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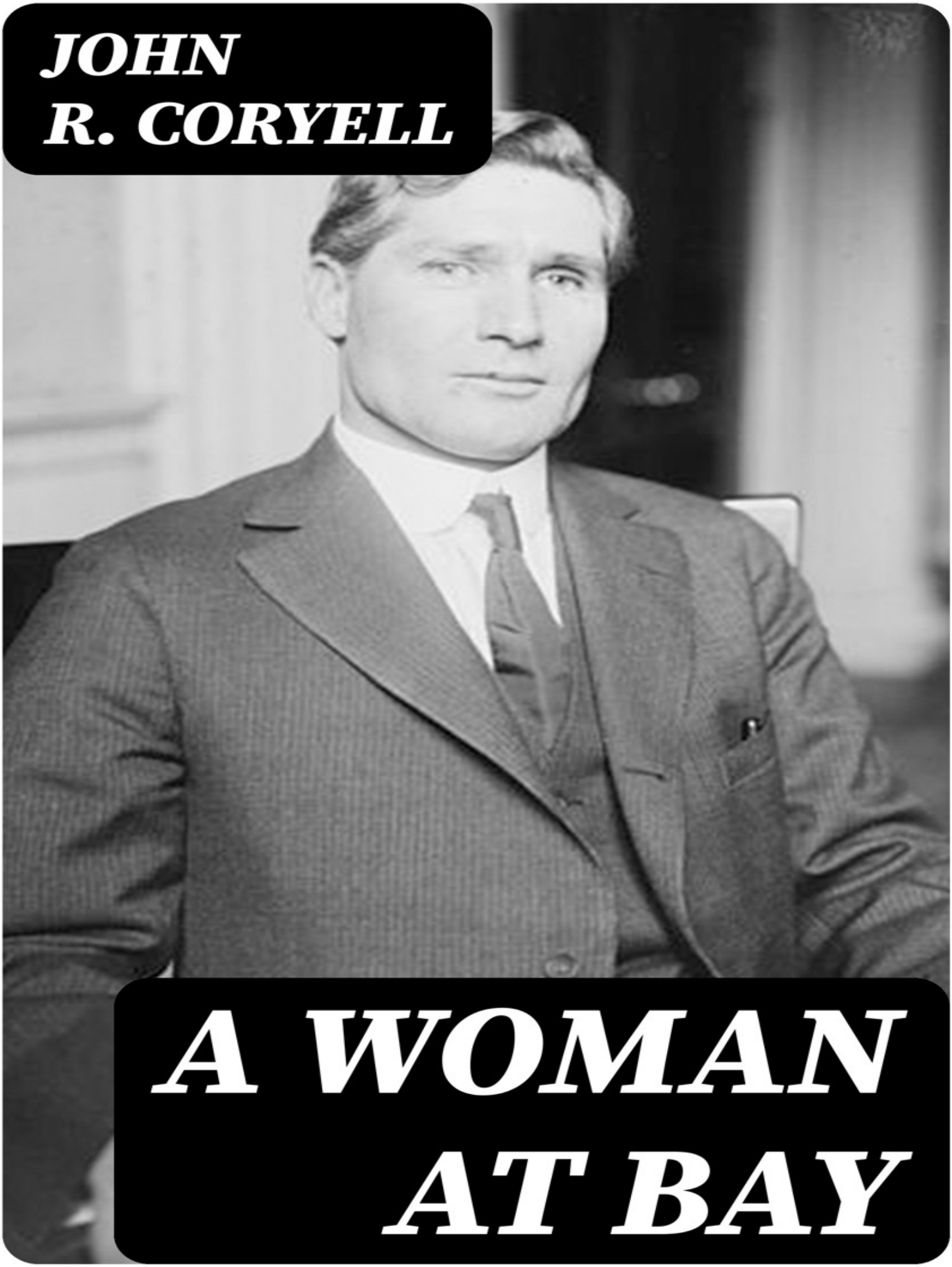

A WOMAN AT BAY

John R. Coryell

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Chapter I.

The King of the Yeggmen

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Four men were seated around a camp fire made of old railroad ties, over which a kettle was boiling merrily, where it hung from an improvised crane above the blaze.

