



There was something deadly in the way Duke looked at Littlejohn.

## LONG SAM'S COYOTE CURE

By LEE BOND

*Outlawed rider Littlejohn puts up a fight against odds when he strives to rescue a youngster from a pair of sidewinders!*

WHEN the roaring shots that knocked young Tommy Galvin out of the saddle threw their thunder against the hot Texas sky, Long Sam Littlejohn was already off his horse. He cursed the pain of a bullet-wounded leg as he crouched down beneath a patch of brush.

Littlejohn reached quickly for the two black-butted six-shooters that rode his

thighs in tied-down holsters. He saw Tommy Galvin rock in the saddle, fling up both arms, and tumble off over the rump of the sleek sorrel. The sorrel went up the trail like its tail was on fire, and Tommy Galvin did a double somersault before he rolled to a stop against a rock.

"They got him!" Littlejohn muttered.

The riderless sorrel vanished around a bend in the thicket-flanked trail with

stirrups popping. Long Sam Littlejohn sat hunkered there in the thicket, a gaunt, unusually tall man, clad in jet-black garments that would offer no flash of color to catch the eye of anyone riding past. Or would anyone be coming up that sandy trail? That thought occurred to Littlejohn when he realized that there were no sounds of riders approaching.

"Looks like they aren't going to follow him after all," Littlejohn said. "Too bad—I aimed to take a hand in this!"

He had expected riders, to be sure. It seemed only natural to suppose that the men who shot young Tommy Galvin would spur up over the little bench yonder and come on to view the results of their cowardly work.

Jogging along the trail on the weary old splay-footed, ewe-necked roan he called Sleeper, Long Sam Littlejohn had heard the dull beat of hoofs coming from below that little bench before the rider was in sight.

He had plunged Sleeper off the trail and into this thicket, then watched young Galvin come over the brow of the bench to sway and fall under the hammering blow of bullets as guns roared behind him.

LITTLEJOHN had heard the muffled churning of hoofs below the bench even as the boy fell tumbling before his eyes. But the riders who had shot Tommy Galvin had been wheeling about, riding back the way they had come. That was obvious now, and suddenly Long Sam Littlejohn stood up, something cold and angry in his smoke-colored eyes.

He shoved the two black-butted six-shooters into holsters, turned and caught up the reins of the ugly roan horse, Sleeper. Yet he hesitated a moment longer there in the screening thicket, smoky eyes searching as much of the trail as he could see.

Outlawed, with a sizable chunk of money offered for his dead-or-alive capture, he had to be almighty careful about letting other men get too close to him. Badge men in general, and a derby-wearing little deputy U. S. marshal by the name of Joe Fry in particular, made it dangerous for him to move too boldly along such well used trails as the one that lay before him.

But the trail seemed empty of riders now, and the gaunt outlaw heaved a sigh of relief as he led his roan out to the trail and across to the boulder where Tommy Galvin lay.

The boy was slim, tall and still a little gawky, but beginning to fill out through the shoulders. Tommy, Long Sam thought somberly as he squatted beside the lad, was seventeen or thereabouts. And now there was the task of riding over yonder to where Fred Galvin's Circle G ranch spread all over Trabuco Canyon, and telling Fred and Dora Galvin that their boy had been killed.

"Telling them will shore be tough," he said.

Long Sam Littlejohn's smoky eyes dulled with the dread of that chore. His gaunt, pain-drawn face looked even more drawn when he stretched Tommy Galvin out face down, studying the blood soaked back of the youngster's shirt. Two slugs had hit Tommy—one high and well out towards the point of his left shoulder, the other lower down and on the right.

The gaunt outlaw's head flung up, his smoky eyes raking the rail up and down in swift glances. Then he turned his attention to Tommy Galvin again, rolling the boy over, aiming to unbutton his shirt and see where the bullet that had hit him low in the back had come out. But suddenly Littlejohn stared. A look first of disbelief then relief mirrored in his smoky eyes.

"Blazes!" he exclaimed. "Mebbe he's

still alive!"

He had tilted Tommy Galvin up on one side, and was looking down into the lean young face that was so pale. Tommy's nostrils twitched, flared slightly. He was breathing!

