

*Hunches Are Sometimes
Evidence*

DOG DEPUTY

By
S. OMAR BARKER
*Author of Many Stories of
Sheriff Hunch McElroy*

“**N**ow looky here, Hunch!” said the bristle-jawed, frog-eyed young deputy called Bug-Eye, in that half exasperated, half solicitous tone commonly used by the young toward elders of whom they are fond, but whom they privately consider too old and feeble to scratch their own itch. “There ain’t no need of you wearin’ your tail-bone off any shorter than it already is. It’s right smart of a ride out there, an’ I can arrest ol’ Santiago jest as easy as you can.”

“Easier, I expect,” sighed Sheriff McElroy. He pulled on the second boot of the sag-heeled pair that habitually stood under the pine plank table upon whose top it was the banty old law officer’s custom to rest gray-socked feet when in his office. “I sorter hate to arrest a man for murder that’s been votin’ for me for thirty-odd years like ol’ Santiago has. But I got a hunch I better go along, Bug-Eye. I ain’t rode nowheres in so long my legs are plumb losin’ their bend.

“Besides”—he stooped to pat the head of a solemn-eyed black and white dog of possible shepherd ancestry that stood tail-wagging at his side—“I got a hunch Oliver wouldn’t enjoy the trip near as much without his ol’ boss—would you, ol’ pupper?”



“Goshamighty!” This time Bug-Eye’s protest was frankly a groan of disgust. “We cain’t make no time waitin’ up fer a domgaddled pooch ever’ time he spooks a rabbit. By myself I could git there quick!”

“What’s the high-powered hurry? If ol’ ‘Sus is dead like this gent reports, he’ll stay thataway, won’t he?”

“Yeah, but s’posin’—”

“Supposin’ you git the ponies saddled,” broke in old Hunch dryly, “while I sag apast the county clerk’s office an’ leave word where we’re gone. Wup! Wait a minute!”

Hunch turned to the angular, droop-lidded gringo prospector who had just brought them the news of old Jesus Maria Jaramillo’s probable murder.

“I s’pose you’ll ride back with us, Beckler—you want a fresh hoss?”

Gus Beckler batted wide-set eyes habitually red rimmed from rock dust and shrugged, obviously indicating that the whole business of riding all this way to town to report a mere Mexican killing was a duty he had found irksome, but a duty

none the less.

"I'm aboard a mule," he grunted. "I reckon he'll carry me back all right—as fast as you'll travel with a dog. I unsaddled him before I come upstairs so he'd have a chance to cool out."

"Bug-Eye will saddle him for you if you want to gargle a cup of Arbuckle's at Pete's Pancake while I'm in speakin' to Tito."

As was often the case in those days, the plank County Court House lacked sufficient room for all the county's officials, and since Hunch McElroy had been sheriff for some years before it was built, he continued to occupy his old office next to the jail a block away across the street. Now as they angled across through the dust, Hunch questioned his informant again, as old men often do who have trouble remembering things.

"Now lemme see, Beckler," he said, "how did you say you happened to come onto this killin'?"

"Well, just like I told you," said Beckler patiently, "I was up on the mesa, on my way to that prospect hole I'm workin' on, when I heard shootin'. I stepped over to the rim, like a man will, to see what was goin' on, an' down on this side ridge I see this old goat-herder kinder staggerin' around. Looked like he was trying to aim his gun to shoot at somethin' acrost on the next side-ridge west, but jest couldn't git the job done. I looked over toward this other ridge but couldn't see nothing. Then the old goat-herder's gun went off in the air, and purt near like an echo, another shot rung out an' the ol' goat-herder dropped in his tracks."

"An' you say this feller over on the other ridge that shot him was ol' Santiago Tafoya?"

"No, I never said nothing of the kind. I ain't mixed much with these Mexkins the six months I been around here, an' I don't

hardly know one from the other. But from the smoke of his gun I located this other feller raisin' up from behind a little juniper bush. He stood there lookin' a couple seconds, then turned an' run kinder down toward this Santiago Tafoya's place."

"So you figger it *was* ol' Santiago?"

