CLASSICS TO GO

THE RETURN OF BLUE PETE

LUKE ALLAN

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CHAPTER I

MAHON ON THE TRAIL

Sergeant Mahon emptied the barracks mail bag on the desk before Inspector Barker and stood awaiting instructions. The Inspector passed his hand over the small pile of letters and let his eye roam from one to another in the speculative way that added zest to the later revelation of their contents.

One from headquarters at Regina he set carefully aside. With an "ah!" of satisfied expectancy he selected one from the remainder and placed it before him. Mahon was mildly interested. The little foibles of his superior were always amusing to him. Eyes still fixed on the envelope, the Inspector commenced to fill his pipe.

"Spoiling for a job, Mahon?"

"Depends."

"Hm-m! Beautifully non-committal."

Mahon's interest was rising. The Inspector went on calmly cramming in the tobacco. When the job was completed to his liking, he thrust the pipe between his lips, flicked a loose flake from his tunic, and forgot to apply a match. Instead, he picked up the envelope and examined it on all sides. Mahon began to grow impatient.

Twice the Inspector turned the letter over. Mahon fretted. He could see on its face the Division headquarters stamp—Lethbridge—but why all this ceremony and pother about an official note that came almost every day? He recalled suddenly that his wife would be holding lunch for him—with fresh fish he had seen unloaded little more than an hour ago from the through train from Vancouver. He could almost smell it sizzling on the natural gas cooker.

"Hm-m!" The envelope was not yet broken. "I imagine this will interest you, Mahon."

Suddenly the Inspector dived into a drawer and, taking from it an official looking envelope, passed it back to the Sergeant. The latter accepted it with fading interest. The Assistant Commissioner at Regina was unfolding to Inspector Barker's immediate superior, the Superintendent at Lethbridge, an unexciting tale of crime. Crime was their daily diet, and this was located far beyond their district.

Somewhere away up north, hundreds of miles beyond the jurisdiction of the Medicine Hat unit of the Mounted Police, events of concern to the Police were happening along the line of the transcontinental railway now under construction. Certain acts of sabotage—tearing down railway trestles and bridges, undermining trains, displacing grade, tampering with rails and switches—were not only hampering construction but endangering life. And things were growing worse. In addition there was complaint of horse-stealing at one isolated camp.

The point of the letter was contained in the last paragraph. Could Superintendent Magwood spare an experienced bushman and trailer to go north and take temporary charge?

Mahon handed the letter back with a laugh.

"Bit of a joke, horse-stealing from contractors who only last year grabbed every stolen horse offered them. Retribution!"

The Inspector swung about on his swivel chair.

"We never discovered who got those horses."

"The ones Blue Pete stole?" A cloud came to Mahon's face. "Not exactly the contractors who got them, but there was no doubt where they went."

"I always regretted we had to hand over the search just there to a
Division that knows little about ranch horses," murmured the Inspector.
"Still—perhaps—" He stopped and shifted the letter he held from one
hand to the other, as if weighing it.

"We'd have made short work of it, sir."

"Even if we'd implicated your halfbreed friend?" The older man was peering beneath his iron-grey brows.

"I'm afraid nothing more was needed to implicate Blue Pete," sighed
Mahon.

"For a halfbreed rustler he seems to have stamped himself on your imagination, Boy." They had called Mahon "Boy" almost since he joined the force seven years before as a young man, packed with youthful vitality, frankness and ambition, and the nickname was dear to him.

"But he wasn't always a rustler. I remember him only for the two years he spent unofficially in the Force, the best rustler-buster we ever had. That was the real Blue Pete. That he died a rustler was due to crooked 'justice.' Poor old Pete! If only he hadn't had the Indian strain!"

"He wouldn't have been so useful to us. His uncanny scent on the trail—By the way, Mahon, strange we never found trace of him—his grave or something—when you're so certain how and where he died. And where's that ugly pinto of his? Whiskers, he called her, wasn't it?"

"Mira found the body, sir—that last letter she sent us said as much. She'd hide him from us—it's exactly the thing she would do. She was a loyal wife—"

"Not quite a wife."

"A wife as truly as absence of formal ceremony can make one. He's lying out there somewhere in the heart of the Hills he loved. . . . They were a sentimental pair."

