



Children of the South



By WILLIAM S. HART

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Juanita, a young Mexican girl in New York City, is suddenly left alone in the world by the death of her grandparents, an aged couple. They are political refugees and die of influenza. Juanita is about fourteen years of age. She has still a very distant relative in the states but the Mexican Consul decides that she must return to her nearest of kin and sends her back to old Mexico. Now, these relatives in Mexico are of opposite political belief to the child's own father and mother who were killed endeavoring to further the cause of their own faction, which caused the old couple to flee to New York City and take their young grandchild Juanita with them.

The Mexican people that Juanita is forced by circumstance to return to are brutal by nature and they hate Juanita as the last of a race whom they consider brought about all their misfortunes by their opposite political belief.

The family consists of Fernando Laynez—Juanita's uncle—and his wife Marta—and Marta's brother—Roderigo Lopez.

Roderigo is bad beyond redemption—He has been so denatured by villany that he is part beast and his face, the mirror of man's nature, has been so rudely moulded by evil thoughts, that it seems unfinished. It is difficult to believe that any human being could be in any way attracted to him and yet such is the case,

there is such a one—Rosita Cada—who makes her home with them and lives in hopes that one day Roderigo will do her justice, and take her to the priest.

All the venom of this unholy and perverted family is centered upon Juanita.

They make her a slave, a drudge. She lives in an old outhouse shack tumbling over with decay, her bed is dried brush and leaves which she gathers from the woods—her food is scraps for which she stands eagerly waiting, when it is thrown out as refuse from the kitchen door. In her weakened condition she cannot perform the heavy tasks assigned her, and she is whipped—brutally whipped. There is one who stands by and watches, with trembling quivering sides, one whose praises are unsung and who is untrusted and uncheered by all save Juanita who gives every ounce of her starved affection to this *one*, a huge dog, so big and powerful as to possess almost the strength of a horse.

It is not only Alaska that breeds these giant wolf dogs—they roam the mountains of old Mexico wherever the wolfpack runs. But if Juanita bestows her frightened love upon Wolf dog—it is returned a million fold. True he is stolid and cowed when the (human?) brutes lash and kick him for being Juanita's shadow. But were not their minds blinded by depraved powers they would pause. They would pause and look at that stoic image—whose eyes would narrow and cut like the lash of a whip. Wolf dog loved Juanita as only *animals* can love.

He was a dog that would weigh close to two hundred pounds; his chest was like that of a young bullock, and his legs like the limbs of a stout oak tree. The mountains abounded with game to his liking, and so he fed and ran the hills—'till he was a veritable dynamo of strength. A strength that was created by fresh mountain air and red raw meat.

The stars which were so unkind to Juanita were also dealing out destruction to two other lives. Manuel Maretta and his Senorita.

Manuel is in love with a tall straight girl of thin and graceful body, with jet black hair and dark velvety skin and — — — eighteen. But she is rich and Manuel is well bred but poor.

The parents of the young Senorita in addition to their great wealth and enormous estates, are despotic and proud of their high position.

Manuel and his Senorita have many romantic meetings. And it is at one of these stolen trysts that she tells Manuel her parents intend to force her to marry a rich man of title. Manuel is frantic but powerless. He evolves a plan whereby they can elope, and by a hard journey through the mountains get to a priest and be married. The girl agrees eagerly—to meet her lover at a certain place at an appointed hour, so they can start upon their journey. But Manuel waits in vain. The Senorita is caught when leaving home by her enraged parents and made a prisoner in her room. A Priest is sent for and the girl is informed that the hated marriage is to take place at once. The girl is frantic, desperate, and determined not to be separated from the man she loves. And while they are making ready for the ceremony, she takes poison, just as Manuel, her lover, climbs through the window of her prison room. The poor distracted girl dies in Manuel's arms, with a prayer of love upon her lips. The parents with the Priest and rich suitor come to carry out the wedding.

Manuel is insane with justifiable rage. He calls down the curses of Heaven upon the parents and he kills the rich lover, thereby forever becoming an outlaw and a fugitive from justice.

His rage against the rich never subsides, and as a bandit he roams Mexico. He robs the rich and gives to the poor. He seeks out poor hunted families and at great risk goes to them alone and leaves them wealth.

