

AWARD BOOKS



A918X 60¢



AN EXCITING
"Man With No Name"
WESTERN

The gun-ready hero
of "For A Few Dollars More"
returns in a hit film—now a blazing novel

**THE
GOOD**



JOE MILLARD

**THE
BAD**



**THE
UGLY**



THE UNHOLY THREE

THE GOOD ONE—The Man With No Name, a bounty hunter who rode out after the biggest prize, whether it was a man with a price on his head, or a fortune with an army on its trail.

THE BAD ONE—Sentenza, the hired-killer whose name was known and feared from Texas to the Tetons. He looked like a circuit-riding preacher, but he struck with the deadly precision of a demon from hell.

THE UGLY ONE—Tuco, the bandit, who was disgraced by the small reward offered for his capture. He dreamed of becoming a truly notorious outlaw, famous for vile deeds and villainous crimes.

Together they blazed a crooked trail across the war-torn southwest. A trail of terror and deceit that criss-crossed enemy lines as the three men changed (and exchanged) roles, donning Confederate gray or Union blue stripped from the dead or the dying, moving relentlessly in ever-narrowing circles upon the golden magnet that drew them to Sad Hill—knowing, even as they rode, that if three men got there, only one would live to ride away!

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

JOE MILLARD



AWARD BOOKS
NEW YORK



TANDEM BOOKS
LONDON



First printing 1967

**© Copyright Produzioni Europee Associate SAS, 1967
All Rights Reserved
Released through United Artists Corporation,
a Transamerica Company**

**Award Books are Published by
Universal Publishing and Distributing Corporation
235 East 45th Street, New York, N.Y. 10017**

**Tandem Books are Published by
Universal-Tandem Publishing Company, Ltd.
33 Beauchamp Place, London SW 3, England**

Manufactured in the United States of America

**The Good,
The Bad
And
The Ugly**

Chapter 1

THE SOLDIER in the Union blue uniform closed his telescope with a snap. He bellied carefully back from his high rocky perch, slid and scrambled down the sheer rock wall of the pass. In the deep shadows at its base he broke into a circle of lounging Union troops.

A bearded lieutenant rose to his feet.

"Company coming?"

"A detail of Johnny Rebs is heading for the pass—a troop of cavalry escorting a single open army wagon."

The lieutenant stroked his beard thoughtfully.

"Sounds like a Confederate paywagon. Tomorrow being the first of March and the Texans occupying Santa Fe—Fort Craig will be figuring on a payday." He grinned. "There'll be a lot of mighty disappointed *cantiña* girls in Sante Fe tomorrow night. Take your places, men, and keep low. Let them get well inside the pass, then hit 'em from both sides hard."

■ The Confederate detail had inched north and westward across the savage land for endless days. The men had been hammered by the relentless sun and strangled by the clouds of fine adobe dust that

smoked up from the wagon wheels and from the hoofs of the mules that drew it. The vultures had followed the detail, wheeling in tireless circles against the brassy sky. They seemed to know that soon their patience would be rewarded.

The wagon was an open army buckboard. Stenciled on its side was the legend: 4TH CAVALRY-C.S.A.—Confederate States of America. The wagon bed was nearly filled by a rough pine chest, about the size and proportions of a military coffin. An older man named Baker sat on the chest, facing backward, a long rifle cradled in his arms.

The driver was a swarthy Texican named Mondrega. On the seat beside him sat a guard named Jackson, his rifle across his lap. The men's Confederate gray uniforms were thick with dust and blotched with dark patches of sweat. Their cavalry escort rode in a wide circle, completely surrounding the wagon. Two more troopers rode a mile or so ahead as scouts.

The guard, Jackson, tilted his canteen, choked and cursed wrathfully as the sun-heated water burned his blistered lips.

"Damn the goddam sun and the goddam dust and the goddam army. As a kid I used to wonder what hell was like. Now that I've seen New Mexico, my curiosity's satisfied."

Mondrega grinned.

"If you think this is hot in February you should ride across it in July, *señor*."

The old man, Baker, growled over his shoulder, "I'm damned if I'd ride through it again, even if I was froze in a cake of ice. Nobody but a knot-head general or a politician would be dumb enough to fight over a hunk of desert and mountains."

"Ah! but our General Sibley is not dumb, *señor*," Mondrega said. "He knows that under those mountains, and out west in California, lie the great fields of gold. The Yankees will have no more money to pay for the war if we can capture those."

The cavalry escort had been closing in around the wagon, adding the dust from their mounts to the cloud that never lifted. Jackson was the first to become aware of the tightening circle.

He coughed and raised his voice. "Hey, dammit, Sarge. Wasn't we choking to death fast enough on our own dust to suit you? Get back a ways with yours."

The leather-faced sergeant reined his horse closer to the wagon.

"Which would you rather have in your face, soldier—a cloud of dust or a cloud of Minie balls from Yankee rifles?" He pointed ahead. "Them's the Sangre de Cristo mountains. On the other side of 'em is Santa Fe. To get through, we got to take Glorietta Pass and Apache Canyon, the best spots in the Territory for a Yankee ambush."

"Aw, hell," Baker growled. "Why would Yankees waste good lead on a flea-bitten handful like us?"

The sergeant's jaw dropped. "Hell, man—don't you know what's inside that chest your backside is planted on, soldier?"

"They never told us," Baker said. "They never tell a foot soldier nothing except to do what he's ordered on the double."

"Man, that chest is full of gold dollars—two hundred thousand of 'em. That's the whole pay and forage funds of the Fourth Cavalry, plus a sight more they aim to spread around to buy us some important

friends. So you guard that chest, soldier. You guard it real damn good."

The abrupt transition from blazing sunlight to the deep gloom of the pass left the detail momentarily blinded. Jackson, who had been riding with his eyes squeezed to thin slits against the glare, was the first to recover his vision. His gaze roved across the forbidding rock walls and caught the barest flicker of movement. Brief as it was, he caught the unmistakable blue of a Yankee uniform sleeve.

He yelled in wordless alarm and flung himself back off the seat into the wagon bed. He was still falling when the walls erupted smoke and flame and the deafening thunder of gunfire. A searing pain streaked along his ribs. Above the racketing of guns rose wild yelling and the scream of a wounded horse.

Mondrega toppled, landed heavily on Jackson and lay still. Baker rolled off the end of the chest and slammed down on the two of them, squirming and uttering liquid, choking sounds.

Jackson felt the wagon lurch and leap ahead as the terrified mules bolted. The echoing tumult fell away behind and rapidly faded. When he could no longer hear any sound of battle Jackson dragged himself out from under the inert figures of his comrades.

The mules, nearing exhaustion from their blind dash, were slowing down. He managed to catch the flying reins and whipsaw the team to a panting halt. He saw that the run had taken them out of the narrow pass and into a broad valley. For the moment he could detect no sound or sign of pursuit.

He scrambled back into the wagon bed to exam-

ine his companions. Mondrega was unconscious from a bullet crease across his skull and bled from a flesh wound in one arm. Baker was in bad shape. A rifle ball had gone through one lung and he was coughing up a steady froth of blood. He needed medical aid—and fast.

Jackson's own wound proved no more than a painful crease in which the blood was already congealing. He got to his feet, using the chest for support, and suddenly full awareness of its contents hit him. *Two hundred thousand dollars in gold . . .*

His mouth dried out and a choking sensation caught his throat. If no one else survived the ambush—no one else could know what became of that fortune. He began to shake.

Abruptly he became aware of the background. To the right the entire slope was covered by the most immense cemetery he had ever seen. The slope was crowded with graves as far as the eye could reach. Each grave was marked by a plain wooden headboard. This could only be Sad Hill Cemetery, the military burying ground begun during the Mexican War, augmented by the Indian troubles and now being swollen by the fruits of the War Between the States.

Partway up the slope gaped the raw scar of a newly dug grave, not yet occupied. Jackson lunged up to the wagon seat and used the ends of the reins to lash the mules into movement.

Beside the open grave he sprang down and lowered the tailgate of the wagon. He caught hold of the rope handle on the end of the chest and hauled with all his might, ignoring the pain that knifed

along his ribs as his wound reopened. The massive chest moved slowly—but it moved.

■ In the wagon bed the wounded Baker opened shock-dimmed eyes. He stared at the empty space where the chest had rested. Then slowly, agonizingly, he rolled his head far enough to see past the back of the wagon to endless rows of marked graves.

He became dimly aware of the sound of frenzied scraping and the hollow thump of pebbles and earth on wood. It was coming from somewhere close by but the sideboard of the wagon blocked his line of sight. He tried to raise himself up enough to see but the effort proved too much. With a low, gurgling moan he fell back into unconsciousness.

Mondrega's eyes flickered open at Baker's movement, stared blankly around for a moment, then closed again.

■ The court martial, held in Santa Fe's Palace of Governors was little more than a formality. A lieutenant testified to finding the entire cavalry escort dead in the pass and bringing in the bodies for identification and burial.

Jackson was next on the stand. His story was brief and convincing. He had been the first one hit and knocked from the seat. Then Mondrega and Baker, in succession, had taken bullets and fallen across him, drenching him with their blood.

"Pretty soon the shooting stopped and the Yankees came to the wagon. I kept still and they thought we were all corpses, I guess. They hauled

out the chest and were starting to chop it open when something scared the mules and they bolted.”

“Was there no pursuit, Private Jackson?”

“No, sir. I guess they figured a wagonload of corpses wasn't worth the trouble. After a while I got loose and got the wagon stopped. I did what I could for the others and found the trail to Santa Fe. That's all I know, sir.”

Mondrega, one arm in a sling and his head swathed in a turban of bandages, had listened intently to Jackson's testimony. He had nothing to add on the stand.

“I saw Private Jackson falling. Then I was hit and fell on him. That's all I remember until I awoke here in the infirmary.”

A surgeon followed him to the stand.

“Private Baker is still in critical condition and unable to appear or testify. He is out of his head most of the time but in lucid moments he recalls only seeing the others go down and then receiving his own wound. In his delirium he appears to be obsessed with dying. He mumbles constantly of graves and graveyards.”

Mondrega started violently at the words. His eyes widened. He controlled himself with a visible effort and sat back, his expression carefully veiled.

The presiding officer struck the table with his gavel. “In the absence of evidence to the contrary, this court concludes that the two hundred thousand dollars fell into the hands of the enemy through no fault of Private Jackson. We hereby find him not guilty of any misconduct. Court dismissed.”

A short time later a sergeant appeared in the office of the colonel commanding. He saluted.

“Sir, it is my duty to report that Private Jackson is gone.”

“Gone? What do you mean—gone?”

“Right after the trial, sir, he gathered up all his personal belongings, stole the lieutenant’s horse and skedaddled.”

Chapter 2

HIS NAME—Sentenza—was known and feared from Texas to the Tetons. Some men crossed themselves at its mention. Others swung hastily to their horses and left the country. Still others reached for fat purses and smiled and prepared to pay off, thinking of enemies who would plague them no longer.

Sentenza was rangy, lean and hard. He possessed the lithe grace of a catamount. His wedge-shaped face was the color of old saddle leather. His high cheekbones set off eyes of palest brown. In his long blue frock coat—his habitual costume—he could be mistaken for a circuit-riding preacher until the coat fell open to reveal the most notorious gun in the West. It rested above his left hip, the butt slanting to the right for a lightning-fast cross-draw that no man had ever matched. It featured a custom made fourteen-inch barrel for balance and accuracy.

By profession Sentenza was a hired killer. His deadly skill was for sale to any man who could pay the price. It was said that he would gun down his own mother without a qualm if someone hired him for the task and Sentenza himself had never denied the charge. If he had ever known emotions they had long since burned to ashes. He neither loved nor hated. He only killed.

He smiled seldom. Sometimes, in fanciful mo-

ments, he thought of himself as already dead. The thought sharpened his enjoyment of living.

He dismounted in front of the adobe ranch house. Leaving his handsome coal-black horse at the worn hitchrail, he stood for a moment, looking at the house.

The door was open. After a moment he walked in on silent feet.

A pretty Mexican woman was in the act of setting a wooden bowl of beans and a chunk of crusty bread before a young boy in his teens, obviously her son. She and the boy looked up, startled at the sudden appearance of Sentenza.

He stared at them, silent and unsmiling, until a look of fear came into the woman's eyes. She caught the boy's arm and drew him out of the chair. Watching the stranger from frightened eyes, she backed away, pulling the boy with her. She darted through an inner door.

A faint mutter of voices reached Sentenza. Then a swarthy man stepped into the room. He studied Sentenza, frowning faintly.

"What may I do for you, *señor*?"

"You're Mondrega?"

The swarthy man nodded.

"And I know you, too, now. You are the gunman they call Sentenza."

"My reputation has traveled far," the killer said with a dead smile. "But for that matter, so have I—and without food. I thank you for your generous hospitality."

He sat down at the boy's place, broke off a piece of the bread and began to eat the beans with a

wooden spoon. The other watched him steadily from wary eyes.

After a moment he said, "Baker sent you, didn't he?"

Sentenza nodded, his mouth full of beans and bread.

Slowly Mondrega pulled back a chair and sat down opposite the visitor. He put both palms flat on the plank table and bent forward.

"Tell Baker I have already told him everything I know. Tell him all I want is to be left in peace, understand? It will do him no good to keep on bothering me. I don't know anything more than I've already told him about that damned boxful of gold dollars."

There was a barely perceptible break in the rhythm of Sentenza's chewing. He swallowed heavily.

"How many gold dollars?"

"Two hundred thousand, they said."

Sentenza's pale eyes narrowed.

"No wonder Baker was close-mouthed about this business. Now I know why the names seemed familiar. The missing Confederate cavalry fund. Tell me more about the dollars, Mondrega."

"How can I?" the Mexican said, with a trace of irritation. "I was unconscious almost the entire time."

"Almost?"

Mondrega spread his hands. "I must have come to for a moment once. In my mind is a picture of graves, thousands of them on a hillside. I thought it was only another of the crazy dreams until I learned at the hearing that Baker also had babbled of graves.

But Baker already knows that because I told him. I swear I have told no one else until now, *señor*."

"Baker knows something else, too. He knows that Jackson came to see you last week. Is it true Jackson came here? Or is Baker wrong about that?"

"He's not wrong. Jackson did come here."

"What name is he using now? What does he call himself?"

Mondrega's eyes narrowed.

"What makes you think he has changed his name?"

"Because I haven't found him. When I look for someone I always find him—eventually. That's what I'm usually paid for. And Baker will also want to know why Jackson came here, what he wanted to know and what he said about that box."

"He wanted the same thing Baker wants—to find out how much I know and to make sure I would not talk."

The ghost of a smile touched the gunman's lips.

"By some strange coincidence, Baker sent me to make sure of the same thing."

The silence grew. Beads of perspiration began to dot Mondrega's forehead.

He asked hoarsely, "How much is Baker paying you to kill me?"

"Five hundred dollars." Sentenza pursued a last bean around the bottom of the bowl. "It's my standard price for easy jobs like this. But I'm waiting for that name you're going to tell me first—Jackson's new name."

"Carson. He calls himself Bill Carson now." Mondrega rose, holding out his palms. "But wait, *señor*."

He went to a carved chest, opened a drawer and

brought out a heavy drawstring purse. It clinked dully as he threw it on the table in front of Sentenza.

"Here is a thousand dollars—all the money I have. It is for you, *señor*. Take it."

The gunman opened the purse and spilled a pile of coins.

"Half in gold, too," he murmured. "Not bad at all. But this is double my fee, Mondrega."

"For two jobs, *señor*. I know now that I will never live in peace while Baker is alive. That is your second job."

"Fair enough," Sentenza said briskly. He scooped the coins back into the purse and stowed it under the frock coat. Under cover of the table the long-barreled pistol slid into his hand, tilting slightly upward. "Since you're hiring me, Mondrega, there is something you should know about me. I have one rule I will never break. When anyone pays me to do a job—I always do that job."

The gun slammed twice. Mondrega was hurled backward and down by the heavy slugs. Sentenza rose to his feet without haste and holstered his gun. He broke off a piece of bread and put it into his mouth, chewing with relish.

The young boy, Mondrega's son, ran down a stairway, carrying a rifle taller than himself. He was trying to level and cock it when Sentenza shot him in the head.

The killer blew smoke from the long barrel, holstered the pistol and strolled out. The woman's keening screams followed him out. He shook his head.

"Women," he murmured aloud to some part of him that was not quite dead, although it felt noth-

ing, "get too emotional over small change. She is still young. There must be hundreds of lusty men in the Territory who would be overjoyed to father more sons for her."

■ The man, Baker, awoke sharply in the inky blackness of his room. His hand slid under the pillow to close on the butt of his pistol.

"Who is it? Who is in my room?"

The effort brought on a paroxysm of coughing, a legacy of his wound. A harsh, scraping sound came close by. A match flared to light, glinting on high cheekbones and pale sorrel eyes.

"It's you." Baker struggled to lift himself upright. "Did you find him? Did he talk?"

Sentenza finished lighting an oil lamp. He replaced the chimney and stood looking down at Baker.

"Yes to both questions. He told me something that will interest you—and something else that interests me."

"Get on with it," Baker wheezed impatiently.

"The name Jackson is hiding under now is Carson—Bill Carson."

"Ah. Go on. What else did you learn?"

"Something you forgot to mention. About a chest full of gold army dollars that somehow disappeared. That's the part of his talk that interests me."

"All right, all right. What more did he say?"

"Isn't that enough? But you can stop worrying about his tongue. He will never wag it to anyone on this earth again."

"Good, good—" Baker gasped. He fumbled under

the pillow and tossed a heavy purse to the gunman. "Here is your five hundred dollars, Sentenza. You earned it."

The killer tucked the purse away, turned as if to leave and then stopped.

"Oh, one thing you didn't ask about. I'll tell you anyway, so you'll understand what happens next. Mondrega gave me a thousand dollars—to get you off his back."

"What? Oh, that's a good one, eh? A thousand to kill me. Ho-ho, that's a real good joke."

"A rich one," Sentenza agreed. He stood over the bed, looking down. "But the funniest part of all is that when I accept a man's money, I always go through with my job. I took Mondrega's money, Baker."

Baker had only time to scream, "No, Sentenza—" before the soft pillow closed down on his face, cutting off his breath and voice.

His body thrashed feebly. His hands found a wrist like iron and clawed at it futilely.

Muffled by the pillow, the sound of the shot was little more than a dull thud. The figure on the bed thrashed for a moment, then went limp, stilled. Sentenza straightened and holstered the long-barreled pistol.

"A really funny joke," he murmured softly.

Chapter 3

TUCO, the *bandido*, who yearned to become notorious as Tuco the Terrible, was in an ebullient mood. He had spent a most lively, though tiring, night with a lady of infinitely varied talents and insatiable ardor. Better still, her husband had not interrupted the fun by returning home early and getting himself killed. Such lighter moments were all too rare in the life of a hard-working bandit.

His pleasant musings were interrupted by the sudden violent shying of his horse. A man had stepped from behind a high rock and stood blocking the narrow part of the trail. He was a stranger to Tuco, a thick-bodied, brutish figure with small, nervous eyes and a knife-scarred cheek. He wore his gun low, the holster tied down for a fast draw. His clawed hand hovered close to its worn butt.

Tuco's hand started toward his own gun and froze as the stranger growled, "Uh-uh. I wouldn't try it if I was you, friend. It just so happens there's three of us."

Two more men stepped into view. One was young and lath-thin, the other an older man with a unkempt tangle of whiskers. The scarred man jerked his head.

"Light down and step up a little. I want a closer look at that ugly face."

"You are no raving beauty yourself," Tuco snarled. But he swung down and reluctantly stepped a few paces closer to the trio. "If it's money you want, my saddlebags are empty."

"It figures. I've seen your face before—on a sheriff's poster. In fact, friend, it looks like the face of a man worth two thousand dollars in bounty."

"You could be right, friend," a new voice said from somewhere off to the side. "But yours doesn't look like the face of a man who's going to collect it."

Tuco and his visitors whirled. A stranger to Tuco was framed in a narrow gap between rocks. He stood tall—inches above six feet—lean and hungry. A line of pale blond hair showed above the weathered bronze of his face. A stubby Mexican *cigarro* jutted from a corner of his wide, unsmiling mouth. His face was without expression. Except for narrowed, glittering eyes, there was nothing sinister in his appearance but Tuco felt a sudden coldness brush his spine.

The tall man jerked his head at Tuco.

"Step back a little, ugly one, out of line of fire."

Tuco gulped and scrambled back to stand beside his horse. The scar-faced gunman cleared his throat noisily.

"I don't know who you are, mister, but it's plain you ain't too bright in the head. Nobody in his right mind would butt into our private business the way you just done."

"If I bother you," the tall man said pleasantly, "butt me out."

Everything happened so fast that Tuco was never afterward certain of the sequence. The three gunmen were no amateurs at their trade. Their

hands slapped down in practiced unison. The tall stranger's gun simply appeared in his hand, pressed tight against his hip and spewing sound, smoke and bullets. After the first shot the heel of his left hand fanned the hammer, getting off two more shots so close together that the sound was continuous and single.

Only one of the trio managed to get his own iron clear of its leather before he died.

Tuco gaped at the sprawled figures and suddenly thrust his hands behind him to hide their trembling. He turned dazed eyes to his rescuer.

"Thanks, amigo. You saved me from a most unpleasant dance at the end of a rough rope."

The thin stranger finished reloading without answering. He reached back among the rocks and led a saddled horse out to the trail. He swung into the saddle and sat looking down, studying Tuco without a trace of expression on his dark face.

"So you're worth two thousand dollars," he said thoughtfully. "Dead or alive."

"True," Tuco said sadly. "It is a disgrace—only two thousand for a man of my reputation. But out here the law is very tight-fisted with its bounties." A look of sudden alarm came over his face. "*Señor*—you wouldn't be thinking of turning me in yourself for such a miserable, stinking Judas price?"

"I haven't decided," the other said coldly. "We'll ride on together while I make up my mind."

Tuco shivered and swung into his saddle. He was tempted to dig in his spurs and try flight but from what he had witnessed he knew how hopeless his chances were.

He reined in beside the stranger. They jogged

along side by side, while the miles crept by. At last the lengthening silence began to get on the bandit's nerves.

He said, "Amigo, if you have faults, running off at the mouth is not one of them. Conversation makes a long trail seem shorter."

The other glanced at him, looked away without replying. Tuco moistened dry lips and tried again.

