

# LONG SAM Jumps the Devil



"Stand your hands,  
buscaderos," Long  
Sam bawled

*An owlhooter  
turns the tables  
on a crafty killer!*

By **LEE BOND**

**F**OR moments after he crawled to edge of the clearing and peered toward the circle of firelight, Long Sam Littlejohn wondered if he was having a nightmare. Certainly what he beheld was reminiscent of hair-raising pirate tales he had read in his youth.

There was the open grave, yawning black and evil in the flickering red light of the mesquite wood fire. On the brink stood three men, their wrists and ankles tightly

bound. Across the pit were four other men, one of whom was dressed in dazzling white satin charro-style pants and jacket.

"El Diabolo Blanco, by thunder!" Long Sam whispered.

Long Sam shivered although the Texas night was sticky with humid heat. In two years time, that slim, white-clad hombre in the clearing had blazed a trail of crime through this thicket country that had every badge-man in the country faunching for

his scalp. Yet no one had the slightest notion as to the cunning thief and killer's real identity, for he vanished like a wraith into these towering jungles of tornillo, prickly pear and mesquite after each raid on town, ranch or stagecoach.

Some people claimed the bandit had a hideout south of the Rio Grande, on Mexican soil. Others contended that he was a local man, walking the streets of Foxfire or some other river community as a respected citizen when he did not don the gleaming white garments that had won him the name "El Diabolo Blanco."

Yet these were only guesses made by harassed peace officers and an alarmed citizenry. Not a single clew had ever been found to the identity of the white-clad bandit or any of his murderous followers.

It suddenly occurred to Long Sam Littlejohn that he had learned more in the last few seconds than the law had learned in two whole years.

Over his head, the white-clad bandit had a hood-shaped satin mask with tiny eye holes. He wore white boots and crisscrossed white belts that supported the white holsters thonged to his thighs. The holsters held nickel-plated six-shooters with pearl grips. Long Sam couldn't even guess at that white-robed killer's identity.

**B**UT the three gun-hung, tough-visaged gents with El Diabolo Blanco were another story. Long Sam's smoky eyes narrowed speculatively as he studied those three. They were Sisco Denton, Curly Hurd and Rick Veale, men whom Long Sam Littlejohn had known for years. All three worked for old Bart Rowland, whose Rocking R ranch covered miles of this thicket country. Slim, hawk-nosed, red-headed Sisco Denton was, in fact, ramrod of the whole vast Rocking R spread.

"Beats me," Long Sam puzzled. "Old

Bart Rowland is near busted, thanks to the way El Diabolo Blanco has whittled on his herds, and robbed his lumber pay roll carriers, and gutted his Foxfire Stockman's Bank twice. And here's some of Old Man Rowland's own hired help, turnin' out to be members of that Blanco hellion's gang!"

Long Sam's angular, bony-cheeked face screwed into a worried scowl that brought thin yellow brows lower over his smoke-colored eyes. He was a gaunt, unusually tall man, dressed in jetty black from boots to the flat-crowned Stetson that covered his thick yellow hair. Because of those black garments, he knew that he was not apt to be spotted in the shadows cast by the tornillo bushes above him.

He could, Sam realized soberly, slide back to the tough old roan horse he called Sleeper and go on about his own business without getting into any kind of mixup with El Diabolo Blanco. Outlawed and with a price posted for his own dead-or-alive capture, Long Sam reckoned that he was about the last hombre in Texas who ought to go butting into something that was a chore to be handled by the very law that hounded, hunted and, hated him.

But even as he lay there thinking, Long Sam knew he would not slip away and leave Diabolo alone. He reached down, slid a pair of black-butted six-shooters from their holsters at his bony thighs, and laid his thumbs over the knurled hammers.

El Diabolo Blanco, Sisco Denton, Curly Hurd and Rick Veale were in a huddle now. That Diabolo and the three Rocking R riders meant to murder the other three men in cold blood, Long Sam did not doubt.

