



By **GEORGE BRUCE**
MARQUIS

IN THE DEVIL'S WIGWAM

*Bat Jennison and Pegleg Found Themselves Hard Put to It
To Carry Out Their Pledge to a Dead Man*

“**P**EGLEG,” Bat Jennison nodded comfortably, “so fur she checks correct accordin’ to the old man’s tellin’. Undoubted thar stands the Devil’s Wigwam.”

Pegleg Wimberley made no immediate reply. Rather he ran an appraising eye over the freak of nature that had summoned Jennison’s nod. A pillar of rock, wind carved, it towered starkly a good fifty feet,

a mimic in stone of an Indian tepee even to the smoke vent. That was aped cunningly by a slab of bluish rock set edgewise in the tepee’s top. Reasonably circular, the skirts of the tepee were whitened rock. It was complete even to an irregular wedge-shaped opening at the bottom as if the door flaps had been hooked back carelessly by an untidy hand. The cramped floor space was carpeted with sand,

patterned and wimpled by the capricious desert winds.

"It's a sure enough wigwam," Wimberley conceded finally, "but why for the Devil's? The old man didn't name it so, not anyway in my hearing."

"The name sticks out as glib as old man Peddog's nose," Jennison chuckled. "Hell cain't be more'n a rod down and I figger when the fuel gits low, old Scratch hasta hike some place to git warm. Natural he romps up here. It's his country home, so to speak."

"Reckon so," and Wimberley spat feebly. "This sand is sure hot as the fiery pit."

"Yep," Jennison amplified the thought feelingly. "You and me, Pegleg, are sure standin' right now onto the stove lids of Perdition." Then he shifted, "I don't see no sign of a mine, but of course he didn't git time to tell us much. Anyway thar's the spring, and the meadow and the wigwam jest as he said. Let's unsaddle our hosses and git supper. In the morning we'll go prospectin'."

Bat Jennison and Pegleg Wimberley were seasoned products of a west that sometimes smiled, more often scowled. Wimberley, older by twenty years, was still a good man to have around when trouble boomed up over the horizon. Despite his peg. For his right leg was missing from the knee down, lost in his youth in a raging blizzard.

The two had done a bit of prospecting, but as desert rats this was a unique venture. It had come about by sheer accident. Three days before, back in the Chipmunk Mountains they had stumbled upon the camp of an old prospector who had spent long years in ceaseless endeavor to tap the gold stream that in imagination he saw flowing beneath the desert sands. And had found it, his matchless samples proved it beyond cavil. Yet its hard-won

riches were not for him. Not yet dead when Jennison and Wimberley chanced upon his camp, yet dying inexorably with dissolution very near. They cared for him without a thought of reward, indeed they paid scant heed to his babblings until he showed them the gold. It made no difference.

They had not the slightest intention to dare the desert. But the indomitable old man persisted, finally wooing from them a reluctant promise to follow up his find and that now.

"I reckon," Jennison admitted regretfully when the worn body had been insured sanctuary from prowling animals, "that we're hogtied by that foolish promise."

"I consider it foolish," Wimberley agreed, "but I consider also we're bound to keep it. But we're damned low on grub, and there ain't nothing here."

A fact," Jennison echoed. "All he's got we can use is these two five-gallon water kaigs. We'll swing 'em across our pack mare. Well yes, thar's this big canteen. Holds a gallon I reckon. Guess we'd best git ready to rack out."

THE old prospector had calculated that they could reach his strike in two days and on this the second day they had arrived. First, if cursory, inspection completed, they unsaddled their horses, watered them judiciously, then turned them loose to graze at will.

Supper over, each carried his lozenge of blankets to the crest of a flat sand dune and made his bed—by the simple expedient of unrolling it. Their boots would serve as odorous pillows.

"She's perfection," Jennison gruntingly inventoried their work. "Why do people sleep in beds, I wonder?"

Lighting their pipes, they sprawled on their blankets to talk. A full moon was

riding the blue-black sky, and under its mellow light the harsh unfriendliness of the desert was wonderfully muted. Small wonder that the two men spanned their sea of sands with the arch of golden dreams.

