

The Saturday Evening

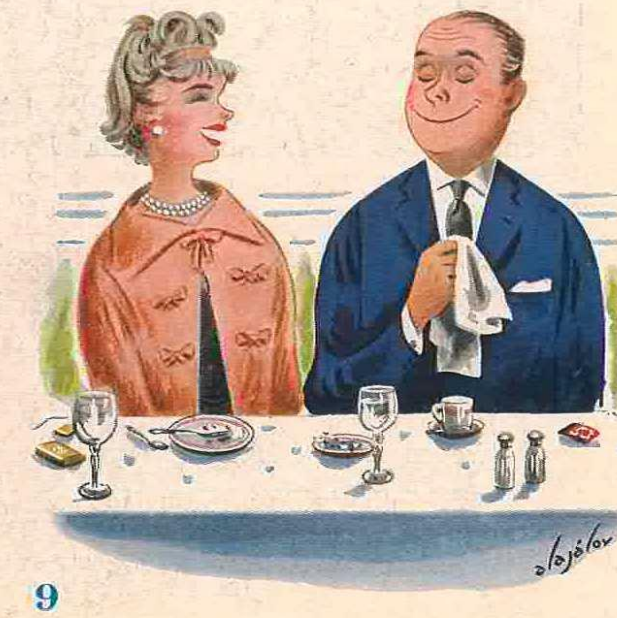
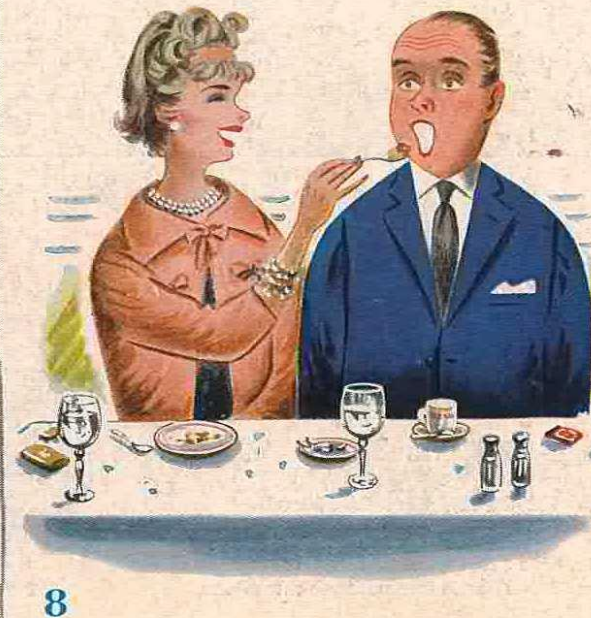
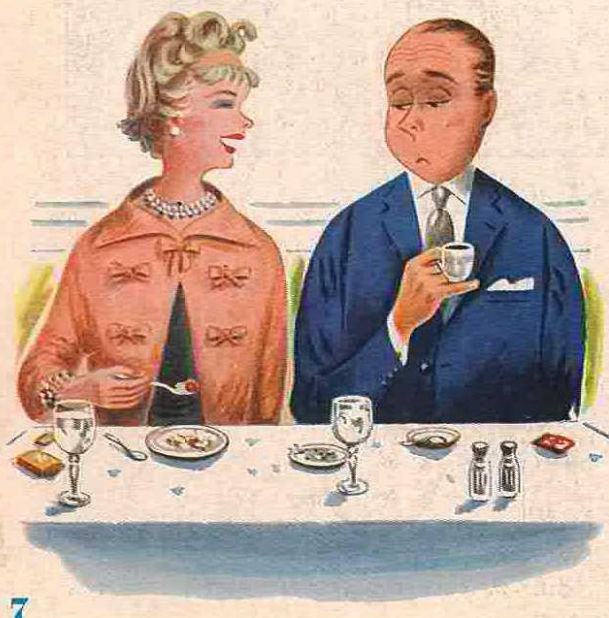
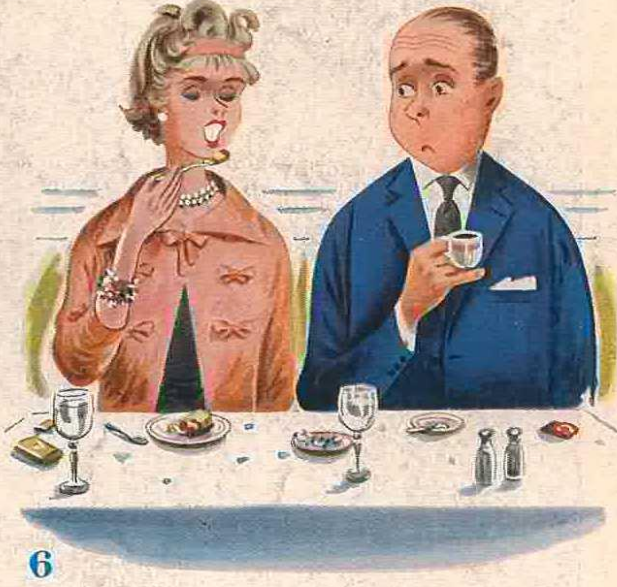
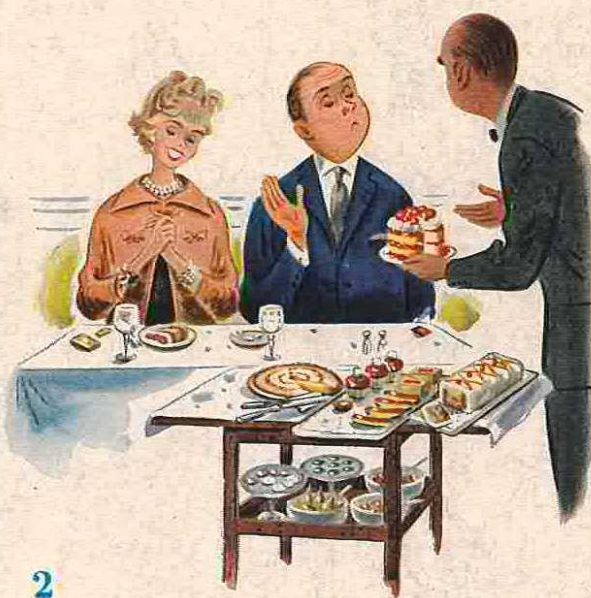
POST

May 2, 1959 — 15¢

THE INSIDE STORY
OF THE BIGGEST BOX-OFFICE HIT

"My Fair Lady"

