Trouble Shooter

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by Ernest Haycox

Dead Man Range
The Feudists
Head of the Mountain
Bugles in the Afternoon

TROUBLE SHOOTER

Ernest Haycox

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Dedicated to
W. F. G. Thacher

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This was April, 1868, with the combination work-passenger train running up the valley of the Lodgepole toward Cheyenne.

More or less surrounded by the necessary junk that belonged to his job, Frank Peace sat with his long legs across the opposite seat and watched April's premature dusk slowly fill the desert's empty horizon. Spring broke late this year, for a gusty wind boiled against the car sides and the air scouring down the aisle laid its raw edge against him. Out in the bleak foreground a band of antelope rushed up from a coulee, scudding away into the farther darkness; a window behind Peace squalled open and the man sitting there pumped seven quick shots from his Spencer fruitlessly into that bitten plain and slammed the window down again.

Fresher cold flowed along the car. They were cracking it up at forty miles, through a suddenly condensed night. The trucks of this car chattered a little and Frank Peace's body registered the sudden bite of a curve with a professional interest. Idle as he was, he could never divorce himself from this care; it had been so all the way from Omaha, his ears and eyes attentive to tangent and curve, to the rhythm of the wheels on the rail joints, to the flow of the train along a grade scooped up from the desert only a year before. At Hillsdale Station it was thoroughly dark, the lights of the station making a yellow shine on the squad of soldiers drawn up along the platform. In the moment they stood to his view he saw their stolid faces whipped red by the wind; and then the train ran on, the engine's halloo roping back through the rush of weather. Conductor Paddy Miles came by.

Peace said: "Stop at Archer, Paddy."

"Sure, Mister Peace," said Paddy Miles and went on down the aisle, his broad shoulders pressing aside the men restlessly congesting it. For this April was the beginning of another construction season. The Union Pacific's steel rails, racing 240 miles across Nebraska from North Platte the year before, had stopped eight thousand feet high in the snowy jaws of Sherman Summit, beyond Cheyenne. But this was spring again and ten thousand men of all degrees and kinds—graders, steel layers, bridge builders, gamblers, freighters, gunmen, ex-soldiers, tradesmen, mule skinners, cowhands,

doctors and lawyers, politicians—were bound back in one great tidal wave to Cheyenne and to the end of track beyond Cheyenne for another turbulent, wicked year. Young and old, worker and drone, reputable and disreputable—the five passenger coaches of this train were crowded with them.

Looking them over with a candid eye, Frank Peace saw one common thing that held them together—a buoyancy, a high vigor that sang in their voices and turned their muscles impatient. He had it himself, a restlessness that made fifteen hours on the train most intolerable. The lamplight of the car diffused itself feebly through an air turned blue by the fumes of small-stemmed clay pipes clutched doggedly between Irish jaws. All faces were ruddy and all talk had the one major overtone, which was that tuneful and tenor lilt of Erin. Some of these men were fresh from the old sod; the rest of them were veterans of the shovel and, before that, soldiers under Grant. In their cowhide boots and formless store suits and round-brimmed hats they made a rough show, but Peace knew them well and understood that these were the kind of men who would stand the bitter blast of winter and the merciless heat of sun and alkali better than any other breed. They would curse and complain and fight, but they would work until work was done; and they would turn from shovel to the stacked guns beside them and stand fast when the Sioux and the Cheyenne and the Arapahoe raided the track. He liked them because he had fought with them and against them—and never had found them soft.

And then his eyes turned to another part of the car and he was again puzzled, as he had been all the way from Omaha, to see the girl with the yellow hair and softly smiling face placed opposite Big Sid Campeaux.

There were two women in this car, but of the one who sat down near the potbellied stove and seemed so cold and demure and frightened he had no illusions. For her name was Rose, and wherever the end of track would be there she would be.

It was the other girl he could not understand. She seemed to know Big Sid, which was part of the puzzle, since Big Sid was no man to hide his talents. At each successive end of track town—North Platte, Julesburg, Sidney and Cheyenne—it was Big Sid's huge tent saloon that trapped a large part of the restless construction man's pay check. They burned for a while, these towns, like a crimson fire against a shocked prairie, and then the rails hurried on and they died and a new camp was born; yet as fast as the rails hurried, Big Sid was there at the vanguard with his saloon to meet the first engine chuffing with its load of Paddies. More than that, it was Big Sid who represented the crooks and desperadoes and gamblers clinging so relentlessly to the flanks of the road as it pressed on. When Big Sid spoke he

spoke for all of them. A huge man, gray and bland of cheek, soft-spoken and well dressed, he sat quietly with the girl and showed her a marked courtesy.

She wasn't, Peace decided, Campeaux's kind of a woman. There was a breeding about her, a pride in the lines of her features. She had put her fashionable wrap aside somewhere on the trip and now wore a long, blue military overcoat buttoned against the chill of the car. Above its collar Frank Peace had an incomplete view of yellow, well-combed hair, of cheeks very smooth and tinted pink by a vitality that strongly impressed itself upon him. The sense of an inward smiling was there for him, and the sense of a gallantry somewhat rare in a woman was there too—on rather long lips and in the clear hazel of her eyes.

She felt his glance, for her head came up and her eyes met his with a moment's steadiness. Campeaux jerked his big round cheeks about and showed Peace a strict civility—nothing else. The engine's long whistling fled by in gusty waves and there was a sudden break in the train's smooth running as it slackened for Archer Station. Peace untangled his legs from the gear piled around him and hoisted his long, flat frame one section at a time, as tall men learn to do in crowded spaces, and started down the aisle. He had to press the milling Irishmen aside. He did it without much ceremony, but he grinned a little as he made his way. There was a short chunk of a man in front of him who looked up—and grinned back; a Welshman all over and a scrappy bridge foreman with the devil in his blue eyes.

"Bully, me boy," he said. "This is the year we beat the Central into Ogden."

"Sure," said Peace. But he knew how to handle these men and so he added: "We'll get there if you can keep your bridges built ahead of the steel. The steel gang has a better foreman, Barney."

"The hell it has!" yelled Barney. "I can lick any black Irish steel layer in this world!"

The rivalry of these men was a keen, violent thing. A long Hibernian yell rocked along the car and a brawling voice called: "Where the jasus is that boy?"

Peace's grin grew longer and thinner, for the feel of this reckless, headlong fighting crowd ran through him and set up a like recklessness. He pushed his way to the end of the car where a blackened gallon coffeepot sat simmering on the stove. He got a cup and poured himself a jot of this stiff drink—strong enough to float a track bolt—and drank it; he stood there a moment with his face tipped down in a scowling pattern. Afterward he

found a second cup. He filled both. He worked his way across to the frail Rose sitting so obscurely inside her closewrapped coat.

He said: "You look cold, Rose," gently, and watched her eyes lift and cling to him.

She took the cup, but held it still—a faint shred of color coming into her face, softening its stony expression. There was something about the girl he never understood—and failed to understand now; for in her was a faint grace that made him remember his manners.

She said, in a slow, murmuring breath: "Thank you," and looked down at the cup. There was a break in her reserve, a letting down of that hard wall she showed the men of this car; he saw it and turned away, not wishing to see more.

He said, "Gangway, you pick-and-shovel experts," and balanced the remaining cup above him.

The packed Irishmen in the aisle were hard to stir, and he put his free arm out without any ceremony and hauled them aside, and came to Big Sid Campeaux's section. The girl there had been watching him, measuring him in a manner that was straight and swift and without a smile. The pride in her was like steel; she had a breeding that in some way put him on the defensive. It seemed to him she kept him this way a long enough time before she smiled and accepted the coffee cup.

"It is very thoughtful of you, Mr. Peace," she told him calmly.

"Maybe," he answered. "And maybe not." He looked over to Big Sid Campeaux who made a taciturn third party to this scene. The car pitched more slowly along the rails and somebody said, "Here's Archer, where Hills got killed last November." Then he drawled: "How are you, Sid?"

"Glad to see you again, Peace," grunted Campeaux. "Been in Omaha all winter?"

"No—just a month." Peace's glance whipped again to the girl. She had lifted the coffee cup to her lips, and her glance came over its rim to him, alert and interested and faintly amused. She had a quality, he thought swiftly, that struck him with a definite impact. Raw and rough as this surrounding scene was, it seemed to please her, it seemed to put a sparkle into the round hazel surfaces of her eyes. The restlessness of all these men and the shouldering of the desert wind outside seemed to appeal to a sense of adventure in her. The lightness of her hair shed a remote cameo glow across the smooth surface of her cheeks. She had a resolute chin, and her lips were longer than he had first noticed, and caught now in a smile. He didn't look at

Campeaux but he spoke to the man with a real impatience. “Your manners, Sid, are rotten.”

The train had come to a full stop and the car was swirling with that high and emphatic Hibernian talk. “When did you get the habit of expectin’ help from me?” retorted Campeaux.

Peace stared deliberately at the man. The indolence went out of him and his lips made a straight line. “That’s right,” he suggested quietly.

There wasn’t any expression on Campeaux’s bland, gray-freckled cheeks. The big man had power in him, and it made him soft and noncommittal with his talk. A great diamond on one of his heavy fingers caught the smoky car light and threw back a brittle blue brilliance; and the sense of hostility between them was impossible to prevent. A little of that deep and resentful feeling got into Campeaux’s eyes then and pulled his eyelids more closely together.

The motion of a man’s shoulders in the seat behind Campeaux diverted Frank Peace’s attention, and he saw Mitch Dollarhide slowly rise from a half-sprawled position and bend forward to catch his talk. Mitch’s ragged mustache edged his mouth; the brim of his hat came well down over his eyes. It was a secretiveness and a shadowing in keeping with his ways, for he was Big Sid Campeaux’s creature, walking always behind Campeaux like a well-trained brute. He watched Peace solemnly.

The train had been halted this while; and presently Paddy Miles thrust his way down the aisle with a sheet of flimsy telegraph paper in his hand for Peace. He said: “Don’t hold us up any longer than you can help, Mr. Peace. We’re late into Cheyenne now.”

Peace bowed at the girl and turned away. He had his look at the message; he took his time reading it, long legs braced across the aisle.

Barney, the Welshman, was speaking in his hearty way: “And you will recall it was here we had to stop the engines last July when the buffalo went across.”

Peace said: “Go ahead, Paddy,” and returned to his seat. The engine sent out its two short blasts; cold air poured down the aisle again and all the shifting men wheeled as the car jerked forward. Peace settled his long legs between his luggage and smoothed out the telegram:

MAKE NO PLANS FOR CHEYENNE TONIGHT

REED

Nan Normandy had a slanting profile view of Peace then. Unobserved, she could let her eyes speculate. If she never saw this man again, she told herself, she knew at least one thing about him: He had little respect for barriers and he had a reckless temper. It was there to be seen in the stubborn and slightly uneven lines of his cheeks. He sat indolent across the seats, with his wide, flat chest in repose; yet there was, she surmised, not the least repose in him. His hair was ink-black, his eyes a smoky gray; and his fists were hard. In one way he was elementary in his actions, for he had wanted to speak to her and had found a quick way of doing it. But he had done another thing, too, which lifted her interest enormously. He had stopped on the way to give the other cup of coffee to the girl sitting at the end of the car —a girl whose place in life was easily enough read. He had smiled at the girl with a sudden softening of his face. Men liked him, for all during this trip she had seen these unruly Irishmen stop and have a word with him; and she had seen his grin make a quick, rash streak across his face.

She turned to Campeaux so suddenly that she caught his heavy, studying look. “What did you say he did on the railroad?”

“His title,” said Campeaux, “is assistant superintendent of construction. Under Reed, who is superintendent, and under General Dodge, the chief engineer.” Campeaux let it ride like that a moment, afterward adding: “You’ll be likely to find him wherever there happens to be a fight. Dodge and Reed use him to fix up trouble. Any kind of trouble.”

“He’s young,” mused Nan Normandy.

“Twenty-six, I guess.”

“And very hard,” said the girl.

“Yes.” Watching Campeaux, she observed his face grow heavy. The hatred between the two was something that couldn’t be hidden. Yet it was equally clear to her that Campeaux held a deep respect for Peace. For he said later; “He’s got four years of the rebellion behind him, a year of Indian fighting, and a year of this job. You get hard fast in this country. Or you don’t stay.”

“I suppose so. Though it is not pleasant to remember.”

Campeaux permitted himself a thin smile. “You’ll hear him referred to as the man who tamed Julesburg.”

“What was that?”

“Just a story.”

She still had her eyes on Peace, watching that black head roll to the motion of the car. He was relaxed, and he had forgotten her, but there was a scowling line across his forehead and he had his eyes on the yellow

message. The Irishmen in the aisle were beginning to boil again, dragging their belongings from beneath the seats.

Campeaux spoke. “Practically to Cheyenne—and seven o’clock.”

“The Magic City of the Plains,” murmured Nan.

Campeaux bent forward. “You’ll like the country.”

“I expect to.”

He rolled his big body against the seat. “It’s for gamblers. You’re a gambler.”

“In my own way—yes.”

Campeaux had a trick of lifting his heavy lids when he was interested—as he did now. Considering the round, cold inexpressiveness of that glance, Nan Normandy felt her guard go up. But a moment later Campeaux’s attitude became indifferent. His hands, thick and soft, lay idle across his legs.

He said: “I want to help you.”

Nan Normandy’s shoulders lifted. But she didn’t speak.

Paddy Miles yelled down the aisle: “Cheyenne!”

All the Irishmen were crowding toward the car doors and an enormous confusion began to rack the narrow space. They were laughing, and the long hours on the train had dammed up a wildness that was about to burst through. In a quick half glance she saw Frank Peace gather up his plunder and join the crush. He had not looked at her again—he had forgotten her entirely, she thought. One man wheeled to say something to Peace and she noted his swift grin return. The train stopped. Beyond the fogged window she saw the lights of Cheyenne shining down a strange, raw street.

Campeaux said, “Mitch,” without turning his head, and a great creature rose from the seat behind Campeaux. Nan hadn’t noticed him before. He had a mustache shaped thinly like a crescent across his flat lips and a pair of muddy eyes set up a little flash under the brim of his hat. He came around and stood obediently in the aisle. His face was very dark, his features blunt to the point of brutality. “Take those things, Mitch,” added Campeaux, and rose.

The aisle was emptied and Nan preceded Campeaux along it to the platform. A harsh wind struck her in the face. Lanterns flashed along the station runway and many men roved the adjoining mud, calling out other men’s names. In all those voices was something eager and high-pitched and gay. Coming down the steps uncertainly she stopped to wait for Campeaux.

Frank Peace’s voice said, behind her: “Any way I can help you?”

It turned her around. He stood there in the frosty glitter of the weaving lantern lights. His head bent toward her. She observed then the pale scar running across his left temple. There were two other men in the background, obviously waiting for him.

Somewhere a man's leather lungs kept yelling at the disembarked Irishmen. "Come over to the Club saloon, you faro sports, and give us a bet! Come over—come over!"

A near-by gun was being fired unevenly into the turbulent night, its reports stretched thin by the gusty, bitter wind. The other girl on the train slipped down the steps and for a moment her white face tipped to Peace. It was something Nan could not help seeing—that strained, somber expression. Then she vanished in the churning confusion.

Nan said: "You have been nice—and thank you. Mr. Campeaux has offered to help me."

The change of his eyes astonished her. They darkened immeasurably and showed disbelief. It was as though he had stepped through a gate and closed it between them. She did not know why, and the moment hurt her. Campeaux came on, speaking bluntly at Peace.

"There's a few things, friend Frank, you ought to stay out of."

Peace said briefly, "I suppose so." He turned on his heel and joined the other two men waiting there. All of them shouldered through the crowd. Something had definitely happened here, oddly depressing her. Campeaux's man, Mitch, got his abnormally long arms around all the luggage and stood patiently by.

"You will want to have a bite to eat," said Campeaux. "The proper place is the Rollins House. Go on, Mitch, go on." He gave his arm to Nan and they drifted slowly with the crowd. There was a man standing by the line of cars, looking on—a short man with very wide shoulders and a gray head. Something amused him and he turned around, impelled to talk. There was only a stranger from the train at hand—another Irishman with an emerald greenness of the isle still thick about him. But the short one laughed with a long amusement.

"You see that? That bully boy with the high-coupled hips—that was Frank Peace, the man who wrecked Julesburg. And him a-talkin' to the girl when Big Sid Campeaux steps up to take her away. Now that was a thing. What's your name?"

"Callahan—and where do I shleep?"

"Ah," said the small man scornfully, "why should you be wantin' to sleep? Listen to me, Callahan. I'm Collie Moynihan. Campeaux took the girl

from under Frank's nose—a rare sight and one you'll nawt be likely to see repeated. When you buy a drink or dance with the girls or try your luck at monte it is likely Campeaux's pocket you'll be linin'. It was so in Julesburg where Campeaux and his gamblin' devils thought to dispute the word of the railroad's marshal there. And so Peace drops back with a few of us chosen ones, Callahan—a few of us railroad boys. We kill and we cure and we leave fifteen of those bad ones to christen a new graveyard, which Julesburg was a-needin'. And here now Campeaux takes this girl from bucko Frank. A rare sight."

"And why," said Callahan, very prompt in his answer, "did we not shtep up there and show this Campeaux the evil of his way?"

Collie Moynihan slid one finger along his nose and laughed—a long, cheerful laugh.

"If you're ableatin' at me—" suggested Callahan softly.

"There is plenty of time, me green one, for fightin'. Indade there is. An' you'll nawt be a much oulder man when it comes to you. Come with me to the commissary shack."

2

The three of them—Leach Overmile, Phil Morgan and Peace—shouldered into the crowd, skirting the fresh pine-boarded buildings of the railroad offices, turning around the vast piles of steel and ties and boxed supplies waiting here to be thrown forward to the end of track. Engines were backing down the sidings, rattling up the long strings of cars. Men were working near by on a new shed, with a huge bonfire to guide their hammers and their saws. A recent rain had turned Cheyenne's main street to a churned and beaten and knee-deep river of mud along which, even at this late hour, the toiling freight wagons were moving hub to hub in formless confusion.

Across the gulf of mud Peace saw the glitter of Cheyenne's saloons and dance halls and business houses stretching away into the windy night. Tent or log framed or pine-boarded, all of them were booming with the traffic and trade of the newly opened construction year. Over on the corner of Eddy the vast shape of Campeaux's Club saloon, a circus tent fifty feet wide and a hundred feet long, emitted its solid gush of light, and a band in there made an enormous clatter through which the hoarse spiel of the barker at the door rose and fell.

"Not a building here last July—and now look at it," observed Peace.

"Nine thousand citizens," said Leach Overmile. He was all Texan, tall and thin and as soft-spoken as a girl. Cold as it was he wore only a thin cotton shirt and a pair of striped butternut breeches tucked into the low-topped boots characteristic of cattle land. A Colt's .44 slapped against his right thigh. "Steeped in sin and proud of it. Kinda tame against Julesburg, though. Vigilantes have got the tough ones temporarily scared. What's Omaha look like?"

They turned into the Rollins House and walked up the stairs to the room Peace kept against his frequent passages in and out of the place. He dropped his plunder and lighted a lamp.

"Omaha's busy but dull. More than a month of office work would kill me." He had his shirt off and he had poured himself a basin of water; standing in front of the dresser mirror, he lathered his face.

Overmile dumped himself casually across the bed, lying full length. Phil Morgan, one of the junior civil engineers on the job, sat more properly in a chair. He was a year or two older than Peace, perpetually nursing a pipe. He had a settled, philosophical manner, with a gravity lining his mouth. He was content to let the others talk.

"Who was that girl?" demanded Overmile.

Peace brought his razor sweeping down his face. "Couldn't find out," he mumbled.

"You tried," Overmile pointed out ironically. "All I got to say is, Big Sid sure has taste."

"Sure."

The door opened without ceremony and a pair of older men walked in. Peace laid down his razor. He said, "I was just coming over to the office, Sam. Hello, Jack."

Sam Reed said, "You've heard the news, I suppose."

Jack Casement said: "What's doing in Omaha?"

They were both small, wiry men. Reed, superintendent of construction, had a rather gentle face set off by a heavy black beard. As for Jack Casement, who held the contract for laying steel all the way through, there was no gentleness about him. He was a terrier, a doughty, scrapping little terrier, physically unable to stand still, never unwilling to fight it out with any of the thousands working under him. Like Reed, he carried a full beard, the color of rust.

Peace went back to finish his shaving. Casement fished up his pipe and began stirring around the room. Peace said: "Your brother Dan told me to say you can have eighty cars of material a day. Omaha looks like a freight dump. So does Council Bluff. Stuff piled story-high on both sides of the river. Ferries workin' twenty-four hours a day. What news, Sam?"

The door opened again with a bang. A burly young man came in and said, "What the hell here, Peace?"

"Mama Tarrant's little boy, Ed, once more," murmured Overmile. "This joint begins to resemble an old settlers' convention."

Ed Tarrant went over and shook Peace with a broad blow on the back. "Here comes the swallow with the spring. So we whip hell out of the Central this year, don't we? Had supper? No? Well, what this room needs is a little more fraternity. Just wait right here. Don't move a step." He wheeled around and waggled his thumb profanely at Overmile and left them, slamming the door with a boisterous violence. Tobacco smoke began to turn the light blue.

Overmile said mildly: “That wild bull.”

“What news, Sam?” prompted Peace.

Reed said: “Well, we had our schedule for ’68 all set. We were to locate to Salt Lake and lay steel as far as the Wasatch range. With a little survey work done west of Salt Lake to Humboldt Wells. But last night I get a wire from Dodge. He’s dropped his work in Congress and he’ll be here within a week.”

Everybody paid Sam Reed strict attention. Peace stood still, the razor suspended. For General Dodge was chief engineer and his word was law to all of them.

Reed went on in his dry way. “Our schedule’s been knocked to pieces. The order now is to make our location lines final all the way to Salt Lake in thirty days, and to Humboldt Wells, 220 miles west of the lake, in another sixty days. We are, moreover, to cover the whole line with men, regardless of the cost, and get into Salt Lake with steel as fast as possible. It makes no difference where snow catches us this year. We are to keep on.”

Jack Casement said, “You hear? Five hundred miles of steel to be laid down, and no stops.”

“Why?” said Peace.

Reed shrugged his shoulders. He had a trick of saying important things without emphasis. He moved his cigar to another corner of his mouth, speaking around it. “Under the original setup, the Central was to build from Frisco east to the California line and the Union was to build west from Omaha and meet them there. All of us know Huntington and Stanford and Crocker have been too ambitious to stop at the California line. So they had their charter changed and came on. Now they have persuaded the Secretary of the Interior that the Central is financially and morally purer than the Union and so should have more rewards. Well, it looked like brag until now. But the fact is that the Central has put the Sierras behind and they’ve got all the level stretches of Nevada in front, whereas we haven’t yet reached our heavy work in the Wasatch chain.”

“Which,” said Casement, always preoccupied with the problem of getting steel laid, “we’ll hit in the dead of winter.”

Reed went on. “So Central sprung its surprise. It intends to beat us into Salt Lake. If it succeeds it will block us out of our only logical terminal and dictate its own terms as to what the Union will have in through traffic. We’re hipped. If we lose, our whole financial structure blows up. There’s no revenue to be had out of a road running nine hundred miles across a desert without a terminal. The government will listen to the road reaching the lake

first—and Central means to make Union the tail of the dog. My guess is that Huntington and his partners aim to beat us to Salt Lake so that they can whip the Union into line and control the whole road from Frisco to Omaha. We have got to reach Salt Lake first regardless of cost—regardless of anything." He leaned forward and his eyes brightened. "We've got to get there first."

Ed Tarrant came banging back into the room, bearing glasses and a bottle. He said, "Amity and concord and fraternity—that's the ticket." But the thoughtful silence of the group struck him and he looked about with a curious eye and shrugged his shoulders. Frank Peace finished his shave; he put his shirt and coat back on. The rest of them were entirely caught up in their own considerations, with the room turning a hazier blue from the rising spirals of tobacco smoke. Ed Tarrant poured the drinks, passing them around. "My God," he muttered, "is this a wake?"

"We're going to have trouble enough," said Reed quietly. "Some of it we can forecast, like weather and grading delay and operating breakdown. Some of it we can't. We're going into country this season that the Indians claim as private hunting ground. There's some sort of a treaty about it. I don't know the rights—all I know is I've been told to lay steel. But the Cheyennes are sore and they're going to hit us. I know also we've got some agitators in our construction gangs. Who's payin' 'em to cause trouble? Make your own guesses. And I know that the gamblers aim to take control of the end of track towns away from us this year. Our rule has been hurting their profits. That's why Big Sid Campeaux came back early this season. They've got their joints laid out already at Laramie. Our tracks will reach there in two or three days. And then the ball opens. The company has been served notice by these fellows, through Campeaux, that they do not propose to observe the authority of any mayor or town marshal we may appoint."

"A fight?" drawled Leach Overmile, and reared up from the bed. His sandy hair made an unruly whorl down across his forehead; eagerness gleamed out of his indigo eyes.

Reed said to Peace, "The construction train leaves for end of track in an hour. I've had Overmile arrange for horses to meet you there. Go on to Fort Sanders and locate Mormon Charley. He's close to the Indians. I want you to have him use his influence with the Indians not to fight us. You don't do any more office work this year, Frank. From now on your particular job is to handle the grief along the right of way. And, in particular, you've got to handle the toughs. The train leaves in an hour."

Peace said: "I haven't had supper. And I've got some personal business."

Reed smiled a little bit—and the other men in the room shared that. “All right. Give Eileen my regards. The train can wait.”

“Gentlemen,” put in Ed Tarrant, “how long should good liquor be ignored?”

They were silent a little while, and then Peace lifted his glass and echoed the thought that was in the minds of all of them. “Here,” he said, “is to ’68—the year we beat the Central into Salt Lake.”

They drank on that and they broke up. Sam Reed stopped at the door to drop an afterthought. “You don’t travel alone this year, Frank. Overmile sticks with you particularly. Phil Morgan is at hand for your use. When you get to Fort Sanders you’ll find Lieutenant Millard has orders to accompany you on any trip off the road.”

“What’s that for?” demanded Peace.

But Sam Reed only shrugged his shoulders and went out, Jack Casement following. Peace remained in his tracks, a tall and unruly presence in that room, with his black head faintly bent. There was a sharpness and a hardiness in the look he threw at those three deep friends ranged about him. He saw the way they studied him, with an affection—and with a concern.

He said again: “What’s it all for?”

Leach Overmile blew a ring of cigarette smoke casually upward. Pure blandness covered the cheeks of this silver-headed ex-cowpuncher and faint crow’s feet wrinkles sprang shrewdly about his eyes. Phil Morgan was an inscrutable figure in the chair, teeth clenched about the stem of his pipe. Ed Tarrant lifted his glass against the light, squinting through it.

“You don’t know yet?” murmured Overmile.

“I don’t like mystery, you slab-sided horse wrangler.”

“No mystery,” remarked Overmile quietly. “This Indian business is just a side trip. Reed sent word to all the joints last night that the railroad proposed to back up its authority in all end of track towns this year—and that you were the man to clean ’em up if they got tough. Ed Tarrant was in the Club last night when the news trickled through. The gamblers held a meetin’ about it. We know for a fact they wired Campeaux, who was winterin’ in Omaha. That’s what brought him along in such a hurry.”

He stopped and blew another smoke ring at the cloudy ceiling. But Phil Morgan said evenly: “Tell him the rest, Leach.”

Overmile drawled: “At this meetin’ the toughs decided to put you to sleep if you started anything. Which is why Reed said you wouldn’t travel alone this year.”

Frank Peace let his eyes narrow a moment, considering it. Afterward the grin they were all waiting for laid a taut streak across his skin. He said indolently: "I'm to be chaperoned? Brethren, I'll run you ragged. I'll have you sittin' on front porches and back steps all summer. Now get away from my sight—I'm busy. See you at the train in two hours."

"Another drink?" suggested Ed Tarrant hopefully. But Frank Peace, bound for the door, swept him forward with a long arm. They went down the stairs and out through the lobby of the Rollins House into Cheyenne's windy, tumultuous street.

Peace said: "At the train," and swung away, cutting around the corner of Eddy and going along it at a fast cruising stride. There were men working at the guy ropes of Campeaux's Club saloon, cursing the wind as they slid into the heavy mud; and a four-horse team pulled away from it, high laden with freight. It was the way all these joints worked. Tonight the Club was in full roar at Cheyenne. But end of track crept on past Sherman Summit into Laramie Plains, and Laramie City was only a few days from steel. Tomorrow night Campeaux's Club saloon would be pitched in Laramie, waiting for the Irish Paddies to come swinging in off the first work train—money in their pockets, a thirst in their throats, and the very devil in their bony fists.

And around the Club's enormous tent would be all the other shanty hells, with their spielers crying across the street: "Come on, you rondo-coolo sports—come on over and give us a bet!" Spring was here, the railroad stirred from its sleep, and 1868 would be a lustier year, a more roaring year—and a deadlier year.

He turned in front of a small two-storied frame building wedged between other buildings of like rawness and newness. A sign above it said briefly: OLIVER MERCANTILE COMPANY, and inside he saw Bardee Oliver's pointed smooth Yankee face turning slowly and obstinately from side to side at a customer across the counter. It roused Peace's sense of humor. Bardee Oliver was on his way to a fortune through that one gift he had of being able to shake his head. In this prodigal country where men were turned giddy by the buoyant air Bardee kept his senses.

He saw Peace. He said, "Hello, Frank," as a matter of course. This casualness was something he never departed from, fire or storm or gun fight. "Eileen," he added, "is just up the stairs," and afterward he turned his attention back to the customer.

Peace went across the store more rapidly than he realized. He skirted the piles of sacked flour, the boxes of canned goods, the heavy tiers of lard tubs;

he came to the narrow stairway and went up two steps at a time to knock impatiently on the upper door.

A voice, like the cool, remote tinkle of porcelain, said: “Come in.”

He pushed the door aside. Across the room Eileen Oliver turned slowly around, slowly and gracefully and without hurry.

It was this picture—the promise of this picture—that had been long in his memory, stirring his restlessness during the month he had been away, a restlessness that was like vaguely remembering something valuable that he had left behind him and might lose. A fear of that sort—a feeling of unease and uncertainty. She had on a dress that lay tightly against her slim waist, that accented the self-reliance of her small, square shoulders. Her hair was quite dark, drawn back in the strict, center-parted fashion of the time; her eyes were gray, and all this darkness gave to her small, distinct and oval face a remote olive tint. She was a quiet girl and her smile now sweetened rather than lightened the grave, even lines of those New England lips.

She said, “I hoped you’d be in tonight, Frank,” and the slight gesture of her head sent two jade eardrops into quiet motion.

“Is that all, Eileen?” he said, and went straight across the room. Her hands came up in a quick gesture of defense. But he brought her to him with a hard sweep of his long arms.

She said, half in a whisper, “Frank!” When he kissed her he caught the perfume of her hair. Her lips slid away from him and her hands put a steady pressure against his wide chest. Her eyes were very bright; color stained her cheeks. “Frank—why are you so rough!”

He was laughing then, for he had remembered that self-possession was the key to this girl and that she hated unsettling emotions. There was that much of her father’s casualness in her make-up. He looked at her until her eyes dropped and that strange shyness pushed his spirits higher than they had been. He reached down and caught the point of her chin, and lifted it and said, “Eileen—coolness is for strangers.” But she had a need for self-possession that he could not break through. Her eyes flashed out quick anger and she shoved his arm aside.

“Eileen,” he said, remotely stung, “are you afraid to be alive?”

She caught her breath. She said, “Frank!” Her hands held him by the coat lapels and he saw through her reserve, down into some part of her that held flame. It was soon shut out. She dropped her hands, and humor turned her lips frankly at the corners. “It doesn’t take us long to quarrel, does it?”

“If you fed me I’d be more agreeable.”

She said, “Sit down,” and went into the kitchen.

There was, Peace thought, an unbreakable serenity in this room. The boards hadn't yet been painted or papered, the furniture was scarred by usage and travel—and the robust, turbulent echoes of a Cheyenne busy with its work and its pleasure beat like waves against the thin walls. Yet the personality of the girl was stronger than these other influences. Quiet as she was, she had put the impress of her will upon the room; it was a matter of orderliness, of small touches of grace against the bare walls. He got out his pipe and packed it, feeling ease go through him.

She came back and put a plate in front of him, and said: "Cold scraps. Has Omaha changed?"

"Packed solid with railroad stuff. Mud hub-deep on the main street. Steamboats tied by the dozen to the docks. It's a railroad town now, Eileen."

She said: "We should be grateful for the railroad, I suppose. It is life for all of us." She sat down opposite him, her arms resting on the table; her definite mouth was minutely stubborn and a latent unhappiness stirred the exact detail of her face. "But I shall be glad when it is finished and all this roughness is gone. Listen to those men outside."

This windy night shouldered against the pine wall of the building, condensing the reports of Cheyenne's uproaring activity. There was a teamster directly under the window, yelling at his horses caught in the muddy channel of Eddy Street. The boardwalk down there was a-drumming with loud feet and out of the Club saloon the racket of the saloon's band poured interminably, laced now and then by the barkeep's strident calling: "Come over here, you rondo-coolo sports, and give us a bet!" Yonder by the depot the ringing of the switch engine's bell kept on. Somewhere the unsupported wall of a half-built house went down against the blast with a long, flat crash.

Watching Eileen across the table, Peace realized that she hated all this raw, lusty life with an unfathomed intensity. The vitality of it warmed him like a fire—and only roused in her a hatred for its disorder. Every fiber in her body was stiffened against it. There was an insistence in her for exact ways, for gentility and sedate manners; and the louder all that outside fury became the more pronounced became the color on her cheeks.

"It isn't bad, Eileen," he said quietly.

She looked at him in her old way—which was cool and clear. "I know, Frank. You love it. Excitement and fighting keeps you going. You are hard. You are becoming harder."

He had finished his meal. He took up his pipe again. He was smiling through the gray lift of tobacco smoke.

"I like it," he admitted.

"They have made a work horse out of you," she told him, "they have made a slave driver out of you. What do these Irishmen call you? Bucko Frank. A man that cleans up gambling dens at point of a gun and knocks workmen down with his fists."

He said mildly: "It's the way to handle these fellows. I could go out on that street now and yell and get a hundred of them around me in five minutes—and they'd do anything I asked."

"I hate it, Frank! Killers call you by your first name and ask you to have a drink on them. Women—" her voice turned bitter—"those women—smile at you."

"Listen," he said carefully: "This is the greatest engineering job in the world. When it's done there'll be other roads to build. Here is where I make my way—for the next job to come."

She made a resigned motion with her small hand. "Have breakfast with us, Frank. I haven't seen you for a month."

He shook his head. His smile was regretting. "Reed's sending me to Fort Sanders tonight."

"Then I won't see you for another month! It isn't right. Why can't he wait one day?" She was angry then, with the rose color filling her cheeks. "How long do I have to sit and wait?"

He said, all at once laughing and reckless: "You're a lovely woman when you get angry." He rose and came around the table, and instantly she got out of her chair, and her hands lifted in a self-defense she couldn't forget.

She said rapidly: "No, Frank—I don't like that!"

But he took her by the arms and looked down, losing his humor. "What have I been thinking about in Omaha? Why do you suppose I held up a work train for an hour and came here on an empty stomach? Good God, Eileen, drop your manners for a minute! Don't be so damned stiff and scared! The waiting is just as tough on me as it is on you. But I keep thinking that the few minutes we have may be worth the waiting. A woman in love, Eileen, doesn't act like a Boston spinster in a museum. We're alive—and what are you afraid of?"

She shook herself away, and her hand lifted and slapped him across the cheek. He didn't step away. He dropped his arms and stood there watching her, smiling once more.

"Maybe," he said softly, "you'd be human if we fought more."

She said, “Frank—I’m sorry.” And stood rigidly in her place, on the edge of tears. “But stay over tomorrow.”

“No,” he said.

She flung her protest at him. “Who’s being stubborn now? Do I take second place to the railroad?”

He said laconically: “That’s something you’ll have to learn, Eileen. Never make a man choose between his job and his woman. There is a time for each, and the two things don’t compare.”

She faced him, resisting him quietly with her will. “I’m not just a woman, Frank. I’m Eileen Oliver. I can’t change that.”

He shrugged his shoulders and was about to answer her when somebody tapped on the room door. Eileen said, “Come in,” and her hands went up automatically to her hair, arranging it.

Ben Latimer walked into the room and stopped, and looked across at these two people with a manner that was very cool and very self-contained.

He said, “Hello, Peace. I heard you were back.” And then he bowed at Eileen, and his voice lost its distant ring. “There’s four thousand Irishmen abroad and the town’s wild—and I got lonely, Eileen.”

Peace said: “A logical and orderly sentiment, Ben,” and stared at Latimer without expression. But a hard, violent impulse washed through him and left him inwardly asmolder. Latimer was young. He was sound and dogged and full of nerve. Yet in the narrows of those pale gray eyes was something wholly unsentimental. It reminded Peace of old Bardee Oliver downstairs who calculated his chances so dryly, so smartly. Latimer was of that same disposition, avoiding enthusiasm, and thereby making his profitable way.

“Just so,” agreed Latimer imperturbably. “Well, I guess we start another year. You’ll be interested to know I took contract on ten miles of fill the other side of Laramie. I got twenty teams and fifty men going now.”

“You progress,” drawled Peace.

“I guess I do,” agreed Latimer. “One year ago I swung a shovel at two and a half a day. I don’t want to be breakin’ in here, though.”

“Sit down, Ben,” said Eileen. A coolness and a serenity had returned to her. She said to Peace: “When will you be back?”

Peace took his hat and walked to the doorway. He kicked his unruly temper into its proper place and spoke idly: “Not sure. Good night, Eileen.”

But she followed him and swung the door after her—and the two were in the semidarkness of the landing. Her hand brushed his sleeve softly; her

voice was a quiet, urgent whisper. “When will you be back, Frank? How long do I wait now?”

He said irritably: “Wait for what? Another argument? Go back and entertain Ben by reciting the table of compound interest. It is a safe topic and you’ll enjoy it.”

“Frank!” Her hand held him and the faint perfume of her hair was a strong call in these shadows. He reached down abruptly and kissed her again, and hoped for an answer. There was a yielding of her body, yet even then he felt a remote resistance. She was giving him a concession, she was trying to please him—but it was no more than that. She couldn’t break through her will; she couldn’t be generous in the way of a woman in love. It struck him hard. He left her there and went down the stairs. Bardee Oliver sat on his counter, waiting for trade. Bardee said:

“Got a raise yet, Frank?”

“Haven’t asked.”

Oliver looked at him out of eyes surrounded by a net of shrewd wrinkles. “Never get more if you don’t ask. You been doing the company’s dirty work. Goin’ to do more, according to rumors. Better figure for yourself and lay by—like Ben there. Ben’s smart enough to know the bonanza don’t last forever. You should be.”

Peace only nodded. He entered the brawling, wind-choked street and tramped toward the depot with his head lowered. Somebody in the western edge of this formless, disorderly town was firing a gun; and the monotonous pumping of the Club’s orchestra kept going on and on. By impulse he cut across the mud, ducking past a mired freight wagon, and walked to the saloon’s doorway. The spieler there quit his talking—quit it suddenly and stared at Peace. Men rolled in and out of this crowded place and a lamplight went glittering along the bright fifty feet of Campeaux’s portable bar. Opposite the bar all the games were going and beyond, on the dance floor, girl after girl in full evening clothes whirled with their partners. The music stopped then and the promenade to the bar began; a monte player kept calling in his tuneless formula:

“Fifty dollars if you spot it. Gentlemen, my hand against your eye. Who’s trying?”

Somebody came along the outgoing stream of traffic and said: “Hello, Frank.” Peace merely nodded. He turned toward the depot, his long arms swinging. A heavy line plowed its way across his forehead; the bite of the wind turned the scar on his temple white.

A man called, “Wait a minute, Peace,” but he kept on, a feeling of frustration boiling up.

There was one passenger coach hitched to nine flatcars of steel, with a helper engine coupled behind. A jet of steam exploded from that engine and a bell kept ringing. At the steps of the coach he found Overmile and Morgan and Ed Tarrant waiting for him, their big coats turned against the wind. The conductor, Mike Connor, came rapidly along the platform.

He said: “We’ll be on our way, Mr. Peace?”

“Let her go, Mike.”

But he stood there at the foot of the car steps, thinking of Eileen’s definite face turned so stubbornly to him, and he kept thinking of the eagerness he had brought to that room and the sultry irritation he had brought away from it. Back of all this the shape of Ben Latimer lay like a shadow. Leach Overmile’s voice reached him as from a distance.

“Make up your mind, Mister Peace.”

All his partners watched him closely. He shrugged his shoulders then and swung up the steps. The coach threw its sudden warmth into his face and the flicker of lamplights momentarily blurred his sight. He found his stuff piled under a seat and sat down there, the others coming on to join him. The engines were alternately pulling and boosting the train out of Cheyenne with a lack of unison that buckled the coach back and forth; the town lights slid by and the speed picked up. Over on the right-hand prairie he saw the barrack windows of Fort D. A. Russell strongly shining through the pitch black. Afterward the steady steam blast of the engines began to slap harder into the night as the track started to climb the long grade to Sherman Summit. He considered his watch and found it to be ten o’clock, and there was in him once more that deep uneasiness he could not explain—the feeling of leaving something behind him he treasured and would lose.

A little flash of color in one corner of his vision lifted him out of this long study. He saw Nan Normandy sitting at the far end of the car. She had her eyes on him and she held his attention for a long moment, seriously and proudly, and with a faint show of something that seemed like fear to him.

She turned her head away. He hadn’t noticed until then that Campeaux sat with her and that Campeaux’s creature, Mitch Dollarhide, held her luggage in an adjoining seat.

3

They labored up the heavy grade, buried between the high shoulders of the Sherman Summit cuts. Engine smoke filtered in, turning the flickering lamplight a more impotent gray. Wilder wind boiled along the car sides and all the wheels howled on the curves, and the exhaust of the helper directly behind this coach ripped its lunging sound through the steady run of the weather.

Phil Morgan broke a long silence. “Last year Tom Durant got enough cash to keep construction going. But the Boston investors furnishing the money don’t like his methods, so they told Oakes Ames to take charge and remove Durant from the vice-president’s job on the road. Durant’s been fighting back. He sent his consulting engineer, Seymour, out here and changed some locations Dodge had made. Then he came out himself. He’s at Laramie now, promising the folks there that Laramie will get the division point over Cheyenne. That’s why Dodge is on his way west. There’ll be a hell of a blowup when those two meet. Durant knew very well, two years ago, he had to get Dodge as chief engineer if he expected government support—because Dodge has got the full confidence of Grant and Sherman, and they’re pretty powerful. But now Durant figures he can do without Dodge and wants to get rid of him. The line-up is entirely clear to me. Dodge is building a straight road. Durant is more of a plunger and speculator. He wants personal power and all the subsidy he can get for the road from the government. It’s going to be a battle when those two meet. He’d fire Dodge in a minute, but Ames won’t stand for it. Ames is only one of the directors, but he’s got the stockholders back of him, and he’s thoroughly honest. It was Lincoln who asked him to come in and put his own fortune behind the road. We’re going to have a showdown some day.”

“I wonder,” said Peace, “what her name is.”

“Nan Normandy,” put in Overmile promptly.

“Why is she here?”

“Don’t know.”

Phil Morgan opened his sleepy eyes. “What are you talking about?”

Peace's glance strayed down the aisle. She sat gently relaxed, her head resting on the back of the car seat and her eyes closed; a well-made girl, strong in a way that he could not clearly define, her presence in this car setting up an actual disturbance.

"A beauty," murmured Overmile.

"You know what happens to beauties up here," drawled Phil Morgan.

Peace said irritably: "Premature judgement, Phil."

"Then why is she with Campeaux?" Morgan was always like that, caustic and bitter in his estimates of women. All Phil's friends knew some old memory burned deeply in him. They had seen it occasionally squeeze him like a vise and press his lips thin.

"We might go find out," suggested Overmile, smiling in a soft, rash manner. Peace noticed then that the long Texan's attention could not leave the girl.

"And we might not," grunted Peace.

They ran on through the summit cuts. Construction fires played livid, wind-raveled splashes of light across the condensed black, shining on the dripping sides of the cut, shining on men crouched there. The engines were easing off now, checking a sudden downgrade speed. All this was fresh road, laid in a thawed uneasy mud. They circled away from the summit, crawled tentatively over the high, spider-legged Dale Creek trestle and swung northward into the Laramie plains. Wind ripped at them with a gustier temper; rain laid ragged silver splinters on the car windows.

Ed Tarrant said: "Sam Reed's been a white man to me, or I wouldn't be such a sucker. I took contract to make a two-mile cut near Medicine Bow River. I'm going to lose my shirt on it, even at the maximum three-fifty per yard. Nobody else would take it, not even Ben Latimer."

Overmile said: "She came all the way from Omaha with him, Frank?"

"Yes."

The train brakes were squalling against the grade. Construction shanties and long rows of piled ties and dumped steel rose out of the misty sleeze of the night. They paralleled a siding, running slowly by Casement's boarding train where a thousand men slept; they crawled beside Casement's enormous portable warehouse, clanging for right of way with a steady bell. This was the end of track—this dismal, disheveled clutter of men and material lying under the full blast of that high wind beating across Laramie Plain.

Overmile, always a restless man, was ready to rise, but Peace held his place, watching the scene at the far end of the car with a downbearing

interest. She sat erect now, the blue military coat buttoned to her chin; and she had covered her pale yellow hair with a man's broad-brimmed hat. At this moment she had her hands folded together in her lap and her head was thoughtfully tipped down. Campeaux waggled a finger at Mitch Dollarhide, who went down the aisle with the girl's bags. Campeaux rose then and spoke to her. She came to her feet, the sway of the train making her reach out for Campeaux for support. And then her glance touched Peace. It was like a faint, far call that held some meaning he could not understand, turning all his impulses powerful and impatient. A moment afterward she passed on to the platform. The train had stopped.

"A beauty," murmured Overmile.

Peace reared out of the seat and left the car by the other door, stepping into a yellow clay soup two feet deep. Wind howled up from the south and the lights of the surrounding shanties sparkled through a thick, hard-driven rain. He stood there indifferently, watching the girl crawl along the edge of the train. Campeaux walked beside her and Mitch Dollarhide sloshed behind.

Overmile said: "Stand still and you'll sink out of sight. Come on."

They found a walk cutting across the mud and took to it single file. "I got the horses over there in that shed," Overmile grunted.

Peace stopped so suddenly that they all banged together. Phil Morgan fell off the walk, the mud reaching up to his knees. He said, "Good God, Frank!" But Peace didn't hear. The girl stood now on the track in front of the engine, its headlight playing on her. Campeaux and Dollarhide had gone.

Peace said: "Bring the horses over there, Leach," and wallowed deliberately through the mud toward her. The wind was a strong rush in his ears; he had to lift his voice.

"Listen—"

The glare of the engine's light made her drop her head. She had her hands tucked into the pockets of the military coat, and water dripped steadily off her hat.

She said: "How far is it to Laramie?"

"Four miles." He thought about that for a minute. "I'm going to Fort Sanders—that's only two miles. You can put up there."

"Mr. Campeaux has a rig waiting for us here."

He said: "All right."

Her head rose quickly. "I wouldn't judge too soon, if I were you."

He kept his tone civil; he kept his temper down. "My mistake."

