

think I must be off to see that my wife is not alarmed by this new game of Ryan's. You'll find me at the House."

II.

By noon next day I brought our herd of ponies to Holy Cross and watered them at the dam, which held some two or three acres of water just under the western wall of the hacienda. A few old trees sheltered the pool, one of which had lately been struck down by lightning. So it happened that in turning the herd up from the water my riders got a little mare snarled in the alien branches, in which she broke her leg and had to be shot. I gave order to have her body hauled away at sundown, then drove the herd into the stable court, mounted a guard on the north-west bastion and sent a servant with my compliments to the Patrone, and went to my quarters mighty wishful to catch my lost sleeps.

I had not slept an hour when the sentry fired and a man from the guard house came running. I jumped into my boots, grabbed my gun, and bolted to the gates, where Balshannon joined me at the spy-hole.

"Who's coming?" he asked.

"A white man, Patrone, and a boy on the lead run."

I swung the gates wide open, and we stood watching the riders, a middle-aged stockman and a young cowboy, burning the rail from the north. As they came swinging up the approach, I reckon their horses smelt a whiff of blood from that dead mare beside the water hole. Horses go crazy at the smell of blood, and though the man held straight on at a plunging run to the gate, the boy lacked strength to control his mare. When she swerved, he spurred, then she reared and began to buck. The saddle went adrift and the youngster went over with it, caught by the stirrup, unable to get clear. When the mare felt him dragging, more terrified than ever, she lashed out and would sure have kicked him to glory but for Balshannon. My boss was a quick shooter and deadly accurate, so that the first bullet caught the mare full between the eyes, and dropped her dead in her tracks. I raised the long yell for my

men as we rushed to get the boy from under her body.

It seemed to me at the time that the elder man never reined, but made a clear spring from his galloping horse to the ground, reaching the mare with a single jump before she had time to drop. Grabbing her head he swung his full weight, and threw her falling body clear of the boy. When we reached the spot he was kneeling beside him in the sand.

"Stunned," he said, "that's all. Sir," he looked up at the Patrone, and I saw that tears were starting from his eyes. "Sir, you've saved my son's life with that shot. I reckon," his voice broke with a sob; "you've made me yo' friend."

"Nothing broken, I hope," said Balshannon.

"No, seh. The stirrup seems to have twisted his foot."

I sent some men for a ground sheet in which the boy could be carried without pain.

Balshannon sent for brandy.

Still kneeling beside his son the stranger looked up into the Patrone's face.

"You are Lord Balshannon," he asked.

"At your service, my good fellow—well?"

"Do any of yo' greaser speak our language?"

"I fancy not."

"Then I have to tell you seh, that I am Captain McCalmont, and my outfit is the Robbers' Roost gang of outlaws." He was bending down over his son.

"I asked no question, my friend," said Balshannon. "We never question agest."

"You make me ashamed seh. I came with a passel of lies to prospect around with a view to doing you dirt."

Balshannon chuckled, and I saw by the glint in his eye that he was enjoying this rober.

"You'll dine with me?" said he.

Captain McCalmont looked up sharp to see what game the Patrone was playing.

"You will notice, Captain," said my boss "that my house is like a deadfall trap. Indeed—ah, yes—only one door, eh?"

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