

LOVE ME, LOVE MY LAMBS

BY S. OMAR BARKER

"I ALREADY got plenty 'cow thieves," growls this ol' doodle wack when I bump him for a job: "You know anything about broncs?"

"I know which end they wear the tail on," I says.

"Somebody must of told you," he grunts. "Question is, can you keep track which end is which when they're swappin' 'em?"

"Accordin' to what I've heard, Mr. Busby," I says, "all it takes to make

There was no telling where romance would lead an hombre like Romeo Jones, but his nose should have warned him to stay off the B Double A



"Runnin' onto Romeo with a gal ain't no surprise—it's what I find him doin'."

a bronc peeler is a split up the middle an' no brains. How many broncs you want snapped?"

"Close to a hunderd, at five dollars a head when they're saddle broke fit to sell—which has got to be purty pronto." Then he looked me over again an' begun shakin' his head. "But I won't have no one-man hoss tamin' on my place. You might git a busted leg an' nobody around to shoot you. Nope, my good friend, if you was twins I'd hire you in a minute, but—"

"But me no buttons, Mr. Busby," I butts in. "The fact is, to all intents an' purposes I *am* twins!" I held up two fingers crowded flank to flank. "I got a pardner name Romeo Jones that's a bronc peeler from who first cussed the cuckle-burs, an'—"

"Yeah?" he busts in to inquire. "Where you got him—in your pocket?"

So I explained to him that I'd left Romeo back in Las Piedras swampin' out for a red-haired waitress to keep our eatin' credit good at the Gizzard & Greens Café till we got snagged onto a pay roll somewheres, but that he'd promised to trail me, and would sure git there before night. What I didn't tell him was how I'd practically wore out my vocabulary tryin' to cuss Romeo Jones into ridin' out with me on the job hunt in the first place. But it'd be easier to drag a full-growed bull upstairs by the tail than pull my pardner away from a lookable female as long as she don't actually smack him down. What I figgered was that by the time the noon hash was baked he'd jest about outwoo himself with this redhead and get his ears knocked down to where he'd come huntin' me up for sympathy like he always does when his courtin' don't jell.

But the next mornin' found me still waitin' at the Lazy B Ranch and no Romeo Jones.

"Maybe you jest imagined you had a pardner," growls ol' Busby.

"Sometimes I wish I did," I sighs, reachin' for my saddle. "Hold this job open, will yuh. I'll ride back an' git the thus an' so of a what all."

"I'll keep it open," Busby growls. "Till somebody else comes along to fill it. You better hurry back."

HURRY back, my eye. At the Gizzard & Greens gobble joint back in Las Piedras I give this red-haired counter cutie a wink.

"Where's the fair-haired boy?" I inquires, meanin' Romeo Jones.

"Back in the kitchen," she answers. "Why?"

"I'll take ham an' eggs," I says, "an' while you're fetchen' it, send him out. I want to talk to him."

"Pig blush an' cackles!" she carols kitchenwards. "And come out here a minute, Sweetie Pie. There's a customer craves to view you."

Already she calls him "Sweetie Pie"! Nothin' like havin' a lady-killer pardner to git a feller in good at the hash house! She turns my way again.

"What color's your money, cowboy?" Just kiddin', no doubt.

"Listen, sister, don't you remember me? I'm ol' Romeo's pardner!"

"So what?"

"So it's all in the family. Surely you ain't callin' a man 'Sweetie Pie' in one breath an' denyin' nourishment to his starvin' pardner the next?"

Before she has time to answer, a ham-handed Swede big enough to hunt bears with a switch white-aprons through the batwings from the kitchen.

"What makes?" he inquires. "You

“speak frash with my Lena, hey?”

“Your Lena, my eye,” I says. “I thought—”

“So did Romeo Jones,” shrugs the redhead. “Till I introduced him to Yonny. By the way, have you met my husband?” She nods towards the outside Svenska under a big white coosie cap. “Sweetie Pie, this gent says he’s a pardner of that Mr. Jones you caught trying to kiss me yesterday—the one that spilled the dish water on your cherry pies when you threw the cleaver at him. He wants—”

“Never mind the details, folks,” I busts in hastily. I’m already purty familiar with the kind of a jam Romeo’s rashness for romance sometimes winds him up in. “All I want to know is, whichaway did he go?”

