

The Fighting Tenderfoot

by William MacLeod Raine

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THE STORY

Garrett O'Hara, young lawyer, on his way to practice at Concho, wild western town, is shot at from ambush. He hears the desperado who fired the shot, Shep Sanderson, talking to Barbara Steelman, who thought the shot was directed at her. Garrett's resemblance to Judge Warner convinces Barbara that Sanderson fired at Garrett thinking he was Warner. She advises Garrett not to go to Concho, center of a big cattle war. He insists. She tells him to see Steve Worrall.

CHAPTER I—Continued

"Are you the floormaster, Mr. Sanderson?" Though he knew it was not safe, O'Hara could not keep a touch of jauntness out of his retort.

The bad man's shallow eyes, a washed-out blue in color, narrowed to points of savage cruelty. He had found a safe object upon which to expend his venom.

"Sa-ay, pilgrim, don't get funny with me. It ain't supposed to be safe. I aim to fix yore clock right now. After I've worked you over for a spell you live off for parts unknown an' don't never let me see you again."

"Or you'll shoot straighter than you did this afternoon," suggested O'Hara. "You don't have to get on the prod with me, fellow. I'm startin' to clean up on you right now."

A prize fighter had once given Garrett O'Hara six rules for rough-and-tumble fighting. He forgot the last five but remembered the first. It was to carry the attack rather than to wait for it. Now he reached for his foe's big outcropping ears, gripped them tightly, and jerked the unkempt head toward him. With all the force of his well-muscled arms O'Hara thrust back the head of the helpless giant, then leaped on him, twining his legs back of Sanderson's stocky ones. His feet moved up and down, swiftly and savagely.

The bully let out a yell of pain. "Take him off! Take him off! He's killin' me."

The dancers had pressed back from the fighting area. They stared at the entwined men, amazed at Sanderson's cry for help. For the stranger's hands still clung to the flapping ears. It was certain that he had not knifed the big man. Nor had he shot him. Why, then, was Sanderson bellowing like a frightened calf?

O'Hara felt a hand clutch his shirt and coat collar just back of the neck. He was snatched violently away from Sanderson and funged up against the wall of the room. A hard, low voice asked a question, not of him but of his antagonist.

"What you blattin' about, Shep? This little fellow's only a mouthful for you. . . . Get yore hand away from that gun."

A man had come into the room. He wore a blue flannel shirt, a broad-brimmed soft gray hat, an open vest, and no coat. His trousers were stuffed into the tops of high-heeled cowboy's boots. To the casual glance he was not a large man, certainly not compared with the bulky Sanderson. But he was powerfully built from the muscular slope of the neck down, and he carried himself as one having authority. The light blue eyes were cool and flinty.

Reluctantly, Sanderson's hand fell away from the butt of the .44 which hung at his side. He glanced at the newcomer. The urge struggled in him to defy the man, to wipe out with one swift lift of the arm and crook of the forefinger the tenderfoot who had discomfited him. But he was listening to his master's voice. He knew Dave Ingram too well to set himself against him.

The big bully looked down at the thighs of his legs. From them the trousers had been ripped and blood was dripping into the boots.

"His spurs roweled me," Sanderson sputtered.

"Quite some," agreed the other drily. He turned to O'Hara, studying him for a moment. That he was a tenderfoot was palpable, yet he was wearing Mexican wheel spurs with long cruel rowels, a note in his costume that seemed wholly incongruous.

O'Hara interpreted the question in the glance. "I bought them of a cowboy in Atropa who was hard up. He said they would be useful."

"He was right," agreed Ingram, smiling. "Good for man or beast."

"I'll get this pilgrim right one of these days," Sanderson cut in vindictively.

"Very likely, but not now," his master said.

To Ingram a Mexican poured out a swift protest of flowing vowels. Other hatches joined in, with much impulsive gesticulation. The cattle man listened, nodded, made answer in rapid and crisp Spanish. He turned to his henchmen.

"What d'you mean comin' here an' breakin' up the balle?" he demanded masterfully. "D'you want all the Mexicans against us, right at this time when we've got war enough on our hands? What's the matter with Pete's Paradise or the Gold Nugget? Can't you raise enough caln in them without

comin' here? Get outa here an' stay out!"

