

Max Brand

*Gunman's
Gold*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER 1. — WIRE GOLD!</u>
<u>CHAPTER 2. — MURDER!</u>
<u>CHAPTER 3. — THE FALSE TRAIL</u>
<u>CHAPTER 4. — SHANNIGAN</u>
<u>CHAPTER 5. — THE PLAN</u>
<u>CHAPTER 6. — AT DEERFOOT</u>
<u>CHAPTER 7. — A TALK WITH SAM</u>
<u>CHAPTER 8. — PRINGLE'S DECISION</u>
<u>CHAPTER 9. — THE SHERIFF</u>
<u>CHAPTER 10. — BEFORE SUNRISE</u>
<u>CHAPTER 11. — SHANNIGAN'S PLEA</u>
<u>CHAPTER 12. — THE NECKTIE PARTY</u>
<u>CHAPTER 13. — THE ESCAPE</u>
<u>CHAPTER 14. — RETURN OF THE POSSE</u>
<u>CHAPTER 15. — SHANNIGAN SMILES</u>
<u>CHAPTER 16. — AT THE BEST CHANCE</u>
<u>CHAPTER 17. — THE EXCITED MAN</u>
<u>CHAPTER 18. — THE TELEGRAM</u>
<u>CHAPTER 19. — REYNOLDS TALKS</u>
<u>CHAPTER 20. — MARY'S IDEA</u>
<u>CHAPTER 21. — SWAIN'S DISCOVERY</u>
<u>CHAPTER 22. — DELIVERING THE BLOW</u>
<u>CHAPTER 23. — EXPOSURE!</u>
<u>CHAPTER 24. — THE MOB</u>
<u>CHAPTER 25. — THE JAILER</u>
<u>CHAPTER 26. — THE TRICK</u>

CHAPTER 27. — SHANNIGAN'S. PERVERSITY

CHAPTER 28. — THE RENDEZVOUS

CHAPTER 29. — HIDING OUT

CHAPTER 30. — THE HUNT

CHAPTER 31. — THE EASIER PREY

CHAPTER 32. — SHANNIGAN'S SWING

CHAPTER 33. — THE WESTERN WAY

CHAPTER 34. — REYNOLDS'S LUCK

CHAPTER 35. — THE TRAP

CHAPTER 36. — A PRISONER

CHAPTER 37. — SWAIN'S PARTY

CHAPTER 38. — A GLASS OF BEER

CHAPTER 39. — THE WESTERN IDEA

THE END

CHAPTER 1. — WIRE GOLD!

[Table of Contents](#)

THE strategy of Lee Swain was simple. It consisted in being at the right place at the right time. He had managed to get there, through skillful planning, so often that he had stacked up what he considered a nest egg. He had done that in the Eastern States. When he wanted to make the nest egg grow into a whole brood of thriving birds, he decided to go West.

He picked out Deerfoot, because it was forty miles from the railroad, because there were cattle, lumber, and mining interests in the region around it, and because it was so inaccessible that he expected to find ready money at a high premium. And he was right.

He made a few small investments here and there; he began to be looked upon as a sound and rising member of the community, but he had not yet found the lucky strike that would make him a rich man capable of retiring. It was chance that brought him to the course of action that makes the foundation of this narrative.

It was purest chance from the beginning. Ordinarily, Lee Swain was not one to be bothered by the more tender sensibilities. He was what he himself would have termed a "practical man." A practical man is one hard to define. The fellow who knows that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush is called practical. The man who wastes no time on daydreams is practical. The man who never lets love, friendship, patriotism, or devotion to any cause stand between him and money is essentially practical.

And, in this sense, Lee Swain was a practical man.

Yet it was the surrender to a sense of idle beauty that advanced him, finally, on the trail of a great fortune! Which shows how this silly old world works by opposites!

He was sitting in the back room of the Best Chance Saloon on the edge of Deerfoot. He was sitting there because he wanted to be alone with his schemes, and because the beer was a shade cheaper than in the center of the town. And now, as he raised his thin face from the hands that had been covering his eyes, he happened to glance out the window and saw, toward the west, a great mountain lifted against a sky of crimson and of gold.

It stirred Lee Swain, in an odd way. It made him think of random snatches of music, of beautiful faces, of noble words that had, in his more careless moments, from time to time invaded his mind.