A New PERRY MASON Mystery



THE SATURDAY EVENING POST



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IN THIS ISSUE

May 2, 1959

Vol. 231, No. 44

4 Short Stories

Runaway Prop	Frank Harvey 26
The Last Gunman	Donald Hamilton 30
Hand-Me-Down Girl	Phyllis Duganne 32
The Private Life of Barbara	Robert A. Knowlton 37

7 Articles

Prosperity Hits Paradise	Frank J. Taylor 19
Adventures of the Mind, 26: Can Man Be Modified?	Jean Rostand 24
We Explored the Drowned Mountains	William L. Worden 28
Egghead From the Ozarks	Beverly Smith, Jr. 31
My Very Fair Lady	Richard Maney 34
He Fights the Wildest Fires	Stanley Frank 36
The Face of America: In Memory of a Winter	Photographs by Frank Ross 38

2 Serials

The Case of the Mythical Monkeys (First of eight parts)	Erle Stanley Gardner 22
The Dark Road (Fourth of six parts)	James Cross 43

Other Features

Letters	4	Verse	46, 57, 73, 79, 85, 100
Editorials	10	Hazel	118
Post Scripts	40	Keeping Posted	120



THE COVER

Cast of characters: man on diet, girlish gourmand. Scene 1: "Ah, that divine shortcake! My soul, I'm hungry all over again!" Scene 2: "No." Scene 3: So for him a demitasse to top off a demidinner. Scenes 4 to finish: Artist Alajálov doesn't know about this, but once, long ago, there was a boy who had a beloved dog, and there was a family rule, known full well to both of them, that the dog must

not be fed in the dining room. One night during a steak dinner the dog with tragic eyes sat and watched the boy's fork go up and down, up and down. When the boy cracked up and slipped his pal a wisp of gristle, the dog looked just like Mr. Demi in Scene 9. Art editor Ken Stuart saw part of this cover unfold in a restaurant, and Alajálov added the happy ending out of overwhelming pity.

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The Last Gunman

The dude and the marshal had only one thing in common — they both loved the same girl.

By DONALD HAMILTON

The big man got on the train at Abilene. He came down the aisle with a pair of saddlebags over his shoulder and stopped by Paul Clyde's seat.

"Mind if I sit down, sir?" he asked politely.

"Not at all," Clyde said, a little surprised at the courtesy of the fellow, since he looked rather like a man who'd sit where he darn well pleased.

The stranger stowed his saddlebags under the seat and settled himself comfortably. He leaned back, drew his big hat over his eyes and promptly fell asleep.

Clyde turned to watch the plains outside the window, wondering if there was any chance, in this year 1882, of seeing a buffalo, or perhaps an Indian tribe on the move. The big man awoke late in the day, sat up, yawned, rubbed a hand over his mouth and leaned forward to look out the window. As he did so, a lurch of the train threw him against Clyde.

"My apologies, sir," he said; "this roadbed gets worse all the time. I figure they must have laid the rails direct on the prairie grass. I heard you mention Prairie Junction to the conductor."

"Yes, that's my destination."

"My stop too. I live there." The big man held out his hand. "Name's Bannerman. Hank Bannerman."

"I'm Paul Clyde, from Boston." Clyde managed to keep from wincing as his fingers were crushed by the other's powerful grip. Retrieving his hand, he said, "Perhaps you can tell me something about the town. All I know is that it must be big enough to have a bank, since I'm to work there."

Bannerman gave him a measuring look, obviously adding up his pale skin, well-cut Eastern clothes and slight stature, and arriving at some sum which he did not reveal, saying only, "A banker, eh?"

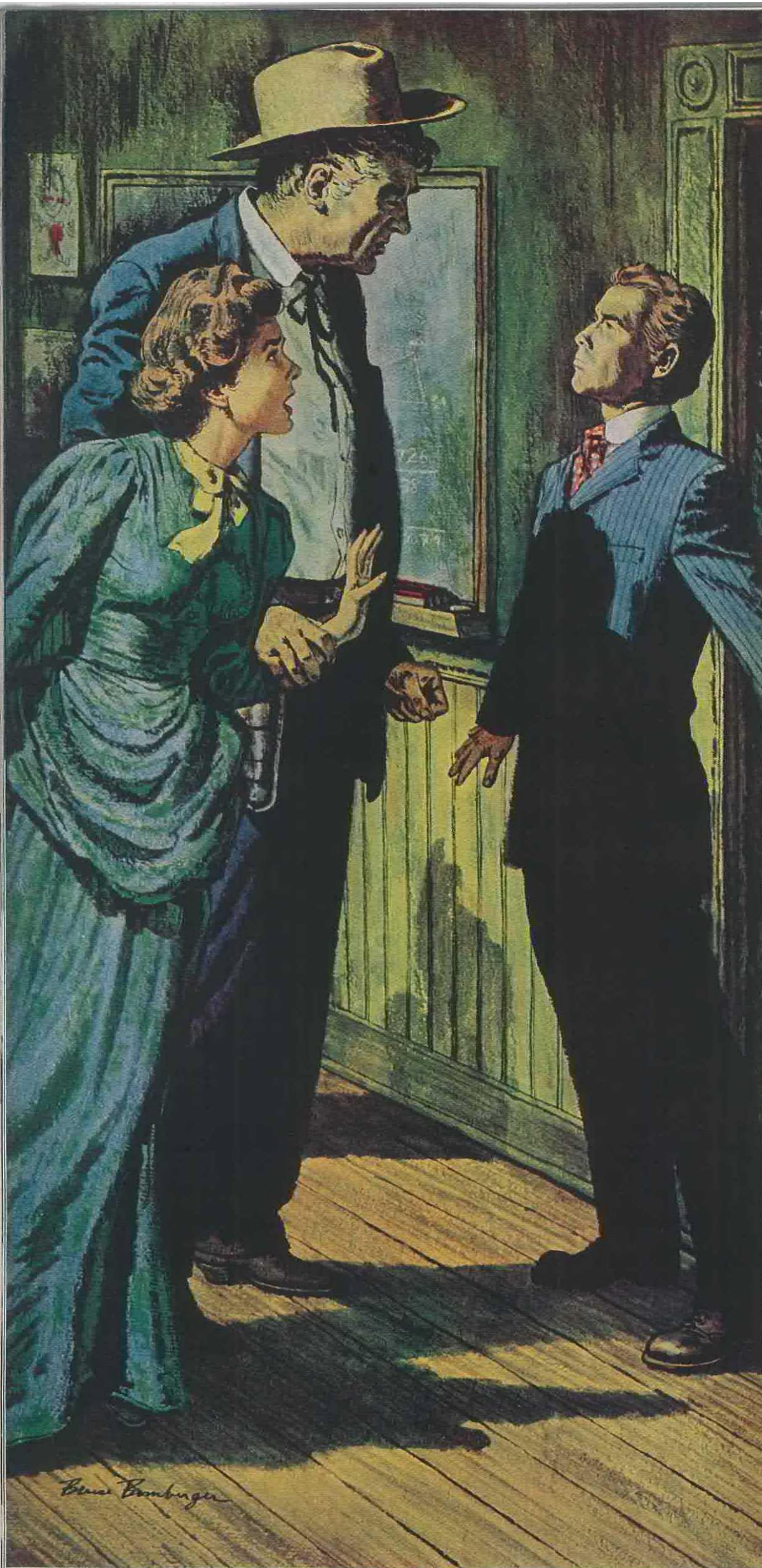
"Hardly that. Just the man at the little window."

