

Easy Come, Easy Go

Edwin L. Sabin



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A delightful story of a real Westerner is here set down in engaging fashion by the gifted author of "The Devil of the Picuris" and "Three Black Hills."

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To the beef round-up camp, now in the last stages of the hectic trail, there arrived, seeking the 77 outfit as by tryst, a party of

four in a buckboard—driving in at noon, across the brown parched plains, timely to the cook's shrill yelp, "Come an' get it!"

They were, to wit: a stout ruddy man, a younger man, and two dazzling girls of garb femininely adapted to the Wild West. The equipage pulled down; lengthy Tex, the 77 foreman, rose from his seat upon his hams, to meet it.

The four piled out, the girls gazing open-eyed.

That which they saw was a conclave of ten hungry, hardy, red-faced punchers, reeking of the sun and saddle, squatted in various postures around the cook's Dutch ovens and earnestly stowing away the midday chuck of coffee, beef, beans, stewed canned tomatoes, hot bread and sorghum.

That which the diners saw was two damsels fabulously appareled and glowing with innocent curiosity, the young sprig in dude rig of riding-breeches and natty flannel shirt and polished puttees, the elder man caparisoned to similar "sporting" effect and manifesting an important strut, aggravated, perhaps, by the bondage of the flesh.

It was one world imposed upon another.

Here, then, was the 77 owner, from the East, evidently to see how his—*his* cows and men were stacking up! Had brought his friends or family ("tourists," in any guise) to the show; and first they were watching the "animals" eat.

"Oh, how romantic!" breathed one of the damsels, lips parted.

"Oh, hell!" murmured man to man.

Dignified as “Mr. Matthews” by virtue of his office, Tex acted host. The party seated themselves. The somewhat flustered cook, Tex assisting with the utensils, proceeded to serve from his cow-camp menu.

The 77 stoically swigged and champed. At last—

“All right, boys.” Tex had spoken from his feet. The horse-herd was in, confined by its rope corral. With creaking of joints the men rose from their post-prandial cigarettes, to take down their ropes from their saddles and to stump on to snare their afternoon mounts.

No joints protested more than those of Laramie,—“Laramie Red,”—who had been riding a hard-bitted horse all the morning and was due, he knew, to fork Old Thunder this afternoon.

The horses of one’s string, however, should be ridden turn about. Consequently Laramie flicked his noose for Old Thunder; and at the clap of the hemp around his neck, Old Thunder followed the trend of the rope. A mild-in-appearance, fly-bitten roan, he, with a sleepy eye—but with Roman nose and aggressive chocky head wherein obstinacy had its dwelling-place.

With “Oh!’s” and “Ah!’s” and sundry “By George! See that!” the tourist squad had taken station to observe the very simple operations of tossing a noose over a horse’s head, yanking him forth, and investing him with bridle, blanket and saddle, and man. Perhaps there was romance in this, too. Kin savvy? If so, it had been imported for the occasion.

“What a pretty horse!”

Laramie was conscious of blue eyes in a fair flushed face devouring his every motion—fascinated, maybe, by his flaming thatch, his largely freckled visage impervious to wind and weather, and his bowed legs set by thirty years of chasing cows.

But “Pretty hawss!” Old Thunder? Who’d ha’ thought it?

“What’s his name?”

“Satan, ma’am.”

“Oh!”

Laramie grimly continued with his routine. Old Thunder submitted, as if contemplating that period of coltship when he indeed might have been “pretty.” His retrospective mien portrayed docility.

“Here’s a genuine cow-pony,” pronounced the elderly man, who was doing the critical. “Hardy, obedient, faithful, the cowboy’s most valued partner. The real cowboy never abuses his horse. Depends on him too much. That’s why he changes mounts whenever he can. Well, people, you’re seeing the actual thing—the Western cowboy at work, off the films. That’s good. You know your business, my man.”

Laramie did not deign answer to that exalted address “My man.” He sensed the sly anticipation of his fellows as he gathered the lines, turned stirrup to his foot, and with hand to cheek strap and hand to mane vaulted aboard in single movement.

“Go!” somebody yapped.

Old Thunder exploded. Always did. But this present play caught Laramie in a frame of mind more savage than usual. Was he to be butchered for a tourist holiday? He gave the brute its head and raked with spurs relentless, to have the fit over with in short order. And ride he could, could Laramie Red, veteran of the range dating back to the long trails, to Abilene, Ogalalla and Miles City.

Cheers and cries attended upon him, inciting Old Thunder. His hat sailed free. After the preliminary cavorting, Thunder, true to his system, launched himself into furious straight-away out across the brush, with Laramie sitting heavily until the fit should expend.

And when he rocked in upon an Old Thunder, now satiated, to get his hat and to receive instructions for duty, he encountered a blast extraordinary.

