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GENE AUTRY

COMICS



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Gene Autry and Champ

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Gene Autry

and the joker

ON HIS WAY TO THE SWINGING-M RANCH, OWNED BY HIS OLD FRIEND, ALEC MEFFORD, GENE AUTRY STOPS IN GRIZZLY PASS FOR A BITE TO EAT.

YOU KNOW, CHAMP, I'VE GOT A HUNCH ALEC'S GOIN' TO BE SURPRISED TO SEE US SO SOON!

BUT WHEN AN OLD PAL'S IN TROUBLE, WE DON'T MIND HITTIN' THE TRAIL DAY AN' NIGHT TO GET TO HIM, DO WE, BOY?

AT THAT MOMENT, NOT FAR AWAY..

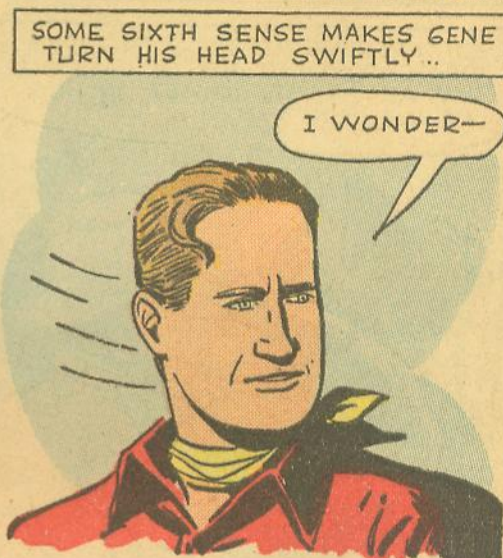
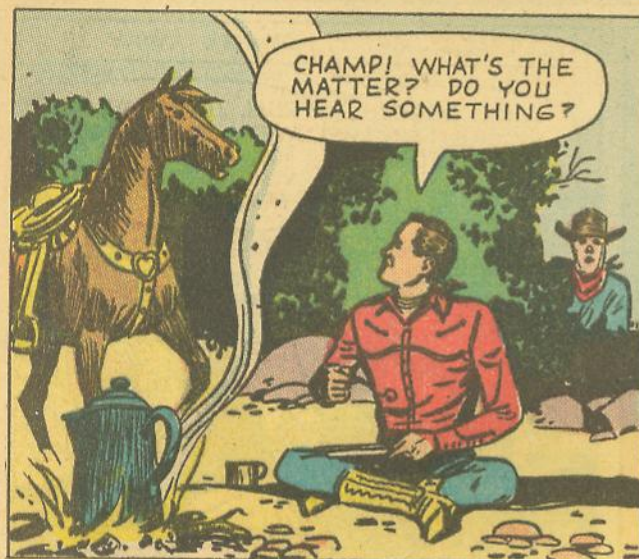
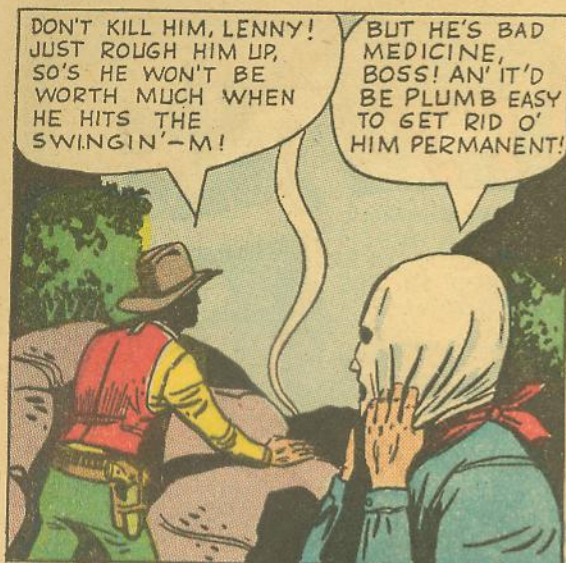
LOOK, BOSS! SMOKE! FROM A CAMPFIRE!

PULL UP, LENNY! WE'LL SNEAK DOWN FOR A LOOK AT WHOEVER BUILT THAT FIRE!

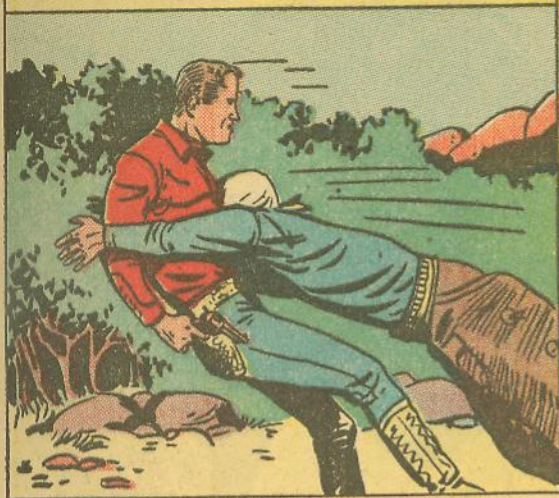
BOSS! MAYBE IT'S AUTRY!

IF IT IS, HIS HORSE MUST HAVE WINGS! IT'S ONLY THREE DAYS SINCE WE OVERHEARD ALEC TALKIN' ABOUT 'SENDIN' FOR HIM!

BLAST ME, IT IS AUTRY! QUICK! GET ON YOUR MASK! WE'LL GIVE THAT JASPER SOMETHIN' TO THINK ABOUT!



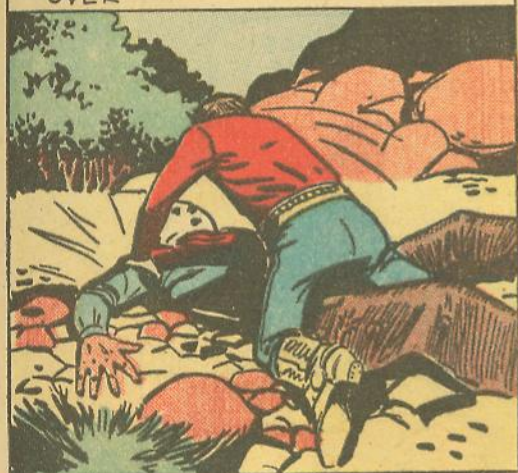
GENE GOES FOR HIS GUN, BUT LENNY MOVES LIGHTNING-FAST...



OOMPH!



USING EVERY OUNCE OF STRENGTH, GENE ROLLS THE BIGGER MAN OVER —



BUT IS INSTANTLY THROWN OFF...



HMMM! HE'S OUT COLD! MUSTA HIT HIS HEAD ON THAT ROCK!



RECKON IF I BUSTED HIS GUN ARM, HE WOULDN'T BE MUCH HELP TO MEFFORD!



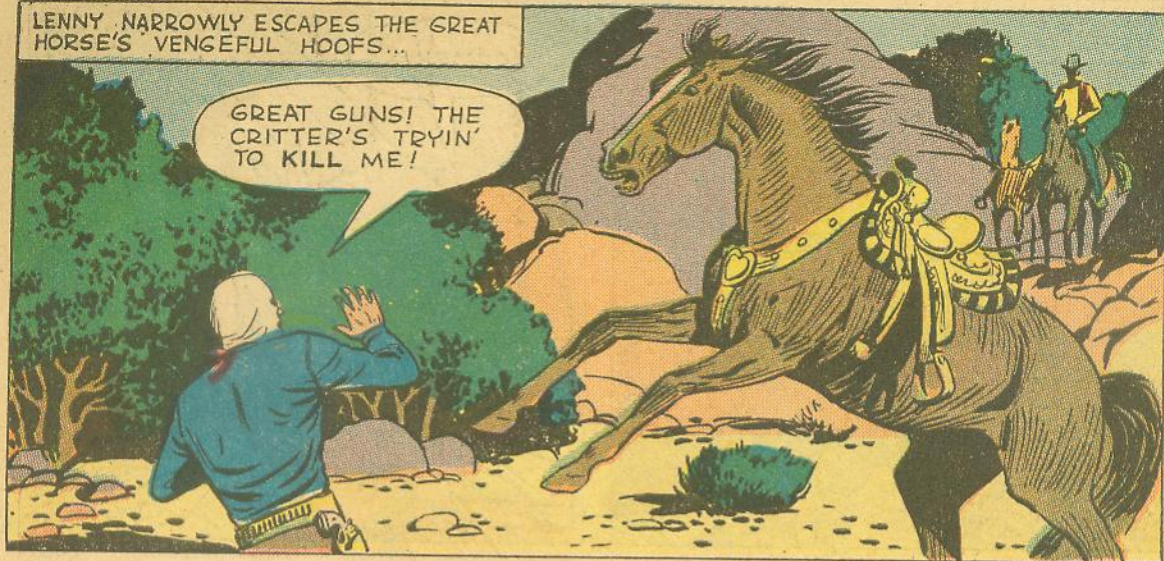
AT THAT MOMENT, CHAMP GOES INTO ACTION...

EEE-YOW!



LENNY NARROWLY ESCAPES THE GREAT HORSE'S VENGEFUL HOOFES...

GREAT GUNS! THE CRITTER'S TRYIN' TO KILL ME!



