

The Sickle and the Hounds

By MacKinlay Kantor



Two Bawling Bloodhounds, a Grim-lipped Marshal, and a Mob That Shouts for a Lynching, Hunt for the Murderer of Alf Dickerson

Binny Joke was beside him. "You want to go in, boss?" he asked

IT was nearly eleven o'clock; but no one in Bluecastle was asleep, except a few babies who cuddled in their slumber, oblivious to ghastly murders or crowds of dark-faced men who swarmed along under the old oaks, *en route* to a manhunt.

On the wide porches which clung close beside the ancient street that wound its full length through the heart of the town, women stood whispering together, or called low-voiced comments back and forth through black tunnels beneath the trees. A few fireflies still spattered their eerie green flashes in the thick mounds of flowered shrubbery.

A woman in a cotton wrapper went slowly out to the gate in front of the Marchand home and peered down the low road to that place where auto lights glowed and the hubbub of a hundred voices made the dust tremble.

"Is Mistuh Price gone down there?" she asked of another white ghost across the street.

"Yes, Mis' Marchand. My, that's a terrible

thing. Young Alf Dickerson was such a handsome boy—"

"He favored his mother," said Mrs. Marchand. "All of the Gamwells was tolerable looking folks. You come over and join us here on our porch, Mis' Price."

At a dozen other places along that road, the same comments were being made, the same shuddering question was asserting itself. Young Alf Dickerson was dead, his throat slit, his cold eyes staring up at the warm Virginia stars above. Old Mrs. Shepherdson had stumbled over his body as she came home from prayer meeting. He was lying in the dust of the road just below Monument Hill.

That was half an hour ago, when he was found. It might have been earlier, if Mrs. Pemberton had not paused to discuss theology with Rev. and Mrs. Banks. But at least the theological discussion had prepared Sister Shepherdson for the ordeal which she was to face a few moments later when she trod upon Alf Dickerson's outstretched hand.

She made her way to the oil station at the Lower Fort Road, where there was a telephone. Marshal Scales hurried to the scene of the crime with great dispatch, and after one look he sent for Ory Kemper's bloodhounds. There was no apparent need for a minute examination of the body; the throat had been cut, and there was a great lake of blood settling into the dust, and not far away lay a sharp sickle with blood upon its curved blade. Alf Dickerson, then, had been murdered with that sickle.

And he had managed to put up a fight, for there were grass-stains on his shirt and loose grass in his bloody hair. Apparently, he and his assailant had wallowed about on the ground. But the other man had wielded that sickle and—

The road where he lay was a narrow, bushy lane which left the main street at its turn toward the creek, and wound along the base of Monument Hill to the old Shepherdson place and the graveyard beyond. Before this, people had always thought of that side road as a lovers' lane, a fairy place of elder thickets and gum trees and blackberry vines. But now each shadow seemed to shake its ugly head: this was the place for a murder. An ideal spot. No one could hear. No one could see. No one had been around to watch the scratched, mauled body of young Alf Dickerson go down before the sharp curve of that horrid blade.

On Marshal Scales devolved the difficult job of keeping back the gathering throngs. Ory Kemper's dogs were good dogs, but there was no need of making the task more difficult.

"Keep back, you folks! If you want us to get the person who done this, you'll stay back."

"Get him," repeated somebody. "Yes, you get him, Marshal. Show us who it is. We'll take care of the rest."

The crowd murmured in assent. People liked Alf Dickerson. Even Bud Calkins, who had aspired to take Alf Dickerson's girl away from him, was a black-browed titan of wrath. . . . People liked Alf. They milled around, there in the glare of those auto lights, and struck sullen matches to inflame their cigarettes, and muttered savagely.

"Somebody get a rope ready," advised Jack Liggett, who owned the pool hall. "A bull-strong rope is what we need. If those dogs take us to the right place. . . . You with us, Bud?" he inquired challengingly of Calkins.

