

"GUNSIGHT PASS"

By William MacLeod Raine. Copyrighted by Thos. Allen.

CHAPTER I

Crooked As A Dog's Hind Leg

It was a land of splintered peaks of deep, dry gorges, of barren mesas burnt by the suns of a million torrid summers.

But moonlight had magically touched the hot, wrinkled earth with a fairy godmother's wand. It was bathed in a weird, mysterious beauty.

Around the camp-fire the drivers of the trail herd squatted on their heels or lay sprawled at indolent ease. The glow of the leaping flames from the twisted mesquite lit their lean faces, tanned to bronzed health by the heat of an untempered sun and the sweep of parched winds.

The talk was frank and elemental. It had the crisp crackle that goes with free, unfettered youth. In a parlor some of it would have been offensive, but under the stars of the open sky it was as natural as the life itself.

Under the soft shadows of the summer night a boy moved from the remuda toward the campfire. He was a lean, sandy-haired young fellow, his figure still lean and unfiled.

"You're sure an easy mark, Buck," grunted a large fat man leaning against a wheel. His white, expressionless face and soft hands differentiated him from the tough range-riders.

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"Hmp!" grunted Miller skeptically. "I'm here to say he can," boasted the owner, stung by the manner of the other.

"Don't look to me like no racer," Doble dissented. "Why, I'd be 'most willin' to bet that pack-horse of ours, Whiskey Bill, can beat him."

Buck Byington snorted. "Pack-horse, eh?" The old puncher's brain was alive with suspicions. On account of the lameness of his horse he had returned to camp in the middle of the day and had discovered the two newcomers trying out the speed of the pinto.

"The chile, hard eyes of Miller met his. 'That's what he said, Buck—our pack-horse.'"

For just an instant the old range-riders hesitated, then shrugged his shoulders. It was none of his business. He was a cautious man, not looking for trouble. Moreover, the law of the range is that every man must play his own hand. So he dropped the matter with a grunt that expressed complete understanding and derision.

Bob Hart helped things along. "Jokin' aside, what's the matter with a race? We'll be on the Salt Flats tomorrow. I've got ten bucks says the pinto can beat your Whiskey Bill."

"Go you once," answered Doble after a moment's apparent consideration. "Bein' as I'm dragg into this, I'll be a dead-game sport. I've got fifty dollars more to back the pack-horse. How about it, Sanders? You got the sand to cover that? Or are you plumb scared of my broomstick?"

"Might as well lose a few bucks myself, seeing as Whiskey Bill belongs to me," said Miller with his wheezy laugh. "Who wants to take a whirl, boys?"

Inside of three minutes he had placed a hundred dollars. The terms of the race were arranged and the money put in the hands of the foreman.

"Easiest man to ride his own cabalero," suggested Hart stily. "The idea of Ad Miller's two hundred and fifty pounds in the seat of a jockey made for hilarity."

"No a chance. That tumblebug Miller is one fishy proposition, and his sidekick Doble may be the kind of a bird that shoots you in the stomach while he's shakin' hands with you. They're about as wary as a lean shark when he's bittin' on the screws—and about as impulsive. Me, I aim to button up my pocket when them guys are around."

Dave returned to the fire. The two visitors were sitting side by side, and the leaping flames set fantastic shadows of them moving. One of these, roared when Miller sat, as like a maddest spider watching its victim. The other, deserted and prehensile, might in its unsteady posture have been an imp of darkness from the nether regions.

"Not potter like Chiquito," ventured Sanders amiably. "That so?" jeered Doble. He looked at David out of a sly and shifty eye. He had only one. The other had been gouged out years ago in a drunken fracas.

"You couldn't get Chiquito for a hundred dollars. Not for sale," the owner of the horse said, a little stiffly.

Miller's fat paunch shook with laughter. "I reckon not—at that price. I'd give all the forty for him."

"Different here," replied Doble. "What has this pinto got that makes him worth over thirty?"

about him were still mysterious in the pre-dawn darkness. The shouting of the wranglers and the bells of the remuda came musically as from a great distance. Hart joined his friend and the two young men walked out to the remuda together. Each rider had on the previous night belted the mount he wanted, for he knew that in the morning it would be too dark to distinguish one bronco from another. The animals were rim-milling, going round and round in a circle to escape the lariat.

Dave rode in close and waited, rope ready, his ears attuned to the sound of his own bell. A horse rushed out, fell true, tightened over the neck of the cowpuncher, brought up the animal short. Instantly it surrendered, making no further attempt to escape. The roper made a half-hitch round the nose of the bronco, swung to its back, and canted back to the camp.

