

HUNTSVILLE

A Novel of Post Civil War Texas

Copyright © 2013 Glynn Rogers

Smashwords Edition

This story is dedicated to the loving memory of Carol Lynn Rogers and Matthew Layne Rogers, two of my dear children who the Lord has called home. They were both taken in mid-life, and their passing has left a great hole in my heart.

Preface

Huntsville, Texas was founded in 1835 by Pleasant and Ephraim Gray as an Indian trading post, and the town was named for Huntsville, Alabama, former home of the Gray family. The post was ideally situated for trade with the Bidai, Alabama and Coushatta Indians who inhabited the region. Relations between these tribes and the early white settlers appears to have been peaceful. As trade along the Trinity River grew, and colonists arrived to exploit the timber and rich soil of the bottom lands, Huntsville became the center of increasing commercial activity. When the Civil War began in 1861, the population had grown to about 1,000 souls.

Huntsville is an historical novel. The story begins in 1874 -- nine years after Lee's Surrender -- and the action takes place in and around this small southeast Texas town. Most, but not all, of the characters, places and incidents portrayed are fictional, and these have been woven into the fabric of history in such a way that, hopefully, the reader will find it entertaining.

Most of the factual information about the town of Huntsville, Texas during the post Civil War period, was taken from a collection of personal accounts that were assembled into a book called *The History of Huntsville and Walker County*. Some facts were gleaned from *The Handbook of Texas Online*. The Eutaw House and Gibbs General Store mentioned in the tale actually existed during this period, and were located on opposite corners of Cedar and Jackson Streets at the court house square as the story indicates. Creath's saddlery and Hume's blacksmith shop were also in operation back then. The Oakwood Cemetery is still in use today, and is the burial

place of General Sam Houston, hero of San Jacinto. The street names referred to in the story were the ones in use at that time, though many of the streets today bear different names.

The chief administrator of the Texas state prison at Huntsville has the unusual title of "Superintendent". In the story, rather than use this unwieldy five-syllable word, the author has chosen to use the more familiar term of "Warden". And those familiar with the town of Huntsville may notice that rather than being in the heart of town, the story location of the prison is a few miles out.

The general information on the Civil War, and the description of the reconstruction era in Texas, as related in the Prologue, is accurately depicted. The brief account of the Battle of Galveston commanded by Confederate General John Bankhead Magruder is true, as is the successful campaign against the Comanche Indians led by Texas Ranger Captain John Salmon Ford. Also, Ford's leadership role in the "Cavalry of the West" during the Civil War, is factual.

Much of the information on Texas history was taken from two comprehensive volumes: one entitled LONE STAR -- A History of Texas and Texans written by T. R. Fehrenbach; and the other entitled The Texas Rangers -- A Century of Frontier Defense written by Walter Prescott Webb. And a rich source of western lore was found among the pages of the Time-Life series of The Old West. With that said, the author invites you to read and enjoy.

Prologue

The American Civil War lasted almost exactly four years -- from the first battle on April 12, 1861 when Confederate troops fired on Union forces at Fort Sumter -- until Lee's surrender at Appomattox on April 9, 1865. Over 600,000 brave men gave their lives in this bloody, fratricidal war -- more than all the U.S. losses in WWI and WWII combined. Confederate fatalities totaled about 250,000, with Texans accounting for about ten percent.

It was not so much their defeat, but the onerous and corrupt reconstruction policies imposed on the South that instilled the resentment and hatred of the North that still smolders in the hearts of many southerners to this day. The reconstruction regime established in Texas was especially venal and oppressive.

President Lincoln's reconstruction plan for the South was one of compassion and humanitarian aid that would heal the emotional wounds and reunite the country. His credo was malice toward none and charity for all. But his charitable policies were bitterly opposed by a vengeful and militant group in the U. S. Congress known as the Republican Radicals. These men wanted to punish white southerners and confiscate their property. Though it has never been proven, there is credible evidence that John Wilkes Booth did not act alone in the assassination of Lincoln, but was the instrument of a conspiracy masterminded by this cabal. (The Lincoln Conspiracy by David Balsiger and Charles Sellier)

After the war, the economy in Texas was in shambles. Practically all wealth, except for the land, had been exhausted. Nearly a quarter of the white male population had been killed or maimed. For nine long years after Lee's surrender, Texans chafed under the yoke of an army of occupation and a despotic political regime of carpetbaggers and scalawags.

