

Jesse Owens-- 'What's Wrong With Our Athletes?'

# Bluebook

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FOR MEN

35c Feb.

True Book Bonus:  
At Last: The Facts Behind

**IWO JIMA**

Worst Scandal In Navy History

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Fiction Book Bonus:

A New **MILO MARCH** Adventure



Stories By:  
Pat Frank  
Hank Searls  
Ladislav Farago  
John D. MacDonald  
William Chamberlain



# Bluebook FOR MEN

Contents for February 1961

Vol. 100

No. 3

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Bluebook For Men is published bi-monthly by H. S. Publications, Inc., 152 West 42 Street, New York 36, N.Y. © 1960, H. S. Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. © under Universal, International and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Application to mail at second class postage rates is pending at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Single copy 35c. Yearly subscription (6 issues) \$2; two-year subscription (12 issues) \$4. Foreign subscription \$4 yearly. Four weeks notice is essential for change of address on subscriptions. When possible, please furnish stencil impression from a recent issue. Address changes can be made only if you send us your old, as well as your new address.

All material submitted will be given careful attention, but such material must be accompanied by sufficient postage for return and is submitted at the author's risk.  
Printed in U.S.A.

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# Epitaph For A

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By Andrew Robin

**S**LIM Maxwell slipped the sheepskin coat over his shoulders without buttoning it. In the two months since he had begun moving slowly southward from Montana's Yellowstone country, the days had been getting noticeably warmer. His frostbitten fingers still burned, and he had not as yet attained the speed he wanted in drawing a six-gun, but he noted improvement with each passing day.

Yet he knew he still was not ready for the meeting with Curly Bart.

As he sat his black mare now and felt the warming rays of the spring sun penetrate to his cheekbones, Maxwell, despite his aching fingers, whipped again and again to the .45 at his thigh, in repeated tests of his ability to cut the draw down to the fastest possible split-second. And still he knew it wasn't quite fast enough.

Curly Bart was faster, maybe even the fastest gunfighter, with the greatest degree of accuracy, in the entire west. He would not be a man who'd be taken by anyone with frostbitten fingers.

Maxwell paused now and made a cigarette, as for the thousandth time in the past three months he turned over in his mind the weird chain of events that again saw him bearing arms against an enemy.

He'd sworn, that day at Colfax Courthouse—when he'd been saluted for the last time as Major Henry Maxwell, Confederate States of America, that never again would he fight with his fellowman, no matter the incentive. My God, hadn't he had enough of killing, of rapine, of the smell of death!

It was not enough that he had come out of the war an old man at the age of 24, a man whose hair was now almost milk-white from experiences no one ventured to ask him about, and about which he knew he never could talk. As though that weren't enough, he had come back to find that chaos at Meadville, with the last remaining members of his family dead or scattered, the only home he'd ever known a charred hulk, and not even a whisper of sympathy from those who, before the war, had carried his favor for no other reason than because he was a Maxwell.

He grunted now as he sat in the saddle and turned his leathery face toward the warming sun. It had been this he had sought when he'd come west: a chance to be alone in this vast new country of Wyoming, to start again in a land where men were not master and slave, but human beings, equal in the sight of Almighty God,

and free to live their lives according to His plan.

Again Maxwell snorted, and viciously flung away his cigarette. Free? He'd had less than a year of freedom, less than a year of freedom, less than a year to do nothing but hunt, and fish, and loaf in the sun . . . and convince himself again and again of the futility of bloodshed. He'd met few individuals during that time. The other whites like himself preferred the activity of the trading posts rather than the solitude of the forests, and the occasional Cheyenne or Piute who'd crossed his trail had seemed to sense in the white-haired stranger a desire for privacy, a yearning to be left alone with whatever bitter thoughts had brought that look of wary suspicion to his steel-gray eyes.

He'd known, of course, that the peace he'd sought was not to be found easily. So long as the white men came, and took what they wanted from the Indian, there could be no peace. Maxwell acknowledged that, and solved his own personal problem the easy way—by staying far away from frontier battle lines.

Even the tales of the vicious Curly Bart, told to Maxwell by the occasional wanderer who drifted into his camp, stirred the white-haired man not a bit. He'd known other Curly Barts—sadists, bullies, wanton killers—during his few adult years, and to Slim Maxwell they were vermin whom one avoided as easily as one avoided a known nest of rattlesnakes.