"At least, *señor*, since we ride together we can at least introduce one another. I am Tuco, the Bandit. You have surely heard of me. Everybody has heard of Tuco the Terrible. Eh?"

The expressionless face turned toward him again.

"No."

"No? Then one thing is sure. You are not from these parts if you have never heard of Tuco. From where do you hail, amigo?"

"Nowhere," the stranger said.

"A Man from Nowhere, eh? Very well. Your business is your business. I do not pry. But at least you have a name to call you. Whether it is yours or not is of no matter to me."

"I have no name."

"Look, Man From Nowhere With No Name," Tuco burst out with a touch of irritation. "Suppose I saw a cocked gun aimed at your back and you didn't know it was there. By the time I yelled, 'Man From Nowhere With No Name, look behind you—' you would be stone dead. So I will give you a name. Because of your hair, I will call you Whitey. So if you hear me yell, 'Whitey, behind you—' you will know I am not talking to my horse."

The other shrugged indifferently. Some miles far-

ther Tuco made one last attempt to open communications.

“You do not have the look of a cowman, farmer or an outlaw. What is your trade, amigo?”

The blond man turned and looked full into Tuco’s eyes. The ghost of a smile twitched his lips.

“Why,” he said softly, “I’m a bounty-killer. Let’s you and me make a deal.”

■ The yelling and swearing brought out most of the town to witness their arrival. The Man From Nowhere rode in front, leading Tuco’s horse. The bandit, bound hand and foot, was ignominiously draped across his saddle like a trussed chicken, head hanging down on one side, legs on the other. His private opinion of such treatment was clearly audible to anyone within miles.

“I’ll get you for this,” he howled. “I’ll see you dead of cholera, of rabies, of the black pox! Untie me! Untie me, you mangy son of a dog! Put me down! Listen, there’s still time. If you let me go and I’ll forgive you. If you don’t—I’ll see that the worms eat your eyes out, you whore’s by-blow!”

The lean stranger ignored both the gaping, grinning crowd on the board sidewalk and the uproar at his back. Tuco’s voice fell to a shrill whine.

“Damn it, Whitey, I feel sick. Take me down. I can’t stand it any longer. My head’s bursting with blood. Water, Whitey—water, in the name of—”

The parade—though not the tumult—came to a halt at the hitchrail in front of a building bearing the sign: SHERIFF’S OFFICE. The tall man swung

down, hoisted Tuco off his horse by his belt and dumped him unceremoniously on the board walk.

"Dog!" the bandit screeched. "Son of a saloon tramp. You're real tough with a man who's tied hand and foot, aren't you? Let's see you untie me if you've got the guts, you miserable seller of souls—"

His captor eluded a vicious kick with the bound feet and strode into the sheriff's office.

On the sidewalk, still bound, Tuco raged: "So you're afraid. Come back here, you stinking vulture—I'll kick your guts out—"

The lean man came out, followed by a grizzled sheriff carrying a reward poster. The sheriff squatted, caught the bandit by the hair and twisted his head around, comparing his face with the picture on the poster.

"So one louse becomes two," Tuco yelled. "Take your dirty paws off me, you polecat's brother. Roll that thing up and I'll tell you where you can stick it. To hell with sheriffs and those who give birth to them—"

The lawman nodded and stood up.

"It's him, all right. Come along, mister. I'll get the bounty money out of my safe."

"Judas," Tuco yowled. "Bastard offspring of a thousand bastards! If there's any justice in this world you'll never get to enjoy your blood money. The undertaker'll get it all. Feel good, don't you, sending a poor man who never hurt nobody to his death?"

The tall man came out, stuffing a wad of banknotes into his pocket. He mounted his horse, rode off.

The sheriff came out and cupped hands to his

mouth to bawl, "All right, folks, let's get a jury together here—on the double. Alex, you fix the noose and get the rope up on the hangin' tree while we're givin' this son of a bitch a fair trial."

Chapter 4

AT THE END of the street the Man With No Name reined in. He turned in the saddle to watch the eager crowd converge in front of the sheriff's office. Two men came out of the saloon, supporting a third who was having difficulty with his equilibrium. The bartender in a white apron followed them out, slamming the saloon door before galloping past to join the excitement. The rest of the street was deserted except for two horses drooping at the saloon hitch-rail.

The tall man reined around to the rail and leaned down to untie the two horses. He slapped their rumps with his hat.

"Get going, you jugheads. Clear out."

He watched them vanish beyond the last shanty, galloping wildly.

The livery stable was behind the row of false-fronts. Wagons and buggies were lined up before it and the corral at one side held a dozen or more unsaddled horses. A pimply attendant popped into sight as he rode up. The bounty-hunter scowled at him.

"How come you're not over at the sheriff's office with everybody else, watching the trial and hanging?"

"Hell and Maria, mister, nobody told me about no

hangin'. Is that what all the yellin' was about? I'd sure hate to miss it but—"

"Go along," the hunter said, swinging down. "I'll put up my own horse and be there in a minute."

"Geez, thanks, mister."

He took off at a gallop, arms flapping.

The hunter unbarred the corral gate and drove the penned horses out. A few well-aimed rocks sent them stampeding out into the bleak desert. He grinned faintly and led his own mount into a gap between buildings, dismounted and ground-reined the animal. He took his rifle from its scabbard and moved up to a point where he could see the street.

The trial was in its final stage. Tuco, mounted on his horse, his hands tied behind him, was the center of the mob's attention. A gaunt man in a black hat, obviously the judge, stood on a barrel, facing him. The sheriff held the bridle of Tuco's horse.

The judge held up his hands to quiet the crowd.

"All right, you're heard all the crimes this no-good bastard's committed. What's your verdict—guilty or not guilty? And don't no more than twelve of you answer. The law says a jury can't have no more than twelve men and we got to keep this trial legal."

A score of voices bellowed, "Guilty—hang the son—"

"So be it," the judge shouted above the uproar. "Let justice be done."

Tuco slumped in his saddle, dazed and silent as the sheriff led the horse to an ancient cottonwood. A noose dangled from a lower limb. A gaunt man wearing a deputy's badge rolled up another barrel and climbed on it to fit the noose over Tuco's head. The bandit began to whimper wordlessly while tears

rolled down his swarthy cheeks. The watching hunter chuckled softly and cocked his rifle.

The judge unfolded a long sheet of paper and perched steel-rimmed spectacles on his nose. "This here dee-fendant, previously wanted in fourteen counties of this Territory, has been found guilty of the crimes of murder, armed robbery of individuals, banks and post offices, the theft of sacred objects, arson of a Territorial prison, perjury, bigamy, desertion of family, incitement to prostitution, kidnaping, extortion, receiving stolen goods, passing counterfeit money, using marked cards and loaded dice, assault and battery against individuals, justices of the peace, county, district and Territorial officials. Have you any last word, you skunk?"

Tuco turned his head as far as the taut rope would permit.

"You left out rustling cattle."

The judge reddened. He waved his arms violently for silence.

"Uphold the dignity of this here court, damnit." He peered at his paper. "Therefore, accordin' to the powers vested in us, we sentence the accused here before us, Tuco Benedicto Pacifico Juan Maria Ramirez, to hang by the neck until dead, and may God have mercy on his soul—if any. Sheriff, proceed with your duty."

The sheriff raised his whip. At its stinging lash the horse would lunge from under Tuco, leaving him to dance at the end of the rope.

The hunter in the alley settled his left hand on the wall and rested the rifle across his arm. He sighted carefully.

The crack of the sheriff's whip was lost in the

thunder of the shot. The rope parted with a twang a foot above Tuco's head as the horse lunged forward, scattering the yelling crowd. The animal pounded down the street and out of town at a dead run before anyone could recover his wits and open fire on the bandit crouched over its neck.

The hunter ran to his own mount and set off, following the dwindling dust cloud of the bandit's horse. He rode at a leisurely gallop, unworried at the possibility of pursuit. It would take the sheriff and his posse at least the rest of the day to find and round up their own horses on foot.

■ At sundown they sat in a rendezvous, high in the mountains, dividing the stack of hundred-dollar bills. "Here's five for you and one, two, three, four, five for me. Another five for you and the rest for me makes it even shares."

Tuco pressed the banknotes to his cheek.

"You know, friend, for the first time in my life I could get to like a bounty-hunter."

"Your price should go up to at least three thousand after this stunt. We'd better skip a couple of counties and hit a sheriff who hasn't had time to hear about it yet. Our game'll get too risky when the news gets around."

"The world—" Tuco chuckled—"is divided in two. Some wear ropes around their necks and others cut them down." He rubbed his throat gingerly. "But do not forget, *señor*, that the neck inside the rope is mine. You speak of risk—but it is I who take that risk. You do nothing but shoot and ride away. That is why the next time I want a bigger share."

The hunter fixed Tuco with a cold, unwinking stare while he took out a stubby *cigarro* and struck a match. He took a long time about firing his smoke.

At last he said softly, "Raising your share means lowering mine, friend, and that could have unpleasant results. It could make me nervous and spoil my aim. I'm sure you would find that most uncomfortable, friend."

Tuco's eyes narrowed.

"Let me give you one warning. If you were to miss the rope you'd better be sure not to miss my head. I might still beat the noose. And any man who thinks to double-cross Tuco Ramirez and leave him alive understands nothing about Tuco—nothing at all."

Chapter 5

SENTENZA leaned against the corner of a harness shop and boredly watched the preparations for the hanging. He had seen—and meted out—violent death in too many forms to be thrilled by the sight of some poor devil kicking away his life at the end of a rope. He took out a yellow meerschaum pipe and packed it with exaggerated care.

Across the street a crowd of townspeople milled excitedly around the makeshift gallows hastily erected in front of the sheriff's office that morning. The condemned man, his hands tied behind him, had been hoisted onto his horse. He slumped dejectedly in the saddle while a sour-faced judge droned through an endless list of charges.

“. . . previously wanted in fourteen counties of this Territory . . . the accused here present, Tuco Benedicto Pacifico Juan Maria Ramirez . . .”

Sentenza had been lounging in the same place some two hours earlier when the outlaw was brought into town, kicking and cursing, flung across his saddle like a sack of grain. His captor, a tall, pale-haired bounty-hunter, had collected a three-thousand-dollar reward and departed without a word or a nod to anyone.

As he had ridden away he had glanced toward Sentenza. The hunter had carefully taken in the

frock coat, looked up and for a moment the two men's glances had met and locked. To Sentenza the hunter's eyes had carried the impact of a physical blow.

Watching the tall, lean figure ride on he had thought, *There goes probably the most dangerous man I have ever encountered . . .*

The observation left him without emotion. Dead men knew no challenges. Still without emotion, Sentenza smiled.

He stiffened suddenly at the rhythmic clatter of wood on wood and a voice calling his name. A grotesque travesty of a man was hurrying toward him along the board walk.

Both of the newcomer's legs had been amputated at the hips so that he was all torso and head and long arms. He gripped two blocks of wood which he used as crutches, slapping them onto the plank walk and swinging his abbreviated body between them. Awkward as his means of locomotion seemed, he dexterously threaded his way through the crowd of onlookers and approached Sentenza with remarkable speed.

"I've been waiting for you, Half-soldier," Sentenza said. "Did you get a line on Carson."

"Enough," the cripple said, "to know why you're looking for him and to be glad I'm not in his boots." He shook his head. "It's like something out of one of those dime novels, Sentenza." He peered around and lowered his voice. "A Confederate escort unit was caught in an ambush by Yankees and practically wiped out. Only three men got through alive—Mondrega, Baker and Jackson. What didn't get through was a chest full of gold dollars they were taking to

Santa Fe. There was a hearing and Jackson claimed the Yankees got the gold. With nobody to contradict him, Jackson was acquitted of stealing it. But get this—Jackson disappeared right after the hearing and turned up around here, calling himself Bill Carson.”

“Yes,” Sentenza said with a touch of impatience. “I know that much. What else did you find out? Where is Carson now? That’s what I want to know, man.”

“I can tell you that. He re-enlisted in another outfit and lost one eye in a skirmish with Colonel Canby’s Colorado Volunteers. You’ll know him when you see him by the black eyepatch he wears now. I couldn’t find out where he is right at the moment but I located someone who can. She’s a prostitute by the name of Maria. This Jackson-Carson lives with her when he’s not out in the field with his outfit.”

“Where do I find her?”

“Now, what in hell’s the name of that town? It’s an easy name, too.” He scratched his head, frowning then brightened. “Sant’ Ana—that’s it, Sentenza. Sant’ Ana.”

The gunman stooped and slipped a handful of coins into the cripple’s shirt pocket.

“You did a good job for me, Half-soldier. Adios, amigo.”

Sentenza leaned back against the wall, his sand-colored eyes rolled and remote. He had most of the answers now. Both Baker and Mondrega had recalled fleeting glimpses of innumerable graves—and what better hiding place for a chest of stolen gold than a grave? The only cemetery of any size in the region of Glorietta Pass, where the ambush oc-

curred, was the military burying ground at Sad Hill.

Two big problems still remained to be solved. One was to discover in which of the thousands of graves on Sad Hill the treasure lay hidden. Only Jackson, alias Bill Carson, could tell him that.

The second problem was to get there. The whole mountain area east of Santa Fe was now battleground as Colonel Canby's Union forces flung themselves desperately at General Sibley's invading Texans. The lines shifted daily and a civilian caught wandering there could be shot by either side as a spy.

That fact would explain why Carson had rejoined the army. As a soldier he stood a far better chance of getting to Sad Hill and making off with his loot, under cover of the fighting.

All he, Sentenza, had to do was find Carson first and make him identify the particular grave before he died.

He straightened, his eyes clearing, his course charted as far ahead as possible. He became aware that across the street the condemned man now sat beneath the gallows farm, the noose tight around his neck. The sheriff stood by, his whip poised to send the horse stampeding from under its rider.

Sentenza glanced away and froze, his eyes flaring. A flicker of shadowy movement had drawn his attention to the open door of the hayloft above the livery stable. The blond bounty-hunter stood just inside the doorway, a cocked rifle across his left arm as he took careful aim toward the gallows below. A light of comprehension and reluctant admiration came into Sentenza's eyes.

"I'll be damned," he murmured softly.

Across the street the judge intoned, "And may the Lord have mercy on his soul. Proceed with your duty, Sheriff."

On the walk beside Sentenza a woman who had stopped to watch whimpered, "Poor wretch. What a terrible, terrible thing it must be for him."

Sentenza's lips moved without humor. "I wouldn't fret, ma'am. Not all hangings end in tragedy. Some lucky devils—even that miserable beggar over there—have a guardian angel, perhaps an armed angel, watching over their fate."

The whip whistled down, the rifle slammed and all hell broke loose. The horse went pounding off, riderless, leaving Tuco's figure twisting and kicking from the uncut rope. The shot had missed.

The hunter levered a fresh shell into the chamber and shot again. This time the rope parted and Tuco sprawled in the dust below.

He scrambled up, howling, "Whitey—for the love of God, Whitey—"

He started to run.

The crowd was pushing and yelling. The sheriff tugged at his pistol. The rifle slammed again and the pistol whipped out of his hand, spun away down the street. Two men ran to intercept the stumbling Tuco. Two shots sent their hats flying and they abruptly lost the urge to be heroes.

The crowd yelled and scattered as the bounty-hunter dropped to his waiting horse and came pounding toward them. He thundered past, bending low to catch Tuco's collar and hoist him up behind the saddle. By the time the crowd had recovered its wits the fugitives were a dwindling dust cloud in the desert.

Sentenza turned away, smiling.

"A man dead by rights—so now there are two of us. A most interesting diversion," he murmured to that part of himself to which he often spoke. "But now it is time to visit a lady of professional love—but not for the usual reason."

■ Tuco, hands still bound behind him, maintained a precarious balance on the rump of the running horse. The length of frayed rope streamed behind but he had managed to loosen the noose with his shoulder until he could breathe more freely.

"Whitey," he bleated. "What are you doing to me? You missed that shot on purpose. You deliberately did it to scare me, to show what could happen if I insist on the bigger cut I deserve."

"Anybody can miss a shot now and then," the hunter said over his shoulder.

"What do you mean, anybody can miss a shot?" Tuco yelled. "You don't miss a shot when I'm hanging from the end of a rope with my lungs bursting and my eyes popping out. Do you know what it feels like to have a rope jerked tight around your neck? Do you know how it feels to be hanged? No? Well, one day you will find out how it feels, Whitey. I, Tuco Benedicto Pacifico Juan Maria Ramirez, make that solemn promise. And while you are choking you will learn what it is like to have someone you depend on miss a shot. That, too, I promise you on my honor as a bandit and a thief."

They were far out in the bleak and burning desert by then. The hunter twisted around to look back. No clouds of dust marked pursuit. He noted with satis-

faction that a hot wind, like the breath of a furnace, was erasing their tracks almost as soon as they were made.

He reined to a halt and waited for Tuco to slide awkwardly to the ground. Leaning an elbow on the saddle horn, he gazed thoughtfully down at the sweaty, bedraggled figure.

"You know, Tuco, I've been thinking things over and you're right. This game is too dangerous for you. If anything happened and I had to leave you hanging there—I'd feel all-over responsible. I'd probably spoil my sleep, worrying."

"What are you saying, Whitey?" Tuco whined nervously. "Stop talking foolishness and get down here and untie me. The cord has cut clear through my wrists."

"Another thing I've been thinking," the other said, "is that a small-time chicken thief like you will never be worth more than three thousand dollars. You've reached your top now."

"What do you mean?"

"That there's simply no future with a partner of your caliber. So I'm dissolving the partnership as of here and now, my friend. I'll go my way and you may go yours. Adios, amigo."

"Whitey!" Tuco screeched. "You pile of toad-droppings! You worm in the guts of a rat! Untie me and give me my share of the three thousand dollars. Just give me my half. I won't insist on a bigger cut. Get down, Whitey. Come on, now, and stop your jokes."

"I'm dead serious—not joking at all, Tuco. As for your cut—since you're no longer my partner you're no longer entitled to a share. That's plain common sense, isn't it?"

"Of all the filthy, stinking, dirty tricks—" Tuco stared wildly around at the vastness and bleakness of the desert, at the tortured rock formations writhing and dancing in the heat waves. His eyes were crazed with fear. "I'll die if you leave me out here, Whitey. Especially with my hands tied. Untie me—"

"You might not survive, it's true. But again, you might, Tuco. For days on end I've heard nothing but endless tales of your daring exploits, your cleverness and smartness. A fellow as sharp and resourceful as you will have that cord off in no time. Then it's only a few miles back to the town we just left where, of course, they'll hang you again, more permanently. But it's only seventy miles across the desert to a town where no one knows you. Consider it a challenge, my friend. A man needs a challenge to bring out the best in him. Good luck."

"Judas!" Tuco howled. "Traitor! Coward! Vulture! Stinking bastard son of a bastard! Come back, Whitey. Get off that horse—if you're a man. Get off and face me if you've got the guts." He strained at his bonds, then launched a raging kick toward the departing figure. "I'll get free, Whitey. I'll get free to hunt you down. I'll tear your black heart out and eat it. I'll skin you alive with a dull knife. I'll hang you up by your bowels for vulture bait—"

He tried to run after the vanishing figure. His toe hit an outcropping of rocks and he pitched on his face. He lay for a time, sobbing, kicking the hot sand.

When he sat up the bounty-hunter was out of sight.

Chapter 6

THE GIRL, Maria, stumbled up the creaking stairs to her room, whimpering and spitting curses. She was a bedraggled mess, her face smeared with mud, her hair in strings, her gown torn.

"*Cabrones*," she sobbed. "Thieves. Vermin. Filthy pigs of troopers—"

Because of Bill Carson she had thought all Confederate cavalymen were gentlemen. But that had been before she had gotten into the buggy with the drunken bunch from the Second Cavalry. When she had refused to accept their worthless Confederate shinplasters they had used her by force, taking turns pinning her on the muddy ground. Then they had left her there without a penny.

She closed the door of her room and groped in the darkness for the oil lamp and matches she always kept on a little table just inside. The table was in its accustomed place but its top was bare. Both lamp and matches were gone.

From somewhere close by came the faintest whisper of movement. Her hand flew to her mouth.

"Bill? Bill, is that you? Are you back so soon? Bill, don't give me such a fright. Say something to me."

A match flame sprang up, lighting a sinister wedge of face that was like the personification of evil. Maria choked back a scream of terror.

"Who are you? What are you doing here? What do you want?"

Sentenza lit the wick of her oil lamp, turning it low. His shadow, thrown on the wall by the flickering lamplight, was monstrous and terrifying.

"Who I am is unimportant. What I'm doing here is something we can talk about. I want to know about your friend, Bill Carson."

"I don't know any Bill Carson," Maria whimpered. "I never heard of him. Go away."

"So you call out in the dark for someone you have never heard of. Where is he, Maria?"

"What do you want with him?"

"I'm asking the questions. Where is he? Where did he go?"

"I don't know. I don't know a thing, I tell you. Get out of here and leave me alone."

"Maria," he said softly, almost sadly, "I haven't either the time or the patience for your stupid games. You're going to tell me everything you know about Bill Carson—sooner or later. The choice of how soon will be entirely up to you."

His hand caught her wrist and twisted cruelly. His free palm closed over her mouth, muffling her shriek of anguish. His strong fingers viced her jaw. "Where is he, Maria? Where—is—he?"

She shook her head.

She had been beaten up many times before—but never so savagely, so thoroughly, or with such fiendishly dispassionate skill in the art of inflicting pain. With every blow came the relentless question.

"Where is he, Maria? Where—is—he?"

Even the strongest spirit has its threshold of endurance.

"Stop! I can't stand any more." She clung to his knees, whimpering, turning up a puffed and bloody face. "I don't know where he is now. He left ten days ago with his unit and I have heard nothing from him since. I swear that's all I know."

"What unit?"

"The Third Confederate Cavalry, General Sibley. They went to reenforce the garrison holding Santa Fe."

He stared down at her for a long moment, then nodded.

"All right, Maria. Now, that wasn't so hard to get out, was it?"

■ The curious little waystation stood between the edge of the desert and the main settlement. One side of its main room sported a sparsely-stocked bar. The remainder was filled with a hodge-podge collection of canned goods, saddlery, hardware. The main feature, however, was a large display of pistols, rifles, shotguns and ammunition.

The owner, a plump little widower known only as Milton, was accustomed to days when not a soul appeared from dawn to dusk. He was content with his isolation, never bored and never lonely. His passion for guns—although he never shot one himself—let him fill the empty hours with endless oiling and wiping and polishing of his stock.

