

Gold-Mounted Guns

by F. R. Buckley

Evening had fallen on Longhorn City. A hard-faced man walked down the main street and got a pony from the dozen hitched beside Tim Geogehan's general store. From the dark the hard-faced man heard himself called by name.

"Tommy!"

The hard-faced man made a very slight movement toward his low-slung belt. But it was a movement well known by the man in the shadows.

"Wait a minute!" the voice pleaded.

A moment later his hands upraised, a young man moved into the open.

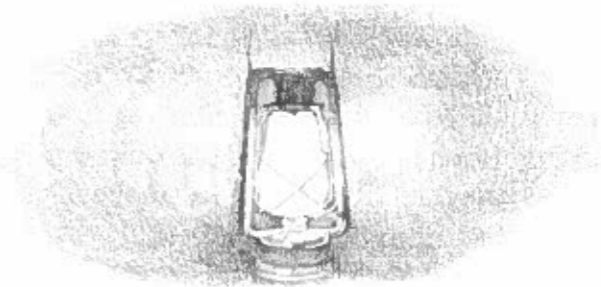
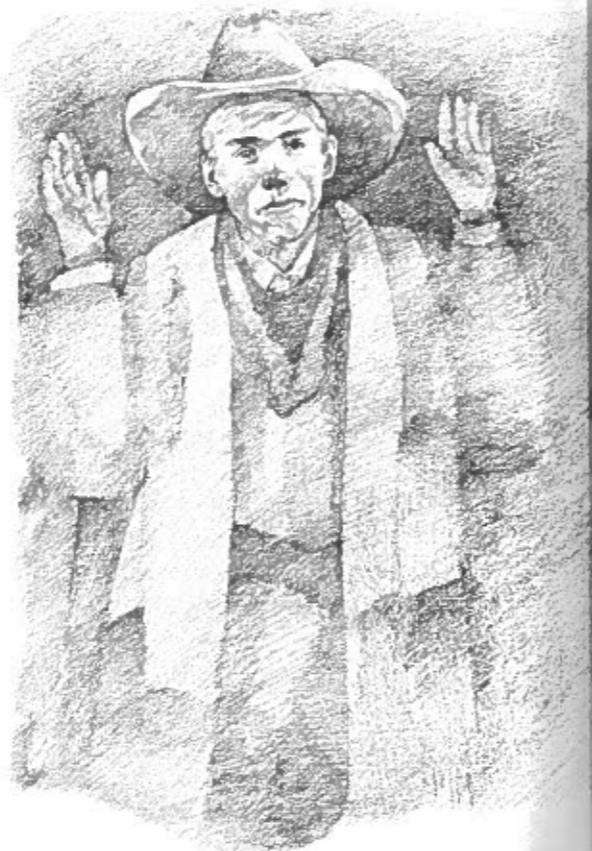
"Don't shoot," he said. "I'm a friend."

For perhaps fifteen seconds the newcomer and the hard-faced man looked at each other. Then the man with the gun said, "What do you want?"

"Can I put my hands down?" asked the other.

"All things being equal," he said, "I think I'd rather you'd first tell me how you got round to calling me Tommy. Been asking people in the street?"

"No," said the boy. "I only got into town this afternoon, and I ain't a fool anyway. I seen you ride in this afternoon. The way folks backed away from you made me wonder who you was. Then I see them gold-mounted guns, and of course I knew. Nobody ever had guns like them but Pecos



Tommy. I could have shot you while you was getting your horse, if I'd been that way inclined."

The lean man bit his moustache.

"Put 'em down. What do you want?"

"I want to join you."

"You want to *what*?"

"Yeah, I know it sounds foolish to you, maybe," said the young man. "But, listen—your sidekick's in jail down in Rosewell. I figured I could take his place—anyway, till he got out. I know I ain't got any record, but I can ride and I can shoot. And—I got a little job to bring into the firm to start with."

The lean man looked at him.

"Have, eh?" he asked, softly.

"It ain't anything like you go in for as a rule," said the boy, "but it's a roll of cash and—I guess it'll show you I'm straight. I only got on to it this afternoon. It's good I should meet you right now."

The lean man chewed his moustache. His eyes did not shift.

"Yeah," he said, slowly. "What you quitting punching for?"

"Sick of it."

"Figuring robbing trains is easier money?"

