

*Black John Thought There Should  
Be Certain Ethics Observed on  
Halfaday; Cush, He Said He Would  
Not Know an Ethic if He Saw One*



## THE MAN WITH THE GLASS EYE

By James B. Hendryx

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I

OLD CUSH, proprietor of Cushing's Fort, the combined trading post and saloon that served the little community of outlawed men that had grown up on Halfaday Crick against the Yukon-Alaska border, set a bottle and two glasses onto the bar as Black John Smith crossed

the floor and elevated a foot to the battered brass rail. Black John's glance centered on the well-worn leather dice box that remained on the back bar beside a row of glasses and a folded copy of the *Police Gazette*.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Break yer arm? Or did someone steal the dice?"

"This un's on me," Cush announced.

"This here's my birthday, accordin' to the calendar—September the fifteenth."

"Cripes—I never knew you had a birthday!"

"Hell, everyone's got a birthday! They'd have to."

"Guess that's right, when you come right down to studyin' it out," Black John admitted. "How'd the old world look a hundred years ago today?"

"What d'you mean—a hundred years? I ain't so damn old as you might think."

"Mebbe not. I was only goin' by appearances—that, an' the fact that you've lived through more wives than most men deems it expedient to marry."

"Huh—most of them wives wasn't only what you might say, temporary. They wasn't none of 'em worth a damn—except the fourth one—an' she up an' died on me. You can figger what they was like. You seen Annie. An' the first two wasn't much better. I'm shore grateful to you, John, fer helpin' me git shet of her. It jest goes to show a man might better stop an' think before he goes ahead an' marries someone."

The big man grinned. "You ought to know."

"Yeah—an' I learnt it the hard way. At that, I've be'n lucky. By Cripes—look at what might of happened to me—what with Elsie sleepin' with a loaded gun in under her piller on account she claimed she was afraid of burglars, an' Maud, with that long slim knife strapped to her leg, an' Annie an' her damn flypaper soakin' in under the bed—by God, I break out in a cold sweat, even thinkin' about it!"

"Yeah, but you've got to remember, Cush—they wasn't none of them women fell heir to no onmittigated blessin' when they got you. There's things you've let drop durin' the course of our acquaintance that leads me to believe you wasn't no model husband—like keepin' women here an' there in flats—an' holdin' out on yer wives

when you made a killin' at the races, er gamblin', and goin' on sprees like you claim you used to every now an' then—an'—"

"But hell, John—they didn't know nothin' about the women an' the money I helt out on 'em! The way I look at it, it wasn't none of their business. As fer the binges—hell, a lot of men goes on binges."

"Yer conduct was far from exemplary, an' absolutely incompatable with conjugal bliss."

"I'm doubtin' that them big words means a damn thing, now you've got 'em said. What I'm gittin' at—every damn one of them first three wives figgered on knockin' me off when the right time come. An' what I claim, it's a hell of a note when a man ain't safe either eatin' er sleepin' in his own house. It wasn't no square deal, 'cause I never figgered on knockin' them off. But believe me, when I seen Annie comin' in that door the other day I wished fer a minute I had! All I want is a square deal—an' when you look back at it, I ain't had none."

"I'm afraid," grinned Black John, "that yer ethics is sadly warped."

"You an' yer damn ethics yer allus talkin' about! I've told you a hundred times I never had none—an' on top of that I wouldn't even know one if I seen it! Drink up, an' have another. A man had ort to celebrate his birthday. Gripes, I'm lucky to be havin' one. If anyone of them women would of found out what was goin' on, I wouldn't be here. The way I figgered it, what they didn't know didn't hurt 'em none."

"A comfortin' philosophy—but one that discloses no deep-seated sense of rectitude. Ondoubtless yer forebears was ignoble."

"What four bears? I never had no bears. Back when I was a kid some of the saloons in town used to have a bear chained out back fer to sort of draw trade. But they

stunk, an' draw'd more flies than trade. An' when they grow'd up they'd git mean, what with folks teasin' 'em. An' if some drunk would of got bit er clawed, he could sue fer damages. Cripes, in Cincinnati one saloon keeper got sued because his cat bit a drunk, an' it cost him five thousan' dollars. If that cat would of be'n a bear, look what he'd had to pay!"

"It's a lovely day," Black John grinned. "An' what a wonderful language we've got."

"It would be all right if you didn't keep on clutterin' it all up with big words so anyone don't know what yer talkin' about. Drink up. Here comes someone—an' he ain't no one I ever seen before."

**B**LACK JOHN glanced through the open doorway to see a man approaching across the little clearing from the direction of the creek. He was a tall, well-proportioned man, and he carried a rifle slung across his shoulder. The man paused in the doorway and subjected the room to a searching glance. Then he advanced to the bar, as Cush slid a glass toward him.

"Ah, a saloon, eh? It isn't often a man finds all the comforts of home while he's off on a prospecting trip."

"Drink up," Cush invited, shoving the bottle across the bar. "This un's on the house."

The man took his place to the left of Black John, and stood his rifle in the corner formed by the bar and the storeroom wall. When the drinks were poured he raised his glass. "Here's lookin' at you," he said, and downed his drink at a swallow. Reaching into his pocket, he withdrew a wallet, and laid a ten-dollar bill on the bar. "Have one on me," he invited.

"Stranger in these parts?" Black John asked casually, as the glasses were filled.

The man turned and faced him. "Yes,"

he answered. "Doing a little prospecting. I was shoving up the crick and saw the little landing here, so I stopped in. Didn't expect to find a saloon. Thought it was some prospector's layout. I passed a cabin three or four miles down the creek, but it was deserted."

"That's Olson's old shack," Cush said.

"Claim peter out?"

"No."

"But the place seems abandoned."

"Yup."

"Fact is," Black John explained, "that claim's never be'n really worked. We hung Olson, an' several subsequent tenants has met up with misfortune of one kind or another. The place is held to be onlucky."

"Why did you hang Olson?"

"Oh, I disrec'lect. It was ondoubtless fer somethin' he done."

"Are there many locations on the crick?"

"Forty, fifty, mebbe—somewheres along there."

"Then there should be plenty of room for one more," the man smiled. "No objection to a man prospecting hereabouts, I presume."

"None whatever."

The man turned and pointed toward the door to the storeroom. "I see you run a trading post as well as a saloon," he said. "Mighty handy not to have to go clear down to the big river for supplies. I'll run through my outfit. There may be a few items I'll need. I suppose you could supply them?"

"Chances is."

"If that claim of Olson's has been abandoned, is there any objection to my moving in there—using it as a sort of base from which to carry on my prospecting?"

"None whatever," Black John replied. "But if all you want is a base camp, you don't have to go clean back to Olson's. You could move into One-Eyed John's cabin."

The man's eyes suddenly narrowed, and

Black John wondered whether it was his imagination, or was there a flinty tone in the man's voice as he asked, "Who's One-Eyed John?"

"He ain't no one, now," Cush explained. "That's who he used to be 'fore we hung him."

"Hanging seems to be a popular pastime around here," the stranger remarked. "Might I ask why you hung him?"

