

Rider of Buck River

By WILLIAM MACLEOD
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THE STORY SO FAR: Ellen Carey, the postmaster's daughter, seems interested in two men, Jeff Brand, a rustler, and Calhoun Terry, manager of a big ranch. Recently four rustlers had been killed mysteriously. Terry called Jeff

CHAPTER XXII

It was a special train consisting of two day coaches and three box cars.

They were a rough-looking lot, these Texans. Some were bearded, and a good many of the others wore long, drooping mustaches. Seasoned man-hunters, they were cool, tough specimens who had ridden hard and far into the brush after the men on the dodge wanted by the law.

At Jim Creek the engineer ran the train onto a siding. Sunday Brown passed through the cars, waking up his men and shouting "All out . . . All out." Sleepily the Texans came to life. They gathered up their bags and their weapons, then filed down the aisle and dropped from the steps of the coach. Eight or ten men in chaps awaited them there. They were cattlemen and foremen of various outfits. Others would join them as the invaders moved deeper into the territory they meant to comb.

Sunday Brown was a big broad-shouldered man moving on toward fifty. He stood six foot in his shoes and weighed two hundred pounds of solid bone, gristle, and muscle. His weather-beaten face was hard and yet wary.

Clint Ellison and John McFaddin led the cavalcade. They were familiar with the terrain, which was part of the country covered by their spring and fall roundups. The party followed a winding, narrow road through the sage to a ford on the North Fork. A coyote crept its furtive way through the brush. On the side of a hill the riders caught a glimpse of startled cattle branded with the Reverse B brand.

Reminded of Calhoun Terry by the brand, Clint Ellison made bitter comment to his companion. "We're risking our lives for that turncoat as much as for our own stuff. He sits tight and says he won't have any part in this, but his outfit shares the profits with us."

Ellison's gray face was set obstinately. "The trouble with him is that he has too many friends among the rustlers. He used to be one of that crowd."

"No, sir," denied McFaddin promptly. "He came of good, clean stock. His father, Barton Terry, was a fine citizen. Cal is all right, for that matter. Plenty of the small cattlemen are square shooters, Clint. They don't like rustlers any more than we do. I'm disappointed in Cal. But that's the way he is made." He added after a moment: "By the way, who is the bird who bumped off Buck Hart and his friends?"

The No. 10, by Joe manager took his time to answer. "You paid your share, John, and I reckon you have a right to know," he said at last. "The fellow's name is Jack Turley. Do you know him?"

"I've met him. That's all. I don't want to know him any better."

"I'm expecting him to meet us somewhere in Box Canyon before we get to Johnson's Prong. Turley has been thick with the rustlers for some time. He knows where they roost and he is to guide us to them."

They passed the spot where Tetlow has been ambushed and rode up the draw leading to Box Canyon.

"We separate here," he said. "The wagons can't go up the canyon, of course. They'll follow the road past Renaud's homestead. If anybody makes inquiries, you are hauling supplies to the Becker coal mines. Don't get excited. The tarps cover the wagons and nobody will suspect anything unusual. We'll meet tonight at Packer's Fork. The rest of us have some clean-up jobs to do today. We're going up the gulch, and when we reach the prong are cutting across the hills. If anybody sees us they have to be stopped, no matter whether they are honest settlers or thieves. In case they try to run, shoot down their horses. Be careful not to hit them. We could easily make a serious mistake by getting the wrong men. We are hunting certain individuals known to us. It has to be made evident by us that decent citizens have nothing to fear. Is that clear?"

There was a murmur of assent.

He led the way through the aspen grove and up the steep, crooked trail beyond. It brought them to a long spur, at the upper end of the gorge, which ran out from Johnson's Prong.

Here Gaines, Collins, and several other stockmen joined the party. The leaders consulted together. They decided it would be better to wait for Turley.

CHAPTER XXIII

As Jeff Brand rode back into the hills his mind brooded over the suggestion let fall by Ellen. He never had liked Turley.

