

Saloon Girl

She was coming from the Alley way by the Red Bird saloon in Young Arizona when the Rancher Bud Collins asked, ‘ Hey there lady what’s wrong. What’s the matter with your face? Are you hurt?’ the woman was in tears, and answered, “ Bad burn, but it’s Ok mister, gotta get to my room. Gus Haynes don’t want me seen in his saloon.” Bud said , “ Wait a minute, what’s going on? You one of his girls?” The answer he got was, “ Yeah, I’m Mattie. You know me?’ Bud replied , “ No, I just got in with that big herd south of here thought I’d get a drink. What was you crying about?” Mattie replied, “ No job now, Gus say’s I’m too old and too ugly for his place. Don’t know what I’m gonna do. Look mister, I better go. Gotta find me a job somewhere, a girl’s gotta eat and Gus don’t even want me cleanin the place.” Bud asked, “ Well you look to be pretty healthy otherwise. Can you cook?” Mattie replied, “ Ranch raised country girl , yeah I can cook, what ya got?” Bud replied, “Lost my Cookie south two days past. I gotta have a hash slinger of some kind. The boys cain’t even boil water , none of’em . You reckon you could handle a cook job on a cattle drive?’ Mattie said, “Mister you’re asking an awful lot for a woman. I know how cow hands are, they can be pretty rough around women and on a cattle drive; No I better look somewhere else. “ Bud said, none of them’ll bother you Mattie. I can guarantee that. I know you won’t have a lotta privacy but the cook wagon is plenty big enough for sleepin and stuff.” Mattie said , “ Where you headed? There’s lots of Mexicans around here that could cook for you, but a lone woman on a cattle drive . No thanks.” Bud said, “ Headed for Santa Fe. Mattie , I’ll be in town for two days. if you change your mind look me up , names Bud Collins.”

Mattie went to the room she shared with two other girls and found out she was in real trouble. They wanted her out right away. The note they had left for her said “ Pack up and move out Mattie. Gus has a new girl coming in and she needs your bed. Sorry to see you go. Good luck- Polly.” Mattie sat on her bed crying. She had very little money and no place to go, but she had to get out. Grabbing a worn out travel bag and ragged suitcase, she began to pack. All she had was a few dresses, underclothes and personal items. All of the fancy dresses

she had bought for the job , she left ; some other girl could use them. When daylight came the following morning, she went looking for work. There were jobs, but no one wanted a known Saloon girl working for them. Some were very angry that she would have the nerve to ask for a job. She had tried every place in town , including the Livery Stable and being refused there was the last . She would have to leave town and find work where she wasn't known. The fresh burn scar on her face didn't help any. She went looking for Bud Collins, maybe he hadn't found a cook yet.

“Mister Collins, is that cook job still open?” Mattie asked upon seeing him at the Mercantile buying supplies. Bud replied, “ Yeah, Mattie wasn't it? Yeah I've got a few leads, but haven't caught up with'em yet. You interested in giving it a try. I've always liked woman's cooking, it just seems cleaner some how. The job's still open and I'll be heading to the herd this afternoon with a wagon load. How much stuff you got?” When Mattie explained that as a saloon girl , she had very little except a bad reputation. Bud said, “ Better get yourself some trail clothes. You'll need britches Mattie, ain't no place for woman stuff. Get what you need, I'll take it outta your pay when we get to Santa Fe. Your background is your business. I never ask for a persons life story, I'm only interested in how they work for me. If you work out as cookie, you'll get a little more pay than cowhands so get boots and a hat. As a Ranch hand , you maybe know how to handle a gun. Might need a rifle. We're going right through Indian Country. Oh by the way , I ain't no mister. Name's Bud.”

Mattie couldn't believe what Bud offered but went about getting a man's outfit top to bottom. She was thinking, “ Might as well get use to being man like. I'll go to the room and dress for a cattle drive. Cooking? Yes, I've done a lot of that for the ranch cowhands, too bad I didn't stay on the Ranch. sure wouldn't be here now. Plain damn fool I was! Nose in the air, too damn good for a ranch hand. Had to run off with the first set of store bought clothes I ever saw. Stupid damn girl , head full of dreams and a down hill trip right outta the gate. Yeah, good times, whiskey and men . Ruined life working Saloons before I was even twenty years old. How many towns and how many years. Nothing, now, I've got nothing and probably never will have anything. Shoulda been killed in Tucson, when Wyatt Earp's brother was shot. I

was standing right next to him. Well I guess it all comes down to this. I ain't a woman no more, at least one you wanna be seen with. I'll try this cook job and hope I don't mess up Bud's cattle drive." She had no idea what was in store for her or that the stories she had heard from a life in the saloon would be such a big help on a cattle drive.

That afternoon, Mattie was introduced to Bud's crew and by nightfall she had beef, sourdough hoecakes and coffee for the crew. They were shocked when Bud told them all that Mattie was a woman and he'd personally shoot anyone that hurt her in any way. She was a woman and they damned well better remember it. Mattie was shocked when they all began yes Ma'am and no Ma'am when speaking to her,. She was thinking, " I'm sure glad they're not from around here or they sure wouldn't be treatin me like a woman." Later she told Bud that maybe things would work out for her, that cooking for his crew would be easier than she thought. They all pitched in to gather fire wood and help get things going. Her bed in the cook wagon was nothing but straw, but a lot better than sleeping on the ground like the crew. Bud was pleased to have cooked food again.

He asked, "Ain't none of my business Mattie , but how'd you get the burn on your face?" Mattie replied " You're right Bud. It's my business, but you ought to know. I might have to kill a man. One of them Red Legs from Kansas was in the Saloon when I came to work one evening. He was drunk and mean. He began slapping Polly, one of the girls . I went to help her and he hit me . I fell over the Faro table knocking over the lamp and the whole thing went up in flames when they pulled me from the table my whole face had been burned, my hair was on fire and I couldn't see. The pain was horrible, that was over two months ago. My hair's grown back some and my eyes are Ok. Doc said , it would be years before the burn would fade in color, but some scars would always be there."

