# The Marquis and Miss Sally

O. Henry

Without knowing it, Old Bill Bascom had the honor of being overtaken by fate the same day with the Marquis of Borodale.

The Marquis lived in Regent Square, London. Old Bill lived on Limping Doe Creek, Hardeman County, Texas. The cataclysm that engulfed the Marquis took the form of a bursting bubble known as the Central and South American Mahogany and Caoutchouc Monopoly. Old Bill’s Nemesis was in the no less perilous shape of a band of civilized Indian cattle thieves from the Territory who ran off his entire herd of four hundred head, and shot old Bill dead as he trailed after them. To even up the consequences of the two catastrophes, the Marquis, as soon as he found that all he possessed would pay only fifteen shillings on the pound of his indebtedness, shot himself.

Old Bill left a family of six motherless sons and daughters, who found themselves without even a red steer left to eat, or a red cent to buy one with.

The Marquis left one son, a young man, who had come to the States and established a large and well-stocked ranch in the Panhandle of Texas. When this young man learned the news he mounted his pony and rode to town. There he placed everything he owned except his horse, saddle, Winchester, and fifteen dollars in his pockets, in the hands of his lawyers, with instructions to sell and forward the proceeds to London to be applied upon the payment of his father’s debts. Then he mounted his pony and rode southward.

One day, arriving about the same time, but by different trails, two young chaps rode up to the Diamond-Cross ranch, on the Little Piedra, and asked for work. Both were dressed neatly and sprucely in cowboy costume. One was a straight-set fellow, with delicate, handsome features, short, brown hair, and smooth face, sunburned to a golden brown. The other applicant was stouter and broad-shouldered, with fresh, red complexion, somewhat freckled, reddish, curling hair, and a rather plain face, made attractive by laughing eyes and a pleasant mouth.

The superintendent of the Diamond-Cross was of the opinion that he could give them work. In fact, word had reached him that morning that the camp cook—a most important member of the outfit—had straddled his broncho and departed, being unable to withstand the fire of fun and practical jokes of which he was, ex officio, the legitimate target.

“Can either of you cook?” asked the superintendent.

“I can,” said the reddish-haired fellow, promptly. “I’ve cooked in camp quite a lot. I’m willing to take the job until you’ve got something else to offer.”

“Now, that’s the way I like to hear a man talk,” said the superintendent, approvingly. “I’ll give you a note to Saunders, and he’ll put you to work.”

Thus the names of John Bascom and Charles Norwood were added to the pay-roll of the Diamond-Cross. The two left for the roundup camp immediately after dinner. Their directions were simple, but sufficient: “Keep down the arroyo for fifteen miles till you get there.” Both being strangers from afar, young, spirited, and thus thrown together by chance for a long ride, it is likely that the comradeship that afterward existed so strongly between them began that afternoon as they meandered along the little valley of the Canada Verda.

They reached their destination just after sunset. The main camp of the roundup was comfortably located on the bank of a long water-hole, under a fine mott of timber. A number of small A tents pitched upon grassy spots and the big wall tent for provisions showed that the camp was intended to be occupied for a considerable length of time.

The roundup had ridden in but a few moments before, hungry and tired, to a supperless camp. The boys were engaged in an emulous display of anathemas supposed to fit the case of the absconding cook. While they were unsaddling and hobbling their ponies, the newcomer rode in and inquired for Pink Saunders. The boss ol the roundup came forth and was given the superintendent’s note.

Pink Saunders, though a boss during working hours, was a humorist in camp, where everybody, from cook to superintendent, is equal. After reading the note he waved his hand toward the camp and shouted, ceremoniously, at the top of his voice, “Gentlemen, allow me to present to you the Marquis and Miss Sally.”

At the words both the new arrivals betray confusion. The newly employed cook started, with a surprised look on his face, but, immediately recollecting that “Miss Sally” is the generic name for the male cook in every west Texas cow camp, he recovered his composure with a grin at his own expense.

