THE LONE STAR RANGER

A Thrilling Texas Border Story By ZANE GREY

SYNOPSIS.

Buck Duane, inheriting blood lust from his father, kills a liquor-maddened "bad man" who is bent on killing Duane. To escape the law, Buck flees to the wild country infasted by outlaws. He has just met one and is invited to form a partner-ship for better or worse. He accepts. They have trouble at once. Stevens dies from a bullet wound. Buck enters the cramp of Bland's gang and wounds an outsw who tries to kill him. He finds a champion in Euchre, and through him meets Mrs. Bland, and Jeants, an orphaned hostage.

********** Comes the next big crisis in Buck Luane's life. He meets it with characteristic energy and decision. More murder is done, but the cause is good. Love and license and intrigue play their part in the drama. How this hunted man who isn't an outlaw at heart brings out the only decent streak in Euchre and how he rolls another bad man by shielding the helpiess is told

CHAPTER VII.

That night Duane was not troubled by shosts haunting his walking and bright and eager, and grateful to Eurhre for having put something worth while into his mind. During reakfast, however, he was unusually thoughtful, working over the idea of how much or how little he could confide in the outlaw. He was aware of Euchre's scrutiny.

"Wal," began the old man, at last, "how'd you make out with Jennie? What 'd you an' she talk about?"

"We had a little chat. You know you wanted me to cheer her up." Euchre sat with coffee-cup poised

and sarrow eyes studying Duane. "Buck, I've seen some outlaws whose word was good. Mine is, You can trust me. I trusted you, takin' you over there an' puttin' you wise to

my tryin' to help thet poor kid." Thus enjoined by Euchre, Dunne began to tell the conversations with Jenale and Mrs. Bland word for word. Long before he had reached an end Dichre set down the coffee-cup and egan to stare, and at the conclusion of the story his face lost some of its red colse and bends of sweat stood out thiskly on his brow.

"Wal, if thet doesn't floor me!" he ejaculated; blinking at Duane. "Young ann, I figgered you was some swift, ea' sure to make your mark on this river; but I reckon I missed your real callber. Do you know what it 'll take to do all you promised Jen?"

"I haven't any idea," replied Duane,

"You'll have to pull the wool over Rate Bland's eyes, an' even if she falls in love with you, which 's shore likely, thet won't be easy. An' she'd kill you wise. You ain't mistaken her none, ere you?"

'Not me, Euchre. She's a woman. I'd fear her more than any man." "Wal, you'll have to kill Bland an'

Chess Alloway an' Rugg, an' mebbe some others, before you can ride off into the hills with thet giri." "All right. I'll meet what comes,"

said Dunne, quietly. "The great point to have horses ready and pick the right moment, then rush the trick "Thet's the only chauce fer success.

An' you can't do it alone." "I'll have to. I wouldn't ask you to

help me." "Wal, I'll take my chances," replied Euchre, gruffly. "I'm going to help Jennie, you can gamble your last peso on thet."

They talked and planned, though in truth it was Euchre who planned, Duane who listened and agreed. While awaiting the return of Bland and his Seutenants it would be well for Duane so grow friendly with the other outsaws, to sit in a few games of monte, or show a willingness to spend a little ioney. The two schemers were to call upon Mrs. Bland every day-Euchre to carry messages of cheer and warning to Jennie. Dunne to blind the dder woman at any cost. These prefiminaries decided upon, they proceed-

ad to put them into action. No hard task was it to win the friendship of the most of those good-natured butlaws. There were men among them, however, that made Dunne feel that terrible inexplicable wrath rise in his breast. He could not bear to be near them. Jackrabbit Benson was one of these men. Because of him and other outlaws of his ilk Duane could scarcely ever forget the reality of things This was a hidden valley, a robbers' den, a rendezvous for murderers, a wild place stained red by deeds of wild men. And because of that there was always a changed atmosphere. The merriest, idlest, most careless moment might in the flash of an use end in ruthless and tragic action. Duane felt rather than saw a