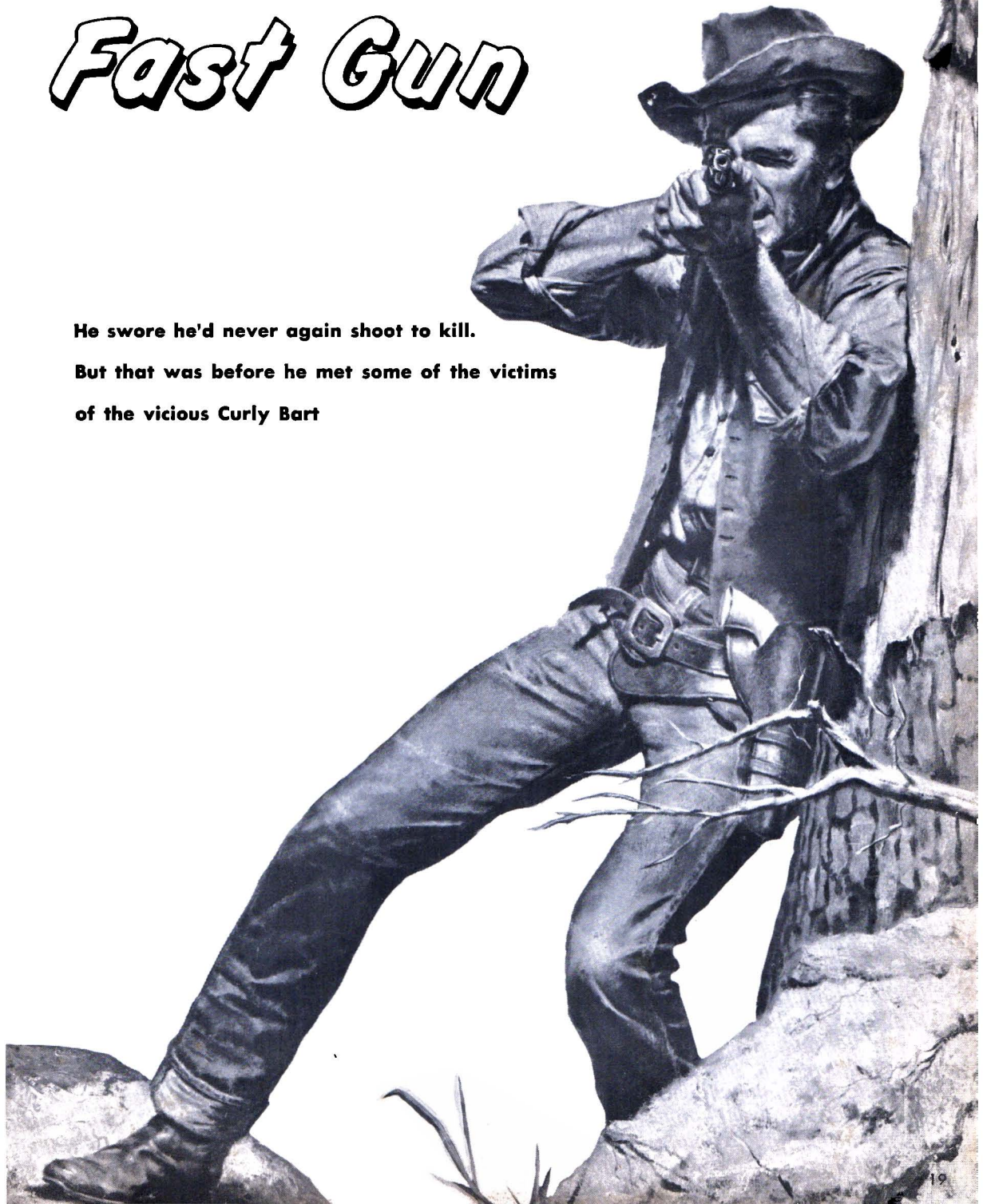
There had been no question in Maxwell's mind from what he heard that Bart was a man seemingly without a soul, an animal who walked and talked and breathed like a human being but who was, withal, a jackal. Even if only a tenth of the stories told about Bart were true, Maxwell knew, the man would stand as one of the most ruthless and savage killers who ever drew a breath.

Yet Slim Maxwell had remained unmoved. What did it matter that townspeople, sheriff's deputies—even other gunfighters—lowered their eyes in terror at the very name of Curly Bart? Maxwell had had his fill of Curly Barts, and all the horrible and frightening carnage their kind seemed to spawn. He preferred to avoid them, to live the life he had chosen for himself, where the Curly Barts of the world were nothing more than legends told by passing strangers.

Yet there had come that one stranger to his camp, a heavy-set rancher in his mid-forties, who had been able to change Slim Maxwell's life as he'd sworn no man ever would change it again. The newcomer had ridden in at sunset, accompanied by two (Continued on page 44)

# *Fast Gun*

**He swore he'd never again shoot to kill.  
But that was before he met some of the victims  
of the vicious Curly Bart**





# Fast Gun

Continued from page 19

other riders whom he introduced as his hands.

