

Adventure

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Twice a Month

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<p>Their battlefield was a sinking ship, and the fight was hopeless. One-eyed Conops leaped to the purple taffrail with the battle trumpet in his fist. "Lay aboard, all hands. Go in fast and gut her. Grapple before their arrows sweep our decks!" And from the quarter-deck Tros staggered to the thunder of crunching hulls and leaped down where the cymbals and the war-roar came. "Grappels—let go!"</p>	
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Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

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ROAD RUNNER

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

FOR reasons best known to themselves, although not incomprehensible to certain peace officers of the district, Steve Purcell and Young Hardesty were riding an old Apache trail in the Dragoon Mountains.

No one, on pleasure bent, ever tackled the Dragoon Mountains in July. Tumbled rock, splintered pinnacles, and sand-eroded, grotesque rock statues radiated heat, evaporated the July rains, and furnished no apparent excuse for being, save as a shelter for rattlesnakes, rabbits, lizards and an occasional road runner. At the base of the range lay a wind-blown desert of sand, studded with abrupt, volcanic outcrops.

The sun hammered hard on the nar-

row, ever-winding trail. The horses plodded with heads lowered, sweat drying on flank and shoulder in dirty streaks and patches. Swarthy as an Apache, slender, tough-sinewed and tireless, Young Hardesty took the heat and monotony as a matter of course. Although not unacquainted with hardship, his partner was of a different fiber. Monotony especially irked him. Having reached the rock-walled pass dividing the crest, they were heading down the eastern slope when a flicker of brown crossed the trail, half running, half flying. Purcell drew his gun. Young Hardesty's hand flashed up, joggling his companion's arm. Muffled by space, the sound of the shot died swiftly. A splotch

of silver showed on a slanting slab of granite. Unharméd, the bird disappeared, shuttling among the rocks.

"Just between ourselves—" Purcell gestured round the shimmering emptiness—"what's the idea?"

"Don't you ever shoot one of those birds. There wouldn't be enough left to eat. Besides, I like 'em."

"Is that all?" Purcell slipped a fresh shell into the gun and holstered it.

"No, it ain't."

Purcell pursed his lips and nodded. From any one else, he would hardly have accepted such a rebuke. But he merely smiled to himself and rode on. His partner never did anything without a reason—usually a good one. A slow half hour of winding trail, of scorching barricade and blinding refraction of white light, and Purcell, whose horse had stopped abruptly, gestured to a coil of brownish gold in the shade of a half-dead cactus. "Any objections?"

"Nope." Grinning, Young Hardesty fired just a shade before his partner. The desert rattler writhed, its golden brown coil shot through and through.

"Is that all?" Purcell's tone was slightly sarcastic.

"No, it ain't."

Three hours later they reached the desert level. Sliding down behind the range, the sun threw long purple shadows of cactus and outcrop across the darkening sand. Another monotonous hour passed before they reached *palo verdes* and water. Though rimmed with bitter white, the water hole was like hearth and home. The weary horses drank and rolled. Staked out for the night, they nipped at the scant vegetation. Over a tiny fire of chaparral roots, Purcell made coffee and fried bacon. The meal was necessarily brief.

"It isn't so far from here," declared Young Hardesty as they stretched out, their heads on their saddles.

Purcell curled a cigarette. "What isn't? Hell?"

Young Hardesty grinned. "Heat kind of got you today."

"It would get anything but a rattlesnake or an Apache. If there's anything to grin at, lift the curtain."

"Up she goes." Yet Young Hardesty sat several minutes staring out into the evening desert before he also rolled a smoke and settled himself. "The last Apache break was in about '88 or '89, wasn't it?"

"I wasn't there."

"'Course you weren't. Took guts to go through those days."

"Go on. Use a shovel. A trowel is too delicate for your hand."

"Well, anyhow," continued Young Hardesty, "the Apache Kid was runnin' loose long after Geronimo and old Natchez quit. Seems there was more than one Apache Kid. Seems like the settlers always called any young buck that took to the warpath alone, the Apache Kid. The one I mean was named Cut-le. His old granddaddy was one of Geronimo's warriors."

Purcell's ears perked up. "Yes, I remember. Young Cut-le stole Gene Rhodes' coffee mill when Gene was running stock up above Tularosa."

"Mebby. But Cut-le wasn't packin' any coffee mill when I met up with him."

