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Overland Red

By HARRY HERBERT KNIBBS

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CHAPTER XIII. The Guests Arrive.

At the station Louise found her guests, young Dr. Marshall and his wife, also the telegram announcing the day they would arrive. "I'm sorry," began Louise. But the Marshalls glanced her with hearty "Oh, pshaw!" and "No matters!" with an incidental hug from Anne.

"Why, you have changed so, Anne!" exclaimed Louise. "What have you been doing? You used to be so terribly formal, and now you're actually hugging me in public!" "The public has just departed, Miss Lacharme, with your pony. I believe he rides well—the tall, dark chap that came with you."

"Oh, Collier! He's gone for the buckboard, of course. Stupid of me not to drive down." We really didn't expect you until tomorrow, but you'll forgive us all, won't you? You can see how telegrams are handled at these stations.

Anne Marshall, a brown-eyed, rather stately and pleasingly slender girl, smiled and shook her head. "I don't know I may if you will promise to introduce me to that fascinating roving cowboy that rode away with your horse. I used to dream of such men."

Young Dr. Marshall coughed. The girls laughed. "Oh, Collier!" said Louise. "Of course you will meet him. He's off right hand man Uncle Walter says he couldn't get along without him, and Aunt Eleanor just thinks he is perfect."

"And Louise?" queried Anne Marshall. "Same," said Louise noncommittally. "I don't see why he took Boyar with him to the store though."

The Marshalls and Louise paced slowly up and down the station platform, chatting about the east and Louise's last visit there before Anne was married. Presently they were interrupted by a wild clatter of hoofs and the grind and screech of a hastily applied brake. The borrowed buckboard, strong, light, two-seated and built for service, had arrived dramatically. Collier leaped back, the reins wrapped around his wrists and his foot pressing the brake home. In the harness stood

or, rather, grated Boyar and Collier's own pony, Apache. It is enough to say that neither of them had ever been in harness before. The ponies were trying to get rid of the appended vehicle through any possible means Louise gasped. "Price's team is out—over to the Oro ranch. I knew you wanted a team in a hurry," said Collier. "It looks quite like a team in a hurry," commented Dr. Marshall. "Your man is a good driver?" "Splendid!" said Louise. "Come on, Anne. You always said you wanted to ride behind some real western horses. Here they are."

"Why, this is just—just bully!" whispered the stately Anne Marshall. "And isn't he a striking figure?" "Yes," assented Louise, who was just the least bit uncertain as to the outcome of Collier's hasty assembling of untutored harness material. "It is just 'bully.' Where in the world did you unearth that word, Anne?" Dr. Marshall's offhand designation of the buckboard as "a team in a hurry" was prophetic, even unto the end. What Boyar could not accomplish in the way of equine gymnastics in harness Apache, Collier's pony, could.

Louise was a little fearful for her guests, yet she had confidence in the driver. The Marshalls apparently saw nothing more than a pair of very spirited "real western horses like one reads about, you know" until Dr. Marshall, slowly coming out of a kind of anticipatory haze, as Boyar stood on his hind feet and tried to face the buckboard, recognized the black horse as Louise's saddle animal. He took a firmer grip on the seat and looked at Collier. The young man seemed to be enjoying himself. There wasn't a line of worry on his clean-cut face.

"Pretty lively," said the doctor. Collier, with his foot on the brake and both arms rigid, nodded. Moonstone canyon trail was not a boulevard. He was not to be lured into conversation. He was giving his whole mind and all of his magnetism to the team.

Boyar and Apache took advantage of every turn, pitch, steep descent and ford to display the demoniac ingenuity inspired by their outraged feelings. They were splendid, obedient saddle animals, but to be buckled and strapped in irritating harness and hitched to that four-wheeled disgrace, a buckboard!

Anne Marshall chatted happily with Louise, punctuating her lively chatter with subdued little cries of delight as some new turn in the trail opened on a vista unimaginally beautiful, especially to her eastern eyes.

Young Dr. Marshall, in the front seat with Collier, braced his feet and smiled. He had had experience in a New York ambulance, but then that had been over level streets. He glanced over the edge of the canyon road, and his smile faded a little. It faded entirely as the front wheel sheared off a generous shovelful of earth from a sharp upright angle of the hill as the team took the turn at a gallop.

"The road needs widening there anyway," commented Collier, as though apologizing. "I have my oil—repair kit with me," said the general doctor. "I'm a surgeon."

Collier nodded, but kept his eyes rigidly on the horses. Evidently this immaculate of the white collar and cuffs and the stylish gray tweeds had "sand."

