

The Aztec Mystery

A Thrilling Story of the Old West

By MURRAY LEINSTER

SYNOPSIS

Sonny Holman, believing he has been cheated out of ownership of the Aztec mine, holds up the mine payroll. Janet Laurier, who holds the real title to the Aztec, offers a reward for his capture. She is kidnapped by Garcia's gang, a band of desperadoes. Sonny follows and prevents Garcia from burning the girl, but he is slain by Garcia and a confederate in the kidnapping.

CHAPTER TEN

"You had me kidnapped, too," she said bitterly. "I've got your pistol in my back, with my finger on the trigger. Don't move! You came to my house and spilled out the ground. You were ready to keep me from summing help until your confederates came."

Sonny shifted his loaded repeating rifle to his other arm and began to roll a cigarette as he rode. "I'm listening," he drawled. "This is right interesting."

For the first time her tone was less than positive. "I know that much is true," she said, "because almost the first words you said to Garcia were that you didn't trust him. I don't know whether he intended—"

"He did, ma'am," said Sonny softly, "an' for that I am going to kill him. And so," she said coldly, "as a thief, and as the betrayer of a man who was fool enough to believe in you, and because you had me kidnapped, I'm going to take you into Moileville."

Sonny made a sudden movement. She gasped. His hand had snapped up behind him and held the revolver firmly. He pulled decisively on it, working her finger out of the trigger guard with his other hand.

"You're going to make me mad one of these days," he drawled. "I'm going to be the one that does the taking in Moileville, ma'am."

He put the revolver in his belt again, but before him this time. The girl of Gunpowder had not changed, nor did she seem to care. She turned toward the distant flaring lights of the little town. Sonny rode cheerfully onward, smoking the cigarette he had manufactured in the dark. When he flung it away in a trailing area of sparks, he spoke again. "This business of being outside the law has its disadvantages. I got me a idea right now where being respectable would be right useful. I reckon I'm going to reform."

There was a long pause. She seemed to be looking for a verbal trap. But he seemed to be musing not unpleasantly.

"If you do take me into Moileville," she offered at last, "and you promise to leave the mine alone, because of your helping me at Garcia's place I'll—"

Sonny's head tilted as he gazed meditatively up at an especially bright star. "Ma'am"

"I'll withdraw the reward I've offered for that."

"Shucks," said Sonny easily. "That's a compliment. The last star the Circle Bar saw was only eight."

"It's best for you and Baby too."

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"Oh, gents," said the bartender, "you forgot something."

He tapped the cash register in a manner politely suggestive. The two men paused. One was a scar-faced, sullen man who had not spoken. The other was short and very fair, with sun bleached hair and faded blue eyes of a black expressionlessness.

"I hate you!" he roared. "You're a thief! You're a murderer! And you dare!"

"Just so, ma'am," drawled Sonny, "re'n' Gunpowder we're ridin' on 'em. He'd ha' called me things like that when he first met me. But Gunpowder an' me, we get along right good now."

"You're saying," she panted, "that you'll break me like a horse?"

"No, ma'am," Sonny chuckled. "You'll break me like a horse."

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Reminiscences

Gertrude Atherton tells an amusing story about her first meeting with Joaquin Miller, the poet of the Sierras.

"I've better sell the poem, boys!" he once confided to friends at the Savoy Club, in London, where he created a sensation by his picturesque appearance, "and," he added, "it tickles the dachshunds."

This in reference to the hit he had made in London drawing-rooms.

To get on with Mrs. Atherton's experiences—related in her reminiscences—"Adventures of a Novelist." One day, Miller called on her in San Francisco.

He wore a black broadcloth suit, the trousers tucked into boots—with high heels—that reached almost to the waist, "he recalls. His shirt had no collar but his neck was encircled by a lace scarf. On his head was a remembrance, which he removed with a sweeping bow as I entered, and I say that his long hair, touching his shoulders, was gray on top, and ended in a series of stiff 'rat tails' that were tried a bright orange."

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