

BLACK DAWN

by Victor Rousseau

CHAPTER XI

SYNOPSIS

Dave Bruce, out of a job, arrives at Wilbur Ferris' Cross-Bar ranch. Curran, the foreman, promises him a job if he can break a horse called Black Dawn. When he succeeds, he discovers Curran expected the horse to kill him. A girl named Lois rides up, angry with Dave for breaking "her" horse. She refuses to speak to him even when he uses his savings to pay off the mortgage on the small ranch she shares with her foster father, a man named Hooker. But when Hooker is shot and Dave is charged with murder, Lois saves him from being lynched. Wounded, she guides him to a mountain cave where she thinks they will be safe from Curran and the sheriff's posse. A quarrel between Ferris and Judge Loneragan reveals that Ferris had killed his partner, Blane Rowland, many years before. Thoroughly scared, Ferris takes Curran into his confidence. When Dave is away from the cave Curran kidnaps Lois. Still unaware of Lois' danger, Dave has just discovered what he believes to be a human skeleton near the cave. He is examining the skull.



"Hold 'em high, Sheriff, or I'll blow your head off!"

There was a clean, round hole at the back, such as a bullet would have made, and the frontal bone was mostly missing, with jagged edges about it.

"Yore horse didn't slip, hombre," said Dave to the skull. "Yores is a case of plain murder. Yore partner shot yuh from behind, the dirty murdering sonof-a-bitch!"

Dave put on his socks and shoes again and began to reascend the side of the ravine. Arrived at the top, he looked at the sun and concluded that it was already well past noon. He had told Lois that he would be back to see her about midday.

But when Dave reached the cave he found it empty. "Lois!" he called. "Lois, girl, where are yuh?"

The echoes of his voice floated back mockingly from the cliffs across the ravine, and that was all. Then Dave's pupils contracted sharply as he saw the footprints of a man's boots on the other side of the cave, faint, but unmistakable in the ground softened by the rains.

Here, too, were the prints of Lois' little boots, and where they ceased there was a furrow in the soil as if she had been dragged. Beyond, the prints of the man's boots were deeper, as if he had been carrying a burden.

It was all perfectly clear and unmistakable, and told its story only too well. Coggswell must have got upon the trail and taken Lois away.

The waddy's face was transformed into a grim mask of vengeance. Dave ran back to where Black Dawn was standing and sprang into the saddle. He adjusted his belt, bringing the holster close to his right hand. When he met Coggswell, it would be just too bad for Coggswell.

Softly Dave edged the stallion along the trail peering right and left for any hidden ambush. But the bootprints had changed to the prints of two horses' hoofs. If Coggswell had set an ambush along the route, he had certainly not joined it himself.

Dave trailed the hoofprints as far as the canyon and then lost them. It was impossible to discover any signs of them on the flinty ground. But Dave was pretty sure Coggswell had taken Lois to Hooker's cabin, perhaps to leave her there and come back in search of him.

It was an hour after the discovery that Lois had been kidnapped before he suddenly saw Hooker's cabin before him.

No horse was visible, but Dave dismounted and crept softly forward, peering through the undergrowth. Foot by foot he edged his way forward. The plaintive lowing of the un milked cow came to his ears from somewhere on the mesa.

Otherwise—nothing. And when at last Dave entered Hooker's cabin, he found it empty, with no sign that anyone had been in it since Lois and he had left it.

Grimly Dave turned the stallion and rode back through the canyons. Again he found the hoofprints and again, in spite of casting about in a wide circle, he was unable to discover which way the horses had gone.

The sun was well down in the west when Dave rode back toward Hooker's cabin, reckless now. He was almost through the scrub when he reined in abruptly. He could see the cabin again and this time a horse was standing saddled in front of it.

Listening, Dave could hear footsteps in the cabin. Someone was walking to and fro inside it.

Dave didn't dismount this time. He edged the black horse forward, its hoofs making no noise on the soft mesa. Now he was immediately behind the house. He could hear the footsteps inside distinctly. Now he got out of his saddle and went quietly around the shack. As he reached the front angle he saw Sheriff Coggswell come out of the door and move toward his horse.

Dave leaped forward. His attitude was the crouch of a beast of prey, his voice a rumbling snarl: "Hold 'em high, sheriff, or I'll blow yore head off!"

Taken utterly by surprise, Coggswell put up his hands. "Well, you got the drop on me all right, Bruce," admitted Coggswell. "But killin' me won't do you no good."

Dave stepped forward and relieved Coggswell of his gun. "You can put yore hands down now," he said. "But yore goin' to talk quick and straight, if yuh want to get back to Mescal without a nasty mess on yore shoulders. What have yuh done with Lois?"