Purcell blew smoke through his nose. "Lay it on as thick as you like."

"Sometimes," Young Hardesty glanced at his partner, "when you git to spoutin', you talk about history repeatin' itself. Well, if you'd been the Apache Kid, today, instead of a no-account card man gone wrong, what with that road runner and the rattler, it would have been almost the same as when I crossed the Dragoons, back about ten years ago. Almost, but not quite. I was just a kid. I crossed alone. Tonto Charley was camped over near old Fort Bowie. He sent word for me to meet him here.

"How did you like traveling with the Apache Kid?"

"I didn't meet up with him till I was pretty well down this side of the range. He was ridin' alone." Young Hardesty paused to roll another cigarette. "When I started across the range to meet Tonto Charley I was ridin' an old crow-bait of a horse. If I hadn't been mighty light weight we'd never made it as far as we did. I had an old canteen, some jerky, some matches and a couple of dollars. I was ridin' a busted army saddle and was packin' one of them sawed-off Springfield .45's, like the Apaches used before they got high-toned and took to Winchesters. Folks on the west side of the range told me I'd never make it. But I'd been rattlin' around Texas and Arizona for thirteen years, mebbly fourteen, and I was feelin' mighty big and important.



"NOW nobody in that section knew the Apache Kid was runnin' loose. Took a pretty good man to keep track of him, any time. He'd be prowlin' around Tularosa and the White Sands country in New Mexico, and next you'd hear of him butcherin' somebody down along the Gila. State lines didn't mean a thing to him. It was all just country where he could steal horses, or rob somebody's shack of grub, or bump off somebody else that got in his way. Killin' was just as natural to him as breathin'—and doggone if I don't think he liked it better. Anyhow, I was just a kid, mighty near as black as an Apache, and my hair was so long I tied it up with a bandanna, like an Indian. Aside from wearin' overalls and boots, instead of moccasins and a gee string, I was about as much Indian as any white kid could be."

Purcell smiled. "I've noticed that, also."

"You're kind of a noticin' hombre, ain't you? How about takin' a look at that centipede that's tryin' to bed down in your boot?"

Purcell flipped the centipede to the sand and obliterated it with a stamp of his boot heel.

Young Hardesty gestured toward the distant Dragoons. "I had just hit this side of the range and was settin' my old crow bait, waitin' for him to get his wind. The noon sun was makin' the rocks wiggle like somethin' was crawlin' over them. I wasn't thinkin' of Indians, or white folks, or anything except the heat burnin' my knees and slappin' me in the face, when off among the rocks up the hillside, a rifle boomed.

"My old horse didn't even jump. He just doubled up under me and laid down without a kick. The slug took him through the shoulder, rangin' back. It must have blown his lungs and heart to pieces. Somehow, I wasn't scared, right then. I kept lookin' down the slope, wonderin' who was gunnin' for me, and I was so dam' mad I didn't think to get behind a rock and do my watchin' from there. I thought I saw a kind of thin web of smoke hangin' over a boulder, 'way off to the right. Mebbly I did. But in that heat a fella could imagine anything."

"Afoot, and nobody around to bother you," commented Purcell.

"That was the trouble. If I could have seen somethin' to shoot at—but that old hillside was like a graveyard, just slabs and monuments and nobody home.

"I stripped the saddle from my horse. He laid stretched out, his head downhill. I reckon it was the first real rest he ever got in his life. Already a couple of buzzards were cuttin' the blue, swingin' and circlin' lower and lower. Now that shot had come from off to one side and below me. It seemed just like somebody sayin', 'You've gone far enough. It's time to turn back.' And if I'd had sense enough to open my mouth when I wanted to spit, I'd have called it a day. But I was mad. It wasn't until I cooled off and commenced to figure, that I got

scared. When I got scared I got mad again because I was scared.

"Mebby you noticed that a man afoot wouldn't be so easy to see, account of the rocks on both sides of the trail down this side of the hill? Settin' a horse, he would be above most of 'em and show up plain. Anyhow, I cached the saddle alongside the trail; takin' the sawed-off Springfield, I started down, watchin' every turn and keepin' my eye on the slope below. Tonto Charley had said he'd be at the water hole Friday or Saturday. It was the long side of noon Saturday and I wanted to make the water hole by evenin'.