It was cold dawn when Jennison awoke, stretched hugely, then shucking out of his blankets like a limp cocoon, stood erect. The little valley was in view, barring its extreme upper end, but he saw nothing of their three horses. No doubt they were there in that tiny obscured corner, but he wished his faith confirmed by his eyes. Waking Pegleg, they went down to the spring and while Wimberley started breakfast, Jennison walked on up the valley. The flat was scarcely more than fifty yards wide, possibly ten times as long. The extreme northern end twisted sharply behind a low shoulder of disintegrating rock and here in this pocket Jennison found the animals. Dead! No second glance was needed to inform him of that appalling fact. Rattlesnakes was his first oath-garnished diagnosis. But that blistering thought held only for a moment. For he had noted the tiny pool of water cuddled by the splayed base of the shoulder of rock. And he knew the pool for what it was, a seepage of arsenic impregnated water. Jennison looked long and sadly at their three faithful companions.

"And your end ain't no diffrent from a man's!" he moralized. "Nature don't play no favorites. On the contrary. Comes the time man or beast gits into the road of nature and she lams him outen pity or regrets."

He turned back slowly toward their camp. And he was thinking deeply as he faced the appalling situation. For it was appalling. There was no other word for it. To be set down afoot in the heart of a desert and Pegleg a cripple was portentous food for thought. Traveling

over smooth ground even was a toilsome process for the old man. In this inferno of burning sand all but impossible. Pyramided above these formidable obstacles was their shortage of food and their unfamiliarity with the desert. Yes, they stood very near to the crossroads of despair.

Pegleg looked up from his campfire and read disaster in Jennison's sober face.

"Horses?" he queried anxiously.

"Dead," Jennison answered. "Tanked up on pisen water. Thar's a little pool up at the fur end of this valley. Probably the old timer didn't know it. Likely broke out since he left. Anyway it 'pears to be fresh."

Now he looked with pity at his comrade's blanched and twitching face. Wimberley was at grips with the terrifying realization of his helplessness. Not for a moment must it remain regnant in his thinking.

"Lefty Steffins—" Jennison grinned fraudfully, "you'll remember I've tootled a lot about him—usta say when the sleddin' got particular rough, 'Boys we've skated more'n seldom onto mighty thin ice and lived to hang up our skates: Well that's the gospel, truth about me and you. Two tough old pelicans like us ain't goin' to be grubbed by no buzzards. Hell, we could roll outen this little patch of sand if we had to do so."

His flaunted contempt for desert perils had a notable and instantly steadying effect on his maimed comrade.

"Damned if we couldn't, Bat," Wimberley chortled loudly, "you bet it 'ill take more than a yard or two of sand to hold us down."

Of primary importance was some method of broadening the tread of Wimberley's peg And Jennison chuckled forth the perfect answer. An empty peach can, that was it! With the awl blade of his

jackknife he bored a hole in the end of the wooden leg, nailed the can in place, bottom down, and crimped the upper end tight about the peg.

"Lucky we always carry a few extray horseshoe nails," said Jennison admiring his cobbling. "That 'ill see you through, Pegleg."

"Yep," Wimberley made qualified approval, "less the old peg splits or something. Sure wish it was that old oak stick that got burned up at Sodom. Not a seam in it. But this fir peg ain't too good. Them weather cracks don't look encouraging 'specially if we've got to drive it full of nails."

"She'll hold, Pegleg," Jennison assured him. "Don't you fret about that. And now," he went on briskly, "cook up what grub we've got whilst I store our dunnage away. Reckon that wigwam 'ill be the proper spot."

So while Pegleg cooked a few thin flapjacks and fried their skimpy stock of rancid bacon, Jennison carried their saddles, blankets, rifles and meager mining equipment over to the stone tepee. The space within was ample and dry. And then the goddess Fortuna unveiled a golden smile. Jennison for no conscious reason chose to sink the pick into that carpet of sand instead of standing it sedately against the wall. Six inches down it struck something, not hard like granite, yet at that something with body to it. Idly curious, Jennison bent down, scraped away the sand, looked carelessly, then sharply, then avidly. His yell brought his partner on a shuffling gallop.

What Jennison by a whimsy of chance had uncovered, was a ledge of whitish cement rock, crammed with nodules of pure gold, as thickly seeded as raisins in a Christmas pudding! Here in very deed was the old prospector's mine. For a few delirium saturated forgetful moments they

trod the ultimate cloud fields of glory. And then their ecstasy was muted. Harsh realism had obtruded its stern and ugly visage. Wimberley's beaming eye had lighted upon his tin-shod wooden peg.

"Bat," he shook his head wretchedly, "what's the use?"

