

Marked Man

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By H. C. WIRE

WNU SERVICE

THE STORY THUS FAR

Summoned to the CC ranch in central Nevada, desert-wise Walt Gandy is on his way to help his old range partner, Bill Hollister. Riding through unfamiliar country, Walt is stopped short by a girl—who holds a rifle in firing position. She knows him, tells him how to get to the ranch, and tells him that they will meet again. Walt is allowed to ride on. Within a quarter of a mile from his destination, Walt is stopped again. This time by a grotesque, mis-shapen man who tells him to get out and then tells him the CC crew is in Emigrant, the closest town, for an inquest. Someone has been murdered. Riding to the inquest in Emigrant, Walt leaves his horse at the livery stable. Before attending the inquest he asks a few questions. Cash Cameron, owner of the CC ranch, is in trouble. A hard but honest man, Cash has many enemies. Gandy's eye is caught by a roan horse tied near the doorway. It belongs to the girl who stopped him earlier in the day. Chino Drake, former cook at the CC ranch, has been murdered and Sheriff Ed Battle is trying to pin the blame on Cash Cameron. The girl is called to the stand. She is Helen Cameron, Cash's daughter.

CHAPTER IV—Continued

Facing the girl from his station farther along the table, Battle said: "This inquest meeting was called for one o'clock today. Seems funny that all the CC people got here on time, and you didn't show up for more than an hour, and then alone. Mind explaining why, and where you were?"

The handkerchief came away from the girl's lips. Distinctly she said, "I was not feeling well. I stayed home until the last minute."

"On the CC ranch?" Battle persisted.

"I was home. I can prove that."

She coughed. Her head turned.

With an effort Walt Gandy remained motionless, as for the second time that pulling look of Helen Cameron's dark eyes reached out to him. She was asking him to stand by her! Perhaps he alone knew the truth of where she was today. Was she going to call on him to . . .

His leap was automatic. It had started in the split second that he saw the handkerchief drop from her fingers. Helen was going limp, falling. She caught herself on the table momentarily, and with the release of spring steel that had hurled him forward, Walt Gandy was the first to grab her as she collapsed.

Instantly other arms reached for her. He saw the stern face of Cash Cameron, and behind Cash, Bill Hollister.

It was Hollister who shoved through savagely, brushing aside all others as he swept the small limp body close to him. He looked into Walt Gandy's eyes, flickered recognition, yet gave no sign of that knowledge audibly. . . . and Walt knew then that he and the CC foreman must not be connected here.

He started to back away. One arm still touched the girl, and it was then that he felt her fingers slip swiftly to his hand, grip it, press something wadded into his palm. He closed upon it and continued to back away.

Walt Gandy worked his way from the filled aisle. He stepped across unoccupied benches and had reached the jam at the entrance, when behind him he heard the bull voice of Sheriff Battle:

"Close those doors! Lock 'em!" Deputies struggled to obey, but the double doors, hinged to swing inward could not be readily closed against the thrust of men. Angriest Battle's two guards flailed into the pack. In time enough of the curious crowd was beaten backward to allow the doors to be swung and locked.

Walt Gandy had taken a blow on the head, one on the side of his neck, another in the ribs. . . . but when the entrance to Gospel Hall had been blocked at last, he was among the overflowed shovels outside.

He put his hand into his blue jeans pocket and felt the wadded thing. Without looking, he knew it was Helen Cameron's handkerchief, dropped upon the table, recovered. In the wad was a lump; and then Walt Gandy needed to feel no further to know that he was carrying away the inquest's key piece of evidence—a bullet from the body of a murdered man.

With a queer cold sensation the truth came to him short-cutting across all other theories and puzzles of this day. Bill Hollister! They were in love. And Hollister had murdered a man.

Walt gained the open street and looked around. Men had been shot for knowing less than he knew this minute!

CHAPTER V

WALT moved in a moment, going back along the street until he found the Emigrant post office. He went in and asked for a box.

"Forty cents," said the clerk, and gave him a number and a key.

Leaning upon a desk that sloped from the end partition, left arm holding his weight, he addressed an envelope to himself, then bought stamps and mailed it. When he turned from the mail slot, a man was eyeing him from the post office door.

Apparently the man had stopped short in passing and stood now but half turned, balanced in a pivoting movement on cow-country boots.

The ramrod form and hard black eyes were vaguely familiar. Walt Gandy knew he had looked into that sharp and swarthy face before. It

was a kind he ought to remember. "Let's have the makings, brother." The ramrod figure had come beside him.