The elderly man, swelling like a turkey cock, advanced upon him.

“Is that your horse, sir?”

“No sir; I wouldn’t claim any such animal,” retorted Laramie, ruffled anew.

“Right. It happens to be my horse. You’re fired.”

Laramie gasped.

“What’s that?”

“You’re fired, my man.”

“Me?”

“Yes. I’m owner of these cattle and these horses. I’m full owner of the Seventy-seven. Understand? I employ cowboys, not busters. I’ll have nobody in my service who abuses animals. They tell me this horse is perfectly gentle when he’s been handled properly. I can see that for myself. You’re ruining him. No doubt you meant to show off a little, but that doesn’t go with me. Give your time to the foreman, and he’ll pay you to date. If you intend to be a cowboy, I hope this will be a lesson to you. Br-rumph! No words, now.” The oracular dignitary had finished.

But Laramie could muster no words of utterance before ladies. There they were, those two, standing aloof and eying him with look that scorched. And—“If you intend to be a cowboy,” the stout gent had said. “If you *intend* to be a *cowboy*!” Suffering cats! He, Laramie Red, intend “to be” a cowboy! And—“They tell me this horse is perfectly gentle when he’s been handled properly!” So he was. The deviltry having been ridden out of him, he’d be as meek as Moses; as witness now—a staid old fool!

Fired! That verbal mandate waited upon no further repetition. Laramie swung from the astonished Thunder and commenced rapidly to unsaddle. Tex, who had been busied elsewhere, came hurrying with gait interrogative.

“What’s the matter, Laramie?”

“There’s nothin’ the matter with me. I’m turnin’ in this hawss,” growled Laramie, engaged.

“What’s wrong with the hawss, then?”

“Nothin’. He’s plump gentle—a putty little hawss. But I’m quittin’.”

“You! No! Why’s that?”

“Been fired, aint I? No man need tell me that more’n once.”

“Who told you?”

“Yore big boss over yonder.” Laramie indicated with jerk of red head.

“What for?”

Laramie smiled sourly through the perspiration of his rugged countenance.

By that twist of the lips he revealed the injury done to his very soul.

“Cause I abuse his pet stock. Got to learn how to handle hawsses, yet.”

“Hold on! You say he fired you?”

“He shorely did. I’m quittin’. Here’s his hawss. You got my time?”

“No!” Tex implored. “Wait! Why, doggone his skin—” He wheeled about, but the “big boss” was valiantly coming as if to impress the stamp of authority. And the lingering riders grinned.

"This man says you've discharged him, Mr. Bunyan," Tex accused.

"So I have. On the spot, too. Look at that horse. The man's a brute."

"Easy, now, Mister," Laramie warned, a glint in his hazel eyes.

"Shore, I see the hawss. There's nothing wrong with the hawss," Tex would placate, somewhat bewildered. "And I'll say the man you're speaking of is a top hand—there's not a better man in the outfit. You can't fire *him*."

"Can't I?" The owner of the 77 repeated. "Look at that horse. In a lather already! See how he's marked up. The man's a—hum!—he's too rough. I'll not have my horses foundered, or their tempers ruined. Let the man learn to handle horses; then if he wishes to come back. I'll consider him. How much do we owe him?"

"But great Scott, Mr. Bunyan!" Tex writhed with honest anguish. "The hawss aint hurt. His hair's scurcely mussed. You can't set a man afoot for that! A hawss has got to be *ridden*, else he aint any good in the herd. I wouldn't waste time with a plumb mean hawss—haven't much use for a buster, anyhow. And if I caught a man mistreating an animal regardless, I'd be the fust to fire him. Old Thunder aint been mistreated. He's just nacherly a trifle gay when he's fust forked. He does it a-purpose; he *expects* to be tapered off like Laramie tapered him—wants somebody to come right back at him, and then he's peaceful. That hawss is ready to go all the rest the day. He's only one o' them kind that's got to be uncorked. Why, Laramie wouldn't

choose to hurt a hawss or ary other animal. But on the range a man has to ride and to rope and to brand; that's what you pay him for, aint it? Laramie's a cow-man—been at it twenty-five or thirty year. He knows the value of hawsses and cows as well as I do. You can't fire him for nothing."

Mr. Bunyan pursed his lips and gave judicial answer.

"I still think he should be discharged. But perhaps he was only showing off before the ladies. He's a ladies' man! Anyway, he'd better stay until you've shipped the cattle."

"I had, had I?" Laramie snorted. "Thanks. Wouldn't care for some. I'll leave my saddle in the wagon, Matthews, and hoof to town. I'll go to cookin' before I'll ever lay hand on another Seventy-seven hawss."

"No, Laramie!" Tex pleaded. "Stay and we'll talk this over. I need you. You *got* to stay."