The afternoon was waning when he laid the last pistol tenderly on its display pad and closed the case. He glanced through the window toward the courtyard and stiffened. His mouth fell open.

A strange man was coming on foot from the des-

ert. He was obviously in the last stages of exhaustion. He stumbled toward Milton's well. He fell against the well curb, scooped handfuls of tepid water from the bucket, splashing them over his blistered face, sucking up cautious sips.

Through the closed door Milton could hear a steady, hoarse animal whimpering between the sucking noises.

His first impulse had been to run out and give succor, but something held him back. He had been visited before by fugitive outlaws fleeing to or from the desert. None of the encounters had ended pleasantly for him. This newcomer had the look of danger.

Milton snatched up a small board sign inscribed: **CLOSED**. He inched the front door open far enough to hang the sign outside, eased the door shut again. He ran to the corner for the stout oak timber with which he barred himself in at night.

The door was hauled open before he could fit the bar into its brackets. The stranger stumbled through, dripping water. At close range he was even less prepossessing.

A word crashed into Milton's mind, made shambles of any coherent thought.

Ugly . . .

He backed up nervously. "I was just closing for the night."

"You just opened again," Tuco croaked.

His gaze fell on the shelf of bottles behind the bar. He stumbled across, snatched a bottle of whiskey and drank thirstily. A full third of the liquor had vanished before he lowered the bottle.

He let go an explosive, "Ah-h-h-h-h—" He stared

around the room and his eyes glittered. "Guns. I need a hand gun—the best one made."

"Yes, yes," Milton said. The stranger's ugliness was that of death, with a foretaste of rot. Milton ran to a case and hauled out pistols, one at a time. "Here are only the very finest, mister. Remington, Colt, Root, Smith and Wesson, Navy, Joslyn—"

"That's enough," Tuco growled. "I know guns."

He examined each pistol with the eye and ear of an expert, testing the trigger pull, the spring's force. He spun cylinders close to his ear to gauge the set of the ratchets. When he found one that pleased him he loaded it and thumbed back the hammer. His gaze roved the room, searching for a target.

"Wait," the little man cried nervously. "Out in the back is a small range where you can try it out. You'll know exactly—"

"Show me," Tuco growled. "Come on—move."

Milton scuttled to a rear door and opened it to reveal a small courtyard with a row of targets across the far side. Behind each target hung a piece of iron that would clang on a bull's-eye.

The pistol bucked and slammed in Tuco's hand. Five shots blasted and each one set iron to ringing. Milton, his eyes wide with awe, followed Tuco back to the counter.

Tuco growled, "Shells." He reloaded and thumbed back the hammer. "How much?"

"Fifteen dollars, sir."

"You don't get the point, friend," Tuco said through his teeth. "Think about it and try again."

He wagged the gun and Milton suddenly became achingly conscious that the muzzle pointed straight at his face. He paled and swallowed heavy.

"A—a hundred dollars? Two hundred dollars, sir." He snatched up a cigar box and opened it to reveal a stack of worn banknotes. "See? It is all the money I have."

"You got the idea finally." Tuco snatched the bills. "Where's your horse?"

"In the stable—out back."

Tuco grinned and slipped his new gun into his holster. "Now I've got everything I need but a cigar."

"A cigar? Yes, sir. I have them right here, sir, the best in the West."

"The cigar I'm looking for," Tuco said savagely, "has the face of a black-hearted son of a whore behind it."

Chapter 7

FEW MEN, Sentenza reflected, ever had the privilege of watching a bloody, day-long battle from a choice box seat. And even fewer men, his thoughts ran bitterly, had the hellish luck to arrive on the ground where a fortune in gold was buried at a moment when two idiot and unaware armies were mauling one another to pieces over it.

His seat was probably the same pinnacle of rock from which a Union soldier had first spied the Confederate cavalry detail escorting the money wagon. It was the best lookout point and his trained eye detected signs of previous occupancy. From this vantage point he could see down into Glorietta Pass, far back into Apache Canyon and westward, across the Pecos, almost to Santa Fe. For the better part of the day—now waning—the entire area below had been bloodied by some of the fiercest fighting of the war.

Sentenza had reached the pass shortly after day-break, bound for Santa Fe and the elusive Bill Carson. One way or another Jackson, alias Carson, would be made to talk, to identify the exact grave which hid the fortune.

Sentenza had known a distinct shock at finding the road from Santa Fe to the pass jammed with marching troops in Confederate gray. Some scouting had revealed them to be a force of Texans sent out

by General Sibley to secure and hold Apache Canyon against the Federal troops at Fort Union. The action was intended to cut off Santa Fe's only hope of liberation by Colonel Canby's tough Colorado Volunteers.

Sentenza's first look at the unwelcome obstacle to his plans had sent him up the canyon wall. The Johnny Rebs had an unpleasant reputation of either shooting stray civilians as spies or forcibly impressing them into the army. Neither alternative fitted into his own program. He had scouted carefully from high ground, ghosting down as opportunity offered to learn what he could by overhearing soldiers' conversations.

At last he rode as high as he could, left his horse among concealing rocks and proceeded on foot. The rock pinnacle offered an ideal vantage point from which to see when the last troops had passed on into the canyon, leaving the road to Santa Fe clear. It also proved the ideal vantage point from which to see the best-laid plans of mice and gunmen go all to hell in a crash of cannon fire.

The last baggage and supply wagons were still rumbling into the pass when the vanguard of the troops rammed headlong into a large force from Fort Union, sent to keep the canyon open. Sentenza suddenly found himself an unwilling spectator to a battle of incredible ferocity.

The Texans were mainly flatlanders, men from the open plains who elected to make their fight on the canyon's floor, taking cover behind the masses of fallen rocks. The Colorado volunteers, on the other hand, were chiefly miners from the gold fields, thoroughly at home in rugged mountain terrain. They

scrambled up the canyon walls like mountain goats to pour a withering fire down into the exposed Confederates below.

For an hour and more the Texans held their ground with incredible courage and at fearful cost. A steady stream of ambulance wagons, jammed with wounded, poured out of the pass, some heading toward Santa Fe, others turning south toward Galisteo, where the main body of Sibley's troops was encamped. The traffic ended any hope Sentenza had of working his way past the embattled forces to continue his journey.

A rare impatience began to gnaw at him. He saw no cavalry in action below, so Carson's Third Regiment would be either in Santa Fe or twenty miles southeast at Galisteo. But for the time being Carson—from Sentenza's viewpoint—might as well be stationed on the moon.

Inevitably, for all their dogged courage, the Texans began to give ground. Slowly but inexorably they were driven back toward Glorietta Pass, leaving gray-clad bodies on the canyon floor.

By midafternoon they had been driven back to Glorietta Pass and were digging in for a last, desperate stand. Sentenza could see the Union forces massing for an all-out assault. It came at last, a howling, irresistible charge that hit the weakened Rebel line and sent it reeling back out of the pass to the bank of the Pecos.

There was little or no pursuit. Having gained their objective, the Volunteers pulled back to the mouth of the pass and settled down to hold the ground. Beyond the river, on the Pecos Plains, the scattered Confederates were coming together and setting up

camp. Plainly, neither side was ready to break off the confrontation and leave the way clear for Sentenza to pursue his search for Bill Carson.

In the glow of the setting sun the peaks of the mountains were taking on the deep crimson hue that had earned them their Spanish name of Sangre de Cristo—Blood of Christ. In the shadowed gorge below lay puddles of a deeper crimson that came, not from fanciful illusion but from the blood of brothers.

It was full dark by the time Sentenza had worked his way down to his horse and nearing midnight by the time he had slipped past the last Union picket post at the mouth of the pass. The sporadic rumble of wagons and strings of flickering lanterns, like regimented fireflies, marked the road to El Paso.

Sentenza mounted and turned his horse's head southward, toward the main Confederate camp at Galisteo. Circumstances would dictate his next move.

Some two hours later he saw the dark bulk of walls against the glow of a rising moon. As he drew closer he saw that the fort was in ruins, shattered by a recent bombardment. He reined in and studied it. Through the broken gates he could see the red glow of flames dancing on an inner wall. The night wind brought the smell of wood smoke and the stench of blood and death. It also brought something else—a soft, eerie keening that rose and fell endlessly, awakening the short hairs on the back of his neck.

Fear was not what he felt—but alertness to danger. The dead, he thought with a thin smile, never panic.

He swung down and started toward the gate, then

turned back to get a full bottle of whiskey from a saddle bag. Cradling it in his left arm, his right hand close to his gun, he stepped to the gate and peered in. A small fire burned in the middle of an unroofed room. An iron kettle bubbled above the flames. Around the walls lay scores of fearfully wounded Confederates. The keening sound he had heard was the blended chorus of their agonized complaints.

A sergeant limped in from another room and stopped short at the sight of Sentenza. A bloody bandage circled his head and his left arm dangled limp and useless, the sleeve ripped and stiff with caked blood.

A sardonic glow came into his eyes. He bowed mockingly.

"Welcome, friend. If it's a quiet place to spend a holiday you're looking for you've come to the right place. This luxury hotel boasts all the comforts of home, with no hurrying crowds to shove you around and trample on your elegant boots."

Sentenza uncorked the whiskey bottle wordlessly and proffered it. The sergeant snatched it, tilted it to his lips. His throat worked convulsively. He lowered the bottle and blew out a gusty breath of appreciation.

"I haven't told you all the attractions of this fine retreat, my friend. This hotel is proud of its cooking. It serves only the most healthy and nourishing of foods—corncocks à la Confederacy, supplied unsparingly by our most generous Government. Want to sample the superb treat?"

He gestured mockingly and Sentenza saw that the pale objects simmering in the kettle were indeed

plain corncobs without a single kernel of corn on them.

"You can see for yourself how well the guests are treated here."

"I'm hunting for a man named Bill Carson," Sentenza said. "Ever hear of him?"

"And we're being hunted by a man named Canby. Ever hear of him?" The sergeant's laugh was a snarl. "He's the Yankee colonel whose Colorado Volunteers cut us to pieces today at Glorietta, friend. Now they're fixing to hunt down the pieces and stomp them to pulp. We're interested in only one thing here, mister, and that's saving our worthless hides. And you come asking for one of us. Why, mister, and in whose name? Damned if I can figure what you civilians got in your heads—it sure as hell ain't good sense."

Sentenza forced himself to patience.

"This Carson has a black patch in place of an eye and he's with the Third Cavalry."

"Ain't nobody here from the Third." The sergeant tipped up the bottle, lowered it abruptly. "The Third, you say? Then your man's riding to his own funeral right now. Our scouts report Canby's whole Yankee force is on the way from Fort Union to hold Glorietta Pass. General Sibley's throwing in every man we got to take it. The Third left Galisteo at midnight to lead the first assault. They'll be plumb in the middle of a battle that'll make today's scrap look like a picket skirmish."

Sentenza slammed his fist to his palm in frustration.

"But suppose Carson survives. Where would he be afterward?"

“Either retreating down that hundred and fifty miles of desert hell they call the *Jornada del Muerte*—the Dead Men’s March—or in Battleville, the Union prison camp. If he’s a friend of yours, you better hope he’s dead or in the desert. Either way he’d be better off than in that hell camp.”

“I’m obliged, Sergeant,” Sentenza said bleakly. “And keep the rest of the whiskey. It’s all yours.”

Outside he stood for a long time in bitter thought. At last he swung into the saddle and headed back toward Glorietta Pass.

Chapter 8

THE CONFEDERATE invasion of New Mexico was at an end. The private dreams of General Sibley and the high hopes of the Confederacy died together in the holocaust of the second battle for Glorietta Pass.

For long and bloody hours the struggle had saw-sawed, the issue in doubt. Then a force of Colorado Volunteers, slipping over the mountains, had struck the unprotected Confederate rear. In a fury of destruction they had burned eighty-five wagonloads of irreplaceable supplies and bayoneted six hundred horses and mules.

Isolated in a barren, hostile land, hands and bellies empty, the invaders had no choice but to begin the long and terrible retreat. It was in no sense a rout. They withdrew from the bloody field in good order and marched southward, Canby's victorious Colorado Volunteers at their heels.

In the little town of Santa Bella, near the northern rim of the dread *Jornada*, a hotelkeeper by the name of Pardue stood at the window with his wife and watched the gray-clad columns pass. He could barely conceal his glee.

"I got it on good authority that Colonel Canby and his Colorado Volunteers are less than five miles behind them. That's why they're marching on the

double. They brought their war to us but Canby gave them a bellyful of medicine. They've had all the fighting they can stomach for a long time to come."

"Poor boys," his wife murmured as an ambulance crowded with wounded edged past the marching columns.

"Poor boys, my rump. They came asking for it and they got it. The sooner those thieving beggars clear out the sooner the Yankees will get here. And the Yankees, in case you've forgotten, woman, don't take everything we have and pay for it in promises or worthless Jeff Davis shinplasters. What Yankees need they pay for in good gold and silver."

A canvas-topped headquarters wagon rattled into view, passing the columns of marching troops. Pardue snatched open the curtain to point.

"Look, there's Sibley himself—up there on that wagon. The one with the white beard, that's the great General Henry H. Sibley himself, getting out from underfoot at last." He pretended to wave a flag, jeering, "Long live the Confederacy! Long live Jeff Davis! Yeah—yeah—yeah—"

His wife grabbed his arm.

"Sam, what are they doing to those men down there?"

Pardue bent forward to look. "Getting ready to execute them."

A few sorry-looking soldiers, their hands tied behind their backs, were being shoved into line against an adobe wall. The firing squad took its stance a dozen paces away. A sergeant with a bull voice read the list of charges, his bellow coming fitfully above

the thud of marching feet and the rumble of wagons and gun carriages.

“Rape . . . cowardice . . . desertion under fire . . . looting of dead or wounded comrades . . .”

The Pardues whirled as the hotel door burst open with a crash. A man charged in, waving a pistol.

“That horse out there at your hitchrail—where’s the man who owns it?”

“Please,” Pardue said nervously, “do you mind pointing that pistol in some other direction. This war already has my wife frightened half to death.”

“Answer me, damn you. Where is he? You know the two-legged skunk I mean. Tall and white-haired—wears a cigar in his face and mighty few words get past it.”

“Get out of here,” Pardue’s wife said shrilly. “Whatever your dirty business is, my husband will have no part in it.”

“Shut up, old hag.” The intruder put his gun on Pardue. “You. Talk.”

Pardue lifted an unsteady hand.

“Upstairs. Room at the head of the stairs. But don’t tell him I—”

His voice was drowned in a man’s scream of mortal terror from the street outside. The yell was cut off by the crash of shots. The voice of the sergeant barked commands. By then the intruder was half-way up the stairs, running on tiptoe.

■ The Man With No Name turned from the window, his face impassive, his feelings untouched by the executions he had witnessed. Death in its most

violent forms had been a part of his life too long to affect him. He went back to a table where his pistol lay beside a kit of cleaning tools.

He sat down, swung open the cylinder and shook the cartridges out to the table top. He reached for the cleaning rod and froze. From the hall just outside his closed door came the faintest tinkle of a spur.

He was on his feet like a cat, facing the door, his gun in his right hand, his left reaching for the spilled cartridges.

From behind him the voice of Tuco, bubbling with glee, said, "There are two kinds of spurs in the world, Whitey—those that jingle outside a door and those that slip silently through a window."

The bounty hunter whirled. Tuco sat on the sill of the window, one foot in the room, the other still on the narrow balcony outside. His cocked pistol pointed unwaveringly at the tall man's chest. His ugly face was a mask of Satanic triumph.

"Drop the gun. You will have no need for it where you are going, friend."

"It's empty," the other said.

He dropped pistol and cartridges onto the table, his eyes measuring the distance to the window.

Tuco chuckled wickedly.

"Uh-uh, Whitey. You'd never make it."

He carefully swung his other leg over the sill and set his feet firmly. A heavy, ominous rumbling began somewhere in the distance. Its reverberations set the window to rattling. Tuco cocked his head, listening.

"Ah-ah, I remember, long ago, the priest telling us that the sky thundered when Judas hanged himself."

“That sounds more like cannon fire than thunder to me.”

Tuco shrugged.

“Cannon fire? Thunder? It is all the same as long as a Judas hangs.”

He slipped a coil of rope from his shoulder, a hangman's noose already fashioned at one end.

The room had no ceiling but the high roof itself. Beneath this a heavy beam ran from wall to wall. Tuco flashed a look at it and grinned with satisfaction.

“It fits you, Whitey, to select a room with a ready-made gallows. This rope is a little present—just for you. Take it, amigo, and climb up on that table.”

Silent, his face devoid of either alarm or rage, the hunter caught the tossed coil and swung himself up onto the table. The beam was still inches beyond his fingertips. Tuco snatched up a low wooden stool and set it on the table.

“Step on this. Ah, that's better. Now tie the rope around the beam, Whitey. Make sure the knot is good and tight so it can't slip. I wouldn't want you to fall and break a leg.”

The distant rumbling began again, louder, heavier, making the plank floor quiver underfoot. A low whistle invaded the sound, seeming to rush nearer. It rose to a piercing shriek that ended in the thunderous crash of an explosion somewhere close by.

“Hurry up, Whitey,” Tuco said. “Ah, that's good. Now—the noose over your head. That's right. Don't worry if it's a little loose. The weight of a pig on it will tighten it to a perfect fit.”

The hunter adjusted the noose with steady hands,

fitting the thick hangman's knot with its traditional thirteen turns of rope snugly behind his left ear. If he felt despair or hopelessness, neither emotion showed on his face or in the cold eyes. He had not spoken a word since taking the rope.

"We'll play our old game, Whitey," Tuco said, backing to the wall. "The one we played so often on the stupid sheriffs, only this time it is turned around. You're wearing the rope and I have the gun. And I have worked out a new system. Instead of shooting at the rope, I will shoot at the legs of the stool. I'm a very good shot. Not as fast as you—but I don't often miss. So, *adios*, old partner."

He took careful aim, ignoring the rising shriek of another cannon shell. His finger was tightening on the trigger when the shriek ended in a great, deafening thunderclap of sound. The old building rocked violently. Under Tuco's feet a section of the floor heaved up sharply, fell away with a rending crash.

The hunter watched as, yelling, the bandit plunged down into a dense cloud of adobe dust where the hotel's small lobby had been. He landed heavily and lay partly stunned while debris rained down upon him. Outside the tempo of the Union bombardment was picking up rapidly.

When the fall had ceased Tuco clawed his way up out of the wreckage. Aside from numerous bruises he seemed to have suffered no injury. He discovered with pleased surprise that he was still clutching his gun and suddenly remembered why.

Cursing wildly, he peered up through the thinning haze at the gaping hole in the ceiling. The table stood at the edge of the hole, the stool perched on top. Above it, the hangman's noose still dangled

from the beam—but now it was mockingly empty. There was no trace of the nameless bounty-hunter whose neck was so recently occupying that loop.

■ The wounded trooper with the shoulder patch of the Third Cavalry sagged back against the wall, watching from hungry eyes as Sentenza rolled and licked a cigarette. The soldier took it between bloodless lips and sucked gratefully at the match flame.

From another room of the makeshift infirmary came the grating of a saw on bone and a man's voice screamed in wordless agony. Two orderlies in bloody uniforms came out, lugging a tubful of severed limbs. Their faces bore the look of dull detachment men wear when taking out garbage. They went out and came back moments later with the empty tub.

Sentenza, on his knees beside the pallet, said impatiently, "You're sure Bill Carson was alive the last time you saw him?"

"Positive," the trooper said. "He was hit pretty bad but he recognized me and called me by name when I was helping load him into the ambulance. He was the last of the load and the wagon started right out. It headed here but it never got here. I was hit about a half-hour later and brought in. I asked about Bill and about our major, who was in the same ambulance. Nobody's seen hide nor hair of either one. That load just never arrived here."

"Maybe it went to another field hospital."

The trooper gave him a look of bitter scorn. "You think we had time or surgeons for more than one,

mister? Even this place is short of medicine and instruments."

"What do you think could have happened to them?"

"Only one thing I know of could have happened. They must have been captured on the way. Those damn Colorado mountain goats were swarming around us like wolves by then. Some of 'em even chased the ambulance I was in but we got away, thank God. I'd rather die here than in the Yankee stockade at Battleville prison camp."

Sentenza got to his feet. "Thanks, soldier."

"Tell me one thing, mister," the trooper said. "Why are you so all-fired anxious to find Bill Carson? Is he a friend of yours?"

"That," Sentenza said grimly, "remains to be seen."

Chapter 9

TUCO PUT his hat on the ground at the crest of the ridge overlooking the river. He carefully parted the bushes. The Man With No Name sat beside a fire in a small clearing on the riverbank. A smoke-blackened coffee pot squatted on the embers and the hunter idly examined an empty tin cup while he waited patiently for the coffee to boil. His saddled horse stood at the edge of the clearing, cropping grass.

Tuco wriggled back below the ridge line, put on his hat and scrambled down to where four men waited beside tethered horses. They were a gun-tough quartet, brawlers with hard, brutish faces.

"The setup is perfect." Tuco breathed hard. "He's hunched over his fire, waiting for his coffee. He's so sure no enemies are near that he does not even bother to look behind him. Red, you and Scar creep up from that way. Juan and Pedo will close in from the other side. When I call to him he will jump up with his back to you. Hit him then—make sure you come out shooting. Don't give him a chance to get out his gun. He's a dead shot."

The man called Scar grinned wolfishly.

"Don't worry, Tuco. The dead shot'll be just dead—and we'll split the four thousand dollars bounty on his head."

"Three thousand," Tuco corrected. "I take one

thousand and you split the rest. Ah, to kill a hated enemy is sweet—but to kill h' m and make a profit is sweeter still.”

The hunter lifted the boiling coffee pot off the coals on the riverbank. Still holding the shiny tin cup, he reached into the open saddlebag beside him and took out another cup, this one old and battered from long use. He poured coffee into this one and set it aside to cool.

Not once had he bothered to glance at the thick underbrush behind him. There was no necessity to swivel his head around. The shiny bottom of the first cup was a mirror. By moving it slightly he could maintain a constant watch on the underbrush at his back.

The mirrored surface showed a stir of movement, then a fleeting glimpse of two heads briefly raised. He turned the cup slightly and caught a similar glimpse on the opposite side.

The voice of Tuco came from in front of him, somewhere beyond the screen of shrubbery.

“Hey, Whitey, are you so selfish you don't invite your old friend and partner to share a cup of coffee?”