Ingram's voice was like the crack of a whip. The men to whom he spoke were hard fighting men, two of them at least "warriors" from Texas imported because they were known killers, but they had not a word to say for themselves except muttered excuses, sullen but restrained. They laughed to make the best of it and went swaggering out of the building. Sanderson whispered a word in his chief's ear before he left.

Garrett O'Hara had a capacity for hero worship. Looking at this bronzed Westerner, whose word had sent these ruffians trooping from the room, he recognized a leader of great force, strong, iron willed, master of himself as well as others.

"I'm in your debt, sir," the tenderfoot said.

"Who are you? Where d'you come from?" Ingram asked brusquely.

O'Hara told him.

"Here on business?"

"Expecting to settle somewhere in this country. Looking for a location."

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"Here on business?"

"No."

"You an' him had any row?"

"Not then. We'd never seen each other. This evening we had a difference of opinion."

"How d'you know it was Shep?"

"He admits it. Claims he thought I was an antelope. That won't wash."

Worrall gaped in his waistcoat pocket for another match. "Well, you got some idea why he shot at you, haven't you?"

"Miss Steelman had an idea. She told Sanderson he was trying to kill Judge Warner and had mistaken me for him."

The lank man whistled. "Great jumpin' horn' toads! Could it be that? You do kinda favor the judge. About his size—an' store clothes. What did Shep say when she told him?"

"He denied it, but the way he denied it was a confession. He had no time to think up a good lie, because she was so quick about it. The fellow was flabbergasted. Of course he stuck to his antelope story."

"What d'you mean about Miss Steelman being shot at?"

"Perhaps I'd better tell you the whole story."

"All right. Hop to it." Worrall put his boots on the table and tilted back his chair.

He did not interrupt with a single question until O'Hara had finished, but there was at least one large one in his mind. What was Barbara Steelman doing on the edge of the flats so close to the entrance of Box canyon? He thought he knew the answer, but did not want to believe it.

"So Miss Steelman wanted you to go back home where you come from? An' she wouldn't tell you why?"

"As I understand it, she sent me here to ask you why."

"Maybeso." The freighter rolled out some fat smoke rings and watched them. "You been here only a few hours. Likely you never heard of Dave Ingram."

O'Hara's answer came smilingly: "Heard of him, met him, got an appointment to meet him tomorrow at the store."

The front legs of Worrall's chair came sharply to the floor. Into the long man's face had come an instant wariness. A blank film had taken all expression out of his eyes.

"Oh! You know Mr. Ingram."

"Not exactly. I never heard of him till today."

"I see. You an' he are strangers, but you jest happened to meet him an' get an appointment for tomorrow."

The young lawyer knew he had prejudiced his case and he tried to set himself right.

He told the story of the evening's adventure. His account was a brief and modest one, but the salient fact could not be obscured that he had roughed it with Bully Sanderson and had not come out second best.

"He yelped for the boys to take you off after you had climbed his frame," Worrall repeated incredulously.

"I was tearing the flesh from his thighs with my spurs," explained the lawyer. "He couldn't shake me off and he couldn't stand the gaff."

Worrall looked at this stranger, shrewd eyes appraising him. "Mr. O'Hara, I don't know you from Adam's off ox," he said. "But if Miss Steelman sent you to me it goes as it lays. That young lady is fine as split silk, an' that's all there is to that. You look like a right limber young fellow, but you can't make Bully Sanderson look like a pore plugged nickel an' get away with it. Seems to me like you've tackled more'n you can ride herd on."

"Likely enough," O'Hara agreed. "I was lucky this time. But there's no reason why he should hold a grudge against me. I was only defending myself."

"Hmp! He's p'ison mean. That's reason enough for him. You made him look like a two-spot. One of these days he'll get the deadwood on you an' do you a meanness. You can bank on that, sure as h—'s hot. I know that bird. He may lay off you right now because Dave Ingram has given orders. That won't mean he's forgot, only that Dave is the big auger. Off-hand, I'll bet you're no kind of a hand with a six-shooter."

"You win the watch on that bet," O'Hara admitted.

