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The Wooden Shoe Conspiracy

There was this bum on the beach.

Fiercely bearded, short, squat, malevolent, his motor vehicle loaded with dangerous weapons: this bum. Did nothing; said nothing; stared.

They ignored him.

Smith's assistant boatman did not appear. Never did appear. Smith rigged his boat alone, chewing on jerky. He sent his girl friend to Page with the truck to pick up the passengers arriving that morning by air.

The bum watched. (As soon as the work was completed he would probably ask for a job.)

Flight 96 was late, as usual. Finally it emerged from a cloudbank, growled overhead, banked and turned and landed into the wind on the strictly limited Page runway—limited at one end by a high-tension power line and at the other end by a three-hundred-foot cliff. The aircraft itself was a bimotored jet-prop job with an antiquarian look; it might have been built in 1929 (the year of the crash) and seemed to have been repainted several times since, in the manner of a used car touched up for sale on the corner lot. (Square Deal Andy's. Top Dollar Johnny's.) Somebody had painted it recently with one thick coat

of yellow, which failed, however, to quite conceal the underlying coat of green. Little round glass ports lined the sides of the craft, through which the white faces of passengers could be seen, peering out, crossing themselves, their lips moving.

The plane turned from the runway and lumbered onto the apron of the strip. The engines smoked and grumbled and backfired but provided enough power to bring the plane almost to the loading zone. There the engines died and the plane stopped. The airport ticket agent, flight traffic controller, manager, and baggage handler removed his ear protectors and climbed down from the open-air control tower, buttoning his fly.

Black fumes hovered about the plane's starboard engine. From the interior came little ticking noises; a hatch was opened and lowered by hand crank, transforming itself into a gangway. The stewardess appeared in the opening.

Flight 96 discharged two passengers.

First to alight was a woman. She was young, handsome, with an arrogant air; her dark shining hair hung below her waist. She wore this and that, not much, including a short skirt which revealed tanned and excellent legs.

The cowboys, Indians, Mormon missionaries, Government officials and other undesirables lounging about the terminal stared with hungry eyes. The city of Page, Arizona, pop. 1400, includes 800 men and sometimes three or four good-looking women.

Behind the young woman came the man, of middle age, though his piebald beard and steel-rimmed spectacles may have made him look older than he really was. His nose, irregular, very large, cheerily refulgent, shone like a polished tomato under the bright white light of the desert sun. A stogie in his teeth. Well dressed, he looked like a professor. Blinking, he put on a straw hat, which helped, and came tramping up to the terminal door beside the woman. He towered over the girl at his side. Nevertheless everybody present, including the women, stared at the girl.

No doubt about it. Under a wide-brimmed straw hat, wearing

huge black opaque sunglasses, she looked like Garbo. The old Garbo. Young Garbo.

Smith's girl friend greeted them. The big man took her hand, which vanished within the clasp of his enormous paw. But his grasp was precise, gentle and firm. The surgeon.

"Right," he said. "I'm Dr. Sarvis. This is Bonnie." His voice seemed strangely soft, low, melancholy, issuing from so grand (or gross) an organism.

"Miss Abzug?"

"Miz Abzug."

"Call her Bonnie."

Into the truck, duffel bags and sleeping bags in back. They whipped out of Page past the thirteen churches of Jesus Row, through the official government slums and the construction workers' trailer-house slums and out of town into the traditional pastoral slums of Navajoland. Sick horses loitered along the highway looking for something to eat: newspapers, Kleenex, beer cans, anything more or less degradable. The doctor talked with Seldom's driver; Ms. Abzug remained aloof and mostly silent.

"What utterly ghastly country," she said once. "Who lives here?"

"The Indians," Doc said.

"It's too good for them."

Down through Dynamite Notch to Bitter Springs to Marble Canyon and under the paranoid gargoyled battlements of the Jurassic Age to Lee's Ferry, into the hot-muck green-willow smell of the river. The hot sun roared down through a sky blue as the Virgin's cloak, emphasizing with its extravagant light the harsh perfection of the cliffs, the triumphant river, the preparations for a great voyage.

A second round of introductions.

"Dr. Sarvis, Miz Abzug, Seldom Seen Smith. . . ."

