



THEIR NAME WAS LEGION!

By Courtney Ryley Cooper



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Splendid stories have been written about mining, cattle raising, railroad-building, etc., in the West, but equally good stories about the new western source of sudden wealth, oil, have been all too few. Courtney Ryley Cooper, who has been a circus man, miner, newspaper man, novelist, and listed man and finally a commissioned officer in the United States Marines, has also been through the oil boom, in this vivid phase of American life, he writes just as he does in his other highly interesting tales, from firsthand knowledge and experience.

With his memories of the war and his enthusiasm as a Legionite, it was natural for Mr. Cooper to make his oil-country romance also a romance of the American Legion, of the former service men in times of peace. In this story he has them performing very active and exciting roles in one of those mushroom oil camps of the West. The story portrays with rare charm and fidelity the atmosphere and romance of an oil boom and it brings out the fine spirit which actuates Legion men.

One could not ask for a more manly, honest, unsparring American than the central character of this tale, Bart Rogers, ex-sergeant of marines, called upon to act as town marshal of Belaine, Wyo., after oil had been struck and the place was suddenly overrun with thousands of adventurers, good and bad. There was an absence of law officers to cope with the situation and Bart's problem was further complicated by the fact that his bitterest enemy, leader of the disorderly element, was also father of the girl with whom Bart was in love.

What could an honest marshal do with his heart torn between love and duty? The problem is one for a clever novelist to handle. It makes a highly interesting story, carrying a number of surprises, much break and many thrilling situations. The author handles the problem in a satisfactory way without sacrificing the honor or principles of any of the characters who possess them. This author of western novels and of over 300 short stories of circus life and jungle animal life has given another evidence of his versatility and added another chapter to the literature of virile Americanism.

CHAPTER I

No Mortgage

As if by instinct, Bart Rogers invariably hesitated as he reached the door which proclaimed, on its glass panel, that beyond lay the office of Leon Barrows, attorney at law.

Rogers never had sought to divine the reason; he simply felt the pause to be necessary, in the same sort of manner in which one pauses before opening the heavy door of a giant refrigerator. And perhaps there was a similarity in the ideas; for the office of Leon Barrows was frigid—just as he was frigid—a great, bare room of pictureless walls.

In keeping with the room was the attorney himself, a white-faced, narrow-eyed person whose long features were lengthened by the smoothness of a three-inch bald streak which ran straight back from his forehead.

Such was the attorney who occupied the big, uncomfortable chair at the orderly, throne-like desk, and because of whom Bart Rogers hesitated, even with his hand on the doorknob. Yet, withal, he resented the unconscious revulsion, for, in spite of the iciness of the man, his thin-lipped snappiness, his general clamminess of appearance and of manner, Rogers could look upon him as nothing if not a benefactor.

It had been the money which had come from his lean hands which had filled the breach when Bart Rogers had come home to find his father suffering from the slow death of paralysis. It had been this money which had helped rehabilitate the small tract of irrigated land three miles from Belaine—land and the faith of both Bart and his father, which had bought the seed to sow, and carried them both until the harvest could come in.

Now that harvest had arrived, and Bart, with his first check, had hurried to the office of Leon Barrows, to halt with his hand on the doorknob; then, at last, to smile with the happiness of an approaching freedom from debt and to go in. Leon Barrows looked up swiftly from his workless desk.

"Well, what is it?" He asked, the question as though he had been disturbed. Bart Rogers knew that he had not. He went forward happily, and reached for the pen and ink.

"I want to incorse a check," he announced.

"Go ahead." The attorney watched him narrowly. "You've been out on the street?"

"Yes."

"How's the election going?"

"Tom Jordan's winning."

"How do you know?" The question came sharply. Rogers looked up.

"Well, I don't know—of my own knowledge. I'm just going on what people are saying. They seem to think Franniston's beaten to a frazzle."

started—my father wrote me about it. That was just before he had his first stroke, and that's been more than a year ago. Then they moved me down to Arizona and I was there four months before they discharged me."

"Guess that's right." The attorney looked at him appraisingly. "You're all right now?"

"Oh, yes. Fact is, I was all right when I got home from France. But I couldn't argue the doctors into it."

"That's the trouble with you fellows," Leon Barrows said it thinly, sarcastically. "I never saw a man yet who'd ever been in the army who didn't have something to kick about. Can't understand it. If you've got so many kicks, why do you wear that button?"

