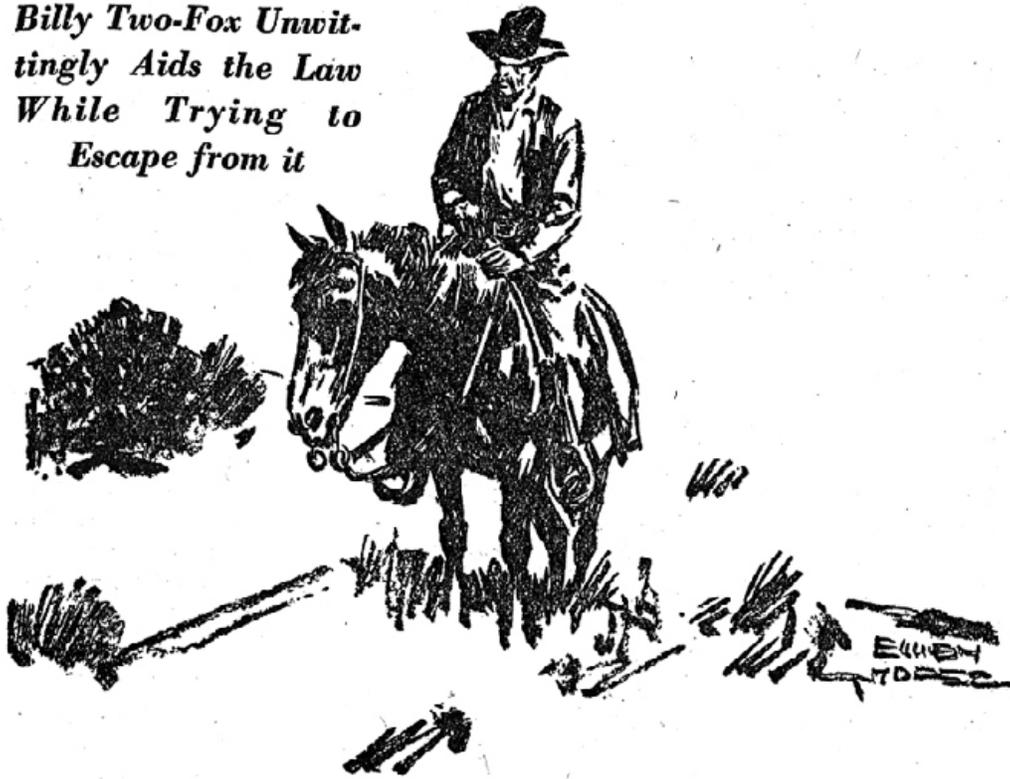


Billy Two-Fox Unwittingly Aids the Law While Trying to Escape from it



BAD MEDICINE

By **RUSSELL HAYS**

Author of Many Stories of Billy Two-Fox

BILLY TWO-FOX had just come down the gulch from Sitshum hot springs and was waddling energetically across the saltgrass flat between the mouth of the gulch and the nearly dry bed of Logie Creek, when his beady eyes picked up the outlines of a horse and rider half hidden in the chokecherries at the lower end of the flat. Billy continued on down the path at a greatly reduced pace; that is to say, he took just as many steps as before but he didn't cover but about half as much ground.

Squinting his eyes against the glare of the sun, he finally made out that the rider wore a high-crowned brown sombrero and

that he was astraddle a knock-kneed, rat-tailed roan. Both the hat and the roan were unpleasantly familiar to Mr. Two-Fox. The thick skin of his forehead corrugated harassedly.

"By golly—him Deputy Gallagher all right," he said. "Bet him seen me!"

Billy glanced over at the sycamores and willow clumps that followed the creek to the west of the flat. For a rod or more he ambled casually on in the direction of the deputy, then gradually left the trail in a wide circle to give the impression that he had been intending to go up-creek all the time, and had merely been following the path running north across the flat because it lay partially along the way.

Without turning his head more than forty-five degrees from the direction of motion, he sighted anxiously back from the corner of his eye. Gallagher, so far, had not moved. Billy drew a worried breath and increased his rate of travel.

Billy, who was a pot-bellied, bandy legged, hawk-nosed specimen of aborigine, felt that he had enough troubles without becoming involved with deputy sheriffs. Billy had boils. He had little boils and medium boils and one on his left shoulder blade that was big around as a half a dollar. So far this latter had failed to come to a head, but made its presence known by a steady thump-thump like that of a tom-tom.

