

# Viva Gringo!



Welcome to Inferno, cowboy. No shooting permitted during siesta time; but as soon as the town wakes up, you better reach for your six-gun—and be ready to shout, "Viva Villa!" in front of a firing squad. . . .  
A complete short novel

## CHAPTER I

### THE DEVIL'S CANTINA

**J**OHNNY TYNE believed in fate. Nothing but fate, he claimed could have brought him to Inferno in the first place—and nothing but the same unknown power could have decreed that he should kill a man, make a friend, and steal a girl all in the time it takes two suns to pass under the bottom half of the world.

And there are many who agree with him.

Such as Rojo Red, whose two names mean the same thing, and who swears under both to shoot Johnny Tyne on sight.

Johnny Tyne was on a bender. Johnny had been a bad boy in school, and had not changed much as his legs lengthened, his chest deepened, and he grew up into a hard-riding cowpuncher. His old man, Big Jack Tyne, had managed thoroughly to spoil Johnny as a kid, yet did not understand why Johnny couldn't settle down as a

man. So, when the whole Box T herd of cowponies was stolen while Johnny played poker with the boys, the old man fired his son.

Much to Big Jack's surprise, the kid packed his doo-funnies, climbed aboard the only mount left on the ranch, and rode away.

Johnny rode slowly. He took it easy because Bessie was an old mare who had had many a foal in her day and had lost the wild spirits of youth. He and Bessie were pals. They had been born on the same day and had grown up together. He told Bessie to take him some place where his old man would be out of his hair forever. Bessie, however, had a mind of her own. Each morning after Johnny had broken up camp she would turn right back for home. Johnnie and Bessie would discuss this for a while until Johnny won the argument, reined her around, and started at an easy trot toward the south.

So it was that they leisurely passed through Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, and into Chihuahua to the town of Inferno, which means Hell and is twice as hot. At first, Johnny thought the place was deserted, for the cross-



Johnny rode right into the middle  
of a celebration

By Arthur Lawson

Author of "Border Fire," "Squaw Lady," etc.

roads that formed the town were lined with crumbling pink and green and blue adobe houses; and the only sign of life was a sleeping dog and half a dozen scrawny goats who nibbled the dusty weeds along the roadway.

But eventually he came to a yellow building in better condition than the rest, covered with strange paintings. There was a picture of a drunken man in a gutter with a *señorita* kneeling beside him, praying and crying. There was a great, lurid splash of red on another wall, coming from a volcano, and three Mexicans, one clutching a cactus plant, one a pigskin, one a bottle, were tumbling into it, looking drunkenly pleased. There were other pictures on the building and they all puzzled Johnny until he figured out the sign above the door.

The sign said: *Cantina Inferno*, which can be translated as "Hell's Saloon."

But Johnny didn't know that. The *cantina*, he thought, meant a water-bottle, like the canteen he had carried so often when riding the range. The *Inferno* meant nothing at all to him—but now he could explain the pictures. Carrie Nation must have wandered down here sometime in the past, reformed the town, painted those pictures to show the evils of drink, and set up a water station in the town's saloon. It made him thirsty. It reminded him of the cool rivers of Montana.

"Well," Johnny said to Bessie. "I guess we get off here. There's somebody inside there snoring. Must of got drunk on water. These Mexicans are funny people, ain't they?"

JOHNNY slipped from the saddle, loosened the girth, dropped Bessie's reins over the hitchrack and stepped into the cantina. It was cool in there and dark. But he



could see that he was right. This place had been a saloon once, and very recently. He could smell the bitterness of stale alcohol.

Following the snore, he came to a dark, fat man sleeping with his head in his arms, behind the bar. There were many bottles of water on a shelf near the man. Johnny considered this situation. The Mexican seemed so peaceful it would be a shame to wake him, so Johnny leaned over the bar, reached a bottle and pulled the cork. Too bad this wasn't cold, Johnny thought, as he opened his dry mouth and tipped the bottle.

Johnny was never quite sure what happened immediately after that.

He felt as if he had swallowed a load of liquid fire. His mouth burned, his throat blazed. He dropped the bottle, swearing. Got some of the stuff up his nose and spit out the rest. There were tears in Johnny's eyes.

"My God!" he shouted. "I'm poisoned."

The Mexican woke up and saw Johnny there crying and swearing. He started to shout, too.

"*Ladrónes! Madre de Dios!*"

"Get me something," Johnny yelled, "before it kills me."

"*Pelado!*" the Mexican shouted. "*Ladrón—Por Dios.*"

He dragged a shotgun from under the bar and pointed its two big barrels at Johnny Tyne.

Johnny pointed to his open mouth, blew as if on a fire.

"Water! I'm poisoned."

The bartender shook his big head, looked lost. He had never faced anything like this before. He thought the gringo was crazy, and he kept his finger on the trigger of the gun.

Then a curtain, made of beans strung like beads, hanging from an opening in the rear of the room, rattled open, and a vision appeared to Johnny Tyne. She was small and lovely, in a full skirt and short-sleeved blouse, the kind the Mexican women wear. Her feet were bare, her legs and arms brown. But her hair was the color of new gold and her eyes were the blue of Montana's sky at dusk.

One other thing Johnny noticed in that brief, hurried moment: Her small hand held a sixshooter pointed steadily for a spot between his eyes.

"You must be pretty hard up, cowboy," she said, "to try holding up this place."

None of this made any sense to Johnny. He swallowed. The burning in his mouth and throat was subsiding. He said:

"I wasn't pinching the joint, ma'am. I just wanted a drink of water. Saw that canteen sign. I didn't want to wake up this feller, so I helped myself." He shuddered. "I got that rat poison," he said dismally.

The girl laughed. She said something in Spanish to the bartender. He shrugged, put up his shotgun. Then she slipped her sixshooter under her blouse with the barrel held by the waistband of her skirt. She was laughing so hard now there were tears in her eyes.

"That's *mescal*," she said. "Made of cactus thorns. Like gin. But *muy piquante!*"

"You mean it's drinkin' liquor?" Johnny asked.

"Yes," she said, "but very hot."

Johnny sighed. He could feel what little he had swallowed turning over in his stomach. It was strangely pleasant. But getting it there had not been fun at all. He fished into his pocket, dropped a silver dollar on the bar.

"I guess that'll pay for it, ma'am. Sorry I made the mistake. I won't make it again 'cause I'm headin' right

back home. If that's what they drink in this country it's no place for old man Tyne's little boy, Johnny."

"We do have water, too," the girl said, laughter still in her blue eyes. "In the rainy season. But it's not very popular."

"I'll come back *then*," Johnny mumbled.

It took all the strength of his will to stop looking at her and to turn toward the doorway where Bessie was curiously looking inside. Gosh, the girl was beautiful in her bare feet. Why didn't women at home dress like that? Why were they all either old biddies or honkeytonk queens where he came from?

It was a puzzle that Johnny could not answer.

"*Adios*," the girl called after him. "Come see us again some day!"

Johnny grinned over his shoulder. "I sure will, sister."

She was smiling softly. It made Johnny's heart jump and started a blind pounding in his skull. He had better get out of here, he decided, while he could still make it. That cactus juice was affecting his mind.

HE TURNED toward the doorway. Bessie still stood with her head inside, watching the excitement. The rest of the door was blocked by a big man, dark of face, fancily dressed, standing on one leg.

"Just a second, pardner," Johnny said. "I'll get ol' Bessie out of the way."

The stranger's black eyes turned on Johnny Tyne for a moment. They were cold as agate. Then Johnny discovered why the hombre was standing on only one leg. The other was swung back. As Johnny stepped forward, the man viciously kicked Bessie in the belly and shouted:

"*Vamos!*"

His big Mexican spurs ripped Bessie's flank.

Bessie screamed, crow-hopped through the door into the cantina. Johnny, loco-mad, leaped for the Mexican. In a flash he was a crazy man, so intent on killing this stranger who had injured his old horse that he never even heard the blond girl crying:

"No—don't do it, *señor. Madre de—*"

Johnny got the man by the throat, lifted him clear of the ground, then smashed his right fist into the smoothly shaven chin and dropped him onto the floor.

"Get up and fight!" Johnny yelled. "Nobody's goin' to kick my Bessie an'—"

The man rolled over, got to his hands and knees. Beyond him, the door was packed with little dark-faced men. Bessie had gotten into a corner where she felt safe after first kicking a table to splinters. The girl and the bartender were behind him, and Johnny did not know which side they would take.

Not that he thought of it at the moment, for he was mad clear through, his only interest at the time being to beat the life out of the hombre who had kicked Bessie.

The man's hands went up. Johnny thought he was quitting; then that the Mexican was brushing his hair out of his eyes, stalling to get breath before attacking again. Then Johnny heard the girl cry, her voice sharp with fear:

"The *cuchillo*—the knife! Look out, Johnny!"

The Mexican's eyes were cold with hatred, unblinking, as his hand moved forward with the speed of a snake's tongue. White sunlight glistened on metal. Johnny knew nothing of knife throwers. He had not even suspected that this Mexican carried a slim, razor-sharp Bowie in a greased holster inside the collar at the back of his neck. Johnny

was caught so short he had no time to duck, no time to dodge it, no time to draw a six-shooter and defend himself from this treachery.

It was a dream—the blast of a gun—the ring of metal. A bad dream.

The knife jumped from the Mexican's hand, whirled like the gun-powder-loaded pinwheels Mexicans use in celebrating fiestas. It went high, backward, smacking into the wall and dropping to the floor with the clang of fine steel.

Then Johnny snapped out of it. He did not wait for this snake in fancy charro clothing to get to his feet and pull another stunt like that one. He gave him just what the Mexican had given Bessie, kicked him hard, full in the face, high cowboy's heels crashing into the man's windpipe, sharp spurs ripping the man's elegant shirt.

The Mexican went back on his heels, collapsed with a sigh. Johnny picked him up, lifted him over his head and flung him out the doorway. Like tenpins, the hurtling body mowed down the little men gathered there.

Johnny had his gun in hand now. He stepped into the sunlight.

"Git!" he howled. "And if you come back, I'll shoot every damn one of you."

Four men climbed out of the dust, looking furtively back at the cantina. They picked up their unconscious boss, draped him, belly-down, over the silver-mounted saddle on his fine horse. Then they jumped into their saddles and rode away from there, spurring hard.

Johnny looked after them. It seemed that he had known these hombres before. There was something damnedly familiar about them. Then he shrugged. It was just an hallucination—he could not have known them.

JOHNNY took a deep breath, strode back into the cantina, up to the bar, to slap down a bright silver dollar. "I'll take some of that cactus juice, Hosey," he said.

Fearfully, the bartender put out a bottle. The girl had not moved from the curtained doorway. The sixshooter was in her hand again, not aiming at anything in particular, and a faint wisp of gunsmoke hung in the air above her. Johnny noticed that a button had torn from her blouse, yanked off when she tried to get the gun in a hurry.

"Gosh, sister, that's shootin'!" He grinned at her. "He would of had me if you hadn't done that. If you want anythin', ever—just remember Johnny Tyne. He'll go through hell to pay that back."

"Then you better go through hell right away, Johnny Tyne," she said softly. "This town is Hell—that's what Inferno means. That hombre you were playing with is El Cuchillo—the Knife!"

Johnny felt good now. He was having fun. "He's goin' to have a crik in his neck for a long time."

"I said that hombre is El Cuchillo. He'll be back."

It was not the name, but the manner of her saying it, that made Johnny realize that he had tangled with somebody really tough. He had never heard of this El Cuchillo before. It meant nothing at all to him.

He laughed. "I'll fix him for keeps—next time." Then the laughter faded out and Johnny added: "You're scared of that hombre."

"He doesn't have any rules," the girl avoided a direct answer. "He'll get you when you're not looking."

"I have eyes in the back of my head," Johnny boasted.

"They didn't help you a minute ago. If I hadn't knocked that knife out of his hand—" She left the rest for Johnny

to imagine. He shuddered. Then she came from the doorway, close to him, so near that he could smell the fragrance of her golden hair. "Please, Johnny Tyne, will you go—and not come back?" she begged.

Johnny said: "You're afraid of him, and I'm going to stick around. Why didn't you shoot him when you had the chance?"

