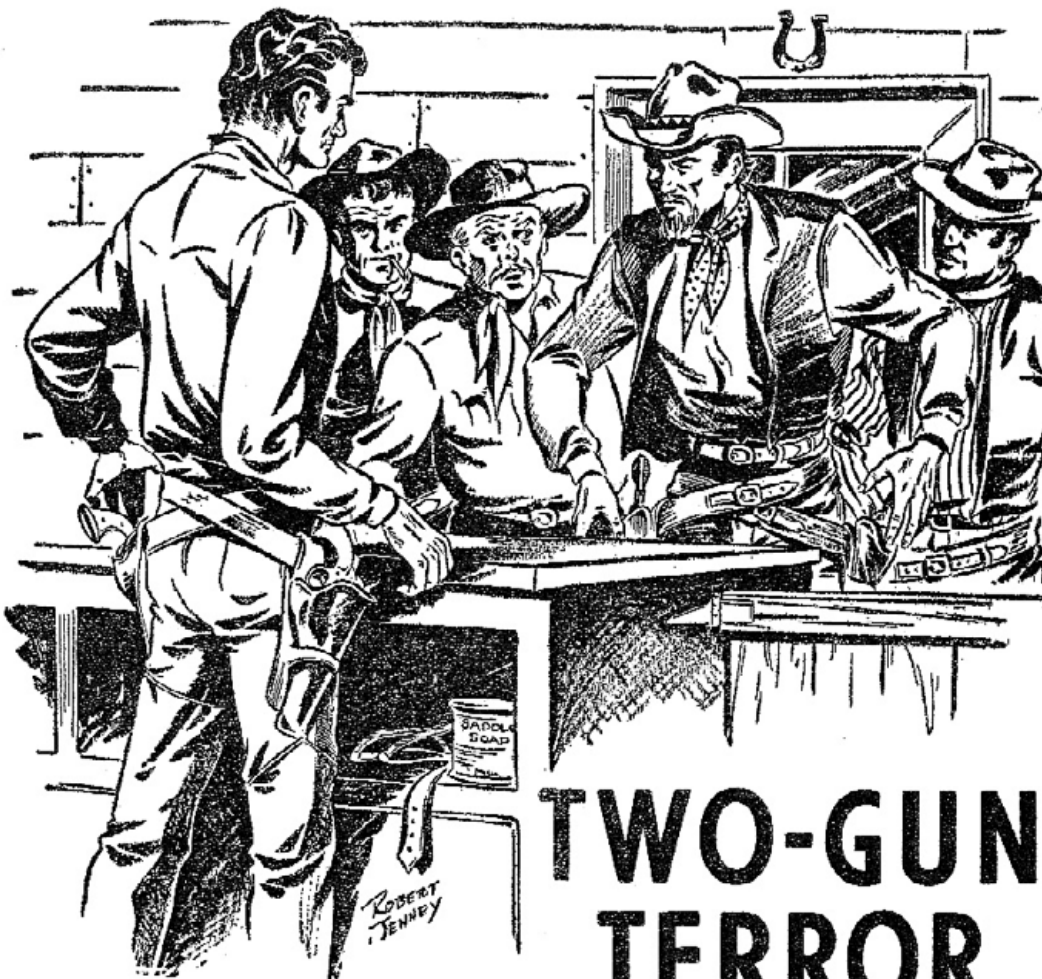


By ROBERT J. HOGAN



"Go ahead, Gort," Scotty said

## TWO-GUN TERROR

*No man knew for sure whether Scotty was a gun hand or not—till the night the Wild Bunch cut loose*

STEVE SCOTT eyed the bewhiskered old man staring at him through the front window of his saddle shop.

"Now what you suppose makes that old gent so fascinated with this face of mine?" Steve said.

Bud Nemo of the Rocking Y shook his head. "Never can tell what crazy old Hank'll do when he's seeing things."

"How come I haven't seen him before?"

"Reckon he's been off prospecting while you were setting up shop, Scotty," Bud said. He twanged his banjo. "You got something you'd like me to play on this plunk drum head?"

Scotty nodded. "Play that one about sleeping by the river."

