THE LONE STAR RANGER

This is a story about the Texas Plains People

By ZANE GREY

SYNOPSIS.

—11—

The time of the story about 1875. The place: The Texas cow country. The chief character: Buckley Duane, a young man who has inherited a fight to kill, which he suppresses. In self-defense he shoots dead a drunken bully and is forced to flee to the wild country where he joins Blandford outlaw band. Euchre, an amiable rascal, tells him about Jennie, a young girl who had been abducted and sold to Bland for a bride. They determine to rescue the girl and restore her to civilization. Euchre is killed. Buck kills Bland and is dangerously wounded by Mrs. Bland, but escapes with Jennie. Jennie is adopted. Buck never sees her again, but kills her abductor. Duane barely escapes death at the hands of lynchers for a crime he never committed. He goes to see Captain MacNelly of the Rangers, who hands him a pardon on condition that he join the Rangers and assist breaking up the outlaws. Duane accepts and goes to the outlaw headquarters on a secret mission. He meets Colonel Longstreth, mayor of Fairdale, and Miss Ray Longstreth, and her cousin, Ruth. Buck affects a robber to Longstreth's home and announces that he is a Ranger. The colonel shows marked enmity. The new Ranger secretly organizes a vigilance committee.

CHAPTER XIX.

Strangers rode into Fairdale; and other hard-looking customers, new to Duane if not to Fairdale, helped to create a charged and waiting atmosphere. The saloons did unusual business and were never closed. Respectable citizens of the town were awakened in the early dawn by rowdies carousing in the streets.

Duane kept pretty close under cover during the day. He did not entertain the opinion that the first time he walked down street he would be a target for guns. Things seldom happened that way; and when they did happen so, it was more accident than design. But at night he was not idle. He met Laramie, Morton, Zimmer and others of like character; a secret club had been formed; and all the members were ready for action. Duane spent hours at night watching the house where Floyd Lawson stayed when he was not up at Longstreth's. At night he was visited, or at least the house was, by strange men who were swift, stealthy, mysterious—all that kindly disposed friends or neighbors would not have been. Duane had not been able to recognize any of these night visitors; and he did not think the time was ripe for a bold holding up of one of them. Nevertheless, he was sure such an event would discover Lawson, or someone in that house, to be in touch with crooked men.

Laramie was right. Not twenty-four hours after his talk with Duane, in which he advised quick action, he was found behind the little bar of his restaurant with a bullet-hole in his breast, dead. No one could be found who had heard a shot. It had been deliberate murder, for upon the bar had been left a piece of paper rudely scrawled with a pencil: "All friends of rangers look for the same."

This roused Duane. His first move, however, was to tell Mrs. Laramie. None of Laramie's neighbors evinced any interest in the dead man or the unfortunate family he had left. Duane saw that these neighbors were held in check by fear. Mrs. Laramie was ill; the shock of her husband's death was hard on her; and she had been left almost destitute with five children. Duane rented an adobe house on the outskirts of town and moved the family into it. Then he played the part of provider and nurse and friend.

After several days Duane went boldly into town and showed that he meant business. It was his opinion that there were men in Fairdale secretly glad of a ranger's presence. What he intended to do was food for great speculation. A company of militia could not have had the effect upon the wild element of Fairdale that Duane's presence had. It got out that he was a gunman lightning swift on the draw. It was death to face him. He had killed thirty men—wildest rumor of all. It was actually said of him he had the gun-skill of Buck Duane or Poggin.

At first there had not only been great conjecture among the vicious element, but also a very decided checking of all kinds of action calculated to be conspicuous to a keen-eyed ranger. At the tables, at the bars and lounging-places Duane heard the remarks: "Who's that ranger after? What 'll he do fust off? Is he waitin' for somebody? Who's goin' to draw on him fust—an' go to hell? Jest about how soon will he be found somewhere full of lead?"

When it came out somewhere that Duane was cultivating the honest stay-at-home citizens to array them in time against the other element, then Fairdale showed its wolf teeth. Several times Duane was shot at in the dark and once slightly injured. Rumor had it that Poggin, the gunman, was coming to meet him. But the lawless element did not rise up in a mass to slay Duane on sight. It was not so much that the enemies of the law awaited his next move, but just a slowness peculiar to the frontier. There was a rude kind of good humor even in their open hostility.