Around, on the ground, were scattered a various assortment of tin cans, some of which had been hammered more or less straight to serve for plates, and it was evident from the general appearance of things around the camp that a meal had just been disposed of, and that the four men who had consumed it were now determined to make themselves as comfortable as possible. The kettle that boiled over the fire contained nothing but water—water with which one of the four men had jocularly said he intended to bathe.

These four men were about as rough-looking specimens of humanity as can be imagined. Not one of them had been shaved in so long a time that their faces were covered with a hairy growth which suggested full beards; indeed, their faces looked as if the only shaving they had ever received, or rather the nearest approach to a shave, had been done by a pair of scissors, cropping the hair as closely as possible.

The camp they had made was located just inside the edge of a wood through which a railway had been built, and it was down in a hollow beside a brook, so that the light of their fire was effectually screened from view, save that the glow of it shone fitfully upon the drooping leaves over their heads.

The four men were tramps—hoboes, or yeggmen, of the most pronounced types, if their appearance went for anything at all.

Their conversation was couched entirely in the slang of their order; a talk that is almost unintelligible to outsiders.

But, strangely enough, the four men were not hoboes at all; neither were they yeggmen; and the lingo they talked so glibly among themselves, although perfect in its enunciation, and in the words that were used, was entirely assumed.

For those four men were Nick Carter, the New York detective, and his three assistants, Chick, Patsy, and Ten-Ichi, a Japanese.

The president of the E. & S. W. R. R. Co. had sent for Nick Carter a week before this particular evening, and as soon as he and the detective were alone together in the president's private room, he had opened the conversation abruptly with this question:

"Carter, have you ever happened to hear of a character known as Hobo Harry, the Hobo King?"

"I have," replied the detective. "I have heard about him in a vague sort of way. I have no particular information about him, if that is what you mean."

"No; I merely wished to know if you were aware that there is such a character."

"Yes. I have heard of the fellow."

"Do you know what he is?"

"A yeggman, isn't he?"

"He is the king of all the yeggmen. He is the master mind, the controlling spirit of all the outlawry and lawlessness that goes on from one end of our big railroad system to the other. Hobo Harry costs us, in round numbers, anywhere from three to ten thousand dollars a month."

“Really?” asked the detective, smiling.

“Yes—really. This is no joke. There isn’t a bit of thievery, however petty it may be, or a scheme of robbery, however grand and great, which they do not turn their hands to under the guidance of Hobo Harry—and we have about got to the end of our patience.”

“I suppose,” said Nick, “that all this means that you want me to find Hobo Harry for you. Is that the idea?”

“That is precisely the idea. Do you suppose you can do it?”

“I can, at least, make the effort.”

“I should tell you one thing before you become too sanguine.”

“Well, what is it?”

“Hobo Harry is largely a mystery. There are those—detectives, I mean—who insist that he does not exist at all, save in imagination.”

Nick nodded.

“They say that he is only a figurehead; that he is only a name; that he is in reality an imperceptible, intangible idol, whom hoboes worship, and to whom they refer as their common leader, while, in reality, there is no real leader at all.”

“It is possible that they are correct in that idea,” said the detective slowly.

“It is possible, but it is not likely. There is too much system about their operations. I am at the head of a great system, and I know how such things are done. I am confident that the operations of these thieves—these yeggmen—could not have been carried on so successfully, and so systematically, without a head—a chief; and so I, for one, believe thoroughly in the existence of Hobo Harry.”

“Well?” asked the detective. “What does all this lead to?”

“I am coming to that. I have had every railroad detective in my employ searching for Hobo Harry for months—I might say for almost a year, and without success. I have employed two of the largest and best—so called—detective agencies in the country to assist me. The result has in every case been the same.”

“What were the results?”

“There have been any number of hoboes and yeggmen arrested; many of them have been sent to prison; some of them have gone up for long terms; we have proved the cases of robberies against them often enough—but the point is, that the robberies have gone merrily on afterward, just the same.”

“Go on,” said the detective, nodding his head.

“Eight separate times we have had, as we supposed, Hobo Harry himself in our clutches. Each of those eight separate times the prisoner who was supposed to be Hobo Harry has confessed that he was that individual, and——”

“And so you have arrested eight Hobo Harrys, eh?”

“That is about the size of it. But the point is——”

“The point is that not one of the eight was really Hobo Harry.”

“Exactly.”

“Very good. Go ahead with your story.”