The hunter was on his feet and spinning around as the four broke through the brush. His palm slapped the hammer of his gun.

The four shots blended.

Deep in the woods, safely sheltered behind the thick trunk of a tree, Tuco also heard the four rapid shots. They were followed by silence. He blanched, whirled and ran frantically to where he had left his horse.

The Man With No Name paused in the act of re-

loading his gun. He cocked his head, listening to the pound of swiftly receding hoofbeats.

A faint smile stirred his lips.

“Goodbye, old friend and partner,” he murmured.

He glanced at the four sprawled bodies, shrugged and squatted down to sample his cooling coffee.

■ Sentenza had spent most of the morning working his way up the mountain to avoid the Union forces holding the canyon and pass below. Close to noon he sat down to rest and catch his breath. He glanced idly around and his eye caught a flash of dark blue among the gray-brown of the rocks. He sprang up and moved cautiously toward the spot.

He found the body of a Union sergeant huddled in a shallow niche under an overhang of rock. The man apparently had been mortally wounded in the fighting that had surged up the flanks of Glorietta Pass and had crawled here to die.

Sentenza squatted and went through the dead man's pockets. Inside the jacket he came upon an order, assigning Sergeant Allen Crane to adjutant duty at Battleville Prison Camp. Sentenza's pale sorrel eyes glowed with satisfaction.

Luckily the sergeant had been no small man. His uniform jacket was full enough to conceal the long-barreled pistol at Sentenza's left hip. Sentenza buttoned the jacket and strapped on the dead man's army Colt over it.

“Excellent,” he murmured, looking down at himself. “Now, if you can only remember how to salute properly, Sergeant Crane, you may wind up yet with two hundred thousand in gold.”

■ The scene had been duplicated too many times. The swarthy prisoner slumped in his saddle beneath the gallows beam, the hangman's noose around his neck. The sheriff stood at the horse's flank, holding his whip. The judge finished reading the list of charges.

"Therefore, with the powers vested in us by the law, the aforesaid Thomas Larson, commonly known as Shorty, has been duly condemned to hang by the neck until dead. May the Lord have mercy on his soul."

Some two hundred yards down the street, in a narrow alleyway, the hunter steadied his rifle across his left arm and took careful aim at the gallows rope. The sheriff raised his whip. The hunter's finger tightened on the trigger.

The barrel of a gun rammed hard into his back and the voice of Tuco hissed, "Eh-eh-eh—not this time, Whitey."

The ugly one reached around and snatched the rifle, then lifted the hunter's pistol from its holster. Down the street the whip came slashing down and the horse lunged away.

"What about Shorty?"

Tuco chuckled coldly.

"Shorty be hanged, amigo. This partnership, like the old one, is—how did you put it, Whitey? Dissolved?"

The hunter looked at the figure kicking at the end of the rope. He shrugged.

"Sorry, Shorty, but I guess every man's luck has to run out sooner or later."

He tramped to the rear of the buildings, the gun nudging his back. He turned toward his horse.

Tuco said, "No, Whitey. Not this time. The world is divided into two kinds of people, amigo—those who ride and those who walk. This time you walk." He swung into his own saddle and grinned down. "They say walking is good exercise. It makes a man healthy. You are going to be the healthiest man in the Territory, Whitey—if you live long enough. Start walking."

■ The Man From Nowhere stumbled and caught himself, forcing his legs to move on. The hot sand dragged at his boots, making every step a supreme effort of muscle and will. The sun hammered down with incredible ferocity until he felt as if he were being beaten from head to foot with white-hot irons. Even when he closed his eyes the fierce glare from the sand burned through the lids. Every sobbing breath of the superheated air seared his throat and lungs.

"Come on there, Whitey," Tuco said gaily. "Walk, man. Walk faster. You're leaving me with no one to talk to. That is not polite."

He sat comfortably on his horse, grinning down at his disheveled victim. Two full canteens of water hung from his saddle horn, sloshing with every movement of the horse. The blond man stumbled again and instinctively grabbed for Tuco's stirrup to keep from falling. The outlaw jabbed with his spur and the horse skittered out of reach. The hunter fell heavily. It seemed to take him forever to struggle to his knees, then to his feet again.

"You should watch where you are walking," Tuco said in mock reproof. "Ah, but I know what the trouble is, Whitey. You are carrying too much extra weight." He reached down, snatched off the hunter's broad-brimmed hat and sent it sailing out of sight behind a dune. "There. Now you will walk lighter, amigo."

Even at a slow walk the horse was moving farther and farther ahead of the man on foot. Tuco reined in, waited for the stumbling figure to catch up.

"Eh, Whitey, this desert makes a man thirsty just to look at it." He uncapped a canteen and tipped it up, drinking noisily, letting some of the precious fluid dribble down his chin and onto his shirt. "Ahhhh, that's better. You have no idea how good cool water can feel on the tongue and throat."

He made a pretense of peering down anxiously as the other caught up.

"How this sun beats down. They say the sun is very bad for people with pale skin like yours, Whitey. It burns and blisters until the skin peels off in strips. And worse, it burns through a man's skull and cooks his brains until they are nothing but jelly. You must be careful not to get too much of the sun, Whitey."

Tuco squirmed around to reach into the blanket roll tied behind his cante. He brought out a ridiculously ruffled pink parasol. He opened it over his head and pretended to shiver.

"It is strange how this thin air cannot hold the sun's heat. A little bit of shade like this and I feel actually cold. Brrr!"

"Where—are—we—going?" the hunter croaked.

"Where? Toward a place where only one of us

will arrive, amigo. Do you see all that beautiful sand ahead of us? That is the *Jornada del Muerte*—an oven a hundred and fifty miles long. Even armies are afraid to go through here. On that side the Confederates are trying to escape. The bluecoats are arriving on the other side. But neither dares set foot in here. Only you and I, Whitey, have the courage to take this beautiful walk where we can be alone and undisturbed. Is that not a pleasant thought?"

The hunter stumbled again and made thick, croaking noises.

"What was it you told me once?" Tuco asked. "Oh, yes. Now I remember. 'You might not survive—but again, you might. Consider it a challenge, amigo. A man needs a challenge to bring out the best in him.'"

The hunter fell, made a feeble, aimless effort to get up again, then collapsed on the burning sand. Tuco shook his head sadly.

"What? You are not resting already? Up, man. On your feet. We are almost there. It can't be more than a hundred and twenty miles more. And in eight hours it will be sundown, when it gets so cold your teeth chatter and the dew falls like rain until you are drenched to the skin. Do you think you will be around to feel it, Whitey?"

He roared with laughter, rocking in the saddle. The hunter made an herculean effort and made it to his feet. He stumbled on. He endured an eternity of torment before Tuco squinted toward the sun and reined in.

"Time to eat so soon? Ah, but I am starved. How good the bread and the big slabs of meat will taste, washed down with plenty of cool, water. What?"

You're not hungry, Whitey? You would rather enjoy the sun while I eat? Oh, very well. But I insist that you have a good drink of water. Here."

He unhooked a canteen, sloshed it invitingly and tossed it to the ground some yards beyond the hunter's reach. The tall man pitched forward onto hands and knees and crawled toward it. He got the canteen and was struggling with the cap when Tuco drew his pistol and fired. The container flew out of the hunter's hands, spurting water from both sides.

The hunter crawled toward it. His outstretched hand was almost on the canteen when Tuco shot again and again, riddling the canteen. The last drops of water gushed out and vanished in the parched air and the thirsty sand. The bounty-hunter collapsed and lay unmoving.

Tuco rode to the sparse shade of a sand dune some distance away and dismounted. Carrying the other canteen and a package of bread and meat from his saddlebags he sat down in the shade and finished a leisurely meal. He stood up and looked toward the sprawled figure.

"I'm afraid I have to leave you now, Whitey. Goodbye, amigo, and pleasant journeying. Remember me to the coyotes."

He had his foot in the stirrup, ready to swing into the saddle, when the wagon rose into view, cresting a dune. The vehicle was a Confederate army ambulance drawn by two running horses. No driver was visible on the seat, no sign of life showed from behind its drawn curtains. The horses had obviously been running for a long time. Their flanks were white with dried lather and their running was little more than a wobble-legged trot.

Tuco snatched his foot down and ran to intercept the runaways. He had no difficulty grabbing the bridles and bringing the exhausted team to a halt. He ran around and snatched open the side door of the ambulance.

The dead body of a Confederate major pitched halfway out. Beneath and beyond it were other bodies, thrown into a tangled heap by the jouncing of the wagon. Tuco dragged the corpse of the major to the ground and rifled the pockets. They yielded a gold watch, a few coins and a packet of Confederate banknotes. The last he contemptuously threw aside.

The next body wore the blood-stained uniform of a cavalryman. A black patch covered the empty socket of one eye. Tuco stripped off the patch and tried it on. It fit well and he put it away in his pocket. It could serve him as a disguise on his next robbery.

He took hold of the body to drag it out and nearly leaped out of his boots when it stirred in his grasp and uttered a feeble moan. Swollen lips moved in a croaking whisper.

“Water, in the name of heaven. Water, water—”

“Aiee.” Tuco spat. “Water is too precious in this desert to be wasted on a man as good as dead. Be quiet while I see if you have anything worth stealing.”

He found a handful of small coins, a cigar case engraved with the name Bill Carson. A folded paper proved to be the enlistment record of one Bill Carson in the Third Cavalry, C.S.A.

Tuco put this carefully away. His eyes glittered as he considered the infinite possibilities inherent in carrying the identity of a man already dead.

The figure stirred again and the one eye opened.

"Water—I'll pay—for it—in gold dollars. Two-hundred-thousand dollars."

"What?" Tuco grabbed the dying man and shook him roughly. "What is this? What about two hundred thousand gold dollars, Carson? Where would you get that much money? If you're lying—"

"No," the feeble whisper came. "Not Carson. Real name—Jackson. I stole—Fourth Cavalry funds—hid them. Only I—know—where. Water—"

"You'll get the water," Tuco rasped, "as soon as you tell me where the money's hidden. I remember the story now. There was a court-martial. You went free. Out with it. Where is the money?"

"In—cemetery—grave."

"What cemetery? Where? Talk, you filthy vermin."

"Sad—Hill. In the—grave."

"What grave? There are thousands there. What's the name? What's the number on it? Come on—talk, talk, you dirty louse. The name or the number. Quick. Spit it out."

"Name—on head—board. Name—wa—"

Tuco yelled, shook the dying man savagely.

"What, you stinking rat? Get it out and I'll give you water? What's the name on that headboard, damn you?"

The dying man strained but only a wordless croak came from his lips. The one eye closed and his head fell back.

Tuco scrambled up, his eyes wild. "Don't die—don't pull a dirty, stinking trick like that on me. Don't move. I'm going for the water. Don't you dare die before I come back, you dirty scum."

He whirled and ran madly toward his horse,

which had wandered several hundred yards from the ambulance in search of grass. In his panic he failed to see the figure of the bounty-hunter crawling slowly toward the ambulance.

Tuco snatched the canteen from the saddle and raced back. He had almost reached the ambulance when he saw his hated enemy huddled in the tiny patch of shade beside the figure of Carson-Jackson.

"Get away from there," Tuco screamed. "Get away, damn your black soul. Get away from him—"

"It doesn't matter," the hunter croaked. "He's dead."

Tuco threw himself down, shaking the lifeless body, beating it in a fury of frustration.

"Damn you, damn you, damn you—" He reared back, his face working crazily. He jerked out his gun. "I'll kill you."

"I wouldn't—if I were—you," the hunter croaked. "Kill me—now—and you'll—stay the beggar—you are for the—rest of—your life."

"He talked?" Tuco screamed. "He told you something? But, no. He was too far gone to talk. You're lying to make me spare your stinking hide. He couldn't talk."

"He told name—grave—full of gold—somewhere—"

Tuco flung himself on the limp figure, shaking it furiously.

"The name, Whitey. Tell me whose grave."

The only response was a feeble moan.

"Whitey, you aren't dying, too, like that pig? You can't die—I won't let you die. I'm your friend, Whitey. Wait, here is water. Suck a little but don't swallow just yet. It will make you sick. Don't die, Whitey—at least not for a while."

The water brought some strength back to the hunter but now he was delirious. His eyes rolled wildly while wordless sounds came from the swollen lips. Tuco turned his eyes heavenward.

“Mother of God, don’t let him die. He is dearer than a brother to me.”

He scrambled up and dragged the remaining bodies out of the ambulance. One had been a very tall man, over six feet. Alternately praying and cursing, Tuco stripped the Confederate uniform from the corpse and somehow got it onto the inert figure of the bounty-hunter.

Another change transformed Tuco into the late Corporal Bill Carson, complete with eyepatch. He gathered up the limp figure of the hunter and deposited it tenderly on the ambulance floor.

“Don’t die, Whitey. Don’t die, don’t die, don’t die —” He scrambled to the driver’s seat and slapped the reins. “Giddyup, you vulture’s bait. Move. If he dies—a part of me will die, too.”

Chapter 10

THE REBEL sentry lifted his gun and peered nervously into the darkness.

"Halt. Who's there? Identify yourself or I'll shoot."

"What do you mean, who's there?" Tuco bawled back. "Who were you expecting—Colonel Canby with the Yankee army at his heels, idiot? If I were the enemy you wouldn't be alive to ask stupid questions. I've got a man here who's in terrible condition—maybe dying or already dead."

The sentry lit a hooded lantern and cautiously approached the ambulance. He studied Tuco, then leaned in to examine the figure of the hunter.

"He's still alive, isn't he?" Tuco called anxiously.

"He's breathing but that's about all. What happened?"

"Our troop was ambushed. Only the two of us got away."

"Your name, rank and unit—and show me your travel orders."

"Travel orders?" Tuco choked. "The only travel orders we got came spitting out of Yankee gun muzzles, you jughead. I'm Corporal Bill Carson, Third Cavalry Regiment, Second Squadron. You got more damfool questions to ask while a man is dying? Or do you show us to the infirmary?"

"Infirmary?" the sentry hooted. "We're on the edge of the desert, separated from our regiment and fleeing for our lives and you ask where's our infirmary. I'll tell you where the nearest infirmary is, Corporal. It's in the Yankee camp." He sobered. "Look, Corporal, we don't even have a doctor here. Your best hope is to get him to the Mission of San Antonio."

Tuco started violently. "Did you say San Antonio?"

"Yep. It's about eighteen miles in that direction. The friars there will take in any wounded man, never mind the color of his uniform. Get along, but watch out for Federal troops. They're all over the area."

It was midmorning when Tuco drove up to the mission door. A gaunt, ascetic monk with a white beard came out as Tuco sprang down from the ambulance seat.

"Hello, Padre. I have a man here who is in bad condition. You must get to work on him at once."

"But we are already overcrowded. There is no more room."

"Then give him yours," Tuco barked. "Where is Pablo Ramirez?"

"Father Ramirez is away from the mission now but we expect him to return any day."

"It doesn't matter. The important thing is to make my hurt friend well. See if he is still breathing, Padre."

The monk leaned into the ambulance.

"Yes, he still breathes."

"God be praised. If you don't know, Padre, God is with us because he, too, hates the Yankees. Give me

a hand here and we'll get this poor fellow inside. Easy, Whitey. Easy now, boy. They'll have you as good as new in no time."

The unconscious figure was deposited on the bed in a small cell. The white-bearded monk turned on Tuco and flapped his hands.

"Get out, now. Outside."

"Padre, this man is like a brother to me."

"But right now he needs nursing and I can't take care of him if I'm falling over you constantly. So out with you. Wait outside and I'll let you know his condition."

For what seemed hours Tuco paced outside the cell, gnawing his knuckles and muttering prayers. Monks rushed past him, carrying towels and instruments and basins of hot water.

At last the cell door opened and the friar emerged. Tuco rushed to him.

"Padre, how is he? Has he spoken? Did he ask for me or perhaps speak a name? Even if he is out of his head, Padre, you must tell me at once if he speaks a name."

"He can't speak—and won't be able to for some time. But do not worry about him. He is a strong man or he would not be alive now. I would say that unless there are complications he should be fully recovered in a couple of weeks. In the meantime we'll find some way to put you up so you can be close to him."

"Thank you, Padre. And thanks to God and Saint Francis, too. You don't know what this means to me."

"You must be a very good friend."

"Padre, I would follow him anywhere—to the ends of the earth if I had to."

Two days later the sick man was judged strong enough for a brief visit. Tuco approached the bed nervously.

Then his face lit.

"Whitey, you look good. The good padre tells me that in a couple of weeks you should be almost as good as new. At least strong enough to travel. Just think how lucky it was that I was there with you when—when it happened. Just think if you had been alone out there. When a man is sick he needs someone dear to him by his side—a friend, a relative. Do you have relatives, Whitey? A mother? No? You are alone like me. But now I have you and you have me."

The hunter rolled his head and a throaty, barking sound came from his lips. Tuco bent over him anxiously, then realized that what he was hearing was weak laughter. He sprang back, his face dark with rage.

"Pig—bastard. What is so funny, eh? Let me in on your grand joke, scum, so I can laugh, too."

"You and me," the other gasped weakly. "We hate each other's guts—but we have to keep one another alive at all costs. Even in hell they must be laughing at so funny a joke, Tuco."

"I'll tell you another joke to laugh at, Whitey," Tuco raged. "I lied to you a minute ago. You aren't going to be well in two weeks—or ever. The padre says it's all over for you, Whitey. Not even a miracle can pull you through. You're going to die and it's my fault. Mine, all mine—"

"Tuco." The rasping whisper drew the bandit's ear

to the hunter. "Don't grieve too much. I will die happy, knowing I leave such a good friend to cherish my memory."

"Son of a pimp." Tuco dropped to his knees beside the bed. "Listen, Whitey. If I knew my hour had come—I swear I would not carry a useless secret with me to the grave. I would not have such a thing on my conscience in Purgatory. I would tell you with my dying breath the location of the cemetery where the money is hidden." He scrambled to his feet. "Here, Whitey, have a sip of this coffee. It will give you strength to speak clearly, to mention the name on the headboard of that grave. After all, what will you need the money for when you're dead? Just speak the name, Whitey, and I swear to you when I lay my hands on the two hundred thousand dollars I will honor your memory. I will have a mass said for you every day. Better yet—I'll have the mass sung, even if it does cost a little more. Nothing will be too good for my dear friend."

"Tuco," the other said in an almost normal voice. "If you don't stop you'll have me laughing myself to death and then you'll never find out the name on that grave."

"Stinking black-hearted bastard," Tuco growled.

The friar put his head in the door.

"Shame on you, using such language in a house of God. Clear out now. Go away and let this man rest."

The following day Tuco encountered the friar hurrying with a glass of water.

"That is for my friend, Padre? Let me take it to him. I want to apologise for my outburst yesterday. I have been so worried over him that my nerves are on edge. I have burned candles and apologised to

God for my wickedness, Padre. Now let me apologise to him.”

The bounty-hunter held out his hand for the glass as Tuco approached the bed. Tuco leered at him, keeping the glass just out of reach.

“You want water, eh? You are dying for water, your poor throat on fire? I’ll give you water, all you can swallow—as soon as you have told me the name, Whitey. The name. The name, you scum, you vermin from the dungheap—”

The hunter made a sudden lunge. He struck the bottom of the glass, throwing the water into Tuco’s face. The outlaw jumped back, sputtering and cursing.

“So you’re strong enough for tricks, eh? Then, damn your soul, you’re strong enough to travel. Your easy time is over. Get your butt out of that bed and get your clothes on, damn you. More wounded soldiers are pouring in by the cartload. The fighting is getting closer and if we don’t clear out fast we’re liable to wind up right in the middle of it.”

The friar put his head in the door.

“Father Ramirez has returned and will see you at once. Come with me.”

Tuco swung around in the doorway. “This is private business that will not take me long. When I come back—see that you are up and ready to go.”

The tall monk rose from a writing table, his dark face devoid of expression as his visitor was ushered in.

When the door closed Tuco ran to him, clutching the robe.

“Pablo, Pablo—don’t you recognize me? It is your brother, Tuco. Let me embrace you.” He gave the

other an awkward hug, then stepped back, looking embarrassed. He laughed nervously. "It is only that—well—I don't know how one is supposed to act with monks. I was passing near here so I said to myself, 'Who knows if my brother still remembers me?' Did I do wrong to come here? All the same—it is good to see you."

"So now you have seen me," the monk said coldly.

"And I am glad, brother—or Father. Ah, you are eyeing my uniform. It is a long story, too long to tell now. But let's talk about you, not about me. You're more important. You look very well. A little thin, perhaps, but—eh—still in good form, Pablito? And how are the old ones?"

"Only now you remember them, Tuco? After nine years?"

"Nine years? Is it that long? Well, well. Nine years."

Tuco laughed nervously and mopped a glistening forehead.

"Our father has been gone for a long time. Our mother died only a few days ago. That was what took me away from the monastery. She looked and hoped for you until the very last. But only I was there."

Tuco snuffled noisily and rubbed a sleeve across his eyes.

"And besides doing evil, what else have you accomplished, Tuco? Did I not hear that you had a wife somewhere?"

"A wife, brother? I have had lots of wives. One here, one there—all over the place. And plenty of mistresses, too. Now go ahead, brother. Preach me

that sermon you've been saving up for me all these years."

The monk spread his hands in a gesture of futility. "What good would it do? Go on your way, Tuco, now that you have seen me. Go—and God have mercy on you."

"Sure, I'll go," Tuco cut in harshly. "But while I'm waiting for that heavenly mercy I, Tuco Benedicto Pacifico Juan Maria Ramirez, will tell you something, brother of mine. You think you are so much better than me because of that robe, eh? Where we came from—a man who didn't want to starve had only two choices. He became a priest or a bandit. You chose your road and I chose mine."

Father Ramirez had turned his back. Tuco tramped around until they were again face to face.

"The hard road is mine. You talk of our mother and father, eh? But when you left to take your vows—who was it who stayed behind to help them? I was ten or twelve years old then, brother, and I had to sweat and sweat plenty even when I knew all I could do was useless."

He wagged an angry finger in his brother's face.

"Do you know what I have to say to you now, brother? You became a monk only because you were a coward—without the guts to become a bandit."

The monk's hand whipped out and cracked against Tuco's face. Tuco fell back. His eyes widened in shock that turned to rage.

"Tuco—forgive me, brother. I didn't mean—"

Tuco cursed, whirled and ran out of the room.

An hour later, on the seat of the ambulance, he sucked his teeth and watched enviously as the hunter lit one of his *cigarros*.