"Wish to thunder I could see the faces of those three," he muttered. "That husky, thick-necked jigger looks kinda like Bull Mooney, leader of them stock thieves over

yonder in the Indian Nations. The scrawny cuss with the gray showin' in his hair could be Gus Lynn, Bull Mooney's right bower. But that stocky gent in the big overalls, hickory shirt and brogans, looks like a farmer. If I could figure some way to signal them three to jump down into that grave—"

Long Sam's musing broke off when El Diabolo Blanco and his companions ended their whispered conference. The white-robed leader put his hooded face close to Sisco Denton's ear. Long Sam could see the white cloth flutter from Blanco's breath as the bandit talked. Sisco Denton nodded, then turned to look across the grave towards the three men. Short-legged, barrel-chested Curly Hurd and dumpy, round-paunched Rick Veale strolled casually over to the open grave. Long Sam could see them grinning at the three helpless men across the yawning pit as they drew and cocked their six-shooters.

"Mooney, you and Gus Lynn have pulled a prize boner," Sisco Denton said harshly. "Blanco says the only thing he can do is see that you two, and that thing, there, yuh mistook for a clod-hoppin' farmer, just up and disappear for good."

"Bull Mooney and Gus Lynn, sure enough," Long Sam whispered.

"Yeah, me and Gus made a mistake, all right, Denton," Bull Mooney's deep voice retorted. "That mistake was in even bringin' them four saddlebags, yonder, with their forty thousand, cold cash, to you and that two-bit coward hidin' under them white duds."

**E**L DIABOLO BLANCO leaned towards Sisco Denton, and the shimmering satin cloth over his face rippled as he talked.

"Blanco says to watch yore tongue, Bull, or he'll order yuh shot low so's yuh feel it a long time before yuh fall into that

grave." Sisco Denton grinned coldly. "And if yuh think Blanco is just talkin', go ahead and make some more remarks about him."

"Listen, Denton," scrawny Gus Lynn said sharply. "Me and Bull and some of the other boys from the Nations took that trail herd of blotch-branded cattle up to Kansas and sold it for yore. Blanco boss, there. We fetched yuh back forty thousand, cash dollars, in them saddlebags. We camped back yonder at Panther Spring, like you fellers told us to do. This gent who calls hisself Stub Smith drove up in a sorry-lookin' wagon and wanted to camp at the spring, too. Me and Bull couldn't run him off, not without makin' him wonder why. When you four fellers showed up, yuh throwed guns on me and Bull and Smith, and shore aim to beef us, all three. What kind of a mistake does yore Blanco boss claim me and Bull have made, Denton?"

"We ain't made no kind of a mistake, except in trustin' these galoots, Gus," Bull Mooney snorted. "They didn't have the sand to take their stolen cattle to market, so they made us a proposition, and we took the cattle up the trail. Now Blanco and these men of his are afraid we'll talk out of turn, if they let us live. This Stub Smith feller, here, ain't nothin' but what he says he is—a derved squatter lookin' for a place to light."

"For a man who claims to be a farmer, Mister Smith's hands look mighty soft to me," fat Rick Veale laughed.

"Blanco, these two renegades, Bull Mooney and Gus Lynn, have told yuh the truth," the overall-clad man said harshly. "I can understand you and these three Rockin' R renegades' bein' suspicious, naturally. You think the three of us meant to trap you cutthroats. But Mooney and Lynn haven't any idea who I am."

"Great jumpin' Jupiter!" Long Sam

Littlejohn gulped, smoky eyes goggling at the sturdy back of the gent in overalls.

The man who had told Bull Mooney and Gus Lynn his name was 'Stub Smith' was actually Joe Fry, deputy U. S. Marshal, working out of Austin. And of all the badge-men who hunted him, Long Sam Littlejohn had cause to dread Fry the most. Fry hounded Long Sam constantly, his pride rubbed raw because Littlejohn was the only "wanted" man he had ever gone after without success.

"Say, yuh don't talk like yuh did when yuh drove up to Panther Spring in that wore-out wagon, feller." Bull Mooney glared at Joe Fry. "Who are yuh?"

