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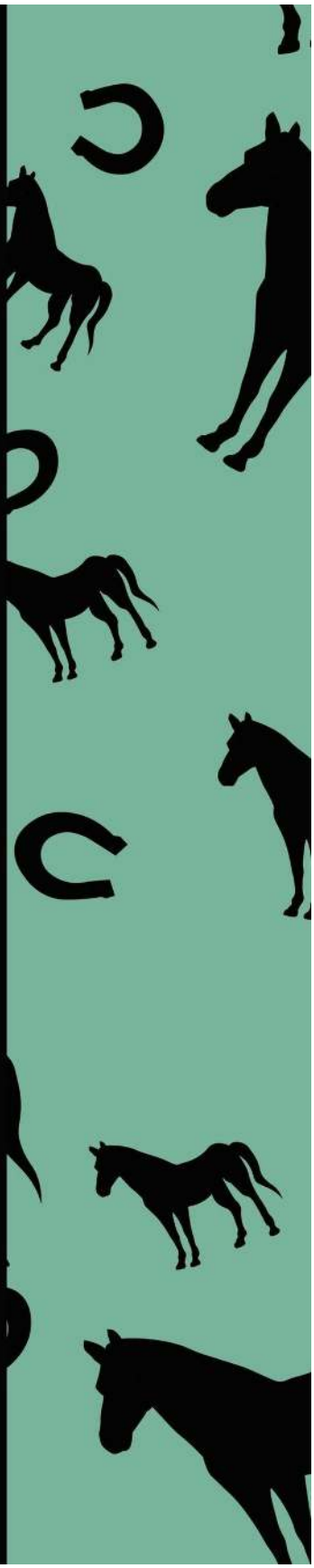

ANDY ADAMS

A Texas Matchmaker

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Andy Adams asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

Sheba Blake Publishing Corp.

2288 Crossrail Dr

Atlanta, GA 30349

support@shebablake.com

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Contents

One

Lance Lovelace

When I first found employment with Lance Lovelace, a Texas cowman, I had not yet attained my majority, while he was over sixty. Though not a native of Texas, "Uncle Lance" was entitled to be classed among its pioneers, his parents having emigrated from Tennessee along with a party of Stephen F. Austin's colonists in 1821. The colony with which his people reached the state landed at Quintana, at the mouth of the Brazos River, and shared the various hardships that befell all the early Texan settlers, moving inland later to a more healthy locality. Thus the education of young Lovelace was one of privation. Like other boys in pioneer families, he became in turn a hewer of wood or drawer of water, as the necessities of the household required, in reclaiming the wilderness. When Austin hoisted the new-born Lone Star flag, and called upon the sturdy pioneers to defend it, the adventurous settlers came from every quarter of the territory, and among the first who responded to the call to arms was young Lance Lovelace. After San Jacinto, when the fighting was over and the victory won, he laid down his arms, and returned to ranching with the same zeal and energy. The first legislature assembled voted to those who had borne arms in behalf of the new republic, lands in payment for their services.

With this land scrip for his pay, young Lovelace, in company with others, set out for the territory lying south of the Nueces. They were a band of daring spirits. The country was primitive and fascinated them, and they remained. Some settled on the Frio River, though the majority crossed the Nueces, many going as far south as the Rio Grande. The country was as large as the men were daring, and there was elbow room for all and to spare. Lance Lovelace located a ranch a few miles south of the Nueces River, and, from the cooing of the doves in the encinal, named it Las Palomas.

"When I first settled here in 1838," said Uncle Lance to me one morning, as we rode out across the range, "my nearest neighbor lived forty miles up the river at Fort Ewell. Of course there were some Mexican families nearer, north on the Frio, but they don't count. Say, Tom, but she was a purty country then! Why, from those hills yonder, any morning you could see a thousand antelope in a band going into the river to drink. And wild turkeys? Well, the first few years we lived here, whole flocks roosted every night in that farther point of the encinal. And in the winter these prairies were just flooded with geese and brant. If you wanted venison, all you had to do was to ride through those mesquite thickets north of the river to jump a hundred deer in a morning's ride. Oh, I tell you she was a land of plenty."

