

WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE'S

To Ride the River With

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SYNOPSIS

Ruth Chiswick of L. C. ranch, obsessed by fear of danger to her outspoken father, Lee, from a band of lawless rustlers headed by Sperm Howard, decides to save him by eloping with young Lou Howard, Sperm's son, and comes to the town of Tail Holt to meet him. While in Yell Sanger's store, a crook-nosed stranger enters, sizes up the situation, and when a drunken cowboy, Jim Pender, rides in and starts shooting, protects Ruth, while Lou Howard hides. Disgusted with Lou's cowardice, Ruth calls off the elopement, and sends the stranger for her father at the gambling house across the street. There the stranger, calling himself Jeff Gray, meets Morgan Norris, a killer, Curly Connor, Kansas, Mile High, Sid Hunt, and other rustlers, and Sperm Howard. Lee Chiswick enters, with his foreman, Dan Brand, and tells Sperm Howard of his orders to shoot rustlers at sight. Jeff Gray returns to Ruth and coldly reassures her of her father's safety. At supper, Ruth introduces Jeff to her father and Brand, and in Sanger's store later she speaks cordially to Curly Connor. Coming out of the store, they are greeted by sudden gunfire. Lee is wounded, and Jeff Gray appears with a smoking revolver. Two days later, Ruth tells her father of her projected elopement and her disillusionment. Later, Ruth meets Jeff Gray, whom she thinks tried to kill her father. When he tries to hold her, she accidentally presses the trigger of her gun, and wounds Jeff. She takes him to Pat Sorley's camp. Talking over the shooting with Sorley, Ruth is incredulous of Jeff's story of shooting at the assassin rather than at her father, and later pleads with Lee to listen to him. When Lee arrives at Pat Sorley's camp, he finds only a note to Pat from Jeff. Meanwhile, Jeff rides into Tail Holt and sends word to Sperm Howard he wants to see him.

CHAPTER IV—Continued

He pulled on his boots and swiftly examined his revolver. That the weapon rested lightly in its holster so that there would be no hindrance to a quick draw he made sure. This invasion in force might or might not mean trouble. Curly had probably come with a chip on his shoulder. Norris was a killer of the worst kind. On the other hand, Sherman Howard had the reputation of doing his fighting by proxy. He might have brought Morg merely as a defensive precaution. Jeff hoped, if they did not open up with a blast of guns, to talk them out of any thought of vengeance. It would not be easy now, not with Curly all hot to rub him out.

In his throat there beat the pulse of excitement that always accompanied deadly danger. His fingers trembled.

A knock on the door sounded. Gray's nervousness vanished instantly. He said, "Come in," his drawing voice cool as ice-water.

CHAPTER V

Their host maneuvered Norris to a rocking-chair, Howard to a straight-backed one. Curly he seated at the foot of the bed. Gray stood in a shadowy corner farthest from the window. He was giving himself the best chance possible. Of the three visitors, Norris was probably the most dangerous gunman, and a rocking-chair is not the most advantageous spot for swift and accurate shooting.

"A little crowded in here, gents," Gray said lightly. "Hope you don't mind sitting on the bed, Mr. Connor. I'm short of chairs."

"Suits me," Curly answered. Gray nodded, turned his attention to the big man. "I hated to trouble you to come here, Mr. Howard," he said apologetically, "but I have a busted leg that interferes with walking."

"I didn't mind coming. I wasn't busy," Howard's leaden opaque eyes never lifted from the stranger.

"Just reached town and I thought I'd better see you," Gray mentioned.

Slumped in the chair, the gross weight of the man overflowing, Howard reminded Gray of a prize hog. Howard said nothing. He waited for the situation to develop. The man had a capacity for effective silence.

"Figuring I might want to stay around Tail Holt awhile," Gray went on easily.

"It's a free country," Howard's voice was suave.

"For some folks," Norris added with an insolent laugh.

Gray smiled. "My idea, too, Mr. Norris. I want to find out if I'm one of those folks."