Indirectly, it was these same boils which had been the cause of Billy's getting at outs with the Law. Several days before, when the first of them had been ripening up nicely, Billy had been passing the two-roomed weather-boarded residence of Turk Dohner which stood about a quarter of a mile up Logie Creek from the willow clumps for which he was now headed. Dohner was a stocky, swarthy-faced individual who went in for polished boots and noisy shirts to a degree hardly to be expected in one who raised alfalfa for a living.

Mr. Two-Fox had always secretly admired the alfalfa farmer's choice of raiment. He pulled up his ancient buckskin to tell him about his afflictions. Billy wanted sympathy.

"Boils, eh?" chuckled Dohner, who had been rehangng a gate. "Sure hell ain't they!"

Billy slammed a moccasined heel into the buckskin's flank and started departing without comment. Dohner quit chuckling, and his wide spaced, slightly popped brown eyes looked covetously upon the Yakima's new fifty-dollar saddle. This look was replaced by one of pawky

calculation, which in turn faded into one of well feigned concern. Dohner looked almost sadder than Billy as he called out:

"Come back here a minute—Chief. I got some hyiu skookum medicine for boils. Mebbe you can dicker me out of it."

Billy came back. His good iat, Sally, had been feeding him so much rock rose tea that his food splashed when it hit his stomach. Billy was sick of rock rose tea. Also, he was sick of boils, and anything that promised him relief sounded sweeter to his ears than the sighing of spring chinooks.

"What um got—let's see um?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Got to go over to the house to get it," said Dohner, and led the way over to the shack which stood between the alfalfa field and the creek.

BILLY waited out in the bare, sun glazed yard while Dohner went into the house and returned presently with a wide belt. Billy could see at a glance that it was no common ordinary belt. It had black leather trimmings, sewn in springs, fancy pockets loaded with little flat sacks, and various other do-jiggers decorating it.

"This here," said the alfalfa rancher gravely, "is a plenty skookum belt, I'll tell you. These sacks got radium in 'em. You savvy radium? Well, it's mighty good medicine. But that ain't all. This here is also a magnetic belt! The kind they use in all the big hospitals. You can strap it on you good and tight, wear 'er for three or four days, and she'll cure anything. Cure bellyache, sore teeth, fallin' hair, bad kidneys, boils, or whatever's ailin' you."

Billy was impressed, but not completely sold on the idea. He slid off his cayuse and settled down to the serious business of bartering. Dohner gnawed the end off a plug of Climax and proceeded to expound upon the miracles performed by

magnetic radium belts. After an hour and a half of haggling, Billy rode on down to Johnny-Jack's place where he and his wife were visiting, minus his saddle but with the belt strapped tightly about his bulging stomach.

Sally was prejudiced against the belt from the first, having privately construed it as a slam at her rock rose tea. Billy explained patiently for three days that Dohner had guaranteed it, then, inasmuch as his boils got steadily worse, rode up creek to swap back. Dohner would have nothing to do with the idea. He winked covertly at the lean, snaky-eyed young man who was visiting with him that morning.

"You ain't wore it long enough/" he protested. "I didn't guarantee it to cure you over night. You got to wear it a week or so. You and me can't do no business. We done made a swap."

"Huh, um damn belt bad medicine!" grunted Billy. "Boils um go away mebbe next week no wear um belt. By golly, me goin' to swap um back!"

"You're just crazy—Siwash! We done made a dicker," said Dohner belligerently. "Take your belt and get the hell outta here! I got chores to do."

MR. TWO-FOX muttered several slurring remarks concerning the alfalfa farmer's immediate ancestry, and got out. Arriving back at Johnny-Jack's place, he sat around all afternoon nursing his boils and listening to Sally's prolonged expose of a skookum warrior that would swap a fifty dollar saddle for a bad medicine belt. That night Billy journeyed upcreek again. Stealing into Dohner's cayuse house, he took his saddle off its peg, left the belt in its place, and returned to Johnny-Jack's to sleep peacefully through the remainder of the night.

The next day when Dohner and his

tilicum came riding down the creek en route to Satus, Billy saw them first and was cached in his brother-in-law's sweat house when the two stopped to inquire about him.

"Well—he'd better git that saddle back, an' mighty quick!" blustered Dohner to Johnny-Jack. "He stole it, that's what he done. And me and Grebe is goin' into town right now to swear out a warrant for his arrest!" From that moment on, Billy had commenced feeling unhappy in the tum-tum.

