

Whose Shoes?

Corporal Tarleton thought Trooper Scott was stupid. But Scott wasn't stupid. He was just a young policeman in the throes of love

By Frederic F. Van de Water



He turned as the closet door creaked. "Stay," a thick voice invited, "only stay damned still"



Illustrated by
E. F. Ward

A MILE from Ophir the right rear tire expired with a shrill diminishing whistle. The car slewed across frozen ruts and rested against the roadside bank the snowplows had raised. Corporal John Tarleton of the New York State Troopers flexed the gauntleted hands he lifted from the steering wheel and looked with reproach at Trooper David Scott.

"I thought so," said the corporal.

Snow crunched as Scott scrambled out. His violent gesture tilted the fur uniform cap of the winter patrol over one eye.

"You thought so!" he snorted. "Who said, an hour ago, she'd go before we got to town?"

The corporal blinked mildly beneath broad, black brows.

"You did," he acknowledged. "That's why I thought so."

A hundred yards back, a shabby house sat on a hillside before a shabbier barn, and in front of his kennel in the dooryard a police dog yelped dismally. Tarleton offered:

"We can phone for a new tire."

Scott looked up with alarm from his inspection of the deflated tire.

"Nix," he said quickly. "We'll patch it. No phone at the Flints' and, anyway, we're not popular there. Delaney and I—"

Tarleton was staring down the road. A girl walked toward them. Suddenly Scott's lips were dry. Breathing was difficult. She was slender and her downcast eyes were fixed with disproportionate attention on the rough road. Her face was even lovelier than he had remembered. The soft uncertainty of her bright mouth was a challenge. He croaked: "Hello, Mary."

SHE stumbled over the clotted snow. Her blue eyes met his for an instant.

"Hello," she said at last. "Hello, Dave," and passed in almost fugitive haste. Scott wiped his forehead on his coat sleeve. The corporal said provocatively: "Pretty," but his partner only rummaged loudly among the tools beneath the upturned seat.

"Know her long?" Tarleton probed.

"Too long." Scott hauled out the jack with a clatter. Wrinkles deepened in the other's lean, brown face.

"Yeh," he agreed. "So I saw. No wonder the skipper transferred you."

"Listen," Scott said in a tight voice. "How would you like this jack wrapped around your neck?"

Tarleton considered his youthful fury and said quietly: "Not very much. Better use it on that axle."

Scott obeyed. Rage evaporated with effort. He spoke at length in a shaky voice:

"Captain Dover didn't transfer me. I asked for it."

He appeared to choke. Tarleton commented dryly:

"Even a kid ought to know enough not to vamp dames while in uniform. So she gated you, eh?"

He watched the jack handle trembling in Scott's hand. Finally, the younger man spoke in short bursts while he wrestled with an ice-bound rim lug:

"Why wouldn't she? We pinched her father and brother—had a still over the hill yonder—old man got a year; George, six months—constable in Ophir—he made the complaint."

The nut surrendered. He straightened up with a harsh laugh.

"So that," he defied, meeting Tarleton's observant eyes, "is what vamping in uniform got me. She spoke to me just now for the first time in six months."

"Why didn't you write—"

"Resourceful guy, eh?" Scott jeered. "They all came back, unopened."

"Six months," the corporal mused aloud. "Brother George ought to be out again, now."

"This week, some time," the other returned, staring down the road. "That's one reason I didn't put up a roar when they sent me back here with you. I didn't want him—or her—to think I was ashamed. Ball, the constable, pulled a fast one and we had to act on his complaint."

Tarleton hammered at the ice-glued rim and offered, over his shoulder: "Bet she's gone in to meet him now."

"Why?" Scott queried sharply.

"Dressed pretty, wasn't she?" the corporal pursued. "Wasn't she going in to trade. No bag or purse. Didn't you see?"

Scott still stared down the road.

"I just only saw—her face," he said slowly.

ALONG Ophir's soiled Main Street houses sat in drifts beneath roofloads of snow. Sleighbells stirred the still cold with trivial cheer and from the steps of the general store a muffled figure waved vaguely as the troop car jounced past.

"Constable Ball," Scott offered through chattering teeth.

