FREDERICK SCHILLER FAUST

TROUBLE KID

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Chapter One

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If he had had a quarter of an inch of rain a year, Newbold could have raised cattle in Hades. For that matter, we all felt that his range was a little worse than Hades; it averaged only a shade more than a quarter of an inch of rain most of the year.

What saved him, of course, was the western half of the range, where the westerlies piled up clouds at certain times of the year and gave that smaller section of his land a good drenching. When the grass petered out all to the east and south, we had to get the cows started through the teeth of the passes and work them over to the green section. They were a hump-backed lot, all gaunted up with thirst and the grass famine, before we got them to the western range, however. And after they hit the green feed they went at it so hard that a lot of them were sick at once, and a good number always died.

No wonder! Nobody but Newbold could have ranged cattle at all on the remainder of that mangy range. We used to say that he gave his cows a college course in gleaning, and that a Newbold yearling would gallop half a mile for a blade of grass and run three days for a drink. There wasn’t much exaggeration in the second remark, either.

Somebody with a mean nature, plus a sense of humor, gave Newbold his start by making him a donation of his first ledge of the range. That was when he was sixteen. That land raised nothing but coyotes and a few foxes, and even the foxes were out of luck in the district. A bear will dine on

anything, from roots to grubs and wasps' nests, but self-respecting grizzlies simply broke down and cried when they had a look at Newbold's gift of land.

But Newbold didn't cry.

He was raised with the silver spoon, at that. Old Man Newbold had made a fortune in lumber, another in cows, another in gold dust, and still another in land. But he used it all on high living and faro. He used to work up a faro system every year or so, and then he would go on a big campaign, but the faro always won. Take it by and large, faro always will. It beats the white men, and it beats the crooks.

So the old man died and left one son and heir; and that boy, who had been raised soft and high, was chucked out into the world with nothing much but hope to fill his poke. Then, as I was saying, an old friend of his father's gave the kid a wedge of desert that was already overcrowded by a fox, a coyote, and half a dozen rabbits, all sinews and fur.

But Newbold took the gift with thanks. He started with about a cow and a half and a burro, by way of live stock. And when big outfits were driving back and forth across the range, and lost young cows and yearlings going across the boy's sun-blasted land, he picked up those dying cattle for half the price of their hides, and then, as we all said, nursed them with pain and promises until they could walk.

I think that cows were afraid to die on Newbold's hands; they had an idea that the earthly paradise was anywhere off his range, and they kept fighting and fixing their sad eyes on the future until they graduated and got to the butcher at last.

Yes, Newbold progressed so rapidly that when he was eighteen he fixed his eyes on more of that range. He took a trip clear to Chicago and walked in on the fellow who happened to own the rest of Hell-on-earth. When this man heard that Newbold wanted to buy, he looked him over and saw that he was all brown steel, like a well-oiled engine. He offered to rent him the range for about a dollar a year, but finally he sold it for something around a dollar an acre, which was sheer robbery, except for the green western valleys, which I have spoken of before.

So Newbold went back west again and got him some more batches of cows that had used up their first chance in life down to the last half-drop. And from year to year he walked his skeletons back and forth across his range, and lost a lot of them, but made a heap of money on the rest.

He took that range when he was sixteen. He expanded it when he was eighteen. And for fifteen years he raked in dollars off the rocks and blow-sands. In a good, fat country, I don’t think he would have done so well. He was one of those geniuses who know best how to make something out of nothing. He was a cactus among men.

At thirty-three, he looked forty-five. He was the hardest heart, and hardest driver, and the meanest boss in the world. He fed worse and paid less than any other outfit. But still he always managed to keep a crew together. In the first place, he was straight; in the second place, he treated himself worse than he treated his men; in the third place, he backed up his boys as though they were his blood brothers when they had a falling out with sheep-herders, or any other poachers; and in the fourth place, and, most important of

all, any puncher who could say that he had lasted out a whole year with Newbold was sure to get a job wherever he cared to roll down his blankets and pick out a string.

The fourth reason was the one that brought me to his place. That, and because I had heard of him since I was a youngster, first as “the boy cattle king,” and secondly as “that hard case, Newbold.”

He was a hard case, all right. His only relaxation was a fight, and even in that line he didn’t get much relaxation after a time. He became too well known. Now and then somebody who wanted to make a reputation went up to the ranch and looked for trouble, but that man either turned up his toes on the spot or had to be shipped out for a long list of repairs.

