



"You're the sort of cowboy I'd like for a dude wrangler," the girl told him.

# Team Work

*by Stephen Payne*

**T**OM MAYBURN, returning home from shipping a carload of beef to market, let his old flivver coast down the south slope of Lone Tree Ridge and braked to a stop to feast his eyes. Here was a view which he loved and of which he never tired; a basinlike area with fountains, big-shouldered and massive, curving from south to west against the blue horizon.

Wooded foothills adjacent to the fountains were summer range for Tom's Flying M herd. Between them and Grizzly Creek, which lay at Tom Mayburn's left, was a choppy, barren area, spotted with red-rock formations. Useless for either ranching or stock grazing, nevertheless this picturesque terrain was strikingly beautiful in the afternoon sunshine of a late July day.

Tom's gaze, however, was upon the wide valley of the Grizzly wherein lay his Flying M ranch. Two

years ago he had plunged head over heels into debt to buy this big outfit, and to make good was his all-consuming ambition. His nine hundred-odd cattle were now safely on the summer range and required little attention. The big job confronting the young ranchman was the harvesting of his hay crop. Over a thousand tons of it, a sea of waving green grass, had to be cut and stacked at once.

This would require a twelve or fourteen-man crew, and men were extremely hard to find. But Tom wasn't worrying much yet. He had a good man cook and four steady hands on whom he could depend. Directed by the foreman, wizened and knotty and loyal old Tuck Macleod, those boys would be repairing machinery and harness and breaking additional horses for the task ahead and—

The unexpected sound of an automobile at his right wrenched Tom's gaze from the meadow valley.

For the first time he saw a new sign decorating the cross bar above a gate in the wire fence which marked the east boundary of Lone Tree Ranch.

With amazement he read:

**LONE TREE DUDE RANCH  
GUESTS WELCOME**

Sudden and immediate anger stirred in Tom. His setup here would have been ideal had it not been for his cunning and irritating neighbor, Lawson L. Lawrence, who had acquired title to all that picturesque but worthless land adjacent to the Flying M.

**N**OW in the one week Tom had been absent, Lawrence had stolen a march on him by opening a dude ranch. It was another of Laws Lawrence's many schemes to force Tom Mayburn to buy his Lone Tree ranch—at Laws' own price. Where would his guests—swanky tourists so doggedly rich they didn't have to work—ride and hike and picnic? On Tom's cattle range, of course. They'd be prowling around, shooting at targets and at small game, keeping the cattle so disturbed they'd not put on any flesh. Where would they fish? In Tom's meadow on Grizzly Creek, where they'd tramp down grass and set fires and—

"The devil take Laws," Tom gritted under his breath.

Then he took notice of the car he had heard, a secondhand station wagon. Chugging along the red dirt road from the direction of Laws' buildings, which were not in sight from this point, it stopped at the gate and a girl stepped out. Apparently she was unfamiliar with this type of gate and its barbed wire loop fastener.

But Tom didn't jump to help her. He merely looked. Jiminy, she was young and chic and pretty! The typical dude outfit—white Stetson, gay scarf, mannish blue silk shirt, overalls and boots—looked nice on her. Wonderful. For she had the slender and shapely figure to wear such duds to advantage.

Having noticed him, she gave him a level and searching look from a pair of the bluest eyes he'd ever seen, and said in a friendly voice, a thrillingly pleasant voice, "Hello, there? How do you open this darned thing?"

"I can show you easier than I can tell you, lady."

Tom leaped from his car. After all, a fellow couldn't take out on a girl the wrath boiling inside him. Not a girl like this one, even if she was a

dudette, a tourist. Eumn! She had a determined little chin, but a generous mouth and a shapely nose. The curls that showed below the new hat were a shade darker than yellow. Tawny brown, Tom called them, and like her clothes, they just suited her.

"I'm surprised a dude ranch could get going so quick," he remarked. "I know Laws has a huge old house, but it's terribly run down."

The girl sighed. "There's still so much work to be done," she said, and then with a provocative glance at his face, "You're the sort of cowboy I'd like for a dude wrangler. Is there any chance you'd take a job?"

Tom always wore rough and sensible cowboy clothing, and folks often made the mistake of thinking he was merely a cowhand. He felt hot color rush up his wind-bronzed throat. If a man had suggested he wrangle dudes, he'd have blown up. But with sudden impact the strange thought came that he'd enjoy wrangling this particular dudette!