“By the window out!” Yonny pulls a fourteen-inch cleaver from under his apron and waves it towards an opening I hadn’t noticed the glass was gone from.

With a sigh I reach for my hat. Half an hour of inquiry up an’ down the street nets me the news that my pardner was last observed, about an hour before sundown, helpin’ some ranch gal load up her buckboard. Then, at the Shoo-Fly Livery Stable, I pick up his trail. Stuck up on the usual letter rack just inside the door that the cowboys kind o’ use for a post office I find a note he’s left for me:

DEAR NOGAL:

Fine job, fine boss, fine prospecks. B Double A Ranch. Foller Oraca road thirty mile northeast an’ come on out. It’s gravy.

F. JONES.

IT’S about noon by the sun the next day when I come around a bend in the draw onto some ranch buildings, which I know can’t be the place, because I ketch a whiff of livestock in the air that ain’t cat-

tle. It’s a smell I generally ride around, but with my tail plumb draggin’ from heat, hunger, hope an’ hard ridin’, I head in here anyhow in hopes of a hand-out.

Bendin’ my pony around the corner of the big shed, I run smack into two persons down on their knees, bendin’ so low over somethin’ that at first I can’t quite make out what it is. With both of ’em sunnin’ the seat of their pants thataway, it ain’t hard to classify ’em. The tow-headed one, I know right off he’s a cowboy because his shirt tail is out. Besides I recognize the patches. The other one I surmise to be a gal—an’ never mind how.

Runnin’ onto Romeo Jones in company with a member of the so-called fair sex ain’t no surprise. It’s what he’s doin’ that kind o’ rocks me back on my haunches. Believe it or suck eggs, while this dark-haired damsel in the blue duckin’ pants holds it for him, Romeo Jones, the curly-wolfest bronc rider in six States, is shamelessly engaged in tryin’ to poke the rubber nozzle of a nursin’ bottle between the reluctant lips of a lob-tailed little lamb!

“Openzy wopenzy oo’s itty bitty moufy!” he croons.

If it wasn’t for the risk of raw-hidin’ the wrong rear an’ insultin’ a lady, I’d’ve announced my arrival with the swing of a doubled rope end right where it would do the most good. As it is I kind o’ control myself.

“Hellzy wellzy’s firezy wirezy!” I says. “Since when you turned sheepherder, Romeo?”

“Oh, hello, Nogal!” he interrupts hisself to greet me, but both of ’em too busy to even look up. “It’s about time you was gittin’ here! Welcome to the B Double A, pardner.”

“B Double A?” I snorts. “Since

when's a sheep outfit runnin' a brand?"

"Since I think it up," answers Romeo. "I wondered if you'd be bright enough to ketch on. 'B Double A'—git it? It stands for—"

"Baa!" interbellars the lamb. "Baa-a-a-aa!"

"You said it, lambsy wambsy!" grins Romeo. "Light an' put up your pony, Nogal. I'll show you the work after dinner."

"In a bug's eye you will!" I drawls. "I got us a job bustin' broncs over at Ol' Man Busby's, Romeo. You gonna quit wet-nursin' *borregos* an' come with me—or have I lost me a pardner?"

"Now, Nogal," he tries to soothe me, "cain't you see we've done accepted employment here at the B Double A?" He looks up an' gives me kind of an agonized wink. "I done promised Miss Dee you'd stick with me, so you got to—"

"The day I turn shepherder to stick with you or any other gent," I bust in, "you'll find the devil out buyin' skates!"

"Why, Mr. Nogal!" says this damsel in a voice that reminds me of the soft sweet sound of whiskey gurglin' out of a mellow wooden keg. "Don't you really like sheep?"

"No, *ma'am!*" I says. "Not none!"

Just then she stands up, turns my way an' I git a view of her face. Nothin' special in the way of a face, I reckon. It must've been them blue eyes, as dark an' liquid-lookin' as the water in a hoss trough on a bright Sunday mornin'.

"When Mr. Jones accepted the employment," she says, "he promised me his pardner would come to work here, too, and I do need the help. But, of course, if you feel that way about sheep—"

"Madam," I interrupts her in

kind of a daze, "when my pardner makes a promise, it's my business to keep it!"

So the next thing I know I'm down there on my knees sunburnin' my pants patches just like ol' Romeo, tryin' to learn this lob-tailed lamb to take nourishment. We do manage to git the nozzle in its mouth, but it don't seem to draw good.