His companion showed little less discomposure, even turning angrily, with a bitten lip, and reaching for his saddle pommel, as if to remount his pony; but “Miss Sally” touched his arm and said, laughingly, “Come now. Marquis; that was quite a compliment from Saunders. It’s that distinguished air of yours and aristocratic nose that made him call you that.”

He began to unsaddle, and the Marquis, restored to equanimity, followed his example. Rolling up his sleeves, Miss Sally sprang for the grub wagon, shouting: “I’m the new cook b’thunder! Some of you chaps rustle a little wood for a fire, and I’ll guarantee you a hot square meal inside of thirty minutes.” Miss Sally’s energy and good-humor, as he ransacked the grub wagon for coffee, flour, and bacon, won the good opinion of the camp instantly.

And also, in days following, the Marquis, after becoming better acquainted, proved to be a cheerful, pleasant fellow, always a little reserved, and taking no part in the rough camp frolics; but the boys gradually came to respect this reserve—which fitted the title Saunders had given him—and even to like him for it. Saunders had assigned him to a place holding the herd during the cuttings. He proved to be a skilful rider and as good with the lariat or in the branding pen as most of them.

The Marquis and Miss Sally grew to be quite close comrades. After supper was over, and everything cleaned up, you would generally find them together, Miss Sally smoking his brier-root pipe, and the Marquis plaiting a quirt or scraping rawhide for a new pair of hobbles.

The superintendent did not forget his promise to keep an eye on the cook. Several times, when visiting the camp, he held long talks with him. He seemed to have taken a fancy to Miss Sally. One afternoon he rode up, on his way back to the ranch from a tour of the camps, and said to him:

“There’ll be a man here in the morning to take your place. As soon as he shows up you come to the ranch. I want you to take charge of the ranch accounts and correspondence. I want somebody that I can depend upon to keep things straight when I’m away. The wages’ll be all right. The Diamond-Cross’ll hold its end up with a man who’ll look after its interests.”

“All right,” said Miss Sally, as quietly as if he had expected the notice all along. “Any objections to my bringing my wife down to the ranch?”

“You married?” said the superintendent, frowning a little. “You didn’t mention it when we were talking.”

“Because I’m not,” said the cook. “But I’d like to be. Thought I’d wait till I got a job under roof. I couldn’t ask her to live in a cow camp.”

“Right,” agreed the superintendent. “A camp isn’t quite the place for a married man—but—well, there’s plenty of room at the house, and if you suit us as well as I think you will you can afford it. You write to her to come on.”

“All right,” said Miss Sally again, “I’ll ride in as soon as I am relieved to-morrow.”

It was a rather chilly night, and after supper the cow-punchers were lounging about a big fire of dried mesquite chunks.

Their usual exchange of jokes and repartee had dwindled almost to silence, but silence in a cow camp generally betokens the brewing of mischief.

Miss Sally and the Marquis were seated upon a log, discussing the relative merits of the lengthened or shortened stirrup in long-distance riding. The Marquis arose presently and went to a tree near by to examine some strips of rawhide he was seasoning for making a lariat. Just as he left a little puff of wind blew some scraps of tobacco from a cigarette that Dry-Creek Smithers was rolling, into Miss Sally’s eyes. While the cook was rubbing at them, with tears flowing, “Phonograph” Davis—so called on account of his strident voice—arose and began a speech.

“Fellers and citizens! I desire to perpound a interrogatory. What is the most grievous spectacle what the human mind can contemplate?”

A volley of answers responded to his question.

“A busted flush!”

“A Maverick when you ain’t got your branding iron!”

“Yourself!”

“The hole in the end of some other feller’s gun!”

“Shet up, you ignoramuses,” said old Taller, the fat cow-puncher. “Phony knows what it is. He’s waitin’ for to tell us.”

