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RAINBOW BY THE TAIL

by James P. Olsen



REMOVING the cartridge belt from around his lean middle, Lew Quest folded it around the cutaway holster that sheathed a Colt .45 and shoved the killer gear into a saddle bag. It was his way of paying homage outside a shrine before

passing through its sacred portals.

Hungrily, then, like a kid outside a sweetshop window, Quest feasted his eyes on the town that lay just ahead, seeing the chimney smoke rise lazily above the deep green of spruce and the rioting yellow and

vivid scarlet of frost-struck aspens. Listening, he heard the sharp blows of an axe and heard the chuckle of a stream that half-mooned the town. Above all, he sensed an air of peace and well-being that lulled and comforted, yet at the same time made a man feel gloriously alive.

"Mirac." Quest breathed the town's name softly. "Short for 'Miracle', and little short of one."

Easy in the saddle, he rode on to a short street that was topped with white sand from the stream, and flanked by gravel sidewalks and low log buildings. Save for himself, the street was unpeopled, but it wasn't the ominous desertion presaging violence that Lew Quest had too often known.

Dismounting in front of the wide-porch general store, Quest rolled and lighted a cigarette and was surprised that it tasted so good. Everything here, he thought, would be good and pleasant—if a man could stay. With such thoughts in mind, the sharp intrusion of a loud, harsh voice jarred Quest roughly and brought him halfway around, his right hand moving fluidly toward the sixgun he no longer packed. Frowning, he eyed the jasper who'd disturbed his own and Mirac's peace. A half-breed, by his looks, he stood in front of Mirac's one saloon and shook one fist at a bent oldster standing in the doorway.

"By damn," he squalled, "I'm show you to don't let Cultus Charley have a dreenk. Sometime I take thees town to parts!"

"You'll ride out and stay out," the old man told him.

"I'm ride you, ol' bassard!" the 'breed raged as he slashed at the oldster with a split-tailed, copper-tipped quirt that had dangled from his wrist. The old man reeled back and the 'breed, slipping his hand through the loop, reversed the quirt and brought the loaded butt down on his head,

driving him to his knees. The quirt was raised to strike again when Quest snatched it from behind, spun the 'breed around and lashed him savagely across the face. Screaming, tangling his own feet, he fell and huddled on the walk while the quirt rose and fell with sickening regularity.

"You reckon you got him tender enough by now?"

The firm, even voice penetrated the pounding in Quest's ears. Stepping back, he flung the quirt at the 'breed and pulled the back of one trembling hand across his eyes.

"Trouble. Everywhere I go!" he panted.

The man who'd spoken to Quest, tall, ruddy-cheeked, with a snowy mustache, said wryly, "I'd reckon Cultus Charley's had *his* fill of trouble as of now," and studied Quest shrewdly.

Reading Quest's brand, he noted the lines around his mouth and the spot on his gray wool pants where a gun had kept sun and weather from fading the cloth. Then he looked at Cultus Charley, who'd dragged himself onto his horse.

"I'm geet even," Cultus croaked as he rode away.

QUEST shrugged. Stony faced, he looked around at the men who'd gathered at the scene. They eyed him back briefly and with quiet reserve. A few nodded as the group began drifting away, but Quest had no attention to give them now. He was staring at a girl following two men who were helping the man the 'breed had slugged away. A small, slender person with big, dark eyes in a pixy-like face, her short bronze-hued hair brushed the collar of her gaudy blanket coat. There was something so vital and contagiously happy about her that it made Quest happy and he was smiling after her when, for the second time, the firm, even voice brought him back to reality.

"You seemed pretty bitter, there," the old man said. "Sort of like it wasn't him you was beating on, as much as you were pounding a symbol of something you purely want to forget."

"You see a lot." Quest smiled wryly.

"I've *seen* a lot, anyhow." The other smiled.

"Well, I am sorry I run into trouble—especially here in Mirac," Quest admitted, adding, "Even if you don't lock me up for overdoing that whipping maybe a little bit, marshal."

"Oh," the older man chuckled, "I'm not the marshal. That was Bill Reeves, the marshal, that Cultus Charley jumped. That Cultus! He holes up in the foothills, packing grub and running errands for owlhooters since we ran him out of town for being drunk and mean most of the time."

"Yeah. I've heard that Dave Tyrus, who owns this town, makes short stay and long leavings of troublemakers," Quest remarked.