Old Hank had gone to the north pane and was shading his eyes.

Since Steve Scott had hung out his sign SCOTTY'S SADDLERY the shop had become a hangout for friendly talk.

Ans Wolston came in, eyed the old man outside.

“What’s ailing Hank? Got another one of his queer spells?”

Scotty motioned Hank in. “Come have a good close look!”

Bud Nemo began to sing and Ans joined him in his shouting voice.

Old Hank peered in the door angrily. “How you expect a man to think with that noise going on?” He stared at the saddler.

“How do I look close up?” Scotty grinned.

“Can’t never be sure when you see a fella face to face after seeing him last from under a table.”

“Who was under the table?” Ans asked.

“Me,” Hank said. “Keeping out of bullets’ way. Say, who belongs to them ivory-stocked guns on the wall?”

A tall man came in carrying a black bag.

“Hi, Doc.”

Doc Warren sat on the bench, got out his pipe. “How’s everybody this morning?”

“You’re interrupting something important,” Hank said. “I was asking Scotty here about—”

Doc sucked on his pipe, didn’t seem to hear old Hank. “That wild kid of the widow Gort’s is back in town.”

“Mighty shame about him,” Ans said. “There’s a lad can do anything. But he gets to be the durndest wild pup with drinking.”

“Lightning on the draw,” Nemo said. “And shoots straighter than a tight rope.”

“That reminds me,” Old Hank cut in. “Like I was saying. Them guns there, if they’re yours, Scotty, answers my question. Yes, sir. I’ve seen you before all right. No doubt about it now for sure.”

RINGO JACKSON stood in the doorway watching Hank with amusement. “You been away a coupla months prospecting this time, Hank. Did the sun get you a little more loco than usual?”

The boys laughed.

Ans said, “I hear you come back with a fortune in gold this time, Hank?”

Everybody laughed loudly.

Hank turned on them. “Shut up your howling mouths, you varmints. I ain’t seeing things when I say I seen this man Scott before. You talk about young Ben Gort throwing down a gun and shooting? Say—”

“Easy,” Ringo said. “Gort’s riding this way with the wild bunch from up Gopher Gulch.”

There was a clatter of hoofs outside and four riders reined up their horses at the rail.

The tall one with the thin black beard got down and his guns hugged his legs as he moved. He carried a bridle in his hand.

The shop grew silent as Ben Gort entered.

Gort looked over the counter at Scotty. “How long will it take to fix this busted bridle?”

Scotty looked the bridle over casually. “Tomorrow about this time?”

“I’ll stop by,” Gort said and started out.

Old Hank caught Gort’s arm. “I was just saying, Ben,” he said. “I was just saying nobody don’t seem to know who this new saddler is. I wasn’t sure till I seen his ivory-stocked six-guns hanging there on the wall. You think you’re a fast man with a gun, Ben Gort. Say! Last time I seen this man in action—” Hank turned to Scotty. “Say, you was wearing a badge then. It was in the Eagle Saloon out Mustang River way. There was a wild bunch riding and this leader of the bunch

came in and the shooting started. I slid under one of the tables and watched from there. You talk about shooting—with them same guns, too.”

Scotty grinned. “That was a fight, wasn’t it, Hank? Never expected to have so much trouble at the start. Usually when I’d walk into a place like that, things’d get calm, but not this time. My guns got so hot I had to put on my gloves to hold onto them.”

Doc Warren sat sucking on his pipe and chuckling.

“I tell you,” Hank barked, “it’s a fact and no laughing matter. I tell you I was there!”

“Did I say you wasn’t?” Scotty replied, looking serious.

Hank frowned, tried to think. “That shows you the man,” he said, brightening. “In the middle of a fight like that, he even remembered me.”

Ben Gort’s mouth twisted sidewise as he studied the situation.

“I’ll stop by tomorrow,” he said.

A thin little woman came by, paused.

“Oh, there are you, Ben,” she said. “Would you take a fifty pound sack of flour home for me?”

“Sure, Mom,” Ben Gort said. “Sure thing. Right now.”