"No," said the young man, "I ain't. But I like a little spice in life. There ain't none in punching."



"Got a girl?" asked the lean man.

The boy shook his head.

"Well, what's the job?" he asked.

"If you're going to take me on," said the young man, "I can tell you while we're riding toward it. If you ain't, why, there's no need to go no further."

The older man slipped back into its holster the gold-mounted gun he had drawn. Then he turned his pony and mounted.

"Come on," he commanded.

Five minutes later the two had passed the limits of the town. Will Arblaster had given the **details** of his job to the man at his side.

"How do you know the old guy's got the money?"

"I saw him come out of the bank this afternoon, grinning all over his face and stuffing it into his pants pocket," said the boy. "And when he was gone, I kind of inquired who he was. His name's Sanderson, and he lives in this cabin about a mile ahead. Looked kind of a soft old geezer—kind that'd give up without any trouble. Must have been quite some cash there, judging by the size of the roll. But I guess when *you* ask him for it, he won't mind letting it go."

"I ain't going to ask him," said the lean man. "This is your job."

The boy hesitated.

"Well, if I do it right," he asked, "will you take me along with you sure?"

"Yeah—I'll take you along."

The two ponies rounded a shoulder of the hill. Before the riders there was the dark shape of a cabin, its windows unlighted. The lean man chuckled.

"He's out."

Will Arblaster swung off his horse.

"Maybe," he said, "but likely the money ain't. He started off home, and if he's had to go out again, likely he's hid the money someplace. Folks know *you're* about. I'm going to see."

He crept toward the house, and the darkness swallowed him. The lean man, sitting on his horse, motionless, heard the rap of knuckles on the door. A moment later there came the heavy **thud** of a shoulder against wood—

a cracking sound, and a crash as the door went down. The lean man's lips tightened. In the quiet, out there in the night, the man on the horse, twenty yards away, could hear the clumping of the other's boots on the rough board floor. A match scratched and sputtered. Then it was flung down. Running feet padded across the short grass, and Will Arblaster drew up, panting.

"Got it!" he gasped. "The old fool! Put it in a tea canister right on the mantelshelf. Enough to choke a horse! Feel it!"

The lean man, unemotional as ever, reached down and took the roll of money.

"Got another match?" he asked.

Willie struck one, and panting, watched while his companion, moistening a thumb, ruffled through the bills.

"Fifty tens," said the lean man. "Five hundred dollars. Guess I'll carry it."

The bills were **stowed** in a pocket of the belt right next to one of those gold-mounted guns which, earlier in the evening, had covered Willie Arblaster's heart.

"Let's get out of here," the younger urged. Now the hand grasped Will Arblaster's shoulder.

"No, not yet," he said quietly, "not just yet. Get on your horse and set still awhile."

The young man mounted. "What's the idea?"

"Why!" said the level voice at his right. "This is a kind of novelty to me. Robbing trains, you ain't got any chance to see results, like: this here's different. Figure this old guy'll be back pretty soon. I'd like to see what he does when he finds his wad's gone. Ought to be amusing!"

Arblaster chuckled uncertainly.

"Ain't he liable to—"

"He can't see us," said the lean man with a certain new cheerfulness in his tone. "And besides, he'll think we'd naturally be miles away; and besides that, we're mounted already."

"What's that?" whispered the young man, laying a hand on his companion's arm.

The other listened.

"Probably him," he said. "Now stay still."

There were two riders—by their voices, a man and a girl. They were laughing as they approached the rear of the house. They put up the horses. Then their words came clearer to the ears of the listeners, as they turned the corner of the building, walking toward the front door.

“I feel mean about it, anyhow,” said the girl’s voice. “You going on living here, Daddy, while—”

“Tut-tut-tut!” said the old man. “What’s five hundred to me? I ain’t never had that much in a lump, and shouldn’t know what to do with it if I had. ‘Sides, your Aunt Elviry didn’t give it to you for nothing. ‘If she wants to go to college,’ says she, ‘let her prove it by workin’. I’ll pay half, but she’s got to pay t’other half.’ Well, you worked, and—Where on earth did I put that key?”

There was a silence, broken by the grunts of the old man as he searched his pockets. Then the girl spoke: the tone of her voice was the more terrible for the restraint she was putting on it.

“Daddy—the—the—did you leave the money in the house?”

