

Louis L'Amour's
Merrano of the Dry Country

An audioplay by

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MERRANO OF THE DRY COUNTRY

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SFX: A hot dry wind blows carrying with it sand and dead leaves... It puffs down to a whisper.

TD RANCH

CANDY DRAKE is standing on the porch. From inside TOM DRAKE, her father, calls her.

TOM

Candy? Candy?

CANDY

I'm outside Pa. Come out here and look.

TOM

At what, the dust?

CANDY

No, a mirage...It's beautiful.

TOM

My ranch is blowing out to California...

CANDY

It's a city floating in the sky. Come out here, it'll lift your spirits.

TOM

A city, in this desert?

He steps out on the porch.

TOM

All I see is dust.

CANDY

It's gone now.

NARRATOR

When Tom Drake, Joe Stangle, and Jim Hill first came to Mirror Valley the grass was taller than the wheels of their wagons. They divided the range of the old Alphonso Fontez Land Grant among them, and they changed the way of life in the valley forever.

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The land was their factory and it had to turn a profit. The lazy days of the Mexican Ranchos were gone.

Each had brought with him over a thousand head of cattle, and in the seven years that followed they built even larger herds.

But now, after nine months of worsening drought, more than half of those cattle were dead.

At first it had been hard to tell that anything was wrong. Spring had come with it's usual rain, but then the grass did not grow back. Cactus began to come in, and large patches of dusty ground appeared.

What grass there was around the water-holes was soon eaten and the cattle had to travel further and further between food and water.

Now, after a long hot summer most of the water was gone, and Tom Drake was a worried man.

NARRATOR

Across Mirror Valley, Joe Stangle was more than worried, he was desperate.

Out of water, and with only dust and scrub where range once was, his cattle were dying from both thirst and hunger. With a sale for beef no longer possible, Joe was cutting his losses.

Cattle move nervously in a corral. A gunshot rings out, cattle stir...a horse drags the carcass away.

NARRATOR

His gaunt, starving, cattle still had hides, and so he and his men were at work shooting and skinning all but the youngest, strongest stock, those with which he'd be able to rebuild his heard in better years.

(MORE)

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CONTINUED: (2)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Joe assumed that he could trade the hides to Mayer at the Mirror Valley Store. But, Mayer was having problems of his own.

MAYER'S STORE

MAYER'S WIFE enters.

WIFE

Klaus?

MAYER

Yes.

WIFE

Klaus, what's wrong?

MAYER

I got a letter...

WIFE

A letter?

MAYER

It's from the bank...in Santa Fe.

They've given me ninety days...

NARRATOR

Since the beginning of the year Mayer had been carrying most of the Mirror Valley ranchers on credit. Now his shelves were going bare and his store room was empty. He no longer had the money to stock his store.

In Mirror Valley the only thing in shorter supply than water...was cash.

Cattle are moving slowly across the desert.

JIM HILL rides toward his cattle.

JIM

What the hell? What are you doing way over here? Come on...move along.

NARRATOR

Jim Hill found twenty head of his cattle bunched up against the six strand barbed wire fence that he had helped build five years ago.

(MORE)

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NARRATOR (cont'd)

In all of Mirror Valley this was the only fence ever strung. It had been built by the ranchers, Tom Drake, Joe Stangle, and Jim Hill, not to keep their cattle in...but to keep Miguel Merrano out.

The trouble had started when the three ranchers went to search out strays in the country west of the valley. They had been making a last pass when Tom Drake spied a small stone house, where a dark young man was working on the roof.

Nails being hammered. Horses approach then come to a stop.

TOM

Afternoon.

MIGUEL

Buenos tardes, Senores.

JIM

You-speak-any-English?

MIGUEL

Certainly...What can I do for you gentlemen?

JOE

Pack up and move off.

TOM

This is our rangeland, we've been running it for over two years.

JIM

We don't want any nesters moving in here. You'll just find yourself another place.

MIGUEL

I'm not a homesteader. This is my ranch...I have deeds.

Joe laughs.

JOE

Now where would a lying little greaser like you get a deed?

MIGUEL

From Don Alphonso Fontez, same as you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

JIM

You're going to need a better story than that.

JOE

We don't believe that...and we don't want any Mexicans in Mirror Valley.

MIGUEL

Lo siento, Senor. I am staying.

JOE

You get out or we'll run you out!

MIGUEL

All right...

NARRATOR

The young man put down his hammer and picked up a shotgun that had been lying out of sight behind a roll of tar-paper.

Miguel cocked the gun...

MIGUEL

...you may begin.

TOM

Watch it, Joe!

JIM

Jesus!

MIGUEL

You men ride up the canyon. And if you come back, come as neighbors.

JOE

This isn't over...we'll be back.

NARRATOR

It took two days and five telegrams for Tom Drake to discover that the land to the west was deeded...to a man named Miguel Merrano.

The next morning the ranchers met at the head of the canyon that led down toward Merrano's land. They brought a wagon loaded with barbed wire and posts, and they set about building a fence.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The gap was about forty yards wide, and they strung their wire head high and hog tight. They ran six strands and sunk the heavy posts deep into the ground.

