

WHERE THERE'S LIFE....

by

Donal White

In all her born days, Kate didn't know when she'd seen such a filthy-looking crew. The trio had suddenly topped a rise and sat on their horses, watching Kate and Jason approach. And effectively cutting off the route back to San Antonio. As her stallion plodded toward the three, she'd been able to distinguish them more clearly.

Dirt-caked clothes; hair matted and greasy, unshaven, they looked as though they hadn't bathed in weeks. Cradling a Winchester, the middle one grinned at her; the other two stared at her. But each held a six-shooter in his hand. She glanced at Jason. He reined in his pony, then sat back, seemingly serene, watching the three approach. Only a twitching at the corner of his mouth betrayed his concern.

The trio ambled toward them. "Well, now," said the fellow with the Winchester, bringing his mount to a halt a few feet in front of Kate but addressing Jason, "isn't this a pleasant surprise?"

A large man, well over six feet and brawny but starting to run to fat, his belly noticeably bulged over his belt. He gestured toward the man on his left, a short, squint-eyed, older fellow. "That's Walleye. Say howdy, Wally."

Walleye spat tobacco juice through a missing incisor. The stream almost hit her horse's foreleg. "Howdy."

The spokesman and evidently leader gestured toward the remaining member of the trio. "That's Carlos. Nice fellow. Most of the time. But he can get real nasty. Likes the ladies, though. Sometimes acts like a Mexican, sometimes like a Comanche. That's because he's half and half. Say howdy, Carlos."

The half-breed, fondling his pistol, leaned forward and showed his teeth in a feral grin. "*Si. Buenos dias, señor.*" He squinted at Kate and ran his tongue along his upper lip. "*Y señora.*"

Jason nodded. "Good afternoon."

The brawny one nodded. "I'm Donald Marsh. You can call me Donnie if it suits you. Now who might you be?"

"I'm Dr. Jason Marlow of San Antonio, and," nodding toward Kate, "this is Mrs. Marlow."

"A doctor, are you?" Grinning, Marsh turned to his companions. "Well, what do you think of that, me boyos?"

The two merely continued to stare at Kate.

Marsh turned back to Jason. "Well, now, Doctor, what're you and the missus doing out here on the prairie?"

Jason shrugged. "I delivered a baby up near Boerne. We're on our way home."

"Why's the missus with you? May be 1873, but it's kind of dangerous out here on the prairie, you know."

"I know, but Mrs. Marlow assists me."

"Boerne's a long way from San Antone. How come you go so far?"

"Because," interjected Kate, "my husband is exceedingly skillful. Women appreciate him. And if a woman wants him, my husband is willing to go a long way. So am I. Besides women appreciate my being along to help out."

"I see." Suddenly Marsh's grin disappeared. "You got a Christian name, Mrs. Marlow?"

Kate glanced at her husband, then turned back to her inquisitor. "I'm Kate Marlow."

The man nodded. "That's better. I like to know who I'm dealing with. More congenial like, don't you think?"

The fellow was repulsive. She was downwind of him and, even though about five yards from him, her nostrils were assailed by an unpleasant body odor. She gave a slight shrug and, without thinking, sniffed and gave a quick, disdainful jerk of her head.

Marsh grimaced. "What's the matter?" he growled. "You too good to talk to me? You a high and mighty princess?"

His sudden ferocity startled her. "No, of course not."

He grinned. "That's better. I don't much care for bitches who think they're too good. They have to be taught a lesson."

"Donnie's a good teacher, too," interrupted Walleye. "Used to teach school."

Kate could see Jason was seething inside. He addressed his wife's tormentor. "Mr. Marsh, I have patients to see, and Mrs. Marlowe has clients who are waiting for her."

Marsh sat back in his saddle. "Clients, huh? Well, do tell. What's she do that she has clients?"

"Mrs Marlow's a prominent lawyer in San Antonio."

Marsh leaned forward. "Is she now? Well, well, who'd have thought it? Times are changing, aren't they? So, not that I'd ever do anything illegal," he glanced at Kate and leered, "but with all the do-gooders around these days, who knows? I might need a lawyer some fine day. So tell me, Doctor, what kind of cases does your little woman handle?"

Kate's indignation growing, Marsh's use of the term "little woman" was too much. Her resentment boiled over. "Sir," she flared, "you will kindly mind your manners. I am

not to be discussed as though I were chattel of my husband. It so happens I look after the rights of women and children."