It got so that Newbold would ride sixty miles to wrangle with a neighbor or to take up a remark that somebody else had said somebody else had heard about him. But even these long rides finally began to bring him in very short returns; and all that Newbold could do was to fight the weather, and the prices, and the railroads—three things that even Newbold couldn’t beat. Even so, he just about got a draw, as a rule.

I think it was because he was running out of trouble, except enough to kill five ordinary men, that he finally thought of raising hay in the western valleys of the range.

It was one of those paper schemes. You sit down with a map and draw a lot of lines. You fence in a lot of the best ground, and then you buy mowing machines and rakes, and you cut the crop, and cure it for hay, and you make a road through the passes, and when the eastern range is as bare

as grandfather’s red head, then you have a lot of first-rate feed to stuff into the cows and pull them through until the next quarter-inch rain comes along and washes more mud and a little water into the tanks.

That was the scheme of our boss. A good, big scheme. And a scheme that might do wonders. The trouble was, in the first place, that fence building, and road making, and mowing machines, and two-horse rakes, cost money.

However, Newbold struck in on the scheme, and he did it in the true Newbold way. You would think that he would just sit down and write off an order to a big manufacturer of agricultural implements, and pretty soon we would go down to the railroad station and debark, a trainload of everything, covered with shining new blue, and red, and green paint.

But Newbold didn’t do that. He was ten miles too mean for that. First he got a one-legged machinist, and a seventy-year-old blacksmith, both of them willing to work for board and tobacco, so to speak. Then he put up a bow-legged shed, and he went away from the ranch on a three weeks’ trip.

All through the West, now and again a big farmer or rancher dies and his family splits up, and the first thing that is done is to sell off all the implements. As soon as the paint is rubbed off a gang plow or a mowing machine, it’s old. And as soon as it’s old, it’s not wanted. It may have been worked six months or sixteen years. That doesn’t matter. It’s simply old. I’ve seen a hundred-and-twenty-five-dollar mowing machine sell for five dollars, and a forty-dollar subsoil plow sell for one dollar, and a seventy-five-dollar running gear for a wagon auction off for seventy-five cents, and a five-

hundred-pound heap of iron junk—chains, hammer-heads, haimes, plowshares—knocked down for a dollar and a quarter. Even junk dealers are not interested when it comes to bidding in on farm wreckage.

Well, Newbold was not proud, in that way. He went out and collected. He attended half a dozen sales, and first of all, up came a forge and a lot of blacksmith's tools, and that sort of thing. And then we got an order to break mustangs to collar and harness; and we went down to the station and began to haul junk forty miles overland to the ranch. It was a long job, and a mean one, and those mustangs could kick off their harness faster than school kids can shed their clothes on the rim of the swimming pool.

But there was the whole mass and heap of stuff, at last. And first of all, he set to work at the forge under the tutelage of the blacksmith of seventy years; and the more intelligent of us—I was not one—were put under the one-legged machinist. He and the blacksmith, do you see, were to supply the brains, and we punchers were the hand power! It was a mean scheme, but then, Newbold was always mean. It was a cheap scheme, but Newbold was always cheap.

We worked for weeks straightening the knock-knees of wagons that had developed flat feet and rheumatism a generation before. We patched harness with secondhand rivets, rawhide, and baling wire. We took out the mysterious insides of mowing machines, and operated, and put them back again, praying all together. We unrolled miles of knotted, tangled, spliced, and rotten secondhand barbed wire. And a roll of barbed wire can play as many tricks as an

outlaw mustang, and buck as high, and hit as hard, and bite as deep. Besides, it never gets tired.

But, to make it short, finally we fenced, and plowed, and sowed, and cut, and raked, and windrowed, that land and the hay crop from it.

And then the boss saw that we could never haul that hay in the loose clear across the passes over the so-called road that he had made. He had to get a machine and bale it.

And that was where the trouble started.

Chapter Two

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Well, we got a fourth-hand device called a hay press. The name of it was Little Giant.

But it was misnamed. It wasn't little. It was a full-grown giant when it came to making trouble. It had to be a giant, because it succeeded where everything else had failed.

Newbold had not really minded the stretch of trouble that he called a cow range. He liked it. The harder the fight, the more he was pleased; the longer it lasted, the better grew his second wind. Climate or no climate, rain or no rain, prices or no prices, he raised cows, he made men herd them, and he coined money.

And that's why I saw that the hay press was a real giant, because, single-handed, it licked Newbold. It put him on his back. And he was a new man when it got through with him.