"Gus became the bastard , he's always been. Blamed me for the whole thing. I ran outta money paying Doc for his work, and paying my way with the girls. That night I met you was the first day I tried to go back. Gus threw me out. So Bud you're taking on my problems when you hired me to cook. I can't thank you enough for the job, I'll try my best to make sure you didn't make a mistake." Bud said, " You'll do just fine Mattie. Who was that Red Leg, I know there's a number of

them raiding here in Arizona and New Mexico.” Mattie replied, “ It was Marlo Barr , he’s the leader of that Barr Red Gang. Wish I’d had a gun that night. I couldn’t hardly see, but I’d a killed him.” Bud whistled saying, “ You sure picked a mean one. He’s killed a string of folks with his raiding around Santa Fe. I’m surprised to hear he was in this area.”

Their next morning was a hurry up breakfast and get the cattle moving. Bud told Mattie to follow him and find a place about ten miles out to set up and cook for dinner. He also told her to keep her rifle handy, there were Antelope, desert deer and an occasional buffalo If she should down one cut it’s throat and bleed it out. He’d have the crew butcher it for her. He also warned her of possible Indian trouble, they were taking the herd right through Apache country. He said, “ Mattie, I guess I should have warned you about rattlesnakes too. This country anywhere near water is full of coon tail rattlers and the small sidewinders. You can practice your shooting a little but, I want everyone to keep a good count on their bullets. The Apaches will taunt you to shoot at them on a running horse and when you’re outta shells they come right in and kill you. They’re the best when it comes to hand to hand fighting”

“. Counting you there’s twelve of us and most of the small groups will steer clear of us. I don’t mind losing a steer or two, but I don’t wanna lose a man. You’re gonna be in real trouble if you’re too far from the herd. Indians love sugar and there’s a bag of dried sugar cane in the wagon. We might be able to do a little trading for a safe trip some time. Ok Maggie that’s it for now. You have a problem let out a yell and remember three shots or three of anything is a call for help.”

Bud had no idea what he had hired, besides a good cook. Mattie was deadly with a rifle and better than most with the hand gun he gave her. Her early years had been filled with fighting off Indian raids and Renegade pillaging. She knew more about fighting Indians than he did. Two days away from the town of Young. Mattie ran into trouble. A gambler from Holbrook hailed the camp at evening and wanted to come in. It was always customary to offer food to any one at your campfire. This gambler was no different, but Mattie recognized him as Sy Blackman, and he immediately thought she looked like someone he knew. The burn scar on her face stopped him asking questions. Mattie

was hoping he didn't remember the name of the girl he thought she looked like.

Mattie was lucky. All of the crew used the Ma'am name anytime they asked for anything. She became alarmed when the gambler suggested a little game of poker with some of the crew. Bud was gonna join the game and Mattie needed to warn him that Sy was crooked as a striped snake. She was standing by the wagon tongue almost in the dark and Bud couldn't see her hand motion to come. Finally as she saw he was ready to take a seat, she picked up a rock and rapped three times on the wagon. Bud looked her way and she rapped three times again. This time he got the message and came to her and she whispered, " Bud, I know him, crooked , uses a marked deck, or finger nails the Aces and face cards. Don't play stud poker with him and keep changing the deck. You might get an honest game."

The next morning Bud laughing said to Mattie, " Great game last night, that gambler feller left twenty two dollars with us. Thanks Mattie, but remind me not to play poker with you." Mattie said, " Yeah, I could never get a game going at the Red Bird. My problem was I didn't know when to quit taking their money. No one would invite me to a game. Being a big winner too many times is a dead giveaway. Sometimes too lucky is worse than losing." Bud said , " I don't think I'll ever have that problem."

Things were going great and they were almost a hundred miles out when Mattie had taken the wagon to a small campsite by the almost dry Willow Creek. Bud had warned all about rattlesnakes thick in this area because of all the small animal life. Mattie had taken him at his word and carefully checked the whole camp site. At a sharp curve in the creek there was a pile up of driftwood, perfect for a camp fire and enough to stuff the possum sack under the wagon for fires when there was no wood. Seeing this , She also realized it was a perfect hideout for rattlers. She took a long stick and began pulling the pile apart. She heard loud buzzing , but didn't see anything and gathered wood for her fire setting up to cook. The buzzing had quit and she thought that her messing with the wood pile had maybe run off the rattler.

Later when the crew began coming in she doled out the Bacon, beans and sourdough with coffee strong enough to float a horseshoe. She told them all, “ No fresh meet tonight boys but there’s a big coon tail rattler in that wood pile and I’m gonna nail him if he sticks his head out. You might get a little meat in the beans tomorrow night.” Jamie, one of the younger hands said, “Miss Mattie, them things eat rats and stuff. I’m not sure I could eat it.” Mattie replied, “ I don’t know what he mighta eat lately but don’t worry I won’t waste any meat. I’ll throw it in too.” Jamie wasn’t too keen on finishing his bacon and beans. He was giving them a hard look, when Bud said, “Jamie, I always make it a point to never question the cook on what’s in your grub. It just might turn a feller off food for good. You gotta remember, out here the wind blows and your coffee’s a little gritty and tasty if you’re down wind of the cows. Them beans ain’t virgin either. Most times you gotta blow the floating livestock off to one side to get it out before boiling and Jamie, I don’t wanna talk about the bacon, the rest of us has gotta eat tonight.” Bud laughed at Jamie’s face and dug into his own plate.