"Ah, yes, Whitey. After a fine meal like the ones the monks gave us back there, nothing is as fine as a cigar to top it off, eh?"

The bounty-hunter fished out another stubby cigar and silently handed it over. Tuco fired it and sucked in the fragrant smoke.

"Now it is perfect, Whitey. What a meal they gave us for a send-off, eh? Those monks eat well and feed well. My brother saw to it that we had the best. You didn't know, did you Whitey, that the head of the monastery is my brother? Pablito—little Pablo. What a fine man my brother is. He told me whenever I was near to stop in again. He said there would always be food and shelter for me. And he told me to bring my friend with me. That is you, Whitey. How my brother hates to see me leave. Even for a sinner like me there is always a welcome—no matter what I have done or what has happened." He fished a worn map out of a pocket and studied it, frowning. "Let's see. We cross the Rio Grande here and follow the trail this way."

"To where?" the hunter asked innocently.

"Uh-uh. When we arrive where we are going I will tell you where we are, Whitey. That way you don't have to worry, with our destination on your mind all the time."

"Thanks," the other said dryly. "But as long as I'm still alive and we'll undoubtedly be passing through both Union and Confederate lines several times—wouldn't it be just plain common sense to give me some idea of where we're going?"

"Toward two hundred thousand gold dollars, Whitey. Isn't that enough for any man to know?"

The hunter shrugged, handed over the reins to Tuco and settled himself for a nap.

Some time later he was awakened by a hand shaking his shoulder and Tuco's urgent voice in his ear.

"Whitey—Whitey, wake up. Soldiers are coming—a troop of cavalry."

The hunter opened his eyes. "Blue or gray?"

The wagon had halted in a little glade where they were hidden from casual view by bushes. Tuco stood on the seat, shading his eyes as he peered over the bushes. He jumped down, beaming.

"Gray, like us—Confederates. We're in luck, Whitey. We don't have to hide here. We'll just give them a salute and keep right on going. Long live the Confederacy—hooray for the South and damnation to all Yankees. Long live General—eh, what's that General's name, Whitey?"

"Lee—Robert E. Lee. But I think we'd be smart just to stay right here, out of sight, until they've gone on."

"Eh? You worry too much, Whitey. Why should friends hide from friends? Giddup, you knothheads. God is with us because he too, hates Yankees."

The ambulance lurched out of the glade into the open. The officer leading the oncoming troop lifted his hand and the double line of cavalry swerved to intercept their path.

Tuco waved his hat and yelled, "Long live General Lee—"

The officer stared at him in silence. Then he stripped off a gauntlet and used it to slap vigorously at his jacket sleeve. A cloud of gray dust smoked up with each slap. After a moment a dark patch began

to appear on the sleeve. Beneath the mantle of dust the jacket was unmistakably Yankee blue.

“God,” said the hunter bitterly, “couldn’t hate Yankees half as much as he must hate idiots.”

Chapter 11

BATTLEVILLE Prison Camp was big, rambling and enclosed by a stockade fence. High watch-towers rose at intervals above the stockade. From these the guards could see and shoot into every part of the camp. More than a thousand Confederate prisoners were already jammed into the place and more were arriving daily.

Tuco and his tall companion were shoved into a small receiving compound with some fifty other captives. These were being processed, one at a time, at a guarded inner gate, then passed through into the main prison yard. The processing seemed to consist mainly of stripping each man of whatever money and other possessions were on his person.

Tuco's eyes glittered as he studied the growing pile of watches, jewelry and money on the table.

"What a haul, Whitey. Maybe we can figure a way to start our own prison camp and rob everybody all legal like that. Only I wouldn't bother with privates. I'd have my camp just for officers—rich officers, eh?"

"You'd better use whatever wits you have to figure a way to get us out of this camp."

A gate guard threw his rifle to his shoulder.

"You, over there. Shut up. Open your mouths once more and you'll be tasting lead."

The number of waiting prisoners dwindled rapidly until only the hunter and Tuco remained. The guard jerked his thumb at Tuco.

"You're next, Reb. Get up here—on the double."

A corporal snatched his enlistment paper and added "Bill Carson" to his list. Meanwhile one of the guards went through Tuco's pockets methodically and thoroughly. Tuco glowered as the watch, jewelry and cash he had taken from the dead soldiers was tossed on the table. Last of all was the gold cigar case with Bill Carson's name engraved in the lid.

The corporal glanced at the case and stiffened. He snatched it up and went to whisper urgently to one of the guards at the gate. The guard nodded, took the case and trotted briskly toward a row of flat-roofed wooden buildings. The corporal turned and gestured to Tuco.

"All right, you. Move along. Get inside."

"Now, wait a minute," Tuco said indignantly. "Where's my receipt?"

"Receipt?" The corporal came toward him, his eyes narrow, his mouth a thin, cold line. "What receipt?"

"You're supposed to give me a receipt for everything you take away so when the war's over or we're exchanged I show it and get my stuff back again."

"Oh, that receipt," the corporal said. "Here—"

He slugged from the hip, pivoting on his toes and putting the full weight of his body behind the blow. His fist sank deep into Tuco's unguarded belly. Tuco fell, retching and sobbing for breath.

The corporal jerked his head at the grinning guards.

“Throw him in the pen with the rest.”

The newly arrived prisoners were herded into a line. A hulking bruiser in a corporal's uniform walked along the line. His thick lips curled in an expression of exaggerated disgust. He turned back and planted himself before the prisoners.

“All right, you Rebs. Straighten up and listen to me. I'm Corporal Wallace and there's nothin' in this stinkin' world I hate worse than stinkin' Johnny Rebs. I'll give you orders and I expect you to squeal like pigs when I say squeal. Understand? Whatever I tell you to do, you do—and do it damn fast. Otherwise, you and me'll take a little walk to the guard-room and have us a little, quiet, heart-to-heart talk about discipline.” He glared ominously at the sullen faces. “All right, we'll call the roll. When you hear your name answer, ‘Present’. I'm a mite hard of hearing sometimes—so make damn sure you call out loud and clear. John Cooper.”

“Present.”

“Charles Louis.”

“Present.”

Tuco suddenly nudged his tall companion and whispered excitedly, “Do you see that big fellow over there, wearing a sergeant's stripes? The one with eyes like a cougar's. That's Sentenza, the hired gun. You know him, Whitey?”

The bounty-hunter studied the distant figure.

“I know about him and his fast gun but we've never met. Are you sure, Tuco?”

“Sure I'm sure. I've worked with him on a couple of deals and against him on some. The son of a bitch beat me out every time. I don't know what he's doing in a Yankee uniform but one thing's for cer-

tain. He sure as hell didn't join up for honest soldiering any more than we did."

Corporal Wallace had bellowed the same name three times without a response. His voice was growing thick with rage.

"Bill Carson!" he roared. "I hope Bill Carson's enjoying himself, because when he finally wakes up, he'll wish he hadn't. Bill Carson—"

"In case you've forgotten, you muttonhead," the hunter said from the corner of his mouth, "you're supposed to be Bill Carson."

"Oh, oh," Tuco bleated. He waved his arm. "That's me, General. Right over here!"

The corporal strode toward him, eyes glittering.

"So you're Bill Carson, are you? I trust you had a nice, sound nap, Bill Carson. You must've been already asleep when I told everybody to answer 'Present' when his name was called."

He was quick as a cat for so big a man. He caught Tuco by the wrist, spun him around and twisted the arm up between the bandit's shoulder blades so savagely that the creak of tortured joints was clearly audible.

"Present, Bill Carson?"

A moan of agony was the only sound that forced itself past Tuco's clenched teeth. Wallace grunted and shoved the arm still higher. Tuco's eyes closed to slits and great drops of sweat crawled down his forehead.

"Big men like you," Tuco ground out. "I like them because when they fall they make such a big noise—"

Wallace howled in wordless fury and brought up a fist like ham.

A cold voice barked, "Corporal, that's enough. Let go of that prisoner."

Sentenza stood a dozen feet away.

He repeated, "Let go of that prisoner, Corporal. That's an order."

Panting with fury, the big man slowly and reluctantly released his grip and stepped away. Tuco's arm dangled limply. He hugged it, moaning softly.

A soldier trotted up.

"Sergeant, the captain wants to see you immediately."

Sentenza's pale cold eyes moved from the whimpering Tuco to the tall hunter.

He snapped, "Corporal, you are to see that these two are treated well. And that also is an order."

He turned and strode toward the row of buildings across the compound.

Wallace glared at the two, breathing in heavy gasps. Slowly his big fists unclenched.

"Prisoners—dismissed."

"Did you hear that, Whitey?" Tuco panted. "Sentenza told that big bastard to treat us well. He recognized me and he knows how to treat old friends. Our worries are over from here on, Whitey."

■ Captain Harper, Commandant of Battleville, was a dying man. He lay in his quarters, growing steadily weaker day by day, his eyes bright with fever in a bloodless, emaciated face. Thin, bony hands plucked aimlessly at the bedclothing. One leg was swathed to the hip in a great mass of stained bandages that gave off a foul odor.

He aroused himself with an effort as Sentenza

gave a perfunctory rap and strode in, flicking a careless salute.

"I hope you're feeling better today, sir."

The captain ignored the amenities.

"Sergeant, I'm telling you for the last time—I want the prisoners in this camp treated as honorable prisoners of war. I will not stand for any more of the kind of manhandling I just witnessed through the window."

Sentenza said harshly, "There are hundreds of those bastards out there just itching to jump us the moment our backs are turned. I've got a handful of guards to maintain order. How are we supposed to make them respect our authority if we let them get away with openly defying it?"

"You'd have better success treating them as human beings."

"Do you think our men are getting better treatment at Andersonville? Breakfast in bed, maybe, with a rosebud on every tray?"

"How our men are treated as prisoners in Confederate camps is not my responsibility. I'm responsible for the treatment prisoners receive here. I will not stand for having the prisoners in my camp regularly robbed, tortured, even murdered."

Sentenza's eyes glittered.

"Is that an accusation—sir?"

"Sergeant, gangrene is eating my leg away but not my eyes. I am well aware that incoming prisoners are systematically robbed of all their possessions, which are then peddled to a pack of filthy jackals who are staked out around the camp. My mistake was in giving you almost unlimited authority to take over until my replacement arrives—if he arrives. I'm

not even certain that my dispatches to headquarters ever leave this camp."

"If you're dissatisfied, sir," Sentenza said, "I would be happy to step down and let you resume personal command."

"Damn your arrogance," Captain Harper gasped. Each rasping breath was taking its toll of his fading strength. "As long as I'm in charge here I will not permit those vicious practices to continue. Have I made myself clear?"

"Oh, sure," Sentenza said. He grinned. "As long as you're in charge."

"I know—I'm dying, Sergeant, but I'm not yet dead. I intend to hang on long enough to gather proof of the charges I've made. Then a court-martial can deal with those who dishonor the uniform of the Union."

"A worthy ambition, Captain," Sentenza said. "I hope it meets with success."

He turned and went out without bothering to request permission or to salute.

Outside, Wallace was deep in conversation with a thin-lipped, sharp-featured man in the uniform of a camp guard. Sentenza strode past them with a barely perceptible jerk of his head. In a few minutes they joined him in his private quarters.

Wallace growled the moment the door closed, "Why didn't you let me finish the job on that smart monkey out there?"

"Because," Sentenza said grimly, "that smart monkey out there happens to be the most important man in the world to me right now. But only if he stays alive and able to talk. You'll get your chance at him in good time." He turned to the sharp-faced guard.

"Sambrell, the time has come for a change in scenery. The game here is played out. Any day now Harper's replacement will arrive—then all hell will break loose."

Sambrell patted the gun at his side.

"I can take care of Harper—and his replacement."

"And the rest of the U.S. Army, no doubt," Sentenza said dryly. "But I'll have a more important job for you. Round up the rest of the boys right away. Saddle up and go for a nice long ride—only don't come back. Wait at the old camp spot until you get word from Wallace or me."

When Sambrell had gone Sentenza tilted back his chair and put his feet on the table. He locked his hands behind his head and smiled at the brutish corporal.

"Wallace, Captain Harper wants the prisoners given more humane treatment. It might be a good idea to treat them to another one of those music concerts you arrange so admirably."

"Yes, sir," Wallace said. He grinned and licked his lips.

"Get every prisoner with a musical instrument into your band. It doesn't matter whether or not they play well—as long as they play good and loud."

"You bet."

Wallace caressed scarred knuckles and his small piggish eyes glittered with anticipation.

"Then," Sentenza said, "bring your friend, Bill Carson, in for a little visit with us. And Wallace—no rough stuff—yet."

Tuco and the Man With No Name were lounging in the shade of a barracks with several other prisoners when Wallace came around the corner. Tuco

wincing and shrank back but the big corporal strode on past to where a bearded old man slept with his back against the wall.

Wallace drew back his boot and drove a vicious kick into the sleeper's ribs. The impact sent the old man rolling. He peered up dazedly, then scrambled to his feet, holding his side and muffling a groan.

"We're having another band concert for the boys, Simmons," the corporal said, grinning. "Get your horn and get over there on the double."

The old man muttered, "Yes, sir."

He stumbled into the barracks, bent over and holding his side. He emerged lugging a battered tuba. He limped off across the compound to where other prisoners were converging, carrying a variety of instruments.

Still grinning, Wallace turned and crooked a finger at Tuco.

"You—Carson. Come along. The sergeant wants a word with you."

Tuco wet his lips and his eyes shuttled wildly, searching in vain for help.

"On your feet," Wallace snarled. "I've got strict orders not to lay a hand on you but don't tempt me too far."

Tuco dragged himself erect and tottered after the burly figure like a condemned man marching to the gallows. A prisoner named Angus looked pityingly at the bounty-hunter and wagged his head.

"I don't know what your friend's done—but God help him. I never seen a band concert set up so close to the sergeant's quarters before."

The hunter scowled.

"I don't get it, friend. What's the connection be-

tween the sergeant's sending for Tuco and the band concert?"

"Don't you know about the Battleville band, mister? They only give a concert when some poor bastard is due to get beaten within an inch of his life or maybe strung up by the thumbs. It's supposed to play so loud Cap'n Harper can't hear his screams."

The hunter's face went tight and icily blank. His fists clenched until the knuckles turned frosty white. Until that moment he had taken it for granted that only he and Tuco shared the dead Carson's secret of the buried gold.

Chapter 12

“COME IN, Tuco,” Sentenza said genially. “Don’t stand on ceremony. How long has it been?”

He was seated at a big table, ladling a rich-looking stew from a large bowl into a smaller one at his place. A chunk of crusty bread lay beside the stew. An open whiskey bottle and a half-filled tumbler of amber liquid stood close to his hand.

Tuco wet his lips and moved a few reluctant steps toward the table.

“A long time, Sentenza.”

“You can take off that silly eyepatch, too. I recognized you immediately out there in line.”

Tuco stripped off the patch with unsteady hands. The vapors from the succulent stew assailed his nostrils. His mouth watered and his stomach rumbled with longing. Sentenza heard the sound and laughed. He gestured toward a chair at the end of the table.

“Hungry? I guess the standard prison fare does leave a little something to be desired. Sit down and eat, Tuco.” He pushed the large bowl of stew and the bread over. “Take it all. I’ve finished my dinner, except for the—ah—dessert.”

He sipped whiskey appreciatively, his mocking gaze fixed on the bandit’s nervous, shifting eyes. Tuco slid into the seat, snatched up a spoon, then

froze. Fear and suspicion came into his eyes. He looked longingly at the stew while an inner battle raged between doubt and hunger. Doubt won and he laid the spoon back on the table.

Sentenza reached over and dipped a heaping spoonful of the stew. He chewed appreciatively and swallowed.

"You see, Tuco—no poison. You always were a suspicious character. Now dive in and fill yourself."

Tuco's face cleared. He snatched the bread with one hand and the spoon with the other and wolfed down the food, making little animal squeals of delight. Sentenza watched him, sipping his whiskey. Wallace stood just inside the closed door, a look of anticipation on his brute face.

"Ah-ah-ah," Tuco mumbled between bites. "I knew it. The moment I saw you I said to myself, 'Look at that pig of a Sentenza. He's got himself set up real good here. And Sentenza is not the kind who forgets his friends. Especially not an old friend like Tuco.'"

"That's right, Tuco. Particularly an old friend like you."

"Good."

Tuco beamed, swallowing a huge chunk of meat.

"And I do enjoy seeing friends once in a while. That way I know I'm not forgotten."

"Right," Tuco mumbled, nodding vigorously.

"Especially," Sentenza went on smoothly, "when friends have traveled a long distance and have many interesting and exciting things to tell me."

Tuco's eyes were suddenly wary and hooded.

"Sure."

"What do you have to tell me, Tuco?"

"Uh—you mean, like about the war and the fighting? And about getting captured?"

"Tuco," Sentenza said softly. "Let's see, you were captured at Fort Craig, or somewhere in that general area, I believe."

Tuco's reply was a cautious grunt that could have been either affirmative or negative.

Sentenza put his fingertips together and studied the outlaw thoughtfully.

"So, you were with Sibley's Texans—which means you must have come from Sante Fe."

"Uh," Tuco grunted. He wiped sudden moisture from his forehead with a ragged sleeve.

"The desert has killed a lot of men. It must have been pretty terrible to cross."

"Very bad," Tuco agreed. He stared wistfully at the whiskey bottle. "It is especially bad when you have nothing to drink."

Sentenza pushed the bottle toward the bandit's outstretched hand.

"Help yourself, Tuco, and don't feel obliged to stint. Good whiskey is sometimes a help in loosening the tongue and yours needs it."

Tuco tilted the bottle and his throat worked convulsively. He lowered it at last with an explosive breath. He wiped his mouth and belched.

"You are a fine fellow, Sentenza. Like I have always said, 'That Sentenza—he is one of the best.'"

"And also—" Sentenza still spoke softly—"one of the most curious. For instance, how did you happen to start calling yourself Bill Carson."

Tuco's eyes shifted.

"It's as good a name as any, isn't it? You know using my own name too much might not be so

healthy, eh? It could give me a very sore throat." He guffawed at his own joke but the sound was strained. "Besides, I don't see you using your name so much, either, Sentenza. Sergeant Sentenza? That might not sound so nice in some places, eh?"

"I see. Then you mean Bill Carson is just a name that popped into your head for no reason at all. Is that the way it was, Tuco? It wasn't one you might have—ah—borrowed from a real Bill Carson?"

"Is there a real Bill Carson?" Tuco asked. "The name just came into my mind."

"I see," Sentenza purred. "And the eyepatch. That just came into your mind, too?" He watched big drops of sweat form and crawl down the swarthy cheeks. "Tell me, Tuco, do you like music? Band music?"

The bandit looked puzzled, then shrugged.

"Well, sure. I guess so." He patted his bulging belly. "Anyhow, they say it is good for the digestion."

Wallace said eagerly from his post beside the door, "Now, sergeant?"

"I think very shortly now," Sentenza replied quietly. "Just be patient a little longer, Wallace."

Tuco's gaze shuttled nervously from one man to the other. The meaning of the cryptic exchange eluded him but it had had an ominous sound. He swallowed noisily and wet his lips.

"So the whole Bill Carson identity is just a fake? Is that your story, Tuco?"

"That's right."

Sentenza drew the gold cigar case from his pocket, opened the lid and set it on the table where Tuco could stare at the engraved name.

“Then this cigar case is part of the fake, too. It seems to me you went to a great deal of trouble and expense to build up the identity of a man who never existed.” His hands slapped down on the table and he bent forward, the pale eyes cold and deadly. “Carson was alive when you found him, wasn’t he? Alive and able to talk. What did he say? What did he tell you about two hundred thousand gold dollars? Where did he tell you he hid it?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Sentenza leaned back again, his pent breath hissing out through clenched teeth.

“Now, Wallace.”

The big corporal whirled, snatched open the door and poked his head out. “All right, you Rebs. Start the music—and make damn sure it’s good and loud.”

The band began to play raggedly and off-key but with tremendous volume.



Chapter 13

TUCO was no weakling. He made a valiant, if hopeless, effort to defend himself. He struck first, driving a left and a right with all his force into Wallace's heavy middle. Tuco's fists rebounded from a mass of iron-hard muscle.

The big man bellowed and sledged with a fist that almost tore Tuco's head off. He flew backward, skidded across the table on his shoulders, taking the stew bowl with him. He crashed to the floor. Wallace was on him like a tiger, hitting, mauling, picking him up and slamming him to the floor. Blood began to pour from the bandit's nostrils and a crimson trail ran down from one corner of his mouth.

Sentenza blew a cloud of smoke from the yellow meerschaum.

"Easy, Wallace. Take a breather." He knocked the dottle from the pipe and stowed it away. "How's the digestion now, Tuco? Does that music get on your nerves? We can stop it, you know, if you'd prefer to have it quiet while you tell me what I'm waiting to hear."

Tuco stirred feebly and mumbled, "Nothing—to tell."

Sentenza sighed.

"You're a stubborn man, Tuco. But then, so is Wallace."

The corporal opened the door, put out his head, yelled, "Play louder you Reb bastards."

He came back across the room, grinned and bent over the limp and battered figure. His huge hands reached for the bandit's throat.

Suddenly the bundle of bloody rags on the floor exploded into life. Tuco's bent legs straightened, lashing out and up to drive both heels full into Wallace's meaty face. Wallace rocked back, blood spurted from his smashed nose and a long cut over one eye.

Tuco tried to roll over and scramble to his feet. He made it as far as his hands and knees before the agony of injured ribs arrested him. Wallace heaved to his knees and flung himself forward. His massive body hit Tuco, rolled him over and slammed down on him, driving the breath from Tuco's lungs in a bubbling scream of pain.

Wallace straddled the squirming figure, trapping Tuco's arms with his knees. His huge hands cupped the battered face, holding it in a vise while his thumbs clamped down on Tuco's eyes.

"You'll need two eye-patches when I'm through with you—"

Wallace pushed down with both thumbs.

Tuco screamed again.

Then he moaned, "I'll talk—I'll talk—"

"That's enough, Wallace," Sentenza said sharply.

Slowly and reluctantly the big man took his thumbs from Tuco's eyes and rose to his feet. He mopped his bloody face on his sleeve, swearing thickly under his breath.

Sentenza moved his chair around to face the

figure on the floor, bending forward, resting his elbows on his knees.

"Now let's hear everything Bill Carson told you about that money."

"It's—hidden—in a—grave."

"Where?"

"Sad Hill—the Sad Hill—cemetery."