"It was tough goin'. Stompin' down the trail wasn't so awful bad; but the heat dancin' on the rocks made everything look queer, so that I kept thinkin' I was seein' shapes crouchin' behind boulders and creepin' from one shadow to another. Even then I wasn't thinkin' of Apaches. Apaches hadn't been botherin' white folks much for quite a spell. Naturally, I figured that the fella that dropped my horse could have dropped me just as easy. Why didn't he? Who was gunnin' for me, anyhow? Bein' a kid, it never come to me I might have been mistook for somebody else.

"It was awful still. The buzzards were cirlin' lower and lower. Alongside the trail a lizard sat on a rock, pumpin' up and down like he was out of breath. Even a lizard looked kind of friendly. It was alive, and I could see it and I knowed what it was. There was somethin' alive, somethin' I *couldn't* see, down among those rocks. It was awful still, and it looked awful far to the water hole. I was makin' as good time as if I was on the horse. But afoot I felt like I was shrinkin' up—gettin' smaller and smaller, till I wasn't bigger than an ant crawlin' over the sand, and gettin' nowhere."

Purcell, gazing up at the stars, turned his head. "I can see you, working down the trail like a cat in the grass, pop-eyed,

and the old Springfield in both hands, ready for business."

Young Hardesty nodded. "But not quite ready enough. What with watchin' all around, and thinkin', and worryin' that I wouldn't make it to the water hole before evenin', I stepped round a bend, where the rocks stood mebbly twenty feet high on each side. There, settin' his pony—I recollect it was a paint horse with only half of one ear left—was a young Apache. He sat lookin' at me over the muzzle of a sawed-off Springfield, just like the one I was packin'.



"I DIDN'T have a chance. A crook of his finger would have blowed me off of my feet.

Across his calico shirt was a second belt of cartridges. He wore white cotton drawers and those long moccasins like boots, with the little round toe protectors, like the Apaches always wear. It didn't come to me right then that, aside from our rigs, most anybody could have mistook me for him. But I'd seen his picture in the newspaper. It was the Apache Kid.

"What with him packin' extra ammunition, a water bottle, and a rawhide sack of grub, I didn't need any newspaper to tell me he was on the warpath. His black eyes was like beads. You couldn't see anything back of 'em. It was just as if he used 'em to see through, but didn't aim to let anybody see into 'em. It was only a second or two he sat lookin' at me, but it seemed like a long while. Then he put up his hand—made the peace sign.

"'Did you shoot my horse?' I asked him in Mexican.

"The Kid could talk Mexican, all right. He told me he shot my horse. It didn't seem to bother him none.

"'Why?'" I asked him.

"He laughed with his mouth, but those bead eyes didn't laugh any. 'You

are not Nanay. I thought you were Nanay.'

"Then he asked me where I was headed for. I told him I was headed for the water hole, yonder, to meet a bunch of my friends. He asked me how many. Thinkin' to throw a scare into him, mebby, I told him six of Curley's gang. How in hell that Indian knew it was only Tonto Charley I was to meet, I dunno. But he said, 'I think it is only one.'

"Slippin' off his horse, but givin' me no chance to get a shot at him, he walked up; stickin' the muzzle of the sawed-off against my chest, he said, 'I'll take that gun.' Now I didn't like the idea of givin' up my gun. It was just about all I had left, except my canteen. But there was nothing to do but hand it over. Then he took my canteen. Steppin' back to his horse, but always keepin' his eye on me, he slung the canteen and my sawed-off on his saddle. All the time I was noticin' what small hands he had, and how easy he used 'em. Looked like he was awful handy with a gun, or a knife.

"Slippin' into the saddle, he pointed down the trail. He was tellin' me to go. I figured that he would shoot me in the back, just to see me wiggle; but I had to step on past him and start down the trail. My back was sure cold. I could feel just where the slug would take me—a kind of itchin' and crawlin' between my shoulders.

"I could hear his pony patterin' along behind me. Pretty soon he told me to stop. He rode up and motioned for me to hand him my tobacco and papers. Honest, that made me madder than all the rest of it. 'Mebby,' I said to him, 'you'd like my shirt and pants and the boots.'

"'If I want, I get,' he said.