This gives Manuel Mareta the Outlaw a protection in a country where it is difficult under any circumstances

to apprehend a law breaker. He rides almost at will, for the poor unconsciously protect him. And whole armies are sent in search for him without avail.

Two years have elapsed and our stories now cross. Manuel goes to the ranch of Juanita's kin folk—with charitable intentions. He has seen the neglect and sordidness of the place. From a distance he sees Roderigo brutally throwing Juanita upon the ground—where she cowers in fear that is not all physical. She has a fear of *this* man that she cannot describe. Roderigo leaves her and goes inside, throwing a club of wood at the lowering Wolf dog as he does so. Manuel watches the girl enter her hovel and then he comes to her. And Wolf dog knows it is different and allows him to enter—while he follows. Manuel finds Juanita cringing with fear on her bundles of dried brush. She is covered with rags and bruises, but she is so frightened and her story is so jumbled, he cannot get the true facts. He consoles her as best he can and goes away, only to lie out in the brush for days, with no one aware of his hiding place, but the Wolf dog.

At last Manuel is rewarded and finds what he seeks. He sees the poor half-starved girl dragged by the hair of her head through the rear door of the house, closely followed by Laynez, his wife, and Roderigo.

Roderigo tries to rescue the half insensible girl from Rosita's cruel blows. He does so. And then Rosita turns upon him and upbraids him. She accuses him of wanting to love Juanita. She is insanely jealous. Roderigo is guilty. It is exactly what he has in mind. He hasn't a spark of real affection, or decency, in his whole being. But, he intends to *use* this sixteen year old child Juanita.

To appease this shrew Rosita, and to throw her off the scent, so he can fulfill his damnable desires, when ready, he laughs boisterously and brutally. Then picking up the almost limp form of Juanita, he strikes her hard—full in the face—with his horny open hand. Then throws her through the door into her hovel.

When he turns there is an ominous silence, and a pause. He is looking straight into the eyes of a stranger, whose eyes are like living coals of fire, as he says "Dog, cur, scoundrel". There is a crash as three bodies come together—Layne, Roderigo and the stranger. Layne is almost immediately stretched out by a powerful blow. But Roderigo is of sterner stuff. Indeed it is known throughout the country that there are none who can match with him in strength and skill at murderous fighting—where there are no rules of manhood, but where bones are broken and faces smashed in by boot-heels. But in this stranger he has met a foe that rivals with him in muscular strength—and whose moral strength is as "Hyperion to a Satyr."

They writhe, they twist, they squirm. And always out shoots that powerful arm of the stranger, as his clenched fist is driven straight to the mark. It is a battle the like of which has never been seen by human eyes on land or sea. The blows when landing sound like bags of cement falling from a scaffold to the rocky pavement below.

There can be but one end, and that end comes. The brute is finally felled by one of those ponderous pile-driving blows—and lies a bleeding, broken mass—unconscious upon the ground.

And then this stranger, this *man*, talks to those who by their sex are protected—and his voice is cutting—hard and stern as he tells them.

I am Manuel Maretta the Outlaw. I am known to keep my word. Harm that young girl again and I will kill your scum called men, as I would a scorpion." And then he was gone. Far into the hills he went and then found a great powerful animal come running from behind following his trail.

And then a strange thing happened—so strange that it almost passeth understanding. The animal looked at him with worshipful eyes. The animal made queer half choking sounds, then licked his hands and was done, the way he had come.

Manuel has no idea of deserting the young girl but he is an outlaw with a price upon his head—doubled and trebled by the rich, whom he has robbed. His self-preservation is imperative, otherwise he could not succor or benefit any living thing. He must always be on the alert and now, more so than ever, for he has crossed those whom he knows would not hesitate to become informers. So he rides hard and long. He takes a desperate chance. He does into a city three hundred miles away—where he has been before—is wanted, and known.

He escapes. His object has been attained. He has established his whereabouts.

Twelve days from the time he left the spot where the Wolf dog said farewell, he is back again, and the Wolf dog is waiting—and with him the girl.

To Juanita this stranger was a God. But had she willed not to come the Wolf dog would have forced her to do so. It was not many hours after the going away of the stranger, when he had taken hold of her torn, ragged garments, and finally pulled her along the trail,

Roderigo and Laynez have both seen the dog and Juanita going into the hills, as there was not a day passed that they did not do so. They are suspicious—has not Manuel Maretta been seen many days journey to the south.