Every one was shocked awake at dawn by a gun shot, Mattie came walking from the creek carrying a big Coon Tail rattler. It’s head was blown off. She said “ Got him boys and he a big’un. Make a good pot of beans. Believe me Boy’s you’ll love it. My Daddy taught me a lot about rattle snakes . Ol’big boy here showed big ‘S’ marks in the sand and I followed them to the creek. When he coiled and buzzed to bite me, I let him eat a bullet. Yeah he’s been eatin good lately and I think it’s only fittin that we should too.” Bud came to take a close look, saying, “ Mattie that’s pretty good shotin. Only took one bullet.” Mattie said , “ Only one snake Bud.” Jamie and the other hands were all impressed with Mattie’s gun work, but she said, “Listen up, boys , you don’t have to go splatterin bullets all over to kill a rattler. If you’re afraid of him you probably will, but if you’ll wave your gun barrel, rifle or pistol slowly about two feet in front of him , he’ll line his head up and all you gotta do is drop the hammer. Works every time. My Daddy loved his rattlesnake roasted. I kinda like mine with beans.”

The next morning there were puffs of smoke on the horizon. Mattie pointed it out to Bud as he finished his coffee. She said, “ Indian talk Bud, I’ve seen it before many times when the Apaches were out

killing folks. It may not mean anything , but tell all the men to check their guns . I've got fifty rounds and both guns loaded in the wagon. If you could spare a man, I'd feel better with someone with me if I'm too far out from the herd. Might need someone to load my rifle, if we get in a killing fight.” Bud said, “ Hope you're wrong Mattie, but I'll ride out with you. Didn't think we'd hit Indians this far east on the Santa Fe Trail with all the stage Coach running and freighting going on.”

Mattie said, “ Bud you never figure on an Apache to follow the normal fighting methods. We're in Apache country and you better be ready for anything. Daddy and I had to put up quite a fight with a band from Apache Wells after that Bascome treachery when they tried to kill Cochise at what was supposed to be a Peace Council. Stupid Lieutenant got a lotta folks killed, because of that. Daddy and I were lucky. Neither of us got hit. Mostly arrows, but twenty at a whack. We were only facing one rifle Thank God. Bud we've gotta set up on a mound or knoll with open ground all around us. Gives us the advantage for shooting and if we're facing Bow and Arrows, they'll lose a lotta braves to our rifles.” Bud said, “ Damn, I didn't know I was hiring an Indian fighter too. Mattie you are really something special. I'm sure glad you took the job. Ok, if we're hit, I'll follow your lead. Just yell it out.”

An hour later and suddenly Mattie exclaimed, “ Smoke west of us Bud! We're right in the middle. Hang on!” she whipped her horses into a runaway toward a small hill a mile away. Half way there Apaches boiled out of a hidden ravine directly in front of them and raced for the wagon laying down on their horses necks. Mattie yelled shoot Bud! shoot for the horses head.” Bud was desperately trying to aim the rifle and the bouncing wagon threw his shots all over. Mattie grabbed her six gun and quickly downed two lead horses. The Indians split around them throwing arrows and shooting. Mattie was praying for her horses and suddenly one took an arrow in the side! It began to falter but ran on. The small hill loomed in front and she pulled to a stop at the top.

Her one injured horse lay down . It's team mate fell also as a barrage of arrows was directed at it. Mattie said, “ Make every shot count, there's a dozen Indians out there. Bud don't kill any more horses; wait for a brave to show.” Mattie was slowly picking off the

Braves as some tried to advance on foot ducking behind sage brush and tall grasses. She knew that she probably wasn't getting killing shots, but wounds to limbs showing was just as good. One Indian jumped to his feet and ran back toward his dead horse. He had no weapon and Mattie refused to shoot him. Bud seeing her hold her fire, thought she was crazy. Suddenly all fighting stopped and Mattie said , "Hold your fire Bud! They're pulling back!" Mattie watched for a full minute, then standing up, took both rifles and held them up in a big "V" immediately the Indians came out of hiding. They began to assemble and help the injured Braves on horses. some that were dead they carried. Bud said, " Damnit, Mattie you're crazy standing up like that. Get down! One arrow or one bullet and you're dead!" Mattie said, " Stay down Bud, the fight is over. The Apaches are leaving and carrying off their dead. Don't show a gun. It's better if you stay down."

The Indian Mattie refused to shoot, suddenly turned facing them and held up his hand making a "V" sign with two fingers, then turned around and joined the walking Braves. Mattie put the rifles down and with a big sigh, said, " Bud we're just damned lucky or we've got the Big man above looking out for us. I showed mercy and gave them the peace sign with the rifles. It was a little risky, but it worked. I'm sorry you lost two horses, but we're still in one piece." Bud said, " I'll never in my lifetime forget today. God, I still can't believe it. I wouldn't have given a Mexican penny for our chances of living through that. How in the hell do you do it Mattie? Two horses I hate to lose, but that's a small price to pay for our skins. Mattie said , "Bud it's over. The herd'll be coming in in about four hours, we're gonna have to set up the cook fire right here on this hill.' Bud said , 'Woman you are crazy! Worried about supper after coming through that." Mattie replied, "Bud the Crew's gotta eat and remember we don't have a horse. We can't go anywhere, so gimme a hand. It's bacon and beans again unless you wanna couple of stakes from your horse. Yeah, it's good eatin, you ought to try it. Indians eat it all the time, and you never see one that's sick unless they're living as white eyes."

After two older saddle horses had been broke to drive they made good time to the next water, Bud decided to lay over a day, before pushing on. Water was close by and there was plenty of grass for the

cows. A little change would be good for everyone. That evening all the hands had kicked in to help with supper when Mattie said, “ Are any of you interested in a horse steak. I cut a good chunk outta Nellie after she died and I’m having steak. Believe me it’s good eating. With buffalo getting so scarce, the Indians eat horse all winter and Mule meat is their favorite , summer or winter.” She had no takers, until her’s began sizzeling over the fire and the smell had all of their mouths watering. Before Twilight, all of the horse meat was gone and the bacon went begging. Later the crew was still talking about the Indian fight. None of them could believe what Bud had told them of Mattie carrying the fight to the Indians and defeating them. Bud was thinking , “And they still call her Ma’am. They’ll never know how lucky I was in hiring her. I’d a never made it outta that alive without her. I gotta study on that some.”

