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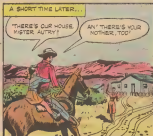


GENE AUTRY

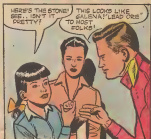
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dead, as required by statute or contract.









NO WONDER ADAM WAS EXCITED, DORA! THIS IS PRACTICALLY PURE LEAD! A 2000-SIZED VEIN OF THIS WOULD BE WORTH A FORTUNE!



AND WORTH KILLING FOR, TOO! OH, COME! I'M AFRAID!

DON'T BOOZOH TROUBLE! HAVING ADAM LOCATED THE STRIKE LATE YESTERDAY



... AN DECIDED TO HEAD FOR TOWN, SO'S TO BE THERE WHEN THE LAND OFFICE OPENED THIS MORNIN'!

BUT WHY DIDN'T HE SEND HIS WORD? HE KNEW I'D WORRY!



WHEN A MAN STRIKES PAY DIRT, DORA HIS THINKIN' GOT TO GO WAYWIDE! BECKON I'D BETTER HEAD FOR TOWN!



BUT SUPPOSE ADAM ISN'T THERE?

THEN I'LL DICK UP A COUPLA MEN AN' GIVE 'EM THAT SKELETON BONE A GOIN' OVER!



WHO WOULD PROBABLY DO THE ASSAY WORK ON THOSE ROCKS FOR ADAM?

ONLY ONE MAN IN BIG BEND COULD DO IT! BOB DIXON!



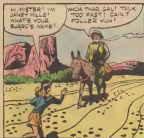


LOOK, MOMMY!  
SOMEBODY'S  
COMIN' DOWN  
THE MOUNTAIN  
TRAIL! IS IT  
DADDY?

NO! ITS AN OLD MAN  
ON A BURRO! LET'S  
GO MEET HIM! MAYBE  
HE CAN TELL US  
SOMETHING ABOUT  
DADDY!



EASY, JOHNNY! KNOW HOW  
YUH FEEL! SCURT O'  
FEMALES, HISSLE!



HI, MISTER! I'M  
JANBY HILLS! WHAT'S  
YOUR  
BURRO'S NAME?

WOWA THERE, GAL! TALK  
TOO FAST! CAN'T  
FOLLER YUH!



JOHNNY MEAN! NAME'S  
FLAPJACK HORSES!  
BEST DUNNO DESERT  
BAT IN THE WEST!  
NEVBE MADE A STRIKE  
BUT ALLUS HOPIN' TO!

I'M GLAD TO KNOW  
YOU! IN DORA  
HILLS!



PLEASE EXCUSE  
JANBY'S SACRIMENT!  
WE DONT HAVE MANY  
VISITORS!

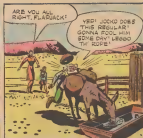
AMT AMIN TO  
VISIT, MAMM! NEED  
WATER! GOT ANY  
T' SPARE?



THERE'S THE PUMP!  
HELP YOURSELF!

SORRY HILL!  
OH ALONG, YUH  
DAD-BATTERED,  
FLOO-BAGGED,  
NO-COUNT PIRCE  
O' CROWBATT!





MEANTIME ...

YONDER'S HIS BEND, CHAMP!  
I SURE HOPE WE TURN UP  
SOME CLUE TO ADAM!



WE'RE IN LUCK, CHAMP! OUR OLD FRIEND,  
ED BLAINE, IS STILL SHERIFF! DECKON  
WE'LL START OUR SEARCH WITH HIM!



AND IN THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE ...

WELL, SHERIFF,  
WHAT DID HE  
SAY?

HE DON'T WANTA  
SEE YOU, DIXON!



DID YOU TELL HIM  
I'D GET HIM A  
LAWYER AN' BAIL  
HIM OUT?

YES! SURE HE'LL  
GIT HIS OWN LAWYER!  
FAR'S BAIL'S  
CONCERNED, HE  
AIN'T ENTITLED TO IT!



HOWDY, SHERIFF  
BLAINE!

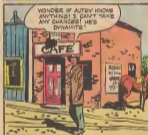
GENE AUTRY!



SURE, GLAD TO SEE YOU,  
GENE! MEET RED DIXON,  
LOCAL ASSAYER AN'  
OWNER O' THE BAD-D  
RANCH!

HOWDY,  
DIXON!







COULD A THING I HAD THE FEELIN'  
I WAS BEIN' TALKED ... BUT I  
DIDN'T SEE ANYBODY!



\* YESTERDAY AFTERNOON, I CAME ACROSS  
SOME ROCKS THAT LOOKED LIKE THOSE  
JANBY FOUND ...