"How many guests on the ranch already so soon?" he countered.

"Only six so far. I'm driving to Red Fern now for supplies. There's not even milk, cream or butter on the place. No milk cows. And the horses!"

Tom chuckled grimly, recalling that Laws owned only a dozen-odd scrub ponies. "Are you pinch hitting for someone?" he asked.

"Pinch hitting! I'm doing most of the work, and you've no idea—"

"Yes I have, lady. Bu—but *you* working on the dogged place. I don't see—Hasn't Laws got house help and wranglers and—"

"Mr. Lawrence promised to have a cook and four wranglers on the job. He hasn't been able to get them. But," the girl tipped her head and smiled happily, "last night the Flying M cowboys entertained the guests. Oh, we had a high old time, a steak fry and songs and square dancing until I told the boys they must go home. Early today, however, they again took over."

"The Flying M boys took over—today? Today?" Tom stammered.

"Yes. Tuck, a funny old fellow, and Slim, Bud Hale and Shorty, three rollicky boys full of life and fun. Well, they showed up with good ponies for the guests and with a lunch for an all-day trip into the hills and mountains."

**T**OM reckoned he looked like a fish out of water, gasping for air. His panicked thought ran, "Good gosh! My men neglecting their work to—I can't believe it! ... Why didn't you go with them?"

he asked.

"I'd have loved it. But I had too many other irons in the fire. I must get to town, so please open this gate for me."

"Okay, lady, but—"

"Do you want that job wrangling? Or can you cook? We haven't a cook, and I must hurry so that I can get dinner this evening."

Tom gulped. "You're doing the cooking as well as—"

"As everything else," she interrupted, stepping into the car with a lithe and easy grace which Tom Mayburn admired. "Mr. Lawrence said he'd hire the Flying M cook, a real roundup cook called Muddy Coffee Miller, away from—from a mean, grasping skinflint who should be rocked back on his heels. Do you or don't you want a job on Lone Tree Dude Ranch?"

"Sorry. I've got a job and I see that my work's cut out for me," Tom returned, and he could not keep an edge out of his words. "But, lady, I want to ask—"

"I'm sorry, too. Good-bye for now." She accelerated the car, and it shot through the gate, passed over the brow of Lone Tree Ridge and out of Tom's sight.

She was a darned nice girl, he was sure, but this was one messed up of a situation. His cowboys wrangling dudes! Laws Lawrence trying to hire old Muddy Coffee Miller! Tom decided he'd see that back-biting cuss right now.

He ran to his flivver, and sent it hurtling over the rough road past freakish rock formations and along the edge of a bluff to where a huge old frame house sat opposite a tumble-down log stable and a corral.

A bluejay and two impudent magpies took wing as Tom honked his horn, but no one answered this signal. Nor did knocking on the door of the old house bring any reply. Tom opened the door and was amazed at the change which a woman's touch had wrought in this living room. He prowled through the house and found the rooms clean and furnished with new beds, dressers, chairs. Now the place was both neat and attractive. Laws must have put out quite a sum of money.

But where was Laws? Might be he'd moved his bed and other personal things to a homestead cabin up around the bend. Tom got in his car, drove to the cabin, and found Laws Lawrence sunning himself against the south wall of the shack.

As the car stopped, Laws got up quickly and stepped close to it, "I was kinda expectin' you,

Mayburn," he greeted. Tall, swarthy and rawboned, his scrawny neck, hooked nose, and shifty little black eyes made him look something like a vulture.

"I'd think a dude rancher'd dress the part," Tom replied. "But you look sloppier than usual."

Law grinned. "I'm local color, if you get me? Them dudes look on me as an old settler, a typical Western character."

"You're as Western as a hillbilly!" Tom snorted. "Why aren't you working at the big house? And by the way, since you've never been known to work, who did clean up the place, move in the new furniture and—"

"She done it. Them new fixin's is hern."

"She?" clipped Tom.

"Sure. I leased Lone Tree to Miss June Addison. She's been workin' like a beaver ever since she landed here a week ago. Didn't you see her as you drove past the house?"

