

SCOWLING, the boy from Georgia stamped out of his hotel room and down the hall. A straw colored cowlick reached to his china blue eyes; he was lean and long, and a black frock coat hung from his shoulders. He stopped at the door next to his own, tapped with a ham sized fist, and barged in without waiting for an answer.

"Ain't no woman on earth can herd me around," he began.

The girl sitting in the rocker let out a yelp and cried, "Simon, you might wait to find out if I was dressed."

She bounded to her feet, and held a red silk dress in front of her to cover the most conspicuous bare spots. Simon Bolivar Grimes stuttered, "Dang it, Elma, how'd I know you'd be plump... ah... uncovered-like?"

He backed toward the door, but the dark haired girl said, "Might as well stay, if there's anything you've missed, I'd love to know what it is."

She turned her back, and proved her point. There was a fluff of chiffon about her hips; it didn't reach very low in one direction, or high in

the other. Her back and shoulders had a creamy richness. She was plump and shapely; her legs were sleek, and her garters made luscious indentations. Just a single graceful move, and the red dress was slipping over her head, and sinking down to her hips. A pat, and it rustled past her knees and cut off his view of her calves, which tapered down to dainty ankles.

"How'd I know?" Grimes repeated.

"I guess you wouldn't." Elma sighed, then winced. "Ouch!" She picked a needle from the red dress. "Never occurred to you I'd have to patch the only dress I have. And you're as ragged as I am, after riding a hundred miles in a frock coat!"

A frown again tightened Grimes' coffin-shaped face. "Look here, Elma, ain't no woman on



SHE HERDED HIM AROUND

By

E. Hoffmann Price

"Ain't no female can herd me around!" Grimes swore. But Elma was going to teach him different, with her insistence that he become a rancher instead of hunting for gold in Mexico

earth can herd me around. I am damn-blasted if I aim to be a cowpuncher just account you got a notion I'm too dumb to reckonize gold if I stumbled over it."

"Simon, darling, I don't mean you're stupid. I mean, you just don't know a thing about mining. Anyway, mining towns are poison, and miners are the lousiest ruffians."

"Huh! When I found you, you was hustling drinks in a dance hall!"

Elma slapped him with both hands before he could dodge. "Yes, and I got you out of jail, I got you the horse you escaped on, and, you were a small town lawyer when I found you, you long-legged idiot!"

She began crying, and clung to him. "Simon, mining towns are poison! Claim jumpers shot my dad. Anyway, your uncle's a cattleman, if you weren't so stubborn you and me could get a start with him."

"Aw, honey --" She was close enough now for him to be delightfully aware of her generous curves, and she snuggled closer; but the Grimes stubbornness won out. "Look here, I ain't got more'n a couple hundred dollars, and my uncle'd mock me, coming back thattaway, after I busted outen that jail wheah that crooked Jedge Hillman flung me fo' contempt of court. I got to get myself some gold, and I'm a-going to."

She jerked back, wiped her eyes. "Simon Bolivar Grimes, yon weren't too proud to have me smuggle saws into the jail!"

THE boy from Georgia straightened up. He dug into his pocket and brought out a buckskin poke and emptied half the gold pieces on the dresser. "M'am, I am mighty sick of these here reminders." He looked at the heavy gold watch his grandpappy had given him just before he was hanged for shooting a revenue officer. "It is jest about time for the stage coach to get here. You kin keep both the hosses you got."

He turned to the hall. She snatched the coins, and flung them. They hit the panel, just as he closed the door behind him. "Ain't no woman herding me around," he repeated. He knew he'd miss Elma, and he had to build up his courage.

Grimes stepped into his room, and shouldered the saddle bags which contained his razor, a quart of whiskey, and a pair of field glasses. Then he went down the creaking stairs, and stood in the doorway.

Cowpunchers yelled when, a few minutes later, the stage came clattering down the dusty main street. Hostlers brought out the new relay, and took the sweating team to the stables. The driver leaped down, and so did the shotgun messenger who guarded the heavy box of gold coin. A blonde girl stepped from the stage.

There was a seductive rustle of skirts, a coy flash of shapely legs; the slanting rays of the sun twinkled on the sheer silk of her hosiery. The sweetness of her perfume warmed Grimes' heart; he felt a little less bleak inside.

Grimes watched her walk into the stage station. She lifted her skirts a little, and picked her way daintily across the dust and among the bottles and cigar butts that littered the dirt side walk; but she looked at home, for all her frilly garments and the little hat with the blue plume. Neither did she grimace when she entered the dingy dining room.

Grimes bought a ticket for Skull Gulch. He had barely stuffed a few ham sandwiches and a slab of apple pie into his coat pocket when it was time to board the coach. He held the door open for the fascinating stranger, and then followed her to the coach; now that she had walked the cramps out of her legs, she needed no assistance.