“That’s the sweetest woman in town,” Doc said, “and mother of that wild Indian. How do you figure things like that?”

“Now there,” Hank said, “is something for you to do, Scotty. Put that young skunk in his place when he gets nasty.”

“Forget it, will you?” Scotty said. “I’m a peaceful gent in the saddle business and I got no hankering for fight.” He glanced out of the window at a buckboard that had drawn up and he tossed a piece of leather over a special sidesaddle to hide it.

Ringo said, “Scotty, your girl wants to see you.”

“He’s got eyes,” Ans said.

Scotty went out, smiling.

Laura Vance said, “Dad asked me to bring down the extra set of harness for you to put in top shape again, Scotty.”

Scotty smiled up at her. “Tell your dad I sure thank him for the business.”

She laughed, said softly, “You don’t think anybody else would get our business as long as you were here, do you?”

Her eyes were soft upon him, gently possessive.

“What time’ll you be ready for the dance tomorrow night?” Scotty asked.

“Seven-thirty be all right?”

“I’ll be there.” He watched her back the team and buckboard into the street and head for the general store.

“You’ve got a wonderful girl there, Scotty,” Doc said. “Where’d you two happen to meet?”

Scotty began shaping a piece of leather. “It was in Kansas City. Laura was going to school there and on this day we met, it was muddy as a sink hole. Laura was heading for the station in Kansas City and she had to cross the muddy street. She came holding her dress in one hand and her carpet bag in the other, picking her way on what solid spots she could find, dainty as a killdee. All at once the carpet valise broke open. Instead of mud and the smell of horse in the air there was little lace things all over and the air was full of French sachet.

“I helped her gather her things and then I carried the whole business, including her, to the station and saw her on the train. Later I came here and opened a saddle shop. I’d always wanted to settle down in a peaceful little town like this.”

“What were you doing when you first met her?” Doc asked.

“Didn’t you hear me say I knew him when he was the killingest hombre that ever drewed a gun?” Hank boasted.

“I’m asking you,” Doc said.

The others hanging around leaned forward, listening, waiting.

Scotty grinned. "Now look, fellas. I said all I wanted was just to relax and not have to shoot anybody any more. I've hung up my guns."

Doc rose and knocked out his pipe. "Got to be going."

"Me, too," Hank said. "I got business a-plenty."

Scotty said, "I'd be obliged, Hank, if you didn't mention me."

Hank shuffled for the door. "Wouldn't say nothing for the world."

Ringo chuckled. "Only to the first one that'll buy him a drink."

Bud Nemo nodded. "I can see him now. He'll sidle up to the bar and say, 'I got news that'll blow your hat off.' And then somebody'll buy him a drink and he'll start talking about your gunning, Scotty."

Ans chuckled. "Scotty, Old Hank'll have you the most famous gun slinger ever to draw a gun by the time he gets through talking."

"I hope nobody believes him," Scotty said.

WHEN supper time came, Scotty went to his boarding house and Mother Murphy tagged him.

"What's this about you being a famous lawman?"

Little Jack Murphy said, "I heard, Scotty, you was first an outlaw and then you turned straight and became a lawman."

"You don't want to believe all you hear," Scotty said, chuckling.

Toward dessert, a gun went off in the evening air and there was some yelling. Jack leaned toward Scotty.

"You going to help Sheriff Rand keep this wild bunch down that Ben Gort's got started?"

Scotty shook his head. "Just call me Peaceful." He got up from the table. "I might be working a little late, Mrs. Murphy. Will you leave the door unlocked for me?"

He knew Laura wouldn't be in town tonight. He could work on her birthday present. He'd just begun on the side saddle when Doc came in.

"Miss Laura'll be mighty proud of that seat when you give it to her, Scotty," the doctor said.

"I sure hope so," Scotty said and worked on.

Doc sat silently puffing on his pipe for some time. It was obvious that he had something on his mind. Finally, he said:

"Ben Gort's got that wild bunch starting to tear for the coming weekend."

"I thought I heard some shooting and yelling while I was eating supper," Scotty said, casually.