Littlejohn got to Sleeper, and got up into saddle, cradling Tommy Galvin in his arms. He turned the ugly roan off the trail and went down into the thickets eastward. Silently he cursed the ill-luck that made it necessary that he take to the thickets instead of riding back north along the trail to where an east fork swung over the ridges to Trabuco Canyon and Fred Galvin's Circle G.

But Long Sam Littlejohn dared not ride back up that trail. Joe Fry, deputy U. S. marshal out of Austin, was pounding sand southward along that very trail, following Long Sam's spoor!

Littlejohn looked down into Tommy's pale face, shifting the lad to a better position. He saw and felt a bulky something inside Tommy's shirt, and discovered that it was wedged between their bodies. He wanted no unnecessary pressure against the wounded boy's body, and promptly unbuttoned Tommy's shirt.

The gaunt outlaw's fingers found a bundle that was wrapped in what touch told him was stout canvas. He drew it out, and saw that it was indeed canvas. Bold, black letters across the bag said: STOCKMAN'S BANK. Below that, in smaller letters, Los Robles, Texas, was printed.

**A** FEELING of mingled puzzlement and uneasiness set Long Sam Littlejohn to working at the draw-string of the money sack with teeth and the one hand he could keep free. But even through the thick canvas sack, he could tell by the crisp, crinkly feel of the packet inside the sack that it was paper money.

Long Sam Littlejohn's smoky eyes popped wide, and a low, startled expression slid from his grim mouth. The bills were clean and crisp, held together by a wide paper band. The bills Littlejohn's staring eyes could see were hundred dollar denominations, and the paper band about the packet had \$10,000 printed across it.

"A hundred bills, each good for one hundred dollars at any bank," the outlaw muttered in growing amazement. "But how in blazes did this button get hold of that kind of—"

Littlejohn's voice ended abruptly. A gun went off behind him, back about the spot where he had left the trail.

"Halt!" a harsh and very familiar voice yowled. "Rein up, or I'll blast yuh both out of that saddle!"

"Joe Fry!" Littlejohn groaned.

The outlaw glanced down at Tommy Galvin, stuffing the packet of money back in the sack as he studied the boy's wan face. He pushed the sacked money inside the front of his own black shirt, and touched Sleeper's gaunted sides with dull spurs.

As the big roan bored through the brush at a faster pace, Littlejohn looked back, puzzled over Joe Fry being able to see him. He saw at a glance that he had actually ridden downhill after leaving the trail, coming into a shallow swale.

Joe Fry was over there beside the trail, off his horse and kneeling to get his elbows knee-rested while he sighted a rifle. Fry fired, the slug screeching off a stout branch scant feet to Littlejohn's left before the roar of the rifle reached him.

The gaunt outlaw heaved a sigh of relief when Sleeper hit a crooked but well-used stock trail. It turned and twisted like all stock trails through the pear and mesquite country did, going around patches of brush and searching out all natural lanes and clearings.

Littlejohn thought nothing about it, therefore, when Sleeper walked around a sharp turn in the trail and started out into a little clearing fifty feet across and about twice that long.

But the gaunt outlaw knew suddenly that he had ridden into some sort of trap by entering that clearing. Sleeper stopped, hind quarters squatting, muscles bunched and ready for quick movements. The roan's ugly head swung from right to left, piggish eyes rolling towards thick brush on each side of the clearing.

Littlejohn balanced Tommy Galvin's weight in his left arm, and let his right hand drift down close to the butt of a six-shooter.

"Steady, Sam!" a cold voice said. "Duke's acrost the trail yonder, on yore left. We've got yuh boxed."

"The Tutter brothers, Duke and Alf," Littlejohn said sourly. "What are you two brush hogs doin' this far from that thing you call a ranch down yonder where Catfish Creek empties into the Rio?"

"You ain't in no position to get mouthy, Littlejohn!" Duke Tutter's thin-edged voice came from the left flank of the trail.

"And I ain't in no position to set here arguin' with you two!" the gaunt outlaw retorted. "Or had you noticed that derby-hatted little hombre in a checkered store suit and button shoes who was takin' potshots at me a while ago?"

"We seen that galoot come down the trail and figgered him for a drummer," Alf Tutter's deep voice rumbled. "Duke and me ducked into the brush thinkin' that dude drummer would ride on down the trail towards Los Robles. But he starts readin' sign up there where yuh'd gathered up that Galvin kid yuh're luggin', and peeled out a rifle when he sighted yuh acrost the swale."