The pioneers of Texas belong to a day and generation which has almost gone. If strong arms and daring spirits were required to conquer the wilderness, Nature seemed generous in the supply; for nearly all were stalwart types of the inland viking. Lance Lovelace, when I first met him, would have passed for a man in middle life. Over six feet in height, with a rugged constitution, he little felt his threescore years, having spent his entire lifetime in the outdoor occupation of a ranchman. Living on the wild game of the country, sleeping on the ground by a camp-fire when his work required it, as

much at home in the saddle as by his ranch fireside, he was a romantic type of the strenuous pioneer.

He was a man of simple tastes, true as tested steel in his friendships, with a simple honest mind which followed truth and right as unerringly as gravitation. In his domestic affairs, however, he was unfortunate. The year after locating at Las Palomas, he had returned to his former home on the Colorado River, where he had married Mary Bryan, also of the family of Austin's colonists. Hopeful and happy they returned to their new home on the Nueces, but before the first anniversary of their wedding day arrived, she, with her first born, were laid in the same grave. But grief does not kill, and the young husband bore his loss as brave men do in living out their allotted day. But to the hour of his death the memory of Mary Bryan mellowed him into a child, and, when unoccupied, with every recurring thought of her or the mere mention of her name, he would fall into deep reverie, lasting sometimes for hours. And although he contracted two marriages afterward, they were simply marriages of convenience, to which, after their termination, he frequently referred flippantly, sometimes with irreverence, for they were unhappy alliances.

On my arrival at Las Palomas, the only white woman on the ranch was "Miss Jean," a spinster sister of its owner, and twenty years his junior. After his third bitter experience in the lottery of matrimony, evidently he gave up hope, and induced his sister to come out and preside as the mistress of Las Palomas. She was not tall like her brother, but rather plump for her forty years. She had large gray eyes, with long black eyelashes, and she had a trick of looking out from under them which was both provoking and disconcerting, and no doubt many an admirer had been deceived by those same roguish, laughing eyes. Every man, Mexican and child on the ranch was the devoted courtier of Miss

Jean, for she was a lovable woman; and in spite of her isolated life and the constant plaguings of her brother on being a spinster, she fitted neatly into our pastoral life. It was these teasings of her brother that gave me my first inkling that the old ranchero was a wily matchmaker, though he religiously denied every such accusation. With a remarkable complacency, Jean Lovelace met and parried her tormentor, but her brother never tired of his hobby while there was a third person to listen.

Though an unlettered man, Lance Lovelace had been a close observer of humanity. The big book of Life had been open always before him, and he had profited from its pages. With my advent at Las Palomas, there were less than half a dozen books on the ranch, among them a copy of Bret Harte's poems and a large Bible.

"That book alone," said he to several of us one chilly evening, as we sat around the open fireplace, "is the greatest treatise on humanity ever written. Go with me to-day to any city in any country in Christendom, and I'll show you a man walk up the steps of his church on Sunday who thanks God that he's better than his neighbor. But you needn't go so far if you don't want to. I reckon if I could see myself, I might show symptoms of it occasionally. Sis here thanks God daily that she is better than that Barnes girl who cut her out of Amos Alexander. Now, don't you deny it, for you know it's gospel truth! And that book is reliable on lots of other things. Take marriage, for instance. It is just as natural for men and women to mate at the proper time, as it is for steers to shed in the spring. But there's no necessity of making all this fuss about it. The Bible way discounts all these modern methods. 'He took unto himself a wife' is the way it describes such events. But now such an occurrence has to be announced, months in advance. And after the wedding is over, in less than a

year sometimes, they are glad to sneak off and get the bond dissolved in some divorce court, like I did with my second wife."