At first, the state was placed under military rule, with Negro troops making up the greater part of the occupation army. The composition of these forces was no accident. It was done deliberately to humiliate the people. Occupying forces committed outrageous and lawless acts against the citizenry, and the army tribunals that had replaced civil courts, refused to hear charges against Union soldiers no matter how odious their crimes. The Negro garrison at Victoria terrorized the populace, and at Brenham, Negro troops burned and sacked the town. Union soldiers also raided Brownsville with widespread looting and destruction of property.

For the first five years of reconstruction there was economic chaos and political turmoil in Texas -- and then it got worse. In 1870 Edmond J. Davis, a Republican Radical, was elected Governor in a rigged election. One of Davis's first acts was the establishment of a state police force composed of 200 men answering directly to him.

The authority of the State Police was absolute. They were a law unto themselves. Many State Policemen were former outlaws or ignorant, recently-freed Negroes drunk with their newfound power and authority. Abuses were many. Unwarranted searches and seizures occurred daily. Habeas Corpus was denied. State Policemen, both black and white, killed with impunity. In Texas during this era,

hatred of the State Police was a white heat burning in the hearts of the people. Nearly all had had some friend or relative severely abused, if not killed by these brigands.

CHAPTER 1

Pardoned

An elderly guard approached his table just as Jacob Magruder was finishing his breakfast in the big, noisy prison mess hall. Speaking loudly to be heard over the clamor, the guard declared, "Jake, the new warden wants to see ya' in his office."

Magruder glanced up, a questioning look on his face.

"What's he want with me, Carter?"

"Well now, he didn't say, Jake. But I'm shore he'll tell ya' when ya' get there. C'mon."

Heads turned and curious eyes stared as the two men walked toward the exit.

Carter led Magruder down a long corridor unlocking and re-locking two sets of heavy steel doors in turn. Finally he stopped before a large oaken door and knocked. A voice inside responded, "Come in."

Upon entering, Carter announced, "Warden, this here's John Jacob Magruder, pris'ner number 10942. Jake, this's Warden Brian Henders who took Warden Ogilvie's place las' month."

Henders, sitting behind a big desk, rose from his chair, smiled and extended his right hand. Accepting the offered hand, Magruder muttered a barely audible, "Hello."

Peering at the prisoner over his little gold-rimmed spectacles, the warden beheld a tall, broad-shouldered, ruggedly handsome man with a thick thatch of dark hair.

"Carter, you are excused," he said. Carter nodded, turned and shuffled out, closing the door.

"Magruder, I've got some good news for you. Please sit down."

Magruder took the indicated chair, somewhat anxious and still puzzled by this unprecedented summons. The warden, a portly man of about sixty years, then sat down and began searching through stacks of papers on his cluttered desk. Finally locating the desired

document, he picked it up and announced, “Magruder, I have here a dispatch sent by special courier from Austin. Governor Richard Coke is granting you a full and unconditional pardon. What do you have to say about that?”

Magruder was stunned. He just sat there with his mouth open momentarily unable to speak. Finally, he stammered, “W-well... Warden... I’m delighted of course...but what brought this about?”

“Governor Coke recently received a visit from a Mrs. Gardner, the wife of the storekeeper you were convicted of robbing four years ago. She told the Governor that on his deathbed, her husband admitted his testimony of your robbing him was a lie. He confessed there had been no robbery at all, but stated he had lost that \$400 you were accused of stealing in a poker game. He concocted the story of a robbery because he feared his wife’s wrath if she learned the truth. Then when you, a stranger who fit his contrived description, was caught near town, and a search revealed you had over \$400 in your possession, he felt compelled to identify you as the robber or risk being found out.

“Mrs. Gardner, being a good Christian woman, told the Governor she was mortified to learn that an innocent man had been incarcerated because of her husband’s deceitfulness; so she immediately contacted the Governor’s office in order to correct this grievous error. Her action, of course, led to the Governor granting your pardon. Mrs. Gardner has not only returned the \$400 that was taken from you and given to Gardner, but she has given you an additional \$1,000 as, according to her, ‘a small measure of restitution for your pain and suffering.’ This money is being sent from Austin and will be placed on deposit at the Gibbs General Store in your name. Banking services in town are handled by Gibbs, as Huntsville doesn’t yet have a regular bank.”

The warden paused here and gazed at Magruder as if expecting a response.