They are holding many councils at this time. Roderigo, Fernando, Marta and Rosita. There was to be a great raid upon the gringoes just across the border, a town where the stars and stripes were planted was to be raided, sacked, and burned, and its accursed flag ground into the dust.

They had received the word to be prepared for the gathering and the Chief was expected at any time.

But Roderigo was smarting with deep-seated hate and longing for revenge, and in spite of the councils, in spite of the great business he would follow the trail of the dog and the girl. He would be sure.

He does so like a coyote crawling through the brush and he sees Juanita and Manuel Mareta with the Wolf dog at their feet.

His eyes are like the windows of hell, but he dare not attack. He dare not. He dare not shoot. He dare not. He might miss. He might only wound, and then—those crashing fists again.

The courage had been *hand-beaten* out of him. He who had always been unafraid. He crawled back through the brush again like a coyote. Another council was held and hellish plans were made.

All unmindful of these happenings Juanita and Manuel daily held their meetings. Manuel had matches and salt and over a roasting partridge there became a new world for Juanita, and she learned to know "WHITHER THOU GOEST, I GO".

Nor could this poor outcast child be blamed, for Manuel was good to look upon and when he spoke there was magic in his voice and words. When Juanita told him of her distant relatives in America it opened up a veritable eulogy of that country by Manuel.

He told her of the wonders of America, its progress, its advancement in all things pertaining to civilization.

No greater picture of our country has ever been painted by word or pen than that spoken by this Outlaw on the side hill of an old box canyon midst the mountains of Chihuahua.

"America stands for Liberty with its hundred million of people and no drones," he said. "Its inventions, its telegraph, its telephone, its discovery of steam, its discovery of electricity, its airships, and with it all, its charity to all mankind, and its evident desire to live in PEACE, HARMONY, and JUSTICE."

And then he would tell her how he loved his own country, poor, torn, bleeding Mexico. Torn by Strife by those who seek their own gain. Those who by birth, education and environment know better, but who are actuated by selfish motives.

And then there were those who had unfortunately been denied all these advantages. Those who were as slaves, to those who control them. Only seeking in their childish simplicity to live in happiness with their families by toil, and falling an easy prey to those renegades who are traitors to Mexico.

They are made to believe that Americans are accursed 'gringos' and that America wishes to rule Mexico.

And so he talked. And so she loved. And the light air around them seemed to end her world right there. Only the sun and the sky were left, and as the sound of his impassioned voice vibrated upon the harp-strings of her nature she seemed to float off into them. She could almost see her shadow upon the ground.

And then came the day when the earth owls were flying home just before sunset, to disappear in their nests which they shared with their prairie-dog companions under the ground.

And could they have talked, they would have told of seeing riders by twos and threes, and eights and tens, coming into the hills from every direction. Their destination was a common meeting-place. The dilapidated shack of Fernando Laynez.

Before the moon with its heartening power was two hours old, full a hundred horses with winchesters in gun boots were standing eight to a man outside its door, while within the plans were made. They were to ride to the Rio Grande six hours away. They were to swim the river, and at three o'clock in the morning, when all were asleep, they were to attack and pillage an American town, and return from whence they came.

The five small rooms were packed with these swarthy men who stood idly smoking their cigarettes as they listened.

Roderigo it was who had been on American soil, and made a rude plan of all the buildings that were supposed to contain the spoils.

And then the Chief addressed his men. The Chief! Never, in the history of man, was a title more aptly applied.

One would think to look upon this strange being that the word had been coined to fit him and none other. A mixture of brute and illiterate human. The Rattler, The Tiger, The Panther, The Wolf. The Tallyrand, The Danton, The Robespierre, and The — — — Hoenzollern. Save in one respect—In this man there was no *coyote*!

In talk he was quiet. In action—he was hell! His words were few to his men. He swayed indolently in his chair as he spoke. Yet as they listened in kind, they scarcely breathed. Villo did not talk to his officers—He talked to his men.

His instructions were soon over and they prepared to depart. When boring through the legs of the closely packed throng, came a ragged, frightened girl, whose eyes burned with a holy light.

