ERNEST HAYCOX

SADDLE & RIDE

MUSAICUM VINTAGE WESTERN

Ernest Haycox

Saddle & Ride (Musaicum Vintage Western)

Published by

MUSAICUM

Books

- Advanced Digital Solutions & High-Quality eBook Formatting -

musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066380113

Table of Contents

THE JURY RETURNS A VERDICT

Table of Contents

From the high edge of Mogul to the floor of Powder Desert was a sheer drop of fourteen hundred and sixty feet; and even on the quietest day a stream of warm air from the desert boiled up the face of the rim, so that if a man stood at the break-off and tossed his hat outward it invariably sailed back to him. Clay Morgan had shown this to his daughter Janet long ago. It was a part of their ritual on the trip to town, and as soon as they reached the rim this afternoon, she reminded him of it again; whereupon he sailed his hat across the rim, caught it on the rebound, and witnessed her delighted smile. Afterwards they turned downgrade on a steep road narrowly cut against the face of the mountain.

As they descended she began to recite lines of "Hiawatha," in preparation for a school play. Riding slightly back of her, Clay Morgan watched, her small arms gesture and her naturally sober face lighten and grow faintly dramatic. To him, it was a matter of never-ending astonishment that one nine-year-old girl's head could hold so much. Now and then when she forgot a line she would turn quite still, her lips pressed straight while she tried to remember. Usually she remembered, but sometimes she had to reach for the small book in the pocket of her overalls. At those times she would say in a disgusted voice, "Oh, fuzz," and give him a small sweet smile. "It's a kind of a long old poem, Daddy. I think people in those days talked too much."

She wasn't much for talking. Silence was a habit she had acquired from him, and from being so much alone on the ranch. There were no other children within ten miles of the Long Seven gate. All her games were played alone, made up

from her own imaginative head. Sometimes, watching her from afar, he had seen her people the ranch yard with fictitious characters and act out their parts one by one in pantomime. She rode loose and straight in the deep saddle, unconscious of the horse yet balanced to anticipate any sudden swing. Since her first talking days he had taught her this—that trouble was something for which she must always be prepared. She wore a boy's shirt and a pair of tan overalls tucked into small boots; she had black hair braided between her shoulders and gray eyes shining from a tanned face which even now foreshadowed some of her mother's lively, graphic prettiness.

The silence and the slow way she had of judging people came from him. The vivid imagination and the growing beauty came from her mother. It was something Clay Morgan had watched for, through the years—and yet, much as he had expected it, it still was strange to see in this girl the image of a woman nine years dead, to know that the tempestuous Lila who had been his wife now reached out of the grave to remind him of the one brief and violent and miserable and beautiful year of their marriage. In the beginning she had said she loved him; she had died hating him.

Powder Desert began at the bottom of the grade. Sand and sagebrush hummocks, built by the east wind, lay before them; around these lumpy barriers, high as a man's shoulders, meandered the deep twin ruts of the road. This September day's sun was half-down in the west and heat lay heavy on the flat; and in the near distance, on the benchland at the head of the desert, the houses of War Pass made an irregular outline. Toward this cattle town they traveled, Janet dreaming her nine-year-old dreams in sober stillness, Clay Morgan holding his clear intimations of trouble ahead.

War Pass lay on the first rise of the Cache Mountains, facing eastward toward the spectacular desert sunrise.

Behind the town, westward, the hills rose away in irregular steps and broken contours of pine-timbered passes in the distance. On north and south, rocky defiles connected with little isolated valleys. All highways led to this crossroad town. Into it came the ranchers and cattle hands and homesteaders, and the shadowy drifters of the land, seeking supplies and cheerfulness after the long loneliness of the deep hills and the dun-gray desert.

Turning at the corner of Gentry's corral, Clay Morgan faced the length of Main Street, with its double row of angular wooden buildings and its deep golden dust. Under the courthouse locusts at the corner of Main and Stage, a large group of men idly waited; and he knew then that the trial of the rustler, Ollie Jacks, was still unfinished.