Grimes looked up at the window at the end of the second floor hallway of the hotel. He caught a glimpse of Elma, and for a moment, he felt like a skunk. Then he said to himself, "Ain't no woman kin herd me around."

He had half hoped she would fling her few odds and ends into her carpetbag and follow. But she had not, and it was too late to back down. Then the driver cracked the whip; the stage lurched forward, flinging the lovely blonde all over Grimes.

She had curves in the right places, even though her prim blouse hid them from the eye. The momentary pressure, the warm contact of her hand, the fragrance of her garments: they all made Grimes tingle down to his boots.

They were alone in the coach, but the girl might as well have been surrounded by a board fence. He could not get up his nerve to edge her into one corner and slip an arm about her; that puzzled Grimes, and fascinated him. She was sweet, and friendly, and she wasn't stand-offish, but he kept his hands clear.

He said, after the exchange of names followed the untangling of accidentally scrambled limbs, "Miss Anne, I knowed you belonged out here, the

minute I seen you picking yo' way, calm and placid-like into that there station. Me, I'm a miner, but I usta practice law. I'm aiming to make a pile fo' myself at Skull Gulch."

Anne Parsell made a gesture of dismay. "Why, Simon, that's the murderingest town in arizona."

"I reckon it ain't too wild," he answered, and hitched about a little, for the .45s in his leather lined hip pockets were a nuisance. Now that he was through being a lawyer, he'd wear his guns on belts again. "Anyways, a fellow can face a few risks for a saddle bag full of nuggets."

SHE laughed merrily. "Well, they do say gold is where you find it. You know, there's the New Golconda, where I live, in Broken Axe. For years, it's been completely played out. And do you know, now they're taking ore out of it, so rich they don't let the miners leave the mine, or else they'd fill their boots with nuggets whenever they headed for town."

Grimes sat up straight. "Miss Anne, mebbe I been a mite hasty about Skull Gulch. Reckon I oughta go to Broken Axe instead."

"You won't get rich on miner's pay. Since you've practiced law, why don't you work in dad's bank?"

"Yo' pappy own a bank?"

"No, he's only president of it, Brad Thorman owns a bit of stock, and he wants to marry me, but he's old as the hills, I wouldn't be surprised if he's thirty-five."

It was dark now, and above the clatter of the stage, Grimes heard the yip-yip of a coyote, and the answering howl of another. Anne's profile was exquisite in the gloom. The noise made conversation lag. She sat up, lovely and straight; but finally, as the hours wore on, her lovely head nodded.

She leaned against the arm rest. She gasped, murmured an apology as a jolt flung her against Grimes, but she did not take her head from his shoulder. She pillowed her blonde curls against the black frock coat, and Grimes said to himself, "Jest like a dang-blasted angel, gosh, she's beautiful...."

To hell with Skull Gulch! He was going to Broken Axe. He hoped Elma wouldn't follow him to Skull Gulch, it'd be too bad, going so far out of her way.

Grimes must have been dozing, for the screech of brakes startled him. Then there was a

shot. Anne cried, "Good Lord, a hold-up!" Men yelled, rocks clattered down the moonlit slope of the pass. The guard cut loose with his carbine; and then a volley raked the coach.

The driver was trying to swing clear of boulders heaped in the trail. Grimes caught Anne by the shoulder and thrust her to the floor. "You scrunch down, honey," he yelled, and drew his .45s.

She cried, "Simon, you'll get killed – oh!"

Two slugs bad zinged from bolts inside the coach. Grimes leaned out the window. Four men were pelting down the slope. Their horses struck fire from the rocks. Their guns blazed. The driver was whipping the team, sawing the lines, weaving in and out among the boulders, trying to get back on the trail. Grimes fired. A man slumped over in his saddle, then rolled off; his horse galloped with the others.

Then the messenger lurched from his post.

The lead team piled up. A horse screamed. Grimes yelled, "cut them loose, I'll hold these here _____s!" The driver answered, and Grimes' Colt blazed again.

The nearest road agent doubled up, clutched for support, and thumped to the ground. Grimes shouted to Anne, "Honey, get out on the other side, get outen here and hide yo'self afore you git a stray bullet."

And then a hammer blow knocked the breath out of Grimes. He had many times before now felt the paralyzing smash of a bullet, but this was different. He could not feel a thing from his collarbone to his knees; the moonlight blurred and blackened.

He never did know how long it was before he heard Anne cry, "Oh, he's not hurt at all, really."

The driver, head bandaged, knelt beside her, with a lantern. Grimes sat up. "M'am, what in tunket you mean I ain't hurt none?"

"Why, the bullet hit the big gold watch in your vest pocket."