"That gent in the derby handles a rifle

better than any dude I ever seen before," Duke Tutter said uneasily. "Howcome he's faunchin' for yore scalp, Littlejohn?"

"That hombre you two mistook for a drummer happens to be one of the shrewdest, most dangerous man-hunters in the Southwest," Littlejohn said flatly. "He's a deputy U. S. marshal, and works out of Austin. You two have likely heard about him. His name's Joe Fry."

**D**UKE and Alf Tutter had obviously heard of Joe Fry, famous manhunter. Their alarmed cursing, and the sounds they made shifting around in the brush told Long Sam Littlejohn that.

"Fry's an expert at trackin', so it won't take him long to hit my sign and come this way," Littlejohn snapped. "You two set on yore hunkers in the brush and mutter-cuss if yuh want to. I'm pushin' on."

"Mebbe you'd better move on, at that," Alf Tutter said coldly. "But don't rush it, Sammy boy. Just set tight until Duke rides out in the trail in front of yuh. Duke'll ride point on down the trail, while I bring up the drag. That'll still keep yuh in the middle."

"What's the idea in you two bristlin' up at me like this?" Littlejohn countered. "That buzzard's roost you two call the Rockin' T ranch down yonder on the river is a place where border-hoppin' renegades can hide out, providin' said border-hopper has enough cash money to lay on the line. You two are supposed to be friendly to noose-bait like me."

"Quit stallin', Littlejohn!" Duke Tutter's thin voice lashed out. "Alf and me know yuh seen us back yonder on the trail, after we'd blasted that Galvin kid outa the saddle with slugs. Is that nosey little fool dead?"

Long Sam Littlejohn felt as if the whole matt of yellow hair was standing straight up under his dusty Stetson. He

started to say something, but thought better of it.

Duke Tutter was out in the trail, a tall man who sat the saddle loosely. Duke had a pearl handled six-shooter in his right hand, and there was something deadly in the way his pale blue eyes squinted at Long Sam Littlejohn. Tutter's hair was as coarse and black as his bay pony's mane, and there was a darkness in his hawk-nosed, thin-mouthed face that even the broiling Texas sun could not have put there.

"I asked yuh a question, Littlejohn," Duke Tutter said coldly. "I asked yuh if that Galvin younker is dead or not, and I'll put a bullet through yore gizzard if yuh don't answer me!"

"Shut up, Duke, and get to movin'!" Alf Tutter snapped before Long Sam could answer. "If yuh hadn't kept suckin' on that bottle all day yuh'd be sober enough to see by Tommy Galvin's color that he's still alive."

Duke Tutter's face had turned a sickly yellow-brown color, and his pale eyes seemed glued to Tommy Galvin's unmoving figure in a stare that had both alarm and cold hatred in it. That Duke Tutter was more than just a little inclined to shoot Tommy Galvin was only too obvious, and Long Sam Littlejohn let his right hand ease down to where he could make a play for one of his own guns if he had to.

"What's the matter, Duke?" Alf Tutter's voice lashed out. "You act like you was seein' a ghost instead of just a bullet-crippled kid who come nosin' around our Chigger Crick holdin' pens, tryin' to make out the brands on them cattle Short Vinson and his bunch was restin' up for a fast push to the river tonight. Or did yuh mebbe forget to tell yore big brother the truth about why yuh was so blood-sweatin' afraid to have

Tommy Galvin get home alive?"

"If you wasn't my own brother I'd slip a bullet 'tween yore teeth for talkin' to me like that," Duke Tutter said harshly.

Long Sam looked over his shoulder at Alf Tutter, who was riding out into the trail. Alf was big and rawboned, with beefy shoulders and thick, powerfully muscled arms and legs. He had the same coarse black hair, mustache and hawk-nosed, pale-eyed looks that Duke Tutter had.

"Move on, Duke!" Alf grunted. "And quit sprainin' yore neck ganderin' at me, Littlejohn. Yuh've seen me before."

LITTLEJOHN faced forward without comment, and touched Sleeper's sides gently with spurs as Duke Tutter started riding down the trail. Duke rode hipped around in the saddle, and kept his six-shooter in his hand. He still looked pale around the mouth, and his eyes were getting bloodshot and mean looking as he watched Tommy Galvin's brown-thatched head sway limply from side to side.

