

# Crooked Trails and Straight

By William MacLeod Raine

Governor of G. W. Hutchinson Company

### SYNOPSIS.

#### Part I.

CHAPTER I.—Adventurous and reckless, rather than criminal, and excited by liquor, Curly Flandrau and his chum Mac, both practically mere boys, become involved in a horse-stealing adventure. Disposing of the stolen stock in the town of Saguache, Ariz., the band separates. Curly and his partner staying in town. They are awakened and told a posse is in town in pursuit of them. They elude their pursuers, but on the next day, Mac is killed by the posse and Curly made captive, after he has shot one and himself been wounded. The man shot is Luck Cullison.

CHAPTER II.—Cullison's friends, all gentlemen, determine to lynch Curly as an example to cattle thieves. With the rope around his neck he is saved by the intervention of Kate Cullison, Luck's daughter.

CHAPTER III.—His wound dressed, and further violence not apprehended, Curly is sent for by Cullison. He questions the boy concerning a notorious outlaw, Sassy Stone, real leader of the rustlers who had been Curly's undoing. Flandrau learns that Sassy Stone is Cullison's bitter enemy and exercises a helpful influence over the ex-sheriff's son Sam, who has quarreled with his father. Cullison goes bail for Curly.

CHAPTER IV.—Curly rescues Sassy Stone from a bear trap into which he has stumbled, and discovers that the outlaw is young Sam's rival for the hand of Laura, Cullison's daughter. She gives Curly a note to deliver to Mac, and Flandrau and Stone set out for the latter's ranch.

CHAPTER V.—There Curly meets his companions of the rustling expedition and delivers Laura's note to Sam. Young Cullison believes Stone is his friend and says he will stick by him. Flandrau sees some more is being planned and becomes convinced it is train robbery. Sam leaves the ranch to go to Saguache. Curly accompanies him.

CHAPTER VI.—Eavesdropping at a meeting place, Curly hears Stone and his lieutenant, Lute Blackwell, arrange to hold up the train at a crossing known as Tin Cup, and after the robbery shoot young Cullison and leave his body on the scene. Stone thus gulling his revenge on the ex-sheriff through his son's death and disgrace. Curly is accused by Stone of being a spy of Luck Cullison's. They are separated, but part with the understanding that their next meeting will mean a fight to the death. Curly makes a confidant of Dick Maloney, cattleman, and they inform Luck Cullison of Stone's plot against his son.

#### Part II.

CHAPTER I.—After an all-night session at the Roundup club, in which Cullison has lost heavily, there is an exchange of sharp words between Luck and a sheepman, Cass Fendrick, with whom Cullison has a feud.

CHAPTER II.—Saguache is electrified by the news of the holdup of express messengers by bandits securing \$25,000. Cullison pays his poker debts and shortly afterward Mackenzie and Alec Flandrau, his closest friends, learn he is suspected of the express robbery; his hat having been found on the scene and he being missing.

CHAPTER III.—Kate goes to Saguache for a consultation with Mackenzie, Alec Flandrau and Curly. All are convinced of Luck's innocence. The sheriff reveals that besides the finding of Cullison's hat, and his payment of his debts, Cass Fendrick had seen the robber and is almost certain it was Luck. Cullison is about to enter a homestead claim which will practically put Fendrick out of business.

The girl's hand went to her heart. Faith in her father was a rock not to be washed away by any amount of evidence. What made her wince was the amount of circumstantial testimony falling into place so inexorably against him.

"Is that all?" she asked despairingly. "I wish it were, Miss Cullison. But it's not. A man came round the corner and shot at the robber as he was escaping. His hat fell off. Here it is."

As Kate took the hat something seemed to tighten around her heart. It

it was stamped all over it. She even recognized a coffee stain on the under side of the brim. There was no need of the initials L. C. to tell her whose it had been. A wave of despair swept over her. Again she was on the verge of breaking down, but controlled herself as with a tight curb.

"You say the robber had on his hat, and that somebody shot at him. Whoever it was must know the man wasn't father."

Gently Bolt took this last prop from her hope. "He is almost sure the man was your father."

A spark of steel came into her dark eyes. "Who is the man?"

"His name is Fendrick."

"Cass Fendrick?" She whipped the word at him, leaning forward in her chair rigidly with her hands clenched on the arms of it. One could have guessed that the sound of the name had unleashed a dormant ferocity in her.