Johnny-Jack, with his usual optimism, had pointed out that white man's law was plenty crazy. In fact, he called to mind several instances where tilicums of his had borrowed cayuses or what not for the best of motives, only to be thrown into the skookum house for indefinite periods. Billy argued weakly that his good friend Sheriff Cadwell would get him out of it. Johnny-Jack insisted that sheriffs didn't have anything to do with how long he would be kept in the skookum house. Johnny-Jack seemed to know all about it.

To make matters worse, Billy's boils headed up in one place only to break out somewhere else. Nor did rock rose tea or sitting around in Sitshum hot springs for several hours each day alleviate his suffering. So far, three days had dragged by without Dohner or the threatened warrant making their appearance. Billy had begun to hope the alfalfa farmer might be going to let the matter drop—when he spotted Deputy Gallagher half hidden in the chokecherries.

In his worried condition and with his usual canniness undermined by too steady a flow of rock rose tea, the possibility that Gallagher might be snooping around Logie Creek for reasons other than serving a warrant on him, never occurred to Billy. His mind was occupied with a particularly displeasing picture of himself penned up

in the skookum house. His harried gaze measured the distance between himself and the deputy and the nearest willow clumps. If he ever got safely out of sight again, he promised himself, all the deputies in Yakima County wouldn't be able to find him.

BY THIS time, Billy was within a rod of the straggling line of chokecherries at the west end of the flat. He passed around the end of them and glanced back. Deputy Gallagher had broken cover and was riding leisurely after him. Billy lined the chokecherries up behind him and angled over for the willows along the creek at a bandy legged gallop. Crossing the creek, he skirted the east end of Dohner's lower alfalfa field, hopped across an irrigation ditch, and proceeded up-trail at a methodical, distance-devouring trot.

As he approached Dohner's shack at the upper end of the field, Billy left the trail and circled south. This brought him back on the same side of the creek as the deputy again. He slowed down and stole warily along, one inky eye searching the brush in the direction of the shack, and the other keeping a lookout in the general direction of the deputy. As a result, Mr. Two-Fox gave a startled grunt when Dohner's deep voice barked out from just ahead of him, "So you was goin' to sneak in on me, was yuh?"

Billy batted his eyes and looked around for the owner of the voice. Dohner was squatted in the shade of a mockorange at the edge of the brush. He rose to his feet, one hairy hand encircling the grip of a small bore Winchester, and the other rubbing reflectively on his blue skinned jowls. His wide spaced eyes bored challengingly into Billy's malignant black ones.

"Just what was you aimin' to steal this

time?" he demanded.

Billy side-stepped around him. "Me gotta go ketchum cayuses, plenty quick," he stated and continued on up-creek."

Dohner jumped over and grabbed him by the arm. "Now looky here, Two-Fox. I ain't goin' to argue with you no more! We made that swap perfectly legal. I got a warrant out for your arrest right now. Accordin' to law, you stole that saddle from me, and you bringin' back that belt it ain't goin' to help you a dang bit. You get that through that thick head of yours?"

Mr. Two-Fox got it perfectly. "Me no savvy," he protested. "Me swap um back!"

Dohner's swarthy face took on the color of over-ripe chokecherries. "Blast your dumb soul!" he said. His gaze came to rest on the highly checked flannel shirt that Billy was wearing. Covetousness again came in Dohner's eyes. Dohner didn't know that that particular shirt was Billy's good luck shirt, or that the only reason he was wearing it at the present time was in the hope that it might help his boils. Dohner saw only a high grade flannel shirt, a bit large for him to be sure, but then flannel shirts always shrank.

He tried the texture of it between his thumb and forefinger, wet his lips. Billy shied off apprehensively. The alfalfa farmer rested his Winchester across his hip and thumbed the hammer suggestively.

"No use you tryin' to get away," he warned. "I had time, I'd take you into the skookum house. Bein' as I ain't, I'm going to hold that shirt for security. You bring me back my saddle, I'll give it to you. Come on, peel 'er off!"

Billy's massive countenance took on a wooden expression. His lower lip curled out sullenly. "No—by golly," he grunted.

At about the same time, he looked past Dohner's shoulder and saw Gallagher riding directly toward them and less than a hundred yards away. Billy did some rapid

calculation. If cultus Dohner were holding his shirt for security he couldn't very well press the stealing charge. Billy unbuttoned the shirt and slid it off over his thick sloping shoulders to show the pie-sized pad of the mud poultice on his left shoulder blade. Dohner smirked sardonically and reached out to give the poultice a tentative tap.

Billy straightened up as though a bumble bee had taken advantage of his bent over position. "Hi-i-i-i, damn um you cut um out!" he rumbled.

