

The Fighting Ranger

BY F. J. McCONNELL and GEORGE W. PYPEL

CHAPTER XXXIV.—(Cont'd.)

Buck, begging for mercy, nodded and stammered that he would answer anything.

"Who killed Michael O'Rourke, my father?"

Buck, breathing hard, gasped:

"Spade Sinclair—his partner—shot him down in cold blood—for the topaz."

"Tell me the whole story."

"They were hunting the Yaqui gold from an old map," Buck went on. "Yer dad found how to read the signs. We wrote the secret down—and sealed it up in the topaz with wax. Sinclair knew the stone had something to do with the loot—but didn't savvy what was in it."

"An' it was this Sinclair—the same man—as killed Black Benwell. But old Marshall was driven from his ranch, hunted for years, and finally convicted for it. Sinclair fired the shot from hiding while Marshall and Benwell grappled—'ee' when Marshall's gun barked by accident. Sinclair wanted Marshall's ranch—the treasure he knew was on it."

"Who is this Sinclair?" Terence demanded. Where is he?"

Buck snarled, with hate:

"The snake—he changed his name—an' his looks. The double-crosser. He is—"

Buck paused. Terence's hand, clenching his throat, tightened, menacingly.

"He's—Topaz Taggart."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A ROUND-UP.

"Well, Taggart," said the sheriff, "here we've spent most of the day around Sierra Diablo on the trail you give us, and we haven't picked up your man yet."

"He's probably around somewhere near," replied Taggart. "We'll get him yet."

The men of the posse had become restless. They had spent too many hours on the fruitless quest.

Taggart himself was becoming increasingly irritable and nervous. On the one hand he felt that Buck would get ahead of him and get the treasure, and he was beginning to despair of his last desperate effort to secure it for himself by enlisting the aid of the sheriff. On the other hand, he began to feel that perhaps he had made a mistake—he was beginning to have a premonition that something would happen to queer his game. He was becoming panicky with fear that his own deeds would be shown up, and

he wanted to break away from the sheriff's party, and flee. He was even ready to forsake all hope of the treasure, and would have been content to simply escape, if he could only think of a reasonable excuse for quitting the sheriff.

The men at the head of the posse shouted, and spurred their horses. Ahead of them they saw a group of horsemen. They started in pursuit. Taggart hung behind, then turned tail, and fled back in the other direction.

He had scarcely started when his way was blocked by a racing automobile. It was the ranger's car, with Mary, Bud and Jack. Taggart turned white with rage and fear as he confronted them. Bud and Jack drew their guns on him, forced him to halt, turn about and go on with them.

The horsemen of the sheriff's posse had gone in pursuit of proved to be Buck's gang of rustlers, belatedly on their way to join their leader. As the car came up, the men of the posse had them all covered with guns, and secured their lassoes.

Further down the road two men were coming toward them on foot. One trudged before the other, who had him covered with a revolver. The posse, with their prisoners, were waiting the arrival of these two.

"Sheriff, make these people let me go," Taggart cried, almost hysterical, cowering at bay under the revolvers of Bud and Jack. "What right have they to hold me up—what's the idea here?"

The two figures on foot, now running, came up. The one behind with the revolver, hearing Taggart's miserable whine, shouted:

"Hold that man Taggart, sheriff—he's the man you want above all."

It was Terence, marching his prisoner, Buck, before him.

Taggart shivered in fear, but dared not move under the menacing pistol muzzles pointed at him. Two of the deputies now flanked him.

Terence pointed accusingly at Taggart and shouted:

"There's your arch-criminal, sheriff—rustler—robber—forger—MURDERER—Spade Sinclair, who calls himself Topaz Taggart."

All listened in amazement as Terence went on:

"He drove John Marshall from the Bar M, and persecuted his daughter in the hope of possessing the Yaqui treasure found on it."

"Years ago, with the same lust for this gold, he—killed my father."