After dinner Bud broke out a quart bottle of Muscatel and soon he along with his crew began to get fuzzy headed Bud said slurring his words, “Maggie you’re quite a woman. Never met one like you. I’m thinkin you oughta go with me back to the Ranch when this cattle drive is over.” Mattie replied, “ Bud you’re a good man and I don’t know many of those. I’d hate to think what folks would think of you hooking up with someone like me.” Bud said, “Mattie I think you’re kinda special and I think we could make a go of it. Look, I got bad points and maybe you got bad points too, but you’re a woman, a great cook, know how to handle horses, good with a gun and a damn fine Indian fighter. What more do you need to be a wife?”

Mattie said, “I like you Bud, but are you serious? I think you’ve had too much of this Apache Cactus Juice.” Bud said , “ No, No Mattie my Dad always said I was too ugly for marryin, the only way I’d ever get hitched would be a Shot Gun Wedding and considerin my looks, that sure weren’t likely. Any woman I had a fling ding with had to be blind or in the dark.” Mattie said, “ Bud we better have this talk when you’re sober. I can’t hardly believe that at your age you don’t have a woman at home. This muscatel can blind your mind. Are you right sure you ain’t got an Apache squaw hiding under your bed at the Ranch. Them Apache girls can be mighty handy with a knife you know? They don’t take kindly to their husbands hop doodling around with another

woman. Somewhere or another, I heard that this is where the name Braves came from."

Morning brought a sober Bud who couldn't remember the night before and when Mattie asked him about his proposal he laughed sayin, " Musta been drunk Mattie. Sorry I was probably hurrahing you. No I ain't cut out for matchin up with a woman. Been too long traveling lonesome." Mattie replied, " Damn you Bud ! You really had me going. I'll shoot you if you play that game with me again." Mattie was thinking, " Damn dreaming again! Wonder if I'll ever learn to quit listening to drunks. Well, the thought was nice anyway."

Two nights later in the far east Bud saw lightening in the sky. Mattie came running to him saying, "Get all your boys saddled up Bud; them long horns are all on their feet Any strike near here and they'll all take off running One loud clap of thunder and we're gonna be up all night. Gotta hook up my wagon and get north of the herd That storm comes in and I'm gonna get run over where I'm camped." Bud said, " You really think so? Mattie you're talkin stampede. I'm not sure but my herd's been a long way and they're pretty quiet. I don't think they'll run off from thunder. I know they've been in storms before, but I'll make'em all get saddled just in case. They'll not like it. probably think you're crazy. They've never seen a stampede before. Neither have I."

Mattie said, " I've only been in one and that was an accident. Scared the Hell outta me, but Bud in the Saloons, I've heard a hundred stories of stampedes from cow hands all over New Mexico and Arizona. They all say the same. Don't believe in yourself, believe in the cows. They're dumb animals and you better remember that. Something frightens one and the whole herd takes off blindly following the ones in front of them. You've gotta get the leaders to circle and mill around. Get all your boys out there and begin to ride circle. If we get hit and they run, you might be lucky to mill'em pretty quick. If not they'll line out running till they tire out and that'll cost you crippled cows and one or two days lost in getting them back together again. Bud , remember we just laid over two days, they're all rested up and ready to run. Get'em out there and tell'em they better be ready for the worse." Bud immediately began yelling orders. Mattie was afraid his bellowing might set off the herd, but within minutes all of the cow

hands were out with the cows. Mattie was quickly loading up to move north and praying if the herd boogered, it would run west.

She was a good mile north when the storm made it's way overhead. Lightning bolts skipped across the sky and thunderous blasts roared like artillery . The herd was moving , she could see in the lightning the cow hands pushing the cows in a circle and trying their best to contain them. Suddenly a bolt hit the hill top south of them and they spooked coming north! Mattie quickly whipped her horses into a dead run east, hoping to be outta the way of the running herd. Thankfully there was enough light to see where she headed. Her only thoughts was a fear the herd would run over her wrecking the wagon and killing her! Just as suddenly as the storm and lightning had hit them , it was gone. Pitch dark almost and nothing but star light , only the rumble of 2000 cows running wild. Mattie swung the wagon around and headed back to her camp site. The herd was now north of her and maybe still running. Her thoughts now concerned Bud and the crew. She began building a big camp fire. It would be a beacon for the Hands to see in the dark. She was thinking, " I'll get coffee going, but I'm just praying that all the boys are safe. I can't do anything until daylight."

It was an hour later when Bud came in with three of his hands and said, " Thanks Maggie I'll never doubt you again. Tonight I was damned lucky. They stampeded right into a high ridge a mile north of here. The boys have got'em now and holdin. We're gonna trade off as soon as we can and give them a break. Can't find that kid Jamie, the boys said he was west when they jumped runnin. Keep that fire goin big. That was smart. Gave us a light to ride to. Thanks." Maggie said, " Bud, I'm gonna saddle up and ride circles out there. Jamie could be down and hurt. You and the crew grab some coffee. Don't worry about me, I'll keep the fire in sight, throw a little brush on it for me." Bud objected, but Mattie rode off into the dark as Bud said, " You'll never , ever see another woman like Mattie boys, she's solid iron and smarter than anyone I've ever ran into. I worry about Jamie, more than I do her. That boy just don't have any common sense. I hope he's alright, probably got scared when the cows took off."

The fire had burned down quite a bit when Maggie came riding in at a fast trot and exclaimed, " Bud, I found Jamie, we gotta get the

wagon out there his horse began bucking with that big lightning strike and he got dumped. Might be a broken leg. He's straight out to that bright star on the sky line, but we gotta hurry . He said that he's bleeding.' Quickly Bud got the horses hitched and they all went to find him. As they got closer to where Mattie thought he was, she called out, but there was no answer. They all called for him. There was nothing but the night sounds. Mattie said," All of you sit tight and let me walk my horse around a bit. He can see a lot better than I can in the dark. We might roll over him with that wagon." Shortly after a few circles Mattie was about to give up when her horse suddenly snorted and quick stepped sideways Mattie called for Bud to bring her lantern. It was Jamie, alive but unconscious. Blood covered the side of his head and it was easy to see in the lantern light the crooked turn to his leg. Mattie said, " Bud I've had my share of doctoring, but I don't know about his leg. I think he took a hard rap on the head and that could be why he's out right now. Let's get him in the wagon and back to camp, before he wakes up and suffers the pain of us movin him."