Over Gus Beckler's broad, unshaven face came the look of an exasperated adult trying to be patient with a half-wit child.

"No, sir, all I told you was that it was kinder of a short heavy man in a high peaked black hat, and looked like gray whiskers. You an' your deputy done all the figgerin' who it was."

"You sure he didn't have on a red shirt? Ol' Santiago's got a red-checked shirt he wears to the *fiestas*. Y'see yesterday was *Dia Santiago*—big fandango over at Agua Limpia. Sometimes they dance all night—even the old 'uns. Bein' about sun-up, like you say, ol' Santiago might have just got back from the *fiesta* an' still had on his red shirt. You sure you never noticed it?"

"I tell you," said Beckler almost impatiently, "all I saw was a black hat, what looked like gray whiskers an' what I took to be a light blue jumper, an' his gait when he run looked to me like an old man."

"Yeah, they fade," chuckled Hunch. "Specially the way Santiago's ol' woman pounds 'em when she washes. Yep, it must of been ol' Santiago! Well, git you some coffee—I'll be back in two chaws an' a spit!"

IN THE county clerk's office Hunch McElroy dropped his wordy chatter.

"Tito," he told the black-haired young Spanish clerk, "ol' 'Sus has been shot. You know anything?"

Tito's black eyes looked shocked, but he could see that his good friend the sheriff was in a hurry, so he wasted no

time with questions.

"Don Jesus Maria," he said, "was here Tuesday, looking up the boundaries of his land again. I have not seen Don Santiago this month."

"Don Santiago?" Hunch blinked pale, sun-faded eyes at him. "What's he got to do with it?"

Tito spread his slender bookkeeper's hands and shrugged.

"*Quien sabe?*" he said. "You know that for many years there has been trouble between those two *viejos* over the boundaries of their *terrenos*!"

"Killin' trouble, you think?"

"*Quien sabe?*" Tito shrugged again. "Sometimes old men are fools!"

"Like me, eh?" Good-humoredly Hunch reached over the counter to pull the young Mexican's nose, then scurried out.

Bug-Eye had the horses and mule saddled and was waiting impatiently.

"Gawdamighty, Hunch!" he grumbled. "I could of been halfway out there! You sure do take your time!"

"Well, it taken the good Lord six days to shape up a little ol' chunk of mud we live on, didn't it?"

Once in the saddle, the three riders wasted no time, and only once did Oliver delay them. That was when, near Berrendo Springs, they came pretty close onto a bunch of antelope, and the dog took after them. For that sally, Oliver got a severe scolding, a less severe whipping—and a ride, for his run had him temporarily so badly winded that Hunch had to carry him on the saddle.

It was hardly mid-afternoon when they pulled up at Gus Beckler's hut near the foot of Costilla Piedra (Rock-Ribbed) Mesa. The hut was an old *jacal* of upright poles daubed with mud, used over a period of years by first one prospector and then another. It stood, so far as Hunch knew, on public domain, but between its periods of

human occupation, old Jesus Maria Jaramillo's goats had used it for shade or shelter. Now it was neatly repaired and orderly. Hunch looked at a patch nearby that seemed to be meant for a vegetable garden, and grinned.

"Don't look like goats an' a garden git along very good together, Beckler," he commented. "Couldn't you fence 'em out?"

"Hell no!" said Beckler, batting his eyes. "I give it up!"

"If it'd been me," observed Bug-Eye, "'bout the second goat visit to my garden, I'd of had me some mutton!"

Beckler shrugged, starting to unsaddle his mule. "I don't eat mutton. Besides I'm up here tryin' to find me a mine, not trouble. You don't need me to go with you, Sheriff? I don't like to mix into this no more'n I have to."

"Why, no, I reckon not. 'Course you know you're liable to have to testify against ol' Santiago in court when the time comes."

"I'll be there," said Beckler. He scowled, his heavy glance following Oliver as he cruised about the place, then looked up at the banty law officer on his tall roan horse. "But I won't testify *against* Tafoya nor nobody else. I'll tell what I seen, that's all! You fellers comin' back this way?"