"That button?" Bart Rogers looked down at his lapel, toward the star of the American Legion which showed there. Then, for the first time during the interview, he grinned. "I guess you don't know soldiers, Mr. Barrows. A man hasn't been in the army unless he's learned to kick against everything in the world. That's what makes him a fighter, because he carries a chip on his shoulder. But just because he kicks that doesn't make him any less patriotic."

"Guess that's right. But I don't like kicking. I like a man to take his medicine and not make faces about it—"

He halted suddenly as the telephone jangled and swung about in his chair to answer it. "Hello" he

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and the color faded, giving his features a ghastly, pasty expression. The thin lips seemed to lose themselves in the white of his face.

"All right," came at last. "I understand. You've got a little more than an hour. That's plenty of time. Go ahead with that proposition we've talked over—and work fast! Understand me? Work fast!"

A second more he remained at the telephone, to receive his answer from the other end. Then the receiver clicked into place, and the tall man leaped from his desk that he might hurry to the window and stare into the street below. In front of the main election booth was a knot of men, one of them Bart Rogers. And upon that figure the eyes of Leon Barrows centered, eyes which suddenly had as-

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called, then leaped suddenly toward the transmitter. "Beg pardon. Very sorry, but I can't see you now. What's that? Yes. A slight pause. Then: "About five minutes I'd say."

Bart Rogers rose.

"A client?" he asked.

"Yes," Leon Barrows turned back to his desk in a fretful, agitated mood.



"A Client?" He Asked.

"Yes, a client. Coming up here in five minutes. You'll have to get out. Let that money thing go. Forget it. Don't come back here trying to give me any more money unless I send for you. Understand? All right. Get out."

"Certainly," Rogers already was at the door. "Only I think that it would be fair to me to tell me what this deal is and let me know the identity of my benefactor."

"You'll know that when legal ethics permit me to tell. Now get out!"

The door opened and closed. A long moment passed, while the lean-faced attorney listened to the steps of the young man as they faded down the hall. Then hurriedly, almost feverishly, he turned toward the telephone and called a number, drumming excitedly upon his desk as he awaited the answer. At last it came, and the attorney leaned close to the phone.

"Hello," he called in a low voice. "Couldn't talk a minute ago. That party was in here. You know the one I mean. Now, go ahead."

Something streamed over the phone which caused the narrow eyes of the thin-faced attorney to blink rapidly, and which slowly brought a steadily deepening flush of color to his high cheeks. His free hand seemed to twist and writhe. Then his eyes set,

sumed a snakelike glitter, eyes which had become deep-set and vicious, eyes which spelled for the moment the true story of the brain behind them. And as those eyes watched the young man below, the lean hands writhed and twisted, twisted and writhed, one into the other; the thin lips drew back from his face teeth, and the unwholesome face seemed suddenly to contort in an agony of hate, of fear—and of victory.

CHAPTER II

A New Marshal

Bart's interview with Leon Barrows had been but little different from others in the past. That Barrows had refused to tell the identity of the person who had furnished the money to sustain Franklin Rogers during the days when his son had been held in hospital after his hospital did not surprise Bart in the least. The true amazement was the fact that he and his father had possessed a friend who desired to remain in the dark, for friends, with them, had been very few.

Seven years before they had come West to play with fate in the tilling of a quarter-section of dry, sandy soil. They had fought for their water rights and obtained them, at last. Then they had worked as only a father and son can work when there is perfect communion.

A dry winter in the mountains, with a consequent dwindling irrigation supply had taken their savings in one summer. Then a crop, bountiful and marketed at high prices, had lifted them to the pinnacle, only to be followed by war.

More than two years after the ending of the war Bart had been allowed to come home and start on the winning road, in spite of an invalid father and the pressure of debt—only to find a mystery at the bottom of it all. Who had been the man who had taken over as a formality, who had entered into a pact with his father?

Bart gave it up and joined a little group in front of the polling place who surrounded Tom Jordan, the apparently successful candidate. Bart looked around for the other aspirant; bread-shouldered, blustering "Bull" Franniston, but failed to see him. Instead—

He moved forward quietly as a girl came around the corner, a rather childlike-looking and wistful-looking girl, who hesitated, then turned toward the bent, angular figure of an old man who followed her, and who hastened to her side with a sort of dog-like devotion in obedience to her silent command.

"Coming for the results, Miss Franniston?" he questioned.