"Pleased to meet you, sir; you too, ma'am. This here's George Hayduke. Behind the bush. He's gonna be number-two nigger this trip. Say something, George."

The bum behind the beard growled something unintelligible. He

crunched an empty beer can in his hand, lobbed the wreckage toward a nearby garbage can, missed. Hayduke was now wearing ragged shorts and a leather hat. His eyes were red. He smelled of sweat, salt, mud, stale beer. Dr. Sarvis, erect and dignified, his beard smartly trimmed, regarded Hayduke with reservations. It was people like Hayduke who gave beards a bad name.

Smith, looking at them all with his happy grin, seemed pleased with his crew and passengers. Especially with Miz Abbzug, at whom he tried hard not to stare. But she was something, she was something. Smith felt, down below, belowdecks, that faint but unmistakable itching and twitching of scrotal hair which is the sure prelude to love. Venereal as a valentine, it could have no other meaning.

About that time the remainder of the passenger list arrived by car: two secretaries from San Diego, old friends of Smith, repeaters, who had been with him on many river trips before. The party was complete. After a lunch of tinned snacks, cheese, crackers, beer and soda pop, they got under way. Still no regular assistant boatman, Hayduke had himself a job.

Sullen and silent, he coiled the bow line in nautical trim, gave the boat a shove from shore and rolled on board. The boat floated into the current of the river. Three ten-man rubber rafts lashed snug together side by side, a triple rig, it made a ponderous and awkward-looking craft but just right for rocks and rapids. The passengers sat in the middle; Hayduke and Smith, as oarsmen, stood or sat on each side. Smith's truck driver waved good-bye from shore, looking wistful. They would not see her again for fourteen days.

The wooden oars creaked in the oarlocks; the vessel advanced with the current, which would carry it along at an average of four to five miles an hour through most of the canyon, much faster in the rapids. Not as in a rowboat but facing forward, like gondoliers, pushing (not pulling) on the oars, Hayduke and Smith confronted the gleaming river, the sound of fast water around the first bend. Smith stuck a stick of jerky in his teeth.

Back-lit by the afternoon sun, the rolling waters shone like hammered metal, like bronze lamé, each facet reflecting mirror-fashion

the blaze in the sky. While glowing dumbly in the east, above the red canyon walls, the new moon hung in the wine-dark firmament like a pale antiphonal response to the glory of the sun. New moon in the afternoon, fanatic sun ahead. A bird whistled in the willows.

Down the river!

Hayduke knew nothing about river-running. Smith knew he knew nothing. It didn't matter too much, so long as the passengers didn't find out right away. What did matter to Smith was Hayduke's broad and powerful back, his gorilla arms, the short strong legs. The kid would learn all he had to learn quick enough.

They approached the riffles of the Paria, under the bluff where the park rangers lived. Tourists watched them from the new metallic campground on the hill. Smith stood up to get a better view of the rocks and rough water immediately ahead. Nothing much, a minor rapid, Grade I on the boatman's scale. The green river curled around a few fangs of limestone, the sleek smooth waters purling foam. A toneless roar, what acousticians call "white noise," vibrated on the air.

As prearranged, Hayduke and Smith turned the boat 90 degrees and bore sideways (this foolish craft was wider than long) onto the glassy tongue of the little rapid. They slipped through with barely a splash. Through the tail of the turmoil they rode into the confluence, where the Paria (in flood) mixed its gray greasy bentonite waters with the clear green of the dammed Colorado. From 12 mph their speed slowed to four or five again.

Hayduke relaxed, grinning. Wiped the water from his beard and eyebrows. Why, hell's fuck, he thought, that's nothing. Why shit I'm just a natural riverman.

They passed beneath Marble Canyon Bridge. From above looking down the height had not seemed so great; there was no standard for scale. But from the river looking up they realized the meaning of a vertical four hundred feet: about thirty-five skyscraper stories from here to there. The automobile creeping across the bridge looked like a toy; the tourists standing about on the observation point were insect size.

The bridge moved away behind them, vanished beyond the turning of the canyon walls. They were now well into Marble Gorge, also known as Marble Canyon, sixty miles of river three thousand feet below the level of the land, leading into the Grand Canyon at the mouth of the Little Colorado River.