"They busted that heirloom," he muttered, looking at the wreckage. "If ever I ketch that sculpin, I'm staking him out on an ant-hill. How's the hosses?"

"One kilt, I had to shoot t'other whilst Miss Anne was looking for bullet holes in your gizzard. And they got the gold."

Anne recoiled. "They got the gold? Oh, good Lord."

Grimes hoisted himself to the seat, and leaned back against the bullet riddled upholstery. "Huh! Tain't yo' gold, is it?"

AT THE next town, Ojo Caliente, the driver got a lead team; but Anne refused to go on.

"Simon," she said, "you've got to see a doctor, you got an awful wallop, watch or no watch. And I'm going to stop over to see that you're taken care of."

Once the coach was on its way, Grimes muttered, "Shucks, nothing wrong with me, here I am letting a woman herd me around again."

Before he reached the head of the hotel stairs, he did think his gizzard had been knocked out of place; but he told the doctor, "Ain't nothing wrong with me, get me a quart of liquor and a cigar."

It was perhaps an hour or two before dawn when he awoke, a gun in each hand, and sweat pouring down his cheeks. He looked around, realized that he had been dreaming of a second hold-up, and took another swig of rye.

Then he heard the sobbing next door; Anne was crying, tossing restlessly. It was all plain through the thin partition. He got up, put on his boots and coat, and tapped at her door. When she answered, he said, "Honey, it's jest me. I done heard you weeping like yo' little heart's busted wide open."

"Oh, just a minute –" There was a flurry of bare feet, the scratch of a match; then, "Come in, Simon, I'm so worried."

She wore a filmy robe over a lace paneled gown; the two garments together wouldn't have been enough to wad a shotgun. Her hair was shimmering gold in the light of the smoky lamp. For all her reddened eyes, Anne was the loveliest creature he had ever seen; through the frail garments he could just distinguish the shadowy roundnesses of her slim figure.

He caught her in his arms, gritted his teeth for a moment, then let himself down into the rocker.

"It's that robbery," she said, snuggling against his shoulder.

"Huh. Tain't yo' money."

"But the loss will hurt dad's bank, there may be a run on it."

"Shucks, ain't the stage company responsible?"

She shook her bead. "The bank owns the stage line."

Grimes stroked the golden hair, slipped an arm about Anne, and kissed her. She did not protest, and before he could marvel at that, she was clinging to him, murmuring, "Simon, when you were half conscious from trying to defend me from the road agents, you said the sweetest things."

That kiss inspired Grimes. "Honey, all the more reason fo' not working in yo' pappy's bank, and going to the New Golconda instead. I'll give him the gold, and I wont ask fo' my money until the bank's earnt enough to stand the loss of the robbery."

"Simon, darling, miners just get pay."

Grimes chuckled. "Not me. I'm a-filling my boots with nuggets every shift I work. They ain't keeping me locked up at any mine!"

"Oh, but that'd be stealing."

"Huh. Tain't neither. It's downright stingy, expecting a fellow to dig and drill and blast all day long, and then holler if he stuffs a couple nuggets into his pockets. Did the owner of the New Golconda put the gold into the ground in the fust place? You jest hush up, honey, I'm saving yo' pappy's bank if I have to high grade two-three mines."

Anne didn't have an answer. Then he was kissing her until she couldn't say anything, for a while. At last Grimes said, "That there light's too dang glaring..." He got up and blew it out. When he got back to the warm white shape in the gloom, he went on, "Who'd you say owns the New Galconda?"

"Brand Thorman."

"Huh. He's the gent that thinks he'll marry you!"

IT WAS dawn when Anne said, "Simon, you better go back to your room, folks might start talking."

He wrote a letter, telling Elma he was not going to Skull Gulch; but he did not tell her what his destination was. No woman was going to herd him around....

When the following stage brought Grimes and Anne to Broken Axe, the town turned out. The marshal and half a dozen cowpunchers surrounded Grimes and Anne, demanding a first hand account of the vain but valiant defense of the coach. Anne's father, Jim Parsell, joined the crowd. He was a tall, ruddy man with a blonde mustache. He wore boots and store clothes, and a battered Stetson jammed down on shaggy white hair.

"Well, I reckon I could, if Simon insists."

And then a dark man with a close-cropped mustache came up. His thumbs were hooked in his green satin vest; a good looking fellow, except for his gimlet eyes and too hearty smile. Anne said, "Hello,



She smacked Anne, and then Grimes was dragging her from the buggy.

"Simon," he said, "I done heard all about it, and I'd sure like to have you be chief counsel for this here bank."

Grimes answered, "If it's jest the same to you, suh, I'm plumb sick of law and I'd ruther work in the New Golconda mine."

Anne said, "Dad, why don't you ask Brand, Simon was defending his interest, too. It was bank money."

