

**THE DEVIL'S KEG:  
THE STORY OF THE  
FOSS RIVER RANCH**

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The Devil's Keg: The Story of the Foss River Ranch by Ridgwell Cullum

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**RIDGWELL CULLUM**

**THE DEVIL'S KEG:  
THE STORY OF THE  
FOSS RIVER RANCH**



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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THE WATCHERS OF THE PLAINS  
THE NIGHT-RIDERS  
THE BROODING WILD  
THE HOUND FROM THE NORTH  
THE DEVIL'S KEG

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OF ALL BOOKSELLERS

# THE DEVIL'S KEG

*THE STORY OF THE FOSS  
RIVER RANCH*

BY  
RIDGWELL CULLUM

AUTHOR OF  
THE BOOKS ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE

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## CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I THE POLO CLUB BALL . . . . .	1
II THE BLIZZARD: ITS CONSEQUENCES . . . . .	10
III A BIG GAME OF POKER . . . . .	20
IV AT THE FOSS RIVER RANCH . . . . .	26
V THE "STRAY" BEYOND THE MUSKOG . . . . .	37
VI "WAYS THAT ARE DARK" . . . . .	46
VII ACROSS THE GREAT MUSKOG . . . . .	52
VIII TOLD IN BAD MAN'S HOLLOW . . . . .	63
IX LABLACHE'S "COUP" . . . . .	73
X "AUNT" MARGARET REFLECTS . . . . .	80
XI THE CAMPAIGN OPENS . . . . .	91
XII LABLACHE FORCES THE FIGHT . . . . .	98
XIII THE FIRST CHECK . . . . .	104
XIV THE HUM AND CRY . . . . .	112
XV AMONG THE HALF-BREEDS . . . . .	121
XVI GAUTIER CAUSES DISSENSION . . . . .	130
XVII THE NIGHT OF THE PUSKY . . . . .	140



CHAP.		PAGE
XVIII	THE PUSKY . . . . .	148
XIX	LABLACHE'S MIDNIGHT VISITOR . . . . .	156
XX	A NIGHT OF TERROR . . . . .	163
XXI	HORBOCKS LEARNS THE SECRET OF THE MUSKEG . . . . .	170
XXII	THE DAY AFTER . . . . .	178
XXIII	THE PAW OF THE CAT . . . . .	188
XXIV	"POKER" JOHN ACCEPTS . . . . .	196
XXV	UNCLE AND NIECE . . . . .	203
XXVI	IN WHICH MATTERS REACH A CLIMAX . . . . .	210
XXVII	THE LAST GAMBLE . . . . .	218
XXVIII	SETTLING THE RECKONING . . . . .	226
XXIX	THE MAW OF THE MUSKEG . . . . .	235

# THE DEVIL'S KEG

## CHAPTER I

### THE POLO CLUB BALL

THE hall was a great effort of the decorator's art; the people were faultlessly dressed; those present represented the wealth and fashion of the Western Canadian ranching world.

It was the annual ball of the Polo Club, and that was a social function of the first water—in the eyes of the Calford world.

"My dear Mrs. Abbot, it is a matter which is quite out of my province," said John Allandale, in answer to a remark from his companion. He was leaning over the cushioned back of the Chesterfield upon which an old lady was seated, and gazing smilingly over at a group of young people standing at the opposite end of the room. "Jacky is one of those young ladies whose strength of character carries her beyond the control of mere man. Yes, it is true I am her uncle and guardian, but, nevertheless, I should no more dream of interfering with her—what shall we say?—love affairs than suggest her incapacity to 'boss' a 'round up' worked by a crowd of Mexican greasers."

"Then all I can say is that your niece is a very unfortunate girl," replied the old lady acidly. "How old is she?"

"Twenty-two."

John Allandale, or "Poker" John, as he was more familiarly called by all who knew him, was still looking over at the group. His companion's words had brought home to him a partial realisation of a responsibility which was his.

"Twenty-two," she repeated, "and not a relative living except a good-hearted but thoroughly irresponsible uncle. That child is to be pitied, John."

The old man sighed. He took no umbrage. He was still watching the group at the other end of the room. His face was clouded, and his eyes followed the movement of a beautiful girl surrounded by a cluster of men, immaculately dressed, bronzed—and, for the most part, wholesome-looking. She was dark, almost Eastern in her type of features. Her hair was black, with the blackness of the raven's wing, and coiled in an ample knot low upon her neck. Her features, although Eastern, had scarcely the regularity one expects in such a type, whilst her eyes quashed without mercy any idea of such extraction for her nationality. They were grey, deeply ringed at the pupil with black. They were keen eyes—fathomless in their suggestion of strength—eyes which might easily mask a world of good or evil.

The music began, and the girl passed from amidst her group of admirers upon the arm of a tall, fair man, and was soon lost in the midst of the throng of dancers.

"Who is that she is dancing with now?" asked Mrs. Abbot presently. "I didn't see her go off; I was watching Mr. Lablache standing alone and disconsolate over there against the door. He looks as if some one had done him some terrible injury. See how he is glaring at the dancers."

"Jacky is dancing with 'Lord' Bill. Yes, you are right, Lablache does not look very amiable. I think this would be a good opportunity to suggest a little gamble in the smoking-room."

John Allandale stood erect, and glanced round the room in search of some one. He was a tall, well-built man, and carried his fifty odd years fairly well, in spite of his grey hair and the bald patch at the crown of his head. Thirty years of a rancher's life had in no way lessened the easy carriage and distinguished bearing acquired during his upbringing. John Allandale's face and figure were redolent of the free life of the prairie. And although, possibly, his fifty-five years might have lain more easily upon him, he was a man of commanding appearance, and one not to be passed unnoticed.