"Don't let Dave Tyrus fret you," the old man advised. "Tyrus, he dreamt this town and built it, but he don't own it. It belongs to the folks who love and enjoy it, like they do that range out there."

Sweeping one hand toward the distant mountains, the man continued: "It's some sixty miles—though it looks ten—to those peaks. In between, a dozen cow outfits uses the range with Tyrus and there's no trouble. See what I mean, Mister—"

"Lew Quest," Quest supplied.

"I'm Dave Tyrus." Tyrus stuck out his right hand.

Quest laughed. "Then I take it I can stay awhile?"

"Why not, Quest? But with everything buttoned down for the winter, what do you aim to do for a living here?"

"To tell the truth," Quest admitted, "I hadn't thought about what I'd do if I ever

grabbed my rainbow by the tail. Just getting hold of it seemed enough."

DAVE TYRUS turned, then, and smiled at the girl who came back from the doctor's to report, "Bill Reeves isn't badly injured, Uncle Ty. Only in his pride. And he sends his thanks to this gentleman." She nodded at Quest.

"Lew Quest, Gay," Tyrus said. "Quest, my niece, Gay Ferris."

Quest took the small warm hand the girl offered and said, "Gay Ferris. What a happy name you have, miss."

"Mr. Quest." She wrinkled her pert, freckled nose at him. "Do you always say such nice things?"

"Never before," he assured her. "But, then, I've never met such a nice girl before."

"You're fun," Gay stated. "I hope you stay in Mirac."

"Well," Tyrus offered, "there's an empty cabin and a few horses to be broke. That pinto of yours for one, Gay."

"I'd do it myself if you'd let me," Gay pouted.

"No doubt," Tyrus dryly agreed. "But you're all I have, and too precious for me to allow you the risk."

"All right, Uncle Ty." She gave him a quick hug. "But I can show Lew the horses and where he's going to live."

Getting his horse, Quest looped the reins over one arm and stepped off long and proud as he and Gay started toward a slope atop which were the big log house, the barns and corrals that marked the headquarters of the Tyrus Circle T. Every few steps, little Gay had to skip to keep up with Quest, until she finally grabbed his hand. That way, clasped hands swinging, they went on up "Tyrus Knob" as the hill was called.

Showing him where to stable his horse, and pointing out the ones he was to break

in a round corral, Gay led Quest on to a cabin in a clump of spruce. "It belonged to our headquarters foreman," she explained. "He had to go south because of his health."

Inside, they inspected the kitchen stove and looked around the other room. In there, there were a few chairs near the fireplace, a table and a built-in corner bunk. "It isn't so much," Gay said, "but it can be fixed up real nice."

She left him then. A girl entirely without subterfuge, yet she was alert to another's feelings and sensed when a man might better be alone.

"A nice place?" Quest echoed Gay's words. Hell, there never was a place like this before, or a man like Dave Tyrus, or a girl like Gay Ferris, and Quest couldn't remember a time when he'd felt as good as now. So good, he slammed his hat down and kicked it plumb across the room!

He started on the horses that afternoon, and when he got back to the cabin, he knew Gay had been there. The bunk was made up with down soogans and Yukon rildies, there were two Indian rugs on the floor and man-type pictures on the wall. Quest was almost reluctant to go out after needed supplies.

DOWN AT the store, the proprietor, Pete Brandon, greeted him, "Hello, Quest," and introduced him to the wife of a Circle T rider. Most of the outfit's married men lived around town. The single ones held down the far-flung camps. When the woman left, Brandon remarked, "Hear you're working for Tyrus, Quest. Uh— If your poke's lean, your tick's heap fat here."

"Thanks. I can use some credit, Pete. But my job's just something Tyrus dug up to help me out, it ain't permanent."

"That so?" Brandon showed Quest a crooked grin.

It was like that all around. Folks were

friendly and accepted Quest, but with a reserve to be expected. He was on trial with everyone but Gay, and aware of it. With Gay, there was no reserve. She liked him and made no beans about it. They took long rides together and she teased him about his reticence with her, but didn't fish for compliments. She was a friendly girl and Quest, not figuring it could ever be anything more, told her very little about himself. He mentioned ranch work he'd done years before, and things like that. But he figured a man should have something solid to offer a girl like Gay before he had the need or right to lay everything before her. So he didn't talk about certain shadows in his past.

You can't shake your shadow, though. Quest was reminded of that fact one morning when the twice-weekly stage pulled up and unloaded the mail and a drummer with a pile of bags. Stepping forward, Quest asked, "Can I help you with them, friend?"

