

Dangerous Crossings / Gerald L. Guy

The McIntyre Adventures #4

DANGEROUS CROSSINGS



By
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PART ONE

Denver or Bust

As Cornelius “Corncob” Carter, Gus McIntyre, Junior Hamilton and the Sanders women head north into the shadow of the Rocky Mountains, they are besieged by outlaws and conmen. One of them will fall victim to the vipers who await them in Denver.



PROLOGUE

Young Gus McIntyre's life is turned upside down when he and his father, en route to gold fields of the Black Hills, are attacked by outlaws. His father is killed and fourteen-year-old Gus is left to fend for himself in the lawless Dakota Territories. He is rescued by a group of Texas cattlemen, led by Walter Hamilton, who take him under his wing.

Accompanied by an ornery trail cook, named Toots, and none other than Calamity Jane, Gus avenges his father's murder and follows the cattlemen to Texas. He fits into the day-to-day routine at the Circle H Ranch, tangles with a deceitful ranch hand and is rescued by a wise and ancient Apache chief named Tatonga.

Later, a dying drifter slips a mysterious treasure map into the hands of the enterprising teen. With the help of Chief Tatonga and the Sanders women, Kate and Lizzy, he discovers the lost treasure the Mexican Emperor Ferdinand Maximilian.

Gus is forced into hiding when he and his friends are pursued by outlaws, a government agent and the KKK, which covets the map to finance a second Confederate uprising.

Rich beyond their wildest dreams, Kate and Lizzy decide to start anew in Denver. Gus and his best friend, Junior Hamilton, agree to escort them north to the growing mining town and help the women begin a new life in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains.

Thus, a new adventure begins.

*“Every decent con man
knows that the simplest truth
is more powerful than even
the most elaborate lie.”*

ALLY CARTER, AUTHOR
From the “Uncommon Criminals”

CHAPTER
ONE



Fort Worth, Texas, 1880

Gus McIntyre and his friends, Kate and Lizzy Sanders, were only a few blocks away from the Fort Worth train station when they were accosted. The sun was beginning to sink on the western horizon and the air was heavy with the smell of cattle. Fort Worth was a cattle town, and its stockyards were overflowing with Longhorns ready for the market.

The trio had just bid farewell to Toots and the Hamiltons, Walter and his son Junior. The three men had escorted their friends to Dallas for the auction of Maximilian's lost treasury, which they discovered in Apache Flats, a remote land that spanned both sides of the Texas-Mexico border.

Kate had just mentioned how fortunate they were to have friends like the Hamiltons, when a gray-haired cowboy suddenly stepped from a dark alley and blocked their path.

The man was tall and rail thin. His long, greasy hair hung to his shoulders and the sweat-stained Stetson he wore was caked with dirt. He had a look of menace in his eyes as he leveled a long-barreled Colt in their direction. His filthy clothing was covered in dust, like just about everything in Fort Worth. The man, however, looked as if he had been wallowing in it. The scent of cheap whiskey was on his breath when he issued his order: "Give me your money!"

Pushing the women behind him so they were out of the line of fire, McIntyre stepped forward and said, “You’ve picked on the wrong people, friend. We ain’t got no money.”

“Don’t lie to me boy!” he replied. “I knows y’all got money. Look how yins is dressed. Fork it over.”

All three of them were dressed in fine clothing that recently was purchased. Gus wore a white shirt, string tie and brown vest. Kate and Lizzy wore frilly petticoats and colorful gowns. Tiny hats adorned their blonde heads.

The gunman’s hand shook a bit as his blood-shot eyes glared at the seventeen-year-old McIntyre.

Before Gus could counter, Lizzy, always impetuous, pushed forward and challenged the assailant. “How dare you try to extort money from us. You are not going to get away with this. I’m going to report you to the town marshal immediately.”

She took a step forward as if she was going to walk away from the alleyway and seek the marshal’s help. With catlike quickness, the cowboy reached out, grabbed Lizzy by the wrist and spun her into a one-arm bearhug. He placed his revolver against her left temple and said, “Give me y’all’s money or say nighty-night to this spunky lass!”

“Unhand me, you brute,” Lizzy challenged. “And when is the last time you bathed? You smell worse than a skunk.”

He tapped the business end of the pistol against her left ear and said, “Shad up!”

