

MAX
BRAND

Speedy's Mare

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a Fadedpage.com administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: Speedy's Mare

Date of first publication: 1932

Author: Frederick Schiller Faust (as Max Brand) (1892-1944)

Date first posted: Jan. 7, 2019

Date last updated: Jan. 7, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20190149

This ebook was produced by: Al Haines, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

Other books by Max Brand:

**MORE TALES OF THE WILD WEST
FLAMING FORTUNE
THE RUNAWAYS
BLUE KINGDOM
JOKERS EXTRA WILD
CRUSADER
SMOKING GUNS
THE LONE RIDER
THE UNTAMED WEST (Anthology)
THE TYRANT
THE WELDING QUIRT
THE BRIGHT FACE OF DANGER
DON DIABLO
THE OUTLAW REDEEMER
THE GOLD TRAIL
THE PERIL TREK
THE MASTERMAN
TIMBER LINE
THE OVERLAND KID
THE HOUSE OF GOLD
THE GERALDI TRAIL
GUNMAN'S GOAL
CHINOOK
IN THE HILLS OF MONTEREY
THE LOST VALLEY
THE FUGITIVE'S MISSION
THE SURVIVAL OF JUAN ORO
THE GAUNTLET
STOLEN GOLD
THE WOLF STRAIN
MEN BEYOND THE LAW
BEYOND THE OUTPOSTS
THE STONE THAT SHINES
THE OATH OF OFFICE
DUST ACROSS THE RANGE/THE CROSS BRAND
THE ROCK OF KIEVER
SOFT METAL
THUNDER MOON AND THE SKY PEOPLE
RED WIND AND THUNDER MOON
THE LEGEND OF THUNDER MOON
THE QUEST OF LEE GARRISON
SAFETY McTEE
TWO SIXES
SIXTEEN IN NOME**

**MAX
BRAND**

SPEEDY'S MARE

“Speedy’s Mare” by Max Brand first appeared in Street & Smith’s *Western Story Magazine* (3/12/32).
Copyright © 1932 by Street & Smith Publications, Inc.

Speedy's Mare

Frederick Faust's saga of the youthful hero Speedy began with "Tramp Magic," a six-part serial in Street & Smith's *Western Story Magazine* (11/21/31-12/26/31). As other of Faust's continuing characters, Speedy is a loner, little more than a youngster, and is able to outwit and out-manuever even the deadliest of men without the use of a gun. Stories of his adventures, in addition to the serial, eventually numbered nine.

I

“Gloomy Gun”

High on a hill above Sunday Slough, in the dusk of the day, three horsemen sat side-by-side, two very large, and one a slenderer figure. The sun had set, twilight had descended on the long gorge of the mining ravine, and the last dynamite shots of that day had exploded, sending a roar and a hollow boom whizzing upward through the air. From the highest of the surrounding mountains, the rose of the day's end had finally vanished, leaving only a pale radiance, and now the smallest of the three silhouetted horsemen spoke:

“*Señor* Levine, as you know, I've come a long distance, because it is the pleasure of a gentleman to defy miles when one of his brothers calls for him. But it is already late, and I must inform you that, instead of going to bed, I intend to change horses and return, before the morning, to my own house.”

He spoke his English with the formality and the accent of a foreigner.

The largest silhouette of the three, a gross shape that overflowed the saddle, answered: “Now, look a-here, *Don* Hernando. I ain't the kind that hoists up a white flag before I gotta need to.”

“That's the one thing that he ain't,” said the third member of the party. “You take Levine, before he hollers, he's got his back ag'in' the wall.”

“Aw, shut up, Mike, will you?” demanded the big man, without the slightest passion. “What I wanna say, if you'll let me, is that I ain't called for you, *Don* Hernando, except that I needed help. And everybody knows that *Don* Hernando is *Don* Hernando. It would be a fool that would yell for him, unless there was really a wolf among the sheep, eh?”

“Thank you,” said the Mexican. He raised his hand and twisted his short mustaches, forgetting that the dimness of the light robbed this gesture of half its grace and finish. Then he said: “We all love to see reason according to our lights. What reason do you think you can show me, *Señor* Levine? This a wolf . . . those sheep . . . which may they be?”

“This sheep,” said Levine, “we're the sheep. Me and my friends down there in Sunday Slough. There was a time, not far back, when we owned the town. What we said went. But then along comes the wolf, which his name is Speedy, what I mean to say. You don't need to doubt that. Because he's the wolf, all right.”

“I have even heard his name,” said the Mexican politely.

“You have even heard his name, have you?” said One-Eyed Mike Doloroso. “Yeah, and you'll hear more'n his name, if ever you got anything to do with him. You'll hear yourself cussing the unlucky day that you ever bumped into him. That's what you'll hear.”

“One never knows,” said *Don* Hernando. “He is not a very large man, I am told.”

“Oh, he ain't so big,” said Sid Levine, “but he's big enough. There was me and Cliff

Derrick. Maybe you heard of him?"

"He was a very great man," said *Don Hernando*. "Yes, yes, some of my friends knew him very well, and one of them was honored by having the *Señor* Derrick steal all that he owned in this world."

"Cliff would do that, all right," said One-Eyed Mike. "I tell you what I mean. Derrick, he'd steal the gold fillings out of your teeth, while you was saying good morning and glad you'd met him. Derrick, he was a man, what I mean."

"Yes," said *Don Hernando*, "I have heard that he was such a man. And he was your friend, *Señor* Levine?"

"Yeah," said Levine. "I had Sunday Slough all spread out, and along comes Derrick, and him and me get ready to take the scalp of Sunday Slough so slick and careful that the town won't hardly miss its hair. Then along comes this no-good, guitar-playin' hound of a tramp, name of Speedy, that looks like a worthless kid, and that turns the edge of a knife, and bites himself a lunch out of tool-proof steel . . . what I mean."

"That I hardly understand," said *Don Hernando*.

Mike Doloroso explained: "What the chief means is this Speedy looks soft, but he's hard-boiled. He's more'n an eight-minute egg, is what he is. You take and slam him the works, and they just bounce off his bean, is what the chief means. He lunches on boiler plate, and dynamite sticks is toothpicks for him, is what the chief means."

"Aw, shut up, Mike. Lemme talk for myself," said the chief, "will you? *Don Hernando*, he understands English like a gentleman, all right."

"I think I understand what you mean about *Don Speedy*," said the great *Don Hernando*. "It is to get a surprise, to meet him."

"Yeah, you said it then, *Hernando*," said Levine. "A surprise is all that he is. I was saying that me and Derrick, we had things planned, and we had this here county all lined up, and tied, and ready for branding. And then we find out that Speedy is in the way, and first Derrick stumbles over him and pretty near breaks his neck, and then along comes my best bet, which it was my old friend, Buck Masters, that I had got made the sheriff of the county."

"Why, Buck Masters was worth ten times his weight in gold to me. He was set with diamonds, was all he was to me, and along comes that sneak of a wolf of a Speedy, and he picks off Buck Masters, too, and all that Buck gets is fifteen years minus hope, for pushing the queer, which was a rotten break for any gent, I say. And there's Derrick in for life, and a matter of fact, I mean to say, that there ain't any fun around here, like there used to be in the old days, when we had Sunday Slough all spread out and waiting to be scalped."

"I seem to understand you," said *Don Hernando*. "I also, in a small way, have a little town at my service. It is not much. We in Mexico have not learned the big ways of you *americanos*. It is very small that we work, in a modest way. Still, it is a comfortable town. Everybody pays me a little bit, not much, partly because I love my people, and partly because they have not much to pay. But we understand one another. If my friends make five *pesos*, one of them they pay to me, and all is well."

"They are poor, simple people. Some of their *pesos* they pay to me in oil, others in

wine, others in chickens, or in goat's flesh. Fine flour and cornmeal they send to me. Their donkeys toil every day up and down the steep road that goes from my castle to their city. So we understand one another. I am not one who rides down suddenly and robs a man's house. No, not I . . . unless the scoundrel has refused my rightful tribute to me. But I leave all of my people in peace. Like a great family, we live all together, *Señor Levine*, and that, I dare say, is how you lived here in Sunday Slough before this accursed Speedy, who I already despise, came to spoil your happiness."

"Yeah," said Levine with a sigh. "You can say that we lived like a happy family, all right. I won't say no to that. The boys didn't know where they stood, except that it was better a lot to stand on the sunny side of me. I can talk out to a fellow like you, *Don Hernando*, I guess?"

"Frankness is as frankness does," said Hernando, wasting a smile on the darkness—only the gleam of his teeth showed through.

"Now, then," said Levine, "in the old days, I ran the biggest gambling house in the town, and I got everything my own way. There's only one side to be on in Sunday Slough, and that's my side, what I mean. All the boys in the know are on the right side of the water, believe me. But along comes this runt of a singing fool, this here Speedy, and slams everything, and busts up the picture, and why, I ask you?"

"That I cannot tell," said the great *Don Hernando*.

"Because," said Levine, his voice warm with indignation, "because, if you'll believe it, I wouldn't let the low-down son of a sea hound get away with nothing. And there was a half-witted sap of a crooked prospector that was a friend of his, by name of Pier Morgan, that claimed to own a mine, and my friend, the sheriff, he turned that mine over to a friend of mine and got Pier Morgan jailed for vagrancy, which is being a tramp, to say it in good English. And Pier Morgan starts shooting his way out of jail, and only shoots himself onto the junk pile, and along comes this here Speedy that nobody had ever heard of, and he takes and picks Pier Morgan off the tin cans.

"Then he takes him off into the hills, and goes and gets him well, what I mean. And while he's getting well, Speedy, he comes down and gets himself a job as a seven-day man, I mean, as a deputy sheriff. You know how it goes. The deputy sheriffs, they didn't last more'n about seven days apiece, in those times, that's what kind of a wide-awake town we had around here, *Don Hernando*. But Speedy, he starts throwing monkey wrenches into the machine. He goes after my scalp, unbeknownst to me, and he picks off Cliff Derrick, and then my pal, Buck Masters, that was sheriff.

"And now comes along the election for sheriff . . . and whatcha think? If they don't go and put up Speedy for sheriff! Why, he ain't got no name, even, and he calls himself John James Jones, and they laugh their fool heads off, but they get all ready to vote for J.J.J. just the same. Now, I ask you."

"That would be hard on you, *señor*, to have him for the sheriff of the county?"

"It was heart failure and rheumatism to me to have him only for the deputy sheriff," sighed Levine, "so what would it be to have him for sheriff? There was a time, when my house down there, the Grand Palace, it took in nine tenths of the coin that was pushed over the felt or over the bar in Sunday Slough. And now what kind of a trade have I got? Nothing but the crooks that hate Speedy so bad that they won't patronize the joints that he

lets run. So they come to me, and drink my booze, and run up bills and don't pay them, and the roulette wheel, it don't clear five hundred a week."

He hung his head for an instant with a groan, and then he went on: "Now, I'm gonna tell you what, *Don Hernando*. I know how to clean out this here Speedy. There's a friend of mine called Dick Cleveland, Crazy Dick, that was smeared around by Speedy once, and he's spotted the place where this Pier Morgan is finishing up, getting well and sharpening his knife for my throat at the same time. Now, *Don Hernando*, if I can snatch this here fellow, Pier Morgan, away, and put him in a safe place, this here Speedy will line out after him, and that'll take him out of my path, and, while he's gone, I clean up on Sunday Slough. Is that clear . . . I mean, is it clear if you're the place where Pier Morgan is taken to?"

"I see your reason, *señor*, but not mine," said *Don Hernando* rather crisply.

"I got five thousand reasons for you," said Levine.

"Reasons, or dollars?" asked *Don Hernando*.

"Both," said Levine.

II

"The Mexican Hand"

In Sunday Slough, later on that day, Speedy, public choice for sheriff, sat in his office, which had formerly been office and home of the late sheriff, Buck Masters, now in the penitentiary where Speedy had put him. He sat at his window, much at ease. In dockets upon his desk were various documents that had to do with his workmen wanted by neighboring states, by neighboring counties. But Speedy allowed such business to roll off his back. He was interested in only one thing, and that was cleaning up the town of Sunday Slough.

The job would have been more than half finished, at that moment, except that Sid Levine was still decidedly at large. The great Levine was the major force with which, as Speedy knew, he had to contend. Although he had cut away, as it were, the right and the left hand of the gambler, there still remained the man himself, with his brain so resourceful in evil, and upon the subject of the great Levine the thoughts of Speedy were continually turning.

He heard a light, stealthy step crossing the porch in front of the little wooden building that housed him and his office. Then came a light knock at the door.

"Come in, Joe!" he called.

The door opened. Joe Dale, short, thick-shouldered, strong as a bull and quick as a cat, came into the room. He waved his hand in the dusk.

"Why not a light, Speedy?" he said.

"I like it this way. I think better by this light," said Speedy. He began to strum, very

lightly, the strings of the guitar that lay across his knees.

“If you don’t stop playing that blooming thing,” said Joe Dale, “I’m gonna go on out.”

“All right. I’ll stop,” said Speedy gently. And stretching himself, he settled more deeply in his chair and watched the other man.

“What’s up, Joe?” he asked.

“I meet up with Stew Webber,” said Joe Dale, “and the fool don’t know that you’ve gone and got a pardon for me out of the governor. When he recognizes me, he pulls a gun. I kicked the gun out of his hand. I slammed that bird on the beak so hard that he nearly busted the sidewalk when he sat down on it. Then I told him what was what. He was gonna collect some blood money out of that, Speedy.”

“He’s a fool,” said Speedy. “He’s a fool, though I don’t know him. How are things in town, Joe?”

“Everything’s so good that it’d make you laugh,” Joe Dale said. “I’ll tell you what. There was a bird come into the Best Chance Saloon, and he starts telling the boys that he won’t vote any ex-tramp for sheriff of this here county. And the boys listen to him a while, and then they take him out and tie him backward on his hoss, and give him a ride out of town. That’s what they think of you, Speedy.”

“I hope the poor fellow doesn’t get a broken neck,” said Speedy.

“No, he didn’t get no broken neck,” the deputy replied. “All he got was a fall, and a dislocated shoulder. One of the camps took him in off the road. He wasn’t hurt bad.”

“Dog-gone it,” said Speedy, “I’ll have to go and see him, tomorrow.”

“Say, what are you?” asked Joe Dale. “A visiting sister of mercy or what?”

“Oh, lay off that, Joe,” Speedy said. “What’s the other news?”

“There was a riot started down in the Thompson Saloon. I got there as the furniture begun to break. A big buck hauled off and was about to slam me, but somebody yelled . . . ‘That’s Speedy’s man!’ Well, the big bozo, he just backed up into a corner and hollered for help, pretty near. He started explaining how everything was wrong that he’d been thinking. I lined him up and made him pay for the breakages, which he done plumb peaceable. Afterward, he bought drinks for the crowd. Thompson, he says that any bird that don’t vote for you, and announces it loud and high, he don’t get no liquor in his saloon. And election day, he’s gonna run wide open, with free drinks for everybody. I told him that was a fine idea, but the Best Chance Saloon already had the same idea. He said that he’d go in one better than the Best Chance, because he’d loosen up and give a free barbeque, along with the drinks. It’s gonna be a great day when you’re elected, Speedy.”

“*Humph!*” said Speedy.

“Like you didn’t care, is what you mean to act like, eh?” Joe Dale commented. He sat down on the window sill, his big shoulders silhouetted against the street light.

“I care, all right,” said Speedy. “But what I’m after is Levine, not the job of sheriff of the county. I don’t want that job, Joe, unless I have to have it before I can get Levine.”

“I know you want Levine,” Joe Dale said, “but you’re human, Speedy. You want the sheriff job, too.”

"I don't," said Speedy. "I'm human, all right, but not that human. Hunting men isn't the kind of excitement that I want. Only I have to get Levine, because he's got so many others."

