

# **The Rustlers**

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MOST OF THE time there was dead silence. When someone did say something it was never more than a word or two at a time: More coffee?

Words that were not words because there was no thought behind them and they didn't mean anything. Words like getting late, when no one cared. Hardly even noises, because no one heard.

Stillness. Six men sitting together in a pine grove, and yet there was no sound. A boot scraped gravel and a tin cup clanked against rock, but they were like the words, little noises that started and stopped at the same time and were forgotten before they could be remembered.

More coffee? And an answering grunt that meant even less.

Five men scattered around a campfire that was dead, and the sixth man squatting at the edge of the pines looking out into the distance through the

dismal reflection of a dying sun that made the grayish flat land look petrified in death and unchanged for a hundred million years.

Emmett Ryan stared across the flats toward the lighter gray outline in the distance that was Anton Chico, but he wasn't seeing the adobe brick of the village. He wasn't watching the black speck that was gradually getting bigger as it approached.

All of us knew that. We sat and watched Emmett Ryan's coat pulled tight across his shoulder blades, not moving body or head. Just a broad smoothness of faded denim. We'd been looking at the same back all the way from Tascosa and in two hundred miles you can learn a lot about a back.

The black speck grew into a horse and rider, and as they moved up the slope toward the pines the horse and rider became Gosh Hall on his roan. Emmett walked over to meet him, but didn't say anything. The question was on his broad, red face and he didn't have to ask it.

Gosh Hall swung down from the saddle and put his hands on the small of his back, arching against the stiffness. „They just rode in,“ he said, and walked past the big man to the dead fire. „Who's got all the coffee?“

Emmett followed him with his eyes and the question was still there.

It was something to see that big, plain face with the eyes open wide and staring when before they'd always been half-closed from squinting against the glare of twenty-odd years in open country. Now his face looked too big and loose for the small nose and slit of an Irish mouth.

You could see the indecision and maybe a little fear in the wide-open eyes, something that had never been there before.

We'd catch ourselves looking at that face and have to look at something else, quick, or Em would see somebody's jaw hanging open and wonder what the hell was wrong with him. We felt sorry for Em—I know I did—and it was a funny feeling to all of a sudden see the big TX ramrod that way.

Gosh looked like he had an apron on, standing over the dead fire with his hip cocked and the worn hide chaps covering his short legs. He held the cup halfway to his face, watching Em, waiting for him to ask the question. I thought Gosh was making it a little extra tough on Em; he could have come right out with it. Both of them just stared at each other.

Finally Emmett said, „Jack with them?“

Gosh took a sip of coffee first. „Him and Joe Anthony rode in together, and another man. Anthony and the other man went into the Senate House and Jack took the horses to the livery and then followed them over to the hotel.“

„They see you?“

„Naw, I was down the street under a ramada. All they'd see'd be shadow.“

„You sure it was them, Gosh?“ I asked him.

„Charlie,“ Gosh said, „I got a picture in my head, and it's stuck there 'cause I never expected to see one like it. It's a picture of Jack and Joe Anthony riding into Magenta the same way a month ago. When you see something that's different or hadn't ought to be, it sticks in your head. And they was on the same mounts, Charlie.“

Emmett went over to his dun mare and tightened the cinch like he wanted to keep busy and show us everything was going the same. But he was just fumbling with the strap, you could see that. His head swung around a few inches. „Jack look all right?“

Gosh turned his cup upside down and a few drops of coffee trickled down to the ashes at his feet. „I don't know, Em. How is a man who's just stole a hundred head of beef supposed to look?“

Emmett jerked his body around and the face was closed again for the first time in a week, tight and redder than usual. Then his jaw eased and his big hands hanging at his sides opened and closed and then went loose. Emmett didn't have anything to grab. Some of the others were looking at Gosh Hall and probably wondering why the little rider was making it so hard for Em.

Emmett asked him, „Did you see Butzy?“

„He didn't ride in. I 'magine he's out with the herd.“ Gosh looked around. „Neal still out, huh?“

Neal Whaley had gone in earlier with Gosh, then split off over to where they were holding the herd, just north of Anton Chico. Neal was to watch and tell us if they moved them. Emmett figured they were holding the herd until a buyer came along. There were a lot of buyers in New Mexico who didn't particularly care what the brand read, but Emmett said they were waiting for a top bid or they would have sold all the stock before this.

