

TALE OF A DRYGULCHER



By Ray Ellsworth

The threat of violence hung over the town like a heavy mist. Silent, watchful men cautiously circled the jailhouse. For Maloney was inside and ready to be sprung—and mean, slippery King Tabor, a guns-for-hire guy, claimed he'd do the job alone.

KING TABOR casually asked:
“Why do you send for me, Carr?”
“Because you are the man for the job,” Carr Sutton answered.

Tabor smiled without parting his lips, the corners of his wide mouth drooping. King Tabor was the man for the job from the Red River to the Sacramento, from the Missouri to the Columbia, because he was a cool, mean ranny with his hands, fast with a gun, and fearless.

Tabor did not look at Carr Sutton, but he knew the shrewd, black eyes in the older man's round, complacent face were upon him, appraising him, weighing him. Tabor did not look, either, at

the girl sitting with them, but he knew that she was beautiful, and that she did not belong, somehow, beside Sutton. He had been in Granada City three hours, and had observed Sutton three times. Each time there had been the girl. Yet, she didn't belong.

Tabor said: “Maybe you're right.”

In this small room at the back of the courthouse, there was peace. Outside, beneath the dying California sunlight, men walked warily with guns low on their hips, the hatred in their hearts.

At Baldy Kelly's Funeral Parlors, a silent line of men and women waited turn to pay tribute to a small, white-haired man stretched without

adornment in a fresh pine box. A man withered by age, wasted with illness, who had fought the people's battles, made himself their voice, printed himself and his newspaper into their hearts and minds until his courage had gotten him killed in their defense.

Tabor glanced briefly at the girl and caught her eyes moving quickly from him to the glass in front of her.

"It's a nasty situation," Sutton said heavily. "Baker Putnam was well liked, and Maloney—well, you know Maloney's type. But we must see justice done. This Vigilante craziness is bad—bad for the people—bad for business—bad all around."

Contempt flavored Tabor's cool attention of Sutton. He caught the glint of a derringer in the left sleeve under the big man's white linen coat. Tabor didn't like Sutton. He felt the western man's scorn for the gutter-snipe precautions the politician thought necessary.

Producing a silk handkerchief, Sutton wiped his face and neck carefully, and continued.

"Maloney is supposed to come to trial in three days, but if the Vigilantes get him first, it will be the Sheean brothers kind of affair all over again."

"The Sheean brothers were friends of yours, weren't they, Carr?"

A glint of hardness made Carr Sutton's quick look at Tabor a flash of his eyes.

"They worked for me, King. I knew their families." Sutton shook his head. "A very bad affair. We don't want it repeated."

"They were burned," the girl said, quietly, unemotionally. "They were burned alive by the Vigilantes."

TABOR leveled his steel grey eyes fully on the girl. He saw that she was more than beautiful. There was a refinement to her that did not match Sutton's heavy manner. But there was a hardness, too. King Tabor liked the hardness as much as the beauty.

"So I heard. Miss Merrill," Tabor said.

"We must move Maloney tonight," Sutton said. Impatience was in his voice. "He's in jail now, of course. These—these Vigilantes aim to get him tonight as well—after Putnam's funeral. I've posted a notice promising a fair trial and

justice, but it has been ignored. So I want Maloney out."

"You're the Mayor," Tabor said. "Why don't you just take him out?"

"The people might misunderstand. Besides," Sutton cleared his throat, "they already have the jail surrounded. I can't afford an open show of force unless they press it—right now. Sheriff Callahan has orders to stop anybody trying to move Maloney."

"And you want from me?"

"I want you to get him out of there so that no one will suspect I'm involved. I'm forced to play a lone hand here and yet I can't do anything for myself. The situation is desperate. It is a one man job—a King Tabor job."

Tabor contemplated the long ash on his cigarette. Sutton was right, it was a one man job.

Baker Putnam, convinced Sutton's government was corrupt, had campaigned vigorously against him. Putnam had built up a following, fought from the inside and the outside, gathered evidence he was certain could renovate the air of Granada City considerably.

His method had been an elimination campaign, picking on the vulnerable underlings first, then gradually climbing higher until Sutton was stripped of his ablest lieutenants. The people, encouraged and aroused by Putnam, had begun to move with guns in their hands.

