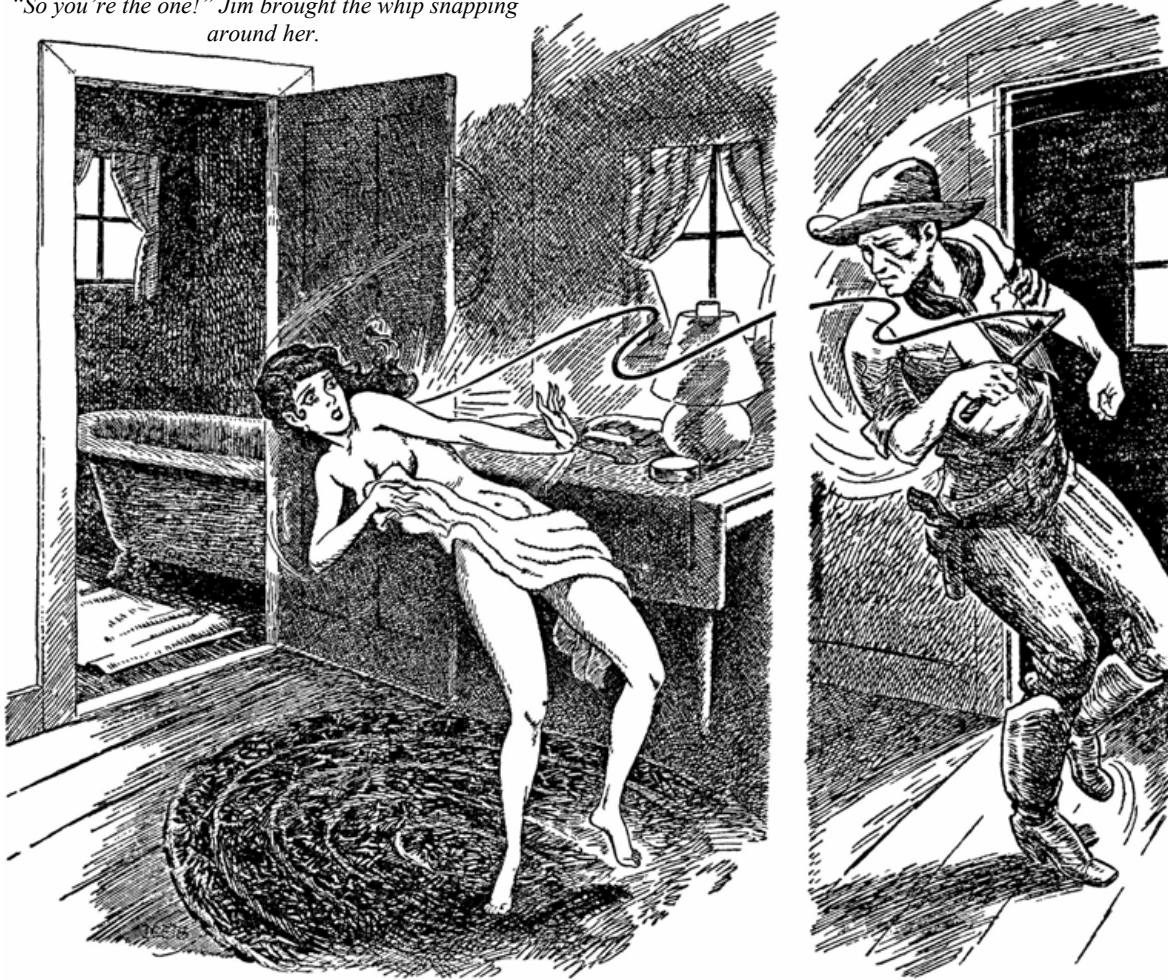


"So you're the one!" Jim brought the whip snapping around her.



WHIPPED

By PETER GRANT

She didn't look like a girl you'd find in a Muddy Water barroom; and Jim was more interested in solving payroll robberies than he was in women until . . .