"You've been trying to make up your mind about me all the way from Omaha. Is it necessary?"

Two horses struggled across the mire, pulling Campeaux and Mitch Dollarhide in a covered rig. Mitch Dollarhide jumped down and slumped forward, his feet catching and throwing up the semi-liquid. His shoulders were thrust forward, he swung his fists as he ran. Peace turned to keep a strict eye on this man. He said to the girl: "Good luck."

But she touched his arm. "Did you ever hear of a Jim Normandy out here?"

"No."

Dollarhide reached the track's gravel. He stopped two yards from Peace, expelling a heavy breathing. "We had enough trouble from you, Bully. Get the hell away from us."

"Shut up, Mitch."

Mitch Dollarhide swayed, a savage and uncertain expression licking across his mouth. Big Sid Campeaux tooled his team through the rain-bubbled mud and stopped beside the track. He stood up in the seat and threw a solid yell back behind him. "Al!"

There was a man riding forward from that darkness on a high gray horse. He sloshed around the buggy, wheeling before Frank Peace. Rain glistened all down his yellow slicker; it roped off his hat. He tipped up the brim of the hat a little to show a face entirely smooth and thin and unemotional.

He said: "Hello, Frank."

Peace murmured: "How are you, Brett?"

Mitch boosted his heavy complaint back over one shoulder, never letting his eyes lose Peace. "I don't need any help to handle Bucko."

Nan Normandy looked from Campeaux to Al Brett to Mitch Dollarhide. All these three were taciturnly established in their places, attentions narrowed on Peace. It was a scene, and it was clear to her. Her words reached Peace calmly: "Don't make an issue of it—not for me."

Al Brett said: "Trouble here, Campeaux?"

Campeaux said: "Ask Peace if he's lookin' for it."

"You standin' in the way, Bucko?" questioned Al Brett, gentle with his talk.

Peace showed a hard and instant grin. It fired up his face, swinging it immediately reckless. "You don't have to go with these men, Miss Normandy."

Campeaux hurled his warning against an increasing wind. The rain whirled rashly down from the ruptured clouds overhead, each fat drop glittering diamond-bright in the headlight's glare.

"Don't interfere with me this year, Peace! Keep out of my way—and keep your hands off my business! Mitch—help Miss Normandy over to the buggy!"

Peace repeated himself. "You don't have to go with Sid, Miss Normandy."

Al Brett unhooked the front of his slicker, the wind instantly ripping it back from his wire-thin body. He put his right hand casually on a holster there. He was remotely smiling.

"I wouldn't be proud, Bucko," he called.

The engine's bell started up a steady ringing. Campeaux yelled at Dollarhide; he swore at Dollarhide. "Lend Miss Normandy your arm!"

A pair of Irishmen from the train stumbled forward into the light, both carrying rifles; and at that moment Overmile and Morgan and Ed Tarrant came up from the turbid blackness at a slashing gait. They rode onto the track. Overmile got down; he took his station near Peace.

"Mother," he drawled. "I'm about to be queen of the May. You want a party, Al?"

"Any time you say," called Al Brett and sat still. Mitch Dollarhide shifted doggedly toward the girl. Water collected at the corner of his stringy mustache and dripped down. He froze in his position, dull and stubborn.

One of the Irishmen near the engine called out: "You want help, Mr. Peace?"

Campeaux said: "What are you going to do, Miss Normandy?"

The girl swept the scene with a long glance. There was no give to any of these men. An old hatred seemed to have brought them together in this wild, bleak night: an old hatred kept them here. She saw no fear and no softness. Their tempers were beds of tinder waiting for a careless spark. Overmile's lazy, unmoved face revealed a faint rashness. Al Brett continued his still attitude, one hand touching the gun butt, a remote smile at the corners of his lips. Campeaux was a shadow in the buggy. Dollarhide a dull presence beside her. Frank Peace didn't speak again. He had his head tipped toward her, and she clearly observed the long riot of his temper. On the train she had guessed he was like this and her guess was confirmed now. Not one of them would retreat; the idle quietness they displayed was a lie.

She said to Peace: “Please,” and took hold of Mitch Dollarhide’s arm. She went across the track and climbed up the hub wheel to the seat, beside Campeaux. Dollarhide went around, crawling in behind the buggy. Al Brett was broadly grinning now.

“No luck tonight, boys.”

“Not tonight,” said Overmile, only indolent.

Al Brett lifted his reins. Campeaux turned the horses around, driving them straight through the mud toward the trackless grade beyond. Fires far off to the north laid fitful beacon lights along the way. Brett said coolly: “Don’t worry, Leach. I’ll blow a hole through your guts before the summer’s done.” He had one more look at Frank Peace—a long, smileless look. “See you in Laramie, Bucko,” he said, and rode away.

Overmile had left Peace’s horse beyond the track. Peace slogged through the mud and swung into a thoroughly wet saddle. He came back, following the rails until they suddenly quit. Loose ties lay scattered ahead, indicating where the steel would march tomorrow. He paralleled the ties, his partners riding behind him, and came at last to the pure dirt grade running north. Leach Overmile forged abreast; Tarrant and Morgan made a pair behind. The engine’s headlight died out and they traveled beneath the uneasy, leaking sky, the western wind slapping strongly on them. Deep rain pools were forming, water channeled all the ruts, and yonder they saw Campeaux’s rig appear abreast another grader’s fire and sink them into the murk.

“If it keeps rainin’,” said Overmile, “you’ll want pontoons on your trains.”

Due ahead, the lights of Fort Sanders blinked intermittently; farther on was the strong glitter of Laramie Town waiting restlessly for its hour to come. They passed the last fire on the grade and found a harder footing. The way was gently downward toward a creek that hit them on their boots when they forded. Laramie River, directly on the left, sent its swollen racket through the black. Beyond, the high, rolling ridges ran westward toward Fort Steele on the Platte; still beyond lay the flatness of the Red Desert, bleak by winter and summer. Far over was the Green River crossing and farther still the Wasatch range waited. It was five hundred miles to Salt Lake. Somewhere out on the Nevada desert this same brawling night the bonfires of the Central were burning their crimson holes through the night, beside an end of track pointed east.

Overmile said: “What in hell is she doin’ with Campeaux?”

Peace bowed his head against the drive of the rain. The wind’s chilliness isolated him, it sharpened his thinking. Eileen’s dress had been a soft gray

and tight around her waist. She brought tranquillity with her, whatever she was. The softness and the calm of that room remained with him, not to soothe him but to bring vividly back the heavy emotion of touching something that he could not hold, of possessing something that he would lose. Her voice, he thought, had been uncertain in the hallway's darkness. She had relented, to kiss him; it was as near surrender as she could ever come. His life ran a different way, his days were full of heat and trouble. He could not order them otherwise and he would not order them otherwise; yet the controlling desire of his life lay back in Cheyenne. He saw no solution, he could think of none, and his mind grew weary with the struggle.

They turned into the Fort Sanders road. A low line of buildings sat in scattered shape, marked only by faint lights burning. A sentry wheeled from the darkness, palms slapping curtly on his gun. "Halt! Who's there?"

"Frank Peace—and party."

"Halt, Frank Peace and party. Sergeant of the guard—post number one!"

A lantern bobbed out of the guardhouse hard by, drawing the slanted rain against it. The sergeant came on and lifted the lantern above his head, revealing his own long, heavy-boned jaw. Above a stiff mustache a pair of old soldier's eyes showed a sad, surly gleam.

"Hello, Malloy. We're putting up."

"Come right ahead, Mr. Peace. You'll want Lieutenant Millard."

"Not till morning, Malloy."

They splashed beyond the guardhouse and got down. Malloy called back: "Egan, take the hawrrses. You'll go to the same house, Mister Peace. That one to left of General Gibbon's."

Egan came. But Overmile was restless and he had changed his mind. He got into the saddle again. He said to Peace, "I'll be back after a while."

"Laramie?"

"Yeah," said Overmile, and turned away.

The others walked down the dark line of buildings, skirted a picket fence and entered a house beyond. Sergeant Malloy had followed them; he lighted a lamp and went out again. Phil Morgan said: "Overmile's a fool."

"He's twenty-four years old," grunted Peace.

Within five minutes they were bunked down. Rain drummed along the house. A sentry called from a distant corner of the post, and the echo came in relays all the way to the guard post. Peace dragged a hand across his face. He stared toward a ceiling he couldn't see, remembering Eileen as she held to him on the dark stairway landing.

Overmile's voice woke him. Overmile was standing beside the bed, vague in the chilly pitch-dark. "Frank. She's at the hotel in Laramie. Damn Morgan for thinkin' different."

4

Peace left Fort Sanders early the next morning with Lieutenant Archie Millard and six troopers, bound south for the Old Virginia Dale stage station. Overmile went along, but Morgan decided to wait for Peace in Laramie.

There was a sun shining and a soft wind running out of the west. All the Laramie plain was wet and fresh, with its occasional patches of forage grass turned brilliantly green. Northward and eastward the land rose into the rolling, broken contours of the Black Hills; off to the south lay the heavy peaks of the Medicine Bow range. Less than a mile ahead of them the stacks of the Union's construction engines funneled up a black smoke.

"Mormon Charley will be there all right," said Millard. "But I doubt if you'll get any help out of him. He doesn't like to see the road cross this country."

"Talked with him recently?" asked Peace.

Millard said: "I was down that way last week."

Overmile cast Peace a glance of amused understanding. Millard caught that and flushed a little. He was an ideal figure, hale and robust and ruddy with the typical cavalryman's flair for the picturesque. Beneath a rakish hat the edges of his hair showed a tawny color and his long mustache was of the same shade. It was easy for him to blush, his complexion being as fair as a woman's; but he had a strong, sweeping chin. "Damn you, Leach," he muttered.

"Well," drawled Overmile, "how is the mountain beauty?"

"We're not discussing that," said Millard briefly.

They trotted briskly along the open plain, passing a solid stream of six-mule freighters lumbering from end of track toward Laramie and toward Salt Lake. The yellow embankment of the right of way was directly beside them, on which Casement's Irishmen were dropping ties methodically. They came to a small rise and stopped at Peace's command near the end of steel. For the space of a quarter mile here Casement's ambulating construction town littered the plain—his enormous portable warehouse, his collapsible shops, his great horse-and-mule compounds. The boarding train lay on a siding, the drying clothes of the Irish Paddies hanging out from bunk cars

like so much festival bunting. A solid string of supply trains stood on the main line, waiting their turn to feed the endless line of freighting wagons bound away for the grading camps and bridge crews flung like a thin skirmish line fifty and a hundred miles ahead.

A thousand men worked at this immediate spot, the interplay of all that human traffic setting up a restless, antlike scene of confusion under the sun. In the foreground end of track surged forward thirty feet at a time, like a dull brown inchworm.

Peace watched that operation with a full, satisfying interest. An engine pushed a load of rails forward, dumping them in an avalanche of sound. Men lifted these rails to a small iron truck pulled by a single white horse. The horse, disciplined in this business all the way from Fremont, heaved forward and came on at a dead gallop to the exact end of track. What followed was smooth and fast. The steel gang trotted to the truck, four men to each rail—lifted two rails and ran them forward. A foreman yelled, "Down!" and the steel clanged on the waiting ties. The gauger knelt, and jumped aside; the spikers swung their sledges with a battering rhythm and withdrew; the bolters bent over and bent back, and the white horse lunged on to the new end of track. In the interval the Union Pacific moved toward Laramie as fast as a man might comfortably walk.

"Pretty," said Lieutenant Millard.

The little column of men pushed forward, leaving behind the crack of all those sledges, the groaning of the freighters, the lash of men's strident voices, and the nervous chuffing of the engines. A trail led up the gentle grade in the direction of Sherman Summit, soon turning aside to enter a narrow pass pointing toward the peaks of the Medicine Bow. The last echo of the engines died behind and then there was only a long, riding calm, with the soft squeal of leather breaking the drone of a warming day. Millard's men sat relaxed in their saddles, all old troopers whose skins were as weathered as the leather gear beneath them. Their Spencer carbines lay tucked in saddle boots; their revolvers hung at their hips, and they kept watching the higher ground around them with a taciturn attention. Later in the morning they stopped to roll their coats and went on again in shirt sleeves.

Millard said: "We got a wire from Sidney this morning. A band of Dog soldiers of the Sioux tribe raided Elm Creek Station and killed five section hands."

"Bad year coming up," said Peace.

"How's Eileen?" asked Millard.

Peace said, “Good,” and let it go like that.

Millard had known him too long not to understand the clipped finality of that single word. He appraised Peace carefully. “Seen Latimer lately?”

“Last night in Cheyenne.”

Millard said, in a rather quick way: “He’s smart. Seems to smell the grading jobs that won’t make money for him. Twenty years from now when this country settles up he’ll have his interest in it—coal and cattle and land. Some men draw money to them. He’s that kind.”

“Watch me,” broke in Overmile.

“What?”

“I know cows and I know grass. Been lookin’ at this territory. When I’m through workin’ for the railroad next year this is where I squat. I got an eye on a pretty spot across the hump there in the valley of the Little Laramie. Come back in twenty years and see my beef roamin’ these hills with me under my fig tree.”

They rode like this for a good while, each man contemplative and silent. They were young and the ferment of ambition was in them. But Archie Millard’s face held a set, dismal expression. He said: “Twenty years? Well, men pray, but there are no answers. Twenty years is a black tunnel. Who knows if it’s daylight at the other end?”

At noon they stopped for water and a long rest. The shape of the land here was all rolling, broken by buttes and small domes and outcrops of round, disintegrated rock. The stage trail led through a low pass, leaving the Medicine Bow peaks over against the west. Scrub trees and a few strands of the fragile-looking aspen grew along the way; the hills were as green as they would ever be. In the afternoon they came upon the Fort Collins road, struck a feeder of Cache Creek and around five o’clock arrived at the Virginia Dale stage station, pitching camp there.

Virginia Dale had the reputation of being the best station on the Overland stage route, its low log buildings and its corrals and barns sitting pleasantly beside a creek running down from the Medicine Bow range. The ruts of the stage road were still deep here, yet dimming perceptibly. The hurrying rails of the Union had done that, cutting out the stage line section by section. This station which once was so lively with the traffic of those big coaches rolling up around the prow of the Black Hills sat more or less idle now under the spring sun, kept alive only by the freighting trade between Denver and Cheyenne.

A lank man came out of the main house and walked over to the camp, showing them an interest which was neither friendly nor unfriendly. He said:

“Hello, Archie,” barely nodding at Peace and Overmile. He gave the troopers one careless look.

“Mormon Charley still here, Reese?”

“Out on a hunt right now. Back tonight.”

Millard turned his fine big body half about. There was a girl looking at him across the yard. She stood in the doorway of a small cabin farther down the creek and Peace, sending his glance that way, saw merely a round, dusky face. Immediately afterward she retreated into the cabin. Millard said: “I’ll see you later,” and went over there in long strides.

“Mormon Charley’s girl?” asked Peace.

Reese shaved himself a thin slice of plug tobacco. “Yeah—that’s Cherry.”

Overmile and Peace swapped glances. Reese saw that. He snapped his knife shut and returned it to his pocket. “She’s good enough for your damned lieutenant, boys. Half Injun or not.”

Peace strolled over the little meadow, Overmile with him, and sat down on the porch of the stage house. Shadows crawled out from the Medicine Bow, turning this little valley blue. The troopers’ mess fire sent its fresh wood-smoke odor keenly across the air. Reese came up. He said: “Supper?”

“Yes,” agreed Peace. “All three of us.”

Reese shook his head. “Just two. Millard always eats with Mormon Charley and the girl.”

“Know his ways pretty well, don’t you?” asked Peace.

“Should,” said Reese. “He’s regular with his visitin’.” He went into the house and began to yell through it in an Indian tongue.

“Another squaw man,” pointed out Overmile.

“Reese? Yes, I knew that.” Peace scrubbed his shoulders against the back of the chair. Millard had gone into Mormon Charley’s cabin. He was still in there, with a quick twilight laying its successive layers of powder-blue satin across the sky. A few men began to collect around the yard; a peaceful Ute and his woman came out of a ravine, bent over on their ponies, and made camp down by one of the corrals.

Peace said: “When did all this start, Leach?”

“Last November in Cheyenne. Mormon Charley came to Fort Russell to see General Stevenson. Brought the girl with him. Archie saw her. Her mother was an Arapahoe woman who died a good many years ago. Charley raised the kid, never takin’ another squaw. Sent her to a school in St. Louis for a few years.”

"Pretty?"

"Wait till you see her."

"No matter," grumbled Peace. "It isn't the point. Here's a man who graduated at the top of his class in West Point. Smart and cool—and the best soldier along the whole line of posts. His father was a general. So was his grandfather. In time Archie will be. Now look at it. We've got to stop this, Leach."

Overmile smiled softly. "How do you do things like that, Frank?"

The supper bell rang. They went inside and sat up with half a dozen other men to antelope steak, fried trout and fresh biscuits served with wild honey. Soft darkness flowed around Virginia Dale, Reese's Ute woman circled the room, moccasins making no sound, and lighted the lamps. Outside, the troopers' fire was a pear-shaped shield of mellow light. They were singing "John Brown's Body." A little wind stirred the room.

At eight o'clock that night Mormon Charley walked into the room, a compact man with bright magpie eyes glittering out through an enormous mat of a beard. He wore a buckskin suit black from the swipe of many a greasy hunting knife across it; and his manner was the manner of all mountain men, blunt and a little wild. Even as he talked he seemed to be listening for other sounds. His eyes were never still.

"Back for another year, Frank?"

"Till the road's finished," said Peace, and shook Mormon Charley's hand cheerfully.

Mormon Charley shook his head. "Country's no damned good now. Buffler's gone, no price to be had for beaver skins. Wagon tracks all over tarnal creation and a thunder buggy snortin' through the hills like God's judgment, skeerin' game an' puttin' a bad smell in the air. I'm an old man. Jim Bridger's old, Bill Williams he's dead, Kit Carson's turned civilized and lives greaser style in Tows. Whar's the fun gone?"

"Let's make a little talk," said Peace.

Mormon Charley's restless, bead-bright eyes flickered around the room, touching everything. Reese stood in a corner, listening. A few other men were there, listening.

"You come to my lodge," said Mormon Charley and led the way out. "Reese," he grunted, "is more Injun than a real Injun is. Where's Archie?"

"At your place."

They crossed the meadow to Mormon Charley's small log cabin. A single lamp burned on a center table, its light not quite reaching the corners of the room. Mormon Charley said, "How, Archie," in a swift, hearty way, and added, "Cherry, let's git some coffee boilin'."

But for a moment the scene in here was dull and quiet. Peace's glance ran over to a shadowed corner where Millard stood. Even in this dimness he saw how strained and desperate Millard's face was. It held no hope, yet a wild desire was there, too. Then he turned his curious attention to the girl who remained by the table. And received a definite shock.

This Cherry who was half white and half Arapahoe was a fairer Indian woman than he had ever seen, fresh and slim and on the edge of beauty. Her hands touched the table and her head was tipped down, avoiding the glance of these men out of modesty. Her cheeks were rather oval and her hair ran blackly and smoothly back on her head. She wore a plain dress and a plain waist; a small gold chain circled her neck, with a little gold locket lying against well-formed breasts that stirred to a sudden, disturbed breathing.

Overmile said: "Hello, Cherry," his drawling voice very gentle.

Her chin lifted, and Peace was further astonished at the even melody of her speech. She said, "I'm glad to see you, Leach." But it was to Peace her glance afterward came and for a long moment she explored his face, her eyes reading him with a sharp care.

Overmile said: "This is Frank Peace, Cherry. A friend of Archie's."

She murmured, "How do you do," carefully. Yet Peace saw her emotions change in that little interval. She had read him. She had felt his antagonism, and her own eyes hardened against him and dropped. She turned toward the stove.

"What's the railroad want now?" said Mormon Charley.

Peace took a chair. He got his pipe packed and nursed it a moment until the smoke was drawing. "It's the Indians, Charley."

Mormon Charley grunted. "Sure. Why wouldn't it be? Your dam' rails are headin' across the finest game land in the world. I've seen a thousand antelope in one band runnin' that plain. Injuns don't like to see their grounds busted up, no better than whites."

"We scrapped the Sioux and Cheyenne all last year, in Nebraska," went on Peace. "Well, that part of the road is done and we can defend it. Far as that goes, we can defend the rest of the way. But it slows us up—and we're due into Salt Lake twelve months from now."

"Tell the Injuns that," remarked Mormon Charley, and laughed shortly.

"What will they do?" said Peace.

Mormon Charley hoisted one foot over the arm of his chair. "The Shoshones won't hurt you. Washakie's friendly to you and he'll keep his people on their blankets. But that's all the help you'll get. The Arapahoes have moved from their proper grounds—just knockin' around this country and lookin' for trouble. The Sioux don't properly belong this far south, but they're fightin' the Shoshones now'days, and they'll send parties down this year. That applies to the Crows, too. Injuns are all busted up. White men have pushed 'em from one place to another. They're stirrin', like hornets. You can expect trouble. Mebbe not open raids on your track. Last year taught 'em that a bullet won't go through an engine, and they got respect for your Irishmen. But when you get a hundred yards off from your right of way you're a-goin' to be in trouble."

"Charley," said Peace, "why don't you go talk to them?"

"Me?" said Mormon Charley. He shook his head. "No. Was a time when I had a welcome in any lodge. But there's too many whites around here now, and I'm white, and the Injuns don't make any distinctions. The old days are gone. Used to be strong friends with the Arapahoes. Took a wife from the tribe. Week ago when I went huntin' I near lost my hair to a bunch of young Arapahoes. Shows you the change. I can't help the road, Frank. Ain't sure I'd want to, anyhow. You've spoiled my country."

Cherry slipped up to the table with cups and the coffeepot. She poured their drink enigmatically, never looking at them, and went back into the shadows. Millard came forward and took his cup, still standing. Mormon Charley raked the young officer with a keen, bright glance.

"Whar's the fun? Mountain days are gone, and the settlers comin' in ain't my style. I'm considerin' a move down to Navajo country. Settlers won't be thar for another hundred years, and mebbe I can potter around my melon patch till I'm rubbed out. I never was no good livin' white style. I can remember when this was a pretty land."

Archie Millard dropped his cup on the table, wheeling and leaving the cabin. Peace, intent on catching all this, saw Cherry's glance race across the room, round and vivid and alarmed. He finished his coffee and got up. Outside, he waited for Overmile and for Mormon Charley. They all went a little way into the meadow's shadowy stillness. Millard's shape vanished somewhere beyond the troopers' fire.

Peace said abruptly: "Can't you stop this, Charley?"

Mormon Charley's talk wasn't pleased. "My girl's good enough for Archie. She's a woman with manners. I didn't raise her to be some

Arapahoe's squaw."

Peace shook his head. "No," he said quietly, "it isn't that at all. Archie's on the edge of throwing up his commission. Then what will he do? He was educated to be a soldier. It's all he likes. Suppose he throws it over and marries your girl. It will be fine for a while. But he'll keep remembering what he might have been—and in time it will turn him bitter. No happiness there for either of them, Charley."

Mormon Charley said: "And why can't my girl be an army officer's wife? I told you she had learnin'."

Peace looked for a match and found it. Its exploding light raveled along the pipe bowl; it showed his cheeks to be hard and skeptical. The light went out. Overmile stirred on his feet, saying nothing.

"No," murmured Peace. "There are no officers with Indian wives."

Mormon Charley cleared his throat. He had been brusque, he had been impatient. But he spoke now in a deeply regretting way. "I wondered about that. It's been a fine thought—that she'd be a white man's legal wife. She's my girl, Frank. I got to see her happy."

"It won't work," said Peace.

"No," agreed Mormon Charley, very soft with his words, "maybe not. I felt it was pushin' luck too far. But it is somethin' I can't tell Cherry. There's half of her with my blood, which is the half I can understand. The other half's Arapahoe. That's the part I've got no influence with."

He turned away from them, moccasined feet making no noise along the meadow. Peace and Overmile strolled toward the main house.

"You can be tough," murmured Overmile. "Where's your pity?"

"It won't work," repeated Peace doggedly. There was a shadow moving along a deeper part of the meadow. He saw it and paid no particular attention. Overmile swung toward the troopers' fire. "Think I'll sit in with the boys awhile."

Peace continued on toward the house porch. He was at the edge of it when a woman's voice said, "Mr. Peace." It turned him and pulled him along the side of the house, deeper into the darkness. Charley's girl stood there, straight and motionless; when he got closer he saw the oval surface of her face dimly showing him hatred.

"I'm sorry, Cherry."

She didn't lift her voice, yet in its huskiness was a passion capable of killing him. "Let us alone, Mr. Peace! Let us alone!" That was all. She

whirled and ran back into the meadow's farther obscurity, leaving him with his unpleasant reflections.

The white blood in this girl cut her away from her own people, it made her dissatisfied with her lot. It put a ferment in her mind, a hope and an ambition. She was in love with Archie Millard, her white blood permitting her to believe that happiness was possible. She would be loyal to him, with a stubborn, steadfast intensity. And yet it was the Indian strain in this girl that dominated all her actions and all her impulses—as in every blood mixture. In the end she would fall back to a primitiveness she could not escape; and beautiful as she was now, another ten years would see her a stolid Arapahoe squaw, pulled back to Indian habits and Indian reasoning. The tragedy of Cherry was a plain thing to Frank Peace. She was not responsible for that warfare in her own veins, and she could not escape it.

He went back to the porch and smoked out his pipe, and afterward rolled his blankets by the troopers' fire for the night. Millard hadn't returned.

5

At six o'clock they rounded into Fort Sanders. Overmile was restless and wanted to be directly on the way to Laramie but they had supper in the officers' quarters before swinging out upon the muddy trail north. Archie Millard walked beside their horses to the guard gate, moody and withdrawn.

He said: "General Gibbon tells me I am at your disposal, Frank. I shall be here whenever you want me."

The morning before there had been no track here; but now the fresh yellow grade held fresh steel and a line of supply trains crept across it, Laramie bound, the engine fireboxes guttering raw crimson into the swelling dusk. All the cars held Irishmen, pleasure bent, to christen this new town.

Overmile said: "They sure do work fast."

"Millard," said Peace, "is about ready to jump his commission. We've got to stop that, Leach."

"How do you stop the things in a man's head?" drawled Overmile. He turned in his saddle to have a long look at Peace. "You're a hard one, Frank. Give these two people some sympathy. It might happen to you."

They rode out of the darkness into the full boil of Laramie Town celebrating its birth. Lusty racket rolled down the muddy street to meet them, a street bursting into swift and brilliant and wicked flower from the raw earth. Shoulder to shoulder sat the tented saloons, the dance halls, the flimsy-framed stores, their fronts making a ragged up-and-down pattern. The hurdy-gurdy music of Campeaux's big saloon rolled up to the astonished sky. The spielers were calling their wares, and hammer and saw kept up a steady tone. This was another Cheyenne, with the high-wheeled freighters jamming the narrow way and two thousand Irishmen roaming the dark in search of excitement, and the high piles of steel and ties and material lying familiarly over by Jack Casement's portable commissary shack. There was a single coach sitting in front of Laramie's improvised depot.

"Dodge is probably there," said Peace, and turned that way.

Overmile was chuckling in a pleased fashion. "A wild, hellraisin' night. It makes a pretty show."

They worked their way through the heavy line of wagons, aiming for the solitary passenger coach. A man stepped down from it and walked leisurely forward, and at sight of him Peace dismounted instantly. Overmile took Peace's horse and rode away toward the railroad corrals.

"General," said Peace, "I'm mighty glad to see you."

General Dodge pulled a cigar from his mouth. He looked at Peace with a gray, hard eye, and extended his arm, speaking affably. "Understood you'd be here tonight. You look well."

He was a man of medium build, this General Dodge whose word was law on the road. Still in his middle thirties, he had the calmness and the certainty of one much older. Behind him stood a wonderful army record and the thorough confidence of Grant and Sherman. A short black beard hid the play of his face. He didn't waste much talk.

"Reed's overloaded with work. It's all he can do to keep the job organized. The responsibility of keeping trouble from tying us up is yours. You've got to see that these contractors stay far enough out so that the steel don't catch up with them. I don't want to wait for unfinished bridges, and I don't want to lose time on account of tunnels that haven't been bored. As for these towns, the railroad is responsible for order. Government expects us to provide merchants with a certain amount of protection. If the crooks want another Julesburg cleanup give it to them."

He quit talking. His head turned aside from Peace and he put his cigar between his teeth. A dapper and slightly stooped little man with a Vandyke beard came forward at a rapid, nervous stride. He said, "Hello, Dodge," and offered a slender hand. The two men shook in a brief way.

Dodge drawled, "Durant, this is Frank Peace. He's Reed's assistant."

T. C. Durant, vice-president of the road, nodded impersonally at Peace. Dodge, thoroughly blunt, said immediately: "Hear you've been telling Laramie people they'd have the connection to Denver, instead of Cheyenne having it. And you sent your consulting engineer out here to change my location lines."

"Seymour didn't like your lines," said Durant. "As for the change of division point—"

"You'll play hell," broke in Dodge. "I told the Laramie people an hour ago they needn't expect any connection from Denver. That's Cheyenne's. And neither Seymour nor anyone else will change my lines while I'm running the job. I don't propose to have it."

Durant flicked Dodge with a veiled, skeptic glance. "May be a difference of opinion there," he said, and went on down the street at the same light and

nervous stride.

Dodge turned back to Peace. “I’m staging it to Salt Lake tomorrow. Remember, the responsibility for keeping trouble down is yours. Good luck.” With that he wheeled back into the car, the cigar laying a wake of smoke behind.

Overmile had put up the horses and returned. The two of them idled across the wagon-choked street, being absorbed in the restless, steady stream of construction men crowding the walk. All the windows and doorways flushed the shadows with a raw, smoky light, and the warm air gushing from these buildings had the strong blend of sweat and damp woolen clothes and tobacco smoke and whisky and wood-smoke. Caught in the human riptide boiling around the wide entrance of the Club, Peace came face to face with Phil Morgan.

Morgan grinned in his dry way. “Let’s have a look.”

The three of them shouldered into Campeaux’s Club, the flash of the fifty-foot mirror on the saloon’s back bar coming against their eyes like an explosion. All the games were in full blast. The orchestra—changed from afternoon’s brass band to evening’s more decorous string instruments—sat on a far platform and hurled its melody against the rising confusion. Over there on the dance floor the white faces of women and the color of their evening dresses went around and around in a blurred and blending pattern. The noise of this place struck Peace in every key. There was no calm, only a kind of surge that swelled more and more vitally against the canvas ceiling of the tent. The partners pushed their way to the bar and caught the eye of one of the dozen scudding barkeeps; they got their whisky and stood meditatively together, drinking.

“Going with Dodge tomorrow?” asked Morgan.

“No, we’ve got another job.” Then Peace said: “Wait a minute.”

A big-bellied Irishman with vermilion cheeks shouted, “Hello, Bucko,” and slapped him on the back.

Peace grinned and pushed on toward the side of the Club where the gambling rigs were. Men kept drifting across his way; men kept hailing him. The music stopped and the whole crowd swayed toward the bar, the women on the dance floor starting the parade with their partners. Blocked momentarily by this rush, Peace heard a voice say in a swift undertone: “Mr. Peace,” and he swung himself around and found Rose—the pale, obscure girl who had come from Omaha on the work-passenger train—beside him. But she was neither pale nor obscure now. Dressed in a low-cut gown as attractive as fashion could make it, she made a jewel-like glow in this

confused atmosphere. Her hair was dressed carefully, piled back on her head and edged with short ringlets. Her shoulders, bare and smooth, rose faintly to command his attention; she had a pink color on her cheeks and she was smiling at him. Yet her voice was guarded.

"Be careful tonight." Then her hands came up with a little gesture of resignation, as though she had been refused, and she wheeled immediately from him and put her hand through another man's arm. She said: "To the bar, Paddy. Don't be stingy with your money."

Peace parted the crowd before him with a swing of his shoulders, coming beside Roy Lovelace who sat on a high stool and dealt the blackjack game. An eye shade on Lovelace's forehead threw a green light down across the spare and composed fatalism of his face. His long fingers dropped the cards, one by one, in front of the players; none of the rest of his figure, covered by a fine black broadcloth suit, moved at all. But he felt Peace's presence and a moment later lifted his glance. His expression didn't break out of its strict indifference. Only his voice changed, becoming even and cordial. "Hello, Frank."

A player's quick voice said, "Hit this," and Lovelace swung his attention back to the game. A tall woman stood directly behind Lovelace—Lovelace's wife who always remained behind him when he played, showing this rough and violent crowd a strange, unmoved fidelity.

Peace said: "Where are the kids, Helen?"

"In bed. Can you have supper with us tonight?"

"I won't be here. Just wanted to tell you I have a couple presents coming from Omaha. For the children—and for you."

She was like Lovelace, steeled against smiling. But a warmth reached out from her fine eyes and touched him. He felt it even as he turned back to the bar. Morgan and Overmile had vanished, apparently too restless to wait. The turgid noise of this crowded place slapped him more definitely as he pushed toward the doorway. A woman's flat and excited laughter sliced through the confusion, rasping across his nerves. Somebody prodded him in the ribs; looking down, he saw a little man struggling against the tidal pressure. The little man's lips moved. He reached up to pull at Peace's shoulder.

He said: "You lookin' for Ed Tarrant?"

"No," said Peace.

The little man said gustily: "He's up to Straight-Edge Annie's place, in trouble."

Peace said, “What—” But the current had caught the little man securely in its undertow, dragging him away.

On the street again, Peace looked around and saw neither Morgan nor Overmile. He got out his pipe and filled it, and dragged a few long breaths of smoke into his lungs, his thinking at once critically alert. The Club’s orchestra was again hard at work; somewhere down the street two shots made flat, detonating echoes against the wind. Across the street an engine backed away from the station house, its bell insistently clanging. Peace let the crowd carry him toward the next corner; and here he slid out of the tide into the comparative quiet of a short side street. Down this way a few lights glowed through tent tops and a few flashes came down from the second-story windows of a pine-boarded building sitting thirty feet farther on, which was Straight-Edge Annie’s place.

That way he drifted. There was a stairway leading up the outside wall of the place; he stopped at the foot of it, studying the surrounding shadows with his insistent eyes. Afterward he climbed the stairs and put his hand to the knob of the door. It let him into a hall illumined by one lamp bracketed against the boards. There was a murmuring and a burst of nervous laughter from a far room, and then that sound died completely and the uneasy stillness of the place rubbed against him like a damp fog. A little ahead of him, on the left side of the hall, he noticed a door standing ajar, through the opening of which crept a thin slice of light.

He said casually: “Straight-Edge.”

Silence flowed around him. But he had the smell of something on his nostrils—the slimmest taint of powder smoke trapped in this dead air. It moved him against the door. He laid the flat of his hand against it, shoving it open. What he saw then jerked him straight.

There was a lamp on the table, its sallow glow staining the shadows of this room the color of mud. Ed Tarrant lay on his chest on the floor, his face twisted to one side. A round, dully shining pool of blood slowly gathered beneath him.

Somewhere along the hall a board squealed and, small as that sound was, it was like a dynamite explosion to Frank Peace. He wheeled in his tracks, ramming his fist into his coat pocket to grip the revolver he carried there. A doorway across the hall swung quietly back on its hinges. He saw somebody moving in the depths of that room’s blackness, and immediately he swayed aside. At the same moment a round bloom of ragged light burst through the doorway. The breath of the bullet licked across his face and the whole

building swelled and shook with the detonation. The slug struck into the wall behind Peace with a small, snoring report.

Peace dropped to the floor, his long, loose body flattened against the boards; the marksman across the way let out a windy sigh and began to rake the room with a rapid, plunging fire.

6

Flattened along the base of the dark room's wall, his head just short of the doorway, he listened with a wire-thin attention as those repeated gunshots swelled and thundered echoes through the house. A bullet ripped the casing just above his head; a bullet made a chance target of the lamp on the table, shattering the globe, whipping out the light. Powder smoke thickened around him, a windowpane's burst fragments jangled down; one of Straight-Edge Annie's girls was screaming as steadily and automatically as though she were wound up. The whole building shivered. Peace counted those shots as they came.

He counted five and drew one knee beneath him, and remained crouched that way. There was one more shot to come. The hidden marksman's breathing began to rasp through a palpitating stillness. The man was smart; he wasn't wasting his last bullet. Peace brought his weapon forward and stretched his arm full length into the doorway, and dragged the barrel across the floor, making a sharp break in the quiet. Hard on the heels of the sound, the gun across the hall drove one more bullet sullenly through the dark.

Peace said aloud, "Six," and was on his feet, tramping through the doorway without hurry.

The darkness was heavy, additionally thickened by powder smoke pouring along the hall. The man over there scraped his feet uncertainly across squealing boards—and quit moving. Peace bent his high body forward. His fingers touched a wall and slid along it until they fell off into the doorway. He went through that opening low and fast, gun swinging in one fist, and struck the man dead in the chest with his driving shoulders.

That long, stiff dive carried them both across that room until they slammed into the far wall. The man's breath was hot and full on him and a fist reached out of the black and laid a slanting blow along his face, a ring on it ripping a clean furrow through his cheek flesh. Both the man's arms gripped him doggedly then and a knee came up and jolted him in the groin. He swung away and they went wheeling around the blackness with the other one's weight bearing against him, with the other one finding his face again with those short, beating jabs. His gun hand was pinned to his side; his free

arm clung to the fellow's coat. His boots snagged the raw floor and he fell backward, hauling the other over with him. His head struck the boards fully, the concussion lighting up his brain. He lay like that a moment, rolling his knees to protect himself. He got his knees under the man's stomach and broke free. They were both crawling around the black, but Peace heard the other one's breathing continue to labor violently, and by that sound he placed his target and lifted his gun. He put a single shot over there—and heard it strike.

He heard it strike, and he heard the man suddenly roll and lose his breath in a long, strangled sighing. Sitting on the floor, blood creeping down a cheek that seemed to be on fire, he listened to the man die. It was as plain and brutal as that. Stillness was settling in heavy layers around him, but somebody's feet were pounding up the outside stairway violently enough to rock this shell of a building. Overmile's voice smacked through the dark.

"Peace!"

Peace said: "Wait a minute. Annie!" His call struck down the black hall, piling against the closed doors. The outside stairway rattled under more traffic.

Overmile said: "What's this?"

Peace rose and found the room's doorway. At the far end of the hall a faint glow gushed out of a crack, as though a lamp had just been lighted. Overmile was shuffling forward, exploring the blackness.

Peace lifted his call more peremptorily. "Come out of there, Annie."

Phil Morgan said, from the stair landing: "That you, Peace?"

A door opened, flushing its square beam of light into the hall. Straight-Edge Annie walked from her room, throwing a high and bony shadow before her. Of a sudden, other doors swung back and women stood there in the half light, all their faces strained and full of fear. Morgan and Overmile tramped rapidly toward Peace.

Overmile said: "What the hell is this?"

"Annie," said Peace, "bring a light."

Annie's voice was as rough and heavy as a man's. She threw that order behind her. "Bring a light." And then she advanced on Peace. She was almost as tall as he was, with a head of iron-gray hair and a half-masculine face.

She said: "Before God, Frank, I had no part in this!"

One of the girls came up with a lamp. Peace said, no feeling in his talk, "Be quiet, Annie," and took the lamp. He swung it around so that its light

struck across the room in which he had staged his fight—and so that it touched the dead one on the floor. Overmile and Morgan were crowded beside him.

"Dollarhide," grunted Overmile.

Peace wheeled. His stare struck Annie hard enough to drop her shoulders. Her talk jumped at him, frightened and quick. "Listen. Mitch came here and told us to stay in our rooms. Next thing I heard somebody run up the stairs. I heard Mitch call out Ed Tarrant's name and then there was a shot. It wasn't more than two minutes before when you came."

At mention of Tarrant's name Overmile seized the lamp from Peace and wheeled over to the other room. He stood there a minute, shedding light down on Tarrant's still bulk, and came back, his face drawn at once to a wicked, pale wedge. The light of his eyes then was yellow; it was full of compressed, frigid rage.

"Annie, you slut!"

Peace stopped him there. He said, "Wait, Leach." Temper rolled around his vitals, squeezing them. His talk beat out at Straight-Edge Annie. It roughened her up, it hit her like physical punishment. "You didn't open the door when Tarrant was shot?"

"Me?" she cried. "No! Mitch told me to keep out of the way! How was I to know? Mitch always carried out Sid Campeaux's orders. When Campeaux talks to me I mind. Why not? He runs this place. It's his building and he's my boss! My God, you know what he'd do to me? He'd bust in my face!"

"You don't know how Tarrant came to be here?"

"No—no!"

Phil Morgan looked at Peace. "How'd you get here?"

Peace told him. Morgan said: "Then that's how Tarrant got here. Somebody told him he was wanted here, and he came up and ran into Dollarhide's gun. Then you came up, marked for the next shot. It was done cleverly. We were waiting for you in the saloon when somebody walked over and told Leach that Reed wanted to see both of us at the train. We were pulled out of the way, like that."

Peace said: "Move out of here, Annie. You and your girls."

"What?"

Peace walked into the room where Tarrant lay. He stooped down, running his hand beneath the man's body. He pulled Tarrant up and lifted him all at once over his shoulder, and marched down the hall.

Annie said, “Frank—what?”

But Overmile growled. “Shut up,” and these three men descended the outside stairway.

Life boomed along Main Street; darkness and quietness still held this side alley. The recent firing had meant nothing to Laramie Town, it had drawn no crowd. There was a tent across the alley, with light shining through its open flap. Peace walked into it, laying Tarrant on the floor. A round, apple-cheeked little man with bright eyes lay half turned on a straw mattress, reading by the glow of a candle driven into a ketchup bottle. He pulled his attention from the book. He reared up, at once complaining.

“Hey—this ain’t no morgue.”

Peace said: “Stop that, Ab.”

Ab Kein took another careful look. He rose then. “Tarrant.” He ran one small hand across the absolute nakedness of his head. “My goodness—my goodness! Such a terrible thing!” Then he thought of something; it lifted his shoulders and caused him to remove his spectacles and put them carefully away. “Boys, you wait till I get my gun and I’ll go with you.”

Peace turned out. He stood a moment, with Morgan and Overmile and Ab Kein beside him, his glance pinned to Straight-Edge Annie’s house across the way. Tarrant had been a solid friend, a big and hearty man who cared more for the fun of these last two reckless years than for the profits of his construction work. Peace remembered him at Julesburg, standing squarely in the middle of the rioting gamblers, his huge fists mowing them down as they came against him, all the while laughing that deep, careless laugh out of his chest. Peace recalled it vividly, the tone of Tarrant’s unquenchable voice with him now as clear and resonant as in life. The hatred of the toughs surrounded them like a blazing fire—and the toughs had got Tarrant at last. It was, Peace considered, the first break. Looking up to a sky sullenly glowing from Laramie’s lights, he realized then that neither Morgan nor Overmile nor he could expect any letup in that fiercely unreasoning animosity. They were out to kill him and to kill his own close friends. They would never stop until they had paid him back for Julesburg, until they had destroyed him.

Overmile said: “When you make up your mind, Frank, let’s know what it is.”

“Rose,” Peace muttered, “warned me. So this stunt was in the air. It was bein’ published on Campeaux’s grapevine system. But Lovelace didn’t know it, or he would have told me.”

“Trust no gamblers, Frank.”

"Lovelace is white. Wait a minute."

He headed out of the alley, into the solid stream of wild Irishmen roving through Laramie Town. Overmile said, behind him: "Reed said I was to stick to you. So I stick to you."

Peace stopped on the walk, splitting the traffic with his shoulders; it swayed him and turned him, but he stood there until he saw the man he wanted to see, a gray-headed man built like a water barrel, with his fists hanging down from his long arms in the manner of rock chunks. Peace reached out and his fingers caught Collie Moynihan. Collie looked up at Peace and smiled in a wicked, happy way.

He said: "You want somethin', Mr. Peace?"

"There's a pile of double-bitted axes over in Jack Casement's warehouse, Collie. Find yourself thirty good lads and go get 'em. I'll be waiting for you in front of Straight-Edge Annie's."

Collie Moynihan had been in Julesburg with Peace. He looked carefully up to the tall man now and saw the black devil in Peace's eyes. Collie had been smiling; he laughed now and said, " 'Twill be less a wait than you'd think, Mister Peace," and whirled and went down the street with his granite fists beating a path. He was saying in a loud and hearty way: "Just thirty of the best, me boys. Just thirty—a wan or two more—for some fun."

Peace tramped back into the alley. Morgan and Ab Kein were still in front of the tent; two men came down the stairway of Straight-Edge Annie's place, carrying the dead Mitch Dollarhide. They crawled rapidly back through a little lane to one side of the building. Lights began to sparkle through the windows of the place. Out on Main Street a long, high tone whirled its way with the wind and caught hold of the crowd, touching off the latent, tinder-dry violence. At once the alley was full of noise, with Collie Moynihan's chosen ones rushing headlong into it, the bright steel bits of their borrowed axes whitely flashing in the little shafts of light crossing the dark.

Collie Moynihan said: "And what is it to be, Mister Peace?"

Peace said: "There's a building that belongs to Campeaux, Collie. Tear it down."

The wickedness of it went like fire through them and a rash, high yell ripped the shadows apart. They were wheeling and running against the building before he had quite finished talking, with their axes slung forward in the manner of soldiers storming a fort—as in fact many of them had done during rebellion. They struck Straight-Edge Annie's house head-on, slamming their axes into the wood wherever they reached it. Collie

Moynihan went up the outside stairway with part of his crew behind him, into the second story. Men made a breach through the sudden-shattered windows of the lower floor. The door sprang off its hinge; the long, loosely nailed planks began to groan and drop all around.

Straight-Edge Annie's girls ran out of the place, cursing as they came, and all this fury irresistibly towed the restless traffic off Main Street. Lanterns were striking a fresher beam down the alley. Beds and mattresses and furniture tumbled from the second-floor windows; shingles flew off the roof and a man, working from the attic of the place, chopped himself a hole and crawled up and walked along the ridge-pole. Others followed and immediately they were strung out along the roof, tearing it apart. A whole section of the front wall sagged out and fell. Peace, never moving from his position, had a full look into one dingy room.

Leach Overmile grumbled, "Look out, Frank," and moved deliberately in front of Peace, taking his station between Peace and the thickening crowd at the alley's mouth.

Peace looked that way and saw only a mass of faces turned in—the blackened faces, the bearded faces, the mixed faces of a rough-and-tumble crowd avidly witnessing this destruction. These were the men building the Union, these were the sharp-witted ones and the mule skinners and the desperadoes. He saw that bulk for what it was—raw and undisciplined and dangerous. Wild enough for a wild country. But he wasn't afraid of it. Some of that mob's virtues were his virtues, some of its faults his faults. There was no quietness in it; there was no quietness in him. And afterward his turning glance met a woman's grave eyes. Nan Normandy stood over there, imprisoned in the crush. She was watching him, not the collapsing house. She was watching him all the while.

A ripping detonation jerked him around. The roof had fallen in on the second floor and Moynihan's boys were up there jiggling on the flattened shingles. Others were crawling out of the wreckage, coming down a stairway swaying under their weight. Like all buildings along the road, this one had been nothing more than a shell of boards hooked to a fragile skeleton—and now it fell piece by piece. Moynihan came skipping down the stairs. Axes slashed into the steps; two-by-fours began squalling against the nails that held them, and then the stairway crashed to the ground. A plank behind the building burst like a gunshot, releasing some key support; all the weight of the wrecked upper story sagged on the lower supports. Moynihan's men swarmed around to one side of the building.