Duke Tutter was heading for the renegade hangout the Tutter's called a ranch down yonder at the mouth of Catfish Creek, and Long Sam's nerves crawled like live things in his flesh when he thought of that ten thousand dollars inside his shirtfront. And there was the badly wounded boy Littlejohn had in his arms.

Duke Tutter's obvious desire to blast the last feeble spark of life out of young Tommy Galvin gave Long Sam Littlejohn a feeling that Tommy might know something Duke did not want told. And judging by what Alf Tutter had said a little earlier, he, too, suspected that Duke had reasons for wanting Tommy's tongue forever stilled.

"You and Alf sorta crowded me into this play, Duke," Long Sam said gravely. "Or are yuh forcin' me to ride some place

I mebbe don't want to go?"

"Try ridin' ary direction except to foller me and yuh'll get a bullet in yore briskit, yuh crane-legged hellion!" Duke Tutter sneered. "You poked yore blasted nose into this deal when you taken Tommy Galvin up on yore saddle and rode off into the thickets with him. Aim to lug him home to his mammy and daddy, I'll bet!"

"I aimed to take Tommy home," Long Sam said evenly. "He's only a youngster, and not even packin' a gun. If he dies, Duke, every man in this country will be lookin' for the man or men who killed him!"

"You blabbermouthed fool, I'll learn you to give me lip!" Duke Tutter yelled, and started chopping the six-shooter down for a point-blank shot at Long Sam's face.

But Alf Tutter's horse suddenly shot forward, and Alf's deep voice boomed a warning that stopped his younger brother cold.

"Pull that trigger, Duke, and I'll stomp yore drunken head off!" Alf said in a cold flat tone. "We'll take care of Littlejohn when the sign comes right, in case he don't want to see things our way. But you fire a shot here, and there'll be a ring of armed men around these thickets before the shot quits echoin'. Or are yuh too drunk to remember that the country is crawlin' with badge men, and the townsmen, cowboys and ranchers they've depitized?"

Duke Tutter was shaking a little, and his pale eyes glared deadly hatred at Long Sam Littlejohn. But he lowered the spiked hammer of his gun, shoved the weapon into leather, and pulled a nearly empty quart bottle out of a saddle pocket. He squinted at the amber fluid in the bottle, then uncorked it and drank deeply.

Long Sam glanced at Alf Tutter, who was riding almost stirrup to stirrup with him. Alf was scowling and tense, watching

his brother out of eyes that were angry and worried. Long Sam's nerves suddenly tightened, and he began slowly easing Tommy Galvin's weight into his left arm. He started sliding his hand gently down to the butt of the six-shooter on his leg, but his long fingers were still inches from their goal when Alf Tutter looked at him.

"If it wasn't for makin' the fuss, I'd let you get hold of that gun, then kill you before you could pull it," he said coldly.

"Yuh can't blame a man for tryin'," Littlejohn grinned ruefully, and slipped his right arm back beneath Tommy Galvin's dangling legs.

**D**UKE TUTTER had finished drinking, tossed the emptied bottle aside, and was hipped around in the saddle again, six-shooter in his hand, face twisted and mean looking.

"Tried a sneak draw while my back was turned, eh?" he sneered at Littlejohn. "Yuh'd be a dead duck now, Littlejohn, if Alf hadn't been afraid to shoot his pistol."

"What's brought so many badge men and deputized citizens prowlin' the thickets?" Long Sam asked Alf Tutter.

"The Stockman's Bank at Los Robles was robbed this mornin'." The burly gunman shrugged. "Reckon that's it."

"Old Bill Cotter can stand the loss!" Duke Tutter snorted. "Besides all the dinero the dried-up little old whelp has crammed in that Stockman's bank of his, he owns a half dozen cattle ranches."

The canvas sack inside Long Sam's shirt that held ten thousand dollars in paper money suddenly felt strangely cold and heavy.

"How much loot did the bandits get?" he asked.

"Cal Pitcher, the Los Robles sheriff says just one man done the job," Alf Tutter said. "Young Guy Shaw, the bank's cashier, always shows up about a half hour

before openin' time. Somebody got into the bank this mornin', caved Shaw's head in with somethin' heavy—probably a six-shooter—and got clean away.