"You might," Black John replied, "but as in the case of Olson, I couldn't name it, offhand. They were both hung after bein' convicted by a duly app'inted miner's meetin'. We resort to hangin', not as a pastime, but as a sort of a hint to the livin', that sech acts as was perpetrated by the hangee is frowned on hereabouts. There's several items of misconduct that merits a hangin' on Halfaday Crick, amongst which I might mention, murder, claim jumpin', robbery er larceny in any form, an' general skullduggery. Hangin's is easily avoided on Halfaday—but they're easy come by, too. We don't keep no written records of the proceedin's of a miner's meetin', nor we ain't got no written code of morals. We jest sort of let a man's conscience be his guide."

"This cabin?" the man asked. "Where is it located?"

"Jest a short piece down. It sets a little ways back from the crick at the top of a high bank. It's right handy to the fort, here. If you'd like to move in, yer welcome. I'll give you a hand with yer stuff."

"I might as well, I guess. If I don't like it, I can always move on. And seeing we're going to be neighbors, as you might say, we may as well get acquainted. My name's Collins—Pete Collins. Heard about this gold rush down in the States, and thought I'd try my hand at it. It's quite a trip, for a man that ain't used to the wild country."

"Never done any prospectin', eh?"

"No. But I can learn. From what I hear, a hell of a lot of others have."

THE big man nodded. "That's right. An' now, Pete, I'll make you acquainted with Lyme Cushing, acrost the bar, there. He's known locally as Cush, an' I'm jest plain John Smith, better known as Black John on account of my whiskers bein' that color. An' now, if you'll fill up an' shove the bottle along, I'll buy a drink"

As the glasses were filled a man stepped into the room and advancing to the bar held up a string of fish. "Had pretty good luck, this mornin'," he announced. "Want to buy some?"

"Keep them damn slimy things off'n the bar!" Cush cried. "An' don't lay 'em on the floor, neither. It's hard enough to keep this saloon clean without havin' it all stunk up with fish. Take 'em around back an' give 'em to the klooch an' tell her I says to fry 'em up fer dinner."

When the man returned a few moments later Black John introduced him to the newcomer as One-Armed John.

Collins eyed the empty sleeve. "Are you a prospector?" he asked.

"Who, me? Hell, no! A man with his right arm gone can't handle no pick an' no shovel. I do odd jobs now an' then for the boys. But mostly I fish."

"Been here long? Here in the north country, I mean?"

"Shore I have. Come in on a whaler, ten, fifteen years ago, an' jumped her at St. Michaels. Be'n here an' there along the river ever sence."

"You know the country, then? Know it well enough to get around in it?"

Black John grinned. "If One-Arm don't know it, I wouldn't know who would. Not havin' no reg'lar occupation, he's always more or less on the go."

The man nodded, and turned to One-Armed John who was filling the glass Cush spun toward him. "How would you like a regular job?" he asked.

One-Arm paused, bottle in hand. "What kind of a job?" he asked.

"Well, I suppose you'd call it a guiding job. I came into the country to prospect for gold. I bought a prospecting outfit in Whitehorse, but I don't know much about using it. I don't know the country and I don't know a damn thing about hunting for gold, except that they seem to find it along the cricks. And on top of that, I'm apt to get lost if I go poking around by myself. You know something about prospecting, I suppose?"

"Oh, shore. I prospected around Star City, an' on the Koyukuk, an' Birch Crick, an' Fortymile right up to when I got crippled."

"How'd you lose your arm?"

"Hell, I never lost it! Feller shot it off with a shotgun on account of me an' his wife. I figger it was practically a miss from where he stud. If he hadn't be'n so damn mad he'd of got me right through the middle. Shore, I'll guide fer you. An ounce a day—that's goin' wages. But I won't guarantee you'll make no strike."

"Okay," the man agreed. "Black John, here suggested that I move into One-Eyed John's cabin, wherever that is. So if you'll give me a hand with my stuff at the landing, we'll pack it over there. Then you'd better get your stuff together and move in there, too."

When the two had departed, Cush glanced across at Black John. "Well, I guess, for onct, an honest man come to Halfaday," he said.

The big man grinned. "Yeah? Well, personally, I don't never jump at conclusions."

"You mean you figger he's a crook?"

"I ain't figured one way or another. Far as I can see, he ain't betrayed no criminal tendency as yet. Nor neither I couldn't detect no outstandin' symptoms of rectitude."

"I s'pose them words means he might, er he mightn't, eh? But leastways he didn't start in claimin' his name was John Smith, an' he didn't shoot off his mouth about what he done, an' what he's goin' to do, an' he didn't claim he come here 'cause he heer'd how the police dasn't show up on the crick, an' he didn't brag how if one does, he'll blast him to hell, like most of the damn crooks does. An' he come right out an' says he don't know nothin' about the country, an' about prospectin', an' he never told us how he was some big-shot where he come from. Chances is, he never even heer'd of Halfaday—jest kep' a-comin' on up the White till he got here, same as anyone would git to any crick."

"Could be." Black John admitted, "Time'll tell. Unfortunately for the honest man, the presumption is that there's two strikes on him, or he wouldn't be here. It'll be interestin' to see how things works out."

## II

A MONTH passed, during which Collins made two week-long forays into the hills with One-Armed John. In the interims he frequented the saloon fraternizing with the men of Halfaday. He drank moderately, played a good game of stud, and was accepted as one of them.

One afternoon One-Armed John sauntered into the saloon as Black John, Pot-Gutted John, and Cush were shaking dice for the drinks.

"What's the matter?" Black John asked. "Quit yer job?"

"Hell, no! Pete, he's fixin' to go off on another trip in a couple of days. He's a damn good feller to work fer, Pete is. He pays me straight time whether we're out on the cricks, er jest layin' around here. Told me I could go ahead an' fish, er do whatever I wanted, jest so I'll be around when he wants to make another trip."

"Run onto any thin' yet?" Cush asked.

"No, not nothin' to speak of. We run onto some colors on a crick that runs into Ladue five, six mile below Sebastian's Village. An' some more on another crick back off'n that there crick where Whiskey Bill located. But they wasn't nothin' to write home about. Pete, he goes at it kinda clumsy like—but he's gittin' onto the hang of it. Anyways, he ain't allus growlin' an' crabbin' about things not goin' right. An' he's a damn good shot, too. By cripes, he knocked over a yearlin' moose one mornin' clean acrost a beaver meadow a damn good five hundred yards if it was a foot! 'How's that?' he says. 'Pretty good shootin' eh?'"

"It was a damn lucky shot, if you ask me," I says. An' he kinda laughs. 'Lucky, hell!' he says. 'You ain't so bad with a rifle yerself,' he says, havin' saw me knock over a caribou calf the week before with a runnin' shot. 'Tell you what I'll do—I'll shoot three shots with you fer an ounce a shot, jest to show you there wasn't nothin' lucky about killin' that moose. Our rifles is jest alike, so there ain't no advantage there, one way er another. But you, havin' to shoot left-handed, an' without no right hand to stidy yer gun. I'll let you take a rest over a log er a rock to sort of even things up.'" One-Armed John downed his drink and refilled his glass.