Moynihan's voice yelled: "Together—yo—yo—yo!"

They were putting their weight against it. Of a sudden the lower floor slid sidewise and Straight-Edge Annie's house crumpled completely to the ground, its skeleton and its framework an interlocked mass of boards pointed askew. There wasn't anything left.

Overmile turned. He stared at Peace queerly. "What next?"

Moynihan trotted up, the sweat pouring down his face and drenching his cotton shirt. He cocked his gray head, smiling in a glittering, pleased way. "Would there be another buildin' to wurrk on, Mr. Peace?"

Peace said: "The drinks are on Sid Campeaux."

Overmile murmured, "A nice thought," and betrayed the rage in him by a sudden lift of his pale glance. He followed Peace as the latter shouldered his way through the crowd. There wasn't any mercy or caution in Peace then, and Overmile, keyed to expect anything from this unpredictable partner, lengthened his gait. Moynihan's men were storming along behind. Peace wheeled at the Club's wide doorway and went in. And stopped.

The excitement outside had drained this vast barn of a place dry. Through the layered smoke he saw the barkeeps making a lonely stand behind the long bar; the band sat idly on the platform, and all Campeaux's girls made a tight knot in the far corner, looking uncertainly out across the barren floor. There wasn't a player at any of the tables. Roy Lovelace sat on his stool, dealing himself a game of solitaire, and his wife stood, as always, by his shoulder with an indifference to whatever else might happen. The rest of the gamblers sat by their rigs, woodenly watching Peace. Campeaux had placed himself at the end of the bar with Al Brett at his right hand, with four other men ranked behind him.

Moynihan's men crowded up. Peace crossed over, walking along the bar until he was near enough to see Campeaux's lids rise and uncover a blank, thoroughly inscrutable glance.

Peace said, over his shoulder: "Ask for what you want, Collie—it's on the house. If you don't get it, take it." Campeaux's lids drew nearer together. Al Brett's feet crept farther apart. The pale composure of this blond gunman's face was unbreakable.

"Sid," said Peace, "we've pulled your building down and the boys are dry. It's your treat."

Campeaux murmured: "Your fun comes high, for me. Someday it'll come high, for you."

"It wouldn't be much of a job to pull this joint down, Sid," Peace said that softly, but there was no softness in him. He made a black, high shape in

this sultry light. The set of his face was unruly, it was heavy with an anger prowling through him.

Campeaux lifted his arm to the nearest barkeep. "On the house." Moynihan's Irishmen yelled. Al Brett's feet kept shifting on the floor; a faintly florid color got into his cheeks.

Peace said: "Mitch Dollarhide made a mistake in judgment, and he's dead. Don't send dumb men after me, Campeaux."

"I'll remember that, Bucko," murmured Campeaux. Then he permitted a little emotion to warm his talk. "You're a fool, which I have just discovered. You turned the dogs loose tonight, like you did in Julesburg. It's a risky thing—as you'll remember when I turn that pack against you."

Peace showed his streaked smile. "I don't hire men to do my chores, Sid. Something about you stinks to me." He stared at Campeaux in a way that was hopefully eager. "Take exception to the remark?"

Campeaux's big jaws grew tight. He let the sighing moment go by; his lids shut out another fraction of his eyes. "No," he said, "not now. I'll just remember what you said."

Peace laughed then and that laugh slapped Campeaux across the cheeks deliberately. He turned and walked across the long floor, out through the doorway. Overmile, set on thin edge, slowly backed away, not letting his glance stray from Al Brett, so obviously cocked for trouble. He retreated in this manner as far as the doorway and wheeled to follow Peace. Morgan had come up. The three of them went along the walk, past Laramie's tents and log huts and raw pine buildings.

"You cut things pretty fine," sighed Overmile.

"Where's Tarrant's people?" asked Morgan.

Peace said: "We'll wire them tonight. In Omaha." There was the smell of coffee in the wind. Peace saw a small counter inside a tent cabin's doorway. He swung there on impulse and went in. He had his head down, and he didn't lift it until he had pulled his long body up to a stool. But when he did he found Nan Normandy standing behind the counter.

Overmile said, deeply pleased, "You're here?"

"Yes," she said, and continued to look at Peace. It was as he had remembered—that pride and gravity written in her eyes. A self-reliance that struck him with a force. But he dropped his head again, weariness pressing on his shoulders.

"Coffee, if you've got it." Overmile was talking, drawling gaiety in his tone, definitely shaken out of his somber mood.

Peace heard her step back beyond a partition to a kitchen beyond. He rested his head between his two broad hands, shielding his eyes from the light. The aftermath of a fight was always like this, the heat and the fury draining out a man, to leave him empty. His muscles ached, his nerves were like hot wires.

Coming back with the coffee, Nan Normandy observed the drawn quality of his face. She put a cup in front of him, gentle in the way she spoke.

"You need this."

Overmile said complainingly: "How about me?"

Peace drank his coffee black. The heat of it jolted him a little, it pulled him out of a deep hole. Nan Normandy stood back from the counter, hands behind her. The light was kind to her, softening and tinting her cheeks. Her shoulders made a pleasant shape against the rough wall, and a remote smiling turned the corners of her lips. It was something, Peace thought, that lived unquenchably inside her.

Phil Morgan dropped his question into the silence with a suave dryness. "This your place, Miss Normandy?"

She said, "Yes," and let her eyes touch Morgan a moment. The man's manner put something into her glance that was thoroughly enigmatic. As though she felt and reacted to the skepticism with which he regarded all women.

"Rough country for you," commented Morgan.

"Perhaps," she said, "I like life that way."

"It may be," agreed Morgan, and rose from his stool, paying the bill.

Overmile got up reluctantly. "You're a light in a weary world. I think I better drink my coffee more often. It ain't a bad habit." The two men stood there waiting for Peace to go. Peace slowly revolved his cup, watching the grounds stir in the bottom. He didn't move and he didn't say anything, and Phil Morgan, keen in his observations, spoke up then:

"Come on, Leach."

"What the hell?" grunted Overmile.

Peace looked around, minutely surprised. Overmile stood high and solemn in the light, discontent rippling his cheeks; and then he followed Morgan out of the place. Peace turned back to the girl.

"Usually," she observed, "you are more direct in your methods."

"Yes," he agreed. "I wanted to stay. I wanted to see you."

"Here I am."

"No," he said. "Not for any reason. Not because I'm curious."

She said gently: "Just because?"

"I guess so." He spread his elbows out on the counter, and he let his glance absorb the fullness of the picture she made against the barren wall. The color of her hair was rich yellow. Her eyes were hazel and as steady as any he had ever seen. Self-reliance, he thought again. But there was more to her than that. A love of life that her lips could not entirely hide, a hunger that her reserve could not entirely suppress. In all her ways she was a brave, fair woman. He felt it more and more keenly.

He said, all out of patience: "Why are you here?"

She was suddenly smiling in a way that lighted all her expressive features.

"Well," he admitted, "strike out the question. Maybe I am curious."

She ceased to smile. "No," she said, "I want to tell you. I'm here because it is where I want to be. Because there isn't any reason why I should be elsewhere. My father ran away when I was seven. My mother died a year later. I was brought up by relatives in St. Louis—and I was supposed to marry a man there and be content to go on living in St. Louis. It was a family arrangement, made many years ago." She stopped to give him a long, thoughtful glance. "How can I tell you?"

"Restless?" he suggested. "Unhappy?"

"No, people have always been kind to me. But it has always been an impersonal kindness. I never really belonged to anybody, after Mother died. Nobody belonged to me. I stayed in a house with my uncle and my aunt and my cousins. But I only stayed there, just somebody extra. It didn't matter, to me or to them. Do you see? An emptiness."

He said: "What do you expect to find here?"

Her small, reliant shoulders lifted and fell. "Who knows? But life shouldn't be empty for anyone. It should be full, it should mean something."

"There are some bad endings to that trail," he pointed out.

It was her strong pride that he saw then; it straightened her. "Not for me. I'm not afraid—and I want nothing cheap." Her manner changed. She came toward the counter. "You have been hurt. I was walking in the alley. I saw you carry your friend down the stairway."

He rose, tired and yet still restless. He said: "Do you have to stay here?"

She gave him a long glance, that calm and direct and candid exploration setting up in him a definite reaction. She said, "Callie," and waited until a

high-yellow Negro girl came out of the back room. “Keep the place for a few minutes, Callie.” She came around the corner.

In the street, Peace took her arm and they walked like that through the straying crowd. All the lights of this bawdy, turbulent little town were glittering into the prairie black and all the games were going again in the joints shouldering one another so closely along the street. The band in the Club had resumed its playing, and the solid boom of men’s voices in there swelled against the canvas. Across the muddy road a long work train clanked past, carrying its materials to end of track just beyond town. The wind was softer; the thin, high air had turned bland. They were walking alone now, out in the darkness with the shadow of Laramie Peak ahead. Peace felt the gentle pressure of her shoulder as they strolled thus, he felt the softness and resilience of her body. It comforted him, easing the low and heavy irritation that clawed his nerves.

“There is one other reason,” said Nan Normandy. “This spring I heard that my father had been seen out here. I should like to see him—to know what he looked like. He’s the only person in the world I can claim.”

“Suppose you found him,” said Peace. “What would you say to him?”

They went idly on, a long silence coming between. When she at last spoke her voice was very gentle. “I don’t know. I think he broke Mother’s heart. Yet from all that I have been told about him he was a man born with wanderlust in him, unable to be still and unable to stand responsibility. I want to find him. To tell him I hate him—or to tell him I’m sorry for him.” Her tone dropped to a gentleness. “I don’t know which.”

He stopped and the peremptory gesture of his arm brought her around. Her face lifted, white and soft in this darkness, her straight figure swaying faintly. He said, “There are few women like you,” and the sense of her presence was stronger and stronger to him, feeding the wild impulse that flashed its way through his restraint. He pulled her toward him, he lifted her head and kissed her in a hard, half-angered manner. She let him have his way, with the pressure of her lips unsettling him beyond anything he had known.

He stepped back. He dropped his hands. She made a still shape in the shadows. He said carefully: “I don’t think I can explain that.”

Her voice was one note above whispering. “I can. You are a very full man, Frank. So full that your needs hurt you. You have a girl in Cheyenne waiting for you, but Cheyenne is far away—and you’re lonely.”

He said almost humbly: “How did you know?”

"It isn't hard to know about you. You cut too wide a trail not to throw your personality across other men and make them talk about you."

They turned by common thought and strolled back. There was no more ease between them. Something lay definitely here, troubling him in a way he could not understand. They reached the boardwalk and went along it, as far as her little restaurant. She stood a moment in the doorway, one hand holding to the sill, composed and aloof. He removed his hat.

"I shall not make that mistake again."

"Mistake?"

He said: "Impoliteness, then."

She smiled, her lips turned in a sweet, womanly way. But he could no longer read her glance. The candidness was gone, the directness gone. She turned without saying more.

Peace sheered off into the crowd. He went toward the Club and stopped to pull his thinking together. The traveling stream of men slowly turned him and shunted him until he stood at the edge of the board walk. There he remained, his head tipped down and a long, sharp line creased across his brow. He thought: "I'll have to find Doc Harrison and tell him about Tarrant," and got out his pipe and tobacco. There had been a moment of ease, and afterward he had kissed this girl and a door had closed in his face. He clamped the pipe between his teeth, drawing in the good smoke; his lips stretched, and thus he stood, squinting at the lights of the commissary shack across the way, not really seeing them.

Ab Kein walked into a corner of his vision, stopping there with another man. Kein had huddled himself close to the other one, talking swiftly. "You want to speculate, hey? Don't speculate. You put your money into something sure, like I tell you. Here is Laramie. It's brand-new. Someday it will be the biggest town in the West. Why not? Look, Setters. Here's the railroad. Here's the land. What's to stop it, hunh? It will be the greatest city you ever saw. Thirty thousand next year. It's got six thousand now, ain't it? Smell this air. Good air, ain't it? Sure—and you wait and see the people come out here to get their health back. A hundred thousand by 1900, I bet you. Maybe more. Now that lot on the corner across from the Club I will sell you at positively a ridiculous figure. Three thousand. You'll sell it for five within thirty days. Sold, huh?"

Setters said: "I ain't buyin'—I'm sellin'."

Ab Kein paused. His shoulders fell and his voice changed. It turned lackluster and discouraged. "That lot you got? My friend, you was stung on it in the first place. Laramie don't grow that direction. It grows west. How

do I know your lot won't end up out nowhere with the town two miles away? But I tell you. I'll give you four hundred."

Setters bawled: "Why, you sawed-off little runt! Who was talkin' about the biggest town in the West a minute ago?"

"Can I help it if I change my mind?" complained Ab Kein persuasively. "Four hundred?"

"Six."

"Four-thirty."

"Six."

Ab's voice took on a note of extreme confidence. "Tell you what. Four-fifty and five acres in Julesburg to boot."

Setters said, completely outraged: "I still got a piece in Julesburg you sold me. Look at that place now. Deader'n a herring. Six or nothin'."

"Is it my fault if the railroad changes its mind? Five is positively my last offer. You bargain too close, Setters. Five?"

"Sold."

"Come," said Ab quickly, "and we'll get it signed."

Peace pushed his way down the street to Doc Frank Harrison's office. He said: "Ed Tarrant's dead, in Ab Kein's tent; I'm wiring his people tonight," and left Harrison instantly.

He crossed over to the depot, spending a bad fifteen minutes on the telegram. Afterward he went to Casement's big portable commissary shack, one room of which was headquarters for the Union's engineers. Phil Morgan lay in his blankets reading a week-old copy of the New York *Tribune*. Leach Overmile sat beside a table. He had his elbows on the table, rolling cigarettes; there was a whole row of them in front of him. He turned his slim face toward Peace, not saying a word, and the expression in his eyes was hard for Peace to understand, being harassed and almost surly. Peace stood there a moment, trying to read this long Texan. The backs of his legs were tired and the reaction of the fight washed its fatigue through him.

Overmile moved his shoulders a little and swung back to his time-killing chore. He said: "Better hit the hay, Frank."

Phil Morgan lifted his glance from the paper. His attention traveled from Peace to Overmile with a dry, acute interest. Whatever he saw he kept to himself, storing it away in his head.

Peace turned in. Long after the lights were out he lay watching the black ceiling, one image and another racing before his eyes. There was no coherence to them. He saw Tarrant lying on the floor; he saw Straight-Edge

Annie's building crash down. Then it was Campeaux standing in the Club, stolidly concealing his hatred. Sixty-eight, he thought, would be a bad year. Nan Normandy's quiet talk returned to him again. "Life should never be empty." And afterward he was thinking of Eileen Oliver, and the confusion in his mind grew greater. The turbulent echoes of Laramie in festival heaved and rattled on the commissary shack.

7

May went along, with the wind losing its softness day by day and the sun spilling out a greater heat. The bunch and buffalo grass on Laramie Plains slowly gave up its greenness, the stubborn sage began to glitter with dust. Winter's little alkali lakes and pools were receding, their exposed edges as white and flashing under the sun as salt.

The track ran north on a yellow scooped-up grade, pointing toward the black shape of Laramie Peak. A mile a day, two miles a day, three miles a day. Jack Casement's terriers swarmed at end of track, sweating and swearing and quarreling but pushing that steel girdle farther out. Nothing stopped them save failure of supplies. Forty cars of material to the mile, six hundred tons of it to the mile—that was the stint set by Dan Casement back in Omaha who had to feed the front. There was no rest. The Union's engines funneled up a black smoke into the astonished sky by day and threw a guttering firebox glow out into the startled prairie by night. Those long rows of highpiled cars made an endless traffic, a nervous, whistling, chuffing traffic baptizing the fresh rails, settling the ties deeper into the fresh soil.

Casement's boarding train crept on, leaving behind at each moving the debris of a thousand hard-playing, hard-fighting Irishmen. Strung out ahead, two hundred miles or more, nine thousand graders gutted out the ocher dust of the hill slopes to smooth the right of way. The bridge and culvert gangs were twenty miles ahead. Once Casement's terriers came charging down upon an incomplete trestle and Jack Casement stood there at the end of steel, blasting that crew with a wickedness that never ceased till they had finished. Afterward he crossed it and tore on to make up time.

Tie and timber gangs roved through the Black Hills. Sawmills sundered gulch and ridge with sounds those ancient mountains had never heard before; all the little streams were choked with material floating toward right of way. Ties that summer were $1.25 a piece, delivered to grade. The high lumbering freighters moved in steady stream away from end of track to supply the working force beyond, to supply Salt Lake, even to supply the Central hurrying eastward across the high Nevada desert. Long bands of antelope scudded beside the grade, lifting high banners of dust; the crack of the professional meat hunters' guns boomed along every remote canyon. In

the first days of June the Union, swinging westward out of the Laramie plain, crossed the Medicine Bow River and dropped Medicine Bow down casually beside its right of way.

From Laramie to here the pace had been two miles a day. And now, with the organization well shaken down and rumors of the Central's fast pace, Casement squared himself toward the broken Hanna Basin country and wired brother Dan at Omaha to speed up the supply trains.

Swinging away from Medicine Bow, the tracks left the last trace of fertility behind. Ahead lay only alkali flats and red rolling ridges, through which the grade ran in a series of cuts and fills, laying open the burned brick-brown and brick-red soil and its heavy layers of marine deposits. All of the water turned bad, frothing up in the engine boilers, corroding men's stomachs. This was June, with a sun rolling across the vacant sky like a huge iron ball half melted and half distorted by heat. All that scorching brilliance poured down, turning the rails of the right of way bitter hot. Over in the south the granite cone of Elk Mountain lay vaguely against the heat fog; of an early morning the shape of the Sierra Madres was a dim substance in the remote southwest. The freighting teams were rolling up thick clouds of flour-thick alkali dust all along the line. Casement's Paddies left a grave a day behind them on the plain, sometimes more. It was sunstroke, typhoid, dysentery and gunshot.

On the last day of June the rails of the Union charged down upon the shallow North Platte and crossed to Fort Steele. On July first the work trains rolled into Benton, three miles beyond, to find the flimsy line of saloon and dive and gambling joint waiting in the midst of the bitter, treeless, grassless desert.

It was, on that day, one small street holding the Club's big tent and a half a dozen other bawdy establishments. Two days later, when Frank Peace came up from Cheyenne, two thousand people were there. In the intervening forty-eight hours a hundred tents had been erected and half a hundred houses knocked together from a ready-to-build pattern. Overmile was at the depot to meet Peace; and the two of them stood awhile in the dusk of a scorching day to see that sight and to marvel at it.

"Ain't she lovely?" drawled Overmile. "Hell itself ain't got a thing like it."

It was Cheyenne and Laramie rolled together, with the virtue left out and the man-eating wickedness increased. Lights burst through yellow windows, glittering against a dust that was like a heavy sea fog. Bedlam hammered out of the joints, confusion rolled down the streets. A man stood on one corner

and lifted his gun, and shot three times through a second-story window, and pocketed his gun and walked away. The barkers were lifting their coyote yells from every saloon doorway; freighters lashed their long teams through this thick street. Irishmen, thirsty and gaunt for trouble, heaved a steady tide down the dusty way and lanterns beamed down from roofs where men sawed and hammered without pause. A woman put her head through the window so recently shot to pieces and began to scream, drawing no attention. Benton, 698 miles from Omaha, had caught its lusty stride.

"Bigger and better," muttered Peace.

"Nan's restaurant is down there," said Overmile, pointing. "I helped her get settled yesterday. Bardee Oliver moved in yesterday, too. Sam Reed's in his office, Seems to be a pow-wow. We got some trouble, I hear."

A faint wind came across the desert; at 6500 feet it was cool. They crossed the track, turning beside a row of flimsy office shacks.

Overmile said: "They transferred Archie Millard from Sanders to Fort Steele. I don't see why. You could have had another officer for escort."

"I had him transferred," said Peace. "Don't want him around Cherry."

Overmile shook his head. They had reached Reed's little shack before he spoke. "It ain't that easy, Frank."

Peace stopped there in the dust. He said unfavorably: "What would you do? Let Archie go to hell?"

Overmile wasn't smiling. He scrubbed a hand across his face. He had got irritable all in a moment. "I don't know. I'm not educated like you or Archie. I'm just a cowhand. Maybe that's why I pull for this Cherry girl. She ain't educated either. She just knows what she wants."

"Ten years from now they'd both be miserable."

Overmile let out a long breath. "It's now—not ten years from now, Frank. You know what that girl feels? I do. She'd rather have a month with Archie than a whole damned life of what's right. You don't see it?"

Frank said more gently: "I see it, Leach. Today would be swell for them. And then it would be all over. Archie's in a bad shape now. But a little grief when he's young won't hurt him. Then he'll be glad to look back on something that wasn't more than a pleasant memory. If he married her he'd be a squaw man—lookin' back to what he might have been. That's worse than anything else."

Overmile stared at Peace. "You're a hard nut, Frank. I never knew a harder one. Nothin' means anything to you except what's right. Except your job. Someday you'll get hurt—and then you'll know."

They went into Reed's office, finding both Reed and Casement there. The room was blue with tobacco smoke. Casement roamed the small quarters like an impatient terrier. Reed sat more calmly at his desk, but he showed a troubled mind.

"I think you won't have any more trouble from Cheyenne," said Peace.

"Fixed up?"

"Yes."

Reed said: "You don't waste much time, Frank. Well, we got plenty more trouble to worry about. The Central's coming up the Humboldt. They're on level ground now, building fast. Nothing ahead of them but a few small ranges. Evans wires me from Salt Lake that they've sent their engineers into Weber Canyon, setting their lines on top of our location stakes. Huntington's in Washington, turning the Secretary of Interior there against us. I wouldn't give a nickel right now for our chances of beating the Central to Salt Lake. Somebody's been talkin' trouble with Casement's crew. The feeling among the men isn't so good. Somebody got at 'em. I can't find out who it is. There's been a tie-up at one of the graders' camps up ahead. Man was killed and the work's stopped. That's Nick Moylan's camp at Bitter Creek. It's your job. I don't care who's killed—but get that grading going again."

"Sure," said Peace.

"General Grant will be at Fort Sanders, with Generals Sherman and Sheridan, on the eighth."

Peace pricked up his ears. "Grant?"

Reed said: "Dodge is staging back from Salt Lake to meet Grant. Durant's been causing trouble again and there's to be a showdown. Finances back East are bad. Congress doesn't like us much, and the Indians have raided our section lines in Nebraska twice this week. You ride to Moylan's camp and see what's wrong."

Peace went out with Overmile. They strolled across the tracks again and stopped short of the street's deep dust. Overmile said indifferently: "Cup of coffee?"

"Where's Oliver's store?"

Overmile pointed. "There," he said, and cleared his throat. "See you later." He went into the street rapidly, cutting across it diagonally in the direction of Nan Normandy's restaurant. Peace watched him, remembering the Texan's strange ways these last few weeks. But there was an impatience in him, rapidly rising. He crossed and turned into a less crowded walk.

Bardee Oliver had his sign over a one-story frame building; Bardee was inside, dry and laconic as usual.

"Ever been to Salt Lake, Frank?"

"No."

Oliver shook his head. "Must be a real smart place. I freighted fifty thousand dollars worth of goods to one firm there this month. Might be a good place to set up business."

"Not unless you're a Mormon, Bardee."

Bardee looked at Peace with his shrewd eyes. "Maybe," he said, "I better read up on that religion. Eileen's in back quarters. Ben Latimer's there."

Peace tramped across the room, discontent getting into him. It showed on his face when he knocked and was summoned in. Ben Latimer, sitting in his chair like a schoolmaster, came slowly to his feet. He said, "How do, Frank?" and got no answer.

Eileen stood in a corner, as it seemed always her habit, her small body making a picture to Peace. He said, "Hello, Eileen."

Ben Latimer went quietly to the door. "Don't wish to be intrudin'. I got the contract for five miles on Bitter Creek, Frank. Nice, clean work."

Peace stood stubbornly in his tracks, and heard the door close quietly behind him. It was a picture that never changed, of Eileen's black head shining a little under the light, of a dark, quick face modeled in a kind of strict attention. She was a compact girl, strong-willed in her quiet way, and the serenity that he remembered was here in this room as in all rooms touched by her presence. He had carried the thought of that serenity with him. It steadied him now, softening his hungers.

He spoke as evenly as he could, knowing how much she hated violence. "When a man's thirsty, Eileen, the first drink is the sweetest."

She came toward him, which surprised him. She came straight across the room until her hands touched his coat. There was a rose stain on her cheeks; excitement brightened her eyes. She reached up and kissed him, and stepped back; and then her eyes couldn't meet his face. It was a modesty that was in her. But it drew a long, cheerful laugh from him. It swung him into his high and reckless mood and he stepped forward and pulled her to him, and had his kiss in his own way. It was, he knew, a mistake, for there was a small and protesting sound in her throat, and when he let her go he saw fear on her face—and that faint blaze of anger again.

He said: "Well, you're learning, Eileen."

Her lips moved faintly; her breasts were lifting with the strength of her feelings. “Yes,” she whispered, “but be patient with me, Frank.”

“A hard thing to ask. I’m not Ben Latimer.”

She was smiling in a way that relaxed the pride and the strict order of her features. There was a woman’s softness about her then. “No, you’re not Ben Latimer. How long will you be in Benton?”

“Going out in the morning.”

She said, “Frank,” and looked up at him carefully. The smile was gone, its place taken by a sudden shadowed glance. He had one fugitive memory then of a glance like that, of Bardee Oliver looking so shrewdly across the counter. Her voice was hurried along by a swift impatience. “How long must I always be waiting for you?”

He said: “There’s a minister somewhere around this town.”

“No.” She turned away and walked the length of the room. “Whatever happened to that job you were offered with the railroad in Boston?”

“Still open, I guess.”

She said: “Take it! Take it, and let’s get out of this country. I hate all this —I hate the way I live—and the way you live!”

There had been a pleasantness in the room. It went away and left him braced against this girl’s will.

He said very carefully: “Eileen, there never is a day I don’t think of you. There’s never a time when I’m traveling away from you I don’t regret it and never a time when I’m coming back that I don’t want the train to run faster. No man ever had a stronger picture of a woman in his head than I have of you. It makes everything possible. I’m a poor hand at speaking the words you ought to hear. I don’t remember ever actually saying that I loved you. I do. It’s the thing that keeps me going.”

She said: “Get your minister, if you want. We’ll be out of here by morning.”

“No,” said Peace. “I don’t leave this job.”

Her face was still tight. “How much do I have to give up to you? Some things I can give up. But I’m not the woman to follow you around from one shanty town to another the next forty years.”

He thought of Ben Latimer’s dry nasal drawl. He imitated it now: “Don’t wish to be intrudin’.”

She came across the room swiftly and caught his arm. “Where are you going?”

He said, in sultry humor, “Don’t know.”

"A cup of coffee, perhaps."

He said: "Been hearing things?"

Her color was at once deep. It made her lovely. It richened the bright anger of her eyes. But she held the anger back.

"Perhaps she doesn't quarrel with you, as I do. I'm told she is pretty."

"Better than that," he drawled. "Striking."

"Better get your coffee, then," she said, quite without tone.

He stared down at her, troubled and irritated. He was like a man handcuffed, unable to reach out for what lay so close by. Wanting it, and not able to reach it.

"Eileen," he said, "I don't know you. I think I never will. We can't get to any bargain. You don't like my life. I can't go back to an office in the East. Maybe we'd be happy that way—for a few months. But I'd soon enough regret it and make you miserable."

She said again, near to crying: "How much do I have to surrender?"

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know."

He knew there was no more ease in the room for him. All the old ghosts of their past quarreling lay here to punish him, to make him feel his loss. He said, "So, I guess that's all for one night."

Her hands took hold of his lapels. She clung to him, her head bowed against his chest. He couldn't see her face but he felt the tremble of her body. It went on like this a long while, until he reached gently down with his fist and lifted her chin. She had no tears, and yet in her eyes was a despair that hurt him to see.

"Frank," she whispered, "don't you want me any more?"

"How long has it been since I met you in Fremont? Two years and a half. I wanted you then, Eileen, and I've never changed."

Her hands kept gripping his coat. "I've come to your terms one by one, Frank. I have! I've lost every quarrel we've ever had. I've changed myself almost over—for you. Only, this one thing I can't do. I can't follow you around this miserable country the rest of my life."

He took her arms and put them aside. He said, "I think we've had enough for one time," and went out of the room, searching his pockets for his pipe. In the street he stopped, the empty pipe bitten hard between his teeth. He stood with his feet on the edge of the boards, all the sound of wicked Benton boiling about him and yet not touching him.

A rider came past him and a voice was speaking. It was the voice that brought him sharply from his gloomy thoughts. Through the shadows he

made out Al Brett's slim, sardonic face. Behind Brett were four other men belonging to Campeaux. They passed into the heavy swirl of main street, vanishing to the west. Peace marched down until he commanded a view of the street. Brett and Brett's men were galloping out of Benton at a long canter, riding westward on the empty grade.

8

Escorted by Lieutenant Archie Millard and five troopers, Peace headed west for the Bitter Creek region early the following morning. As usual, Overmile and Phil Morgan went along; and with them, too, on the trip was the company's geologist, young Dave van Lennep. At five o'clock the faint chill of a high-altitude night clung to the air; at eight the full blaze of the sun swept the flat plain and another burning day began to oppress them. At Rawlins' Springs they stopped to fill their canteens.

In the northerly distance lay the sweep of the Seminole Mountains. To west and to south the Red Desert rolled its barren sage-studded surface onward under a shimmering heat. Here and there an occasional flat-topped butte broke through the condensing haze; in the immediate south the route of the big freighting wagons was marked by a succession of dust fuma-roles spiraling like fire smoke to the brassy sky. It went on like this without visible break, Twenty Mile Desert, Red Sand Desert, White Desert—names compounded out of the heat and the thirst and the glare of a pure desolation. The outfit steadied down to a stolid riding, following the raw line of the trackless railroad grade.

Young van Lennep said: "Once upon a time this was a swamp, the fern growths rising a hundred feet high. You wouldn't have been able to see the sun for the steam rising. A thousand square miles of it."

Overmile, schooled in tall tales, cocked an eye on van Lennep. "When?" he asked skeptically.

"Oh, a million years, more or less."

Overmile considered this and dropped the thought with a dry grin. "Before my time."

"Herb-eating animals stood twenty feet high, sixty feet from nose to tail. Lizards in those days were forty feet long. The biggest of the birds could cast a shadow over this whole party with shade to spare."

Overmile growled: "I don't believe none of them damn educated lies."

That night they put up at a water camp thirty miles from Benton. The next day, riding on across the parched, faintly undulating land, they reached the crest of the Continental Divide, so flattened out here that they could not

perceive it. They were 7100 feet high, with a faint breeze burning against them; they were tipping down into the scorched plains of Bitter Creek. Around the middle of the afternoon Peace halted the party.

He said: "I don't know what we'll find at Moylan's. A man was killed, and the work's stopped. But it wouldn't do to bring soldiers into the camp. Put up here until I come back." He went on with Morgan and Overmile. At dusk they sighted the yellow glitter of Moylan's grade campfires.

Daylight died entirely as they followed the foot-deep alkali dust of the right of way toward twenty or more tents lying on the desert. A street ran between these tents. Men walked forward and formed a little group, waiting for Peace's party.

Peace murmured: "Doesn't look good."

Overmile let one hand fall toward his hip, fingers casually unlatching the holster flap. He murmured, "There's always a smell to things."

They came to the street's entrance, the group of graders standing across it with a sullen silence. Farther up the camp other men were ducking out of their tents. Peace reined in. He reached for his pipe and took his time filling it, his glance meanwhile evenly running that line of resentful faces. Nick Moylan, a tough one himself, always had the reputation for hiring the toughest shovel hands he could find. They made a scowling barrier in front of him, reflecting a mass anger caused by something he didn't know about. He let his match glow against the pipe's tobacco. He whipped out the light, observing that the quick motion of his arm seemed to run a tremor along the group. They were jumpy, they were suspicious.

He said, "Evening, boys. Where's Moylan?"

He thought he wasn't to have an answer. Somebody finally spoke up from the rear of the group. "Other end of camp." And then that man pushed his way forward, short and quick-muscled and with immense eyebrows attached like awnings to a round, vermilion face. He had a careful look at Peace. His voice was very careful:

"What you doin' here, Bucko?"

"Hello, Ring. Just passing through." But Peace knew something then. Duke Ring would be the bully boy in this camp, or of any camp. Whatever the trouble, Ring was in it. He was, Peace remembered, a rough-and-tumble fighter and thoroughly merciless. Nobody else had anything to say. Peace urged his horse on; the group split to let him through. He rode along the street, pipe stuck askew between his lips.

Overmile said, "I don't get this," but he said it in a guarded way, for other graders stood at their tent fronts, close by. The air had turned quickly

cool and the wood-smoke of a cook shack somewhere about drifted pungently with a little wind. Considerable noise rose from a large tent at the exact end of the street. Peace rode that way. They all dismounted.

Overmile said, “The smell gets worse.”

Morgan stirred in his tracks, looking through the darkness with a dry indifference. His talk held an ironic, half-weary note. “How many thousands of years has the prairie been here, empty and without sound, waiting for civilization? Well, here’s civilization—this miserable little dung pile made by white men. Full of noise and murder and bad whisky. What a hell of a joke.”

Overmile suggested gently: “Maybe we better get about our business.”

Peace led the way into the tent. It was this camp’s saloon, with a bar made of rough pine boards, with half a dozen knockdown gambling tables at the far end in full operation. The place was built for perhaps thirty men and at this moment it was altogether full. Peace saw Nick Moylan drinking at one end of the bar; there was a gap between Moylan and the next nearest man. Moylan’s ruddy cheeks, netted with little veins, swung about. He saw Peace, but he seemed too drunk to be interested.

“Frank,” he grumbled, “come have a drink.”

“We’re pretty hungry,” suggested Peace. “Your cook shack still open?”

“I’ll see,” said Moylan. And yet he made no immediate move. Talk in the tent eased off. A man clattered a pile of chips restlessly through his fingers, the sound of that very large in the place. Moylan pushed himself away from the bar and looked around him. Peace, trapping every gesture of the man with his eyes, saw a faint fear show through Moylan’s bold Irish front. “Let’s go see,” murmured the contractor and laid the flat of his hands against the bar, shoving himself away.

The barkeep’s voice slid in. “A dollar for the drinks, Nick.”

Peace ran his glance back to the barkeep. He was in his fifties. With one streak of white running straight back through his black hair. Peace was about to turn away, yet some obscure interest roved up and steadied him a moment longer. The man had a clean, thin face marked deeply by time and trouble, but there was the sharp reminiscence in it of gentlemanly dignity once, still remembered. The insistence of Peace’s glance drew the saloonman’s eyes abruptly up. He met that curiosity with a moment’s steadiness, then took Nick Moylan’s dollar and retreated farther down the counter.

Moylan led the three men to the cook shack, indicating a long table placed under a fly. He called: “Markie, here’s three men to feed,” and stood uncertainly in his tracks. Markie, in the cook shack, was all at once swearing

in a temperamental way. Moylan listened to it a moment. He said: “That’s all right, boys. You’ll get fed. If he’d started throwin’ pots around you’d been out of luck.”

The partners sat down, Moylan circling the shadows uncertainly with his head tipped. Peace said: “Who was killed?”

“My foreman, Jack Ladue. Night before last.”

“Know who did it?”

Moylan stopped his pacing, scanning the roundabout darkness carefully. It wasn’t like this rough, bruising Irishman to be afraid of shadows. He said finally: “I guess not. It was a brawl in one of the tents. Ladue was a bully foreman. He kept this crowd humble. He had to. It’s a hard bunch. They ain’t worked since.”

He quit talking. The cook came out of the tent to lay two pans of food on the table. He dropped tin plates and cups before them with a bad grace, made another trip for the coffeepot, and retreated.

“You better get out of here,” grunted Moylan. “I’m leavin’ tonight.”

“What’ll I tell Reed?”

“What you dam’ please. I’m through.”

“Nick,” said Peace, “What are you afraid of?”

Moylan came up to the table. He bent over, his talk soft in Peace’s ear. “I know Irishmen and I know how they fight. This is different. There’s money been put into this camp for causin’ trouble. You tell Reed he’s buckin’ somethin’ besides weather and bad water.”

He wheeled away, bound back for the saloon. Peace ate his meal and sat idly by the table, nursing his pipe. Overmile and Morgan were slouched comfortably opposite him. The moon ran a low arc in the west, three quarters filled and catching up the pale desert in a crystal shining.

“They won’t work, and they won’t quit,” murmured Peace. “Why? That’s not Irish style, which is to fight and forget. What’s here we can’t see?”

“Moylan’s scared,” said Overmile.

“Then Ladue’s shootin’ was part of something else, and Moylan thinks he may be next. Something here we’re missing.”

“This Duke Ring,” murmured Overmile, “was a bouncer for Lou Queed’s joint in Julesburg. I just remembered it a minute ago. He killed a man in a fist fight there. Got him down and kicked him to pieces.”

Peace made a waggling motion with his hand. They rose and strolled toward the tent saloon. Something had changed the mind of the graders

these last few minutes, for Peace noticed they were moving upon the saloon in a deliberately idle way. The squat, chesty shape of Duke Ring, Peace observed, led them on. Under the pale, flooding glow of the moon all those faces emerged from the shadows with a sallow and flat and wicked expression. There was a strangeness here, an invisible savagery plucking at Peace like a little gust of wind. Turning his eye along the ragged semicircle, he observed more men emerge from a near-by tent and come up. One of them was Al Brett.

Brett joined the semicircle. He was grinning at Peace, his lips wide, and a dry hunger lay whitely thin. His tone held the inflections of some secret joke, "Long way from Benton, Bucko. We thought maybe you'd be comin' out here."

Peace said, "That's right, Al," and understood the game completely then.

Ring had quit talking, leaving the authority here to Brett. It was Brett's private show, and Brett had his orders from Campeaux. They wanted their chance at him; they had it now. But something else interested him at the moment. The back edge of this crowd was breaking off and men were drifting away into the hidden areas behind the tents. Presently he had a complete knowledge of the camp. Brett was still planted solidly in the dust, a man at either elbow. Duke Ring stood fast, with one other Irishman beside him. And that was the substance of it. Those other graders now retreating from the scene were lukewarm to a fight. Peace let out a long breath; he felt better from knowing how the situation stood.

"When you go back," drawled Brett, "you can tell Sam Reed he won't get any gradin' done here."

"Maybe. Maybe not."

Overmile shifted the weight of his high body. He took two steps away from Peace and turned a little, and thereby presented himself directly at Brett. It was a move as deliberate as the presenting of a gun. Overmile was taking Brett, leaving Ring for Peace. At once the tension screwed up.

Brett's voice fell into a monotone. "If you're itchin' for it, Texan, go right after it."

But Overmile, so reckless and so rash, was smart in the ways of this game. He let Brett's invitation slide off; he waited for Peace to make the move. Meanwhile, Phil Morgan had quietly balanced the greatest source of danger in that loose-strung group across the dust and had made his own decision. Saying nothing at all, he dropped back of Peace and stepped over to take a position near Overmile, thus putting his weight against Brett and Brett's two partners. It left Peace alone to handle Duke Ring and his friend.

Brett's voice, higher and more unnatural, cracked out a question: "What you waitin' for, Bucko?"

Peace let the silence run on. He watched Ring, he laid all the pressure of his temper against that barroom fighter, driving it boldly at the man. Ring pulled his shoulders forward; there was a sweat glittering across the narrow width of his forehead. He moved one foot behind him and stood in an awkward way.

He said: "I'm not carryin' a gun on me."

Brett cracked him with one wild phrase: "You damned fool!"

Nick Moylan stumbled from the saloon, drunker than before. He couldn't see the trouble before him. He walked into it. "Peace, you still here?"

Peace said: "Where do we bunk, Nick?"

"There's blankets in the end tent. Listen, Peace. Tell Reed he can bring his own Irishmen out here to make this cut."

Ring took a long step backward. He said, "Come on," and walked down the street, his friend going with him.

"You tell Reed that," repeated Nick Moylan, and weaved back toward the saloon.

"Tell him that," mimicked Al Brett wickedly. But there was a change in the feeling here, a sudden sag. Brett stared at Peace, some calculation brightening his eyes, and then he ducked his head at the men beside him and followed Ring. All of them presently disappeared behind the far tents.

Overmile murmured: "It ain't over yet." Suspicion rooted him to the spot; his quickened senses keened the night for its treacheries. They were three men spotlighted by a radiant moon, with the voices of the graders murmuring gutturally all around them. Lights began to drop off along the rows of tents. A few graders came out of the tent saloon. Nick Moylan's voice grew louder and louder in there.

Peace said: "Campeaux put Ring out here to stir up this trouble. Then he found out we were coming and sent Al Brett."

"Ring lied," said Overmile. "He had a gun in his pocket."

"Shootin's not his best style. He wants to get at me with his fists—and his feet."

"There's more to come of this," said Overmile, and began to shift restlessly around. He wasn't satisfied with their situation.

"In the morning," agreed Peace.

"Ring and his few friends have got the rest of the camp bluffed. I think the boys would work if it wasn't for him. The showdown comes in the morning."

Overmile went over to get the horses still standing by the saloon. He led them off in search of water and hay. Peace watched him march vaguely around the cook shack—and presently come back.

"Put 'em on picket," explained Overmile. "Left 'em saddled."

Peace murmured: "We sleep somewhere else," and towed them out into the desert. There was, a short distance from camp, a small gully eroded ten feet down into the plain. They made a blanketless camp here, each man finding a spot. The air was touched with a thin chill; all the stars were bright in the sky.

"I'll take the first watch," volunteered Morgan.

Standing in front of the saloon tent next morning, Peace watched these fifty graders finish breakfast and come back into the street and stand along it with a visible uncertainty. The red, raw embankment of the right of way ran directly in front of the camp, and one man strolled up its dusty slope and stood there smoking his short-stemmed pipe, boot heels kicking at the loose clods of earth. Peace saw that, and saw other men stand and stare at the grade. Uncertainty, that was what controlled them. It was hard for them not to be on the job. Duke Ring came out of the cook shack and saw the man topping the grade. His voice sailed across the still, fresh morning's air.

"Get off that, Mike!"

Peace drew pipe smoke evenly into his lungs, and expelled it. Overmile and Morgan looked at him, narrowly reading his face. Nick Moylan dragged himself from the saloon tent, sober but as haggard as a man could be. Peace withdrew the pipe from his teeth and knocked out the ashes.

"Let's see now," he murmured, and walked toward Ring's squat shape.

He didn't know, until then, how closely and how intently the men of this camp were observing him. The first step he took drew them on from every angle; and when he stopped a yard away from Ring there was a circle around him. Ring slowly adjusted himself, his feet spread apart, his ramlike shoulders bowed down. He had a pair of black, close little eyes and he was watching Peace with a glittering, greedy hope. Looking above the man's head, Peace observed Al Brett in the background. Overmile noticed Brett too, for the Texan stepped aside until he had Brett fully in view.

Peace lifted and lowered the pipe in his fingers, Ring's glance rising and falling with it, very interested in that small motion.

Peace said: "Ring. Get to work or hit the ties for Benton."

"Me?" snarled Ring. "Hell with you!"

"Catch," said Peace, and threw the pipe.

Ring's hands lifted, and he came involuntarily off his crouch. He was like that—half unprotected—when Peace, hurling himself across the little distance, smashed him in the soft flesh under the ear and sank him, like a struck ox, to the ground. A great yeasty sighing went round the watching circle. Ring lay with his mouth wide open, sucking in air; his knees threshed around and he seemed to be stunned.

But Peace knew the cunning of that half-savage; knew it and watched for it, and jumped into the air when Ring, a fiery rage bawling out of his throat, came clawing; Peace stepped aside. He lifted a knee and drove it up and forward into Ring's vitals, and waited for the bully one's arms to drop; and when they dropped he broke Ring's nose with one head-on blow and brought his other fist in afterward, tearing the flesh down Ring's temple.

Blood spouted out. Ring spread his feet farther apart. He made a spiderlike jump aside, and whirled and backed into Peace and pinned down one of Peace's feet with a stamping heel, and afterward tried to carry Peace down in that rear fall. Peace bent. He caught Ring on his hip and clamped Ring's neck into the crook of his forearm. He swayed back until he felt the cartilage of Ring's neck grind. Ring's feet were stamping down again, catching the arches of Peace's feet in pure stabs of pain. But the man's face was turning color, the red dulling to purple; blood spouted out of the raw cut in his temple. Peace turned him as he might turn a doll and pushed him backward—and fell on him with his knees. He broke a pair of Ring's ribs then; he heard them definitely snap.

There wasn't any mercy in him. He had an animal to punish, an animal who would have gouged out his eyes, who would have kicked his face in and laughed at him. He had to give this bully one a savage beating; he had to put the fear of God into the malcontents of the camp. Ring's eyes were swelling out, turned to a glassy shining; his tongue was caught between his teeth, bitten and swollen.

Peace pulled his knees up; he stepped back. He said: "Get a bucket of water," and felt the deep, painful distension of his lungs laboring for air. Dust swirled up from the ground, clouding the faces of the grading crew standing by. Mauled and blood-smeared and half dead, Ring made no motion.

Somebody came along with a bucket of water. Peace seized it and sloshed the full load along Ring's body; the man's muscles shuddered and fell loose again. Peace ran a hand across his forehead, scooping the sweat aside. The dust was settling, a hotter sun bit into a cheek bruise he didn't remember receiving. His eyes touched Al Brett standing like a carved figure at the edge of the circle. Brett's lips were pulled back; his nostrils flared out, as though the hating desires in him were all aflood. But he broke his long immobility and stared at the struck-still graders with a calculating interest. It made Peace remember that these men were here. He had his look at them.

"There's your bully boy," he said. "The fun's over. Nobody can make you work. But get the hell out of this camp if you're through with the job."

A cheerful voice said: " 'Tis seven o'clock." It was like that. The uncertainty vanished from this outfit—and they swung toward the embankment. Al Brett turned his head to watch them go. He had his two riders behind him, but they were fiddling around, they were uneasy.

Peace said: "What's your intention, Al?"

Al Brett's bright yellow head whipped back. The secret, careful thinking laid a sharpness and a thinness across his cheeks. He made up his mind then; for his narrow grin appeared and vanished, and he looked once at the bruised Ring still knocked out and moved across the dust with his men. Peace saw them swing into their saddles and wheel out of the camp, boiling up the dust.

Nick Moylan remained here. And the saloonman remained here, too. Moylan's voice was shocked. "My God, Frank!"

The saloonman's face was without expression; and yet Peace watched him with an interest he could not define. The man stirred memory in him, faintly reviving an image that would not focus. Ring had begun to groan. The saloonman dropped his head and went rapidly back to his tent.

"Who is he?" asked Peace.

"Bill Wallen," said Nick Moylan stupidly. "My God, Frank, I thought you were goin' to tear his heart out!"

Ring pulled himself as far as his knees. He crawled painfully that way a foot or so, his head sagging. Blood collected on the tip of his nose and dropped in steady blobs. He made two efforts before he got to his feet. There was a long interval before he recognized Peace.