All of us about the ranch, including Miss Jean, knew that the old ranchero's views on matrimony could be obtained by leading up to the question, or differing, as occasion required. So, just to hear him talk on his favorite theme, I said: "Uncle Lance, you must recollect this is a different generation. Now, I've read books"—

"So have I. But it's different in real life. Now, in those novels you have read, the poor devil is nearly worried to death for fear he'll not get her. There's a hundred things happens; he's thrown off the scent one day and cuts it again the next, and one evening he's in a heaven of bliss and before the dance ends a rival looms up and there's hell to pay,—excuse me, Sis,—but he gets her in the end. And that's the way it goes in the books. But getting down to actual cases—when the money's on the table and the game's rolling—it's as simple as picking a sire and a dam to raise a race horse. When they're both willing, it don't require any expert to see it—a one-eyed or a blind man can tell the symptoms. Now, when any of you boys get into that fix, get it over with as soon as possible."

"From the drift of your remarks," said June Deweese very innocently, "why wouldn't it be a good idea to go back to the old method of letting the parents make the matches?"

"Yes; it would be a good idea. How in the name of common sense could you expect young sap-heads like you boys to understand anything about a woman? I know what I'm talking about. A single woman never shows her true colors, but conceals her imperfections. The average man is not to be blamed if he fails to see through her smiles and Sunday humor. Now, I was forty when I married the second time, and forty-five the last whirl. Looks like I'd a-had

some little sense, now, don't it? But I didn't. No, I didn't have any more show than a snowball in—Sis, hadn't you better retire. You're not interested in my talk to these boys.—Well, if ever any of you want to get married you have my consent. But you'd better get my opinion on her dimples when you do. Now, with my sixty odd years, I'm worth listening to. I can take a cool, dispassionate view of a woman now, and pick every good point about her, just as if she was a cow horse that I was buying for my own saddle."

Miss Jean, who had a ready tongue for repartee, took advantage of the first opportunity to remark: "Do you know, brother, matrimony is a subject that I always enjoy hearing discussed by such an oracle as yourself. But did it never occur to you what an unjust thing it was of Providence to reveal so much to your wisdom and conceal the same from us babes?"

It took some little time for the gentle reproof to take effect, but Uncle Lance had an easy faculty of evading a question when it was contrary to his own views. "Speaking of the wisdom of babes," said he, "reminds me of what Felix York, an old '36 comrade of mine, once said. He had caught the gold fever in '49, and nothing would do but he and some others must go to California. The party went up to Independence, Missouri, where they got into an overland emigrant train, bound for the land of gold. But it seems before starting, Senator Benton had made a speech in that town, in which he made the prophecy that one day there would be a railroad connecting the Missouri River with the Pacific Ocean. Felix told me this only a few years ago. But he said that all the teamsters made the prediction a byword. When, crossing some of the mountain ranges, the train halted to let the oxen blow, one bull-whacker would say to another: 'Well, I'd like to see old Tom Benton get his railroad over *this* mountain.' When Felix told me this he said—'There's a railroad to-day crosses those same mountain passes over which we forty-niners whacked our

bulls. And to think I was a grown man and had no more sense or foresight than a little baby blinkin' its eyes in the sun.'"

With years at Las Palomas, I learned to like the old ranchero. There was something of the strong, primitive man about him which compelled a youth of my years to listen to his counsel. His confidence in me was a compliment which I appreciate to this day. When I had been in his employ hardly two years, an incident occurred which, though only one of many similar acts cementing our long friendship, tested his trust.