"Right," and Jennison cut squarely across his partner's coming ode to defeat. "Thar ain't no use fur us to tarry. We've struck it rich beyond the dreams even of Creosote, the Egyptun king or mebbly he was a Dago, I'm kinda limber onto that. But and anyway thar it is, and all ourn. We'll tuck away a few nuggets to keep us in mind how rich we are and then we'll git ourselves a new outfit and flit back here for some *real* diggin'. Hell though, it ain't achul mining. We can pick these lumps of gold out with our fingers and not even git a blood blister. Here, help me bed it over with sand and then we'll store the rest of our plunder away. He's a smart devil. Sure fixed us up a dandy bank."

So, purposefully, Jennison rattled on, till haunting fear loosened its icy clutch upon his companion's heart.

"He sure did, Bat," Wimberley cackled. "All I've got to say is, he's a good enough devil for me. What are you aiming to do with that water keg? It'll weigh fifty pounds full. All right for a pack mare, but you cain't tote it."

"I figger it at say half full." Jennison told him. "We don't need to hurry ourselves if we've got plenty of water." Artful words!

Certain it was that they could not hurry, and the water keg furnished an iron-clad alibi for lack of speed. And now they arranged their burdens. Wimberley carried their meager food supply and their half-gallon canteen. Around his waist was strapped his pistol. Jennison had the gallon canteen, his pistols and their mackinaws,

both necessary he asserted stoutly, as shoulder padding against the weight of the water keg. They would follow the old prospector's advice to strike north, rather than return the way they had come. It would be shorter he had said and not so steep. They indulged in more than mild regrets that they had shown so little curiosity as to waterholes on this northern route.

Jennison adjusted his *impedimenta*, glanced toward the graveyard of their faithful animals and jerked out a bitter curse. Vultures those ubiquitous scavengers, had already arrived. Then he glanced at Wimberley to say buoyantly, "Pegleg, if you're set let's mosey."

Wimberley contented himself with an indomitable and breath-saving grunt, "Let's."

FOR half a mile the going was simple, traveling as they did a flat bottomed wash paralleling the one that held their mine. Here, however, they faced a hazard of sharply sloping sand. Jennison turned to his comrade.

"Set down a minute," he suggested, "whilst I scale them heights and take a looksee."

There was more to it than mere desire for exploration. Without ostentation Jennison could scale the barrier, set down his own burdens and after a superficial scanning of monotonous scenery return to aid his comrade climb the steep slope. It was a kindly subterfuge practiced in a variety of forms a dozen times in the course of that first trying day. The fact that it did not deceive Wimberley detracted nothing from its merit.

To paint a complete picture, to etch in every painful line, to record each panting breath, to detail every stumbling step, to memorialize the withering heat, to set down in cold print the agonizing thirst, is

not the wish of this chronicler. It is enough to draw in outline, that imagination may round in the completed tale. Enough then to say that within the course of some hours their feverish thirst had marvelously reduced the weight of the water keg. At long last something more than occasional halts became imperative, and a wind sculptured mass of clay and rock beckoned them to its torrid sanctuary.

"It's hot, Bat," Wimberley wheezed dolorously, as he crept into the minute shade.

"Yes," Jennison nodded, "she's hotter than the seven brass hinges of hell. Wish we dared to snake our boots off, but we'd probable never git 'em on again. Anyway, mebby I can root down to cool sand. This ain't so worse, Pegleg. Try this burrow and see how it fits you. I'll tunnel me another. Whilst we're restin' let's try fur a nap."

THREE hours later Jennison awoke. Wimberley still slumbered riotously on and leaving him to his gurgling diversions, Jennison scrambled out of his nest. One corner of the rock offered easy footing and presently he stood on its flat top. Out of red-rimmed inflamed eyes he peered northward. Immediately before him stretched a flat plain shimmering white with borax. This for what he guessed was a half dozen miles, then the treacherous sand resumed its reign. Far away he glimpsed a mountain peak or knob of cloud, phantom or reality, he did not know. But they could cross this borax plain at night he concluded, doubly so as there was a moon at the full. Armored with this decision he scrambled down just as Wimberley awoke.

Flapjacks dry and insipid reinforced scrimpily with bacon furnished a meager meal for the ravenously hungry men. The warm fetid rinsings drained from the keg

was meager answer to a clamoring thirst. Yet they did not tap their reserve supply, the two canteens. Jennison stowed the empty keg in the undercut lee of the pillar of rock, then they slogged away.

