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Upper & Middle Grades

A Double-Dyed Deceiver

Outlaw on the run finds the family he never had,
and steps up to do right by them. . . .

by O. Henry, adapted by Carol D. Wise

Characters

LLANO KID

CONSUL THACKER, *U.S. Consul
at Buenas Tierras, South America*

SEÑOR URIQUE

SEÑORA URIQUE

SCENE 1

TIME: *Early 1900s.*

SETTING: *Consul Thacker's office, with a desk and two chairs, left, flanked by a window. An open door is right.*

AT RISE: *CONSUL THACKER is taking a siesta. LLANO KID knocks on the door, waking him.*

KID (*Holding up his hand*): Don't disturb yourself. I just dropped in. They told me it was customary to come by your office when first arriving at Buenas Tierras. I just came in from Texas.

THACKER (*Standing and shaking KID's hand*): Glad to see you, Mr.—

KID (*Laughing*): Sprague Dalton. It sounds funny to me to hear it. I'm called the Llano Kid in the Rio Grande country.

THACKER (*Sitting back down*): I'm Thacker. Please. . . have a seat. (*Indicates chair*) So you've come from Texas, son?

KID (*As he sits*): Yes—Laredo.

THACKER: Trouble there?

KID (*Shrugging*): You might say that.

THACKER: You look like the kind of kid who might be used to trouble.

KID (*Boastful*): Quite a bit, as a matter of fact.

THACKER: How'd you get here?

KID: Sailed down on the schooner *Flyaway*.

THACKER: Ah, yes—Captain Boone. Now, if you've come to invest, you want somebody to advise you. There's some around here that will cheat you out of

the gold in your teeth. They speak Spanish here. You'll need an interpreter. I'm a good one.

KID: I speak Spanish—about nine times better than I do English. Everybody speaks it on the range where I come from.

THACKER: Hm-m-m. . .well, if there's anything I can do, why, I'd be delighted. If you're buying fruit lands or looking for a concession of any sort, you'll want somebody who knows the ropes to look out for you.

KID: I'm not in the market for anything.

THACKER (*Rubbing his chin*): You know, you almost look Spanish, come to think of it. And you can't be more than twenty or twenty-one.

KID (*Suspicious*): Twenty, to be exact. Why?

THACKER: I wonder if you've got any nerve.

KID: I've got a lot of nerve. I wouldn't be alive today if I didn't.

THACKER (*Leaning forward in his chair*): Are you open to a proposition?

KID (*Shrugging*): What's the use to deny it? I got into a little gun frolic down in Laredo with the Coralitos outfit from Hidalgo. One of their men was killed, and the Coralitos were not happy. I barely escaped with my life. So I didn't come down to your parrot-and-monkey range just to smell the morning glories and marigolds. But you've already figured that out, haven't you?

THACKER: Let me see your hand. (*Takes KID's left hand*) Yes. . .yes. . .I

can do it. (*Excitedly*) Your flesh is as hard as wood and as healthy as a baby's. It will heal in a week. (*KID quickly withdraws his hand.*)

KID: Heal? You want me to fist fight? That's like ladies at a tea-party, for me.

THACKER: It's easier than that. (*Stands and goes over to window*) Just step over here, will you? (*KID joins THACKER, who is pointing out window.*) See that two-story white-stuccoed house with the wide galleries?

KID: What about it?

THACKER: In that house, a fine old Castilian gentleman and his wife are yearning to gather you into their arms and fill your pockets with money. Old Santos Urique lives there. He owns half the gold-mines in the country.

KID (*Puzzled*): What in the blazes are you talking about? (*THACKER and KID return to their chairs.*)

THACKER: Twelve years ago the Uriques lost a child.

KID: He died?

THACKER: No, he didn't die. He was a wild little devil, even if he wasn't but eight years old. Everybody in town knows about it.

KID: I was pretty wild myself. (*Laughs*) Still am, for that matter.

THACKER: Some Americans were through here prospecting for gold, and they filled the boy's head with big stories about the States. About a month after they left, the kid disappeared, too. He was supposed to have stowed himself away among the banana bunches on a fruit steamer, and gone to New Orleans. He was seen once afterward

in Texas, it was thought, but they never heard anything more of him. Old Urique has spent thousands of dollars searching for him. The madam was broken up worst of all. The kid was her life. She wears mourning clothes yet. But they say she believes he'll come back to her someday, and she has never given up hope. (*After a pause*) You could easily pass for their son.

KID (*Rubbing his chin*): No kidding?

THACKER: On the back of the boy's left hand was tattooed a flying eagle carrying a spear in his claws. That's old Urique's coat of arms.

KID (*Thoughtfully*): A flying eagle with a spear, you say?

THACKER: Exactly. You can see it emblazoned on their coach and around their home. Simple—not too difficult to replicate.

KID (*Raising his left hand and gazing at it*): So. . .you want to tattoo my hand with the coat of arms and have me pose as his son.

THACKER: It will be a cinch. I can do it. I'll have the eagle bird blended in so you'd think you were born with it. How does the name Señorito Urique sound, for a change?