The big man grinned. "It's about time George Jarvis got somebody into that place who can count."

"Oh, you know Mr. Jarvis?"

Bannerman's smile cooled somewhat. "Yeh, I know Mr. Jarvis," he said in a dry tone. "Well, you'll find Prairie Junction a peaceful and pleasant place nowadays, Mr. Clyde. It was a tough town once, but the country's grown up and the cattle trail's moved still farther west, taking most of

(Continued on Page 76)



He could see himself clearly, standing in front of the big man, a slight figure inviting destruction.

The Last Gunman (Continued from Page 30)

the rough element with it. Of course, there's a few of the old crowd still hanging around trying to make trouble—like this Bannerman gent some folks figure should have been run out of town long since."

He chuckled and leaned back in his seat. He seemed to be about Clyde's own age of twenty-eight. He had a face that was saved from heaviness only by the long and humorous mouth; and his hair was thick and yellow.

"This was a fine country ten years ago, when I first came up the trail—a fine, wild, hell-raising country, Mr. Clyde. But it's grown up and civilized now. Reckon a man should get grown up and civilized, too, in that many years. Even three years ago, coming this way at this season, there'd be herds of Texas cattle as far as the eye could see, awaiting shipment east. Well, the barbed wire killed the trail — There's the old loading pens now; we're coming into town."

He reached down for the saddlebags, opened one and, before Clyde's startled eyes, drew out a heavy cartridge belt supporting a holstered revolver. Standing up, he buckled the belt about him. Then he turned back to Clyde.

"It's been a pleasure to make your acquaintance, sir. I hope you'll like our city." He grinned abruptly, reached into his pocket and produced a silver badge, which he pinned on his shirt. The badge read: MARSHAL. "You may consider that an official greeting, Mr. Clyde, in case there is no band to welcome you." He moved away down the aisle.

Prairie Junction seemed to be lined up opposite the railroad tracks. There was a wide, dusty, unpaved main street; a school; a church; a long row of false-front frame buildings, and the solid brick building that was the Farmers' and Merchants' Bank, situated on a corner. Up the side street, Clyde managed to read the names on a couple of once-gaudy, now-faded signs: the Cattleman's Rest and the Bulls-eye Saloon.

He picked up his coat and valise and stepped down to the ground. There was a trunk to be seen to, and he looked around for the proper official, but paused as he recognized the tall, broad-shouldered shape of Marshal Bannerman, standing with a girl only a few yards away. The girl was speaking; and her voice held a hint of amused reproach.

"Well, was it a good trip, Hank? Did you get drunk and disorderly in some other lawman's town?"

Bannerman chuckled. "Why, a man can't give rein to his baser impulses in the place where he wears the badge, Sally. It would lead to disrespect among the citizens. Yes, it was a good-enough trip. But the ending was the best of it, seeing you standing here. Although I can't flatter myself you're here for my sake."

The girl laughed. "I might have been, if you'd let me know when you were coming back. No, dad had some business with the stationmaster; and I'm supposed to be keeping an eye out for a man he's expecting, to work in the bank. I haven't any idea of what kind of a person I'm supposed to be watching for, except that he's from Boston."

"I can help you there," Bannerman said. "I made his acquaintance on the train." He turned, letting his glance sweep the platform. It came to rest on Clyde, who was already moving forward. The marshal waited for him to reach them, and said formally, "Miss Jarvis, allow me to present Mr. Paul Clyde, your dad's new —"

He broke off. The girl was not even looking at Clyde. Her smile of greeting had died abruptly; now her hand went out to grasp the marshal's arm. "Hank! Isn't that Rios, the man who tried to — Over there by that wagon!"

The marshal's voice was calm. "I saw him. Yeh, that's Johnny Rios. I'm waiting to see who comes to welcome him home. And here's Jud Haskell, right on schedule. Excuse me."

The girl retained her grip on his sleeve. "Hank, be careful! Rios is wearing a gun!"

"Which is illegal in this town," the marshal said. "It is my duty to so remind the gentleman." When she did not release him immediately, he said gently, "Sally, never interfere with a man's business."

Sally Jarvis flushed slightly. Bannerman raised his hat to her, nodded to Clyde and moved away. Beyond the marshal, Clyde saw two men shaking hands by a baggage cart. One, balancing a canvas-covered bedroll on his shoulder, was narrow, young and swarthy. There was a holstered pistol at his hip. The man who had come to greet him was considerably older and had a fleshy white face. Both men turned at Bannerman's approach. The younger one, Johnny Rios, let the bedroll slide from his shoulder in a casual way and set it on the ground.

The older man, Haskell, spoke to Bannerman. The distance was too great for Clyde to catch the words. He was aware that the girl beside him, watching this scene, had moved closer to him. He heard her breath catch sharply.

"Hank! Hank, watch out!" It was only a whisper, but it had the quality of a scream. She had seen it before Clyde did: the younger man's hand striking snake-like toward the butt of his holstered weapon. What happened next was so nearly instantaneous that Clyde could not be sure his eyes had caught all the details of the action. All he knew was that Bannerman was in motion; his left hand knocking Rios' pistol aside as it cleared

the holster, his right whipping out his own weapon and laying the barrel brutally across the younger man's head.

A moment later, everything was still again. Johnny Rios was on the ground, and Bannerman was aiming his pistol at the older man, whose hand seemed to be frozen just inside the lapel of his coat. Slowly, Jud Haskell drew the hand into sight, empty. Bannerman spoke. Haskell hesitated, shrugged, reached inside his coat again, brought out a small revolver and held it out, butt first. Bannerman took it and dropped it into his pocket; then, almost casually, he turned and kicked Rios in the face.

The wicked sound of the boot going home echoed across the depot. Rios, whose hand had been creeping out toward his fallen pistol, was lifted into the air and dropped on his back, unconscious. Bannerman scooped up the pistol, bent over the unconscious man, unbuckled the heavy gun-belt and pulled it free.