In the grey dawn near details were becoming visible. The mountains began to hover on the edge of the young world. The wind was blowing across half a continent.

Sanders saddled, then rode out upon the mesa. He whistled sharply. There came an answering clump of hoofs, and presently out of the dark a sleek little fellow, beautiful in action and gentle as a kitten.

The young fellow took the well-shaped head in his arms, fondled the neck of the cowpuncher, and tucked in his open palm, and put the pony through the repertoire of tricks he had taught to pet.

"You wanta shake a leg today, old fellow, and throw dust in that tinhorn's face," he murmured to his four-footed friend, gentling it with little pats of love and admiration.

Across the mesa Dave galloped back, swung from the saddle, and made a beeline for breakfast. The other men were already busy at this important business. From the tail of the chuck wagon he took a tin cup and a tin plate. He helped himself to coffee, soda biscuits, and a strip of steak just forked from a large kettle of boiling lard.

"The punchers of the D Bar Lazy R were moving a large herd to a new range. It was made up of several bunches, from smaller outfits that had gone out of business under the pressure of falling prices, short grass, and the activity of rustlers. The cattle had been loose for a week or more, and the upper end of which was sealed by an impassable cliff. Many such mountains, fenced across the face made for hilarity."

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halfway post, heard his friend Hart's triumphant "Yip yip yippy yip!" coming to him on the wind.

He leaned forward, patting his horse on the shoulder, murmuring words of encouragement into its ear. But he knew, without turning round, that the racer galloping at his heels was drawing closer. Its wings, for he knew that in the morning it would be too dark to distinguish one bronco from another.

Simultaneously he became aware of two things. The bay was no longer running side by side with Chiquito, he was just ahead. The cowpuncher knew exactly how to make the turn with the least possible loss of speed and ground. Too often, in heading the young world, the wind was whistled as on a dollar, to leave him any doubt now. Scarce slackening speed, he swept the pinto round the clump of mesquite and was off for the home stretch.

Dave was halfway back before he was sure that the thud of Whiskey Bill's hoofs was almost at his heels. He called on the cowpuncher for a last spurt. The plucky little horse answered the call, gathered itself for the home stretch, for a moment held its advantage. Again Bob Hart's yell drifted to Sanders.

Then he knew that the bay was running side by side with Chiquito, he was slowly creeping to the front. The two horses raced down the stretch together. Whiskey Bill half a length in the lead and gaining at every stride. Daylight saw the two men when they crossed the line. Chiquito had been outrun by a speedier horse.

Hart came up to his friend grinning. "Well, you old horn-toad, we got no kick comin'. Chiquito run a mighty pretty race. Only trouble he had was to keep his soda biscuits. The owner of the pony nodded, a lump in his throat. He was not thinking about his thirty-five dollars but about the little race that had won him his horse. He was so busy that he did not see the bay until it was too late.

"Much obliged, Steve. I reckon he sure done his best," Sanders grunted. "You make me feel good, old fellow. You make me feel good."

"You get our money," said Hart quietly. "Ain't that enough without rubbin' it in?"

"Sure, it's our money—easy money, at that," boasted Doble. "Got any more you want to put up on the circus bronco?"

Steve Russell voiced his sentiment. "You make me feel good, old fellow. You make me feel good."

"Not any, thanks. Whiskey Bill is a racer, not a mule team," Miller said, laughing.

Steve loosened the center-fire cinch of his pony's saddle. He noted that there was no real gentleness in the fat man's remark. It was a surface thing designed to give an effect of good-fellowship. Back of it lay the chill implacability of the professional gambler.

"Breathing hard, Dave faced his rival warily. He was in a better strategic position than he had been, for he had pulled the revolver of the fat man from his holster just as they were dragged apart. It was in his right hand now, pressed close to his forehead, for the instant use if need be. He could see without looking that Doble was still struggling ineffectively in the grip of Russell.

Dave stumbled and split some coffee. He staggered when George he tried to gun him. Miller mixed in then," explained Hart.

"The foreman glared. 'None of this stuff while you're on the trail with my outfit. Get that, Sanders? I won't have it.'"

"Dave he couldn't hardly hep hisself," Buck Byington broke in. "They was runnin' on him considerable."

face of malignant triumph. His self-control snapped, and in an instant the whole course of his life was deflected from the path it would otherwise have taken. With a flip he tossed up the tin cup so that the hot coffee splashed the crowd.

