

A Good Man

“ Oh God! Daddy , You can’t die! Whatta I do? I can’t run this Ranch! The Hands all treat me like a little girl! I’m not strong like a man and I am a girl! Remember?” These crying words from Samantha hammered in Sam Collins ears as he lay dying. Gently squeezing the young girl’s hand he whispered to her, “ Honey, you’re strong and full of spirit. Find yourself a good man and grab him. I’m sorry, it’s getting dark. I love you Darling.” Sam Collins passed into a coma and two days later , he died. A grief stricken Samantha waded through the necessary funeral arrangements alone and continually ran through her mind the last words from her Dad. There was no one else, her Mom had died giving birth, to her.

Two weeks later, sitting alone in her kitchen , Samatha was talking to herself, “ No Daddy I’m not strong! I can’t swear out at these men like you did, and I can’t tell them what to do. They’ll just pat me on the head and go their way. Russ, your Foreman don’t really like me. He thinks I’m a fuzzy headed dummy. You know I’m no dummy. I kept the books for you ever since Momma died.

They don’t know that, but they’re gonna find out pretty soon that I write the paychecks. They’re also gonna find out that I know more about this ranch than any of them. I can read and write! That ought to be a real shocker to Mister Pat me on the Head Russ Thompson. He can’t even get numbers right. He is a good Foreman though; I’ll give him that. We’ve been in the black for years since you hired him.

So Daddy, Damnit; tell me where do I go to find myself a good man?" Samantha quit talking and the only sound was the whisper of the kerosene lamp burning. Taking a deep breath, she realized that the conversation and a little anger had lifted her spirits , " Maybe Daddy was right, Maybe I'm a lot stronger than I realized."

Going into the family room , she went to the hand made table that served as her Daddy's desk. It was a disaster. Letters and papers were stacked everywhere. Her Dad had not been the best organized. The Ranch Ledger was there among everything, but she knew it practically by heart and there was no need to go through it. She stacked up everything and one by one sorted through his letters . There was very little to get her interest. Most of the communication concerned cattle sales and feed prices.

She was ready to trash the whole mess when she came upon a very neatly addressed letter to her Dad. Curiously, she opened it and read. "Dearest Sam, Thank you so much for the 300 dollars. You were the only one I could turn to and I don't know that I can ever repay you. Thank God, Bobby is walking again and he swears that he'll get work and pay off your loan. That wound he received has now healed and except for a slight limp, he's back to his old self. Things here are pretty rough without livestock, but with Bobby's help, I think we can get the old farm going again. My Jim was killed in the same battle that injured Bobby. It's been a long long time since we were neighbors. I would love to see you and meet your daughter. I'll bet she is beautiful.

Sam , there is no way that I can ever Thank you. You are still my best friend and you always were. I wish that I had realized that forty years ago. I'm just sorry that we can't turn back the clock. My sincerest thanks and love . Hoping to see you again , Susan”

Samatha was shocked. Her dad had never said anything about his life or neighbors in Kansas. This letter read like an old girl friend. She felt a little guilty at reading it and almost threw it in the trash pile. Thinking about it though; she felt closer to her Dad and realized with pride that he had reached out and responded to an old friend in need. She decided to keep the letter and placed it in the ranch ledger.

Samatha was thinking, “ Forty years would mean Dad was a teenager when he left Kansas. This girl Susan didn't know a good man when she had one. I wonder if Dad was trying to tell me something? Well, I guess I'll have to begin looking for a good man as Daddy put it. I wonder just what one looks like?” Samatha laughed at herself saying, “Maybe I should take a trip back to Kansas and meet Susan. Maybe she could line me up with a good man.”

Three months went by and slowly Samatha had gained the respect of her Foreman and the crew. They found out that ol'Sam had trained this young girl to handle the business of a ranch and how to manage cattle raising. Unfortunately, her gaining leadership and Ranch owner status was scaring off most of the young men around the County. Some that had been calling frequently before her dad had died were no

longer coming out. There were some from town though, that were pressing her for marriage.

The Sheriff's son Matt Rawlings was a favorite , but she held him off saying, “ Matt, I like you and you're a good friend, but I'm not ready for marriage just yet.” Dave Hogan was the Banker's son and all the girls were after him. He was handsome and a great catch for a husband, but although he was courteous and wealthy, he thought too much of himself. Samatha put him off. Charley Drop was the son of Livery Stable owner and a good friend to Samatha, but once again; he was not someone that she felt like marrying. Her crew and Russ all favored Charley. He was more their kind of man and one they liked.

Sam as all the hands now called her was not gonna be rushed into any marriage. She was holding out for that good man her dad has told her to find. In her mind, he was still out there somewhere. She was thinking more and more about Kansas when the heavy rains came.

Russ came beating on her door at daybreak, yelling, “ Sam, we gotta problem. The creeks flooding. All the hands are over east . We gotta move those horses out. They're standing in water right now crowding up by the barn. Gimme a hand and we'll turn'em all out. I can't hold the gates open with that water running out there.” Samatha grabbed her jacket and ran to the barn corral behind Russ.

The horses were getting panicky and pressing against the corral gate The creek water was swirling and running hard through the lower

end and Russ yelled, “ Sam, grab the barn gate and swing it open. I’ll get the outside gate.” Quickly, Samatha ran to the Barn as Russ pulled the pin on the outside gate allowing it to swing wide. Samatha was pushing with all her weight to free the lock pin, but half a dozen horses were pressed against it . there was no way she could pull the pin and Russ couldn’t let go of his side or it would slam close .

Suddenly , Samatha was roughly grabbed from behind and a rough voice said, “Damnit! Boy, get outta the way!” Samatha was thrown towards the barn door as a gun shot went off and just as suddenly the gate swung open and the whole cavy of work horses stampeded through the gate and away towards the open pasture. Russ came running to Samatha, helping her to her feet as he turned to question the man now leaning against the barn gate. He said, “ Thanks Mister, where the hell did you come from ?”

The man replied, “Sorry about roughing up the Boy, but there was no room and that gate woulda hit us both. I fired that shot to get the horses to back off. It worked! Names Bobby John. I came lookin for work. Stayed in your barn overnight. Got in late, raining like hell and all the lights were out. Hope you don’t mind.” Russ replied, “No problem with that but that Boy you threw around happens to be Miss Sematha Collins, owner of this ranch. I’m Russ Thompson, Foreman.” Bobby John jerked his hat off saying, “ God I’m sorry. Excuse me Miss Collins. In that get up , I thought you were a boy. Sorry if I was a little rough, but things were happening too fast.”

