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**WOLF MOON**  
A ROMANCE OF THE GREAT  
SOUTHWEST

BY JOSEPH J. QUINN

CHAPTER VI.  
A WARNING FROM TULANE

The hot furnace breath of summer with its pageants of clean-cut clouds, was beginning to stir the dust devils on the plains. They swung into brown eddying vortices that gathered debris and sand and swept across space until spent. There was a brilliance to the shine resembling white heat and the glare from the red earth with its seething waves burned one's eyeballs like the flare from acetylene torches.

The free life of the western plains appealed to Jack Corcoran. There was a different atmosphere here from Eastern Oklahoma, immensity, distance a new freedom that enthralled and held him captive. It was the same in the cool, crisp morning when the sun started its heat dizzy climb to the zenith as in the evening when the stars flung their faint shadows down upon an almost uninhabited world. As April gave way to May the rainy season broke, sending the rivers over their banks and cutting deep gullies in the washlands. From the Cimarron to the Kiamichi, the bottoms filled and lengthened across the lowlands. Down the entire run of the Canadian a wall of water rolled till it met the Arkansas and then on through the foothills of the Ozarks, breaking through here and there like a maddened moccasin, carrying bridges on its tawny crest. The Panhandle, burnt dry for ten months of the year, turned green under the freshets. The short grass took on a verdure that contrasted sharply to the dry brown hills of winter. But June brought the last heavy rains of the year and these soggy lowlands gave up their moisture to a festering sun.

One morning in early June Jack stopped at the postoffice for the mail. But the letter he was expecting from Janet did not arrive. With only the morning paper in hand he turned his pony back toward the Christian ranch. Far off to the East the rails of the Rock Island glistened under the full flush of morning sun. A few cumulous clouds seemed stranded in the sky as if loosened from a grand army that passed on in the night but now imprisoned by bars of gold. It was to be a day of torture for man and beast for already the green scorpions were scampering across the roads under the tail weeds.

With head buried in the paper Jack read as he rode. Everything was news in the breezy little sheet, from the depredations of Al Spencer's train robbers in the Osage hills to the descriptions of floods in Eastern Oklahoma. Deeply interested he failed to look ahead until Cordovan pricked his ears and whinnied. Jack looked up and was surprised to see in front of him a black pony with a girl tugging at the saddle cinch. She was looking directly at him as if in appeal. As Jack dismounted she again endeavored to tighten the broken girth.

"Perhaps I can help you," offered Jack as he advanced toward her.

"Why, I believe this center-fire cinch is broken, but I could fix it if I had a knife."

"I can mend it in a moment," declared Jack confidently, searching his vest pocket for a knife. Then observing the wet flanks of her pony, he added "Look as if you have done some hard riding."

"Oh, no, just around the ranch. Mrs. Trichell forbids me to go far unless it's to the postoffice."

"Oh, are you a Trichell?" asked Jack with a show of surprise.

"No, but I live there," Louise was growing embarrassed under his questioning.

"My name is Corcoran, Jack Corcoran, might I ask you?"

"Mine's Louise. Thanks for your trouble. But I must be going to the postoffice. Mr. Trichell wants his paper," Louise drew in the reins of her pony nervously and hastily placed her foot in the stirrup.

Before Jack could speak again she had spurred her horse into a few short pitchy motions and disappeared toward the village. The paper slipped from his hand to the ground.

"Well, what do you know about that? That's the first time I ever saw that vision," Jack, overcome with surprise, was speaking to himself.

"She's about the sweetest thing I've run across in Oklahoma. Louise! Can you beat me for not getting her last name. I have a good mind to wait for her until she returns. If it weren't for old man Christian. He's so darned anxious to read his paper. But I'll see her again if I have to come out here every morning. That's too good to let go by. And away out here in the Panhandle, too. Who would expect a dream like that here in this plains country?"

And Jack turned and swept the horizon with his eye. A bunch of Christian's cattle, a red blot on the green grass, was grazing on a slope that flung itself toward the sky.