Her eyes flickered. There was fear still in them as they turned away from Johnny. "I'm not afraid of him, and—and he means a lot to me, Johnny." Johnny could not believe this. "El Cuchillo is a bad man to cross, but I couldn't shoot him. Now, go, Johnny—and stay away."

Funny she should have a feeling like that for a snake of El Cuchillo's stripe. Well, okay, he'd go. But never come back? That was something he would not promise. He wanted to get in another lick on the hombre who had kicked Bessie—and another look at the girl who had saved his life.

"Okay," he agreed. Then his eyes suddenly opened wide. "Say, I thought there was something funny about those hombres. Like I'd seen them before. But it wasn't them—it was the horses. My old man's horses!"

"I think you made a mistake!" It was a new voice to Johnny, a man's voice. The man was big, completely filling the doorway that was hung with polished beans strung like dangling beads. In the gloom, the man's red hair, splashed with gray, was like a dying campfire. "All horses look alike in Mexico," the man said. "Now run along, cowboy. Do as Panchita says."

"By God," Johnny shouted, "they *were* my old man's horses!"

"No, they weren't!" The red-headed man's voice was deadly low.

Johnny glanced back at the girl who had stepped away from him. She had not put up her six-shooter, and her eyes that a moment ago had seemed ready to fill with tears, were direct and cold.

"You made a mistake," she said.

Johnny looked over toward the bartender. He was handling a shotgun. The man in the doorway carelessly held a rifle under his arm.

"I guess I did," Johnny said. "Yessir, I guess I did make a mistake."

He turned from the bar. He back tingled as he led Bessie through the doorway to the dusty street. The sharp sun smarted in his eyes.

JOHNNY rode through town. It was swarming with people now, little naked kids in huge sombreros, men wearing unbleached pajamas, women plodding along barefooted, and many a long-eared, gray-haired burro. As he jogged along he realized that he had arrived during the siesta while everybody slept in the shade. Now they were up again, carrying on their endless chores.

He came to the plaza. There were dusty trees here, sparse grass and shrubs. A fountain squirted half-heartedly in the little square. Men lounged around. Women, in tiny stalls, shouted to him as he passed, peddling all sorts of things from clothing, huaraches, to gay-colored fruit and steaming tamales. But Johnny went on.

At the cathedral, Bessie halted while Johnny stared. It was a beautiful building, massive, intricately carved. It dwarfed everything here. But to Johnny it looked more like a fort than a church, and he wondered about it. He wondered about the golden-haired girl back in the Cantina Inferno. She had been afraid of that Cuchillo hombre.



Cuchillo's dark eyes had been cold with hatred when she called out to Johnny to watch out for the knife. Yet Cuchillo, the girl, and the red-headed man were allies. And those horses were Box T!

"*Por l'amor de Dios. . .*"

It was a mumbling beggar. Johnny gave him a dollar and the beggar bit it before bowing low, rattling quick Spanish in thanks. Johnny had to laugh when the man ran off, forgetting his limp.

"Meester, for fi' cents I show you."

Johnny had no idea what the kid would show him. It was a youngster in tattered pants, half a shirt and a ragged sombrero. The kid clutched the nickel Johnny gave him. He was very polite, this little Mexican. He pointed to the cathedral.

"She are t'ree honred years," he told Johnny. "You weel come?"

He indicated that Johnny should get off his horse and go inside the cathedral with him. Johnny observed that the church must have been at least the age the kid gave it. Like the rest of the town it was beginning to crumble. He had heard about the magnificence of these cathedrals in Mexico, but he shook his head.

"I got all I can look at out here," he said. "And, besides, I'm kinda busy." The kid had talked as if he knew his way around. Johnny held up a silver dollar. The boy's eyes shone. "I'll tell you what I do want to see," Johnny said.

The kid grinned. "*Muchachas? Si, señor.* These way."

He reached for the dollar. Johnny was beginning to catch onto this lingo. He still did not know any words. It was the expression he was learning to read. By the light in the kid's eyes he guessed the meaning of *muchachas*.

"Nope, I don't want to see any girls," he said. "I'm too busy for that. But I'll give you the dollar, kid, if you take me to a hombre by the name of El Cuchillo."

The boy's eyes glazed. The hand that was reaching for the dollar suddenly went stiff. Then he ran as hard as he could, sending up a tiny dust-cloud, dodging, to disappear behind the church.

"I'll be damned," Johnny said to himself. To his horse, he added: "Ain't that somepin', Bessie?"

Bessie apparently thought so. Agreeing with the Mexican boy, she broke into a trot, taking Johnny around the plaza, back to the road that they had used in entering town.

Johnny smiled grimly. He tried not to look at the Cantina Inferno as he passed. He wanted those who watched from inside to think that he was really leaving town and that he was not coming back.

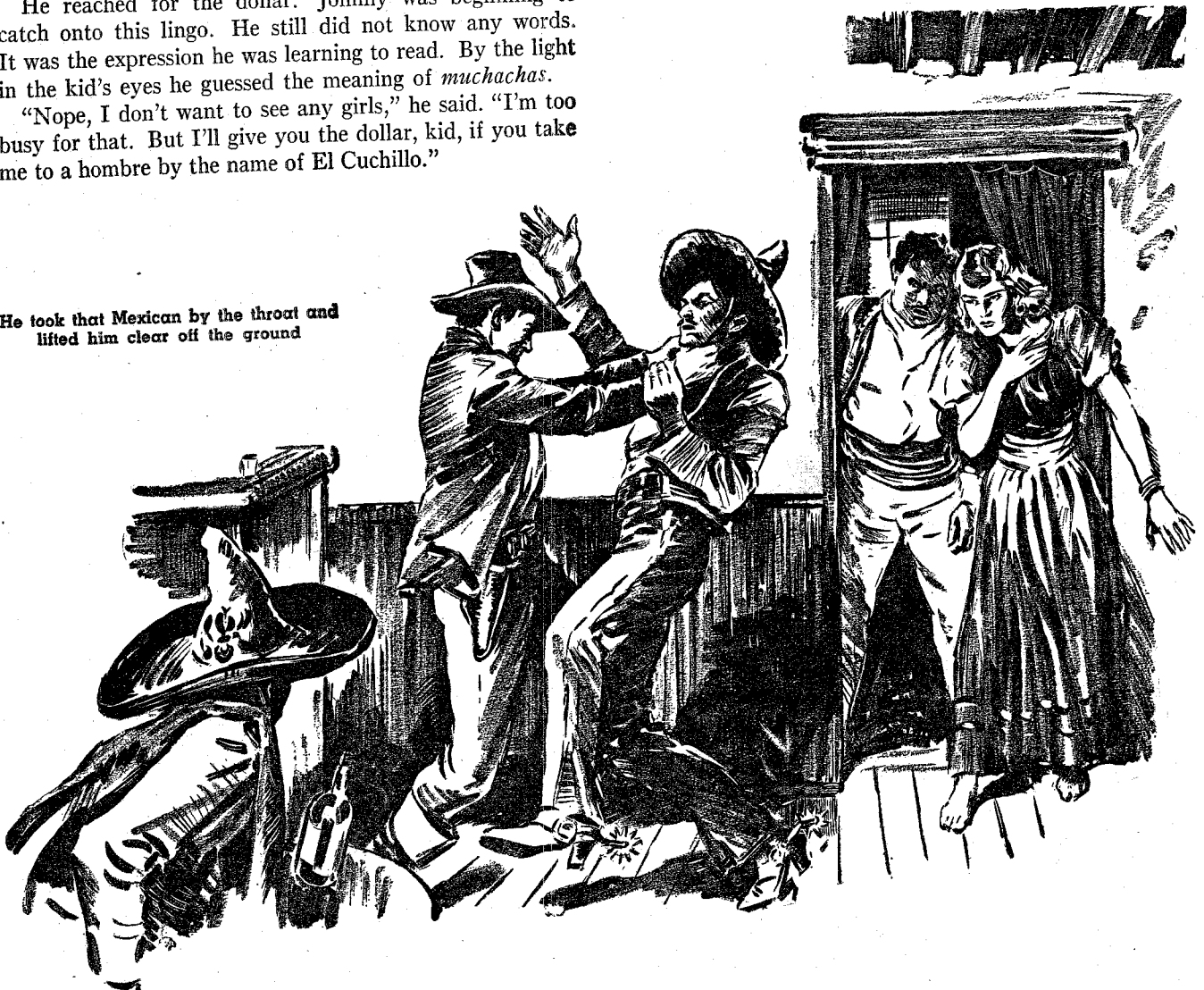
## CHAPTER II

### MEXICAN WELCOME

HIS passing did not go unobserved. The fat bartender brought the news to the back room where the red-headed man sat at a cigarette-scarred table with a tall, handsome caballero. The caballero drew deep on a brown-paper cigarette and blew a thick ring that sailed slowly toward the shadowed ceiling.

"Rojo Red, that's one thing I'll always regret," he said, "not being here when that gringo kicked El Cuchillo in the face. He was still unconscious when I saw them carrying him out of town."

He took that Mexican by the throat and lifted him clear off the ground



"Maybe dead," Rojo Red said. "Mike, I'm scared."

"What of?" The caballero always seemed to be laughing. Now he frowned. "He a friend of yours—the gringo?"

"Never saw him before. It's Panchita. When her mother died I should have gotten her out of this hell hole. Even if El Cuchillo doesn't live, his men saw her shoot the knife out of his hand. They'll be back. What they can't do to him—they'll do to her."

"Where is she?"

"She's in the patio."

Mike said: "When it's dark, get her out of here. I'm going to catch up with that gringo and bring him back. You say he was killing mad?"

"Yeah. Easy-going kid. Don't seem to have a nerve in him. But I never saw a hombre blow up like he did when El Cuchillo kicked that old crowbait mare of his."

"Were those his horses?" Mike's voice had lost its soft Mexican inflection and become hard, incisive. "You know where you got them?"

Rojo Red shrugged. "I don't know where they came from. I bought them from—uh—the boys. They'll be bringing some more along pretty soon. But"—he leaned forward in the table and his voice dropped—"I ain't got a doubt that they were Johnny Tyne's."

Mike stood up. "It would be nice," he said, "veree nize to be rid of El Cuchillo. It would be verree, verree nize to be rid of him and not be blamed for it. And if we shoot his killer, it might help us with El Presidente."

Rojo Red shuddered. When Mike talked that way, and a touch of the Mexican accent came into his voice, it always gave Rojo the shivers. Rojo had broken the law in many ways during his life. He had killed his man. But he had never learned how to doublecross with a clear conscience.

"Damn you, Mike," he said bitterly, "if that's your scheme, don't count me in on it." He stood up, his back stiff. "And don't ring my daughter in on it either!"

Mike laughed easily.

"Forget it," he said. "Panchita and I will be married some day, and I'd never do a thing to hurt my future wife or father-in-law." He stepped toward the door. "I'll be back with that gringo before midnight. Let it be known. But get Panchita out of here, some place where she'll be safe."

"I'll take care of her," Rojo Red said. "You take care of your own little schemes."

AS BESSIE trotted along, Johnny saw things he had not noticed when riding into town. It was as if the girl with the new-gold hair, the beggar and the kid, the fine but dilapidated-looking cathedral had all combined to open his eyes. He saw the dusty mesquite covering the flat country, the mountains, blue and gigantic and unreal to the south and west. He saw the ratty goats eating mesquite beans, a gray coyote in the distance, his head up, watching him, backed by an endless planting of cactus that was in neat, even rows. He saw, too, in his mind, a picture of Inferno many years ago when the adobe houses were new and the town was rich enough to build that great cathedral.

And Johnny wondered what had happened to make it only a ghost of its former glory and a hangout for horse-thieves and paupers.

He rode along, thinking so hard of these things that it was Bessie who discovered that they were being followed. Bessie, possibly remembering the kick and the spur mark

that still stung her flank, broke into a fast run. Johnny looked back over his shoulder. A dust cloud whirled along the road, red in the glow of a setting sun. A rider was coming up at a good, fast clip.

Bessie was willing, but having been a mother so often, she was unable to outdistance even one of those tired goats feeding on mesquite beans. So Johnny pulled her down to a walk, looked over his six-shooter to make sure there was no sand in the works, and pretended to admire the view.

