

BLACK DAWN

by Victor Rousseau

W.N.U. FEATURE

CHAPTER XII

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 Lonergan 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. Meanwhile Dave discovers a human skeleton with a bullet hole through the skull. When he later finds Lois gone, he heads straight for Hooker's ranch and there finds Sheriff Coggswell. He convinces Coggswell of his innocence and together they start for the cabin where they have learned Lois is being held prisoner and where, unknown to them, Ferris and Curran are planning to kill Judge Lonergan.

Lonergan sat down with a scowl. "I've got no time to waste, Ferris," he said in his most judicial manner. "I consented to come here and talk with you, because Curran told me you had something here to show me. Well, where is it, and what's the point of it all?"

Curran winked at Ferris as he stood behind Lonergan's back. Lonergan went on:

"I understand you're willing to accept my offer. But what is it that you've got to show me here?" "Here's what I got to show you, Lonergan!" shouted the ranchman, suddenly drawing a revolver from his armpit. "Desperate? Yeah, and you miscalculated, because you trusted the wrong party when you let Curran bring you here. You've hounded me too long, Lonergan. I warned you the other day in Mescal. Now you're going to sign an agreement making over to me all your claims on the Cross-Bar, or I'll kill you!"

Lonergan had sprung to his feet. But Curran was at his side, covering him too. The foreman stepped forward and drew a revolver from Lonergan's pocket.

"That's right, Lonergan," grinned Curran. "You slipped up some when you come here. Now sit down and sign the paper on this table. Yuh don't need to read it. All yuh got to do is affix yore signature. Mr. Ferris and me will do the rest."

"And suppose I do sign," said Lonergan, apparently weakening, "how do I know you're not planning to kill me afterward?"

"All yuh, Mr. Lonergan!" jeered Curran. "Why, we ain't murderers, and you and Ferris has got too much on each other to make it seemly for to kill yuh. He's just aimin' to git back what yuh took from him by the processes of fraud. Nobody won't interfere with yuh after we got yore name signed. Yuh can ride straight home."

With a shrug of his shoulders Lonergan gave in. "My pen is in my saddle-bag with some papers," he announced.

"In a way, Mr. Lonergan," said Curran, "Mr. Ferris and me will just accompany yuh outside and sign yuh and it, keep him covered, Ferris. I guess he's full of tricks."

Lonergan moved slowly out of the cabin to where his horse was standing, a little beyond the others, the reins thrown over the stump of a tree. He lifted the flap of his saddle and arched to be looking for the pen. Curran, who was standing beside Ferris, interposed. "You was speakin' of aimin', judge," he said, "and that sure hurt my feelings and Mr. Ferris'. Besides which, there was a little misunderstanding. We got the funeral staged all right, but we ain't got the right corpse."

Lonergan turned around. "Just what do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"You!" shouted Curran—not at Lonergan but at the ranchman.

With a bound he was upon Ferris and had twisted the revolver out of his hand. At the same instant Lonergan's hand appeared from the flap of the saddle, holding another gun in it.

In the brief interval before the shots that followed, Ferris saw the trap, and understood that he had foreseen Curran's treachery quite well, in the depths of his subconsciousness. He screamed twice as the two heavy slugs from the guns of Lonergan and Curran ploughed their way through the upper part of his body, reeled, and dropped like a log down the slope into the ravine.

Curran fired a second shot as Ferris' body was in the act of ion with a grin.

"Well, there's one hombre won't make no more trouble," he said. "I'll spade him under in the mornin'."

But Lonergan was shaking. "Get me that drink, Curran," he said. "Why did you make that play? There were moments when I wasn't sure you were not double-crossing me."



"Lois!" His voice went out in a cry of fury.

"Double-crossin' yuh, Mr. Lonergan? Why, I thought yuh had more confidence in me than that," replied the foreman. "I made that play so as that girl inside wouldn't know just what was happenin'. Ferris had to go. He was gittin' too wise. It sure was hard to keep from laughin', him thinkin' it was you who was goin' to be bumped off instead of himself. What's that?"

There sounded the creak of saddles, the scamper of horses' hoofs. Then came Coggswell's sudden challenge out of the dark:

"Sky high, the pair of you! You're covered!"

Panic-stricken, Lonergan twisted this way and that, as he recognized the sheriff's voice. Now, in the faint starlight, he could see two mounted figures looming up out of the scrub close at hand.

"Beat it!" hissed Curran in his ear. "They're on the wrong side of the gully!"

Dave and Coggswell had come up on the other side of the ravine which, at this point near its blind end, was little more than a coulee. It was, however, too wide to set a horse to jump it. Next instant Curran was on his knees and firing at the two mounted figures.

Dave felt a slug thump into his saddlehorn. He emptied his gun at the flashes and heard a yelp of pain. He saw the other figure racing away, dimly outlined against the sky. Then Curran was following, bending almost double, weaving in and out of the scrub, with his hand clapped to his ear.

"Git Miss Lois, Bruce. I'll handle this pair!" the sheriff shouted, and he raced his horse around the blind end of the gully.

Dave, cramming fresh cartridges into his gun, saw the two weaving figures attempting to mount two of the group of horses that were clustered together near the cabin entrance. Coggswell was almost upon them, his gun blazing. There came a single shot in return, then the thump and clatter of hoofs, and one of the pair racing along the trail, leaning flat upon his horse's side.

This was Curran, making his get-away at top speed, while Coggswell was struggling with Lonergan. Dave raced his stallion to the sheriff's side.

"We'll git the other, Bruce," said Coggswell. "See if Miss Lois is in the cabin."

