No Spurs, No Gun

By George Michener

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The days move slowly and without changes in the cowlands, and it's easy for a veteran to forget how quickly a kid becomes a man. And it's dangerous to forget . . .

Cautiously, careful to make no sound, David beckoned General away from the house to clear the way for thieving hands

THIS, David thought, is a hangover! His brain throbbed and bulged against the iron-tight compression of his skull. His stomach coiled and uncoiled queasily; his mouth was an abomination.

The sideboard of David's bunk resounded to the rhythmic beat of a boot. Old Hank Tooky's gravel voice besought David to arise:

"Get up, get up. Tom wants to see you. Get up, get up."

David opened an eye. Sunlight, streaming through the bunkhouse window, stabbed him deep and he closed the eye, pushed his face into the smothering darkness of the pillow. Unwelcome recollection, blurred in a spectral gray, confronted him.

David had met Tom Ingersol when he returned to the ranch last night. Tom was David's foster-father and he didn't hold with drinking—not for boys. David, in Tom's opinion, was still a boy. This was an error which David had resolved to correct. Today!

Today David was going to have it out with Tom Ingersol, man to man. But not just now. Now he yearned only for peace and quiet.

Hank Tooky's boot resumed its devilish tattoo. "Davie! Tom wants to see you. Get up, get up, get up. . . ."

David Harney's lank, seventeen-year-old body remained motionless, embalmed in misery. He wished Hank Tooky would die. He tried desperately to recapture the sweetness of oblivion.

Hank Tooky changed tactics. "Fetch him, Gen'al!"

General was Hank's dog. He was part English Shepherd and part speculation. The result was large, shaggy and formidable.

David felt a damp nose probing beneath his cheek. Inch-long fangs clamped about his wrist and gently tugged. David raised his head. "Lemme alone!" he shrilled.

David's inflamed face, his bleary eyes plainly were a shock to Hank. He recoiled a step. "Better pile out," he advised mildly. "Tom wants to see you. Let him go, Gen'al."

Smallish, warped and sparrow-legged from years in the saddle, Hank Tooky stumped toward the door. General released his grip and padded after him. David dropped back on the pillow.

The sun climbed and the bunkhouse grew warm. David stirred cautiously. He sat up on the edge of the bunk and held his head. Today was Sunday, day of rest. Morning of pain and remorse. The connotation of maturity in his pain somewhat tempered David's remorse. He spoke thickly and gruffly, an authoritative voice in an otherwise empty bunkhouse:

"Man!" he said. "It's sappin' your strength."

He crossed to the drinking pail, plunged his head in the water, ears deep, and drank.

Since David had neglected to remove his clothes the night before, his morning toilet was brief. He telescoped the top of a riding-boot into a climbing jeans leg, screwed around his shirt so the buttons were properly aligned in front and mopped his face on the roller towel. He ran a comb through his dripping, sandy hair and rescued a three-gallon hat from the floor. Then, jamming on the hat and thrusting his nose to within six inches of the shaving mirror, he studied his reflection.

The shaving mirror had its imperfections, and also its virtues. By moving back a careful few inches David's bony but not unusual features assumed, in the glass, a

crushed, bull-dog ferocity. The sail tendency of his ears was minimized and slightly scalloped. His jaw became prominent and brutish.

David narrowed his pale eyes and thinned his mouth. A knuckled forefinger caressed his upper lip. He spoke again, ominously:

"Tom," he said, "a man can stand so much. I'm leavin'. I'm tellin' you, man to man, before I go I want an accounting."

Still squinting, still wistfully stroking his lip, David turned from the mirror. His stomach was easier now and his head pained no more than enough to put an edge to his temper. He gulped down another pint of water, squared his shoulders and strode to the door. He was, he thought hopefully, in an ugly mood.

TOM INGERSOL had visitors this morning. Two saddled horses waited by the ranch office. General sat in the open doorway, his ears pricked and his plumed tail waving David a courteous greeting.

David's purposeful tread changed to a saunter. The ranch office, an annex to Tom Ingersol's loghouse, had a bench before it. David flopped down there and critically appraised the two saddlers. One, a big blaze-faced dun, he recognized as belonging to Captain Murdock, the cattle buyer. General came out and laid his head on David's knee, closing his eyes as David kneaded spread, stiffened fingers into his gray ruff.

In the office Captain Murdock was telling a story, a story that ended in a boom of laughter from Captain Murdock and a cackle from Hank Tooky. Captain Murdock's companion didn't laugh—not that David heard—nor did Tom Ingersol. Tom's was a Puritanic heritage and his reaction to stories—Captain Murdock's kind of stories—was negative. Captain Murdock, undaunted, repeated the snapper of the story and laughed again.

