STRAIGHT William MacLeod Raine COPYRIGHT BY G.W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY

CHAPTER VI.

Eavesdropping.

Out of the murmur of voices came one that Curly recognized as that of Soapy Stone, alias You Know Who. ". . . . then you'll take the 9:57,

After more whispering, "Yep, soon as you hear the first shot . . . cover the passengers . . ."

The listener lost what followed. Once he thought he heard the name Tin Cup, but he could not be sure. Presently another fragment drifted to him. ". . . . make our getaway and cache the plunder . . .'

The phonograph lifted up its voice. This time it was "I Love a Lassie." Before the song was fiffished there came the sound of shuffling feet. One of the men in the next stall was leaving. Curly could not tell which one, nor did he dare look over the top of the partition to find out. He was playing safe. This adventure had caught him so unexpectedly that he had not found time to run back to his room for his six-inch gun. What would happen to him if he were caught listening was not a matter of doubt. Soapy would pump lead into him till he quit kicking, slap a saddle on a broncho and light out for the Sonora line.

As the phonograph finished unexpectedly-some one had evidently interrupted the record-the fragment of a sentence seemed to jump at Curly. " . . . so the kid will get his in

the row." It was the voice of Soapy, raised slightly to make itself heard above

the music. "Take care," another voice replied, and Flandrau would have sworn that this belonged to Blackwell.

Stone, who had been sitting on the other side of the table, moved close to the paroled convict. Between him and Curly there was only the thickness of a plank. " . . . don't like it," Blackwell

was objecting sullenly.

"Makes it safe for us. Besides"-Stone's voice grated like steel rasping steel, every word distinct though very low-"I swore to pay off Luck Cullison, and by G- I'm going. to do it." i

Again they fell to whispers. The next word that came to Curly clearly was his own name. "Luck Cullison went his bail. I

arned it this mo'ning. "The son-of-a-gun. It's a cinch he's

a spy. Reckon he knows anything?" "No. Can't." "If I thought he did-" !

"Keep your shirt on, Lute. He don't know a thing. And you get revenge on him all right. Sam will run with him and his friends while he's here. Consequence is, when they find the kid where we leave him they'll sure guess Curly for one of his pardners. Tell you his ticket is good as bought to Yuma. He's a horse thief. Why shouldn't he be a train robber, too? That's how a jury will argue."

Once more the voices ran together indistinctly. It was not till Blackwell suggested that they go and get a drink that Curly understood anything more of what was being said. . The outlaws passed out of the little

room and strolled forward to the bar. Curly had heard more than he had expected to. Moreover, as he congratulated himself, his luck had stood up fine. Nobody in the sunburnt territory felt imppier than he did that minute when he struck the good fresh air of the alley and knew that he had won through his hazardous adventure alive.

The Erst thing that Flandrau did was to walk toward the outskirts of the town, where he could think it out by himself. Before he reached Arroyo street Curly came plump against his old range-mate, Slats Davis. Flandrau caught him by the arm. "Hello, Slats. You're the man "I'm pretty busy today," Davis an-

swered stiffly.

"Forget it. ? This is more important."

"Well?" "Come along and take a walk. I got something to tell you."

Reluctantly Davis fell in beside him. "All right. Cut it short. I've got to

see a man." I "He'll have to wait." Curly could

not help chuckling to himself at the evident embarrassment of the other. The impish inpulse to "devil" him had its way. "You're a man of experience, Slats. Ever hold up a train? Some of my friends are aiming to hold up one shortly. If you'd like to get in I'll say a good word for you." Davis threw him a look that

drefiched like ice water. "I expect you and me are traveling different trails these days, Curly. You don't mean it, of course, but the point is I'm not going to joke with you along that line. Understand?"

"Wrong guess, old hoss. I do mean

part right here. When you choose Soapy Stone's crowd to run with that cuts out me and other decent folks. If they have sent you here to get me mixed up in their deviltry you go back and tell them there's nothing doing."