"Bruce," answered Coggswell, "I ain't set eyes on Miss Lois since she rode into town the mornin' of Hooker's murder, seein' I was knocked cold tryin' to purtect yuh. The declinin' sun showe straight into Dave's eyes, showing the haggard lines of his face. He stared into Coggswell's trying to read the truth.

"You swear that's true?" Dave cried suddenly.

"I'm talkin' straight," answered the sheriff. "I rode up here with the idea of campin' out and startin' on a hunt for yore trail in the mornin'. If someone took Miss Lois away when you was gone, it was not me. Why, I don't know where you two been hidin' up. She ain't hurt bad, is she?"

"She was gettin' well. We was goin' to start out tomorrow." And suddenly the mask of hate vanished from Dave's face. "I'm be-

in turn and gave Dave his hand. "That goes with me," he said gravely. "Yore right, Bruce, I'm purty sure yuh didn't kill Hooker. I been workin' on a line of my own and I think I'm on the trail. I'm acceptin' them terms of yores. And in a few minutes I think I'll have some evidence. It's in that cabin. Nope, not Miss Lois. I just trussed up and gagged a hombre who was actin' suspicious, after havin' to kill his horse."

He led the way into the cabin. Trussed and gagged very effectively upon the floor was the Mexican, Pedro, whom Curran had sent back to the Cross-Bar. "Ain't had time to question him yet," the sheriff explained. "He was sorter stunned when his horse dropped under him. Now we'll see."

He pulled the gag out of the mouth of the helpless man, Pedro, who recognized Dave, glared in mixed fear and fury at him and at Coggswell.

"Yore jig's up, Pedro," said the sheriff. "Yore goin' to come across and come quick, or yore life ain't worth a nickel. I'd just as soon shoot yuh there as I'd shoot a widewinder. Where's Curran?"

"I do not know, Senor Coggswell," protested the Mexican. "I ride jus' now, back to the range, after lookin' for strays, and you shoot my horse and tie me up."

"Now listen, Pedro, it ain't a bit of use lyin' to me," replied the sheriff, "because I got the goods on yuh. I been doin' some watchin' myself the last few days and I see you and Curran prowlin' around these parts lookin' for someone."

"I watched you this mornin' ride out into the hills, and I watched you ride back. When I called yuh, yuh tried to git away. Now I'm putting it up to yuh. Curran ain't at the Cross-Bar. Where is he?"

"I see him last night. I do not know today. Me and him we look for this man," Pedro jerked his head in Dave's direction. "Today I look for strays—"

"lievin' yuh, sheriff," he said. "But if it wasn't you who took her away, who was it?"

Sheriff Coggswell was silent. Dave met the keen scrutiny of his eyes, then suddenly handed him back his gun and thrust his own into its holster.

"You got the drop on me now, Coggswell," he said. "I'm trustin' you. You can take me into Mescal if yuh want to. But I always felt yuh knew I didn't kill old Hooker. And I'm askin' yuh to trust my word same as I trusted yores, and ride with me to find the skunk that took her away. After that, I'll be ready to place myself in yore hands."

Coggswell holstered his own gun

'Workin' on the R.R.'



Pictured at her post in the tower that controls the gates at a busy railroad crossing in Nashua, N. H., is Mrs. Andrea L. Hogan, first woman to fill such a post on the Boston & Maine railroad. The mother of three boys, Mrs. Hogan used to work in the railroad accounting department. When she heard the crossing job was open she applied and got it.

"I'm putting the question in another way," said the sheriff patiently. "Where's Curran got Miss Lois?"

"Senor, I no have seen her since that night she ride away with this man from Mescal—"

Coggswell drew his six-gun from his holster and spun the cylinder. He turned to Dave.

"May as well take this feller where we aim to bury him," he said. "No sense in massin' up th' floor. There's a place at the edge of the mesa where the ground's soft."

He picked up the end of the rope that bound the Mexican and began dragging the man toward the door.

"Senor," chattered Pedro, "you cannot murder me. I did not take the girl away."

"You've had your chance, Pedro. Come on, Bruce, let's git him over the sill and finish him," he added. The six-gun jerked upward. A scream broke from the Mexican's lips.

"Senor, I tell—don't shoot—I tell," chattered Pedro. "Curran bring the girl this mornin' to the cabin that the gold prospector built many year ago in the blind canyon."

"I know where it is," answered Coggswell. "All right, Pedro, yuh saved yore life. I'm goin' to leave yuh tied up here, for which I reckon yuh'll be grateful to me afterward. I'll get yuh a drink of water."

Coggswell filled a pitcher and held it to Pedro's lips, setting it down beside him when he was through. He turned to Dave.

