

MRS. HOOKER'S LIFE DRAMA ECLIPSES ROLE OF HEROINE NAMED AFTER HER IN "ARIZONA"

Woman Who Didn't Know What Fear Was Puts True Story of West Into Book

BROKE WHIP ON FACE OF STEER AND SWORE

Daughter of General Famous in Indian Wars Married Son of Cattle King

"I WONDER, ma'am, if you would be so kind as to let me sleep in your bunkhouse for the night?"

It was sunset in Arizona. The peaks that were stained with the violet and orange of countless other settings stood out in gauntness against the sky. The man was gaunt, too, as he stood on the path in front of the lichen-bleared of the little ranch house. The woman—she was only a slip of a girl—looked back at him. Then her eyes wandered slowly to his hand. There were two fingers missing.

Through the fading light of the ranch dusk was standing. The mountains stood out in their tremendous loneliness. For all of that, since there might have been no towns, no cities in the world, as it was, the nearest neighbor was thirty-five miles away.

Bridie Hooker raised her eyes slowly from the man's maimed hand to his waiting eyes. With him she traded a long, even glance.

Then she answered: "Why, yes, of course, you may stay. Come right in now for supper."

The other day—last Saturday to be exact—Mrs. Forrestine C. Hooker sat in the living room of the home of her cousin, Mrs. E. E. Meyer, in Chestnut Hill, and reached back through the years for this little piece of true story.

"The man," she continued, "was 'Three-Fingered Jack,' a notorious bandit of the West. I knew it as soon as I spied his hand and I was all alone—with my husband and the babies up at the big ranch house. But I let him stay. Why not? He was a very proper sort of guest. He helped get supper and then washed the dishes and insisted on poking around to put them in their proper places. He slept in the bunkhouse that night, as he suggested, and the next morning when I came into the kitchen he had the bacon all cut, biscuits in the oven, and his only apology was that he couldn't cook the eggs because he didn't know how I liked them."

Three months later, Mrs. Hooker added, her gentleman bandit was shot and killed in his spectacular attempt to hold up the Southern Pacific.

"Weren't you afraid to have—to have a man like that around?" was the question that filled in the pause following this rather amazing declaration.

The smart-looking woman in the blue point twill dress looked back reflectively. She shook her head.

"Do you know," she said impulsively, "I never knew what fear was all through the years until I came back to civilization? I have gone out on all-night round-ups with the cowboys—I have ridden the unbroken trails with only an old-colored soldier for my guide. I've broken a whip over the face of a steer. I cried that time because I was mad! A still beautiful pair of brown eyes laughed at the memory."

Known as Heroine in Play "Arizona"

"But I was never afraid—until I came back to the heat of civilization."

It is a little bit difficult to begin to identify Mrs. Forrestine Hooker, so many are her claims to fame. She is perhaps best known as the young girl of the West whom Augustus Thomas, the playwright, adopted for his heroine, Bonita Canby, in his play "Arizona." As such her name has at some time or other skipped nimbly over the tongues of half the population of the United States. But if Mrs. Thomas crammed two tense hours of drama around her Bonita Canby heroine daughter of a ranch, this seems almost tame in comparison with the life drama of the real Bonita.