Louise swept down the road, her face burning. There came crowding upon her a thousand questions to which her mind, fired with embarrassment and emotion, hurled back a thousand questions. She

could not understand the feverish flush of blood to her face and forehead. She was holding the saddle horn with a grip of steel. Then she slowly became conscious that her rowel was grooved against Thunderbird's side, driving her into a mad gallop. Something about the stranger had awakened an inner fire until it flared up and raced to her heart and face. Even her fingers thrilled under the new intimidation. An ineffectual survey of her feelings only dragged her deeper into a questioning mood. Who was this stranger who talked so softly and so deftly courteous? He was so different from anyone she had ever seen; there was not even a faint resemblance to any of the Trichell riders. She observed that he was a new comer to the country. She could tell that by his new hat and light spurs. Over and over she heard herself repeating "Jack Corcoran." She had never known a name like that.

Returning from the postoffice Louise looked longingly at the place where she had met him, at the footprints in the dust. She could have dismounted and traced them with her fingers. Down the road to the entrance of the Christian ranch she trailed the footsteps of his pony. She rejoiced at the fact that he lived so close. Perhaps it might mean future meetings. Flushed with the hope of seeing him again she nourished it with his remembered smile and pleasant ways. Louise turned in upon the Trichell ranch and flashed down under the cottonwoods.

"Oh, Mrs. Trichell, I met a stranger from Christian's. A big, tall fellow who fixed my saddle cinch. It broke half way down to the village and he came along and offered to mend it." Louise was breathless in her confession.

"Oh, that must have been Buster Christian. He's home from the oil fields. I hear," answered Mrs. Trichell, with lack of great surprise, to Louise's disappointment.

"No, Mrs. Trichell, he said his name was Corcoran, Jack Corcoran."

"Jack Corcoran!" she explained. "Why I never heard of him. Where does he live?"

"Over at Christian's, I believe, at least he turned in there."

"Well now that's news. What did he say, Louise?"

"Nothing. I don't suppose I gave him time. You know I was so embarrassed I just jumped on Thunderbird and scooted down the road."

Mrs. Trichell laughed at the picture. It was not long before she got in touch with Mrs. Christian. The latter told of Buster's acquaintance with Jack in Two Sands and of Buster's persuading him to come to the ranch.

From time to time Louise came across Jack either on the road to the village or in the town itself. Sometimes he appeared as if by magic as she rode near Roundtop. Again on errands at Christian's ranch they inevitably came together. At first the meetings were of short duration for Louise still felt a wave of embarrassment sweep over her as he came in sight. Later, however, Jack and Louise lingered longer together. They made appointments in the evening and rode down the wide avenue of meat to the south end of the range. Little did they realize they were shadowed by Tulane. They were too interested in each other, Jack in her modest, demure ways and Louise in the stories Jack told her of the East, to entertain suspicion. Gradually Louise felt herself drawn toward him with irresistible affection. From under her sombrero she stole glances at his manly, handsome face and loved his interest in her. She succumbed to his friendship with a resistance that came only from innate modesty. In the evening under the cottonwoods she found herself gazing across to the Christian herd where Jack was riding. At night his remembered image came stealing into her room where for hours she lay punching the pillow into conducive sleep.

Jack's friendship for Louise grew stronger and was marked by ever-increasing enmity between him and Tulane. The latter boasted of his love for Louise. Over in Terlton his affection for her was common talk. This was brought about by Tulane, who spoke of her as his girl and even went so far as to name her when he was to marry her. Rising within Louise was a bitter feeling of distrust and misgiving, of suspicion and hate, that at times approximated a loathing. Her courtesy to him, which was extended to all the boys, was ill taken. A chance smile and Baisan feasted on it from sun-up to sun-down. He felt a sense of appropriation as of something that rightfully belonged to him.

Jack's first intimation of Tulane's infatuation came after meeting with Louise. Tulane dashed up fiery-eyed, muttering curses. The savagery of the man rushed to his throat.

"What yuh doin' meetin' here?" he blurted wildly.

"Who wants to know?" Jack glared at him coldly.