“No, fellers and citizens,” continued Phonograph. “Them spectacles you’ve e-numerated air shore grievious, and way up yonder close to the solution, but they ain’t it. The most grievious spectacle air that”—he pointed to Miss Sally, who was still rubbing his streaming eyes—“a trustin’ and a in-veegled female a-weepin’ tears on account of her heart bein’ busted by a false deceiver. Air we men or air we catamounts to gaze upon the blightin’ of our Miss Sally’s affections by a a-risto-crat, which has come among us with his superior beauty and his glitterin’ title to give the weeps to the lovely critter we air bound to pertect? Air we goin’ to act like men, or air we goin’ to keep on eaten’ soggy chuck from her cryin’ so plentiful over the bread-pan?”

“It’s a gallopin’ shame,” said Dry-Creek, with a sniffle. “It ain’t human. I’ve noticed the varmint a-palaverin’ round her frequent. And him a Marquis! Ain’t that a title, Phony?”

“It’s somethin’ like a king,” the Brushy Creek Kid hastened to explain, “only lower in the deck. Guess it comes in between the Jack and the ten-spot.”

“Don’t miscontruct me,” went on Phonograph, “as undervaluatin’ the aristocrats. Some of ‘em air proper people and can travel right along with the Watson boys. I’ve herded some with ‘em myself. I’ve viewed the elephant with the Mayor of Fort Worth, and I’ve listened to the owl with the gen’ral passenger agent of the Katy, and they can keep up with the percession from where you laid the chunk. But when a Marquis monkeys with the innocent affections of a cook-lady, may I inquire what the case seems to call for?”

“The leathers,” shouted Dry-Creek Smithers.

“You hearn ‘er, Charity!” was the Kid’s form of corroboration.

“We’ve got your company,” assented the cow-punchers, in chorus.

Before the Marquis realized their intention, two of them seized him by each arm and led him up to the log. Phonograph Davis, self-appointed to carry out the sentence, stood ready, with a pair of stout leather leggings in his hands.

It was the first time they had ever laid hands on the Marquis during their somewhat rude sports.

“What are you up to?” he asked, indignantly, with flashing eyes.

“Go easy, Marquis,” whispered Rube Fellows, one of the boys that held him. “It’s all in fun. Take it good-natured and they’ll let you off light. They’re only goin’ to stretch you over the log and tan you eight or ten times with the leggin’s. ‘Twon’t hurt much.”

The Marquis, with an exclamation of anger, his white teeth gleaming, suddenly exhibited a surprising strength. He wrenched with his arms so violently that the four men were swayed and dragged many yards from the log. A cry of anger escaped him, and then Miss Sally, his eyes cleared of the tobacco, saw, and he immediately mixed with the struggling group.

But at that moment a loud “Hallo!” rang in their ears, and a buckboard drawn by a team of galloping mustangs spun into the campfire’s circle of light. Every man turned to look, and what they saw drove from their minds all thoughts of carrying out Phonograph Davis’s rather time-worn contribution to the evening’s amusement. Bigger game than the Marquis was at hand, and his captors released him and stood staring at the approaching victim.

The buckboard and team belonged to Sam Holly, a cattleman from the Big Muddy. Sam was driving, and with him was a stout, smooth-faced man, wearing a frock coat and a high silk hat. That was the county judge, Mr. Dave Hackett, candidate for reelection. Sam was escorting him about the county, among the camps, to shake up the sovereign voters.

The men got out, hitched the team to a mesquite, and walked toward the fire.

Instantly every man in camp, except the Marquis, Miss Sally, and Pink Saunders, who had to play host, uttered a frightful yell of assumed terror and fled on all sides into the darkness.

“Heavens alive!” exclaimed Hackett, “are we as ugly as that? How do you do, Mr. Saunders? Glad to see you again. What are you doing to my hat, Holly?”

“I was afraid of this hat,” said Sam Holly, meditatively. He had taken the hat from Hackett’s head and was holding it in his hand, looking dubiously around at the shadows beyond the firelight where now absolute stillness reigned. “What do you think, Saunders?”

Pink grinned.

