Silver Dawn

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Part One

JUD first spotted her away up on Two Buttes creek at the south end of the Frying Pan's range, in March, when the buffalo sod was just beginning to smell fresh at midday as the trickles of ice water chuckled down from the melting snow banks. She was a short yearling and had a winter coat three inches long, shaggy as a grizzly. But every move she made, even to the nervous toss of her head to shake a precocious forelock out of her eyes, was graceful as a dancer.

Jud reined old Shorty into the shelter of a willow clump and sat there and feasted his eyes.

She was with a bunch of smokeys, wild ones, her mother and five other mares and three other last year's colts all following a shaggy blue roan stud that carried a brand from away down in southern New Mexico. They'd drifted north, somehow: or maybe only the stud had drifted north and had gathered the mares along the way. At any rate, they'd dodged horse hunters and fought blizzards, coyotes, bobcats, and starvation. And this far they'd won out.

The graceful yearling was a misty sort of blue-gray, shading almost to white in spots, and had a mane and tail as pretty a gleaming silver as you ever saw on the trimmings of a fol-de-rol rodeo saddle.

"Gad!" Jud murmured to Shorty. "She's just like a chunk of dawn, ain't she? Darned near too pretty to look at very long. Dawn, that's what we'll call her, old boy. Silver Dawn. And if we don't lay our rope on her, Shorty old boy, nobody else will!"

For half an hour Jud sat and watched and twice he was tempted to shake out his rope, give old Shorty his head and take after the Dawn youngster. Then he thought of the heavy going, the soggy sod, and the fact that while Shorty was good for an all day jaunt and was an Al cutting horse, he wasn't exactly what one might call fleet. Twenty jumps and little Dawn would leave old Shorty like a prong horn leaves a house dog. She could run, that baby. Look at the length of those fine legs, at her long, supple ankles, at the powerful pair of hips on her! She could run like a jack rabbit!

And at last Jud swung old Shorty back out of the willows, up to the hillside.

They saw him. The blue stud snorted, flung up his ugly head. The mares, four of them heavy with foal, trotted obediently up the hollow. And the yearlings, led by Dawn, sped away with a regular circus display of wheeling, side jumping, snorting and general showing off. Could she run? Gad! She had legs on her like wings! Even among those other lithe youngsters she showed up like a swallow among a flock of crows.

Jud watched, entranced, until the whole bunch of them had trooped away over the hill and out of sight. Then he turned with a lump in his throat and a hint of moisture in his eyes. For Jud was the son of Marie La Tour, who had come to Colorado to paint mountains, and who had died, heartbroken, on a lonely homestead, leaving a gray eyed, wondering boy of ten who watched the crimson sunsets and dreamed of great, bearded knights who rode chargers like elephants to save lily white maidens from monster ogres.

Jud watched this Dawn colt, thrilled to his very boot-tips. For Jud also was the son of Greg Milholland, who loved horses as Marie loved mountains, and whose good looks were as great as his wanderlust, his eternal quest for a beauty of far places, of strange women, for a richness of life that he never found. For two years he quarreled with Marie on the homestead and drifted away—deserted her, most said—he was found dead under a snow bank not two miles from the homestead where Marie had died of pneumonia and a broken heart—died only a week before. Grey had come back, too late. And the neighbors buried him beside Marie over on the hill where she used to sit and watch the sunset.

Little Jud didn't understand much of the goings on. But when he was given the choice of going to live with prim, starched old Mrs. Baron, whose son ran the store and postoffice at Bluebell, or of going with Pat Donlan, Jud didn't hesitate. He went with Pat. Pat was sixty. Pat was a widower; there wasn't a woman on Pat's ranch. But Pat had two thousand head of horses.

Almost before he had lost his milk teeth Jud was spending the bulk of each day in the saddle. At twelve he could ride with the best of the punchers. And at fifteen he could stick to anything that grew on Donlin's range.

"There's something damned quare about the way the laddy rides," old Pat once said to his foreman. "It ain't work for him—it's not play, neither. It's just a part of life. He kind of belongs in the saddle, and he knows it. Him on a horse looks like an eagle in the sky—like he's doin what the good Lord cut him out for, and like he'd been doin' it a hell of a long while."

The whole truth was that Jud was an artist, but instead of singing or painting or writing poetry, he rode horses.