Tom Ingersol austerely cleared his throat. "It's too bad," he said, "about Jed Hilton's stuff. He counted on those steers running twenty, thirty pounds more."

"There's the weight sheets they sent me from Chicago," answered Captain Murdock in a sobered voice. "Checked at the stockyard scales by an Association man."

Hank Tooky was Tom Ingersol's foreman and he spoke with knowledge. "You can't," he said, "take in yearlin' feeders and make 'em pay. Not around here. They wintered all right—Jed had plenty o' slough hay—but spring's too late. He couldn't get 'em on grass long enough before shippin' time to make the weight."

"It's too bad," said Tom again. "Hank and I warned him, but Jed's not what I'd call a provident man."

David, on the bench outside, laughed hollowly and silently. He, too, like Jed Hilton's steers, had been taken in—a yearling of thirteen—and fattened to a profitable size. Even the feed had cost Tom Ingersol nothing. Nine hundred dollars David Harney's father left when he died had footed the bill. The analogy gave David a morbid satisfaction. Tom, he guessed, considered himself a provident man. He's made his feeder pay.

Conversation in the office had ceased. David heard the little iron safe close with an air-cushioned thud and a whirr of the combination. Then he heard Tom slide out the bottom drawer of his roll-top desk, heard the gurgle of a bottle and a rattle of cups.

David's stomach stirred sluggishly.

General yawned, left David and stalked into the office.

Old Hank Tooky suddenly spoke. "That dawg," he said, "is the tanglin'est critter I ever see! Lookit them tushes! No man alive can walk in this office while Gen'al's watchin' it. Here, boy. See this? Watch it! All right, Cap, now try 'n' make a move toward Tom's safe."

"Not this chicken!" declared Captain Murdock. "Well, here goes the dust-cutter. Lookin' at you, gentlemen!"

"Luck, Captain," toasted Tom Ingersol.

Captain Murdock's companion murmured politely, and Hank Tooky barked: "Powder River!"

There followed the clatter of emptied cups. The four men moved to the door.

Captain Murdock came out first, stocky and florid-cheeked and with his great nugget watch-chain gleaming bravely against his alpaca vest. He spoke distantly to David and went on to his horse, smacking and wiping his lips.

David knew Captain Murdock, but his companion was a stranger, a spare, loose-jointed man, range dressed and with a long, sad face and dark, sad eyes. At sight of David seated so near and listening by the office door the sad-faced man turned questioningly to Hank.

"Davie's all right," said Hank Tooky and he jerked his thumb toward Tom Ingersol behind him. "His kid."

The sad-faced man nodded as if reassured and in the softest voice he said to Tom Ingersol: "I didn't know you had a son."

Tom stood stiffly quiet in the doorway, his thin, stern features constrained, his level, humorless gaze boring into David. "Adopted," he answered finally.

"He has good hands," said the sad-faced man.

He said it drearily and sorrowfully, as though he had no hands of his own at all, although he did have—lean, strong, beautifully tapering hands. And his eyes, now that David got a close look at them, were the strangest David ever had seen—clear and deep and darkly illumined. "My boy," said the sad-faced man, "you have good hands. That's something you must never forget."

"Yes, sir," said David, somewhat confused. "No, sir, I won't forget."

The sad-faced man joined Captain Murdock by the horses and together they rode on.

David looked down at his hands and then at Hank. "Hank, who was that man?" he asked.

"That," said Hank, "was Harry Pelven 'n' he's finished more badmen than you can count on your fingers. He usta be a Ranger."

"Come in here, David," said Tom Ingersol.

Hank stumped off toward the corrals, and David arose.

THE wait on the bench had had a subduing influence upon David. He entered the office reluctantly. General, lying by the little iron safe, thumped his tail, and David snapped his fingers at him. Then, uneasily, David looked at Tom.

There was no kinship between David and Tom. Tom had been his father's friend, nothing more. David's mother had died when he was five, and his father—*John Harney, Feed and Gen. Mdse.*—when he was thirteen. Since then David had lived with Tom.

Tom had demanded no affection from David, only discipline, the hard, strict discipline of a man whose life has been one of self-imposed discipline. A bachelor and ranch owner, Tom had achieved modest prosperity by work, thrift and foresight. He believed that prosperity gained in any other way was ephemeral and worthless. Also, he believed in Heaven and Hell.

That much David understood about the graying, dour man who had been his father's friend. More than that—what compromise, if any, Tom's philosophy embraced—David understood not at all. Today, as always, Tom's speech to David was a model of directness:

"David," he said, "is it your idea that I have treated you badly? That I have worked you too hard?"

David felt a flush creep into his cheeks. "I don't know," he mumbled. "I don't remember what I said last night."