"Won't have a thing to do with them. Is that it?"

"Not till the call comes for citizens to get together and run them out of the country. Or to put them behind bars. Or to string them to a cottonwood. Then I'll be on the job."

He stood there quiet and easy, the look in his steady eyes piercing Curly's ironic smile as a summer sun does mackerel clouds in a clear sky. Not many men would have had the courage to send that message to Soapy and his outfit. For Stone was not only a mankiller, but a mean one, at that.

Curly sloughed his footshness and came to the point. "You're on, Slats. I'm making that call to you now." . Surprise, doubt, wonder, relief filled in turn the face of the other man. "I'm listening, Curly."

His friend told him the whole story from the beginning, just as he had



"I'm Listening, Curly."

been used to do in the old days. And the tale in quietly with a grim look settling on his face.

"So he aims to play traitor to young Cullison."

"He means to shut Sam's mouth for good and all. That is what he has been playing for from the start, to get even with Luck. He and his gang will get away with the haul and they will leave Sam dead on the scene of the holdup. There will be some shooting, and it will be figured the boy was hit by one of the train crew. Nothing could be easier. He aims to put me on the stand and prove by me that Sam and he had a quarrel and parted company mighty sore at each other hardly a week before the holdup. He'll have an alibi, too, to show he couldn't have been in it. See how slick his scheme is? At one flip of the cards he kills the kid and damns his reputation. He scores Cullison and he snuffs out Sam, who has had the luck to win the girl Soapy fancies. The boy gets his and the girl is shown she can't love another, man than Stone."

"You've got it about right," Slats admitted. "How about warning Luck?" "The point is, would be be willing to wait and let Soapy play his hand out till we called?"

"You would have to guarantee his boy would be safe meanwhile."

"Two of us would have to watch him day and night without Sam knowing

"Count me in."

"There is where we hit heavy traveling. Slats. For we don't know when the thing is going to be pulled off."

"We'll have to be ready. That's all," "Happen to know whether Dick Maloney is here for the show?"

"Saw him this mo'ning. Luck is here too, him and his girl." .

"Good. We've got to have a talk with them, and it has to be on the q.t. You go back to town and find Dick. Tell him to meet us at the Del Mar, where Luck always puts up. Find out the ramber of Cullison's room and make an appointment. I'll be on El Motino street all mo'ning off and on. When you find out pass me without stopping, but tell me when we are to meet and just where."

Curly gave Slats a quarter of an hour before sauntering back to town. As he was passing the Silver Dollar saloon a voice called him. Stone and Blackwell were standing in the door. Flandrau stopped, *

Soapy's deep-set eyes blazed at him. "You didn't tell me it was Luck Cullison went bail for you, Curly. So you and him are thick, are you?"

"Now, I wonder why."

The eyes of the man had narrowed to red slits. His head had shot forward on his shoulders as that of a snake does. Curly would have given a good deal just then for the revolver lying on the bed of his room. For it was plain trouble was in sight. The desperado had been drinking heavily and was ready to do murder.

"That's easy to explain, Soapy. shot him because I was driven to it. He's too much of a man to bear a grudge for what I couldn't help."

"You're a liar. He did it because you promised to sneak up to my ranch and spy on us. That's why he did it." With the last word his gun jumped into sight. That he was lashing him-, self into a fury was plain. Presently his rage would end in a tragedy.

Given a chance, Curly would have run for it. But Soapy was a dead shot. Of a sudden the anger in the boy boiled up over the fear. In two jumps he covered the ground and jammed his face close to the cold rim of the bluesteel barrel.

"I'm not heeled. Shoot and be damned, you coward. And with my last breath I'll tell you that you're a liar." Flandrau had called his bluff, though

he had not meant it as one. A dozen men were in sight and were watching. They had heard the young man tell Stone he was not armed. Public opinion would hold him to account if he shot Curly down in cold blood. He hung there undecided, breathing fast, his jaw clamped tightly. The lad hammered home his de-

fiance. "Drop that gun, you four-flusher, and I'll whale you till you can'tstand. Sabe? Call yourself a bad man, do you? Time I'm through with you there will be one tame wolf crawling back to Dead Cow with its tail between its legs."