"I've gotta believe you, if you say so," answered Joe Dale. "But, if I was you and circulated around the town and heard the boys singing songs about Speedy and J.J.J., it'd give me a thrill all right."

"What's the rest of the news?" Speedy asked.

"There ain't any other news except you. It's all that anybody is talking about. All the big mine owners are gonna close up shop, that day, because they want to make sure that their men get a chance to vote for you on election day."

"That's kind of them," said Speedy. He yawned. "Anything about Levine?" he asked.

"Levine is cooked. His place don't draw no business, no more," said Joe Dale. "The tables are mostly empty, day and night. Levine is cooked in this town. It's a funny thing that the fool keeps hanging on."

"He'll hang on till he gets me, or I get him. He's no hero, but his blood's up."

"He's beat," declared Joe Dale. "He's only a joke, now. He's got no hangers-on."

"He'll have them five minutes after I'm dead," answered Speedy. "Oh, I know how it is with the boys. They like the top dog. You say Levine is beat, but I tell you that I'm more afraid of him right now than when he was on top of the bunch here. Bad times sharpen good brains, and Levine has a brain in his head, don't doubt that!"

"He has a lot of fat in his head, is what he's got," said the other. "You're all wrong, Speedy. Levine is finished in Sunday Slough. Gents have had a taste of law and order, and they like it better than Levine's rough-house. Only, Speedy, we oughta do more about the outside jobs. We get letters every day about thugs and crooks that've come over into our county. We're expected to clean up some of those boys. We oughta do it."

Speedy yawned once more, very sleepily. Then he said: "They behave, over here. They don't even lift cattle. They pay their way. I know a dozen of 'em around town, right now. But as long as they stay quiet, this can be their port of missing men. I don't mind having them about. I don't care how many other states and counties want them . . . all I want is peace in Sunday Slough. It was a rough nest when we came here, Joe, and now it's settling down, I think."

Joe Dale grunted, but, before he could answer, a rapid drumming of hoofs was heard, the rider stopping before the shack. Then, he threw himself from the horse and ran forward.

"Speedy! Speedy!" he called, in a guarded voice.

"It's Juan. It's the half-breed," said Speedy. Instantly he was through the window, going like magic past the form of Joe Dale.

The panting runner paused before him.

"Juan, you idiot," said Speedy, "what are you doing showing your face in town with a price on your head?"

Juan shook the head that had a price on it, as though disclaiming its importance, then he said: "Pier Morgan, the *Señor* Morgan, he is gone, Speedy!"

Speedy got him by the shoulders and backed him around until the street light, made of the dull shafts of distant lights, fell upon his face.

“Say that again!” he demanded.

“The *Señor* Morgan, he is gone. I, *señor*, have a bullet hole through the side of my neck. That is why the bandage is there. I still bleed, my friend. It is not for lack of fighting, but the evil one himself came and took Pier Morgan from me.”

“D’you know the name and address of this evil one, Juan?” asked Speedy.

“It is *Don* Hernando of Segovia, *señor*. I saw his face only in part. But I knew the scar on his forehead. I was once one of his people. It was *Don* Hernando, and you will never see Pier Morgan again. He is gone to Segovia. He is gone forever.”

“Where’s Segovia?” snapped Speedy.

“A little on the other side of the Río Grande. It is more than a day’s ride from this place, *señor*. But it might as well be the journey of a life, for those who go into it never come back. They are held in the teeth of *Don* Hernando forever! Ah, *señor*, it was not carelessness on my part, but. . . .”

“Be still, Juan,” said Speedy. “You know the way to Segovia?”

“I know the way, *señor*.”

“Will you take me there?”

“I take you within sight of it,” Juan said. “I do not dare to go closer. I have been in the dungeons of Segovia. I shall never go there again.”

“I’ll go all the way, Speedy,” offered Joe Dale.

“You’ll stay here and run Sunday Slough,” Speedy answered. “I’ll find out about Segovia on the way down, but I imagine that this is a one-man job. You know, Joe, that an army often can’t take a place by open assault, but one crook can pick the lock of the gate.”

III

“Intrepid Youth”

Segovia stood among rocky hills, bare as the palm of the hand. The town itself was an irregular huddle of whitewashed adobe, without a tree in the streets, without a bush to cast shadow. In fact, vegetable life could not exist beside the famous goats of Segovia which, men swore, could digest not only the labels of tin cans, but the tin as well.

How these people lived was a mystery which it was hard to solve. The naked eye could see almost nothing except, now and then, a dun-colored patch of cattle, scattered here and there in the distance. But distances mean little in Mexico, and a cow will run two days to drink of water on the third. A cow will walk thirty miles a day, grazing on a few blades of grass or tearing at a frightful cactus now and then. Still the cow will live and grow, becoming fat enough for marketing in the early spring.

So it was that the outlying herds fed the town of Segovia. In addition, it was said that some of the hardy inhabitants worked along the river, not as boatmen or agriculturists, to be sure, but in other sorts of traffic, generally done at night, work that pays well per hour, but whose pay and pleasure is well salted with death, now and then, death that spits out of the guns of federal patrols and Texas Rangers on the northern side of the stream.

Some of the sons of Segovia, also, went at times to the mines, or to very distant ranches, returning to their homes with money to blow in. They helped to support the two *cantinas* of the town and the little stores, where the women bought each day enough food to keep starvation off for twenty-four hours. There was even a store, in Segovia, where one could buy clothes, and it was notorious that the second-hand department of that store was filled with wonderful bargains, usually in styles and materials from north of the great river.

These people of Segovia were a race apart, a race all to themselves. Almost to a man, they were slender, agile, and strong. They were like their own goats, which seemed to eat the sand and the sunshine, for there was little else on the ground where they grazed. They and their ancestors had inhabited this place since the days of the *conquistadores*. The old Spanish blood mixed with the Indian in their veins. They were paler than other *peónes*. They bore themselves like *caballeros*. They were fierce, cruel, revengeful, patient, enduring. They loved their friends with a passion; they hated their enemies with still more fervor. They were people to be noted, and to be feared.

All of these terrible clansmen, for like a clan they clung together, looked down on the rest of the world, and looked up to the castle of *Don Hernando Garcías*.

It was not really a castle. Once, to be sure, the walls had been of stone, cut and laid together with the priceless skill of the Mexican stonemasons. But the centuries had cracked, molded, and eaten the big stones until they had fallen from their places, and a ragged mass of adobe finished in part the outline of the earlier walls.

Still, it remained a castle to the proud, stern *peónes* of Segovia. When they raised their eyes, a saying had it, they never found heaven or aught higher than the walls of the castle. For in that building, for three centuries and more, there had always been a Garcías called Hernando.

They were as like one another as peas in a pod, all those lords of Segovia. They all looked like the villagers themselves, that is, they were lean, hardy, tough-sinewed, erect, quick-moving, passionate of eye. They all wore the same sort of bristling, short mustaches. They all bore themselves like conquerors.

Sometimes when the people of the town were called the children of their overlord, there seemed to be more than words in the phrase, such a family resemblance existed among them. Their devotion to their lords of the castle, therefore, was all the more passionate and profound because they looked upon them, in true medieval style, as children upon parents. They rejoiced in the pride, cruelty, and wealthy grandeur of their masters and paid the heavy exactions of the Garcías family with perfect calm of mind. Most Mexicans are resolved democrats, but the men of Segovia preferred to be under the thumb of an autocrat.

For one thing, he preserved them from paying taxes to the state, for when tax collectors came to Segovia, they strangely disappeared, and finally they had fallen out of

the habit of going to the mysterious little white town above the river. For another thing, according as he was a great and lordly freebooter, they themselves picked up plenty of profit from his expeditions. The present Hernando Garcías filled all the requirements.

He was rapacious, stern, and ruled them with a rod of iron. On the other hand, in settling their village disputes, he was as just as he was cruel. Furthermore, he had always had some large employment on hand. It might be the organization of a long march into the interior, where he harried wide lands and brought back running herds of the little Mexican cattle, to be rustled across the Río Grande and sold “wet” into the northern land. It might be simple highway robbery, organized on a smaller scale, but paying even better. It might be a midnight attack upon an isolated house or a mountain village. It might be a stealthy smuggling of liquor or drugs.

But he was always occupied and always providing employment for his “children”, as the men of Segovia loved to call themselves. Since he had come into power, they rode better horses, wore brighter sashes, ate more meat. The *cantinas* offered them beer, wine, and distilled fire; they had money to buy it. What other elements could they have desired in a terrestrial paradise?

The sun of the day had set, and in the twilight the white town had been filmed across with purple, and the lights had begun to shine out of the doorways, flashing upon groups of children who played and tumbled in the deep, white dust of the streets. Then night gathered about the town, and it seemed to huddle, as though under a cloak, at the knees of the castle, and about the home of Garcías the stars drew down out of the clear sky—or so it seemed to the villagers.

It was at this time that a rider on an old gray mule came into the town, and stopped in front of one of the *cantinas* to play on a guitar and sing. His voice was good, his choice of songs was rich and racy on the one hand, profoundly sentimental on the other. His hair was dark, so were his eyes; his skin was the rich walnut color of Mexico; his handsome face seemed to fit exactly into his songs of love.

So a crowd gathered at once.

He was invited into the *cantina*. He was offered drinks. Then they brought him some cold, roasted flesh of a young kid, cold tortillas, hot tomato and pepper sauces. He ate with avidity, leaning well over his food, scooping it up with the paper-thin tortillas.

A jolly, ragged beggar was this minstrel, with a ragged straw hat on his head of the right Mexican style, its crown a long and tapered cornucopia. In the brim of it were a few twists of tobacco leaf and the corn husks for making cigarettes. Furthermore, somewhere along the road, he had found a sweetheart, who had rolled up a number of cigarettes and tied them in pretty little bundles, with bits of bright-colored ribbon. These, also, were attached to the brim of the hat.

He had on a gaudy jacket, the braid of which had tarnished here and ripped away there. His shirt was of silk, very soiled and tattered, and open at the throat. However, a splendid crimson sash was bound about his waist and narrow hips. The flash of his eyes and his white teeth as he ate, or as he sang, or as he danced, made the tawdry costume disappear, particularly in the eyes of the women who crowded about the door of the *cantina* to look on at the diversions of their lords and masters.

Particularly was he a master of the dance, and it was really a wonderful thing to see

him accompany his flying feet with strumming of the guitar, while he retained breath enough in his throat to sing the choruses, at least. Furthermore, and above all, his spinning was so swift that he could unwind the sash that girded him and keep it standing out stiff as a flag in the track of his dancing, and so remain while, without the use of hands, he wound himself into it again.

The old men sat in the corners of the room and beat time with their feet and hands. Their red-stained eyes flashed with fire. The younger men stirred uneasily, nearer at hand. Sometimes one of them would fling his voice and his soul into a chorus. Sometimes one of them would dart out, with a bound, and match the steps of the visiting master. Whenever a village dancer came out to rival the minstrel, the ragged fellow welcomed him with such a grace, such a bright smile, and nodded in such approval of the flying feet, that each man felt Segovia had been honored and flattered.

It was almost midnight before this entertainment ended. By that time the minstrel had collected, it was true, not very many coins, but he had been surrounded by good wishes and ten men offered to give him a bed for the night. However, it appeared that the little glasses of stinging brandy had done more than their work on the minstrel. Like a drunkard, he declared that he would not bother any of them to put him up for the night. Instead, he would gain admission to the castle, where there were sure to be many empty beds!

They listened with amazement. Some of the good-hearted warned him that Garcías's household could not be wakened with impunity in the middle of the night, but the fume of the liquor, it appeared, had made him rash and, therefore, the whole lot of them flocked along to see the performance.

They even pointed out the deep casement of the room of Hernando Garcías, and then they crept away, into hiding in nooks and corners and shadows among the nearer horses to watch the fortune of the rash young entertainer, as he strove to sing and dance his way into the house of the great man.

IV

“Music on the Air”

Don Hernando was about to sink into a profound slumber with the peaceful mind of one who has done his duty and done it very well.

For a little earlier, that evening, he had arrived with his prisoner, the *gringo*, Pier Morgan, and had ridden up to his house, not through the village streets, but up the narrow and steep incline that climbed the face of the bluff and so came directly to the outer gate of the building. By this route he came home, partly because he did not wish to be observed, partly because he would thus have his prisoner closer to the dungeon cell in which he was to be confined, and partly, also, because he loved to impress and mystify his townsmen.

He knew that some of the household servants would soon spread everywhere in Segovia the news that a prisoner had come, a *gringo*. Even the little children would soon be buzzing and whispering. But just as surely as the story was bound to fill every house in Segovia, so sure was it that not a syllable would pass beyond. The secrets of *Don Hernando* were family secrets, as it were, and the whole town shared in them and rigorously preserved them.

The good *Don Hernando*, having lodged his captive in one of the lowest and wettest of the cellar rooms of the old house, posted a house servant with a machete and a rifle to watch the locked door. He had then gone on to his repast for the evening, content.

He had been told by Sid Levine that he would have to use every precaution to keep his prisoner from falling into the hands of Speedy again, and this subject constituted part of his conversation with his lady, as they sat together at table. She was a dusky beauty, and now that the years were crowding upon her and she was at least twenty-two, she began to be rounder than before, deep of bosom and heavy of arm. Her wrist was dimpled and fat, and so were the knuckles of her fingers. But her eyes were bright, and she carried her head like a queen, as befitted the wife of *Don Hernando Garcías*.

When she had seen and distantly admired the new thickness of the wallet of her spouse, he explained the simplicity of the work which he had done. It was merely to receive from one man the custody of another, and to ride the man down across the river and hold him in the house.

“This Levine, who pays me the money for the work, is a simpleton,” he said. “He seems to feel that his enemy, Speedy, is a snake to crawl through holes in the ground, or a hawk to fly through the air and dart in at a casement. But I told the *señor* that my house is guarded with more than bolts and locks and keys, for every man within the walls of it has killed at least once. This vagabond, this Speedy, of whom they talk with such fear, had he not better step into a den of tigers than into the house of *Garcías*?”

The same fierce satisfaction was still warm in his breast when he retired to sleep, and he was on the point of closing his eyes when he heard the strumming of a guitar just under his window. For a moment he could not and would not believe his ears. Then rage awoke in him, and his heart leaped into his throat. It was true that the townsmen took many liberties. It was true that they acted very much as they pleased within their own limits, but those limits did not extend to the very walls of the castle. No, the space between the last of their houses and his own outer wall was sacred ground, and no trespassing upon it was permitted!

“A drunkard and a fool,” said *Garcías* to himself, as he sat up in his bed.

He listened, and from the outer air the voice of the singer rose and rang and entered pleasantly upon his ear. It was an ancient song in praise of great lords who are generous to wandering minstrels. On the one hand, it flattered the rich; on the other hand, it poured golden phrases upon the singers who walk the world.

The purpose of the song seemed so apparent that *Garcías* ground his teeth. No man could be sufficiently drunk to be excused. He, *Garcías*, was not in a mood to allow excuses, anyway.

He bounded from his bed and strode to the window, catching up as he went a great crockery wash basin from its stand. With this balanced on the sill, he looked over the

ledge, and below him, smudged into the blackness of the ground, he made out clearly enough the silhouette of the singer, from whom the music rose like a fountain with a lilted head. Garcías set his teeth so that they gleamed between his grinning lips. Then he hurled the great basin down with all his might.

It passed, it seemed to him, straight through the shadowy form beneath. Even the stern heart of Garcías stood still.

It was true that his forebears, from time to time, had slain one or more of the townsmen, but they had always paid through the nose for it. The men of Segovia were fellows who could be struck with hand or whip, by their master, but, when it came to the actual taking of a life, they were absurdly touchy about it. They insisted upon compensation, much compensation, floods of money, apologies, declarations of regret in public, promises that such things should never happen again. On certain occasions, they had even threatened to pull the old castle to bits and root out the tyrants.