They were just pulling the last wire tight when they heard a wagon coming...

JOE

Here he comes, boys! If he tries to cut the fence we'll shoot him for trespassing.

The ranchers cock their guns as the wagon approaches.

NARRATOR

Merrano stopped his wagon fifteen yards from the fence. Without pausing a moment he got down and began unloading, heavy cedar posts and roll after roll of wire. As they watched, he began to build his own fence.

Price Taylor, Tom Drake's foreman, began to laugh.

JOE

I don't see what's so funny.

PRICE

Well, he's made us look like a pack of fools.

JOE

I'm not fool...the mex just fenced himself in. If he cuts that wire I'm going to string him up for destroying my property.

JIM

You're right...he can't stay over there forever.

NARRATOR

For three weeks they waited, for there was no way to get a horse or wagon out of Merrano's basin and into Mirror Valley except through the fence. Then one day they heard that Miguel Merrano had been to Mayer's store for supplies.

When they rode out to look...the fence was still intact.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

They scouted around but when they finally found Merrano's route they could scarcely believe their eyes.

A dim set of wagon tracks cut away from the main road just a mile past Willow Springs. They led to The Neck, a narrow ridge of rock that formed Mirror Valley's western border. After a few hundred yards the tracks turned toward the wall of sandstone and disappeared into the black mouth of a tunnel.

Tom Drake just stared...The Neck was solid rock over two hundred feet thick.

No one mentioned fencing the tunnel mouth. So, for a while, the ranchers and their new neighbor lived in peace.

Winds blows.

TD RANCH - MORNING

A rooster crows. PRICE and other MEN go to work. PRICE walks up to the door and knocks.

CANDY

Good morning, Price.

PRICE

Morning, Ma'am. Tell your father that Klaus Mayer is coming.

Mayer's rig pulls up.

MAYER

Ho...Whoa.

PRICE

Morning.

TOM comes out onto the porch.

TOM

Morning Klaus. What brings you out so early?

MAYER

Gentlemen. Miss Drake.

CANDY

Hello.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

MAYER

Tom, I stopped by to tell you...There's a man named Sam Monroe in Aragon, and he's buying cattle. You won't get more than six or seven dollars a head from him, and he'll want your best stuff.

TOM

Well, it's cash money...and any is better than none.

MAYER

I thought you ought to know.

TOM

Well, thank you Klaus. I'll be in with half of it to help even my debt with you.

MAYER

Good...you're the only man around here I knew I could count on to do just that.

Ma'am.

Git-up

His wagons rolls off.

PRICE

That old son of a gun.

CANDY

He's a good man...

TOM

Yeah, and he's a sly one, too.

Price, do we have twenty head that still look good?

PRICE

Maybe...They're mostly pretty scrawny, but we might.

TOM

Well, good. Ride over to Aragon and see if you can make a deal.

CANDY

Oh, Price, bring the Paint for me. I'm going to ride over and visit with Ruth Hill.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

PRICE

Yes, Ma'am. I'll go over with you on my way to town.

Price walking away.

NARRATOR

It was late in the afternoon when Candy Drake headed back to the TD ranch. It was very hot and the mountains shimmered in the distance.

When she turned off the road to water her horse at Willow Springs she noticed that someone else was already there.

A light colored Morgan stood ground hitched by the low rock shelf that the drained across, and in the shade of one of the dying willow trees sat a man with his hat tilted forward over his eyes.

Candy could not remember seeing either the man or the horse before.

Candy rides up and stops.

CANDY

Whoa...

Hello...

MIGUEL

Oh! Pardoname, Senorita. I was asleep.

CANDY

Don't get up it's alright. I just came over to get a drink.

She gets down.

MIGUEL

Please, use my canteen. The spring is low and the cattle have made it muddy.

CANDY

All right.

MIGUEL

I have a cup.

CANDY

Thank you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

MERRANO gets a tin mug out of his saddlebag. He pours her some water from his canteen.

CANDY
It's so hot.

She drinks.

NARRATOR
The wool covered sides of the canteen had been soaked earlier in the day, so the water inside was cool.

CANDY
Are you going very far today?

MIGUEL
No...

CANDY
Then could I have another.

MIGUEL
Of course.

CANDY
I'm Candice Drake...Candy.

MIGUEL
I am Miguel, it is nice to meet you.

He pours her some more.

CANDY
Do you work around here? I feel like I've seen you before.

MIGUEL
I don't live in Mirror Valley.

CANDY
Oh...

MERRANO
But I do go to Mayer's once in awhile...

CANDY
That must be it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (10)

NARRATOR

It wasn't, though. Candy knew that she had never seen him before, but she was beginning to believe that she had heard stories about this man.

CANDY

Well, tell me, where do you live?

MIGUEL

I have a place between here and the reservation.

CANDY

A homestead?

MIGUEL

No, ma'am, a ranch.