"I'm Joe Fry, deputy U. S. Marshal, Bull," the stocky officer snorted. "I trailed you and Gus all the way from Kansas, knowin' that herd of cattle you galoots marketed up there had been gathered by this Blanco and his cutthroat pack. I figured to nab Blanco when yuh tried to turn the money over to him. And I figured the murderin' rake hidin' behind those white duds would be a long-shanked sinner named Long Sam Littlejohn."

Bull Mooney and Gus Lynn were cursing Fry, their anger mounting as he ignored their faunching. And Long Sam Littlejohn was doing some cussing of his own. It was like Fry, Long Sam thought angrily, to accuse him of being El Diabolo Blanco. Fry started yelping Long Sam's name every time a major crime was committed anywhere in Texas.

"Mooney, you and Gus Lynn shut up!" Sisco Denton barked sharply. "Blanco says maybe yuh're telling the truth when yuh say you two didn't whip us a deal with Fry, aimin' to trap us fellers. But Blanco also says that us boys ain't takin' no chances. If you did have a deal cooked and we was fool enough to let yuh off, yuh'd tip our hands to the law. So get set to take pistol lead, you three."

Sisco Denton and the white-clad bandit chieftain each drew twin pistols. They paced forward, and Denton started to nod the murder signal at Curly Hurd and Rick Veale. But the roar of the six-gun from the clearing caused him to duck violently. Sisco Denton sat down abruptly, his howl of terror knifing through the night.

"Stand yore hands, buscaderos!" Long Sam bawled. "Blanco, I'll drill yuh center if yuh move."

Long Sam knew that he had made a mistake in singing out, for the moment he did, Curly Hurd and Rick Veale started shooting toward the sound of his voice, and a bullet kicked dirt in his face. He was rolling away from that when another bullet ripped through the brush close to his face. Long Sam swore and, at the risk of being killed, kept his head up and got his black-butted six-shooters into line.

Blanco made quickly for the thickets, where unquestionably there were saddle horses waiting. Long Sam lined his guns and let roll a thunderous volley, his smoky eyes glinting as Blanco's white figure spilled to the ground. He heard a high, thin wail and swung his smoking guns, hunting Sisco Denton, Curly Hurd and Rick Veale.

"The dirty devils," Long Sam growled, for Bull Mooney and Gus Lynn were sprawled there on the lip of the grave, the limp way they were huddled telling Long Sam what had happened. Joe Fry was nowhere in sight, but Long Sam had a feeling that the stocky deputy was down in the grave.

**T**HE gaunt outlaw reared up, the bucking guns in his bony hands targeted on three dark shadows skittering towards the thickets where Blanco had evidently crawled after hitting the ground. Long Sam saw Curly Hurd sprawl suddenly, and fat Rick Veale was knocked off his feet just as he hit the edge of the

brush. Then the guns in Long Sam's hands clicked on empty shells, and he swore through locked teeth as he watched Sisco Denton go into the brush like a coyote-chased cottontail.

Long Sam reloaded his gun, but waited in the black shadows, knowing that to venture out was to invite a bullet from the brush across the clearing. He heard a man cursing over there, and the snort and stamp of uneasy horses. Then riders were heading southward, three or four of them, the gaunt outlaw judged from the sounds.

Long Sam moved into the clearing on his stomach, worming his way along cautiously. He was within a pace of the open grave when he heard Joe Fry grunting and cussing and moving around. The sounds that came up out of the grave sent a chill down Long Sam's spine.

"You hit, Joe?" he called.

"You crane-legged imitation of a human bein', get down here and cut me loose," Fry's harsh voice barked. "I had sense enough to jump in this hole, when that first gun popped. Who was doin' that shootin', Sam?"

"Who do yuh think jumped that bunch when you were the width of a gnat's ear from Boothill, runt?" Long Sam snorted.

"Allright, so I'm properly impressed," Fry snorted. "Also, noose-bait, I'm puzzled over why you tried to save my hide. Or did yuh just have a peeve at the rest of yore murderin' bunch?"

