

# marked man

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## CHAPTER XVII—Continued.

Gandy swung up onto his palomino and followed, at first lifting the horse into an incautious running walk. Bent Lavic was deaf; he could crowd close to the man, and yet those gray eyes were sharp as an owl's. He pulled down.

Beyond timber and out upon the bench the trail forked, one west, one south, and again with a match held low Gandy found fresh tracks holding to their southward course.

In an hour it was certain they were leading to Willow Spring. He moved at last along the dark hollow of the hill cove, came to a familiar shallow ravine sloping gently upward. Here he dismounted as on that first day and left the palomino.

The ravine topped out a good hundred yards above the black-looking willow clump. Nothing showed down there to indicate life, either animal or human. And then as Gandy stood uncertain, waiting for a guide-sign, a gray shape moved a little, near the edge of trees and there came the restless thud of a hoof. He had located the gray nag.

When he was within five paces of the nag, the gray head lifted, turned, hung for a moment suspended in air. Then it dropped wearily without sound. Gandy took a free breath and entered the corridor.

Now he could see nothing. Trees rooted low overhead, and the tight thicket of their trunks made walls spaced no farther apart than the width of a steer. He reached a point where the pool's reflection was dimly visible. The trick of squinting in the dark brought a sharper outline of the water and its surrounding basin. And then the surface broke. Ripples formed and widened across the faint gray disc. At once there came a sucking sound as of a boot pulled from soft mud. In less than two minutes after that Walt Gandy knew someone was coming stealthily along the black corridor of tree trunks.

He had no time to move aside, but stood hands down, one lifting on the butt of his thirty-eight. Then a better plan came, and he waited, as rooted as the willows themselves, until human closeness could almost be felt.

As the dim blob of a face emerged from the pitch dark, his arms shot out, closed. Instantly he would have released them for they were locked around the body of a girl. She went all at once limp, unstruggling, with only a single short outcry, and Gandy knew it was Helen Cameron hugged there hard against him.

He spoke her name. But the unnering jar of his lunge reacted in violent trembling after the momentary shock, and swiftly putting one hand under her knees, he lifted the girl and turned to carry her out upon the open hill slope.

At the willow edge she stiffened suddenly in his arms. "Don't stop here! Wait! Get away from the spring!"

Within Gandy himself a dull bitterness was rising. Helen had come here to meet someone. He could see nothing else in this secret night ride. And that one must be Stoddard. She had seen the 77 man yesterday afternoon. Now again.

By the time he reached the ravine bottom the dull bitterness had grown close to a flood of anger. He set the girl on her feet and released her, dropping the gray nag's reins close to the palomino's. For a moment, saying nothing, he looked down into the upturned face.

Then before Gandy could launch his accusation, Helen Cameron flared: "What do you think you're doing? Coming here like this? I told you once before. Walt Gandy, that everything you do is all wrong! Now what do you mean, following me? What did you expect to find out, anyway?"

They stared at each other through the vague light, until at last Gandy said in a quiet, even voice, "I expected to find a traitor to the C C, Helen. And I think I have. You were meeting Stoddard, weren't you?"

"I was meeting . . .!"

The words choked off in a gasp. A gloved hand flew to the girl's mouth. Wide-eyed, she stepped back from him.

"Oh!" she uttered. And then he had a display of the Cameron temper. "So that's what you think! That's where you hold me in your mind—meeting the 77 out here!"

She spun around and would have fled, but his two hands gripped her shoulders. "Listen, Helen! Listen to what I mean!" He turned her until at arm's length she was facing him again.

"I didn't follow you. I trailed the gray nag and thought Lavic was riding. But now, it's you I found—what am I to think? Can't you tell me, Helen? Can't you put me straight?"

She moved a little closer to him then, still with his hands holding her shoulders, and the flare of temper was gone. In its place came a gentleness of surrender, not to him nor anything he might ask, but to what she was going to say.

It was a moment before she began again: "I must talk to you, Walt. You're right. Only, I don't know how. I've been putting it off, hoping . . . I don't know what for." Her eyes pierced through the dark to his.

He laughed softly, uneasily. "Go ahead. I can take it, I guess—all but one thing."

"What is that?" she asked quickly.

"Never mind," he evaded.

Out of the silence, Helen asked, "Will you do something for me?"

He turned his head to her. "What?" It was a wary question, regardless of what he had just felt.

"Do as I asked you to do the other day—leave this country. Go now, tonight; head off south where you came from."

"Sure!" he said. "Fine!" And have the sheriff of Emigrant County on my trail for a year or so!"

She shook her head. "No. Battle won't trail you. I can promise that."

"You can!"

"Yes." Walt Gandy looked down at this puzzling girl. "Helen," he asked, "why do you want me to leave?"