NARRATOR

He was Miguel Merrano...but very different than the man she had been told about.

She looked over his horse and saw that it's saddle and bridle, while not new, were well cared for. When he put the cup away she noticed that the cuff of his shirt had been torn, but carefully re-stitched. And while he wore no gun, the highly polished stock of an old Henry rifle stuck out from a saddle scabbard.

From what her father and others had told her, she had come to expect a fat, greasy, little man who was just making ends meet by running a few crow-bait cattle.

CANDY

Well, I have to go. I really hope that the drought hasn't been too hard on your place.

MIGUEL

Drought? Oh no, I'm fine. It's just a dry year.

CANDY

A dry year...Mr. Miguel, all the grass is gone, the trees are dying, all the soil is blowing away. Do you call that just a dry year?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (11)

MIGUEL

Pardon me, Ma'am, but there would be more grass if the cattle didn't eat it all before it had a chance to drop seeds for the spring. And there would be more water if there was fewer cattle.

CANDY

Well, if we're all lucky it will rain soon.

MIGUEL

Yes, that would be good.

CANDY

I really have to go. It was very nice meeting you.

She gets on her horse.

CANDY

Bye. I hope to see you again some time.

MIGUEL

Adios.

She rides off.

Wind blows.

NARRATOR

Late that night Candy Drake heard a horse walk slowly up the road and into the yard.

The front door opens.

TOM

Price?

PRICE

Yes sir, I'm back.

TOM

Did you find Monroe?

PRICE

I was too late.

TOM

He bought cattle from someone else?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (12)

PRICE
Miguel Merrano.

TOM
Merrano..?

PRICE
Yes sir, fifty head. I'm sorry.

TOM
Where the hell...Where do you suppose he
found fifty healthy cattle during this
drought?

PRICE
I don't know, sir.

Good night.

TOM
Night.

NARRATOR
Saturday morning Joe Stangle drove over
to Mayer's store. The wind had finally
stopped and the day was hot and still.
Jim Hill and Tom Drake were sitting on
the porch when Joe rode up. Candy was
inside talking with Mrs. Mayer.

MAYER'S STORE - LATE MORNING

Joe stops his wagon, gets down.

JIM
Morning.

JOE
Jim. I've business with Mayer.

JIM
Well, sure thing Joe.

INSIDE MAYER'S STORE

Joe walks up to the counter.

JOE
Mayer?

Mayer!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAYER

Coming. I'm coming.

Joe, good morning.

JOE

I've got a deal for you.

MAYER

And what would that be.

JOE

Right outside I've got a wagon load of hides. I'll trade them for the order on this sheet.

MAYER

May I?

He examines the list.

MAYER

This quite an order. I'm sorry, Mr. Stangle. I can't do it.

JOE

What?

MAYER

I have no way to sell them. I can't trade for something I can't sell.

JOE

You don't understand, I slaughtered those cattle so I could pay this bill.

MAYER

You should have asked me. The market is flooded with hides. I wish I could take them, I really do.

JOE

By God, you will take them if you know what's good for you. Now I've got something to trade, and that's better than anyone else in this damn valley.

MAYER

Mr. Stangle, you owe me eight hundred and sixty three dollars, and you are not in a position to demand anything!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JOE

These hides are all I have.

MAYER

If you want your order, and I don't have all of it, I'll have to put it on your tab.

JOE

Right...right. Just do it. I'll be outside when you get it ready.

MAYER'S STORE PORCH

JOE comes back outside...sits down.

JIM

Hey, Joe. I heard it was raining over in Arizona.

JOE

Shut up, Jim. It's always raining somewhere.

JIM

It was just an observation.

JOE

Someone else's rain isn't going to help us any. I don't want to hear about it.

TOM

Well, look here.

JIM

What?

TOM

Look who's coming.

JIM

That's Merrano.

TOM

He was in Aragon yesterday...sold fifty head to Sam Monroe.

MERRANO'S wagon pulls up. He gets down.

NARRATOR

Miguel Merrano stepped down from his wagon.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NARRATOR (cont'd)

As he crossed to the store he felt the eyes of the men on the porch boring into his back.

JOE

So, he's been pushing his scrubs over in Aragon.

MERRANO goes into the store.

TOM

Well, you know Monroe, he only buys the best, but he's not too particular where they come from.

JIM

You trying to say something?

TOM

I just wondered if you felt like you been losing some stock here recently.

JOE

Yeah...

JIM

You know, I found some of my cattle bunched over near "the fence"... I couldn't figure why they'd head that way on their own.

TOM

It's hard to tell. I haven't done an accurate count for months.

JOE

We're losing our shirts while he's been stealing our healthy stock.

TOM

I don't know for sure, but it's something that we should look in to.

JIM

What's he doing in there, Joe?

JOE moves a bit to look in the window.

JOE

Mayer's figuring his bill...Damn!

JIM

What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JOE
He just gave Mayer a twenty dollar gold
piece!

TOM
What?

They all move to the door.

JOE
Stealing our cattle and he throws it in
our faces!

