The Lone Star Ranger

A Fine Tale of the Open Country

By ZANE GREY

CHAPTER XX—Continued.

Just at that moment Duane felt an almost inappreciable movement of the adobe wall which supported him. He could scarcely credit his senses. But the rattle inside Longstreth's room was mingling with little dull thuds of falling dirt. The adobe wall, merely dried mud, was crumbling. Duane distinctly felt a tremor pass through it. Then the blood gushed back to his heart.

"What in the hell!" exclaimed Longstreth.

"I smell dust," said Lawson, sharply.

That was a signal for Duane to drop down from his perch, yet despite his care he made a noise.

"Did you hear a step?" queried Longstreth.

No one answered. But a heavy piece of the adobe wall fell with a thud. Duane heard it crack, felt it shake.

"There's somebody between the walls!" thundered Longstreth.

Then a section of the wall fell inward with a crash. Duane began to squeeze his body through the narrow passage toward the patio.

"Hear him!" yelled Lawson. "This side!"

"No, he's going that way," yelled Longstreth.

The tramp of heavy boots lent Duane the strength of desperation. He was not shirking a fight, but to be cornered like a trapped coyote was another matter. He almost tore his clothes off in that passage. The dust nearly stifled him. When he burst into the patio it was not an instant too soon. But one deep gasp of breath revived him and he was up, gun in hand, running for the outlet into the court. Thumping footsteps turned him back. While there was a chance to get away he did not want to fight. He thought he heard someone running into the patio from the other end. He stole along, and coming to a door, without any idea of where it might lead, he softly pushed it open a little way and slipped in.

CHAPTER XXI.

A low cry greeted Duane. The room was light. He saw Ray Longstreth sitting on her bed in her dressing-gown. With a warning gesture to her he silent he turned to close the door. It was a heavy door without bolt or bar, and when Duane had shut it he felt safe only for the moment. Then he gazed around the room. There was one window with blind closely drawn. He listened and seemed to hear footsteps retreating, dying away.

Then Duane turned to Miss Longstreth. She had slipped off the bed, half to her knees, and was holding out trembling hands. She was as white as the pillow of her bed. She was terribly frightened. Again with warning hand commanding silence, Duane stepped softly forward, meaning to reassure her.

"Oh!" she whispered wildly; and Duane thought she was going to faint. When he got close and looked into her eyes he understood the strange, dark expression in them. She was terrified because she believed he meant to kill her, or do worse, probably worse. Duane realized he must have looked pretty fiend and fierce bursting into her room with that big gun in hand.

The way she searched Duane's face with doubtful, fearful eyes hurt him.

"Listen. I didn't know this was your room. I came here to get away —to save my life. I was pursued. I was spying on your father and his men. They heard me, but did not see me. They don't know who was listening. They're after me now."

Her eyes changed from blank guilt to dilating, shadowing, quickening windows of thought.

Then she stood up and faced Duane with the fire and intelligence of a woman in her eyes.

"Tell me how. You were spying on my father?"

Briefly Duane told her what had happened before he entered her room, not omitting a terse word as to the character of the men he had watched.

"My God! So it's that! I knew something was terribly wrong here—with him—with the place—the people. And right off I hated Floyd Lawson. Oh, it 'll kill me if—if— It's so much worse than I dreamed. What shall I do?"

The sound of soft steps somewhere near distracted Duane's attention, reminded him of her peril, and now, what counted more with him, made clear the probability of being discovered in her room.

"I'll have to go out of here," whispered Duane.

"Wait," she replied. "Didn't you say they were hunting for you?"

"They sure are," he returned, grimly.

"Oh, then you mustn't go. They might shoot you. Stay. If we hear them you can hide. I'll turn out the light. I'll meet them at the door. You can trust me. Wait till all quiets down, if we have to wait till morning. Then you can slip out."

"I oughtn't to stay. I don't want to—I won't," Duane replied, perplexed and stubborn.

"But you must. It's the only safe way. They won't come here."

"Suppose they should? It's an even chance Longstreth 'll search every room and corner in this old house. If they found me here I couldn't start a fight. You might be hurt. Then—the fact of my being here—"

Duane did not finish what he meant, but instead made a step toward the door. White of face and dark of eye, she took hold of him to detain him. She was as strong and supple as a leopard. But she used not have been either resolute or strong, for the clasp of her hand was enough to make Duane weak.

