

# REUNION '78

Dodge City's Long Branch saloon was enjoying an unaccustomed quiet night. The bar was lightly patronized the two aprons moved back and forth behind it with a leisurely air, setting out a bottle, taking a coin, making desultory talk. The gaming tables in the rear were getting a fair play but the customers there were being surprisingly unvocal.

Seated at a table with Kitty Russell, Marshal Matt Dillon noted the relative silence prevailing in this normally tumultuous place and remarked on it to his pretty table companion.

"Kind of unusual for the Long Branch." He made wet circles on the table top with the bottom of his half-empty glass. "Unusual for Dodge City, come to that," he added.

"Thank heaven a time like this does come along once in a while," Kitty responded. "Believe me, Matt, we can use an easy hour when we get it. Both of us."

Matt smiled. "My work comes in fits and starts," he told her. "But you're going it hot and heavy most of the time. In fact, the reason I came in he confided, "was to get you to sit down for a minute--didn't know then what a soft touch you were having tonight."

She gave him a mock salute. "Good Samaritan Dillon," she said, quirking her lips at him. "I don't know if I can stand you so saintly."

"Won't have to, long," He made some more circles. "Got to finish the street, get back to the office for a while."

Her eyes held his face for a moment. "Make it in again later," she said. "I might need you to slow me down then; I don't think this will last."

He sighed. "You're right. There's two trail outfits still camped a ways out. They'll be showing, sooner or later, and then there'll be no rest for the wicked."

"Meaning me, I suppose?" She tilted her head, eyebrows arched.

"Meaning all of us." Matt Dillon said it lightly but his lips showed no smile. "Show me a man and I'll show you a sinner. We all tote a share of it—some of us more than others, that's all."

Kitty Russell looked at this lawman, her eyes 'warm and gentle.' "I know how you feel, Matt. You bear a heavier load than most of us, maybe because you let your conscience take on what a lot of other people shoulder aside

Matt, why don't you get away from this town?" she burst out

"A lot of good people in Dodge City," he reminded her. "Not angels, maybe—but good people. I work for them. My job is to make this place tolerable. Later on it'll be somebody's else's job to keep it a proud place to live. You know how I feel, Kitt . . . there are worse places Dodge City."

"It's a better place because you're here Matt..." she said quietly. She looked up as a middle-aged: **erect** man approached her table. "Well, Pete I didn't expect to see you back here so soon? Where's Belle?"

Captain Peter Wynn, breveted Lieutenant Colonel in the Civil War, was a retired U. S. Army officer with a little money who had been living in Dodge for several months and spending a large part of his time hanging around the Long Branch. It was no secret that the place's attraction for him lay in the charms of Belle Archer, one of its prettiest girls.

"Outside," Pete Wynn answered briefly. He picked up the woman's garment draped over the back of the vacant chair at the table. "She asked me to get her cape and take her home."

Kitty frowned and started to rise. "Is there something wrong, Pete? Anything I can do to help?"

"No thanks, Kitty," Wynn said. "She just said to tell you she's going to her room, that she doesn't feel so well." He looked uncertain. "Headache, I guess."

"That's tough," Kitty said. "Tell her not to worry about us, Pete. Have her take an aspirin and go to bed and get a good sleep for a change. Wait, I'll tell her myself"

Wynn nodded briefly to Matt and headed for the door, Kitty hurrying along with him.

Matt raised one finger to Wynn in a vague farewell gesture. He was engrossed in watching two men at the bar.

One of them was wearing "store" clothes. His appearance

was that of a town man, but Matt, who had talked to him a couple of times, felt that the designation somehow didn't quite fit the fellow. His name was Andy Culley and he was hardware and farm-equipment salesman. He had recently added a new item—something he called barbed wire—to his line, and he was tiresomely voluble about it. Matt had been subjected to a rapid-fire talk on the new product's virtues earlier in the day and he suspected that the bartender, who had been serving Culley with a blank face and half-raised eyebrows, was being treated to the same dose.

A few minutes earlier a newcomer had sided Culley at the bar. He was in his middle or late twenties, **Matt judged,** lean and **tanned,** his face an interesting **combination** of strength and sensitivity. **He** wore the garb of a **trail driver,** and Matt who had never seen the man before, assumed he was a rider for one of the two outfits that had **just crossed** the Arkansas with their herds and were waiting to get **their stuff** into the shipping pens.