A Jean D'Arc! For had not *she* been listening to *her* God! With religious zeal she poured forth her words. "You must not do this thing—You must not—You must not. The Americans are good—they are kind—they wish to be friends with all our people. He has told me!"

There is an ominous silence! He! Who? And then the double traitor, the "Uriah Heap" comes forth. Surely the evil one is placing all in his hands—Manuel Maretta!

There is a rigid tightening of every muscle of Villa's body—Maretta—Manuel Maretta—my rival, Ah! The words come lazily forth as he coolly puffs at his cigarette and exudes the smoke through his nostrils. The measured ticking of an old clock is the only sound . . . And then again—Ah! I would see my rival—we have never met—though our trails have run side by side for two years.

Juanita has *betrayed* her God! Roderigo talks. Villa thinks and acts. Paper and pencil are brought. Juanita is told to write. She will not do so. Roderigo with every thing in his grasp, and now fearing to lose, raises his arm and strikes at her viciously. Villa catches the blow! "Enough, my friend. You have been very useful but had that blow fallen—I would have had you shot. I always shoot my men for that. We *love* but we do not *strike!*"

Juanita has betrayed but she will go no further. *Rosita* can write. She is the only one—man or woman—in that whole assemblage—(Save Juanita) who can.

The message calling for help is written and signed "*Juanita,*" and pinioned to the buckle of Wolf dog's collar.

Juanita is half carried to the beginning of the trail but the Wolf-dog has streaked along it and is lost in the trees long before it is reached. He knows not what message he bears, but he knows his friend is needed.

And soon he comes, all caution thrown to the winds of heaven, a veritable cyclone of fury.

He is trapped and stood before the Chief Villa! whose manner has not changed a hair. Villa calls for another chair and Manuel is invited to sit. He does so and the duel beings.

On the one side an animal with intermittent human feelings—who can neither read nor write. On the other, an educated man—who, if there be alloy in his nature—it is only sufficient to hold together the shining gold.

Yet in this duel of words they are not unequal. They advance—they retreat. They parry—they thrust, in Carta and in Tierce—Steel meets Steel! And still the smoke comes through the nostrils of the Chief! — — — "We hold different views, my rival countryman. We cannot agree! — — You may be blindfolded and give the order or not, as you please." — — The firing squad — — Ramirez—we have waited long—We must be on our journey.

And now those men wanted are no longer indolent—they are men of action—they come forward like soldiers. And Manuel is led quickly from the room.

The Chieftain throws away his cigarette and rises—but before he can make one forward step—a human chain is about his feet—human lips are pressed to them and a human body is torn by convulsive, hysterical sobs.

“Save him! Save him! Save him! You are a man. You do not strike women. The vile wretch Roderigo wants me. I will die first. I will give myself to you. Save him! Save him! Mother of God—Save him!”

Villa, “The Butcher”, stoops! His great, rough, brown hands gently lift up this girl, this child. He looks at her face, the very pores of which are shedding tears.

“Ah! So! — — — I have another problem—Why is he an outlaw when he inspires such a love as this. We shall see. We shall see.” A stride, and he is at the door. The guns are just being brought to shoulder when the voice rings out—“Do not fire, Ramirez! — — —Not blindfolded, eh? Well, that is good. Senor Maretta, a man so loved should have his chance—You shall have yours—The chance to change your views. You ride with us to the attack. If you fight (as a Mexican should) and come back—Ah! then — — —as I said We shall see! If you do not fight, Senor, you are riding on my right side!”

The little bells ring on the spur rowels—They mount and they are gone.

Within the shack there are three women, each torn by conflicting emotions. Marta has seen her husband go. Rosita has seen Roderigo go—but hers is a jealous hate. And Juanita, she has won—but what a victory—Her God is free, only to be made to attack those he reveres and to be shot down if he does not do so. To attack—to *attack* those Americans! God! It must not be. Her distracted mind goes back to those talks, when her hero told her of that great people, and when he

pointed out to her the star in which direction they were—and explained that over the mountain, where there was no trail, they were scarcely fifteen miles away.

Electricity is fast, but not one-millionth part as fast as thought. It all flashed through Juanita's brain in an instant.

She must go. She must go over the mountain, and warn the Americans, while the raiders ride around by the trail.