“In each case, after the arrest, as we supposed, of Hobo Harry himself, the robberies and thefts along the line have received an impetus; they have increased in number, and in volume—and also in seriousness. These yeggmen do not confine themselves to breaking into freight cars and stations along the line of the road. They burglarize post offices, and even country banks. They pillage houses. They turn their hands and their talents to anything and everything where

there is hope of reward for them. The thing has got beyond endurance."

"Well?"

"We want you, Carter, to find Hobo Harry himself—if you can."

"Well?"

"The matter was discussed thoroughly at a meeting of our board of directors yesterday, and it was determined at that meeting that if you could find Hobo Harry and arrest him, and, having arrested him, could convict him and send him to prison, and, having done that, could prove to our entire satisfaction that the man is Hobo Harry, your reward will be fifty thousand dollars, spot cash. Only, you must understand, we must be certain that your man is the real article."

"Hobo Harry, the King of the Beggars, eh?"

"Yes. Beggars, you know, is supposed to be the name of their organization."

The detective nodded.

"Will you take the case, Carter?"

"I suppose so—if there isn't a time limit set upon it."

"You may take your own time; that is, of course, if it is not too long."

"It will require some time to do the thing thoroughly."

"I suppose so. Well, have it your own way; only succeed. That is all the railroad people desire—success."

"I will get your man; only I won't promise to do it in a day, or a week, or a month. I won't set a time."

"All right. You shall be your own master in the case."

"I will have to be that—absolutely. After I leave this office, when my interview with you is finished, you will not see me again until I have got Hobo Harry in my clutches. You will

not communicate with me, or attempt to do so, and I will not communicate with you."

"That is a little hard, isn't it, Carter? We would like to know, from time to time, how you are getting on, and what you are doing."

"That is precisely what you will not do."

"All right. Have it your own way. But what about the other men that are now on the case, Carter?"

"Leave them on it. Add more of them. Appear to increase your vigilance in other quarters. If there are fifty detectives on the case now, add fifty more if you wish. I would prefer that you should do so rather than not. The more the better."

"But suppose that one of them should nab the real Hobo Harry while you are seeking him. You would lose the reward."

"I will take my chances about that. The point is that I must work absolutely independent of all others who are on the case, and that nobody outside of yourself and the board of directors of your company must know that my services have been called into the matter. Will you agree to that?"

"Certainly."

"Increase your vigilance on every side, if you can. If you do so, you will assist me."

"I suppose," said the president slowly, "that it is your plan to become a yeggman yourself, in pursuing this case."

"It does not matter how I may accomplish it, does it?"

"No; I was merely going to say that that very thing has been tried four separate times; once with more or less success. But I ought to warn you that two of the four who attempted it lost their lives; a third is a cripple for life, minus a leg; and only the fourth, who ended by arresting the wrong man, after all, had any degree of success. And now he is frightened almost into imbecility, for his life has been

sworn away by the yeggmen, and he expects to be murdered every time he goes out alone."

"All the same," said the detective, "that will not deter me."

"You will want money for your expenses, Carter. If you will tell me how much——"

"I will present my bill of expenses along with my demand for the fifty thousand dollars reward," the detective interrupted quietly.

By more closely questioning the president of the railroad, Nick learned that the depredations and robberies committed by Hobo Harry's gang had been remarkable in their extent and thoroughness; and that every effort to break up the gang had been in vain.

Whenever one of the yeggmen was arrested and sent to prison, two new ones, even more proficient in their thievery, seemed ready to spring up in his place; and so the thing had gone on and on until the people who had been robbed so often became desperate.

And then it was determined to call Nick Carter into the case.

Of Hobo Harry himself, nothing whatever was known beyond the fact that there was such a character, and that he was the head and front of the hobo gang—their chief, to whom absolute and implicit obedience was accorded. His power over them seemed absolute.

Whether it was because of fear of him, or for love of him, it was, nevertheless, true that not one of the fraternity of hoboes who had been arrested could be prevailed upon to betray the master. Neither threats nor offers of bribery had any effect upon them.

Hobo Harry remained as entirely in the dark as ever; and even in the cases of the eight men to whom the president of

the railroad had referred as having confessed that each of them was Hobo Harry himself—they had each seemed to get a queer sort of enjoyment in posing, even for a time, as their dreaded chief.

