

Aunt Abby says



Women who read the most about reducing exercises seldom exert themselves more than to reach for the chocolates.

Pa says he wishes he'd known Sir Thomas Lipton. He'd like to have thanked him personally for startin' those Lipton Tea gardens in Ceylon. It's the teas from these very gardens, you know, that help make the Lipton blend so smackin' good.

A man may marry a girl because she's cute and helpless, but the week after the wedding he'll want her to be an expert at house-keeping.

Cousin Lucy has to count her pennies. But I notice she serves that extra satisfyin' iced Lipton's Tea, and no wonder . . . it's only half a cent a glass!

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"Yes?" Her voice came from upstairs. "Just remember we're having breakfast early," Segrist said. Modoc rose up with an effort, hands on knees, and turned through the open door. He refused even to look at Bill in passing. "Bring out the blankets," Segrist told Tully Colton. "Fetch a pair for Dalhart."

Bill rose up, stretching his arms, and crossed the porch to snap his cigarette into the gloom.

"I think I'll walk over and take a look at the old cabin," he announced, yawning. "I haven't seen the old homestead for seven years." To make it more casual he added: "Want to come along, Slade?"

"Not me, brother. Me, I crave sleep. Watch your step around the well," he warned. "Some guy's stolen all the planks off the deck."

"Nobody stole 'em, you fathead," came Modoc's venomous voice from inside. "Them planks was all rotted through. I was just about to put on a new deck when you summer tourists lit on me. Just you walk right into it, Bill. It's dry now, and only thirty feet deep. And I hope you light on your head."

Bill half expected Segrist to halt him, or order Slade to go along. It was worse than that. When he reached the end of the porch and stepped down, the old convict was at his elbow—his right elbow, which left Segrist's gun arm free. "I'll go with you, Dalhart."

They descended the slope in silence, angling to the right, or westward. Modoc's farm buildings were soon at the rear, dark and motionless. There appeared to be little livestock on the premises: a saddle horse or two, a pair of work horses stamping in a corner of the barn lot. Directly ahead, to the south, the Dalhart side of the pocket was utterly devoid of life.

Bill glanced back, checking the disposition of the enemy forces. The Tolliver twins and the Dude would be at the gap. Greta was upstairs, Modoc in the bedroom downstairs. The Colton boys were on the porch. From this angle, a section of the porch was still visible.

Segrist called a halt on the edge of the swale.

They faced each other, just beyond arm's length. In the light of the stars and the half-moon, the old convict's pose was significant. It was outwardly casual, but his right hand was inside his open shirt.

Afterward, Bill was to look back upon that moment as an opportunity lost, no matter how desperate the chance involved. With a diving tackle, hard and low, he might have got Segrist's gun. But, at the moment, he had half guessed rather than grasped the more formidable design that underlay what had already been revealed.

"You and I are alone, boy. We can talk turkey. Here's your angle, as near as I've got you figured. You're in this thing against your will. So you're hoping for some kind of break."

"Something like that," Bill agreed. "But you're also smart, as Modoc says. You don't care about the mine. Not compared to having us out of this hole and seeing the gal in the clear. So play ball with us in the morning, bub. Show us the gold and we're gone."

"What about the girl?" "That's your problem, after we're through the gap. She's safe as long as you play ball. I don't harm women. At the same time I won't be crossed. Understand?"

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