Presently he rose—since the beer glass was empty—and walking out the back door of the little building, he rested his back against the side wall. He contemplated the flames in the sky and wondered, if they had been real fire, how many thousands of useful factories could have been run by the heat. As his thoughts began to drift on toward kindred reflections, about the vast wastage of energy in this most spendthrift universe, three men entered the front of the saloon, and he heard them speaking to the proprietor:

"Hey, Slim—is the back room free?"

"I think there's Lee Swain back there," said the proprietor.
"Wait'll I see."

Presently he said: "No, I guess Swain went home and forgot to pay for his drink."

"One of your charity patients, Slim?" asked a voice.

"Aw, no; Swain's all right. Kind of a sour little guy, but he's as straight as a string. One of these gents with brains and money."

Lee Swain smiled and nodded.

The praise was doubly sweet to him, because he felt that it was entirely just. It was the picture that he carried in his own mind's eye, the ideal toward which he aspired. As for "straight as a string," that was a little embroidery that did not hurt the essential pattern of the description. Honesty was certainly the best policy, except on important occasions.

"Bring some beer back in here," said one. "You know my friends, Slim? Doc Halpin, here—"

"Glad to meet you, Doc," came from "Slim."

"And Jack Reynolds you oughta know, if you don't."

"Aw, I know Reynolds, all right. He don't wear no veil over his face."

Slim laughed, and then they all laughed. Said a hearty young voice:

"That's all right, Slim. Now I know where I stand with you."

"Well," said Slim, "I hope you'll always stand *with* me because if you stood *agin'* me, I wouldn't keep my feet very long!"

They all laughed again.

As they pulled out their chairs, and settled around the table of the back room, the listener gathered the third name—Chad Powell.

The beer came in.

Two or three voices presently joined in a groaning chorus of content.

"Yeah, and that's pretty good," said Chad Powell.

"The first drink of beer, there ain't anything in the world like it," said Halpin. "Let's have another."

"No, you don't get another so quick, boy," broke in Powell. "Take a coupla, three beers and you're started, maybe. And you ain't goin' to start today, brother. You save your thirst a while. I guess you're goin' to be able to buy your drinks, one of these days."

"Yeah, maybe I will, too," said the other. "Maybe I'll be able to buy a lotta drinks, one of these days."

He laughed, loudly, as though there were a hidden meaning behind this remark.

"Lock the doors, Chad," said Halpin.

"Yeah, I guess we'd better. Better light the lamp, too. Maybe there's goin' to be something that old boy Jack'll wanta see."

"You fellows struck it rich?" asked young Reynolds.

His voice was big, cheerful, clear. His reputation was big and cheerful, also, but not quite so clear.

With increasing interest, Lee Swain listened.

"You wait and listen, and then look," said Halpin. "It's this way. You take a throw at a stake for us, and we barge out. We got an outfit, and we got some spare cash besides, because we didn't need all that we got from you, Jack. And we decide that we'll cut straight for the Willejee Mountains, and we'll take a short cut. And, like a pair of fools, we head straight out across the Owens Desert."

Some one whistled—Reynolds, perhaps.

Then his voice said: "That's a hot place, this time of day."

"We pretty near died, before the whisky got sweated out of us," put in Powell. "And then we struck one of them little streams that only show their heads and run twenty steps and jump down a hole ag'in, like ground squirrels, and—"

"Say, are you goin' to tell this, or am I, Chad?" demanded Halpin angrily.

"Aw, go on and tell it then," said the other. "You enjoy shootin' off your face such a lot, you do!"

"We filled up with water," said Halpin, "and we were so dog-gone hot and tired that we were half minded to turn back and go around the desert, instead of through it. I mean, lookin' at the boulders and the gravel, it kind of hurts your eyes, and your brain, too, after a while."

"It does," said Reynolds. "Owens Desert is a plain hell hole!"

"But the water bucked us up, a lot, and pretty soon we got up with our canteen full and us full, and the hosses full, and we slogged along, slow and steady, maybe an hour. Then there was a fool of a rabbit that jumped up, and this here Powell, dog-gone his heart, he ups with a rifle and shoots—and the rabbit, it runs faster than ever.

"'I scared him, anyway,' says Chad.