"'Course, havin' to shoot left-handed wasn't no handicap, 'cause I was left-handed to start with. But I didn't see no call to tell him that. An' with him givin' me a rest, I figgered it would be a cinch to cop off them three ounces. So Pete, he steps off the distance, two hundred, four hundred, an' six hundred yards, in an old burnin', an' makes blazes with his ax on them burnt stubs that shows up good an' plain. 'You shoot first,' he says, 'an' then go on ahead an' stick a twig in yer bullet-holes, if any, so you kin tell 'em from mine.' Well, that's what I done, and when I went an' looked at

'em, I figgered he'd have to go some to beat me. I'd set my bullet in every blaze, an' not so damn fer from the middle of all but the last one, which it was a damn good shot to hit it at all.

"Then he tuk his three shots—an' when we went an' looked at 'em, damn if he wasn't inside of me on every blaze. Yes, sir, he win every damn one of them three ounces—an' I'm tellin' you that's shootin'! He's a damn good shot, an' he's got a damn good rifle. He'd art to have—he treats it like it was a baby, er made of gold, er somethin'-allus cleanin' it, er robbin' it, er 'ilin' it, er somethin'. He's damn tetchy about it, too. Allus handles it hisself. I picked it up one day, an' he bawled hell out of me—told me to take my hands off'n it, an' leave 'em off. It's the only time I ever seen him git riled up. Like I said, he's a good guy to work for."

"Seems like a good feller, all right," Pot-Gutted John said. "Seems like he's kinda deaf in his right ear. I set next to him on his right side 'tother night in the stud game, an' when I'd call, er raise he'd turn his head clean around so's his left ear could ketch what I said."

"Might be," One-Armed admitted. "It ain't very bad though, I guessed. I ain't had no trouble makin' him hear. Well, so long. I'm a-goin' fishin'. Mess of fish would go pretty good. If I ketch enough I'll fetch you boys some. We'll be pullin' out pretty quick, an' I won't git another chanct."

"Where you headin', next time?" Black John asked.

"We figger to go up to the White a piece, an' look over some of them cricks up there."

Pot-Gutted John grinned. "Better keep off'n Skookum Crick," he said, "er Old Matt Tabor'll hang yer hide on a limb. He figgers he owns Skookum from one end to 'tother."

One-Armed John scowled. "Old Matt's

location ain't no bigger'n no one else's. He's got a Discovery claim on Skookum—an' that's all he has got. An' he ain't got no rights at all on none of them pups an' feeders that runs into it."

"It's about time Matt was showin' up fer his winter's supplies," Cush said. "He gen'ly comes in about this time of year."

"His winter's supplies, an' his fall drunk," Pot Gut amended. "Last year he hung around fer a week."

"Yeah," One Armed John scowled, "an' this time he hadn't better drop no pepper in my licker, er I'll knock his damn head off. It damn near burnt my throat out. I couldn't talk good fer a week. That's a hell of a joke to play on a man—what I mean."

**C**OLLINS stepped into the room, and grinned at One Armed John. "What, idling away your time! I thought you were going fishing."

"Yeah, I'm goin', right now. Jest stopped in fer a drink an' got to chawin' the fat with the boys. We'll have fish fer supper, all right. I know right where to go." He stepped out, and a moment later stuck his head through the doorway. "Hey, youse guys—speakin' of the devil an' up he pops! Old Matt's jest pullin' in to the landin'."

The announcement was followed by the bellowing voice of old Matt who invariably staged his arrival at the fort to the accompaniment of vociferous song:

*Little black bull slid down the mountain,  
long time ago.*

*Long time ago. Long time ago.*

*Scraped his horn on a hickory saplin'  
long time ago.*

The bellowing voice boomed louder, filling the room with its raucous volume as the big man barged through the doorway:

*He pawed the dust in the heifer's faces,*

*Long time ago!*

The song ceased and pausing abruptly in mid-floor the huge man surveyed the little group at the bar. "What the hell's gain' on here—a funeral? Fill 'em up, Cush! By God, it takes old Matt to lively things up! Shove me out two glasses, Cush. It'll take me till midnight, drinkin' right an' left-handed to ketch up. You boys has got a start on me."

Black John grinned. "I guess you'll ketch up all right, Matt—jedgin' from past performances. How's things goin' on Skookum?"

"Goin' all right. Hell, I'm shov'ellin' out more dust than anyone man's got a right to! Come spring I'll have to take me out a new claim to cache the dust on." He lifted the bottle from the bar, took a big drink from it and filled the two glasses Cush had set before him. With one in each hand, he cried, "Drink up, boys! By God, I kin shoot faster, jump higher, yell louder, an' spit straighter than any man on Halfaday fer dust er licker!" He tossed off the two drinks and glared about him.

Pot-Gutted John laughed. "It shore ain't goin' to take you long to ketch up with us, workin' two glasses an' the bottle! Hell, yer ketched up a-ready. We ain't only had three drinks."

"What do you mean—ketched up! Cripes, you fellas is here every day in the year—an' I only git here spring an' fall. I've got six months ketchin' up to do in a week—an' the way you fellas pours it down, that's a damn tough chore fer any man. Fill 'em up ag'in, Cush. An' send that damn One Armed John up an' down the crick to tell the boys to come on in an' celebrate. Tell 'em old Matt Tabor's hit the crick, an' we got a legal hollerday fer a week!"

"One Arm ain't here," Cush said. "He went fishin'."

"Fishin'—hell! I seen him sneakin' around the corner of the buildin' when I come up the bank."

"Yeah, that's when he went."

"Haw, haw, haw! 'Fraid I'd feed him some more pepper in his lick, eh? I damn near laughed my head off—never seen a man come so close to chokin' to death in my life—what with coughin' an' sneezin', an' the water runnin' out of his eyes. Guess it learnt him to keep off'n Skookum, all right. I run him off'n the crick, onct. Told him if he ever showed up there ag'in, I'd nail his ears up over my door."

"One Arm's all right," Black John observed. "He wouldn't harm no one."

"Mebbe he wouldn't. But that ain't sayin' I want him snoopin' around on Skookum—him, nor no one else. I run a couple chechakos off'n the crick along this summer, an' from the way they tuk out, with me kickin' the dust out from in under their feet every jump with that old forty-five-ninety of mine, I'll bet they're goin' yet."

Black John remarked, noting that Pete Collins had been a silent listener, "After all, Matt, a man don't git a grant to a whole crick, jest because he filed a Discovery claim on one. Others has got a right to file there, too."

"I don't want no neighbors, an' I ain't goin' to have none," Tabor replied. "They's plenty other cricks in the country without folks comes crowdin' in on Skookum. Come spring, I'll have all the dust I want, an' I'm a-goin' back to Minnesoty an' buy all the likker in town, an' buy me the biggest damn farm in Stearns County, an' marry me the prettiest gal in the hull damn state, an' git me the reddest-wheeled buggy an' the fastest hoss in the hull U. S. By God, I'll show 'em! I'll have more damn fun than anyone in the world!"