Seldom Seen Smith as usual was fondling memories. He remembered the real Colorado, before damnation, when the river flowed unchained and unchanneled in the joyous floods of May and June, swollen with snow melt. Boulders crunching and clacking and grumbling, tumbling along the river's bedrock bed, the noise like that of grinding molars in a giant jaw. That was a river.

Still, even so, not all was lost. The beaded light of afternoon slanted down beyond the canyon walls, whiskey-gold on rock and tree, a silent benison from the flawless sky, free from your friendly solar system. Cut off, then reappearing, the pale elided wafer of the new moon followed after. A good spirit, a faery queen, watching over them.

Again the white roar. Another rapids coming. Smith gave the order to fasten life jackets. They turned another corner. The noise swelled alarmingly, and down the canyon where all now stared they saw rocks like teeth rising through a white rim of foam. The river apparently went underground at that point; from boat level nothing of it could be seen beyond the rapids.

"Badger Crick Rapids," Smith announced. Again he stood up. Grade 3, nothing serious. All the same he wanted a good look before diving in. He stood and read the river as others might read the symbols on a score, the blips on a radarscope, or signs of coming weather in cloud formations far away. He looked for the fat swell that meant hidden fang of stone, the choppy stretch of wavelets signifying rocks and shallow water, the shadow on the river that told of a gravel bar six inches under the surface, the hook and snag of submerged logs that could gash the bottom of his rubber boats. He followed with his eye the flecks of foam gliding steadily down the mainstream, the almost invisible ripples and eddies on the river's flanks.

Smith read the river, the ladies reading him. He was not aware

of how comic and heroic he looked, the Colorado man, long and lean and brown as the river used to be, leaning forward on his oar, squinting into the sun, the strong and uncorrupted teeth shining in the customary grin, the macho bulge at the fly of his ancient Levi's, the big ears out and alert. Rapids closing in.

"Everybody down," Smith orders. "Grab rope."

In a frantic clamor of tumbled water, the mass of the river crashes upon the rubble of rock fanning out from the mouth of a side canyon—Badger. The deep and toneless vibration all around, a mist of spray floating on the air, little rainbows suspended in the sunlight.

Again they swing the craft about. Smith heaves mightily on his oar, taking the bow, and steers the boat straight onto the tongue of the rapids, the oil-smooth surge of the main current pouring like a torrent into the heart of the uproar. No need to cheat on this, a minor rapid; he'll give his customers a thrill, their money's worth, what they paid for.

A wave eight feet high looms above Smith, crouched in the bow. The wave stands there, waiting, does not move. (On the river, unlike the sea, the water moves; the waves remain in place.) The front end of the boat climbs the wave, pushed up by momentum and the weight behind. Smith hangs on to the lines. The tripartite boat almost folds back upon itself, then bends over the wave and slides down into the trough beyond, the middle and third parts following in like fashion. A wet and shining boulder stands dead ahead, directly in their course. The boat pauses before it. A ton of water, recoiling from the rock, crashes into the boat. Everyone is instantly soaked. The women scream with delight; even Doc Sarvis laughs. Smith hauls on his oar; the boat rolls off the boulder and careens like a roller coaster over the waves in the tail of the rapids, then slows in the steadier water below. Smith looks back. He has lost an oarsman. Where George Hayduke should have been the unmanned oar swings loosely in its lock.

There he comes. Hayduke in his orange life jacket bobs down the billows, grinning with ferocious determination, knees up under his chin, the fetal pose, using his feet and legs as shock absorbers,

caroming off the rock. Instinctive and correct response. Has lost his hat. Makes no sound. . . .

In the calmer water below the rapid they dragged him back aboard.

“Where you been?” Smith said.

Grinning, sputtering, Hayduke shook his head, popped the water from his ears and managed to look both fierce and sheepish. “Fucking river,” he muttered.

“You got to grab a line,” Smith said.

“I was holding onto the fucking oar. Jammed it on a rock and it hit me in the stomach.” Nervously he pawed his tangled mass of soaked hair. His hat, an old leather sombrero from Sonora, was floating on the waves, about to go down for the third time. They retrieved it with an oar.

