

O. HENRY AND AL. JENNINGS

(Continued from last week.)
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

We left Porter, harried with anxiety, at the Hotel Plaza in San Antonio. Frank and I and the rancher rode into New Rochelle. Our plan was simple. The cowman was to attract the attention of the marshals while we cleaned out the bank's vault. The bank stood on a corner opposite the public square. The cowman went quietly to a bench to wait for the signal from me. I pulled out my handkerchief and began mopping my face. The opened fire shooting like a lance into the air. Men and women ran into saloons, stores and houses. The officials hurried over to the crazy cowman. Frank and I walked into the bank, stuck up the cashier and compelled the delivery of \$15,500 in currency. The rancher charged with drunkenness, was arrested, fined and released. Frank and I left the bank as quietly as the next door merchant might have. The ruse worked.

Porter Surprised At Holdup Speed.

We went straight to the ranch and then doubled back to San Antonio. It was about two days since we had left Porter. He was not ordinarily a warm spoken man, but when he saw us he out his hand and his voice was rich with suppressed emotion. "Colonel, congratulations. This is indeed a happy moment. I was so troubled in your absence."

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From Bill Porter that greeting was more expressive than the gustiest tribute from the gibb-tongued. Porter's stories are crowded with colorful slang. His own speech was invariably pure and correct.

All of us knew that the parting had come. If Bill could not rob with us he could not settle down on the ranch bought with our stolen bills. I have never relished farewells. I did not want to probe into Porter's soul. He had never said a word about his past. He had not even told us his name. But little as I wished to quiz him, I was eager to know his identity. I did not want to lose track of him forever.

"Bill," I said, "here's where we scout. We're getting on mighty familiar soil. There's likely to be trouble enough some day. Something may turn up. I'd like to write to you. I might want your advice."

Sorry He Had Not Been Entirely Frank.

"I haven't been very frank with you, have I?" he answered. "I'm sorry."

Such reticence, I felt was more than a shield for an unhappy love affair. Porter's troubles, I know, must have been deeper than I had suspected.

"Good-bye, Colonel; may we meet happily again," he said. And the next time I saw him, nearly three years later, the very word "happy" was stricken from his vocabulary. Bill Porter was a changed and broken man.

Trapped by Marshals Six Months Later

Frank and I went out to our ranch. For six months we lived in free and profitable industry. Suddenly an old, familiar face peered at our window. Zona, a bandit friend, had tracked our parade some way. We had the range and dodged again. The marshals had trapped us.

Frank, Zona and I escaped. For weeks we rode from range to range. Hunger spurred us. There were more robberies. And then there was the Rock Island daylight holdup. We had counted on a clean haul of \$90,000 from the express car. Our dynamite failed to break the safe. We were cheated on the transaction. It was our most futile venture. It led to our capture. The stick-up was counted the boldest in outlaw exploits. Armed bands patrolled the country for the "Jennings gang." In December, 1887, they caught us.

We had gone back to the old Spike S, the range where I had first met and joined the outlaws, the range where the M., K. & T. robbery was planned. We were

waiting for the arrival of "Little Dick."

Rancher on Visit In Rain as Spy.

There came a knock at the door. The wind was howling like a fiend, outside. Mrs. Harliss went to the porch. A man, covered with dirt, his eyes swollen almost shut, his coat dripping with rain, asked shelter. He was a ranchman who lived some few miles away. That night he came as a spy. We were his quarry.

All of us felt the "closing of the trap." We had nothing but our suspicions to work on. The rancher was a friend of the Harliss folk. We could not hold him. But none of us went to bed that night.

The sun came blazing out brilliant but cold the next morning. Mrs. Harliss went down to the cistern for water. She came rushing back, her shawl gone, her hair blowing in the wind.

"The marshals are here! We'll all be killed!" Frank and Bud hurled themselves downstairs. Winchester in their hands. Mrs. Harliss grabbed her little brother in her arms and ran to the front door. I started out through the kitchen window. The fight was on.

Fortress Shattered In Forty Minutes.

Bullets tore the knob off the front door. The first volley splintered glass in my face. We got to a little boxhouse just outside the ranch home. There were three rooms downstairs, one up. The shots went through the house as though it were cardboard.

Bullets broke the dishes on the table, smashed the stove, dashed the pictures off the wall. Three of us were hit. We were surrounded on three sides. Marshals were in the barn to the northeast, the log house to the north and the rocks and timber to the northwest, a little peach orchard skirted the south. Beyond that was open prairie.

We fought for 40 minutes until our rickety fortress was all but shattered. Then we hit for the prairie, firing as we ran. They didn't dare to track us into the open spaces.

Rush for Last Stand on Hill.

Just across the Duck Creek we stopped to bind our wounds. I was shot above the knee, the bullet lodging in the bone. Bud was shot in the shoulder and Bill had a gash that looked like a dog bite in his thigh. Frank's clothes had 27 holes in the coat. He was not even scratched.

Up in the mountains we prepared for a "last stand." We had all day. It was blue cold. Between

the three of us we had two apples. That was our fare for three days. The marshals didn't follow.

We recrossed the creek, took a couple of Indians and their pony team prisoners and made for the Canadian River bed. My wound swelled. I had to rip it open twice with my penknife to get relief. We made straight for Benny Price's house. He had been a friend of ours before the outlaws days. He took us in and gave us a good meal. We could not stay without menacing his welfare.