One morning just as he was on the point of starting on horseback to the county seat to pay his taxes, a Mexican arrived at the ranch and announced that he had seen a large band of *javalina* on the border of the chaparral up the river. Uncle Lance had promised his taxes by a certain date, but he was a true sportsman and owned a fine pack of hounds; moreover, the peccary is a migratory animal and does not wait upon the pleasure of the hunter. As I rode out from the corrals to learn what had brought the vaquero with such haste, the old ranchero cried, "Here, Tom, you'll have to go to the county seat. Buckle this money belt under your shirt, and if you lack enough gold to cover the taxes, you'll find silver here in my saddle-bags. Blow the horn, boys, and get the guns. Lead the way, Pancho. And say, Tom, better leave the road after crossing the Sordo, and strike through that mesquite country," he called back as he swung into the saddle and started, leaving me a sixty-mile ride in his stead. His warning to leave the road after crossing the creek was timely, for a ranchman had been robbed by bandits on that road the month before. But I made the ride in safety before sunset, paying the taxes, amounting to over a thousand dollars.

During all our acquaintance, extending over a period of twenty years, Lance Lovelace was a constant revelation to me, for he was original in all

things. Knowing no precedent, he recognized none which had not the approval of his own conscience. Where others were content to follow, he blazed his own pathways—immaterial to him whether they were followed by others or even noticed. In his business relations and in his own way, he was exact himself and likewise exacting of others. Some there are who might criticise him for an episode which occurred about four years after my advent at Las Palomas.

Mr. Whitley Booth, a younger man and a brother-in-law of the old ranchero by his first wife, rode into the ranch one evening, evidently on important business. He was not a frequent caller, for he was also a ranchman, living about forty miles north and west on the Frio River, but was in the habit of bringing his family down to the Nueces about twice a year for a visit of from ten days to two weeks' duration. But this time, though we had been expecting the family for some little time, he came alone, remained over night, and at breakfast ordered his horse, as if expecting to return at once. The two ranchmen were holding a conference in the sitting-room when a Mexican boy came to me at the corrals and said I was wanted in the house. On my presenting myself, my employer said: "Tom, I want you as a witness to a business transaction. I'm lending Whit, here, a thousand dollars, and as we have never taken any notes between us, I merely want you as a witness. Go into my room, please, and bring out, from under my bed, one of those largest bags of silver."

The door was unlocked, and there, under the ranchero's bed, dust-covered, were possibly a dozen sacks of silver. Finding one tagged with the required amount, I brought it out and laid it on the table between the two men. But on my return I noticed Uncle Lance had turned his chair from the table and was gazing out of the window, apparently absorbed in thought. I saw at a glance

that he was gazing into the past, for I had become used to these reveries on his part. I had not been excused, and an embarrassing silence ensued, which was only broken as he looked over his shoulder and said: "There it is, Whit; count it if you want to."

But Mr. Booth, knowing the oddities of Uncle Lance, hesitated. "Well—why—Look here, Lance. If you have any reason for not wanting to loan me this amount, why, say so."

"There's the money, Whit; take it if you want to. It'll pay for the hundred cows you are figuring on buying. But I was just thinking: can two men at our time of life, who have always been friends, afford to take the risk of letting a business transaction like this possibly make us enemies? You know I started poor here, and what I have made and saved is the work of my lifetime. You are welcome to the money, but if anything should happen that you didn't repay me, you know I wouldn't feel right towards you. It's probably my years that does it, but—now, I always look forward to the visits of your family, and Jean and I always enjoy our visits at your ranch. I think we'd be two old fools to allow anything to break up those pleasant relations." Uncle Lance turned in his chair, and, looking into the downcast countenance of Mr. Booth, continued: "Do you know, Whit, that youngest girl of yours reminds me of her aunt, my own Mary, in a hundred ways. I just love to have your girls tear around this old ranch—they seem to give me back certain glimpses of my youth that are priceless to an old man."

"That'll do, Lance," said Mr. Booth, rising and extending his hand. "I don't want the money now. Your view of the matter is right, and our friendship is worth more than a thousand cattle to me. Lizzie and the girls were anxious to come with me, and I'll go right back and send them down."