"And it was Taggart—Spade Sinclair—who murdered Black Benwell. This girl's father, John Marshall, is innocent!"

"It's a lie—it's a lie!" Taggart was shrieking.

"No it ain't—I saw you do both the killings," yelled Buck McLeod. "An' if you think I'm not goin' to turn state's evidence now and try to save some of my own hide—you double-crossin' cur, after the way you figured to trim me—we'll, ye gotta another think comin'."

"Lies, lies, lies," Taggart continued to wail.

"Come on, Sinclair-Taggart," shouted the sheriff, "you'll have a chance to prove what's lies and what's truth before a judge and jury."

"If there's anything left of Taggart when you get through with him here, sheriff," Terence put in, "Uncle Sam want it!"

From a battered card case Terence drew a card and handed it to the sheriff, who read, aloud:

"Terence O'Rourke, U. S. Government Ranger—Texas."

By this time Mary had jumped from the car and came to Terence's side. The sheriff shook hands with him, and said:

"Of course Mary's father will be released at once, but we'll have to take this Stella Montrose woman."

Mary saw a look of anxiety come over Bud Hughes' face. A wave of compassion swept her.

"Stella was—was playing the game in our cause—all the time," she cried. Bud gave her hand a hearty squeeze of appreciation, and turned away to wipe a tear from his eye with his coat sleeve.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A PERFECT DAY.

Terence and Mary rode in from town at sunset. They were both all smiles as they came in the gate of the Bar M and received a cheery greeting from Bud Hughes, as they dismounted.

Mary leaned against Terence joyfully, and his arm encircled her waist as Bud came running up.

"Hello, Bud," Mary hailed him. "Have you seen Stella to-day? How is she getting along?"

"Yes, I saw her," Bud answered. "She's getting along fine. She wasn't nearly as badly hurt as it seemed at first, and they say at the hospital she can come out in another week. An' then we're going to forget all the past, and begin things over again."

She's really all right, you know—down at bottom, only she got mixed up with the wrong kind of people. When she comes out, she and I are going to hit for new territory and try to remodel the sorry scheme of things, as old Omar would have said it."

They were walking toward the ranch house.

"We'll be awfully sorry to lose you,

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Bud, but of course we want you to be happy."

As they came up to the porch of the ranch house, Mary asked:

"Oh, say, Bud, is Daddy in?"

"Yes, he's in there," Bud replied. "Well, listen," Mary whispered into his ear. Bud's eyes grew big, and his lips broadened in a huge smile.

"What!" he cried. "Do you mean it?"

Terence stood smiling embarrassedly and nodded his head, and Mary said: "Yes, really," and sunk back into Terence's waiting arms.

"Well, I'll be blowed," said Bud, the great benevolent smile on his face growing wider. "Sure, I'll tell him—be glad to tell him."

As he stalked into the house, Terence looked Mary in his arms, and bent his head over toward her face till the magnetism of her lips became irresistible, and his own were drawn against them.

"Terence, that's the eighty-seventh time to-day," she protested, but her eyes sparkled with happiness.

"And not the last either," said Terence with a wicked smile.

Inside the house old Marshall was sitting at his desk, working over the ranch accounts, straightening them out after his long absence and the manipulations of Taggart. He had been a free man, back as boss of his own outfit for two weeks now.

"Mr. Marshall," said Bud entering. "Mrs. O'Rourke wants to see you."

"Who?" asked Marshall, looking up from his books.

"Mrs. O'Rourke, sir."

"And who is Mrs. O'Rourke?" Marshall asked, puzzled. "I don't know any such person."

"Oh, yes you do, pardon me, sir," Bud contradicted.

A smile of sudden comprehension crossed Marshall's face.

"Oh, perhaps I do," he said.

He strode out onto the porch and found Mary still in Terence's arms, the two of them gazing rapturously into each other's faces.

"Mary," Marshall called in a stern voice, and frowning upon her as she responded.