Samatha brushing wet straw and muddy manure off was more than a little mad; giving Bobby John a hard look, said, “ I’m not used to getting jerked around by some grub line rider and thrown in horse manure. Russ, I’m going to the house. I think we’re full up with hands right now!” Samatha stomped her way back to the Ranch house.

Going across the porch, she abruptly stopped and spun around, quickly walking back to the barn. Russ and Bobby John watched her not quite thinking why she was coming back. Walking straight to Bobby John, she said, “ Mister, I apologize! That was very rude and thoughtless of me. Please forgive me. I have to learn to control my temper. My Dad would have spanked me for that. Thank you for your help. Russ you and Mister Bobby John come on up to the house, there’s hot coffee. Thank you again. I think we can get Cookie to scare you up something to eat.”

Bobby John said, “Miss Collins, you don’t have to apologize. I had no idea you were a girl and I guess I was a little rough.” He laughed a bit saying, “ Getting thrown into a manure pile would get my dander up too.” Russ asked, “ Where’s your horse feller? I’ll get a bait of corn out.” Bobby replied, “ Don’t have one Russ. I walked out from town. That’s why I got here so late. Didn’t think it was that far.”

Later over coffee, in the house; Samatha said, “Mister Bobby John, I’m curious. Who sent you out here to the Bar C to look for work?” Bobby replied, “ It was a well dressed pretty boy in town. Told him, I had some experience as a wheel wright and horse shoe’er. He said he

had a personal interest in the Bar C as he might be marrying into the ranch and some of the wagons and equipment out here were in pretty bad shape.” Samatha jumped up spilling her coffee saying, “ Dave Hogan! He thinks I need help because I might be marrying him? What an insult! Russ, did you ever hear of such a thing. He wants to marry into a Ranch where all the wagons have pretty new wheels. Well, I’ve got news for him!”

Russ said , “ Bobby John, now she’s really mad! Sam don’t be thinking about getting a horsewhip and going to see Hogan. He’s not worth your time. He’s just like that skinflint Banker Caleb , his Dad. And Sam! I don’t want to light your fire again, but Hogan does have a point. Our wagons are in need of major repair. I was gonna talk to you about rolling one into Drop’s Livery and get it fixed up a bit.”

Samatha looked at Bobby John saying, “Mister, how good are you at fixing wagons?” Bobby spread his hands saying, “ First of all, I have no tools, but if I can take parts from broken out of use pieces, like those in the barn, and others around the Ranch; I can do a quick fix and get you a few in fairly good shape pretty quick. During the recent war, I spent hundreds of hours swapping parts to keep cannon carts and wagons rolling. I reckon, you’d say I’m a pretty good hand at fixing things.”

Russ said, “ Sam, I know we’re full up right now , but this feller could more than earn his keep if he can keep up our rolling farm equipment. It’ll cost three or four months in his wages to get one

wagon fixed even if Drop gives us a bottom price.” Samatha nodded saying, “ OK, Mister Bobby John, you’re on. Thirty a month and found. Let Russ know what you might need in tools. We’ll get’em out from town right away. I’ll be going in tomorrow.” Then laughing she said, “And Russ, I promise I’ll leave the horse whip in the tack room”

Bobby John thanked them and went to get his back pack from the barn. Russ had already pointed out the bunkhouse and told him to grab a free bunk. After stowing his pack, he headed back to the barn and started sorting through the old frames and axels. He was thinking how lucky he was at getting a job and laughing at the fiery temper of Samatha. If he could work here for a year or so , he could maybe save a little and think about a life of his own. Everything following the War had been difficult and ex-confederate soldiers were not welcome anywhere. It was almost dark when the crew came in and Bobby met all the hands at supper. They asked no questions and he let it go that way. Time would sort out likes and dislikes.

The following afternoon, Russ came practically running to where Bobby was at work saying, “ My God help us Bobby! That Sam is madder than a wet hen. Bobby , we gotta do something. She was headed into town this morning and the front wheel on that light wagon collapsed. Sam was thrown out into the muddy roadway and them young buggy horses took off running. She don’t know where the wagon and horses are. That may be a good thing. She’d probably shoot’em.

Sam walked back in the rain. What can we do about that wagon? I've sent some of the boys out to find it and bring the horses in."

Bobby stepped down from the wagon he was repairing saying and half laughing, "I'd say the lady had a good reason to get mad, I walked that same road in the mud and believe me it's no fun. I've got this one manure spreader wagon all tightened up. We could run it up the road and bring her wagon back, the back end is low and by pulling the front wheels, I could get the front up enough for a piggyback move back here to the barn. Do you have any idea how far out she was?" Russ laughed saying, " I'd guess about three miles. She was cold and plum outta cuss words. She went to get a bath and peel off the mud. Boy was she mad."

Russ was wrong! Samatha was laughing and enjoying a warm bath. The spill and all the mud was maddening, but she tried to remember Russ's face when she came tromping into the barnyard. His shocked expression, she'd never forget; and then remembering the horrible looking thing she saw in the mirror sat her off laughing once again.

Russ and Bobby John came knocking on the front door and while she dressed, they outlined their plans for getting her wagon. Samatha said, "Russ, let's wait till morning and Bobby John can drive me into town. We'll pick up my wagon on the way back. I saw the boys bringing my team in. Where did they find them?" Russ replied, " About half a mile down the road from where you broke down. The team left the road and tangled in the brush. Boys said "They were standing there eating

leaves just like nothing had happened. Ok, we'll do like you say and get a team in for tomorrow. See you at supertime."

Russ turned to Bobby saying, " Looks like you get the job babysitting her tomorrow. I'm glad it ain't me. Maybe I'm being a little hard on her, but when ol'Sam was alive , I don't know how many times I had to quit what I was doin to do something for that girl. I gotta admit she's doin a lot better, but Bobby I'm kinda wore out. I'm sure glad you showed up. She seems to like you and you'll get her off my back. Good luck tomorrow."

The following morning Bobby John pulls into the front yard with the manure spreader wagon and Samatha blows up when she sees what they're going to town in. " My God !" She yells at Bobby, " What the hell do you take me for? We're surely not going into town in that! I'll be the laughing stock of the town. Mister Bobby John, there has to be something else on this ranch we can take in."

Bobby folded his hands, and very slowly said, "Miss Samatha, I've spent my full time and half the night changing parts and working with worn out tools busting knuckles and straining muscles to put this thing together. I know it's not the prettiest of wagons, but it is the safest and strongest thing you have on the Ranch. Aside from that, we need the lower back end to piggy back your wagon. If you'd prefer not to be seen with me in this wagon, I'll get one of the Hands and go bring

in your wagon. The problem is, It may be a few days before I can have one ready that might be more suitable for a pretty lady.”

