

ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

Volume 266 CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 15, 1936 Number 4

- The Spy Double—*Complete Novelette*.....Ared White 4
Spies and counter-spies in war-time Holland
- Swamp Carnival—*Short Story*.....Franklin H. Martin 33
Three musketeers of the tent-shows
- Buccaneers International—*First of three parts*.....
Arthur Hawthorne Carhart 44
Outlaws of the Orient scheme the doom of Tomorrow's brave new world
- Strike Three in Dogieville—*Short Story*.....W. C. Tuttle 70
Baseball, bottles and bullets
- Thief-Lover Valley—*Conclusion*.....Bennett Foster 82
Bushwhack and gunflame come to the Frying Pan Ranch!
- Men of Daring—*True Story in Pictures*.....Stookie Allen 104
Edward Marshall, war correspondent
- Decoyed—*Short Story*.....Frank Richardson Pierce 106
A trapped beast turns
- Brave Men Die Hard—*Third of four parts*.....Eustace L. Adams 115
Oil—and trouble—in the tropics
- The Dead Remember—*Short Story*.....Robert E. Howard 137
The dead cannot forget their vengeance
- Toy Battleships for Admirals.....J. Wentworth Tilden 32
- Argonotes 142
- Looking Ahead! 144

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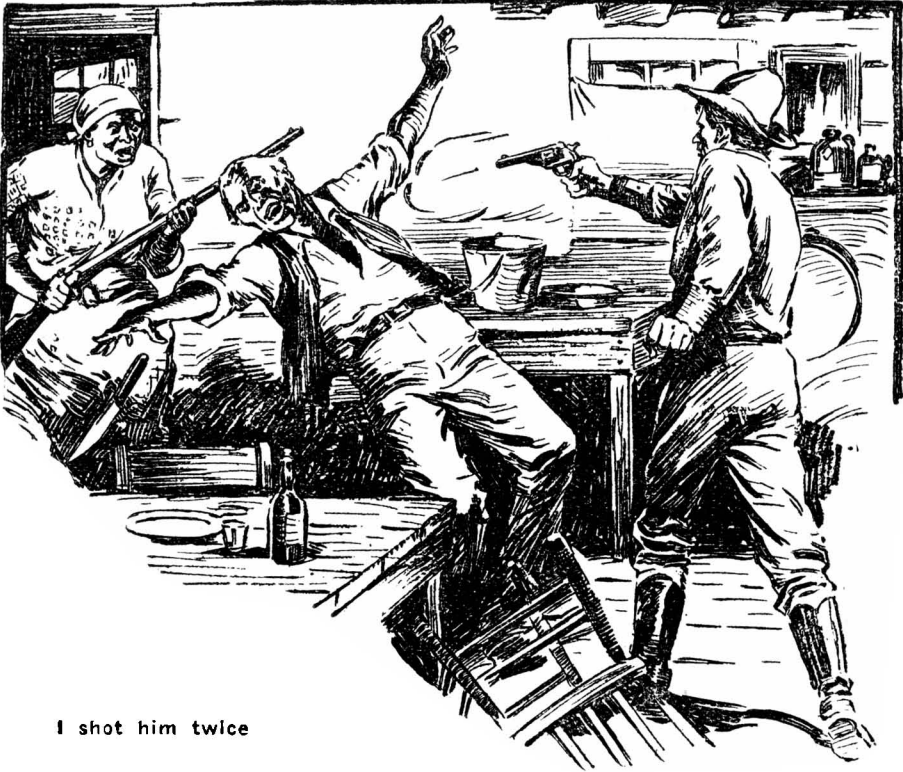
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I shot him twice

The Dead Remember

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

She had cursed him by the big snake and the black swamp and the white cock. What was it, then, that killed Jim Gordon?

DODGE CITY, KANSAS,
November 3, 1877.

MR. WILLIAM L. GORDON,
Antioch, Texas.

DEAR BILL:

I am writing you because I have got a feeling I am not long for this world. This may surprise you, because you know I was in good health when I left the herd, and I am not sick now as far as that goes, but just the same I believe I am as good as a dead man.

Before I tell you why I think so, I will tell you the rest of what I have to say,

which is that we got to Dodge City all right with the herd, which tallied 3,400 head, and the trail boss, John Elston, got twenty dollars a head from Mr. R. J. Blaine, but Joe Richards, one of the boys, was killed by a steer near the crossing of the Canadian. His sister, Mrs. Dick Westfall, lives near Seguin, and I wish you'd ride over and tell her about her brother. John Elston is sending her his saddle and bridle and gun and money.