"Am I to understand that, without even asking my consent or advice, you have run off and married this young fellow?"

"Well, Daddy, dear, I was sure you would approve of Terence," Mary pleaded.

"Then you HAVE married him, have you?"

"Yes."

Marshall's frown changed to a smile, and he stepped forward with outstretched arms to both of them.

"I'm glad you knew I would—"

But the last words of his sentence were smothered by Mary, drawing both father and husband to her in one loving embrace.

(The End.)

The Value of a Poor Memory.

Do you belong to that class of people who have great difficulty in recalling the things that have happened? With them, events and plans seem to occupy no permanent place in their minds. Such things fade away in the mist of the past.

Now, what is the value of such a memory? If there were a market place where such things were bought and sold, how much would one bid for a memory that did not work?

Nevertheless, such a memory has a value. For instance, in driving a car you get in a tight place, this non-functioning memory does not flash before your eyes all the horrible automobile accidents that you have seen or read about. It keeps the coast clear, and enables you to act collectedly. Then, too, the embarrassing and unfortunate memories of the past are pretty much eliminated from your daily experiences.

But, notwithstanding these advantages, if there is anyone who has trouble with an over-working memory, and could exchange it, you undoubtedly would be glad to make a deal with him.

Sentence Sermons.

It is Always Safe—To wait a little longer before you give a stranger your confidence.

—To refuse to repeat a slander whose truthfulness you are not sure of.

—To be polite no matter how irritating the other party may be.

—To take the time that extra good work requires.

—To be the first to offer the apologies.

—To keep an open mind—you may even learn from a fool.

—To go more than half way in patching up a quarrel.

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Children's Laughter.

No plunging sea-birds swept the bay At evening when I crossed the shore; The silver sickle of the tide Soundless gathered his crescents wide; About the rocks an austere stillness lay.

But in my ears a lightsome sound Disturbed the peace, for on the sands, Where children in their games had chased Each other, little feet had traced Their random scampering pattern on the ground.

—David Cleghorn Thomson.

Week Ends.

The distance takes the roaring train. The platform sleeps in peace again. And through the sudden hush is heard The little song of some small bird Who doesn't know of London Town And has no smuts upon his gown, And Chasfield spire at evening's edge Gathers the country, feld and hedge, Farmhouse and lane and tree and sod And points them steadfastly to God.

—M. R. Betts.

Used to it. "No, says I, this kind of weather just suits us, 'cause we're cold storage eggs!"

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Architecture.

There is my castle, strong and white and proud, Such as the knights of old were wont to seek. Block upon block of white wind-hammered cloud, Piled in a row upon that far blue peak.

There do I house my host of voiceless songs, Holding with them a grand and knightly court, Hearing their pleas, and righting all their wrongs, Still their plaints, presiding at their sport.

Over the moat of placid waveless air All day they ride, on plumed palfreys set, Till in the night my dreams foregather there— All the dear dreams that I may not forget.

Castle of dreams—my wayward fancy's prize, Mist in the mist, and aloof of air, Deep in my heart your splendid towers rise— I know, for it was I who built them there!

—W. A. Brewer, Jr., in Youth's Companion.

Optimism is a fine thing except when it takes the form that Providence will cut the kindling for the wife.



Only Seems That Way.

"You seem always to give your wife her way in everything."

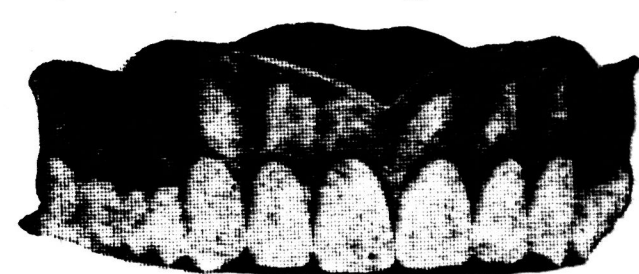
"It only seems that way, my friend—she takes it."

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