It would be a joy indeed to depict their trek that night as glamorous stroll under a burnished moon. But truth demands that proper accounting be made of biting dust swirled up at every labored step, of thirst, of hunger, of bitter weariness when leaden feet stumbled over obstructions hardly more palpable than shadows. Daybreak brought them to the edge of the borax plain and to a high banked dry wash that barred their way. Jennison peered down wearily into the sandy bottom. That smooth surface seemed discolored. It might be a shadow, a film of mineral pigment, but, it might mask a water seepage!

Yet he steadied his voice when he spoke.

"Let's climb down, Pegleg," he suggested casually. "That sand looks like it was made to bed down on. Here, lemme give you a hand. Fine. Well here we are right-side up an a-grinnin'. Set down."

But now Wimberley had noted the brownish smear.

"Bat," he croaked excitedly, "that looks like—"

"Don't say it, Pegleg," Jennison advised sensibly. "Let's side trail any joy helps till we know."

Down on his knees now Jennison ran an exploratory hand over the smooth surface. Cool he found it, yet his mind scarcely dared to register the fact that it was damp. In tentative way his fingers spaded in to the knuckles, then lingered a long moment. Then he was digging, the increasingly damp sand cascading wildly. A foot down and he could ball the sand into a cohesive lump. Two feet down a thin emulsion of sand and near water

trickled out of his clenched fist. Pegleg Wimberley bent above the hot trail panting with expectancy. And then Jennison's clawing fingers clutched dry sand!

A long silence followed. Still without a word Jennison moved down gulch a few feet and renewed his hand drilling. Defeat even more speedy than the first met him. Up the gully next, to rise convinced. An infrequent summer shower had left its passing trace and that was all.

"She's probable jest a fooler dropped by a jokin' thunder head," he diagnosed. "Anyway," he continued, "she's cool to rest onto. Also we've got one full canteen left, which 'ill be plenty, on account it cain't be fur now. Let's eat."

They ate the remaining shreds of super dried flapjacks and bacon and jested as to the meaty possibilities of a somnambulant lizard. Then Jennison persuaded his worn companion to stretch out in the sand while he looked about. The sky was now obscured by sand stirred to still life by the lightest of breezes. So when he had climbed to a towering sand dune and turned his face northward he found that he could not have seen Mount Hood even if it had been set down in the sand a thousand rods away. It might be fifty miles to the break in the desert, it might not be a half dozen. Below him lay the dry wash and now he looked upstream if such liberty of expression is permissible under the common meaning of words. Here he noted another discoloration in its bed darker and more pronounced than the spot that had marked his recent futile efforts. He decided that he would again prospect for liquid gold.

It was a quest that met quickly with qualified success. The sides of the shallow hole oozed inward to fill the excavation about as rapidly as he dug it.

"I names you sandwater," he christened the dubious fluid aloud. "And I

sure wish I had a fistful of moss."

He knew the Indian trick of bedding the end of a tube in a moss filter, but he might as well look for a water lily as for moss in this wilderness of sand. Rocking there on his knees before his mud pool, his mind ranged on from the unobtainable moss to tubes. The ghosts of everything hollow from reeds to tin whistles raced through his mind, a wild ungovernable horde. Then desperation whispered the magic word. Wimberley smoked a corn cob pipe fitted with a cane stem. Moss? Hell, he had far better! In his mackinaw pocket was a handful of wool garnered from a rip in their pack saddle, and thrust into his pocket in a thrifty and unthinking moment. Madly he galloped back to his companion, eager to setup his filtering plant.

It worked. And that muddy gruel flavored with plug cut tobacco incensed with soiled wool and tinctured with nicotine seemed to these desert-hobbled men authentic nectar of the gods no less. By even turns they strained and gulped until nausea threatened. Now they worked their comfortable bodies into the sand and fatigue betrayed them to blissful sleep. Yet only a few feet from their miracle water. A dozen yards would have been too distant.

TOWARD mid-afternoon they awoke less water logged and greatly refreshed. Deciding to push on, they first filled their empty canteen by methods heroic yet highly effective. A pale yellow disk that was the sun in its swaddling clothes of dust, was their only guidepost. Yet with its fury muted and with plenty of water their spirits were high as they trudged away. It was an evanescent phase doomed to speedy extinction.

At heavy dusk, they halted. They had come again upon a borax plain whose surface seemed fairly smooth but the

extent of which was anybody's guess. And without a compass or even the guidance of a moon now fully obscured, to advance was to take a useless hazard. The air might clear later for the light breeze had finally whispered itself to sleep. Then they would march. Meanwhile they would don their makinaws and snuggle down to sleep.