"Ain't sore, is it?" chuckled Dohner. He took the shirt and examined it critically. "All right, you get ready to bring back that saddle I'll give 'er back to yuh."

HE FROWNED as he heard the approaching hooves of the deputy's sway-backed cayuse. Whirling around on his heel, he jerked up his Winchester, and kept on frowning. Gallagher rode through the scanty brush and reined in beside him. The deputy had a horsey red face and sandy eyebrows that met in a tangle on the bridge of a long, slightly warped nose. His drowsy blue eyes stared puzzledly at the Yakima's naked chest, shifted over to the flannel shirt in the alfalfa farmer's hand, then came back to Mr. Two-Fox again.

"What kinda hocus pocus is goin' on a here, anyhow?" he inquired.

"Is it any skin offa your nose?" challenged Dohner.

"I dunno yet," said Gallagher. "But I aim to find out."

"Huh—if you feel that way about it," sniffed Dohner, "I s'pose I'll have to tell you. 'Tain't none of your damn business, but Two-Fox and me made a dicker a while back. He's got a saddle of mine, an' I'm keepin' his shirt till he brings it back."

"Yeh!" Gallagher squinted questioningly over at the Yakima. "That right Two-Fox?"

Billy had a feeling that all was not exactly as Dohner had led him to believe. On the other hand, Dohner hadn't denied that he was holding the shirt for the return of the saddle. Billy pulled agitatedly on his nose. Of one thing he was sure, he couldn't be put in the skookum house for giving his shirt away. Still, he hesitated. His iat, Sally, was going to have plenty to say if he came home half naked. Billy wanted more time to think the matter over.

"What about it, Two-Fox? You give it to 'im?" insisted Gallagher.

"Uh huh, me give um shirt," said Billy finally.

Gallagher wasn't exactly convinced. Having more important business at hand, however, he was willing to let the matter ride. He leaned over to swat a couple of yellow-bellied horse flies that had settled on the roan's ewe neck, and asked in an off-handed manner, "By the way, Dohner—you ain't seen anything of young Grebe down here today, have you?"

The alfalfa farmer shot a quick glance back over his shoulder as though half expecting to find that another deputy or two had come up behind him. "Naw, I don't know nothin' about young Grebe," he snapped. "What's the matter with you birds, anyhow? Didn't I tell you yesterday, when' you was down here with the sheriff that the last time I seen Grebe was Wednesday afternoon?"

"As I recollect, you did mention it," admitted Gallagher unperturbed.

"Oh, you recollect, do yuh? Funny thing, just account of Grebe bein' down here to see me a coupla times, yuh can't get over the idea he's down here now. He never was no pal of mine. Where do you get that stuff?"

GALLAGHER combed the fingers of his left hand lazily through the roan's sparse mane. His right thumb was hooked

casually in his belt and some three inches from the bone butt of his revolver. Gallagher looked as if he was about half asleep, which meant that he was very much awake and capable of spraying bullets in all four directions at the drop of an eyelash.

“Speakin’ of funny things, Dohner,” he droned. “Seems like there’s a lot of people in Satus has got the idea that somebody was settin’ on a cayuse back in the alley—a holdin’ Grebe’s pony—while the kid was inside the store makin’ old Timothy open up his safe. Just one of these rumors that goes around, I reckon. Anyhow, if Grebe did have a pardner out in the alley, this pardner wouldn’t be to blame for old Timothy gettin’ shot. Of course, a jury might not see it that way—not unless they was feelin’ kinda friendly toward him.”

Dohner was wearing a poker face. He scowled angrily, perhaps just a shade too angrily, as he stepped threateningly toward the deputy. “Now see here, Gallagher,” he rasped, “I’m gettin’ sick and tired of you and the sheriff makin’ these wise cracks about me bein’ in with young Grebe. An’ I’ll tell yuh somethin’ else. If I did know where he was, I wouldn’t tell you! What do yuh think about that?”

“Just what I figured,” said Gallagher. “If you don’t care, I think I’ll ride on up to that haybarn in the other field.”

“Huh, a lot of good my carin’ would do,” snorted Dohner and added sarcastically. “I s’pose yuh want me to go along with you; so’s not to tell nobody you’re comin’?”

“Well, it wouldn’t be a bad idea at that,” complacently agreed the deputy. “Let’s go.” He urged the roan forward with the reins, glanced over at the Yakima. “Be careful yuh don’t get sunburnt, Two-Fox.”

