

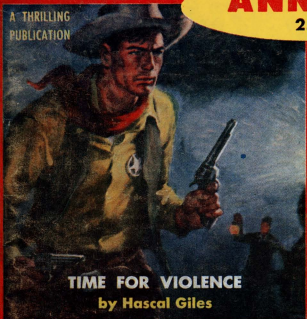
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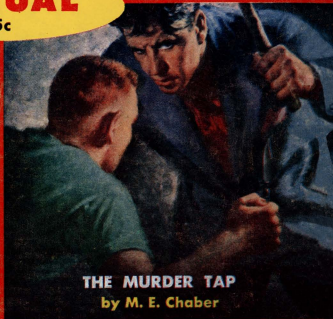
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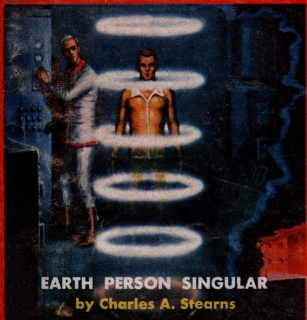
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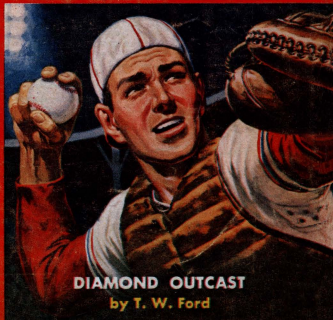
TIME FOR VIOLENCE
by Hascal Giles



THE MURDER TAP
by M. E. Chaber



EARTH PERSON SINGULAR
by Charles A. Stearns



DIAMOND OUTCAST
by T. W. Ford

STORIES

ANNUAL

Vol. 1, No. 1

1955 Edition

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ALEXANDER SAMALMAN, Editor



*He hunted around till
he found the shingle*

Time for Violence

By HASCAL GILES

They were waiting for a chance to kill the squatter

CARDWELL had wanted to kill the squatter when the man first moved into the valley, but he'd talked to Con Ainsworth about it, and Ainsworth had said to wait. The country was filling up with people more all the time, Ainsworth had said, and a man didn't have the freedom he used to have.

There was a deputy marshal in Sherman now, eighty miles away, and that was what Ainsworth had in mind. The law was moving in, a step at a time, and Ainsworth was getting cautious.

Now, as Cardwell waited in Orb Preston's cross-trails store for Ainsworth to

come in with his usual Saturday night grub list, he was ready to force the matter to a decision. Once a man had his family around him he was twice as hard to handle; it made him think he had roots and rights, and put a hard pride in him to have his wife watching. Ainsworth was overrated, in fact Cardwell began to wonder how the man had ever managed to set himself up as the valley's spokesman. He had muffed this deal by his caution, and Cardwell saw no way to settle it now without violence.

"He sent for his woman, huh?" Cardwell said. He had his elbows propped against a stack of crisp levis, staring absently out into the lavender twilight which had fallen over the clearing since he had come. He didn't get an answer right away, and he turned with annoyance in his muddy eyes, walking closer to the counter where Orb Preston stood with his bony face close to the dog-eared Bible he was forever reading.

PRESTON turned a page without looking up. There was an ugly twist about Cardwell's small mouth tonight, and his loose-skinned face was all hunched up like sand mounds left behind a desert storm. When evil which he could not touch was brooding under his roof, Orb Preston felt a man ought at least to hunt some answers for his own soul.

"Who do you mean? Oh, Ben Inskip, I reckon."

"The squatter up in Blackjack Flats," Cardwell said. "You know who I mean. You said he was here. When's his woman coming?"

"Inskip didn't say exactly. He said it had been too long without her, though, because he made her a promise. I was just making talk with you, Cardwell. I didn't mean to carry tales. All he said was he'd have his wife with him by the time his cabin was finished. But a man's got a lot to do when he starts with a thicket and tries to make it feed him. Maybe it'll be next spring—"

Cardwell stared out the window again. "It'll be a week," he said, almost to himself. "Maybe less."

He saw Ainsworth's buckboard bounce

over the pole bridge at the far edge of the clearing. A big man, Ainsworth, in every way. He sat in the center of the wagon seat, as though trying to cover it all, his hide vest flapping to show his barrel chest and thick waist. Ainsworth whipsawed the buckboard in at the front of the store, handling the team as he handled everything—with confidence and finality.

He had settled here when all the land was a thicket, and his voice was the first every new settler had heard. Those who had been allowed to stay—those who had chosen land far enough from Ainsworth's Circle A Ranch to show respect for his power—were still listening to that voice. But Ben Inskip had come too late.

