

"THE MAVERICK"

By R. E. SHAFF

FOURTH INSTALLMENT



SYNOPSIS

Roy Ashley, with his family, moves West from the timber country where he had been in the lumber business. His son Bobby is believed to have been burned to death in a fire which swept the ranch, but in reality the boy had strayed away and after wandering for some time with a half-wild dog is picked up by a half-breed Indian from whom he later escapes. Joe MacDonald runs across the boy while out looking for stray calves and a rattlesnake is coiled near the youngster, ready to strike.

Before Joe has a chance to shoot the snake strikes the child, but by sucking the finger of the boy he draws out the poison of the scratch caused by the fangs. MacDonald takes the youngster home after a race thru the brush and Mom puts the boy to bed. They plan for his future and he is sent away to school. After a lapse of fifteen years we find The Maverick as he is called by all, a fine young man ready for his future as a rancher. Joe gives him a herd of cattle registered in the Maverick's name. Mom and Joe move to town where Joe has been elected sheriff and he puts Dave Hines' son in charge of the ranch. The Maverick goes to town to meet Ida Peterson, an old school mate, and is amazed at the change in her after a period of two years. They start for the Peterson ranch in the face of a threatening storm.

Now go on with the story—

Altho it was nearly dark, they started on the winding trail that led thru the hills to the big, broad fertile valley where lay the Peterson, the Cross Bar, and Old Joe Gru's ranch.

The Maverick was soon to sense his mistake. A few drops of rain spattered down; the air suddenly became chilled and the rain slicked. Then came the big soft, fleecy snow flaks. He turned and looked back but it was getting too dark. It made him angry with himself to think that her remark, and her look had caused him to ride past Turner's. Yet he had and now he hated to give in. The snow was beginning to slant down, pushed by the wind. He stopped and as she looked at him inquiringly, he motioned back towards Turner's and she grasped his meaning.

"Don't worry about it unless you are afraid." There was challenge in her tone, and he said no more. They started on . . .

Before she left for the city they never had a word. Now, she seemed to hate him. True, she had been back each summer for a visit but he had not. He sat there and pushed the horses along as hard as he dared, and yet not use up all their energy. He would cast a look once in a while at her over his shoulder; she was a game girl. As they rounded a shoulder of the trail, the blizzard was upon them, driving down from the northwest. It came like a blanket.

Night was coming with it tho it was scarcely three o'clock. He pulled over closer as the storm hit. The big horse he rode shook his ears and snorted—he did not like the idea of a blizzard. It blew the snow in their ears and their eyes. They were off the road now, he heard the horses splash thru a shallow slew. The horses were walking now with their heads low, their tails lugged, icicles hanging on them.

The weather was getting cold fast, but the Maverick was lucky as he had his heavy mittens and his heavy sweater. Even tho he was dressed warmly, he felt the sting of the wind. What must she be suffering? He leaned closer to her. He saw icicles in her hair, where it stuck from under her hat and over the slicker collar. Her hands were hanging down. She had let loose of the reins and they were dragging. The pony was doing its best to keep along side of the big roan. He then noticed that she had on only kid gloves.

He leaned over and gathered the reins, more by feeling than seeing, tied them together and dropped them over the bronco's neck. He did the same to his own reins, reached over and took the now unresisting bundle over on his own mount.

He tried to get her hands thru inside his own slicker, but to keep her face from the biting sting of the wind. She looked at him, and he saw she was cying. He put his face close to hers and she kissed him on the cheek.

It took his breath short—this sudden change. And again he held his head down. Darkness was all about now. Even his horse was invisible. He felt the weight of that mighty body as it swayed thru the storm, stumbling up grade and jolting down.

The cold was making him shake like a leaf, or was it having her there so close? He dared not think of what might be the end of this. If only they might find a straw

stack. She slid her arm around his neck and began to shake with great rasping sobs. She had denied being cold, tho his hands ached. He shielded her as best he could and tried, man-fashion, to soothe her.

He had lost his sense of direction and location. The big horse was going his own gait where his instinct took him. Bob felt her brush the snow from his collar and again she shook with sobs. From then on they talked of their childhood, or rather, he did. He was trying hard to hold up her spirits. Each time she shifted, he felt a thrill.

Suppose they were able to ride out the storm? He was sure they were lost. Suppose they rode out into one of the myriad of lakes or slues that dotted the country? Whole herds of cattle had done that very thing—why not a horse?

