

Title

RANGER STYLE

By

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Ranger Style

I.

"*GRAB* the ceiling! The man who looks down is dead!"

There was no one in the bank who doubted the statement. The second bandit advanced to the paying teller's window. With a heavy-calibered, single-action, cocked and probably hair-triggered pistol, he motioned the teller to admit him back of the long counter that ran the length of the room. Back of it were the cages of the employees, with an open space toward the front.

The bandit who had first spoken leaped forward. Both had entered through the rear door, and now stood with a gun in either hand. A minute before, the bank had been functioning quietly on a drowsy spring afternoon in Wichita Falls, Texas, unsuspecting trouble. Now it was under the control of two desperadoes. There were no clients before the counter, few people on the streets. Most of these latter loungers were lolling or seated in the shade.

The two bandits had gone about their illicit business with the utmost simplicity from its conception. They wanted money. Money was kept in banks. There was a bank in Wichita Falls, which was convenient and of which they knew the layout.

It was a weakness for such an institution to have a back door; folly, perhaps, to keep it unlocked. But Wichita Falls was a peaceful and neighborly place. Robberies were not thought of, and the back door was convenient.

The two had ridden into town, well-mounted, but not conspicuously so. True, they both wore two guns in their holsters, and their belts were well filled with cartridges. But there were plenty of cowboys who toted the same equipment. One of them was young, barely twenty - so young in years and appearance that his own name of Elmer Lewis had been merged in that of the "Kid."

The other, who had covered the teller with his single-action pistol, was Foster Crawford. He had more or less of a hard reputation, but he was not definitely "wanted." None would have suspected them of being bound for the bank, intent upon looting it. Few noticed them at all as they jogged down the street, turned off, ahead of the bank, into another one that was shaded with trees planted along the edge of the sidewalks.

They swung right once more. Next door to the bank, they left their horses in a vacant lot and tied them to the top of a rail. Ordinarily they would have left them ground anchored, but they wanted to be sure of finding them, of their not being startled away.

Crawford was twice the age of the Kid. Both were fair-haired, as are ninety-five percent of bad men who are killers. Crawford was close-mouthed, the Kid more vivacious.

But nothing was said as they went through the back door with their guns ready for action. The simple plan had been rehearsed - the Kid to the front, Crawford to the teller's window, and so round the counter.

They were in possession. Everything worked as they had intended it to do. There hadn't been a slip- up.

Behind the counter were two bank officials, not generally there - Doctor Kendall, physician and surgeon, carrying in his pocket a case of medical instruments; and John Nichols, city treasurer.

Kendall's instruments, designed to cut and, in so doing, save human life and bodies, played their part that afternoon in unexpected fashion. Crawford's single-action weapon, ready cocked for intimidation, came into play in a manner the holdup pair had never anticipated.

The bookkeeper's name was P.P. Langford. He was the first to see the robbers come in through the back door, and the first to see their guns, and guess their purpose. As the Kid sprang toward the front and whirled, lithe as a panther, his eyes blazing with excitement, himself primed for action, Langford dropped back of the counter before either of the looters saw him.

Langford had nerve. His courage may be called foolhardy, but he was not the sort who tamely submits. As he went to hands and knees, he started to crawl to the end of the counter.

The Kid's ears, meanwhile, were alert for the slightest sound. The whole thing was to be one of lightning action. As soon as Crawford scooped up all the money in sight and called to the Kid, the latter was ready to race back, cover his partner while he went through the rear door, and then bolt after him.

Langford figured he could make the end of the counter, crawl beneath a flap that closed off the open end of the operating department, and, back of the Kid, make a break and get through the door to the street and raise the alarm. Men do not have time to consider their thoughts at such a crisis. Faced by danger, the reaction comes in one of fear or daring.

Langford was a man grown. He saw that the bandit up front was only a youngster. He thought he could get away with it. He was going to try. If he had been a man of the open, he might have hesitated. A cowboy, seeing the Kid with his guns drawn and that flame in his pale-blue eyes, would have read more wisely the record of range experience than his tanned face showed. A cowboy would have sized up the Kid for a dangerous customer to cross.

Langford was halfway on his scrambling journey when he glanced up and found Crawford standing over him. He rose to run.

Crawford was not anxious to fire. A shot would arouse the drowsing town, and he knew that the Texans who lived there were, many of them, men of resource and action. Most of them knew how to handle firearms. This robbery of theirs was to be one of rattlesnake fashion, a brief warning and a silent strike.

He brought down the heavy weapon on Langford's head. It was a glancing blow, but it appeared efficient. Then things began to happen so swiftly that it was not repeated. Crawford did not have time to see whether or not he had knocked his man out.

His gun, set for quick firing, discharged from the sheer impact of the blow.