



"It seemed as if there was a cut-and-dried conspiracy to starve me to death."

Three Dollars and Hash

By GLEN FORD MOTT

BULL was a long, lean, lantern-jawed Arkansawian, who came to his senses and to Cloud City about the same time. He had looked upon Cloud City and the snow range at the end of a hot July day, immediately called them good, and deserted a box-car and his dreams of empire farther west to join the flotsam and jetsam of the new camp in the obstacle race after the elusive dollar.

Opportunity led him to the bar Metallic Smelter, and dumped him into the lap of success in the form of a four-dollar job as furnace-man.

One night the boys got him to let out something about his past life.

"I got tired of digging snake-root down in Arkansas a while back," he began, "and started off to look for a position. Seventy-five cents a day was about all a feller could make, and to make that he had to be a good workman and own his tools. As I had no tools, I hit the hammer for Kansas City and better wages. Now, all I could hear there was 'farm-hands and Kansas,' so off I goes to the State Slave Market, where I was knocked down for three dollars a day and hash to Jim Hunkinson, a Pratt County farmer I'd never land my eyes on.

"Pleased? Well, I guess; tickled to death ain't no name. 'William,' says I to myself, 'you're a lucky man.' And I got on the train with the meanest gang of 'boes that ever wore shoe leather. Steal? Oh, no; there was a little hammered-down mule skinner along that would steal corn from a blind chicken. Tried to get my telescope from me four times before we hit Whitchataw. Seems like we wandered over the four quarters of the world and a pretty good ways up the hind-quarters before we pulled into a wide spot in the road called Prairie Centre. Farmers and windmills! Farmers would run 5,000 to the acre, and it was just like going the wrong way to a fire to get any place at all. I was man-handled half a dozen times; but no, siree, I was lookin' for Mr. Jim Hunkinson. Do you know one straw broke a camel's back? Well, when a big double-fisted jawhacker almost broke mine trying to kidnap me, my Southern blood boiled. 'See here,' says I, 'beat it, or by gum, I'll give you a wallopp that will cause your immortal grandpa to sit up and take notice.' So I got out of the mob and went to the station agent. 'I'm a lookin' for a man named Mr. James Hunkinson; do you know him?' 'Yes, I know him,' says he; 'everybody does, and they're all sorry they do. If you work for Jim Hunkinson, you'll think hell's afoot and the devil's a Dutchman before you cut many swaths. Yonder he is,' and he pointed to a little fat, butter-bell of a man who was leanin' against a lamp-post, chewing a sinful cud of chewing-gum, and who looked as if he had a one-way ticket to

heaven bought and stowed away ready to use when Gabe would blow his trumpet and time would be no more. Do you know the farthest mountain always looks the greenest, but when you get there, there ain't enough grass on it to pasture a goose. Well, it was just the same way with Jim Hunkinson. The minute I got a good look at his bas-relief countenance I knowed I'd swapped the devil for a witch, and looked around for some farmer; but no use—they'd gone. I hadn't had enough to eat since we left Kansas City, and was mighty hungry, so I says: 'Mr. Hunkinson, if you'll wait a minute, I'll run over to the beanery and eat a snack;' but he says, 'No, William, it's a pretty good drive, and you can get a good warm meal when we get home.' So away we goes, me as empty as a keg at a hack-drivers' picnic, and him as full as a tick. He was driving a team of mules, and before we'd gone a mile Jack stopped—yes, Jack was his name.

"He worked on the off side and was as fine an appearing mule as ever looked through a collar; but a mule is like a woman, you can't go much on looks. Well, sir, we tried everything from a brotherly talk to a black snake whip on that mule, but no use; he just stood still and dusted the whiffle-tree with his tail, and every once in a while he would back about a hundred yards and then stop and stand careless-like, letting his ears hang any way at all, and then, after resting and studying devilment for a while, he'd mosey up to our first stopping-place, just about as slow and peace-ful-like as an old lady taking a walk, and it's a fact it took us four stretching hours to go six miles.

"Did you ever see the spirit work on a mule? No? Well, I have, and it's a fearful thing and passes all understanding. Two minutes before he moved I'd a swore Jack didn't have enough strength or spirit in him to pull the hat off your head, for he looked as meek and repentant as the prodigal son, and two minutes after he moved forty men and a boy couldn't have held him. Now, no more than I was feeling sorry than here comes the spirit.

"That mule laid his ears back like a buck rabbit, and with his teeth a-grinin' and the devil looking out of his two eyes, he commenced to do a buck-and-wing dance, with an Irish heel-and-toe movement thrown in as a side issue. Talk about the panic of '73! It wasn't in it. I looked at Hunkinson, and he was swollering his heart like a cow swollering her cud. And his eyes were bulgin' out so you could have knocked them off with a stick.

