


THREE GUNS AND A HEART

BY A. ROBINSON



He was known down Gulch City way as Three-Gun Weaver. Strangers in Gulch City had often inquired concerning the origin of Weaver's calling-name and had as often received the querulous reply of, "Don't you savvy nothing podner?" He was a gent who carried guns all over himself and he was lightnin' on the draw, but except when he was plenty riled, he was a plumb peaceful hombre.

Three-Gun Weaver was a young cow-poke for the Square-Dot Ranch, which was one of the largest cattle businesses east of Goat Range. It was said of him that he shied from work better than anybody on the ranch. During daylight he hung around "Chicken" Frier's saloon, but at night he just couldn't be found.

You see, Weaver was one of those guys that all women fall for. He wasn't a very big man, but if he had been any more handsome, he could have been called pretty. His trim figure and gay manner were envied by every man and admired by every woman in Gulch. But to quote the young men in Gulch, "he just had what it took." A trail of broken hearts could always be found where Three-Gun had been. But the trouble that Three-Gun complained of was that he had broken all the hearts in Gulch so that there were no more to break. That's the kind of tale that he told in Chicken's saloon to his Smoky Circle Gang, which consisted of some pokes about Three-Gun's own age who worked around Gulch territory and who liked to listen to his stories about women—women who had lost their breath at first meeting Three-Gun and who had had their love and affection ensnared by his unquestionable charm.

Each member of the gang, too, had felt heart pains due to this superior control of Three-Gun's when he had stolen girl-friends and returned them only as the game grew tiresome. The gang had taken these punishments as being unpreventable, but had a lingering hope that sometime would come a day of retribution.


"Some day," said "Fizzle" Bland—and the other young men, including "Suds" Braziel, nodded their heads and voiced approval, "you're going to fall for some dame and fall so hard you'll never get over it. We know you've got everything, but—"

"You said it. I've got everything—but a heart!" With that, Three-Gun walked out, leaving the saloon doors flapping, and left the gang to what turned out to be a conspiracy. And in that conspiracy, genius was born in the head of one of Three-Gun's heart victims, Otto Shields, who brought fourth the fact that on that very day the new school marm, a most gorgeous angel, a perfect specimen of feminine loveliness—had moved into Jett Sullivan's place, which was right across the creek from Otto's Double-M hangout. Perhaps she might be persuaded to work for their cause! It would be a great joy to the youth at Gulch to see a gal give Weaver a dose of his own medicine.

Otto's plan was received coldly at first. Maybe she was married. Maybe she would fall in love with Three-Gun like all the others. But maybe—! Otto was elected to take the problem to her. That he did, and this possessor of great feminine attributes reluctantly agreed to work for what she had been persuaded to believe was a good cause.

Maybe it was because the sweetness of spring filled

the air in Gulch City that Weaver fell. Maybe it was because Mary Magee, the new addition of queenly beauty to Gulch, was the essence of spring herself, that caused him to fall. But regardless, the time of year and Mary's beauty were certainly no hindrance to a thickening plot.



Three-Gun lost no time in courting Mary when he was introduced to her by master-of-ceremonies Otto Shields. And his visits to Mary's residence soon became a nightly occurrence. Each evening as the sun began to redden the west, he would saddle up Sugar, his little paint horse, and ride with the lengthening shadows through Hangman's Draw toward Mary's residence. He would scarcely hear the high thin wail of the cougar, so eager did he become to see her.

Three-Gun became so interested, in fact, that he rarely ever attended the meetings of the Smoky Circle Gang, and when he did there was no talk on his part concerning the manner in which he was "gettin' along" with Mary Magee. But the boys knew that he had finally fallen, because although Weaver didn't know it, news was coming direct from Mary herself.

For many nights in a row the sofa at Mary's house held comfortably and warmly a couple who seemed to be greatly thrilled by each other's presence. Three-Gun had patiently submitted to seeing Mary indoors until one night Jett Sullivan's brat had suddenly sprung from behind the sofa with, "Go ahead and kiss her! You'll like it!" After that Weaver had tried to coax her outdoors.

"Let's go outside and I'll point out the wonders of the night for you. Let me show you things you never dreamed of before." But Mary shook her head and told him that she had rather look at him where her eyes wouldn't be so strained. He had persisted, "You know Mary, it is pretty outside, with the mellow moon a-shinin', the breezes blowin', the crickets crickin' and the grasses growin'. Don't you see? Don't you think so?" At this she just wrinkled up that pretty little nose of hers, and Three-Gun's insides would feel like that time when he had tried to bust that ornery strawberry roan.

How wonderful it was to court a creature like Mary! How fresh and how different she was at every visit! He just knew that she felt the way he did, but her refusing to say so just made the situation the more interesting.

But finally she let him point out the wonders of the night to her.

They left the Sullivan house by the kitchen door and wandered down to Sluice Creek, which they could hear bubbling as it wound its way along in the darkness. Upstream along the water's edge they followed, disregarding the dangers of the night. Shortly they came upon the small waterfall made by the creek where it entered the Sullivan property. Here they sat and talked. They removed their boots and rinsed their feet in the cool running water and watched as a full moon began to raise itself above a clump of trees across the creek. The water shook and sparkled before them, while back in the hill trees could be heard the shrill cry of the screech owl . . .

A few days later Otto saw that Three-Gun was showing great signs of absent-mindedness and loss of appetite, so he