LENNY! GET OUTA THERE! PRONTO!

NOT TILL I DRILL THIS ORNERY KILLER!



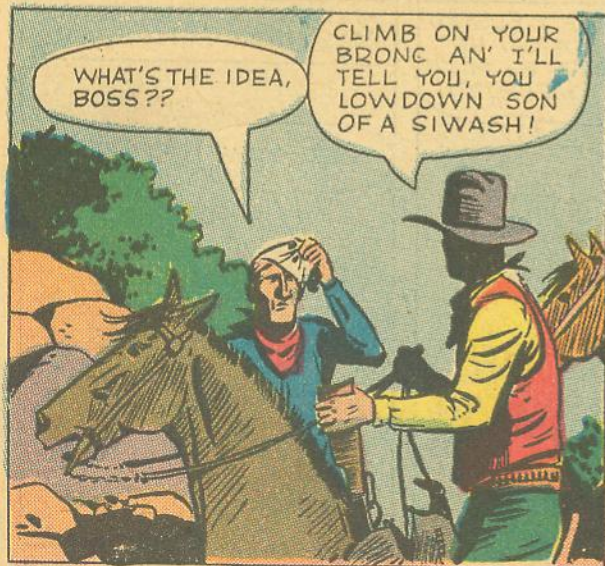
YOU PLUG THAT HORSE AN' I'LL DROP YOU IN YOUR TRACKS!

TAKE IT EASY, BOSS! I'M GIVIN' UP THE NOTION — RIGHT NOW!

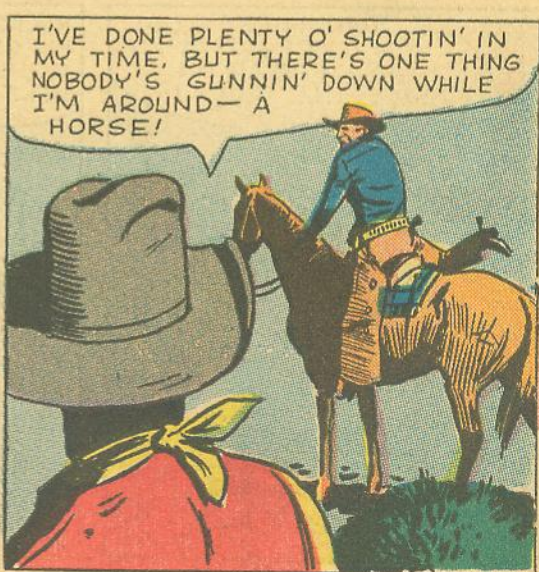


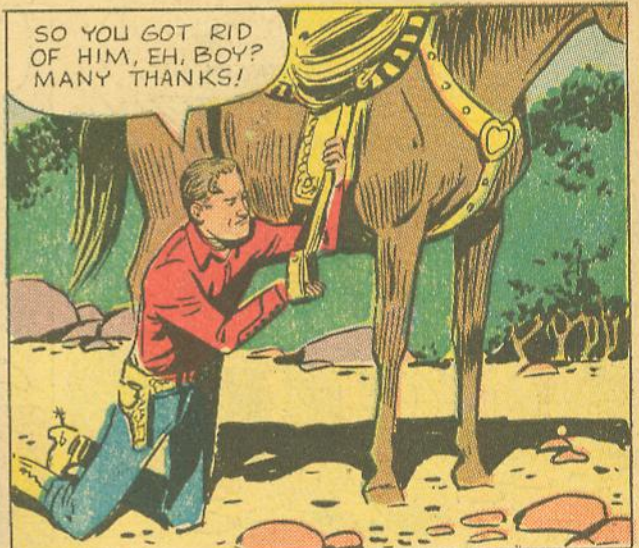
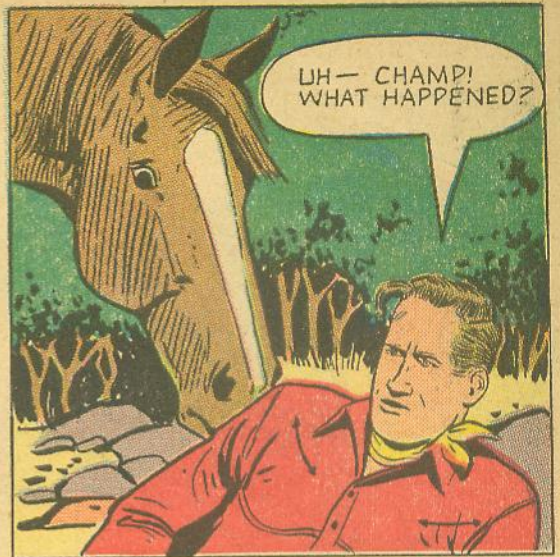
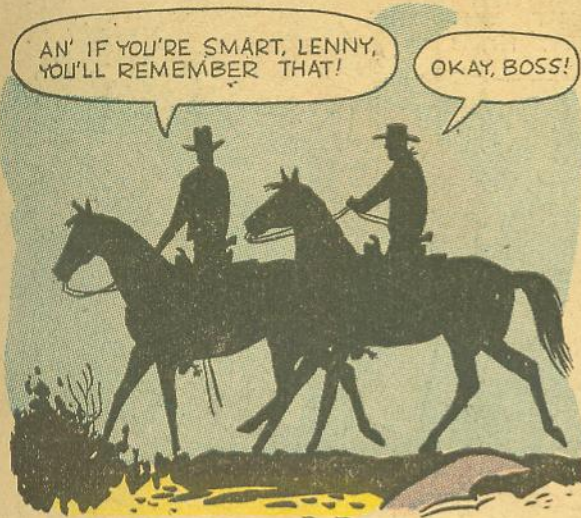
WHAT'S THE IDEA, BOSS??

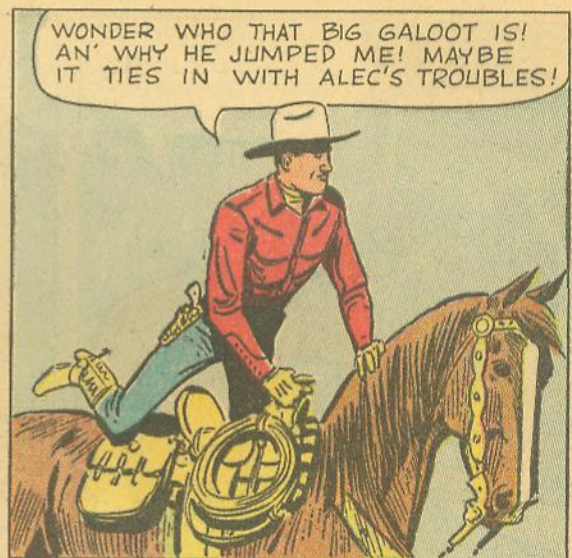
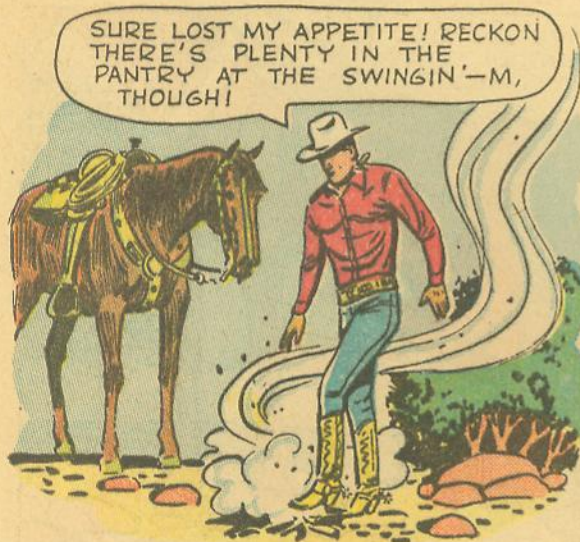
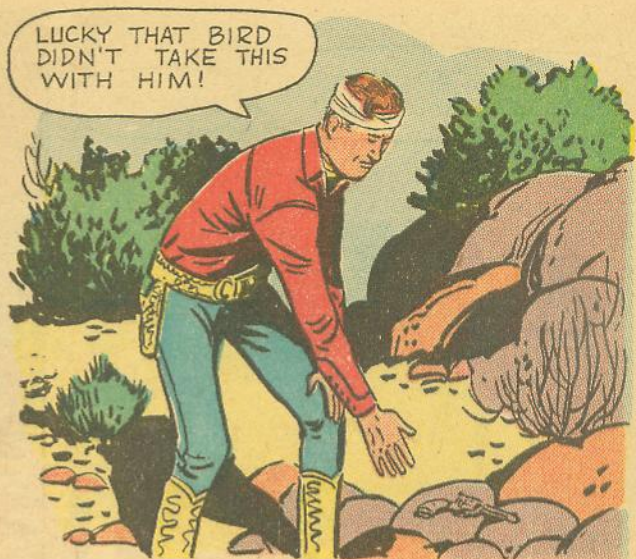
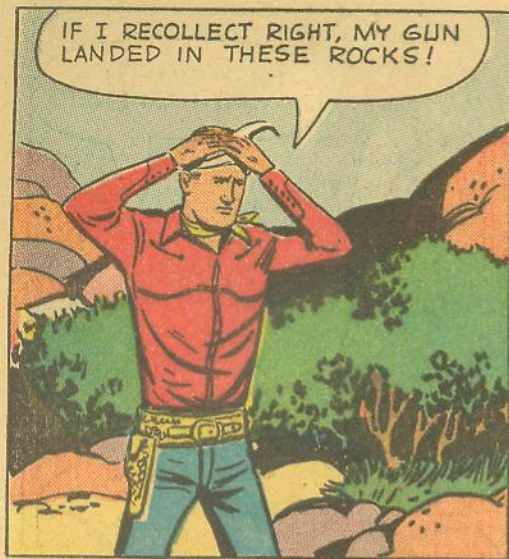
CLIMB ON YOUR BRONC AN' I'LL TELL YOU, YOU LOWDOWN SON OF A SIWASH!



