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WESTERN WRITER**



MAX BRAND

DONNEGAN

**FIRST TIME
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PAPERBACK!**



FIRST TIME IN PAPERBACK!

SHOWDOWN AT SUNDOWN

He came from out of the sunset—a stranger with a sizzling six-gun. Legend said he was Donnegan. And every boomtown rat knew he had a bullet ready for any fool who crossed him. But even though the Old West had fools enough to keep Donnegan's pistols blazing until the last claim was struck, the sure shot had his sights set on a certain sidewinder. It wasn't just Donnegan's duty to slay the slithering snake. Blasting the deadly gunman to hell would be the sweetest revenge any hombre had ever tasted.



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THEY'VE COME FOR YOU!"

"What have you done, what have you done?" cried the girl, in one of those heart-piercing whispers of fear. **"They have come for you—a whole crowd of armed men—they're outside the door! What have you done? It was something done for me, I know!"**

Donnegan suddenly transferred his wrath from big George to the mob.

"Outside my door?" he asked. And as he spoke he slipped on a belt at which a heavy holster tugged down on one side, and buckled it around him.

"Oh, no, no, no!" she pleaded, and caught him in her arms.

Donnegan allowed her to stop him with that soft power for a moment, until his face went white—as if with pain. Then he adroitly gathered both her wrists into one of his bony hands; and having rendered her powerless, he slipped by her and cast open the door.

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MAX BRAND

DONNEGAN

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DONNEGAN

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CHAPTER I

TALE OF DONNEGAN

THE fifty empty freights danced and rolled and rattled on the rough road bed and filled Jericho Pass with thunder; the big engine was laboring and grunting at the grade, but five cars back the noise of the locomotive was lost. Yet there is a way to talk above the noise of a freight train just as there is a way to whistle into the teeth of a stiff wind. This freight-car talk is pitched just above the ordinary tone—it is an overtone of conversation, one might say—and it is distinctly nasal. The brakie could talk above the racket, and so, of course, could “Lefty” Joe. They sat about in the center of the train, on the forward end of one of the cars. No matter how the train lurched and staggered over that fearful road bed, these two swayed in their places as easily and as safely as birds on swinging perches. The brakie had touched Lefty Joe for two dollars; he had secured fifty cents; and since the vigor of Lefty’s oaths had convinced him that this was all the money the tramp had, the two now sat elbow to elbow and killed the distance with their talk.

“It’s like old times to have you here,” said the brakie. “You used to play this line when you jumped from coast to coast.”

"Sure," said Lefty Joe, and he scowled at the mountains on either side of the pass. The train was gathering speed, and the peaks lurched eastward in a confused, ragged procession. "And a durned hard ride it's been many a time."

"Kind of queer to see you," continued the brakie. "Heard you was rising in the world."

He caught the face of the other with a rapid side glance, but Lefty Joe was sufficiently concealed by the dark.

"Heard you were the main guy with a whole crowd behind you," went on the brakie.

"Yeh?"

"Sure. Heard you was riding the cushions, and all that."

"Yeh?"

"But I guess it was all bunk; here you are back again, anyway."

"Yep," agreed Lefty.

The brakie scratched his head, for the silence of the tramp convinced him that there had been, after all, a good deal of truth in the rumor. He ran back on another tack and slipped about Lefty.

"I never laid much on what they said," he averred. "I know you, Lefty; you can do a lot, but when it comes to leading a whole gang, like they said you was, and all that—well, I knew it was a lie. Used to tell 'em that."

"You talked foolish, then," burst out Lefty suddenly. "It was all straight."

The brakie could hear the click of his companion's teeth at the period to this statement, as though he regretted his outburst.

"Well, I'll be hanged," murmured the brakie innocently.

Ordinarily, Lefty was not easily lured, but this night he apparently was in the mood for talk.

"Kennebec Lou, The Clipper, and Suds. Them and a lot more. They was all with me; they was all under me; I was the Main Guy!"

What a ring in his voice as he said it! The beaten general speaks thus of his past triumphs. The old man remembered his youth in such a voice. The brakie was impressed; he repeated the three names.

"Even Suds?" he said. "Was even Suds with you?"

"Even Suds!"

The brakie stirred a little, wabbling from side to side as he found a more comfortable position; instead of looking straight before him, he kept a side-glance steadily upon his companion, and one could see that he intended to remember what was said on this night.

"Even Suds," echoed the brakie. "Good heavens, and ain't he a man for you?"

"He was a man," replied Lefty Joe with an indescribable emphasis.

"Huh?"

"He ain't a man any more."

"Get bumped off?"