Tom was standing by the roll-top desk. His fingers

started a gentle drumming. He spoke more slowly, as if his thoughts were charting a course through a strange and perilous channel. "You are getting older," he said. "Maybe I hadn't quite realized. . . Who gave you that whisky last night?"

David sullenly shook his head. "I forget."

Tom turned and gazed out the window. David watched him, faintly baffled. For the first time he was seeing Tom undecided, hesitant.

Suddenly David remembered anew all the wrongs he had suffered. He remembered the nine hundred dollars his father had left when he died and which Tom Ingersol had appropriated. He remembered those dark winter mornings when Tom mercilessly had routed him out of bed to fill the wood-box before breakfast and the freezing, seven-mile ride to school, the interminable and staggering list of chores to be performed when he returned from school.

He thought of the numerous thrashings Tom had given him, thrashing for poor school work, for disobedience, for swearing, for smoking, for forgetting once to feed and water a horse after a hard day's ride—a really memorable thrashing, that last one! Bitterly he thought of the work he was doing now, a man's work and at half the pay Tom was giving the rest of his riders. A man working for a boy's wages!

David clenched his fists. "Tom, I'm leavin'," he said.

Tom turned from the window. "No," he contradicted. "You aren't leaving this office until I tell you to."

Tom's voice was calm, the dogged calm of a man who has come to a disagreeable decision. "David," he said, "until you are a grown man I want you to do no drinking. I've told you that before. After this you may remember better."

Tom was unbuckling his heavy cow-hide belt. David watched the belt slide out through its loops.

Tom raised his arm. "David," he said, "turn around."

DAVID'S hand moved. He saw his fingers grip the belt and tear it from Tom's grasp and fling it upon the floor. It lay there, the belt, a limp and damning thing, the buckle brightly gleaming, and David stared down at it, aghast. The seconds ticked by, and David couldn't breathe. Slowly he lifted his gaze.

Tom's cheeks were pale. He wasn't looking at David, but at some point remote beyond David's shoulder. He spoke flatly, lifelessly. "I've made a mistake," he said.

David took a backward step. "I'm leavin'!" he cried thickly. "I mean I'm leavin' for good! 'N' you can't stop me! You ain't my guardian! You ain't nothin' to me—legal."

Tom kept staring past David's shoulder. "I should have realized . . ." he said. "I should have given it more thought." He bowed his head as if in melancholy cogitation. He seemed humbled and old. A gray-haired old man of sixty with his pride humbled and crushed.

Contrition stirred in David. Generously enough he said: "I can't blame you, Tom, for tryin' to get all the work out of a man that you can. That's the way the world is. And you can't hold it against me because I want that money Dad left me when he—"

"You'll get that when you're twenty-one." Tom bent down to pick up his belt.

"You mean you won't give me my money now? It's my—"

"No! Not one penny of it. That's final."

And, dismally, David knew that it was final.

Tom had straightened. He no longer seemed humbled or so old. His steel-blue eyes explored David's mind chillingly and thoroughly. "David," he inquired sternly, "who put you up to this? Who were you with last night?"

"It don't make no difference who I was with. I'm leavin', and you can't stop me!"

Tom had bowed his head again, threading his belt back through its loops. Mildly he said: "I won't try to stop you."

"I'm goin' to Texas! I'm never comin' back!"

"Goodbye, David."

"Goodbye, Tom."

David left the office with a feeling of frustration. Tom had not reacted exactly as he had anticipated. Nor, in retrospect, did his own stand seem so heroic. He should have been more insistent about the money.

He looked back defiantly. "It's my money!" he said. But he did not say it loudly, and the office doorway remained vacant. "You'll see!" muttered David. "Damn' ol' slave-driver!" Scowling, he scuffed his way through the dust to the bunkhouse.

In the bunkhouse David went torpidly about preparations for his departure. He spread his slicker on the floor and atop it he dropped blankets and a helter-skelter of shirts, socks and drawers. He rolled the whole into a bundle and tucked it under his arm. He tiptoed to the doorway and looked out.

No one was in sight. David ducked around the corner of the bunkhouse and walked swiftly toward the barn.

THREE hours later, by riding devious trails, David had arrived at a small corral set lonesomely in a fold of the foothills. Here he was facing the reproachful gaze of a young man with sideburns, a wide-brimmed beaver hat and a beautiful silky-black mustache.

"But I *did* ask him!" David was explaining earnestly. "I told him straight from the shoulder that I wanted my mo—"

"You didn't mention my name, did you?"

"No, I didn't. Honest I didn't, Stew!"

Stew's eyes were brooding and disappointed. "Kid," he said, "you've let me down." He began rolling a cigarette.

In unhappy silence David finished unsaddling his horse. He closed the corral gate and tossed in a couple armfuls of feed and moved back to where Stew was standing moodily by a corral post.

