

THE BEST OF FRONTIER TALES

Volume 2



Featuring Tales by Greg Camp

Kenneth Mark Hoover - Gary Ives

Ellen Gray Massey - Kenneth Newton

John Putnam - Jeff Richards - Nina Romano

Tom Sheehan - Kathi Sprayberry - Willy Whiskers

Edited by Duke Pennell

The Best of Frontier Tales

Volume 2

**Winning short stories from
www.FrontierTales.com**

Pen-L

Published by
Pen-L Publishing
PO Box 4455
Fayetteville, AR 72702

© Pen-L Publishing
All rights reserved
Printed and bound in USA

First Edition April 2013

ISBN: 978-0-9851274-6-6

Cover art *Cowboys in the Bad Lands* by Thomas Eakins, 1888

Copyright for each story is held, all rights reserved, by the individual authors.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission from the publisher, except in the context of reviews.

Visit our web site at www.Pen-L.com

Dedicated to those who love the creak of saddle leather, a dance
hall piano, and the smell of horse sweat and gunsmoke.
Saddle up for some fun times!



THE TALES

Firebaugh's Ferry by John Putnam.....	1
The Hog Lot Shooting by Ellen Gray Massey.....	13
We Won't Tell. Ever by Ellen Gray Massey.....	37
Desert Rose — Bounty Hunter by Kathi Sprayberry.....	51
Payback at Murderer's Bar by John Putnam	67
The Lord in This by Jeff Richards.....	79
Cayo Bradley by Nina Romano	91
A Saddle in the Desert by Tom Sheehan	107
The Stock Detective by Kenneth Newton.....	117
Women of Action by Willy Whiskers	129
Redemption Bound by Kenneth Mark Hoover	133
Indian Agent by Gary Ives.....	142
Editor's Choice: The Driving Flame by Greg Camp	155
The Editor.....	171
The eZine Frontier Tales	172

FIREBAUGH'S FERRY

by John Putnam

It wasn't much of a town. The one ramshackle wooden building looked so poorly made that someone must've piled the barrels of beans, barley and wheat along the sides just to keep the place from blowing down in a good-sized wind. Next door a large round tent with 'saloon' scrawled in crude red letters over its open flap beckoned, and the rest of the posse ducked inside, their prisoner in tow. But I headed across the road to where wood smoke from a low chimney attached to a sod-roofed adobe carried the welcome smell of roasting meat.

I tied the mare to a rail, hopped down and pulled paper and pencil from my bags, then dodged a large trunk by the wall as I stepped inside. Indoors was refreshingly cool. Somehow this part of the world hadn't gotten the word that the seasons had changed and October shouldn't be as hot as July. There were four tables, two on each side of the door. A woman and boy were sitting to my left. I walked to the far right corner and pulled up a chair where I could see the flap of the saloon through the open window.

A small Mexican woman hurried up from the back wearing a grease-spattered gingham apron over a worn cotton dress, her hair tied in a red bandana, unease nestled in the corners of her dark eyes. "Buenos tardes, señor," she said in a trembling voice.

"Buenos tardes to you, señora," I replied, using almost all the Spanish I knew. I pointed to the fire in the back and rubbed my stomach.

"Hungry," I said.

"Oh, si, si," she gasped, seemingly relieved that I wanted food. "Carne asada con frijoles," she added.

I nodded eagerly. "Si," I answered. "Gracias. It smells good." I smiled honestly, happy at the prospect of a good meal for a change.

"Un momento, señor," she replied and hurried away.

I tossed my paper on the table and began to write. There was much to say. This was the end of the biggest story of my career with the *Alta California* and, in the twisted way we newshounds looked at things, was all because of my good luck. I'd been sent to the gold country to dig up colorful articles for the San Francisco readers, a kind of breaking in project for a new man fresh from the east. But no one expected me to fall right into the middle of the biggest manhunt this state had ever seen.

Tom Bell and his gang of hooligans had run roughshod over the territory around the Feather and Yuba Rivers for over a year, first robbing lone travelers along trails, then targeting the express companies that hauled in mail and supplies by mule to mining sites deep in ravines and canyons where no road existed and no wagon could go, then carried large amounts of gold back out. Posses had been sent from every town in the area—Downieville, Nevada City, Oroville—without finding a trace of Bell or his cohorts.

I'd had several dispatches that I wanted to get on the steamer to San Francisco as soon as possible so I had taken the Langston Company stagecoach south to Marysville. Later I learned it was at the California House stage stop in Camptonville when Tom Bell's spy had relayed information that the stage carried \$100,000 in gold. Six of them hit us about half past four that afternoon, but the driver whipped the team right past Bell and two of his men who'd tried to block the road. The guard started shooting, the gang fired back, and several of the men in the coach

THE HOG LOT SHOOTING

by Ellen Gray Massey

Ocie Tulley frowned as she handed the neatly typed and bound manuscript back to the young man who was eagerly awaiting her opinion. "Lies," she said. Behind her steel-rimmed glasses her eyebrows contracted, forming two deep lines in her forehead. "Mostly lies."