The river bore them calmly on, through the plateau, into the Precambrian mantle of the earth, toward the lowlands, the delta and the Sea of Cortez, seven hundred miles away.

“Soap Crick Rapids next,” Smith said. And sure enough, they heard again the tumult of river and stone in conflict. Around the next bend.

“This is ridiculous,” Abzug said privately to Doc. They sat hunched hard together with a wet poncho spread over their laps and legs. She was beaming with pleasure. Water dripped from the brim of her exaggerated hat. The doctor’s stogie burned bravely in the damp.

“Absolutely ridiculous,” he said. “How do you like our boatmen?”

“Weird; the tall one looks like Ichabod Ignatz; the short one looks like a bandit out of some old Mack Sennett movie.”

“Or Charon and Cerberus,” Doc said. “But try not to laugh; our lives rest in their uncertain hands.” And they laughed again.

All together now they plunged into another maelstrom, Grade 4 on the river runner’s chart. More gnashing river, heaving waves, the clash of elementals, the pure and brainless fury of tons of irresistible water crashing down upon tons of immovable limestone. They felt the shock, they heard the roar, saw foam and spray and rainbows

floating on the mist as they rode through chaos into the clear. The adrenaline of adventure, without the time for dread, buoyed them high on the waves.

This was the forty-fifth trip down the Grand for Smith, and so far as he could measure, its pleasure was not staled by repetition. But then no two river trips were ever quite alike. The river, the canyon, the desert world was always changing, from moment to moment, from miracle to miracle, within the firm reality of mother earth. River, rock, sun, blood, hunger, wings, joy—this is the real, Smith would have said, if he’d wanted to. If he felt like it. All the rest is androgynous theosophy. All the rest is transcendental transvestite transactional scientology or whatever the fad of the day, the vogue of the week. As Doc would’ve said, if Smith had asked him. Ask the hawk. Ask the hungry lion lunging at the starving doe. They know.

Thus reasoneth Smith. Only a small businessman, to be sure. Never even went to college.

In the grand stillness between rapids, which was half the river and most of the time, Smith and Hayduke rested on their oars and let the song of a canyon wren—a clear glissando of semiquavers—mingle with the drip of waterdrops, the gurgle of eddies, the honk of herons, the rustle of lizards in the dust on shore. Between rapids, not silence but music and stillness. While the canyon walls rose slowly higher, 1000, 1500, 2000 feet, the river descending, and the shadows grew longer and the sun shy.

A chill from the depths crept over them.

“Time to make camp, folks,” Smith announced, sculling for shore. Hayduke pitched in. Close ahead, on the right bank, lay a slope of sand, fringed by thickets of coppery willow and stands of tamarisk with lavender plumes nodding in the breeze. Again they heard the call of a canyon wren, a little bird with a big mouth. But musical, musical. And the far-off roar of still another rapids, that sound like the continuous applause of an immense and tireless multitude. The grunt and breath of two men laboring, oars scraping. The quiet talk of the first-class passengers.

“Dig the scene, Doc.”

"No technical jargon, please. This is a holy place."

"Yeah but where's the Coke machine?"

"Please, I'm meditating."

The bow grated on gravel. Hayduke, general swamper, coiled line in hand, splashed through ankle-deep water and tethered the boat to a stout clump of willows. All came ashore. Hayduke and Seldom passed each passenger his/her river bag, the rubberized dunnage, the little ammo boxes containing personal items. The passengers wandered off, Doc and Bonnie in one direction, the two women from San Diego in another.

Smith paused for a moment to watch the retreating figure of Ms. Abzug.

"Now, ain't she something?" he said. "Ain't she *really* something?" He closed one eye, as if sighting down a rifle barrel. "Now that little girl is a real honey. Finger-lickin' good."

"Cunt is cunt," said George Hayduke, philosopher, not bothering to look. "Do we unload all this stuff now?"

"Most of it. Lemme show you."