Stew Harney, older than David by twelve years, was David's uncle and he had traveled much. Indeed, he had done little else in his life. He wore a pearl-handled gun and silver-inlaid spurs, and David always had admired him greatly.

For as long as David could remember, Stew had been turning up unexpectedly for a visit of a week or so with David's father. Once, soon after David had gone to live with Tom Ingersol, Stew had turned up there, too. His stay had been brief, just long enough for a meal and a trenchant interview with Tom. Since then, when sojourning in these parts, Stew would shack-up with a local horsebreaker known as Dough-god Rottles. It was at Dough-god's place that David now had joined Stew.

Stew and David—they had made their plans last night—were leaving for Texas. Stew knew of a little cow-spread for sale along the Red River—or was it the Pecos? Stew had mentioned both rivers, so David wasn't quite certain—where free range was unlimited all the way to the Guadalupe Mountains. A fine, rolling grassland and two hustling partners like Stew and David could make their fortunes. Providentially—or so it had seemed last night—all that was needed to swing the deal was nine hundred dollars.

Stew was gloomy over David's failure to get the nine hundred from Tom. David was gloomy, too, but he wanted Stew to have no slightest doubt about his fighting spirit. He slapped his uncle on the back.

"Cheer up, partner!" he cried. "They can't keep us Harneys down! We'll have that money in no time. All we gotta do is to catch on with some Texas cattle outfit and save our wages."

The prospect, instead of lessening Stew's gloom, ap-

peared only to add irritation. He spat out his cigarette, scowled and strode off toward Dough-god's little one-room shack on the slope above.

David, after some hesitation, followed Stew.

Stew entered Dough-god's shack; so did David.

Dough-god Rottles, like Tom Ingersol, was a bachelor. There noticeable resemblance ended. Dough-god was a man who inclined to the by-ways rather than the highways, the shadows rather than the sunlight, whiskers in preference to soap and water. At the moment of David's entrance Dough-god was lying on the flat of his back in his bunk and fixedly regarding the ceiling. Now, with a minimum of effort and hospitality, Dough-god propped himself on his elbow and transferred his bag-eyed gaze to his guests.

David waved a genial hand. "Hiyuh, Dough-god ol' timer!"

Dough-god swiveled his disconcerting eyes toward Stew and back to David.

A bit self-consciously David tried again: "Dough-god, you should've been with us last night. Did Stew tell you about it? I met him over town and we stopped at the Palace for a few dust-cutters. You'd have died laughin' if you'd heard Stew stringin' that French girl there. Ha! Ha! How about it, Stew? Heh, heh. . . "

David's laughter was not infectious. Dough-god returned his sphinx-like attention to Stew.

Stew said out of the corner of his mouth: "No dice. And don't keep starin' at me, you whisker-faced baboon." He sat down at Dough-god's grease-stained table and began gathering up a scattered deck of playing cards.

David spoke quickly and soothingly. "Cards are all right. We don't need dice. I know a couple good three-handed games."

"The hell you do!" exploded Dough-god. Then, shaking his head as if it were all too much for his comprehension, he flopped over on his back again and resumed his study of the ceiling.

Stew, frowning intently, shuffled and re-shuffled the cards.

David perched upon the edge of a bench. He spoke timidly in the growing silence. "Stew," he asked, "what's it mean if a man says you have good hands?"

"It depends on who said it." Stew let the pack run through his fingers. "If a gambler said it—Who was it? Was it about me?"

"It was a friend of Captain Murdock's. He was with him today—"

"Cap Murdock! At Tom's today?" Stew put down the cards.

David nodded. "This mornin'. He and this other man—"

David cast a startled glance toward the bunk. Dough-god had come to life; his bristly countenance was up and peering.

Stew's chair scraped along the floor. "I'm goin' to take a turn outside. Come on, Davie." He gripped David's arm.

STEW led David a little distance from the shack and confronted him sternly. "Davie, you shouldn't have mentioned Cap Murdock in there. Tom handles beef shipments for half a dozen of these little outfits. Didn't Cap leave money with Tom this mornin'?"

"I—I guess so. Anyway, I heard Tom close the safe when—" David widened his eyes. "You don't trust Dough-god?"

Stew snapped his fingers. "Not that much! You've got to remember to watch your tongue, Davie. Like last night in the Palace when you were braggin' you knew the combination to Tom's safe. What was it you said? Two, eight, four. . . ."

"Three, six, two, nine, seven," David murmured. His brow furrowed. "Stew, I don't remember tellin' you that."

"Suppose someone had overheard you last night."

"Gosh, Stew! D'you think anyone did?"

Stew's teeth flashed in a quick smile. "I guess not. Don't take it so hard, Davie. Come on, let's sit down and forget it."

