

ADAMS ANDY

A TEXAS

MATCHMAKER

Andy Adams

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Andy Adams

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CHAPTER I

LANCE LOVELACE

When I first found employment with Lance Lovelace, a Texas cowman, I had not yet attained my majority, while he was over sixty. Though not a native of Texas, "Uncle Lance" was entitled to be classed among its pioneers, his parents having emigrated from Tennessee along with a party of Stephen F. Austin's colonists in 1821. The colony with which his people reached the state landed at Quintana, at the mouth of the Brazos River, and shared the various hardships that befell all the early Texan settlers, moving inland later to a more healthy locality. Thus the education of young Lovelace was one of privation. Like other boys in pioneer families, he became in turn a hewer of wood or drawer of water, as the necessities of the household required, in reclaiming the wilderness. When Austin hoisted the new-born Lone Star flag, and called upon the sturdy pioneers to defend it, the adventurous settlers came from every quarter of the territory, and among the first who responded to the call to arms was young Lance Lovelace. After San Jacinto, when the fighting was over and the victory won, he laid down his arms, and returned to ranching with the same zeal and energy. The first legislature assembled voted to those who had borne arms in behalf of the new republic, lands in payment for their services. With this land scrip for his pay, young Lovelace, in company with others, set out for the territory lying south of the Nueces. They were a band of daring spirits. The country was primitive and fascinated them, and they remained. Some settled on the Frio River, though the majority crossed the Nueces, many going as far south as the Rio Grande. The country was as large as the men were daring, and there was elbow room for all and to spare. Lance Lovelace located a ranch a few miles south of the Nueces River, and, from the cooing of the doves in the encinal, named it Las Palomas.

"When I first settled here in 1838," said Uncle Lance to me one morning, as we rode out across the range, "my nearest neighbor lived forty miles up the river at Fort Ewell. Of course there were some Mexican families nearer, north on the Frio, but they don't count. Say, Tom, but she was a purty country then! Why, from those hills yonder, any morning you could see a thousand antelope in a band going into the river to drink. And wild turkeys? Well, the first few years we lived here, whole flocks roosted every night in that farther point of the encinal. And in the winter these prairies were just flooded with geese and brant. If you wanted venison, all you had to do was to ride through those mesquite thickets north of the river to jump a hundred deer in a morning's ride. Oh, I tell you she was a land of plenty."

The pioneers of Texas belong to a day and generation which has almost gone. If strong arms and daring spirits were required to conquer the wilderness, Nature seemed generous in the supply; for nearly all were stalwart types of the inland viking. Lance Lovelace, when I first met him, would have passed for a man in middle life. Over six feet in height, with a rugged constitution, he little felt his threescore years, having spent his entire lifetime in the outdoor occupation of a ranchman. Living on the wild game of the country, sleeping on the ground by a camp-fire when his work required it, as much at home in the saddle as by his ranch fireside, he was a romantic type of the strenuous pioneer.

He was a man of simple tastes, true as tested steel in his friendships, with a simple honest mind which followed truth and right as unerringly as gravitation. In his domestic affairs, however, he was unfortunate. The year after locating at Las Palomas, he had returned to his former home on the Colorado River, where he had married Mary Bryan, also of the family of Austin's colonists.

Hopeful and happy they returned to their new home on the Nueces, but before the first anniversary of their wedding day arrived, she, with her first born, were laid in the same grave. But grief does not kill, and the young husband bore his loss as brave men do in living out their allotted day. But to the hour of his death the memory of Mary Bryan mellowed him into a child, and, when unoccupied, with every recurring thought of her or the mere mention of her name, he would fall into deep reverie, lasting sometimes for hours. And although he contracted two marriages afterward, they were simply marriages of convenience, to which, after their termination, he frequently referred flippantly, sometimes with irreverence, for they were unhappy alliances.

On my arrival at Las Palomas, the only white woman on the ranch was "Miss Jean," a spinster sister of its owner, and twenty years his junior. After his third bitter experience in the lottery of matrimony, evidently he gave up hope, and induced his sister to come out and preside as the mistress of Las Palomas. She was not tall like her brother, but rather plump for her forty years. She had large gray eyes, with long black eyelashes, and she had a trick of looking out from under them which was both provoking and disconcerting, and no doubt many an admirer had been deceived by those same roguish, laughing eyes. Every man, Mexican and child on the ranch was the devoted courtier of Miss Jean, for she was a lovable woman; and in spite of her isolated life and the constant plaguings of her brother on being a spinster, she fitted neatly into our pastoral life. It was these teasings of her brother that gave me my first inkling that the old ranchero was a wily matchmaker, though he religiously denied every such accusation. With a remarkable complacency, Jean Lovelace met and parried her tormentor, but her brother never tired of his hobby while there was a third person to listen.

Though an unlettered man, Lance Lovelace had been a close observer of humanity. The big book of Life had been open always before him, and he had profited from its pages. With my advent at Las Palomas, there were less than half a dozen books on the ranch, among them a copy of Bret Harte's poems and a large Bible.

"That book alone," said he to several of us one chilly evening, as we sat around the open fireplace, "is the greatest treatise on humanity ever written. Go with me to-day to any city in any country in Christendom, and I'll show you a man walk up the steps of his church on Sunday who thanks God that he's better than his neighbor. But you needn't go so far if you don't want to. I reckon if I could see myself, I might show symptoms of it occasionally. Sis here thanks God daily that she is better than that Barnes girl who cut her out of Amos Alexander. Now, don't you deny it, for you know it's gospel truth! And that book is reliable on lots of other things. Take marriage, for instance. It is just as natural for men and women to mate at the proper time, as it is for steers to shed in the spring. But there's no necessity of making all this fuss about it. The Bible way discounts all these modern methods. 'He took unto himself a wife' is the way it describes such events. But now such an occurrence has to be announced, months in advance. And after the wedding is over, in less than a year sometimes, they are glad to sneak off and get the bond dissolved in some divorce court, like I did with my second wife."

All of us about the ranch, including Miss Jean, knew that the old ranchero's views on matrimony could be obtained by leading up to the question, or differing, as occasion required. So, just to hear him talk on his favorite theme, I said: "Uncle Lance, you must recollect this is a different generation. Now, I've read books"—

"So have I. But it's different in real life. Now, in those novels you have read, the poor devil is nearly worried to death for fear he'll not get her. There's a hundred things happens; he's thrown off the scent one day and cuts it again the next, and one evening he's in a heaven of bliss and before the dance ends a rival looms up and there's hell to pay,—excuse me, Sis,—but he gets her in the end. And that's the way it goes in the books. But getting down to actual cases—when the money's on the table and the game's rolling—it's as simple as picking a sire and a dam to raise a race horse. When they're both willing, it don't require any expert to see it—a one-eyed or a blind man can tell the symptoms. Now, when any of you boys get into that fix, get it over with as soon as possible."

"From the drift of your remarks," said June Deweese very innocently, "why wouldn't it be a good idea to go back to the old method of letting the parents make the matches?"

"Yes; it would be a good idea. How in the name of common sense could you expect young sap-heads like you boys to understand anything about a woman? I know what I'm talking about. A single woman never shows her true colors, but conceals her imperfections. The average man is not to be blamed if he fails to see through her smiles and Sunday humor. Now, I was forty when I married the second time, and forty-five the last whirl. Looks like I'd a-had some little sense, now, don't it? But I didn't. No, I didn't have any more show than a snowball in—Sis, hadn't you better retire. You're not interested in my talk to these boys.—Well, if ever any of you want to get married you have my consent. But you'd better get my opinion on her dimples when you do. Now, with my sixty odd years, I'm worth listening to. I can take a cool, dispassionate view of a woman now, and pick every good point about her, just as if she was a cow horse that I was buying for my own saddle."

Miss Jean, who had a ready tongue for repartee, took advantage of the first opportunity to remark: "Do you know, brother, matrimony is a subject that I always enjoy hearing discussed by such an oracle as yourself. But did it never occur to you what an unjust thing it was of Providence to reveal so much to your wisdom and conceal the same from us babes?"

It took some little time for the gentle reproof to take effect, but Uncle Lance had an easy faculty of evading a question when it was contrary to his own views. "Speaking of the wisdom of babes," said he, "reminds me of what Felix York, an old '36 comrade of mine, once said. He had caught the gold fever in '49, and nothing would do but he and some others must go to California. The party went up to Independence, Missouri, where they got into an overland emigrant train, bound for the land of gold. But it seems before starting, Senator Benton had made a speech in that town, in which he made the prophecy that one day there would be a railroad connecting the Missouri River with the Pacific Ocean. Felix told me this only a few years ago. But he said that all the teamsters made the prediction a byword. When, crossing some of the mountain ranges, the train halted to let the oxen blow, one bull-whacker would say to another: 'Well, I'd like to see old Tom Benton get his railroad over *this* mountain.' When Felix told me this he said—'There's a railroad to-day crosses those same mountain passes over which we forty-niners whacked our bulls. And to think I was a grown man and had no more sense or foresight than a little baby blinkin' its eyes in the sun.'"

With years at Las Palomas, I learned to like the old ranchero. There was something of the strong, primitive man about him which compelled a youth of my years to listen to his counsel. His confidence in me was a compliment which I appreciate to this day. When I had been in his employ hardly two years, an incident occurred which, though only one of many similar acts cementing our long friendship, tested his trust.

One morning just as he was on the point of starting on horseback to the county seat to pay his taxes, a Mexican arrived at the ranch and announced that he had seen a large band of *javalina* on the border of the chaparral up the river. Uncle Lance had promised his taxes by a certain date, but he was a true sportsman and owned a fine pack of hounds; moreover, the peccary is a migratory animal and does not wait upon the pleasure of the hunter. As I rode out from the corrals to learn what had brought the vaquero with such haste, the old ranchero cried, "Here, Tom, you'll have to go to the county seat. Buckle this money belt under your shirt, and if you lack enough gold to cover the taxes, you'll find silver here in my saddle-bags. Blow the horn, boys, and get the guns. Lead the way, Pancho. And say, Tom, better leave the road after crossing the Sordo, and strike through that mesquite country," he called back as he swung into the saddle and started, leaving me a sixty-mile ride in his stead. His warning to leave the road after crossing the creek was timely, for a ranchman had been robbed by bandits on that road the month before. But I made the ride in safety before sunset, paying the taxes, amounting to over a thousand dollars.

During all our acquaintance, extending over a period of twenty years, Lance Lovelace was a constant revelation to me, for he was original in all things. Knowing no precedent, he recognized

none which had not the approval of his own conscience. Where others were content to follow, he blazed his own pathways—immaterial to him whether they were followed by others or even noticed. In his business relations and in his own way, he was exact himself and likewise exacting of others. Some there are who might criticise him for an episode which occurred about four years after my advent at Las Palomas.

Mr. Whitley Booth, a younger man and a brother-in-law of the old ranchero by his first wife, rode into the ranch one evening, evidently on important business. He was not a frequent caller, for he was also a ranchman, living about forty miles north and west on the Frio River, but was in the habit of bringing his family down to the Nueces about twice a year for a visit of from ten days to two weeks' duration. But this time, though we had been expecting the family for some little time, he came alone, remained over night, and at breakfast ordered his horse, as if expecting to return at once. The two ranchmen were holding a conference in the sitting-room when a Mexican boy came to me at the corrals and said I was wanted in the house. On my presenting myself, my employer said: "Tom, I want you as a witness to a business transaction. I'm lending Whit, here, a thousand dollars, and as we have never taken any notes between us, I merely want you as a witness. Go into my room, please, and bring out, from under my bed, one of those largest bags of silver."

The door was unlocked, and there, under the ranchero's bed, dust-covered, were possibly a dozen sacks of silver. Finding one tagged with the required amount, I brought it out and laid it on the table between the two men. But on my return I noticed Uncle Lance had turned his chair from the table and was gazing out of the window, apparently absorbed in thought. I saw at a glance that he was gazing into the past, for I had become used to these reveries on his part. I had not been excused, and an embarrassing silence ensued, which was only broken as he looked over his shoulder and said: "There it is, Whit; count it if you want to."