Lizzy did and, with exasperation, looked to Gus and her mother for help.

Gus glared with chiseled eyes and said, “You hurt her, mister, and you won’t get a chance to spend any of the small amount of funds we have.”

“You don’t scare me, boy,” the grizzled cowboy growled. “And I seen your faces in the paper. I knows you got money.”

“How stupid do you think we are to carry it around with us?” Gus replied.

“It’s all in the bank,” Kate announced, stepping forward so she was next to Gus and closer to her daughter.

McIntyre looked at her and winked. It was a signal the two had worked out for when they were in dangerous situations. It meant to be alert. Something was about to take place.

“I’ve got one hundred dollars in my back pocket,” Gus said. “Lower your weapon and I’ll give it to you.”

The cowboy turned the pistol toward McIntyre and said, “That’s a good start. Let me see some green, boy, and do it very slowly.”

“I’ve got a hundred, too,” Kate said and grabbed her purse with both hands and held it out to the desperado.

The gunman had to make a decision — release Lizzy or grab the purse.

“I don’t want ya purse, lady. Just your money,” he said as the direction of his pistol began to move back and forth from Gus and Lizzy’s mother.

McIntyre reached for his hip pocket as he watched Kate open her purse and fumble inside. He knew they had successfully drawn the man’s attention away from Lizzy, and it was time to act.

Kate’s hand was deep inside her purse when she glanced quickly toward Gus and nodded ever so slightly. The two moved quickly and in perfect unison.

With catlike quickness, Gus retrieved the slingshot he always carried in his back pocket and swept the “Y” down hard on the

cowboy's outstretched hand. Bones cracked. The would-be thief had not pulled back the hammer of the pistol, so it did not fire when it was knocked from his hand.

Simultaneously, Lizzy stamped on his foot and freed herself. The cowboy staggered as Kate pulled her father's Army Colt from her purse, placed it against the beggar's chin and marched him up against a wall.

"There is only one thing I hate more than a drunken thief," Kate said as she pushed the pistol so hard against the man's chin that his head banged against the side of the building. "Do you know what that is?" she snarled.

Whimpering, the cowboy shook his head and said, "No, ma'am."

"Someone who threatens my daughter!" she proclaimed and pulled back the hammer of the Colt.

Gus quickly had retrieved the gunman's pistol and had it pointed at the thief's abdomen when he urged his female friend to calm down.

"Easy now, Kate," the thoughtful teenager said. "Let's do nothing we might be sorry for later."

"Don't tell me what to do," she said angrily and pushed harder against the man's chin.

"Please, I didn't mean no harm," the cowboy said. "The gun ain't even loaded."

Gus checked the cylinder and said, "Well, I'll be. What kind of stupid robber are you?"

The man couldn't speak as the barrel of the Colt at his chin felt as though it was about to poke through the bottom of his mouth. If she pulled the trigger, he would be dead in seconds. His eyes showed fear and worry. He knew he had picked the wrong people

to rob and was quite possibly at death's door.

Lizzy put her arm around her mother and said, "Gus is right, Mama. Don't pull that trigger. Let Gus and me handle this. Nobody is hurt and nobody needs to die this evening."

Kate took a deep breath, pulled her pistol away and took a step backward.

"What do you want to do with him, Lizzy? We could strip him down and leave him hanging somewhere, just like me and Toots did with the Hernandez gang up in the Black Hills," Gus suggested.

"No, humiliation will have no effect on the likes of him," she replied. "I mean to teach him never again to put his grubby hands on another woman without her permission. "

With the words barely out of her mouth, Lizzy took one step forward for momentum and planted her right shoe between the man's legs. So hard was the blow, the thief's feet raised an inch off the ground before he fell forward into a ball of agonizing pain.

"Ouch!" Gus said as he watched the cowboy grab for his groin and curl into a hurtful, fetal position.

"I reckon that's worse than death," Kate snarled and spat at the worthless garbage who threatened them. "Let's get out of here."

"Yeah, I don't think he's going to be trying to rob anyone else anytime soon," Gus said. "Nice work, Lizzy."

Kate laughed and said, "Yeah, I doubt he'll be able to walk for several days, and his family jewels are going to remind him to never again mess with innocent women."