Two

Shepherd's Ferry

Within a few months after my arrival at Las Palomas, there was a dance at Shepherd's Ferry. There was no necessity for an invitation to such local meets; old and young alike were expected and welcome, and a dance naturally drained the sparsely settled community of its inhabitants from forty to fifty miles in every direction. On the Nueces in 1875, the amusements of the countryside were extremely limited; barbecues, tournaments, and dancing covered the social side of ranch life, and whether given up or down our home river, or north on the Frio, so they were within a day's ride, the white element of Las Palomas could always be depended on to be present, Uncle Lance in the lead.

Shepherd's Ferry is somewhat of a misnomer, for the water in the river was never over knee-deep to a horse, except during freshets. There may have been a ferry there once; but from my advent on the river there was nothing but a store, the keeper of which also conducted a road-house for the accommodation of travelers. There was a fine grove for picnic purposes within easy reach, which was also frequently used for camp-meeting purposes. Gnarly old live-oaks spread their branches like a canopy over everything, while the

sea-green moss hung from every limb and twig, excluding the light and lazily waving with every vagrant breeze. The fact that these grounds were also used for camp-meetings only proved the broad toleration of the people. On this occasion I distinctly remember that Miss Jean introduced a lady to me, who was the wife of an Episcopal minister, then visiting on a ranch near Oakville, and I danced several times with her and found her very amiable.

On receipt of the news of the approaching dance at the ferry, we set the ranch in order. Fortunately, under seasonable conditions work on a cattle range is never pressing. A programme of work outlined for a certain week could easily be postponed a week or a fortnight for that matter; for this was the land of "la mañana," and the white element on Las Palomas easily adopted the easy-going methods of their Mexican neighbors. So on the day everything was in readiness. The ranch was a trifle over thirty miles from Shepherd's, which was a fair half day's ride, but as Miss Jean always traveled by ambulance, it was necessary to give her an early start. Las Palomas raised fine horses and mules, and the ambulance team for the ranch consisted of four mealy-muzzled brown mules, which, being range bred, made up in activity what they lacked in size.

Tiburcio, a trusty Mexican, for years in the employ of Uncle Lance, was the driver of the ambulance, and at an early morning hour he and his mules were on their mettle and impatient to start. But Miss Jean had a hundred petty things to look after. The lunch—enough for a round-up—was prepared, and was safely stored under the driver's seat. Then there were her own personal effects and the necessary dressing and tidying, with Uncle Lance dogging her at every turn.

"Now, Sis," said he, "I want you to rig yourself out in something sumptuous, because I expect to make a killing with you at this dance. I'm

almost sure that that Louisiana mule-drover will be there. You know you made quite an impression on him when he was through here two years ago. Well, I'll take a hand in the game this time, and if there's any marry in him, he'll have to lead trumps. I'm getting tired of having my dear sister trifled with by every passing drover. Yes, I am! The next one that hangs around Las Palomas, basking in your smiles, has got to declare his intentions whether he buys mules or not. Oh, you've got a brother, Sis, that'll look out for you. But you must play your part. Now, if that mule-buyer's there, shall I"—

"Why, certainly, brother, invite him to the ranch," replied Miss Jean, as she busied herself with the preparations. "It's so kind of you to look after me. I was listening to every word you said, and I've got my best bib and tucker in that hand box. And just you watch me dazzle that Mr. Mule-buyer. Strange you didn't tell me sooner about his being in the country. Here, take these boxes out to the ambulance. And, say, I put in the middle-sized coffee pot, and do you think two packages of ground coffee will be enough? All right, then. Now, where's my gloves?"