"That seems to cover everything except the sun, moon, an' stars, Matt," Black John

laughed. "Looks like you've mapped out quite a program. But if you figure on gittin' married you'd art to lay by some of yer dust for what kids you might have."

"To hell with what kids I might have! An' I ain't got no folks to worry about, neither. I was found on a stoop, an' raised in a foundlin' home along with a hundred other kids. I skipped out when I got big enough an' I've made my own way ever since. An' by God, what kids I might have kin do likewise!"

**O**THERS drifted in during the afternoon, and toward suppertime One Armed John stepped through the doorway carrying a string of fish. Making his way toward Collins, he passed behind Tabor who, with a quick backward thrust of his foot, tripped him so that he sprawled his length on the floor. He was up in an instant, and as Tabor turned from the bar, laughing, One Arm whirled the fish squarely into his face.

"Take that, big mouth!" he cried.

Dashing the slime from his eyes, Tabor, bellowing with rage, launched a kick that caught the one-armed one squarely in the seat of the pants with a force that fairly lifted him from the floor. One Armed John retreated across the floor. In the doorway he paused, and shook his fist at Tabor. "Damn you!" he cried, his voice shrill with rage, "I'm a-goin' after my rifle—an' if you're here when I git back, I'll make you jump in the crick!"

**B**OTH Black John and Collins slipped from the room, a few moments later met One Armed coming from One Eyed John's cabin, blood in his eye, and rifle in hand.

Collins sought to deter him. "Hold on, One Arm," he said. "It was a damn dirty trick—to trip you the way he did—but it ain't a shooting matter. And you evened it up with that string of fish."



"Yeah, an' he onevened it ag'in! Can't no one kick me hard as he done an' git away with it! Cripes, I thought I was goin' on out through the roof! By God, I'll make him jump in the crick, er I'll blow his damn head off!"

Black John's eyes narrowed, ominously. "Trippin' an' fish-slappin', an' pants-kickin' is one thing—but shootin' a man is somethin' else ag'in. You've lived here on Halfaday, One Arm, long enough to know the rules. An' you know the graveyard's full of folks that broke 'em. You can go ahead an' shoot Matt Tabor if you want to. That's your business. But if you do, we'll string you up, shore as hell, an' carry you out back an' bury you alongside them others. That'll be our business. An' that ain't no idle warnin', nor no threat. It's a promise—an' I never give a promise yet, I didn't keep."

As the anger faded from One Armed John's eyes, Collins laid a hand on his shoulder. "Go on, One Arm," he said, a note of sympathy in his voice. "Go back to the cabin an' stay there till we hit out on that trip. You can put in the time fishin'. But keep away from Cush's an' you'll keep out of trouble."

As the two made their way back to the saloon Collins said, "A man could hardly blame One Arm for shooting Tabor after what he did to him. Would you really have hung him if he had?"

Black John nodded. "Yer damn right we would. He'd get a fair trial, but shootin' an onarmed man's murder. An' we hang murderers on Halfaday."

"But One Arm's a good fellow. The men here on the crick all know him. Maybe your miner's meeting would vote to acquit him."

"Not a chanct. Miner's meetin's don't try a man on his past record. If the evidence shows that he jumped a claim, or robbed a cache er murdered a man, by God, we hang him, no matter what his past record was. It's

the way we keep the crick moral."

### III

**R**UNNING true to form, old Matt Tabor kept things lively at Cushing's Fort for a week. He rigged his bed in a corner of the storeroom and slept till noon each day, wolfed down the prodigious breakfast that Cush's Indian woman cooked for him, spent the afternoons drinking with all and sundry at the bar, and the nights playing stud. Just before supper on the last afternoon of his stay, he faced Cush across the bar. "You got all my stuff done up—every damn thing in that list I give you?"

Cush nodded. "Yeah, it's all done up an' piled to one side, there in the storeroom. You want to check it over?"

"Hell, no! Why'n hell should I waste my time doin' your job? Tell me how much it comes to an' I'll pay you right now. There'll be four Siwashes with a couple of canoes come fer it in the mornin'." Clawing through his pockets he produced various crumpled wads of paper money which he piled on the bar before him.

Cush consulted a memorandum. "The stuff comes to seven hundred an' four dollars," he said.

Tabor smoothed out the crumpled bills, and passed them across the bar, one by one, counting aloud as he did so. "There you be," he concluded, "an' I've got sixty-five dollars left. Belly up, boys an' we'll drink up the damn dirty paper! Here I fetch down couple hundred ounces of damn good Skookum Crick dust, figgerin' you boys might take me fer the bulk of it in the stud game, instead of which I git a week's drunk, an' half a year's supply of grub, an' sixty-five dollars to boot, without touchin' a damn ounce of my dust! You boys better git you a deck of cards an' go out back somewheres an' practice up—lettin' an old coot from the cricks come in an' take you

fer all them bills! Keep on fillin' up the glasses, Cush, till them sixty-five dollars is gone—then I'll be on my way. An' quick as I git home. I'll pop them two hundred ounces right back in my cache—you bet!"

Collins smiled and held up his glass. "Here's looking at you," he said. "But you ain't pulling out this evening, are you? Why not wait till tomorrow? Hell, with luck like yours, you could run that sixty-five dollars up to a thousand by morning."

"Not by a damn sight, I couldn't," old Matt exclaimed. "My luck's run out. I got a hunch. A man's a damn fool that goes ag'in his hunch—an' my hunch says my luck's changed. A man's got to watch the signs. When the signs says a man's luck's changed, it's changed."

Black John grinned. "What kind of signs do you go by, Matt?" he asked. "I might stand in need of them hunches myself, some time."

"They's plenty signs, if a man's got sense enough to heed 'em. This time it's the spider."

"The spider?"

"Yeah, the spider that's got his web hangin' down from a rafter right over where I sleep there in the storeroom. Every noon when I wake up I lay there a while tryin' to figger where the hell I'm at, an' I watch that there spider runnin' up an' down that strand of web. Well, sir—this mornin' he clumb up it hind end first—an' every other mornin' he dumb it head end first. An' when I seen that I knowed my luck had turned. A man's a damn fool to try to go ag'in his luck. So, I'm right now on my way." Stepping into the storeroom, he reappeared with his packsack and headed for the outside. In the doorway he paused. "Keep on shovin' out the drinks till that sixty-five is gone, Cush," he said. "So long, boys—see you in the spring, when my luck's had time to fresh up ag'in!"

A few minutes later Collins yawned and

stretched his arms above his head. "Well; I guess I'll go home and roll in. Too damn of many all-night sessions of stud to suit me. I've got to be catching up on my sleep."

He left the saloon, and a short time later Black John slipped out and headed for his cabin.

#### IV

LATE in the afternoon of the fifth day thereafter it was Matt Tabor who barged through the doorway of the saloon to interrupt a cribbage game between Cush and Pot Guttled John. "Where's One Armed John?" he demanded in a voice hoarse with rage.