Tom made a noise as if the wind had been knocked out of him. "Foxy as usual," he said slowly. "Realizing that I couldn't fight a woman, you leased your ranch to a woman."

Laws stuck his thumbs in the arm-holes of his vest, his smug smile further infuriating the young ranchman. "I figure I've played it pretty smart, Tom. However, I put a special clause in the lease, stating that a buyer may have immediate possession and that with change of ownership this lease is null and void."

Tom's eyes flashed. He said scathingly, "I suppose June Addison is so green she let that clause ride, never suspecting she might be thrown off the Lone Tree at an hour's notice. In which case she'd lose—"

"Gosh, you yelp like her problem was yourn," Laws interrupted. "You want to buy Lone Tree ranch right now? I'll make you a flat price of twelve thousand bucks for the six hundred and forty acres."

"No!" snapped Tom. "Just to get rid of you, I've already offered you a dollar an acre, although your ground doesn't raise enough grass to pad a blackbird's nest. I won't pay more."

"I sort of figure you will Tom. You will because you've got a thousand tons of hay to stack right pronto. And you can't get hay hands. You know where the four Flying M cowboys are today, Tom?"

"Neither you nor June Addison can hire those boys away from me, Laws," the ranchman retorted.

"Want to bet on it, Tom? Dude wranglers draw higher wages'n pinch penny ranchers like you pay. Your cowboys wouldn't be human if they didn't

have a weakness for pretty young dudettes, and Miss June Addison is a knockout her ownself. Right persuasive, too. She's got Muddy Coffee Miller balancin' his loyalty to Tom Mayburn against a hundred bucks a month on Lone Tree just for cookin'."

**C**UFFING his hat savagely over his right ear, Tom threw the car in gear. As he turned the machine, Laws called, "Come back when you ain't mad, Tom. You know, Jack Snyder, the realtor in Red Fern, is interested in the Lone Tree now it's a dude ranch. But as a favor to you, Tom, I'll hold him off and let you have the place for twelve thousand."

Tom didn't answer. He had tried unsuccessfully to pick up hay hands in the railroad town from which he had shipped his beef; he had tried again in Red Fern. None were to be found, and as Laws had remarked, Tom's four loyal hands were only human. Pretty girls could cast a spell on them. Even old Tuck Macleod was not immune.

Now that Tom knew the worst, he'd have a frank talk with June Addison, the attractive young woman he'd met at the gate, and maybe he'd spike Laws Lawrence's disturbing scheme.

Rounding a curve, he came in sight of the Lone Tree house, now converted into a dude ranch lodge, and then braked hard, turning his flivver off the road and in behind a huge red boulder. The Lone Tree guests and their escorts were stringing over a low rise at Tom's right, angling along a trail toward the buildings.

Until this moment, Tom had rather doubted that his cowboys had taken time out on a working day to go dude wrangling. But old Tuck Macleod and a middle-aged woman were riding ahead, and trailing them were the Flying M cowboys: Slim, Hale and Shorty. Thoroughly enjoying themselves, they were gallantly escorting five attractive dudettes.

Tom grew hot under the collar, yet somehow he couldn't stay furious with those gay and colorful girls, young, vivacious, and eye-arresting! They rode astonishingly well, and although they were sunburned and gnat-bitten, they were laughing and chattering as if they were having a glorious adventure.

As for the Flying M punchers—Tom doubled his fists—those doggoned young loons were going all-out to entertain the two blonds, two brunettes and one alluring little redhead.

The party filed into the yard, where Tom's cowboys helped the guests to dismount and then took the saddles off the horses and carried them into

the old barn. It was apparent that the boys were going to lead those Flying M ponies home, but they stood around, joking with the girls, as if loath to depart.

At last however, Tuck Macleod lifted his hand and said loudly, "We must get our chores done on Flying M, boys," and he led the younger cowboys away.

The girls trooped to the big house, but the Flying M men were not out of Tom's sight when June Addison's station wagon appeared, and as June stopped the car, the cowboys instantly congregated around it.

In Tom's opinion, that young woman had everything a girl could have. He didn't doubt that she could twist even old Tuck around her finger, and her smile could certainly completely enslave all of the three susceptible younger fellows.

Alarm built up in Tom that he was going to find himself left entirely alone on the Flying M. Laws—give the cunning old devil credit—had concocted a sure-fire scheme to get Tom Mayburn just where he wanted him.

