

"That reminds me of something that happened to me once."

broke off our laughter and

We all/looked up in surprise.

words the stranger had uttered since joining us.

Those were the first words the stranger had uttered since

joining us.

He was too well dressed to be a bum

so when he came over to our fire in the

hobo jungle just outside of San Berdoo, we were suspicious and

didn't talk to him. Now, he'd tried to break the ice, but we still wanted

to ignore him.

"Jeez, it's cold!" said Shorty. *Limpy*

"Wight I wuz in Miyamee." said *Limpy* picking up the cue.

"Migawd, I come all the way from Milwaukee so I can ^{get} have a little

Californnee sunshine, and what happens? The sonbitchin' weather-

man pulls a Pearl Harbor and makes it snow!" spat out Big Bo disgustedly.

I didn't say anything; I was watching the stranger...

There were too many things about him that wouldn't let me ignore him. In

the first place, he was too well dressed to be a bum; but his ~~clothes~~ ^{clothes} ~~were~~ ^{were}

weren't fit for the kind of weather we were having.

It was freakish weather in Southern

Cal and the first snow in 40 odd years had fallen in Ellay; and we had

some in San Berdoo too...It wasn't more than a half inch deep on

the level ground, but it was plenty cold.

Getting back to this

strange guy, he was dressed pretty light for even a mild Southern Cal

winter: he had only a pair of slacks and a ^{light sport shirt} ~~light sport shirt~~, but the

cold weather didn't phase him none. Another thing about him was that

he didn't seem to notice that Shorty, Limpy, and Big Bo were trying

to cut him out.

"That reminds me of something that happened to me once," he repeated.

Limpy had been telling us some pretty tall ghost stories and

had just finished his funniest one when the stranger first spoke.

"It was ^{repeated about} ~~just~~ three years ^{last summer} ago," the stranger continued. "I ^{had just moved} ~~moved~~ into

" 'Enos Pritchard, ' he ~~xxxxxx~~ told me.

"~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ 'That's strange, there's another Enos P ritchard around here; are you ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ a relative of his?' I remembered ~~xxxx~~ this other ^{Pritchard} ~~Enos~~ pretty well because when I first moved ~~xx~~ onto the farm, he came over and watched us unload. He was a big, hairy, evil looking, ^{with a pair of massive hands} hulk of a man: he didn't ~~saxzxyzbixxxx~~ offer to help; in fact he didn't even say a word. Just kept watching everything we did ~~xxxx~~ ^{with} those evil eyes of his. He ~~frightened~~ my wife at first, but ~~xxx~~ as he went away as soon as we'd finished ~~xx~~ taking our stuff into the house, she didn't say anything. After that he kept coming around to our place about twice a week, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ never saying a word, but always following our motions. And every once in awhile, I'd see him at the general store and he'd look at me as if he were trying to read my mind. If this ~~fellow~~ ^{well-digger} were a relative of his, I was going to turn him down.

"~~xxxxxxx~~ "Nope, no kin," ^{he} looked as if he wanted to say more, but he kept his mouth closed.

I had a spot for a well all picked out, but ~~x~~ Pritchard ~~xx~~ wanted to dig at another spot. I didn't

^{we agree he agreed to work at my price so} I asked him if he wanted to start the next morning, but he told me that he'd like to start that night. "I'm allergic to sunlight," ^{explained} he told me, and as I'd heard of cases like that, I didn't think anything of it ~~and we~~.

I had a spot ~~fff~~ for a well all picked out, but Pritchard wanted to dig at another spot. ~~xxxxxxx~~ I didn't know the first thing about digging wells and I figured that he knew ^{best} where he'd strike water ^{best} so I let him dig ~~xxxxxxx~~ where he ^{wanted} ~~thought~~ best.

"Well, I went ~~xx~~ back into the house and went to bed. ^{Early the} The next morning I went out to see how much work had been done on the well. It was about three feet deep, but what struck me as queer was that ~~xxxxxxx~~ instead of being round, it was oblong, about six feet by ~~xxxx~~ four. It looked more like a grave than a well to me, but as I ~~xxxxxxx~~ said, ^{Enos} I didn't know the first thing about digging wells and supposed that ~~he~~

knew the proper way to go about it."

"~~xxxxxxx~~ Haw! haw! what a bonehead!" shorted Big Bo, "Any fool knows that there aren't any oblong wells."

"Shut up!" hissed Limpy ~~xxx~~ ^{smelling} ~~xxxxxxx~~ a story he ~~xxxxxxx~~ might be able to retell, but the stranger ignored them both.

"I meant to ask him about it that evening," he continued, "but he didn't come to the door. I went out ~~xx~~ to see if he'd come yet, but he wasn't at the well. ~~On~~ As ~~I~~ we were used to retiring at 9:30, I had to go back into the house and go to bed.