She did not hesitate, the light of the Savior was in her eyes.

She sprang up, but before her were two forms, and one clutched her fiercely by the throat.

An enormous panther-like black body hurtled through the air, and the two forms were stretched seemingly lifeless upon the floor and the girl and the dog ran out into the night—out under the moon and the stars, and headed straight for that one star—which led to the base of the mountain.

Why try to write of that journey that will be handed down in mother's tales to their children, for generations to come.

What looked like brush at a distance upon the mountain side was a tangled mass of thick growth, high above the head of this child. It stripped her few rags until she was naked, cut, and bleeding. Her face was torn beyond recognition. Still she struggled on blindly in the wake of her powerful friend.

There were times when she would fall and moan in utter exhaustion, but the giant dog would return and lick the blood from her eyes. Her fingers would clutch his hairy sides and they would go on again.

When the top of the mountain was reached she sank to rise no more. Nature demanded her toll. It was beyond human endurance. And the dog came and sat beside her, and lifting his great head wailed forth his dog prayer to the skies.

God gave human beings brains to guide their deeds. He also gave animals *instinct*. Who shall say where that instinct begins or ends.

Who shall say that this giant animal was "baying at the moon" when he was pleading, (his head high toward heaven) to his Creator—his God. And who shall say that his prayer was not answered, for he got down flat upon the ground beside the mistress whom he loved, his powerful forefeet were thrust beneath her body followed by his boring head. Slowly and carefully he worked, inch by inch, crawling further under, and then he gently rose with the limp form upon his back. He whined piteously and the half unconscious girl understood. Her fingers tangled in his shaggy hair and weakly closed and down the mountain side they went.

Two hours later they were at the river, the Rio Grande—with the girl still upon this lion-hearted beast's back.

If they were torn before no words can describe their condition now.

The girl was scarcely recognizable and the dog had great cakes of matted blood upon his sides and the white bones shone through the hide of his legs, but he did not hesitate. He plunged straight into the swollen swift running river.

Had not the cold water brought the girl additional life, she would have drowned this courageous Wolf dog and herself—for she could not swim. But her numbed brain cleared—she fastened her fingers in his long hair—and was dragged by his side. The dog swam rapidly to keep her afloat, his head boring into the current and always working toward the opposite shore. *The American Shore!* where just beyond the lights burned fitfully. *They had WON!*

The mighty crowd had somewhat thinned out at the HEADLIGHT Saloon and Gambling Hall. For the hour was two in the morning. Still the whirl and rattle of the little ball of chance was heard as it was sent spinning around its circle.

About the faro layout where the smoke hung heavy, the dealer was saying—four to one for the turn. The idlers at the bar were indulging in closing drink time. The bartender with his Stetson hat pushed back upon his head, was serving, while the cashier lazily counted the proceeds of the night. When through the double doors came two drenched, staggering objects—a girl and a giant dog. The girl was nearly nude, and the dog sank to the floor with a half-choking yelp,—the last of his God-given strength.

The girl swayed and would have fallen had not quick hands steadied her.

“Throw over that Serapa quick, Pete—God! the kid’s naked”

They cover her form. She sways again, and then forces herself to an upright position. And then with a high, piercing voice, calls out:

“Villa and his riders are coming. We came over the mountain to warn you.” The last of her strength is sapped, and falling, she is picked up and tenderly handed over the bar, and lain in the little front office at the end on the boss’s sofa.

A great torn dog goes around the end of the bar and follows her and lays down beside her. And while the whole place is at once transformed to action and hurrying figures, a gentle voiced and sad faced gambler of fluted bosom and white shirted prosperity, looks down upon them and says—“Don’t ever tell me there ain’t no God, fellers” and he is gone.

And in a few moments two dance hall girls, with a gingham dress and other clothing are with Juanita—and Pete, the bartender, is on the floor and the head of the great dog is in his lap and extract of beef juice is slowly trickling down his throat. Juanita is dreaming—she hears many shouting voices, the loud ringing of a bell—she feels warm all over and then she feels no more!

She is awakened by voices, but she cannot see. It is all dark! But she knows men are at the windows. The door opens and in the streak of moonlight she sees a man enter who says, "They're comin'—they're swimmin' the river. Git ready. Everything' is planted boys. We'll give 'em hell!"