I never quite understood the workings of that machine. When he got it, it looked like a cross between a traveling crane and a moving van. It was these things, and something more. It had all the faults of everything, and none of the virtues. It broke the heart of the machinist, and it nearly killed the poor old blacksmith. I shall never forget how he used to sit with his head in one hand, and a broken piece of iron fixture in the other, too tired to swear, and too worried to sleep.

I remember right well the day that we finally hauled the hay press through the worst of the pass, having pried and prayed it over jutting rocks, through tight squeezes, mile after mile. We had chucked stones under the wheels in time to keep it from lurching forward down a slope and crushing

the mustangs which hauled it. We had thrown a log under it in time to keep the obstinate fool of a thing from running backward into a ravine. I remember the day for these reasons, and because that was when a pinto beast working in the swing clipped me on the point of the hip with a well-aimed kick just as I was jumping out of range; but most of all, I remember it because that evening a man rode into our camp and sat down to eat with the boys.

He was Dug Waters, whom most people in those days called “White Water,” for a lot of obvious reasons. Mostly because, here and there, he had made as much noise and done as much damage as a river at the flood. He was a tall, gentle-looking man with a good deal of Adam’s apple, and an embarrassed smile. He had a way of crowding into corners and seeming to beg every one not to notice him.

But the boss noticed him, you can bet.

That fellow Newbold always had a good look at any stranger who sat down to eat his meat in our camp. As I said before, it was the worst chuck that ever was put before cow-punchers, and Heaven knows that cow-punchers never got much of the cream, no matter where they hung their bridles and tried to call home. But Newbold could watch a penny in the shape of sour dough as closely as a jeweler could watch a fine diamond.

At the table was where we liked him least.

He hauled up to where Waters was sitting and asked him his name and business, and when he found out that it was White Water himself, the boss almost choked. He told Waters to start for the sky line as soon as possible, and that the shortest road would probably be the smoothest. He said

that he had never turned an honest man from his door, but that he would walk ten miles and swim a river to take the hide of a skunk.

Now, our boss was a known man, but so was Waters, for that matter; and the moment we heard his name and saw how quiet he was, we knew that he was really a dangerous fighter. I've never seen it fail. A fellow of many words never has so many bullets in his magazine. The quiet fellows who seem to think their way from word to word are the ones who wreck a saloon when the time comes, and shoot the tar out of a whole sheriff's posse when they're pursued.

Now, White Water was exactly that sort of a fellow, to judge by the look of him, and to listen to his reputation; but he didn't pull a gun on Newbold. Yet I've never seen more cold poison than there was in the eye that he turned on the boss.

Finally he said:

"Newbold, I'm a sick man. I'm bound on a long journey, and I haven't eaten a morsel for two days. I'll tell you one thing more. I'm not begging on my own account, altogether. I'd see you hanged before I'd do that. But I'm asking you to let me sit here and eat a square meal. I haven't a penny to pay you, but I'll give you the bridle off my gelding, yonder. I can ride him just as well with a halter."

We all watched the boss pretty carefully at this. And I think that almost any other man in the world would have thrown up his hands when he heard and saw the straightness with which White Water was speaking. But Newbold was all chilled steel. He was the stuff that they put in the nose of armor-piercing shells.

“Your bridle and you be danged together,” he said. “Get out of this camp before I throw you out! You’re a thug, and a thief, and a gunman, and I hate your breed. If you’re sick, you’re not as sick as I’d like to make you. I’d like to see you and your whole breed drop and the buzzards start on you before your eyes were dark. Now, start along before I use my hands on you!”

I thought that it would be guns, then, and a mighty neat fight, because it made no difference to the boss. Perhaps he preferred fists, but he was just as much at home with knives, or guns, or clubs, even, for that matter. It was a sight to see him there with the red light shaking from the fire over his long, lean, loose-coupled body.

But Dug Waters only looked up at him for a moment as though he were seeing a game bird, away off in the sky. Then he surprised us a good deal by saying:

“You don’t have to throw me out. I’ll go.”

With that he got up and left us, and the amazing part of it was that not one of us, in speaking of the thing afterward, thought that Waters was yellow. We all agreed that he must have had something on his mind. Pete Bramble said that he saw Waters stagger as he raised his foot to the stirrup to go off. And every one of us agreed that he had told the truth and was a sick man. He had the white look of a fellow with very little blood in his body—very little good blood, at least.

