

## WHEN THE SCHOOL-MOM ARRIVED

(By D. J. Walsh.)

IT WAS shortly past noon when Joe Posson drove by the big blow-out. Glancing at his watch, he saw that he had scant time in which to reach Crystal City and bank the money his employer had entrusted to him before he must meet the train. The new school-mom whom Missus Fanning had selected for the Big Arroyo district was coming in on the local and must be conveyed with care to the Fanning ranch.

Joe felt deeply the importance of his two commissions, but his sense of pleasant self-gratulation cooled as he saw another outfit approaching.

"Old Man Raines' buckskins and Sile Robbins handlin' 'em," he said to himself.

The circumstance was untoward. At their last meeting Joe had promised Sile a thrashing and he saw clearly that he would have no time for it now.

"Just my luck," he muttered. "But I've got to attend to business even if I have to postpone the pleasure of lickin' Siles." And he sighed because of a wasted opportunity—a sigh which was nipped short by a spreading smile of surprise. For he now saw that Sile was not alone. Tucked in under his shoulder was a woman whose hat looked like an eager little flame against the barren overpervasiveness of the fall prairie. Only a young woman would wear a hat like that. Where had Old Sile picked her up, and where was he headed for?

As the distance lessened Joe could see that the woman was not only young but pretty and that Sile seemed to be all taken up with her. Of course to be liked. But what could such a nifty looking little piece of calico see in that hulking, gum-shoed critter? Not that Joe cared. There was only one girl in the world for him and that was Dolly Bindle whose letters he carried with him night and day. Still the way the girl smiled up into Old Sile's mackerel-colored eyes was enough to assure one that her helplessness needed a true protector.

The Raines' buckskins came alongside the Fanning blacks and Siles at a notion from the girl stopped. A wondering gaze, blue as violets, was directed at Joe's handsome dark face from under the brim of the flaming little hat.

"Are you really Mr. Posson?" inquired a sweet voice. "And were you coming to meet me?"

Meet her! Great crowd! Could this be the school-mom? And Old Sile had her! Joe's jaw dropped and he burned with fresh resentment.

"This is Miss Lucy Dow, Joe," said Sile patronizingly.

Joe swept off his hat, but his eyes were full of fire. The school-mom's name was Lucy Dow as he knew well, but he had received the impression from the letters he had heard Missus Fanning read that she would be both plain and middle-aged.

"You see," the girl explained, as she tucked back a strand of silken, corn-colored hair, "I made better connections than I expected. When I arrived in Crystal City I don't know what I should have done but for Mr. Robbins. He gave me lunch—" Joe snorted. Lunch! At Wes Howley's old cluck wagon! "And then he offered to take me to my destination. But now that we have met, Mr. Posson," she turned earnestly to Sile, "I won't put you to any further trouble, Mr. Robbins. Since he was coming to meet me I will go the rest of the way with him."

Sile glowered.

"Might as well go on now, I'm most here," he said.

The girl's blue eyes appealed to Joe. It was as if she whispered: "He is a queer fish. Please help me." Joe flushed betwixt pleasure and pain.

"I'm sorry," he stammered when Sile caught him up.

"Don't you remember I told you Joe was bound for Crystal City anyway?" he asked the girl. "He's got to mail a letter"—he grinned knowingly—"and bank some money. See that bulge on the left side of his coat? He's got forty-two hundred there. You know I told you my boss paid it to his boss yesterday. That's right, Joe, I saw it done."

Joe's chest swelled with rudely taken breath. He clenched his hands. Wasn't there a thing on earth that Old Sile didn't snoop into?

"Oh, please don't quarrel!" Miss Lucy's blue eyes were full of tears. "I've always heard you westerners shoot at a word. You'll frighten me to death, you will so." She covered her face.

"Oh, laws!" Sile laughed reassuringly. "We don't carry guns when we are on peaceable business."

"Don't you? Haven't either of you a firearm?" Miss Lucy quavered, timidly peeping. If Joe had not felt so much like wiping up the ground with Sile he would have been amused. The poor little thing, he recalled, was from somewhere in Vermont. "Cross your heart?" she persisted plaintively, laying one hand on her own obviously palpating breast. "Hope to die?"

"Sure," Sile obligingly crossed his big hairy paws on his chest. Joe with contemptuous toleration crossed his.

Instantly Miss Lucy's other hand came out of the deep pocket of her gray coat.

"Don't move," she commanded crisply while she handled the snub-nosed, deadly thing of steel with convincing

skill. "I don't fire to miss. You understand I'm in dead earnest."

"You're a queer school-mom," Joe sneered.

"School-mom! I'd be ashamed to be anything so ornery. I'm big Jake Dury's wife!" she snapped. "You-all hearn of him? proudly. "Get out of that wagon," she bade Joe. "I want your team for my getaway. And hand over the money—pronto!"

Joe got out of the buckboard and she got in. He handed her his wallet. Sile might have grabbed her (Len, all business though she was, but all he could do was to shake and giggle. She seized the lines and whip and was gone.

