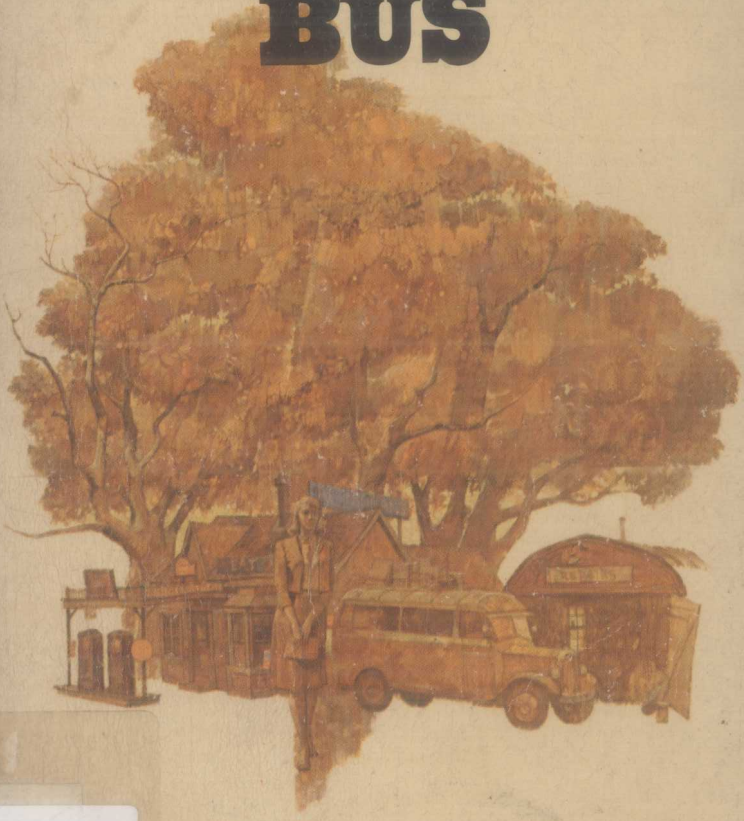
STEINBECK

THE WAYWARD BUS



10027-9 • $1.75 • A BANTAM BOOK

JOHN STEINBECK

THE WAYWARD BUS

This low-priced Bantam Book has been completely reset in a type face designed for easy reading, and was printed from new plates. It contains the complete text of the original hard-cover edition.
NOT ONE WORD HAS BEEN OMITTED.

THE WAYWARD BUS

A Bantam Book / published by arrangement with The Viking Press, Inc.

PRINTING HISTORY

Viking edition published February 1947
2nd printing ... February 1947
3rd printing ... February 1947
Book-of-the-Month Club edition published March 1947
Armed Services edition published April 1947
Material from this book appeared in OMNIBOOK *August 1947*
Condensation appeared in THE NEW YORK POST *October 1947*
Grosset & Dunlap edition published February 1948
Doubleday One Dollar Book Club edition published May 1967
Bantam edition / January 1950
2nd printing ... January 1950 3rd printing .... March 1950
4th printing .. November 1952
New Bantam edition / April 1957

2nd printing ..... May 1962	*10th printing ..... May 1966*
3rd printing ..... May 1962	*11th printing ..... May 1967*
4th printing . September 1962	*12th printing .November 1967*
5th printing . November 1962	*13th printing ..... May 1969*
6th printing .... March 1963	*14th printing ... August 1970*
7th printing .... August 1964	*15th printing .December 1971*
8th printing . November 1964	*16th printing .. January 1973*
9th printing ..... June 1965	*17th printing .November 1973*
	18th printing ..... June 1975
	19th printing

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

Bantam Books are published by Bantam Books, Inc. Its trademark, consisting of the words "Bantam Books" and the portrayal of a bantam, is registered in the United States Patent Office and in other countries. Marca Registrada. Bantam Books, Inc., 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10019.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THE WAYWARD BUS

is one of John Steinbeck's most powerful novels. It is a novel of crisis and passion, of lust and love and longing . . .

"It is superb, it is excellent! A fine craftsman working at his most expert!"

—New York Herald Tribune

"It has warmth, simplicity and compassion. The result is vigorous, fresh and polished. It emphasizes Steinbeck's amazing, profound knowledge of human beings."

—Philadelphia Inquirer

"Sustained brilliance, complete credibility and vividness, striking, dramatic!"