"Because," she answered, "I'm afraid of you."

"Afraid?"

"Yes. You know too much. You know about the inquest bullet, and me, and you're gathering facts all the time and putting them together. Wait, you mustn't! Listen. If you knew Bill Hollister was clear of all trouble, then you'd go, wouldn't you? That's what you came up here for. I know. Well, he is. Bill is safe."

Walt Gandy denied it with a slow movement of his head. "No, he isn't. I'm not convinced that Hollister is guilty here, but Ed Battle will do his best to hang it all onto him. Battle has three bullets now. If he has Bill's rifle . . ."

"He hasn't."

The girl spoke so surely that Gandy stared into her face a moment before demanding, "How do you know?"

She looked away. "He hasn't. That's all I can tell you."

Gandy stood silent, watching her with an ache in his arms. Did she think that he still had only one purpose in being here? How could she not know!

"Helen!" he said. "You're not blind! I came here to help Bill Hollister, but that isn't all of my reason for staying. Why can't you talk to me? You know the truth! I'm going to see this thing through, and when that . . ."

It was not plain to Walt Gandy himself why he broke off.

Her eyes had dropped quickly from his, and she stood with head bowed. He put out a hand to her, but she avoided it and suddenly lifted one of her own to her cheek.

"Helen!" he begged.

Her head jerked up. Then with a queer, short laugh she told him, "Walt, you're fine. But it's no use. The other afternoon I said I was working out the C C troubles, in my own way. I have. There's going to be no range war, and no more killing. The only thing is, you'd better go. Please don't misunderstand me, and don't ask me to explain any more. A way to keep peace on the Emigrant Bench was offered, and I've taken it."

Before the girl finished, Walt Gandy knew what she was going to say, and he stood with the life gone from him, heavy and cold, while Helen Cameron's voice sounded far off: "I am going to marry Jeff Stoddard."

## CHAPTER XVIII

WALT GANDY stood alone in the bottom of the dark ravine. Helen had not wanted him to ride back with her, and he was glad that his offer had been refused. He had to get hold of himself first.

Then reason told him that what the girl had said, could never happen. She would never marry Jeff Stoddard. No matter in what spirit she had promised herself to the 77 owner, the thing was too ungodly. Unless she loved him. Clinging to his own hope, Walt Gandy refused to believe that she did.

In a little while, leading the palomino, he made his way back to the spring. Adroitly, he realized now, Helen had evaded answer why she had come here tonight. He had to know.

There came to mind the faint sounds he had heard while waiting, unaware of who was at the pool; the rippled surface and sucking as of boots drawn from mud. The girl had warned him away from the spot, then had given no sign that she was afraid someone else might come.

He left his horse at the willow edge and groped on along the short tree-trunk corridor. Warily he struck a match. The disc of water and its small basin leaped out of the dark; nothing more.

Lighting one match from another and holding the flame low, he traced where the girl had walked once around the pool. Then she had backtracked. She had stopped, as if for considerable time, her boots sinking in deep. He went into his pockets and brought out more matches, for now the mud showed an imprint of her hand.

Through a minute more he stood imagining moves she might have made here, and then, fitting his own

boots into the holes hers had left, squatted down and felt in the dark water.

Only a press of cold ooze touched his fingers. The shelving bottom was shallow. But cattle wading here had churned a soft pit, and suddenly Walt Gandy knew that the girl had used Willow Spring to hide a secret; could almost say what she had hidden.

He rolled up his sleeves, stretched both arms far out and thrust them down. It took many minutes' exploring in the slime until his hands struck something hard, and straightening, he tugged upward, drawing out at last a mud-coated rifle.

There was little need to clean the gun. He hunched down again, working with slow deliberation on an unwanted job.

Gandy laid the rifle down. Hollister's. Carried those years they had been on border duty together. Used up here to shoot a man in the back. He sat staring into the black night; felt all at once old with knowing too much. But it was more than the shooting that put this weight in his feeling against Bill Hollister. Hollister must have



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known how desperately the girl was trying to shield him. Did he even know Helen had promised to marry Stoddard?

It was plain what she had done. No deputy sheriff had taken this rifle from the C C ranch house. Helen herself had, then pretended it had been stolen. Walt knew now that she was hiding it here the first day they met, and had come back tonight to make certain the law had not discovered her secret. All to shield Hollister! Only a girl would go to such scheming. The gun would never have been found in this pool, with cattle tramping it deeper until it rusted away.

Gandy sat unmoving for a long time, trying to see what was ahead for him; saw only that he would stick and go through to the end. Once he had sworn that if Hollister had done the cold-blooded killing here, he'd quit. Not now.

At last he got up, took the rifle and thrust it back into the mud.