Their eyes met. "Brush-popper, are you?" the dark one asked. "So, so," said Gandy. "Down my way we work cattle in cover that rattlesnakes crawl into and get broken backs trying to crawl out of. Yeah, I guess I'm a brush-popper all right." He took a drag on his cigarette.

The other grinned faintly. The unceasing study of his gaze shifted downward.

No gun belt nor holster sagged at Walt Gandy's right thigh, but a worn and faded patch along the seam of his blue jeans was a plain mark to any interested observer. A revolver carried on border duty had rubbed that spot. Some men might guess at another purpose.

Abruptly this one said, "I'd like to talk to you."

"Sure," said Gandy. "Fire away."

"Not here. Over there." The black head nodded across the street.

Walt tossed away his cigarette, saying nothing; they moved together.



"I was home, I can prove that."

er across to the wide maw of the livery barn.

They had reached long covered grain bins beside the runway. He backed against one and propped himself, half sitting.

The ramrod figure faced him. "I've been ordered to hire some help," the man said openly. "That's what I'm in town for. With everyone drifting in to the hearing, it looked like a good chance to take my pick. You want work?"

"Cows?" Gandy asked.

"Moving about two thousand head," said the man.

Walt glanced past him. "Short-time job, huh?"

"Pay'll make up for it."

"I don't know," said Walt slowly, shaking his head. "I don't like this country so much. Was traveling for Utah, maybe to quit this cow business and do me some prospecting. I don't know," he mused. "More money in that."

"See here," said the stranger, short tempered, "you don't need to stall me up for higher pay! It'll be enough."

"Oh, sure," Gandy agreed. "But I don't know your country. Why don't you pick yourself some men that already have the lay of things here?"

"Good men," came the prompt answer, "are hard to find, even these days. You wouldn't think it, but they are."

Lazily Walt Gandy leaned upon the grain bin, indifferent. "How many men you looking for?" His brown eyes poked into various corners about the barn.

"Ten, twelve. We won't be short-handed."

"Huh?" Abruptly Gandy's non-committal gaze returned from an inspection of the stables and narrowed into the black face before him.

"Ten, twelve men to shift a herd of two thousand cows? Where I come from we'd do that with a couple of boys and a dog!"

Hands on the grain bin cover, he pushed himself upright onto his feet.

The other man moved back a step. "No one's prodding you into the job," he said. "Guess you haven't got what I thought you had, brother."

Walt smiled dryly. "Suppose," he suggested, "we quit boosting each other and see what's in the pot. I've got plenty of what you thought I had, and I'm looking for work. But I don't figure to make this my last job."

"Meaning?"

"That you are going to move two thousand head of cattle. . . . and what else? Somebody's boundary line?"

"Boundary line's already moved. Only we aim to keep it so. All this is going to take place on public domain where we want to winter in a certain low sink."

"Good place to winter, too," Walt nodded. "If someone else isn't already located there. Who is?"

Again through a minute of silence he felt himself being measured. Ap-

parently he qualified for what this stranger wanted, and he did not know whether that fact was a compliment or discredit.

"Cash Cameron," the man answered. "But the CC is done for, everyone knows that. Cameron's tangled up with the law right now, over a killing on his ranch. That's what this inquest is about. He's in a hole and before he gets himself out of it, those money bags of his will be too flat to carry much stock on this range." And then as a conclusive amendment: "If he gets out at all."

"Cameron caught that bad?" "Will be. Sunk, sure as taxes! That's what, and the Emigrant ranchmen know it. There's going to be one smashing scramble for public range that the CC controls. But the man I'm boss for is getting the jump. Satisfied now?"

Gandy's brown gaze hardened. "Friend," he said, "that kind of rubs me the wrong way, heaving rocks in on a man when he's at the bottom of a hole." The focus of his eyes sharpened. "Any chance that someone reached out and shoved him in?"

"What do you care!" The easy voice turned suddenly surly. "How about the job?"

Walt measured the distance between himself and the ramrod body. He looked into the black eyes. "I wouldn't handle it," he said, "with a pitchfork and rubber gloves!"

It took a second for that to penetrate. "Why you skunk! You draw me out, then turn me down?" A hammerhead fist lashed upward.

Walt Gandy had measured the distance well. He drew his chin back only a little. The fist shaved past. At waist level his own hooked in—a short left jab and a longer drive with the right. The ramrod figure doubled. Walt slammed it upward again with an open-handed shove in the face.

