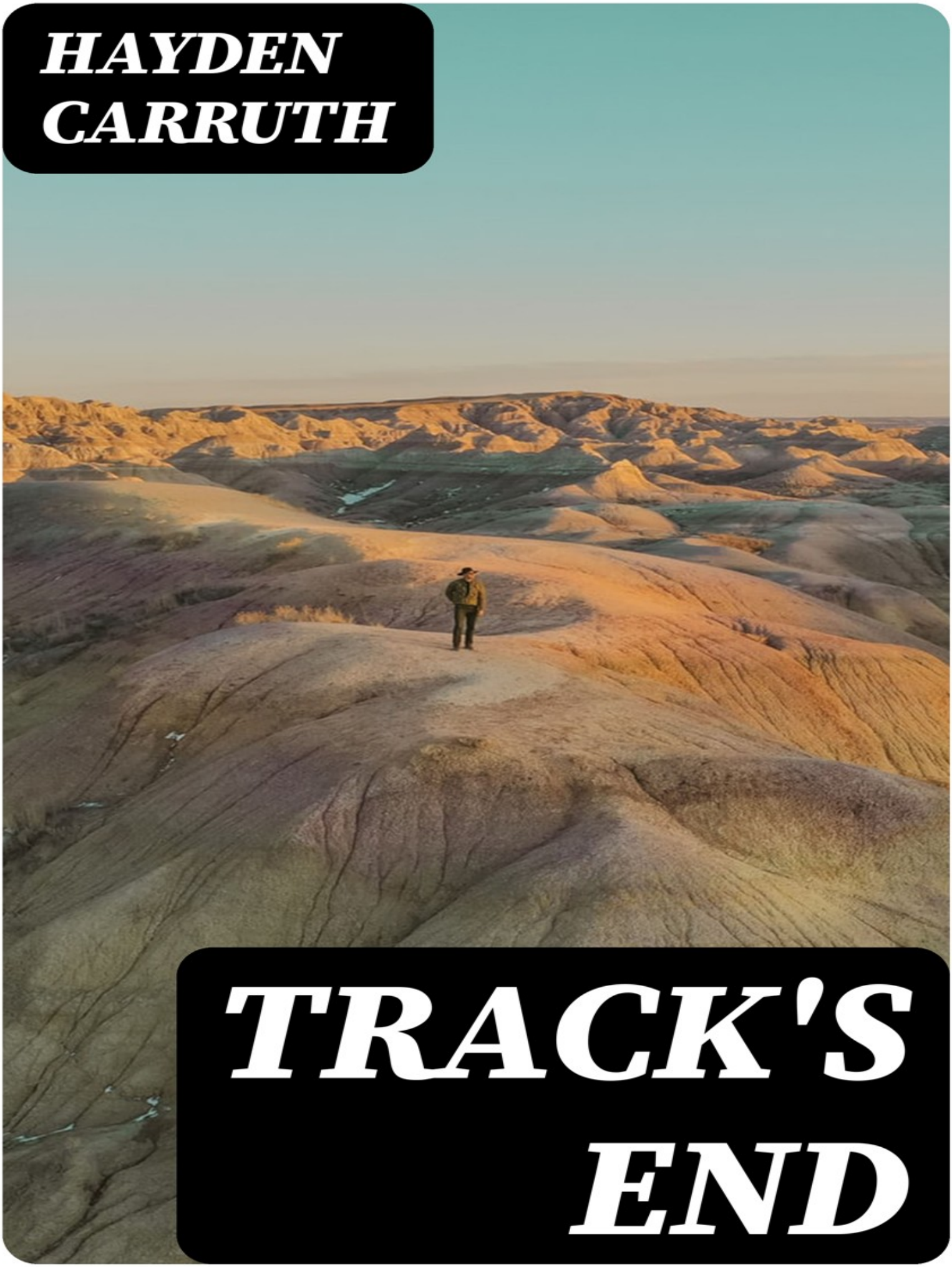
HAYDEN CARRUTH



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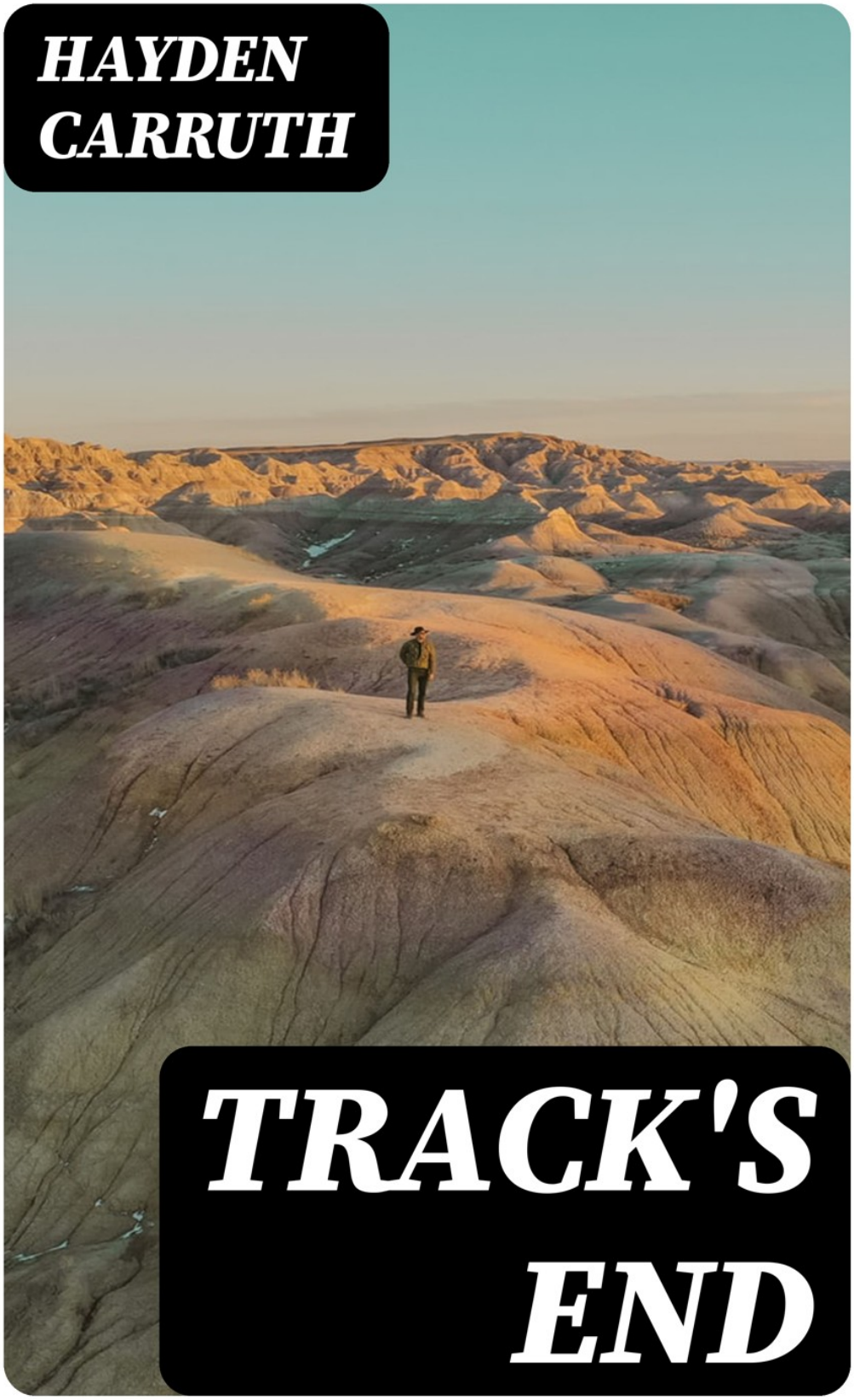

TRACK'S END

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Track's End

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CHAPTER I

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Something about my Home and Track’s End: with how I leave the one and get acquainted with Pike at the other.