They wrestled with the heavy baggage, the big ammo boxes full of food, the ice chest, the wooden box holding Seldom's cooking pots, frypans, Dutch oven, grills, other hardware, and lugged it all onto the beach. Smith outlined an area on the sand as his kitchen where he set up the cookstove, his folding table, his pantry, the bar, the black olives and fried baby clams. He chipped off little chunks of ice for all the begging cups that would soon appear and poured a spot of rum for Hayduke and himself. The passengers were still back in the bushes, changing into dry clothing, fortifying themselves in private for the cool of the evening.

"Here's to you, boatman," Smith said.

"*Hoa binh*," said Hayduke.

Smith built a fire of charcoal, peeled the butcher paper from the standard first-night entree—huge floppy steaks—and stacked them near the grill. Hayduke prepared the salad and, as he did so, chased the rum with his tenth can of beer since lunch.

"That stuff'll give you kidney stones," Smith said.

"Bullshit."

"Kidney stones. I oughta know."

"I been drinking beer all my life."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-five."

"Kidney stones," Smith said. "In about ten more years."

"Bullshit."

The passengers, dry and refurbished, came straggling in one at a time, the doctor first. He placed his tin cup on the bar, installed one miniature iceberg and poured himself a double shot from his bottle of Wild Turkey.

"It is a beauteous evening, calm and free," he announced.

"That's true," Smith said.

"The holy time is quiet as a nun."

"You said a mouthful, Doctor."

"Call me Doc."

"Okay, Doc."

"Cheers."

"Same to you, Doc,"

There was some further discussion of the ambience. Then of other matters. The girl came up, Abzug, wearing long pants and a shaggy sweater. She had shed the big hat but even in twilight still wore the sunglasses. She gave a touch of tone to Marble Gorge.

Meanwhile the doctor was saying, "The reason there are so many people on the river these days is because there are too many people everywhere else."

Bonnie shivered, slipping into the crook of his left arm. "Why don't we build a fire?" she said.

"The wilderness once offered men a plausible way of life," the doctor said. "Now it functions as a psychiatric refuge. Soon there will be no wilderness." He sipped at his bourbon and ice. "Soon there will be no place to go. Then the madness becomes universal." Another thought. "And the universe goes mad."

"We will," Smith said to Abzug. "After supper."

"Call me Bonnie."

“Miss Bonnie.”

“Miz Bonnie,” she corrected him.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” muttered Hayduke nearby, overhearing, and he snapped the cap from another can of Coors.

Abzug cast a cold eye on Hayduke’s face, or what could be seen of it behind the black bangs and the bushy beard. An oaf, she thought. All hairiness is bestial, Arthur Schopenhauer thought. Hayduke caught her look, scowled. She turned back to the others.

“We are caught,” continued the good doctor, “in the iron treads of a technological juggernaut. A mindless machine. With a breeder reactor for a heart.”

“You said a mouthful, Doc,” says Seldom Seen Smith. He started on the steaks, laying them tenderly on the grill, above the glowing coals.

“A planetary industrialism”—the doctor ranted on—“growing like a cancer. Growth for the sake of growth. Power for the sake of power. I think I’ll have another bit of ice here.” (*Clank!*) “Have a touch of this, Captain Smith, it’ll gladden your heart, gild your liver and flower like a rose down in the compost of your bowels.”

“Don’t mind if I do, Doc.” But Smith wanted to know how a *machine* could “grow.” Doc explained; it wasn’t easy.

Smith’s two repeaters from San Diego emerged from the bushes, smiling; they had unrolled his sleeping bag between their own. One young woman carried a bottle. Something about a river trip always seems to promote the consumption of potable drugs. Except for Abzug, who sucked from time to time on a little hand-rolled Zig-Zag cigarette pinched between her fastidious fingers. There was the smell of some kind of burning hemp in the air around her head. (Give a girl enough rope and she’ll smoke it.) The odor reminded Hayduke of dark days and darker nights. Muttering, he set the table, buffet-style, with the salad, the sourdough bread, corn on the cob, a stack of paper plates. Smith turned the steaks. Doc explained the world.

Hog-nosed bats flickered through the evening making radar noises, gulping bugs. Downriver the rapids waited, gnashing their teeth in a steady sullen uproar. High on the canyon rim a rock slipped

or was dislodged by something, gave up its purchase anyway, and tumbled down from parapet to parapet, lost in the embrace of gravity, into the alchemy of change, one fragment in the universal flux, and crashed like a bomb into the river. Doc paused in mid-monologue; all listened for a moment to the dying reverberations.