"My advice is for you to cut dirt back to the land of marshals, calabosoes, an' plug hats."

"I think I'm going to like it here, Mr. Worrall."

"You're liable to rue yore decision if you stay. By the way, what's yore line, Mr. O'Hara?"

"I'm a lawyer."

"A lawyer. Great jumpin' horn' toads!" A thought stabbed the Westerner and brought his alert attention to another phase of the matter. "That's why Dave Ingram told you to come see him. Young fellow, if I knew where you were at!"

"I'm a total stranger, as I told you before. Until today I never met a soul in this neck of the woods. I've had no correspondence with anyone. My purpose in coming was to find a good town to hang out a shingle. Now my cards are on the table. I came to talk this over with you because I promised Miss Steelman I would. But since you doubt me—"

He rose and picked up his hat.

"Don't push on yore reins, Mr. O'Hara," the freighter told him. "Sit down. I'll tell you whatever you want to know."

Promptly, O'Hara tossed his hat on the table and sat down. "I want to know the inside politics of this town: who is fighting who and why, the reason Shep Sanderson wanted to kill Judge Warner, and the ground for Miss Steelman's advice that I had better not stay here to practice my profession. That will do to begin with."

The crowd's feet around Worrall's eyes crinkled to mirth. "You're sure enough a lawyer. Boy, if I answer those questions thorough you won't need to ask any more."

"I've got all night before me," the lawyer said.

Worrall made himself comfortable by resting his weight on the lower end of his spine and his shoulders. He talked.

"If you want it in one word, short an' sweet, that word is 'cows,'" Worrall said. "Cows are the cause of all the trouble in this man's town. Goes clear back to the war. Down in Texas them days cattle ran wild, unbranded. All the men folks in the Confederate army. Well, when they come home, licked an' ragged, cows sure dotted the landscape. In a way of speakin'

Worrall detected a faint flavor of irony in this remark. He dropped his feet from the table and rested an arm upon it, leaning forward toward his guest.

"See here, young fellow, I'll offer you advice free gratis, seeing as Miss Steelman sent you to me an' seeing as I kinda cotton to you anyhow. Keep yore mouth padlocked. Folks fight here at the drop of the hat. Maybe you got sand in yore craw. I ain't sayin' no. Worse for you if you have, for you wouldn't last a split second when some low-down bird smokes up. Where was I at? After Shat Brown got killed Ingram an' his store partner Tom Harvey began to bring in Texas warriors. So did Steelman an' McCarthy. I'm not tellin' any secret when I say that right soon now some one is gonna drop a match in a keg of powder an' our lit' private war will begin to pop."

"You mean—"

"I mean that if Shep Sanderson hadn't made a mistake in his man today an' had shot straighter, if he had killed Judge Warner, the fat would already have been in the fire."

"How does Judge Warner come into it?"

"Another long story in that, but the upshot of it is that tomorrow he's expected to make Wes Steelman administrator of the estate of Jerry Hughes. Jerry was a friend of Ingram's an' his place is a sort of strategic point between the Diamond Tail an' the upper Hashknife ranch. Both Wes an' Dave want mighty bad to control it." Worrall added, to make the situation clearer: "Dave stepped in an' took charge of the place when Jerry died. He'd hate to give it up."

"So as a simple way out he decided to kill Judge Warner, an innocent party."

"Judge Warner is known to be friendly to the Steelman side, an' we don't know that Dave knew a thing about what Shep was aimin' to do. Myself, I don't hardly think he did. If you want to stay in Concho an' be Dave Ingram's man or Wes Steelman's why hop to it an' hang up yore shingle. I wouldn't wish to insure yore life, but that's neither here nor there, as the fellow said when his two wives met an' he lit out for the chaparral."

O'Hara rose. "If I hang out my shingle I'll be by own man."

The long man grinned. "You'll have a heap of time on yore hands to learn yore Blackstone thorough," he answered.

"And you, Mr. Worrall? Do you expect to sit on the fence and keep out of this fight?"

"I wish I knew," Worrall answered impulsively. "I'd like to, but here's where I'm at. Ingram an' Harvey have got their own freight outfit. I haul for Steelman's store an' for private parties. Looks to me like I'm gonna be drug in whether I want to, or not, but you'll sure hear me yellin' for a while that I'm an innocent bystander."