Ned Bristol and Lloyd Cohane got up and stretched and then just stood there awkwardly looking at the dead fire, their boots, and each other. Lloyd pulled a blue bandanna from his coat pocket and wiped his face with it, then folded it and straightened it out thin between his fingers before tilting his chin up to tie it around his neck. Ned pushed his gun belt down lower on his hips and watched Emmett.

Dobie Shaw, the kid in our outfit, went over to his mount and pulled his Winchester from the boot and felt in the bag behind the saddle for a box of cartridges. Dobie had to do something too.

Ben Templin was older; he'd been riding better than thirty years.

He eased back to the ground with his hands behind his head tilting his hat over his face and waited. Ben had all the time in the world. Everybody was going through the motions of being natural, but fidgeting and acting restless and watching Emmett at the same time because we all knew it was time now, and Emmett didn't have any choice.

That was what forced Emmett's hand, though we knew he would have done it anyway, sooner or later. But maybe we looked a little too anxious to him, when it was only restlessness. It was a long ride from Tascosa. A case of let's get it over with or else go on home—one way or the other, regardless of whose brother stole the cows.

Gosh Hall scratched the toe of his boot through the sand, kicking it over the ashes of the dead fire. „About that time, ain't it, Em?“

Emmett exhaled like he was very tired. „Yeah, it's about that time.“

He looked at every face, slowly, before turning to his mare.

IT'S ROUGHLY a hundred and thirty miles from Tascosa, following the Canadian, to Trementina on the Conchas, then another thirty-five miles south, swinging around Mesa Montosa to Anton Chico, on the Pecos. Counting detours to find water holes and trailing the wrong sign occasionally, that's about two hundred miles of sun, wind, and New Mexico desert—and all to bring back a hundred head of beef owned by a Chicago company that tallied close to a quarter million all over the Panhandle and north-central Texas.

The western section of the TX Company was headquartered at Sudan that year, with most of the herds north of Tascosa and strung out west along the Canadian. Emmett Ryan was ramrod of the home crew at Sudan, but he spent a week or more at a time out on the grass with the herds. That was why he happened to be with us when R. D. Perris, the company man, rode in. We were readying to go into Magenta for a few when Perris came beating his mount into camp. Even in the cool of the evening the horse was flaked white and about to drop and Perris was so excited he could hardly get the words out. And finally when he told his story there was dead silence and all you could hear was R. D.

Perris breathing like his chest was about to rip open.

Jack Ryan and Frank Butzinger—Frank, who nobody ever gave credit for having any sand—and over a hundred head of beef hadn't been seen on the west range for three days. R. D. Perris had said, „The tracks follow the river west, but we figured Jack was taking them to new grass. But then the tracks just kept on going...“

Emmett was silent from that time on. He asked a few questions, but he was pretty sure of the answers before he asked them. There was that talk for weeks about Jack having been seen in Tascosa and Magenta with Joe Anthony. And there weren't many people friendly with Joe Anthony. In his time, he'd had his picture on wanted dodgers more than once. Two shootings for sure, and a few holdups, but the holdups were just talk. Nobody ever pinned anything on him, and with his gunhand reputation, nobody made any accusations.

Gosh Hall had seen them together in Magenta and he told Emmett to his face that he didn't like it; but Emmett had defended him and said Jack was just sowing oats because he was still young and hadn't got his sense of values yet. But Lloyd Cohane was there that time at the line camp when Emmett dropped in and chewed hell out of Jack for palling with Joe Anthony. Then came the time Emmett walked into the saloon in Tascosa with his gun out and pushed it into Joe Anthony's belly before Joe even saw him and told him to ride and keep riding.

Jack was there, drunk like he usually was in town, but he sobered quick and followed Anthony out of the saloon when Emmett prodded him out, and laughed right in Emmett's face when Em told him to stay where he was. And he was laughing and weaving in the saddle when he rode out of town with Anthony.

Until that night Perris came riding in with his story, Em hadn't seen his brother. So you know what he was thinking; what all of us were thinking.

Riding the two hundred miles to find the herd was part of the job, but knowing you were trailing a friend made the job kind of sour and none of us was sure if we wanted to find the cattle. Jack Ryan was young and wild and drank too much and laughed all the time, but he had more friends than any rider in the Panhandle.

Like Ben Templin said: „Jack's a good boy, but he's got an idea life's just a big can-can dancer with four fingers of scotawaboo in each hand.“ And that was about it.