As the president explained to Nick, there were many among the detectives who had been detailed upon the case who insisted that there was no such person as Hobo Harry. It was their belief that the name was merely a fictitious one, to which the hoboes, one and all, had agreed to give obedience.

But the president of the railroad did not believe this; neither did the detective. The completeness of the organization of the gang was a sufficient negative to such a statement. To have a perfect organization there must be a chief; a head; a ruling power.

By investigating the case a little further before actually starting out upon it, Nick discovered that the yeggmen had carried their depredations even into whole villages. In one town—Calamont—the place had been literally gutted in a single night.

The yeggmen had descended upon it in such numbers that the inhabitants were terrified, and could only protect themselves by barricading their doors, and remaining with their guns and other weapons in their hands, while they watched the looting of their bank and post office. And there had been other occasions as bad as that one.

Sometimes the yeggmen traveled in small groups; sometimes they worked in twos or threes, but often they went about in large bands which had been known to include as many as fifty or even more.

Had the outrages been confined to one community the inhabitants would have risen in their might and, by organizing vigilance committees, could have driven them

out—possibly. But they were not confined to communities at all; they extended all along the line of the railroad, and the descent of the robbers seemed always to have been arranged far ahead—and perfectly planned by a master mind at that.

These descents always happened when it was known that there were large sums of money, either in the banks that were robbed, or when the post offices that were broken open were better provided than usual with cash.

At every place where there was a siding along the line of the railroad, freight cars had been broken open, and denuded of their contents; and this often happened when there was one or more night watchmen on hand for the purpose of preventing that very thing.

But in each case the watchman had been overpowered, and either beaten into insensibility or maimed—and in at least one instance—killed.

And hence it was that the railroad company was willing to pay well for the apprehension of the chief of these marauders.

All of this information Nick Carter gleaned before he formed any definite plans for his campaign.

Roughly speaking, there was a stretch of main line of the railroad over which, or rather along which, the yeggmen seemed to be most active. This principal thoroughfare for their nefarious trade was approximately five hundred miles long; and it was here where the greatest and the most persistent outrages were committed.

There were branches of the line, too, along which they worked; but off the main line the organization seemed to lose some of its power for concentration of force.

After Nick had pieced together all the information that could be gleaned without being actually at the scene of the

trouble, he called his three assistants together in consultation with him. For he had determined to make use of all of them in this case. Indeed, that was the only method by which he believed that he could entirely succeed at it.

To them he related the circumstance of his connection with the case, after which he told them all he had been able to learn about it; and in conclusion he said:

“Now, lads, there is only one way by which we can hope to succeed in this undertaking, and that is, we must become hoboes ourselves.”

The three nodded almost in unison.

“If we decide to do that,” continued the detective, “we must do it thoroughly. We must do as General Grant did when he decided, against the wishes of his generals, to invest Vicksburg—be cut off from his base of supplies; and that is what we must do.”

“I don’t think I understand exactly what you mean,” said Patsy, who was paying close attention; for Patsy liked the plan inconceivably.

“I mean,” replied Nick, “that when we start out to become hoboes, we must become so in fact, and not in appearance merely. It is easy enough for any one of us to make ourself up as a tramp, or a hobo, or even a yeggman, and to play the part; but in this case we must do more than that: We must be the part.”

“But that ‘base of supplies’ business—what do you mean by that?” insisted Patsy.

“I mean that when we start out on this case, there will be no returning here until we have lodged Hobo Harry behind the bars. We are going to live as hoboes, and do as hoboes do, carrying out a real robbery or so, on our own hooks, taking care, of course, that one or more of the real article shall know about it.”

“And taking care also,” interjected Chick, “that we keep track of what we steal, so that it, or its value, may be returned to the owners later on.”

“Of course, Chick; that goes without saying. Now, there is another thing.”

“What is that?”

“At the present time there are no less than fifty detectives, some from Pinkerton’s, and some from other places, engaged upon this case. If we play our parts as we should play them, we are bound to run into some of those chaps sooner or later. If we do that——”

“Well?” asked Patsy.

“We must continue to play our cards to the end, no matter what happens—even to the extent of being arrested, and possibly tried for the offenses that have been committed. If one of us should get caught, he must play his part even then, for the protection of the others who are still on their jobs; for if that one should confess himself a detective, the usefulness of the others would be past.”