THE blackness of another moonless night was spreading over the mesa. In Muddy Water, as the oil lamps were lit one by one, there was a spirit of marked tension. Muddy Water owed its existence to the gold mines in the hills. And the payrolls for the Black Diamond, biggest of the mines, weren't getting through.

Jim Holland, the young and lanky town marshal of Muddy Water, sat in his office, reading a paper. It was the *Mosquito Bend Clarion*, published in the next county. It said:

"OVER AT MUDDY WATER"

"It is safe to say that the recent stage robberies near Muddy Water in which big

payrolls for the Black Diamond mine have been stolen are the work of an organized gang which is intent on embarrassing the owners and getting control away from the independents. Also, John Clarkson, one of the best beloved of the real pioneers in Muddy Water was killed when he attempted to draw a gun on the outlaws. Both holdups were within the jurisdiction of Marshal Jim Holland, but he has made no effort to round up the malefactors. What's the matter, Jim, are you afraid?"

Jim Holland cursed. His usually good-natured eyes were hard—and cold as blue steel. He crumpled the paper savagely in his big hands, threw it to the floor.

“Remind me to go to Mosquito Bend Thursday and horsewhip the *Clarion* editor,” he said.

Jack Connor, his deputy, looked at him with mild interest.

“All right,” he said. “You kin get some supplies while you’re at it.”

Holland got up. He strapped on his .44 and went out. He was sore as hell. He didn’t like to be called yellow—by anyone. On the street, darkness had come and Muddy Water was already evincing signs of its nightly hilarity. The sidewalks were crowded with half-drunk cowmen, miners, promoters, grafters—and the painted women who flock to the gold towns to offer their favors to anyone with money.

HOLLAND’S keen eye picked out the figure of a pretty girl standing against a wall. She was angrily fighting off the advances of a drunken cowboy who was trying to kiss her. He was clumsily putting an arm around a series of curves that would be an armful to anyone—including Town Marshal Jim Holland.

Interested, Holland watched. The cowman had a ten-dollar gold piece which he was attempting to force on the girl—along with his affections. She didn’t want either. Holland finally went up and pushed the cowman away. Too drunk to offer resistance, the man lurched off.

“Wasn’t the price enough?” Holland asked the girl mildly. He grinned.

The girl stood staring at him—breathless, angry, afraid. He noticed that she was pretty as hell. She was dressed in expensive silk and one hand was clasped across her breast. Beneath the silk, Holland could see the contours of round, young breasts. His eyes went down the curves of her lithe body until they rested finally on a neat ankle—a very trim ankle.

“Evening, ma’am,” he said. “You don’t want to let the boys scare you—they’re harmless.”

She was staring at him with unconcealed hostility. She had not answered his first remark—nor his second. Finally she said:

“Ugh! I wonder if there’s a gentleman in this whole vile place.”

Holland chuckled.

“I doubt it,” he said. “At least, not in this part of town. You’re in the wrong section of Muddy Water.”

“Ugh!”

The girl turned suddenly, her silk skirts flouncing high about curvy, tapering legs. Jim watched her as she pushed through the crowds on the planked walk. He noticed that she was making in the general direction of the *Silver Dollar*, the most notorious dive in the whole of Muddy Water. He smiled cynically. That type was sometimes very high-toned. He decided he would have to look her up.

HE walked slowly along the street but he had hardly gotten to the corner when he was hailed by three horsemen who drew up to him and dismounted.

“Jim Holland,” said Abner Clark, a councilman, “we’ve got a warrant for you to serve.”

With Clark were Pete Vallejo, unsavory vice lord and gambler, and Arden Hawkins, a cattleman who was known to be siding with the gang that was trying to seize control of the Black Diamond mine.

“It’s for the arrest of Craymore for not paying his mine workers. It’s sworn to by a worker.”