Now, Bill, I will try to tell you why I know I'm a goner. You remember last August, just before I left for Kansas with

the herd, they found that Old Joel, that used to be Colonel Henry's slave, and his woman dead—the ones that lived in that live-oak thicket down by Zavalla Creek. You know they called his woman Jezebel, and folks said she was a witch. She was a high-yellow gal and a lot younger than Joel. She told fortunes, and even some of the white folks were afraid of her. I took no stock in those stories.

Well, when we was rounding up the cattle for the trail drive, I found myself near Zavalla Creek along toward sundown, and my horse was tired, and I was hungry, and I decided I'd stop in at Joel's and make his woman cook me something to eat. So I rode up to his hut in the middle of the live-oak grove, and Joel was cutting some wood to cook some beef which Jezebel had stewing over an open fire. I remember she had on a red and green checked dress. I won't likely forget that.

They told me to light and I done so, and set down and ate a hearty supper, then Joel brought out a bottle of tequila and we had a drink, and I said I could beat him shooting craps. He asked me if I had any dice, and I said no, and he said he had some dice and would roll me for a five-cent piece.

So we got to shooting craps, and drinking tequila, and I got pretty full and raring to go, but Joel won all my money, which was about five dollars and seventy-five cents. This made me mad, and I told him I'd take another drink and get on my horse and ride. But he said the bottle was empty, and I told him to get some more. He said he didn't have no more, and I got madder, and begun to swear and abuse him, because I was pretty drunk. Jezebel come to the door of the hut and tried to get me to ride on, but I told her I was free, white and twenty-one, and for her to look out, because I didn't have no use for smart high-yellow gals.

Then Joel got mad and said, yes, he had some more tequila in the hut, but he wouldn't give me a drink if I was dying of thirst. So I said: "Why, damn you, you get me drunk and take my money with

crooked dice, and now you insult me. I've seen nigras hung for less than that."

He said: "You can't eat my beef and drink my licker and then call my dice crooked. No white man can do that. I'm just as tough as you are."

I said: "Damn your black soul, I'll kick you all over this flat."

He said: "White man, you won't kick nobody." Then he grabbed up the knife he'd been cutting beef with, and ran at me. I pulled my pistol and shot him twice through the belly. He fell down and I shot him again, through the head.

Then Jezebel come running out screaming and cursing, with an old muzzle-loading musket. She pointed it at me and pulled the trigger, but the cap burst without firing the piece, and I yelled for her to get back or I'd kill her. But she run in on me and swung the musket like a club. I dodged and it hit me a glancing lick, tearing the hide on the side of my head, and I clapped my pistol against her bosom and jerked the trigger. The shot knocked her staggering back several foot, and she reeled and fell down on the ground, with her hand to her bosom and blood running out between her fingers.

I WENT over to her and stood looking down with the pistol in my hand, swearing and cursing her, and she looked up and said: "You've killed Joel and you've killed me, but by God, you won't live to brag about it. I curse you by the big snake and the black swamp and the white cock. Before this day rolls around again you'll be branding the devil's cows in hell. You'll see, I'll come to you when the time's ripe and ready."

Then the blood gushed out of her mouth and she fell back and I knew she was dead. Then I got scared and sobered up and got on my horse and rode. Nobody seen me, and I told the boys next day I got that bruise on the side of my head from a tree branch my horse had run me against. Nobody never knew it was me that killed them two, and I wouldn't be telling you now, only I know I have not got long to live.

That curse has been dogging me, and there is no use trying to dodge it. All the way up the trail I could feel something following me. Before we got to Red River I found a rattlesnake coiled up in my boot one morning, and after that I slept with my boots on all the time. Then when we was crossing the Canadian it was up a little, and I was riding point, and the herd got to milling for no reason at all, and caught me in the mill. My horse drowned, and I would have, too, if Steve Kirby hadn't roped me and dragged me out from amongst them crazy cows. Then one of the hands was cleaning a buffalo rifle one night, and it went off in his hands and blowed a hole in my hat. By this time the boys was joking and saying I was a hoodoo.

But after we crossed the Canadian, the cattle stampeded on the clearest, quietest night I ever seen. I was riding night-herd and didn't see nor hear nothing that might have started it, but one of the boys said just before the break he heard a low wailing sound down amongst a grove of cottonwoods, and saw a strange blue light glimmering there. Anyway, the steers broke so sudden and unexpected they nearly caught me and I had to ride for all I was worth. There was steers behind me and on both sides of me, and if I hadn't been riding the fastest horse ever raised in South Texas, they'd have trampled me to a pulp.