"Been trailing a pack of mad dogs," the rancher, who said his name was Caleb Saunders, told Maxwell over a tincup of hot coffee. "They been killing sheep and cattle all through here. Don't s'pose you've seen anything of them?"

"I've heard plenty of howling," Maxwell answered. "I figured it was coyotes."

Saunders sighed heavily. "I wish they was, but they just plumb ain't. They're wild dogs, all right. Came out of the Shoshone area; either Hoodoo Peak—that's the mountain there on the south—or Papoose Peak, the one on the right."

Maxwell let his eyes roam toward the distant mountain range, and shivered involuntarily; there was a coldness and an air of sinister foreboding to the mountains which he hadn't noticed before. At the same time, he acknowledged the havoc that could be spread among any settlement by an onslaught of rabid dogs.

"I'd be mighty obliged," he heard himself telling Saunders, "if you'd let me join your hunt. I'm just wandering, and . . . well, it may be I can help you out."

Saunders showed by the faintest trace of a smile at the corner of his mouth that he welcomed the slim, broad-shouldered camper's offer, and, without another word, Maxwell took from his saddle bag the rifle he'd kept wrapped in oiled rags, and which he'd convinced himself he'd never fire again.

They set out early the following morning. Slim Maxwell took the lead as they rode out of camp, and held it until they'd topped a rise stretching back from the long floor of the valley to the east. Then Saunders spurred his horse alongside Maxwell's black mare.

"Funny," he said. "You're younger'n I thought you were last night. I—well, the hair, I guess. But . . . well, I'll wager you're not even thirty yet?"

Maxwell smiled and said nothing, and instead offered the rancher his tobacco. It was almost the only conversation between them during the course of two full days in the saddle. Then, on the third day, one of Saunders' hands let out a shout—he'd come across a freshly-killed deer, froth still flecked on its tongue and the obvious look of an animal that had been dead but a very few minutes.

"Come on!" Saunders shouted, and spurred his horse. "They've got to be close by now."

Maxwell was at his side instantly. "Wait! We've got to bury this deer first. If we don't, the rats will be at it in no time, and you'll soon have the whole countryside sick with maddened animals."

Saunders stared at him in disbelief.

"Where'd you get that notion?" he asked.

"From an army doctor, a friend of mine. As he explained it, *any* animal—fox, bobcat, rat, or anything else—that touches meat killed by a mad dog will get the same madness. They call it hydrophobia. So why stop ten dogs, and let hundreds of others spread the same sickness?"

For a moment Saunders hesitated, then quickly dismounted.

"You're right," he said. "Come on, boys, let's start digging."

Two hours later the dead animal had been pushed into a broad hole, and its remains covered with dirt and heavy boulders, enough to keep even the hungriest packrat from getting to it. They'd lost valuable time, Maxwell admitted when they finished, but he assured them it had been worthwhile. His words, his every move, bespoke the authority ingrained in him, and the others seemed to sense it and automatically acknowledge his leadership.

"How you figger to take it from here?" Saunders asked.

Maxwell mounted and pulled his mare around. "We can't just go after these brutes without a plan," he said. "If they catch our scent, they'll attack us, and though we may get half of them, the others'll get us. We've got to work out some way to trap them."

The others nodded, and indicated their willingness to follow Maxwell in whatever plan he devised.

"Let's stick to the timberline," he told them. "That way, if we can lure the dogs to us—say with fresh-killed meat—we can pick them off from high ground before they can get to us."

It was the best plan, and the others knew it; and so simple was it that it worked without a hitch. Using a doe which was shot by one of Saunders' cowhands, Maxwell dragged the animal's carcass from a line tied to his saddle-horn, creating a wide circle whose outer edge was tainted with the doe's scent. He then strung the doe to a tree limb in the center of the circle, and they all climbed into the branches of surrounding trees to sit and wait.

When the maddened dogs eventually found their way to the bait, it was an easy matter to pick them off one by one.

It was a maneuver that plainly impressed Saunders, and he was lavish in his praise of Maxwell for devising it. "Mister Maxwell," he said, wiping his brow with a huge bandana, "I'd admire to buy the drinks, now that's done. And if you can find the time, we'd sure be happy to have you stop by at the ranch for a spell."

Maxwell smiled, a strange little smile that scarcely told its viewer whether it was one of happiness, pleasure, or more cynicism. Then he mounted and swung toward Saunders.

"You've just bought yourself a guest," he said.

In the bar of the combination saloon-hotel in the little town of Piute, Maxwell felt his shoulder muscles ease in a flow of relaxation such as

he hadn't known in years. The men around him were friendly, gregarious ranchers, who accepted Saunders' introduction of the white-haired stranger as enough of a reference to make the latter a welcome guest in their midst. The bourbon wasn't good, yet it warmed Maxwell, and it wasn't until he was on his second drink that he recalled that he'd broken his pledge never to kill again, even if his victim had been nothing but a pack of mad dogs.