He straightened up and spoke to Haskell, "Tell your boy, when he wakes up, that he can pick up his property at the marshal's office whenever he decides to leave town. The same goes for you. Don't put it off too long. Good day, Mr. Haskell."

He walked away across the wide and sunlit street, looping the confiscated gun-belt over his arm. The people drawn by the rumor of conflict made way for him. The girl beside Clyde had not moved at all and did not move until Bannerman was out of sight; then Clyde heard her pent-up breath go out in a sigh.

"Well, Mr. Clyde," she said, "you have something to write home about."

He was shocked to see on her face only relief that the incident was over. She displayed none of the horror and disgust and faintness proper for a gently reared young lady who had just witnessed a scene of brutal violence. In other respects, also, he found her a disconcerting person. He had come west with the notion that the female population would consist entirely of weather-beaten frontier matrons and buxom prairie belles. Sally Jarvis fitted into neither category. She was of no more than medium height, blue-eyed and slim-

waisted, differing in appearance from the young women he had known back East only in a certain look of vigor and directness, and in being considerably prettier than most of them.

He looked away from her to where Johnny Rios, half conscious, his face streaming blood, was being led away between Haskell and another man. With some revulsion, Clyde said, "I thought that sort of thing belonged to the past."

Sally Jarvis glanced at him sharply. "Out here, the past isn't quite dead yet, Mr. Clyde."

"Your Mr. Bannerman seems to be doing his best to revive it."

There was clear dislike in her voice when she replied, "I might find some things to criticize if I visited your home town of Boston, Mr. Clyde. But I don't think I'd speak out until I'd been there long enough to know what I was talking about. Here comes my father."

A portly, gray-mustached man was marching down the platform toward them.

"Sally, I've told you —" he burst out.

"Dad, this is Mr. Clyde," she said quickly.

Mr. Jarvis ignored the introduction. "I have strictly forbidden you to have anything to do with that roughneck, and yet I'm informed that you just greeted him like a long-lost friend, with the whole town watching! I hope this latest display of his brutality will bring you to your senses! Bannerman should be shot for having the effrontery to address you; his place is on Texas Street with the people it's his business to control, his own kind of people! As a matter of fact, I don't understand why the city council keeps him on, at his inflated wages, now that we no longer have the yearly influx of cattle drovers to contend with. I shall bring it up again at the next meeting. In the meantime, I must insist that you —"

"Dad," the girl said gently, "this is Mr. Clyde."

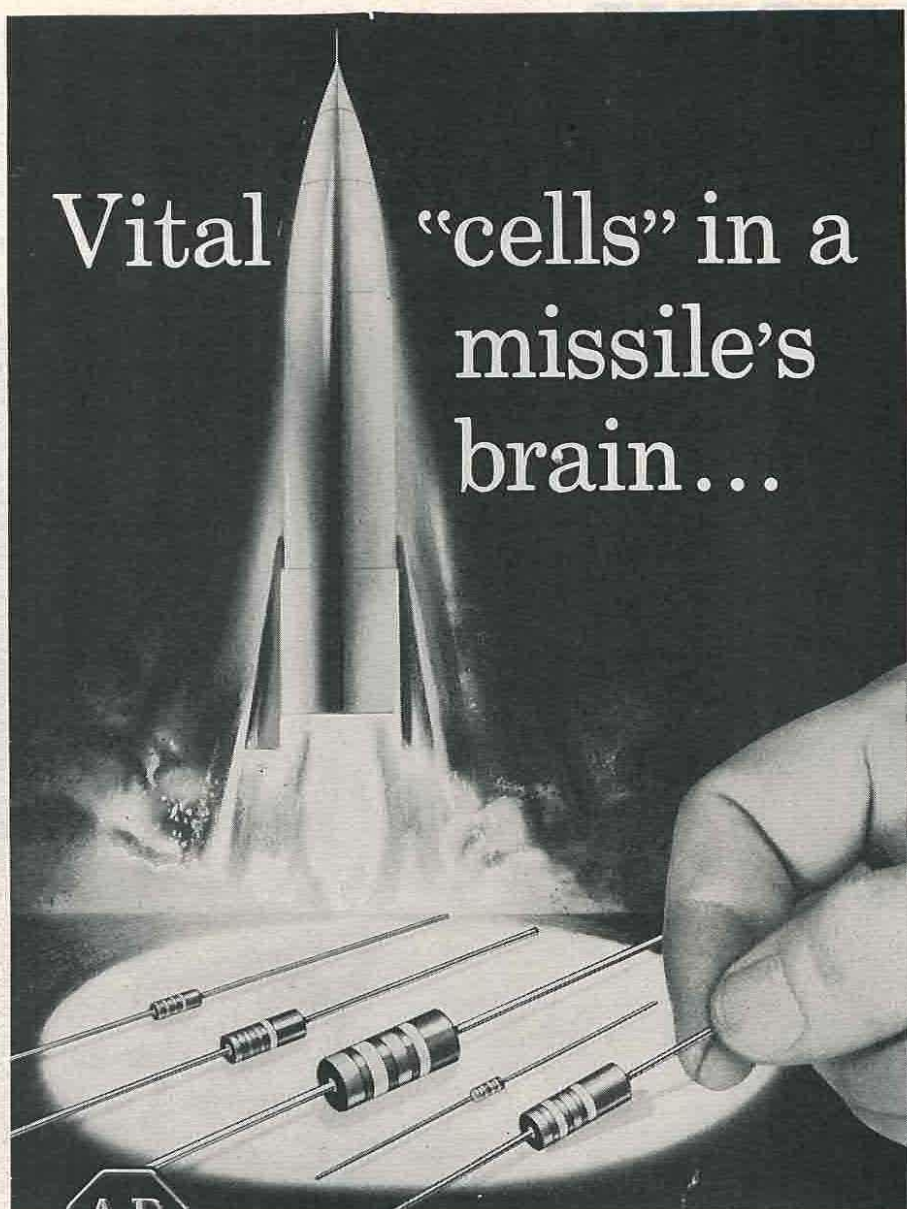
"Oh," Mr. Jarvis put out his hand abruptly. "Glad to have you here, Clyde. You run along, miss. I'll speak to you later!" He watched the girl walk lightly away. Then he said in a tired voice, "I don't know, Clyde, do you have a daughter? No, I suppose not. You're not even married, as I recall your letters. Well, let's see to your baggage; and then I'll show you around the bank, if you're not too tired from your journey. . . ."