Brand, Dad and I would like for you to give Simon a job in your mine.”

Brand Thorman cocked his head and eyed Grimes from dusty boots to bullet riddled hat. “So you’re Simon Bolivar Grimes, the Texas gunslick, eh? Nice work, smoking out two road agents.”

“Huh? What’s that?” Grimes scowled; he didn’t like the man. “I ain’t no gunslick.”

Thorman chuckled. “No offense, Simon, no offense. And I’m sorry, but I don’t need any more miners, I’ve got plenty.” He lifted his hat, “Goodbye, Anne.”

Grimes watched him mount up the slim legged *palomino* in front of the Thorman House Bar. Then Anne’s father said, “Simon, let’s liquor up a bit, and see if I can talk you into working for me.”

Anne cut in, “I wish you could persuade him, dad.”

Though Grimes stepped into the Thorman House Bar, he was still determined not to have any woman herd him around.

After two or three quick ones, he said, “Look-ee here, Mistah Parsell, you got to get me into that mine, I’m plumb sot on mining, I allus craved to learn the business.” He omitted any mention of his plans for pocketing nuggets; he sensed that rugged Jim Parsell would have the same childish ideas that Anne had. “Though mebbe I ought to help the sheriff run down them robbers that ruined my grandpappy’s watch.”

Jim Parsell’s craggy face tightened. “I’d sure love to see them dancing on the business end of a riata. Forty thousand bucks, and if the news gets out how hard we’re hit, no telling what’ll happen.”

THE following morning, cattlemen came driving in to Broken Axe, supposedly to buy groceries; but each one went to the bank and drew out cash. Grimes watched Jim Parsell through the fly specked windows; the tall rancher was saying to each depositor, “Your *dinero*’s safe, neighbor. But if you drag it down, you might get held up, same as the stage.”

Parsell was sweating. Some depositors did return most of the money they had drawn, but some got stubborn. It was touch and go, all day.

Grimes was impatiently waiting for night. He and Anne were driving out on the mesa. She was bringing a lemon pie, some cushions, and a Navajo rug. Anne would pass by the hotel to pick him up.

Brand Thorman drove down the street in a buckboard, and pulled up in front of Cy Daley’s General Mercantile, Hay, Grain & Feed Store. He did not notice Grimes, and Grimes barely noticed him; the passengers sitting on boxes set on the wagon bed accounted for that last.

There were two Mexican girls built like Percheron mares, three chemical blondes, and a red-head. They were painted up like a carnival parade, their perfume drowned the main street’s odor of stale beer and horses, and their low cut dresses made Grimes gape.

The redhead said, “See anything you ain’t seen before, dearie?”

Grimes answered, “Not yet, m’am, but if that there wagon hits any bumps, there’s jest no telling.”

She laughed, and patted the deeply cut yoke of her dress, just by way of checking up. One of the Mexican girls said, “*Señor*, you are too fonny!”

“Where you all ladies going, to a picnic or suthin?”

“Picnic?” A blonde turned to her nearest neighbor. “Sure, and he thinks it’s a picnic, up there at the mine.”

Then a little gray man with a blue apron came out of the store, carrying a case of whiskey. Brand Thorman followed, a case on his shoulder. Grimes asked the girl nearest the tailgate, “Gosh, m’am, is that there liquor for the miners?”

“Miners get thirsty, don’t they? Listen, dearie, come up to see me Friday night, I live right next to the post office.”

Thorman took the reins, and cracked the whip. The cargo of girls and whiskey rolled down the street. Grimes said to Cy Daley, “That gent sure treats his miners mighty nice.”

The storekeeper said, “Finding nuggets the size of steers, he can damn’ well afford to! It beats all, bub, the luck of some folks. Mine’s been given up fer years, and Brand snoops around and finds the lost vein,”

Grimes watched the dust cloud rising from the desert. As he went to the hotel to wait for Anne, he said to himself, “No dang wonder these gals holler when a fellow aims to work in the mines. Some of them ladies was right pert looking, too.”

He ate a steak and four eggs and half a dried-apple pie. But thinking of Elma took the edge from his appetite.

"After all," he said to himself, "she's got them two hosses, and I gave her half of my roll. No, I ain't being herded around by no woman."

It was dark now, but he sat there, trying to devise an approach to the problem of getting a job from a man who did not want more employees. Finally he brightened up: "If Thorman don't break all the likker out at once, which he wont, supposing I snuck in and opened a case? Them miners ain't going to know their own names fo' a week."

WHEN Anne Parsell drove up in her father's buggy, Grimes took the reins, and flicked the high stepping bay's rump. "Sure a scrumptious night, honey."

Anne sighed, leaned back against his shoulder.