"Up yet, Ray?" came Longstreth's clear voice, too strained, too eager to be natural.

"No. I'm in bed reading. Good night," instantly replied Miss Longstreth, so calmly and naturally that Duane marveled at the difference between man and woman. Then she motioned for Duane to hide in the closet. He slipped in, but the door would not close altogether.

"Are you alone?" went on Longstreth's penetrating voice.

"Yes," she replied. "Ruth went to bed."

The door swung inward with a swift scrape and jar. Longstreth half entered, haggard, flaming-eyed. Behind him Duane saw Lawson, and indistinctly another man.

Longstreth barred Lawson from entering, which action showed control as well as distrust. He wanted to see

A Low Cry Greeted Duane.

into the room. When he had glanced around he went out and closed the door.

Then what seemed a long interval ensued. The house grew silent once more. Duane could not see Miss Longstreth, but he heard her quick breathing.

Presently he pushed open the closet door and stepped forth. Miss Longstreth had her head lowered upon her arms and appeared to be in distress. At his touch she raised a quivering face.

"I think I can go now—safely," he whispered.

"Go then, if you must, but you may stay till you're safe," she replied.

"I—I couldn't thank you enough. It's been hard on me—this finding out—and you his daughter. I feel strange. I don't understand myself well. But I want you to know—if I were not an outlaw—a ranger—I'd lay my life at your feet."

"Oh! You have seen so—so little of me," she faltered.

"All the same it's true. And that makes me feel more the trouble my coming caused you."

"You will not fight my father?"

"Not if I can help it. I'm trying to get out of the way."

"But you spied upon him."

"I am a ranger, Miss Longstreth."

"And oh! I am a rustler's daughter," she cried. "That's so much more terrible than I'd suspected. It was tricky cattle deals I imagined he was engaged in. But only to-night I had strong suspicions aroused."

"How? Tell me."

"I overheard Floyd say that men were coming to-night to arrange a meeting for my father at a rendezvous near Ord. Father did not want to go. Floyd taunted him with a name."

"What name?" queried Duane.

"It was Chesseldine."

"Chesseldine! My God! Miss Longstreth, why did you tell me that?"

"What difference does that make?"

"Your father and Chesseldine are one and the same," whispered Duane, hoarsely.

"I gathered so much myself," she replied, miserably. "But Longstreth is father's real name."

Duane felt so stunned that he could not speak at once. It was the girl's part in this tragedy that weakened him. The instinct she betrayed the secret Duane realized perfectly that he loved her. The emotion was like a great flood.

"Miss Longstreth, all this seems so unbelievable," he whispered. "Chesseldine is a rustler chief I've come out here to get. He's only a name. Your father is the real man I've sworn to get him. I'm bound by more than law or oaths. I can't break what binds me. And I must disgrace you—wreck your life! Why, Miss Longstreth, I believe I—I love you. It's all come in a rush. I'll die for you if I could. How fatal—terrible—this is! How things work out!"

She slipped to her knees, with her hands on his.

"You won't kill him?" she implored. "If you care for me—you won't kill him."

"No. That I promise you."

With a low moan she dropped her head upon the bed.

Duane opened the door and stealthily stole out through the corridor to the court. But long after he had trampled out into the open there was a lump in his throat and an ache in his breast.

CHAPTER XXII.

Duane had decided to go to Ord and try to find the rendezvous where Longstreth was to meet his men. These men Duane wanted even more than their leader. It was Poggin who needed to be found and stopped. Poggin and his right-hand men!

All night of the day before he reached Bradford, No. 6, the mail and express train going east, was held up by train-robberies, the Wells-Fargo messenger killed over his safe, the mail-clerk wounded, the bags carried away. The engine No. 6 came into town minus even a tender, and engineer and fireman told conflicting stories. A posse of railroad men and citizens, led by a sheriff Duane suspected was crooked, was made up before the engine steamed back to pick up the rest of the train. Duane had the sudden inspiration that he had been cudgeling his mind to find; and acting upon it, he mounted his horse again and left Bradford unobserved.