He dismounted by the stable and permitted both horses to nose into the water trough before tying them to the rack.

Janet said: "I am going to Ann McGarrah's, Daddy."

She always had a quick smile for him when she mentioned Ann McGarrah's name, as though there might be some secret involved. "I think," she added, "we will eat supper there."—and watched him a moment with her observant eyes.

"You seem pretty sure of that."

Janet said, with complete conviction, "She always invites us to supper," and walked on beneath the street's board awnings. Morgan's glance followed her small, resolute figure and he smiled at the precise way she bowed toward Jesse Rusey, the town marshal, when she passed him. At the door of McGarrah's store she turned, waved at Morgan, and passed inside.

Morgan remained near the stable's hitching-rack to roll up a quick smoke. But he was never a man to let his eyes be idle; thus now, while his fingers tapered off the cigarette his glance ran down the street, past the courthouse and post office and the Long Grade saloon, past the Mountain House hotel and beyond that to the little cluster of brick and dobe

buildings of Old Town. Two cross-streets dropped from a higher level of the hillside. Up there sat the high, square, iron-ornamented houses owned by the wealthier merchants and the big cattlemen who liked to winter their families in town. This was four o'clock and already the street was in shadow, though the far desert burned up its brown- gray glitter. The smell of dust, the rank odor of Gentry's corral, and the faint steaming of the water in the trough rose strongly around him.

All these things he saw carefully and completely, as though the changing shadows and the shift of men and the opening and closing of doors mattered greatly. At twenty-nine his life had made him, among other things, close-mouthed and vigilant. He was a long-legged man, turned dark by the sun and toughened by constant work, with features so solidly composed that when he smiled the change of expression was a complete and surprising break. Most of the men on this street were his deep friends; but some were not—and it was this tangled warp and woof of friendship and enmity in a tough, quick-tempered land which put the expression of aloof interest in his stone-gray eyes.

Jesse Rusey, the town's marshal, cruised the walk—short, broad body swinging a little. He had the shoulders of a wrestler; above the sweep of his mustaches was a glance as cool as flint. This man had a kind of rocky solidness, a formidable courtesy. He said, "How are you, Clay?" and passed by.

Charley Hillhouse and Hack Breathitt broke from the courthouse group and walked toward him, their boots puffing up the street's dust; but for a moment he remained slackly by the hitching-rack, his mind picking away at the mystery of Jesse Rusey. This town marshal had been in War Pass for twenty years, yet nobody knew him, or knew what he thought, or knew where his sympathies actually lay. Everything that Jesse Rusey was lay inside a cropped, ball-

round head. His eyes met every man's glance with a straight gray stare. His voice was soft, in peace or in trouble.

Hillhouse and Breathitt came cheerfully forward and for a moment these three fast friends stood by the hitching-rack and swapped gossip, pleased to be together again. All of them had grown up in the country, they had gone to school together and had worked and hunted and had their fun together, and in trouble had stood inseparably side by side. Clay Morgan said: "Nothing new on Ollie Jacks yet?"

Hillhouse shrugged his shoulders. "They been arguing about it since noon. I don't see nothin' to argue about. We caught Ollie dead in his tracks, bendin' over a Three Pines calf with his iron. But there's a couple townsmen on the jury. They're the ones hanging this thing up."

Hack Breathitt grinned. "Ben Herendeen's sore enough to shoot the jury." He gave Charley Hillhouse a slanting, skeptic glance. "Your boss is gettin' pretty large for his pants, Charley. But then he always was that way."

Ben Herendeen owned Three Pines, and Charley Hillhouse was Herendeen's foreman, loyal to the core. Hillhouse said in a mild voice: "If they don't throw Ollie Jacks in the cooler there ain't no use for any juries in this country. After all, Hack, it was Ben's beef."