Pot Gut pegged his hand and eyed the irate man. "He's down to One Eyed John's cabin I guess," he answered. "Leastways him and Pete Collins was choppin' firewood there when I come by half an hour ago."

Tabor turned toward the door. "By God, when I git hold of him I'll break him in two!" he roared.

Cush shoved the steel-bowed, square-framed spectacles from nose to forehead and frowned. "What the hell's ailin' you, Matt?" he asked. "Jest because One Arm belted you in the face with a string of fish ain't no call fer you to go on the warpath damn near a week later. Besides which, you tripped him er he wouldn't of done it—an' besides that, you h'isted him one in the pants that damn near put him through the roof. An' I'm tellin' you right now—hadn't be'n fer Pete Collins an' Black John, One Arm would of blow'd yer head off that day. Them two ketched him headin' back here with his rifle, an' turned him back."

"The hell with what happened here! I ain't payin' no heed to that. But the damn dirty sneakin' coot robbed my cache!"

"Yer crazy! One Arm wouldn't rob no cache."

"The hell he wouldn't! He did. An' he

can't lie out of it. His fresh tracks is right there in wet snow back of my shack where he snuck up to see if I was home. When I got back to Skookum I went right to my cache to put back them two hundred ounces I fetched down here an' didn't have to use. An' the cache was okay. Then the next night when I went to it to put in the four an' a half ounces I sluiced out that day, the cache was empty. Not a damn ounce left out of more'n four thousan' ounces—better'n sixty-five thousan' dollars."

"How do you know them was One Arm's tracks you claim is there in the mud?"

"I know they're his'n! When I tripped him up that day, right here in the saloon, he went sprawlin' on his belly, an' the soles of his pacs showed up plain the way his knees was bent. They 'was new pacs, an' I seen the pattern on them rubber soles; plain as I see the nose on yer face—four bars acrost 'em an' a big S in the middle of a Circle."

Cush nodded. "Yeah, I sold One Arm a pair of pacs like that a couple weeks ago. But that ain't sayin'—"

"It's sayin' all I want to know!" Tabor roared. "He'll tell me where he's got my dust cached, er I'll choke the livin' daylights outa him!"

AS THE man disappeared through the doorway, Cush turned to Pot Guttled John. "Slip over to Black John's cabin an' tell him to git over here right away er hell'll be to pay. If One Arm sees old Matt chargin' in on him with blood in his eye he'll shoot him shore as hell."

Just as Pot Gut reached Black John's door the sound of a shot rang out. "Too late," he exclaimed, as Black John stepped from his cabin. "He's up an' done it!"

"Who done what to who?"

"One Arm's shot old Matt Tabor. Cush claimed he would onlest you got there first."

"H-u-u-m," Black John said, leading the

way toward Cush's. "The facts will bear lookin' into."

"Yeah," Pot Gut agreed. "But—John, if One Arm has shot him, ain't it self-defense, er somethin'? Old Matt ain't no hell of a loss, anyways you look at him. An' One Arm—Cripes, he wouldn't harm no one. He's be'n around here a long time, an'—"

"Did you see Matt when he headed fer One Eyed John's?"

"Shore I seen him. He stopped in the saloon an' ask' where One Arm was at."

"Was Matt heeled?"

"Well, no. That is, not that I could see, he wasn't."

"Shootin' an unarmed man is murder. I warned One Arm that we'd hang him if he shot old Matt the last time he tried it."

"But hell, John—you got to remember, One Arm's be'n around here quite a while—an' well, damn it—when you git to likin' a fellow, seems like, somehow—you kind a hate to hang him. An' besides, if One Arm got hung, who the hell could we buy fish off'n?"

THEY reached the saloon to find Cush waiting in the doorway. "One Arm's prob'ly shot Old Matt," he said glumly. "Matt claimed he robbed his cache. Said he seen One Arm's tracks by his shack there on Skookum."

Pete Collins came running up as Cush finished. "Well, it's happened," he panted. "One Arm shot Matt Tabor, just as he threatened he would!"

Black John nodded. "Yeah, we heard the shot. Did Tabor attack him?"

"He didn't have time to. We were in the cabin and heard someone running down the trail, and the next thing we knew Tabor was in the clearing, and One Arm grabbed up his rifle and drilled him right through the middle."

"Did One Arm skip out?"

"No, he knew it was no use. I told him

to wait there and I'd tell you and Cush. I thought you'd ought to know."

"You done right," Black John commended, and turned to Cush, who had stepped to the door. "Lock up. You're the coroner. We'll go down to One Eye's an' hold the inquest."

Red John came around the corner of the building and eyed the group. "What's all the excitement?" he asked.

"One Arm's shot Matt Tabor," Cush replied, as he snapped the huge padlock on the door. "Matt claimed he robbed his cache."

"Hell, One Arm never robbed no cache!"

"Of course he didn't," Collins agreed. "There was bad blood between 'em, that's all. We all saw what happened here in the saloon, and we all heard One Arm threaten to shoot him. In fact Black John and I prevented him from shooting him that day. Didn't we, John?"

"We shore did," Black John agreed. "Turned him back right there on the trail with a warnin' that if he shot Tabor, we'd hang him shore as hell."

"Come on," Cush said "Let's git the inquest over. I don't want to lose no more trade than what I've got to. At that, there ain't only four of you fer a jury an' accordin' to law, there'd ort to be six. We hadn't ort to let One Arm set on it, seein' he done the shootin'."

"Him nor Collins, neither," Black John said. "Collins is a material witness. But there's Short John—"

"Hell, he ain't here," Cush exclaimed, "an' it would take 'an hour to fetch him."

"He can serve *in absentia*," Black John said, "that's Latin fer sayin' a man's here when he ain't. An' it's legal as hell."

"Still we ain't got only four—if Collins can't set on it."

"Well, there's One Eyed John an' Olson—we can use them in a pinch."

"But cripes—they're both dead!"

"Well, so's Tabor—so what the hell's the difference. Come on—let's get goin'."

Proceeding to One-Eyed John's the five eyed the body of Tabor which lay at the edge of the small clearing, passed on to the cabin, and ranged themselves about the room. Black John rapped on the table with his knuckles.

"Cush, bein' coroner, convenes this here inquest over the body of the late Matt Tabor. In the first place, Cush—what's Matt's status?"

"His which?"

"Is he alive, er dead?"

"He looked deader'n hell a minute ago."

"Okay. Havin' established the fact of death, we will now proceed to investigate the means by which the said Matt Tabor's death was come by. In your opinion, Cush was this here death violent, er natural?"

"Natural."

"What! With a bullet hole plumb through him, an' blood runnin' all over the snow!"

"Shore," Cush replied. "A man in that fix would nach'ly be dead, wouldn't he?"

Black John grinned. "Yer p'int seems well taken. Now, fer the first witness, Cush calls Pete Collins. Pete, do you swear to tell the truth, the hull truth, er any part of it, s'e'lpe God?"

"I do."

"All right, go ahead an' tell us what come off here."