"You know," Doc said, "Sheriff Rand isn't as young as he used to be. He's slowed up considerable. I wouldn't be surprised if Ben Gort could outdraw and outshoot him now, easy."

Scotty paused and turned. "This Ben Gort doesn't look like too bad a youngster."

"It's different when he's been drinking," Doc said. He puffed on for a time as if he were studying the situation. "I was talking to Sheriff Rand about a half hour ago. He was asking me if I knew whether what they're saying about you is true."

Scotty chuckled. "You folks are sure enough suckers for tall stories."

"You mean you aren't a lightning draw man and a dead shot, like Old Hank says you are?"

Scotty dropping his working hand and faced the doctor. "Look, Doc. I'd sprain my wrist trying to draw a six-gun. And I'd miss whatever I aimed at by a couple of

yards.”

Doc shook his head earnestly. “I’d hate to believe that, under the circumstances.”

“Under what circumstances?”

“As I say, Sheriff Rand was wondering if you’d accept a deputy badge at least until the wild bunch got calmed down and under control.”

“Doc, I’ve already told you—”

“Trouble is,” Doc went on, ignoring his protest, “there isn’t anybody else in the county that’s really handy with a six-gun and it’ll take somebody like that to scare these wild rannies into calming down.”

“Doc, I—”

Warren was rising. “Just thought I’d mention it so you could think it over, Scotty. We all like you here. And we need you in the saddle business. But as things are shaping up, we need you a lot worse just now in the other capacity.”

Doc hesitated in the doorway, knocked out his pipe against the outside door casing. “Good night.”

Twice during the night as he worked, Scotty heard shots and yells down the street.

He went back to his boarding house late and went to bed but not to sleep. He lay worrying about the situation. He said, “Now what am I going to do?”

He didn’t sleep much, got up early, had breakfast and went back to the shop.

The boys came drifting in now and then. It being Saturday, the crowd that hung around grew larger. It seemed that almost everybody he knew dropped in, or came by to glance at him through the saddlery window and move on.

Bud Nemo came in before noon with his banjo and started plunking out some tunes and Ans and Ringo sang a little. But the atmosphere about the shop had grown strained.

Old Hank came and sat on the doorstep listening and watching Scotty.

Finally Hank said, “I’d sure like to see them guns of yours keep the peace of this town, only this time I don’t want to be around if you start throwing lead.” He glanced at the others standing around. “You young squirts think you’d like to be in on a real lawman killing, don’t you?”

Ringo and Bud grinned.

“You wouldn’t like it if you’d seen it the way I seen it,” Hank said. “From under a table, where you could look up into the faces of the men that was falling. Then you don’t care what a man’s been before, when he’s slobbering blood and grunting like a beast—”

“Quiet,” Scotty said. “You’re turning my stomach and it’s close to noon.”

“You’re a fine one to turn green,” Hank said. “You being the one that done what I seen. Once is enough, I tell you. When you see—”

“Look,” Scotty said. “Go down and get yourself a couple of drinks, Hank. Here.” He tossed two bits to him and Hank caught the coin.

THE others sat around silently after Hank had left. Scotty had felt it all morning. A sort of respectful and also fearful gaze. Not being so friendly and unhampered with him. Now there seemed to have grown up a barrier between him and the friends that came in to visit.

Now coming on noon, first one got up and left and then another. Scotty worked on alone. When the hands of his watch were at twelve, Sheriff Rand came thumping into his shop with a nod.

Rand was grey on top and shaggy. His shoulders were a little bent and the right-hand gun that he carried hung rather listlessly in his leg holster.

But Rand’s manner was forthright enough. He tossed a deputy badge on the counter and eyed Scotty. “I’m hoping you’ll pick it up and put it on, Scotty.”

Scotty put down his awl and came over to face Rand.

“Sheriff,” he said. “I’ve already told Doc Warren all about what kind of a gun hand I am. But maybe you won’t believe that.”

“Doc didn’t,” Rand said. “Doc thinks you’re still trying to keep out of shooting people.”