Marsh regarded her thoughtfully, then spat in the dust at the feet of her horse and turned to her husband, dismissing her. "Quite a feisty little spitfire you have on your hands, Doctor? Tell me, how tall is she?"

"I don't see that's any of your business," snapped Kate, "but I'm five nine. And if you have any further questions, you'll kindly address them to me. I'm not a piece of furniture to be discussed as though I were my husband's property."

Marsh ignored her outburst. "And, Doctor, how much does the little woman weigh?"

Kate, hands on hips, eyes blazing, defiantly snapped, "I weigh 150 pounds, if that's any of your business."

Marsh glanced at her, then turned back to Jason Marlow. "She's a fine figure of a woman, Doctor, but how come you haven't trained her better, taught her some manners? Taught her to speak politely to her betters? Or does she wear the pants in the family?"

Kate couldn't restrain herself. "Why you miserable, slovenly, reprobate. I've sentenced better men than you to chastisement they richly deserved, and if I had you before me in my courtroom, we'd see about this business of betters."

Marsh wiped his nose on his sleeve. "And what, pray tell, Mrs. Marlow, is this nonsense about your courtroom?"

"I, sir, was an acting judge in the Arizona Territory for a year, before I married Dr. Marlow."

Marsh again turned to Jason. "That right, Dr. Marlow?"

Jason nodded. Kate flared. "Are you doubting my word?"

Marsh grinned. "Maybe not, maybe not. But tell me, Kate. What was your maiden name?"

"Not that it's any of your business," she snapped, "but my maiden name was Caine."

Marsh suddenly burst out laughing. "So *that's* who you are. I might've known. They tell me you're somewhat of a legend in Arizona. 'Caning' Kate Caine, you were known as. Oh, yes, ma'am, I know all about you. You were the female judge who liked to handle things herself, liked to apply a switch or cane to the bare bottom of men you decided to find guilty. And sentence as you saw fit. A real terror, weren't you?"

He leaned forward and glared at her. "Matter of fact, it was you who humiliated my brother, and he wasn't even guilty of what he was charged with, despite what you claimed." Marsh nodded. "Well, what do you know, Judge? Small world, isn't it?"

Kate drew herself up. "It is at that, Mr. Marsh. So you'd better watch your tongue. I still have friends in high places in Arizona."

Marsh grinned. "But Arizona's a long way from here, Judge."

Jason held up his hand. "Please, Kate." He turned to Donnie Marsh. "Mr. Marsh, it's still a long ride to San Antonio, so if you and your friends will excuse us, we must be moving along."

"Not just yet, Doctor. We have business to attend to." Suddenly he raised his rifle and pointed it at Jason. Kate stifled a scream.

"Now," snapped Marsh, "you two just sit nice and still. And hold out your hands. Walleye is going to tie the little woman's hands, and Carlos will take care of yours."

"And," said Jason, "if we don't sit still? I mean, you're planning to shoot us anyway, aren't you?"

Marsh grinned and shrugged. "Well...maybe, maybe not. Who knows? But look at it this way, Doctor. Right now you and your little woman are still alive, and, as my sainted mother used to say, where there's life, there's hope." Marsh scowled. "But if you don't do what you're told, you'll surely be dead."

"Jason," snapped Kate, "do as he says."

Marsh turned to her. "Very wise, Kate, very wise. And I see you do give the orders in your family. Now hold out your hands. Both of you."

Marsh's henchmen tied their victims' hands securely. Walleye took the reins of Kate's stallion, Carlos those of Jason's mare. Promptly they set off for a stand of cottonwoods about a mile away. Approaching the wooded area, it appeared, to be an unremarkable growth of trees and dense brush, but as they penetrated deeper into the forest, Kate realized it was more extensive than it had first appeared.

Eventually they came upon a good sized clearing with a small stream running through it. Along one bank cooking utensils and food supplies plus four bedrolls gave evidence someone had camped there for quite some time. Kate wondered to whom the fourth bedroll belonged.

Marsh gestured with his weapon. "All right, you two, get down."

Despite her bound wrists, Kate managed to dismount without the humiliation of falling by hanging on to the saddle horn and sliding to the ground. Walleye and Carlos dismounted and tied all four horses to trees, then turned back to their captives.