dark, brooding shadow over the valley. Then, without any solicitation or encouragement from Duane, the Bland woman fell passionately in love with him. She launched herself. And the thing which evidently held her in check was the newness, the strangeness, and for the moment the all-satisfying fact of his respect for her. Duane exerted simself to please, to amuse, to pater-

deference. That was his strong point, I his latter remark was significant to a

He was playing a game of lovelittle communication he had with Jennie was through Euchre, who carried glimpses of her every time he went somehow to pass door or window, to give him a look when chance afforded. Dunne discovered with surprise that these moments were more thrilling to him than any with Mrs. Bland. Jennie had been instructed by Euchre to listen, to understand that this was Duane's only chance to help keep her idlnd from constant worry, to gather the import of every word which had a double meaning. And all through those waiting days he knew that Jennie's face, and especially the warm, fleeting glance she gave him, was responsible for a subtle and gradual change in him. This change, he fancied, was only that through remembrance of her he got rid of his pale, sickening ghosts.

One day a careless Mexican threw a lighted cigarette up into the brush | grizzled breast. matting that served as a ceiling for Benson's den, and there was a fire which left little more than the adobe eping hours. He awoke feeling walls standing. The result was that while repairs were being made there



She Contrived to Pass the Window. Black.

hung very heavily on the hands of some twoscore outlaws. Duane, however, found the hours anything but empty. He spent more time at Mrs. to a minuit, Buck, if she ever got Bland's; he walked miles on all the trails leading out of the valley; he had a care for the conditions of his two horses.

Upon his return from the latest of these tramps Euchre suggested that they go down to the river to the boatlanding.

Nearly all the outlaws in camp were assembled on the river-bank, folling in the shade of the cottonwoods. The heat was oppressive.

Duane and Euchre joined the lazy group and sat down with them. Euchre lighted a black pipe, and, drawing his hat over his eyes, lay back in comfort after the manner of the majority of the outlaws. But Duane was alert, observing, thoughtful. He never missed anything. It was his belief that any moment an idle word might be of benefit to him. Moreover, these rough men were always interesting.

"Bland's been chased acrost the river," said one.

"Naw, be's deliverin' cattle to thet Cuban ship," replied another, "Big deal on, hey?"

"Some big. Rugg says the boss hed an order fer fifteen thousand." "Say, that order 'll take a year to

"Naw. Hardin is in enhoots with Bland. Between 'em they'll fill orders bigger 'n thet."

Wondered what Hardin was rust-

lin' in here fer." Dunne could not possibly attend to all the conversation among the outlaws. He endenvored to get the drift of talk nearest to him.

"Kid Fuller's goin' to cash," said a sandy-whiskered little outlaw.

"So Jim was telling me. Bloodpoison, sin't it? Thet hole wasn't bad. But he took the fever," rejoined a comrade.

"Deger says the Kid might pull through if he had nursin'."

"Wel. Kate Bland ain't nursin' any shot-up boys these days. She hasn't got time

A laugh followed this sally; then came a pencirating silence. Some of the outlaws glanced good-naturedly at in when he reached his destination, tiers," Duane. They bore him no ill will. There was no light in the house. Mrs. Manifestiy they were aware of Mrs. Bland's infatuation.

"Roys, poke all the fun you like at me, but don't mention any lady's name again. My hand is nervous and itchy

these days." He smiled us he spoke, and his

and it had made his part easy so far. class of men who from inclination and necessity practiced at gun-drawing unplaying with life and death! What til they were callous and sore places on their thumbs and inculcated in the very deeps of their nervous organizashort messages. But he caught tion a habit that made even the simplest and most innocent motion of the to the Bland house. She contrived hand end at or near the hip. There was something remarkable about a gun-fighter's hand. It never seemed to be gloved, never to be injured, never out of sight or in an awkward position. Grizzled outlaws in that group, some of whom had many notches on their gun-handles, accorded Duane silence that carried conviction of the regard in which he was held.

