

marked man

© D. APPLETON-CENTURY CO.

By H. C. WIRE

WNU SERVICE

CHAPTER I

WHERE the gray Nevada desert rose in one tremendous sweep to form a bench against the Emigrant Mountains, Walt Gandy came upon the first water that he had seen in thirty-six hours. Three iron troughs were arranged stair-fashion on the slope of a hill cove. Water fell from an inch pipe and dripped from the end overflow of each trough into one lower, making cool music in a land that for a hundred miles had been dry, barren and desolate.

Halting, Gandy looked about. In this heat of noontime, cattle should be here, drinking or lying under the palo-verde brake that fringed the hill above. There were none.

Sunspot, his pale gold horse, turned bright eyes upon the water; an eager ear flicked back toward his master. Walt Gandy moved on and dismounted at the highest trough. He loosened his cinches, slipped off the bridle and hung it on the saddle horn. Then he slapped a gloved hand on the pale gold neck.

"Fill up, old beer keg!" he said. The palomino nibbled at the water and thrust his muzzle in thirstily; but the man stood scanning the far reach of bench over which he had come. He was young, under thirty, lean, hard-bodied and brown, with steady dark eyes that took in all they looked at, gave nothing back. In this watchful moment he was something more than just another cowpuncher on the move.

His chaps were smooth leather, undecorated, made for work. He wore short black boots and a blue cotton shirt. His thin war bag, rolled in a blanket, was tied behind his saddle.

Turning from his sweep of the desert, he drank from the iron pipe, then went back to where his palomino, full of water, was having a contented doze. He took down the bridle and held it out. But as the bit chain rattled, the pale gold ears flattened. The horse clamped his teeth. His eyes remained closed.

Walt Gandy looked at him. "You know," he said sadly, "one of these days I'm going to kill you."

At that the bright eyes opened and Sunspot thrust his head out for the bit. It was not until Walt Gandy was in his saddle and had reined from the trough, that with a start he discovered the other horse.

Walt Gandy considered. He was a stranger in this country. Only one man knew his purpose here. Better that he ride on now, investigate later; but then it came to him that this hidden horse and its secretive rider might have much to do with a trouble toward which he had been pushing for the greater part of two weeks.

He touched up Sunspot and rode on only until a ridge slope dropped him out of sight of the spring.

"Stay here, you!" he told the palomino, swinging off.

Crawling back up the slope he reached the ridge top and looked over . . . full view into the face of someone crouched on the other side!

Walt Gandy's gun was in the bottom of his war bag. Why should he come riding into Nevada armed like Billy the Kid? Yet he blinked now with a sudden cold certainty that even if his border service thirty-eight had sagged there at his belt, he would have been fairly beaten in the draw.

Beaten by a girl with a rifle. Walt grinned at her. "I will be darned!" he said fervently. "You must have practiced that some!"

"And I've practiced hitting what I aim at," said the girl. "Put your hands up!"

Gandy put his hands up only as far as his shirt pockets. He drew out tobacco and papers and began to roll a cigarette. Licking the paper edge and shaping a perfect brown cylinder, he studied the surprising person before him. She was more than surprising. She was a wonder! That conclusion came immediately.

Undecorated brown chaps as work-scarred as his own covered her slim straight legs. Her short boots had the look of being fitted to a stirrup through many a day of long riding. She stood a little spraddled, like a boy, her small, neat body as lightly balanced as a fighter's ready in the ring. But then Walt Gandy caught the terror hidden deep within her face, and he flipped away his cigarette, unlighted.

"Who are you?" she demanded suddenly. "And what are you doing here?"

There was a momentary urge to tell her who he was, offer her his help. His name was known well enough among men who patrolled those red and broken hills down along the Mexican border. "Walt Gandy" might even mean something to her. Walt wished suddenly that it did. All at once he wanted to explain himself to this girl, find some common ground of talk that would draw him into her friendship.

He did not explain. Steadily for these two weeks he had been laming his palomino pony north across the deserts, answering a one-time partner's urgent summons. It was best that for a little longer he keep himself unknown.

But then with a queer feeling he heard the girl say: "I'll bet anything I know who you are!"

Still covering him, she took a quick step to the top of the gully

and glanced down at his horse. She came back.

"A palomino!" For a fleeting moment the terror seemed eased from her face.

"Your name is Walt Gandy! You're the man Bill Hollister sent for!"

Then she moved in close to him, tipping her brown head back to look into his face, and once again he felt an amazing wonder at this girl. Savagely her rifle barrel poked his ribs. Something more than terror flashed into her eyes.