When hoofbeats became audible, Johnny glanced back again. When the beat of them came close and the tattoo of a gallop broke down into a trot, he pulled over to the side of the road. This was not one of Cuchillo's boys, but a stranger to Johnny Tyne, and a wide, friendly smile showed his teeth white against dark skin. He rode with both hands on the reins, well up in front of him at a safe distance from his holstered guns.

The stranger halted beside Johnny, lifted his big, span-gled sombrero.

"She ees Johnny Tyne," he said, "or am I the mistake."

"You are not the mistake," Johnny said, feeling very much in the open. "But don't pull the old gag that you saw me somewhere before—because you didn't."

"And much is the sorrow for that!" The stranger held out his hand. "Veree glad I am." He bowed. "Don Miguel Kelly y Alvarez a sus órdenes."

Johnny shook with him. The man's grip was solid. It made Johnny feel as if he could trust him. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Ordenes," he said.

Don Miguel laughed heartily. "Meester Ordenes. She ees fonnny. Americanos ees alway make the joke. Don Yonny, a sus órdenes, she ees to say, at your service."

Johnny laughed with him then. It was a wonderful world, he decided. Here Don Miguel was thinking Johnny was odd—and Johnny thought the Mexicans were funny.

"Don Miguel," Johnny said. "I guess I just don't know my way around this country. You gents don't do things like we do back home. Why are you at my service? I didn't hire you to do anything for me."

"Eet ees just the politeness," Don Miguel explained. "Eet does not mean but the same like 'pleased tuh meecheer'."

"That's right," Johnny nodded. "We say that when we ain't pleased at all. Like just now. But it's okay with me."

"Ah, she ees fine," Don Miguel said. He glanced down the road in the direction from which he had come. There were no more dust clouds in the crimson sunset. The goats had started wandering slowly back toward Inferno. Don Miguel bowed again to Johnny. "The night, she ees here. You, Don Yonny, have done me the beeg good, the favor. My house, she ees yours."

THIS gent was nuts, Johnny decided. He was only curious now how Don Miguel happened to know him and what the favor might be that had been so big the Mexican felt he had to give away his house to even the score. He was about to ask, when it occurred to him that this might be another of those Mexican phrases which did not mean anything. So he said instead:

"Thanks for the house, Don Miguel, but I won't need it. This country and me don't savvy each other. I'm headin' out of it and back home as fast as my Bessie'll take me."

Don Miguel could not be put down. The white teeth flashed again.



"For the favor—I mus' geeve Don Yonny the favor. You 'ave keek een the face El Cuchillo."

Johnny grinned, thinking about that scrap with El Cuchillo. He'd like to get another crack at that hombre. "I would of kicked him twice as hard," Johnny said, "only I was sorta off balance."

"My beeg sorrow," said Don Miguel, looking very sad, "ees that I do not see these keek. I weel feex heem, as the Americano say, so Don Yonny keek, w'at you call heem, *un mas*—wance again!"

That Johnny itched for the chance showed plainly in his eyes. Don Miguel added:

"I weel also show Don Yonny hees *caballos*—hees 'orses."

"You know where my horses are at?" Johnny burst out.

"*Si*," Don Miguel said. He laughed heartily as if there was a big joke. "Me, I buy these 'orses from the *ladrón*—the rustler. *Muy barato*—veree cheap. El Cuchillo, he come in the night and steal them."

This did not sound funny to Johnny Tyne. But he guessed he would never understand the Mexican sense of humor. Even if he had bought some rustled horses, or if he had stolen them himself, he would not think it so funny as Don Miguel did to have them hi-jacked.

It made Johnny wonder if this smooth-looking caballero wasn't putting him on. Maybe he had been sent out by El Cuchillo to lead Johnny into a trap where they could even up the score for that kick in the fce.

It was a chance Johnny would have to take if he hoped to get back his horses.

"El Cuchillo is an enemy of yours? You'll tell me where to find him?"

"*Si, poco pronto*."

"And then," Johnny asked. "Supposin' I get back those horses, then what are you going to do? You reckon on keeping them because you bought them? Or do I get them, because they were mine in the first place?"

Don Miguel shrugged expressively. "*Mañana*, she ees anothaire day. Who know w'at *mañana* weel breeng?"

Johnny certainly didn't know. But Don Miguel's answer made him laugh. He held out a hand. "Okay, Don Miguel. I liked the way you put that about *mañana*. I'll string along with you, hombre. But don't get the notion in your head that I'll be asleep tomorrow."

Don Miguel shook his hand. There was a challenge in his eyes that Johnny did not miss. Don Miguel, however, he was sure, would behave okay until they had eliminated El Cuchillo. After that he would bear watching.

"Okay," Don Miguel repeated, "That 'okay' she ees the nize word. He lifted his reins. "*Vámonos*!"

A funny word and a funny world, thought Johnny Tyne. *Vámonos* sounded more like vamoose, a home-town word to "beat it" than it did like "let's go." He smiled thinking about it, thinking how these Mexicans had everything upside-down. They painted terrible pictures of drunks going to hell on the sides of their saloons to encourage people to come in and do likewise. They gave you their house when they meant nothing of the kind. They promised to help you now and cut your throat tomorrow.

A funny world and funny people in it. Don Miguel was repeating *Vámanos* and gesturing to Johnny to follow. Why not?

The cowboy tickled Bessie's ribs with his spurs, and the old mare trotted along, doing her best to keep up with Don Miguel's big gelding.

DON MIGUEL turned off the main road for a side path leading in the general direction of the maguay plantation where Johnny had seen the coyote earlier in the evening. They rode steadily toward a clump of great trees at the foot of a blue mountain. It was dark when they arrived, candles flickering like fire-flies behind the leaves, and it seemed to Johnny that they had come to another town, smaller than El Infierno, completely surrounded by an old wall.

Beyond a heavy, newly-painted gate, a short, dark man, bare-footed, in the pajama-like white clothing of the poor Mexican, ran up to Don Miguel. Don Miguel spoke in rapid Spanish. The man lifted his straw hat to Johnny, then trotted alongside as Johnny and Don Miguel rode to the big house some quarter of a mile from the wall. As they rode along, Johnny noticed other houses, small, made of adobe and thatched with the wide base leaves of the maguay cactus. He passed a couple of long, barn-like structures and smelled the same strange, damp-rotten odor that had come to him in the Cantina Infierno.

Then they were at the big house, bright with strong lights. Its main door was of wrought iron, stout as the entry-way of the Deer Lodge Prison up in Montana. Unlike that door, this one was open. Beside it, stood another Mexican who bowed deeply as Don Miguel dismounted.

It gave Johnny a queer feeling of uncertainty. But he had gotten himself into this with his eyes open. He was not going to back out now.

He slipped from the saddle. The little Mexican who had come from the gate, took the horses to lead them off into the night. Don Miguel was speaking to Johnny, waving toward the door, repeating that the house was Don Yonny's. Johnny thanked him for the present and went inside, blinking his eyes in the glare of many-candled crystal chandeliers. Don Miguel followed, spoke to the servant, then took Johnny's arm and led him into the main room where a low fire flickered in a great, carved fireplace.

This place was a dream to Johnny Tyne—like the fairy palaces his mother had described to him when he was a baby. But Don Miguel was very real. His smile was wide.

"Fine dump, huh, like the Americano say?"

"Yeah," Johnny had to admit, "it sure is some dump. Who'd you steal her off? Or did you buy this *muy barato*, too?"

"She ees of my grandfather, of hees grandfather, and she ees today my *ranchero*." Don Miguel frowned. "But *mañana*—"

He opened his hands, wide and empty.

Johnny walked on, past great oak tables and chairs, red leather, gold and silver trimming and ornaments, up to the head-high fireplace and its warm glow.

"What do you mean—*mañana*?" he asked. Don Miguel had spoken of *mañana* before. "What's going to happen tomorrow?"

"*Quien sabe*?" Don Miguel said darkly. "Who knows?" He cupped a hand behind his ear as if listening for some minute sound. "Trobble. Wan hears eet een the air. *Revolución*. The people, they are seek of *El Presidente* and he weel not leesen to them."

"Gosh," Johnny said, "I thought he had that job for keeps!"

"Even the forever has the end," Don Miguel said. "*Mañana*—"

Tomorrow, Johnny thought, was sure going to be a big day. It was just his luck to cross the border with a thing like this brewing. He wanted to hear more about it, but the servant was coming down the room and Don Miguel was looking at a chandelier with an air of preoccupation. The *mozo* carried a silver tray holding a bright porcelain bottle and two crystal glasses that reflected the candlelight. There was a yellow bowl containing quartered limes; a little dish of salt beside it.

The *mozo* set the tray on a stand near the red leather chairs, then backed to the wall, standing there like a butler, his face dark and blank. Don Miguel poured Johnny and himself each a drink of pale, amber liquor. Johnny was about to swallow it as he would have a slug of red-eye when he noticed that Don Miguel was going through some sort of Mexican ritual. He had picked up a bit of the lime and deposited a pinch of salt in the natural little depression at the base of his left thumb. Curious, Johnny followed suit.

Don Miguel lifted his glass with his right hand, held it before his eyes. "*Salud!*"

"Mud in yore eye!" Johnny said.

Don Miguel licked the salt, drank the drink, sucked the lime. Johnny did likewise. Tears smarted in his eyes. He licked his lips, grinned.

Don Miguel bowed. "She ees the *grande* compliment. We make her ourself."

"You made this stuff?"

Don Miguel nodded proudly.

That explained the great planting of maguay, the long buildings on the road to the big house, and the rotten smell of them. Don Miguel was in the liquor business. He and all his grandfathers had made a fortune from it.

"These"—Don Miguel indicated the bottle—"ees *mescal*. Veree old. Two years een the keg."

A funny way, Johnny thought, to mention age in such an ancient country. But time was long in this country and the thirst for *mescal* always strong. And *mañana*? *Quien sabe*? Who knows what will happen tomorrow? You might as well drink it now.

"About *mañana*," Johnny said, "and those horses and *El Presidente*—"

Don Miguel wouldn't let him finish. "*Si!*" he cried. "*Bravo!*" Quickly he poured two more drinks and made a toast. "*Viva El Presidente!*"

Johnny drank. As the stuff jolted down into his stomach, he heard a cry from the far end of the room:

"*Abajo Madero!*"

IT WAS a woman's voice, and Johnny recognized it. His head turned swiftly on his neck. In the brief glance he had seen Don Miguel's cheek muscles go stiff, and a sudden dull burning in the eyes of the *mozo*.

Then he was watching the golden-haired girl from the cantina walking gracefully on bare feet down the long room.

At the fireplace she stopped, whirled around, her full dress flaring about her hips. She stood with her back to the glowing coals and smiled warmly on the two men. Nodding to the servant, she said:

"*Buenas noches, Pablo.*" To Johnny and Don Miguel, she added. "Good evening, *señores!*"

Don Miguel and the *mozo* bowed. This was something Johnny would have to learn if he hung around this country much longer.

"*Buenas noches, señorita!*"

"Pablo," the girl said to the *mozo*, "*favor de traerme un tasse de agua?*" To Johnny, she added: "Don't look so foolish. I'm only asking for a glass of water."

"For all I knew," Johnny grinned, "you might have been telling him to cut off my head."

The girl laughed. The *mozo*, a sullen-looking *hombre* Johnny wouldn't have had hanging around any house he lived in, seemed not to want to do as the girl had asked. Slowly, he shuffled off. When he was gone, the girl said hastily to Don Miguel:

"What's the idea of bringing Johnny Tyne out here? You might just as well have shot him in the back in town and saved some trouble."

The pleasant glow of liquor became ice in Johnny's stomach. He reached for his gun. Swiftly, the girl stopped him. She let her hand remain on his as she said:

"No—not now. You won't need it yet. Mike's okay, but a fool."

Don Miguel laughed. "It was his idea. He wanted another chance at El Cuchillo. I told him I'd fix it up."

Johnny Tyne felt the fool now. Only the girl's soft hand on his kept him from pulling this gun. Don Miguel had led him into a trap. The girl called him Mike—and this Mexican who had stumbled through his English now spoke the language perfectly.