"Certain I'm with you," growled the black-

headed young man. "Me and Alf had our little troubles, but what's that compared with murder? I'll take right holt of the rope alongside the rest of you."

All this talk passed over Marshal Scales' head. His ears might have been stuffed with cotton, for all the attention paid to that crowd. Nevertheless, he slid a tanned and corded hand inside the band of his trousers. His .45 was there, safe and snug.

There hadn't been a lynching in Bluecastle for a long time. And since his elevation to public office, Bertie Scales had never lost a prisoner. He didn't propose to lose one now. . . . "Providing," he meditated to himself as an afterthought, "that I get my hands on a prisoner."

More auto lights shafted across the scene, nearer and nearer, hot and yellow. The throng of men parted to let a battered old Ford touring car slide to a stop in the weeds beside the road.

"Hi, Ory," said Scales.

"Howdy, Marshal. Somebody got young Alf, eh?"

"Yup. Got the dogs?"

"Yeh."

ORY KEMPER was a tall, bony man with a lantern jaw, sad, squinting eyes, and a head of bumpy baldness. From the back seat of his car he led his dogs—a matched pair of hounds. The crowd closed in more tightly.

"Did you look for tracks, Marshal?"

"Couldn't do much. There was old Mrs. Shepherdson's, and the oil station fellow's, and my own. And maybe more. . . . Guess he's been dead a couple of hours or more." He displayed the bloody sickle. "And this was handled, of course. I didn't move the body, 'count of I wanted you to have a good start."

"Did any of those folks—handle him?"

"No. Just me, I rolled him over."

The hounds displayed that strange, preoccupied reluctance of bloodhounds setting to work, contrary to the usual idea of baying, fuming dogs eager to take up the scent. Held in leash by Kemper, they wandered lethargically around the scene, sniffing close to the body, yawning, stopping out of apparent boredom, and again taking up their eternal wandering.

Kemper followed close behind them, the leashes slack in his hands. Occasionally he knelt beside the animals and spoke to them in a jargon only half

intelligible to the men in the crowd. "Rose. Gettum Rose gettum Rose gettum . . . Briar. Nozum, Briar, nozum . . ."

The little bitch sniffed loudly at the dry dust. She stiffened, and gave a cough. Dragging tight against the leash she led Kemper in uneven circles about the body and headed straight toward Bertie Scales.

"It's the Marshal," someone said, and a few nitwits chuckled.

"No, Rose. Naw." Kemper swore at the hound, and dragged her back beside her teammate. Again ensued the sniffing, then nosing into the dust, as the hesitant bloodhounds sought to distinguish one scent from another.

Briar flung back his head; his loose ears flapped. He jerked forward; sneezed against the dry dust. Then his muffled belling broke the hot silence. "*Owp. Owp. Owrr . . .*" Rose took up the cry; the crowd tumbled apart to let the dogs through as they dragged Kemper with them, their short legs spraddling wide apart, their ears fairly dragging on the ground. *Owp . . . Owp . . .*

"Right up the main drag!" a man yelled, and the throng became a milling pack that stampeded through the dust, keeping well-abreast of Kemper as his hounds turned into the wide road and up the cinder path which lay beside it.

Bertie Scales stood there and gazed at the body of Alf Dickerson. "Huh," he muttered. He turned quickly and glanced into the shrubbery at the lower side of the lane, then turned his gaze to the vague blot of Monument Hill which lifted its smooth, close-clipped sod above him.

"How about the body?" It was Johnson who spoke—the town's undertaker and coroner. "Can't let him lie here all night in the dirt with nothin' but a cloth over the face—"

The officer nodded.

"That's right. Better take him away, now. You see why I had to leave him. The dogs—"

"Sure. And I better call up his folks in Richmond . . . I tell you, Scales, those men are feelin' ugly. Likely there'll be a hangin'."

"Yeh?" growled Scales. He swung away and started after the hounds and the crowd of men, on a rapid trot.

