

Quick Draw

by
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Of course, it was my own fault. I've been hot tempered all my life, and it's gotten me into trouble many times, but this time might just be the last. If only I'd kept my mouth shut! But that's another of my problems: I always have to speak up, and I hate a bully.

It all began when I was walking to the post office to see if any checks had come in. My saddle-making business was not what anyone would call a money maker yet; in fact, I was hanging on by my well-worn teeth. The largest order I had ever had was making five saddles for an Englishman that owned the HL. He had sent one of his hands in with a wagon to pick up the saddles, but he hadn't sent any money. The rider had a note from the Englishman saying he'd send a check from Dark Water if I would give the hand an invoice. An invoice? Mine had always been a cash business, and I didn't even know what an invoice was until I asked the judge. He helped me make one up and I sent it back with the cowboy.

I charged the Englishman one hundred dollars a piece for those five saddles, and on advice from the judge, I added \$20.00 for something he called "handling." That \$520.00 represented the difference between keeping the shop open or going back to work as a thirty-dollar-a-month cowhand.

Well, like I say, I was on the way to the post office when I saw Rube Baker shove the Albert kid off the boardwalk and into the mud puddle by the water tank. Rube was a known bully, and picking on a ten-year-old kid was just his style. He was standing on the edge of the boardwalk laughing when I put my shoulder into his back and shoved *him* into the

same puddle. He was mad clear through, and he got even madder when he heard laughter all along the street. He came out of the puddle with mud all over his shirt and face mouthing curses and threats.

“What’s wrong, Rube?” I asked in a kindly tone. “Did you slip and fall into that mud puddle?”

He stood there on the walk with his hand hovering over his gun, and if looks could kill, I’d have been long dead. “You heeled, Walker?” he asked in a harsh voice.

“Nope, I don’t carry a gun, Rube. I’m afraid if I did I might be tempted to shoot some useless no-account like you.” Oh, I was getting hot now. This two-by-four slacker trying to act like a bad man was getting under my skin.

“Well, I’ll give you a chance to get one, Walker. You meet me out here on the street in one hour, and you be packin’ a gun,” and he whirled and walked off. Now, I always figured Rube for a coyote, but today he was talking like a wolf. He’d actually challenged me to a gunfight! Way too many people had heard our exchange, and several of them offered me their guns as I walked on to the post office, but I turned them down with a smile.

There was a letter from the Englishman, but I just carried it back to my shop and dropped it on the desk unopened. I now had more important things on my mind than a check for saddles.

Oh, yes, I had used a gun before, though I was not a quick-draw artist. In my cowboying days I had carried a Colt .44, and I had used it a time or two shooting at Indians or rattlesnakes, but I wasn’t a very good shot, and as far as I knew I never hit anyone or anything I shot at. Of course, I’d never seen Rube shoot, but he carried his gun slung low with the

holster tied to his leg, so he must have done some practicing, and he was bound to be a faster draw than I was.

I was trying to figure out what to do when the door opened and I walked the Albert kid's sister, Jill. "Oh, Mr. Walker," she gushed, at least I guess that's what gushing is, "thank you for making that bully pay for pushing Bobby into the mud puddle. He told me all about it when he got home." She was flushed up with excitement, and looked as pretty as a speckled pup under a new red wagon, and I sure took the time to appreciate it.

"Why, it wasn't much, Miss Albert," I replied with mock modesty.

"Wasn't much! Why, the whole town's talking about it, and they're all saying that you're going to finish the job by running that big lout out of town."

Oh, boy. Now I couldn't just slip away and go fishin', as I had more or less been thinking about doing. When a pretty girl thinks you're something, why it just comes natural to try and make her think she's right. Miss Albert had a few more nice things to say, and she invited me to eat supper with her family that very day. I accepted, thinking that if I didn't make it I'd at least have somebody to mourn over me.