Besides, one ranger or a company of rangers could not have held the undivided attention of these men from their games and drinks and quarrels except by some decided move. Excitement, greed, appetite were rife in them. Duane marked, however, a striking exception to the usual run of strangers he had been in the habit of seeing. Sneeker had gone or was under cover. Again Duane caught a vague rumor of the coming of Poggin, yet he never seemed to arrive. Moreover the goings-on among the habitues of the resorts and cowboys who came in to drink and gamble were unusually mild in comparison with former conduct. This lull, however, did not deceive Duane. It could not last. The wonder was that it had lasted so long.

Duane went often to see Mrs. Laramie and her children. One afternoon while he was there he saw Miss Longstreth and Ruth ride up to the door. They carried a basket. Evidently they had heard of Mrs. Laramie's trouble. Duane felt strangely glad, but he went into an adjoining room rather than meet them.

"Mrs. Laramie, I've come to see you," said Miss Longstreth, cheerfully.

The little room was not very light, there being only one window and the doors, but Duane could see plainly enough. Mrs. Laramie lay, hollow-cheeked and haggard, on a bed. Once she had evidently been a woman of some comeliness. The ravages of trouble and grief were there to read in her worn face; it had not, however, any of the hard and bitter lines that had characterized her husband's.

Duane wondered, considering that Longstreth had ruined Laramie, how Mrs. Laramie was going to regard the daughter of an enemy.

"Sir, you're Granger Longstreth's girl?" queried the woman, with her bright, black eyes fixed on her visitor.

"Yes," replied Miss Longstreth, simply. "This is my cousin, Ruth Herbert. We've come to nurse you, take care of the children, help you in any way you'll let us."

There was a long silence.

"Well, you look a little like Longstreth," finally said Mrs. Laramie, "but you're not at all like him. You must take after your mother, Miss Longstreth. I don't know if I can—if I ought to accept anything from you. Your father ruined my husband."

"Yes, I know," replied the girl fadly. "That's all the more reason you should let me help you. Pray don't refuse. It will—mean much to me."

If this poor, stricken woman had any resentment it speedily melted in the warmth and sweetness of Miss Longstreth's manner, and no sooner had she begun to talk to the children than both they and the mother were won. The opening of that big basket was an event. Poor, starved little beggars! The havoc was wrought in that household. The needs now were cheerfulness, kindness, help, action—and these the girls furnished with a spirit that did Duane good.

"Mrs. Laramie, who dressed this baby?" presently asked Miss Longstreth. Duane peeped in to see a dilapidated youngster on her knee. That sight, if any other was needed, completed the full and splendid estimate of Ray Longstreth and wrought strangely upon his heart.

"The ranger," replied Mrs. Laramie.

"The ranger!" exclaimed Miss Longstreth.

"Yes, he's taken care of us all since —since—" Mrs. Laramie choked.

"Oh! So you've had no help but his," replied Miss Longstreth, hastily. "No women. Too bad. I'll send someone, Mrs. Laramie, and I'll come myself."

"It 'll be good of you," went on the older woman. "You see, Jim had few friends—that is, right in town. And they've been afraid to help us—afraid they'd get what poor Jim—"

"That's awful!" burst out Miss Longstreth, passionately. "A brave lot of friends! Mrs. Laramie, don't you worry any more. We'll take care of you. Here, Ruth help me. What—ever is the matter with baby's dress?"

Manifestly Miss Longstreth had some difficulty in subduing her emotion.

"Why, it's on hind side before," declared Ruth. "I guess Mr. Ranger hasn't dressed many babies."

"He did the best he could," said Mrs. Laramie. "Lord only knows what would have become of us!"

"Then he is—is something more than a ranger?" queried Miss Longstreth, with a little break in her voice.