"'You done nothin' but hit a rock,' says I.

"'I pretty near hit him,' says Chad.

"'You're crazy,' says I.

"We sort of pulled up our hosses, and as we sat there in the saddle, like a pair of fools, talkin' about how close he come to a rabbit, or how close he *didn't* come to it, I looked and seen a yaller point of light, shinin' like a candle flame on

a dark night, and it was shinin' right off of the edge of a boulder. I thinks that it's funny, and I goes and takes a look. And there, mind you, was a fresh chip off the edge of the rock, where Chad's bullet had broke off a chunk—"

"It wasn't my bullet," said Powell, with some energy. "I hit in the sand, right close to the rabbit. I seen the sand splash."

"You seen the sand fly where the rabbit was pawin' the ground," said Halpin.

"I didn't," said Powell. "I got a better eye than you, any day, and I seen where—"

"Wait a minute, boys," said the voice of young Jack Reynolds. "What was it that made the stone shine?"

Halpin answered with a lowered voice: "Gold! Wire gold!"

The words struck electric splashes through the mind and the imagination of Lee Swain, listening outside.

Wire gold! He had heard of pockets of it that yielded thousands of dollars—pockets that a man could surround with his arms.

He heard Halpin going on huskily: "The rock was rotten. It was so rotten it was black. You could pretty near kick it to pieces. We put a blast into it, and we seen that there was driftings and colorings all the way clean through it. Then we took and hunted, and we seen a few other rocks, stretched out in a line, and them rocks had the same stuff. They was lyin' over a fault. They was what was broke off the end of a real strike of ore, we says to ourselves, and we sunk a shaft, and pretty soon—you tell him, Chad!"

"We're rich," said Chad Powell. "The three of us, we're all rich. We're goin' to roll in gold, I can tell you. We can throw it

away. We're millionaires. We got—"

"Tell him what we found!" gasped Halpin.

"We got the biggest thing I ever seen—" cried Powell.

There was the smacking sound of a blow against bare flesh.

"I'll knock your head off, you dog!" shouted Powell.

"I'll kill you, Chad," said Halpin, grimly, and through his teeth. "I'll kill you dead, if you talk out loud like that again."

Suddenly Powell was muttering: "Yeah, you're right. I was yelling. I can't talk about it. It drives me crazy. Listen, Jack, you could go and dig it out with shovels, pretty near! It's so rich it makes you laugh, it makes you crazy!"

"It's a foot thick, the vein is," said Halpin. "We seen that, and then we decided that we'd leave the shaft, and jump back here, and get you to see it. Then we'd work some more and open out the real line of the strike of the ore, and then we'd locate our three claims! You hear, son?"

"You boys found it. It's yours. You take it," said Jack Reynolds.



CHAPTER 2. — MURDER!

[Table of Contents](#)

A SNEER of almost fierce contempt curled the lips of Lee Swain, as he heard Reynolds speak. It was the flamboyant generosity of a born fool. It was an absurdity even to conceive of such a folly!

"You fellows worked for it, and sweated for it. I know the Owens Desert," said Reynolds. "I wouldn't grab what you've found."

"Look, you crazy man," said Chad Powell. "Don't you see the lay of the land? There's room for a dozen gents to file their claims, maybe. I dunno. Maybe there's room for a hundred gents to file their claims. And lemme tell you, the three of us will find the cream. We're goin' to find the proper cream, and file, and then we'll pick out the gents we got that are worth a hand, and we're goin' to go and send them invitations to come out and file, and they'll be rich with us. And we'll go and raise the devil all over—we're goin' to all be rich—we can go and waller in gold and—"

"Keep cool, boy," said Halpin.

"Look, partners," said Jack Reynolds, with a proud carelessness in his voice, "I take what comes my way, when I've a right to it. I loaned you boys a few hundreds. I won't come in for a few hundreds of thousand in exchange. I'd feel like a swine!"

"Why would you?" said Halpin gravely. "You know what the facts are. We were just a pair of bums, floating around. We didn't have a bean. You knew about us. You knew that we were a pair of jailbirds—"

"Shut up, Doc!" broke in Powell.

"I say, he knew all about us," said Halpin. "I know. I heard the sheriff tell him. But he didn't care. I remember what you said, Reynolds. You said you'd had some luck that cost you mighty little, and here was part of it. That's what you said, when you handed us the coin. I don't forget things like that."

