

Gun-Whipped!



Snake drew but before he could fire young Petey had drilled him through the forearm. Then Bill was sent sprawling from his chair as another gunman went into action!

Snake Furgeson had plenty of notches on his six-gun but young Petey Malone showed him a trick or two in gunfighting when the killer gunman filled his hand.

by CARMONY GOVE

THE Silver Spur bar was busy for a mid-week night. Most of the gambling tables were going, too. Old Bill Tope tilted his chair back against a post. Slightly to his left a five-handed poker game was in session. Tope didn't like the nasty squinting of Snake Furgeson's eyes; Furgeson had too many notches on his gun.

"An' that Petey boy hain't got th' sense to keep from hornin' right into trouble," Tope muttered to himself.

An abrupt, heavy-fisted slapping of hands at cards jarred the table. Each poker player suddenly kicked back his chair and was solidly on his feet.

Three of the players backed away quickly, leaving only Snake Furgeson and young Malone. Snake's gun was jutting out from his right hip, its big black barrel ready to spit a slug through Pete Malone's chest, across the table.

"He ain't heeled, Snake."

Old Bill Tope was still tilted back against the post. Apparently he hadn't moved, yet his old-fashioned Colt forty-four was steadied across one of his cocked-up knees. A fannin' gun—that Colt. No need of pulling a trigger; there wasn't any, anyway. The hammer had to be fanned with the heel of the other hand, or thumbed back with the thumb of the gun hand. Tope had the hammer back, now. All he had to do was let his thumb slip and the old cannon would drill Snake Furgeson through the heart.

Furgeson's blazing eyes flashed toward Tope and back to Pete Malone.

"Then git heeled, er stay outta town, young fella," Furgeson snarled. "'Cause I'm comin' at yuh smokin', on sight."

Holstering his gun, Snake Furgeson wheeled and stomped toward the bar.

"Reckon we'd better be a-moseyin', son." Tope

got to his feet and holstered his own gun.

Pete Malone turned his long lean frame from the table, where he had stood, bent forward, with both hands upon its top. Tope was stopped for an instant by the hard light in the youngster's gray-blue eyes; he hadn't known that those eyes could do anything but smile. Pete settled his big felt hat a bit more firmly over his light brown hair, rammed his hands into his pants pockets and followed the old cow-man from the place.

Out in the darkened street, and several doors from the Silver Spur, Bill Tope spat into the dust and growled:

"Reckon yo' best get ridin', son. Get up across th' border, pronto. Tell th' boss that th' grass in this yere Sonora valley he leased is makin' beef, and to send me another man. Reckon me an' Sime an' Wiggin can hold th' herd for a spell."

"Tope, that—"

"Tell th' boss I said yo' wasn't ripe for Mexico. He'll savvy. He's been under fire, hisself."

"That hombre had the ace of diamonds palmed in his left hand."

"Eh-heh. Don't s'prise me. Gotta look out for them kind o' things in these yere crossroads towns. That Snake Furgeson is a killer. Best thing is to ease out of a game like that, 'less yo're heeled, an' Snake shore wouldda drilled yo', if yo' had been."

"But I was."

"Was what, son?"

"Heeled."

"Hey?" Tope snapped the back of a hand against the left side of Pete Malone's leathern vest. His knuckles rapped against nothing but good solid ribs. There was no gun there in a shoulder holster. There was no gun swinging at either of the youngster's hips. He had never seen Pete have a gun. "What yo' headin' at, Petey?"

"I said I was heeled. Still am."

"Wh—"

"Sure. See?" Pete Malone stopped and slid his right hand from his pants pocket. In the palm lay a little thirty-two automatic.

"Well of all the honswagglin' young fools! A-packin' iron an' not goin' for it 'fore callin' a crooked deal. If I knowed yo' had that—Tarnation! I gotta notion to chase yo' right back to th' Silver Spur."

"All right." Pete turned. "You hold off his gang, and I'll bust out the Snake's fangs." Tope grabbed one of his arms.

"No, son. Yo' made kind of a durned fool outta me, but I ain't sendin' yo' to be plain murdered. Not with that there thing. What yo'd need is a Colts."

"This is a Colts." Pete again produced the little gun, with the flip of a hand.

"It's a danged pocket pistol! That's all that is. One of them new-fangled, slab-sided playthings. What I mean is a reg'lar hawg-laig—a six-gun."

They were just beyond the last of the town's single block of frame and adobe store buildings, within forty yards of where their horses were tied. Tope stood shifting his weight from one none-too-long, bowed leg to the other, muttering:

"I'm gettin' 'long in years; gettin' kinda slow. But I reckon I best go back. I'd a danged sight ruther brace up to Snake, then to have him a-gunnin' for me. An' he's shore a-goin' to be doin' just that, when he finds out yo' was heeled after I said yo' wasn't." Then, a trifle frantically and much louder, "Hey! Come back 'ere."

PETE MALONE quickened his step, avoiding Tope's reaching hands, as the old cow-man waddled after him. But Pete was heading diagonally across the street toward Mendoza's general store, where lights still burned, instead of for the Silver Spur.