"Ring," said Peace, "start walkin'." But he quit being interested in Ring. He had whipped the man in front of the graders. He had broken Ring's power here. The sun was a burning, brilliant flare in the morning sky and all the freshness was gone from the day.

“See you later, Nick,” Peace said, and turned back to where the horses were. Presently they were riding the grade eastward toward Benton. His fists were alive with pain and he thought he had broken a knuckle.

Overmile hauled himself out of a deep reflection. “Frank,” he said, “you’re top dog. Know what happens to top dogs?”

Phil Morgan broke his customary taciturnity. “I was thinking about that, too. You made a lot of enemies at Julesburg, which time didn’t soften. This year you’ve hurt Campeaux badly, killed Dollarhide and knocked the teeth out of this Ring. Twice now Al Brett’s had to back down before you. Campeaux and Ring and Brett. And the gamblers behind Campeaux. Your chances get slimmer. This thing here was a trap. We almost got caught in it. They’ll never rest until they rub you out.”

“Perhaps.”

“Campeaux never forgets what he’s after. He won’t forget you.”

Six miles out they sighted Archie Millard’s camp. When they came up he was ready to march; and they all fell in and continued on. Millard asked the news and Overmile told him. Millard glanced at Peace.

“You’re pretty hard, Frank. Valuable to the road. Dangerous to yourself. I’d hate to be in your shoes.”

“See?” said Overmile to Peace.

The heat of the day squeezed further talk out of them. Millard, having spoken once, said nothing more during the course of the day, except to give the occasional orders for rest. Peace was struck by that downbearing silence. Millard’s tall, soldierly figure made a fine shape in the sunlight; but the face of the man held no light, no vigor. Definitely Millard fed upon himself, a hope in him seeming to flicker always lower, leaving less expression in his gray eyes.

Once Morgan mused: “Archie, life is a pretty sorry joke. But still not as bad as that.” But Millard, paying a faint and puzzled attention, shrugged his shoulders only. They camped beyond the Continental Divide and arrived in Benton the following evening to find headquarters swept by a minor tempest. Dodge had returned by fast stage from Salt Lake, his driving temper quickening an organization already geared to a nervous pitch. General Grant’s party had arrived at Fort Sanders 130 miles back on the line. Dodge was to be there the following afternoon for the conference.

Reed said: “You’re going with Dodge, Frank.”

9

The photographer said, “If you please, gentlemen,” and waited for the group to come to a pose.

In front of the camera, posted along the white picket fence which enclosed the headquarters house of General Gibbon at Fort Sanders, General Grant’s party slowly and somewhat stiffly arranged itself. Phil Sheridan, olive-skinned and sardonic in expression, removed his hat and stood beside General Potter’s wife. General Sherman hooked a thumb into his pants’ pocket and swung a little aside. Dodge was in the background. Durant, the dissenter and the fiery one, sat partially on the fence, his hands clasped across his vest. These and a dozen other full major generals of the recent rebellion surrounded Grant, the least striking of the group. Grant laid both his hands on the picket fence; he made a still and closemouthed figure there, dressed in a wrinkled black suit and a Panama hat turned up all the way around. His cropped beard lay close against the noncommittal face.

The photographer said, “Thank you,” and the group dissolved, going slowly back into General Gibbon’s house to resume the conference.

Dodge saw Peace standing in the background with the lesser officers of the post. He said: “Come here, Frank,” and then spoke quietly to Grant. Grant swung in the doorway, his even glance surveying Peace. Dodge said: “General, this is Frank Peace. He was a major under me during the Tennessee campaigns. I depend on Sam Reed to push the rails forward, and Sam depends a good deal on Peace to keep the way clear.”

Grant shook Peace’s hand quickly. “Glad to know you,” he murmured and went on into the house. Peace started to turn away, but Dodge touched him on the arm and motioned for him to follow Grant. Inside the room, Peace took a discreet station in one corner, watching the party collect.

A high and wordy controversy, filled with temper, had gripped these men during the morning, and some of that agitation still showed on Durant’s suave cheeks. He came in and walked once around the room, his small fingers plucking at the tip of his Vandyke; his eyes were shrewd in the way he measured the other men. Grant sat down and Sherman and Sheridan sat

down, none of them revealing any expression. There was a poker-faced impassiveness about them, a sort of dogged, ground-in taciturnity.

Dodge said: “Some things I want to make very clear.”

Grant looked carefully at Dodge. Sherman turned to listen. And one thing Peace understood then. Both of these men had been Dodge’s commanders in the war; they knew him and they trusted him in the deep, strong loyalty the war had engendered. And Peace knew also that neither Grant nor Sherman liked the civilian Durant. It was to be seen in their attitude.

“The government commissioners complain of the changes that have been made in the right of way,” Dodge said. “They dislike to approve a line unless they know it to be a sound line, built for traffic and not for subsidy. As long as I’m in charge I’ll build the line for traffic. I will not have the private contractors agitating for changes that will make their own pieces of construction work more profitable to them. I will not have Durant sending his own set of engineers out here to set aside my orders.”

Sherman cast a glance of sly, iron humor at Grant, who sat imperturbably in his chair, the acrid smoke of a cigar rolling around his face. Durant moved his slight, stooped body nervously about the room. He said: “I have no particular intentions of tying up General Dodge. But I should like to remind you that it is the investors who must be pleased. They’re spending the money; they’re entitled to any changes that will bring in further government revenue.”

“The investors or the stock manipulators?” asked Dodge bluntly.

Durant lifted his shoulders, an expressive gesture. “Is it necessary to use the word? I realize the general public back East considers the Credit Mobilier contracts to be tainted. I understand very well that the public considers certain men to be feathering their own nests. That’s an unavoidable public reaction when a large project is under way. Particularly when government subsidies are involved.

“But look at it from another angle. Private money is building this road, it is a gamble. Who knows if we’ll get that money back? At the same time we are building something that is an instrument of national defense. We’re binding the two coasts together. Therefore private investors have a perfect right to insist on all the help the government can give them. The subsidy for the first five hundred miles was only sixteen thousand dollars to the mile. Over these hills and out into the Red Desert it will be forty-eight thousand dollars. In the Wasatch we’ll receive—we’ll earn—thirty-two thousand dollars to the mile. It is not excessive. And I want to remind you this money

is a loan by the government to the road. A loan we must repay. It is not a gift—as the public seems to think. Nor are the land grants in any sense graft. What was this land worth before the road went through? Nothing. Whatever value it attains is due entirely to the building of track. I think the government is getting a bargain. I think it should not complain—and certainly General Dodge shouldn't—if we change the lines occasionally. Consider this, gentlemen. The Credit Mobilier is under a terrific strain. If it collapses there'll be no more building—and no transcontinental road."

Grant said: "How about that, Dodge?"

Dodge said: "I want the road to be safe, and I want it as straight as it can be built. I want the government interest protected. And I want the private investor protected. Oakes Ames represents the private investors to a greater degree than Durant here—and Ames wants the road built straight. If he does, Durant shouldn't be so greatly worried about the investor. I cannot have either the private contractors or financial interests dictating the layout of the line. There is a good deal of dissension and arguing back East. A good deal of fighting for control. That is not my province. I'm simply concerned with putting down a railroad according to my best engineering judgment. As to that, neither Durant nor any other man will interfere, as long as I'm chief engineer. If change is insisted upon I'll quit."

The silence came on, loaded and strained. Sherman looked at Grant. They were all watching Grant. He had no real authority here; he was still a private citizen. Andrew Johnson sat in the White House, an embittered, suspicious man who had no faith in the road. But the shadow of the presidency already hovered over Grant, and to him already men were beginning to bring their affairs. And it was Grant who, two years before, had given Dodge a furlough from the army to become the Union's chief engineer. He sat there a long while, silently and secretly weighing what had been said. Nobody spoke. Durant's fragile fingers kept pulling at the tip of his Vandyke. Grant rolled the cigar between his lips and pulled it aside. He spoke quietly:

"The government expects this railroad to be finished. The government expects the railroad company to meet its obligations. And the government expects General Dodge to remain with the road as its chief engineer until it is completed."

He had not lifted his tone, but it was an ultimatum, nevertheless. Sherman's seamy face held again that glint of iron humor. He looked around at Durant, as all of them were doing.

Durant had straightened. Color got into his rather pale face; and a flash of anger got into it. But he was a shrewd man, a clever man, and now he looked at Grant with a steady, calculating glance. Somewhere along these moments he made a lightning-swift change of front. He said, almost affable, "I withdraw my objections. We all want Dodge to stay with the road."

To Peace, Durant's reasoning was as clear as if it had been spoken aloud. Grant would be president and Grant was Dodge's friend; and to Grant friendship was like a point of honor. Yet Peace, looking at that elegant little man with the neat, distinguished countenance, felt that Durant was thinking of other means and other strategies.

The group broke up, moving out to the special train that waited to carry them westward as far as Medicine Bow. Peace climbed into one of the coaches and settled himself down. At Cheyenne all the town had massed to meet the party and a band there began to blast the hot afternoon; and there was a long stillness and Peace heard Grant's stiff, unhurried voice roll out from the end of the last coach. Applause washed up and the train moved on. Sam Reed broke through the solid ranks of spectators and caught the handrail of Peace's coach on the dead run. He saw Peace and settled down in the same seat.

"What happened at Sanders?"

Peace told him, whereupon Reed's energetic features expressed a dark doubt. "Grant will no doubt be President. The soldier vote will put him in. But Johnson's term still has eight months to go and Johnson's secretary of the interior, Browning, hates us. We can be hamstrung in a day. That ain't all. The Credit Mobilier is just about out of money. When it's gone the construction stops. Where's more money to come from? Maybe Oakes Ames can raise it in Boston. But Boston people won't trust their dollars with Durant. So Durant's got to go—and he's too clever for Ames. Last week I raised my boys to three dollars a day. There's been trouble makers workin' on 'em. Campeaux has got all the toughs lined against us, for his own reasons. What they are I don't know. The Central's building faster than we thought. On top of that Brigham Young threatens to throw his influence with the Central if we don't build into Salt Lake town. And we can't do it. Ogden is the only feasible engineering point. I wouldn't give a nickel for our chances to beat the Central into Salt Lake Basin."

"You're tired, Sam. You need a rest."

"And we'll be in the Wasatch range when winter comes. Forty feet of snow to buck through. An impossible job, but we have to do it or we're licked."

At Laramie the train stopped. Grant spoke again. There was a long yelling outside. “Three cheers for Unconditional Surrender!” “Three cheers for old Tecumseh!”

The train moved on through this tumult, clicking down the Laramie plain smoothly, passing small groups of graders gathered to see Grant go by. They reached Medicine Bow at four o’clock, and here Peace got off the special, which was going no farther, and took a construction train for Benton. Sam Reed had stopped to talk with Dodge, who was returning to Omaha with Grant’s party.

Peace sat sprawled across the seat in the lone coach of the work train, moved by a strange thinking. Cheyenne was a quiet little town now, its streets emptied of the rash, wild construction gang. And Laramie was quiet now. But these two towns, bereft of excitement, were nevertheless steadily growing. The canvas houses were giving way to wood; and white paint appeared and neat square fences, and trees were being planted in the shifting dust. The construction crews roared and shouted in the deeper desert, leaving the sober and industrious ones behind to plant and to reap the fruit of permanence.

Permanence and something in life that was serene. These were the things that lifted his mind hopefully. How long since his own life was ordered that way? In ’61 he had left Ohio for the war. In ’66 he had cruised the plains with his cavalry regiment. Now it was ’68 and he lived at the end of track where the tidal wave reached its foaming, turbulent peak. There was something in him, born of the long years of excitement, which needed the fire and fury of that boiling life. The dust and raw pine smell, the sweating energy of men, the long flow of violent shadows at dusk across a strange and empty land. These things were vivid and satisfying on his senses. And so he was balanced like that. The pull of a wildness to one side of him. The hope of softness and security and Eileen Oliver strong on the other. He sat long-legged across the coach seats, seeing twilight pour like water across the desert; eaten by doubt, feeling again that imminence of loss, that hopeless personal confusion.

They reached Benton at eight o’clock, and he stepped into the bawdy, bawling glitter of that wicked town and stopped a moment on the platform. Nan Normandy’s restaurant lights were directly over the dust. Bardee Oliver’s store was to the right, down an alley. There was a desire in him to go straight for the alley, yet the lights of Nan Normandy’s place oddly held him. Morose and irritable, he stood there, wondering what kept him so still. Watching the restaurant, he saw Overmile come strolling from it; and an

emotion that was almost anger got into him, though he did not recognize it. Overmile idled across the street.

Peace said gruffly, “Where in hell have you been?”

When Archie Millard returned from the westward trip with Peace he dismissed the squad of troopers and went to his quarters at the Fort Steele bachelor hall. He cleaned up, had a late meal at officers’ mess and took a stroll across the parade ground. Tired as he was, he could not return to quarters; his troubles obsessed him, and his desire to be near Cherry gnawed at his mind in a way that sometimes frightened him with the thought of insanity. Beyond the parade ground, just past post number one, he saw a small, slim figure standing under the heavy moonlight. The figure of a girl with her face turned his way.

He said: “Cherry!” and swung over there rapidly. “Cherry, how did you get here?”

He took hold of her and kissed her. Her body came against him, wholly soft and willing; there was a tempest in this girl as well as in him, for her cheeks were strong with feeling, and her lips clung to him and would not let him go until he touched her shoulders and pushed them gently back. He noticed then that she had changed from the gingham dresses she habitually wore to buckskin garment and high moccasins.

She saw his face change. She was alive to it, as she always was. “What don’t you like, Archie?”

He repeated his question. “How did you get here?”

“You didn’t come to Virginia Dale. It has been almost a month. So, I came here. My father and I are living in the tepee there.”

He saw its conical shape standing against the bright moonlight, a hundred yards away. He put his hand to her arm, and they walked toward it. He said: “I don’t like you in a tepee, Cherry. I don’t like you in buckskin.”

She bowed her head, her jet-black hair shining in the moonlight. “It is what I am,” she murmured.

“No,” he said shortly, “not a blanket woman.”

They went into the lodge. A lantern hung down from a thong, glowing on a clean, blanket covered floor. There were neither tables nor chairs in the place; only two beds made on the floor—at opposite sides of the tent—a parfleche trunk, and a rack containing some of Mormon Charley’s guns.

“My father went on a hunt yesterday,” she said, and sank in a graceful, turning fashion to the bed. He remained standing, his silence lifting her chin.

Her eyes were round and soft; they held a depthless fidelity. Her face was all sober, stirred by faint, wild beauty. Of a sudden it dragged him down to the bed. He put his arms around her waist and stared at her, strain turning his expression harsher and harsher.

"I don't want you a tepee woman camped outside a fort!"

She had a dignity, a pride. Her shoulders straightened. "You want me to be a white woman. I have tried. But I am not a white woman. If I were we would be married by now. Do you want me to go back to Virginia Dale?"

His answer was ragged, half groaned. "No, Cherry."

"Why did you leave Sanders?"

"I've been transferred to be with Frank Peace. I have had no leave since or I'd have been to see you."

"Peace," she murmured. Her eyes were at once bright and bitter. "Peace. He doesn't want us to be together."

"It was an army order, Cherry. Not Peace's."

She smiled at him obscurely, her lips making a gentle curve. "All right, Archie. I say nothing against your friend."

Stillness crowded the tent. She sat by him, watching his face, watching his eyes. Her body was quiet within the possessive circle of his arms, quiet and warm and obedient. His blond head sank a little, the full and ruddy features of the man turning hopeless.

"You have pride," she said slowly. "And I have pride. But my pride is not as great as yours, Archie. I can forget mine."

He stared at her. His question was dully spoken. "What?"

"My father," she murmured, "is a kind man. He sent me to school. He put me in white clothes. I have lived with chairs and high beds and cotton dresses—even silk ones. This is the first tepee I remember since a little girl. I carry a gold cross around my neck. I speak English and I learned the manners of your people. My father has done this for me, because he is kind. Why am I not married to you, Archie?"

"I've told you," he said.

Her glance was wise, it was sad. "Yes, I know. White officers do not have Indian wives. You are an officer. It is what I have thought. So, Archie, marry me and put me away somewhere in a town where nobody will know —and come to me when you can."

He reared back. "Never! I'm not ashamed of you. If I married you I wouldn't hide you!"

She said, “Why would that matter? We are in love. You see? You are proud. Well, then Archie, I am not proud. Do not marry me in your way. Marry me in mine, which is no way at all. I shall be in this tepee when you come. I shall be near, wherever you are. You keep your pride and I will keep you, which is enough for me.”

He said doggedly, “No.”

She put herself against him, her arms slipping around his neck. “Yes, Archie. I am wiser than you are, I think. No other way is possible for us. Don’t go away! Don’t forget me.”

“I won’t always be out West,” he said.

Her voice begged him with a faint and tender and breathless whisper: “I know. Someday you go away. But I’ll be old then—and it won’t matter.”

He lifted her face with his big hand and kissed her again. They remained this way, mutely clinging to each other. The sentries’ calling floated across the night. “Eight o’clock and all’s well.” That echoing went all around Fort Steele’s parade. The slow tramp of the guard relief crossed the distance; the smash of a sentry’s palm against his presented rifle sent a jarring sound through the bland shadows. Flame raveled up from the lantern’s wick, smoky and dying. Millard saw Cherry’s face in the last glow, dark and wild and sweet, and then some of that wildness got into him and touched off his reckless despair. The light died and left them there in a darkness turned the color of silver by the moonlight shining through the tent.

“There’s some way out of this, Cherry,” he groaned.

10

Roy Lovelace and his wife Helen had two rooms in Benton's flimsy hotel. A touch of air came into the windows to relieve the trapped heat of late July day. Dusk was flowing down Benton in layers of powder-blue color and lights were once more setting up a crystal glitter along the street. For a brief hour it had been quiet, but now the work trains loaded with Irishmen were pulling in from the end of track to fill the veins of the town with a wicked vigor. It was Saturday evening.

Peace drank the last of his coffee. He pushed his chair back slightly from the table so that he might cross his legs. The shadows of the room were round and pleasant until Lovelace's Irish girl came in with a lighted lamp. Helen Lovelace said:

"It is too hot for the twins to sleep yet, Mary. Take them for a walk."

The twins slid from their chairs and stood formally in the center of the room a moment—two small girls with their hair combed tight back from their heads into pigtails. One of them bowed and showed her company manners. "Good night, Mister Peace." The other gravely mimicked that; and then a little gust of giggling disturbed them and they ran from the room, Mary following.

Lovelace put his hands flat on the table, his long fingers flexing. "How long do you suppose we'll be in Benton, Frank?" The whiteness of his still shirt's front accented the pale and solemn wire-thin face. Somewhere and sometime, Peace knew, this man had lived in well-born surroundings. It was to be seen in his soft ways, it was to be heard in the smoothness of his speech. Lovelace and his wife were altogether alike—living in a world to which they didn't belong, with a shadowy strain showing, with a remote sense of tragedy showing.

"Green River," said Peace, "is the next controlling point. There'll be a good town there. We'll reach it around the middle of September."

"Six more weeks here, then," murmured Lovelace.

Campeaux's musicians were collected at the Club doorway, throwing their brass blare up and down the street to announce the beginning of another roaring night; instantly the sound of Benton stepped up to a quicker

and more humming pitch. Lovelace looked at his hands. Helen Lovelace rose as though possessed by impatience. But she stood motionless, her head turned toward the windows, her smooth features stilled by some remote thought. She was to Peace the meaning of fidelity, and he thought then that she would be beautiful in a black velvet dress, with diamond eardrops glittering against the dark luster of her hair. That kind of woman. Gracious. Too proud to show her hurts. They were both listening to Campeaux's band in a way that seemed to tell Peace they hated it—and could not help obeying it. A rebel yell from the construction hands lifted Benton's flimsy rafters. Helen Lovelace tipped her head at her husband, quietly watching him. Lovelace said:

"I never knew a more evil town than this. But it has been good to us. The best of all towns for a gambler. In a way, I shall hate to leave it. My luck's run good here, as good as it ever has. Something tells me it is a climax."

Peace stirred in the chair. "A dead man every morning. A girl dead from laudanum every week. When are you going to take your family out of this, Roy?"

Lovelace lifted his steel-indifferent eyes. But Peace knew he had struck a tender spot and wasn't sorry. Lovelace's shoulders shrugged.

"When my luck goes out, Frank, I'm through. This is my life. I can make money in no other way. But I'm not the fool you may think. My draft goes to San Francisco every week—and some day my family will be done with this."

"When?" said Peace skeptically.

"Fortune always runs out. When I get my warning I'll obey, because I'm gambler enough to understand. Will you?"

Peace said: "What?"

"Sure. It applies to you as well. Helen and I often talk about it. You bear a charmed life. The risks pile up and still never hurt you. There is no man on this right of way better liked and none better hated. You think that's going to last forever? It won't. The law of percentage will take care of that. One day your luck will run out and that's the end of Frank Peace."

Peace said: "Where will you go when you're through with the game? Back East?"

Lovelace let a quick gust of irritation come out of him. "Why don't you listen to me when I give you good advice?" He shook his head, his voice changing to a tone that was regretful. "No, never back East. That's closed to us. San Francisco, I think."

He rose and went across the room for his hat. For a moment he stood in the soft light, clipping the end from a cigar. There was a scene here of a man mustering up the ingredients of the part he had to play; the quietness, the detachment, the tight-lipped indifference of the gambler. Pushing himself to his feet, Frank Peace could not help asking this.

"Why," he murmured, "why do I always find you standing behind him, Helen?"

But it was Lovelace who answered that, swiftly and very simply: "Because she's my luck. I couldn't turn a card without her."

They were tall and still in the room, with that deep silence full of a speechless pride. Peace turned his eyes away from them; it bothered him to be a witness to something he had no right to see.

"Your luck," he said, "runs in more ways than one, Roy!"

"Perhaps I have thought of that," answered Lovelace, and led the way from the room.

The twins were racing up the steps, noisy and out of breath. Lovelace bent down; he removed the cigar from his mouth, and kissed them and went on. At the bottom of the stairway Peace looked back and saw their round, big eyes peering between the stairway standards. They were giggling again.

Peace stopped in the street and removed his hat. "The meal was a treat to me—and the visit pleasant, as it always is."

Helen Lovelace gave him one quick glance, as though that touch of civility startled her. She had no smile for Peace, yet he saw the softening of her glance. He watched them go, two fine figures moving side by side with a self-contained dignity through the thickening traffic of Benton's undisciplined crowd. The fragrance of a passing pipe reminded him of his own and he stepped to the edge of the walk and casually filled it. He saw Overmile stationed against the front of a building ten yards away; he caught Overmile's eye. Overmile barely nodded. Drawing in the good smoke, Peace tried to understand his partner's sudden remoteness and could not. Something had got into the string-shaped Texan to turn his sunny humor sour. All the pleasant parts of his life, Peace considered, were being pulled away from him this hot, savage summer. More and more he found himself alone.

Ab Kein walked up. "Ask me about business, Frank."

"All right."

"Listen," said Ab. "I buy ten lots from the railroad for one-fifty each. That's twenty-eight days ago. The last one I sell tonight for twenty-five hundred. I buy three back and resell. I ain't got a nickel's worth of property

left in Benton. This town makes me nine thousand dollars. So now, where's the next town?"

"Maybe," suggested Peace, "you could do more dickering here."

"Benton's all through. I can smell the end of a boom. Sixty days from now you know what this town will be? Just a pile of tin cans."

His cigar, to this point caught loosely in one corner of his mouth, at once shot upward like a storm warning. He had been loose, thoroughly at ease; but a faint quiver got into him, the sure sign of his mental machinery in motion again. He lifted a hand to the cigar; he pulled his shoulders together.

Ben Latimer, plodding forward at a high-kneed, methodical gait, pulled in beside Peace. He said, "Howdy, Frank," and seemed not to see Ab.

Ab said, floridly genial: "Hello, Ben. Anything on your mind?"

Ben Latimer stuck his hand in his pockets. He began to talk to Peace in a different way. "Got a kind of a problem, Mr. Peace. Like to get your idea. I'm minded to settle in Wyoming when the road's done. What's your notion of towns—Laramie or Cheyenne?"

"Couldn't guess," said Peace.

"Cheyenne," put in Kein. "And look, I got four lots there you can have. What am I doin' with Cheyenne property when I'm movin' West? Your own price. Two thousand for the whole bunch."

"I was thinkin' of Laramie," mused Ben Latimer to Peace. Afterward he appeared to remember Ab Kein had spoken. He turned on the little man, exposing a sharp and dry expression. "Those lots? No good."

"Hey?" said Ab Kein. "The Denver road's goin' through two of 'em. What's no good about that? And the other right where the elegant residences will be."

"Your first two will be condemned for right of way and you'll get a hundred dollars, mebbe. As for the residential proposition, there ain't nothing elegant about Cheyenne and prob'ly never will be. Mr. Peace—"

"Look," said Ab earnestly, "Cheyenne or Laramie, that's good property. Wyoming's goin' to grow, ain't it? Cheyenne's the magic city, ain't it?" He grew thoroughly confidential, he came up and began to tap his fingers on Ben Latimer's flat chest. "Don't tell nobody Ab Kein made a sacrifice like this. Only because I ain't got time to bother with land that far away—a thousand dollars."

Latimer showed no enthusiasm. He wheeled as if to go and was stopped by an afterthought. "You paid a hundred apiece for 'em, from the railroad.

They ain't worth it. But that's what I'll give you. Four hundred for the bunch."

Kein yelled: "Absolutely not!"

Latimer said, "All right. Didn't want 'em, anyhow. Don't think Cheyenne's the right town." He said, "I got ten miles of grading from Reed tonight, Mr. Peace—east of Green River," and walked off without another glance at Ab Kein.

Kein stared at Latimer's retreating back. The smoke of his cigar boiled furiously around his bright eyes. At once he yelled, "Wait," and scurried after Latimer.

Peace had listened with only a little interest. The pipe rose and lowered between his teeth; his eyes kept rummaging the crowd. Overmile still remained at his self-established station against the building wall, seeming to catnap on his feet. And at that moment Peace's head lifted another notch, a keenness threading his nerves. Jack Cordray appeared from the black maw of an alley and stood indecisively at the edge of Benton's main street, having a general look at the scene.

Peace thought, "Why is he here?" and watched carefully. Cordray was thinner and flimsier than when he had last seen the man—which was at Julesburg the year before. After that affair Cordray had vanished with a bullet in his shoulder. He seemed to Peace to be on the edge of consumption; a grayness lay on the skeleton-bare outline of his face, a grayness like the powdery alkali dust of Benton's street. Against that pallor his eyes burned bitterly black and a roll of jet hair lay down against his forehead. It meant something to Peace that Cordray had again appeared. He thought, "Campeaux needed another clever hand with a gun," and noticed how Cordray's quick inspection roved its way through the traffic. In a moment Cordray had found him; he saw Cordray's whole face break with a recognition and afterward strictly compose itself. The man wheeled swiftly back into the alley.

Overmile came out of his spurious repose, noting Peace's steady-placed stare. It turned the Texan at once, and he had his own sight of Jack Cordray disappearing. He breasted the flowing column of Irishmen on the walk, coming directly up to Peace.

He said: "Listen, Frank. Be smart now."

The two were knocked apart by a huge rawboned shape that swayed and was near to falling. The man had a long bronze beard, beneath which his lips moved vaguely. "I'm from Tennessee. You from Kentucky?"

Peace threw him backward. "Get out of here."

“I can whip anyone from Kentucky,” growled the big one—and lurched beyond them, looking for trouble.

Peace said: “It’s all right, Leach.”

He stepped into the traffic and let it carry him onward past Campeaux’s Club, past Lou Queed’s smaller joint, past the lusty riot of a dance hall. Abreast Nan Normandy’s he paused, pushing Irishmen off his elbows, and saw Nan serving a full counter. Campeaux, he noticed, was sitting in there talking with her. He let the tide boost him forward again and slid out of it at the next alley. A line of freighters was jammed up in front of Bardee Oliver’s store, loading merchandise for the Salt Lake trade. Lanterns danced here and men were laboring hugely through the threshed dust. Peace, heavier humored than he realized, found his way into the store. He went on back and knocked, and entered the rear room at Eileen’s cool call.

The noise dropped off and the feeling he had was of being suddenly folded in a softness, in comfort, in serenity. For a moment it was always this way. Something in him let down; the edge of his hard temper dissolved. The room cushioned his weariness.

He stood a moment, seeing Eileen’s black head lift from a basket of sewing. He had nothing to say that would interest her; he had no desire to speak. And it wasn’t possible for him to know the picture he made to her, gaunt with the drive of his work, a ragged flare brightening the gray surfaces of his eyes. He had forgotten to shave; the line of his mouth was long and very thin.

She said gently: “Sit beside me, Frank.”

He took the near-by chair and settled his frame in it, letting all his muscles go loose. She dropped her eyes to the sewing.

But if her hands worked at the needle her mind was far from that chore. His presence disturbed her, as it always did. Every entrance he made into this room sent strange, wild currents rolling across it. She was, she knew, a little afraid of this man, afraid of the utter helplessness he produced in her. She hated to be detached from her certainty, and always he disturbed the ordered little world she struggled so resolutely to create in the midst of these raw camps. And it was like tragedy to remember that she could not handle him, could not bend him.

She said, not looking up, “You seem so tired to me, Frank. Where have you been this week?”

“Bill Stagg reported Indians along Bitter Creek. Archie Millard and I went there and saw nothing but signs.”

“Have you had supper?”

"With Roy Lovelace and his wife." He stirred, impatient even in his weariness. "I wish they'd get the twins out of this."

A quick hurt thrust through her. She laid her small hands on the sewing and faced him. "You could have come here."

"Lovelace," he said irrelevantly, "is the only square gambler in town. His wife has a quality hard for me to define. You ought to know her."

"No."

His faint grin appeared. "Don't always push the world away, Eileen. There's fun in it which you're missing."

She tipped her chin toward the sewing again. She laced her fingers together and held them still. "I can only be what I am, Frank."

"Perhaps it's my mistake, not to realize that." The idleness, the down-running indolence of his voice broke abruptly; it turned rough. "You're all a man could want, if you'd let yourself be."

She murmured: "How, Frank?"

"Haven't you ever learned what men and women mean to each other? Love isn't cold. It isn't calculating."

The ivory color of her face had turned to pure rose. Her chin dropped so that he might not see her eyes, so that she might not see his.

"Rash and reckless, and you think nothing of tomorrow," she whispered. "That way, Frank?"

He pulled himself up; he checked the rush of his temper. He knew she didn't like it. When he spoke again he was dry and a little ironic: "That's the theory of it, Eileen."

"You're not very patient with me, Frank," she murmured. Then she dared to look at him, and a forlorn little cry came out of her: "What's to become of us?"

He didn't answer. Sprawled back in the chair he watched her rise, her face so stirred that all its lines were lovely. Yet even then she couldn't forget the orderliness she had to have. Her shoulders lifted, and then she had put her will against him.

He said brusquely: "If you wish me to leave say so. But don't stiffen against me as though I were a stranger."

She let go with an anger that straightened him in the chair: "Don't bring your work manners in here. You have become calloused and brutal. All the gentleness is gone out of you! It is your way you've always insisted upon—and now you're sullen because I don't give my mind over to you for keeping."

He said, “You become human, Eileen.”

“I think we’ve had enough of that, too,” she retorted. “I can’t be vulgar, if that’s what you mean by human.”

He hoisted himself wearily to his feet. Comfort was gone from the room. He rubbed his hand across the flat plane of his jaws, and felt the stubble there. He needed a bath, he needed sleep, he needed something beyond that. It was the first time he had realized how thin and tight his nerves were. Campeaux, he understood, had put a pressure against him that wouldn’t relax. Campeaux meant to break him down.

“Why are we fighting again?” he said.

She faced him with a touch of defiance that was strange. “Frank,” she said, “we never fight when you have your way. It is only when I stand by myself that you talk to me like this. I can’t go further. I told you that last time. I mean it. Do you see? I’m a person, I’m Eileen Oliver. I can’t be part of your baggage, to be thrown in stray car seats and lugged around from one construction town to another for another forty years. And I can’t be just a casual wife, living outside your world. Your world is your job. I’m not in that. I have no share of it. You come here when you are finished with that. You go back to it when you’re finished with me. No. Not ever, Frank.”

He had nothing to say. He stood with his feet apart, braced against the insidious creep of weariness, and knew he could never break through that indomitable resistance. He could not tell her how he felt, he never had been able to do that. He listened to her, and in his mind a far light got dimmer and dimmer. When she had quit talking the silence was very thick.

Somebody knocked on the door and presently Ben Latimer, scarcely waiting to be invited, came in. He saw what was here and stopped, his glance scrupulously polite, shrewdly sharp. Peace waited for the man’s characteristic apology, but it didn’t come and then Peace, resentment having its savage turn in him, saw that Latimer was smiling, that Latimer was venturing to be boastful.

Latimer said: “I knew Kein wouldn’t let a dicker die, once I put it in his mind, Mr. Peace. I got those four lots at my price, as I aimed to do. Kein didn’t know an ice company wanted to build next to the tracks, on that ground. As for the other two, they’ll do for what I want.”

Peace said, “Good night,” and left the room.

Latimer closed the door. He stood against it, dogged and fairly resolute. “Seems,” he said, quietly, “I always come in to find you two quarrelin’. Why should a man quarrel with you, Eileen? God knows that bein’ here in this same room where you stand makes me humble enough.”

Eileen looked at him. He had done something that put pride in him. He was a flat figure against that door; he was a man she hadn't seen distinctly before.

"What money I have made," he said carefully, "I have made in Wyoming territory. It has been good to me. Someday Cheyenne will be a pretty town, the capital of the state. The dust and trouble will be gone, and there'll be shade on the streets and well-thought people to live beside—like back East." He let that talk go and abided the silence a little while. Afterward he said: "I bought a couple lots in the heart of it today. A sightly spot. I bought 'em for a big house."

She said: "Have you had supper, Ben?"

"Why," he said in some surprise, "I was so busy baitin' a hook for Kein that I straight forgot."

"Sit down, Ben," she said, and stood a moment to gravely consider him.

Peace tramped back down Main Street as far as Nan Normandy's. He had no purpose in his head, but when he saw her place to be empty he turned through the doorway on impulse. She had her back to the counter, arranging a pile of dishes; but she swung about when she heard him. There was a change on her light-loving face, a quick expression in her eyes.

He said stupidly: "Maybe it's coffee I need. We'll try that."

She put her hands behind her. She had a gentleness for him. "How long has it been since you've slept?"

A little current of humor rippled the set of his cheeks. "It wouldn't be the help you'd think."

She shook her head. Suddenly she went toward the door of the kitchen. "You're careless, Frank. With yourself as well as with others. Come back here."

He followed her through the kitchen to her own room in the rear. There was a decent bed in the place and a few matched chairs and a table supporting a lamp. On the wall, one picture. She said, "Sit down," and returned to the kitchen.

He dropped on the chair and got out his pipe. But he held it idle, elbows propping him against the table. The weariness in him made his head dull, it was deep down in his bones. Through the thin partitions of this building he heard the diminished brawling of men in the adjoining joint. Gunshots beat doggedly along the street, the rumble and jolt of a big freighting caravan on the main street telegraphed through the earth and through the walls. Nan

returned with his cup of coffee, placing it before him. He laid aside his pipe. The coffee helped some. That sound of shooting kept up and a man yelled in a wild, savage way out in front of the restaurant. Peace pulled up his head to find her standing against a wall of this little room, carefully watching him.

He said: "I wonder why I'm here."

"Perhaps I get a little lonely, too, Frank."

"Do I strike you that way?"

"Not lonely, so much. But of being terribly alone, even with all your work and all your friends."

"How do you know that?"

"I know you," she told him gently.

He rose, no particular thought in his mind. "The coffee helped," he said, and turned about. The pressure of fatigue was in his knees, strange to him. He had not known that he could be this tired. He put his hands on the edge of the bed and sat down. The softness of it pulled him back, and he lay full length, one hand shading his eyes against the light. She saw that and came about the table until her body shut off the glare.

He said: "You're not afraid of anything—that's my guess. You have a pride that can freeze a man out in a minute. Yet you remind me of a little girl standing in the middle of an empty road, hoping something exciting will come along."

"Yes," she murmured. Her lips made a long, wistful curve against the smoothness of her face. The love of laughter, the hunger and the eagerness for the strong emotions of living could be seen so plainly in her. For a moment the barrier was down, and he saw the richness and the desirability of this woman again. He reached over and took one of her hands and held it in his own broad palm; and closed his eyes.

It seemed a long while afterward that he heard her speak in a hurried, uneven whispering: "Sometimes you can be very cruel, Frank."

He opened his eyes. "How?" he asked curiously.

She drew her hand away. "It isn't that you mean to be."

He said: "I have never lifted a gun or a fist against a man before he moved first, Nan."

"I didn't mean that."

"Then what?"

She said: "Shut your eyes."

But for a moment he held her glance. The silence was stirred with something like a quick heat rushing between them. She was smiling in a

remote way, the corners of her lips softly curved. A long excitement raced through him. And then he closed his eyes. “There’s a comfort here,” he said. . . .

Something brushed him faintly across a cheek, and suddenly he was wide awake. Nan Normandy sat beside the bed, her face lifting away from him. Her cheeks were soft and rose-colored in the gentle lamplight. She said: “Do you know you’ve been asleep for two hours?”

He sat up at once, ashamed of himself. “That’s the second time I’ve made a mistake,” he grumbled. “I’m sorry.”

“Are you?”

He grinned. “No, I guess not.” He rose and walked around the room, his restlessness returned. He got out his pipe. “The sleep helped. You’re a wise woman, Nan.”

“I said I knew you, didn’t I?” She sat in the chair, hands folded; her eyes followed his impatient circling.

He stopped in front of her, looking down. Her blond hair was palely shining in the light; all her features were clear and even and vivid to him. He said: “I like women who follow Eve’s pattern.”

The color deepened instantly on her cheeks. She dropped her chin, not looking at him. “She was a restless woman, Frank. She made Adam miserable.”

“But she was a woman,” he drawled. “And I never thought much of Adam’s farm and fireside disposition.”

It made her laugh. She rose. “You’re feeling better. So I have done my Christian duty. You’d better go.”

“Been out to end of track yet?”

“No.”

“Tomorrow’s Sunday, but they’ll be laying steel. We’ll catch the morning work train.”

“Why,” she said, “I’d love to go.”

He said, “Good night,” and went to the door. He turned there and looked back. She wasn’t smiling. The barrier was between them again, as though danger had come to this room. He felt it and could not understand it. One moment they were friends; and then they were strangers looking across the wall. He went out through the kitchen into the full boil of Benton’s street. Back at engineers’ quarters he found Morgan, as usual, propped up in the bunk reading an old newspaper.

“Where’s Leach?”

Morgan looked over the top of the paper. “Out nursin’ a grouch somewhere.” He let his shrewd eyes cover Peace a moment and then returned to his reading.

11

At eight o'clock they left Benton on the work train, Nan and Peace and Overmile and the imperturbable Morgan. On the train also were the two inseparable bulldogs of the road, Sam Reed and Jack Casement. One of the government commissioners joined them at Rawlins, fifteen miles out. These and the usual quota of Irishmen bound back to grading camps filled the coach.

For some reason Morgan exhibited a quality of cheerfulness not usual to him; and for some reason Leach Overmile, ordinarily full of dry humor, had nothing to say. The same dismal temper that had been in control of him for almost a month still possessed him. Relaxed in the coach seat, Peace painstakingly sought to discover a reason for the Texan's aloof silence and could not.

Morgan's good nature was easier to explain. In the beginning Phil had disliked Nan, as he disliked most women. But it wasn't hard to look at Nan this morning and understand why a man should be charmed by her personality. Her gayness went along the car like warmth. Jack Casement came forward and sat on the arm of a seat, his scrappy Irish face openly appreciating Nan. Reed came up to have a word. Silent while the talk went on, Peace noted the way her mouth stirred, softly showing the play of an inner laughter. She was speaking to Reed, her voice composed and calm; and the tilt of her face strangely quickened Peace's interest. She had a womanly fullness behind that smiling reserve, a richness that was for none of them.

Her eyes came to him, feeling his glance. Reed said: "We'll have to put a guard around you when we get into Utah territory, Miss Normandy. Brigham's boys are shy on wives." She nodded, holding Peace's attention. Her lips were straight and still, with sweetness on them, and a thought struck straight across the space to him, direct and plain, excluding the other men.

Overmile abruptly rose and went down the aisle. Morgan smiled. "Our long drink of water from the Lone Star State feels like bitin' himself this mornin'."

"I wish," said Peace earnestly, "I knew why."

Morgan stared at him. Morgan shrugged his shoulders. “Let it go.”

All the desert ran its monochrome surface off into the dim powder-blue heat mists of this heated day. The flash of the sun was full and harsh. They ran up the gentle Creston grade and dipped over the Continental Divide, diving through the red walls of the recently cut right of way. Beyond, on the baked flatness of the Red Desert, they passed a half-mile line of laden material trains waiting on the siding. Two hours from Benton they reached end of track.

Casement and Reed hurried off. Overmile wasn’t to be seen and Morgan went his own way, leaving Peace and Nan alone. Peace took her arm and started straight down the track.

This was Casement’s capital city—this formless, dusty, confused and hurry-scurry habitation lying across the sun-blasted Wyoming plain. The long boarding train stood on a siding; the shacks and warehouses and corrals and shops that fed materials to ten thousand men scattered two hundred miles to the front stood in formless rows under a pall of alkali whipped forty feet into the sky. Great dumps of steel and ties lined the right of way, and wagons and men crossed and recrossed the powder-churned earth. A material train slowly backed along the rails, stopping at the very end of steel. Half a dozen soldiers squatted under the false protection of a tin-roofed lean-to, their faces broiled black. Coming beside another huge row of ties, Peace gave his arm to Nan.

“We’ll get a good view from there,” he said, and helped her climb the ten-foot vantage point. From that spot the activities of the track gang lay directly under their eyes. The rush of the steel truck and its galloping white horse, the runout of the rails, the bronze-voiced “Down!” of the steel foreman, the clang fall of those rails and the swift attack of the sledges beating the spikes home—these things were part of a familiar routine to Peace. Familiar and strongly satisfactory. Watching Nan, he saw that her attention was full with the picture. The material train chuffed forward another length of track, funneling a black smoke into the agitated sky. The whistling of other advancing material trains cut hoarse, beating patterns of sound into this sweaty racket. Out forward, far forward, the line of waiting ties made a flickering gray-white row along the grade. In the greater distance, smoky dust spires marked the travel on the Salt Lake stage road. In all directions this rolling, sage-studded desert heaved its faint undulations away.

She turned to him, her voice wistful. “They work so very hard.”

“And fight hard and play hard,” he said. “That’s your Irishman.”

“And die from heat and disease and accident and bullets,” she added. “I have wondered why they are so violent and so savage when they hit Benton. Can you blame them?”

“I wish,” he said, “you’d tell that to the Eastern moralists who came out here to pass judgment. Sure, Benton is wicked. It couldn’t be otherwise, with the sort of man that comes to it. But that’s the only sort of man that could swing a sledge or heave forty-pound steel or swallow shovel dust in this heat.”

“You like them rough and tough,” she said. “You like them when they laugh in your face and come at you with their fists.”

“They’re alive.”

“That’s why you like them.”

Sam Reed came past the tie pile rapidly, shaking his head. “This sun’s no place for you, Miss Normandy. Should have a parasol.”

Peace started to climb down, but she caught his arm and said, “Just another moment.”

Deep in the south the vague shoulders of the Sierra Madre range were visible; and afterward his eyes fell to dust jetting up from a coulee a quarter mile beyond end of track. It pinned his attention—that spreading shroud of alkali. Nothing showed along the earth.

Nan said: “The driver of the steel truck is only a boy.”

He had turned to her; now he turned back. One long, high and excited yell split the camp, and hard on the heels of the yell a gunshot laid its flat burst across the hot, windless air. Out of the coulee and up from the spreading dust spilled a column of Indians, flattened on angular, long-maned ponies, racing down upon the steel gang. More guns began to split the heat; the construction engine’s whistle set up an intermittent hooting and all the Irishmen in the camp began to charge across the grade toward their rifles stacked near by. The little squad of soldiers rushed out of the tin lean-to and deployed and knelt and began firing. The Indians, holding to that single wedgelike column, tore straight down upon the camp.

Peace wheeled and swept the girl up in his arm and, thus holding her, made the ten-foot jump to the ground. He went down on his knees, stung by the drop, and rolled awkwardly to cushion her fall. He saw her face whiten as her head hit the dust, but she let go of him as he kept rolling away, and when he got up again she had risen and was standing against the tie pile.

He said, “Flat against it,” and put himself at a corner. She hadn’t known he was carrying a gun. It came out of some pocket, and she saw him steady himself and take aim—and wait.

The graders were deployed against the slight right of way embankment, their rifles driving short, spanging echoes against the hoof-drum of the Indian ponies, against the steady howling of the savages. Dust rolled more thickly along the grade and the shapes of the Indians were dim in it. They were firing as they came, driving their bullets down into the crouched Irishmen and charging on. The whistle of the construction engine kept up its alarm; a man in the cook shack banged his fist regularly on the bottom of a pan as though he were swarming bees. The kid driving the steel truck made one long dive and landed, flat on his stomach, at Nan's feet under the half shelter of the ties.

Peace said, "Arapahoes," and opened up with his revolver, targeting those ruddy shapes weaving up through the dense dust. His gun roared and kicked back, and straightened and roared again.

A bullet shaved a long sliver from a tie over Nan's head. The Indian column rushed on through the camp's irregular street, pounding by the far side of the tie pile, shots rattling against the sides of the adjacent boarding train like the burst of popcorn. Dust was thicker than rain mist from one end of the camp to the other; the bullets of the graders, pursuing the Arapahoes, began to strike dangerously close to the tie pile. Up out of the pall raced a single buck, his thin and tall and naked torso presented squarely at Peace as he charged the ties. Peace's revolver caught him a scant ten yards away, knocking him physically off the pony. There was a rope tied to the waist of the savage and when he fell the pony wheeled and bolted after the departing column, dragging the Indian through the up-ripped alkali.

The graders moved forward from the embankment like soldiers making a charge. Down at the end of the camp's street the high battle wail of the Arapahoes slimmed out to an echo that presently blended with the tattoo of their pony hoofs. The firing died to a few solitary shots. Men were milling along the street, half hidden by the dust and cursing out their vivid Irish wrath. Sam Reed ran forward and stopped by the tie pile. He grasped a Spencer carbine in one fist, the glitter of excitement turning his eyes pale. The whole front of his black suit had the appearance of being dipped in a flour barrel.

"Miss Normandy!"

Peace whirled around. Nan stood directly by him. Her cheeks were faintly white. Yet Peace, thoroughly aroused, saw no fear in her. She said to Reed: "Nothing's happened to me."

Reed said: "My God," in a deeply relieved way, and went trotting over to the embankment.

A man over there said: “Hack McKinley’s sure dead,” in a wholly matter-of-fact way. The graders were straggling back down the street, dragging the butts of their rifles in the dust. The steel truck boy got up and grinned at Nan and started for the track.

Peace said brusquely: “I’d like to think of the right word to describe you, Nan,” and took hold of her arm. She swayed to his touch and he felt the faint tremor of her body. But she was smiling at him in a manner that drove a long, rash pulse through his blood. For a moment they were two people, quite alone, a quality pulling them more closely together; the heat and the dust and the sound of all the voices of the camp fell aside. Peace let his arm drop. Some of the fighting bitterness loosened its grip on his long mouth. The long regret in his voice was very clear to her.