But Mr. Booth, knowing the oddities of Uncle Lance, hesitated. "Well—why—Look here, Lance. If you have any reason for not wanting to loan me this amount, why, say so."

"There's the money, Whit; take it if you want to. It'll pay for the hundred cows you are figuring on buying. But I was just thinking: can two men at our time of life, who have always been friends, afford to take the risk of letting a business transaction like this possibly make us enemies? You know I started poor here, and what I have made and saved is the work of my lifetime. You are welcome to the money, but if anything should happen that you didn't repay me, you know I wouldn't feel right towards you. It's probably my years that does it, but—now, I always look forward to the visits of your family, and Jean and I always enjoy our visits at your ranch. I think we'd be two old fools to allow anything to break up those pleasant relations." Uncle Lance turned in his chair, and, looking into the downcast countenance of Mr. Booth, continued: "Do you know, Whit, that youngest girl of yours reminds me of her aunt, my own Mary, in a hundred ways. I just love to have your girls tear around this old ranch—they seem to give me back certain glimpses of my youth that are priceless to an old man."

"That'll do, Lance," said Mr. Booth, rising and extending his hand. "I don't want the money now. Your view of the matter is right, and our friendship is worth more than a thousand cattle to me. Lizzie and the girls were anxious to come with me, and I'll go right back and send them down."

CHAPTER II

SHEPHERD'S FERRY

Within a few months after my arrival at Las Palomas, there was a dance at Shepherd's Ferry. There was no necessity for an invitation to such local meets; old and young alike were expected and welcome, and a dance naturally drained the sparsely settled community of its inhabitants from forty to fifty miles in every direction. On the Nueces in 1875, the amusements of the countryside were extremely limited; barbecues, tournaments, and dancing covered the social side of ranch life, and whether given up or down our home river, or north on the Frio, so they were within a day's ride, the white element of Las Palomas could always be depended on to be present, Uncle Lance in the lead.

Shepherd's Ferry is somewhat of a misnomer, for the water in the river was never over knee-deep to a horse, except during freshets. There may have been a ferry there once; but from my advent on the river there was nothing but a store, the keeper of which also conducted a road-house for the accommodation of travelers. There was a fine grove for picnic purposes within easy reach, which was also frequently used for camp-meeting purposes. Gnarly old live-oaks spread their branches like a canopy over everything, while the sea-green moss hung from every limb and twig, excluding the light and lazily waving with every vagrant breeze. The fact that these grounds were also used for camp-meetings only proved the broad toleration of the people. On this occasion I distinctly remember that Miss Jean introduced a lady to me, who was the wife of an Episcopal minister, then visiting on a ranch near Oakville, and I danced several times with her and found her very amiable.

On receipt of the news of the approaching dance at the ferry, we set the ranch in order. Fortunately, under seasonable conditions work on a cattle range is never pressing. A programme of work outlined for a certain week could easily be postponed a week or a fortnight for that matter; for this was the land of "la mañana," and the white element on Las Palomas easily adopted the easy-going methods of their Mexican neighbors. So on the day everything was in readiness. The ranch was a trifle over thirty miles from Shepherd's, which was a fair half day's ride, but as Miss Jean always traveled by ambulance, it was necessary to give her an early start. Las Palomas raised fine horses and mules, and the ambulance team for the ranch consisted of four mealy-muzzled brown mules, which, being range bred, made up in activity what they lacked in size.

Tiburcio, a trusty Mexican, for years in the employ of Uncle Lance, was the driver of the ambulance, and at an early morning hour he and his mules were on their mettle and impatient to start. But Miss Jean had a hundred petty things to look after. The lunch—enough for a round-up—was prepared, and was safely stored under the driver's seat. Then there were her own personal effects and the necessary dressing and tidying, with Uncle Lance dogging her at every turn.

"Now, Sis," said he, "I want you to rig yourself out in something sumptuous, because I expect to make a killing with you at this dance. I'm almost sure that that Louisiana mule-drover will be there. You know you made quite an impression on him when he was through here two years ago. Well, I'll take a hand in the game this time, and if there's any marry in him, he'll have to lead trumps. I'm getting tired of having my dear sister trifled with by every passing drover. Yes, I am! The next one that hangs around Las Palomas, basking in your smiles, has got to declare his intentions whether he buys mules or not. Oh, you've got a brother, Sis, that'll look out for you. But you must play your part. Now, if that mule-buyer's there, shall I"—

"Why, certainly, brother, invite him to the ranch," replied Miss Jean, as she busied herself with the preparations. "It's so kind of you to look after me. I was listening to every word you said, and I've got my best bib and tucker in that hand box. And just you watch me dazzle that Mr. Mule-buyer. Strange you didn't tell me sooner about his being in the country. Here, take these boxes out to the

ambulance. And, say, I put in the middle-sized coffee pot, and do you think two packages of ground coffee will be enough? All right, then. Now, where's my gloves?"

We were all dancing attendance in getting the ambulance off, but Uncle Lance never relaxed his tormenting, "Come, now, hurry up," said he, as Jean and himself led the way to the gate where the conveyance stood waiting; "for I want you to look your best this evening, and you'll be all tired out if you don't get a good rest before the dance begins. Now, in case the mule-buyer don't show up, how about Sim Oliver? You see, I can put in a good word there just as easily as not. Of course, he's a widower like myself, but you're no spring pullet—you wouldn't class among the buds—besides Sim branded eleven hundred calves last year. And the very last time I was talking to him, he allowed he'd crowd thirteen hundred close this year—big calf crop, you see. Now, just why he should go to the trouble to tell me all this, unless he had his eye on you, is one too many for me. But if you want me to cut him out of your string of eligibles, say the word, and I'll chouse him out. You just bet, little girl, whoever wins you has got to score right. Great Scott! but you have good taste in selecting perfumery. Um-ee! it makes me half drunk to walk alongside of you. Be sure and put some of that ointment on your kerchief when you get there."

"Really," said Miss Jean, as they reached the ambulance, "I wish you had made a little memorandum of what I'm expected to do—I'm all in a flutter this morning. You see, without your help my case is hopeless. But I think I'll try for the mule-buyer. I'm getting tired looking at these slab-sided cowmen. Now, just look at those mules—haven't had a harness on in a month. And Tiburcio can't hold four of them, nohow. Lance, it looks like you'd send one of the boys to drive me down to the ferry."

"Why, Lord love you, girl, those mules are as gentle as kittens; and you don't suppose I'm going to put some gringo over a veteran like Tiburcio. Why, that old boy used to drive for Santa Anna during the invasion in '36. Besides, I'm sending Theodore and Glenn on horseback as a bodyguard. Las Palomas is putting her best foot forward this morning in giving you a stylish turnout, with outriders in their Sunday livery. And those two boys are the best ropers on the ranch, so if the mules run off just give one of your long, keen screams, and the boys will rope and hog-tie every mule in the team. Get in now and don't make any faces about it."

It was pettishness and not timidity that ailed Jean Lovelace, for a pioneer woman like herself had of course no fear of horse-flesh. But the team was acting in a manner to unnerve an ordinary woman. With me clinging to the bits of the leaders, and a man each holding the wheelers, as they pawed the ground and surged about in their creaking harness, they were anything but gentle; but Miss Jean proudly took her seat; Tiburcio fingered the reins in placid contentment; there was a parting volley of admonitions from brother and sister—the latter was telling us where we would find our white shirts—when Uncle Lance signaled to us; and we sprang away from the team. The ambulance gave a lurch, forward, as the mules started on a run, but Tiburcio dexterously threw them on to a heavy bed of sand, poured the whip into them as they labored through it; they crossed the sand bed, Glenn Gallup and Theodore Quayle, riding, at their heads, pointed the team into the road, and they were off.

The rest of us busied ourselves getting up saddle horses and dressing for the occasion. In the latter we had no little trouble, for dress occasions like this were rare with us. Miss Jean had been thoughtful enough to lay our clothes out, but there was a busy borrowing of collars and collar buttons, and a blacking of boots which made the sweat stand out on our foreheads in beads. After we were dressed and ready to start, Uncle Lance could not be induced to depart from his usual custom, and wear his trousers outside his boots. Then we had to pull the boots off and polish them clear up to the ears in order to make him presentable. But we were in no particular hurry about starting, as we expected to out across the country and would overtake the ambulance at the mouth of the Arroyo Seco in time for the noonday lunch. There were six in our party, consisting of Dan Happersett, Aaron Scales, John Cotton, June Deweese, Uncle Lance, and myself. With the exception of Deweese, who was nearly twenty-five years old, the remainder of the boys on the ranch were young fellows,

several of whom besides myself had not yet attained their majority. On ranch work, in the absence of our employer, June was recognized as the *segundo* of Los Palomas, owing to his age and his long employment on the ranch. He was a trustworthy man, and we younger lads entertained no envy towards him.

It was about nine o'clock when we mounted our horses and started. We jollied along in a party, or separated into pairs in cross-country riding, covering about seven miles an hour. "I remember," said Uncle Lance, as we were riding in a group, "the first time I was ever at Shepherd's Ferry. We had been down the river on a cow hunt for about three weeks and had run out of bacon. We had been eating beef, and venison, and antelope for a week until it didn't taste right any longer, so I sent the outfit on ahead and rode down to the store in the hope of getting a piece of bacon. Shepherd had just established the place at the time, and when I asked him if he had any bacon, he said he had, 'But is it good?' I inquired, and before he could reply an eight-year-old boy of his stepped between us, and throwing back his tow head, looked up into my face and said: 'Mister, it's a little the best I ever tasted.'"

"Now, June," said Uncle Lance, as we rode along, "I want you to let Henry Annear's wife strictly alone to-night. You know what a stink it raised all along the river, just because you danced with her once, last San Jacinto day. Of course, Henry made a fool of himself by trying to borrow a six-shooter and otherwise getting on the prod. And I'll admit that it don't take the best of eyesight to see that his wife to-day thinks more of your old boot than she does of Annear's wedding suit, yet her husband will be the last man to know it. No man can figure to a certainty on a woman. Three guesses is not enough, for she will and she won't, and she'll straddle the question or take the fence, and when you put a copper on her to win, she loses. God made them just that way, and I don't want to criticise His handiwork. But if my name is Lance Lovelace, and I'm sixty-odd years old, and this a chestnut horse that I'm riding, then Henry Annear's wife is an unhappy woman. But that fact, son, don't give you any license to stir up trouble between man and wife. Now, remember, I've warned you not to dance, speak to, or even notice her on this occasion. The chances are that that locoed fool will come heeled this time, and if you give him any excuse, he may burn a little powder."

June promised to keep on his good behavior, saying: "That's just what I've made up my mind to do. But look'ee here: Suppose he goes on the war path, you can't expect me to show the white feather, nor let him run any sandys over me. I loved his wife once and am not ashamed of it, and he knows it. And much as I want to obey you, Uncle Lance, if he attempts to stand up a bluff on me, just as sure as hell's hot there'll be a strange face or two in heaven."

I was a new man on the ranch and unacquainted with the facts, so shortly afterwards I managed to drop to the rear with Dan Happersett, and got the particulars. It seems that June and Mrs. Annear had not only been sweethearts, but that they had been engaged, and that the engagement had been broken within a month of the day set for their wedding, and that she had married Annear on a three weeks' acquaintance. Little wonder Uncle Lance took occasion to read the riot act to his *segundo* in the interests of peace. This was all news to me, but secretly I wished June courage and a good aim if it ever came to a show-down between them.

We reached the Arroyo Seco by high noon, and found the ambulance in camp and the coffee pot boiling. Under the direction of Miss Jean, Tiburcio had removed the seats from the conveyance, so as to afford seating capacity for over half our number. The lunch was spread under an old live-oak on the bank of the Nueces, making a cosy camp. Miss Jean had the happy knack of a good hostess, our twenty-mile ride had whetted our appetites, and we did ample justice to her tempting spread. After luncheon was over and while the team was being harnessed in, I noticed Miss Jean enticing Deweese off on one side, where the two held a whispered conversation, seated on an old fallen tree. As they returned, June was promising something which she had asked of him. And if there was ever a woman lived who could exact a promise that would be respected, Jean Lovelace was that woman; for she was like an elder sister to us all.