Suddenly June started the car and drove it up along the west side of the big house and halted outside the kitchen. Turning back, the Flying M men flung themselves out of their saddles and joyfully carried boxes and crates, sacks and baskets, into the house for the girl dude rancher. This done, they rode away fast and soon vanished.

"At least," growled Tom, "the doggoned idiots are going to attend to my chores." He tried to build a cigarette, broke the paper, threw it away in disgust, and with a determined glint in his eyes stalked to the house.

**U**NANNOUNCED, he entered the kitchen where June was starting a fire in an old wood-burning range. She turned and their eyes met. For seconds neither spoke. Tom knew his face was taut, his eyes bleak and cold, but sizing June up once again, he also knew his first impression of her had been correct. June Addison was just perfect. He hated himself for even thinking of fighting with her.

"Hello," she said. "You startled me. Did you change your mind and decide you would work for me?"

Tom jerked off his hat. "If I was footloose, I surely would work for you, Miss Addison. You see, I've learned your name and that you're trying to run this dude ranch all alone."

"All alone is right," she replied almost bitterly. "I couldn't find even a boy in Red Fern who'd take a

job. Now I must get supper for the girls. As usual, because I'm so rushed, I'll open cans, and they're getting sick of canned meals . . . You—you aren't foot-loose?"

"Hardly," said Tom with a wry grin. "How about those wranglers I saw?"

"I think I told you, cowboy, that they work for the Flying M. Tuck, the foreman, said he gave the boys one day off, but that he could not possibly do it again."

"Tuck said that?" Tom's keen relief was evident. The boys hadn't actually quit Flying M—yet!

She nodded. "You seem to be familiar with this neck of the woods, though I presume you're a drifting cowboy," she said thoughtfully.

When Tom offered no reply she went on, "I'm at my wit's end, afraid I'll flunk this venture and it means—You can't understand what it means to me."

She put more wood in the stove and Tom noted that the box was nearly empty. The Flying M boys had enjoyed wrangling dudes because those dudes were charming, lively girls, but it hadn't occurred to them to provide a supply of firewood.

"I'll be back in a minute, and you can tell me what it means to you," Tom invited.

He whirled out of the kitchen, ran to the woodpile, smashed up a couple of dry quaking aspens with a dull axe and lugged in an armload of firewood.

June, who was beginning to arrange things for the evening meal, said, "Good man. I don't even know your name, but there's a lot about you I like. I feel I can trust you, so—"

"Another minute," interrupted Tom, snatching the water buckets and departing on a run for the nearby spring. Having filled the stove reservoir, he brought two more brimming pails and set them on the bench.

"What are you going to have for supper?" he asked.

"Canned things and some of this stuff they call bread which I brought back from town."

"I'll make biscuits and gravy. That'll help like everything," offered Tom, tossing his hat on a nail and beginning to wash his hands in a basin on the kitchen bench.

"Biscuits?" June cried. "You're a real help. I was about to tell you I have worked on dude ranches, and was crazy to start one of my own. I saved a little money last year, but I could only hope to begin in a small way by leasing a place. One thing and another prevented my getting an early start, even

though I had the guests lined up. When I advertised, Mr. Lawrence was the only one who answered my ad."

With an easy grace Tom admired, June moved into the next room to set the table. When she returned, Tom, now hard at work, prompted, "Yes?"

"Well," in a troubled tone, "my guests were clamoring to come, and rather than disappoint them I took what Mr. Lawrence had to offer."

"Couldn't these guests—I s'pose they're millionaires' daughters and the like—have gone 'most anywhere?"

"Oh, no. They're working girls, stenographers, nurses, school teachers, who don't have much money. They can't afford a big, snazzy dude ranch. Thank goodness! They rather glory in this primitive place of coal oil lamps, no plumbing, hot water in the range reservoir, make your own beds, clean your own rooms."

"Working girls!" ejaculated Tom. "And I thought they were—"

"Hot house plants?" June supplied. "No, indeed. They're capable, too. The elderly woman is a wonderful horsewoman, and all the girls know how to ride and drive horses."

"To ride and drive horses? Drive teams?" Tom asked sharply.

