

Cattle Kingdom

© Alan Le May

By ALAN LE MAY

WNU Service

CHAPTER XII—Continued
—14—

He was trying to guess who the second man could be. Vaguely he was thinking of the green eyes of Rufe Deane, watching Marian as she testified against the Bender faction at the Inspiration hearing. He knew that there was nothing behind the embittered man which would prevent his firing upon the girl—if a reason for such an act could be conceived. But still he could think of no explanation for the firing of that other distant gun.

Abruptly he turned and went back to the fire. Marian was sitting up trying to press the redness from her eyes; she seemed steady again. "Sorry," she said.

"I've got to go up on the canyon," he told her.

"I thought you said Magoon wouldn't stop there, now."

He told her, shortly, of the distant report of the gun.

"But who could it be?"

"I don't know. But—I've got to go up and see."

"I'm ready to start," Marian said. "Ready—?"

"I'm going to go where you go."

He considered a moment. She looked tired, and there was a long hour of rough travel between them and the hidden cabin. But he supposed she would not want to try to wander back through the dark alone nor could he, against her will, leave her to imagine horrors in the dark. The hard twist of his mouth turned a shade more grim.

"Very well," he said. "But you're going to be a little tired before the night's over, I'm afraid."

"I don't care anything about that."

To a tired rider a trail can unroll interminably ahead; much worse is a trail on foot, forever upward into increasing dark. To a walker accustomed to the saddle one mile seems ten. It could not have been more than three miles to the ancient shack at the head of the gulch, but they climbed continually and the twist of the dry stream lengthened the miles. He knew that often Marian was trying to conceal from him the laboring of her breath in the high air. It must have seemed to the girl that she plodded and stumbled all night long through that uphill sand, while Wheeler's long stride led on relentlessly. She could not know how much he slowed his pace for her.

The broad canyon narrowed and steepened until it was a twisting gorge between vast black walls. The going became steeper, and the sand shelves ended; the dead stream was an interminable staircase of ledges and tumbles of rock.

They had traveled an interminable time before Wheeler whispered to her, "We've got to be quieter now." And still they went on, climbing a long way.

He was moving slowly and very cautiously when at last he turned off and worked his way up a gravelly slide of stone; then forward through twisting juniper that clung to the steep land. He stopped, gripped her shoulder, thrust her downward to her knees.

"What—?"

He stopped her whisper with a quick hand over her mouth; but directly ahead, not a dozen paces away, she was answered by the sudden long snort of a pony. He was peering through the juniper; her eyes followed his, straining in the darkness, and without moving seemed to appear suddenly all at once. With a shock she saw that they were not fifteen steps away from a small ruined shanty set hard against an overhanging wall of stone.

The shack at the head of the gulch was windowless, and its door was open into blackness. Beside it, tied some yards apart, were the horse which had snorted, and a second animal that might have been either a horse or a mule.

Wheeler backed away, drawing her after him, foot by foot. Fifty yards away in the shelter of the rocks he made her sit down. No sound came from above except the uneasy shifting of the ponies' feet; and Wheeler permitted himself a deep breath of relief. She could hardly hear his whisper in the dark: "I didn't remember it was so close."

"Is he there?"

"Someone's there, or the horses would be gone. Wait here."

Slowly Wheeler made his way upward again over the rocks, through the juniper scrub. Walking upright, but very quietly, he circled and approached along the rock wall, until his hands found the side of the cabin itself. He pressed an ear against the rough timber, and listened for long minutes. But he could hear nothing, not even the drawing of a breath.

He took out his knife and cut a plume of brush. Standing close against the corner of the cabin he struck a match and set the brush aflame. He swung an arm around the corner of the cabin and threw the lighted brush through the open

Crouching low, he moved ten paces from the cabin and circled slowly, watching the lighted doorway.

He could see the blazing brush on the cabin's floor of hard-packed earth, and no hand moved to put it out. Behind the flame the cabin's interior was barren; he made out an ancient brush jacket hung against the wall, the three-legged ruin of a crude table, the black shadow of a bunk. Someone was here—should be here; but if the fugitive had been in the cabin he would have thrown a blanket over that torch by now. Wheeler wondered if the man was behind him, or drawing a bead on him from above.

As he circled a high-heeled boot came into view upon the cabin floor. That boot was unnatural; it was lying on its side, yet not on its side—tilted up a little upon its toe. When he saw that, something turned over inside Wheeler, for he knew what was in the cabin. He straightened up and walked to the door, stepped inside quickly and flattened himself against a wall.