Affronted by her unexpected condemnation, he watched as with steady hands, she tied her sunbonnet straps under her chin, the shadows from its stiff brim making her wrinkled face even blacker. Spurning the young man's help, she pulled herself from the chair with her homemade crutch and limped out to the porch of her clapboard cabin. She wiped the perspiration on her face with a flowered handkerchief from her apron pocket and supporting herself with her crutch, stared across the dirt road at her hog lot.

"But..." Grayson's body stiffened at her blatant dismissal of his scholastic research. The presumption of this former school teacher! And after all his efforts to find her, overcome her suspicions of him, and persuade her to read his thesis. When he pointed to her brother's name in his paper, she had stopped shaking her head. Then she opened the screen door to let him into her living room when he explained that he wanted to see the actual rooms in her house where the dead men were carried after the shooting.

Controlling his resentment, he pointed across the dirt road

where she was looking and demanded she agree. "But wasn't over there where young Mort Killion fell over dead?"

"That's where he tumbled off his horse—right over the fence into my hog lot," Ocie said.

"And over there..." his lips tightened into a smug line as he pointed to their right down and across the road about fifty yards to a big white oak tree in the woods pasture, ". . . over east there, isn't that where Pinkerton detective, Oliver Larimore, was mortally wounded by Mort's brother?"

"That's where the last bullet hit him." Ocie nodded her head.

"Then how can you say my account of the gun battle is lies?"

"Cause them two fellers getting shot is about all you got right." Ocie eased her thin body into a homemade rocker on the porch, smoothing out her apron over her long print dress. Sighing, she rocked with a rhythmic squeak-rumble as the runners of her chair rolled back and forth across the cracks in the unpainted, rough oak floor of the porch.

"That was a long time ago," Grayson said, his frown deepening. He thumbed through the pages of his manuscript. Perhaps you've forgotten."

"A long time, yes," Ocie agreed. "Forty-eight years last March. But I remember." Her eyes did not look at her indignant visitor, but continued to stare across the road.

Grayson sat on the steps, one foot swinging among the golden marigolds as if they and not the woman were opposing him. He looked alternately at his pages, at Ocie, and at the two fatal spots across the road, his eyes squinting in vexed concentration. A Model A breezed down the road followed by a cloud of dust which settled on the hood and canvas top of Grayson's new 1921 Buick touring car. Ocie's hogs grunted and nuzzled one another as they wallowed in the cool mud in the corner of the lot—the very spot where many years ago young Mort Killion finally lost consciousness and fell off his horse after earlier being hit with a

WE WON'T TELL. EVER.

by Ellen Gray Massey

I'd have never figured it out about Rudy if it hadn't been for that quilt. Well, I guess I should say me and Betsy'd never figured it out. Betsy is my twin sister. She's smart. Sometimes I think she's smarter'n me, but I'd never say it out loud. Probably because she was born five minutes before me. It just takes me a bit to catch up to her. Anyways, me and Betsy figured it out. We are the only ones that know, except Rudy and old Mr. and Mrs. Pendleton. They know, of course. But we won't tell. Ever.

It was summer and Ma had one of her quilting parties. Us kids really looked forward to them. They was always held at our house because we had a big parlor. It was big enough for the ladies to sit around the quilt that was all spread out and sewed into the cloth strips tacked onto the frame. Ever so often the neighbor women (and their kids) come to our house for the day to finish up someone's quilt. One of the ladies would have a quilt already sewed together into some fancy pattern.

Then first thing in the morning on the quilting day, Ma and a couple of women who came early to help her would put the quilt in the frame. They'd set the wooden frame that Pa made on the backs of straight chairs. Then they'd first tack on the lining and then spread out the cotton filling before stretching the pretty pieced top across it all. The women'd all sit around it sewing away all day seeing who could put in the tiniest stitches that held it all together. Being a girl Betsy knows all about that. I know it,

too, just like she knows all about man stuff because of me. We know everything together, don't matter that she's a girl and me a boy.

Sometimes there'd be fifteen or twenty ladies there. And talk! They really talk up a storm. I guess it is just as much fun for them as for me and Betsy when they get together like that for all day and still make something useful. And warm and pretty.

One reason me and Betsy like quilting day so much is because Rudy comes with nothing to do all day but be with us. Or he always came before that last gathering. But no more. I guess all three of us grew up some that day.

Well, I'll get to all that directly, but I need to tell you how much we like Rudy. We looked up to him like a big brother, or a best friend. Only he wasn't. Nothing like that. He was old lady Ward's driver.

Me and Betsy just had our twelfth birthday and was feeling kinda superior to the mob of little kids running around playing tag and king on the mountain. But it being mid-summer, there wasn't much work to do on the farm, so Pa give us the day off. He said he wouldn't get a lick of work out of us nohow with all the goings on with the quilting party.

So we spent the day with Rudy. As usual, he was lots of fun. Oh, did I tell you that he is a slave? Well he is. That means in Missouri that he is property not a real person.

