

# HOOK, LINE AND SUCKER!

By Robert Turner



**F**RAZER, the big, dark one with the short-cropped black hair, who would have looked like a handsome, fresh-faced collegiate, except for the yellowed muddiness of his eyes and the almost viciously blunted sullenness of his mouth, worked feverishly in the moonlight down by the river. He kept telling himself that there was really no great hurry, to take it easy. But it didn't work. He dug furiously into the soft earth of the riverbank, sweat soaking his checkered hunting shirt.

He cursed Lyman for insisting on burying the box so deeply. It hadn't really been necessary. But wise-guy Lyman had to do it his way. "Don't be stupid," Lyman had told him. "Suppose something goes wrong and we get caught? All right, so we do our time but when it's done we come back here and get the cash and live like kings from then on. Getting caught and doing a piece won't be so bad if we've still got the hundred grand to come to when it's over. But if we don't bury it deep, it's likely not to be here. Suppose some fisherman decides to dig for worms right in this particular spot? Crazier things have happened. Where will our hundred grand be then? Let's not be dumb, Frazer. Let's not take any chances. Keep digging. Get that hole good and deep!"

Lyman, skinny, scrawny little Lyman, The Brain, who thought of everything. Real tricky, real smart Lyman, who had nothing but scorn for Frazer's big shoulders and good looks, who was always letting Frazer know how dumb he was. Frazer grinned through the shine of sweat on his handsome face. But who was dumb now? Where was Lyman now? What good did his brains do him, splattered all over the wall of the hunting lodge, back up the trail, by the shotgun that had blown half of his head off.

Frazer bent to his job of digging up the metal box containing the hundred thousand dollars in small denomination bills that he and Lyman had gotten in that last payroll holdup. A lump caught in

his throat and his heart jumped like a frog in a bucket just at the thought of all that money. It had been their biggest, best job yet. It had gone smoothly, thanks to Lyman's careful planning. There had been the usual hue and cry afterward, by the police and the newspapers, and Lyman had figured that to be on the safe side, they'd best hole up in this lonely fishing lodge for a couple of weeks, to let the thing blow over.

That was when Lyman had started to become too smart for his own good.

Almost from the first day that they'd settled down in the lonely little fisherman's shack near the river, Frazer had started to think about how nice it would be not to have to share that hundred grand with Lyman, to have it all to himself. He didn't need Lyman's brains any more. There would be no more jobs. He could live on that hundred thousand for the rest of his life. And he hated Lyman's guts, anyhow, for his sharp, sarcastic tongue; because he *was* dumb and Lyman *was* clever and no getting away from it; and even if Lyman wasn't always reminding him of it, rubbing it in, he still would have hated the little man, just for being that way.

**F**OR TEN DAYS now, Frazer had tried to figure some clever, foolproof way to get rid of Lyman. But every time he thought he had something tricky figured out, a loophole would turn up and he'd have to abandon the scheme. And that damned hick sheriff, Clayburn, complicated things. An old duffer with walrus-like mustaches, he'd stopped by their fisherman's shack in that lonely spot on the river, the second day, to chat with them, he said. And also to check them on fishing licenses.

Clayburn had given Frazer a bad moment then, when he'd asked to see their licenses. Frazer had gotten panicky, picked up the shotgun, was ready to blast the sheriff. He wasn't going to let them get caught by a silly little oversight like that, get them arrested by some over-conscientious hick sheriff. But Lyman saved the old sheriff's life. He'd quickly produce the licenses. It seemed that clever-boy Lyman hadn't made any such oversight. He'd

bought the licenses, unknown to Frazer. Clever Lyman.

Every night after that, around ten o'clock, though, Sheriff Clayburn would stop by their shack. "To chat awhile," he'd tell them. "To check up on you greenhorn babes-in-the-woods, to make sure you ain't drowned yourselves in the river, or gone over those falls."

Frazer paused in his digging to sleeve sweat from his face and listen to the distant roar of those falls a few hundred yards downstream. A shiver took him at the very thought of them. Several times while they were out in the little rowboat, fishing, Lyman would grin his crooked grin and taunt Frazer.

