

Hot Damn !

A shot was fired and ‘Hold Up! Don’t touch that gun! Get your hands in the air” was yelled at the Stage driver. A demand was made and the Driver exclaimed, knowing he hadn’t heard right. “ You need a What?” “ Damn! You hard of hearin? I said, I need a woman! One of them girls in there.” This statement came from thirty year old Willi Hobbs a black bearded and ugly down at the heels Range bum. A horrible scar could be seen crossing his forehead’ His one good looking feature was the new forty five he held pointed at the Stage Driver Ron Bloxie. Ron exclaimed “Mister did I hear you right? What the Hell are you up to?” Will replied , “ You got six girls in that coach; I saw you load ‘em up in Lany town. I want one of’em. ” Ron said,” Mister, you’re crazy. These girls are all going to Santa Fe. Dixon’s bringing ‘em in for his Yellow Bird Saloon. They’re all whores. You better look somewhere else. “ Will said , “They’re all girls ain’t they? I want one ! I need a wife. Git’em out here.” Ron said , “ Man be reasonable . You cain’t just take a women. What the hell, you run outta money ? This is crazy.” Ron jumped holding the horses as Will fired his pistol saying, “ I ain’t got time! Git’em out here !” The girls all began screaming at Ron and Will, They sat up a howling den of yelling as the door popped open and a dark haired Mexican girl was pushed out by the other girls. She fell to the ground and quickly jumped up wanting to get back in the Coach. Ron took this opportunity to Crack his whip and send the Coach careening down the trail. The girl ran after the Coach for twenty feet or so but stopped quickly when Will fired his pistol again. The girl turned helplessly looking at Will.

Will took one look at this pretty girl exclaiming, “ Hot Damn! You stay here! “ and walking into the brush beside the trail; he led out two horses. He asked “ What’s your name? The girl aiming flashing black eyes at him said, “ No English name, Madam call me Teresa. you gonna hurt me? You scare me. Please let me go. “ Will said, “ No, I’m not gonna hurt you, but I don’t like that name . What do you want me to call you?” She replied, “Some mans call me Bitch. “ Will shook his head, ” No , if I’m gonna marry you . I wanna good name. How about Elli. You kinda remind me of Elli. Will Elli be Ok for your name?

the girl said , “ Ok Mister. What to call you and why you want marry me?” Will responded, “ Name’s Willi Hobbs. Your name will be Elli Hobbs. I need a wife , that’s why I want to marry you.” The former Teresa, now Elli replied, “ Mister don’t steal girl for wife ; you want puta, whore?” Will replied, “ I asked lots of girls, but they all say no. I gotta have a wife and I think you will be Ok. Get on this horse. If it’s hard for you to ride in that big dress I can cut it off some. I’m gonna lead your horse and you hang on. We have a ways to go and I’m in a hurry.”Elli yelled, “Mister , you crazy! Let me go.” Will yelled back at her “ Shut up and hang on!” he jerked the lead rope getting both horses in a gallop. Elli hung on to the saddle horn, afraid she would fall off.

It was hours later that they approached the town of Trinidad and Will had been cussed at in Spanish and English for twenty miles. He thought long about dropping the girl. After getting her balance when the horses slowed down, she wouldn’t shut up. Finally in desperation he said, “ Girl you either shut up or I put a bullet in your filthy mouth!. Elli shut up. This man Will is really crazy enough to kill her. She was afraid. He stopped on a side street , tied the horses up and led Elli to the door of the local Justice of the Peace Judge Ross Bradley. Bradley met them at the door and asked , “ Will is this the girl?” Will said , “ Yes it is Mister Bradley, her name is Elli and the last name you can’t say in English.”

Bradley said, “ Ok let’s get the certificate out and let me enter the names. Will I don’t know why you’d want to marry a girl with mind damage, but it’s mighty kind of you. It looks like she could use a good home and I’d strongly suggest you get her some descent clothes. She’s dolled and painted up like a whore. I can easily see what you mean about the mind damage.” Elli exclaimed, “Mister , I puta whore, he take me, he crazy. Please help me. He hold up Stage I pushed out, driver run off. He shoot his gun. I afraid. I scared. Please !” Bradley said , “Now, Now, take it easy Miss Elli, every things gonna be Ok. Will are you sure you want to go through with this. I sure don’t envy you the job you’ve got ahead of you. I didn’t realized she was this bad. Man you’ve got more guts for this than I would ever have.”

Elli almost screamed again, ‘ No! No! Mister no understand. I am puta . I go to Santa Fe. “ Bradley sadly shook his head and said, “Will,

we better get this done , everything I say seems to set her off. I can easily see why a preacher is outta the question. Miss Elli can you sign your name? No? I didn't think so. Ok Will sign her name here and your name goes here. Will your application for this certificate is about ten days in remission , but considering everything we'll proceed . Please hold hands. Elli wouldn't shut up and kept jerking away from Will. Putting his hand on his pistol quickly got her attention. Will took both of her hands in his and repeated the consent vows. Elli merely shook her head "no" but Bradley overlooked her actions considering her condition. Finally he said," By joining hands here, you are showing consent for spending the rest of your lives as husband and wife. By the authority I hold under the law of New Mexico Territory. I declare you as husband and wife . Willi and Elli Hobbs. He signed and placed his seal on the Certificate.

Will was jubilant and Elli was stunned!" Yesterday she was a puta and today she's a married woman" . Never in her wildest dreams would such a thing happen. It all had to be a dream. She didn't know this man she had married . He had never been a customer. Why had this all happened? Why did Will need a wife so bad that he would steal a whore? When would he tell her? What was he gonna do to her? Was he gonna hurt her? She was afraid. Will said, "Judge thank you , I'm sorry but it has been difficult." The Judge said, " Will, I really admire you. I don't think I've ever met a man of your character. This poor girl will now have a descent life and I've got those other papers you needed. The co ownership documents and necessary title transfers are all there. All you need is your Father's signature.