As they walked away, the would-be thief quit groaning. His world went dark, a result of the alcohol he had consumed and Lizzy's nut-cracking retaliation. Passersby never notice him as he lay unconscious in the dark alley.

CHAPTER
TWO 

McIntyre and the Sanders women were the toast of Dallas when news of the auction hit the newspapers. They chose Dallas to sell off the massive cache of gold and jewelry because it was quickly becoming the business hub of Texas. As a result, the trio could go nowhere without being recognized, congratulated or whispered about. Kate and Gus hated the attention they attracted, while Lizzy basked in it. She actually enjoyed the notoriety until the violent encounter in Fort Worth. It opened her eyes, and she quickly agreed it would be best to leave Dallas as soon as possible and head to Denver, where she and her mother would open a fine restaurant in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains.

Junior Hamilton planned on joining the trio for the journey to the northwest, but had to travel home with his father, Walter, and their trail cook, Toots, to say farewell to his mother. Walter insisted or he never would be forgiven by his wife, Gert.

Junior, 21, had never struck out on his own before. Although he would have three companions, he had never traveled anywhere without the Circle H Ranch being his central focus. The Denver trip was going to be a coming-of-age adventure and exploration.

The four friends realized the trip from Texas to the booming town of Denver, Colorado would be long and grueling. Located on the banks of the South Platte River and close to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, Denver was founded in 1858 as a gold mining town when gold nuggets were discovered in the sands of Cherry Creek and the South Platte.

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Denver continued to prosper when the rush for panned gold waned in 1859, and prospectors moved on to more lucrative deposits found in the higher locales to the west.

Kate Sanders, 36, was looking forward to opening a first-class eating establishment in the booming territory, with the help of James Fargo, who had financial contacts from New York to California. Fargo had assisted the Texans in liquidating the treasure they were lucky enough to find.

The Sanders women and McIntyre discovered what was believed to be the lost treasury of Ferdinand Maximilian, the deposed emperor of Mexico who was overthrown and executed in 1867. Foreseeing his own demise, Maximilian gathered all his riches — said to be more than ten million dollars in gold, silver and jewels — and transported them out of Mexico and the greedy hands of rebel dissidents. Somewhere north of the Rio Grande River, a caravan of almost thirty Austrian and Mexican soldiers were set upon and overwhelmed by a band of Confederate loyalists, who sought the riches to fund a second Southern uprising.

Realizing the booty was far too large to be transported safely, the Dixie insurgents buried it in a secret location, which was lost when a sudden illness struck and killed every one of the rebels.

Gus was given a piece of a treasure map by a dying drifter and later discovered the other half belonged to Kate Sanders, owner and operator of a diner in San Angela, Texas.

Gus, Lizzy and Kate had plenty to do before Junior returned. The attack in Fort Worth told them the sooner they left the better. First, however, they needed to gather supplies for their six-hundred-mile journey. They needed a wagon, a team of horses and a guide.

Junior and Gus felt a guide was a wasteful expense because they thought they could find their way to Denver easily. Kate, however, insisted.

“Listen, I’m the senior member of this troupe,” she said. “You’re all old enough to make decisions on your own. This one, I’m making for me.”

“But Gus and Junior say we don’t need a guide,” naive and impressionable Lizzy argued.

“Maybe they don’t; I do!” she replied.

“Do you not trust us,” Gus asked.

“Don’t be silly, young man. You know I trust you implicitly, but have you forgotten what all we’ve been through. We’ve survived or outsmarted outlaws, Confederate sympathizers, a sneaky federal agent and the darn KKK.

“I don’t want to be looking over my shoulder the whole way to Denver or riding into an ambush. The closer we get to Oklahoma, the more susceptible we will be to Indian attack. I’d feel safer with a guide to show us the way and provide an extra hand if we run into trouble.”

“You don’t think I can fend off an Indian attack with my slingshot?” said a smiling McIntyre as he pulled the well-worn pea-shooter from his hip pocket.

Kate laid her arms across her chest and looked at the seventeen-year-old with amusement and said, “I admit you are a deadly shot, but the pebbles you shoot from that contraption don’t stand a chance against a bullet. I think you know that.”

“I do. I was just kidding,” Gus said. “If you want a guide, let’s find one. And you promised you would teach me to shoot a pistol as well as you do. Maybe we should tend to that before we leave, too.”