Holland read the warrant. Then his leathery face contorted in a thin smile; he showed his teeth.

“This ain’t no good,” he said.

“Why, damn you—!” exploded Hawkins. “It’s proper sworn! He ain’t paid no wages in three weeks!”

“He couldn’t pay,” said Holland, “because the money never got here. His payroll has been stolen.”

“That ain’t the law!” exclaimed Clark.

“I’m the law here,” said Jim Holland. “And you three ain’t interested in the law. That there stage was held up for a purpose—and it wasn’t just for the payroll. You want to get the fellows running the mine in trouble. You’re trying to drive Craymore out—so’s your gang can get the Black Diamond!”

“Damn you!” exploded Hawkins. His ugly face had turned livid. He took a step forward and his gun hand suddenly went toward his holster. Abner Clark stepped in front of him.

“Let him come,” said Holland mildly. “Let him come—if he’s hankering for a hole in his belly.”

He made no motion. His eyes were mere slits and there was a curious grin on his face. Hawkins knew better than to draw—because Marshal Jim Holland was lightning on the trigger!

“The town council will fix you,” said Abner Clark. “You ain’t no good! I guess the *Clarion* is right—you’re just plain yellow!”

Holland grinned grimly as the three men

mounted and rode away. He was certain now he was going to horsewhip that editor. He pushed in through the swinging doors of the *Silver Dollar*.

It was Pete Vallejo's worst joint. The girl he had seen in the street was not in sight. But there were plenty of other women—lips painted red and bold breasts revealed temptingly at the vees of their dresses. They would laugh hysterically, grasp some befuddled miner by the hand, lead him toward the stairs.

There were a lot of new girls—shipped in from Omaha for the gold men. Some looked at him significantly. Jim Holland just grinned. He didn't have time—tonight.

AT eleven o'clock, he and three trusted deputies rode out of town.

And, at one o'clock, the stagecoach was held up and robbed of the Black Diamond payroll—the third successive time in three weeks! The driver, resisting, was shot. The stage had come by a route different from that in which it had come on the other occasions.

At three o'clock, Pete Vallejo appeared at his *Silver Dollar*. Nobody knew where he had been. He had Homer Ludlow with him—an evil creature, supposedly reformed, who had been acting marshal for a week in a small and very disorderly town on the border.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" exclaimed Pete. "I wantcha to meet our new town marshal. The council will take care of it tomorrow. Holland is through. Ludlow, here, will catch somethin' else other'n a cold!" There were loud guffaws. Everyone was convinced Jim Holland was through.

It was daylight, and the crowds had thinned, before Jim Holland arrived in town. He was alone—and grim. A hard wind was blowing stinging sand out of the mesquite and it blew fiercely about the frame buildings of the settlement.

Holland tied his horse to the post in front of the *Silver Dollar*. There were three or four scrawny saddle horses still there.

Inside, a half-dozen nondescripts hung around the bar. They looked at him in silence.

"Where's Pete Vallejo?" said Holland.

The fat man in the apron hesitated a moment—then looked apprehensively toward a door across the room.

"He's in there, but—"

Jim Holland crossed the room in five big strides.

He opened the door, walked in and closed it behind him. His .44 leaped into his hand.

Pete Vallejo was sitting there. And there was a girl with him—sitting in his lap. She tore her lips from his and turned and looked at Jim Holland and the gun. She was the girl he'd seen on Main Street the night before! But she didn't look quite so demure. She still wore her silk dress and petticoats—but two long, lithe legs were brazenly visible and one black cotton stocking was down, revealing plenty of tantalizing white flesh. She said "oof!" and would have jumped to her feet if Vallejo hadn't already given her a shove that almost upended her.

So that was it, thought Holland. Just another.

But he was busy. Pete Vallejo looked at Holland with undisguised venom. His sharp, pockmarked features were contorted. His lips were thin and his slitted eyes were dangerous.

