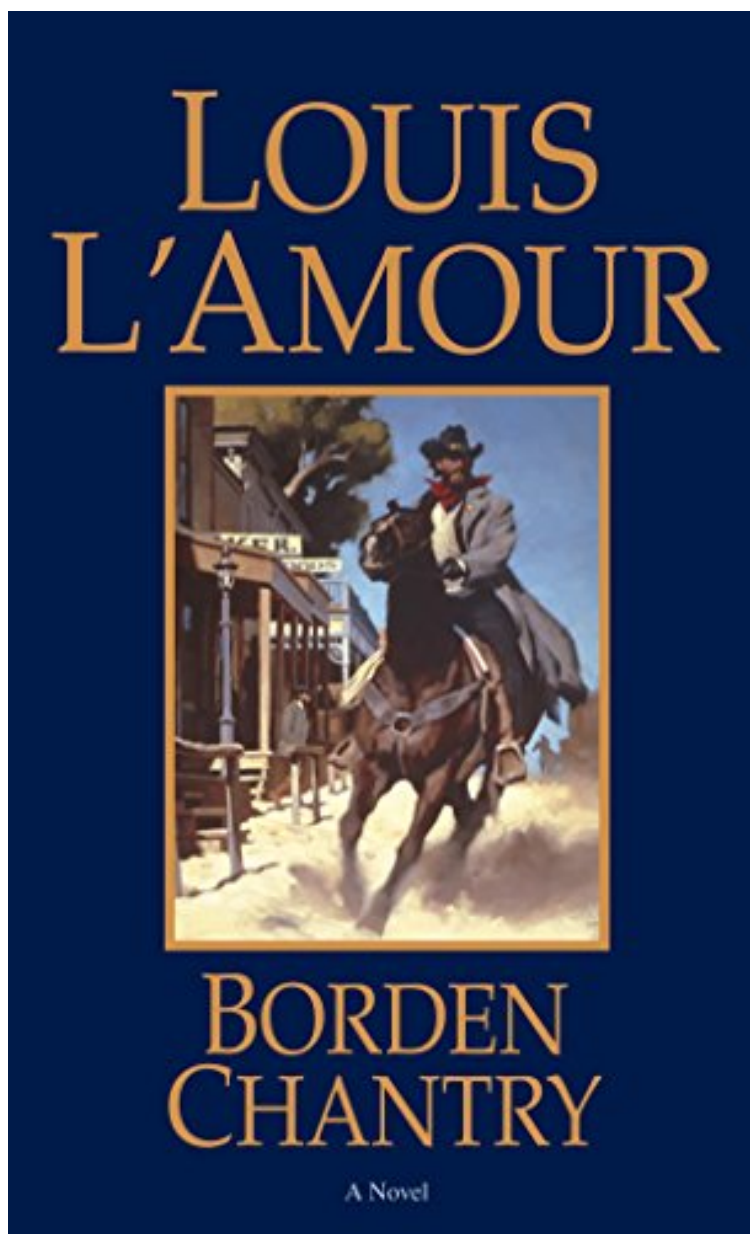


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## Borden Chantry



*Par Louis L'Amour*  
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### Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe marshal's name was Borden Chantry. Young, lean, rugged, he's buried a few men in this two-bit cow town every single one killed in a fair fight. Then, one dark, grim day a mysterious gunman shot a man in cold blood. Five grisly murders later, Chantey was faced with the roughest assignment of his life find that savage, trigger-happy hard case before he blasts apart every man in town... one by bloody one.ExtraitChapter OneDawn came like a ghost to the silent street, a gray, dusty street lined with boardwalks, hitching rails and several short lengths of water trough. False-fronted buildings alternated

with others of brick or stone, some with windows showing goods for sale, some blank and empty. A door slammed, a well pump came to life, complaining in rusty accents, then a rooster crowed . . . answered by another from across the town. Into the end of the street rode a lone cowboy on a crow-bait horse. He saw the sign of the Bon-Ton Restaurant, and turned toward it, then his horse shied and he saw the body of a man lying beside the walk. He glanced at it, dismounted, then tied his horse at the rail. He tried the restaurant door and had started to turn away when the sound of footsteps drew him back. The door opened and a pleasant voice said, "Come in. There's coffee, breakfast ready in a few minutes." "I ain't in no hurry." The cowboy straddled a chair, accepting the coffee. "Dead man out in the street." "Again? Third this week. You just wait until Saturday. Saturday night's when they let the wolves howl. You stick around." "I seen it here and yonder. Ain't figurin' on it. I'm ridin' over to Carson an' the steam cars." He jerked his head toward the street. "You seen him?" "No . . . don't aim to. I seen a dead man. I seen two dozen of them, time to time. Ain't nothin' about bein' dead pleases me. Some drunken fight, no doubt. Happens all the time." A woman came along the street, her heels clicking on the boardwalk. She passed the dead man, glanced back, then turned her head away and walked on to the post office. A man crossing the street turned aside and bending over the dead man took the head by the hair and turned the face around. "Him? Prob'ly had it comin'," he said, and walked on. Down the street another door slammed and somebody sang, off-key, of the streets of Laredo. Another pump started to squeak. Finally the woman emerged from the post office, glanced at the body, then went to the door of the marshal's office and rapped vigorously. "Borden? Borden? Are you in there?" A tall, young man came to the door, slipping a suspender over his shoulder. "What's the matter, Prissy? You outa stamps?" "There's a dead man lying in the street, Borden Chantry, and it's a disgrace. It . . . why, you should be ashamed! And you call yourself a marshal!" "Wasn't even here last night, ma'am. I was clean over on the Picketwire. Prob'ly just some drunken shootin'." "No matter what it was, Borden Chantry, you get that body out of the street! What's this town coming to, anyway? Dead bodies lying around, shootings and stabbings every night. You call yourself a marshal!" "No, ma'am, I don't. The city council does. I only figured to be a rancher until that norther came along. Why, I was fixin' to be a rich man come spring!" "You an' how many others? You get that body up, Borden, or I'll have the committee on you." Borden