

For the fraction of a minute, while understanding came home, not a man stirred. Then of a sudden Parker turned swiftly and started back into the night.

"By the Eternal," he corroborated, "I believe you're right. We can't get there a second too quick."

"Too quick!" caught up the Irishman for the last time. "We couldn't get there quick enough if we had wings. It's all over before this, take my word for it."

And it was. Though the men ran every step of the mile back they were too late. As O'Reilly had anticipated, the ranch house was empty, deserted. Similarly the stables hard by. Likewise the adjoining tool shed. Though they searched every nook, until a mouse could not have escaped detection, they found not a trace of him for whom they looked, nor a clue to his disappearance. Though they shouted his name until they were hoarse not an answer came back from the surrounding darkness. Within the ranch house itself, or upon the dooryard without, there was no sign of a struggle or of aught unusual. The living-room was precisely as it had been at that last moment when O'Reilly had left. Craig's cap and topcoat were on a chair as he had thrown them down. At the stable every horse was within its own stall: every piece of saddlery was intact. While the three men were looking, attracted by the blaze, the distant cowboys one by one began