Well out on the mesa, Grimes pulled up at a *tinaja* whose slow ooze of water filled a small rocky basin, just enough for the grass that covered the thin soil for a few yards about the basin. He spread out the Navajo rug, and Anne snuggled beside him, in the lee of the boulder that sheltered them from the cool wind.

The silence finally made him look up from the girl in his arms, for all that she clung to him, lips eager and misty eyes veiled by drooping lashes. "Gosh, honey, I could almost grab them stars, and put 'em in your hair."

She sighed ecstatically. "You're so poetic, Simon." And then, needing both arms, Grimes was unable to reach for the stars....

The way it ended, he forgot all about the chicken sandwiches and the lemon pie until Anne exclaimed, "Oh, it's getting late, we ought to get back to town before every one turns out for the westbound stage."

He helped her to her feet, sighed regretfully, and then became practical. "Better let me brush the burrs offen your skirt, honey."

There weren't any to speak of, but it was nice work.

On the way back to town, Grimes asked, "Why in tunket don't Thorman put up gold brick and save your pappy's bank?"

"He's offered to, if I'll marry him."

"That old buzzard, I bet he's dang neart forty. Your pap can't make you marry Thorman, can he?"

"Oh, it's not a case of *forcing* me to, Simon. But dad's worked so hard with that bank. He's

carried so many ranchers through bad years. I just can't let him fail now. I'd be letting all our friends down."

Grimes flicked the whip. "Look here. Suppose you and me cut up so scandalous that Thorman'd not want to marry you, and then maybe your pappy could deal with him reasonable."

Her eyes brightened. "That would be fun, darling." But the smile faded quickly, and she let go his hand. "Only Thorman'd kill you. No, that's not the way – oh, hurry! Here comes the stage!"

He plied the whip. The bay stretched his long legs. The buggy bounced and careened over the rough road; but for all his gallant effort, the stage beat Jim Parsell's trotter. And when Grimes pulled up, all of Broken Axe had turned out.

Grimes gave Anne the reins. "Shucks, mebbe we coulda made it through the arroyo instead of to town, I musta been absent-minded."

"I'm afraid not," Anne said. "without going miles and miles around."

Even so, the late return might have been inconspicuous, but for one passenger who had stepped out of the stage. In another moment, she would have been in the hotel. As it was, she stood there under the lights at the door. Elma Austen had followed Grimes.

She saw him, and she saw his blonde companion. She dropped her carpetbag and darted toward the buggy. Grimes leaped to the street and said, "Anne, you hurry –"

The crowd, however, blocked her way, but it did not block Elma. She said, "You jailbird, maybe you think I didn't see this blonde bait get on the coach with you! Maybe you thought I'd not hear of that robbery, and know where you'd gone?"

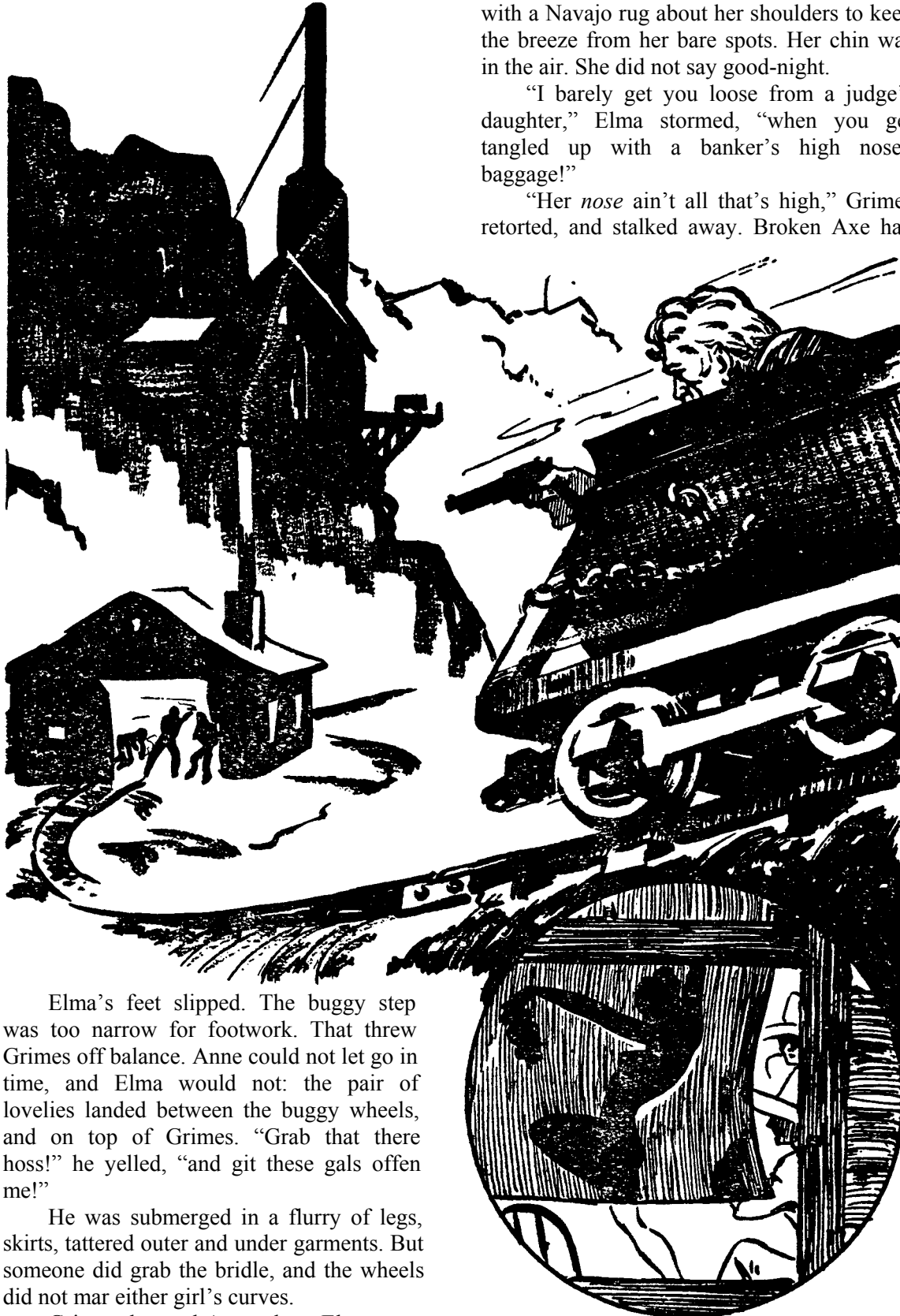
She bounded to the step of the buggy, and said to Anne, "If you think you can take advantage of this long-legged idiot, you're crazy! Not after I got him out of jail."