For a time, Magruder just sat there tight-lipped. Finally he spoke. “Many a night I laid awake in my cell thinkin’ about killin’ that lyin’ sonuvabitch when I got out of here! Now, it seems, fate has cheated me out of the satisfaction.” He breathed a heavy sigh. “And I intended the same for that carpetbagger judge who presided at my

trial. I told that despicable...whoreson, that I could get depositions from prominent citizens in San Antone to account for the money I was carryin'. He could've allowed me to be held in the local jail until the evidence was produced. But no! That fat bastard wasn't about to miss a chance to put another Texan behind prison bars!"

Henders looked sympathetic. "Magruder, it's a damned shame to be convicted on fallacious charges and lose four years out of your life. But you're still young, and have a long life ahead of you. Don't do anything foolish that might get you put back in this place." He paused a moment, then asked, "How old are you anyway?"

"I'll be thirty-eight next month, Warden."

"You don't look it. You also look trim and fit. Prison life doesn't seemed to have harmed you physically. And you have a healthy tan instead of the prison pallor common to most inmates. How do you account for that?"

"I was lucky enough to be assigned to the wood detail, Warden--- under old Carter. We spend most of our time outside the walls cuttin' and haulin' firewood for the heatin' and cookin'. The work is hard but we get plenty of fresh air and sunshine. If I'd been confined inside all the time workin' on those damnable cloth-making looms, I'd have gone crazy."

Henders then withdrew a folder from a drawer of his desk and held it up. "After receiving the Governor's message, I pulled your records from the file to learn more about your case."

Then he opened the folder, and after adjusting his glasses, he began to summarize, occasionally referring to the report, and at times injecting his own viewpoint:

"The record indicates that it was Mrs. Gardner, not her husband, who filed the complaint with the town marshal that night. It also says she referred to her husband as a fool for not reporting the loss himself. He probably wanted the whole thing kept quiet for fear that others involved in that poker game might expose his duplicity. But obviously no one did.

"The record also shows that the town marshal enlisted the aid of a few citizens and rode out of town in the direction Gardner claimed his assailant had taken to try to apprehend the robber. And it further indicates that two miles out of town the posse observed the glow of a

dying campfire two hundred yards off the road in a grove of trees. There, according to the report, they found you, a stranger answering the general description of the robber sound asleep.

“In addition, the record states that \$487 was found on your person when you were searched. In your defense, you claimed the evidence was circumstantial, and given two weeks time you could obtain depositions from reliable witnesses to account for the money found in your possession. And finally, the record states your request for more time was denied. You were pronounced guilty, and sentenced to five years hard labor.”

At this point Henders laid down the file, leaned back in his chair, and gazed at Magruder over his little spectacles. “How did you happen to be there near Caldwell that night, anyway?”

“Well, I had been in San Antone attending a reunion of my old Ranger Company. And I received a wire from Nacogdoches that my mother was seriously ill. So I was headin’ home. I had ridden over a hundred miles that day, and I was worn out and my horse was goin’ lame. So I decided to make camp by a little creek about dusk. After tendin’ to my animal, I built a fire, made coffee and ate some food, then threw my bedroll and went to sleep. The next thing I knew, I was being prodded awake by a rifle barrel jabbed in my ribs.”

“So you never got to see your Mother. Did she get all right?”

“She died a month after I was imprisoned,” Magruder expressed bitterly. “That’s another reason I wanted to kill those bastards that put me in here!”

“I’m truly sorry, son. But don’t let hate ruin your life. We can’t change the past. So, if you can’t forgive, try to forget, and go on from here.”

Henders looked at Magruder contemplatively a few moments before saying, “There was a Confederate General named Magruder involved in a battle with Union forces at Galveston in ‘62 or ‘63. Was he any relation of yours?”

“Yes, sir, he was. That was General John Bankhead Magruder. He’s my uncle, as well as my namesake. Uncle John retook Galveston from a superior force of Yankees in December of ‘62 with a joint assault by land and sea. He converted two bayou steamboats to war vessels by installin’ breastworks of cotton bales. And he

manned the boats with three hundred expert riflemen. Then on a dark night, as his infantry forces waded across Galveston Bay, his gunboats steamed quietly toward the Union warships in the harbor. They took the bluebellies completely by surprise, and after a brief firefight the Yankees surrendered.”

