

But he was annoyed — this lacked mountain courtesy. Then he grinned. "Not this trip, pardner. Your artillery's as full of snow as the Arctic Circle, while this instrument I have—"

Flame, smoke, and steam exploded between the two men. As it floated upward, he of the voice was bent



"He of the voice had leveled a long six-shooter, white with frost and snow, at the Mail Carrier."

double, squeezing his right hand between his knees. Blood was dripping over his felt boots and overshoes. An exploded six-shooter rang on the ice twenty feet away.

"I told you you'd have fireworks if you turned that ice-jam loose. No wonder she busted. What'd you expect? You're too experienced a man by the looks of you to throw such a kid trick as that. Thought I wasn't heeled, hey, and thought you'd work a bluff on me, did you? Goin' to spear me on an icicle! Now, you fool!"—Sullivan's tone became a dry metallic—"you wiggle a hair and I'll kill you. My gun has not been out all winter. It's ready for business. Just off the hip; hot as buckwheat. Now don't do the stage-eye act on me, nor try any football dives—and leave that sticker of yours alone. You might cut somebody with it. No, straighten up now, and turn your back. See here! Are you going to do as I tell you, or shall I fix your hide so that they'll tan it for chair bottoms? Jump lively now, or I'll fill you so full of lead that you'll assay for Leadville ore, and it'll take the coroner's jury twenty-four hours to count the holes. Still I don't want to kill you; it's a dirt job, and I would rather walk you into town than haul you there on my back. Oh, don't go frothing now and sass me back like that. Of course I'm festive. Who wouldn't be, with a five-thousand dollar winner—hold on there!—five-thousand dollar gold mine, as I was a-sayin', in your own self as a standing reward for Black Jack. N-no, my dear sir! A single jump into my latitude and I'll plug you. Post-office robber, huh? And gathered in by Uncle Samuel himself in the person of your humble striker! Lord! I ain't talked so much since speech-makin' over good luck come into fashion. Oh yes, I know you. No; it ain't no lie either. I have your circular description here in my pocket, right next my heart, to tack up in ev'ry mail window between Empire and Hot Sulphur. You're wanted, wanted bad; five thousand dollars' worth of bad, too; and I've got you—and incidentally I intend to keep you. Now drop that cleaver of your'n and shinny on down the trail there, or you'll have trouble—"

A mile above a concussion jolted the cliff: a terrific echo to the pistol-

shot. Down came the slide—gently at first—so far away it seemed only as wide as one's hand. In an instant the snow shot from under the two men. The enemies fell flat. A mile of snow, bristling hair-like with root-torn pines, thundered down the slope. Sullivan and Black Jack, forgetful of each other, were tossed whirling in the air, and fell back into the grinding chaos. Yet the piece of ice on which they lay was thick and solid, laced and interlaced with tough brushwood frozen in. This woven acre rode the avalanche like a sled.

As hour later a mountain lion sneaked over the wreck. A hill of snow, ice, broken stone, and splintered logs dammed the gulch. Away to the top of the Range the track of the slide lay like a scald. Miles away, high in the air, a cloud of white dust was floating. All nature was hushed as if frightened. A screeching eagle went flapping far away. From under the ruin a wolf howled dismally; then weaker and weaker—a piteous whine—silence. Berthoud had struck a terrible blow: and humanity—where were the men? The panther was hunting; his nose had found them, but not his jaws. Settling himself he dug. As the famished brute raked a log to one side with his gaunt paw, he heard a groan within an inch of his ear. Whirling he flashed up the mountain side a streak of yellow. But his work was done. From the shallow hole Sullivan appeared, chalk white, his face a ghastly blue. He struggled carefully, then desperately, to free himself; but when he stopped exhausted, only his head and shoulders appeared above the snow.