He rode at an easy trot most of the night, selected an exceedingly rough, roundabout, and difficult course to Ord, hid his tracks with the skill of a long-hunted fugitive, and arrived there with his horse winded and covered with lather. It added considerably to his arrival that the man Duane remembered as Fletcher and several others saw him come in "the hard way through the lots and jump a fence into the road.

Duane rode haltingly up to the porch where Fletcher stood waiting his board. He was flatless, vestless, and evidently had just enjoyed a morning drink.

"Howdy, Dodge," said Fletcher, incredibly.

Duane replied, and the other man returned the greeting with interest.

"Jim, my hoss is done up. I want to hide him from any chance tourists as might happen to ride up curious-like."

"Haw! haw! haw!"

Duane gathered encouragement from that chorus of coarse laughter.

"What, if them tourists ain't too durned snooky the hoss 'll be safe in the 'dobe shack back of Bill's here. Feed that, too, but you'll hev to rustle water."

Duane led Bullet to the place indicated, had care of his welfare, and left him there. Upon returning to the tavern porch Duane saw the group of men had been added to by others, some of whom he had seen before. Without comment Duane walked along the edge of the road, and wherever one of the tracks of his horse showed he carefully obliterated it. This procedure was attentively watched by Fletcher and his companions.

"Wal, Dodge," remarked Fletcher, as Duane returned, "that's safer 'n prayin' fer rain."

Duane's reply was a remark as loquacious as Fletcher's, to the effect that a long, slow, monotonous ride was conducive to thirst. They all joined him, unmistakably friendly. But Knell was not there, and Duane assuredly not Poggin. Fletcher was no common outlaw, but, whatever his ability, it probably lay in execution of orders. Apparently at that time these men had nothing to do but drink and lounge around the tavern. Duane set out to make himself agreeable and succeeded. All morning men came and went, until, all told, Duane calculated he had seen at least fifty. Toward the middle of the afternoon a young fellow burst into the saloon and yelled one word:

"Posse!"

From the scramble to get outdoors Duane judged that word and the ensuing action was rare in Ord.

"What's all this?" muttered Fletcher, as he gazed down the road at a dark, compact bunch of horses and riders.

"First time I ever seen that in Ord! Wish Phil was here or Poggin. Now all you gents keep quiet. I'll do the talkin'."

The posse entered the town, trotted up on the dusty horses, and halted in a bunch before the tavern. The party consisted about twenty men, all heavily armed, and evidently in charge of a cleancut, long-limbed cowboy. Duane experienced considerable satisfaction at the absence of the sheriff who he had understood was in the posse. Perhaps he was out in another direction with a different force.

"Hello, Jim Fletcher," called the cowboy.

"Howdy," replied Fletcher.

At this short, dry response and the way he strode leisurely out before the posse Duane found himself modifying his contempt for Fletcher. The outlaw was different now.

"Fletcher, we've tracked a man on all but three miles of this place. Tracks as plain as the nose on your face. Found his camp. Then he hit into the brush, an' we lost the trail. Didn't have no tracking with us. Think he went into the mountains. Then we took a chance an' rid over the rest of the way, seein' Ord was so close. Anybody come in here late last night or early this mornin'?"

"Nope," replied Fletcher.

His response was what Duane had expected from his manner, and evidently the cowboy took it as a matter of course. He turned to the others of the posse, entering into a low consultation. Evidently there was difference of opinion, if not real dissension, in that posse.

"Didn't I tell ye this was a wild-goose chase, comin' way out here?" protested an old hawk-faced rancher. "Them hoss tracks we followed ain't like any of them we seen at the water-tank where the trails was herded up."

"I'm not sure of that," replied the leader

"Wal, Guthrie, I've followed tracks all my life—"

"But you wouldn't keep to the trail this feller made in the brush."

"Gimme time, an' I could. Thet takes time. An' hegh you go hell-bent for election!' But it's a wrong lead out this way. If you're right, this road-agent, after he killed his pals, would hev rid back right through town, an' with them mailbags! Supposin' they was greasers? Some greasers has sense, eny, when it comes to thievin' they're shore cute."