Blinking, the drummer leaned toward him for a better look. Then, addressing the small crowd around them, he cried, "To think I'd see the day when Mister Boothill would offer to help carry my grips! *Boothill!* Man, what're you doing here?"

"From now on, keeping my big mouth closed," Quest flung back over his shoulder as he strode away.

Turning his coat collar up against the cold, his mood as gray as the sky now was, Quest went up on Tyrus Knob. Restless and uneasy, he had to occupy himself, and was teaching Gay's pinto to kneel when a discreet cough caused him to look around to find Gay watching him, her expression very sober. Coming out of the corral, he faced her and said, "I guess you've heard?"

"That you're Mister Boothill? Oh, I knew that before I heard the news awhile ago. Uncle Ty knew about you and mentioned it to me. He said you'd tell me

yourself whenever there was any reason that you should.”

“It’s a short tale and soon twisted,” Quest told her. “Cow work couldn’t hold me. I was a stagecoach guard, fought in a line war and a water feud and became a deputy and a marshal in frontier towns. The bad ones hated me because they were jealous of their own gun reps, and they had a crazy pride that wouldn’t allow them to let me arrest them—so they had to try their luck and sixgun savvy against mine. I was always the fastest and luckiest, so I got that Boothill monicker because I sent them to boothill instead of taking them alive.”

Pausing, Quest shifted restlessly then went on: “Maybe I grew up. I don’t know. But I got almighty sick of bloodshed, and folks shying away from me, and nobody I could call a friend. I’d heard of Mirac, and here I am... Say, it’s started to snow!”

“‘It’s started to snow,’” Gay mocked him. “What a way to finish a story. Isn’t there a fairy princess whom you marry and live with happily ever after?”

Head back, she waited for his answer. And got it! Pulling her to him, Quest kissed her, long and ardently.

“Lew!” Gay gasped and stepped back when it was over.

Troubled, Quest said, “Didn’t you want me to kiss you?”

“Of course I did.” Gay laughed. “Do you expect me to say ‘Oh, this is so sudden’, when I intended it from the start?”

“Why, you little devil!” Quest grabbed at her.

Still laughing, Gay eluded him and ran toward the house.

SLOWLY, in a happy daze, Quest went to his cabin. He was sitting there beside the fire, when Dave Tyrus called his name and then came in. Brushing snowflakes off his shoulders, Tyrus took a chair and without preamble, said, “I got a little

medicine to make with you, Quest.”

“I expected you would,” Quest nodded. “And I want to say, that when I let Gay know how I felt about her, I just didn’t think of my past, or how little I had to offer a girl who’ll someday inherit a bank, and a spread like Circle T, and all.”

“Ah, shut up,” Tyrus snarled. “I come to offer you the job of foreman of the home spread here. And it’s because I think you’re the man for it, and not because you and Gay are in love—which I could see all along, even if you couldn’t.”

“And you don’t mind?” Quest mumbled.

“Hell, I ain’t marrying you!” Tyrus snorted. “That’s Gay’s lookout, and I figger she knows what she wants. Me, I’m glad to get a man like you for a nephew who can someday step into my boots and shoulder a helluva lot of work and responsibility. You see, Quest, Gay’s husband will be responsible for the well-being, the peace and happiness of those who love this range and Mirac, like you’ve shown me you love it, too.”

“Those people,” Quest muttered, staring into the fire. “Now that they know I’m Mister Boothill, they’ll be watching for some gunnie to ride in and challenge me. Or they’ll be waiting to see if I’ll kill my way out of any trouble that comes up. Either way, they’ll never accept me and won’t be happy about me. Mirac wouldn’t be a happy place, and Gay and me wouldn’t be happy knowing I was spoiling things.”

“They’ll learn to accept you, so don’t try solving problems that might never come up ahead of time. And don’t be one of those fools who throws his cutter away in blind hopes that that’s the way to settle things!” Tyrus growled.

“I come here to rope my rainbow, not to crucify myself or commit suicide.” Grinning thinly, Quest slid his hand under

his shirt and drew a stingy .44 out of a shoulder rig.

Snow, swirled by a cutting wind, continued to fall when Quest came out the next morning, and Mirac lay serene under a white blanket as he went down the slope and over to the saloon. Alone at the bar, a steaming Tom and Jerry in front of him, the ticking clock making a comfortable sound, Quest was thinking how good and peaceful this life was when he heard the muffled drumming of running horses in the street, and then a high-pitched yell, "Bank robb'ry! They robbed the bank!"