The **trail driver** was obviously alone, but **upon** coming in he had unhesitatingly taken a position at the bar **right** next to Culley, ignoring the empty spaces extending on each side of the **salesman.** He had ordered a whisky and stood there, ignoring it after one quick sip, shooting glances at Culley, listening to his gab, seeming to size the man up.

As Matt observed the tableau, Culley appeared to be getting ready to pay his tab and leave. He wiped his mouth, straightened the hat on his head, spoke to **Mike,** the **bar-tender,** and reached into his pants pocket. The **good-looking** young **trailsman** interposed, **throwing** a coin on the bar, waving a hand at Mike, and looking expectantly **and—Matt** thought-challengingly at Culley. Culley said **something** and grinned at the younger man, but there was a **tension** about his face that made Matt Dillon, who had an **eye** for such things, sit straight in his chair, and bring all **his** attention on the two.

**Kitty,** who had followed Pete Wynn out to have her word with Belle, slipped back into her seat.

"She's a strange one," Kitty remarked.

"What's that?" Matt said, not turning his **head.**

"Belle Archer, I mean." Kitty lifted her drink and sipped it. "Not coming back. Headache, my eye. She acts like she's **plain** scared, to me. Of what, I don't **know.**"

"Yeah?" **Matt** said, still looking toward the two at the bar.

"I can't help wondering about her," Kitty said. "Where she came from ... what brought her here. She never talks about herself ... she's kind of a puzzle to me."

Matt said, "I got another one for **you—why's** the cowboy picking the fight with the hardware drummer?"

Kitty's attention went to the scene at the bar. Culley, red-faced and sweating, was half-turned toward the door, as though **anxious** to get away. The trailsman was in the act of pouring another drink into the glass that Culley had already emptied, quickly once, at the other's insistence. **The** bartender was watching them worriedly.

Matt got to his feet and moved unobtrusively toward them. He got close enough to hear Culley say: "Sorry, mister, I've got to get back to the hotel."

He started away but the cowboy grabbed his arm. "Let's not get insulting, now," he said harshly.

The bartender leaned **forward**. "The man says no, he means no," he told the trailsman. He reached to pick up the bottle that sat on the bar.

The rider quickly put his own hand on it. "Leave it there." He pushed the shotglass full of whisky at Culley. "Drink it."

Culley looked at it, looked at the other's set face, looked away. "I said I'm going," he announced weakly.

"And I said drink it," the cowboy persisted. "Better bring another bottle, bartender. Andy here's **goin'** to drink to the old home town till he drops."

With a sudden movement of his left arm Culley knocked the shotglass out of the trail man's proffering hand and then swept the bottle off the bar top. Glass and bottle crashed on the floor. Men rose quickly from tables, faced about at the bar, staring.

With a muttered oath, the trail driver grabbed **Culley's** left arm, twisted it in a hammerlock, spun the man around and pinned him against the bar.

The drummer was sweating profusely now: from his **pain-**twisted mouth came a whining "Let go, let go!"

Matt Dillon stepped forward to break it up, then paused **as the** tense-faced young man, holding Culley tight with the hammerlock grip, shoved the drummer's right sleeve up to the elbow. Matt peered forward as the trailsman bent over the

**exposed** forearm. On the man's pale **skin** he saw tattooed a letter Q boxed by a diamond.

The rider's voice was harsh and strained: "I was right." Loosing his grip on the other's left arm he yanked **him** around **Culley's** face was a study in fear. The **trail man** balled his fists. "I ought to kill you," he grunted. He punched the drummer in the face. Culley sagged and the other **hit** **him** again, a swinging smash to the jaw. Culley **staggered** back against the bar. The rider crowded after **him** and landed another punch to the drummer's face. **Culley** fell **side-**wise to the floor and lay still.

**The** whole sequence of violent action had taken no more than ten or twelve seconds. Once it started, Matt Dillon had no chance to stop it. **He'd** been momentarily **thrown** off by the exposure of the tattoo mark on the drummer's arm. **Now** **he had to act.** He stepped toward the trail driver again, **being** careful to stay more than arm's length from **him.** **was** **always** a mistake to get too close to a man who was **quick** with his fists.

Mike the bartender, was leaning **over to** take a look at the hall-conscious Culley. "Holy smoke," he muttered, and looked up at the defiant trail driver. Kitty's voice **came** to **Matt** **above** the murmuring of the other onlookers: "Get hi out of here!" she was saying. **crowding**

**The trailsman** had swung to face the spectators **about.** "Stay back," he warned. "I'm not finished with **him.**" His hand hovered over his holstered gun.