That night was a no sleeper for everyone. Jamie was lucky that Bud knew a little about setting and splinting broken limbs. He said, " Mattie I know you're wonderin, but I have first hand knowledge of broken legs. I had one a few years back . I don't know everything about'em but they hurt like Hell when you pull'em apart to get'em in the right position for splinting. We better work on Jamie while he's out. Believe me, we'll be doin him a big favor." When daybreak came Jamie was still out and one of the hands said, " He's got a concussion, when I had one the Doc made me lay down for a couple of days. Kinda makes you dizzy and a bad headache."

Jamie lay in Mattie's bed and came awake hurting bad that afternoon. Mattie told him to lay quiet. He had a badly banged head and they had put a splint on his broken leg. Bud said, ' Wish there was a town nearby where we could leave Jamie, but the nearest is Santa Fe. That's gonna take a few more weeks at the rate we're going. Mattie we'll rig him up some walkin sticks first chance I get, but for now he stays in the wagon. I hate to have to ask you, but." " But Nothing Bud! I'll take care of him and I know I'll sleep on the ground till he gets better. I've been there before, so let's put this Cattle drive

back together and get to Santa Fe before we have more trouble.” was Matties reply.

Two cows had to be killed from injuries they’d suffered during the Stampede. Bud said, “ We’re gonna hold over a couple of days. Butcher them cows and smoke the meat. It’ll cost us time, but we’ll eat fresh beef for a few days anyway. We’ll all travel better on a full belly.” It was a good plan, but the smoke from their fire smoking the meat was a drawing target for a traveling band of Red Leg Renegades, The notorious Barr Red Legs. Maggie had no idea that she would once again have to deal with this murdering outlaw that she had sworn to kill.

Three days had passed since the stampede and things were tough for Mattie as she had no privacy at all. Sleeping on the ground was Ok, but Jamie was there in her wagon bed and she could do nothing but fare for herself in much the same manner as the cow hands. Bud was more concerned than she was and said, “ We’ve got good water and feed. Maybe we should camp out here until Jamie can get around on his own.” Mattie replied, “ No, you don’t Bud! I know what you’re thinking, but Jamie’s gonna need that wagon bed all the way to Santa Fe. You just do your job and quit tryin to coddle me. I can take it. The ground ain’t no harder for me than it is for you. Let’s get a move on tomorrow. The sooner we get movin, the sooner we get to Santa Fe.” Bud reluctantly agreed and broke camp that evening for a quick get away at sunrise. Wrong!

That evening as everyone spread out their blanket rolls for sleeping, they were suddenly shocked by a demand, “ Set tight! Don’t touch a gun! “ They were surrounded by eight Red Legs, all pointing guns at them . The leader Barr exclaimed , “Just take it easy boys. We don’t want any trouble. Who’s the Boss here?” Bud stood up exclaiming “ I am , Bud Collins; who’re you? Whatta you want?” Barr replied, “ Don’t get smart Mister. We’ll just look your outfit over. There is something I want. This is my Territory and you’re cutting through it. It’ll just cost you one steer for every ten going through. I’ll do the pickin.’ Bud angrily fired back with, “ The hell you say! This is the Santa Fe Trail. It’s open , nobody owns it!” Bud took one step toward his rifle and a bullet was fired at his feet. Barr said, “” Mister the next

one will kill you. Now are we all gonna be peaceful? My men and I want supper. Looks like you gotta cook. Get him out here.'

Suddenly a voice exclaimed outta the dark behind him, " Marlo! Get your hands up and drop your gun! I'll puta bullet through your miserable head if you or any of your men move. Tell'em to drop their guns . Now!" Marlo hesitated and Bang ! his hat flew from his head! " Marlo exclaimed, " Don't shoot!" throwing his gun to the ground saying, "Men, drop your guns." Mattie said from the dark, " Bud get your gun , I'll keep a bead on Marlo's head. One bad move and he's a dead man!" Bud and two of the crew drew their guns as Bud made the raider's dismount and lay face down on the ground. Mattie said, " Check'em good for weapons Bud, they're all killers there's dozens of families out there with graves made by this bunch . They all need to be hung, beginning with Marlo." Bud said, " Mattie I agree with you, but there ain't a tree big enough in a hundred miles." He sent two of his crew to spell the men at the herd and let'em know what the shooting was all about. Marlo said , " Collins I'll kill that man out there, if it's the last thing I ever do. No man shoots my hat off and lives to talk about it. Nobody!" Bud said , " You're a lucky man, and that's a woman . Mattie , our Cook. She would have put a bullet through your head and felt good about it. She's probably sorry now that she didn't kill you. Ok all eight of you sit down here in a circle back to back. There'll be a gun or two on you all night. Mattie, we've got'em corralled , you can come in now." Marlo began cursing and swearing vengeance the minute Mattie shown in the campfire light.