The caravan was moving steadily up Fort Road, that ambling thoroughfare which strung its way through the length of Bluecastle. Flashlights waved in gaudy white shafts over the picket fences and

shrubbery that lined the way; the pound of two hundred feet came back in a deadening, dusty throb. People were crowded on porches; the dark homes shimmered with moving lamps. Half-clad and barefoot children screamed their excitement from the fringes of the chanting crowd. And through it all came the muffled, broken gulping of the hounds. *Owrrp. Owrrp. Owrrrr . . .*

Just before he caught up with Kemper and the dogs, Marshal Scales turned aside to pause before a tall figure which stood inside a gate.

"Looks like they've got something, Scales?" the tall figure spoke. It was Judge Livingstone.

"Maybe. You been on your porch all evening, Judge? See anybody come up from the lane?"

"Just—" the Judge's throat seemed a little dry. One does not like to speak condemnation of an old neighbor. "Just Granger Helton. I saw him come."

"Thanks, Judge." Scales ran on. He shoved the tagging boys out of his way and trotted ahead to join Ory Kemper.

The dogs dragged steadily ahead of their master. The cinder path had given way to an uneven brick sidewalk, and Rose and Briar forged rapidly along the bricks, jaws wet and sad eyes rolling. *Owp . . . Owp*. The crowd made a menacing rumble beside them, in the road. "Get a rope, boys," came Jack Liggett's yell, and there was an answering chorus.

Scales' flashlight licked quickly over the straining dogs. "Looks like they've got something, Ory."

"Yeh."

"Judge Livingstone said he saw somebody come up the street from down there, tonight."

Owp . . . Owrr . . . bowrrrr . . . "Yeah? Who was it?"

"Old Granger Helton."

Kemper squinted ahead.

"Only one square away from the main street," he said.

THE Helton house was half a block ahead, a dark, dreamy place of Doric columns and magnolias and wide windows which gave out a yellow shimmer of light. J.E.B. Stewart and Von Borcke had slept on that shady veranda, long before. There seemed a sudden and horrid sacrilege in the yelping of those dogs, in the rush of feet which churned toward the Helton house.

"Going for it," remarked Kemper, and then he didn't say anything more.

At the gate, the dogs dragged sideways against their chains, and then swept forward up the wide concrete walk which led toward the towering veranda. There was a horrid silence in the street—a silence which broke in a surly, murmuring roar as the men charged across the grass and forced their way through the narrow gate behind the marshal and the hounds.

From the shadows of the porch, Granger Helton's voice spoke calmly.

"What's all this, seh?"

He was a slight, white-headed man with a shaggy white mustache. Standing there beside the big column, it seemed as if he were striving to reach out and support himself, and yet he kept his hands rigidly folded in front of him.

The last male descendant of an old family, Granger Helton had absorbed the pride of his native aristocracy without its strength. He was a good businessman, depending on natural canniness and close dealing to make the fortune which he had built up; and as rapidly as his worldly goods had increased, so had increased the hostility of Bluecastle. Few people liked Granger Helton; some feared him, a very few respected him, and more were apt to hoot him openly. In the eyes of the older residents, two characteristics of the man redeemed him from utter disapproval: his staunch pride in his ancestors, and the warm affection which he lavished on his motherless daughter.

The dogs sniffed and bayed, fairly at the man's feet. They seemed vociferating in surprised yelps to Kemper. Here he is, they howled . . . Why don't you get him?

"What does this mean, Marshal?" came Helton's snapping voice again.

Scales brushed a stubby hand over his forehead. "The dogs brought us here, Helton. They're good dogs." The crowd pressed close behind him.

"Do you mean"—Helton's thin voice rose to a shriek—"that I am accused of this murder?"

"The dogs—" began Scales reluctantly, but his words were drowned in the growl of the men who pushed against him.

The exclamations flew like red-hot arrows. "What we waiting for, anyway?" "You-all go get a rope." "Reckon he cut Alf with that sickle so's he couldn't marry Luella." "Everybody knows—" And individual expressions were lost in the mounting howl of a mob.