“That is clear enough,” said Ten-Ichi.

“It sure is,” said Patsy. “It isn’t very pleasant, either. Although it will be some fun to work on the opposite side of the fence for once.”

“How do you mean?” asked Ten-Ichi.

“Why, we are always chasing down criminals, aren’t we? Now we will have some fun in letting others chase us while we play the criminal. Say, chief?”

“Well?”

“We will have a chance to learn a little about that other side of the fence. We will discover how it feels to be chased, instead of doing the chasing.”

“Yes,” said the detective; and Patsy turned then to Ten-Ichi.

“I’ll make you a bet,” he said. “I’ll bet you anything you like, on the basis of two to one, that I don’t get nabbed while we are on this lay.”

“That’s a go,” smiled Ten-Ichi, “for I think you will be the very first one to go under.”

“How much do you want to bet?”

“Never mind the betting part of it, lads,” Nick interrupted them. “The point is, that each of you is to do his utmost to carry out his part to the end, no matter what happens. Now, if you please, all step this way. I have a map here that I wish to show you.”

He spread the map upon the table, and upon it he showed them the five hundred miles of railway along which they were to work; and presently he put his finger upon the name of a town along the line, and he said:

“Here is a place called Calamont. It is, roughly speaking, two hundred and fifty miles from New York. Some time ago Calamont suffered greatly by the descent of the hoboes upon it. It has not quite recovered from the effects of that time yet, although several months have elapsed since the occurrence. Do you see it, all of you?”

They admitted that they did.

“Right here,” he continued, drawing his pencil with which he was pointing a little to the eastward, “is a patch of woods through which the railway runs. There are about twenty acres of woodland there, and the road passes through the centre of it.”

They nodded, and he went on:

“To the south of the railroad, through the woods, is a swamp. It is almost an impassable swamp, I am told. I will have more to say about that part of it presently. Understand, do you?”

They did understand.

“To the north of the tracks, through the woodland and beyond it, the country is hilly and almost mountainous. There is a limestone formation there. There are deep ravines and gulches, high cliffs and precipices, and, although I stated in the first place that there is only about twenty acres in the woodland, I meant to say in that particular patch of woods to which I first drew your attention.”

“Yes,” said Chick.

“As a matter of fact, the country all around this region is wild and unsettled. It is much too rough to settle, and there are woods and forests everywhere. Just beyond these woods, to the northward, the forest is almost unbroken for several miles, save that there is a narrow clearing to separate this particular bit of woods from those beyond it.”

“Well?” asked Chick, who was paying close attention.

“To the south of the tracks it is almost the same, save that the country is flat and low. As a matter of fact, the railroad passes across the spur which lies between the rough country to the north and the flat, swampy country to the south.

“I have not been able to gain any very exact information about those swamps, but from the best opinions I can get, I should assume that it is a sort of another Dismal Swamp down there. Men and cattle, horses and sheep have been known to wander in there, and never return. Presumably they were lost in the swamps or——”

“Or else eaten up by the yeggmen,” suggested Patsy.

“Precisely. But it is a wild country. Now”—he rested one finger upon the map—“right here at the point where my finger rests, two weeks from to-morrow, at or near the hour of darkness, I will meet each of you. You will find me just north of the track; or, if any of you get there before I do, you will wait there for me, and for the others. Whoever arrives

first must build a fire. We part to-night, here, now. You must each leave the house separately, and become lost to the world—you must each become a hobo in the meantime, in your own particular way. Fix yourselves up as you please, and go where you please—only go separately. And keep your appointment for two weeks from to-morrow. That’s all.”

Chapter II.

The Yeggmen’s Camp Fire

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Each of the detective’s three assistants understood thoroughly that Nick Carter’s reason for directing them to do as he did was that they might each have learned the parts they had to play thoroughly by the time the actual work of it should begin.

And not only that, they would have had two weeks during which to wear off the newness of habit and apparel; and by the time they arrived at the place of meeting, each would have become sufficiently schooled in his part to play it quite naturally.

And there was still another reason which Nick hoped they would take advantage of, although he said nothing about it: That was that they would make acquaintances among such of the ilk as they happened to meet. Such acquaintances might be of value later in the game.

When Chick left the house, about two hours after the interview with Nick, he had his traveling bag in his hand, and he went direct to the railway station, where he took a train for the West—for a city far beyond the line of the road upon which Nick Carter’s campaign was to be worked out. It was his intention to start from there.