It was all right to carry a hidden gun, with another slung right out in sight. That was the code. Pete Malone realized it, now. And Tope thought he hadn't gone for his pocket pistol because he was afraid. Damn! It just hadn't occurred to him. Guns were for use on rattlers and coyotes, and the little automatic was all right, if a fellow kept it clean and knew how to use it. He'd got it because he was curious about this little, new type of gun.

Mendoza was closing his store, shoving out a few hangers-on, as Pete crowded in through the door. Tope followed close upon his heels. Confound Tope! Chase him back up over the border to the boss, would he? And then take up the quarrel. There wasn't a chance in a thousand that Snake Furgeson would ever find out about the automatic. But Tope would see that he did, to save his own face. That was some more of the old cow-man's stiff-necked code.

Mendoza had plenty guns. They were locked in a cupboard, over behind the counter on the right-hand side of his store. Pete picked out a heavy forty-five caliber double-action six-gun; the latest

thing out. Tope grunted in disapproval. And, when Pete bought a new open-top holster, he snorted in disgust.

Pete looked at Tope. The old fellow stood leaning slightly against the counter, his eyes hard to the left, watching the front door. And Tope had his gun unholstered, had it pointing toward the door across his front under the counter's edge. His only intelligible words, while in the store, were to Mendoza, after the purchases were made.

"Wrop 'em up," Tope told Mendoza, "an' let us out th' back way."

Pete had been about to buckle the holster belt around his waist; but Tope glared him out of that idea and whipped his eyes again to the front door. It wasn't until after they had slipped out and around behind all of the buildings to their horses that Tope explained.

"Yo'd go bustin' right out after Snake with that there cannon, huh? When I 'scovered yo' had a gun an' hadn't went for it, I thought mebbe yo' was—was a bit skeered. But I reckon yo' just hain't got no sense 'tall."

"Where're you going?" Pete asked as Tope swung into his saddle and wheeled his horse from the hitch-rail.

"Out to th' cabin, yo' dingbusted tenderfoot. An' we're a-goin' to stay there, 'til yo've had a sight o' practice. Yo' couldn't yank that gun outta that new half-breed holster with both hands 'fore—Why, Snake'd have yo' drilled three, four times, 'n' then there wouldn't be a bit o' use. Hit that saddle, son."

Pete Malone grinned in the darkness, but he tied his package to the horn of his saddle and followed Tope. They swung away from the road, a mile out, yet the trail was wide and they rode stirrup to stirrup. Pete's horse was a raw-boned, sensitive young chestnut. As they rode past a spread of chaparral, the horse leaped into a dead run. Tope had lurched over and lashed it across the rump.

Pete hadn't seen the red flash of the gun, but he heard the report and knew it had come from the thicket. Tope's horse was thundering along, close behind. Pete pulled his own horse to a lope.

Tope raced up abreast, bending low in his saddle, hatless. "Rifle," he bellowed above the pounding of the horses' hoofs.

"Who—" Pete was pulling in his horse but Tope reached out and lashed it again.

"Snake, yo' danged idjit! Or one o' his gang. He

knows yo' bought that hawg-laig. Short cut. Pot shot. Got my best hat. Dang it!"

Pete Malone gritted his teeth. Old Bill might have lost more than his hat—might have been left, lying back there in the road—so might he—and it was all his fault. Then Pete grinned once more into the darkness, as they gave their horses their heads for a ways.

Sime opened one eye and blinked at them from his bunk as old Bill Tope and Pete Malone came into the cabin.

"Somepin' chasin' yuh?" Sime asked, squinting in the light from the lantern.

"Close yo' trap an' go to sleep," Tope growled and made ready for a bit of shut-eye himself, in a manner which choked off any talk.

WHEN the Mexican cook routed them out for breakfast the next morning, Pete was surprised to realize that he had been able to go right to sleep the night before. "That's what comes from having a clear conscience, I s'pose," he mused and smiled to himself.

"What yuh grinnin' at, Petey? If it's th' cut uv my—"

"Yo' shut up and listen, Sime," Tope growled. As Tope told of the happenings of the evening before, Sime's face sobered. He looked over Pete's new gun and holster. "Too danged stiff," he mumbled, with reference to the holster, and took it and pounded it; then greased it thoroughly on the inside with tallow.

"Put it on, son," Tope ordered as Pete prepared to go out and relieve Wiggin. "An' keep it on. An' yo' take a few quick shots at somethin' movin'. Get the feel of that there cannon. But don't go skeerin' no cattle."

Pete Malone wore his new gun continually. He began to feel at home, with its weight thonged against his right thigh, although he was not altogether unfamiliar with a six-gun. He had worn one on the range before. But he grew weary of the paces which old Bill Tope and Sime insisted on putting him through.

Wiggin came into the cabin one rainy day, when the cattle were close in. Tope and Pete were facing each other across the length of the single room. Sime was there, too. Sime had a skillet, and, whenever he banged it against the wall, Tope and Pete would go for their empty guns.

Invariably, Tope's gun clicked two or three

times before Pete's. Then Tope would shake his head and make some sarcastic remark. Finally, Wiggin asked:

"Whyn't yo' let 'im try for th' cross draw, same as Snake uses, hisself? Strap his gun high up, on th' left, butt for'ard. He can go for it mo' ca'less like, then."