“Grab a plate,” said Smith to his customers, “and load up.” There was no hesitation; he served the steaks. Last in line and disdain-ing a plate, Hayduke held out his G.I. canteen cup. Smith draped a giant steak over the cup, covering not only the cup but Hayduke’s hand, wrist and forearm.

“Eat,” said Smith.

“Sweet holy motherfuck,” said his boatman, reverently.

Smith kindled a campfire, now that his passengers and help were feeding, with driftwood from the beach. Then he heaped a plate for himself.

All eyes turned toward the fire as the darkness of the canyon gathered around them. Little blue and green flames licked and lapped at the river wood—sculptured chunks of yellow pine from the high country a hundred miles away, juniper, pinyon pine, cottonwood, well-polished sticks of redbud, hackberry and ash. Following the sparks upward they saw the stars turning on in staggered sequence—emeralds, sapphires, rubies, diamonds and opals scattered about the sky in a puzzling, random distribution. Far beyond those galloping galaxies, or perhaps all too present to be seen, lurked God. The gaseous vertebrate.

Supper finished, Smith brought out his musical instruments and played for the assembled company. He played his harmonica—what the vulgar call a “mouth organ”—his Jew’s harp, or what the B’nai B’rith calls a “mouth harp,” and his kazoo, which last, however, added little to anyone’s musical enrichment.

Smith and the doctor passed around the firewater. Abzug, who did not as a rule drink booze, opened her medicine pouch, removed a Tampax tube, took out some weed and rolled a second little brown cigarette twisted shut at one end. She lit up and passed it around, but

no one cared to smoke with her except a reluctant Hayduke and his memories.

"The pot revolution is over?" she said.

"All over," Doc said. "Marijuana was never more than an active placebo anyway."

"What nonsense."

"An oral pacifier for colicky adolescents."

"What utter rubbish."

The conversation lagged. The two young women from San Diego (a suburb of Tijuana) sang a song called "Dead Skunk in the Middle of the Road."

The entertainment palled. Fatigue like gravitation pulled at limbs and eyelids. As they had come so they departed, first Abzug, then the two women from San Diego. The ladies first. Not because they were the weaker sex—they were not—but simply because they had more sense. Men on an outing feel obliged to stay up drinking to the vile and bilious end, jabbering, mumbling and maundering through the blear, to end up finally on hands and knees, puking on innocent sand, befouling God's sweet earth. The manly tradition.

The three men hunched closer to the shrinking fire. The cold night crawled up their backs. They passed Smith's bottle round and around. Then Doc's bottle. Smith, Hayduke, Sarvis. The captain, the bum and the leech. Three wizards on a dead limb. A crafty intimacy crept upon them.

"You know, gentlemen," the doctor said. "You know what I think we ought to do. . . ."

Hayduke had been complaining about the new power lines he'd seen the day before on the desert. Smith had been moaning about the dam again, that dam which had plugged up Glen Canyon, the heart of his river, the river of his heart.

"You know what we ought to do," the doctor said. "We ought to blow that dam to shitaree." (A bit of Hayduke's foul tongue had loosened his own.)

"How?" said Hayduke.

"That ain't legal," Smith said.

"You prayed for an earthquake, you said."

"Yeah, but there ain't no law agin that."

"You were praying with malicious intent."

"That's true. I pray that way all the time."

"Bent on mischief and the destruction of government property."

"That's right, Doc."

"That's a felony."

"It ain't just a misdemeanor?"

"It's a felony."

"How?" said Hayduke.

"How what?"

"How do we blow up the dam?"

"Which dam?"

"Any dam."

"Now you're talking," Smith said. "But Glen Canyon Dam first. I claim that one first."

"I don't know," the doctor said. "You're the demolitions expert."

"I can take out a bridge for you," Hayduke said, "if you get me enough dynamite. But I don't know about Glen Canyon Dam. We'd need an atom bomb for that one."

