

# marked man

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By H. C. WIRE

WNU SERVICE

CHAPTER XIX—Continued.

Away westward, twenty miles perhaps, there came a momentary rift in the overcast sky, and a peak of the Barricade Mountains, thrust up like a blunt thumb, threw back an opalescent glow. Sunrise. Walt Gandy set his watch. He rode on after that into a thickening gloom, until the mist came down about him and turned to fine drizzle.

He stopped and shrugged into his black slicker. Steam rose from the palomino. The little beast shifted uneasily and tried to wheel back.

"Cut it out!" said Gandy. "I don't like this either!"

They moved on, angling into the southwest.

There was no turning back from this trail, he knew that; but this minute he would like to turn back. His life had never seemed so much worth holding onto; because that moment, there in his arms Helen Cameron had answered his kiss.

He pushed on. And then an abrupt converging of many cowtrails told him that a water-hole was not far off. They came in fanwise from across the bench top, merging together until they were one deep rut, and following, he struck unexpectedly down the course of a ravine. Within twenty minutes after that he was swinging off at the cabin of Outpost Camp.

It had only the one small building, of weathered boards and an iron roof, set where the ravine emptied into the sink. The water-hole with a single tall mountain cedar, out of place here, was behind the cabin. A steer hide from an animal butchered in the last round-up hung stiff and dry from the tree's lowest branch.

Hollister had been here. The large sharp prints of his black showed at the water-hole. Then inside the cabin Gandy at once sniffed cigarette smoke. The coffee pot, a quarter full of grounds, was cold. But the cast iron stove was faintly warm. Hollister had left not more than an hour ago.

Again in the saddle Gandy put spurs to the palomino, relieved for a little while by a feeling that Hollister might not be too far ahead. There was a chance of catching up before Bill encountered any of the 77.

Yet cattle prowling the sink bottom had left their maze of tracks, across which the pock-marks of a single horse could not be followed. Herds of the uncomfortable animals were crowded close against the sink cliff, trying to find shelter from a needed wind. The drizzle had ceased. Back at the cabin Gandy had peered out of his slicker and tied it again behind his seat.

From this distance he saw a choice of three ways up. Along the sheer rock face three deep notches showed within a mile of one another. The first seemed to bear too far southward. Either the second or third appeared more in his course due west. There was no way to tell into which one Hollister had gone, and staring hard as he approached the silent cuts, Walt Gandy felt for the first time a cold dread. Then, nearer, he saw something that jerked him to instant wariness.

A low rock wall had been built across the first ravine mouth to prevent C C cattle from drifting west out of the sink. That wall now lay scattered. It was the same in the second cut. By the time he had charged on to the third, the sign was plain; 77 men had thrown these barriers down to let their cattle through. The drive of two thousand head was coming—even now some of the 77 guards might be watching the rims above him. Still, Kelso and Stoddard had not expected fight from the C C.

Gandy wheeled suddenly up the third cut.

He shoved around the next bends at a faster pace, all at once wanting to be out of this. No wind reached him down here, and no sound save the rapid pad of his palomino's hoofs. He felt the oppression of being caged in, and riding blind. Then when he least expected it, the cut struck sharply upward; there was a short scramble on loose rock, a funneling away of the walls, and he rose abruptly upon the open prairie.

An immediate sweeping glance took in a circle of flat empty land. He was alone. But then far westward where this top began a long lift, a dark smudge showed against gray earth. The 77 drive. Seven miles off, Gandy judged, though maybe more. They'd not reach the watch. Three o'clock, dark in another two hours. Hollister? He rocked up onto his feet, hands on the saddle horn and stood searching that sector of prairie west and southwest.

He reined his pony south, seeking the heads of those other two ravines, for surely into one of them Hollister had started. There was no other way west. Again as he rode on, bowed into a cold wind, there settled upon him a dull constant dread, the sense of an inevitable ending here which Hollister himself had predicted.

He had covered less than a quarter of a mile when a rider seemed to leap from the very earth. His horse was in a tight run, the man bent forward, and he had shot out like that, Gandy knew, from one of

the other west cuts. He was headed for the 77 drive and through the first minute after his sudden appearance it was plain that he did not know there was another on the prairie top.

Gandy clapped spurs to the palomino, loosening the thirty-eight in its belt holster as he quartered toward the fleeing man. This party was getting away from something; no doubt about that. His head turned, and then in a jerk upon shortened reins, he set his horse back with all hoofs sliding. In the same move his right hand had crossed over to the left of his saddle; smoothly a rifle ran from the scabbard there and whipped up to his shoulder.