“I want to learn, too, Mama!” Lizzy chimed in.

“Well, then, I reckon we’ll need to purchase some pistols and a heap of ammunition,” her mother said. “When we do, maybe we can learn something about what kind of guides are available here in

Dallas.”

“Let’s do it,” Gus said.

* * *

BY 1880, DALLAS HAD become a business hub for the central part of the state. Population had soared to 10,000 and neighboring Fort Worth had 6,600 residents. Its streets were busy with traffic during the day and its many bars and saloons overflowed with cowboys once the sun disappeared. Guns were readily available on almost every street.

The two women and Gus stopped at Miller’s Mercantile & Haberdashery on Main Street and found the pistols and ammunition they sought.

Kate kept her Army Colt in her purse or her saddlebag. It belonged to her father, and she wasn’t ready to part with it. It had been converted from cap and ball to metallic cartridge and its .44-caliber load would stop any man and most animals.

She was sold on the Colt models. She and the storekeeper talked Gus into the new Colt double-action, central fire, six-shot revolver. Gus chose the .38-caliber Model, called “Lightning” because it was lighter and easier to draw than its predecessors. A similar model, called “Thunder,” carried a .41-caliber payload.

“I don’t think you can go wrong with either model,” the store clerk said. “I heard tell Billy the Kid and John Wesley Hardin put all their faith in the more powerful of the two. The Lightning will be perfect for you if you are new to handguns.”

It felt comfortable in Gus’ hand and it didn’t take much for him to be convinced. A nod from Kate was all he needed. Gus spun it on his finger, smiled and said, “I’ll take it, along with a dark brown holster to carry it in.”

Lizzy insisted on having a pistol, too. She had shot her mother’s

rifle many times but, like Gus, had no experience with a handgun. Her mother convinced her to get a small pocket pistol that was easier for a woman to conceal.

“Let me show you this Pepperbox,” Miller said. “I think you’ll like it. It’s got a revolving barrel and dispenses a .31 caliber bullet, much like the Lightning your friend just bought.”

“That’s perfect,” Kate said. “Both guns use the same size shell. You’ll have the rifle nearby at all times as we make our way to Denver. Keep this *senorita* pistol hidden and loaded for use at close range, like when them varmints tried to kidnap you.”

“Oh mother, must you keep reminding me?” Lizzy hissed.

“Oh, you poor child,” the store clerk said. “Is it safe to say you were rescued and returned to your family unharmed?”

“Twere these two who did the rescuin?” Lizzy said, “and I thank them for their courage every single day.”

The clerk nodded smartly and asked if they would need anything else.

“We’re heading to Denver soon,” Kate said. “So, we’ll need several boxes of shells for these two new pistols, two boxes of shells for my Army Colt and some kindly advice.”

“I’m here for all my customers, but my advice comes with no guarantees,” he replied.

“We’re looking for a guide to join us on our trip north. Do you know of anyone who might be reliable and willing?”

“I’m sorry, I don’t,” Miller said, “but I can point you in the right direction. Go on down to the stable. Most days, you’ll find an old-timer sitting on a bench out front. His name’s Corncob...”

“C-O-R-N-C-O-B!” all three declared at once.

“Never seen him without that pipe in his mouth,” Miller said.

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“So, that’s what everybody calls him. He’s a seasoned veteran of the Indian Wars. If he can’t help you, he’ll know someone who can.”

“Is that Stuart’s Livery, just down the way?” Gus asked.

“Sure is!” Miller replied. “He can be cantankerous at times, but he is honest and trustworthy. He’ll be able to help y’all.”

“I think I recall an old guy sitting in front of the stable,” Gus said looking at Kate and winking.

She paid Miller for her daughter’s pocket pistol and thanked the storeowner. Then, she turned to Gus and said, “Don’t go winking at me like you know something I don’t, Gus McIntyre. If that dirty-rotten, sneaky devil is still in town, I might shoot him with Lizzy’s new pistol.”

“I’m sure our federal agent friend has gone off to some new assignment,” the teenager said. “We’re of little interest to him now that the puzzle of Maximilian’s lost treasure has been solved.”

“Well, let’s go see,” Kate said, and they all charged out the door, armed more heavily than they were when they entered.