“Sheriff Pitcher found boot tracks where one man had gone in, then come out, at a window in old Bill Cotter's office, which is at the back of the bank building. Pitcher figures Guy Shaw raised that winder so's Cotter's office would be cooled out a mite when the old coot got there. Nobody'll know how much dinero that bandit got until Bill Cotter and his clerks can check up.”

“Old Bill Cotter is shore fit to be tied!” Duke Tutter laughed harshly. “The white-headed little old wart put up a thousand dollars cash money for the capture of the man who killed his cashier. But that bandit is too smart. Nobody'll ever nail him, unless—”

Duke Tutter broke off, licking his lips uneasily as he found his brother's eyes boring coldly into him.

“I started you up to Chigger Crick to collect what Shorty Vinson owes us for usin' them hidden corrals to hold cattle in, the last couple days,” Alf said flatly. “You sashayed into town, got yore hide full of busthead whisky, and fetched along a bottle to suck on. But you didn't have brains enough to come past the ranch and tell me that the country was due to be crawlin' with posses.”

“I headed for Chigger Crick, aimin' to warn Shorty Vinson that him and his bunch had better take to the brush if they didn't want a posse stumblin' up on them with that herd of stolen cattle!” Duke retorted. “I dropped off the trail and hit Chigger Crick where it heads at Apache Spring.”

“Then what?” Alf asked as his brother paused.

“And there was this Galvin kid, sneakin' up through the bushes to where

he'd tied that sorrel of his,” went on Duke. “He'd been down the crick on foot, I tell yuh, spyin' on that dumb Shorty Vinson and Shorty's men. That Galvin brat likely knows every brand that was in that bunch of cattle Shorty's holdin', and if yuh're fool enough to let that kid loose to tell what he seen, you and me'll both be in hot water.”

“Why didn't yuh nail Tommy then and there?” Long Sam said bluntly.

“The little hellion was on that sorrel and into the thickets before it soaked in on me what he'd been up to!” Duke Tutter snapped. “I'd taken a few shots at him and he bushed up on me. I was staked out waitin' for him to make a try at gettin' out to the trail when Alf showed up.”

“A gent in town who gets ten dollars every time he rides out and tips me off when somethin' gets the law stirred up had come to the ranch and told me about the bank robbery,” Alf Tutter scowled. “I scattered four-five boys who'd been hangin' around the ranch lately, then lit for Chigger Crick to warn Shorty Vinson that the law was in a stir. I was at the Chigger Crick holdin' pens when I heard Duke shootin'. I went up to have a look-see, naturally.”

LITTLEJOHN nodded assent.

“Naturally,” Long Sam said drily. “But how'd you two get Tommy smoked out of the thickets and on the run?”

“We hid out and watched until he made a run for the main trail,” Alf Tutter snorted. “But that sorrel the kid was on was too fast for my and Duke's cowponies. We had to wing him or he'd have got home and told what he seen, in case he had been down snoopin' around them hidden corrals on Chigger Crick.”

“Then you had to stick yore nose into things!” Duke glared at Long Sam. “Alf and me seen a funnel of dust up over the

bench in the trail where we winged that blasted Galvin kid. We knowed someone was comin' towards the kid when we shot him, and was afraid to ride on up. We went back down the trail, hid our hosses in a thicket, and sneaked back on foot. You was gettin' up into yore saddle with the younker, and looked right smack towards Alf and me. We know you seen us, Littlejohn."

"But I didn't," Long Sam said grimly. "I heard you two ride back down the trail and figured yuh'd hightailed for good."

"We'd have jumped you, only there was another dust funnel pokin' up into the sky to the north, and we laid doggo until that derby-hatted, sawed-off hombre yuh say is Joe Fry come along and started nosin' around," Alf Tutter grunted. "Duke and me slipped back to our hosses and started cuttin' across the brush, figgerin' to trail yuh down. But derned if Fry didn't turn yuh right back toward us with rifle lead!"

"What do you two aim to do with me?" Long Sam asked.

"Collect the bounty on yore tough hide!" Alf Tutter said flatly. "Come night, that Galvin kid goes into the Rio Grande. Tomorrer, Duke and me'll take yuh to town, feet first, and collect some scalp money."

Long Sam ground his teeth in rage, but held his tongue. They were riding out into a sort of valley, where the brush grew less densely. Duke Tutter stopped, waving Long Sam to follow suit.

