

Crooked Trails and Straight

By William MacLeod Raine

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SYNOPSIS. Part I.

CHAPTER I.—Adventurous and reckless, Curly Flandrau and his chum, Mac, both practically mere boys, become involved in a horse-stealing adventure.

CHAPTER II.—Cullison's friends, all cattlemen, determine to bring Curly an example to cattle thieves.

CHAPTER III.—His wound dressed, and further violence not apprehended, Curly is sent for by Cullison.

CHAPTER IV.—Curly rescues Soapy Stone from a bear trap into which he has stumbled.

CHAPTER V.—There Curly meets his companions of the rustling expedition and delivers Laura's note to Sam.

CHAPTER VI.—Eavesdropping at a meeting place, Curly hears Stone and his lieutenant, Luke Blackwell, arrange to hold up the train at a crossing.

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

CHAPTER VIII.—Saguache is electrified by the news of the holdup of express messengers.

CHAPTER IX.—Kate goes to Saguache for a consultation with Mackenzie, Alex Flandrau and Curly.

CHAPTER X.—Kate's shrewdness reveals how Cullison had taken Fendrick's bait when he left the Roundup club.

CHAPTER XI.—In the cellar of the cigar store Flandrau finds a cipher message left by Cullison.

CHAPTER XII.—Luck is held prisoner by Fendrick and Blackwell in a sheepherder's cabin in the mountains.

CHAPTER XIII.—Fendrick wants him to sign a relinquishment of his homestead rights.

CHAPTER XIV.—Luck is going to let you get away from here now?

CHAPTER XV.—Luck's answer came easily and lightly.

CHAPTER XVI.—Cass Fendrick Makes a Call.

Kate was in her rose garden superintending the stable boy as he loosed the dirt around the roots of some of the bushes.

The rider who cantered up to the fence, seeing her in her well-hung corduroy skirt, her close-fitting blouse, and the broad-brimmed straw hat that

shielded her dark head from the sun, appreciated the fitness of her surroundings.

At the clatter of hoofs she looked up from the bush she was trimming and at once rose to her feet.

From the pocket of his shirt he drew a crumpled piece of stained hlop.

"I've brought back your handkerchief, Miss Cullison."

"What have you done with my father?" He nodded toward the Mexican boy and Kate dismissed the lad.

"You've surely got a nice posy garden here. Didn't know there was one like it in all sunbaked Arizona."

"I want you to tell me what you have done with my father."

He laughed a little and looked at her with eyes that narrowed like those of a cat basking in the sun.

"You're a young lady of one idea. No use arguing with you, I reckon."

"Not the least use. I've talked with Mrs. Wylie."

"She will say it in court—if it ever comes to that."

"Just what will she say, if you please?" Kate told him in four sentences with a stinging directness that was the outstanding note of her, that and a fine self-forgetful courage.

"Is that all? Comes to this then, that she says I heard her servant, ran in, and saved your father's life. Is that a penitentiary offense?"

"You helped the villain take his body into the cellar. You plotted with him to hold father a prisoner."

"Just naturally knew it without overhearing," he derided.

"He had touched on the weak spot of Mrs. Wylie's testimony."

"How would this do for an explanation?" he suggested lazily.

"I did help carry him downstairs where it was cooler and that I did have a long talk with the fellow Blackwell. What would I be talking to him about, if I wasn't reading the riot act to him?"

"You can talk of course. I don't care. It is all lies—lies. You have kidnaped father and are holding him somewhere. Don't you dare to hurt him."

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"But he wouldn't—not if you free him."

He laughed harshly. "I thought you knew him. He's hard as nails."

"He was hedging because he thought he had gone too far, but she appeared not to notice it."

"If I could only see him and have a talk with him. I think I could get him to do as I ask."

"This was what he had come for, but now that she had met him half way he hesitated."

"You've got to persuade Luck to come through with an agreement to let go of that Del Oro homestead and to promise not to prosecute us."

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The tinkle of hoofs from the river bed in the gulch below rose through the clear air.

"What went into you zig-wagging to now?" Luck asked from the bed.

"Yes, it's Cass. There's some one with him, too. It is a woman."

"A woman!" Luck took the cigar from his mouth in vague unease.

"The Mexican smiled behind his open hand. 'Your question anticipates mine, senior. I too ask the same.'"

"The sight of his daughter in the doorway went through the cattlemen with a chilling shock."

"Mr. Fendrick brought me," she explained when articulate expression was possible.

"He brought you, did he?" Luck looked across her shoulder at his enemy, and his eyes grew hard as jade.

"I promised you a better argument than those I'd given you, Miss Cullison is that argument," Fendrick said.

"The cattlemen's set face had a look more deadly than words."

"No use you getting crazy with the heat, Cullison. Your daughter asked me to bring her here, and I brought her."

"After supper the door of the cabin was locked and a sentry posted."

"The prisoners were on parole, but Cass did not on that account relax his vigilance."

"Well, what have you decided?" he asked at last.

"What is it you offer?" Luck demanded gruffly.

"You sign the relinquishment and agree not to make us any trouble because we brought you here, and you may go by two o'clock."

"Well, I accept your terms. I'll make you no legal trouble. But I tell you straight this thing ain't ended."

"Where is that paper you want me to sign?" Luck dashed off his signature and pushed the document from him.

"Evening, Cass." Fendrick put down his newspaper, but did not rise.

"That leaves me only one thing to do. You're under arrest."

"For what?" demanded the sheepman sharply.

"For abducting Luck Cullison and holding him prisoner."

"Has he come back?" (To be continued.)



"All Right; I'll Take You to Him."

power of the damndest villain that ever went unhung.

"She nodded, white to the lips. 'Let us go at once, please.'"

"They rode together through the wind-swept sunlit land.

"He had touched on the weak spot of Mrs. Wylie's testimony."

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