While Magruder recounted the story of the Battle of Galveston, the Warden was silently appraising the man. He noted that Magruder sat relaxed, gazing back steadily with intelligent blue eyes, and appeared not the least bit self-conscious nor intimidated. And his soft drawl, characteristic of the native Texan, fell pleasantly on the ear. Before Magruder had concluded his account of that battle, Henders had warmed to the man. He instinctively liked him. Here is another of the many decent men who have been victimized by the late sordid reconstruction regime, he reflected.

“Magruder, yours is an interesting case---and I am pleased with the outcome. If there were time, I’d like to learn more about you. You’re obviously an educated man---your manner of speech proves that. And your testimony at the trial indicates you have some knowledge of the law. But these questions will have to wait, because I have a meeting scheduled with my officers in a few minutes. Perhaps we’ll have a chance to talk another time. Do you expect to stay in Huntsville for a while?”

“I’ll have to, Warden. I’ve got to buy a horse, saddle, guns, clothes---a whole new outfit. It’ll likely take me several days.”

“Good. I’ll be in town sometime in the next few days. How about joining me for dinner one evening, and we can get better acquainted over a good steak and a bottle of brandy?”

“That sounds fine, Warden. I’ll look forward to it.”

“You know, Magruder---they have rail service to Nacogdoches. You could save yourself time by taking the train, rather than traveling horseback.”

“Thanks, Warden---but after bein’ confined so long, I’m anxious to be outdoors. I want to ride through the hills and forests, soakin’ up the scenery, and sleep under the stars.”

“I can appreciate the way you feel, son.”

“Alright, let’s finish our business here. I am authorized to spend \$125 to provide you with a suit, boots, and other necessary articles of clothing. Or, I can give you the money along with some clothes from

the guard's supply room, and you can buy your own stuff when you get to town. Which shall it be?"

"I'd prefer to take the money and buy my own things."

"I thought you would, so I made out the check that way," Henders expressed with a smile.

"The other matter to settle is compensation for your property which was confiscated by the State. You're probably aware that your horse, saddle, guns and other property were sold at auction after your conviction. Governor Coke has authorized me to reimburse you the \$175 which the State received from the sale of your property."

Magruder was peeved. "Warden, my horse alone was worth \$300. And my guns, saddle and other trappin's worth another \$200. And all I'm goin' to get for 'em is a lousy \$175? That really galls me! And another thing: how about that \$87 I had in excess of my \$400 that was given to Gardner? What happened to that?"

"I can't say, Magruder. According to the record there was no cash on the list of property turned over to state officials."

"Those damned carpetbaggers in Caldwell stole it---that's what happened!" he griped.

"Perhaps so. I don't know. I'm sorry about your losses. I know it seems unfair, but a total of \$300 is all I'm authorized to give you."

Magruder breathed a long sigh. "Well, it's not your fault, Warden. Let's try to wind this up so I can get out of here."

The warden nodded. "Alright." Then taking some papers from a drawer he said, "Here's a state check for \$300 made payable to you. And this is a letter addressed to Sanford Gibbs, owner of the Gibbs store, identifying you as John Jacob Magruder. Since the State maintains an account with Gibbs, you won't have any trouble cashing the check.

"Also, here are your pardon papers signed by the Governor." Henders adjusted his glasses, then began to read aloud from the document. "Having been found innocent of the crime for which he was incarcerated, the prisoner John Jacob Magruder, presently an inmate at the Huntsville Prison facility, shall be released; and he is hereby granted a full and unconditional pardon, with all rights and privileges of a citizen of Texas completely restored. By the order of Richard Coke, Governor of Texas."

Henders picked up a pen stating, "I'm required to co-sign this and affix the date of your release." He then began writing while speaking in an audible whisper, "Bri-an Hen-ders, War-den." Pausing a moment, he asked himself, "Let's see, this is Monday---what is the date? Oh yes, the thirteenth." He then resumed writing while exclaiming aloud, "I'm sure you'll remember this date for a long time, Magruder---April thirteen, eighteen hundred and seventy four."

As he handed all the papers to Magruder, Henders pretended not to notice the tears welling in the other man's eyes.

"Do you have any questions about any of this, Magruder?"

"No, everything's quite clear, Warden."

"Since you're planning to be in Huntsville for a while, I'd like to recommend the Eutaw House as a place to stay. It's a nice hotel. I stayed there several days when I first came to town, and I found it quite comfortable. And it's also right across the street from the Gibbs store. They're on opposite corners of Jackson and Cedar at the courthouse square."