"He's more than I can tell," replied Mrs. Laramie. "He buried Jim. He paid our debts. He fetched us here. He bought food for us. He cooked for us and fed us. He washed and dressed the baby. He sat with me the first two nights after Jim's death, when I thought I'd die myself. He's so kind, so gentle, so patient. He has kept me up just by being near. Sometimes I'd wake from a doze, an', seeing him there, I'd know how false were all these tales Jim heard about him and believed at first. Why, he plays with the children just—just like any good man might. Then he has the baby up I just can't believe he's a bloody gunman, as they say. He's good; but he isn't happy. He has such sad eyes. He looks far off sometimes when the children climb round him. They love him. His life is sad. Nobody need tell me—he sees the good in things. Once he said somebody had to be a ranger. Well, I say, 'Thank God for a ranger like him!'"

Duane did not want to hear more, so he walked into the room.

"It was thoughtful of you," Duane said. "Mommakind are needed here. I could do so little, Mrs. Laramie, you look better already. I'm glad. And here's baby all clean and white. Baby, what a time I had trying to puzzle out the way your clothes went on! Well, Mrs. Laramie, didn't I tell you—friends would come? So will the brighter side."

"Yes, I've more faith than I had," replied Mrs. Laramie. "Granger Longstreth's daughter has come to me. There, for a while after Jim's death I thought I'd sink. We have nothing. How could I ever take care of my little ones? But I'm gaining courage to—to—"

"Mrs. Laramie, do not distress yourself any more," said Miss Longstreth. "I shall see you are well cared for. I promise you."

"Miss Longstreth, that's fine!" exclaimed Duane. "It's what I've expected of you."

It must have been sweet praise to her, for the whiteness of her face burned out in a beautiful blush.

"And it's good of you, too, Miss Herbert, to come," added Duane. "Let me thank you both. I'm glad I have you girls as allies in part of my lonely task here. More than glad I am for the sake of this good woman and the little ones. But both of you be careful about coming here alone. There's risk. And now I'll be going. Good-by, Mrs. Laramie. I'll drop in again to-night. Good-by."

"Mr. Ranger, wait!" called Miss Longstreth as he went out. She was white and wonderful. She stepped out of the door close to him.

"I have wronged you!" she said, impulsively.

"Miss Longstreth! How can you say that?" he returned.

"I believed what my father and Floyd Lawson said about you. Now I see—I wronged you."

"You make me very glad, But, Miss Longstreth, please don't speak of wronging me. I have been a—a gunman, I am a ranger—and, much said of me is true. My duty is hard on others sometimes on those who are innocent, alas! But God knows that duty is hard, too, on me."

"I did wrong you. If you entered my home again I would think it an honor. I—"

"Please—please don't, Miss Longstreth," interrupted Duane.

"But, sir, my conscience flays me," she went on. There was no other sound like her voice. "Will you take my hand? Will you forgive me?"

She gave it royally, while the other was there pressing at her breast. Duane took the proffered hand. He did not know what else to do.

Then it seemed to dawn upon him that there was more behind this white, sweet, noble intensity of her than just the making amends for a fancied or real wrong. Duane thought the man did not live on earth who could have resisted her then.

"I honor you for your goodness to this unfortunate woman," she said, and now her speech came swiftly. "When she was all alone and helpless you were her friend. It was the deed of a man. But Mrs. Laramie is not the only unfortunate woman in the world. There are, too, unfortunate men. Ah, how I may soon need a friend! Will you be my friend? I'm so alone. I'm terribly worried. I fear—I fear—Oh, surely I'll need a friend soon—soon. Oh, I'm afraid of what you'll find out sooner or later. I want to help you. I bet us save life if not honor. Must I stand alone—all alone? Will you—will you be—" Her voice failed.

It seemed to Duane that she must have discovered what he had begun to suspect—that her father and Lawson were not the honest ranchers they professed to be. Perhaps she knew more! Her appeal to Duane shook him deeply. He wanted to help her more than he had ever wanted anything. And with the dawning of the tumultuous sweetness she stirred in him there came the realization of a dangerous situation.

"I must be true to my duty," he said, hoarsely.

"If you knew me you'd know I could never ask you to be false to it."

"Well, then—I'll do anything for you."

"Oh, thank you! I'm ashamed that I believed my cousin Floyd. He lied —he lied. I'm all in the dark, strangely distressed. My father wants me to go back home. Floyd is trying to keep me here. They've quarreled. Oh, I know something dreadful will happen. I know I'll need you it—if—Will you help me?"

"Yes," replied Duane, and his look brought the blood to her face.

CHAPTER XX.