Chantry chuckled. "Now, now, Prissy, you wouldn't do that, would you? Why, those old biddies--" "Hush your mouth, Borden! If they heard you speak of them like that, why--!" She turned around and went back to the post office. A tall, handsome man with sandy hair stopped on the walk across the street. "What's the matter, Bord? You in trouble?" "Seems like. There's a body in the street an' our postmistress is reading the riot act over it. You'd think she'd never seen a dead man . . . at her age." "Less you say about age to her, the better off you'll be, Bord." He glanced at the body. "Who is it? Some drunk?" "Prob'ly. I never did see so many men couldn't handle liquor. They get to drinkin' that block an' tackle whiskey and right away there's trouble." "Block an' tackle whiskey?" "Sure," Chantry chuckled at the old joke. "One drink an' vou'll walk a block an' tackle anything!" "Had breakfast. Bord? You get him off to the barn an' come on in. I'll stake you to some ham and eggs." "All right, Lang. You just hold your horses. I'll get Big Injun. He'll tote him off for me." Langdon Adams crossed the walk and entered the Bon-Ton, seating himself at a table near the window. It was a small town but a good town, and he was at home here. It was one place he really wanted to stay, for despite the occasional brawls between cowmen and miners, it was a pleasant enough town. He watched the old Indian back a buckboard up to the hitching rail and then saw Borden Chantry and the Indian load the dead man into the back. The Indian drove off and Borden dusted his hands off and came inside. A fat, buxom woman came in from the kitchen. "Here! You boys start on this. Ed's fixin' some more ham an' eggs. Why, we had a cowboy in here this morning that et enough for three! I never did see such a man!" Borden Chantry walked through to the kitchen and poured water from a bucket into a wash-pan and rinsed his hands. "Who was he?" Ed turned from the fire, spatula in hand. "Know him?" "Never saw him before, Ed. Nice-lookin' feller, though. He surely doesn't look the part." Borden Chantry walked between the tables to the one near the window. Langdon Adams looked up, smiling. "Well, how does it feel to be marshal of a cowtown?" "Don't care much for it, Lang. I'd rather be ranching, but I will say the city fathers were mighty nice to offer me the job. I was really wiped out." "You and how many others? I never did see so many big men become small overnight. I was lucky. I hadn't many cattle and they were down yonder in the breaks and out of the wind. I don't think I lost over three or four head." "Neither did Blossom. That widow-woman makes about as few mistakes as anybody I know. She trimmed her herds down, sold off all her scrub stuff, only kept good, sturdy stock that could last through, and they did." "She's a fine woman." Borden glanced at his friend. "You really shinin' up to her? Can't says I blame you. She's a mighty pretty woman, and she's got the best ranch

left around here. And if you buy the old Williams place--""I haven't bought it yet. I'm not even sure if I want it.""What? If you had that ranch, right next to hers, and then you two got married, you'd have about thirty sections of the best grazing in the state all to yourselves."Ed brought the ham and eggs himself, then refilled their cups. He sat down, straddling a chair. "You catch that horse thief, Borden?""Uh-huh. He made him a good run, but I got him. He stole those two mares of Hyatt's. He couldn't have done worse. Why, there isn't two horses in the state look like them, or have their quality. Worst of it