"They're a little fussy, but I know 'em," said Collier as Boyar, apparently terror-stricken at a manzanita that he had passed hundreds of times, reared, his fore feet pawing space and the traces dangerously slack. Louise bit her lower lip and quickly called Anne's attention to a spot of vivid color on the hillside. To Dr. Marshall's surprise, Collier struck Apache, who was behaving smartly with the whip. Apache leaped forward, bringing Boyar down to his feet again. The doctor would have been inclined to strike Boyar for misbehaving. He saw Collier's wisdom and smiled. To have punished Boyar when already on his hind feet would have been folly.

At the top of the next grade the lathering, restive ponies finally settled to a stubborn trot. "Mad clean through," said Collier. "I should say they were behaving well enough," said the doctor, not as much as an opinion as to relieve his tense nerves in speech.

"When a bronc gets to acting lady-like then is the time to look out," said Collier. "Boyar and Apache have never been in harness before. Seems kind of queer to 'em."

"What! Never been—why, huh! For heaven's sake, don't let Mrs. Marshall hear that!" Walter Stone and his wife made the Marshalls feel at home immediately. Walter Stone had known Dr. Marshall's father, and he found in the son a pleasant living recollection of his old friend, Aunt Eleanor and Louise had visited with Anne Marshall and Louise were east. Since was Anne Winthrop then, and Louise and she had found much in common to enjoy in shopping and sightseeing. Their one regret was that Louise would have to return to the west before Anne's marriage to the young Dr. Marshall they admired so much. There had been vague promises of coming west after "things were settled," as Anne put it, which was merely another way of saying, "After we are married and have become enough used to each other to really enjoy a long trip west."

The Marshalls had arrived, with three years of happiness behind them and apparently with an acre or so of happiness to look forward to, for they were quiet, unassuming young folks, with plenty of money and no desire whatever to make people aware of it. In the shadows of the mountain

evening they congregated on the veranda and chatted about the east, the west and incidentally about the proposed picnic they were to enjoy a few days later, when "boots and saddles" would be the order of the day. "And the trails are not bad, Anne," said Louise. "When you get used to them you'll forget all about them, but your pony won't. He'll be just as delicate and anxious about your safety and his at the end of the week as he was at the beginning."

"Imagine! A week of riding about these mountains! How Billy would have enjoyed it, doctor!" "Yes. But I believe he is having a pretty good time where he is."

"We wish he could be here, Anne," said Louise. "I've never met your brother. He's always been away when I have been east."

"Which has been his misfortune," said Dr. Marshall. "He writes such beautiful letters about the desert and his mining claim"

CHAPTER XIV. A Red Episode. OVERLAND RED, despite his outward regeneration, was Overland Red still, only a little more so. His overwhelming apparel accentuated his peculiarities, his humorous gestures, his silent self-consciousness. But there was something big, forceful and wholesome about the man, something that attracted despite his incongruities.

Young Dr. Marshall studied him, racking his memory for a name. Presently he turned to his wife. "What was Billy's partner's name—the miner? I've forgotten."

"A Mr. Summers, I believe. Yes, I'm sure. Jack Summers Billy called him in his letters."

"Just a minute," said the doctor, turning to Overland, who sat, huge limbed, smiling, red visaged, happy. "Fardon me. You said Mr. Jack Summers, I believe. Do you happen to know a Mr. Winthrop, Billy Winthrop?"

"Me? What, Billy? Billy Winthrop? Say, is this me? I inhaled a whole lot of gasoline coming up that grade, but I ain't feelin' dizzy. Billy Winthrop? Why?"—And his exclamation subsided as he asked cautiously, "Do you know him?"

"I am his sister," said Anne Marshall. Overland was dumfounded. "His sister," he muttered, "the one he writes to in New York. Huh! Yes; me and Billy's partners."

"Is he better?" asked Anne hesitatingly. "Better? Say, lady, excuse me if I tell you he's gettin' so blame frisky that he's got me scared. Why, I left him gettin' on a rock eatin' a sardine sash with one hand and shootin' holes in all the tin cans in sight with the other. So long, Red!" he bellers as I lit out with the burro to cross the range. So long, and don't let your feet slip! And pom! goes the 45 that he was jugglin', and another tin can passed over. He takes a bite from the sash, and then pom! goes the gun again, and another tin can bites the dust, just as free and easy as if he wasn't keepin' guard over thirty or forty thousand dollars' worth of gold dust and trouble, and jest as if he ain't got no lungs at all."

Overland Red was concluding his last yarn, a most amazing account of "the night the Plancher boys shot up Abilene."