JIM
I haven't seen that much money in months.

MIGUEL
Gracias.

MERRANO walks out of the store.

NARRATOR
As Merrano reached the edge of the porch
Joe Stangle leaned back and kicked his
feet out from under him.

MERRANO falls dropping packages and all.

JIM
Nasty spill.

JOE
We build that fence for a reason.

NARRATOR
Merrano scrambled to get up but Joe
stepped in and kicked him in the ribs.

JOE kicks...MIGUEL groans.

JOE
Didn't you get the message.

MAYER comes running out.

MAYER
Hey! Hey! What are you doing?

TOM
Klaus, he's been stealing our cattle!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JOE

Look at him run. You're not going anywhere. You get in that wagon, I'll put a bullet in your horses.

JIM

We should hang him!

MAYER

Tom, stop this!

JOE

The hell with that. Just shoot him.

NARRATOR

Merrano pulled himself from the ground using the side of the wagon. He reached in under the seat and pulled his Henry rifle from it's scabbard.

MERRANO cocks the rifle.

JIM

Joe! He's got a gun.

MERRANO

This is what you want, right? For years, this is what you want!

CANDY

Pa! Pa what's going on?

TOM

Candy, you get back inside!

CANDY

What are you doing!

MAYER

Miss Drake, please.

TOM

Now Merrano put that gun down. Joe didn't mean it.

JOE

The hell I didn't!

MERRANO

You want to kill me, come on! But it won't make a thief if I'm not.. and it won't make it rain, and it won't bring back your herds.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

TOM

Joe! My daughter's out here!

JOE

Yeah...yeah...Your lucky day, Merrano.

TOM

Alright now Merrano, you put that gun down and get yourself out of here.

JIM

We don't want you around here causing trouble around here.

MERRANO

I have never stolen anything from anyone.

JOE

You get out!

NARRATOR

Merrano moved painfully to his wagon and turning into the road, drove away.

Wagon rolls away.

CANDY walks over to her father.

CANDY

What happened Pa?

JOE

Tom you...you got to teach that girl...Oh hell...

JOE walks off.

TOM

Candy, when I tell you to do something... you just do it.

We'll be leaving in a minute get your things.

JOE rides his wagon past TOM.

TOM

Hey Joe, you stop by my place tonight...we've got to get to the bottom of this.

JOE

Yeah. Right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

TOM

Jim, you come too.

JIM

Yeah, we'll show him. Nobody steals our cattle.

ROAD TO TD RANCH - AFTERNOON

TOM'S wagon rolls along.

CANDY

Pa, why do you think that man is stealing your cattle?

TOM

Well Candy, there are differences between people...he doesn't live like we do. The last time I was over there I only saw fifteen or twenty head of cattle...and he was living in a tent...why he didn't even have an outhouse.

Now he's selling good beef in Aragon, and spending gold money at Mayer's.

Now me and Jim and Joe, we've all worked hard and...now there's hard times...and when a man like Merrano starts making money and we're not...well you can just bet that it's at our expense.

CANDY

Joe was going to kill him.

TOM

Well...I don't know about killing...but we do have to protect ourselves...and in this country they hang rustlers.

CANDY

You've never seen him steal, have you? How do you know?

TOM

Honey, there's just differences between people.

Wagon rolls off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NARRATOR

After she got home Candy Drake went to the barn, slipped her mother's old saddle on the paint, and headed up the road to Willow Springs.

Candy knew where she was going, but she had only a vague idea of how to get there.

It took her almost an hour to get to the spring. Today she saw that it was dry. The pool where the water had stood was just caked mud drying in the heat.

A few hundred yards further on, tracks that seemed to be those of Merrano's buckboard cut away from the road and headed up into the hills. She pointed her horse along the dim trail until she came to the tunnel.

CANDY'S horse stops.

CANDY

Come on...

Her horse walks forward, hooves now tapping on stone, echoes.

NARRATOR

Candy emerged into a huge wind hollowed pocket in the rock wall. On three sides towered red sandstone cliffs and against the rock to her left stood a maze of broken stone buildings, ancient rooms and towers crumbling in the shade of the great cliffs.

MIGUEL

Don't come any further!

CANDY

Ahh!

MIGUEL

Is there anyone else with you?

CANDY

You scared me.

No. I'm alone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MIGUEL

Alright.

CANDY

Where are you?

There is a sound to her left and MERRANO comes scrambling down the slope.

NARRATOR

Miguel Merrano came down off the slope. He was carrying a rifle. He walked to the tunnel, listening carefully.

CANDY

Mr. Merrano, nobody is coming after you...yet.

MIGUEL

What do you mean?

CANDY

They think you've been stealing their cattle.

MIGUEL

Yes, I got that impression.

CANDY

Well, I came to talk to you.

MIGUEL

For what?

CANDY

I want to know if they're right.

MIGUEL

If they were, you'd be in a lot of trouble right now.

CANDY

If you're not you're in trouble over nothing.