"Tough on Ben," said Hack, but his smile remained and the other two knew how he felt toward Ben Herendeen. Hack Breathitt was small, quick and restless. He couldn't stand still. He was forever shifting in his tracks, his eyes and his interest always roamed around. There was a good deal of rebellion in him and a good deal of laughter. He never stayed long in one place; the mark of his campfires lay all through the hills and deep in the desert. They made an aimless, crisscross trail which led nowhere. This was Hack Breathitt.

Clay said: "You look thin, Charley."

"I been on the go," said Hillhouse. "We're shippin' heavy this fall."

Hack Breathitt spoke impatiently. "What are we standin' here for? Let's get a drink."

They moved toward the Long Grade saloon, three abreast.

Clay Morgan walked between his partners, a hand lying on each man's shoulders. He was a head taller than Hack, half a head taller than Charley. Directly opposite, under the locust trees, Clay noticed the crowd grouped around Ben Herendeen—Gurd Grant and Lige White, both big cattlemen, and Sheriff Ed Nickum, and a few smaller ranchers like Hamp Brigham and Vance Ketchell. Herendeen's riders, with a few townsmen, made up the rest of the crowd. Ben Herendeen had his huge muscular back shoved against the bole of a locust tree. He was speaking with a good deal of energy; his sandy head bobbed up and down and his extremely heavy arms made quick cuts through the air, throwing some of his physical intolerance into the talk. His eyes lifted and found Clay Morgan and for a moment, even as he spoke, his long full stare clung to Morgan. A moment later the three partners shouldered into the Long Grade.

Hack Breathitt got a bottle, two glasses, and a bunch of cigars. They went to a corner table and sat down. Hack Breathitt passed the cigars to Morgan, poured a drink for Hillhouse and for himself and settled deep in the chair. For that little interval he was as relaxed as he could ever be, still smiling a little, the sparkle of secret amusement in his eyes. He said, "To law and order," and downed the drink.

"You," said Hillhouse, "are an ornery son-of-a-gun."

"I guess," murmured Hack Breathitt, "I never see things like other people see 'em. Seems like I was born to argue. I'm the man that puts salt in my coffee instead of sugar. Maybe I ought to settle down. You think so, Clay?"

Clay Morgan fired up one of the cigars. He was low in the chair, chin against his breast; his face then was dark and

speculative. He shook his head. "Man has to make his own life, Hack. If you like yours, why change?"

Breathitt shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe I better change before it is too late."

Charley Hillhouse's question held a degree of sharpness. "What's that mean?"

"The country ain't the same," murmured Hack. "There's one hell of a beautiful ruckus comin'. The sheep and the goats. That's it. The sheep and the goats. Accordin' to Ben Herendeen I'm one of the goats. Ben's about ready to work on the goats."

Charley Hillhouse, who was a quiet workhorse of a man, slowly nodded. A young rider, wearing boots so high-heeled that he seemed to walk on stilts, entered the saloon and came straight toward the table.

"The jury's comin' in, Charley, and Herendeen wants you." Both Morgan and Breathitt watched Hillhouse, who showed a rare irritation. He said briefly, "I'll come when I'm through here," and when the messenger tarried he added: "Go on, Billy, go on," and watched the young man leave.

"Well," said Breathitt in a more earnest manner, "we sure have had some fun, us. I guess my trouble is in thinkin' that sort of thing goes on forever. Which it don't. Here's Charley with a fine job. Here's you makin' a big ranch for yourself. And here's me—still warmin' my fingers over the campfire. Everything changes. Some men grow up and some don't. I never will."

Neither of the other men answered. Hack gently circled his glass along the table. "Charley, you remember how Clay used to laugh? I ain't seen him laugh like that in years." And both men were watching Clay Morgan with a close, analyzing regard. "You ought to get married again," said Breathitt very bluntly.

"That's right," agreed Charley.