"Quit that kind of talk, or I'll pick up one of these shovels and start wheelin' dirt in on yuh," Long Sam growled.

Fry sputtered angrily and began thrashing around, but Long Sam, ignoring him, crawled around to the far side of the grave. Before the fire had died out, he had marked the location of two pairs of saddlebags that had been lying there. He found them now and grinned as he gathered them up. From each of the four

pouches he took a small, paper-wrapped bundle, and the way those bundles gave to his grip widened the grin on his face.

"Forty thousand, in cash foldin' money," he chortled. "Down yonder in South America, a Yankee with that much coin would sure be settin' pretty."

"Sam!" Joe Fry's voice came up out of the pit. "Hey, where are yuh, Littlejohn?"

Long Sam stuffed the pockets inside his shirt, excitement making his fingers tremble a little. He buttoned the shirt very carefully, then crawled back to the edge of the grave.

"Stand up and turn yore back to me, Joe," he said gruffly. "I'll reach down and cut yore wrists loose."

"How many of those murderin' devils did yuh kill, Sam?" Fry asked and Long Sam thought there was something mocking in his voice.

"I didn't kill any of 'em," the outlaw retorted. "I hit Blanco, Curly Hurd and Rick Veale, but don't know how hard. I think all four of 'em got away."

"Just as I thought," Fry snorted, stepping back as Long Sam finished slicing through the ropes on his wrists.

"What do yuh mean by sayin' 'just as I thought,' Joe?" the outlaw asked.

"You have no trouble killin' honest men when yuh line yore guns on 'em," Fry sneered. "But when yuh open up on that bunch, yuh manage to miss every shot. Who do yuh think yuh're kiddin', yuh long-shanked hellion?"

Some sixth sense warned Long Sam. He jerked his arms out of the pit, and was rearing up when the rock hit him a glancing blow along the side of the head. He saw lights pinwheel before his eyes, and for it moment his muscles went slack, causing him to pitch back to the edge of the grave. Joe Fry's sturdy arms locked around his neck, and the deputy's growl of triumph was harsh in the half-stunned

outlaw's ears as Fry heaved mightily, trying to yank him into the grave.

Long Sam dropped the stock knife he had used to sever Fry's bonds, drove a bony fist into the deputy's face, then heaved back. Fry's hold slipped and he cursed wildly as Long Sam reared back, squatting above the lip of the grave.

"You swell-headed, ungrateful little devil," Long Sam growled. "I saved yore life, and you'd thank me by arrestin' me, if yuh could."

"Yep, you tricky hellion," Fry panted.

"Yuh missed them bandits with every shot yuh fired, so don't claim yuh was tryin' to down any of 'em. But they shot Bull Mooney and Gus Lynn to ribbons before they left. Yuh're part of that bunch, Littlejohn. Yuh pulled this play, hopin' to fool me. But I'll bet Blanco took that forty thousand dollars with him when he left, didn't he?"

"I dropped my knife in that grave," Long Sam said gruffly. "Yuh'd better find it, cut the ropes off your ankles, and skin out of here. Blanco and his bunch didn't get the forty thousand. I've got it, right here in my shirt. I only shot at the legs of that bunch, because I wouldn't shoot even their kind in the back. Dark as it is, I couldn't line my sights, so I doubt if any of 'em are hurt much. They'll remember this money, and be comin' back. Yuh better be gone when they get here."

"Bull!" Fry growled. "Yuh're not pullin' the wool over my eyes, Littlejohn. You made this grandstand play, hopin' I'd be fool enough to think yuh actually saved my hide and, lay off huntin' yuh, through gratitude. Yuh're the brains of this El Diabolo Blanco gang, just as I've been tryin' to tell that fat-headed sheriff, Rod Varney, down yonder at Foxfire!"

**L**ONG SAM got out of there, knowing he would lose his temper if he listened

to much more. He walked across the clearing and into the brush, so angry he had the shakes as he crawled up into the hand-tooled black saddle on Sleeper's back.

"Some day, that glory-drunk runt will make me so mad I'll do him a meanness," the outlaw growled. "Rattle them big hoofs, Sleeper."