"In which grave? What's the name or number on it?"

"I don't know."

"Wallace," Sentenza said.

The big man started forward, Tuco screamed again wordlessly.

Then: "No more." Fear gave him the strength to sit up. He flung out a pleading hand. "Listen to me. I swear to heaven that I don't know which grave. Whitey—Whitey knows the—the name on it. Whitey—the big white-haired man who was captured with me."

Sentenza's sharp gesture stopped Wallace in his tracks.

"You'd better explain that, Tuco, and tell it so it makes good sense. I don't buy fairy tales."

"Yes. Carson was dying. He told about the money and the cemetery but when he tried to name the grave he couldn't get the words out. All he could do was croak for water. I ran to get the canteen from my saddle. When I got back Whitey was hanging over him and he was dead. But with his last breath he got out the name on the grave. That's why we had to—stick together. Whitey knew the grave but not which cemetery. I knew the cemetery—but not the grave."

Sentenza straightened, the sorrel eyes glittering. "I'll be everlastingly damned."

■ A guard found the bounty-hunter sitting by the barracks. He jerked a thumb by way of command. "The sergeant wants to see you right away. Come along."

Sentenza was perched on the edge of the table swinging one leg when the hunter was brought to him. He had exchanged his sergeant's uniform for his regular clothing. The butt of the long-barreled pistol showed under the frock coat. More civilian clothing was piled on the end of the table. He nodded toward it.

"Get out of the Reb uniform and into these clothes. As far as you and I are concerned, my friend, the war is over."

The hunter remained where he had stopped, just inside the door.

"Why?"

"Because we're leaving here right away."

"Leaving for where?"

"For the spot where two hundred thousand gold dollars lie waiting to be found. I know the name and location of a certain cemetery and you know the name on a certain grave. That makes us what you might call traveling companions, doesn't it?"

"So Tuco talked," the bounty-hunter said.

"He really didn't have a great deal of choice," Sentenza said dryly.

"I can see that," the hunter said.

He used the toe of his boot to smear a small puddle of fresh blood on the floor.

Sentenza nearly smiled.

"Wallace is proficient in many ways. Housekeeping isn't one of them."

"Aren't you going to honor me with a band concert, too?" the blond hunter asked.

"Would it encourage you to talk?"

"I don't think it would."

"I didn't think so, either. Not because you're tougher than Tuco, necessarily, but because I think you're smarter. You would realize that while talking might save you a beating—it wouldn't save your neck."

"Is that what happened to Tuco? You had him killed?"

"Oh, no. As a matter of fact, he and Wallace are getting ready to leave on a little errand for me. They're going to the bank to get some money for me."

The hunter's eyebrows lifted.

"Like about three thousand dollars, maybe?"

"Exactly," Sentenza said. "You're a sharp one, aren't you? After all, why should I let the U. S. Army hang him free when a sheriff will pay me three thousand dollars bounty for the same privilege?" He got to his feet. "You're changing partners—but you're not making a bad deal. I'm not a greedy man. When I make a bargain I stick to it and I'm easily satisfied. All I want is half that gold. The other half is yours. Is it a deal?"

The hunter's lips twitched in a trace of a smile. "You don't leave me a great deal of choice, either."

He began to unbutton his uniform jacket.

The last item of clothing in the pile was a Mexican poncho, slit in the center to drop over the

wearer's head and cover him to the knees, both front and back. The bounty-hunter stared at it, then at Sentenza.

Sentenza nodded.

"Although we never met—I've heard a great deal about you in my travels. You, your Mexican *cigarros* and your poncho are becoming a legend. The Man From Nowhere. The Man With No Name, no nerves—and no scruples. You'll find a supply of your *cigarros* in that box. And the gun hanging on the chair there is for you."

The hunter spun the cylinder and saw that the pistol was fully loaded. The belt was filled with spare cartridges. He strapped it on.

"Aren't you taking a chance?"

"Not," Sentenza said, "as long as each of us keeps his own little secret to himself. What better life insurance could either of us have?"

It was late in the afternoon when Sentenza led the way into a small clearing shielded by a circle of dense underbrush and well away from the prison camp.

"This is a good, safe camping spot I've used before. We'll unsaddle and let the horse browse while we build a small fire."

As they finished unsaddling the bounty-hunter said casually, "If your men stay out in that damp brush much longer, they're likely to catch either a cold or a bullet."

Sentenza grinned faintly and raised his voice: "Did you hear that, boys? Come on out."

They filed into the glade, looking slightly sheepish. They had abandoned their guards' uniforms and were now dressed as the gunslingers they clearly

were, holsters tied down for a fast draw, gunbutt worn slick with use.

“As long as we’re all going the same way,” the hunter said, “we might just as well keep each other company. Let’s see—” He counted as they stepped into sight. “One, two, three, four, five, six. A perfect number.”

Sentenza’s eyebrows lifted. “What makes six perfect?”

“Why,” the hunter said pleasantly, “that’s how many bullets I have in my gun.”

Sentenza eyed him thoughtfully for a long moment.

“I see your point,” he said finally.

Chapter 14

CORPORAL WALLACE snapped one end of the handcuff to Tuco's right wrist, the other to his own left wrist. He gave the short chain a vicious jerk.

"Get moving. That's our train coming in now."

As they emerged from the guardhouse there was a stir among a group of lounging prisoners.

An old man with one arm cackled, "Be ye afeared of losin' him, Corporal? Where ye takin' him?"

"To the gallows," Wallace growled. "This man has a fat price on his head."

"Three thousand dollars, amigo," Tuco added. "That's a lot of money for one head, eh? And how much did they give you for that arm?"

Wallace cursed and gave the handcuff a savage twist that sent Tuco to his knees, stifling a groan of pain. He struggled back to his feet, nursing a bleeding wrist. He glared at his tormentor.

"Don't forget what I told you before, Corporal. When I knock you down you will make one big crash. It will make louder and sweeter music than your Battleville band ever played."

A long freight train stood puffing at the prison station. Flatcars loaded with cannon and cases of ammunition were interspersed with boxcars full of Union soldiers. A single coach on the end of the train was obviously reserved for officers.

Wallace clambered into one of the open boxcars and hauled Tuco up after him. A dozen soldiers sat around the walls, staring with open curiosity. The car stank of sheep and manure and the mildewed hay that covered the floor. They found a space and sat down with their backs against the wall. A whistle tooted and the train lurched into motion with a crash of couplings and a squealing of flanges.

Tuco leaned his head back against the wall and fell into a fitful doze. From far off he could faintly hear the voice of Wallace answering the questions of the soldiers.

"I'm staying around for the hanging," he heard the big corporal saying. "It'll be a sight to remember—this bastard doing a rope dance in the air and no partner around to shoot him down like he always had before."

Hours later Tuco awoke and peered around. Everyone else in the car was sound asleep. Wallace breathed in rasping snores beside him, his head tipped back and blubbery mouth sagging open.

Tuco sat up cautiously. Beyond the inert mountain of beef and muscle he could see the butt of the corporal's pistol peeping enticingly from its holster. Tuco's eyes glittered behind dark puffs of battered flesh. Holding his breath and moving with infinite caution he reached his free hand toward the gun.

He was barely inches from his goal when the rasping snore ended in a choked gurgle. He snatched his hand back an instant before Wallace's pig eyes flew open.

"What the hell are you—what do you want?"

"What do you think I want?" Tuco whined. "A place to go. How many hours you think a man can

bounce around in this damn car before his bladder bursts, eh? How would I look, hanging from the gallows with my pants soaking wet?"

"Not in here," Wallace yelled, scrambling up. "Out the door. This car stinks bad enough as it is."

He jerked Tuco to the open door of the boxcar. They stood side by side, facing out from the opening, Wallace bracing his free hand against the side. Tuco reached to his trousers, then stopped, glaring at the other.

"Well, can't a man even take care of his private business without you watching? You think I'm a little baby, eh? I got to have papa hold me on the potty and see that I do it right?"

Wallace cursed him but he turned so that his back was partially to Tuco. Tuco took a step backward, braced himself and sprang. His shoulder slammed into Wallace's back. The big man yelled wildly and flew through the open door, dragging Tuco with him.

They struck the embankment with Wallace underneath, cushioning Tuco's fall and taking the full impact of his weight. Then they were rolling helplessly, gouged and clawed by the sharp gravel of the ballast.

The train was vanishing around a distant curve when they stopped at last.

Tuco sat up. He was covered with scratches and bruises and his ribs were a mass of agony but necessity gave him strength. Wallace was unconscious, a darkening lump rising from the side of his head. He looked to be out for some time but Tuco was taking no chances. He found a big chunk of jagged rock and brought it down hard on the corporal's skull.

Then he rose to his knees and began ransacking the big man's pockets.

He had gone through every imaginable hiding place three times before he could make himself accept the terrible truth. He rocked back on his heels, sobbing with mingled rage and frustration.

"Oh, that bastard!" he sobbed. "That miserable, black-hearted bastard. He wouldn't even trust Wallace to carry the handcuff key. He must have sent it on ahead to the sheriff—along with the word that I was being brought in."

He stared around wildly and his gaze fell on a sharp outcropping of granite some yards away. He scrambled up, hooked both hands into Wallace's belt and dragged the heavy figure to the rock. He found a chunk of rock, stretched the handcuff chain over the sharp ridge of granite and hammered with all his strength. The rock shattered after a few blows without leaving a visible mark or dent on the tough steel links.

He found another rock and renewed his efforts, panting.

"So you don't want to leave me, eh? You are beginning to like me a little, eh, and you want me with you everywhere you go? Well, I don't like you and I'm not going to stay. You hear me, you big piece of bull-blossom, you?"

The second rock shattered. Maybe a bullet would cut the chain—if the impact didn't tear his hand off. But Wallace's holster was empty. The pistol had been jarred loose by their fall.

Tuco peered wildly along the embankment. He saw no glint of metal, no sign of the gun.

Dragging the heavy body, sobbing and panting,

he inched his way along the course of their rolling tumble, searching in vain for the weapon. It could be anywhere among the rock fragments that formed the embankment—or it could be lost in the thick mesquite below. It might even have been buried by a landslide started by their own rolling bodies.

The full impact of his self-made predicament was beginning to hit him. In every direction he could only see the arid landscape without a tree or a sign of human habitation.

He fell on the unconscious man, shaking and slapping him.

“Wallace, wake up—wake up. You’ve slept long enough. Wake up and help me. I can’t drag you for miles, you big tub of rotten guts. Wake up and walk with me.” A new and more terrifying thought struck. “Wallace, you aren’t dying, are you? You wouldn’t die and leave me here like this. You can’t die when I need you.”

He collapsed across the limp figure, whimpering, tears rolling down his cheeks.

A dark speck appeared suddenly overhead, then another and another. Silently, patiently, the vultures were taking up their vigil in the brassy sky. Somehow they knew, as they always did, that it would soon be time for the feast.

Chapter 15

THE NEW LOCOMOTIVE was officially the BLW Number Nine, but after her trial run the engineer had enthusiastically rechristened her *Mighty Maude*. She merited the name.

Mighty Maude was not only the newest locomotive on rails but by far the largest, heaviest, fastest and most powerful. She also possessed the loudest whistle. When she flung her wailing hoot across the sere wasteland the engineer's boast was that coyotes and jack rabbits ten miles away fled in blind panic. The fireman, whose task was to hurl heavy chunks of hardwood from the tender into the gaping maw of her firebox, had a different and somewhat biased reaction.

"That damn hooter uses up too much steam. Every time you toot that contraption the steam gauge drops ten points. I got to heave twice as much cordwood to bring her back up again."

The engineer dismissed such carping criticism with comments directed at his fireman's work habits and ancestry.

He would, however, grudgingly admit that *Mighty Maude* did have one fault, albeit a minor one. This was in the design of her cab. When the man who drove her was properly seated at his controls the forward cab window was just a trifle too

high. The engineer could see a great distance along the track ahead but nothing closer than five hundred feet in front of the great boiler.

On the straightaway this was no great handicap. But on a sharp or blind curve *Maude* might plow into anything. The obstacle could be a wagon in the act of crossing the track or—even worse for the train—a herd of wandering cattle whose heavy bodies had been responsible for many a disastrous wreck.

The engineer's solution to this dilemma was to jerk his whistle cord vigorously and repeatedly at the approach to every curve. This inevitably led to a highly colorful and profane shouting match with the fireman. Since these exchanges had to be carried on over the pounding of the drivers and the thunder of the exhausts, both men usually finished their runs too hoarse to communicate above a whisper.

The engineer peered ahead through the shimmering heat waves to where the track curved out of sight behind a great, wind-sculptured mass of red sandstone. He reached for the dangling cord and *Mighty Maude's* hoarse scream racketed ahead.

On the far side of the sandstone butte, where the tracks emerged from the blind curve, Tuco lifted his head and listened. In a moment the sound came again, louder and nearer—the unmistakable hoot of a locomotive's whistle. His eyes glittered with the light of one reborn.

He scrambled to his feet, took hold of Wallace's belt and dragged the dead weight up the steep embankment with strength born of desperation. As he dropped the heavy body to the ties and rolled it between the rails the corporal stirred and moaned weakly.

"Don't wake up now, Wallace," Tuco panted. "It's too late to do any good and what you would see would just make you unhappy. Be a good fellow and lie still."

He flung himself face down at the outer side of the track, stretching the chain of the handcuffs taut across the rail. The hoot of the whistle was earsplitting and above it he could now hear the rumble of the speeding train. The rail beside him hummed and quivered.

Mighty Maude howled into view from behind the sandstone mass, less than five hundred feet away. As the giant locomotive hurtled toward him Tuco flattened himself as much as possible, burrowing his face into the gravel. Beneath him the ground shook and a wave of hot, compressed air buffeted him. Then the speeding engine was upon him.

The tough steel links of the handcuff chain could resist many forces but they proved no match for the sharp wheel-flanges and enormous weight of *Mighty Maude*. There was a jerk and Tuco's hand dropped free. He flung himself away from the track, rolling down the embankment as the locomotive flashed past. Above the thunder of wheels and drivers he heard a brief burst of angry yelling from the cab.

He sat up in time to glimpse something that resembled a bundle of red rags hanging under the locomotive's low-slung firebox and bumping against the ties. The spot between the rails where Wallace had lain was empty. Tuco whirled away from the track and ran in the opposite direction.

A mile or so down the tracks, one of two brakemen standing on the rear platform of the last car suddenly clutched his companion's arm and yelled,

"Goddlemighty, there's a man, or what's left of one, lying between the rails. He must have been drug a ways, by the look. Pull the emergency cord."

"Not me," the other said firmly, shaking his head. "You pull the emergency stop when we're makin' this speed and that engineer'll climb your frame clean to your shoulders and chew your damfool head off. Besides, there ain't nothin' anybody can do for that poor bastard now that the vultures can't do quicker and cleaner."

■ The settlement of Marcosito had been a thriving, bustling community until, overnight, the Confederate invasion turned it into a ghost town. By an accident of geography the town happened to stand in the path of Sibley's advance force. By a more catastrophic accident it was the place where the Texans encountered the first strong Union resistance.

The Marcositans had retired at night, blissfully unaware that the war was at their doorstep. They awoke in the morning to find the town swarming with enemy troops.

The Texans had paused only long enough to plunder the shops and saloons and raid hencoops before moving northward. The outraged citizens swarmed out on the heels of their departure to curse and commiserate. They were assessing their losses when the sound of heavy firing broke out to the north.

Presently the Confederates reappeared, hard-pressed by Union forces and clearly intending to make their stand in the town. They were at the outskirts when a battery of Union artillery opened up and shells began falling on the town. The citizens

hurriedly snatched a few possessions—piling them into wagons and buggies or hanging them from saddles—and departed en masse for a less hazardous clime.

Eventually Sibley's main force caught up to drive the out-numbered Yankees back and the fighting moved on, leaving Marcosito battered and abandoned. None of its citizens ventured to return, nor would they until the war ended or the last Confederate had been driven out of New Mexico Territory.

The day was waning when Sentenza, his six gunhands and the Man From Nowhere came to Marcosito. They rode down the cannon-pocked street, the clatter of their hoofbeats echoing from the empty buildings.

The scars of the fierce bombardment were evident everywhere. They passed a fire-gutted stable, a house with part of its roof blown off, then picked their way around a pile of debris that had been the high false front of a saloon.

"It looks," Sentenza remarked, "as though we had the whole town to ourselves."

The bounty-hunter glanced at him without replying. White lines etched his mouth and his eyes glittered.

Sentenza reined in before a rambling two-story hotel. Most of it appeared to be intact but a shell had torn off an upper corner, leaving heavy roof beams unsupported. Sentenza studied the structure and shook his head.

"I don't like it. A jar could bring those timbers crashing down to kill or trap anybody inside."

They rode on and halted before the ruins of what

seemed to have been a store. Most of the front had been blown off but the structure itself looked sound.

"I like this better," Sentenza said. "We'll bed down here for the night. We can see any visitors without being seen and either pick them off or fade out by the back door. Bill, you and Andy take care of the horses. Put them up somewhere out of sight."

The gunman named Hank had crowded his horse up beside the bounty-hunter's. As they swung out of the saddles Hank's right spur jabbed the flank of the hunter's horse. It shied violently and the hunter, caught in mid-swing, had to make a frantic grab for the cantle to avoid being thrown under the trampling hoofs. He quieted the horse, dropped to the ground and stepped around to confront Sentenza's man. He was aware of the other five closing in at his back.

"You're asking for it, Hank," he said through set teeth.

"Aw, it was an accident," Hank said but his eyes glinted with malice.

"I had a bellyful of accidents before I ran into you. What happens next won't be one."

Sentenza said, "Cool down, you two. There'll be time enough to settle scores after we've got what we came for."

Suddenly the silence of the street was shattered by a single gunshot. The hunter stiffened, his jaw sagging, his usually-impassive face wearing an expression of astonished disbelief.

Sentenza stared at him. "What is it? What hit you?"

"That shot," the hunter said. "Every gun sings

with a different voice and that's one I have good reason to know."

He whirled and strode down the street in the direction of the shot. Sentenza turned.

"Hank, follow him. Don't let him out of your sight for one minute."

"Don't worry, boss."

Hank hurried after the tall figure, taking cover in doorways and alleys. The hunter suddenly vanished around a corner without looking back. Hank abandoned his cover and sprinted in pursuit.

He skidded around the corner and almost rammed into the tall figure blocking the sidewalk. The hunter had the poncho thrown back over his right shoulder.

"I was hoping it would be you, Hank," he said and shot Sentenza's man between the eyes.

The hunter turned and ran. The earlier gunshot had sounded from the direction of the ruined hotel. He halted on the sidewalk in front of the building. From an open upstairs window came the sound of water splashing and a man's voice raised in song. There could be no mistaking the owner of that lusty unmelodious baritone.

He whirled and darted into the hotel an instant before Sentenza and his cohorts ran around the corner and literally stumbled over Hank's body.

Chapter 16

FROM THE FOOT of the embankment Tuco looked back at the long train. The last of the freight cars was racketing past. Behind it were two passenger coaches. Coaches meant people who might well see him and stop the train to investigate.

Tuco dove into a patch of mesquite, throwing himself flat behind the sparse cover. Something hard dug into his cheek. He reached up to paw it aside and his hand felt metal. He snatched it out and stared incredulously at the pistol that must have been jarred from Wallace's holster by the fall.

Slowly it came to him that there was something vaguely familiar about the weapon. He turned it over and gaped at a nick in one of the walnut grips. That nick had come, he well knew, from using the butt to crack the skull of a bounty-seeking deputy.

It was his own gun, taken from him at the time of their capture. It must have fallen to Wallace in the division of the plunder taken from prisoners. Now, miraculously, it was back where it belonged and he no longer felt naked and defenseless.

He climbed to his feet, thumbed his nose toward the vanishing train and set off in the direction he knew would take him to the nearest settlement.

The gun, both protector and provider, served Tuco well. At an outlying ranch it got him a good

horse and saddle with a fine rifle in the boot. At the first small settlement it got him a supply of provisions, including a bottle of whiskey. At the next town it persuaded a reluctant blacksmith to chisel off the handcuff.

The one thing it could not provide was a solution to his most urgent problem—the two hundred thousand dollars in gold. He knew where Sad Hill Cemetery was. But only the tall one he called Whitey knew in which grave the money lay waiting.

But Whitey was, as far as he knew, still a prisoner at Battleville and to be caught anywhere near that prison camp would be putting his own neck back into a tight noose. Yet somehow he had either to engineer his partner's escape or persuade Whitey to reveal his share of the secret. Neither prospect seemed likely.

He was still wrestling with the problem when he crested a low ridge and saw a sizable town ahead. He approached with caution, baffled by the fact that he saw no horses at any of the hitchrails or any sign of human life anywhere. Then he became aware of the extent of the scars of the bombardment and guessed that the town's occupants had all fled.

His ride down the main street confirmed his guess. The hotel caught his eye, as did a narrow alley beside it. As he anticipated, the alley led to a small stable in the rear where guests had kept their mounts. He unsaddled, found some hay and grain and left his horse in a box stall.

Gun in hand he prowled the hotel, finding only empty rooms. He came at last to one larger than the others and much more luxuriously furnished. A large

folding screen at one end aroused his curiosity. He tiptoed across and peered over it.

Behind the screen was a rarity of rarities in that rough frontier land—a tin bathtub. It was narrow and long enough for a man to sit down in with his legs outstretched. One end swept up in a high graceful curve to provide a headrest for a bather. Attesting to the hasty abandonment, the tub was filled with sudsy water from which rose a delicate fragrance.

It was the first real bathtub Tuco had ever seen. As he goggled at it he realized that he was hot, dusty, sweaty and tired from a long day's ride. A glint came into his eye and he began to strip.

The water was luxuriously cold as he sank into it. He soon discovered that splashing increased the foamy suds and sent up fresh waves of perfume to his nostrils. He became so absorbed in reveling in the new sensation that he almost failed to hear the stealthy creak of a floor board in the hall outside.

He was lolling back against the headrest, his eyes closed, when a harsh voice said, "If that ain't the damndest place to finally catch up with you, Tuco."

Tuco's eyes opened and snapped wide. The man standing just inside the door was gaunt, with a tangle of unkempt beard. His right arm was no more than a short stump in an empty sleeve. His left held a cocked pistol that pointed unwaveringly at Tuco.

The intruder laughed harshly.