"I been thinking about that dam for a long time," Smith said. "And I got a plan. We get three jumbo-size houseboats and some dolphins—"

"Hold it!" Doc said, holding up a big paw. A moment of silence. He looked around, into the darkness beyond the firelight. "Who knows what ears those shadows have."

They looked. The flames of their little campfire cast a hesitant illumination upon the bush, the boat half grounded on the sandy beach, the rocks and pebbles, the pulse of the river. The women, all asleep, could not be seen.

"There ain't nobody here but us bombers," Smith said.

"Who can be sure? The State may have its sensors anywhere."

"Naw," Hayduke said. "They're not bugging the canyons. Not

yet anyhow. But who says we have to start with dams? There's plenty of other work to do."

"Good work," the doctor said. "Good, wholesome, constructive work."

"I hate that dam," Smith said. "That dam flooded the most beautiful canyon in the world."

"We know," Hayduke said. "We feel the same way you do. But let's think about easier things first. I'd like to knock down some of them power lines they're stringing across the desert. And those new tin bridges up by Hite. And the goddamned road-building they're doing all over the canyon country. We could put in a good year just taking the fucking goddamned bulldozers apart."

"Hear, hear," the doctor said. "And don't forget the billboards. And the strip mines. And the pipelines. And the new railroad from Black Mesa to Page. And the coal-burning power plants. And the copper smelters. And the uranium mines. And the nuclear power plants. And the computer centers. And the land and cattle companies. And the wildlife poisoners. And the people who throw beer cans along the highways."

"I throw beer cans along the fucking highways," Hayduke said. "Why the fuck shouldn't I throw fucking beer cans along the fucking highways?"

"Now, now. Don't be so defensive."

"Hell," Smith said, "I do it too. Any road I wasn't consulted about that I don't like, I litter. It's my religion."

"Right," Hayduke said. "Litter the shit out of them."

"Well now," the doctor said. "I hadn't thought about that. Stockpile the stuff along the highways. Throw it out the window. Well . . . why not?"

"Doc," said Hayduke, "it's liberation."

The night. The stars. The river. Dr. Sarvis told his comrades about a great Englishman named Ned. Ned Ludd. They called him a lunatic but he saw the enemy clearly. Saw what was coming and acted directly. And about the wooden shoes, *les sabots*. The spanner in the

works. Monkey business. The rebellion of the meek. Little old ladies in oaken clogs.

"Do we know what we're doing and why?"

"No."

"Do we care?"

"We'll work it out as we go along. Let our practice form our doctrine, thus assuring precise theoretical coherence."

The river in its measureless sublimity rolled softly by, whispering of time. Which heals, they say, all. But does it? The stars looked kindly down. A lie. A wind in the willows suggested sleep. And nightmares. Smith pushed more drift pine into the fire, and a scorpion, dormant in a crack deep in the wood, was horribly awakened, too late. No one noticed the mute agony. Deep in the solemn canyon, under the fiery stars, peace reigned generally.

"We need a guide," the doctor said.

"I know the country," Smith said.

"We need a professional killer."

"That's me," Hayduke said. "Murder's my specialty."

"Every man has his weakness." Pause. "Mine," added Doc, "is Baskin-Robbins girls."

"Hold on here," Smith said, "I ain't going along with that kind of talk."

"Not people, Captain," the doctor said. "We're talking about bulldozers. Power shovels. Draglines. Earthmovers."

"Machines," said Hayduke.

A pause in the planning, again.

"Are you certain this canyon is not bugged?" the doctor asked. "I have the feeling that others are listening in to every word we say."

"I know that feeling," Hayduke said, "but that's not what I'm thinking about right now. I'm thinking—"

"What are you thinking about?"

"I'm thinking: Why the fuck should we trust *each other*? I never even met you two guys before today."

Silence. The three men stared into the fire. The oversize surgeon. The elongated riverman. The brute from the Green Berets. A sigh.

They looked at each other. And one thought: What the hell. And one thought: They look honest to me. And one thought: Men are not the enemy. Nor women either. Nor little children.

Not in sequence but in unison, as one, they smiled. At each other. The bottle made its penultimate round.

“What the hell,” Smith said, “we’re only talkin’.”