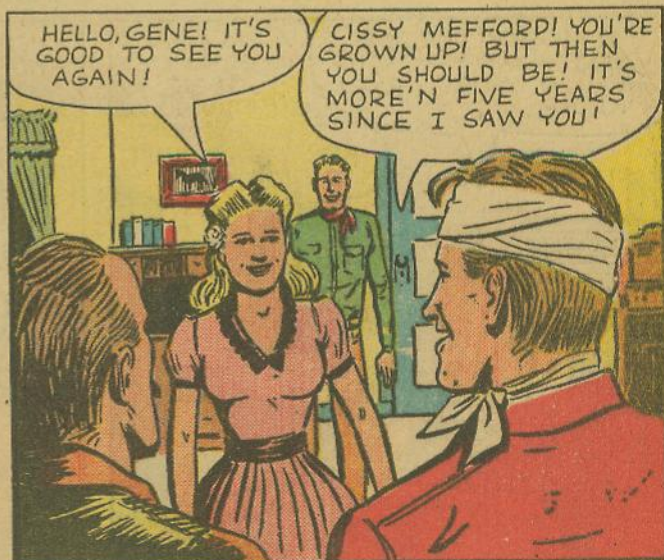
I'VE DONE PLENTY O' SHOOTIN' IN MY TIME, BUT THERE'S ONE THING NOBODY'S GUNNIN' DOWN WHILE I'M AROUND — A HORSE!

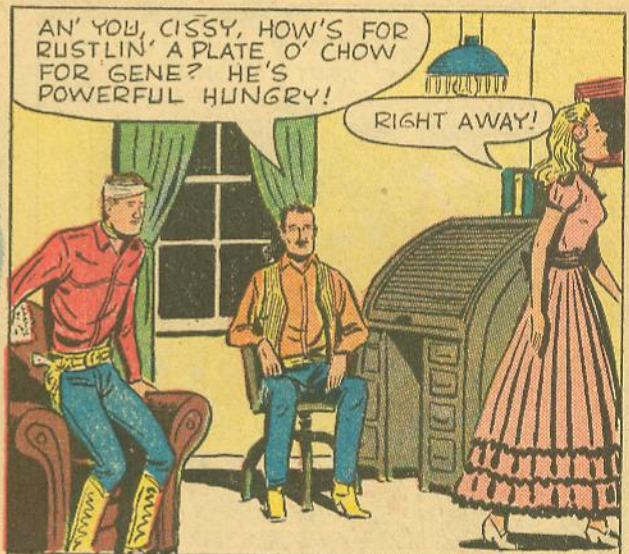


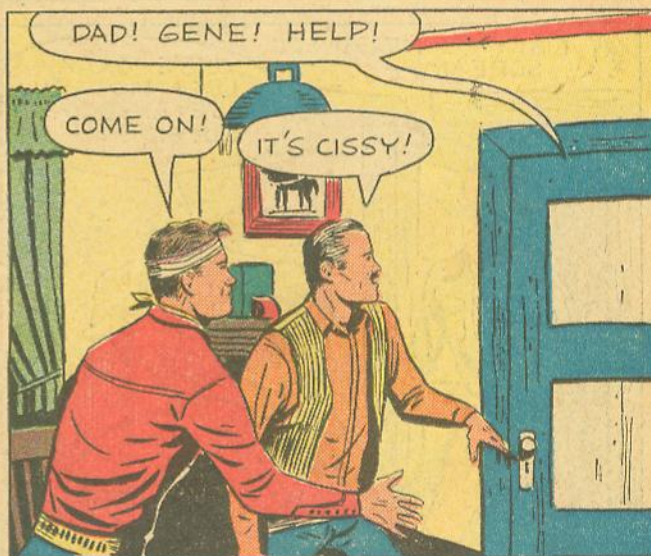
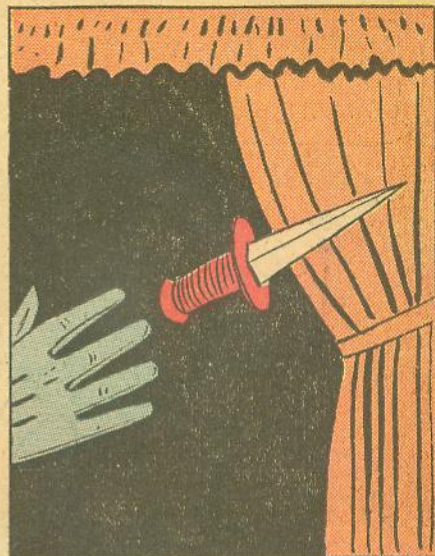
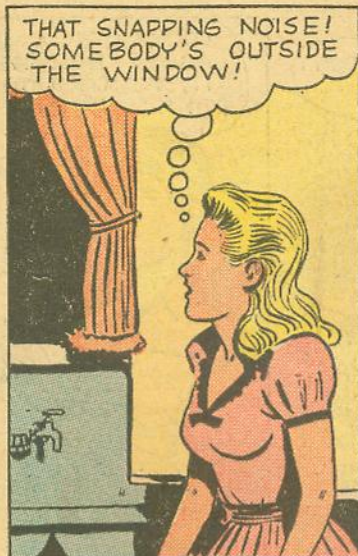


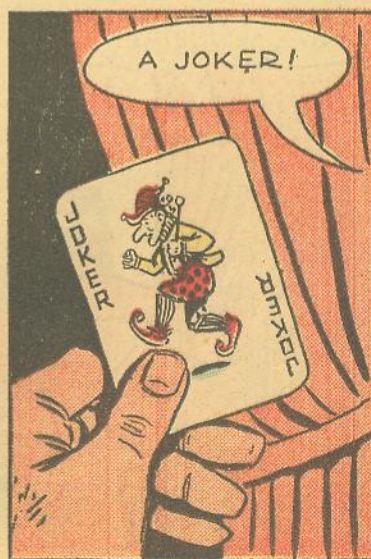


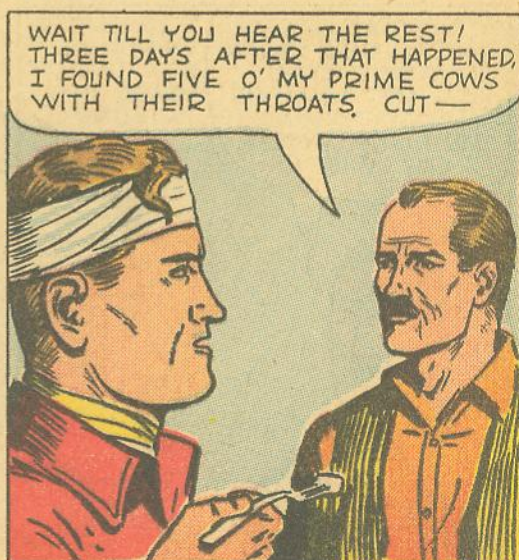
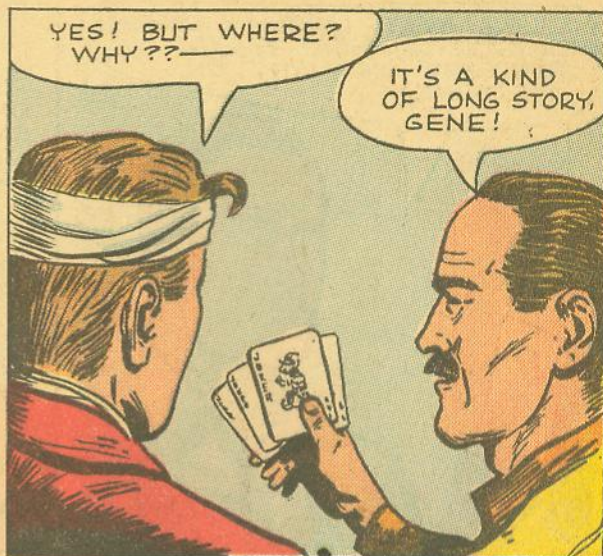
INSIDE THE RANCH HOUSE...











COUPLA NIGHTS LATER, MY FOREMAN,
BUCK TUTTLE, DISAPPEARED!
THIS CARD WAS LYIN' ON
HIS BUNK!



THEN MY SILO BURNED! AN' ONE O' MY
NIGHT HERDERS WAS STRANGLED!
A DOZEN STEERS WERE
POISONED! AN' EVERY TIME,
ONE O' THESE DANGED
CARDS WAS LYIN' NEAR
AT HAND!