"Last time I saw you that roan was foggin' it outa town fast," Norris taunted. "You looked like you had hurry-up business anywhere but here, Mr. Gray, if that's what you call yoreself."

"I changed my mind," Gray said. "Why?" Howard asked bluntly.

"Got a busted leg. Shot up the other day."

"In front of the Golden Nugget?" Norris inquired, suspicion in his cold gray eyes.

"No. Out on the L. C. range."

"While you were gunning for Lee," Curly charged.

"No."

"That so?" Norris snarled. "Who did it? How come you out there?"

"Talk fast, fellow," Curly ordered harshly.

"Miss Ruth Chiswick did it," Gray did not look at Curly. His stone-wall gaze was on the killer Norris. "I was there on personal business of my own."

Curly ripped out an angry oath. "If you hurt Miss Ruth—"

Smoothly Howard interrupted. "Let us hear the story, Curly. Mr. Gray sent for us to tell it, don't you reckon?"

"Go ahead, Sorreltop," Norris laughed derisively. "We'll believe every word you say."

Gray told the story of his adventures in the L. C. territory, with careful editorial elisions. They heard it to a finish.

"That Chiswick girl is a tough proposition," Howard said, shaking his head gravely. "She'll come to a bad end, like enough."

"Nothing of the kind," retorted Curly hotly. "She's a mighty nice little lady."

"Some hot-tempered, but with the making of a fine woman in her," Gray concurred.

"She's sure a wampus cat," Norris cut in, his slurred voice a sneer. "Leave the girl out of this," Curly snapped.

"Mr. Norris only meant she is a little lively," Gray explained.

"I can tell him what I meant, fellow, without any help from you," Norris blustered. "And I didn't bring her name into it. She was in the fairy tale this bird has been giving us."

Ignoring Norris, the crook-nosed man spoke to Howard. "I don't claim to be so law-abiding myself. Maybe I left some place in a hurry. Maybe I didn't. Thought it wasn't good manners to ask a stranger about his past."

"You can't catch a mule without an ear of corn, Mr. Gray," the big

portant in Texas. Arizona sure ought to give him the glad hand."

"The name is Gray in Arizona," corrected the crook-nosed man.

"Worth two thousand on the hoof—or as meat, I reckon—down Santone way," Norris continued. "The other guys who helped rob the train only rate at five hundred apiece. But Mr. Duke—he's an honest-to-God Jesse James."

Gray ignored the jeer. "Like to correct you on one point, Mr. Norris. Two thousand on the hoof. Not a cent if shipped down in a coffin." He thought it just as well to stress this, to avoid being shot in the back.

"That's right," Norris assented. "I didn't read it careful. Well, Mr. Duke—Gray, I mean—it's a pleasure to meet up with a famous man like you."

"This is private information," the fugitive said. "I don't expect the word passed around among yore friends. I'm lying low for a while, you understand."

"It still isn't clear to me what you were doing in the Sweet Spring valley," Curly insisted. "Or why you wanted to kill Lee Chiswick?"

Gray smiled. "I was in the Sweet Spring valley because I had to get out of Tail Holt in a hurry on account of Curly Connor making a target out of me," he told the black-haired man cheerfully. "Me, I was going somewhere in a hurry, and I happened to land in the L. C. country. About yore other question—I never have wanted to kill Chiswick."

"You just shot at him for practice," Curly suggested.

"I didn't shoot at him," Gray let his cold eyes rest on Norris. "I reckon that's not information to yore friends."

"Meaning me?" asked Norris, his eyes slitted.

"Meaning only that this has been talked over among you. Someone took a crack at Chiswick. Whoever it was, I could just see his figure in the alley, and I ripped loose at him."

"Why?" asked Howard. "Had you any chips in the game?"

"I've asked myself why often enough since," Gray replied, shaking his head. "Damnfo why. Nary chip, Mr. Howard. But I had just been eating supper with him as his guest, and I reckon my notion must have been to see he got a fair break."

"But that isn't yore notion any longer, Mr. Gray?" Howard queried lightly.

"I'm not drawing a pay-check to be his bodyguard," Gray drawled.