“Some day, Nan, you’re going to make some man’s life a pleasant thing, full of fun and sweetness. I envy that man.”

“Does it mean that much to you?” she murmured; and then, before he could answer, her talk broke in hurriedly. “Let’s go on.”

The steel truck rolled forward with its fresh load and the sledges of the track crew fell resonantly on the rail spikes; the broken rhythm of the job was resumed. The material train crept forward another length of newly laid track. The squad of cavalry trotted back from a short and futile, stern chase of the Arapahoes and settled down once more under the sultry shade of the tin-roofed lean-to. One more flurry had passed by.

At noon Peace and Nan ate in Reed’s office car with the official staff. Around two o’clock they boarded the day coach hooked to a Benton-bound construction train. Phil Morgan ambled in and sat with Nan. Overmile wasn’t to be seen. Traveling the length of the coach, Peace found him crouched in the vestibule, smoking through a glum silence. He stared at Peace, saying nothing. Peace returned to Nan; the train got under way.

Phil Morgan said: “Think that was the red man’s swan song as far as direct attack on the right of way is concerned. He’ll roam the edges and catch the fellow foolish enough to stray beyond protection. But he’s learned he can’t monkey with a bunch of Irishmen who were educated at Vicksburg and Lookout Mountain. I—”

Nan Normandy suddenly wiped a clear patch in the car window’s dust-fogged surface and looked through it. A man came abreast of the car, mounted on a big roan horse, and waited there for the train to pull by. Nan said in a swift, strange way: “Frank!”

Peace stared out there and had a moment’s sight of the rider whose face straightened on the car with a suddenly impaled interest. Peace said: “Bill

Wallen—a saloonkeeper at Nick Moylan's camp."

She started to rise from her seat, the strangeness of her expression increasing. Peace tried to catch another view of Wallen, but the man had wheeled his pony away at a dead gallop. The train gathered speed and slid past the solid line of cars on the siding. Nan Normandy fell back in the seat; her eyes, wide and stirred, sought Frank Peace's face.

"Wallen?" she murmured. "You're sure?"

He said, "Wait," and grabbed at the edge of a picture that slid fugitively through his head. He failed to get it. "Yes. Somebody you know?"

She didn't answer. That expression, startled and half afraid, slowly settled. Peace noticed Overmile at the vestibule door, staring down the aisle to Nan.

They got off the train at Benton shortly after five and walked across the street to the restaurant, pausing there a moment in the harsh flood of the day's last sunlight. She turned so that the pleased, happy expression on her lips was there for him to see.

"Thank you so much, Frank."

He had a question in his mind and found it hard to shape up. It came out of him lamely and wasn't what he wanted to know at all. "You're getting along all right?"

She said: "Perhaps I ask for too much."

He didn't understand it; he showed that by the quick crease springing across his forehead. She smiled and put her hand to his arm. "Never mind, Frank. Do you approve of me?"

He said carefully: "If it matters to you I do."

She was grave then, grave and still. "It seems to matter, I don't know why." But her ingrained honesty, always so near to the surface, made her add something. "That was a silly question. I'm sorry I asked it. There shouldn't be any obligations between us. You have troubles enough. Forget it."

A voice behind him, clear and self-possessed, said: "How are you, Frank?" Turning he saw Eileen walking up, parasol tipped against the sun.

He removed his hat. "Eileen, have you met Nan Normandy?"

Eileen's voice was like the gentle, crystal tinkle of glass. "I have heard of you, Miss Normandy."

There was a comparison here that was, for Peace, hard to make. Dark and slim, Eileen stood before Peace in a way that was willfully proud. The orderliness of this girl covered her like a hard finish; and no emotion

showed through it. It was a contrast he could not overlook. For Nan's presence, even now, was as the stir of a soft, wild wind against him.

She said: "Thank you again, Frank," and smiled at Eileen, and turned into her place.

Eileen said in that straightened, unmoved voice: "Walk a way with me, please," and kept beside him along Benton's empty street. This day's dull lethargy still locked the town; the smell of tobacco smoke and whisky puffed out of the saloons in stale eddies. They turned down the alley, their steps striking together. Eileen's voice was rigidly controlled. "I never thought that I should ever take a man publicly away from another woman, Frank."

He said nothing. They entered the store and went through it. Inside the back room, she turned to face him with a swiftness that he didn't understand, with a passionate force that destroyed all her calm. "I never thought I would ever beg for a man! I walked that street for an hour, waiting for you to come back with her. Do you think it was an accident I passed you? It wasn't! I hate myself for doing it. To be cheap and ordinary!"

"Eileen—"

"You have never been very patient with me, Frank. I know. You have been tiring of me—because I can't help being proud! Oh, Frank, you don't know what misery is! I want to be myself, but you will not let me be. Every time we quarrel you beat me lower and lower in my own eyes. I have nothing left except the thought that one day we'll be out of this country and away from this kind of life. But you won't even let me hope for that! I have to be your kind of woman, if I want you, I have to throw away my own ways. Frank, you're so cruel!"

"Eileen," he broke in sharply, "what have you done?"

She made a gesture that changed her completely from the woman he knew. She raised her arms, she opened them. "All right, Frank. If you can't change I must. So here I am, just as you want me to be."

He reached out and pulled her in. The pressure of her arms was tight and complete on his shoulders, and her lips met his mouth swiftly and gave him all that he wanted. The beat of her heart struck quick and hard against his chest; her body shook. When he lifted his head he saw that she was crying, a thing she never had done before.

"I can't lose you, Frank," she said. "My pride goes before that." And then, seeing the look in his eyes, her fingers dug fiercely into his shoulders. "Isn't that enough? What more do you want?"

"Nothing," he said gently.

"Then," she said quickly, "let us be married. At once. Tonight."

He said: “There was a minister through here last week. He’s back in Cheyenne now.”

“We can go to Cheyenne tonight.”

“I have to leave tomorrow for a trip into the Wasatch tie camps. I’ll be back inside of three weeks.”

She looked at him. “Have you changed your mind about me?”

He said, “No,” and didn’t like the sound of his voice. He repeated it. “No, Eileen,” and kissed her again. The setting of a ring on her finger had slipped around; it bit into his neck as she held him.

When Peace entered the bunkroom at the commissary building half an hour later he found Overmile there. Overmile stood up and carefully took a cigarette from his mouth.

“Peace,” he said, “what the hell kind of a man are you?”

Peace looked at him. “You’ve got something on your chest. You’ve had it there a long time. Get it off if you think you’ll feel better.”

“The company,” said Overmile, “pays me to rustle horses for you. That’s my job, and I’ll do it. But, by God, I can’t stand by and see you make a fool out of a woman!”

“Is that it?” said Peace.

“That’s it.”

“Your job doesn’t include my personal affairs,” said Peace quite softly.

“No,” said Overmile. “No? Maybe it’s my personal affair, too.”

“Keep it to yourself. I don’t want to hear it.”

Overmile’s temper was a wicked thing when it lifted. He paled a little. He said: “I don’t take that talk, Frank. Not even from you. And I don’t let any man livin’ hurt Nan Normandy.”

Peace said, “Who?” and his freshening glance saw something on the Texan’s face then that shook the anger out of him. He walked over to Overmile; he put a hand on Overmile’s shoulder. “I’m sorry, Leach.”

“Sorry?” growled Overmile.

“I misunderstood you,” answered Peace. “The field’s all yours. Eileen and I are getting married the day I come back from the Wasatch camps.”

Leach stared. There wasn’t any light on Peace’s face, there wasn’t any lift in his talk. It made the Texan narrow his lids and search Peace with a long, solid attention. Afterward he dropped his head, turning the burning cigarette around and around between his fingers.

“Maybe,” he said dryly, “we both better get drunk. Some folks hold to that theory.” He drew a long breath. “I’ve had a hell of a month, son. Let’s forget it.”

12

This was September. On the high Continental Divide plateau the sun struck men down with its sledgehammer strokes and the fine dust was a constant mist along the grade; by night the water in the camp buckets froze an inch deep and the deep cold stiffened the tough Irish in their bunks.

Racing across the broken flats of the Red Desert, the Union hit its stride. Three miles a day. Four miles a day. On one memorable day, seven. Jack Casement, nervous and indomitable, drove his terriers as he drove himself. The dull steel rolled forward; it caught up with a dallying grade crew in a stubborn cut and waited not at all. Jack Casement hurled the grading crew aside and threw a thousand of its own chosen Irish into the breach, eating out that obstructing cut between sunup and sundown. The flow of material faltered. Tugging at his red beard, Casement burned up the wires to Omaha where his dogged brother Dan fought to keep the life-blood rhythm of supplies pulsing smoothly toward an end of track now eight hundred miles away. Wired brother Jack: "I'm building a road. What the hell are you doing back there?" Answered brother Dan: "You'll get your steel," and threw his long, heavy-laden trains out across the Nebraska prairie.

One hundred cars a day. Two hundred. Three hundred. It was a dark stream ceaselessly flowing, the Union's straight engine stacks belching smoke into that virgin sky, the Union's fireboxes shuttering a blood glow into startled dark. Up the Platte Valley the diminishing buffalo herds snorted away from the clank of the iron monster; high on Laramie Plains antelope bands scudded like a low wind into the remoter hills at the hoarse blast of the engines' exhaust pipes. Silhouetted on distant ridges, the intractable Sioux watched that steel band more firmly girdle the very bosom of their land.

The first day of September found end of track past the middle barrens of the Red Desert into the equal desolation of the Bitter Creek region. Following that dry and meandering stream's bed, the road ducked its way through one geologic fault after another. On the fifteenth it dropped Rock Springs Station hurriedly behind and pressed into the Bitter Creek canyon. On the twentieth it broke into the valley of the Green, to find the white tents of another hell-on-wheels waiting for the thirsty construction men. But the

Welsh Barney's bridge gang had already passed this way and so, scarcely pausing at Green River, the road rushed over the waiting bridge, hoisted itself out of the river's gorge and reached Bryan at the edge of Black's Fork on the twenty-seventh.

Bryan roared overnight. Directly ahead the rugged Uintah chain waited. Sixty miles to the south the thirteen-thousand-foot spire of Gilbert's Peak glittered whitely in the sun, warning the construction crew. Salt Lake lay two hundred miles west, with winter and nothing but heavy mountains ahead.

Jack Casement stood in Bryan's street that night and considered the rolling hills before him. He said to Reed: "There will be no more four-mile days. Where's the Central now?"

"Coming up the Humboldt, 260 miles from Ogden."

"Sixty miles farther from Ogden than we are. But they've got nothin' but level ground to cover. Or almost so. Our heavy work's just started. We're goin' to get snowed in ninety days from now. They could beat us, Sam."

"Damned if they do."

"I was only statin' a possibility," said Casement mildly. "I hear Oakes Ames and his Credit Mobilier is about busted. Where's the money to build this road comin' from, then?"

Reed said: "From somewhere."

"It had better," answered Casement. "This winter work is goin' to cost the company twenty million dollars." That same night a small, nondescript man whose sober moments were occupied in swamping out Campeaux's saloon with a bucket and a broom drank a little deeper than usual. His name was Heck Wolver and his station in these rough-and-tumble surroundings was thoroughly obscure. Trained to jump when ordered aside, trained to smile when some roistering Irishmen shoved him back against the wall, he long since had forgotten what pride was. But once in a while, when thoroughly drunk, Heck Wolver remembered that he was a man and something crawled abysmally through him.

The barkeep said: "You've had your round of free drinks, Heck. Don't block the way."

Wolver turned obediently and went out into the street, being jostled this way and that by the crowd until he found himself standing alone beside the main line track. There was a round, bright moon paling the shadows, with wood smoke keen in the crisp mountain air. Wolver stared up at the moon like a gaunt coyote, growling to himself in a husky way, lashed by the thought of all the wrongs done him. Without much purpose, he walked along

the right of way, out toward Bryan's edge. When his eyes focused he was in front of a small shanty, looking through an open doorway. There was a woman moving about the single room—the young wife of Ned Beard, telegrapher.

Wolver stared at her, his soaked and irregular face put into order by a strangling impulse. He turned his eyes to either side of the house, and he listened and heard only the woman's footsteps. After that he crept into the place.

She saw him; she saw what he was completely. She backed away, warning him. "Get out of here."

But Wolver murmured, "You come here, honey," and went directly for her. Her hand slapped him across the face, shaking his vision. After that he went after her, hit her on the mouth with his doubled fist and lifted his boot and drove it into her stomach. He said, "I'll teach you something, honey." She screamed as she fell, and then fainted.

Wolver rushed from the shanty. He reached the track, stumbled on a rail and plunged headlong into the gravel. Somebody yelled at him, and when he got up he swung his head and discovered a pair of men racing for him; the light from the shanty hit him fully at the moment and one of the men yelled, "Wolver, come here." Full of panic, Wolver rushed across the uneven ground, reached the back end of Bryan and crawled under the edge of Campeaux's big tent. Before he quite got through his feet were seized and he was dragged out.

He had been sighted by two men; but there were a dozen around him now. Somebody said very calmly, "Go get Collie Moynihan—we'll be at Miz Beard's house," and started Wolver back along the trail he had made.

Other Irishmen began to trot up from the main street, to be warned away by this quiet little group. Feeling the bite of two tough fists into the flesh of his arm, Wolver complained: "Gentlemen, there's been a mistake."

Nobody answered him. At the door of the shanty they stopped. Collie Moynihan came running up the track—the laughing Paddy who had wrecked Straight-Edge Annie's place on Peace's command. He knew what this was when he saw it and said only, "Take him inside, bhoys," and preceded them into the shanty, carefully removing his hat. The telegrapher's young wife sat on a chair and pressed a towel to her bruised face.

He said: "Is this the man?"

"A mistake," said Heck Wolver. "All a mistake."

Mrs. Beard groaned faintly. "Send for my husband—that's the man."

They took Heck Wolver out of the shanty. Collie Moynihan dropped a soft word that sent a man running back toward Casement's big warehouse, and afterward they marched Wolver on down the track into the farther darkness. The despatched man presently returned with a length of rope over his shoulder. A quarter mile from town Collie pointed to a short telegraph pole—merely pointed to it. Somebody threw the rope across the arm of the pole, and somebody found an empty box by the right of way and stood it under the dangling rope.

"Get on it, Heck," ordered Collie.

"The hell I do!"

A pair of men lifted him up to the box and slipped the rope around his neck, and tightened it until he felt the pressure. They tied the free end to a spike in the telegraph pole, and got another piece of rope and bound his arms. A figure was trotting along the track, throwing gravel fast beneath his boots. Moynihan drew a gun and called that way:

"Stay where you are, my bhoy." The man stopped, not speaking. Looking at him in the pale moonglow, Wolver identified one of Campeaux's gamblers. He called desperately at the man:

"You get Sid here. Tell him to get Al Brett."

But the man yonder didn't speak; nobody in the group spoke. The box beneath Wolver tipped in the loose soil, making him cry out again: "Gentlemen, I'm falling!"

One of the crowd suddenly pulled up his shoulders and ran toward the box. Heck understood immediately what was to be done, and his last shrill, rattling yell was for Campeaux's gambler in the background. "Frank Peace's men got me! Tell Campeaux that!"

Heck Wolver dropped sharply; the rope tightened and snapped back a little as Heck's feet kicked up and down. The gambler in the background suddenly whirled and threw himself toward Bryan.

Collie Moynihan said, after a long stillness: "That'll be all, bhoys."

Campeaux waited in the small office room off the main tent. He had a desk there and one chair, which he occupied. Hung above the desk was a painting of a big-thighed woman lying on a couch, enfolded by an immaterial bit of gauze. The title was "Beauty," and Beauty smiled ambiguously down upon the men collecting in the little room. Queed came in, a straight, roan-haired man with one long scar slashing his left cheek. His lips were very short, coming together in a single straight line. Above them sat a pair of eyes

without the power of warmth. Sailor Dick Shugrue, whose saloon favored knockout drops when the customer had money, followed after Queed. Faro Evans, operator of Number One House, stood in a corner and pared his fingernails casually with a pocket knife. Half a dozen other owners of Bryan's saloons and dives were here. Al Brett and Jack Cordray stood by the door. Duke Ring was just outside, watching the alley.

Queed said: "Wolver wasn't any loss to you, Sid."

"I protect my men," stated Campeaux. "Even the bums."

"You'll play hell protectin' him now," joked Faro Evans. "His neck's stretched a foot. Who did it?"

"Collie Moynihan."

"Peace's man. Where's Peace?"

"Just got in town."

"I thought," said Faro Evans, "you were going to do something about it. That's a nice picture on the wall. Give you fifty for it."

"I want to talk about this," said Campeaux.

The rattle of glasses, the scrape and turn of feet, the undulating waves of talk came through the flimsy office wall from the Club. Campeaux's wide jaws loosened on the cigar he held between his lips.

"I thought once it would be a simple matter to knock Peace out of the way. Then I got to thinkin' maybe we could stand a little bit of order in these towns as long as we did a good business. That's all I want—business. But we're bein' pinched out. Benton was a fine place. We were all set to have the same thing at Green River. Then the road jumps Green River and comes here. I have found out we won't be here but a couple of weeks. See the idea? We move towns so fast that we shake a lot of floating population loose. They ain't following us from Benton. I'm losing a thousand dollars' worth of trade a day on that account. And this moving around every week costs money. Freight charges and carpenter work. Business ain't as it was."

"Couldn't expect it to last forever," said Faro Evans.

"No," agreed Campeaux. "But the railroad ain't reasonable. Moynihan's vigilantes beat hell out of two of my gamblers last week for cleaning a couple suckers. That's Peace's idea. He's tightened up. Well, I know we don't have much more of this left. But while it lasts I want things open."

Queed said, out of his stony calm: "We made our mistake away back at Julesburg. We let Peace have his way there. He's had it ever since."

Campeaux murmured: "I mean to open this camp. From here on to the end of the line we'll run things our way. I'm just telling you the lid's off, so

go ahead."

Sailor Dick Shugrue said skeptically: "How?"

"You'll know before the night's over."

Queed stared at him. "There's only one way to handle Peace, Sid. Don't waste your time on anything else."

"That's all right," said Campeaux.

"Better be sure about it," insisted Queed, and left the room. The others took this as a cue, leaving Campeaux sitting enigmatically in the chair, his wide body spilling over its edges. Duke Ring came in to join Al Brett and Jack Cordray. Campeaux considered Ring a moment, the slate surfaces of his eyes thoroughly unchangeable.

"Ring," he said, "you go up to the nearest tie camp. Understand?"

"Yeah," said Ring, and left.

Campeaux hunched himself forward, his index finger wagging at Cordray and Brett. "Now we're going to have some fun."

"Moynihan?" drawled Brett. His pale face loosened up and he showed a faint, curled smile.

"No, Al," said Campeaux. "Come over here."

At his blackjack table, Roy Lovelace paid off a round of bets, dealt and broke himself again. His long fingers nudged and measured the chips out against the bets placed; and for a moment he let his hands lie idle, one fist holding the card pack, the other palm flat on the table. Faint sweat coated his forehead; looking around, he observed the speechless alarm lying deep in his wife's eyes. He said to the crowd at the table: "Deal's closed a moment," and walked across the room to the far corner of the bar. A water bucket with a tin dipper stood on a stool against the partition of Campeaux's office; he heard Campeaux's talk, heavy and calm, come through the shrunken edges of the boards.

He helped himself to a drink, thirsty from the strain of a bad hour's playing. The cards this night were running out on him, and a man waited back at the table with the offer of a thousand-dollar bet. He could refuse it, but he never had. The voices shuttling back and forth in Campeaux's quarters came against his own hard reflections and made no dent in his mind; not until he heard Peace's name mentioned. It was that word which opened a wide and receptive alley through his head. He bent over the bucket in a manner that put his ear nearer to the partition, and skimmed a little

speck of dirt from the water's surface. One of Campeaux's barkeeps looked casually at him and nodded. Men went out of Campeaux's office.

Al Brett's dry question was quite clear: "Collie Moynihan?"

"No, Al," said Campeaux. "Come over here."

Lovelace skimmed the water back and forth, his cheeks wholly unstirred. He lifted the dipper again and drained it. And stood there a moment, staring at the bright flash of the back bar's mirror. No saloon west of Chicago had an elegance equal to this place whose huge paintings showed out between their golden frames, whose cut-glass goblets threw a thousand slivers of diamond light down upon the glow of the polished mahogany. The near-by barkeep turned to look at him again, showing curiosity. The orchestra's music of a sudden filled the tent. Lovelace walked back to his table.

"Take a thousand?" said the player.

"A bet," said Lovelace, and dealt.

Two cards to the player. Two to himself, one face up. The player covered his cards with a palm and cautiously lifted their edges, bending down to read them.

He said: "Good."

Lovelace had a king showing; the other card, when he tipped it over, was a five. Fifteen. He could stand on that and hope the player had less; or he could draw and risk going broke beyond the limit of twenty-one. The player had been lucky all night; and in the man's veiled, set expression was no sign to help Lovelace now. His fingers more or less made the decision for him; they drew and turned a card. It was a ten-spot and it broke him.

His wife's presence was a weight behind his shoulder. He laid down the pack, measuring out the chips to the player. The player said evenly: "Take two thousand?"

"The game," said Lovelace, "is closed for the night."

When he had cashed the chips he racked them all in the box, put away the cards and walked quietly from the Club, his hand guiding Helen through the crowd. They went on in pure silence, past the lights of the stores, out into the flood of moonlight beyond town. She spoke then, careful to make her voice indifferent: "How much have we lost?"

He said: "Five thousand tonight." He admired her for the restraint she always wore; he felt humble now for the way her hand went through his arm. He said: "I've said I'd quit when my luck ran out. I'll know in another week's playing if it really has. But that's not why I closed the table. I happened to overhear Campeaux talking when I took a drink of water."

They went on, swinging together through the still, pine-scented night. Bryan's noise was a low, churning echo behind them. "Helen," he groaned, "what a rotten life this has been for you!"

"We have grieved enough over that, Roy."

He said, bitter as a man can be: "Two things I have never ceased to regret, and never will. Your being in that saloon. The kids living from pillar to post, in every cheap lodging house along the road. Well, a man's got to have one rule of conduct to hold his pride up. I have mine. I've kept my word, Helen. I've never betrayed a secret. No matter what I've heard in that saloon the information has stayed inside me. Gambler's honor. Good God, what irony the word holds!"

She said, "Roy," in a soft-deep-concerned way.

"I know better now," he muttered dismally. "It's been my boast to be the squarest dealer in town. But I was always fooling myself. A gambler's a gambler. Straight or crooked, there's no difference. Why has Frank Peace been our friend?"

"Because he likes us, Roy."

"I wish to God he never knew us!" groaned Lovelace. "It would make the situation easier for me now. A gambler's a fool to have friends. All he can do is lose them when the showdown comes. It's come to me. I can't squeal, Helen. By God, I can't! That's the only thing I've stuck by. Campeaux trusts me. I've made my living in his tent for two years. I've kept my mouth shut. But Peace trusts me. What am I going to do?"

"Roy," she cried, "what is it?"

"You can't help me, Helen. Whatever I do I'm lost."

There was a ledge of rock stretching across the moonlight, like a bench along the earth. He stopped there and sat down. She took her place beside him, as she had always done, and put her arms softly around his shoulders. He had nothing more to say, gripped as he was by his own savage problem. She swayed gently, rocking him as though he were a child.

13

Peace got back from a long swing through the mountains that night shortly after eight. His plans had called for a three-week trip, which had stretched to five. Weary as he was, he could not break the long-established habit he had of reporting directly to Reed, and so he turned toward the superintendent's portable office the moment he dropped from the saddle. Reed and Casement, he found, were sitting together by a table disordered with a mass of grading bids. Reed grinned at Peace's inch-long beard.

He said: "All you need now is a squaw and a string of traps over your shoulder."

"You're going to get all the ties you want," said Peace. "There's ten little sawmills scattered between here and Weber Canyon. I made contracts on the spot. Ties to be floated down Bear River to Tie Siding and picked up there by the contractors."

"How much?" asked Reed.

Peace smiled wryly. "From ninety cents to a dollar and a quarter per tie, at the siding. The hauling by the contractors is extra."

"We ought to be using golden spikes for ties at that price," commented Casement.

Reed shrugged his shoulders. "We can't choose. I told Frank to get ties. He got 'em."

"Your bridge timbers will be waiting for you in Echo Canyon."

"Where you been all this time?" questioned Reed.

"I met Dodge in the Weber River gorge. He was bound for Salt Lake and took me along."

"I got a wire from him a week ago," said Reed. "He said the Mormon situation was all right but the right of way business wasn't. What's that?"

"We stopped at the Townsend House," explained Peace. "We meant to go straight to see Brigham Young. But he came right over to see Dodge. Dodge told him it was impossible to build into Salt Lake town. That Ogden was all we could do. Young blew up. On Sunday he preached a sermon at the tabernacle scorching the hide of the Union and making Dodge pretty

much a personal devil. Dodge went right back to give Young the facts of the case. He told Young the Union couldn't hit Salt Lake town, and neither could the Central. It was the first time Young knew the Central wasn't going to skirt the south side of the lake. Dodge is pretty smooth. Next Sunday Brigham preached another sermon and said the Union was probably Utah's best friend, after all. So that's settled. Brigham sees a chance for his people to make some money in construction work."

The three of them sat in silence a moment. "Dodge," remarked Reed finally, "could build roads through hell. But what's this right of way trouble he mentioned?"

"Durant was in Salt Lake," explained Peace.

"Yeah," put in Casement. "He came through here ten days ago, traveling like a wild man."

"Dodge met him with a proposition," said Peace. "He thinks it's foolish for the two roads to keep grading past each other. At the rate we're going there never will be a connection. The Central means to beat us to Ogden and come right on through Weber and Echo canyons. Dodge suggested that he get together with the Central officials and agree on a meeting point somewhere west of Ogden. Durant blew up and said the Union was to ignore the Central completely and lay its grade clear out into Nevada, past the Central's completed track. Never mind the cost or the waste. Get every mile of government money it can. Well, those were orders. So Dodge is shooting his grading outfits up toward the Humboldt."

Casement spoke pessimistically. "The Credit Mobilier construction contract runs out when we reach Piedmont Station. Poor Oakes Ames, who's been a white man all the way through, can't get any more Boston money. He's personally busted and his shovel shop is about gone. He said he'd sacrifice it before he saw the Union quit. So where's the cash coming from then?"

"Maybe Durant will pull another white rabbit out of the hat," suggested Reed.

"He'd better. I don't understand the man."

"A fight for control," said Reed, "that none of us understands. All I know is we've got to get to Ogden before the Central or we haven't got a railroad."

Peace said, "I think I'll get some supper," and left the room. Going past the station, he found Collie Moynihan waiting for him.

"Wait a bit, Mister Peace," said Collie, and softly explained the lynching of Heck Wolver. He said afterward, "Did I do right?"

Peace looked down at the solid chunk of an Irishman. “You did right, Collie. But it was one of Campeaux’s men. So watch yourself.”

“Ah,” retorted Collie, “it’s yourself that should be careful. Campeaux wastes no time on little ones like me. ’Tis you he’ll hate the more.”

Peace went to his quarters and shaved and scrubbed off the riding dust. In the mess shack he found Overmile and Morgan and Archie Millard loitering over the meal. There wasn’t any army post near by and Millard, accordingly, was attached to the commissary for quarters and rations. He sat before the table with his coat unbuttoned, the long yellow hair carelessly falling down across his fine, broad brow. Looking at the man at that moment, Peace was shocked to see the quality of misery in those blue eyes. His mouth was really bitter behind the tawny sweep of his mustache.

“Frank,” he said, “do you have need of me the next three or four days?”

“I forgot to ask Reed. I’ll do it tonight.”

Millard’s words were stiff and strained. “As a particular favor to me. I’d like to get away for a little while.” He reached into his pocket and drew out a letter, tossing it before Peace. It had been crushed into a ball by pressure of Millard’s powerful fists, smoothing it, Peace recognized a departmental order from Fort D. A. Russell in Cheyenne.

> Lieutenant Archibald Millard, Troop A, 1st Cavalry, serving on detached duty, will report to Fort D. A. Russell, Cheyenne, Wyoming Territory, not later than the 15th of December, for transfer to Governors Island, New York.
>
> J. D. Stevenson, B’v’t Maj-Gen.

Millard said, dull and angered: “My regiment stays, but I’m transferred back East. I don’t understand it. I’ve served here less than a year.”

“I’ll ask Reed what we have to do. Tonight.”

Millard stood up, tall and solid and thoroughly a soldier; he buttoned his coat and adjusted his hat. He looked a moment at Peace, those blue eyes narrowed by a hard thinking. He said, “Let me know,” and left the room.

Morgan and Overmile were studying Peace. Morgan said in a direct way: “You have anything to do with that transfer?”

“I wrote Stevenson a letter a month ago,” admitted Peace.

Morgan said nothing. Judgment with him was always slow in forming. But Overmile shook his head in a regretful manner. “Sorry you did. Know what he wants the leave for? Cherry’s at Fort Bridger. He’ll go there and see

her. And when he sees her he'll come to the conclusion that's been in his head all summer. He'll resign and marry her."

"Then," said Peace, "we're doing him a favor by bringing his problem to a head. He's been eating his heart out for six months, unable to make up his mind. It's a tragedy either way. If he sticks with his profession he'll never cease to regret losing her. If he resigns he'll be a squaw man—and in time to come he'll remember what he might have been."

"What would you do?" softly questioned Morgan.

"I think I'd stick to my job."

Morgan murmured: "You're a hard nut, Frank, and that's what you'd do."

"Each man has to cross his own rivers," stated Peace. The food was before him. He ate a little of it, though he wasn't hungry any longer, and stoked his pipe and sat with his elbows propped on the table, not realizing that he was scowling at the far wall.

Morgan and Overmile kept watching him through that pervading silence. He had no laughter in him, nothing to remind them of the deviltry that once had been so characteristic. There wasn't any fat on him. His cheekbones were flat and high on a deep-tanned skin. A scar from the fight with Duke Ring made a pale V on the back of his right hand. Morgan turned his head and met Overmile's glance; and Overmile quietly shook his head. He got up.

"Think I'll take a walk," he said, and left the room.

Morgan gently repeated what Peace had last said. "A man has to cross his own rivers. Didn't think you had that wisdom in you, Frank. Fighters usually don't."

Peace said: "What's that, Phil?"

Morgan rose. He was smiling, a rare thing for this man; smiling in a quiet, sad way. "Was a time in my life when a good many things mattered. But I crossed my river and left practically everything on the far bank. All I seem to consider important now is a little sleep and a little food and some amount of friendship. I hope that never happens to you. You're right out in the middle of the street, swapping punch for punch, raising a hell of a racket, making this damned sorry world mind you. I want to see you win out. People seldom do. That's why I stick with you." A little gust of emotion got into his voice. "Damn it, kid, never change your ways! Ask for what you want—and take it—and let others do the crying! Don't be sentimental, and don't be a gentleman. I was."

He left the room, leaving Peace in an astonished solitude. He put down his pipe, the taste of the smoke unsatisfactory on his tongue, and scrubbed a

palm across his cheeks and rose because he could sit still no longer. Going out the door, he saw Morgan half across the street, aimed at Campeaux's Club. He started that way and then felt the weight of somebody over to the left of him, somebody standing in the deep darkness falling down the side of a steel pile. A voice said, "Wait, Frank."

Roy Lovelace walked forward. Roy's face in this vague light was quite pointed. His voice wasn't natural.

"I have got to warn you to be careful. I can't tell you any more, but I can tell you that much."

"Thanks."

"Your luck," murmured Lovelace, "is running out. I think mine is, too." He turned and vanished beyond the steel pile.

Peace strolled by the station, a small chill fiddling through his nerves; the sense of trouble always reached him this way, with a premonition such as comes to the cat animals, clearly and sharply. Beyond the tracks, at the edge of Bryan's crooked, narrow street, he paused and had his look at the roving shapes across the way. A crisp, cold air flowed off the Uintah range; the deep, growling clamor of the Club rolled up against the shining night. There was a man stumbling along the track. He came up to Peace; and Peace recognized Bill Wallen, the bartender of Nick Moylan's camp—thin and prematurely old, with an air of a remote elegance still clinging to him.

He said: "How are you, Peace," very civilly and stood with his eyes pointed across the street. The edges of a familiarity brushed Peace's memory again, as they had before in this man's presence, and went away. Wallen murmured: "What is the girl's name in the restaurant, do you know? No offense meant by the question, of course."

"Normandy."

"I knew some Normandys, a long time ago—in Missouri," explained Wallen, and turned away. Peace watched Nan's restaurant lights a long while before crossing the street. When he passed the restaurant he didn't look in. At another alley he turned toward Bardee Oliver's store.

Leach Overmile went directly to Nan's from the mess hall. There were some men eating at the counter and he had no chance to talk to her for a moment. Afterward she called the colored girl out of the kitchen and beckoned Leach into the back room.

"I've missed you," she said candidly. "How far did you go?"

“Clean to Salt Lake with Frank.” He grinned, and ceased to grin. “I missed you, too.”

“What a nice compliment.”

He said: “Campeaux bothered you much?”

“He pays me an occasional visit.”

“Don’t you know that man’s record by now?”

“Leach,” she said, very sober, “don’t scold me. Campeaux has always been kind.” Her glance followed Overmile’s high, stringy shape as he circled the little room. He had to duck his head at the corners. She said, her voice quite even: “How is Frank?”

He stopped, and nothing could conceal the misery, the doubt and the discouragement lying in his honest eyes. “I wish to God I knew,” he blurted out.

“Leach—why?”

It was a quick half cry of alarm, though he didn’t recognize it. For he was thinking of his own wishes, this indolent-shaped and yellow-headed young cowhand who had no power to conceal his thoughts before her. “A man,” he said, “ought to have the right to consider himself. Shouldn’t he?”

“Yes,” she said. “I know.”

“You know? Why, honey, how could you know about me that’s kept my mouth stric’ly shut?”

She didn’t answer that. Her lips were soft and sad; and they held an answer for him, though he didn’t see it. He went on, his words running out rapidly. “I’ll say nothin’ I shouldn’t say, though the Lord knows my heart’s plumb full. Is there any chance for me?”

She stepped over and laid her hand on his arm. “I hate to hurt you, Leach.”

He pulled up his head; his lips came together in a severe, thin line. He cleared his throat in a noisy way and looked down at his hands. It was quite a while before he shrugged his shoulders in a manner that tried to be careless, before he achieved a faint, wry grin.

“Shoot, what was I thinkin’ of in the first place? Comes to me now somethin’ Frank said tonight. I didn’t get it. I got it now. A man has to cross his own rivers. Yeah.”

She murmured: “How did he say it, Leach?”

He shook his head. “Sometimes I don’t know Frank.” He watched her carefully.

She dropped her glance from him, and she spoke quite slowly: “I heard he’s to be married rather soon.”

“Yeah,” grunted Leach. He cleared his throat again. “Well,” he said, and clapped on his hat and went bowling out through the three rooms of this building. He stepped into the street’s dust, cutting under the nose of a freighter’s lead horse.

The freighter yelled: “What you tryin’ to do?”

Overmile stopped in his tracks. He said wickedly: “Shut up or I’ll pull you off that seat,” and changed his mind and turned back. He entered Campeaux’s saloon in no respectable frame of mind. Morgan was at the counter. Overmile joined him.

“Where you been?” asked Morgan.

“Nan’s.”

Morgan shook his head. He said gently: “Sorry.”

Leach drew a long, uneven breath. His voice went downward along a hopeless note. “That was a kinda wide river to cross, Phil. Leaves me pretty far from nowhere.”

Morgan seemed to be speaking to himself. “A man’s life is a weary walk through the dark. A long way back on the trail little lights are shinin’. That’s memory, Leach. You’ll never get back to those lights. But they’ll be a comfort to you—in a way.” His eyes lifted to the vast mirror behind the bar and found the reflection of Al Brett and Jack Cordray crossing it, on the way to the door. Morgan paid for his drink. “See you later,” he said, and left the saloon. Cordray and Brett had put themselves swiftly out of sight. Morgan stood with the point of his shoulder touching the saloon’s door casing, his head bowed in dark consideration. Presently he, too, moved out of sight.

Entering the back room of the Oliver store, Peace found Ben Latimer keeping Eileen company. Latimer got up, saying, “Won’t intrude,” and started for the door. But he stopped near Peace and braced his stocky feet apart. “I’d offer you my congratulations, if I could.” Some latent touch of feeling disturbed the dryness and the coolness of his character. “Eileen deserves better. I mean no offense at all. I say she deserves better than anything she’ll find out here.”

Peace grinned. “Good for you, Ben.”

Latimer inclined his head and left. Eileen had been sitting at the end of the room’s table. She got up now and came over to Peace. He hadn’t expected this swiftness, this odd possessiveness. She lifted her arms, her dark face losing its order, its willed serenity.

She said, “Frank,” and put her lips up to him. She swayed against him, the enfolding pressure of his arms locking her there. There wasn’t any resistance when he kissed her, there wasn’t any reservation. He could think of these things even as he held her; he could have strange thoughts in his mind even then, thoughts that were remote from this deep, pure pleasure. She was coolness for a man, she was a fragrance and a soft light shining. Always her presence laid its gentle pressure on the wildness of his mind and the gustiness of his temper. It was like coming into a tranquil harbor. Stepping back, he saw her glance search him.

“You’ve been gone for so long,” she whispered, and led him across the room. He sat down, at once relaxed. She took her place by the table again, laying a sewing basket into her lap. Her head dropped to the quick turning of the needle in her fingers. “Did you have a good trip?”

“Yes.”

She threw him a swift, sidewise glance. The silence ran on—until she broke it with a casual talk. “Things move so fast. Each town gets a little smaller and a little more wicked. When the road is finished Father has decided to keep his business in Cheyenne. Ben’s going in with him to handle the freighting. Ben’s already started a line from Cheyenne down to the Colorado mines. And they have decided to pool some land they got north of Cheyenne and stock it with Texas beef. Ben intends to run for the legislature this year.”

He rolled his head against the back of the chair, watching her clear profile. Energy in him ran low; he had no desire to speak.

She said: “A girl in Campeaux’s place killed herself last week. And the gambler who ran the chuck-a-luck game at Queed’s was found dead yesterday morning beyond the depot.”

“How,” he said curiously, “would you be knowing things like that?”

“My world is too small for you, Frank. So I’ve had to take an interest in yours. I have been told that Al Brett and Jack Cordray mean to kill you.” Her needle stopped; she looked directly at him, her small shoulders squaring. “What will you do when you’re through here?”

“Another railroad, another place.”

“Frank—have you any money at all?”

“I suppose so. Got some pay checks stuffed away somewhere.”

“Father’s made himself wealthy—a country storekeeper who came West and took the opportunities he found. Ben, slow as he seems, will be rich, too. These chances are here. You build a road and help make them. Why aren’t you taking them, Frank?”

“I have no talents toward accumulating.”

“No,” she murmured. “Not unless you put your will to it. Your will—which is hard as any man’s, once it is set.”

He said: “There’s a Baptist minister in town, Eileen. Will he do?”

She put the basket on the table and came over to him, dropping to her knees so that she might read his face, which was so hard to read now. She was quietly crying: “I thought you had changed your mind!”

He pulled her up until she lay against his big chest. And he held her there a long while, the warmth of her body penetrating him. “No,” he said.

She stood up finally, a scarlet color staining her skin. “How much you have changed me! What kind of a woman was I? What kind am I now?”

He pushed himself to his feet. “You have nothing to be ashamed of, Eileen. You’ve grown up. I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

He went out of the room, tramping taciturnly across the store quarters. He saw Bardee, and stopped. “I think you’re getting the son-in-law you don’t want.”

Bardee shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t presume to shape Eileen’s mind for her. It would do me no good. If she wants you, Peace, she’ll have you. Her mother was like that.”

Peace walked into the street. He got out his pipe and filled it, not sure of what he wanted to do next. A tall shadow of a man strolled along the far side of the alley and wheeled out of view. Peace noted that casually, himself going on toward the main street. Overmile dawdled along, caught in the stream of Irishmen. Peace caught him by the arm with a relief he could not explain.

“Leach,” he said, “there’s a Baptist minister somewhere around. Down at the Mission Hall, I think. Bring him over to Oliver’s for me.”

Overmile said: “What for?”

“Oh hell,” said Peace irritably and swung on through the traffic, leaving Overmile planted crookedly in his tracks.

Peace got out of the traffic again, idling through another one of Bryan’s alleys. A man staggered down the outside stairway of Faro Evans’ place, holding both hands across his stomach. Freighters were backed up to Haley and Leisure’s store, loading cased liquor for the Montana mines. Beyond that the houses straggled to an end and he walked through the silver-paled shadows, his thought spiraling farther and farther downward, beyond his control. He had loved a girl for two years with a hunger that never varied;

this night he was marrying her. Where was the feeling a man ought to have? There was shame in him, because he was going back to Eileen without it.

The small sound of a breath swiftly drawn in pulled him from his thoughts; and he lifted his head and found Nan before him, her body pulled to a startled straightness. The moonlight laid a crystal screen between them, but the sense of her waiting there was a power that pulled him on until her lifting features were clear to his eyes. She said nothing. She didn't need to. Her personality, so rich and so gallant, was again like a soft wind coming out of wild places, stirring every sense he owned. She did this for him, giving his life a meaning, freeing him of all darkness. He reached out and took her hand, the long, warm fingers lying obediently in his hard palm. She was, at that moment, completeness for a man.

She said, in a low, quiet whisper; "Make no more mistakes, Frank."

He said, "No," and let her hand slide away. He removed his hat and watched her turn and go rapidly across the uneven ground. And, standing there, torn inwardly apart, he heard a shot roll out of one of Bryan's alleys behind him. Afterward a woman screamed and a swift gunplay ricocheted across the night.

He wheeled back, led toward that sound ripping through the alley which held the Oliver store. He came into the foot of it, clawing his revolver from an inside pocket. A man stood in the little beam of light made by Oliver's store lamp and turned and fired and turned again, quietly losing his balance. Gunlight stabbed short, purple-red fingers out of two black corridors of the alley, the bullets of those guns striking this exposed man with a small, merciless tearing sound. He turned once more and his face showed itself to Peace, who cried at the top of his lungs, "Morgan!" and raced forward.

The little jets of fire bloomed around and direct in his eyes. A lead slug clipped his boot and he fell purposely in the dust and rolled against the wall of the store, and rose and smashed his return shots into those black corridors. He heard Overmile shouting nearer and nearer. Windows above him shrilled up and Morgan's voice called dimly to him from the dust. "Frank——"

He ran across the alley, straight at the jaws of one of those corridors; there was a man stumbling down it, scraping the close walls of the buildings to either side. He drove a bullet at that vague image and saw the man fade entirely, out into Bryan's back area. Then his hammer dropped on a fired cartridge.

Overmile was raging down the other side of this building, the echoes of his gun shaking all the boards. Men were scudding into the alley toward the

prone Morgan; and Morgan's voice kept calling, kept growing weaker. "Frank——" Peace went back, kneeling in the dust. He pulled Morgan half up; he saw Morgan's weary smile creep across pale lips. "Frank," he murmured, "I've had a lot of fun with you this last year. I want you to know that."

"Phil—who did it?"

"I ran into it. Two men—in Oliver's store. They shot somebody in there and came out. I took it up. Here I am. It doesn't matter at all."

"Who was it?" ground out Peace.

Morgan's shoulders lifted gently. "I hope you win out. I'd like to live to see that."

His weight fell fully against Peace's arms; and he was dead then. Overmile tramped back from his chase. A woman in Oliver's store was crying. Peace laid Morgan gently on the dust and stumbled to his feet, going to the store—Eileen was in the center of the room, her head dropped, her hands stiff and clenched. Ben Latimer rose from behind the counter and solemnly motioned. Going over there, Peace found Bardee Oliver lying full length inside the counter, a bullet hole's black blemish on his cheek. Latimer lifted an arm and pointed behind him—and Peace's following glance hit the open doors of Oliver's safe.

Latimer said: "I came in the back way and had no gun. They were just leavin'—two thin fellows wearin' burlap masks. Was four thousand dollars in the safe."

Men began to crowd the room. Overmile drove his way through them, pale, crazy-eyed and murderous. The Baptist minister followed Overmile and stood gently by, saying nothing. Latimer walked back from the counter.

Standing there, having nothing to say, Peace watched Eileen pull up her head. She looked at him and she looked at Latimer. She put out her hand and it was Latimer she touched, and afterward it was Latimer she swayed against. Latimer held her awkwardly with his arms.

"I'll be here, Eileen," he kept saying. "I'll be here."

Peace wheeled. "Leach," he called, and smashed his way through the crowd. In the street he found men lifting Morgan out of the dust. He yelled, "Leach, damn you!" and walked toward Main Street. Leach came trotting up, breathing fast. At the edge of Main Street Peace stopped. He said: "Give me some cartridges."

"Two tall fellows," said Overmile. "Brett and Cordray are tall."

"We'll find out."

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Peace loaded his gun with Overmile's cartridges and put it in a coat pocket, the long fingers of his right hand gripping the butt. He said again, "We'll see, Leach."

Overmile's arm stopped him. "Wait a minute, Frank."

"What for?" growled Peace.

Wild as the Texan was, he had a saving coolness. He saw the temper of his partner burning like a white flame, its light rushing out through Peace's powder-gray eyes, and he understood how little caution there was in the man at that moment, how terribly Peace's fighting impulses hammered at his head and swelled his big muscles. Roused like this, Peace was altogether past realizing that a bullet could kill him. Overmile remembered Julesburg. He remembered Benton and Nick Moylan's grade camp.

"Maybe it's Brett and Cordray we want," counseled Overmile. "I don't much doubt it. But they know your way, Frank, and they'll be waitin' for you. We don't step into no traps. That's what Ed Tarrant did, and I think that's what Phil did. Both times the bullet was meant for you. We walk easy."

"Come on, Leach."

"Look at the street."

Casement's chosen Irish tramped the board walk as usual, turned restless by the excitement; and down by the Club saloon Collie Moynihan's gray head bobbed and disappeared somewhere along the ceaseless flow. Peace found nothing in the faces of those men to warn him; they were tough, but they were loyal. Then, looking farther up the light-slashed street he caught what Overmile meant. Wagons were rolling in from the Uintah slopes, loaded with graders and camp hands.

He said, "Come on, Leach," and went on.

Lou Queed stood in a near-by doorway, a stiff figure cut against the glow of his joint; his glance clawed across Peace.

Overmile stretched his long legs and got beside Peace, softly murmuring: "You and me—we got damned few friends."

His shoulder points lifted and fell. His gun hung low from his right hip and his fingers kept brushing its butt. The thin cotton shirt he wore clung to his flat muscles, stretching as they stretched. Those wagons rolled forward through the street, the graders and the tie cutters springing into the dust and hurrying forward; the jam in front of the Club's doorway slowly got worse. Peace rammed into the crowd and pushed on. Collie Moynihan's rash Irish face caught his attention, and Collie's head slowly moved from side to side. The arriving men surged in, packing that little area densely.

Somebody began to swear. "Get the hell back from me——!"