We were all dancing attendance in getting the ambulance off, but Uncle Lance never relaxed his tormenting, "Come, now, hurry up," said he, as Jean and himself led the way to the gate where the conveyance stood waiting; "for I want you to look your best this evening, and you'll be all tired out if you don't get a good rest before the dance begins. Now, in case the mule-buyer don't show up, how about Sim Oliver? You see, I can put in a good word there just as easily as not. Of course, he's a widower like myself, but you're no spring pullet —you wouldn't class among the buds—besides Sim branded eleven hundred calves last year. And the very last time I was talking to him, he allowed he'd crowd thirteen hundred close this year—big calf crop, you see. Now, just why he should go to the trouble to tell me all this, unless he had his eye on you, is

one too many for me. But if you want me to cut him out of your string of eligibles, say the word, and I'll chouse him out. You just bet, little girl, whoever wins you has got to score right. Great Scott! but you have good taste in selecting perfumery. Um-ee! it makes me half drunk to walk alongside of you. Be sure and put some of that ointment on your kerchief when you get there."

"Really," said Miss Jean, as they reached the ambulance, "I wish you had made a little memorandum of what I'm expected to do—I'm all in a flutter this morning. You see, without your help my case is hopeless. But I think I'll try for the mule-buyer. I'm getting tired looking at these slab-sided cowmen. Now, just look at those mules—haven't had a harness on in a month. And Tiburcio can't hold four of them, nohow. Lance, it looks like you'd send one of the boys to drive me down to the ferry."

"Why, Lord love you, girl, those mules are as gentle as kittens; and you don't suppose I'm going to put some gringo over a veteran like Tiburcio. Why, that old boy used to drive for Santa Anna during the invasion in '36. Besides, I'm sending Theodore and Glenn on horseback as a bodyguard. Las Palomas is putting her best foot forward this morning in giving you a stylish turnout, with outriders in their Sunday livery. And those two boys are the best ropers on the ranch, so if the mules run off just give one of your long, keen screams, and the boys will rope and hog-tie every mule in the team. Get in now and don't make any faces about it."

It was pettishness and not timidity that ailed Jean Lovelace, for a pioneer woman like herself had of course no fear of horse-flesh. But the team was acting in a manner to unnerve an ordinary woman. With me clinging to the bits of the leaders, and a man each holding the wheelers, as they pawed the ground and surged about in their creaking harness, they were anything but gentle; but Miss Jean proudly took her seat; Tiburcio fingered the reins in

placid contentment; there was a parting volley of admonitions from brother and sister—the latter was telling us where we would find our white shirts—when Uncle Lance signaled to us; and we sprang away from the team. The ambulance gave a lurch, forward, as the mules started on a run, but Tiburcio dexterously threw them on to a heavy bed of sand, poured the whip into them as they labored through it; they crossed the sand bed, Glenn Gallup and Theodore Quayle, riding, at their heads, pointed the team into the road, and they were off.

The rest of us busied ourselves getting up saddle horses and dressing for the occasion. In the latter we had no little trouble, for dress occasions like this were rare with us. Miss Jean had been thoughtful enough to lay our clothes out, but there was a busy borrowing of collars and collar buttons, and a blacking of boots which made the sweat stand out on our foreheads in beads. After we were dressed and ready to start, Uncle Lance could not be induced to depart from his usual custom, and wear his trousers outside his boots. Then we had to pull the boots off and polish them clear up to the ears in order to make him presentable. But we were in no particular hurry about starting, as we expected to out across the country and would overtake the ambulance at the mouth of the Arroyo Seco in time for the noonday lunch. There were six in our party, consisting of Dan Happersett, Aaron Scales, John Cotton, June Deweese, Uncle Lance, and myself. With the exception of Deweese, who was nearly twenty-five years old, the remainder of the boys on the ranch were young fellows, several of whom besides myself had not yet attained their majority. On ranch work, in the absence of our employer, June was recognized as the *segundo* of Los Palomas, owing to his age and his long employment on the ranch. He was a trustworthy man, and we younger lads entertained no envy towards him.