"Very odd advice from a couple of bachelors," pointed out Morgan.

"Ain't the same," countered Hillhouse. "Ain't the same at all. Hack and me can go it single, no harm done. You never was that way. You feed on a different grass than we do."

Hack Breathitt said, as though it were an idle idea, "Catherine Grant was in town this mornin'." It was so heavy-footed that suddenly all three men were amused. Clay Morgan bent back in his chair and let out a long deep laugh. "You're a butter-fingered scoundrel, Hack."

Breathitt started to speak but was stopped by quick-rising talk on the street. A man struck the swinging doors of the saloon with both fists and rushed in. He said, in a half shout, "They let Ollie Jacks free," and ran out. The conversation in the saloon rose at once to a noisy pitch.

Charley Hillhouse slapped the palm of his hand on the table. He was violently and openly angry, a rare thing for him. "The two townsmen on that jury did it," he said. "It is plain that we can't convict a rustler in War Pass. There won't be any more monkey business with juries."

Hack Breathitt grinned. "I'd like to see Ben Herendeen's face right now."

Charley Hillhouse answered irritably. "If it was your beef, Hack, you wouldn't make a joke of it."

"No," said Hack Breathitt, "I guess I wouldn't. I guess if it was my beef I'd handle that business myself."

"We'll do that," stated Charley Hillhouse. "Wait and see."

"I'm waitin'—and I'm seein'," murmured Hack, quite seriously. He put his elbows on the table, a handsome young man, a man impatient and unconforming and disbelieving. "And this is what I'm seein', Charley. Ben Herendeen and Gurd Grant and Lige White will get tough. They'll figure to clear up the hills, their own way. You know how that ends, Charley? The sheep and the goats. Everybody on their side is sheep. Everybody else is goats. No questions and no answers. Just bang!" He stretched his long finger outward and cocked his thumb, making an imaginary shot. "They'll figure to scare hell out of every stray rider. But they won't,

my boy. They'll just make fellows like me damned good and mad—and then the trouble starts."

"If it was your beef you'd see it our way," repeated Charley Hillhouse.

Hack Breathitt had his moments of wisdom; he had his far thoughts. "There's two kinds of people in this world, Charley. Those that have got beef—and those that have got none. People that stick and people that drift. The Lord made you and me different. It ain't my fault and it ain't your fault. But I like my way—and no man can make me change."

"Ben's got nothing against you," said Charley Hillhouse.

Hack Breathitt showed Hillhouse a smart, dark expression. "When folks get heated up, Charley, there ain't no halfway. It's one thing or the other. The sheep or the goats." He poured himself a second drink. "You know what I'm thinkin', boys? I'm thinkin' that this is probably the last time us three will sit at the same table."

"Don't talk like that," said Charley Hillhouse.

But both of them were watching Clay Morgan, who sat silent all this while, buried in his own thinking. He had always been the silent one, the last one to speak. He said, very quiet with his words, "I want you to know this, Hack. If you ever get in trouble, come to me. I'll stand behind you."

Charley Hillhouse shook his head, bothered by Morgan's words. "I knew you'd say that, Clay, but I wish you hadn't. Makes it tough on me. Long as I work for Three Pines, I'll let nothing get between me and the ranch. Nothing at all." He met Hack Breathitt's glance and quietly added: "Don't come to me, Hack."

"See?" murmured Hack, and then was smiling at them with a little regret and a little of his old malice showing. "Well, we've had fun."

That was all. These three rose and crossed the room, pushing through the doors. Ben Herendeen remained under the locust trees, with Lige White and Gurd Grant and a group of Three Pines riders. Sheriff Nickum was also there,

coat hung loosely to his gaunt frame. Jesse Rusey, farther down the street, watched this crowd; and on him Clay Morgan put his glance for a moment. Charley Hillhouse went across the dust to join Herendeen. Janet turned out of McGarrah's store, advancing toward Morgan. Her little shoulders showed straight in the sunless light, her small feet made a quick tapping on the sidewalk boards. She said: —

"We are having supper with Ann McGarrah, Daddy." Her soft smile held its secret again, her eyes showed it. "Didn't I tell you?"