Overmile used his knees and elbows to keep up with Peace. It was like walking across loose sticks of dynamite—and Peace didn't seem to know it. They wheeled into the Club, Overmile expelling a long breath. The orchestra slammed its music across the hall, and girls' white faces and white shoulders went round and round till they were blurred; and the smell of sweating bodies and smoke and whisky laid a rank stench before Overmile's sensitive nostrils. His swift-searching glance located Roy Lovelace behind the blackjack table—and ran beyond and stopped. Both Al Brett and Jack Cordray were sitting in at Diamond Jim's poker game. The three of them together. With the other chairs at that table empty.

He murmured, "Careful, Frank," and obediently tagged after Peace, who cut a straight path through the rising confusion and got to that table. Diamond Jim jerked his head back and ran a hand nervously along his heavily-oiled mustache. The worry in his eyes was very plain. But neither Brett nor Cordray seemed to be aware. Brett laid three cards in the center.

"Three, Jim," he murmured, and put his hands down on the green-felt surface. Overmile watched Brett's shoulders faintly lift; he watched Brett's chest faintly arch. The man was cocked.

Peace drew back a chair; he sat down at the table, beside Diamond Jim and opposite Brett. Overmile kept standing until Jack Cordray's sallow features rose to him and showed a thin glint of venom. Overmile took a seat then. Al Brett was directly at his right elbow, but he wasn't interested in Brett; his impartial mind had adjusted and balanced the weight of this game. Brett was Peace's problem. Jack Cordray, across the table, belonged to him.

Brett said, "How are you, Frank?" His skin was pink as a girl's and some secret thought released his rash grin.

Diamond Jim gathered up the cards, uncertainly speaking. "Gentlemen, who's playing?"

Brett laughed aloud. "What's the matter with your nerves, Jim? Too much opium?"

Peace pulled a hand full of silver dollars from his pocket and stacked them on the table. But Overmile drawled, “I’ll rest out.”

Brett’s sky-blue eyes turned an insolent humor on Overmile. “All Southerners are born tired.”

Overmile let it go. It was Jack Cordray’s gaunt fingers and Cordray’s eye pupils he watched. The man was cocked. One crazy impulse or one quick word would do the trick. Cordray was that kind of a wolf.

Frank Peace picked up his cards one by one, as Diamond Jim dealt them. He was loose in the chair, slouched a little, his knees, touching the under side of the table top—deliberately placed that way. The motion of the crowd in here kept changing the angles of light, the hum and the crackle of talk kept drumming against his ears. The music stopped with a final crash.

One of Campeaux’s floor men yelled: “Promenade to the bar,” and couples wheeled around the table. A girl’s arm came more distinctly into his vision and he focused it and he saw the frail Rose look at him with something charged in her long-lashed eyes. She went by.

He pushed his stack of silver forward. “Open,” he said. Cordray coughed and bent forward. Peace stared at him and saw a man half dead. In Julesburg a bullet had ruined Cordray; that memory, with its tenuous, toxic desire for revenge, was all that kept the man breathing.

Brett dropped his chips into the pot. “Stay with you,” he said evenly. “I always have and I always will. You bluff a lot of people, Frank. But you don’t bluff me.”

“Your luck,” pointed out Peace evenly, “has so far only been fair.”

“It’ll change,” grinned Brett.

“Cards, gentlemen,” suggested Diamond Jim, and caught his breath.

Peace said, “One.” Brett’s high blood laid a fuller flush on his skin. Restlessness kept pulling at his lips; it kept drawing at the corners of his eyes. All this was on the man’s surface, and Peace wasn’t fooled. Behind that lay a fixed and tremendous desire. “Bet ten dollars,” murmured Peace. The sweat of recent exertion had dried across Brett’s forehead, gluing dust to it; and dust was plain along the yellow edges of Brett’s hair.

“Call,” said Brett, and laid down a pair of kings.

Peace tossed three deuces to the table and raked in the center pile. Brett’s lip corners stiffened. “What are we playin’ for,” he challenged recklessly, “pins or money?”

A huge call threshed the turmoil. “Any damned scoundrel here from Kentucky? Stand up! I’m from Tennessee!”

Brett looked fretfully back of him to the big, red-bearded man swaying in the center of the hall. A deeper, thicker talk rushed in through the Club's doorway and the pressure of bodies out there sagged its canvas sides. Brett was smiling again.

Peace said: "Been sittin' here long, Al?"

"Not long," retorted Brett boldly. "Just came in from a little walk."

"A fast walk, judging from the dust in your hair."

"Maybe," said Brett.

The music started with a full, sharp crash. It caught Jack Cordray off guard; he flung himself up from the table with all his muscles shaking, his head twisted over at a hard, painful angle.

Brett growled, "Hell's wrong with you, Jack?"

Overmile quietly put his palms flat on the table, waiting in that half-eager position. Cordray circled his chair and sat down again.

Diamond Jim called out in his shaken voice: "Gentlemen, are you going to play cards?"

"Ask Peace what we're going to do," snapped Brett.

The giant with the red beard bawled again: "Stand up, you whelps from Kentucky!"

Peace observed Helen Lovelace move around the near-by blackjack table, her expression agitated and pale. Her eyes met his and turned expressively. Obeying the signal, he looked to the saloon's far corner and saw Roy Lovelace walking into Campeaux's office door.

"Peace," rapped out Brett, "I don't like waitin'. What do you want?"

A man strolled toward this table, drunk and curious; he stopped behind Brett's chair. But somebody ran across the room and dragged him back, murmuring: "Don't be a damned fool!"

Peace didn't answer Brett. He kept watching that patch of dirt on Brett's forehead. Overmile's palms were beginning to rub the felt cloth with a circling, feline softness. Cordray sighed and strangled back a cough. Brett's lips quit smiling; change shuttered across his eyes.

"Here," he said angrily, rashly, "I've got a handkerchief in my pocket. I'll take one end—you take the other. We'll draw, and shoot away. To hell with this crawlin' around!"

There was a row of faces beyond the table, dimly at the edge of Peace's narrowed vision. He saw that row fade farther and farther back. There wasn't any music going; he couldn't hear much talk around him. Blood slogged steadily through him, his underlip made a thick roll across the

gathering violence of his face. He put his left arm across the table, the big bone of his wrist sliding from his shirt sleeve. There was a heavy, ink-colored tuft of hair running down the back of his hand.

"All right, Al. Drag out the handkerchief."

Cordray coughed again, the force of it wrenching him around the chair. Overmile remained in that same bland attitude of waiting. But a color rushed solidly across Brett's skin; he held his fists on the table and refused to move them. His recklessness veered away; he was at once reserved and thoughtful.

"You've turned killer," he murmured. "I didn't notice it before."

A floorman walked across the hall and bent at Brett's side. "Sid wants to see you."

A long, heavy breath spurted through Brett's nostrils. He dragged his hands back from the table, never letting them drop below its rim. He stood up. "Come on, Jack," he said.

Cordray got uncertainly to his feet, like a man knocked groggy.

"What are you afraid of?" taunted Peace.

Brett said, more careful than he had been. "Now now, Frank. Now now." Cordray came around the table and Brett preceded him across the room, thus using Cordray as a screen against Peace.

A long, low surge of talk rolled through the saloon. The Tennessean staggered out of the background, his heavy voice rising: "You from Kentucky?"

Brett stopped; he whipped his slim body about. The Tennessean saw him do that and began to claw his thigh, to catch the gun hanging there. Brett jerked his own revolver out of its holster, lifted and aimed it and fired once. The Tennessean's long howl beat against the tent wall, ending in a wild and broken scream; when he hit the floor he was dead, his crash shaking all the chairs and tables in the place. A woman began to cry.

"That's the end of one damned nuisance," said Brett, and walked on to Campeaux's office.

Overmile shook his shoulders. "You cut it kind of fine, Frank."

Peace watched the door close on Brett and Cordray. He threw back his chair. He said: "Let's go," and started for Campeaux's office. Floormen were lifting the dead Tennessean.

A barkeep yelled: "Hey, professor, get that music goin'," and the orchestra jerked into another tune.

Overmile said, "What in God's world do you want, Frank?"

"I want him to fight," growled Peace.

A gun ripped its hard echoes down Bryan's street; and the noise of the growing crowd out there was like a mob howl. A man ran in through the tent's doorway, but a long ax handle cut a swift circle through that doorway and whacked him across the head; he dropped without a sound. Peace rammed his way directly across the dance floor, making a pathway that Overmile followed silently.

The fragile Rose wheeled in front of Peace and lifted her shadowed glance.

"Mr. Peace——"

He shook his head, pushing her gently aside. At Campeaux's closed door he lifted his foot and smashed it against the knob, breaking its latch. He went on through; Overmile made that opening in one long jump, pushing the door to behind him.

Brett and Cordray both whirled and laid their stiffening shapes against the far wall of the office. Campeaux sat with his huge, soft bulk overflowing the chair—the freckled, full-moon area of his cheeks intractably set. Roy Lovelace stood in the center of the place, stone-calm. Slow fury boiled inside Peace—and yet his mind was clear enough to receive an indelible impression then of Lovelace's proud, gentlemanly bearing, of a look reflecting sadness and ruin in a way he could not understand. Afterward Peace put his glance on Brett, and his voice sliced and pounded and stabbed at Brett.

"What're you afraid of? Where's your guts now, Al? I'm right here in front of you. That's what you've been howling for the last year. Come on—come on! Do you always have to catch a man in the dark—or beat him over the head behind a counter? Come on, Al—here's your chance."

Al Brett said from a long, cool distance, "I'll pick my time."

"Go up to Faro Evans' and put on a nightgown," said Peace contemptuously.

"I'll pick my time," repeated Brett, gritting out the words.

"Campeaux," called Peace, "both your hound dogs are yellow."

Silence came on, strained and uneasy, and filled this room until the air was hard to breathe. Cordray was a skeleton shape against the wall. Al Brett stood motionless, encased by a steely indifference. Only once had the attentive Overmile seen Peace's words break that aloof calm and bring a yellow flash from Brett's narrowed eyes; but instantly Brett had pulled himself behind that protective stillness again. Campeaux eased his body in the chair. Neither surprise nor anger got through the gray veil always covering his features.

"You're pretty proud right now, Frank," he observed softly.

Peace said: "What do you want with Lovelace?"

"Lot Withers said he saw Roy listening in at my door a little while back," murmured Campeaux. "I'm kind of interested. What'd you hear, Roy?"

Lovelace said: "Whatever I heard, Sid, I kept to myself."

"Always trusted you," remarked Campeaux regretfully. "But you're Bucko's good friend."

It disturbed Lovelace. He looked directly at Peace. "Did I carry any information to you, Frank?"

"Nothing but a warning to watch out for myself."

"That's all it was, Sid," said Lovelace carefully. "I don't give a damn what you do to me—but I wouldn't like to have you think I was a blabber."

"Let it go," suggested Campeaux, and laced his soft, white hands across his stomach. Lovelace shook his head, saying no more. He walked out of the room.

Campeaux laid a sly glance on Peace. "What do you want, Frank?"

"Nothing I can get here," retorted Peace. "But listen to me, Sid. If Lovelace is touched I'll be back—to see you."

"Very proud," said Campeaux in a dreaming tone. "Don't worry. You'll get what you want in due time."

Sound rioted and raced beside Campeaux's saloon, swinging tidally off the main street down an adjacent alley. Peace heard glass breaking; he heard shots flatten through the yonder dark.

He said, "Come on, Leach—the air's pretty foul here," and walked back into the saloon hall.

Campeaux turned on his two motionless henchmen. He said: "Why?"

Brett broke his long-maintained position; a dammed violence whirled him around the room. Pallor turned his florid skin the color of wax. He stopped in front of Campeaux. "Never brace a killer when he's primed. He's a killer, Sid. I didn't know that before. He's been crowdin' me for an hour."

"Afraid of him?" Light as the question was, it stung.

"I'll pick my own time," growled Brett. "But it won't be when he's running on his luck. You can't beat his luck."

"Faugh!" snorted Campeaux. His head swung around and he listened to the rising roar in the alley. The crowd was smashing down the boards of

somebody's store. Campeaux nodded. "Ring's brought his tie crews in. The town's open. Let Peace try to stop that."

"What about Lovelace?"

"I'll handle that."

Brett swung toward the door on the alley side. But he thought of something and turned back. "You keep that money locked up, Sid. Jack and me will be back for our share."

Peace went straight across a saloon floor that had been deserted in favor of the wild tumult outside. The barkeepers were idle, the tables empty. He saw Lovelace and Lovelace's wife standing soberly together.

Overmile said, "What now, Frank?"

"I want Brett to make a fight!"

"You sure have tried."

A weltering, savage confusion slapped at them when they stepped from the Club. Irishman fought Irishman all along the street. More men were charging into Bryan, more graders bent on trouble; and Casement's Irish track layers were swarming up from the boarding train to resist that attack. A construction Paddy lay full length in front of the Club, badly beaten around the head, and men stepped over him and surged into the swell of the hand-to-hand fighting now sweeping down the alley. It had turned instantly into a bitter affair between Casement's terriers and the tie cutters and the graders; without argument, without reason. Peace saw a tie hand swing a pick handle brutally down toward the white top of Collie Moynihan; Collie Moynihan lifted a long yell, and then the tie man was reached at by a dozen avid hands and he sank into the dismal oblivion of the dust.

Rose, the dance-hall girl, ran out of Campeaux's and tried to catch Peace by the arm. But he was plowing through the melee and she missed him—and turned and lifted a pale face to Overmile, whispering something to him. One of Casement's men saw her and laughed, and lifted her without effort, carrying her into the Club.

"Ye'll keep out of this, darlin', if you don't want a busted mug. In your business such a sad thing would help you none."

Peace beat his way through the shouldering conflict. The crowd plugged this alley from side to side, indiscriminately slugging and wrestling and heaving toward Haley and Leisure's wholesale liquor store farther along the alley. Lights glittered out of a second-story window and threw pale, agitated beams across the wrecked boards and torn canvas sides of the store, half

revealing the bloody fist battles rolling around the vicinity of that wreckage. Men hauled themselves from this turmoil, climbed the broken sides of the buildings for a breathing spell, and then threw themselves boldly down into the fight again. Peace came against an Irishman who, knocked totally unconscious by a stray rap on the head, was caught so tightly in the jam that he could not fall.

A bushy-bearded fellow yelled at the top of his voice: "There's Bucko!" and drove forward, trying to reach Peace. Overmile drew his gun and batted that man's on-plunging skull once with the weapon's barrel.

They broke through the storming edges of the mob, reaching the smashed doorway of Haley and Leisure's store. A handful of Casement's Paddies held back the attack here; but inside Peace saw a group of men breaking open stacked whisky cases and passing bottles out through the wide gaps in the store wall. Overmile shot past Peace and began swinging his gun barrel in wide, scythelike strokes. Steel cracked on bone. White faces wheeled and dropped, and men's lips stretched wide apart as they fell. Peace caught a man at the store counter and bent him over it, banging his head up and down. A bullet spit across the surface of the counter, scratching a white track deep in the pine; and the raiders in this room rushed out through a side door.

Archie Millard's curt order cut through the racket. "Straight through," and he ran in the back entrance, his troopers behind him.

Peace said, "Good boy, Archie." The troopers crowded the small room, and crossed it and passed out of the front doorway, spreading against the crowd. Out there Millard said calmly: "Take aim. Fire!"

That volley sailed above the crowd, its long and beating report falling like a hot breath down into all those swinging faces. "Take aim," repeated Millard in an unstirred voice.

Men were cursing in a high, screaming tone—turning and kicking and clawing. The tide rolled back toward Bryan's main street furiously. One of Casement's Irishmen, hard used in his defense of Haley and Leisure's store, said, "Bedad, soldier boys, you can have it," and sat down on the walk, altogether exhausted.

Millard said, "Clear this alley." The troopers stepped across the street, spreading against the sullen, withdrawing edges of the mob. A man appeared in a second-story window of Sailor Dick Shugrue's dive, intent on some trouble of his own invention. Peace, following the troopers, pulled up his gun and threw a shot that way, driving the man back.

The crowd recoiled into the main street; it turned there, facing that silent, thin troopers' line. Casement's loyal Irish were pulling together, outside the range of the carbines. The tie camp men and the graders rolled reluctantly toward the railroad tracks. A violent, smoky half silence brushed Bryan. Millard stepped in to the middle of the street, square and tall and undisturbed.

"Gentlemen," he said succinctly, "get on your wagons and leave Bryan. I am closing the town for tonight."

Peace, watching the mob closely, saw Duke Ring slowly slide backward into the shadows and disappear. A grader stepped forward from the group, his lank cheeks glittering with sweat, to speak for all of them.

"The hell we will."

If they got their backs up, Peace thought instantly, they would make a slaughterhouse of Bryan. The spokesman's taunt rippled a mass rage along the close-packed ranks; it pulled those bitter men together. He walked around the troopers, suddenly knowing what he had to do, and came before the spokesman who stood dismally still. The man's eyes narrowly watched.

"Bucko," he murmured, "I'll kill you!" But his arms came up too late; Peace cracked him under the chin with one swift drive of his fist and dropped him to the dust.

Somebody in that group said in a dead, groaning voice, "Other times comin', Bucko," and walked toward the wagons. Hatred flowed like a stream of acid around Peace; but he stood there and saw the graders break—and move on to the wagons.

15

Ring came into Campeaux's office. His flat lips were crushed and blood dripped along a fresh cut in his forehead. A bright animal glitter disturbed his muddy pupils. "I can't buck soldiers, Sid."

Campeaux drawled, "That's all right, Ring, I saw the play."

"Listen," said Ring, "if Bucko ever gets away from the end of track the tie hands will kill him for what he's done tonight."

"Ring," said Campeaux, "fade from town. Get yourself a job in one of the tie camps."

Ring murmured: "They'll kill him," and went out of Campeaux's back door. He stood in the alley, rubbing the blood from his forehead. Millard's troopers still stood in the middle of the street; the graders and tie cutters were pulling away from Bryan and Casement's faithful Irish roamed back toward their quarters beyond the tracks. Ring saw Peace talking with Millard and a wildness crawled through the squat, senseless fighter and turned him loose from his reason for a little while. He started up the alley toward Peace. But afterward he dropped back, disappearing.

Peace said to Millard: "Thanks, Archie."

Millard shook his head. "Who started this?"

"Campeaux, I think."

"You've got the graders all stirred up."

Peace said: "I'll see Reed about the vacation you want."

"I won't leave with things like they are. That can wait. Something rotten here."

"Sure," agreed Peace. He looked around him. His manner changed. "Where's Overmile?"

"Didn't see him."

Peace looked through the diminishing crowd of construction hands and wheeled back down the alley.

Millard hitched his belt more exactly into place, turning to the troopers. "Quarters," he said, and went over into the shadows of the depot.

Somewhere along the side of Casement's vast warehouse he saw a stooped and familiar shape coming up from the open desert beyond Bryan.

"Charley," said Millard.

Mormon Charley stopped. "Whar's the fightin'?"

"All over."

Mormon Charley keened the cold night wind. "Used to be a man could smell the smoke of a Injun camp five miles off. Moccasin tracks on the ground meant somethin'. Waren't no noises except buffler travelin'. Now the mountains are full of engine smell and the hootin' and tootin' of fools, and a man's sleep is sp'iled by tin-can towns like this." He grunted in the manner of an Indian, to show his complete disgust. Afterward he said: "Cherry's in the lodge. I got to take a train to Sanders to see General Gibbon." He went off, making no sound with his moccasined feet.

The lodge was a quarter mile out in the desert, a pale wedge in the moonlight. Millard saw Cherry standing by the door flap, and he caught her in his big arms and kissed her in an awkward, hungry way. Her head slid down against his coat; her voice was very quiet: "Here I am, Archie."

"I thought you were at Fort Bridger."

"Bridger's a long way—and you didn't come."

"I had planned to start in the morning."

She drew him inside the tent, and pulled him down to the blanketed bed, sitting in front of him with her two hands holding his arms. Candlelight threw a vague softness across her round cheeks and brightened her eyes. A narrow beaded band circled her black hair. "We can travel back together."

"Peace is in trouble. I'll have to stay here for a while."

"What trouble?" said Cherry.

"The toughs are on his trail."

She said: "His trail is your trail, Archie?"

"He's my friend, Cherry. To me that means something."

"To me it means something, also," she murmured. And her glance dropped away from him. Her lips were heavy with what she was thinking at the moment; her face was stolid with the wild, cruel hatred she conjured up against Frank Peace.

Millard said unhappily: "I don't like to see you sitting here this way. You belong in a house that has chairs and furniture. You ought to have a proper woman's dress—not this buckskin."

She murmured obediently, "What shall I do?"

"Go back to Fort Bridger. I'll come when I can."

She kept her glance on her hands; her round breasts stirred from a long, swift breathing. "You will never come," she murmured.

"Cherry—Cherry!" he groaned.

"No," she said in that low, sweet, relentless voice, "you will never come. That is what I see, Archie. You are a soldier and you are a white man. I can't take you away from that."

"Listen to me, Cherry. I have an order in my pocket transferring me to New York. I—"

She cut into his talk, her tone almost guttural. "Who did that?"

"That's the army way, Cherry."

But she was thinking of Peace who represented all that she feared, who seemed to be taking from her the hope of her life. Millard said: "I have made up my mind. I shall resign within two months." He had spoken so quietly, so drearily. Her glance went out to him, reading him through and through. She saw the misery and the struggle and the doubt there; and a light in her flickered out and left it dark.

"I am here, Archie."

He said irritably: "Don't let your voice sound that way—singsong and harsh."

She held his hands tightly. She crept toward him until her shoulders were against him. "You see?" she murmured. "You see?"

His big arms took hold of her and cradled her as though she were a child. The warmth and softness and the wild, willing sweetness of this girl swept like fire through him. "Cherry," he groaned, "whatever it costs me, I love you."

"Let us not speak of trouble," she whispered, "for that will come to us soon enough. I wish I had not gone to school. It has taught me nothing. I knew what my heart wanted, long ago, I shall remember your arms many years after I have forgotten to speak your tongue. That is all the wisdom I need."

"I'll be out of the army soon, Cherry."

Her lips came against his and stopped his talk.

Peace stopped at Nan's restaurant. He said to the colored girl, "Overmile been here?" The shake of her head sent him on. He turned down the nearest alley and came by Bardee Oliver's store. He could hear Eileen's choked

crying tremble out from the rear room; standing there on the board walk he could hear it—and feel it. He leaned against the door casing a moment and considered going in to comfort her. Yet there wasn't any comfort in him and he could think of nothing to say. Paused like that, ashamed of his reluctance, he remembered how she had turned to Ben Latimer for support.

Latimer walked out of the inner room, softly closing the door. He saw Peace and came over.

"Overmile been here?" asked Peace.

Latimer shook his head. He dug his hands into his pocket. "Mr. Peace," he said, "I don't understand. She was in there, wantin' a man's help, a man's arm. And you went away just then, forgettin' her, riskin' your life in a street brawl."

"Let it go, Ben," said Peace softly.

Ben Latimer was quick with his stout answer. "No, sir, I can't. No fight in the world could draw me away from Eileen if she wanted me. You use her hard, Mr. Peace. Well, you use all things and all people hard. Maybe it's right. I don't propose to intrude my advice. Only I want you should know how I stand. Bardee took me as a partner last week. Tonight Eileen said she hoped I'd run the business. And so I will, because there's nothin' she asks I won't do, till I drop. And I reckon it's fair I should tell you I'll press my own case with her. Because I can't help it."

Peace continued down the alley, his boots striking into the stillness of a town emotionally exhausted. Ben Latimer's talk stirred a low, raveling irritation around his head and left him depressed. The lights in Faro Evans' joint were going out one by one; a girl came down the stairs, recognized Peace and dropped back into the shadows. He remembered Al Brett's sudden surprised stare across the poker table and Al Brett's wondering remark: "You've turned killer." Well, Latimer was right and Brett was right; and he tramped the boards of this evil town with the smell of powder smoke in his clothes, with the hatred of men pushing him into the protective darkness. A lonely, dismal thought came to him then: This was the way killers walked.

The sharp rap of his boots on the board walk pulled him up. He turned at the end of the alley and skirted a building and entered the adjoining alley; moonlight laid a frost-silver glow along the rippled dust. Somewhere a man in a lodging-house room drew a low, melancholy tune out of a fiddle. Into this alley's absolute emptiness, into its velvet silence arrived the sharp urgence of Overmile's voice.

"Frank—get back!"

Peace was in the middle of the dust, the glow of the moonlight revealing him. He couldn't see Overmile, he couldn't see anybody. But he swung, his leg muscles cutting the dust, and slammed against the nearest building. A gun pumped swift, shocking echoes into the alley's dead calm; a bullet bombed up a round ball of dust where he had been a moment before, and this continuing lead lifted and followed him as he retreated, crushing through the building wall in little rapping sounds, like the flick of a thumb on a sheet of paper. His striding legs backed him into the black strip of a between-building corridor; he rolled around and slapped up his gun. He dug his knees and chest against the wall, feeling little gusts of air roll at his face as the bullets plucked by. There were two of them targeting this spot in the alley; two men farther up the street, their angling fire not quite reaching him. Overmile called sharply out of his covert across the alley.

"All right, Frank?"

Peace hooked his head around the building corner and saw the foot-long flash of a gun leap out of a black spot near the back side of Campeaux's big tent. He drove a shot at that darkness. At the same time Overmile opened up. Four guns were going at once, beating the dreary calm out of Bryan, slamming at the walls and windows of all the flimsy structures along the alley. But it didn't last long. The bullets quit fanning past Peace, and Al Brett's insolent call sailed out from the dark niche near Campeaux's.

"I'll pick my time, Peace."

They were both rushing back through the rabbit warrens of Bryan—Brett and the other man—who probably was Cordray. Overmile came into the moonlight. "Frank." Peace listened to the fugitive sounds run out. Afterwards he walked over to Overmile. "Follow?" grunted the Texan.

Peace said, "No."

"Glad to hear it," sighed Overmile. "The night's been kinda on the ramp." Then he cocked his shrewd glance on Peace. "What a hell of a time we're goin' to have from now on."

The two of them went wearily out of the alley, bound for the commissary building. Looking behind him, Peace saw Nan Normandy at the doorway of her restaurant. Her eyes were on him for a moment; for a moment only. This night, he thought, had changed his world. Somehow it had placed him apart from Nan and apart from Eileen. There was no way he could get back to either of them. He stumbled on the tracks, bringing Overmile's curious glance around. He and Overmile were altogether alone, a pair of men as good as condemned. The wildness of the toughs grew greater; the hatred of the toughs laid a harder pressure against him. It was two hundred miles to

Ogden. He doubted if he'd ever see Ogden. He was weary of fighting and yet Campeaux had made a target out of him; Campeaux had hoisted him up like a turkey on a pole. The odds were getting slimmer and slimmer, as Roy Lovelace had forecast. There was always an end to luck.

He murmured: "Campeaux wanted an open town. He didn't get it."

"Other towns comin'," growled Overmile.

Late in September, with the premonition of early winter in the wind, Casement's terriers left the unsavory dust of Bryan behind and pushed up the foot slopes of the Uintah range. Bryan with its "man for breakfast" each morning for five straight days, with its graveyard holding fifteen men and three women violently dead, became only a memory, only a yellow station house sitting alone beside the empty ruts of the main street. Coyotes came down and sat on the rubbish heaps; and where Campeaux's tent had been, so furious and glittering for a little while, a snake crawled and coiled itself under a colder sun.

In spite of dismal prophecies, the Union leaped the rising contours at a dizzy pace. The word was out among Casement's dogged Paddies that over in Nevada the heathen Chinese coolies were slamming down track toward Ogden at a rate that might beat the Union; and Casement's Paddies cursed and spat on their hands—and the steel spurted on. Dan Casement's material trains howled up the long grades in endless file by day and by night, and the constant clang of the steel being dumped was like the beat of a great gong in the high, windy wilderness. The fever of hurry was in everybody. Ties were laid on broken clods and scantly smoothed surfaces. Ballast was left for the cleanup crews coming behind. It ceased to be important whether the rail joints met on tie surfaces or hung between; that could be done later. Masonry work was abandoned in favor of ready-cut timbers that could be swiftly bolted.

The steel swung up out of Bryan, struck Black's Fork and surged on to Granger, into the provisional limits of Utah territory. At Church Buttes they were 6300 feet in the air. Seventeen miles farther on they dropped the station house of Carter to honor the old suzerain of Fort Bridger, Colonel Dick Carter. That fort lay eleven miles to the south, on the old road still used by the overland stages. At Piedmont they reached the huge stacks of ties waiting at Tie Siding and reached also the first summit of the Wasatch range. At Piedmont, too—or near it—Oakes Ames and his Credit Mobilier contract was ended, with the reverberations of Ames's financial crash already trembling out along the track. Somewhere Durant got money, and Dodge

flung Casement's tireless Irish into the breach; and the grading went on. Aspen Station found the rails poised at 7500 feet. Plunging down from this dizzy height, sweeping around the heavy grades of these bold hills, the Union's rails touched Bear River and found the evil-spawned Bear River Town waiting.

All the peaks of the Wasatch range were a-glitter with snow; all the higher meadows were filling with it, and just beyond Bear River Town snow touched the hasting Union rails for the first time, the bleak howl of an eastern wind announcing winter.

Coming back from end of steel at seven o'clock of a quick gray night Peace stepped into a half gale that rattled Casement's tin-roofed warehouses and bellied in Bear River Town's tent sides. Snowflakes the size of half dollars drove slantwise through the uneasy darkness. Under this blast the little huddle of tents and shacks made a forlorn, dreary show. It was, he understood, a town that belonged to the tie cutters—and the tie cutters, snowed out of the hills, drifted up and down the single street and sampled the saloons impartially. Here, too, were a good many private contractors' crews awaiting work. None of them had any love for him. Casement and Casement's faithful Irish were up the line, driving toward Evanston. Reed was there and Millard and Overmile were there. He stood here alone, returned because he wanted to see Eileen.

He crossed over near Campeaux's big tent. Wind drove his heavy overcoat against his knees and hit into his solid face. A pair of men went by, staring at him in a swift, sidelong way. Nan Normandy's little restaurant cabin adjoined Haley and Leisure's store, its heat-fogged windows showing a pleasant light. Bill Haley came from the store and saw Peace.

He said: "Just the man I want to see. Duke Ring came into town, drunk as a lord and raisin' hell. The vigilantes got together and locked him in an empty cabin."

"Proper," said Peace.

Haley shook his head. "Ain't so sure. The tie hands are actin' funny tonight. You'll be around?"

"Till the next train west."

"I got the boys ready, if anything should happen. This is a wild camp, Frank."

Peace trudged through the wind to the end of the street and went into the Oliver-Latimer store. And for a moment he stood very still, the making of an illusion before him. Latimer was behind the counter, looking up at Peace with a shrewd, dry expression. It was as Bardee Oliver had looked; and

Bardee's personality seemed to shine out of Latimer's eyes. Ben said, scrupulously even:

"She's in the back room."

Time did all things. Frank Peace walked on and knocked at Eileen's door, remembering past days that had seen him cross this store's threshold so impatiently, so eagerly. He heard her call in the same quiet, crystal-chiming voice, and went in. Eileen sat before a high, nickel-ornamented parlor stove with a basket of sewing in her lap.

She murmured: "How are you, Frank?"

He unbuttoned his overcoat and sat down, spreading out his long legs. Heavy hair lay ruffled and unruly across his forehead.

Eileen said: "You never change. Last night I thought of how you sat in that chair, of how many times you have stretched out like that—and scowled because of so many things in your mind I never could understand. And here you are, doing it."

"I'm not hard to understand, Eileen. There's little enough to me."

"That's not true, Frank. You've done things to me I can't explain. There are ways about you that are so dear to me. And some I hate. I can't help it." She looked at him, smiling. "You haven't kissed me yet."

He rose promptly and went over, his rare white smile appearing. He pulled her up and kissed her; and his heavy fingers deliberately disarranged the even swirl of her hair. She caught his arm. "Once that would have made me furious."

He said: "I wonder where your heart is, Eileen?"

She stared at him. She whispered, "Why should you wonder?"

He said carefully: "It was to Ben you turned the night your father was killed. Not to me."

"He stood beside me. You were a stranger that night, Frank. You were a man I'd never seen. You had death on your face."

"I suppose," he drawled, and sat down again. They talked on, without much effort. There was a thing in his mind he wanted to bring up and failed to find the words for. Never since that wild night had she mentioned the interrupted marriage; nor had he—though it was something that lay mutely between them. He felt that. Long after he looked at his watch.

"Train time," he said, and felt relieved.

"You'll come again?"

"Tomorrow night." He got up and buttoned his coat. He stood indecisively there, and presently went over and kissed her on a cheek. Her

eyes brightened; the corners of her lips turned soft and wistfully pleased. She put up a hand and held him in that bent position quite a little while. Not saying anything. Just watching the expression on his features. After a while she let him go. He said, turned ashamed and humble by that moment, "Good night," and left the room.

In the street again, he sought for his pipe and packed it. The wind blew out his matches, and finally he stepped into the irregular joining of two buildings and tried again, the smell of coffee drifting across his nostrils. He drew smoke heavily into his lungs, one shoulder point propped against the wall of Nan's place, his mind hard and keen with the memory of her voice and her laughter and the wild, gay sweetness of her personality. A few men stumbled over the tracks, coming from the black area by the station house. Somebody near him wheeled and ran back into a building. And then he saw a whole line of shifting bodies emerge from the station house's side and move deliberately upon Bear River Town's single row of buildings. A voice in that group said:

"There's Peace. There's the — —"

The man didn't finish. One single shot ripped out of a store near Peace and somebody in the oncoming group stumbled and fell. And afterward the group broke into a maddened charge and the windy night was burst apart by the slash and roar of rifles letting go. A pure, cold sliver of pain drove its way all through Peace and shocked and astonished him. Of a sudden he made a small gesture with his arm and fell full length on the board walk.

Vaguely he heard the metallic boiling of that gunfire all around him. Long after he heard a woman's voice in his ear—a voice that called his name between gusts of crying. He remembered he had dropped directly in front of Nan's restaurant, and then he floated out on an ebb tide into blackness that had no relieving light.

Through the fogged windows of the restaurant Nan saw him fall, and was in the street at once, crouched on her knees beside him. The graders were wheeling out of the dark; they were charging the log shack beyond Haley and Leisure's store, where Duke Ring had been jailed by the vigilantes. They were firing at the store—and being met by a solid sheet of flame and lead from the vigilantes barricaded inside.

She was scarcely conscious of all this as she got her arms around Frank Peace's shoulders, and lifted him and called his name. She was crying—crying bitterly. For this proud, stormy man in whom life was so vital and hungry and demanding a thing had no answer for her. It was like the drop of sun from the sky to see him so lifelessly there, the fiery greatness of his

personality extinguished utterly. He was, she thought, dead, or close to the gray border of death.

"My dear," she whispered brokenly. "My dear!"

16

Young Frank Harrison, the company doctor, lifted the dressing on Peace's chest and pressed his fingers gently along the edges of that ragged wound. The bullet, striking a rib, had been deflected upward, tearing a wide path through Peace's flat muscles. He replaced the dressing.

"I've always heard you were a lucky man, Frank."

"When do I get up?"

"Ten days, maybe. It isn't the walking that matters—it's the chest muscles we'll have to favor."

Peace stirred in the bed, not happy about it. Harrison said: "Better get lazy. That's something it wouldn't hurt you to learn. Your philosophy is all action. It could stand a little gentling. Look at the world. It's a damned beautiful one right now—if you could forget the men in it."

The coach sat on a siding near end of track—a coach rigged up by Reed to be Peace's private hospital. They had built a bed between a pair of seats and brought in a stove. Beyond Peace's window a shoulder of snow six feet high rubbed the side of the car. Looking over that wall, he could see pure whiteness sweep away under the heatless glitter of a November sun, rising fold on fold to the heavy Wasatch ridges. Up there a ragged row of peaks lifted sharp spires to the sky. A work train slugged its way laboriously along the main line.

"I've had some thoughts," admitted Peace, "but none of them very gentle."

"It's a good time to catch up with yourself. Your sort of man never does, unless he's flat on his back."

"I never did find out what happened back there at Bear Town."

"Fourteen dead graders," answered Harrison, and shook his head. "They were trying to get Duke Ring out of the log jail. They did, too. You got caught between fire. I happened to be coming through on the eastbound work train, just in time to see what I could do for you. You weren't much of a prospect at the moment, being pretty well bled out."

Peace asked his question with a show of idleness. "Where was I?"

"In Nan Normandy's back room." Harrison got his doctor's grip together. He stood a little while longer, looking down at Peace with a faint speculation, with the manner of waiting to answer the next question to come. But Peace turned his head back to the window; and Harrison left the car.

The noon whistles were blowing. Men struggled along the outside drift, sinking hip-deep in it, all their faces ruddied and bitten by the constant sweep of the wind. Collie Moynihan walked down the car aisle, short body swaying to the motion of his topheavy shoulders. The scars of the Bryan fight were healed welts along his dogged face. He paused by Peace's bed, an ineffaceable grin mellowing the bulldog grip of his features.

"And you're a good deal better today," he observed. "You're a-scowling, which is a healthy sign. 'Twas only a while back that you lay there and had no strength for anger. Then I felt a fear."

Peace grinned back. "We've done a lot of fighting together, Collie. Maybe too much."

"Ah," said Collie, the Irish lilt in his voice, "let it be. There's some as must be mild and there's some as must be black and always in the thick of it. You're that. It is nawt a thing to deny. The mild can only come along when you have broken the wicked skulls that must be broke. Shleep on that. You will have the fun and the mild will have their profits. Which is the better?"

"The mild ones smoke of a night on their own front porches, Collie. They'll own this country when you and I are drinkin' alkali out of a tin can somewhere else."

Collie cocked a bright eye on Peace. He said irrelevantly, "I have observed a woman admires a careful man, but it is the reckless one she loves and breaks her heart on."

"You're a rash scoundrel, Collie."

"I have had me fun."

"What are those boys doing outside the car?"

"Ye've noticed them? Well, they'll be guardin' the car as long as you're in it. 'Twould please Campeaux's fancy ones to settle you now. It's a bitter game."

Overmile and Millard arrived, Overmile stamping the snow off his legs. He didn't like the weather and said so profanely. "Ain't my kind of country at all. There's ice in my blood. I can feel it grittin' around."

Collie went quietly away. Overmile considered Peace with a thoughtful irony. "You know, Archie," he said, "this man Peace is a skinny-lookin' guy when he's flat on his back."

“Hell with you,” grumbled Peace.

“Sure, I know. You can’t beller, you can’t bawl, you can’t stand on your hind legs and paw the dust. You lie here and watch men walk by, you hear the steel clankin’ up ahead—and it just gravels you to feel the world marchin’ on, leavin’ you just a shadow in a hospital coach. Yours truly, L. Overmile.”

“Feeling better?” asked Millard.

“Something around here smells,” grumbled Peace. “I think it’s Overmile. Take him away, Archie.”

Millard faintly smiled, and soon ceased to smile. He said: “See you later,” and left the coach.

“He’s worse,” commented Overmile.

“Did he go to Fort Bridger?”

“Yeah. Last night he sat in the bunk shack for two hours without a word. I think he’s going to resign.”

Peace said: “Tarrant’s gone. Morgan’s gone. Archie, the poor devil, is ready to ruin himself. Well, here we are. Who’s next, Leach? You or me?”

“Cross that bridge when we come to it,” was Overmile’s careless answer.

Peace scrubbed the back of his head restlessly along the pillow. “How are you making out with Nan?”

“What?” grunted Leach, as though he hadn’t heard. But Peace’s glance penetrated his partner’s scrupulously maintained calm. Leach looked down a moment. “Dam’ boots get wet fast. Better get a new pair. Nan? Oh, I see her once in a while.”

“Wonderful woman.”

Overmile cleared his throat. He said: “Where’d you get the idea I had any notions that way?”

“Don’t talk like a fool.”

“No, Frank,” murmured Overmile. He was smiling now, gently and regretfully. “If I had a chance I’d push my luck. But there ain’t none.”

“How do you know?”

“Found out,” said Overmile.

“I’m sorry, Leach.”

“I’d like to know,” began Leach, and then quit talking. He laid a long, narrow glance on Peace’s face. “Well, never mind. I’ll drop in later.”

After Overmile had gone Peace tried to turn on his side. Needles jabbed a trail up and down his chest and he grumbled, “Damn such a thing,” and

resumed the flat position that had begun to be unendurable. He pulled one arm cautiously up to his face, shading his eyes. The one o'clock whistles hooted down the wind; more work trains came by. He attempted to bring his mind back to a definite point, to grip a question that lay like shadow in the top of his head, darkening all his other reflections.

But his thoughts kept pulling away and images flickered by his inner vision in transient, disordered haste. He remembered the time a cannon shell blew him out of a rowboat in front of Fort Donelson, and remembered the wheeling scream of Minié balls all about the river as the Confederates fought to hold the fort. There was the name of a Sioux chief that kept bothering him, a chief he had met down on the Washita in '66 under Custer. It wasn't important, yet that savage's face crossed and recrossed his mind's eye. He recalled the fight at Julesburg, seeing Ed Tarrant's big shape beating a wide hole through the massed rank of gamblers; he heard Tarrant laughing, clearly as if big Ed were at the end of the car. All these memories unrolled and grew large and warm companioning his solitude.

A man's life was a strange thing in retrospect; and strangest of all was the feeling he had of looking back, detached and unmoved, at the things he had done. Admiring some of those things, despising others—yet never quite seeing himself as the one who had done them. Back there Frank Peace was another man whose acts he observed critically, whose faults he saw with a naked eye. All that seemed to stir him now was an odd feeling of growing old. One day he would be another Collie Moynihan, rubbing his memories in the way a man would rub his cold hands over a lantern's globe. Nan's face appeared, and Eileen's appeared; and they both blended, and he could not distinguish either clearly.

Collie Moynihan brought his supper in at six. Darkness closed down, with the cold wind brushing along the coach and setting up thin, eerie sound currents. One of the guards came in to stoke the stove. Overmile presently arrived and sat on the edge of the bed.

"Where's the end of track?"

"Near Evanston."

They didn't have much to say. Overmile rolled a cigarette for Peace. They smoked through a long silence. Overmile slouched back, staring toward the car's dark ceiling.

"Town there?" said Peace.

"Was to've been. Reed changed his mind. Winter quarters at Wasatch—that's the plan."

Half an hour later Overmile looked at his watch. “Twenty feet of snow in Echo Canyon,” he said, and strolled down the aisle.

The overhead lamp dropped irritating splinters of light in Peace’s eyes; he lifted his arm to shade that away, and fell into a sleep broken by a troubled dreaming. He crouched before a campfire—he did not know where—with the sound of coyotes ululating all across a dark, wild desert. A dog lay beside him, the hair on its neck ruffed up, growling dismally; and then Mormon Charley’s girl appeared from the dark. She stood across the fire, with her eyes sprung round and wide by a personal hatred that poured a strange heat through him.

Nan Normandy’s voice called his name, softly repeating it: “Frank . . . Frank.”

He was wide awake, sweat crawling across his face. Nan stood beside the bed, her glance oddly concerned. “Frank—what is it?”

The near-by stove poured out an insufferable heat. He said, “Please close the damper,” and watched her shoulders gracefully stir and turn. She swung back to him.

“You seemed so troubled,” she murmured. “Or I wouldn’t have wakened you.”

He said, “It’s good to see you.”

The room’s warmth strengthened the color of her cheeks. Her lips were softly turned. She pulled off the snug cap she wore, a heavy, beaver-furred cap that came down about her ears. The light of this dismal coach lifted. She made a small, faintly reckless gesture with her arms and sat on the edge of his bed. Her hands caught his hands, and for a little while she let him see what lay behind her hazel eyes. It was a gallantry that made her beautiful, the glow of a womanliness rising out of its secret places for a man to behold.

“I’m not very wise, Frank. This time I’m making the mistake. I shouldn’t be here.”

“I wondered when you’d come.”

“I have thought of it for three days. I have thought of almost nothing else.”

“It isn’t my idea of a mistake, Nan.”

Their glances came gently together. For him there was again, as always in her presence, the feeling of a wild wind lifting his spirits high. There wasn’t any strength in him, which was all that kept him from pulling her down to him. The reflection of that gusty, hungry desire was very plain to

Nan. She bent and her lips brushed him, then she straightened back and tried to smile. And then they had passed some point they would never pass again.

"Do you see now, Frank?" she whispered. "We keep repeating the same mistake."

"I ruin what I touch," he murmured.

Her fingers tightened on his hands and held them like that, for a moment possessive. "You change people," she told him wistfully. "I've seen it happen often, whenever you walked along the streets of all these wicked little towns. Well, you've changed me. I'm not the same girl that came up the grade into Cheyenne seven months ago."

"I'm sorry."

Her answer came out like a cry. "Why? I'm not! I'm happy—I'm grateful! Didn't I tell you I didn't care what happened to me, except that I didn't want my life to be empty."

"Nan—"

She let his big hands go and got instantly up from the bed. She put on her fur cap with an odd swiftness, her fingers tucking under the edges of that rich hair. She stood a moment longer beside the bed, so quietly smiling, so wistfully sad; and a door closed, and the intimacy that had for a little while pulled them together definitely vanished.

"When I'm gone, Frank—"

His question jumped at her. "Gone where?"

She looked at him, her glance veiled and downslanting and tender. "All things come to an end. I have wondered. What will you do when this road is finished?"

"Another road, I suppose."

She thought about that, watching the solid features of this man slowly compose themselves into a somber calm. "Your life," she murmured, "will always be that way. Full of unexpected things, full of fighting." Then her voice dropped to a faint tone. "And sometimes full of loneliness. I know you, Frank." With that, she turned sharply and left the coach.

He lifted his head, the broken muscles of his chest painfully stirring, and saw only a shadow at the far end of the coach, and dropped his head. The outer sides of the car windows were solid sheets of ice; the wind had lifted a notch, shrilling around the car eaves and through the adjacent telegraph wires. He was thoroughly tired, with an ache in his bones, with a pure confusion in his head. It was painful to realize that his affairs were so badly scrambled, for he had always managed his life with a drastic simplicity, and

it came as a shock to discover in himself a strange inability to meet the problem uppermost in his mind.

Until now everything had seemed so clear. He could look at Archie Millard and see the decision Archie had to make, and he could feel a little surprised at Archie's failure to make it. A man, he had thought, ought to seize his difficulties and break them quickly with his hands before they broke him. This was the way to live.

Or so he had believed. Yet, looking at himself with an irritable distinctness, he understood how exactly Millard's problem was also his own. Archie could not solve it; and now he could not solve his. Flat on his back, with nothing but time to spend, he could not hold court on himself and reach judgment. He thought: "I've got no reason to condemn Archie. I'm making a poorer show than that."

A faint step sounded behind him, pulling him up from his thoughts. He said, "Who's that?" Afterward Eileen turned before him, her cheeks dim and cold between the lifted collar of her heavy overcoat.

"Are you too tired, Frank?" she asked humbly. "You look tired."

He remembered that Nan had left only a moment ago, and noticed again the chill that gripped Eileen's slim body and faintly shook it. "Eileen," he said, "have you been waiting outside?"

She said, "Yes," and bent her head toward the stove. "That's all right, Frank. I wouldn't interfere with her."