Things happened then. Distance was too far for the thirty-eight. Wheeling his own mount Walt Gandy made a vain try with two rapid shots. He saw dust kick up in front of the other's horse. Wind snatched a white wisp from the rifle barrel leveled toward him and a hornet zinged close to his ear. Again he saw the white wisp and his palomino jumped straight up. He heard that second report, a third and the



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earth rose and slammed him from the saddle.

Breath went out of him and he fought a black fog that thickened before his eyes. It could have lasted only a few seconds. He came out of it crouched behind the body of his horse, gun trained across the bulging side. The other man was streaking away once more in a head-long run.

Walt Gandy stood up and was not aware until then that he was shot in the left leg. It felt as if a red-hot rod was suddenly stabbed into his flesh near the knee. His knee was stiff; his blue jeans already beginning to stain. But again that went momentarily out of his mind as he stared down at the unmoving palomino. The little beast was dead.

The fact registered now only in a numbing way; too much impeded for him to feel the full sense of his loss. Rapidly he stripped off the saddle, blanket, and bridle, shouldered them and turned toward the ravine out of which the unknown rider had appeared. On the rim he looked back. He would never want to own another pale gold horse.

Now it was a matter of getting back to Outpost Camp with no time lost, and searching the ravine on the way. The rider might have left him for dead. Still it would be no good if others came ahead and found him on 77 ground afoot.

The cut slanted in a sharp descent at first, then leveled out in a winding sand bottom much like the one up which he had ridden. High-heeled boots were never made for rapid walking. He limped on, shifting the saddle from shoulder to shoulder. He was perhaps halfway to the sink when two brass shells glittered against the sand. Gandy scooped them up, put them to his nose. Next he had let the saddle gear fall and was stumbling ahead, for the shells still had in them the rancid smoke of freshly burned powder.

Within fifty paces the sand showed that Hollister's horse had come to a sudden stop, had wheeled, plunged sideways. All the marks of ambush were here in a tangle of tracks—and then a spot where a man had fallen, bleeding.

Gandy ran on, reading signs where the horse had come to a halt, and where Hollister had remounted. Relief swept him. Bill was not dead. But farther on he was following a trail of blood stains dropped evenly every two paces.

CHAPTER XX

BILL HOLLISTER had clung to his saddle until within twenty feet of the cabin at Outpost Camp. Stumbling up, Gandy saw where he had pitched to the ground, then dragged himself on a short distance. He was lying now on his back, left arm folded under his head, inert, but conscious. His eyes opened at the thud of boots and in them a knowing smile kindled. He started to speak.

"Save it," said Gandy. "Think

you're a swell prophet, don't you!" He bent over. "How are you, Bill? Where are you hit?"

Not until he had moved the man a little to lift him, did he see the right arm almost shot away, and a widening spot of blood from another wound somewhere in Hollister's back. His own injury was nothing compared to this; a continued stiffening of the left knee, but the stain on his blue jeans was drying. He picked Bill Hollister up bodily, carried him to the cabin and booted the door inward.

Outpost Camp was the usual range shack, an overnight stopping-place for a man riding circle, or the center of a more lively scene for a week during fall or spring round-up. Inside was a rough table, half a dozen boxes for chairs, four double-tier bunks and a stove. It was no more barren nor isolated than most, yet entering with the wounded man, Walt Gandy felt that a place had never been so desolate.

He laid Hollister on the straw tick of a lower bunk near the stove, pushed back the stove lids and crammed brush stems in onto ash that was still warm. There was no wood here in the bottoms. The brush flared. Methodically he went out to the spring for water, brought in a full bucket, poured some in a basin to heat, some in the coffee pot, went out for more fuel—and all the time he was telling himself that a tough fellow like that one in there couldn't die, knowing that he could.

Hollister lay face down, saying nothing during the minutes Walt worked over him, cleaning sand from the shattered right arm, then putting on a tight bandage to stop the blood. The back wound was only a small neat hole; but what the bullet had done internally was beyond Gandy's help, save for the ease of coffee and soothing warmth from the red-hot stove. In time someone would come. He could only wait.

Finished with his first-aid, he brought the coffee pot, two tin cups and sat down on a box beside the bunk. Hollister was over on his back now, his head propped upon a folded coat, and that quiet, knowing smile had never left his eyes. He managed the cup with his left hand. They sat there drinking, silent.