The taunt diverted his mind, just as Curly had hoped it would. He thrust the revolver back into the holster and reached for his foe.

Then everybody, hitherto paralyzed by the sight of a deadly weapon, woke up and took a hand. They dragged the two men apart. Curly was thrust into a barber shop on the other side of the street and Stone was dragged back into the Silver Dollar.

In two minutes Flandrau had made himself famous, for he was a marked man. The last words of the struggling desperado had been that he would shoot on sight. Now half a dozen talked at once. Some advised Curly one thing, some another. He must getout of town. He must apologize at once to Stone. He must send a friend and explain.

"Explain nothing. I've done all the explaining I'm going to. And I'll not leave town either. If Soapy wants me he'll sure find me." "Don't be foolish, kid. He has got

The young man laughed grimly.

four notches on that gun of his. And he's a dead shot." The tongues of those about him galloped. But Curly was excited, pleased

with himself because he had stood up to the bogey man of the Southwest and too full of strength to be afraid. Maloney came into the barber shop and grinned at him. "I bear you and

Soapy are figuring on setting off some

fireworks this Fourth." It did Curly good to see him standing there so easy and deliberate among the excitable town people.

"Sonpy is doing the talking." "I heard him; happened to be at the Silver Dollar when they dragged him

Maloney's evebrows moved the least bit. His friend understood. Together they passed out of the back door of the shop into an alley. The others

stood back and let them go. Back to the hotel the two ran. When Curly buckled on his revolver and felt it resting comfortably against his thigh he felt a good deal better.

"I've seen Siats Davis," Maloney explained. "He has gone to find Luck, who is now at the Del Mar." "Had any talk with Slats?"

"No. He said you'd do the talking." "I'm to wait for him on El Molino street to learn where I'm to meet Cul-

"That won't do. You'd make too tempting a target. I'll meet him in-

That suited Curly. He was not hunting trouble just now, even though he would not run away from it. For he had serious business on hand that could not take care of itself if Soapy should kill him.

Nearly an hour later Maloney appeared again.

"We're to go right over to the Del Mar. Second floor, room 217. You are to go down El Molino to Main. then follow it to the hotel, keeping on the right hand side of the street. Slats will happen along the other side of the street and will keep abreast of you. Luck will walk behind you. Unless I yell your name don't pay any attention to what is behind you. Soon as we reach the hotel Slats will cross the read and go in by the side door. You will follow him a few steps behind, and we'll bring up the rear casually as if we hadn't a thing ... with you."

They moved down the street as ar ranged. Every time a door opened h front of him, every time a man came out of a store or a saloon, Curly was ready for that lightning lift of the arm followed by a puff of smoke. The news of his coming passed ahead of him, so that windows were crowded with spectators. These were doomed to disappointment. Nothing happened The procession left behind it the Sii ver Dollar, the Last Chance, Chalk-

eye's Place and Pete's Palace. Reaching the hotel first, Davis dis appeared according to program into the side door. Curly followed, walked

A young woman was sitting there engaged with some fancy work. Slender and straight, Kate Cullison rose and gave Curly her hand. For abour two heartbeats her fingers lay cut'dled in his big fist. A strange stifling einotion took his breath.

Then her arm fell to her side and she was speaking to him. "Dnd has gone to meet you. We've heard about what happened this morn-

Her father and Maloney entered the room. Cullison wrung his hand. "Glad to see you, boy. You're Vn luck that convict did not shoot you



"You're in Luck That Convict Didn't Shoot You Up."

up when he had the chance. Saguache is sure buzzing this mo'ning with the way you stood up for him. That little play of yours will help with the jury in September."

Curly thanked him for going bail. Luck fixed his steel-spoked eyes on him. "By what Dick tells me you've more than squared that account."