"I'm full up on talk, and I'm full up on punchin', too," replied Laramie. "For the information of this loco, I'll say I was goin' to quit anyhow. Decided that yesterday. He's late. But I'll finish out on yore account, Tex; then I'm done."

"Oho!" chuckled the aggravating Bunyan, out of wisdom excessive. "Pay-day; then wine, woman and song, eh?"

"'Cordin' to yore tell," growled Laramie. He resaddled Old Thunder, brusquely mounted, and without instructions rode off on duty self-assigned.

The virtuous Mr. Bunyan returned to his party.

“Did you discharge him, uncle?” one of the girls asked breathlessly. “Wouldn’t he go?”

“He’ll stay till after the round-up. Was rather saucy about it. Said he was going to quit anyhow. The sooner he quits, the better.”

“Independent, aye?” the younger man queried.

“Oh, it’s easy come, easy go, with these cowboys. He’s probably saved his wages. No way to spend ’em, you see. So at first opportunity he’ll lay off and blow ’em all in. That’s it. Then he’ll be hunting another job. The same old story. I don’t worry.”

Laramie rode on, for a distance, alone. Thud of hoofs sounded. Happy Jack drew in to pace him and be his partner for the afternoon’s last circle.

“Say, Laramie, you aren’t goin’ to quit, are you?” Happy blurted. “Sure not. Everybody knows you’re all right.”

“You bet I quit.”

“But you aint fired. Tex does the firing in this outfit, and you can stay till your feet drop off.”

“Then I fire myself. ‘Brute’ and ‘ladies’ man,’ am I? I know when I got enough, and I’m plump sick o’ ridin’. There’s no thanks to it. There’s nothin’ to show but saddle-corns and rheumatics and a bad reputation. What’s a puncher, outside o’ story papers? Yep, I’ve made up my mind. I’ll quit at the shippin’-pens, when I aint needed. I aim to sell my saddle and straighten out my legs, and never ride no more. Mebbe I can live on my income,” he dourly added.

“Aw, Laramie!”

“I’ve said it. If you’re goin’ to talk, you can talk about the weather.”

This evening the 77 camped by themselves, for the outland guests had left. After supper Laramie waddled over to sit beside Tex and put an important question.

“How much’ll I have comin’ to me, Tex, when you pay off?”

“Where?”

“At the shippin’-pens. We draw our money when we strike town at the end of the drive, don’t we?”

“Shorely. You needn’t worry about that. You’ll get your share, unless you want me to hold back.”

“Nope: no holding back this time,” said Laramie. “How much’ll it be, Tex? You can figger, can’t you? I aint kept track.”

“What do you want to know for?” Tex demanded. “Can’t you wait? There’s no way to spend it here. You’ll spend it fast enough when you do get it. Why don’t you let it grow?”

“Well,” said Laramie, “I’m curious. It’s mine, aint it? Then I get it, don’t I? How much?”

“But what’ll you do with it? Throw it away?” Tex reproved. “Five dollars will give you a good time in that shipping burg; the rest wont harm you if I keep it for you.”

“I don’t stop in that burg,” announced Laramie. “I told you I’m quittin’. I’ll need all my money.”

Tex deplored:

“Oh, pshaw, Laramie! I was hoping you’d got that out of your system. The old man’s gone. ’Twasn’t only a flash in the pan. I mean for you to stay on. Blamed if I’ll let you leave the Seventy-seven.”

“Can’t help yoreself, Tex,” said Laramie. “I been thinkin’ of quittin’, two-three weeks now, and I do quit, soon as we reach the pens. You’ll have men enough there.”

“Going to join another outfit?”

“Nope. When I quit, I quit ridin’, and I pull out.”

“Why—what do you aim to do? You’re talking foolish!” Tex censured.

“Me?” said Laramie. “Well, I reckon I’ll go to little old K. C. I aint been in a city since—gosh, I don’t know when, Tex. It’s time I was learnin’ something.”

“You might have gone,” Tex snapped. “You’ve been started—I’ve started you, myself; but ’fore you got to the train, where were you? Plumb flat. But all right: I’ll send you in with the stock. Give you another chance.”

“No, sir!” said Laramie. “I don’t go as any stock-tender, Tex. I go civilized. I know I’ve fell by the way, on several occasions, Tex, but this time will be different. There don’t nary man call me a brute ag’in. I quit the range, and I live white. When I get to Kansas City, I’m goin’ to the swellest cafe in that town, and I order me the best feed on the hull mee-noo, regardless. I been livin’ so long on beef, I moo whenever I see a calf. I reckon I’ll

put up at the best *ho-tel*, and I'll take in the best thee-ater, and I'll buy some store clothes. Wow! Hey?" And Laramie fairly licked his chops.

"Shorely," agreed Tex in tone caustic. "I see yuh. Easy come, easy go. You fellows are alluz fools with your money. All right; what'll you do then?"