The month previous a band of masked night riders had cornered Tom and Grant Sheean in their home, locked them inside, and fired the place. From that, Sutton had won a respite. It had been a little too brutal. Sutton's vigorous words about Vigilante law getting out of hand carried some weight, after that.

But Putnam protested his innocence in the affair, saying it had been a band of irresponsibles and not his men. He continued his attacks on Sutton. Maloney, Sutton's closest confidant, was next. Frightened, Maloney had picked an argument with the old man, forced him to draw, and killed him in a public bar. Maloney claimed self-defense.

Any other time, or any other public figure, and Maloney could have gotten away with it. But Putnam was too well liked, and Maloney had been crude about it. The citizens and the Vigilantes went after him. Sutton had to jail him and

schedule a trial. The Vigilantes were still after Maloney. Their faith in Sutton's jury trials had "been undermined by some previous instances involving Sutton compatriots.

Tabor said: "I understand."

Sutton wiped his face with the silk handkerchief and seemed relieved.

"There's a shack out on Glenn Creek. Place called Aiken's Point, just outside of Granada. I'll meet you there. Once you deliver Maloney to me, your job is over."

"Sounds easy," Tabor commented. "For a thousand."

Carr Sutton blinked. The suggestion of a smile hung at the corners of Miss Merrill's lips.

"I'm doing my best in this, Tabor," Sutton said, slowly, "but you're making yourself too high."

Tabor smiled. Maybe Sutton thought he could shoot Maloney clear himself—with his little sleeve gun—and save the money.

"Can't make a thing like justice come too cheaply, Carr."

It wasn't a thing he cared much for anyway. Sutton had made his bed; let him lie in it. Maloney would get what was coming to him. Justice was a woman with a band over her eyes.

"It's a dangerous job," came Miss Merrill's soft voice, "and may make enemies for Mr. Tabor. Perhaps it is not too much after all, Carr."

Tabor looked at the girl, trying to conceal his surprise. He saw her level gaze down Sutton's look of protest.

"All right," Sutton let his breath out slowly. "Half now, the other half when you deliver Maloney."

KING TABOR accepted the heavy roll of banknotes and stood up. With a bow for Miss Merrill he turned his back on Carr Sutton and strode out of the courthouse.

The threat of violence hung over the town like a mist. Silent, watchful men gathered around the general vicinity of the jail and courthouse. Directly in front of the Sheriff's office a knot of them stood without speaking. In the Chinese restaurant next door others leaned moodily over coffee. Black rain clouds bundled northward in the sky, a damp gloom against the dying sun. Beyond, the ring of mountains dwarfed the town

and the men.

King Tabor walked down the walk to the Settlers Hotel. Several of the men before the jail watched his slim figure in its black broad-cloth coat, Texas boots, and pan-cake black hat as he turned into the open doors of the Hotel.

In his room Tabor placed the roll of currency in his battered valise. Turning to the window, he allowed his gaze to range the length of the street below. His glance lingered at one squat, square frame building. The red and gilt sign splashed across its front read: "Granada News-Gazette." A black wreath hung from the closed door, and the wide office window had an empty look.

Baker Putnam.

Thinking of Putnam, Tabor found his gaze settling on the misty, shadowed mountains. In their brown, barren majesty was a hint of Putnam's spirit. Putnam had lived for this land, had fought always those who would not allow the west to grow.

Thoughtfully, Tabor built and lighted a cigarette. He pulled at it, watching the show-down gathering in the street as the shadows lengthened. As he watched, the number of men increased.

Once, King Tabor had fought Baker Putnam's kind of battle. Now he was only the man for the job.

He dropped the half-smoked cigarette to the scarred pine floor and ground it out with his heel. Turning, he shoved his valise far under the bed, then lifted his twin Colts from their holsters. He adjusted a live cartridge to rest beneath each firing pin, and replaced them. Facing the doorway, he glimpsed his melancholy image in the clouded mirror of the dresser.

Memories flooded him. Debts unpaid. Promises broken. Battle fought for fun. For money. For women—and once for a hope. A hope that had glittered like a polished diamond. He had been a different man then. Now, a black wreath hung on an old man's door, a fox-faced man in a jail sought deliverance from his mortal sin, a lovely girl sat in on a hard man's game playing from the middle out—and Carr Sutton had given King Tabor promise of money out of fear of Vigilantes who burned their victims alive.