He tried to cheer her up by telling her about his new-found feeling, all unaware of the cause of those sobs. If they did not come out of this, he wanted her to know he was still "her Bobby," as he had been when they had played together at keeping house. He had always declared he was going to be her man when he grew up.

The roan stumbled over a fence. The posts were already nearly flat on the ground. The posts were broken over by the weight of tumble-weeds and snow. After what seemed hours, the roan stopped and neighed. The wind had eased up a little. A horse from their left answered the roan. The Maverick put out his left hand and felt the side of a building—his heart gave a leap.

"I guess we are somewhere, Ida," he cried joyfully.

She tried to get down. Slowly she slid from the horse's back and crumpled to the ground. The Maverick lifted her to her feet. Her hands were like sticks. Gripping his way along the side of the barn, he found a door near the corner. There fast to the corner of the barn was a faint drawn wire. Encircling it, he found a few iron rings large enough for one's hand. Grasping one of these, and half carrying Ida, The Maverick started along the wire. They stumbled up the steps of the house to be greeted by Clem Peterson and his wife. Great was the rejoicing, but it soon stopped. Ida collapsed in her mother's arms. Her hands and feet were frozen.

The Maverick wanted to start out at once to put up the horses, but Peterson simply said "No, I can do that better than anyone else. Get your things off and thaw out." Morning dawned and still the storm raged on. Ida remained in bed, her hands and feet were swollen. Near four that afternoon the wind dropped, and aside from gusts, the buildings might be seen. Still the cold and powdery snow drifted about. The Maverick was anxious to get home. He saddled the roan and started the three-mile ride to the Cross Bar Ranch.

Roger Hines, the foreman of the Cross Bar Ranch and seven years the senior of The Maverick, met him at the barn where he was caring for the horses.

"Come thru today, kid?" Roger Hines asked.

"No," answered the Maverick, "stopped at Peterson's last night. Got lost coming out."

"Did Ida come on the train yesterday?" Rodge asked.

"Yes, she did."

"Can't say that I blame you for getting lost with her." The remark was casual enough, but the tone implied more.

"Listen, Roger, leave that part out of the conversation!" The Maverick glared at Roger, and Roger glared at The Maverick. Neither one said any more.

towards the inner door. Joe stood up and looked the other straight in the eye. "I think you had better come in too, son. I want to talk to you."

"Better do your talking out here, I guess, Governor," Rodge informed him, "the old gent doesn't seem to take to me too kindly this morning."

"That's all right," Joe said. "I heard everything you were saying. Now I don't think that we'll have much trouble fixing this thing up some way."

"You heard what he said, didn't you?" Roger asked him.

"Couldn't help but hear it. You both were rather outspoken I'll have to admit," he answered simply.

"Well, the end seems to have come for me here as far as I can see," Roger told him, "but if you want to mix in this, it's your funeral."

Otto Hines, bald as an egg, and with a complexion that was like a baby's, sat at his desk, trying not to show the anger that still seethed within him.

Joe broke the ice. "Mr. Hines, I happened to hear everything you two were saying. Now I don't want to mix in your private affairs, but since I did hear it, it isn't private any more."

Hines turned to Joe, doubt in his face, "Joe, you evidently didn't hear as much as you think. At least, all that that ungrateful, lazy loafer has done."

The lawyer got up, his anger rising as he came to his feet. "I'm thru with you. Didn't I tell you that a minute ago?" His glaring, beady eyes were focused on Roger.

MacDonald strode forward. "Look here, Hines, I asked him in here and he stays until I tell him to go. Do you hear?"

All three men stood silent for a moment. Finally the young man spoke. "It isn't any use, mister. I'm just what he says I am. Plain no good. There isn't anything you can do about it either, so I guess I'll be going."

"Not so fast, son; I might have an idea, also. Not only about what you have done but also about the things I think you can do—that is, if you care to try," Joe told him forcefully.

"That's all he has done for the last year, MacDonald, and every time he makes a bigger fool of it than ever," Mr. Hines said.

"Hines, I never kill a horse for anything but old age or accident. I've known folks to break a horse's leg purposely so's they might have an excuse to take it out behind the barn and shoot it, and I don't reckon I like those kind of people. Now, I promise that if this young man will go out to the Cross Bar Ranch and try to do the right thing he can make a man of himself. No one knows him out there, and I won't tell them about him either."