WE'VE GOTTEN TO CALLIN' THE
MURDERIN' VARMIN'T "THE JOKER,"
FOR WANT OF ANY OTHER NAME! I
SURE DON'T SAVVY WHY HE WANTS
VENGEANCE ON ME!



ONLY ONE MAN EVER SWORE THAT! FRED
STOKES! BUT SINCE HE GOT KILLED,
I DIDN'T THINK I HAD AN ENEMY
IN THE WORLD!



FRED STOKES?
SOUNDS KINDA
FAMILIAR!

IT OUGHTA! HE WAS
MY PARTNER BACK
IN DODGE CITY!
YOU MET HIM! HE
ALMOST ROBBED
ME BLIND AFORE
I GOT WISE!

I REMEMBER!
DIDN'T HE
GET TWENTY
YEARS IN
PRISON?

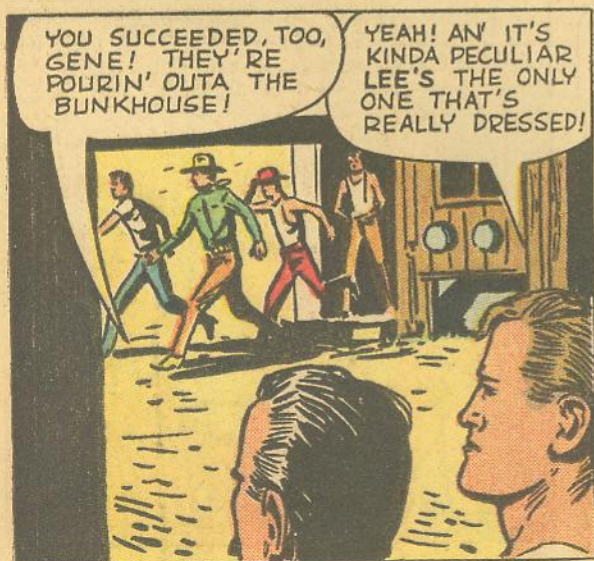
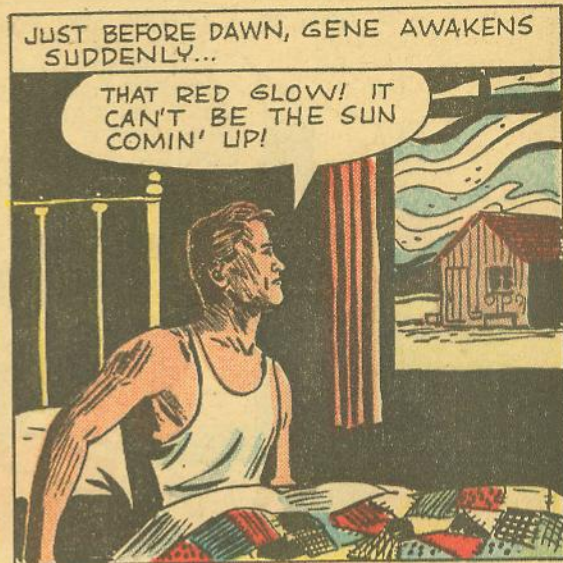


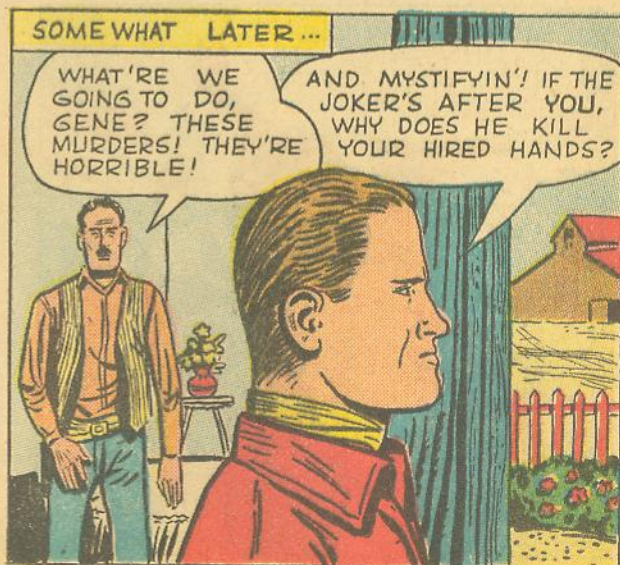
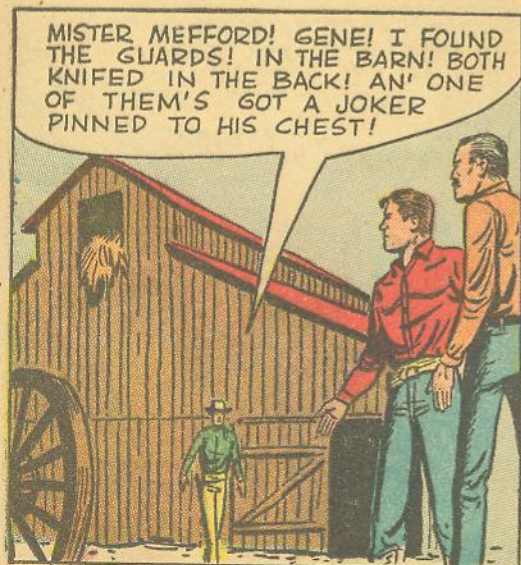
TWENTY-FIVE! HE ESCAPED AFTER SERVIN'
SIX! TWO YEARS AGO, HE GOT KILLED
IN A TRAIN WRECK! I'M SURE O' THAT
'CAUSE I IDENTIFIED HIS BELONGIN'S!



RECKON THAT
RULES HIM
OUT THEN!

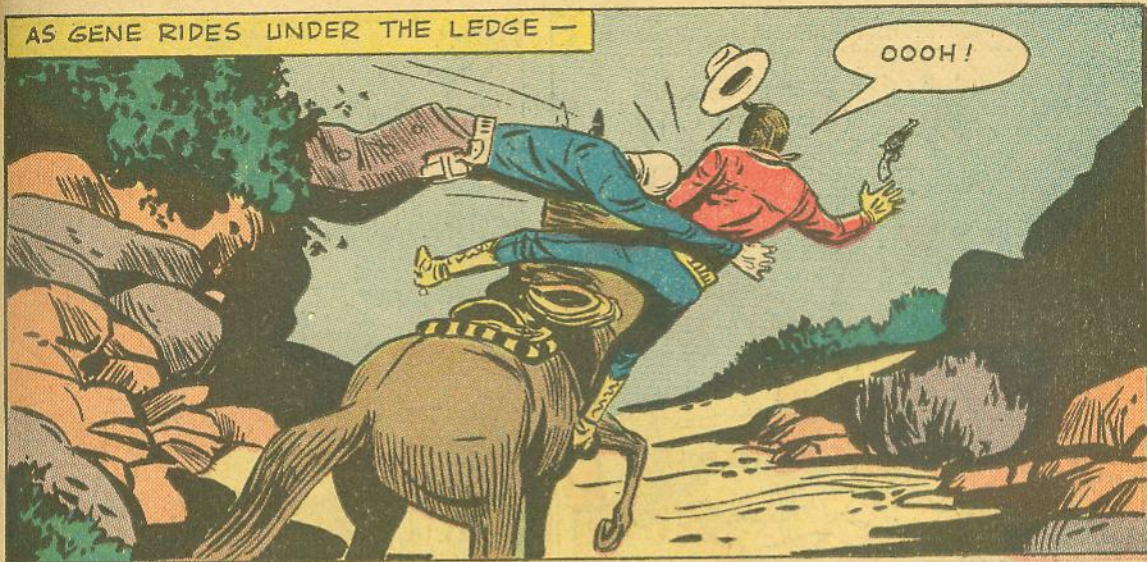








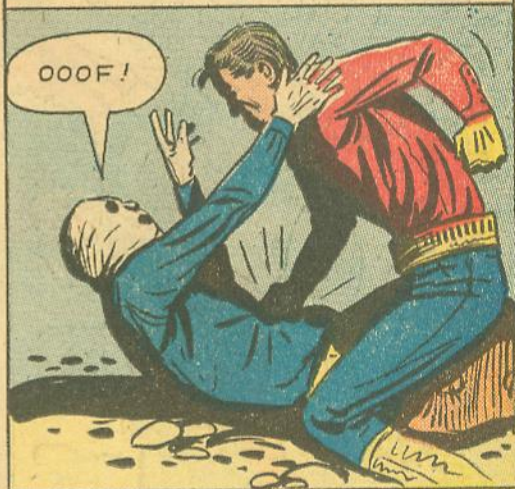
AS GENE RIDES UNDER THE LEDGE —



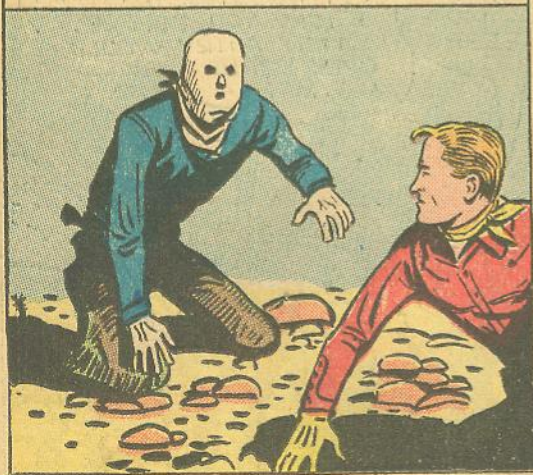
AGAIN GENE FINDS HIMSELF UNARMED
AND BATTLING THE MASKED MAN...