In starting, the ambulance took the lead as before, and near the middle of the afternoon we reached the ferry. The merry-makers were assembling from every quarter, and on our arrival possibly a hundred had come, which number was doubled by the time the festivities began. We turned our saddle and work stock into a small pasture, and gave ourselves over to the fast-gathering crowd. I was delighted to see that Miss Jean and Uncle Lance were accorded a warm welcome by every one, for I was somewhat of a stray on this new range. But when it became known that I was a recent addition to Las Palomas, the welcome was extended to me, which I duly appreciated.

The store and hostelry did a rushing business during the evening hours, for the dance did not begin until seven. A Mexican orchestra, consisting of a violin, an Italian harp, and two guitars, had come up from Oakville to furnish the music for the occasion. Just before the dance commenced, I noticed Uncle Lance greet a late arrival, and on my inquiring of June who he might be, I learned that the man was Captain Frank Byler from Lagarto, the drover Uncle Lance had been teasing Miss Jean about in the morning, and a man, as I learned later, who drove herds of horses north on the trail during the summer and during the winter drove mules and horses to Louisiana, for sale among the planters. Captain Byler was a good-looking, middle-aged fellow, and I made up my mind at once that he was due to rank as the lion of the evening among the ladies.

It is useless to describe this night of innocent revelry. It was a rustic community, and the people assembled were, with few exceptions, purely pastoral. There may have been earnest vows spoken under those spreading oaks—who knows? But if there were, the retentive ear which listened, and the cautious tongue which spake the vows, had no intention of having their confidences profaned on this page. Yet it was a night long to be remembered. Timid lovers sat apart, oblivious to the gaze of the merry revelers. Matrons and maidens vied with each other in affability to the sterner sex. I had a most enjoyable time.

I spoke Spanish well, and made it a point to cultivate the acquaintance of the leader of the orchestra. On his learning that I also played the violin, he promptly invited me to play a certain new waltz which he was desirous of learning. But I had no sooner taken the violin in my hand than the lazy rascal lighted a cigarette and strolled away, absenting himself for nearly an hour. But I was familiar with the simple dance music of the country, and played everything that was called for. My talent was quite a revelation to the boys of our ranch, and especially to the owner and mistress of Las Palomas. The latter had me play several old Colorado River favorites of hers, and I noticed that when she had the dashing Captain Byler for her partner, my waltzes seemed never long enough to suit her.

After I had been relieved, Miss Jean introduced me to a number of nice girls, and for the remainder of the evening I had no lack of partners. But there was one girl there whom I had not been introduced to, who always avoided my glance when I looked at her, but who, when we were in the same set and I squeezed her hand, had blushed just too lovely. When that dance was over, I went to Miss Jean for an introduction, but she did not know her, so I appealed to Uncle Lance, for I knew he could give the birth date of every girl present. We took a stroll through the crowd, and when I described her by her big eyes, he said in a voice so loud that I felt sure she must hear: "Why, certainly, I know her. That's Esther McLeod. I've trotted her on my knee a hundred times. She's the youngest girl of old man Donald McLeod who used to ranch over on the mouth of the San Miguel, north on the Frio. Yes, I'll give you an interslaption." Then in a subdued tone: "And if you can drop your rope on her, son, tie her good and fast, for she's good stock."

I was made acquainted as his latest adopted son, and inferred the old ranchero's approbation by many a poke in the ribs from him in the intervals between dances; for Esther and I danced every dance together until dawn. No one could charge me with neglect or inattention, for I close-herded her like a hired hand. She mellowed nicely towards me after the ice was broken, and with the limited time at my disposal, I made hay. When the dance broke up with the first signs of day, I saddled her horse and assisted her to mount, when I received the cutest little invitation, 'if ever I happened over on the Sau Miguel, to try and call.' Instead of beating about the bush, I assured her bluntly that if she

ever saw me on Miguel Creek, it would be intentional; for I should have made the ride purely to see her. She blushed again in a way which sent a thrill through me. But on the Nueces in '75, if a fellow took a fancy to a girl there was no harm in showing it or telling her so.

I had been so absorbed during the latter part of the night that I had paid little attention to the rest of the Las Palomas outfit, though I occasionally caught sight of Miss Jean and the drover, generally dancing, sometimes promenading, and once had a glimpse of them tête-à-tête on a rustic settee in a secluded corner. Our employer seldom danced, but kept his eye on June Deweese in the interests of peace, for Annear and his wife were both present. Once while Esther and I were missing a dance over some light refreshment, I had occasion to watch June as he and Annear danced in the same set. I thought the latter acted rather surly, though Deweese was the acme of geniality, and was apparently having the time of his life as he tripped through the mazes of the dance. Had I not known of the deadly enmity existing between them, I could never have suspected anything but friendship, he was acting the part so perfectly. But then I knew he had given his plighted word to the master and mistress, and nothing but an insult or indignity could tempt him to break it.

On the return trip, we got the ambulance off before sunrise, expecting to halt and breakfast again at the Arroyo Seco. Aaron Scales and Dan Happersett acted as couriers to Miss Jean's conveyance, while the rest dallied behind, for there was quite a cavalcade of young folks going a distance our way. This gave Uncle Lance a splendid chance to quiz the girls in the party. I was riding with a Miss Wilson from Ramirena, who had come up to make a visit at a near-by ranch and incidentally attend the dance at Shepherd's. I admit that I was a little too much absorbed over another girl to be very entertaining, but Uncle Lance helped out by joining us. "Nice morning overhead, Miss Wilson," said he, on riding up. "Say, I've waited just as long as I'm going to for that invitation to your wedding which you promised me last summer. Now, I don't know so much about the young men down about Ramirena, but when I was a youngster back on the Colorado, when a boy loved a girl he married her, whether it was Friday or Monday, rain or shine. I'm getting tired of being put off with promises. Why, actually, I haven't been to a wedding in three years. What are we coming to?"

On reaching the road where Miss Wilson and her party separated from us, Uncle Lance returned to the charge: "Now, no matter how busy I am when I get your invitation, I don't care if the irons are in the fire and the cattle in the corral, I'll drown the fire and turn the cows out. And if Las Palomas has a horse that'll carry me, I'll merely touch the high places in coming. And when I get there I'm willing to do anything,—give the bride away, say grace, or carve the turkey. And what's more, I never kissed a bride in my life that didn't have good luck. Tell your pa you saw me. Good-by, dear."

On overtaking the ambulance in camp, our party included about twenty, several of whom were young ladies; but Miss Jean insisted that every one remain for breakfast, assuring them that she had abundance for all. After the impromptu meal was disposed of, we bade our adieus and separated to the four quarters. Before we had gone far, Uncle Lance rode alongside of me and said: "Tom, why didn't you tell me you was a fiddler? God knows you're lazy enough to be a good one, and you ought to be good on a bee course. But what made me warm to you last night was the way you built to Esther McLeod. Son, you set her cush about right. If you can hold sight on a herd of beeves on a bad night like you did her, you'll be a foreman some day. And she's not only good blood herself, but she's got cattle and land. Old man Donald, her father, was killed in the Confederate army. He was an honest Scotchman who kept Sunday and everything else he could lay his hands on. In all my travels I never met a man who could offer a longer prayer or take a bigger drink of whiskey. I remember the first time I ever saw him. He was serving on the grand jury, and I was a witness in a cattle-stealing case. He was a stranger to me, and we had just sat down at the same table at a hotel for dinner. We were on the point of helping ourselves, when the old Scot arose and struck the table a blow that made the dishes rattle. 'You heathens,' said he, 'will you partake of the bounty of your Heavenly Father without returning thanks?' We laid down our knives and forks like boys caught in a watermelon patch, and the old man asked a blessing. I've been at his house often. He was a good man, but Secession caught

him and he never came back. So, Quirk, you see, a son-in-law will be a handy man in the family, and with the start you made last night I hope for good results." The other boys seemed to enjoy my embarrassment, but I said nothing in reply, being a new man with the outfit. We reached the ranch an hour before noon, two hours in advance of the ambulance; and the sleeping we did until sunrise the next morning required no lullaby.

CHAPTER III

LAS PALOMAS

There is something about those large ranches of southern Texas that reminds one of the old feudal system. The pathetic attachment to the soil of those born to certain Spanish land grants can only be compared to the European immigrant when for the last time he looks on the land of his birth before sailing. Of all this Las Palomas was typical. In the course of time several such grants had been absorbed into its baronial acres. But it had always been the policy of Uncle Lance never to disturb the Mexican population; rather he encouraged them to remain in his service. Thus had sprung up around Las Palomas ranch a little Mexican community numbering about a dozen families, who lived in *jacals* close to the main ranch buildings. They were simple people, and rendered their new master a feudal loyalty. There were also several small *ranchites* located on the land, where, under the Mexican régime, there had been pretentious adobe buildings. A number of families still resided at these deserted ranches, content in cultivating small fields or looking after flocks of goats and a few head of cattle, paying no rental save a service tenure to the new owner.

The customs of these Mexican people were simple and primitive. They blindly accepted the religious teachings imposed with fire and sword by the Spanish conquerors upon their ancestors. A padre visited them yearly, christening the babes, marrying the youth, shriving the penitent, and saying masses for the repose of the souls of the departed. Their social customs were in many respects unique. For instance, in courtship a young man was never allowed in the presence of his inamorata, unless in company of others, or under the eye of a chaperon. Proposals, even among the nearest of neighbors or most intimate of friends, were always made in writing, usually by the father of the young man to the parents of the girl, but in the absence of such, by a godfather or *padrino*. Fifteen days was the term allowed for a reply, and no matter how desirable the match might be, it was not accounted good taste to answer before the last day. The owner of Las Palomas was frequently called upon to act as *padrino* for his people, and so successful had he always been that the vaqueros on his ranch preferred his services to those of their own fathers. There was scarcely a vaquero at the home ranch but, in time past, had invoked his good offices in this matter, and he had come to be looked on as their patron saint.

The month of September was usually the beginning of the branding season at Las Palomas. In conducting this work, Uncle Lance was the leader, and with the white element already enumerated, there were twelve to fifteen vaqueros included in the branding outfit. The dance at Shepherd's had delayed the beginning of active operations, and a large calf crop, to say nothing of horse and mule colts, now demanded our attention and promised several months' work. The year before, Las Palomas had branded over four thousand calves, and the range was now dotted with the crop, awaiting the iron stamp of ownership.

The range was an open one at the time, compelling us to work far beyond the limits of our employer's land. Fortified with our own commissary, and with six to eight horses apiece in our mount, we scoured the country for a radius of fifty miles. When approaching another range, it was our custom to send a courier in advance to inquire of the ranchero when it would be convenient for him to give us a rodeo. A day would be set, when our outfit and the vaqueros of that range rounded up all the cattle watering at given points. Then we cut out the Las Palomas brand, and held them under herd or started them for the home ranch, where the calves were to be branded. In this manner we visited all the adjoining ranches, taking over a month to make the circuit of the ranges.

In making the tour, the first range we worked was that of rancho Santa Maria, south of our range and on the head of Tarancalous Creek. On approaching the ranch, as was customary, we prepared to encamp and ask for a rodeo. But in the choice of a vaquero to be dispatched on this mission, a spirited

rivalry sprang up. When Uncle Lance learned that the rivalry amongst the vaqueros was meant to embarrass Enrique Lopez, who was *oso* to Anita, the pretty daughter of the corporal of Santa Maria, his matchmaking instincts came to the fore. Calling Enrique to one side, he made the vaquero confess that he had been playing for the favor of the señorita at Santa Maria. Then he dispatched Enrique on the mission, bidding him carry the choicest compliments of Las Palomas to every Don and Doña of Santa Maria. And Enrique was quite capable of adding a few embellishments to the old matchmaker's extravagant flatteries.