"Maybe it's kind o' stopped up," I says, for I'm still as ga'nt in the stummick as a gutted snowbird but too good-mannered to let on. "Lemme take a pull or two an' see if I can open it up!"

Miss Dee McPhail pokes the bottle at my face.

"Openzy wopenzy!" she smiles.

Good thing she held on to the bottle or that little ol' lamb would never of knowed what he missed.

AFTER dinner, which was chilmutton stew served by a fat ol' *Mexicana* that Miss Dee called Tia Nita, an Tio Nacio, her sparse-whiskered, question-mark-shaped "hoozband," me an' Romeo tolled each other off to the shack they called the bunkhouse to wrastle a few private words with each other. Personally I'd kind o' got over my blue-eyed daze.

"Romeo," I opens, "I leave you in Las Piedras to kind o' maintain our eatin' credit while I adorn my carcass with saddle corns huntin' a job—an' what happens?"

"Why," he says, "the big Swede throwed a cleaver at me! Didn't they tell you?"

"Snappin' out them broncs of ol' Busby's at five bucks a head is real money, Romeo, an' no sheep stink throwed in."

"Ain't she got purty eyes?" he sighs.

"Never noticed," I lies firmly.

"But as long as her pappy's a sheep-man—"

"He ain't, though. He's dead. Don't you git it, Nogal? All them sheep belong to *her* herownself personal, hide hoof an' hair. Sheep is money makers, Nogal. All I got to do is marry her an' we're on Easy Street for life!"

"Who's *we*?" I inquires. "You an' the sheep?"

Romeo gits that hurt-dog look on his face that always makes the women want to sew a button on for him or somethin' equally motherly.

"*We* means *us*, Nogal—you an' me. You don't think I'd go back on a pardner, do yuh? Shucks, it's more for your sake than anything else that I'm doin' it, Nogal."

"Doin' what—herdin' sheep?"

"No, marryin' the gal," he explains. "Only you got to co-operate, dang it."

"What you want me to do—make you some spit curls an' tie ribbons on 'em?"

"No, jest co-operate. For instance, till you come, that bunch of sheep you see the dust of off yonder didn't even have no herder."

"They still ain't. I ain't never herded no sheep yet, an' I'm too old to commence."

"But, Nogal, you got to—an' per-

tend you like it, so's to help me make a good impression. Then, quick as I marry the gal, I'll make you the manager an' hand you a silk piller to set on."

"All right," I says finally. "I'll take a whirl at it. Who knows? Seein' me around so much, maybe I'm the one she'll fall in love with, then I can hand *you* the manager's silk piller, huh?"

"She won't be seein' you around none to speak of," grins Romeo. "You'll be out with the sheep."

For a week I manage to put up with it purty good, specially as Romeo rides out to my camp ever' day or two to report progress.

"She's kind o' kittenish, Nogal," he explains, "an' I dassent hurry her too much for fear she'll git the mistaken idee that I'm marryin' her for her money. I been helpin' her bottle-nurse a bunch of them orphan lambs, though, an' already, when speakin' to 'em she refers to me as their 'daddy wadzy Romeo.' Jest gimme another week an' you can take a day off to go fer the preacher!"

ANOTHER week settin' around on ant hills with nothin' to do but inhale the aroma of sheep an' wonder which way they'll wander

THE PARTY FAVORITE!

TOPS 'EM ALL!

PEPSI-COLA

5¢

BIGGER BETTER

ICE THIRST-BUSTER!

Pepsi-Cola is made only by Pepsi-Cola Company, Long Island City, N. Y. Bottled locally by authorized bottlers.

next, an' I not only ketch myself talkin' to myself, but also discover to my surprise that most all I can think of to tell me is "Baa!"

Still Romeo reports he ain't quite made the grade.

"She's comin' around, though," he insists. "Two, three times now, when reachin' to pat one of them lambzy wambzies on the head I've patted her hand instead, an' she ain't even slapped me—not very hard anyways. An' yesterday evenin' she offered to sew some bullets into the tail of my shirt to keep it in. Jest gimme another week, an'—"

"Baa-a-aa!" I says.

Two days later a cowboy happens by an' between "baa's" I ask him if he knows whether them broncs over at Ol' Man Busby's is still to bust yet or not.

"Why?" he grins. "You want to sell him a sack of sheep stink to help smother 'em down?"