Jud probably would have lived with Pat all his life, and would have grown into a lazy, vain, useless rider, pampered and spoiled, spineless and petulant. But the spring Jud was seventeen Pat got caught in a cold rain, and a week later he wheezed his last through pneumonia clogged lungs. The old man had scarcely been recently buried when a flock of creditors flew in like buzzards, to lay hold of everything he had held. Jud was lucky to save his saddle and one sorrel gelding from the crash. And before the fresh earth had settled over old Pat Donlan, Jud Milholland rolled his extra pair of sox in his slicker, saddled his sorrel, and headed south, the spirit of Greg Milholland pointing the way.

He worked at the old JOD. He worked at the Two Diamond over on the Badger. He even went as far south as old Fort Garland, down on the Rio Grande. But ever he would drift back toward the Arkansas; toward the Flying Pan, where Red Ike, bald as an egg and with a flaming red beard like a Hebrew prophet, ruled the cook shack; where one-eyed Bill Fess had been the foreman more than twenty-five years; where Greg Milholland had worked when he met Marie La Tour.

Ever would Jud drift back "home," where the buffalo sod began to smell fresh of a March day when the trickles of ice water buckled down the hillsides from the dwindling snow banks.

By the time the Dawn colt was a two-year-old Red Ike had growled to one-eyed Bill Fess, "Jud's just like his daddy—got his heart set on a filly, and I reckon he'll go through hell to get her."

Fess nodded. "But," he slowly ventured, blinking his one gray eye like an owl, "once he's got her, how long'll he want her? Remember Marie———"

And Red Ike nodded solemnly.

Jud had chased the mist-gray filly a hundred times, and never yet had he been within rope length of her.

The spring she turned three Dawn took up with a leggy black stud, lured a couple of skittish Frying Pan mares to turn wild and follow her, and took to the Little Muddy Badlands.

The badlands lie like a giant, threefingered hand, cut off in some long forgotten battle of the gods and flung there on the plains, its two mile fingers thrusting out toward the south, its sandstone mesa thumb toward the west and its three mile square palm a maze of wild plum, sage, cactus and gravel hills. Near the center of the palm is a deep, clear pool fed by a spring sweet as dew and cold as January, and in the canyon between the ring finger and the index there are two brackish pools where range cattle and antelope often water.

Half a dozen times that spring Jud rode down there, spent two or three days poking about the weird canyons, losing himself in the trails and cross trails—of which there were thousands —and catching occasional glimpses of Dawn and her followers.

In August Jud went to Bill Fess.

"I'm going to lay off a month or so, Bill, if it don't pinch you none."

"Not at all, Jud." But there was a suspicious light in Fess' eye. "Something special on?"

"Nope. Just want to drift down to the Badlands a week or so."

Not half an hour later Red Ike's prophetic beard was waggling in agitation.

"Just like his daddy," Ike growled while Bill sat in a corner and smoked. "What did his daddy do but pike off for a month when he seen he wan't getting nowhere with that La Tour girl? And didn't Greg come back with the girl in a hackamora? Mark my word, Bill, Jud'll come home with that filly at the end of a lead rope."

But Ike was wrong. Jud came home with Shorty limping at the end of a lead rope. And Jud was riding the Dawn filly.

Jud told them but few details of the chase or capture. He had gone down there alone, and he came back riding Dawn. That was all the curious ones needed to know.

But Jud, if he lived to a thousand, never would forget that moonlit night when his rope settled around Dawn's gray neck.

He had chased her over the brush and over the hills for three solid weeks. He had found that of an evening she usually took to the trail around the tip of the Thumb, and that if he chased her she scurried around, through a gully in the Palm, and back along the Thumb, completing the circle. Then he had spotted an old water course that cut directly up over the Thumb, a sort of pathway hidden by brush and brambles.

And then the moon came full, and Jud saddled Shorty and took after Dawn and her followers.

For half a mile, there in the moonlight, she ran straightaway toward the end of the Thumb. Jud put old Shorty hard to, it, pressed to within three hundred yards. Then he came to the water course, and the wild ones sped around the end of the Thumb. Jud could go up and over, a scant five hundred yards, while Dawn sped on around the curve, nearly a mile. And Jud would be there beside the trail on the other side when she came thundering past. He would be within rope length of her at last.