Roger Hines rode out to the Cross Bar Ranch in the buckboard beside Joe MacDonald. Roger was no fool. He realized that this must be the last chance. Farming came natural to him. He knew considerably about machinery, had a better education than the average floater—so in the course of a year, he was the mainstay at the ranch.

The Maverick had come home from agricultural school that summer. Joe was the sheriff and lived at the county seat. Roger had been left in charge of the ranch while Bob had finished school. Now, another spring was upon them and work was to be done as soon as the snow had left the ground.

Petersons gave a dance and Roger and The Maverick had lingered after the others had taken for home. Each was basking in the sunlight of the charms of Ida Peterson. They rode home together, each with his own thoughts.

Before the week was over, he and Roger had come to blows over a mere trifle in the bunk house. The Maverick had been working at the task of plaiting rawhide to make a bridle. Roger had come in while one of the hands was arguing good-naturedly how rawhide was made. The Maverick maintained that it was horse hide, and Roger insisted it was pig skin. The outcome had been blows. Roger was the first to strike, altho The Maverick had been the first to clinch. The hands had parted them, but it was a bad condition left unsettled. There was no more hecking each other—or horse play. Each went his own way but the thing got no better between them. The Maverick was sorry this thing had come up between them—doubly so, because Joe and Mom must hear of it sooner or later. He set out to look over the south fence. Joe had erected it there in the first place to keep back those damned sheep. Old Man Gru's had sheep that had long been the thorn in Joe MacDonald's side. Old Man Gru's had, as Joe figured it, horned in when he had bought a considerable piece of free range from the government, that lay along the south

line of Joe's place. If anything could cause more trouble in the range country than sheep, it had not yet been discovered. Open war had been declared between Gru and MacDonald the first time the close-nibbling flock had come serenely up across the Cross Bar. The first spring, when the snow had left the ground bare, the fence had been the dead line. All hands belonging to the Cross Bar had their orders from Joe not to cross that line. That was law enough for anyone that knew Joe MacDonald. Two wolfhounds now replaced the one that Joe had brought into the kitchen the day he and the Maverick had laid down the hatchet, when he had first come to the Cross Bar.

The hounds were called Blue and Queen. They were out in front, now, bounding along the ground like feathers blown by a breeze. Blue was older than his mate by several years, close-haired and smaller than the beautiful Russian mate that had been shipped in from the city. Queen, white as snow that covered the ground in spots, a reminder of the blizzard that had so recently held the prairie in its grasp.

Soon old Blue gave a yelp. He had surprised a full grown coyote in the bottom of a draw. The coyote fled along the fence, and old Blue was in hot pursuit. Queen was several rods away when the chase started. Away they went down the fence, the Maverick trying to close the distance by cutting cross lots. Queen's long legs were rapidly closing the distance between Old Blue and herself.

The coyote's lead of a hundred feet still separated it from old Blue. Queen drew abreast of old Blue, passed him, and cut the lead of the coyote down to ten yards before they had covered a half mile. The coyote glanced back over its shoulder, gave a twist of its tail and slid thru the fence, and darted off at an angle.

The dogs kept on down the fence and soon came to an opening where the fence was down. The coyote had gained quite a lead by his clever ruse, the dogs went on and on, straight ahead, Queen leading. The Maverick was racing along behind, while the dogs again closed up the gap.

After a mile or so Queen was again within a few feet of the quarry, this time there was no fence to slide under and the nearest draw a mile away. The coyote seemed to scrub the ground with its tail and turned sharply to the right.

Queen's tactics were quite different. Instead of slashing out at the wolf as she went by, Queen took a couple high bounding leaps, more like a buck-jumping bronco. About the third time she came to the ground her lithe body shot skyward. The sun glistened on the white silken coat. At least ten feet straight up she shot. At the peak, her long tail cracked out like a whip so suddenly did she change ends. Those long legs were thrusting out like pistons before she hit the ground. Dirt flew up behind her as she took off after the wolf on its new track. Old Blue had simply turned off at an angle from his rear position, thus cutting his distance. Yet again Queen passed old Blue, again the wolf turned—again Queen did her acrobatic stunt.

The dogs were not running in a line any more, one kept at each side of the line of flight. Only a few short leaps were again between Queen and the quarry. These she closed and the wolf turned to slash at the silken shoulder bounding at its side.