Ignoring him Mattie said, " Bud you got any plans on how to handle eight murderers?" Bud replied, " Mattie , I can't just shoot'em and I can't take'em with us. You got any ideas?" Mattie said, " They've all got horses. Probably all stolen. I'll tell you what I heard that John Loving did with Rustlers he caught when he was headed for Dodge with a big herd. He took all of their gear including saddles and let'em ride off bareback. They didn't come back. Maybe the Indians got'em." Bud said, " Well, if that worked for Loving, maybe it'll work for me, but I'm not gonna waste all night guarding a bunch of killers. They get outta here tonight." He had his crew unsaddle all of the horses, brought them into the fire light and had 'em all mount up bare back . The killers weren't sure whether they were to be hung or not. Bud said,

“ You’re lucky Mattie has feelings even for killers. I really don’t believe that. I still think she feels bad that she didn’t put a bullet through your head Marlo. Her real problem is her brand new rope that she just bought in Holbrook. She didn’t wanna mess it up with hanging. She told me herself that she witnessed the hanging of Black Jack Slade and it jerked his head off. Sure messed up the rope. Here’s what’s happening, You’re all mounted and I’m gonna be nicer than John Loving was, I’m letting you keep your boots. That’s all you’re getting, nothing else, maybe someone will come to your rescue. If we even see you on the skyline we’re shooting and Mattie gets the first shot.” All eight let out howls about Indians and no guns. Bud said, “ You’re getting off lucky. If there are Indians around, I’d recommend you ride clear of them. They love good horses and the stolen ones you’re riding are really good mounts. Now one at a time get outta here!” He sent them on their way complaining and cursing. It was after midnight and Bud took first guard watch just in case the killers tried to come back . His instructions were, “ Shoot anything that moves.”

The morning brought a beautiful desert sunrise with blue skies as far as one could see. The possible horror of last night was gone and Bud rode out with Mattie. There was no sign of the Red Legs. A pile of discarded saddles lay by the ashes of their campsite. Bud’s cow hands had freely swapped things around and Bud had a small arsenal in the wagon. Bud was thinking, “ Those outlaws sure had the best of firearms. Every crew member now sported a new 45 . We’re ready for just about anything.” Bud was wrong again. Guns were of no help in the next difficulties he faced. Two days farther east and they were passing through a section of desert with nothing but sand dunes for miles in every direction. There was no feed for the cattle and water was also scarce. His map of the Santa Fe Trail didn’t include sand dunes, but here they were. He said, “Mattie, do you know anything about this part of the country? My map is pretty poor this far east, it only shows Santa Fe to be north and east of us , about half a month more for us.” Mattie said , “ Never been here and no, I know very little of this country. Looks like your map has a good waterhole ahead though, that looks like a river, this side of Santa Fe and we’ve got to cross it.” Bud replied, “ Yeah, but this time of year it’s probably dry or close to it. Can’t depend on it, I’m swinging south to hit that ol’Fort

Johnson There'll be water there I'm sure." Mattie replied, " Bud I hate to tell you this but that Fort is deserted. I heard Peg Leg Smith, the outlaw; stole the Calvary's whole herd of horses. Indians then attacked the Fort and the soldiers put up a great fight, but couldn't follow up their victory without mounts. The whole Army stationed there had to leave on foot and march to Fort Buchannan Indians burned the Fort buildings and walls. It's a sure bet they filled the well with anything left. I wouldn't count on there being water there." Bud replied, " Never heard that story Mattie, but I'll take your word for it. We'll head straight for that Rio San Jose on the map. It's half a day further on, but we'll have to try it."

That evening a wind came up out of the south west. Supper was really gritty with the blowing sand. Mattie had all she could do to get food together for the crew. Bud said, " Reckon I don't have to get a bath anytime soon, this sand just wore the dirt off me."Mattie said, " Bud it ain't the dirt that smells. We all need a bath, but we better get the ground tarps out and get under them. This sand is really picking up speed. Bud we're in for a sand storm." Bud exclaimed, " Damn it, what else is gonna go wrong?" He sent two riders out to stay with the herd telling them to stay horseback and follow the herd if they can. The cows would put their tails to the wind and drift north east. Everyone in camp gathered on the lee side of the wagon and covered up. It was gonna be a long night. Mattie shares a tarp with Bud . Jamie stayed in the wagon.

Conversation was a little difficult , but Mattie sat back to back with Bud and they traded stories. At one point Bud asked, "How did you manage to get the drop on those Red Legs Mattie? They were all around us so sudden like . If it hadn't been for you we might all be dead and my herd headed for Santa Fe to be sold by Marlo Barr." Mattie replied, " Blame it on the stampede Bud, Jamie breaks a leg and my chamber pot is in the wagon for him to use. I had to go out in the brush like everyone else. I've had to get everything ready before I can hit my bed roll and it's always late. I always carry a gun with me and when I heard the loud talk and shot fired I came runnin. I was ready to do some killing when I saw who it was. That was my pistol I used to shoot Barr's hat off. Good thing for him I didn't miss his hat and kill him. Bud , it wouldn't have bothered me one little bit."

Bud whistled saying, “ Whew! I thought you had a rifle. Mighty good shootin in the dark Mattie. I don’t think I could do that well. Luckiest break I ever had was when I hired you. You’re a great cook, and Mattie, I’d have to say, when it comes to a marriage you would sure be one to ride the river with.” Mattie said , “ Damn you Bud, don’t you be hurrahing me again about marriage. The next time you begin making remarks and rollin your eyes at me I’m gonna get me a shotgun!” Bud wasn’t sure how to take her and said, “ Ok Mattie whatever you say. Whatta you gonna do after we hit Santa Fe?” Mattie said, “ Look for a descent job, but Bud it won’t be another cattle drive. I’ve had my fill of eating dirt, sleepin on the ground and shootin Red Legs.”

Bud said, “ I don’t know Mattie, you know more about cows than I do and I’ve been ranchin for ten years or better. How did you learn all this stuff?” Mattie replied, “ Saloon’s are full of stories Bud and almost all of them are about cows or horses. When we had that stampede it reminded me of what the ol’Timer’s had to say that every cattle drive was really just a stampede under control. I told you one would follow blindly the one in front of it and if one keeps breaking away from the herd, any ol’ Cow Hand’ll tell you. “ The bunch quitters make the best eating and this solves a lotta problems.”