Without a word, the two tied Jason to a tree, facing outward, so he'd have a good view of whatever took place. They slipped a lariat over Kate's head and let it slide down around her waist. Marsh, still mounted, reached down and seized the end of the rope from Carlos. Then Marsh drew up the slack. Kate found herself hauled along like a dog on a leash.

Donnie jerked his head toward his confederates. Swiftly they rummaged through the medical saddle bags but appeared to find nothing that interested them. Next they went through Jason's pockets, turning up only a few dollars.

"That all you got?" Marsh snorted in disgust. "What kind of sawbones are you, anyway? Well, I suppose the horses and the saddle bags'll be worth something. And the

drugs could be useful."

He turned to Walleye and Carlos. "Well, boys, let's see what the high and mighty princess has to offer."

"Something better than money, I betcha," said a grinning Walleye.

A slow grin spread across the half-breed's face. "Oh, *si*."

Marsh dismounted and tossed the end of Kate's leash to Walleye. "Here hang onto this. And don't let go of it."

Marsh began to haul on the rope, drawing the now apprehensive Kate ever closer to him. She'd already begun to regret her hotheaded, impetuous words to Donnie Marsh. By the time they'd reached the clearing, panic nibbled at her.

"Now, your highness, we can do this the easy way or the hard way." Marsh winked, "Remember: where there's life, there's hope. So as long's you do what you're told, you'll live a little longer. Understand?"

Shivering, she nodded.

He studied her a moment, then with a slow grin, said, "All right. I reckon that outfit you're wearing ought to be worth something, so take it off. Every last stitch."

"Oh, no," she wailed, trying to pull away, "please, no."

"We going to have to do this the hard way? I can cut them off, or," he drew his pistol and thrust it against her temple, "I can shoot you in the head. So there won't even be a hole in the garments."

"Oh, no! Don't. Pl...please," she stammered, realizing this barbarian was serious, "don't. I'll...I'll do whatever you say."

He narrowed his eyes. "All right, now. I'm going to untie your hands, and you shed those clothes. And your boots." He turned to Walleye. "Let a little slack in the rope, so she can slide out of her clothes."

Marsh untied her hands; the pull of the rope around her waist eased. Behind her, Jason yelled, "Leave her alone, damn you!"

The outlaws ignored him. Marsh made a sudden motion with his pistol. "Stop wasting time. Strip."

Kate bit her lip, then reluctantly began to shed her clothes. If she hesitated, another flick of Marsh's weapon spurred her on. As she divested herself of her apparel, Marsh would seize each item and stuff it into his saddle bag. Her boots he tied together with a thong and draped them over his saddle horn.

When finally she stood utterly naked and bare-foot, Marsh stared at her. "Very nice, your highness. *Very* nice."

He ran his hands over her flesh, fondling her still youthful breasts. Next he studied her naked buttocks. Eyes narrowed, tongue peeking from the corner of his mouth, he slowly ran his hands over her plump, white behind, all the while murmuring, "Oh, yes. Oh, yes." Brow furrowed, he said, "Judge, how old are you?"

"None of your bus——"

A flick of his pistol halted her angry remonstrance. "Forty-two."

He nodded. "I thought you might be something like that. Your buttocks have matured real nicely." He winked. "I do like a woman with well-rounded hindquarters. And those dimples in them do add something to your appeal."

He turned to his cohorts. "Whadda you think, boys?"

Walleye nodded. "Hers are just the kind I like best. They surely are."

Carlos contented himself with a wink and licking his lips.

Marsh turned back to her. Dreamily, he said, "Now, by golly, who in Arizona would ever've guessed a judge could have such a appealing, exciting rear end? Think any of those fellows you caned wondered about that." He turned to Walleye. "All right, Wally.

Tie her hands again."

He turned back to Kate. Shoulders hunched, hands crossed before her crotch, she strove to maintain some degree of modesty. "Like Wally told you, I was a school teacher. And," he leered, "I learned early on how to deal with unruly pupils."

He drew his knife and walked over to a tree. Reaching up, he cut a thin, four foot long switch. "Now, your highness, before Wally and Carlos have a go at you, I'm going to teach you some manners."

"Oh, my God," she whispered. Surely he wasn't going to whip her. She began to tremble, tried to pull away. "Oh, no, no. You wouldn't," she whined. "Please, no. You can't do this. I'm forty-two years old, a mature, grown woman."

Marsh snickered. "Well, now, Judge, most of those men you whipped until they begged were mature, grown men. And it's said you enjoyed whipping their bare backsides. So why should I make an exception in your case?"