"That didn't sound awful good to me. Livin' in the Apache country some, I knew how bucks like the Kid often took a fancy to string a fella along, make him

think everything was all right; then turn on him and slit his throat, or strip him and peg him out over an ant hill, where he would get et up an inch at a time. It was hot, but I was close to shiverin' when we hit the bottom of the grade. Ahead stretched the sand, the outcrops and cactus. And way off yonder, like a blue haze, I could see the *palo verdes*, where Tonto Charley was waitin' for me."

Purcell sat up and made a cigarette. "The *palo verdes* and the water hole. That's right here. And right here we are."

Young Hardesty grinned. "Yes. But sometimes it seems like a hundred years ago that I first set out to get here. Most of that hundred years was when I was doggin' down the trail ahead of the Kid. He was right close behind me. I never heard a sound, but I felt the loop of his rope over my head. Then it come to me quick that he was goin' to beef me, and I wouldn't meet Tonto, like I sent word I would.

The Kid wasn't mad. He was grinnin' most of the time. He didn't have nothin' against me. I was only about fourteen and he was a growed man. But he wanted a little excitement. I reckon he would figure it playin' a game. First, he made me strip off my boots and overalls and shirt. My hat he took and put on himself. And he sure looked tough. 'You no Apache,' he said, grinnin' like a Gila monster. I told him hell, no! I was white, and a dam' sight better man than he was. You see I figured it was all up with me, so I thought mebby if I made him mad he wouldn't torture me, but bump me off quick.

"When it come to tyin' my hands and feet, I give him a battle. But shucks! He was as stout as a horse, and just like he'd been oiled. While we were battlin' he was grinnin' right in my face. He was enjoyin' himself. When he got me tied, I was winded. I lay lookin' up at the sky, watchin' the clouds driftin' slow.

The sun was movin' down behind the range, so I didn't feel the heat so much. Pretty soon he steps up on his pony and heads back up the slope, leavin' me stripped naked on the sand, tied hand and foot.

"I got to thinkin' that mebbly that was all there was to it: that he would leave me there where I couldn't get to water—and about noon next day the sun would get busy, and I'd be finished, or crazy. I commenced to think of how mebbly I could crawl to some outcrop and saw the buckskin off my wrists against a sharp rock. If I could get my hands loose I could get my feet loose. Then I could head for the *palo verdes*. Travelin' at night, even naked, wouldn't be so bad.

"Just about the time I started to roll toward the nearest outcrop I heard his pony comin'. Then I knew he wasn't through with me. He rode up and stepped off his pony. In his hand was what I called his grub sack. He held it close to my face. I could see the sides of the sack move and I heard a kind of rustle, like something squirmin' around. Then all that happened before was like heaven. He had a rattler in that sack. 'How you like?' he said. I told him to go to hell.



"HE had cut five stout pegs. I counted 'em when he threw 'em down beside me. He took a stone and drives one peg. Then he loosed my feet and drew one foot up to the peg and tied it. When he got through he had me staked out like a bat on a barn door. He put me face down and shoved a little chunk of stone under my chin, so I had to see what was comin'.

"By that time I had quit hopin'. I knowed what he was goin' to do. Every once in a while he would look up at the clouds and grin. It was gettin' ready for a rain, one of them summer storms that comes quick and goes the same

way. And he needed the rain to work out his plan."

Purcell, who had been sitting up, shivered.

Young Hardesty went on. "Takin' the fifth stake, he drove it in the sand, about six feet beyond my face. Then he opened the mouth of the sack, mighty careful. When the rattler's head slid out, the Kid grabbed him back of the jaws. Tyin' a thong of buckskin to the rattler, he fastened the end of the thong to the far stake. I reckon the Kid had had some practise at this kind of game, for when he got through, the rattler could make it to within about an inch of my face. At first the snake—he was one of those thick, brown mountain rattlers, mebbly three feet long—slid around the sand, crawlin' in every direction tryin' to get loose. When he would come up short, it made him mad. All the time the kid was squattin' on his heels, grinnin'. He was havin' a good time. Every once in a while the rattler would sweep round and strike at my face. I was so far beyond bein' scared I was sick. What I mean, sick to my stomach.

"Now the snake could have kept crawlin' round and strikin' at me all night, without doin' any damage, so long as it didn't rain. But when it rained the buckskin thong would get wet and stretch. And all the rattler needed to get to me was about an inch. I been bit on the leg by a rattler, and come out of it all right. But nobody who has ever been bit in the head or face ever had a chance. And mebbly you think the Apaches don't know that.