It was exactly 2 o'clock by Dr. Marshall's watch. "Both my guns was choked up with burnt powder. I reached down and borrowed two guns off a gent what wasn't usin' his jost then. Next day I was elected sheriff unanimous. That was seven of us left standin'. That was back in '98." Overland yawned and stood up.

"The boys are all asleep now," said Walter Stone. "We have plenty of room here. You'll not object to taking one of the great rooms as you find it. I'm sure."

"For better or for worse, as the pote says," and Overland grinned. "But I got to put that little chatter to roost somewhere."

"That's so."

"I'll go wake him up." And Overland strode to the racing car. The "chaffer" had departed for parts unknown.

"I guess he was scared at that last grade," said Overland, returning to the house. "He's gone. He must 'a' been scared to beat it back down the road afoot."

"Perhaps he has gone to the stables," said Stone. "Well, we'll take care of you here. You can see Collier in the morning."

Overland, closing the door of the spacious, cool guest room, glanced about curiously. What was it made the place seem so different from even the most expensive hotel suits? The furniture were soft toned and simple. "It's—it's because the rose girl lives here, I guess," he soliloquized. "Now, this kind of a roost would jest suit Billy, but it makes me feel like walkin' on eggs. 'This here grazin' is too good for me."

He undressed slowly, folding his unaccustomed garments with great care. He placed his automatic pistol on the chair by the bed. Then he crept beneath the sheets, forgetting to turn out the light. "Huh! Gettin' absent minded like the old professor what poked up a hairbrush instead of a lookin' glass to see if he needed shave. He was dum' near scared to death to see how his beard was growin'." And Overland chuckled as he turned out the lights.

He could not go to sleep at once. He missed the desert night—the spaces and the stars. "I left here in a hurry once," he muttered. "Bout three years ago. Then I was kiddin' Collier about wearin' silk pajamas. Now I got 'em—got 'em on, by thunder! Don't know as I feel any better in the intelie." And I can't show 'em to nobody. What's the good of havin' 'em if nobody knows it? But I can hang 'em on the bedpost in the mornin' car—jest like I was raised to it. Then pejammas cost \$1 a leg. Some class!" And he drifted to sleep.

After breakfast Dr. Marshall, who had taken a fancy to Overland, strolled with him over to the bunk house. Most of the men were on the range. Collier was assembling bits and bridle, and saddles, cinchas and spurs to complete an equipment for the proposed camping trip in the hills. He was astounded at Overland's appearance. However, he had absorbed western ideals rapidly. He was sincerely glad, overjoyed to see his old friend, but he showed little of it in voice and manner. He

shook hands with a brief "How Red!" and went on with his work. Dr. Marshall, after expressing interest in the equipment, excused himself and wandered over to the corrals, where he admired the horses.

"Where did you get 'em?" queried Collier, adjusting the length of a pair of stirrup leathers. "These?" And Overland spread his coat and ruffled. "Why, out of the old Mojave. Dug 'em up with a little pick and shovel."

"You said in your letter you found the claim."

"Uhuh. 'Almost fell over it before I did, though. We never found the other things by the track. New ties. No mark. Say, that Billy Winthrop I writ about is the brother of them folks stayin' here! What do you think?"

"Wish I was out there with you fellows," said Collier. "You're doin' pretty good right here, kiddo. The boss don't think you're the worst that ever came across, and I expect the ladies can put up with havin' you on the same ranch by the way they talk. Got a hoss of your own yet?"

"None. I got my eye on one, though. Say, Red, this is the best place to work. The boss is fine. I'm getting forty a month now and savin' it. The boys are all right too. Brand Williams, the foreman—"

"Brand who?" "Williams. He came from Wyoming."

"Well, this here's gettin' like a story and not like real life. Why, I knowed old Brand in Mex. in the old days when a hoss and a gun was about all a guy needed to set up housekeepin'. We was pals. So he's foreman here, eh? Well, you follow his trail close about cattle or hosses and you'll win out."

"I been doing that," said Collier. "The other day he told me to keep my eye on one of the boys. Silent Saunders he's called. Kind of funny. I don't know anything about Saunders."

"Well, you bank on it. Stack 'em up chin high on it, Collier, if Brand says that. He knows somethin' or he would never talk. Brand is a particular friend of yours?"

"Well, tie to him. What he says is better than fine gold as the pote says. I reckon course gold suits me better outside of pot'ry. How does the Saunders inse? wear his clothes?"

"He's kind of lame in one arm and here he comes now. You can see for yourself. The one on that Pinto."