MIGUEL

Not nothing, Senorita. I'm in trouble because I'm a Mexican...a foreigner. My great grandfather came up here with Father Escalante in 1776. The United States wasn't even a country.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CANDY

I don't agree with them, you know.

MIGUEL

I'm sorry. I guess the least I could do is show you around...prove my innocence.

CANDY

Well, that's what I came for.

NARRATOR

He led her down the trail away from the ruins. The walls of the basin opened up and down on the flat Candy saw tall grass waving in the wind.

CANDY her HORSE and MERRANO walking.

CANDY

You have so much grass. The drought hasn't even touched your place.

MIGUEL

Miss Drake, there is no drought...not really.

CANDY

You said that before, but our stock is dying and the valley is turning into a desert.

MIGUEL

It was always was a desert...you just couldn't see it.

NARRATOR

They came down the trail behind a small stone house with a wide porch.

MIGUEL

Leave your horse here and have a seat on the porch...I'll get you a glass of lemonade.

CANDY

Lemonade!

MIGUEL

I have fruit trees. Please have a seat.

Door opens as Merrano goes into the house.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

NARRATOR

From the porch Candy could see most of the basin. Cattle were grazing in a fenced section of pasture. They were fat, healthy cattle, like her father's had been. In the distance a windmill turned, another pumped water into a pair of barrels near the kitchen door.

MIGUEL comes out of the house, he sits and hands CANDY a cup.

MIGUEL

Here...

CANDY

Thank you.

She drinks.

MIGUEL

Do you like it?

CANDY

It's so beautiful.

MIGUEL

Oh...I meant the drink, I think I made it too weak.

CANDY

Hmm...no it's fine. This place, how did you do it?

MIGUEL

My father and brother came up from Mexico...they helped me.

CANDY

I really want you to tell me about the drought. If that's not what we're having, then what is it?

MIGUEL

When I was a boy my father used to work for Don Alphonso, the man who owned this whole valley. I've seen some very dry years here, but this is not one of them. The rangeland in Mirror Valley has been destroyed by overgrazing. Your father has been running three times too many cattle for the kind of land he has. This is the desert, it's not Oregon or Ohio.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

CANDY

I know, but he said that millions of buffalo used to live on the plains and even right here in New Mexico.

MIGUEL

It's true. But the buffalo were always moving. They ranged for hundreds of miles. They didn't live out their lives on one ranch.

I fence my grazing areas and I move my stock every month. That is why there is always some grass left to reseed for the spring.

CANDY

That was a lot of work wasn't it, building all that fence?

MIGUEL

Sure, but now all the grass in Mirror Valley has been eaten and all that can grow is cactus. Your father ran a lot of cattle and he got rich, but now his land is worn out.

CANDY

If we had any water we'd be better off...you seem to have so much.

MIGUEL

I put a lot less demand on it. I built holding tanks and I drilled wells... there's something your father can do.

CANDY

Maybe some day. But...we don't have the money right now.

MIGUEL

Oh...

CANDY

I have to go. It's getting late.

MIGUEL

I'll ride back with you.

I'll get my horse.

MIGUEL walks off for his horse.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

NARRATOR

As the moon appeared over the horizon,
Miguel and Candy rode past Willow Springs
and down the road toward the TD ranch.

CANDY

Well, here we are.

MIGUEL

Yeah...

CANDY

I wish I could invite you in, but...

MIGUEL

That's okay, I'd rather not get shot.

CANDY

I'm sorry.

MIGUEL

Well, tell your father that I don't want
any trouble.

CANDY

I know. Thank you.

Footsteps from the porch.

PRICE

Candy? Your father's been worried.

CANDY

You'd better go.

MIGUEL

Yeah...

CANDY

Goodbye. I hope that --

PRICE

Hey...Hey!

PRICE draws his gun.

PRICE

Get down off that horse.

CANDY

Price, no...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

NARRATOR

Merrano stepped his horse sideways,
pulled his boot free of the stirrup, and
kicked the gun from Price Taylor's hand.

He dropped to the ground and instantly
Price was on him.

Their two bodies collide...blows.

CANDY

Stop it!

NARRATOR

Merrano backed off, and then the larger
man rushed. Like a matador Merrano
stepped aside and, as Price tried to
turn, slammed a solid right to his
kidneys.

Price came around and reached out, but
Merrano wasn't there. Then a slight form
appeared at his side so close that Price
barely had time to take one stumbling
step backwards before a blow sent him
down gasping for breath.

TOM

Hey, what's going on out there!

JIM

Joe, get out here.

CANDY

Miguel, go!

NARRATOR

As the men came running from the house,
Merrano leaped onto his horse, spurring
away into the night.

TOM

Stop him!

Gun shots.

CANDY

Stop it! Joe stop it!

JOE

Jim, get our horses! We'll catch him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

JIM
Right.

TOM
Candy, you alright?

CANDY
Dad, stop them.

TOM
Price what happened?

PRICE
Ahh...oww. It was Merrano.

JIM rides up with JOE'S horse.

CANDY
No...

TOM
Candy!