"Yes, I know he and your father aren't friends. They have had some trouble. For that reason he was very reluctant to give your father's name."

The girl flamed. "Reluctant! Don't you believe it! He hates father like poison." A flash of inspiration came to her. "Cass Fendrick is the man you want, and he is the man I want. He robbed the express company, and he has killed my father or abducted him. I know now. Arrest him tonight."

"I have to have evidence," Bolt said quietly.

"I can give you a motive. Listen. Father expected to prove up yesterday on his Del Oro claim. If he had done so Cass Fendrick's sheep would have been cut off from the water. Father had to be got out of the way not later than Wednesday, or that man would have been put out of business. He was very bitter about it. He had made threats."

"It would take more than threats to get rid of the best fighting man in Arizona, right in the middle of the day, in the heart of the town, without a soul knowing it."

"He was trapped somehow, of course," Curly cut in. For he was sure that in no other way could Luck Cullison have been overcome.

"If you'll only tell me how, Flandrau," Bolt returned.

"I don't know how, but we'll find out."

"I hope so."

Kate felt his doubt, and it was like a spark to powder.

"You ought to know father couldn't have done this. There is such a thing as character. Luck Cullison simply couldn't be a thief."

Mackenzie's faith had been strengthened by the insistent loyalty of the girl. "That's right, Nick. Let me tell you something else. Fendrick knew Luck was going to prove up Thursday. He heard him tell us at the Roundup club Tuesday morning."

The sheriff summed up. "You've proved Cass had interests that would be helped if Mr. Cullison were removed. But you haven't shaken the evidence against Luck."

"We've proved Cass Fendrick had to get father out of the way on the very day he disappeared. One day later would have been too late. We've shown his enmity. Any evidence that rests on his word is no good. The truth isn't in the man."

"Maybe not, but he didn't make this evidence."

Kate had another inspirational flash. "He did—some of it. Somehow he got hold of father's hat, and he manufactured a story about shooting it from the robber's head. But to make his story stick he must admit he was on the ground at the time of the hold-up. So he must have known the robbery was going to take place."

Bolt's shrewd eyes narrowed to a smile. "You prove to me that Cass had your father's hat before the hold-up and I'll take some stock in the story."

"And in the meantime," suggested Curly.

"I'll keep right on looking for Luck Cullison, but I'll keep an eye on Cass Fendrick, too."

Kate took up the challenge confidently. "I'll prove he had the hat—at least I'll try to pretty hard. It's the truth, and it must come out somehow."

After he had left her at the hotel, Curly walked the streets with a sharp excitement tingling his blood. He had lived his life among men, and he knew little about women and their ways. But his imagination seized vividly upon this slim, dark girl with the fine eyes that could be both tender and ferocious, with the look of combined delicacy and strength in every line of her.

"Ain't she the gamest little thoroughbred ever?" he chuckled to himself. "Stands the acid every crack. Think of her standing pat so game—just like she did for me that night out at the ranch. She's the best argument Luck has got."

### CHAPTER IV.

#### Two Hats on a Rack.

One casual remark of Mackenzie had given Kate a clue. Even before she had explained it, Curly caught the

point and began to dig for the truth. For though he was almost a boy, the others leaned on him with the expectation that in the absence of Maloney he would take the lead.

In the morning he and Kate had a talk with his uncle on the subject. Not content with this, he made the whole party adjourn to the club rooms so that he might see exactly where Luck had sat and the different places the sheepman had stood from the time he entered until the poker players left.

Together Billie Mackenzie and Alec Flandrau dramatized the scene for the young people. Mac personated the sheepman, came into the room, hung up his hat, lounged over to the poker table, said his little piece as well as he could remember it, and passed into the next room. Flandrau, senior, taking the role of Cullison, presently got up, lifted his hat from the rack, and went to the door.

With excitement trembling in her voice, the girl asked an eager question. "Were their hats side by side like that on adjoining pegs?"

"That's how I remember it."

"Both gray hats?" Curly cut in.

"Can't be sure of that. Luck's was gray all right."

Curly looked at Kate and nodded. "I reckon we know how Cass got Mr. Cullison's hat. It was left on the rack."

"How do you mean?" his uncle asked.