"When Pablo comes with the water," Panchita said, "you and I will say goodnight, Johnny Tyne. Mike, with the help of my father, was planning a little doublecross. He's an expert at it."

Johnny's gun-hand tugged under the girl's restraint.

"Your father know you came out here?" Don Miguel asked hastily.

"No, he doesn't. He sent me over to Francisco's house. I guessed what was up—and I didn't like it." Her blue eyes darkened. "*El Presidente. . .*"

Her lovely mouth shut with a snap. Facing her, his back to the doorway, Johnny could not see what had caused her to stop. Now she was smiling again as she had when she first came in, pretending that this was only a little social call, and the *mozo*, Pablo, shuffled up on his silent sandals, bearing a glass and water that misted the outside of a silver pitcher. He poured Panchita a drink. She said "*Gracias*" when she took it. When she had finished she said something in Spanish followed by:

"Now we shall go, Johnny Tyne."

OUTSIDE, while waiting for the horses, Johnny studied this girl with furtive glances. Here in the soft night she seemed lovelier than she had in the saloon, smaller. Yet her round chin was set, and her shoulders square, and Johnny remembered the shot she had taken at El Cuchillo's knife, and knew that she would fight like a wildcat once she had a cause and was cornered.

He wanted to ask her many questions. But the feeling that Pablo was nearby kept him silent. He did not trust that *hombre*. Somehow he had gathered that Panchita and Don Miguel had no faith in him, either.

The servant who had taken the horses earlier came up with them now. The girl's big bay carried no saddle. She vaulted up, sitting on his back with both her legs on the nigh side as if in a side-saddle. Johnny climbed aboard old Bessie, and they trotted slowly down the path, by the big warehouses, the adobe huts, to the gate. There the servant left them and they rode on into the night.



A moon like a flattened pumpkin hung in the sky, and the stars were very close in the crystal Mexican night. The dry hopelessness of the daytime had gone. Mystery and romance had taken its place.

Clear of the trees, the girl laughed softly, swung her right leg over the horse so that she was riding astride. It pushed her dress well up above her bare, brown knees.

"If you ever see my old man," she said to Johnny, "don't tell him I rode this way. He's old fashioned. He'd skin me alive."

Johnny forced his eyes away from her. She was so beautiful it hurt. Beautiful and strong, and not at all hard like the girls one would find in hometown honkeytonks. There was something wild about her, but it was the wildness of the mountain lion.

"He—is he that big red-headed gent?" Johnny asked.

"*Si, señor.* Rojo Red, they call him. He looks hard as granite, but he's got a big, tender heart."

"A big, tender heart," Johnny said, "that doesn't stop him from rigging a doublecross with that weasel, Don Miguel."

Her laughter was musical, soft as the night. She gave no answers as they trotted on through the yellow moonlight. When they came to the meeting of the side road and the main trail, she reined in. From far in the distance the yap of the coyote rang through the fields. She came close, forcing him to look down at her.

"So it's goodbye. Don Johnny," she said.

"Hell, no!" Johnny denied. "It's only—uh—hello. I'm taking you back to *Infierno*."

She pointed down the roadway as if she had not heard him. "Go straight. In two hours you will come to a big road. Take that. In two more days you will cross the *Rio Grande del Norte*." She kicked her horse in the ribs. "*Adios!*"

Johnny moved swiftly. It was instinct, rather than thought, that prompted him. He reached for her, just as her mount started to move. With both hands, he got her by the slender waist and the horse ran out from under her. Old Bessie sagged. The saddle creaked, but Johnny held on, and the girl was so startled she was sitting across his knees before she had a chance to put up a struggle.

"GOSH!" Johnny was as surprised as she that this had happened. "I—uh—didn't mean to do this, ma'am. I just wasn't ready for you to go yet."

Her eyes turned up to him. There was starlight in them, and though she did not actually move, he felt that she was cuddling closer to him.

"All my life," she said, "I've wanted something like this, dreamed of it. I've dreamed someone would come and take me away from *Infierno*." Her voice became brittle. "But it's too late now, Don Johnny. Put me down. My horse will come back in a minute."

She pushed at his chest, but he held his grip.

"I'll let you go as soon as you tell me two things. What's going on around here—and where are my horses?"

"I don't know where your horses are—and nothing's going on around here!"

She struggled to get away. It made Bessie stamp nervously, trying to keep balanced, and Johnny held her tighter. Now he wanted never to let her go. He laughed.

"Then it's an even swap, kid. I'll trade those horses to Mexico—for you. I'll take you back across the Border."

She was strong and wiry for all her soft roundness. But

there was no use fighting against this tall gringo, and she had no real wish to struggle against him. She went lax in his arms and, because Bessie was fretting, he stepped down from the saddle and stood the girl on her bare feet facing him. He held her with one arm around her shoulder, and tipped up her chin so that she had to look at him.

"Rojo Red and Don Miguel are up to some sort of hell," he said. "They hate *El Cuchillo*, but are playing along with him. You're afraid I'll find out what they're doing and spill the beans."

"No!" She shook her head, causing the bright curls to dance in the starlight. She did not want to look in his eyes, but when she glanced down he lifted her face again. "I'm afraid for you," she said. "They can take care of themselves. *El Cuchillo*, you didn't kill him and they don't dare to. Mike was—I heard him talking—he was going to kill you when you had killed *El Cuchillo*!"

"I kinda thought so," Johnny said. The girl was trembling. Johnny's arm held her snugly. "I was ready for him." He was silent for a moment, looking past her, down the road to *Infierno*. Her horse had not come back as she promised. It had trotted on out of sight and Bessie was staring after it. He knew then what he had to do. He dropped his arm from her shoulder, causing her to glance up uncertainly.

"You better go back to Don Miguel's shack," he said, his lips thin. "Your horse has gone home. I'm gittin'."

"You're going back to *Infierno*!" she said slowly.

He stepped away silently, put a foot into the stirrup and went up onto Bessie's back. She caught his belt.

"You mustn't!" she cried. "You don't know what you're running into. *El Cuchillo* is one of *El Presidente's* men. If you go after him you'll have the whole Mexican army after you."

"The whole Mexican army ain't big enough," Johnny grinned.

He took her hands in his, moved them from his belt, held them for a moment.

"You and your old man are on the other team," he said, seeing light. "So is Don Miguel. But you're not quite ready yet. You haven't enough horses and guns and soldiers. You're afraid that *El Presidente* will find out about your schemes if anything happens to *El Cuchillo*!"

She would not answer. Her silence told him that he had discovered the truth. Then he dropped her hands, tickled Bessie with the spurs. Bessie lumbered ahead. The girl ran after him, calling:

"Don Johnny—Johnny Tyne—"

## CHAPTER IV

### FIESTA WITH LEAD

HE FORCED Bessie into the tight conglomeration of horses, mules, burros and rickety crow-baits crowding the front of the *Cantina Infierno*. That afternoon, during the siesta, you would have thought the town deserted. Now it looked as if there was some kind of celebration going on. Groups of men were gathered around the corners. Everywhere was movement, people, horses. The sound of a band playing martial music came to him from the plaza; and inside the saloon some men were singing while twanging the guitar.

You would never guess by the surface that a revolution was boiling below it.

Johnny slid from the saddle, pushed his way through the crowded horses to the dusty sidewalk edging the cantina. He was a damn fool, he thought, to mix in with a thing like this. One lone *Americano*—and a Mexican revolution. He was a double-damned fool, for *El Presidente* had been in power for many years. *El Presidente* had filled the country with spies, men in his pay like El Cuchillo, men like that Pablo, who had served his master for many years and now wanted his master's goods. Johnny knew that he was a triple-damned fool to think that he could do anything for or against ten million people who were about to rise up and change their overlords who had kept in power through bribery and gunpowder.

But he did figure that even one lone *Americano* might be able to bring a little happiness into the blue eyes of a lovely *señorita*—and that he might, incidentally, get back some of his old man's horses.

So he stepped into the saloon, smiling, blinking his eyes, instantly aware that everyone there had heard of the gringo who had kicked El Cuchillo in the ugly face. They moved aside, making a path for him. At the bar they hastily drank their drinks, leaving the place bare for this man who had done what they all dreamed of doing.

Johnny Tyne stopped there, near the door that was hung with a curtain of stringed beans. The fat bartender, frightened to a pale yellow, waddled down to him. Johnny said:

"I want to see your boss." There was only blankness behind the fear on the barkeeper's face. Johnny struggled to remember the Spanish he had heard. "Favor de fetch Rojo Red!" he got out.

The blank look left the bartender's eyes. The fear remained. He pointed to the outside door with a trembling hand, said something in Spanish, then motioned with two hands as if throwing something away and added: "Rojo Red." He finished by shaking his head.

"Oh, so he's gone, huh?" Johnny said. "Okay; I'll wait for him."

Still smiling, he stepped through the curtain-shrouded doorway at the rear of the cantina. Because he did not want to block whatever light came through to the dark

room, and because he was a cautious man, he moved swiftly sidewise, bringing his back against an adobe wall.

He heard the beaded beans rattling, and a murmur arising in the cantina. He heard the words "El Cuchillo" and "Rojo Red" and "Panchita." He also heard "gringo" many times.

Then he became aware of the fact that he was not alone in this room. There was someone near him in the darkness, trying to keep down his breathing so that his location would not be given away. Johnny drew his gun, hunkered down on his heels and said:

"Okay, Rojo Red, turn up the light. And don't try any funny tricks or you'll never see your daughter again."

Only silence answered him.

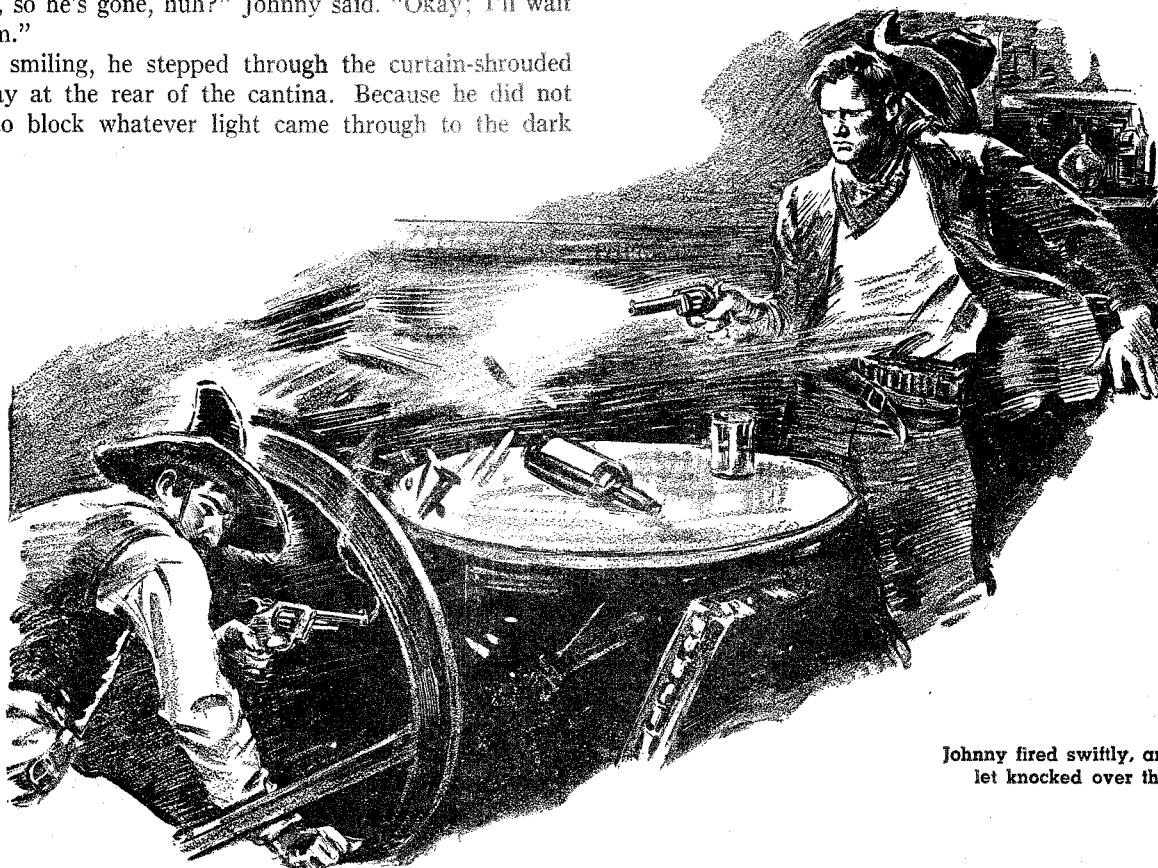
"I know you're in here, Rojo Red," Johnny said. "And I'm goin' to start shootin' in a second if you don't light up."