Dohner shifted his Winchester to the crook of his arm and moved on ahead of

the deputy. “You bring me back my saddle, I’ll give you your shirt,” he called back.

Billy scowled darkly after them and said nothing. Not having anything to say and being too busy digesting all the deputy had said to bother making pointless replies. That old Timothy Adams who ran the trading store in Satus had been held up and shot by Dohner’s tilicum, young Grebe, was news to Billy. Of more interest to him, however, was the very obvious fact that the hay farmer had not sworn out the warrant for his arrest as he had claimed.

This discovery lent strength to Billy’s original belief that it hadn’t been against the law for him to swap back the medicine belt. Soberly reflecting on the matter, he could see how too much rock rose tea and too much listening to Johnny-Jack’s calamity howling had made him afraid of Dohner all the same as an oleman kloodchman. Mr. Two-Fox’s beady eyes took on a decidedly malevolent glitter and he gave a snort that spread the nostrils of his hawkish nose like the battle whistle of a fuzztail stallion.

“By golly—me been plenty damn fool!” he grunted.

The sun beating down on his naked shoulders reminded him forcibly of the loss of his shirt. If he went home without that good luck shirt and then had to admit to Sally that the deputies weren’t looking for him after all, it was a foregone conclusion that home life was going to be unbeatable for some time to come. The manner in which the alfalfa farmer had tricked him with a forked tongue, was becoming plainer and plainer to him with each passing moment. Billy glared up the trail where the deputy and Dohner had disappeared, with a growing sense of injustice.

“Damn um, him better give um my shirt back!” he muttered angrily.

THE trouble was that Dohner wasn't the giving back kind. When Dohner had had the saddle and Billy had had the medicine belt, it had been a simple case of swapping even. But now—Dohner had his good luck shirt, and all Billy had was a bare back and a bunch of boils. The unfairness of it rankled. Then a sudden solution of the problem gouged its way through his morose musings. What he needed was something of Dohner's to swap back!

Inasmuch as Dohner was now bound to the upper hay field, it was almost certain that there would be no one at his shack. Mr. Two-Fox could see no logical reason why he shouldn't amble over and do a bit of collecting. As the idea took hold, he nearly forgot the throbbing thump of the boil heading up on his shoulder blade. He set off purposefully in the direction of the shack.

Recrossing Logie Creek, he waddled boldly around the corner of Dohner's cayuse house and across the bare yard to the front of the Boston house. Trying the door, he found it unlocked as he had expected it would be. Cautiously, he pushed it open. From somewhere within or beyond the shack came a sound curiously like that made by a board scraping across a rafter. Billy came to a dead halt halfway across the sill. His jet eyes probed suspiciously about the crudely furnished room. For a full minute he stood there listening.

"Huh, mebbe um sage rat," he told himself at last, and stepped on into the building.

The other room of the shack was fitted with a couple of iron cots and a clothes closet. Billy tip-toed warily into the room like a tomcat exploring a strange alley. The closet, he decided, would be the best source of supply. Billy unlatched the door

and judiciously contemplated Dohner's numerous changes of costume.

As regarded clothes, Dohner had been very generous with himself. Billy picked out a deep cream buckaroo shirt and proceeded to slide into it. Although a bit snug, it fitted well except around the collar band. A calfskin vest hung on the next hook. Billy eased it gently over his boil and waddled over to study the effect in the cracked mirror hung on the north wall of the room. The effect was highly satisfactory from a sartorial standpoint. But the movement that caught his eye from beyond the room's west window was not so pleasing.

In fact, Mr. Two-Fox's wide mouth drooped distressfully at the corners. "Ugh, what me goin' do?!" he panted fearfully.

Emerging from the willows to the west of the shack was Deputy Gallagher and the suspected hay farmer. Evidently, they had not gone to the upper alfalfa field after all. It was equally evident that they were now bound for the shack. Billy slid into the kitchen and looked around for something to crawl under. Going out the door was out of the question since Gallagher would be sure to see him if he did. Billy had a feeling that for the deputy to discover him sneaking out of Dohner's house was liable to make the latter form some wrong conclusions.

Mr. Two-Fox's beady eyes swept the room in a panicky search for cover. He whirled around to go back to the bedroom and crawl under one of the cots. In the same breath he discarded the idea as impractical. If Gallagher were to search the shack, he would look under the beds the first thing. Billy inspected the floor for a possible cellar way. He looked up at the ceiling. Directly above the cook stove at the east end of the room was a small trap door leading up into the attic of the shack.

“Bet him no look um up there,” he grunted.