"Depends on how things turn out. Might hit here about supper time"—Hunch winked—"if we got invited!"

"Supper?" An odd look not unlike embarrassment came into the prospector's heavy-lidded eyes. "Sheriff, the fact is—well, the fact is I ain't got much to offer in the way of grub. Ain't time to bile beans, an'—"

"We ort to of shot one of them antelope," grinned Bug-Eye.

"Don't let it fret you, Beckler," said the sheriff kindly. "I was only joshin'

about supper! Heah, Oliver! Let's go!"

Coming up the draw toward the foot or the Mesa, Beckler had pointed out the particular rocky, sparsely brushed side-ridge on which he had left the body of the goat man. They found it without difficulty, apparently lying as it had fallen, except that Beckler had covered it with juniper boughs against sun and buzzards.

"Looks like ol' droopy-eyes could anyways have carried him down to the shack," grunted Bug-Eye as they examined the body. "He don't weigh nothin' hardly."

Hunch shook his head.

"Nobody ain't supposed to move a dead body like this till the law views it," he said.

"I never knowed that before," said Bug-Eye. "I wonder how ol' droopy-eyes happened to?"

"Wonderin'," said Hunch dryly, "is good for you."

Jesus Maria Jaramillo had been shot twice; once through the meat of his thigh and once in the region of the heart. His own battered old carbine, with a fired shell still in the chamber and another empty glinting in the sun nearby, lay with its stock still gripped in gnarled brown fingers. Hunch looked down at the wizened body of the stooped, ferret-eyed old goat a man who had long been his friend, and sighed.

"Pore ol' 'Sus. I reckon him an' his goats was kinder of a nuisance sometimes, an' I reckon he *was* kinder loco in the head about them land boundaries him an' ol' Santiago was always fussin' over, but he never done nothin' to deserve this."

The whole steep skirt of the Mesa was too rock-ribbed for tracks to show much, and of course there was goat sign everywhere. What little other sign they did find in the way of scuffed or turned over stones seemed to verify the scene as

Beckler had described it, even to the man running off down the hill at a westward slant toward the *ranchito* of Santiago Tafoya. At one point Hunch examined fragments of quartz broken-off by a prospector's hammer. But these already showed the weathering of a week or more.

"Yup," sighed Hunch in response to Bug-Eye's question, as they packed the body as gently as possible on the deputy's pony, "this here is part of the strip them two *viejos* have been quarrelin' over for the past twenty years. The way them old Spanish records are, nobody knows who it sure enough belongs to, but they both claimed it. Not worth a cent an acre for anything but goat range an' not over ten cents for that, yet both them ol' Mexkins been threatenin' to shoot the other 'un if he didn't keep off of it, ever since 'Sus first brung his goats over the mountain. Only I always had a hunch it was just another case of '*Mucho gritar, poco pelear*'—'Big holler, little fight'. I wonder what's become of them goats?"

From Beckler's shack they had slanted westward up the hill. Now they came straight down to the 'dobe-and-rock hut of old 'Sus. Westward another half mile around the foot of the Mesa lay the meadows and rocky corn-patches of Santiago Tafoya's *ranchito*.

"No use hoss-backin' this body all over the hind end of hell," said Hunch. "'Sus ain't got no kin this side the mountain, but he was a *Penitente*, and we'll git word to the Hermano Mayor at Agua Limpia an' the Brotherhood will 'tend to buryin' him. Meanwhile let's just leave him inside here on his own bunk."

APPARENTLY nothing in the cabana had been disturbed. From a crudely carved wooden *santo* in a wall niche, Hunch picked up a piece of freshly broken quartz. Outside he paused to examine it in

the slanting sunlight.

"Gawdamighty, Hunch!" snorted Bug-Eye, swinging to the saddle. "What you tryin' to do—give ol' Santiago time to git plumb outa the country? Let's go git him arrested an' have it over with!"

When they rode over the low ridge just back of Santiago Tafoya's house, they saw what had become of the dead man's twenty-odd goats; they were in Santiago Tafoya's cornfield, and a shouting, cursing, sparse-whiskered, stocky built old man in a faded blue jumper and high crowned black *sombrero* was trying to drive them out of the field into his corral. There was no sign of any of Santiago's numerous family about the house, and his only helper with the goats was a brown mongrel dog, apparently doing more harm than good with his excited yapping.

