

# WILD PASTURES By REX BEACH

## THE STORY TO DATE

In the nineties, when Florida was a wild cattle country, Tom Kennedy, young Texas cowboy, arrives at Punta Rassa on his way to see his uncle, Capt. Ben Noble, cattle baron, for whom he is going to work. Arriving on the same boat is Rita Mendez, daughter of a rich Cuban, and her duenna. Tom falls in love with the dark Cuban beauty. She is going to Fort Myers to visit relatives. Her young cousin, Miguel Rubio, and his sister, had come to meet her. Tom arranges to sail with them to Fort Myers. Before sailing, Tom makes friends with Bide Willing, cowboy, and becomes involved in a feud with the overbearing Dolman brothers, Tad and Sonny, powerful cattlemen.

## INSTALMENT II.

TOM congratulated himself. This, he decided, was about the most daring thing he had ever done. Here was an exploit that took nerve; in his own eyes he assumed the proportions of a Davy Crockett. Who said he wasn't a ladies' man?

The two girls ignored his presence and twittered together like two birds; the black-gowned duenna eyed him distrustfully, then lighted a cigar and made herself comfortable. Miguel called upon his new acquaintance to note his skill as a boatman.

Coverly Tom studied the two girls. Luisa was attractive, she was animated; she would have passed for a very good-looking young woman anywhere except alongside of her Havana cousin. No girl could be considered really pretty under such a disadvantage. Both used the English language with a fascinating inflection, both had foreign mannerisms that were charming.

Tom started when he overheard Luisa say, "O, he's handsome enough, and I can see he's in love with you already."

The passenger was tempted to wait, to listen further, but realized in time that it would never do, so in a tone audible to the others he inquired of Miguel:

"*A que distancia queda Fort Myers?*"

The boy's eyes brightened; there was a movement forward. Ofelia shot a startled look at him and held her cigar poised.

"So! You speak Spanish!" Miguel cried.

"I don't know whether it's Spanish or just Mexican."

"You have lived in Mexico?" Miss Mendez asked this question. She turned so as to hide her cousin's confusion.

Doubtless what those three young people said was improper from the strict Castilian point of view, for they were insatiably curious regarding each other and they spoke of many things which concerned them only. They discussed habits and customs, likes and dislikes. They revealed themselves.

Boldly Tom told how he had prayed for the Lily Snow to sink on the way down from Tampa so that he could save Rita's life, and she colored at the ardor of his words. The idea sounded foolish to Miguel, but it pleased his sister, who began to dramatize the imaginary calamity. This was fun. Soon the three were laughing and prompting one another.

CAPT. BEN NOBLE was the leading citizen of Fort Myers and one of the outstanding men of the state. Although his early opportunities had been few, he had by wide reading and diligent study developed a naturally keen mind until he was considered a well-educated man. He was progressive and public spirited; he was a natural leader; he wrote a good deal for the newspapers, and his writings commanded respect.

Captain Ben was broad-minded and tolerant for his day. His Civil war comrades still rolled the bitter taste of defeat under their tongues; at their annual reunions they still cursed the Yankees—damnyankees was the word—and fought their own heroic battles over again; but not he. He gave credit to the enemy for his start in life. After the final curtain had rung down upon the grim tragedy of the C. S. A. he had ridden home on a Yankee mule, a Yankee overcoat covered his rags, Yankee boots were on his sockless feet, and a Yankee hat of fine black felt was on his head. All were gifts from an admiring foe, and they had set him up in business. The clothes had kept him warm, the mule had enabled him to collect what was left of his cattle and to form the nucleus of his present herds.

Hard times, those Young Noble had penned and branded and doctored and guarded his own stock. By patient, ceaseless effort he had built a fortune for himself.

Tom Kennedy was relieved to discover that his uncle was not at all the "preacher" he had half expected, but a kindly, courteous, dignified man to whom he took an instant liking.

They were seated on the porch in a pair of "venison" bottomed chairs—chairs with seats of deer-skin. Greetings were over; they were getting acquainted. Tom had finished telling about his long trip. "It was a wonderful experience for a poor country boy," he confessed, and then, with a grin, "If this old world is as big every way as the way I came, it certainly is a whopper!"

Noble's eyes twinkled. "I don't reckon it could be quite that big. Your mother wanted to see it; that's how you came to be a Texan instead of a cracker. She'd have liked it here."

Tom agreed. He gazed appreciatively at his surroundings and told himself that he was a fortunate person to fall into a berth like this. The Noble house was not so daintily built or so brightly painted as some of the newer Fort Myers dwellings, but its walls were overgrown and its roof was thatched with vines the blooms of which drew honey bees in such numbers that the air was filled with a pleasant humming like the sustained note from a tuning fork. In the yard odd foliage plants, ornamental shrubs, tropical fruit trees such as orange, lime, loquat, mango, memey, rose apple, crowded each other so thickly that the street was hidden from view. It was a fragrant, disorderly, homelike place.

