CHAPTER XII—Continued

—15—

"You still think the killer's horse was here in the 94 layout after the killing, like old Rock seemed to think?"

Old Man Coffee's answer was a grunt; it might have meant one thing or the other. "You're stalled, son. You got no lead."

"Sure we've got a lead."

"And where is that?"

"Just a minute ago we were talking about the peculiar way Bob Flagg kind of eased into the Red Rock, coming in through the back way, bumming it in a cattle crate. From what we know Bob Flagg had fore-knowledge that somebody was going to make a try for him. Now, how did Bob Flagg come by that fore-knowledge?"

Old Man Coffee did not reply. Out by the corrals a hound moaned in its chest; the dog called old Rock awoke by Coffee's feet, raised its head to listen, then blew out a long breath and went back to sleep again.

"Coffee—I'm thinking now that when we find out how Bob Flagg come by that fore-knowledge, we'll have caught our man."

With an impatient movement Old Man Coffee knocked out his pipe again. "You want to know what I think? I think, 'Oh, hell!' You better go on to bed."

Obviously Old Man Coffee was tired of arguing. Wheeler had been trying to lead the old man out, and it had got him nowhere. He rose slowly and stretched. "Guess you're right. Seems like you might need some sleep, too."

"Slept all the way from Pahranagat, on the top of my mule. I'll get plenty rest sitting right here with my pipe." He added irascibly, "Or I will if the everlasting talky-talk dries up."

"Looks like it might slack off some," Wheeler grinned. He went in, fumbled his way through the dark house to his room, flung his gun belt on the floor, and lighted his lamp.

CHAPTER XIII

It was very late when Wheeler left Old Man Coffee. Without checking the hour, he knew that morning could not be far off; and he had supposed that Marian was asleep. She had ridden a long way, not to count that long climb of theirs through the dark. In her own way she outlasted the leathery strength of men and horses — and came through clear-eyed and light-footed, apparently untouched. But she seemed so fragilely made that he always underestimated the young strength of her vitality.

So, he was thinking of her as asleep, as he now sat down on the edge of his bunk and rolled a cigarette. His long-boned frame rested relaxed, but he did not look tired. All his life had been spent in the saddle, simply for the reason that the dry country has few roads—few places for roads to go—and the horse is the only means of cross country transportation across mountain ranges and sand dunes and the vast gulch-cut plains. Ten thousand miles in the saddle had hardened him until he was made of braided leather, and no less enduring than the runty, unkillable range ponies. A few more miles on the horse trails and a few nights short of sleep could not tire him now. His leanly-muscled face was as awake as ever, and his gray eyes, made to look lighter than they were by his wind-burned and weather-leathered skin, were as clear as they had been when he arrived at the 94. He let his cigarette trail from a corner of his mouth, rested his chin on one hand; and, squinting through the thin upward-moving line of smoke, considered his next moves.

He must travel—that was certain. What could be done here was done—the finding of Bob Flagg and Lon Magoon. He must trace Bob Flagg back to his sources, back through Flagstaff, perhaps to the sold-out Arizona ranch itself, seeking the truth, for he was certain that Flagg had shown more than a premonition of his death.

And he must find time to run down the 94 debts, seeking ways to avert its bankruptcy, at least for a time. He was wondering how far he dared go against Dunn's order that no penny of Wheeler money should ever be chanced in the 94. Dunn would be game to split the works wide open, if he didn't like the way salvation had been obtained. It was up to Wheeler to find ways to get around that, taking care that the girl would never guess any obligation to him. That last was what Dunn feared most.

But though his mind was laying out routes and plans far outside of the Red Rock country, he was somehow not surprised as Marian now came and joined him here. To think about any phase of this killing case, or of the imminent ruin of Horse Dunn's cow kingdom, was to think about her. After all, the 94 was her brand, and her future was interlaced with its future. So now as he looked up at the sound of her light quick step it seemed a natural, somehow expected thing to see her standing there in his door.

"This is a lonely night," she said. "Nothing anywhere in this night intends to sleep."

"I guess that's so. But it's near morning now."

Without high heels and with her hair light and loose about her shoulders she should have looked smaller, but she did not. He thought he had never seen her so slimly tall, so gravely steady.

Perhaps that was partly the effect of what she wore. Because he had never seen her dressed as she was now, he had a sudden sense of how little he knew her, after all; just as he did not know what she wore when she slept, how could he know what went on in her mind when she was alone—or ever?

She was wearing pajamas, but their black silk was cut like a Russian smock, with a high collar of soft black silk about her throat, and close cuffs at her wrists, so that standing against the dark she was all a part of the dark, except for the bright ivory of her face and hands and the loose shimmer of her hair.

