

# Buried Treasure

## Buried Treasure: The Old-Timer's Yarn

By Stewart Edward White

Taken from "McClure's Magazine," Volume 27, May - October, 1906

We jogged homewards, our cutting ponies, tired with the quick, sharp work, shuffling knee deep in a dusk that seemed to disengage itself and rise upwards from the surface of the desert. Everybody was hungry and tired. At the chuck wagon we threw off our saddles and turned the mounts into the remuda. Some of the wisest of us, remembering the thunder-clouds, stacked our gear under the veranda roof of the dilapidated and abandoned adobe structure that had once been a ranch house of importance.

Supper was ready. We seized the tin battery, filled the plates with the meat, bread, and canned corn, and squatted on our heels. The food was good, and we ate hugely in silence. When we could hold no more we lit pipes. Then we had leisure to notice that the storm-cloud was mounting in a portentous silence to the zenith, quenching the brilliant desert stars.

As soon as we had come to a definite conclusion that it was going to rain, we deserted the camp-fire and went rustling for our blankets. At the end of ten minutes every bed was safe within the doors of the abandoned adobe ranch house, each owner recumbent on the floor claim he had pre-empted, and every man hoping fervently that he had guessed right as to the location of leaks.

Ordinarily we had depended on the light of camp-fires, so now artificial illumination lacked. Each man was indicated by the alternately glowing and waning lozenge of his cigarette fire. Occasionally some one struck a match, revealing for a moment high-lights on bronzed countenances and the silhouette of a shading hand. Voices spoke disembodied. As the conversation developed, we gradually recognized the membership of our own roomful. I had forgotten to state that the ranch house included four chambers. Outside the rain roared with Arizona ferocity. Inside men congratulated themselves, or swore as leaks developed and localized.

Naturally we talked first of stampedes. Cows and bears are the two great cattle-country topics. Then we had a mouth-organ solo or two, which naturally led on to songs. My turn came. I struck up the first verse of a sailor chantey as possessing at least the interest of novelty.

*Oh once we were a-sailing, a-sailing were we;*

*Blow high, blow low, what care we;*

*And we were a-sailing to see what we could see,*

*Down on the coast of the High Barbaree.*

I had just gone so far when I was brought up short by a tremendous oath behind me. At the same instant a match flared. I turned to face a stranger holding the little light above his head and peering with fiery intentness over the group sprawled about the floor.

He was evidently just in from the storm. His dripping hat lay at his feet. A shock of straight, close-clipped vigorous hair stood up gray above his seamed forehead. Bushy iron-gray eyebrows drawn close together thatched a pair of burning, unquenchable eyes. A square, deep jaw, lightly stubbled with gray, was clamped so tight that the cheek muscles above it stood out in knots and welts.

Then the match burned his thick square fingers, and he dropped it into the darkness that ascended to swallow it.

“Who was singing that song?” he cried harshly. Nobody answered.

“Who was that singing?” he demanded again.

By this time I had recovered from my first astonishment.

“I was singing.” said I.

Another match was instantly lit and thrust into my very face. I underwent the fierce scrutiny of an instant, then the taper was thrown away half consumed.

“Where did you learn it?” the stranger asked in an altered voice.

“I don’t remember.” I replied, “It is a common enough deep-sea chantey.”

A heavy pause fell. Finally the stranger sighed.

“Quite like,” he said, “I never heard but one man sing it.”

“Who in h— are you?” some one demanded out of the darkness.

Before replying the new-comer lit a third match, searching for a place to sit down. As he bent forward, his strong harsh face once more came clearly into view.

“He’s Colorado Rogers,” the Cattleman answered for him. “I know him.”

“Well,” insisted the first voice, “what in h— does Colorado Rogers mean by bustin’ in on our song *fiesta* that way?”

“Tell them, Rogers,” advised the Cattleman, “tell them—just as you told it down on the Gila ten years ago next month.”

“What?” inquired Rogers, “Who are you?”

“You don’t know me,” replied the Cattleman, “but I was with Buck Johnson’s outfit then. Give us the yarn.”

“Well,” agreed Rogers, “pass over the ‘makings’ and I will.”

He rolled and lit a cigarette, while I reveled in the memory of his rich, great voice. It was of the sort made to declaim against the sea or the rush of rivers or, as here, the fall of waters and the thunder—full, from the chest, with the caressing throat vibration that gives color to the most ordinary statements. After ten words we sank back oblivious to the storm, forgetful of the leaky roof and the dirty floor, lost in the story told us by the Old-Timer.

### *I—The Sailor with One Hand*

I came from Texas, like the hulk of you punchers, but a good while before the most of you were born. That was forty-odd years ago—and I’ve been on the Colorado River ever since. That’s why they call me Colorado Rogers.

At the time I speak of I was hanging out at Yuma.

We had every sort of people with us off and on, and as I was lookout at a popular game I saw them all. One evening I was on my way home about two o’clock of a moonlit night, when on the edge of the shadow I stumbled over a body lying part across the footway. At the same instant I heard the rip of steel through cloth and

felt a sharp stab in my left leg. For a minute I thought some drunk had used his knife on me, and I mighty near derringered him as he lay. But somehow I didn't, and looking closer I saw the man was unconscious. Then I scouted to see what had cut me; and found that the fellow had lost a hand. In place of it he wore a sharp steel hook. This I had tangled up with and gotten well pricked.

I dragged him out into the light. He was a slim-built young fellow, with straight black hair, long and lank and oily, a lean face, and big hooked nose. He had on only a thin shirt, a pair of rough wool pants, and the rawhide homemade *zapat*os the Mexicans wore then instead of boots. Across his forehead ran a long gash, cutting his left eyebrow square in two.