"Orful hot, ain't it?" remarked Bill Binck, presently. Bill could not keep quiet for long. He was a typical Texas desperado, had never been anything else. He was stoop-shouldered and how-legged from much riding; a wiry little man, all muscle, with a square head, a hard face partly black from scrubby beard and red from sun, and a bright, roving, cruel eye. His shirt was open at the neck, showing a

"Laziest outfit I ever rustled with." went on Bill, discontentedly. "Nuthin' to do! Say, if anybody wants to swim | told Duane that Mrs. Bland was hermaybe some of you'll gamble?"

He produced a dirty pack of cards and waved them at the motionless crowd.

"Bili, you're too good at cards," replied a lanky outlaw.

"Now, Jasper, you say thet powermight take it to heart," replied Black, with a sudden change of tone.

Here it was again—that upflashing passion. What Jasper saw fit to reply would mollify the outlaw or it would old fox, was talking loud and with not. There was an even balance.

placidly, without moving. Bill grunted and forgot Jasper. But

he seemed restless and dissatisfied. Duane watching the disgruntled outwere more variable than children, as ly and gave welcome to the other man. unstable as water, as dangerous as Duane could not see well enough in presently with a lighted pipe.

whatever's in the bucket thet peon's way. packin'," said the outlaw called Jim. Black's head came up with the ac- Bland, heavily. "Who's here with tion of a hawk about to swoop.

Duane glanced from Black to the carrying a tin bucket toward the river, | replied Mrs. Bland. This peon was a half-witted Indian who lived in a shack and did odd jobs for the Mexicans. Danne had met him | could not catch. often.

caught a leaping gleam in the outlaw's

"Aw, Bill, thet's too fur a shot," said Jasper, as Black rested an elbow on his knee and sighted over the long, heavy Colt. The distance to the peon was about fifty paces, too far for even the most expert shot to hit a moving object so small as a bucket.

Duane, marvelously keen in the alignment of sights, was positive that Black held too high. Another look at the hard face, now tense and dark with blood, confirmed Duane's suspicion that the outlaw was not aiming at the bucket at all. Duane leaped and struck the level gun out of his hand. Another outlaw picked it up.

Black fell back astounded. prived of his weapon, he did not seem the same man, or else he was cowed by Duane's significant and formidable front. Sullenly he turned away without even asking for his gun.

CHAPTER VIII.

What a contrast, Duane thought, the calm evening of that day presented to the state of his soul! This third facing of a desperate man had thrown him off his balance. It had not been fatal, but it threatened so much. Despair had seized upon him and was driving him into a reckless mood when he thought of Jennie.

He had forgotten her. He had forgotten that he had promised to save her. He had forgotten that he meant to snuff out as many lives as might stand between her and freedom. The very remembrance sheered off his morbid introspection. She made a difference. How strange for him to realize that! He felt grateful to her. He had been forced into outlawry; she had been stolen from her people and carried into captivity. They had met in the river fastness, he to instill hope into her despairing life, she to be the means, perhaps, of keeping him from sinking to the level of her captors. He became conscious of a strong and benting desire to see her, talk with her,

These thoughts had run through his mind while on his way to Mrs. Bland's house. He had let Euchre go on ahead because he wanted more time to compose himself. Darkness had about set Bland was walting for him on the porch.

She embraced him, and the sudden, violeur, unfamiliar contact sent such a shock through him that he all but forgot the deep game be was playing. She, however, in her agitation did net speech was drawled; but the good notice his shrinking. From her emast, to farcinate her, and always with hamor in no wise weakened it. Then brace and the tender, incoherent words

that flowed with it he gathered that | a laugh, "Circumstances made me a in' on with him, an' I want to know, Euchre had acquainted her of his action with Black.

"He might have killed you!" she whispered, more clearly; and if Duane had ever heard love in a voice he heard it then. It softened him, It was ensy, even pleasant, to kiss her; but Dunne resolved that, whatever her abandonment might become, he would not go further than the lie she made

"Buck, you love me?" she whispered. "Yes-yes," he burst out, eager to get it over, and even as he spoke he caught the pale gleam of Jennie's face through the window. He felt a shame he was glad she could not see.

The moon had risen over the eastern bulge of dark mountain, and now the valley was flooded with mellow light. and shadows of cottonwoods wavered against the silver.

