

NEUTRIA

was the childishness of this display. But because it was Chappo and I could feel from his legs that all was not right with him, I meekly ascended the steps and walked into the bar, taking heed where I placed my feet. A crowd of loafers cheered me and filled a large bowl, that I might drink, but Chappo would have none of this.

He sang much on the road back to camp. It was dark as a panther's lair. Chappo would hum and drone a few lines, then relapse into abrupt silences. I kept every sense alert, for his safety depended on me. Once, when he sagged in the saddle, I stopped until he got settled again. After that he rode with firmer seat, but his good humor seemed to have vanished. We reached a point where a cow trail, a mere thread so faint that it was barely discernible, led off from the main trail.

"Here, you," Chappo said, jerking me about, "who's running this show? Hey? Doggone your fat haid. This is a eut-off."