Not much talk had ever been needed between these two. For a time now they did not talk at all.

Hollister opened his mouth and took a cigarette held out for him. Then he lay silently smoking. But there was something he wanted to talk about and seemed waiting until enough strength was stored. His eyes sobered to their deep-set, studying look.

Walt Gandy saw, and felt instinctively that he did not want to listen. He did not want a confession, if that was what Hollister had on his mind. What did it matter?

Twice he shook his head to stave off talk, until with effort the lank man burst out: "Turn around here! I've got things to tell you. And I haven't got much time."

"They'll keep," said Gandy. "You're going to pull out of this all right. The ranch knows where we are and someone will come trailing us if we don't show up. You keep quiet." But he drew his eyes from the pain-ridden face. If they were coming, they'd better hurry!

"No," Hollister managed doggedly. "I want you to understand something."

Gandy's head lifted and he looked across the flickering light to where Hollister lay in shadow. "Maybe I do already, Bill. Never mind."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Let it go, Bill."

"Well, I don't think you do," Hollister said. "It's Helen I want to talk about."

"Walt? Have you fallen in love with that girl?"

The question came so pointedly that Walt Gandy stared. Then he countered: "What difference does that make one way or the other?"

"All the difference, in what I say to you," Hollister answered, and the grave tone of his voice showed this deeply important to him. "Have you?"

Walt Gandy admitted only, "I've never met anyone like her."

"Good," said Hollister. "That's enough." Though his lean face was in half dark, he seemed to be smiling to himself, pleased with something, and Gandy wondered.

Hollister waited to regain breath. Unexpectedly he asked: "You must have an idea by this time, haven't you, who killed Chino Drake?"

Walt Gandy's gaze slid to the floor. He said nothing. What did it matter now?

Hollister persisted. "And Ranger Powell, too. But maybe you haven't figured the reason . . ."

"Bill! Shut up!"

Gandy was up onto his feet. Outside, Hollister's horse had nickered. He puffed out the candle and covered the open stove hole. Cat-walking to the window his first thought was that no one from the C C could be here so soon . . . it was some of the 77.

Beyond the window pane was only solid blackness of night. He shifted along to the door, put his left hand on the knob and held it.

For perhaps five minutes after the first tentative call from Hollister's horse there was no other sound. Then in the same instant, boot soles

crunched and someone rapped on the door.

Gandy waited, thirty-eight aimed at hip level.

The sharp rap came again, and a voice, saying, "Bill! Bill Hollister?"

He jerked the door inward, sheathing the gun. "Helen! Helen, where are you?"

"Here," she answered out of the dark, invisible at only a little more than arm's length. Then she gasped "Wait! Has something happened? What are you doing?"

He stepped back. "Are you alone?"

"No. Paul is out there with the horses."

Gandy had groped for the candle in its beer bottle holder, found it and struck a match. "Come in, Helen. Bill is over there, on the bunk."

The girl darted past him, and he did not turn to look. He heard the light thud as she flung herself down beside the wounded man, and a single fluttering cry of her voice. Her words came softly after that, flowing on in tones as soothing as a caress. He closed the door behind him and stood outside in the dark.

Time ceased; a long blank age in which a girl's words turned from caressing to pleading, followed by silence. At last the door opened, and Helen groped out with the candlelight flickering at her back.

"Walt?"

"I'm here." He caught her outstretched hands.

Her voice broke. "I knew it! I knew something like this had happened and started early in the afternoon. Oh, why didn't I come sooner! Is it too late? Wait, if he dies, I don't know what I'll do!"

"He's tough," said Gandy. "You've got to go right back, Helen. I'd go but the 77 has gunmen loose out here. Phone for a doctor. Tell Horsethief Fisher to bring on Bailey and his bunch. We can't move Hollister now." Her face was close to him and he saw that she was crying. Her hands gripped his, hard.

"Hurry," he told her. "Ride like the devil!"

He heard her at the spring talking to Paul Champion. There burst a rattle of running hoofs as they plunged off across the sink, and he went back inside to Bill Hollister. At once it seemed as if the girl's being here, and what had passed



"So you lied at the inquest to shield Cash Cameron!"

between them was all the man had wanted. The fight against pain was gradually distorting his face, yet deep under that look his expression was unbelievably peaceful. He looked up: "God never made another one like her, Walt. I've thought that every minute for two years, and still do. Now you sit down here and listen. Don't you butt in."

Gandy hitched his box in close. "Bill," he said, "there's not a darn thing you need to tell me."