"My poor horses!" groaned Joe. "I wish they'd run away and break her neck, but she sure knows how to drive."

"Do you reckon she is that hell-cat Big Jake brought up from Tulsa?" quavered Sile. The very name of that famous bandit subdued him.

"Fears like it—got any speed in those buckskins?" Joe asked.

"I'll show you," answered Sile.

She was out of sight all the way. They entered Crystal City on two wheels scattering dogs and chickens in the narrow street. The local was in. Joe made for it, but the two dusty coaches were already moving. He raked their windows with his glance. At one he caught a glimpse of a white face under a red hat which looked back at him with a grimace of rage and hate.

The blacks stood reeking with sweat and beside them was a tall, sensible, spectacled woman, who gravely considered Joe as he approached.

"I reckon you are Miss Lucy Dow?" he said.

"I am," she said pointing to a trunk bearing her name.

At that instant Sile appeared.

"Telegraph! Catch her at Larri-more!"

"Oh, let her go," he said.

"With \$4,200," howled Sile.

Joe reached into his trousers pocket and pulled out a role of bills. Sile staggered.

"But what was in the wallet?" he asked.

"Dolly's letters," Joe's tone was exceeding mournful. "I've kept 'em in that wallet since I got the first one. I sure hated to lose them, but I reckon they were sacrificed in a good cause."

Then he proceeded toward the bank, while the real school-mom for Big Arroyo held the horses.

### World's Finest Gems Bought by Americans

One hears a great deal of the size and magnificence of the jewels in the possession of oriental and Russian potentates, and certainly many of these famous jewels are as fine as they are large; but not so many as we in the West are apt to believe.

The greatest part of the wealth of the world in gems today is right here in America—an astounding proportion of it; I should say between one-third and one-half—and we not only possess the greatest quantity of gems and the largest proportion of big ones, but our standard of quality is far higher not only than that of the East but even of Europe.

Many of the celebrated gems of the East are stones which an American woman would not buy, let alone wear. Some of the emeralds in the Russian crown jewels, for example, instead of being what is properly termed a gem, are the whole large crystal—that is when an emerald crystal some four inches long is found, some of the foreign lapidaries will facet and polish the whole enormous thing although it may be uneven in color, with fissures and inclusions. It is the size that impresses them, and one overpowering stone of not very good quality appeals to them more than a small but perfect jewel.

A more discriminating taste demands that the one beauty spot in that great crystal—the tiny, unflawed, intensely green bit that constitutes the true emerald—be cut out for use as a gem and the rest discarded. That is why emeralds, if they approach perfection, can command almost \$1,000,000 an ounce—not a high price when one realizes that perhaps only one ten-thousandth part of the original crystal cut to produce that ounce is here represented.

However, no stone varies more in quality—from the most worthless at \$5 a carat up to gems worth well over \$5,000 a carat. A warning to the amateur buyer to watch his step.—Dr. George Kunz in the Saturday Evening Post.

—Oh, Daddy!

It was nice and quiet in the movie theater. They sat near the center of the lower floor. A star appearing in person was doing a combination of "shimmy" and "snake dance." Little Allen, age three, decided to talk in the far-reaching stage whisper of a child. "I like a girl like that. I wish I had a girl like that." When the chuckles had subsided, he added: "If I had a girl like that I would take her a ride in daddy's car."

Poor Tom

Miss Teresa Hardy, aged eighty-five, cousin of the late Mr. Thomas Hardy, the novelist and poet, died in her sleep at her thatched cottage at Rockhampton, near Dorchester.

Miss Hardy said to a Daily Mail reporter shortly before her death: "Poor Tom! He was a clever boy but I never thought he would take to writing, and I didn't like it when he did. Writing, I think, is not a respectable way of earning a living."

—London Daily Mail.



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### An Object Before Him

Henry—You will never get the dog to mind you, my dear.

The Mrs.—I will with patience. You were just as troublesome yourself at first.

### Eat Oysters to Music

For the first time in the history of the famous annual opening of the oyster season at Gloucester, England, the bivalves were swallowed to music this season. To encourage the guest to do so rhythmically, the mayor of Gloucester invited many distinguished musicians, including Sir Edward Elgar, Sir Henry Wood and Sir Hugh Allen, director of the Royal College of Music. A special train took guests, among them being the duke of Marlborough, Lord Birkenhead, the lord mayor of London, and Signor Marconi, to the rose-decked tables. The innovation was a success and will be tried again next year.

### Gas Mask for Housewives

Fumes from onions are kept from the nostrils and eyes by a gas mask which has been especially adapted to domestic instead of war use. It is easily slipped on or off and affords an unobstructed vision through wide lenses. It may also be used by hay-fever victims to avoid dust.—Popular Mechanics Magazine.

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### Water "Fertilized"

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### No Use Shirking Trouble

"He who shirks the present trouble," said Hi Lo, the sage of Chinatown, "finds himself at a disadvantage as he is turned to face trouble with which he is less familiar."—Washington Star.

Defects, repeated, may not improve a man's judgment; they may only make him timid.

The opportunity is often lost by deliberating.—Sydney.

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