The following days were busy ones for Paul Clyde, since it developed that Mr. Jarvis had for years run his bank as a typically one-man business, keeping half the records in his head. Now, at the age of sixty, urged on by his family and doctor, he was taking steps toward ridding himself of at least part of the burdens of management. Clyde, with his rigid Eastern training, found himself continually shocked by the casual and trusting way this institution had been operated—at a considerable profit, he had to admit. One evening toward the end of the first week, he walked over to the Jarvis house to pick up a ledger Mr. Jarvis had forgotten at home, and incidentally to let Mrs. Jarvis know that her husband would be working late.

It was a pleasant evening, which, Clyde told himself, was why he had volunteered for the errand instead of sending a boy. He knew the way, having been to the big, white house for supper a few nights before—Sally Jarvis had been noticeably cool to him, despite her parents' cordiality. He had not consciously been thinking of her as he walked; but when her mother, a small, handsome, white-haired woman, opened the door, he found that he was disappointed.

The discovery startled him; and as he was shown into (Continued on Page 78)





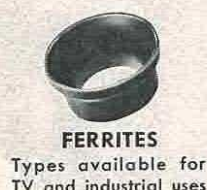
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(Continued from Page 76)

the living room to wait while Mrs. Jarvis went upstairs for the ledger, he told himself firmly that he could have no possible interest in the headstrong daughter of a small-town banker—a girl with so little taste and modesty that she would let her name become linked with that of a man who, although wearing a badge, was certainly no better than the crude and violent people with whom he had to deal.

Then there were footsteps on the veranda, and, as if in response to his thoughts, a voice he recognized as Marshal Bannerman's came clearly through the open window: "He's tried before. There's nothing to fear, Sally."

"Nothing to fear!" The girl's voice was sharp. "You know why he brought Rios back. And Rios will hate you twice as much now, after what you did to him at the depot."

"I can handle Johnny Rios. And Jud Haskell too. It's what I've been waiting for."

There was a short silence. Sally's voice had a strange, flat sound when she spoke again. "Oh," she said, "is that what you've been waiting for, Hank?"

"I do not like to leave unfinished things behind me. Haskell fought me all the way down the line when I was cleaning up Texas Street some years back. I closed up his Bulls-eye Saloon until he got in some dealers and girls who'd give the trail hands half a chance. He had men try for me on several occasions; Johnny Rios was the last one, and almost made it. It was in the cards there'd be a final showdown. The Street is dead now except for small sins, and Haskell's pulling out. He's waited a long time to do it. I wondered why. Now I know. He was waiting for Rios. He wanted one more try at me. This time, I think, he'll be out there with a gun himself. Well, I've waited a long time for him to hate me enough for that. It will finish my job here in Prairie Junction."

It occurred to Clyde that he was eavesdropping. He rose and walked across the room to the bookshelf, taking no pains to move quietly; but the two people on the porch were too concerned with their own affairs to hear him.

Sally's voice came through the window, clearly audible: "So all these last months—this last year—you've been waiting around to kill a man?"

The marshal's voice held a smile. "Well, there were some other things to hold me."

The girl spoke swiftly, "And if you succeed—if you survive, what then?"

"There's a town called Lagos Springs, to the west. The Texans coming up the trail take it apart each summer. The citizens have to spend all winter putting it back together again. A committee came to see me the other day —"

"Are you taking the job?"

"I thought I would."

"And after that?"

"What do you mean?"

"After you have—tamed Lagos Springs, where do you go? And was it your thought that I would be with you?"

"It was my hope that you would be, Sally."

There was a silence. It lasted so long Clyde thought they must have moved away; then Sally's voice said, "No. No, Hank. I'm sorry." She paused, as if to let Bannerman speak; when he remained silent, she went on swiftly: "If this were twenty years ago, or even ten years ago, my answer would be different. It was that kind of a country then. It needed your kind of man. But the cattle trail is dying, Hank; and the country's changing, and if you don't change with it, what's left for you—for us, if I should accompany you? Oh, there are a few years left.

There will be a few more trail towns, perhaps, trying feebly to live up to Abilene and Dodge City and Prairie Junction. But after that, where do you go? To the gold towns, the silver towns, one or another mining camp that needs a tough man with a gun?"

"Oh, Hank, you've sowed your wild oats, and they've been wild enough, heaven knows, but I don't mind that. But when I get married, it will be to a man who can give me a home and children, not a room above a roaring street of sin in which to wait—wait for my husband to be brought home dead. That may make me less of a woman than you thought, my dear; but this pursuit of violence, for its own sake, also makes you less of a man. You're thirty years old, Hank. If you can't see it yet, I'm afraid there's not much hope for you. I will not be going with you!"

Her footsteps ran along the porch, and the front door opened and closed. Then Mrs. Jarvis was coming down the stairs; and Clyde, crossing the living room, heard her say: "Why, Sally, dear, I didn't know you were home. Is something wrong?"

"No. No; everything's fine, mother," the girl said, and hurried upstairs. She did not glance in Clyde's direction—he did not think she was aware of his presence—but he saw her face as she passed, and read the heartache of the words she had spoken on the porch. He took the ledger from Mrs. Jarvis, thanked her and started to turn away.

"Mr. Clyde. Paul. Did Mr. Bannerman bring her home?" Sally's mother asked.

Clyde hesitated, but saw no reason to lie. "Yes," he said.

"I see," she said slowly. "Well, as I told Mr. Jarvis, forbidding them to meet was no answer, no answer at all. But —" She drew a long, unhappy breath. "Thank you. Good night, Paul. Don't let Mr. Jarvis work too late."

The following day, Clyde was leaving the bank on his way to lunch when Sally Jarvis came out of her father's small office and started for the front door. Bare-headed, she looked like a schoolgirl. She saw him, paused and smiled coolly.

"Which way are you going, Mr. Clyde?"

"Up toward the Chinaman's," he said. "Cheap and nourishing."

"Then you can walk with me as far as the corner," she said.

He bowed, and held the door for her. The sunshine struck them solidly as they emerged from the building. Clyde squinted, half-blinded by the glare, and the girl laughed at him.

"You've been at your books and ledgers too long; you've got the look of a mole, my friend." She hesitated, and glanced at him in a sudden, speculative way. "I have a suggestion. Being new in town, perhaps you don't know that there's a dance at the schoolhouse Saturday night."

She left it there. He looked at her as they walked. The warm prairie wind was blowing her skirts ahead of her and playing with a few liberated tendrils of her fair hair. Her face was slightly flushed, perhaps from the sunlight. She threw him a quick glance, and he caught the challenge in her eyes.

"Why, it sounds interesting, but I would need a partner, would I not? Unfortunately, I'm acquainted with only one young lady in this town, Miss Jarvis, and she seems to have a fairly low opinion of me."