The way up was rough, boulder-strewn, but Shorty took it at a jerky lope. The way down was through loose gravel and shale, and Shorty took it mostly on his haunches. Then, twenty yards from the trail where Dawn would come with flying hoofs, Shorty tripped on a root, stumbled, and fell.

Jud was off in a leap. With a jerk he yanked the lariat from the pommel. Half a dozen jumps and he was at the trail edge. And Dawn was thundering down at him. big as a mastodon there in the moonlight.

Jud's rope shot out like a tongue of silver. Dawn heard the hiss, tried to swerve. Too late! The twang of the rope as it tautened was like the note of a mighty bow string.

Jud's boot heels ripped twin furrows five feet along the sod at that first lunge. Dawn nearly went head over tail. Then she spun about, saw the puny human being at the far end of the rope that bound her throat, and lunged toward the freedom of the plains. And again Jud's boot heels ripped long furrows through the sod. Again and again she plunged at the far end of that spider web tether, yet the two-legged being at the far end could not be loosened, and the tether itself clung tight as a sinew.

Jud's hands ached. His palms were seared, raw, while the front of his chaps stank of scorched leather where the rope sang like a guitar string as Jud half snubbed it about himself.

Deeper and deeper into her neck the rope cut the filly, throttling her windpipe. And she plunged in mad. blind frenzy. Her eyes bulged. Her pink nostrils became gaping wounds fighting for air. She must free herself of that terrible silver cord! But it gripped, tighter, relentless as the hand of death.

How he snubbed her and saddled her and mounted her, there in the moonlight on the buffalo sod; how they battled, she unbridled, unfettered save for the grip of the cinches, he hatless, quirtless, clutching the saddle with two bruised, bleeding hands, slinging like a madman; how they ceased to fight, long after, she' drooping like a frosted flower, he too battered, too faint, too weak to dismount—those things were like a mad vision of a far, far place.

No, if Jud lived to be two thousand, he never would forget that night beneath the moon there at the edge of the Little Muddy Badlands.

The short autumn days rolled past. Fall roundup came and went, and preparations were made for winter.

And Red Ike and Bill Fess marveled.

Dawn was the best cow horse on the Frying Pan. Dawn and Jud could do an amazing amount of work in a day. Dawn knew, by instinct, it seemed, what her rider would do. And Jud rode her as a mother leads a child.

"Sure a great pair," observed Red Ike, with a pass at a late fly that pestered his bald head.

"Sure a great horse," was Bill's comment.

And a few minutes later, "But I wonder how long it'll last. Jud's not the kind "

"Greg and Marie," put in Bill between puffs at his pipe, "got on for about eight years."

"But Dawn," observed Ike, "ain't Marie."

"Both women," came Bill's answer.

Spring and the Dawn filly would come at a trot when Jud whistled. Summer, and she followed him like a dog. When Jud rode another horse he lathered him getting back to fondle his Dawn mare. And when he rode Dawn like as not he'd stop two hours three miles from home to cool her back and rub her pink muzzle. Jud was madly, foolishly in love with her. And she nickered like a baby when Jud was out of her sight.

Then came the war talk. A bunch of boys were in town one afternoon when an enlistment officer hailed them. They rode over, laughing, and he told them what was up. Then they quit laughing and three of the five of them signed up. The fourth was one-eyed Bill Fess, who couldn't have got in if he wanted to. And the fifth was Jud.

For the better part of an hour he stood in the street rubbing Dawn's neck while he thought. The other boys were over undergoing the physical examination. Finally Jud twisted Dawn's ear affectionately, stalked over to the uniformed man's office:

"Listen," Jud demanded, "if I was to enlist in the cavalry, could I take my own horse along?"

The man in uniform smiled and shook his head. "'Fraid not. Government provides—____"

But Jud was gone. Back beside Dawn once more, he rubbed her muzzle almost fiercely. "They won't let us go together, girl, and damned if I'm going without you."

Part Two

THAT night when Jud and Fess rode | home they trailed three horses with empty saddles. And when Jud stripped his saddle and blanket from Dawn he was muttering again, "No, sir, damned if they'll get me to go and leave you, old girl."

That was in June. But in December Jud was in the trenches, eating canned Willie and dodging whiz-bangs with the rest of them.