"Well," said Laramie, "lackin' better while I was lookin' round, I suppose I might get a job at the stockyards. I know cattle. But that wont be ridin'. It'll be loafin'. Now," he concluded, "you understand why I figger ahead on what's comin' to me. How much?"

"Very good," Tex rapped. "Seeing you're bound to know, I'll give it to you straight. Close as I can calkilate, Laramie, at the pens you'll have exactly thirty-three dollars and fifty cents due you. Want, cash or a gold bond?"

"What you sayin', Tex?" Laramie gasped. "I got more than that!"

"No, you haven't. You remember, Laramie, that last time you turned loose, after the calf round-up, you lost all your money, and your saddle, and bridle, and boots, and your four-gallon Texas hat, in a tin-horn poker-game. So I had to stake you to a new outfit. Those things cost. And you've been drawing a dollar or two, now and again, since. I can show you in black and white."

"You needn't, Tex. Yore word's good." But thirty-three dollars and fifty cents, after thirty years of dogging cows from the border to Montana! Shucks!

Laramie rallied. He had faced worse crises.

“I’ll take it, anyhow,” he said cheerfully. “I aint clean busted.”

“No,” said Tex. And he added with significant disapproval: “Not yet! But if you come back with your fifty cents, you’ll be doing well.”

So Laramie Red was quitting! Considerable more remained to be said upon the subject, chiefly among his mates. And the chantey welled with drawl of chorus his-way directed:

After the round-up’s over,
After the shipping’s done,
I’m going ho-ome, boys,
Never more to roam.

Capped by the remindful—

Gimme a platter o’ Lillian Russell,*
Gimme a look at a skirt and a bustle,
Then take my money and watch me hustle
Back to the sage and sun!

[* Peaches and cream, of course!]

“Laramie wont get past the first stop with a ‘Last Chance’ sign over a door,” they laughed. “What’ll you bet, Laramie?”

“I know that’s regulation with you-all,” Laramie answered soberly. “Nope, I don’t bet. Can’t afford to, after only thirty year workin’ for grub. But you needn’t lay any plate for me. When I ride, I ride in the cars. And, while you or’nary brute punchers are still ruinin’ hawsses, I’ll be eatin’ off French mee-noos and

sleepin' in a real bed. Anybody who thinks I don't mean it had better make me an offer on my saddle. I've fired myself, and I'm done."

"True to his promise, several days later Laramie found himself at the railway station of the shipping town—a wayside town bared upon the bare plains, drenched with sun and dust—a spasmodic little town livened at intervals, as now, by the beef herds bawling in the pens and shutes, and by the brown, rollicking riders turned loose from the durance of the trail for their brief fling.

Easy come, easy go, this, where (in the language of the country) "the coyote howls and the poker-chips rattle and money rolls up-hill!" Wow! A rebound to riotous living, even to the extent of canned peaches and canned cream; then—"back to the sage and sun." Therefore, the session being limited and sentiment for a "plumb idjit" scant, Laramie, having rigorously declined invitations to a farewell that might have cut his travels short again, was alone at the station. Behind him the revels beckoned. He licked his lips thirstily.

He had shed his chaps; he had consigned his saddle and bridle and bed-roll also to Tex, for disposal. Somebody would buy them—and pay out of future earnings. But he was free, and he had his ticket, and money besides—hard money for that feed, and a thee-ater, and a "top" bed with sheets and pillers; reckoned he'd have to get a nightshirt!

The long train thundered in. And he (a figure *sui generis*, in his high-heeled boots and his big hat and his stained checkered blouse and his dusty trousers shaped to irrevocably bowed

legs) was stumping down the line, when he brought up against another figure, just mounting the steps of a Pullman.

This was his critic, name of Bunyan.

“Hello, my man.” Mr. Bunyan paused “Stock-tender, eh? Did you decide to stay on for another try?”

“No sir,” said Laramie, holding himself in stern check. “It happens yore stock-tenders don’t travel on passenger cars. They travel cabooses, if they’re lucky. Besides, yore cows are old enough to travel alone, and so am I. I’ve quit; I’ve drawn my pay and I’m headin’ for Kansas City, never more to roam.”

Mr. Bunyan smiled with smile exasperating.

“You are, are you? Hunting a job there?”

“I suppose I’ll have to earn my keep, after I’ve been fed up and to a thee-ater. Reckon I’ll enjoy life a little, fust.”

Mr. Bunyan laughed.

“That’s it! Easy come, easy go! Can’t spend your money fast enough in this town, eh? Those other boys don’t seem to have any difficulty, judging by what I’ve seen and heard. You men are all of the same stamp. You lack good sense. What you earn in one month, you guzzle and gamble away in half an hour. I suppose that’s being a cowboy!”

Laramie recognized that in this ironical diatribe there might be a grain of truth.

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