It was about nine o'clock when we mounted our horses and started. We jollied along in a party, or separated into pairs in cross-country riding, covering about seven miles an hour. "I remember," said Uncle Lance, as we were riding in a group, "the first time I was ever at Shepherd's Ferry. We had been down the river on a cow hunt for about three weeks and had run out of bacon. We had been eating beef, and venison, and antelope for a week until it didn't taste right any longer, so I sent the outfit on ahead and rode down to the store in the hope of getting a piece of bacon. Shepherd had just established the place at the time, and when I asked him if he had any bacon, he said he had, 'But is it good?' I inquired, and before he could reply an eight-year-old boy of his stepped between us, and throwing back his tow head, looked up into my face and said: 'Mister, it's a little the best I ever tasted.'"

"Now, June," said Uncle Lance, as we rode along, "I want you to let Henry Annear's wife strictly alone to-night. You know what a stink it raised all along the river, just because you danced with her once, last San Jacinto day. Of course, Henry made a fool of himself by trying to borrow a six-shooter and otherwise getting on the prod. And I'll admit that it don't take the best of eyesight to see that his wife to-day thinks more of your old boot than she does of Annear's wedding suit, yet her husband will be the last man to know it. No man can figure to a certainty on a woman. Three guesses is not enough, for she will and she won't, and she'll straddle the question or take the fence, and when you put a copper on her to win, she loses. God made them just that way, and I don't want to criticise His handiwork. But if my name is Lance Lovelace, and I'm sixty-odd years old, and this a chestnut horse that I'm riding, then Henry Annear's wife is an unhappy woman. But that fact, son, don't give you any license to stir up trouble between man and wife. Now, remember, I've warned you not to dance, speak to, or even notice her on this occasion. The chances

are that that locoed fool will come heeled this time, and if you give him any excuse, he may burn a little powder."

June promised to keep on his good behavior, saying: "That's just what I've made up my mind to do. But look'ee here: Suppose he goes on the war path, you can't expect me to show the white feather, nor let him run any sandys over me. I loved his wife once and am not ashamed of it, and he knows it. And much as I want to obey you, Uncle Lance, if he attempts to stand up a bluff on me, just as sure as hell's hot there'll be a strange face or two in heaven."

I was a new man on the ranch and unacquainted with the facts, so shortly afterwards I managed to drop to the rear with Dan Happersett, and got the particulars. It seems that June and Mrs. Annear had not only been sweethearts, but that they had been engaged, and that the engagement had been broken within a month of the day set for their wedding, and that she had married Annear on a three weeks' acquaintance. Little wonder Uncle Lance took occasion to read the riot act to his *segundo* in the interests of peace. This was all news to me, but secretly I wished June courage and a good aim if it ever came to a show-down between them.

We reached the Arroyo Seco by high noon, and found the ambulance in camp and the coffee pot boiling. Under the direction of Miss Jean, Tiburcio had removed the seats from the conveyance, so as to afford seating capacity for over half our number. The lunch was spread under an old live-oak on the bank of the Nueces, making a cosy camp. Miss Jean had the happy knack of a good hostess, our twenty-mile ride had whetted our appetites, and we did ample justice to her tempting spread. After luncheon was over and while the team was being harnessed in, I noticed Miss Jean enticing Deweese off on one side, where the two held a whispered conversation, seated on an old fallen tree. As they returned, June was promising something which she had asked of him.

And if there was ever a woman lived who could exact a promise that would be respected, Jean Lovelace was that woman; for she was like an elder sister to us all.

In starting, the ambulance took the lead as before, and near the middle of the afternoon we reached the ferry. The merry-makers were assembling from every quarter, and on our arrival possibly a hundred had come, which number was doubled by the time the festivities began. We turned our saddle and work stock into a small pasture, and gave ourselves over to the fast-gathering crowd. I was delighted to see that Miss Jean and Uncle Lance were accorded a warm welcome by every one, for I was somewhat of a stray on this new range. But when it became known that I was a recent addition to Las Palomas, the welcome was extended to me, which I duly appreciated.