"I never recollected when the Apache Kid left. All I know is that it come to me, sudden, that he was gone. I could hear the rattler swishin' on the sand, wigglin' and tryin' to get loose. I kept my eyes shut all I could. But sometimes they would come open, just like I didn't have anything to do with it. And there would be the snake, mebbly close to me, or off at the other edge of the circle,

crazy mad, and always movin'. I got over bein' sick. I commenced to feel like I was freezin' to death. My eyes were shut and I was prayin' that somethin' would happen quick, when I heard the swishin' stop. I looked. There was a road runner, his tail cocked up, kind of dancin' round the rattler, just out of reach."

Purcell leaned forward, his gaze on the figure of his companion. Yet it was at another Young Hardesty he was looking, a dark, slender body, naked, pegged out on the sand, eyes fixed on a brownish gold snake that writhed and drew back to strike at the quick, slim road runner. He could almost feel himself in Young Hardesty's place. He could also feel the hope that must have flickered in Young Hardesty's brain—a vague hope against indeterminable odds. Would the road runner give battle to its ancient enemy, or would the sprightly chaparral cock become frightened at the proximity of the figure staked out on the sand, and dart away into the evening haze drawing down over the desert?

"I had heard that road runners hate rattlers and have a way of fixing 'em. But I had never seen it done, and I didn't believe it. This time, though—" Young Hardesty broke off abruptly. "I reckon those road runners do it account of snakes eatin' their eggs. Some snakes will climb a right high bush to get at a bird's nest. As you know, a road runner is a mighty scary bird. Some birds will get scared and circle round a tree and then light in it again. But a road runner does most of his travelin' afoot. When he leaves he don't come back.

"Knowin' that, I laid still, like I was dead. But it seems the road runner was too busy takin' care of the rattler to pay any attention to me. And if you think that rattler didn't know what was comin', you get another guess. He commenced to thrash round, so mad he even strikes at the peg he is tied to. All the time I was thinkin' that just one of

those strikes would finish me. My hands and feet tied down, and only able to wiggle my head a little, I would have to lay there and take it. I could see little green drops tricklin' down the peg after the rattler struck.

"All this time the road runner was hoppin' 'round, perkin' his head like he was figurin' out when to make a dash and peck the rattler in the neck. But road runners don't do it that way. All of a sudden he turns and lights out like a streak. I thought he had quit for good. Well, that was the end of that. Mebby he had seen my eyes blink, and got scared. I was so busy watchin' him and the snake that I hadn't noticed it was gettin' darker, and I didn't notice it was commencin' to rain till one of those big, scatterin' drops hit my back. It was like a bullet.

"Now birds don't like bein' out in the rain, any more than humans. The road runner was gone. If it turned in and rained just one good let-down the buckskin thong holdin' the rattler would get wet and stretch. Leave it to an Apache to figure out a scheme like that. With the rattler crawlin' round and pullin' to get loose, the thong would get just a little longer—and it only lacked about an inch for him to get in his work on me.

"I had been hopin' and givin' up so frequent that I quit feelin' anything. I was just kind of cold curious to see what would happen next."

Purcell nodded. "I can understand. Your feelings were about used up, but your brain went on reporting, like a camera."



YOUNG Hardesty nodded. "It was like a dream when the road runner came skippin' back, close to the ground. I just lay and stared. What was he goin' to do now? But you've seen it, so you know. He dropped a knuckle of cholla cactus as near the rattler as he dared,

then off skips the road runner again. Pretty soon he comes back with another joint of cactus. Honest, I was so interested watchin' him build his little corral that I forgot I was pegged out.

"That rattler went loco. He swished round, strikin' and drawin' back, floppin' so hard when he comes up short, account of bein' tied, that his belly showed. All the time the road runner was lopin' off and fetchin' back little knuckles of cholla. And he was a mighty neat workman, startin' to lay those cactus joints up in a wall to go plumb round the rattler.

"I wished then that the Kid hadn't propped up my chin. I could see too well. It was rainin' enough now so that right in front of my eyes the rattler's thong was beginnin' to swell."

Young Hardesty drew a long breath. His companion made some remark, but Young Hardesty did not hear it. He was living over again the horror and suffering of that dread experience. Even now he could feel the long-ago rain beating on his naked back, dripping chill from his forehead into his eyes, shutting out the foothills, narrowing his vision down to the scurrying bird, to the blurred shape moving in the circle of cactus, to the swelling buckskin.