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When I left home to shift for myself I was eighteen years old, and, I suppose, no weakling; though it seems to me now that I was a mere boy. I liked school well enough, but rather preferred horses; and a pen seems to me a small thing for a grown man, which I am now, to be fooling around with, but I mean to tell (with a little help) of some experiences I had the first winter after I struck out for myself.

I was brought up in Ohio, where my father was a country blacksmith and had a small farm. His name was William Pitcher, but, being well liked by all and a square man, 2 everybody called him Old Bill Pitcher. I was named Judson, which had been my mother’s name before she was married, so I was called Jud Pitcher; and when I was ten years old I knew every horse for a dozen miles around, and most of the dogs.

It was September 16th, in the late eighteen-seventies, that I first clapped eyes on Track’s End, in the Territory of Dakota. The name of the place has since been changed. I remember the date well, for on that day the great Sisseton prairie fire burned up the town of Lone Tree. I saw the smoke

as our train lay at Siding No. 13 while the conductor and the other railroad men nailed down snake's-heads on the track. One had come up through the floor of the caboose and smashed the stove and half killed a passenger. Poor man, he had a game leg as long as I knew him, which was only natural, since when the rail burst through the floor it struck him fair.

I was traveling free, as the friend of one of the brakemen whom I had got to know in St. Paul. He was a queer fellow, named Burrdock. The railroad company set great store by Burrdock on account of his dealings with 3 some Sioux Indians. They had tried to ride on top of the cars of his train without paying fare, and he had thrown them all off, one by one, while the train was going. The fireman told me about it.

Burrdock was taking me out to Track's End because he said it was a live town, and a good place for a boy to grow up in. He had first wanted me to join him in braking on the railroad, but I judged the work too hard for me. If I had known what I was coming to at Track's End I'd have stuck to the road.

Perhaps I ought to say that I left home in June, not because I wasn't welcome to stay, but because I thought it was time I saw something of the world. Mother was sure I should be killed on the cars, but at last she gave her consent. I went to Galena, from there up the Mississippi on a packet to St. Paul, and then out to Dakota with Burrdock.

The snake's-heads delayed us so that it was eleven o'clock at night before we reached Track's End. Ours was the only train that ran on the road then, and it came up Mondays and Thursdays, and went back Tuesdays and

Fridays. It was a freight-train, with a 4 caboose on the end for passengers, “and the snake’s-heads,” as the fireman said. A snake’s-head on the old railroads was where a rail got loose from the fish-plate at one end and came up *over* the wheel instead of staying down *under* it.

Track’s End was a new town just built at the end of the railroad. The next town back toward the east was Lone Tree; but that day it burned up and was no more. It was about fifty miles from Track’s End to Lone Tree, with three sidings between, and a water-tank at No. 14. After the fire the people all went to Lac-qui-Parle, sixty miles farther back; so that at the time of which I write there was nothing between Track’s End and Lac-qui-Parle except sidings and the ashes of Lone Tree; but these soon blew away. There were no people living in the country at this time, and the reason the road had been built was to hold a grant of land made to the company by the government, which was a foolish thing for the government to do, since a road would have been built when needed, anyhow; but my experience has been that the government is always putting its foot in it. 5

When I dropped off the train at Track’s End I saw by the moonlight that the railroad property consisted of a small coal-shed, a turntable, a roundhouse with two locomotive stalls, a water-tank and windmill, and a rather long and narrow passenger and freight depot. The town lay a little apart, and I could not make out its size. There were a hundred or more men waiting for the train, and one of them took the two mail-sacks in a wheelbarrow and went away toward the lights of the houses. There were a lot of mules and wagons and scrapers and other tools of a gang of

railroad graders near the station; also some tents in which the men lived; these men were waiting for the train with the others, and talked so loud and made such a disturbance that it drowned out all other noises.