Dawn brought a campsite buried in sand and Bud began throwing things together and getting all of the hands saddled to go looking for the herd. Sand was still blowing, but a lot calmer than the night before

Poor Jamie was covered in sand and it took a while for Mattie to get him set up and ready for travel. There was no coffee, but plenty of tough dried beef to chew on. The whole bunch began going north looking for the herd. Bud said, “ They’re probably still drifting, but we should catch up by noon.” He was wrong. The herd was 12 miles out and almost late afternoon before they were spotted. His two Cow Hands had them in a small canyon and feeding. They were outta the sand Dunes , but there was no water. Most were laying down. Bud was worried . They had to have water! How far was it to that Rio San Jose? Mattie said , “ Can’t be far if that map of yours is any good. Send out a couple of riders . if their horses smell water they’ll sure let the riders know. These horses have been outta water too. It would be a good idea to get’em on their feet and push on. Another day without water

and some are gonna lay down and die on you. Bud they'll travel better at night. We can only pray that water is maybe only a day away.' Quickly Bud had the crew began whipping the cattle to their feet . Some refused to get up and Bud said, " Leave'em , we've gotta get movin!'

At almost midnight , Bud's two riders returned with great news. The river was just a few hours ahead and there was plenty of water . The river was overflowing it's banks. Here again great news, but Mattie said, " Bud you've got another problem. When the cows smell water they're gonna start another stampede to get there. You have to break up your herd and send half out ahead. The tired and slow will be easier to manage. Send all of your men and horses to the river, but too much water and you're gonna have more problems. You've gotta keep those horses from drinking too much. Cows can handle it a little better. The best answer for all is a little water at a time and try to control the running cattle when we get closer."

It was almost dawn when the herd leaders smelled water and tried to run. Too tired for that , they trotted to the river. Mattie said , " Thank God there was no stampede. All of the cattle had water and Bud said, " We've lost about twenty or twenty five head. They'll die of thirst today or tomorrow." Mattie said , " No Bud, fill up my barrels and take the wagon back Jamie can stay here with me . Those poor animals just need a quart or two and they'll come along just fine. Bud said, " Damnit Mattie, you ought to be bossin this drive. You have all the answers.' Mattie said laughing, " Bud I am Bossing it. No I'm just kidding. I was a farm girl and I was raised with cows. I've just heard a thousand stories and some made good sense. Get those on the back trail a little water and we'll take care of the herd . They sure ain't going anywhere with that river as high as it is and this is a dandy place to camp." The following day Bud came back for more water and his news was good . He only found two dead steers. The others were being slowly brought in by two Hands. He was going back with more water. The next day saw all of the crew and cows in camp. Bud said, ' There's no rush now . We're in striking distance of Santa Fe and we'll hold here until this creek goes down . Plenty of good feed and It'll give all of us a rest. Maybe next week we can push on to Santa Fe."

Four days later everyone was resting up and Jamie was walking around with his sticks when he exclaimed “ Riders Comin!” Mattie was in the wagon and grabbed her rifle. Two men riding their way and both wore the Red Leggings of Barr’s Gang! Bud had a gun on them as they rode up to him. They looked to be in pretty desperate condition, as Bud talked with them. Suddenly, both jumped down and ran to the river and drank. Bud led their horses to the water. Mattie carrying her rifle went to Bud. He said, “ Two of Barr’s Gang Mattie, smart ones, these two , Rod Cane and Steve Dowdy. They split away from Barr and rode back to our campsite figuring we wouldn’t take all of their equipment with us. They figured right and they got saddles and blanket for their horses. They never saw Barr again. They had no idea if he and his men made it to Santa Fe or not. They themselves, had to run from Indians and with saddles it was easy to out distance the overworked and poorly fed Indian Ponies. They like us; had no water for over two days.’ Mattie said, “ Bud they may be Ok , but you can’t be sure. We don’t need rattlesnakes in our back yard. Turning your back on one could cost you your life. I’d say feed’em, give’em a canteen and some smoked beef and send them on their way. We can’t keep eyes in the back of our heads.” Bud said, “ Mattie, I had no idea what to do with them. You sure come up with the best answers.”

That evening Bud said to the two riders, “Rod and Steve , I hope you understand our situation. A few days ago we were facing a shoot out with the gang you were part of. Now you two may be as innocent as my ol’dog at home, but I don’t know that and I never believe the words of a man. The way he acts tells me everything I need to know. I hold you no malice, but you can’t stay with us. Mattie has food and a canteen for you and the trail is open from here to Santa Fe. The Indians have been quiet in this area for a long time, so you should have no trouble. I never send a hungry man away from my camp fire. You’re welcome to stay the night, but after morning chuck, I want you outta here.” Bud knew that would not be enough, he’d have to keep a watch up all night.

That evening both Rod and Steve gave Bud a sincere Thank You for the help and swore that they were both taking a better road than the hanging one they were on. Mattie said later, “ Now you know what it feels like to be a Saloon girl Bud. I ‘ve heard those stories a

thousand times and a thousand times they were only good for the evening. The next day ,they were back to their normal nasty self.” Bud replied, “ I’d like to think some folks were different.” Mattie said, “ Bud you’re one of the few real men I’ve ever met. You’ve sure made a big change for me. Maybe some of you’ll rub off on those two outlaws.”

The following morning , the two Red Legs rode off up river, planning on crossing where the water was shallow. They had no defense from any Raiding Indians, but Mattie said, “ Bud, they made this choice when they teamed up with Marlo Barr and what happens now is up to them. Look at my face. This never would have happened if I had not been in a Saloon and that was a very bad choice that I have to live with.” Bud just shook his head. He hated to see the outlaws riding off into what could be their death, but he knew , his crew was more important to him than the death of two Raiders. He said, “ It don’t set well with me Mattie , but you’re right. I hope they get to Santa Fe Ok. I hope we do too.”

That evening a huge lightning storm and heavy rain came down all around them . Bud had three of his riders out with the cattle, but they were still recovering from the ordeal of the past week and didn’t spook at the lightning overhead. The only place outta the rain was Mattie’s wagon and the riders not out with the cows were huddled inside sucking on sugar cane . Suddenly in the lightning light Mattie saw two riders racing toward their camp! Quickly grabbin her gun she exclaimed , “Bud! Get your rifle! The Red Legs are back!” Bud took one look and yelled, “ Hold your fire ! It’s Rod and Steve. They don’t have guns Mattie, but they sure seem in a hurry.” Rod and Steve were both waving empty arms as a the came sliding to a stop at the wagon. Steve yelled , Boss man , you gotta move! Your cows are too close to the river. It’ll be flooding here tonight!.” Rod went on to say, “ We’ve been here before. This whole place will be under water, get you cows out and do it fast. It’s raining like hell in the mountains. It’s a real gully washer!”