"He! He is coming! Oh! dear Lord! What shall I do! He is coming!"

It is dark. She is behind the bar. She crawls quickly to its end hoping to make a dash for the street. But there at the end of the bar is a side door. She can see the moonlight through the cracks.

She noiselessly opens it and slips out, closing the door on the black form, her friend, who would follow.

She is going to do a deed, where she along must die.

Cautiously she goes to the corner of the little blind alley that opens on the main street. She is just in time. She sees them coming in the moonlight a hundred strong—Riding at their head Villa, with her God at his right side.

Straight out and toward them she runs, her hands stretched high in the air.

"Go back—go back—go back—I have warned them! she cries!

There is a curse behind Villa and Maretta and a thing of blasted hopes fires—Villa turns like lightning and sees as Maretta rolls to the ground.

"We need your weapon now, Senor Roderigo. After the fight, you die." The girl is upon them and she has heard as she throws herself prostrate across *his* breast.

There is a myriad of reports from every door and window comes the flash of red spurting fire. The fight at Columbus is on!

Back and forth and across they go. The occupants of the buildings after the first death dealing volley come forth. Those Sons of New Mexico are not men to fight behind barricades. The shrill battle cry of the cowman splits the night air. Riderless horses dash at breakneck speed in every direction, always swerving from those living figures (as horses always do) in their headlong flight.

She coaxes, she pleads, she implores him to rise. There is a great gapping wound in his side. And as the bullets zip, and cut through the air she supports and drags him midst the din and carnage, toward the place from whence she came. *There* will be help and succor. She almost makes it. When out of the turmoil comes a demon! A demon of hate and death. He has seen! They are just in front of the high board sidewalk, when he come clubbing his gun like a dervisher. It is raised high in the air to bring down with full force upon their helpless heads. The galloping horse is upon them. When — — — even above the din of battle—there is an unearthly savage cry. The cry of—the Wolf. A great black body leaps from the high board walk through the air, as straight to the mark as a shot from a gun.

A riderless horse dashes on and a human body writhes and twists a moment upon the ground and then lies still. While over him the Wolf, the Avenger, stands with blood-red jaws.

The raiders are in flight. In the middle of the street is a hatless, unhorsed, stalwart figure, with big white teeth, which flash as he smiles in slow retreat, firing as he goes. He will be surrounded and shot down—it is inevitable, when out from behind the belching guns of the defenders rides a girl. Straight at this lone figure she goes, and slides with one movement from her horse. "Go!" she cries! And the huge bulk of a man vaults lightly to the saddle. Again the white teeth flash and again he smiles. "Deos", he calls. "I hope my rival lives, for I have seen!"

Some three moons have come and gone since that *battle* moon lighted the way for JUSTICE!

It is again approaching the hour when day denatures night.

At the "Headlight Saloon and Gambling Hall"

Pete is again serving. The cashier is again counting and the idlers at the bar are again idling while the smoke again hangs heavy over the Faro layout. At its side there is a round table at which shirt-sleeved men play silently. One is the sad-faced gambler whose words have such a peculiar force.

"I'm sure a missin' that shaggy head that's been comin' in here and settin' along side o' me so long," he says,— "Raise her two reds!"

"Gee! You must have a' ace buried, Dan—I see it— Did they git away alright?"

"Yep! We put 'em across at Francisco ford just twenty-four hours ago, to the minit."

"What are you hikin' it for, Sully—you losin, your mind?—I'm stayin'—Wuz the kid happy?" "Happy! I'll say she wuz—The ol' Padre up there married 'em just afore they 'crost!"

Tens in sight an' he bets two blues—"I'm in wrong. Huh! It didn't take no third roll o' the dice to know how that 'ud turn out—I'll trail."

"Well, she had it comin' That kid didn't care no more for her life 'n I do for a tin tobacco tag! What you droppin' fer, Curley, be game!"

"Uh, huh, I wonder where the wind goes when she don't blow!"

"Two better!"

"That's me! When they got on the other side they waved at us an' we could see the kid gettin' down on her knees an' sayin' of a prayer."