Enrique was in camp next morning, but at what hour of the night he had returned is unknown. The rodeo had been granted for the following day; there was a pressing invitation to Don Lance—unless he was willing to offend—to spend the idle day as the guest of Don Mateo. Enrique elaborated the invitation with a thousand adornments. But the owner of Las Palomas had lived nearly forty years among the Spanish-American people on the Nueces, and knew how to make allowances for the exuberance of the Latin tongue. There was no telling to what extent Enrique could have kept on delivering messages, but to his employer he was avoiding the issue.

"But did you get to see Anita?" interrupted Uncle Lance. Yes, he had seen her, but that was about all. Did not Don Lance know the customs among the Castilians? There was her mother ever present, or if she must absent herself, there was a bevy of *tias comadres* surrounding her, until the Doña Anita dare not even raise her eyes to meet his. "To perdition with such customs, no?" The freedom of a cow camp is a splendid opportunity to relieve one's mind upon prevailing injustices.

"Don't fret your cattle so early in the morning, son," admonished the wary matchmaker. "I've handled worse cases than this before. You Mexicans are sticklers on customs, and we must deal with our neighbors carefully. Before I show my hand in this, there's just one thing I want to know—is the girl willing? Whenever you can satisfy me on that point, Enrique, just call on the old man. But before that I won't stir a step. You remember what a time I had over Tiburcio's Juan—that's so, you were too young then. Well, June here remembers it. Why, the girl just cut up shamefully. Called Juan an Indian peon, and bragged about her Castilian family until you'd have supposed she was a princess of the blood royal. Why, it took her parents and myself a whole day to bring the girl around to take a sensible view of matters. On my soul, except that I didn't want to acknowledge defeat, I felt a dozen times like telling her to go straight up. And when she did marry you, she was as happy as a lark—wasn't she, Juan? But I like to have the thing over with in—well, say half an hour's time. Then we can have refreshments, and smoke, and discuss the prospects of the young couple."

Uncle Lance's question was hard to answer. Enrique had known the girl for several years, had danced with her on many a feast day, and never lost an opportunity to whisper the old, old story in her willing ear. Others had done the like, but the dark-eyed señorita is an adept in the art of coquetry, and there you are. But Enrique swore a great oath he would know. Yes, he would. He would lay siege to her as he had never done before. He would become *un oso grande*. Just wait until the branding was over and the fiestas of the Christmas season were on, and watch him dog her every step until he received her signal of surrender. Witness, all the saints, this row of Enrique Lopez, that the Doña Anita should have no peace of mind, no, not for one little minute, until she had made a complete capitulation. Then Don Lauce, the *padrino* of Las Palomas, would at once write the letter which would command the hand of the corporal's daughter. Who could refuse such a request, and what was a daughter of Santa Maria compared to a son of Las Palomas?

Tarancalous Creek ran almost due east, and rancho Santa Maria was located near its source, depending more on its wells for water supply than on the stream which only flowed for a few months during the year. Where the watering facilities were so limited the rodeo was an easy matter. A number of small round-ups at each established watering point, a swift cutting out of everything bearing the Las Palomas brand, and we moved on to the next rodeo, for we had an abundance of help at Santa Maria. The work was finished by the middle of the afternoon. After sending, under five or six men, our cut of several hundred cattle westward on our course, our outfit rode into rancho Santa Maria proper to

pay our respects. Our wagon had provided an abundant dinner for our assistants and ourselves; but it would have been, in Mexican etiquette, extremely rude on our part not to visit the rancho and partake of a cup of coffee and a cigarette, thanking the ranchero on parting for his kindness in granting us the rodeo.

So when the last round-up was reached, Don Mateo and Uncle Lance turned the work over to their corporals, and in advance rode up to Santa Maria. The vaqueros of our ranch were anxious to visit the rancho, so it devolved on the white element to take charge of the cut. Being a stranger to Santa Maria, I was allowed to accompany our *segundo*, June Deweese, on an introductory visit. On arriving at the rancho, the vaqueros scattered among the *jacals* of their *amigos*, while June and myself were welcomed at the *casa primero*. There we found Uncle Lance partaking of refreshment, and smoking a cigarette as though he had been born a Señor Don of some ruling hacienda. June and I were seated at another table, where we were served with coffee, wafers, and home-made cigarettes. This was perfectly in order, but I could hardly control myself over the extravagant Spanish our employer was using in expressing the amity existing between Santa Maria and Las Palomas. In ordinary conversation, such as cattle and ranch affairs, Uncle Lance had a good command of Spanish; but on social and delicate topics some of his efforts were ridiculous in the extreme. He was well aware of his shortcomings, and frequently appealed to me to assist him. As a boy my playmates had been Mexican children, so that I not only spoke Spanish fluently but could also readily read and write it. So it was no surprise to me that, before taking our departure, my employer should command my services as an interpreter in driving an entering wedge. He was particular to have me assure our host and hostess of his high regard for them, and his hope that in the future even more friendly relations might exist between the two ranches. Had Santa Maria no young cavalier for the hand of some daughter of Las Palomas? Ah! there was the true bond for future friendships. Well, well, if the soil of this rancho was so impoverished, then the sons of Las Palomas must take the bit in their teeth and come courting to Santa Maria. And let Doña Gregoria look well to her daughters, for the young men of Las Palomas, true to their race, were not only handsome fellows but ardent lovers, and would be hard to refuse.

After taking our leave and catching up with the cattle, we pushed westward for the Ganso, our next stream of water. This creek was a tributary to the Nueces, and we worked down it several days, or until we had nearly a thousand cattle and were within thirty miles of home. Turning this cut over to June Deweese and a few vaqueros to take in to the ranch and brand, the rest of us turned westward and struck the Nueces at least fifty miles above Las Palomas. For the next few days our dragnet took in both sides of the Nueces, and when, on reaching the mouth of the Ganso, we were met by Deweese and the vaqueros we had another bunch of nearly a thousand ready. Dan Happersett was dispatched with the second bunch for branding, when we swung north to Mr. Booth's ranch on the Frio, where we rested a day. But there is little recreation on a cow hunt, and we were soon under full headway again. By the time we had worked down the Frio, opposite headquarters, we had too large a herd to carry conveniently, and I was sent in home with them, never rejoining the outfit until they reached Shepherd's Ferry. This was a disappointment to me, for I had hopes that when the outfit worked the range around the mouth of San Miguel, I might find some excuse to visit the McLeod ranch and see Esther. But after turning back up the home river to within twenty miles of the ranch, we again turned southward, covering the intervening ranches rapidly until we struck the Tarancalous about twenty-five miles east of Santa Maria.

We had spent over thirty days in making this circle, gathering over five thousand cattle, about one third of which were cows with calves by their sides. On the remaining gap in the circle we lost two days in waiting for rodeos, or gathering independently along the Tarancalous, and, on nearing the Santa Maria range, we had nearly fifteen hundred cattle. Our herd passed within plain view of the rancho, but we did not turn aside, preferring to make a dry camp for the night, some five or six miles further on our homeward course. But since we had used the majority of our *remuda* very hard that day, Uncle Lance dispatched Enrique and myself, with our wagon and saddle horses, by way

of Santa Maria, to water our saddle stock and refill our kegs for camping purposes. Of course, the compliments of our employer to the ranchero of Santa Maria went with the *remuda* and wagon.

I delivered the compliments and regrets to Don Mateo, and asked the permission to water our saddle stock, which was readily granted. This required some time, for we had about a hundred and twenty-five loose horses with us, and the water had to be raised by rope and pulley from the pommel of a saddle horse. After watering the team we refilled our kegs, and the cook pulled out to overtake the herd, Enrique and I staying to water the *remuda*. Enrique, who was riding the saddle horse, while I emptied the buckets as they were hoisted to the surface, was evidently killing time. By his dilatory tactics, I knew the young rascal was delaying in the hope of getting a word with the Doña Anita. But it was getting late, and at the rate we were hoisting darkness would overtake us before we could reach the herd. So I ordered Enrique to the bucket, while I took my own horse and furnished the hoisting power. We were making some headway with the work, when a party of women, among them the Doña Anita, came down to the well to fill vessels for house use.

This may have been all chance—and then again it may not. But the gallant Enrique now outdid himself, filling jar after jar and lifting them to the shoulder of the bearer with the utmost zeal and amid a profusion of compliments. I was annoyed at the interruption in our work, but I could see that Enrique was now in the highest heaven of delight. The Doña Anita's mother was present, and made it her duty to notice that only commonplace formalities passed between her daughter and the ardent vaquero. After the jars were all filled, the bevy of women started on their return; but Doña Anita managed to drop a few feet to the rear of the procession, and, looking back, quietly took up one corner of her mantilla, and with a little movement, apparently all innocence, flashed a message back to the entranced Enrique. I was aware of the flirtation, but before I had made more of it Enrique sprang down from the abutment of the well, dragged me from my horse, and in an ecstasy of joy, crouching behind the abutments, cried: Had I seen the sign? Had I not noticed her token? Was my brain then so befuddled? Did I not understand the ways of the señoritas among his people?—that they always answered by a wave of the handkerchief, or the mantilla? Ave Maria, Tomas! Such stupidity! Why, to be sure, they could talk all day with their eyes.

A setting sun finally ended his confidences, and the watering was soon finished, for Enrique lowered the bucket in a gallop. On our reaching the herd and while we were catching our night horses, Uncle Lance strode out to the rope corral, with the inquiry, what had delayed us. "Nothing particular," I replied, and looked at Enrique, who shrugged his shoulders and repeated my answer. "Now, look here, you young liars," said the old ranchero; "the wagon has been in camp over an hour, and, admitting it did start before you, you had plenty of time to water the saddle stock and overtake it before it could possibly reach the herd. I can tell a lie myself, but a good one always has some plausibility. You rascals were up to some mischief, I'll warrant."

I had caught out my night horse, and as I led him away to saddle up, Uncle Lance, not content with my evasive answer, followed me. "Go to Enrique," I whispered; "he'll just bubble over at a good chance to tell you. Yes; it was the Doña Anita who caused the delay." A smothered chuckling shook the old man's frame, as he sauntered over to where Enrique was saddling. As the two led off the horse to picket in the gathering dusk, the ranchero had his arm around the vaquero's neck, and I felt that the old matchmaker would soon be in possession of the facts. A hilarious guffaw that reached me as I was picketing my horse announced that the story was out, and as the two returned to the fire Uncle Lance was slapping Enrique on the back at every step and calling him a lucky dog. The news spread through the camp like wild-fire, even to the vaqueros on night herd, who instantly began chanting an old love song. While Enrique and I were eating our supper, our employer paced backward and forward in meditation like a sentinel on picket, and when we had finished our meal, he joined us around the fire, inquiring of Enrique how soon the demand should be made for the corporal's daughter, and was assured that it could not be done too soon. "The padre only came once a year," he concluded, "and they must be ready."

"Well, now, this is a pretty pickle," said the old matchmaker, as he pulled his gray mustaches; "there isn't pen or paper in the outfit. And then we'll be busy branding on the home range for a month, and I can't spare a vaquero a day to carry a letter to Santa Maria. And besides, I might not be at home when the reply came. I think I'll just take the bull by the horns; ride back in the morning and set these old precedents at defiance, by arranging the match verbally. I can make the talk that this country is Texas now, and that under the new regime American customs are in order. That's what I'll do—and I'll take Tom Quirk with me for fear I bog down in my Spanish."

But several vaqueros, who understood some English, advised Enrique of what the old matchmaker proposed to do, when the vaquero threw his hands in the air and began sputtering Spanish in terrified disapproval. Did not Don Lance know that the marriage usages among his people were their most cherished customs? "Oh, yes, son," languidly replied Uncle Lance. "I'm some strong on the cherish myself, but not when it interferes with my plans. It strikes me that less than a month ago I heard you condemning to perdition certain customs of your people. Now, don't get on too high a horse—just leave it to Tom and me. We may stay a week, but when we come back we'll bring your betrothal with us in our vest pockets. There was never a Mexican born who can outhold me on palaver; and we'll eat every chicken on Santa Maria unless they surrender."