Tabor shrugged and went on out the door. He respected Putnam, but somewhere he had lost part of himself playing Putnam's way. Now he didn't

lose anymore. He had changed sides and knew how to win.

Putnam's burial was over. The crowd dispersed. The lights in the bistros fought against the gathering dusk.

With the wind damp on his face, King Tabor got his big Claybank mare from the livery stable behind the Chinese restaurant and cased the town carefully, watching with keen, calculating attention the showdown gathering in front of the city jail. Except to watch, he avoided it, riding the narrow back streets. He would use it when the time came—for his own purposes.

He rode south to Glenn Creek for a look-see, planning his trail to the cabin which would have to be routed in the dark. Then he swung back through the alleyways of Granada.

The twilight had deepened by the time he reached the grassy knoll that served Granada for a grave yard. The damp wind rustled the grass among the crude crosses and few stone markers. Tabor sat silently on the Claybank looking down at where Baker Putnam's fresh mound of earth stood out starkly against the green. He dismounted and removed his hat.

"Happy landings, old timer," he said.

Something moved beside him in the dusk. Tabor whirled, his slim body tensed like a drawn string, crouching forward and down. His right hand filled magically with his Colt. Then, almost as suddenly, he relaxed.

"It seems we all respected Baker Putnam," Miss Merrill said. "For our own reasons."

SHE had reined her pony close to Tabor. Now she dismounted and stood beside him. She wore a split skirt and a man's shirt open at the throat. Her skin was very white.

"He was a brave man," Tabor said.

"Yes."

She stood close to him. She seemed smaller here in the dusk and even more alluring than before. He liked the firmness of her proud mouth, the unbending grace of her throat.

"Did you know him?" she asked.

"Was it necessary?"

She shrugged.

"He stood for something," she said.

"I don't match you very well with Sutton," Tabor said bluntly.

"It's no match. I work for him. He has a huge house, you know."

"Yes, I saw it. Nice lay-out. Suppose you didn't have much choice?"

Her chin lifted angrily.

"As much choice as you had, Mr. Tabor," she said. "I'm his housekeeper. You can think anything else you like."

She turned and mounted the pony. Tabor moved toward her, then stopped.

"I'm sorry. I just find it odd, somehow. And dangerous."

"What does it matter?" Then she asked, more briskly: "Do you know where to bring Maloney?"

Tabor nodded. "If I get through."

Her brown hair brushed her cheek as she looked full at him.

"I think you will, Mr. Tabor." Her tone was enticing.

Tabor smiled. "Your confidence inspires me, Miss Merrill."

"Will you bring him alive?"

"Sutton didn't say anything about that."

"Well, I'm saying something about it now," she said, clipping her words. "Bring him alive."

She half-turned the pony, then looked back. "And incidentally, my first name is Janet."

Before Tabor could move, she turned the mount and was gone, spurring the animal down the grade,

The night, suddenly, seemed to grow blacker. The wind flared, a wet clinging wind. Rain began to fall in large, scattered drops. Tabor mounted his Claybank and headed down toward the Sheriff's office.

The first flash of lightning streaked the sky, and thunder rumbled. Tabor spurred the Claybank to a trot, threading his way expertly through the mud-ruts to where an alley way, near the base of the slope, angled behind the street front, leading to the livery stable.

None of the men keeping the vigil had noticed his shadowy form. They were, Tabor had seen, looking the other way—south. The lightning had revealed a body of mounted men moving steadily and purposefully toward the Granada City jail.

At the livery stable, Tabor left the Claybank and moved quickly in the shadows between the buildings back to the main street. It was time to

get his man.

Sheriff John Callahan stood in the street, feet planted firmly apart. He had drawn both guns, and stood with them pointing at the approaching horsemen. Leading the Vigilantes was a huge, redheaded man. He carried a carbine balanced in one hand, the barrel resting in the crook of his left arm.

THE rain came, the big drops splattering the buildings, slapping at men's faces. The wind caught it and hurled it slant-wise in the night. Another fork of lightning branched blindingly above the building tops, the thunder pealing in a roll of ugly sound. The lanterns flickered and swung in the windows of the Sheriff's office.

"Hold on, Burton," Callahan shouted. "Another foot and my men start shootin'."

The advancing horsemen slowed to a stop twenty feet from Callahan.