Rudy belongs to Mrs. Ward who lives in town –about five miles up the river from our farm. Now there aren't many slaves in our part of the state. The land in the Ozark hills isn't good for crops. Too rocky and hilly. The only good soil is a few acres in the river bottoms, like ours. Just enough ground for Pa and me to raise some corn and hay for our cows, horses, hogs, and Ma's chickens. Nothing like the rich land near the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers where there are big plantations of cotton, hemp, and corn. But even so, some richer people, like the Wards, have a

DESERT ROSE – BOUNTY HUNTER

by Kathi Sprayberry

A flat-brimmed hat shaded her startling blue eyes and creamy complexion. Coal black, curly hair bounced and flipped against her back, drawing sweat from her dust-stained white shirt. A split skirt in muddy brown encased slender legs that gripped the flanks of the horse upon which she rode. Rose O'Cannon, survivor of one of the infamous coffin ships leaving Ireland during the Great Potato Famine, stared hard at the unrelenting desert landscape surrounding Tombstone, Arizona Territory. Here she began her quest three years past and here she would end an unrelenting search when she captured the men responsible for killing the last of her family.

"Tis nothing but sorrow for the O'Cannon's since those men did their vile work," Rose murmured. "I be not the last, but the name dies with me daughter. Oh, the shame of it! What the English and the famine failed to accomplish, those murdering scum did."

Sorrow settled around Rose like a heavy blanket. Most of her four and twenty years had been spent grieving family taken from her by the English invaders in her homeland or other circumstances. Since losing her aunt, uncle, and cousins, Rose's life consisted of travel from town to town in the untamed West. She sought miscreants for the rewards offered in return for their capture. Because of her diminutive stature and gender, the criminals she tracked down always resisted. Her fast draw and

dead-on aim earned her the moniker Desert Rose, bounty hunter.

"This one's for free, Bailintin." Rose leaned forward to pat her horse's neck; the gelding's name came from the ancient Irish language, Gaelic, and meant Valiant. "This one is for Uncle Liam, Aunt Kathleen, and me cousins."

A bit of the Irish speech crept into her voice as yearning took her heart. Rose carried a taint upon her soul, a taint that killed her parents and five brothers during the long journey from Ireland to New York City. She firmly believed the same taint brought about the famine in her homeland. Three centuries earlier, the Spanish Armada washed ashore near her family's home. The Spaniards pillaged the land and ravished many a young woman. Now, in every generation of O'Cannon's, one female carried the looks of those marauders and brought bad luck upon those close to her.

"We break the curse forever today." Rose straightened and stared at the town on the horizon. "Tombstone's where those men lit and Tombstone's where I shall bring them in – alive."

Never far from her memories, the past took hold of Rose. Twelve at the time she watched her parents and brothers buried at sea, she overcame the sorrow before her fourteenth birthday by helping her aunt, uncle, and cousins build their desert ranch between Tombstone and Charleston. Then came the moonless night on the eve of her twenty-first birthday when three bandits crept through her bedroom window; men who never bothered covering their faces. They had their way with her and one knifed Rose's neck when she wailed out her terror. Unconsciousness took her only seconds into a heated gun battle with bullets whistling all around and she woke to yet again having lost those she loved.

"They'll pay." Rose pushed the horrific memories into the far reaches of her mind, to better concentrate on the task at hand. "No one will stop me."

PAYBACK AT MURDERER'S BAR

by John Putnam

Sunshine suddenly flooded through the open door of the cabin. I picked up the crutch my eldest, Enos, had fashioned from an alder branch and limped outside. Thick, dark clouds still roiled above the river as far as I could see, but off to the west a small gap between heaven and earth had given the setting sun a last brief opportunity to remind us of the glory of its existence.

It was a welcome sign. Rain had fallen in a steady downpour since yesterday morning, starting just after we'd finally finished work on the flume. All summer long nearly four hundred men, most new to California, had toiled together to this one end. We'd even hauled a horse-powered sawmill up from Sacramento to turn the trees of the canyon into lumber. When it looked like we weren't going to finish on time we'd toted piles of canvas in by mule back and painstakingly stitched it across a wooden frame twelve feet wide by three feet high that stretched more than a mile downstream.

Using more heavy timber reinforced with rock, we'd built a wing dam a hundred yards upstream that crossed to the gravel of Murderer's Bar where it hooked up with the flume. The whole thing was carefully contrived to direct the water down the canvas-covered chute so that we could mine the riverbed. Men had already pulled most of the gold from the bars and gullies above the waterline but an unimaginable bounty still lay at the bottom of the stream. During a short break from the rain this

morning two men had dug out over nine pounds of gold before breakfast. Everyone was eager to get started.

The river had swollen quickly during the storm and brought a new power to the flow that could be seen clearly in the fury of the water tumbling over the falls above Murderer's Bar. The rain had caused a lot of consternation here and men were busy piling more rock near the dam just to be sure it held. Still, we could use a few days of sun to dry the stream's bed. Miners who'd been in California a while said September was way too early for a storm this strong and we could expect many more days as hot as any we'd seen all summer. They figured the sun would be back in all its might by morning.

For miles above the falls more men had joined together with the same purpose as we had, and more dams and flumes were now being built far upstream, even into the high mountains. The Middle Fork of the American River had proven to be as rich a mining site as Mormon Island or Hangtown, and thanks to our hard work a vast fortune now sat exposed in the belly of the river, leaving us awaiting only a favorable change in the weather to realize the goals of our long suffering summer of toil. Each man here fully expected a payback many times his expenditures in both hard cash and hot sweat.