"But we ain't got any reason to believe this robber who murdered the greasers is a greaser himself. I tell you it was a slick job, done by no ordinary sneak. Didn't you hear the facts? One greaser hopped the engine an' covered the engineer an' fireman. Another greaser kept flashin' his gun outside the train. The big man who shoved back the car door an' did the killin'—he was the real gent, an' don't you forget it."

Some of the posse sided with the cowboy leader and some with the old cattleman. Finally the young leader disgustedly gathered up his bridle.

"Aw, hell! Thet sheriff showed you off this trail, Mobbe he hed reason! Savvy that? If I had a bunch of cowboys with me—I tell you what, I'd take a chance and clean up this hole."

All the while Jim Fletcher stood quietly with his hands in his pockets.

"Gimme, I'm sure treasurin' up your friendly talk," he said. The sarcasm was in the tone, not the content of his speech.

"You come-an' be damned to you, Fletcher!" called Guthrie, as the horses started.

Fletcher, standing out alone before the others of his clan, watched the posse out of sight.

"Luck for you all that Poggy wasn't here," he said, as they disappeared. Then with a thoughtful mien he strode up on the porch and led Duane away from the others into the barroom. When he looked into Duane's face it was somehow an entirely changed scrutiny.

"Dodge, where'd you hide the stuff? I reckon I git in on this deal, seein' I staved off Guthrie."

Duane played his part. Here was his opportunity, and like a tiger after prey he seized it. First he coolly eyed the outlaw and then disclaimed any knowledge whatever of the train-robbery other than Fletcher had heard himself. Then at Fletcher's persistence and admiration and increasing show of friendliness he laughed occasionally and allowed himself to swell with pride, though still denying.

Later, when Duane started up announcing his intention to get his horse and make for camp out in the brush, Fletcher seemed grievously offended.

"Why don't you stay with me? I've got a comfortable 'dobe over here. Didn't I stick by you when Guthrie an' his bunch come up? Supposin' I hedn't showed down a cool hand to him? You'd be swingin' somewheres now. I tell you, Dodge, it ain't square."

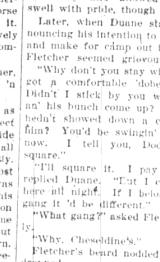
"I'll square it. I pay my debts," replied Duane. "But I can't put up here all night. If I belonged to the gang it 'd be different."

"What gang?" asked Fletcher, bluntly.

"Why, Chesseldine's."

Fletcher's beard nodded as his jaw dropped.

Duane laughed. "I run into him the other day. Knowed him on sight. Sure, he's the king-pin rustler. When



Fletcher and Others Saw Him.

he seen me an' asked me what reason I had for bein' on earth or some such like—why, I up an' told him."

Fletcher appeared staggered.

"Who in all-fired hell air you talkin' about?"

"Didn't I tell you once? Chesseldine. He calls himself Longstreth over there."

All of Fletcher's face not covered by hair turned a dirty white.

"Chesseldine Longstreth!" he whispered, hoarsely. "God Almighty! You braced the—" Then a remarkable transformation came over the outlaw. He gulped; he straightened his face; he controlled his agitation. But he could not send the healthy brown back to Duane, watching this rude man, marveled at the change in him, the sudden checking, betrayal, the pool of a wonderful fear and loyalty. It all meant Chesseldine, a master of men!

"Who air you?" queried Fletcher, in a queer, strained voice.

"You gave me a handle, didn't you? Dodge. That's as good as any. Shore it hits me hard. Jim, I've been pretty lonely for years, an' I'm gettin' in need of pals. Think it over, will you? See you mananna."

The outlaw watched Duane go off after his horse, watched him as he returned to the tavern, watched him ride out in the darkness—all without a word.

Duane left the town, threaded a quiet passage through cactus and mesquite to a spot he had marked before, and passed the night. His mind was so full that he found sleep aloof. Luck at last was playing his game. He guessed the first slow heave of a mighty crisis. The end, always haunting, had to be sternly blotted from thought. It was the approach that needed all his mind.

Late in the morning he returned to Ord. If Jim Fletcher tried to disguise his surprise, the effort was a failure. Certainly he had not expected to see Duane again. Duane allowed himself a little freedom with Fletcher, an attitude hitherto lacking.