JOE
Out of my way!

CANDY
Stop it. Stop it NOW!

JOE
Tom, he's getting away.

TOM
Joe, hold up...

Candy, what happened out here? Where have you been?

CANDY
I went out to Miguel Merrano's.

TOM
You were out there with him...alone?

JIM
The man's a know criminal!

TOM
What happened?

CANDY
He's not a criminal, and I won't let him be treated as one.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

JOE

This is a man's business, you stay out of it.

TOM

Joe shut up. Let her talk.

CANDY

Joe, you leave him alone. He has water and grass, and he's been selling cattle at a profit for the last three years.

JIM

He has water? That's ridiculous.

JOE

There's a drought. Nobody has any.

CANDY

Just because you don't?...and he can't have cattle just because yours are dead? He's a thief because he's smart and you'all are so stupid.

TOM

Candy! Now don't you talk that way!

PRICE

Candy, did you say that Merrano has water?

CANDY

Yes, and grass.

TOM

Ah, there aren't any streams over there.

CANDY

Pa, he's drilled wells, he's built tanks.

TOM

Well, he can't be gettin' much.

CANDY

His place looks like this valley did when we first got here.

He doesn't need to steal our cattle...they'd embarrass him.

TOM

Candy, we're not going anywhere tonight, you go on inside.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (10)

CANDY

Pa, what are you going to do?

TOM

I don't know. Go inside, it's late.

I'll put your horse up...go on.

CANDY reluctantly goes inside.

JOE

Well...that's it then.

JIM

What?

JOE

He has water and we don't.

TOM

I don't know. We'd have to cut "the fence".

JOE

So what? What right has he got to that water when our cattle are dying.

JIM

If you had a water hold you'd let me use it, wouldn't you?

TOM

Well sure, but --

JOE

Right. Why should I let my cattle die because he keeps his water fenced up.

JIM

You've got a family to think about. You're too old to move on.

JOE

I'll be starting what I'll got left down in this direction first thing tomorrow morning. Come along or go broke, as you see fit.

TD RANCH - MORNING

From inside the house the lowing of cattle can be heard. They are being moved past the yard toward the road.

NARRATOR

Candy was awakened by the sound of cattle being herded past the house.

Candy sits up in bed.

CANDY

Oh, Pa...

NARRATOR

She dressed quickly, but by the time she got out of the house the herd was already a quarter of a mile down the road to Willow Springs.

ROAD TO WILLOW SPRINGS

Cattle are crowding the road, men herd them along.

NARRATOR

When Candy caught up with the herd she found more than her father's cattle headed up the road. The first she saw wore the JH connected brand, and as she skirted the mass of cattle she saw one of Joe Stangle's men drive a group of about twenty head out of a draw and turn them into the herd.

Up ahead she could see Tom Drake's black hat bobbing in the clouds of dust.

CANDY

Pa! Pa wait!

TOM

What? Candy.,.What are you doing out here.

CANDY

Where are you going?

TOM

Go on back. I'll come see you at the house later.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CANDY

I want to know where you're taking all these cattle!

TOM

Go back, Candy. I'm busy now.

CANDY

You're going to Merrano's aren't you. You're going to take down that fence.

TOM

I'm protecting our home.

CANDY

I don't want it. It's not worth having now stop this, you stop this!

TOM

I don't have time for this Candy.

CANDY

He's built so much. If you let all your cattle in there now you'll ruin it...in two months it will be as bad as it is here.

TOM

In two months it'll rain!

CANDY

It's not right, Pa.

TOM

I can't afford right any more.

CANDY'S horse gallops down the road.

NARRATOR

Candy Drake spurred her horse away down the road. She knew what she had to do.

MAYER'S STORE

Door closes, locks.

NARRATOR

Klaus Mayer locked his store, then placed a large hand lettered "closed" sign in the window. He hitched his horse to his buggy and headed down the road toward Merrano's ranch.

ROAD TO MERRANO'S

NARRATOR

As Mayer passed the canyon that ran down to the fence he saw Price Taylor and several other men moving a large group of cattle into the mouth of the canyon. Worried, he turned off the road and up the narrow track to the tunnel.

MAYER'S wagon drives through the tunnel and emerges on the other side. There is a GUNSHOT and MAYER'S horse rears.

MAYER

Whoa...

MIGUEL

Stop...right there!

MAYER

Young man, you're in trouble. They're moving cattle up to the fence.

MIGUEL

I know that. What do you want?

MAYER

Business. I need your help...and I think right now you need mine.

MIGUEL

There is going to be violence.

MAYER

I know...

MIGUEL

Be sure, there's no time for second thoughts.

MAYER

I'm sure.

MIGUEL

Follow the road down to the house. I'll be right behind you.

MAYER'S wagon rolls toward house.

NARRATOR

Miguel Merrano smiled, a hard cynical smile, and struck a match.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Then he touched it to the fuse at his feet, and ran.

TREMENDOUS EXPLOSION

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Mayer stopped his rig at Merrano's stone house. As he stepped up onto the porch, the door to the house opened.