\* THOSE ROCKS WERE PURE LEAD ORE! THERE  
WERE SO MANY OF THEM I GUESSED THE  
MOTHER LODE WASN'T FAR OFF! SO I  
HEADED UP THE GULLY, LOOKIN' FOR IT ...



\* 'D SOME ONLY ABOUT FIFTY YARDS  
WHEN I SAW IT! SOLID CHUNKS O' LEAD  
STICKIN' OUTA THE SANDSTONE SIDES  
O' THAT GULLY ...



\* I STARTED DRAWIN' A MAD FOR FILIN'  
A CLAIM, WHEN I HEARD A NOISE ...



\* BEFORE I COULD DRAW, A RIFLE CRACKED ...



"I DUCKED, STRUCK MY TOE AN' WENT DOWN! I MUST'VE HIT MY HEAD ON A ROCK 'CAUSE I WENT OUT COLD .



"WHEN I CAME TO, MY HORSE WAS THERE BUT MY GUN AN' HAT WERE GONE .



"LAIN' A FEW FEET FROM ME WAS AUGIE LARSON, DEAD! HE HAD TWO BULLETS IN HIM! CLOSE BY HIM WAS MY GUN!



"RIGHT THEN, TWO COWBOYS FROM THE RANGERS SHOWED UP AN' THREW THEIR GUNS ON ME . . .



"I TRIED TO EXPLAIN BUT THEY WOULDN'T LISTEN! THEY BROUGHT ME AN' AUGIE'S BODY TO TOWN!"



"THE WAY I SEE IT, SOMEBODY'S FRAMIN' ME TO GET THEIR HANDS ON THAT CLAIM! AN' SURE AS SHOOTIN', THAT SOMEBODY IS RED DIXON!"







AT THAT MOMENT, IN DIXON'S OFFICE ALONG THE STREET...

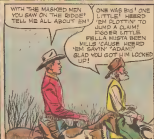
















AUTRY'S PROBABLY BEEN TO THE LAND OFFICE! GOOD THING I DIDN'T FILE ON THAT CLAIM THIS MORNING!



AUTRY MUST BE GETTIN' WISE! I'LL HARTA GET BUSY QUICK! NOBODY BUT MEBS CAN PROVE THAT MILLS DIDN'T KILL AUBRE... OR THAT I'M MIXED UP IN THE DEAL!



IF I GET RID OF MEBS, I'LL BE IN THE CLEAR! MILLS WILL HAND FOR SURE!



AFTER THAT, IT'LL BE A CINCH TO PRETEND I MADE THAT LEAD STRIKE... ALL BY MYSELF!



A MOMENT LATER...

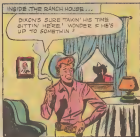
HIT TH' BRASS, GENE! THESE GUNS DIDN'T!



YAKENT'S SURE MAKIN' TRACKS!

PROBABLY HEADIN' FOR HIS GANCH!









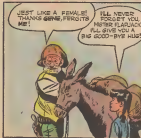




LATER... IN THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE...



AND STILL LATER...





# one STEP FROM DEATH

Tex Rogers reined up the pinto. The shaded waterhole was an inviting, welcome sight after the sun-baked desert miles he had ridden. Sliding from the saddle, he patted the pinto's shaggy neck.

"Looks like our night's lodgin's all set, Ginger." His voice was soft—a direct contradiction to his face, weathered to the russet hue of polished leather. "Gosh, I'm tired. I'm gain' to sleep for twelve hours—if Rex gets clear to Conodo ofare we catch up with him!"

Only six of those twelve hours had gone by when Tex suddenly awake, listening tensely. Horses' hoofs, close at hand! He had heard them although they were silent now. At the same instant, he regretted having left the fire, still glowing bravely against the silver splendor of the moon. His gun, too. It lay several feet away, for he had felt fairly safe. Especially where Rex was concerned. Rex wouldn't be too quick to shoot him, even though the years had been many and strife-torn. Slowly, noiselessly, he reached toward the Colt. His fingers were brushing the handle when a voice came from the blackness of the trees.

"Hold it! You're covered!"

Tex did not move. Not until the four men moved into the circle of firelight. Then he relaxed, following a sigh of relief with a deep-throated chuckle.

"Gosh, I thought you were road agents!" He frowned slightly as none of the four faces mirrored his smile, and he stared from one to the other, taking in not only their grim features

but the silver badges on their coats.

"Get up an' na funny business." The sheriff nodded to his nearest deputy. "Take his gun, Sam."

