

CHAPTER II

A SADDLE-COLORED horse, dust streaked and weary, topped the long rise of the Poison Spider Divide and, willing enough to obey the slight tug at bridle, shambled to a halt on the crest. The rider, a shrunken figure in overall blue under a flapping black hat, straightened a bit in his seat and looked down on the town of Two Moons in the hill pocket. Always in the Big Country there is this pleasurable prick of surprise when the last billowing divide of an interminable succession falls below horse's hoofs to reveal destination. After thirty miles of desolation — ranked buttes like organ pipes shooting into the blue; bald mesas; leprous waves of alkali hills — first sight of town crashes on the dulled senses like smitten iron.

Shabby, both horse and rider. No pride of the sleek-limbed cutting horse, aristocrat of the cow outfit's *remuda*, showed in the beast's slack neck and limp ears; in his dull eye no spark of deviltry awaiting opportunity to flare