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Bluffing an Outlaw

By C. B. LEWIS

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The New Yorker silver mine, located in Mexico, but owned and worked by Americans, had been in running order a year before Jose Favara put in an appearance. He had been heard of, however. He was known as a cattle stealer, a claim jumper and a general outlaw, and it was the popular belief that he stood in with the police. At any rate, they had not interfered with his operations to any extent, and he walked the streets of the town as free as any other man. One day Jose appeared at the mine. He walked straight to the superintendent's office and, doffing his hat, said:

"Senior Barnes, I beg you to excuse me. My name is Jose Favara. I should have called on you weeks ago, but have been busy in other directions. I am now here to do business with you."

"Well, what is your business?" queried the superintendent, although he had a pretty fair idea of it.

"To arrange to draw my monthly salary, senior."

"For performing what services?"

"For leaving my mine in peace."

"In other words, you mean to levy tribute on us?"

"The senior hits the nail on the head at the first blow. My terms are \$200 per month in cash. I shall call for it myself. If accepted you will be under my protection. If not—"

"You will make trouble for us?"

"The senior Barnes hits the nail again. I like to do business with an Americano."

Jose Favara was told that he would have to wait a few days until his proposition could be submitted to the president and board of directors in New York. He was agreeable. He went away bowing and smiling, and Mr. Barnes sat down and wrote a letter.

The proposition was extortion pure and simple. The authorities could be appealed to, and would doubtless do something. Nevertheless the fact remained that Jose was a bigger man in that district than the authorities. He could harry and harass. He could stare every peon out of the mine in two weeks. He could capture every mule and driver engaged in transporting the ore over the mountains. He could do lots of things to make the situation unpleasant, and the superintendent recommended that a monthly salary be paid. He added that \$200 per month was dog cheap.

The president and his board looked upon it as a rather funny case, but followed the advice of Mr. Barnes. From that time on for two years Jose Favara regularly appeared on the 10th of each month and received his "salary." Twice during that time the peons would have struck for higher wages had he

not appeared and threatened them with his vengeance. A Mexican lawyer discovered what he thought was a flaw in the title of the New Yorker and would have made cost and trouble had not Jose sent him word that he was after his scalp. It was conceded that the outlaw earned his wage.

Things were going on satisfactorily when the old president died and Mr. Nervely was elected in his place. While the dividends were large, Mr. Nervely wanted to increase them. He saw a way to do it by lopping off and cutting down. A cut of 10 per cent was made in wages and salaries, and the \$200 per month to Jose Favara was cut off entirely.

When Mr. Barnes wrote that this move would bring trouble, he was directed to arm his staff and fight. When he asked for rifles a dozen old condemned Springfield muskets were sent him, but not a single cartridge. He wrote for cartridges, but was answered that the president would soon take a trip to Mexico in his private car and would visit the mine and give further instructions in person. Mr. Nervely had been known in trade as a hustler. As president of a silver mine he determined to be a hummer.

Jose Favara called, as usual, on the 10th of a certain month to be told that his salary was nix. He had been discharged. Mr. Barnes entered into particulars with him, even to stating the probable date of the arrival of the president. Jose was impassive and unperturbed. He smiled the same old smiles and bowed the same old bows. He knew he had earned his money, but if he felt sore he gave no sign of it. He went away saying that he might call again, and things went on as usual for three weeks.

Then President Nervely arrived. It was twenty miles over to the railroad, and he had to make this distance on the back of a burro, but he made it. He arrived at the mine at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. At 6 the peons came up from the shaft and announced that there was a strike on. There were 400 of them. Next morning Jose Favara appeared. He wanted to know if his salary was to be restored.

President Nervely flattered himself that he was a fighter. If not an actual fighter, then he was a good bluffer. He had been bluffing for thirty years and had the art down pat. The miners might strike, and be hanged to them. They might be out for a week, but they would then be tumbling over each other to get back. As for Jose Favara, he was an outlaw, a blackmailer, an extortioner. Not another cent should he draw from the treasury. If he made one little move against the peace and harmony of the New Yorker the majesty of the law would be invoked and he would find himself behind prison bars. He was talked to in the plainest English. Mr. Nervely talked in a loud voice. He conveyed the idea that he owned the earth. When he had tired himself out and was taking a rest Jose quietly asked:

"Am I, then, to understand that my services are no longer required?"

"Of course you are."

"But about this strike?"

"I can settle it without your help."

"And as to what I may do with my band?"

"Poof! Look here, my man, let me give you a pointer: Don't come monkeying around here unless you are aching to get hurt. If the law won't protect us we will protect ourselves."

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The outlaw did. He bowed and smiled and took his departure. It was a cold bluff, and he meant to call it when the proper time came.

"Do you think he will try to make us trouble?" asked the president of the superintendent when Jose had departed.

"Sure to."

"I don't. I think I bluffed him out. However, there are the muskets."

"And not a cartridge for one of them."

"Cartridges are awfully expensive. I think that empty muskets will do the trick. Nothing like a bluff if you run it in hard enough."

The strike had lasted four days, with all quiet around the mine, when Jose Favara rode up. It was early in the morning, and President Nervely was eating a picnic breakfast. The outlaw had thirty men with him, and each and every one had a business look about him.

"When the senior is quite through with breakfast I should like to see him," was the message sent to the magnate.

Ten minutes later he appeared and ordered the outlaw to go way back and sit down. He was seized, bound and carried off among the mountains. He called for help, but there was no help. He yelled "Police!" "Fire!" and "Murder!" by turns, but the staff left behind numbered only five men, and they had no cartridges.

An hour later President Nervely was at the outlaw's headquarters. Two hours later he had got over bluffing and was inditing a telegram to a New York banker. The telegram asked for \$10,000. The money was forwarded to a town designated, and a week after the abduction it was in the hands of Jose Favara, and President Nervely was set free within half a mile of the mine to find his way in. At the hour of his arrival the strike was called off.

"Didn't I tell you what the man could do?" asked the superintendent as the president came staggering in.

"Yes, but I thought he could be bluff ed. He has taken \$10,000 out of me. We must fix it some way to charge it up to machinery or repairs."

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