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"My father don't know any cowmen," Hilma Ring answered shortly.

"Never too late to get acquainted," he smiled. There was something disarming and ingenuous in Original's smile which on occasion had carried farther than a .45 bullet, but the Norsk stolidity in these blue eyes blasted his best efforts.

"My father and I pick and choose the folks we know." Hilma gave the insult in a studied drawl; her chin was tilted out from the firm round of her throat, and blue-black eyes looked out from beneath lowered lids like the eyes of a panther firming herself for the spring. Original still smiled, but with the lips alone.

"Well, you picked a good one when you chose Zang Whistler of Teapot Spout," he retorted hardily. "He's one of the politest outlaws and all-round bad men we have in our midst, which is saying something."

Hilma made no answer save through her eyes, which flashed like feldspar in the sun. She took a backward step as if to close the door in the visitor's face.

"An' I take it I did n't miss meeting Zang Whistler right here in your dooryard by a very long time," Original pursued with studied cold-