About this costume, which was strange to him, there was a barbaric dignity, as if it were not something to sleep in at all, but the ceremonial dress of some forgotten priestess. It was strange to see this vision here, standing beside a spare saddle that had been flung on the floor under a tangle of bridles on a wooden peg. Everything around her was cow country, but she—she was something else, something lovely from beyond the hills—a daughter of two worlds.

She came and sat beside him on the bunk. "Did you find out anything more from Old Man Coffee? I thought you'd get more out of him if I left you alone."

"Not very much. Old Man Coffee's been a disappointment to me in a way. Sometimes I think he doesn't know anything about it."

"I wonder."

"Marian, what are you going to do?"

"What is there for me to do? One of two things—stay here or go to Inspiration to be near Horse. Of course, he ought to be out of there in a few days."

"I wouldn't count on that, Marian. They can't make a case against him—not even the beginnings of a case. They know that. But what they want to do—and can do—is to tie up the 94 finances by making the case look as ugly as possible. They'll point out that Dunn was the main one who would be expecting Flagg there; and probably make Flagg's share of the money the motive. Of course that's ridiculous. But for their purpose, all they need to do is to raise the question and then cause a delay in clearing it up."

Her eyes were on distance beyond the walls — smoky eyes, drowsy, even misty on the surface; but behind them was that continuing deep glow of slumbering fire, the smouldering light of a great reserve vitality.

"I'd go east now, if I were you," he told her. "We'll fight this thing out, and save out of it what we can—you can count on that. But—this isn't a good place for you any more. There won't be anyone here, except a couple of cow hands to keep an eye on things. And it would drive Horse crazy to have you in that hornets' nest in Inspiration."

"But you—?"

"I'll be gone. I have to backtrack Bob Flagg a little further. I'll have to go to Flagstaff; then maybe down-country. God knows how long I'll be gone. It looks like a dim, crooked trail."

She considered this. "When are you leaving?"

"Now—before daylight. I'll send a note to Horse. I don't even dare see him in Inspiration, for fear they'll hold me there on some trumped-up charge."

They were silent again. Through the window came to them a cool, fragrantly clean breeze from the uplands, with a fall tang in it that promised frosts before long. He suddenly thought she might be cold. There was a clean Navajo blanket on his bed, and he put this about her shoulders. She smiled faintly, but did not look at him or move.

She said, "It will be queer and lonely here, with you gone."

"But you'll be leaving too."

She shook her head, her eyes far away. "I'm through with hovering on the outskirts of my own life."

For a moment he wondered what provision he could make for her safety here. He no longer doubted that what she determined to do she would do, and could not be dissuaded from. He thought of consigning her safety to Old Man Coffee, or to the cowboys now searching the hills for her; but he was deeply concerned.

"Sometimes I think," Marian said, "that the answer to everything is to be found right here—here at the 94—and no place else."

He nodded moodily. "A man ought to be able to figure it out, if he was smart."

"There isn't anything more you could follow up, here? When time is so important—"

"There's one lone, slim possibility," he said.

"In heaven's name, what is it?"

"There's one thing in this case that I can't swallow. It stands out above everything else—one unbelievable thing that couldn't possibly happen. I'm thinking of those two shots that have been thrown at—you."

She was silent, and after a moment or two he went on. "Somehow those shots at you are mixed up with these other shootings; it would be too big a coincidence if the shots at you and the killing of the men were separate, yet happening at the same time."

"I can see that, all right."

"But the shots at you eliminate nearly every suspect we have. Take Val Douglas. He hasn't proved very dependable, Marian. He's been caught in lies as to where he was. Even just now, when he was sent to Pahranagat to check up Bob Flagg, it seems from what Coffee says that he didn't even go near there. Sometimes I've suspected Val. Even if he didn't kill Flagg to rob him, still he might have killed him by mistake, thinking it was somebody else. But one thing is certainly plain—Val Douglas would never fire on you."

"No," Marian said, "Val could never do that."

"Or take Link Bender—a hard, bitter, violent man. Once he was boss of all this range, until Horse Dunn took hold. Link Bender might go to any length to put down the 94. But he controls this kid sheriff, and through the sheriff he's bearing down on the 94 through this killing; and he's getting away with it. His whole way of attack is orderly and thought out. He wouldn't try any such crazy thing as shooting a girl."

"It's pretty hard to see in what way I could stand between Link Bender and his plans."

"The same thing applies to Pinto Halliday; he's a shifty crook, but he isn't crazy. Sam Caldwell is another that it doesn't fit in with."

"The thing just won't fit together, will it?"

"Marian, it's in my mind that I know who killed Bob Flagg."

"Billy! If you know that—"

"There's one man in that Inspiration crowd that is too savage bitter to wait for Link Bender's plan to pan out. That man is Rufe Deane. Rufe Deane blames Horse for the death of his son, years ago."

"Yes," Marian said, "I've thought of him."