"Almost too much sentiment in Mira Stanton for you," chuckled the
Inspector. "When I think of how near a thing it was—"

"I was a fool, sir." Mahon's face was red. "But it wasn't because I was too good for her. We'd never have pulled together; I know that now. She was born and bred in the wild ways. I respect her as much as I ever did—perhaps more because she has steadfastly refused even to let us know where she is—we who sent her down and indirectly killed the man she loved."

"I suppose you've talked all this over with your wife, young man?"

"Yes, sir. Helen, though reared in such a different atmosphere from her cousin, understands Mira better than I. She sympathises—"

"But where is she—Mira, I mean? We know she's drawing the profits regularly from the 3-bar-Y. But that foreman of hers is as mute as a clam. . . . And now Bert, her best cowboy, has disappeared. Hm-m! What d'ye make of it, Mahon?"

It was not like the Inspector to draw the opinions of his staff, and
Mahon regarded him slyly.

"You have a theory, sir. I haven't. I only see what's clear. Mira's over in Montana—"

"And so you think Mira Stanton is living on her past in Montana—gamboling about with Whiskers, I suppose? And Blue Pete lies in the Hills? Comfortable disposal of the whole affair. I envy you."

"I've searched the Hills in all his old haunts, sir—"

"And I'm dam glad you didn't find him."

The Inspector tore open the letter in his hand, smiled, and passed it back.

"You have a copy of the Assistant Commissioner's letter to me of the tenth," it ran. "In observance of his orders I would suggest that you send Sergeant Mahon, who is, I believe, the best for the purpose in the Division."

Mahon flushed. A gleam of boyish excitement made him look five years younger. Eagerly he searched the Inspector's face.

"I'd like it, sir. I'd do my best. I've done bush work in the Hills, and Blue Pete knocked something into me about trails."

"It always surprises me," began the Inspector maliciously, "how eager young husbands are to get away—"

"May I take Helen, sir?"

"No—you—may—not! What do you think this is—a honeymoon? In the first place you'll probably be located in some defunct end-of-steel village where even the ghosts are

abominable. In the next place you'll be too busy to know you're married. Horse-thieves? Bah! This is different stuff. You'll be up against something new. We've more than a suspicion that those devils, the Independent Workers of the World, are at the bottom of it. When you get on the trail of the I.W.W., Boy, there'll be no chivalry of the plains. It'll be knives, and poison, and dynamite . . . and darkness for deeds of darkness. All the criminals you've met are saints compared with these foreign devils. Thank the Lord, they've come no further from the States as yet than the construction camps!"

He rose and deliberately removed the tunic that was to him the badge of office.

"Speaking unofficially," he observed, "my advice is to shoot first and enquire after. Remember that every Pole and Russian and Hungarian there carries a knife or a slug—he has to in self-protection—and uses it as we do slang. Every foreign workman on a railway construction gang is a potential murderer. . . . I'd rather give evidence for you on a murder charge than strew flowers on your grave."

He reached for his tunic.

"You'll have a chance to do credit to Blue Pete's memory. . . . About
Helen—wait till we see what size the cloud is."

He thrust his arms into the tunic and buttoned it tight to his chin.

"You leave on Saturday," he growled.

CHAPTER II

EVENING AT MILE 130

"Daddy!"

Big Jim Torrance, framed in the doorway of the shack, was deaf to everything but the scene before him.

"Daddy!" There was a note of impatience in the girl's voice. "I know what you're doing—" She appeared in the doorway between kitchen and living room, enamel pan in one hand and a dish towel in the other. "Of course! That horrid trestle—always that trestle! And you might have been helping with the pans. You know how they stain my hands."

But the noise of the distant camp, lounging out now from the night meal, crowded what small interstices of his attention remained from the beloved trestle.

Out before him, painted in the vivid mesmeric colours of evening, lay a vista dear to him—a new railway built in silent places. Across the yellow grade the bush of Northern Canada stretched on and on, not thick just here, but prophetic of the untracked forests beyond. On his left a great cleft cut the earth, an eleven hundred yard valley, in the middle of which ran a river, sweeping into sight up there round the bend from the deep green of the bush—running placidly enough until it struck the foaming rapids above the trestle—then smoothing into quiet current and swinging

back through the chasm to disappear into the unknown behind the shack.

Five hundred yards up the wide bottom of the valley the construction camp sprawled its ugly mass. From where he stood in the doorway he looked down on it over the grade—its straggling unformed planning; the flimsy shacks, half unhewn logs, half canvas, without respect for streets or angles or lines; its half-hearted struggle to lift itself up the slope to the sheltered forest above.