“I’m trying to make you understand,” Scotty said. “I told Doc about meeting Laura Vance in Kansas City, and how that decided me to come here and go into the saddle business here. I don’t reckon I told Doc everything because—well I guess I kind of liked being admired a little. I know it’s silly, but that’s why I brought those guns out and hung them up.”

“They aren’t your guns? I thought you told Hank they were.”

“They’re my guns all right now,” Scotty said. “They came in the deal for my saddle shop in Kansas City. You see, I got sick and tired of just plodding along in the city without any excitement. About half the gents that came in for work to be done would tell about exciting things happening west of there. So when I saw Laura I decided to sell out to my cousin. He’d been wanting to come to the city and settle down and he’d learned the saddlery business when he was a kid the same as me.”

“You were telling about the guns,” Rand said.

“That’s how I got his guns. I said I’d like a pair of guns like his and he told me to take them. He’d throw them in extra on the saddle shop deal in Kansas City. So I brought them here and hung them up and with that ‘Scotty’ carved on each ivory stock, Old Hank must have recognized them from the coast where my cousin was lawman and—”

“Scotty,” Rand cut in, “I’ve just wired the coast where you were. I got the story

of your career. They say nobody can outdraw or outshoot you. They say, just as you told Hank and some of the boys, that you quit so you could live a peaceful life and stop killing.”

“I was just leading him on when I said that,” Scotty said. “I was only fooling. I didn’t think it would go this far.”

“They just wired your description,” Sheriff Rand said. “You fit the description perfectly.”

“That’s like I say,” Scotty said. “My cousin Hal, he and I always got taken for each other, only you get us side by side and you could tell the difference without much trouble. We both looked like our grandfather Scott did when he was younger.”

“Scotty, you know what I think?”

“I’m giving you the truth,” Scotty said. “I’m molasses in January on the draw and I can’t hit the whole side of a butte with a rifle, to say nothing of one of those sixguns.”

“I think you’re lying,” Rand said. “And I think you got a lot of nerve coming into this town to settle down, figure to marry one of our nicest girls in the county, and then refuse to do your share in an emergency.”

Sheriff Rand nodded at the deputy badge.

“I’m leaving that for you to think over. I hope you come to your senses.” He walked out and down the boardwalk.

A couple of the hangers-on drifted in as the afternoon wore on but they drifted out again. Scotty was alone when Will Vance, Laura’s father, came m after his harness.

“It’s all ready for you, Mr. Vance,” Scotty said.

Vance didn’t smile, or show any sign of friendliness. He took the harness over his arm, paid for it and paused. His eyes shot to the guns on the wall.

"I've just been talking to Sheriff Rand," Vance said. He nodded at the deputy badge lying where the sheriff had tossed it. "What are you going to do about it, Scotty?"

"Mr. Vance," Scotty said. "I've already told the sheriff and Doc Warren how it is. I'm no fast-draw man. I'm no gun hand at all. It wouldn't be any use for me to—"

"Then you're bluffing and traveling under false colors with those famous guns hanging up there," Vance said. "In any event, I don't expect Laura will care about seeing you again." He left abruptly, got into his buckboard and turned the team around fast for home.

Scotty had started after him, to explain further. He gave it up and came back in his shop. Some of his gang were now watching him from down the street and the other side. They hung around in front of the hotel now.

He worked on alone during the rest of the afternoon. Those who came to get their saddles or harness, or to bring in other work to be done, talked very little. They came and went.

**Y**OUNG JACK MURPHY came in as it began to grow dark.

"Here's the sandwiches you wanted from Mom so you wouldn't have to leave the shop to eat," he said. Then he stayed to watch Scotty work. A few minutes later he said, "It ain't true what they're saying about you, is it, Scotty? That you lost your nerve and that was why you quit being lawman out on the coast? That ain't so, is it?"

Scotty worked on, trying to think of an answer. He heard the kid playing with the deputy badge on the counter.

"Why don't you pin this on and show 'em? I hear the wild bunch is getting liquored right now down at the Palace

Saloon. There's going to be trouble, sure."

"Jack," Scotty said, "I—"

It was almost dark now and Scotty turned as he heard shots coming from down the street. There were more shots and a couple of yells.