Low in their saddles, four riders raced past the saloon as Quest leaped out, and the nearest one, twisting toward him, slammed a shot that went wide and spider-webbed the saloon window. In the brief time the man's head was turned, Quest glimpsed his twisted, pock-marked face, and his exclamation, "Cultus Charley!" blended with the bark of his stingy gun. It was no weapon for running targets at such a distance, and the four rode on and lost themselves behind the curtain of falling snow.

Cursing, Quest started for the bank. Along the street, doors had popped open and others ran that way, too. Swerving, Quest headed for Tyrus Knob. At the stable, Quest saddled his horse, rode up to the cabin and went in. Stuffing his coat pockets with chunks of cornbread and a box of .30-30 cartridges, he buckled on his Colt, grabbed up his rifle and went out.

AS HE RODE down to the street, Quest looked toward the bank. Men were milling around there, but few if any of them were young enough or the kind who'd be much help to Quest—even if they'd had the stomach to ride with Mister Boothill, who'd made his name by making men dead at trail's end. Seeing Quest, someone called his name. He lifted one hand and rode on.

Beyond the town, the trail of the four riders was still very plain, the far-apart hoofprints of the horses showing that they were still being hard run. Out here on the rolling flats, the wind slammed a man unchecked and Quest, hunching his shoulders as it drove at his back, put his horse into a steady lope.

As the miles fell behind, Quest busied his mind, and wondered if this trouble wasn't in a measure his own fault. Maybe, he thought, if he hadn't lost his temper and quirted Cultus Charley so damned badly, the 'breed wouldn't have been goaded to getting even with him and the town by bringing three wild ones with him and sticking up the bank. In that case, a quirt was shaping Quest's destiny, putting him on the trail of men he had to bring back alive. Dead, they'd cause Mirac to regard him as Mister Boothill forever more.

As the day grew older it became colder. Snow particles, driven by a zero wind, hit Quest's back like birdshot. The cold bit through his gloves and clothing. His feet were numb and he stumbled when he jumped off his horse and ran to warm himself until he was breathless.

It was getting along into the afternoon and the mountains were looming nearer when Quest sighted his quarry ahead. As they jog-walked their horses over the skyline, Quest put his own mount into a hard run, and when he topped the next rise and sighted them again, he'd pulled up to within long rifle shot of them. Driving on, he continued to close the gap until one of them glanced back and spotted him.

Confusion followed that discovery. Two of the four bumped each other as they reined their horses around. A third flashed his sixgun and emptied it futilely in Quest's direction. Cultus Charley, dragging his saddle-gun from its boot, came around facing Quest, who had his carbine to his shoulder. The carbine cracked sharply and

Cultus Charley's horse half reared, then dropped under him. Landing on his feet, the 'breed ran to another rider and grabbed the stirrup leather to pull himself lip behind the man. Quest sucked in his breath and held his fire as the rider kicked Cultus Charley in the chest. Stumbling, the 'breed went for his sixgun. The other's sixgun lifted and lined down, lifted and came down again. Gunned down, Cultus Charley fell in a dead, rag-doll heap.

"Honor among thieves," Quest whispered, drawing a bead on the killer's horse, "so they won't be slowed carrying double, they shoot one of their bunch. Pack double, anyway, damn you!"

Quest's carbine spat and the horse dropped. As its rider landed running, the other two men acted together. Pulling their rifles, they alternated shots that drove Quest angling away from them. At that range, it was hell's own luck that a bullet gouged Quest's upper arm and rocked him against his saddlehorn. Cursing, he ran his horse into a concealing swale.

REINING around, Quest pulled up. Fighting to make his numbed arm obey his will, he lifted his rifle and waited. Nobody showed on the skyline, and Quest's lips curled. Smart men would have run him down—or tried to—knowing he was hit. Or they'd have tried to shoot his horse and leave him afoot. But all the kind he dealt with now could think of was to run. Run for the mountains; run until darkness cloaked them. Run! Running now, they'd be slowed by one horse carrying double, unless another one of them was shot to ease that burden.