"Yes, you are," Matt's voice brought the other's head around to look at the lawman. "You're finished here, friend."

"Keep out of this, Marshal," the trailsman said in a level voice. "I said I'm not finished With him. I got a ways to go yet."

"That you do," **Matt** said. "About two hundred feet. From here to the jail."

The trailsman's hand moved almost **imperceptibly** nearer the butt of his holstered gun. Matt stood **still,** ready **himself,** not wanting to use his gun if he could help **it,** watching the other's eyes, keeping his own face calm, **thinking** that **this** shouldn't have been allowed to develop, that, he **should** have moved in sooner, when he first saw the conflict brewing **in** the tension in the attitudes of this man and the drummer, pleading silently that the other's gun hand be stayed.

"**Don't** do it," he said quietly.

Culley made a diversion by stirring, shaking his head, groping uncertainly to his feet. The trailsman turned his head slightly to glance at the man he had attacked. Then he looked back at Matt and let his right hand drop quietly to his side.

Matt Dillon sighed inwardly and let himself relax. "Come on, mister," he said. "Let's go." He headed the trailsman toward the door. First warning the other that he was going to do so, he pulled the man's gun from its holster and walked along behind him, holding the weapon in his left hand.

"Someone was saying in a hushed voice, "Can you beat that?" and another man asked querulously, "Who the devil started it, anyhow? Does anybody know?"

Matt took a backward glimpse as he followed his prisoner out the door. Mike, the bartender, was looking concernedly at Culley, his lips moving in some kind of comment or question, as the drummer lifted a glass of whisky to his lips, a little unsteadily.

In the marshal's office, Matt tossed the prisoner's gun on his desk, had the man shuck his cartridge belt and add it to the pile. Matt sat down behind the desk and pulled out a report blank.

"What's your name?"

"Jerry Shand."

"Well, sit down over there. . . . They must grow 'em real tough where you come from, Shand. Roughing up a hardware drummer with a pot belly. Real two-fisted, he-man stuff."

"You're a real talky kind of marshal, too," Shand said sourly.

"Well, I've got more patience than some. Maybe you might give a little thought to the advantages of getting talked at instead of pistol-whipped. You've been around long enough to know what sort of treatment you'd be getting from some lawmen.?"

"Yeah, I'm real grateful," the other said, but Matt thought he detected a note of genuine contrition under the sarcastic words.

"What's your outfit?" he said shortly.

"Lazy K," was the response. "From the Pecos."

Matt scribbled. "When'd you pull in?"

"This afternoon."

"where's the rest of your crew?"

"Gut at the holdin' ground. Couple of us got leave to come in ahead of the rest."

"A couple? Where's your partner?"

"Lost him outside. He's not much of a drinkin' man. Lookin' for faster action down the street somewheres."

"What call did you have to pick on Andy Culley, there in the Long Branch? Got something against him?"

Shand did not reply.

"You don't even know hi, do you? Just hit town at the end of the trail, feeling ringy, and look for a fight? Why didn't you choose somebody who could give you a run for your money?"

"Listen, Marshal," Shand said tightly, "you don't know what this is 'all about."

Matt looked at him. "All right; you tell me, then." "It's-personal between him and me," Shand said stubbornly.

"Well," Matt said evenly, "have you got twenty-five dollars bail money to put up?"

"No, I haven't. Boss pays off tomorrow."

"Then you can spend a peaceful night here on a jailhouse bunk. I wish it would teach you and your Texas saddlemates to keep your hands folded when you get north of the Deadline-but I don't reckon it will," Matt ended with a sigh.

He and Shand looked around as the door opened. It was Andy Culley. He had a cut lip and a mouse under one eye. He glanced once at Shand, who was staring malevolently at him, and then turned his gaze to Matt.

"Evening, Marshal," said the drummer.

"What is it, Culley?"

"I-don't want to butt in, Marshal," Culley said hesitantly, taking a couple of slow steps toward the desk.

"You already have," Matt said drily; "but go ahead—what's on your mind?"

Culley licked his lips and flicked a glance at Shand, who had risen quickly from his chair. "I, uh, just wanted to tell him-I'm sorry . . ." the drummer said.

Matt stared at him. "You're sorry?"

"Yeah-for starting the fracas over there. I maybe' said something I shouldn't."