was, ever'body in this part of the country knows those mares. Hyatt Johnson's talked them up so much, and showed them around . . . A man would have to be a damn fool or a stranger to steal them.""Well, which was he?""A stranger. He surely doesn't talk like any damn fool," Chantry commented. "I come up on this camp just shy of daybreak and waited until he rolled out of bed and went into the brush. Then I just stepped up and taken his gun belt and rifle and set there a-waitin' when he come back. He was mighty upset.""Anybody got away since you been marshal, Bord?" Ed asked curiously."No . . . but there ain't been but four or five I had to go after. A man steals something, I try to get him. If a man kills somebody and then cuts and runs, I take in after him and bring him back for a hearing. If a man tried to prosecute every man who has a shooting or a knifing against him, there'd be nobody in town but the preacher, an'--""Preacher?" Ed scoffed. "You just don't know the preacher. He's had him a few scraps here and there.""Well . . . I don't know about that. As long as it's a stand-off fight, nobody cares, and I certainly don't feel like trying to bring a man before a judge when the jury will surely turn him loose. Killing a man in a fair fight is about the safest thing you can do around here.""Want to take a ride down to my place, Bord? Might get some wild turkeys.""No . . . no, thanks, Lang. I got to see to this body. Get him identified and bury him, if there's no relatives.""How many have relatives that show up?" Lang asked."One in ten. If you find out where their family's at they usually just say to bury him and send them whatever he left . . . which isn't much after a night or two boozing it up down to Henry's.""Why bother? Seems a kind of thankless job to me. Just so as they get a Christian burial it should be enough. The town can't afford it.""Costs only a coupla bucks, Lang. A blanket to bury him in if he hasn't one of his own, and somebody to dig the grave. Comes to that, I've dug nine graves so far this season, dug 'em myself."They ate in silence. After a moment, Langdon Adams asked, "Bord, have you thought of going to Hyatt Johnson for a loan? To get started again, I mean. He knows you're a good cattleman, and he just might come up with the money.""You've got to be joking. Money goes into that bank of Hyatt's. It doesn't come out. Anyway, I'll make my own start when I can. I won't be beholden to any man, nor work half of my life to pay no banker."The door opened and a short, wiry man slouched in, unshaven, the hair under his narrow-brimmed hat uncombed and still showing fragments of straw from the barn where he had slept.He sat down at a table, almost falling into the chair, then crossed his arms and leaned his head on his arms.Ed came in and put a cup of coffee in front of him. "Johnny? Here she is. Y' look like y' need it. Drink up."Johnny lifted his head and stared at the chef. "Thanks, Ed. Been a long time since the ol' Slash Seven days.""It surely has. You want some flapjacks, Johnny?"The drunk shook his head. "Stomach wouldn't hold 'em. Maybe later, Ed. Thanks."He gulped the last of his coffee and staggered out to the street.Ed looked over at them. "Y' wouldn't know it now, but that there was the best puncher in this country when I come in here. That was six year back. He could ride anything wore hair, and was a better than fair hand with a rope, but he just can't handle whiskey."Top hand. Any outfit be glad to have him on the payroll. Now he couldn't get a job anywheres.""Does he ever pay for the grub you give him?" Langdon