Now the talk in the cantina was so loud Johnny could not hear the slighter sounds. He glanced sidewise as the stringed beans rattled, felt a cool breath of air on his cheek. His eyeballs turned swiftly. He could see nothing in here but a yellow path on the floor, a dim table and some chairs, some rubbish. He thought he heard a scraping on the floor, the click of a door latch.

The son of a gun! He was running out! An open door had caused that breeze.

Johnny jumped to his feet, took one quick step forward. In that split second he knew he had been tricked. The barrel of a gun jabbed into his back.

JOHNNY dropped. The gun blasted, knocking off his hat, and Johnny whirled around. His six-shooter bucked twice, ejecting blue-orange pencils of flame. In the light of the blazing gunpowder he saw the man who had come up behind him. He saw that it was not Rojo Red, and that



Johnny fired swiftly, and his bullet knocked over the table



he had hit him square in the chest. The man's fingers were splaying, dropping his gun. The man's jaw was falling, an expression of agonized pain on his dark face. Then the light was out again before the man collapsed, dead, and Johnny was momentarily blinded by the two bright jets.

Johnny swung on his toes, still close to the ground. He wished he had had sense enough to leave his spurs behind for they rattled every time he moved. He wished he had never come into this place, but had figured some way of getting Rojo Red to meet him outside.

The three shots had silenced the murmuring in the cantina. The sound of the body dropping brought a sigh. And now, in this dark room, Johnny distinguished the sharp, muffled gasps of a man. It was beyond him, close to the far wall. Whoever had skipped out had left behind him at least two gunmen to do the job where his nerve had failed.

Johnny took a chance. Waiting was making him jittery. "Rojo—"

Instantly his voice was answered.

A bullet hummed by, smashed into the wall with a dull *chunk*. Firing at the flame, Johnny shot swiftly. The bullet crashed into a leg of the table, splintering it and knocking the table over. Glass, bottles, a tin tray all clattered on the earth floor as Johnny's adversary shot back at him.

That gent could shoot. He put the bullet right through the heart of the spot where Johnny had been when he triggered.

In moving away, Johnny found himself beside the dead man. He lifted the body, groaned, dropped it with a noticeable thud. Then he held his breath and waited.

The man in the shadows did not shoot again, but his patience was running thin. Johnny could hear him shifting his position. Johnny heard him breathe convulsively, and by the creak of leather he knew that he was standing. Still, he waited.

Now the man was coming across the room, treading softly, and with each step he took, Johnny moved one farther from the body. Johnny got to the side wall before the man showed like a shadow beyond the lighted doorway. There the gunman hesitated, afraid to come into the open. Johnny held his fire though he could easily have picked him off. It was more important to him to know what was back of his reception than it was to pile up a neat stack of corpses.

After a while, the gunman moved closer to the light, staring at the spot where he had heard the body fall. Then he called something in Spanish. Talk in the cantina had dropped to nothing. It seemed to Johnny that the place was deserted except for himself and the gunman and the one he had killed.

The Mexican called again. Fearfully, the bartender came to the curtained doorway, parted the bean strings, poked a candle through, then his head.

Johnny said: "Just hoist yore hands real high, mister."

The bartender froze, candle-light glinting in his black eyes. The gunman, caught flat-footed, lifted his hands, let his six-shooter clatter to the ground. Johnny saw the man's hands moving back. But he was not to be caught twice by the same trick.

"Drop that knife!" he said. "That—uh—*cuchillo*."

With his left hand he went through the motions of taking a Bowie from a neck sheath. The gunman watched him like a cat, doing as Johnny had ordered. Then Johnny waved his gun at the bartender.

"Come inside, mister. You and yore friend back up against that wall!"

Terrified, the bartender followed the directions pointed out to him by Johnny's six-gun barrel. His eyes wavered. Johnny's traced them, and Johnny began to laugh.

"*Buenas noches*," Johnny greeted in newly learned Spanish. "*Buenas noches, Don Rojo Red*."

Rojo Red answered with a malevolent glare. Rojo Red couldn't say a thing, for he was tied stoutly to a chair, and a hastily made gag was bound over his mouth. During the entire fight he had been in the middle of it, square in the center of the cross-fire.

JOHNNY'S back was to a wall; he was facing the two captives and could also watch the door to the cantina. There was a second door, he noticed, directly opposite the beaded one. There was also a window on that wall, giving out on a patio, rather than a street, but it did not make him feel any better. He had felt a breeze, heard that door close, and had good reasons to believe that one or more men who had been here when he arrived were now out there. They could pot him easily through the window.

Quickly, he stepped across the room, slashed the gag over Rojo Red's mouth and the ropes binding the big man to the chair. Then he moved back to the corner of the room where he was protected from the window and could keep his eyes on both doors. Rojo Red, as soon as he found his voice, began to cuss in a fancy mixture of Spanish, Americano, and Indio. Johnny stopped laughing at him.

"Cut it short, Rojo," he said, "and do some translatin' for me. Tell your barkeeper to tie up that mug and lay him on the floor. Then tell him to chase the boys out of the cantina. And don't try anything else, redhead, or it'll be the last time you'll ever jump a track."

The barkeeper looked somewhat relieved when Rojo Red spoke. Swiftly, he did the job demanded of him. While he was at it, Johnny asked Rojo Red:

"There was one other feller here, maybe two. These two hombres here look kinda familiar. Where did the other one go?"

"For El Cuchillo," Rojo Red said. "Yuh didn't think they were fetchin' Santy Claus?"

"Wouldn't be surprised," Johnny said. "Either of those two gents know English?"

"They won't need to know English," Rojo Red said bitterly, "when their pal brings El Cuchillo."

"They'll need to know how to pray," Johnny said, "if they pull any more knives or guns on me." The bartender had finished tying the gunman, so Johnny took time to reload. "Your daughter ain't at the place you sent her to," he informed Rojo Red.

"I know that," Red said dismally. "These boys discovered she was gone. They were trying to find out where she was—and you, too—when you busted in. For the first time in my life I was telling them the truth, but they didn't believe me." Rojo Red had been stretching, to get back the use of his arms and legs. Now he got to his feet. "If you've hurt that little girl, I'll—"

"Cool off, mister!" Johnny snapped. "I came here to tell you where she was. On one condition—"

"Yeah?"

"You don't have any business mixing her in this kind of hell," Johnny said. "I'll tell you where she is providin' you'll get her across the Border immediately. If you've

got no place to send her, you can ship her up to my folks."

Rojo Red said: "Okay, cowboy!"

"Then let's get out of here," Johnny suggested. "I don't want to say hello to El Cuchillo until Panchita's on her way to the States."

Rojo Red studied Johnny closely for a second, then strode stiffly toward the doorway. Johnny waited until he was almost there before following him. There was one place in that room where he could not watch both the doors and the window at once. There he hesitated a second until Rojo Red was in the doorway. Then he jumped across the open space.

Johnny heard the window crash, but he could do nothing about it because he was moving too rapidly. He heard the sharp bark of the gun.

Then the bullet smashed into his ribs, spinning him around like a top. He felt all the sensation going from his body in one mighty sweep. Then he was dropping, falling endlessly into nothingness.

## CHAPTER V

### VIVA VILLA

JOHNNY was still falling. He landed very hard and the jolt brought some consciousness back to him. It took quite a while before he realized that he had not landed in the room where he had started falling, but was some place else that was steamy hot, where the floor was filthy with half-rotten straw.

He turned over, and the wounded side sent sick, knife-like pains shooting through his head and body, whirled around in his stomach with the grip of nausea. He gritted his teeth until it felt as if he were biting sand. This steadied his nerves so that he could sit up.

Someone was talking. Johnny tried desperately to listen and failed because the buzzing in his ears made the words sound like gibberish. Then he discovered a most extraordinary thing. He thought he had fallen through a trapdoor and had just struck bottom. But the blood on his side was caked hard, and the high, tiny windows in this room were gray with daylight.

He closed his eyes and slept. . .

When he woke, the buzzing was gone from his ears, the film from his eyes. His side burned fearfully, and his stomach was one great bite of hunger. He became aware of the fact that he was not alone.

"Close your eyes," a voice snapped.

Johnny looked at a man with a month's beard on his chin, with a white, desperately thin face. He was also looking at Rojo Red with a bandage over his red head.

"Close your eyes," the bearded man hissed again. "If they see you're awake they'll take you out of here. You might never come back alive."

Johnny's eyes opened wider, then closed like a rabbit trap. It had taken all this time for him to realize that he was in a jail, a *cárcel*, and that Rojo Red and this bearded skeleton were locked up with him.

"And don't say nothin'," the bearded one said. "Wait'll it's dark and they don't know who's talkin' or who's awake."

But Johnny Tyne could not bear this blank silence. He opened his eyes again and said determinedly:

"The hell with them. They got nothin' on me. I'm goin' to holler for the judge and make them let me out."

The bearded man laughed, Rojo Red looked very sad. "They ain't got nothin' on you?" he said.

"It was self-defence," Johnny insisted. "Plain as daylight. They can't lock me up for that. The hombre I shot started it. I was just making a peaceful call on you."

The bearded one said: "That's absolutely right, Johnny. They can't lock you up for that. It's only a dream. You ain't really here."

Johnny had sense enough to know when he was being rawhided. He got the drift and shut up. Rojo Red, his pale blue eyes burning, asked:

"Panchita, Johnny Tyne, where's she?"

Johnny was really waking up now to the situation. He said:

"Gosh, Rojo Red, damned if I know. She came out to stop the little double-cross you and Don Miguel were rigging on me. Her horse ran away. I left her out there by the cactus patch when I come to fetch you. I was figuring on forgiving you for that doublecross if you'd take her across the Border." A bright light came to Johnny's eyes. "Say, is this mixed up with that revolution I heard about?"

Rojo Red was hardly relieved with Johnny's news. The bearded man said:

"It sure as hell is, and you're on the wrong side, Johnny." There was a touch of hysteria in his voice. "I'm on the wrong side, too. A hundred bucks a day, they promised me, in El Paso, and bullets for the old Hotchkiss. But when I found out what it was about, I started for home. This is as far as I got!" His grim face was ghostly. "They woulda shot me long ago only they figger on my changing my mind if I get enough of this hole. They need machine-guns!" He ended with significant bitterness.

"But," Johnny said, "I don't even know what it's all about. I ain't on either team. I never even seen a machine gun."

"But you kicked El Cuchillo in the face, and he's one of *El Presidente's* men. You shot Pepe, and he's one of El Cuchillo's men," Rojo Red said. "We're all in the same boat."

"And it's been snagged," Johnny said. He smiled reminiscently. "When I was a kid, my old man took me down to Saint Louis once, down the Missouri. We were having a race with another feller when the *Saint Jo Belle* run up on a snag. It sunk quicker'n you could wink, and Pa swum ashore with me on his back. Then he licked me because I near choked him to death on the way."

Neither of them laughed at Johnny's story. There was a clanging of spurs outside, a rattle of Spanish. The machine-gunner said:

"It's six o'clock. They're changin' guards. In a couple of minutes we can all have a drink and forget that the boat's goin' down."

"Some jail," Johnny observed, "servin' six-o'clock drinks."

"You'll learn," the bearded man said. "Rojo Red and me had an agreement with the night guard. For ten times what it costs he'd bring a bottle now and then from Rojo's saloon. It's over there hid in the hay."

Johnny started to reach for it. Rojo Red hissed suddenly. Johnny froze. The heavy, mouldy oaken door was slowly opening, letting in a shaft of bright light. Then El Cuchillo loomed up there, and a couple of other men with rifles at ready.

El Cuchillo came into the filthy room and stood over Johnny Tyne.



Johnny tried to duck, but the pain and the hunger had weakened and slowed him. El Cuchillo's heavy foot struck him full in the face, knocked him back so that his head hit the rock wall of the *cárcel*.