There was a silence. The marshal and his prisoner thought about this strange statement, each in his own way, trying to

fit it into the framework of his own knowledge. It was **Culley** who broke the silence.

"You aren't bringing assault charges against him, **Marshal**—because I won't sign a complaint."

"You don't need to," Matt said shortly. "I was there and I saw what happened. Shand here picked a fight."

"Well, I won't have no part in it," Culley said; "I don't want no trouble."

"Disturbing the peace happens to be a **misdemeanor**—even in Dodge City." Matt wondered where this was all leading to.

"Well, then, what's the bail?" Culley demanded.

"Twenty-five dollars," Matt said wearily.

Culley thrust a hand into his trousers pocket and brought it out filled with gold coins. He counted out five and dropped them on Matt's desk. "There you are." He looked at Jerry Shand. "It's the least I can do, boy," he said to the trailsman, and went out.

Matt was watching Jerry Shand. **The** young rider's face was bleak, his mouth a grim, uncompromising line, as he kept his eyes on the retreating drummer's back.

The marshal pushed his hat back with an exasperated grunt. He **did** not offer a word as Jerry Shand lifted his gun and rig from the desk and buckled the belt around his middle. Shand's eyes were blank, his expression cold and noncommittal, as he met Matt's 'stare. He turned, strode to the door, and went out into the night.

Slowly, Matt Dillon tore the partially filled-out blank from the pad in front of him. Eyes troubled, he crumpled it in a wad, ending with a vicious twist, and threw it into a corner.

There was something wrong here, something that had **its** roots in the past. A past that the drummer wanted to forget . . . that **young Shand** wouldn't forget, and wasn't going to let Culley **'forget** . . .

Matt remembered the tattooing on **Culley's** arm. A Q in a diamond. It identified Culley as a former follower of William Clark Quantrill, colonel in the Confederate Army and notorious guerrilla chieftain in the noquarter border fighting in **Missouri** and Kansas. Any man who had fought with Quantrill's raiders was sure to have made enemies-lasting ones. Jerry Shand looked too young to have been involved in the border fighting, though; this was 1878, **thirteen**

years after the end of hostilities. Shand must **be carrying** on some kind of blood feud that dated back to the war years. . . .

Matt Dillon thought somberly of the bitter differences that all too often still set one **American** against another. The War was long over, and bygones, no matter **how vividly experienced** and recalled, should be no more than bygones. But the scars that had been inflicted were long-lasting and slow to heal, and occasionally something like this came along,—a result of the fanaticism of a John Brown or the brutality of a Quantrill, an open, running sore. Making an Andy, Culley cringe and crawl. Making a Jerry Shand strike out, eager to hurt and maim. Corrupting both, making them **more** animals than men. . . .

War was hell, yes. And for some men the aftermath of war was a special kind of hell.

Half "an hour later Matt Dillon was patrolling Front Street, getting a line on the crowds that were now beginning to **collect** in this place and that, spotting a couple of potential troublemakers, making mental notes to look over the **odgers** in his desk to check them against this or that seen face, **seeing** a swarthy man with his gun rigged for a cross-draw **and** guessing **that** he was maybe more proficient with the knife tucked in the back of one boot. He had just turned toward his office, meaning to spend a few minutes with those dodgers, when he heard the shot.

It came from the west end of Front Street. Looking that way, Matt saw a horse rearing, a man snatching at the bridle reins, running after the animal as it shied away. A huddled shape lay on the boardwalk near by. Drawing his gun, Matt ran toward **them**. As he passed the Long Branch, a crowd began pouring out through its swinging doors. Most of them legged it right after him, a few shouting hoarsely.

Matt was no more than fifteen yards away when the man caught the plunging horse. It was Jerry Shand. Matt shouted at him to halt. If the trailsman heard the **command** he ignored it, trying to mount, but he could not hold the shying horse still long enough to be able to toe the stirrup.

Matt stopped ten feet away **from** him. "Hold it, Shand," he said sharply. "My gun's on you."

Shand ceased his efforts to mount and faced the marshal, but kept his hold on the restive horse's reins. Men crowded around. Matt took Shand's gun, the cowboy **offering** no re-

**stance.** Pete Wynn came up. Matt handed Shand's gun to Pete and told him to keep Shand covered. Then he went over and knelt by the huddled body on the boardwalk. It was Andy Culley. He made a swift examination and rose. He glanced at Jerry Shand. The cowboy looked at him wordlessly, his face frozen.