Hands still clasped loosely before him, Granger

Helton looked down across the sea of faces. "I didn't do it," he cried. "I didn't like that young Dickerson, but—"

One man had pushed his way to a vantage point on the terrace. He pointed an accusing fist at the figure on the porch. It was Bud Calkins.

"Ain't it a fact," he bellowed, "that you told Alf Dickerson to leave off chasing after Luella or you'd kill him?"

Helton's head came up with a jerk.

"Yes, that's so. And I meant the same thing, seh, for you or any other cheap young ruffian. A Helton doesn't associate with—"

"Look at him!" Calkins' face was contorted with rage as the waving beam of a flashlight picked him out. "Look at him! Talks about how good the Heltons are, and yet he goes down a road and sneaks up on young Alf and cuts his throat with a ole sickle! Those dogs come here straightaway, and those dogs—"

Bertie Scales forced his way past the hemming shoulders on either side, and stamped up the steps to stand upon the porch beside Granger Helton.

"Listen to me, you folks. I'm Marshal of this town, and I'll run this doings the way I like—"

"Blue-blood," shrieked Bud Calkins. "Yeh, old Granger Helton is a blue-blood. So blue that for two years he ain't nevah wore a hat so's he won't have to take it off when he meets women-folks. Blue-blood! Everybody in Bluecastle knows how many mortgages he's foreclosed. He's cheated folks and—"

Somebody screeched:

"Cut out yore yellin', Bud. They's been too much talk already." The lower wave of men surged up against Ory Kemper and his hounds.

Helton did not move. But on the top step beside him, Scales was suddenly all action. His blue-steel .45 had come out swiftly, and its muzzle winked down at the halting rank of men and boys.

"You folks stop your pushing and crowding," he ordered. "Or else, some folks are liable to get hurt."

The men glared up at him. The silence was ugly and too oppressive.

"Now," Scales turned to the man beside him. "Hounds can't be led nor persuaded, Mister Helton. You better speak up and tell us how come they trailed you up here."

THE older man's chin trembled. He gulped fearfully. "All right, if you must know!" he

fairly shrieked. "There's no reason for my parading my personal business before this crowd of riff-raff, but—I was walking, alone. Strolling. I came past that place and discovered Alf Dickerson, dead, there in the road. And the sickle—"

"Yes?" came Bertie Scales' easy drawl. "What about the sickle, Mister Helton?"

"It was my own sickle," cried Granger Helton. "It came out of my own barn. It was mine . . . I knew that nobody would believe me. There was nothing I could—could do for that young man. He was dead. So I decided to come along home, and say nothing about it. I—I never thought of those bloodhounds. They must have picked up my trail there at the body and followed me—"

There was a mean, raucous rumble from the crowd—a shrill cat-call or two.

"Where's your daughter, Helton?" asked Scales.

The little man lifted his face.

"I do not propose to have my daughter questioned. She is there in the parlor, behind us, but she shan't be questioned in front of this mob, seh."

"Right," agreed Bertie Scales. He bent forward and plucked Ory Kemper's sleeve. "Ory, come up here a minute." As Kemper mounted the steps, Scales pressed his own heavy revolver into Ory's hand, and wound the leashes of the hounds about a projection on the railing. "Folks," he said to the crowd, "I am going inside for a minute. Granger Helton will stay right here in sight. And Ory Kemper will shoot the first man that moves toward this veranda. I reckon you-all know that Ory can shoot."

There was jostling and mumbling, as he entered the house; people, safe on the outskirts of the crowd, shrieked invective at Helton; but no one offered to mount the steps. Ory Kemper was as good with a gun as he was with dogs, and they knew that the lean farmer had a great admiration for Bertie Scales.