"So you remember me, eh, Tuco? You haven't forgotten old Elam after all these years. I never forgot you, either. I remembered you real good every time I wanted to do something with my right hand and it wasn't there." He hawked and spat on the carpeted

floor. "I just rode in and was puttin' up my horse when you come riding down the street, bold as brass. I knowed you in a flash, Tuco, so I follered you here. Remember that day, Tuco? You could have killed me. You was a lot faster on your draw than me. You should have killed me—'stead of bullet-smashing my gun arm so it had to be cut off."

Tuco had neither moved nor spoken. He sat rigid in the ridiculous tub, both hands hidden in the foamy suds. His clothing was piled on a chair beside the tub.

His gunbelt hung from a chairback.

"A lot of time has passed since then, Tuco. Time enough for me to learn to shoot real good with my left hand. Now I'm gonna show you just how good I learned." His eyes narrowed as his finger tightened on the trigger.

Tuco lifted his own gun out of the concealing suds and shot him precisely through the adam's apple.

"When you're going to shoot somebody," he said coldly to the twitching figure on the floor, "shoot him. Don't stand around trying to talk a man to death."

He carefully wiped the soapsuds from his gun, returned it to its holster and lolled back in the tub, splashing the cold water up over his chest and shoulders. He felt so relaxed and content that presently he yielded to an unprecedented urge to burst into song.

The sound of his voice drowned out the single gunshot from below.

The song ended abruptly in a choked gurgle. He

sat up, his mouth open, gaping at the tall figure in the poncho who materialized in the doorway.

"Eh-eh-eh! Whitey? Is that really you or a ghost? It must be you because I don't believe in ghosts. If there were such things—I would be followed by a crowd."

"Get out of that silly bucket of suds and get your pants on. You'd look pretty ridiculous going into a gunfight naked as a jaybird."

"A gunfight?" Tuco scrambled out of the tub, skidded on the soapy floor and grabbed wildly for a towel. "What are you doing here, Whitey? How did you get out of that sewer?"

"Your dear old friend, Sentenza, gave me new clothes and a gun and personally escorted me out of Battleville."

"Sentenza?" Tuco howled. "You coward! You traitor! You stinking Judas! You talked. You told him the name. You betrayed your own partner, who loved you like a brother. Who saved you from that awful desert, eh? Who shared his water with you? Who carried you to that mission and stayed by your side, night and day, to help nurse you back to health, eh? And in return you sell me out to that black-hearted scoundrel, Sentenza."

"Oh, shut up and try using your head for a change. If I'd given Sentenza even a hint of what he wants to know, do you think I'd be alive and standing here now?"

"Ah—you didn't talk, then. Your secret is still your secret and no one else's. Whitey, I could not love my own brother more. Wait a moment until I button my pants and we will go kill that pig, Sentenza, eh?"

"That might take a little doing, Tuco. Sentenza isn't alone. He has five gunmen, all plenty good at their trade and every one itching to gun me out."

A crafty look came over the bandit's face.

"Five, eh? So that's why you come to Tuco again. No matter. Five or five hundred, we'll kill them all."

The hunter stirred the body on the floor with his toe.

"Who was this? A friend of yours?"

"An old friend." Tuco nodded, strapping on his gun. "Now the best kind of friend to have—a dead one. Let's go."

He started toward the door, stopped short. "Wait a minute, Whitey. Sentenza is after the gold—our gold. Right? And you're the only man alive who knows the name on the grave where it is buried. Right? So Sentenza will never find the gold if you die. Right? So you come to your old friend, Tuco, with a crazy story that Sentenza's men are trying to kill you. You think Tuco Benedicto Pacifico Juan Maria Ramirez is so stupid he will swallow that story and walk into your trap, eh, Judas?"

"I don't think Sentenza has any say in the matter now. He had six gunmen until a few minutes ago. I just killed one of them down on the street. The others will be so hungry to get me that he won't be able to stop them—short of killing them all himself. And I don't think even Sentenza's gun is quite fast enough for that."

"Ah," Tuco said, nodding. "A double double-cross, eh? That I can understand, Whitey. So let's hurry and kill them all and go get our gold."

They peered cautiously through a downstairs window of the hotel. The body of the dead Hank

still lay on the walk by the corner. His five companions, guns in their hands, were spaced out along the street, two on each side and the fifth, Andy, who was rated the fastest, covering the middle. There was no sign of Sentenza.

"Come on," the hunter whispered. "There's got to be a back door out of this hotel. We can follow an alley and come out on them down the street."

"One thing, Whitey," Tuco said as they darted out into the narrow alley. "Sentenza is all mine, eh? That pig. That raper of babies and grandmothers—I still hurt all over when I hear his name after what he had that animal, Wallace, do to me."

"He's yours if you think you can take him. I don't care if a horsefly kicks him to death—as long as I can see his body and make sure he isn't faking."

Their sudden appearance down the street was greeted by yells of rage. The five gunmen moved toward them, maintaining a wide-spaced formation. Tuco and the bounty-hunter moved apart and advanced to meet them. The only sounds in the eerie stillness of the street were the measured shuffle of boots on sand.

The gunman called Andy stepped up his pace. He moved out in front of the others.

"Hank was my partner," he called out. "I claim first chance at the man who gunned him down without a chance." He dropped his gun back into its holster and raised his voice. "How about it, you yellow-topped buzzard? Have you got the guts to make it a match?"

"Don't get yourself killed, Whitey," Tuco pleaded. "Let me take him, eh? What would my life be without you?"

"Fry your own fish," the hunter said.

He dropped his gun into its holster. Slowly and deliberately he fished out one of his stubby *cigarros*. By the time it was lighted to his satisfaction he and Andy were no more than a dozen paces apart. He held up the flaming match.

"When I drop this—"

His fingers opened. The match was still falling when the shots came almost together.

The two men stood, feet wide apart, each staring into the other's face for a long moment. Then Andy's knees buckled and he pitched forward onto his face. A cloud of gray dust puffed up from the street. The hunter threw a quick glance at a fresh bullet hole through a fold of his poncho. An inch to the right and he, too, would be lying in the dust.

Then the others were yelling and shooting as they came forward. Slugs whistled around him and kicked up dust at his feet. He heard Tuco's gun bang and the scar-faced killer known as Emil spun around and fell. The hunter's left hand slapped his gun hammer in a blur of motion.

It was over in seconds. Tuco's voice rose in a bellow as he pushed out the empty shells and reloaded.

"Eh, there, Sentenza, you miserable coward! Come out from wherever you are hiding and trembling so I can kill you, too."

"He's probably miles away by now," the hunter said, "but come on."

With Tuco at his heels he sprinted to the store with the shattered front that was to have been their night's shelter. It was empty now but a message had been printed boldly on the one undamaged wall. It

was signed with the initial S. Tuco scowled at it, laboriously picking out the words.

“We’ll—meet—again—id— What is that last word, Whitey?”

“Idiot,” the hunter said dryly. “He probably meant the message for you.”

Chapter 17

THEY LAY belly-down on the crest of a high, grassy ridge. Below them a broad river flowed sluggishly southward. Tuco's eyes were squeezed tightly shut. He moaned softly and pounded his head with the heel of his hand.

"Those thieving brothers of vultures at Battleville Prison Camp. May the coyotes fight over their guts and the worms feast on their eyeballs. If they had not robbed me of my map, along with everything else, I would not have to give myself a headache trying to remember our route."

"Maybe I could help you," the hunter said, "if you'd tell me where we're headed. I know most of this country pretty well."

"We're headed toward a grave, Whitey, That's enough." Tuco's eyes flew open and he sat up, beaming. "Eh, now I have it. I can see the river as clearly as if it were right in front of me."

"It is," the hunter said.

Tuco ignored the jibe. "Below this point the river makes a bend and beyond the bend is a bridge. We cross it and turn north—and almost before we know it we will be at the cemetery. Come on, Whitey."

He scrambled to his feet.

"Hold on a minute, Tuco," the hunter said dubiously. "Don't you think we'd be smarter to wait

until night fall and cross the bridge in the dark? After all, a bridge is a pretty exposed spot. Anyone on the ridge could see us and pick us off with a rifle if he had a mind to. And what about our horses?"

"Ah, Whitey, you worry too much all the time." Tuco flung out his hand in a sweeping gesture. "Who is there to see us, eh? Look at all this great big empty country. Leave everything to me. Tuco knows what he is doing. He is getting us to that two hundred thousand gold dollars before that pig of a Sentenza can get there. Don't forget, Whitey, he knows where the cemetery is and he has not given up hope by any means."

"Maybe you're right," the hunter said.

He rose reluctantly and followed the bandit down the ridge slope to the riverbank. Tuco's memory proved accurate—the river almost immediately began a sweeping curve eastward. Here its banks were higher, covered with lush grass and dotted with stands of timber.

"Eh, Whitey, how calm it is here. How peaceful. Maybe with my share of the two hundred thousand dollars I will settle down here where no one will ever bother me. Just Tuco and a few choice women, eh?"

Behind them a harsh voice said, "All right, you two. Turn around. Slow. Then stand where you are."

The hunter and Tuco turned. A squad of Union cavalry troopers sat their mounts at the edge of a small woods, covering them with carbines. A sergeant gestured with his pistol.

"Drop your gunbelts and step away from them. Then keep going as you were. We'll ride along. You

can explain to the captain why you were prowling around here on foot. We've got your horses."

The hunter gave his companion a look of sour disgust.

"Look at all this great big empty country," he mimicked. "Then look at this great big empty head that's dumb enough to go along with your stupid ideas."

He started to walk. Tuco ambled silently beside him. The mounted troopers followed.

They emerged from a stretch of open woods and stopped short. The bridge Tuco had remembered was there—just beyond the bend—but nothing on his map had indicated that now it was guarded by Union pickets.

Above the bridge the whole slope of the ridge was criss-crossed with a network of entrenchments, fortifications and artillery emplacements. The muzzles of giant mortars loomed like tree stumps along the crest of the ridge. Troops in Union blue were everywhere.

Directly across the river an almost identical stronghold was occupied by an army of gray-clad soldiers. From a tall flagpole floated the Stars and Bars of the Confederacy above the Lone Star flag of Texas.

"Ah," the hunter said softly. "How calm it is here. How peaceful. I'm almost tempted to settle down here with you, Tuco, where no one will ever bother us."

The sergeant and two of his men dismounted. The hunter and Tuco were herded along a narrow trench and to a closed shelter, its timbered roof shielded

and fireproofed with earth and sod. A guard with a rifle jumped up from a bench near the door.

The sergeant holstered his pistol.

"Tell the commanding officer we found these two wandering around on foot just upriver. Their mounts were concealed nearby."

"Yes, sir."

The guard vanished inside. He returned in a moment, a dubious expression on his face.

"Captain's drunk again—but I guess its all right to go on in."

He and the sergeant exchanged veiled glances. Tuco and the hunter were prodded into the shelter. An officer sat at a table littered with maps and official forms. His uniform jacket was unbuttoned and his dark hair was mussed. He peered drunkenly, then jerked his head.

"Clear out, sergeant. I'll take over." When the sergeant had gone he squinted at his visitors. "Where are you from?"

The bounty-hunter gestured.

"That would take a long time to tell."

"And you?"

"Me?" Tuco said. "I travel with him."

"What were you doing wandering on foot near a military installation? Spying for the Rebs?"

"Oh, no, General," Tuco said hastily. "We came to sign up as soldiers."

He ignored his companion's withering glare.

"So you want to be soldiers. Well, your first duty can be to learn the differences in rank. I'm a captain, not a general—Captain Clinton, in command of this oversized burial detail." The captain pronounced each word with exaggerated care and his voice was

faintly slurred. "Sit down, gentlemen. Make yourselves comfortable. The only ceremonies we stand on here are funeral ceremonies. You'd better start perhaps, by making out your wills—today could be your turn." He blinked at them owlshly. "You should go far in this man's army, spies or not. You ought to make colonel at the very least."

Tuco beamed. "You think so, Captain?"

"Definitely. Anybody who wants to join either side in this war has to be an imbecile—and every army loves imbeciles. They make the best cannon fodder and the best commanding officers. You two might even become generals. Here—" He pawed into an open box and brought up a long-necked wine bottle wrapped in straw. He stripped off the straw, knocked out the cork and solemnly handed over the bottle. He brought another bottle, half-empty, from beside his chair. "Drink to the future—may it be short."

The hunter drank, then passed the bottle to Tuco who tilted it, lowered it, smacked his lips and cocked his head critically.

"Not bad, Captain. It doesn't grab the gut like whiskey but it's not bad at all."

The captain drained his bottle and leaned toward them.

"Do you know which side will win this war? I'll tell you. The side with the most bottles to keep their soldiers drunk enough to go out and get slaughtered. That's who wins a war. We and those Johnny Rebs over on the other side of the river—we have one thing in common. The stink of alcohol." He paused to open another bottle for himself. "What did you say your names are? Ah, never mind. What does it

matter? Soon you'll be just two more brave, honored heroes who fell at Langston Bridge. For one side or the other. And you'll fall—make no mistake about that. We make two attacks on the bridge every day to give every man a chance to be a dead hero. The army believes in equal opportunity for all. Even captured spies.”

“Two attacks a day?” Tuco blurted.

“Every day—and you're just in time to lead today's second round of slaughter. There'll be guns behind you and guns ahead.” He drank again and belched. “A short while ago the Confederates were peacefully running away on their side of the river and here we were on our side, peacefully seeing to it that they did. Nobody shot at anybody and everything was fine.”

He drank again, the wine dribbling down onto his shirt front. His head wagged loosely and he had difficulty keeping his red-veined eyes in focus. Tuco finished his own wine and rubbed a sleeve across his mouth.

“Then,” the captain continued, “some genius at headquarters looked at the map, saw a flyspeck marked Langston Bridge and decided it was the key to this whole area. We have to take it and hold it, no matter how many lives it costs. The Rebs stumbled over the same idea—so here we'll stay and fight until every man on both sides is dead. I don't really give a damn whether you're spies or not—you'll drop, boys. You'll rot under the earth or in that damn river. But that worthless bridge will still be standing.”

“Why don't you just blow the damn thing up?” the hunter demanded.

"You think I haven't blown it up, eh? I've blown it up a thousand times. Up here." He tapped his temple with a forefinger. "In my mind. In my dreams. But to do so in fact would be the most serious of crimes. I could be court-martialed for even thinking of blowing up Langston Bridge. Here, let me show you."

He lurched to his feet and led the way to another room. This one had an observation slit between the wall and the roof, running around two sides of the room. Through the slit they could look down across the Union lines and into the Confederate fortifications on the opposite shore.

All around the walls of the room stood cases of dynamite, blasting caps and coils of fuse. The captain teetered and gestured at the store of explosives.

"You see? I have everything to do it with. I even have my plan all worked out. The best time to mine the bridge would be right after an attack, when there's a truce for both sides to collect their dead and wounded. If I carried my plan through, I would save the lives of hundreds of men. And my sanity—what's left of it."

"Then why don't you?" the hunter asked.

"Because I haven't got the guts to face the court-martial and the loss of rank and command."

"If you want your stinkin' bridge blown up," Tuco said, "we'll blow it up for you. Eh, Whitey? We'll give the captain his big boom. We haven't any rank or command to lose."

Before Clinton could reply a mortar across the river let go a thunderous bellow. Moments later a blossom of scarlet flame erupted on the slope below the command post.

"The afternoon massacre begins—this time they seem to have started it. You two might as well stay here and enjoy the show today. It'll be a preview of what you'll experience more directly tomorrow."

Both hillsides gushed a solid sheet of smoke and flame. An almost tangible wall of incredible sound hammered them and the earth rocked to the fearful concussion. Shells burst among the crowded trenches. A severed leg sailed through the air and bounded off the edge of the observation slit. A mortar below was blown off its base. It fell backward onto its own gun crew, crushing its screaming men.

Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the fierce bombardment tapered off. In the silence that followed could be heard the groans and screams of the wounded on both hillsides. An aide appeared in the door and saluted.

"Captain, the men are waiting for you to give the order to attack."

"I'll be right there." He turned a haggard face toward the hunter and Tuco. "Stay right here and watch. Don't try to escape—there are guards outside. You mustn't miss the exciting second act in our daily drama."

He staggered out and in a moment they heard his slurred voice acknowledging the roster of companies. When the last officer had reported ready Clinton's voice rose to a bellowing order to attack.

Blue-clad troops surged from the trenches and streamed down the hillside toward the bridge, yelling fiercely. Across the river lines of gray were racing toward their end of the disputed crossing.

Each side opened a withering fire as the first columns of soldiers advanced onto the heavy planking.

The front ranks literally melted away and the men behind leaped over bodies to rush into the same deadly hail of lead.

Tuco suddenly grabbed the hunter's arm.

"Whitey, that captain, he looks to me like a man who is begging for a bullet in his guts, eh?"

Captain Clinton was staggering down the slope toward the bridge, a wine bottle tucked under his arm. He seemed blind or indifferent to the hail of bullets from the fighting on the bridge that hissed around him and kicked up spurts of dirt at his feet.

"I think he probably is," the bounty-hunter said grimly. He shook his head in wonder. "I never saw so many men die, and die so uselessly. This war looks like a long and nasty business."

"Ah—Whitey."

"What?"

"Our money—it's over on the other side of that river."

"Yes? Whereabouts on the other side?"

Tuco grimaced. "On the other side is enough. But I will tell you one thing, Whitey. No one will get to it where it is as long as the Confederate army is there."

"And if both sides get reenforcements—they could stay right where they are now for months or years, killing each other over the bridge."

"But if someone should blow it up—"

"Then they just might go away and kill one another somewhere else. You know, Tuco, for once in your life you actually sound smart."

The firing outside was dying down. Both sides were falling back, leaving the middle of the bridge a tangle of twisted bodies and writhing wounded.

“This must be about time for the truce the captain spoke of,” the hunter said, “when everybody’ll be too busy collecting his dead and wounded to pay any attention to the bridge.”

From somewhere close by a man’s voice bawled, “Doctor! Doctor—on the double! The captain’s been hit and hit bad.”

Two soldiers entered the adjoining room, carrying a stretcher. They lowered it to the floor. Captain Clinton’s face was deathly white but his eyes were open. His hands were clasped to his middle. Blood oozed steadily out between his fingers.

The bounty-hunter snatched out a bottle of wine, opened it and put the neck to the bloodless lips.

“Drink a little of this for strength, Captain. And keep your ears open. We’re going to make a little noise for you down on the river.”

“Yes, sir,” Tuco agreed, nodding vigorously. “We are going to give you one hell of a grand bang.”

A doctor ran in and knelt by the stretcher. The captain’s pallid lips moved in a ghost of a smile.

“Maybe you two can beat this game. I’ll chance it.” He reached up and tugged weakly at the surgeon’s sleeve. “Doctor, help me to hang on just a little while longer—just long enough to hear some good news I’m expecting shortly.”

Chapter 18

TUCO SCOWLED at the stacked cases of explosives. He lifted a box of dynamite a few inches, grunted and set it down hastily.

"Ah, Whitey, these are heavier than they look. Why didn't my fine idea include an easy way to move all this down to the bridge, eh? If I had enjoyed hard work I would never have taken the trouble to become a bandit."

"The weight of this stuff is only half the problem," the hunter said. "If we try lugging these cases down openly we're likely to run into some junior officer with a military-regulations mind who wouldn't go along with the idea of having his pretty little death-trap bridge blown to hell and gone." He glanced out through the observation slit and stiffened. "Hold on, Tuco. I think the solution to our problems is coming now."

Two soldiers, members of the burial detail, were toiling up the slope with another body. They were carrying it between them on a makeshift stretcher fashioned of rough planks nailed together. They set their burden down on the parapet outside, squatted beside it and rummaged through the dead soldier's pockets for identification papers and personal trinkets.

They stood up, carrying their pitifully small find-

ings, and trotted off to make the final entry of another hero of the Langston Bridge in the military record. As they disappeared the bounty-hunter darted out, rolled the corpse onto the parapet and came back, dragging the plank stretcher.

He and Tuco piled cases of explosive on the planks. The hunter found an army blanket in an adjoining storeroom and spread it over the low pile. At a casual glance their burden could be readily mistaken for another victim of the daily slaughter.

No one paid any attention as the hunter and Tuco worked their way down the slope of the ridge to the river. In the deep shadows under the bridge they cautiously set the plank stretcher in the water and found that it floated with sufficient buoyancy to serve as a raft. From the bridge planking above their heads came the steady tramp-tramp of boots as men carried their dead and wounded off the blood-drenched span.

"You know something, Whitey?" Tuco said. "It has just struck me that doing what we are doing could get us both killed."

"That it could," the other agreed, "but it could also lead to something a whole lot worse."

"Worse, Whitey? What could be worse, eh?"

"Only one of us getting killed. Then the other could spend the rest of his life going crazy—thinking about all that money he might have had mouldering away to dust in a grave somewhere."

Tuco's eyes grew round as the full realization struck him. His lips pursed in a soundless whistle.

"Whitey, I have a great idea. We are close to where we are going, now. Very close. Why don't we trust each other now and share our secrets? I will

tell you the name of the cemetery and you tell me the name on the grave. Then if, say, you should be killed, I would be able to find the two hundred thousand dollars and use your share to honor your memory.”

The hunter said hastily, “Let’s not go through that whole mass-and-candles business again. Let’s just say I think your idea has merit and I’m game for it if you are.”

“Whitey, you are a true friend and partner, as I have always said. See, I will hold up my right hand—so—and give you my word of honor. Tell me the name on that grave. Quickly.”

“Uh-uh. The idea was yours, Tuco. You deserve the honor of revealing your secret first, I’d never think of depriving a good friend of such a privilege.”

Tuco struggled briefly with the impasse, then surrendered.

“All right, Whitey. The place to which we are going is Sad Hill, the military graveyard. Now—quickly—tell me the name on the grave. And no tricks, Whitey.”

“No tricks, Tuco, on my word of honor. The name Carson, or Jackson, muttered to me just before he died was Stanton—Arch Stanton. He said it was painted on the headboard over the grave.”

A low, gurgling moan came from somewhere nearby. The two men whirled in unison, hands streaking to their guns. In the deep shadow where the bridge met the bank of the river lay a wounded Union soldier, his uniform sodden with blood. His eyes were closed and he breathed in liquid, rasping gasps.

Tuco’s eyes were wild. He snatched out his pistol.

“He could have heard what we said. We spoke of

the sum of money and said exactly where it is buried. We can't take any chances. Step aside, Whitey, and let me finish him off."