A disreputable, careless, disgusting picture of hardened man catering only to his simplest needs. In large part the survival of previous grade and bridge camps which had merely picked up their canvas when they moved along, it had been patched up with more disreputable canvas, now mouldy and torn, with bits of roof gone here, and windows and doors missing there. The very dregs even of construction camps. Big Jim Torrance himself had used it first on grade and had sold the portable parts to a contractor with work further west. Then O'Connor, the first contractor to tackle the trestle, had shoved his men into what was left with orders to do their damnedest. And now Torrance again, having taken over the task O'Connor had funked in a moment of panic.

Half a thousand bohunks[1] were existing there now, five hundred of the wildest foreigners even Torrance had handled. But they were *his* gang. And Mile 130 was *his* camp. That thought had impelled him once to punch the head of a leering engineer who rashly ventured to call it

"Torrance's pig-sty" in Torrance's hearing. The camp might go to perdition so far as he was concerned, but he wasn't going to have any rank outsider shoving it along.

With a determined little set to her lips, her only inheritance from her father, Tressa Torrance passed through the living room and seized him by the ear; and he returned to earth with a howl of mock pain.

"You little tyrant!" he protested, wrapping one arm about her and hoisting her to his shoulder. "Your mother wasn't a patch to you."

She wriggled herself free and, still holding to the ear, led him into the shack.

"At least you can empty the water," she ordered.

"Oh, I can do more than that. How about the pans?"

"They're done."

He was really contrite. "I guess I did forget, little girl."

"It's a habit you have."

He rubbed his moustached lips along her bare arm and swung her again to his shoulder.

"Low bridge!"

She bent from her lofty perch until her cheek lay along his hair, and they passed into the kitchen, where he set her down with elaborate care.

"I guess that trestle isn't through with me yet," he observed, a frown marking his forehead. "It's dropped six inches in the last week." He picked up a pan of dirty water and started for the door. "You won't be beaten," she told him confidently. "It's sinking less every day. You've put in half the country now—there must be bottom somewhere." He disappeared without a word and tossed the water over the edge of the chasm. "Anyway," she protested, as he returned, "looking at it isn't going to stiffen its backbone. If it is, you can do the pans and I'll do the looking. See those hands!" She held them outspread before his face. "Aren't you ashamed?"

He tried to look as she desired.

"They're the dandiest little hands in the world to me. They're your mother's over again. You don't need to care who sees them out here."

He saw the slight flush come to her cheeks, and his voice sobered.

"Adrian Conrad looks a pretty big fish where there's nobody but bohunks."

"Adrian's a 'big fish' anywhere," she flamed, "and you know it.
Besides, there's the Police. Counting you that makes four real nice
people. We've often been where there are fewer. The daughter of James
Torrance, the big railway contractor—"

"Big Jim Torrance, you mean," he interrupted, throwing back his huge head to laugh. "The crudest boss that ever hammered a lazy bohunk to his pick. No, no, little girl, not all your airs, not all my big jobs, can make me more than a half-taught rough-neck—a success, I'll admit. But the biggest success he ever had was in having a daughter—"

He dived for her, but she held him off by planting the bottom of the pan on his face.

"Now," she ordered, "you finish your work."

By the time he had obeyed orders—emptied the last pan of water, taken a look at the two horses in the stable behind the shack, tossed his mud-caked boots through the back door to await his pleasure—inter-larding between each chore another glance at the trestle—Tressa was in her own room.

Torrance returned to the front door. A crash of musical instruments broke from the ugly clutter of buildings on the river bottom.

"Do cut it short to-night, Tressa. Morani's got the orchestra going already. Where that Italian devil stows music in that vile body of his, and where he manages to find more of it in those other brutes, beats me."

He could hear her moving about her room, sliding drawers, lifting and dropping the implements of her evening toilet.

"Not another woman in a hundred miles," he grumbled, "at least not one that matters. And yet I got to go through this waiting every night!"

She laughed, her mouth full of the coil of her hair.

His eye moved upward from the camp and settled on one lone shack that crowned a promontory overlooking the ugly scene below.

"Koppy's at home," he called.

"Some day you'll find out something about your underforeman," she teased.

"I wish I could," he returned so viciously that she laughed aloud.

"You've been wishing it a long time, but to date he seems innocent enough. You don't need to care so long as he turns up to work every morning."