Hack Breathitt removed his hat. "How, honey."

"How, Hack."

Hack said: "Come along with a gentleman."

Janet put her hand in Hack Breathitt's fist and walked away with him. Hack Breathitt pushed his hat far back on his head and began speaking confidentially of a sidehill gouger he had recently seen.

"Did he have a kink in his tail?" asked Janet, who liked to be fooled.

Morgan laid his shoulders against the wall of the saloon and freshened his cigar with a match. The group remained beneath the locust trees, Herendeen and Lige White now talking together while the rest remained silent. A good many people had come to the street, scattered under the board awnings. All of them, he noticed, were watching the courthouse. Tension crawled up the street, strong enough to touch Morgan's nerves. Jesse Rusey never moved from his position as he, too, watched the courthouse door. A stage stood by the Mountain House hotel, ready to go. At the stable, Parr Gentry sat on a capsized barrel, lumped over and apparently disinterested, but Morgan saw the way the man's eyes traveled around. Hack Breathitt and Janet were crossing the dust to Tanner's drugstore, and at this moment Ollie Jacks, freed by the jury's verdict, stepped from the courthouse, looked to either end of the street, and halted.

There had been some talk along the street. It died out as quickly as if a gust of wind, rushing between these buildings, drew all sound away. A pair of men walked from the saloon and stood near Morgan, one of them whispering, "Watch this, Bill." Herendeen swung his big body from the locust tree. The crowd around him shifted, each man wheeling on his heels, until everybody faced Ollie Jacks. Suddenly, for some reason of his own. Jesse Rusey left his position at the mouth of Stage Street, passed Herendeen's group and stopped at the edge of the post office, not far from Ollie Jacks.

This shifting and turning was what Clay Morgan saw, this and the taut shape of Ollie Jacks before the courthouse. He was a wiry man with the drawn, blank face of a gambler; he was a man who had been caught stealing beef and now, by the act of the jury, was free to ride out. His horse was in Gentry's stable, fifty feet from where he stood, yet this was as far as he got, this rooted position before the courthouse with Jesse Rusey on one side of him and Herendeen's group watching him from the other, and with all the town looking on. At that moment he knew what Clay Morgan and every soul in town knew: he knew he was a dead man.

THE THIN CHANCE

Table of Contents

This was the way Ollie Jacks faced the town, narrow-shaped and thoroughly still, his glance taking in all that was to be seen. He showed no expression during that small interval, nothing marred the smooth blankness of his wiry cheeks. Yet Clay Morgan knew what lay behind that mask—the shocking fear, the wild clawing of desperation, the scheming and the hoping, the fatal insight; and though Morgan had never liked the man he had his stir of admiration and pity. This was showdown for a fellow who had gambled his life; now in the showdown, with all his luck running out, he wasn't breaking.

During this time two other bits of side-play caught Clay Morgan's attention—Rusey's change of position and the sudden appearance of Pete Borders at the corner of the Mountain House hotel. By all the rules of the book Borders had less security in this town than Ollie Jacks, for Borders was known as a rustler far more ambitious than Jacks had ever been. Jacks was a weak man caught by a daring he wasn't big enough to carry off, whereas Borders was the kind to make his audacity stick and now to appear here, contemptuous of them all.

The long silence held on, as though everybody waited for something to come. Ollie Jacks reached at his shirt pocket and produced his tobacco. He put his head down while he rolled the cigarette, the brim of his hat shading his eyes, and he was thinking, Clay Morgan knew, of each last thin chance he had. Morgan watched the man's fingers roll the cigarette back and forth until the paper began to crush and the tobacco to spill. There was a growing sharpness to Jacks's shoulder-points until at last, when Jacks could no longer endure it, he dropped the cigarette and pulled up his head and showed this town the gray bitter color of his face.

