

## Crawling Stone Wash

The third man, Seagrue, less than fifty yards away, had got off his horse and was laying down his rifle, when the hoot-owl screeched again and he looked uneasily back. They had chosen for their halt a spot easily defended, and needed only darkness to make them safe, when Smith, stepping out into plain sight, threw forward his hand.

They heard his sharp call to pitch up, and the men under the point jumped. Seagrue had not yet taken his hand from his rifle. He threw it to his shoulder. As closely together as two fingers of the right hand can be struck twice in the palm of the left, two rifle-shots cracked across the wash. Two bullets passed so close in flight they might have struck. One cut the dusty hair from Smith's temple and slit the brim of his hat above his ear; the other struck Seagrue under the left eye, ploughed through the roof of his mouth, and, coming out below his ear, splintered the rock at his back.

The shock alone would have staggered a bullock, but Seagrue, laughing, came forward pumping his gun. Sinclair, at a hundred and twenty yards, cut instantly into the fight, and the ball from his rifle creased the alkali that crusted Whispering Smith's unshaven cheek. As he fired he sprang to cover.