The break had come early in June. Jud had been down toward the Little Muddy Badlands, riding alone, as usual. And Dawn had shied at a tumbleweed, side-jumped like a flash. Jud was half asleep, and, caught unawares, roused suddenly to find himself sitting on the sod forty miles from the home ranch. Dawn was grazing fifty yards away.

Jud laughed at himself, thrown so easily, and walked over to the filly. But just as he was reaching for her bridle a fly stung her and she shied away.

Jud flew into a rage. He swore like a demon. He alternately cursed her and cursed the flies. Then he ran after her, and she fled, quite naturally. He walked the better part of a mile after her, and his anger cooled as his feet began to burn. Then he begged and cajoled, pleaded, and finally whistled for her. And half an hour before sunset, when Jud had blisters like dollars on his heels, Dawn turned and trotted straight to him.

The following day when she shied at another tumbleweed Jud cut her viciously with his rope, and for several minutes they had a royal setto. Next morning Dawn refused to come at Jud's call and he finally had to rope her after driving her into the corral.

For a week they played a cat's game, always on the lookout for a chance to "do up" the other. Jud was fighting her every time he hit the saddle, and he was riding with every nerve taut every minute of the day. Then she stumbled in a badger hole one afternoon ten miles from the ranch. Jud cut at her with his rope, and she let go the works. She bucked and pitched and raised general deviltry; but Jud stuck to her like a cockleburr until she dashed under, a runty jack pine and scraped him off.

But as he went Jud took along the end of a twenty-foot lead rope he'd tied around her neck just for such an emergency; and he nearly broke her back when he set his heels and jerked her head around under her tail. Then he got right back on and they had a battle "worth riding far and waiting long to see.. It lasted twenty minutes or so, Dawn bellowing like a bull and Jud raking her from withers to tail with his rowels. Then she got near the jack pine again, and before Jud could say yes or no he was sitting on I the ground, a gash across his head where the tree struck him, and Dawn was streaking it for the Frying Pan.

When Jud walked in at the ranch it was just getting dark. The boys were out at the corral cutting horses, but Jud didn't notice that nothing but scrubs went into the little corral. What he did see was a squat, dark-skinned man checking off the mounts as they were crowded into the pen. Jud went directly to him.

"Buyer?" Jud demanded.

The dark-skinned man nodded.

"I got one for you."

The other continued to check the incoming horses.

"War stuff?" There was an eager fierceness in Jud's voice.

Again the other nodded.

Five minutes later Jud led his Dawn mare over to the stranger. She was docile, now, as a kitten. But Jud fairly trembled as he announced, "Here she is."

"In there," the little man grunted, glancing quickly at her. Then, as Jud loosened the lead rope and viciously cut her across the rump, driving her into the pen, the buyer whistled softly to himself. Jud returned to the buyer's side, and the dark-skinned one halted his pencil long enough to announce, "Twenty-five dollars."

Jud grunted and walked away like one in a trance, while the buyer whistled again, shook his head, muttered, "Crazy mad."

It was after supper that Red Ike edged alongside Jud, whose eyes still held that hard, fierce glare, almost a madman's look.

"Jud boy," Ike rumbled, "did you know that was a Mexican buyer? Not a U. S. man. He wants horses for them Spicks to shoot." There was almost a pleading note in his voice.

But his only answer was a frown and a snarl: "So much the better!"

"He's mad," Ike told Bill Fess later in the kitchen. "Mad as a wet hen. And he's about gone off his nut with it."

"Just like Greg was," Bill ruminated, blinking his one eye and lighting his pipe. "Just like Greg the night he up and left Marie,"

"But he'll be sorry as hell tomorrow."

"Maybe. Grey wasn't sorry for nearly two years."

"He'll be sorry," Ike continued as if Bill had not spoken, "and he'll be willing to pay ten times what he sold her for to get her back."

But Ike was wrong. Jud enlisted in the U.S. army the next day.

Not quite four years later a man who might have been forty-five instead of a scant twenty-nine, judging by the haggard, haunted look in his eyes, opened the door of the Bluebell postoffice and general store. There was a familiar set to the shoulders, a line about the mouth, and despite the olive drab and the puttees George Baron recognized him.

"Jud Milholland!"