And Pete Bramble, after the boss had rolled into his blankets, looked around him at the silent circle of us and said:

“That’s gunna bring us bad luck. That’s going too far. When a man’s sick—” He stopped and puffed at his pipe.

The cook was standing there in his shirt sleeves, the fire shining on his greasy, red arms.

“When a man’s sick?” he echoed. “No, but when he’s hungry! Ay, or even a dog, when it’s gaunted all up!”

I think he was the worst cook in the world, but I loved him for saying that. We all did. For two or three days hardly a man cursed him for the way he made the coffee or burned the beans.

The next day we got the hay press down to its first location and set her up. It’s a hard thing to describe a hay press. In the first place, it’s a job I don’t like. The less I have to think about them, the better pleased I am. In the second place, I never understood them, and I never wanted to.

But I can say that this thing that turned big hay into small, so to speak, was a long box set upon one end, with a beater in it that worked up and down on long irons. The power that worked it came from four sweating mustangs, that scratched their way around and around on a circle, hitched to a beam. Halfway around the circle they were lugging to pull the beater up; the other half they were lugging to jam the feed down. And it was run, run, run for them except when the bale was made, and then the power driver yelled “Bale!” and dropped an anchor board that held the power beam in place until the bale was tied with wire.

The first thing that we did was to start out a fleet of four Jackson bucks. For the benefit of punchers who never saw a Jackson buck, I’ll say that it’s a thing with a lot of iron-shod and pointed wooden spears that stick out in front. Two horses work behind this line of spears with a wooden, open

bulwark in front of them, and behind them sits the driver on a seat that has a single plowwheel under it.

It was my job, at first, to drive one of those Jackson bucks. I admired the contraption a good deal, right at first, but I used up my admiration plenty before the day was an hour old. The trick was to start out with the teeth of the machine hoisted, and while running empty, like that, the clumsy brute was sure to start sliding on a down slope where there was no down slope to see, or zigzagging over bumps where there were no bumps to find. And I ask any cow-puncher to imagine what a pair of broncos only half broke to the saddle and a quarter broke to harness would do with that sort of a stall on wheels weaving around them.

They kicked, and bucked, and threw themselves down, and reared to throw themselves backward, and then they started to run away. But the cards were stacked against those broncs. They were tied in front, and they were tied behind, and they were framed in on both sides, and when they tried to bolt, I just lowered the spears into the ground, and after they had plowed an acre or so, they admitted that they were beat.

So was I. I was kind of chafed a little, to tell the truth. I thought that riding for years in a saddle had given me an outside lining as tough as leather, but I was all wrong. That iron seat on top of that jolting, jouncing, jarring plowwheel found all sorts of new and tender places that I didn’t know were on the map.

Finally, the broncs were convinced that it was no good, so I started their work, which was to pick up as many shocks of hay as the buck would hold without spilling and shove them

up to the back end of the hay press. The broncs would ram the load home well enough, but when it came to backing up, they couldn’t understand. They simply balked. Pete Bramble lighted matches and burned off their chin whiskers before it dawned on them that there were two ways of going, and one of them was back.

But still, it was a hard job. Between pulling my arms out of joint to back my ornery team of nags, and trying to steer that danged sidewheeling invention, and being bumped like a hiccupping rubber ball until my heart and stomach changed places and my liver and lungs got scrambled together, I was ready to quit by noon.

So I went up to the boss to tell him my idea, and there I had my first sight of the kid.

I have to take a new breath before I start talking about him.

Chapter Three

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This kid was about fifteen, I should say, very big for his age, and with a pair of smooth shoulders—the sort you see in a well-made mule. He looked more, but you could see that the bull was only beginning to appear in his neck and the mastiff in his jaw, and the mischief in his eye. His face was covered with bright-red freckles.

“They’re the sparks and the coals of fire that come out of the top of his head,” said Pete Bramble, one day.

For his hair was just the color of fire—red fire. This pug-nosed boy was sitting on a rock chewing a straw and looking like a simpleton, which is a talent that no grown man can divide with a fifteen-year-old brat. He had on about half a hat, with his red hair burning up through the holes in the roof. He had on a shirt that was minus a collar and one sleeve. His trousers were a sawed-off pair that once had fitted a man, and a big man at that. His feet were bare, and so were his calves, with white marks on them where the thorns had scratched.

Take him all in all, he looked like a young mountain lion with the fur peeled off and the hide tanned.