As Saunders rode past the two men he turned in his saddle. Despite Overland's flurry he recognized him at once. Overland's gaze never left the other's hands. "Mornin'," said Overland, nodding. "Ain't you grazin' pretty far this side of Gophertown?"

"Who the deuce are you talkin' to?" Saunders asked venomously, and his eyes narrowed. Overland grinned and carelessly shifted the lapel of his coat, from beneath which peeped the butt of his automatic pistol. Collier felt his scalp tightening. There was something tense and suggestive in the air.

"I'm talkin' to a fella that ought to know better than to get sassy to me," said Overland, "or to cut my trail like that."

Saunders rode on. "Seen him before?" asked Collier. "Yep. Twice—over the end of a gun. He come visitin' me and Billy at a

water hole out in the dry spot. We got to exchangin' opinions. Two of mine he ain't forgot, I guess."

"Saunders is brandes about the hills on both arms," said Collier. "He's been shot up pretty bad."

"You don't tell! Wonder how that happened. Mobby he was practicin' the double roll and got careless. Now, I wonder!"

"He's one of the 'bunch'?" said Collier, suddenly awake to the situation. "Come on over to the bunk house, where we can talk. Red, I'll introduce you regular to Silent."

"All right. Here, you walk on the other side. I'm left handed when I shake with him."

But Saunders was not at the bunk house. Instead he had ridden on down to the gate and out upon the Moonstone trail. He had become acquainted with Deputy Tenlow. He would make things interesting for the man who had winged him out in the desert.

Anne Marshall had stepped from the porch to the living room, Overland was alone with Louise. Facing her quick-

ly, his easy banter gone, his blue eyes intense, untroubled, magnetic, he drew a deep breath. "They're waiting for me down the canyon about now," he said, and his tone explained his speech. Louise frowned slightly, studying his face. "That is unfortunate just now," she said slowly.

"Or most any time—for the other fella," responded Overland cheerfully. "The girl gazed at the toe of her slipper. 'I know you didn't speak because you were afraid. What do you intend?'"

"If I ain't oversteppin' the rules I invitin' you—why, I was goin' to say 'Miss Lacharme, wouldn't you like to take a little buggy ride in the Guzzuh nice and slow. She's awful easy ridin' if you don't rein her too strong.'"

"I don't know," said Louise pensively. "Your car can only hold two?" "Yes, ma'am."

"I couldn't run away and leave Mrs. Marshall. Of course you would go after—after we were in the valley. How would I get back?"

"That's so!" exclaimed Overland, with some subtlety, pretending he had not thought of that contingency. "Course Collier could ride down ahead with a spare hoss. You see, the sheriff gent and Saunders—"

"Saunders! Our man Saunders?" "Uhuh. Me and him ain't friends exactly. I figure he's rode down to tell the Tenlow man that I'm up here."

"You are sure?" "Yes, miss. I don't make no mistakes about him."

"Then one of our men has gone to get the deputy to arrest you, and you are our guest."

"Thanks, miss, for sayin' that. It's worth gettin' pinched to be your guest."

"I did intend to ride down for the mail. Boyar needs exercisin'."

"So does the Guzzuh, miss. It's queer how she acts when she ain't been worked every day."

"I don't believe Anne would care to come in the machine. I'll ask her."

Anne Louise stepped to the living room, Collier, who had been watching anxiously from the corrals, came across the yard to the veranda. He was dressed for riding, and he had a gun on his hip. Overland scowled. "You little idiot," he said, "when your Uncle Jack's brains get ossified just give the sad news to the press. You're jest itchin' to get in a muss and get plugged. I ain't. I figure to ride down the Moonstone trail, steerin' the Guzzuh with one hand and smellin' a bunch of roses in the other. Watch my smoke. Now, heat it!"

Louise, coming blithely from the living room, nodded to Overland. Her pensiveness had departed. Her cheeks were flushed. "Oh, Collier! Saddle Boyar!" she began, but Overland coughed disapprovingly. He did not wish Tenlow and Saunders to suspect that the led horse was for Louise.

"Or—no. Saddle Sarno," said Louise, at once aware of Overland's plan. "And have him at the foot of the hill for me as soon as you can."

"Yes, Miss Louise." And Collier departed for the corrals wondering. Overland was too much for him.

They had luncheon and allowed Collier two hours to arrive at the valley level with the led pony. After luncheon Louise appeared in riding skirt and boots. "Mr. Summers is going to take me for a ride in his new car," she said. "Don't worry, aunty. He is going to drive slowly. He finds that he has to leave unexpectedly."