The flickering flame of the brush was lower now, but by what was left of its light he was looking, for the first time in his life, at the face of Lon Magoon. Magoon had fallen forward; there was a rifle under him, and it was at the cock. But

"Well—these killings being done with a shotgun is kind of unusual; it makes you think the same killer attended to all three. And it's easy to see, too, how Magoon might have been a kind of a distant witness. Suppose Magoon was riding along with Flagg, who didn't know him very well. Pretty soon Magoon sees some local cowman coming toward them. Magoon doesn't want to fall in with any local cowman, on account of the business he's in. He splits off and kind of hovers in the distance. In a case like that, him not getting out of sight soon enough would just be suicide for him. Whoever killed Flagg would figure he had to kill Magoon before he talked."

"Did you see Val Douglas at Pahrnanagat?"

"No, he wasn't there when I was. But he's been back here, tonight, since I been here. He said Pahrnanagat was where he was. Well, I don't know; I didn't see him there. And according to him he couldn't get any trace of Bob Flagg."

"Is he here now?"

"He pulled right out again. Nobody's here, but me and that old woman that cooks. She claims the sheriff come in and took Horse Dunn to Inspiration, about an hour before I got here. Tulare Callahan come in with Horse; they was pretty much worried over where you was, Marian. Tulare saddled up again and rode out to see if he could find out where you had went. Later Steve Hurley come in, and he's gone looking for you too. So naturally Val Douglas, he figured he'd have to make as good a showing as anybody did, and he lightailed. So now the whole 94 is out hunting for you—what of 'em isn't in jail."

"Men make me so mad!" Marian declared. "I have a good notion to go riding out looking for them, now, just to make the picture of idocy complete!"

Coffee looked as if he wouldn't put it past her. "Oh, now, I wouldn't go and do that, child."

"Coffee," Billy said, "one other kind of funny thing happened, while we were out. That hombre that shot at Marian the other night—he took another try."

"Damn!" said Coffee. "He come close?"

"Killed her horse. I got nervous and let my own pony get loose, and he stampeded. Later we had to come back on a mule Magoon had tied up, and a horse he stole from the 94."

Old Man Coffee turned slowly and for a few moments studied Marian's face. "Uh huh," he said at last.

There was a silence. "What do you think of it?" Marian said.

"I think," said Coffee, "you better turn in."

Marian rose slowly. "I suppose you're right—I've made enough trouble for one day, haven't I?"

When she was gone Billy Wheeler took her place on the step beside Old Man Coffee. "Well, we're slowly learning a thing or two," he said. "God knows where this thing leads to; but it ought to lead some place pretty soon."

Old Man Coffee knocked out his pipe, refilled it again, and struck a new light. In the flare of the match his bony old face looked more grim and more sardonic than ever. "It ain't going to lead me no place. It's led me far enough. I'm through."

Wheeler did not argue this. Twice before Coffee had made such hollow threats; he did not believe the old lion hunter would actually withdraw now.

"One thing I didn't tell you about Bob Flagg," Coffee said. "I suppose you got a right to what I know. Well—here's a little item that's a peach! Flagg—he bummed his way into Pahrnanagat in an empty cow car."

Wheeler was astounded. "You sure must be wrong," he declared. "Why, that sounds crazy! He and Dunn had just sold out the Arizona ranch, at Dunn's order. Dunn's share was the biggest, and of course they couldn't get but part cash but there was fifty thousand ready money mixed into the deal. Flagg didn't have any reason for coming in any such way as that!"

"He done it, though. It was right hard for me to find anybody that knew he'd been there at all. Sure seems like Flagg was taking every way he could think of to get to the 94 without being noticed." I thought it was kind of peculiar that Flagg should come by way of Pahrnanagat, which is kind of like sliding in the back door. Still, that wouldn't mean anything by itself; some of us old guys get used to thinking in terms of saddle work. But this other thing—it's queer."

"Well, you must have mistaken your man!"

"No, I didn't."

Wheeler turned thoughtful, they were silent for some minutes. A dark and ugly reason for Flagg's peculiar behavior was taking shape.

"Do you suppose Lon Magoon could have been a spy, sent to Pahrnanagat to watch for Bob Flagg?"

"A spy for who?"