"Listen!" she said. "If you ever tell a soul, anybody, that you saw me here today, I'll have to shoot you! Don't you even mention it to me!"

"But," Walt began. "I mean it! Every word! Are you going to promise?"

Her look was unwavering, desperate. Until he knew the meaning of this, there was no argument. Gandy nodded.

The girl stepped back. "Thank you," and in those two words, spoken huskily, was more than a moment's gratitude. "I suppose you're headed for the C C ranch," she finished. "It's three miles due north. Now you'd better ride." Still she continued to look at him, and Gandy waited; and her next words he knew were definitely a command. "Don't leave the bench top. When you reach timber, pull into it and keep north."

He turned from her; turned back again to give himself a lasting memory of this dark-eyed girl, as she stood on the bank above him, the sunny hills behind her, a rifle glinting across her body.

Then upon Walt Gandy's brown face came a slow, disarming grin. "You've got me sidestepping, all right; backed clear off the lot! And I don't even know your name."

Her voice came quietly. "You will."

He stopped on a pivoting boot heel. "We'll meet again?"

"Yes," she answered. "Soon."

CHAPTER II

GANDY loped north. If he had had reason to keep his palomino relentlessly on the prod these past two weeks, he had cause now to reach the end of his trail at once. That girl knew him. Then others might know him. She even knew that he had been sent for by Bill Hollister. She knew too much!

Walt Gandy was off his own range, unfamiliar with the land and only guessing vaguely at the trouble which had brought him here. A partner had sent for him, and the very fact that Bill Hollister's letter had been brief, without details, had jerked him instantly into the saddle.

Those men who, two by two, ride the border patrol, facing the daily curse of bitter winds or blasting sun, or the more certain unpleasantness of a sniper's bullet, come in time to know each other well indeed. It is not a matter of their spoken words. What they have talked about in endless night camps is passing. But in action each has measured the other everlastingly. Give any two men three unbroken weeks of it, and they will come through like aces back to back.

Bill Hollister and Walt Gandy had been like that; Hollister, the older and more steady one, backing up young Gandy's less cautious play. Three years . . . they could hold long conversation with the glance of an eye or the turn of a head; thought was telegraphic. They were two men whose teamwork was as smooth and sure as the drawing of their guns.

They had separated only because of an offer that any man would be a fool to turn down. Both were ranch born and both knew inwardly that some day the urge would come when they would seek an unfenced rangeland, build there and take root.

That homing urge had settled upon Bill Hollister first. Up here in Nevada he had done well; Hollister was foreman of the C C now, right-hand man to the mighty Cash Cameron, and running a bunch of his

own white-faced Herefords with the C C's.

Gandy also, in this matter of getting along, had nothing to kick about. He had left the service and picked up good money as a feeder and livestock broker. There was a little game of thinning down Mexican cattle on a dry diet, so that when they were weighed, crossing the border northward, the duty was small. On U. S. soil they could be quickly fattened again . . . and the profit was Walt Gandy's. He knew cattle, and he knew men, but he missed something—lank Bill Hollister to cuss him out occasionally.

Almost imperceptibly he was being lifted into an atmosphere of a clean, bracing sharpness, that after his days on the heat-heavy lowlands, was as potent as wine. The land continued its gentle upward slant, and now from an eminence of the bench his glance swept far over the new country, and his cattle-man's eye approved of what it saw.

He passed slantwise through a gap in the red hills, crossed a meadow with grass underfoot that had not



"Hold on there!" said Gandy.

been nipped by fall, came to a running stream and then timber. Sunspot splashed through the water, his hope unchecked. They moved on beneath a dark canopy of the forest.

So engrossed was Gandy in discovering the fine points of this new country, that for a time he rode forgetful of existing trouble, which was his real reason for being here. It came back to him abruptly—for the second time today he was looking into the muzzle of a gun.

"Now then," he said under his breath. "you'd better wake up!"

The palomino pony of his own accord had swerved left upon a beaten trail and had followed a wire fence that went snakewise from trunk to trunk of the pine trees. Now a split pole gate blocked the path, one end hinged against a high post into which had been burned the name of this ranch—C C.

Gandy drew sudden rein before the threatening gun. Here was the end of his two weeks' riding. In a clearing below him, less than a quarter of a mile away, the C C ranch buildings sprawled irregularly, forming in a haphazard fashion a rectangular compound. Yet instantly, before details were clear, he was aware of a desolation about the place. Next moment the reason was clear. Corrals were vacant. A bunk shack door gaped half open. No sign of life showed in the yards nor around any of the buildings; over the C C ranch hung the emptiness of complete desertion.