"Never mind quotin' me the bright sayin's of small children," I tells him. "I've rode broncs you wouldn't dare spit at through the fence. All I'm askin', is the job still open or ain't it?"

Latest he's heard it is, he says, but if I'm interested I better git my ridin' duds aired out an' git over there quick, for the rumor is that the job won't be open much longer.

That settles it with me. Romeo or no Romeo, weddin' or no weddin', silk piller or no silk piller, I'm done with sheepherdin'. That evenin', quick as it's cool, I'm jest fixin' to shake the dust of sheep range from off my feet for good an' all when Romeo arrives, plumb pantin' with purple-pink prospecks.

"It's a ketch, Nogal!" he effooverates. "Last night I plain up an' ask

her if she'd considered participatin' in the so-called joys of matrimony, an' she says yes, she has—specially right lately, since the sheep work has been goin' so good. 'Course, when I snuck my arm around her she got kittenish like the women will an' kind o' give me the slip. But this mornin' I ketch a glimpse of a letter she give to Tio Nacio to take to the mailbox, an' who you reckon it was addressed to?"

"Billy the Kid?" I hazards.

"Nossir! To the Reverend John W. Hoozit, over at Albuquerque. You realize what *that* means, don't yuh?"

"Sure," I says, "it means the guy's a preacher. So what? I'm backin' out on this baa-baa business, Romeo, an' lightin' a shuck for them broncs of Ol' Man Busby's. You comin' with me—or have I lost me a pardner?"

Once more he gits that hurt-dog look.

"Nogal," he says, "ain't you even got the imagination of a *wahalote*? It means she's writin' to this preacher to make arrangements for our weddin'. Jest gimme another day or two, an'—"

"Baa!" I says. But maybe he's right. After all, what's another day or two to a sheepherder? After all it might turn out kind o' agreeable for a feller to have his pardner marry a well-fixed woman—even if her money does come from sheep. Then if a horse happens to step in a badger hole an' leave the wealthy Mrs. Jones a widow, I mebbe could marry her my own self. So I decide to give him another day or two, anyhow.

Then the next day it happens. Ol' Tio Nacio comes out to help me bring the herd in for shearin'.

"*Mucha lana, mucho dinero,*" he

grins. "Planty beeg wool, planty money. So queeck the *señorita* gonna sold eet, then *caramba!* She gonna make marriage—I theenk!"

WHEN we finally git them blatters all corraled at the ranch, Tio Nacio hands me an' Romeo each a wicked-lookin' pair of over-size scissors.

"Cleep cleep!" he says.

"Clop clop!" laughs Romeo. Gay as a gilded gadfly, he slips around to where Miss Dee McPhail is settin', purty an' petite, on the fence, an' commences playfully pertendin' he's plannin' to pilfer a lock of her purty dark hair. The girlish giggle with which she gits out of his reach does sound like maybe he's got her on the run, all right. You know how the women is, acting coy an' kittenish with their sweeties.

Meantime I hand my scissors right back to Tio Nacio.

"No, thanks," I says, pokin' in my pocket for my knife. "I'll jest skin 'em with the ol' frog sticker."

"No skeen! No skeen!" shouts Tio Nacio. "Cleep cleep!"

He grabs an ol' ewe an' starts shearin' the wool right off of her to show me how it's done. It was the first time I ever knowed there was any way to git the wool off a sheep without skinnin' 'em.

"No skeen!" he grins again. "Cleep cleep!"

Nevertheless, when I take them broad-lipped scissors an' start cleep cleepin', seems like I wack as much hide as wool, an' the ol' ewe don't like it. The results is she wiggles loose from me an' when I take after her, about fourteen lambzy wambzies git tangled in my feet an' my nose roots gravel. Only bein' in a sheep pen, it ain't gravel.

Over acrost the corral I spy Ro-

meo Jones leanin' against the fence, kind o' touchin' his thumb to his pair of scissors like a woodsman does to an ax to see if it's sharp enough. So far he ain't even offered to try usin' 'em. Of course, he's got his courtin' to 'tend to. In fact it looks like all he's done ever since we hit this wool farm is loaf an' make love—if any—while I been out shepherdin'.

So when he calls out to me now not to git excited, somehow the advice don't set good. By the time I ketch that ol' ewe again I'm madder'n a teased rattlesnake with cactus in his tongue. When that ol' she sheep starts strugglin' again, I take me a good deep breath an' let 'er rip.