"Somebody go get Doc Adams," Matt said. "It's a coroner case."

Several men went close enough to see that the dead man was Culley. They turned on Shand.

"Culley wasn't heeled!" one of them snarled. "Let's get this bird!"

"Yeh, string 'im up!" someone else said shrilly. The phrase was chorused by several others, over the crowd's angry muttering.

Shand was sweating and pale. "Now listen," he pleaded. "Wait a minute ..."

"Shut up!" a redbearded man shouted at him. "Come on, boys!"

Matt drew his gun quickly. He held it waist-high. His eyes were cold. He did not raise his voice but his words lashed at them.

"That's enough of that! This is my party, boys. Nobody's going to get riled up without reason."

"Come on, Matt," a man objected huskily, "this skunk shot Culley down in cold blood!"

"If he did he'll hang for it," Matt said. "After he has a trial."

"Trial nothin'!" Redbeard shouted. "There's a limit, Matt!"

Angry yells backed him up. The crowd began to press in. Matt thumbed back the hammer of his gun. It made a startlingly loud click. Jerry Shand stood by, his face white, drawn up to his full height, his eyes on Matt.

"Stay back!" Matt whipped at them. "I mean it."

The ones in the van stopped, hesitated. Matt grasped the moment's opportunity. "Now scatter," he said quickly. "Go about your business." He paused; then: "Fast!"

There were a few muffled curses, but the crowd started to disperse. Matt watched them go. He let out a long breath and looked at Shand. His mouth twitching, the cowboy wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead.

After Doc Adams had come, examined Culley and pronounced him dead, and ordered the corpse carried to the tiny

county morgue, Matt made his way to his office. Shand was there, manacled and under guard, not yet in a cell. Matt sent Pete Wynn, who had brought Shand to the jail, away. He proceeded to question Shand.

"You don't have to talk if you don't want to," he said in preliminary, "but I hope you will. I'd like some answers."

"I'll talk," Shand said huskily.

"Why'd you shoot him?"

"He drew a gun on me and threatened to shoot me, that's why. I pulled my own gun and got in the first shot."

Matt looked at him. "He had a gun? We didn't find any gun on him, or around anywhere."

"He had a gun," Shand insisted. "It was a silver-mounted derringer. I got a good look at it."

"Where did it go to?"

"I don't know, darn it. Any one of that crowd could've picked it up and carried it away. All I know's he pulled it on me and I beat him to the shot."

"Well, why'd he draw on you? Why'd he want to kill you?"

"I told you, Marshal," Shand said. "It's personal."

"I think I know anyhow," Matt told him. "He was a Quantrill man-wasn't he?"

Shand looked at him for a long minute without speaking. Then he opened his mouth and the words came fast. "He was with Quantrill when they hit Lawrence in 'Sixty-three. His name isn't Culley-it's Bloody Bill Ashley-or that's what he was called then, I was just a kid but I remember it like it was yesterday. Ma made me get up and hide in the woodshed. I saw him kill my father in cold blood, and I saw that Quantrill tattoo on his arm. I saw him drag off Ma. ... When they rode away there wasn't anything left but smoking ruins of buildings, and dead bodies. Men and women and children. ..."

Matt was silent as he looked at Shand. He knew the man was telling the truth. He felt a stab of compassion. But he had to go on questioning Shand, had to get the whole story if he could.

"What happened on the street?" he asked. "I thought Culley was trying to keep clear of you."

"After I left here, I got my horse," Shand said. "I was heading out of town, goin' west. Culley popped out from beside a building all of a sudden and flagged me down. I asked him what he wanted, and he said he wanted to talk to

**me a minute, I lit and walked over to him.** I thought I'd worked off most of my hate back there in the saloon but I was about ready to slug hi again.

"Then he begun to say how sorry he was, how he'd **be** sorry all his life, that everybody was crazy back in the war, sort of out of their heads. Wanted to make things right with me, he said, wanted to pay me.

"**I said, 'Buy it back, huh? Think you can wash it all away with money?'** He said what else could he do, and I **said** he could **at** least get out of Kansas. He said he couldn't do that, and then he offered me five hundred dollars. I said he must be getting rich off of Kansas now, and he said he'd make it six hundred, but he couldn't leave Kansas, **he'd** been in business here nearly ten years.