She finally left with a swish of skirts, and I saw that I only had thirty minutes to go before I had to meet Rube out on the street. Now what? I got out my gun in its worn holster, strapped it on and tried a few fast draws, but I wasn't much impressed. True, I didn't actually drop the gun, but twice I pulled the trigger before the gun cleared leather, and if I'd had any bullets in it I would probably have shot myself in the foot.

With fifteen minutes to go I had one of those moments of inspiration that only come once or twice in a lifetime, and I quickly went into the back of the shop and rummaged around in some junk left by Old

Harland, the man I bought the business from. Then I made up a harness for my right arm and tried the new invention out. It worked slicker than boiled okra, and I was as ready as I would ever be to meet Rube with a gun when I went out into the street.

Just at the hour I started to walk toward Rube, who was standing down by the water tank. As I slowly walked toward him, he squared up and his hand was hovering over the butt of his revolver. I kept on going until I was no more than twenty feet away from him, and it came to me that this might be his first showdown, too.

“So,” he said in a high voice. “I didn’t think you’d have the guts to come, saddle maker.”

“Are we here to talk, or shoot, Rube?” I answered with a sneer.

He did about what I figured. Thinking I was going to talk some more, he grabbed his gun and pulled it out of the holster, but mine popped up into my hand faster than he could draw, and I fired as soon as the gun came level, *and missed!* I was earing back the hammer for another try, when old Rube showed his yellow streak. He gave a scared yelp, dropped his gun on the ground and turned to run. “Hold it!” I yelled in a loud voice, steadier than I would have thought.

He stopped with his back to me and raised his hands in the air. “D-d-don’t s-s-shoot, Walker!” he cried. “I dropped my g-gun.”

“Turn around,” I said, as I holstered the Colt, while leaving my hand on the butt.

Rube Baker turned and faced me, and if I wanted revenge I had it just looking at his white face with fear stamped all over it. But revenge was not part of my makeup, and to tell the truth I felt a little bit sorry for the man. “Unbuckle your gun belt and let it drop,” I commanded. He untied

the leg thong and unbuckled the belt, letting the whole rig fall to the ground. “Now, I don’t ever want to see you wearing a gun or bullying anybody again, Rube. Go get your horse and get out of town.”

Applause broke out along the street as he shambled off to the livery stable, and it was only then that I realized what a crowd of townspeople had gathered. I didn’t speak to any of them, just nodded and kept on walking, and I managed to make it all way into the shop before the shakes started. I could just control my hands enough to release the elastic band from the handle of my gun, and leather cuff from under my sleeve. It had worked just like I wanted, pulling the Colt out of holster and into my hand like a quick draw, and I was just as glad my bullet went wide. I sure didn’t relish killin’ anybody. I stuffed my invention into a drawer and slumped into a chair, still shaking from reaction.

Just as I began to come back to normal, Jill Albert came through the door with her little brother right behind her. The shakes were pretty well gone, so I stood up, and she came right over and stood on tiptoe to plant a kiss on my cheek. That took care of the rest of the shakes, and it also set my heart to zipping along.

Well, Jill and Bobby had all kinds of nice things to say about me, and I almost believed about half of them. They finally left after making sure I would be at their house at six for supper, and I sat back down. There was the mail on my desk so I took out my penknife, and when I opened the letter from the Englishman, there was a check for five hundred and twenty dollars, the most money I had ever had in my hands at one time.

It made me think – here I was a successful businessman with standing in the community; maybe what I needed was a wife just to round things out. Thanks to Rube Baker and a whole lot of luck, I was Jill Albert’s hero, so why not go for broke and see how interested she was? I decided to start that evening by asking her father if I could court her. How could she refuse “Quick Draw Walker” after today’s performance? I didn’t

think I'd mention how I came to draw so fast, though. Somehow, tying the elastic from an old corset to the handle of my gun and the harness under my sleeve didn't seem very romantic. Sure worked though – it worked a treat!