Suddenly the clip-clop, clip-clop of hoofs caused Duane to raise his head and listen. Horses were coming down the road from the head of the valley. The hour was unusual for riders to come in. Presently the narrow, moonlit lane was crossed at its far end by black moving objects. Two horses Duane discerned.

"It's Bland!" whispered the woman, grasping Duane with shaking hands. You must run! No, he'd see you. That 'd be worse. It's Bland! I know his horse's trot."

Then she dragged Duane to the door, pushed him in.

"Euchre, come out with me! Duane, you stay with the girl! I'll tell Bland you're in love with her. Jen, if you give us away I'll wring your neck."

The swift action and fierce whisper self again. Duane stepped close to Jennie, who stood near the window. Neither spoke, but her hands were outstretched to meet his own. They were small, trembling hands, cold as ice. He held them close, trying to convey what he felt-that he would ful sweet, an' you look sweet, er I protect her. She leaned against him, and they looked out of the window. the lane and wearily come forward. A boy led away the horses. Euchre, the remarkable ease, considering what he "No offense, Bill," said Jasper, claimed his natural cowardice.

The approaching outlaws, hearing voices, halted a rod or so from the porch, Then Mrs. Bland uttered an exclamation, ostensibly meant to exlaw, marveled at him and wondered press surprise, and hurried out to meet what was in his mind. These men them. She greeted her husband warmthe shadow to recognize Bland's com-"Bill, I'll bet you ten you can't spill panion, but he believed it was Allo-

> "Dog-tired we are and starved," said you?"

"That's Euchre on the porch. Duane road, where he saw a crippled peon is inside at the window with Jen,"

"Duane!" he exclaimed. Then he whispered low-something Duane

"Why, I asked him to come," said "Jim, I'll take you up," replied the chief's wife. She spoke easily and naturally and made no change in tone. Something, perhaps a harshness in "Jen has been ailing. She gets thinhis voice, caused Duane to whirl. He ner and whiter every day. Duane came here one day with Euchre, saw Jen, and went looney over her pretty face, same as all you men. So I let him come."

> Bland cursed low and deep under his breath. The older man made a violent action of some kind and apparently was quieted by a restraining hand.

> Then he led the way to the porch, his spurs clinking, the weapons he was carrying rattling, and he flopped down on a bench.

"How are you, boss?" asked Euchre. "Hello, old man. I'm well, but all

Alloway slowly walked on to the porch and leaned against the rail. He answered Euchre's greeting with a nod. Then he stood there a dark, silent figure.

Mrs. Bland's full voice in eager questioning had a tendency to ease the situation. Bland replied briefly to her, reporting a remarkably successful trip. Duane thought it was time to show

himself. He had a feeling that Bland and Alloway would let him go for the moment. They were plainly nonplused, and Alloway seemed sullen, brooding.

"Jennie," whispered Duane, "that was clever of Mrs. Bland. We'll keep up the deception. Any day now be

She pressed close to him, and a barely audible "Hurry!" came breathing into his ear.

"Good night, Jennie," he said, aloud, "Hope you feel better to-morrow." Then he stepped out into the moon-

light and spoke. Bland returned the greeting, and, though he was not amiable, he did not show resentment. "Met Jasper as I rode in," said Bland, presently. "He told me you made Bill Black mad, and there's liable

to be a fight. What did you go off the handle about?" Duane explained the incident, "I'm

sorry I happened to be there," he went "It wasn't my business." "Scurvy trick that 'd been," mut-

tered Bland. "You did right. All the same, Duane, I want you to stop quarreling with my men. If you were one of us-that 'd be different. I can't keep my men from fighting. But I'm not called on to let an outsider haug around my camp and plug my rus-

"I guess I'll have to be hitting the trail for somewhere," said Duane. "Why not join my band? You've got a had start already, Duane, and if

I know this border you'll never be a respectable citizen again. You're a born killer."

"But I'm no gun-fighter," protested Dunne.

rustler. your father was one of the most don't see any other career for you, money." Instead of going it alone-a lone wolf, as the Texans say-why not make live longer."