Billy stepped up on the stove and discovered that it was still slightly warm. Reaching above his head he shoved up on the trap door and grabbed the edge of the rafter on which it rested. With a mighty grunt he chinned himself into the darkness of the hole, and hooking his elbows over the rafter wriggled on up. Turning back, he carefully closed the door, and perching on a rafter peered owlshly about him.

HERE beneath the roof, it was stifling hot. As his eyes grew more accustomed to the dark he could see that tiny cracks along the eaves and between the shingles, threw a murky half light into the cramped triangular room. Sweat began to ooze out on Billy’s forehead and to trickle down in front of his ears.

“Whe-e-ew, um plenty hot up here,” he whispered.

The next instant, he had forgotten how hot it was. From the west end of the attic came a scraping sound identical with that which he had heard on opening the door of the shack. This time, however, there was no question about where it was coming from. Or its proximity. It emanated from the far end of the attic. Nor was it the sort of sound that a sagerat would make. Not unless the sagerat happened to be about the size of a yearling colt.

Mr. Two-Fox quit breathing temporarily. A prickly tremor flowed down his spine. Fearfully, he peered into the gloom. Then the hair on the nape of his neck bristled up against his hat brim. Except for himself, the attic was empty!

Billy reached over and yanked up the trap door. He knew when he was well off and he aimed to stay that way. Hanging around in an attic with a bunch of ghosts what wiped their feet on the rafters was not Billy’s idea of the proper way to

remain healthy. He poked one leg down through the trap door and was bringing its companion down to join it, when he heard footsteps and Gallagher’s voice just outside the shack.

“There ain’t no call for you to be edgin’ aroun’ to the side of me all the time, Dohner,” Gallagher was saying. “I reckon I’ll have to remind you again that this here gun of mine has got a hair trigger. Goes off awful easy.”

The alfalfa farmer gave an infuriated snort. “By God—yuh got your nerve comin’ down here and doin’ a law abidin’ citizen this a way! Give a damn fool a little authority and it goes to his head. Me gettin’ around to the side of yuh! How do you get that way? It’s a wonder yuh don’t get scared of your shadow!”

“Y-e-h?” said Gallagher.

Billy didn’t like the tone of that “yeh?”. He decided that the ghosts in the attic wouldn’t be liable to pounce upon him while the deputy was down below, anyhow. Billy hastily drew his leg back into the attic. He started closing the trapdoor at the same time that the deputy shoved open the door of the shack. In his hurry, Billy had taken a back-handed hold. Two inches from the sill, the door slipped from his fingers and settled into the ceiling with a faint bang.

Billy perched breathlessly on the rafter and hoped that Gallagher hadn’t heard it. He hoped, however, in vain. The deputy had glanced up at the trapdoor and then darted back out of the shack with the frenzied haste of one who has blundered into a nest of side-winders. He shoved the barrel of his revolver against Dohner’s ribs.

“Gimme that Winchester!” he snapped. He grabbed it out of the alfalfa farmer’s hand, leaned it against the wall of the building, and ran his hand over Dohner’s stocky body in search of other weapons.

Finding none, he snatched up the Winchester and motioned Dohner to move back. "Stand off there about ten foot! An' don't go fidgettin' around! I thought they was somethin' fishy around here."

"What the hell yuh talkin' about?" snarled Dohner. "The county'll pay for you pullin' a stunt like this. And pay plenty!"

"Aw—shut up!"

Gallagher gave the door a kick that banged it back against the wall. Keeping one eye on Dohner, he peeked warily around the doorframe and pointed his revolver up at the trapdoor. "Come on out of it, Grebe!" he ordered. "I know you're up in that attic. No use your tryin' to stall."

Mr. Two-Fox gulped, but maintained a tomb-like silence.

GALLAGHER squinted his eyes and looked over at Dohner. The hay farmer was slightly pale along the jowls. He muttered sulkily to himself and avoided the deputy's gaze. Gallagher glanced back up at the ceiling. "The game's up, Grebe!" he called out impatiently. "Another minute and I'm goin' to start fillin' that roof fulla lead. Get that?" By way of illustration, Gallagher tilted up the Winchester and sent a bullet angling up through the ceiling of the west room and at the opposite end of the building from the trap door.

Queerly enough, this brought not one, but two responses. Mr. Two-Fox reached hurriedly for the trap door. From the other end of the attic came the sound of spirit land *tamahawis* wiping their feet on the rafters. Billy's deep set eyes bulged in their sockets as he stared into the gloomy emptiness of the west end of the attic.