"I tried to get her to come back, but she was pretty stiff-necked," the owner continued.

"I understand it's a family trait, Uncle Ben. . . . It nearly killed her to let you put me through school. You were mighty generous."

"Not at all. I made an investment in brains, and I expect to get compound interest on my money. Every child is entitled to an education. I had none, so I help others get theirs. I built more than one schoolhouse and hired teachers before we finally got a decent law passed. . . . People say I'm always trying something new, and I am. If there's two ways to do a thing I want to know them both. That's why I had you learn the cattle business out there before I sent for you."

Tom said gravely, "I'm afraid I did something today that you won't be proud of." Briefly he recited what had happened at Punta Rassa that afternoon. "In all probability the Dolmans are friends of yours. I'm mighty sorry."

M. NOBLE eyed the young man curiously. "You mean to tell me Tad put a gun to your back and you—took it away from him?"

"Yes, sir. I'm right handy with guns and ropes and such things. I learned a lot of tricks from the Mexicans."

"Show me what you did."

Tom rose, took his revolver from its shoulder holster, removed the shells, and handed it to his uncle. He turned his back and lifted his hands. He repeated the trick he had used earlier in the day.

"I wouldn't have believed it," Noble confessed, "and I been raised with a gun in my hands."

When his chair was again tilted back against the porch railing and his heels were hooked over its lower rung he said, "Asa Dolman—he's Tad and Sonny's father—didn't go off to the war with the rest of us. He stayed at home and put his mind to stock raising. He turned out right good at it, too; inside of four years his little bunch of scrub cattle was a sizable herd and ours had dwindled to 'most nothing. He owned all the young stock; ours was old and worn out. Asa waxed fat. He had money to lend, and he lent it profitably. He's one of the richest men in this part of the state, and yet I don't reckon he owns forty acres of land all told. He can't bring himself to pay taxes. They say that along about January first he buries his money; I don't know. Anyhow, cattle and politics are his line, and we've let him run things so long that every officeholder in the county wears his brand. There's not much we can do about it now."

"He started a bank here, finally

—a little yellow pine bank—and put Tad in, as president. I reckon about the only deposits it has are their own. Asa is trying to live down his early reputation, but the boys make it hard for him. Tad has the brains of the family; Sonny is a quarrelsome, vindictive fool. One of these days he'll up and kill somebody and light out for the silent country. . . . No, they're not exactly friends of mine."

"I'm mighty glad of that. What is this 'silent country'?"

"Okeechobee. Our local no man's land. It's pretty nearly as

"I'm just back."

"You know a Senor Umberto Mendez?"

"Yes."

"I reckon he's—rich."

"Rich and prominent. Why?"

The younger man dropped his eyes, he colored. "I met his daughter. She was on the boat and I came up from Punta Rassa with her. She's—beautiful."

"Not smitten, are you?"

"Worse! What's more, I sort of feel that the sight of me isn't altogether repulsive to her." Kennedy laughed in some confusion.

manhood and womanhood are peculiar, however, and they're fixed. I respect the sanctity of marriage and I revere virtue in a man as highly as in a woman. No gentleman will make love to a married woman or betray a girl. Furthermore, if he ever intends to marry he should save his manhood, all of it, for his wife. That's my belief, my religion. That's how you've got to live if you live with me. I read my Bible; I'd advise you to do the same."

"Thank you, sir. It's no hardship to read a good book. Your

Noble handed him several, saying, "If you need any more, help yourself."

Tom thanked him; he stared at the coins, then at the speaker. "Is it safe to leave money around like this?" he inquired.

"As safe as Dolman's bank, I reckon. Nobody steals money here. Niggers steal chickens and food, of course, and a few people steal cattle, but we've got them pretty well killed out. I never heard of anybody stealing money. I don't scarcely know what we'd do with a man that stole money. . . . I remember meeting Gordon Hobby out in the woods one day. He had over three thousand dollars in gold over his saddle. We're good friends, and we jawed so long we decided to camp right there and have our visit out. He rigged up the fly while I started a fire and got the coffee going."

"In the morning Gordon decided to ride back to town with me and catch up on some drinking he had neglected. Those wallets had galled his horse, so he hung 'em over the tent pole and left 'em there. He was gone three days."

FORT MYERS was a small town; it had no "opera house"; its amusements were simple. This year, for the first time, a medicine show had extended its route and was playing on a vacant lot fronting the main street.

