



Whenever he uttered protest they held him stretched over a roll of blankets and thrashed him woefully with a pair of leather leggings.

his pockets for a few crumbs of the precious weed.

"Ah, Don Samuel," he said reproachfully, but with his touch of Castilian manners, "excuse me. They say the jack-rabbit and the sheep have the most leetle sesos—how you call dthem—brain-es? Ah don' believe dthat, Don Samuel—excuse me. Ah dthink people w'at don' keep esmokin' tobacco, dthey—bot you weel excuse me, Don Samuel."

"Now, what's the use of chewin' the rag, boys," said the untroubled Sam, stooping over to rub the toes of his shoes with a red-and-yellow handkerchief. "Ranse took the order for some more smokin' to San Antone with him Tuesday. Pancho rode Ranse's boss back yesterday; and Ranse is goin' to drive the wagon back himself. There wa'n't much of a load—just some wool sacks and blankets and nails and canned peaches and a few things we was out of. I look for Ranse to roll in today sure. He's an early starter and a hell-to-split driver, and he ought to be here not far from sundown."

"What plugs is he drivin'?" asked Mustang Taylor, with a smack of hope in his tones.

"The buckboard grays," said Sam. "I'll wait a spell, then," said the wrangler. "Them plugs eat up a trail like a road runner swallowin' a whip snake. And you may bust me open a can of green-gage plums, Sam, while I'm waitin' for somethin' better."

"Open me some yellow cllings," ordered Poky Rodgers. "I'll wait, too."

cans of fruit. The cowpunchers never failed to treat themselves to a change from the beans and bacon of camp whenever they rode in to the store.

The store, a big, white wooden building like a barn, stood fifty yards from the ranchhouse. Beyond it were the horse corrals; and still farther the wool sheds and the brush-topped shearing pens—for the Rancho Cibolo raised both cattle and sheep. Behind the store, at a little distance, were the grass-thatched jacals of the Mexicans who bestowed their allegiance upon the Cibolo.

The ranchhouse was composed of four large rooms with plastered adobe walls, and a two-room wooden ell. A twenty-foot-wide "gallery" circumvented the structure. It was set in a grove of immense live oaks and water elms near a lake—a loffg, not very wide and tremendously deep lake in which, at nightfall, great gars leaped to the surface and plunged with the noise of hippopotamuses frolicking at their bath. From the trees hung garlands and massive pendants of the melancholy gray moss of the South. Indeed, the Cibolo ranchhouse seemed more of the South than of the West. It looked as if old "Kiowa" Truesdell might have brought it with him from the lowlands of Mississippi when he came to Texas with his rifle in the hollow of his arm in '55.

But, though he did not bring the family mansion, Truesdell did bring something in the way of a family inheritance that was more lasting than brick or stone. He

brought one end of the Truesdell-Curtis family feud. And when a Curtis bought the Rancho de los Olmos, sixteen miles from the Cibolo, there were lively times on the pear flats and in the chaparral thickets of the Southwest. In those days Truesdell cleaned the brush of many a wolf and tiger cat and Mexican lion; and one or two Curtises fell heirs to notches on his rifle stock. Also he buried a brother with a Curtis bullet in him on the bank of the lake at Cibolo. And then the Kiowa Indians made their last raid upon the ranches between the Frio and the Rio Grande, and Truesdell at the head of his rangers rid the earth of them to the last brave, earning his sobriquet. Then came prosperity in the form of waxing herds and broadening lands. And then old age and bitterness, when he sat, with his great mane of hair as white as the Spanish-dagger blossoms and his fierce, pale-blue eyes, on the shaded gallery at Cibolo, growling like the pumas that he had slain. He snapped his fingers at old age; the bitter taste to life did not come from that. The cup that stuck at his lips was that his only son Ransom wanted to marry a Curtis, the last youthful survivor of the other end of the feud.

the mesquit flat wound the ranch road that, five miles away, flowed into the old government trail to San Antonio. The sun was so low that the gentlest elevation cast its gray shadow miles into the green-gold sea of sunshine. That evening ears were quicker than eyes. The Mexican held up a tawny finger to still the scraping of tin against tin. "One waggeen," said he, "cross dthe Arroyo Hondo. Ah hear dthe wheel. Verree rockee place, dthe Hondo." "You've got good ears, Gregorio," said Mustang Taylor. "I never heard nothin' but the song bird in the bush and the zephyr skallyhootin' across the peaceful dell." In ten minutes Taylor remarked: "I see the dust of a wagon risin' right above the fur end of the flat." "You have verree good eyes, senior," said Gregorio, smiling. Two miles away they saw a faint cloud dimming the green ripples of the mesquita. In twenty minutes they heard the clatter of the horses' hoofs; in five minutes more the gray plugs dashed out of the thicket, whickering for oats and drawing the light wagon behind them like a toy. From the jacals came a cry of: "El Amo! El Amo!" Four Mexican youths raced to unharness the grays. The cowpunchers gave a yell of greeting and delight. Ranse Truesdell, driving, threw the reins to the ground and laughed. "It's under the wagon sheet, boys," he said. "I know what you're waiting for. If Sam lets it run out again we'll use them yellow shoes of his for a target. There's two cases. Pull 'em out and light up. I know you all want a smoke." After striking dry country Ranse had removed the wagon sheet from the bows and thrown it over the goods in the wagon. Six pair of hasty hands dragged it off and

III

FOR a while the only sounds to be heard at the store were the rattling of the tin spoons and the gurgling intake of the juicy fruits by the cowpunchers, the stamping of the grazing ponies, and the singing of a doleful song by Sam as he contentedly brushed his stiff auburn hair for the twentieth time that day before a crinkly mirror.

From the door of the store could be seen the irregular, sloping stretch of prairie to the south, with its reaches of light green, billowy mesquit flats in the lower places, and its rises crowned with nearly black masses of short chaparral. Through

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