Just as I turned to go back inside I saw Rawley, my youngest, coming up the hill wearing his black India rubber coat, a rain sopped felt hat, and britches and boots caked with mud. With his head down, never once looking up, hands jammed in his pockets, he kicked away a rock in his path and cursed. The boy was a handful, almost grown and headstrong. Sarah said he needed extra love. Maybe I didn't have enough to spare.

"Evening, son. Supper's almost ready. Where's your brother?" I called out.

He looked up at me with a sneer. "Why should I care where Mister Enos Oates is?" he carped as he bulled past me and into

THE LORD IN THIS

by Jeff Richards

One day his mother smiles at him over the dining room table. He can see the love sparkle in her eyes like it's something he can touch. The next week she's laid out in a pine-box in the parlor, a frown on her lips. Eyes slammed shut for eternity. Two years later to the month his brother's thrown from a horse. Breaks his neck. Then Cindy Limon goes, the girl he was going to marry, caught in the influenza that roars through town. He is only fourteen and so much bad has happened to him. He figures it's because he was doing something wrong. His mom said, you trust in the Lord, the Lord protect you. You do his bidding, He give you everlasting life. Asa Greer figures that his trust is wearing thin. He needs to work more on his bidding.

That's how he comes to the idea of aiding Reverend Lawrence Wilson who preached about how it is our duty to end the abomination of God.

Asa totes his rifle down the path below the Reverend's house. He puts on a bandana dipped in hog's blood to show he's in the Army of the Lord. He climbs a tree. Hides patiently behind the lush cover of leaves until the light comes on in the preacher's window and he seen Marshall Limon, Cindy's older brother, and Eliot Thomas slink out of the woods to a clearing. Marsh waves a lamp. The light in the window blinks twice. Eliot slinks back in the woods and a few minutes later the runaways slink out with him. Marsh slides down to the river's edge where he uncovers a

flatboat beneath a tarp. They all clamber in the boat. Pole across. One of the runaways jumps out when they reach the Ohio side, hugs the ground, and shouts, "The Lord deliver me."

Marsh tells him to hush up. "He ain't delivered you yet."

Two days later, Marsh and Eliot appear on the opposite bank with eight runaways. They pole across. The minister crawls down the hill to greet them. Hugging each of the freed folk in turn. They all crying. Asa wants to leap out of the tree and cry with them, but he knows the Reverend Wilson would send him home. So he stays hidden as a kind of sentinel praying for a chance to prove himself.

That comes one early July twilight a runaway kid breaks through the forest and dives in the water. He ain't much of a swimmer, moving more sideways with the current than forward. But he's half way across when two strangers loop out in the open. Both blond. The one with a goatee carries a gun, the other clean-shaven, hair down to his shoulders. Same blue eyes. Same height. Same slouching demeanor like they was brothers. The clean-shaven one points out the kid flailing in the river. The goateed one shoulders his rifle and fires. The ball plunks in the water a few inches from the runaway's face. The second shot misses entirely and the third hits the kid in the wrist but only seems to hasten his progress across the water. What Asa's thinking is that this ain't much different than the Biblical days. He's heard the song in church, "Oh! Go down, Moses, Away down to Egypt's land." To him those fellows across the river, brothers or not, are like Pharaoh's army and the dark fellow in the river is like the Israelites. Bt there's no parting of waters. Only Asa with his gun and he ain't no Moses. He takes a bead on the goateed blond.

He's a crack shot. Been hunting since he was five. Killed many rabbits. A couple deer and once even a cougar jumped out of a tree near where Tom stood. He caught him in midair. The cougar flopped to the ground harmlessly. Asa saved his brother's life.

CAYO BRADLEY

by Nina Romano

A whistle sleek as moonlit grass captured the attention of Darby McPhee. She listened to the remains of its sibilance with longing, wanting to run away. How long could she stay in that cottage slaving away her youth for her five brothers and father? Darby was days shy of her fifteenth birthday when the three o'clock whistle blew. She'd made up her mind. Tomorrow she'd be on that iron panther heading for the east, her Aunt Bea's, an education and a new life.

There were several obstacles she'd have to overcome not the least of them the fact she might never return. She would take her courage in her two hands, like her Pa told her so many times to do when she faced a fearful thing and she'd tell Cayo Bradley just how she felt about him. And it would be today. Wondering what it would be like to kiss him, she rolled up her sleeves.

Darby reached for the butter churn and poured in the cream she had skimmed off the milk. Her thoughts followed the white stream. Then veered with, *After all, I may never see him again, and a man ought to know if he's been loved, even if it's a starry-far-away love that can never be fulfilled.* Her anger and fear were felt in every forceful slam of the stick with its round flat disk end. She'd make butter all right and she'd cream away every worry and dang thought about the long train ride east, leaving Pa and telling Cayo. What if he didn't feel the same? Wouldn't matter, she'd be leaving anyway. And a man should know.