“Better elevate it some,” he said, in the tone of one giving disinterested advice. “The light ain’t none too good. I wouldn’t want it on my head.”

Holly stepped upon the hub of a hind wheel of the grub wagon and hung the hat upon a limb of a live-oak. Scarcely had his foot touched the ground when the crash of a dozen six-shooters split the air, and the hat fell to the ground riddled with bullets.

A hissing noise was heard as if from a score of rattlesnakes, and now the cow-punchers emerged on all sides from the darkness, stepping high, with ludicrously exaggerated caution, and “hist”-ing to one another to observe the utmost prudence in approaching. They formed a solemn, wide circle about the hat, gazing at it in manifest alarm, and seized every few moments by little stampedes of panicky flight.

“It’s the varmint,” said one in awed tones, “that flits up and down in the low grounds at night, saying, `Willie-wallo!’”

“It’s the venomous Kypootum,” proclaimed another. “It stings after it’s dead, and hollers after it’s buried.”

“It’s the chief of the hairy tribe,” said Phonograph Davis. “But it’s stone dead, now, boys.”

“Don’t you believe it,” demurred Dry-Creek. “It’s only ‘possumin’.’ It’s the dreaded Highgollacum fantod from the forest. There’s only one way to destroy its life.”

He led forward Old Taller, the 240-pound cow-puncher. Old Taller placed the hat upright on the ground and solemnly sat upon it, crushing it as flat as a pancake.

Hackett had viewed these proceedings with wide-open eyes. Sam Holly saw that his anger was rising and said to him:

“Here’s where you win or lose, Judge. There are sixty votes on the Diamond Cross. The boys are trying your mettle. Take it as a joke, and I don’t think you’ll regret it.” And Hackett saw the point and rose to the occasion.

Advancing to where the slayers of the wild beast were standing above its remains and declaring it to be at last defunct, he said, with deep earnestness:

“Boys, I must thank you for this gallant rescue. While driving through the arroyo that cruel monster that you have so fearlessly and repeatedly slaughtered sprang upon us from the tree tops. To you I shall consider that I owe my life, and also, I hope, reelection to the office for which I am again a candidate. Allow me to hand you my card.”

The cow-punchers, always so sober-faced while engaged in their monkey-shines, relaxed into a grin of approval.

But Phonograph Davis, his appetite for fun not yet appeased, had something more up his sleeve.

“Pardner,” he said, addressing Hackett with grave severity, “many a camp would be down on you for turnin’ loose a pernicious varmint like that in it; but, bein’ as we all escaped without loss of life, we’ll overlook it. You can play square with us if you’ll do it.”

“How’s that?” asked Hackett suspiciously.

“You’re authorized to perform the sacred rights and lefts of mattermony, air you not?”

“Well, yes,” replied Hackett. “A marriage ceremony conducted by me would be legal.”

“A wrong air to be righted in this here camp,” said Phonograpby, virtuously. “A aristocrat have slighted a ‘umble but beautchoos female wat’s pinin’ for his affections. It’s the jooty of the camp to drag forth the haughty descendant of a hundred—or maybe a hundred and twenty-five—earls, even so at the p’int of a lariat, and jine him to the weepin’ lady. Fellows! roundup Miss Sally and the Marquis, there’s goin’ to be a weddin’.”

This whim of Phonograph’s was received with whoops of appreciation. The cow-punchers started to apprehend the principals of the proposed ceremony.

“Kindly prompt me,” said Hackett, wiping his forehead, though the night was cool, “how far this thing is to be carried. And might I expect any further portions of my raiment to be mistaken for wild animals and killed?”

“The boys are livelier than usual tonight,” said Saunders. “The ones they are talking about marrying are two of the boys—a herd rider and the cook. It’s another joke. You and Sam will have to sleep here tonight anyway; p’rhaps you’d better see ‘em through with it. Maybe they’ll quiet down after that.”

The matchmakers found Miss Sally seated on the tongue of the grub wagon, calmly smoking his pipe. The Marquis was leaning idly against one of the trees under which the supply tent was pitched.