Kate explained in her soft voice. "Dick told us why you went up to Dead Cow's creek." "Sho! I hadn't a thing to do, so I

just ran up there. Sam's in town with me. We're rooming together." "Oh, take me to him," Kate cried. "Not just now, honey," her father said gently. "This young man came here to tell us something. Or so

gathered from his friend Davis." Flandrau told his story, or all of it that would bear telling before a girl. He glossed over his account of the dissipation at the horse ranch, but he told all he knew of Laura London and her interest in Sam, but it was when he related what he had heard at Chalkeye's place that the interest grew most tense. Luck's eyes burned like live coals. The color faded from the face of his daughter so that her lips were gray as eighr ash. Yet she sat

up straight and did not flinch. When he had finished the owner of the Circle C caught his hand. "You've done fine, boy. Not a man in Arizona could have done better."

Kate said nothing in words but her dark long-lashed eyes rained thanks upon him.

They talked the situation over from all angles. Always it simmered down to one result. It was Soapy's first play. Until he moved they could not. They had no legal evidence except tile word of Curly. Nor did they know on what night he had planned to pull off the holdup. If they were to make a complete gather of the outfit, with evidence enough to land them in the penitentiary, it could only be after the holdup.

Meanwhile there was nothing to do but wait and take what precautions I reckon there's nothing to do but keep they could against being caught by surprise. One of these was to see that Sam was never for an instant left unguarded either day or night. Another was to ride to Tin Cup and look the ground over carefully. For the present they could do no more than watch events, attracting no attention by any whispering together in public.

The old Arizona fashion of settling a difference of opinion with the sixgun had long fallen into disuse, but Saguache was still close enough to the stark primeval emotions to wait with a keen interest for the crack of the revolver that would put a period to the quarrel between Soapy Stone and young Flandrau. It was known that Curly had refused to leave town, just as it was known that Stone and that other prison bird Blackwell were hanging around the Last Chance and Chalkeye's Place drinking together morosely. It was observed, too, that whenever Curly appeared in public he was it inded by friends. Sometimes of would be Maloney and Davis, sometimes his uncle. Alec Flandran, occasional'y a couple of the Map of Texas vaque os. It chanced that "Old Man" Flan-

iran, drifting into Chalkeye's Place, found in the assembled group the man he sought. Billio Mackenzie, grizzled wner of the Fiddleback ranch, was with Lim, and it was in the preliminary pause before drinking that Alec made his official announcement.

"No. Mac. I ain't werrying about that eny. Curly is going to get a square deal. We're all agreed on that. If there's any shooting from cover there'll be a lynching pronto. That

Flandrau, senior, knew perfectly even break with Curly would be al- officers. Another day passed. The festivities

had begun and Curly had to be much from riding in the bucking broncho

contest, but he had refused to let his name be scratched from the list of contestants.

A thousand pairs of eyes in the grandstand watched the boy as he lounged a against the corral fence laughing and talking with his friends. A dozen people were on the lookout for the approach of Stone. Fifty others had warned the young man to be careful. For Saguache was with him al, most to a man.

Dick Maloney heard his voice called as he was passing the grandstand. A minute later he was in the Cullison box shaking hands with Kate. "Is-Is there anything new?"

asked in a low voice. Her friend shook his head. Sonpy may drift out here any minute

"Will he-?" Her eyes finished the

question. He shook his head. "Don't knew. That's the mischief of it. If they should meet just after Curly finishes riding the boy won't have a chance. His nerves won't be steady enough."

"Dad is doing something. I don't know what it is. He had a meeting with a lot of cattlemen about it- I don't see how that boy can sit there on the fence laughing when any min-

"Curly's game as they make 'em. He's a prince, too. I like that boy better every day."

A lad made his way to them with a note. Kate read it and turned to Dick. Her eyes were shining happily.