He said roughly, "That was a fool thing to do." But he saw how that hurt her. Her mouth tightened, like a child's; and a gentleness swept over him. Suddenly she stripped the heavy gloves from her hands and dropped to the bed, lying beside him with her face against his cheek, her body disturbed by a silent crying. He put one arm awkwardly to her shoulder. "Eileen, honey—Eileen," and he was borne back by an emotion that he could not explain to the time he first had seen her standing in Bardee Oliver's store doorway at Fremont. He recalled how the pride of that slim, dark girl had crossed Fremont's dusty street, how it had turned him in his tracks.

"Eileen," he said, "I wish—"

She sat up, eyes very bright. "Don't talk, Frank," she murmured, and laid her cool fingers across his mouth. "We have always talked too much always hurting each other by it. And what could wishes do for us now?"

He said curiously, "What would you wish?"

"Whatever it is, Frank, you shan't know it." She sat with her small, straight shoulders bowed toward him, that little girl's humbleness, that little girl's sense of waiting in patience coming strongly from her. When she

smiled a sweetness was on her lips for him to see. In her presence he always felt that deep comfort of a man arrived home. He felt it now. It was a warmth that soothed out the trouble in his head and made him surer of himself. How long had it been since he'd been touched by that sense of ease?

She talked to him with a deliberate lightness, soothing him with the even run of her words. "Bear Town's been very quiet since the fight. The tie cutters are going up toward Wasatch. Ben's getting ready to move the store there for the winter. We had some tourists come through the other day, from Boston. I entertained them and it was quite like old times. They told me everybody back East was in a fever to try the transcontinental trip when the roads were finished, but that the Credit Mobilier was quite a scandal. Poor Mr. Ames is bankrupt. Of course you've heard General Grant has been elected President."

He spoke from a deep drowsiness. "Eileen, where have you been these last five days?"

She didn't answer for a moment and he opened his heavy lids to see her lips half pale and pressed together. "Doctor Harrison came by every day to let me know," she said. "You were badly hurt, Frank. I saw you that night lying in Nan Normandy's room."

"I didn't know."

"I didn't want to bother you too soon. You're very tired now. I wish I—"

He closed his eyes. But he said: "What would you wish, Eileen?"

He felt her sway downward toward him. Her lips were near his ear. And her whisper was crowded with a passionate emotion. "I have my wish now, Frank. To be here with you."

He said: "That's the way it will always be, Eileen. If you still want me."

She touched him with her hand, brushing her soft fingers across his forehead. "My dear—my dear!"

When she rose from her crouched, cramped position fifteen minutes later he had fallen asleep. She drew on her mittens and turned up her coat collar, and stood there beside the bed. The heavy fighting lines were out of his face and his solid lips were near smiling. He lay like that, the square, unsymmetrical and thoroughly masculine body relaxed from its stormy energy. She reached down and pushed the jet ends of his hair back from his forehead; and a little color came across the ivory smoothness of her cheeks, and her eyes were soft with the secret pleasure of her thoughts then. She reached up and dimmed the car lamp, and left it.

Ben Latimer sat in a cutter, holding a restless team. She got in, drawing the lap robe around her. Ben said, “Belle—Star—g’dup,” and sent the cutter down the hard-packed snow crust. A wilder wind raced across the Wasatch chain and huge flakes turned the night to a dense, mealy, agitated gray. Bear Town, three miles away, showed its lights with a thin and intermittent glitter. “He’s all right?” asked Latimer.

“Yes.” Cloaked by an extra blanket, Eileen bowed her head. Her thoughts carried her to a warm, bright world remote from this one.

17

Ten days after the Bear Town fight, Peace rolled aside his blankets and stood on his feet. He walked down the car aisle and back again, and returned to bed. When Overmile came in that night he found Peace in a gusty, grinning temper.

"You've been up—against orders," accused the Texan. "Cut it out, Frank, or I'll steal your pants."

"Son," said Peace, "I could walk to Ogden now, pants or no pants."

"Sure. It's just a little stroll. The snow's so deep up the line the boys have to shovel down to find their tents, and you can get a clean shave any time by just stickin' your face out in that wind." Overmile considered himself gloomily. "The bottom half of my lungs is froze solid. Last night Millard let the fire die in our room. When I woke up things was droppin' down on my face. Know what? Well, every time I blew out a breath it floated up in that cold room and turned to ice and fell smack on my nose. It's ten below outside right now. I wish I was to hell and gone back in Texas."

Casement and Reed and Millard entered the coach, the three of them turned white from head to foot. They stripped off their heavy coats and gloves. Casement shook up the fire; and they settled themselves comfortably around, listening to the violent slash of the outer wind. A strengthening light flushed along the coach—being the head lamp of an engine roaring up the track under full power, bucking the snow with its attached plow.

"Got to keep that up from now to March," said Casement.

Reed, dark and restless from his worries, snapped at the thought. "We're nine hundred and fifty miles from Omaha. I've been dreading the approach of winter ever since last April. We'll see forty feet of snow at Wasatch Station in another month. I hope I never have to take another job laying down a road under conditions like that. We'll try it—if the material doesn't fail us, which is something we can expect. If the weather really gets bad all the snowplows in hell won't keep the track clear."

"Where's the Central now," asked Peace.

"Twenty miles short of Humboldt Wells."

“A little over two hundred into Ogden,” commented Peace. “We’ve got about seventy-five to go.”

“I’d be willing to swap our seventy-five for their two hundred,” said Reed. “Those people are smart. Their track through the Sierras has been snowshedded. Nothing’s going to stop their supply trains. They’ll be at Humboldt Wells in a week. Man came through the other day and said there wasn’t any snow yet in eastern Nevada. They’ve got a straight shoot into Ogden, except for a few hills that don’t amount to a damn. They’ll be layin’ three mile a day to our one. But if this road is blocked behind us for any length of time we’ll lay no steel at all.”

“Where’s Dodge?”

“Salt Lake. Brigham Young’s struck a bargain with him. The contract reads for Young’s Mormons to assume the grading from Wasatch to Promontory.”

The engine on the main line backed down the track and came forward again, roaring into the snow. All these men listened to that sound attentively; the engine’s bell set up a sharp clanging and men were yelling against the wind. A second engine whistled through the lower darkness.

“That’s the helper,” grunted Casement. “Two engines to run one plow. In November. What’ll it be like when January comes?”

Reed looked at Peace. “Dodge wired in from Salt Lake yesterday, asking about you. We’ve got another job, when this is through.”

“Where?”

“Buildin’ a railroad across Texas.”

They sat there in silence, eased by the heat issuing from the red-bellied stove; considering, as men will do when an adventure nears its end, the vivid memories commonly shared. Long afterward Reed said simply, “I miss Phil Morgan.”

Casement cleared his throat. He got up and buttoned his coat. “Texas is a long way off. We ain’t built this confounded line yet.”

Reed said to Peace: “Take your time about movin’ out of that bed. I don’t know any other place half as comfortable. We’ll reach Wasatch Station in probably seven days. That’s our winter camp.” Casement and Reed went out together. Overmile strolled behind. Millard remained by Peace’s bed.

“What would you do in my place, Frank?”

Peace said: “I can’t help you, Archie. You’ll have to make your own choice.”

“I know. But what would you do?”

"I'm the poorest man you could come to for advice."

Archie Millard shook his head. "There's no other man I could turn to. My mind's about made up, but I've got to have your advice before I do the hardest thing of my life. I'm not a soft man. I've got a good deal of pride, and God knows it's hard for me to choose between Cherry and the army—the only two things that count with me at all. I had come to a conclusion last night. And then I got to thinking of you. I know what you want me to do. I don't blame you for that, because you're my friend—and I'm proud you are. But I want to ask you a question and I want you to answer it honestly."

"The day you quit the army," said Peace gently, "is the day you begin to be a disappointed man. You'll never quit thinking of what you might have been. Cherry's a fine girl, but she's an Indian—and you'll be a squaw man. Some men can do that. Mormon Charley could. But you'll eat your heart out and the things in your mind will drive you crazy."

"Perhaps," said Millard quietly, doggedly. "But I want to ask you this single question." He stood with a balanced straightness—a splendid figure, a soldier born. He was, Peace thought, as sharp and perfect and gallant a type as generations of soldierly men could produce. The yellow mustache lay evenly along his sober mouth; his ruddy cheeks were strict with gravity. He drew a definite breath. "Put yourself in my place for a minute. Put yourself there honestly. You had no business loving this girl, but you did. That's a destiny none of us can order. You paid your compliments to her until she put her trust in you. There's no halfway giving with Cherry. Her life is yours to dispose of, because she wishes it to be that way. Whatever contentment she might have had living her accustomed life with her own people you have destroyed, because you showed her another kind of life. She built her hope around you. If you go she has no hope left. Would you leave her, Frank?"

Peace lifted his hand to shade the light from his eyes—to avoid seeing the desperate look on Millard's face. He wondered then how much Millard knew of his own problem—it fitted so closely into the groove that his mind kept endlessly circling. This was the question he had not been able to face.

He said: "No, Archie."

"You see?" said Millard. He shrugged his broadspread shoulders. "Well, there are things a man can do, and things he cannot do. Either way a penalty hits him. I'm supposed to report back to D. A. Russell for transfer within ten days. Next Saturday I shall send in my resignation from the army." He wheeled and left the coach.

Peace rubbed his palm slowly back and forward across his face, the simplicity of Archie Millard's words remaining behind to stir him in strange

ways. He remembered Eileen standing in the bleak night by the car, waiting for Nan to go; he remembered Eileen lying against him, crying. He had made up his mind at that moment what he had to do. He had told Eileen. And yet, his thoughts terribly clear, he knew there had been a faint hope surviving in his heart, like a doorway held ajar for escape. The sense of shame in him deepened and deepened. Mentally, he reached out and closed the door; and when he did so his hope died. Nan had seen all this so much more clearly than he had seen it. He recalled her as she stood by the bed, her lips soft with the wishes of a woman, her glance wistful in a way he couldn't comprehend. He murmured, as she had done, "All things come to an end," and knew he was as near the truth as he would ever be.

In Nan was a richness, a completeness; in her was a flame he had seen. All men, even the toughest of them, had a picture like that secretly in their hearts, fashioned out of their deep desires. So had he. To few men did the picture ever completely materialize; and it had been one of the profound shocks of his life to see her, the image of his wishes, sitting in the smoky coach of the Cheyenne-bound work train. She had been faintly smiling, and that smile he would never forget, calling like wind across the width of the world.

Through his sleep, long afterward, came the howling of an engine's whistle against the wind. He felt the coach roll along the track; he lifted himself on an elbow, to see the solid banks of snow creep by. They were moving upgrade.

Evanston's few houses showed their ridgepoles as vague angles on the surface of the rising snow. Past Evanston the steel mounted one frigid mile at a time, through glittering wide walls twenty feet high, from one contour to another across a world turned solidly white. Foot by foot the telegraph poles disappeared beneath the drifts, the crossarms near enough to reach by the lift of a hand. Standing on the platform of the coach, Peace watched the boarding train creep another completed stretch toward Wasatch, now six miles away on the howling, winter-beleaguered heights. Snow laid a thick-driven screen across the sky; the bundled forms of Casement's terriers were vague shapes at a distance of twenty feet. A man stood propped against his shovel as the coach rolled by, and shook his head.

"Ye'll do better back where it's warm, Mister Peace."

That night Eileen rode the cab of an engine up from Bear Town to see him. She was excited and pleased at the trip and the little-girl glow in her

eyes brought out Peace's smile. "They were quite nice to me," she said. "I sat on the engineer's side."

"They should be nice to you, Eileen. You're an old-timer on the Union Pacific now."

"It's you," she said thoughtfully, "that makes them nice to me. They know that you and I—" But she bit the sentence between her teeth and a quick color stained her cheeks. "I didn't mean to say that."

"Why not?"

She shook her head. Her old pride straightened her shoulders. "I don't know your mind very well, Frank. You're not a changeable man. Yet you have changed, and I won't hold you to any promises. I want you to regret nothing. I couldn't have you sticking to a bad bargain."

She had been speaking in a quiet tone; but that last sentence came out swiftly, like a repressed cry. She was offering him his release, and she was trying to be casual with him and not succeeding. He turned his head away, staring at the solid frost on the window. And shame stirred him painfully. He said gently: "No, Eileen. You're all a man could ask for. I'm happy over my luck."

The silence came rushing on. He rolled his head around again. Her eyes were bright and near tears; yet that steady glance went into him powerfully and searched him. Afterward—and he could not tell what her thoughts were then—she sat down on the edge of his bed and her fingers touched his hand in a light, brushing way. Afterward her talk was faintly gay.

"What will you do when you're through here, Frank?"

"Reed says Dodge has us booked for another road, in Texas."

"Yes," she murmured. "I thought it would be something like that."

"It won't be so bad, Eileen. I'll promise you—"

"I'm not complaining," she broke in instantly. "Oh, perhaps I was once. It seems so long ago—and so many things have happened. The things I thought then aren't very real now. Only one thing is. I want to be with you, Frank."

There was a fragrance and a simplicity about this girl; there was a humble candor that kept deepening his shame. He remembered when she had been so certain of herself. But he had destroyed that world she lived in —all its security and its beliefs; and now she sat beside him, not afraid of what lay before her, yet hesitant and disturbed. He thought again of the only comparison possible. Like a little girl walking through darkness.

He said: “It’s a little hard for me to pull myself up, or I’d come after a kiss.”

It brought back her deep color. She caught her two hands together and looked at them, afraid of his eyes. She put them on the bed and bent, her lips warm when they touched him, warm and shy. She drew back, uncertainly smiling.

“Why should I feel a little guilty, Frank? I always do.”

An engine backed down the grade, the hiss of ejected steam sibilantly cutting the high run of wind. Brakes squalled abreast the coach and a whistle hallooed.

“There’s your buggy,” said Peace.

She stood up, her fingers hurrying with the buttons of her coat. Excitement showed in her eyes again and her laugh was soft and suppressed. “It’s fun. Ben’s packing up the store. We’ll be at Wasatch next week. I don’t know when I’ll see you next.”

“In Wasatch, then,” said Peace, and watched her slip down the coach aisle.

Thoroughly weary, he soon fell asleep and was vaguely conscious of the coach being towed, late at night, up another constructed mile of the grade. In the morning he woke to a whiter, higher world, and slid into his pants and tramped the coach aisle for half an hour, testing his strength. That night end of track lay three miles from Wasatch; and Overmile came in and gossiped a bit and went away. There was no letup to the gale sweeping viciously across the world, there was no diminution to the dense, driven snowfall. The following day they made another mile, and then took two days to gain an additional mile. Winter fought Casement’s Irish bitterly, knifing through their coats and numbing their hands; the right of way hourly vanished and had to be discovered again. Five days from Eileen’s visit a savage night roared down on Peace’s coach, with Wasatch Town five hundred yards ahead.

Harrison dropped in, looked at Peace’s chest and said, “You can buckle on the harness tomorrow,” and left. With that cheering news, Peace fell asleep.

A voice said, “Well, Frank,” with an intonation that dragged across his shallow slumber. For a moment, not quite wakened, he thought it was one of Collie’s guards announcing daylight. Bitter cold flowed through the car and the roar of the wind was like the rush of water over a high fall, shaking the coach on its heavy springs. Light dropped a pale glow against his eyes when he opened them.

Al Brett stood beside the bed. He had his hands stuck into his overcoat pockets and a thin smile stretched a line across the wind-whipped coloring of his cheeks. His lashes were white with frost.

Shock pounded through Peace in long, somersaulting beats; it whipped his mind keen. His gun hung behind him, beyond sudden reach. The fire had gone out of the stove and he knew then Collie's guards had deserted him. He lay wholly still, murmuring: "How are you, Al?"

"Cold," said Brett, soundlessly laughing. "Cold and damned sleepy. It's a hell of a job to plug through this wind. But I was kind of curious. I'd heard you was to be a cripple. That would be a joke. Frank Peace a cripple. What's the answer, Bucko?"

He had been drinking; his eyes were yellow and restless. Temper fluxed uncertainly in them, like the unstable spooky reactions of a cat animal. His fists bulged his coat pockets, but the right pocket sagged under the weight of a gun held there. His hand, Peace guessed, gripped the gun. Peace remembered the lashing he had given this man in Campeaux's saloon at Bryan.

"I've got to disappoint you, Al, I'm all right."

"Disappoint me? Me?" That rash, bold grin stretched its tighter line across Al Brett's mouth. "What the hell did you think I came here for?"

Peace said: "You answer that one."

Al Brett quit grinning. A faint noise at the car's end whipped his head around; it swung as swiftly to Peace again, eyes bright as shining silver. As warmthless. "Your guards got thirsty and walked up the grade to get a drink. I saw 'em go."

"That's what you waited for, Al?"

"Yeah," murmured Al, and rubbed his boots gently along the car floor.

Peace considered his possibilities and found them no good. He could not get at his gun; and the guards were beyond call. He twisted his head along the pillow; his long toes made a tented shape in the blankets at the foot of the bed. The bitter air scouring down the coach aisle sparkled like frost in the dim light.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"One o'clock of a damned rough night," Brett's stare was a ceaseless, greedy pressure against Peace, like the insistence of a knife point. Brett's cheeks were strict and smooth. "You're a hard gent, Bucko," he mused. "I give you credit. You know what I could do to you right now?"

"It's a thought," said Peace indolently.

Brett growled, “You know damned well it is. And you’re thinkin’ I’ll do it.”

“Yes,” said Peace, “I think you will.”

Brett scowled. “Listen. I was sittin’ in Campeaux’s tonight. I got to considerin’ those guards Collie Moynihan’s been puttin’ around this coach. It made me sore. To hell with you, Bucko! You can figure Duke Ring or Jack Cordray for this sort of a stunt. But I never assassinated a man in his bed and I never will! I got a little pride. I want you to know it. I’m not Ring and I’m not Cordray. I’m Al Brett. I’ll fight any man that lives and one day I’ll fight you, in my own way. But you’ll be on your two feet when I do—see? You’ll be on your feet, able to take care of yourself. I don’t shoot my turkeys on the roost. I don’t have to. That’s what I come to tell you, Bucko.” He was angry then, angry in a bold, flaming manner. “I don’t want any advantage from you and I want the whole damned world to know it,” he snarled, and brought both his hands from his pockets, and wheeled down the coach aisle.

An hour later, when Collie Moynihan’s two guards came back from Wasatch they found Peace sitting up in bed, cleaning the barrel of his gun. He said: “Wish one of you boys would get that fire going. It’s twenty below if it’s anything.”

Around two o’clock of the following storm-lashed afternoon he stood on the steps of the coach as it crawled slowly up the grade and stopped in front of the depot. Wasatch’s main street was a white canyon running back from the new track; a canyon feeding tunneled-out-passages leading back into a double row of scattered cabins entirely lost in the snow. He stepped down from the coach, his legs spread apart in the manner of a sailor touching firm ground; his knees were a little uncertain. But he stood there and bowed his head gratefully against the full beat of the wind, grinning at Overmile and Millard who waited for him.

“Got a job for a good man?” he said.

Overmile said: “What’s your specialty, pilgrim?”

“Trouble, I guess.”

“Hired,” stated Overmile. “And, brother, you’re goin’ to get stoop-shouldered from the work.”

Bill Wallen walked down Wasatch’s bitter street through a premature, wind-torn twilight. Opposite Nan’s he paused and saw a man enter the restaurant; and so he resumed his endless tramping, circled the depot and started back.

At Campeaux's Ring stopped him. "What you doin' here? Thought you was down by Echo Canyon."

"No," said Wallen, and went on.

Nan's windows were covered by a milk-white sheet of ice. He stood there, touched by a faint current of warmth creeping out of the building cracks, and tried to see through. Presently somebody left the restaurant—the same man he had seen enter a little earlier. He paused at the door, stiff and uncertain, as ready to run as to go in, thoroughly at the mercy of his contrary impulses. He didn't know what made his hand turn the knob. He closed the door behind him, the light harsh on his eyes.

Nan said, "Sit down."

He waited a moment until his vision had cleared. He unbuttoned his buffalo coat and took off his cap. The streak running back through his black hair was almost pure white and his face had a wire-drawn thinness. He put his shoulders against the door, watching the girl in a weary, humble way.

"Are you sick?"

He said, "No. Just a little bit cold. I walked in from the head of Echo."

She was listening to him. Her eyes were guarded, and he saw her lips change expression. His voice ran very carefully along the words, as though he remembered what decent speech should be like. "I suppose there is no reason why I should be here. It would be simpler if I weren't. Do you know who I am?"

She said, so calm that the moment went black to him: "I think you are my father."

"Yes," he said, "that's right," and had no hope in him at all. "I thought you ought to know. Perhaps I'm wrong. It occurs to me I've been wrong most of my life. Of course, after fifteen years, I couldn't expect to mean anything definitely to you." His teeth chattered. "You have become a lovely girl. Your mother also had yellow hair. Good night."

"Wait."

She came around the counter, up to him. She looked at him. "I have always remembered," she said quietly, "the sound of your voice. You used to read to me. It was a book of stories about strange lands. Your voice is still the same." Then she said, at once near tears, "Why, I'm like you!" And laid her hands on his shoulders.

He put his arms around her, turning his face. He spoke in a ragged, broken voice: "I think your mother would think a little more kindly of me if she were here to see this."

That night a wild blizzard lashed across the Wasatch peaks and drove every living thing from the howling streets of this camp. Work trains were caught on the grade, telegraph wires went down, isolating end of track. The snow piled higher and higher.

That night Peace lay in his room in the commissary shack, a roaring fire warming him. Casement and Reed were there, uneasily listening to the storm. Reed said: “I think we’re lost.” In the back room of the Oliver-Latimer store Eileen bowed her head over a sewing basket and tried not to think of Peace. And at this moment Archie Millard sat before a soap box and lantern in one of the boarding train cars and wrote out his resignation from the army.

18

Two days later a harried, exhausted operating department cleared the road from Wasatch back toward Green River, releasing half a dozen storm-bound construction trains strung along the way; and that day Archie Millard put himself and his horse in an eastbound boxcar without saying anything to Peace and rode to Bear River Town. Here he got into the saddle and took the Fort Bridger road through a soft, mealy fall of snow. Late at night he hailed the guards at the fort.

It was a two-company post, with the usual row of army quarters stretched along a little parade ground. The civilian Colonel Carter, more or less a court of first and last resort for a territory a thousand miles square, had his house adjoining the military quarters. A few mountain men wintered here in cabins built long ago by old Jim Bridger; and out a short distance from the fort—but under its sheltering wing—a wandering band of Arapahoes had pitched their tents.

Archie Millard put up his horse, paid his respects to the major commanding the post and sought out Mormon Charley, finding him in the sutler's shack fraternizing with half a dozen restless-eyed beaver trappers. Mormon Charley said, without being asked:

"Cherry's visitin' her cousins. It'll be the biggest tent."

Millard walked back across the parade and past the guard line, deeply angered. Smoke spiraled up from the Arapahoe tent tops, and he heard the murmuring of Indian talk and short bursts of Indian laughter. A dog ran before him, growling as it came, lifting its feet gingerly from the snow. Millard turned at the largest tent and had to bend low to crawl through the half-laced flap.

The smell of damp clothes, of food and of bodies reached his nostrils in a rank, strong wave. There had been a little conversation going on, but it stopped; and he stood up in this semi-dark interior and looked around, more irritated than curious, to see a typical Indian family hunkered down along the edges of the tent. A few old women and a few old men. Three grown girls in the background. Half a dozen young bucks sitting side by side. A very young baby laced into its carrier and propped against a roll of blankets.

Cherry was with the girls in the rear of the tent, seated like the rest of them, her shoulders drawn forward, her whole body immobile. She didn't show any expression. He was a stranger here and made to feel so by the opaque stare of all those eyes; they had stopped talking and they had stopped moving—and they were waiting for him to speak and be gone.

"Cherry," he said, "come with me."

She rose instantly. One of the young men, thin and bold-nosed and wide of lip, turned his head to her, running out a quick row of Arapahoe words. Cherry said something briefly back and came across to Millard. He went out before her, tramping back the trail. But a few yards on he stopped short and turned back. She was following in his steps Indian fashion, her head bowed down. Her eyes, incurious and obedient, lifted to find why he had halted—and that pure Indian look sent a duller and more painful resentment through him. "Go in front of me, Cherry," he said, and trailed her to the parade ground. She took him into one of the small cabins, into the familiar presence of Mormon Charley's guns and traps and accumulated plunder. A slow flame in the fireplace lifted light across the room. Cherry stopped, her hands idle beside her, waiting for him to speak.

He said, in desperate protest: "Why do you go there?"

"They are my people, Archie," she murmured.

This girl's shoulders were even and softly rounded, and her body was slim; the sparkle and glow of girlhood was in her, the hot temper of life was in her. But he was thinking of the older women in the tent, turned slovenly and formless by the years, their cheeks wrinkled by a thousand tent fires, their manners stolid as beasts.

He said: "Each time you go into that tent, Cherry, you're pulled down another inch. Each time you sit on those blankets it becomes harder for you to use a chair and a table. I don't want you going there."

She said, "Where shall I go?"

"Make your friends among my people."

"They will not have me. I can only go where I'm welcome. In that lodge nobody is ashamed of me."

"I don't want you going there!"

She said submissively: "Then I will not go."

The softness and the gentleness of this girl took all the anger out of him. "Cherry—Cherry," he groaned and pulled her against him. She held his arms, her fingers fiercely biting into his muscles and lifted her suddenly

lovely face for his kiss. He forgot the difference that separated them and did not remember it for a long, long interval.

"I have resigned from the army, Cherry."

She pulled back, reading his eyes, reading the lines of his cheeks. "Are you sorry?"

"No," he said, and threw his will against the doubts creeping grayly like ghosts into his mind. "Come with me."

They crossed the parade ground to Colonel Carter's house and found him sprawled in wide-legged comfort before a cheerful fire, a big man with a tremendous voice. "Lieutenant Millard," he said, as though he spoke to all the desert, "I'm kindly pleased to see you."

"Colonel," said Millard, "you are a legal magistrate. It is our desire to have you marry us."

The colonel was a diplomat who had learned to keep his emotions well concealed in this land of willful individuals. He said, "So," in a slightly changed voice and got up and crossed the room to a table. He put on his glasses and stood in mild meditation—seeing the handsome shape of Millard fill out the blue uniform, seeing Cherry's dark eyes turn back his interest with a show of half fear. He said, "You're quite sure, Millard?"

"Quite sure."

Carter lifted his voice, throwing it through the house. "Mother—Quincy, I want you both." He turned to a little shelf at the corner of the room and found a weathered brown book containing the laws of Iowa, and riffled its pages. Mrs. Carter and a young man came in. Carter took off his glasses and put them immediately back on again. He spoke in a way that was, for him, very quiet. "How old are you, Cherry?"

"Twenty-two."

"Both of you," suggested Carter, "wish this?"

"Yes," said Cherry. "Yes." Millard only nodded.

Carter looked at the book. He cleared his throat. He said: "I don't believe I ever knew Mormon Charley's last name. What is your last name, Cherry?"

Cherry threw a quick glance at Millard. Her fingers held to his arm. She said: "I heard him speak it once. La Bonte. That is it. I am Cherry La Bonte. My mother was Little Woman. She was afterward named Katherine by a black-robe priest who once rode through Bear Valley and asked my people to pray."

Carter thrust a quick look of appeal to his wife and got no help; and then he looked at the statute book, and closed it, and spoke hurriedly from

memory. “I, William Carter, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the laws of the territory of Wyoming, do pronounce you, Archibald Millard, and you, Cherry La Bonte, to be man and wife.”

Millard said evenly, “Thank you, Colonel,” and bowed to Mrs. Carter.

Cherry stared at Carter. “Is that all? Are we married?”

Carter saw the doubt in her eyes. He had dealt with Indians the greater part of his life, and he understood the suspicion with which they looked upon white men’s customs. Even Cherry, half white, could not quite escape that primitive distrust. And so, because he knew this—and knew how to answer it—he reverted to the manner he used on Indians speaking slowly and rather sonorously.

“My words will be written in a book. I shall write them in the book. Any man may come to the book and see that you have been married. The words will say so. They will not grow dim.”

“That is right,” said Cherry and smiled.

Millard touched her arm. They went into the silent snowfall, and crossed to the cabin. Mormon Charley was there, waiting. He threw a sly, sober look at them.

“I have married your girl, Charley,” said Archie. “Tomorrow I’ll get another cabin. But for tonight, if you don’t mind too much, I’ll put you out of this one.”

Mormon Charley laughed. “For a squaw man, Archie, you’re a polite cuss.” But he had some feeling in him and it sobered him when he looked at his girl. “Cherry,” he said, “I reckon I lose you now. God knows it’s been my wish for you to be a happy girl.” She didn’t move, nor did she speak; and Mormon Charley, knowing her better than she knew herself, patted her awkwardly on the back and left the cabin.

She kept her round, dark eyes on Millard who stood so solemnly in the room’s soft fireglow. She missed nothing that was on his face. She whispered: “Will you ever be sorry, Archie?”

His words were as gentle as a man could make them: “I am not sorry, Cherry.”

Coming into Fort Bridger the middle of the next day, Frank Peace found Millard standing in the cabin doorway, smoking his pipe. Millard had got himself a civilian suit; he hadn’t thought to shave. When Peace dropped out of his saddle he observed the reserve in Millard’s glance.

“You’re too late, Frank. I’m a squaw man now.”

Peace shook his head. “I heard you’d started for Bridger. But the weather was so confounded bad I got worried.”

“Take your arguments and go home,” said Millard roughly.

Peace said: “I had no arguments. And I wish you luck.” But he had something on his mind that wouldn’t leave. “What will you do?”

Millard shrugged his shoulders. Something, Peace thought, had gone out of his man the moment he put his uniform aside. A pride of carriage. A hope —replaced by a stolidness that wasn’t real. “Doesn’t much matter. But I’ve got a civil engineer’s education. I guess I can use that, running boundary lines for cattle ranches and homesteaders.”

“You’ll stay here?”

“No,” said Millard definitely. “I’m taking Cherry away from these Indian relatives. Probably we’ll move over to Laramie Plains and set up a ranch of our own.”

“I’ve got a little business with Carter,” reflected Peace. “Then I’ll be on the road back.” He smiled a little, but it was a regretting smile, formed by memories of his friendship for this man. “Will I see you again, Archie?”

“I’ve got to go to Wasatch to get the rest of my plunder.”

“Come with me.”

“No,” said Millard, drawing back inside the stolid shell again. “I’d rather not talk with you. Good-by, Frank.”

Peace said gently, “So long, Archie,” and went rapidly across the parade, leading his horse.

Cherry, coming out of the sutler’s cabin, saw Peace stop to talk to Archie, and saw him go on. That fear she could never quite rid herself of turned her toward the soldiers’ quarters. There she stood a good half-hour, watching Millard poised in the cabin doorway, watching Colonel Carter’s house. Peace presently came from Carter’s house, got on his horse and rode back down the parade, her straining glance catching no sign between him and Millard. When Peace had disappeared beyond Bridger’s picket line, riding into the heavy fall of snow, she went over to the cabin.

Millard followed her in, knocking the ashes from his pipe. “I’m going up to Wasatch to get the rest of my things. I’ll be back in two days.”

She didn’t answer. She stood against the cabin wall, watching him pull on his long coat and strap a revolver belt about him. He saw how bright and intent her eyes were as they followed him, and saw the rigid shape she made. He went over to her, faintly smiling. “It’s all right, Cherry.” When he

kissed her he felt her arms hang to him and afterward he had to pull them down. He repeated himself: “I’ll be back in two days,” and left the cabin.

At the doorway she watched him get his horse and ride across the parade, following the trail made by Peace. He lifted his arm and waved it at her, but a numbness held her there, beyond the possibility of answering him; a numbness made by fear. And behind that fear was a formless, helpless, primitive anger. After the white snow screen had covered him up she ran out of the cabin, her head lowered and swinging from side to side, and came into her relatives’ lodge. Only one man was there—the bony big nosed man with a wide mouth, who was her cousin.

He said, in their own language: “What do I see? A woman running from the lodge of her man. He will come here and beat you. That is right.”

She called him by his name. “Walks-at-Night. There is another man, a friend of the lieutenant’s, who hates me. He came here now and talked, and went away. The lieutenant is following. He won’t come back.”

“So,” said Walks-at-Night. “Your man is weak to listen to this other.”

“This other,” said Cherry, “has a power. A bad eye.” She folded her hands tightly across her body; she swayed and she said in a wild, terrible way: “He should be dead! He should be dead! The lieutenant will not come back.”

Walks-at-Night looked at his cousin carefully, his slack big lips meeting in a straight line. After a little while he left the lodge. In another lodge he got a gun, discarded his blanket in favor of a white man’s blue army shirt, and trotted out into the woolly drive of the snowstorm.

Without particular hurry he followed the up-and-down ridges northward, the straightness of his trail avoiding the curves of the Fort Bridger—Bear Town road. An hour later, well satisfied he was in front of Peace, he settled himself at the top of a low roll of ground overlooking the road and squatted down to wait.

He had not been there long when a horse and rider materialized through the thick and continuous screen of snow. The rider was dressed in a long blue army overcoat and he had his head bowed against the snow. Walks-at-Night laid his gun sights on that figure and followed him this way another twenty yards, or until the target was too plain to be missed. His shot sent a muffled, damp echo across the smothered world; the rider, never straightening from his bowed position, fell from the horse slowly and lay still. Walks-at-Night drew back into the gray mists and vanished, pleased from knowing he had destroyed the man with the bad eye.

But Peace had taken another trail toward the railroad; and it was Archie Millard who lay in the trail, his hand reached up to grasp a button of his overcoat and halted there, his yellow head uncovered and his life quite gone.

When Mormon Charley returned to the fort from a scouting trip that evening he heard the news. Millard's horse had drifted back to the fort and a squad of soldiers, tracing the trail, had found Millard and brought him in.

Mormon Charley saw his daughter neither at the cabin nor at Colonel Carter's. He knew then where she was—and went directly to the Arapahoe camp, to the tent of her relatives. She was alone in the tent, a small, round huddle of clothing in this growing darkness. She was swaying back and forth; she was saying something in the Arapahoe's language. When he called to her she lifted her head—and, old and tough as Mormon Charley was, it gave him a shock to see the red, savage gleam of her eyes. She stared at him and refused to know him.

She said, "Go away. I live here. Go away."

19

Buried by great drifts of snow, blasted by a blizzard wind that howled steadily and unrelentingly across a world without sun and without sky, Casement's Irish doggedly fought their way out of Wasatch toward the head of Echo Canyon four miles away and seven hundred feet lower. To cover that drop, Reed's engineers had projected two high trestles across a pair of gullies and a tunnel seven hundred and seventy feet long through the shoulder of a ridge. The bridge gangs had finished their chore; but the tunnel crew had not. Caught here by the weather, they had to handle the ice-hardened red clay and sandstone as they would have handled solid rock, blasting it with nitroglycerin. Each yard of excavation was costing $3.50; and the bore moved one painful reluctant foot at a time.

Reed and Casement and Peace held a meeting on that. Time pressed them cruelly and they were getting nowhere. Each night the Union scouts over in Nevada wired the day's work of the Central. The Central, still free of heavy snow, pressed across the high desert, their construction crews forging through the low passes of the Pequop and Toano ranges. They were doing a mile a day; they were doing two—and sometimes three. Huntington, the Central's driving force, had some wily plan up his sleeve. His instructions to the Central's engineers were common knowledge. "Come right on as fast as you can and leave a good road behind."

"If we could get by that tunnel," said Reed, "we could lay steel in Echo Canyon."

"Build a Z around it," said Peace.

"How're you going to make a grade, when the ground's twenty feet under snow?"

"Lay your steel on the snow," replied Peace.

"Oh hell," protested Reed, "that won't do."

But Casement, made desperate by the sight of his terriers standing idle, came into the argument. "The tunnel won't be done for a month. The Central can come fifty miles in a month, or maybe a hundred. Try it. Try anything."

So Casement's Paddies backed away from the tunnel, dug an entrance through the solid alley of ice that imprisoned them on the grade, and charged

out upon the solid, pure drifts. They dropped their ties on this naked surface and bolted down their rails; and so by ten miles of uneven, precarious and temporary trackage they came down upon the head of Echo and back to the main grade. When he rode over the completed Z for the first time Reed looked at the ties and saw the engine's weight slip them down the side of the stiff hill.

He shook his head: "It won't work."

His gloomy guess was well borne out. The next train over the Z, carrying ten loads of steel and a caboose, reached the lower switchback, broke the rail fastenings and slid, engine and all, a hundred feet to the canyon's bottom.

Casement came storming up to the break with his terriers and repaired it. He went back then and got another engine and another load of steel, and, asking no man to do what he wouldn't do, took the train down himself. Peace fired for him. They reached the head of Echo without accident.

"We've licked it," crowed Casement.

They thought they had. Yet that afternoon when they returned to Wasatch the down-drifting snow had begun to boil before a strengthening wind. At five o'clock it was pure black and a roaring arctic blizzard smashed Wasatch terrifically and ripped the snow dunes high, like huge breakers at sea. The telegraph wires, scarcely repaired from the previous storm, went down again; and again traffic on the road came to a full stop and this camp was shut out from the world.

It was Christmas Eve. Peace got out the gifts he had ordered from the East and pulled on his heavy coat. There was a huge celebration going on in the commissary shack, with all the engineering staff sitting up to turkey and champagne. Peace made his rounds, passing out boxes of cigars to all his partners, and went on to the boarding train to leave a few choice bottles of Irish whisky with Collie Moynihan. Afterward, bucking through a blinding sweep of wind and snow, he went down the street and turned into Roy Lovelace's shanty.

He found them sitting up to the table, Roy and Helen and the twins, and the young Irish girl. He laid his packages before them, not bothering to loosen his coat.

"Next Christmas," he said gently, "I'll miss you. I suppose I'll be in Texas. Where will you be?"

They had changed—these two people. Something had happened to Lovelace; it was harder for him to keep up his proud, gentlemanly front. After the Bryan episode he had set up his own gambling establishment, but it was common knowledge that his luck was consistently bad. There was,

Peace thought, more gray in Lovelace's hair; and his eyes were rather bitter. Helen had dressed for this dinner—a touch of old times she remembered. Her bare shoulders stirred expressively under the light. She couldn't smile and her voice was soft and deeply sad.

"I don't know, Frank."

Peace said: "Why don't you get out of this now, Roy? You'll recall what you said about your luck."

Lovelace stared down at the table, his dropped shoulders bucking up the smooth front of his white shirt. The twins were softly giggling between themselves.

"I know," murmured Lovelace. "I know. But I think it will turn better. I think it will."

Helen lifted her eyes to Peace and he saw a misery in them that made him turn away. "I wish you a Merry Christmas," he said, and tapped each of the twins affectionately on the head, and left the room. The onhurled snow was like a cinder blast against his face, cutting and burning as it struck. A few laggard souls plugged down the street, bound for one or another of the saloons; and all these saloons this night were a-roar with a festival crowd. There would be more than one man found in the snow when morning came, Peace realized. Bound back from the boarding train, they would fall drunkenly down and never wake from the insidious, pleasant slumber of freezing death.

When he passed the snow tunnel leading into Campeaux's Club sound rolled out hugely—sound and warmth and the glitter of many lights. A woman half ran toward the Club and collided with Peace. She gripped his arm and he saw the dark, prematurely wise eyes of the fragile Rose lift to him. He swung about so that his body might shelter her from the wind.

"Rose," he said. "Merry Christmas."

He saw her lips moving and bent down. "It was what I wanted to wish you," she said. Her hand lifted to him, and her fingers opened to expose a small package. "This," she said, "is for you." But he stood there, not quite understanding, and she slid her hand along his overcoat, dropping the package into his pocket. "You've been nice to me."

"Rose," he said, "you're young enough to get out of here. Do you need help?"

She looked at him carefully, the faint and anonymous smile she showed so many men softening her lips. But he saw a strangeness stir her glance. "Not now, Mr. Peace," she told him. Her fingers touched his coat a moment, and dropped reluctantly. She turned into the Club tunnel; but just before she

pushed the doors aside she swung her head and looked at him again. She was laughing then, and her white face stirred to a recklessness.

He trudged on, his hand touching the package she had given him. Ab Kein's voice sailed out of some dark doorway's crack. "Merry Christmas, Frank." Peace entered the Oliver-Latimer store and crossed to the rear room. Eileen's voice pulled him in.

She was waiting for him. He saw that. He saw how it colored her cheeks, how it laid sweetness across all her even features. She wore a dress he had not seen before, the lines of it tightening around her slim hips and lying smoothly across the soft swell of her breasts. The table was set for only two. He spoke of that.

"Where's Ben?"

She shook her head; and the shyness she could not help showing made her drop her glance. "Not tonight, Frank. I asked him to eat at the hotel."

"That's too bad—for Ben."

"You're sorry?"

He said, "No," and crossed to take her between his heavy arms. Her hair ran neatly and beautifully across her head; two turquoise earrings stirred as she came forward. He kissed her, the flavor of her eagerness reacting strongly in him. But she pulled back to show him how quietly she was smiling.

"I do not know a happier Christmas, Frank. Sit down."

She went into the small kitchen. Peace took off his overcoat, finding it pleasant to observe the grace of this girl as she moved around the table. She beckoned him, and they sat down to the meal. Somewhere she had found old linen to cover the table—and a silver candelabrum to hold the spermacetie tapers that threw a soft glowing over the room. The corner stove's heat eased him. Outside, the savage roar of the wind scoured the street with a sound like the rolling of deep drums. She sat quietly in her chair, not speaking, and then he knew she was waiting for him to set the pattern they were to follow through the years to come. She was waiting, quietly and curiously. This was the beginning.

He lowered his head and said a brief blessing. He hadn't done it since boyhood, but it wasn't difficult to do, for his memories this night made him humble and the soft pleasure in Eileen's eyes made him humble. When he raised his head he saw that she had clasped her hands and was far away from him at the moment in a prayer of her own.

They talked a little as they ate, of things out of the past. It was, he recognized, something they had not done before, nor felt like doing. When

he spoke of his own past he observed the quietness of her attention, as though she were trying to visualize the kind of man he had been; and it came to him suddenly that she had a grace and a charm and a dignity which belonged to surroundings he might never be able to give her. She belonged to a fine house; she belonged to a kind of life that was gentle and mannerly. In his vision he could see her come into a drawing room filled with people, so calm and graceful that she commanded it.

"What do you think of, Frank?"

"I'm not giving you much, Eileen."

She murmured: "It isn't like you to be wistful, Frank. Do you know what fullness is? I do—tonight."

They were through. She rose and brought in a bottle of champagne; and they stood together by the black, cold outline of the window and touched glasses, and drank. He put down his glass, troubled by the moment to come, and got a box from his pocket. His heavy fingers opened the box and drew out a ring whose white facets streaked a bright glitter across the room. He took her left hand and put the ring on the third finger.

When he looked up from her hand he saw how white her cheeks had turned. He couldn't understand this, and in all his life, he never did understand it; but there was an expression in her eyes then so shaken and so strange that it might have been despair or it might have been happiness. He didn't know. She came against him, her cheek against the rough surface of his coat. It went like that for long, long moments—until he heard her say in a deep, outgoing breath:

"No, Frank, you don't know what fullness is. But I do." She stepped back from him, her manner turned gay.

He helped her with the dishes; and afterward they sat by the stove, all the outside pressure of a mad world cracking against the building front. Shot echoes raced thinly with the wind; a tin tub of some kind went banging down the street.

She said: "I heard that Nan Normandy found her father. He was a gambler in a grading camp. Or a saloonman."

He looked up. "When was this?"

She looked at him. "Didn't you know? I thought you would."

He shook his head. "Haven't seen her lately." He bent over in the chair, rubbing his big palms slowly together; a long line cut its way across his forehead. She watched him, gone quite still.

“Frank,” she whispered, and drew up his glance. But he shook his head, the scowl erased by a slow smiling.

“No, Eileen. No.”

“What are you thinking?”

“Nothing,” he said.

At ten o’clock he pulled on his coat and braced the storm again. Above him and around him was a screaming emptiness, all the saloon lights being pressed back by the thick weave of snow. Somebody staggered out of Campeaux’s but another man ran through the door and caught him and pulled him into the place again. Braced against the bitter wind, Peace crossed over the street and headed for the commissary. Nan’s restaurant—and he had not consciously realized this—was directly in front of him, all its windows turned an opaque milk-white by the layered ice. He paused by her door, his shoulder resting against it, and thought of her with a hunger that he couldn’t prevent. He stood like that for two or three minutes and then went on. The party in the commissary’s dining room was at high tide, but he avoided it, going to his own room.

Overmile, notoriously an early riser, woke Peace in the bitter black of the next morning. “Merry Christmas,” he said. “There ain’t no track in sight and every door in Wasatch is frozen solid. Snow measures thirty feet deep at Campeaux’s. You know that girl Rose?”

Wind still drummed and whined across the tin roof of the commissary building. Peace lighted a match to look at his watch. It was five o’clock. “Rose? Sure.”

“They found her dead. She took laudanum. It’s breakfast time.”

Overmile stamped out. Peace lighted a lamp and got dressed. He thought of something then and went to his overcoat, lifting out the package Rose had given him. She had found a piece of tissue paper somewhere with which to wrap it. When he pulled it open he found a small heart-shaped locket attached to a thin gold chain. He brought it nearer the lamp and wedged his thumbnail against the locket’s edge, opening it. The lamp light was bad and he couldn’t see very well; he turned up the wick, forgetting the bitter bite of the cold air. Inside the locket was the picture of a little girl who stood braced by a tall chair, all her clothes stiff and starched and her hair braided back from a pleasant face. She looked straight out at him, her mouth on the verge of a smile, her eyes direct and trusting and without shadow. This, Peace understood, was the childhood Rose—as the older Rose wanted him to remember her.

At New Year's the storm swung off. The first week in January it struck again. The sundered telegraph wires remained down. In and near Laramie Plains two hundred miles of track lay buried and could not be opened. Snowplows cut a way back to Evanston and got stuck at Piedmont Station. Casement's terriers cleared the road to the tunnel so that the men there could continue the bore and clear off the buried Z. In that merciless cold their heavy clothes helped them little and they had to build a chain of bonfires along the road to keep alive. There was no wood except the ties painfully hauled from the higher Wasatch canyons. Laid down on the grade, those ties cost six dollars apiece. It was Collie Moynihan who estimated he warmed his hands over a hundred-and-fifty-dollar fire at the head of Echo Canyon. Pneumonia laid them low and frostbitten members crippled them—and there was no steel coming up the grade from Omaha.

It was that lack which turned Reed desperate as he trampled the right of way and saw no progress. Caught in the jaws of a vise that would not let go, the Union lay within hand's grasp of the prize of Ogden, which was only sixty miles away, and could not reach it; and meanwhile the Central would be striding over the level Nevada high desert.

Peace said: "Tear up the sidings and use that steel."

Casement jumped at the thought. His terriers back-tracked all the way to Bear River Town, ripping up every secondary rail; and thus they crept over the Z with their loot and tossed it to the track gang nervously waiting at the head of Echo. Three weeks after Christmas Dan Casement's first material train broke through the Laramie Plains and came snorting up the Wasatch grade. The wires into Ogden were mended. The Central, came the message, was within a hundred and twenty miles of Ogden and advancing fast.

"They've cut our lead in half," said Casement. "To hell with 'em. Watch us go."

All that delayed material glutted the narrow jaws of Echo. The track layers slogged forward, dropping rails on ties that squirmed in snow slush and semi-liquid mud. Echo Creek roared bankfull beside them. Thaw and freeze alternated, buckling up the track and dropping it; when trains passed this way Casement's Irish laid their crowbars beneath the rails to support the load.