asked skeptically. "I didn't see any money.""He doesn't need it here," Ed replied shortly. "I like Johnny. He lent me a hand time an' again when I first hit this country, and never mentioned it."He was in a poker game, settin' around a blanket with some other punchers. I was sort of standin' by. Flat broke, no eatin' money. No job."I ast them if any knew where there was work, and they said no, an' I said I had to find a job pretty quick for I was sure enough broke."Johnny, he just reached over to his stack of money and taken off two or three bills and handed 'em to me. "There's eatin' money till you make it," he said. I made out to thank him an' he just waved me off."A couple of days later he slipped me three bucks on the street, and when I got a job, I paid him back.""I know," Borden Chantry said, "Johnny was a good man . . . one of the best."Langdon Adams pushed back his chair. "If you change your mind, Bord, come on out. We could shoot some turkeys and I'd show you the place.""Maybe. I haven't seen Bess yet. I came in late and rather than wake them up I slept in the office. If I come in late and wake her up she doesn't get back to sleep."Adams went out, and Ed brought a cup of coffee to the table. "Got any idea who that dead man was?""No, Ed. Some drunken cowboy, I guess. They will drink too much and get into arguments with the miners. Some of those Mexicans are tough . . . And then there's so many drifters coming through. Since the war there's a lot of footloose men who can't seem to find a

place to light."As long as they shoot each other, nobody much cares, at least so long as it's a fair fight. Nobody likes murder or back-shooting, but there hasn't been one of those around here in years." "Not since George Riggins was marshal. He had one . . . least, I always figured it for murder. Far as that goes, Helen Riggins always figured the marshal was murdered." "I wasn't around when that happened." "Rock fell on him.

He was ridin' some rough country out yonder, an' was close under a cliff. Three days before they found him." "That dead man . . . did you see him around?" "If it's the same one, he came in here to eat. Quiet man." Ed scowled. "Borden, that man didn't size up like no trouble-hunter. Quiet man, like I say. He sat alone, ate his meal and left." "Pay for it?" "Twenty-dollar gold piece. I give him change." Ed pushed back his chair and got up. "I got to clean up. Dot ain't comin' in today. Headache or somethin'. Sure is hard to get help . . . women-folks is always ailin' when you need 'em most." Borden Chantry walked out on the street. He should go home, let Bess know he was back, anyway. She always worried whenever he rode out after outlaws, but so far it had proved less dangerous than handling wild horses or longhorns. He'd go home, but first he'd stop by the old barn and have a look at the dead man. He didn't care for the job, but it was his to do, and he had to make a show of doing it. He told himself that, yet at the same time he knew he had never done anything just for show. He was no marshal. He'd never figured on being a law officer, but as long as they'd given him the job he'd do the best he could. Presentation de l'diteur The marshal's name was Borden Chantry. Young, lean, rugged, he's buried a few men in this two-bit cow town every single one killed in a fair fight. Then, one dark, grim day a mysterious gunman shot a man in cold blood. Five grisly murders later, Chantey was faced with the roughest assignment of his life find that savage, trigger-happy hard case before he blasts apart every man in town... one by bloody one.