After supper Duane stole out for his usual evening's spying at Longstreth's ranch-house. When he reached the edge of the shrubbery he saw Longstreth's door open, flashing a broad bar of light in the darkness. Lawson crossed the threshold, the door closed, and all was dark again outside. Not a ray of light escaped from the window. Duane tiptoed to the door and listened, but could hear only a murmur of voices. Besides, that position was too risky. He went round the corner of the house.

This side of the big adobe house was of patch-older construction than the back of the larger part. There was a narrow passage between the houses, leading from the outside through to the patio.

This passage now afforded Duane an opportunity, and he decided to avail himself of it in spite of the very great danger. Crawling on very swiftly, he got under the shrubbery to the entrance of the passage. In the blackness a faint streak of light showed the location of a crack in the wall. He had to slip in sidewise. It was a tight squeeze, but he entered without the slightest noise. When he got there the crack he had marked was a foot under his head. There was nothing to do but find toe-holds in the crumbling walls, and by bracing knees on one side, back against the other, hold himself up. Once with his eye there he did not care what risk he ran. Longstreth appeared distinctly, and the last striking his mustache; his brow was troubled. Lawson's face seemed darker, more sullen, yet lighted by some indomitable resolve.

"We'll settle both deals to-night," Lawson was saying. "That's what I came for."

"But suppose I don't choose to talk horses?" protested Longstreth, impatiently.

"You've lost your nerve since that ranger hit the town. First now will you give Ray to me?"

"Floyd, you talk like a spoiled boy. I tried to persuade her. But Ray hasn't any use for you now. So what can I do?"

"You can make her marry me!" replied Lawson.

"Make that girl do what she doesn't want to? It couldn't be done. But if Ray loved you I would consent. We'll all go away together before this miserable business is out. Then she'd never know. And maybe you might be more like you used to be before the West ruined you."

"What 'd you want to let her come out here for?" demanded Lawson, hotly. "It was a dead mistake. I've lost my head over her. I'll have her or die. No, Longstreth, we've got to settle things to-night."

"Well, we can settle what Ray's concerned about right now," replied Longstreth, rising. "Come on; we'll ask her. See where you stand."

They went out leaving the door open. Duane dropped down to rest himself and to wait.

The men seemed to be absent a good while, though that feeling might have been occasioned by Duane's thrilling interest and anxiety. Finally he heard heavy steps. Lawson came in alone. He was leaden-faced, humiliated. Then something abject in him gave place to rage. He strode the room; he cursed. Then Longstreth returned, more appreciably calmer. Duane could not but decide that he felt relief at the evident rejection of Lawson's proposal.

"Don't fuss about it, Floyd," he said. "You see I can't help it. We're pretty wild out here, but I can't rope my daughter and give her to you as I would an unbroken steer."

"Longstreth, I can make her marry me," declared Lawson, thickly.

"How?"

"You know the hold I got on you—the deal that made you boss of this rustler gang?"

"I isn't likely I'd forget," replied Longstreth, grimly.

"I can go to Ray, tell her that, make her believe I'd tell it broadcast—tell this ranger—unless she'd marry me."

Lawson spoke breathlessly, with haggard face and shadowed eyes. He had no shame. He was simply in the grip of passion.

Longstreth gazed with dark, controlled fury at this relative. In that look Duane saw a strong, unscrupulous man fallen into evil ways, but still a man. It betrayed Lawson to be the wild and passionate weakling. Like the great majority of evil and unrestrained men on the border, he had reached a point where influence was futile. Reason had degenerated. He saw only himself.

"But, Floyd, Ray's the one person on earth who must never know I'm a rustler, a thief, a red-handed ruler of the worst gang of robbers," replied Longstreth, impressively.

Floyd bowed his head at that, as if the significance had just occurred to him. But he was not long at a loss. "She's going to find it out sooner or later. I bet you she knows now there's something wrong out here. She's got eyes. Mark what I say."

"Ray has changed, I know. But she hasn't any idea yet that her daddy's a boss rustler. Ray's concerned about what she calls my duty as mayor. Also I think she's not satisfied with my explanations in regard to certain property."

Lawson halted in his restless walk and leaned against the stone mantelpiece. He had his hands in his pockets. He squared himself as if this was his last stand. He looked desperate, but on this moment showed an absence of his usual nervous excitement.