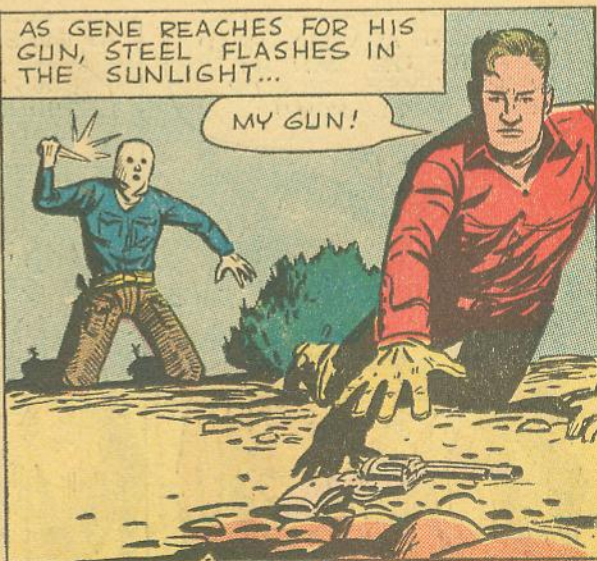
GENE LANDS A SAVAGE SOLAR
PLEXUS BLOW —



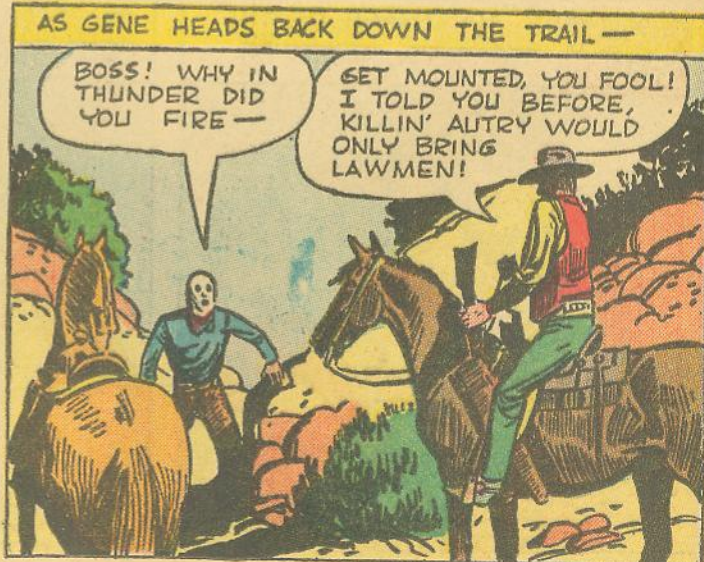
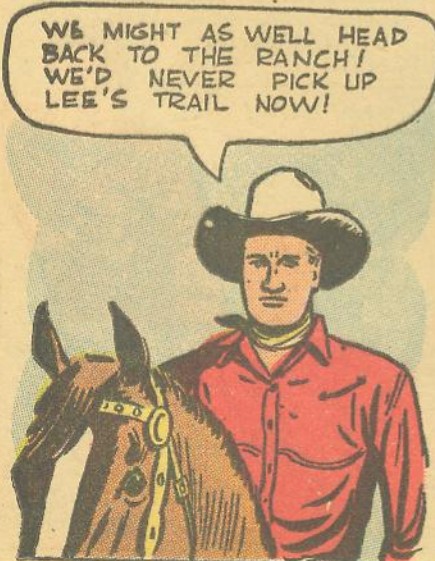
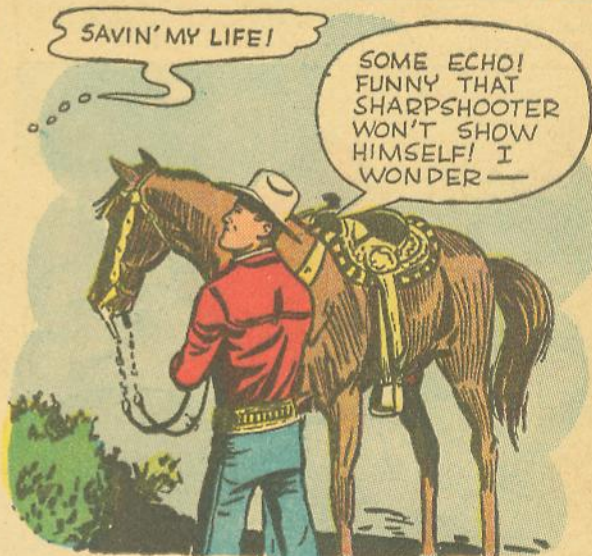
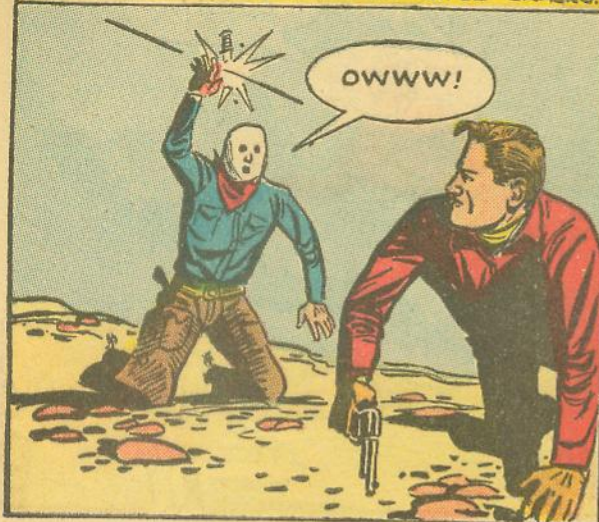
AND TAKES ADVANTAGE OF THE
OTHER'S SUDDENLY RELAXED
GRIP...

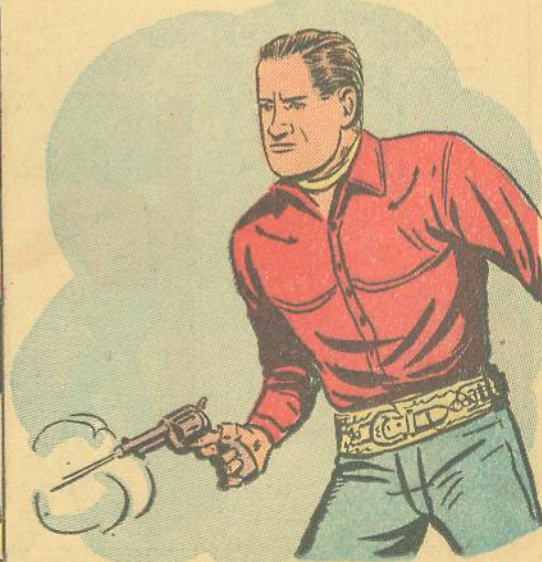
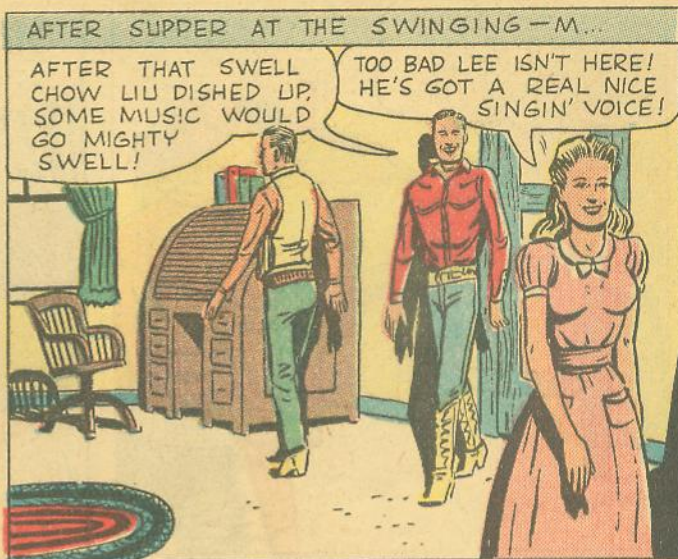


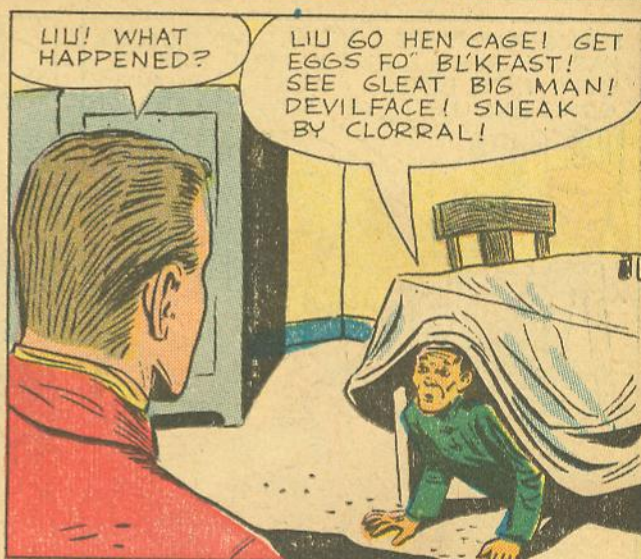
AS GENE REACHES FOR HIS
GUN, STEEL FLASHES IN
THE SUNLIGHT...