Samatha almost yelled as she stomped her foot in frustration! She exclaimed, “ Of all the insults, I’d just as soon ride a damn mule to town.” Bobby John laughed saying, “ Yes Miss Samatha, I’ve noticed that mules have a stubborn streak too. Sometimes there’re difficult to work with.” Samatha caught the veiled insult , but instead of making her furious; she busted up laughing. “ OK Mister.” She said, “ I guess I owe you one; but a manure spreader?” she came to the wagon shaking her head.

Bobby started to get down and she unlady like scrambled up the wheel to sit beside him. She said, “ Bobby John, you don’t think much of me ;do you?” Bobby looked at her and said, “ No-o Miss Samatha, quite the opposite, you’re without a doubt the prettiest lady I ever took for a buggy ride in a manure spreader.” Samatha whooped in laughter drawing Russ from the corrals to see what all the laughter was about. He smiled as he watched the two driving out through the mud roadway thinking, “ That’s the most laughter he’d heard from Sam since her Dad died. This Bobby John feller might just be good to have around.”

Samatha was beginning to enjoy the ride and asked, “ Bobby John, on our payroll ledger, your name appears as Bobby John Reynolds. The name is very familiar. Do you have family around here?” Bobby replied, “ No , the only relative I have anywhere in Arizona Territory is Cam Reynolds, the gun fighter over in Nogales. He’s my uncle. Haven’t seen

him in years. Don't plan on seeing him either. He's pretty wild and some folks claim he's a wanted outlaw. We were in the same Company during the fighting at Wood Bridge in Tennessee. It's probably just as well if no one knows we're related."

Sam replied, " I've heard of him, but I don't think that's where I heard of Reynolds. It's not important anyway. I'm curious though. That list of tools you gave Russ. You know how to read and write. Your writing is much better than mine. Did you go to school?" "No, better than that ." Said Bobby, " Mom was a school teacher. Most of my schooling was at home and every evening was school time. I had to work the farm with Dad most every day. Hey, I see your wagon over there!"

Sam looked that way saying, " Yeah, that's it . That wheel is really busted up. No wonder I was thrown out. The whole right side of the wagon is in the dirt." Bobby drove over next to the wreck saying, " It looks bad alright. That wheel can't be repaired, it'll need a new one. We'll pick it up on the way back from town. I think I can put a couple of wider road wheels on the back and move one of those lighter wheels up front. It'll look a little different , but make a much stronger buggy for you." Sam spoke up laughing and saying, " Mister , anything will beat a manure spreader!" Bobby laughed saying, " Samatha, I promise you a much better wagon the next trip to town."

Later , that night after supper Samatha was still enjoying the day trip she had with Bobby John. In town she had endured the laughter of

some of her friends, but she was surprised at herself for keeping her temper under control. She was doubly pleased that all of her girlfriends were interested in wanting to meet Bobby John.

Returning from town they managed to jack her wagon up on the back end of the manure spreader and tied it piggy back . Before it was secured, the rear wheels began to sink in the mud and the wagon slid sideways. Bobby John grabbed Sam and jerked her clear of the wagon before it could pin her . Sam went flying backwards and splash! Right into a mud hole. Sam was furious and when Bobby, laughing, attempted to help her up , she jerked him forward pitching him face down into the mud .

Fortunately , they both looked horrible and they both busted up laughing at each other. Russ's opinion when they pulled in, was that they had been rolling in the mud , but he helped them get the whole mess in the barn. "Hopefully." She told him, " Bobby John can get enough parts to fix my wagon. Anything is better than that spreader." She had a long hot bath still laughing at their muddy afternoon. She had no idea that he was still out there working long after she went to bed.

Four days had gone by and Bobby John was changing everything about Samatha's wagon. The wheel repair went quickly swapping out the broken one, but with a twenty year collection of parts and pieces available, he went all out. He built her a real lady's wagon with leather padded seats, and step ups with hand rails back of the front wheels .

Finally, giving it a bright coat of green , red and white paint, he started on putting together a fancy set of black harness for her two gray mustangs.

Russ was the first to see his creation and exclaimed , “ My God Bobby, that thing will scare everything else off the road. I’ll say this , there ain’t never been a prettier wagon in Benson. Sam will surely love it!” Bobby John replied, “ Yeah, Russ all of this stuff I got from that pile in the barn. I’d like to have built her a canopy for the rain, but there’s nothing like that around.”

Russ replied, “ The old Benson place about eight miles west on the creek We use it as a line camp during the winter. There’s a couple old buggies and a coach or two over there. The Benson’s used to own this whole country. Town’s named after them. Lot’s of junk on their old place. You might find something in the smithy shed. It’s been part of this ranch now for a long time ,but we seldom get over there cept in winter.”

That night at supper, Bobby John was informed that Sam wanted a trip to town the following morning. There would be no time for adding anything more to the wagon . When Bobby, as everyone now called him; drove the pretty new outfit to the house, Sam came out and screamed. Bobby didn’t know if she was happy or mad. Sam exclaimed, “ Damn you Bobby, I’m wearing work clothes. I can’t go to town in that wagon wearing this outfit!” with that, she slammed back into the house. Ten minutes later and a patiently waiting Bobby was

pleased to see a pretty well dressed young lady happily smiling come out to join him. Bobby said, “Miss Samatha , I hope you’re pleased with the repair of your wagon.” Sam said, “ Bobby , I love it. I don’t know how you did it but I’ve never seen one this pretty. All my friends in town will want a ride. It’s wonderful.”

Bobby handed her a list saying, “ I’d like you to pick these things up for me if you can. That hay wagon is really in terrible shape and we’re gonna need it bad as soon as the fields dry out a little.” Sam said, “I thought you would be going with me.” Bobby said, “No, sorry; I’ve gotta ride over to the ol’Benson place and try to locate some more wagon parts. I’ll see you tonight at supper. You have a wonderful day in town.”

Samatha was surprised at the disappointment she felt when Bobby couldn’t go with her. She shrugged off her feelings and happily looked forward to showing off her pretty wagon. After all, Bobby was just a day hand and he had to follow orders from Russ. Still though, his company would have been nice. He was a very interesting person. Maybe on her next trip she could arrange to have him drive her. She was the owner!

Bobby was thinking the same. Another trip with Samatha would have been fun, but every wagon needed work. Bobby had to laugh as he recalled some of Samatha’s fiery antics. It was too bad that he couldn’t meet her on an equal level, but she was the owner and he only a day Hand. He’d better get on with the job and leave day dreaming for

someone else. He loaded a few hand tools in the manure spreader and drove down the creek road west. As a last thought , he grabbed his pistol and shoved it under the seat. There could and most likely would be rattlers in that smithy shed.