Darby rushed to finish her chores. She set the table, pulled the muffins from the oven, turned the bacon, and whisked a dozen eggs with farm cheese she'd made earlier that morning. Standing in the doorway, she clanged an iron triangle, calling the men to breakfast. When will I tell Pa? She patted the pocket of her apron, which held Aunt Bea's letter stating all the arrangements she'd made for her niece. Darby slapped the butter onto a daisy form cut-out made of an oval piece of sorrel wood, closed the three inch high wooden mold with scalloped edges around it and hooked a curved nail over the head of another nail to secure it. She ran to the barn giving a hoot to her eldest brother Garret and buried the butter shape under the ice protected by hay. It always amazed her how the hay kept the blocks of ice from melting, but this would be the last time she'd have to concern herself about farm things like this. Aunt Bea had an ice box. City folk lived so much better.

The omelets were made and served. Garret reached for the strawberry preserves that Darby put up last summer.

"Pa, pass the biscuits," Garrett said. "Hey, girl, where's the butter?"

"I've a given name, Garret, just like you," she said. "I'll get it. I put it to cool in the barn."

"Probably just cuddling that dumb old sheep dog is all," Darby's father said.

"Not," Darby muttered and walked out the kitchen door.

Garret and Pa. She'd miss them. The only ones who recognized the fact that she was the opposite sex. Darby's younger brothers, Bixby, Randy, Chad and Pat, were inconsiderate. Darby thought of them as irresponsible assholes. Pa and Garret were always at them to fix something they'd messed up. Or to get going on a task or chore that should have been finished days before. Lazy bunch of oafs, serve them right to have to clean up after themselves.

A SADDLE IN THE DESERT

by Tom Sheehan

He was in the sparse land between shifting sands of the great desert and the last tree bearing green when he saw the vultures descending from their high flight. Breward Chandler, “Brew” to friends back in the mountains where breathing was much easier than here in the midst of little life, sat bareback on an Indian pony he had freed from a natural corral behind a blow-down. Chandler had learned that the horse would obey pulls on his mane and in this manner he had escaped from sure capture by heading into the desert, with his pistols loaded and a lariat and a canteen he had grabbed on the run. He was not sure who was after him, either renegade Indians or renegade whites out for the kill, looking for guns, clothes, saddles, anything for free. He was hoping that they’d measure the little he might have against the rigors of a chase in the desert. Perhaps, he also hoped, they were smarter than he thought they were.

The canteen was almost empty and water had to be found.

Now, arrowed out of the high sky, he saw the vultures drop down and out of sight ahead of him. There was no hesitation on his part; he’d have to check the attraction. It might only be a natural desert kill, but it could be a man caught in the last tremors of life and death, a man like him, on the run from one thing or another. It was easy to see that life was full of such chases; he was proof of it.

He dipped into a slight swale, crested a small hill as much

dune as he had imagined, and saw the horde of black birds at the carcass of a horse, the saddle in place. Chandler, watching them feast on the horse's flesh, stayed in place, now and then looking back over his shoulder for signs of any pursuit.

In less than half an hour the vultures had almost stripped the bones of flesh. Hoping they had done little damage to the saddle, he galloped in on the hungry critters and drove them off. Shortly they were aligned again high overhead on the lift of a thermal, like people waiting to get into church or for a general store to open its doors.

To his everlasting thanks, the saddle was undamaged and did not take him long to get it off the carcass remnants and onto the pony. The pony, not surprising Chandler, did not like the smell of death that came upon him, but he held the pony in place by hobbling his front legs.

The saddle looked to be a good old Texas saddle, with a high back, one that would have lasted the rider for life, wherever he was. Or if he was. The initials LGT were burned into the pommel textured into the skirts, and the whole rig showed a few years of use. He'd have to look for the owner, see if he had fallen off, had been wounded, died of thirst. He could not tell how the horse had died. He assumed that if the rider was dead out there somewhere the vultures would have gone after him also.

Chandler only agreed that he would search ahead of him on the trail for the owner, not behind him, not wanting to run into those chasing him, or had been chasing him. The desert, he wished again, might hold them back.

When he rode off, sitting comfortable at last on the pony, the vultures returned to their feeding, and no signs of pursuit appeared on the wide horizon. Chandler figured his pursuers had backed off because of the desert threats. Ahead of him, near the Barracks Rim, sat a waterhole the old Kiowa, Bent Wing, had told him about earlier in time, the night they had sat outside

THE STOCK DETECTIVE

By Kenneth Newton

The stock detective spotted the cow thieves through his spy-glass from about a half a mile away. He worked his way toward them through a deep gully off to the side, then circled around behind a low hill so he could approach them from the opposite direction without being seen. Near the base of the hill he hobbled his mare, gave her some oats to keep her mind occupied, and pulled a lever action carbine from its scabbard.

He worked his way up the hill with the sun at his back. It was only an hour after sunup; the cow thieves probably thought nobody would get up early enough to catch them, but they were wrong. He crested the hill and watched them for a minute — an old woman and a young man busily quartering a steer. She wielded a long butcher knife, and he worked a cross-cut saw as they hurried to get the carcass into small enough pieces to put into their waiting buckboard.