"Is it straight goods what he says, Sperm?" Curly demanded.

"I reckon so, Curly. One of the boys got impatient and cut loose at Chiswick."

"Who?"

"I don't know who. I'm telling you only what I've heard."

"All right," Norris said. "This busted leg of his. Do we have to take it on faith?"

"It needs some attention," the wounded man replied. "Is there a doc in town?"

"No, doc, but Sperm here is almost as good."

"Fine. Would you mind looking at it, Mr. Howard?" Gray asked.

Howard examined, washed, and dressed the wound. There could be no doubt it was authentic. After he had finished taking care of it, the fat man gave a decision.

"No objection to your staying here, Mr. Gray. This community doesn't aim to be hard on a man in trouble. Of course, if Lee Chiswick finds out you are here, as he is liable to do, it will be up to you to look out for yourself."

Gray said he would try to do that.

Tony Flores, one of the vaqueros, rode in to the big house with word

that there had been another raid on L. C. stock.

"How do you know?" Lee Chiswick demanded.

"Ran across the tracks of a bunch being driven up Box canyon," the Mexican said.

"New tracks?"

"I'd say not more than a day old, senor."

"Sure they were driven—that they weren't strays?" asked Dan Brand.

Tony explained that five or six shod horses had followed the cattle.

"Too late to catch the thieves or pick up the stolen stock," Brand mourned.

"Maybe not," Lee gave curt orders. "Arm yourselves, boys. We'll take off after them. Ruth, help Frank rustle grub for us—enough for two-three days. Bob, get Pat Sorley and Buck Conrad. Cut across and meet us at the mouth of Box canyon. Tell them to bring rifles as well as six-guns. Be there inside of an hour."

Ruth gathered all the food she had cooked, had Nelly grind two packages of coffee, chose a side of bacon, added flour and corn meal, as well as salt, pepper, and sugar. The food she put in gunnysacks.

Her brother rode a pack-horse and put on a cross-buck. With a lash rope he threw a diamond hitch expertly over the supplies.

"Bring your slickers," the boss snapped. "No war-sacks. We're traveling light. You won't be sitting on your spurs any this trip. Got to hot-foot it over a cold trail."

At the entrance to Box canyon Lee found Sorley, Conrad, and his son Bob waiting for them. Sorley was sniffing over the ground like a dog looking for a scent. The old man was an expert trailer. He had been a scout in the army during the Geronimo campaigns.

The cattleman turned his horse over to Frank and strode forward to join Pat.

"What'd you find?" he asked.

"About half a dozen of 'em with a bunch of young stuff traveling lickety-split," Sorley said. "They're in one hell of a hurry. Here's a big long-stepping horse with outside shoes. This one has a broken hoof. You'll be pleased to know, Lee, that the lying scound who calls himself Jeff Gray is with them. Must have ridden right over from the line-camp."

"Sure?"

"Unless he has loaned his roan to someone else. I made it my business to take particular notice of that animal while he was at the line-camp. The blacksmith who shod that roan was either short of time or nails. There's a nail shy in the shoe on the left front hoof. Take a look at this track."

Lee Chiswick studied the foot-mark.

"Here it is again. Begorry, I'd swear to that on a stack of Bibles. Gray's roan made it."

"Hmp! We've got him at last so he can't lie out of it. He's one of the Tail Holt rustling gang," Chiswick's salient jaw set.

"I knew he was a bad hombre first minute I clapped eyes on him," Brand said.

Lee drew Frank to one side. "Son, we're following a cold trail. Look at those clouds. It's going to rain tonight, and all tracks will be blotted out. Might as well hunt a needle in a haystack as these scoundrels. I want you to go to Tail Holt and keep your eyes open. There will be a lot of whispered talk among the rustlers there, but you won't hear any of that. What I'd like to know is who is in town and who isn't. Find out who has been away. Notice who drops in. If two or three come together, check up on that. I'm pretty sure Sperm Howard is back of these raids on our stock, though of course he doesn't do any night-riding himself."