"Cal," a beefy, florid-faced man wearing a tin star said to Saunders as they stood against the bar, "reckon it's none of my business, but we had a visitor while you were gone. Wrangler looked like, name of Bart. Said he planned to mosey out your way, and would be waiting for you. Looked dangerous to me, somehow. Wore his guns low, and said something about how you'd fired him once."

At the sheriff's words, Maxwell saw Saunders stiffen momentarily, then shrug resignedly. He'd told his two hands to take a few days off in town, and now he abruptly turned to Maxwell and suggested they get moving.

"Thanks, Sheriff," he said, downing the last of his drink. "I'm much obliged." He spoke not at all as he and Maxwell covered the three miles from Piute to the Saunders ranch.

Once inside the snug, freshly-painted ranchhouse, Maxwell could well understand Saunders' reluctance to talk about Curly Bart. Where once had obviously been neatness and the comfort that only a woman's care could provide, there now was chaos. Tables and chairs were overturned, dishes smashed, picture frames hung askew, and the whole grisly scene was as though a giant twister had roared through the house and had missed nothing.

"Martha!" Saunders yelled, and immediately leaped toward the rear of the house. As for Maxwell, he paused only momentarily before turning quickly to the other side of the building, and toward a room at the right that obviously led into a bedroom.

The next moments were ones which, lightning-like, brought back to the white-haired man scenes he had been certain he would never see again.

On the bedroom floor, her clothing torn and a look of sheer terror painted on her face, lay a woman in her early forties, her eyes glassy, a pool of blood providing a cushion for her gray-streaked hair. There was a gaping hole in the middle of her forehead.

The girl on the bed looked even worse, her clothing in shreds, and the few strips of white cotton that covered her glued to her young body as if pasted on with crimson paint. She moaned agonizingly, and her eyes widened at Maxwell as he hurled himself into the room. But whatever it was she was trying to tell him was lost in the explosion that crashed within his skull.

He heard the one blast from a .45 as he tumbled into oblivion.

**S**lim Maxwell came awake with no idea of the passage of time. His head throbbed, his eyes burned, and only the smell of freshly-starched cotton, and the softness of a woman's flesh under him, revived him enough to realize where he'd fallen—atop the dead woman with the bullet-hole in the middle of her head.

He had no doubt now that it was Saunders' wife, just as he had no doubt that she was long past needing his care. As for the rancher himself, he lay spread-eagled on the far side of his wife, blood oozing from the corner of his mouth, a jagged hole in his side.

Groggily, Maxwell swayed to his feet. The stabbing pain in the back of his head, and the sticky wound that met his touch, told him he'd been viciously slugged, and he mentally muttered a prayer of thanks that it had been nothing more. The shot he'd heard as he fell quite obviously had been the one that cut down Saunders.

Yet the man was alive, Slim quickly assured himself, as was the girl on the bed, who now had lapsed into unconsciousness. Staggering, holding to the bedpost for support, he made his way to the ironstone pitcher on a dresser in the corner, and quickly doused his flaming head over the slop jar. It cleared much of the fog from his brain, and gave him a chance to take stock of the situation.

Quite obviously, Curly Bart or whoever his attacker was had been hiding behind the bedroom door. He'd slugged Maxwell first, and almost in the same movement had snapped off a shot at Saunders. The question now was, had the man left, or was he still lurking nearby to be sure his work was completely finished?

With his mind beginning to function almost normally, Maxwell slipped Saunders' gun from its holster, and, checking its action, moved quickly through the house, searching every closet and corner. There wasn't a sign of life.

Outside, the same empty stillness greeted him, with only the whinnying of the stock in the far corral disturbing the almost eerie calm of the night. With a sigh, Maxwell shoved the .45 into his belt, and hurried back inside. There was a possibility that, with speed, either Saunders or the girl on the bed could be saved.

In the kitchen he found a kerosene lamp, clean towels, salt, lard, and a teakettle of water on the stove whose lid perked noisily. He grabbed as many of the articles as he could and headed for the bedroom.

Gently, he picked up Saunders wife and carried her body into a room next door that seemed to be a crude type of guest room. Laying the woman on the bed, he covered her with a blanket, and went back to Saunders.

The man breathed wheezily, stertorously, and Maxwell quickly took a pillow from the bed and put it under the rancher's head. Then, throwing a blanket over him, he dropped to his

knees and examined the wound in the older man's side. It had torn into the rancher's flesh less than two inches from the heart. Only the removal of the slug, Maxwell knew, could save the man's life. Saunders began to moan.