"By the time he finished, the rain was comin' down right smart. The rattler was penned in and couldn't get to me."

Still the youth could not get entirely free of his memory. The road runner had gone. It had spread its wings, following a long run, had sailed off close to the sand. Young Hardesty recalled that strange sudden feeling of loneliness. Flash after flash of lightning followed the departure of the road runner. Water lay in dull silver pools in the shallow sand hollows. All unaware of what he was doing, Young Hardesty rubbed his wrists when he again spoke.

"If that rattler had been loose, I reckon he would have kept free of those cactus joints; for he knew if he once got spiked good, he would never get free

of 'em. Loose, he would have kept crawlin' round and round, till he got so mad because he couldn't get out, he would naturally turn and bite himself—commit suicide.

"But he was tied, and that made him mad enough, without any cactus ringin' him in. The buckskin thong commenced to stretch plenty. The rain was beatin' in my face and I couldn't see any too clear. But I could see the rattler raise about a foot of his length off the ground and make a lunge at the cactus. He hit it hard. Some of those barbed joints stuck to him. Then he commenced to squirm. Every time he moved he whipped into more of those cactus joints. Pretty soon he was just a ball of cactus, movin' slower and slower."

Purcell shrugged. There was something ghastly about that moving ball of cactus joints in the dusk and downpour. Yet apparently Young Hardesty did not feel that way about it. His tone became almost brusque. "The rattler was all done. He couldn't get to me. But it took me a long time to believe it. A long time. Pretty soon the storm blew over the hill and the stars came out. I was shiverin'; likewise I was burnin' up for a drink of water. But it wasn't water I craved most, nor to get loose. I wanted to roll a cigarette and pull the smoke down inside of me till I couldn't feel anything. It had quit rainin'. I could feel my face wet, though. I was cryin' like a kid. But it seemed as if somebody else was cryin' and I was layin' there watchin' them."

"You were about fourteen years old—and you had been through hell. I've seen a man of forty cry like a baby after a great nervous strain."



"PRETTY soon," said Young Hardesty, "I commenced to ache all over. I was staked out and stiff. I reckon I had been achin' for some time, but I hadn't noticed it till then. I don't know whether my

light went out for a spell, or whether I went to sleep. I recollect openin' my eyes in the moonlight, at first not knowin' where I was. I tried to get up. Then it all came back. Yonder was what was left of the little ring of cactus fingers, and inside of it was layin' a ball of cactus. It wasn't movin'.

"I figured it was about three in the mornin'. Pretty soon it would be daylight. Staked out like I was, I knew what the sun would do to me. But I wanted to see the sun come up over the ridge. First would come a streak of gray, then pink, then it would spread and shoot up to the sky. And pretty soon the sun would come boomin' up, big and hot and all ready for business. I wondered how long I could stand it.

"I got to thinkin' of the Apache Kid. Would he come back to see what kind of a job he had made of it—or would he light a shuck for some other part of the country, where he could work some more devilment? While I was thinkin', it came just like a clock tickin' slow—the sound of a horse walkin' steady. Close to the ground like that, I could feel it. Then pretty soon I could hear it. Sometimes it would fade a'way, like when a horse steps from the hard level into the soft sand of a hollow. But each time it would come back louder. That was it. The Apache Kid was comin' to get one more grin out of it before he quit that end of the country. It came to me—what kind of a play would he make when he found out that his little game was spoiled?

"I wasn't so awful scared. I guess I had used up all the scare in me. The sound of that pony's hoofs commenced to get clearer and clearer. I could hear the creak of the saddle. I said to myself that I would just let on I was dead. Mebby the Apache Kid would take a look and ride on. But I knew all the time that no Apache could be fooled like that. Then the pony snorted like he had smelled the rattler. I couldn't see,

because the Kid's pony was comin' up from behind. But out yonder I could see the mornin' fightin' its way across the hills. I kind of liked seein' it, even if it was the last time. Behind me the saddle creaked louder. Somebody had stepped off a horse. I felt somethin' touch my bare back. Then my light went out."

Purcell rose and paced back and forth in the moonlight. Young Hardesty sat watching him, a curious expression in his eyes. To the younger man the events he had related were simply facts, gruesome facts, some of them, but they did not grip his very vitals as they did those of Purcell.