"Those falls must be a hundred feet high, handsome," he'd say. "And those big jagged rocks underneath it, they'd smash a little boat like this to pieces—and whoever was in it—if it ever got washed over those falls. Now wouldn't that be ironical, Frazer, if something should go wrong? If something should happen to this boat and it should drift down and over those falls? You can't swim, can you Frazer? You wouldn't have a chance. The current's fairly swift but I *might* make it to shore before I was swept over the falls, with a little luck. But you never would, kid. And just when you're rich, set up for life, with your share of our loot. It would be a shame if anything like that happened, kid."

"Cut it out, Lyman!" Frazer had snarled at him. "You're talking like a fool. The current's not so strong you can't row against it. Nothing's going to happen to the boat. What are you trying to do, torture me?"

Lyman had just laughed. After that, Frazer had trouble getting himself to go out in the boat onto that swiftly flowing river above the falls, to go fishing. But he'd had to go. Lyman had insisted. "Suppose," Lyman said, "that busybody old rube of a sheriff is spying on us? We're supposed to be crazy about fishing, aren't we? Isn't that what we're supposed to be holed up in his Godforsaken place for? We've got to go out there and go fishing, every day, to make it look good. We can't take chances with anything, at this stage." And Frazer had to give in. He knew Lyman was right. He was always right. That was proven a couple of times when Sheriff Clayburn *did* turn up by surprise, during the day, and holler to them from the shore.

Frazer was glad the whole damned thing was

over now. In another few moments he'd have the metal cash box up out of this deep hole in the ground. It wasn't much farther down. He'd dug nearly three feet already. When he got the box out, he'd put it in the boat, row across to the other shore, which was in another state. There was a dirt road that led into a main highway after about a mile. By morning, he'd be back in New York. They'd never find him. Even if they pinned Lyman's murder on him, what did it matter? They'd be too late. By the time they traced back Frazer's real identity, he'd be in South America.

It just proved, Frazer decided, that sometimes the simplest plans were the best. And a man should be himself. If you didn't have a tricky mind, inclined toward complicated schemes, like Lyman, there was no sense in trying to force yourself to be that way. Some people were just direct, basic in their thinking. That didn't mean you were dumb, like Lyman claimed. What had happened, proved that Frazer wasn't dumb, by a long shot.

WHEN FRAZER had caught Lyman putting rat poison into the biscuits, tonight, it had floored him for a moment, realizing that the little man had also decided that he didn't want to share that hundred thousand with a partner, that Lyman was planning to kill him. What had happened, then, had partly been in anger on Frazer's part, but mostly it had been because of the calm, deliberate acceptance of the fact that if Lyman had made up his mind to kill him, Frazer didn't have much chance of living. If Lyman failed one time, with one method, he'd try another. And Lyman's being so much cleverer than Frazer made the result a foregone conclusion. Frazer had only one defense. He would have to kill Lyman, quickly, simply and not put it off until he thought up something tricky, or for the right opportunity to present itself.

Once Frazer made up his mind to do something, he went ahead with it. If there was something that had to be done, he'd go ahead with it, no matter how unpleasant it might be. Like the times in a couple of smaller stick-ups before this last big one, when it had been necessary to kill, Frazer had to take care of that end of it. Even Lyman had to compliment him on that. "One thing I'll give you, kid," Lyman said. "You're decisive. You're not squeamish. You don't let a little think like looking a man right in the eye while you shoot him, bother you."

So after catching Lyman putting the poison powder into the biscuit mix, it hadn't bothered Frazer at all, once he'd made up his mind what he had to do. He'd gotten the big shotgun out of the closet. He'd called out: "Hey, Lyman, turn around here a minute." And when the little guy did that, he'd watched the horror and disbelief crawl like live things across Lyman's face. He'd listened to Lyman scream: "Wait, Frazer! You—you don't know what you're doing! Put that gun down Frazer! Are you crazy?"