Ainsworth gave Cardwell a nod as he came in. That was all—a faint dip of his big-brimmed black hat without any change in the bear-trap mouth or round blue eyes. His aloofness put a taste of vinegar in Cardwell's mouth as it always did. He had gone to him out of habit, but he regretted it now. Inskip was none of Ainsworth's business; the squatter was much closer to Cardwell's place, and Cardwell needed more room to grow than did Ainsworth. Ainsworth was too big already.

Cardwell waited until Ainsworth had reeled off his needs to Orb Preston. He watched disdainfully as Preston grew polite and fawning under the authority of the gruff voice, eagerly stuffing the items in Ainsworth's grass sack for him.

His business finished, Ainsworth put his back against the counter and faced Cardwell as though he had known why he was here.

"I was up to Blackjack Flats again today," Cardwell said, his eyes probing at Ainsworth's square face. "You'd be surprised what the squatter's got done. The thicket's most gone—there's good grass showing over maybe two hundred acres. Six months is a long time to dally over a thing. He's roofing his cabin, and things look real permanent. He's got a water hole grubbed out and seepage is pouring him more water than I ever knowed was there. He's got a good layout."

Ainsworth's eyes squinted to get the picture and his tight mouth smiled a little.

"That's what we want; ain't it? Nobody could run cattle in the brush that was there, and a man can't keep up with his chores and send his cowhands out to clear new land. That much work would cost a lot of dinero if a man had to hire it done hisself."

"His woman's coming," Cardwell said. "You can't scare a man off a place so easy once he starts calling it home."

Ainsworth nodded. "I know. He's got stockers coming in from Sherman, too. It's a shame about a man with Inskip's grit. But if he stayed there'd be others, and the first thing you know fellers like us could spit clean across our range. But thirty head of breed-stuff must have taken the last of the stake Inskip come here with. When you can't scare a man, you've got to break his spirit. Cardwell."

"We've got a week," Cardwell said, trying to keep it from sounding like an ultimatum. Ainsworth had tried to impress him again with his far-reaching grip. He'd had his cowboys snooping and reporting to him, and he knew more of the squatter's progress than did Cardwell. But still he'd let Cardwell talk first, like a gambler who runs up the stakes before he claims a pot.

THERE was no sign that Cardwell's impatient tone bothered Ainsworth. His mind seemed to be on other things. He remembered something he'd forgotten, and he looked over his shoulder at Orb Preston.

"Throw in sixteen sacks of smoking tobacco and a box of strychnine, Orb."

He watched the storekeeper complete the order, nodding approval as Orb Preston wrapped a double thickness of paper around the strychnine before he put it in the sack with the feed.

"Strychnine's moving slow as soap." The storekeeper wanted to make conversation with a man as important as Ainsworth. "Wolves ain't as thick as they once was, and some like a rifle better than poison."

Cardwell's patience was running thin. He grabbed at his own grass sack which he had filled an hour earlier. He slung it over his shoulder and pushed his sharp chin out at Ainsworth. "That roof will be on Inskip's cabin in a week. That's not much

time, Ainsworth."

"I'll handle it," Con Ainsworth said, his lips settling hard behind the words. "Let's move over to Orb's bar and drink on that."

"Some other time," Cardwell said. "I've been here too long."

Cardwell waited three days, and nothing happened. He hid in the brush on the fourth day and watched Ben Inskip at his chores, and that was when he decided he'd wait no longer. The squatter was a tall, gangling man whose shoulders were already rounded from six months of swinging axe and scythe. His flannel shirt was a mess of crude patches, and his sandy hair was faded almost white from too much sun. Most of the things he had done here were a matter of necessity if a man was to carve a future from the brush, but now he was overstepping the bounds of reason. As Cardwell watched, Ben Inskip put the finishing touches on a pole fence around the water hole he had sunk at the edge of the flats.

Where the two patches came to a point between Inskip's sharp shoulder blades would be a good place to put the bullet, Cardwell thought as he backed toward his horse.

He went to the Circle A to tell Ainsworth what had happened, but before he got there he hated himself for it. He knew why Ainsworth was hogging this show, but still he was running to him. Ainsworth didn't aim to let Cardwell use a foot of Inskip's graze. If Ainsworth ran Inskip off he'd have first claim to what the man left behind him.

It was dusk when Cardwell stopped in the cedar clump a hundred yards from the Circle A ranch house. As he pulled his claybank to a halt, his mind was already made up; but the way it happened seemed almost like impulse. Ainsworth just happened to step into the yard at that moment, shading his eyes toward the horizon as if looking for his riders to come in, and Cardwell was watching him across the sight of his rifle. A puff of dust jumped from Ainsworth's hide jacket before he spun around like a boulder teetering off a cliff and fell on his back.