Dave required no third invitation. He dashed into the shack. The candles were guttering on the table in the outer room, but the room was empty. But in the smaller room Dave saw a little figure gagged and bound.

"Lois!" His voice went out in a cry of fury. He ran to her side, slit the gag from her mouth, cut the ropes with his jackknife.

"Lois! Lois!" he whispered. "They ain't harmed yuh, noney girl?"

She tried to speak, but could only reach up for Dave's neck. He bent and covered her face with kisses.

"They ain't harmed yuh?"

"No," said Lois in the faintest whisper. "I'm all right, Dave."

Dave swung about as the sheriff entered the cabin with his prisoner. "I got her, sheriff," he called. "They ain't harmed her. Who was the other coyote, Lois?"

"Curran!" Lois' voice was just audible.

"Yeah, Curran," said the sheriff grimly. "I reckoned him. Dunno yet who was shot, but I'll know soon. Yuh best come through Lonergan," he continued. "No use splutterin' like a trapped cat. There's too much evidence against yuh. And I'm stayin' here 'til yuh talk."

Lonergan glared at his captor, then seemed to wilt. "Coggswell, I'll talk—I'll talk to you," he said. "I'll talk—I'll talk to you," he said. "me?"

"No difficulty about that," said Coggswell. "Bruce, s'pose yuh take Miss Lois back to her cabin on yore horse. She'll be feelin' better there, and I'll see yuh there before the night's through."

Dave picked the girl up in his arms and carried her to where Black Dawn was standing. He raised her into the saddle and swung up behind her.

"Dave, they shot Mr. Ferris," whispered Lois, shuddering. "I

heard the shot. They trapped him here."

"Ferris?" Dave cried. He pulled Black Dawn around and rode up to the cabin door. "Sheriff, Lois says it was Ferris that they shot just now."

"Yeah," came the sheriff's grim voice. "Mr. Lonergan's just told me that. I'll be seein' yuh later at the Hooker cabin, Bruce. Keep yore eyes peeled for Pedro."

Dave turned the black and rode off along the gully again. They rode through the canyons and were approaching the thick undergrowth at the back of Hooker's cabin. Dave leaned forward.

"We're home, Lois, darling," he whispered. "And it looks as if all our troubles was just about over."

And as the words left his mouth, there came the crack-crack-crack of six-guns from a clump of scrub to the left.

Black Dawn leaped convulsively. A bullet whipped Dave's hat around on his head. Another passed between the reins, searing his knuckles. Black Dawn's legs bent under him. The horse was going down.

"We got the coyote!" yelled Curran exultantly out of the scrub.

A second man ran forward and Dave recognized the Mexican, Pedro. But Dave was already on his feet and had pulled Lois to the ground. His gun belched answer. Pedro howled as the bullets caught him in the chest and abdomen. Then he flattened out, his scream of death cut short, and dropped almost beneath the staggering stallion.

As he fell, Dave leaped to one side and emptied his gun into the thicket from which the flashes had come. Two wild shots from Curran answered him, then came

the audible click of the hammer upon an empty cartridge. Dave was on his feet again and rushing forward. With a vile curse Curran wheeled his horse and raced thru the scrub toward the Hooker cabin.

Dave was no more than twenty yards behind him when Curran reached the open, and he had already jammed fresh cartridges into his cylinder. He saw Curran working frantically with his gun, while his horse, frightened by the sound of the discharges, reared wildly, almost unseating him.

Yelling obscenely, Curran spurred his horse and dashed across the mesa and a moment later Dave could hear him forcing his mount down the steep side.

He sent a last shot after him and ran back to Lois. She was standing beside Black Dawn, who was on his feet again.

"Lois, yuh ain't hit?" Dave shouted.

"No, no! Did he hit you, Dave?" "Nary nick. But he hit Black Dawn!" Dave cried.

He had heard the bullet thud into the stallion's body. Dave ran his hand along the flank and felt the blood dripping from the shoulder. With his fingers he traced the course of the wound. It ranged upward. Suddenly he felt the bullet just beneath the skin. It had been deflected by the shoulder bone, and seemed to have inflicted only a slight, glancing wound.

Dave leaped into the saddle and gripped the horse with his knees. Black Dawn responded with his usual gait, though he was quivering from head to foot. It was clear that neither bone nor sinew had been seriously injured.

(To Be Continued)

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Wishes O. G. and Mrs. Crawford the best of luck. We will miss them.



SUCCESSFUL PARENTHOOD

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

A FAMILIAR PROBLEM

One of the tasks children complain about most frequently is looking after younger brothers and sisters, particularly when the latter have to be taken along on excursions with their own friends.

There are three sides to this problem: that of the mother who is entitled to some time to herself, since spending a whole day with a small child is often considerably wearing; that of the older child who after being in school most of the day needs a few hours for unhampered play, reading or other amusement; and that of the young child who often finds herself the unwelcome member of a group of older girls or boys. How would you like to be four years old and be greeted with, "Didja have to bring her?" whenever you joined your sister's friends?

Now whenever a problem involves the rights of two or more persons there is only one solution—compromise. The mother, being the adult, should make the major concessions. First, she should rid herself of the idea that there is anything unnatural about not wanting a younger child to tag along. Between the ages of seven and twelve the child is making her first friendships with those her own age, taking her first steps to establish herself outside the family and the little sister or brother (who may be her very best friend five years from now) is definitely not an asset to popularity with her schoolmates.

Another thing, when families were as a rule quite large, with children of many ages, the older girls could take turns being nursemaid. Besides, children had more interests in common then—there weren't such gaps in age—and moreover these interests centered about the home. But nowadays there are so many activities which take children away from home—trips to museums, the moving pic-

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