"What um hell!" he grunted.

A section of the west wall of the shack had moved, or rather a section of what Billy had formerly believed to be the west

end of the shack. This movement resolved itself into a narrow doorway, which instead of opening up to reveal the bright sunlight of out of doors, revealed only the deeper shadows of a small partitioned off space at the end of the attic.

The head and shoulders of a man whom Billy recognized as young Grebe pushed out through the opening. Although the light was none too good, Billy had no trouble in making out that the fugitive was plenty cultus. Grebe's snaky eyes glistened like a spider's. His face was dewdropped with perspiration; and his long straight hair, which was usually sleekily pompadoured, now hung in greasy strings against his sallow cheeks.

In his right hand, he clutched a heavy caliber automatic, the muzzle of which was aimed at a point between the pockets of Dohner's cream colored buckaroo shirt. Billy, who was inside the shirt, began wishing there had really been a ghost in the attic after all. He belched plaintively and raised his hands. Grebe scowled, then showed his teeth in a snarl. With his free hand he motioned for Billy to descend down through the trapdoor, and to descend immediately. He touched his lips and made shooting motions with the automatic.

Billy had no trouble in interpreting the motions. He shook his head in vehement agreement. Meanwhile, Gallagher was getting impatient. He fired up through the ceiling again, this time at the other end of the shack. "I'm givin' you this last warnin'!" he threatened.

Billy had already started yanking up on the trapdoor as the bullet tore through the shingles behind him. "Quit um shootin', me comin'," he uttered sullenly, and poked his moccasined feet down through the ceiling.

Gallagher stared up at them dumfoundedly. Then started swearing.

Dohner came up behind the deputy and looked up at the squat figure of the Yakima sliding down through the hole, with a surprise almost as great as Gallagher's. A decided sense of relief was also in evidence on his smoothly shaven face. His eyes narrowed as he saw that Billy was wearing his calf skin vest and cream colored buckaroo shirt. So did Gallagher's.

THE latter waited until Billy had dropped down on top the stove, then switched his cussing to remarks of a more personal nature. "By yahoo, I'll be a son-of-a-sea-captain if I can figure what you guys are up to! First you give Dohner your shirt, and now I catch you up in his attic with his shirt on! Just what the hell's the meanin' of it, eh?" His steel blue eyes bored questioningly into Billy's shifting black ones.

Billy was taking no chances. "Me no savvy," he grunted.

"N-a-w?"

Dohner chuckled nervously. "Guess it's my fault," he confessed. "Yuh see I kinda rimmed old Two-Fox in a trade the other day. Looks like he'd come in here on the sly to get one of my shirts—an' we come up on him kinda unexpected."

Billy hopped hastily off the stove as the dormant heat in it penetrated through his moccasins. Gallagher strode on into the room and wheeled around to scowl back at the alfalfa farmer. The deputy had a hunch that there was more about the shirt exchanging than met the eye. Dohner wasn't the type to take the loss of a calf skin vest so lightly.

"Oh, so that's it," said Gallagher.

"Sure—that's all there is to it. Too bad you had to get all excited," sneered Dohner. Dohner had just concluded that Billy didn't know that Grebe was in the attic.

The deputy, on the other hand, had just reached conclusions of another nature. He covered Billy with his revolver and sighted up at the open hole in the ceiling. "Anybody else up there, Two-Fox?" he snapped.

"Huh, uh," said Billy promptly. He shook his head so that there would be no doubt about it.

Gallagher, however, was unconvinced. "Well, we'll dang soon find out," he announced. "Come on down from there, Grebe!" Gallagher raised his six-gun and shot a couple more times up through the roof.

In the same breath, the reports of the revolver thundering through the narrow confines of the shack, were answered by the muffled crash of an automatic. Gallagher's gun went spinning out of his hand. Gallagher hunched his narrow shoulders, jumped sideways as his hand slid back to the grip of Dohner's Winchester, and glanced searchingly about the ceiling.

"Hey—lay offa that rifle!" snarled Grebe, his voice echoing hollowly from the attic. "One more screwy move outta you, yuh snoopin' son-of-a-buzzard and I'll cut yuh down like I did old man Adams!"

Gallagher located the voice as coming from a narrow crack close to the partition between the rooms. Scowling, he let the Winchester drop to the floor.

"Put them fins up where I can see 'em!" commanded the fugitive. "Get ahold of that rifle, Turk. Keep 'im covered!"