So Hernando Garcías stood at his window, sweating and trembling a little, and cursing his hasty temper. For the song had ceased, or had it merely come to the end of a stanza?

Yes, by heaven, and now the sweet tide of the music recommenced and poured upward, flowing in upon his ear. At the same time, *Don* Hernando unmistakably heard the tittering of many voices.

“By heavens,” he said, “the louts have gathered to watch this. It is a performance. It is a jest, and I am the one who is joked at.”

He said other things, grinding them small between his teeth. It was excellent cursing. It was a sort of blasphemy in which the English language is made to appear a poor, mean, starved thing. For the Spaniard swears with an instinctive art and grace. There are appropriate saints for every turn of the thought and the emotions. And *Don* Hernando called forth half of the calendar as he cursed the minstrel.

He turned. The washstand was nearby, and on it remained the massive water jug, half filled with a ponderous weight of water. It was not so large a missile as the wash bowl, but it was at least twice as heavy, and it was the sort of thing with which a man could take aim.

The fear that he might have committed murder, the moment before, now died away in him. He wanted nothing so much as to shatter the head of the singer into bits. He wanted to grind him into the ground. So he rose on tiptoes, holding the jug in both hands, and he took careful aim, held his breath, set his teeth, and hurled that engine of destruction downward with the velocity of a cannon ball.

It smote—not the form of the minstrel. It must have shaved past his head with only inches to spare, but the undaunted voice of the song arose and hovered like a bird at the ear of *Don* Hernando. The jug was too small. He needed a large thing to cast. And presently his hand fell on the back of a chair. It was an old chair, the work of a master. It had been shipped across the sea. Even its gilding represented a small fortune, and on the back of it was portrayed the first great man of the Garcías line.

That was why it stood in the room of the master of the house. For every morning, when he sat up in bed and looked at the picture on the back of the chair, he was assured of his high birth and of the long descent of his line, for the picture might have stood for a

portrait of himself. There were the same sunken eyes, the same hollow cheeks, the same narrow, high forehead, and even the same short mustache, twisted to sharp points. He thought not of the portrait, alas, as he stood there by the window, teetering up and down from heel to toe, in the grand excess of his wrath. But, catching up the chair, he hurled it out of the window, and leaned across the sill, this time confident that he could not fail of striking the mark.

It did not seem to him that the minstrel dodged. But certain he was that he had missed the target entirely, for the song still arose and rang on his ears! Then, lying flat on his stomach across the window sill, he remembered what it was that he had done. The chair must be smashed. Undoubtedly the portrait was ruined. Woe coursed through his veins. For it was plain that he had cast away with his own hand what was as good, to him, as a patent of nobility. He groaned. He staggered back into the room, gasping, and buried his fingers in his long hair.

Then he flung himself on the bell cord that dangled near the head of his bed, and pulled upon it frantically, not once, not twice, but many times, and, when he heard the bell jangling loudly in the distance, he hurled a dressing gown over his shoulders.

Hurrying feet came to the door of his room. There was a timid knock; the door opened.

“Manuel, fool of a sleepy, thick-headed, half-witted muleteer, do you hear the noise that is driving me mad?”

“I hear only the noise of the singer, *señor*,” said poor Manuel.

“Music! It’s the braying of a mule!” shouted Garcías. “Go down. Take Pedro with you. Seize the drunken idiot by the ears and drag him here. Do you hear me? Go at once! Go at once!” He seized the edge of the door and slammed it literally upon the face of Manuel.

It eased his temper a little to hear the grunt of the stricken man, and to hear the muttered names of saints that accompanied him down the hallway.

V

“The Angry Don”

Don Hernando lighted a lamp and paced hurriedly up and down the room. From the windows, he heard again the tittering of many voices. Yes, it was as on a stage, and the crowd was enjoying him as one of the actors. Rage seized upon his heart. He thought of the ruined portrait on the chair and a sort of madness blackened his eyes.

At one end of the room hung various knives. He fingered a few of them as he came to that side of the room but, remembering the revolver, pistols, rifles, and shotguns that were assembled in a set piece against the opposite wall, he would hastily go back and seize on one of these, only to change his mind again. Nothing could satisfy him, he felt, except to feel the hot blood pouring forth over his hands.

Then came rough voices in the outer court and stifled exclamations from the near distance. That soothed him a trifle. He shouted from the window, leaning well out: "Bring up the wreck of the chair and, if you pull off the ears of the singer, I, for one, shall forgive you!" He retired and sat in another chair, deep and high, wide as a throne and with a tall back. Seated so, nursing his wrath, his fingers moved convulsively, now and again, as though he were grasping a throat.

Presently up the hall came the voices and the footfalls of Manuel and Pedro. The door opened. They flung into the room the body of a slender man, who staggered, almost fell to the floor, and then, righting himself and seeing the glowering face of *Don Hernando* in the chair in the corner of the room, bowed very deeply, taking off a tattered straw hat and fairly sweeping the goatskin rug with it.

"*Señor* Garcías," said the minstrel, "I have come many miles to sing for you. One of my ancestors sang for yours, generations ago. And so I have come."

The master of the house glared.

Pedro, in the meantime, was presenting him with the wreckage of the chair. The old, worm-eaten wood had smashed to a sort of powder. Of the back panel, in which the face was painted, there remained no more than scattered splinters. He picked up a handful of that treasured panel. Only a twist of a mustache, only one angry eye glared forth at him from the ruin. Garcías dropped the wreckage, rattling upon the floor, feeling sure that he would kill this man.

He surveyed him, the dark head and eyes, the large, over-soft eyes, like the eyes of a lovely woman. He regarded the smile, the sort of childish delicacy with which the features were formed.

Then he said: "*Señor* minstrel!"

The stranger bowed, brushing the floor once more with the brim of his hat.

The fool seemed totally unconscious that he was about to receive a thunderbolt of wrath that would annihilate him.

Suddenly *Don Hernando* smiled. It was a smile famous in the history of his family. Every Garcías had worn it. Every Garcías had made that same cold smile terrible to his adherents. All of Segovia knew it. Manuel and Pedro shuddered where they stood. But the idiot of a minstrel stood there with high head.

One thing was clear. To act on the spur of the moment would be folly. Together with the rich, red Castilian blood, there flowed in the veins of Garcías a liberal admixture of the Indian. That blood mastered him now and, still smiling, he told himself that time must be taken with this affair. The painting on the chair had been a work of art. The revenge he took would be a work of art of equal merit, a thing to talk about. Why not? The fellow was not of Segovia. He was not of the chosen people. He came from a distance.

So Garcías cleared his throat, and, when he spoke, it was softly, pleasantly.

Another shudder passed through the bodies of the two servants. Like all the others in the house, each of these had killed his man, but the smile and the voice of *Don Hernando*, in such a mood, seemed to both of them more terrible, by far, than murder.

"The Garcías family keeps an open house for strangers," he said. "We have rooms for

all who come. But chiefly for such good singers. I wish to hear you sing again. Manuel, Pedro, take him down to the most secure room in the house. You understand?"

His fury mastered him. He thrust himself up, half out of the chair, with glaring eyes, but the half-witted minstrel was already bowing his gratitude and sweeping the floor with his hat, so that he entirely missed both the gesture and the terrible expression of the eyes.

Don Hernando managed to master himself. Then he said: "My friend, you will be well looked after. You will be put in a safe place. All the enemies you have in the world could not disturb your sleep, where I shall put you. You, Pedro, will sleep outside of his door, armed. You understand?"

"*Señor*, I understand," said Pedro. He had heard the songs of this man. In his heart he pitied him, for he saw that the naked wrath of the master was about to be poured out upon his head. But it never occurred to him to disobey. Besides, he was really a savage brute. So were all of that household, hand-picked brigands. He soon mastered any feelings of pity or of remorse.

"I understand," he repeated. "The deepest room of the house, *señor*, if you wish."

"Yes, the deepest . . . the deepest! The one with the strongest door," repeated the great *Garcías* through his teeth, "the smallest window, and the heaviest lock . . . the one where sleeping clothes are always ready, bolted to the wall. You understand? You understand?" His voice rose to a high, whining snarl, like that of a great cat. Then he added: "And in case he should want to sing, let him have his guitar. Yes, let him sing, by all means, if he wishes. I am only afraid that I shall not be able to hear the songs."

Manuel and Pedro grinned brutally. Their master laughed, but the fool of a minstrel was again bowing to the floor and seemed to fail to see or to understand his dreadful predicament. That was all the better. He would learn, soon enough, what was to befall him. The guards took him to the door of the room.

"Strip him!" shouted the great *Garcías*, and slammed the door behind the trio.

He went back, then, to the wreckage of his precious chair and picked up, again, the splintered wood upon which the remnants of the portrait appeared. Holding them tightly grasped in his hand, he groaned aloud, with such pain that he closed his eyes.

He went to the window. His rage was overcoming him, and he was feeling a trifle in need of air. From the open window, he could hear long, withdrawing whispers and murmuring down all the alleys that approached the face of the castle.

"Well," he said through his teeth. "Very well, indeed. They shall learn that the old spirit has not died in the blood of *Garcías*. They shall learn *that*, if nothing else." His spirit was eased as he thought of this. There is nothing that impresses a Mexican more than the signs of absolute, even cruel power. He was right in feeling that the men of Segovia would be impressed by the object lesson that he would give them in the person of the young minstrel, the unlucky stranger.

Still, when he lay upon his bed, about to fall asleep, he roused to complete wakefulness. For it occurred to him that the many bows of the singer, as he stood in the presence of danger, might have been useful in concealing a certain smug expression of self-contented pleasure which, as *Garcías* remembered, had seemed to be lingering about the corners of the eyes and mouth, every time he straightened. At all events, one thing was

clear, the man was an idiot.

Then he soothed himself by devising torments. It was clear, above all else, that for the destruction of the famous Garcías portrait he deserved to die. With the placid emotions of a cat about to torment a mouse, the great *Don* Hernando finally fell asleep.

VI

“Guest Room”

The two house servants were conducting the young dancer and singer down winding stairs that sank toward the bowels of the earth, as it seemed. They grew narrower and narrower. The feet slipped in the moisture that covered the stones. The stones themselves were worn by the centuries of footfalls that had passed over them. Their steps echoed hollowly up and down the descending corridors. The head of the tall Pedro bowed, as he avoided the roof of the passage, rounded closely in. Finally they passed the mouth of a black corridor.

“Down there,” said Manuel, “is the last dear guest that the *Señor* Garcías brought home with him. He, also, has a secure room. He, also, is guarded against intrusion. Oh, this is a safe house, friend. Danger never breaks in from the outside.” He laughed, and his brutal laughter raised roaring echoes that retreated on either hand.

The minstrel merely said: “This should be cool. But also rather dark. However, darkness and coolness make for perfect sleep in summer.”

They went on, the two servants muttering one to the other, and so they came to the last hall of all, in which there was the door of a single room. In the hallway lay slime and water half an inch thick, and the horrible green mold climbed far up the walls on either hand. There was a low settle in the hall.

“You’ll sleep there, Pedro,” said Manuel with a chuckle.

“A plague on my luck,” said Pedro. “If I don’t catch rheumatism from this, I’m not a man. It needs a water snake to live in a hole like this.”

Manuel was unlocking the door. It groaned terribly on its hinges and gave upon a chamber perhaps eight feet by eight, and not more than five in height. It was like a grisly coffin. A breath of foul air rolled out to meet them.

“Is this . . . is this the room?” gasped the poor minstrel.

“Yes, you fool,” said Manuel. “Strip him, Pedro.”

They put the lantern on the floor. Between them they tore the clothes from the body of the poor singer and flung them to the floor. But when he was stripped, they paused, and looked him over in bewilderment.

For he presented not at all the picture which they expected to see, of a starved and fragile body. He seemed slender, in his clothes, to be sure. But he was as round as a pillar. He was as deep in the chest as he was wide, and over arms and back and legs spread a cunning network of muscles, slipping one into the other, strand upon strand. An anatomist,

with a pointer, could have indicated his muscles without effort.

“Hey!” said Manuel. “He could be a bullfighter.” He thumbed the shoulders of the captive. It was like driving the thumb into India rubber.

“But what does it mean, my friends,” said the minstrel. “Why am I stripped? Alas, I am a poor man. I have done no wrong.”

“Be quiet,” said Pedro. “You were told about a secure room and this is it. And you were told about bedding and this is it, perfect to fit you, like a suit of clothes ordered from the tailor.” As he spoke, he dragged a mass of chains from the wall, and then locked them around the wrists and the ankles of the trembling minstrel.

“Ah, my friends,” said the youth, “this is cruel and unjust. Trouble will come upon your master for this act. Trouble, for sure, will follow him.”

They left the room, slammed the door upon him, and turned the key in the lock.

“There’s a guitar against the wall beside you. You can play and sing in the dark, *amigo*,” were their last words.

They were hardly gone, when the minstrel raised his manacled hands to his head, and, from the base of a curl, he drew forth a little piece of flattened steel, like a part of a watch spring. With this, he began to work, cramped though his fingers were for space, upon the lock of the manacle that held his left wrist. He did not work long before the manacle loosened. It slipped away, and presently its companion upon the other wrist likewise fell to the floor. The singer stooped over his anklets. They presented a little more difficulty. But they, also, presently fell away, and he was free in the room. After that, he felt his way along the wall to the heap in which his clothes had been flung. There was a bitter chill in the air of the dungeon, and he hastily pulled on his garments, one by one, the shoes last of all. They had soles of thin whipcord, silent as the furred paw of a cat for walking over stone, and light as a feather.

When he was dressed, he went to the door and felt of the lock. To his dismay, he found that the whole inside of the lock was simply one large sheet of steel. The key did not come through the massive portal! He stood for a time, taking small breaths, because the badness of the air inclined to make him dizzy. But eventually he had a thought. Outside, in the corridor, Pedro the guard was already asleep, for the sounds of his snoring came like drowsy purring into the dungeon cell. So the prisoner found his guitar and lifted his voice in song. He took care in the selection of his music. The ditties that found his favor, now, were the loudest, and he sang them close to the door.

It was not long before there was a heavy breathing against the door, and then the loud voice of Pedro, exclaiming: “Half-wit, I, Pedro, wish to sleep! If you disturb me again, I shall come in there and make you wish that it were Garcías instead of me. He shall have only half of you. I’ll eat the other half.”

“Ah, *amigo*,” said the minstrel, “I am as cold as a poor half-drowned rat. May I not have covering? The floor of the room is covered with wet slime and. . . .”

“Shiver, then,” said the Mexican angrily. “I have told you before, what I shall do if you sing once more.”

The singer waited until he heard the snoring begin again, and then, for a second time, his voice arose like a fountain of light.

The answer came almost at once. The key groaned in the lock, the door was thrust wide, and in rushed big Pedro, cursing.

From the shadow beside the door, the minstrel struck with a fist as heavy as lead, hitting home beneath the ear. Pedro slumped forward on his face in the slime.

He was quickly secured, ankle and wrist, in the manacles, which had just held the singer. The wet filth in which he lay brought back his senses after a moment or so. He opened his eyes, groaning, in time to feel the revolver being drawn from its holster on his hip and, by the light of the lantern, he saw the minstrel smiling down upon him. Exquisite horror overcame big Pedro. Agape, he looked not so much at the slender youth before him as at a terrible vision of the wrath of Garcías when the lord of the house should hear of this escape. He could not speak. Ruin lay before his eyes.

“Good bye, Pedro,” said the minstrel. “Remember me all the days of your life and never forget that I shall remember your hospitality. As for your master, who you are fearing now, don’t worry about his anger. He shall have other things to think of before many minutes.”

He left the room before the stupefied Pedro could answer and closed the door gently behind him. He picked up the lantern and quickly climbed to the black mouth of the corridor down which, as he had been told, the last guest of Garcías was housed. He could guess the name and the face of that poor stranger.