"What's the idea?" Tex was on his feet in one movement. "You're lawmen, aren't you?"

"Yep! Sheriff Fleming of Rockhill County an' three deputies—all duly elected an' swore in—"

"All right." Tex interrupted irritably. "But start explainin' why you're treatin' me like a CROOK!"

"'Cause you are one!" barked the sheriff. "Put him on his hass, men. The sooner we get him to town, the sooner he'll hang!"

"Hang?" Tex echoed incredulously. "What for?"

"Save yore breath," growled the sheriff. "An' let's get gain'."

The way back to town was a long one, and the sun was well above the horizon when the quintet of horsemen trotted down the main street. Tex had passed through the stage of angry fury into one of dozed bewilderment. What did he have to do with this town? He had never been here before . . . Of what crime was he accused?

Behind the little cavalcade, an angry muttering began to make itself heard. The sound grew louder until even Tex's dulled ears heard it and separated it into syllables.

"That's him, all right!"

"Hongin's too good for him!"

"Round up the boys! We don't need no trial!"

The quintet halted before a building marked "COURTHOUSE."

A thin-featured woman, in a calico dress, was being hustled forward through the crowd. "It's Marthy Brown . . . Marthy Brown . . . Marthy Brown . . ." The name became a refrain, beating on Tex's brain.

"Is this the man, Marthy?"

The woman peered under Tex's hat and nodded violently. "That's him! He murdered my man!"

Flanked by deputies, he was rushed into the building.

"Hear ye . . . Hear ye . . ."

Marthy Brown joined the group before the table. The Judge studied her briefly.

"This is the man who killed Henry?" he asked.

"He is!" Marthy tossed her head. "Seven other people seen the shootin'! They recognize him, too!"

The Judge looked at Tex. "The law's mighty swift in this part o' the country . . . but I don't believe in it goin' so off-fired fast, if it ain't check-reined by Justice!" He paused, when Tex said nothing, he continued: "You're accused o' killin' Henry Brown in cold blood, young fella . . . an', from the description we got o' the killer . . ."

The judge glanced at a paper on the table . . . "looks like Sheriff Fleming caught the right man. Six feet, one . . . brown hair . . . front cowlick . . . brown eyes . . . tanned complexion . . . cleft chin—"

Tex could stand it no longer. "Sure, that description fits me! So what? It fits my twin brother, too!" A murmur of skepticism swept through the room; even the judge raised a disbelieving eyebrow. "I know it sounds phony," Tex plunged on. "But I've got one! An'—an' he's an outlaw! I've been huntin' him for six months . . ." He stopped. There was no use trying to convince these hostile people he wasn't Rex but Tex Rogers . . . His number was up. He might as well accept the fact, and hope it wouldn't take too long.

"Har-rumph!" The judge cleared his throat. "Your outburst was highly irregular but . . ." His eyes wandered to the paper again and a gleam of inter-

est came into them. He looked at the sheriff. "Where's the prisoner's gun belt?"

"Here, Your Honor." Fleming, plainly puzzled, held out the belt.

"Give it to him." The judge indicated Tex. "Put it on," he added snappishly as Tex took the belt from the sheriff and let it hang limp in cold fingers.

Tex obeyed. The room was deathly silent; each face wore a perplexed frown. Each face except the judge's. His lips were, strangely, wreathed in a generous smile that only deepened the frowns of the spectators.

"That settles it!" He pounded the table with his fist. "He has got a twin brother—an' he ain't guilty!"

The hubbub was loud and protesting but quieted before the judge's shouting: "I know he ain't the killer! Look at his gun belt!" Twenty pairs of eyes turned toward Tex. "He's wearin' it for a righthand draw—" Ten heads nodded agreement—"An' here—in this paper—" The judge waved it high—"eight witnesses swear to the fact—that the killer was LEFT-HANDED!"

It was funny, thought Tex, half an hour later, how the sound of voices could change so fast. He couldn't hear the mob yells any more; only the cheers of the people and their apologies rang in his ears as he and Ginger headed north . . .



# POTHOLE TREASURE

HI THERE, YOUNSTERS!  
MORRIS PAW SAID I'D FIND  
YOH IN HERE!

FINHANDLE PETE!

WHEN DID YOU GET HERE, PETE?  
HAVE YOU GOT ANOTHER  
"LOST-AND" STORY FOR US?

DID YOU FIND THE  
LOST PEBBLES OF  
THE LLANOS? OR  
SOME OTHER STREET?

TAKE IT EASY, YOU YOUNG  
QUESTION MARKS! I DIDN'T  
FIND THE LLANOS GOLD  
PEBBLES ...

