he sits down and smokes. When the coolie is ready, he too sits down, receives from his companion tobacco and cigarette paper, and starts a conversation with him.

COOLIE: The Merchant always says it's a “service to humanity” to take oil out of the ground. When the oil is taken out of the ground, there'll be railroads here, and prosperity will spread. The Merchant says there'll be railroads. How shall I earn my living?

GUIDE: Don't worry. There won't be railroads as fast as all that. They discover oil, and then they suppress the discovery, or so I've heard. The man who stops up the oil-hole gets hush money. That's why the Merchant is in such a hurry. It's not the oil he's after, it's the hush money.

COOLIE: I don't understand.

GUIDE: No one understands.

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COOLIE: The path across the desert is sure to get even worse. I hope my feet will hold out.

GUIDE: Certainly.

COOLIE: Are there bandits?

GUIDE: We'll have to keep a lookout — especially today, the first day of the trip. The station attracts every sort of rabble.

COOLIE: How about afterward?

GUIDE: Once we have the Myr river behind us, it's a matter of sticking to the water holes.

COOLIE: You know the way?

GUIDE: Yes.

The Merchant has heard voices. He comes up behind the door to listen.