As soon as the herd had started for home the next morning, Uncle Lance and I returned to Santa Maria. We were extended a cordial reception by Don Mateo, and after the chronicle of happenings since the two rancheros last met had been reviewed, the motive of our sudden return was mentioned. By combining the vocabularies of my employer and myself, we mentioned our errand as delicately as possible, pleading guilty and craving every one's pardon for our rudeness in verbally conducting the negotiations. To our surprise,—for to Mexicans customs are as rooted as Faith,—Don Mateo took no offense and summoned Doña Gregoria. I was playing a close second to the diplomat of our side of the house, and when his Spanish failed him and he had recourse to English, it is needless to say I handled matters to the best of my ability. The Spanish is a musical, passionate language and well suited to love making, and though this was my first use of it for that purpose, within half an hour we had won the ranchero and his wife to our side of the question.

Then, at Don Mateo's orders, the parents of the girl were summoned. This involved some little delay, which permitted coffee being served, and discussion, over the cigarettes, of the commonplace matters of the country. There was beginning to be a slight demand for cattle to drive to the far north on the trails, some thought it was the sign of a big development, but neither of the rancheros put much confidence in the movement, etc., etc. The corporal and his wife suddenly made their appearance, dressed in their best, which accounted for the delay, and all cattle conversation instantly ceased. Uncle Lance arose and greeted the husky corporal and his timid wife with warm cordiality. I extended my greetings to the Mexican foreman, whom I had met at the rodeo about a month before. We then resumed our seats, but the corporal and his wife remained standing, and with an elegant command of his native tongue Don Mateo informed the couple of our mission. They looked at each other in bewilderment. Tears came into the wife's eyes. For a moment I pitied her. Indeed, the pathetic was not lacking. But the hearty corporal reminded his better half that her parents, in his interests, had once been asked for her hand under similar circumstances, and the tears disappeared. Tears are womanly; and I have since seen them shed, under less provocation, by fairer-skinned women than this simple, swarthy daughter of Mexico.

It was but natural that the parents of the girl should feign surprise and reluctance if they did not feel it. The Doña Anita's mother offered several trivial objections. Her daughter had never taken her into her confidence over any suitor. And did Anita really love Enrique Lopez of Las Palomas? Even if she did, could he support her, being but a vaquero? This brought Uncle Lance to the front. He had known Enrique since the day of his birth. As a five-year-old, and naked as the day he was born, had he not ridden a colt at branding time, twice around the big corral without being thrown? At ten, had he not thrown himself across a gateway and allowed a *caballada* of over two hundred

wild range horses to jump over his prostrate body as they passed in a headlong rush through the gate? Only the year before at branding, when an infuriated bull had driven every vaquero out of the corrals, did not Enrique mount his horse, and, after baiting the bull out into the open, play with him like a kitten with a mouse? And when the bull, tiring, attempted to make his escape, who but Enrique had lassoed the animal by the fore feet, breaking his neck in the throw? The diplomat of Las Palomas dejectedly admitted that the bull was a prize animal, but could not deny that he himself had joined in the plaudits to the daring vaquero. But if there were a possible doubt that the Doña Anita did not love this son of Las Palomas, then Lance Lovelace himself would oppose the union. This was an important matter. Would Don Mateo be so kind as to summon the señorita?

The señorita came in response to the summons. She was a girl of possibly seventeen summers, several inches taller than her mother, possessing a beautiful complexion with large lustrous eyes. There was something fawnlike in her timidity as she gazed at those about the table. Doña Gregoria broke the news, informing her that the ranchero of Las Palomas had asked her hand in marriage for Enrique, one of his vaqueros. Did she love the man and was she willing to marry him? For reply the girl hid her face in the mantilla of her mother. With commendable tact Doña Gregoria led the mother and daughter into another room, from which the two elder women soon returned with a favorable reply. Uncle Lance arose and assured the corporal and his wife that their daughter would receive his special care and protection; that as long as water ran and grass grew, Las Palomas would care for her own children.

We accepted an invitation to remain for dinner, as several hours had elapsed since our arrival. In company with the corporal, I attended to our horses, leaving the two rancheros absorbed in a discussion of Texas fever, rumors of which were then attracting widespread attention in the north along the cattle trails. After dinner we took our leave of host and hostess, promising to send Enrique to Santa Maria at the earliest opportunity.

It was a long ride across country to Las Palomas, but striking a free gait, unencumbered as we were, we covered the country rapidly. I had somewhat doubted the old matchmaker's sincerity in making this match, but as we rode along he told me of his own marriage to Mary Bryan, and the one happy year of life which it brought him, mellowing into a mood of seriousness which dispelled all doubts. It was almost sunset when we sighted in the distance the ranch buildings at Las Palomas, and half an hour later as we galloped up to assist the herd which was nearing the corrals, the old man stood in his stirrups and, waving his hat, shouted to his outfit: "Hurrah for Enrique and the Doña Anita!" And as the last of the cattle entered the corral, a rain of lassos settled over the smiling rascal and his horse, and we led him in triumph to the house for Miss Jean's blessing.

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTMAS

The branding on the home range was an easy matter. The cattle were compelled to water from the Nueces, so that their range was never over five or six miles from the river. There was no occasion even to take out the wagon, though we made a one-night camp at the mouth of the Ganso, and another about midway between the home ranch and Shepherd's Ferry, pack mules serving instead of the wagon. On the home range, in gathering to brand, we never disturbed the mixed cattle, cutting out only the cows and calves. On the round-up below the Ganso, we had over three thousand cattle in one rodeo, finding less than five hundred calves belonging to Las Palomas, the bulk on this particular occasion being steer cattle. There had been little demand for steers for several seasons and they had accumulated until many of them were fine beeves, five and six years old.

When the branding proper was concluded, our tally showed nearly fifty-one hundred calves branded that season, indicating about twenty thousand cattle in the Las Palomas brand. After a week's rest, with fresh horses, we re-rode the home range in squads of two, and branded any calves we found with a running iron. This added nearly a hundred more to our original number. On an open range like ours, it was not expected that everything would be branded; but on quitting, it is safe to say we had missed less than one per cent of our calf crop.

The cattle finished, we turned our attention to the branding of the horse stock. The Christmas season was approaching, and we wanted to get the work well in hand for the usual holiday festivities. There were some fifty *manadas* of mares belonging to Las Palomas, about one fourth of which were used for the rearing of mules, the others growing our saddle horses for ranch use. These bands numbered twenty to twenty-five brood mares each, and ranged mostly within twenty miles of the home ranch. They were never disturbed except to brand the colts, market surplus stock, or cut out the mature geldings to be broken for saddle use. Each *manada* had its own range, never trespassing on others, but when they were brought together in the corral there was many a battle royal among the stallions.

I was anxious to get the work over in good season, for I intended to ask for a two weeks' leave of absence. My parents lived near Cibollo Ford on the San Antonio River, and I made it a rule to spend Christmas with my own people. This year, in particular, I had a double motive in going home; for the mouth of San Miguel and the McLeod ranch lay directly on my route. I had figured matters down to a fraction; I would have a good excuse for staying one night going and another returning. And it would be my fault if I did not reach the ranch at an hour when an invitation to remain over night would be simply imperative under the canons of Texas hospitality. I had done enough hard work since the dance at Shepherd's to drive every thought of Esther McLeod out of my mind if that were possible, but as the time drew nearer her invitation to call was ever uppermost in my thoughts.

So when the last of the horse stock was branded and the work was drawing to a close, as we sat around the fireplace one night and the question came up where each of us expected to spend Christmas, I broached my plan. The master and mistress were expected at the Booth ranch on the Frio. Nearly all the boys, who had homes within two or three days' ride, hoped to improve the chance to make a short visit to their people. When, among the others, I also made my application for leave of absence, Uncle Lance turned in his chair with apparent surprise. "What's that? You want to go home? Well, now, that's a new one on me. Why, Tom, I never knew you had any folks; I got the idea, somehow, that you was won on a horse race. Here I had everything figured out to send you down to Santa Maria with Enrique. But I reckon with the ice broken, he'll have to swim out or drown. Where do your folks live?" I explained that they lived on the San Antonio River, northeast about one hundred

and fifty miles. At this I saw my employer's face brighten. "Yes, yes, I see," said he musingly; "that will carry you past the widow McLeod's. You can go, son, and good luck to you."

I timed my departure from Las Palomas, allowing three days for the trip, so as to reach home on Christmas eve. By making a slight deviation, there was a country store which I could pass on the last day, where I expected to buy some presents for my mother and sisters. But I was in a pickle as to what to give Esther, and on consulting Miss Jean, I found that motherly elder sister had everything thought out in advance. There was an old Mexican woman, a pure Aztec Indian, at a ranchita belonging to Las Palomas, who was an expert in Mexican drawn work. The mistress of the home ranch had been a good patron of this old woman, and the next morning we drove over to the ranchita, where I secured half a dozen ladies' handkerchiefs, inexpensive but very rare.

I owned a private horse, which had run idle all summer, and naturally expected to ride him on this trip. But Uncle Lance evidently wanted me to make a good impression on the widow McLeod, and brushed my plans aside, by asking me as a favor to ride a certain black horse belonging to his private string. "Quirk," said he, the evening before my departure, "I wish you would ride Wolf, that black six-year-old in my mount. When that rascal of an Enrique saddle-broke him for me, he always mounted him with a free head and on the move, and now when I use him he's always on the fidget. So you just ride him over to the San Antonio and back, and see if you can't cure him of that restlessness. It may be my years, but I just despise a horse that's always dancing a jig when I want to mount him."

Glenn Gallup's people lived in Victoria County, about as far from Las Palomas as mine, and the next morning we set out down the river. Our course together only led a short distance, but we jogged along until noon, when we rested an hour and parted, Glenn going on down the river for Oakville, while I turned almost due north across country for the mouth of San Miguel. The black carried me that afternoon as though the saddle was empty. I was constrained to hold him in, in view of the long journey before us, so as not to reach the McLeod ranch too early. Whenever we struck cattle on our course, I rode through them to pass away the time, and just about sunset I cantered up to the McLeod ranch with a dash. I did not know a soul on the place, but put on a bold front and asked for Miss Esther. On catching sight of me, she gave a little start, blushed modestly, and greeted me cordially.

Texas hospitality of an early day is too well known to need comment; I was at once introduced to the McLeod household. It was rather a pretentious ranch, somewhat dilapidated in appearance—appearances are as deceitful on a cattle ranch as in the cut of a man's coat. Tony Hunter, a son-in-law of the widow, was foreman on the ranch, and during the course of the evening in the discussion of cattle matters, I innocently drew out the fact that their branded calf crop of that season amounted to nearly three thousand calves. When a similar question was asked me, I reluctantly admitted that the Las Palomas crop was quite a disappointment this year, only branding sixty-five hundred calves, but that our mule and horse colts ran nearly a thousand head without equals in the Nueces valley.

I knew there was no one there who could dispute my figures, though Mrs. McLeod expressed surprise at them. "Ye dinna say," said my hostess, looking directly at me over her spectacles, "that Las Palomas branded that mony calves thi' year? Why, durin' ma gudeman's life we alway branded mair calves than did Mr. Lovelace. But then my husband would join the army, and I had tae depend on greasers tae do ma work, and oor kye grew up mavericks." I said nothing in reply, knowing it to be quite natural for a woman or inexperienced person to feel always the prey of the fortunate and far-seeing.

The next morning before leaving, I managed to have a nice private talk with Miss Esther, and thought I read my title clear, when she surprised me with the information that her mother contemplated sending her off to San Antonio to a private school for young ladies. Her two elder sisters had married against her mother's wishes, it seemed, and Mrs. McLeod was determined to give her youngest daughter an education and fit her for something better than being the wife of a common cow hand. This was the inference from the conversation which passed between us at the gate. But when Esther thanked me for the Christmas remembrance I had brought her, I felt that I would take

a chance on her, win or lose. Assuring her that I would make it a point to call on my return, I gave the black a free rein and galloped out of sight.