"But," she remonstrated, "they deserved it. They were guilty of crimes."

"Some of them maybe, but a lot of them weren't. You just claimed they were. You admired their backsides, I reckon, and wanted to make those poor fellows dance and beg, guilty or not. I understand you enjoyed fondling their peckers, too. Until the poor fellows rods stood out straight. Then your ladyship had the gall to blame *them* for getting a hard-on in front of you. Anyway, Judge, now it's your turn."

Marsh turned to the half-breed. "Carlos, turn her around. Wally, toss that rope end up over that tree branch."

The walleyed man did as Marsh had instructed.

"All right, Wally, string her up."

Wally hauled on his end of the rope. Even though Kate tried to resist, the man was much stronger. Relentlessly her arms were drawn straight up over her head, until she was

stretched full-length, naked, totally vulnerable before the three men, her defenseless buttocks exposed to Marsh.

Her tormentor raised the switch. She bit her lip and tensed, vowing to maintain her dignity. She would *not* give this bully the satisfaction of making her dance and beg. Fearfully, glancing over her shoulder, she saw him draw back the switch. The scourge sang through the air but, mercifully, didn't touch her.

He chuckled. "I like to get in a couple of practice cuts before getting serious. Really sings, doesn't it, Judge?"

She bit her lip, but remained silent.

"Well, doesn't it? Answer me, Judge High and Mighty."

"Yes, it does, it does. But, please, please don't."

Marsh laughed. "Not so high and mighty now, are we?"

He raised the switch. Once again it sang through the air. But this time didn't miss its mark. It slashed cruelly across her naked buttocks. Pain and fear overwhelmed the surge of rage flooding her. Despite her resolution to maintain her dignity, to stoically bear the punishment in silence, the searing pain across her bottom defeated her. She leaped high, then twisted and turned, trying desperately to present less of a target.

The switch came down a second time, cutting across her naked buttocks. Despite her resolve, she couldn't help herself. She let out a wild, quavering screech. "Aaahhh! Please! My God, no more, no more."

Donnie Marsh giggled. "Say please, sir."

Rage and defiance once again welled within her. But only momentarily. The sting of the switch still fresh, tears streamed down her cheeks. "Please, please, sir, no more," she sobbed. "I...I apologize, sir. For hurting your feelings."

"Well, Judge High-and-Mighty, that's more like it. But we've only just begun. You're

good for at least another six or seven. Maybe more."

"Oh, Christ, no," she shrieked. "I can't bear it. I apologized. What more do you want? Please, please, no more."

A sly grin on his face, Marsh said, "What are you willing to do if I let you off?"

"Oh, my God, anything, anything. Just please don't whip my bottom."

Marsh ignored her plea. "Well, then, Your Honor, let's see you dance."

He brought the switch back. Once more it descended on her naked buttocks. She couldn't stand the pain. She leaped in the air, kicking, wailing, "Please, please, no more. Oh, Jesus, no more."

"Now, by God," snarled Donnie, "you know what it's like to be on the receiving end, don't you, you bitch?"

Rear end wriggling, she moaned, "Oh, yes. Oh, Christ, yes."

"Well, then dance, you sadistic bitch, dance."

He brought the pitiless switch down across her tender naked bottom rapidly, five more times in succession, then shifted his target and brought it down across the back of her thighs. Each stroke elicited from her an ever more frantic prancing and twisting. With each stroke, she leaped high, screeching and begging, vow to maintain self-control dissolving in the pain elicited by the fearsome switch.

"Whooooee," hooted Walleye. "Just look at 'er dance! And look at that big beautiful behind jiggle!"

Watching this uppity high falutin' female get what was coming to her excited him. She leaped and plunged, capering and twisting, screeching for mercy, all concerns for dignity forgotten, fading in the searing pain of the merciless scourge.

Walleye nudged Carlos. "Golly dogies, just look at the welts on that gorgeous white behind. You ever see anything like it?"

The usually restrained half-breed, now laughing out loud, shook his head. "*Nunca, amigo, nunca.*"

"Aaaah" Kate shrieked. "Please, please, no more!"

Marsh halted his assault on her vulnerable bottom. "You know I don't believe Walleye and Carlos have ever poked their peckers into a judge, so how about it, girl, you willing to let them have their way with you?"