"Rufe Deane tried to raise a mob in Inspiration to see that the 94 people never got away from there. If he had started in time, there'd have been a lynching before midnight. He threw down his deputy's badge because he thought the sheriff was going too easy with Horse. And when you testified for me at the hearing—Rufe Deane was looking at you like a wolf waiting. Marian, I believe Rufe Deane is one man that's crazy enough and bitter enough to try to kill you—to get back at Horse for the death of young Deane."

"Billy, if you're right—if you can prove that—"

"That's just the trouble. Suppose I'm right—Rufe Deane did it. We're no better off than we were in the beginning. You see, Marian, there's two parts to these killing cases. One thing is to find out who did it and why. The other thing is to prove it and get a conviction. I haven't one single thing to show against Rufe Deane; and until I can show evidence, it won't matter how sure I may be in my mind."

When he looked at her it was past his power to imagine how Rufe Deane or anyone else could ever look down the sights of a gun at Marian Dunn; she was so gently and sweetly made, so precious in his eyes. He didn't believe in Horse Dunn's creed of gun justice, for he thought that the use of violence outside the law was a costly thing, defeating its own purposes in the end. But he knew that if ever he faced Rufe Deane with anything like a decent proof in his hands, he would destroy the killer as he would destroy a sidewinder or a vinegaroon.

"I'll never be able to believe in God's world that anyone would set out to hurt you," he said. "Yet—somebody has tried. What naturally comes to mind is that somebody, some enemy of Horse Dunn, has gone out of his head. But—hard as it is to believe, there is one other possibility we have to take account of—that without knowing it you've heard something, or seen something, which would give away the Short Creek killer—if you remembered it, and recognized it for what it was."

She said, "I've thought of that."

"Marian, if you can remember seeing anything—a rider in the distance—some horse coming home at a strange time—one of the guns missing from its rack here in the house—even an empty shell that you thought nothing of—that one thing might give us the answer!"

"I've racked my brain over and over; but I can't think of anything, Billy."

"Not even a chance word, overheard somewhere—"

She shook her head. "Billy, I just can't remember anything that would answer the purpose at all." She pressed her palms against her eyes for a moment; then lifted her head sharply, shaking out her loose hair. "It's no use. This isn't the first time I've tried to remember; I've been trying hard for two days."

"I thought it would most likely be hopeless," he admitted. "I'll have to go to Flagstaff."

"I know. I've seen that coming. I'm ready to stay here alone; without you or my uncle, I mean."

"Marian, if I could get you to pull out of here, until this is over—"

"This is my outfit, Billy. It shouldn't be my outfit; it should be my mother's, or Horse Dunn's. But nothing can make Horse see that. And I see now that if you're going to run cattle on a big scale out in this country, you sometimes have to be willing to fight for your range."

He stared at her, marveling. The girl who was talking to him now was not the girl he had known two years ago; she was not even the girl he had known at the beginning of the week. It was as if some false outer cloaking of ideas and habits, put upon her by her mother's seaboard world, had suddenly fallen away, leaving her revealed as what she was—a daughter of the dry land. Under the pressure of the dark days and unquiet nights since the killing of Bob Flagg she had come nearer to him, becoming one of his own people.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Most of the World's Mercury Is From Almaden, Little Town in Central Spain

Since the Fifteenth century a little town in central Spain, Almaden, in Arabic simply "The Mine," has supplied most of the world with mercury, the metal which is liquid at ordinary temperatures and which dissolves other metals. It is needed in obtaining gold and silver from their ores, in scientific and manufacturing processes and in pharmacy.

California and Oregon, Texas and Nevada are intermittent producers of mercury. New Almaden, Calif., mines half of what is produced in the United States, these mines having been established about seventy-five years. Southern Austria and Italy also have some mercury ores but the Spanish rock is far richer, containing about 13 per cent compared with barely 1 per cent, says the Milwaukee Journal.

The chief ore of mercury is mercuric sulfide, commonly called cinnabar and originally the source of the pigment called the vermilion. This the women of ancient Rome used for rouge. The Roman town, Sisapo, was in the neighborhood of Almaden.

E. E. Kisch, a writer for Gegen-Angriff, the Paris weekly of the German exiles, visited Almaden some time ago and reported that mercury necrosis, anemia and other occupational diseases had made alarming inroads on the workers, who, even in youth, were mostly pale, lean, toothless and lacking in energy. At one time it was the custom to give exemption from military service to those who would serve two years as miners in Almaden.

"To Spain, Almaden is far more than a gold mine," he wrote, "for it has always been the world's source of mercury. Abderrahman III, the caliph of Cordoba, had the famous moonlight fountain made for his favorite wife, the moonlight being mercury. The knights of the Middle ages got rid of vermin with the aid of mercury. The 'gold makers' of the Middle ages used mercury for their tricks. Physicians in those days prescribed mercury for any digestive trouble.