Grimes caught Elma's shoulder. "Look here," he stuttered, "you can't talk thattaway, this lady's totally respectful, she's a banker's daughter."

That did not soothe Elma a bit. "Banker? Oh, you low down coyote, you fortune hunter, after all I've done for you!"

She smacked Anne. Grimes, trying to drag her from the buggy step, tore Elma's red dress to the waist, and Elma turned out a good display. A crowd of cowpunchers cheered.

Then Anne took a hand. Two hands, in fact: both full of brunette hair.



with a Navajo rug about her shoulders to keep the breeze from her bare spots. Her chin was in the air. She did not say good-night.

"I barely get you loose from a judge's daughter," Elma stormed, "when you get tangled up with a banker's high nosed baggage!"

"Her *nose* ain't all that's high," Grimes retorted, and stalked away. Broken Axe had

Elma's feet slipped. The buggy step was too narrow for footwork. That threw Grimes off balance. Anne could not let go in time, and Elma would not: the pair of lovelies landed between the buggy wheels, and on top of Grimes. "Grab that there hoss!" he yelled, "and git these gals offen me!"

He was submerged in a flurry of legs, skirts, tattered outer and under garments. But someone did grab the bridle, and the wheels did not mar either girl's curves.

Grimes dragged Anne clear. Elma came up clawing. Before he could shake her until her teeth rattled, Anne was driving away,

As the car roared down, Grimes blazed away at the silhouetted gunners.

become complicated. He would have left on that very stage, but no woman was going to herd him around.

IN THE morning, he got a livery nag and rode out toward the buttes whose gold was making Brand Thorman rich. He reasoned, "Now that Anne ain't got no use for me, Thorman won't be refusing me a job outa spite."

Gold he had come for and gold he was getting.

Presently, he heard the wheeze of a steam engine, the pounding of the ten-stamp mill. But he could not see any miners. There were no ore cars coming out of the black tunnel to feed the mill; no ore cars took useless rock to the dump. All Grimes knew about mining could have been written on a postage stamp, but even so, he felt that there should have been more activity than that thump-thump-wheeze.

He might never have thought of ore cars had he not seen three of them on the rusting rails, up there along the butte's eroded side.

Then there was activity aplenty. That puff of vapor from the engine house might have been steam, but just on the off chance, Grimes piled out of the saddle. Two seconds later, a slug buzzed past. He heard the rumble of the gun. As he clawed dirt, he muttered, "Either that coyote's shooting a cannon, or they jest fired a blast in the mine."

A second shot kept Grimes from taking his horse to a sheltering dip. The animal toppled over, kicking. A third shot from the buffalo gun drove the rider scrambling for cover. He pitched and rolled. Then, minutes later, he took off his hat, held it well to one side, and cautiously crept toward the lip.