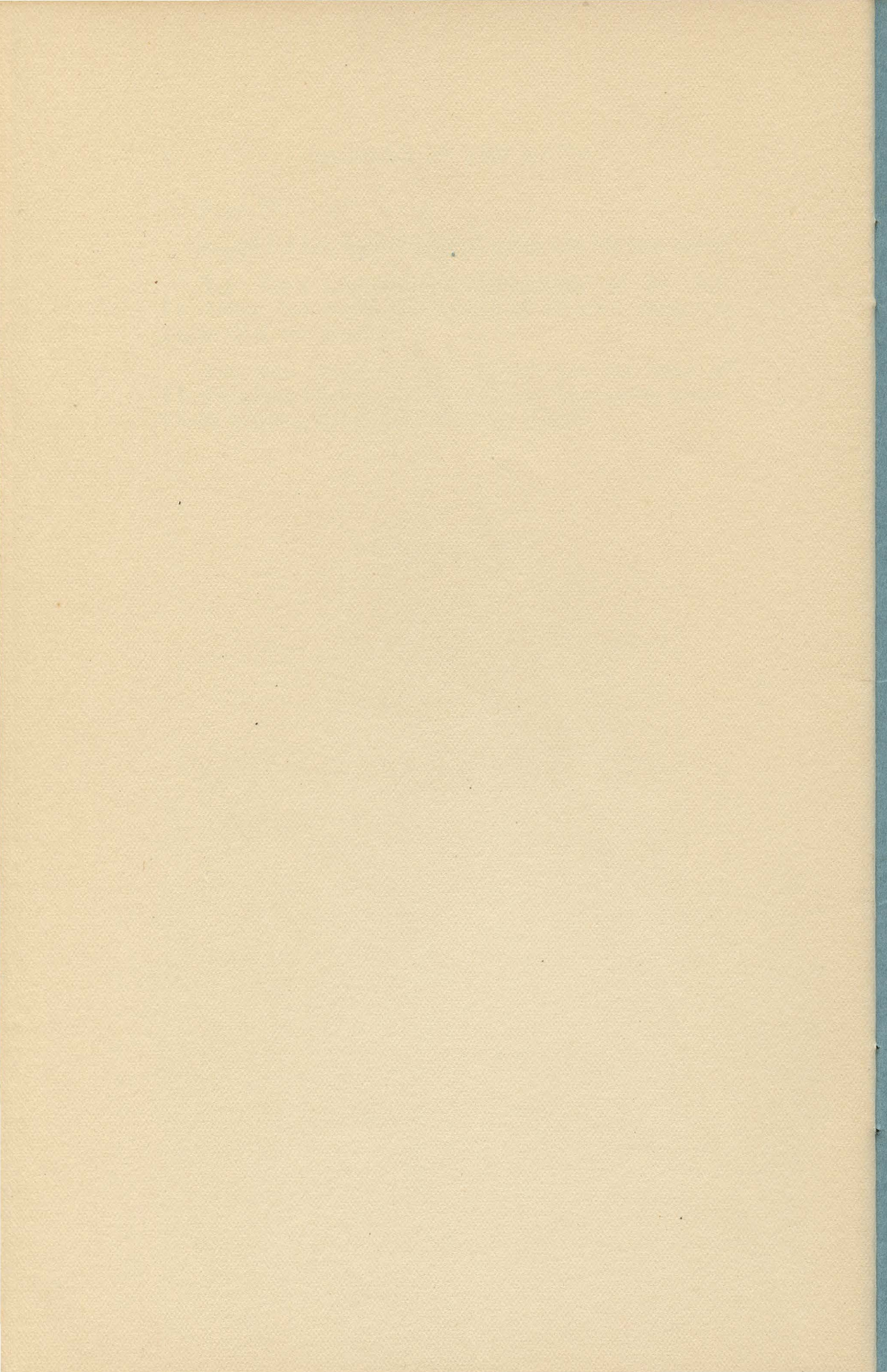
"Four blues—!"

"See it! I'll bet they wuz glad to hit old Mexico again!

"No! I got a hunch she wuz prayin' for us. An' I'm tellin' the world the prayer of all good people is good—Bet the stack!"

"You win!—Sufferin' tarantulas!—kin you beat it? I have a king buried—one in sight an' he cops on tens—Them prayers didn't hit me none—Dan!"

THE END





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