"Neither do I!" said Chad Powell.

"Neither do none of us," said Halpin. "You're with us, Jack. And I'm a happy man, and Chad's happy, too, that we can show white for white!"

He banged on his table. Lee Swain jumped a little.

"We start tomorrow morning, and you start with us," said Powell.

"I don't know," muttered Jack Reynolds. "I'll tell the truth—I'm excited. I'll go along, then, if you want me to—only, I don't like to cut in and spoil the game of a friend of mine."

"Spoil it? You'll only make what we haven't hands to hold, that's all," declared Halpin.

Powell exclaimed: "Here's some samples. Look!"

There was a rattle of rocks, a clatter of them falling to the floor.

Then rapid-fire curses flowed from the lips of Halpin.

"What you trying to do?" he demanded in a fierce whisper. "Tell the whole world?"

"Get that stuff under cover," said Jack Reynolds. "Quick! The gleam of that gold in the rock is enough to burn the brain out of a man!"

They scraped up the fragments; then, hastily, they departed.

It was a half hour later that Lee Swain sauntered into the front of the saloon. "I forgot to pay for a drink, Slim," said he.

"That's all right, Swain," said the grinning proprietor. "You don't need to worry about bills in this saloon. Have another?"

"Here you are," said Swain, putting the money on the bar. "I'll take the other one back there, if the room's free. It's a good place to sit and think."

"Yeah, it's cool and easy in there," said Slim.

He himself carried the glass of foaming beer into the back room, needlessly mopped off the top of the table, and drew back a chair for Lee Swain. Then Slim left, and Swain was instantly on his hands and knees.

He found what he wanted almost at once. With a glittering eye it called his attention, and he picked up a mere splinter of rock that had embedded in the face of it a design like a rudely sketched tree—a child's sketch of a tree, and the outline was done in little wires of gold!

Lee Swain went back to his chair, and sat there for a long time, with closed eyes. The world, he felt, had finally rewarded his cunning, his keenness, his patience in running down every favorable opportunity. Now it had poured into his hands a chance to win incalculable treasure.

Only one thing bit him to the heart—that he would have to share the treasure with at least three other men!

He felt savage about it. They were three wastrels. Two were self-confessed jailbirds. The other was known as a gunman.

The pity of it, when there was Lee Swain, a practical man, able to turn everything to the best advantage, able to make the most of every ounce of that valuable ore!

He pushed back his chair and left the saloon.

He had hardly turned into the street when the voice of the saloon keeper wailed from the interior of the building:

"Hey, Swain! You didn't drink your beer. What's the matter? Wasn't there no head on it?"

He walked on, heedless.

Of such small things are our vital mistakes made. He should have remained to drink the beer. Great and strange things were to come upon Lee Swain for that simple omission!

But, when he got to the hotel, he started at once building his kit, and the first thing that he put out for the journey were two good Colt revolvers, caliber .45, double-action, and a repeating Winchester.

He had not been a good shot when he came West, but by conscientious practice he had made himself one in the interim!

When he had finished building the pack, he sat down and considered his plans.

After that, he entered the little lobby of the hotel and talked to the clerk behind the desk.

"Over there in the Willejee Mountains," he said, "I hear there are plenty of signs of gold—silver, too."

"Lemme tell you something, Mr. Swain," said the clerk. "The minute that I get a stake ahead, I'm goin' to go to the Willejee in a bee line. You take it from me, there's billions over yonder!"

"I'm starting tomorrow," said Swain, "and I'm crossing the Owens Desert. That's the straightest line."

"It's the hottest line, too," said the clerk. "You take it from me, the Owens is hot. I wouldn't go that way."

"The Owens may be hot," said Swain, "but if there's as much in the Willejee peaks as I've been led to believe, it's worth a little heat to get there before the rush!"

He went back to his room, and lay all night sleepless looking up into the darkness. He had always told himself that the time might come when he would have to step outside of the law. Perhaps that time had come now! If it had, he would be prepared. All night long he lay with jaws gripped hard together, and told himself that he must be prepared.

When the morning came, he rose with the dawn, strapped his pack on a mule, mounted his horse, and rode out of the town on the trail to the Owens Desert.