THE SPLOTCH of white that was Anton Chico from a distance gradually got bigger and cleared until finally right in front of us it was gray adobe brick, blocks of it, dull and lifeless in the cold late sunlight. Emmett slowed us to a

walk the last few hundred feet approaching the town's main street and motioned Ben Templin up next to him.

„Ben,“ he said, „you take Dobie with you and cut for that back street yonder and come up behind the livery. Don't let anybody see you and hush the stableman if he gets loud about what you're doing. Maybe Butzy'll come along, Ben—if he isn't there already.“

I looked at Emmett watching Ben Templin and Dobie Shaw cut off, and there it was. His old face again. All closed and hard with the crow's feet streaking from the corners of his eyes. And his mouth tight like it used to be when he thought and ordered men at the same time, because he always knew what he was doing. You could see Emmett knew what he was doing now, that he'd set his mind. And when Emmett Ryan set his mind his pride saw to it that it stayed set.

Emmett walked his mount down the left side of the narrow main street with the rest of us strung out behind. When he veered over to a hitchrack about halfway down the second block, we veered with him and tied up, straggled along before two store fronts.

Em stepped up on the boardwalk and moved leisurely toward the Senate House hotel almost at the end of the block. He stopped as he crossed the alley next to the hotel and nodded to Lloyd Cohane, then bent his head toward the alley and moved it in a half-circle over his big shoulders. Lloyd moved off down the alley toward the back of the hotel.

„Go on with him, Ned,“ Em whispered. „Stick near the kitchen door and if anybody but the cook comes out shoot his pants off.“

Ned moved off after Lloyd, both carrying carbines. Em looked at Gosh and me, but didn't say anything. He just looked and that meant we were with him and supposed to back up anything he did. Then he turned toward the hotel and slipped his revolver out in the motion.

Gosh moved right after him and pointed the barrel of his Winchester out in front of him.

Two idlers sitting in front of the hotel stared at us trying to make out they weren't staring, and as soon as we passed them I heard their chairs scrape and their footsteps hurrying down the boards. A man across the street pushed through the saloon doors without even putting his hands out. A rider slowed up in front of the hotel as if about to turn in and then he kicked his mount into a trot down the street.

In the hotel lobby you could still hear the horse clopping down the street and it made the lobby seem even more quiet and comfortable, feeling the coolness inside and picturing the horse on the dusty street.

But there was the clerk with his mouth open watching Emmett walk toward the cafe entrance, his spurs chinging with each step.

It seemed like, for a show like this, everything was moving too fast.

The next thing, we were in the cafe part and Jack Ryan and Joe Anthony and the other man were looking at us like they couldn't believe their eyes.

None of them moved. Jack's jaw was open with a mouthful of beef, his eyes almost as wide open as his mouth. The other man had a taco in his fingers raised halfway to his mouth and he just held it there. Didn't move it up or down. Joe Anthony's right hand was around a glass of something yellow like mescal. His left hand was below the level of the table. The three of them had their hats on, pushed back, and they looked dirty and tired.

Jack chewed and swallowed hard and then he smiled. „Damn, Em, you must have flown!“

The other man looked at us one at a time slowly, then shrugged his shoulders and said, „What the hell,“ and shoved the taco in his mouth.

Joe Anthony wiped the back of his hand over his mouth and moved the hand back, smoothing the long mustaches with the knuckle of his index finger. The other hand was still under the table.

Emmett held his revolver pointed square at Joe Anthony and seemed to be unmindful of the other two men. Lloyd and Ned came through the kitchen door and moved around behind Emmett.

„Get up,“ Em ordered. „And take off your belts.“

Somebody's chair scraped, but Joe Anthony said, „Hold it!“ and it was quiet.

Anthony was staring back at Emmett. „Do I look like a green kid to you, Ryan?“ he said, and half smiled. „You're not telling anybody what to do, cowboy.“

„I said get up,“ Em repeated. Joe Anthony kept on smiling like he thought Emmett was a fool. He shook his head slowly. „Ryan, the longer you stand there, the shorter your chances are of leaving here on your two feet.“

„You're all mouth,“ Emmett said. „Just mouth.“

The outlaw's expression didn't change. His face was good-looking in a swarthy kind of way, but gaunt and hungry-looking with pale, shallow eyes like a man who forgot where his conscience was, or that he ever had one.