—Saturday Review

"One of Steinbeck's best books . . ."

—Newsweek

Bantam Books by John Steinbeck
Ask your bookseller for the books you have missed

AMERICA AND AMERICANS
CANNERY ROW
EAST OF EDEN
THE GRAPES OF WRATH
IN DUBIOUS BATTLE
THE LONG VALLEY
THE MOON IS DOWN
OF MICE AND MEN
THE PASTURES OF HEAVEN
THE PEARL
THE RED PONY
SWEET THURSDAY
TO A GOD UNKNOWN
TORTILLA FLAT
TRAVELS WITH CHARLEY
THE WAYWARD BUS
THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT

I pray you all gyve audyence,
And here this mater with reverence,
By fygure a morall playe;
The somonynge of Everyman called it is,
That of our lyves and endynge shewes
How transytory we be all daye.

—EVERYMAN

Chapter 1

FORTY-TWO miles below San Ysidro, on a great north-south highway in California, there is a crossroad which for eighty-odd years has been called Rebel Corners. From here a country road goes at right angles toward the west until, after forty-nine miles, it connects with another north-south highway, that leads from San Francisco to Los Angeles and, of course, Hollywood. Anyone who wishes to go from the inland valley to the coast in this part of the state must take the road that begins at Rebel Corners and winds through hills and a little desert and through farmland and mountains until, at last, it comes to the coastal highway right in the middle of the town of San Juan de la Cruz.

Rebel Corners got its name in 1862. It is said that a family named Blanken kept a smithy at the crossroads. The Blankens and their sons-in-law were poor, ignorant, proud, and violent Kentuckians. Having no furniture and no property, they brought what they had with them from the East—their prejudices and their politics. Having no slaves, they were ready, nevertheless, to sell their lives for the free principle of slavery. When the war began, the Blankens discussed traveling back across the measureless West to fight for the Confederacy. But it was a long way and they had crossed once, and it was too far. Thus it was that in a California which was preponderantly for the North, the Blankens seceded a hundred and sixty acres and a blacksmith shop from the Union and joined Blanken Corners to the Confederacy. It is also said that they dug trenches and cut rifle slits in the blacksmith shop to defend this rebellious island from the hated Yankees. And the Yankees, who were mostly Mexicans and Germans and Irish and Chinese, far from attacking the Blankens, were rather proud of them. The Blankens had never lived so well, for the enemy

brought chickens and eggs and pork sausage in slaughter time, because everyone thought that, regardless of the cause, such courage should be recognized. Their place took the name of Rebel Corners and has kept it to this day.

After the war the Blankens became lazy and quarrelsome and full of hatreds and complaints, as every defeated nation does, so that, pride in them having evaporated with the war, people stopped bringing their horses to be shoed and their plows for retipping. Finally, what the Union Armies could not do by force of arms the First National Bank of San Ysidro did by foreclosure.

Now, after eighty-odd years, no one remembers much about the Blankens except that they were very proud and very unpleasant. In the following years the land changed hands many times before it was incorporated into the empire of a newspaper king. The blacksmith shop burned down and was rebuilt and burned again, and what was left was converted into a garage with gas pumps and then into a store-restaurant-garage and service station. When Juan Chicoy and his wife bought it and got the franchise to run a public conveyance between Rebel Corners and San Juan de la Cruz, it became all these and a bus station too. The rebel Blankens have, through pride and a low threshold of insult which is the test of ignorance and laziness, disappeared from the face of the earth, and no one remembers what they looked like. But Rebel Corners is well known and the Chicoys are well liked.

There was a little lunchroom in back of the gas pumps, a lunchroom with a counter and round, fixed stools, and three tables for those who wanted to eat in some style. These were not used often for it was customary to tip Mrs. Chicoy when she served you at a table and not to if she served you at the counter. On the first shelf behind the counter were sweet rolls, snails, doughnuts; on the second, canned soups, oranges, and bananas; on the third, individual boxes of cornflakes, riceflakes, grapenuts, and other tortured cereals. There was a grill at one end behind the counter and a sink beside it, beer and soda spouts beside that, ice-cream units beside those, and on the counter itself, between the units of paper-napkin containers, juke-box coin slots, salt, pepper, and ketchup, the cakes were displayed under large plastic covers. The walls, where there was room, were well decorated with calendars and posters showing bright,

improbable girls with pumped-up breasts and no hips—blondes, brunettes and redheads, but always with this bust development, so that a visitor of another species might judge from the preoccupation of artist and audience that the seat of procreation lay in the mammaries.