KID (*Musing*): I never played a son before. If I had any parents to mention, they went over the divide about the time I gave my first cry. I have no memory of a mother or a father.

THACKER: How far are you willing to go in a little matter of this sort?

KID: Depends. What exactly is your plan?

THACKER: Here's the scheme. After I

tattoo the trademark on your hand, I'll notify old Urique that his son has been located. In the meantime, I'll furnish you with all of the family history I can find out, so you can be studying up points to talk about. You've got the looks, you speak the Spanish, you know the facts, you can tell all about Texas, you've got the tattoo mark. When I notify them that the rightful heir has returned and is waiting to know whether he will be received and pardoned, they'll rush down here and fall at your feet.

KID (*Suspicious*): I haven't had my saddle off in your camp long, pardner, and I never met you before; but if you intend to let it go at a parental blessing, why, I'm mistaken in my man, that's all. What's the rest of the deal?

THACKER (*Laughing and slapping his desk*): I haven't met anybody in a long time that keeps up with an argument as well as you do. The rest of it is simple. If they take you in only for a while, it's long enough. Old Urique keeps anywhere from \$50,000 to \$100,000 in a little safe that you could open with a shoe buttoner. Get it. My skill as a tattooer is worth half the boodle. We go halves and catch a tramp steamer for Rio Janeiro. Let the United States go to pieces if it can't get along without my consul services. *Que dice, señor?*

KID (*Nodding*): Sounds good to me.

THACKER: All right, then. You'll have to keep close until we get the bird on you. You can live in the back room here. I do my own cooking, and I'll make you as comfortable as a parsimonious government will allow me.

KID: How will you notify the family?

THACKER: I'm already going over that

in my head. I will send a letter to Old Señor Urique and tell him that I am hosting as a temporary guest a young man who arrived in Buenas Tierras from the United States some days ago. Then I will suggest there is a possibility of your being his long-absent son.

KID: What excuse will you give for my not going directly to the home myself?

THACKER: I will tell him your courage failed you because you did not know how you were going to be received.

KID: Ingenious. (*Shakes THACKER's hand*)

THACKER: Precisely. (*Lights fade.*)

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SCENE 2

TIME: *Two weeks later.*

SETTING: *The same.*

AT RISE: *THACKER and KID are standing by the desk.*

THACKER: So, Señorito Urique, you are finally ready to meet los padres?

KID: Indeed, I am. (*Holds up his left hand with the tattoo*) Your work on the coat of arms is excellent.

THACKER: It took longer than I anticipated to make it look authentic. Have you memorized the family history I gave you?

KID (*Proudly*): Every bit of it. I am pretty convincing, if I do say so myself.

THACKER: It has been a long time. It is certainly conceivable that you have forgotten certain things. (*Knock is heard. THACKER nods to KID.*) Come in! (*SEÑOR and SEÑORA URIQUE enter. SEÑORA URIQUE is wearing a black dress and veil. THACKER*

bows.) Ah! Señor and Señora Urique! What an honor it is to greet you! (*KID bows as well.*) Here before you is—(*SEÑORA throws back her veil and rushes over to KID, embracing him emotionally.*)

SEÑORA: *Hijo! Hijo mio!*

KID (*Wiping imaginary tears away*): It is good to be home, madre, padre. Can you ever forgive me for running away?

SEÑORA: There is nothing to forgive now that you are home.

SEÑOR (*Concerned*): *Esposa*, are you certain this young man is our son? How can we be sure? He left us so long ago.

SEÑORA: I would know him anywhere! A mother knows her son, and I know in my heart that he is our boy. And look, Santos—(*She holds up KID's left hand.*) he bears the coat of arms.

KID: I am sorry that I have caused you so much pain. You see—

SEÑOR (*Firmly*): You do not have to explain. We are overjoyed to welcome you back into our arms. We do not need to know where you have been or what you have done. We will never speak of this again. Your former life is in the past. We live now for the future.

SEÑORA (*Taking KID by the arm*): Come, *hijo!* We will buy you some new clothes, clothes that will befit a Castilian nobleman. And you are so thin! Our *cocinera* will put meat on those bones. She makes delicious iguana steak, and—

SEÑOR (*Laughing*): *Esposa*, you will overwhelm the boy. Let's get him home. (*Gestures for KID to come with them*) Consul Thacker, I cannot thank you enough for returning our son to us.

THACKER (*Nodding his head graciously*): The pleasure was mine.

SEÑOR: Come, we have much catching up to do with our Francisco. (*They exit. Light fades.*)

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SCENE 3

TIME: *A month later.*

SETTING: *The same.*

AT RISE: *THACKER is pacing back and forth, nervously. A knock sounds at the door, and KID enters. He is richly dressed as a Spanish caballero.*

KID: I received your message. You wanted to see me?

THACKER (*Angrily*): Of course, I wanted to see you! It's been over a month. What have you been doing?

KID: Nothing much. I ate my first iguana steak today. Big lizards! Delicious. Do you care for iguanas, Thacker?

