

BLIZZARD

By Ernest Haycox

ILLUSTRATED BY GEOFFREY BIGGS

Two wayfarers who found in each other refuge from the storm

THERE was no sun and no wind, but it was the kind of morning that bit into a man's bones, with a steel-colored haze lying in the south and an extreme silence covering the land. When Bill Post knocked the ice from the water bucket and washpan this sound rattled all around the Circle Dot yard; the air, he thought, was pretty thin. It was a comfort to enter the kitchen's warm smell of coffee and flapjack batter and frying bacon and sit against the table lamp's yellow light. Yet even inside the house that pervading thinness and silence was noticeable.

"Storm coming up," he said.

There were four here—Post, the cook, and two winter riders. Post said to his riders: "Still a small jag of beef in the timber. Better go up and get it out of there before snow hits."

The telephone sounded two long and two short rings for Bryce Blackerbee's ranch at Towson Crossing. This was pretty early for the phone; usually the operator in Custer didn't go on until eight. A little while later the three long bells for Dentler's store, at the edge of the badlands, grated through the house.

It kept up like this: Somebody called the Arrowhead ranch; then it was Belding's. The signals were all familiar to him and he would have listened in had he been curious, as was customary for people to do; but he knew the meaning of most of these calls. The promise of bad weather had gotten everybody busy, for a heavy storm would send down the lines by night and snow in the whole country. In a little while he heard his own ring; Bois McLean's voice alternately scratched and blasted and whispered its way across twenty-five miles of desert.

"Bill, you smell snow?"

"Sure," said Post. "I'm just startin' out to ride the drift fence."

"All right. Tom Nelson's covering it from my side. Didn't see you at the dance last night. Hell of a swell time. I guess everybody's home now. Should be, anyway, with this breeze coming along. You seen Ray Kennedy? He's supposed to be on his way here."

There were listeners on the line and now Pack Duster, at Topance Lake, broke in: "He passed here half an hour ago, Bois, packin' a headache big enough for a horse."

"And probably still thirsty," said Bois McLean. "I'll call Blackerbee's and head him off. Nobody's got any business crossin' the desert today."

Bill Post hung up at once, hearing the phone ring for Diamond-and-a-Half; everybody was trying to get everybody else and the operator at Custer wouldn't have much luck leaving the switchboard for breakfast. Post put on a long pair of wool socks, stored another pair in his pocket in case of wet feet and struggled

into his sheepskin. Against possible weather he took his full-length blue army overcoat, chucked his hands into fleece gauntlets and crossed the yard to saddle a horse. Southward the loose steel coloring was more distinct and the air here was as thin as he had ever felt it to be. He cinched up the saddle and warmed the metal bit in his gloves a moment before slipping on the bridle.

"A little stick of candy, my friend," he murmured to the horse. "Come on now, sweetheart, open up those liver lips, or I'll bat down your ears."

The horse had a knot in its back and as soon as Post hit the saddle it proceeded to unravel the knot, head down and pitching over the frozen ground with a heavy grunt at each jump, the exhalations of its breathing lying like steam in the air. It was a way of getting warm for horse and rider. Post let it finish out the pitching and left the yard at a run. But he soon pulled around and returned to the house, going in to get his gun. He hadn't worn it for months and it was more or less a matter of instinct that made him take it now.

FORTY miles eastward the Kettle Hills stood in low outline; behind Post, in the west, were the ragged heights of the Silver Lode. Between these two mountain chains lay the trough of the desert and up this trough the storm now made its way. A quarter-hour from the house, trotting straight over the flats, Post realized the storm would hit him broadside before he finished riding the drift fence. There was a change in the air; it was a variation of temperature that registered on his skin; it was a slow haze dropping out of the sky. This was morning, but southward the sky slowly filled with a blurring shadow.

The drift fence was a small dark line in the north, running straight over the desert to keep cattle from traveling toward the northern end of the desert. In time of blizzard it was a trap. Cattle, drifting with the wind, reached it and piled against it and died there. Out in the middle reaches of the desert hulked the low shadow of Hub Weston's deserted log hut and lean-to. Bill Post aimed at it and at the scatter of beef south of it. Far over on the Kettle Hills side he thought he saw a rider's shape, but could not be sure; elsewhere—and he scanned the desert carefully to be certain of this—there were no travelers.

When he came up to the cattle he saw they were uneasy; they were winding around, heads southward, and they

(Continued on page 32)

For a moment the wind broke, giving him a view of a horse and rider. He yelled and fired the gun





Carol took the play right out of my hands. She said, "Is George in yonder, Sheriff?"

Buck Warren's Son

By Octavus Roy Cohen

ILLUSTRATED BY L. R. GUSTAVSON

SOONER or later, if you were stopping over in Karnak, someone would point out young George and say, "Yonder goes Buck Warren's son. Can you imagine that?"

Well, if you were at all familiar with Karnak, you'd take a good long look and shake your head and say that you could not imagine that. And then you'd most likely say, "I reckon it's a good thing Buck Warren is dead. He'd sho' be unhappy thinkin' he begat something like that."

Folks talk thataway, 'specially in a sleepy little Southern town where there ain't a whole lot of things to talk about anyway. They say whatever pops into their heads, and they say it in the cruellest way, without ever stopping to think that they maybe ain't being fair.

The trouble is that when you hear the name Warren in Karnak you always think of Buck. Sort of like thunder and lightning. He was that kind of a man, Buck was: the most handsome feller that was ever born and raised in Karnak County—and the most powerful. Handsome, too, with clear gray eyes and hair that was gray at the sides. His family was pretty good—no aristocracy or any-

thing like that—but still something to be proud of. And he never had any enemies. It wasn't exactly healthy to be Buck Warren's enemy.

He owned Big Cypress plantation, made good money farming it, played around with politics, which he pretty well controlled, and had his finger in almost every pie in Karnak. Nobody knew for sure just how rich he was, and nobody cared a lot. But he had enough, with plenty left over. I reckon he had everything a man could ask of life, except the right son. Not that there was anything wrong with young George. It was just that you couldn't think of him as being of Buck Warren's stock.

They were his friends. He knew they'd never sign his death sentence. So he signed it himself

But then you'd think that way only if you were making snap judgment. Me, I claim a boy has got a perfect right to be like his mother, which is what George was. Of course, nobody ever figured out why Buck married Ellen Mabry in the first place: she was so tiny and pretty and gentle, but he did marry her, and they do say he was crazy about her, and the place where she is buried out Pineville way has got the biggest and most expensive stone on it of any grave in the county. And after that stone was put up, why, Buck never married again, though Lord knows there was plenty of handsome girls in the county that would have given their right eye to get him.

But, no, sir, Buck just went his way: controlling everything that was worth controlling, and watching his one child—this George—sprout up to be like his mother.

I reckon I know young George better than anybody else in Karnak. And I know this much about him: That if he had been the son of anybody except Buck Warren, folks would have liked him a lot, and never would have said anything about him that wasn't nice. But somehow you expect the child of a skyrocket to be a skyrocket, too . . . and there sure wasn't nothing like that about George. The best you could say about him was that he was pleasant and harmless and friendly.

AFTER Buck died, George went right on living at Big Cypress and doing a pretty good job running things, but by and large, nobody paid him a lot of mind. He wasn't the kind you'd notice: slim and younger looking than his twenty-two years, with soft brown hair and blue eyes as gentle as his mother used to have, and a real quiet way of speaking. He could ride all right, and

(Continued on page 41)