I reached home late on Christmas eve. My two elder brothers, who also followed cattle work, had arrived the day before, and the Quirk family were once more united, for the first time in two years. Within an hour after my arrival, I learned from my brothers that there was to be a dance that night at a settlement about fifteen miles up the river. They were going, and it required no urging on their part to insure the presence of Quirk's three boys. Supper over, a fresh horse was furnished me, and we set out for the dance, covering the distance in less than two hours. I knew nearly every one in the settlement, and got a cordial welcome. I played the fiddle, danced with my former sweethearts, and, ere the sun rose in the morning, rode home in time for breakfast. During that night's revelry, I contrasted my former girl friends on the San Antonio with another maiden, a slip of the old Scotch stock, transplanted and nurtured in the sunshine and soil of the San Miguel. The comparison stood all tests applied, and in my secret heart I knew who held the whip hand over the passions within me.

As I expected to return to Las Palomas for the New Year, my time was limited to a four days' visit at home. But a great deal can be said in four days; and at the end I was ready to saddle my black, bid my adieu, and ride for the southwest. During my visit I was careful not to betray that I had even a passing thought of a sweetheart, and what parents would suspect that a rollicking, carefree young fellow of twenty could have any serious intentions toward a girl? With brothers too indifferent, and sisters too young, the secret was my own, though Wolf, my mount, as he put mile after mile behind us, seemed conscious that his mission to reach the San Miguel without loss of time was of more than ordinary moment. And a better horse never carried knight in the days of chivalry.

On reaching the McLeod ranch during the afternoon of the second day, I found Esther expectant; but the welcome of her mother was of a frigid order. Having a Scotch mother myself, I knew something of arbitrary natures, and met Mrs. McLeod's coolness with a fund of talk and stories; yet I could see all too plainly that she was determinedly on the defensive. I had my favorite fiddle with me which I was taking back to Las Palomas, and during the evening I played all the old Scotch ballads I knew and love songs of the highlands, hoping to soften her from the decided stand she had taken against me and my intentions. But her heritage of obstinacy was large, and her opposition strong, as several well-directed thrusts which reached me in vulnerable places made me aware, but I smiled as if they were flattering compliments. Several times I mentally framed replies only to smother them, for I was the stranger within her gates, and if she saw fit to offend a guest she was still within her rights.

But the next morning as I tarried beyond the reasonable hour for my departure, her wrath broke out in a torrent. "If ye dinna ken the way hame, Mr. Quirk, I'll show it ye," she said as she joined Esther and me at the hitch-rack, where we had been loitering for an hour. "And I dinna care muckle whaur ye gang, so ye get oot o' ma sight, and stay oot o' it. I thocht ye waur a ceevil stranger when ye bided wi' us last week, but noo I ken ye are something mair, ridin' your fine horses an' makin' presents tae ma lassie. That's a' the guid that comes o' lettin' her rin tae every dance at Shepherd's Ferry. Gang ben the house tae your wark, ye jade, an' let me attend tae this fine gentleman. Noo, sir, gin ye ony business onywhaur else, ye 'd aye better be ridin' tae it, for ye are no wanted here, ye ken."

"Why, Mrs. McLeod," I broke in politely. "You hardly know anything about me."

"No, an' I dinna wish it. You are frae Las Palomas, an' that's aye enough for me. I ken auld Lance Lovelace, an' those that bide wi' him. Sma' wonder he brands sae mony calves and sells mair kye than a' the ither ranchmen in the country. Ay, man, I ken him well."

I saw that I had a tartar to deal with, but if I could switch her invective on some one absent, it would assist me in controlling myself. So I said to the old lady: "Why, I've known Mr. Lovelace now almost a year, and over on the Nueces he is well liked, and considered a cowman whose word is as good as gold. What have you got against him?"

"Ower much, ma young freend. I kent him afore ye were born. I'm sorry tae say that while ma gudeman was alive, he was a frequent visitor at oor place. But we dinna see him ony mair. He aye

keeps awa' frae here, and camps wi' his wagons when he's ower on the San Miguel to gather cattle. He was no content merely wi' what kye drifted doon on the Nueces, but warked a big outfit the year around, e'en comin' ower on the Frio an' San Miguel maverick huntin'. That's why he brands twice the calves that onybody else does, and owns a forty-mile front o' land on both sides o' the river. Ye see, I ken him weel."

"Well, isn't that the way most cowmen got their start?" I innocently inquired, well knowing it was. "And do you blame him for running his brand on the unowned cattle that roamed the range? I expect if Mr. Lovelace was my father instead of my employer, you wouldn't be talking in the same key," and with that I led my horse out to mount.

"Ye think a great deal o' yersel', because ye're frae Las Palomas. Aweel, no vaquero of auld Lance Lovelace can come sparkin' wi' ma lass. I've heard o' auld Lovelace's matchmaking. I'm told he mak's matches and then laughs at the silly gowks. I've twa worthless sons-in-law the noo, are here an' anither a stage-driver. Aye, they 're capital husbands for Donald McLeod's lassies, are they no? Afore I let Esther marry the first scamp that comes simperin' aroond here, I'll put her in a convent, an' mak' a nun o' the bairn. I gave the ither lassies their way, an' look at the reward. I tell ye I'm goin' to bar the door on the last one, an' the man that marries her will be worthy o' her. He winna be a vaquero frae Las Palomas either!"

I had mounted my horse to start, well knowing it was useless to argue with an angry woman. Esther had obediently retreated to the safety of the house, aware that her mother had a tongue and evidently willing to be spared its invective in my presence. My horse was fidgeting about, impatient to be off, but I gave him the rowel and rode up to the gate, determined, if possible, to pour oil on the troubled waters. "Mrs. McLeod," said I, in humble tones, "possibly you take the correct view of this matter. Miss Esther and I have only been acquainted a few months, and will soon forget each other. Please take me in the house and let me tell her good-by."

"No, sir. Dinna set foot inside o' this gate. I hope ye know ye're no wanted here. There's your road, the one leadin' south, an' ye'd better be goin', I'm thinkin'."

I held in the black and rode off in a walk. This was the first clean knock-out I had ever met. Heretofore I had been egotistical enough to hold my head rather high, but this morning it drooped. Wolf seemed to notice it, and after the first mile dropped into an easy volunteer walk. I never noticed the passing of time until we reached the river, and the black stopped to drink. Here I unsaddled for several hours; then went on again in no cheerful mood. Before I came within sight of Las Palomas near evening, my horse turned his head and nickered, and in a few minutes Uncle Lance and June Deweese galloped up and overtook me. I had figured out several very plausible versions of my adventure, but this sudden meeting threw me off my guard—and Lance Lovelace was a hard man to tell an undetected, white-faced lie. I put on a bold front, but his salutation penetrated it at a glance.

"What's the matter, Tom; any of your folks dead?"

"No."

"Sick?"

"No."

"Girl gone back on you?"

"I don't think."

"It's the old woman, then?"

"How do you know?"

"Because I know that old dame. I used to go over there occasionally when old man Donald was living, but the old lady—excuse me! I ought to have posted you, Tom, but I don't suppose it would have done any good. Brought your fiddle with you, I see. That's good. I expect the old lady read my title clear to you."

My brain must have been under a haze, for I repeated every charge she had made against him, not even sparing the accusation that he had remained out of the army and added to his brand by mavericking cattle.

"Did she say that?" inquired Uncle Lance, laughing. "Why, the old hellion! She must have been feeling in fine fettle!"

CHAPTER V

A PIGEON HUNT

The new year dawned on Las Palomas rich in promise of future content. Uncle Lance and I had had a long talk the evening before, and under the reasoning of the old optimist the gloom gradually lifted from my spirits. I was glad I had been so brutally blunt that evening, regarding what Mrs. McLeod had said about him; for it had a tendency to increase the rancher's aggressiveness in my behalf. "Hell, Tom," said the old man, as we walked from the corrals to the house, "don't let a little thing like this disturb you. Of course she'll four-flush and bluff you if she can, but you don't want to pay any more attention to the old lady than if she was some *pelado*. To be sure, it would be better to have her consent, but then"—

Glenn Gallup also arrived at the ranch on New Year's eve. He brought the report that wild pigeons were again roosting at the big bend of the river. It was a well-known pigeon roost, but the birds went to other winter feeding grounds, except during years when there was a plentiful sweet mast. This bend was about midway between the ranch and Shepherd's, contained about two thousand acres, and was heavily timbered with ash, pecan, and hackberry. The feeding grounds lay distant, extending from the encinal ridges on the Las Palomas lands to live-oak groves a hundred miles to the southward. But however far the pigeons might go for food, they always returned to the roosting place at night.

"That means pigeon pie," said Uncle Lance, on receiving Glenn's report. "Everybody and the cook can go. We only have a sweet mast about every three or four years in the encinal, but it always brings the wild pigeons. We'll take a couple of pack mules and the little and the big pot and the two biggest Dutch ovens on the ranch. Oh, you got to parboil a pigeon if you want a tender pie. Next to a fish fry, a good pigeon pie makes the finest eating going. I've made many a one, and I give notice right now that the making of the pie falls to me or I won't play. And another thing, not a bird shall be killed more than we can use. Of course we'll bring home a mess, and a few apiece for the Mexicans."

We had got up our horses during the forenoon, and as soon as dinner was over the white contingent saddled up and started for the roost. Tiburcio and Enrique accompanied us, and, riding leisurely, we reached the bend several hours before the return of the birds. The roost had been in use but a short time, but as we scouted through the timber there was abundant evidence of an immense flight of pigeons. The ground was literally covered with feathers; broken limbs hung from nearly every tree, while in one instance a forked hackberry had split from the weight of the birds.

We made camp on the outskirts of the timber, and at early dusk great flocks of pigeons began to arrive at their roosting place. We only had four shotguns, and, dividing into pairs, we entered the roost shortly after dark. Glenn Gallup fell to me as my pardner. I carried the gunny sack for the birds, not caring for a gun in such unfair shooting. The flights continued to arrive for fully an hour after we entered the roost, and in half a dozen shots we bagged over fifty birds. Remembering the admonition of Uncle Lance, Gallup refused to kill more, and we sat down and listened to the rumbling noises of the grove. There was a constant chattering of the pigeons, and as they settled in great flights in the trees overhead, whipping the branches with their wings in search of footing, they frequently fell to the ground at our feet.

Gallup and I returned to camp early. Before we had skinned our kill the others had all come in, disgusted with the ease with which they had filled their bags. We soon had two pots filled and on the fire parboiling, while Tiburcio lined two ovens with pastry, all ready for the baking. In a short time two horsemen, attracted by our fire, crossed the river below our camp and rode up.

"Hello, Uncle Lance," lustily shouted one of them, as he dismounted. "It's you, is it, that's shooting my pigeons? All right, sir, I'll stay all night and help you eat them. I had figured on riding back to the Frio to-night, but I've changed my mind. Got any horse hobbles here?" The two men, George

Nathan and Hugh Trotter, were accommodated with hobbles, and after an exchange of commonplace news of the country, we settled down to story-telling. Trotter was a convivial acquaintance of Aaron Scales, quite a vagabond and consequently a story-teller. After Trotter had narrated a late dream, Scales unlimbered and told one of his own.

"I remember a dream I had several years ago, and the only way I can account for it was, I had been drinking more or less during the day. I dreamt I was making a long ride across a dreary desert, and towards night it threatened a bad storm. I began to look around for some shelter. I could just see the tops of a clump of trees beyond a hill, and rode hard to get to them, thinking that there might be a house amongst them. How I did ride! But I certainly must have had a poor horse, for I never seemed to get any nearer that timber. I rode and rode, but all this time, hours and hours it seemed, and the storm gathering and scattering raindrops falling, the timber seemed scarcely any nearer.

"At last I managed to reach the crest of the hill. Well, sir, there wasn't a tree in sight, only, under the brow of the hill, a deserted adobe *jacal*, and I rode for that, picketed my horse and went in. The *jacal* had a thatched roof with several large holes in it, and in the fireplace burned a roaring fire. That was some strange, but I didn't mind it and I was warming my hands before the fire and congratulating myself on my good luck, when a large black cat sprang from the outside into an open window, and said: 'Pardner, it looks like a bad night outside.'