"She's my gal and I don't want furriners like you hangin' round. She's mine and I brought her here to this ranch. So yuh 's keep yure eyes peeled mister. Yuh get it straight." Tulane jerked up his bridle until the horse stood erect. Then he prodded him into a wild

lurch and dashed away at an angle.

Jack was left with mouth open. "Say, who does he think he is? His girl. Where does he get the right of possession? Louise has something to say about that. I'll show that old greaser that he can't bluff me."

Later Jack told Buster of his meeting Tulane.

"I meant to put you wise, Jack. Watch out for him. Everybody in Texas county knows Tulane and fears him. We have heard that he is wanted in Galveston. He came into these parts mysteriously. Dad declares that he's a spy of some sort. I think he's just a plain darn fool. But he's a hair-trigger man. He carries his gun low, easy to draw. I've never had a run-in with him but our words are few and far between. He's a treacherous cuss. He may be in a league with some of the cattle rustlers. But Simpson, our best rider, swears he saw him last night talking to the Dorados."

"Who are the Dorados?" asked Jack, struck by the peculiar name.

"Never told you? Well they're a gang that hangs out over in Navajo Gulch when they're in this part of the country. Periodically they disappear and no one knows just where they go. They may rustle cattle over in New Mexico and sell 'em down at Clayton. Anyway when they come back they strut around the village and gamble at Tuppert's, that's the gambling joint next to the Postoffice. They're back in town now—came back yesterday. You can tell 'em on sight, two big strapping giants with red beards. They carry rifles on their saddles and wear green corduroy shirts. We'll ride in tonight and take a look at 'em."

After supper Jack and Christian waited until dark and set out for the village. Christian insisted upon Jack taking his six-shooter. A moon was due to rise—late. They mounted their ponies and turned into the main road in a canter. Overhead a starry two had swung into life, heralds of a million others. The night air was warm and while through it skimmed and darted bullets in jubilant buoyancy. Jack was telling a story of his college life when Buster stopped him for a moment. Above the squeaking of the saddles could be heard the footsteps of an approaching horse. Someone was riding hard toward them.

"Wonder who that could be?" dropped from Buster's lips.

A rider dashed around the curve near the alfalfa meadow and reigned in his pony. It was Duke Mitchell, one of Trichell's cowboys.

"Say, boys, I believe there's something stirring tonight. Jake Tuppert tells me the Dorado boys left Terlton about dusk armed to the teeth. He swore he heard them say they were off for the Tye Valley ranch. That's to the North of here about twenty miles, which makes me believe there's going to be something doin' down our way. When the Dorados say they're going North then watch out for the South cattle. They haven't struck in these parts for about two years and the time's ripe. 'Nother thing makes me suspect something's going on is that Tulane left Circle H about four o'clock to round up some strays near the gulch and he ain't showed up since. Tuppert swears he saw Tulane with the Dorados down near the split. Boys I'm off."

"How about our cattle, Chris?" questioned Jack with alarm.

"Fenced in tighter than a sardine. Of course those Dorados can cut a fence as easily as a shark can a carrot but Fred Catt and Ted Ogg are out there with them. They keep their eyes open when the Dorados are around."

Terlton was staging no disturbance. A few men swung their feet from the boxcars at the siding. Down at Tuppert's several tables were occupied by men all known to Buster, riders in from nearby ranches. Boisterous laughter burst from the corner coffee shop where several cowmen ate. Occasionally a rider's spurs rang on the pavement. Here and there a pony stood tied to a long iron pipe that served as a hitching post, their flopping ears giving them a dejected appearance. Two riders swung in from across the crossroads, jogging easily, throwing their sombrero shadows against the long row of warehouses. A sudden peal from a kicking pony started a series of biting and teeth-snapping along the line, accompanied by sharp squeals. A rider's mount reared and pitched, stamped and caracolled, bringing a chorus of "Ride 'em cowboy" from a sitting group of cattlemen.

"Dorados are not in town," remarked Buster. "You could tell their horses at a glance. Well, there's nothing stirring. Let's go to the movies. If anything happens the news will spread in that place like wildfire."