Down that corridor he went, and presently around a sharp elbow turn the light of another lantern mingled with that of the one that he was carrying. He went on at the same pace, dropping the revolver that he carried into a coat pocket. He could take it for granted that, if a guard waited outside the door of this prison, the face of the singer would not be known to the man.

So he went on fearlessly and now saw the man in question seated on a stool that he had canted back against the wall. With his arms folded on his breast, he was sleeping profoundly. The minstrel laid the cold muzzle of the revolver against his throat and picked up the sawed-off shotgun from his lap. Then, as the rascal wakened with a start, he said: “Be quiet and steady, my friend. There is no harm to come to you except what you bring with your own noise. Stand up, turn the key of that locked door, and walk into the cell ahead of me, carrying the lantern.”

“In the name of the saints,” said the guard, “do you know that it is an enemy of Garcías who lies there?”

“I know everything about it,” said the singer. “Do as I tell you. I am a man in haste, with a loaded gun in my hand. Pedro loaned it to me,” he added with a smile.

The guard, one of those Oriental-looking fellows one sometimes finds south of the Río Grande, with ten bristles in his mustache and slant eyes, studied the smile of the stranger as he looked up and suddenly he felt that he recognized in this man a soul of cold iron. He rose with a faint gasp and, striding to the locked door, turned the key and stepped into the gloom within.

There, stretched on a thin pallet of straw, was the prisoner. He had not been stripped; there were no irons upon him. Plainly he had not excited the wrath of the great Garcías to the same degree as the singer, who now stooped over and fastened the manacles that were

chained to the wall upon the wrists and the ankles of the guard.

The latter was moaning and muttering faintly: "The saints keep me from the rage of *Don Hernando*! Oh, that ever I was born in Segovia!"

The prisoner, sitting up, yawning away, settled his gaze beneath a frown at the other two and suddenly bounded to his feet.

"Speedy!" he cried. "I didn't know you, with the color of your skin and. . ."

"We have to go on," said Speedy calmly. "There's something more for us to do before we leave the house of the great Garcías. He's fitted the two of us with such good quarters that we ought to leave some pay behind for him, Pier. Come along with me. This chap will be safe enough here. Rest well, *amigo*. When the others find you in the morning, or even a little before, they will give you the last news of us."

So he passed out from the cell and locked the door behind him.

Pier Morgan, in the meantime, was gaping helplessly at him.

"Speedy," he said, "I'm tryin' to believe that's your voice that I'm hearing. I'm trying to believe that. I've never seen anything finer than your face, man, and never heard anything sweeter than your voice. But how did you come here? Did you put on a pair of wings and hop in through a window?"

"*Don Hernando* asked me in," Speedy said, smiling faintly. "He even sent out his men and insisted on my coming in. He's a hospitable fellow, that man Garcías, and I can't wait till I've called on him again. How do you feel, Pier? Are you fit to ride a bit, and do some climbing, perhaps, before we start the riding?"

"I'm fit to ride . . . I rode all the way down here," said Pier. "And I can ride ten times as far in order to get away. This here place is a chunk of misery, Speedy. I've had something like death inside of me ever since I smelled this dungeon. Let's get out quickly and let your call on *Hernando* go!"

VII

"The Hanging *Hernando*"

The door of the bedroom of Garcías was locked from the inside. He had gone to bed, with the flame turned down in the throat of the lamp. Now he awoke, not that he had heard any suspicious sound, but because there was a sighing rush of wind through the room, as though a storm had entered.

The nerves of Garcías were not entirely at ease. His dreams had been pleasant, but very violent. In his sleep, he had killed the insolent *gringo* singer by scourgings that had flayed his cursed body to the bone. Again, he had toasted his feet at a low fire, he had tormented him with the water cure, and he had hung up the American by the hair of the head. Also, he had dreamed of various combinations of these torments, and, although it was true that Garcías was to be the torturer, and not the tortured, it was also true that his

nerves were jumping. All the tiger in him had been fed in his sleep. And the tiger in him now demanded living flesh, so to speak.

At the noise of the murmuring in his room, like the rising whistle of a storm wind, he raised himself impatiently on one elbow and turned his head toward the door. To his amazement, that door was open! He rubbed his eyes and shook his head to clear away the foolish vision, for he knew that no one in the house would ever dare to attempt his locked door. Even if there were someone foolish enough to make such an attempt, the lock of the door would itself give simple warning, for the key in the bolt could not be stirred without making a groaning sound, audible all up and down the corridor outside.

He opened his eyes again and scowled at the offending door, but now the vision was more complicated. A man stood in the doorway and was gliding with a soundless step straight toward his bed. The light of the lamp was very slight but, as he stared, the bewildered Garcías saw that it was the face of the *gringo* minstrel who was all the time drawing nearer to him.

He grunted. In the distance, the door was being closed by a second shadowy figure. But there was always a weapon at the hand of Garcías, and now he snatched his favorite protection from beneath his pillow. It was a rather old-fashioned double-barreled pistol, short in length, but large in caliber. It was equipped with two hair triggers, and it fired a ball big enough and with sufficient force to knock a strong man flat at fifteen yards. He always had it with him, in a pocket during the day and under his pillow by night. It had served him more than once. He had killed men many a time in his life, but all other weapons had been less deadly than this old-fashioned toy.

So, snatching it out, he tried to level it at the *gringo*. But he found his hand struck down, a cleaver stroke, as it were, falling across the cords of his wrist and numbing the entire hand.

The pistol slipped into the sheets of the bed. A second stroke, delivered with the flat edge of the man's palm, fell upon the neck of Garcías, where the nerves and the stiff tendons run up to the skull. He floundered a little, but with only vague movements. He was stunned as though with a club.

Before he was entirely recovered from the effects, he found that the minstrel was sitting comfortably on the edge of his bed, toying with that double-barreled pistol with his left hand, but in his right was a short-bladed knife, the point of which he kept affectionately close to the hollow of *Don Hernando's* throat.

The second shadowy form had drawn closer and stood on the farther side of the bed. With disgust, *Don Hernando* recognized the face of Pier Morgan. He had received twenty-five hundred dollars for taking Morgan into the southern land across the river. He would receive twenty-five hundred more for keeping him there, or for making away with him. This was a bad business, all around. He wished for wild hawks to tear the flesh of the minstrel.

"I see," said Garcías, "how it is. You tricked the guards and got away from them, but you know that you can't get out of the house. Well, then, I am to let you go . . . through me you wish to manage it, but I tell you, my friends, that you never can persuade me. I know that you will not kill me, because you fear what will happen to you before you manage to get clear of the house. You think that you still have a chance to talk to me and

to give me orders, but every door and every entrance to the house is guarded night and day!” He laughed a little as he ended. His fury made his laughter a tremulous sound.

“Speedy?” said Pier Morgan, “we can’t waste time. We must hurry.”

He said it in English naturally. But *Don Hernando* understood the language perfectly. Also, the name itself struck his ear like the blow of a club. He stiffened from head to foot.

“You are not Speedy,” he exclaimed through his teeth. “Your skin is as brown as. . . .”

“As walnut juice, *amigo*?” suggested Speedy.

The lips of the Mexican remained parted, but no word issued from them.

Then Speedy said: “You see how it is, *Don Hernando*? I knew that your house was so guarded that only a bird could fly in safely through a window. And I had no wings. So I came and sang at night, to disturb you. Do you understand?”

The teeth of the Mexican ground together. He said nothing.

“Then, when you were sufficiently annoyed,” Speedy said, “you sent for me to get me into your house and throw me into your hole of a prison. But I expected that, *Garcías*. I was prepared for all of that trouble, and it was worthwhile, because I had to reach my friend, Pier Morgan. I knew that it would be hard to hold me in a cell, because I know the language of locks.”

Garcías rolled his eyes toward the door of his own room.

“The others were no harder,” said Speedy. “Besides, your men are all fools. Like dogs that are kept half starved. They have plenty of teeth, but no brains whatever. They pointed out the room where Pier Morgan was kept on the way down to your slimy pigpen in the cellar. One of your servants sleeps in one of those cells, and another sleeps in the second. They are not happy, *Don Hernando*, because they are afraid of what you will do to them when they are set free.”

“I will have them cut to pieces,” said *Garcías*, “before my eyes. I will have them fed to dogs, and let you watch the feeding, before you are cut to bits in your turn!”

“You are full of promises, *Don Hernando*,” Speedy observed, “but that’s because you don’t understand how simply we can get out of your house through that window with a rope of bedclothes.”

“Idiots!” said *Don Fernando*. “Segovia lies beyond, and will have to be passed through. And there are always armed men there!”

“True,” said the minstrel, “and I shall let them know that I am passing. I shall sing to my guitar.”

“Are you such a half-wit?” *Garcías* said with a snarl.

“They know that I was dragged into your house,” said the other, “but they don’t know that I was treated like a whipped dog.”

“Ha?” said *Hernando*.

“Besides,” Speedy said, “I shall have something to show them, which will prove that *Garcías* forgave me for disturbing him in the middle of the night.”

“What?” demanded the man of the castle.

“A ring from your finger,” said Speedy.

Don Hernando gripped both hands to make fists. His fury was so great that his brain turned to fire and threatened to burst. For he could see that the inspired insolence of this *gringo* might very well enable him to do the thing that he threatened.

“I shall believe when I see,” said *Don* Hernando.

“You will believe and see and hear, all three,” Speedy said, “for I shall put you on a high chair to look things over. I shall put you where you’ll be found in the morning. Tie his feet, Pier. I’ll attend to his hands.”

Hand and foot, the lord of the town of Segovia found himself trussed and made utterly helpless. That was not all, for then a gag was fixed between his teeth. The language of Speedy was more terrible than the insulting treatment he was giving to his host. He apologized, every moment, for the necessity of being so rough with so great a gentleman in his own house. For his own part, he regretted such a necessity. He would do much to avoid the occasion for it. It was only, after all, that murder and cruelty and dungeon tortures were not popular on the northern bank of the river, and even here, to the south of it, the people must be shown an example. They must be shown that tyrants are also cowards and that cruel beasts are really fools. For that reason he, Speedy, intended to give the people of Segovia an object lesson in the person of their master.

As he spoke, he drew from the struggling hand of *Don* Hernando almost his dearest possession, his signet ring. It was merely a flattened emerald of no great value, but it was carved with the arms of the house of Garcías. That ring and the portrait which had been ruined that night were his two clear claims and proofs of gentility.

He saw the second one departing in the possession of the same scoundrel; he turned blind with fury. When he recovered from the fit, he was hanging from the sill of a window of his room by the hands, his back turned to the wall. Strong hands held him at the wrists. Presently his arm muscles would weaken. The strain would come straight upon bones and tendons. And then the real torment would commence. But what would that matter compared with the exquisite agony of being found in this humiliating position in the morning by the loyal populace of Segovia?

VIII

“In Segovia”

In all the house of Garcías, among all of his people, was there not one careful soul to look out a window, at this time, and see the two villains who now clambered down their comfortably made rope of bedding to the ground?

No, well filled with food and drink, they were snoring securely in their beds. As for the guards, they would be awake. He always took pains to be sure that they would sooner risk their necks than fall asleep either at the main door or at the one that opened over the bluff. But now he wanted a guard outside the place, and not within the massive old walls.

His anguish grew. He turned his head and saw the wretches standing upon the paving

stones at the base of his wall. He bowed his head to stare down at them, while rage choked him, and there he saw Speedy remove from his head the hat with the tattered straw brim and sweep the ground with it, making a final bow.

Anguish, shame, fury, helplessness, fairly throttled the great Garcías. He became alarmed. He was unable to breathe well. He had to give all his attention, for a time, to drawing in his breath deeply. Fear of strangling at once made his heart flutter desperately. He compared it to the beating wings of a trapped bird, a bird dying of fear. Aye, he was like a bird, he thought, like a chicken hanging by the feet in the market, plucked, ready for the purchasers to thumb before making sure that it was fat enough to buy and take home. If only he could cry out!

He had only his bare feet to kick against the wall, and he soon bruised the flesh of his feet to the bone. But no one answered. No one looked out of the adjoining windows to discover the master, so crucified in shame and pain. Then he heard a sound that fairly stopped the beating of his heart again. It was rising from the lower streets of the town, and it was the strumming of a guitar, and the sound of a fine tenor voice that rose and rang sweetly through the air.

It was true, then, that the rascal had determined to do all as he had said? Was he to outbrave the fierce men of Segovia and increase the shame of Garcías? A demon, not a man, was walking down the street and playing on that guitar, singing the words of those old songs.

But Speedy and Pier Morgan did not get unhindered from the town.

It was said that the men of Segovia slept as lightly as wild wolves, which they were like in other respects, also, and, when they heard the voice of the minstrel, one, then another and another, jumped up in the night and went out to see what the disturbance might be. For they had seen the fellow dragged within the walls of the house, and what had happened to him in there was much pleasanter to guess than to see.

So they came running out, a score of those ragged, wild men, and found the minstrel, as before, mounted on the ancient gray mare, with a white man walking at his stirrup. This was too strange a sight to let pass.

There was one elderly robber, long distinguished in forays, known as by a light, by the great white scar that blazed upon his forehead. He was gray with years and villainy, and music did not particularly tickle his fancy.

He took the mule by the bridle and halted it. "What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "I saw you snatched into the door of the castle like a stupid child. High time, too, what with your caterwauling. Now you are here. Who set you free?"

"An angel, father," said Speedy, "walked into my room, wrapped me in an invisible cloak, and took me away, with this man."

"So?" said the desperado, darkening. "I'll have another kind of language out of you, before I'm through." He pulled out a knife as long as a sword, and glared at the boy in the saddle.

"If you're in any doubt," Speedy continued, "take us back to the house. If Garcías is wakened again, tonight, he will be interesting to the people who disturb him. You, however, are a wise man and know best what is to be done."

The veteran scowled. Some of his companions had begun to chuckle. They enjoyed this predicament.

“I ask questions when I can’t understand,” he said. “Now let me ask these questions again. *Señor* the singer, you will sing a new tune, if you try to make a fool out of me. You are here after midnight. So is this man. People do not start a trip at this time of the night.”

“Look at his hands,” said Speedy.

“Aye,” said the other, “I see that they are tied together behind his back. And what do I understand by that?”

“You will understand,” Speedy said, “when Garcías knows that you have stopped me in the streets and made me explain before the people. I am taking this man to a friend of Garcías.”

“Ha!” said the man with the scar, coming a little closer, glowing his disbelief. “Taking him where? How will you prove that?” He snatched a lantern from the hand of another, and held it up to examine the face of Speedy.

The latter used the light, thrusting forward his left hand with the emerald ring on the largest finger. “Do you know the signet of Garcías?” he demanded harshly. “Would he give it to me for pleasure, or because of an important errand in his name?”

The other was stunned. He squinted at the ring. The face of it was well known. His companions were already falling back from the scene. They did not wish to interfere where the will of the master of Segovia was expressed in such unconditional terms as this.

The man of the scar no longer hesitated. He released the head of the mule and stepped back. “Well, *amigo*,” he said, “there is a time for talk and a time for silence. This is a time for silence. Go along.”

“Perhaps you wish to know to what place I am taking the prisoner?” asked Speedy. “You are many and I am one. You can force me to tell you even that.”

The man of the scar muttered: “You can take him to Satan, for all I care.”

Speedy rode on, slowly, through the last street of Segovia and into the plain beyond.

Once down the slope, he cut the cord that confined the hands of Pier Morgan and the latter gasped: “Speedy, I thought that we were finished when we came to the gang of ’em. I thought they’d certainly drag us back to the big house. And if they had . . . eh, what then?”

“Garcías would have burned us alive,” Speedy answered. “That’s what would have happened. But it didn’t happen, old man, and the more luck for us. I thought that the ring would turn the trick, and it turned out that way.”

“I’ve got other things to ask,” said Pier Morgan. “But I’ll ask ’em after we get on the other side of the river.”

