

# PLUMB AMUSING

by JACKSON COLE

*Jerry Hunt has one powerful sense of humor—  
and believes it's fun to be fooled!*

**J**ERRY HUNT was big, rugged and a right good cowhand, but sometimes the way he found just about everything plumb amusing was hard to stand. Fun was fun, but the rest of the Horseshoe outfit figured there were times when a man should be serious.

“Never did see a man like Jerry,” said Carl Birkell, the salty foreman of the spread. “Last winter when he got lost in the blizzard and nearly had his feet froze off, he thought it was funny as all getout.”

“And the time a horse kicked him and laid him up for a week he thought that was shore humorous,” said Len Foster. “Huh, the things that hombre thinks are funny!”

Since Foster was an old waddy who hadn't been known to even crack a smile during the four years he had worked for the Horseshoe, it seemed unlikely that he would understand Jerry Hunt. Len Foster had suffered from an ingrowing disposition for years.

It had been a peaceful summer in Mesquite County. There had been just enough rain and enough dry weather to keep the stock on the four ranches fat and sassy. There had been no trouble between outfits, no range feuds. None of the ranches had been bothered by rustlers. Up to the first of July it looked like a good year for everybody—and then Frank Jessen arrived in the valley.

It happened that Jerry Hunt and Carl Birkell had driven into town to get a wagon load of stuff for the ranch, so they were on hand to witness Jessen's arrival. Bearclaw considered itself a thriving metropolis because in addition to the single street that ran the entire length of the town, there were two intersecting streets. Bearclaw's citizens failed to mention that those streets were no more than fifty feet long.

Hunt and Birkell were sitting on a bench in front



Jessen dropped, while Hunt leaned against the bar  
and watched

of the general store taking it easy before starting to load the wagon when Frank Jessen made an entrance—it could only be called that—into the town.

“Here comes a jasper on a white horse,” said Hunt, glancing down the street. “And I don’t recognize either one of them.”

“He appears to be leading a parade,” observed the foreman. And sure enough, the man on the white horse was followed by four pairs of riders. “This might prove interestin’, Jerry.”

“Figger so,” agreed Hunt with a grin.

The riders came on up the street, and as they drew closer Jerry Hunt studied their faces and the way they rode and acted. He didn’t like what he saw. There was little conversation among them, and their faces were hard, like the faces of gunslicks.

**N**OR was the ninth man particularly impressive. He was middle-aged, with dark hair and mustache, and wore ordinary range clothes. Yet there was an indefinable air of authority about him. When he reached the general store he glanced back over his shoulder and nodded. The first pair of riders continued on up the street and dismounted on the plank walk. The second two followed and swung out of their saddles on the opposite side of the street.

The other four men rode back down the street. Two of them dismounted on the left side of the street, and two on the right.

“You got a guilty conscience, Carl?” Hunt asked. “A feeling yuh want to admit yuh ain’t worth shucks before yuh cash in yore chips? It looks like we have eight ways of being killed unless we are good boys and eat our spinach.”

“Maybe the boss of that bunch is just cautious,” said Birkell. “Here he comes.”

The man on the white horse rode over to the front of the store. He halted his mount and stared at Hunt and Birkell with dark eyes.

“I’m Jessen,” he said, as though the mere mention of the name was all they needed to know.

“I’m Hunt,” said the big waddy in much the same tone.

“I’m Birkell,” said the foreman.

Apparently this wasn’t the reception Jessen expected. He looked at the two men and frowned. “Frank Jessen,” he said.

“Jerry Hunt,” said Hunt.

“Carl Birkell,” said the foreman.

“Who owns this store?” Jessen asked.

“I do.” Martin Lee, the gray-haired owner of the general store stepped out through the open door as he heard the question. “What about it?”

“How much are you asking for the place in actual cash?” demanded Jessen.

“Ten thousand,” said Lee, “including the stock.”

Hunt grinned as he listened. He was sure the store and everything in it wasn’t worth more than five thousand dollars at the most.

Jessen swung out of the saddle and tied his reins to a hitchrail in front of the store.

“Ten thousand, eh?” he said. “All right, I’ll take it.”

“Huh?” Martin Lee stared at Jessen with wide-open mouth. “What did you say?”

“I’ll buy the store at your price.” Jessen reached into his pocket and drew out a big roll of bills. He peeled off ten one-thousand-dollar bills and handed them to Lee. “Here’s your money, now make me out a deed to the store.”

“Sell it to him, Martin,” said “You’ll never get rich any younger.”

Apparently Lee felt the same way about it. Clutching the money in his hand he led Jessen into the store. When the two men had disappeared inside Hunter looked at Birkell.

“Now I’ve seen everything,” said the foreman.

“Not yet, yuh haven’t,” Hunt said. “Wish I had me a newspaper.”

“What for?” Birkell asked.

“To read, of course,” said Hunt. “I like to know what’s going on in the outside world.” He laughed. “Seeing as we don’t know who is the owner of the store right now, we’ll have to put off getting the stuff for the ranch loaded until later.”

“That’s right,” said Birkell. “Let’s wander up to the saloon.”

It proved to be an interesting morning in Bearclaw. The general store was already Jessen’s for ten thousand dollars. He offered ten thousand for the hotel and got it, along with a dazed look. He bought the saloon for five thousand, the feed store for fifteen hundred, and the harness shop for a thousand. All the former owners were sure they were getting far more than the places were worth.