And then he cut loose savagely from sheer reaction after the inquest's high pressure and from the treacherous talk he had listened to just now. His hard body leaned in behind two punches that sent the other man teetering backward.

These first exchanges had come in a moment's rush. The black one had had no time to gather himself. But now, even as Gandy followed his advantage, the man dug to a stop in the dirt floor of the runway, stiffened, and his frame seemed all spring steel. He launched from boot toes sunk into the earth. His arm had a yard-long reach and came with the explosive drive of a piston.

Gandy was rocked to the roots. He spun half around and the next blow slid from his turning body. Footwork carried him aside, gave a second's recuperation. Experience told him not to take his eyes from the other's quickly shifting fists. But with hat knocked off, the long sharp features of this man's face were fully exposed for the first time.

Walt Gandy looked, and in a glimpse of twitching jaw muscles, and of cold slitted eyes he read more than a passing flare of anger. This was going to reach far. He had no doubt that he faced an opponent who would kill.

In the second that his eyes shifted from the fists to the man's face, a treacherous move was begun. A right jab to his heart was in the open. He saw that. It was only from his eye corners that he caught sight of a boot toe kicked out to trip him. He half blocked the heart blow. Then all of his strength went into a sudden hooking of his leg around the other's shin.

What happened next was short. They tripped, stumbled, legs locked. Walt Gandy felt an arm around him like a steel band. The steel crushed inward. Wind went out of him. It was no longer a fight but a savage brush for survival. With abrupt relaxation of every muscle he let himself fall backward. As the man came over, off-balance, Walt stiffened again and rolled in the air.

His one hundred and seventy-pound weight was on top when they hit the earth. Breath gushed from the form beneath him. He leaped up. The other lay still, his black hair stringing on the ground.

The blood was hot in Gandy's veins, boiling. He reached down and twisted hard fingers in the shirt collar, dragged the man to the nearest grain bin, raised the cover, lifted him in both arms and rolled him onto a bed of oats. The cover had a padlock. Walt snapped it.

Then he turned. The gaunt attendant stood gaping in the runway. His bony jaw worked up and down, wordless.

Gandy leaned winded and dizzy against a post. He said, "I'll take my horse now." When the attendant only stared, he rocked along closer. "What's the matter?"

"He'll kill you!" the old fellow gasped.

"Maybe," Walt said. He took his chaps from the side bench and struggled into them, fumbling the buckles.

The gaunt man stood rooted. "But that was Pete Kelso! Of the 77!"

Straightening, Walt Gandy felt in his pockets for money. "Here," He tossed a silver dollar. "Can you forget Pete for a little while? He likes it there in the box."

"But that was Kelso!"

"Sure. Will you get my bronc?"

CHAPTER VI

THE inquest was over, and Walt Gandy put his Sunspot palomino into a thinning crowd along the street. Already knots of men had formed to rehash again this thing that had descended upon the Emigrant Bench, and it seemed to Walt as he passed among them, that each group represented an individual war-camp.

Helen Cameron's roan horse was not where Walt had seen it at a post near Gospel Hall. He passed the windowed store building, now empty. A man stepped suddenly from a street corner and stopped him with an upraised left hand.

Walt Gandy looked down from his saddle. The man flipped back the lapel of his coat to let the silvered surface of a deputy's badge gleam momentarily.

"Sheriff wants to see you," he said. "Office is down there." The deputy pointed into a cross-street. He followed afoot as Gandy turned his palomino in that direction.

Sheriff Battle sat behind an ancient, flat-topped desk, slouched in a swivel chair with a back high enough to support his large head. A second man, seated on a wall bench running from the desk end, was Hollister.

The CC foreman uncrossed long legs and stood up, his weathered, studious face lighting with a grin.

"This the man you mean, Battle? I know this fellow. You don't need to search him." He turned to Walt and held out his hand. "How are you?"

Bill Hollister knew nothing about the stolen bullet. Walt Gandy was certain of that as he gave back the handclasp and the grin. He looked into the face of this partner who had urged him up from the border, across two weeks of hard desert travel, and in that silent second he was aware of something. Bill Hollister had changed. How, he could not say, had no time to consider, for even as the thought flashed to him, he heard Battle snap:

"You don't need to tell me what I need to do, Hollister! Al?"

"Yeah," said the deputy at Gandy's back.

"Go through him!"

Walt jerked around. "Not so fast, you!" He looked into the bore of the deputy's gun. "Aw, put that bean shooter away. What's the

charge, Sheriff? Got a search warrant, have you?"