Bud jumped from the wagon and began throwing orders. Rod and Steve joined in the effort to get the cows away from the river. Mattie loaded up and quickly moved her wagon back to high ground. It

was going to be another tough night. A good hour it took to get the cattle moved and Rod said to Bud. “ Steve and I came back to warn you. This whole flat is like a small canyon and it’ll be six feet deep come morning.” Bud replied, “ I gotta thank you, but it’s hard for me to believe this place will flood.’ Rod said, “ You haven’t seen this place like I have and with this rain you’ll have to go upriver to cross. It’s a shorter distance to Santa Fe down river, but it’ll take days before the river goes down.” Bud said, “How about you boys hang out with us till we get to Santa Fe, I can put you on payroll for a months pay. After what you did for me; I owe you a few cows.”

Morning brought a scene that frightened everyone. Water was every where. Bud and Mattie were looking at a horrible calamity , Steve and Rod had saved them from. Every cow would have been drowned or swept down river. Bud would have lost everything. Mattie said, “ Bud , it was your doing that saved your cattle. If you had been too hard nosed with them , they would have kept riding. I’m gonna tell’em to get rid of those Leggings. It’s a bad mark they don’t deserve. We’ll be in Santa Fe in a week with good luck .’

The drive upriver was easy. Water and feed were abundant. Steve and Rod proved to be good Cow Hands. Bud offered them a job on his Ranch if they wanted to make the trip. He said, ‘Out where I live , no one will ever connect you with the Red Leg Raiders of Kansas. You can make a good life for yourselves out there.” It looked like they were going to take his offer. The remaining trip was a grateful uneventful drive. Prices were good in Santa Fe and Bud was a very happy Rancher. Jamie was staying over until his leg healed . Bud welcomed any of the Hands back that wanted to go back. A big celebration was in order for the Cow Hands and Bud had a few drinks to sorta cut the dust from his tonsils. Mattie joined him for a couple and later as they had a good store bought dinner at the San Jose, Rooming house. Bud asked, ‘ What’s you plans Mattie? Whatta you gonna do here in Santa Fe? “ Mattie replied, “ Don’t know for sure Bud. I might get a job here in town. Old Saloon girls don’t last long, but I can tell anybody, I’ve been through the very worse. Cook On a Cattle drive oughtto be as good a recommendation as a girl could get, but Bud it’s been a wonderful trip even with all the problems. I’ll sure miss you all.” Bud

noticed the tear in her eye as she wistfully talked of the problems they'd overcome.

Suddenly he said, Mattie , "I'm sure sorry about that proposal I made while I was drunk on Muscatel. I didn't mean to treat you bad. Can you tell me what I said that night? I've never made fun of a woman before." Mattie replied, " Bud, it ain't your fault. I should have known better. You were drinking and believe me it's happened to me many times before. I felt you were sincere mainly because I like you, I guess. Anyway it's all water under the bridge now and as I look back . it was kinda funny. Here's what was said." After a few laughs at what was said that night, Bud said, " I'm not drinking now Mattie and it's true I don't have a Squaw back at the Ranch, but you know something, when I met you I could see you were something special. You held your head up although it was ugly scarred from that burn and you didn't apologize for your work as a Saloon Girl. I know that there are hundreds of women out there forced into selling favors if they wanna eat. You don't claim to be any better than they are, you're hell on wheels with a gun, braver than most men I've met and besides that you're a great cook, so how about you and me plan on hitchin up and light a shuck outta here for a go at it together back in Phoenix?"

Mattie was shocked for words. She said, " Damn you Bud! This ain't no time for jokin! I'll shoot you right here and now if you're hurrahing me again. A girl will only take so much you know! Bud held his hands up saying, " No hurrah Mattie , put you gun away, there's a number of Parson's in this town and I ran into one at a saloon, would you believe his name was John Shakes and he had'em bad. Said he was there to get a little whiskey for medicinal purposes, it helped his bad back and I'd bet that wasn't all it would help.. I kinda lined him up to marry us if you're willin."Mattie said, "Bud I really think it's wrong for you, but if you're willin to take a chance, I am. I can at least promise you that marriage ain't no worse than fighting Indians, eating horsemeat or shooting Redlegs." Bud laughed saying, " Let's get it done, with all this cattle money on me, I get propositioned every where I go. I need to be a married man!"

“Yes. Parson Shakes, Miss Mattie. I take it you’re ready to marry Mister Collins?” “Yes I am and I feel that although he’s had a little Muscatel, he assures me he’s ready for the words.” The Parson says, “ Alright we’ll get right to it and we’ll fill out the Marriage certificate before Mister Collins does any more celebrating.” Bud said, “ Yeah Parson she’s a wonderful lady. Whatta you want me to do . I ain’t never been married before.” Shakes replied , “ Just answer my questions with I do and we’ll get everything in order and you’ll be happily married. Now we’ll begin with the ceremony.” First of all , is there anyone here that can show just cause why these two people should not be married.?” Bud said, “ Cain’t be Parson, you’re forgittin, we’re the only ones here.” “Yes, yes , I know that but it’s part of the ceremony and that statement gives you the opportunity to back out if you like.” Mattie, at this point gave Bud a strong look, as the Parson continued. “Now Mister Bud Collins , do you take Miss Mattie to be your lawful wedded wife?” Bud held up his hand, “Parson, can I ask you a question first” and then whispered, “My Daddy made a prediction about me gittin married, do you see anyone around holdin a shotgun?” Parson Shakes whispered back, “ Your Bride is!”

The End