Down Echo they went, through its narrowing walls to the high black shoulders of the Weber Gorge, where the snow-fed Weber River stormed at their very feet. Echo City bloomed and wilted, all in the course of a week. Near the first of February they passed the lone pine standing out of the rock—one thousand miles from Omaha. And that day the wires from Ogden

were full of the Central's newest trick. The wily Huntington, playing his trump card, had filed on the right of way all up the Weber and Echo canyons in Washington, claiming government subsidy on it, claiming a prior right to it. Dodge wired Reed to come to Ogden.

Reed called Peace into the office shack. "You'll take this job here. I've got another one at Ogden. Huntington's smart. Our steel covers the ground he's claimin'. But the administration doesn't like the Union and it may allow his claim. If it does we've built sixty miles of track that he'll say belongs to the Central, which is just another way of shutting us out from Ogden. Dodge sees it. It's a game two can play. I've got my orders to grade out of Ogden, clean through Nevada, paralleling the Central's track. So we'll see."

It rained in Weber Canyon, and snowed, and thawed, and froze. The rails swung down that gorge without regard to footing or ballast, bridged the river, tunneled the outcropping shoulders, and fought forward. At Devil's Slide the Union track layers came upon the Central graders working up the canyon, tangible evidence that Huntington meant to make his threat good. But the Union, gathering momentum, broke through Weber's gateway with a rush on the last days of February, to see the glitter of Ogden Town's lights, ten miles away, shining across the valley. And on March third, with the military band from Fort Douglas blaring out a welcome tune and Captain Wadsworth's artillery booming its salute, the Union's first train rolled through Ogden.

They had won the thousand-mile race for Ogden. One hundred miles to the west, crippled by a steel train tearing through a trestle, the Central's track layers limped slowly on. It was the Union's victory—hooray!

But that night the weary Union staff, gathered together by Dodge, heard bad news. Dodge held a telegram in his hand; he waved it before Reed and Casement and Peace and the others.

"We beat 'em to Ogden," he said dryly. "But apparently we've lost. For the Secretary of the Interior has approved Huntington's claim of the whole sixty miles from Ogden to the head of Echo. The bonds, totaling $1,333,000, have been issued the Central. The Central hasn't laid an inch of track there—our steel covers the whole distance. But we don't get a dime of it, and in addition we have been told in so many words that our entry into Ogden is illegal."

The staff sat there in stunned silence. Casement's stubborn Irish face turned scarlet. Reed's shoulders sank—the first time Peace had ever known this indomitable man to show physical defeat. Dodge was smiling in a grim way.

"President Johnson never trusted the Union," he went on. "But I want to remind you that tomorrow is the fourth of March, the day of Grant's inauguration. What Johnson has done Grant can undo. That's the only hope we have. We're working on that proposition in Washington. Grant knows what we have been up against. He's fair, which is all that we ask."

"Have we got to fiddle around and wait?" said Casement, never liking inaction.

Dodge shook his head. "If the Central wishes to play that kind of a game we'll play it with them. They intend to lay track east of Ogden, paralleling ours—shutting us out of this town. Very well. We'll build west of Ogden and make our claims to shut them out. I don't like it, but we can do nothing else. So now, we head for Nevada. We head right straight for San Francisco. Maybe that will bring Huntington to reason: Our claim will match the Central's claim—and that's the basis of a horse trade. I want to see the steel go down fast."

On March the fourth Casement's Paddies, aroused by the thought of competition, swung out of Ogden with a yell. The track raced northward along the borders of the lake. Spring touched Salt Lake Valley and the rigors of the Wasatch winter became a memory. Dan Casement's supply trains hurried in from Omaha by night and day, and the flow and swing and roar of another construction year disturbed a brightening Utah sky. The Central's steel was seventy-five miles away but the Central's graders were coming down the lake beside the Union's steel; whereupon Casement's terriers only laughed and ran out their rails and dropped them and hurried on. Thirty-one miles from Ogden and twenty-five days from Ogden the Union's trains touched the edge of Bear River and spawned Corinne.

All of a sudden fever touched Corinne. Overnight it became the queen city, and men hurried up from Salt Lake to shape a great non-Mormon town in the basin; suddenly a huge freighting trade lumbered out of Corinne for the Montana and Idaho mines. All the riffraff and hangers-on who had pursued the Union as far as Green River and had been driven back by winter now swarmed over the mountains. The high, thin air went like wine to men's heads; optimism ran riot. Corinne's streets grew, row on row. Nineteen saloons, two dance halls and eighty girls made Corinne's evenings large; the Corinne *Reporter* reported corner lots successively at two hundred dollars, at five hundred dollars, at one thousand dollars, at three thousand dollars, and forecast a population of ten thousand people in two years.

At night, lighted by tar flares, men stood on soap boxes and spoke of Corinne as a colossus that would stand in the midcontinent, looking west to China, looking east to Europe. This was Cheyenne and Laramie and Benton

and Wasatch all rolled into one. Campeaux's club roared, pandemonium surged through the streets with the Union's construction crew. Four men died of gunshot wounds the first week.

Bill Wallen came into Nan's restaurant late in the evening and sat at the counter, gravely watching expression play across his daughter's cheeks. "The road," he said, "will be done before long," and fell wonderingly silent, absorbed by a regret he could never forget and by an affection he could not express.

"Cheyenne seems too far back," she remarked. "It's hard to realize all this will stop."

"You're not sorry?"

"I wish I knew."

"You're wondering what comes next for you."

She looked at him. "How did you guess that?"

He had a slow, small smile that turned his features half handsome. "I've come to the end of things a good many times—always wondering what was next. I can suggest something for you."

"What?"

"I've seen most of the world. It isn't much fun for me any more. There's always a time when the novelty wears thin and the hope wears off, and afterward your eyes get tired. I have money enough. Let me show you the world, Nan. I think you'd like it—and maybe I could see something new, through your eyes, which are still fresh."

"I think," she said softly, "you want to change me."

"I happen to know how you feel about Frank Peace."

She didn't answer him. She stood against the wall, her hands tucked behind; her eyes were beyond reading. He couldn't guess how deeply she was hurt.

"There's another reason," he added. "The thing that ruined me was a restlessness I couldn't kill. I thought there was something in the world I was missing. Well, I know better now—but I learned the lesson too late. I can see some of that in you, too. You think there's something in the world you're missing. I don't want you to spoil your life that way. We'll take a look—a good, long look. Then I think you'll see."

She said, "All right," in a quiet, unemotional way.

"Now?"

That brought a quick answer. “I’d like to see the rails come together. Then we’ll go.”

He considered her with his gentle, shrewd glance. “It isn’t the joining of the rails, Nan.”

She met his eyes. “No, maybe not.”

“When you end a thing,” he said, “end it clean. Close your mind to it—and never carry any lost hopes away. It is hard to do, but it will save you pain.”

“I’ll be ready to go, whenever the road is finished.”

He got up. He said carefully: “It will be a happy time for me, Nan. I had thought life was about through with me. I’ve had no real peace since I left your mother.”

After he had gone into the robust, brawling noise of the street she remained behind the counter, the pale glow of her hair throwing light down across the struggling darkness of her eyes. Her father, she knew, was wrong. It wasn’t possible to forget. It wasn’t possible to shut out of her mind the picture of Frank Peace. Wherever the years took her she would remember him. She could say good-by—she had already said that to Frank Peace. She had put away her hopes. But she couldn’t forget, and never would.

20

Duke Ring came through the alley door into Campeaux's office. Campeaux stirred a little in the chair, shoulders rolling. He lighted up a half-smoked cigar. "Ring," he said, "you're a pretty good blackjack player."

"Sure," said Ring.

"I heard Roy Lovelace's luck ain't been very good."

"That's right."

Campeaux opened a drawer. He laid a roll of gold pieces on the desk. "Take that," he said, "and go bust him."

Ring weighed the gold in his hand a moment, the glint of cupidity rising unsuppressed to his eyes. "Maybe I'll lose."

"Go find out. Push the works at him, first bet. If you lose come back here for another thousand. If you win drag your thousand and play his money. Double it up."

Ring listened to his instructions carefully. "It's his cards I'm buckin'," he observed.

"He's square," said Campeaux. "He's square—and a fool. Do what I tell you."

Ring put the money in his pocket and left the room. He started to shut the door, but Brett and Cordray had been waiting there. They came in. Cordray closed the door and put his back to it, his skeleton-thin body needing support. Campeaux had turned to his desk, but he swung around again and took a long, cool look at these two men. Brett showed him a dry grin.

"Just to jog your memory, Sid. We want our money."

"What money?"

Brett's grin lengthened across his lips, pale and containing no humor. He talked over his shoulder to Cordray. "Hear that, Jack? Sid don't remember. We thought you wouldn't, Sid. Four thousand dollars was the amount we took from the old man Oliver's store in Bryan. That's ours."

"Sure," murmured Campeaux. "But you don't get it now."

"No?" said Brett smoothly. "No?"

“This business is about over,” stated Campeaux. “I can see you boys are gettin’ restless to pull out. I’ve made a meal ticket for you, Al, all the way from Fremont, and I guess you’ve done a little forgettin’ yourself.”

“Peace?” suggested Al Brett.

“Afraid of him?” asked Campeaux.

“I’ll pick my time,” said Brett.

Campeaux’s scorn was more and more evident. “I’ve heard that before. Here’s Cordray, wholly useless to me, and a damned sight better off dead to himself. Here you are, goin’ yellow.”

Brett’s cheeks whitened until only two round, small, bright stains of color remained high on his cheekbones. “You’re a little brash, Sid.”

“I saw you back up from Peace,” growled Campeaux. “He backed you and Cordray against that wall. He called you every name a white man ain’t. Both of you brave boys stood there, sickly as ever I saw men look.”

Cordray shook his head. He said in a dead, weary tone: “Never mind, Sid. Never mind. Brett knows what he’s doing.”

“And what’s he doing?” challenged Campeaux.

“Holdin’ off, Sid. Holdin’ off till Peace forgets to be careful. That’s—”

Brett grunted: “Be quiet, Jack.” Yellow light filtered out of his eyes—heatless and wicked. “No man speaks to me that way, Sid. You hear?”

“I spoke to you that way,” retorted Campeaux.

Whiteness crept more and more around the edge of Brett’s nose—the pure pallor of a man sickened in his stomach, or of a man whose passions crowded his blood back into its main channels. But in the end Brett let his stiff muscles relax.

“All right, Sid. You’re welshin’ on that money. That’s bright. You make a small fortune and use men like me to do your dirty chores. Then you welsh on ’em. Very bright, Sid. But listen. I’ll ask you once more for that money. When I do I want it.”

“You know how to get it.”

“That’s right—I do,” said Brett. “Come on, Jack.”

Outside, Brett stopped Cordray. He only touched Cordray’s arm, but the latter’s body was so weak that this little pressure whirled him half around. “Listen, Jack. I don’t want Peace to see you and me together. Catch the next work train out to Blue Creek.”

Cordray was seized by a long and terrible spell of coughing. Standing back, Brett watched the man with a glance that was impersonal and without sympathy. Cordray finally got possession of his breath.

"We better get this over with soon," he gasped. "I ain't got much farther to go."

"It'll be soon," said Brett, and stood in the shadows, watching Cordray walk uncertainly toward the depot.

Peace came in from Blue Creek that night, as weary as he had ever known himself to be, and went to Eileen's. She saw the dull, ground-in need for sleep when she kissed him. It impelled her to push him toward a chair—and to go make a cup of coffee.

He had the satisfaction of knowing that the long fight was about over; for this day Durant of the Union and Huntington of the Central had come at last to an understanding. The two right of ways which, if the fight kept up, promised to parallel each other from Omaha to San Francisco without ever joining, were to meet ten miles beyond Blue Creek, at the top of the Promontory range. He told Eileen that.

"But it's been a hell of a month. We got caught short at the edge of those hills. There's no decent grade from the flats up into Promontory. We've been working twenty-four-hour shifts, lifting the grade by long fills."

She brought him his coffee and sat beside him. "But it's over?" she said.

He noticed the deep relief in her voice. "Almost," he said.

She said: "Are you glad, Frank?"

"I suppose so."

She considered him, calm and clear-minded. "I have wondered. It is your life. So much so. When it is done there will be so many things to regret losing, so many friends to leave."

"How do you know that, Eileen?"

She said: "Your feelings are very deep, Frank. You don't show them—but they are."

He said: "It's time you and I did some talking."

She got up, plainly agitated by his words. She moved around the room. "Whatever you wish," she murmured.

"Dodge wants me to be in Texas within a month. We have that month, Eileen. I think we'd better begin it pretty soon."

She whirled. "Frank," she said swiftly, "are you sure?" He dragged himself out of his thinking. Excitement unsteadied her features; and faint fear was in her glance. He got up and went over to her. "I answered that question once before," he told her.

"I know. But sometimes I'm frightened."

"Why?"

“Things happen to you. They always do and they always will. You can’t help being what you are. You can’t ever stop men from liking you—and women from loving you. You can’t ever stop other men from wanting to kill you. I wish we were a thousand miles from this town tonight!”

“Spring’s here,” he said gently, “and the world’s a pretty pleasant place. Let’s have a look at this queen city.”

They went through the store. Ben Latimer stood in the doorway, staring into the restless traffic and not hearing them come up behind him. Eileen said, “Ben,” in an affectionate voice. He stepped aside for them, looking soberly down at the girl. He had no answer for her smile; and afterward, ignoring Peace, he wheeled back into the room.

They went along with the flow of the crowd, her hand holding Peace’s arm. Corinne stretched out under the night, all its lights glittering through a soft damp, May air; freighting wagons rolled by and horsemen cut through this steady traffic, now and then lifting their voices to pedestrians roving the street. Campeaux’s orchestra laid a lively racket over the housetops. At the edge of town a long train whistled and ran slowly by. The surface of the lake was all rippled and shining; in the west the outline of Promontory blackened the horizon. To the east the Wasatch range lifted its massive walls.

“Ben,” said Peace, “feels badly about this. He loves you.”

“Do you mind?” she whispered.

He looked down at her and his smile was very gentle. “How could he help himself? I’m sorry for him.”

“You’re—you’re not jealous?”

“No,” he said. Afterward her silence turned his eyes again; and he saw that his answer had in some strange way hurt her feelings.

Down the street a tar flare sent up a round, smoky light; and a crowd blocked the corner entirely, listening to a man speak from an impromptu platform. His high, long-drawn words ran out with a tenor ringing. “Reach down, each one of you, and take up as much dirt as you can hold in your fist. Gentlemen, mark me—and mark me well. You will live to see the day when land in Corinne—that land you hold—will be worth its weight in gold! Here’s the great agricultural and mineral heart of America. Here’s the railroad. Here’s the lake. Here’s opportunity. It taps you on the shoulder now. Now! Don’t let it go by! It will never come to you—and you—and you again!”

Al Brett turned the edges of this crowd, coming forward. He saw Peace and stopped; and his reckless face showed a thin smile as he removed his hat

and bowed to Eileen. Peace, covering this man with an alert and steady stare, felt Eileen's fingers dig into his arm. But Brett's smile broadened.

"Peace," he said, "I wish you well."

Peace drawled, "From you, Al, that's an unnatural wish."

"I realize it sounds poorly," murmured Brett. His yellow head stirred and his glance jerked around, sizing up the crowd; it was a habit he could not break, rising as it did from his self-preserving instincts. The ruddy, cream complexion of the man strengthened in the guttering light of the tar flare; vitality and arrogance were qualities that showed so plainly through him. "I've been looking for you," added Brett.

"I'm here," stated Peace. Eileen's fingers hurt him with their increasing pressure.

"No," said Brett. "No trouble, Bucko. The road's about done. I'll be soon gone. You and I've been on different sides of the fence—that's the way it had to be. But I want you to know I'm through working for Campeaux, which is what I want to tell you. I hold no resentment. I hear you'll be married shortly. Well, my congratulations to you and my best wishes to the lady." Brett's laughter seemed to Peace then a stronger and stronger thing. "Maybe you don't get it. I'm no hand to explain. We ain't in each other's way any more, so why should I be holdin' a grudge? It's a big world and I figure we won't be meetin' again. Leave it go like that."

He was pleased with himself; the long lips of the man framed that assured grinning as he swung back into the street. Peace watched him go; and not until the man had disappeared somewhere beyond Campeaux's did his own muscles relax.

Eileen murmured: "Don't believe him! Don't trust him!"

Peace, keen to the shapes and sounds of this boiling street, saw Overmile stroll out of a doorway and walk over the street—and take a position opposite the alley down which Al Brett had disappeared.

"Don't trust him," repeated Eileen.

"Never—never—never!" shouted the man on the platform. "You will never again see a chance like this! How would you like to own a corner in the middle of Chicago? Gentlemen, your chance to be a millionaire lies here—tonight! Some day these corners will be as valuable as those in Chicago. Why not? Look around you and see this land. No town ever had Corinne's opportunity!"

Bill Wallen came along the street and stopped. "Frank," he said, "I found my daughter the day you brought her to end of track, beyond Benton. I wish I could thank you."

Sudden embarrassment caught hold of Peace. Eileen was a still shape by his side. Wallen was trying to hide an emotion; he cleared his throat and spoke again. “You were mighty kind to her. It is a thing I’ll remember. We’re leaving as soon as the tracks are joined.”

Peace said woodenly, “Good luck,” and watched Wallen go. He turned with Eileen and they went back to the Oliver-Latimer store. He said, “I’ve got to find Reed. I’ll see you again tomorrow night.”

She looked up at him, whispering: “Will you see her, Frank?”

“No,” he answered and did not realize how short his voice was. “Why should I?”

“I wish,” she repeated with an intensity that astonished him, “we were a thousand miles from here tonight.”

“Eileen.”

She paused in the doorway, darkness lying across her features. He removed his hat and the edges of his unruly hair dropped down on his forehead; he had an expression then that showed the raggedness of his temper. Her glance, always so sharp and discerning, saw this.

“Go see her, Frank, if it will help you.”

“Don’t read things in my head that are not there, Eileen.”

She murmured humbly. “I’m sorry, Frank,” and touched his arm, and hurried into the store.

Going back down the street toward the depot, he was intercepted by Overmile. “What was Brett wantin’?”

“Nothing. He wished me luck.”

“Yeah?” intoned Overmile. “What kind of luck? I saw Cordray pull out on the work train. Why? You better go see Lovelace. Duke Ring bucked his game tonight—and busted him.”

“Now what will Helen and the twins do?” groaned Peace.

“Go see him.”

But Peace shook his head. He remembered Lovelace’s haggard expression and the misery in Helen’s eyes. They would be having a bad evening and his presence wouldn’t help. He said, “I’ve got no business there tonight. Let’s go over to headquarters.”

They strolled on. Presently Peace said: “You’ll be here tomorrow. Do me a favor. Find out if Roy’s got any immediate plans. I’ve got to stand back of those people.”

“Yeah.” Then Overmile said, very casual with his words: “I hear Nan and her dad are pullin’ out after the rails meet.”

Peace didn't answer. Overmile's glance whipped across his partner's cheeks and fell thoughtfully aside.

Lovelace revealed no expression, and his voice didn't change. He said to Ring: "That's all."

"Another thousand?"

"Game's closed," said Lovelace.

He watched Ring's short, broken-boned fingers pick up the money on the table and drop it into a coat pocket. Ring's face was soft and greasy, the crushed lips pulled at the corners by nervous muscular spasms.

"Go back to Campeaux," said Lovelace, "and tell him you did your job."

"What?" said Ring narrowly.

"I realize he's had his way with me at last," droned Lovelace. "Tell him that."

Ring shot a quick look at Lovelace and at Lovelace's wife standing wholly still in the background. "Too bad," he said, and left the little room. Lovelace walked to the door and closed it, and turned around. He racked the chips and put away the pack of cards. His fingers did this automatically. In the rear living quarters the twins were chuckling, copying each other's strange noises. Lovelace lifted his glance to Helen.

"We're broke," he said.

He could not understand his wife's manner. She looked on, all her features drawn inexpressibly sober. She had something in her eyes very strange to him—a calmness surviving this bad night. She was always calm, always steeled to the misfortunes of their life. But this seemed deeper, so deep that it would never leave.

"Altogether broke, Roy?"

"Ring took the last of it." He said, as a barren afterthought: "I was right. Benton was the top of our luck. I knew it then—I knew it would never stay like that."

"Have you any money at all?"

"A ten-dollar bill in my pocket."

"Possibly you could borrow, for another try."

"I'd lose it. There's nothing left—no luck, no money, and no hope. I wasn't smart enough to quit when I saw the end coming. So I'm a sucker—a tinhorn."

She said, gently: "You're through?"

"Yes."

"Quite through?" she repeated in that same breathless, relentless way.

He nodded. This pride was out of him and he saw himself with the sunless, shadowless clarity of total disillusion. He was a weak man, he knew it then. His life had been useless and the little dream of honor was something that never had existed, a self-deception to cover his failure to face reality. He had led his wife to ruin, he had laid an indelible mark against the future of his children.

"Thank God!" said Helen, a tone rushing out of her in a manner that was terrible and passionate, like the release of heartbreak. It jerked him up. She had been so steady, she had been at his right hand for so long, supporting him by her presence, with never a word of regret or of reproach, or of longing for the life they had left. But here she stood with all the reserve vanished from her eyes.

"I'm glad you've lost!"

He said dully: "What's there to be glad about, when I've brought you down to poverty?"

"How long a wait it's been," she said. "How cruel a wait it's been. I have laid awake many a night—wondering if this time would ever come—if you would ever reach the end of your luck, and know that you had reached the end, and be willing to quit."

"I know nothing else. I'm good for nothing else."

She said: "We can be honest people, Roy. It doesn't matter how hard it will be to live. At last we can live and not be ashamed."

The gambler's immobility of expression on his cheeks broke; he dropped his head across his arms lying on the table, and then a rasping despair shook his shoulders and laid a weird, choking sound across the room. Helen moved to him. Her hands touched his shoulders; her eyes were soft and lovely and maternal. Her voice had a singing melody in it.

"I could cry for you, Roy. For all that you have lost yourself. But this is the first day's happiness I have felt for many years."

Leaving Lovelace's place, Duke Ring walked in the direction of Campeaux's Club. Near the back entrance of the saloon he stepped into a little area of shadow and looked very carefully about him. His right hand was in his coat pocket, touching the money he had won; and an impulse, long nursed, now set him about on his heels and carried him down one of Corinne's side streets to a stable. His horse was here; he got it and saddled it and trotted out to the street again, turning southward in the direction of Ogden. At the corner he hauled in on his reins.

"Campeaux!"

Sid Campeaux stood beside an empty building. Darkness crowded this rear street; the sound of Corinne's busy heart came over the housetops to touch it with muted echoes. Campeaux threw his cigar out into the dust, the lighted end bursting into glitter-pointed fractions of light.

"It ain't ever very hard to figure you out, Duke," said Campeaux, and shot Ring through the heart.

The Union's grade swept out of Blue Creek to tackle the Promontory range by main force. Casement's Paddies rushed forward, as they had done for two years, charging that stubborn barrier like old soldiers deploying against an enemy line. Two long trestles lifted the Union's rails out of the flat lands and Promontory's forbidding flanks were broken by huge charges of nitroglycerin. Great cuts and fills carried the track at last onto the tabled surface of the range; on April twenty-eight the questing terriers, dashing the sweat of this heavy labor from their brows, saw the twinkle of the Central's campfires in the near distance. Promontory, last lurid stand of the end-of-track dives, mushroomed up from an inhospitable soil on May the first, its one street paralleling the right of way. Discharged graders and construction men began to drift through Promontory, back through Blue Creek and on to Corinne—settling old grudges and old thirsts. All trains out of the East were bringing in tourists for the final epic spectacle of the age. The Union's Irishmen swung their picks side by side with the Central's Chinese and laid a "grave" for the yellow men, the blast burying a dozen of them.

Campeaux moved his Club to Promontory and for a few days the dance halls whirled to their tinsel pleasures, and the three-card monte cappers called across the street, and bravado reached its highest frenzied pitch when two gamblers, pitched into sudden quarreling, seized the opposite ends of a bandanna across the width of a poker table and shot each other to death over the doubtful affections of one Peigon Bess. Campeaux sold the painting of the enigmatic gauze-draped lady to Faro Evans, who cherished it, for fifty dollars; and Sailor Dick Shugrue, serving one too many knockout drops to an Irishman with fat pockets, was next day beaten into unrecognizable shape and pitched out a second-story window—to be patched together by Doctor Frank Harrison.

On May the ninth a single rail's length separated the Union and the Central, and a polished mahogany Last Tie and a golden Last Spike waited in the Central's headquarters safe for the final ceremony. All the wires were humming with the news of the great ones of the East and West on their way

for the morrow's celebration. Huntington and Stanford of the Central were already here; and Vice-president Durant's car rested on the siding. This night General Dodge used it to give his staff a dinner.

Sitting at the table, Peace saw all these hearty, forthright men with a silent affection and with a regret that lay like a hurt in him. They had all been through a good deal, with the wild, hard years of the road's building binding them together by bands that were difficult to break. It was what he felt, and what they felt as well—for the gentleness of the reflection softened their talk.

Peace saw Dodge rise to make a speech—and stand quite a little while silent. When he did speak it was slowly and briefly.

"When we stood at Fremont a little less than two years ago, and saw Jack Casement drop the command that started the rails west, I doubt if any of us knew how much lay ahead. I do not know of any period in my life that has been more satisfactory to me. Money couldn't buy the loyalty you gentlemen have given me; and money couldn't buy my feelings toward you. Some of you I'll see again, which is a happy thought—for most of us here will be building roads till we die. Some of you I'll not see again. I wish I could tell you how I regret that."

He stopped and looked at his plate, and lifted his face to show them a heavy earnestness. "I want to tell you something. Some men talk and some men do. Back East the talkers are going to lay scandal at our door. They'll say we wasted money, they'll say we cheated the government, they'll take up all our mistakes and tell us how we might have avoided them. Gentlemen, you have nothing to be ashamed of. We had to build a road across a thousand miles of desert and mountains. We had to make our own way, we had to fight our own fights. We built the road. Remember that. We built it—and in building it we joined our country together and gave a value to land that had no value before. Let them talk and let them argue. Our monument is a thousand miles of steel stretching from here to Omaha."

He quit that subject abruptly and lifted his glass. "Gentlemen, here's to those who should be sitting here and are not—to those great, gallant souls we'll meet someday in a better world."

They rose and drank on that; and the meeting broke into little groups moving aimlessly around. Peace looked at his hands, thinking of big Ed Tarrant, of Phil Morgan, of Archie Millard. His own problems seemed just then to be deepening around him, and yet he had a feeling of utter uselessness. Blood ran through him idly, his muscles were without work to do, and his mind had no point. It was a strange sensation; it was like living

under the roar of wind for two years and afterward coming into a vast silence. The silence was hard to bear. Dodge walked down the car and stopped before him.

"I'll expect to see you in Omaha June fifteenth, Frank," he said, and went on.

Peace caught Overmile's eyes; and they left the coach, standing by the depot. A gusty spring rain swept over the desert; across the wide street Promontory's evil, lurid row of shacks and tents echoed up a last violent spasm of sound. End of track had reached a final ending, its last reincarnation bolder and more brazen intentioned than before. Casement's Irish were filling the street—restless, empty-handed, eager for trouble.

Peace filled his pipe. He stared through the flare of the match, seeing the street clearly. "It doesn't seem two years. A man remembers a lot of things so damned distinctly." His voice dropped to a falsely casual tone. "What'll you be doin', Leach?"

"Me," said Overmile. "I'm going back to Laramie Plains. I got a spot picked out for a ranch."

"A lot of things," repeated Peace in a very soft tone, "distinctly."

"Yeah."

Ab Kein wheeled across the street. He grinned a little, making a round gesture in the night air with his hands. "So the fun's about over."

"I guess," considered Overmile, "you've filled your basket."

Ab Kein looked at Overmile and laughed in a sudden, astonishing way. It bent him over and brought tears to his eyes. "Listen," he said. "From Fremont to Benton I made plenty. The world is full of suckers. At Corinne I said, 'Ab, you're going to be rich.' " He had to stop here because the thought of this enormous joke broke his voice again. Peace and Overmile waited with a deep curiosity.

"A thousand times I've talked money out of men's pockets. I'm slick. In Corinne there's other men, talkin' like I talked. Smart men from San Francisco. Would you believe Ab Kein would ever bite his own hook? I did. Those San Francisco men made me the sucker. Me, Ab Kein. I own half of Corinne and I ain't got a dime. And Corinne will be a field of dust, like Benton, thirty days from now."

"Trimmed?" said Overmile incredulously.

Kein wiped his eyes and blew his nose. "Don't worry. I've had fun—and the world's still full of suckers bigger than me." He went back across Promontory's street, his feet plodding gingerly through the mud.

A work train's bell began to ring below the depot, ready to pull out for Corinne. "I guess we've all had some fun," murmured Overmile, and shrugged his high shoulders. "You goin' to bring Eileen up here tomorrow for the ceremonies?"

"Yes," said Peace. Both of them walked over to the train and swung aboard.

Jack Cordray turned off the main street and walked back along the edge of Campeaux's huge tent wall to where Al Brett waited. He said, "Campeaux's comin' in."

Brett opened the rear door of Campeaux's office. Cordray followed him in, closing the door and leaning against it. But Brett pointed to another corner of the office, that gesture sending Cordray over there. Brett's grin licked a thin line across his lips and his eyes began to burn. He looked like that when Campeaux pushed through from the saloon.

Campeaux saw that grin. He stopped and his fingers gave the door a little shove, closing it quickly. He looked carefully at Brett and shot one short glance over to the corner where Cordray stood. He saw what was in their minds; he saw Brett's yellowing stare and the savagery pulsing and pulling at the corners of Cordray's tubercular lips. He brought his vast shoulders together, facing them with a massive contempt.

"Move out of here."

"We'll take that money, Sid," murmured Brett.

"Maybe," said Campeaux, "I better show you boys how to mind."

He moved straight at Brett. It put his broad back toward Cordray who, waiting for such an opportunity, sprang catlike out of his corner. Cordray snatched at his gun and lifted it, not to fire but to smash its barrel at Campeaux's head. The huge saloonman felt that threat and pulled up a shoulder, taking the blow there. Huge-bulked as he was, he wheeled faster than Cordray could draw back, and his great arms circled Cordray and squeezed the man inward. Cordray's wind came sighing out of him under that pressure; he tried to trip Campeaux, ramming his legs up and down. Campeaux laughed. He held Cordray like that, crushing the man's thin muscles, springing the man's thin bones, presenting him at Brett like a shield.

"Al," said Campeaux, "I can do this to you."

Brett looked on with a pale, composed interest. Not speaking, not stirring. Cordray cried, "Al—come in here!"

And then he screamed and fell loose in Campeaux's arms, sagging downward to expose Campeaux's barrel chest. Campeaux started to pull him back up. It was then that Brett, hauling his own gun from its holster with the indrawn coolness of a target marksman, sighted the nugget charm on the chain crossing Campeaux's vest and drove a bullet at it, directly above Cordray's lolling head.

Down the barrel of the gun he still held in that cocked attitude Al Brett noted rage and shock pull the man's jowls together. Campeaux let Cordray drop and afterward fell atop the man. He landed on his knees and elbows. He crawled across Cordray, reaching out for Brett's legs. Brett kicked at Campeaux's face and stepped aside. But Campeaux was driven by a terrible, inhuman patience; he pulled himself around and crawled at Brett again. Brett lost his coolness.

He yelled, "Why in damnation don't you die!" And shot Campeaux through the head. Campeaux dropped down, issuing no sound.

There were men beyond the saloon doorway; he heard them talking, he heard them brush against the wall. He put his sights on the doorway, waiting —turned cool again. Cordray groaned and rolled and got up. There was little left in him.

He whispered, "You were mighty slow, Al. He broke my ribs."

Brett said: "We're through here, Jack. Come on."

Cordray struggled to his feet. He put both hands against the wall, sick and shaken and half dead. "What?" he sighed.

"One more chore," said Brett. "One more—and we're all finished. Go back to Corinne and wait for me."

Cordray shook his head. "I'll never last to see Bucko dead."

"Yes, you will," said Brett. "Yes, you will."

21

A high wind whipped up the bunting of the special trains gathered at Promontory; the rain had stopped and the sun was out, lifting the fresh, raw smell of the earth. Peace took Eileen's arm and pushed a way through the crowd until he found standing room near the ceremony. Photographers were lugging their unwieldy cameras around, hunting better locations.

A picked group of track layers had placed a last pair of rails in position, and across this narrow space the straight-stacked Rogers of the Union faced the Central's Jupiter, whose bell-shaped funnel rolled out a heavy smoke. Fifteen hundred spectators of all degrees crowded around—Irishmen, Chinese, Mexicans, tourists, Promontory's sports, and the officials of both lines. Four companies of the Twenty-first Infantry from Camp Douglas were drawn up before the rails, and the Fourth Ward band from Salt Lake stood ready to play. A telegrapher's rig had been set up by the track, hooked to a waiting world; and the operator stood nervously by, watching the Central's president, Leland Stanford, awkwardly poise the sledge over the golden spike. Durant and Huntington and Dodge—and twenty other high officials stood here, looking gravely on.

Stanford swung the sledge down on the spike. The telegrapher's nervous fingers tapped "Done!" out along three thousand miles to an expectant America. Stanford handed the sledge to Durant, and the band broke into the "Star-Spangled Banner," and the soldiers snapped stiff. Eileen's hand tightened against Peace's hand. She looked up at him, her lips framing a single word: "Over!" Peace looked at his watch. This was two forty-seven in the afternoon of May 10, 1869, and two years of his life closed definitely with that sledge's tap. Like a door slamming shut. All the crowd was yelling and the officials were shaking hands, and the band, finished with the anthem, burst into a quick-step tune: "Hard Times Come Again No More." The Jupiter and the Rogers, jetting out steam, slowly moved forward till their pilots touched. Irishmen swarmed up on the engines, champagne bottles broke in foaming streams over the engines and the cheering grew louder.

Stanford handed this message to the telegrapher:

Promontory Summit, Utah, May 10, 1869
To President Ulysses Grant: The last rail has been laid, the last spike driven. The Pacific Railway is completed. The point of junction is 1086 miles west of the Missouri River and 690 miles east of Sacramento City.

Leland Stanford, Central Pacific
T. C. Durant
Sidney Dillon
John Duff, Union Pacific

The crowd milled and surged without direction. More men were taking turns at tapping the spike. All the engine whistles were rending the windy afternoon and the band kept crashing out its tunes. Peace took Eileen back through the crowd, following other people hurrying toward the Corinne train. Gunfire rose up from Promontory's street in rowdy bursts.

Eileen said with a slow, gentle voice: "How final it is. I have lived in the middle of fury for so long. Tomorrow it will seem like living in an empty house. Isn't it a little hard to say good-by, Frank?"

"Yes."

Another thought brought her glance back to him. "Campeaux—is he really dead?"

"Brett and Cordray killed him last night."

"I saw Brett in the crowd—just now, Frank—what will he do?"

"I think he's through."

"Don't trust him—don't ever," she said vehemently.

They came to their car and to the group waiting at the steps. More people came along and the group thickened—and then Peace, turning half around, came face to face with Bill Wallen. And with Nan.

Wallen said, "How are you, Frank?"

Peace nodded, not answering. To him at that moment Wallen was a dim figure in one corner of his vision, and he forgot for that little while that Eileen clung to his arm. Nan's eyes met his glance with a steadiness that ran an old shock through him again, waking the hunger he had so painfully put away. She stood before him, so quiet and so fair and so much a woman; and her eyes betrayed her, showing him a quick tenderness. He looked down and stepped back, letting them go by. But Wallen turned to have another word.

"Nan and I are leaving here tonight on the San Francisco train. I'd like to say good-by to you and wish you luck." He shook Peace's hand, poorly

hiding his emotion, and caught up with Nan. Peace had no way of stopping his glance from following. He watched the graceful swing of her shoulders, until she was absorbed by the crowd boiling down Promontory's street.

He brought his head about with an effort. Eileen's face was pale, it was strained. She wheeled abruptly so that he might not see her expression and went up the steps into the car. Overmile trotted across the street and joined Peace, and the three of them found a place in the coach.

Overmile said cheerfully: "Never saw so much good liquor busted in my life. Them engines has been well christened."

"Yes," said Peace. The Corinne train started with a sudden jerk of coupling and clattered across Promontory's switch points. Eileen was a small, huddled shape in the seat. She wouldn't look at him and she had nothing to say. Peace bent forward, rubbing his palms together in an endless circle. It was, he understood, always going to be like this. She would remember Nan and her lips would go pale as they were now, and her eyes would grow wholly dark. Memory would never let her alone.

They came into Corinne an uncomfortable hour later and got off. They stood here a little while, the other passengers crowding by them and going down the short street leading to the heart of town. Overmile's quick eyes roved around, keenly alive to all that happened.

Peace said to Eileen: "I'll take you home."

Eileen said, "Never mind," and went rapidly away. Peace stood still, embarrassed from knowing Overmile's glance touched him. He watched her turn into Main Street and disappear.

Overmile drawled, "I guess I'll go roll up my extra pair of socks. There's a Cheyenne train out of here pretty soon." He left Peace abruptly, going around the depot.

The commissary building, where Peace's quarters were, lay farther along the track, reached by a short cut through one of Corinne's back streets. Peace took that street, hands plunged deeply into his pockets, his shoulders swung down. Half the shacks and tents and flimsy frame buildings of Corinne were already deserted; and on this street a semi-emptiness oppressed him. For a little while the queen city had boomed, lifted to giddy heights by the full-blooded tide of the railroad builders. And now that tide, rolling higher and higher all the way from Fremont, had reached its crest on a barren Utah summit and had burst with a last roar. Leaving silence behind. Leaving hollowness behind.

A special train whistled down from Promontory and went by in the direction of Ogden. Faro Evans' two-story house stood gaunt and unlovely

ahead of him. A woman came from a tent. She said, “Hello there, Mr. Peace.”

He tramped stolidly on, not answering. Long Tom, junk dealer, came from another house and threw a mattress on his wagon standing by, and climbed up to the seat. Peace noted the sorry condition of Long Tom’s horses and then was deep in his own thoughts again. There was a sense women possessed he didn’t understand. Their eyes saw things a man concealed in the deepest corners of his mind. He had buried a memory of Nan.

“Hello, Bucko.”

It was a voice that crashed through his thinking like a bullet. It stopped him that quickly. Before his lifting eyes had reached their mark he knew whose voice it was and knew what it meant; and then his eyes reached a second-story window of Faro Evans’ and met the round, cold muzzle of a rifle. Behind it lay Al Brett’s grinning face.

He stood rooted, every thought and every instinct in him thinning down to a wild, bitter hope of survival. Placed as he was in the middle of the street, with no possibility of making a sudden rush into a doorway and with no chance of escaping that gun’s fatal aim, he realized he was utterly trapped. He had his hands in his pockets. He let them remain there. He stood with one foot advanced and held that position. Al Brett’s acid smiling never changed.

“Can’t you think of anything, Bucko?” he jeered. “You’re on your feet and you carry a gun. That’s the way I said I’d take you.”

Beyond the left-hand line of houses another special rolled down from Promontory, eastward bound. Peace listened to that noise fade out in the direction of Ogden. Then he heard a wagon groaning up from behind him—Long Tom’s wagon pulled by those two gaunt horses.

Brett said: “I wouldn’t leave you behind me in a thousand years. Remember the tongue lashin’ you gave me at Bryan? Think of that, Bucko, when I send you to hell. That’s the thing I’m killin’ you for.” He quit talking to Peace. The muzzle of the gun waggled and he sent a curt order to the approaching Long Tom. “Turn that thing around.”

Long Tom, Peace guessed, was ten feet behind him; and the man seemed not to hear Brett, whose voice snapped like a whiplash. “Turn around.”

Peace said: “Who’s there with you, Al?”

Brett’s attention slid back to Peace instantly; his shoulders moved and he started to speak, and didn’t. The wagon kept moving. Listening with an attention that squeezed him dry and flattened his muscles, he estimated the

team with less than two paces to his rear and bound to pass him on the side that would mask Brett's aim. Long Tom hadn't heard—and never would hear. The man was stone deaf. Peace observed Brett's chin lift from the gunstock. The muzzle swung off again—aimed at Long Tom; and at that instant Peace, throwing his life in the strength of his guess, wheeled and saw the near horse of the team coming up. He took one step against the horse. Brett's rifle roared out, the off horse grunted and dropped to his knees and Long Tom, emitting a whining cry, fell from the seat in a long dive.

The far horse was down, threshing in its harness; the near horse stood still. Peace threw himself straight at the doorway of Faro Evans' house. Brett was pumping a new shell into his gun; he heard Brett yell, "Cordray—Cordray," and a revolver's solid slug smashed the doorway casing as he reached that aperture and ran inside.

Cordray, stationed in some opposite building, kept throwing his shots in; they were wide of Peace, who now rushed along a narrow flight of stairs toward the upper landing. Brett's boots stamped across the floor up there. A door slammed, and after that another gun began to join Cordray's firing out in the street.

Peace reached the hall, to face a row of closed doors. The farthest one led into the room overlooking the street, where Brett was. That much he knew. He jerked himself down the hall, lifting his gun and driving a pair of bullets at the door's lock. He shattered it and stepped aside, and struck it with his extended foot, throwing it back. There was no more sound in the street.

Brett faced him across the threshold of the room—thin and pale, yellow fury ablaze in his eyes. He had dropped his rifle; he held a revolver half risen in his arm.

"Bucko," he said in as wicked a tone as a man could utter, "you got the devil's luck," and snapped his gun up for a shot.

Peace's bullet caught him like that, driving all the life out of him. He was dead before he fell, his lips white and wide and still unmerciful. He buckled at the knees and at the shoulders, and dropped with a force that ran a dismal echo all through the house.

Overmile's voice was in the stairway. "Peace!"

Peace said softly, "All right, Leach, all right," and turned to see his partner swing at the landing and come on. Overmile's breath whistled out of him. He looked in at the room, at the dead Al Brett. And an expression wholly and abysmally savage slowly faded from his face. He turned to catch Peace's eye.

"Sure," he muttered. "I heard the shootin' start. That was Cordray across the street. He emptied his gun. I never fired at him. He just died. His heart just quit. Good God, Frank!"

"I guess," said Peace, "that closes the book," and went back down the stairs. Out in the street he had a look at one dead horse and a driver with a broken arm.

Long Tom stared down at his sleeve. He said, "Hell," and walked unsteadily off.

Peace unhitched the remaining horse from the wagon and let it go. He bent his head back and forth to ease the strange stiffness in it. He patted all his pockets automatically, searching for his pipe. A train, coming down from Promontory, whistled for Corinne.

"That's my train," said Overmile.

"What?"

Overmile cleared his throat. "I guess this is one of the things I won't forget. Bein' here, I mean, to see Brett dead and Cordray dead. It's my idea of a good end. I recall what Phil Morgan once said. He wanted to see you win out. Well, I'm seein' it. It'll be damned good to remember."

"Leach," grunted Peace, "it's tough."

"Damn you, Frank—you're a hard man to forget!"

"I'll be in Texas," said Peace. "If you ever get tired of Laramie Plains—"

"No," said Overmile quietly. "We've had our fun, kid. It wouldn't come again for us. These things happen just once in a man's life. My time's come to settle down and recollect the old times that was. I couldn't live in another end-of-track town without recallin' a lot of people I was pretty fond of."

He put out his hand, smiling in a way that was crooked and dim and impermanent. Peace took it; and they stared at each other a long moment, having no words to say. Overmile pulled suddenly back and whirled, and traveled down the street at a charging gait. The train was ringing into Corinne. At a far corner, just before he swung out of sight, he stopped and looked behind him and threw up his long arm—and then vanished.

Peace went on toward the commissary building, walking with his feet wide apart. His head wasn't clear and strange sounds and impressions kept superimposing themselves one upon another. Of Brett falling, of the kickback of the gun in his own fist, of the fragile Rose's faint and sad smile, of Overmile's deeply felt words—of all these and many more. They made a pattern of two years of his life—without form and without significance. He came to his own small room in the commissary building and entered it.

Eileen Oliver stood there, waiting for him.

"Frank," she said. "Frank."

He was still a little stupid, his mind alternately bright and dark. He said, "What?"

She had been crying; and her face now was pointed and starved. She held her shoulders back.

"I don't want half of a man's heart, Frank. I saw how you looked at Nan Normandy this afternoon. You couldn't help it."

"Eileen," he said, "let's forget that."

She shook her head. "I knew all this back at Bear Town. But I thought you had made up your mind. And I thought I could be happy with whatever I got from you. But when you looked at her today I saw how it would be with us. No matter how you might hide it it would always be there. And both of us would have that ghost between us. We would die slowly."

She pulled her head up and came to him, a remote glow in her eyes breaking the terrible shadows across her face. She held his hands down; and she kissed him. "I would rather have just this much. I think I can remember it without too much crying. Good-by, my dear!"

He stood humbly by. He heard her walk along the side of the commissary and then run. Afterward he sat down in a chair head bent over, rubbing his big hands together.

Sometime later he jerked himself upright. A train whistled across the town, and he looked at his watch and found it to be five o'clock. He rose, making a complete circle of the room—thinking of things that never had seemed possible. The clanging of the train's bell came through the walls of the commissary building—and suddenly he went out of the room. When he reached the track he found a Promontory-bound work train rolling slowly away from the station. He made the caboose handrail after a hard run. . . .

It was six o'clock in Promontory, with a gustier wind stirring off the festival bunting of the few remaining specials. A huge party was in progress in Durant's private coach, all the car lights shining out upon the platform when Peace passed by. Promontory's street was quiet; and a crew of Irishmen were sledging down a few last sections of track for through traffic. The California train was on the main line, waiting to go. He swung aboard it and walked through all the coaches, and got off at the head end. Twilight dropped down, gray and gusty. He went around the corner of the depot—and saw Nan sitting on a bench beside the building.

She heard his steps and looked up; and a quick breath came out of her as she rose. She swayed against the station wall, and she put her hands behind

her—which was a gesture that took him all the way back to the night in Benton, in her room.

He said: “Nan, I am free to ask you—”

She brought her hands forward. She looked at him with a long, straining attention. She murmured, “I know—I know,” and lifted her face, showing him eyes bright with unshed tears.

He brought her to him with a quick sweep of his arms. When he kissed her and felt the desperate hunger of her lips a feeling raced through him like fire, tremendously shaking his mind. She had this power over him, this way of lifting him to a wild, far height, to touch him with the vague hints of a glory a man and a woman might know. He had a strange, humble side thought then of Eileen’s dark cheeks turned hopeless and of the gentleness she had touched his life with. It was a memory, he thought soberly, that would never leave.

Nan murmured, “My dear, I thought I had lost life.” And that soft phrase brought him back to the fragrance and gallantry of this woman. All that his dreams had fashioned was here; she was all he could desire.

Bill Wallen, stumbling through the falling darkness, saw them. He stood a moment, watching; and the moment turned him old. Finally he swung away as quietly as he could.

“Perhaps,” he murmured, “I was asking for more than I had a right to expect.”

The California train’s bell began to ring, and at last chugged out of the station. Peace and Nan watched it go. Night swung down on Promontory and the desert lay wild and empty.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Trouble Shooter* by Ernest Haycox]