"I eyed him a little suspiciously; but, for all that, if he hadn't spoken, I wouldn't have thought anything about it, for I like cats. He walked backward and forward on the window sill, his spine and tail nicely arched, and rubbed himself on either window jamb. I watched him some little time, and finally concluded to make friends with him. Going over to the window, I put out my hand to stroke his glossy back, when a gust of rain came through the window and the cat vanished into the darkness.

"I went back to the fire, pitying the cat out there in the night's storm, and was really sorry I had disturbed him. I didn't give the matter overmuch attention but sat before the fire, wondering who could have built it and listening to the rain outside, when all of a sudden Mr. Cat walked between my legs, rubbing himself against my boots, purring and singing. Once or twice I thought of stroking his fur, but checked myself on remembering he had spoken to me on the window sill. He would walk over and rub himself against the jambs of the fireplace, and then come back and rub himself against my boots friendly like. I saw him just as clear as I see those pots on the fire or these saddles lying around here. I was noting every move of his as he meandered around, when presently he cocked up an eye at me and remarked: 'Old sport, this is a fine fire we have here.'

"I was beginning to feel a little creepy, for I'd seen mad dogs and skunks, and they say a cat gets locoed likewise, and the cuss was talking so cleverly that I began to lose my regard for him. After a little while I concluded to pet him, for he didn't seem a bit afraid; but as I put out my hand to catch him, he nimbly hopped into the roaring fire and vanished. Then I did feel foolish. I had a good six-shooter, and made up my mind if he showed up again I'd plug him one for luck. I was growing sleepy, and it was getting late, so I concluded to spread down my saddle blankets and slicker before the fire and go to sleep. While I was making down my bed, I happened to look towards the fire, when there was my black cat, with not even a hair singed. I drew my gun quietly and cracked away at him, when he let out the funniest little laugh, saying: 'You've been drinking, Aaron; you're nervous; you couldn't hit a flock of barns.'

"I was getting excited by this time, and cut loose on him rapidly, but he dodged every shot, jumping from the hearth to the mantel, from the mantel to an old table, from there to a niche in the wall, and from the niche clear across the room and out of the window. About then I was some nervous, and after a while lay down before the fire and tried to go to sleep.

"It was a terrible night outside—one of those nights when you can hear things; and with the vivid imagination I was enjoying then, I was almost afraid to try to sleep. But just as I was going into a doze, I raised up my head, and there was my cat walking up and down my frame, his back arched and his tail flirting with the slow sinuous movement of a snake. I reached for my gun, and as it clicked

in cocking, he began raking my legs, sharpening his claws and growling like a tiger. I gave a yell and kicked him off, when he sprang up on the old table and I could see his eyes glaring at me. I emptied my gun at him a second time, and at every shot he crouched lower and crept forward as if getting ready to spring. When I had fired the last shot I jumped up and ran out into the rain, and hadn't gone more than a hundred yards before I fell into a dry wash. When I crawled out there was that d-d cat rubbing himself against my boot leg. I stood breathless for a minute, thinking what next to do, and the cat remarked: 'Wasn't that a peach of a race we just had!'

"I made one or two vicious kicks at him and he again vanished. Well, fellows, in that dream I walked around that old *jacal* all night in my shirt sleeves, and it raining pitchforks. A number of times I peeped in through the window or door, and there sat the cat on the hearth, in full possession of the shack, and me out in the weather. Once when I looked in he was missing, but while I was watching he sprang through a hole in the roof, alighting in the fire, from which he walked out gingerly, shaking his feet as if he had just been out in the wet. I shot away every cartridge I had at him, but in the middle of the shooting he would just coil up before the fire and snooze away.

"That night was an eternity of torment to me, and I was relieved when some one knocked on the door, and I awoke to find myself in a good bed and pounding my ear on a goose-hair pillow in a hotel in Oakville. Why, I wouldn't have another dream like that for a half interest in the Las Palomas brand. No, honest, if I thought drinking gave me that hideous dream, here would be one lad ripe for reform."

"It strikes me," said Uncle Lance, rising and lifting a pot lid, "that these birds are parboiled by this time. Bring me a fork, Enrique. Well, I should say they were. I hope hell ain't any hotter than that fire. Now, Tiburcio, if you have everything ready, we'll put them in the oven, and bake them a couple of hours."

Several of us assisted in fixing the fire and properly coaling the ovens. When this had been attended to, and we had again resumed our easy positions around the fire, Trotter remarked: "Aaron, you ought to cut drinking out of your amusements; you haven't the constitution to stand it. Now with me it's different. I can drink a week and never sleep; that's the kind of a build to have if you expect to travel and meet all comers. Last year I was working for a Kansas City man on the trail, and after the cattle were delivered about a hundred miles beyond,—Ellsworth, up in Kansas,—he sent us home by way of Kansas City. In fact, that was about the only route we could take. Well, it was a successful trip, and as this man was plum white, anyhow, he concluded to show us the sights around his burg. He was interested in a commission firm out at the stockyards, and the night we reached there all the office men, including the old man himself, turned themselves loose to show us a good time.

"We had been drinking alkali water all summer, and along about midnight they began to drop out until there was no one left to face the music except a little cattle salesman and myself. After all the others quit us, we went into a feed trough on a back street, and had a good supper. I had been drinking everything like a good fellow, and at several places there was no salt to put in the beer. The idea struck me that I would buy a sack of salt from this eating ranch and take it with me. The landlord gave me a funny look, but after some little parley went to the rear and brought out a five-pound sack of table salt.

"It was just what I wanted, and after paying for it the salesman and I started out to make a night of it. This yard man was a short, fat Dutchman, and we made a team for your whiskers. I carried the sack of salt under my arm, and the quantity of beer we killed before daylight was a caution. About daybreak, the salesman wanted me to go to our hotel and go to bed, but as I never drink and sleep at the same time, I declined. Finally he explained to me that he would have to be at the yards at eight o'clock, and begged me to excuse him. By this time he was several sheets in the wind, while I could walk a chalk line without a waver. Somehow we drifted around to the hotel where the outfit were supposed to be stopping, and lined up at the bar for a final drink. It was just daybreak, and between that Dutch cattle salesman and the barkeeper and myself, it would have taken a bookkeeper to have kept a check on the drinks we consumed—every one the last.

"Then the Dutchman gave me the slip and was gone, and I wandered into the office of the hotel. A newsboy sold me a paper, and the next minute a bootblack wanted to give me a shine. Well, I took a seat for a shine, and for two hours I sat there as full as a tick, and as dignified as a judge on the bench. All the newsboys and bootblacks caught on, and before any of the outfit showed up that morning to rescue me, I had bought a dozen papers and had my boots shined for the tenth time. If I'd been foxy enough to have got rid of that sack of salt, no one could have told I was off the reservation; but there it was under my arm. If ever I make another trip over the trail, and touch at Kansas City returning, I'll hunt up that cattle salesman, for he's the only man I ever met that can pace in my class."

"Did you hear that tree break a few minutes ago?" inquired Mr. Nathan. "There goes another one. It hardly looks possible that enough pigeons could settle on a tree to break it down. Honestly, I'd give a purty to know how many birds are in that roost to-night. More than there are cattle in Texas, I'll bet. Why, Hugh killed, with both barrels, twenty-two at one shot."

We had brought blankets along, but it was early and no one thought of sleeping for an hour yet. Mr. Nathan was quite a sportsman, and after he and Uncle Lance had discussed the safest method of hunting *javalina*, it again devolved on the boys to entertain the party with stories.

"I was working on a ranch once," said Glenn Gallup, "out on the Concho River. It was a stag outfit, there being few women then out Concho way. One day two of the boys were riding in home when an accident occurred. They had been shooting more or less during the morning, and one of them, named Bill Cook, had carelessly left the hammer of his six-shooter on a cartridge. As Bill jumped his horse over a dry *arroyo*, his pistol was thrown from its holster, and, falling on the hard ground, was discharged. The bullet struck him in the ankle, ranged upward, shattering the large bone in his leg into fragments, and finally lodged in the saddle.

"They were about five miles from camp when the accident happened. After they realized how bad he was hurt, Bill remounted his horse and rode nearly a mile; but the wound bled so then that the fellow with him insisted on his getting off and lying on the ground while he went into the ranch for a wagon. Well, it's to be supposed that he lost no time riding in, and I was sent to San Angelo for a doctor. It was just noon when I got off. I had to ride thirty miles. Talk about your good horses—I had one that day. I took a free gait from the start, but the last ten miles was the fastest, for I covered the entire distance in less than three hours. There was a doctor in the town who'd been on the frontier all of his life, and was used to such calls. Well, before dark that evening we drove into the ranch.

"They had got the lad into the ranch, had checked the flow of blood and eased the pain by standing on a chair and pouring water on the wound from a height. But Bill looked pale as a ghost from the loss of blood. The doctor gave the leg a single look, and, turning to us, said: 'Boys, she has to come off.'

"The doctor talked to Bill freely and frankly, telling him that it was the only chance for his life. He readily consented to the operation, and while the doctor was getting him under the influence of opiates we fixed up an operating table. When all was ready, the doctor took the leg off below the knee, cursing us generally for being so sensitive to cutting and the sight of blood. There was quite a number of boys at the ranch, but it affected them all alike. It was interesting to watch him cut and tie arteries and saw the bones, and I think I stood it better than any of them. When the operation was over, we gave the fellow the best bed the ranch afforded and fixed him up comfortable. The doctor took the bloody stump and wrapped it up in an old newspaper, saying he would take it home with him.

"After supper the surgeon took a sleep, saying we would start back to town by two o'clock, so as to be there by daylight. He gave instructions to call him in case Bill awoke, but he hoped the boy would take a good sleep. As I had left my horse in town, I was expected to go back with him. Shortly after midnight the fellow awoke, so we aroused the doctor, who reported him doing well. The old Doc sat by his bed for an hour and told him all kinds of stories. He had been a surgeon in the Confederate army, and from the drift of his talk you'd think it was impossible to kill a man without cutting off his head.

"'Now take a young fellow like you,' said the doctor to his patient, 'if he was all shot to pieces, just so the parts would hang together, I could fix him up and he would get well. You have no idea, son, how much lead a young man can carry.' We had coffee and lunch before starting, the doctor promising to send me back at once with necessary medicines.

"We had a very pleasant trip driving back to town that night. The stories he could tell were like a song with ninety verses, no two alike. It was hardly daybreak when we reached San Angelo, rustled out a sleepy hostler at the livery stable where the team belonged, and had the horses cared for; and as we left the stable the doctor gave me his instrument case, while he carried the amputated leg in the paper. We both felt the need of a bracer after our night's ride, so we looked around to see if any saloons were open. There was only one that showed any signs of life, and we headed for that. The doctor was in the lead as we entered, and we both knew the barkeeper well. This barkeeper was a practical joker himself, and he and the doctor were great hunting companions. We walked up to the bar together, when the doctor laid the package on the counter and asked: 'Is this good for two drinks?' The barkeeper, with a look of expectation in his face as if the package might contain half a dozen quail or some fresh fish, broke the string and unrolled it. Without a word he walked straight from behind the bar and out of the house. If he had been shot himself he couldn't have looked whiter.

"The doctor went behind the bar and said: 'Glenn, what are you going to take?' 'Let her come straight, doctor,' was my reply, and we both took the same. We had the house all to ourselves, and after a second round of drinks took our leave. As we left by the front door, we saw the barkeeper leaning against a hitching post half a block below. The doctor called to him as we were leaving: 'Billy, if the drinks ain't on you, charge them to me.'"