"Plenty I've got to tell you!" Hollister answered. "You think I killed Drake and Ranger Powell. I know. But I didn't, Walt."

"Then for . . .!"

"Wait. I knew that day before the Drake inquest that my rifle had vanished from the rack. Understand? Before the inquest. It wasn't taken by one of Battle's deputies while we were in town. I've known that all along."

Walt Gandy jerked forward, hands on his knees. "Then you mean Cash?"

Hollister nodded. "Only two days earlier Cameron lost his temper over the forest argument and threatened Powell. I heard it. Then the only thing I could see afterwards was that he had carried out his threat, and Chino Drake was unlucky enough to be a witness."

"So you lied at the inquest to shield Cash Cameron!"

"No. The day Drake and Powell were killed I was some place that a girl like Helen would never understand. But you—you know times we had on the border. Mexican fiesta, dances . . . There's a place here called Mexican Hole. That's where I was, trying to forget I could never make Helen Cameron marry me. I couldn't tell that in front of her."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Strange Facts

Off-Color Whites Adopt a Skunk? Low Oil Production

At least 40 per cent of the Caucasian race, which is generally supposed to comprise the white branches of the human species, is composed of people such as the Hindus and Arabs, whose skin is dark brown, and others such as the Ethiopians, whose color is nearly black.

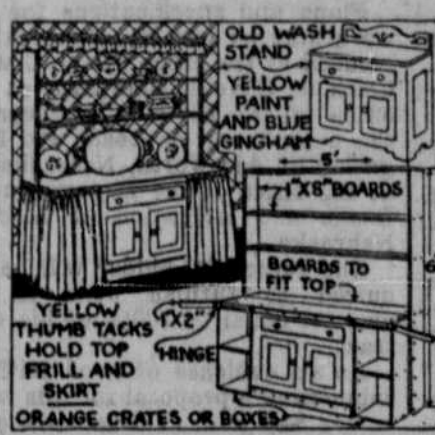
As the London zoo is low in funds, several hundred people have come to its rescue by adopting an animal. They pay for its food and, in return, have their generosity acknowledged on a sign attached to the animal's cage. Three lions, two giraffes, a gorilla and a skunk are still awaiting adoption.

The blind people of the United States are engaged in about 425 different regular occupations.

Although there are oil wells in this country capable of producing up to as much as 185,000 barrels a day, the average daily production per well is less than 10 barrels. In Pennsylvania, it is less than half a barrel.—Collier's.

# HOW TO SEW

by Ruth Wyeth Spears



SO MANY of you have written me letters of appreciation about the new SEWING BOOK 5 that I want to thank you all here at one time. In Book 1 is sketched and described methods of making slip covers, curtains, bedspreads, dressing tables and other things for the house. Next came Book 2 with gifts, novelties and a glossary of embroidery stitches. Then, in Book 3, I began to share with you some of the human interest side of this fascinating job of mine, and to tell you about the adventures of many clever women who make the things that they want for their homes—sometimes from almost nothing. There were more of these adventures in Book 4, and there are still more in Book 5. I am glad that everything needed is in today's sketch about this remodeled washstand because I have used up all my space now; and the frill around the top shelf is five inches deep. Books are 10 cents each. Send order to:

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## ASK ME ANOTHER

A Quiz With Answers Offering Information on Various Subjects

The Questions

1. What is the Alhambra?
2. How does the ostrich defend itself?
3. According to the Homeric legend, who devised the wooden horse stratagem that brought about the capture of Troy?
4. Why are golf balls dimpled instead of smooth?
5. What was the first ship to carry the American flag around the world?
6. What is meant by "O tempora! O mores!"?
7. How many different types of crosses are used in Christian architecture, art and ceremonies?
8. Is a kangaroo born helpless?
9. England had eight kings by the name of Henry. How many did France have?
10. Do thunderstorms sour milk?

The Answers

1. A Spanish palace (the fortress of Moorish kings at Granada).
2. By its powerful kicks.
3. Odysseus.
4. A dimpled ball flies farther and straighter than a smooth one, having a greater "hold" on the air while traveling through it.
5. The Columbia, commanded by Capt. Robert Gray (1792).
6. Oh the times! Oh the manners! Alas for the times! Alas for the manners! Words spoken by Cicero.
7. Approximately 50.
8. Yes, it is born blind, is only an inch long, weighing but a fraction of an ounce.
9. France has had four kings by the name of Henry.
10. No. Hot sultry weather, which usually precedes storms, aids in producing the souring.

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