MAYER

Miss Drake! Well, the older I get the more easily I'm surprised.

NARRATOR

She was holding a double barreled shotgun.

CANDY

I...came out to warn Miguel...Mr. Merrano. But I'm really afraid of what's going to happen.

MAYER

Well, maybe there's something we can do about that.

MERRANO comes riding up.

MIGUEL

I blew the tunnel. Mr. Mayer, would you stay here with Candy. I have to go up to the fence.

CANDY

This is my fight too...I'm coming with you.

MIGUEL

No. Your father --

CANDY

My father is going to get the shock of his life.

MAYER

Both of you, wait. Now I'm here to help you regardless, but, if you go along with my proposition I may be able to stop this fight.

MIGUEL

How?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MAYER

I'm in debt, and I'm not going to be able to restock my store. That means that I'm going to be out of business in two weeks.

CANDY

No...

MAYER

I'm afraid so. Now I came here to see if you, Mr. Merrano, would help me out.

MIGUEL

Of course, you've helped me often enough. But we have to talk about this later.

MAYER

There may not be a later. Now I need two thousand dollars to restock and open my credit again. I want you to become my partner.

MIGUEL

There are probably cattle trampling my fields right now.

CANDY

Miguel, listen to him!

MAYER

Each of those men owes me a lot of money. Unless they want to go all the way to Aragon they have to buy from my store.

Now if you become my partner they can't move against you and survive.

MIGUEL

Yes, it might work...

MAYER

It will, if Candy stands with us.

MIGUEL

She shouldn't.

CANDY

No he's right, Miguel. I have to face my father, and we have to do it now or it will be too late.

THE FENCE - NOON

The lowing of cattle can be heard. Yells of the herders.

NARRATOR

Cattle pressed up against the fence. Joe and Tom used their horses to force them back as Price Taylor slipped through the strands, a pair of wire cutters in his hand.

JIM

Cut Merrano's fence first, then the clips on ours, that way we can drop it all at once and not get trampled.

PRICE

Simmer down, Jim...I know what I'm doing.

NARRATOR

Price moved along the ten foot space between the two fences, the one the ranchers had built and Merrano's. He reached up with his clippers to cut the top strand...

Gunshot and ricochet.

JOE

Damn!

JIM

Where is he?

NARRATOR

Price hit the ground and crawled for cover.

TOM

There!

NARRATOR

Miguel Merrano stood on a rock ledge fifty yards off, his rifle pointed at the sky.

MIGUEL

Don't cut my fence.

JOE

It looks like we'll get this over with all at once...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM

Joe, we don't have any cover.

JOE

Neither does he.

JOE cocks his rifle.

NARRATOR

Candy Drake and Klaus Mayer stood up on either side of Merrano. Candy held the double barreled shotgun and Mayer had a revolver in his hand.

MAYER

Gentlemen, you must turn those cattle around and drive them out of here.

TOM

Candy...?

JIM

Mayer, what the hell are you doing?

TOM

Candy, you come down here, right now.

CANDY

Pa, I'm not going to let you do this.

TOM

Mayer, you send my daughter down here.

MAYER

That's up to her, Tom.

I've helped you men out when ever possible. When you couldn't pay for my goods I let you have credit, and I borrowed money to do so.

I believed in you, but now I'm in trouble too. If I go out of business, you go out of business.

I've sold half my store to Miguel Merrano. He owns half of my profits, and half of your debts.

JOE

We need water and by God we're going to get it!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MIGUEL

You come any further and I'm going to shoot you.

JOE

He's bluffing. Price, go ahead.

PRICE

Are you crazy!

TOM

Candy, I order you to come down here. I'm your father, damn it!

CANDY

You're wrong, Pa!

JOE

Cut the wire!

PRICE

Mr. Drake...count me out.

JOE

What's wrong with you...you yellow?

PRICE

You know I'm not.

JOE

Then do it!

PRICE

This isn't right. Merrano's made good, when we all laughed at him. And there isn't a fairer man in the valley than Mr. Mayer.

Tom, that's your daughter over there.

JOE

You turning traitor.

PRICE

If that's what you want to call it.

Don't shoot, Merrano. I'm coming over.

Gun cocks...

TOM

Joe...stop!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Gunshot...PRICE falls.

CANDY
Price!

MIGUEL
No! Stay here.

TOM
Price...

NARRATOR
Tom Drake dropped off his horse and ran to the fallen man, the barbed wire tearing into him as he crawled through the fence.

JIM
Tom...is he...

JOE
He was a traitor.

TOM
That was murder...Joe that was nothing but murder.

JIM
Tom...

TOM
You put that gun down, Joe.

JOE
Like hell. I'm riding out of here. If you try to stop me I'll kill you.

He turns and spurs his horse off.

JIM
Mayer, you let us pick him up...then we'll ride out of here.

NARRATOR
Jim Hill and Tom Drake picked Price up and laid him across his saddle. Merrano, Candy and Mayer watched as the men rode off.