It was Pier Morgan who rode the mule across the shallows of the ford. It was Speedy who waded or swam behind until they struggled up the farther bank. There they turned and looked back over the dim pattern of stars that appeared, scattered over the face of the famous river.

Then Pier Morgan said: “Yesterday, I thought that I was ridin’ my last trail, Speedy. And today it don’t seem likely that I’m really here, on safe ground, and you beside me.

You've got through stone walls, and locked doors, and raised the mischief to get me out of trouble. I ain't thanking you, Speedy. Thanks are pretty foolish things, after all, considering what you've done for me. I've used up nine lives, like any cat, and you've kept me on the face of the earth. That's what you've done. But still I'd like to ask you a couple questions."

"Fire away," said Speedy, beginning to thrum very softly on the strings of his guitar.

"I dunno that I understand very well," said the other, "why you wanted to make this here Garcías so crazy mad at you. You done that on purpose, but I dunno what the purpose is."

"You could guess."

"Yeah, I could guess," Pier said. "I could guess that life was kind of dull for you up there in Sunday Slough. I could guess that you didn't have your hands full, and that you wanted to crowd in a little more action. So you got Garcías practically crazy. You wanted to make sure that he'd get together every man that can ride and shoot and come up to the Slough looking for your scalp."

Speedy chuckled a little. "Garcías can be a pretty dangerous fellow, I imagine," he said. "He has that reputation. But I wanted to have him so blind crazy with rage that he would hardly know what he's about. He'll never rest till he gets at me again, do you think?"

"No, he'll never rest," agreed Pier Morgan. "He'll certainly never sleep until he gets a whack at you in revenge."

"When he comes, he'll come like a storm," Speedy said, "and the first thing that he does will be to get in touch with friend Levine. Isn't that fairly clear?"

"Yeah. That's pretty likely."

"When that happens, I have a chance to scoop him up along with Levine. And then the charge is kidnapping, with you and me both for proofs of what's happened. Kidnapping of a man and taking him across a frontier is pretty bad and black for everybody concerned. I think, if my scheme works, I'll have Levine in for fifteen years, at least. That's my hope. Then I've done what I wanted to do . . . I've cleaned up Sunday Slough and given it a rest."

"All right," murmured Pier Morgan. "I'm behind you every step, but you must carry a pretty steep life insurance, old man."

IX

"The Return"

Levine was at the breakfast table. His coat was off. He had not put on the stiff white collar that made him respectable for the day. He had rolled his sleeves. By way of a bib, a large cotton hand towel was stuffed in at his throat. This kept him from the necessity of leaning

far forward every time he raised a dripping forkful from his plate. Fried eggs will drip. A ragged half of a loaf of bread remained at his left hand; a tall coffee pot and a can of condensed milk were at his right. The eggs were well flavored by numerous strips of bacon. The precious juices that might slip through the fork were salvaged by using the bread as a sort of sponge. In this way he made excellent progress.

He had a newspaper propped up in front of him, but he paid less attention to its headlines than to the cheerful conversation of One-Eyed Mike Doloroso, who was lolling in a corner of the room. Mike had just come in and made himself at home.

“Have something?”

“Nope,” said Mike.

“Slug o’ coffee, maybe?”

“I fed my face a coupla hours ago,” said Mike. “I ain’t a lazy hound like you, what I mean.”

“You got nothin’ on your brain to worry you, like me,” said Levine. “You got nothin’ but hair.”

“Ain’t I got Speedy to worry me, too?” asked Mike.

“Him? Aw, he don’t pay much attention to you. It’s me that he wants. What’s that yowling out there?”

Mike went to the window. “Aw,” he said, “there’s a coupla dozen poor fools walkin’ down the street carryin’ a big banner that says J.J.J. for sheriff.”

“Close the window and shut the yapping out, will you?” asked Levine testily. “That tramp, I’m kind of tired of thinking about him.”

“Yeah,” said One-Eyed Mike, “you shouldn’t go and get yourself into a stew about him now. You’re gonna have plenty of time later on, when he throws you into the pen for life.”

“He’s gonna throw me into the pen, is he?” asked Levine.

“Sure, so you’ll be sure to have plenty of time to think about how he’s trimmed you.”

Levine paused with a large slice of egg dripping from his raised fork. Twice he tried to put it into his mouth. Finally he gave up the effort and lowered the fork to the plate. “Whatcha drivin’ at, Mike?” he asked. “Stow that chatter, will you? You wanna spoil my breakfast?”

“You’ve had enough for three men for three days, already,” said Mike. “I was just thinking how you and Derrick and Buck Masters had the town all laid out and ready for a trimming. And here comes Speedy, and he gets Derrick first, and then Buck Masters that was sheriff, and now he’s gonna get you.”

Levine pointed at Mike with his fork. “You think I’m asleep on the job, do you? Well, right now, Mister Deputy Sheriff Speedy has disappeared from Sunday Slough, and the town’s gonna wake up to the fact, pretty *pronto*.”

Mike rose stiff-legged from his chair. “You think that he followed Pier Morgan?” he said.

“I don’t think. I know. He started right out. I’ve sent off another rider, riding fast, to

let Garcías know that Speedy has a gray mule that he's riding on. The kid may try to disguise himself or something. Another day or two, Garcías will make fish bait out of him."

"Speedy ain't so easy," One-Eyed Mike advised.

"You're telling that to somebody that don't know?" suggested Levine, resuming his eating. "But Mexico ain't home soil for him. He's out of the water, down there. And this here boy Garcías has done a couple things in his life, lemme tell you!"

"All right," said Mike. "You're an optimist, is all I say. But one of these days you may be rotting like Buck Masters. I got a letter from Buck just the other day."

"Why didn't you tell me about it?"

"Because you didn't want to see it."

"Why not?"

"Because Buck is pretty sore. He says that he trusted you to fix things for him. He says that he's the goat and went to jail to save your scalp."

"Did the fool say that?" asked Levine, losing a splotch of color out of either cheek.

"Yeah, he said that."

"Prison letters are opened and read!" gasped Levine.

"Aw, they've all heard more than that about you a long while before this," declared One-Eyed Mike. "Talk ain't gonna kill you, or you'd've been a sick fish a long while ago, I guess. But Buck is sore, is what I mean."

"I spent a lotta money on that case," Levine said sadly. "You know what I mean."

"I know what you say you spent," said Mike.

"Look," protested Levine, "are you gonna lie down and croak on me, too? Are you fallin' away, Mike? Gonna do a State's evidence, or something like that on me?"

"Aw, shut up," said Mike Doloroso. "You know that I ain't that kind. But I ain't a fool. And I'm worried. County courts, they're one thing. You can get to a jury and fix a coupla jurors, or maybe you can buy up a judge. But I tell you what . . . a federal judge is a lot different. Look at Buck and Derrick, both. There was plenty of money working for both of them two, but it didn't do no good. Not a damned bit."

The window that looked onto the street was thrust up with a screech. The face of young Joe Dale appeared in the square. "Hello, boys," he said.

"Hello, beautiful," said Mike. "Whatcha want here, kid?"

"I just wanted to clap eyes on you bozos, was all," said Joe Dale. "I just wanted to ask you where you seen Speedy last."

"We ain't seeing Speedy these days," said Levine. "He don't seem fond of me, no more. We was good friends once, but he's gone and got proud, since those days."

"Has he?" asked Joe. "That's all right, too. But how far south would your partner, Garcías, trail him?"

"What Garcías?" asked Levine. But he glanced at One-Eyed Mike.

"No, you never seen Garcías, did you?" Joe Dale said. "Lemme tell you, brother. I'm

inside the law, just now. But I was outside of it for a long time and got along pretty good. If Speedy don't come back, I'm gonna be outside the law ag'in. I'm gonna be outlawed for shooting the brains out of a pair of fatheads that I'm looking at right now."

"Breeze along, Joe," said Levine. "You're all right, but you're young. You ain't got any sense."

"I'm just telling you, that's all," said Joe Dale.

"Look," broke in One-Eyed Mike. "Speedy licked you so good that you love him now, don't you?"

"He licked me," agreed Joe Dale. "But I can lick you, you slab-faced Irish bum. That's all I gotta say to you."

"Get out of the window," said Levine. "You're standing on my ground."

Another voice struck in cheerfully from the distance, down the street.

"Hello, Joe! Hello!"

Levine started up from his chair. "It's Speedy!" he gasped.

One-Eyed Mike grunted. There was a sawed-off shotgun standing in the corner against the wall, and this he picked up and held at the ready. Revolvers were the favored weapons of Mike but, where Speedy was concerned, experience taught him that a gun with a wide spread of shot was more likely to touch the elusive mark. He stood firm, but his face was very pale.

Sid Levine had slumped down into his chair again. A frightful weakness in his knees had attacked him.

The cheerful face of Speedy now appeared outside the window, at the shoulder of Joe Dale, and behind Speedy loomed Pier Morgan.

Sid Levine became smaller in his chair, a watery pulp. That window seemed to him to open upon the inferno itself, three such enemies were gathered there before his face.

Speedy said: "I took your regards down to your friend, the great Garcías, Levine. He'll be up, before very long, to see you. Just dropped in to say hello to you, Levine. And Morgan wanted to tell you that he'd enjoyed his trip with *Don Hernando*."

"I don't know what you mean," said Levine. He shook his head; his fat cheeks wobbled and bulged from side to side.

"You may understand later on," said Pier Morgan. "We're gonna do our best to clear up the idea in your mind, anyway. Hello, Mike! I ain't seen you for quite a spell."

But Mike Doloroso answered nothing at all. He was rather sick at heart.

So the three outside the window passed out of view, laughing.

They left a silence behind them in the room which had been such a cheerful breakfast scene the moment before. Levine was resting his fat forehead in a fatter hand. Mike remained still, as one stunned by bad news. But at last he began to pace up and down along the floor.

Then he said: "Chief, it looks like we got our backs against the wall."

Levine slowly roused himself and leaned forward. "There's one thing that we can still try," he said. "And there's one thing that will work."

“What’s that?” asked Mike.

Levine beckoned, and the big Irishman came closer to him and leaned over.

Levine whispered one word, and Mike Doloroso, although a man of exceptionally steady nerves, jumped away as though a knife had been thrust into him.

X

“The New Danger”

Speedy and Joe Dale sat in the sheriff’s office. Pier Morgan, exhausted by his long journeying, was asleep in the side room. The deputy sheriff who, as nine tenths of Sunday Slough declared, was to be the sheriff in full at the next day’s election now sat slumping in a chair, yawning a little from time to time, and making short answers to the questions of Joe Dale.

“You ought to let the people know what you did down there, Speedy,” said Joe Dale. “That’ll poll all the votes for you. You’ll be unanimously elected, I tell you!”

Speedy yawned. “Ask Betsy about it,” he said. “Ask her what I ought to do.”

Betsy was grazing in the lot behind the shack which housed the sheriff’s office. It was a good, deep lot, and the grass grew tall in it. Betsy, now that the heat of the day was over, moved slowly, step by step, spreading her forelegs a little and scratching her long neck as she moved about for choice tufts. Now and then she snorted, shook her head, and lifted it to look about her.

Joe Dale went to the window and looked upon her with a loving eye.

“She’s always a little wild in the eye,” commented Speedy.

“She’s been in some wild places with me,” said Joe Dale. “She’s a cross between a horse, a friend to talk to, and a watchdog. I’m as safe sleeping out, with her to keep an eye around, as I’d be with two men on guard. Safer, even, because she can use her eyes and her scent, as well.”

“Ask her about me,” said Speedy.

“What about this fellow?” Joe Dale asked, pleased by the suggestion. “Come here, Betsy, and tell me about him.”

Speedy went to the window as Betsy came up to it.

“Tell me about him, Betsy,” repeated her owner. “Is he a good fellow?”

She stretched her head through the window and sniffed Speedy’s hand, then she drew back a little and shook her head.

“I’m gonna look out for you, Speedy,” said Joe Dale. “I thought you were all right, but trust Betsy. She knows the right sort of a man.” He began to laugh, immensely pleased. Then he added: “Come here and tell me about him again, Betsy. I want to see you vote twice on him. Tell me what sort of a bad egg he is, will you?”

Betsy came and again sniffed the hand of Speedy, but this time she pricked her ears mischievously and began to nibble at it.

“She knows you’re no good and she’s trying to bite you,” declared Joe Dale. “I’m going to keep an eye on you, Speedy. Here’s Betsy saying that you’re no good at all. Betsy, you’re a wise old girl. You know more than I do.”

“I’ve never ridden her,” said Speedy.

“You’d better not try,” answered Joe Dale.

“Why? I thought that she was as gentle as a lamb.”

“She’s gentle with me. She’s gentle with others, too, but she knows some little tricks.”

“Such as what?”

“She hates spurs. One touch of ’em and she’ll buck like a fiend. She’s an educated little pitching witch, I can tell you. She learned young.”

“How did she learn?”

“Got into the hands of a half-breed son of trouble and learned how to pitch him off every time she jumped, even if he was a pretty slick rider. She’s had other chances, too. I’ve had people try to steal her a dozen times, and she generally gets them out of the saddle before they’ve gone a mile. A touch of the spurs will always start her.”

“Anything else that she doesn’t like?”

“She’s a balky brute, at heart. She even tries it on me, now and then,” confessed Joe Dale. “Sometimes she doesn’t like to pass a stump or tree with a funny shape. And sometimes she’ll stop dead at a bridge, and start turning in circles like a crazy thing. I can bring her out of those wrong notions with a touch. But nobody else can.”

“What’s to do, then?” asked Speedy.

“Get off and lead her. That’s the only way. She’s always as quiet as a lamb when she’s on the lead. She seems to be sure that a man walking on the ground really knows the way better’n she does.” He added: “You planning to steal her, Speedy, asking all these questions?”

“I’d rather have my gray mule.” Speedy grinned. “He’s slow but he’s sure. But someday I might want to make a fast move and need Betsy.”

“You don’t wear spurs, so you’d be all right on her,” said the other. “And I’ve told you about the bucking.”

“How fast is she?” asked Speedy.

“She’s no racer,” Joe Dale admitted. “She looks a lot faster than she is. Somehow, she doesn’t seem able to stretch out in a real, long gallop. But her point is that she can last all day and all night, and she’ll live on thistles and drink the wind for a week, and still be able to lope along like a wolf.”

“That’s the horse for this country,” declared Speedy. “Next to the iron horse, that’s the way to travel in this country.”

“You’re still a tramp.” Joe Dale grinned now. “You’d like to be back on the bum, riding blind baggage, and going nowheres.”

“Going nowhere is the best place to go,” Speedy said.

“How come?” asked Joe Dale.

“Well, you ought to know how it is. You straighten out for you don’t know what, and the fun is all in the getting there. There’s no place I’ve ever seen where I’d like to drop anchor. But to drift from one spot to another . . . that’s a good deal better.”

The other stared curiously at him. “Look a-here, Speedy,” he said. “Look at Sunday Slough. Take a place like this, and you could live here the rest of your days. The people are all proud to have you around. You could be sheriff here till kingdom come. They’d give you a fat salary. You wouldn’t have to keep smiling, up here. The boys know what you can do.”

“I’ve had a good time here, but it’s lasted long enough,” said Speedy.

“You want to be on the road again?”

“Yes, I want to be going nowhere. I’m tired of having a fixed home address.”

A horse beat down the street, came to a grinding halt before the sheriff’s office, and a big man in shirt sleeves rolled to the elbows, with salty sweat stains on his breast and shoulders, came clumping into the room.

He had been riding against the western glare of the sun, and now he paused, scowling and blinking, growing accustomed to the dim light inside the house.

“Hullo, Speedy,” he said.

“Something wrong?” asked Speedy.

“You bet there’s something wrong,” he replied. “You know me?”

“I’ve seen you. I don’t know your name.”

