

The Physician's Gun - Sample Chapter

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Chapter 1

Dead enough

HENRY APPLETON JUMPED to his feet and grabbed the doctor's bag.

He swung it hard, knocking the gun out of Kelly's hands, and charged away like a hunted animal. *Run, run!*

A dark shape burst from the forest, waving a rusty shovel in the air.

"Come back, you little toad!" Sullivan roared.

Not on your life! Henry kept running.

"Get him!" Sullivan yelled.

Kelly leapt to his feet and followed with the physician's gun.

Henry ran hell for leather, arms flailing, doctor's bag swinging. *I'm faster! They won't catch me.*

Then, abruptly, he stopped.

He was at the top of a steep ravine. Far below was a shallow creek full of rocks.

I'm trapped! What can I do?

Behind him, Sullivan drew his pistol.

I'm going to die like a dog! Shaking, Henry raised the doctor's bag in front of his chest and closed his eyes.

Sullivan squeezed the trigger and *crack!* The bullet whistled through the air and smacked into the doctor's bag. The bag absorbed the impact of the bullet, but it threw Henry off balance.

He slipped backwards over the edge and tumbled down the bank, smashing through bushes, still clutching the bag.

Sullivan and Kelly, panting from their chase, appeared at the top of the ravine and watched Henry fall.



He crashed into the creek and lay there, dazed. Through blurry eyes he saw a thin trail of his blood snake into the water.

“He’s dead,” said Kelly.

“Maybe. Maybe not,” said Sullivan. “Git down there an’ finish him awf. An’ get the bag.”

Sullivan ran back to join the gang, and Kelly squinted at Henry in the creek.

“He looks dead enough,” he muttered.

Henry didn’t move a muscle. *Please don’t come down here and check on me!*

“Hey!” Kelly shouted.

Play dead! Henry turned his face away but kept his eyes wide open as he listened to Kelly. Rama’s scarf, gripped in his hand, trailed in the current of the stream.

“Hey, you!” Kelly called. He picked up a rock the size of a man’s fist and took aim.

The rock spun through the air and smacked into Henry’s leg with a dull *thunk*.

Henry’s face screwed up. *Aaaaaagh!!!* He screamed silently as pain shot through his leg. But still he didn’t move.

Kelly looked down on Henry’s body, lying crumpled in the stream.

Henry felt the ache seep through his body. He screwed up his face as a jumble of images and thoughts cascaded through his head. Sullivan’s hands around his throat. His father’s headstone: *Bring justice to the fatherless*. The physician’s gun.

His longing to have a gun of his own.

My leg hurts so badly. God help me!

I’m going to die and no one will ever find me and—

I’m not even sixteen.

Henry Appleton, lying in a nameless creek somewhere in the dark hills above his home, waited to die.