Suddenly, from behind Hunch's horse, sounded an eager whine and a streak of black and white flashed down the hill as Oliver sped to join the fun.

"Back!" shouted Hunch, but his command went unheeded.

Even if he wasn't doing much good himself, the brown mongrel evidently resented any offer of strange canine assistance. A minute later the banty sheriff ripped his shirt crawling through the barbed wire fence and joined the excited, sweating old Mexican in trying to stop the dog-fight. Santiago already had his own dog by the heels, and Hunch grabbed for Oliver's. But somewhere in both dogs' uncertain ancestry there must have been the taint of some philandering bulldog, for neither would let go his hold.

"*A la acequia!*" yowled Santiago. "To the deetch weeth heem!"

Dunking in the irrigation ditch stopped the fight all right, but the ditch bank was slippery, and both old men slid in with them.

Old Hunch climbed out muddy and

dripping but grinning, dragging Oliver with him by one hind leg. Santiago gave his pooch a kick that sent him yelping to the house, and climbed out snuffing and snorting like an old scrub bull.

"That Jesus of the goats!" he puffed. "Naxt time she's put hees *cabras* in my corns I gonna shot heem too dead for mak' a water!"

Suddenly he remembered his manners.

"Excuse me, please, my friend," he said in well modulated Spanish, putting out his right hand and giving his dripping nose a swipe with the other, "How passes everything with you?"

Hunch touched palms with him in the limp Spanish fashion.

"Not very good, *amigo*," he said. "Let's go to the house."

Old Santiago gave a regretful look at the goats scattering over his cornfield again, and came along.

Bug-Eye opened a wire gate for them to come out.

"Y'see, Hunch," he told-you-so'ed, "I told you not to bring that dang dog! Look at yuh—you'll ketch pneumony!"

"*Com' esta*, Senor Bogs-Eyes?" Santiago put out his still muddy hand.

Bug-Eye took it—and held on, bringing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket with his left.

"*Com' esta?*" he grunted. "Shall I clip the hobbles on him, Hunch?"

Already in none too good a humor, old Santiago's obvious effort to accept this, as a joke was not very convincing.

"This shereefs—all a time make fun, eh?"

"Never mind the irons, Bug-Eye. I wish it *was* just fun, Don Santiago. Let's go to the house!"

The Mexican shrugged.

"Sometheeng is that you don't onderstand myself," he grunted and came along.

A wagon stood in the yard, with the harness dropped on the doubletree. Hunch paused to look at it. The sweat on the horse-collars was dry, yet obviously today's sweat.

"Don Santiago," said Hunch gravely, speaking in Spanish to make sure he was thoroughly understood, "you don't have to answer anything I ask you—now—and I'm required by law to warn you that anything you say may be used against you. But I'm asking you anyhow. Where you been in the wagon?"

"*Caramba!* What kind a make fonny beezness are those?" exclaimed the *viejo* with a sudden look of fear in his eyes, then lapsed into Spanish.

"Yesterday I took the family to the fiesta—St. James' day—at Agua Limpia. There the old woman wanted to stay today also to visit her cousin, but I have a cow to milk, so when the dance was over, I came on home alone. Tomorrow I go back for them."

"Like hell!" grunted Bug-Eye impatiently. "Tomorrow you'll—"

"Here, Bug-Eye," broke in Hunch dryly, pulling a soiled chunk of hard-taffy from his pocket, "I brung this along for Oliver, but it'll do for you to lick if your tongue needs exercise! Now, Don Santiago, what time did you get home today?"

"Very early of the morning, Senor Honch. Already before the sunrise I have milked the cow. Then I am very tired and go to bed. A little while ago I wake up—and find those sons of he-goats goats are eating my corns. Always, *amigo*, it is something of trouble from those *cabras* of Jesus Maria! Every time I swear that some day this old son of a he-goat, I will kill him. This time—"

"Yuh see, Hunch?" growled Bug-Eye. "He practickly admits—"

"Your rifle, Don Santiago," Hunch s

went on quietly. "Is it in the house? I want to see it."