"Easy, now," Maxwell said, cradling Saunders' head in his arm. "You've been hit bad. But it may not be too late. Just try to take it easy. I'll need help to get that slug out of you, and maybe your girl can help. But I don't know; she's been badly beaten."

Saunders answered with his eyes, and Maxwell got to his feet. He'd picked up a half-bottle of whiskey on his second trip into the kitchen, and now he forced a gulp of it into the rancher's mouth. As he dropped the man's head onto the pillow again, the girl on the bed began to moan softly.

Maxwell muttered a prayer of thanks for at least one thing—Saunders' position on the floor made it impossible for him to see the condition of the girl, whose young body was a mass of bloody bruises from shoulder to knee.

With his jackknife, Maxwell now cut away the last shreds of her torn clothing, working swiftly and quietly, pausing only occasionally to adjust the light. With the sodden dress and savagely-ripped underclothing pulled from her skin, the girl showed that she must have been, just hours before, a very beautiful and full-bosomed young woman. As she appeared to Maxwell now, however, he knew that it would be only her youth, only a miracle, that could prevent even more damaging internal scars than those which now criss-crossed her creamy white skin.

Again the girl moaned, and then her eyes opened widely. The scream, when it came from her throat, was piercing and ridden with terror.

"Now, now," Maxwell soothed. "It's all right, do you hear? You're safe now."

Again the girl screamed, and cringed in fright.

"Angie! It's me—Pa!" Saunders' voice was surprisingly strong. "This is Mr. Maxwell. He's here to help us."

At the sound of her father's voice, the girl subsided into a soft moan, and Maxwell now put the liquor bottle to her lips. She gasped and choked on the mouthful he forced into her lips, and then fell back heavily.

"That man—that . . . !"

"It's all right, dear. I tell you it's all right," Maxwell soothed. "But I'm going to need your help. Your Pa's hurt bad, but if I can get the bullet out of his chest, he'll have a chance. But I can't do it alone. Do you understand?"

"I—I can't move. My—I'm on fire!"

"Let her alone, Maxwell," Saunders said. "You can't ask her to help. Even if I die, she . . ."

His voice trailed off, and Maxwell quickly stooped and lifted the rancher onto the bed beside his daughter.

The kerosene in the lamp had

burned low, and he now went through the house collecting lamps, transferring kerosene from one to the other in an attempt to get the strongest light possible. Then, using a mixture of salt and lard, an ancient remedy he remembered dimly from his childhood days among the slaves on his father's land, he daubed it across the girl's chest, her stomach and her thighs. At his touch, she winced, and once cried out in pain, but she finally subsided again, and closed her eyes.

Maxwell now turned to the man at her side.

"Here, take another slug of this. Get drunk if you want to. You'll need it. Just save enough for me to pour on the wound when I'm through."

"You—you're a good man, Maxwell. I won't . . . forget this."

"Sure. Now relax, will you."

The next hour was a nightmare for Maxwell. Sterilizing the knife over the flame from the lamp, he cut and probed at Saunders' side, as the rancher, gritting his teeth and alternately lapsing into blessed unconsciousness, moaned and occasionally cried out in agony.

Only when the strain on his eyes became more than he could bear, only when it was necessary to pause to wipe the perspiration from his face, did Maxwell hesitate. And only when the light had grown so dim as to make further progress impossible, did the white-haired ex-officer drop his knife with a curse.

He still had not found the bullet. "Give me the light. I can hold it."

The girl's voice recalled her presence to Maxwell for the first time since he'd started to work, and he looked at her now with renewed respect. She had pulled a sheet around her, and there was a confidence in her now that had been missing before; and when she rose to her elbows and took the lamp, Maxwell looked at her for no more than a second before he felt the strength pour back into him. Then he took up the knife again.

This time he probed swiftly and deep, and slowly, agonizingly, the lead slug came up into his bloody hand. As he edged it out, the girl swiftly plunged her fingers into the gaping hole, and held them there while Maxwell poured whisky into the wound, and then bound it with strips of cotton cut from the sheet he'd taken from the guest-room bed. Only when he'd finished did his utter and complete exhaustion surround him, and he staggered to the bedroom rocker. He was asleep within a minute.

He never even felt the soft kiss of the girl on his forehead, as he lapsed into unconsciousness.

Maxwell came awake with the bel-lowing of Caleb Saunders on the bed across from him. "Angie! Angie! Can't I even get a cup of coffee around here?"

The rancher saw Maxwell awake now, and his eyes told the man in the rocker more than any words could how much his help was appreciated.

"I tell you I won't forget this, Maxwell—you know that."

"I know that. Now take it easy, man. You're not out of the woods yet, by any means."