Well, I finally pulled out of the fringe of them, and we spent all next day rounding them up out of the breaks. That was when Joe Richards got killed. We was out in the breaks, driving in a bunch of steers, and all at once, without any reason I could see, my horse gave an awful scream and rared and fell backward with me. I jumped off just in time to keep from getting mashed, and a big mossy horn give a bellow and come for me.

There wasn't a tree bigger than a bush anywhere near, so I tried to pull my pistol, and some way the hammer got jammed under my belt, and I couldn't get it loose. That wild steer wasn't more than ten jumps from me when Joe Richards roped it, and the horse, a green one, was jerked down

and sideways. As it fell, Joe tried to swing clear, but his spur caught in the back cinch, and the next instant that steer had drove both horns clean through him. It was an awful sight.

By that time I had my pistol out, and I shot the steer, but Joe was dead. He was tore up something terrible. We covered him up where he fell, and put up a wood cross, and John Elston carved on the name and date with his bowie knife.

After that the boys didn't joke any more about me being a hoodoo. They didn't say much of anything to me and I kept to myself, though the Lord knows, it wasn't any fault of mine as I can see.

Well, we got to Dodge City and sold the steers. And last night I dreamt I saw Jezebel, just as plain I see the pistol on my hip. She smiled like the devil himself and said something I couldn't understand, but she pointed at me, and I think I know what that means.

Bill, you'll never see me again. I'm a dead man. I don't know how I'll go out, but I feel I'll never live to see another sunrise. So I'm writing you this letter to let you know about this business and I reckon I've been a fool but it looks like a man just kind of has to go it blind and there is not any blazed trail to follow.

Anyway, whatever takes me will find me on my feet with my pistol drawed. I never knuckled down to anything alive, and I won't even to the dead. I am going out fighting, whatever comes. I keep my scabbard-end tied down, and I clean and oil my pistol every day. And, Bill, sometimes I think I am going crazy, but I reckon it is just thinking and dreaming so much about Jezebel; because I am using an old shirt of yours for cleaning rags, you know that black and white checked shirt you got at San Antonio last Christmas, but sometimes when I am cleaning my pistol with them rags, they don't look black and white any more. They turn to red and green, just the color of the dress Jezebel was wearing when I killed her.

Your brother,

JIM.

STATEMENT OF JOHN ELSTON,
NOVEMBER 4, 1877

MY name is John Elston. I am the foreman of Mr. J. J. Connolly's ranch in Gonzales County, Texas. I was trail boss of the herd that Jim Gordon was employed on. I was sharing his hotel room with him. The morning of the third of November he seemed moody and wouldn't talk much. He would not go out with me, but said he was going to write a letter.

I did not see him again until that night. I came into the room to get something and he was cleaning his Colt's .45. I laughed and jokingly asked him if he was afraid of Bat Masterson, and he said: "John, what I'm afraid of ain't human, but I'm going out shooting if I can." I laughed and asked him what he was afraid of, and he said: "A high-yeller gal that's been dead four months." I thought he was drunk, and went on out. I don't know what time that was, but it was after dark.

I didn't see him again alive. About midnight I was passing the Big Chief saloon and I heard a shot, and a lot of people ran into the saloon. I heard somebody say a man was shot. I went in with the rest, and went on back into the back room. A man was lying in the doorway, with his legs out in the alley and his body in the door. He was covered with blood, but by his build and clothes I recognized Jim Gordon. He was dead. I did not see him killed, and know nothing beyond what I have already said.

STATEMENT OF MIKE O'DONNELL

MY name is Michael Joseph O'Donnell. I am the bartender in the Big Chief saloon on the night-shift. A few minutes before midnight I noticed a cowboy talking to Sam Grimes just outside the saloon. They seemed to be arguing. After awhile the cowboy came on in and took a drink of whiskey at the bar. I noticed him because he wore a pistol, whereas the others had theirs out of sight, and because he looked so wild and pale. He looked like he was drunk, but I don't

believe he was. I never saw a man who looked just like him.