Sleeper snorted at the touch of spurs and headed down a winding stock trail that went generally south through the towering, thorn-armored walls. Long Sam rode fast, taking trails known to very few men. It was a little after midnight when he pulled Sleeper in at the base of a gentle slope, where a cluster of buildings marked the headquarters of old Bart Rowland's vast Rocking R spread. But, late as it was, there were lights blazing in the main ranch-house and other buildings, and Long Sam could see lanterns bobbing around corrals and barns and sheds.

"Somethin' sure has that outfit in a stir," the outlaw figured. "Maybe if I watch where I'm puttin' my big feet, I can—"

"You can elevate, or I'll salivate you," a sharp voice interrupted his thoughts.

Long Sam stiffened up in the saddle, for the voice was unquestionably that of a woman. And she was in a huge moss-hung oak, smack over his head.

"Nina, that you?" he made a guess, his voice tight with uneasiness.

"Oh, fiddle!" came the peevisish reply. "I never get by with grabbing any glory. Here I thought I'd nabbed El Diabolo Blanco, or one of his gang, at least. Who are you?"

"I'm just a bounty-plastered owlhooter named Littlejohn," Long Sam chuckled.

"Long Sam!" came the excited cry. "Gollies, it's been ages since you came to the Rocking R. Here, take my rifle."

Long Sam grinned, took the rifle that

was thrust at him. Then a slender hand touched his arm, slid to his shoulder, and with a recklessness he had forgotten to be on guard against, Nina Rowland, old Bart Rowland's daughter, came down behind Sleeper's saddle.

"Yipee!" Nina squealed, and her arms shot around Long Sam as Sleeper bogged his head, bawled in rage, and swapped ends in the air.

Long Sam cursed under his breath, fought the reins with one hand, and groaned in dismay when Sleeper sunfished, came down in a series of fence-row pitches, then cannily took to the air in a mighty leap. Again the wise old roan swapped ends in mid-leap, and Nina Rowland's reckless laughter mingled with Long Sam's sizzling remarks as they spilled down on the hard earth.

"I ought to use the stock of this rifle for a paddle, and just naturally set you on a fire, Nina," Long Sam beefed. "When in thunderation will yuh grow up, anyhow?"

"Did Grandpa Littlejohn get his rheumatiz jolted?" Nina chuckled.

She was already on her feet, slipping her hands under Long Sam's armpits, mocking his grumpiness with a pretense of helping him up. He laughed suddenly, came to his feet, and pushed the girl's rifle into her hands. Nina was taller than the average girl, and, to Long Sam's notion, a whole lot a more attractive. He had known her for a dozen years, and had seen her grow from a leggy youngster into a lovely, dark-eyed young woman. Nina had always been gaily tomboyish, a cover-up, Long a Sam suspected, for hurts her father had unwittingly brought her by constantly bemoaning the fact that his only child had not been a boy.

"It's a wonder yuh haven't broken yore lovely neck, Nina," Long Sam chuckled now. "Yore mother and father couldn't stop yore tomboyishness, I know.

But didn't marrying settle yuh down any?"

NINA chuckled. "Marrying? I'm not married, Sam."

"Last time I came visitin' at the Rockin' R you and Clay Foley were plannin' to travel in double harness," the gaunt outlaw said cautiously.

"Clay was planning on it, with the help of Mom and Dad," Nina said soberly. "I was five years old, Sam, when mother and Dad took Clay Foley in. He was nine then, and had been deserted by his parents. So far as I'm concerned, Clay is my brother. That's the only feeling I've ever had towards him."

"Come to think of it, more than two years have passed since I visited you folks," Long Sam said quietly. "I hadn't heard that you and Clay Foley had married, but took it for granted that yuh had, since yuh were engaged, last time I was here. Some buckaroo come along and beat Clay's time?"