"A spy for the men that set out to kill Flagg. We know who the enemies of the 94 are. Link Bender—Pinto Halliday—Rufe Dean—even Sam Caldwell—there isn't a one of them that would have hesitated to shoot a man down, if it meant wiping out the 94. We know that those people, or some of them, got access to Horse Dunn's mail at Inspiration. We can figure they knew that the Arizona outfit was sold, and that Flagg was on the way here with the money—money that the 94 had to have to pull through."

"I had that figured out long ago," Coffee said. "I figured Cayuse Cayetano was the cat's paw for Link Bender. Even after Cayetano was killed, I thought maybe they just killed him so he wouldn't turn state's evidence."

"But you don't think that now?"

"Now," said Coffee, "I don't think."

"Throw out the death of Cayuse," Wheeler suggested. "Say that he was killed simply because he was too hot on the trail. Throw out the death of Magoon—say that he was feared as a distant witness. It turns back to the enemies of the 94."

"Which includes everybody," Coffee snorted.

"Coffee, have you found out something you're holding back?" Wheeler asked.

Coffee shook his head. "You know everything I know so far as I can think."

"Then you have some way of reading the facts—some way different from what I've got."

"Maybe. I've quit bothering my head about it."

"Hell! You'll never make me think that you're going to pull out of this case and leave it unsolved."

"There's just one thing about this case," Coffee admitted, "that I sure hate to leave mixed up. How come old Rock and me to get mixed up about the trail of the killer horse? I s'pose all the rest of my life—"

Old Man Coffee's voice was bitter—"I'll never get away from wondering how come I lost that trail."

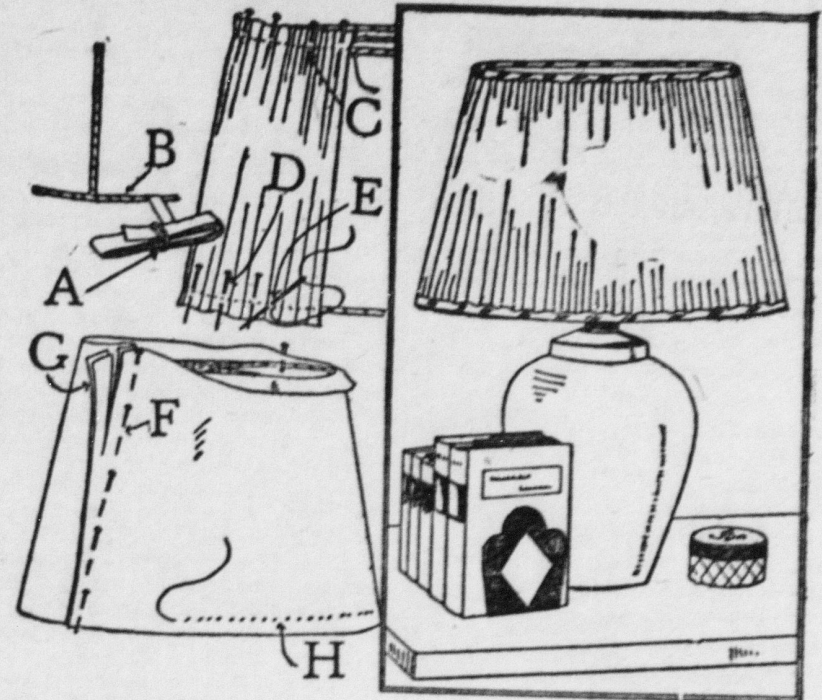
"Of course, if I remember rightly," Wheeler reminded him, "you figured out from the way the shot went into the saddle that the man on the so-called killer horse was not the killer."

"That ain't important. The man on the killer horse took and hid the body, anyway. Two men or one—comes to the same thing. Catch one and you catch both."

"(TO BE CONTINUED)"

HOW TO SEW

by Ruth Wyeth Spears

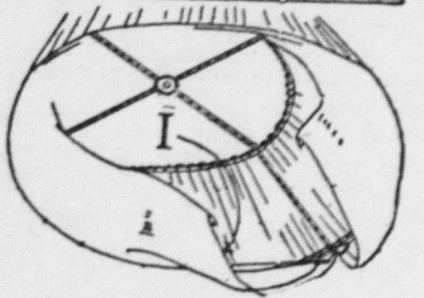


Silk Shades Give a Soft Glow

THERE is subtlety in the light that glows through a silk shade, and many decorators are using them for the room that needs the softness of plaited folds and the mellowness obtained by placing two tones of fabric one over the other.