“I’m Sam Jedbury. I got a claim up there at the head of the ravine. I went about a mile beyond everything else, and I struck it pretty good. I struck it too good for my health. I’m working along, and getting out my share and a little more of the bonanza, and today along comes a low-down hound of a Swede and pokes a rifle into my stomach and tells me that he staked that claim a year ago. Why, there wasn’t even a jack rabbit in Sunday Slough a year ago. But that’s what he says. And what am I to do? Argue? You can’t argue with a rifle, unless you got a gun in your hand. And I didn’t have no gun. So I come in here to let you know.”

Speedy sighed. “What sort of a looking fellow?” he asked.

“Big and hairy is all I can say,” said Sam Jedbury. “Got a mean-looking eye, too. It was like poison to me.”

“What sort of a rifle?”

“Winchester.”

“I’ll go and call on him,” said Speedy.

“I’ll go along,” said the other.

“No, you stay here. You, too, Joe.”

Dale had picked a gun belt from a nail on the wall and was strapping it around his hips.

“Hold on, Speedy,” Joe Dale said. “You let me tell you something. You’ve handled a

lot of the wild men around here, but you've never handled a claim-jumper before. Those fellows know that trouble is ahead of 'em, and they plan on doing a little shooting. Besides, everybody in Sunday Slough, by this time, knows that you don't carry no gun."

"That's right." Sam Jedbury nodded. "You let us both go along."

"I don't carry a gun . . . everybody knows it . . . so guns aren't likely to be used on me," Speedy stated.

"Don't be so sure of that," said Jedbury. "Every gunman in the Slough would be pretty proud if he could slam a slug of lead into you, no matter whether you carry a gun yourself or not. Neither does a wildcat or a grizzly pack a gun, but gents will go shooting for them."

Speedy shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll go alone," he said. "Don't be surprised if I don't come back for a while. The fact is that I may have to do a little scouting around." He turned to Dale. "Suppose that I borrow Betsy?" he asked.

"You can have Betsy," said Joe Dale, "but I'd a lot rather you'd let me go along with you. You're taking too many chances, Speedy. Someday you'll lose your bet. Do you realize that?"

"I told you before that I wanted to be on the road," said Speedy. "Here's a trip on a sideline, anyway. It may not be much, but I'm going to take it."

So, straightway, he took the mare and rode off. The other two remained staring after him.

"He loves trouble, I reckon." Jedbury sighed.

"It's the only fun he gets," said Joe Dale, and he sighed in turn.

XI

"The Trap"

Twice the beautiful mare balked on the way up the valley, and twice Speedy dismounted and led her forward until her step became free and willing and her ears were pricking. But he had been so delayed by these halts that it was after sunset when he got to the claim of Jedbury, at the head of the ravine.

The claim-jumper was in full view, sitting on a broad-topped stone at the mouth of the shaft, which lay on top of a dump. It was apparent that he had been working inside the shaft or, at least, making a thorough survey. But now he was merely intent on keeping his fort. He smoked a pipe with a quiet concentration, and he had across his knees a shining new Winchester that would hold fifteen shots—fifteen lives, perhaps.

He was what Sam Jedbury had described—a hairy fellow, with a very considerable jaw to be guessed at behind the tangle of his beard. His great eyebrows bushed out and downward, and the eyes themselves were as bright as bits of flame.

He paid no heed to the approach of Speedy and the mare, but continued to smoke his pipe. It was only when the deputy sheriff was a few yards away that he picked up his rifle and held it like a revolver in one hand, his forefinger on the trigger and the long barrel pointing at Speedy.

The latter spoke to Betsy, and she halted. "How's things?" asked Speedy.

"Things are fair to middling," replied the other in a noncommittal way.

"Been here quite a time?" Speedy asked.

"On this stone? No. Whatcha want?"

"Just to spend some time with you," said Speedy, and he dismounted.

"I can't offer you no hospitality," said the man at the mouth of the mine's shaft. "I ain't got no chuck to offer you, stranger. Sorry."

"That's all right," said Speedy. "I just wanted to have a chat with you." He sat down on a rock near the claim-jumper, facing him. The muzzle of the rifle followed his movements like the magnetic needle pointing toward the pole.

"You go on and chat," said the miner. "Whatcha gonna chat about?"

"A fellow came into town," said Speedy, "and told me a wild yarn about his mine up here. He said another fellow, who answers your description, had arrived and jumped it. It sounded like a cock-and-bull yarn, but I had to come up here and investigate. I'm the deputy sheriff, you see."

"Wait," said the other, frowning. "You call yourself Speedy?"

"Yes," said the man of the law.

"The Speedy that runs Sunday Slough?"

"I don't claim to run it."

"Hold on, now. You say that you're Speedy, and I say that you lie. Whatcha think about that?" He thrust his head forward and uttered the last words with a sneer.

"Are you sure that I'm a liar?" Speedy asked, smiling.

"Sure? Of course, I'm sure."

"Have you ever seen Speedy?"

"I don't need to see him," answered the claim-jumper. "I heard him described enough times. Back in the mountains they don't talk about much else of a winter evening, except to swap lies about Speedy . . . what he's done and what he ain't done. I been damn' sick of hearing the name, just to speak personal."

"Too bad," said Speedy. "Maybe I'm not big enough to be the right man?"

"Well, he ain't so very big," said the other. "I'd say maybe he was about six feet, not weighing more'n a hundred and eighty or ninety. But that's big enough. And you're only a runt. You ain't more'n five nine or ten. You wouldn't weigh a hundred and fifty pounds hardly. Why, kid, you're a plain fool if you think that you'll kid me into believin' that you're Speedy!"

The latter opened the breast of his coat and showed the steel badge that was pinned inside of it. "That's all I can say," he said. "You can believe me or not, but I'll have to

take you into Sunday Slough.”

“You?” cried the miner.

“I’m afraid that I shall,” Speedy said. “Unless you can prove that the mine belongs to you. You drove out Jedbury. He was the first to work it.”

“That’s a lie,” said the ruffian. “I’ll tell you what. I staked out this claim pretty near a year ago. I broke the ground. I started things going. Jedbury, he never would’ve found nothing here, except that he saw where I’d been working and. . .” He paused, scowling. “I done enough talking,” he said. “Talking ain’t my style.”

“Fighting is more your line, I suppose,” suggested Speedy.

“I’ve done my share of that,” declared the miner. He glared at the smaller man as he spoke.

“I think Jedbury was telling the truth,” said Speedy. “You’ll have to come to town with me, partner.”

“Where’s your warrant?” asked the man of the beard.

“Warrant?” Speedy echoed. He lifted his brows and stared in turn. “We don’t bother about those little formalities in Sunday Slough. Not when we have fellows like claim-jumpers to handle.”

“I’m a claim-jumper, am I?” asked the other. His teeth glinted through his beard as he spoke. Then he added: “You’re gonna take me back, are you? Would you mind telling me what you’re gonna take me with?”

“Yes, with my hands,” said Speedy. He stood up. “It’s getting toward dusk,” he observed. “We’d better be starting along.”

When the miner spoke, it was as if a dog were snarling. “You don’t dare do it,” he challenged. “If you’re Speedy, I’ll tell you what else you are. You’re a fake. That’s what you are! Now, if you’re the wild man that I’ve heard so much talk about, start something, kid.” He rose in turn and held the rifle stiffly toward the breast of the man of the law.

“Resisting arrest may be hard on your eyes and bad for your health,” declared Speedy. “Have you thought about that, partner?”

“You talk like I needed advice or asked for it,” said the stranger. “Now, shove up your hands. I’m gonna make an example out of you. You may run Sunday Slough, but you can’t run me!”

Speedy obediently raised his hands, and the other came closer, slowly. “You have a gun,” said Speedy, “and you know that I don’t carry one.”

“I could lick you without a gun,” said the miner, “except as how they say that you’re a whole pack of tricks. I reckon that I don’t really need a gun, but why should I throw away a bet on a sure thing? I’m gonna skin you alive, Mister Deputy Sheriff, that’s what I’m gonna do. I’m gonna teach you what it means to mix up with Bill Parry, and. . .” With savage satisfaction he drew nearer to the boy, so near that the muzzle of his gun, although still out of reaching distance, was not, however, out of range of a kick.

And that was what Speedy tried. It was a difficult target, the narrow, gleaming barrel of that rifle, and, if he missed, a bullet would take his life the next instant. Murder was no new thing, he could guess, to this ruffian. But he took the chance.

It was a partial miss. Only with the side of his shoe did he touch the rifle a glancing blow. It exploded almost on the instant, but the force of the kick had been sufficient to make it swerve to the side, and the bullet ripped the shirt under Speedy's armpit. Half an inch closer in, it would have broken his ribs and knocked him down.

Bill Parry, as he fired, leaped backward to avoid danger, but he was far too slow of foot. All the tangled padding of his beard was not sufficient to dull the force of a blow that clipped him close to the point of the chin and staggered him, bent his knees. His head was flicked back by the blow and, although he managed to fire again, it was blindly, at an unseen target.

What happened to him after that, he was never quite sure. He simply knew, all in an instant of time, that he was tripped up, disarmed, half stunned by a blow on the temple and, in general, felt as though he had been tackled by a combination of wildcat and grizzly bear. Then he was lying flat on his back, looking up toward the darkening sky and toward the face of Speedy, who stood erect, panting.

"You'd better get up, Bill Parry," Speedy advised. "As I said before, you'll have to come into Sunday Slough with me. You've resisted arrest, attempted murder, and in general played a bad hand. I'm going to see that you get the limit. I'll be lucky if I keep the men of the Slough from taking you out on a necktie party."

Parry did not move. He merely said: "There'll be a necktie party, all right enough."

"I'm not threatening you," Speedy assured him.

"Ain't you? But I'm threatening you! You fool, we got everything set ready for you. We got you trimmed and trapped, you swine. If you don't believe me, look around you."

Although he did not turn his head, Speedy was suddenly certain that figures had moved up behind him during the fight, and that now they were in readiness. The chill of an unknown dread flowed suddenly like liquid ice through his blood.

Then from behind him, he heard the last voice in all the world that he wished to hear, the voice of Garcías, saying with a tremor of joy: "Now, Pedro, now Manuel, take him on each side. If he moves a finger, fill his skin with lead!"

For the first time in his wild young life, Speedy made certain of death!

XII

"A Digression"

Chains, irons, and locks they knew better than to try upon the magic hands of Speedy by this time. They used ropes, instead, not big ones that may be slipped, but thin, powerful cords that will fit into the very knuckles of joints and that hold on as if with conscious force, steadily applied. They took no chances. They tied his hands together. They tied him across the elbows. They tied his feet and ankles together; they bound his knees. They put a stout pole down his back, and wrapped him to it with lashings.

Then he heard a voice saying: “There ain’t anything he can move, now, but his brain and his tongue.”

It was the voice of Levine, and the voice of One-Eyed Mike broke in to add: “Yeah, he can think and he can talk. We’re gonna see how he can talk himself out of this here pickle.” He came and stood over Speedy, and kicked him brutally in the ribs with his heavy boot.

“You go on and tell me, Speedy. You tell me how you’re gonna cut these here cords with your tongue. You got a bright brain in your head, and you got a tongue with a fine sharp edge to it. But now, you tell me how you’re gonna talk your way clean out of this, will you?”

“Oh, I’ll tell you,” said Speedy. “I don’t at all mind telling you that I’ll get out of the tangle.”

“You hear that, *Don Hernando*?” said the great Levine, laughing softly. “He says that he’ll talk his way out of this here trouble. He ain’t the kind to boast, neither.”

The Mexican came nearer, glaring down at the victim. “Pedro, give me a whip,” he commanded.

Pedro handed him a double-lashed quirt, and Don Hernando struck the bound man across the face.

“There is your answer, dog,” Garcías said.

The knotted tip of one of the lashes cut through the skin of Speedy’s cheek, cut deeply, and brought a stream of blood. But he hardly felt any pain. The imminence of death made all lesser things of no moment whatever.

“You are here again, *Señor Garcías*. This time I did not have to wake you up by singing,” he said.

Garcías smiled. Suddenly he squatted like an Indian on his heels, to bring his face closer to that of the helpless prisoner. “You had a moment in my own house,” he said, “when you could have run a knife through my throat. You could have killed me as the mountaineers kill pigs in the autumn, when the frosts begin. But you did not, *Señor Speedy*. Tell me why, like a blind fool, you let me go.”

“Because,” Speedy answered, “I wanted you up here.”

“And so you have me, eh?” said the Mexican.

“So I have you,” agreed Speedy. “And Levine with you, and your two man-killers, there, and One-Eyed Mike, also. I am only baiting a trap that will catch you and swallow you all.”

Hernando sprang up and looked about him in alarm. Then he raised the quirt as though to strike again. “You lie,” he said, “and your lies are the lies of a fool. There is no danger near us. I have other men posted. They can see everything that comes near. We are alone here with you, and we intend to see you die slowly.” He turned toward Levine, saying: “I told you that this would be the better way.” Then he added, to the prisoner: “Poison was the last thought of Levine, my dear friend Levine. He has a good, quick mind, but I am not a fool, either.”

“Find a death for me,” said Speedy, “that takes plenty of time, because there won’t be

any shame in it. There'll be no shame like hanging out a window of my own house, like a suit of old clothes taking the air. How much do the people of Segovia laugh when they think of you, *amigo* Hernando?"

The Mexican, in frantic anger, fairly howled out an oath, and whirled the lash of the whip above his head.

It was caught from behind and the voice of Bill Parry exclaimed: "No more of that, Garcías!"

Pedro, on one side of Parry, drew a knife. Manuel, on the other, had a revolver ready. They waited the signal from their chief before laying the rash *gringo* dead.

But Levine called out: "Stop 'em, Garcías! We don't want anything to happen to Parry. He's all right. He's played the game straight and square with us. We wouldn't've had Speedy now, except for him."

"He . . . he," exclaimed Garcías, stammering with rage, "he dared to hold my . . . ! What shall I do to . . . ?"

He could not find words, and Bill Parry said calmly enough: "It's all right, Garcías. I know that the kid has to die. He's done too damn' much. He's spoiled too many good times. It's the day for him to be bumped off. But don't slam him like that when he can't slam back. You'd never have the nerve to try it, if you and him was alone, and his hands was free."

"Shut up, Parry!" called Levine.

Don Hernando had drawn himself up, stiff with pride and rage.

"I have come many leagues," he declared. "I have ridden furiously with my men. I suggested this method for catching the snake when I came here. And now I am insulted by a *gringo*!"

"*Señor, señor,*" Pedro muttered warningly.

"Shut up, Parry," repeated Levine, but the miner was enraged in his turn, and his tongue could be as bitter as any in Mexico for that matter. He shouted out: "If you call me a *gringo*, you greaser puppy, I'm gonna . . . !"

He reached for a gun as he spoke, but an unexpected voice broke in on the debate, not that of Levine or of the followers of Garcías.

It was Speedy, saying cheerfully from the ground where he lay: "Fight it out, boys. When the last of you are dead, I'll be safe enough."

This logic struck Garcías at once.

"That is true. Why should we fight with one another?" he asked. "To please this demon who lies beside us on the ground? We have come to dispose of him, not of one another."

"You'll never dispose of me, Garcías," Speedy corrected. "It's not in the cards for you. Neither for that fat-faced Levine. I know my luck that far away. But don't argue with the *gringos*, as you call them, *Don* Hernando. They have everything better than you have . . . stronger hands, better brains, better guns, better horses to ride on."

Don Hernando groaned with fury. "You say four things and you lie four times!" he

said. "You are nothing but a lie, a great and complete and horrible lie. We have guns as good, better hands, better wits, better horses."

"You have broken-down, lump-headed, knock-kneed, sway-backed wrecks for horses," said Speedy. "They are the off-casts of the tramps and fourth-rate cowpunchers, who get tired of them and sell them for the price of their hoofs and hides. But they're good enough for you fellows south of the Río Grande. Plenty good enough! You're proud to sit the saddle on brutes like that. You tie sashes about your hips and feed your horses on steel, so that they stumble along a mile or so, and then drop dead. When they die, you have to wait half a year before you can afford to buy another horse fit for the glue factory, and for nothing else."