Alice Chicoy, Mrs. Juan Chicoy, that is, who worked among the shining girls, was wide-hipped and sag-chested and she walked well back on her heels. She was not in the least jealous of the calendar girls and the Coca-Cola girls. She had never seen anyone like them and she didn't think anyone else ever had. She fried her eggs and hamburgers, heated her canned soup, drew beer, scooped ice cream, and toward evening her feet hurt and that made her cross and snappish. And as the day went on the flat curl went out of her hair so that it hung damp and stringy beside her face, and at first she would brush it aside with her hand and finally she would blow it out of her eyes.

Next to the lunchroom was a garage converted from the last blacksmith shop, its ceiling and beams still black from the soot of the old forge, and here Juan Chicoy presided when he was not driving the bus between Rebel Corners and San Juan de la Cruz. He was a fine, steady man, Juan Chicoy, part Mexican and part Irish, perhaps fifty years old, with clear black eyes, a good head of hair, and a dark and handsome face. Mrs. Chicoy was insanely in love with him and a little afraid of him too, because he was a man, and there aren't very many of them, as Alice Chicoy had found out. There aren't very many of them in the world, as everyone finds out sooner or later.

In the garage Juan Chicoy fixed flat tires, got the air locks out of gas lines, cleaned the diamond-hard dust from choked carburetors, put new diaphragms in tubercular gasoline pumps, and did all the little things that the motor-minded public knows nothing whatever about. These things he did except during the hours from ten-thirty until four. That was the time he drove the bus, carrying passengers who had been deposited at Rebel Corners by the big Greyhound busses to San Juan de la Cruz and bringing passengers back from San Juan de la Cruz to Rebel Corners, where they were picked up either by the Greyhound bus going north at four-fifty-six or by the Greyhound going south at five-seventeen.

While Mr. Chicoy was gone on his route his duties at the garage were carried out by a succession of overgrown boys or

immature young men who were more or less apprentices. None of them lasted very long. Unwary customers with dirty carburetors could not know in advance the destruction these apprentices could heap on a carburetor, and while Juan Chicoy himself was a magnificent mechanic, his apprentices usually were cocky adolescents who spent their time between jobs putting slugs in the juke box in the lunchroom and quarreling mildly with Alice Chicoy. To these young men opportunity beckoned constantly, drawing them ever southward toward Los Angeles and, of course, Hollywood, where, eventually, all the adolescents in the world will be congregated.

Behind the garage were two little outhouses with trellises, one of which said "Men" and the other "Ladies." And to each one a little path led, one around the right-hand side of the garage and one around the left-hand side of the garage.

What defined the Corners and made it visible for miles among the cultivated fields were the great white oaks that grew around the garage and restaurant. Tall and graceful, with black trunks and limbs, bright green in summer, black and brooding in winter, these oaks were landmarks in the long, flat valley. No one knows whether the Blankens planted them or whether they merely settled near to them. The latter seems more logical first, because the Blankens are not known to have planted anything they could not eat, and second, because the trees seemed more than eighty-five years old. They might be two hundred years old; on the other hand, they might have their roots in some underground spring which would make them grow large quickly in this semidesert country.

These great trees shaded the station in summer so that travelers often pulled up under them and ate their lunches and cooled their overheated motors. The station itself was pleasant too, brightly painted green and red, a deep row of geraniums all around the restaurant, red geraniums and deep green leaves thick as a hedge. The white gravel in front and around the gas pumps was raked and sprinkled daily. In the restaurant and in the garage there was system and order. For instance, on the shelves in the restaurant the canned soup, the boxed cereals, even the grapefruits, were arranged in little pyramids, four on the bottom level, then three, then two, and one balanced on top. And the same was true of the cans of oil in the garage, and the fan belts hung neatly in their sizes on nails. It was a

very well-kept place. The windows of the restaurant were screened against flies, and the screen door banged shut after every entrance or exit. For Alice Chicoy hated flies. In a world that was not easy for Alice to bear or to understand, flies were the final and malicious burden laid upon her. She hated them with a cruel hatred, and the death of a fly by swatter, or slowly smothered in the goo of fly paper, gave her a flushed pleasure.