THACKER (*Glowering*): No, nor for some other kinds of reptiles. It's time you were making good on our deal, sonny. You're not playing up to me square. You've been the prodigal son for four weeks now, and you could have had veal for every meal on a gold dish if you'd wanted it. Now, Mr. Kid, do you think it's right to leave me out so long on a husk diet? What's the trouble? Don't you get your filial eyes on anything that looks like cash in the Casa Blanca? Don't tell me you don't. Everybody knows where old Urique keeps his stuff. It's U.S. currency, too; he doesn't accept anything else. What's going on? Don't say nothing. (*KID sits on the corner of the desk and polishes his large diamond ring.*)

KID: Why, sure! There's plenty of money up there. I'm no judge of collat-

eral in bunches, but I will undertake for to say that I've seen the rise of \$50,000 at a time in that tin grub box that my adopted father calls his safe. And he lets me carry the key sometimes just to show me that he knows I'm the real Francisco that strayed from the herd a long time ago.

THACKER (*Furious*): Well, what are you waiting for? Don't you forget that I can upset your apple-cart any day I want to. If old Urique knew you were an imposter, what sort of things would happen to you? Oh, you don't know this country, Mr. Texas Kid. The laws here have got mustard spread between 'em. These people here'd stretch you out like a frog that had been stepped on, and give you about fifty sticks at every corner of the plaza. And they'd wear every stick out, too. What was left of you they'd feed to alligators.

KID (*Folding his arms*): I might just as well tell you now, pardner, that things are going to stay just as they are. The scheme's off.

THACKER (*Wide-eyed*): Off? What do you mean off?

KID: In the future, whenever you have the pleasure of speaking to me, address me as Don Francisco Urique. I guarantee I'll answer to it. We'll let Colonel Urique keep his money. His little tin safe is as good as the time-locker in the First National Bank of Laredo as far as you and I are concerned, and that's a good place for it. The money is no longer important to me.

THACKER (*Aghast*): You're going to throw me down, then, are you? After all I've done for you?

KID: You did nothing for me. You only wanted to help yourself. I just hap-

pened to fit into your little scheme. Sure I'll throw you down, and I'll tell you why. The first night I was up at the colonel's house, they introduced me to a bedroom. No blankets on the floor—a real room, with a bed and things in it. And before I was asleep, in comes this gentle, loving mother and tucks in the covers. "Panchito," she says, "my little lost one, God has brought you back to me. I bless His name forever." And down comes a drop or two of rain and hits me on the nose. Tears. Tears over me, Thacker. I've never known a mother's love, and it was wonderful. It's been that way ever since. And it's got to stay that way. Don't you think that it's for what's in it for me. If you have any such ideas, keep 'em to yourself. I haven't had much truck with women in my life, but here's a lady that we've got to keep fooled. Her son left her once. I can't allow her to lose one again. Once she stood it; twice she won't. I'm a low-down wolf, and the devil may have sent me on this trail instead of God, but I'll travel it to the end.

THACKER (*Balling his fists*): I'll expose you today, you—you double-dyed traitor.

KID (*Grabbing THACKER by his lapels*): I told you why I came here in the first place. To escape a band of outlaws. You know what kind of person I was, what I was capable of doing. If I leave here, you'll be the reason. And if you reveal your role in this, your life won't be worth two pesos. Never forget that, pardner. Now, what is my name? (*THACKER stares at him coldly.*) My name, Mr. Thacker? (*KID steps closer to him.*)

THACKER (*Timidly*): Er—Don Francisco Urique. (*Offstage, sound of wagon wheels, shouting, horses*)

KID: My parents are arriving. There's

one more reason things have to stand as they are. You see, the fellow killed in the gunfight at Laredo had one of those coat-of-arms pictures on his left hand.

THACKER (*Hoarsely*): The eagle?

KID: Yes, the eagle. Their real son is dead. He is never coming back to them. From what I saw, he had no intention of ever doing so. He had had it all and chucked it for a life of crime. I want to spend the rest of my life in atonement, becoming a better person. (*A knock on door and SEÑOR and SEÑORA enter. SEÑORA is wearing a colorful gown. KID quickly lets go of THACKER.*)

SEÑORA (*Joyfully*): Ah, Mr. Thacker, it is so good to see you again!

THACKER (*Clearing his throat*): Señora! You look so different! So *bella*!

SEÑORA: I am happy again. I have thrown away the dark clothes. We celebrate each new day now.

KID: You look beautiful, Madre. (*Hugs her warmly*)

SEÑOR: Come, Francisco, we have so much lost time to make up for.

SEÑORA: We have planned a family picnic, one like we had together so long ago! (*To THACKER*) Señor Thacker, we cannot thank you enough for the return of our precious son. We never thought to know such complete joy again.

THACKER (*Nodding slowly*): Er, ah—the pleasure was mine, Señora.

KID: *Madre mia, yo vengo.* Mother, I come. (*They exit. Curtain*)

THE END

(*Production Notes on page 40*)