"Reckon we better ride," he said. "I got my four men waitin' down below the mesa, but I don't aim to waste no more time with Miss Lois in the hands of that feller."

Dave only spoke once during the ride. "Sheriff," he said, "you lived in this district quite some time, ain't yuh? Ever hear of a waddy disappearin' mysteriously? Course he didn't have to be a waddy. May have been a prospector."

He described his discovery of the skeleton in the ravine. "Shot through the back of the head," he said. "Feller had fractured his leg at some time, up near the thigh. It was all healed up rough."

"Yuh found him?" shouted Coggswell, turning round in the saddle. "Well, that clears up considerable more along the lines I was workin'."

"It's at right, judge," called Curran, as Loneragan drew rein suspiciously in the way Ferris had done. "Here's Mr. Ferris, and just me, and we're waitin' to talk things over pleasant-like."

"You don't need to shout my title," grumbled Loneragan, dismounting and stalking into the shack. He nodded curtly to the ranchman and seated himself upon one of the tree stumps, waving away Curran's offer of a drink.

Loneragan's manner was still that of a judge, a man condescending to meet those socially beneath him. "What's that noise in there?" demanded Loneragan suspiciously, as Lois, hearing the voice of the new arrival, made a desperate attempt to free herself.

"Yuh can go in and look if yuh want to, Mr. Loneragan," grinned the foreman. "But that's strictly a private matter."

Loneragan strode to the entrance of the smaller room. He could just make out Lois fastened on the bed and her eyes turned imploringly upon his. He hesitated, then swung back angrily.

"What's that mean, Curran?" he demanded. "Got on Bruce's trail this mornin'," answered Curran. "He made his getaway, but I nabbed the girl. Was waitin' for yuh to examine her, after this other business is settled."

(To Be Continued)



SUCCESSFUL PARENTHOOD

By MRS. CATHERINE CONRAD EDWARDS
Associate Editor, Parents' Magazine

"If I wear makeup and talk about the boys and stop riding my bike to school do you think I can be popular?" is a typical adolescent query.

It is difficult to persuade a daughter who looks shy and childlike in the company of glittering girls her own age, girls who have matured early, that some day her as-yet undeveloped beauty will far exceed the mere prettiness of those she envies. What does she care about the future—she wants to be pretty and popular right now!

Parents of sons have this problem too, for there are boys who grow up slowly and although 10 years later they may be worth 20 of the smooth fellows they envy, that, too, is something you can't make them take comfort in, or even believe.

Parents can help these slowly maturing youngsters through the unhappy years when their school-boy or school-girl can't spare them all hurt. This youthful heartbreak is like an illness, you can nurse a child tenderly through mumps but you can't prevent his suffering some pain. Nor do you want to shield a young person from learning to take the normal disappointments of life.

Sometimes parents make matters worse by sharing the child's fear of being unpopular. Certainly nothing could be worse for an already battered ego than to sense that Mother is disappointed because you don't look like a movie star. As a matter of fact parents should be grateful if their children take a few extra years in maturing. Those who come to full flower early and are sure of themselves too soon miss the slow absorption of knowledge and the deepened understanding which make for a better, richer adult personality.

So first make sure in your own mind that you are giving your boy and girl a big parental O. K., then try to open their eyes to the fact that there are far more shy young people like themselves than

like the gay, super-sophisticated crowd they are being left out of. When they turn their backs on other wallflowers like themselves they are being as selfish as the ring leaders who are making them miserable.

I know, it seems to be adding insult to injury to expect a neglected girl to be nice to a stammering boy who she knows would rather be dancing with someone else anyway. But it's nevertheless true that relieving another's loneliness is a sure way of winning friendliness for oneself. The personality grows by what it exerts itself to do, and if it makes the effort to be friendly to those who need friendliness (not just to the glamorous few) it will acquire warmth and self-forgetfulness.

To encourage your son or daughter to make this exertion, do everything you can to improve their appearance. Don't tell yourself that clothes don't matter because everything just hangs on Sue's bony frame, or Bill's big hands and feet make him look awkward whatever he wears. It is now that they need the bolstering effect of the nicest clothes you can afford to buy them. Encourage them to be the best groomed youngsters in their class—clean smooth hair, spotless clothes, well manicured hands. If they are troubled with acne take them to a doctor for treatment. Watch their diet and see that they get plenty of sleep and exercise and provide them with a lotion which will partially cover facial blemishes.

Although you can't force young people to entertain, by inviting one friend of theirs at a time to dinner and making the youngsters the center of attention you can gradually make your home a place they like to come to. And this is the best bid for popularity that parents can give their children.

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