"Innocent?" He snorted. "Them damn Poles can't be innocent. Ever since them horses began to go— If we could only do without the damn heathen!"

"But you damn well can't."

"Tressa!" He stumbled back to her door with horrified eyes.

"My daddy's good enough to copy," she laughed.

"Your daddy, girl, is—is shocked. If I hear you—" He tossed his hands up helplessly. "You're making your daddy so mealy-mouthed, the first bohunk with a grouch will pull his nose. I've got to swear at 'em. If you don't let me tear loose a bit when I'm with you, the air's going to be so blue next time I meet a bohunk that he'll think he's gone to his last reward."

She came to the doorway of her room, coiling a loop of hair.

"Go and listen to the music, daddy. You need sweetening to-night."

The rough big fellow looked deep into her eyes. "I'd go plumb crazy in this life without you, little girl."

"Sure you would," she agreed contentedly. "Now run along and do
Morani's orchestra justice. He deserves it."

He patted her cheek and returned to his favourite stand in the front door.

The evening mysteries were deepening. Already the trunks of the trees on the far bank of the river were merging into a dull mass. The play of sunlight and shadow in the nearer forest was an etching of white and black. The mellow sudden Western night was dropping glamorous mantle over the familiar scene, softening the crudeness of the camp and exalting the dying round of the forest's fight for solitude. The sand of the grade gleamed with evening tint of ochre.

The network of the trestle was a maze of incised lines against the shaded bank opposite. A solitary bird, astir beyond its bedtime, hovered against the sky, cheeping to unseen brood below. Some swift-vanishing creature—wolf or coyote—ran along the edge of the distant bank for a fearful, curious glimpse of the persistent invasion of its venerable privacy. The sun, like a mocking challenge, was painting with flaming hand its tremendous but fleeting colour-picture on the northwest sky, where clouds unseen by day hung ever ready for the evening-hour brush of the great artist.

The dirty canvas of the camp was laundered by the mysteries of twilight. Living groups lay peacefully about the river bottom, gambling, Torrance knew. For the moment the orchestra was resting. But snatches of hideous sound came wafting on the evening air as music; concertina, fiddle, mouth-organ, with here and there a cornet, a mandolin, a guitar, many breathing individual melody, merged into one vast harmony. Rasping voices lifted themselves in song. No laughter, no shouting—only the sounds of men whose memories are more sensitive than their feelings, who live in the past or the future, never in the present. Evening was fluttering gently down, mellowing line and tone.

Even to Big Jim Torrance at such an hour came the appeal of dimly reverent things. Here on the fringe of prairie and forest, in the vast spaces of Northern Canada where wolf met coyote, Torrance was waging a big fight. Last year he had brought the grade, a simple task, east of the mountains. Somewhere far down the list of sub-sub-contractors—fleas on larger fleas almost ad infinitum—he

had built that gleaming line of yellow sand that held the sleepers and the rails—almost with his own hands. From far over the horizon to the east he had crept along westward, urging on his big gang with relentless but just hand. And out there before his door they had driven the last spike at the very edge of the valley that cut the landscape.

There was the end of his contract. Eastward the line awaited only the final ballasting. Westward—that was different.

The great river chasm that had ended his task was baffling O'Connor, the bridge contractor. For the irregular, winding gouge in the earth, reminder of the day when some tremendous torrent teemed there from the mountains hundreds of miles to the west, was more than a mere cutting to fill. Eleven hundred yards, one foot, four inches from bank to bank (Torrance knew every measurement to the last inch), by one hundred and forty-one feet, eight inches deep, was task enough. Where the railway was to span the Tepee River, meandering in the midst of the valley, the water ran only seventy yards wide; nowhere in sight was it more than one hundred and fifty. And there was solid bottom to it.

But down there, one hundred and fifty feet below Torrance's eyes, was two hundred yards of quicksands. There lay the real job.

O'Connor had tackled it blithely enough, while Torrance was hustling grade from the east. But when Big Jim Torrance, his task completed, had rolled down his sleeves

and commenced to pack, O'Connor was more than worried. Tressa had skipped about the packing with happy songs, for they were going East—to civilisation.

Then Torrance had gone to take a last look at O'Connor's progress, and O'Connor had turned haggard eyes on his friend and bent his head over his arms and wept. The quicksands were beating him.

Torrance fled back to the end-of-steel village at Mile 127, that ghastly face before him, the picture of a strong man weeping. And for three days he drank himself to forgetfulness.