"Why the hell don't you knock?" he snarled.

"Not for you," said Holland. "I came to arrest you for first degree murder."

The girl just stood there. Vallejo went white and his eyes glowed like a snake. Then he flushed and laughed.

"You're drunk!"

"Not tonight. You dropped your wallet, Vallejo. You and Clark and Hawkins and Ludlow stuck up the stage. I wasn't on time—but I found the wallet!"

Vallejo's hand shot toward his coat. The wallet was gone. His face contorted and he started to reach for a gun.

"Want to commit suicide?"

The gambler swore—shrugged. His hands rose slowly. Jim Holland's gun turned on him—like a compass on a magnet. Holland marched him to the jailhouse.

His deputies had Homer Ludlow, the would-be marshal, two of his rustlers, and Abner Clark, the councilman. None of them could account for his time. All were known to be desirous that the Black Diamond miners didn't receive their pay—so as to create trouble and give the big rival outfits a chance to seize the rich diggings. And Holland had Vallejo's big, red wallet—dropped at the scene of the crime!

"There'll be hangings for this," he said grimly. "And news for the *Mosquito Bend Clarion*."

WHEN the town awoke, there was wild excitement. Crowds gathered in Main Street. There were angry arguments—and some fist fights. Henchmen for the gang tried to defend the prisoners—but the townsfolk were with Jim Holland.

“The loot?” exclaimed Abe McClain to a group of gold men and cowhands. “Hell, good outlaws always bury that!”

Jim Holland wasn’t much interested. He had his prisoners. And he had his precious evidence, the dropped wallet, sewed in the deepest inside pocket of his leather jacket. He’d protect it with his life.

His thoughts were about a girl—he couldn’t get out of his mind that momentary vision of those long, lithe limbs; the tantalizing white flesh and the dress so shamelessly high.

She was someone new to town—probably come down to work the boom. And Pete Vallejo, of course, had decided to take the cream of the crop.

Holland hung around the *Silver Dollar*. He had a couple of drinks at the bar. There were girls for him—plenty of them. They’d come down, still sleepy-eyed and take a couple of hookers of rye to prepare for another night of gayety. Finally, he sneaked upstairs. The upper floor of the big rambling building was divided into two sections. In the back, were the cubbyholes where the dancehall girls lived.

In the front, facing the street, were a dozen rooms for first class hotel customers. They were the only accommodations in town. Holland was about to go toward the rear, when a door opened. Out of the side of his eye he caught a glimpse of a hotel guest—the girl. She merely opened the door to put out her shoes. Then she closed it again.

Holland grinned. He crept up to the door, turned the knob softly. It was unlocked. He opened, went in, closed quietly. It was a technique he had developed—in taking prisoners unawares.

The girl’s back was turned. She wore a black silk dress, with a big, flowing skirt. Her figure was very beautiful and in the daylight he could see that her hair was a beautiful auburn.

Suddenly she turned—in alarm. For a moment there was terror in her face. But her expression softened. She smiled at him and her red lips were again in a pout.

“You *never* knock, do you?”

“I never learned,” said Holland.

SHE was all packed. She had two straw bags. She wore a traveling dress, long gloves. It was evident that she wanted her shoes shined and she was going to catch the night stage. Her feet were bare.

“Traveling, eh?” said Holland.

She bit her lip—nervously. She glanced at the bags.

“Yes, yes. I’m taking the night stage.”

His eyes narrowed slightly. He began to wonder. But, uppermost in his mind was the thought that beneath those flowing skirts were those miraculous long limbs, of such firm white flesh, that he had glimpsed the night before.

He smiled thinly—shook his head.

“I don’t think you’re leaving,” he said. “There was a little matter of a murder last night and you were slightly familiar with the murderer.”

It worked. Fear, almost terror, showed in her face. She came up to him, with pleading in her eyes. She put her hand on his arm. Her breath was coming in short gasps and as he looked down he could see the rims of the beautiful hillocks of her breasts, held firmly upright by stays, rise and fall with her breath. He could smell the sweet odor of her.