“Yes. What is it?” cried the old man.

“Daddy—the door’s broken down, and—”

There was a hoarse cry. Boot heels stumbled across the boards. Again a match flared. In one hand Pa Sanderson held the flickering match, in the other a tin box.

“Gone!” he cried in his cracked voice. “Gone!”

Willie Arblaster drew a breath through his teeth and moved uneasily in his saddle. Instantly a lean strong hand, with a grip like steel, fell on his wrist and grasped it. The man behind the hand chuckled.

“Listen!” he said.

“Daddy—Daddy—don’t take on so—please don’t,” came the girl’s voice. There was a scrape of chair legs on the floor as she forced the old man into his seat by the fireplace. He hunched there, his face in his hands. She struck a match and laid the flame to the wick of the lamp on the table. As it burned up she went back to her father, knelt by him, and threw her arms about his neck.

“Now, now, now!” she **pleaded**. “Now, Daddy, it’s all right. Don’t take on so. It’s all right.”



But he would not be comforted.

“I can’t replace it!” cried Pa Sanderson, dropping trembling hands from his face. “It’s gone! Two years you’ve been away from me; two years you’ve slaved in a store; and now I’ve—”

“Hush, hush!” the girl begged. “Now, Daddy—it’s all right. I can go on working and—”

With an effort, the old man got to his feet. “Two years more slavery, while some skunk drinks your money, gambles it—throws it away!” he cried. “Curse him! Whoever it is, curse him! Where’s the justice? What’s a man going to believe when years of scraping like your aunt done, and years of slaving like yours in Laredo there, and all our happiness today can be wiped out by a thief in a minute?”

The girl put her little hand over her father’s mouth.

“Don’t, Daddy,” she choked. “It only makes it worse. Come and lie down on your bed, and I’ll make you some coffee. Don’t cry, Daddy. Please.”

Gently she led the old man out of the circle of lamplight. The listeners could hear the sounds of weeping.

The lean man sniffed, chuckled, and pulled his bridle.

“Some circus!” he said appreciatively. “C’mon, boy.”

His horse moved a few paces, but Will Arblaster’s did not. The lean man turned in his saddle.

“Ain’t you coming?” he asked.

For ten seconds, perhaps, the boy made no answer. Then he urged his pony forward until it stood side by side with his companion’s.

"No," he said. "And—and I ain't going to take that money, neither."
"Huh?"

The voice was slow and meditative.

"Don't know as ever I figured what this game meant," he said. "Always seemed to me that all the hardships was on the stick-up man's side—getting shot at and chased and so on. Kind of fun, at that. Never thought about—old men crying."

"That ain't my fault," said the lean man.

"No," said Will Arblaster, still very slowly. "But I'm going to take that money back. You didn't have no trouble getting it, so you don't lose nothing."

"Suppose I say I won't let go of it?" suggested the lean man with a sneer.

"Then," snarled Arblaster, "I'll blow your head off and take it! Don't you move, you! I've got you covered. I'll take the money out myself."

His revolver muzzle under his companion's nose, he snapped open the pocket of the belt and took out the roll of bills. Then he swung off his horse and shambled into the lighted doorway of the cabin. The lean man sat perfectly still.

It was a full ten minutes before Will Arblaster came back alone. He stumbled forward through the darkness toward his horse. Still the lean man did not move.

"I'm—sorry," said the boy as he mounted. "But—"

"I ain't," said the lean man quietly. "What do you think I made you stay and watch for, you young fool?"

The boy made no reply. Suddenly the hair prickled on the back of his neck and his jaw fell.

"Say," he demanded hoarsely at last. "Ain't you Pecos Tommy?"

The lean man's answer was a short laugh.

"But you got his guns, and the people in Longhorn all kind of fell back!" the boy cried. "If you ain't him, who are you?"

The moon had drifted from behind a cloud. It flung a ray of light across the face of the lean man as he turned it, narrow-eyed, toward Arblaster.

"Why," said the lean man dryly, "I'm the sheriff that killed him yesterday. Let's be riding back."

GETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY. Complete each of the following sentences by putting an x in the box next to the correct answer. Each sentence helps you get the meaning of the story.