Russ was right, there was a pile of junk in the Smithy shop, it appeared to have been abandoned for years. After having waded through the mess in the Barn back at the ranch, Bobby was surprised there were few hanging spider webs to sweep outta the way getting in. His army experience once again made him suspicious . “ Someone had been in here recently! What’s going on? Russ said there hadn’t been anyone over here in three for four months!”

Bobby went back outside and decided to look around before he made a bunch of tracks around the shed. There was no sign of boot or hoof prints , but he knew someone had been inside and taking a very close look , he saw where brush marks appeared in the loose sand next to a side door. “ Why would anyone go to the trouble of brushing out foot prints, unless they were trying to hide something.” He thought, “ Well, they’re not here now; so I’ll get what I can find and get on back. Who and why they were here is a mystery. Russ might have some answers.”

Inside. Bobby found a full wagon load of parts and hardware that he could use. He wanted to get more, but the manure spreader could only haul so much without damaging it. Making a last check for other iron and hardware he might get on his next trip, he discovered a recently

used branding iron hanging on a separate iron rod hanger with a number of other older broken irons and rods. Curious, he took the iron and set it on the ground in loose dirt leaving it's imprint. He read it as a bar -- E) quarter circle. Not being from Benson, he had no idea whose brand that would be. He left the iron hanging back where he found it, closed up the shed and took his wagon load back to the Ranch.

Bobby was pleased with his trip. He had a canopy frame that he could modify and cover for Samatha's wagon. He found that he really enjoyed doing things that would please her. This girl was getting to him. Once again, that evening , he was out there working by lantern light to have a canopy ready for her next trip to town.

The following day at breakfast, Russ asked about the Hay wagon and when it would be ready. They needed it as soon as possible because he wanted to put winter hay up before another rain. Bobby said, " We got lucky yesterday, Russ. I found a fifth wheel , a reach and a team evener that closely matched our Hay wagon. I put'em all on when I returned yesterday and greased her up good. You can take it out today. I'd like to talk to you before you head out today if you have time." Russ replied, "Bobby John, you're a life saver! We'll get every bundle of that hay put up today. Let's talk as soon as I get the boys going."

Later , at the house , Samatha was busy with the books when Bobby came to see Russ. She was saying, " Damn it Russ, these

numbers are wrong, they've gotta be. I counted those steers myself in the west range. There were two hundred and thirty eight. You're telling me there's a hundred eighty. My God Russ that's fifty eight market steers. There's gotta be a big miscount here. I want'em counted again. Have the boys run'em through a gate and get a good count. That's the bunch we're gonna sell. Get it done quick. We need the cash from that bunch and a hundred eighty won't break us even." Russ said " OK Sam, we'll count again, but I saw them myself. Those numbers might be off by a few , but not fifty eight! Are you sure your count was right?"

Samatha stopped her writing, slammed her pencil down and exclaimed, " Damn it Russ! I've got a mark right here for every ten head going through that gate in April and here's Dad's marks on his paper they match exactly. Something is wrong, damn it. We're missing a lotta steers! Get 'em counted tomorrow!" Russ replied , "OK, Ok Sam , I'll pull two of the boys from haying and get a count." Russ said as he headed out, " Sorry Bobby but I gotta get a couple of boys on this steer count. I'll talk to you later."

Samatha turned saying, "Good morning Mister Bobby John! Hey that wagon is great. Thank you! We've never had one that rode so easy and it's beautiful. My trip to town was wonderful and all my girlfriends love the wagon. How was your trip to Benson's place?" Bobby replied, " Miss Samatha that's what I wanted to talk to Russ about. I found a lotta parts over there that we can use and I gotta wagon load, but some one has been in that smithy shed recently. Russ said no one

from here has been there since mid winter. It may not be a big thing, but it bothers me. Whoever was there brushed out all sign outside of the shed. To me that means they were up to no good. Maybe I was an Army scout for too long and put too much importance on little things. May not mean a thing. Just thought I'd get Russ's opinion."

Sam replied, " Bobby, it's probably from some wandering rider getting in outta the rain, but when you make a trip back over there; If I'm free, I'd like to go along. I haven't seen that place in a couple of years." Bobby said, " Miss Samatha, I'm going back tomorrow. I'll swing by and see if you can go." Samatha was thinking, " I know I'm gonna be free to go. Bobby John is good company. It'll be a lot better than sitting here adding up cow, calf , steer counts while arguing with Russ and his 1st grade arithmetic. Bobby John is always interesting and I like him."

That evening , Bobby outlined to Russ, everything he'd found at the Benson place and his concerns about someone hiding their footprints . Russ had the same opinion as Samatha. "Not really anything to worry about." Bobby John went back to his canopy and once again , it was a lantern full of oil later that he went to the bunkhouse.

Around high sunup, Bobby drove up to the Ranch house and Sam came out right away. Her first words were, " Oh God Bobby! Not the manure spreader again!" Bobby laughed saying, "Miss Samatha , you bring out the very best in me. This is the best wagon on the Ranch excluding your town wagon. I've gotta lot of rusty stuff to haul and

ol'Betsy here is just what I need." Samatha laughed and scrambled up the wheel saying, " Bobby, you sure know how to make a girl feel special. A Manure spreader called ol'Betsy!"

Their ride to Benson's was full of questions from Samatha and careful answers from Bobby. He was afraid to be too open with her and let her know how much he really enjoyed her company. On the other hand, Samatha was totally happy to be with him. She was thrilled to hear that he had no intention of moving out of Benson once his job was finished at the Bar C.

She was telling him about the town getting ready for a celebration when she asked, "Bobby, do you dance? The town has a special event on the fourth and all the girls in town will be there." Bobby replied, " Miss Samatha, I loved dancing until I was shot. My leg hasn't been the same since. I haven't tried dancing. It might be a big mistake ." Samatha said, **" Sorry Bobby, just thought I'd ask. Everyone has a great time. I love to dance. My Dad was a great dancer. Anyway it'll be a lot of fun. Everyone is looking forward to the 4th."**

Shortly the ol'Benson barn came in sight and Bobby said, " Miss Samatha." Sam interrupted him saying, "Just a minute Mister Bobby John! I'm not Miss Samatha, please call me Sam like everyone else. You're always making me feel like we just met and I don't know why but I feel uncomfortable or something." Bobby replied, " OK Sam, but if you feel uncomfortable because I address you as someone special. That's how I feel." Bobby was surprised that he'd said that. Sam was

surprised also, but felt a great pleasure at his comment. She had no come back for that and a little embarrassed , she closely examined all the old buildings as they drove into the barn yard.