Euchre squirmed in his seat.

"Boss, I've been givin' the boy egzactly thet same line of talk. An' he'd be a grand feller fer the gang. I've like. seen Wild Bill Hickok throw a gun, an' Billy the Kid, an' Hardin,' an' Chess here-all the fastest men on the border. An' with apologies to present company, I'm here to say Duane has them all skinned. His draw is differ-

ent. You can't see how he does it." Euchre's admiring praise served to create an effective little silence. Alloway shifted unensily on his feet, his spurs jangling faintly, and did not lift his head. Bland seemed thoughtful.

"That's about the only qualification I have to make me eligible for your band," said Duane, easily.

"It's good enough," replied Bland, shortly. "Will you consider the idea?" "I'll think it over. Good night."

He left the group, followed by Euchre. When they reached the end of the lane, and before they had exchanged a word, Bland called Euchre back. Duane proceeded slowly along the moonlit road to the cabin and sat down under the cottonwoods to wait for Euchre. As he sat there with a foreboding of more and darker work shead of him there was yet a strange sweetness left to him, and it lay in thought of Jennie. The pressure of her cold little hands lingered in his. He did not think of her as a woman. and he did not analyze his feelings. He just had vague, dreamy thoughts and imaginations that were interspersed in the constant and stern revolving of plans to save her.

A shuffling step roused him. Euchre's dark figure came crossing the moon-Duane saw the riders dismount down light grass under the cottonwoods, The moment the outlaw reached him Duane saw that he was laboring under great excitement. It scarcely affected Duane. He seemed to be acquiring patience, calmness, strength.

"Bland kept you pretty long," he said.

"Wait till I git my breath," replied Euchre. He sat silent a little while, fanning himself with a sombrero, though the night was cool, and then he went into the cabin to return

"Fine night," he said; and his tone further acquainted Duane with Euchre's quaint humor, "Fine night for love-affairs, by gum!"

"I'd noticed that," rejoined Duane,

"Buck, listen to this here yarn. When I got back to the porch I seen havin' them ready?" Bland. Asked me some questions right from the shoulder. I was ready for them, an' I swore the moon was green cheese. He was satisfied. Bland always trusted me, an' liked me, too, I cally, reckon. I hated to lie black thet way. tions toward Jennie, an' I'd doublecross him any day.

"Then he went into the house. Jennie had gone to her little room, an' Bland called her to come out. Then, Buck, his next move was some surprisin'. He deliberately throwed a gun on Kate. Yes sir, he pointed his big blue Colt right at her, an' he says: "T've a mind to blow out your

brains.' "'Go ahead,' says Kate, cool as could

"You lied to me,' he roars.

"Kate laughed in his face. Bland slammed the gun down an' made a



Duane Struck the Gun Out of His Hand.

grab fer her. He choked her till I thought she was strangled. Alloway made him stop. She flopped down on the bed an' gasped fer a while.

"Then he went in an' dragged poor Jen out. An' when I seen Bland twist her-hurt her-I had a queer hot feelin' deep down in me, an' fer the only time in my life I wished I was a gun-

fighter. "Wal. Jen was whiter 'n a sheet, an' her eyes were big and stary, but she had herve. Fust time I ever seen her

" 'Jennie,' he said, 'my wife said "Circumstances made me-" Duane came here to see you. I believe "No doubt," interrupted Bland, with she's lyin'. I think she's been carry-

show any.

You don't know yourself. If she's been an' you tell me the truth You're young; you've got a temper; I'll let you go. I'll send you to Huntsville, where you can communicate dangerous men Texas ever had. I with your friends. I'll give you

"Thet must hev been a hell of a minnit fer Kate Bland. If ever I seen friends with other outlaws? You'll death in a man's eye I seen it in Bland's. He loves her. Thet's the strange part of it.

"'Has Duane been comin here to see my wife?' Bland asked, fierca-

"'No,' said Jennie. "He has fallen in love with you? Kate said thet.'

"'I-I'm not-I don't know-he hasn't told me.'