"Don't you see?" the girl explained, her eyes shining with excitement. "Father took the wrong hat. You know how absent-minded he is sometimes."

Mackenzie slapped his knee. "I'll bet a stack of blues you've guessed it."

"There's a way to make sure," Curly said. "Fendrick couldn't wear Mr. Cullison's hat around without the risk of someone remembering it later. What would he do then?"

Kate beamed. "Buy another at the nearest store."

"That would be my guess. And the nearest store is the New York emporium. We've got to find out whether he did buy one there on Tuesday sometime after nine o'clock in the morning."

The girl's eyes were sparkling. She bustled with businesslike energy. "I'll go and ask right away."

"Don't you think we'd better let Uncle Alec find out? He's not so likely to stir up curiosity," Curly suggested.

Within a quarter of an hour Alec Flandrau joined the others at the hotel. "You kids are right at the head of the class in the detective game. Cass bought a brown hat, about 9:30 in the morning. Paid five dollars for it. Wouldn't let them deliver the old one but took it with him in a paper sack."

With her lieutenants flanking her Kate went straight to the office of the sheriff. Bolt heard the story out and considered it thoughtfully.

"You win, Miss Cullison. You haven't proved Fendrick caused your father's disappearance by foul play, and you haven't proved he committed the robbery. Point of fact I don't think he did either one. But it certainly looks like he may possibly have manufactured evidence."

Curly snorted scornfully. "You're letting your friend down easy, Mr. Bolt. By his own story he was on the ground a minute after the robbery took place. How do we know he wasn't there a minute before? For if he didn't know the holdup was going to occur why did he bring Mr. Cullison's hat with him punctured so neatly with bullet holes?"

"I told your hawkes a while, Flandrau, and look at this thing reasonable. You're all prejudiced for Cullison and against Fendrick. Talk about evidence! There's ten times as much against your friend as there is against Cass."

"Then you'll not arrest Fendrick?"

"When you give me good reason to do it," Bolt returned doggedly.

The four adjourned to meet at the Del Mar for a discussion of ways and means.

"We'll keep a watch on Fendrick—see where he goes, who he talks to, what he does. Maybe he'll make a break and give himself away," Curly said hopefully.

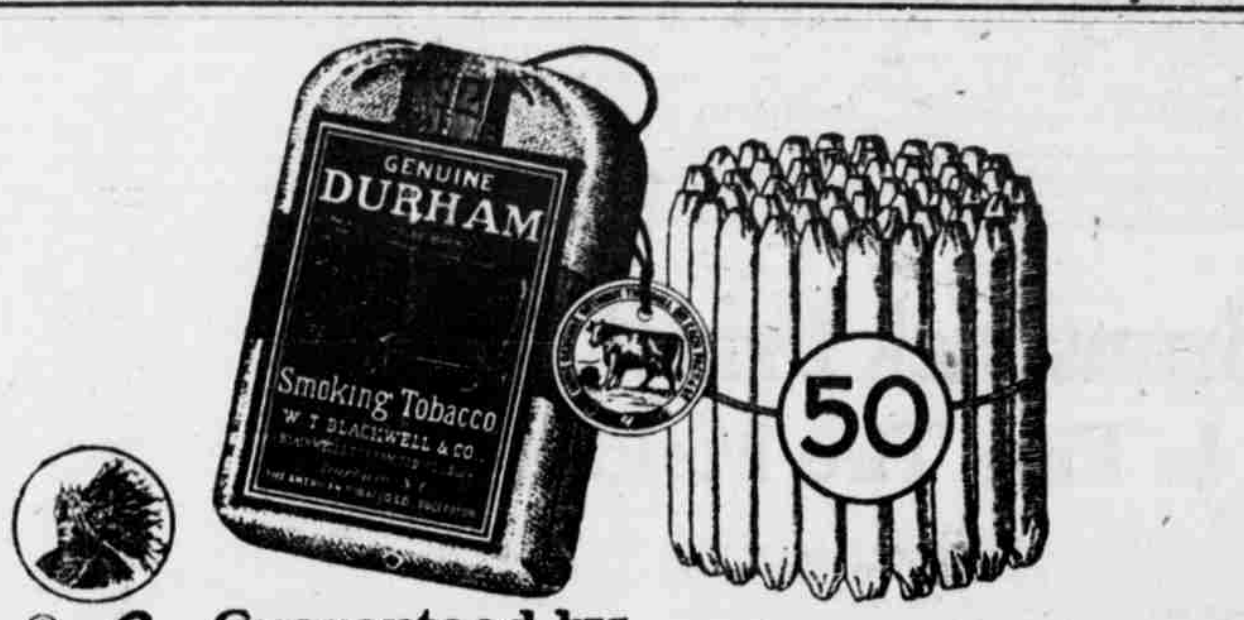
"But my father—we must rescue him first."