If there is any tender point with a Mexican of any pretensions to rank, it is the horse that he rides upon. Speedy already had seen the glorious animal that *Don Hernando* usually rode. Although it was not in sight now, he guessed that it must be somewhere near, for it was said that *Garcías* rode it in all his marauding expeditions.

Don Hernando, in the long flow of insult that poured from the lips of Speedy, was a mere drifting, staggering thing, so did rage buoy and lighten him. At last he managed to say: "Pedro, bring me my horse. Even this lying demon will look on it and gasp. Bring the horse and let him see what a gentleman rides in Mexico."

Pedro went for the horse.

Levine, in the meantime, together with Mike, had carefully propped up the helpless, stiff-lashed body of Speedy against the bank of the mine dump. He and his henchman sat down nearby. Levine said: "Don't get too hot, *Garcías*. There ain't any use matching words with this here sneak. He's got a vocabulary longer'n his arm, what I mean. Let him go, and we better put our heads together about the best way of getting rid of him."

But here the horse was brought, a fine gray gelding with black points, gleaming and dancing through the dusk of the day.

The eyes of Speedy, prepared as they were, widened a little.

"Look!" commanded *Garcías*, "and then tell me what a liar you are. Say it with your own lips!"

"I see what you have there," Speedy said. "You've got a thing that looks like a horse and seems like a horse, walks like a horse and stands like a horse, but it isn't a horse at all. It's only a pretty picture out of a book."

"Ha!" said *Don Hernando*.

Levine began to chuckle, almost inaudibly, behind his hand. He did not object to this badgering of *Don Hernando*. He still owed the man twenty-five hundred dollars—and Levine was not one to love a creditor. One-Eyed Mike, too, was looking on with a grin.

"Only a pretty little picture pony," Speedy repeated calmly. "That's the sort of a pick-up that we give our children to ride. No man would want to be on the back of a horse like that. Take the mare, yonder. She has more brains than you and your men put together. She'll come when she's called, sit down, lie down, fetch, and carry. She'll run faster, and run farther than your gray. She is worth looking at. She has points!"

Don Hernando stared with a fixed passion. Then he said: "You, *señor*, being about to

die, already rave. But I would like to show you how the gray would leave the mare behind him. If they ran as far as that rock and back. Then you would see!”

“Bill Parry will ride the mare and make a fool of your horse,” answered Speedy. “Bill, show up the Mexican, will you, and his bragging?”

“I’ll do it free and willing and glad,” said Bill Parry. “It’s a good mare and a grand mare to look at. Garcías, I’m ready.”

XIII

“The Race”

In all parts of the world, in all times, there have been strange races, but never one under auspices more peculiar than this. Sid Levine was the only one to protest.

“The kid is playing for time,” he said. “He’s making a fool of us. He may have something up his sleeve. You know that, Garcías.”

“What can he do?” answered Garcías. “And what can his friends do? If they come near, we have horses to carry us away, unless we can drive them with our rifles. Before we mount, each of us puts a bullet through the head of *Señor* Speedy. That much is clear. In the meantime, we really have nothing to fear. We have hours before us. The men in Sunday Slough suspect nothing, and we shall kill this man in so many ways that it will repay us everything that we have suffered from him. Also, before that begins, I shall show him that he is both a fool and a blind man, since he cannot judge horses. Manuel, take the saddle of the gray. *Amigo*,” he added to Parry, “you ride the mare. I laugh, a little, but I will make you a bet, if you wish.”

“I got fifty dollars,” said Bill Parry stoutly. “I’ll lay it all on the back of the mare.”

“I have a hundred,” answered the Mexican contemptuously. “I offer you two dollars for one. Are you ready?”

Parry was already mounted, a big, uncouth form on the back of the dainty Betsy. Speedy looked with interest at the short spurs that ornamented the heels of Parry’s boots. It was an odd miner who wore spurs at his work.

“Any tricks to her?” asked Parry of the prisoner.

“Sometimes she’s lazy,” said Speedy. “And if she hangs a little, just warm her up with the spurs. She’ll go by the picture horse as if he were tied to a post. Give her plenty of punishment if she hangs fire. There’s plenty in her, but she’s a little petted and spoiled.”

“I’ll get the speed out of her,” Bill Parry said savagely, “if I have to cut her heart out with the spurs. You can lay your money on that.”

“I’ll lay my money on her and you, Bill,” Speedy said calmly.

“Are you ready, Manuel, you lump?” asked Bill Parry.

“Ready,” said Manuel with a sneer of satisfaction.

He regarded the mare with a glance of scorn. He, for one, knew the value of the gelding on whose back he sat.

“I give the word,” said the great Garcías. “You are both ready? Remember, to the rock and back to this place, where I draw the line with my toe. Fortune to the deserving. I raise my arm and when I drop it, send the gray on like a demon, Manuel!”

His arm fell, and the two animals shot away, side-by-side.

No! For the gray had a distinct head in front at the very beginning and, running down the very gradual slope toward the big, dark rock that stood on the verge of the trees on the floor of the ravine, with every stride the good gelding shoved farther in the lead, a neck, a half length, a length.

The satisfaction of Garcías knew no bounds. He laughed and shouted. He roared with laughter, too, when suddenly the mare, running still more slowly than before, began to buck. The curses of Bill Parry roared back down the wind to them. Even Sid Levine was laughing heartily. One-Eyed Mike smiled a savage smile.

Swiftly the gray flew on toward victory, and suddenly Bill Parry, for all his riding, flew high in the air, fell, and, as his body thudded upon the ground, the mare cantered easily forward, carrying with her no burden other than the saddle on her back.

That instant, Garcías, with a snarl, observed to his prisoner: “Ha? Is she a return horse? Would she run on into Sunday Slough and bring the warning?” Aloud, he screeched in a voice like the whistling cry of a hawk. “*Hai!* Manuel! The mare, the mare! Stop her, rope her, or shoot her down!”

Manuel heard that far-borne yell and, swinging the gray around, observed the riderless mare swinging down the trail, while the form of her rider lay spread out far behind her. He picked a rope from beside the saddle horn, opened the noose of it, and went for her with a whoop.

She came straight on toward him, only when the rope was flung, underhand, the noose cutting the air like a knife, the heavy, slender rawhide perfectly thrown, did Betsy leap like a dancer to the side. Half of the noose rapped across her back, and down the valley she went in wild flight, as though the blow had been a signal.

“Shoot! Shoot!” shouted the great Garcías.

Manuel, with an oath, drew up the gelding, slid a rifle out of the saddle holster that ran under his right knee, and fired from the shoulder. The light was not good, but he was an expert; he took the head for a target and, at the first shot, she bounded high but went galloping on. At the second bullet, she tumbled head over heels and lay flat upon the trail.

Manuel, putting up the rifle and turning his head to make sure that she was indeed motionless, turned the gray and came victoriously back toward his chief.

“And there it is,” said Garcías. “It was not I that wished to do this. It was not I. It was you, *Señor* Speedy. And there lies your horse dead.”

“Not my horse,” said Speedy. “It belongs to a man who’ll follow you and cling to you like a bur. If you manage to do me harm, I know that he’ll have your blood later on.”

Garcías laughed. “My blood will take care of itself. Welcome, Manuel. It was a good shot. Through the head, I know, by the way the mare fell.”

“It was through the head,” Manuel said, showing his teeth. “I shot carefully. I clipped her through the brain, just under the ears. The first bullet, it was too far down.”

“He knows how to shoot,” Garcías said with immense pride. “He could shoot in the dark, aiming at sounds. That is Manuel, a man in one million fighters.”

Big Bill Parry, finally managing to get up from the ground, came back to the rest of the group, limping, shaking his bushy head. For he had been badly jarred by the fall, and there was a dimness still in his eyes.

He came to Speedy, and, leaning over him, he shook a fist in his face. “I got a mind to smash you,” he said, “and I oughta smash you. I was kind of friendly to you, compared to the rest of these here. But I ain’t friendly now. I’m gonna stand by and see them do whatever they wanna. I tell you what, I’m gonna give them a hand in the doin’ of it, because I see the snake that you are, Speedy. Yeah, I see it, and I’d put my heel on your head, except that there’s ways of making you suffer a lot more than that, before you cash in. You knew that she’d buck like a demon when she got the spur.”

“Of course, I knew it,” said Speedy.

“You was gonna have her buck me off, and then she’d go into town like a regular return hoss, and start ’em out on her trail, was that it?” demanded Bill Parry.

“Bill,” Speedy said, “you have a good, clear-working brain, after somebody else has pointed the way for you. Except for Garcías, and his man Manuel . . . Garcías who saw what was happening and Manuel who shoots like ten demons . . . she would be well along down the ravine by this time.”

Both Garcías and Manuel expanded with pleasure. Praise is always sweet, but never so delicious as when it has been forced from the unwilling lips of an enemy.

“You see now, *gringo*, what it means to cross one of my name?” said Garcías.

“I knew that before, *Don Hernando*,” Speedy said. “That was why I hung you like a white flag out a window of your house. I wanted to make sure that you would remember me.”

Under the taunt, the Mexican snarled savagely. But he managed to restrain the hand that he had lifted to strike, once more, with the whip. “There is a time,” he said through his teeth, “for brave words. But your time has come to be braver still, when the fire answers what you have to say, *Señor* Speedy. My friends, let us sit down and consider, carefully, exactly what should be done to this man. Let us take time, and use much thought. Now there is nothing for us to fear. We may deliberate. Even the tricks of this snake have come to an end.”

XIV

“Betsy Comes Home”

It was in the very last light of the day that Manuel had fired his shot and with every

moment the gloom increased, shutting in closer and closer upon all within the ravine.

As the men who had captured Speedy sat down to begin their calculations, like so many Indians around the body of a famous warrior newly taken, Betsy lifted her head, shuddered, and rose to her feet. She had been wounded twice. The first bullet had cut through the chin and that wound was bleeding fast. The second shot had glanced across the top of her neck, behind the ears. It was the shot that was called in the old days a "crease". It was said that the hunters of wild horses, men with a diabolical skill with a rifle, had sometimes brought down the mustangs with a bullet so placed that it nicked, without shattering, the spinal column, just back of the head. So she had been struck and, thoroughly stunned, had fallen as though the bullet had passed straight through her brain.

But when she had gained her feet, she was still able to take the trail. She had been badly hurt, and the blood was running down freely from both her wounds, but the instinct that guided her was as strong as ever, the impulse that had started her down the trail after she had bucked big Bill Parry from the saddle. It was the image of her master that lived in her brain, young Joe Dale, who she had carried through so many dangers and who she loved with devotion. The touch of his hand, the sound of his voice, the very pressure of his knee conveyed to her messages that she understood perfectly as a spoken language.

Now she was in much trouble, badly hurt, and she started on toward him. The trail was not a new one. She had traveled this way many times, carrying her rightful rider, and so she went forward without hesitation, slowly at first, until she made sure of her balance.

So it was that the keen-eared men up the valley did not hear her rise and start off through the shadows. The trees closed behind her, unseen, and now, making sure of herself, she struck into a sharp trot, and then into a sharper gallop. She grew dizzy. The effects of the blow on the spinal column could not be shaken off at once. She was rather like a boxer who has received a knockdown blow and rises to resume the fight, although with a brain more than half stunned.

So she went through the movements of the gallop, staggering a little, and so blindly that presently she struck a tree trunk with a force that almost broke her shoulder, barking away the skin and knocking her to the ground a second time. She got up slowly, shuddering more violently. But she shook her brave head and then resumed the trail.

It was a strange world that she found herself running through that night. The boulders and the trees were in motion, it appeared, and swayed toward her from either side. When she dodged, the movement of those things that should have been fixed and rooted in the ground became all the more violent. She got on until the lights from the town of Sunday Slough were spread out before her eyes, and then she stumbled, blinded by the swirling illumination. She fell for the third time.

It was not the effort that told upon her so much; neither was it the benumbing effects of the bullet that weakened her. There was hardly strength enough in her head to lift it from the ground. There she lay for a time, the forelegs quivering, braced far apart, but her brave head fixed toward the goal and her ears pointing forward. Something had happened to her that she could not understand.

She strove to rise. Her body heaved, and then sank back. She strove again and this time gained her feet, only to topple over on the right side. She lay for a long moment. A horse, like a man, can be beaten and discouraged before the body is willing to give way.

So she lay there, wondering what had happened, and with a chill of actual cold beginning in her body and rising into her soul.

All living things have the sense of death, as it steps toward them, even though without pain. The poor mare knew that greater darkness than the night with its stars was approaching her, but, like all the brave, she was not beaten by two failures, or by three.

Patiently she worked, until once more her head was raised from the ground. Her breathing was harsh and stertorous. She was covered with cold sweat, in streams. She shook violently with every effort that she made. Finally, however, the hindquarters that had failed before reacted to the pressure of her will, and she came uncertainly to her feet. She staggered and almost fell again from the effort, but presently she was able to walk on.

She tried to trot, but it was very hard. The whole landscape immediately became a wavering sea of shadows, mingling with dazzling sparks and long swinging strokes of light. So she had to fall to a walk once more. Before her, the lights separated and spread apart. A chasm of comparative darkness opened, and she entered the main street of the town. That street, as she turned a corner, opened upon many loud sounds of human voices and laughter. There were more lights, blazing intensely, close at hand, half blinding her.

Then a dog ran out and snapped at her head. She almost fell as she strove to rear and strike out at him. The dog ran, and she went on, still staggering. The dust of the street was thick and deep; she slipped in it as though she were wading through swiftly running water, stepping upon rocks as treacherous as glass.

Men came running out to her. Someone cried: "This here is Joe Dale's mare, and look at what happened to her! Look, will you? Somebody's shot her!"

Hands fell on her bridle reins. She shook her head, although the movement cost her pain, and broke into a floundering trot. Down the street, two blocks, she knew that there was a large building, filled with lights, with the sounds of many human voices by day and by night, even, and behind that building there was another of almost equal size where horses were kept and where there was always a cool, sweet savor of hay and of peace.

She thought of that now. And she thought, too, of the long watering troughs that extended before the front of the hotel, three of them in a row, always with the water flowing musically from one to the other, water kept clean and sweet as a mountain stream, with the small, keen faces of the stars deep down in it.

She had been thirsty before, hard-driven down many a mountain trail and under burning suns, but never had she felt such thirst as this, invading the marrow of her bones. She would drink up the very stars that lay like flickering sparks in the bottom of the trough. So she trotted weakly, stumbling, on to the front of the hotel, leaving behind her a swirling train of inquiry. There was the black water, there were the stars a-drowning in it. She plunged her head in to the very eyes, and drank and drank again. She lifted her head, infinitely refreshed.

She was very sick, very weak. All was afloat and shuddering before her eyes. But now she remembered her master more keenly than before. This was where he was to be found. It was into this building that he disappeared at night, and out of it he came every morning. Lifting her head, she whinnied, high and sharp. Even the neigh was wrong. She snorted and tried again, and the old bugle note rang out clearly.

Almost instantly a door slammed and a step ran out onto the front verandah.

“Hello, Speedy,” called a voice. “Did you get him?”

It was the voice of her master! She whinnied again, softly, a note that he would be sure to know, for many a time on night trails she had spoken to him in exactly this manner and he had always known.

He knew now, for he came down the steps with a jump and a lunge. He was at her head. He was touching her wounds. He was crying out in a voice sharp and wild and high, as she, many a time, had heard the voice of a dog, eager for a fight, and snarling at another. So Joe Dale cried out.

He stood with his fists doubled. He groaned with the great apprehension that was in him. Other men ran in about him. “What’s happened, Joe?” asked Pier Morgan, among the rest.

“They’ve murdered Speedy, and they’ve almost murdered Betsy. She’s bleedin’ to death,” said Joe Dale, “and, when I get them that done this, I’m gonna have the hide off their backs, and put a quirt on the raw underneath. They’ve gone and got Speedy at last.”