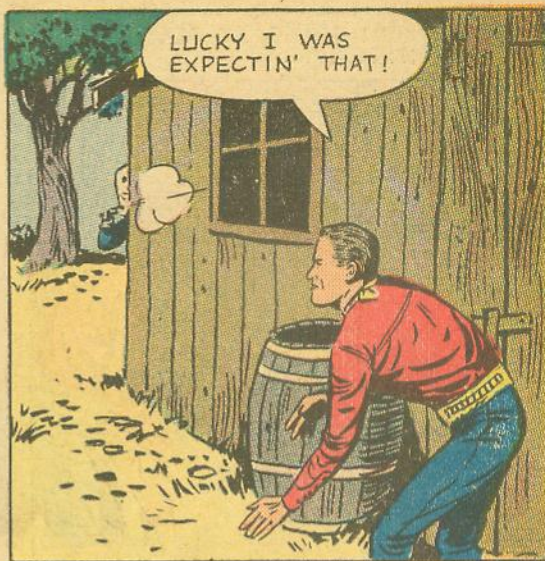


AT THAT MOMENT, A HIDDEN RIFLE CRACKS.

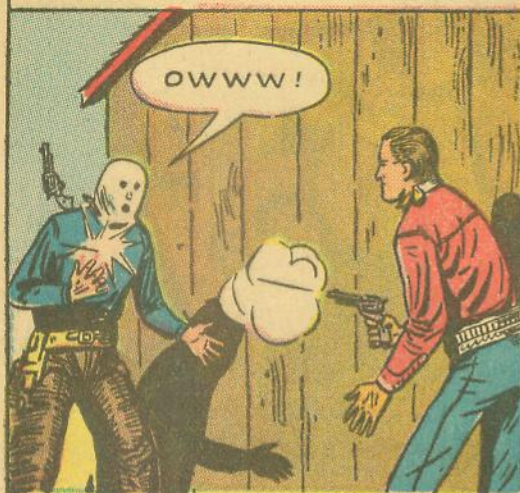








GENE'S GUN BARKS AT ALMOST THE SAME INSTANT...



WITH AMAZING SPEED, LENNY TAKES OFF...

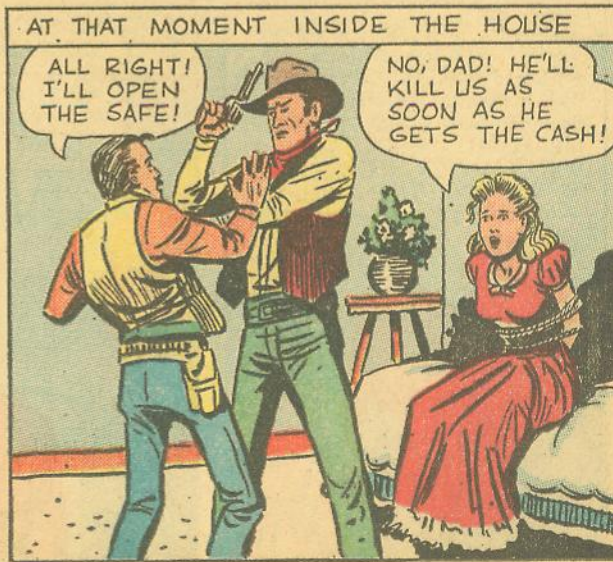
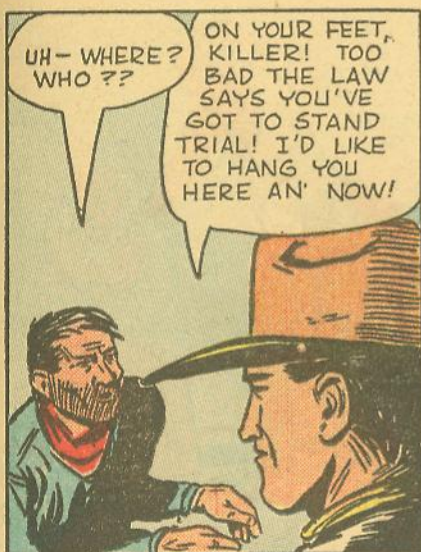
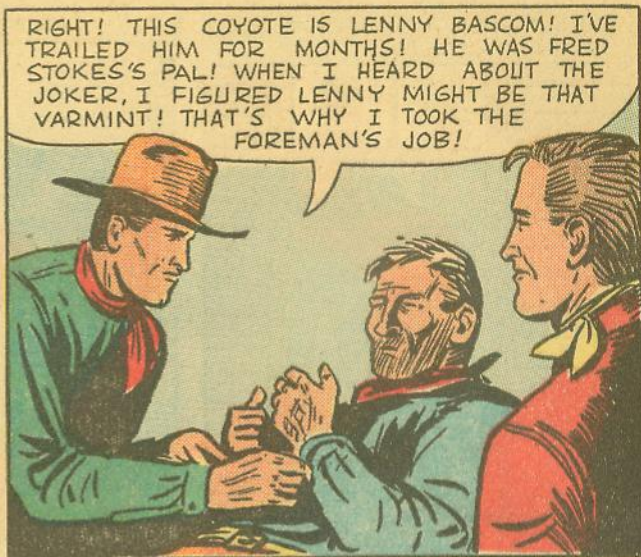


DUCKING UNDER LENNY'S GUARD, GENE LANDS A KNOCKOUT PUNCH...

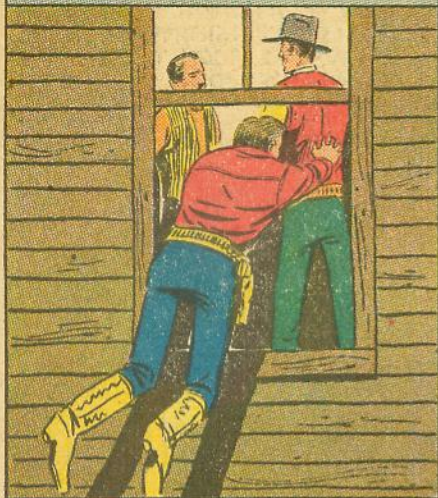


A STRANGER!
I WAS WRONG
ABOUT LEE!

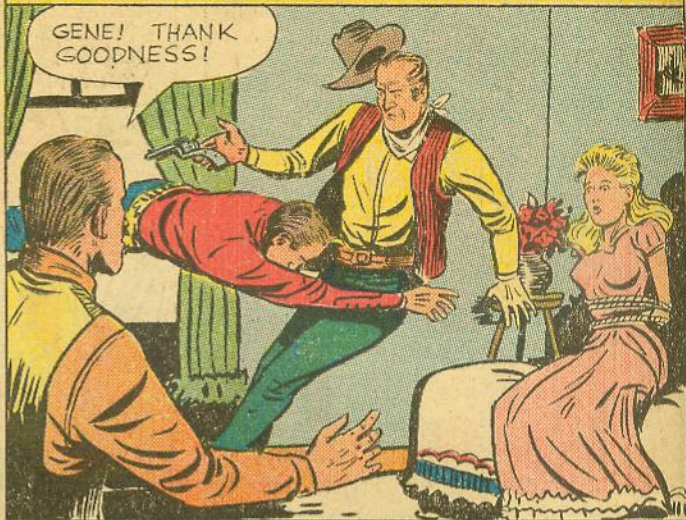




GENE PLUNGES THROUGH THE WINDOW —



AND CATCHES THE JOKER BY SURPRISE!



LOOKS LIKE YOU BEAT ME TO NABBIN' THESE GUNNIES, GENE! BUT NO HARD FEELIN'S! ANYWAY, THE JOKER'S PLAYED HIS LAST HAND!



THAT LOWDOWN POLECAT IS FRED STOKES! HE MUST'VE BEEN IN THAT WRECK AN' SWITCHED CLOTHES WITH A DEAD HOMBRE SO'S I'D THINK HE GOT KILLED!



LATER

THE SHERIFF'S TAKIN' THOSE BIRDS TO JAIL! STOKES SAYS HE DID ALL THOSE THINGS TO DRIVE YOU LOCO, MISTER MEFFORD! WHEN THEY DIDN'T WORK, HE DECIDED TO ROB YOU, THEN KILL YOU AN' CISSY!



I FOUND BUCK TUTTLE'S BODY TODAY! IN THE HILLS!

SO THAT'S WHERE YOU WERE HEADIN' TODAY!