On the morning of the fourth day he rolled up his sleeves again, waved his hand after the fleeing O'Connor, and signed a fresh contract for himself. Nature, the enemy he had been threshing into submission all his life, was not going to block the beautiful grade he had built. With the effects of the acidulated poison of Mile 127 still in his limbs but clear of his brain he shook his fist at the quicksands.

And now, eleven months later, he was still shaking his fist—and his curses were deeper and more bitter. For the quicksands were fighting to the last ditch, swallowing whole forests of trees and hills of rock, and opening its maw for more. Friends urged Torrance to ask leave to move the grade north or south to sounder bottom. But Torrance was not built that way. Besides, he had great reverence for a survey. Even a bridge, where a filled-in trestle was planned—a bridge with a span two hundred yards long—impossible!

Torrance stood in the doorway and cast his eye along the line of steel above the trestle. Only a week ago it had been shored up again, and fewer supply trains than usual had passed. Yet it was down six inches.

The orchestra Chico Morani, a mere Dago bohunk himself, had organised among the men, burst afresh. And every other sound ceased. Even the gambling groups out before the camp paused to listen.

"Morani's started on the second number, Tressa. Thank Heaven he has one redeeming feature, if he is a Wop."

"This isn't your loving night, daddy. It must be my cooking —"

"There's Koppy just come out of his shack. A couple with him, Werner and Heppel, I bet."

"Dear me!" she teased out to him. "And I've been so careful with the meals." A few moments of mirror concentration. "But I know what it really is—that trestle. It's nerves. . . . Till that hole's filled you're just an ordinary sick man. . . . And you know you can't stand the twilight. Come in and light up. . . . Adrian'll be here in a few minutes and read you back to peace. . . . And don't forget, daddy, we're almost out of books. You'll have to send for more by the next supply train. Constable Williams is to lend me his catalogues to make out a new list."

She stopped, conscious of a tense stillness from the room beyond. For a fleeting moment she listened, then hurried

out, fastening the last pin in her belt.

Her father, feet braced, was staring tensely over the grade past the camp. And in his hand, half raised, was the rifle that always hung in a rack beside the door.

[1] The term applied to foreign laborers, especially on railway construction.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERIOUS RAFT

Tressa Torrance, inured as sensitive girl could be to the turmoil and danger of their life on railway construction, experienced a new sensation of fear. Never had she seen her father use a firearm; his ready fists were more to his liking. With a breathless rush she stood by his side, one hand gripping the wrist of the hand that held the trigger guard.

That precaution first. Then she turned her eyes to where her father was staring.

Far up the ribbon of river, only a few hundred yards below where it emerged from its hidden course through the forest, a clumsy raft was drifting clumsily down. In the gleam of the last sun rays it was but a silhouette of black—a flat base with live creatures on it. In a moment it drifted from the glare and in the clear evening air was visible to the last line.

On it were a man and a woman, and a group of horses. Good cause for excitement there in the shack up by the grade. Along the mile of the Tepee that was known to man there was only one raft—at least only one that had a right to exist—the make-shift affair employed on construction duty down at the base of the trestle. Within sixty miles there was not a living soul but the construction gang and the two

Policemen at Mile 127, not a horse but Torrance's and the Police pair. At least that was the limit of Torrance's information, and none other had such claim to know.

But this was not the construction raft—and there were the horses.
Torrance had already lost a dozen of his best in some mysterious way.
It was with that thought that he had seized his rifle.

Then the woman!

Suddenly he became aware that something was wrong with the raft—and a few hundred yards ahead was a stretch of foaming rapids that would smash it to kindling wood. The woman stood leaning on the shaft of a broken sweep, watching the man. With unhurried but almost superhuman strength he was working the other sweep from the rear, aiming for the opposite bank.

The struggle seemed hopeless. Torrance read it at a glance, unaccustomed as he was to water. The tug of the rapids was drawing them swiftly downward in a course that was too slightly diagonal to its current to promise more than the faintest hope. The man seemed suddenly to grasp the extent of their peril, for his arms moved more quickly, the bow of the raft swinging about and pointing upstream; but still the current gripped them relentlessly.

The woman lifted her head and looked down along the whirling eddies to the froth of broken water. For a moment she stood, rigid, then turned to the horses, and from among

them sprang a huge dog. Into its mouth she pressed the end of a rope, and it leaped far into the water.