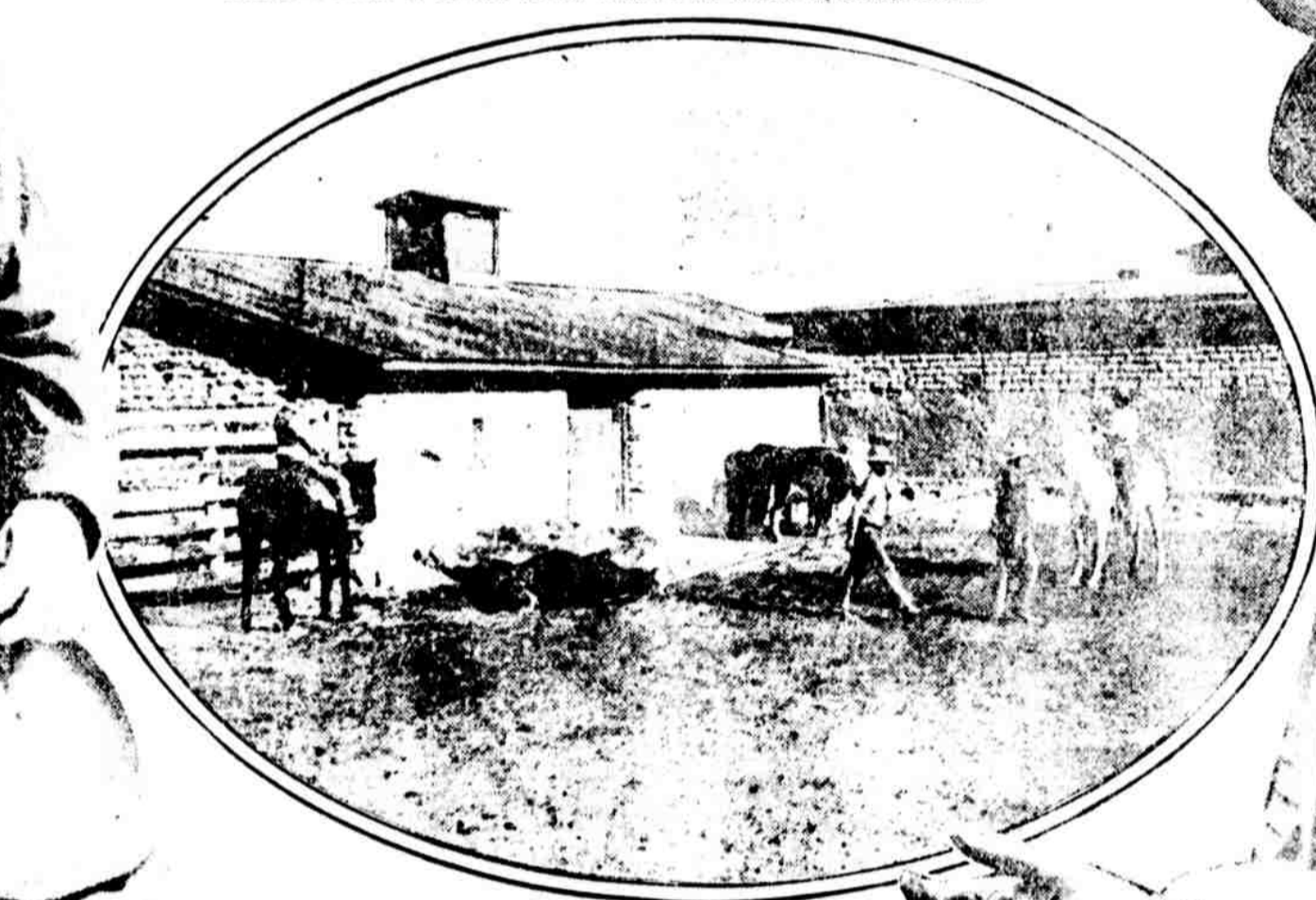
Things began calmly enough for her, it is true. She started by being born in Philadelphia. But events began to happen very shortly. At the age of one year, as the daughter of a famous father, Brigadier General C. L. Cooper, she was learning to walk in the tender care of an old colored soldier at Fort Sill, Indian Territory. At six she was playing with Indian children. At seventeen she was no longer playing with them because her father was in the thick of fighting these red men in the last great Chiricahua Apache outbreak. It was in that famous campaign where Major General Wood and other stanch young men later became great, grave gen-



The "Bonita Canby," made famous by Augustus Thomas' play, "Arizona"



Mrs. Forrestine C. Hooker at the home of her cousin in Chestnut Hill



A scene on the Nevada ranch where Mrs. Hooker lived in the old days

eral and Bridge and her little brother and sister in the care of Private Clark. This mother of the plains put her little ones to bed under buffalo robes. The night winds of Texas howled without, but everything seemed safe and snug within, and everybody went to sleep. Bridie was six, though, and now able to awaken easily. When she did, when she felt her mother stir suddenly from her warm little bed.

Then she saw her crawling under the robe, trying to shield all her children at once with her two arms. In a second she heard her mother calling in terrified hoarseness:

"Clark, Clark, are we in danger with them?"

"Not as long as I'm alive, Mrs. Cooper," came back the darky's answer. Then he entered the soldier's room. "I'll shoot and I'll shoot to kill the first heart that comes in here of this tent."