"No. Busted."

The brakie considered this bit of news and rolled it back and forth and tried its flavor against his gossiping palate.

"Did you fix him after he left you?"

"No."

"I see. You busted him while he was still with you. Then Kennebec Lou and The Clipper get sore at the way you treat Suds. So here you are back

on the road with your gang all gone bust. Hard luck, Lefty."

But Lefty whined with rage at this careless diagnosis of his downfall.

"You're all wrong," he said. "You're all wrong. You don't know nothin'."

The brakie waited, grinning securely into the night, and preparing his mind for the story. But the story consisted of one word, flung bitterly into the rushing air.

"Donnegan!"

"Him?" cried the brakie, starting in his place.

"Donnegan!" cried Lefty, and his voice made the word into a curse.

The brakie nodded.

"Them that get tangled with Donnegan don't last long. You ought to know that."

At this the grief, hate, and rage in Lefty Joe were blended and caused an explosion.

"Confound Donnegan. Who's Donnegan? I ask you, who's Donnegan?"

"A guy that makes trouble," replied the brakie, evidently hard put to it to find a definition.

"Oh, don't he make it, though? Confound him!"

"You ought to of stayed shut of him, Lefty."

"Did I hunt him up, I ask you? Am I a nut? No, I ain't. Do I go along stepping on the tail of a rattlesnake? No more do I look up Donnegan."

He groaned as he remembered.

"I was going fine. Nothing could of been better. I had the boys together. We was doing so well that I was riding the cushions and I went around planting the jobs. Nice, clean work. No cans tied to it. But one day I had to meet Suds down in the Meriton Jungle. You know?"

"I've heard—plenty," said the brakie.

"Oh, it ain't so bad—the Meriton. I've seen a lot worse. Found Suds there, and Suds was playin' Black Jack with an old gink. He was trimmin' him close. Get Suds going good and he could read 'em three down and bury 'em as fast as they came under the bottom card. Takes a hand to do that sort of work. And that's the sort of work Suds was doing for the old man. Pretty soon the game was over and the old man was busted. He took up his pack and beat it, saying nothing and looking sick. I started talking to Suds.

"And while he was talking, along comes a bo and gives us a once-over. He knew me. 'Is this here a friend of yours, Lefty?' he says.

"'Sure,' says I.

"'Then, he's in Dutch. He trimmed that old Dad, and The Dad is one of Donnegan's pals. Wait till Donnegan hears how your friend made the cards talk while he was skinning the old boy!'

"He passes me the wink and goes on. Made me sick. I turned to Suds, and the fool hadn't batted an eye. Never even heard of Donnegan. You know how it is? Half the road never heard of it; part of the roads don't know nothin' else. He's like a jumping tornado; hits every ten miles and don't bend a blade of grass in between.

"Took me about five minutes to tell Suds about Donnegan. Then Suds let out a grunt and started down the trail for the old Dad. Missed him. Dad had got out of the Jungle and copped a rattler. Suds come back half green and half yellor.

"'I've done it; I've spilled the beans,' he says.

"'That ain't half sayin' it,' says I.

"Well, we lit out after that and beat it down

the line as fast as we could. We got the rest of the boys together; I had a swell job planned up. Everything staked. Then, the first news come that Donnegan was after Suds.

“News just dropped on us out of the sky. Suds, you know how he is. Strong bluff. Didn’t bat an eye. Laughed at this Donnegan. Got a hold of an old pal of his, named Levine, and he is a mighty hot scrapper. From a knife to a toenail, they was nothing that Levine couldn’t use in a fight. Suds sent him out to cross Donnegan’s trail.

“He crossed it, well enough. Suds got a telegram a couple of days later saying that Levine had run into a wild cat and was considerable chawed and would Suds send him a stake to pay the doctor?

“Well, after that Suds got sort of nervous. Didn’t take no interest in his work no more. Kept a weather eye out watching for the coming of Donnegan. And pretty soon he up and cleaned out of camp.

“Next day, sure enough, along comes Donnegan and asks for Suds. We kept still—all but Kennebec Lou. Kennebec is some fighter himself. Two hundred pounds of mule muscle with the brain of a devil to tell what to do—yes, you can lay it ten to one that Kennebec is some fighter. That day he had a good edge from a bottle of rye he was trying for a friend.

“He didn’t need to go far to find trouble in Donnegan. A wink and a grin was all they needed for a password, and then they went at each other’s throats. Kennebec made the first pass and hit thin air; and before he got back on his heels, Donnegan had hit him four times. Then Kennebec jumped back and took a fresh start with a knife.”