Johnny yelled, fighting mad. His fists clenched and he wove to his feet. Through a crimson mist he saw the big mouth of El Cuchillo laughing at him. But when he struck out, he instinctively knew that a six-week's-old baby could have done more damage. His knees were giving out under him.

El Cuchillo snapped Spanish orders.

Two of the men who had come with him took Johnny by the arms and dragged him out of there.

THEY took him to a big room where a strong light seared his eyes, where three judges in military uniforms sat behind a high bench. The judges yapped questions at him in Spanish and he stood there, not understanding anything, licking the salty blood that trickled down his lips.

El Cuchillo made a long-winded speech. A little man, sitting at a low desk beside the bench, made notes in a book.

The judges had more questions. The man Johnny had not shot the night before in the Cantina Inferno came into the room and told the judges something. Then four men brought in the body of the hombre Johnny had killed. He was covered with a dirty sheet. The judges looked underneath and nodded their heads. They pointed to the body and the center judge repeated the same sentence twice to Johnny.

Johnny only licked his lips. He knew these men were going to have him shot or hanged. He wasn't going to give them a bit of satisfaction.

El Cuchillo made another lecture, longer than the first, with a lot of resounding words and waving of his arms and grimaces. Johnny enjoyed this more than the first one. His head was clearing and he knew that it hurt El Cuchillo to talk, for he could see that his mouth was still swollen and his Adam's apple crushed from the battle of yesterday.

Johnny began to grin. One of the judges thundered at him, and he looked sober again. Then the three conferred. After a while they all stood up.

The middle one had a lot to say. When he was through, he spoke to the little gent who had been making notes all along, and the note-maker stood up. It seemed to Johnny that there was a bit of sympathy in this hombre's eyes, and that El Cuchillo looked too pleased for the news to be anything but very bad. The little man cleared his throat.

"These military tribune," he said, "has make the decision. Don Johnny Tyne has admit the guilt with no force. Wan—spy. Two—coinciding with the *revolución*. T'ree—making the murder of wan Don Eduardo Sanchez. Four—injure of the body of wan Don Carlos Ibanez. Five—steal and hide Señorita Panchita Murphy."

As he rattled them off, Johnny's anger got the better of him.

"I didn't admit a damn thing," he shouted.

"Shot op," the little man said. He winked at Johnny, and Johnny subsided. The little man cleared his throat again. "These tribune has decide by the law to shoot these Johnny Tyne tomorrow at dawn. Maybe"—He shrugged—"they weel change their mind eef Johnny Tyne weel say where he hide Señorita Panchita Murphy."

Johnny said bitterly: "You tell them to go to hell."

The interpreter spoke to the judges in a soft voice, and Johnny knew immediately that he had not passed on his

message. The judges nodded. El Cuchillo, his hand at his throat where Johnny's heel had smashed into him, stared at Johnny with narrow, satisfied eyes.

"She ees all," the little man said to Johnny.

Johnny felt that terrible anger sweeping through him again. He tried to break free of the two men holding him. He shouted:

"*Vámonos infierno!*"

And he never knew what were the results of his sparse Spanish, for the men were dragging him along the big room toward the stairs and the dungeon. At the head of the stairs El Cuchillo caught up. He kicked Johnny in the spine as the two men shoved, and Johnny went rolling down to come up with a crash against the old oak door.

THE first thing Johnny said to his two prison mates was: "Well, they ain't found Panchita yet."

Tears came to Rojo Red's eyes. "Thank God for that!"

"Say," Johnny asked, "why didn't you tell me your name was Murphy? I wouldn't have gotten into all this trouble if I'd know that. I got sense enough to know that when a Mick starts fightin' he don't quit until the end of the battle. You never would of taken Panchita out of here."

"I don't know," Rojo Red said.

Johnny felt as if he had been through a rock crusher, and he wanted to sleep. But he only had about ten more hours of this world, ten hours that seemed suddenly precious to him. He was going to die five times tomorrow, according to that half-pint interpreter. Once for spying. A second time for being mixed up with the wrong end of a revolution. It might make things easier, he thought, if he only knew what he was dying for. It was like that cussing he had given the judges. Fighting back, or knowing that you were dying for a good cause, gave purpose to an otherwise meaningless life and death.

"They're going to shoot me five times tomorrow," Johnny boasted. "So I told them to go to hell. I said, *Vámonos infierno*. Some Spanish, huh?"

The machine-gunner saw humor in it.

"Your Spanish is lousy. You said, 'Let's go hell'."

Johnny was beginning to laugh. Dying five times was starting to look funny to him. The machine-gunner dug his bottle out from under some mouldy straw and uncorked it, handing it to Johnny.

"Take a snort," he said, "and quit worrying. There's no telling what might happen by tomorrow."

Johnny drank. It eased his nerves. "*Mañana*, that's some more Mexican I learned. Your pal Don Miguel who Panchita calls Mike, taught me that. Also *queen savvy*. He likes to say, 'Who knows what's going to happen tomorrow'."

"Yeah. *Quien sabe?*" Rojo Red was beginning to look hopeful. He had been in this country so long, tomorrow always looked better to him than today. "Maybe Pancho Villa will show up. I heard he had his army together and was riding toward Chihuahua."

Johnny said: "He's only a bandit. I thought this was a revolution."

"It is," the machine-gunner said. "That's what I found out when I came down here. That's why I tried to swap sides and landed in this jug. The president was a big hero, once. He fought under Juarez, helped take this country away from Maximilian. Then he took it away from the people. They went to get back their land, and, when I get out of here, I'm going to help them."

Johnny took another drink. He was beginning to feel resigned to *mañana*. He said slowly:

"This country is upside down. It's crazy. Up home they say Villa is a bandit trying to steal the country from its owners. They even talk of sending down the American Army to stop him.

"I heard that, too," the machine-gunner said. "And I guess the Spaniards called Bolivar a bandit, and the English said the same of George Washington." He took the bottle from Johnny, raised it high in the dark cell.

"*Viva Villa!*" he shouted.

Johnny could hardly see him in the gloom, and he wondered about him. He wondered how a man could be hard-boiled enough to hire out as a professional killer, then be tender enough to swap in the middle to fight for what he thought was right.

The machine-gunner passed the bottle to Rojo Red. Rojo lifted it, whispered hoarsely: "*Viva Villa!*"

It was Johnny's turn. Yeah, tomorrow he was going to be shot on five different counts, all five frames and lies against which he had not been allowed to defend himself. It was just about time the people took back this country from such a bunch of cutthroats.

"*Viva Villa!*" Johnny said.

**I**T WAS dawn, and the guard had come for him—six soldiers, stiff as ramrods. A priest came with them and went through his business, and Johnny, though he had never been to church in his life, felt a lot better. Johnny was ready.

"So long," he said to his two cellmates.

"Be seein' yuh," the machine-gunner answered.

Rojo Red added: "I'll write a letter to your folks, Johnny. I'll tell 'em—uh—about my daughter. You saved Panchita from worse than you know."

This didn't make much sense to Johnny. He hadn't saved her from anything. He had tried to, but had been caught. Whatever saving had been done, she had done herself. So he said: "Thanks, Rojo Red. Don't lay it on too thick." The guards were prodding him now. "Well—uh—" He stumbled, grinning. "So long, boys."

Johnny went up the stairs at a slow pace. They walked out into the big courtyard of this building and, though the sun was hardly over the mountains, the white glare made Johnny nearly close his eyes. He heard a drum and a bugle that didn't mean much to him; nor did the crowd, packing the place, enter into his consciousness. The first thing that he really noticed was a wall he was made to face, an adobe wall, pitted in many places with rifle bullets. Evidently, Johnny thought, these hombres had had a lot of practice at this sort of thing.

One of the guards prodded him around facing the crowd. There were six soldiers there, holding rifle butts to the ground. El Cuchillo was with them, looking very happy. He had gotten a sword somewhere and was holding it so that the sun flashed along its entire length.

Johnny wondered if he could get to El Cuchillo and kill him before those sleepy-looking soldiers in the firing squad woke up. He measured the distance, gave up the idea. These guys were having fun enough without Johnny adding any more to the show than he had to.

Then Johnny saw something else that made him laugh. Behind El Cuchillo was a black hearse, drawn by two black horses. and the horses were branded with the Box T. It was so funny, he laughed until the tears came to his eyes.

Wouldn't he give a lot if Rojo Red could see this and could write about it in the letter to Johnny's old man! Wouldn't that hand Pop a jolt for kicking Johnny off the home ranch. Shot as a spy and toted off in a hearse drawn by Box T horses.

A hearse drawn by Box T horses and—and that wasn't all, by golly!

Johnny blinked, stared. Sitting on that hearse, his white teeth bared in a big smile, was Don Miguel. That's right! Johnny was certain it was Don Miguel up there beside the driver, grinning like a wolf, the dirty, doublecrossing son of a coyote. He couldn't stay home when something like this was going on—not Don Miguel.

Well, it takes all kinds of people to make a world. Forget about it. . . .

Johnny tried to pay attention to the day's business, but Don Miguel and that hearse kept distracting him. Now El Cuchillo was yapping something, talking to Johnny who wasn't listening; and someone poked Johnny in the ribs. It was that little gent who had taken the notes and done the translating at the trial.

"Listen now," he said, "or maybe they shoot before you are ready."

"I been ready a long time," Johnny said. "Tell 'em to shoot and get it over with."

"They have to talk first," the little man said. "Now listen."

Johnny looked at El Cuchillo who cleared his throat and talked some more. The little man translated in a muted voice.

"Don't look surprise. He says you are bad man and will be shot. He is always right. So, when they shoot, fall down on your face and don't move."

Johnny said: "Huh?"

The little man was listening to El Cuchillo. He told Johnny what had been said:

"He ask do you have a last word?"

Johnny said: "What did you think I was going to do when they shoot me? Sprout wings and fly?"

The little man spoke to El Cuchillo. El Cuchillo came forward with a blindfold. Johnny snapped:

"Tell that goat to keep his bandana. Tell him I'll bet him an *Americano* dollar he can't look into my eyes when he gives the order to shoot."

The little man translated rapidly. El Cuchillo glared at Johnny, swung on his heel and strode back to his firing squad. There, he raised his sword and shouted. The squad came to attention, lifted their rifles to their shoulders, and Johnny was staring down the six black barrels.

The little guy whispered: "Fall front!"

He turned away suddenly and ran while Johnny stared after him. Then Johnny turned his head. He concentrated in staring straight into the eyes of El Cuchillo. El Cuchillo's gaze dropped. He shouted, brought down his sword snappily. Six eyes peered over their sights at Johnny, and six fingers tightened on their triggers. Six rifles spat flame and lead, followed by a rattling roar, and Johnny thought that this was a remarkably painless way in which to die.

So far, anyhow.

His eyes snapped open, closed. He remembered, in his amazement, the advice of that little hombre who had run away. Gasping, Johnny clutched at his heart, fell back against the adobe wall, then bent in the middle. He rolled over on his face in the dust and lay still, waiting for the pain of the bullets to start throbbing.



## CHAPTER VI

## THE SIX-GUN HEARSE

HOW long he lay there he did not know. After a while someone came up, took his wrist as if feeling his pulse and said:

*"Es muerto."*

There was the beat of drums, the vibration through the earth of marching. Wheels crunched. Hoofs drew near, and another man was kneeling beside Johnny, spreading a sheet over him.

"Don't move," was whispered to him in English. "It's Mike. I bought the right to bury you—so for God's sake, don't move."

Heaven, Johnny thought, was a funnier place than Mexico.

He lay there unmoving while someone took his feet and someone else took his wrists and lifted him from the ground. He felt himself being carried, hoisted high, and dropped on something hard. He was dragged along for a couple of feet. A door closed and he began to wonder if this was heaven after all when a soft, cool hand touched his forehead and a woman's voice sobbed:

"Thank God! Lie still, Johnny. You're not hurt?"

The hand pulled away the sheet from his face. Johnny blinked. He was looking straight into the blue eyes of Panchita Murphy.

"So they got you, too," he said.