“Oh, no, no,” she pleaded. “You don’t understand! It’s impossible! I can’t stay. I can’t be mixed up in this. I’m the kind of girl—well, not that kind at all. I don’t get arrested!”

Strangely, he believed her—that she wasn’t the type. And he suddenly wanted her more than he wanted any woman in his life. But his smile was cynical.

“You seemed doin’ all right last night with Pete Vallejo—with your petticoats over your head!”

She shook her head in a jerky way—as if she wanted to shake thought of it out of her mind.

“Oh, no, no,” she said. “No, no. You don’t understand. It’s a terrible fascination I have for him. I come from a good family. I sneaked down here to—to be with him, my lover, for a night!”

“Sorry to have interrupted you,” said Holland dryly.

Her eyes were searching his eagerly. She was desperately anxious not to be detained.

“Won’t, won’t anything convince you?” she asked.

He shook his head. Suddenly her mouth contorted, hardened and she stepped back. She clawed at the shoulders of her dress—half-bared

the luscious mound of one breast.

"Can't you be persuaded?" she said. "How about me?"

In her desperation she was tearing at her clothes frenziedly. Holland felt the blood begin to boil within him. She was acting the wanton as she tried to release herself. And, this is what he had come for.

"There's plenty of that inside," he said.

She laughed.

"Not me," she said! "I'm not that stuff. I'm nothing that's bought and sold to every stranger. I'm very, very good!"

SHE pulled again at her clothes and, in her dishevelment, she came to him; her body melted against his, the long sweep of her legs were trembling and her breasts pressed hard against his chest. Their lips met in a kiss that sent his blood to the boiling point. His arms encircled her.

Then he had lifted her off her feet, was cradling her in arms that trembled.

"Darling!" she moaned and her teeth touched the lobe of his ear.

IT WAS much later that they were sitting side by side on the divan. She had hurriedly straightened her disarrayed clothing. She couldn't appear before any man otherwise. Not even married women did—except when absolutely necessary.

Jim Holland was smoking a cheroot. He was watching her in mild amusement. She wasn't going anywhere—he knew that. Her story, or rather, stories, were too fishy.

She flashed him a smile of pearly teeth as she got her shoes from the door. They were shined. That was nice thought Holland—for jail.

"A drink?" she asked—with another smile.

He didn't mind. She went into the next room, was busy with bottles. Jim Holland was ruminating. He was wondering if there wasn't some way in which he could get her life imprisonment. She'd be nice to have around the place—as a pet.

She returned, with another smile, and handed him a drink. It was a rye—neat. He downed it with one gulp and—

Wham! Mickey Finn hit him. Jim Holland staggered to his feet. He tried to vomit. There was enough laudanum in that glass to topple an elephant! He staggered to his feet, blue in the face. He reached out a clawing hand for the girl—but she

dodged him.

"Why, you—!"

Holland got sleepy. And the floor was soft.

WHEN he woke up, his mouth tasted like a motorman's glove—fur-lined. He was certain there were a couple of coyotes chewing on his skull. Their teeth were sharp. He rolled over—groaned.



Pete dropped the girl. "Why the hell don't you knock?" he snarled.

He finally came around. It was pitch dark. He staggered to his feet—got out of there. It was almost midnight—and the stage was many, many miles away.

In the street, he learned something that he already knew. He found out that a young lady in a silk dress and with two straw bags had taken the six o'clock stage.

"Umph," said Jim Holland.

He went in and had four ryes. It helped kill the taste of the drugged drink.

At the jailhouse, there was excitement. Jack Connor slapped him on the back.

"Marvelous work!" he said.

"I'll admit I'm a genius," said Holland dejectedly.