I did not pay much attention to him after that because I was very busy tending bar. I suppose he must have gone on into the back room. At about midnight I heard a shot in the back room and Tom Allison ran out saying that a man had been shot. I was the first one to reach him. He was lying partly in the door and partly in the alley. I saw he wore a gun-belt and a Mexican carved holster and believed it to be the same man I had noticed earlier. His right hand was torn practically off, being just a mass of bloody tatters. His head was shattered in a way I had never seen caused by a gunshot. He was dead by the time I got there and it is my opinion he was killed instantly. While we were standing around him a man I knew to be John Elston came through the crowd and said: "My God, it's Jim Gordon!"

STATEMENT OF DEPUTY GRIMES

MY name is Sam Grimes. I am a deputy sheriff of Ford County, Kansas. I met the deceased, Jim Gordon, before the Big Chief saloon, at about twenty minutes until twelve, November 3rd. I saw he had his pistol buckled on, so I stopped him and asked him why he was carrying his pistol, and if he did not know it was against the law. He said he was packing it for protection. I told him if he was in danger it was my business to protect him, and he had better take his gun back to his hotel and leave it there till he was ready to leave town, because I saw by his clothes that he was a cowboy from Texas. He laughed and said: "Deputy, not even Wyatt Earp could protect me from my fate!" He went into the saloon.

I believed he was sick and out of his head, so I did not arrest him. I thought maybe he would take a drink and then go and leave his gun at his hotel as I had requested. I kept watching him to see that he did not make any play toward anybody in the saloon, but he noticed no one, took a drink at the bar, and went on into the back room.

A few minutes later a man ran out, shouting that somebody was killed. I went right to the back room, getting there just as Mike O'Donnell was bending over the man, who I believed to be the one I had accosted in the street. He had been killed by the bursting of the pistol in his hand. I don't know who he was shooting at, if anybody. I found nobody in the alley, nor anybody who had seen the killing except Tom Allison. I did find pieces of the pistol that had exploded, together with the end of the barrel, which I turned over to the coroner.

STATEMENT OF TOM ALLISON

MY name is Thomas Allison. I am a teamster, employed by McFarlane & Company. On the night of November 3rd, I was in the Big Chief saloon. I did not notice the deceased when he came in. There was a lot of men in the saloon. I had had several drinks but was not drunk. I saw "Grizzly" Gullins, a buffalo hunter, approaching the entrance of the saloon. I had had trouble with him, and knew he was a bad man. He was drunk and I did not want any trouble. I decided to go out the back way.

I went through the back room and saw a man sitting at a table with his head in his hands. I took no notice of him, but went on to the back door, which was bolted on the inside. I lifted the bolt and opened the door and started to step outside.

Then I saw a woman standing in front of me. The light was dim that streamed out into the alley through the open door, but I saw her plain enough to tell she was a Negro woman. I don't know how she was dressed. She was not pure black but a light brown or yellow. I could tell that in the dim light. I was so surprised I stopped short, and she spoke to me and said: "Go tell Jim Gordon I've come for him."

I said: "Who the devil are you and who is Jim Gordon?" She said: "The man in the back room sitting at the table; tell him I've come!"

Something made me turn cold all over, I can't say why. I turned around and went back into the room, and said: "Are you Jim Gordon?" The man at the table looked up and I saw his face was pale and haggard. I said: "Somebody wants to see you." He said: "Who wants to see me, stranger?" I said: "A high-yellow woman there at the back door."

With that he heaved up from the chair, knocking it over along with the table. I thought he was crazy and fell back from him. His eyes were wild. He gave a kind of strangled cry and rushed to the open door. I saw him glare out into the alley, and thought I heard a laugh from the darkness. Then he screamed again and jerked out his pistol and threw down on somebody I couldn't see.

There was a flash that blinded me and a terrible report, and when the smoke cleared a little, I saw the man lying in the door with his head and body covered with blood. His brains were oozing out, and there was blood all over his right hand. I ran to the front of the saloon, shouting for the bartender. I don't know whether he was shooting at the woman or not, or if anybody shot back. I never heard but the one shot, when his pistol burst.

CORONER'S REPORT

WE, the coroner's jury, having held inquest over the remains of James A. Gordon, of Antioch, Texas, have reached a verdict of death by accidental gunshot wounds, caused by the bursting of the deceased's pistol, he having apparently failed to remove a cleaning rag from the barrel after cleaning it. Portions of the burnt rag were found in the barrel. They had evidently been a piece of a woman's red and green checked dress.

Signed:

J. S. Ordley, Coroner,
Richard Donovan,
Ezra Blaine,
Joseph T. Decker,
Jack Wiltshaw,
Alexander V. Williams.