The girl Angie, when she entered the room, now wore a bright cotton dress, and her face showed the only traces of her ordeal of the night before. It was her red-rimmed eyes that revealed to Slim Maxwell that she hadn't slept, but had spent the night mourning her dead mother in the next room.

When they'd eaten the huge breakfast Angie brought to them, the girl appeared again, this time carrying the family bible. Saunders took it wordlessly, and for the next half-hour read from it in a sonorous, even voice. When he'd finished, and had laid it down on his lap, Maxwell saw tears in his eyes for the first time.

"Ma," he said, simply, and that was all.

"She's all laid out," Angie said simply.

Maxwell swallowed, and averted his eyes. "I'll bury her," he said, "so you can watch from the window." Both Saunders and his daughter nodded solemnly.

When he'd finished, and had tossed the last spadeful of earth on the grave, Angie appeared beside him and silently laid a bouquet of flowers at the head. As he put the shovel aside, Maxwell saw out of the corner of his eye the face of Saunders, staring at them from the bedroom, a hand going to his eyes to wipe away a tear.

"Mr. Maxwell?" Angie murmured, as they walked back to the house. "I—my father and I want to thank you for what you've done. You know we . . . we couldn't have lived if you hadn't been here."

"Nonsense," Maxwell said, and turned to face her. "I hope, Angie, that you won't judge all men by . . . by the one last night. He—"

She silenced him quietly, and lifted her face to his. "You don't have to say that," she said. "I haven't judged all men by him—any more than I've judged all men by Pa . . . and you."

He kissed her then, fleetingly at first, and then with the full passion and power of the urging that was in him. "Wait for me, Angie," he told her, and abruptly headed for Saunders' room.

When he reached the side of the rancher, now propped on his pillow, it was to be greeted by the cowhands, George and Tex, who'd ridden in while he and Angie were completing the burial of Mrs. Saunders.

"Howdy," George muttered. "The boss told us what you done."

"It was nothing any man wouldn't have done."

"Mebbe," George said. "Now, though, we're doing our part. We're going after Bart."

"Wait!" Saunders said. "I don't hold with killing; you know that, George. I say, leave Bart alone. Let's let be what'll be."

The man George, rangy and whip-

set, hitched at his pants. "That may be, Boss," he growled, "but the fact is, this man Bart's wanted all over the west. He's got at least ten killings on his record, and he's crippled at least another dozen. Are you going to let him go scot-free to harm more people?"

"Wait a minute," Maxwell told them. "This boy's *my* target. I want him!"

"No, Maxwell!" Saunders voice was strident, pleading. "This isn't your fight. Stay out of it, man! Let—"

"You got a handgun, George?" Maxwell's voice was even, edged.

"Yeah, sure. I—"

"Here," Saunders muttered, grimly. "I'm givin' this to you, in a token of appreciation." He suddenly handed Maxwell a pearl-handled Colt .45. "Drummer sold it to me, said it could stop a longhorn at fifty feet. Don't know if he was tellin' the truth. Never used it, really."

Maxwell took the gun, looked at it curiously for a moment, and then buckled it around his waist. He'd had little or no experience with the weapon, even though he'd worn one throughout the war; his rifle always had been his specialty, and somehow, deep within him, he still felt that it would be a rifle that would bring down Curly Bart.

"Thanks," he said, and after nodding briefly to each of them, strode from the room.

As he saddled his roan outside, Angie came to him, stiff-legged and showing the pain she still felt from the beating she'd received at the hands of Curly Bart. She carried a saddlebag filled with bacon, hardtack, flour and coffee.

"Take my mare," she said simply. "It's the big black. I think yours looks a little the worse for travel."

"Thank you. I'd like to, but—well, I don't know if I'll be coming back this way."

"I want you to come back. Unless, that is . . . unless you have someone else waiting for you."

"No, I have nobody . . . nobody at all."

"Then . . . the horse has our brand on it—*my* brand. I would be grateful if you took it—and came back on it. We—I'll—want to know what happened."

She kissed him then, as she'd done before, and then pushed him abruptly away. "That's for being the fine man you are," she said, "and for what you are going to do. I've kissed you twice now. When you come back, I hope you'll kiss *me*."

Maxwell touched her chin briefly, and then quickly heaved himself into the saddle. "I'll be back, Angie. Remember that—I'll be back!"

He sat in the saddle now in the warm spring sunshine, and wandered back mentally over the months that had passed since their parting. Months? They seemed like years to Maxwell now, as he flexed his frozen fingers and swept his eyes



over the distant horizon.

Months? Sure, months, and yet Maxwell couldn't help but feel that it had been much longer than that. He'd been sure the man would head north into Montana, and for weeks he'd trailed him endlessly, from one trading post to another. Once he missed him by no more than a day, and at another time by less than three hours.