Sally Jarvis laughed. "But you're a man of the world, Mr. Clyde; you must know that a lonely young lady will put up with just about anybody for the pleasure of an evening of dancing."

Clyde laughed abruptly. "Well," he said, "in that case—will you do me the honor, Miss Jarvis?"

"Naturally," she said. "Why do you think I brought the matter up? Eight o'clock. We can walk if you don't have a rig."

"For such an occasion," he said, "I will certainly rent one."

Saturday evening was quite warm and windless, and the sun had just set red when Clyde drove away from the Jarvis house with Sally Jarvis at his side. The girl turned to wave to her parents, who were sitting on the veranda.

"They approve of you, Mr. Clyde," she said. "Of course, right now they'd approve of just about any man who didn't wear a gun."

"I seem to have come along at a fortuitous time," Clyde said dryly. "I will not question my luck."

She favored him with a sharp glance. "You've a funny, sarcastic way of talking, haven't you? I don't think I like it very much." She hesitated. "Tell me, why did you come out to this country, anyway?"

He looked at her, but the light was already too poor for him to see her clearly. He found himself, instead, visualizing her as she had looked descending

Leading the Parade

Sunday drivers are those
This can truly be said of:
The slower they go,
The more cars they're
ahead of.

Curtis Heath

the stairs toward him a few minutes earlier, in a blue silk dress that outlined the shape of her upper body with gentle fidelity, the skirt drawn smoothly back to a generous fullness in the rear, after the fashion of the period. She had no longer looked in any way like a school-girl; she had been a poised and breath-takingly beautiful woman, and there was no longer any doubt in his mind about his feelings toward her. However, he had been taught the propriety of keeping his feelings to himself, and when he spoke, his voice was level and impersonal.

"You sound as if you disapproved of my coming here, Miss Jarvis."

She said, "No, but you just don't look like the kind of person—I mean, I don't think you left home to hide a broken heart or a criminal record."

He smiled. "Are those the only reasons for coming west?"

"Some come to find adventure or make a fortune. But you certainly don't look adventurous, and as far as money is concerned, dad says you were being paid a better salary back there than he's paying you now, with much better chances of advancement in a much bigger bank. He's very pleased to have you here, I must say; but this worries him a little."

"It shouldn't," Clyde said. "Back home, I was one of a row of men sitting at a row of desks. In twenty years, perhaps, I would have worked my way to the head of the row of desks; in another twenty, I might have become a member of the firm. By then, I would have been almost ready for retirement. I would have been a substantial, respected and very dull member of the community —"

"It's funny," she said, interrupting him. "I must be wrong about you, be-

cause my impression is that that's exactly what you'd like."

He grinned. "In other words, you think I'm naturally a dull and pompous fellow, Miss Jarvis?" She did not speak, and he went on: "Granted that I have certain tendencies that way; in my favor, let me say that I do try to overcome them. Which is one reason why I decided to break out of the pattern of my life and come out here. The other reason is that the next few decades of this Western land are, I think, going to be very interesting from a financial standpoint. There is half a continent to be opened up; the process has hardly begun. A man on the ground, with a little capital and sound training. . . . I don't expect ever to make the fortune you mentioned, Miss Jarvis. I am not a gambling man; and it takes a gambler, usually, to make money in great quantities—or lose it. I do expect, however, to make some small contribution to the country's development, receiving in return enough profit to guarantee a fairly comfortable, as well as interesting, life for myself and such family as I may have."

For a long time the only sound was the chopping noise of the horse's hoofs. At last she turned to look at him directly. "I don't quite understand why you're telling me this," she said.

He said gently, "I think you do." Before she could speak, he went on: "I have a confession to make. I was in your house the other evening, waiting for your mother to bring me something from upstairs, when Mr. Bannerman brought you home. I could not help overhearing the conversation. He was telling you his plans for the future. You did not approve of them. I thought I'd take this opportunity to tell you mine."

It was the first time he had seen her visibly disconcerted. She frowned, and said stiffly, "Aren't you taking a good deal for granted, Mr. Clyde? Just because I talked you into bringing me to a dance —"

He laughed and shook his head. "You had a disagreement with Mr. Bannerman, and decided that it would be well for you to be seen in public with some other man—any other man—so that the marshal would realize that your decision was irrevocable. It was my good fortune; and it gave me a chance to speak to you like this; but I'm giving it no more weight than it deserves, I assure you."

She had been studying him in a half-puzzled way; now she said, "You look like an unadventurous man; still you leave a good job to come out here, and speak like this to a girl on no more than a week's acquaintance. There must be more to you than I thought, Mr. Clyde."

He said, "I usually know what I want."

After a little, he added, "I usually get it."

"Indeed?" she said sharply. "At least you have confidence in yourself, that's something. Well, there's the schoolhouse. Do you know, this will be the first time I've danced in well over a year?"

He looked at her in surprise; then he realized that, of course, Bannerman could hardly have escorted her to public functions over her parents' disapproval. They pulled into the schoolyard. There were people around of all ages, dressed in their best; and Sally introduced him to one group and another as they moved toward the open schoolhouse door. She seemed unaware of the glances they drew and the whispers that were passed behind them; but once inside the door she turned to face him.

"I hope you don't mind," she said. "It really wasn't very fair of me to put you in this position."

"They mean no harm," he said. "It's something to (Continued on Page 82)

PART 4

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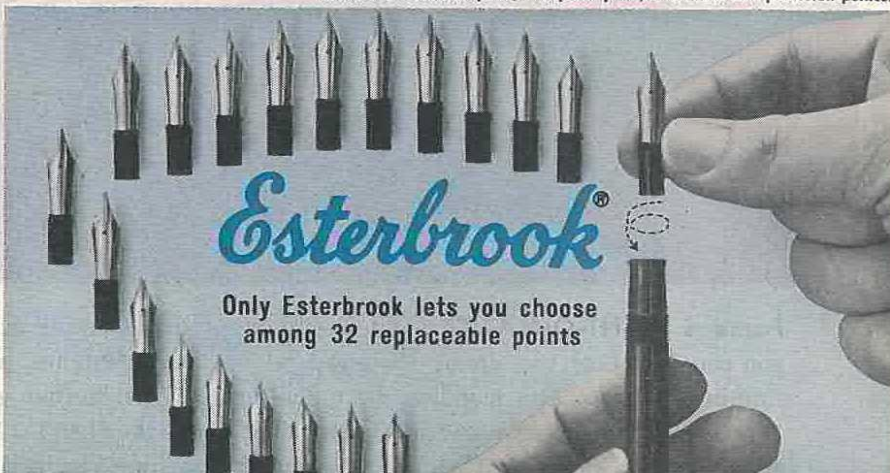
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EVERYWHERE

(Continued from Page 79) gossip about." He looked at her in the yellow lamplight. "Would it be presumptuous of me to tell you that you look very lovely?"

