

The Project Gutenberg eBook of When everybody knew

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: When everybody knew

Author: Raymond S. Spears

Release date: April 1, 2024 [eBook #73315]

Language: English

Original publication: New York: The Butterick Publishing Company, 1928

Credits: Roger Frank and Sue Clark

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK WHEN EVERYBODY KNEW ***

WHEN EVERYBODY KNEW

By Raymond S. Spears

Of course it was easy to understand Patient Bob's handling of the bad man.

A swaggering monster of a man, with long, tangled black hair, a cascade of blue steel whiskers and sunken caverns for eyes, thundered on thick soled boots into the Many Moons Barroom where he surged with long and eager strides to the center of the three man width of liquid counter. As he approached, those between him and his apparent point of destination spread swiftly to right and left.

"Set 'er up!" he growled, shaking his head, snorting, and turning from side to side till he had surveyed the whole circumference of the establishment with his sunken, glowing eyes.

He drank what looked to be a ridiculously little drink for so huge a carcass; he wriggled all the way down as the tiny shot burned in his throat. He gurgled and choked, as if the drink were in proportion to him, and after four or five fillings of the barrel shaped little glass he reached tentatively for the outflaring yellow handled revolver which was of a size in proportion to his beef. He gave sidelong glances into the big mirrors behind the bar after three or four false alarms with his gun. And he had a drink after each half completed movement. Then suddenly he pulled and let go a shot. He looked around. The bartenders stood with their hands lifted, like squirrels' paws, and other patrons

of the place were skittering without dignity out of the way, drawing toward the front and rear entrances through which the ones who always avoided trouble vanished like mist cloud shadows. The big fellow took some more drinks, and at intervals in a tentative kind of way he let go a booming shot. And presently, when he had reloaded his cylinder twice from loose ammunition in his trousers pockets he threw a pinch of silver on the bar, enough to pay for his drinks, and surged into the square.

There, with his big legs spreading, he weaved and swayed while he looked around. Court House Square of Boxelder was a glow and a sparkle of yellowish lights, with here and there the colors of red, green, blue and sundry hues, the brighter places being saloons, dance halls, gambling places, the most ornate of which had pool and billiard tables imported at enormous cost. Large boxlike buildings were dull--the reputable emporiums of trade, where hardware, food, dry goods and outfits were to be bought.

Swing doors were flashing to the shadows of ingoing or outgoing figures. As he looked around, the big fellow caught flashes of sparkling points, the eyes of humans, shining in the gloom like those of dogs or cats, some green, some golden, some purple.

* * * * *

"I'm Bill of Buck Hill!" the man murmured in his throat, so that it sounded like a growl; and then, louder, "I'm Rearin' Bill of Buck Hill!"

He looked around rather expectantly, and raised his chin higher, throwing back his head.

"I'm Rearin' Bill of Big Buck Hill!" he shouted. "I'm two yards wide and nine feet high--_Woo-who-o! Woo-who-o!_"

At that shout--"_Woo-who-o!_"--men, standing at every bar around the square and all the way down to the Claybank Delight, turned and glanced at one another.

"'Tain't Texas!" One shook his head. "That'd be _e-yeow-w!_"

"'Tain't Prairie--hit'd be _Hi-i-i-i!_"

"'Tain't Rebel--'tain't Yank." An old veteran shook his head.

"'Tain't old Mississip' shanty boat landing whoop er soundin' hail."

"Ner mule skinnin' cowboy--none of them!" another declared.

"That's green timber!" a square shouldered, high headed man remarked as he turned a sheet of a weekly paper in the lobby of Squint Legere's hotel.

"My lan'! He's bad!" A bystander shook his head. "Y' c'n tell that--the way he growls-- My lan'!"

"Who is he?" some one asked, and another raised a warning hand.

"Cyarful, ol' man! He's from Buck Hill. I've been t' Buck Hill. Hit's

way yonder in the head of Snake Creek Bad Lands. My land'! I was glad the sun didn't set on me up theh; yes, indeedy! He's Rearin' Bill--my lan'! Don't 'tagonise 'im. He comes from a bad country!"

The hoarse, rumbling growling of the man thus identified came around the square in the middle of the street. Horses hitched along the rails turned their heads to look at the phenomenon going by, twitching their tails and snorting a little under their breaths. A dog ran out in the dark from the sidewalk, wagging its tail, yipping as it pranced. Rearing Bill turned and growled at the vagrant beast, and the dog stood on its hind legs in an enthusiastic invitation to come on and play!

Some one laughed in the gloom of a passageway between two saloons. Rearing Bill threw a bullet into that shadow insult and then slammed two shots which sent the dog squealing in creased terror the other way around the square. A man's yell of alarm rose frantically from the passageway and the clatter of loose boards and the fall of a stack of booming empty kegs reverberated around.

"_Woo-who-o!_" Rearing Bill whooped, and the echoes returned from faces of Bad Land cliffs.

"Lawse, he c'n shore yell!" listeners said in low voices.

* * * * *

As the big fellow shambled nearer, the gamblers around the tables hesitated, the drinkers at the bars held their liquor poised, looking over their shoulders at the front doors; and those with nothing special to divide their attention withdrew to the rear or side entrances. The bartenders, who must perforce stay and take it, wiped their hands on their aprons, their fingers twiddling, all except Flat Face Dink of Squint Legere's liquid annex. Flat Face Dink lifted the corner of his lips; then he gave the long, red, cherry wood bar an extra dry polish.

"My gracious!" the observing Tid Ricks whispered. "Dink don't care f'r anybody in the world! He's all nerve, Dink is! Come the devil himself and Flat Face'd say to him, 'Name yer pisen, old boy--how's hell t'day?' He would, honest! I bet he would."

A heavy footfall out in front of Legere's shook the planks till they boomed and creaked. Rearing Bill of Big Buck Hill surged into the middle of the barroom. Tid Ricks shrank into a corner. Patrons along the bar watched anxiously through the mirror reflections. Flat Face Dink deliberately turned his back and stacked up a pyramid of glasses.

"I want pisen!" the newcomer declared, shambling toward the bar, where they gave him ten feet width according to his size, looks and actions.

Flat Face Dink flipped up a quart bottle, tall, straight sided and long necked, and set up a thick, fluted glass to hold two good liquor drinks. Rearing Bill looked at the glass, picking it up.

"Put 'r thar, mister!" Rearing Bill said, enthusiastically. "You got a measure 'cording to the man here--put 'r thar!"

Flat Face Dink colored happily under that praise, and drank with Rearing

Bill, something he never did except with the most distinguished of patrons.

Rearing Bill holstered his gun with the stained ivory handles. He was a gentleman among gentlemen, in Squint Legere's, all on account of the appreciation of Flat Face Dink of the appropriateness of measures for a man, serving glasses according to one's size. Rearing Bill surged forth into the street again, popped away a couple of times and went on his way.

He began to sing:

"I'm Rearing Bill of Big Buck Hill.
Snake pisen is my cure.
Of human flesh I eat my fill;
An' I takes my whisky pure."

He ended the verse with a chorus of shots. He aimed at lights, which crashed in broken glass, for he could shoot pretty straight. His gunfire made the horses nervous, and they pranced around. When he was on one side of the square men scurried on the opposite side to remove their mounts, either racing out to the livery barn and corral or down toward Strollers' Campground on the creek bottom.

Rearing Bill's horse was built on his own generous scale, but he had begun to ride it when it was too young; and now the beast, which would have been a good draft horse, was a swayback with a tired look in the lop of its ears. When Rearing Bill came by, however, the animal pranced and shook nervously.