Two tones of China silk, one to be used for a plain lining and the other for a gathered outside covering will make an attractive shade. Before you buy the material it is best to experiment with samples one over the other trying them both in daylight and over an artificial light. You will also need a roll of silk binding tape matching the top color of the shade. This tape is to wrap the wire frame. And fancy braid either in gold, silver or a harmonizing tone of silk is used to bind the top and bottom of the shade. Use cotton thread to match the outside tone of the silk.

Slip the binding tape off the roll and wrap a rubber band around it as shown here at A. Working from the inside end of the tape wrap the frame as shown at B. The outside layer of silk is put on next. This is gathered both top and bottom and pinned to the wire covering as at C and D so that it is stretched quite tight. Joinings



in the outside covering need not be sewed but may be hidden under the folds. This material is sewed in place as at E.

Next, cut a straight strip for the lining and fit it around the outside of the frame as shown here at F. Trim the joining allowing a seam as shown at G. Sew to the frame at the bottom as at H. Trim quite close at the bottom. Turn lining to inside as at I. Slip stitch the joining. Turn in raw edges at top and whip around top of frame. Pin the binding around and then sew it with stitches buried in the mesh of the braid.

Every Homemaker should have a copy of Mrs. Spears' new book, SEWING. Forty-eight pages of step-by-step directions for making slipcovers and dressing tables; restoring and upholstering chairs, couches; making curtains for every type of room and purpose. Making lampshades, rugs, ottomans and other useful articles for the home. Readers wishing a copy should send name and address, enclosing 25 cents, to Mrs. Spears, 210 South Desplaines St., Chicago, Illinois.

"Quotations"

We can do anything we want to do if we stick to it long enough.—Helen Keller.

Then let us laugh. It is the cheapest luxury man enjoys.—William Matthews.

Culture is the first fruit of education.—Cardinal Hayes.

This era should be the era of paradise on earth. Mankind has never had the possibilities of happiness that it has now.—Harry Elmer Barnes.

Beauty is the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.—Katharine Cornell.

The expression of beauty is the primary purpose of art.—George Grey Barnard.

CARDUI

In this modern time something wonderfully worth while can be done for practically every woman who suffers from functional pains of menstruation. Certain cases can be relieved by taking Cardui. Others may need a physician's treatment. Cardui has two widely demonstrated uses: (1) To ease the immediate pain and nervousness of the monthly period; and (2) to aid in building up the whole system by helping women to get more strength from their food.

WISSE

The wise and pleasant way to relieve a cough due to a cold is a Smith Brothers Cough Drop. (Two kinds: Black or Menthol-5¢.)

Smith Bros. Cough Drops are the only drops containing VITAMIN A

This is the vitamin that raises the resistance of the mucous membranes of the nose and throat to cold and cough infections.

Fountain Pens Affected by Altitude, According to an Official of Airline

Old Man Altitude still holds a decided edge over the fountain pen manufacturers, according to an official of an airline corporation.

The challenge of high altitudes has been accepted by at least two of the largest pen designers in the world, and to date the decision has always gone to the rarefied air. Despite the best efforts of pen manufacturers over a period of several years, fountain pens still insist on discharging ink on people who are careless in opening them above 5,000 feet.

In the early days of air transportation, when the problem was still new to the fountain pen industry, a fountain pen could be depended upon to act as a real fountain and provide the writer with a spurt. Since those days most manufacturers have succeeded in improving their product so the actual spurt is eliminated but no one has been entirely successful in eliminating profuse leakage.

The reason for this is that the fountain pen, filled at normal altitudes on the ground, has pressure within a sac equal to the pressure

outside the case. As the pen is carried aloft the outside air pressure decreases while that within the pen remains the same. The result is constant pressure within the pen tending to force the ink out—in spurts whenever the passage is imperfect.

Aggravating the situation is the fact that present-day transport planes operate at altitudes almost invariably above 8,000 feet whereas the old-time transports seldom exceeded 5,000 feet except in unusual weather or wind conditions.

Many people have thrown away perfectly good pens under these circumstances, convinced they had in some way been ruined, but it's only altitude.

When There Were No Dukes
Between the years of 1572 and 1623 there were no dukes in our peerage, says London Answers Magazine. In the former year, Queen Elizabeth executed the remaining two, while James I revived the title in the latter year for the benefit of his favorite, George Villiers, who became Duke of Buckingham.

LIFE'S LIKE THAT By Fred Neher



"Would you say dear Mrs. Dolza or just dear ma'am?"