Later as Will rode away with his new wife , he ran over in his mind the events that brought him to where he was today. It had all begun with his Mother Jeanie Hobbs and her boy friend Black Jack Henry, the outlaw. He, Willi Hobbs, was their illegitimate son . Jeanie was a working girl at the Long Horn Saloon in St. Joseph, Missouri, when he was born. He was lucky, being a boy baby. Girls and some boy babies were commonly drowned at birth, by the Madam's owning the prostitutes during that period. It put the girls back to work sooner. Willi grew up breaking horses and raising hell around town. Twenty odd years later he joined his Father, Black Jack in Stage Coach and Bank robberies. Although an outlaw , and deadly with firearms , he

never gained the notoriety and recognition of his father. There were wanted posters out but none described or named him.

A turn of events occurred during a bank Robbery in Santa Fe , New Mexico Territory that brought a major change in his life. Black Jack and his gang were holding up the First National Bank of Santa Fe. Will was holding customers hostage while the gang cleaned out the Teller money boxes. A Teller pulled a gun and everything went to hell. Bullets began flying and Will fired a shot to hold his hostage group in place. A middle aged lady moved as he shot and his bullet caught her arm, causing her to scream and drop to the floor. Blood covered her left arm. Will thought he had killed her. Running from the Bank , he grabbed his horse racing outta town to the agreed upon meeting place at an outlaw Camp on Turkey Creek . It was always split up and every man for himself following a robbery. This was the best way to avoid pursuit. Will was in shock by his belief that he had killed a lady . He remained this way for two days, but thankfully found out that the lady had suffered only a surface flesh wound.

Unfortunately, his relief was replaced by fear as the Sheriff's posse discovered their hide out and a violent gun fight began. Will had done all the killing he needed to do and purposely pulled his shots or tried wounding the posse members. This was difficult and when suddenly Black Jack was wounded; the whole gang grabbed horses and left Turkey Creek. The posse had lost four deputies wounded and the Sheriff should have held up and got help from the local Sheriff. His stupidity cost him his life. Black Jack had only moved to a better defense location a short distance from the creek and the Posse rode boldly into a hail of gunfire killing the Sheriff and one Deputy. In the pitched battle , two outlaws were shot down and lying in the trail as the Black Jack gang once again fled the scene. At the scene of the gunfight, the remaining two deputies cautiously moved in where the fight took place.

Two bodies lay in the trail, one with two bullet holes in the chest, the other shot in the face, his whole head covered in blood. The deputies were inspecting guns and abandoned equipment when the outlaw shot in the face crawled off into the thick brush. This was Will Hobbs; he had been hit by a bullet cutting across his fore head above

the eyes; this disfigurement to become so gross and ugly that even saloon girls would have nothing to do with him. Will clearly remembered trying to wrap his head with his torn shirt sleeve to stop the bleeding while he hid in the brush until nightfall when he could escape. . Black Jack was bleeding badly and his Gang left him at a nearby ranch house where he was found and arrested the next day. This was the end of Will's outlaw career until he held up the stage to get a prostitute.

Following the capture of Black Jack, Will became a railroad hand, working any job offered to earn a living. He had never been close to Black Jack, but they had been friends. When he heard that Black Jack was facing a hanging, he visited him bringing tobacco and a sack of Bear Sign that Jack loved. It was a fateful day for Will as he learned of the Henry Horse Ranch in Raton Valley. Black Jack's Father had recently died leaving him the Ranch and with his hanging the ranch would go to the state as he had no known living heirs. Black Jack and Will talked at length about family and he even called Will son a few times. Finding that Will had no wife or family was a distressful shock to Jack knowing that Will would be the last of the Henry blood line."

" He also knew there was no one living to confirm that Will Hobbs was his son. He said Will, I can't give you the Ranch. Some crooked Lawyer has already laid claims that there were other heirs. I'll make you a deal. You show me a wife and I'll sign a Bill of Sale giving each of you half interest in the Ranch, but Will, there ain't much time, they moved my hanging up from November to August the fifth. Will said , " Jack I don't think I can find a girl to marry me; I've asked half a dozen over the last few years and been turned down. Since I was shot even the whores won't have nothing to do with me."

Jack said, "Yeah, you are kinda hard to take looking straight on , but Will don't try to buy a wife. That's a no deal for me. I'm splitting the Ranch to you two so there cain't be no shenanigans. I want a straight deal or the state gets the Ranch. See what you can work out. I ain't going nowhere." Will went straight away to see an old friend that he had shared a few calf stealing episodes with when they were teen age. He was now a Judge and Justice of the Peace in Trinidad, the Honorable Ross Bradley. Following the Judges advice, Will had

obtained a license and Certificate to have in-hand as soon as a bride could be found. Will also had Bradley get everything for a title transfer and Bill of Sale. The Judge was ready and all paper work was ready. Will just had to find a girl willing to marry him as he was; not as a Ranch owner. Bradley was thinking, “ Good luck with that. Will would need a half witted girl to make this deal.” When he said this jokingly to Will; Will began making plans.

Will's first attempts were soundly rejected. He was laughed at for such a ridiculous proposal as marriage by every girl, including the Saloon and Cabin girls. Time was marching on and August the fifth was fast approaching . Will finally became desperate and planned on getting one of the local cabin girls drunk and taking her to Ross for marriage he went to Ross and told him he might be bringing a girl in. That she was not all there all of the time. That he suspected whiskey abuse. It was while thinking along these lines, and the danger of using a local girl, that he saw the Stage Coach in Lamy with six good looking Saloon girls inside. He was an old hand at stage coach robberies. Why Not? At least now, I gotta wife.

Black Jack was in the territorial Prison of Santa Fe and Will waited long hours to see him. Having been there before, he introduced his wife, now clean and wearing new clothes, and signed in . Black Jack couldn't believe the pretty girl Will had with him. He suspected that he was being duped and said, “Will, before I sign these papers , I wanna talk to your wife.” Will figured all was lost and said, “ Jack you understand that I had a hard rock to beat getting a wife in such short order; She has no idea about our deal.” Jack said , “ Very good. Elli welcome to the family. This may be the last time I see you, but you are a very pretty lady to be married to Will here. How did you come about marrying him?” Elli replied, “ He robs the Stage Coach to Santa Fe , take me off. Take me to Judge. They make paper. I married to him. That's all.” Jack broke up laughing and said “ Yeah , he's damn sure a Henry all right. Robs a stage coach to get a wife. Damnest thing I ever heard of. What about you Elli? Are you gonna stick with him now? Have kids and everything. “ Elli replied, “ Not work if I have baby.” Jack said “ Right you are Elli and I'm making sure of that. Half of the Henry Horse Ranch is yours. Hand me the papers Will, I'll sign 'em; Son, I

don't know how you did this ; you got yourself a good woman and now they can do their damndest to me. I'm ready to go. "

They said their Good Byes and rode back to Trinidad where Will had a room. He had cleaned himself up with new clothes , no beard and a haircut. Sitting across the table from Elli he said, "Elli where do we go from here? What would you like to do? The ranch live stock account came with the Ranch" Elli replied, " Will , I your wife , I don't understand. I go with you. Thank you for marry me." Will said, ' Thank you Elli. I'm sorry for the way I treated you. Would you like to go see our Ranch.?