"The first thing I recollect was the feel of a slicker, cold and clammy against my bare hide. I was settin' with my back against a rock. Squattin' on his heels, lookin' at me—no, it wasn't the Apache Kid—was Tonto Charley. He didn't say a word—just squatted there lookin' at me like I was something curious he had picked up somewhere. I reckon I was. Not knowin' but that I was dreamin', I tried it on. 'Hello, Charley,' I said. And just like nothin' had happened he said, 'Oh, it's you, Young Hardesty.' And that was all he said while he was leadin' up his horse—or after, when I was settin' in the saddle, and Charley afoot, headin' for the *palo verdes*."

"Which means," Purcell smiled for the first time in an hour. "This water hole, right here."

"Right here," nodded Young Hardesty. "I was feelin' pretty sick, and so weak I could just set in the saddle without hangin' on. Charley had wrapped his old slicker around me to keep the sun off. That was all the clothes I had, just then. When we got to the water hole Tonto made a little fire and fixed me some coffee. Things had been all mixed up for a spell, but after the coffee I commenced to see things straight." Young Hardesty gestured to a round-topped

rock a few feet back of Purcell. "Leanin' against that rock, yonder, was my old sawed-off Springfield, and my canteen. I wasn't so awful surprised. Nothin' would have surprised me much that mornin'. All the same I was mighty curious. But Charley wasn't one to talk much at any time. Gettin' a story out of him was like minin'. What I mean, you had to drill for what you got."

"He had your gun, and your canteen, eh? How about your overalls and rowdy?"

Young Hardesty grinned. "It was three, four days before I found out what had happened. Havin' had his fun with me, it seems the Apache Kid aimed to have some more, so he rode a circle for the *palo verdes* here. He aimed to surprise somebody in camp. I had told him I was to meet my friends there and I reckon he believed me. Anyhow, Tonto Charley, who was watchin' for me that evenin', didn't camp right at the water hole, like we are doin'. With papers out for him and no tellin' when some deputy would show up, Charley camped over yonder back of that ridge, where he could see the water hole and watch the back trail at the same time.

"Now the Apache Kid rode a circle, so as to come up on the water hole from the east. 'Long about midnight, Charley heard a pony comin' from that direction. The rainstorm had cleared the air; the moon was shinin' down strong. In makin' for the water hole, the Apache Kid had to ride past the ledge behind which Charley was camped. Charley said the Kid rode within twenty feet of the ledge, then stopped and sat his pony like he was listenin'. Mebby it wouldn't have happened, after all, if Charley hadn't seen that the Kid was packin' an extra rifle and an extra canteen. Now that canteen was an old army canteen that Charley gave me, one of the big ones. On it he had run a big T. C., one time when he was loafin' at the Cottonwoods. In turnin' to look 'round before

he started to ride on, the Apache Kid's knee touched the canteen so that it moved, and the T. C. showed plain in the moonlight.

"Charley didn't dare reach for his rifle, layin' alongside, for fear the Kid would hear him. But a six-shooter is different. 'That Injun's got one canteen and one gun too many,' he said to himself. Reachin' back he pulled his gun. It was about twenty yards, and clear moonlight. He only fired twice. The second shot dropped the Kid's pony. You see, Charley didn't want that pony to break and run. Why? Well, he wanted to take a look at the canteen close, and also the rifle." Young Hardesty gestured. That was all. He had told his story.

Purcell said: "It checks up perfectly from muzzle to butt, with one exception."

"One which?"

"Evidence I can see. My hearing believes, and that part of my mind attached to it. But my eyes—" he paused and grinned at his partner.

"I'm here, ain't I?" said Young Hardesty.

"You? Yes. But—"

"Oh, hell!" Young Hardesty stretched and rose, apparently through with the subject. Casually he sauntered to the far side of the *palo verdes*. Purcell heard a clattering of loose stones. Casually Young Hardesty returned and threw something which looked like a knobbed stick at Purcell's feet. Purcell picked it up, then swiftly dropped it. It was the lower leg bone of a man. To it was still attached the shrunken, dry-rotted leather of an Apache moccasin.

"His horse—" said Young Hardesty, "if the coyotes haven't drug 'em off, you'll find it's backbone and ribs over behind that ledge yonder. You see Charley was a white man. He piled a lot of rocks on the Kid, so the coyotes wouldn't dig him up."