(TO BE CONTINUED)



"No objections to you staying here, Mr. Gray."

man said. "If I get you right, you are asking our help. Before we give it we have a right to know all about you."

"Fine, for you," the cornered man replied. "But how about me? How do I know some fox won't write a letter and have me dragged back to—to some place I don't want to go?"

Howard looked affronted. "If a man throws in with us, we don't betray him."

"Is that a promise?" Gray asked, looking to the others for confirmation.

"Y'betcha, if we're satisfied with yore story," Curly said.

"If," Norris accented, with an ugly laugh.

Reluctantly Gray drew from his pocket the poster. Still slumped in his chair, the big-shouldered fat man read it carefully.

"So you're Clint Duke," he said. Gray did not admit this in words.

"Draw yore own conclusions," he told Howard.

"Lemme have a look at it," Curly said impatiently. He read aloud:

"Height five foot ten, age twenty-nine, weight about 158 pounds, crook nose, light red hair, gray eyes, scar on back of left hand. Will probably fight desperately before being taken."

Curly lifted his eyes and grinned at Gray. "Certainly reads like it might be you, unless you've got a twin brother the spittin' image of you, even to the scar on yore hand."

Norris reached for the poster. "The picture is sure ugly as galvanized sin," he sneered. "But it looks a heap like this guy, I'll say that. I knew all the time he was from Texas."

"Says you and these three other fellows are wanted for robbing the Texas and Southern Flyer," Curly mentioned. "Where are the other guys?"

"On the dodge, down in the Texas brush country."

"How come you not to stay there?"

"The Rangers were after me special," Gray explained. "I figured I had better light out."

Norris looked at the poster, his lip curled. "Mr. Duke is real im-

portant in Texas. Arizona sure ought to give him the glad hand."

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(TO BE CONTINUED)

found it, so they made the rounds of the jeweler's shops. A necklace almost identically like the lost one, cost 40,000 francs, but they could get it for 36,000 cash. By using all their savings, and by borrowing at ruinous rates, they bought the new rope of diamonds.

When Madam returned it, she did not wait for her friend to open the box, for fear she might see the difference. Then began the paying back of all this borrowed money. They moved into a garret, dismissed the maid, and lived as laboring people. Madam lost her physical beauty. From haggling over prices she became loud and coarse. At the end of ten years they paid off the debt and could again face the world.

The Revelation.

One day, Madam was walking in the park to get a breath of spring. Just ahead she saw her old friend, Madam Forestier. But the latter did not recognize Madam Loisel, and exclaimed upon learning who she was. Her changed appearance called for an explanation. It could not do any harm now, so the story of the necklace was told. At the end of it, Madam Forestier cried out in pain. She took the hands of Madam Loisel and tearfully said, "Oh, my poor Mathilde. Why, my necklace was paste. It was worth at most 500 francs."

This story is often said to have the most perfect plot of all short stories. The technique of Maupassant, great French artist, is to emphasize the plot above the people. With him it is a question always of: What happened?

LITERARY GEMS

Maupassant's 'Necklace' Is Perfect Tale

By ELIZABETH C. JAMES

SHE had been born a poor girl and she had married a poor man, yet Madam Mathilde Loisel, heroine of Guy de Maupassant's "The Necklace," did not give up life so easily. She dreamed of lovely things. With in her surged the power to charm, to sway emotions. One day her husband returned from work with an envelope which he eagerly handed her. Reading the contents, she began to cry. He was astonished.

"I thought you would like to go. It is to be a grand ball, and every-

one wanted to go. I had much trouble to get it for you."

"And what am I to wear?"

What would a new dress cost? She calculated rapidly to see how much she thought he would give her, and then said, "Four hundred francs will do."

He gave up his savings for her gown and she ordered the dress.

The week of the ball arrived, but still Madam Loisel was not happy. Her husband inquired the reason, and she deplored her lack of jewels.

He suggested her wealthy friend, Madam Forestier, a friend of convent days. At the home of her friend, Madam Loisel surveyed all the jewel cases and held each ornament up to see the effect. Finally she inquired if she might use the diamond necklace. Her friend