His smile sagged a little and he said, „Ryan, let's quit playing. You ride the hell out of here before I shoot you.“

„I'm not playing,“ Emmett said, leveling the revolver. „Get up, quick.“

„Ryan,“ Joe Anthony whispered impatiently, „I've had a Colt leveled on your belly since the second you come through that doorway.“

I thought I knew Emmett Ryan, but I didn't know him as well as I supposed. His face didn't change its expression, but his finger moved on the trigger and the room filled with the explosion. His thumb yanked on the hammer and he fired again right on top of the first one.

Joe Anthony went back with his chair, fell hard and lay still. His pistol was still in the holster on his right hip.

Emmett looked down at him. „You're all mouth, Anthony. All mouth.“

Nobody said anything after that. We were looking at Em and Em was looking at Joe Anthony stretched out on the floor. I heard steps behind me and there was Dobie Shaw tiptoeing in and looking like he'd dive out the window if anybody said anything.

Emmett waved his gun at the other man and glanced at his brother.

„Who's this?“

Jack spoke easily. „Earl Roach. We picked him up for a trail driver. He didn't know it was rustled stock.“

Roach was unfastening his gun belt. He shot a look toward Jack.

„Boy,“ he said, „you take care of your troubles and I'll take care of mine.“

Dobie Shaw moved up behind Emmett hesitantly and waited for the big foreman to look his way. „Mr. Ryan—Ben's holding Butzy over to the livery.“ He went on hurriedly trying to get the whole story out before Em asked any questions. „Butzy walked right in and didn't move after Ben throwed down on him, but there was another one back a ways and he turned and rode like hell

when he saw me and Ben with our guns out. Me and Ben didn't even get a shot at him 'fore he was round the corner and gone."

"All right, Dobie. You go on back with Ben." Emmett hesitated and glanced at Jack like he was making up his mind all over again, but the doubt passed off quickly. He said, "We'll be over directly. You go on and tell Ben to keep Butzy right there."

FRANK BUTZINGER was flat against the boards of a stall, though Ben Templin was standing across the open part of the stable smoking a cigarette with his carbine propped against the wall. Ben wasn't paying any attention to him, but even in the dim light you could see Butzy was about ready to die of fright.

Gosh Hall pushed Jack and Earl Roach toward the stall that Butzy was in and mumbled something, probably swearing. Jack looked around at him with a half smile and shook his head like a father playing Indians with his youngster. Humoring him.

Emmett stood out in the open part with the rest of us spread around now. He said, "You sell the stock yet?"

"A few," Jack answered. "We got almost a hundred head."

"You got the money?"

"What do you think?"

The foreman motioned to Gosh Hall. "Get some line and tie their hands behind them."

The little cowboy's face brightened and he moved into the stall lifting a coil of rope from the side wall. When he pulled his knife and started to cut it into pieces, the stableman came running over. He'd been standing in the front doorway, but I hadn't noticed him there before.

He ran over yelling, "Hey, that's my rope!"

Gosh reached out, laughing, and grabbed one of his braces and snapped it against his faded red-flannel undershirt. "Get back, old man, you're interfering with justice." Then he pushed the man hard against the stall partition.

Emmett took hold of his elbow and pulled him out toward the front of the livery. "You stay out here," he said. "This isn't any of your business." He turned from the man and nodded his head to the stalls where three horses were. The stable was large, high-ceilinged, with stalls lining both sides.

The open area was wide, but longer than it was wide, with heavy timbers overhead reaching from lofts on both sides that ran the length of the stable above the stalls. The stable was empty but for the three horses toward the back.

"Bring those horses up here." Em said it to no one in particular.

When Dobie and Ned and I led the mounts up, I heard Lloyd ask Em if he should go get our horses. Em shook his head, but didn't say anything.

Lloyd said, "Shouldn't we be getting out to the stock, Em?"

"We got time. Neal's watching the cows," Em reminded him. "The man that was with Butzy spread his holler if there were any others out there. They'd be halfway to Santa Fe by now."

He turned on Gosh impatiently. "Come on, get 'em mounted."

I picked up one of their saddles from the rack and walked up behind Gosh, who was pushing the three men toward the horses.

„Look out, Gosh. Let me get the saddles on before you get in the way. You can't throw 'em on with your arms behind your back.“

Gosh twisted his mouth into a smile and looked past me at Emmett.

There was a wad of tobacco in his cheek that made his thin face lopsided, like a jagged rock with hair on it. He shifted the wad, still smiling, and then spit over to the side.

„You tell him, Em,“ he said.

Emmett looked at me with his closed-up, leathery face. He stared hard as if afraid his eyes would waver. „They don't need the saddles.“

Gosh swatted me playfully with the end of rope in his hand. „Want me to paint you a picture, Charlie?“ He laughed and walked out through the wide entrance.