Frazer just grinned at him. He said: "Lyman, a man who would try to poison his pardner ain't fit to live. So long, Lyman. Goodbye, smart stuff!" And he'd squeezed both triggers of the shotgun. The recoil caught his shoulder like a mule-kick. The sound of the simultaneous blasts was deafening. When the smoke cleared away, there was little Lyman, twisted on the floor, without any face and not much left of his head, either.

Without hardly glancing at the dead man again, Frazer had calmly packed his things, lugged them down to the river and tossed them into the boat. He was all set to leave, now, just as soon as he got the cash box dug up out of the hole. He heard the clang of metal against metal as the spade finally scraped against the top of the buried box, and a little cry of triumph broke from his dust-caked lips. He had just began to worry whether or not he was digging in the right place.

A few moments later, though, another sound turned the marrow in Frazer's bones to ice. It was the rattle of gravel along the path that led down from the fishing shack to the edge of the water. At the same time a rasping voice called: "Hey, greenhorns, where are you?"

Frazer glanced up toward the shack, saw the glare of a flashlight bobbing along the path, moving down toward the water. His brain seemed to explode. He glanced at his wristwatch in the moonlight, saw that it was a few minutes past ten. He'd forgotten about Sheriff Clayburn's nightly rounds. In the excitement of all that had happened, he hadn't even given the grizzled old lawman a thought.

Now he was caught. He fought off the panic that engulfed him and tried to think. He remembered that he had turned out the lights in the cabin and locked the door. If Clayburn hadn't gotten too nosy, flashed his light in a window, he might not have discovered the corpse.

**D**ROPPING the spade, Frazer turned quickly away from the hole he had dug, moved down toward the tiny wharf where the rowboat was tied. If he could get there before Clayburn, he could grab up one of the fishing rods that had been left in the boat, pretend that he was just down here doing some night fishing off of the little pier. If he acted perfectly natural and normal, the old geezer wouldn't suspect that anything was wrong. He'd talk a few minutes and then go on his way. Everything could still work out all right, Frazer told himself, if only he didn't go haywire, blow up, lose his head.

He reached the wharf, got the rod and reel out of the boat and had cast a plug out onto the dark, swirling surface of the river, just as the Sheriff joined him. Clayburn shone the flashlight in his face, barked in his peculiarly brusque way: "Hey, what's goin' on here, young fella? Ain't you out a little late? Where's your pardner at?"

Frazer's throat felt as though it was stuffed with cotton. For a moment, he couldn't answer. He kept reeling the line in, swallowing, trying to find his voice. He finally made it. He forced out a nervous little laugh. "Just doin' a little night fishin'. Lyman, he—oh, he's probably asleep already."

"Is, he?" Clayburn said. "I stopped by up at your cabin and—"

His words broke off as he watched something suddenly jerk Frazer's line taut, bend his pole almost double. Frazer felt relief flow through him. His luck was holding out. A big fish had struck at his plug as he was reeling it in, taken Clayburn's mind off of his questioning. The sheriff watched silently as Frazer horsed in the line, finally lifted a fat and wetly shining four pound small mouth bass, wriggling and bucking at the end of the line, up onto the small dock.

"Hey, how do you like that one?" Frazer said, laughing. He grabbed the bass, worked the plug from its mouth and held the still squirming and struggling fish up in the glare of the sheriff's flashlight. "Look, at him! A beaut! How do you like that kind of fishing, sheriff?"

For a moment Clayburn didn't answer. Then he said, gruffly: "I don't, son. I don't know, you city fellas are supposed to be so much smarter than us hicks, but sometimes I wonder. You come up here to the woods and commit the boldest faced crime, right under the very eyes of the law and think you can get away with it. Just because I befriended you,

I'm an easy-goin' old—”

“What—what are you talking about?” Frazer blurted. He felt as though his eyes were starting right out of his head. His feet and his fingers felt numb. His head began to ache. “I—I haven't committed any crime!”