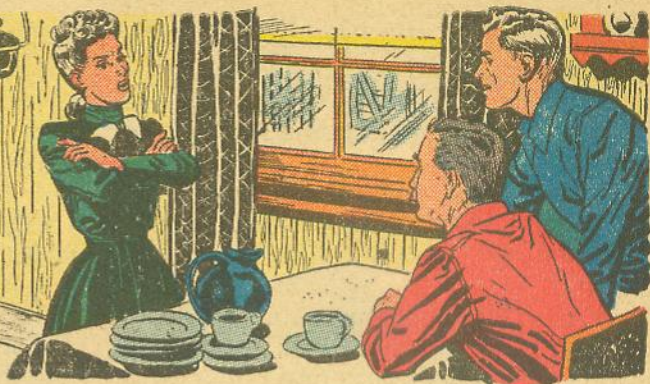
YUP— SAY, GENE, HOW ABOUT STICKIN' AROUND A FEW DAYS? I'VE GOT A HUNCH I'LL BE NEEDIN' A BEST MAN!

GLAD TO OBLIGE, LEE! NOW THAT THE JOKER'S NOT RUNNIN' WILD ANY MORE!



PLUMB SCAIRT

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The first rays of the rising sun were probing the corners of the kitchen when Sheriff Eben Daly drained his coffee cup, pushed back his chair, and stood up. He frowned across the table at his broad-shouldered son. "Well, Ted, if we're goin' after that murderin' owlhoot, Lefty Baxter, we'd better get movin'. I told the posse to be ready to ride at sunup."

"Uh, I don't reckon I'm goin' with the posse, Pa."

Eben's frown deepened. "Guess I didn't hear you right, Ted. Sounded like you said you weren't goin'."

"That's right." Ted glanced toward the fair-haired girl sitting at the end of the table. The girl's face was tense; a shadow of fear lurked in her lupine-blue eyes. He looked back at his father. "More'n likely, we wouldn't get back for a coupla days. An' Claire's not feelin' too chipper. I kinda hate leavin' her alone that long."

Eben transferred his frown to his daughter-in-law. "She looks okay to me," he growled, turning back to Ted. "Why don't you be honest, son? Yore wife isn't sick. She's plumb scairt."

"I am not!" Claire was on her feet, eyes blazing. "I'm just as brave as any other woman in Red Rock!"

Eben's lip curled derisively. "Then why do you jump outa yore skin every time a gopher pokes his nose outa the ground? An' turn white when you see a harmless grass snake? Not scairt, eh? Why, t'other day when a pint-sized lizard run across the floor, you liketa yelled the roof offa the house."

Claire reddened at the truth of his words. "I'm not used to gophers and

snakes and lizards, Sheriff Daly. And they don't frighten me, they startle me."

"Humph!" Eben took his gunbelt from the back of his chair and buckled it around his waist. "Never thought I'd see the day when a Daly would be married to a girl that's scairt o' her own shadow."

Ted stood up, a little muscle bunching his jaw. "I don't like that kind o' talk about Claire, Pa. She—"

"Please keep still, Ted," Claire interrupted. "Your father and I might as well have this out, once and for all." She stepped in front of Eben, forcing him to look at her. "How do you know WHAT kind of a girl I am, Sheriff Daly? From the day I came into this house, four months ago, you've treated me as if I were a stranger."

"You are!" barked Eben.

"I'm your son's wife!"

"That don't make you kin to me!"

For fully twenty seconds, Claire stared at him without speaking. Then: "Thank goodness for that!" she said scathingly. "I'd detest being related to you. To my mind, you're the most cantankerous, stubborn, hide-bound individual I ever met! Just because I'm an Easterner and can't ride a horse or shoot a gun, you're always belittling me. If I didn't love Ted so much, I'd pack up and go back home on the next stage!" Quick, indignant steps took her across the kitchen. The back door slammed behind her.

"Of all things!" Eben gasped. "Such impudence! An' in my own house, too!"

"I'm only surprised Claire didn't blow up before this," said Ted. "The way you've picked on her an' —"

"Fiddlesticks!" Eben broke in. "I've just been tryin' to put some starch into her backbone."

Claire's face appeared at the open window. "That's a mighty lame excuse for making a body's life miserable, Sheriff!"

Briefly Eben looked as if he were going to answer her. But he turned away without speaking and yanked his hat from the wall peg. Jamming it on his head, he looked at Ted. "Well, son, are you comin' along?"

Before Ted could reply, Claire again spoke through the window. "He certainly is! Because if he doesn't, I AM leaving here! Today!"

Ted walked to the window and, for a long moment, looked into his wife's face. Then he reached for HIS gunbelt. "Okay, Pa. Reckon I've gotta help Claire prove somethin'. Let's get started."

It was late that afternoon when the posse, headed by Sheriff Eben Daly, picked up the trail of the outlaw, Lefty Baxter. And, to Ted's consternation, discovered that it led back to Red Rock.

"Golly Ned," he yelled at his father above the thunder of their horses' hoofs, "I sure hope Lefty hasn't got a notion o' gettin' you before you get him! If he shows up at the house an' Claire —"

"Quit gabblin'!" Eben interrupted. "An' ride!"

Ted was leading the posse when it swept into Red Rock's main street. Consequently, he was the first to pull in and stare, in horrified amazement, at the two people coming out of the Daly house. The one in front was the outlaw, Lefty Baxter, with his hands raised above his head. Behind him came Claire. In her hands was an old-fashioned revolver, its muzzle pointing squarely at Baxter's back.

Ted swung out of the saddle and raced toward the pair, drawing his gun as he ran. "It's okay, Claire!" he shouted. "I've got him covered."

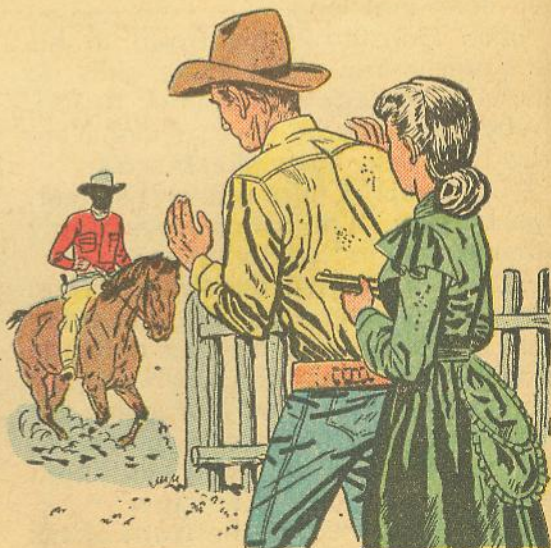
Slowly Claire lowered the revolver. Then a smile curved her lips as she looked past Ted at Eben who, with tautened features, was taking charge of Lefty. She said nothing, but linked her arm in Ted's and waited.

"Claire found Lefty hidin' in the pantry awhile ago," said Ted before his father could speak. "She recognized him from the reward picture but pretended to mistake him for an ordinary hobo. That got him off guard long enough for her to get Gramp's gun off the mantel an' —well, you know the rest."

Eben nodded and held out his hand. "If you'll let me, I'll take back the things I've said. I reckon you're the bravest woman in the whole blamed west—daughter."

Claire put her hand in his. "Thank you—father. But I only did what any other pioneer woman would do."

"Such impudence, contradictin' me!" Eben's voice was gruff, but his eyes were bright with affection and admiration. He reached for the old-fashioned revolver and broke it open. Ted gasped. But Eben paid no attention; he continued: "I don't know a woman—or a man, either—who'd have the gumption to go up against a gunslingin' outlaw with THIS gun! Land o' goshen, it hasn't been loaded since Gramp carried it in the Mexican War—more'n twenty years ago!"



The Pearls of Loretto

EVENIN', YOUNGSTERS!
GOT AN EXTRY
MARSHMALLOW
FOR ME?

SURE HAVE,
PANHANDLE
PETE! HERE'S
A FRESHLY
TOASTED ONE!

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WAIT, JANEY! DON'T
GIVE IT TO HIM TILL
HE PROMISES TO
TELL US A STORY!

A HOLDUP, HUH?
WAL, RECKON
I CAN DELIVER
OKAY...

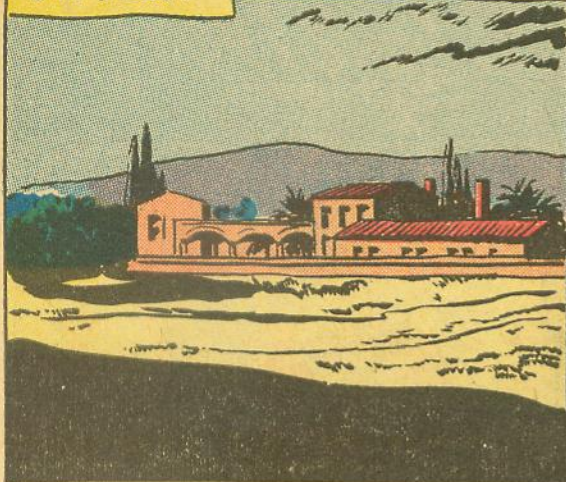
... IF YOU TWO KEEP ME
SUPPLIED WITH THESE
DEELICIOUS
FLUFF-DUFFS
WHILE I'M
A-SPINNIN'
IT!

I GOT A DIFFERENT KIND
O' LOST TREASURE YARN
TONIGHT! 'BOUT A
BEAUTIFUL SEÑORITA
AN' TH' PEARLS O'
LORETTO!

THAT SOUNDS
KINDA SISSIFIED
TO ME!