They sat down together on a rock, David humbled yet warmed with the knowledge that somehow the camaraderie, the boon companionship, of the previous night had been restored. He glanced sidewise at his uncle. "Stew, when are we pullin' out for Texas? Tonight?"

Stew got out his tobacco and papers. "I don't know," he replied gently. "If you'd got that money like you promised—Now I may have to hole up here with Dough-god a while. I'm sorry, Davie, but you can see how it is."

"Sure," David. He grinned. "I don't blame you at all, Stew. Not at all." He clasped his hands over his knee and gazed at yonder hillside. His cheeks felt stiff and unnatural, and slowly he relaxed his grin.

Stew struck a match. "Who all was at the ranch, Davie?"

David swallowed. "No one. Just Tom and Hank. The Hender boys went over to the flats to help their old man for a week, and Snowball's away, too, till tomorrow. Hank's doin' the cookin' today, I guess." David kept his gaze on the hillside. "It's funny," he added, "but I guess I forgot to eat today. Forgot it, I guess. . ."

"That mutt of Tooky's likes you pretty good, does he?"

David nodded. "He'll kinda miss me, I guess."

"Suppose, Davie, I showed you how to collect that money."

David turned. "You mean sue, Tom? I wouldn't want to—"

"I mean collect it. Take it."

"Take it?" David gave a start. "You mean—"

"No, I don't mean steal it. The money is yours. How can we steal something when it belongs to us already?"

David opened his mouth, but he had no answer.

Stew was smiling and his black, steady eyes were crinkling at the corners. "Davie," he asked, "do I look like a crook? Do you really think that of old Uncle Stew?"

"Gosh, no, Stew! Gosh! It's just—just—Well, how did you mean to—to collect it?"

"You know how to open Tom's safe, don't you? And the mutt won't bother you. We'll take the nine hundred—just what's comin' to us and not a cent more." Stew paused. "Well?"

David could feel his cheeks beginning to burn. "I couldn't, Stew," he said weakly. "I—I—"

Stew shrugged. "I thought," he murmured, "that a Harney would always stand up for his right."

"I will stand up for my rights! It's only that—"

"Then what're you scared of?"

"I ain't scared!"

"Maybe," Stew muttered to himself, "it's a good thing poor John died when he did. If he'd ever lived to see a Harney and a son of his show the white feather. . ."

Silent and miserable, David stared down at his clasped hands.

Stew arose and flipped away his cigarette.

"Stew."

"Well?" Stew looked at David coldly.

"Stew, I—Stew, roll me a smoke, will you?"

Stew reached in his pocket, and suddenly he was smiling. He sat down again.

AT MIDNIGHT Stew and David were standing by the corner of Tom Ingersol's barn. Their horses were tied in the creek brush beyond the out-buildings.

David's stomach was pursed into a tight little ball, his armpits were wet and he held his mouth open to muffle the labor of his breathing.

Stew squeezed his arm. "Luck, kid. Remember, you

take the mutt all the way out to the windmill before you come back here. And leave the office door open!"

There were two doors to Tom Ingersol's office: an outside door and one giving into the hallway of the ranch-house. The outer door would be barred and General would be on watch by the safe. It was David's mission now to enter the office through the house, unbar the door and quietly lead out the big dog. Then, together, Stew and David would open the office safe. In this way both would be assured that no more than the amount rightfully due them was collected.

The plan was triple-armored, morally and legally. The money belonged to them because it was the estate of John Harney, David's father and Stew's older brother. Nor could Tom Ingersol complain to the law, for he himself had gotten the money by "malefactoring and conspiracy to defraud."

David had been impressed by Stew's knowledge of law. Nevertheless, he wasn't quite convinced that there wasn't a flaw somewhere—if not in Stew's logic, then in his own fortitude. For it was a fact at the moment David wished he was anywhere but where he was. He wished his father never had left him nine hundred dollars. Almost he wished that he never had had an uncle.

He licked his lips. "Stew," he said shakily, "d'you suppose Dough-god had any idea where we were goin' tonight?"

"What makes you say that?" Stew's voice was sharp.

"Quit the stallin', kid! Get goin'!" Stew gave him a push, and David began walking toward the ranch-house.

As David left the barn his nervousness resolved into a sort of somnambulistic detachment. His gaze was riveted to the front. His feet carried him on through the moonless gloom while his mind waited passively for the swoop of catastrophe, the opening of the abyss.

He mounted the steps to the ranch-house porch, raised the latch and pushed the door inward. Subterranean snores issued from the black depths of the house. He paused, listening, not breathing.

Still nothing happened.

David tiptoed along the hall to the front office door. He scratched on the door, and General's snuffings on the opposite side changed to a soft, eager whining. David entered the office and closed the door. General, nudging, thrust his badger-scarred muzzle into his hand.