The green-tinted mountain dawn was in his face by the time he reached the C C.

Ground mist was rising. Through it he saw vague movement of figures. Three horses stood saddled at the corral post. Horsethief Fisher came hurriedly from the bunk shack. At sight of him Gandy lifted his pony into a lope.

Fisher was armed, and at the sudden thudding of hoofs, he about-faced, hand on his gun, unusually jumpy.

"Where the devil you been?" he wanted to know, as Gandy reined his Sunspot in close.

Walt cast a quick look over the lot, swinging off beside the bronc rider. "Never mind me," he answered. "What's up?"

"Declaration of war, boy!" Horsethief told him. "I'm ridin' in to get Bailey and the bunch! Hollister's orders!" He clamped down on the news with grim satisfaction.

Hollister's tall black was not among the horses which stood saddled, nor in the corral. "Where's Bill now?" Gandy asked.

"Rode off before daybreak," said Fisher, looking worried for the moment. "Told me he was going to try for a last talk with Stoddard to see if his herd mightn't be turned back without gunfight. But I just now saw that Bill's sixshooter ain't hangin' there at the head of his bunk. Boy, I'll bet it's more than talk he's gone after!"

"He go alone?"

Fisher nodded. "Good Lord!" Gandy burst out. "I know," Fisher agreed. "But Bill slammed out of here before anyone figured what he was doing. As I said, I only just now saw his gun was missin'. Anyway I'm dustin' for town!"

Young Champion appeared from around the bunk house. Gandy tossed over the palomino's reins. "Feed him, Paul, will you? I'm riding again." In the act of moving on up-slope he turned and asked over

one shoulder, "What orders did Hollister give you for today?"

"I'm stick right here," the boy said, grave-faced. He was wearing his big forty-five. "With Helen," he finished.

"Where's Lavic?"

"Dunno. Haven't seen him."

Helen was not in sight when Gandy tramped into the kitchen to grab a fast breakfast. The gallon granite-ware coffee pot was simmering on the back of the stove. He poured a mug full, drank it while eggs and a round of ham were frying, then with those cooked, poured more coffee, got biscuits hot from the oven and ate standing at a window overlooking the ranch yard.

Impatience goaded him, but it was a safe bet that this meal would be his last for many hours. He filled up.

Helen came into the kitchen before he had quite finished. He promptly stacked his plate and cup on the sinkboard and turned to the outer door, wanting no talk with anyone, not even the girl. It was past time for any more words.

But she called quickly; and what she said jerked him around.

"Walt! Did Lavic find you?"

He moved a step nearer, and would have given everything he possessed to tell this girl that she need worry no more, that it was all close to an end.

"Lavic?" he asked. "Looking for me? What did he want?"

"I don't know. The poor fellow was worked up over something and was hunting every place for you. Have you seen him at all since last night when Battle was here?"

Impatient to be gone and knowing that every minute was carrying Hollister closer to an enemy camp, still Gandy waited, feeling an unexplainable portent in what the girl was saying.

"No," he answered, his words hurried. "I haven't seen him. Why, Helen? What is it?"

Again she said, "I don't know. Bent wouldn't talk to me. Only . . ." With an unexpected movement she came across to him. At arm's length she stopped. "Only, Walt, Bent Lavic knows something! I almost think he knows exactly what has happened here, and I've tried to make him tell. It's no secret that he is terribly bitter and hates dad, maybe Hollister, too. And last night . . ."

Her voice trailed off.

"Last night," Gandy put in, "you thought Lavic was going to talk to me here in the kitchen, so you hung around until he went out! I saw that play, Helen. Why?"

"Because I didn't want him to! He has nothing to tell you. Nothing! He hasn't seemed to mind having you here, and I saw how he looked at you last night when Battle was talking. But he has nothing that you should know!"

"I know it already, Helen." They were close, staring at each other. "You can't go on with what you're doing," Gandy said. "You aren't hiding anything from me; I found Bill Hollister's rifle there at Willow Spring."

She recoiled as if he had struck her, one hand against her cheek. Quickly he added: "It's all right. I put it back in the mud. No one will ever know. Only you can't go on shielding Hollister forever. Girl, you've done your part!" He turned from her, reaching for the door. "Do you know that Bill is headed for the 77 right now?"

"No!"

"I'm trailing him."

"No!" she cried again. "Let me go! Let me handle this. Walt Gandy, you stay out of it!"

He spun back and was suddenly close upon her. He stood rigid, looking into her desperate face. "Let me go?" he asked. "Go and talk to Stoddard? Make more promises, to save the C C men? That? Listen to me. His voice was all at once low and surprisingly sure. 'You will never marry Jeff Stoddard.'"

She stared up. "I will. You don't know—you have no reason to say anything else."