Then more strange than that discovery, was the silence of this man who had stepped into the trail, rifle leveled. He had given no order. It was as if a gray shadow had suddenly appeared there. But there was nothing unreal about the threat of his gun.

Hands on his saddle horn Walt Gandy stared down, bringing his eyes to bear upon the man after their quick shift over the C C lay-

out. What he saw held him rigid. Back in the tangle of hills he had passed through a brake of weather-distorted junipers, the bare red trunks and uplifted branches looking like grotesque human shapes. Here before him was one of those things come to life.

The man had been big once, for the bones that made the size of him now were huge and hard and the joints were like hammerheads. But something had happened. His back had collapsed and twisted to the left, and both his left arm and leg had shriveled. He was old. Gray hair lay against his bony head as tight as a skullcap. His eyes were gray, sunken, with the cold intensity of a desert hawk's.

"Hold on there!" said Gandy. "Just a minute, old-timer. Look here . . ." He broke off, for he saw then that the man was deaf.

The cold gray eyes blinked. Words came up gasping and winded. "Get out!" The gun jerked.

Walt Gandy shook his head and made a sign of not understanding. He considered the warped piece of humanity. Not crazy. But the man would shoot. There was no mistaking the glare of those gray eyes. They were filled with suspicion. Of him? Once more he looked beyond the gate.

That sense of staring at a deserted ranch came again as his glance swept the array of sheds, corrals, the long low house, yet found no sign of life. A windmill clanked in a creek bottom. On the bank above it was a garden patch. Under the high sun details stood out clearly, and there seemed mute evidence of something in the way a saddle had been left on the ground near the open bunk-shack door. With a queer feeling he saw a child's swing close to one end of the main house, the long ropes looped from a pine tree branch. Life had been here, not long ago . . . Suddenly Walt Gandy froze with the chill of an unwanted thought. He had come too late!

He bent his head and shouted down at the man. "What's happened here?"

For the first time the distorted face showed understanding. Yet the winded voice gasped up only, "Get out!" A bent thumb pulled back the rifle hammer.

Gandy yelled. "Wait, you! Where's Bill Hollister, foreman of this place. Where is he? Hollister knows me."

The unblinking gray eyes continued to drill him.

Gandy waved toward the house, mutely questioning. And then the man said, "Gone. They've gone to the inquest at Emigrant."

At the word inquest Walt Gandy started in his saddle. He leaned low to shout again but the gun whipped upward into his face. Then a sudden tremor shook the twisted body, and the old man stood rubbing at his tight-ening throat.

Hoarsely he managed, "There's been a killing here! You get out!"

CHAPTER III

A KILLING! Hollister dead? Gandy refused the thought. Lank old Bill was too cagey an animal to be snapped off like that. They'd have to catch him in the dark with his hands tied. Well . . . Was it maybe that kind of a country? Walt hedged. They hadn't got Hollister.

Emigrant was unusually populated for a Wednesday afternoon. He swung his palomino along the first block where hitch racks were crowded solid. All riding stock of the range seemed to be in here today. More horses stood tied to brush clumps out on the open flat behind store buildings. The second block was jammed with buckboards and spring wagons, and to Walt Gandy, hunting for a tie spot, it looked as if there could not be a man, woman or child left out upon the ranches. They were all here in town at the coroner's inquest over a killing.

He wheeled into the wide maw of a livery barn and rolled from his saddle.

An attendant sprang to take the palomino pony by the bridle, a gaunt man, stooped, pale-eyed.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Don't Become an Air Hostess If You're Afraid of Hard Work

Being an airline stewardess is romantic, but it isn't peaches and cream. Katherine Wilson, below, TWA hostess, was chosen "Miss American Aviation" last year. Pre-requisites for a stewardess job: Candidates must be registered nurses between 21 and 25 years old; not under 5 feet 2 inches nor more than 5 feet 5 inches; weight, between 100 and 125 pounds; cheerful disposition; attractive; unmarried. Training course lasts from six to twelve weeks, and it must be intensive because the stewardess' duties are legion.



Picture Parade

She must know how to handle tickets; how to serve hot meals; make berths; to control heating and ventilating; to answer passengers' questions (foolish and otherwise) about airplanes and engines. During training she is paid \$2.50 a day. Her starting salary on the run is \$100 a month, gradually increasing to \$125 a month plus \$4 daily for expenses.