The stock detective side-stepped and slid his way down the side of the hill, no longer concerned with the element of surprise. He had already achieved that, and he had a Winchester and a top break Smith and Wesson for insurance. Considering that the cow thieves would be looking up into the rising sun, he felt like he had things pretty much under control. "Drop those tools and put up your hands," he said. "I'm arresting you for cattle rustling."

Both of them jerked their heads in his direction and put up a hand to shield their eyes from the sun. If they could see anything,

it was just the black silhouette of a man against a hot orange glow, but they knew what was happening. The woman held onto her knife, but the man dropped his saw and glanced quickly toward the seat of the buckboard where a well-worn belt and holster offered up the walnut handle of a Colt percussion revolver some ten feet distant.

"That will be the last stupid thing you ever do," the stock detective warned. There was already a round in the chamber of the carbine. He thumbed back the hammer.

The young man looked back toward the sun. "Now, look, Bull," he said. "This ain't what you think. This is our steer."

"You picked a funny place to butcher him." Bull glanced toward the old woman, who still had her knife but hadn't moved a step. "I said put that down."

The boy was talking again, and reclaimed Bull's attention. "It's the truth, Bull. We had our milk cow bred, and we been raisin' this fella up for slaughter. He broke out. He was pen raised, and didn't know nothin' about makin' his way on rocky ground. When we found him, his leg was broke. You can see it's so."

The steer's right foreleg was broken. Bull gestured toward the back of the buckboard. "For all I know, you did that with that sledge hammer before you brained him with it. Do you reckon I'd find a 36 caliber bullet hole in him someplace, if I was to look?"

"There ain't no bullet in this steer, Bull, and even if there was, without this meat, my grandma ain't gonna make it through the winter."

"Well, let's let the law sort it out."

The young man put his hands to his head in exasperation. "The law? Don't you mean the Cattleman's Association? They own all the lawyers and judges for 100 miles in every direction." He glanced back toward the buckboard.

Bull Henry shook his head. "You're worrying me, boy, the way you keep thinking about going for that gun. You need to give up

WOMEN OF ACTION

By Willy Whiskers; Constable of Calliope, Nevada.

Savanna Sal ran the Peachtree saloon in Calliope Nevada. She had a lively clientele with many would-be suitors among the cowboys and miners who washed the dust from their throats standing at her bar rail. Well-formed and taller than most women, Sal liked pleated dresses that hid a great deal. She had a scar that ran from her right ear across her cheek that she covered with an abundance of makeup.

Each man got a sweet smile and a peck on the cheek, though her heart belonged to Long Jim: gambler, sometimes gun-for-hire and notorious womanizer who held court at a corner table of the Peachtree.

Jim was the handsome sort with a set jaw, thin handlebar mustache that he waxed several times a day and a high-crowned Stetson that accentuated his lean, lanky frame. Favoring a shoulder holster as he felt it preserved a cleaner look when striking a pose at the bar, he carried a white bone-handled nickel plated .38 which he often polished with the ornate silk handkerchief that usually resided foppishly in the upper pocket of Jim's frock coat.

Catercorner across the street from the Peachtree was the professional house of Betsy Lovey. Betsy, who actually did come from Savanna Georgia — as opposed to Sal who did not — was the most prominent madam in the town and Sal's long time rival for Jim's affections.

Madame Betsy was an average woman in height, figure and beauty, but she had a head for figures and could strike a bargain better than any horse trader. This made her one of the richest women in the territory, with interests in mines, ranches and railroads. Still, she was not one to show off, and contented her days tending to her girls and pleasing her customers.

One fine spring morning Betsy woke early and from her bedroom window saw Long Jim standing on the second floor walkway outside Sal's private room, enjoying a cigar. Betsy had dabbled in Jim before and knew all of his angles, but seeing him there — as the sun peeked over the hills illuminating his face — created a desire deep inside. In that instant, she decided to take Jim away from Sal, once and for all.

Quickly changing into a sheer gown, she stepped out onto her own balcony. As she struck a pose of her own that accentuated her best features, she coyly waved at Jim, beckoning him over. With a devious devilish grin, Jim glanced into Sal's room to make sure she was still asleep. He then lightly descended the stairs at the side of the saloon and swaggered across the empty street to Betsy's place.

Few happenings in Calliope escaped Sal's attention. As crafty as Betsy was in business, Sal matched her in intrigue. Aside from booze and good times, Sal's forte was information; who met who behind the cow shed, where to find this body or that, and all territorial goings-on arrived at her door. Her pet name for the Governor was "Sweet Little Joe". So, thanks to her network of spies, Jim's early morning assignation was not as secret as he would have liked. She decided that Betsy's affront could not stand. The situation did not improve when Jim came in that afternoon.

"Where were you this morning? Was surprised you not being there when I got up," Sal asked.

Jim smiled broadly with a little chuckle, "Oh, I had some business, but I'm here now. Where's my kiss?"

REDEMPTION BOUND

by Kenneth Mark Hoover

We rode all day with scheduled stops so the horses could blow. The iron-hot wind sheared off the hard pan and blasted our faces. We had gloves, bandanas and hats pulled down, but the skin around our eyes and wrists were cut from whipping sand and flake rock.