"Longstreth, that may well be true," he said. "No doubt all you say is true. But it doesn't help me. I want the girl. If I don't get her—I reckon we'll all go to hell."

Longstreth gave a slight start, barely perceptible, like the switch of an awakening tiger. He sat there head down, stroking his mustache. Duane's conviction was that Longstreth right then and there decided that the thing to do was to kill Lawson.

Lawson no more caught the fateful significance of a line crossed, a limit reached, a decree decided than if he had not been present. He was obsessed with himself. How, Duane wondered, had a man of his mind ever lived so long and gone so far among the exacting conditions of the Southwest? The answer was, perhaps, that Longstreth had guided him, upheld, him, protected him. The coming of Ray Longstreth had been the entering-wedge of dissension.

"You're too impatient," said Longstreth. "Ray might be won. She might marry you to save me, but she'd hate you. That isn't the way. Wait. Play for time. Let's plan to sell out here—stock, ranch, property—and leave the country. Then you'd have a stake with her."

"I told you we've got to stick," growled Lawson. "The gang won't stand for our going. It can't be done unless you want to sacrifice everything."

"You mean double-cross the men? Go without their knowing? Leave them here to face whatever comes?"

"I mean just that."

"I'm bad enough, but not that bad," returned Longstreth, "If I can't get the gang to let me off, I'll stay and face the music. And the same, Lawson, did it ever strike you that most of the deals the last few years have been yours?"

"Yes. If I hadn't rung them in there wouldn't have been any. You've had cold feet, and especially since this ranger has been here."

"Well, call it cold feet if you like. But I call it sense. We reached our limit long ago. The time we had to go on. Too late to turn back."

"I reckon we've all said that. None of the gang wants to quit. They all think, and I think, we can't be touched. We may be blamed, but nothing can be proved. We're too strong."

"There's where you're dead wrong," rejoined Longstreth, emphatically. "I imagined that once, not long ago. I was bull-headed. Who would ever connect Granger Longstreth with a rustler gang? I've changed my mind. I've begun to think. I've reasoned out things. We're crooked, and we can't last. It's the nature of life, even here, for conditions to grow better. The wise deal for us would be to divide equally and leave the country, all of us."

"But you and I have all the stock—all the gain," protested Lawson.

"I'll split mine."

"I won't—that settles that," added Lawson, instantly.

Longstreth spread wide his hands as if it was useless to try to convince this man. Talk had not increased his calmness, and he now showed more than impatience. A dull glint gleamed deep in his eyes.

"Your stock and property will last a long time—do lots of good when this ranger—"

"Bah!" hoarsely croaked Lawson.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"It Was a Dead Mistake."

"Mr. Ranger, Wait!"

EXPLAINING THE TELEGRAPH

Headman of Village in Bosnia Relieves Perplexity of His People When They See New Wonder.

As a general rule, the telegraph no longer arouses the wonder and awe that it did in our grandfathers. In remote countries, however, there are still people who have never heard it, or who are unable to understand it. The following is a story of the perplexity that the telegraph caused in a small village of Bosnia.

The government had installed a telegraph line from Prijedor to Bihatsch. "What is the meaning of this wire?" asked the astonished inhabitants of a village through which the line happened to pass.

"It's a telegraph," said the headman of the village, who had been in consultation with the officials. "One can send a message along this wire, straight from here to Stamboul."

The villagers were incredulous. "That is impossible. How can a message run along a wire?"

The headman thought for a while; then he hit upon the proper explanation. "Imagine," he said, "a dog that is terribly long, and whose tail is stretched like the wire on these poles; imagine that his tail is so long that he reaches from here to Stamboul. Now, suppose we pinched his tail here. Wouldn't he howl in Stamboul?"

And the villagers understood.

Editor's Plight.

If an editor ever accidentally got into one of those fashionable summer resorts where the inmates dress three times a day, his other necktie would do all right for the second time, but the third time he'd have to appear in his pajamas.—Columbus (O.) Journal.

HOTEL NAMES HAVE CHANGED

Passing of Old "American House" in Boston Recalls Long Past Period in American Life.