She laughed. "No woman considers that a presumption, Mr. Clyde—Paul. I think I'm going to like —"

She checked herself abruptly; and Clyde realized that the room had suddenly become very quiet. He turned to look at the door. Bannerman stood there. His big frame seemed to fill the doorway. He came forward slowly, and Clyde realized, apprehensively, that he was a little drunk. It made him no less deadly; it only made his deadliness blind and unpredictable.

"Sally," he said, speaking slowly and quite clearly, "I want to talk to you."

She said quietly, "I don't think there's anything more to be said, Hank."

"I want to talk to you," the big man repeated, standing above her. "Not here." He reached out and took her arm.

Sally threw a quick and warning glance toward Clyde, and stepped forward obediently. "All right, Hank. All right."

Bannerman turned and started toward the door. His grip on the girl's arm was strong and awkward, so that she had difficulty in walking erect beside him. Clyde saw her face whiten with pain; suddenly his own chest seemed to be full of something that was not air, something thick and unbreathable; and he took one step after them.

"Just a minute!"

To his surprise, his voice came out strong and distinct. A rustle went through the room, which had forgotten his presence. Sally turned her head quickly.

"No, Paul; no! It's all right. Don't —"

"The lady came with me," he said, looking up at Bannerman. "She will leave with me."

He could see himself clearly, standing in front of the big man, a slight dapper figure with a piping voice, inviting destruction. It was ridiculous, and he expected to hear laughter, but none came.

Bannerman shook his head, as if to clear it of the fumes of alcohol. "Get out of my way," he said.

"You're drunk, marshal," Clyde said. "Let Miss Jarvis go."

"Little man," Bannerman said, "don't interfere."

He swung an arm to brush Clyde aside. There was no choice, and Clyde ducked and hit him, putting all his strength into the blow, and directing it just above the belt buckle. The man was built of leather, it seemed; nevertheless the blow knocked some wind out of him, set him back a pace, and caused him to let go of Sally's arm. It also seemed to sober him miraculously; suddenly his eyes cleared and his jaw tightened, and his whole posture became taut and dangerous. His right hand swung casually into the neighborhood of the holstered gun; and the two men faced each other like that for measurable seconds—the longest seconds in Paul Clyde's life—then Bannerman straightened up slowly.

"You are quite right, Mr. Clyde. I've had a little too much to drink. My apologies." He looked at Sally. "To you, too, ma'am. I will not bother you again."

He turned on his heel and strode away. Two steps from the door he came to a sudden halt, listening. They all heard it then, the distant sound of gunfire in town. A horseman was approaching at a dead run. They heard him dismount in the yard and hurry toward the door; then he was in the doorway, a grubby little man with thinning red hair.

"Marshal Bannerman!" He saw the marshal standing there, and caught his breath with an effort. "Haskell and Johnny Rios are shooting hell out of Texas

Street. A drunk got hit in the Cattleman, and one of the girls in Lou Dance's place was cut by flying glass; they'll kill somebody yet if you don't stop them quick!"

A slow smile formed on Bannerman's face; his voice was gentle. "Why, you go on back, Pinky. Tell your boss and his shadow to save their cartridges; I'll be right with them."

The red-haired man flushed. "Ah —" he said, turning quickly away. They heard him run across the yard to his horse and ride off. Inside the schoolhouse Bannerman stood, looking idly about him. Abruptly he grinned, dug into his vest pocket and produced a small, shiny badge. He tossed this into the air and caught it.

"I'm told this town's too poor to afford a permanent deputy marshal any longer," he said. "Tonight I could use a man to watch my back. Any of you fine, tax-paying citizens want to feel what it's like to wear a badge when the chips are down, here's your chance."

The room was silent. Bannerman laughed, tucked the badge back into his pocket and walked out. Presently they heard him ride out of the yard at an easy trot.

Clyde heard a man nearby speaking to another in an angry voice: "The arrogance of the fellow! They're three of a kind, I say, Haskell, Rios and Bannerman. Whichever of them goes down, it will be good riddance for the town!"

"Well, it will be Bannerman who goes down tonight. Did you note that he'd been drinking? That's one thing that will make him reckless; and there is another thing also —" His glance touched Sally Jarvis, briefly. "He will march straight down Texas Street, taking no precautions. Haskell's a sly and careful one who's never exposed himself before; and Rios never faced a man without big odds in his favor. There'll be a marksman in the alley behind the bank, perhaps, to take the marshal in the rear as he goes up the street. Well, I hold no brief for anyone who lives by the gun, but that man will leave an emptiness behind him, dying. A brave man always does."

Clyde glanced at Sally Jarvis, whose face had gone pale. He touched her arm and said, "Wait here."

"Paul, what —"

"Wait here," he said.

Then he was out of the door, in the darkness, hurrying toward the rented buggy. The livery-stable nag felt the cut of the whip, and broke into a lumbering run as they cleared the yard. Far ahead, Clyde could see the shape of a solitary rider, a big man on a gray horse that looked silvery in the darkness.

To the right, the railroad tracks were pale and shining ribbons in the night. The depot was dark except for a pair of illuminated windows marking the station-master's office. Well before he reached the bank, Clyde dragged the panting horse to a stop. He covered the rest of the distance on foot. The lock of the front door yielded to the key he had been given by Mr. Jarvis; he pushed the door open and looked around. Front Street was empty except for his deserted buggy. He stepped into the bank and pulled the door gently closed behind him.

Inside the familiar building, the night lights gave him plenty of illumination. The silence was complete, and his footsteps sounded loud and arresting as he crossed to the teller's cage and found the pistol beneath the counter. There was also a box of ammunition. He dropped a handful of cartridges into his pocket and walked quickly to the side door of the bank. It took a little time to throw off the locks without making a noise; then the door swung open under his hand to let him look out upon Texas Street.

Usually at night one could hear the constant beat of pianos and the sound of drunken laughter. Tonight, the street was silent. Directly across from him, Clyde saw, was the marshal's gray horse, riderless, standing at a hitching rail. Clyde stepped out cautiously. Looking up Texas Street, he saw Bannerman's tall and square-shouldered form striding away from him at a deliberate pace, holding the center of the street. Beyond him, awaiting him, were two men, whose shapes were familiar to Clyde: He had seen them once before, at the depot on his first day here. As he watched, they moved slowly apart, one to each side of the street.

