

LONE HAND

By TOM W. BLACKBURN

The bandit thought he knew how to handle a woman, but this simple Mexican girl was somehow out of his reach—even though she was his captive



THE mare had cost Martinez sixty dollars. That is, she would have cost him sixty dollars if he had paid for her. The fact that he had not, that he had simply found her wandering at graze down in the barrancas with no owner in sight, made no difference in his present concern. She had belonged to him for nearly three years now. He had an affection for her. And she was a valuable animal. A man did not destroy something worth sixty dollars, even if he was in a great hurry. The mare could go no farther.

Martinez reined up and slipped down. The mare stood on wide-planted feet, head lowered, but she arched her neck a little and looked at him with gratitude he understood as he slipped the cinch and pulled the high, hide-covered saddle from her back. There was grass of a kind on these slopes and a certainty of water not too distant. He thought she

would be all right in a day or two. Someone else would find a horse worth sixty dollars and no owner in sight to claim her. As he watched the mare move away with weary stiff-leggedness, Martinez had a peculiar feeling of repaying a debt which had long troubled him. It seemed fitting. A man of honor desired to pay his debts—all of them.

Leaving the saddle where it had fallen, Martinez pushed the big gun, which was thrust under his belt, to a more comfortable position and started on again afoot. The going was hard. This was not a country which lay at peace with itself, this malpais. It twisted as though in struggle, rising and falling, and it was cut by the arroyo and canyon scars of old battles.

In half an hour the mare was out of sight behind him, lost in the twisting country, gone. The mare

had been the last of the things which had once made his life good. Martinez would have felt alone and a little frightened but for one thing. This was a just errand on which he traveled and the good God traveled with him. The good God and the big pistol under his belt.

EMORY RICHARDS sat on the chopping log at the woodpile, about fifty yards from the door of the cabin. He had a double-bitted timber ax across his knees. The handle was weather roughened and split a little, but it was sound enough. The bit itself was giving him trouble; it was badly nicked and rusted with long neglect. Still, a man could do a lot with patience if he could afford it, and for the first time in his life Emory Richards could afford patience. He could afford practically anything he wanted. It was a great feeling, worth a

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The girl rummaged dispiritedly in the grub box. The rising firelight glistened from her cropped black hair and the smoot of a man at the crown of one shoulder

hundred times what he had gone through to acquire it.

There was a harsh, abrasive sound to the sliding of the old whetstone in his hand across the bit of the ax, but each stroke left a wider expanse of bright keen steel exposed under the rust. An edge was coming up on the bit. When it was as sharp as a man could whet it, Richards would cut firewood, but not before. He could not abide dull tools and he had plenty of time. Besides, he was playing another game while he whetted—a game which interested him more for the moment than firewood and a fire and the prospect of a hot meal after a long ride.

As the stone in his hand rasped across rusty steel, sharpening it, the corner of one eye kept the doorway of the cabin in focus. He sat so that it did not appear he was watching, yet he was. The girl was

stubborn, like a traded horse accustomed to one owner. It took a little while and some watchfulness to break that stubbornness out—in horse and woman alike. Richards knew both equally well. He smiled faintly as he worked on the ax and waited.

Kelso, his partner—now dead—had not wanted to take the Mexican girl with them. She and her man—husband or whatever—had put Kelso and Richards up the first night out of Hermosa, feeding them and, with instinctive courtesy, asking no questions. Kelso had wanted to give them a few dollars out of the take from the Hermosa bank, enough to buy their gratitude and their forgetfulness, if there should be inquiries about strangers in their end of the malpais. Kelso had probably been right. He usually was. Certainly he had been right as to how the Hermosa bank should be man-

aged. A piece of business Richards knew he could not have handled alone.

The trouble was that for all of his being right, there were two mistakes in Kelso's thinking. He had been building plans in the belief that Richards and himself would hole up together at this empty, long-forgotten homestead until the uproar at Hermosa had quieted, and then split up, dividing the bank's money equally between them when they did. And he had not realized that Emory Richards desired beauty in women only a little less than he desired money for which he did not have to sweat. The young wife in the little Mexican jacal on the malpais had been too pretty. She had showed too much spirit. And there had been too much money in the Hermosa bank for Emory Richards to split with anybody. These things had cost Kelso his life.

The girl had seen Kelso (*Continued on page 45*)



A quiet retreat in thunderous Manhattan, the famed church is on a street once known as Lovers' Lane

A window dedicated to Joe Jefferson, the actor



The rector, Dr. Ray, has married 30,000 couples



Hundred

By ROBERT STEIN

New York's Little Church Around the Corner, spiritual home of theatrical folk, has been the romantic scene of 100,000 weddings in the last century

AFTER marrying a young couple recently, Dr. Randolph Ray, rector of the Little Church Around the Corner in New York City, received an unexpected shock. As soon as the ceremony was over, the groom's parents walked blushing up to the altar and asked the rector to marry *them*.

Dr. Ray's eyebrows descended to their normal elevation only after the older pair explained that they had been wed in a civil ceremony 25 years before, that their marriage had been extremely happy, but that they had always regretted not being wed in the Little Church Around the Corner. Could the rector bless their union and make them an "official" Little Church couple? With an understanding smile, Dr. Ray consented.

Such requests reflect the earnest belief of romantic-minded couples all over the world that a wedding at the Little Church is gilt-edged insurance against marital troubles. Since the first wedding at the church 100 years ago this year, more than 100,000 dewy-eyed brides and grooms have marched up to its altar—a record unmatched by any other church in the world. Over the years, lovers have walked up the Little Church's middle aisle on the last lap of trips that began in every state of the union, as well as Argentina, Switzerland, Hawaii and Italy.

Sentiment clings to the Little Church as naturally as ivy to the staid walls of an old university. More than 30,000 couples who have taken their vows there are linked in a unique "alumni" organization called "The Family of the Little Church Around the Corner." Just as a Harvard man would never dream of sending his son to any other college, Little Church alumni almost invariably bring back their children to be baptized or married. Not long ago a couple ushered three youngsters into Dr. Ray's office. "After you married us," they told him, "we moved to Australia. We've waited 10 years to come back and have our children christened here."

Other Little Church alumni have made the nostalgic pilgrimage back to their marital alma mater from Trinidad, Abyssinia, Germany, China, Japan, Ireland, South America, Spain and Russia. Each year hundreds of couples trek back on their silver or golden wedding anniversary, and some go through another ceremony to renew the vows that launched them on married life. Often these "re-marriages" take place at the famous Brides' Altar, built with funds contributed by newlyweds and studded with jewels donated by grateful brides from their engagement rings.

For an institution that inspires such sentiment, the Little Church is located in a strikingly unromantic setting. Almost in the shadow of the Empire State Building, the tiny house of worship stands on a small green oasis in Manhattan's roaring business district. Hemmed in by skyscrapers, the low brick buildings seem as out of place as Whistler's Mother in a roomful of Picasso paintings.

Completely in character with this old-fashioned

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