"We ain't much more than a quarter-mile from the ranchouse, and that's about close enough, Alf," Duke said nervously. "With all them badge men and deputies on the prowl, one of us better ride up and look the place over before we take Littlejohn and the Galvin kid down there, hadn't we?"

"Good idee," Alf Tutter nodded. "So shag on down and scout around to see if we've got the wrong kind of unexpected company."

There was a hard grin on Alf Tutter's mouth, and a challenging, mocking gleam in his eyes. He obviously expected Duke Tutter to insist on staying behind to guard the prisoners. Long Sam expected the same sort of thing, for Duke Tutter still had that worried, half-scared look in his eyes each time he glanced at Tommy Galvin.

But to Long Sam's surprise Duke grinned, laid his thumb over the hammer of his six-shooter, and nodded agreement. He swayed a little in the saddle, as if the booze he had consumed that day might be hitting him pretty hard. But his ugly, killer eyes were steady enough, Long Sam noted with a sudden sense of alarm.

"Shore, Alf!" Duke laughed coldly. "I'll slope down and look the place over—from behind the brush patches. And any blasted snooper I ketch sight of will wish his mammy had drowned him when he was a baby."

"Come back here, yuh drunken fool!" Alf Tutter roared.

**H**IS face was white, and his big, knobby hands shook as he lifted bridle reins and sent his horse forward. Duke, who had started to ride away as he talked, spun his horse around and sat regarding his brother owlshly.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Never mind!" Alf gritted. "Just stay here and watch Littlejohn and the Galvin kid. I'll have a look-see around the place myownself."

"Don't buy it, Alf!" Long Sam snapped.

"Buy what?" Alf Tutter looked at him angrily.



"The bill of goods yore coyote brother is sellin' yuh!" Littlejohn snapped. "He shot off his mouth about what he aimed to do to anyone he sighted around yore ranch so's yuh'd be afraid to let him ride down there. Duke wants to stay here while you go to the ranchhouse. And if yuh let him, he'll try his sweatin' best to put a bullet in Tommy Galvin's brain."

"Don't mind that long-shanked noose-dodger's yappin', Alf!" Duke Tutter said harshly. "Snake them guns out of his holsters, though, before yuh leave. I don't want no trouble with him while yuh're gone, so git them guns so's he can't—"

"So I can't keep you from finishin' Tommy Galvin off, eh?" Long Sam cut in harshly. "Duke, I know that yuh're afraid of somethin' Tommy Galvin knows. Alf savvies that, too."

Duke Tutter got about as white as his murky skin could get, and started cursing Long Sam Littlejohn in a whining, rage-choked voice.

"Shut up, Duke!" Alf Tutter roared.

Duke quit cursing Long Sam and sat glaring around like a vicious animal suddenly brought to bay.

"Now start makin' a little sense, you lunkhead!" Alf snapped at him. "Littlejohn's right. You are afraid of somethin' this Galvin kid knows!"

"Somethin' like that bank robbery and murder at Los Robles this mornin', eh, Duke?" Long Sam Littlejohn's voice was almost kindly.

The gaunt outlaw eased his feet back until only his toes bore his weight in the stirrups. His long arms tightened slowly about Tommy Galvin while he sat watching Duke Tutter's face twist and tighten into a mask of rage. Duke Tutter's eyes, Long Sam thought, resembled the glassy, unwinking eyes of a rabid animal.

"Yuh yaller-headed, noose-dodgin' son, I don't savvy yore play!" he rasped at

Littlejohn. "If I had caved in the back of Guy Shaw's skull and sloped off with that ten thousand dollars, I'd have told Alf about it, split the money with him. I wouldn't hold out money like that on my own brother, and he knows it!"

"Duke's right, Littlejohn!" Alf Tutter scowled. "He gives me trouble with his wild ways, and I have to watch out that he don't pull some kind of fool stunt that'd have the law on our necks. But Duke wouldn't double cross me by holdin' back my half of a fat haul like that bank robbery netted some feller. So yuh're either guessin' wild, or else tryin' to stir up trouble 'tween Duke and me, hopin' we'll get into a fight and give you a chance to hightail."

