

CHAPTER XLIX.

SANDY TELLS BILL A SECRET.

During the succeeding three months Bill visited at the Circle-Dot ranch quite often, and, judging by the cordial manner in which he was received by both Circle-Dot and her mother, it was evident that the old lady had concluded to accept Bill as one of the family. The marriage, however, was not to take place for some time.

Often as were Bill's visits to the ranch, he discovered that Sandy never failed to put in his appearance just as frequently, and a casual observation disclosed the fact that May Dyer and Sandy seemed very much interested in each other. One day, on his return from a visit to the ranch, Sandy sought Bill, and they had a confidential talk.

"Bill," began Sandy, "yeh tol' me tother day that yeh wuz goin' t' marry Circle-Dot."

"That is our present intention," laughed Bill.

"Well," continued Sandy, "I know all the fine pints uv a hawse ur a steer, an' I reckon that the galoot as would try t' fool me 'bout one uv them critters wouldn't hev much luck; but wimmen air different somewhat.

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A whole herd uv 'em, like we seed at the picnic in the Cross-Timbers, looks powe'ful purty, an' yeh naturally feel good to'ards the whole drove. But I hev been tol' that yeh kaint pick out no one uv 'em an' tell whetheh she'll lead ur drive ur work; ur tell whether she'll be gentle an' docile ur whetheh she'll balk an' kick oveh the traces. But Bill, Circle-Dot are the choice uv the herd; she's 'way above the average, an' ll walk by yeh side an' assist yeh eveh step uv the way goin' 'cross the range, an' I feel powe'ful happy t' know yeh'r goin' along the same trail. Ef yeh two don't make a successsful an' pleasant drive through life, I'll neveh bet on a shoah thing agin.

"Right heah now I'm goin' t' tell yeh a secret uv my own, Bill. Perhaps yeh hev noticed that I've been spendin' lots uv time down thar at the Circle-Dot ranch lately. Well, the cause uv hit are easy t' explain: I'm gittin' soft-hearted an' tender-like to'ard May Dyer, fur she's jest 'bout the neatest an' best little critter that eveh grazed on Texas soil, an' she's got the lariat wrapped 'roun' my heah good an' plenty; an' so we've agreed t' corral together, an' ef agreeable t' yeh an' Circle-Dot, ateh yeh hev been spliced an' turned out uv the pen all right we'll hev the same gospel-slinger tie the rope fur us, an' we'll all staht on the drive togetheh."

To this proposition Bill readily assented, and when they parted there was a mutual understanding be-

CIRCLE-DOT.

tween them, and Sandy was greatly elated and perfectly happy.

Down in western Texas, where the land is high and dry, with enough moisture each year to produce a good crop of grass but not enough for farming purposes, there are many large cattle ranches. All of them are now under fence, and some of them contain many thousand acres of land, affording pasture for large herds of cattle. One of the largest of these ranches is owned by two partners, who annually ship to Kansas City and to the Eastern market many of the best grades of beef steers. They are well-known, reliable stockmen, and their business and trade are welcome and sought for by all of the large cattle-buyers and packing industries of the United States.

On the west side of this ranch, on the east bank of the Rio Grande, are two large and commodious dwellings used by the owners during a portion of the year, and at that time, two happy and contented families may be seen there. At one of these houses Sandy and May preside, and the other one is occupied by Bill and Circle-Dot.

THE END.