Elli said, " Do not be sorry Mister Will. You must want me mucho to rob stage coach. Yes, would like to see you Ranch. Will said , " No, it is our Ranch Elli. Black Jack gave half of the Ranch to Elli Hobbs That's you! Yours. " Elli was speechless! She finally came to realize she actually had something and she was married. She had no idea what this all meant. It was too big and too sudden for her to take in. Never, even drunk had she ever had a dream like this. Surely she would wake any moment. Will said, ' Ain't never been married before, don't know what it feels like, but I reckon now I gotta leave the Saloon girls alone. Whatta you think?"Elli said, " All married men say, 'Don't tell wife', Mister Will, you have problem."

Will laughed saying Elli , "I think we're gonna do Ok. I think you'll make a great wife. Why did you get outta the Coach first?" Eli replied, " I not liked by other girls. Madam don't like me. Some mans don't like me, call me Bitch; you hold up stage coach, all girls are scared . I afraid , but girls all push me out ; they say give him Bitch. You are nice man Will. Thank you for hold up stage and marry me. I like name Elli . Where from name?" Will smiled and said, "I had a pretty pet Toad frog, I played with all the time, when I was a kid. Her name was Elli until she turned out to be a He." Elli asked ' What happen him?" Will replied, " I was learning to shoot. I taught him to jump every time I yelled Elli and I'd shoot where he was settin. One time he didn't jump. Didn't want no He frog anyway." Elli laughed. This was her first time since the hold up. Will said, " Good laugh Elli, feels good, I like it." Elli replied, " You yell Elli mister Will, I jump , maybe." Will laughed thinking, " I believe we're gonna get along Ok."

Later he asked, “ Elli, how do you feel about being my wife?” Elli replied, “ Don’t know mister Will , never marry, just puta.” Will asked , “How come Elli, you’re a pretty girl, surely some boy wanted you for a wife.” Elli replied, “No mister Will, Pinta village very poor , all boys leave , work on boats. Many girls in family to eat. Sell some ,Gringo Dixon buy me, you no puta, you no eat ; puta for him one year Dodge ; trouble comes , go to Santa Fe. You hold up stage . Thank you.”

Will was shocked by her story and said, “ You don’t go buying young girls to turn into whores. Who the Hell does this Dixon think he is? Elli , it just ain’t right. The Bastard outta be shot buying young girls to work his whore house.’ Elli said “ Maybe , mister Will , you hold up stage to get girl?” Will exclaimed , “ Well damn Elli , it ain’t the same. Here he is buying you and forcing you to be a puta.” Elli replied, “ Maybe mister Will he hold up stage, get girl, scare her for marry him, be puta wife.” Will said, “ Damn, that’s not the way it is Elli, I don’t want you as a puta. We’re gonna run a Horse Ranch and maybe raise a family. Can’t a puta woman still have babies?” Elli said, “Mister Will, yes I have baby but never see. Don’t know girl or boy. Madam take, give away .” Elli wasn’t laughing, there were tears in her eyes. Will was thinking , “ Yeah, give away to who?” He said, “Elli, I see your pain. I will make no more for you. Tomorrow we go to the Ranch.”

It was a good plan, but, the Sheriff of Trinidad, Bob Toler wanted to question Will and his wife about the stage hold up where a prostitute was stolen that belonged to Matt Dixon of Santa Fe. He found them at the Rooming house where Will had signed the register indicating that he was from the town of Lany which was in the foot hills a short distance from where the robbery took place. He was saying, “ Mister Hobbs I apologize for bothering you and your wife. I realize you are newly married, but is there any chance you may have seen the man that robbed the stagecoach and took one of the prostitutes. She was said to be Mexican and I understand that your wife is Mexican.’

At this point Will exclaimed angrily, “ What the Hell are you saying Sheriff ?” the Sheriff threw his hands up saying, “No! No! Mister Hobbs you don’t understand; three families of Mexicans came in from Lany last night and I need some one that can understand Spanish.

They may have seen or heard something. Matt Dixon and his Stage driver are at the Jail right now and he's raising Hell. You'd think somebody stole his wife , the way he's carrying on. I told him I'd check around ,but the robbery was really outta my district. He needs to see Sheriff Rod Haynes in Ruidoso, but Rod is a strong Christian. He'll probably throw him outta his Office and escort him outta town. That's probably why he came to see me. I'm not sure it wasn't the girls husband or maybe another Road House Owner, that's running low on girls. What ever it is I really don't give a damn. I just hope the girl's ok."

Will breathed a sigh of relief and said , "I'm sure Elli will be glad to do what she can, but her English is not that good either. Where is this group of Mexicans?" Sheriff replied, "Just south east of town, there's a camp area. I always get most of my calls from campers over there. People just cain't seem to get along. You better go with your wife. I won't let anything happen to her but you might feel better about it." Will said " Sheriff, we been married two days. That ought to tell you something. I'll be coming along and Sheriff, I'll be carrying a gun. I won't stand for any insults to her from anyone." Elli had overheard everything and didn't want to go after hearing that Dixon was in town. She was afraid he might see her. She called Will to their bedroom and told him she was afraid to go outside because Dixon might see her. Will said "Elli, as a newly wed you can wear a shawl covering your entire face and no one will object, I promise you."