That afternoon a horseman rode in from Bradford, an outlaw, evidently well known and liked by his fellows, and Duane heard him say, before he could possibly have been told the train-robber was in Ord, that the loss of money in the hold-up was slight. Like a flash Duane saw the back of this report. He pretended not to have heard.

In the early twilight at an opportune moment he called Fletcher to him, and, inside a room within the outlaw's, he drew him off in a stroll down a log bridge spanning a little gully. Here after gazing around, he took out a roll of bills, spread it out, split it equally, and without a word handed one half to Fletcher. With clumsy fingers Fletcher thrust through the roll.

"Five hundred!" he exclaimed. "Dodge, thet's damn handsome of you, considerin' the job wasn't—"

"Considerin' nothin'," interrupted Duane. "I'm makin' no reference to a job here or there. You did me a good turn. I split my pile. If that doesn't make us pards, good turns an' money ain't no use in this country."

Fletcher was won.

The two men spend much time together. Duane made up a short fictitious story about himself that satisfied the outlaw, only it drew forth a laughing jest upon Duane's modesty. For Fletcher did not hide his belief that this new partner was a man of achievements. Knell and Poggin, and then Chesseldine himself, would be persuaded of this fact, so Fletcher boasted. He had influence. He would use it. He thought he pulled a stroke with Knell. But nobody on earth, not even the boss, had any influence on Poggin. Poggin was eccentric, a jack part of the time; all the rest he was bursting hell. But Poggin loved a horse. He never loved anything else. He could be won with that black horse Bullet. Chesseldine was already won by Duane's monumental nerve; otherwise he would have killed Duane.

Little by little the next few days Duane learned the points he longed to know; and how indelibly they etched themselves in his memory! Chesseldine's hiding-place was on the far slope of Ord, in a deep, high-walled valley. He always had his men just before a contemplated job, where he met and planned with his lieutenants. Then while they executed he basked in the sunshine before one or another of the public places he owned. He was there in the Ord den now, getting ready to plan the biggest job yet. It was a bank-robbery, but where, Fletcher had not as yet been advised.

Then when Duane had pumped the now amenable outlaw of all details pertaining to the present he gathered data and facts and places covering a period of ten years Fletcher had been with Chesseldine. And herewith unfolded a history so dark in its bloody recital, so incredible in its brazen daring, so appalling in its proof of the outlaw's sweep and grasp of the country from Pecos to Rio Grande, that Duane was stunned. Compared to this Chesseldine of the Rio Bend, to this rancher, stock-buyer, cattle speculator, property-holder, all the outlaws Duane had ever known sank into insignificance. The power of the man stunned Duane; the strange, elderly given him stunned Duane; the intricate inside working of his great system was equally stunning. But when Duane recovered from the shock of terrible passion to kill consumed him, and it eased fiercely and it could not be checked. He had trailed Poggin, if that cold-eyed fiend-faced Knell had only been at Ord! But they were not, and Duane with help of time got what he hoped was the upper hand of himself.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Again inaction and suspense dragged at Duane's spirit.

But one day there were signs of the long quiet of Ord being broken. A messenger strange to Duane rode in on a secret mission that had to do with Fletcher. Duane was present in the tavern when the fellow arrived saw the few words whispered, but did not hear them. Fletcher turned white with anger or fear, perhaps both, and he cursed like a madman. The messenger rode away off to the west. This west mystified and fascinated Duane as much as the south beyond Mount Ord. After the messenger left Fletcher grew silent and surly. It became clear now that the other outlaws of the camp feared him, kept out of his way. Duane let him alone, yet closely watched him.

Perhaps an hour after the messenger had left, not longer, Fletcher manifestly arrived at some decision, and he called for his horse. Then he went to his shack and returned. To Duane the outlaw looked in shape both to ride and to fight. He gave orders for the men in camp to keep close until he returned. Then he mounted.

"Come here, Dodge," he called.

Duane went up and laid a hand on the pommel of the saddle. Fletcher walked his horse, with Duane beside him, till they reached the log bridge, when he halted.