"There they go. See what I tell you?" Jack said.

"Look," Scotty said. "There's likely to be trouble. You better get on home before you get hurt."

"Not till I see you pin this deputy badge on," the kid said. He was coming toward Scotty with the badge. "Go on. Pin it on and I'll go home. I want to tell Ma and everybody that you ain't afraid."

There was more shooting and someone came running up the boardwalk.

"Go on home, I tell you." Scotty's voice was sharp and harsh.

Jack looked at him, a light of fear came into his eyes, then he braced himself. "No, sir. Not till you pin on that badge, Scotty."

"Oh, all right." Scotty was pinning on the badge. There was more shooting from below. "Now get out the back door before I—"

A horse squealed and took to running out in the street.

A familiar voice called, "Scotty! Scotty! You up here in your—"

Scotty pushed the kid out the back door, closed it, turned.

Old Hank came puffing in the front door of the saddle shop. He pointed down the street.

"I came up to warn you. The wild bunch—Ben Gort. Sheriff Rand—he was trying to tame down the boys and Gort challenged him to draw. They drew together and Gort shot first by considerable. Shot the gun out of the sheriff's hand. Wounded his hand. Now Gort says he hears you're the law and he's coming up to have a show-down with

you!”

Scotty took a quick look out of the window. He glanced at his guns. He was still trying to think.

“Get them guns on before this crazy kid trying to grow a black beard comes up and murders you in cold blood!”

“I keep telling you all, it wouldn’t do any good,” Scotty said. But all the time he was saying it, he was taking down his guns and belts and Old Hank was helping him buckle them around his waist.

“Now you look like your old self. Now you’re ready for ‘em, Scotty. This fight won’t last more’n a few seconds, then you can go on back to peaceful living. Nobody won’t ever bother you again.”

Scotty heard the shouts and the shooting down the street. He took out his left-hand gun and spun the cylinder to make sure that it was loaded and ready. He took out the right-hand gun, did the same. He hefted the guns in his holster. They hung light and free at his finger tips.

He squared his shoulders and parted his feet behind the counter.

“That star looks mighty fine on you, Scotty,” Hank said. “Hey, you’ll excuse me if I don’t stay close by when the shooting starts.”

Scotty nodded. His lips seemed to be sealed shut.

He moved so his back was close to the wall and yet there was room for his elbows to swing behind him in a draw. He stood waiting.

Hank started for the door but he was too late.

Ben Gort, swaggering as if the weight of his twin guns made him sway, came through the door. Behind Gort were three of his wild pals. They spread out at either side of him.

“I left a bridle here yesterday,” Gort said. “You got it done?”

“Right here,” Scotty said. He took it

off a hook without turning his back and tossed it on the counter. “That’ll be four bits.”

Ben Gort leered at him. His eyes followed Scotty’s face, ran down to the deputy star on his chest, fastened on the ivory-stocked guns and the eyes held there.

“Four bits,” Scotty said again. “And while you’ve got your hand in your pocket, near your guns, you might as well take them out and lay those on the counter, too.”

Ben Gort stopped half-way to his pocket with his right hand.

“Who you telling to leave his guns?”

“I’m telling you,” Scotty said. He took a step to the left, spread his legs, stood like that with thumbs hooked in his gun belts. “I understand you shot the sheriff in a draw.”

“Show him how you shoot a gun out of a lawman’s hand,” a ranny chirped. “Show him, Gort.”

Scotty gave his head a short nod. “Go ahead if you want to chance it. Only I hope you don’t, Gort, because I’m trying not to kill any more.”

Gort was glaring. His head was down. He was sinking slightly in a crouch, ready to yank his guns.

**O**LD HANK came up from the back of the shop.

He said, “For the sake of your mother, Ben, don’t go drawing with this man. I’ve seen him draw in a saloon full of men. Him against the pack. It ain’t fun seeing what goes on when his guns start flashing. I was under a table last time. I got no hankering to see you get your gizzard blasted open and splashing on my clothes. I don’t want to see these kids with you, their faces looking pained as they get their hearts blowed clean out of ‘em.”