"I figger," Jennison said cheerfully, "that tomorrow ends it."

"I figger the same," said Wimberley. "You ain't the only one to harbor hunches."



Something in his tone brought Jennison up straight in his sand burrow. "What do you mean, Pegleg," he queried anxiously, "by 'hunch?' No hunch is worth a damn. We've mebbly drove too fast a pace. We'll slow up. Hell, we don't hafta hurry frum now on." His laugh was high grade counterfeit, warranted to deceive the uninitiated, But Wimberley was of the elect.

"You believe in hunches, Bat," he answered by the book. "It's too late to try to hoot 'em down now. All I know from my hunch is that tomorrow spells danger, in big letters too."

"She cain't spell out nothin' me and you cain't lick, Pegleg," Jennison asserted buoyantly. "So let's try the effigy of sleep. It's like to slick up purty soon, so as we can traipse on by moonlight. I'll call you then."

But it was Wimberley—not Jennison—who did the summoning. At three o'clock he nudged Jennison awake.

"Clear enough for us to travel, Bat," he stated. Then he appended as an alibi for sleeplessness, "The cold waked me up."

"I'm cold also!" Jennison falsified in true comradely fashion. "Sure a good thing you waked up. I'm such a damned sleepy head I'd roosted here till I froze stiff. Here, let me give you a hand up and we'll ramble."

Why his companion had been awake at this unseasonable hour was sunlight clear to Bat Jennison. The yeast of worry, that troubling hunch, that was it. So he chattered, there is no other word for it, as they trudged along on aching and swollen feet, to ease the terror in his comrade's mind. Even limping fabrication contributed its feeble tale. He halted suddenly, canted his head, then cupped a well sanded hand behind his unlauded ear for mythical amplifier.

"Hark!" he said dramatically. "I heerd a coyote yippin'! That means we're at the edge of the desert mebbey."

"I don't hear it," and Wimberley shook his head. "Besides coyotes do their yipping evenings as an almost solid rule. Also when the moon's shining bright, which it sure ain't now. I'd like to set down a minute."

It was daylight, screened doubtfully through an emulsion of sand and air when they cleared the borax flat. New terrain greeted them here; rocky, yet not particularly difficult. It was much as if they were walking an ancient stream floor, ground down to primitive bedrock. The simile was a just one even to pot holes not large but too deep. Wimberley's peg plunged into one as he stepped, the leverage of his advance completed the tragedy. Snapped off squarely in the middle, its splintering-rending fracture had

in it the wailing whimper of a lost soul.

Jennison a few steps in advance pivoted around swiftly at the sound. Instantly he realized that the accident was indeed catastrophic, and for a clipped second he paused, too numbed for words or action. Then his indomitable spirit shook the reins over his laggard will. No time for faltering now, nor fumbling. Instead of haste, leisureliness, placidity not emotion, words few if any. And he all but overplayed. Came within touching distance of committing an irrevocable error. Another infinitesimal moment of delay and he would have been alone in the desert with a dead comrade. He had just time to pounce, and with gentle force retrieve the pistol from Wimberley's closing fingers. As Jennison stood up and mechanically dropped the pistol into his side pocket Wimberley spoke to him.

"You done wrong, Bat." He set it out calmly and without heat. "Dying don't make any difference to me, whether now or ten years. *But* I've got the right to pick my way out. My way woulda been swift, for I know where to hold a gun. The way you've picked for me I'll die slow, choking for water. Bat, you ain't got the right to choose my way for me. Hand me back my pistol and turn your back. It'll be for your good as well as mine. For I know you'll stick by me till you cain't make it out either. There's no sense in that. You've got a lot of things to do yet. My time's run out, that's all. Gimme my pistol, Bat."

Jennison was shaken to the depths of his loyal soul. Against the reasoned and dispassionate argument of his intrepid comrade he had no handy rebuttal. The seeming utter futility of escape, the apparent certainty of a loathsome, lingering death, even Wimberley's cogent insistence that he had the right to choose the method and time of his own exit, found

Jennison's mind seined clear of even plausible demurrer. Iron-clad fatalist himself, he could easily have been impaled on the sheep horns of that dilemma. Yet Wimberley had not averted to it, though closely skirting its sheer edge. And now the dark and agonizing moment was transmuted into radiance and joy. Jennison had found the one impregnable answer, the one possible solution, the one way of escape.

"Pegleg," he asked sunnily, "did you ever run in a three-legged race?"