"I told him not many Kansans would buy his **stinkin'** barb' wire if they knew they was doing business with a bush-whacker. Right then he pulled that derringer and **told** me to shut up, and he said, 'We'll see who's through in Kansas. Well, while he was **talkin'** I drew my gun-I was standing a little sideways to him and I guess maybe' he didn't see what I was doing. But he was going to pull that trigger, all right. I just beat him to it. That's the God's truth, Marshal."

"Jerry," **Matt** said softly, "are you sure he pulled a **gun**?"

"Yeah, he pulled a gun." Jerry Shand put his elbows on the desk, covered his eyes with his manacled hands, **and let** his head sag wearily. "He pulled a gun all right," he repeated in a dull voice.

Matt Dillon was prowling around the comer where the shooting had occurred, searching in the shadows, peering down between the cracks of the boardwalk. He got down on his knees in the dust of the street to look beneath the planks of the walk. He thought he saw something glimmer but when he reached in he found only an empty tin can.

He stood up, brushing his hands together, just as Kitty Russell came up behind him.

"**Matt,**" she **said** in a worried voice, "there's a bunch in the Long Branch still talking up a lynching."

"Shand claims Culley had a gun. Could be one of the lynch-law boys has it in his pocket."

"Why'd he do it, Matt? Shand, I mean."

"He seems to have had reasons. That wouldn't make any difference to the law, though. **But** he insists Culley had a gun

and drew on **him** first. That'd make a difference-but no gun has showed up, and he made some threats after that fight in the bar. **That'll** count against him."

Kitty was looking past **Matt's** shoulder, up at a lighted window in the second story of a good-sized building fronting on the street.

"Looks like the only thing that could save him would be a witness, but—" **Matt** broke off to follow Kitty's glance. As he did so, a woman's figure appeared in the window, reaching to close the lace curtains. "**That's** Belle Archer, isn't it?" he asked Kitty.

"**Yes—this** is where she rooms."

"And she left the Long Branch early tonight, before all this happened ... if she's been there right along ..."**He** moved quickly to the base of the building and called **up**, "Belle!"

The **woman** in the window took her hand away from the curtains, leaving them partly opened, but she took a half **step** back into the room. She did not answer immediately.

"Belle," Matt called again, "are you up there?"

Her voice came down in faint answer: "What do **you** want?"

"How long h&e you been up there?"

Again Belle Archer did not reply, and Kitty called **to** her. "It's important, Belle!"

"Not-long," It sounded hesitant, uncertain.

"You see what happened down here?" **Matt** demanded

There was a pause before a half-strangled "No" and a sound of sobbing came down to **them.** **Matt** and Kitty exchanged glances. "She must have seen it," he said. "She got here in plenty of time to see it all-and something's got her upset. ... Kitty, we're going up there and talk to her."

**Doc** Adams, the coroner of Ford County, was presiding at the inquest held **thel** morning after the shooting. The scene was the lobby of the Dodge House. **Adams** sat at a table below the balcony. To one sidk was the witness chair, to the other sat the half dozen members of the coroner's jury. Jerry Shand, under guard, was next to the witness chair and Kitty sat **near** by. A lank man with sad eyes was testifying.

"Let's proceed," Adams was saying. "You were sitting outside the Long Branch at nine last night when the accused **rode up.** That right?"

"That's right, Doc."

"You sure it was this Jerry Shand, right here?"

The witness pointed at Shand. "It was him, all right."

"Did you see or hear anything this court should know?"

"Y'bet 3 did! Somebody this feller knew was waitin' for him. 'Is he in there?' he says, I mean Shand, and the other feller says 'Yes,' and then he says, 'Whatcha gonna do to him, Jerry?' an' this feller here says, 'I dunno, kill him, mebbe.' I recall them exact words, Doc."

"Pretty incriminatin'," Adams commented sonorously. "Remember you're under oath, Charley."

"Ed Mabry'll back me up on it!" the witness retorted with spirit. "He was right there with me, heard every dang' word!"

Jerry Shand jumped to his feet. He was trembling. "I said it, all right-but I didn't mean it! I was mad enough to do 'most anything to him, but—"

Adams pounded the top of his desk. "You'll get your chance to talk later, young man. Sit down"

Ed Mabry was called. His testimony substantiated that of the first witness. Other witnesses told of the fight in the Long Branch, started by Shand; some of them had heard him say to Cnlley then, "I ought to kill you!" and so testified.