The fearful look in Don Santiago's eyes was gradually becoming sullen and resentful. But he shrugged and opened the low door, bowing them in politely.

Hunch moved spryly across the low-ceilinged room with its spotless white-washed walls and picked up the battered .30-30 carbine standing in the far corner beside a rumpled bed. He sniffed at the barrel. Then he stepped outside, held the opened breech up toward the sinking sun and looked through. The inside of the barrel looked a little smudgy. He levered three cartridges out of the magazine, levered again and when no more came, shook his head sadly. In a full magazine there should have been six. He sniffed the gun barrel again. When he turned to old Santiago, at whose back Bug-Eye hovered watchfully, he saw that there was real fear in the *viejo's* dark eyes now.

"Old man," he said soberly, "this gun's been fired today—three shots!"

Santiago shrugged sullenly.

"Thass right, Senor Hunch. The forst twice shoots I don't keel him!"

"Don Santiago," Hunch spoke more sharply now, "you are under arrest! Dammit, why did you do it?"

"*Pues*, when a man needs meat, Senor, does he stop to consider—" he broke off suddenly. "Leesten! Those damn dog—"

HE started as if to run around the corner of the house whence came the slathery-snarling sound of dogs fighting again. Whether the old man intended only to stop the dog-fight or to run away, Bug-Eye evidently didn't mean to take any chances.

"No you don't, Mister!" he said, and whacked Don Santiago suddenly on the head with his pistol barrel, dropping him like a pole-axed steer.

Don Santiago still hadn't come to when Hunch got the dog-fight stopped and came back from behind the house with a bloody, somewhat cowed Oliver in tow.

"You didn't have no business hittin' him thataway, Bug-Eye," Hunch's dry voice was sharp. "You know what I found hangin' up to a *viga* on the north side of the house?"

"Supposin' he'd got away?" grumbled Bug-Eye. "He's knocked out, anyhow. What? Diapers?"

"A fresh killed antelope," said Hunch. "Santiago must have shot it on the way home from Agua Limpia, which would account for his dirty gun barrel an' that short load in the magazine."

"So what?"

"Nothin'—maybe. But Bug-Eye, I've got a hunch that's what the ol' coot was talkin' about when he said 'the forst twice shoots don't keel him.' I got a hunch he thought we was arrestin' him for violatin' that new law against shootin' antelope outa season!"

"Gawdamighty, Hunch!" exploded Bug-Eye. "You still tryin' to persuade yourself this ol' booger didn't murder 'Sus? Ain't he admitted he'd been aimin' to kill him sometime? Ain't he admitted he was back here from the *fiesta* early enough to of done it? Ain't he wearin' a black hat an' blue jumper—an' no red shirt, just like the feller Beckler saw?"

"That's right, he is, ain't he? Still I got a hunch—"

"Hunches," observed Bug-Eye, "ain't evidence!"

"You ort to have been a lawyer," said the banty sheriff dryly. "All right. I reckon we'll have to take him in on suspicion—if you ain't already killed him. You better hitch up his wagon to haul him in—since you fixed him so he ain't able to straddle a horse. First fetch me a dipper of water."

"Okay," said Bug-Eye. "But

sometimes I wonder what am I around here, a deppity or a flunky!"

"You," observed Hunch aridly, "are the feller that socks 'em when they start to run!"

IT WAS getting well into dusk, with darkness inching rapidly in upon them, when they reached Beckler's shack on their way out. Bug-Eye was driving the wagon with their prisoner bedded down in the box as comfortably as possible on straw and sougans, groaning but not yet completely conscious. Hunch rode ahead scouting wagon-passage on the rough, long-abandoned road that had once served as a neighborly link between old Santiago and his *vecinos* in the long ago before Jesus Maria Jaramillo had come over the mountain with his goats, and the feud over land boundaries had started. There was a shorter route they might have taken but Hunch had overruled it in favor of this one.

Beckler evidently heard them coming. He was standing in the door, outlined against the yellow light of a kerosene lamp.