"But how will you come back?" queried Anne. "Collier has gone ahead with a spare pony. Goodby, aunty."

"I can't thank you enough for all that you have done for Billy. I am so glad he's well and strong again. We never could manage him. Goodby, and tell Billy he must come over and see us right away."

As Collier rode down the last pitch, leading the restive Sarko, Dick Tenlow stepped from the brush. "Mornin', Collier! Out for a little paser?" "Shouldn't wonder, Dick."

"Horses are lookin' good. Feed good on the hills yet?" "Pretty good."

"I hear you got company up to the Moonstone?" "Yep. Eastern folks, doctor and his wife." And Collier looked the deputy half in the eye.

"Oh, that was their machine I heard coughin' up the canyon last night, eh?" "I didn't ask them about that," replied Collier.

"You're improvin' since you first come into these hills," said Tenlow, with some sarcasm. "I'm holdin' down a better job than I did then," said Collier good naturedly. "Well, I ain't. I'm holdin' the same job, which you will recollect. It ain't much of a job, but it's good to requisition that cayuse you're leadin'."

"What you kiddin' about?" "Straight goods," said Tenlow, reaching for Sarko's reins. "Just hand over your end of that rope."

"I guess not, Dick. You're on the wrong trail. What do you think I am?"

"Same as I always thought."

"Then you want to change your opinion of me," said Collier, relinquishing the tie rope. "I ain't breakin' the law, but you are going to hear more about this."

"I'll risk that. You can ride right along, pronto."

"And you keep Sarko? I guess not. I'll stick."

"You can't throw no bluff this mornin'," said Tenlow.

"You got the horse, but I don't leave here without him," said Collier stubbornly. And there was an underlying assurance about Collier's attitude that perplexed the deputy, who was satisfied that the led horse was for Overland Red's use.

Continued in next week's Banner.



In the Radiance of the Porch Light Stood a Wonderfully Attired Stranger.

—that's his latest fad—and says he's much stronger. But I believe they all say that when they have his trouble, you know."

"From Billy's last letter I should say he was in pretty fair shape," said the doctor. "He's living outdoors and at a good altitude, somewhere on the desert. He's making money. He posts his letters at a town called Daggett, in this state."

"Up above San Berdo," said Walter Stone. And he straightway drifted into reverie.

"Hello!" exclaimed Dr. Marshall, leaning forward. "Sounds like the cab-hust of a pretty heavy car. I didn't imagine any one would drive that canyon road after dark."

"Unusual," said Stone, getting to his feet. "Some one in a hurry. I'll turn on the porch light and defy the mosquitoes."

With a lionine roar and a succeeding clatter of empty cylinders an immense racing car stopped at the gate below. The powerful headlight shot a widening pathway through the night. Voices came distinctly from the vicinity of the machine. Before Walter Stone had reached the bottom step of the porch a huge figure appeared from out the shadows. In the radiance of the porch light stood a wonderfully attired stranger. Frock coat, silk hat, patent leathers, striped trousers and pearl garters, a white vest and a noticeable watch chain adorned the driver of the automobile. He stood for a minute blinking in the light; then he swept his hat from his head with muscular grace. "Excuse me for intrudin'," he said. "I seen this glim and headed for it. Is Mr. Walter Stone at tea-stone?"

"I'm Walter Stone," said the rancher, somewhat mystified. "My name's Summers, Jack Summers, proprietor of the Rose Girl mine," and Overland Red, erstwhile sheriff of Abilene, cowboy, tramp, prospector, gun man and many other interesting things, proffered a highly engraved calling card. Again he bowed profoundly, his hat in his hand, a white carnation in his buttonhole and rapture in his heart. He had seen Louise again—Louise, leaning forward, staring at him incredulously. Wouldn't the rose girl be surprised? She was.

"I can't say that I quite understand," began Stone. "Why, it's the man who borrowed my pony!" exclaimed Louise. "Correct, miss. I—I come to thank you for lendin' me the cayuse that time."

Walter Stone simply had to laugh. "Come up and rest after your trip up the canyon. Of course you want to see Collier. He told me about your findin' the claim. Says you have given him a quarter interest. I'm glad you're doin' well."

"I took a little run in to Los to get some new tires. The desert eats 'em up pretty fast. The Guzzuh, she cast her off hind shoe the other day. I was scared she'd go lame. Bein' up this way, I thought I'd roll up and see Collier."

"The Guzzuh?" queried Stone. "You rode up, then?" "Nope. The Guzzuh is me little old rascal. I christened her that right after I got so as I could climb on to her without her pitchin' me off. She's some bronc, she is."



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