That was the beginning of the end. A soft cruel shoulder crashed against the wolf, just back of its front leg. Caught off balance it sprawled on its side, while Queen passed on. Before the wolf had time to gain his feet, old Blue had got his famous throat hold. Back swung Queen to spread her long jaws, fanged with needle-sharp tusks to reach and crush and reach again just back of the wolf's front legs. So quick had the climax been that the Maverick and the dogs had crossed the fence in pursuit of the wolf.

That had been the first time the Maverick had ever ventured on the land of Old Man Gru since the sheep man had come. Now, he sat there looking at the low buildings stretched out before him, well aware that he was on forbidden ground. The dogs had stopped worrying the coyote and were again scouting about the sheep. The sheep were massed in fenced-in pens that jutted out from the long sheds. There was a continual subdued roar from the bleating sheep.

Two shepherd dogs sat in front of the shack and pointed their noses at the skies, giving a long, moaning howl—they were not merely barking, it was a heart-rending wail. Dogs sometimes give that long throaty howl at night when everything is still, but seldom is it heard in the light of day. There was no sign of smoke coming from the shack—no piles of hay placed about the pens.

It came to the Maverick that something must be wrong with Old Gru. An uncanny understanding of those howling dogs settled the issue, something must have happened to the old man. He might be dead; no one lived with him there. The Maverick wanted to go and see, but what if Joe found out about it? Well, he certainly would be angry. (CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

Surrogate Court Work Continues

Despite the fact that Surrogate Judge Walter N. Benwick is supposed to be enjoying a vacation from his duties, considerable business has been done under the able direction of Clerk Leon A. Ackerman from week to week. Regular sessions will be resumed Friday, August 3. During the past week two wills were probated, two letters of administration granted and six judicial settlements made.

Stanley C. Swift, Cuba, husband of Alice C. Swift, was named administrator of her estate for the purpose of discharging a mortgage long since fully paid but not cleared by the filing of discharge papers.

James White of Bolivar was granted letters of administration on the \$2,000 personal estate of John A. White, same town, whose widow, Edith White, four daughters and three sons are heirs.

The will of Charles N. Tucker, veteran Belmont business man who died July 11th, was admitted to probate. It names his widow, Adell Tucker executrix and disposed of personal property estimated at \$5,000 and real property at \$10,000. The widow, a daughter, Mrs. Helen Brooks, Scio; and a son, Nathan B. Tucker, Belmont, are named to share in the estate.

Proof of the will of George H. McKee of the town of Independence was made. The will named Melvin W. Reynolds of Wellsville as executor and the amount of the estate was stated as exceeding \$1,500 in personal and \$500 in real property. The widow, Bessie, was left \$500 and an automobile, a granddaughter, Jane Rae McKee, New Hartford, a mortgage on Whitesville property, to be used for educational purposes, the balance of the estate to go to a

son, Lewis H. McKee, New Hartford. Judicial settlements were made in six estates: Walter D. Ormiston, Cuba, executor of the estate of Arthur H. Wheeler, Cuba, appraised at \$7,734.28; Cynthia P. Fassett and Agnes K. Cronauer, executors of estate of Cora L. Fassett, Wellsville; Carolyn K. Laidlaw, executor of the estate of William Laidlaw, Belmont; Emma Pendleton, executrix of the estate of Frank Pendleton of the town of Alma; Lucian E. Hardy, executor of the will of Josephine A. Butts, Rushford; Elnora N. Basom, Alamba, N. Y., administratrix of the estate of Cora N. Winsor, town of Hume.

Public Warned of "Lindbergh Ransom" Swindle Scheme

Business men have been asked by Federal authorities to detain any persons representing themselves as Federal agents checking up on currency in a search for the Lindbergh ransom money, and notify the police immediately.

Racketeers are working a new type of swindle, according to Department of Justice officials. Working in pairs, they pose as Federal agents, showing "credentials" and producing long lists of currency serial numbers, ask to inspect the cash on hand in the store selected for the swindle.

They look over the cash and select several bills of as large denomination as possible, issuing a receipt and telling the merchant he will hear from them later. They never come back, and the merchant loses whatever money they take.

More than 15 million horses and mules are still in harness in the United States.



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4.50-21	7.31	6.30	4.04
4.75-19	7.18	6.70	4.32
5.00-19	8.44	7.20	4.56
5.25-18	8.77	8.00	5.08
5.25-21	10.29	8.80	5.60
5.50-17	12.15	8.75	5.60
5.50-18	10.45	9.05	5.60

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