"Mebbe I'm only guessin' wild, Alf," Long Sam droned the words. "On the other hand, mebbe yuh better ask Duke how he knew the *back* of Guy Shaw's skull was caved in, and how he knows that the bandit got ten thousand dollars out of the bank when even the bank owner can't know how much is missin' until he checks up?"

"By the livin', Duke, you stubbed yore toe!" Alf Tutter began wildly. "Yuh splatter-brained fool, yuh robbed that bank as shore as—"

Alf Tutter's words were suddenly drowned in the wild, screeching howl of rage that came from Duke's twisted lips. Duke threw the spurs to his bay horse, and the six-shooter in his hand spat flame and thunder as he charged Long Sam Littlejohn.

**B**UT the gaunt outlaw had expected that. Littlejohn had rammed the spurs to Sleeper, then kicked his toes out of the stirrups and rolled out of saddle as the big roan lunged. Long Sam held Tommy Galvin tightly, cushioning the youngster's fall as best he could. They hit the ground

and rolled over twice, and to Long Sam's amazement Tommy Galvin was suddenly squirming out of his grasp.

"Watch them two coyotes, Long Sam!" the boy gasped.

Littlejohn whirled over once more, snatched guns from leather as he rolled, and came up with a Colt in each fist, a low, mournful range tune humming through his bared teeth.

Sleeper had lunged into Duke Tutter's mount, momentarily checking Duke's rush. But Duke had his horse swung clear now, and was charging again, six-shooter chopping down to lance flame at Long Sam.

The gaunt outlaw winced when Duke Tutter's slug burned across his neck, then flipped the hammer of his right-hand Colt back and let it drop in a single, fast motion. But just as he was dropping the gun-hammer from beneath his thumb, a slug slashed in quartering from the right, ripping across his middle with the feel of raw flame.

Long Sam lurched from the pain, and knew that his slug had not gone into Duke Tutter's middle as he had meant it to do. But the shot had not missed entirely, for Duke was rearing back in the saddle, a look of sick dread in his glazed eyes. He fell sideward and down, but Long Sam had no time to see what Duke did after he hit the ground.

Another slug came snarling in from a right angle. Long Sam felt the hat jump off his head. He half turned, saw Alf Tutter quitting a horse that had gone spooked from the gun thunder. Alf Tutter's face was savage, his eyes cold and determined as he hit the ground on his feet, took a couple of running steps, then came to a halt on wide planted feet.

"Drop that gun, Alf!" Long Sam yelled. "Drop it, or—"

He broke off, smoky eyes narrowing as

he saw Alf Tutter's gun swing towards him. Long Sam let both thumbs skid from knurled gun-hammers, and the double roar of exploding shells came a fraction of a second before Alf Tutter's six-shooter exploded.

Alf's bullet went too high, and the big renegade went staggering backwards in short, quick steps for a full two yards before the strong legs buckled, and his lifeless body tumbled over backwards.

Long Sam Littlejohn turned fast at a sound behind him, then stood gaping for a moment. Tommy Galvin was standing over Duke Tutter, holding Duke's own pearl gripped six-shooter cocked and slanted down at the moaning, white-faced tough.

Duke Tutter cursed the youngster and tried to rear up. But Duke's right arm kinked over queerly at the shoulder, and suddenly he was clutching at the blood-soaked sleeve, too sick to notice what went on around him.

Long Sam walked up to Tommy Galvin, and said he reckoned Duke Tutter did not need much guarding. Tommy nodded, lowered the hammer on Duke's gun, and pushed the weapon down inside his pants belt. Tommy's face was white, but his eyes were clear as he looked at Long Sam and grinned.

"Gollies, Long Sam, I know now why Dad has always said yuh're not as bad as yuh're painted," the boy said. "Yuh're shore not like these two coyotes yuh just cured of their ornery ways."

"I hope I'm not like this pair was," Littlejohn shrugged. "But peel off that shirt, sprout, and let's get a look at yore hurts. And how long had yuh been awake before yuh let me know?"

"I'd been awake a long time—ever since Duke and Alf Tutter got you 'tween 'em and started ridin' down this way," the boy said simply. "But I was watchin' that

Duke feller without openin' my eyes wide, and knew he'd blast us both if he found out I was awake. I had a whackin' lot of money inside my shirt, but Duke must have got it, somehow, after I stopped them two bullets. But if we search him—"

"Here's the dinero yuh're worryin' about, Tommy," Long Sam tapped the bulge inside his shirt. "But let's get after them wounds of yores, then skeddaddle before somebody comes to find out what this shootin' was all about. Peel off that shirt, but tell me how yuh got hold of all that dinero, button."