For centuries thermometers and barometers have been made with the aid of mercury. Rabbit skins are prepared with mercury before they are turned into felt hats. Many dyes can be made only with mercury.

"The Christian kings of the houses of Aragon, Castile, Hapsburg and Bourbon, who had fewer riches, warriors and slaves than their Phoenician, Greek, Roman, West Gothic and Arab predecessors, could pay their creditors only with mercury."

Beginning of Purse Races

It has been customary to credit the state of Virginia with originating horse racing for prizes in this country, because it was established that there were turf contests in that state as early as April 10, 1674. But horses were raced and trophies awarded in New York beginning in 1665. It is merely presumed that a race was run in March, 1665, on the track which Col. Richard Nicolls called the New Market course, in Hempstead, Long Island. Colonel Nicolls, who arrived in America in 1664, as the first English governor of New York, called the meeting, but it is established that there was a race on March 25, 1668, because there is in Yale university's collection of old American silver a porringer given to the winner of the contest in 1668.

In Step With Santa Claus

KEEPING up with the Joneses is easy—it's keeping up with Santa Claus that has Sew-Your-Own in stitches currently. We got a peek at his wares, though, and frankly we copied some of his artistry. (You can see for yourself there's a "Christmasy look" about today's trio of fashions.) And happily you can do more than look and wish—you can make them realities the easy way: just sew, sew, Sew-Your-Own!

Cute and Cozy.

Look your prettiest in leisure or on the job in the lusciously feminine house jacket (young sister to the house coat)above, left. Santa Claus has ordered thousands of these for feminine friends in his good graces and you know S. C. usually shows impeccable taste in gifts. In handsome silk crepe or very lightweight corduroy it is as cosy as a love seat before an open fire. Make it either in the short length (see inset) or regular dress length.

Feminine Flattery.

Polish yourself off in a brilliantly styled new frock for the holidays just ahead. Sew-Your-Own's newest success (above center) will be your success once you wear it in the public eye. It is most gifted in its distinctive design, below-waist slimness, and all-of-a-piece simplicity. Make your version the very essence of chic in sheer wool or satin, in your most flattering color.

A Blouse or Two.

Tops in the fashion picture just now is that friendly little item—the blouse. A completely engaging one is shown here for women who sew. Wear it tucked in or peplum style. And here's a practical idea: you have a choice in sleeve lengths. For variety's sake, why not make the long sleeved model in silk crepe for dress; the short sleeved one in jersey for sports and all occasion wear?

The Patterns.

Pattern 1412 is designed for sizes 32 to 42. Size 34 requires 4½ yards of 39-inch material and ½ yard for contrast. Short length requires 4⅛ yards.

Pattern 1394 is designed for sizes 14 to 20 (32 to 42 bust). Size 16 requires 2⅞ yards of 54-inch fabric.

Pattern 1417 is designed for sizes 34 to 44. Size 36 requires 2⅛ yards of 39-inch material; with short sleeves, 1⅞ yards.

Send your order to The Sewing Circle Pattern Dept., 247 W. Forty-third street, New York, N. Y. Price of patterns, 15 cents (in coins) each.

New Pattern Book.

Send 15 cents for the Barbara Bell Fall and Winter Pattern Book. Make yourself attractive, practical and becoming clothes, selecting designs from the Barbara Bell well-planned, easy-to-make patterns.

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HOUSEHOLD QUESTIONS

Ripening Bananas.—Green bananas can be ripened by placing them in a paper bag and keeping them in a dark closet for a day or two.

• • •

Improving Vegetables.—Sugar, added in the proportion of a fourth of a teaspoon to two cups of vegetables, will improve the flavor of cooked corn, beets, peas and lima beans.

• • •

Cleaning Brassware.—Brass ornaments should be put into hot soapy water to which soda has been added and scrubbed with a soft brush to remove any polish that may have stuck in previous cleanings. Finish off by rinsing with clean hot water and dry with a soft cloth.

• • •

That Breakfast Omelet.—That omelet will not fall if a pinch of powdered sugar and a pinch of cornstarch are added to the omelet mixture.

• • •

Concerning Mirrors. — Never hang a mirror where it faces a glare of light. The back of the mirror should be protected so that no light or water could possibly enter.

• • •

Manipulating Velvet.—The usual method of pressing seams, especially in velvet, is to get a second person to hold one end of the material while you hold the other. Flatten out the two sides of the seam, then pass the iron along on the wrong side.

Increased by Advertising

In 1869 the per unit of population value of manufactured products in America amounted to $89.60. For the year 1929 the per unit of population value of manufactured products had increased to a total of $579.70. Advertising created the demand that called for the employment of three to four times the number of workers and reduced the cost of products to consumers.

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