A mile out, he pulled back behind some brush, and when the trio of Reynolds, Halpin, and Powell passed him on that trail, he fell in well behind them. He did not wish to get close enough to be seen, and he had an excellent pair of glasses for picking out his leaders along the trail.

All that day he followed them, slowly, never gaining, keeping the same discreet distance, until they had entered into the wide- spread furnace of the desert.

Still he followed them. He wondered why the sweat ran down his face, drying in streaks of salt. For his own part, he felt no heat. He had no feeling at all, for he believed that he was at the door of the Promised Land.

Late in the afternoon they encamped in a region where the gigantic boulders were scattered far and wide over the land.

Crouched behind a boulder half a mile away, Swain studied with his glasses the movements of the three men, and saw them delving steadily.

They were at the mine, then. They were opening up the fabulous vein. They were reveling, as they counted untold millions!

It was toward evening that one man took the two horses of his companions, and with his own set off into the distance, riding, no doubt, toward the patch of water that ran twenty steps, according to the prospectors, and then dived into another hole in the ground, like a squirrel.

Carefully Swain studied with his glasses the retreating horseman, and made out, finally and surely, that it was Jack Reynolds.

Swain's mind was instantly made up. It was as clear as a bell, and he acted upon the impulse as though he had known from the first what he would do.

Straightway he stalked the hole of the shaft in the ground. He came to within ten steps of it, and lay quietly in the shelter of a rock, staring.

Presently Powell, a fat-faced fellow, came up, took off his hat, and mopped his forehead.

"Hotter up here than it is down there, boy!" he exclaimed. "And it's—"

That was his last word on earth. Lee Swain had drawn his bead with care, and now he shot his man fairly and squarely between the eyes.

Powell dropped, and lay still, without a struggle.

"Hey, what was that?" called the voice of Halpin, muffled and distant.

Then he was heard scrambling out of the hole on the ground. He, also, appeared, and stood for an instant, frozen.

That instant was enough for Lee Swain. He put a second bullet squarely between the eyes of his victim, and saw the body of Halpin fall on that of his friend.

Everything worked perfectly. It was the plan that had flashed upon his mind.

If he got the two weaker members, he could wait for the famous Reynolds and shoot that unsuspecting man when he returned with the water.

He would stow the two bodies in the shaft, in the first place.

But he would treat himself to a sight of the wire gold, before all else.

With that in mind, he entered the shaft, and was amazed to discover that it was a dead hole! There was not a sign of gold—there was only a certain surface of perfectly uninteresting rock exposed before him!

CHAPTER 3. — THE FALSE TRAIL

[Table of Contents](#)

HE now understood, perfectly. Halpin and Powell had developed some theory about the trend of their strike of ore. They thought that the vein would be due to crop out again in a certain place, and when they passed that place, they had stopped with the consent of Jack Reynolds to dig a bit. There was no hurry. Their millions were waiting for them all the time!

So they had opened up a perfectly useless prospect hole. And he, Lee Swain, had killed two men in vain!

He felt no remorse, only a touch of alarm.

He was certain that his idea had been good, but he was troubled because he had worked in vain. He had done everything perfectly, down to the shooting of the two. But luck had played cruelly against him. Somewhere in the distance lay that treasure-trove which the pair had discovered. Not even Jack Reynolds would know just where it was. There were certain black rocks in the Owens Desert, that contained wire gold. That was all any one could say. But there were tens of millions of black rocks in the Owens Desert. How could the treasure be located?

It was all a waste. He, Lee Swain, would eventually begin to prospect the entire surface of the desert for the right place. No doubt the little shaft of the prospectors had been filled in, and the first blow of wind, like that which was beginning now, would promptly sweep away all traces of the coming and going of men.

He went rapidly back to his horse and mule, mounted, and struck the trail for Deerfoot.

The next morning he entered it and called at the sheriff's house. The sheriff was gone!

He thought of another man, grim, stern, ever with a face set toward law and order, a true type of the vigilante.

His name was Pringle, and on Pringle little Lee Swain called.

He said, when he stood in the kitchen, watching the thin clouds of smoke that rose from the griddle on which Pringle was frying flapjacks:

"Pringle, I've run into a bad thing."

"Yeah, there's a lot of bad things around, here and there," said Pringle.