Fortunately for Bobby, Sam didn' answer back and pulling around the corner he saw that the Shed door was open. He exclaimed, “ I knew it ! Look at that . Someone has been here. I know that I closed and put the bar up when I left.” He pulled his pistol from under the seat and jumped to the ground saying, “ Sam stay where you are. I'm gonna look inside.” Sam ignored him jumping down herself saying, “ Bobby there's surely no reason for a gun! Maybe the wind blew the door open. Aren't you being a little over dramatic.”

Bobby ignored her and closely studied the ground. There were fresh boot prints leading into the shed door. There were none coming out! That old cold lonesome feeling of fear raised the hair on his neck. Many times his scouting duties during the war brought about this same feeling. He was alive today because he never ignored the feeling. Standing wide of the doorway , he gently started to close the door. Sam , stepped forward boldly thinking Bobby was being foolish .

Two bullets slammed into the door just as Bobby grabbed Sam , jerking her back behind him! Sam screamed as she fell and Bobby , thinking she had been hit; slammed the door and turned to Sam lying on the ground. God! he was scared!' Had she been hit? Thank God No!” Sam was scared , exclaiming, “ Oh God! Are you Ok? My God! Some one is shooting at us! Bobby , what can we do? Please don't ! Don't go

in there.” Sam couldn’t help herself, she grabbed Bobby hugging him as he tried to stand up. Bobby helped Sam to her feet and reassured her that he was Ok. He said, “ Sam, I’m fine. We’re lucky! Whoever did the shooting took off running out the other side . Are you sure you’re OK?”

Sam replied, “Bobby, I’m Ok, but I’m so sorry. I almost got you killed. I wasn’t much help was I?” Bobby said, “ Sam you did great. I was suspicious because I’ve been trained to look for trouble. I saw movement inside just as I grabbed you. Something is going on here. I think our shooter has gone , but I’ll go around to the other side door and see if I can tell where he went. I don’t like people shooting at me. You stay here. I’m gonna take my rifle. Here’s my pistol. Don’t be afraid to use it.” Sam replied , “OK Bobby, this time I’ll do as you say. Please be careful.”

After a yard search, Bobby determined that the shooter had ran to his horse and got away. He and Sam went into the shed to look around and once again Bobby followed the boot prints to that iron rail where the old branding irons were hanging. This time the bar E quarter circle iron was missing. Bobby said, “ Sam, I think we better notify the Sheriff that something is going on out here and we were shot at. Whoever, did the shooting took that one recently used iron and were willing to kill to get it. Why would anyone want that iron unless it was some kind of clue to outlaw work or maybe even murder.”

Sam replied, “ Bobby, my nerves are shot and normally I’d say you’re making too much outta this, but I was dead wrong and we were almost killed when I didn’t believe you before. Let’s get outta here, this place is giving me the creeps. We’ll get word to the Sheriff and let him check it out.” Bobby replied, “ Sam, if I were here by myself, I’d trail that shooter and see how he likes being shot at, but I think you’re right. We’ll get back and have a little palaver with Russ. Maybe he’ll have some ideas.”

Bobby made a fast run back to the Ranch and told Russ about the shooting. He immediately sent a rider to town to get the Sheriff out to the Ranch. Sam went in saying. “ Russ, I’m gonna get cleaned up before Sheriff Rawlings gets here.” Then laughing, she said, “Every time something happens around here Bobby throws me on the ground. This time I didn’t mind too much though, those bullets were right where I was standing. God it was frightening! I’m still shaking just thinking about it.”

Russ angrily replied, “ I’ll arm the whole crew and we’ll do some shooting ourselves. Any strange rider will be stopped and held. Rawlings will probably be an hour getting here. Bobby John , what do you make of all this?” Bobby replied, “ Like I told you before, some one was trying to hide something in that shed and I think it’s got something to do with that branding iron I told you about. That iron is now missing. I ‘ve got an idea rolling around in my head that keeps bothering me, but I just can’t clear it up. Look, I’m gonna be in the barn

working on that freight wagon. Send someone to get me when the Sheriff gets here.”

Two hours had gone by and no Sheriff. Bobby was deep into replacing a collar bearing when Sam came into the barn. She said, “ Bobby, I really want to thank you for covering up the frightened way that I acted today. I’m sorry, but that shooting scared me to death. I know that I hung on to you like a scared school girl all the way back, but I’ve never been shot at before. I wanna thank you for letting it go as you did.”

Bobby replied, “ Sam, forget it, you did great. During the war, I had young recruits screaming and running from just the sound of shooting. I just hope that we can get this straightened out without more shooting. I saw way too much killing during the war, but I won’t pull my shots off someone trying to kill me. What’s Russ up to and where’s the dang Sheriff? Some one needs to get on the trail of that shooter before the tracks are wind blown out.”

Sam said, “ Bobby, we’ve got another problem, that Russ is working on. There’s fifty three head of market steers missing from the west pasture. I’m gonna have to sell off part of my calf crop to make up the loss. We’re not hurting , but Dad always said . “ You can’t go in the hole . We gotta at least break even. It’ll mean fewer cows for next year, but I’ll have to cut back a little and maybe put off buying a few stock horses. Russ is gonna put out a notice right away for fifty plus

head of Bar C steers stolen. How anyone could expect to sell that many without getting caught is unheard of with today's market."

Bobby scared her with his exclamation saying, " Sam! I've got it ! I've got it!' He grabbed her arm and Sam exclaimed, " No!" jerking away. Bobby went on with, "Sam, the branding iron , the branding iron!" Sam said, " Thank God! I thought for a minute there you were gonna throw me on the ground again!" Bobby laughed saying, " No Sam. But I think I know why the shooter wanted that iron. When you mentioned Bar C. look here." Bobby went to the tack room returning with a Bar C iron. In the loose dirt of the barn floor he made a stamp mark of the Bar C and said, " Sam, I told you and Russ the iron I saw in the shed at Benson's was a Bar E quarter circle. Look what happens if I overlay your Bar C with a drawing of the other iron. The brand becomes a Bar circle E or a Bar O with an E inside. All we have to do is find that brand and they'll have your steers!" Sam stood in shock looking at Bobby. She said " Bobby you're right! You're right! I've heard of such a brand. Dad had something or said something about the Circle E years ago. I could kiss you! You are wonderful!" Sam came and gave Bobby a big hug. Bobby wanted to respond, but just patted her back a little. He knew that Sam was still upset and grateful. Still , it was wonderful to have her so near. He had no idea that Sam was feeling the same.