MIGUEL
Lo siento...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CANDY

I have to go home. My father needs me.
I had to come...now I have to go home...I
wish --

MIGUEL

So do it.

Tell your father I'll take care of fifty
of his cattle for him...he needn't lose
everything.

CANDY

Thank you!

I'll be back.

She rides off.

NARRATOR

The sun was setting when Candy rode into
the yard at the TD ranch. Dust had
settled on the house giving it a faded,
abandoned look. No one was in sight. No
cattle, no horses.

Candy reins up...dismounts and walks across porch.

CANDY

Pa...? Pa...?

TOM

I'm over here.

NARRATOR

Tom's voice spoke to her out of the
shadows.

CANDY

Pa, I'm so sorry.

TOM

I must be getting old. I'm letting
things get out of hand. I feel like I
shot him myself.

CANDY

Well you didn't. And it wasn't because
of you.

TOM

I'm going to lose the ranch. Have I lost
you too?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

CANDY

No...no.

Miguel told me that he would keep some of our cattle til next year...we don't have to lose everything.

TOM

I can't do that.

CANDY

You can't afford pride.

TOM

That's not it.

CANDY

Yes it is... You're a good man. If you're strong enough to do something bad, something immoral to save your home...then you're certainly strong enough to swallow your pride and accept his offer.

You think about it. I think you'll decide it's a good idea.

The wind blowing, whipping up leaves and sand.

NARRATOR

After dark the wind returned, blowing up the dust around Mayer's store.

JOE

(outside house)

YOU...YOU GONNA' TAKE MY RANCH.

MAYER'S WIFE

Klaus wake up. Who is that?

JOE

(outside house)

YOU GIVE IT TO THE MEXICAN?

MAYER

What...what is it?

MAYER'S WIFE

Get up.

JOE

(outside house)

I WORKED FOR WHAT I HAVE!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

MAYER

What?

MAYER'S WIFE

Who is that? Klaus...

MAYER

I don't know.

JOE

(outside house)

MAYER...

MAYER

It's Joe.

JOE

(outside house)

GO TO YOUR OWN COUNTRY...

Gun shot. Window breaks.

MAYER

Get down!

MAYER'S WIFE

What...

JOE fires, shooting through MAYER'S windows. He empties his gun.

JOE

(outside house)

MAYER, YOU'RE ALL THE SAME!

NARRATOR

Mayer crawled behind the counter to get his shotgun, but by the time he came back with it, Joe had disappeared into the blowing dust.

MERRANO'S RANCH - MORNING

NARRATOR

The morning after they buried Price Taylor, Tom and Candy Drake drove down the old road to Merrano's.

MERRANO works in the water.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NARRATOR (cont'd)

After he had blown up the tunnel Miguel Merrano noticed that the reservoir he had built near the indian ruins had begun to leak. And now, after about two hours of work, he felt that he had it under control. After inspecting the sight carefully for more wet spots, he put down his shovel and looked up into the eyes of Joe Stangle.

JOE

They're going to send you back to Mexico in a box, Merrano.

NARRATOR

When they found no one at the house, Candy decided to show her father where the tunnel had come through into the basin. As they come up the trail, they saw Joe Stangle standing on top of the dam pointing his pistol at Merrano's chest.

CANDY

Dad...

TOM

Put your gun away, Joe. We've had enough of this.

JOE

Like hell we have.

TOM

We've been through a lot together. You'll get a fair trial, I'll see to that.

JOE

A trial? Tom, you try to take me in, I'll shoot your daughter.

NARRATOR

Joe half turned toward Candy, Merrano bent down and picked up his shovel. Swinging in a wide, flat arc the blade smashed into Joe's thigh just above the knee.

Joe went down and rolling over, shot Merrano in the chest.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Gunshot.

CANDY
Miguel!

TOM
Get down!

NARRATOR
Joe turned his gun toward Tom, firing.

More shots.

NARRATOR
Tom took aim and put a bullet in his heart.

Final shot.

MIGUEL
Candy...?

She runs to him.

CANDY
I'm right here.
Pa are you okay?

TOM
Yeah...yeah I am.

CANDY
Now get the wagon. Mr. Merrano is alive and he needs help.

NARRATOR
Late that afternoon, Candy stood on the porch of her father's house and watched the heat waves shimmer across Mirror Valley.

CANDY
Klaus, is he going to be all right?

MAYER
He's asleep, and the doctor thinks he'll make a full recovery.

CANDY
Thank God.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CANDY (cont'd)

You know I used to think I saw cities out there...and water. Mirages... If Miguel is right, we've ruined this land.

MAYER

It may not be hopeless. Mr. Merrano and I have an investment in your father, and we'll do all we can to help you out.

CANDY

Thank you.

MAYER

He'll have to stay in bed for several weeks. See that your father talks to him. That young man knows quite a bit.

Also, while he's here the two of you can get better acquainted.

CANDY

Klaus!

MAYER

I'm not blind, Miss Drake. And you know me, I'll do what ever is best for business.

THE END

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)