Just as Juan usually had a succession of young apprentices to help him in the garage, so Alice hired a succession of girls to help her in the lunchroom. These girls, gawky and romantic and homely—the pretty ones usually left with a customer within a few days—seemed to accomplish little in the way of work. They spread dirt about with damp cloths, they dreamed over movie magazines, they sighed into the juke box—and the most recent one had reddening eyes and a head cold and wrote long and passionate letters to Clark Gable. Alice Chicoy suspected every one of them of letting flies in. Norma, this most recent girl, had felt the weight of Alice Chicoy's tongue many times about flies.

The routine of the Corners in the morning was invariable. With the first daylight or, in the winter, even before, the lights came on in the lunchroom, and Alice steamed up the coffee urn (a great godlike silver effigy which may, in some future archaeological period, be displayed as an object of worship of the race of Amudkins, who preceded the Atomites, who, for some unknown reason, disappeared from the face of the earth). The restaurant was warm and cheerful when the first truck drivers pulled wearily in for their breakfast. Then came the salesmen, hurrying to the cities of the south in the dark so as to have a full day of business. Salesmen always spotted trucks and stopped, because it is generally believed that truck drivers are great connoisseurs of roadside coffee and food. By sun-up the first tourists in their own cars began to pull in for breakfast and road information.

The tourists from the north did not interest Norma much, but those from the south or those who came over the cutoff from San Juan de la Cruz and who might have been to Hollywood fascinated her. In four months Norma personally met fifteen people who had been to Hollywood, five who had been on a picture lot, and two who had seen Clark Gable face to face. Inspired by these last two, who came in very close together,

she wrote a twelve-page letter which began, "Dear Mr. Gable," and ended, "Lovingly, A Friend." She often shuddered to think that Mr. Gable might find out that she had written it.

Norma was a faithful girl. Let others, featherbrains, run after the upstarts—the Sinatras, the Van Johnsons, the Sonny Tufts'. Even during the war, when there had been no Gable pictures, Norma had remained faithful, keeping her dream warm with a colored picture of Mr. Gable in a flying suit with two belts of 50-caliber ammunition on his shoulders.

She often sneered at Sonny Tufts. She liked older men with interesting faces. Sometimes, wiping the damp cloth back and forth on the counter, her dream-widened eyes centered on the screen door, her pale eyes flexed and then closed for a moment. Then you could know that in that secret garden in her head, Gable had just entered the restaurant, had gasped when he saw her, and had stood there, his lips slightly parted and in his eyes the recognition that this was his woman. And around him the flies came in and out with impunity.

It never went beyond that. Norma was too shy. And, besides, she didn't know how such things were done. The actual love-making in her life had been a series of wrestling matches, the aim of which was to keep her clothes on in the back seat of a car. So far she had won by simple concentration. She felt that Mr. Gable not only would not do things like that, but wouldn't like them if he heard about them.

Norma wore the wash dresses featured by the National Dollar Stores, though, of course, she had a sateen dress for parties. But if you looked closely you could always find some little bit of beauty even on the wash dresses. Her Mexican silver pin, a representation of the Aztec calendar stone, was left to her in her aunt's will after Norma had nursed her for seven months and really wanted the sealskin stole and the ring of baroque pearls and turquoise. But these went to another branch of the family. Norma had also a string of small amber beads from her mother. She never wore the Mexican pin and the beads at the same time. In addition to these, Norma possessed two pieces of jewelry which were pure crazy and which she knew were pure crazy. Deep in her suitcase she had a gold-filled wedding ring and a gigantic Brazilian-type diamond ring, the two of which had cost five dollars. She wore them only when she went to bed. In the morning she took them

off and hid them in her suitcase. No one in the world knew that she owned them. In bed she went to sleep twisting them on the third finger of her left hand.

The sleeping arrangements at the Corners were simple. Directly behind the lunchroom there was a lean-to. A door at the end of the lunch counter opened into the Chicoys' bed-sitting room, which had a double bed with an afghan spread, a console radio, two overstuffed chairs and a davenport—which group is called a suite—and a metal reading lamp with a marble green glass shade. Norma's room opened off this room, for it was Alice's theory that young girls should be watched a little and not let to run wild. Norma had to come through the Chicoys' room to go to the bathroom—that, or slip out the window, which she ordinarily did. The apprentice-mechanic's room was next to the Chicoys' on the other side, but he had an outside entrance and used the vine-covered cubicle marked "Men" behind the garage.