WHEN he went back to the Flats that night Cardwell took Mark Stucky, one

of his riders, with him. A man could go after a squatter without keeping secrets from his hired hands. The death of an invader like Ben Inskip didn't have to be a mystery for folks to guess about as it was in the case of Con Ainsworth.

"He's got a fence all right, boss." Mark Stucky said when they came out of the brush and started across the squatter's cleared pasture. The cowboy rubbed a hand across his scrubby mustache and spit between the ears of his horse. "Looks like he's aimin' to make sure there'll be no water used by nobody before he brings in his own stock."

Cardwell signalled for a halt, and the horses pranced up sideways to the skinned poles which Inskip had stacked around his water. Cardwell pointed to the far side of the water hole where a gate sagged on rope hinges.

"He'd keep the fence forever. He's even got a gate to let 'em in and out, and then he'll shut it behind them in case a starving man happens past. A thirsty man opening that gate would likely get shot. That's the kind he is, Mark."

Mark took the lass' rope off his saddle-horn and ran the coils through his fingers. He made a hitch around the horn with one end of it, eyed an upthrust pole.

"You ready to pull it down, boss?"

Cardwell's eyes ran across the sweep of dark land and settled on the patch of orange light which showed in the front window of the new cabin. The squatter would hear them and come out with a gun in his hand. It would be self-defense, for the part about the fence would not have to be told to anyone—not even to a deputy marshal who might ride this way some day.

"I'm ready," Cardwell said.

Unlike most of Inskip's work, the fence was a fairly flimsy affair. With two ropes on the key poles and two wiry cowhorses tugging on them, the fence collapsed like a toadstool. Cardwell was disappointed because the fence fell so gently there was hardly a sound except the blowing of the horses.

"What now?" Mark asked.

Cardwell studied the lighted window for a moment, his muddy eyes expressionless in the moonless dark. "We'll put cattle over

here tomorrow. That ought to bring things to a head."

They started away, but Cardwell was not satisfied. He stopped, studying the fence, then he stepped to the ground.

"You want a drink of this squatter's fenced water, Mark?"

Mark wiped his mouth, understanding Cardwell's sudden thirst, but not sharing it. "I'd take you up if you had a bottle of good rotgut, boss."

Cardwell knelt at the edge of the water hole, taking off his peaked hat to fan the surface of the water. He lay on his belly and drank for a long time, catching his breath and drinking again. He started to drink some more, as though he wanted to take it all away with him, but the water left a bad taste in his mouth and he decided he'd satisfied the inner urging which had made him do it.

They were going into the brush again when the pain hit him. It was sudden and sharp, and Cardwell jerked his legs in the stirrups because of the shock of it. Hunger pangs, he thought: a man with a killing behind him and one in front of him had little appetite, and he'd skipped supper.

He groaned with the second pain, and Mark Stucky swung a sharp glance at him. "What's wrong, boss?"

Cardwell's legs were beginning to get out of control now. His stomach was a load of hot coals, and when the fire went through him it went to his toes. He pulled at the horse's reins, wondering why he couldn't see the trail ahead any more. And then he knew.

He didn't try to talk. He got the horse turned around, and beat it on the head with his fists to make it gallop. He heard Mark Stucky alongside him, but he did not try to see him. His voice was a whimper, a shameful sound, but he had to make Mark understand.

His horse shied away from the shambles of fallen poles and that was how he knew they were back at the water hole. He tried to step out of saddle, but his legs buckled under him and sent him tumbling on his face. A piece of wood rammed him under the chin, and he could feel the warmth of blood

(Concluded on page 113)

TIME FOR VIOLENCE

(Concluded from page 54)

on his neck, but not the pain. His stomach wouldn't let him feel anything but the fire it held.

Mark Stucky was beside him, pulling at him, shouting questions in his ears.

"The gate, Mark," he ground out. "Get me over to the gate Inskip built. Hurry, Mark, hurry!"

Mark didn't move. He wanted to know what had turned Cardwell's face so granite gray and what was causing his lips to turn inside out like those of a snarling wolf. For the sake of speed, Cardwell made himself listen, made himself answer.

"Strychnine, Mark. Strychnine that wasn't for wolves after all. That was Ainsworth's way, but the squatter found out before he brought his cattle in. Ainsworth meant to poison Inskip's breed stock, break him before he started. I—I'm glad I killed him. You—you can tell them that if—"

Mark Stucky eased the dead man down and stood looking at him, shaking his head. He didn't need to go to the gate now, but he went because it had seemed important to Cardwell. When you thought about it calmly, you knew why a man like Ben Inskip would fence a water hole. The fence had come down easily because it had been meant to come down when the water cleared. But he went to the gate, and hunted around amid the timbers until he found the shingle with the burned letters on it. He moved his lips over the two words, "POISON WATER," and then threw the shingle down and walked slowly back toward his horse.