Jeff tried to think back to the times when the killings were done. He was sure that Turley had not been with him at any of the periods when the assassinations must have taken place. Little things began to fit together. Jack owned a .45-70 Winchester, the weapon used by the killer. That in itself was

INSTALLMENT ELEVEN

and Carey to investigate the last one. Lee Hart, brother of one of the victims, is also believed to have taken a shot at Terry. Jeff shows Ellen the note left by the killer and she thinks it is Jack Turley's writing. The big ranchers bring in

nothing. Brand could name a dozen men who had one. It only showed he had the weapon handy. Turley had a habit of occasional absence. The boys had joshed him about it, hinting at an unknown woman.

When Jeff rode up to the cabin on Turley's claim he found two other men there with the homesteader. One was Dave Morgan and the other Bill Herriott.

"What's new?" Bill asked after the first greetings.

Jeff dropped the bridle reins to the ground. "A heap of things," he drawled. "You'll be surprised. First off, the Diamond Reverse B is quit-'n' business. Sellin' out lock, stock, and barrel."

"Who to?" Herriott inquired. "To Tom, Dick, and Harry. The big boss is on from Boston or somewhere. He was at the Box 55 with Terry, and he told the Careys they was cutting it up into small tracts to be offered for sale."

Brand then spilled his next piece of news.

"This guy from Boston had a copy of the Denver Republican with him. There was a piece in it about a big bunch of Texas warriors all garished with guns ready to take off



"What's new?" Bill asked after the first greetings.

somewheres to clean out rustlers. Clint Ellison was seen with them."

Jeff's eyes had not lifted from Turley as he told this bit of news.

"You think they are headin' this way?" Morgan asked.

"I wouldn't know. Do yore own figurin'." Brand's head, shallow eyes still held fast to Turley. "What would you say, Jack?"

Turley was disturbed by the steadiness of that regard. "Why, I wouldn't know, Jeff. Chances are there's nothing to it. It doesn't sound anyways reasonable. But maybe I'm wrong. What's your idea?"

"I haven't made up my mind for sure. Thought I'd wait till I heard from you."

"From me?" Turley's startled face showed more than astonishment. "Why, how would I know?"

"I expect you know a lot we don't, Jack," Jeff answered, his voice ominously gentle. He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and handed it to Herriott. "Take a look at that, Bill, and pass it on to Dave. It was found pinned on Black Yeager's coat. The gent who killed him left a sample of his handwriting. I don't reckon you recognize it."

Herriott frowned down at the paper, shook his head, and passed it to Morgan.

Morgan said, "Can't prove a thing by me," and passed the slip to Turley.

As Turley looked at it, a gray-green pallor spread over his swarthy face.

"I . . . don't know . . . who wrote it," he mumbled, and looked at Brand, despair in his eyes.

"I do," Jeff's voice rang out crisp and hard. "We've found the killer, boys. He's standing there with the paper in his hand that he left on Yeager's coat."

"No . . . no! It's not true." Turley gulped down his terror, to fight back.

Watching the trapped man's fearful face, Morgan realized that Jeff had found the guilty man.

"Better talk, Turley," he advised ominously. "Talk fast, if you don't want us to believe Jeff."

"While he is talking you and Bill search the cabin, Dave. You might find money. A lot of it. He's been playing poor. Let's get wise about that."

"From a chalk-dry throat Turley offered an explanation. "My folks sent me some money, boys."

The two men walked into the cabin and began rummaging among its contents. In a straw tick they found a rip, through which their exploring hands brought a canvas sack. In the sack were four packages of greenbacks.

a lot of Texas expens officers to round up rustlers and kill them. Terry objects. He gets the owner of his ranch to offer his sale in small parcels to small ranchers. In his opinion, the day of the absentee owner is past.

"Must be nearly two thousand dollars here," Herriott said.

"Five hundred apiece." Jeff's voice was cold as a mountain stream fresh from a glacier. "They pay fine, don't they, Turley?"

"You've got it wrong, Jeff," the killer croaked hoarsely. "I wouldn't do that to boys I had bunked with. Don't you know I wouldn't?"

"Come clean," Morgan snarled. "Who hired you?"