"Hold on," says he. 'To what?' says I. And with them very words I laid hold of him like grim death. 'Let go!' he yelled, and then Jack started. Now me and Hunkinson and Beck was unwill-

ing parties. And me and Hunkinson was a-pulling back, and Beck a-stepping sideways, like a hog going to war. But no use, up the road we goes, like the devil beating tan-bark. Now, if we lost any time on the start, for all you could see was a dust-cloud, and all you could hear was the wind a-going by like a country boy whistling through his teeth. That is all I can remember. When I come to we had stopped, and Jack was hollering in with one breath and out with the next, because he didn't have the harness off, and his head buried up to his eyes in sprig wheat at ninety cents a bushel. I was that weak I just sat and watched Hunkinson and a feller he called Bill un-harness the mules and turn them into a lean-to, with some straw on top of it, they called a stable. I was just a-wishing for a cup of coffee like mother used to make to revive me, when a freckled faced, snub-nosed, red-haired woman yelled something in my ear. I was plumb skeered to death, and jammed the brake on and reached for the lines, and was bracing my feet for another tug of war with the devil in the mule skin, when she jumped upon the hub of the front wheel, reached over and grabbed me by the suspenders and yanked me out of the wagon. Then she explained to me that supper was ready, and pirty soon I stuck my feet under one of the slimmest tables that ever failed to groan in a land of plenty. I was sandwiched in between a farm hand named Bill, who was about as talkative and cheerful as an undertaker at a funeral, and Hunkinson, who looked more like the devil before daylight than a respectable Kansas farmer. Both of them was doing a juggling act with a black handled knife and green peas that would have made a bigger hit in vaudeville than it did with me. Maw Hunkinson and Sally were across the table, both of them talking like two phonographs with the asthma.

"Now I have often heard about them Wall Street outlaws forming a corner in wheat and corn, but that was the only

Hunk orders me and Bill off to the stables to curry the mules, warning me to be careful of fire, and chewing the rag about cigarette fiends and dope sticks.

"Bill was ducking his orders same as if they had been brickbats, and I could see in a minute that Old Hunk had him buffalod up to the point where he would jump through and eat out of his hands, or wave his paws and speak. Now, right there I appointed myself a committee of one to incite a rebellion and disturb the conjugal bliss of the Hunkinson household. Before I had curried the near side of Beck, I had planted a few seeds in fertile soil, and from what Bill told me of his experience with Hunkinson I knew that they would grow and flourish like a green bay tree.

"Every time Bill would rub his improvised currycomb over Jack's ribs, that equine would jump for the roof, and the only thing that kept him from going out that way was a three-quarter inch grass rope tied to a post. When he came down he would bunch his hoofs and waltz clog around the stall, then he would fox trot, dog trot, single foot, short lope, and gallop from one end of the stall to the other. Now, if that mule would put as much energy into a race with Lou Dillon as he did in avoiding that enrrycomb and brush, you could not see him for the blue ribbons and dust, and you could hear the crowd yellin' yet. But he preferred to waste his devil-given faculties on the desert air, and continue in his natural mean-ness.

"Bill worked for an hour, and at the end of that time Jack was only curried in patches, but we called it good and started for the hay; but old Hunk showed up about that time and showed how we had better grease the wagons so we could get an early start on Friday morning. Now me for system, and a place for everything, so you can shut your eyes and walk right up to it. It was just thirty minutes by an Ingersoll before they found the axle-grease some bone-head had put in the chicken-house,



"Yes I know him," says he "Everybody does, and they're all sorry they do."

time I ever bumped up against a corner in grub. It seemed as if there was a cut-and-dried conspiracy to starve me to death. Old Hunkinson would load up his plate till he would strain it, and then pass the grub to maw, who would follow suit; then she would pass it to Sally, who would help herself and pass it to Bill; he would pass it to me after he had helped himself. I got the loavings, and it didn't amount to enough to feed a boarding-school miss, much less a real man that had fasted clean across the State of Kansas on a jerk water train. I finished up what old Hunk called a sumptuous repast with a sigh and a cup of weak-kneed coffee, and sauntered out on the porch for a peaceful smoke. I had no more than lit a cigarette than

They never did find the wagon-jack, and yours truly held up an Old Hickory, while Bill and Hunk smeared axle grease over the rustiest spindles I ever laid eyes on. We put in another hour in odd jobs before we started for bed a second time. I was so sleepy I could hear the rain on the roof and feel mother tuck me in, and I was just going to bid Bill good-night, when Sally, handed me a blanket and pointed to a straw stack, and old Hunk began to warn me about fire. Now I was as sure of sleeping in a bed as a preacher is of heaven, and to have my hopes shattered by that freckled-faced piece of calico, went against the grain. But I took the bedding and went out to the straw stack along with Bill to spend my first night