"One Armed John and I were in the cabin overhauling our outfit for a prospecting trip and we heard someone running down the trail, and the next thing we knew Tabor showed up in the clearing, and One Arm grabbed up his rifle, there in the corner, and shot him—"

One Armed John leaped forward and faced the man, his eyes wide with horror. "Why—you damn liar! You shot him yerself!"

Black John banged on the table with his fist. "Silence!" he roared. "You shet up till the witness gets through. Then you'll be given a chanct to talk—an' on top of that yer fined a round of drinks fer contempt of a coroner's inquest. Go ahead, Pete. What happened, then?"

"Well, that's about all there is to tell, except that I told One Arm to wait here till I notified you and Cush."

"Okay. Now One Arm step out in front of Cush there." Having sworn him in, Black John eyed him sternly. "Go ahead an' tell your story, rememberin' that perjury is hangable on Halfaday, in case we'd fall down on a conviction fer murder."

"I never done it," One Arm said. "Like Pete says, we was settin' here goin' over the outfit, when we heer'd someone runnin', an' then Tabor showed up, an' 'fore I know'd it Pete retch fer his rifle an' let him have it, an' Matt, he dropped right there where he's layin'."

"Did you, er did you not, threaten to shoot Tabor?"

"Shore I did. But—"

"Did Pete Collins an' I, er did we not, stop you out there on the trail, the other day, an' did you er did you not, have a loaded rifle in yer hands an' threaten to make the said Matt Tabor jump in the crick er you'd blow his damn head off?"

"Yeah, shore you did. An' I'd of shot him, too. But—"

"An' did I, er did I not, warn you that if you shot Tabor; we'd hang you shore as hell?"

"Yeah that's what you claimed—but I never shot him! Pete Collins shot him."

"Why?"

"Damn if I know. He jest up an' shot him, that's all I know."

"Have you ever heard Collins threaten to shoot him?"

"No."

"Don't you know it to be a fact that damn near everyone on the crick heard you threaten to shoot him?"

"I don't give a damn if they did, er didn't. I never done it."

"That's all," Black John said, and turned to the jurors. "You men have viewed the corpse, an' heard the evidence. I might p'int out that in view of the contradictory nature of the evidence, we'll have to use our own judgment in decidin' which of the two witnesses we'll hold fer trial by miner's meetin'. Takin' into consideration the fact that Collins prob'ly wouldn't have had no motive fer shootin' Tabor, who was practically a total stranger to him, an' also the fact that One Arm an' Tabor had had trouble before, an' One Arm had threatened him, I believe we must vote to hold One Arm fer trial. All so minded signify by sayin' 'Aye'—contrary 'No'."

**B**LACK JOHN'S "Aye" was seconded by weak assent from the others. "Okay," he said. "Cush's verdict is that the said One Armed John be remanded fer trial by a miner's meetin' to be held in the saloon tomorrow evenin'. He app'ints Pete Collins to go up an' down the crick an' notify the boys of the meetin'. He also app'ints Pot Guttled John, an' Red John to take the said One Arm to Pot Gut's cabin, an' there hold him prisoner, to be delivered at the meetin' in good shape. Allowin' the prisoner to escape will be considered skullduggery in the first degree, an' hangable, as such. Inquest adjourned to the saloon where the round of drinks assessed agin One Arm will be drunk."

Red John spoke up. "Hey, John—miner's meetin's is legal enough where there ain't no law, like most times on Halfaday. But I seen Constable Brock couple days ago. He claimed he was goin' up to Sebastians Village on Ladue Crick,

an' then he'd swing over here. He'd ort to git here by tomorrow night."

"Okay," Black John said. "I wish it was Corporal Downey instead of Brock. But with the law on the crick we won't have to hold no miner's meetin', so Pete an' me will haul the corpse up to Cush's an' pack it in snow so it will keep. An' also, I'll take the two rifles there in the corner, an' carry 'em up to Cush's fer Brock's inspection." He turned to Collins. "No objection, I s'pose to takin' yer rifle along with One Arm's. Brock'll want to see all the evidence."

Collins hesitated only a moment. "No. No, of course not. Sure—take it along. We've got to help the police all we can."

Black John picked up the two rifles. "Well, come on, boys. We'll be gettin' back to the saloon."

## V

CONSTABLE BROCK R. N. W. M. P., arrived at Cushing's Fort the following evening to find an expectant gathering of the outlawed men of Halfaday Creek awaiting him. This gathering was composed entirely of Alaska wanteds, a local term used to designate those citizens whose difficulty was with the American, or Alaska authorities, and who had nothing to fear from the Canadian officer. The Yukon wanteds were wont to keep discreetly out of sight whenever an officer of the Mounted showed up on the creek.

Black John greeted the officer cordially. "Hi, there, Brock! On time to the minute. Step right up to the bar. The house is buyin' a drink. I guess you know all the boys here, except mebbe Pete Collins. Pete, he's a newcomer amongst us—doin' a little prospectin' out in the hills." He turned to Collins. "Pete, this here's Constable Brock. Damn good man on the trail, Brock is. You'd ort to make a trip with him, sometime."

Brock filled the glass Cush set before him and glanced about the room. "What's goin' on?" he asked casually. "Somebody's birthday, or somethin'?"

"No, the fact is, Brock, one of our esteemed citizens is accused of murder. Normally we'd have gone ahead an' held a miner's meetin' and hung the guilty party, forthwith. But, bein' as Red John claimed you told him a couple days back that you aimed to swing around here after visitin' Sebastians Village, we deemed it advisable to turn the case over to the constituted authorities. On Halfaday, Brock, we aim to work hand in glove with the police."

"Who's accused of this murder?"

"One Armed John."

"One Armed John! Cripes—why would One Arm murder anybody?"

BLACK JOHN grinned. "Gettin' around up an' down the crick, like he does, One Arm has found more corpses than all the rest of us put together. But it's quite a while sence he found one, an' bein' as me an' Cush is habited to slip him a small fee fer his trouble, mebbe he decided to sort of boost business a bit."

"Have you got a *corpus delicti*?"

"Yer damn right. Old Matt Tabor's playing that part. He's good an' fresh, too. Me an' Pete packed him in snow."

"Where's One Arm?"

"We've got him, too. Pot Gut an' Red John stood guard on him an' a couple hours ago they fetched up here an' we stuck him in the hole till you come along."

"Why would One Arm kill old Matt?" Brock asked.

"Oi' Matt had it comin'," Long Nosed John opined. "He's allus bedevilin' One Arm."

"That's right," Short John agreed. "Told him to keep off'n Skookum Crick, er he'd nail his ears up over his door."

"Yer damn right," Red John added, "an'

on top of that he stuck pepper in One Arm's whiskey an' damn near choked him to death, one time."

"Shore he did," Pot Guttled John added, "an' last week when he was here he stuck out his foot an' tripped One Arm flat on his belly—right there where yer standin'."

"Besides which he ruttled One Arm one in the seat of the pants with the toe of his boot that h'isted him plumb off'n the floor," Cush added.