Three Mexican families were camped fairly close together and there was an argument going on when they arrived. Elli was petrified with fear . One man arguing with the Mexican group was Matt Dixon, there was no sign of Ron Bloxie. Matt was gesturing and cursing two men and insisting they must know the whereabouts of his puta. Bob Tolar yelled , " Dixon, leave these folks alone! Damnit, you told me you didn't speak Spanish. You get on back to my Office. I brought Mrs. Hobbs to speak to these folks." Dixon was mad exclaiming, " Tolar, these damn Mexicans are all stickin together. They've gotta know something. That Mex Teresa didn't just disappear. Who's this Hobbs woman? Does she know something? Woman get over here!"

At this point Will could feel Elli trembling and he stepped in front of her and said, "Sheriff, I will not have my wife spoken to like that. Dixon my name is Hobbs, Will Hobbs and you better be damn good with that gun if you wanna speak to Mrs. Hobbs. Sheriff you better get someone else to speak to these folks; my wife and I are leaving." Sheriff Tolar cursed and said, " Damnit , Dixon you sure don't help things. You won't get any answers here. Cursing at these folks just kills your chances of getting any information. They may not speak English, but they sure know when you're cussin at them . You and Bloxie best go home ; You ain't gonna find your girl working the streets in this town. Not as long as I'm Sheriff anyway." Will put his arm around Elli and she leaned into him as she quit trembling. They made the Rooming House still hearing the loud mouth of Dixon as he switched from cursing Mexicans to cursing the Sheriff.

Later Elli said, " Mister Will, thank you ; I very scared. Mister Dixon bad man; beats puta's; one puta die." Will replied, "Elli , he's a dead man if he ever tries to take you or beat you. I know how Madams and other owners treat their girls. No one will miss Dixon . Elli , we're headin for the Bar H Henry ranch tomorrow. I'm hoping we can begin to enjoy a little of the good times together."

Wrong! Things were not good on the Bar H. Every cow and horse except a man killer stallion had been stolen .The only livestock left was half a dozen burro's. The Ruidoso Sheriff, Rod Haynes was at the Ranch house when Will and Elli arrived. After introductions Will and Elli met the ranch manager and keeper Ricardo . The Sheriff said, "Mister Hobbs, as the new owner, you have a tough time ahead of you . After Ol'Henry died , the thieves took over. I don't know if you'll ever find your horses . Ricardo has had me out here a dozen times over the last month and yesterday the last three horses were stolen. My Deputy is out right now trailing the thieves. So far we've only been able to track them as far as Cedar Ridge. He'll probably have the same problem we've had right along. I know Ricardo to be an honest man Will and I know right now he's got a problem. His wife Angie is very ill and can't feed her baby. You can't blame him for not keeping watch . It just ain't possible with the problems he has; they could easily lose that baby. Ol'Henry would roll over in his grave if he knew he'd been wiped out by horse thieves."

Elli had over heard the talk and went to meet the sick Angie and see what she could do for the baby. After tending the baby and making a Willow tea for Angie, she went back outside to Will. The Sheriff was riding out to meet his empty handed Deputy. They waved as they headed back for town. Ricardo said, “ Mister Hobbs I am sorry , but I am but one man and not a young man anymore. The horse thieves have taken every horse except Diablo; Mister Henry’s stallion. I only have a burro left to ride to get the Sheriff, but I am afraid to leave my Angie and our little girl Reena. She may die Mister Hobbs , Angie has very little milk to give. I don’t know what to do.”

Elli said, “Mister Will, Mother very sick , baby no milk . What to do Mister Will?” Will replied, “ I don’t know for sure but there are chickens running around here . Ricardo have you got eggs. ? Yeah, Ok Elli, take a couple and beat the yokes up and add a little water and sugar. This should help the baby until we can get back into town.” As they went to gather some eggs, they passed the corral of burros and will was frightened as Elli sharply cried out, “ Mister Will! Mister Will ! Nino’s , Nino burros in Pinta , use burro milk for baby.”Jabbering in Spanish she explained to Ricardo that he must milk the mama burro for milk to feed Reena, that many babies in Mexico are raised on Burro milk when the mother dies or has no milk. Ricardo explained this in detail to Will and between them they tied up one leg on one of the jenny burros and got plenty of milk for Reena. Elli was thrilled to take and care for the baby. She said , “Mister Will you go for horses maybe.’ Will replied, “Elli ,Ricardo and I will take a look at this Cedar Ridge where the tracks vanish, but we’ll be back before dark.”

Cedar ridge was no help. There was no sign of horse travel anywhere the trail led up to a solid sheet of hard granite rock. There was horse sign up to that point but nothing showing to the top of the Ridge and the evening wind was beginning to sweep the granite clean. Will decided to come back when he had more daylight to go to the very top and over. Maybe he could pick up a trail on the other side. Back at the Ranch house he had another problem. The smell of a rotting animal filled the house and trying to eat under that condition was outta the question. Will had to get rid of a dead horse. What happened to kill the horse and where was it?

Ricardo explained that during a horse raid the previous week, the thieves had attempted to Catch Diablo and steal him while only Angie was home . She was fighting her sickness at the time and locked the house doors . She lay in bed with little Reena and a pistol in her hand while the thieves were at work. She heard the squealing of the angry Diablo, but was unable to do anything. When Ricardo returned , there was a dead saddle horse in Diablo's pen. It still wore a saddle. The Stallion had lived up to his name. There was no sign of the rider ; he must have escaped the Stallion.

Will was thinking, "I've gotta get the dead horse outta there, but what about Diablo? How do I keep him outta the way? The corral is much too big for throwing a rope from the fence and even if I caught him, how do I get the rope off before he chokes to death." For a good while he considered every method with the constant reminder strong enough to make you sick. There were two ways to handle a dead horse, drag'em out on the lee side of your ranch yard for the Coyotes or burn the carcass. Both methods would work, but Diablo had to be kept back from attacking while he worked. The burning method gave him an answer. Horses are terrified of fire. He had Ricardo put a pair of ropes together while he made himself a torch. Ricardo was scared but the torch kept Diablo as far away a he could get and they attached the rope to the carcass and drug it outta the corral. It was stinky, but easy from there. Elli was very happy to air out the house and put out the candles they'd been burning to cover the smell.