"As soon as we find where he is. Killing him wouldn't help Cass any, because you and Sam would prove up on the claim. But if he could hold your father a prisoner and get him to sign a relinquishment to him he would be in a fine position."

"If we could only have Fendrick arrested—"

(To be continued.)

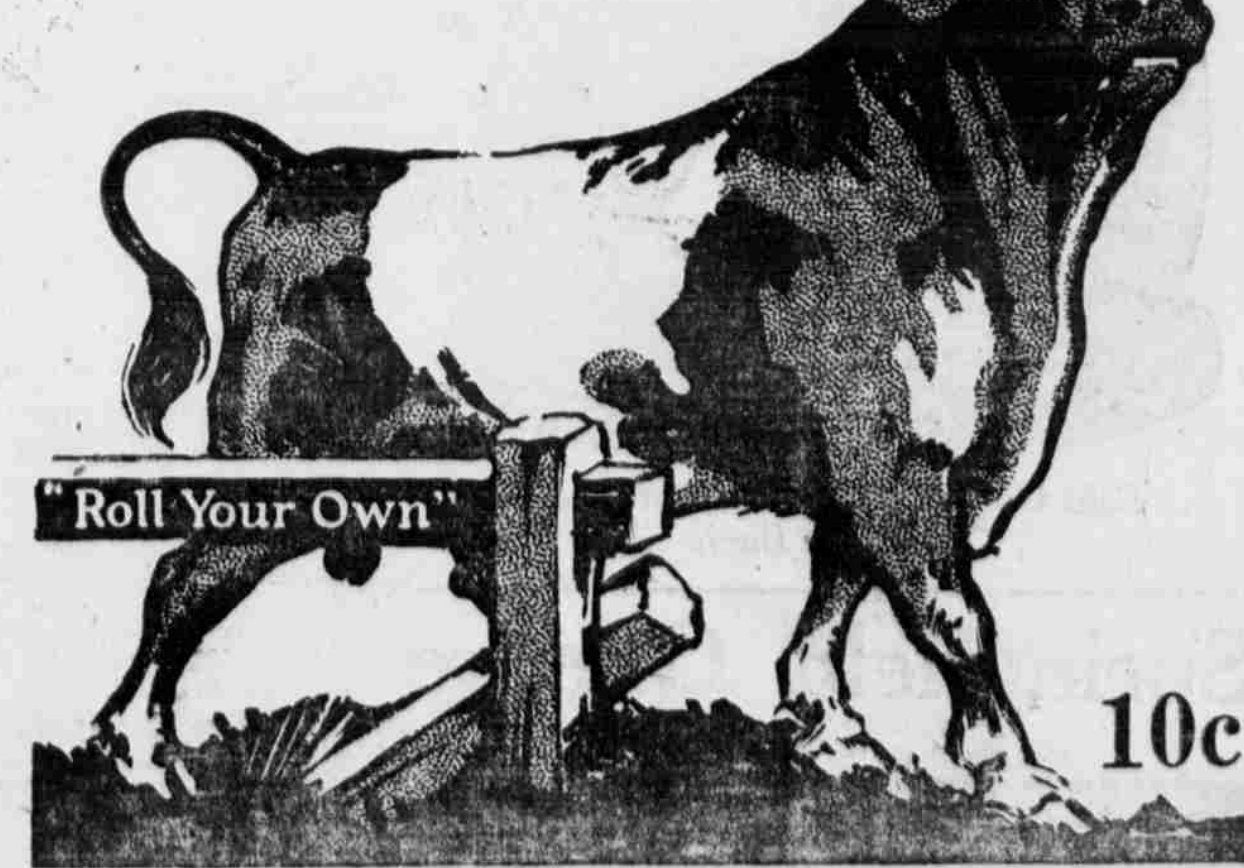
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