Riding back, Quest could see no sign of a downed man, or one afoot. Putting his own horse into a run, he began to ride a wide, far circle, keeping below the skyline, taking advantage of swales and rises to keep out of sight. More than an hour of that

kind of riding brought Quest into a small patch of brush and cottonwoods, and put him between his quarry and the mountains. Leaving his tired horse at the far edge of the shelter, he walked through and looked back north. A mile away, dark blots in the thickening gloom of oncoming darkness, three men on two horses were heading for this bit of shelter too.

Quest's left arm had stiffened and blood that seeped down had frozen on his thin glove. To limber up and warm himself, he moved around gathering sticks and leaves into a pile, and then went back and stood behind a tree, his Colt in hand, and watched the three men ride on up.

Coming into the trees, the trio passed within a few feet of Quest. Vague shapes in the near darkness, they slid to the ground as men do who are bone weary and dazed by bitter cold.

"All right!" Quest's voice was a whiplash at their backs. "Stand hitched and claw for clouds!"

Caught flat-footed, stiff with cold, there wasn't a damned thing they could do but cuss and shove their hands above their heads. Quest, moving up, yanked their guns and tossed them into the brush. Backing off, he rapped out, "Down on your bellies and root snow, with your hands behind you. And make one move—"

He didn't have to finish the sentence for them. They went down and rooted while Quest cut the rope from the nearest saddle, cut it into three lengths and tied their hands behind their backs.

"There's a pile of wood ahead of you," Quest said when he straightened up, the last man tied. "Get to it and sit."

Damning him, they rolled over and struggled to their feet, then stumbled over and sat down. Holstering his Colt, Quest hunkered and struck a match to the fire he'd laid. The flames took hold, leaped up, and Quest studied his captives in the rising

light. He knew none of them, but he'd known many of their type: Men without imagination to bother them and with no regard for human life. Killer-cunning devils, and deadly—even trapped as these three were.

"You." Quest spoke to the black-bearded man directly across the fire from him. "What name you using now?"

Glaring back, his eyes red with cold, he snorted, "Smith."

"If five million other Smiths can stand it, I can, too," Quest agreed, then looked at the second man and added, "So I guess your name'll be Jones. And you can be Bravo," he told the third one. "It takes a brave snake to gun down a man like you gunned down Cultus Charley this afternoon."

"Gimme a chance at you an' you'll join him," the man Quest called Bravo snarled.

THE one Quest had nominated to be Jones put in, "Look, fella, there's a heap of gold we ain't counted yet, over in my saddlebags. Half of it's yours if—"

"Why, friend," Quest cut in, "you'd better be glad I'm not the offer-taking kind. If I was, I'd simply shoot you and take it all."

"We are glad," Smith said softly. "I can see we winged you pretty well back there, and it's a long way to Mirac."

"Oh, there'll be a posse along," Quest assured him easily.

"Like hell!" Smith hooted. "There wasn't no sign of one behind us, an' you know damn well there ain't one comin' out with this storm blowin' an' it gettin' colder all the time."

"Didn't need a posse to catch you, and I don't think it'll take one to get you back. Now, shut up and get some rest. I think you're going to need it," Quest said, and put more wood on the fire.

"Sure, we'll rest," Bravo jeered. "Smith, you an' Jones get what snooze you can. I'll watch for this smart son to go to sleep. We'll take turns dozin' an' watchin' him."

Chuckling grimly, the two leaned and rested their foreheads on their knees. Inwardly damning them, Quest warned, "I can tie you to trees, don't forget."

"An' one of us might work loose while you're so sound asleep nothin' can wake you," Jones hooted.

Or we could all freeze to death, Quest thought.

Well, if he couldn't rest, there'd be none for anyone, and the trail was the way for that. Hating his decision, he rose, got his horse and led it up. Taking the loot-heavy saddlebags off Smith's horse he transferred them to his, own saddle and then, Smith's rope in hand, walked toward the three.

"Hey," Jones squawked as Quest tied them by their necks in the center and at both ends of the rope. "What the hell you think you're doin' now?"

"Choke or drag you to death, you try any sandies while I'm taking you back to Mirac," Quest calmly replied while he fixed his own rope to the one linking them and tied the other end hard and fast to his saddlehorn.

His arm was throbbing and bleeding again and he had to lean against his horse and gather the strength to mount. When he'd made it, Bravo protested, "Facin' the wind in this cold, with our hands tied behind us, we'll freeze inside an hour."

Leaning in the saddle, knife in hand, Quest had them back up one at a time while he cut the ropes from their wrists. Straightening, then, he ordered, "Smith. Bravo. Climb your nags. Jones, you walk a while. All right, move on out!"