BUT I COME ACROSS  
THIS DOWN IN  
WICHITA FALLS!



IT'S A GOLD NUGGET!

RIGHT JANEY AN' ITS STORY  
GOES WAY BACK... TO THE  
DAYS WHEN PAINTED SAVAGES  
RODE THE  
TEXAS PLAINS...

ONE DAY, A WAGON TRAIN, BOUND FOR  
NEW MEXICO, CROSSED THE RED RIVER  
SOUTH OF THE MOUNTAINS...



SUDDENLY, IT WAS ATTACKED BY A BAND  
OF HOSTILE INDIANS...



THE MEN OF THE TRAIN MADE A CORRAL OF THEIR WAGONS  
WHILE THE INDIANS GOT THE YOUNG "LIVE OUTFITTER"  
OF THE "REDSKIN" ARROWS.



WHEN THE CHILDREN WERE SAFE,  
THE WOMEN GOT INTO THE BATTLE, TOO...



COME NIGHT, THE REDSKINS WERE STILL GOING STRONG  
BUT THERE WAS ONLY A HANDFUL OF THE PIONEERS LEFT.



THEY DECIDED TO MAKE A BREAK FOR IT  
THE INJUNS SPOTTED 'EM.



ONE MAN, JARVIS BROWN, GOT AWAY  
BUT ONLY 'CAUSE HE FELL INTO A  
POTHOLE.



BROWN LAY THERE HARDLY MOVING, TILL SUNSET  
HE HEARD THE INJUN LEAVE AND WAS TRYING TO  
CLIMB OUT WHEN HE SPOTTED SOMETHING SHINY  
IN THE POT-HOLE'S SANDY BOTTOM.

"GOLD nuggets!  
DOZENS OF 'EM!  
I'M RICH!"



ALL DAY BROWN DUG FOR NUGGETS BY HAND.  
HIS CLOTHES WERE DIRTY WITH GOLD. HE CLIMBED  
OUT OF THE DAVEN.





NOTHING WAS LEFT OF THE WAGON TRAIN EXCEPT CHARRD  
EMBERS AND ASHES. THE INDIANS HAD BURNED WHAT SUPPLIES  
THEY COULDN'T TOTE AWAY.



WITH HALF A CANTER OF WATER AND  
NO GRUB, BROWN SEARCHED FOR THE  
ABANDONED POST. AT LAST FOUR DAYS  
LATER HE WAS ON THE SACA TRAIL.



LONG TOWARD NOON NEXT DAY HE GOT  
POWERFUL HUNGRY. SPOTTING A FLOCK  
OF SAGE HENS, HE RAISED HIS GUN - WITH  
SUDDENLY ...



HE HIT FOR COVER IN A WILD-BLUM THicket, AND THE  
BIRDS KEPT ON ALONG THE RIDGE, LUCKY FOR HIM ...



HE WAITED A COUPLE HOURS THEN HEADED  
EAST AGAIN, TAKING A ZIGZAG TRAIL. HE  
WAS GETTING REAL WEAK FROM HUNGER...



... AND THE GOLD WAS GETTING MIGHTY  
HEAVY. THE WEIGHT OF IT MADE HIM  
STUMBLE.



SPOTTING A GOYHER HOLE  
HE DUGGED SOME OF THE  
MUSSETTS IN IT.



ON AND ON HE WENT,  
EVENY LITTLE WHILE HE  
DROPPED SOME MORE OF  
THE GOLD...



WHEN HE GOT TO THE ARMY POST, HE WAS  
HALF-DEAD! AND ALL THE GOLD HE HAD  
LEFT WAS THREE MUSSETTS...



FOR YEARS AND YEARS JABET BROWN SEARCHED  
THE PATHLESS PLAINS SOUTH OF THE MOUNTAINS  
LOOKING FOR THE WRECK OF THAT WAGON TRAIN



BUT HE NEVER FOUND IT--ON THE  
ROTTOLE TRAILHEAD! HE SAID  
THERE MUSTA BEEN A BARREL  
OF THOSE MUSSETTS!

I SUPPOSE YOU'LL BE  
GOING TO LOOK FOR  
MORE OF THEM ONE OF  
THESE DAYS, PANHANDLE  
PETS!



THOSE SO? BUT RIGHT NOW I'M HAVIN' ONE OF  
THESE BEE-LICIOUS-SWELLIN' APPLES...



AN' THANEIN' MY STAGE I'ANT  
OUT ON THE DESERT WITH AN  
EMPTY STOMACHE AN' A POKETFUL  
O' GOLD MUSSETTS!!