Only a few moments elapsed, and Scales was once more at Granger Helton's side. He took the revolver from Kemper, and with it he motioned the whispering mob into silence

"I've done talked to Miss Luella Helton," he announced . . . The white-haired man beside him sucked in his breath . . . "And she says that it's true—that her father did threaten to kill Alf Dickerson. But"—his calm gaze swept the crowd—"he threatened to kill Bud Calkins, too, and any other young fellow who took to following Miss

Luella around. And—Luella Helton was engaged to Alf Dickerson."

His last words fell on a moving, menacing silence—the pause in which a mob reconsiders, takes stock, decides what it will do.

"Reckon that folks in town don't know about that. But it's true. The young lady just told me, herself. She is right cut up over young Alf's death, so I didn't talk to her any—"

Bud Calkins was at the edge of the porch railing, his sinewy hands closing on the balustrade for a firm hold as he swung to face the men who crowded beneath him. "How long are you fellows going to listen to this talk?" he bellowed. "Scales is just stalling for time, I tell you! Helton's a little man, but he had the sickle and Alf didn't have anything. One tree's as good as another—"

His words fell on fertile ground; these people were anxious to avenge Alf Dickerson's death, and they realized that much delay would be fatal to their design. As if impelled by one lever, the growling ranks moved toward the step.

Scales lifted his .45. He rolled his eyes toward the towering shape of Calkins.

"You get down off'n your perch, Dickey-bird," he snarled. "I'm gonna let daylight through you if you stay up there." His face was blank as a stone mask; he swung the solid muzzle of the gun toward Calkins, and with a growl, the young giant dropped into the throng.

"Now, listen to me for the last time. Granger Helton never killed Alf Dickerson. I know that; I'll stake my life on it."

Jack Liggett yelled:

"All right, then. Who did? The dogs—"

"The dogs are damn' good dogs," agreed the marshal. "I don't stand prepared to say who was the murderer. But I tell you that Helton never killed him. We've got that sickle—we know where it come from. And we're a-going to work on that."

"And let Helton go?" brayed a dozen voices.

Scales ignored them.

"Helton," he demanded, "who does your yard work?"

The old man nodded toward the mass of humanity in his yard. "Maybe he's out there, seh. It's Binny Joke."

"Binny Joke!" cried Scales. "Is he out there, boys? Send him down front . . . Binny!"

There was a twisting of heads, and some slow movement on the edge of the crowd.

"He's across the road," called a man.

"Bring him over here, directly."

Presently the close-packed mob spread apart to admit a fat old negro who poked his way fearfully toward the veranda steps.

"Binny," ordered Scales, "look up here." And then the rest of the crowd saw what those closest to the marshal had known all the time—that he carried the murderous sickle with its blade thrust carelessly through his belt. Scales dragged the blade out and waved it before the negro's eyes.

"Does this belong to Mister Granger?" he demanded.

Cringing, the colored man thrust his head forward, blinking.

"Yes, Mistuh Scales. Reckon so. That's his very own sickle."

"When did you see it last?"

"**C**UT a little grass this afternoon," mumbled Binny Joke, fearful. "Yes, boss. 'Bout four o'clock, I cut a little grass. Left that theah sickle in the bahn."

"Show us where you left it," ordered Scales. Peremptorily, he started down the steps. The crowd hesitated, eyes glaring at Granger Helton . . . Bertie Scales saw that look, and he stopped dead in his tracks. Turning, he marched up the steps, and bent down to whisper to the old man. Helton nodded slightly; his glassy gaze could not leave the mob.

Scales vanished through the front door, but reappeared in a moment and in his hand was a double-barreled shotgun. He stared enigmatically into the hot glare of flashlights, lanterns, and the glaring auto headlights which beamed from the street beyond the fence.

"Ory," he said, "you watch Helton. Don't let no man set foot on this porch. These boys are going along with me."

Kemper nodded; his trained hands slid quickly around stock and barrel of the shotgun.

"Now," declared the marshal, "I'm taking these dogs." He wound the leashes of Briar and Rose around his left wrist, and with his right hand still grasping his .45, he advanced down the steps.

Granger Helton sobbed aloud. He had not moved through all that ordeal; he still stood like an insignificant statue, his white hands hanging loosely in front of him.