"Dodge, I'm in bad with Knell," he said. "Ain't I pears I'm the cause of friction between Knell an' Poggy. Knell never had any use for me, but Poggy's been square, if hot friendly. The boss had a big deal on, an' here it's been held up because of this scrap. He's wirin' over there on the mountain to give orders to Knell or Poggy, an' neither one's showin' up. I've got to stand in the breach, an' I ain't enjoyin' the prospects."

"What's the trouble about, Jim?" asked Duane.

"Reckon it's a little about you Dodge," said Fletcher, dryly. "Knell hadn't any use for you that day.

"God Almighty! You Braced the—"

Knell claims to know somethin' about you that 'll make both the boss an' Poggy sick when he springs it. But he's keepin' quiet. Hard man to figger, thet Knell. Reckon you'd better go back to Bradford for a day or two, then camp out here till I come back."

"Why?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

SPLENDID BARGAIN FOR JOEL

Citizens' Committee Had Good Idea, but It Didn't Work Out as They Had Planned It.

The shiftless owner of a worthless old horse, Joel Turner, had been in the habit of feeding the animal from the cribs of his more enterprising neighbors, until the patience of his victims was completely exhausted. They had caught him in the act of helping himself to corn a number of times, and so there was plenty of evidence to convict him; but on account of his family and his vindictive disposition, no one wanted to prosecute him.

One day, when Joel's neighbors were discussing the situation, someone suggested that it would be an act of mercy—which would also solve their problem—if they bought the old horse and put it out of its misery.

This suggestion the conference adopted. They subscribed a purse of $10, and sent a committee of one to buy the horse.

Here the plan was threatened with failure. The committee reported that Joel did not want to sell.

After a few days, Jesse Winfield, who thought himself something of a diplomat, undertook to negotiate the sale, and to his surprise found Joel not only willing but anxious to sell the horse.

"That," said Jesse, in a congratulatory tone, as he handed over the ten dollars, "was a good deal for you. You'll get lots more good out of the ten dollars than you would out of the old horse."

"That's right," assented Joel, "I know where I can buy a team for ten dollars."—Youth's Companion.

Fireflies and Fire Fish.

Whoever can invade the secret of the firefly and his portable electric battery may confer a wonderful favor upon civilization. Prof. Dubois in pursuit of it, Professor E. N. Harvey, of Princeton university, has lately reached Japan. He has gone thither in fact to make a special study of the "hotaru-ika," a species of cuttlefish living in the Japanese seas. The "hotaru-ika" spawns at times only in that part of the ocean. It produces light in the waters which can be seen on the surface. The best time to study this fish is in May and June, for many of them then come up far into the rivers. Professor Harvey has already made a study of Japanese fireflies and is looked upon as an authority on the subject.

Dr. Ishikawa, of the Imperial university, had already published the results of researches in regard to the "hotaru-ika." But most of his researches are said to have been made in connection with the bodily structure of the fish.

His Choice.

A school teacher in the Italian quarter of Chicago had been telling her pupils certain of the fables of Aesop and of these the story of the fox and the grapes seemed especially to appeal to one dusky son of Italy.

By a stroke of luck the teacher was enabled to hear the lad give his version to a lad in another class.

In a delicious dialect the boy recounted the fable-story which as it is written until he reached the climax, which he rendered thus:

"Den de olda fox he say, 'I thinka da grape no good, anahow. I guess I go geta da banan'."

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Convincing.

"Rather odd that you can't keep a cook, my dear."

"Oh, but we can. There was one we had this month who stayed overnight."

Flattery.

"Mrs. Green flattered me greatly yesterday, and I knew she was flattering, too."

"It is so? What did she say?"

"She said I had a wonderful husband."

Extra Large Size.

"There goes Miss Grubcoin, the heiress. It is said that a duke once drank champagne out of her slipper."

"Possibly so," answered the cynic. "She's a big woman. Some of those foreign noblemen have an astonishing capacity for wine."

Working Abandoned Holdings.

Many holdings in Brazil which have been abandoned for nearly a century are now being worked and made productive. That of the Carmelite monks, where there is now settled a colony of foreign agriculturists, and that of the Benedictine monks, worked by the monks themselves, are among these. The ancient industry of sugar planting has been revived to an extent never before known in some states. Many of the municipalities have revived and again placed under cultivation old and abandoned coffee fazendas.

Childish Craving

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