"Thanks, Warden. I'll do as you suggest."

"Is there anything else on your mind before we go down to the supply room?"

"Yes, there is one thing. Would you allow one of the prison barbers to give me a shave and haircut before I leave? I'm sure I look pretty seedy."

"Of course. Let's go on down now and I'll turn you over to our quartermaster. He'll take care of everything."

They left the Warden's office and descended a flight of stairs, and as they walked along Henders said, "Oh, I almost forgot---one of our supply wagons will be leaving for town in a couple of hours---you can ride in on it, if you'd like. It'll be going right to the Gibbs store."

"That sounds fine, Warden. Much oblige."

A big man wearing a guard uniform was sitting at a desk just inside the double doorway of the supply room. He stood up as Magruder and the Warden entered.

"Harry, this is John Magruder. He just got a pardon from the Governor. I want you to fix him up with a change of clothes so he can go into town looking half decent. See that he gets a shave and a

haircut, too. And he'd also like a ride into town on the next supply wagon. Will you take care of him?"

"Sure thing, Warden. I'll see that he gets fixed up."

The Warden extended his right hand and Magruder grasped it in a firm grip. "Magruder, I'm pleased to have met you, and I'm happy you've been freed. Harry will take care of you now, and I'll see you in town in a few days."

"Thanks for all your help, Warden. And I'm holdin' you to your promise of that steak," Magruder expressed with a smile.

Henders smiled back, then turned and walked away.

Harry said, "Okay, Magruder, what'll it be first---the shave and haircut?"

"That'll be fine, Harry."

"Okay, you go down this hallway to the third door on the right. That's the guard's barber shop. And in case they're busy, you tell those birds that Harry Fallon said that you're to get pri-or-i-ty. By the way, you can also get a bath in there if you'd like to do that before puttin' on your new togs."

"Yes, I'd like that, Harry. And thank you."

"Well, in that case, let's get your new stuff together first, and you can put 'em on after you get cleaned up. Do you know what size shirt and trousers you wear?"

Magruder told him.

Harry walked to some bins at the far side of the big room and pulled out some articles. "How about a change of underwear, an' some socks?" shouted Harry.

"The warden didn't say anything about that," Magruder yelled back.

Harry pulled some garments from other bins anyway, then walked back to where Magruder was waiting. "Hell, if you're gonna bother takin' a bath, you might as well have fresh things next to your skin."

He handed the clothes to Magruder. "Okay, you just go on down there now, and tell 'em what you need. And if they give you any lip, just let me know. And come back here when you get through. Okay?"

Magruder did as he was bidden, and was back in about an hour, looking and feeling refreshed.

“Hey, you look like a new man,” said Harry with a smile. “You just sit down right here now and I’ll find out when that supply wagon’s gonna leave.”

CHAPTER 2

Freedom

The supply wagon rolled out of the prison gates about mid-morning. It was a wonderful spring day with a cool breeze blowing and cottony clouds floating in the sky. A pair of hawks sailed high overhead, and field birds swooped low over the meadows. The raucous sound of a flock of crows could be heard in the distance, and a mockingbird sang in a nearby copse. Patches of wildflowers painted the landscape with a medley of colors, and buzzing bees explored the blossoms. Magruder gazed contentedly at the beautiful scene. The rolling prairie with its scattered groves of oak and pine evoked memories of his East Texas home. He took a deep breath of the sweet, flower-scented air of freedom, and a great swell of elation filled his breast.

Sitting on the seat next to the driver, Magruder asked, “How far is it to the Gibbs store, anyway?”

The driver, a crusty old man appearing to be toothless, gave a terse reply, “Two ‘er three mile.”

The old wagon bumped along the rocky road, creaking and clattering. Magruder smiled to himself, amused by the thought that the old driver had likely lost his teeth by making this tooth-rattling daily drive.

He noted that the two little mules trotting along ahead of the wagon looked poor and bony, and the harness was about worn out. He’d heard rumors that Ogilvie, the carpetbagger warden appointed by Edmond Davis, had been fired by Governor Coke for misappropriation of funds. He concluded that money allocated for stock and equipment had likely been squandered, if not stolen.

“How many wagon-loads of goods does it take each day to keep the prison supplied?” he asked.