Ten-Ichi took his departure a little sooner than Chick, and he was dressed as usual, also. Outside the house, on the curb, he stopped for a few moments, and appeared to be thinking; and then he started down the street on foot, and disappeared.

Patsy was the last to go, except the chief himself, who was smilingly watching these departures from an upper

window of the house. He had said no more than he did to them purposely, for he was curious to see how each would go about it. He knew that each one of his assistants was entirely proficient in his way, but he also knew that each had a way of his own for doing things.

When Patsy left the house he also hesitated in front of it for a moment; and then he walked rapidly away up the street, and disappeared.

And that was all that Nick cared to see; he wished to feel assured that each had departed on his own hook, and that it was their intention to work singly. He had left the map for them to study in the library after he left them alone together, and he had no doubt that each would be fully competent to find the place of appointment when the time should come.

He was the last to leave the house, of course. There were many directions to give before he finally took his departure. Joseph had to know how to account for his absence from home to those who might inquire too particularly about him; and the absence of the three assistants had to be accounted for also.

Having arranged that, and provided himself with everything which he regarded as needful, he selected one of his own disguises—one that he was fond of, and which will appear more particularly later on, and with that in a small satchel which he expected ultimately to rid himself of, he went out, and away also.

And from that moment we will skip to the time of the opening paragraphs of this story, which was two weeks and one day later—to the time when we behold the camp fire made of railway ties, with the four hoboes grouped around it, having enjoyed their evening meal and now ready to

smoke and rest; for if there is anything in the world which a hobo really enjoys, it is rest.

It was only a little bit after dark—and the night was not a dark one at that. Already the moon was shining down upon the world.

But around the immediate vicinity of the camp fire it seemed quite dark by contrast, and the light thrown back by the trunks of the trees rendered the scene a picturesque one.

Nick Carter had purposely been the last one to arrive at the trysting place, if such it may be termed; but he had been a close observer of the arrival of the others, nevertheless; and he accomplished that by arriving in the vicinity early in the day, and by later climbing among the boughs of one of the trees, from which perch he was enabled to watch the coming of his assistants.

Patsy came first. His eagerness led him to do that, and Nick had expected it; and as the detective watched his youngest assistant he was pleased to see the manner in which he made his approach.

Had Nick Carter, concealed in the boughs of the tree, been an enemy, instead of a friend, he could not have had one suspicion aroused by Patsy’s manner.

The young fellow was most disreputable in appearance. His hair, and it was his own, too, he had managed to dye to brick-red hue. His face and his hands were grimy, and there was a considerable growth of beard upon the former. He wore good shoes—just out of a store, they appeared to be, and he carried a string of three other pairs, equally new, in one hand. His coat was much too large for him, and he had turned the sleeves back at the wrists for convenience. His hat had once been a Stetson; it had also quite evidently been a target for a shotgun.

When Nick first spied him he was walking along the track, whistling; but directly opposite the place of meeting he stopped, and, after a moment, he dived quickly over the fence into the woods, and approached with care the place which he finally selected for the fire.

And there he scraped some dried boughs together, made his fire, brought an old tie from the track to aid it, arranged his crane of green sticks, and, from a bundle that he carried slung upon one shoulder, he produced the kettle, a package of meat, some bread, and other articles, with which he began the preparation of his supper.

A little later a second figure appeared so suddenly out of the gathering gloom that neither Patsy, at the fire, nor Nick, in the tree, had any idea of its near approach.

“Hello, pal!” he said gruffly; and Patsy wheeled like lightning, with a gun already half drawn, to face him.

“Hello yourself!” he growled, not too cordially, and eying the newcomer suspiciously. “Who are you lookin’ for?”

The other came slowly forward without deigning to reply to this direct question, and without so much as glancing again at Patsy; but he slung his own bundle on the ground, and, after a moment, stalked away in the gathering darkness again.

Presently he returned with another tie, which he dropped near the fire; and then he looked sullenly toward Patsy.

“Share up, or chuck it alone?” he demanded, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets.

“What you got?”

“As much as you have, and as good as you have.”

“All right. I’m agreeable. Chuck it down.”

Half an hour later, when it was almost dark, a third one appeared.