Suddenly David's heart began to pound. Fumbling desperately in the blackness, he unbarred and opened the outer door. He seized General by the scruff of the neck and fled the office.

Stew had ordered David to leave General by the old windmill pump on the flat beyond the blacksmith shed. When David reached the blacksmith shed he halted, leaning against the building. As his breathing quieted he gazed doubtfully in the direction of the windmill. The windmill was still a distance off—farther, perhaps, than Stew had realized.

General wore no collar. Also he objected to being tied—anytime, anywhere.

David threw down his hat. "Watch it, boy!" he ordered.

General promptly stretched out, his forepaws on the hat brim and his white fangs laughing and gleaming. General would now stay put. So would the hat.

On lagging feet David headed back toward the barn.

STEW was waiting where David had left him, smoking a cigarette. His voice was as untroubled as if opening safes were an everyday occurrence: "Take care of the mutt, did you? Office all clear?

David nodded. "Stew," he said hoarsely, "I've been—"

"Don't say it, kid. Let me say it for you." Stew laid his hand on David's shoulder. "Davie, let's call it off."

David wasn't sure he had heard a-right. His legs began to tremble. "You mean," he said hopefully, yet unbelievingly, "you want to—to *not* take the money after all?"

"That's it." Stew snuffed out his cigarette. "I guess, Davie, I'm just too damn' honest for my own good. Whatever it is, I can't go through with it. Suppose you take the mutt back to the office and shut him up again and we'll forget all about the mo—"

A yell had split the night quiet—a cry of terror, and mingling with it was a roar like that of a small but lively lion.

"The mutt!" cried Stew. Even in the darkness David could see the ringing white of his eyes. He caught David by the shirt and shook him. "Where'd you leave him? At the windmill?"

"The blacksmith shed! I thought—"

"Balls o' fire!" Stew flung David back against the corral and began running. As he ran he pulled out his pearl-handled gun.

David bounced off the corral poles and took after Stew.

The sound of murder by the blacksmith shed continued. From the direction of the house old Hank Tooky's rasping, excited voice, and then Tom Ingersol's, joined the uproar.

Stew and David raced around the corner of the blacksmith shed almost abreast. The gray shape of General, jaws distended, arose from a struggling figure before them. Stew raised his gun.

"Stew! Don't shoot!" David lunged at his uncle. He got his arms about him, and they tumbled to the ground, David on top.

General, seventy-five pounds of awesome fury, drove in hard.

David tried to grapple with him, and the big dog veered, dancing like a boxer. He drove in again and this time he sank his teeth in Stew's leg. He was working on the leg, and Stew and David both were yelling when Tom Ingersol and Hank Tooky came up.

Hank dragged the raging dog backward by his tail.

"Lock him in the shed, Hank, and bring a lantern." Tom's voice was ominously quiet. He was bare-foot, clad in long white drawers and carrying a rifle. He moved close, rifle pointing.

"That you, David?"

"Yes, sir," whispered David. He sat up and bowed his head.

"And you, Stew Harney!"

Stew, too, sat up, nursing his leg in tight-lipped silence.

"And who's this here? Here with the lantern, Hank!"

Old Hank Tooky wore nothing but a shirt. Bare-legged, knob-kneed he stumped forward in a puddle of lantern glow.

The third man on the ground was Dough-god Rottles.

Hank held the lantern high, admiring the big dog's tooth work. "That Gen'al!" he said. He picked up a small canvas sack from beside Dough-god. "See this, Tom? They busted your safe."

Dough-god propped himself on an elbow. Fascinated, he spread a dripping hand to the light, draining it, fingers down. "He said," he muttered, "that the dog would be outa the way. He—"

"Who said?"

"Stew Harney. He got the combination to the safe from the kid."

"David, did you help steal this money?"

"Davie," Stew answered calmly, "was only the fall guy. We used him to get the mutt outa the way. He thought him and I were just goin' to take the nine hundred dollars John left him."

"There's more than nine hundred in this sack."

"Sure. Dough-god and I knew there'd be. Davie didn't know Dough-god was in the deal. Soon as Davie got the mutt outa the office, Dough-god skipped in and cleaned the safe."

"You said he'd leave the dog by the windmill," Dough-god said accusingly. "You said even if we were caught there wouldn't be any trouble. I ain't goin' to—"

Tom said: "David, is this the truth?"

"I—I guess so. Yes, sir." David kept his eyes covered; his shoulders started to shake.

"Davie," murmured Stew, "is only a dumb kid. I'm the one that talked him into this. I'm willing to take full blame."

Tom said: "You are thoughtful of David all of a sudden. What's back of this?"