The old driver, who had been continually gumming a wad of chewing tobacco, spat a dark stream at the rear end of one of the mules. After a moment he got the cud over in his other cheek, and replied, “We ‘uns got four waggins like this’n, an all of ‘em make leas’ one trip ever’ day. An’ sometime, h’it takes more.”

Magruder grinned at the old driver’s backwoods vernacular. “Seems to me, they should get some bigger wagons and make fewer trips.”

“Humph!” grunted the old driver. “These hyar scrawny mules can’t hardly pull a full load as t’is.”

After a bone jarring ride, which seemed longer than it actually was, the supply wagon pulled to a halt in front of a large two-story clapboard building. The sign above the doorway read Gibbs General Store. As Magruder stepped down, he said, “Thanks for the ride, ol’ timer.”

The old driver spat another amber stream, and acknowledged his thanks with a curt nod.

He entered the big store and looked about. It was one of the largest establishments of its kind he had ever seen. There were hundreds of shelves and racks full of a miscellanea of goods stacked almost to the ceiling. He saw hardware, tools, harness, feed, flour, clothing, and a variety of other merchandise. Dozens of people were busily shopping, and a number of clerks scurried about waiting on them. He stopped a comely young lady with a pencil behind her ear. “Pardon me, Miss, but are you one of the employees here?”

She gave him a disapproving look. “I certainly am. I’m in charge of the dry goods department. What is it you wish to purchase?”

“Well, not anything right now, Miss, I’d like to see Mr. Sanford Gibbs, if I may.”

The young lady now narrowed her eyes, pursed her lips and looked Magruder up and down. “Do you have an appointment with Mr. Gibbs?” she asked in a haughty manner.

“No, Miss, I don’t. But you see, I have a check to cash, and I have a letter identifying me that’s addressed to Mr. Gibbs.”

The young lady's attitude seemed to soften a bit. "In that case, it will not be necessary to see Mr. Gibbs. Just go to the rear of the store and present your letter and check to Mr. Collins. He takes care of all the banking business. You'll see a sign with his name on it above his booth."

"Thank you very much, Miss. You've been most helpful," said Magruder, offering a slight bow and an amiable smile.

The young lady evidenced mild surprise at this gesture, then responded with a quick half smile, and hurried off, her head held high in a self-important manner.

He stood there a moment admiring the provocative wiggle of the young lady's shapely derriere as she walked away.

Magruder found the bank booth at the rear of the store, where a sign above the teller's window proclaimed: Fred Collins, Cashier. He was able to cash his check without difficulty, and he inquired of Mr. Collins if there had been a recent deposit of funds from Austin in his name. Collins consulted his records, and reported there had not been.

Well I guess it will be along shortly. In the meantime, I've got \$300 to tide me.

He was tempted to do some shopping while at Gibbs, but decided to do that later. He wanted to check in at the hotel first, and then find a good restaurant---he was hungry, and he was looking forward to a good meal of his own selection.

Magruder stepped out of the store onto the board sidewalk. And he stood there a minute watching the bustle of activity around the courthouse square. Horse drawn conveyances of various description were busily moving about on sundry errands.

He crossed the street, carefully avoiding a large freight wagon with a four-horse team. Then he walked through the open doorway of the Eutaw House, crossed the wide lobby and went up to the desk. The small, bald man behind the desk asked in a friendly manner, "May I help you, sir?"

"Yes, I'd like a room, please."

"How long will you be staying, sir?"

"Well, I'm not sure---probably several days."

“Our rates are three dollars a day or fifteen dollars per week. Would you like our weekly rate?”

“Yes, that’ll be fine.”

“Please sign that register, sir, and I’ll see what rooms are available.” The clerk turned, picked up a ledger and began to examine it.

He signed the register, then looked about the elegantly furnished foyer. There was only one other person there at the time. It was a woman. She was seated on one of the velvet settees with her head in her hands, and she appeared to be sobbing.

When the clerk looked up, Magruder asked in a low voice, “What’s the matter with the lady? She seems to be cryin’.”

The clerk replied in like manner, “That’s Mrs. Gersemann. She and her husband were held up by outlaws north of town this mornin’. They shot Mr. Gersemann and stole all their money.”

“Was the husband killed?”

The clerk nodded. “They were on their way to Houston from Crockett, and now she’s stuck here with no money. I told her if there were any unrented rooms at the end of the day, I’d let her have one for the night.”

“How many rooms do you have available?”

