

West is West

Robert Ervin Howard

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“Get me,” I told the foreman of the ranch where I was spending my vacation, “a tame and peaceful bronc, for I would fain fare forth among the hills to pursue the elusive bovine and, as thou knowest I have naught of riding skill, therefore I wish a quiet steed and if it be aged I care not.”

The foreman gazed at me thoughtfully.

“I have just the cayuse for you,” he said.

“Hi Alkali! Bring forth Whirlwind!”

“Nay, nay!” I said hastily, “for doubtless he is a veritable whirlwind and such I will not mount.”

“Not so,” quoth the foreman, “he is named thus in delicate sarcasm, for he is lazy as a tenderfoot and as gentle as a kitten.”

Alkali led the horse out, Utah Jack, the top hand, Two-Gun Ghallihan, and all the rest of the disreputable gang following. The steed was a shabby, sleepy, mild appearing buckskin of no great size. He dozed as he stood and slumbered as I saddled him.

The saddle was a high, double-rigged affair with a bulging fork and before I swung into it, the foreman tied a coiled lariat to it. Then, solemnly he buckled about my waist a belt from which swung a long, black holster in which reposed a single action Colt .44-40.

“For rattlers,” he explained, solemnly.

I mounted. My noble steed stood still, slumbering. I invited him to go forward. He remained stationary. I touched him tentatively with my spurs. He turned his head and gazed at me strangely. Indignant I jabbed him viciously with the spurs, at the same time using words.

That brought results! I thought at first that a cyclone had hit me but it was only the kittenish pranks of my gallant charger. He bucked. He pitched. He sun-fished. He swapped ends. He rose on his hind legs and danced. He rose on his front legs and capered. He placed his hind and fore feet together and spun around and around with such rapidity that I was dizzy. He leaped high in the air and came down stiff-legged with a force that jolted my very intellect. He seemed to be changing the whole landscape.

How did I stay on? There was a reason. Not my fault that I stayed on. I wanted off as bad as he wanted me off. I felt as if my bones were falling apart. I could scarcely hear the delighted yells of the cowpunchers. Yet I stayed. Even when my steed dashed at full speed under a tree limb which just cleared the saddle horn. I remained but the branch did not. I remained even when my frolicsome charger lay down and rolled on the ground

in spite of my protesting screams. He arose and began to do some entirely new tricks when something snapped. It was the two girths breaking simultaneously. I described a parabola and landed on my head some twenty yards away with the heavy saddle on top of me. My erstwhile steed emitted a paean of victory, danced a scalp-dance on my prostrate frame and galloped away over the horizon.

“General Jackson fit the Injuns,” remarked the foreman as he helped me up. “You’re the ridin’est critter I ever see. They ain’t another guy on the ranch that coulda stayed on Whirlwind that long.”

Shaking off his hand, I staggered up and drew the gun he had given me. “For rattlers!” I gasped and if he hadn’t fled and I hadn’t missed and the gun hadn’t been loaded with blanks anyway, I’d have massacred him.

But what I did not tell him was that my gun belt got hung over the saddle horn and the lasso came loose and tangled me up so I was tied to the saddle and couldn’t get off to save my life till the saddle came too.

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First published in 1922

This edition in 2016

Publisher: LibRARY.cz – Martin Doucha
Kukaňova 19, Chomutov, Czech Republic