The word went like lightning through the town.

There were some who were glad in the bottom of their guilty hearts, but there were many more who were savagely annoyed and these came out, with guns. They offered themselves and their guns to Joe Dale, as the representative of the missing deputy sheriff.

He picked them with care, a stanch dozen men.

He said to the suddenly gathered posse: “I’ll tell you what, boys, Speedy was never got by only one man. There’s more than one. There’s plenty of them that were in on his death. We ain’t got much chance to nail ’em. Not hardly any chance at all, because the minute that they killed him, they’re sure to’ve busted loose and run, because they knew that Sunday Slough would go clean crazy about the dirty job. But we’ll do our best, and we’ll do it on the run.”

He turned back to the veterinary who, with shirt sleeves rolled up, was busily laboring over the wounded mare.

“Doc,” he said, “you’ll do what you can for her. I know that.” He himself went to her and laid his hand on her muzzle. Her soft, whimpering answer almost unmanned him.

He heard the doctor saying: “I’ll fix her up, old son, so’s you’ll never know that anything ever happened to her, except the scars. And you wouldn’t want to rub them out. The whole of Sunday Slough wants that writing to remain on her, brother, because it’ll remind us how she come in and give the alarm, and I only hope that she ain’t come too late.”

Serious and deep murmurs arose.

There was Bill Turner, the news gatherer, standing with notebook in hand, jotting down his observations of her looks at this grim moment and carefully considering her, biting at his lips for all the world like a man who had started to take down an oral interview from a dumb beast.

Even Joe Dale, no matter how his heart was wrung, could not help a faint smile as he looked at this. He patted her neck for the last time, sprang into the saddle of a gallant roan

mustang, and went at a gallop down the main street of the town, heading toward the upper end of the ravine along which the mines were strung.

All of Sunday Slough was out there to see the posse pass and wish them luck, and particularly one huge fellow, very drunk, his long wet mustaches blown out into sails as he bellowed: "Ten thousand dollars for the scalp of the skunk that murdered our Speedy!"

XV

"The Funeral Pyre"

High up the ravine, in their deep consultation, Sid Levine and Garcías worked over the details of their calculations. The ideas of Levine were ingenious.

"Now, I've heard somewheres of a thing like this being done," he said. "I mean to say, they take a lot of men and rope the top of a tree and pull the top down and stake it. Then they pull down the top of another tree, as far as they can get it, and then they take and tie a man spraddling to the two tops of the trees and break the stakes. Them trees start to spring up, and they take and tear the man in two, and, if they ain't too strong, they just do it gradual. Y'understand? They take and rip him like a piece of paper, slow and gradual. I take that to be a pretty good way with Speedy. It might show other nosey fools what happens to 'em when they get between men and their business."

"Sure, it'll show 'em," said One-Eyed Mike. "You got an idea that time, chief."

The Mexican, Garcías, remained in a profound quandary, lost in devoted thought. The faces of his two warriors were turned steadily toward him.

Then he said: "I have given it careful thought. I see, *Señor* Levine, that you are a man with a mind. But, also, I remember hearing of other things. There are very clever Indians in this world. All the brains are not limited to the whites, like you and me. The Indians had some devices. They would stick pine splinters, good resinous pine splinters, into the body of a man, and then light the splinters, that burned down well into the flesh. They had ideas, the Indians."

"Yeah, there's all kinds of ideas in the world," said One-Eyed Mike, "the same as they're all kinds of people. I took a trip over to China once, when I was kind of on the loose and the run, and over there I seen them torture a chink by forcing his joints through pieces of board that was smaller than the bones. Crushed 'em, you see? Them chinks, they got plenty of nerve to stand pain, I know. But that pirate, he just opened his mouth and hollered like I can remember it yet, and feel it yet, too, right down the middle of my back."

"As a matter of fact," said Levine, "we could do several things. There's no use limitin' ourselves. We got the time and we got the means. I've heard tell, somewheres, about lashing of a gent between two boards, and then sawing through the boards and the man. I mean, the boards keep the saw blade working straight. They clean the flesh and the blood out of the saw teeth. It took some imaginin' to think of that, I say."

“Well,” said Mike Doloroso, “for my part, I never knew anything that much beat plain methods, like tying a gent up by the thumbs and putting a fire under his feet so as he gets tired of hanging that way.”

“Yes, and I seen a lot of funny things done by just putting a cord around the head of a man,” said Levine, “and then twisting the string with a stick. That makes their eyes pop out, and they holler, you can bet.”

“He is a singer,” Garcías said savagely. “And when he screams, it should be worth seeing and hearing. His face will be good to watch, because it is a handsome face, my friends.”

He laughed as he spoke, and the others laughed, also. He thought so much of his remark that he translated it also into Spanish for the enjoyment of Manuel and Pedro, and those worthies grinned from ear to ear.

Pedro said in Spanish: “Take the arm and bend it at the elbow, and then twist. It does things to the shoulder bones. Things to hear and to see!”

Levine suddenly stretched his fat arms and yawned. “We been talking for a long time,” he said. “I guess we been here for about an hour, tasting this here without doing nothing. Suppose we start. Start anyway, but make a beginning.”

“One moment,” said Garcías. “Suppose we ask him what he wishes. *Señor Speedy*, what would you prefer? You have heard us talk of many things.”

They had brought a lantern from the mine, and the lantern they now raised to see the face of the victim.

Speedy smiled against the light. “Try anything you want, boys,” he said. “If you can be Indians enough to do the things you talk about, I can be Indian enough to stand ’em without squealing, I hope.”

“Talking game ain’t the same as dying game,” said Levine. “We’ll get a song out of you before we finish. Curse you. I always hated the look of your mug from the time that I first seen it. Now you’re gonna see what happens when you step between men and their work. We’re gonna show you.”

“Look at the way you’re winding up, Speedy,” said One-Eyed Mike. “You’ve had your day, and right now, back there in Sunday Slough, there’s plenty of red-eye being drunk to you. They’re drinkin’ the health of their next sheriff, but he’ll be in Hades before ever he’ll be in Sunday Slough again. We all know that, I reckon. Oh, Speedy, a fine end you’ve come to. You’d live your life over again, I guess, if you could do the choosing right now. Speak up and tell the truth.”

“Well, I’ll tell you the truth,” Speedy began. “I’ve had my fun, and I’ve had plenty of it. I’ve been kicked in the face, now and then, but I’ve been the top dog often enough, too. I’ve gone where I wanted to go, and when I wanted to go. I have no regrets, and I don’t expect that I’ll have them when I’m dying here and you fellows play the mischief with me. You can’t string it out more than a few hours, at the most, and I can balance a good many free years and happy years against all of that. Go ahead, Levine. Another day or two, and I should have had you.”

Levine laughed loudly. “You would’ve had me,” he said, sneering. “But you didn’t get me. It was a long game, and you won all the tricks up to the last one. But I’m winning that

one, Speedy. You didn't think that I'd reach this far or that I was behind that claim-jumper, did you? You couldn't see that was all a plant?"

"I'd like to know one thing," Speedy said. "Was the other miner in on the deal, too?"

"Him? Oh, no! He's the honest man that was thrown out. I knew that he'd go straight to you. I knew that he'd get you started straight up the valley. I knew that you'd come along, too, because you've built up the kind of a reputation that you don't dare to act like you ever needed any help. I've beat you, Speedy!"

"The simple things will work, now and then," Speedy said calmly. "Nobody can win all the time. But as I die, I'll be thinking of what the boys from Sunday Slough will do to you when they nail you, Levine. And nail you they will, sooner or later. Gray, and Joe Dale, and Pier Morgan, they'll never give up the work until they've cornered you and rendered down some of your fat into lard."

"Bah," said Levine, sneering, "I've matched my brains against theirs more times than I can count. I've always won before, and I'll win again. I know that I'll win. You're the only man in the world that ever bothered me much. I had Sunday Slough in my vest pocket, before you turned up. I had a million or a couple of clean millions in sight, before you appeared. And with you out of the way, I'll go back and get the town in my hand again."

Speedy shook his head. "You're an optimist, Sid," he said. "The town knows you now. The whole town knows what a rotten crook you are. And no decent man will ever be seen with you again. You'll have nothing but muckers like One-Eyed Mike around you, and cheap greaser murderers, like Garcías." He smiled again, straight through the light of the lantern and into the face of Levine.

The latter grew half purple and half white. At last he said: "It's time to commence, Garcías. There ain't any use using up words on him, because words don't mean anything to a dog like him. It needs the whip to make him feel something."

Garcías arose. "We begin, then. Pedro, what's that on the wind? Do you hear anything? Like horses, coming up the valley?"

"I thought that I heard," said Pedro.

"But now there is nothing," broke in Manuel.

"Very well," Garcías said. "My men and I vote for fire, a slow fire built at the feet . . . roasting the feet carefully. When the fire has rotted the flesh off the bones, then move it up higher. A man will live for a long time in flames like that."

"Build the fire," snapped Levine. "You're right, and I should've known before that I wouldn't have ideas worth the ones that you could trot out. Go ahead, then, and start the fire."

The wood was gathered. There was a considerable noise of crackling in the underbrush as Pedro and Manuel broke up the fuel. Then Manuel, with a bit of dry bark, started the fire, heaping the leaves over it and the driest part of the brushwood, broken short, until the flames had gathered a good headway and showed a brilliant little pyramid of hungry yellow.

"That is enough to roast the meat," said Garcías. "Even enough to char it, unless we

keep the joint turning.”

He laughed joyously, as he spoke, and Pedro and Manuel laid hands on the prisoner.

Levine, holding the lantern high, leaned close over the face of Speedy. “Can you hold out, now that it’s coming?” he asked, sneering. “Beg, you cur. Beg! Promise! Swear! Now’s the time for you to talk. Talk us sick. Maybe we’ll let you go. Beg for a quick way of dying!”

But, instead, he saw a gradual and deadly smile spread on the lips and in the eyes of the prisoner.

Speedy said nothing at all.

The voice that next spoke was not from anyone about the fire, but from the neighboring brush. It was the sharp, barking tone of young Joe Dale, exclaiming: “Shoot for the legs! We want ’em alive, Garcías and Levine! The rest don’t count!”

And rifles spoke like hammer strokes against the ears of the stunned group.

XVI

“Snipe on the Wing”

When snipe, feeding in a marsh, hear the voice of the hunter’s dogs in the distance, they will rise staggering into the wind, each on a different course. So, when the cry of Joe Dale was heard, the men of the party gathered around Speedy scattered.

Each went his own way, winged with panic. No doubt every man would have been dropped at the first volley, had not Dale issued his orders. He himself could not understand, afterward, why he had shown such stupidity, except that it seemed to him only fair that the creatures who had been about to torment his idolized friend should taste death for a time themselves before they suffered it.

As it was, his men strictly obeyed his orders, and fired low. But the light was bad. The glimmer of the flames of the fire danced before their eyes and, although every one was a chosen marksman, the execution was surprisingly slow.

Big One-Eyed Mike, with a howl, doubled up as though the first volley had sent a bullet through his stomach, and in this position he ran like a football player, charging the line, straight for the nearest trees opposite to the line of firing. A bullet knocked off his hat. Another sliced through the calf of his leg. But these hindrances did not keep him from running at full speed. He flattened the brush before him like a charging elephant and went on, dashing and crashing.

Sunday Slough saw him no more.

Pedro and Manuel, running in exactly the same fashion, ducked and dodged right and left, heading for the same trees. Pedro reached them without a scratch. But luck was against Manuel. A bullet, flying far higher than the marksman intended, broke the back of his neck and he fell dead on the verge of safety.

Big Sid Levine, screaming like a woman, and like a woman throwing his arms above his head and before him, literally fell forward toward shelter, rushing off in such blind panic that he ran straight into the enemy. A gun butt wielded by Joe Dale with infinite relish struck him fairly on the mouth and knocked out his breath and most of his teeth. He fell down like one who had received a mortal wound. He had fallen in a dead faint, from which he did not recover for half an hour.

Bill Parry, running for safety, stumbled midway in his course, fell flat, and rolled headlong into tall grass. He had sense enough not to rise again, but crawled away. He would have been taken, had there been any pursuit, but there was none.

Something else was happening beside the fire that attracted attention that way, and all the guns.

For all the men who had surrounded Speedy, intent on snuffing out his young life in the most agonizing possible manner, only *Don* Hernando, in the pinch, remembered the work at hand rather than the preservation of his own life. It was not a blind passion on his part.

The men of Segovia were a part of him, and he was a part of Segovia. He had been shamed in the eyes of all of his people, and he dared not return to them unless he could say that the insulting *gringo* had fallen by his hand.

He was, at the moment of the alarm, the farthest from the scene of the impending torture, surveying it with a calm and well-pleased eye. But the moment that the alarm came, he knew what he had to do, and started to do it. He sprang straight for his victim.

The first hindrance was purely accidental. Big One-Eyed Mike, turning toward his blind side, with his massive shoulder struck the Mexican and knocked the slighter man spinning with his charge.

As Garcías recovered his balance and darted forward once more toward Speedy, young Pier Morgan came plunging in between. He was still very weak. The riding of the last two days and the strain of the excitement had been too much for him, but he could not be kept from the posse that rode out of Sunday Slough to save or avenge his benefactor. So he placed himself instantly between Speedy and danger, standing with his legs braced well apart.

He saw Garcías coming like a tiger, and fired, but missed with his shaking hand. The second bullet clogged in the revolver. He hurled the weapon itself at the head of Garcías, but it flew wild in turn, and Garcías, holding his own bullet with a terrible fixity of purpose, avoided wasting a shot on the body of poor Morgan, merely knocking him senseless with a blow from the barrel of his gun.

That removed the last screen, and with a frightful cry of triumph, he stood over Speedy, leveling his gun. He wanted to make too sure, or he would have done his work. As it was, he saw the firelight shine into the steady, keen eyes of the prisoner, and, as he was about to pull the trigger that would have banished Speedy from the pleasant ways of this earth, a rifle slug tore through the hips of the Mexican and knocked him down.

He struggled to one elbow and strove to fire again. But Joe Dale, running in like a wildcat, broke his gun arm with a kick.

That ended the battle of Sunday Slough, as it was called from that date henceforward.

Men said that all the credit was due to the brains of Speedy, who had devised the liberation of a dumb beast as a messenger. But they gave the credit, as hero of the encounter, not to Joe Dale, or even to gallant Pier Morgan, who had been willing to die for his friend, but to the beautiful mare, Betsy.

They paraded her through the streets of the town, the next day, decked out with garlands of flowers. For she was of a tough ancestry, and she had not lost enough blood to injure her seriously for long. She was weak, but happy with her master beside her.

As for the prisoners, they brought Garcías, silent and composed, to the town jail, where Marshal Tom Gray took charge of him. With him, they carried the great Sid Levine, fallen forever. He had collapsed completely and had to be carried on a litter, where he lay sobbing out of a broken and bleeding face.

And Speedy?

Joe Dale and Pier Morgan, literally with guns, defended him all the election day from the enthusiasm of the crowds who wanted to break into the sheriff's house.

The election itself was a joke. No man dared to vote against the hero, and in the evening, when the votes had been counted, in the rosy dusk of the day, the whole population of Sunday Slough came trooping to congratulate the hero and make him the center of such a celebration as the Slough had never known before.

Joe Dale went to rouse him from the sleep of exhaustion, but received no answer to his knock. The door was locked. They crawled through the open rear window, and found Speedy gone.

In place of him was a letter which read:

Dear Joe and Pier, and All My Friends in Sunday Slough: Levine is down. My job is ended. My trail is the out trail. If I'm the sheriff, I resign. Good luck to everybody, but I've already stayed too long in one place.

Speedy

That was all of him.

Sunday Slough saw him no more.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover was created for this eBook and is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Speedy's Mare* by Frederick Schiller Faust (as Max Brand)]