The question apparently so irrelevant measured in harsh present realities, caught Wimberley with his guard down. So completely so that his mind responded in unthinking way as he thumbed back over dim memory pages laden with half forgotten yet precious lore. And found and turned down the exact page:

"In Chillicothe, Ohio," he rehearsed the ancient triumph pridefully, "in—lemme see—1847. Fourth of July it was and me and my pard won."

Then the light faded in his eyes. They had fallen on that shattered, useless peg. He looked at Jennison reproachfully.

"Bat," he said slowly, "that's an awful pore joke for a time like this."

"It ain't no joke," Jennison corrected firmly. "That's jest what me and you are goin' to do only 'stead 'of runnin' we're *walkin'* a three-legged race."

"Lookit, Pegleg," he rattled on, "me and you are the same height, weight too fur that matter, and whilst we never measured I betcha our laigs are the same length. Don't you see it now? Sure you do. Well, we'll strap your *right* laig stump to my *left* laig, and thar we've got it. Your *left* laig and my *right* laig 'ill be our own but the middle 'ill be partnership laigage. After we git geared together at our middles we'll hafta practice some, but hell, in no

time we'll be movin' faster a damned sight too than formerly."

"By God, Bat," he okayed fervently, "it *will* work."

AND it did. Through an apprenticeship buttressed on trial and error pedal coordination emerged. This established as a workable formula, Jennison shouldered the two empty canteens, added the fork end of Wimberley's peg, this for the straps and padding, without a word passed Wimberley's pistol back into the old man's hands and they were ready to march. Jennison inventoried the gruel-like air with jaundiced and disparaging eye.

"Should the Columbia River be tootling along out thar," he stated, "we'd be swimmin' therein before we'd even see it. Let's hit the trail. One, two, one, two. We've got the swing, Pegleg."

Their roadway presently was along the bottom of a dry wash, its ten-foot banks edged with a fretwork of greasewood, chaparral, sagebrush and an occasional clump of rye grass. Because they guessed that it led in the right direction they followed its sometime sinuosities without complaining, this for the better part of an hour. Very tired from the strain incident to the unnatural "hook-up," they had just decided to rest, when fatigue and discomfort fled into thin air. Two, four, six birds, flushed from their covert atop the bank, at their left, took wing and zoomed away, displaying in their flight a tattling wedge of white tail feathers.

"Prairie chickens." So exploded the doubled barreled recognition of a famous Western game bird. And to them it told a wonder tale. Edge of the desert. Nothing less.

"We've made it, Pegleg," Jennison exulted. "Them blessed prairie chickens don't fool around no desert."

"We have," Wimberley nodded solemnly. Then he added wistfully, "Bat, I could relish some grub. Mebby if we was unhooked—"

Jennison agreed with plenty of enthusiasm. "Also you can treat yourself to a little rest whilst I rustle up that said grub."

Some of the thongs had snarled into snug little knots, but Jennison's agile fingers soon unscrambled them.

Wimberley sighed down into his sand cushion; and with his aching back braced caressingly by the soft gully wall watched Jennison's foraging tactics with eager eyes. And now as a by-product of his beneficent moment of leisure he noted something of as yet unexplored significance. Beyond the voyaging hunter, the sky was wondrously clear. Then his eyes dropped again to Jennison for he was very very hungry.

Jennison had padded swiftly down the dry wash for fifty yards or so seeking an easy way to scale the ten-foot wall. Here he found one made to order, a narrow land slip in the side wall affording a steep yet passable ramp up to the top of the dry wash itself. Now Jennison drew a Colt's

forty-live, cocked it with supple thumb, then holding it at an instant ready crept up the sandy causeway. Keeping mimic step with his comrade's movements, Wimberley too crouched while his linger was arched alertly about a phantom trigger. They both fired, reality and myth, then Jennison scurried up over the top, straightened up, took two hesitant steps, then whirled about, whooping:

"Trees, Pegleg, miles of 'em. Hallelulah! And thar's millions of sage hens, more or less. Anyway I jest shot one big as a young turkey."

Ten minutes later the two men stood atop the dry wash and gazed northward with shining eyes. Not far away, a scant half mile at the farthest an impressive phalanx of trees cut their line of march, their bases banked with bushes, these, in turn coyly wriggling their brown toes in the verge of a thick grass carpet of greenest green. Behind them the desert, its horrors already a dimming memory. Yet not forgotten. For back there waiting for their certain return guarded by the treacherous sands lay their mine housed cunningly within the bleak walls of the Devil's Wigwam.