"Nothin'. Except, maybe, that I can't forget I'm the kid's uncle." Stew's voice was earnest but undisturbed. "You've got your money back, Tom. If this don't get into the courts and no one hears about it, no one can call Davie a crook. You wouldn't want that to happen. Neither of us would."

"I see," said Tom. "I see your point." And afterwards he said: "If anyone *does* hear about what happened tonight, you and Rottles are going to get prison terms as long as your arm. I swear that! Now pick up your fancy gun and both of you get off my land."

Stew Harney and Dough-god Rottles departed.

"Come on to the office, David," said Tom.

IN THE office David waited numbly while Tom took a small memorandum book from his desk. "David," he said, "the money your father left was put into cattle. According to this I now owe you nineteen hundred and seventy-three dollars."

David shook his head. "I—I don't want it now, Tom. I—"

"I was giving you an accounting, not the money. I've told you before—you'll get that when you're twenty-one."

Tom put up the memorandum book. His face, in the yellow lantern light, was as stern as Judgment Day. So was old Hank Tooky's. Both were looking at David.

David stared at the floor. "Tom," he said huskily, "I ain't a crook. I—"

"No," said Tom, "I don't think you are. But I'm not the one to convince. You yourself have to be sure."

"I am sure!" cried David. "I'm so sure that I—Tom, if you'll take me back I'll work for nothin'. I want to show you and Hank that I ain't ungrateful. Besides, I *want* to stay here! This is my home and you've been just like a father to me."

"I wasn't aware, David," said Tom, "that you had left."

"I told you this mornin' that I was goin' to Texas."

"Yes, of course you did. What's the matter with your finger, David? Did the dog nip you?"

"No, sir. I stuck it under the hammer. Stew was goin' to shoot General, and I got my finger caught."

Tom glanced at Hank Tooky and back to David.

After that there was a silence, and David knew that Tom and old Hank were passing judgment.

David kept his head bent, inspecting his finger, pressing his hands, palm down, on the table. They weren't pretty hands. They were merely strong, big-knuckled working hands. Honest hands, he hoped.

Good hands.

All his life now David would remember that. And always would he remember Harry Pelven with his lean, beautiful gunman's hands and his sad face and his strange, haunting eyes. He'd never forget him.

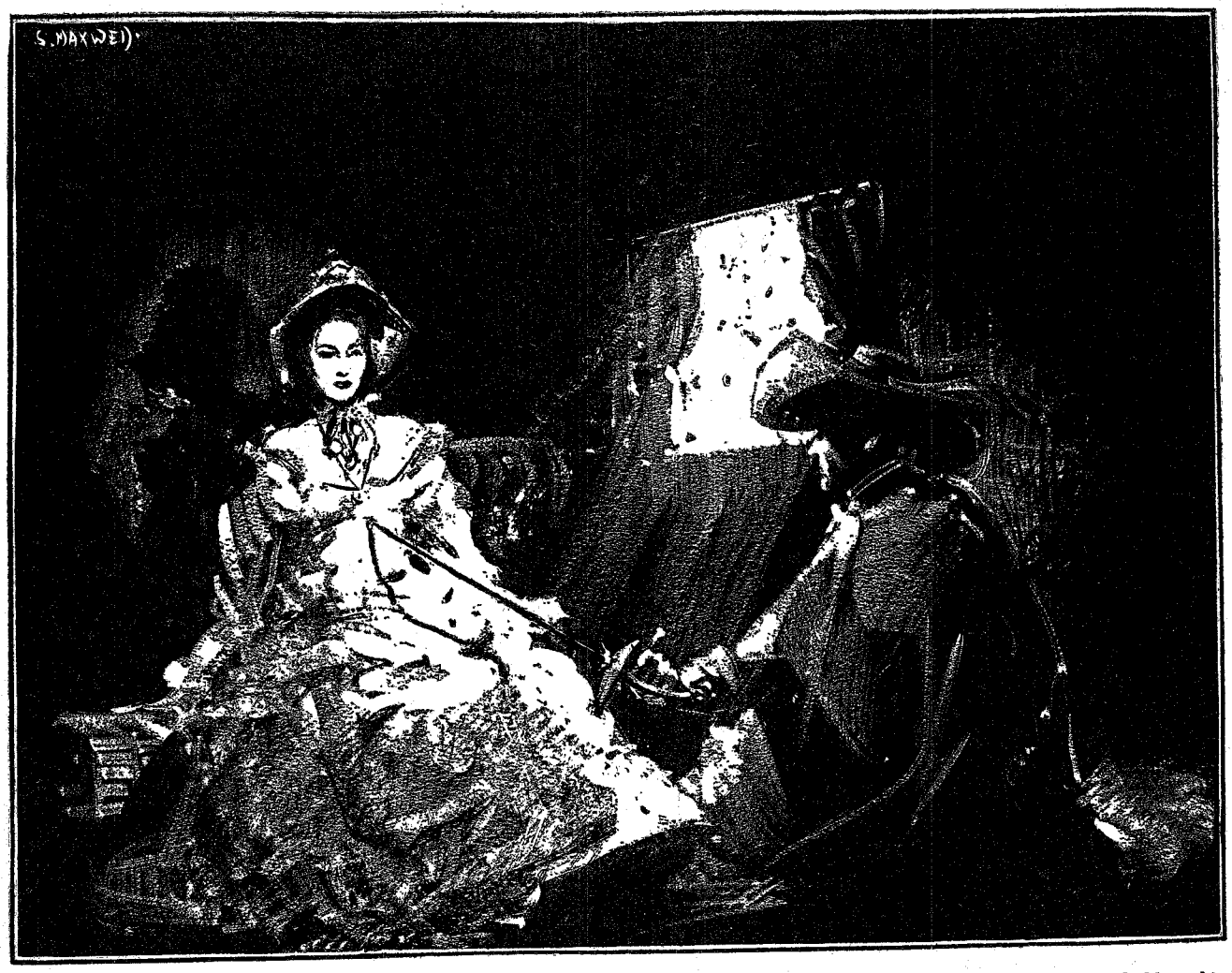
Suddenly in the weighted silence David spoke again. "Tom," he said, "I ain't a crook—I'm sure of that. But I've been something that's maybe just as bad." He lifted his head until he could meet Tom's cold, steely gaze. "A damn' fool, Tom."