"Pinned down—dead—my last trip—and yet not hurt. Freeze like a cockroach in the ice-house. Cool, my boy, cool—keep cool. Don't lose your head—don't get rattled, or you're a dead man. Now's when you need all your brain. Keep cool—though you'll be cool enough all too soon." Sullivan's head disappeared in the panther-dug hole. Slowly the end of a small log ten feet away rose into the air and fell aside. Up straightened the grizzly head of Black Jack, one side daubed with a red slush.

"Well—I-be—damned! This don't look much like hell: still it's a pretty good imitation," growled the desperado as he gazed around on the confusion. He noticed the straining mail-sack. Black Jack waited patiently until the carrier's haggard face again came above the rim. The two looked into each other's eyes.

"Hurt?" asked Sullivan.

"I don't think so. Both feet fast. How's yourself?"

"One leg in a vise—can't move it. What d'you think?"

"We're done for."

"Guess you're right. How's the snow round you?"

"None. 't all—ice. Solid."

"Hold still. I've got one foot a little loose," exclaimed Sullivan as he stamped on a log far below.

"Same log," said the thief, "got us both."

Nothing more was said. They went to work. The carrier unslung the mail-sack and laid it carefully aside. For an hour both men strained, pulled, twisted, and dug with bare fingers until the purple ends were raw. Human fingers are not panther claws. Both men were packed tight up to their armpits in solid snow. Four feet below the surface of the ruin their legs were fast between two parallel logs as in a steel trap. An inch closer and their ankles would have cracked like pipe-stems; an inch wider and the men would have been free. They were not hurt; merely held. Berthoud had been kind only to be cruel.

"No use," panted Sullivan; "my trail ends here."

"Mine don't. I wish it did," answered Black Jack. The hard tone was gone, the voice was almost gentle.

"Hell's ahead of me. You're an honest man, my friend, and have nothin' to fear from death; while I—" and there was a silence for many minutes. "Many's the time I've faced it, but not when I had to think it over—"

like this," he continued as if to himself.

Then they waited. A camp-robber came like the blue angel of death, and scolded within a yard, mocking them. "Lucky jay, you've got what I'd give the world for," mused Black Jack. Sullivan said nothing. He was thinking of a little log-cabin at Hot Sulphur; of an old, white-haired lady who at that moment he knew was rocking contentedly before the open fire in the hot stone fireplace. The carrier was brave; he did not want to die. Life held so much for him to live and to work; yet he waited calmly, his brain as cold as his freezing foot. At intervals the men struggled, wrenched their muscles, with no hope of getting out, but to keep warm. The thirst-fever that comes from pain dried the carrier's tongue. He longed for water. A mouthful of snow burned like hot cinders. He spat it out and pressed the rigid jaw with stiff, bare hands to warm the aching teeth. He looked about for water. Fifty feet up the mountain, in the lee of a boulder, was a spring; but it was frozen solid and banked with snow. The breeze was gently keen. Sullivan's clothes grew cold; he felt nude and shrank from them; his skin became small and tight, smarting as if blistered. A chill shook him. Blunt pains worked along the bones and met in the joints. Each paticular finger and toe seemed about to burst; his scalp stiffened; his chin was numb. The cold was gnawing between his shoulders, was biting for his heart. Only the wedged foot was warm, strangely warm. Webs of spidery ice floated in the cheerful sunlight—and vanished. Flashing wrigglers swarmed before the man's eyes and disappeared—only to come again.



"We're Done For."

Sullivan was freezing. Away into the sky loomed Berthoud, hoary with icy ermine and wrapped in fleecy clouds. To Sullivan's hopeless eyes the wreathing veil seemed smoke and steam, curiously warm. He shuddered, locked his rattling jaws, and grimly faced the end.

Up on the summit the clouds were of gold; the very top was red. In oblivious majesty rose the Pass; but over and about the two heads sticking from the snow a single snowflake, flashing, dazzling, glittering, was waited like a dancing diamond. It tickled Sullivan's face then tumbled into the air a very ecstasy of whirls. The man's head drooped, drooped, dipped, jerked back, drooped again, and hung pendulously. Sullivan was asleep, warm and comfortable. With a dull yell of pain he awoke. Black Jack had hit him in the ear with a snowball.

