

DOUBLE TROUBLE

By WILLIAM HOBSON

AP Newsfeatures

(Chapter 24)
He died there on the floor of Brad Morden's place. Jay rose. Then his hand swooped up Turk's six-shooter. He spun—and found himself staring down the muzzle of Ace's gun.

"Sorry, old-timer," the outlaw said without rancor. "I know how you feel about Turk. But no guns for you. Boss's orders. Hand it over, Jay. I wouldn't want to try shootin' it out of your hands."

Jay silently handed it over. "Take him outside and bury him boys. He was a good man, I think I'll go over to the cabin."

He went out, followed by his two silent guards, and walked through the dusk. He saw Miguel lounging in the doorway of Lucia's cabin, and there was sneering mockery in the death-dealing Mexican's eyes as he looked at Jay. Smoke was beginning to come from the kitchen pipe. Miguel's woman was cooking his supper.

He went inside and sat down. As for Peg Smith, he had gone straight to Morden's cabin and the two men had talked. The exterminator sat with a boot crossed over his knee, cigarette between fingers, his long shaggy locks down over his ears.

"So that's how it is, eh? Twina!" "That's how it is, Peg."

"I knowed I got him!" exclaimed the killer, self-satisfaction in his eyes. "I don't miss."

"Anyhow, you got his brother by mistake, too, but it all come out in the end. That's why I let you come back to camp after Jim chased you out. I got a job for you. It'll take a problem off my hands an' let you square up for gettin' wracked over the head. Tomorrow some of the boys are takin' the sixty head an' headin' west with 'em. I'm doin' no hoes swappin', even for them Morgans. This is goin' to be a straight raid."

"Sounds good," exulted Smith. "It is good," admitted Brad Morden. "Only this is the haul of my life—the kind I've been waiting years to pull, and I'm not taking any chances on things going wrong. I didn't trust Joe, but hell, Jay either, fer that matter. Them boys are too close. But Joe's too hot-tempered. Now you take his brother; he's cool an' got a head on him. So when we slip in after the herd, we're goin' to take Jay with us. After his brother knocks out that guard we're goin' to substitute an' bring Joe back with us as a prisoner. You an' one of the other boys is goin' up to the house an' keep everybody under guard till daylight. That'll give us about ten hours start, an' no horses left on the ranch. You can finish off Jay later an' burn the breeze to catch up, an' then I'll turn Joe over to you."

"Why, I reckon that's fair enough. Brad. But how come Jim ain't in on this? He wouldn't be pullin' a double-cross now would he? I kin take care of him shd' yuh want."

Brad Morden snorted. "Jim's goin' to be right there under yore guns to make it look good. That's why he finagled that going-away party at the ranch. I run the horse-stealin' end of the outfit an' Jim is the brains who giv us oua trouble when the law catches up, sah? That's why I took him in as a full pardner."

Jay paced the cabin restlessly, went out and chatted with the two guards sitting in tipped-back chairs, went inside again. Every minute dragged by like an hour.

Brad Morden came over and talked a bit, outlining plans for the big raid, and soon left. Six men came back from the slope back of the cabin, mackrels and shovels in their hands. Turk was under six feet of Texas earth, in an unmarked grave.

Dawn crept down. From the cabin next door came staccato Spanish. Presently Miguel's voice rose higher and Lucia's came back, sharp, defiant. Then came the snap of a hand against flesh. Lucia's scream and the thrash of bodies and scuffling feet. Jay left the door in a small amount of fabric.

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