“We have two on the lower floor and three upstairs. I’d recommend one of the upstairs rooms. They’re toward the rear and it’s quieter up there.”

Magruder pulled out his roll of bills and extracted three tens. “Alright, here’s thirty dollars---a week’s rent for two of the upstairs rooms---one for me and one for the lady. Tell the lady that you have arranged with your management to let her have a room for a week free of charge.”

“That’s very kind of you Mr.---uh,” the clerk quickly referred to the register, “Mr. Magruder. I’ll tell her. I’m sure the poor soul will be relieved.”

“Wait,” he said, and pulled out his money again peeling off a twenty-dollar note. “Give her this as well and make up some story to explain it.”

“Mr. Magruder, that’s an exceptionally generous gesture. I know the lady will appreciate it---and frankly, I do too. If there’s any way I

can possibly assist you while you're here, just tell me and it'll be done. My name is Karl Swartz."

Magruder saw a skinny blond youth of about sixteen enter from the rear of the lobby carrying a broom and dustpan. Swartz motioned the boy over, and said quietly, "Willy, I want you to watch the desk for a few minutes while I take Mrs. Gersemann up to her room." The kid just nodded and walked behind the desk.

Then Swartz turned to Magruder. "Here's the key to your room, Mr. Magruder. You'll be in 210, and I'm puttin' Mrs. Gersemann in 211. I'm goin' to take her up now and make sure she's comfortable. Do you think you can find your way?"

"Yes, of course---but I'm not going up right away. I want to find a café where I can get some good food. Any suggestions?"

"We have a dinin' room here, but we won't begin servin' dinner till 'leven-thirty." He turned to look at the clock behind the desk. "That'll be another twenty minutes, Mr. Magruder. If you don't wanna wait, there's a nice café a coupla blocks down the street." And he indicated the direction with a tilt of his head.

He expressed his thanks, and walked out the front door. He turned in the direction Swartz had indicated and walked along looking in the various stores and shops as he passed. He found the café and went in. Although it was early, there were several diners already eating. He found an empty table and sat down. The place was light and airy, and very clean; and there were tantalizing odors emanating from the kitchen that made his mouth water. He picked up the menu on the table and scanned it just as a pretty young waitress came over. She greeted him with a warm smile.

"May I take your order, sir?"

"Yes, ma'am, you surely may. I'd like the roast beef, mashed potatoes, black-eyed peas, corn bread, apple pie and coffee."

The young lady flashed him another charming smile, and hurried away. She was back in only a few minutes, and set before him a large platter of steaming hot food. For a minute, Magruder just devoured the food with his eyes, savoring the wonderful aroma, and then he began eating slowly, relishing every mouthful. And he continued doing so until it became almost painful.

As he was finishing, the pretty waitress came over and asked, "Can I get you anything else, sir?"

He groaned. "No, ma'am, I couldn't eat another bite. The food was excellent---and the beauty of the one servin' it will long be remembered," he offered with a winsome smile.

The young waitress, who was very fair, turned fiery red, but maintained her equanimity. "It's kind of you to say so, sir---and it's been a pleasure servin' you."

"What do I owe you?"

"Fifty cents, sir."

"That's entirely too little for such a splendid meal. Here's a dollar. Please keep the change."

When Magruder walked out of the restaurant, he noticed a shop across the street advertising boots and shoes. He decided it was time to be getting some decent attire, and walked over. When he opened the door, a tiny bell tinkled, and a gray-headed lady with a kind grandmotherly face came out of a back room.

"Can I help you sir?"

"Yes ma'am. I'd like to look at some of your boots, please."

She nodded and led him to a long table displaying several styles of boots. "Have a look at these, sir, and see if there's somethin' you like."

He picked up a boot that caught his eye and examined it. It had a sturdy sole with a good arch, and a heel of sufficient height to engage a stirrup. It also had the rounded toe he preferred, and soft leather foot and upper part. He told the lady, "I'd like to try on a pair of these---size ten, please."

The lady went into the rear storage room and returned with the boots. He sat down, pulled off his old shoes, and put on the new boots. Then he got up and walked around a bit.

"How do those feel, sir?" asked the lady.

"They feel just fine. I think I'll take 'em."

He peeled off some bills from his roll and paid the lady, and then he held up his old shoes. "Do you have a trash can where I dump these?"

"I'll take care of them, sir, and thank you for your business."

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