Gosh didn't have to paint a picture. Ben Templin dropped his cigarette. Lloyd and Ned and Dobie just stared at Emmett, but none of them said anything. Em stood there like a rock and stared back like he was defying anybody to object.

The boys looked away and moved about uncomfortably. They weren't about to go against Emmett Ryan. They were used to doing what they were told because Em was always right, and weren't sure that he wasn't right even now. A hanging isn't an uncommon thing where there is little law. Along the Pecos there was less than little. Still, it didn't rub right—even if Em was following his conscience, it didn't rub right.

I hesitated until the words were in my mouth and I'd have had bit my tongue off to hold them back. „You setting yourself up as the law?“

It was supposed to have a bite to it, but the words sounded weak and my voice wasn't even.

Emmett said, „You know what the law is.“ He beckoned to the coil of rope Gosh had hung back on the boards. „That's it right there, Charlie. You know better than that.“ Emmett was talking to himself as well as me, but you didn't remind that hardheaded Irishman of things like that.

„Look, Em. Let's get the law and handle this right.“

„It's black and white, it's two and two, if you steal cows and get caught you hang.“

„Maybe. But it's not up to you to decide. Let's get the law.“

„I've already decided,“ was all he said.

The stable hand crept up close to us and waited until there was a pause. „The deputy ain't here,“ the old man said. „He rode down to Lincoln yesterday morning to join the posse.“ He waited for someone to show interest, but no one said a word. „They're getting a posse up on account of there's word Bill Bonney's at Fort Sumner.“

He stepped back looking proud as could be over his news. I could have kicked his seat flat for what he said.

Gosh came back with two coiled lariats on his arm and a third one in his hands. He was shaping a knot at one end of it.

Earl Roach looked at Gosh, then up to the heavy rafter that crossed above the three horses, then Jack's head went up too.

Gosh spit and grinned at them, forming a loop in the second rope.

„What'd you expect'd happen?“

Jack kept his eyes on the rafter. „I didn't expect to get caught.“

„Jack's always smiling into the sunshine, ain't he?“ Gosh pushed Earl Roach toward his horse. „Mount up, mister.“



Roach jerked his shoulder away from him. „I look like a bird to you? You want me up on that horse, you'll have to put me up.“

„Earl, I'll put you up and help take you down.“

When he got to Butzy and offered him a leg up, Butzy made a funny sound like a whine and started to back away, but Gosh grabbed him by his shirt before he took two steps. Butzy looked over Gosh's bony shoulder, his eyes popping out of his pasty face.

„Em, what you fixin' to do?“ His voice went up a notch, and louder.

„What you fixin' to do? You just scarin' us, Em?“

If it was a joke, Butzy didn't want to play the fool, but you could tell by his voice what he was thinking. Em didn't answer him.

Gosh finished knotting the third rope and handed it to Dobie, who looked at it like he'd never seen a lariat before.

Gosh said, „Make yourself useful and throw that rope over the rafter.“

He went out and brought his horse in and mounted so he could slip the nooses over their heads, but he stood in the stirrups and still couldn't reach the tops of their heads. Emmett told him to get down and ordered Ben Templin to climb up and fix the ropes. Ben did it, but Em had to tell him three times.

Before he jumped down, Ben lighted cigarettes and gave them to Jack and Earl. Butzy was weaving his head around so Ben couldn't get one in his mouth. Just rolling his head around with his eyes closed, moaning.

Gosh looked up at him and laughed out loud. „You praying, Butzy?“ he called out. „Better pray hard, you ain't got much time,“ and kept on laughing.

Ben Templin made a move toward Gosh, but Emmett caught his arm.

„Hold still, Ben.“ He looked past him at Gosh. „You can do what you're doing with your mouth shut.“

Gosh moved behind the horses with the short end of rope in his hand. He edged over behind Earl Roach's horse. „Age before beauty, I always say.“

Butzy's eyes opened up wide. „God, Em! Please Em—please—honest to God—I didn't know they was stealing the herd! Swear to God, Em, I thought Perris told Jack to sell the herd. Please, Em—I—let me go and I'll never show my face again. Please—“

„You'll never show it anyway where you're going,“ Gosh cracked.