"Callahan," the red-head roared, "Unless you get the hell out of the way you're going to die. We aim to get what we're after."

"No matter, Burton," Callahan yelled. "We'll both die if you want foolishness. Go back to your home and let the law handle this."

"To hell with your law."

The red-head swung the carbine around and pulled the trigger. The roar of the shot filled the night. Callahan shot from both six-guns, their muzzles spouting red and blue flame. Instantly, flame and roar split the darkness.

Tabor, flat against the building, felt his hat plucked from his head. Something kicked at his boot. Just ahead of him in the darkness a man leaned forward and stayed that way, freakishly propped against the building.

Tabor ran toward the lighted office. As he reached it the lights crashed out. A man appeared in the doorway, leaning against the jamb and shooting from his hip. Tabor pulled his Colt and slashed viciously downward against the man's gun wrist. The man screamed and stepped back, tripping over the sill and falling heavily on his back.

Tabor moved inside. Two men, crouched under the windows, turned towards him. One of them crossed his gun hand over and his finger squeezed on the trigger. Tabor shot carefully, first with one Colt, then with the other.

Tabor flattened himself against the floor, waiting for the lightning to give him a glimpse of the layout. Three times lead flew inches above his head, splatting against the far wall. The lightning came, showing a small door to his right. Tabor ran for it in a crouch.

Colliding at first with part of the door jamb, he burst into the corridor beyond the small door. Unable to see anything, he stopped short.

"Maloney!" Tabor called. "Jimmy Maloney."

Maloney's voice came from about halfway down.

"Here. Here I am."

Tabor holstered his Colts and struck a match. Maloney crouched against the wall of his cell, beneath the barred window. Tabor had a glimpse of a burly man in a white shirt, string tie, a handsome triangular face glistening with sweat and white with fear. Tabor blew out the match and pulled his guns again.

"Stand near me," Tabor said.

He shot and kicked at the lock until the iron frame door gave beneath his assault. He yanked it open.

"Come on."

Maloney didn't move.

"Are you from Sutton?" he said.

"Yes."

Still the man did not move, except to press himself closer to the wall.

"I—I don't know," Maloney said hoarsely. "Sutton doesn't like me anymore."

"Move," Tabor said sharply. "I'm not giving you any choice."

At the end of the corridor there was a back door. Tabor knew it was there. It led into an alleyway that ran parallel to the street and joined the livery stable. Sheriff Callahan had been proud of it as a means of quick riding when in a hurry. Tabor used it now.

He held Maloney in the doorway, peering ahead into the darkness. Maloney breathed heavily. At their back, a pounding of feet sounded on the boardwalk, then came the crash of wood splintering. A horse screamed. Tabor stood immobile, one Colt in Maloney's ribs, the other pointed toward the mouth of the alleyway.

Lightning brightened the sky. In its quick flash a man could be seen at the corner of the building, on one knee, his rifle pointing at Tabor's

chest. Tabor shot from the hip an instant before the man fired. The man jerked back against the building, sank to the wet ground. The heavy rifle slug ripped along the side of the jail.

Tabor heaved at Maloney, and both moved out into the rain. In the shelter of the wooden awning that hung over the stable doorway. Tabor said:

“Maloney, I’d just as soon as take you where you are going dead or alive. It’s up to you.”

Maloney was already skin drenched, his hair matted against his white face, and he was trembling.

“Who are you, anyway?” he demanded. “Why are you doing this?”

“Name’s Tabor. I’m doing it for money. What the hell do you care? You’re out. Those Vigilantes aren’t playing.”

“Damn it, if you’re taking me to Sutton, it’s murder. I got a note from the—the Vigilantes. They said I’d go free if I talked, once they got me out. I’m no fool. Sutton will kill me.”

TABOR barked, “Do you trust a bunch of blood-thirsty night-riders who burned their men alive the last time they caught them?”

Maloney’s face froze.

“Who the hell are you, anyway? What do you know about—”

Tabor didn’t make an answer. He poked the man with his gun, pushing him against the Claybank.

Maloney sucked in his breath, making a sound like a sob. He brought both arms up, knocking Tabor’s gun hand to the left, and rammed his knee into the smaller man. Tabor, caught off balance, sprawled to his knees, the wind knocked out of him. Maloney drew back one foot.