"Damn all motherless lawmen," Cal growled from his saddle. "Hang a man even in this weather."

"Shut up."

I was leading his horse, the extended reins dallied around my pommel, through rough country. I didn't want to tie him fast in this weather. If I fell off a cutbank or into an arroyo I didn't care if Buford came with me. But if he went down first I wanted to be able to slip the knot fast so I wouldn't be pulled in after him.

You think about things like that when lawing on the frontera. Any lawman who doesn't tends to live a short life.

Even all, Buford wasn't as wind-chewed and rock-bit as I was. He sat one of our tough little chestnut mustangs we used to ride prisoners to gallows. His brown hands, horned yellow with calluses and missing two fingers on his left hand from an old hatchet fight, were lashed tight to the cantle. A separate rope dangled from his unshaven neck to the saddle horn. He rode with his big head bowed, letting the wind-driven sand beat against his down-turned Stetson.

"I never know'd a man so fired anxious to watch another

hang," he continued. "You come by this dedication when they gave you that fancy Marshal's badge?"

"I don't like the dust and wind any more than you, Buford."

"Fooled me."

He didn't speak again for the remainder of the day. Maybe he didn't have the breath. I know I didn't. That dry, hot wind sucked the life out until you were nothing but empty husk with eyes.

Not that I blamed him for grousing. Like as not he could already feel the hemp noose cinching around his neck, and wondered how it was to die with blood boiling behind his strangling face, his body kicking like a fish on a jerk-line.

Not that I felt in any way sorry for Cal Buford, either. He had shot a man in the back of the head right in front of the Governor's Palace in Santa Fe. He had been arrested, sentenced, and would be killed in turn. Ordinarily, we didn't do a hanging in Haxan. But Judge Creighton, in one of his more sober moods, figured we spent enough money running Buford to ground through Colorado, Kansas, and finally down to the bed of a consumptive whore in an El Paso cantina.

"We might as well save the taxpayers any further expense," Judge Creighton had said over cigars and Kentucky bourbon, "and stretch him in Haxan."

It wasn't my place to argue. I know some people don't like hearing this, but I never feel much sorrow for them I ride to gallows. Which is why the War Department ordered me to the New Mexican Territory in the first place. Judge Creighton wanted someone as hard as the spoilers who killed and raped their way across the New Mexican desert. Simply put, he wanted another murdering bastard who would meet these killers on their own terms, and take them down.

That's how I got the badge, if it matters.

The hazy sun dipped near the horizon, a great orange ball of dying flame. With all the sand and dust in the air, nighttime fell

INDIAN AGENT

by Gary Ives

Amos Merriweather's assignment as Badger Creek Indian Agent was a reward. As a Cavalry Captain at the Battle of Yellow Tavern he had rescued a dismounted major who some said was no more a thrown rider than a pumpkin and actually was a panicked runaway heading off the battlefield lickety split for the tall cotton. But Amos had intervened. He'd seen plenty of men cut and run, most of them good men, and if the major had had a lapse of courage, well, so what. The war was craziness. Let it go. His written report, eventually reaching General Sherman, even earned the Major accolades and a promotion. Now ten years after the war that major was a United States Congressman with higher political ambitions. The congressman's vague notion that Amos Merriweather's knowledge could damage his future led him to seek out Merriweather with the aim get him as far from his congressional district as possible.

Since the end of the war Merriweather had run the livery stable in St. Joseph that he'd inherited from his father, barely managing to keep it afloat. How he hated dealing with customers, generally city men who'd never owned a horse, who didn't know how to saddle, ride, hitch or in any way properly tend a mount much less a wagon or trap. But, oh, didn't they know how to piss and moan and how to try to whittle down a bill. Horses he knew — business he didn't. The appointment, the congressman assured him, was his to assign. Merriweather considered the

congressman's offer manna from heaven and asked no questions.

"A \$2,000 salary as Indian Agent and another \$1,000 as U.S. Marshal. Plus a budget of \$5,000 to take care of your redskins. You're a natural for this. These Injuns, they're pretty much pacified since they got their asses kicked back in '62 in The Dakota War... Hand out a few blankets and barrels of flour and keep 'em off the whiskey trail . . . that's 'bout it. You'd be a fool not to jump at this, Merriweather." He agreed and in two weeks received his appointment. He turned the livery stable to his brother and headed west with his bay mare and a string of four pack horses.

Far beyond handing out blankets, his written commission detailed responsibilities "to maintain law and order, to establish schools that would educate the savage in agriculture, and to take all steps to civilize various heathen nations within his administrative confines."

The Station at Badger Creek had been originally built by the army during the war to establish stronger American presence in Sioux territory after the Indian uprising in Wisconsin. Afterwards it served as a horse buying post. Merriweather arrived in May and relieved the last military Indian Agent to begin administration of his various heathen nations.

The captain he relieved advised him where and when to look for the French Canadian drummer who regularly came through to trade whiskey with the tribes. "Arrest that whiskey sellin' rascal and your job will be a hell of a lot easier. The good Lord knows I've had my bellyful of drunken Injuns. Good luck, Merriweather." Perhaps because Merriweather had been a captain himself, or maybe because they just didn't care to dismantle and load them, the blacksmith forge, anvils, and other heavy tools were left behind.