"Letting Helton go!" screamed Bud Calkins' voice. "Scales is just saving time, I tell you. Scales

is just—" But he was fighting a losing battle. The ranks severed themselves to let the stony-eyed marshal and the hounds pass through; they closed up again. Something of the little officer's seriousness had penetrated these inflamed minds, even Jack Liggett's mouthings were stilled.

Men followed Bertie Scales in a trotting, stumbling mass. They trampled heedlessly over flower beds, pressing toward the old barn at the rear of the property.

Once, very long before, there had been palatial stables and vehicle sheds in a long row under those willows. Now one moldering barn survived, a dark block of soft jet with its rear against the alley . . . Scales glanced back; the mob was a mob no longer, only an excited crowd—a mass of bulky shoulders and waving arms and winking lights. He shoved the revolver under his belt and took a new grip on the dog leashes.

Binny Joke was beside him.

"You want to go in, boss?"

"Yes. Where's the door on this side?"

"Right here, Mister Scales." The negro fumbled with a hook.

Scales ordered:

"The rest of you stand back. Don't come pushing in after me or you'll spoil the scent. Don't go wild, boys—I reckon you'll need all your energy in running this man down."

Silence settled over the men as Scales and Binny Joke pushed in through the door. The old barn had been divided by numerous partitions, and one of these separated from the abandoned carriage house a storeroom in which lawn-mowers, watering pots and tools were stored. It was this compartment in which Bertie Scales stood. Light from two flash-lamps held at the open window made the whole interior plain as day.

"Where does the sickle belong, Binny?"

The negro pointed.

"I hung it over that boa'd, boss. Right beside that alley do'."

Scales nodded, and eyed the alley door.

"Reckon a person could come along the alley without anybody seeing him. And of course that door wasn't locked. If he was looking for a weapon here—a knife or hatchet or sickle or anything else, it would be easy to find."

"Yes, boss."

"Stay behind, while I take the dogs over there."

A pushing, narrow-eyed gallery hung at the

window and the open entrance behind him as Scales and the hounds went forward across the littered floor.

"Probably this is all over with my smell, now," grunted the marshal, "but we'll try." He drew forth the sickle and let the dogs muzzle it. Briar turned and sniffed at Scales' leg.

"Then we'll try the door," murmured Bertie, more to himself than to the crowd. He lifted the latch in the alley door—a common bent clasp with a handle on both sides—and opened it. "Gettum Rose, Briar . . . nozum, gettum, dogs," he chanted. The hounds snuffed and dawdled about the worn, wooden doorsill. Scales held them there; the long shadows twisted beyond him like formless ogres.

Rose bayed loudly. The crowd set up a yell.

Owr. Owp. Owp. Owp . . . Both hounds had the scent now, a definite man-scent that led them yowling into the weedy road which served as an alley behind the Helton barn. As the vanguard of the crowd came whooping around the corner of the building, Rose and Briar were already headed north between the grassy ruts.

"Save your lungs, dogs," Scales muttered. "Reckon you'll need all your wind." The caravan cheered and chattered at his heels.

THE trail was leading up and up, climbing across the steep vacant lot which sloped behind the Livingstone property. Trotting with a devilish intensity, the little hounds dragged Bertie Scales through the long grass.

Whatever men had not been summoned by the first startling news of Alf's death, which raced like a prairie fire through the town, were being drawn to the scene by this fresh outburst of baying and yells. Lights frisked across nearby gardens, the white shirts of men were mottled ghosts in the darkness. And in the pound of running feet that came in from side streets, the groan of the bloodhounds rose and fell.

"Monument Hill," yelled some canny youth. "They're makin' for Monument Hill!" Several men broke forward and passed Scales at a trot, half-expecting to be ordered back by the fiery little officer. But Bertie gave a crooked grin that they could not see through the darkness. Reassured, they broke at full speed up the hillside lane, and more followed.