His glance struck into the street, point by point; he looked at Herendeen, at Rusey, at Gentry's stable, and at last he looked straight to Clay Morgan. His shoulders dropped and he seemed to let a great breath out of him; and, still staring at Morgan, he came across the dust.

"Clay," he said, "I never did you no wrong, did I?"

"Not that I know of."

Sweat ran its oil-shine across Ollie Jacks's face; his lips were small and sharp and his eyes—not eyes that any man could trust—clung to Morgan. "No," he said, "I never did you any wrong. I never set foot on an inch of your range in my life. That's something, ain't it? I'm not lyin'. The jury gave me a break, but I know what all this means. All I want is a chance to ride out of this town."

Morgan slowly turned the cigar in his mouth. The weight of the town was on him; all the eyes of Herendeen's crowd had swung to him. He saw the way Charley Hillhouse slowly shook his head, signaling him to keep out of it. He watched Jesse Rusey make a half-turn to more accurately face him. Hack Breathitt came from the drugstore with Janet, reached the middle of the street, and stopped at once. He bent down and whispered to her, and sent her on to McGarrah's. Pete Borders hadn't moved from the corner of the Mountain House hotel. There was nothing good in Ollie Jacks; never had been and never would be. If he got away from Herendeen now he would be back in the hills again, once more rustling. Morgan knew it, yet said: "Wait here, Ollie," and walked toward Herendeen.

The group around Herendeen gave ground as he came up. Lige White said in a puzzled voice, "Don't interfere, Clay," and Gurd Grant shook his head. They were all cattlemen and so was he; but they felt a difference in him now and didn't like it. Ben Herendeen remained against the locust tree. His round, long jaw ran back to flat ears, to a tall forehead and close-cut sandy hair; he was no older than Morgan, no more than twenty-nine, with a ruddy unlined

face, He was heavy and swell-chested. His chin threw the lower lip over the upper, adding to the square bulldog cast of his expression; and he hated Clay Morgan, and had hated him as far back as boyhood.

Morgan said: "My daughter is in town. I don't want her scared—"

"Clay," said Lige White, "step over here a moment. I want to explain something—"

"Later, Lige. Not now."

Herendeen said in his bluntly unanswerable manner: "Everybody's been talking about things being legal. So we made this legal and see what happened. We won't make that mistake again. You're wrong, Clay. Better get right."

"Never mind," said Morgan. They saw him now as he seldom was, the quick angles of his face showing up. The change was instant; he had no smoothness, no reasonableness. What he said was a challenge—he meant it that way and wanted them to know it. No qualifications, no arguing. "As long as Janet is in town I want no racket about this. If there is a racket I'll take care of the man that made it." He swung around, speaking to Ollie Jacks. "You're all right in town, Ollie. But when you leave, that's your grief."

"Whoa!" said Herendeen. "I'll make what damned racket I please."

Morgan came about fast enough to make Lige White jerk his head aside. Morgan said: "All right, Ben. If you want it, you can have it now."

It shocked everybody still, this challenge so unexpected and so deadly in a quick-tempered country. It caught Herendeen with his guard down. Charley Hillhouse's mouth fell open. Gurd Grant showed Morgan a stunned wonder; and then everybody was waiting for Herendeen to say the only thing he could say. Nobody accepted that kind of talk. Herendeen stepped away from the locust tree, the bright flame of anger in his eyes.

"I'll just go along with you—"

Jesse Rusey's voice, very soft and very sure, broke in: "Nothin's goin' to happen to Ollie Jacks inside this town."