Earl Roach was looking at Butzy with a blank expression. His head turned to Jack, holding his chin up to ease his neck away from the chafe of the rope. „Who's your friend?“

Jack Ryan's lips, with the cigarette hanging, formed a small smile at Roach. „Never saw him before in my life.“ His young face was paler than usual, you could see it through beard and sunburn, but his voice was slow and even with that little edge of sarcasm it usually carried.

Roach shook his head to drop the ash from his cigarette. „Beats me where he come from,“ he said.

Ben Templin swore in a slow whisper. He mumbled, „It's a damn waste of good guts.“

Lloyd and Ned and Dobie were looking at the two of them like they couldn't believe their eyes and then seemed to all drop their heads about the same time. Embarrassed. Like they didn't rate to be in the same room with Jack and Earl. I felt it too, but felt a mad coming on along with it.

„Dammit, Em! You’re going to wait for the deputy!“ I knew I was talking, but it didn’t sound like me. „You’re going to wait for the deputy whether you like it or not!“

Emmett just stared back and I felt like running for the door. Emmett stood there alone like a rock you couldn’t budge and then Ben Templin was beside him with his hand on Em’s arm, but not just resting it there, holding the forearm hard. His other hand was on his pistol butt.

„Charlie’s right, Em,“ Ben said. „I’m not sure how you got us this far, or why, but ain’t you or God Almighty going to hang those boys by yourself.“

They stood there, those two big men, their faces not a foot apart, not telling a thing by their faces, but you got the feeling if one of them moved the livery would collapse like a twister hit it.

Finally Emmett blinked his eyes, and moved his arm to make Ben let go.

„All right, Ben.“ It was just above a whisper and sounded tired.

„We’ve all worked together a long time and have always agreed—if it was a case of letting you in on the agreeing. We won’t change it now.“

Gosh came out from behind the horses. Disappointed and mad. He moved right up close to Emmett. „You going to let this woman—“ That was all he got a chance to say. Emmett swung his fist against that bony tobacco bulge and Gosh flattened against the board wall before sliding down into a heap.

Emmett started to walk out the front and then he turned around.

„We’re waiting on the deputy until tomorrow morning. If he don’t show by then, this party takes up where it left off.“

He angled out the door toward the Senate House, still the boss. The hardheaded Irishman’s pride had to get the last word in whether he meant it or not.

THE DEPUTY got back late that night. You could see by his face that he hadn’t gotten what he’d gone for. Emmett stayed in his room at the Senate House, but Ben Templin and I were waiting at the jail when the deputy returned—though I don’t know what we would have done if he hadn’t—with two bottles of the yellowest mescal you ever saw to ease his saddle sores and dusty throat.

We told him how we’d put three of our boys in his jail—just a scare, you understand—when they’d got drunk and thought it’d be fun to run off with a few head of stock. Just a joke on the owner, you understand. And Emmett Ryan, the ramrod, being one of them’s brother, he had to act tougher than usual, else the boys’d think he was playing favorites. Like him always giving poor Jack the wildest broncs and making him ride drag on the trail drives.

Em was always a little too serious, anyway. Of course, he was a good man, but he was a big, red-faced Irishman who thought his pride was a stone god to burn incense in front of. And hell, he had enough troubles bossing the TX crew without getting all worked up over his brother getting drunk and playing a little joke on the owners—you been drunk like that, haven’t you, Sheriff? Hell, everybody has. A sheriff with guts enough to work in Bill Bonney’s country had more to do than chase after drunk cowpokes who wouldn’t harm a fly. And even if they were serious, what’s a few cows to an outfit that owns a quarter million?

And along about halfway down the second bottle—So why don’t we turn the joke around on old Em and let the boys out tonight? We done you a turn by

getting rid of Joe Anthony. Old Em'll wake up in the morning and be madder than hell when he finds out, and that will be some sight to see.

The deputy could hardly wait.

In the morning it was Ben who had to tell Em what happened. I was there in body only, with my head pounding like a pulverizer. The deputy didn't show up at all.

We waited for Emmett to fly into somebody, but he just looked at us, from one to the next. Finally he turned toward the livery.

„Let's go take the cows home,“ was all he said.

Not an hour later we were looking down at the flats along the Pecos where the herd was. Neal Whaley was riding toward us.

Emmett had been riding next to me all the way out from Anton Chico. When he saw Neal, he broke into a gallop to meet him, and that was when I thought he said, „Thanks, Charlie.“

I know his head turned, but there was the beat of his horse when he started the gallop, and that mescal pounding at my brains. Maybe he said it and maybe he didn't.

Knowing that Irishman, I'm not going to ask him.