The following morning they inspected the saddle they had taken from the dead horse, but there was no name of owner on it. Will said to Ricardo, " Take your skinning knife and cut the brand off ; that'll tell us who owns the horse. I'll just present it to Haynes. We'll take the saddle in and see if he might recognize it. Ricardo, we don't have any answers yet, but we've got something the thieves couldn't get. I hope it gets us an answer to who the thieves are. I'd say that brand is an AB from the looks of it, Just might be a ranch around here with that brand." That afternoon Will rode to the Cedar Ridge , went over the top and down the other side. There were twenty odd trails leading off from the bottom of the ridge. Any one could be the route of the horse thieves, but none showed recent travel.

Days later visiting Sheriff Haynes, Will took him the saddle and horsehide. Haynes said , ‘ Yeah that’s the old Alice Brown horse ranch brand from over by that little town of Las Vegas near Santa Fe. Folks claim she bought the Ranch with money she earned as a prostitute when Santa Fe was Booming with Mexican Traders and Gold miners. She died a few years back . The ranch is now operated by the owner of the Yellow Bird Saloon and Roadhouse in Santa Fe. The dead horse could have been stolen from the AB and the saddle Will, it’s Mex made ; you’ll never find an owner. There’s hundreds around just like it. Sorry, I can’t be of more help.”

“By the way, how’s Ricardo’s wife Angie doing? I wanted to tell you when we were at the Ranch; it sounds like she’s got that spotted or black fever from Mexico. I didn’t wanna say anything with Ricardo there, but Will you maybe outta prepare yourself, that fever has killed hundreds in Mexico.” Will was shocked at this news about Angie! He exclaimed, “ Damn I hope not! How would she get the fever and will we all get it? What about her baby Reena, she’ll never live through a sickness.” Haynes replied, “ No Will it’s not catchable. Comes from a tick bite, but it is bad. A strong healthy person can live through the fever, but Angie just had her baby. Will, I hate to say it, but it’s touch and go with her. She’s lucky to have your wife there to take care of Reena.”

That evening, Will told Elli what Haynes had told him about Spotted fever. Elli was shaken and crying saying, “ No! No! Please No! Black fever - many die in Pinta. Very Bad sick.’ Will said, “ I’m sorry Elli, but I had to tell you. I haven’t told Ricardo, but he has to know and prepare himself for the worse. Hopefully Angie will recover, but for now it looks like you have Reena to care for.” Elli said, “Mister Will, Elli, love baby Reena; she happy.”

That evening Will relayed the frightening news to Ricardo. Shocked and upset, he said, “ I’m sorry Mister Hobbs, but yes, it is the Black fever, maybe. I have suspected this. Angie went to stay with her mother in Mexico when Reena was to be born. There is much fever in Mexico this time of year. We can only hope she has strength to live.” Will was thinking, “ Yeah, it’s tick season, a bad time to be in central Mexico.” Ricardo went outside to sit watching the sundown as Will

heard Elli talking softly to little Reena. Tomorrow he would take another ride up Cedar Ridge; a horse ranch without horses wasn't much. He would go well armed for trouble. Will had no idea that other threats would soon be coming from Matt Dixon.

In Trinidad on the afternoon when Sheriff Tolar had requested Elli's help with talking to the Mexican campers for Dixon ;his stage driver Ron Bloxie was busy in town. Bloxie in describing the Stage hold up remembered the outlaw said he wanted a girl for a wife and he was in a hurry to get one. Trinidad was the nearest town where a parson or priest could be found to get married, so while Dixon was cussin Mexicans, Bloxie was checking around for a recent marriage. He had overlooked the Justice of the Peace entirely; found nothing while they were in town and went back to Santa Fe.

It was on a trip weeks later that he thought of the County Recorder's office. By a stroke of luck he knew a lady working there and found out that a marriage Certificate had been issued to Will Hobbs and a Mexican girl named Elli. Maybe there was a connection; the girl's name he was looking for had been Teresa, but that was her Saloon name. He was anxious to get this information back to Dixon , but he wasn't scheduled for another run for two weeks. In the meantime , he decided to check things out himself ;Dixon would pay him really well if he could find the stolen saloon girl. That was a lot easier than he thought it would be. The rooming house had Will and Elli Hobbs in their register with the Henry Horse Ranch in Ruidoso as their address. Bloxie rented a horse to go to Ruidoso. He was getting really excited. It looked like he might have found the girl!

Everything seemed to hold up Will from riding to Cedar Ridge, but things were quiet at the Ranch house. Elli was becoming more dependant upon him every day and found herself enjoying life as his wife . Being a Mother to Reena was something she really enjoyed, Angie seemed to be slowly slipping away and could do nothing for the baby. Reena saw Elli as her mother. Will could see this happening, but knew there was nothing they could do for Angie except care for her and see to her comfort . He told Ricardo he'd be out awhile looking for stolen horses.

Knowing that he might be gone a few days trying to follow tracks weeks old, he pack saddled a burro to take with him. Will was thinking these thoughts as he climbed Cedar Ridge and as he reached the solid sheet of granite where all tracks ended. The burro jerked on his lead rope. Will thought the burro just wanted to go back and taking a turn around the saddle horn he drug the Burro forward. No mister burro would not go up the hill; he wanted to go down from where the tracks ended. There was no trail, just sheer rock but the burro easily walked down it. Will decided to let him go back down and unload the sorry Ass at the bottom. He'd have to let him go back to the Ranch. Dragging a stubborn burro ; he could never get his search finished. Surprisingly the burro led the way back around the Ridge through a blind rock formation and to the bottom on the solid granite.

Here was a real surprise, dried horse manure covered the bottom where grass grew at the edge of the granite. Now it made sense. This was the stolen horse trail. His pack burro knew it or followed smell. That horse manure was blown off the granite , and rolling down to collect at the bottom. A well used trail led south. Will followed it. Mister burro had moved way up in Will's opinion; he named him Chester. If there was a question on which way to go Chester would lead the way .