There was no doubt of his being alive, for he was breathing hard, like a man does when he gets hit over the head. It didn't sound good. When a man breathes that way he's mostly all gone.

Well it was really none of my business, as you might say. Men got batted over the head often enough in those days. But for some reason I picked him up and carried him to my 'dobe shack, and laid him out, and washed his cut with sour wine. That brought him to. He sat up as though he'd been touched with a hot poker, stared around wild-eyed, and cut loose with that song you were singing.

It fair made my hair rise to hear him, with the big, still, solemn desert outside, and the quiet moonlight, and the shadows, and him sitting up straight and gaunt, his eyes blazing each side his big eagle nose, and his snaky hair hanging over the raw cut across his head. However, I made out to get him bandaged up and in shape; and pretty soon he sort of went to sleep.

Well, he was clean out of his head for nigh two weeks. Most of the time he lay flat on his back staring at the pole roof, his eyes burning and looking like they saw each one something a different distance off, the way crazy eyes do. That was when he was best. Then again he'd sing that Barbaree song until I'd go out and look at the old Colorado going by just to be sure I hadn't died and gone below. Or else he'd just talk. That was the worst performance of all. It was like listening to one end of a telephone, though we didn't know what telephones were in those days. He began when he was a kid, and he gave his side of conversations, pausing for replies. I could mighty near furnish the replies sometimes. It was queer lingo—about ships and ships' officers and gales and calms and fights and pearls and whales and islands and birds and skies. But it was all little stuff. I

used to listen by the hour, but I never made out anything really important as to who the man was, or where he'd come from, or what he'd done.

At the end of the second week I came in at noon as per usual to fix him up with grub. I didn't pay any attention to him, for he was quiet. ♦ As I was bending over the fire, he spoke. Usually I didn't bother with his talk, for it didn't mean anything, but something in his voice made me turn. He was lying on his side, those black eyes of his blazing at me, but now both of them saw the same distance.

"Where are my clothes?" he asked very intense.

"You ain't in any shape to want clothes," said I. "Lie still."

I hadn't any more than got the words out of my mouth before he was atop me. His method was a winner. He had me by the throat with his hand, and I felt the point of the hook pricking the back of my neck. One little squeeze—Talk about your deadly weapons!

But he'd been too sick and too long abed. He turned dizzy and keeled over, and I dumped him back on the bunk. Then I put my six-shooter on.

In a minute or so he came to.

"Now you're a nice, sweet proposition," said I, as soon as I was sure he could understand me. "Here I pick you up on the street and save your worthless carcass, and the first chance you get you try to crawl my hump. Explain."

"Where's my clothes?" he demanded again very fierce.

"For heaven's sake," I yelled at him, "what's the matter with you and your old clothes? There ain't enough of them to dust a fiddle with, anyway. What do you think I'd want with them? They're safe enough."

"Let me have them," he begged.

Just to satisfy him I passed over his old duds.

"I've been robbed," he cried.

“Well,” said I, “what did you expect would happen to you lying around Yuma after midnight with a hole in your head?”

“Where’s my coat?” he asked.

“You had no coat when I picked you up,” I replied.

He looked at me mighty suspicious, but didn’t say anything more—wouldn’t even answer when I spoke to him. After he’d eaten a fair meal, he fell asleep. When I came back that evening, the bunk was empty and he had gone.

I didn’t see him again for two days. Then I caught sight of him quite a ways off. He nodded at me very sour; and dodged around the corner of the store.

“Guess he suspicions I stole that old coat of his,” thinks I; and afterwards I found that my suspicions had been correct.

However, he didn’t stay long in that frame of mind. It was along towards evening, and I was walking on the banks looking down over the muddy old Colorado, as I always liked to do. The sun had just set, and the mountains had turned hard and stiff, as they do after the glow; and the sky above them was a thousand million miles deep of pale green-gold light. A pair of Greasers were ahead of me, but I could see only their outlines, and they didn’t seem to interfere any with the scenery. Suddenly a black figure seemed to rise up out of the ground; the Mexican man went down as though he’d been jerked with a string; and the woman screeched.

I ran up pulling my gun. The Mex was flat on his face, his arms stretched out. On the middle of his back knelt my one-armed friend. And that sharp hook was caught neatly under the point of the Mexican’s jaw. You bet he lay still.

I really think I was just in time to save the man’s life. According to my belief another minute would have buried the hook in the Mexican’s neck. Anyway, I thrust the muzzle of my Colt’s into the sailor’s face.

“What’s this?” I asked.

The sailor looked up at me without changing his position. He was not the least bit afraid.



“This man has my coat,” he explained.

“Where’d you get the coat?” I asked the Mex.

“I ween heem at monte off Antonio Curvez,” said he. “Maybe,” growled the sailor.

He still held the hook under the man’s jaw, but with the other hand he ran rapidly under and over the Mexican’s left shoulder. In the half light I could see his face change. The gleam died from his eye; the snarl left his lips. Without further delay he arose to his feet.

“Get up and give it here,” he demanded.

The Mexican was only too glad to get off so easy. I don’t know whether he’d really won the coat at monte, or not. In any case he flew *muy pronto*, leaving me and my friend together.

The man with the hook felt the left shoulder of the coat again, looked up, met my eye, muttered something intended to be pleasant, and walked away.

This was in December.

The last day of February I was sitting in my shack smoking a pipe after supper, when, my one-armed friend opened the door a foot, slipped in, and shut it immediately. By the time he looked toward me I knew where my six-shooter was.

“That’s all right,” said I, “but you better stay right there.”

I intended to take no more chances with that hook.