"Nobody. That money came from my folks, like I said. Boys, I been your friend. You wouldn't—"

His voice died away in a quaver. "You're bucked out in a quaver. You're bucked out," Jeff said evenly. "You're going on a long journey. Starting right damn now."

The man looked round from one to another. His glance slid back to Jeff. "Thing to do is . . . talk this over," Turley began, and stuck. There was no mercy in these implacable eyes.

"You didn't give Buck or Black or the other boys a show for their white alibies," Jeff told him. "You don't deserve one either. But I'm giving you one. Bill and Dave will keep out of this till I'm through. It will be one of us at a time. Don't keep me waiting, you—"

The guns came out together. The roar of them was almost simultaneous. But not quite. Jeff was the quicker by a fraction of a second. Turley spun round from the shock of the bullet, clutched at his heart, and pitched forward full length.

After a silence, Morgan said, "That will be all for Mr. Turley."

"What will we do with this blood money?" asked Herriott.

"Jim Tetlow left a wife and three children," Brand said. "Take it up Fisher Creek to her, Bill, when you head for home. Part of it is the price of her husband's death. The other boys weren't married. It will come in handy to feed the kids."

Jeff thrust the revolver back into its holster. "I noticed some Flying V C horses down the trail a way as I came up. We'll rope one, tie the body on it and send it home with this carrion on its back."

"Fine!" Morgan ripped out a mal-evil oath. "Telling them their killer has come back to report."

Bill Herriott left for Fisher Creek on his errand to Mrs. Tetlow. The other two rounded up the bunch of Flying V C horses, roped one, and brought it back to the cabin. They found a cross-buck pack saddle in the barn and cinched it to the animal. The body was made secure to the cross-buck by a lash-roped interlaced about the load. Jeff threw the diamond hitch expertly so as to absorb any slackness that might arise. Meanwhile Morgan penciled a note.

They had to drive the packhorse many miles, to be sure it would reach its destination.

On Sage Hen Flats they met a cowboy. He rested in the saddle, his weight on one foot and on the thigh of the other leg.

"Where you headin' for?" he asked.

"Just maverickin' around," Jeff told him. "Know anything new?"

"Not a thing. Little while ago I saw McFaddin and Collins."

They crossed the tableland into a hilly country where they gradually wound down toward Johnson's Prong. When at last they came suddenly on three horsemen at the foot of the draw, Brand noticed instantly that they were strangers. Swiftly he said to his companion, "Don't start anything."

The strangers were watching them, their horses motionless.

"Some freight for McFaddin and Collins," Jeff called. "Seen 'em?"

After a pause one of the men said, "Yes."

"Fine. Turn it over to them. Be seeing you later."

Jeff wheeled and led the way round the bend, then went to a cantery.

Someone shouted to them to stop but they kept going. They heard the pounding of hoofs behind them. Just before they disappeared over another hill a rider showed at the head of the draw. He shouted again, then fired, too hurriedly for accuracy.

"This way," Morgan called to his companion, and slid into a hollow between two rises.

The country was a huddle of hills, and inside of a few minutes their pursuers had completely lost them.

"Who were those fellows?" Morgan asked. "They're mighty quick to burn powder. I'll say that."

"Yes. With few questions asked." "Must be warriors of some of the big outfits."

"Yes, but not cowboys," Brand's eyes were shining with excitement. "Part of this army the Republican was tellin' about."

Morgan pulled up his mount. "Hell! It might be that-way. We'd better find out for sure, and if it's so get word to the boys."

"Just what I'm thinking, Dave. Let's scout around and find out how big a bunch of them there are."

They talked it over together, then made a wide circle to strike Johnson's Prong from the pines above.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Barnum Had Plugged Holes And Was in the Money

When F. T. Barnum, as a young man, left Danbury, Conn., to make his way in the world, he left numerous unpaid bills behind him. To one creditor the imaginative showman said with great intensity: "I'll pay you what I owe you as soon as I get rich."

The other laughed and eyed the youth disdainfully.

"That will be when a sieve holds water," he jeered.

But in a few years the master showman was well on the road to success, and with great satisfaction wrote the man the following note:

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