In the vast chamber assigned them on the second floor of the Mansion House the patrol-wise Tarleton tested the beds in turn and shrugged.

"No use matching for these," he announced. "Can't tell which is worse."

His partner peered into a cavernous clothes closet and absently turned the key in the massive door. The corporal shouldered off the depression of weariness.

"I'll phone the operator," he said, "so she'll know where she can get us. Put the car under cover, Dave. We'll work on her later. Might drive down and get our patrol sheet postmarked, first."

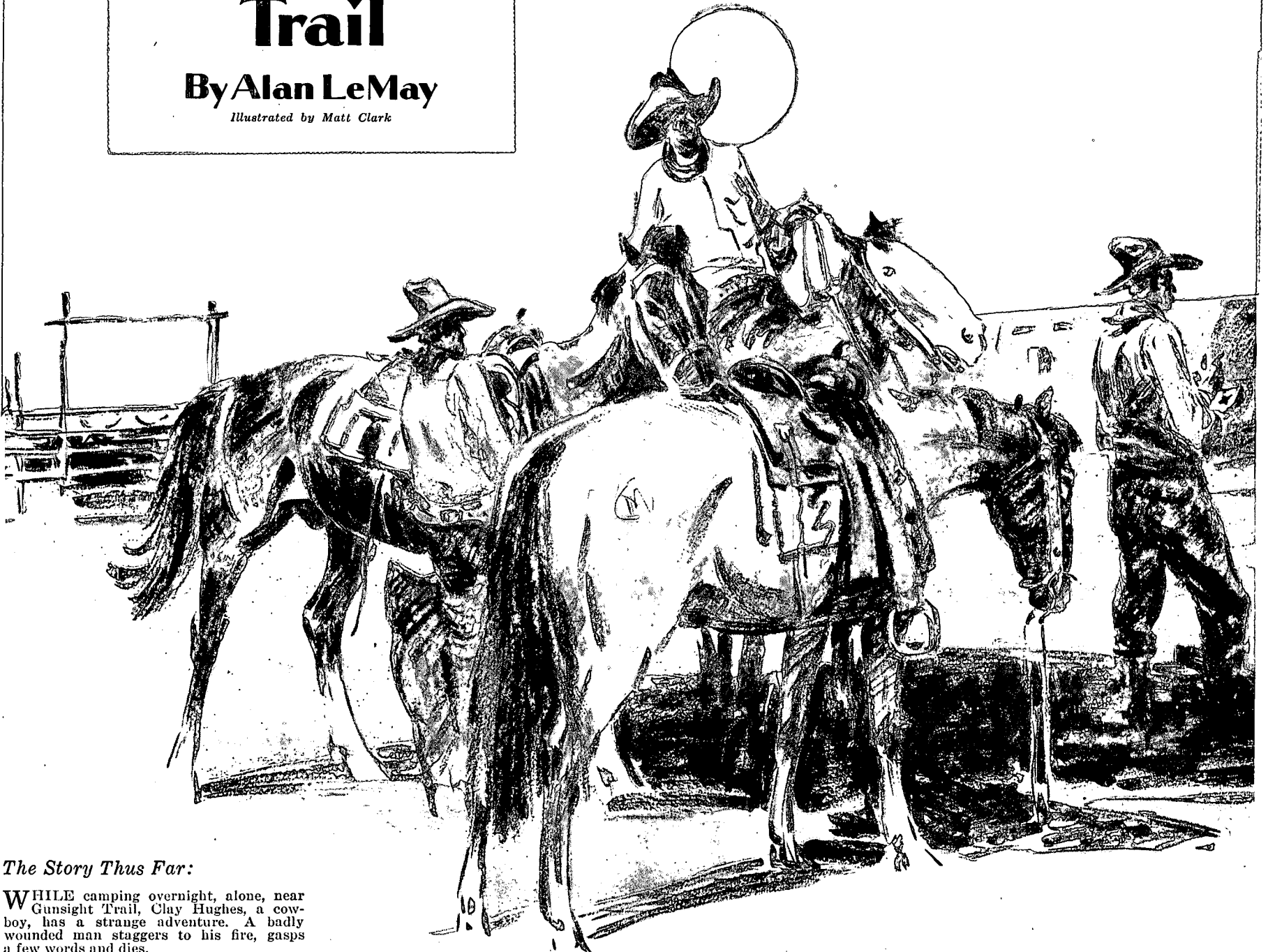
"Sure," Scott replied with sudden briskness.

