

GOLD BULLETS

by Charles G. Booth

SYNOPSIS: During the blistering heat of the desert, Jerry rushes to Skull Valley to warn her fiancé, Jerry Ogden, that the police charge him with slaying his father. Lucy's uncle, John Peebles, follows her to the ghost town, Torridity, where the murdered Andrew Ogden is believed to have ruled 30 years before as Alex Peterson, gambler and overlord. As Peebles searches the eerie buildings, Lucy and Jerry suddenly drive past by fall to see him. Peebles tries to follow them but discovers that the tires of his auto have been slashed.

CHAPTER 29.
Slight From a Tomb.
What of the man who had slashed my tires? Dillon, undoubtedly. Knowing that Jerry was in Torridity, he had come to plant the flame-Furie.



The fury of a Skull Valley sand storm lashed Peebles mercilessly. The children, I decided, didn't know he was here and he may not have seen them. He certainly knew I was here. Why in the name of common sense hadn't I brought a pistol?

I don't know what made me think of Furie just then. MacNair had assumed that Furie knew something about the Two Brothers mine; perhaps, indeed, had brought Ogden the bit of quartz. Moreover, Hubbard's description of him strongly suggested the old desert-rat type. Mightn't Furie be a relic of Torridity's vanished prosperity? Was it Furie's presence I had sensed in the town instead of Dillon's? Was it, indeed, Furie who had slashed my tires? And had Dillon, after "planting" the flames, taken himself off? I began to wonder about the Two Brothers mine. MacNair had connected Furie and the quartz specimens with it and I had concluded Lucy had found Jerry there. After swallowing a sandwich I set off up the street towards the flank of the mountain behind the town. On the outskirts my feet found an indistinct trail of sorts and I let them carry me along it.

The sun was declining towards the Skeletons, but the wind blew hot as a dragon's breath and in its teeth whistled that sound I had heard as I drove towards Torridity. I thought it hissed at me: "Go back, you fool!" A thin sand haze hung in the air. A windstorm impended, I felt sure, and common sense urged me to go back; but just then I saw the buildings of an abandoned mining property. Heading into the bite of the wind, I quickly identified the property as the Two Brothers by the huge mass of splintered rock in front of the entrance to the main bore.

It took me half an hour to explore the property. In ruin and a-creak in the burning wind, the buildings were a sorry mess, but the machinery was in fair condition. From the "tailings" dump I followed the ore-cart rails up to the great pile of debris which blocked the entrance. To remove it would be a sizable job.

In a barn-like structure was the police man, Lucy had commanded. It cheered me mightily. Leaving the car where it was for the time being, I started back along the flank of the mountain. The sun was lower. The wind had quickened; its eerie note shrilled a little. After I had gone 100 yards beyond the limit of the Two Brothers property I came upon a narrow gash slashed deep into the flinty mountainside which I hadn't seen as I came up. A vague trail led into the gash and the imprint of shoes showed in a sprinkling of sand at my feet.

Striking into the gash, I found myself between towering walls of reddish rock which gradually widened into a sizeable canyon that cut into the heart of the Skeletons. I had gone some 200 yards when I noticed a V-shaped joint in the south slope of the canyon. As I approached the joint I saw it was really a cavern-like slash in the rock wall.

I had come within 30 feet of the slash when a rifle cracked and a bullet flattened against the rock 12 inches above my head! My eyes sprang up the opposite slope which ascended gradually and I saw not far above me a small wooden shanty from which I concluded had come the shot. I wondered if I were to be dropped dead as I stood.

The slash offered sanctuary. Only 30 feet away! Could I make it? I hurried myself towards it. Before I had covered a third of the distance the rifle cracked again and my hat leaped and fell over my face. Losing my balance, I roiled back against the cliff. It seemed likely that a third shot would put an end to the foremost collector of pistols in San Felipe county, and I stayed where I was. The sun was beginning to set beyond the crest of the Skeletons.

desert holding itself in leash, of malign forces gathering beneath this outward tranquility, affected me, and I began to run.

When I had come, within 100 yards of the nearest building the wind screamed like a herd of terrified horses. The ferocity of the wind was beyond conception. It took me into its arms and, spinning me like a top, ran with me screaming down the street. Abruptly it left me and for a moment I hung in a little pocket in the wind. Geysers of sand sprang up from the earth, ropes of sand fell from the sky, and I saw them driven by the bellows of heaven into the reveals of a pit full of fiends let loose.

And then, suddenly, a blast of sand poured into my face, blinding me; the wind picked me up again, spun me, and hurled me against the side of a building. Pinned me, it smote me, blow upon blow until I thought my senses would leave me. My body felt beaten to a pulp, and my face was stinging and bleeding from tiny cuts inflicted by the gravel-toothed wind.

Once again the wind picked me up and sent me spinning down the street. Then it smote me sideways. I pitched through an open door and went headlong.

Will the desert's fury add Peebles to its toll? Who fired the shot? What is he guarding? Continue the story tomorrow.

"Winter ale," an experimental beer produced by state breweries in England, has proved a success. The only grass houses still to be seen in Hawaii are those preserved as relics.

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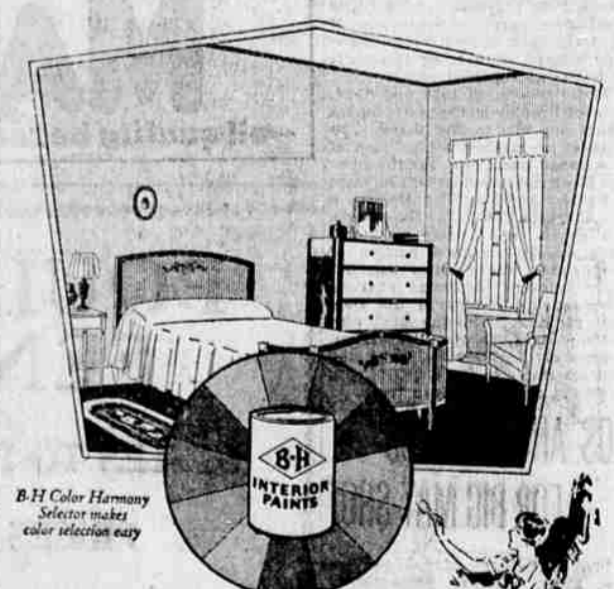
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