He stood there looking straight at me without winking or offering to move.

“What do you want?” I asked.

“I want to make up to you for your trouble,” said he. “I’ve got a good thing, and I want to let you in on it.”

“What kind of a good thing?” I asked.

“Treasure,” said he.

“H’m,” said I.

I examined him closely. He looked all right enough, neither drunk nor loco.

“Sit down,” said I—“over there; the other side the table.” He did so. “Now fire away,” said I.

He told me his name was Solomon Anderson, but that he was generally known as Handy Solomon, on account of his hook; that he had always followed the sea; that lately he had coasted the west shores of Mexico; that at Guyamas he had fallen in with Spanish friends, in company with whom he had visited the mines in the Sierra Madre; that on this expedition the party had been attacked by Yaquis and wiped out, he alone surviving; that his blanket-mate before expiring had told him of gold buried in a cove of Lower California by the man’s grandfather; that the man had given him a chart showing the location of the treasure; that he had sewn this chart in the shoulder of his coat, whence his suspicion of me and his being so loco about getting it back.

“And it’s a big thing,” said Handy Solomon to me, “for they’s not only gold, but altar jewels and diamonds. It will make us rich, and a dozen like us, and you can kiss the Book on that.”

“That may all be true,” said I, “but why do you tell me? Why don’t you get your treasure without the need of dividing it?”

“Why mate,” he answered, “it’s just plain gratitude. Didn’t you save my life, and nuss me, and take care of me when I was nigh killed?”

“Look here, Anderson, or Handy Solomon, or whatever you please to call yourself,” I rejoined to this, “if you’re going to do business with me—and I do not understand yet just what it is you want of me—you’ll have to talk straight. It’s all very well to say gratitude, but that don’t go with me. You’ve been around here three months, and barring a half-dozen civil words and twice as many of the other kind, I’ve failed to see any indications of your gratitude before. It’s a quality with a h— of a hang-fire to it.”

He looked at me sideways, spat, and looked at me sideways again. Then he burst into a laugh.

“The devil’s a preacher, if you ain’t lost your pin-feathers,” said he. “Well, it’s this, then: I got to have a boat to get there; and she must be stocked. And I got to have help with the treasure, if it’s like this fellow said it was And the Yaquis and cannibals from Tiburon is through the country. It’s money I got to have, and it’s money I haven’t got, and can’t get unless I let somebody in as pardner.”

“Why me?” I asked.

“Why not?” he retorted, “I ain’t see anybody I like better.”

We talked the matter over at length. I had to force him to each point, for suspicion was strong in him. I stood out for a larger party. He strongly opposed this as depreciating the shares, but I had no intention of going alone into what was then considered a wild and dangerous country. Finally we compromised. A third of the treasure was to go to him: a third to me: and the rest was to be divided among the men whom I should select. This scheme did not appeal to him.

“How do I know you plays fair?” he complained, “They’ll be four of you to one of me: and I don’t like it, and you can kiss the Book on that.”

“If you don’t like it, leave it,” said I, “and get out, and be d— to you.”

Finally he agreed; but he refused me a look at the chart, saying that he had left it in a safe place. I believe in reality he wanted to be surer of me, and for that I can hardly blame him.

## *II—The Murder On the Beach*

I had a chum named Billy Simpson, and I rung him in for friendship. Then there was a solemn, tall Texas young fellow, strong as a bull, straight and tough, brought up fighting Injins. He never said much, but I knew he’d be right there when the gong struck. For fourth man I picked out a German named Schwartz. He and Simpson had just come back from the mines together. I took him because he was a friend of Billy’s, and besides was young and strong, and was the only man in town excepting the sailor, Anderson, who knew anything about running a boat. I forgot to say that the Texas fellow was named Denton.

We worked the open boat we got, up to Yuma partly with oars and partly by sails. Then we loaded her with grub for a month. In addition we put in picks and

shovels: and a small cask of water. Handy Solomon said that would be enough, as there was water marked down on his chart. We told the gang that we were going trading.

At the end of the week we started, and were out four days. There wasn't much room, what with the supplies and the baggage for the five of us. We had to curl up most anywheres to sleep. And it certainly seemed to me that we were in lots of danger. The waves were much bigger than she was, and splashed on us considerable; but Schwartz and Anderson didn't seem to mind. They laughed at us. Anderson sang that song of his: and Schwartz told us of the placers he had worked. He and Simpson had made a pretty good clean-up, just enough to make them want to get rich. The first day out Simpson showed us a belt with about an hundred ounces of dust. This he got tired of wearing, so he kept it in a compass-box, which was empty.

At the end of the four days we turned in at a deep bay and came to anchor. The country was the usual proposition—very light brown, brittle-looking mountains, about two thousand feet high; lots of sage and cactus: a pebbly beach: and not a sign of anything fresh and green.

But Denton and I were mighty glad to see any sort of land. Besides, our keg of water was pretty low; and it was getting about time to discover the spring the chart spoke of. So we piled our camp stuff in the small boat, and rowed ashore.

Anderson led the way confidently enough up a dry arroyo whose sides were clay and conglomerate. But though we followed it to the end, we could find no indications that it was anything more than a wash for rain floods.

“That's main queer,” muttered Anderson, and returned to the beach.

There he spread out the chart—the first look at it we'd had—and set to studying it. Two crosses were marked on the land part—one labeled “*oro*,” and the other “*agua*.”

“Now there's the high cliff,” says Anderson, following it out, “and there's the round hill with the boulder—and if them bearings don't point due for that ravine, the devil's a preacher.”

We tried it again, with the same result. A second inspection of the map brought us no light on the question. We talked it over, and looked at it from all points, but

we couldn't dodge the truth; the chart was wrong.