WAL, IT AIN'T! IT HAPPENED
WHEN CALIFORNY WAS PART
O' MEXICO! AN' LIFE WAS
CENTERED IN TH' GREAT
RANCHOS SPRAWLIN' FROM
TH' DESERT TO TH' SEA!

"ONE O' TH' BIGGEST AN' RICHEST O' TH' RANCHOS WAS NOT FAR FROM SAN DIEGO."



"IT BELONGED TO DON JULIO RAMIREZ WHOSE ONLY CHILD, YNEZ, WAS ABOUT TH' PRETTIEST GAL NORTH O' TH' RIO GRANDE."

YOU WISHED TO SEE ME, FATHER?

SI! ABOUT THE FIESTA NEXT WEEK! THERE WILL BE MANY CABALLEROS! FROM THEM YOU MUST CHOOSE A HUSBAND!



"AT THIS, YNEZ WAS KINDA MAD."

I DO NOT WISH TO MARRY! I AM YOUNG AND...

BUT I GROW OLD, YNEZ! ERE I DIE I MUST LEAVE THE RANCHO IN GOOD HANDS! YOU WILL OBEY!



"REALIZIN' HER PA MEANT WHAT HE SAID, YNEZ STORMED OFF TO HER ROOM."

I WILL NOT DO IT! MY FATHER IS AN OLD FOOL! I WILL THINK OF A WAY TO OUTWIT HIM!



"COME TH' NIGHT O' TH' FIESTA, YNEZ HAD FIGGERED OUT A PLAN AN' SHE SMILED WHILE WATCHIN' TH' DANCERS WITH A FAVORED SUITOR, DON MIQUEL."

YNEZ, IT IS TIME TO ANNOUNCE YOUR DECISION!



"AT TH' CLOSE O' TH' DANCE DON JULIO
CLAPPED FOR SILENCE."

AMIGOS! TONIGHT MY
DAUGHTER, YNEZ, HAS
AGREED TO CHOOSE A
HUSBAND FROM HER
MANY SUITORS!

I KNOW NOT WHOM TO
CHOOSE! SO I HAVE
DECIDED TO WED HIM
WHO BRINGS ME THE
PEARLS OF LORETTO!

"MOST O' TH' FOLKS WERE FLABBERGASTED
AT HER WORDS! BUT DON JULIO WAS PLUMB ANGRY!"

HAVE YOU LOST YOUR
SENSSES, YNEZ? THOSE
PEARLS ARE SACRED!
NO ONE WOULD DARE TO
STEAL THEM FOR YOU!

WHICH MEANS, MY
FATHER, THAT I
SHALL NEVER HAVE
TO MARRY!

"TH' OLD DON KNEW SHE'D TRICKED
HIM, BUT HE COULDN'T DO ANYTHING
ABOUT IT!"

YOU ARE
LEAVING,
DON MIQUEL?

SI, SEÑORITA! I
HAVE URGENT
BUSINESS!
UNTIL I
RETURN,
ADIOS!

"A FEW MINUTES LATER, DON MIQUEL AN'
HIS SERVANT, JOSE, RODE AWAY FROM
THE RANCHO."

WHERE DO WE
GO, DON MIQUEL?

TO LORETTO! TO
WIN A LADY'S HAND!

"THREE DAYS LATER THEY PULLED UP AT TH' LORETTO MISSION IN BAJA, CALIFORNY."

WELCOME, MY SONS!
WHAT BRINGS YOU
TO THIS MISSION?

I WISH TO
ATONE FOR
A GRIEVOUS
SIN BY PRAYING
ALL NIGHT IN
THE CHURCH,
PADRE!



"TH' GOOD PADRE BELIEVED MIQUEL'S YARN AN' PRAYED WITH HIM TILL MIDNIGHT."

SUCH MATCHLESS,
PRICELESS
PEARLS!
SMALL WONDER
SEÑORITA
YNEZ CRAVES
THEM!



"WHEN TH' PADRE LEFT TH' CHURCH,
MIQUEL STRUCK HIM DOWN."

DON MIQUEL! THE
DEED IS DONE!
HE HAS FALLEN!

BRING AROUND
THE HORSES! I
SHALL JOIN YOU
SHORTLY!



"WORKIN' AT TOP SPEED, MIQUEL
STRIPPED TH' SACRED STATUE OF
TH' PEARLS."



"JUST AS HE AN' JOSÉ WERE RIDIN'
AWAY, PADRE LUIS REVIVED AN' SAW
WHAT HAD BEEN DONE."

SOCORRO! THE SACRED
PEARLS ARE GONE!
ALL WHO TOUCH
THEM SHALL
PERISH!

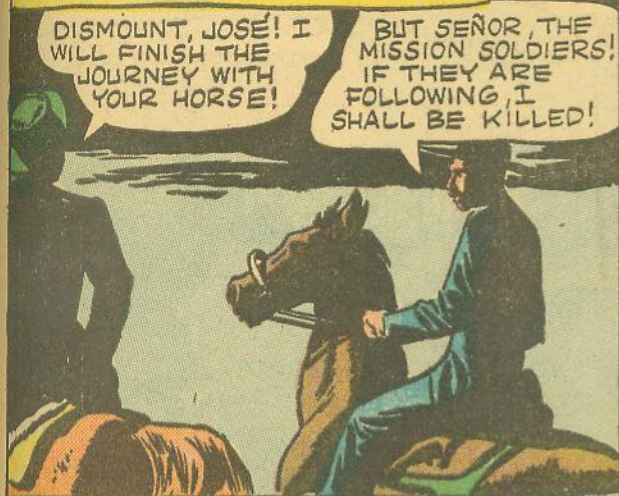


"DAY AN' NIGHT, MIQUEL AN' JOSÉ
RODE NORTH."

RIDE, JOSE!
ONCE ACROSS
THE BORDER
WE ARE
SAFE!



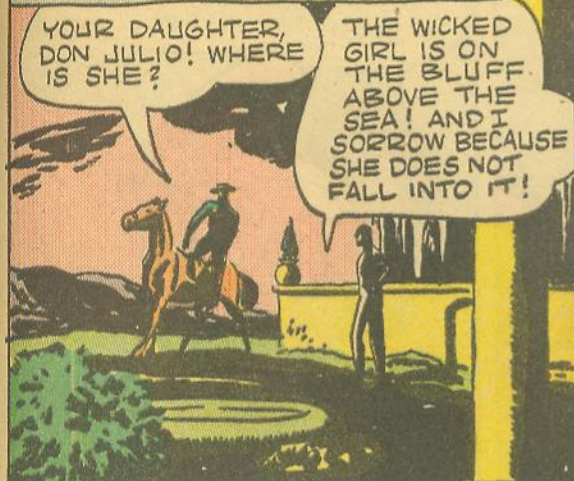
"JUST AS THEY CROSSED INTO CALIFORNIA, MIQUEL'S HORSE WENT LAME."



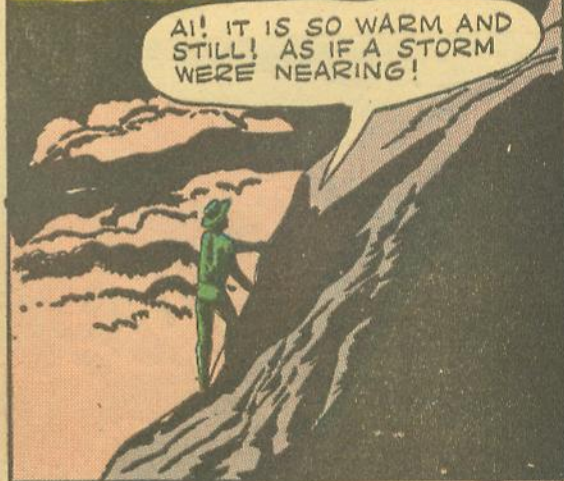
"MIQUEL LAUGHED AND MOUNTED JOSÉ'S HORSE."



"T'WAS NEAR SUNDOWN WHEN MIQUEL DISMOUNTED AT TH' RANCHO."



"DON MIQUEL MADE TRACKS UP TH' BLUFF."



"FINDIN' YNEZ, HE POURED TH' PEARLS INTO HER LAP."



"AFORE HIS VOICE DIED OUT, LIGHTNIN' SPLIT TH' SKY AN' TH' EARTH STARTED SHAKIN'!"

IT IS THE
WORLD'S END!
WE ARE DOOMED
BECAUSE YOU
STOLE THE
PEARLS!

NONSENSE! IT IS
ONLY AN EARTHQUAKE!
LET US HURRY TO
YOUR CASA!

"THEN TH' GROUND CRACKED OPEN WITH A
TERRIBLE ROAR AN' TH' WHOLE BLAMED
BLUFF SLID INTO TH' SEA!"

AN' NARY A SIGN O' YNEZ
OR DON MIQUEL OR TH'
PEARLS WAS EVER
FOUND!

GOSH, THAT
WAS SOME
STORY,
PANHANDLE
PETE!

DID IT REALLY
HAPPEN?

SEARCH ME! ALL I KNOW
IS THERE'S NO PEARLS
ON TH' LORETTO MISSION
STATUE ... AN' THAT'S
WHAT I HEERD
HAPPENED TO 'EM!