"No one beat Clay's time, Sam," the girl answered. "I just don't love Clay, and never did. Mother and Dad wouldn't listen to me when I tried to tell them that. They hammered at me until I finally accepted Clay's ring in order to have a little peace. But I was twenty-one, shortly after you visited us, the last time. When I came of age, I gave Clay's ring back to him, and told Mother and Dad to stop meddling unless they wanted me to move out."

"How did Clay Foley take it?" Long Sam asked, making his tone casual.

"Clay took my refusing to marry him the way your too-casual tone tells me you suspect," Nina replied. "Clay's a stinker, Sam, as you darned well know. Dad wanted a son instead of a daughter, and has spoiled Clay badly. Since the day I handed his ring back, Clay has been sullen and bad-tempered. He frightens me at times, for there's something furtive in his

manner. If I told Mother and Dad that, I'd catch what-for, so forget that I said it."

"I'm not gabby, Nina," Long Sam reassured her. "Besides, I'm plumb on yore side of the argument. Clay Foley always was too cocky, to suit me. He hittin' the booze and raisin' Cain, since yuh· denied him eventual ownership of the Rockin' R by bein' too intelligent to marry him?"

"Gollies, Sam, those words are salve in sore wounds," Nina cried. "No, Clay doesn't drink or gamble or do any open cavorting. He's too shrewd for that. But he does have some scheme in his head, I'm sure. The way he looks at me sometimes, Sam, I know very well he intends owning the Rockin' R, even if I have refused to become his means to that end."

"From what I've been hearin', the Rockin' R has been pretty hard hit by this El Diabolo Blanco," Long Sam drawled. "I headed up here soon as I heard that Bart Rowland is about to go bust."

"You heard the truth, Sam," Nina said wearily. "Dad is almost ill from worrying. He spread himself out, two years ago, and got into lumbering and the banking business. Then he put Clay in charge of his whole business affairs, just to salve Clay's feelings after I refused to become Mrs. Clay Foley."

"Seems to me it's about time yore daddy got straightened out on a few things," Long Sam said drily. "Any chance of my seein' him right away, Nina?"

"You can't go up to the house now, Sam," Nina said sharply. "Clay and the only three cowhands we keep at headquarters any more now, Sisco Denton, Curly Hurd and Rick Veale, had a brush with El Diabolo Blanco, earlier tonight."

"That so?" Long Sam probed.

"El Diabolo and his bunch were rounding up some of our remaining pure bred Shorthorns, north of here," the girl

continued. "Clay and the riders spotted them, and there was a running fight. Clay, Curly Hurd and Rick Veale all got slight leg wounds. They came in for fresh horses and are going back to scour the hills for those bandits."

"So Clay Foley got a leg wound, eh?" Long Sam droned. "Well, that ties it up, neat and sure."

"Ties what up?" Nina asked sharply. "Sam, you sound so grim!"

"Clay Foley is yore El Diabolo Blanco, Nina," Long Sam said flatly. "Sisco Denton, Rick Veale and Curly Hurd are the men who have followed the murderin' devil in all his raids."

"Sam, what are you saying?" Nina gasped. "Surely, you must be mistaken. Clay Foley and three of Dad's own riders—"

Her voice trailed off into a stammer. Quietly, Long Sam told her of his run-in with El Diabolo Blanco and the three Rocking R riders earlier in the evening.

"That's how I know Clay Foley is El Diabolo Blanco, Nina," he finished. "Sisco Denton, Curly Hurd and Rick Veale weren't even masked. But I knocked El Diabolo down with a bullet, and if Clay Foley has a leg wound he claims he got fightin' bandits off Rockin' R cattle, that clinches the deal. He's El Diabolo Blanco, for sure. . . . We'd better get goin', girl. If Foley and those other three get fresh hosses under them, they'll split the Rio, gettin' to Mexico. Joe Fry jumped down into that grave before they could shoot him, and they know he'll be here to arrest Sisco Denton, Curly Hurd and Rick Veale."

"Sam, this is horrible," Nina said shakily. "Poor Dad! I just don't know how he'll ever stand this. He worships Clay Foley, and when he finds out—"

"The old fool need not find it out, my dear," a cold voice purred. "No, don't

move, Littlejohn. We've got a bead on you, and on Nina, too."