Herendeen turned at once. The marshal had come to the edge of the group. He stood by, short and quite broad, with no change on his face. Blood rushed to Herendeen's cheeks until they were a dark-stained red. He gave Rusey a killing glance and looked over to Ollie Jacks who remained by the saloon. Pete Borders had drifted forward as far as Gentry's stable; he had the point of a shoulder against the stable wall and he stared on with a latent, amused insolence. Herendeen watched him a moment and then looked at Morgan again. There was this long interval in which he had seen these four men, Rusey, Ollie Jacks, Peter Borders, and Morgan; and after that something changed in his head and his eyes showed a gray, heated smartness. He spoke in a level voice.

"I've got some business to finish during the week, Morgan. When that's done I'll see you. That is all I care to say."

"Fine," answered Morgan, and walked away. Behind him, the astonished silence still held.

He passed the courthouse and went into the post office, rapping at the wicket until Fred Rich came out of the back room.

"No notice yet on Government Valley?"

"No," said the postmaster.

"I want to know when it comes."

"I'll post it on one of the buildings in the valley. That's regulation."

"Sure," said Morgan and turned to go. He met Lige White and Gurd Grant at the doorway. They waved him back into the post office lobby, both of them dead serious. Gurd Grant was a man close to thirty, red-headed and pretty cool; Lige White was older. These two operated outfits almost as large as Herendeen's; they were long friends of Morgan but they were irritated with him now, and told him so.

Lige White said: "You had no call to talk to Herendeen like that. Now there's hell to pay. You know very well he'll have to call you on those words. I want you to take this right, from me—you were mighty foolish. Everybody knows you two boys don't care much for each other, but that gives you no license to insult him on this matter. What's Ollie Jacks to you, anyhow?"

"Nothing," answered Morgan.

Lige White threw up his hands. "Then, why?"

Morgan only shook his head, still smiling. The smile further irritated Lige White, who said: "You must be crazy. We've all got to stick together. I don't know how we're going to do this, but we'll have to patch up this quarrel somehow, Come over to the saloon with me. We'll have a drink, and then maybe Gurd can get Herendeen to join us. We can talk about it."

Morgan still held his cigar. He lighted it again, letting these two wait for his answer. He said: "Ben Herendeen is pretty proud. Damn a man that brings his outfit down here to scare hell out of one small-time rustler. Tell him that."

Lige White said: "I never saw you this way before. There must be something else."

"Maybe there is."

Lige White shrugged his shoulders. "All right, Clay. Your funeral, not mine. Let's go, Gurd."

He watched them return to the group under the locust trees. Pete Borders turned back from Gentry's stable and traveled along the opposite walk. He looked over to Morgan, showing the latter a deeply interested expression. This scene had puzzled him as much as the others; he was trying to figure its meaning. Jesse Rusey hadn't moved. Ollie Jacks still stood against the wall of the saloon, as though tied hand and foot. The man was waiting out this long, dangerous stretch of time, fearing the slightest motion. Herendeen watched him, and the group around Herendeen held tight. Morgan showed nothing on his face, but the

feeling in him ran quick and hard and restless, made so by the dragging suspense. Suddenly Herendeen said something to Charley Hillhouse, who walked over to Jesse Rusey. Hillhouse spoke a quiet word, whereupon Rusey shook his head. Charley Hillhouse returned to Herendeen, carrying back the message, and then Herendeen gestured with one arm and crossed to the Long Grade, going inside. The group dissolved. Herendeen's riders drifted into the street aimlessly, but Morgan saw that they were still watching Ollie Jacks. There would be no trouble for a little while, he guessed; he brought a fresh match to his cigar.

Janet had gone into McGarrah's store, but all this while Hack Breathitt remained in the middle of the street, missing none of the scene. As soon as Herendeen entered the saloon Breathitt came over to Morgan. Excitement brightened his restless blue eyes; the strain of all this had kinked his nerves.

"I never saw you do that before, Clay."

"What were you standing out there for?" Morgan asked.

Hack showed a small, embarrassed grin. "What you think?"

"My grief—not yours, Hack."