1. Will Arblaster thought that the lean man was Pecos Tommy because the man
 a. looked like Pecos Tommy.
 b. said he was Pecos Tommy.
 c. was wearing Pecos Tommy's gold-mounted guns.
2. Will Arblaster knew that Pa Sanderson had a roll of cash because
 a. Will saw him come out of the bank with it.
 b. Pa Sanderson always carried a lot of money with him.
 c. Will heard that Sanderson was planning to give his daughter the cash.
3. After Will took the money, the lean man insisted that they
 a. get away from there quickly.
 b. stay and watch to see what would happen.
 c. think of how to spend the cash.
4. At the end of the story, Will decided to
 a. give the money back.
 b. join Pecos Tommy's gang.
 c. force the lean man to turn himself in.

× 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

REVIEWING STORY ELEMENTS. Each of the following questions reviews your understanding of story elements. Put an x in the box next to the correct answer to each question.

1. What happened last in the *plot* of the story?
 a. The lean man announced that he was the sheriff.
 b. Pa Sanderson realized that the money was gone.
 c. Will Arblaster broke into the cabin.
2. Which sentence best *characterizes* Will Arblaster?
 a. He found life exciting and was happy with his job.
 b. He was afraid of being caught.
 c. He was not as cruel and heartless as he thought he was.
3. What is the *setting* of "Gold-Mounted Guns"?
 a. a city in the East
 b. a farm in the South
 c. the Old West
4. Pick the sentence which best tells the *theme* of the story.
 a. When a young man sees the pain he has caused others, he learns a lesson.
 b. A young woman cannot afford to go to school when her money is stolen.
 c. People cannot really change.

× 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS. Answer the following vocabulary questions by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. If you wish, look back at the words before you answer the questions.

- The lean man stowed the cash in a pocket of the belt. What is the meaning of the word *stowed*?
 - a. packed
 - b. lost
 - c. opened
- There was the heavy thud of a shoulder against wood—and a crash as the door went down. What is a *thud*?
 - a. a scream
 - b. a dull sound
 - c. a marching band
- Will Arblaster gave the lean man the details of the job he had planned. Which of the following best defines the word *details*?
 - a. rewards or prizes
 - b. best answers
 - c. small pieces of information
- “Daddy, it’s all right. Don’t take on so,” the young woman pleaded. The word *pleaded* means
 - a. urged strongly.
 - b. wondered about.
 - c. worked hard.

× 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

ADDING WORDS TO A PASSAGE. Complete the following paragraph by filling in each blank with one of the words listed in the box below. Each of the words appears in the story. Since there are five words and four blanks, one word in the group will not be used.

Life in the Old West was sometimes dangerous. Outlaws often decided to _____₁ together in gangs. These gangs robbed _____₂ and held up banks. There were few sheriffs and fewer jails. Often a _____₃ had to keep order in an area hundreds of miles in size. It was difficult, but after a _____₄, law was finally brought to the Old West.

hill	join
sheriff	
while	trains

× 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

THINKING ABOUT THE STORY. Each of the following questions will help you to think critically about the selection. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer.

- What would have happened if Will Arblaster had decided to ride off with the cash?
 - a. He would have escaped.
 - b. He would have become the lean man’s partner.
 - c. He would have been arrested by the sheriff.
- Why did the lean man make Will stay and watch?
 - a. He wanted Will to see the sadness and suffering he caused.
 - b. He thought that Will would think the scene was funny.
 - c. The lean man had no place to go and was not in a hurry to leave.
- How did Will feel when he saw what happened because he stole the cash?
 - a. He was very sorry.
 - b. He was pleased.
 - c. He didn’t care.
- How did the Sandersons probably feel after Will Arblaster left them?
 - a. angry for being so careless
 - b. amazed and delighted
 - c. afraid that he would return

× 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

Thinking More about the Story. Your teacher might want you to write your answers.

- At the beginning of the story, Will Arblaster thought that the lean man was Pecos Tommy. Why didn’t the lean man tell Will that he was the sheriff then?
- Will asked the lean man, “If I do the job right, will you take me along?” The lean man answered: “Yeah—I’ll take you along.” What did he *really* mean by this answer? Explain.
- His experience with the sheriff changed Will’s life forever. Do you agree with this statement? Give reasons to support your answer.

Use the boxes below to total your scores for the exercises.

<input type="text"/>	+	G ETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY
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▼ **Score Total:** Story 15

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