Then we explored several of the nearest gullies, but without finding anything but loose stones baked hot in the sun.

By now it was getting towards sundown, so we built us a fire of *mesquite* on the beach, made us supper, and boiled a pot of beans.

We talked it over. The water was about gone.

"That's what we've got to find first," said Simpson, "no question of it. It's God knows how far to the next water, and we don't know how long it will take us to get there in that little boat. If we run our water entirely out before we start, we're going to be in trouble. We'll have a good look tomorrow; and if we don't find her, we'll run down to Mollyhay and get a few extra casks."

"Perhaps that map is wrong about the treasure too," suggested Denton.

"I thought of that," said Handy Solomon, "but then, thinks I to myself, this old rip probably don't make no long stay here—just dodges in and out like, between tides, to bury his loot. He would need no water at the time; but he might when he came back, so he marked the water on his map. But he wasn't noways particular *and* exact, being in a hurry. But you can kiss the Book to it that he didn't make no such mistakes about the swag."

"I believe you're right," said I.

When we came to turn in, Anderson suggested that he should sleep aboard the boat. But Billy Simpson, in mind perhaps of the hundred ounces in the compass-box, insisted that he'd just as soon as not. After a little objection Handy Solomon gave in; but I thought he seemed sour about it. We built a good fire, and in about ten seconds were asleep.

Now usually I sleep like a log, and did this time until about midnight. Then all at once I came broad awake and sitting up in my blankets. Nothing had happened—I wasn't even dreaming—but there I was as alert and clear as though it were broad noon.

By the light of the fire I saw Handy Solomon sitting, and at his side our five rifles gathered.

I must have made some noise, for he turned quietly toward me, saw I was awake, and nodded.

After a minute Anderson threw on another stick of wood, yawned and stood up.

“It’s wet,” said he, “I’ve been fixing the guns.”

He showed me how he was inserting a little patch of felt between the hammer and the nipple—a scheme of his own for keeping damp from the powder. Then he rolled up in his blanket. At the time it all seemed quite natural—I suppose my mind wasn’t fully awake, for all my head felt so clear. Afterwards I realized what a ridiculous bluff he was making: for of course the cap already on the nipple was plenty to keep out the damp. I fully believe he intended to kill us as we lay. Only my sudden awakening spoiled his plan.

I had absolutely no idea of this at the time, however. Not the slightest suspicion entered my head. In view of that fact, I have since believed in guardian angels. For my next move, which at the time seemed to me absolutely aimless, was to change my blankets from one side of the fire to the other. And that brought me alongside the five rifles.

Owing to this fact, I am now convinced, we awoke safe at daylight, cooked breakfast, and laid the plan for the day. Anderson directed us. I was to climb over the ridge before us and search in the ravine on the other side. Schwartz was to explore up the beach to the left, and Denton to the right. Anderson said he would wait for Billy Simpson, who had overslept in the darkness of the cubby-hole, and who was now paddling ashore. The two of them would push inland to the west until a high hill would give them a chance to look around for greenery.

We started at once, before the sun would be hot. The hill I had to climb was steep and covered with *chollas*, so I didn’t get along very fast. When I was about half way to the top, I heard a shot from the beach. I looked back. Anderson was in the small boat, rowing rapidly out to the vessel. Denton was running up the beach from one direction, and Schwartz from the other. I slid and slipped down the bluff, getting pretty well stuck up with the *cholla* spines.

At the beach we found Billy Simpson lying on his face, shot through the back. We turned him over, but he was apparently dead. Anderson had hoisted the sail, had cut loose from the anchor, and was sailing away.

Denton stood up straight and tall looking. Then he pulled his belt in a hole, grabbed my arm, and started to run up the long curve of the beach. Behind us came Schwartz. We ran near a mile, and then fell among some tules in an inlet at the farther point .

“What is it?” I gasped.

“Our only chance—to get him—” said Denton, “He’s got to go around this point—big wind—perhaps his mast will bust then he’ll come ashore—” He opened and shut his big brown hands.

So there we two fools lay, like panthers in the tules, taking our only one-in-a-million chance to lay hands on Anderson. Any sailor could have told us that the mast wouldn’t break, but we had winded Schwartz a quarter of a mile back. And so we waited, our eyes fixed on the boat’s sail, grudging her every inch, just burning to fix things to suit us a little better. And naturally she made the point in what I now know was only a fresh breeze, squared away, and dropped down before the wind toward Guyamas.

We walked back slowly to our camp, swallowing the copper taste of too hard a run. Schwartz we picked up from a boulder just recovering. We were all of us crazy mad. Schwartz half wept and blamed and cussed. Denton glowered away in silence. I ground my feet into the sand in a helpless sort of anger, not only at the man himself, but also at the whole way things had turned out. I don’t believe the least notion of our predicament had come to any of us. All we knew yet was that we had been done up; and we were hostile about it.

But at camp we found something to occupy us for the moment. Poor Billy was not dead, as we had supposed, but very weak and sick and a hole square through him. When we returned he was conscious, but that was about all. His eyes were shut and he was moaning. I tore open his shirt to stanch the blood. He felt my hand and opened his eyes. They were glazed, and I don’t think he saw me.

“Water, water ”” he cried.

At that we others saw all at once where we stood. I remember I rose to my feet, and found myself staring straight into Tom Denton’s eyes. We looked at each other that way for I guess it was a full minute. Then Tom shook his head.

“Water, water ”” begged poor Billy.

Tom leaned over him.

“My God, Billy, there ain’t any water!” said he.