"Two dead men in the Owens Desert," said Swain.

Pringle tossed the flapjacks, and exclaimed with pleasure as they all landed properly on the other side, on the face of the griddle. Some of the wet dough had splattered on the floor, some upon the shirt front of Mr. Pringle, but that did not in the least diminish his pleasure in the proper flipping of the hot cakes.

"Two dead?" said he.

"I was lining out for the Willejee Mountains," said Lee Swain, his thin face very sober. "And I was traveling hard, with my head down, as you might say, because the Owens is a hot place, and I wanted to get across it as soon as possible. I'd heard a good many tales about gold in the Willejees, and I wanted to have a look for myself."

"Fool's gold in the Willejees, that's all," said Pringle.

"Perhaps," said the other. "And, as I was going, I saw among some rocks, a pile of earth, and beside the pile of earth, two men, one lying on top of the other. I went over and had a look. Men don't lie still in the sun—the sort of sun you have on the Willejee. No, sir! Well, each of these fellows had a reason for lying still. A bullet hole right between the eyes."

"Each of 'em?" said Pringle.

"Yes, both."

"Right between the eyes?"

"Yes."

"Good shooting," said Pringle. "They killed each other, eh?"

"That's what I thought, but there wasn't a gun near either of 'em."

"Hello!"

"No, not a sign of a gun."

"That's funny," said Pringle.

"It seemed so funny to me," said Swain, "that I turned around and trekked back for Deerfoot. I've been riding all night."

"Yeah?" murmured Pringle. "Sit down and tackle this stack of hot cakes, then. I'm one of the champeen flapjack throwers in this neck of the woods. That's what I claim, and that's what I hold to. I ain't got any maple sirup. But I got some brown sugar melted down, that's pretty nigh as good. Lay a tooth into them, and tell me are they tender!"

Lee Swain was hungry, and he sat down to eat. He was thankful that such men as Pringle could be found.

As he ate, he issued new bits of information—such as the fatness of the face of Powell, and the red hair and the scarred forehead of Halpin.

"Well, one thing," said Pringle, "I know who the dead men are. Another thing. I know who killed 'em. A third thing, I'm goin' to bust myself to catch the hound that murdered 'em."

"You know?" said Lee Swain.

"Coupla jailbirds that I seen around Deerfoot, some time back," said Pringle. "One is Powell, and the other is Doc Halpin. And the gent that killed 'em is the one that rode out of town with 'em yesterday morning. His name is Jack Reynolds!"

"Old enemies, maybe?" said Lee Swain.

"Swain," said Pringle, "you're a smart man. Everybody knows that. But maybe you ain't been around here long enough to understand what a gunman is."

"I have some ideas," said Swain. "But go ahead and enlarge."

"A gunman," said Pringle, "is a fellow who knows how to shoot a whole lot straighter and faster than ninety-nine men out of a hundred. And when he gets to the point where he knows how good he is, he loses his temper easy. And then he happens to kill a man. Self-defense, you see?"

"I see," said Swain.

"And then he kills another, and another, and it's still self-defense. And a lot of half-witted dummies, they look up to the man-killers a lot, and give 'em preference, and pretty soon man- killing, it gets to be a kind of an honorable career for the gent that's fast and straight with a gun."

He finished a second griddle load of flapjacks, and sat down to consume them in his turn.

"And so," said Pringle, "it goes on till a gent, he can't give over the pleasure of just killin' for the sake of killin'. The more that are dead, the better he likes it, and the deader they are, the liver he feels. And it's that way with Jack Reynolds. He wasn't a bad kid when he come out here. But he was just too dog- gone good with a revolver. That made him a killer."

"But why should he kill the pair of them?" asked Lee Swain.

"Why, I dunno," said the other. "Maybe one of 'em said that it was a hot day, and it was a hot day. And Mr. Reynolds, he didn't think so, and he killed one for holdin' a different opinion, and then he went and killed the other, just to keep his hand in. It don't take much cause to kill a man. Not if you're free and easy with a gun!"

"I'm learning things that may do me good," said Lee Swain.

"That's where you got brains," said Pringle. "Most tenderfeet, you know, think they're old-timers, after they've gone and raised their first crop of calluses, out here."