"You bug-eared, misborn, blattin' ol' so'an' so!" I bawls.

Next thing I know there's a small firm hand on my shoulder an' a small firm voice at my ear.

"Swearing won't help," says Miss Dee McPhail severely. "What's more, I simply won't permit it!"

At that I give my ewe one last snip, turn her aloose an' throw them sheep shears plumb out o' the corral.

"Listen, lady blue eyes!" I snorts. "If I can git used to sheep, you can git used to cussin'! Fact is, if you're goin' to marry a cowboy, you'll have to!"

"But I'm not going to marry a cowboy, Mr. Nogal!" she widens them purty blue eyes. "I'm going to marry a preacher!"

"Oh oh!" I says. "Romeo, did you hear what the lady said?"

"You . . . you mean"—Romeo stares at her in a daze—"you . . . you wasn't writin' that Rev. John W. Hoozit to git him to come out an' marry us?"

"Why, of course not!" She seems

sure 'nough surprised. "He's my fiancé."

"Fiancé?" gulps Romeo. "What's that?"

"In this case it sure ain't a cowboy!" I dryly drawls. "Excuse us, ma'am. No wonder you didn't care for cowboy cussin'. Come on, Romeo—let's drift!"

Just then ol' Tio Nacio, more worried about sheep shearin' than fiancés, prods Romeo in the ribs with the blunt end of the sheep shears he has dropped.

"Cleep cleep!" he urges.

"Clop clop!" grunts Romeo, an' I purt near have to run to keep up with him goin' after our ridin' gear an' ponies.

NOGAL, mourns Romeo solemnly as we ride townwards to give our woes a temporary drownin' on shepherder's wages; "there's two things I'm plumb done with, now an' forever: sheep an' women, so help me Jehossyphat! You reckon that Busby bronc-ridin' job is still open?"

Next day we ride out to see. We ketch Ol' Man Busby jest fixin' to take out in a loaded buckboard.

"Sorry, boys," he says, "I got tired of waitin' an' traded off them broncs unbroke. Fact is, I've done sold out. But if you want a job"—there's a strange twinkle in his eyes—"I'll interduce you to the new owner."

Which he does—a sour-lookin' ol' apple name Tyler, flanked by a brown-eyed, baby-faced daughter as purty as a spotted dog under a little red wagon.

"Yeah, I need hands all right," grunts this new owner. "I'll hire you both, forty a month an' found. Only I'm stockin' the place with sheep. You boys got any objections to—"

I don't wait to hear no more, but I ain't more'n half turned around to leave when Romeo yanks me back:

"It's the chance of a lifetime, Nogal!" he whispers. "I'll marry the daughter an'—"

He turns to give Mr. Tyler his answer, but his eyes are on the gal.

"Objections to woollies?" he says. "Why, Mr. Tyler, sheep is our fav'rite animal—ain't they, Nogal?"

"That's right," I says feebly. "Little sheepzy weepzies!"

THE END.

Under the onslaught of Piutes, renegades and hell raisers in general, the Fireball Express Line was buckling when Mike Valley, tooling a double load of trouble, threw in his last blue chip with the

FREIGHTERS OF HELL'S HIGHWAY by M. Howard Lane
Plus many other dynamite-packed stories of the untamed West by your favorite authors.

ALL STORIES COMPLETE

On Sale At All Newsstands Wednesday, December 3rd

With a fling of its thick neck the bull sent the dog sprawling, and then, roaring in triumph, lunged forward to finish the boy.



Would killing or kindness remove that

BARRIER OF HATE

BY KENNETH GILBERT

WHAT Jim Dyke saw as he came over the hogback knoll was stark drama. There was his field-trial setter, Skagit Chief, frozen into statuesque pose before a willow run where a wily old Chinese pheasant crouched in hiding. Just beyond the willows was old Jeff Blodgett, red-faced with anger and triumph. Beside Blodgett was the latter's ten-year-old grandson, Skipper, solemn-

ADV—5m

eyed with suppressed excitement. At that moment, hearing Dyke's footsteps, perhaps, and aware that it was cornered, the big pheasant burst out of the covert with a thunderous roar of wings, taking a course almost directly over the heads of Blodgett and the boy.

Blodgett whipped up the double-barreled shotgun which lay across his left arm. There was the sharp thud