### *III—Pirate Gold*

We could do nothing for him except shelter him from the sun, and wet his forehead with sea-water; nor could we think clearly for ourselves as long as the spark of life lingered in him. His chest rose and fell regularly, but with long pauses between. When the sun was overhead, he suddenly opened his eyes.

“Fellows,” said he, “it’s beautiful over there; the grass is so green and the water so cool; I am tired of marching, and I reckon I’ll cross over and camp.”

Then he died. We scooped out a shallow hole above tide-mark, and laid him in it, and piled over him stones from the wash.

Then we went back to the beach very solemn, to talk it over.

“Now, boys,” said I, “there seems to me just one thing to do; and that is to pike out for water as fast as we can.”

“Where?” asked Denton.

“Well,” I argued, “I don’t believe there’s any water about this bay. Maybe there was when that chart was made. It was a long time ago. And anyway, the old pirate was a sailor, and no plainsman, and maybe he mistook rain-water for a spring. We’ve looked around this end of the bay. The chances are we’d use up two or three days exploring around the other, and then wouldn’t be as well off as we are right now.”

“Which way?” asked Denton again, mighty brief.

“Well,” said I, “there’s one thing I’ve always noticed in case of folks held up by the desert; they generally go wandering about here and there looking for water until they die not far from where they got lost. And usually they’ve covered a heap of actual distance.”

“That’s so,” agreed Denton.



“Now I’ve always figured that it would be a good deal better to start right out for some particular place, even if it’s ten thousand miles away. A man is just as likely to strike water going in a straight line as he is going in a circle; and then, besides, he’s getting somewhere.”

“Correct,” said Denton.

“So,” I finished, “I reckon we’d better follow the coast south and try to get to Mollyhay.”

We took stock of what we had to depend on. The total assets proved to be just three pairs of legs. A pot of coffee had been on the fire, but that villain had kicked it over when he left.

So without any further delay we set up the ridge I had started to cross that morning. Schwartz lagged, sulky as a muley cow, but we managed to keep him with us. At the top of the ridge we took our bearings for the next deep bay. Already we had made up our minds to stick to the sea-coast, both on account of the lower country over which to travel, and the off chance of falling in with a fishing vessel. Schwartz muttered something about it’s being too far even to the next bay, and wanted to sit down on a rock. Denton didn’t say anything; but he jerked Schwartz up by the collar so fiercely that the German gave it over and came along.

We dropped down into the gully, stumbled over the boulder wash, and began to toil in the ankle-deep sand of a little sagebrush flat this side of the next ascent. Schwartz followed steadily enough now, but had fallen forty or fifty feet behind. This was a nuisance, as we had to keep turning to see if he still kept up. Suddenly he seemed to disappear.

Denton and I hurried back to find him on his hands and knees behind a sagebrush, clawing away at the sand like mad.

“Can’t be water on this flat,” said Denton, “he must have gone crazy.”

“What’s the matter, Schwartz?” I asked.

For answer he moved a little to one side, showing beneath his knee one corner of a wooden box sticking above the sand.

At this we dropped beside him, and in five minutes had uncovered the whole of the chest. It was not very large, and was locked. A rock from the wash fixed that, however. We threw back the lid.

It was full to the brim of gold coins, thrown in loose.

“The treasure ’” I cried.

There it was, sure enough, or some of it. We looked the chest through, but found nothing but the gold coins. The altar ornaments and jewels were lacking.

“Probably buried in another box or so,” said Denton.

Schwartz wanted to dig around a little.

“No good,” said I, “We’ve got our work cut out for us as it is.”

Denton backed me up. We were both old hands at the business, had each in our time suffered the black thirst; and the memory of it outweighed any desire for treasure.

But Schwartz was money-mad. Left to himself he would have stayed on that sand flat to perish as certainly as had poor Billy. We had fairly to force him away, and then succeeded only because we let him fill all his pockets to bulging with the coins. As we moved up the next rise, he kept looking back and uttering little moans against the crime of leaving it.

Luckily for us it was winter. We shouldn’t have lasted six hours at this time of year. As it was, the sun was hot against the shale and the little stones of those cussed hills. We plodded along until late afternoon, toiling up one hill and down, on only to repeat immediately. Towards sundown we made the second bay where we plunged into the sea, clothes and all, and were greatly refreshed. I suppose a man absorbs a good deal that way. Anyhow, it always seemed to help.

We were now pretty hungry, and as we walked along the shore, we began to look for turtles or shell-fish or anything else that might come handy. There was nothing. Schwartz wanted to stop for a night’s rest; but Denton and I knew better than that.

“Look here, Schwartz,” said Denton, “you don’t realize you’re entered against

time in this race—and that you're a d— fool to carry all that weight in your clothes.”

So we dragged along all night.

It was weird enough, I can tell you. The moon shone cold and white over that dead, dry country. Hot whiffs rose from the baked stones and hillsides. Shadows lay under the stones like animals crouching. When we came to the edge of a silvery hill, we dropped off into pitchy blackness. There we stumbled over boulders for a minute or so, and began to climb the steep shale on the other side. This was fearful work. The top seemed always miles away. By morning we didn't seem to have made much of anywhere. The same old hollow-looking mountains with the sharp edges stuck up in about the same old places.

We had got over being very hungry, and though we were pretty dry, we didn't really suffer yet from thirst. About this time Denton ran across some fish-hook cactus, which we cut up and chewed. They have a sticky wet sort of inside, which doesn't quench your thirst any, but helps to keep you from drying up and blowing away.

All day we plugged along as per usual.

We kept a sharp lookout for anything to eat, but there was nothing but lizards and horned toads. Later we'd have been glad of them, but by that time we'd got out of their district. Night came. Just at sundown we took another wallow in the surf, and chewed some more fish-hook cactus. When the moon came up, we went on.