Tom turned and opened the bottom drawer of his desk and got out a whiskey bottle and three tin cups. He replied quietly over his shoulder: "Every man is, David, in one way or another."

Tom poured whiskey into the cups and set them on the table, one in front of Hank, one in front of David and one for himself. He looked at David, and his eyes no longer were cold. He raised his cup. "Luck, David," he said, "to *two* damned fools."

"Powder River!" barked old Hank. And then he jarred David with his elbow. "Drink 'er, kid!"

Swords in Exile



Cleve swung around in the coach, holding his blade against the girl's breast

By Murray R. Montgomery

CARDINAL RICHELIEU learns from SIR HARRY WINTHROP that the King of England has at last pardoned LORD RICHARD CLEVE, who was banished from his homeland some years before. But the Cardinal is loath to part with his valued Guardsman, and so he lies to Sir Harry, telling him that Cleve has left his service and disappeared.

Discovery of Richelieu's duplicity arouses Cleve to a fury. After brazenly insulting the great Cardinal, he charges off in pursuit of Sir Harry and the treasured pardon. But Richelieu is by no means defeated; he orders Count GUY D'ENTREVILLE, Cleve's rake-helly companion, to follow and arrest the Englishman. D'Entreville agrees, for if he does not obey, Cleve will summarily be shot.

SIR Harry Winthrop, Richard Cleve and Guy d'Entreville are all heading in the direction of the Duchy of Montferrat. Richelieu had planned to send his two Guardsmen into that principality, for there is trouble brewing in it that may threaten the security of France. This peril the Cardinal had partly explained to d'Entreville before Cleve made his furious escape.

Lying close to Savoy, Montferrat is a vital buffer state, a protectorate of France; if Spain and Austria gain control of it they can easily invade southeastern France. Richelieu has had reports of treason in Montferrat; but but he does not know that BARON VON ERLA, an Austrian agent, has already made a pact with Duke Charles of Savoy. The duke has always coveted Montferrat, and Von Erla has promised to give him control of that state if he will sign a treaty with Austria. Duke Charles agrees, although he doesn't understand how Von Erla will fulfill his promise.

VON ERLA'S plan is simple enough. His two weapons are CATHERINE CORDOBA, a lovely and quite ruthless woman; and MAZO GARDIER, a hired swordsman. Catherine Cordoba has already managed to fascinate COUNT HENRI, son of DUKE VINCENT, of Montferrat; and Von Erla tells her that he will shortly eliminate the duke. Thus she can marry Henri and become the duchess. All she must do is to make it possible for the assassin Mazo Gardier to reach the old duke with his blade. But Catherine does not know that Von Erla plans also to murder Count Henri, so that Montferrat will be completely in the Austrian agent's hands.

But meanwhile Mazo Gardier himself has been eliminated. Pursuing Sir Harry Winthrop and the king's pardon, Richard Cleve gets into combat with Gardier at a roadside tavern, and the hired bravo is killed. Another curious incident has befallen Cleve on his journey. He was held up by a girl dressed in boy's clothing, and she stole his horse from him, telling him no more than her name—MARY DE SARASNAC. Cleve knows that name, for d'Entreville fell violently in love with the girl in Paris.

And it was she whom Gardier was seeking!

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