The train was left right on the track, and the engine put in the roundhouse, after which Burrdock took me over town to the hotel. It was called the Headquarters House, and the proprietor's name was Sours. After I got a cold supper he showed me to my room. The second story was divided into about twenty rooms, the partitions being lathed but 6 not yet plastered. It made walls very easy to talk through, and, where the cracks happened to match, as they seemed to mostly, they weren't hard to look through. I thought it was a good deal like sleeping in a squirrel-cage.

The railroad men that I had seen at the station had been working on an extension of the grade to the west, on which the rails were to be laid the next spring. They had pushed on ten miles, but, as the government had stopped making a fuss, the company had decided to do no more that season, and the train I came up on brought the paymaster with the money to pay the graders for their summer's work; so they all got drunk. There were some men from Billings in town, too. They were on their way east with a band of four hundred Montana ponies, which they had rounded up for the night just south of town. Two of them stayed to hold the drove, and the rest came into town, also to get drunk. They had good luck in doing this, and fought with the graders. I heard two or three shots soon after I went to bed, and thought of my mother. 7

Some time late in the night I was awakened by a great rumpus in the hotel, and made out from what I heard through the laths that some men were looking for somebody. They were going from room to room, and soon came into mine, tearing down the sheet which was hung up for a door. They crowded in and came straight to the bed, and the leader, a big man with a crooked nose, seized me by the ear as if he were taking hold of a bootstrap. I sat up, and another poked a lantern in my face.

“That’s him,” said one of them.

“No, he was older,” said another.

“He looks like he *would* steal a dog, anyhow,” said the man with the lantern. “Bring him along, Pike.”

“No,” said the man who had hold of my ear, “he ain’t much more’n a boy–we’re looking for grown men to-night.”

Then they went out, and I could feel my ear drawing back into place as if it were made of rubber. But it never got quite back, and has always been a game ear to this day, with a kind of a lop to it.

Sours told me in the morning that they 8 were looking for the man that stole their dog, though he said he didn’t think they had ever had a dog. Pike, he said, had come out as a grader, but it had been a long time since he had done any work.

I took a look around town after breakfast and found forty or fifty houses, most of them stores or other places of business, on one street running north and south. There were a few, but not many, houses scattered about beyond the street. Some of the buildings had canvas roofs, and there were a good many tents and covered wagons in which

people lived. The whole town had been built since the railroad came through two months before. There was a low hill called Frenchman's Butte a quarter of a mile north of town. I climbed it to get a view of the country, but could see only about a dozen settlers' houses, also just built.

The country was a vast level prairie except to the north, where there were a few small lakes, with a little timber around them, and some coteaux, or low hills, beyond. The grass was dried up and gray. I thought I could make out a low range of hills to the 9 west, where I supposed the Missouri River was. On my way back to town a man told me that a big colony of settlers were expected to arrive soon, and that Track's End had been built partly on the strength of the business these people would bring. I never saw the colony.

When I got back to the hotel Sours said to me:

"Young man, don't you want a job?"

I told him I should be glad of something to do.

"The man that has been taking care of my barn has just gone on the train," continued Sours. "He got homesick for the States, and lit out and never said boo till half an hour before train-time. If you want the job I'll give you twenty-five dollars a month and your board."

"I'll try it a month," I said; "but I'll probably be going back myself before winter."

"That's it," exclaimed Sours. "Everybody's going back before winter. I guess there won't be nothing left here next winter but jack-rabbits and snowbirds."

I had hoped for something better than 10 working in a stable, but my money was so near gone that I did not think

it a good time to stand around and act particular. Besides, I liked horses so much that the job rather pleased me, after all.

Toward evening Sours came to me and said he wished I would spend the night in the barn and keep awake most of the time, as he was afraid it might be broken into by some of the graders. They were acting worse than ever. There was no town government, but a man named Allenham had some time before been elected city marshal at a mass-meeting. During the day he appointed some deputies to help him maintain order.