Two days later Will was approaching the small New Mexico town of Las Vegas. The stolen horse trail had included a number of camp sites where horses had been corralled over night. The thieves had not tried to hide anything. It was almost as if they had no concern of being caught. The trail led to a fairly large wing gate entering the AB Ranch. It resembled a gate used for corralling wild horses. This was where the Henry Ranch horses had been driven to. There was no doubt . The Trail was very plain and had been used over a good period of time. There were sites of old camp fires that looked to be two years old. Riding the perimeter ranch fence, Will saw many groups of horses. There were no Bar H horses in any of the groups. What happened to the Henry horses? They must be holding them some where else. He would go to Haynes and tell what he had seen. Maybe he would have some idea. The dead horse in Diablo's pen had definitely carried an AB brand. It had to be horse thieves from the AB Ranch.

Will decided to go see Sheriff Haynes, but knew he didn't want to ride to Ruidoso leading a burro. Chester just didn't like anything but a slow walk and that would take two days. As he was preparing to leave it had been a long day and Chester hadn't eaten but leaves and brush he'd grabbed as they walked the trail. When Will hung the feed bag on his horse, good ol' Chester started braying. He wanted to eat too. His braying aroused a group of horses and they all came running to the fence. Some of them were crowding the fence and whickering at his horse. Will saw a cow hand come out by their barn looking in his direction. It was time to leave , he didn't want to explain why he was there. So wearing feed bags on both animals , he rode back up the trail. He would be a day and a half getting back home.

Tragedy awaited Will at the Ranch. Angie had died! Elli was in tears and Ricardo was numb with depression. Will tried to comfort both of them and felt the sorrow of death himself. He finally said to both, " I feel your pain and it's terrible to lose Angie, but you both knew the pain she was in. It was so much more terrible than anything we feel. She's at peace now . It's up to us to find her a resting place and take care of baby Reena. Elli , you must now be her Mother. Ricardo we have to move on. Where would you like Angie to be buried? Ricardo replied, " Mister Hobbs, we have a small church yard in Ruidoso. There is a Nun ,Sister Margaret, living there. She will help us' Will said , "That's good Ricardo, but we'll need a coffin box." He replied , " Sister Margaret will have one. She say's Death comes to everyone . One must be ready." Will wasn't sure that's what the sister was saying . Later, Elli dressed Angie in her best clothes and wrapped the body in her favorite blanket . Ricardo had prepared a bed of straw in the wagon. Sadly they all, including baby Reena, drove to Ruidoso.

Upon their arrival in town Will had gone to see Sheriff Haynes, leaving Ricardo and Elli at Sister Margaret's. Hayne' wasn't surprised by the death of Angie. Digger's were hired and Yes, the Chapel had coffins on hand. Angie would be laid to rest by sundown. For most of the afternoon Angie's body would lay in the open coffin inside the Chapel. Will had briefed Haynes on his trip ending at the AB Horse Ranch; also telling him of his riding the perimeter fence , but seeing no sign of Bar H horses. Haynes said, " Will I agree, the AB Ranch was often accused by Ol'Henry and I even went there on a few occasions

to look for Bar H stock We never found any and when Matt Dixon took over the Ranch, he threatened to kill Henry for accusing him of stealing. You look surprised? You didn't know Dixon owned that Ranch?" at Will's "No" head shake he continued , "Yeah Dixon makes big tracks in Santa Fe sells some very good horses, a whole lot like those ol'Henry raised." Will said, "I wouldn't be surprised if they were Henry horses and Haynes if they are , folks still hang horse thieves in New Mexico." Haynes exclaimed, " Hey! I don't wanna here any of that kinda talk Hobbs . You bring proof to me and I'll handle Matt Dixon. " Will asked " Dead or Alive?" and walked out.

It was later in the morning when Ron Bloxie rode into town Haynes had answered a number of questions ,when the name Will and Elli Hobbs was mentioned, Haynes said, "Bloxie I know you're friendly with Matt Dixon and you may think he's a big man in Santa Fe, but believe me he's small potatoes compared to Will Hobbs. If I'm any judge of gunfighters, you make any slighting comments about his wife and you better say it holding a gun in your hand. Even then, you will still be in trouble. I can't and won't help you. Right now, the whole family is over at Sister Margaret's for a burial. Here's my advice ;I'd say keep your mouth shut . I don't know where Will Hobbs comes from or what's behind him, but I'll bet there's a few graves. You ask the wrong kind of question to that man and we'll be carrying you to Boot Hill. Bloxie said, " I'm going over there Sheriff, but all I'll do is have a look. If what I think is true, I'll pass it on to Dixon . He can do what he wants to." As Bloxie left ,Haynes said, " Boot Hill has room for him too."

Bloxie pulled his hat low so that he wouldn't be recognized by anyone. There were a few friends of Ricardo and Angie in the chapel. Getting a look at the face of Angie, he recognized her as a Mexican Girl. He studied her and couldn't decide anything. She had none of the paint that saloon girls wore. Watching everyone , he saw Elli carrying the baby Renna and dismissed her immediately, but Will he wasn't too sure of . This man was the right build, and had scars on his face but cleaned up it was hard to tell. Watching how he acted with his wife and baby. No it couldn't be him and Sister Margaret had written Angie's name on a stand beside the coffin. Bloxie couldn't read much Spanish but asked one of the women to read it for him. She said it read

to be Angelina Terista Evangelista, “ Yes, Yes!” he said to himself, “ This was the puta, Teresa ; Dixon was looking for. I’ll take this information to Dixon and warn him about Will Hobbs, the new owner of Henry ranch as a dangerous man to deal with.”

Days later Bloxie delivered his findings to Dixon and the man blew up, calling Bloxie a coward for not calling Will out and questioning him about what his wife knew about the Stage hold up. He insisted that these damn Mexicans stick together and she knew something. He wasn’t gonna believe his puta had died. He suspected that Will Hobbs knew something and he was gonna keep an eye on the man. He wanted Bloxie to find out all he could about this girl that had been buried. Bloxie wasn’t anxious to do anything more thinking to himself, “ I got no thanks for the work I did in getting answers. If he wants more, he’ll have to get it himself. I’m through with him.”

Dixon , within a week found out he had another problem when he visited the AB Ranch. His foreman Bart King, partner in horse stealing informed him that a man fitting the description of Will Hobbs had been seen riding his fence line looking over his horses. He assured Dixon that he had nothing to worry about . Everything in the north pasture carried an AB brand. Dixon exclaimed, “I had a little run in with that Bastard. Shoot him if he shows up here again. We need to get rid of him . We’ve cleaned out the Henry Ranch, but it’s the best pasture grass around here and we’re way over grazed . I want that ranch Bart, or I want free rights to use it. Bloxie tells me this Hobbs is married and has a kid. Married to a Mex woman . Get rid of him and we can easily take over.”