By the time the marshal and the dogs reached the summit of Monument Hill, most of the crowd

was there ahead of him.

"Nobody hiding up here," Jack Liggett cried. "We've looked all over the place, Marshal!"

Scales lifted his eyes to the bronze Confederate soldier, a shapeless image against the stars, who stood looking forever toward the distant Blue Ridge.

"We'll let the hounds do the looking," he said. In his mind he was trying to reconstruct a story, build a plot, and tear it down again.

Owr. Owp-owp. Still mouthing loudly, Rose and Briar led Scales through a crescent of bushes laid out near the monument, and swung back in a circle to the crest of the hill. Beneath him, in the lovers' lane, the officer could see a few lights shifting about. Doubtless the body had been taken away before this, and morbid watchers were gazing at the place where Alf Dickerson had lain. The smooth grass ran down in a long curve to the road beneath.

Bending back from the brow of the hill, the hounds headed once more for the village. Behind them the crowd seemed surly, disappointed. It had been expected that the murderer might be found lurking on the crest of the hill.

"Got a good run yet, boys," Scales told them over his shoulder, and then once more he became oblivious of his followers.

South along the ridge, twisting crazily, the trail seemed to grow fresher even as the dogs grew more tired. Their tongues lolled, their eyes were rheumy and sad, but their soft noses still dragged against the ground; still they yelled.

Down Corey Street, into the alley behind the stores, with the mob, a puffing, hot pageant that spread behind.

Up to the doors of Jack Liggett's pool hall; and Jack Liggett cursing wildly at Bertie Scales' side—

"My God, Marshal! Somebody who was in my place—somebody who—"

An ancient loafer, deaf and dingy, sole survivor of the cohorts who lounged nightly in the billiard parlor, stood with glassy face and uplifted cue as the torrent of men spread into the hall through the rear doors.

Scales jerked Rose and Briar to the front door.

"No sense wasting time," he declared. "Reckon it goes out here."

Owp. Owp . . . Few people even glanced across the street as they passed on the far side of the road from the Helton house, where Ory Kemper still guarded Granger Helton in the gloom of the

veranda. Down the Fort Road, scattering crowds of women and children who clung at the front gates, lifting a damp fog of dust through which the lights could not shine. But the deep gasp of the weary dogs drew the town of Bluecastle in a hot mob behind.

AT the scene of the crime, Scales calmly led his dogs into an immediate turn on the trail.

“What’s the idea?” people cried. “Give ‘em their heads. Let ‘em go—”

“They’ll go,” grunted Bertie Scales. “They still got it. Reckon it’ll go up to Helton’s front yard.”

And it went to Helton’s front yard; again the hundreds of trampling feet bruised the grass, bodies pushed against the picket fence, and up on the porch Ory Kemper gripped the shotgun a trifle more tightly.

“You can come down, Ory,” Scales called. “You better take these hounds of yourn. They’ve gone far and they’re tired.” To the staring, breathless mass of humanity which pressed behind him, he said. “Now folks you’re back where you started. And I reckon the real run has just begun . . . Bud Calkins ain’t in the crowd by any chance, is he?”

People knew, then. They realized that they hadn’t seen Bud Calkins since they were in that yard before. He hadn’t been with them at the stable or up on Monument Hill; now they knew. They yelled and swore, but Scales told them to quiet down.

“Reckon Bud isn’t going to be took easy,” he warned. “Not so much talk and more results: that’s what we want, you can help, if you want to.”

A few men tore away to Bud Calkins’ lodgings, searching wildly and heatedly, but the bulk of the throng still trailed the dogs. With Ory Kemper urging them in that strange jargon which they understood, the little hounds launched bravely out on the fresh trail that led from the very edge of Granger Helton’s porch.