There was another friend there, a horse thief named Baker. He came down and gave us a wagon. Frank did not trust him. He would not go. Bud, Bill and I got into the covered wagon. Baker was to drive us to his house. Bill seemed to be dying with his wounds. Bud and I were both unconscious. I woke up suddenly. Someone was sitting on the driver's seat.

Capture, Trial And Long Sentence.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Mr. damn it!" Frank answered. "Let's get out of this." While we were unconscious. Baker sent word to Frank that I wanted him. He had come. Baker drove us into the timber, into the trap, and left us yowling we were on the right road. A felled tree lay athwart the path. Bill was dying. Bud and I, but half-conscious, were dozing in the bottom of the wagon. Frank had scrambled out to move the tree.

The guerdon of marshals, six-shooters cocked, sprang about us. "Jennings, surrender, or we'll shoot down the team!" About 10 to 1 they had us. It took nearly two years before sentence was passed. I was given five years on a charge of assault with intent to kill a deputy. In another district I was found guilty of the Rock Island holdup and given life imprisonment. I was sent to the Ohio penitentiary.

The mystery of fate had brought me to the home of Bill Porter.

(Continued next week)

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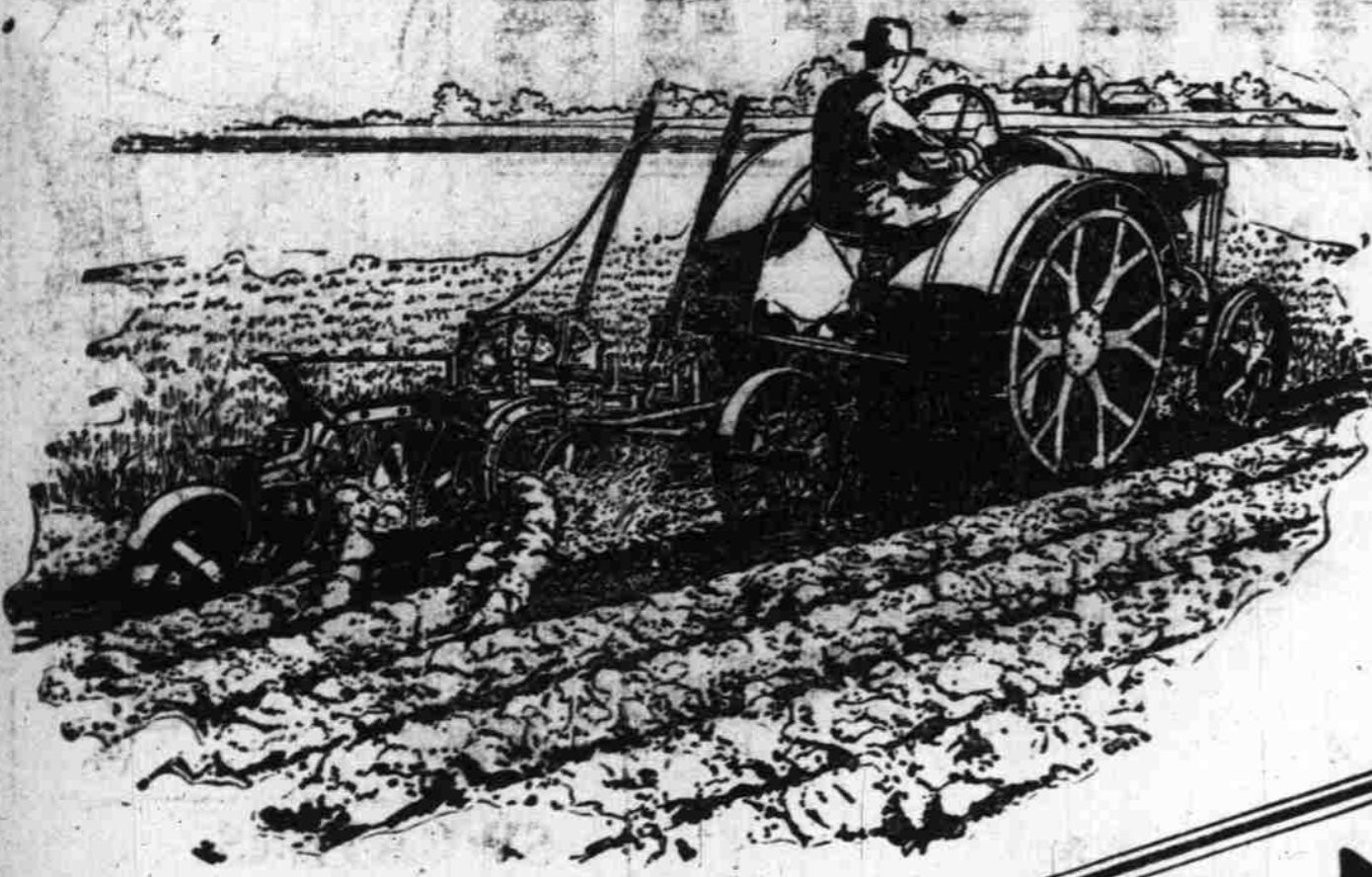
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