“Shut up, you old fool,” the blocky



hand that was riding with the bunch said.

Gort swung an arm and knocked the old man back a yard. "Get out of my way!" Gort's face was going pale.

"Maybe you never heard how they sound, when Scotty shoots 'em," Hank barked, raising his voice. "Blood gurgling from their mouths, talking gibberish with their eyes rolling and wishing they'd never crossed Lawman Scott."

Doc Warren came striding in the door. "Hold on there!" he said. "Gort, stop acting like a locoed steer. You came out all right with the sheriff. It was an even draw and his hand'll get better. But this might be murder. You can't tell. And besides, I saw the telegram the sheriff got after checking on this man, Scott. He's lightning death, the wire said. Nobody's got a chance against him."

Scotty hadn't moved a muscle so far as anyone could see. His voice came out clear and hard in the sudden stillness.

"Ben Gort, I'm giving you one more chance. Turn your back, take out your guns and hand them to Doc. You're in no shape to be handling guns."

Gort was trembling slightly in the tension.

"Okay, Doc. You help him keep on living," Scotty said. "Step behind him, take his guns and lay them on the counter."

Doc Warren was white of face, too, but he moved as if he had been through worse than this.

Gort never moved. There was utter silence while Doc stepped behind him and Doc kept talking.

He said, "Why I remember when you were born, Ben. Cute little ticket you were. I'd sure hate to see you get a bullet between the eyes before you had a chance even to get your guns out."

Then Doc lifted out Gort's guns and Ben Gort lifted his arms some, his hands

shaking as he raised them.

Doc laid the guns on the counter, muzzles toward the back of the room. He turned to the tall ranny of the wild bunch.

"You're next, son. Let's have your guns. No need anybody getting killed just for a little fun." He lifted those guns and the next rider and the next stepped up.

"Thanks, gentlemen," Scotty said. "You all come back Monday morning and pick up your shooting irons. And hereafter, you'll find this'll be a good place to check 'em before you start liquoring. Good night now, men. Ben, you can pick up your bridle when you come for your guns Monday."

Ben Gort turned and walked out of the door. The wild bunch followed him. Doc Warren closed the door.

Scotty took the first breath, it seemed to him, that he had taken in an hour. He nodded to Old Hank.

"Thanks for your help in talking them out of trouble."

Hank chuckled rather hysterically. "Wasn't nothing I done for you," he said. "You coulda handled things, only I got caught in here and I didn't want to see no more killing like I seen that other time. Makes me sick. I don't get over it for months. Can't sleep nights."

"Well you'll sleep tonight," Doc said, grinning and mopping the sweat that had collected on his forehead.

He closed the door on Hank and turned to Scotty.

"I hope I never see anything closer than that," he said.

"You did believe me, then, Doc, when I said I wasn't a gun hand? You knew I was bluffing?"

"I didn't believe you," Doc said. "So I telegraphed the man you said you sold your saddle shop to, your cousin. Look here what your cousin Hal wired back to me." He held out a telegram.

Steve Scott read:

STEVE SCOTT YOU REFER TO NO GUN  
HAND STOP DON'T LET HIM START  
DRAWING AND SHOOTING OR HE'LL BE  
MURDERED

HAL SCOTT

Scotty handed the telegram back to the doctor. "That's just what I kept telling you."

"Phew!" Doc whistled and shook his head. "We won't ever tell anybody about this but just the same you better practice up with those guns so if you ever do have to shoot you'll know how." Doc shook his head again, took a deep breath and blew it out. "I never saw such nerve in my life."

"Thanks," Scotty said. "But maybe you could have figured out something else to do under the circumstances."

Doc thought about it while he filled his pipe. He shook his head.

"No, I guess that was all you could do, Scotty, throw a bluff."

Scotty looked at his watch, unbuckled his gun belts.

"I'd better get started changing my clothes so I can get to the Vance place early enough for some explaining I've got to do. You see this afternoon Will Vance came by and said—"

"I know," Doc said. "He talked to me. But wait till he sees that badge on you. Then wait till I tell him how you faced down that wild bunch. He's liable to turn worse braggart about you than Old Hank."