




El Diablo by Paul Ketselsen

 The sleepy town of Gunsmoke woke with a headache this particular morning, and the cause was none other than Luke Patton. Luke was the town boss, his men were the deputies, and his saloon took all the money from the miners, ranchers and other men that happened to drift into the small but very wild town. The night before, Luke had decided to take over the town bank, legal-like of course, and in staying within the law had framed a murder charge on old Silas Tripp. The trial was as big a farce as Luke himself, but he had the power and that meant Silas wasn't given a chance. During the trial Luke plied most of the town with "rotgut" and by the time the trial was over—if it could be called such—the men were so drunk anything was all right with them. The cut and frayed end of a rope thrown over a low-hanging limb was mute evidence of Silas' fate.

Mary Tripp sat by the body of her father and softly cried. She was a pretty girl, with soft yellow hair and large blue eyes. Silas and Mary had lived alone for some twelve years, ever since her brother had turned bad man and left home. Since that time nothing had been heard from him, so both of them had supposed he was dead.

Just across the border in a small Mexican town, Jimmy Tripp had hidden himself from the world. The only world that knew him called him "El Diablo." His gunslinging ranked with the best and his cunningness came from twelve years of hard living. Living for an existence. El Diablo had been chased by the best police of the Mexican government and also by the smartest Marshal's the U. S. could muster. They were stumped, mostly because no one knew anything about him except that he had red hair and rode

alone. For all his ruthless killings, Jimmy was sorry he had ever been mixed up in them, but it was a case of either shooting first or being shot. He had always kept a weather eye on the town of Gunsmoke just in case anything ever happened to Mary or his father. Not twenty hours had passed since the hanging of his father, and Jimmy was well on the way to Gunsmoke. If the town had a headache from a hanging, it was really due for a relapse this time.

The swinging doors of the Golden Eagle saloon—Luke's saloonswung open and the rangiest cow poke ever seen struck his head inside, then walked in. His first glance took in the room, the bunch at the far table and those standing at the bar. He headed for the bar, his red hair waying like uncut wheat.

"Hello, stranger," said the barkeep. "Ain't ever seen you around; where ya hail from?"

"I'm from Mexico and I ain't ever been in these parts before; now is there anything else ya'd like to know?" "Nuthin' 'cept what'll ya have?" "Give me straight rye. By the way, can ya tell me where I can find Luke Patton?" The boys at the far table shoved their chairs back and fingered the butts of their six-guns. "Just what would ya be wantin' with Luke? Maybe one of the boys over there can help you." "That's my business," snapped the red-head. "Say, partner, maybe you didn't hear me say where I was from. Mexico—now does that mean anything?" Three of the men at the bar jumped for the door; one got his legs