"CLAY!" Nina gasped. "What are you doing here?"

Clay Foley said thinly, "Fortunately, I saw you get your saddle and bridle when you thought no one was looking, and start down here to your private horse pasture. I suspected that you might have a notion of following us. And since we were heading for Mexico, we couldn't have that."

"I was going for my horse, and I did intend to follow you, Clay," Nina said sharply. "But I heard Sam coming, shinned up this tree, and—"

"The details don't matter, my dear," Foley interrupted. "Littlejohn, I have Sisco and Curly and Rick here with me. You and Nina head south down this swale."

"Sam, I'm scared," Nina gasped. "Clay and these other three fiends will kill us, won't they?"

"Not right away, at least," Long Sam said and chuckled drily. "Yuh see, Nina, there's a forty-thousand-dollar question they'll want me to answer before they harm either of us."

"Hear that, Clay?" Sisco Denton's voice ripped out. "That long-legged son got our money."

"Want Rick and me to slide in and get the gal's rifle and take whatever kind of weapons Littlejohn is packin', Clay?" Curly Hurd's thick voice asked.

"No time for it, here," Foley gritted. "Old Rowland may come huntin' us. We'll march 'em to that shed Nina had built in her horse pasture."

"Sam, can't we do something?" Nina whispered shakily.

"We'd get shot to rags if we made a break or showed fight," Long Sam droned.

"Head south, down this swale, Littlejohn," Clay Foley ordered. "Nina can

keep you traveling in the right direction. Move, both of you."

Long Sam reached, caught Nina's arm. His fingers tightened, warning the girl to obey the bandit's orders. Nina whimpered but moved off along the swale, and soon Long Sam felt a grassless path under his feet. They came to a gate and went through, and Long Sam saw the low shed Nina had had built as a shelter for her private saddle horses.

"Hold these two here, boys," Clay Foley said nervously. "I'll go ahead, get the lantern going in the grain room. When you see the light, bring Littlejohn and the girl on."

Long Sam and Nina stopped, watching Clay Foley's shadowy figure merge with the darkness. A few moments later faint light showed at one end of the shed, and Sisco Denton's surly order sent Long Sam and the girl forward. They walked past the open front of the shed to the west end, where a small space had been boxed off to make a grain and hay room. As they approached the lighted doorway of the feed room, Long Sam glanced over his shoulder. Sisco Denton, Rick Veale and Curly Hurd were about three paces behind him, stalking along with drawn guns.

"Ladies first," Long Sam droned as he and Nina reached the doorway.

Long Sam hesitated, as if he meant to let the girl step through the narrow doorway and into the lighted room where Clay Foley stood beside a lantern. The gaunt outlaw's right hand came up, touched Nina's shoulder as if he meant to reassure the white-faced girl. But suddenly Long Sam's gaunt body flexed like a steel spring, and the hand he had put on Nina's shoulder sent her plummeting down against the wall of the grain room.

"Look out, Clay!" Curly Hurd bawled. "Littlejohn is makin'—"

The stocky, barrel-chested bandit's voice was drowned in the booming roar of six-shooters as Sisco Denton and Rick Veale opened up with their drawn weapons. Curly Hurd's guns chimed in, and the night throbbled to the pounding explosions.

But those three had an elusive target. Long Sam's black garments blended with the shadows as he leaped beyond the weak light that was coming through the doorway. And now the gaunt outlaw's own guns were out, their muzzles tipped with flame that licked out towards the three frantically shooting Rocking R men.

There was no nervous haste in Long Sam's shooting, no frantic cap-busting in the hope he could score a hit by sheer luck.

Fat Rick Veale suddenly squealed like a shoat, dropped smoking guns, and clamped both thick hands to his middle. He staggered into the path of Sisco Denton, who had suddenly leaped towards the open feed room door. They both fell, Denton cursing and Rick Veale's voice lifted in a shuddering moan.