They shook hands. Jud asked about George's mother, about his wife, about the neighbors. Finally he ventured, "The fellow I rode out with said the Frying Pan went under."

"Yep. Better'n a year ago." George was behind the counter fooling with the calico stacked where overalls and chewing tobacco used to be. "Too many nesters. Cut off the range, and then beef didn't sell right and the bottom dropped out of the horse market."

Jud smothered a cough, a hackling, scraping cough. For several minutes they stood in silence. Then Jud said, "Nesters, huh?"

"Yep. They's got about everything now but a couple of sections down in the Little Muddy Badlands, and that's too rough to get under plow, I reckon."

Jud blinked, blew his nose, turned away. Finally he said, "What happened to Red Ike? And Bill Fess? They still around somewhere?"

"Bill went down to El Paso. Got a brother down there. He's a lawyer or a representative to Mexico or something like that. And Ike went along and last I heard he was running a chili parlor there in El Paso."

Two nesters came with cans of cream for George to test and eggs for him to count. As he turned to care for their needs he looked at Jud who leaned against the counter and gazed out the big front window, his eyes glistening and moist. Then Jud coughed again and George thought he looked scarcely a day older than the bare headed little

tike who had cried over Marie Milholland's grave, then solemnly decided he'd rather live with Pat Donlan on the horse ranch than go home with George's mother.

"Going to stay around here a while?" George asked, stirring the first can of cream and taking a sample.

"Hardly know,"' came his answer. Jud still stared out that front window. And five minutes later Jud asked, "Ike and Bill are down in El Paso, you say?" Then, just as George finished both tests, Jud blew his nose loudly, turned with a great air of old time swagger, and said, "Well, George, if you see any of the boys tell 'em I'm back all in one piece. If I decide to stick around I'll see you again. By the way, George, you never saw that Mexican horse buyer that was through here just before I left, did you? He didn't come back the next year?"

George shook his head.

"Well," Jud seemed to swallow something big and hard, "well, so long, George."

Jud opened the door, wandered out into the afternoon sunlight, where he could smell the freshness of the buffalo sod still moist with last night's rain. But when a flivver chugged along heading north, toward the railroad, Jud hailed the driver, climbed in, vanished down the dusty road.

It was a sunny morning the following March when Jud opened the door of the imperial chill parlor in El Paso; ; opened the door, stepped in, sat on a stool at the ten foot counter. He wore mufti now, but his eyes still had that haunted look and he coughed even as ☒ he waited. Then he saw a long, red, prophetic beard, and he saw a tall cook's hat—Ike himself edged out from the tiny galley!

"Jud!" The bellow rattled the big front window.

"Hello, Ike. God, it's good to see you!" There were tears in Jud's eyes and there were tears in Ike's eyes, and neither tried to hide them.

For an hour they talked, while the sun beat down and the natives lolled on the sidewalks or stared in at them unnoticed.

"So Bill's here, too?" Jud finally asked.

"Yep. Due along here most any time now. Him and the Major—Bill's brother. The Major's some high mucky much with the government, something to do with Juarez. Got more to say about what goes on over there than I the president of Mexico himself. Whenever any of the boys go over and shoot up the town, anyway, it's the Major who gets 'em out. He talks, and the I Spicks jump to do what he savs, saving any questions till afterward."

"Yeah?"

"Yep. Him and Bill's due along most any minute. We're going over there to a bull fight this afternoon. It's a big holiday or something, and we decided to go along with the Major and see what kind of a rodeo those Spicks can throw. You'll come along?"

"O, I reckon."

So they went, the four of them, across the international bridge, past the long rows of 'dobe huts in the native section, out to the big amphitheatre. Bill's ' brother reminded Jud of the major in his outfit overseas, the kind of a man a fellow would do anything

in the world for, a big, tall, broad shouldered chap with a regular army carriage, iron gray hair, close cropped mustache, eyes that twinkled like gray diamonds, and a low, vibrant voice that made you want to tell him your troubles. And Jud noticed, the Spicks were bowing to the Major like he was the Presidente himself.

Then they were in their seats, almost at the ringside, and the Major was reading the Spanish printed program to them. There were three bulls to be killed, all from some famous herd down near Durango, and half a dozen "famous" matadors were to vie for high honors. Then they watched the gathering crowd for a time, and at last the Major ventured, "Seems to me that Billy has mentioned you, Milholland, as something of a rider."