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Gunsight Trail

By Alan LeMay

Illustrated by Matt Clark



The Story Thus Far:

WHILE camping overnight, alone, near Gunsight Trail, Clay Hughes, a cowboy, has a strange adventure. A badly wounded man staggers to his fire, gasps a few words and dies.

He learns more, however, at the Lazy M ranch, to which he goes to take a job offered by an old friend—Bob Macumber, the foreman. The dead man was Hugo Donnan, the sheriff; and the ranch owner's son, Dick Major, mysteriously absent for three days, is under suspicion. . . . Soon everyone—old man Major, Dick's father; Art French; Tom Ireland, and all the other cowboys—hears Clay's story, with one vitally important detail omitted. Finding himself greeted not as a friend but as an enemy, Clay stubbornly refuses to reveal what the dying man told him. And presently he finds himself a prisoner.

A tremendous struggle—between the Lazy M forces and those of one Earl Shaw, a neighboring rancher—is impending. Soon there may be actual fighting, bloodshed.

Clay sees Sally Major, old man Major's daughter, and because she is the loveliest girl he has ever seen he resolves to stay and face the approaching storm.

Adventure follows quickly. Entering his room, he finds himself locked in—by his shadower. It is night. He strikes a match. A girl stands before him. It is Sally Major! The match flickers, dies. A shot rings out, and a bullet crashes into the wall. Someone, outside, has tried to kill Clay! "Why," he whispers, "are you here?" "I had to come," the girl gasps, "to talk to you. . . ." Then—"Smash down the door!" comes the order from outside. "I heard his lamp fall!"

II

TO HUGHES it seemed that his irrational situation had now become completely incredible—the more so because he was acutely conscious of the nearness of Sally Major, kneeling beside him in the dark. All day long his eyes had followed her whenever she was in sight. Her quick, clean-limbed stride, the live warmth of her gray eyes—the least tones of her voice, the least movements of her hands—had held his acute attention from the first moment he had seen her. And whenever his eyes were upon her he had been aware of an unaccustomed sense of humbleness, as if the distance between them was very great and would take a long time to cross—if it were ever to be crossed at all. Yet this was the girl whom the unpredictable turn of events had now imprisoned beside him.

The voice that was raised beyond the door was hard with the pressure of an imagined quick necessity. "That feller may be dying in there!" came the voice of Tom Ireland. "We got to break in!"

There was a heavy thud as somebody charged his weight against the planking of the door. The hasp rattled violently but the door did not appear to strain.

There was an electric tremor in the quick pressure of the girl's hand upon his arm. Reassuringly he covered her hand with his own. "Set easy," he whispered. He raised his voice, putting a tone of impatience into an unexcited drawl: "What's the matter with you blame' fools out there?"

"Hughes, you all right?"

"HELL, yes," Hughes growled back. "But it's no fault of yours if I am. What kind of a rat-trap are you running here, anyhow?"

"Well, heck," said a voice outside, "if he's all right, I suppose we may as well leave him in there."

"Leave him in there, hell! I've got to find out what's going on here, don't I?" said Ireland's voice. "Where's Art French with that key? Go out and find him." There was a sound of departing

"Mr. Major," said Ireland, "a funny thing happened here a little while ago." The old man waited, watching him sharply

footsteps and a shouting for Art French.

"Wait a minute, Hughes!" Ireland called, unnecessarily, "we got to get the key."

Hughes chuckled as he answered, "I won't go away."

Sally Major leaned against Hughes' shoulder to whisper intensely in his ear: "Listen!" Her fingers pressed his arm sharply. "Can you hear what I'm saying? They mustn't know I've been here—do you understand?"

"Why, of course—"

"It isn't for me. You can't possibly understand! But"—her words, tumbling over each other nervously, were no louder than the faintest breath, close to his ear, yet they were distinct and clear—"you have to do what I ask you—right away—tonight—do you hear?"