"Yes," she smiled quickly. "Who was it?"

"They haven't finished counting the

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ballots in here yet. The other four precincts gave a majority of about 100 to Tom Jordan."

"Did they honestly?" Bart Rogers believed he caught a tone of hope in her voice.

"Then—then Father's beaten?"

"It looks that way."

"I'm so sorry," Bart Rogers looked at her quickly, wondering if what she said were the truth.

"If you're sorry, I'm sorry, too, Miss Franniston." He moved closer to her. "But to tell the truth, I voted the other way."

"I—I understand." She hesitated and turned away as though to hide the expression which a bitter memory had brought to her features.

Then, the dog-like Old Jim once more following her, she went on. "But Bart Rogers watched after her. To him she represented more than a pretty, likable girl; she was all and nothing—an unattainable ideal.

To him she represented the gap, the near-hatred which stood between him and "Bull" Franniston, her father, a gap which dated back to the night before Bart had left for France. He had been walking along the road toward town, when suddenly he had stopped at the sound of a girlish scream, followed by the hoarse, anger-burdened voice of a man. He had turned, and running back the road, had leaped toward a man and a girl—the girl crying and frightened, the man bellowing over her. Bart clenched for another blow. Then Bart Rogers had fought with all the strength in him, fought against superior odds. And he had won, while in the background the frightened girl had crouched in the arms of a whimpering, prematurely aged man; only to learn when once victory had been his, that he had fought a father to prevent him from beating his own daughter.

More than once had Bart Rogers wondered if "Bull" Franniston still strove to beat his daughter, and if Old Jim shrunk, whimpering and helpless, in the background. More than once, too, he had dreamed of the time when the load of debt which now was his could be lifted that he might think of other things than work—of a girl, perhaps, a girl for whom he might strive, that the frightened, wistful glance might depart from her eyes forever, and glowing happiness beam there instead. But the dream had not come true.

So now, as in the past, he was a watcher, looking after them as they made their way down the street.

The crowd at the curbing moved forward, the workers surging about the red-faced, somewhat docile appearing Tom Jordan as he went forward to receive the verdict. The election judge grinned and put forth a hand.

"So, I'm mayor, eh?" Genial, easy-going old Tom Jordan, ex-cattleman, merely stood and grinned. "Gosh!" Then the workers surged about him, while at the very edge Bart Rogers stood smiling and satisfied.

He had wanted Tom Jordan to win. Not that Jordan would make a wonderful mayor, but Rogers knew one thing—that Tom Jordan would try to do the right thing whether he accomplished the feat or not.

At last the group about the newly elected mayor parted, and Bart Rogers, true to small western town form, went forward to proffer his congratulations. The big cattleman boomed with happiness, just as he had done with the others who had shaken his hand. Then suddenly he sobered.

"Bart," he said quietly as he drew him aside. "I've had my eye on you for a long time. Now, I want to ask you a personal question: Are you as friendly with Bull Franniston as you are with his daughter?"

"I didn't vote for him. I'm not a Franniston man, Mr. Jordan."

"Good enough, Bart! I had a hunch you weren't, but I just wanted to be sure. You see, Bart, I'm easy going. I'm the sort of fellow, who lets his friends play with him and do him up brown, rather'n say 'no' to 'em. So I'm lookin' for a young fellow with a good, strong chin, that I can say to: 'Here, there's only one job in this town that

has to do with the keeping of the peace, and that's the marshal. I'm going to give you that job. I want him the kind of a fellow that'll pinch my best friend if he's done wrong and tell me to go to hell if I come along and try to get him out. Understand?"

"Exactly."

"All right, Bart Rogers," and a big, friendly hand found a place on the younger man's shoulders. "I've been looking over the herd considerable, and I've just about come to the conclusion that you're the critter I want. What say?"

"But I don't know anything about the job."

"Didn't know anything about war until you went into it, did you?"

"No; that's true."

"All right; the same thing goes here, what say?"

"Can I have a little time to think it over?"

"Sure—a week if you want it."

"I guess I ought to know by that



"I've Been Looking Over the Herd Considerable."

time." Then Bart thanked Jordan and started to run home.

A half-mile and he dropped into a walk again, to ease the pull on his lungs—for the mark of a bullet still remained there, unnoticed most of the time, but ready to protest at the first heavy strain. Five hundred yards, he gained his breath again, and once more increased his speed, only to turn suddenly from the road, to stop and

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