Into this tent they were both hustled, and Phonograph, as master of ceremonies, gave orders for the preparations.

“You, Dry-Creek and Jimmy, and Ben and Taller—hump yourselves to the wildwood and rustle flowers for the blow-out—mesquite’ll do—and get that Spanish dagger blossom at the corner of the horse corral for the bride to pack. You, Limpy, get out that red and yaller blanket of your’n for Miss Sally’s skyirt. Marquis, you’ll do ‘thout fixin’; nobody don’t ever look at the groom.”

During their absurd preparation, the two principals were left alone for a few moments in the tent. The Marquis suddenly showed wild perturbation.

“This foolishness must not go on,” he said, turning to Miss Sally a face white in the light of the lantern, hanging to the ridge-pole.

“Why not?” said the cook, with an amused smile. “It’s fun for the boys; and they’ve always let you off pretty light in their frolics. I don’t mind it.”

“But you don’t understand,” persisted the Marquis, pleadingly. “That man is county judge, and his acts are binding. I can’t—oh, you don’t know—”

The cook stepped forward and took the Marquis’s hands.

“Sally Bascom,” he said, “I KNOW!”

“You know!” faltered the Marquis, trembling. “And you—want to—”

“More than I ever wanted anything. Will you—here come the boys!”

The cow-punchers crowded in, laden with armfuls of decorations.

“Perfifious coyote!” said Phonograph, sternly, addressing the Marquis. “Air you willing to patch up the damage you’ve did this ere slab-sided but trustin’ bunch o’ calico by single-footin’ easy to the altar, or will we have to rope ye, and drag you thar?”

The Marquis pushed back his hat, and leaned jauntily against some high-piled sacks of beans. His cheeks were flushed, and his eyes were shining.

“Go on with the rat killin’,” said be.

A little while after a procession approached the tree under which Hackett, Holly, and Saunders were sitting smoking.

Limpy Walker was in the lead, extracting a doleful tune from his concertina. Next came the bride and groom. The cook wore the gorgeous Navajo blanket tied around his waist and carried in one band the waxen-white Spanish dagger blossom as large as a peck-measure and weighing fifteen pounds. His hat was ornamented with mesquite branches and yellow ratama blooms. A resurrected mosquito bar served as a veil. After them stumbled Phonograph Davis, in the character of the bride’s father, weeping into a saddle blanket with sobs that could be heard a mile away. The cow-punchers followed by twos, loudly commenting upon the bride’s appearance, in a supposed imitation of the audiences at fashionable weddings.

Hackett rose as the procession halted before him, and after a little lecture upon matrimony, asked:

“What are your names?”

“Sally and Charles,” answered the cook.

“Join hands, Charles and Sally.”

Perhaps there never was a stranger wedding. For, wedding it was, though only two of those present knew it. When the ceremony was over, the cow-punchers gave one yell of congratulation and immediately abandoned their foolery for the night. Blankets were unrolled and sleep became the paramount question.

The cook (divested of his decorations) and the Marquis lingered for a moment in the shadow of the grub wagon. The Marquis leaned her head against his shoulder.

“I didn’t know what else to do,” she was saying. “Father was gone, and we kids had to rustle. I had helped him so much with the cattle that I thought I’d turn cowboy. There wasn’t anything else I could make a living at. I wasn’t much stuck on it though, after I got here, and I’d have left only—”

“Only what?”

“You know. Tell me something. When did you first—what made you—”

“Oh, it was as soon as we struck the camp, when Saunders bawled out ‘The Marquis and Miss Sally!’ I saw how rattled you got at the name, and I had my sus—”

“Cheeky!” whispered the Marquis. “And why should you think that I thought he was calling me ‘Miss Sally’?”

“Because,” answered the cook, calmly, “I was the Marquis. My father was the Marquis of Borodale. But you’ll excuse that, won’t you, Sally? It really isn’t my fault, you know.”