"'But you're in love with him?" "'Yes,' she said; an', Buck, if you only could have seen her! She throwed up her head, an' her eyes were full of fire. Bland seemed dazed at sight of her. An' Alloway, why, thet little skunk of an outlaw cried right out. He was hit plumb center. He's in love with Jen. An' the look of her then was enough to make any feller quit. He jest slunk out of the room. I told you, mebbe, thet he'd been tryin' to git Bland to marry Jen to him. So even a tough like Alloway can love a woman !

"Bland stamped up an' down the oom. He sure was dvin' hard.

"'Jennie,' he said, once more turnin' to her. 'You swear in fear of your life thet you're tellin' truth. Kate's not in love with Dunne? She's let him come to see you? There's been nuthin' between . them?'

"'No. I swear, answered Jennie: an' Bland sat down like a man licked. "'Go to bed, you white-faced-Bland choked on some word or other -a bad one, I reckon-an' he positively shook in his chair.

"Jennie went then, an' Kate began to have hysterics. An' your Uncle Euchre ducked his nut out of the door an' come home."

CHAPTER IX.

Both men were awake early, silent with the premonition of trouble ahead, thoughtful of the fact that the time for the long-planned action was at hand.

"Buck, the sooner the better now," Euchre finally declared, with a glint in his eye. "The more time we use up now the less surprised Bland 'Il be."

"I'm ready when you are," replied Duane, quietly, and he rose from the table.

"Wal, saddle up, then," went on "Tie on them two Euchre, gruffly. packs I made, one fer each saddle. You can't tell-mebbe either hoss will be carryin' double. It's good they're both big, strong hosses. Guess thet wasn't a wise move of your Uncle Euchre's-bringin' in your hosses an'

"Euchre, I hope you're not going to get in bad here. I'm afraid you are. Let me do the rest now," said Duane. The old outlaw eyed him sarcasti-

"Thet 'd be turrible now, wouldn't But he's a hard man with bad inten- it? If you want to know, why I'm in bad already. I didn't tell you the Alloway called me last night. He's gettin' wise pretty quick."

> "Euchre, you're going with me?" queried Duane, suddenly divining the truth. Wal, I reckon. Either to hell or safe over the mountain! Now, Buck.

> you do some hard figgerin' while I go nosin' round. It's pretty early, which 's all the better." Euchre put on his sombrero, and as he went out Duane saw that he wore a gun-and-cartridge belt. It was the

outlaw armed. Dunne packed his few belongings into his saddle-bags, and then carried the saddles out of the corral. The hour had arrived, and he was ready. Time passed slowly. Finally he heard the shuffle of Euchre's boots on the hard path. The sound was

first time Duane had ever seen the

quicker than usual. When Euchre came around the corner of the cabin Duane was not so astounded as he was concerned to see the outlaw white and shaking. Sweat dripped from him. He had a wild look. "Luck ours-so-fur, Buck!" he

"You don't look it," replied Duane, "I'm turrible sick, Jest killed a man. Fust one I ever killed!"

"Who?" asked Duane, startled. "Jackrabbit Benson. An' sick as & am, I'm gloryin' in it. I went nosin' round up the road. Saw Alloway goin' into Deger's. He's thick with the Degers. Reckon he's askin' questions. Anyway, I was sure glad to see him away from Bland's. An' he didn't see me. When I dropped into Benson's there wasn't nobody there but Jackrabbit an' some greasers he was startin' to work. Benson never had no use fer me. An' he up an' said he wouldn't give a two-bit piece fer my life. I

asked him why. " 'You're double-crossin' the boss an' Chess,' he said.

"'Jack, what 'd you give fer your own life? I asked him.

"He straightened up surprised an' mean-lookin'. An' I let him have it, plumb center! He wilted, an' the greasers run. I reckon I'll never sleep again. But I had to do it."

Duane asked if the shot had attracted any attention outside.

What, in your opinion are the chances that Buck and Euchre will get away with little Jennie? Isn't it possible that the good element hidden in Mrs. Bland will crop out to save Buck?

Consessant Consessant Consessant (TO BE CONTINUED.)