I'm not going to tell you how dead beat we got. We were pretty tough and strong for all of us had been used to hard living, but after the third day without anything to eat and no water to drink, it came to be pretty hard going. It got to the point where we had to have some *reason* for getting out besides just keeping alive. A man would sometimes rather die than keep alive, anyway, if it came only to that. But I know I made up my mind I was going to get out so I could smash up that Anderson; and I reckon Denton had the same idea. Schwartz didn't say anything; but he pumped on ahead of us, his back bent over, and his clothes sagging and bulging with the gold he carried.

We used to travel all night, because it was cool; and rest an hour or two at noon. That is all the rest we did get. I don't know how fast we went; I'd got beyond

that. We must have crawled along mighty slow, though, after our first strength gave out. The way I used to do was to collect myself with an effort, look around for my bearings, pick out a landmark a little distance off, and forget everything but it. Then I'd plod along, knowing nothing but the sand and shale and slope under my feet until I'd reached that landmark. Then I'd clear my mind and pick out another.

But I couldn't shut out the figure of Schwartz that way. He used to walk along just ahead of my shoulder. The weight of the gold in his clothes bent his shoulders over.

As we went on, the country gradually got to be more mountainous; and as we were steadily growing weaker, it did seem things were piling up on us. The next day we ran out of the fish-hook cactus; and, being on a high promontory, were out of touch with the sea. For the first time my tongue began to swell a little. The cactus had kept me from that before. Denton must have been in the same fix, for he looked at me and raised one eyebrow kind of humorous.

Schwartz was having a good deal of difficulty to navigate. I will say for him that he had done well; but now I could see that his strength was going on him in spite of himself. He knew it, all right; for when we rested that day, he took all the gold coins and spread them in a row, and counted them, and put them back in his pocket, and then all of a sudden snatched out two handfuls and threw them as far as he could.

"Too heavy," he muttered; but that was all he could bring himself to throw away.

All that night we wandered high in the air; I guess we tried to keep a general direction, but I don't know. Anyway, along late, but before moonrise—she was now on the wane—I came-to to find myself looking over the edge of a twenty-foot drop. Right below me I made out a faint glimmer of white earth in the starlight. Somehow it reminded me of a little trail I used to know under a big rock back in Texas.

"Here's a trail," I thought, more than half loco, "I'll follow it!"

At least that's what half of me thought. The other half was sensible, and knew better, but it seemed to be kind of standing to one side, a little scornful, watching the performance. So I slid and slipped down to the strip of white earth; and sure enough it was a trail. At that the loco half of me gave the sensible part the laugh.

I followed the path twenty feet and came to a dark hollow under the rock, and in it a round pool of water about a foot across. They say a man kills himself drinking too much after starving for water. That may be; but it didn't kill me, and I sucked up all I could hold. Perhaps the fish-hook cactus had helped. Well, sirs, it was surprising how that drink brought me around. A minute before I'd been on the edge of going plumb loco; and here I was as clear-headed as a lawyer.

I hunted up Denton and Schwartz. They drank themselves full, too. Then we rested. It was mighty hard to leave that spring—

Oh, we had to do it. We'd have starved sure there. The trail was a game trail, but that did us no good, for we had no weapons.

The good effects of the water lasted us about a day. Then we began to see things again. Off and on I could see water plain as could be in every hollow; and game of all kinds standing around and looking at me. I knew these were all fakes. By making an effort I could swing things around to where they belonged. I used to do that every once in a while just to be sure we weren't doubling back, and to look out for real water. But most of the time it didn't seem to be worth while. I just let all these visions riot around and have a good time inside me or outside me, whichever it was. I knew I could get rid of them any minute. Most of the time, if I was in any doubt, it was easier to throw a stone to see if the animals were real or not. The real ones ran away.

We began to see bands of wild horses in the uplands. One day both Denton and I plainly saw one with saddle marks on him. If only one of us had seen him, it wouldn't have counted much, but we both made him out. This encouraged us wonderfully, though I don't see why it should have. We had topped the high country too, and had started down the other side of the mountains that ran out on the promontory. Denton and I were still navigating without any thought of giving up; but Schwartz was getting in bad shape. I'd hate to pack twenty pounds over that country even with rest, food, and water. He was toting it on nothing. We told him so; and he came to see it; but he never could persuade himself to get rid of the gold all at once. Instead he threw away the pieces one by one. Each sacrifice seemed to nerve him up for another heat. I can shut my eyes and see it now—the wide glaring yellow country, the pasteboard mountains, we three dragging along, and the fierce sunshine flashing from the doubloons as one by one they went spinning through the air.

#### IV--\_The Chewed Sugar-Cane\_

It was five days to the next water. But they were worse than the eight days before. We were lucky, however, for at the spring we discovered in a deep wash near the coast, was the dried-up skull of a horse. It had been there a long time; but a few shreds of dried flesh still clung to it. It was the only thing that could be described as food that had passed our lips since breakfast thirteen days before. In that time we had crossed the mountain chain, and had come again to the sea. The Lord was good to us. He sent us the water, and the horse's skull, and the smooth hard beach, without breaks or the necessity of climbing hills. And we needed it, oh, I promise you, we needed it!

Schwartz still threw away his gold coins; and once, in one of my rare intervals of looking about me, I saw Denton picking them up. This surprised me mildly; but I was too tired to be very curious. Only now, when I saw Schwartz's arm sweep out in what had become a mechanical movement, I always took pains to look; and always I saw Denton search for the coin. Sometimes he found it, and sometimes he did not.