The store and hostelry did a rushing business during the evening hours, for the dance did not begin until seven. A Mexican orchestra, consisting of a violin, an Italian harp, and two guitars, had come up from Oakville to furnish the music for the occasion. Just before the dance commenced, I noticed Uncle Lance greet a late arrival, and on my inquiring of June who he might be, I learned that the man was Captain Frank Byler from Lagarto, the drover Uncle Lance had been teasing Miss Jean about in the morning, and a man, as I learned later, who drove herds of horses north on the trail during the summer and during the winter drove mules and horses to Louisiana, for sale among the planters. Captain Byler was a good-looking, middle-aged fellow, and I made up my mind at once that he was due to rank as the lion of the evening among the ladies.

It is useless to describe this night of innocent revelry. It was a rustic community, and the people assembled were, with few exceptions, purely pastoral. There may have been earnest vows spoken under those spreading

oaks—who knows? But if there were, the retentive ear which listened, and the cautious tongue which spake the vows, had no intention of having their confidences profaned on this page. Yet it was a night long to be remembered. Timid lovers sat apart, oblivious to the gaze of the merry revelers. Matrons and maidens vied with each other in affability to the sterner sex. I had a most enjoyable time.

I spoke Spanish well, and made it a point to cultivate the acquaintance of the leader of the orchestra. On his learning that I also played the violin, he promptly invited me to play a certain new waltz which he was desirous of learning. But I had no sooner taken the violin in my hand than the lazy rascal lighted a cigarette and strolled away, absenting himself for nearly an hour. But I was familiar with the simple dance music of the country, and played everything that was called for. My talent was quite a revelation to the boys of our ranch, and especially to the owner and mistress of Las Palomas. The latter had me play several old Colorado River favorites of hers, and I noticed that when she had the dashing Captain Byler for her partner, my waltzes seemed never long enough to suit her.

After I had been relieved, Miss Jean introduced me to a number of nice girls, and for the remainder of the evening I had no lack of partners. But there was one girl there whom I had not been introduced to, who always avoided my glance when I looked at her, but who, when we were in the same set and I squeezed her hand, had blushed just too lovely. When that dance was over, I went to Miss Jean for an introduction, but she did not know her, so I appealed to Uncle Lance, for I knew he could give the birth date of every girl present. We took a stroll through the crowd, and when I described her by her big eyes, he said in a voice so loud that I felt sure she must hear: "Why, certainly, I know her. That's Esther McLeod. I've trotted her on my knee a hundred times. She's

the youngest girl of old man Donald McLeod who used to ranch over on the mouth of the San Miguel, north on the Frio. Yes, I'll give you an interslaption." Then in a subdued tone: "And if you can drop your rope on her, son, tie her good and fast, for she's good stock."

I was made acquainted as his latest adopted son, and inferred the old ranchero's approbation by many a poke in the ribs from him in the intervals between dances; for Esther and I danced every dance together until dawn. No one could charge me with neglect or inattention, for I close-herded her like a hired hand. She mellowed nicely towards me after the ice was broken, and with the limited time at my disposal, I made hay. When the dance broke up with the first signs of day, I saddled her horse and assisted her to mount, when I received the cutest little invitation, 'if ever I happened over on the Sau Miguel, to try and call.' Instead of beating about the bush, I assured her bluntly that if she ever saw me on Miguel Creek, it would be intentional; for I should have made the ride purely to see her. She blushed again in a way which sent a thrill through me. But on the Nueces in '75, if a fellow took a fancy to a girl there was no harm in showing it or telling her so.

I had been so absorbed during the latter part of the night that I had paid little attention to the rest of the Las Palomas outfit, though I occasionally caught sight of Miss Jean and the drover, generally dancing, sometimes promenading, and once had a glimpse of them tête-à-tête on a rustic settee in a secluded corner. Our employer seldom danced, but kept his eye on June Deweese in the interests of peace, for Annear and his wife were both present. Once while Esther and I were missing a dance over some light refreshment, I had occasion to watch June as he and Annear danced in the same set. I thought the latter acted rather surly, though Deweese was the acme of geniality, and was apparently having the time of his life as he tripped through the mazes of