Tom Kennedy and his uncle went to the Wonder Oil show that night, as did practically everybody in Fort Myers, and doubtless the young Texan would have enjoyed the entertainment immensely had he not encountered Rita Mendez there. Having laid eyes on her, he could not have told thereafter whether this was a camp meeting or a political rally.

She was with the Rubio family, and her appearance had thrown the young men of the town into a fever; there was a deal of whispering and craning of necks.

It had been raining; and suddenly, without the faintest warning of breeze or of thunder, came a heavier downpour, and the crowd stampeded.

"Run! Run quickly!" Mrs. Rubio directed her niece and her daughter.

Tom removed his coat and flung it over Rita's shoulders; he took her hand and shoved through the confusion. When they were out in the clear the girl exclaimed: "Make haste! We'll be drowned!"

After a while Rita stopped and gasped, "Where are you taking me?"

"Dogged if I know. Where do you live?"

Miss Mendez looked around hurriedly, then up at him. Her eyes were shining, her lips were parted, her bosom heaved tumultuously. In mimicry of his tone she confessed: "Dogged if I know; in Fort Myers I'm a stranger. The house of my cousin is some distance, but—where?"

Onward they hastened until a more ominous rustle in the treetops overhead and a stirring of the air gave warning of a swiftly approaching deluge. Close at hand Tom made out a darkened house with the usual porch on two sides; a low picket fence separated the yard from the street, but there was no gate in sight.

There was not a moment to lose; other people had sought shelter; so Tom stooped and lifted his companion. She was startled to find herself in his arms, and she clutched at him; then she was standing on the other side of the fence. He vaulted after her; then, just as a curtain of water fell, the couple flung themselves under the shelter of the veranda.

Rita's face was a pallid blur in the gloom. Tom felt her fingers close over his and heard her exclaim in a voice deadened by the uproar:

"How terrifying! It is the—tornado."

He put his mouth close to her ear and said, "You'd better slip into my coat and button it up."

Then he lifted the garment from her shoulders and held it for her. He wondered if she really leaned back into his arms or if that was mere imagination. Imagination, of course. He longed to close his arms around her, but resisted the temptation. He was crazy to think of such a thing. Why, men had been shot for less. Rita would probably scratch his eyes out—

"Thank you!" She looked up over her shoulder; again a wisp of her hair touched his cheek. He

felt her warm breath. "How strong you are! You lifted me so easily," she said in Spanish.

"I hope you're not wet," he mumbled.

"No, no. But you?" Her hands touched his arms, his breast, and a thrill raced through him; he tried to speak, but his mouth was dry; he could think of nothing to say. "Whose house is this? Dios! Somebody will shoot us."

There was no doubt now that Miss Mendez pressed closer. Tom ventured to put his arm around her in a reassuring and perfectly respectful manner. There was a silence for a moment until she seemed to notice the liberty he had taken and said, "O, you should not do that!" In the darkness a small unseen hand groped for his, pushed it away and yet held it. Her body withdrew from his at least an inch. "Are you so bold with every girl?"

"I'm not bold. I—I love you." Heavens! The harm was done! Kennedy all but fainted. What a beast he was to frighten the girl with such a savage declaration! He expected her to swoon or to scream for help. It would serve him right. Through and above the roaring in his ears he heard her say reproachfully:

"You tell me that to flatter me. How could you care for a stranger whom you never saw before this day?"

"I don't know, but—I loved you the very first minute. I feel as if I've known you always. I—can't think of anything else." His voice was thin and reedy; it seemed to expire on his lips.

THE rain was diminishing as swiftly as it had come; a few minutes more and they could steal away and nobody would be the wiser. While they waited, tense and apprehensive, they heard a murmur of voices from the street, then the click of a gate latch. People were hurrying up the walk; there was a stamping of feet on the steps leading to the other wing of the veranda.

At that instant Miss Mendez did something wholly unexpected. She flung her arms around Tom's neck and kissed him. Her lips were soft, they clung to his, her body melted into his embrace.

"Rita! . . . Rita dear, are you safely home?" The words were in Spanish; they came from Mrs. Rubio.

Miss Mendez turned her face and answered in a perfectly normal voice: "Yes, Aunt Leila, here I am. I thought you'd never come. The rain on that side of the house—"

"God be praised! You're drenched, of course. The door, Vicente! Quick, we're all streaming." Rita's relatives were all talking at once; probably they had been talking from the very first. Tom didn't know.

"What a shower! We stood under a tree. . . . Darling! Is your dress ruined? Mine is. . . . I told you not to worry. How could she lose her way?"

"Mr. Kennedy gave me his coat. And how we ran! Then blackness! The door locked! Ofelia sleeping like one dead! Heavens, it was a flood!" Rita laughed joyously. "But it was fun, and who cares for a little water? I'm not made of sugar."