Panchita was frightened. A finger to her lips signaled for silence. Someone yelled, "Giddap" to the Box T horses and the hearse rumbled along noisily. Panchita leaned very close to Johnny and kissed him. She was crying.

"Mike bought the firing squad. You're not dead, Johnny. You're alive. But wait until we get out of here. They don't know I'm here. I mean, El Cuchillo. Mike does, and the undertaker, and that little interpreter. That was beautiful, Johnny Tyne, not taking the blindfold. El Cuchillo couldn't look into your eyes. He didn't see that the bullets all missed."

Johnny wanted to sit up and howl. The girl's hand on his forehead kept him still. One of her tears splashed on his cheek, and he tasted the warm saltiness of it.

"Lie still, Johnny Tyne."

On the driver's seat, the two men were whispering. Don Miguel suddenly said over his shoulder:

"Get out those guns, Panchita. Give one to Johnny. Pass me a couple."

"What's the matter?"

Johnny shook off the sheet. He got to his knees, balancing himself in the dark, swaying hearse. Panchita was dragging automatic rifles from under another white sheet. She gave one to Johnny, handed a couple of six-shooters up to Don Miguel who placed them between his back and the seat. Don Miguel said:

"He's found out. El Cuchillo. He's over there looking for blood!"

The driver whipped up the horses. El Cuchillo was howling. Johnny snapped:

"Just give me one crack at that skunk!"

He pushed his way past the girl, knocked open the rear panel of the hearse and looked out over the rifle sights. Where the execution had taken place, El Cuchillo was shouting, waving that bright sword. Three soldiers had started running toward the hearse. The crowd that had

come to see Johnny killed were screaming, piled up like sheep against the far exit of the courtyard, scrambling over one another in a frenzy to escape.

Johnny steadied the gun and pulled the trigger. He knew without looking that he had missed the big Mexican. The jolting of the wagon had knocked out his aim.

Now Panchita was with him, lying on the floor of the hearse, bracing her rifle by spreading her elbows on a shroud. Up on the front seat, Don Miguel had begun to yell.

"They closed the gate!"

Someone beyond was shouting:

*"Alto—alto!"*

Johnny aimed again. He saw El Cuchillo's big sombrero leap up, turn over while the man froze there stupidly. Once more—he wanted just one more shot before they got him.

But the driver yanked on the brakes, bringing the wagon to a grinding halt. A bullet snapped through the black side of the hearse. The sudden stop knocked Johnny over. When he got back to his knees El Cuchillo had vanished, and a dozen or more soldiers were advancing, firing through the courtyard.

"They're *El Presidente's* men," Panchita whispered. "El Cuchillo's, too. They're closing in in front, too."

Johnny knew that, for bullets were coming from all directions now. He glanced around through the gunsmoke and saw that they were near a building that looked vaguely familiar.

"Say," he asked, "isn't this the court? Isn't the jail in there?"

"Yes," the girl said, "but—"

"Then grab all the rest of the guns and come with me!"

Johnny jumped out the back of the hearse. On solid ground, he could really shoot now. He stopped the charge for a second, until Panchita had joined him. Then, with her in the lead, they ran hard for the door of the *cárcel*.

DON MIGUEL followed. The driver was slumped on the seat of the hearse. He had taken his last ride in that ancient wagon he had driven for so many years, and the two big horses, driven wild by the shooting, were kicking themselves out of the traces.

Johnny clubbed down a guard who came through the foyer, and took away his rifle. Inside the doorway, the three halted. Johnny Tyne ordered crisply:

"Keep 'em back, Mike. Rojo Red's downstairs, and a couple other guys. I'll be back in a second."

He swung on his heels. Backing toward him was the little interpreter, shooting with an old Colt revolver. Johnny shouted:

"Stick to it, Shorty!"

He had forgotten his wounds and his pains, the fact that today was the day he had been slated for the firing squad. The interpreter shouted:

*"Viva Villa!"*

And Johnny answered him as he ran toward the stairway leading down to the dungeons. At the head of the stairs a guard shot point blank for Johnny, but Johnny had seen him first and had ducked down. He came up, slugging with the butt of his rifle, taking the man in the chin and knocking him rolling, clattering down the steps.

Before the man could find his feet, Johnny was on top of him, clubbing him down again, kicking his rifle out of reach. Then Johnny was on his knees, firing down the long corridor at a third guard who had taken refuge around a corner.

Up above, the blast of guns was racketing around the halls. Outside, by the sounds, Johnny guessed that El Cuchillo's men searched for cover and were sniping at the tiny party in the doorway to the courthouse. Down here, the third guard poked his rifle around the corner and Johnny plugged him dead center.

"Viva Villa!" Johnny let go with his new war-cry.

Up and down the corridor, the prisoners answered and kicked at their great oaken doors. The din was terrific as Johnny Tyne hurried through the guards' pockets, searching for keys that he never found. He stood there for a second, uncertainly, looking around him in the murk. Then he went back to the cell where he had been prisoner for a day. He took the dead guard's rifle, slung the bandolier over his shoulder.

"Hey, Rojo Red, get away from the door!" he shouted.

There was no answer from Rojo Red—or if there was, the racket and the cheering drowned it out. Johnny shouted again. He couldn't wait. It was hopeless to think that the three upstairs could hold back the army forever. Johnny held the muzzle of the gun an inch from the door's lock. He bit his lip as he fired twice. Then he put his shoulder to the oak, and the shattered lock gave way.

Johnny tumbled in, landed on his hands and knees in the filthy straw. A big hand grabbed his shoulder, hauled him to his feet, and Rojo Red kissed him.

"Johnny! *Madre de Dios!* Did Pancho Villa . . . ?"

Johnny started to grin. He had forgotten how sick he was. He had forgotten that wound that was a dull throb in his side, and the beating he had taken. He had forgotten all these things until now, and the cell was whirling around him as if he were just awakening from a drunken dream.

"Hell," Johnny said, "I don't know where this Villa is. Mike bought me. Mike bought off the shooting squad and the sawbones. But they found out. Villa, I guess he's still up in the mountains. I dunno. But Mike's upstairs—and Panchita. They got guns. Bust out the rest of these guys."

The soldier of fortune snapped out of it first. He ran out of there. Johnny heard him blasting down the doors to the rest of the cells. Then Rojo Red went through the door like a shot.

Johnny was so dizzy he could hardly keep his feet. The roar of "Viva Villa" was sweeping through the place, along the corridors as gaunt, bearded men came through broken oak doors. There were *Americanos* here and Spaniards. *Indios*—and the short, hungry, patient *peones* who were ready to die for a handful of earth.

Johnny shook his head to clear it, and followed them.

**M**EN guarding the windows, men on the roof sniping at El Cuchillo's boys. The interpreter and the machine-gunner, whose name Johnny never would know, were herding an army officer through the big courtroom. Kneeling, firing at everything that moved, were Panchita and Rojo Red and Don Miguel.

Johnny stumbled toward them. He felt a lift when he saw that Don Miguel could still laugh and that the others were smiling.

Don Miguel was saying: "It was a hard bargain your Panchita drove, Rojo Red."

His rifle bucked. He kept his eyes on the sights though he talked as if he were at some party in his big, fine hacienda.

"For her hand in marriage," Don Miguel went on, "I

must give away my *ranchito* to that *picaro*, that *infel cochino*, Pablo. I must give it to him so that Pablo can bribe the firing squad and the *médico*."

"I told you he was one of El Cuchillo's men," Rojo Red said, punctuating his sentence with a gun blast.

They were so busy they had not noticed Johnny standing there groggily, and Johnny felt suddenly out of place.

Rojo Red said: "Pete and that little shaver, Alfredo, have *el coronel* by the ears. He knows where there's more ammunition. Enough to hold us over—guns too—until tonight maybe." Rojo Red grunted. "There goes another one," he said. "Knocked him right off the wall."

Then Panchita spoke, her voice ringing with hope. "I heard that Villa is riding toward Chihuahua. Maybe he'll come this way."

"Yeah," her father agreed. "Maybe he will!"

Johnny backed away from there. Chihuahua, he knew where Chihuahua was, and it was a long way from here. He knew that Rojo Red was talking to hold up his daughter's courage.

In the hallway, he found some stairs going up, and he pulled himself along by the handrails. At the top, he was surprised to find himself on the roof, out in the open, on top of the wide, low building. Here the sun shone brightly, and the cathedral was a great pile of intricate masonry before him. The streets and plaza were deserted, the courtyard was empty of men except for the bodies of two or three in the dust. But all around hidden rifles sniped from roof tops.

A bullet screaming past his head reminded Johnny that he was not in Sunday School. He sat down abruptly, protected by the escarpment around the building, and tried to remember what he had come up here for.

Oh, yes, that was it, Pancho Villa. He had come up here to fetch Pancho Villa and his ragged army. Somebody had to fetch Pancho Villa, or little Panchita would never live through this, nor would Don Miguel who had sold everything and risked his skin to save the life of Johnny Tyne. And the bearded machine-gunner who had discovered a cause below the Border, and the half-pint interpreter who had told Johnny how to die. They would not live either.

Johnny rolled over to his hands and knees and crawled along the roof, keeping close to the low wall. He had heard the cry of a horse down there in the courtyard, a horse who had been mortally wounded. But when he got to the far end of the roof, he pulled himself up, looked over the edge quickly, and ducked back while sudden lead chewed at the limestone where his head had been.

One of those horses was dead. The other who had been attached to the hearse was apparently alive and unharmed. He had broken away from the wagon, and with the traces still dangling at his heels, had backed into a corner between the wall and the building.

Johnny again stuck up his head. The gate at the far end of the courtyard was still open. The mob that had jammed it was gone. With a little bit of luck he might be able to get through it.

He took a deep breath. The dizziness had become only a vague thing in him as he braced his hands on the shallow wall edging the roof. Then he vaulted over, to land square on the back of the frightened horse.

He gripped the horse with his knees, jabbed in the spurs. And the big animal went like a cannonball across the courtyard.





Johnny leaped and dragged El Cuchillo from his horse

## CHAPTER VII

### REVOLUTION!

JOHNNY knew that bullets were humming past him, but they left him strangely unmoved. He had been executed once today, and reckoned that was enough for any man in any single twenty-four hours period. He also felt he was being backed by a power more potent than guns, and that it would take him through.

As the horse ripped through the dust, he heard Panchita cry:

"Viva Johnny Tyne!"

She, too, knew that he would get away. "Viva Villa!" he shouted.

Johnny had found the broken reins by the time they reached the gateway, and he slapped the horse around to head him down the street with the traces snapping like firecrackers beneath him. Without looking back, Johnny knew that someone had gotten a horse to chase him. But this did not bother him either, for he was aboard a Box-T mount, a friend of his called Charlie, a son of gallant old Bessie.

It would take another Box-T horse to catch him.

"Git goin'. Charlie," he begged, lying low across the horse's withers. "Show 'em what you got."

Charlie, who had heard only Spanish for weeks, liked the familiar ring of American and the sound of his own

boss's voice, so he put more power into his long legs as they thundered past the ancient cathedral and plaza. He picked up speed when they pounded by the familiar smell of the Cantina Inferno. And, in the open country he was still running like a thoroughbred.

Now Johnny glanced behind. There was only one rider on his tail, coming along fast. He was still far enough behind so that Johnny had no immediate worry about his guns. It was still possible that Johnny might outrun him. But the cowboy began casting about, wondering what he would do if Charlie failed him. He had a bandolier of cartridges around his shoulder—but no gun. And he did not have the slightest idea where to find Pancho Villa.

"Just keep on rollin', Charlie," Johnny whispered to his horse.

The crackling of traces was beginning to terrify Charlie, making him run crazily all over the road. Johnny leaned down, unhooked the breeching stay and backstrap, slipped the buckles holding the traces to the saddle-piece and belly-band, and let the crupper and all slide down over Charlie's tail. This made Charlie hardly any happier because the collar, freed from the rest, began to jump around on his neck.

Johnny steadied it with a hand on the hame because there was no way he could figure to slip off the collar without stopping.

Another two miles, with Charlie getting worse all the way. He was breaking pace more often now, and it would not be long before Johnny was overtaken. He glanced back; the pursuit was slowly closing in Johnny's advantage. He had to take the chance that he could stop, throw off the collar, and get going again before the man caught up.