King said, “We’re gonna have to be careful Matt. Haynes has been out to the Henry four times lately and if this Hobbs knows how we get horses off Cedar Ridge, we’ve got a real problem. I told you about the big steal I wanted to do before ol’Henry died. Wayne Miller’s been holding off bringing back those thirty select mares Henry had bred to that Morgan stallion of Wayne’s. Word has been out for weeks that the new owner has taken over and Miller’s tired of feeding the bunch. He’s bringing them in this week. Matt those horses are the very best that ol’Henry had. Prices will go through the roof for their foals. We’ll really have to pull off something to steal that bunch. I’ve been

working on a scheme, but it has lots of holes in it.” Dixon said, “ Keep at it Bart and get me a message when you’re ready to take’em, I’ll get back here with a couple of my men to lend a hand.”

Will had learned in town of the Wayne Miller Stallion and Ol’Henry’s mares that would be delivered to his Ranch shortly. He couldn’t hardly believe the good news. Thirty select mares bred to the finest Stallion in the country. The Henry Horse Ranch was back in business! That week, Will questioned Ricardo about everything on the Ranch and what dealings were there that he didn’t know of. He had put Chester back with the burros and told Ricardo of his trip. It was good to hear the ol’Boy braying at supper time. The Stallion Diablo, raced around his pen when Chester got going good.

Will found that most of the horses were stolen from the corrals there near the Ranch house. They amounted to a dozen saddle horses and fifty some mares over the past three years. Will asked, “Ricardo, why did Ol’Henry keep Diablo. He’s not of good quality for breeding. Seems to me a killer like him needs to be put down.” Ricardo replied “ Oh No Mister Hobbs, Diablo is a Range Stallion. Mister Henry owned his Mother. She was very mean. Tried to stomp and bite riders when she bucked them off. After Diablo was born and weaned she was shot and killed.

Diablo was just like his mother and Mister Henry roped him and tied him down. Then he operated on Diablo, not to geld him but cut his sheath so he can never breed a mare. He turns him out with all of his mares. He is so big and mean , he fights and kills any wild horse stallions coming on the Henry Ranch . Diablo is very afraid of bird shot from the riders and he brings the herd in when Mister Henry wants to breed them to a good stallion, this is when his mares are stolen, Diablo is kept in his corral away from the breeders. Mister Hobbs I forgot about the bird shot when we moved the dead horse. He is very afraid of a shotgun.”

Will asked, “ What about these mares Wayne Miller is bringing in? How should we go about handling them, will there be any near foaling that we should care for?” Ricardo said, “No they should all be for spring birth . Mister Henry did not do year round foaling. Lose too

many in bad weather.' Will said, " We can't just turn them loose; I understand they are the best in the Territory. Every thief in the country will be after them." Ricardo said, " No Mister Hobbs. We turn them loose with Diablo. He takes care of them. He will attack every rider. You must kill Diablo to get mares or use shotguns to scare him back to the Ranch yard and corrals.' Will said, "I've never heard of such a thing Ricardo. Where did Ol'Henry pick up this Stallion trick." Ricardo replied, " He comes from Wyoming and he said that most every Rancher there used a Range stallion to protect their good mares from Mustang breeding. It was a very common thing. The range is all open and free grazing. The rancher brings in his mares to breed to a good stallion."

The following week Miller brought in the mares. He and two range hands each led a group of ten horses tied head to tail. Bart King had seen the line up in Ruidoso and immediately made plans to steal the whole group. Here were thirty of the best horses he'd ever seen and when Miller pulled out after delivering them, the only thing to protect them was two men. In his mind Ricardo and Hobbs would turn them all out in the big corral. Probably keep them corralled for a few days to check all for injuries. This would be the best time. At midnight , two of Dixon's men would go in and stampede the horses out through the corral gates that he would have open. They would push the herd to Cedar Ridge . Two of King's riders would be there to turn them down the granite trail and take over from there pushing the horses to their first holding corral five miles away. The next day would be another controlled stampede for ten miles to get them on the AB Ranch. Bart sent a rider to Santa Fe to get Dixon and his two ranch hands. The two hands came back but Dixon couldn't make it. Bart figured to do it on his own before the mares were turned on the Range.

Will and Ricardo were thrilled with the look of every horse. Will had not turned any of them loose, but instead tied each to a corral post so he could check each one over. Ricardo was not happy with this arrangement. Each horse was led to water and hay was placed for it to eat .Ricardo complained that it took him all morning to water and feed and by afternoon it was time to start all over again. Will said, " Ricardo, you saw some of the trail injuries and that Stallion of Miller's was a neck biter. He should have put a muzzle on him. We can't turn

'em loose until we can get medicine salve on all of them. I don't wanna be chased by Diablo while I'm trying to catch an injured mare."

Will was getting concerned that a steal attempt would be made and both he and Ricardo took turns on watch every night. Elli was up frequently with Reena at night and it was on one of her visits to the baby that she noticed both Will and Ricardo were sound asleep. She sat for an hour or more holding Reena and keepin watch on the corrals knowing that both men were badly needing sleep. She, herself was dozing as Diablo whinnied and whistled a warning. Quickly she woke Will telling him of Diablo making noise. Will grabbed his rifle shaking Ricardo awake. There was a little moon light and he could see figures moving near the corral. Two riders on horse back could be seen in the corral. Ricardo shot his rifle before Will could stop him . The night came alive with gunfire as both riders began shooting at them. Another gun began shooting from the corral gate.