"Hold it," the hunter said sharply. The ragged breathing sounds had ceased and the shattered chest no longer rose and fell. He squatted down to touch the figure. "Save your bullet, Tuco. He's on his way to Sad Hill, all right, but not to dig up our money. But we'll never make it there if we don't get this damn bridge mined before the truce period is up."

He led the way, wading out between the supporting timbers. The plank stretcher made a makeshift raft that helped to support its deadly burden. While Tuco lashed bundles of dynamite sticks to the bridge supports the hunter attached the fulminate caps and connected them to a single continuous fuse.

They were well past midstream and close to the Confederate-held bank when their supply of explosives was exhausted. The hunter crimped the last cap to the end of the fuse. The tramp of feet overhead had long since ceased. The burial details on both sides had fanned out along the ridge slopes, searching out the last victims of the savage bombardment. A squad of men on the Union side was rigging a scissors and tackle to hoist the dismounted mortar back onto its platform.

The bounty-hunter squatted under the Union end of the bridge. He struck a lucifer to flame on his thumbnail, held it close to the tip of the fuse and glanced up.

"Run like hell and dive under an overhang of the riverbank when this starts to sputter. There'll be

chunks of bridge timber flying all over New Mexico Territory."

"I will fly ahead of the blast, amigo."

The fuse sputtered to life, spitting crimson sparks. The two men ran. Some distance upstream, where the river straightened from its sharp bend, the current had deeply undercut the bank. They dove under the protecting overhang of earth and sod an instant before all hell broke loose.

There was not a single explosion but a succession of ear-shattering blasts as the fire raced along the fuse from one bundle of dynamite sticks to the next. With each thunderous boom a new section of the bridge flew up, hung suspended for a moment, then broke into chunks of jagged timber and metal that filled the air. Underneath, the force of the blast pushed great holes in the water itself, exposing the muddy river bottom for brief moments.

When the echoes of the last explosion died away the hunter climbed to the riverbank and wrung water from his sodden clothes.

"I hope the captain was still alive to hear his big bang. I'd like to know but I don't see any point in going back to find out. We can stay here out of sight until they start to pull out. Maybe, with luck, we can grab us a couple of horses from one side or the other. They owe us mounts."

"They owe us more." Tuco screwed up his face and pounded his temples with clenched fists. "What fools we have been—What stupid idiots. What unbelievable muttonheads—"

"What in blazes is biting you?"

"That wine," Tuco wailed. "All that lovely, lovely wine. We could have put the whole case on the

planks with the dynamite and brought it along to celebrate our great triumph. The captain has no more use for it. Now we will sit here and spit cotton while those pigs up there drink it all.”

Chapter 19

SENTENZA crouched at the edge of a dense thicket on the hillside overlooking Sad Hill Cemetery. The sorrel eyes were bloodshot from strain and veins throbbed in his temples above the high cheekbones. The fingers of his right hand opened and closed convulsively on the butt of his long-barreled pistol.

"Why don't they come?" he muttered. "Damn—why don't they hurry up and get here?"

His head swiveled as his baffled gaze shuttled over the endless rows of identical graves. He had tramped over every foot of the immense cemetery, scrutinizing each individual grave, digging his fingers into the mounded earth to feel its freshness, testing the firmness of each weather-beaten headboard.

More than half the markers bore only the single cryptic word, UNKNOWN. Even these drew his full attention as he searched frantically for a clue—a dab of extra paint or a notch cut into a board, perhaps, for later identification. He had gone over every mound on hands and knees, looking for a rock of an unusual shape or coloration or for a seemingly casual arrangement of smaller stones that would be meaningless to anyone but the man who had placed them—or to someone looking for a sign.

In the end he knew only continuing frustration for his pains. It was all too obvious that the dead

Carson—or Jackson—had depended solely upon the name of the grave's supposed occupant as painted on its headboard. And only one man in the world—the tall blond bounty-hunter—knew that name and could identify the grave in which two hundred thousand gold dollars lay waiting.

He stared out over the empty landscape.

Come on, damn you. Come on . . .

He stiffened and leaped to his feet. A great distance off a small, pale dot of dust moved against the dark backdrop of the mountains. He stared at the spot until his eyes watered and blurred. He rubbed them and stared again. It was a good half-hour before he could make out the two dark pinpoints, moving side by side, that were stirring up a steady dust.

His hand whipped to the long pistol. He slid it in and out of its holster to try the slickness of the waxed leather. He thumbed back the hammer and eased it down several times, testing the hair-trigger action. He flipped open the cylinder gate and checked the loads, replacing a cartridge whose brass case showed the faintest trace of a dent. He snapped the gate shut with a grunt of satisfaction and slid the weapon back into its holster.

His tension and impatience vanished. His quarry was coming to lead him to the buried gold. He could afford to be patient—no, he had to be patient. He sat down with his back against a tree, folded competent hands in his lap and closed his eyes.

He had time for a refreshing nap while he waited for his destiny to arrive at Sad Hill Cemetery.

■ “Whitey,” Tuco said anxiously. “That Bill Car-

son, he was dying—pretty near dead—when he told you the name on the grave, wasn't he?"

"As good as dead," the hunter agreed. "He barely got the name out before his heart stopped for good."

"His voice—it was pretty weak, eh? And with his tongue swollen for want of water—he couldn't talk clearly, eh?"

"I had to put my ear right to his lips to make out what he was trying to say."

Naked worry clouded Tuco's eyes. "Whitey, how can you be sure the name you heard was Arch Stanton? Maybe he said Art Landon or Bart Blanton or some other name that only sounded like Arch Stanton. What then, eh?"

"Then," the hunter said, "you're going to end up with blistered hands and empty pockets." He grinned faintly. "Stop worrying, Tuco. I got the name straight enough. What I didn't get was the location of the grave. We may have a mighty long search ahead of us, finding that one particular grave among thousands just like it."

"The search will soon begin, Whitey," Tuco said, pointing. "There is Sad Hill Cemetery on that slope ahead."

"It's big, all right." The hunter squinted through the heat haze. "But it's going to get a whole lot bigger when the toll from Langston Bridge starts coming in."

They dismounted at the edge of the immense burial ground. Tuco almost fell over his own feet in his wild haste to get to the nearest grave markers. He peered around.

"Unknown. Unknown. Pete Anson. Unknown—"

"Hold it, Tuco. We'll find it a lot faster if we

organize our search. You take the first two rows and I'll take the second two. That way we won't miss a single headboard as we work our way through."

Heads turning right and left steadily, they tramped up the slope to the edge of the woods, then moved inward and worked their way back down. Tuco stopped at the end of his third row to mop his streaming face.

"You know, Whitey, I am so mad at those Yankees I could almost become a real Confederate myself."

"What are you riled up about now? We traded them our spent mounts for fresh and better ones."

"But the stinking tightwads could have at least thrown in a couple of shovels for us to dig with."

It seemed they had been tramping for hours and there was still more than half the vast cemetery still to be covered. A few rows ahead of them the center of the graveyard was marked by a large open space—an amphitheater reserved for the holding of formal funeral services.

"When we get to that open space," the bounty-hunter said, "we might as well call it a day. It'll be too dark to see the names—and my head feels about ready to break right off my neck. We can get a good night's rest and start on the other half at sunrise."

"How can you think of sleeping when all those beautiful, beautiful gold dollars are lying right around here somewhere—maybe so close one of us could reach out a hand and touch the spot, eh? I will keep on looking until my eyeballs pop out and my legs drop off."

"All right. We've still got a couple of hours of daylight left."

They reached the trees, shifted over to the next

rows and started back down the slope. Tuco suddenly loosed a wild, incoherent howl and flung himself onto one of the grave mounds.

He clawed frenziedly at the dirt with his bare hands, yelling, "Here it is, Whitey. This is the one. I have found it at last. I have found my fortune."

The hunter strode to the spot, bent to examine the marker. Storms and the fiercely beating sun had faded the paint but the name, Arch Stanton, was still plainly legible on the weathered headboard.

He straightened and turned to find himself looking into the muzzle of Tuco's pistol.

"I am sorry about this, friend," the bandit said, thumbing back the hammer, "but you know how it is sometimes, eh? There are two kinds of people in this world. Those with a little money and those with two hundred thousand. It is better to be one of those with two hundred thousand, eh, Whitey? This time I am the one who is dissolving the partnership."

He pulled the trigger. The hammer fell with an empty, metallic click.

The hunter leaned an elbow on the headboard and watched impassively as Tuco whirled the cylinder, staring at it from bulging eyes. He slapped frantically at his gunbelt.

"My bullets are all gone. You—you—"

The hunter said, "I took them out last night after you went to sleep. You're a little too handy at switching sides to suit my fancy."

"You could have gotten me killed," Tuco yelled.

"That would have been a pity—before you'd finished doing the heavy digging for me." The hunter wrenched the headboard from the ground and

tossed it at the bandit's feet. "Get on with it. And use this instead of your bare hands to dig with. You'll get the job done a lot quicker."

Behind him Sentenza said, "In fact, you'll get it done twice as fast with both of you digging."

He stood at the edge of the woods, smiling sardonically. The long-barreled pistol pointed steadily. The hammer was drawn back. Sentenza's finger lightly caressed the trigger.

"I wondered when you'd show up."

The bounty-hunter seemed unperturbed.

"Now you know," Sentenza said. "Drop your gun-belt and step back away from it."

The hunter smiled faintly and shook his head.

Sentenza's face darkened. His pale eyes glittered with rage.

"Damn you, do as I say or I'll—"

"Or you'll what, Sentenza? Kill me? You would be foolish. The only wealth you'll find in Arch Stanton's grave are the remains of poor Arch Stanton. His mother might like them—but they wouldn't bring a dime on the open market."

"Don't believe him, Sentenza," Tuco howled. "He's lying—it's only a trick to save his miserable skin. The gold is here. It's got to be here—"

"I think so, too," Sentenza said through his teeth. "How else would he have known there was an Arch Stanton's grave? But there's one simple way to find out. Start digging."

The bounty-hunter shrugged.

"They're your hands, Tuco. Go ahead and get them all blistered for nothing if you want to."

He leaned against an adjacent headboard and watched with mild interest as the bandit attacked

the grave mound with his makeshift shovel. Sentenza moved down to a point where he could keep the hunter covered and still watch the progress of the digging. Under the packed surface the earth was fairly soft and the excavation was soon knee-deep.

Tuco stopped suddenly, panting, and mopped his streaming face. "Why should I do all the hard work, Sentenza? Make him dig, too."

The hunter smiled faintly and shook his head. "Sorry, but grave-digging just isn't my trade."

Tuco said, "Don't let him bluff you."

Sentenza stared at the hunter's bland face and the first faint shadow of doubt clouded his eyes.

He gestured with his gun and said savagely, "Shut up and get on with the job. I'll give the orders now."

Chapter 20

TUCO'S BOARD suddenly encountered firm resistance. A hollow thump was followed by the unmistakable grating of wood against wood.

"Sentenza," Tuco yelled. "It's here. A box—a big one."

Sentenza stepped to the edge of the grave.

"Get it uncovered and open." He wagged his gun at the tall figure. "You—stay right where you are. Don't make any sudden moves."

The hunter stifled a yawn. "I wouldn't think of moving. I lose all interest in corpses once the worms have been at them for a while. You two enjoy yourselves."

The coffin-sized chest was quickly cleared of earth. Tuco hooked his fingers under the edge of the lid and wrenched hard. It gave way with a protesting squeal of nails. A human skull grinned up at the intruders. Then, as the lid was flung back, the entire skeleton came into view, fleshless hands folded across the cage of ribs. A few mildewed shreds of blue uniform still clung to the remains.

Tuco howled and scrambled wildly out of the grave. He spun and shook a furious fist at his late partner.

"You son of a saloon tart! You filthy pig. You tricked me. I told you the truth—the name of Sad

Hill Cemetery—but what you told me in return, on your word of honor, was a big lie.”

“I told you the absolute truth, Tuco,” the hunter said in a mild tone, “as far as it went. But I just didn’t see any particular point in telling you all of it. Arch Stanton was the name Bill Carson told me to look for—but it wasn’t the name on the grave where he hid the money. It’s only a key, a signpost to indicate the location of the real hiding place.”

He smiled genially at Sentenza’s strained face. “This makes for a kind of complicated situation now, doesn’t it? Here I am, still in the driver’s seat and you two are practically back where you started. Still want to use that gun on me, Sentenza? Or do you have a better idea?”

“Your deal. You call it. What’s it to be? A three-way split?” He gave a contemptuous jerk of his head in the direction of Tuco. “Or better still—two ways, down the middle.”

“Whitey,” Tuco bleated. “Don’t listen to him. We’ve been partners, fifty-fifty in everything. You won’t let him kill me now—just for some filthy dollars? You’ve still got your gun. You can take him, Whitey. Hurry up and shoot him so we can find the right grave, eh?”

The bounty-hunter eyed him coldly.

“What makes you think I wouldn’t use my gun on you? You were ready enough to shoot me for those filthy dollars.”

“Sentenza,” Tuco howled, throwing out his hands. “Make him talk. Make him tell us where the gold is buried, eh? Then we’ll be rich—just you and me, Sentenza. You can get it out of him. Or let me do it. I am an old hand at making a pig squeal.”

Sentenza's left hand whipped around in a vicious backhand that caught Tuco across the lips. The outlaw yelped and stumbled back into the open grave. He scrambled out, sobbing.

"You've got a proposition of some kind in mind," Sentenza said, ignoring Tuco. "Spit it out."

The bounty-hunter finished lighting one of his stubby *cigarros* and flipped the spent match into the open grave.

"Why, as a matter of fact, I have. You two came here with the same idea—that once the gold was found only one man would leave with the whole two hundred thousand dollars. The more I think about it, the better I like that deal myself."

Sentenza's pale eyes narrowed.

"Meaning what? Get to the point."

"For a long time I've been hearing about how fast you are with that cross-belly draw. I'm not exactly an amateur at the trade. I'm sure you've been wondering the same thing I have, Sentenza. In a showdown between us—which one would come out alive? This seems like a good time to settle the question. The stakes are high—more than a life or two. Besides, men like you and me live on borrowed time. You might say we're already dead."

"What about the two hundred thousand? If you win you'll be rich. If I win—I'll still be a pauper."

"Not at all," the other said amiably. "I'll write the location of the real hiding place on a piece of paper. If you want it enough—take it off my dead body. Fair enough?"

For a long moment Sentenza stared at the bounty-hunter, his dark wedge of face without a hint of ex-

pression. Then, slowly, he slid the long gun back into its holster.

"Go ahead. Write."

The hunter fished out an old reward poster from his pocket and dug out a stub of pencil. He scrawled a few words, folded the paper and tucked it into his pocket. He grinned at Sentenza.

"That clear space should give us plenty of elbow room."

"Lead the way," Sentenza said.

"You go first. I don't want a bullet in my back. Whoever gets the gold will have to earn it the hard way, my friend."

Sentenza's lips stirred in the ghost of a smile. He strode on into the amphitheater. The bounty-hunter followed. Tuco stumbled after them, wringing his hands and whimpering.

"Whitey, Whitey, you won't forget that it was Tuco who saved your life in the desert? It was Tuco who took you to his brother's monastery and watched over you like a father until you were strong and well. Without Tuco you wouldn't be here today." He whirled and held out pleading hands. "Sentenza, I forgive you for what you had that pig Wallace do to me. I am not a vengeful man or one to hold a grudge. It was simply a matter of business, what happened there in Battleville. I understand, Sentenza. I would have done the same thing myself."

Neither man paid the slightest attention to his mouthings. They faced one another, a dozen paces apart. The bounty-hunter took a long drag on his *cigarro* and flipped it away. His right hand hung just below and behind the butt of his gun.

Sentenza used his left hand to pull the long frock

coat away from the holster on his left hip. His right hovered close to his belt.

"The count of five suit you?"

The hunter nodded.

"Tuco, stop that damn babbling and give us the count."

Tuco moistened his lips and began to count in a high, quavering voice.

At the count of five the poised hands moved in a blur of fantastic speed. The slap of palms against walnut butts sounded almost as one.

Only a single gunshot thundered.

Sentenza stood very still, the long-barreled pistol only half drawn. He stared at the bounty-hunter, his forehead creased in a frown of perplexity. He gave his head a little shake, as if some thought troubled him.

Then, very slowly, one knee began to buckle. He turned half around in a grotesque, dipping pirouette, then fell heavily on his side. His hand made one feeble effort to finish drawing the pistol, then went limp.

The hunter strode to his fallen adversary, stirring the body with the toe of his boot. He holstered his gun and turned away.

Tuco found his voice. "Whitey, you did it. I knew you could. I told you you could take Sentenza and you did. The pig is dead and good riddance, eh?" He stumbled backward on rubbery legs and collapsed on the nearest grave. "Now there is only you and me, Whitey. Tell me where the gold is buried, eh? Which is the grave, eh?"

"You're sitting on it," the hunter said.

Chapter 21

TUCO GAPPED at the headboard with bulging eyes. "But—but, Whitey, there is no name on this grave. All the marker says is unknown."

"That's right." The bounty-hunter nodded. "Carson said—the unknown grave nearest to Arch Stanton's. So grab that headboard and start digging."

"But Whitey," Tuco wailed, "you will have to help me. I can't dig it all by myself. Already I have dug up one grave. My muscles are like water."

"Tuco," the hunter said grimly, "as you're so fond of repeating, there are two kinds of people in this world—those who have bullets in their guns and those who dig. You dig."

He stood watching until the excavation was knee-deep to the sweating bandit, then turned and went down the slope to where his horse was tethered. He took something out of a saddlebag and came back, holding the object behind him.

Tuco loosed a wild shout.

"Aieee, it is here, Whitey! I can see the top and this one is not a coffin. It's a money chest, all right."

The lid came up protestingly. The cavity beneath it was packed full of bulging leather sacks. Their contents made a dull chinking sound as Tuco hoisted one after another out of the grave. The hunter knelt and pulled the drawstring on one sack. A

stream of gold dollars cascaded out to the ground. Tuco scrambled out on his knees and plowed shaking hands through the pile.

"Eh, Whitey, Whitey, what a lovely sight. And it's all ours to divide. We're partners, you and me, Whitey, to share and share alike, eh?"

"Oh, you'll get your half," the bounty-hunter said, "and here's something else that belongs to you." He held out a coil of rope with a hangman's noose at one end. "Remember this, Tuco? Recognize your handiwork? I went back and got it that day—after the Yankee shell had conveniently interrupted your merry little game of shoot-the-stool-legs. I figured I might find a use for it, sooner or later."

Tuco, still on his knees, goggled at the rope, his mouth sagging open.

"Whitey, you are fooling, eh? You are just making a big joke with your friend, Tuco, eh? I know. You are trying to frighten me, to give me the big scare."

"By the expression on your face," the other said dryly, "I'm not only trying but succeeding. And this isn't a joke—it's a rope. Take it and put it on. Snug it up around your neck where it belongs and then you can rest and relax. I'll take care of the rest myself."

"Whitey—" Tuco took the rope into shaking hands and managed to get the loop over his head. "You can't, Whitey. You wouldn't do this to Tuco—who loves you like a brother and saved your life."

"Turn around and put your hands together behind you."

He slapped the butt of his pistol. Sobbing, the outlaw got to his feet and put his wrists together.

The hunter used the buckskin thong from the money sack to lash them together.

He gave the shaking figure a nudge.

“Walk over to that rail fence.”

The fence divided the cemetery from the woods. One tree put out a stout limb that hung low above the rail. The bounty-hunter tossed the end of the rope over the limb and caught it. He drew the rope snug.

“Now climb up and stand on the top rail. You can make it if you’re careful. I’ll hold the rope good and snug to help you keep your balance.”

“Whitey, Whitey—” Tears streamed down Tuco’s swarthy cheeks. He managed to scramble onto the top rail where he teetered precariously. “Do you know what you always were, Whitey? A big bastard. A stinking bastard and the son of bastards.”

The bounty-hunter tied the end of the rope to a fence post and went back to the pile of exhumed money sacks. He knelt and began to separate them into two piles.

“One for you and one for me. Another for you and another for me. Just like old times, isn’t it, Tuco, old faithful partner?”

“Whitey,” Tuco screamed. “I am losing my balance. I can’t stand up on this rail any longer.”

“Oh, I think you can manage, Tuco—for a little while. Just stay real still and don’t breathe hard.”

Tuco’s foot slipped on the narrow rail. He screeched and managed to regain his balance by main effort.

The bounty-hunter stood up, hugging his share of the money sacks to his chest. “I’m leaving your share here on the ground for you. It will give you some-

thing to look at and dream about when you get bored."

The bandit howled obscenities. Midway to his horse the hunter stopped and looked back.

"If I were you, I don't think I'd try dancing any jigs, Tuco. Adios, friend."

The hunter stowed the money into his saddlebags, mounted and rode across the vast field of the dead. At the edge of the cemetery he reined in to look back.

Tuco was teetering wildly on the rail fence, about to lose his balance completely. The bounty-hunter reached down and drew out the army rifle that had come with the stolen horse. He levered a shell into the chamber, took careful aim and fired.

Tuco was falling off the rail. The rope was tightening around his neck when it parted a scant foot above his head. He landed on the ground on his side with an impact that jarred the breath from his lungs.

The hunter slid the gun back into its scabbard and sat watching until he saw Tuco sit up and struggle to his knees, tugging frantically at the thong binding his wrists behind him.

The hunter's lips moved in a faint smile. He touched the brim of his hat in a vague salute.

"The partnership is hereby dissolved," he murmured, "but it wasn't too unsuccessful while it lasted. Adios, Tuco Benedicto Pacifico Juan Maria Ramirez."

He turned the horse's head and rode south without another backward glance.

THE END

“The Man With No Name”

His partner is the desperado, Tuco, who turns vengeance into a sadistic contest of endurance.

His adversary is the ruthless Sentenza, a killer who long ago lost count of the lives he has cut down.

His goal is a \$200,000 treasure in stolen Army gold for which many have died and more will be killed.

His secret is a dead man's final breath. More than once it has saved his life, and it will lead him to the treasure—if he can keep alive long enough to reach it.

His trail is a path of blood cutting across the hell that the Civil War had brought to the southwest.

His reward—death, probably, from any one of a hundred enemies; betrayal, possibly, from the unpredictable Tuco; defeat, perhaps, blazing from Sentenza's custom-made pistol . . . or the gold that two armies and a legion of dead men have failed to reclaim!

**To the Man With No
Name, the odds seemed
almost favorable!**