Tears streaming down her face, shiny wheals rising on her throbbing bottom, she moaned, "Oh, yes, yes."

Marsh chuckled. "You mean, letting them have their way with you wouldn't be a fate worse than death?"

"Oh, no, no!" she screeched.

"Well, then, Judge, maybe we should see what they prefer, watching me switch you or them poking you. But unless you want more of my switch, you better beg them real nice. Convince them to poke their peckers into you. If you can persuade them to mount you, I might let you off."

"Anything, anything," she whimpered. "Just...just no more of that horrible switch. Please, please."

"We'll see. I'm going to untie that rope and let you down. Then you crawl on your knees to them and beg them to pleasure you. Understand?"

"Yes, oh yes. Just no more of that. . .that awful switch."

Marsh released the rope, allowing her to collapse on the ground, hands still bound in front of her. Once again the switch whistled through the air. "Now, Your Honor, crawl!"

Thoroughly reprimanded, she painfully inched along on her knees, buttocks smarting and burning. The tip of his switch lightly tickling her backside, reminding her what would happen if she failed to persuade the other two to penetrate her, Marsh urged her along.

When she reached Walleye, Marsh again brought the switch down hard across her burning bare bottom. "Stop, stop!" she screeched.

"Not yet, Judge. Just you grovel and lick Wally's boots."

Terrified of the dreadful switch, Kate hastily did Marsh's bidding.

"All right, your highness, now beg."

Still on her knees, tears trickling down her face, hands clasped and held out, Kate looked up beseechingly at the older man. "Please, please, Mr. Walleye, poke me. Please poke me."

Marsh laughed. "All right, Wally, what's it going to be? More whipping or do you want to slip your pecker into her?"

The snaggle-toothed man grinned. "Well, golly, that's a hard one, but I think I'd like to slip it into her."

Marsh grinned. "I figured." He addressed Kate. "Now your highness, crawl over to Carlos. See what he wants."

Marsh brought the switch down on her striped bottom. She squealed and struggled over to the half-breed. Immediately she licked his boots. Hands clasped, tears trickling down her cheeks, she imploringly looked up. "Please, Mr. Carlos, please, please poke me."

"What're you doing, Donnie?"

Marsh, switch poised to deal another savage stroke if she failed in her mortifying mission, lowered the flail and glanced over his shoulder. "What's it look like I'm doing?" he growled. "I'm teaching this slut some manners."

Kate managed to get a view of the newcomer. Derby tilted rakishly forward over one eye, he sat astride a large black horse. He had long black hair and his face, tanned and clean-shaven except for a couple of days stubble, would've been handsome if not for his

nose, large and Roman.

Suddenly Marsh brought the switch down across her sensitive bare bottom. Despite her vow, she shrieked and, hands still bound, sprawled forward at the feet of Carlos. Tears again welling in her eyes, she couldn't help herself. "Oh, sir, please, please. I implore you, no more, no more."

"All right, Donnie, stop it."

She turned her head, simultaneously rolling on her back in the dirt so her bottom would no longer be exposed to the savage switch. Carlos stepped back a pace. The newcomer, dismounted, advanced toward the former schoolmaster.

"Now, Danny, you just stay out of this. She had it coming, the snotty bitch. She's too goddamn high and mighty. And if there's one thing I can't abide, it's an arrogant female."

Arms folded across his chest, Dan came to a halt a few feet from Kate's persecutor. "I know how you feel, Donnie. You've told me often enough, but this is no way to deal with her."

"Who says so?"

"I do." The newcomer reached down and rolled Kate over, so her buttocks were once more exposed. "My God, man! Look at those welts. Must be a dozen. At least. She won't be able to sit in the saddle for a week."

Donnie grinned. "I'm sure you're right, Danny. But she deserves it!"

"Ah, Donnie, you don't want to mark up beautiful buttocks like that. What she needs is a proper loving."

Marsh gave vent to an ugly snicker. "I'm leaving that to Carlos and Wally. They like that sort of thing." He winked. "Anyway, she's decided being pleased by them wouldn't be a fate worse than death and was just begging them to hump her. Or else enjoy my switch across that beautiful bare bottom again. So just you stand back and let us finish, let

Walleye and Carlos have their fun."

Dan dropped his arms to his sides and, shaking his head, turned to Walleye and Carlos. "Sorry, boys, I can't let you do it."