Ricardo was hit and Will drug him behind a water trough. He was unconscious. Carrying his rifle and although he couldn't see the sights , his shootin was almost automatic. Both riders went down and the gun at the corral gate was now silent. Will was in a high state of anger and concern for Ricardo. He almost made a fatal mistake. He lay down his rifle and as he stood up, a bullet almost caught him. His hat was blown from his head! Jerking out his pistol he emptied all five rounds in the area where the shot came from, his pistol clicked on empty. There was silence and then he heard a moving from the corral. Will knew he'd pulled a stupid stunt by standing up and lay low with Ricardo as he tried to reload his gun. There was no light behind the trough and the cylinder jammed with a shell half way in. Footsteps were fast coming toward him . The thieves knew his gun was empty! Desperately he tried his rifle. He knew he'd made another mistake emptying his guns. He was helpless to defend himself. He and Ricardo would die there tonight. He couldn't get up to run. He would only be a bigger target. Suddenly thinking of Ricardo; his rifle where was it? Scrambling around he found it just as two of the thieves closed in on him. His quick shooting caught both of them ;they both went down. The sudden silence was frightening.

Will lay motionless as he listened for any sound from the thieves. There was none! It was an hour later after he and Elli had wrapped up Ricardo's head and leg where he had been shot, that he took a lamp and cautiously went out to examine the thieves. Luckily for him, all three were dead Approaching them in the dark was a dangerous thing to do. Later Will found that there were bullet holes in his shirt on the right side. "Yeah", he was thinking, "Another dose of stupidity like tonight and I won't be around." Poor Ricardo was lucky to be alive; he had a concussion and a broken leg. Elli would now have to take care of him and the baby. Will was furious the next morning when he found the thieves horses and all were wearing AB brands.

Tying all three bodies on their horses, he went to see Haynes . The Sheriff was horrified saying, " Damnit Hobbs , I told you to come and get me if you had trouble. This man here is Bart King, Matt Dixon's partner and half owner of the AB Ranch . I can't believe this. What happened?" Will said " Yeah, Sheriff you said to come see you if I had trouble. Well here it is. Three thieves trying to steal my horses and they shot Ricardo. He's in bed right now with a broken leg. Damn lucky he's not dead. Took a bullet up the side of his head. All three of their horses are AB brand. That's enough for me. Either you get rid of them or I will. They stole ol'Henry dry and trying to do the same to me. Two of them Elli recognized. They work for Dixon . He's next on my list."

Haynes exclaimed, "Hobbs, I told you. You can't go gunning for some one without cause. These three and your killing of them will bring a Federal Marshal in here. Any more fighting and threats on your part and you'll be arrested. Hobbs, you have to have proof that Dixon is one of the thieves. Maybe he is and you're probably right, but hold off until we can prove something. He'll blame this whole thing on King. You've got a wife and baby to think about now. What happens to them if you go down or get locked up?"

Will was furious! Dixon was guilty as hell and should be one of the dead. Haynes had no idea that Will also hated the man for what he'd done to Elli. Will rode back to the ranch trying to figure a way to kill Dixon. That man had to die. He was worse than a thief or a murderer. Then Will thought of Elli, " Yeah, Haynes was right. He had

forgot all about her with his hate for Dixon. He had to spend more of his time, thinking about her. She was carrying a heavy enough load without him adding to it. He'd have to start acting like a husband and father."

Haynes was right , Dixon blamed King for the whole thing, but Dixon made his plans to kill Will Hobbs . His wife and kid would give him the opportunity to draw Will to a place where he could be killed. Elli had spent a lot of her time making things just right for little Reena. Taking care of Ricardo increased her desire to keep the house cleaned up and wanted to throw out things from the house. Asking Will about the saddle and piece of horsehide he'd brought back from Hayne's office, Will said, "Elli, that saddle is just about the right size for you to ride, we'll keep it in the stable. That piece of horse hide with the AB brand you can toss it out." Elli said, " Will this is not AB brand. This is Bar "B". " Showing it to Will, he exclaimed, " I'll be damned Elli you're right! Darling girl, this is just what I need. The hair side is AB, but the skin side is Bar B. The Bar B has been over branded with the AB Dixon you're going to jail or a hanging." Will saddled up and headed straight for Ruidoso and Sheriff Haynes. Knowing now that all of the stolen horses were over branded and it would take a close inspection to see it . He could understand why all those horses had rushed the fence when Chester began braying, it was feeding time of course! They were all Bar B horses. Had he known , he would have stampeded back to the Ranch house, but he had no idea that Dixon had planned this day to abduct Elli and Reena to lure him to his death .

Dixon and two men rode to the Bar B ranch house and watched from the surrounding trees for any activity, They had no knowledge that Ricardo was bed ridden and Ricardo was known for his rifle work. It would be much safer for them if Ricardo could be shot . Dixon placed his men on opposite sides of the house to wait for Ricardo to show. Shadows were getting long as afternoon wore on and still no sign of Ricardo. Dixon was getting anxious, They had to get Elli and her baby before dark. Chester had begun braying for his dinner and Diablo began racing around his pen , surely Ricardo would come out any minute to feed the animals. He didn't show and Dixon decided to ride over to the ranch house himself. Ricardo would come out to meet him and then his

men could kill him. He decided to ride through the big corral and out the far side near the house. Wrong!

A big mistake! Diablo had already killed one horse coming into his corral and Dixon was petrified with fear when the big horse squealed and charged knocking his horse to the ground and immediately began to stomp it to death .Dixon was under the side and pinned to the ground by the weight of his horse as Diablo continued to kill. Dixon's two men saw what was happening and began shooting at Diablo. Finally a killing shot put the big horse down. He fell across the body of Dixon's horse and his crushing weight pinned Dixon under him.

Dixon, his body suffering broken bones everywhere was screaming in mortal agony as his two men rolled the dead animals off of him. Elli was sitting in the house with Ricardo's rifle pointed at the door when the men brought Dixon to the house and begged for help. Elli looked down at the man that destroyed her life and thought she should be glad to see him dying, but she felt no hate for him, only pity, She thought for a moment he recognized her, just before he died. Little Reena finally quit crying after Dixon died. His screaming agony had frightened the little girl.

Late that night Will returned home to learn of Dixon's death and listen to the confessions of his two men. He was grateful for Elli and Reena's safety, but his thoughts were that Dixon should have been hung, but maybe it was better this way.

Weeks later as Reena was playing on a blanket on the floor and Will was showing Elli how to use a gun. Elli said , "Will darling, do you think we could have a little brother for Reena?" Will laughed and said, "Darling Elli, do I have to buy you a drink first?" Elli grabbed the rifle laughing, and yelled , "Hot Damn ! This is hold up . I need husband!"

The End