He was shorter and slimmer than the others, and the best dressed one of the three, although he was disreputable enough in all conscience.

He came noisily over the fence from the track, and the two at the fire could hear him long before he reached them. But they made no move. Anybody who approached them with as much noise as that was not to be dreaded, it appeared.

When he arrived within the circle of the firelight, he stopped and strangely enough began to laugh; and he laughed on, boisterously, amazingly, in fact; he laughed until there were tears in his eyes, and until he had to hold to a sapling near him for support.

“Aw, what’s eatin’ you?” called out one of the men from the fire. “What you see that’s so funny; must be in your own globes. Come along inside if you wants to, and don’t stand there awakin’ up the dead.”

“I ain’t got any chuck of my own,” he called back to them. “I was laughing to think how near I came to getting it—and didn’t.”

“Well, there’s enough here for three—‘r four, for that matter. Come in and set down, pal.”

And it was not until the meal was cooked, and spread out upon all sorts of improvised arrangements, that the fourth member of the party appeared—and he made his arrival in a most surprising manner.

He dropped literally among them, seemingly from the clouds—or the tree—just as they were beginning to eat; and he squatted beside them, and, reaching out without a word, helped himself to a hunk of the toasted meat, which he began to tear viciously with his teeth.

“Nice guy, ain’t he?” said Patsy, leering at the one with whom he had agreed to share.

“Looks as if he might have come over in the steerage of a cattle ship, inside a rawhide, don’t he?” assented the other, who was Chick. But neither Chick nor Patsy was at all assured that this new arrival was their chief, and they determined to play their parts to the end, or, at least, until they were absolutely certain.

In reality Nick Carter looked like a Sicilian bandit in hard luck. He certainly looked the Italian part of it, all right; but even among his rags there was some display of color, which an Italian is never happy without.

When the other referred to him in this slighting way, he raised his eyes sullenly toward them, and he also released his hold upon the food he was eating long enough to finger the hilt of his knife suggestively; for Nick was aware of the fact that not one of the three was sure of his identity, and he preferred not to make himself known just yet.

“Me understands da Inglis you spik,” he muttered, in a sort of growl. “Better hava da care wota you say dees times. I hava da bunch uh banan in da tree ifa you want more chuck. Go getta it—you!”

He drew his knife quickly and leveled the point of it at the one whom the others had already christened ‘Laughing Willie’; but Ten-Ichi, nothing daunted by the implied threat, only shrugged his shoulders, and went on eating.

“Go getta da banan, or I slice you up fora de chuck,” repeated the supposed Italian, rising slowly from his seat by the fire and advancing toward Ten-Ichi; but he had not taken a step before he found himself looking into the muzzle of a pistol, and Patsy, in his capacity as host over the meal, said sourly:

“Sit ye down, dago, or I’ll make a window of your liver. We’re three friends enjoying a feast, and you’re welcome to

part of it if you want it, but if you make any more breaks, out you go—feet first, if you prefer it that way.”

The Italian subsided with a grunt, and the meal continued undisturbed until all but Ten-Ichi, who appeared to have been really very hungry, had drawn back from the fire; and then it was that Chick made the remark about his hurrying that was mentioned in the beginning of this story.

But Nick had in the meantime managed to make it known to the others who he was, although he had said no word in reference to it. They each one of them knew that there might still be others concealed in the trees or somewhere near at hand watching them. There was no telling how many pairs of eyes had observed them when they entered the wood. Yeggmen are as cautious and as careful about what they do in the lonely places among their brethren as the cave man used to be in primitive times.

For they prey upon one another, those men, as readily as they prey upon society. Among them it is always merely a question of the survival of the fittest—and the fittest is always the quickest, and the strongest, or the most alert.

It was not likely that they would have this firelight to themselves for a very long time, and they knew it; and, in fact, it was not ten minutes after their meal was finished, and their pipes were alight, before, like shadows, three other men suddenly loomed beside the fire, as if they had sprung out of the ground.

And they stalked forward from three sides at once—came forward as if they owned the woods.

But not one of our four friends, already seated there, made a motion or uttered a word. They smoked stolidly on, but with their eyes alert for anything that might happen.

And then, out of the darkness around them, appeared three more figures, and then two more; and the eight, who

had seemed to come together, grouped themselves with their backs to the fire, and gazed sullenly and silently down upon the four they found there.