Imps of mischief kicked up their heels in O'Hara's brown eyes. His remark apparently had no connection with anything that had gone before. "Yes, Miss Steelman is a very attractive lady. As you say, if you're going to be dragged in anyhow—"

Worrall blushed beneath the tan "Who said anything about Miss Steelman?"

The young lawyer fled, but he flung a grin back at the "innocent bystander."

main one in the valley. Both Dave an' Wes are what you might call arbitrary an' bullheaded. There's no compromise in either one of 'em, an' each thinks he ought to be chief. Consequence is, trouble. It grew to a head after a fellow called Shat Brown was killed. Shat was one of the lit' hill ranchers up Jim Wilson creek an' he was lined up with Ingram. You've got to understand that while Ingram an' Steelman are major-domos, as you might say, of their factions, they can't ride herd on every ornery waddy that trails along with them."

"I think I see," O'Hara said drily. "They reap the benefit of murder without being responsible for it. A convenient arrangement."

"That's no word to use, not in this country," Worrall told him severely. "If you aim to live long in the land you'll have to get educated. When folks have trouble out here they may have a difficulty resultin' in a shooting. I've been present at some killings, but that word of yours ain't either discreet or polite. There are some skunks it applies to, but we most generally hang them to the end of a propped-up wagon pole or a cottonwood."

"I'll have to learn the technical differences in homicides," the lawyer said.

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(TO BE CONTINUED.)



"Hmp! He's p'ison mean. That's Reason Enough for Him."

they belonged to the fellow who threw the widest loop. Many a herd got its start in the next few months by real industrious brandin' of mavericks. Lots of cows, but no market for 'em. Last few years a market has been developing. Texas got crowded. The boys an' their herds began to emigrate. Some pushed into the San Marcos valley. The one with the biggest herd was old Wes Steelman. Right now, today, he don't begin to know how many cows are carryin' the Hashknife brand."

"I've heard of the Hashknife brand. Didn't they use to call Steelman the king of the San Marcos?"

"Do yet," Worrall nodded. "The Lord sure blessed his herds an' they multiplied, if that's the way you want to look at it. Some folks didn't see it jest thataway. Other folks came into the San Marcos, mostly in the upper end of it an' in the hills above the valley. They were small cattle men, what they call nesters. The small cattle men drew together under the leadership of Dave Ingram. Dave owned the Diamond Tail, a right numerous brand. If you listen to his enemies Dave usta be one of that kind of cow man that it would hurt his health to eat a critter with his own brand on it. You don't need to take that at par value. They say the same about every one who has got ahead. Dave can see a dollar far as anyone. He started a store at Concho an' a freight outfit. He got in with the government officials an' secured fat beef contracts to supply the reservations. Small-fry nesters came to him an' he staked them. Dave got to be about the king pin up here in the mountains. What he said went."

"Well, Wes Steelman wasn't any ways pleased at the way things were shapin'. He had to go farther for markets. Every range began to get crowded. Every which way he turned some nester had squatted, an' on top of that was Dave Ingram hornin' in on his markets. Time for him to get busy, he thought. So he started a store in Concho with Patrick McCarthy as his partner. Then he bought out a fellow on Dead Horse creek an' stocked a ranch of his own in the hills seventy miles above the

Odd Prescription That "Cured" African Native

There are modernists even among the witch-doctors of Africa, to judge by the story told by a missionary on furlough about the native who was treated with powdered gramophone record mixed with water from a locomotive—the engine water to make him move and the record dust to make him talk. In its own way the treatment is not illogical—and it embodies an obvious compliment to the white man's capacity for "big ju-ju."

It is water that makes the engine move and the record which makes the gramophone talk—the only flaw in the argument is that the patient was neither a phonograph nor a locomotive. However, he recovered the use of his limbs and tongue—so simple faith must have once more proved its superiority to that nasty, know-all spirit, by failing to perceive the fal-

lacy on which the treatment was based.

One would like to know that witch-doctor's recipe for deafness. Probably he gives his patients a strong infusion of the telephone directory.—Manchester (Eng.) Guardian.