"Well," said Swain, "I stopped at the sheriff's house, and he wasn't there. So I came here to you, Pringle. You have the name of being the leading man in Deerfoot, when it comes to keeping the place in order. For my part," he added, "I'm used to seeing the law enforced, Pringle, and I don't mind saying that I would bend every effort to that end. The West, I'm afraid, takes the matter of human life a little too carelessly!"

"It does," agreed Pringle. "I'm finishing my breakfast, and then I'm rounding up the best men that I can find in town. I'll need 'em, too, on the trail of that Reynolds. Because he's a mean kind in a pinch. You may be hearin' news, before very long."

Lee Swain went back to the hotel, and told again, and yet again, the story of what he had seen. He said that he was upset, and that he would abandon his idea of a trip to the Willejees, for the time being.

Then he went to bed, and slept the round of the clock.

He was perfectly placid, when he roused himself. There would be no sign of him that other men could trace.

He was thoroughly satisfied, and his satisfaction increased as he ate his breakfast.

As he pondered upon the past event, he decided that perhaps he had done all for the best.

He would prospect the Owens Desert. He would tap every rock, if need be, until he found the right place. And when he found it, he would know how to develop his claim! He would enrich himself in the course of a single year. He would make himself a figure in the nation.

He was assured, in a deep and heartfelt way, that success could not help but come to a man who planned as carefully as he had planned, and he could not help smiling when he thought how easily he had put Pringle on the false trail.

Well, Reynolds was a gunman, and no matter what happened to him, he would deserve his fate!

Not only was the conscience of Lee Swain clear, but he had a sense of virtue, added to his well-being. Two jailbirds,

and a gunman—it really did not matter!

It was not until the next day that he heard of the results of the posses' work.

Very fine results they were, too!

For, heading down the trail toward the Owens Desert, in the midst of a tangle of mountains, the posse had run straight into young Jack Reynolds, who had seemed to expect no enemies, and had ridden straight into the arms of his hunters!

When he was arrested, impromptu, however, he fought with a ferocity that proved his guilt!

He had shot and seriously wounded two men; a third was badly hurt. Then he had been knocked over the head, and so secured.

They were bringing him back to the town of Deerfoot to hang him before the crowd, was the message that the town received from Pringle. But the return trip would be slow, very slow, on account of the wounded men, who could only be carried a few miles a day. In the meantime, let the telegraph carry the good news across the country.

When he heard this, Lee Swain smiled. He almost laughed. For he knew that there is no way to close the book on a crime except to punish with conviction some one supposed to be guilty of the deed.

Not for an instant did he remember that glass of beer which he had failed to drink in the Best Chance Saloon!

CHAPTER 4. — SHANNIGAN

[Table of Contents](#)

WHEN Arthur Howison got to the middle of the bridge, he stopped for a moment in spite of the heat and looked on the two halves of San Andreas. They were as sharply divided in character as though a thousand miles and many centuries lay between them instead of one small stream of water.

The American part of the town was laid out regularly, and over the big roofs rose the trees which had been thriving for thirty years along the streets. A sense of prosperity and comfort exhaled from that part of the town. But on the far side of the river was a confused huddling of little, square adobe boxes, whitewashed until they threw back the full glare of the sun. A few trees rose here and there, but they looked like green boughs cast into a fire and about to burst into flames.

Mr. Howison, staring at this part of the town with squinting eyes, shook his head. However, it was there that he had to go to find the address that was in his pocket, so he stepped on with the steady and measured step which is characteristic of middle-aged men.

Once in the dusty streets and winding lanes of the Mexican village, the heat seemed to redouble. Howison had to lift his hat once or twice and mop his forehead with a handkerchief that was already wet.

Yet in spite of the heat, he found a group of half a dozen youngsters playing about in the fiery dust. He needed more particular directions than he had received before, therefore

he hailed them. His Spanish was not good, but it was enough to ask the question:

"Can you tell me where to find Señor Shannigan?"

They were stilled at once. The veiling clouds of dust fell softly and slowly away from them, and the oldest of the lot said:

"He wants the señor."

"But he cannot see the señor at this time of day," said another instantly.

"I've come a long, long distance," said Arthur Howison, "and I have to see Shannigan. Just show me where his house is."