It was a nice compact grouping of buildings, functional and pleasant. The Rebel Corners of the Blankens' time had been a miserable, dirty, and suspicious place, but the Chicoys flourished here. There was money in the bank and a degree of security and happiness.

This island covered by the huge trees could be seen for miles. No one ever had to look for road signs to find Rebel Corners and the road to San Juan de la Cruz. In the great valley the grain fields flattened away toward the east, to the foothills and to the high mountains, and toward the west they ended nearer in the rounded hills where the live oaks sat in black splotches. In the summer the yellow heat shimmered and burned and glared on the baking hills, and the shade of the great trees over the Corners was a thing to look forward to and to remember. In the winter when the heavy rains fell, the restaurant was a warm place of coffee and chili beans and pie.

In the deep spring when the grass was green on fields and foothills, when the lupines and poppies made a splendid blue and gold earth, when the great trees awakened in yellow-green young leaves, then there was no more lovely place in the world. It was no beauty you could ignore by being used to it. It caught you in the throat in the morning and made a pain of pleasure in the pit of your stomach when the sun went down over it. The sweet smell of the lupines and of the grass set you

breathing nervously, set you panting almost sexually. And it was in this season of flowering and growth, though it was still before daylight, that Juan Chicoy came out to the bus carrying an electric lantern. Pimples Carson, his apprentice-mechanic, stumbled sleepily behind him.

The lunchroom windows were still dark. Against the eastern hills not even a grayness had begun to form. It was so much night that the owls were still shrieking over the fields. Juan Chicoy came near to the bus which stood in front of the garage. It looked, in the light of the lantern, like a large, silver-windowed balloon. Pimples Carson, still not really awake, stood with his hands in his pockets, shivering, not because it was cold but because he was very sleepy.

A little wind blew in over the fields and brought the smell of lupine and the smell of a quickening earth, frantic with production.

Chapter 2

THE electric lantern, with a flat downward reflector, lighted sharply only legs and feet and tires and tree trunks near to the ground. It bobbed and swung, and the little incandescent bulb was blindingly blue-white. Juan Chicoy carried his lantern to the garage, took a bunch of keys from his overalls pocket, found the one that unlocked the padlock, and opened the wide doors. He switched on the overhead light and turned off his lantern.

Juan picked a striped mechanic's cap from his workbench. He wore Headlight overalls with big brass buttons on bib and side latches, and over this he wore a black horsehide jacket with black knitted wristlets and neck. His shoes were round-toed and hard, with soles so thick that they seemed swollen. An old scar on his cheek beside his large nose showed as a shadow in the overhead light. He ran fingers through his thick, black hair to get it all in the mechanic's cap. His hands were short and wide and strong, with square fingers and nails flattened by work and

grooved and twisted from having been hammered and hurt. The third finger of his left hand had lost the first joint, and the flesh was slightly mushroomed where the finger had been amputated. This little overhanging ball was shiny and of a different texture from the rest of the finger, as though the joint were trying to become a fingertip, and on this finger he wore a wide gold wedding ring, as though this finger was no good for work any more and might as well be used for ornament.

A pencil and a ruler and a tire pressure gauge protruded from a slot in his overalls bib. Juan was clean-shaven, but not since yesterday, and along the corners of his chin and on his neck the coming whiskers were grizzled and white like those of an old Airedale. This was the more apparent because the rest of his beard was so intensely black. His black eyes were squinting and humorous, the way a man's eyes squint when he is smoking and cannot take the cigarette from his mouth. And Juan's mouth was full and good, a relaxed mouth, the underlip slightly protruding—not in petulance but in humor and self-confidence—the upper lip well formed except left of center where a deep scar was almost white against the pink tissue. The lip must have been cut clear through at one time, and now this thin taut band of white was a strain on the fullness of the lip and made it bunch in tiny tucks on either side. His ears were not very large, but they stood out sharply from his head like seashells, or in the position a man would hold them with his hands if he wanted to hear more clearly. Juan seemed to be listening intently all the time, while his squinting eyes seemed to laugh at what he heard, and half of his mouth disapproved. His movements were sure even when he was not doing anything that required sureness. He walked as though he were going to some exact spot. His hands moved with speed and precision and never fiddled with matches or with nails. His teeth were long and the edges were framed with gold, which gave his smile a little fierceness.