"Well," Jud cleared his throat and colored slightly, while Bill tried frantically to signal to the Major that he was venturing on dangerous ground, "well, maybe I was once."

"Chased wild horses, or something," the Major pressed him.

Jud smiled wanly, and a faraway look came into his haunted eyes. "Yes, I did that, too."

Ike and Bill were almost wheezing in their suppressed excitement. The Major was playing with a volcano. Jud was just about to explode, tell him to go to hell, walk right out on them. Jud felt about that little mare like a fellow feels about a girl he's been head over heels in love with and then had a hig row and left her cold. And the longer a fellow broods over such a thing, the worse he gets. Jud had been brooding over it four years. See that look in his eyes! Jud was more than half crazy on that subject.

"I'd like to hear about it," the Major was saying. And before they could realize it the Major had Jud telling him about Silver Dawn, how he first

saw her, how he followed her for months, how he finally roped her, saddled her, rode her. It was a simple, unadorned tale, matter of fact almost to barrenness.

But the Major and Bill and Dee listened completely absorbed, and Jud, as he talked, stared straight across the ring with eyes that saw neither crowd nor sky, but only a mist gray filly as beautiful as a desert sunset running wild and free in the Little Muddy Badlands, waiting fretfully for her absent master, trotting like a dog to him when he returned; and finally, through misted eyes, thought he saw her lying starved and beaten, gashed and bullet torn, glassy eyed and lifeless beneath a fierce sun in whose face circled the eternal buzzards.

Jud finished his story and after a moment the Major asked, "And what do you think you'll do now?"

"It's hard to, say. Keep drifting, I guess. This gas I got—"

"Yes, but there's a cure for that, son."

"Yeah." Jud's tone was frankly sneering. "Go out in the hills somewhere and sit in the sun a couple of years." He laughed harshly. "I'd rather die outright, now."

"But if you—"

"Listen, Major, I've thought it all out a hundred times. If things was like they ain't—if I had Dawn again, I mean—I'd swing right back up onto those old plains. And I'd

grab me a homestead in the most God forsaken looking place there is—right in the Little Muddy Badlands. That's where we two first got acquainted, and that's where we'd settle down. We'd build us a shanty and we'd get a cow and some chickens, and we'd just set down and kind of vegetate. And the sun would get in my skin and eat up the gas, and we'd be happy as hell."

He hesitated a moment and the glow faded from his eyes, leaving them hard again. "But it can't be done, Major. It can't be done. As the boys say, I loved and I lost and it's all over. I'm just sorry the Heinies didn't tag one of them whizbangs for me. That's all."

The bugler down in the ring was sounding off again and the matadors in their gaudy capes were acknowledging the salvos from the stands. The bandilleros took up their places, the muletero cracked his whip and his team of blacks with jingling harness and tinkling bells trotted toward the exit. Two picadors, one on a shambly, moth eaten black horse, and the other on a gray that looked like a four legged washboard, made for opposite sides of the ring.

The bugler blew another blast, the stands roared, the heavy gate at the far end of the arena opened. Down the chute trotted a leggy red bull.

The bull fight was on.

A matador waved his crimson cape in the bull's face, leaped lightly aside from the charge. Another lunge, and yet another, and the matador still plagued the beast. Then a bandillero danced forward, egged on the beast to a charge, planted his hooked darts as the bull plunged past.

The stands were cheering. It would be a grand success, this fight. Such a bull! And two others of his kind! An afternoon's sport fit for the Presidente himself!

Again a matador waved his cape in the bull's face, leaped clear, and a picador urged his skeleton of a horse down the side of the ring toward where the four Americans sat and toward the bull. Now first blood would be drawn, horse's blood.

Jud stared like a madman. He gasped audibly.

Red Ike heard, and Red Ike saw. Jud went white as a cloud, his eyes blazed, his fists clenched. Jud was staring at the oncoming picador. The horse that picador rode, mere skeleton though it was, once had been a misty gray. It was a mare. And though she was blindfolded, there was a familiar toss of her head, an air to her gait.