A .55 caliber slug drilled the Stetson. He tried to crawl in the opposite direction to reach an arroyo that seamed the mesa. A slug fanned his ear. Grimes' Colts were outranged by a good 600 yards. He was bottled up. He could not get at the canteen hooked on the saddle.

The sun was beating down. Horn toads raced among the hot rocks. Grimes' mouth became dry; his lips cracked in the searing wind. He began to doubt that anyone could get a job at the New Golconda.

At hourly intervals during the blasting afternoon, Grimes tried to creep to the arroyo. The final attempt cured him. Another quarter inch, and he'd have had both lungs torn out by a 550 grain

slug. Brand Thorman wanted to make sore that snoopers didn't return with reports on the lay of the land.

The sun was low, and Grimes was fairly perishing of thirst. Little whirlwinds blinded him with dust and burrs. The whole mesa danced crazily. He took some mesquite sticks, tore his shirt into strings; he peeled out of his coat and pants.

"I'm getting into that mine if it takes till Judgement Day," he mumbled as he set to work. "Mebbe I ain't working there, but I'm getting a look and I'm getting a nugget."

He made a dummy of mesquite branches tied together. He dressed it, and put his hat on the dummy. Then, crawling on his belly, he caught a wooden "ankle" in each hand and made the scarecrow simulate cautious peeping.

No one fired. He wondered if the watcher was looking. He tried again, making the dummy pop up once more, a little nearer the point where a man might make a dash for the arroyo's protection. Grimes reasoned that a man who had baked in that deadly heat all day would not have patience to wait until dark; he might be too crazy with the heat. Indeed, Grimes was practically that, or he would have let well enough alone.

Once more he managed to put his double up to spying.

The dummy jerked. An ounce slug had smacked it between the shoulders. A big puff of dust rose. Grimes lay there, flat on his face, the scarecrow just ahead of him. From the mine, it must have looked like that final, perfect shot. Mirage, and sunset haze had kept the sniper from seeing that he had plugged a dummy.

PATIENTLY, Grimes waited for darkness. Then he went to his dead horse to get his canteen.

The hot water tasted better than any beer.

Once in the arroyo, he headed upgrade, toward the now silent stamp mill. Lights gleamed in the buildings. As he came nearer, he could hear voices; there was laughter, some feminine, some masculine, and all drunken.

A foghorn voice bawled,

*"Three gals came down from, Canada,
Drinking rum and wine,
The subject of conversation was,
Your hair ain't as red as mine –"*

It was the chorus that shocked Grimes. He muttered, "They sure weren't ladies," and picked his way up the grade. Soon he was at the narrow gauge line for ore cars.

He got a look through a crack in the nearest shack. Four miners were paralyzed, and one was nodding, and one was bawling another verse of the song. The second case of whiskey was open, and the half dozen girls had most of their garments scattered all over the tangle of bottles and tin plates and pack saddles. One was doing a dance that fascinated Grimes.

"Gosh, I never knowed a gal could wobble in so many places at onct."

The nodding miner prodded her hip with a cigarette butt. She cried, "*Chinga'o borrego!*" and smacked his mustache. He toppled over. The song went on. So did Grimes. But the life of a miner sure did have its high spots.

The other lighted shack was new. The lumber had not yet turned gray in the blistering sun. The narrow gauge tracks ran right into the building; it had apparently been whacked up with no regard to ore cars. That was odd. But not half as odd as what went on in the large room.

There were three-decked bunks, horse gear, a sheet iron stove. Three men sat on packing cases; Brand Thorman sat on a solid oaken chest with a shattered lock whose express company seals still hung from wires. The fifth man knelt before a little crucible under which there was a charcoal fire; sparks flew as he pumped goatskin bellows and sweated in the red glare.

There was a box of black sand in which ingots cooled; there was a depression in the sand, ready for the next crucible of melted gold. The man with the bellows said, "Dump in a bit more, Brand."

Thorman straightened up, took a double handful of coins out of the chest and dumped them into the crucible. By then Grimes understood the whole game. One of the gang was familiar; he had taken part in the stage robbery,

No wonder Thorman kept his gang of miners dead drunk, and did not want strangers prowling around! The miners and the stamp mill were to fool the natives of Broken Axe. The mine was a fake; a hideout for bandits to melt down stolen coin and palm it off as gold from a lost lode. Thorman was sinking the bank, and then offering to ante in enough to save Jim Parsell, marry Anne, and also get control of the bank. Simple as pouring sand out of a boot!

These men were sober and armed. Even for a surprise party, five to one was too much to bite off. Grimes retreated up the rusty tracks. Fifty yards upgrade, he came to an ore car. He released the brake, and heaved to free the rusty axle. It squealed. The car began to roll. Grimes vaulted into the steel shell. Creaking and groaning, the car picked up speed.