Sheriff John Rawlings rode in as Sam and Bobby were leaving the barn. Invited into the house and Bobby described to Rawlings the

whole shooting incident. Sam said to Rawlings, “ I woulda been killed , but he jerked me outta the doorway. John, Bobby knew something was wrong, but I couldn’t believe there was anywhere in the County that would be safer than right here on the Ranch. Looks like we’re all gonna have to go armed. Russ will have every stranger stopped and questioned. The Bar C is no longer open Range for anyone. Just today we discovered that over fifty head of prime steers are missing and Russ, Bobby John thinks they’ve been stolen. I’ll let him describe what he thinks.” Bobby went on to outline what the branding iron meant and why the thieves were willing to kill to hide their work.

He further said, “ Sheriff after thinking about it some and remembering the cow tracks and dung around the old barn; I think the thieves were pushing small groups to the holding pen over there and using the forge in the Smithy shack to heat the branding iron. Once branded with the Circle E , the steers could easily be trailed to a hide out until the brands healed and then sold at auction. Had we looked; Sam and I would have probably seen hoof prints all along the road to Benson’s where a lookout could spot anyone coming from the Bar C to race back and alert companions.”

Rawlings interrupted, exclaiming, “ Damn! Excuse me Sam , But Ol’Sam had trouble with the Circle E a few years back. Claimed they were a bunch of rustlers. He said he had proof they were stealing, and I rode with him up there north of Benson right into the Circle E barn yard early on a Sunday. I was desperately afraid he was gonna lynch

someone. The whole Bar C crew was with him and armed to the teeth. He fired his pistol in the air bringing the whole Circle E crew outside. He yelled at Oliver Whitehead , the owner of Circle E, to come out. He sat his horse with Bible in one hand, gun in the other and said, to the best of my recollection “ Oliver, I’m a tolerant man and I believe in the All Mighty . I’m here today to deliver God’s message to you and yours. In the Bible in Exodus it says right here that these are the judgments which thou shall set before them. Because you can’t read and understand the Good Book, I’ve come to put these judgments in plain language. He that shoots one of my men , so that he die, shall be hung. In the event of injury, it’s gonna be an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound and stripe for stripe. And finally Oliver, he that stealeth my cow and selleth him, or if found in possession shall be hung! I hope that I have made my position clear and I better never have to ride to your place again.”

“When ol’Sam finished his reading, he calmly closed his Bible, put it in his saddle bag, turned his back and slowly rode out of the yard. Until just now , I haven’t heard a word concerning the Circle E. I know they still have that Rawhide outfit of a Ranch about fourteen miles north of Benson, but you’re the first to make a complaint about losing cattle. Two of ol’Oliver’s boys are running the outfit now. Sam, I can send a Deputy up that way to look around and I’ll personally check the local Auctions for recent Circle E sales. I’d sure like to have that branding iron. It would be incriminating enough for me to make an arrest and then canvas their Ranch for your steers. Without better evidence than

Bobby John's word, there's not much more I can do." Bobby John exclaimed, "Sheriff, those thieves shot at me and almost killed Sam. I don't need any more evidence than that. You may be bound by your rules for a County Sheriff , but I'm not. Russ, I'll need a horse and a little trail grub. I'd like to get back to Bensons before dark if I can and see which way that rider headed." Sam spoke up,saying, " Bobby No! They'll kill you if they can. I wish you wouldn't go. I don't care about the steers." Bobby replied, " Sam, this stealing won't stop. If they get away with shooting at us and scaring us into folding our hands , they'll take everything until you're broke. I promise you that I won't do anything foolish. You know how careful I am." Russ said, "Sam, don't worry about Bobby. From what I've seen, he's the best man we have for this. Bobby, take my roan horse. He's got eight years on him, but he's Calvary trained and a good one." Rawlings was getting upset saying, " Hey, wait a minute here! You're all going off half cocked and some one is gonna get hurt. Let me handle this. We have to go slow and make sure we don't go blaming the wrong party." Bobby was saying goodbye to Sam and went towards the barn. Russ said, "John, you know if ol'Sam was still alive and had the word of Bobby John about the shooting, he would already be riding for the Circle E with twelve armed men and there'd be a hanging sometime tomorrow." Rawlings replied, " Damnit Russ, those days are behind us. We've got a little law and order in Benson now. Who is this new man Bobby John and where's he from?" Russ replied, " His full name is Bobby John Reynolds and he's from Kansas I think." Rawlings exploded with, " Oh,

God! He's part of that Gun fighting family outta Kansas. Cam Reynolds, the killer from Nogales is probably the most feared gun man in the territory. I've heard they were the best and bravest fighters from Kansas in the Confederacy. Damn, the Whiteheads don't have any idea what they may have stirred up. They'll probably be coming to me for protection before this is over. Look, I'll go out and have a few words with Bobby John." He was too late, Sam was standing on the porch waving as Bobby John rode down the south road.

When Sam came in off the porch, Russ noticed that she was in tears. Wiping her eyes , she said, "I couldn't stop him Russ. He thinks he's got the whole thing figured out and time is on the side of the thieves. He's upset because John won't make a move and an attempted murder was committed. He's very upset because it was me that almost got shot and that was my own dumb fault. Russ, I'm too young. I just didn't believe him about the possible danger. He was right. I was wrong and now he may get killed trying to help me." Russ came over placing his arm across her shoulders saying, **" Sam , he's doing what a man has to do. He's a very special kind of man. He thinks the world of you , but don't want you to know it, because he's just a ragged dirt poor day hand that has nothing and don't even own a horse. Did you know he spent every night till midnight working on your wagon and only went to Bensons to get a rain canopy for your wagon? No , Sam , he'll be twice as careful trailing these thieves and believe me there won't be anyone shooting at you again as long as he's**

around. I think you can rest easy. I can't say the same for the Circle E." Sam went inside crying. Now she was really upset.

Bobby rode carefully into the barn yard at Bensons. It appeared that everything was as he and Sam had left it. It was easy to follow the tracks of the running horse and a mile or so , down the trail; the rider slowed his horse and Bobby was trying to read the shooter's thinking at this point. A couple of thoughts he puzzled as he carefully followed the tracks. When the shooter first rode out, he headed for safety. That would be his first thought, but after there was no immediate threat, he would veer off to some high point where he could look at his back trail.

Since it had been a good five hours since the shooting and no pursuit, he would leave his lookout point and head for the hideout where his companions were holding some of the more recently stolen stock. Bobby had many times bet his life on his reasoning during the War and this was no different. He immediately looked for the highest point around that would give a clear view of where he was at that moment.