The bull was in front of them now, not twenty yards away, and the 'gray was not fifty yards from him. For a moment the bull poised, ready to charge the picador on the gray. Then a matador shook his cape in the bull's face and the red beast plunged across the ring. There the other picador waited on the tottery black. A matador urged him closer. The crowd shreiked, sensing the fatal charge. And the bull sped toward the gaudy man on the helpless old black horse.

Red Ike groaned and covered his face, and Bill blinked his one eye while he cursed. Jud, white faced, tense, wavered and Ike felt his weight against his shoulder as Jud nearly fainted.

The black hadn't a chance. Blindfolded, he waited like a sheep in the slaughter chute. A swift impact, a thud, a squeal, and the crowd's frenzied shouts drowned the other sounds. The picador, as usual, was thrown clear and dashed to safety. And the bull was maneuvered back to the center of the ring while the muletero came dashing in, the jingling blacks trotted back out dragging their black burden, and but one horse remained in the ring—the little gray mare, so thin, so familiar.

The applause abated, and the matadors urged the bull toward the little gray. But in the stand behind the picador a new excitement was rising. Gaudily dressed policemen tried vainly to force their way through the crowd. Soldiers from the ringside tried equally in vain to reach the spot.

In the tenth row a great, red bearded man with a head bald as an egg was bellowing in English. In front of him stood a tall, thin man white as a yucca flower. And while he of the red beard bellowed and raged the white faced one pointed to the ring, tried to worm from the other's grasp.

The bull was set for his charge; the gray mare stood meekly with her blinded eyes.

With a sudden turn, a quick jerk, the white faced man broke free, leaped, scrambled over the heads of the Mexicans in front, reached the ground.

And the bull charged.

A high, shrill whistle sounded. The gray beneath the picador tossed her head, danced. And the toss of her head with a gust of wind lifted the faulty blindfold for a second. From one eye the gray saw a charging red flash. She leaped aside, as only a cow pony could. The bull whipped past, missed her by an inch.

The crowd was hissing, the picador sawing at his reins while he jerked at the faulty blind. A matador engaged the bull, urged him back for another charge. And Red Ike still stood on his seat in the tenth row bellowing like a maddened stallion.

Again the picador poised his horse. Again the bull set himself for the charge.

And over the fence climbed a man, the tall, thin, white faced one who had leaped down from that tenth row—the man who had whistled but a few seconds before. Over the fence and into the ring, and even as he ran the bull was charging.

The stands gasped. The matadors froze in their tracks. Then the man, running full flight, leaped like a great cat. His out-stretched hand struck the gray on the muzzle, slapped her with a resounding clap. And she went back on her haunches even as the man sprawled, tried to catch himself—even as the bull shot into the picture, missed a rearing horse by inches, perked his head to one side, ripped a man's white flesh with a razor sharp horn, paused twenty feet away.

The picador sprawled in the sand, chattering like a monkey. Matadors ran from all directions. The stands ushered the bull fighters.

And none of them gave more than a passing glance at the gaudily dressed horseman who circled the ring, blew a blast on his bugle, led a column of soldiers round and round and finally bellowed, cat-called, threatened. Then two other Americanos were in the ring, one with a great red beard and the other with but one eye. And with them

swarmed Mexican police and soldiers by the score. Then through the mass of them leaped a fourth American, a tall, broad shouldered one with a gray mustache.

The Major shouted an order, bellowed it. Ten policemen leaped to obey. He roared another command in Spanish. A dozen soldiers drew their pistols. Shots rang out, echoed in the ring. The bull quivered, fell dying in the sand.

Matadors, picadors, bandilleros, even the muietero, gathered around the fallen picador who had' ridden the gray. And in their midst stood a very thin man, very tall and with a white, boyish face down which tears streamed as fierce sobs shook his thin body. While one arm hugged tight the quivering muzzle of the starved gray mare, scarred, marked and trembling, Jud's other arm hung limp, slit in its length in the bull's last charge.

Jud was sobbing like a baby, and the Major was waving them away, matadors and all, while he calmed their noisy anger with fluent Spanish.

"She's mine," Jud was shouting. "She's my Dawn horse! And no Mexican bull is going to kill her in any Juarez bull ring! Not if I have to fight every damned Spick in Mexico. She's mine, ain't you mine, Dawn baby?" And Dawn whickered softly and nuzzled Jud's wet cheek as a wise old mother would soothe her child.

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Hal Borland
Silver Dawn
1929

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