

L. RON HUBBARD



The Slickers

GALAXY
PRESENTS

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TEX LARIMEE inserted his cigar below his scraggly mustaches and looked sideways at the stranger.

“Yep,” said Tex, “I’m on my way to New York, and I’m here to tell you right now that if any of these greenhorns tries to pull anything on Tex Larimee, they’ll have to talk it over with Judge Colt first.”

He patted the bulge under his coat and, in doing so, displayed his bright sheriff’s badge to momentary view.

The stranger tilted his bowler hat and suppressed a smile with his hand. The stranger had a diamond on his finger which matched the glitter of his hard eyes.

Tex, supposing that this partner in the smoking car had come there by chance, talked on.

“Old John Temple knows where to go for help,” said Tex, nodding his head vigorously and gnawing harder on the mangled cigar. “He wouldn’t trust none of those city dicks. He sent right out to Arizony for his old friend Tex Larimee.”

“Who’s John Temple?” said the stranger.

“What,” said Tex, “you ain’t never heard of John Temple? Why, snap my suspenders, but you Easterners are the most ignorant . . . Well, he’s the biggest copper man in Arizony, that’s what. He’s got more millions than you got whiskers.

He's so rich he uses solid gold cuspidors, that's what. An' you never heard of him."

"Huh-uh," lied the stranger, fingering the diamond. "What'd he send for you for?"

"Why, to guard him, o'course. Out in Arizony, a man don't need no guardin'. Why, you could leave a million dollars sittin' in the middle of the street and nobody would think of packin' it off. But New York—wal, that's different. They'd slit your throat for a nickel in that town, I hear. John Temple, he ain't in such very good health and he wanted me to come East and bring him back home. And here I am."

"You're sheriff out there or something, aren't you?" said the stranger.

"Sure . . . Say, how'd you know?"

"Oh, you just look like a sheriff, that's all. I could spot your kind most anyplace. Big black hat, gray mustaches, high-heeled boots . . . Sure, I know your kind when I see one."

"Sheriff of Cactus County," said Tex, proudly. "Been sheriff for thirty years and they don't show no signs of kickin' me out yet."

The stranger got up and elaborately stretched. "We're passing Newark," he said. "I think I'll go get my baggage together. See you later, Sheriff."

"S'long," said Tex, looking out of the window.

The stranger went up the aisle, opened a door and passed into the next car. He promptly collared a porter and thrust a five-dollar bill into his hand. "Here, take this telegram and send it when we stop at Newark, understand?"

Tex was uncomfortable sitting on the red plush. He squirmed and shifted his gun into an easier position. He looked at the maze of chimneys which went sailing past and shook his head.

“Beats hell,” said Tex. “Ain’t even room to breathe out this way. No wonder John Temple wants to go home.”

A few minutes later, after the stop at Newark, the train screeched to a stop in Pennsylvania Station. Tex picked up his paper suitcase and followed the other passengers down to the platform. Suspiciously, he thrust away the redcaps.

“Beats hell,” said Tex. “These here Easterners ain’t even strong enough to carry their own suitcases.”

Disgustedly he stalked up the iron steps to the waiting room, intending to phone John Temple at the Manhattan Hotel.

The crowd was thick and noisy. Tex Larimee, standing a head taller than most of the men, gouged his way through the press, eyes yearningly fixed on the red-and-gold sign far away which said “Phones.”

“Beats hell,” said Tex. “Regular damned stampede.”

A sallow-faced man was coming the other way. His face was thinner than a knife blade and his eyes were hot. He ran squarely into Tex. The press of the crowd held him there for a moment.

Tex shoved him away but the man was hurled back at him again.

“Doggone,” said Tex, “you can’t walk through me. What do you think I am? A shadow?”

The sallow-faced one drifted out and away and Tex lost

sight of him. Presently the crowd thinned and Tex made his way toward the phone signs.

He leaned over the switchboard desk. "Please, ma'am, would you call up the Manhattan Hotel for me?"

The girl glanced up, startled by the mustaches and the big black hat. "Five cents, please."

Confidently, Tex reached into his pocket. He scowled and tried another. He set down the suitcase and rapidly searched through his coat.

A baffled expression came over his leathery face. "Beats hell. I put that wallet right there in my hip pocket and I . . ."

"Five cents, please," said the girl in a mechanical voice.

Tex repeated the search and then it began to dawn upon him that he had been robbed. Hastily he felt for his gun. It was gone. He grabbed for his star and clutched nothing but vest cloth.

The girl frowned and held her earphones on tight. A policeman came up and motioned with his stick. "Move along, buddy."

"Look here," said Tex, looking earnestly at the beefy red face before him, "I'm Sheriff Tex Larimee of Cactus County, Arizony. I—"

"That so?" said the cop. "Move along, buddy, before I have to get tough with you."

"Tough with me?" said Tex, backing off to give himself arm room. "Look here, you shorthorn, when you bark at me—"

"Move along," said the cop.

A thin finger tapped the sheriff's shoulder. Full of fight, Tex whirled and found himself facing the stranger he had met on the smoking car.

"Having trouble?" asked the man in the bowler hat.

"I been robbed," cried Tex. "I was coming through that crowd and some sticky-fingered coyote went through me like a bullet through butter. And then this blankety-blank beef steer—"

"What's that?" said the officer, juggling his nightstick.

"You heard it!" roared Tex.

Nervously, the stranger tugged at the sheriff's arm. "You better come along with me, mister. It won't do you any good to buck the law."

Tex picked up the paper suitcase and, still growling, followed his newfound friend out of the station and into the din of Seventh Avenue.

"We better have a drink," said the stranger, tipping the bowler hat forward on his milk-white brow.

Tex yelled, "All right, but I've got to call the Manhattan Hotel."

"Call from the bar," said the stranger.

Overawed by the hurry and bustle and noise, feeling small in this dingy canyon of buildings, Tex tagged along, high-heel boots scuffing the pavement, spur rowels whizzing.

They entered a small barroom on Thirty-fourth Street, where the stranger seemed to be known.

"Better go into the back room," said the stranger. "More quiet back there."

Tex was still too worried about his money and papers to protest and he stepped through the door. The place was dimly lighted and poorly furnished with scarred tables and unpainted chairs.

A sleek-headed waiter took their order and slipped out with it.

“What the hell’s the matter with people in this town?” said Tex. “They stare at you like you was something out of a museum.” He gave his big black hat a defiant tug and then straightened his mustache. “I don’t think I like this place. All my life I wanted to see New York and now I’m here, to hell with it.”

“Oh, you have to get used to it,” said the stranger.

“I don’t think I’d live long enough,” said Tex, “what with all them taxis scootin’ around. Them drivers act like they was breakin’ broncs. Where’s the phone around here?”

Tex started to get up. A chilly voice behind him said, “Don’t move, Bronson, and that goes for you, too, old-timer.”

Tex turned carefully around. He knew that tone of voice. A man had slipped into the door and stood with his back to it holding a .45 automatic carelessly pointed in the general direction of the table. The fellow wore a checkered suit and a flaming red tie. His nose had been broken back against his face and his mouth was an ink mark across his off-side jaw.

Bronson froze where he was and his eyes grew very round.

“I told you never to come back to this town, Bronson. I told you and I thought you’d have better sense. Get up careful and walk into that other door, understand?”