The only moving picture house the town could boast was not a parlor. There were peanut shells an inch deep on the floor. Once upon a time an enterprising agent had installed candy-slot machines that were fastened on the backs of the seats. But they were useless relics of a past day. Spurs and high-heeled boots had scratched the varnish off the seats. Few patrons had been enticed inside by the flaring blood and thunder signboards nailed to the outside wall.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE PICTURE

It was a long way from her home to Mrs. Webb's home and the basket of laundered clothes were heavy. So Lena Dare was glad when Mrs. Webb said to her:

"Come in and sit down and wait while I get a bundle of things ready that I want you to take back with you."

She led the little girl into the sitting room gave her a chair and left the room. Lena glanced around curiously at the nicely furnished room, so different from her own poor home. She sank comfortably back in the cushioned arm chair, and thought how nice it must be to have such things. Then her eyes were attracted to a picture hanging on the wall near her; a woman with a child in her arms. Her face was so beautiful, and there was a light shining around them. Lena thought that it was the most beautiful picture that she had ever seen. Mrs. Webb was gone a good while, but when she returned to the room the little girl was still gazing at the picture.

"Ask your grandmother to let me have these as soon as she can, and here is the money for the clothes you brought today."

When Lena got home, she was still thinking about the beautiful picture. She told her grandmother about it. "I wish we could have one like it," she said.

"Only people with plenty of money can have things like that," said her grandmother, and she sighed heavily as she spoke, and went on with her work.

Lena's brother Davy looked up from a pair of old roller skates he was trying to mend. "Aw, what good would a picture do you?" he exclaimed.

Lena went over to the window and looked out. How different the narrow street, and mean looking houses from the broad avenues where she had been that morning. She was wishing she could live on one of them when her grandmother said: "I want you to run around to the store and get some potatoes. Hurry back."

The store was a few blocks away, and in a better neighborhood than the one in which Lena lived. She was returning home with the potatoes, when she passed a group of girls of about her own age. They were laughing and talking, and she was laughing and talking. She heard one of them say: "Isn't Sister lovely to let us have that entertainment?"

"All the Sisters do nice things for us," said another.

Lena had often seen this same group of little girls. She knew that they went to school in the big stone building near to the church on the corner. She thought, as she hurried along with the potatoes, that it must be nice to go to school and have kind teachers who did nice things for you. Lena had not especially liked the only school that she had attended. That was in the country where they had lived until her grandmother had come to the city to live, six months before.

When she went into the house with the potatoes, she said, "Grandmother, aren't we going to school again?"

"I don't see how you are going. Mrs. Smith wants me to come there four days of the week. It'll pay me better than doing washings at home. I'll do Mrs. Webb's though, till she goes away. I have to have you children at home to take care of the house."

"Oh, is Mrs. Webb going away?"

"Yes, they are going right soon."

"Now I'm going to get your dinner. You can come and iron these towels and handkerchiefs. Lena," directed her grandmother.

"I'm sorry she's going. Then I won't get to see that picture."

"Gee, what makes you so crazy over an old picture," scoffed Davy.

"Put such things out of your head and get at that ironing," said her grandmother impatiently.

Lena had to go with laundry to Mrs. Webb's quite often, and each time she had to wait in the sitting room until Mrs. Webb brought her another bundle. The little girl was glad that it gave her a chance to see the beautiful picture. It made her sad to think of the time when Mrs. Webb would be gone and she could not see the picture again.

One day when she got there with the clothes, she found the place all in disorder. "We are getting ready to sell everything off," explained Mrs. Webb, as she led Lena into the sitting room.

A sudden thought came to the little girl. "Oh, are you going to sell that picture," she asked, pointing to her favorite. "Oh, I wish my grandmother could buy it. But I guess it would take an awful lot of money. It is so beautiful."

Mrs. Webb gave Lena a kind smile. "You like it so much? It is a good copy of a celebrated painting. But it was so expensive. I shall be glad to give it to you. It is our Blessed Mother, you know," and Mrs. Webb crossed herself reverently.

"Oh," breathed Lena in rapture too great for words. Her eyes shone, and her cheeks grew pink.

"The picture is not very heavy. I think if you will bring your brother with you this afternoon, you can easily carry it home between you."