"But you've got to remember, Cush," Black John said, "that One Arm had smacked him plumb in the face with a string a fish."

"Well, who the hell wouldn't—trippin' him like he done?"

"What I claim," Pot Gut said, "One Arm had a right to shoot him."

"He evidently thought so," Pete Collins added. "We all heard him threaten to kill him, and Black John and I slipped out and turned him back with a loaded gun in his hand."

"All that bedevillin' don't add up to a murder," Brock said. "What did One Arm do—go over to Skookum an' shoot Matt?"

"No," Black John explained, "Matt was shot in the clearin' of One Eyed John's cabin. Matt, he was here on his semi-annual drunk when these bedevillin' incidents happened. He pulled out fer home an', five days later he showed up here at the saloon an' told Cush an' Pot Gut his cache had be'n robbed, an' he figured One Arm had robbed it, an' when he found out that One Arm an' Pete Collins was livin' in One Eye's cabin, he hit out fer there. Pot Gut come to my cabin to see if there wasn't somethin' we could do about it, when we heard a shot, an' when we got to Cush's, Pete Collins come runnin' up an' said that One Arm had shot Matt."

"That's right," Collins concurred. "We heard someone running down the trail, and suddenly Matt showed up in the clearing

with blood in his eye, and One Arm grabbed up his rifle and shot him dead."

"We went down an' held an inquest," Black John continued, "during the course of which One Arm denied shootin' Matt—claimin' it was Pete that shot him."

Collins smiled. "But I don't hold any grudge against the poor old fellow. It was a clumsy and preposterous lie, uttered on the spur of the moment. Why should I have shot Tabor? I never met him till he showed up here at the Fort, and during his stay we all drank together and played cards. On the other hand everyone knows there was bad blood between One Arm and Tabor."

Brock nodded. "Everyone's spoke up except One Armed John. Fetch him in an' we'll hear what he's got to say."

Red John and Pot Guttled John stepped into the storeroom, rolled the barrel of pork aside and raised the trap door to allow One Armed John to climb out of the "hole", a log-lined cell constructed beneath the storeroom floor for the safe keeping of those characters whose detention was deemed advisable. As the prisoner stepped into the saloon accompanied by his guards, he eyed the officer.

"Hello, Brock. Red John told me you was headed this way. An' now you've got here I s'pose you figger, like Black John, that I shot old Matt Tabor. But it's a damn lie. Pete Collins there shot him, an' claimed it was me."

"But you had threatened to shoot him, hadn't you?"

"Shore I did. But you can't hang a man fer threatenin'."

"Why did Collins shoot him?"

"How the hell do I know why he done it? He up an' shot him—I seen him do it—an' that's all I know about it. Onlest it was somethin' old Matt said to him, er done to him over on Skookum."

"This trouble you had, and the threat you made to shoot Tabor was while he was

here, last week?"

"Shore it was. But I hated the old son of a gun before that."

"You say that Collins might have shot Tabor for somethin' that happened on Skookum? Has Collins be'n on Skookum sence Tabor was here?"

"Shore he has—him an' me both. We pulled out from here the same evenin' old Matt pulled out—only he went back in his canoe, an' me an' Pete cut acrost."

"Why did you cut acrost?"

"Pete, he wanted to do some prospectin' over in there. I'm workin' fer Pete—er I was till he told that damn lie."

"So you were on Skookum when Matt got back there?"

"Pete was. I wasn't. There's a hell of a swamp jest this side of Skookum, an' we never got to the crick till noon, the next day, an' Pete, he was wet to his knees, an' all over mud, an' mad as hell, so he said he'd be damned if he'd go back through the swamp fer no money, so he sent me back to git the canoe, an' his other pacs, so when we come back we could go down the White, an' up Halfaday. So I loan't him my dry pacs an' come back for the canoe an' it was two days before I got back to Skookum, an' when I did git back, Pete, he says to throw the stuff in the canoe an' git to hell out of there."

"I asks him if old Matt run him off, an' he says he ain't saw Matt—an' I'm paid to do like he says an' not ask no questions. So we loaded up an' come on back here."

Brock turned to Collins. "How about it?" he asked. "Did you see Tabor on Skookum?"

"No, I didn't. The fact is I met an Indian over there who told me that Tabor had run several prospectors off the crick, and had threatened to shoot anyone who prospected there: So rather than have any trouble with Tabor, I decided to try my luck somewhere else, and when One Arm came back with

the canoe, we pulled out."

"Tabor told Cush and Pot Gut that One Armed John robbed his cache. Do you know anything about that?"

"He's a damn liar! I never robbed his cache—nor no one else's neither!" One Armed John cried.

"I know nothing about what One Arm did between the time I sent him for the canoe, and the time he returned with it," Collins replied. "I hadn't thought of it before, but he would have plenty of time to rob it."

BROCK nodded, and eyed One Armed John. "I'm arrestin' you for the murder of Matt Tabor, an' takin' you down to Dawson to stand trial. It's my duty to warn you that anything you say may be used against you." He turned to Collins. "An' I'm takin' you along as a material witness."

Black John grinned. "I don't s'pose it's occurred to you that you might be puttin' the cart before the horse, has it?"

"What do you mean," Brock asked, eyeing the big man sharply.

"Meanin' that a little further questionin' might throw a different aspect on the case."

Brock's brow drew into a frown. "I don't know what you're drivin' at," he said, "On the evidence I don't see how I can do any different. But I know that Corporal Downey's got a lot of respect for your judgment. If you can help me out on this case, I'll sure be thankful. I don't claim to know it all."

The big man nodded. "An' that's where yer different from most of the rookies. It's why, if you keep yer eyes an' ears open, you'll prob'ly make a damn good policeman. Fer's I can see yer as wide between the ears as Downey is—but you ain't got Downey's experience."

"Nor yours, either," Brock grinned. "S'pose you go ahead with this further questionin' you spoke about."



"Okay." Black John's eyes roved about the room, and finally centered upon One Armed John's feet. "Them pacs you've got on—is them the ones you got off Cush, lately?"

"Shore they be."

"An' the ones you loaned Collins when he got his feet wet?"

"Yup."

"How about it, Collins—did you borrow them pacs One Arm's got on?"

"Why—yes, of course, I did. Mine were wet and muddy, so I borrowed his. He was wearing another pair at the time."

"An' you wore 'em, I s'pose, whilst you was on Skookum?"

"Yes—it took a couple of days for mine to dry out. What's the difference what pacs I had on?"

Black John ignored the question. "Now, turnin' to the matter of guns. You was in the cabin when you claim One Arm shot Tabor—which gun did he use—yours, or his?"

"Why—I don't know. I didn't notice. The two guns are just alike. They stood there together in the corner. He grabbed up one of them, and fired, and Tabor dropped in his tracks."

"Pretty good shootin', wasn't it—to hit Tabor, dead center, through the doorway an' acrost the clearin', an' him on the move."

"It was damn good shooting," Collins admitted. "One Arm is a good shot."