The clump and clatter warned the gang a little too soon. Two men dashed out, guns blazing. Slugs zinged from the sides of the car. Grimes rose, a Colt in each hand. Light from inside the house silhouetted the gunners. One doubled up, and rolled down the grade. The other stumbled.

Brand Thorman's buffalo gun cut loose from the window. Grimes, however, was already ducking. The next instant, the car ploughed into the cabin. A lantern smashed. The crucible and furnace tipped over. It was the oaken chest that derailed the ore car. Guns laced the murky glare. Slugs smacked and screamed; Grimes came up, shooting, but two men escaped.

Horses clattered down the grade. The wrecked cabin began to blaze. The drunken miner and one of the Mexican girls still sang, "*Three gals came down from Canada, drinking rum and wine....*"

Brand Thorman and one accomplice had escaped. Grimes thrust his guns into his leather-lined hip pockets and bounded toward the tunnel where the horses had been stabled. He lost time catching a saddled nag; the fugitives had stampeded the dead men's animals. When he set out, he could no longer hear the pounding of hooves across the mesa. But he quirted a dead man's mount toward Broken Axe.

Thorman couldn't leave Broken Axe. Thorman could scarcely suspect the identity of the snooper; neither could he double back to recover the unmelted coins from the blazing shack. So Grimes galloped on.

HE DISMOUNTED in front of the Thorman House Bar. None of the horses at the hitching rack were blowing or sweating. He was sure that Brand Thorman had come down a side alley, and gone either to some bar or to his quarters in the hotel he owned. Grimes poked his head into several saloons, and decided, "He'd go to his room and pretend he's been, in all evening. Fust find him, then find his hoss."

Grimes bounded up the narrow stairs to the second floor. "Mistah Thorman," he yelled,

drunkenly, "if you think yo're marrying Anne Parsell, yo're crazy – yo're crazy, you sidewinder, you ain't fit for Anne!"

There was no action from any hall door. But men in the lobby heard the bawling challenge. Someone shouted, "Brand'll shoot your gizzard out, kid! You better go home to bed."

Grimes repeated the challenge, then answered the men below: "I'll be any dirty name if I back down, he ain't marrying my gal!"

Just then two doors opened; one at his left, near the head of the stairs; the other at the further end of the hall. Elma came dashing out of the nearer door. She wore a transparent nightgown, and her dark hair was streaming. "If you're that crazy about her," she cried, "go ahead and good luck, you jughead!"

Brand Thorman stamped into the hall. His boots were dusty, and he saw the dust on Grimes' boots, the alkali and rust and dirt on the frock coat; he saw, and his face changed. He understood.

Elma screamed, "Simon, watch it!"

But Grimes was already whirling from that lovely distraction. Thorman's guns were clearing leather when the kid from Georgia cut loose. No one, Thorman least of all, believed that any man could get a Colt from a hip pocket and clear of a long frock coat in time to win the exchange.

But Thorman learned. His own shot went wild, just as Grimes' Colt bucked a second time, and knocked a second jet of dust from Thorman's green vest. The big man spun, his knees buckled, and he fell face forward; his smoking gun skated down the hall.

Elma clawed her breast. Her gown was soggy, blood soaked. Before Grimes could catch her, she caught the door jamb, missed, then slumped to the floor.

"Simon – you fool – I told you – mining towns – are poison – did he get you – ?" She shivered, held to him with one arm. When he supported her in the crook of his elbow, she smiled. "Kiss me, Simon, you idiot – it's been fun – herding you around –"

The men who came pounding up the stairs checked up short. One said, "Hell, the pore gal's been shot, get a doctor."

"Shot hell!" Grimes choked. "She's dead, and so is that son of a _____!"

HE WAS right. Later that night, he rode to Jim Parsell's house with the marshal, and told of Thorman's trick to palm off stolen coin as gold from a high grade mine. Anne came out, wide eyed, and laid a soft hand on his arm. "Simon, darling," she said, "I'm so sorry about that poor girl. And I'm not angry about the way... the way she called my hand. You saved us all, Simon, and –"

Grimes kissed her, then gently thrust her from him. He said to Anne, and to Jim Parsell, and to the marshal: "Folks, you'all been mighty nice, but I'm leaving tonight. I'm going back to my uncle's spread, like Elma wanted me to –" He choked, blinked, then jammed his hat on and ran down the front steps. As he stumbled toward town, he muttered, "Damn it, I wish I'd let her herd me around."

N. B.: To this day, the management of certain mines in Mexico sends ladies and liquor to the mines: though to keep the miners from deserting, rather than to prevent "high-grading." And just last year, the F. B. I. nailed a gang that used an exhausted mine as a front for the disposal of illicit gold.