“Somehow Jessen doesn’t strike me as Santa Claus,” Hunt told Birkell. The two waddies had decided to remain in town and see things through to the end or the beginning—they weren’t sure which.

“No, not Frank Jessen. He hasn’t any nice white beard.”

Jerry Hunt was having himself a time. He thought Jessen’s buying up the town was quite amusing, and when the men who had come to town with Jessen took charge of the hotel, saloon and feed store general store and harness shop, that was something else for Hunt to laugh about.

In the hotel Hunt finally found what he had been looking for ever since the Jessen crowd had arrived in town. It was a newspaper that carried not only the news of Mesquite County, but of the whole state. Hunt spent an hour reading the paper.

“It shore is a wicked world, Carl,” Hunt told the foreman. “Here’s a feller over East that was arrested for stealing sheep, and bandits stole fifty thousand dollars from a bank at the south end of the state about a hundred miles from here, and a eighty-year-old father beat up his fifty-year-old son.”

“What for?” asked Birkell.

“Seems the son was staying out until ten at night and running around with girls,” said Hunt.

“I’m going to the general store and see about that stuff for the ranch,” said Birkell. “Soon as I get it arranged we’ll start loading.”

“All right,” Hunt said. “I’ll be at the saloon when you want me.”

**H**E PAID a visit to the sheriff. Sheriff Hank Peterson, was an old time lawman, who found it often paid to listen when a man talked. Jerry Hunt talked and the sheriff listened. Finally Peterson nodded.

“That’s smart thinking on yore part, Jerry,” he said. “And it could be that you are right.”

“Shore would be funny,” Hunt laughed. “Biggest joke that has been played on folks around here.”

“How funny it is depends on where yuh’re sitting, as the feller said when he sat on a stove,” the sheriff remarked dryly. “Right now I ain’t doin’ much laughing.”

A little later Jerry Hunt stepped into the saloon to find some of the local citizens there in a state of turmoil. Since Jessen and his men had taken over the price of everything had been raised.

“That’s right, boys,” said one of Jessen’s men who was now in charge of the saloon. They had kept the old owners bartenders. “From now on all drinks, except beer, will be two dollars a drink.

Beer will be one dollar a glass.”

“You see,” said Martin Lee. “I just tried to buy some stuff from my own store and they have raised the prices a hundred per cent.”

“It’s that way all over town,” said another man.

Jessen strolled into the saloon. His manner said that he was honoring the patrons of the place by his mere presence.

“Don’t get up, gentlemen,” he said to the men seated at the card tables. “It isn’t necessary.”

Hunt grinned as he stood watching with his back against the bar. Carl Birkell stepped into the saloon. Hunt could tell from the expression on Birkell’s face that the foreman was angry.

“I just started to get the things we need for the ranch from the general store,” Birkell said, stepping up to Jessen and glaring at him. “Your man has raised the price of everything so high, we’ll have to stop dealing at the store.”

“You’ll pay or go without supplies,” said Jessen. “And like it!”

Apparently Jessen wanted the men of the town to think he was a dangerous individual. He drew his gun fast, but he wasn’t quite fast enough. Birkell’s right hand had already snapped up with his Colt ready.

Quickly he reached out and tapped Jessen on the side of the head, and Jessen dropped to the floor, out cold.

So far Hunt had found it amusing. But when one of Jessen’s men started after the Horseshoe foreman from the rear Hunt went into action. He smashed blows to the man’s head and body and knocked him out just as Sheriff Peterson stepped into the saloon.

“You were right, Jerry,” the sheriff said excitedly. “I looked up my old ‘wanted’ notices, and everyone of Jessen’s men are there.”

“What about Jessen himself?” Hunt asked. “Got a notice on him?”

“No.” The sheriff shook his head. “But the men he left in charge of the hotel and general store talked when me and my deputies placed them under arrest. They admitted that they pulled off that bank robbery a hundred miles south of here a week ago.”

**A**LL the former owners of the places Jessen had bought were in the saloon and they moved closer to hear what was being said.

“I thought it was shore strange when Jessen started buying up all the places around town and

being so willing to pay more than they were worth," Hunt said. "Then I got wondering how Jessen happened to have that much cash with him. If he was an honest man and had thirty or forty thousand dollars, what would he do with it?"

"Put it in the bank?" said Birkell and the sheriff nodded.

"That's right," said Hunt. "But if it was stolen money then he wouldn't fool around with any banks." He grinned at Martin Lee and the other former property owners of the town. "'Guess the sheriff will tell yuh that yuh have to return the money Jessen paid yuh since it belongs to the South Bend bank."

"Correct," said the sheriff. "But I'll see to it that all of you get yore property back."

He looked down at Jessen who was moaning and getting unsteadily to his feet.

The outlaw had not heard what had occurred, so he still considered himself boss of the town.

"I want these two men arrested, Sheriff," he commanded. "Jessen says so."

"Forget it," said the sheriff. "You are under arrest for the bank robbery at South Bend. Peterson says so." And the sheriff added with a smile, "Your men confessed."

Jerry Hunt started to laugh. In his estimation it had been a right amusing day. The other men of Bearclaw hesitated and then they, too, began to laugh. Jerry Hunt, a waddy who found everything funny, had saved their property for them—and there was respect in their laughter.