"I haven't!" Then arms that had been held rigidly at his sides swept the girl to him. Close to her lips he said, "I've got the best reason in the world!" And madly he kissed her.

## CHAPTER XIX

YOUNG Champion had fed the palomino and shifted him into a dry saddle blanket. Freshened, the horse stood ready to go.

Gandy came down to the corrals on a run. "Good," he said.

"Thanks, boy," mumbled he, asked. "Is there a direct trail to the 77?"

"So-so," Paul answered, "as far as our Outpost Camp. That's the limit of C C range and is at the south end of the sink. Only a shanty. You can't miss it if you keep angling in that direction. No trail from there on. All you can do is get up to the rims somehow and travel straight west from the Outpost. Walt?" The boy hesitated.

Gandy looked down from his saddle. "What is it?"

"I've figured it out, maybe, when I shot at the other night. If it'll do any good. Bent Lavic."

"Not certain?"

Again the boy hesitated, reluctant. "Well," said Gandy, "suppose you keep it under your hat. All right?"

"Sure!" Paul agreed. Then impulsively, "Wish I could go with you!" But Gandy shook his head.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

# London Is Ready for Sky Raids And Business Goes On 'as Usual'

London has taken the most careful air raid precautions to repel the Nazi invaders from the sky, with sandbags playing an important part in the defense. However, in between air raid warnings the regular way of life goes on undisturbed. Britain takes it all as a matter of fact. Up in the sky at all times one can see hundreds of silvery balloons afloat. Store fronts are sandbagged, but business goes on as usual. Air raid precautions have become "streamlined" to meet the emergency. The cinema is popular, and the populace has learned to carry gas masks at all times.



(Above) Myriads of sandbags above a London hospital make an unusual picture presentation. (Left) Gas masks are advertised like any other merchandise—these are of "smart appearance."



A brace of multiple anti-aircraft machine guns looks skyward from the bridge of one of the British navy's newest racing torpedo boats. The boats are capable of great speed.



A woman air raid ward, with gas mask at her side, telephones from a well-protected booth.



Section of bombed village "somewhere in France."

## Applied Bedspread In Gayest of Scraps



Pert isn't he, this easily appli-qued pup, Frisky Fido! He's just one patch and his bow can be in the gayest of scraps. Do a block in odd moments. Pattern 2541 contains a diagram of block; accurate pattern pieces; directions for making quilt; diagram of quilt; yardages; color schemes. Send order to:

Sewing Circle Needlecraft Dept. 82 Eighth Ave. New York Enclose 15 cents in coins for Pattern No. Name Address

## HOUSEHOLD QUESTIONS

Lime marks on bath tub, caused by hard water, can be removed by rubbing with peroxide of hydrogen.

Save left-over toast for use as bread crumbs. Run it once through the food chopper or roll it out with the rolling pin. Store in a covered glass jar.

Brass will need less cleaning if, after being polished in the usual way, it is rubbed with a cloth slightly moistened with furniture polish or cream.

Meat loaves will cook quicker and more evenly if baked in a tube cake pan.

To make cut glass sparkle, dip a small brush in lemon juice and scrub the glass with it.

Excellent pads for the stair-carpet can be made by covering a fairly thick pad of newspaper with hessian, felt or cloth.

## WEARY DESPONDENT GIRLS: Crying spells, irritable nerves due to functional "monthly" pain should find a real "woman's friend" in Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound. Try it!

Happy State A sound mind in a sound body is a short but full description of a happy state in this world.—Locke.

Today's popularity of Doan's Pills, after many years of world-wide use, surely must be accepted as evidence of satisfactory use. And favorable public opinion supports that of the able physicians who test the value of Doan's under exacting laboratory conditions.

These physicians, too, approve every word of advertising you read, the object of which is only to recommend Doan's Pills as a good diuretic treatment for disorder of the kidney function and for relief of the pain and worry it causes. If more people were aware of how the kidneys must constantly remove waste that cannot stay in the blood without injury to health, there would be better understanding of why the whole body suffers when kidneys lag, and diuretic medication would be more often employed. Burning, scanty or too frequent urination sometimes warn of disturbed kidney function. You may suffer nagging back-ache, persistent headache, attacks of dizziness, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes—feel weak, nervous, all played out. Use Doan's Pills. It is better to rely on a medicine that has won world-wide acclaim than on something less favorably known. Ask your neighbor!

## DOAN'S PILLS

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## CREATING NEW WEALTH TO ORDER

Advertising creates new wealth by showing people new and better ways of living, and as it creates new wealth it contributes to the prosperity of everyone touched by the flow of money which is set up. In this way, don't you see, advertising is a social force which is working in the interest of every one of us every day of the year, bringing us new wealth to use and enjoy.