't you worry. If they crowd us, we better take the gal back to the line camp in the timber, north."

"She's a pertty gal," the second voice said.

"Ain't she though?" Sayres drawled.

Dave straightened up and swung the door open.

Both men were seated at one end of the table, a bottle before them.

In the least part of a second Dave divined what Sayres was going to do. Seated, the outlaw could not get at his guns. He made a leap to place himself behind the stranger, his hands clawing at his guns. Dave's shot was quick, hasty, hardly allowing time for his Colts to clear leather. The shot caught Sayres in the

side and pitched him into the stranger. The impact sprawled them both on the floor. Then Dave's rage broke, as he emptied his guns into Sayres and the stranger.

A feeling of sickness and weariness and disgust enveloped Dave as he let his own gun sag. Sayres lay sprawled over the upset chair face down, his guns fallen out of his lifeless grip. The stranger lay peacefully on his back.

He shucked cartridges into his guns as he strode to the padlocked door.

"Mary!" he called.

There was a sort of muffled cry for an answer and Dave shot the lock off. He knew the two men after the horses would have heard the shots and would probably be running back now.

Once in the dark room, he made out a figure sitting tensely on the cot.

"Dave!" she said.

She was in his arms sobbing before he could recover from his surprise.

"Dorsey. Mary isn't here?"

"N-n-no. I don't think so."

"Who has the keys to the leg irons?"

"I don't know their names, but it's the boss."

He ran over to Sayres, rolled the body over and fumbled thru the pockets. His hands paused and he listened, hearing the pounding of running feet. Slowly, his hand left Sayres and settled to his gun-butt, his eyes narrowing. The running ceased, and a man stepped through the door hesitantly, guns already drawn.

Dave shot just once more and the man pitched forward on his face. Suddenly, a window shattered and Dave laughed.

The second outlaw had chosen wisely. He was fortified up behind a rock sixty yards in front of the house.

Dave found the keys on Sayres and returned to Dorsey, who white and trembling, had witnessed through the open door the duel with the outlaw.

"We kill coyotes because they kill our cattle," Dave said softly. "And we have to kill these hombres, or they'll kill us."

"I know."

"No you don't," Dave said, "but you will when you understand. It's just bloody and cruel."

"Do you feel that way about it too?" Dorsey asked wonderingly.

"More than you," Dave answered.

"More because I'm the one that's got to kill and kill."

"Then this isn't the end?" she asked.

Dave shook his head grimly. The outlaw in front of the cabin was still to be accounted for.

"Can we get away?"

Dave nodded. He stepped to the back door of the addition and shot the lock off.

"Step through here and wait for me outside."

"What are you going to do?"

"A dirty job," Dave said slowly, "but a decent one, I reckon, at that. I'm goin' to fire the place."

When she had stepped outside Dave went into the main room and scattered lamp oil on the floor and blankets. Then he touched it off and stepped outside.

"That hombre out front has only got a six-gun," Dave said. "He can't hit us—I don't think he can even see us. Make a run for the barn and I'll follow you."

"Look out! Dave!"

Dave dropped on his face as a shot blazed from the corner of the cabin. He landed on his stomach, rolling on his side, his free arm whipping out his gun. Only the edge of a hatbrim and a gun showed but Dave emptied his gun at them as he watched the other gun explode. He felt a hot searing pain in his arm and then the shooting ceased.

Flattening himself against the wall, he waited. No more shots came and he made his way cautiously to the corner. He swung out, gun ready, and saw the outlaw kneeling. The man had died like a tired child.

Dave shuddered and looked away.

"I reckon we better hightail it," he said finally, and added slowly, "I'm sorry about that, but there was no other way out."

Dorsey stood up suddenly.

"Take me home, please."

Dave remembered the stinging scorn in her voice when he had seen her in Dr. Fullerton's. "We'll get the horses."

"Where are they?"

"About a mile from here. Can you walk it?"

"Yes, I—" Dorsey at last lifted her eyes to his set white face.

Continued Next Week

NOTICE OF SALE

Under and by virtue of the power contained in a certain deed of trust executed by W. E. Burckham to the undersigned trustee, recorded in the office of the Register of Deeds of Surry County in Book 110, page 234, default having been made in the payment of the note thereby secured and at the request of the holder of the same, the undersigned will offer for sale at public auction to the highest bidder for cash on Monday, October 24, 1938, at one o'clock P. M., in front of the Post Office, Elkin, N. C., the following described property, to-wit:

BEGINNING on an iron stake, A. S. Bates' corner at the curb of Elk Spur street, runs South 59 degrees West 196 feet to an iron stake, cornering in said Bates' line; thence North 29 degrees West with Bates' and W. W. Byrd's land 60 feet to a stake; thence North 58 1-2 degrees East about 168 1-2 feet to the curb of Elk Spur street; thence with Elk Spur street 61 feet to the beginning.

This the 20th day of September, 1938.

EARL C. JAMES, Trustee.

A TIP TO HOUSEWIVES AND HOUSEHOLDERS

Mrs. Housewife, Mr. Householder, do not fail to read the article, "Keeping in Hot Water," which begins on page 137 in the October issue of Good Housekeeping.

This article stresses the importance, from the standpoint of health, convenience and the saving of time and labor, of an adequate supply of hot water; and the ease with which an adequate supply, automatically heated and controlled, can be had. "Installation costs of modern water heaters are reasonable, perhaps lower than you have imagined," advises this publication.

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