**T**OMMY peeled off his shirt and undershirt, and Long Sam saw the boy turn a sickly green color when he looked down at the deep, ragged gash along his right side. Littlejohn grabbed Tommy's undershirt, hastily tore it into strips, and went to work quickly.

"Gaze off across the country, Tommy, and don't look down at this wound any more," the outlaw said. "And just keep on thinkin' how mighty lucky you are, young feller."

"All right," Tommy said.

"That slug hit a rib down low in yore back, glanced off the rib, and shore cut a gash in yore hide," Long Sam said. "But it's a clean wound, the rib isn't even broke, and about the worst yuh'll suffer will be settin' on yore hunkers around home until the gash heals up. This hole up in the top of yore left shoulder will be sore for a spell, too. But yuh're a mighty lucky boy, Tommy Galvin."

"Only don't forget that my luck would have petered out mighty fast if you hadn't come along, Long Sam," the youngster said gravely.

"Speakin' of somebody comin' along, that Joe Fry pest will be doin' just that," Long Sam sighed. "He walked in on me at a little crossroads store back yonder in the

hills early this mornin'. I went in to buy grub and tobacco, but all I got was a bullet hole through this off leg of mine when I spotted Fry comin' in the front door and made a run for the back door.

"Fry's been hot on my trail all day, so hustle into this shirt, button, while I get Duke Tutter up in a saddle. We'll try to get to yore daddy's place without hubbin' into any of the posses that are on the prowl."

"Don't worry about posses, Long Sam!" Tommy said quickly. "I know every pig trail in these thickets, and we'll shore get to the Circle G without anybody seein' us. And won't Mom and Dad get a surprise when I tell'em how you sided me in a fight, and fixed these two Tutter coyotes so's they'll not ever rustle any more Circle G beefs!"

"Uh-huh, I reckon the Tutters won't bother yore folks any more," Littlejohn nodded. "But how'd yuh get hold of that bank loot, Tommy?"

"Why, I was ridin' to town for the mail this mornin' and saw this Duke Tutter scootin' up the trail on a played-out hoss," Tommy said simply. "Duke was lookin' back over his shoulder like a scared coyote, so I knew he'd been up to somethin' that had somebody after him. He ducked off into the brush at the head of Chigger Creek, so I poked along after him to see where he aimed to hole up, in case the law was after him."

"If Duke had seen yuh he'd have shot yuh!" Littlejohn scowled. "But go on, Tommy."

"Duke stopped at Apache Spring at the head of Chigger Creek," Tommy resumed. "That bay hoss, there, was staked out at the spring, and Duke changed mounts in a hurry. Then he took somethin' out of a saddle pocket, and I seen that it was a canvas sack. He lifted up a big rock, put the sack under the rock, and lit out of there

on the bay, hazin' the wore-out hoss ahead of him. I slipped down to the spring and lifted up that rock, and when I seen the Los Robles bank's name on the canvas sack, I got so flabbergasted I dropped the big rock I was holdin' up."

"And Duke heard that rock fall!" Long Sam groaned.

"I reckon so," Tommy nodded. "Anyhow he came buzzin' back, jerkin' his gun out the minute he spotted me. I high tailed into the thicket where I'd left my hoss, and Duke sure singed the air around me with bullets. When I looked in the sack and saw all that money, I knew Duke must have stole it."

"Didn't you know Duke and Alf were both watchin' for you to come out of the

thicket and make a run for it," Long Sam asked.

"No," Tommy said soberly. "I heard Alf come up to the spring and ask Duke what the trouble was. They fussed a while, then got on their horses and rode off. But the minute I popped out of the brush they was both right after me. My sorrel Streak hoss outrun their plugs fair and square. Only they shot me out of the saddle, didn't they?"

"They did," Long Sam said grimly. "But shake a hoof, younker, or Joe Fry will be tryin' to give me a dose of the same. Borrow Alf Tutter's hoss, since he won't be needin' it. I've got this Duke cuss roped to the saddle, so lead out, Tommy, and let's find them pig trails you were talkin' about."