"Hang on, friend. Keep a-scrapin'. Don't give up," were the rough words of cheer.

The carrier knotted his muscles, shook off the torpor as if it were the cold coils of a cold snake, and rubbed his burning ear.

"What's the use? We'll both be stiff in three hours. Might as well have it over with," replied Sullivan as if speaking of a card game.

Aroused, he freed his feet of the

webs and forced some feeling into the imprisoned one. From his pocket he took his lunch, until now forgotten, and silently tossed half to his fellow prisoner. The camp-robber darted on a piece of meat in the air, and flew squeaking to a limb. Black Jack swore at the bird in profane amusement. Sullivan redid his piece of pork and threw it over. The robber protested, raked it in, and tossed it back. Sullivan ate his own share, but this piece of meat he put back into his pocket.

Black Jack looked at him. "Say, pardner, you're a man." The fires of life rekindled, flew up anew in the desperado.

"I will get loose," he snarled with set teeth as he tore frightfully at the snow packed around his waist.

"Try this; my hands are too stiff to use it," said Sullivan, as he threw his watch to Black Jack.

"Ah, a regular snow-plow," grunted the other as he sprang open the lid with his teeth and began to scrape. "Sa-ay!"—the yell rang up the Pass—"here's my knife."

Buried tight in the snow was the knife—life itself—within easy reach, yet frozen fast. Sullivan did not answer, but waited. Just then Black Jack's hands dropped the watch. It vanished along his leg into the black hole that held him, and then faintly clinked on a stone under the log-jam. With a curse the lifelong criminal clawed viciously in the snow with scarlet fingers. Ten minutes of bloody scratching cleared the handle and hilt of the heavy bowie; and Black Jack's head and shoulders arose triumphant, his gory right hand flourishing the priceless steel. The light from that blade flashing to the very top of Berthoud. Sullivan writhed to keep warm.

The shadows were growing longer now. Another two hours the sun would be down, and their lives would go out like candles. Black Jack ripped, jabbed, strained, and from his burrow hurled ice, snow, and splintered wood. Iron against water, with men for stakes. In thirty minutes he was free all but his feet. Both ankles were held between two logs: one thick as his waist, the other a mere pole. Hack, slice, split. In five minutes more Black Jack, sweating and breathless, crawled painfully from the hole. He tried to stand, but tottered and fell as if on stilts. He rubbed, he pounded, he rolled and twisted his numbed calves and feet: the thick, black blood turned bright and throbed again. Black Jack stood erect, danced sorely, and except for his skinless fingers and a scalp wound, now stanch with a frozen plaster of bloody hair, he was as well as ever. The bruised shoulder was unheeded. A lusterless snowflake dropped weakly at the man's feet. He stepped on it as he picked up the knife and clambered over the snow and logs to the carrier.

Black Jack looked at Sullivan, and Sullivan looked at Black Jack. Sullivan's lips were without motion, but in his eyes was the look of a paw-fast grizzly. The desperado seated himself on a broken spruce branch not six feet from Sullivan, rested his hands on his knees, and thought. He stared at the carrier. Here was a man whom two hours before he had tried to kill; who in turn stood ready to kill him; who had even started him at the muzzle of his six-shooter on that short, sure road to living death—the penitentiary for life. Leave him there—why not? No crime: he had not put him there. What if it were a crime? Who would know? And what if they did? In the spring—perhaps not for years—they would find the skeleton, and fleshless jaws say little. Dig him out—then what? Was it not to set free a messenger sure to start all the machinery of the law to land the rescuer in a cage—a cage where nothing could come but insanity and death? Had he not escaped entirely by his own efforts? The watch! But the other's hands had been—still were—too cold to use it, so it could have done him no good. Black Jack thought these things, seated on the log-end in the snowslide that frigid February

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