Now there was a rustle of movement much closer at hand. Clyde drew back into the arch of the doorway, lifting the heavy pistol. He knew enough about firearms to have considerable respect for their deadly potentialities, but very little for the knowledge it took to operate one. It was a manual skill like any other. To become really expert took practice, no doubt; but there was nothing mysterious about the mechanics of putting a bullet into a large target at close range.

He watched two men step out from behind the alley behind the bank. One had a rifle in his hands. The barrel reflected the shine of the lights along the street. The other carried a holstered revolver, which he drew as he came to a halt. This one spoke: "Better take him now. Make it good; he's nobody to fool with."

The man with the rifle put it to his shoulder and sighted carefully. As he did so, Clyde aligned the barrel of the bank's weapon against the rifleman's hunched, black silhouette. His mouth was a little dry, and his voice came out softer than he had intended. "Look this way, gentlemen."

Soft though it was, it was loud enough for them to hear, punctuated by the metallic sound of the hammer of the pistol coming to full cock. They turned instantly, throwing themselves in opposite directions. Clyde had had some thought of disarming them and holding them at pistol point while Bannerman fought his battle at the other end of the street, but he saw at once that it was not going to work that way. He reminded himself that these men had come here for the purpose of shooting an officer of the law in the back, and he pulled the trigger as the rifleman was swinging his weapon around for a shot.

The muzzle flame was a startling thing to a man who had never before fired a short gun at night; it blinded him momentarily. The bright, answering flame of the rifle cut through his blindness, but the bullet came nowhere near him, and he heard the man fall heavily to the ground. Now, as if these two shots had been a sig-

nal, the street seemed to pulse and echo with gunfire. A bullet went by high overhead with a strange, sucking sound. He had the pistol cocked again when something struck him a savage blow in the side, driving him back into the doorway and causing him to discharge his weapon ineffectually. He saw the second man, on one knee in the street, taking careful aim for another shot; and he knew he had no time to recock his piece and fire. This was the man who had carried the message, he saw, whom Bannerman had called Pinky; there was wicked triumph on his face. Then a shot sounded up the street, and that face went slack and dead, and the man fell over in the dust.

Clyde drew a cautious breath. There was some pain, and his side was wet with blood, but he did not think the injury was critical. He pressed his arm against it and straightened up. Marshal Bannerman came striding toward the bank, and stopped to look at the two men on the ground and the third standing in the doorway.

"What the hell are you doing here, Boston?" he asked.

Clyde said, "Why, I intend to marry Miss Jarvis if she'll have me, marshal. She would have blamed herself if you'd been killed tonight. I could not let that happen."

People were coming from everywhere now. A buggy pulled around the corner, and Sally Jarvis jumped out before it had stopped and came running up to them. Bannerman looked at her gravely for a moment and turned back to Clyde.

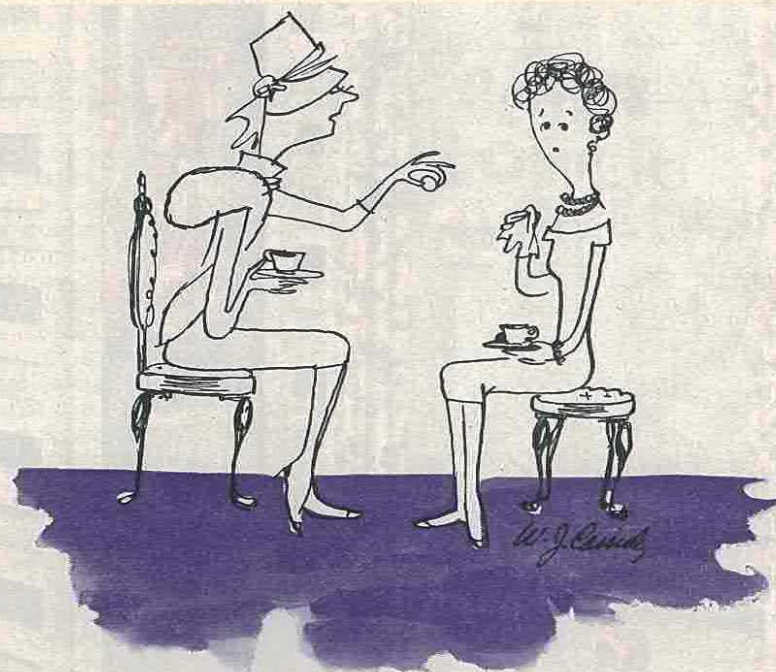
"Well, my work here is done," he said. "Take good care of her, Boston, and thank you for my life."

He turned and walked to his horse. They watched him mount, lift his hat and ride up Texas Street past the two sprawled forms that lay there in front of the brightly lighted saloons. Clyde turned to look at the girl beside him. Her eyes were wide and questioning as she answered his look.

"What will become of him, Paul?" she whispered. "Where will he end?"

He knew that she was not thinking of death in a dusty street like this. She was thinking of a time when there would be no more streets like this; she was seeing a great, bowed, shabby figure in a barroom somewhere, buying another drink to drown the ghostly memories of a past glory, forgotten by everyone but himself. It was this, Clyde knew, that she had not been able to face; it was the reason she was here, with him. He was the tame and prosaic future; the man they were watching ride away was the wild and gaudy past.

Beyond the street and its lights, the darkness swallowed him. They never heard of him again. THE END



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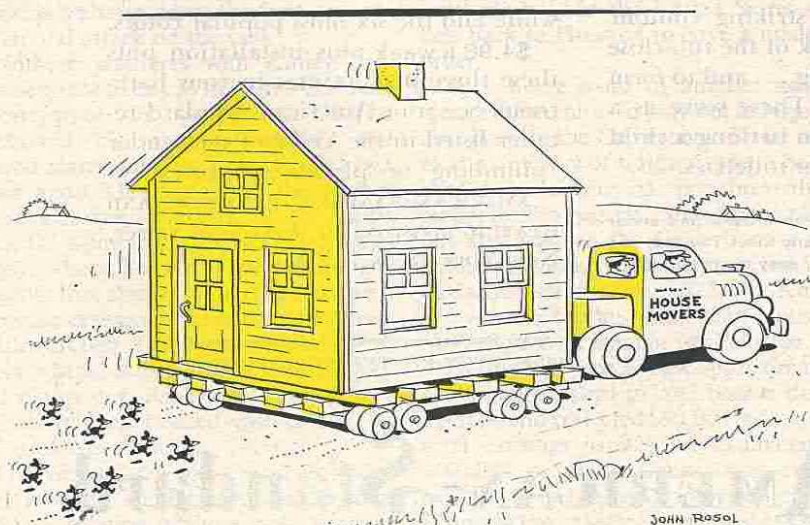
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