A month later Merriweather struck a secret deal with Pardieu, the trader, which allowed Pardieu access to the tribes in return

THE DRIVING FLAME

by Greg Camp

The man sat down on the stool and glanced at the barman. He shoved back the shot glass that he was offered and grabbed the bottle of whiskey. He took a pull from it, holding the liquid in his mouth before swallowing.

"God bless all here," he whispered, "for no one else will."

"What's your name?" the barman asked.

"Dowland."

"You called anything else when you're at home?"

"I don't have a home."

"How about your friends—what do they call you?"

"I only have one, and he knows better than to remind me of what I already know."

"You're a hard man to get on with," the barman said. "How'd your friend do it?"

"It took him a war," Dowland answered, pulling back his duster to reveal the two Colt Navys in his belt. "You want one of your own?"

The bar went silent. Dowland felt the men around him looking for a place to watch without getting shot. The barman just shrugged and went back to his glasses.

One pair of shoes stopped behind Dowland, and he eased around to see whose body was about to lie on the floor.

"My name's Stanley," the man said, "and if you would refrain from shooting me, we could have a pleasant conversation at my

table."

"Why would either be of any interest to me?"

"Because that bottle will only go so far, and then a man like you will want coffee. I'm buying."

"A man like me?"

"A veteran of the recent events back east."

"You a Pinkerton?" Dowland demanded, his fingers curled an inch above the butts of his revolvers.

"I'm a correspondent," Stanley answered. "I'm here to write a report for the Indian Peace Commission, but that doesn't mean that I can't notice other points of interest."

After relaxing his hands, Dowland let his arms drop to his sides. He stood.

"Over there," Stanley said, pointing at a table against the back wall.

Dowland picked up the bottle and walked over to take a seat, his head resting on the planks behind him. He watched Stanley collect a pair of glasses and come over to join him. There was not anything obviously wrong with this fellow, and he did have good taste. Still, he needed explaining.

Stanley joined him, sitting down in the chair opposite, his back toward the room.

"You don't have any enemies?" Dowland asked.

"Perhaps I do, but you already took the good seat."

"All right, you wanted to talk. What about?"

"I took one look at you and saw a story," Stanley answered. "I just need to find out which one it is."

"What stories?" Dowland's hands rested on his legs. The whiskey bottle sat untouched on the table.

"I saw your belt buckle when you came in, so I could tell that you fought for the South. I take it that you're not one of the galvanized Yankees that General Dodge brought out here to fight the Indians."

FROM THE EDITOR

Aren't stories wonderful? To be able, for a while, to travel back in time, to go to the far corners of the country, or even the world, to live great adventures, meet fantastic people, see historic events unfold right in front of your eyes? All that, and more, comes from the mind of a storyteller. My first storyteller was my grandmother. She introduced me to the wonderful world of words, words used to paint pictures in my mind. More vivid than reality, her tales allowed me to go out and fight villains and ride monsters. Heady stuff!

Grand as that was, in a way I'm even luckier now. The stories I have now are written. Instead of traveling miles to my grandmother's house, then waiting for her to have time to sit down and regale me with her latest twist on *When Grandpa Shot the Whale*, now I can just sit back in my easy chair and pick up a book, eReader, or laptop. So many books, with so many wonderful stories in them.

Readers are all lucky. From now on, whenever you want, you can pick up this book and take a trip back to the old West, where justice had nothing to do with the law, and a person's word was his bond. Or you can visit www.FrontierTales.com for fresh Tales each month.

I am very grateful to all the Western writers who submit their lovingly-crafted stories, and to every reader who visits each month and votes for his or her favorite Tale. Without all of you, FrontierTales.com would not exist.

So keep on writing, reading and voting, tell your friends about us, and maybe buy a paperback or eBook collection of the "Best of" now and then.

Thanks and Happy Trails to you!

Duke



FRONTIER TALES EZINE

The ezine Frontier Tales was born out of frustration. I couldn't find anywhere to send my Western stories and Dusty Richards, who has over 100 published books under his belt, told me there was much uncertainty facing authors because of the changes in the publishing industry. Book stores were going out of business and magazines were almost a thing of the past. The year 2009 was a scary time for writers.

I was just a beginner at this fiction-writing business, but I knew what we needed. I decided to create an online magazine devoted to Western short stories, and **Frontier Tales.com** was born.

Hundreds of stories have now seen the light of day and a lot of writers, new as well as veterans, have gotten exposure they wouldn't have otherwise found. Several of them have told me that Frontier Tales has made the difference in their writing careers. I'll confess, that makes me proud. Since its beginning, stories from men and women who also love words, ideas, and history have been available to anyone who has a few minutes to take a trip back to the Old West.

Frontier Tales has received a wonderful reception and reaches viewers from around the world, with readership almost doubling every year. If you're a writer, greenhorn or old hand, consider sending us your polished western frontier prose.

The Best of Frontier Tales Anthology, Volume 1 featured the stories from the first year that were voted Favorite of the Month. Now, here's the next year's Best. Enjoy!