They showed him. It was hardly a hundred yards from the spot, and it appeared as a long, high, whitewashed wall, with a single door let into the face of it, like a portal into a castle. On that door he knocked, but one of the urchins showed him the knob of a bell pull, and gave it two or three good tugs. Faintly, Arthur Howison heard the bell sound inside the building. The lads scattered, grinning.

Now the door was pushed open, and a blue-eyed girl of twenty stood in the shadow.

She saw the children first, and cried to them in Mexican:

"You worthless little sons of trouble, the next time you bother me I'll give the señor your *names*!"

There was instantly a chorus of plaintive protest.

"Look there! We have only brought his friend!"

She saw Howison for the first time, and nodded shortly at him.

"It's not the señor's time for seeing people," said she. "You'll have to come back again."

"But when?" asked Howison, putting out a tentative hand toward the door, which the girl seemed about to close. He added: "I've come a long distance. Do you speak English?"

"Sure, I speak English." She measured him with a very direct and critical glance.

"The matter I wish to see him about is important, and urgent," said Howison. "The fact is that every second counts, and it may already be a lost cause. If I'm to see him at all, I must see him now!"

"Must you?" said the girl, totally unimpressed. "But this is a time in the afternoon when he never sees people, and he's already broken the rule once today. He has some one with him now."

"Then while he's still in the way of business, let me see him," urged Howison.

She looked at him again, with a slight shake of the head.

"This may be losing my job for me," she remarked. "But I'll take one more chance. After this I'm going to unhook the bell during his off hours. But come in!"

She motioned him past her into a small room, dark with shadows, but wonderfully cool. A ripple of water passed through it, and now he saw a shallow channel in which the current ran. There were two or three chairs of woven basketry that promised to fit the back of the tired man; there was a screen of Indian feather work in a corner, and the grinning mask of a jaguar on the wall. Not many furnishings, but enough to make Howison feel that he had stepped from the sun-beaten street into a strange little new world.

"What *are* the hours of Mr. Shannigan?" he asked.

"Seven-thirty to eight in the morning," she said, "if he happens to be up, and six-thirty to seven in the evening, if he happens to be at home."

Howison made a gesture of surprise.

"But how is one to know when he's up and when he's home?"

"One doesn't know. One takes the chance," said she. "I'll go tell him that you want to see him."

She opened an inner door.

"No, he's still busy," said she.

Howison looked through the door into a patio which was shaded by several big acacia trees, growing low, with their branches stretching out sinuously and wide. In the center of the courtyard there was a silver pool of water, and the thin spray of a fountain rose high in the air and showered back with a refreshing sound into the pool.

At the same time, a man's voice said harshly in Spanish:

"Do you hear, Pedro?"

"I hear every word, señor," said a youngster's frightened voice.

"You're written down in the book of the police," said the first speaker. "They have their eye on you. I have my finger raised. If I drop it, they come to catch you. Do you think I don't know you, you rascal?"

"Ah, the señor knows everything," said the humble voice of the youth.

"I know your card playing, too, and the tricks you've learned with them. I have my finger raised, Pedro. Now go over there—go into the hall and wait. I have something to say to your father."

There was a hastily retreating footfall.

Then the harsh voice, somewhat lowered, continued: "Now, José, I've threatened him, and if you play the fool any more, I'll have to make my threat good. From this time use your brain, José. Your boy is all right. He's lazy, but all boys are lazy. He likes to gamble. So do all boys that have the nerve to lose their money on a chance. You sit about the house and do nothing but scowl at him. You call him 'bad' to his face, you ought to have pride in him and show it. The next time you wrangle at him I'll wash my hands of the business. You don't understand him. Your wife does. Now go home and tell her that she can manage Pedro from now on."

There was an obscure and humble murmuring, then another rapid footfall retreated.

A door slammed at the front of the house.

"I'll see if Mr. Shannigan can talk to you now," said the girl, and passed on through the door which she already had opened.

Arthur Howison was a man of the strictest integrity in every way, and yet something made him now, some irresistible impulse, follow her, turn the knob at that door, and open it a crack. The sound of the voices came clearly to him.

"There's another one for you, Sam," said she.

"There's no more for me," said the other.

"He looks—" began the girl.

"I don't want to know how he looks," said the man.

Howison put his eye to the open crack of the door and saw a man lounging prone in a long, low chair with a cushion under his head.