Then Jerry Shand took the chair. Adams looked at him sternly. "You've heard the testimony that you threatened to kill the victim. A barful of people saw you pick a fight with him. What you got to say?"

"I don't deny any of that," Shand said tensely, "except that when I said it, I said it in anger and I didn't actually intend to kill him. I shot him, all right, but I shot him in self-defense. He pulled a gun on me."

"Marshal Matt Dillon ain't here right now," Adams said, "but he's told me no gun was found-I mean no gun that Culley had, or is claimed to have had. That's that. The next point is-why would Andy Culley want to shoot you?"

"He wanted to shut me up. He didn't want me telling how he'd been a bushwhacker with Quantrill. You saw the tattoo on his arm!"

"Tattoo don't make a man a bushwhacker," snapped Adams.

"This one does!" Shand retorted. "I saw it on his arm, when they came for my father and mother. That was in Lawrence. That's why I'm sure. They-killed both of them . . . and then they went across the street to where my girl

lived, and they took her away. I never saw her again . . ." His voice trailed off, his face hard.

There was a commotion at the front door. Heads turned; Adams bent a fierce gaze at the two people there. Jerry Shand stared.

Belle Archer was a step in front of Matt Dillon. The marshal's right hand cupped her elbow. Belle wore a pretty, bright-colored gown, but her face was drawn and miserable.

Jerry Shand stood up, his mouth slightly open, his eyes wide. Belle Archer took a halting step forward.

"Hello-Jerry," she said huskily.

"Lord!" Jerry Shand breathed. Then: "Ellie . . ."

"Belle Archer, now . . ." She paused, fumbled for words, "Matt says either I-talk, or they take you away. If it wasn't for that, I wouldn't do this to you, Jerry. You've had it bad enough already. I-didn't want you to see me now . . . see what happened to Ellie Clark after that day in Lawrence."

"Just a minute, now!" Doc Adams interjected. "What's this all about, Matt?"

"I believe Miss Archer's got some testimony to give, Doc. What she has to say ought to be controlling in this case."

"All right, then!" Adams said with asperity. "Put her on the 'stand-no need to make a show out of these proceedings!"

Shand was excused from the stand and Belle was sworn in. Adams asked a couple of preliminary questions and then told her to go ahead with any pertinent information.

"I can tell you all about last night, Doc," she said simply. Her eyes swung to Jerry Shand, who was watching her unblinkingly, his face masking whatever emotion he was feeling. "I left the Long Branch early last night-left because I saw Jerry coming in. I didn't want him to see me. I went home—to my room, I mean. And I saw everything that happened from my window-between Jerry and Andy Culley. I saw Andy pull a gun out of his pocket and point it at Jerry. Then Jerry drew his gun and fired-but he had to do it, Doc, or he would've been killed!"

She stopped. Doc Adams took his eyes from her and looked at the accused man. Jerry Shand's eyes were brimming with tears.

"What Jerry told Matt was true, Doc," she ended. "I saw it all . . . And I saw that fool Busby kid pick up Andy's



gun and run away with it." Amid silence, she left the witness chair. Gently, Matt took her arm **and** led her to the door.

Marshal Matt Dillon stood in front of his office, patting the neck of Jerry Shand's saddled horse. Jerry toed the stirrup and swung aboard. He looked 'down at the lawman.

"I-I don't know how I . . ." he began.

"It's over and done with," Matt said quietly. "Forget it now."

"Yeah," Jerry said.

"Better get going, Jerry," Matt said gravely.

"I wish I could see Ellie first . . ."

"It's like I said **before—she** refuses to see you, Jerry."

"I don't figure why Ellie-it don't seem right she won't!"

"Listen. She said to tell you Ellie's gone . . ."

"Gone?" Jerry stared at him.

"Yes, gone. She means she isn't Ellie **Clark** any **more—** at least, the Ellie Clark you knew. Remember, she's been through a lot, Jerry-maybe more than you have, even. It's a rough life she leads-but she likes it, now. She couldn't share a **different** kind of one with you. She might pretend, but she couldn't fool you long, and she's smart enough to know it. And big enough to want to spare you.

"It's true, kid. Ellie's gone. There's only Belle Archer." Matt looked up at Jerry Shand for a long moment. Then he lifted a hand.

"So long, Jerry."

Jerry Shand raised his own hand and let it drop. "So long, Marshal." His voice was almost inaudible. He reined his horse around and touched spurs.