Battle had risen, drawing his huge weight upward and propping it stiffly on the desk top. "You, Al! What's the matter with you? I said go through him!"

Walt laughed. He raised his arms and felt the hands move thoroughly through his pockets. Matches, money, tobacco, his watch, his knife, a horseshoe nail and his handkerchief; nothing more. He saw Ed Battle sink down like the gas going out of a big balloon.

The sheriff glared at his deputy. He seemed to feel it was the man's fault that nothing had been found. He hesitated, cigar in his teeth, frowning with mental effort. Here away from the eyes of his voters, Sheriff Battle became less a thunderous bull, roaring for results, and seemed a human being of not too much will, easily swayed, and at this moment, baffled.

"Hollister," he launched out bluntly. "I'm giving you a chance. I want you to come in with the law!"

Hollister grinned. "You," he emphasized, "want me to come in with the law. Where do you figure I am, Ed?"

"Up a flagpole and no ladders," said Battle promptly. "It'll be for the good of the CC and the whole Emigrant Bench," he went on, solemn-faced, "if you and me can get down on the same footing. Look out there on the street. Look at those women. They and the kids are the ones who are going to suffer if our ranchmen get to gun-fighting with each other. I'm older than you—I've seen bloody times, and they didn't start from no more than what has happened here right now!"

"But that was Kelso!"

"Sure. Will you get my bronc?"

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HERE'S a beautifully graceful dress that has everything you need to make your figure look more slender and supple. Made with a long, unbroken line in the back, 8631 has a front panel widening toward the hem, (in itself creating the illusion of height as against width because it directs the eye up and down) bodice gathers and shoulder darts. Thus with a few easy details, it assures correct fit over the bust, slenderness of waistline and hips.

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Ask Me Another

A General Quiz

The Questions

1. Rome was built on how many hills?
2. How is the temperature of a Centigrade thermometer reduced to Fahrenheit?
3. Why did Lady Godiva ride through Coventry?
4. What is a salaam, a fish, a salutation, or a small coal bucket?
5. To win the Democratic presidential nomination a candidate must receive—a majority of the votes in the party convention, two-thirds of the votes, or four-fifths of the votes?
6. Why are rats used extensively in biological research?

The Answers

1. Seven.
2. Multiply by 9/5 and add 32.
3. To help the people escape heavy taxes.
4. A salutation.
5. A majority.
6. One chief reason: Owing to their size they require a minimum amount of testing substances.

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To remove lime in a teakettle boil a little vinegar in it.

After peeling onions rub the hands with a little dry mustard, then wash in the usual way.

To remove ink from carpets, wash the stain immediately with skim milk.

Clear ammonia—pure, not household—will remove paint from windows even when it has been on a long time. Apply with a scrubbing brush.



Really Missed
Choir Boy—What made you resign from the choir?
Ex-Choir Boy—I was absent one Sunday and some one asked if the organ had been mended.

Keeping Time
"What's the idea—only two prunes?" roared the British army sergeant.
"You save the stones twice a week till you get a thousand," said the orderly, "and then you know the war lasted five years all but ten weeks."

Really Missed
Two motorists were zipping along at 70 or 80 miles an hour when a police patrol appeared from nowhere and forced them over to the curb.
"What's the matter, officer?" asked one, blandly. "Were we driving too fast?"
"No," answered the officer, sarcastically, "you were flying too low."

Really Missed
"So Tom took a course in first aid. Is he good at it?"
"Well, a man was nearly drowned yesterday, and the first thing Tom did was to throw a glass of water in his face."

Really Missed
"It's beneficial to yawn when you feel like it," says a doctor. Not when the boss is talking to you.

Really Missed
"Hurry up, Harry! I simply must go out and show off my new dress."
"Wait a minute. I simply must cut the frayed ends off my coat sleeves."

Really Missed
Maid (peeking through the keyhole)—Really, some people are too inquisitive. There's the missus reading her husband's mail.

Really Missed
Hearing someone prowling about downstairs, the timid husband seized a candle and proceeded to investigate, while his even more timid wife buried her head beneath the bedclothes.
Suddenly her husband came upon a burglar, who covered him with a revolver.
"Oh, don't take any notice of me," said the timid man quickly. "I'm only walking in my sleep."

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MADE BY KELLOGG'S IN BATTLE CREEK

Old in Hours
A man that is young in years may be old in hours, if he have lost no time.—Bacon.

Waking Dream
You ask what hope is. He (Aristotle) says it is a waking dream.—Laertius.

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5 EXTRA SMOKES PER PACK!