It was a mistake. Tabor caught Maloney’s balanced leg and twisted. Maloney screamed and went down. Tabor stood up, pressing his injured stomach and gasping for breath. Maloney rolled over slowly and tried to get up. Aiming the right hand Colt at Maloney’s head. Tabor coldly pulled the trigger. The firing pin fell on an empty shell. Tabor shrugged, leaned over, and brought the Colt’s barrel in a hard, raking blow down across the side of the big man’s head.

He dumped Maloney like a meal-sack across

the Claybank, climbed up behind him, and wheeled out into the driving rain.

Maloney was still out when Tabor reached Glenn Creek. Light glowed dimly in the window of the pine shack. Tabor heaved Maloney’s body over his shoulder and struggled to the shack.

Inside was Carr Sutton and Janet Merrill. They leaped to their feet.

Tabor kicked the door shut and threw Maloney to the dirt floor with a force that sent him sprawling limply against the wall.

“There’s your man, Carr,” he said.

Tabor felt surprise at seeing the girl. Irritation spiced his feeling. He shrugged it off. She was just a girl, and she was with Sutton. Perhaps she did belong, after all.

“Good work, Tabor.” Sutton moved around the table and looked down at Maloney. He reached into an inner pocket and brought out a small, oblong package, which he tossed onto the table. “I knew you’d come through all right.”

Janet was staring with a stricken look at Maloney’s form. Suddenly, she lifted her face to Tabor. Hate flamed in her eyes. Rage twisted her face. Her hands were doubled into fists.

“You fool!” she blurted, despair hoarsening her voice. “You fool! You’ve killed him. Now he’ll never tell them.”

Sutton whirled quickly to face the girl.

“Sutton is the one you want,” she cried. “Sutton had them burned alive. Sutton had Putnam murdered. Maloney only helped him...”

She stopped with a choke. Sutton had her by one arm, his fingers sinking into her flesh.

“Janet, Janet,” he rasped. “You are hysterical. This has been too much for you. You don’t realize what you’re saying...”

Tabor’s hands dropped over his Colts.

“What is she saying, Carr?” Tabor asked.

“They raised her, King. She thought a lot of the Sheean boys.” Sutton’s heavy face assumed an injured look. “Now she thinks I’m responsible for their deaths. That’s unfair, Janet,” he added, turning to the girl. “Spying on me, pretending loyalty...”

Janet pulled her arm free of Sutton’s grip and backed against the wall.

“It’s true,” she screamed. “You found out they were working for Baker Putnam, that they had evidence against you. Maloney got a band of

men for you—you led them yourself—and you burned them alive, locked in their house. But you were too late. They had already given their evidence to Putnam—evidence that would run you out of the country or see you hung. You ordered Maloney to shoot Putnam.”

“You’ve let your imagination run away with you, young woman,” Sutton yelled. “Maloney might have tried to do things in my name, but you can’t connect me with any part of these regretful affairs. If you have evidence against Maloney, the place to give it is at a trial...”

Sutton was interrupted by Janet’s sudden scream—a scream of horror. Tabor felt a cold touch on his spine at the sound of it, and Sutton’s face froze. Tabor looked to where the girl’s wide eyes were watching.

MALONEY was lurching to his feet. He leaned heavily against the wall of the shack, blood streaking his face and shirt. His eyes were the eyes of a mad puma.

Maloney looked from the girl, to Sutton, to Tabor. His look found the packet of money on the table. Suddenly, a six-gun was in Carr Sutton’s hand, and Maloney tensed.

“Careful, Jimmy,” Sutton said.

Maloney’s lips drew back, making his whole face a sneer.

“Damn you,” he said. “Damn you! You can’t make me pay for everything...”

A fork of lightning leaped into silhouette against the black window pane, and the thunder made a crack like a whip beyond it. At the sound, Maloney leaped from the corner.

Sutton’s six-gun spoke once. A small hole appeared between the glowing puma eyes, and the back of Maloney’s head splurged blood. He dropped in his tracks.

Sutton looked gravely at his six-gun and shook his head.

“Hated to do that. Maloney was a good man, and my last real friend.”

Then he looked over the sight of the gun at Tabor. His black eyes were hard. A half-smile was forming on his lips. He did not move the gun.

“There’s your money, King,” he said, tipping his head toward the table. “Thanks for the help.”