"Will you come in and dry yourself?" Vicente Rubio inquired of his niece's escort, but Tom declined the invitation.

Rain was still falling when he went out the gate, nevertheless it was not until he neared home that he found he was carrying his coat under his arm.

(Copyright, 1934, By Rex Beach.)  
(To be continued.)

## When Poisons Clog KIDNEYS and irritate Bladder

### JUST DO THIS

Go to your druggist today and get this safe, swift and harmless diuretic and stimulant—ask for Gold Medal Haaren Oil Capsules and start at once to flush kidneys of waste matter saturated with acids and poisons.

That's the way to bring about healthy kidney activity and stop that bladder irritation which often causes scanty passage with smarting and burning as well as restless nights.

Remember, the kidneys often need flushing as well as the bowels, and some symptoms of kidney weakness are: Getting up once or twice during the night—puffy eyes—cramps in leg—backache and moist palms. But be sure and get GOLD MEDAL Haaren Oil Capsules—the original and genuine—right from Haaren in Holland—the price is small (35 cents), the good results will fulfill your expectations.



He longed to close his arms around her, but resisted the temptation.

ild as the Ten Thousand Islands, below here. All the outlaws from up-state and farther north head in there. Most of them can't afford to make friends, so they fish and hunt and trap alone. That's how it got the name. Good place to stay away from. The Ten Thousand Islands are different; mighty few people ever been in there. The men are mostly egret and alligator hunters, and a fellow named Osterter has set himself up as a kind of king. Nobody knows just how many people he has killed, and we don't care much as long as he keeps his graveyard private."

"Seems like this is a pretty cool country, Uncle Ben."

"It used to be, but it's getting me and settling up fast. People are crowding in; they're planting orange groves and starting farms. That means the end of the open range."

"Gosh! The nesters and the hoe men ruined Texas."

M. NOBLE shook his head. "They'll mean the salvation of the stock business here, but I'm the only one who sees it. We've got to own our land, fence it, improve our pastures, and raise better cattle. Trouble with this state, 'om, it's too rich. Wherever the climate is best and the soil is richest the people are poorest, and vice versa. Hardship and privation develop the sturdier virtues. Where it's easy to make a living people're content with that and no more. That's why civilization flows toward the poles."

Tom pondered briefly. "I never thought a lick about it. . . . Cuba's rich country, and yet they've got some fine people there. I suppose you're acquainted in Cuba."

all, you might say; that is, with young ladies like her. To be real honest, I don't suppose there's another young lady like her anywhere in the world."

Captain Ben was silent for a while; then he said, "I've read a good deal trying to learn something about subjects on which I'm ignorant. In music there's a theme—a motif, they call it—which runs through every composition and sort of holds it together the same as the backbone holds a beef together. I was raised in the stock business, and the one theme that runs through a cowboy's head is women. That's due to the life he leads. It's a nice motif as long as it's honest and pure—as long as the words fit the music, so to speak. But when a man sings about women instead of marriage it's—like putting dirty words to a pretty song. . . . You're the only relative I have, Tom; I'd like to give you a start; but if we're going to get along together let's put our cards on the table. Here's my proposition: If you'll learn this country and the business as we carry it on; if you prove yourself in, say, two years to be the man I think you are, I'll give you an interest in everything I have. It's the biggest prize ever offered in this country to any boy. However, there's a string to it. I have my conception of decency and honor and what constitutes a gentleman, and you'll have to promise to abide by it. If you're going to step into my boots you'll have to prove you're man enough to fill 'em. I assume you're honest and fair-minded. I don't much care if you gamble and drink within reason—you can't injure anybody but yourself that way. My ideas about

TOM grinned. "When a western cowboy rides into civilization he lets his cartridge belt out to the last hole so it'll hang down and make a big show."

Noble's smoke-blue eyes twinkled; he nodded. "Nickerson would love that. He's my head man; you'll like him. He'll be in from the Kisimmee with a drove before long, and you're going back with him to learn the business. You'll be out there a long while, so make the most of your time here. Let your belt out and do your strutting. Get this Cuban love lesson over with so you can settle down to business. You can't be riding to town every Saturday night; once in a couple of months is often. . . . Got any money?"

"I reckon I have enough, sir. I took in so many sights on the way here that my money and my trip came out about even."

Captain Ben called to his cook: "Sylvia! O, Sylvia!" A voice answered from inside the house. "Where are those saddle bags I brought from Cuba?"

"Seem' like I th'owed 'em on de side gal'ry," came the reply. "You look your own self, Cap'n Ben; my han's all over dough."

"Fetch me those bags, Tom."

Kennedy obeyed; he returned in a moment with two heavy leather saddle bags, which his uncle unbuckled. They were filled with gold coins, Spanish doubloons.