Long Sam's right-hand Colt bucked against his palm, and Curly Hurd's beefy face went slack as a bullet ripped through his brain. A bullet bit Long Sam's left thigh, knocking him off his feet. He saw Sisco Denton rearing up, hunting him with bugged-out eyes and the smoking snout of a cocked gun. Long Sam's left-hand Colt thundered, then the right boomed an echo. Sisco Denton fell back across Rick Veale, screaming in agony, both arms broken.

**B**UT Long Sam wasted only a glance on Sisco Denton, knowing shock would keep the cutthroat anchored for some time. Clay Foley had not once shown his handsome face at the doorway, yet Long Sam could hear him in the grain room, cursing and shouting. The lantern

was still going, and as Long Sam got on his feet and edged towards the doorway he glimpsed Clay Foley's black-thatched head, poking cautiously around the sill. Foley's face turned so white his blue eyes looked black when he saw his three men lying there in the swath of lanternlight.

"Up with 'em, Foley!" Long Sam barked, leaping through the doorway as he delivered the command.

Long Sam's guns were out and cocked. Clay Foley had fallen back, stark terror in his eyes. It was over then and there, and Foley's hands opened, letting the six-shooters spill to the floor even as Long Sam braced his tall legs, braking for a halt. Then it was not over at all, for instead of braking him to a halt, Long Sam's boot heels began to skid faster and faster.

"Loose hay on the floor," he realized and tried desperately to shift his weight and break the skidding, stumbling rush.

But his left foot skidded completely out of control, and suddenly he was down on the hay littered floor, with Clay Foley's squall of vicious delight ringing in his ears. Long Sam butted the wall, flopped over sidewise, and got his bearings.

Clay Foley had snatched up his guns, and their muzzles were tipped with licking tongues of powder blaze as he sidled towards the open door, white teeth flashing in a murderous grin. Long Sam's left-hand Colt thundered, but a bullet cut his cheek just as he was pulling the trigger, and the slug missed.

Clay Foley gained the door, and his grin was savage now as he checked his rush, leveled both guns, and let their hammers skid from beneath his slim thumbs. But that moment of checking his speed, of leveling his guns carefully for a sure, telling blast, was Foley's last mistake. Long Sam Littlejohn's right-hand six-shooter seemed to fire at the same time Clay Foley's twin guns exploded. Yet

there had been that fractional part of a second's difference, and Long Sam's slug was already ripping through Foley's heart, jerking him up and backwards, when the twin guns of the murderous El Diabolo Blanco flamed.

Long Sam stood up, reloading his guns as he watched the shiny boots sticking up in the doorway become immobile. He holstered his weapons and stepped over Clay Foley's feet into the open shed, where Nina Rowland stood slanting her rifle at Sisco Denton, and trying to keep the barrel from wobbling.

"Sam, you're hurt," she said tensely. "There's blood all over your face and on your trouser leg, too!"

"Thanks for keepin' in the clear, Nina," Long Sam said wearily. "And don't worry about these hurts of mine. They're just reminders that jumpin' the devil ain't always a healthy stunt to try. Here, I'll take charge of that Denton buzzard. I want to get him up yonder to the house and let him tell your daddy the straight of things."

"This will just about kill Dad, I'm afraid," Nina said shakily. "If only we

could have caught onto Clay before he broke us."

Bart Rowland is too much of a fighter to curl up and die over the hurt he'll get when he learns about Clay," Long Sam said evenly. "And right here, inside my shirt, is enough cash money to see Bart through the tight Clay Foley's thievery put him in. Get the lantern, and lead the way to the house, Nina. I'll have to lug this Sisco cuss, for he's sure in no shape to walk."

The girl went obediently for the lantern, and Long Sam stood there, feeling the bulges of the packeted money under his shirt. He thought of South America and how easy it would be to take the money he had and go there, beyond the reach of the law that hated and hounded him. Then Nina returned with the lantern, and something in her soft, dark eyes made the gaunt outlaw forget about South America as he reached down, lifted Sisco Denton to his shoulder, and followed the girl and the bobbing lantern through the horse trap gate.