**J**UNE nodded her dark head. "Why so surprised? But Laws Lawrence is long on promise and short on performance."

Tom rolled out biscuit dough and began to cut it with a tin can. "That doesn't surprise me," he said grimly.

"You know Laws?"

The ranchman contented himself with a nod, and June went on, "Getting back to my problem, Laws could sell the Lone Tree and cancel my lease—which would break me."

"Break you?"

"I'm working on a shoestring, you see. My guests have paid in advance. I've used the money for equipment and food. If I lost out, I couldn't refund it."

She emptied two cans of corn into a saucepan and added tautly, "And I'm afraid I may lose out, for two reasons."

"Two reasons?" pressed Tom, seriously considering June Addison's problem, although he had not for a second forgotten his own.

"Lawson Lawrence has bragged that he now has Tom Mayburn in a spot where Mayburn must buy the Lone Tree," she explained. "Laws didn't

amplify, except to say that this Tom Mayburn so hates dudes that to get rid of them he'll buy a ranch, worthless for either grazing or growing hay. The other reason is that I can't get any help. It's no use kidding myself, I can't hold the pace I've been going, trying to do everything alone."

Oddly moved and suddenly sympathetic, Tom said admiringly, "You've done a bang-up job so far. Hum'n. When we first met you said Laws promised to have four wranglers. Was he to hire them?"

"Yes," said June with a flash of anger. "Four good men. A cook also. I realized how difficult it was to hire good help, so after Laws had insisted on inserting a clause in our agreement that I didn't like, I put in one to the effect that not only is Laws to hire the wranglers and cook, he's also to pay them for one month's work."

Tom slapped two pans of biscuits in the hot oven and straightened. "Laws is to pay them?"

"That's right. He squealed about it, but I wouldn't let his clause ride unless he agreed to mine. However, he hasn't gotten the help and I don't think he intends to."

June bustled on with her work, but Tom was completely still, there in the warm kitchen on Lone Tree Dude ranch. His eyes narrowed and then a twinkle leaped into them. "June," he cried, "Laws is to hire the help, but who'll give them their orders?"

"I shall of course." Her large blue eyes met his with wonder in their depths. "Why are you so steamed up, Mister No-Name?"

"Is that in the agreement?"

"It is."

"Good for you! June, I'm Tom Mayburn and I'm happy we've had this talk."

She dropped the dish she was about to fill with stewed canned corn, stepped back and flushed angrily. "So you're Mayburn! You've been pumping me to find out—"

"Please don't be mad, June."

"Why not? Laws warned me that Tom Mayburn was—was—"

"Surely you couldn't be around Laws an hour without discovering what sort of a person he actually is."

"That's true. He's sly and slippery and lazy and no good and I believe he's crooked as well. But you, Tom Mayburn—"

"Easy, June. I apologize for fooling you. Humbly. Now that I understand your side of this, I want to work with you, and I want—I beg you to work with me."

The girl was motionless as Tom had been

minutes earlier, studying him again. Finally the anger slowly vanished from her expressive face and eyes. "Work with you, Tom? I think—no, I'm sure—I like that idea."

IT was quite late when Tom got home that night. He stayed on the Lone Tree for supper, helped wait table, met all the guests, talked with them, and completely enjoyed himself. Yet he was happier still when he and June had finished the evening chores and she rode with him in his old flivver to look at the flying M by moonlight.

Yes, Tom was late getting home. But there was a light in the bunkhouse, and he found Tuck Macleod playing pitch with Muddy Coffee Martin in the main house, where the cook had a room. The fat cook, who was no beauty, and wizened old Macleod, looked both startled and sheepish, although Tuck began at once.

"Tom, the boys were wrangling dudes today. But, don't jump on 'em. It was my fault. I gave 'em a day off. Allowed they deserved a lark before we tear into this haying job."

He acted as if he expected the boss to raise the roof, but Tom merely asked, "Has Laws been after you fellows to work for him?"

"Yeh," Muddy Coffee burst out. "That old coot's been pesticator me to quit you and cook for dudes. I told him where he could go, I did. Tuck ain't going to let you down, neither."

"Let Tuck speak for himself," Tom suggested.

Tuck said slowly, "Laws is offering us sixty a month against your forty. Naturally Shorty and Hale and Slim are tempted, Tom. Mighty tempted. But us fellers don't play the game that way. Tain't fair."