“Look, son,” Clayburn said. “I've got you red-handed. Don't try to talk your way out of it. Won't do you any good.” There was the slight clanking sound of the old, heavy metal handcuffs that the sheriff always carried strung from his belt. “I reckon I'm goin' to have to lock you up, Mister. You city men, comin' up here and tryin' to get away with murder, just—”

The sheriff didn't get a chance to finish. Frazer slung the bass at him. The fish struck the old man in the face with a wet *smack* of sound. Then Frazer, his stomach churning like cement in a mixer, punted the flashlight out of the old man's hand. It turned end over end through the air, still lit, and fell into the lake with a small splash. The sheriff made one cry of protest, then was still as Frazer's big fist crashed through the dark against his jaw. He went down.

Trembling, stumbling through the dark, Frazer raced back to the hole he'd been digging, frantically finished unearthing the metal cash box that contained the hundred thousand dollars, returned to the pier and dropped the box into the boat. He saw with relief that the sheriff was still out cold as he untied the boat from the wharf, jumped into it and pushed out into the river.

The little rowboat was about fifty yards from shore and Frazer was having a little trouble rowing against the strong current that swept down toward the roaring waterfall, when he felt something give way under his right foot. Almost instantly that foot was soaking wet up past the ankle. There was the sound of water gurgling and bubbling. With a little cry, Frazer looked down at the bottom of the boat. It was coming in around the edges of a square of wood that had been not quite sawed all the way through, right where his foot, braced for rowing, would be placed and pressure put upon it. The water was coming in fast. The bottom of the boat was already covered and Frazer's other foot was immersed, in just those few seconds. He screamed, a shrill, horror-struck sound, like the shriek of some night animal.

“Lyman!” he gasped. “In case the poison didn't work, he was going to get me this way! He was

going to drown me!”

HE REMEMBERED that tomorrow, it was his, Frazer's turn, to row across the river alone, take the road over there into the nearest town for supplies and cigarettes. Clever, cautious Lyman! It would be just like him to make doubly sure of a crime to have a second method all worked out in case the first one failed. It seemed in the sudden silence over the river that from somewhere, Frazer could hear Lyman's high pitched, derisive laugh. The sound grew louder and Frazer realized that it wasn't just his imagination. Somebody *was* laughing. At the same time, he realized that it wasn't Lyman, couldn't be the dead man. It was that damned sheriff, Clayburn, back on shore by the dock.

When the laughter cut off, Clayburn's voice rolled echoingly across the river as he shouted: “Where are you, fella? Come back here! Serves me right, I suppose, but damned if I'm ever goin' to josh with you again. Didn't reckon you'd take me *that* serious! It *is* agin the law in this state to fish after nine o'clock at night but I wasn't really going to take you in for it. Was just goin' to scare you some, give you a warning, but you . . .”

The rest of Clayburn's words faded off and Frazer didn't seem to hear them. He was too busy trying, vainly, to bail out the water that was nearly filling the boat, with one hand, and to try and plug up the hole where the section that Lyman had sawed through had come loose, with the other. He wasn't having any success other way. In another moment the little rowboat went completely underwater and heeled over, spilling Frazer, screaming, into the chill, swirling water of the river. He managed to reach out and claw a grip onto the side of the overturned boat and hold on for all he was worth. But he knew that only gave him another few minutes to live, at the most. The half-submerged boat was drifting fast toward the falls, carried along by the current, the oars gone.

As the roar of the falls grew louder, Frazer seemed to hear little Lyman telling him: “The trouble with you big, husky, stupid oafs is that you get panicky. You don't *think*. You let your *emotions* run away with you!” Frazer had an idea that this would have never happened to Lyman. His dead partner wouldn't have let the sheriff throw him into a scare like that. Smart-guy Lyman would probably have somehow figured it out that the

sheriff couldn't have possibly been talking about a murder. Frazer would have to tell Lyman about this, admit once and for all that he, Frazer, was just a big dumb slob like Lyman had always said. He had an idea that he would be seeing Lyman soon to tell him that.

Then he felt the terrible pull and drag of the water at the edge of the falls, felt his fingers yanked

loose from their grip on the edge of the overturned boat and he stopped having ideas. There was nothing but the all-over pounding roar of millions of tons of water and the sensation that he was like one of the little matchstick boats that used to rush, spinning and twisting through the torrent of water in the gutter after a storm, back when he was a kid . . .