The litton white emphysem, drunk now in the absence of their commander, were laying siege to the tent.

The still Texas plains echoed sharply with a rapid exchange of shots. Five bullets passed through the top of the tent. The Negro soldier won, though.

"I was a soldier. An hour later he and Mrs. Cooper were trying the drunken soldiers with gay notes.

"They were sent to the Federal prison in the morning after my father's return," Mrs. Hooker said.

"I saw George Clark the last time I was in California. He is out there in the Soldiers' Home in Sawtell. It was Decoration Day, and when I went to see him I gathered all the roses I could cut and put them in his old army coat. I told him that I was a day for dead horses, but that I wanted to pay tribute to a living one."

"I can see him now walking down the road with his roses, his footless mouth grinning and his white hair grizzled under his shabby old hat."

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simple walls, and so were General Nelson A. Miles, General Crook and many other notables. It was from this house that Mr. Thomas waited for his east-bound train after visiting Fort Grant and the Hooker ranch for data for his play.

The cabin had other claims to fame as well. To it also came cattlemen from other states, ranchers, cowboys and many who later were involved in cattle rustling hold-ups. Here, indeed, was the center of the second part of Bridie Cooper's life, matching in thrills those years of the first part.

As young Hooker was official cattle inspector at Wilcox and the front room of the bungalow was the office, Mrs. Hooker assisted in all his official work and gained the experience and working knowledge that a little later encouraged the United States Government to dub her as its only official woman cattle inspector.

Arizona—the last great stand of the bad man of the West!

It was significant to sit in the quiet "office" civilization of Chestnut Hill and listen to Mrs. Hooker's impression of him.

"The knickers of the girls of today wouldn't go far with him," she remarked. "One thing that the supposedly wild man of the West required of his women was that they be womanly. I have yet to see a horse astride. I rode all over the plains of the West but I rode side-saddle, and I never was thrown! I didn't wear knickers, just a skirt."

"I never heard a cowboy swear until one day I got mad at a steer and swore myself. It was one time when we were from five in the morning until eleven at night trying to round up a herd of cattle. I was concentrating my attention on one particular steer. He seemed to know what I was trying to do. He'd wink his eye at me and wiggle his tail and then shy off sideways. It made me so mad I broke the handle of my whip slashing him over the face. Then I cried through sheer vexation."

"Mr. Hooker said, 'Crying wasn't help.'"

"I answered, 'Well, maybe swearing will.'"

"And it did. I assembled all the misdeeds I had ever heard or imagined and do you know that steer respected me and came like a lamb—or almost like a lamb. After that I said to the boys, 'Go ahead, boys, you can't handle cow unless you swear.'"

"That night I had to ride back to the ranch for help. It was so dark I couldn't see my horse's ears and without knowing it I lost the trail. My pony would have none of my indifference. He fought my rein until he made me understand I was not going the right way. That was when I almost bumped into the barndoor and realized that, fighting, he had brought me safely home."

The music which "Bonita" made out in those wild Western ranges made like a fine gold thread. Time and time again with a loving fondness in her voice she referred to it.

Mrs. Hooker, present-day noble and modern woman, smiled. Then she said, again: "Some day I'm going to get a horse and a gun and I'm going back!"

Since she left the West she has done extensive social service work. As secretary-manager of the humane society in Los Angeles in a short space of time

she attended to cases involving 1000 children. Despite the number of cases, only eight complaints were filed, the other cases being adjusted in the office without making a record against any human being. She has also served prominently in the politics of Los Angeles, helping in campaigns for the election of the District Attorney, the Mayor and finally the Sheriff.

Although she has written many short stories, it was only in 1920 that she looked back across the vista of the years and decided to write the story of her early life into novels. "Some of those" she has written are "The Long Trail," "Star," "The Story of a Cow" and "Prince Jan."

But, although she lives now a life of comparative quiet, compared to those old days on the frontier, Mrs. Hooker admits that the years as Bonita of the Western legend still live deeply within her.

"I would not trade those years for all the gold in the world," is her summing up of them. "I learned things out there. The unbroken trails and people whom I met gave me a wide standing."

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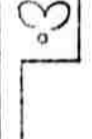
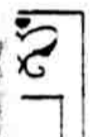
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A recent photograph of Mrs. Hooker