^{Early} "The next morning, I ~~walked~~ ^{about} went down to the well again and there was ~~xxxxxxx~~ Enos Pritchard lying in the hole."

"Drunk?" asked Big Bo.

280
246
1680

"I thought he was drunk at first, but ~~he looked pretty dead~~ when I got down to look at him, he ~~looked like a shapeless mass~~ was And, funny thing, there was dew on the ground but not on his body. ^{was} dead. /Not only ~~that~~ was he dead, he looked as if he'd been dead for about

a month; ~~the~~ ^{carelessly} Parts of his hands and face ^{was} had already started decomposing. ^{it} Thrown/on top of his body was a ~~w~~ billfold. I was afraid

to touch it at first, but I finally picked it up; it was pretty soiled with earth, but there were a few cards in it that I could make out. ~~a~~

~~driver's license~~ There were three membership and a check

cards, ~~xxx~~ a few calling cards/all made out to ~~x~~ James Hoskins. I recalled

a newspaper article about ^a James Hoskins disappearing when I first moved there, and all of a sudden it came to ^{me} ~~xxxxxxx~~, hard as it was to believe, that his ghost ~~was~~ had appeared to me and uncovered ^{the} his own body."

~~xxxxx~~ "Migawd! you don't really believe in ghosts do you?" said Shorty in a ~~xxxxx~~ voice that ~~xxxxx~~ showed that he ~~xxxxx~~ himself wasn't altogether ~~xxxxx~~ sure that ghosts didn't exist.

^{tail} "I recalled ~~that~~ ~~xxxxx~~ ~~xxxxx~~ the well digger's face when ~~xxxxx~~ I asked him if ~~he~~ were related to Enos Pritchard; he looked as if he wanted to tell me something more and couldn't. ~~xxxxx~~ ~~xxxxx~~ But what con-

← vinced me more than anything else was the fact that there were no footprints other than mine ~~xx~~ on the dew-covered ground. I couldn't see why he ~~xxxx~~ called himself Enos Pritchard though until I visualized the real Enos Pritchard's evil face and hairy body; I recalled the way he kept watching me. "Watching me to see if I'd discovered his secret," I decided... And I recalled too, the well-digger's look when I asked him if he ~~x~~ were ~~xxx~~ related to this Pritchard; he looked at me as if he wanted to say more ~~x~~ but couldn't. *James Hoshins had been murdered by Enos Pritchard and* The only way he could bring the name out, I thought, *was to* call himself Enos Pritchard. *but hearing a noise behind me, I looked*

"I thought of calling the constable immediately, ~~x~~ and ~~turned~~ to face ~~Enos Pritchard~~ the real Enos Pritchard in all his ugliness. I was afraid that ~~my discovery~~ he would read ~~xxxxxxx~~ on my face what ~~xx~~ I had discovered, so, for the first time, *since that first day,* ~~xxxxx~~ I spoke to him, trying to be casual, 'Good morning, neighbor.'

"It was plain that ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ his conscience wouldn't let him discard the idea that I knew his secret; he was plainly suspicious, and, perhaps without meaning to, *and nervously* replied gruffly, 'Found a body, huh?' although it was impossible for him to see it from his position.

"I couldn't ~~be~~ casual any longer; "You killed him, didn't you?" ~~xxx~~ I blurted out in accusation.

"If you'd been there, you'd have actually seen the beast in him take possession of his body. *Yess* 'he growled, 'I ~~xxxxxx~~ him with my two hands,' lifting up his ham-like paws, "and I'll kill you the same way ~~xxxxxxx~~ so's ~~xxx~~ no one else will know." I backed off, but he was ~~x~~ fast for all of his bulk. I could have *run* ~~ran~~ towards the house, but I didn't want to endanger Mary. He finally caught up with me, and I prepared to fight back with every ounce of my strength. He got hold of ~~my~~ me with his huge hands and..."

The stranger's voice broke off with a choking sob.

We all sat and stared into the fire; none of us ~~xxxx~~ wanted to look at a man crying; like my old buddy Mac would say, there's 'aintt no sight worse

howling

worse than a grown man crying like a baby or a woman.

Finally Limpy couldn't hold it any longer. "What hap-~~pened~~ ~~xxxxx~~ J-j-jeez," he ended up, ~~in~~ fear nearly strangling him, "Wh-where'd he go?!" I looked up wondering what had gotten hold of Limpy. I followed Limpy's eyes to the log that the stranger had been sitting on. ~~It~~ No one was there. The snow on top of it ~~wasn't even~~ wasn't even packed down. And there were no footprints in the snow.