I looked at this young limb for a while, and then I sashayed up to the boss. He gave me the nearest relation to a smile that could be found in his house—about a fifth cousin, say.

“How is things, Joe?” says he.

“Kind of monotonous,” said I.

“Monotonous?” says he.

“Well, chief,” said I, “I came up and hunted for your shindig because I heard that there was some action to be found around your place.”

“Why, Joe,” said he, “I’ve always aimed to keep the boys amused and with enough to do so they won’t have to be rocked to sleep at night. I used to keep minstrels and such to soothe them down, but then I decided that I’d have to look up more for them to do. Matter of fact, I haven’t had no complaint like yours since I can remember.”

“That’s a funny thing,” said I, “and I’ll bet you ain’t been keeping your ear peeled close to the ground. Well, it hasn’t been so bad, mostly. Breaking in ten-twelve trained outlaws that you call range ponies every year was one pleasin’ feature that we all looked forward to, especially me.”

“I always guessed that you did, Joe,” says the boss. “You look so plumb graceful in the air.”

“There was other good features, too,” says I. “Like drinking tank water when the wriggles have to be strained out of it and vinegar mixed in; and eating beans twenty-one times a week; and exercising our jaws like lawyers on beef that we never could convince. And the ship’s biscuit was entertainin’, too, because it was a lot of fun to rap a chunk of it on the edge of the table and see the weevils come out and take notice who was callin’ at the front door of their old home.”

“Why, Joe,” said he, “it seems that I’ve been running a regular vaudeville show to keep you boys amused. I didn’t know that I was laying myself out to do that.”

“A regular college, too,” says I. “Couple of years up here would make a man pretty handy with some of the dead

languages, because it’s a cinch that your cows don’t understand no living tongue. There’s some medical trainin’, too, because anybody that can nurse your yearlings through one of these winters ought to be able to set up a ‘first-rate’ practice giving the rich and the old and the feeble another ten years of life.”

“That’s an angle I never thought of,” said he. “I guess that I ought to start to charge admission, and here I’ve been all the time paying out regular wages.”

“It’s been a terrible mistake,” says I. “The boys all been wanting to speak about it, but you know—some fellows, they break right down when they find that they can’t give away a lot of their dough. We all thought that you must be one of that kind.”

“I see how it is,” says he, a lot more patient than I ever expected him to be. “My mistake is being too big-hearted and generous all the time.”

“I hate to tell you,” says I. “I hate to complain, but that’s the truth. Look at the way you put up a roof over the bunk house with the roof all patterned with holes, like an open-work shirt, so’s we could see the stars while we were lying in the bunks. A plain cow-puncher, he don’t expect that much care, and thought and trouble on the part of his boss. Though I must admit that it was handy to know when it was raining, and we could always tell when the cows was likely to freeze to death by the way we felt in the bunk house.”

“I see it all, now,” says he. “I’ve just been too kind!”

“Chief,” says I, “I’m a humble man, and I don’t like to complain, but the hard truth has gotta come out. We’re a rough lot, and a thick-skinned lot, and we have to be treated

that way. Still, for the sake of education, and all that, I've stuck along on the job, but today is too much. There ain't enough to do on that Jackson Creek to keep me awake."

"Joe," says he, "you fair make my heart bleed. Sitting there on that soft iron seat has sort of culled you."

"Yes," says I, feeling my way along, "about half a yard of hide has been culled right off me. And a fellow like me that has been used to riding thoroughbreds out of Thunder and sired by Lightning, you can't expect him to have his hands full with nothing but a pair of those pets that I've been driving all morning."

"They've been too well taught," said he. "I can see that."

"Yes, chief," says I, "the fact is that it ain't hardly possible to keep them from reciting their lessons all day long. They've been marking up a hundred per cent on me all the time!"

"It's hard to bear," says he.

"Yes," says I. "I'm already limping a little. But I've been waiting and hoping that I would have something to do to keep my hands full and my mind occupied, but the only other thing that I've had has been a three-wheeled cartoon of a wagon that already knows a lot more than I'll ever learn. It can find its way where I never would guess that there is one. That's what I call a college-graduate wagon."

"I've been admiring it myself," said he. "And what's the conclusion that you're drifting all these ideas toward, Joe?"

"It's a sad thing, chief," says I, "but I'm going to vamose. I'm afraid that you've got the wrong kind of man in me. You oughta fill up your bunch with recruits from the old folks' home, or a hospital, or something like that; the sort of