Carlos took a step toward Dan. "*Amigo*, do not interfere." He leered. "I am planning to make love, *amor muy emocionante*, with this lovely *señora*. I will demonstrate to her *marido* how he should have made love to her when he had the chance."

Carlos shrugged. "*Por supuesto*, for him, it is too late now. They will soon both be *muerto*, but *quizas* in the next life, eh?" He smiled. "*Quien sabe?* Maybe that is why they call it Paradise."

Kate tried to roll away from the half-breed but Carlos planted his foot in the small of her back. Walleye, who stood about twenty feet away, spoke up. "Aw, now, Dan, we're friends, ain't we? So why do you have to spoil all the fun? You can have your turn. Tell you what. You can go before me. How's that? You can have her right after Carlos." He bared his snaggle teeth in a lecherous grin. "I don't mind waiting for something nice like this. Just makes it better."

Dan shook his head. "Nope. Can't let you do it. Robbing and maybe rustling a few head of cattle or a horse or two is one thing, but abusing the ladies? No, sir. So give her back her clothes, Donnie. I don't doubt you've already taught her a lesson. She apologized to you."

Marsh looked uncertain. "Mind your own business, Dugan," he growled but didn't raise the switch.

Dugan's voice took on an edge. "I'm making it my business. I've tried to be fair with you galoots, but I'm warning you. Leave her alone."

Suddenly he whirled, gun in hand. Two shots blasted out. An invisible hand plucked Dugan's derby from his head, a hole through its brim. Walleye knelt, as though in prayer,

a smoking revolver held in front of him. He loosed a wild shot, then pitched forward on his face.

Simultaneously with getting off his shot at Walleye, Dugan flung himself to the ground. His gun roared again, a fraction of a second before the half-breed's pistol fired. Carlos whirled, as though performing some sort of Mexican jig, staggered, seemed to bow, seemingly acknowledging an unseen partner, then crumbled to the ground. He managed to raise himself just enough to get off one more shot, then collapsed on his belly.

In the few seconds consumed by the deadly fusillades, Donnie Marsh had dropped the switch and swung himself up onto his pony. He fired once with the Winchester and spurred his horse. The shot caught Dan Dugan in the right thigh. The wounded man fired at Marsh as the schoolmaster disappeared through the trees. Sounds of the galloping horse crashing through the underbrush faded in the distance

Kate screamed, "Stop him, for God's sake, stop him. He's got my clothes!"

Still on her knees, naked, almost paralyzed by fright and the disappearance of her clothing, Kate gazed about her. Two men lay dead. Her benefactor, Dan Dugan, clutching his thigh, struggled to get to his feet but fell back. Jason, cursing, struggled with his bonds.

Dugan yelled at her. "C'mere, lady. I'll untie your hands. Then you get your husband loose."

At his command, she struggled to her feet. Still naked, buttocks burning, she hobbled to the side of the wounded man. Oblivious of her nudity, she knelt before him. A slow smile spreading across his face, he stared at her nakedness. After several seconds of gazing at her, he reached across to struggle with the thongs binding her wrists. Finally the knots unraveled.

Blushing, embarrassed, hands now rubbing the smarting welts on her naked buttocks, she rose and, increasingly hampered by her painful buttocks, stumbled over to free Jason.

Once his hands were free, he found his medical bag and tightly bound the wound in their savior's thigh.

Finally Kate snapped, "Come on, Jason. Let's get out of here!"

She freed her stallion and threw herself into his saddle. Instantly she let out a shriek and slid off Warrior's back. "Oh, Jesus, I can't, I can't!"

"Can't what?" asked her bewildered husband.

"I can't sit in the saddle. My bottom hurts too much. Oh, Christ, what'll I do?"

"Oh," said Jason, "that whipping Marsh gave you really smarts, does it?"

"Yes! For God's sake," she snapped. "How do I get home?"

"Well," said Jason, striving to suppress a smile at the thought of his domineering wife having been thoroughly put in her place by the outlaw's terrifying switch, "looks to me as though you'll just have to sprawl across the saddle on your belly."

"Naked? On my belly?"

"Of course," still suppressing a smile, "you'll have to keep your thighs together, so your privates aren't on display to the world."

"Oh, my God! But what happens when we get to San Antonio? I can't ride through the streets naked like this."

Still suppressing his smile, Jason said, "We'll figure out something. Maybe by then your backside will be feeling better. Let's hope so. Remember, where there's life, there's hope."

THE END