Johnny drew in, worked swiftly. The pursuer halted, too, lifted a rifle. On a running horse, he would have missed by a hundred yards. But he was steady now, with a standing target; the bullet whistled by, just nipping the tip of Charlie's ear. The horse screamed, leaped high in the air. Charlie had gone loco.

After that, Johnny was too busy for a while trying to stay on the back of his mount to worry particularly about the end. That was El Cuchillo back there; Johnny was certain of it. It was the man who had ordered his execution, only to discover that the corpse had failed to bleed. El Cuchillo, Johnny reckoned, would see to it this time that his victim was surrounded with a big red puddle.

Johnny's teeth clacked as Charlie sunfished. Charlie whirled around, ducking his head to shake the collar over his ears, and it seemed to Johnny that he was on a pivot spinning like a merry-go-round gone wild. Several seconds passed after the horse finally quieted down before Johnny realized that the bucking had stopped. But Charlie had not entirely quit. His hoofs were spread as he tried to bite away the harness that had plagued him.

Johnny grinned broadly at El Cuchillo who sat another Box T horse, holding a brace of Colts on the man he had caught.

"*Buenas noches*," Johnny said. "If I'd been in a rodeo, I'd of made ten bucks off that ride."

El Cuchillo had no smile for Johnny Tyne. He had overtaken his man. He was determined to leave him there for the buzzards.

Johnny was searching for an opening that wasn't there. Those two six-shooters had not been bought off. This time El Cuchillo was going to be mighty sure that Johnny Tyne be properly executed for the insult of that kick in the face.

He spoke to Johnny and, though Johnny did not understand a word of the beautiful, sinister-sounding language, he knew exactly what El Cuchillo was talking about. He raised his hands shoulder high and said:

"Okay—shoot and be damned!"

El Cuchillo cursed.

Johnny jabbed the spurs into Charlie's ribs, and fell flat against Charlie's neck. The horse quivered, reared, leaped toward El Cuchillo. El Cuchillo's guns spoke, smashing lead into Charlie's collar, into Charlie's head. Then Charlie was falling, his forefeet over the back of El Cuchillo's mount who was trying to crowhop away.

Johnny instinctively saw that there was only one thing to do: he had to drag this hombre out of the saddle.

As Charlie dropped, Johnny reached from underneath and got a grip on the throat of El Cuchillo's fancy charro jacket. El Cuchillo, fighting down a crazy horse between his legs and a wild man on his neck, could not immediately bring his guns into effective play. While he had the chance, Johnny took it. Doubling up, he swung a foot to a goad El Cuchillo's horse. The mount screamed, broke free of Charlie's weight, jumped up and over while El Cuchillo tumbled backward out of the saddle.

Johnny and El Cuchillo landed hard, Johnny on the bottom. El Cuchillo had him by the throat now, pinning him helpless in the dust. His right hand was swinging up, gripping a Colt, to bash in Johnny's head.

Then Johnny remembered something. When El Cuchillo's right hand started down with that six-shooter, Johnny squirmed around, trying to get his head out of the way. At the same time, he reached for the back of El Cuchillo's bull neck.

His fingers closed on the knife sheathed there. He pulled it from oiled leather, jabbed short and hard. A spasm went through El Cuchillo. The gun slipped from his fingers, and he collapsed on top of Johnny Tyne.

Johnny, for a while, lay as still as he had following the execution. When the strength had come back to him, he rolled El Cuchillo over and dragged him to the side of the road.

JOHNNY'S mind was a blank sometimes, then it would be as clear as a Montana mountain pool. When it was clear, he would say to himself, over and over again:

"I gotta find Pancho Villa. I gotta go to Chihuahua."

Through the hot noon, he rode, and during the hours when sensible Mexicans take their siesta in the shade. He fell asleep in the brilliantly silver-mounted saddle of El Cuchillo, to waken again with a Mexican shaking him by the belt.

"Pancho Villa?" Johnny gasped.

The Mexican shook his head. He pointed to the west, and Johnny rode on. He rode until the sun squatted on the purple peaks and a great crimson dust-cloud blocked his way.

There, by a shallow stream, a couple of vaqueros rode up to him, rifles ready under their arms, dark eyes suspicious.

"Pancho Villa?" he asked.

They conferred, wheeled their horses and, one on each side, led Johnny on into that big, red cloud that was made of dust raised by the hoofs of many horses. Vaguely, Johnny saw that he had come to a camp; that there were women here and kids; and dark-faced, raggedly-dressed men carrying guns. Then he was facing a big, heavy man with laughter in his eyes, with two bandoliers crossed over his big stomach. A lean American with drooping blond mustaches stood beside him.

"My God!" the American gasped. "Where'd you come from, cowboy?"

"From Hell," Johnny said. "From *Infierno*. Rojo Red and Panchita and Don Miguel—they're fighting in the plaza. El Cuchillo—he's dead. But they need help. I've come from Hell, mister, and I'm headed back."

The American translated for Pancho Villa, then added a piece of advice of his own.

"Let us take care of this, cowboy. You need food and sleep. We'll attend to *Infierno*. When we come back, you can go on with us to Ciudad Juárez."

Johnny thanked him. Big, burly Pancho thanked Johnny. The guerilla chief rounded up a band of horses, the fastest, and his best men, and thundered off to the south, with the men singing *La Cucuracha* as if it were their song of freedom.

There were all kinds of men in that army, caballerros and peons, old-time bandits and many cowboys from the great state of Chihuahua. There were women, kids, too. This army was an army of the people.

Johnny clung to the bright silver saddlehorn. He did



not know that he had become delirious. He only knew that he had done the job he had set out to do and that now he had to find old Bessie and go home to Montana where he could sleep forever. He turned his back on the camp and rode away.

He came to a crossroads that was vaguely familiar under the half-full moon, a rutted path that he had seen before near a field of ghostly maguay cactus. He came to a gate and a grove of trees, to a couple of big buildings that smelled very sour. He rode by many small adobe huts and a bunch of Mexicans who peered at him, frightened and curious in the night.

"Viva Villa!"

They took up the cry. Johnny laughed hysterically.

"We got to find Bessie!" he yelled. "¡Vámonos!"

The little men charged past him. They ran faster than Johnny's tired horse could go, charging up on Don Miguel's fine home. And there it was that Johnny's delirium had a moment of brilliance followed by a darkness blacker than night.

He saw Pablo, whimpering like a beaten dog, screaming, while brown, hard hands dragged him through marble halls. Then a great whirlpool swallowed up Johnny Tyne, and these pictures, which had been more like a dream than things he had actually seen, vanished into nothingness.

JOHNNY thought he was in that hearse again. The same cool hand was on his forehead, the same white sheet drawn up to his chin. There was a difference, however. They had put a mattress in the bottom of the hearse, and the wheels were not rolling.

When Johnny opened his eyes he saw the golden hair of Panchita Murphy above him. Then her cheek was close to his and he knew that he must be dreaming.

"Oh, Johnny—Johnny Tyne!" she whispered.

Johnny went to sleep. Panchita was still there when he woke again. She smiled down on him. She brought hot soup that hurt his stomach when he swallowed it, but he knew it was good, because it turned his dreams into real life. He was in a room, he discovered, not in a hearse. The sun was shining.

"Everybody get out okay?" he asked.

"Papa and Don Miguel—" Panchita's eyes were darkened with sadness. "They're riding to Ciudad Juárez with Pancho Villa. The revolution has come."

Yeah, Johnny thought, he'd go, too. There were kids in that army, women, men like Don Miguel who had always lived high; there were people like that bearded machine-gunner who would fight for a cause that was not his own.

"Me," Johnny said, "I'm going with them."

Determinedly, Panchita shook her head. "No, Johnny, this is not your war; it is not for *Americanos*. It is for men like Mike and Papa and Pancho Villa, for the millions who have been starved and enslaved. And there are plenty of them, Johnny, to win."

She added, blushing: "Besides—well, you have to think of Bessie. She must be wonderful. You can't leave Bessie."

"Where is she?" Johnny asked eagerly.

The girl's lovely face went blank.

"I don't know!" She became indignant. "How would I know? Isn't she in Montana? Why would I know where your sweetheart is?"

Johnny laughed; he laughed so hard it exhausted him.

Panchita was really indignant now. "All you've talked about for a week was this Bessie. While I—I—"

That girl must like him, Johnny thought, to work herself up like this. And he liked her, too. It was a real pity she was going to marry Don Miguel, this hombre she called Mike, who was the best guy in the world just the same. Yeah, it was a shame.

"Gosh," he said. "You got to forgive me for talking so much about Bessie. She's my sweetheart, all right, the only one I got. But neither of us ever thought of getting married. She's had too many husbands already. Yeah, Bessie's my old mare—the one El Cuchillo kicked."

"Why, Johnny!" the girl cried. "Bessie—she's in the stable. Why, I—"

She was all mixed up. Maybe that was why she started kissing Johnny Tyne.

\* \* \*

So down there in old Chihuahua, in the Cantina Inferno, Rojo Red swears by both his names that he'll plug that gringo on sight for kidnapping his daughter while he was busy winning the revolution. At the same time Rojo Red will show snapshots of his grandsons. Rojo Red will expand his chest as he boasts:

"Look more an' more like their gran'pa every day, don't they? Ain't got a bit of that kidnappin' gringo in them, have they? Well, maybe the one called Mike has some, maybe."

At the same time, Don Miguel Kelly y Alvarez, who is now *el capitán*, will tell how he was out-traded.

"He left a note swapping all his horses for Panchita," he says. "They were damn good horses. But I was robbed. I already had them."

"And he already had Panchita," Rojo Red reminds him. "Wait'll I get my hands on that kidnappin' gringo son-in-law of mine."

THE END



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# Seven Mile House



Gun in hand, Julie stole toward the dead man

By Max Brand

Start now this absorbing novel of mystery and strange terror under the desert sun

**I**T BEGINS with the wounded dog. SAMUEL KENNEDY finds him in a desert canyon, a big gray police dog, shot and left for dead. But there is still life in him, and after Kennedy has given him water and released him from the place where he is trapped, the dog starts out with a purpose—and leads Kennedy to a dead man. This man has been killed by a rockslide and buried in a shallow, hurried grave, which the police dog quickly uncovers. Examining the body, Kennedy finds only one possible clue—a kind of fuzzy thread adhering to the head wound.

**S**TILL guided by the dog, Kennedy soon reaches a desert inn called Seven Mile House. This remote and expensive retreat is managed by a good-looking young woman named JULIE VERNON. Kennedy tells her about his discovery up in the canyon, and the dead man is brought in and identified: He is one WILLIAM HARRISON, a mining promoter and ex-lawyer who had his headquarters in a neighboring village. He had come to Seven Mile house five days before. What particularly interests Kennedy is the odd behavior of Julie Vernon in connection with the dead man. "Fear of more than death," is the way he describes it to himself.

It is established that William Harrison was killed by the rockslide, which was heard by the guests at Seven Mile House. But Samuel Kennedy believes this slide

to have been deliberately engineered; and so he proceeds to investigate the various inmates of the desert hotel.

**F**OUR of them interest him especially, for any of these could have slipped up to the canyon that evening and started the slide. There is ALEXANDER MACDONALD, a genial and pleasant engineer, whom Kennedy suspects simply because his appearance is so innocent. There is CAMILLA CUYAS, an exotic and moody Spanish refugee, who had been much in the company of the dead man Harrison. There is DANIEL FARGO, writer and former cattleman—very much in love with Julie Vernon; and there is Julie herself. The fact that Harrison was decidedly a lady's man, attentive to both Julie and Camilla, makes jealousy a possible motive behind the murder.

Samuel Kennedy has the idea that some one of the Seven Mile house people owns the big police dog, and so he takes the animal to a pre-dinner gathering. But the experiment is a failure; the only person the dog will pay any attention to is Camilla Cuyas who speaks to it in Spanish; and she insists that she has never seen the animal before. Kennedy believes that the dog's owner was in the room and that he or she gave it a secret command to prevent identification.

About all Kennedy has accomplished has been to earn the dislike of virtually everyone at Seven Mile House. Julie Vernon, who has been hostile from the beginning, tells him that he must leave the next day; and he finds Camilla Cuyas watching him with almost frightening malice. . . .

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