No expression flickered on Tabor’s long face. His hands relaxed over the twin Colts,

moved slowly away from them. He nodded and took a step to the table. He over the edge so that the bills fluttered lifted the packet of currency, ran a thumb slightly.

A sob came from the girl. She stood pressed hard against the wall, a hand holding her bruised arm. Her hair was slapped in wet lines against her white face. She was looking at King Tabor with fear-stricken eyes. The terror and pleading in them were naked.

Tabor slipped the package in his pocket. He turned, walked to the door. He heard the girl suck her breath in sharply.

A cold, hard anger seeped through Tabor. Sutton, he realized, thought him a fool. Now, he knew himself, he had been one.

There was a click, loud in the silence, and a slight movement. Tabor dropped to his knees, flung himself back against Sutton’s legs. The roar of the shot from Sutton’s six-gun filled the shack.

Sutton went sailing against the pine table, upsetting it and crashing the storm lantern to the floor, extinguishing it. The two men grappled on the hard packed earth. Sutton’s gun flew from his hand, clattered against the far wall. Tabor, with his leg pinned, his back to the dirt, felt Sutton’s fists pounding his head.

Lightning forked the sky through the window, and thunder sent a pistol crack echoing across the creek. The pine shack trembled with gusts of wind that flung a curtain of water in a whistling tattoo against the roof. The two men fought desperately in the dark.

Tabor twisted around, wrenching his leg free of the table, but Sutton had the advantage. Tabor could feel the big fists slamming his face with a force that pegged him helplessly to the floor. He could taste the blood in his mouth. Gradually Tabor fought free, shook himself clear of Sutton’s frantic hands.

He fought with a cold, consuming hatred. He was remembering Sutton’s casualness in placing the rendezvous out here in this lonely ferry shack. He was remembering the swift current of the overflowing Glenn Creek, current that could wash a man’s body miles away before discovery. He was remembering Baker Putnam’s quiet courage, and Janet Merrill’s liking Putnam for something. He was remembering Maloney’s bitter accusation, “You can’t make me pay for everything.” His fury

mounted as he saw the pieces fit together.

SUTTON was a snarling bundle of desperation. He used his greater size ruthlessly, matching his bulk against Tabor's quick skill. He managed to burst free, and seized the table in the dark, holding it by one leg. He swung it viciously at Tabor's crouched form.

The flat top slapped against Tabor's back. He felt himself spinning across the room, then the impact of the opposite wall. There came a sharp, breath-catching pain in his chest. He tried to move, but the pain filled his head. Dimly, he saw Sutton lurch toward him. A cold hand seemed to touch the back of his neck when he realized Sutton held something small and deadly in his hand—and he could do nothing.

The thing in Sutton's hand glinted. The sleeve gun. Tabor arched himself for a kick. His boot caught the derringer the instant a spurt of orange appeared at its mouth.

Then the shots rang out clearly. Sutton's torso jerked, began to fall. There were five shots. Sutton was on the floor.

Tabor became aware of Janet against him. The trembling warmth of her body was pleasant

“Are you all right?” she asked.

Tabor nodded. He held himself against the wall as she righted the table and lighted the lantern. Then she was back, wiping blood from his face. Tears of relief made rivulets on her cheeks.

“How did you know about Sutton?” Tabor asked.

“I overheard them talking.” She shuddered. “Sutton and Maloney planned it to disgrace the Vigilante movement Putnam had started against him, and to get rid of them at the same time. Then, Putnam himself threatened Sutton, said he knew about the burning. Sutton and Maloney planned Putnam's death. Sutton promised Maloney he would get him off. But he was going to kill him. I could tell.”

Tabor nodded again.

“I couldn't do anything,” the girl went on. “Sutton watched me. He suspected I knew. And tonight he would have killed me, too.”

She looked into Tabor's face, her eyes bright.

“You could have gone,” she said. “You had done your job.”

Tabor shook his head. Pain still filled his chest, but he felt good—buoyant. Something poisonous had been drained from him, leaving him cleaner. He had been the man for the job. But a man had to be more than that. Tabor knew now. Once, it had been that way—it had to end that way, whatever went between. A man had to stand for something.

Outside thunder rumbled again, but it was distant this time. The rain had slackened, became only a soft down settling gently in the night. A fresh, cool wind touched their faces as they stepped together from the door of the shack.