And always Bart's trail was one of blood, and cruelty, and lust. A six-year-old boy had fallen before the man's surging pony in one community, and when the father had drawn on Bart, the killer had gunned him down cruelly. And, to cap the atrocity, he had carried his victim home across his pommel, only to drop him at the widow's feet. Before he'd left, he'd ravished the shrieking woman and left her for dead.

In Montana, Maxwell had frozen his hands, and been saved only because of the kindness of a friendly trapper.

Bart? He was heading south again, and relentlessly, desperately, Maxwell stuck to his trail.

At Cheyenne, a bank holdup had been pulled by a man answering Bart's description; at Denver, his trade mark had been left on the corpse of a Wells Fargo guard, and at Pueblo a maniacal school girl bore mute, if violent, testimony to Bart's having passed through.

Throughout, it appeared that Bart knew he was being followed, and Maxwell found ever-widening traces of the grim pattern of the man's ferocity. A poker game in Durango had left a player shot through the stomach, a man who'd had the temerity to claim that one of the players, a curly-headed stranger, had been cheating. A payroll robbery two miles west had left but one piece of evidence—the bandit had been a curly-haired stranger. In this last one, though, Bart had not been so lucky—a cowpoke had snapped off a quick shot that had taken away a part of the killer's ear.

So the man needed medical aid, Maxwell told himself now, as he again flexed his fingers in a quick practice draw. He'd be heading for the border, that much was certain; the question now was, would he be able to catch him before he disappeared into the mountains of Mexico?

It was that a gnawing thought came back to Maxwell—was it possible that he'd been *afraid* to catch up with the killer all this time, that he'd been holding back, overcome with a soldier's premonition of impending death? Could he have caught up with the killer sooner, if he'd wanted to hurry?

No! He simply had insisted to himself that Bart meet him on his own terms, rifle against rifle. Certainly not in a drawing contest, where his frostbitten fingers would be no match for the trigger-fast ones of Curly Bart.

He shrugged now, and again soaked up the warming rays of the spring sun; and a day later a Wells Fargo

station attendant spoke of a cowpoke with a bandaged ear who'd just ridden through, heading south.

"How many roads are there to the border?" Maxwell had asked.

"Just one, through Echo Canyon."

The white-haired man had spurred his horse at the word, and took off at a gallop. His plan now was to make Bart come after him; he would be no match for the man in a straight shoot-out, of that he was certain. But in the foothills and rocks of Echo Canyon, with the echo giving him a slight distracting edge—well, there was always the chance that Fate would be on his side.

Near the entrance to the canyon, he came across a blood-soaked bandana, and he dismounted to examine it carefully. It was still wet, even though the sun must have been on it for some time. So he was closing in at last.

Bart had to be less than fifteen minutes ahead of him!

The trail now led through the rocky foothills to his right, and Maxwell spurred his black mare to the left, and into the rough country that bordered it. After months in the saddle, he had to be certain he didn't cap it all by riding into a trap.

At a ridge, less than a mile from where he'd entered the hills, he drew up sharply and dismounted. Then he listened without drawing a breath for one tell-tale sign that Bart was near him.

From the canyon came the sound of a horse's hooves!

"BART! CURLY BART!" The shout burst from Maxwell impulsively, all the pent-up fury that was in him spewing forth in an excitement he hadn't known since Shiloh, "BART! DROP YOUR GUNS! WE'VE GOT YOU SURROUNDED!"

Once, twice, three, and then four times, the echo ricocheted off the canyon walls, and it was followed almost immediately by the echoed answer from Bart.

"COME AND GET ME, YOU BASTARD!"

Maxwell nodded to himself, and eased his mare forward, heading toward the spot from which Bart's words had seemed to come. Moments later, and he reined in suddenly and dismounted. Calmly, he rolled a cigarette and lighted it.

So this was the showdown at last! He took his rifle from the holster alongside his saddle, and coolly checked it. Then the .45 came out, and he spun the cylinder expertly. It still was not his choice of weapons, and with the sharp, needled pain that still ran through his fingers, he knew the odds would be against him if he had to draw with it.

And now he was ready.

Throwing the reins over the mare's head, he left her, and silently began to creep forward across the rocks, the rifle cradled in his arm. He could feel the excitement begin to well within him, knew again the urge to kill—and he grimaced roughly at his now

forgotten resolution never again to shed another man's blood!

Slowly, painstakingly, an inch at a time, he edged forward, his finger tips tingling, his whole being one of alert assurance. He was only vaguely aware of the perspiration that had begun to run in rivulets down his spine.

"Drop that rifle!"