Dohner glided over from the doorway and picked up the Winchester. Mr. Two-Fox stood silently in the far corner of the room to which he had retreated at the opening of hostilities. Billy wasn't feeling particularly well in the tum-tum. Nor did the grim manner in which the alfalfa farmer was lining the sights of the

Winchester on himself and deputy improve his condition.

Footsteps pounded across the rafters above his head, and a moment later Grebe's lean body swung lithely down to the stove top. If the killer had been cultus looking up in the attic, he was doubly so now. His dark face was congested with blood, his hands twitched nervously, his eyes had a wild glitter. He glared at the deputy, glared at Dohner, as he stepped down off the stove.

"Damn it, Grebe—it ain't my fault!" said Dohner hurriedly.

"Nobody said it was your fault!" snarled the killer. He whirled around to glower at the Yakima. "Here's the sneakin' buzzard that give us away!"

MR. TWO-FOX tried to look innocent. His beady eyes huddled together in very real apprehension. "Me no do nothin'," he protested faintly.

"Naw, yuh didn't do nuthin', dang your lousy soul!" said Grebe. He stole catfootedly across the room to within a pace of the Indian. "So yuh would have to get up in that garret, would yuh? Of all the places you coulda hid—yuh had to crawl up there! Damn you—I'd oughta drill you!"

Grebe gave an impression of being liable to do it. He waved the automatic carelessly around, gritted his teeth, turned half away, then quite without warning whipped his left fist up against Billy's jaw. Billy staggered back, batting his eyes, and trying to tell himself that he didn't mind getting hit in the siahoos. Grebe got aggravated at having skinned his knuckles on Mr. Two-Fox's jawbone. He followed through with a vicious hook that landed squarely on the Yakima's downcurving beak of a nose. Billy swayed back against the shack's south wall with a force that made the bedroom window rattle.

For the space of a second he slumped there as though half paralyzed. His eyes took on a glazed expression. He gave a tremulous groan that started down deep among his inwards and whistled out through his nasal cavity. Billy had just broken the four-bit sized boil that was heading up on his shoulder blade. Grebe didn't know this. He concluded that the Yakima was begging for mercy.

"Yuh better whine, yuh slop faced son-of-a-buck!" he jeered, and hit Billy on the nose again.

Billy's second groan broke off about half way through the chorus. He had just passed out of the groaning stage into the massacre stage. His thoughts, what there were of them, were highly incoherent and fairly dripping with gore. Billy wanted to murder somebody just as quickly as possible, and that somebody was Grebe. He pulled his bullet head down between his shoulders and emitted a sound similar to that made by a crowbar going through a threshing machine.

At the same time a moccasined hoof chopped up from the floor into the killer's stomach. Billy's back was braced against the wall. His eyes bulged slightly as his squat body took up the backfire of the energy utilized in raising the foot. At the instant of contact, a sound was produced resembling that produced by dropping a watermelon from a great height. Grebe and his automatic went off together. The automatic took a nick out of the stove and clattered to the floor. Grebe soared along about three feet off the ground and crashed into the woodbox at the far side of the room. Billy leaped after him.

"Hi-i-i-i, damn urn, me bust um you!" he screeched, and did a flying mare into Grebe's stomach. Grebe had long since passed out in mid air, but Billy didn't know it. He was too busy to bother about whether his victim was conscious or not.

He looked around for something to hammer with.

By doing so, he discovered that Gallagher and the alfalfa farmer were engaged in a furious tussle for possession of the Winchester. Dohner, having lined the sights on Billy as the latter had charged across the kitchen, had given the deputy an opportunity to grab at the muzzle of it. Mr. Two-Fox's beady eyes lighted joyfully. His sinewy fingers closed about the back of a chair.

"Hi-i-i-i!" he whooped and swung it in a full arc that landed squarely on the top of the hay farmer's head.

Dohner did a nose dive under the kitchen table. Billy heaved up the chair to let him have it again with the intent

purposefulness of a terrier digging into a rat hole.

"Better not," said Gallagher tersely. He had the Winchester all to himself now and was feeling a bit more assertive. "Not that I'd mind, but the old man don't like his prisoners all chawed up."

"Huh!" grunted Billy disgustedly. Sullenly he threw down the chair. Then suddenly his eyes opened wide in startled discovery.

"What's happened?" asked Gallagher puzzledly.

Mr. Two-Fox's inky eyes had a contented gleam. He turned and pointed at Grebe. "By golly, him plenty good medicine. Fix um boil. Plenty quick um get well now." Billy waddled over and gave the unconscious killer a vicious kick.