So they tried that. It seemed to be an improvement. The next day, he was sure that his gun had clicked in unison with Tope's. He tried it with Sime and got the same results. He later tried it with Wiggin and beat him to the click several times. Pete began to smile to himself and to practice, when the others weren't around, along lines of his own.

"Reckon Snake wouldn't be so anxious to sight yo', now, if he knew—"

"He's sighting me Saturday night," Pete Malone grinned across their breakfasts at Wiggin, a couple of days later.

"Tomorry night?"

"Yep," Pete answered. "That's the Saturday night I'm talking about."

"Yo' dangbusted young idjit," Bill Tope snapped and began to argue.

Arguing didn't do any good. Bill Tope could fire him, if he wanted to; he was the foreman. But Pete Malone was going into town the next evening.

Secretly, old Bill Tope looked at the slender youngster and began making plans. That Petey boy had guts. He had liked young Petey Malone, ever since the boss had sent him down here.

It was Tope, who grew restless as Saturday evening arrived. A Mexican vaquero had been hired to night-ride the herd, and Sime was sent into town an hour in advance.

Sime was waiting at the hitching-rail, on the near side of the first store building, when old Bill Tope, Pete Malone and Wiggin rode in, shortly after dark.

Sime had been nosing around. Snake Furgeson was in town. And he had a couple of his buddies trailing along with him, close up. But Snake wasn't in the Silver Spur; he was over at Botler's corral, dealing for some horses.

"But he'll be over to th' Silver Spur, right soon, 'cause he give me an invite to sit in a poker game. Asked me if I was by my lonesome. Course I was—right then." Sime chuckled as he finished.

"Eh-heh. Kinda s'picious, wasn't he?" Tope scratched his stubby chin and gave some orders.

Wiggin was to loaf outside the front door of the Silver Spur; Sime by the side door, through which Snake would probably enter, coming from Botler's corral. If either saw Snake approaching, he was to step inside quickly. That would give Pete warning.

Tope, himself, was sticking with Pete. They went right to the Silver Spur and entered. Tope passed a few "howdys" around and slumped into his favorite chair against a post. Pete stood leaning back against the bar, rolling a cigaret. He kept sharp lookout on the doors.

Pete snapped a match, lit his freshly rolled cigaret and puffed out a cloud of smoke. Over the heads of the crowd, he saw Sime's big gray hat. Snake Furgeson was coming.

PETE'S nerves began to tingle, his jaw muscles hardened. He saw Snake moving toward him. The crowd opened up a path and then made for the doors. The bartender disappeared behind his mahogany fortification.

"Howdy, Snake Furgeson," Pete made a futile attempt at one of his friendly grins.

Old Bill Tope, over against his post, groaned aloud. Petey Malone had sure put the showdown up to Snake. But he was standing there with his right fist shoved down into his pants pocket, when it should have been fumbling at his left vest pocket right above his gun.

"I told you that—"

"That you were coming at me smoking, on sight. Well—start smoking!" Pete leaned forward, tense, and Snake went for his gun.

Crack! Petey Malone had jerked his right hand from his pants pocket. His little automatic had spit a bullet through Snake Furgeson's right forearm as he made his cross draw.

Snake's heavy gun roared harmlessly, jetting its slug through the floor. Another sharp crack, as Pete drilled Snake high up on the right shoulder. Then came a second roaring of a heavy gun.

Old Bill Tope scrambled to his feet. His chair had been kicked from under him. Close beside Tope, one of Snake Furgeson's followers was twisting and crumpling to the floor, a heavy bullet through his thigh. Tope booted a drawn gun from the falling man's hand, and wheeled with his own gun ready. Then he stopped, staring, his mouth agape.

Petey Malone was leaning lazily against the bar once more. His right hand had slipped back into his

pants pocket; while in his left was his new six-gun, swinging back and forth, threatening the scanty remains of the crowd.

That last roar had come from Pete Malone's big gun. He had gone for it backhanded, with his left, and dropped the man who was planning to put Tope out of business.

Snake, himself, was still on his feet. A thirty-two bullet won't floor a big husky man. His right arm hung useless at his side; his gun was on the floor. His left hand was clapped over the little hole high up in his right shoulder.

Old Bill Tope hitched his belt a bit higher. He high-stepped toward Snake, like a banty rooster.

"Well, Snake, looks as how yo' started smokin'

once too offen. An' no more pottin' at us from th' brush. Savvy? 'Cause we got up-to-date artillery, what shoots right or left, back'ards or for'ards."

Snake began backing toward the side door. Tope, now satisfied that Snake's nerve was gone, let out a yell, slipped his gun and fired through the floor. Snake dove out the door.

"Come on, Bill. Snake ain't got no fangs no more. Petey's done busted 'em off right down to th' roots."

"Eh-heh, Sime. Just a minute. I want Petey to write a letter for me an' order me one of them there pocket pistols like his'n. Danged thing might come handy some time. 'Cause I'm gettin' 'long in years, gettin' kinda slow on th' draw."