The moon was just rising, and at Uncle Lance's suggestion we each carried in a turn of wood. Piling a portion of it on the fire, the blaze soon lighted up the camp, throwing shafts of light far into the recesses of the woods around us. "In another hour," said Uncle Lance, recoaling the oven lids, "that smaller pie will be all ready to serve, but we'll keep the big one for breakfast. So, boys, if you want to sit up awhile longer, we'll have a midnight lunch, and then all turn in for about forty winks." As the oven lid was removed from time to time to take note of the baking, savory odors of the pie were wafted to our anxious nostrils. On the intimation that one oven would be ready in an hour, not a man suggested blankets, and, taking advantage of the lull, Theodore Quayle claimed attention.

"Another fellow and myself," said Quayle, "were knocking around Fort Worth one time seeing the sights. We had drunk until it didn't taste right any longer. This chum of mine was queer in his drinking. If he ever got enough once, he didn't want any more for several days: you could cure him by offering him plenty. But with just the right amount on board, he was a hail fellow. He was a big, ambling, awkward cuss, who could be led into anything on a hint or suggestion. We had been knocking around the town for a week, until there was nothing new to be seen.

"Several times as we passed a millinery shop, kept by a little blonde, we had seen her standing at the door. Something—it might have been his ambling walk, but, anyway, something—about my chum amused her, for she smiled and watched him as we passed. He never could walk along beside you for any distance, but would trail behind and look into the windows. He could not be hurried—not in town. I mentioned to him that he had made a mash on the little blond milliner, and he at once insisted that I should show her to him. We passed down on the opposite side of the street and I pointed out the place. Then we walked by several times, and finally passed when she was standing in the doorway talking to some customers. As we came up he straightened himself, caught her eye, and tipped his hat with the politeness of a dancing master. She blushed to the roots of her hair, and he walked on very erect some little distance, then we turned a corner and held a confab. He was for playing the whole string, discount or no discount, anyway.

"An excuse to go in was wanting, but we thought we could invent one; however, he needed a drink or two to facilitate his thinking and loosen his tongue. To get them was easier than the excuse; but with the drinks the motive was born. 'You wait here,' said he to me, 'until I go round to the livery

stable and get my coat off my saddle.' He never encumbered himself with extra clothing. We had not seen our horses, saddles, or any of our belongings during the week of our visit. When he returned he inquired, 'Do I need a shave?'

"'Oh, no,' I said, 'you need no shave. You may have a drink too many, or lack one of having enough. It's hard to make a close calculation on you.'

"'Then I'm all ready,' said he, 'for I've just the right gauge of steam.' He led the way as we entered. It was getting dark and the shop was empty of customers. Where he ever got the manners, heaven only knows. Once inside the door we halted, and she kept a counter between us as she approached. She ought to have called the police and had us run in. She was probably scared, but her voice was fairly steady as she spoke. 'Gentlemen, what can I do for you?'

"'My friend here,' said he, with a bow and a wave of the hand, 'was unfortunate enough to lose a wager made between us. The terms of the bet were that the loser was to buy a new hat for one of the dining-room girls at our hotel. As we are leaving town to-morrow, we have just dropped in to see if you have anything suitable. We are both totally incompetent to decide on such a delicate matter, but we will trust entirely to your judgment in the selection.' The milliner was quite collected by this time, as she asked: 'Any particular style?—and about what price?'

"'The price is immaterial,' said he disdainfully. 'Any man who will wager on the average weight of a train-load of cattle, his own cattle, mind you, and miss them twenty pounds, ought to pay for his lack of judgment. Don't you think so, Miss—er—er. Excuse me for being unable to call your name—but—but—' 'De Ment is my name,' said she with some little embarrassment.

"'Livingstone is mine,' said he with a profound bow, 'and this gentleman is Mr. Ochiltree, youngest brother of Congressman Tom. Now regarding the style, we will depend entirely upon your selection. But possibly the loser is entitled to some choice in the matter. Mr. Ochiltree, have you any preference in regard to style?'

"'Why, no, I can generally tell whether a hat becomes a lady or not, but as to selecting one I am at sea. We had better depend on Miss De Ment's judgment. Still, I always like an abundance of flowers on a lady's hat. Whenever a girl walks down the street ahead of me, I like to watch the posies, grass, and buds on her hat wave and nod with the motion of her walk. Miss De Ment, don't you agree with me that an abundance of flowers becomes a young lady? And this girl can't be over twenty.'

"'Well, now,' said she, going into matters in earnest, 'I can scarcely advise you. Is the young lady a brunette or blonde?'

"'What difference does that make?' he innocently asked.

"'Oh,' said she, smiling, 'we must harmonize colors. What would suit one complexion would not become another. What color is her hair?'

"'Nearly the color of yours,' said he. 'Not so heavy and lacks the natural wave which yours has—but she's all right. She can ride a string of my horses until they all have sore backs. I tell you she is a cute trick. But, say, Miss De Ment, what do you think of a green hat, broad brimmed, turned up behind and on one side, long black feathers run round and turned up behind, with a blue bird on the other side swooping down like a pigeon hawk, long tail feathers and an arrow in its beak? That strikes me as about the mustard. What do you think of that kind of a hat, dear?'

"'Why, sir, the colors don't harmonize,' she replied, blushing.

"'Theodore, do you know anything about this harmony of colors? Excuse me, madam,—and I crave your pardon, Mr. Ochiltree, for using your given name,—but really this harmony of colors is all French to me.'

"'Well, if the young lady is in town, why can't you have her drop in and make her own selection?' suggested the blond milliner. He studied a moment, and then awoke as if from a trance. 'Just as easy as not; this very evening or in the morning. Strange we didn't think of that sooner. Yes; the landlady of the hotel can join us, and we can count on your assistance in selecting the hat.' With a number of comments on her attractive place, inquiries regarding trade, and a flattering compliment

on having made such a charming acquaintance, we edged towards the door. 'This evening then, or in the morning at the farthest, you may expect another call, when my friend must pay the penalty of his folly by settling the bill. Put it on heavy.' And he gave her a parting wink.

"Together we bowed ourselves out, and once safe in the street he said: 'Didn't she help us out of that easy? If she wasn't a blonde, I'd go back and buy her two hats for suggesting it as she did.'

"Rather good looking too,' I remarked.

"Oh, well, that's a matter of taste. I like people with red blood in them. Now if you was to saw her arm off, it wouldn't bleed; just a little white water might ooze out, possibly. The best-looking girl I ever saw was down in the lower Rio Grande country, and she was milking a goat. Theodore, my dear fellow, when I'm led blushing to the altar, you'll be proud of my choice. I'm a judge of beauty."

It was after midnight when we disposed of the first oven of pigeon pot-pie, and, wrapping ourselves in blankets, lay down around the fire. With the first sign of dawn, we were aroused by Mr. Nathan and Uncle Lance to witness the return flight of the birds to their feeding grounds. Hurrying to the nearest opening, we saw the immense flight of pigeons blackening the sky overhead. Stiffened by their night's rest, they flew low; but the beauty and immensity of the flight overawed us, and we stood in mute admiration, no one firing a shot. For fully a half-hour the flight continued, ending in a few scattering birds.

CHAPTER VI

SPRING OF '76

The spring of '76 was eventful at Las Palomas. After the pigeon hunt, Uncle Lance went to San Antonio to sell cattle for spring delivery. Meanwhile, Father Norquin visited the ranch and spent a few days among his parishioners, Miss Jean acting the hostess in behalf of Las Palomas. The priest proved a congenial fellow of the cloth, and among us, with Miss Jean's countenance, it was decided not to delay Enrique's marriage; for there was no telling when Uncle Lance would return. All the arrangements were made by the padre and Miss Jean, the groom-to-be apparently playing a minor part in the preliminaries. Though none of the white element of the ranch were communicants of his church, the priest apparently enjoyed the visit. At parting, the mistress pressed a gold piece into his chubby palm as the marriage fee for Enrique; and, after naming a day for the ceremony, the padre mounted his horse and left us for the Tarancalous, showering his blessings on Las Palomas and its people.

During the intervening days before the wedding, we overhauled an unused *jacal* and made it habitable for the bride and groom. The *jacal* is a crude structure of this semi-tropical country, containing but a single room with a shady, protecting stoop. It is constructed by standing palisades on end in a trench. These constitute the walls. The floor is earthen, while the roof is thatched with the wild grass which grows rank in the overflow portions of the river valley. It forms a serviceable shelter for a warm country, the peculiar roofing equally defying rain and the sun's heat. Under the leadership of the mistress of the ranch, assisted by the Mexican women, the *jacal* was transformed into a rustic bower; for Enrique was not only a favorite among the whites, but also among his own people. A few gaudy pictures of Saints and the Madonna ornamented the side walls, while in the rear hung the necessary crucifix. At the time of its building the *jacal* had been blessed, as was customary before occupancy, and to Enrique's reasoning the potency of the former sprinkling still held good.

Weddings were momentous occasions among the Mexican population at Las Palomas. In outfitting the party to attend Enrique's wedding at Santa Maria, the ranch came to a standstill. Not only the regular ambulance but a second conveyance was required to transport the numerous female relatives of the groom, while the men, all in gala attire, were mounted on the best horses on the ranch. As none of the whites attended, Deweese charged Tiburcio with humanity to the stock, while the mistress admonished every one to be on his good behavior. With greetings to Santa Maria, the wedding party set out. They were expected to return the following evening, and the ranch was set in order to give the bride a rousing reception on her arrival at Las Palomas. The largest place on the ranch was a warehouse, and we shifted its contents in such a manner as to have quite a commodious ball-room. The most notable decoration of the room was an immense heart-shaped figure, in which was worked in live-oak leaves the names of the two ranches, flanked on either side with the American and Mexican flags. Numerous other decorations, expressing welcome to the bride, were in evidence on every hand. Tallow was plentiful at Las Palomas, and candles were fastened at every possible projection.

The mounted members of the wedding party returned near the middle of the afternoon. According to reports, Santa Maria had treated them most hospitably. The marriage was simple, but the festivities following had lasted until dawn. The returning guests sought their *jacals* to snatch a few hours' sleep before the revelry would be resumed at Las Palomas. An hour before sunset the four-mule ambulance bearing the bride and groom drove into Las Palomas with a flourish. Before leaving the bridal couple at their own *jacal*, Tiburcio halted the ambulance in front of the ranch-house for the formal welcome. In the absence of her brother, Miss Jean officiated in behalf of Las Palomas, tenderly caressing the bride. The boys monopolized her with their congratulations and welcome,

which delighted Enrique. As for the bride, she seemed at home from the first, soon recognizing me as the *padrino segundo* at the time of her betrothal.

Quite a delegation of the bride's friends from Santa Maria accompanied the party on their return, from whom were chosen part of the musicians for the evening—violins and guitars in the hands of the native element of the two ranches making up a pastoral orchestra. I volunteered my services; but so much of the music was new to me that I frequently excused myself for a dance with the señoritas. In the absence of Uncle Lance, our *segundo*, June Deweese, claimed the first dance of the evening with the bride. Miss Jean lent only the approval of her presence, not participating, and withdrawing at an early hour. As all the American element present spoke Spanish slightly, that became the language of the evening. But, further than to countenance with our presence the festivities, we were out of place, and, ere midnight, all had excused themselves with the exception of Aaron Scales and myself. On the pleadings of Enrique, I remained an hour or two longer, dancing with his bride, or playing some favorite selection for the delighted groom.

Several days after the wedding Uncle Lance returned. He had been successful in contracting a trail herd of thirty-five hundred cattle, and a *remuda* of one hundred and twenty-five saddle horses with which to handle them. The contract called for two thousand two-year-old steers and fifteen hundred threes. There was a difference of four dollars a head in favor of the older cattle, and it was the rancho's intention to fill the latter class entirely from the Las Palomas brand. As to the younger cattle, neighboring ranches would be invited to deliver twos in filling the contract, and if any were lacking, the home ranch would supply the deficiency. Having ample range, the difference in price was an inducement to hold the younger cattle. To keep a steer another year cost nothing, while the rancho returned convinced that the trail might soon furnish an outlet for all surplus cattle. In the matter of the horses, too, rather than reduce our supply of saddle stock below the actual needs of the ranch, Uncle Lance concluded to buy fifty head in making up the *remuda*.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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