Something swelled into Tom's throat. The men were loyal. They'd not quit him in a pinch, even when tempting wages and far more enjoyable work dangled as bait before them. He called to the boys at the bunkhouse, and when the three rollicky young cowboys had joined the cook and the foreman, he threw an amazing statement at them.

For a moment stunned silence held them, then Tuck exploded, "Tom, are you drunk or locoed, or both? We won't do it and that's flat."

"Yes you will, boys," said Tom grinning. "Here's why—"

Early the following morning Tom started for Red Fern. To Tuck he confided, "I want to have a medicine talk with the real estate fellow, Jack Snyder. Then I'll stay in town until Laws comes in to crow and tell me what I'll have to do—or else."

Tom's talk with Jack Snyder was eminently

satisfactory. Afterward he purchased repairs for his haying machinery. At eleven o'clock Laws Lawrence, dressed in his town suit and oozing triumph from every seam, rode into the town. He tied his horse and strutted across the street to intercept Tom Mayburn.

"Got big news for you, Tom," he stated.

"It'll keep, Laws. I'm busy hunting a hay crew."

"Hay crew? Ha-ha!" guffawed Laws, tilting his town hat back on his bullet-shaped head. "You're sunk, Tom. Sunk! Your men, every one of 'em, have gone to work on Lone Tree Dude ranch. Yep. Muddy Coffee has taken over the kitchen. And you braggin' they wouldn't quit you!"

"You're lying," Tom said flatly.

"Come out to the place and see if I am."

"I haven't got the time right now," was Tom's curt reply.

"But you've got the time to make a deal for Lone Tree ranch—on my terms."

"Nope."

"You'll be singin' another tune pretty quick. Why, you ain't got even one man on Flying M. It'll keep you busy just doin' chores. How you goin' to look after your cattle? And how—how you goin' to put up your hay?"

Tom shrugged, and Laws, losing patience, exploded, "You're a stubborn jigger, but at last I've got you over a barrel."

"If what you say is true, maybe you have," Tom agreed.

Nevertheless he stalled until mid-afternoon—for reasons of his own—before, with Laws riding with him, he drove out of Red Fern. As the car rolled over Lone Tree Ridge and the mighty panorama of Grizzly Creek, the colorful hills and the magnificent mountains came into view, Laws stiffened in his seat and grabbed Tom's arm.

"What the heck's all that I see? Five mowing machines at work in your meadow. At work in *your* meadow."

"Listen to 'em hum," said Tom. "Sweet music, ain't it?"

**B**UT Laws Lawrence's expression indicated he'd never heard more sour music than the mower's song.

"Look!" he gasped. "More hands near the buildings. Some of 'em's repairin' machinery and harness, some's handlin' horses. Tom Mayburn, where'd you get that crew? How'd you keep it a secret from me?"

"Let's get a closer look at 'em," Tom suggested.

"Hold up," ordered Laws. "Don't you want to turn in at my ranch and see what I told you was true?"

"Nope." Tom drove on, and they saw that girls were driving four of the five mowers. Girls in overalls, shirts, gay scarfs and Stetson hats. Leading them was Bud Hale of the Flying M, but it was the girls who drew Laws' pop-eyed attention.

"Them! Them dames," he panted. "All of 'em is June Addison's guests."

"Looks like it," said Tom quietly.

Waving to the girls, he tooted his car into the Flying M yard. Here the older woman guest and Shorty and Tuck Macleod were repairing machinery in a most efficient manner. In the corral, Slim and June Addison were handling horses which were to be broken to work.

Laws leaped out of Tom's car as if a swarm of bees were attacking him. "Miss Addison!" he yelled and sprinted to the corral.

June, dusty and flushed from exertion, but with her eyes glowing, stepped forward to meet him.

"What's the meaning of this?" The man's stammering words ran together. "I—I fixed you up with the wranglers and cook I'd promised, and now I see—What do I see?"

"You're not seeing things, I'm sure," June assured him sweetly.

"B—but them guests of yours as well as the wranglers, is working for—for Tom Mayburn."

"Don't worry about my guests, Mr. Lawrence. They loved the idea of making hands in the hay field and earning money while on vacation. Wranglers and guests together will make a good crew, don't you think?"

