

**Ernest Haycox**



*Blizzard  
Camp*

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ON the third day of his confinement in the old line-riders' hut, Tom Darrah looked at the sky and decided reluctantly to chance a run for Arrowhead. The driving Easter had stopped sometime during the night and the ensuing calm was profound and brittle—not the calm following a blown-out blizzard but rather that sort of a sullen recess auguring worse to come. There was no feel in the air of the bland chinook which erases and melts the effects of the harsher winds; there was, in fact, nothing to indicate change. Two feet of dry, packed snow lay along the ridge and trimmed the pine boughs. A slate-gray sky pressed its ceiling down within a hundred yards of the ground. The footing, he knew, would be bad and the travel slow. Nevertheless, Tom Darrah decided to make the try. So he saddled, tied his tarp roll to the cantle thongs and started out. Crossing three lesser ridges, he fell into the flats of the Arrowhead and was around five miles from the cabin when the worst of his fears were realized. The snow began falling again, softly bellying down. A clap of wind rushed into the vacuum of stillness. Inside of half an hour the full tempest was upon him, howling like a thousand mongrel packs.

Arrowhead was east and out of that east rose a rushing, screaming element he could not fight. There came a time when his horse, stout and willing, was able only to march in its former tracks; as for Tom Darrah, he could not face the knives of that hurling blast. For man and beast Arrowhead became an impossibility. Turning to northward, Darrah tried

a tangential advance. In that direction, about three miles, an abandoned mining camp, Sumpter Gulch, butted against the hills and furnished the shelter he had to have rather soon.

"An hour of this," he said casually to himself, "is about the outside limit. Sumpter Gulch better be where I think it is."

It was a canny remark, for he had fought blizzards long enough to realize how greatly they increased the probabilities of error. All the landmarks were gone. Sky and horizon ceased to be. It was a world suffocated and drowned out; and there actually seemed to be no free space. The snow didn't strike the earth but ran parallel to it in ever-thickening substance, and all this while the cataclysmic wind beat the pony on its flank and drove it off the true course. Great solid clouds were ripped up by that wind and rolled against Darrah, tipping him in the saddle, smothering him. The grayness of the morning deepened, the rumble and whine and clapped-out reports increased. Now and then Darrah essayed to correct his course—deliberately setting himself little sums in arithmetic to think out, asking himself simple questions. Storms like this one did things to a man, warped the mind and dulled it; in some respects it was like the heat craze. Meanwhile he felt the inward creep of the cold. Heavy as was his buffalo coat and his ear-lapped cap, a slow paralysis struck his extremities and worked back. The bandanna raised over his mouth was quite stiff. Fringes of ice drooped from his brows and lashes. Lids three quarters closed, he had only a narrow vision of a world revolving like a wheel.