"God-damn!" screamed Doble, leaping to his feet. He reached for his forty-five, just as Sanders closed with him. The range-riders' revolver, like that of most of his fellows, was a blanket roll in the wagon.

Miller, with surprising agility for a fat man, got to his feet and launched himself at the puncher. Dave flung the smaller of his opponents back against Steve, who was sitting tailor fashion beside him. The gunner tattered and fell over Russell, who lost not time in pinning his hands to the ground while Hart deftly removed the revolver from his pocket.

"Have it your way. I hate to have you leave us after I tell you there'll be no more trouble, but if that's how you feel about it I got nothin' to say. What I want understood is this—Dug Doble raised his voice for all to hear—"that I'm boss of this outfit and won't stand for any rough stuff. If the boys, or any one of 'em, can't lose their money without bellyachin', they can get their time pronto."

The two gamblers packed their race-horse, saddled, and rode away without a word to any of the range-riders. The men round the fire gave no sign that they knew the confidence men were on the map until after they had gone. Then tongues began to wag, the foreman having gone to the edge of the camp with him.

"Well, my feelin's ain't hurt one bit because they won't play with us no more," Steve Russell said, smiling broadly.

"Can you blame that fat guy for not wantin' to play with Dave here?" asked Hart, and he beamed at the memory of what he had seen. "So, you certainly gave him one rum party when you rowels dug in."

"Wonder to me he didn't stampeed the cows, wad he hollowed," cried a third. "I don't grudge him any of my ten plunks. Not none. Dave he give me my money's worth that last round."

"I had a little luck," admitted Dave modestly. "Betcha," agreed Steve. "I was just startin' over to haul the fat guy off Dave when he began bleatin' for us to come help him turn loose the bear. I kinda took my time then."

"Onct I went to a play called 'All's Well That Ends Well,'" said Byington reminiscingly. "At the Tabor Grand theater, in Denver."

"Dit it tell how a rickied cow-punch rode a fat tinhorn on his spurs?" asked Hart.

"Bet he wears stovepipes on his legs next time he mixes it with Dave," suggested a man in coffee-brown youth. "Well, looks like the show's over for tonight. I'm gonna roll in."

CHAPTER IV  
The Paint Horse Disappears  
Wakened by the gong, Dave lay luxuriously in the warmth of his blankets. It was not for several moments that he remembered the fight or the circumstances leading to it.

The grin that lit his boyish face at thought of his unexpected conclusion was a fleeting one, for he discovered that it hurt his face to smile. Briskly he rose, and grunted "Ouch!" His sides were sore from the rib squeezing of Miller's powerful arms.

Byington walked out to the remuda with him. "How's the man-tamer this glad mo'nin'?" he asked of Dave. "Fine and dandy, old lizard."

"You sure got the deadwood on him when you spurs got a discoverin' a man's like a watermelon. You can't tell how good he is until you thump him. Miller is right biggity, and they say he's sudden death with a gun. But he hadn't the guts to go through and stand the ga."

his roll of bedding was. He untied the rope, flung open the blankets, and took from within the forty-five he carried to shoot rattlesnakes. He showed down between his shirt and trousers where it would be handy for use in case of need. His roll he brought back with him as a justification for the trip to the wagon. He had no intention of starting anything. All he wanted was not to be caught at a disadvantage a second time.

Miller and the two Dobles were standing a little way apart talking together in low tones. The fat man, his foot on the spoke of a wagon wheel, was tying up one of his bleeding calves with a bandanna handkerchief. Dave gathered that his contribution to the conversation consisted mainly of fervent and almost tearful profanity. The brothers appeared to be debating some point with heat. George insisted, and the foreman gave up with a lift of his big shoulders.

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APPOINTED MATRON  
McGill Nursing Graduate Gets Hospital Appointment.

PRINCE RUPERT, B.C. June 21.  
Miss Charlotte Black, of Montreal has been appointed matron of the General Hospital here succeeding Matron Atkinson.

MISS Black is a graduate of the School for Graduate Nurses, McGill University, which has just completed its first session. She was president of the class and followed the course in Administration and Teaching in Hospitals and Nurses Training Schools, completing the year with a high average in the seasonal examinations. Miss Black is English by birth but has been a resident of Peachland, B.C. for some years. She is a graduate of the Vancouver General Hospital and was for a time an instructor in the Western Hospital, Toronto, and for two years in charge of a hospital in Los Angeles, California.

Some Duck Egg.  
Kingston—James Gordon, Athens, has a duck that evidently is not on strike. She laid an egg measuring eight and a half inches around length-wise and six and a half inches short way. Who says it doesn't pay to keep ducks.

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