WITH Quest some twenty feet behind them, they moved out into the mean fury of the storm. The full blast of the wind hit them, rocked them, sucked the breath out of them out there, and Quest was almost glad when it ceased cutting him and he became numbed all over. His feet like ice lumps in the stirrups, he pulled his neckerchief over his nose and held his hands under his armpits inside his coat, while an overpowering drowsiness beat down his stubborn resistance. Dozing, he awoke with a start to find himself almost on top of his captives. They'd stopped and were waiting, twisted in the saddle, Jones ready to grab him from the ground.

Pulling back, Quest fumbled his six-gun from the holster and fired a shot above their heads. "Three wise men," he bawled. "Smith, you and Bravo get down and unsaddle. All three of you can walk from here on in."

When their saddles hit the ground and the two horses turned and drifted with the storm, Quest rapped out, "Start walking, and keep apart. I'll be riding with my gun cocked, and I'll have no more tricks out of you."

Riding on after the three out at the end of his rope, Quest envied them. Walking, they could maintain a degree of warmth he had to deny himself. He hadn't the strength for walking, and couldn't risk a fall. One slip and they'd be swarming all over him. Setting his teeth, he tried to shift his Colt to his almost useless left hand and nearly dropped it. After that, he kept the gun in his right hand and rested the weight of it on his saddlehorn.

Time lost meaning for Quest after that. He managed to get his sack of smoking tobacco out of his pocket and rub some in his eyes so the smart and sting would keep them open. He lost the sack and almost rocked from the saddle as he hauled rein

suddenly to keep from riding up on the three ahead again.

"I told you!" Quest raged and drove a shot close to their feet, and the gun didn't even feel like it was his hand it was in.

"Snowdrift," Smith squawked. "We're restin' right here."

Without a word, Quest rode off at an angle. Shouts were cut short as the rope tightened and he dragged the three around the drift. Gasping, they scrambled to their feet when he at last gave them slack. Cursing him, they bent their heads and plodded ahead again. There were other drifts to go wide around or plow through during the terrible hours of sub-zero darkness that remained. Sometimes, when the three ahead fell, Quest would let them catch their breath then drive them on in a voice he could hardly recognize as his own.

Daylight, gray and unfriendly, broke on Quest's right, then, and he knew he was headed in the right direction still. How far off course he might be, he couldn't tell, and by now he damned near couldn't even care.

When he let the three miserable wretches ahead of him rest, they stared back and up at him, and were frankly afraid of that unmoving, terrible figure whose sunken eyes stared fixedly at them over a bandana stiff with his frozen breath. They eyed the cocked gun in the hand that rested and held the reins on the saddlehorn, and twisted their necks that were raw from the ropes around them. Any ideas or hopes for escape had gone out of them. All they wanted to do was rest. Rest and die, if that went with it. And that devil driving them wouldn't let them die. He just kept driving them on and on.

That was the way the small posse, led by the sheriff from the county seat, with Dave Tyrus riding at his stirrup, intercepted them later on that day. Trailing them, because they wouldn't let her ride with the

posse, was a small girl on a pinto pony that Quest had gentled for her.

It was the outlaw, Smith, who, sitting on the ground, pointed a shaking finger at Quest and babbled hysterically, "Hang us. Lock us up. Jest git us away from *him*!"

Quest sat unmoving. He didn't speak. He didn't hear Tyrus call his name. Riding over, Tyrus laid a hand on Quest's shoulder, and Quest leaned slowly, like a toppling tree. They grabbed him and lowered him to the ground.

"Here. Lemme take his pistol," someone said, then cried, "Migawd in heaven, his hand's froze hard as ice around his gun!"

At least that's the way they tell it in Mirac. And it's the reason no eager-for-glory gunmen ride there to challenge the sixgun prowess of the quiet man who'll

someday step into Dave Tyrus' boots and fill them to the satisfaction of every one, even though he's minus most of his toes from frostbite. There's no glory gunning for a man whose right hand has been amputated well above the wrist.

They're mighty proud of Lew Quest in Mirac. They'll point out how he could have ridden off and left his captives to die, most likely, while he spared himself. But he didn't, and it proved forever that Mister Boothill had ceased to exist—if he ever really did.

Lew Quest doesn't seem to mind that right hand being gone. In fact, he is a very happy man. It takes only one arm to squeeze a wife the size of Gay, and only one hand to hold a rainbow firmly and forever by the tail. . .