Hostesses cannot work more than 110 hours a month, work days being interspersed with days off. From time of takeoff to arrival at the plane's destinations she is busy preparing delicious meals, answering questions and making conversation. Favorite topic of most travelers is themselves. Subject may range from literature to sports and religion, so the stewardess must keep herself posted. At right: American airline hostesses learn about a motor.



Above is a typical stewardess classroom scene. At New York's North Beach airport, 23 girls from 18 cities, representing nine different states, learn flying technique as demonstrated in a Link trainer.



Some of them fly, too. Above: Stewardess Agnes Hermansen.

Kinds of Winds

On the Beaufort wind scale (named after Sir Francis Beaufort, Nineteenth-century British admiral, and used by the United States weather bureau) a strong wind is one blowing from 25 to 38 miles per hour; a gale is from 39 to 54 m. p. h., and a whole gale, from 55 to 75 m. p. h. Winds above 75 m. p. h. are called hurricanes.

Other Beaufort designations: calm, below 1 m. p. h.; light, 1 to 7; gentle, 8 to 12; moderate, 13 to 18; fresh, 19 to 24 m. p. h.

LADIES Sensational Purchase 3 Pair \$1.00

Fine Fashioned Pure Silk Hose RING-LESS 3-THREAD CHIFFON
• NEWEST SPRING SHADES •
LIVELY—A Gay Medium Brown
FLIRTATIOUS—Fashionable Light Brown
AUDACIOUS—Smart Reddish Brown
SUPPLY LIMITED—SEND ORDER NOW
State size, shades and number of pairs.
Send Cash with Order to
RELIANCE HOSIERY CO.
224 No. 16 St. Omaha, Nebr.

Small Pleasures

The chief secret of comfort lies in not suffering trifles to vex us, and in prudently cultivating an undercurrent of small pleasures since very few great ones are let on long leases.—Augshey.

SPEED SUITS ME IN A RACING CAR— BUT I WANT MY CIGARETTE SLOW-BURNING. CAMELS BURN SLOWER— GIVE ME THE 'EXTRAS' IN SMOKING PLEASURE—AND EXTRA SMOKING FOR MY MONEY, TOO!

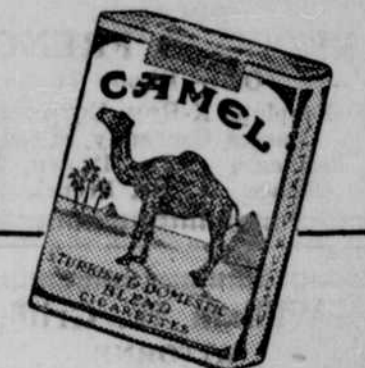


BOB SWANSON
Midget Auto Racing Champion

WHETHER you smoke a lot or a little, you'll find several definite "extras" in the slower-burning cigarette. . . Camel. You'll find freedom from the excess heat and drying, irritating qualities of too-fast burning. . . extra mildness and extra coolness. You'll find a cigarette that doesn't tire your taste. . . for slower burning preserves the full, rich flavor of Camel's matchless blend of costlier tobaccos. At the same time, you'll be getting the equivalent of extra smoking from each pack!

In recent laboratory tests, CAMELS burned 25% slower than the average of the 15 other of the largest-selling brands tested—slower than any of them. That means, on the average, a smoking plus equal to

5 EXTRA SMOKES PER PACK!



FOR EXTRA MILDNESS, EXTRA COOLNESS, EXTRA FLAVOR—**CAMELS** SLOW-BURNING COSTLIER TOBACCOS

The most thrilling Western mystery story you've ever read—told by that incomparable spinner of yarns . . .

Harold Channing Wire

MARKED MAN

A Story of Mystery Action and Love in the Land of the Six-Gun!

"Marked Man" is the story of square jawed, hard riding Walt Gandy who is summoned to Nevada by his old range partner, Bill Hollister. In grave trouble, Hollister needs Gandy's help. Eager to get into the fray, Walt is surrounded by a wall of silence and intrigue. Something is definitely wrong at the C C ranch, owned by old Cash Cameron and managed by Hollister. Cameron's beautiful daughter, Helen, seems to have the answer, but it is locked within her. Walt solves the ghostly riddle of the C C ranch, but only after the spatter of bullets brings his friends close to eternity.

BEGIN IT TODAY . . . SERIALLY IN THIS PAPER