"It wasn't no shot that a man could of made without drawin' a fine sight? Couldn't have b'en a snap shot—like shootin' from the hip, er' jest pullin' up an' blazin' away?"

"I'll say it couldn't! From the angle he stood he couldn't have had more than a foot of doorway to shoot through."

"An' you actually saw him take aim—line up his sights before he shot?"

"Sure I did. I was about to knock down the gun when he fired."

"Okay," Black John turned to Cush. "Fetch them two rifles over here, an' we'll find out which one killed old Matt. I couldn't find no empty shell on the floor over to One Eyed John's, so I assume the empty is still in the chamber." When Cush brought the rifles, Black John held them up, one in each hand. "Now, Pete," he asked, "which one of these guns is yours?"

Unhesitatingly Collins indicated one of the rifles. Laying the other on the bar, Black John worked the bolt and ejected an empty shell. Then he ejected a loaded shell from the other rifle, and turned to the officer. "So you see, Brock, Matt Tabor was killed with Collins' rifle. Mebbe, now, you'd better make a shift in yer cast of characters, holdin' Collins fer the murder—an' One Eye fer the material witness."

"But—hell, John," the young officer said. "The two rifles stood together in the corner. One Arm simply grabbed up Collins' rifle instead of his own!"

Black John's lips settled into a grim smile as his shrewd gray eyes focused on Pete Collins' face—a face that had suddenly gone paper-white. "It couldn't have be'n a snap shot, Pete. You said so yerself. And you saw him take aim when he fired." Collins' lips moved feebly—but no words came. A thick ropy spittle drooled from one corner of his mouth, and he wiped it away with the back of his hand. Black John continued. "An' you admitted wearin' One Arm's new pacs whilst you was on Skookum. You didn't know that old Matt told Cush an' Pot Gut, jest before he was shot, that he seen the tracks of them pacs in the wet snow beneath his window. The jig's up, Collins—yer right now puttin' up as good a defense as you ever can, because nothin' you could ever say would acquit you."

Constable Brock stared from one to the other—from the shrewd, grimly-smiling face of Black John, to the trembling,

drooling figure that stood leaning against the bar for support. "But—I—I don't understand," he said. "Why couldn't One Arm have used Collins' rifle."

The big man's grin widened. "Pick it up an' try it yourself," he said.

**B**ROCK picked up the rifle and threw it to his shoulder. "What the hell!" he exclaimed, lowering the gun and examining it.

Again he raised it to his shoulder, and again he lowered it and regarded it with a puzzled frown.

Black John laughed. "Off-set gun," he explained. "I've seen one er two of 'em before—but never one as good as this one. I'd say the stock was bent at the factory, with Collins right there for accurate measurement. You see, that right eye of his is glass—an' that's a damn good job, too—matches the other jest about perfectly. They make these off-set guns for men who lose a right eye an' can't learn to shoot from the left shoulder, an' vicy-versy."

Numerous exclamations of surprise and incredulity greeted the words, as the men of Halfaday crowded closer to peer at the cowering man's eyes. "Cripes," Pot Guttled John cried. "He's be'n here a month an' none of us know'd his eye was glass! When did you find it out?" he asked, turning to Black John.

"The first day he come," the big man answered. "He stood just left of me at the bar, an' when I said somethin' to him, he turned to face me before he answered. I thought then he was deaf in his right ear. But when a little later, he turned clean around to p'int to the storeroom door, I figured it was his eye instead of his ear. Then, when he stood his rifle in the corner at the end of the bar, I noticed that it swung a little off center when he let go of it—didn't stand straight like a regular gun would. Then he sort of bristled up fer a

second when I mentioned One Eyed John's cabin—thought fer a second I was kiddin' him about his affliction. Then half a dozen times, playin' stud, I could see he used his left eye only—I wouldn't have noticed that, though, if I hadn't known beforehand. He's got himself pretty well trained."

**B**ROCK nodded, and again picked up Collins' rifle and threw it to his shoulder, sighted with it, and lowered it again.

"Still I'm afraid a good lawyer would demonstrate to the court that a man who knew this gun was an off-set could sight it with his left eye, the same as Collins does. I just now tried it and the sights come in perfect line for the left eye."

Black John grinned. "It would take a damn good lawyer to prove how One Armed John could do it! With his right arm gone, how the hell could One Arm get a gun to his right shoulder? When that thought hit Collins, he collapsed like a wet sack—I noticed his eye starin' at One Arm's empty sleeve when the color begun drainin' from his face."

"For Pete's sake—get it over with!" Collins cried, in a low trembling voice. "I did it! I confess. I robbed his cache—and I shot him. Let's get out of here. I'll show you where I recached his dust."

When the officer had departed with his prisoner after securing Black John's promise that all necessary witnesses would appear at the trial when notified, One Armed John turned to the big man. "Then if you know'd all the time it was Pete shot old Matt why the hell did you scare the livin' daylight outa me, by claimin' I done it?"

Black John grinned. "As long as Collins thought I figured you done it, he wouldn't skip out, would he?"

"No—but why the hell couldn't you of helt him fer the miner's meetin' as well as me?"

"I saw the possibilities for a good drayma. You'll have to admit that it was much more dramatic to let the damn scoundrel stand up there an' convict himself, than to have merely arrested him."

"You an' yer damn draymas!" Cush growled from behind the bar. "You never pulled off one yet that someone didn't git the hell scairt out of 'em—only it's gen'ly me!"

FOUR days later Constable Brock returned to Halfaday with his handcuffed prisoner, and interrupted a dice game between Black John and Cush. "I want to search One Eyed John's cabin, where this damn cuss lived. He took me on a wild goose chase over on Skookum and showed me a niche in the rocks where he said he'd cached Tabor's dust. But there was no dust there!"

Black John shook his head slowly and regarded Collins with a frown. "Don't it beat hell, Brock, what damn liars these thieves is?"

"Their duplicity is onbelievable. Go ahead an' hunt fer his cache. Good luck to you. It wouldn't be right to let the damn rascal profit from his crime, in case the law didn't hang him."

When the two had departed Cush eyed the big man across the bar. "You was gone

fer a couple of days after old Matt went back," he said.

"Yeah, that's so, ain't it? Fact is, I figured Collins was goin' to make a play fer Matt's cache when I seen how his left eye glittered when he listened to Matt tell how much was in it. So I sort of loafed over to Skookum to see how he worked it. He watched Matt deposit the dust he fetched back in his cache—then he robbed it. It was a fairly good job—fer a glass-eyed man, I thought."

"How much was in Collins' cache when you robbed it?"

"Robbed it! What the hell do you mean—robbed? I merely removed the dust to prevent Collins from profitin' by a crime. If old Matt hadn't got shot, I'd have returned every ounce of it!"

"Oh, shore. But Matt got shot. How much was in it?"

"Right around four thousan' ounces. 'Long as Matt claimed he didn't have a relative in the world, there wouldn't be no p'int in makin' the Public Administrator try to dig up some. It would jest encourage a bunch of loose-moraled folks to put in fraudulent claims. So me an' you might's well divide it between us. It seems to be the only equitable solution."