"Look-a-here, Miss." Laws was desperate. "I hired them men and—golly darn—I've paid 'em each a month's wages at twice what Tom was paying. They stuck me like that! But I didn't hire 'em to—"

"You hired them to take their orders from me," June interrupted. "That's in our contract." She went back into the corral.

Shorty, Tuck and Slim had drawn close and were grinning tantalizingly at Laws. He glowered at them, then whirled to confront Tom Mayburn.

"So I'm payin' men to put up your hay! Me payin' to put up your hay. But you won't get away with it, you and that June Addison."

Tom erased his grin. "How'll you fix us, Laws?" he asked.

"I'll kick her and her guests off my ranch, and you ain't got room here to accommodate girls. You can bunkhouse ordinary hay hands, but not dudettes."

Tom shrugged. "I admit the girls would be crowded and uncomfortable here, but to break June's lease, you've got to sell Lone Tree ranch. I'm the only prospective buyer, Laws, and I won't be gouged. Throwing your own words back in your teeth, I've got you over a barrel."

"Take me back to town, Tom. I'll fix you and that girl. I'll bust up your devilish plot. Take me to town, I say."

"I don't know why I should," said Tom. "But you did leave your horse there and I'll be happy to get you off of my ranch. Jump in ... Tuck, June, I'll be back in time to enjoy one of Muddy Coffee's good suppers on Lone Tree Ranch."

For the full seven miles to Red Fern, Laws did not once break his stony, brooding silence. But when Tom had parked the flivver, he snapped, "You wait a little bit. I'll soon be ready to evict June Addison and all her guests. I want you to tell her so and that if she ain't gone in an hour I'll have the sheriff out there."

Tom said, "Okay. I'll wait I'll take out the sheriff, too, if it's necessary."

Laws Lawrence trotted to Jack Snyder's real estate office. Scarcely ten minutes later, he reappeared, accompanied by Snyder.

"Snyder's bought Lone Tree ranch," he told Tom Mayburn. "That breaks June Addison's lease, and now she's got to get out."

"Not so fast, Laws," Tom chided good-naturedly. "Not so fast. Since you've sold the place you have nothing more to say about it. Only the purchaser can order June off."

"I thought of that, too," clicked Laws. "Snyder said if he had anything to say about it he would send 'em a-kiting. That's why I let him get me down on the price. When I'm all crossed up, Tom, I get vengeful."

"What did you pay for Laws' ranch, Jack?" Tom inquired.

"Four hundred dollars," chuckled Snyder. "We've signed the papers, and Laws has got his money. And now, as I agreed, Tom, I'll transfer the

property to Miss June Addison, you to act as her agent. Step over to my office. It'll only take a minute. Matter, Laws?"

But Laws Lawrence, apparently struck speechless, didn't answer.

THERE was a jolly after-supper dance on Lone Tree Dude ranch that night, Muddy Coffee Martin playing his fiddle and calling the square dances. But, following June Addison's orders, the party broke up early. Hay hands, she said, must get a good night's rest to be fit on the morrow. Tom Mayburn agreed, but he did not seem to think the rules applied to himself and June. Not on this glorious moonlit night anyhow.

As on the previous night they rode out to where they could look across the Flying M. Behind them lay the picturesque rock formations and red hills of Lone Tree ranch, a lovely scenic spot for city guests, but useless for any practical ranch purpose.

The smell of freshly-cut hay, mingled with the pungent aroma of sage, floated up to them, and Tom Mayburn sensed that his own emotion of triumph and heady exhilaration was running high in his lovely companion as the midsummer moonlight wove its magic spell and cast it over them.

"June," he said low, "I can't thank you enough for saving me from a major setback which could have wrecked me."

"Nor can I thank you, Tom, for both of us faced disaster in somewhat different ways. But now that my venture is sure to be a success I'm so happy it hurts."

"So am I, June, darling. Team work did it. But after this season will you want to go on with the dude ranch?"

"I—I'm not sure, Tom."

He silenced the old car and put his arm around June's shoulders and felt the quickening of his pulses and of hers.

"You're not, dear? Are you sure of anything else?"

"Yes, one thing. I know I'd love to stay here always, Tom. With you, Tom."

"That's what I hoped you'd want, you darling."

Tom drew her closer and she did not pull away.