"We'll come for it as soon as ever we can," said Lena eagerly. And I do thank you ever so much."

"I am very glad for you to have it, my child."

Lena hurried home as fast as she could. It seemed too good to be true. To think that wonderful picture was hers! She could see it whenever she wanted to!

It was one of her grandmother's days out. Davy was playing ball in the yard. She told him about her gift. "Come along and go with me now to get it. We can lock the house. It won't take us long," she begged.

"All right," he agreed. Davy was curious to see the picture that Lena was so "crazy" over.

Mrs. Webb smiled to see them come so soon. She took down the picture, and showed them how to carry it.

Lena thanked Mrs. Webb again, and they went away with the picture, held very carefully between them. "Isn't it just beautiful?" said Lena as they walked along.

"Yes," admitted her brother. "Say, Lena, it's the Blessed Virgin that mother used to tell us about. Don't you remember? I guess if she had not died, and we hadn't to go to live with grandmother, we'd be different."

"I thought maybe it was the virgin when Mrs. Webb called it 'Our Blessed Mother.' I hope grandmother will like it. There's a nail on the wall so we can have it hanging, when she comes home tonight."

Their grandmother was, of course, much surprised to see the picture, and to know that it had been given to Lena. She did not say much, except that Mrs. Webb was very good to give it to her. But after the children had gone to bed, she sat a long time before the picture in deep thought.

The next day was one of her days at home. She said to Lena, "I think we'll give the place a good cleaning." She glanced at the picture as she spoke.

"Oh, yes," agreed the little girl eagerly. The place ought to be nice for "Our Lady," she thought. Her mother's teachings were gradually coming back to her mind. She wished her grandmother would talk to them about those things.

"Say," said Davy, "I'll help, too, and we'll get the cleaning done in a jiffy."

After a good deal of hard work, the place, poor as it was, looked so much better, that Lena felt that it was almost good enough for "Her," as she looked at her beloved picture.

Late in the afternoon, the three of them were sitting together, grandmother darning stockings, Davy mending the old roller skates which were again out of order, and Lena sitting idle and looking at the picture. There came a knock at the door. Lena opened it, and there stood two Sisters.

Grandmother stood up in surprise. She had been brought up in the Catholic faith, but had fallen away. She had often thought she would do differently, especially since she came to the city, where there were churches, but her hard work seemed to need all her time.

She now was glad to see the Sisters, and welcomed them heartily. Lena fell in love with them at once. They had such sweet faces, and were so kind in their manner.

After a long talk, the Sisters seemed to them like old friends. Grandmother told them all her troubles. And the Sisters advised how everything could be arranged so that Lena and Davy could come to their school.

When they were about to go, one of the Sisters glanced at the picture, and said "Our Blessed Mother brought this about. Mrs. Webb told us of the little girl who loved the picture. So we came."

After they had gone Lena almost cried for joy. To think that she and Davy were going to school, where those happy little girls that she saw on the street went. And she was to have some neat clothes and Davy, too, so that they would not feel ashamed. And grandmother said they were going to Mass the very next morning.

"Oh, I shall always love you," Lena whispered, as she stood before her beloved picture.—Emily S. Windsor in the Missionary.

SLANDER

"Slander," how ominous the word sounds—how it makes one shudder. Yet it is one of the commonest forms of pastime in our very modern world. Two or three persons can scarcely ever meet and part without: "Have you heard?"

And so the conversation goes on, innocent people's characters are torn to pieces, merely to pass away the time. Those thoughtless people who indulge in that sort of thing have no scruple whatever in putting into words the foulest calumny, prefacing it with: "Have you heard?" and ending with: "Could you believe it?"

Persons who talk thus are base and selfish; theirs is a blasphemous spirit which rejoices in blighting and crushing the sunshine out of other lives, because to hear cruel calumny about ourselves, or about someone we know and respect, has a very crushing effect upon the spirit.

We should try by showing our displeasure to put down this evil habit, and when we can, avoid those who indulge in it, for truly the slanderer is a vile beast of prey who does not wait for the death of the creature it devours.

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