There were two hills and the one most in line with the shooters first mad run for safety was where he headed. The tracks he was currently following were at right angle to that hill, but he surmised this to be a ploy to throw off pursuit. He turned and rode in an opposite direction circling until he was completely behind the hill. Crisscrossing, he found the fresh tracks of a loping horse. This he

figured to be the shooter heading to his hideout. Bobby knew that he could be all wrong, but so far things were falling into place. He could see a few miles ahead that there appeared to be a sharp cut in between two small hills. The tracks were headed in that direction, but unfortunately sundown would catch him out in the open and he was looking directly into the sun. Any lookout would spot him immediately and he was a perfect target. Bobby decided that he would wait until sunrise and go in Indian style. With the bright sun directly behind him , he would be almost invisible. He would go in running.

That evening and night he spent in a dry wash rolled up in blankets with jerky and water for his supper. Up before daylight , saddled and loaded for war, he moved in the dark to within a hundred yards of the hill cut. He held his impatience until the sun was sitting just barely on the horizon, then made a racing dash at the opening between the two hills. He had no idea what to expect, but fairly exploded into a camp site sat squarely in the mouth of a small blind canyon.

Three bedrolls came alive like rattlesnakes grabbing for guns! Bobby jumped from his horse triggering two shots into what was left of their campfire yelling, “ Hold it! Hold it Don’t touch those guns!” One of the men already had a rifle in hand and swung it around. Bobby practically moaned , “ Oh No!” as he fired at the man. His bullet caught the man just above his belt. The rifle clattered to the ground as the man folded up. The other two, jerked their hands in the air, yelling, “Don’t shoot! Don’t shoot!” The man shot was hit hard. There was no

fight left in him, but Bobby took no chances, he kicked the rifle aside and had the other two move away from the bedrolls and into the open.

He said , “ What’s his name” ? pointing at the injured man. One replied , “Charlie, Charlie White head! He’s my brother! “ Bobby said, “ Well Brother , you better get over here and see what you can do for him. I don’t like killing people, but don’t point a gun at me. I Damn sure don’t like you taking a shot at Samatha Collins. Which one of you did that?” Brother replied, “ That was Charlie, he said, “You’all scared him,” He didn’t mean to kill anyone. God! He’s bleeding bad Mister. We gotta do something quick!” Bobby replied , “ Get his shirt off and let me see the wound. Damn , I tried to pull off a little.”

Brother said, “He’s shot in the side, there’s blood all over! He’s gonna die! Charlie’s gonna die!” Bobby angrily said, “Boy quit your yammering. You and your friend git over on that little knoll over there. Either of you so much as breath hard and I’ll shoot to kill. I’m gonna take his shirt and belt to make a compress. This’ll stop the bleeding. Ok brother what’s your name and where are Sam’s steers? He replied, “ They’re back in the brakes at the end of this canyon. I’m Jimmy and that’s Carlin, he works for us.” Bobby said , “ OK , Mister Jimmy, you go saddle a horse and get it over here. Stay clear of those guns by your bed rolls. Carlin , you come over here.” As Carlin walked over, Bobby noted that he had a bad arm and asked , “ What’s with the arm?” Carlin replied, “ Got shot in the elbow during the war. Can’t do

much with it.” Bobby replied , “ Hell of a note! It works good enough to steal cows. Can you saddle a horse?” Carlin replied , “ Yes Sir.”

Jimmy brought his saddled horse and Bobby said, “ Here’s what we’re gonna do boys if you wanna see Charlie live. You Jimmy are gonna beat it to the Bar C and tell’em to get a wagon out here with a couple of hands to bring Charlie in. He may not live as it is, but he Damn sure can’t ride a horse. You Carlin , high tail it to Benson and get the Doc out to the Bar C. I’m gonna stay here with Charlie. If he don’t make it , well; we’ll hope otherwise. Now git both of you, Jimmy don’t kill your horse!”

The next few hours were a torment for Bobby. There was nothing he could do for Charlie, but give him an occasional drink and insure that the compress stayed in place. Charlie couldn’t talk , but Bobby recognized his thankfulness from his eye expression. He had seen too much shooting , killing and dying during the war. He was encouraged that there was no blood on Charlie’s lips. Thankfully the bullet had not hit the lungs. He didn’t want another young man’s life on his head.

It was just after noon when he saw dust approaching from the trail east. “Thank God!” he muttered as he checked Charlie’s bandage, “Maybe we’ll get lucky,” the bleeding had stopped and Charlie was awake. Bobby was thrilled to see Samatha riding far out ahead of the wagon. He walked out to meet her.

Samatha couldn't help herself; jumping from her horse to grab and hug Bobby! Quickly releasing him she exclaimed, "Oh God! Bobby you're bleeding!" Bobby replied, " No Sam I'm not hurt, it's his blood. " pointing to Charlie. " He's hit pretty bad and we've gotta get him to the Doc as soon as we can." Sam said, " Mister you scared the daylights outta me. Jimmy Whitehead came riding in yelling for help. Said you had shot his brother Charlie and he was dying. We came as fast as we could. Russ threw some straw and blankets in the wagon. How is Charlie doing?"

Bobby said, " Not Good Sam, I've done all I can for him but if we can keep the bleeding stopped, he might make it. Sam, thank you for coming. I'm sorry that I acted like an avenging fool, rushing out after these men. I should have stayed on the Ranch and let the Sheriff handle it. I got your steers back, but may have killed Charlie doing it." Sam replied, " Bobby you did what you thought was right and we'll get Charlie back . Don't go blaming yourself." She almost without thought gave Bobby a hug.

Russ and Jimmy rode up in the wagon and carefully used a blanket to make a carrier and get Charlie in the wagon. Sam said, " I'll ride back in the wagon with Charlie. I've had to nurse a wounded Father half a dozen times and "Yes Bobby", I'll keep that bandage tight."

Sam stayed with Charlie through the whole ride and tended to him through the evening assisting the Doctor whenever possible. It was past midnight when the Doc said, "Miss Collins, he's lost a bit of blood

and part of his rib cage, but I think he'll pull through. I'll get back out here tomorrow and change the bandage. Mister Bobby John, you did a good job with that compress. Probably saved his life." John Rawlings had come back with the Doc and said, " Bobby, I'd like to get a full accounting on what took place out there. These boys will face Rustling charges and attempted murder. There's just no way around it. I'll take Jimmy and Carlin in and lock 'em up." Bobby said, " Sheriff hold up a little while if you can. I need to talk to Sam."