Connor was looking at something lying on the table. Holland followed his eyes. There was a payroll—the Black Diamond mine payroll! He blinked his foggy eyes. It was there—envelopes

filled with gold and silver coins, each marked with a name! And beneath it was lying a coat which he thought he recognized as belonging to Abner Clark, the crooked councilman.

“What the hell!” exclaimed Holland.

Connor looked at him curiously.

“You’re drunk again,” he said woefully. “I’ll explain. You sent a note by a girl in a silk dress—with orders for us not to open it unless you didn’t return by ten. We opened it—and there you told us where to find the stolen payroll—buried out under a cottonwood. And we found it buried in Abner Clark’s jacket. Do you understand, now?”

“No,” said Jim Holland.

He went out and got drunk. He couldn’t understand anything. He didn’t want to try. That girl had given him a Mickey Finn—and then turned over the loot.

He was still drunk the next day. Nobody needed him. The case was clinched against the murderers. There’d be an elaborate hanging in due course.

OUTSIDE a saloon, he bumped into Jack Connor. His deputy looked at him in disgust.

“Hey,” he said, “if it wasn’t my official duty, I wouldn’t bother to tell you—but you got a date to horsewhip an editor today.”

Jim Holland’s eyes glinted. That was just what he wanted—a job like that. He was mad enough to vent his rage on anyone. The fact that he had a special case on hand delighted him.

“You’re my best pal!” he told Connor.

He bought himself a pint of rye and got a big horsewhip. Then over the mesa he galloped. He was getting madder every minute. He found out that Pat Marlowe was editor of the *Mosquito Bend Clarion*. There was no one at the plant. He hunted out the editor’s home—a little frame building with some scrubby flowers planted in the yard.

Jim Holland went up the steps pompously.

A small boy answered his pounding on the door.

“I want the editor!” roared Jim.

“The editor’s taking a bath,” said the little boy.

The boy was trembling all over.

“That’s fine!” roared Jim.

He pushed the little boy aside, plunged in the house. He ran into a back room where water was splashing.

The girl was standing in the tub—the girl of the silk dress of the night before.

She took one look at Holland and the raised

whip and emitted a shriek. She grabbed a towel and ran into the next room. The little boy was shrieking.

“You leave my sister alone!”

Jim Holland stood rigid. He was suddenly cold sober. The girl was so frightened she trembled. The little boy was beating his fists against Jim.

“Leave her alone!” he cried.

“Is she the editor?”

“Yes.”

Jim Holland gave a boisterous laugh.

“Then, by God, she gets hoss-whipped! No sniveling editor can call Jim Holland yellow!”

The big whip swished in the air. And it wrapped about her—ever so gently. He knew how to throw a lariat. And he saw it all now—at least, he believed he did. The girl had come down to Muddy Water from Mosquito Bend—just as a snooping newspaper editor. She had been wrapped in the arms of Pete Vallejo, and seemed willing to go a lot further—just because she was a snooping newspaper editor. And she had been his—just to get news.

He felt a sudden rage in him. He put a sting in the whip.

“Please, please,” she cried in terror as she felt the smart of it on her back. “You’ve got no reason to do this. I told you where the payroll was. I was, I was”—she was dancing around ludicrously to escape the whip—“I was very good to you. And I went down there only, only because my uncle, the man who owned this paper, John Clarkson, was—”

He stayed the whip.

“John Clarkson was killed in that payroll robbery—the first time they took the Black Diamond payroll. He made this paper—he was my uncle. He raised me and this little boy, my brother, and, and—”

Jim Holland put down the whip.

The little boy was still jumping up and down. When the whip stopped, the girl stood upright again, holding the towel before her—she smiled and grinned. She turned to the boy.

“Go on out,” she said.

Dumbfounded, the kid left.

She turned to Jim Holland. Her lips twisted—and they were red, and moist—and rich.

“Listen, you big baboon,” she said. “Is that the only thing you can do to a lady—take a whip to her?”

That stopped him.