"Maybe, maybe not." But the small man shook his head. "You're too smart to spout off like that unless you had it all figured out. So you got something in your coco. I wish I knew. When you leaving town?"

"After dinner."

"I'll stick around until then," said Hack dryly, and headed for the saloon.

The sun was gone from desert and sky, leaving a soft blue- running light behind. The supper triangle began to beat up its iron clanging from the porch of the Mountain House hotel. The Red Canyon stage rolled out of the hills, made a howling swing into Main Street and stopped before the hotel in smoky eddies of dust. Morgan left the post office doorway, still interested in the way the Three Pines riders—

Herendeen's outfit—scattered themselves along the street. When he passed the hotel he saw Lige White's wife standing in the doorway, a repressed expression on her face. He stopped and removed his hat and spoke pleasantly; she was, he thought, the most self-contained woman in the country. When she smiled she became ten years younger, but as always, a shadow remained in her eyes. Like worry, or like some unhappiness deeply hidden. Janet had appeared at McGarrah's doorway and was calling his name.

Mrs. White, who had no children of her own, said gently: "She has the prettiest hair, Clay. I wish you'd let her stay with me sometime."

"I'll ask her," said Clay Morgan. He turned over the dust, once more running the street with his careful glance. A Three Pines man stood by the post office corner, and one loitered at the arch of Gentry's corral. Jesse Rusey wasn't to be seen. Ollie Jacks left his spot by the saloon, crossed the street and walked beneath the board awnings, as far as the hotel. He put his arm on the porch rail. His head was lowered but Morgan saw his hat jerk a little. The man was dead, even as his mind clawed at the thought of escape; and he knew he was dead. A Three Pines rider walked by Morgan, going down to the brick and dobe buildings of Old Town. From the doorway of McGarrah's, Morgan watched that man turn and block the way for Ollie Jacks. Ollie Jacks's arm slowly fell from the hotel's porch rail; he swung around and started back for the stable, walking as though a heavy weight pushed at his shoulders and at his knees. Morgan caught one good glimpse of his face; it was thin and old with strain.

Janet took his hand. They went on through the store, into the back quarters. Yellow lamplight poured on the red-checkered tablecloth, splintering brilliantly against the glass cruets. Ann McGarrah was in the kitchen, dishing the meal; he passed on to the rear porch, took off his coat and

scrubbed away the riding dust. When he returned to the dining room they were waiting for him—Janet and Ann.

Sometimes, in his long riding hours, Clay Morgan's thoughts turned to the puzzle of his future and always, in that pondering, there came a time when he saw Ann McGarrah's face and heard the even melody of her voice. Her eyes were deep brown, with stillness, with depth. Black hair ran smoothly away from forehead and temples. Her lips, red and expressive, could quickly smile, or could hold the soft curve of soberness. He was never sure of her thinking, never certain of what her eyes meant when she watched him, but the slow gesturing of her hands and the small swing of her shoulders displayed a grace that never ceased to capture his attention. She never tired a man, she never asked anything of him. Always, when she spoke, she held him gently distant.

"Like home," he said.

She looked at him carefully, "What should home be like? Men have different notions."

"I wish," said Janet, "you would tell Daddy not to cut up my meat. I'm nine years old now."

"I keep forgetting," said Morgan. "Hard for me to recall you're practically a lady. Just a little while back, it seems, you were in, a high chair, spilling milk. That's how time goes." He was watching Janet and he was smiling, knowing that this reference to babyhood always teased her. This was how Ann McGarrah best remembered him, this was the side of him that made her still and watchful and a little sad—this sight of this man idle in the chair, loosened and idle and affectionately amused with his daughter. He was big-boned and long-armed. There wasn't any fat on him. The edge of his jaws were sharp against a heavy tanned skin and his nose had a small break to the bridge. Most people in this country were his solid friends but he had a few bitter enemies, and to those he always showed the autocratic side of his heart, as he had shown it to Ben Herendeen. This was