Schwartz threw away a gold piece as another man would take a stimulant. Gradually, without really thinking about it, I came to see this; and then went on to see why Denton picked up the coins; and a great admiration for Denton's cleverness seeped through me like water through the sand. He was saving the coins to keep Schwartz going. When the last coin went, Schwartz would give out. It all sounds queer now; but it seemed all right then—and it *was* all right, too.

As for me, the figures of my companions, and the yellow sand under my feet, and a consciousness of the blue and white sea to my left are all I remember, except when we had to pull ourselves together for the purpose of cutting the fish-hook cactus. I kept going; and I knew I had a good reason for doing so, but it seemed too much of an effort to recall what that reason was.

So we walked on the beach, losing entire track of time. And after a long interval I came to myself to see Schwartz lying on the sand, and Denton standing over him.

“He's give out, ” croaked Denton.

His voice sounded as if it was miles away, which surprised me; but when I

answered, mine sounded miles away, too, which surprised me still more.

Denton pulled out a handful of gold coins.

“This will buy him some more walk,” said he gravely, “but not much.”

I nodded. It seemed all right, this new, strange purchasing power of gold—it *was* all right, by God, and as real as buying bricks—

“I’ll go on,” said Denton, “and send back help. You come after.”

“To Mollyhay,” said I.

This far I reckon we’d hung onto ourselves because it was serious. Now I began to laugh. So did Denton. We laughed and laughed.

*A damn long way*

*To Mollyhay,*

said I. Then we laughed some more, until the tears ran down our cheeks, and we had to hold our poor weak sides. Pretty soon we fetched up with a gasp.

*A damn long way*

*To Mollyhay,*

whispered Denton; and then off we went into more shrieks. And when we would sober down a little, one or the other of us would say it again.

*A damn long way*

*To Mollyhay,*

and then we’d laugh some more. It must have been a sweet sight!

At last I realized that we ought to pull ourselves together; so I snubbed up short, and Denton did the same; and we set to laying plans. But every minute or so one of us would catch on some word, and then we’d trail off into rhymes and laughter and repetition.

“Keep him going as long as you can,” said Denton.

“Yes.”

“And be sure to stick to the beach.”

That far it was all right and clear-headed. But the word ‘beach’ let us out.

*I’m a peach*

*Upon the beach,*

sings I, and there we were both off again until one or the other managed to grope his way back to common sense again. And sometimes we crow-hopped solemnly around and around the prostrate Schwartz like a pair of Injins.

But somehow we got our plan laid at last, slipped the coins into Schwartz’s pocket, and said good-by.

*Old socks, good-by,*

*You bet I’ll try,*

yelled Denton, and laughing fit to kill, danced off up the beach and out into a sort of gray mist that shut off everything beyond a certain distance from me now. So I kicked Schwartz, he felt in his pocket, threw a gold piece away, and bought a little more walk.

My entire vision was fifty feet or so across. Beyond that was the gray mist. Inside my circle I could see the sand quite plainly and Denton’s footprints. If I moved a little to the left, the wash of the waters would lap under the edge of that gray curtain. If I moved to the right, I came to cliffs. The nearer I drew to them, the farther up I could see; but I could never see to the top.

One day, without any apparent reason, I moved at right angles across the beach. Directly before me lay a piece of sugar-cane; and one end of it had been chewed.

Do you know what that meant? Animals don’t cut sugar-cane and bring it to the beach and chew one end. A new strength ran through me, and actually the gray mist thinned and lifted for a moment until I could make out dimly the line of



cliffs and the tumbling sea.

I was not a bit hungry, but I chewed on the sugar-cane, and made Schwartz do the same. When we went on, I kept close to the cliff, even though the walking was somewhat heavier.

I remember after that its getting dark and then light again, so the night must have passed, but whether we rested or walked I do not know. Probably we did not get very far, though certainly we staggered ahead after sun-up, for I remember my shadow.

About midday, I suppose, I made out a dim trail leading up a break in the cliffs. Plenty of such trails we had seen before. They were generally made by peccaries in search of cast-up fish—I hope they had better luck than we.

But in the middle of this, as though for a sign, lay another piece of chewed sugar-cane.

#### *V—The Calabash Stew*

I had agreed with Denton to stick to the beach; but Schwartz could not last much longer, and I had not the slightest idea how far it might prove to be to Mollyhay. So I turned up the trail. We climbed a mountain ten thousand feet high. I mean that; and I know, for I've climbed them that high, and I know just how it feels, and how many times you have to rest, and how long it takes, and how much it knocks out of you. Those are the things that count in measuring height, and so I tell you we climbed that far. Actually I suppose the hill was a couple of hundred feet, if not less. But on account of the gray mist I mentioned, I could not see the top, and the illusion was complete.

We reached the summit late in the afternoon, for the sun was square in our eyes. But instead of blinding me, it seemed to clear my sight, so that I saw below me a little mud hut with smoke rising behind it, and a small patch of cultivated ground.

I'll pass over how I felt about it: they haven't made the words—

Well, we stumbled down the trail and into the hut. At first I thought it was empty, but after a minute I saw a very old man crouched in a corner. As I looked at him he raised his bleared eyes to me, his head swinging slowly from side to

side as though with a kind of palsy. He could not see me, that was evident, nor hear me, but some instinct not yet decayed turned him toward a new presence in the room. In my wild desire for water I found room to think that here was a man even worse off than myself.

A vessel of water was in the corner. I drank it. It was more than I could hold, but I drank even after I was filled, and the waste ran from the corners of my mouth. I had forgotten Schwartz. The excess made me a little sick, but I held down what I had swallowed, and I really believed it soaked into my system as it does into the desert earth after a drought.