At his workbench he picked tools from nails on the wall and laid them in a long, flat box—wrenches and pliers and several screwdrivers and a machine hammer and a punch. Beside him Pimples Carson, still heavy with sleep, rested his elbow on the oily wood of the bench. Pimples wore the tattered sweater of a motorcycle club and the crown of a felt hat cut in saw teeth around the edge. He was a lank and slender-waisted boy

of seventeen, with narrow shoulders and a long foxy nose and eyes that were pale in the morning and became greenish-brown later in the day. A golden fuzz was on his cheeks, and his cheeks were rivuleted and rotted and eroded with acne. Among the old scars new pustules formed, purple and red, some rising and some waning. The skin was shiny with the medicines that were sold for this condition and which do no good whatever.

Pimples' blue jeans were tight, and so long that they were turned up ten inches on the bottoms. They were held to his narrow middle by a broad, beautifully tooled leather belt with a fat and engraved silver buckle in which four turquoises were set. Pimples kept his hands at his sides as much as he could, but in spite of himself his fingers would move to his pitted cheeks until he became conscious of what he was doing and put his hands down again. He wrote to every company that advertised an acne cure, and he had been to many doctors, who knew that they could not cure it but who also knew that it would probably go away in a few years. They nevertheless gave Pimples prescriptions for salves and lotions, and one had put him on a diet of green vegetables.

His eyes were long and narrow and slanted like the eyes of a sleepy wolf, and now in the early morning they were almost sealed shut with mucus. Pimples was a prodigious sleeper. Left to his own devices, he could sleep nearly all the time. His whole system and his soul were a particularly violent battleground of adolescence. His concupiscence was constant, and when it was not directly and openly sexual it would take to channels of melancholy, of deep and tearful sentiment, or of a strong and musky religiosity. His mind and his emotions were like his face, constantly erupting, constantly raw and irritated. He had times of violent purity when he howled at his own depravity, and these were usually followed by a melancholy laziness that all but prostrated him, and he went from the depression into sleep. It was opiatic and left him drugged and dull for a long time.

He wore pierced white and brown saddle oxfords on bare feet this morning, and his ankles, where they showed below the turned-up jeans, were streaked with dirt. In his periods of depression Pimples was so prostrated that he did not bathe nor even eat very much. The felt hat crown notched so evenly was not really for beauty but served to keep his long light brown

hair out of his eyes and to keep the grease out of it when he worked under a car. Now he stood stupidly watching Juan Chicoy put the tools in his box while his mind rolled in great flannel clouds of sleepiness, almost nauseating in their power.

Juan said, "Get the work light on the long cord connected. Come on, Pimples. Come on now, wake up!"

Pimples seemed to shake himself like a dog. "Can't seem to come out of it," he explained.

"Well, get the light out there and take my back board out. We've got to get going."

Pimples picked up the hand light, basketed for protection of the globe, and began unwinding the heavy rubber-guarded cable from around its handle. He plugged the cord into an outlet near the door and the hand light leaped into brilliance. Juan lifted his toolbox and stepped out of the door and looked at the darkened sky. A change had come in the air. A little wind was stirring the young leaves of the oaks and whisking among the geraniums and it was an uncertain, wet wind. Juan smelled it as he would smell a flower.

"By God, if it rains," he said, "that would be one too many."

To the east the tops of the mountains were just becoming visible in outline with the dawn. Pimples came out carrying the lighted hand lamp and unkinking the cable behind him on the ground. The light made the great trees stand out, and it was reflected on the yellow-green of the new little oak leaves. Pimples took his light to the bus and went back to the garage for the long board with casters on the bottom on which a man could lie and wheel himself about when he worked under a car. He flung the board down beside the bus.

"Well, it's like to rain," he said. "Take nearly every year in California it rains this season."

Juan said, "I'm not complaining about the season, but with this ring gear out and the passengers waiting, and the ground is pulpy with rain—"

"Makes good feed," said Pimples.

Juan stopped and looked around at him. His eyes crinkled with amusement. "Sure," he said, "it sure does."

Pimples looked shyly away.

The bus was lighted by the hand lamp now and it looked strange and helpless, for where the rear wheels should have been were two heavy sawhorses, and instead of resting on axles