At about ten o'clock I shut up the barn, put out my lantern, and sat down in a little room in one corner which was used for an office. The town was noisy, but nobody came near the barn, which was back of the hotel and out of sight from the street. Some time after midnight I heard low voices outside and crept to a small open window. I could make out the forms of some men under a shed back of a store across a narrow alley. Soon I heard two shots in the street, and then a man came 11 running through the alley with another right after him. As the first passed, a man stepped out from under the shed. The man in pursuit stopped and said:

"Now, I want Jim, and there's no use of you fellows trying to protect him." It was Allenham's voice.

There was a report of a revolver so close that it made me wink. The man who had come from under the shed had fired pointblank at Allenham. By the flash I saw that the man was Pike.

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CHAPTER II

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The rest of my second Night at Track's End, and part of another: with some Things which happen between.

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I was too frightened at first to move, and stood at the window staring into the darkness like a fool. I heard the men scramble over a fence and run off. Then I ran out to where Allenham lay. He made no answer when I spoke to him. I went on and met two of the deputies coming into the alley. I told them what I had seen.

"Wake up folks in the hotel," said one of the men; then they hurried along. I soon had everybody in the hotel down-stairs with my shouting. In a minute or two they brought in Allenham, and the doctor began to work over him. The whole town was soon on hand, and it was decided to descend on the graders' camp in force. Twenty or thirty men volunteered. One of the deputies named Dawson was selected as leader. 13

"Are you certain you can pick out the man who fired the shot?" said Dawson to me.

"Yes," I answered. "It was Pike."

"If you just came, how do you happen to know Pike?" he asked.

"He pulled me up last night by the ear and looked at me with a lantern," I said.

“Well,” replied the man, “we’ll take you down and you can look at him with a lantern.”

They formed into a solid body, four abreast, with Dawson ahead holding me by the arm, as if he were afraid I would get away. To tell the truth, I should have been glad enough to have got out of the thing, but there seemed to be no chance of it. I was glad my mother could not know about me.

We soon came up to the camp, and the men lined out and held their guns ready for use. Not a sound was to be heard except the loud snoring of the men in the nearest tent, which seemed to me almost *too* loud. There was a dying camp-fire, and the stars were bright and twinkling in a deep-blue sky; but I didn’t look at them much.

“Come, you fellows, get up!” called Dawson. This brought no answer. 14

“Come!” he called louder, “roust up there, every one of you. There’s fifty of us, and we’ve got our boots on!”

A man put his head sleepily out of a tent and wanted to know what was the trouble. Dawson repeated his commands. One of our men tossed some wood on the fire, and it blazed up and threw the long shadows of the tents out across the prairie. One by one the men came out, as if they were just roused from sleep. There was a great amount of loud talk and profanity, but at last they were all out. Pike was one of the last. Dawson made them stand up in a row.

“Now, young man,” said he to me, “pick out the man you saw fire the shot that killed Allenham.”

At the word killed Pike started and shut his jaws tightly together in the middle of an oath. I looked along the line,

but saw that I could not be mistaken. Then I took a step forward, pointed to Pike, and said:

“That’s the man.”

He shot a look at me of the most deadly hatred; then he laughed; but it didn’t sound to me like a good, cheerful laugh. 15

“Come on,” said Dawson to him. Then he ordered the others back into their tents, left half the men to guard them, and with the rest of our party went a little ways down the track to where an empty box-car was standing on the siding. “Get in there!” he said to Pike, and the man did it, and the door was locked. Three men were left to guard this queer jail, and the rest of us went back to the Headquarters House. Here we found that the doctor’s report was that Allenham would probably pull through.

The next morning a mass-meeting was held in the square beside the railroad station. After some talk, most of it pretty vigorous, it was decided to order all of the graders to leave town without delay, except Pike, who was to be kept in the car until the outcome of Allenham’s wound was known. It wasn’t necessary even for me to guess twice to hit on what would be the fate of Pike if Allenham should die.

In two hours the graders left. They made a long line of covered wagons and filed away to the east beside the railroad track. They were pretty free with their threats, but that was all it amounted to. 16

For a week Track’s End was very quiet. Allenham kept on getting better, and by that time was out of danger. There was a good deal of talk about what ought to be done with