"Git your man, Sheriff?" he inquired.

"He's in the wagon," said Hunch.

"What'd he do—own up to it?"

"Well, not exactly. But he acted kinder spooky."

"Started to make a break for it," volunteered Bug-Eye from up on the wagon seat, "so I cammed him down with a hawgleg barrel. What's that I smell—coffee?"

"Yeah, I figgered you might stop by. Sorry I sounded so inhorsepitable 'safternoon. Fact is there ain't nothin' but biskits an' lick. Beans on bilin' but they ain't done yet. You fellers come in?"

"Why, I reckon a cup of coffee wouldn't go bad!" Hunch's old knees popped audibly as he swung down from

the tall horse. "You sure you ain't got no dog around for Oliver to fight with?"

"Hell, no!" laughed Beckler. "I never was much of a hand for dogs, Sheriff. Come in!"

"Hitch the team, Bug-Eye, an' git you some coffee. I'll fetch a cup out an' see if I can pour it down ol' Santiago. It might at least revive him so he won't die on us before we git around to hangin' him!"

Bug-Eye was startled to hear Hunch laugh. It was the first sign of cheerfulness the sheriff had betrayed for hours. The deputy climbed down, rein-hitched the docile pony team to a wheel and went inside.

"Ain't you fellers afeered your prisoner will quit you?" inquired Beckler.

"Oh, no," Bug-Eye grinned and winked. "We left Oliver out there to watch him, didn't we, Hunch?"

But the banty sheriff's mind seemed to be on other matters. He was explaining to Beckler that he would see to it that the county paid off whatever was due him for his trip to town to report the goat-man's death.

Still chattering away like, a human blue-jay, Hunch passed the table and reached down a .30-30 carbine from a cedar-limb rack on the wall.

"Right nice little gun, ain't it?" he chattered. He levered it open, tore a piece of white paper from a pocket-worn notebook and stuck it in the breech, then held the muzzle up to his eye and squinted through the barrel toward the yellow lamp flame. His nostrils quivered faintly, sniffing; but the only smell they got was the clean smell of gun oil, and the inside of the barrel shone like polished silver. "Keep it mighty clean, too, I notice."

"Yeah," said Beckler, "they rust on you if you don't, when you ain't shootin' 'em very often."

Unnoticed, Hunch rammed the end of

his little finger into the magazine-loading slot—far enough to satisfy himself that the magazine was full—then put the gun back on its rack.

Meanwhile Beckler had poured two tin cups of coffee.

"Ain't got but two cups," he apologized.

Hunch took one of them and stepped outside with it.

"Ay! *Por dios!*" mumbled a groaning voice in the wagon. "*Por matar un berrendo—*"

In the semi-darkness Hunch saw Oliver coming from Beckler's garden patch with something in his mouth. Hunch set the coffee cup up on the wagon seat, stooped and took it from him. Even in that poor light he could see it was part of the foreleg of a small, hoofed animal. He ran his fingers over it, and sucked in a sudden breath.

The leg bone had been cut off squarely about ten inches from the hoof, as if with a saw or axe, and though grimy with soil, seemed fairly fresh.

"Beckler," Hunch called, making his tone casual. "I wish you'd step out here a minute."

When the man came to the door Hunch held out the fragment of leg in the scant light streaming past him.

"Beckler," he said, softly, "look what my dog just dug outa your garden patch! I thought you said you didn't eat mutton?"

Almost imperceptibly the lank man in, the doorway stiffened. Then he laughed.

"That's right," he said easily, "I don't. But that ain't a goat leg. That's off an antelope I shot last week."

"You sure it ain't off a goat? For if it's antelope, I'll have to arrest you, Beckler, for violatin' the game law!" Hunch's usually dry voice sounded as soft—and yet as tough—as a much used saddle string.

"The hell!" There was plainly

something of shock in Beckler's exclamation. "Damn the game law! Anyhow that there's a—" he hesitated.

"Goat?" queried the sheriff. "Or antelope?"