In a moment or so I took the vessel and filled it and gave it to Schwartz. Then it seemed to me that my responsibility had ended. A sudden great dreamy lassitude came over me. I knew I needed food, but I had no wish for it and no ambition to search it out. The man in the corner mumbled at me with his toothless gums. I remember wondering if we were all to starve there peacefully together—Schwartz and his remaining gold coins, the man far gone in years, and myself. I did not greatly care.

After a while the light was blotted out. There followed a slight pause. Then I knew that some one had flown to my side, and was kneeling beside me and saying liquid, pitying things in Mexican. I swallowed something hot and strong. In a moment I came back from wherever I was drifting, to look up at a Mexican girl about twenty years old.

She was no great matter in looks, but she seemed like an angel to me then. And she had sense. No questions, no nothing. Just business. The only thing she asked of me was if I understood Spanish.

Then she told me that her brother would be back soon, that they were very poor, that she was sorry she had no meat to offer me, that they were *very* poor, that all they had was *calabash*—a sort of squash. All this time she was hustling things together. Next thing I knew I had a big bowl of *calabash* stew between my knees.

Now strangely enough I had no great interest in that *c\_alabash \_stew*. I tasted it, sat and thought a while, and tasted it again. By and by I had emptied the bowl. It was getting dark. I was very sleepy. A man came in, but I was too drowsy to pay any attention to him. I heard the sound of voices. Then I was picked up bodily

and carried to an outbuilding and laid on a pile of skins. I felt the weight of a blanket thrown over me—

I awoke in the night. Mind you, I had practically had no rest at all for a matter of more than two weeks; yet I woke in a few hours. And, remember, even in eating the *calabash* stew I had felt no hunger in spite of my long fast. But now I found myself ravenous. You boys do not know what hunger is. It hurts. And all the rest of that night I lay awake chewing on the rawhide of a pack-saddle that hung near me.

Next morning the young Mexican and his sister came to us early bringing more *calabash* stew. I fell on it like a wild animal, and just wallowed in it so eager was I to eat. They stood and watched me—and I suppose Schwartz, too, though I had now lost interest in anyone but myself—glancing at each other in pity from time to time.

When I had finished, the man told me that they had decided to kill a beef so we could have meat. They were very poor, but God had brought us to them—

I appreciated this afterward. At the time I merely caught at the word ‘meat.’ It seemed to me I could have eaten the animal entire, hide, hoofs, and tallow. As a matter of fact, it was mighty lucky they didn’t have any meat. If they had, we’d probably have killed ourselves with it. I suppose the *calabash* was about the best thing for us under the circumstances.

The Mexican went out to hunt up his horse. I called the girl back.

“How far is it to Mollyhay?” I asked her.

“A league,” said she.

So we had been near our journey’s end after all, and Denton was probably all right.

The Mexican went away horseback. The girl fed us *calabash*. We waited.

About one o’clock a group of horsemen rode over the hill. When they came near enough I recognized Denton at their head. That man was of tempered steel—

They had followed back along the beach, caught our trail where we had turned

off, and so discovered us. Denton had fortunately found kind and intelligent people.

We said good-by to the Mexican girl, made Schwartz give her one of his gold pieces.

We mounted and rode off, very wobbly.

We lived three weeks in Mollyhay. It took us that long to get fed up. The lady I stayed with made a dish of kid meat and stuffed olives—

Why, an hour after filling myself up to the muzzle I'd be hungry again, and scouting round to houses looking for more to eat!

There were lots of fishing boats in the harbor, and we hired one and a man to run it for next to nothing a week. We laid a course north, and in six days anchored in our bay.

I tell you, it looked queer. There were the charred sticks of the fire, and the coffee-pot lying on its side. We took off our hats at poor Billy's grave a minute; and then climbed over the *cholla*-covered hill carrying our picks and shovels and the canvas sacks to take the treasure away in.

There was no trouble in reaching the sandy flat. But when we got there, we found it torn up from one end to the other. A few scattered timbers, and three empty chests with the covers pried off alone remained. Handy Solomon had been there before us.

We went back to our boat sick at heart. Nobody said a word. We went aboard and made our Greaser boatman head for Yuma. It took us a week to get there. We were all of us glum, but Denton was the worst of the lot. Even after we'd got back to town and fallen into our old ways of life, he couldn't seem to get over it. He seemed plumb possessed of gloom, and moped around like a chicken with the pip. This surprised me; for I didn't think the loss of money would hit him so hard. It didn't hit any of us very hard in those days.

One evening I took him aside, and fed him a drink, and expostulated with him.

"Oh, *h*— Rogers," he burst out. "I don't care about the loot. But, suffering cats, think how that fellow sized us up for a lot of pattern-made fools; and how right

he was about it. Why all he did was to sail out of sight around the next corner. He knew we'd start across country; and we did. All we had to do was to lay low, and save our legs. He was *bound* to come back. And we might have nailed him when he landed.'

"That's about all there was to it," concluded Colorado Rogers after a pause, "—except that I've been looking for him ever since; and when I heard you singing that song, I naturally thought I'd landed."

"And you never saw him again?" asked Windy Bill.

"Well," chuckled Rogers, "I did about ten year later. It was in Tucson. I was in the back of a store, when the door in front opened, and this man came in. He stopped at the little cigar-case by the door. In about one jump I was on his neck. I jerked him over backwards before he knew what had struck him, threw him on his face, got my hands in his back-hair, and began to jump his features against the hard floor. Then all at once I noted that this man had two arms: so of course he was the wrong fellow. 'Oh, excuse me' said I, and ran out the back door.