

O. HENRY and AL. JENNINGS

The Bandit's Astonishing Tale of the Story King

An Amazing Revelation With a Thrill in Every Chapter

Charged with Human Interest and Emotion, This Vivid, Dynamic Document Flashes with All the Good and Evil in Human Nature. Its Startling Chapters Shoot Burning Light Upon One of the Awful Crimes of Civilization, the Barbarous Cruelty of the Penitentiary in Which Both Were Confined.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

(Continued from last week)

Houston and Love free! The thing I had been dreading and expecting for six months came now with a shock that sent a cold fury of resolution through me. I knew that I would have to do deliberately what I should have done in passion. It was not blood-lust, but raging vindictiveness that spurred me on the 75-mile ride to my father's house. The hoof beats stopping at his door aroused him. When he saw me, he stood as one petrified. "Lo, your honor," I put out my hand. He did not take it. "What have you been doing?" Never had I seen his eye so cold, so hostile. "What does this mean?" He reached into his pocket, took out a folded handbill and offered it for me to read. "Reward for the apprehension of Al Jennings," it said, "wanted for the robbery of the Santa Fe Express." I saw it in a moment. That was the work of Houston and Love. They would get me out of the way. They

would save their cringing hides by another cowardly attack. "I had nothing to do with it. I'm damn sorry I didn't," I hurled the words at my father. Anger caught me by the throat and was choking me. "Darned if I had anything to do with it. By hell, they'll pay for it."

Father's Appeal Becomes Command.

"If you had nothing to do with it, give up and clear yourself. That's the way to make them pay." One of those sudden shifts from command to appeal softened my father's face. "Do you want to bring disgrace on the name?" he asked. "The name he damned and the law and everything connected with it. I hate it." "If you don't come in and clear yourself, I'm finished with you." "I can't clear myself," I told him. "The Harless range harbors outlaws. I can't bring them in to prove an alibi for me. Harless wasn't there at the time. If I did give up, I couldn't establish my innocence." "Then you're guilty?"

Not in all the lawlessness of my early life, nor in all the frenzy of sorrow and revenge after the murder, had such a full tide of storming violence beaten down the discretion of my nature. If he distrusted me, what had I to expect from enemies?

I went out from my father's house, lashed with a desperate, unappeasable fury. I wanted something to happen that once and for all would put me beyond the pale.

I slept out on the range and the next morning rode toward Arbeka. I had eaten nothing the day before. On the public road through the timber on the old trail west from Fort Smith was a little country store. I could have carried off all its contents in my sacker.

Five men were lounging on the bench near the horse rack when I threw my bridle over the pole. Their horses were tied. I couldn't tell whether they were marshals or horse thieves from the look of them. Whatever difference there is favors the horse thief.

I bought some cheese and crackers. When I came out my horse was gone.

"Where's my horse?" The fellow felt the hot blast of anger in the challenge.

"Ran away," he answered. "Ran!" I snapped at him. "Some of you fellows turned him loose."

In the glade about 10 yards distant, I saw my horse nibbling grass. I ran down, mounted and was just galloping off when a shot whizzed past, then a clash, a volley and the next moment the marauders slid wards and thumped to the ground, planning my leg under her.

They were possumen out to get me on the holdup. They were five to one and they didn't even try to take me on the porch. They fired without calling for a surrender. It was better to get a suspected train robber dead than alive. The question of guilt and the surety of reward were then settled beyond dispute.

I pulled myself free, started firing like a madman, and saw two of them drop. I hid behind a tree, plugged up again and went for the porch.

shooting as I went. Two of them ran into the timber.

Road Turns Now To Real Outlawry.

As I got to the store the fifth tumbled over into the brush. I ran inside, took up an ax and smashed the place to pieces. The owner crawled out from behind an empty cider barrel. He looked like a bearded rat with his gray cheeks puffing out above his parted black whiskers. I didn't care what I did. The viciousness of their attack infuriated me. I busted out at him as he slid off the porch.

The drawer in the counter was open. There was \$27.50 in it. I took it. I needed no money but the theft filled me with happiness. I had taken a definite step. I was a criminal now. My choice was made. I was one with the outlaws. For the first time since Ed's death, I felt at peace. I knew that I would have a gang with me now to the end.

The big iron gray horse that had stood undisturbed during the rucus, I mounted and started back to the Harless ranch. My foot was slipping up and down in my boot. I looked down.

The shoe was filled with blood. One of the bullets had struck through the muscles above my ankle. I picked it out with my pen knife and stuffed the hole with a puff ball weed.

When I got to the range I did not stop at the house but made for the timber. As I came near a pang of fear shot through me. It had a fire blazing. One of the men raised stealthily and glanced toward me.

He nodded.

Flation Ends at Silence of Gang.

The sudden elation at the store was dissipated. Should I go on? Could I rely on these men? I no longer felt at ease with them. Should I tell them what had happened? The silence of the fugitive is inbred. The reserve of the savage in his armor. Innocent, I had trusted the outlaws; guilty, I doubted their loyalty.

"Hello," Andy called.

"I'm coming over," I answered, guiding my horse into the deep stream.

"Want some coffee?" Jake asked.

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I was limping miserably. They asked no question.

"Looks like you got snagged," Bill offered.

"Got shot. They tried to kill me. Soaked my horse full of lead. They beat it. I robbed the damned store."

"Reckon you're with us."

Andy settled it.

They had a cozy camp hidden there in the lap of the mountains. An old wagon sheet, stretched between two poles, roofed the kitchen. Bill was making biscuits in the flour sack, shuffling up just enough dough and not wetting the rest.

I was lying on the floor at the

fire. I looked up. A man on horseback in the level at the edge of the creek had reined in and sat staring at me.

Andy nodded to him. He came over. It was Bob, the fourth man of the gang.

"It's O. K.," he said. "She stops at the tank."

(Continued next week.)

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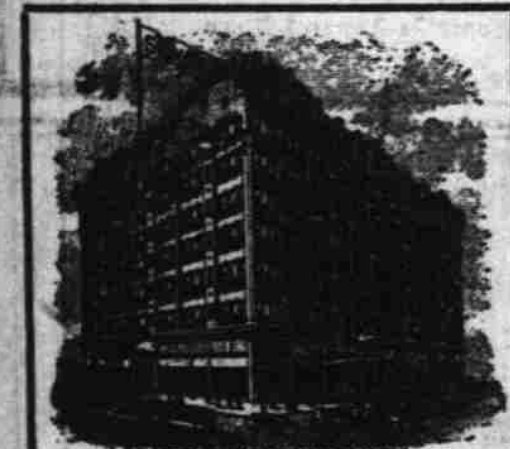
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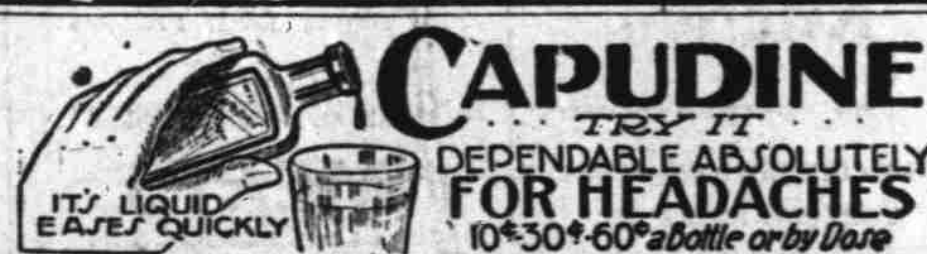
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