"I've got news from dad. It's all right. Soapy Stone has left town." "Why?" "A dozen of the big cattlemen signed

a note and sent it to Stone. They told him that if he touched Curly he would never leave town alive. He was given word to get out of town at once." Maloney slapped his hand joyously, on his thigh. "Fine! Might a-known

Luck would find a way out. Soapy couldn't stand out against the big ranchmen when they got together and meant business. He had to pull his freight." "Let me tell him the good news,

Dick," she said, eagerly. "Sure. I'll send him right up."

Bronzed almost to a coffee brown. with the lean lithe grace of youth gambed in the picturesque regalia of the vaquero, Flandrau was a taking enough picture to hold the roving eye of any girl. A good many centered upon him now, as he sauntered forward toward the Cullison box, cool and easy and debonair.

Kate gathered her skirts to make room for him beside her. "Have you heard? He has left

"Who?" "Soapy Stone. The cattlemen served notice on him to go. So he left."

town."

A wave of relief swept over the young man. "That's your father's fine "Isn't it good?" Her eyes were shining with gladness. "I'm so happy

I don't know what to do." "I suppose now the holdup will be put off. Did Sam and Blackwell go with him?"

"Have you seen Sam yet?" "No, but I've seen Laura London. She's all the nice things you've said about her."

"No, He went alone."

"I see she has made a friend of you.' "You bet she has."

Miss Cullison shot a swift slant glance at him. "If you'll come back this afternoon you can meet her. I'm going to have all those dimples and all that sunshine here in the box with me." "Maybe that will draw Sam to you,"

"I'm hoping it will. But I'm afraid not. He avoids us. When they met he wouldn't speak to father." "That's the boy of it. Just the same he feels pretty bad about the quarrel.

an eye on him and be ready for Soapy's move when he makes it." "I'm so afraid something will happen to Sam." "Now, don't you worry, Miss Kate. Sam is going to come out of this all

right. We'll find a way out for him yet.' Behind her smile the tears lay close "You're the best friend. How can we ever thank you for what you're doing

for Sam?" "Do you reckon I have forgot how a girl took a rope from my neck one night? Do you reckon I ever forget

that?" "It was nothing. I just spoke to the bovs." "Or that I don't remember how the

man I had shot went bail for a rustler he did not know?" "Dick knew you. He told us about you.'

"Could he tell you any good about

me? Could he say anything except that I was a worthless no-'count-?" She put her hand on his arm and stopped him. "Don't! I won't hear you say such things about yourself. You were just a boy in trouble."

"How many would have remembered

that? But you did. You fought good for my life that night. I'll pay my debt, part of it, The whole I never could pay." . . His voice trembled in spite of the best he could do. Their eyes did not

waves surging through their reins (To be Continued).

meet, but each felt the thrill of joy

- The 120th anniversary of the founding of the University of South Carolina was celebrated by that institution Thursday night at a banquet, at which well that inside of an hour word it was the host of its alumni, members would reach Soapy Stone that only an of the general assembly and the state

- J. J. Adams has been elected presiin evilence before the public. His dent of the Laurens National bank to friends had attempted to dissuade him succeed the late Dr. Hugh K. Aiken, who committed suicide a few days ago.

RETURNING HOME

American Typhus Fever Fighters on Way Home From Poland.

Fifty-five soldiers and ten officers of the American typhus expedition to Poland left Warsaw for Coblenz on the Rhine recently in a special crain of 12 cars, the mission's time having expired.

The Americans came to Warsaw 16 months ago, and worked with the Polish health authorities in combatting typhus, chiefly along the Eastern frontiers where refugees were flocking from the interior of Russia under the Bolshevik regime. The Americans worked so near the front lines during the Soviet Russian-Polish war that frequently, the relief trains were under shell fire, and in one instance a soldier captured by the Bolsheviki.

One car of the special train to Coolenz was reserved exclusively for 10 Polish women who had married American soldiers and were taken, with

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"I've met him once, if that's being directly up the stairs, along the cor thick. . That time I shot him up." Davis stopped in his tracks. Then ridor, and passed without knocking you've said too much to me. We'll . "Funny. And then he went ball for into room 217.