The voice had roared out of the emptiness at his right, and Maxwell spun quickly toward it, at the same time as he plunged to the ground. His action was followed instantly by a brace of quick shots from a six-shooter that crashed over his head and chipped fragments from the rock surface. The echo ricocheted back and forth across the canyon.

"You didn't muffle your big feet," the voice jeered now. "I did." Silently, Maxwell cursed his stupidity in not realizing Bart could be so close.

"You the hombre's been following me?"

"That's right."

"Marshal?"

"Nope."

"Fast?"

"Pretty fast."

The jeering mockery came back into the voice. "Wanta try to take me out in the open?"

"Why not?"

"Then throw away the rifle, and come on out."

Maxwell smiled. The man was no fool, that was for sure. With only his handgun, Maxwell stood no chance against the wily Bart, and the latter knew it. The white-haired man paused now, and glanced quickly to the left and to the right.

He was to the west of Bart, judging by the latter's voice. What's more, it was close to sunset. If he could play it smart, he might be able to wangle around until the sun was directly behind him. He spotted a boulder now, leaning next to a tree. By getting on top of the rock, he would be in such a position that the sun would be a ball of fire at his back. He started to inch forward.

"Throw your rifle away yet?"

Maxwell tried to get a lead on the direction of the voice. "No," he answered. "I plan to use it to kill you with."

The laugh that echoed up the canyon was loud, maniacal.

Maxwell was on top of the rock now, his left shoulder against the tree. As he steadied himself, Bart ripped off two fast shots that tore harmlessly into the tree trunk beside him. Then Maxwell used his own .45 in the general direction of the voice. Their echo was followed by a moan from down below.

"You got me, damn you!"

Maxwell smiled mirthlessly. So that was it! The oldest trick in the book.

"Then come out," he ordered, "with your hands up!"

His Colt was back in its holster now, and Maxwell held the rifle carefully on the place where he knew Bart had to appear. Then, almost

furtively, the big man strode into view. His right arm hung lifelessly at his side; in his left was a rifle which he held high, his hat resting at an angle on the muzzle.

A trick? Maxwell wasn't sure, and, as he studied the man, his own Springfield dropped a fraction of an inch. Bart was a handsome devil, no question about that, with strong white teeth contrasting with the curly black hair, the entire picture set off by a Mexican sombrero trimmed in silver, and a holster and belt in the same rich, hammered metal.

"Who are you?" he asked Maxwell, gently.

"Name's Maxwell. You don't know me."

Bart sniggered mirthlessly. "Hell, I always figured I'd get it from a fast gun—not a cowpoke with a rifle."

Maxwell relaxed his guard for the barest fraction of a second, and even as he did, Bart's "lifeless" right hand leaped for the holster on his thigh. Before the slender man on the rock even knew what was happening, the desperate Bart was fanning shots with unbelievable rapidity.

It was his closeness to the tree that saved him, Maxwell knew. That and the blazing sun at his back. Yet even so, he heard the whistle of air created by the lead as it sped by his right ear. Then he had pumped out one quick shot of his own, and Bart vanished behind the rock from which he'd come.

It was then that the plan emerged in Maxwell's mind, the one chance in a million that had to be taken. In his place of hiding, Bart obviously was between two boulders, the one nearest to Maxwell giving the killer a bullet-proof shield. There were just three shells left in the rifle. It was a long chance, but it was one that had to be taken.

Suddenly, Maxwell stood up. Then, with almost nerveless calm, he raised the rifle to his shoulder, and aiming at a spot in the second boulder that gave the best chance of ricocheting the slugs into Bart's hiding place, the slim man quickly pumped out three fast shots.

This time there was no faking the moan that came from Bart's lips. A moment later, and the man had spun erect, twisted once, and plunged on his face.

He was dead before he touched the ground, and Maxwell knew it as surely as he knew the great surge of relief that suddenly sighed within his own breast.

Only then did Maxwell turn and face the sun, now a red ball on the far horizon. It appeared to be more than just a red ball; it was a bloody ball. But tomorrow, Maxwell told himself, tomorrow, it would emerge fresh and shining again, and a new day, a new life would begin. By then, he would be well on his way back to Piute.

It was a long ride, but he knew it would be one that would be worth every aching step. •

# Blue Notes

*Some assorted background facts  
on who wrote what, and why, in  
this issue of Bluebook*

**A**ndrew Robin, who's responsible for "Epitaph For A Fast Gun," the western on pages 18-19, once managed to get as far west as Gary, Indiana, and it was that which started him to write epics of the plains. Since then, he's written scores of them, three of which have been made into Hollywood films, and a half-dozen of which have galloped across the 21-inch screen in your living room. In his spare time, he collects sleeve-garters.