Owp. Owp. Owp. It was a savage dirge for the dead Alf Dickerson, a litany of doom for Bud Calkins who waited in hiding somewhere, balked and snarling. They went down the main street, jerking on their chains. Yes, a few people said, Bud Calkins had passed there. He was running—

In the railroad yards, where the townspeople swarmed, armed and hooting, Bertie Scales addressed them:

“All you young kids stay to the rear,” he ordered. “And anybody else who doesn’t want to get shot at had better stay back, too. Reckon Bud come down here to hop a freight, but there doesn’t any go through for half an hour yet. You let me and Ory Kemper go ahead, and you stay safe.”

And he went ahead, marching beside Kemper with his gun drawn, as the dogs slathered their way over the cinders. The water tanks and semaphores were towers of blackness alongside, with ugly green and red eyes that watched from their high perch to see what would happen.

And they saw it all.

They saw Bud Calkins, a racing gray hulk, leap from the shelter of the dark coal shed from which the belling of the hounds forced him out. They saw him cross the right-of-way with gorilla bounds, cursing as he fled, nerving himself toward that desperate plunge at the high board fence that bordered the spur. *Owp. Owp. . .*

“You can’t make it, Bud,” called Bertie Scales. “Better take your medicine peace—”

He was going to say “peaceably,” but Bud didn’t give him a chance. Calkins snarled as he whipped around; it was dark; Scales couldn’t see that gun, but he knew what was happening. Even as the first stream of orange scratched the blackness where Bud Calkins crouched, the big revolver in the marshal’s hand gave three rapid, savage thuds.

Then there was silence, except for the rush of feet that flooded over the ties toward that spot.

THE bloodhounds moaned, and panted like bellows. “Too bad,” grunted Ory Kemper, as Scales’ flash-lamp swept its beam over the young man’s body—a big body, dead and wet.

“I’m not so sorry,” said the marshal honestly. “He tried to lynch an innocent man, when all the time he had done it himself.

“Reckon he was just jealous, jealous as all hell. Alf Dickerson had made the grade with Miss Luella Helton, and Bud couldn’t, so he figured he’d fix Alf.”

There was a big circle of men around there, and he and Ory Kemper and the hounds and the body of Bud Calkins were all in the middle.

“Next time, don’t you men be so ready to listen to lynch talk,” Bertie Scales told them. “This here was a clever murder. Things ain’t what they often appear. I’ve done thought it all out. Bud swiped that sickle out of the Helton stable and went up

there on Monument Hill, in the bushes. He knew that Alf would come there to meet his girl, since the old man didn't give Alf yard room. Alf come early, like any young fellow in love. And Bud sliced him with that sharp sickle. He rolled the body over the edge of the hill, that was all."

The crowd murmured and grunted.

"That's how come all the grass and grass-stains on Alf. Bud was certain about the dogs not taking up his scent from that body; it was simple. He just went back downtown and waited for the news to come in, right there in Jack's pool hall. Must be a good hundred yards from the top of Monument Hill to the bottom, and a body could get a pretty fast roll on that and drop off the edge clean into the lane. Yes. And throw the sickle down after him. Yes. Plumb easy. Of course he hadn't figured on Granger Helton being trailed by the hounds. That was just good luck for Bud and bad luck for Helton. But Bud was out to make the most of it. I never did like lynch talk, boys."

Jack Liggett spoke respectfully, and his voice

was sober with awe.

"But you seemed so dead sure, Marshal. You tole us that you would stake your life how Granger Helton never did that killing."

"Reckon I was certain. I got that when I was in the house. His daughter told me."

"Luella—she told you—"

Bertie let the toe of his broad shoe go out and nudge against the heaving sides of the two silent hounds.

"You-all remarked how Bud talked about Granger Helton. Hadn't worn no hat for two years, he said. And that's the truth, if you stop to think . . . Just bows. Don't never take off his hat, 'cause he don't never wear one. Granger Helton is plumb paralyzed in his arms, boys. He can wiggle his hands plenty, but Miss Luella said he hadn't been able to move his arms for two years, scarcely at all . . . Man that's sensitive as Granger, I don't go to affront him. I wouldn't tell the whole town about it, right at his own front door."