Beckler leaned deliberately against the left door jamb. He laughed, albeit somewhat ruefully. "I might as well admit it an' take my medicine, Sheriff. A little fine for violatin' the game law ain't worth tryin' to lie out of, I reckon. It's antelope. What's it liable to cost me, Sheriff?"

"Your neck, Beckler!" As he spoke the banty sheriff stepped back out of the ray of light, hand on his gun. "For the charge is murder! Reach high, Beckler!"

QUIETLY as it was spoken, the sheriff's accusation seemed to hit Beckler like the sudden jab of a sharp knife into tender flesh, startling all self-control and reasoned pretense out of him. Timed with a fearful oath, his right hand jerked swiftly to the inside of his shirt and came out shooting. For one swift-flung shot to have hit the meager figure of Hunch McElroy out there in the darkness would have been a miracle. And there wasn't any second shot. For whatever else his faults, the young deputy called Bug-Eye was never slow to action. The smack of his gun barrel descending on Beckler's skull from behind, downed him like a pole-axed steer.

Standing over him, Bug-Eye ran a big, puzzled hand through his own hair.

"Gawdamighty, Hunch! Whyn't you warn me you aimed to jump this wolf, so I could of been ready to help you?"

"I ain't never caught you unready yet, Bug-Eye," said the sheriff soberly. "Besides, I didn't know myself that I was goin' to jump him till Oliver handed me this goat foot and Beckler lied an' tried to make me think it was antelope!"

"Supposin' he did? I don't see how

that proves him a murderer!"

"Wolf hair on the wire fence don't prove who slaughtered the sheep, neither," twanged Hunch dryly. "But it'll do to call a jury on! Try addin' this up, Bug-Eye: Why did Beckler kinder hesitate about invitin' us for supper—when he'd already said he didn't eat mutton? Was he afraid we'd find out that mutton was all the grub he had, an' suspect that he'd been shootin' ol' 'Sus' goats? You know it ain't but a few steps from shootin' another man's livestock to a shootin' scrape with the owner. Besides, we saw where Beckler had been prospectin' on land ol' 'Sus considered his, and was touchy about. Prob'ly 'Sus had ordered him off. But with 'Sus dead, he could prospect where he damn pleased. Now maybe you can figger why Beckler would rather have paid a fine for violatin' the game law than admit this was a goat leg Oliver dug out of his garden?"

"Hell," grunted Bug-Eye, reaching for the segment of foreleg, "how'd you know this ain't off an antelope—'specially out there in the dark?"

"I had a hunch from the start," went on Hunch, deliberately ignoring the question, "that Santiago and ol' 'Sus had been threatenin' each other too long for it to come to a head all of a sudden now—'specially in a long distance rifle fight like Beckler described. In the heat of a face to face quarrel, o' course, it could of happened. But even thataway—'Sus an' Santiago was brother *Penitentes—Hermanos de la Luz*. Besides—"

"I be danged if I can see why this ain't off an antelope," broke in Bug-Eye, studying it in the yellow light. "It's so dirty you can't—"

"Besides," persisted Hunch, "Beckler's gun was too dang freshly cleaned an' oiled. An' furthermore—"

"Ay! *Por dios!*" groaned Don Santiago

querulously, suddenly sitting up in the wagon bed. "Where am I yourself, Senor Honch?"

"Take it easy, *viejo*." Hunch reassured him. "You bumped your head on the corner of the house when you run to stop the dog-fight-remember? We're just takin' you to the doctor."

"Ain't you even gonna arrest Santiago for shootin' that antelope outa season, Hunch?"

Already Bug-Eye was dragging the unconscious Beckler out of the doorway, getting ready to load into the wagon his second gun-barrel victim of the evening.

"No, I ain't," declared the banty officer cheerfully, grabbing Beckler's foot to help lift him. "I got a hunch that lookin' at that illegal antelope of his reminded me of something I might have forgot to remember. Namely, that antelope ain't got no dew-claws—like a goat has. You reckon you can haul in the freight, Bug-Eye, so me an' Oliver can be gittin' on to town?"

"You go ahead," grinned Bug-Eye. "But Oliver—that there deputy is entitled to ride in the wagon!"