The old American house, on Hanover street, which gives up the ghost after 65 years of continuous service as a hotel, was the parent of a thousand American houses all over the country. The name itself was, older than that; the building, still virtually intact, erected in 1801, had had a predecessor on the same spot, to which the name American House had been given in 1835. In the years which were the high noon of the nineteenth century no new town was opened up in Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska or California without the American house, called after our original. That was the period of flamboyant, spread-eagleism which was satirized in Dickens' Martin Chuzzlewit, and of which Hon. Elijah Pogram was the shining example. English names for hotels, such as the Westminster, the Windsor, the Victoria, the Buckingham, and so on, were then decidedly at a discount. It was the period which gave us such names as the American, the United States, the Revere House, the Eagle Hotel. It followed the epoch of fantastic and picturesque old titles such as the Blue Bell, the Indian Queen, the Red Lion, the Green Dragon, the Blue Anchor and the Bunch of Grapes, all of which swung before their doors.—Boston Transcript.

Vindicated Self-Esteem.

"The Woggses seem to have a high opinion of themselves."

"Yes. You see the same cook has consented to remain in their employ for three or four years. So they feel entitled to think that they are rather nice people."

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Youngster's Great Idea.

A small boy who was not familiar with country ways was taken by his fond mother for a short stay in the country.

On a farm in a neighboring county he waxed fat and sunburnt, and picked up a wondrous store of astonishing experiences.

One day the youngster, who had kept his eye on the hen, suddenly said to the mother: "Just ask your boy why he had two eggs in the stable."

So the very first opportunity the mother said to the six-year-old:

"My dear, what did you do with those eggs you took from the henhouse?"

"I hid them in the stable," answered the boy.

"And what for?" asked his mother.

"'Cause it's my scheme."

"Your scheme? And what is your scheme?" asked the mother.

"Why, you see, mamma," said the little philosopher, "when eggs is borned in a chicken house they is always little chickens, and I find if they are borned in a stable they might be little horses."

She Thought Wolf a Bear.

The lawyer was a big colored woman charged with a misdemeanor and when arraigned before the judge in the criminal court declared that she wanted her "lawyer-man" before she was tried.

"Who is your lawyer?" asked the clerk.

"Lawyer Bear," replied the witness. The clerk searched the papers and could find no record of a lawyer by that name having entered his appearance in the case and he asked her to guess again.

"Oh," said the prisoner, "it ain't Bear, it is Lion."

"Come again," said the clerk. "You have no lawyer by that name."

"Well, it some kind of a animal, bear, lion, or something like that," she said.

"Do you think his name is Wolf?" queried the clerk.

"Yaas, that's him, Lawyer Wolf—Harry B. Wolf," said the negress, and while the court enjoyed a laugh he was sent for and the trial went on.—Baltimore News.

His Pathetic Plea.

David came over to play with Dorothy. Dorothy's mother explained to David that she would have to send him home because Dorothy had been naughty and she would have to be punished by depriving her of what she liked best, which seemed to be playing with David. He left, and about fifteen minutes later there was a tiny knock at the door and David said, "I want Dorothy." Dorothy's mother said: "Why, David, Dorothy is being punished and can't play with you," to which David replied: "Well, I wasn't naughty; you needn't punish me."

Wounded Soldier Explains.

Old Lady—And how did you get your medal?

Tommy—Won it.

Old Lady—Yes, yes. But how and where?

Tommy (in desperation)—At a bazaar, ma'am. In a raffle!

His Remedy.

"I hear Snuksmus scratched his ticket. What did he do that for?"

"I suppose it was because he was itching for revenge."

An Adroit Debater.

"My boy Josh always gets the last word in an argument with me," commented Farmer Corntossel, not without a touch of pride.

"How does he manage it?"

"Hands me out some long technical word that compels me to go to the dictionary and before I can get back changes the conversation."

Looking for Bargains.

Doctor—Have you a pain in your stomach, or one in your side?

Patient—Which would be cheapest?

Something Appropriate.

"Professor, I have made some money and I want to do something for my old college. I don't remember what studies I excelled in, if any."

"In my classes you slept most of the time."

"Um! Well, I'll endow a dormitory."

Looks So.

"I see fashion decrees that skirts must touch the floor this season."

"I suppose that is one of the sweeping reforms they have been talking of."