Torrance's left hand fumbled back within the door for his field-glasses. Through them he saw the dog emerge lower down, still holding the rope, and dash in long bounds up the bank. As the strain of the rope came, it sank back on its haunches. The rope snapped up out of the water for a moment, and the dog plunged forward with the jerk, fighting every inch. Then it got a firmer hold and braced. Inch by inch the raft yielded to the extra power. It continued to drift toward the rapids, but also it was working to the bank now. At intervals the eddying current pulled the dog along, but always it braced against the tug, its feet digging into the loose gravel and sand.

The man was working hard, but so regularly that the dog felt but a fraction of the weight of the loaded raft. But what it felt was sufficient to turn the scales.

As the raft slithered in sideways to the bank, a small broncho dashed ashore, followed by four other horses. At a fast lope it led away toward the trees that grew down the distant slope to the river bottom.

Torrance awakened then. With livid face he swung the rifle up and fired. Tressa struck at his arm too late.

It was a long range, and to such an indifferent marksman a matter of luck. But to Tressa to try was sacrilege after the struggle they had witnessed. The bullet fell far short,

glancing from the water in a swift slit in the reflecting surface.

At the report the broncho broke into a gallop. The man and the woman swung swiftly toward the grade, and the next instant the woman had disappeared—somewhere; neither Torrance nor Tressa knew where. The man straightened and shaded his eyes toward them.

Tressa was struggling with her father. He must not shoot again. The man watched. Presently he slowly raised his rifle.

The thud of the bullet in the shack not two feet from Torrance's shoulder preceded the sound of the explosion. The rifle did not drop. A second tiny fleck of smoke, and a bullet sank into the logs only two feet on the other side of the doorway. Torrance heaved Tressa back within the shack. And as he came about, a third bullet from the mysterious stranger dug into the log not more than a foot above his head.

Torrance did not move—he scarcely even thought at that moment. The marksman above the rapids lowered his rifle and turned carelessly away. The woman and the dog joined him. The horses were lost in the trees.

The big contractor twisted himself from bullet hole to bullet hole, and one big hand pushed wonderingly through his heavy hair.

"It sure ain't me he wants," he muttered.

CHAPTER IV

IGNACE KOPPOWSKI APPEARS

The rifle fire, disturbing to Torrance, created a panic in the camp below. Men who used weapons on each other with the worst intent were the first to appreciate their menace. True, they seldom resorted to firearms, for the Pole, and the Russian, and the Hungarian, and the Italian and their kind on construction consider the knife more suited to their particular case, as being safer and more satisfying. But for a gun they have a proper respect.

Some of the groups of gamblers on the river bottom saw the raft while yet Torrance was wrapped in the evening picture, watching at first with the stupidity of their class, then with equally characteristic suspicion. From group to group the strange spectacle passed without spoken word; and some whose spotted lives had carried them through varied scenes realised the threat of the rapids. Here and there one, more sensitive to the struggle, rose to his feet in unconscious sympathy. The stable foreman, recognising the horses, stumbled away to where his charges were housed for the night. But for the most part these slow-witted men without a quiver saw death creeping on the raft. Until the horses leaped ashore each knew to a cent his position in the interrupted games.

But the rifle shot whipping out from the boss's shack up beside the grade electrified them. As if worked by a common spring, they rushed for the camp, heavy footed and panicky, drawing hidden weapons from shirt or trousers or bootleg to repel the danger they did not understand.

By the time the stranger across the river had replied twice only one face was visible about the camp.

From a shack part way up the bank toward the trestle a small man had bounded at the first report. In his right hand was a hairbrush, and a pair of mauve suspenders hung from his hips. Anxious but angry, he searched the camp with those firm eyes.

Adrian Conrad, Torrance's foreman, Tressa's lover—the latter first in sequence of time as in everything else—knew these men and hated them with an intensity born of enforced association. Their unorthodox but definitive methods of settling the smallest dispute were familiar to him by experience. Indeed, on his small wiry frame were sundry scars of knives, whose customarily decisive operations he had thus far escaped by an arrogance of manner and a promptness of action that disconcerted a bohunk's aim and riddled his nerve.

About the camp he saw only the panic of getting to cover. As he wondered, he caught the movement of the lifting rifle across the river. Ahead of the bullet his eye reached the shack beside the trestle, and Torrance's quick turn pointed out its course. Conrad, who kept no rifle at his shack, had to be satisfied with watching, mechanically completing his