Calling Sam to the porch, Bobby said, "Sam, I want you to drop the charges against these boys. They were raised by a Father that was a killer outlaw and thief. Jimmy can't be more than seventeen and Charlie a couple years older. Charlie threw those shots at us because he was scared and had no thought of killing anyone. Carlin is a veteran from the War with one good arm. He was totally innocent, had just began working for the Circle E. Sure they were stealing your steers and deserve punishment, I don't deny that, but your Dad had the right idea. Put the fear of God in'em and that's a lot more effective than killing."

Sam says, " Can I do that Bobby? Will the Sheriff let me do that?" Bobby replied , "Miss Samatha Collins as sole owner and Boss of the Bar C cattle Ranch, little lady, you can call it anyway you like. Without charges from you or I, those boys are free. I'm not gonna have their prison sentence hanging on my head. I've got too much guilt from the War to deal with already." Bobby was shocked when Samatha broke

up crying and grabbed him around the neck saying, “ Bobby John Reynolds you’re a good man!”

Sam went back inside where Rawlings, Russ, Jimmy and Carlin were all seated. Bobby followed her inside as she said to Rawlings. “ John do I have to make charges against these men?” Rawlings replied, “ Yes Sam. I want you and Bobby John to come to my office tomorrow and sign the papers.” Sam said, “ John, there won’t be any charges. Bobby and I are not filing any charges.” Rawlings mouth fell open saying, “ What the ? You Mean you’re gonna let these thieves get off with attempted murder and cattle rustling. Have you lost your mind? Samatha these men tried to kill you. God , if your Dad was alive he’d hang’em! I just can’t believe you.” Sam replied, “ John, you were with my Dad years ago when he could have hung someone. You said yourself that he read ‘em from the Good Book and there hasn’t been any Rustling in the County in fifteen years. No Bobby John feels bad enough that he had to shoot Charlie and he refuses to make charges. He took all the risks and got my cattle back. If he won’t make charges , neither will I.”

Rawlings shook his head and said, “Jimmy and you Carlin, was I you; I’d go get me a Bible and read some every day of the next five to ten years you’d get convicted for rustling. You can be damn thankful to Miss Samatha and Bobby John for your freedom, but I’ll warn you right now if I so much as smell hair burning anywhere in this County; I’m gonna come looking for you.”

Rawlings left with the Doc and Russ sent Jimmy and Carlin to the barn loft for sleeping. Bobby said his good night to Sam and Russ as he headed to the bunkhouse. Sam said as he left, "Good night Bobby, I'd like to talk to you tomorrow." Bobby waved a hand and left. Russ said, "Sam , I've met very few men like Bobby John, he's quite a man, handy with tools, handy with a gun and handy with people. Your Dad was like that a really good man. Bobby John is a rare breed of a man and like I told you he has his pride." Sam agreed.

Two weeks later, things had quieted down on the Bar C. Charlie had been taken to Benson and all of the stolen steers had been recovered. Russ asked Sam for the cattle ledger, to check count . Sam handed him the ledger and as she did her Dad's letter fell out. Picking it up ,she exclaimed, " Oh No! it can't be!" Russ , surprised at her outburst , said, " What is it Sam ? What is it?" Sam showed him the letter, saying, " Russ, look at the name of the lady that sent this to Dad. I just can't believe it! " Russ replied , " Sam, you know I can't make out that writing. What's wrong with it?"

Sam came back excitedly, " Russ, the Lady's name is Susan Reynolds, and she's from Kansas! Can't you see? She may be related to Bobby John. He may know her. Where is Bobby?" Russ replied, " Finishing up our freight wagon. A couple more days and he'll be done. I think he'll be leaving us next week. All of our rolling stock is now in tip top condition. Oh and Sam, should I send a message to town and let Dave Hogan know that all of your wagons have new wheels?" Sam

laughed saying, “ You do and I’ll get that Horse whip after you! I’m gonna take this letter and go see Bobby.”

Bobby was wrapping up his work on a tail gate as Sam came into the barn. She had tried many times over the past two weeks to spend time with Bobby, but he always seemed to evade her with work that needed doing somewhere. Twice he had found reasons to be out when she wanted to go to town. She was beginning to feel that he didn’t want to be around her at all. It seemed that the friendliness between them had been lost following the shooting incident. Something was wrong and she didn’t know how to fix it. She was thinking, “ Maybe a little talk concerning this Susan Reynolds from Kansas will help.”

She said , “ Bobby , can I talk to you for a minute?” Bobby was startled and spun around saying, “ Of course Sam. I needed a break. What ‘ya got there?” Sam said, “ Well it’s an old letter to my Dad from a lady in Kansas. I was curious if you might know her. Her name is Susan Reynolds.” The shock on Bobby’s face couldn’t have been greater if he’d been shot. “ Oh God” ! he exclaimed. “ She’s my Mom! Sam, she died a year ago! How or when did she know your Dad? May I see the letter?” Sam was shocked also, but handed Bobby the letter.

Quickly reading he said , “I’ll be damned! Excuse me Sam! So your Dad was the one she got the money from for the operation on my leg. Sam , I’m sorry, but this is too much. I couldn’t remember the name she said and only knew that the man lived in Benson Arizona territory. That’s the reason I came to Benson. I promised Mom on her death bed

that I'd honor that gift and pay off that loan. Sam, I owe your Dad more than I can ever repay. I'm dirt poor right now, but I'll repay every dime." Sam was crying and came to hug Bobby saying , " Oh Bobby, I'm so sorry. You lost your Mom. Dad has always been my Mom and I know how terrible I felt. Don't worry about this loan. You've more than paid it. You saved this Ranch almost two thousand dollars recovering our steers." Bobby replied, heatedly, " Oh No Sam! I worked for the Ranch! I'll pay off Mom's note. I promised her."

Sam replied, " Mister Bobby John Reynolds, didn't you just tell me a couple weeks ago that I'm Miss Samatha Collins sole owner and Boss of the Bar C . That I could make the calls around here. I declare your Mom's note to be paid in full and your money's no good on the Bar C!" Bobby said , " Sam you can't do that! A man has his pride, damnit!" Sam said, " Yes , I been seeing your pride for the past two weeks and I'm tired of it. Just because I own the Ranch don't mean I can't fall in love with you if I please and Mister Bobby John , I happen to know you feel the same way about me." Sam held up her hand as Bobby tried to object. " Don't you say a word!" she went on with, " My Daddy told me when he was dying to find a good man and grab him. He didn't say the man had to be rich, famous or anything else. He only had to be a good man and Mister Bobby John, weather you like it or not, you're a good man and if you hadn't noticed I've got a death grip around your neck right now!"

**“Well, what’s a poor man to do? Throw her on the ground again?
Marry her ? Or maybe both?”**

The End