

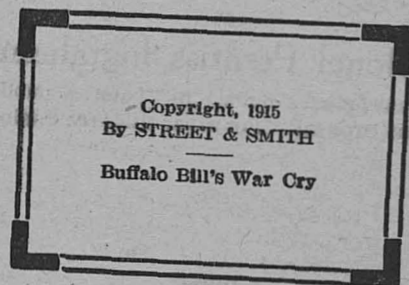
BUFFALO BILL BORDER STORIES No. 118

BUFFALO BILL'S WAR CRY

By

Col. Prentiss Ingraham





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IN APPRECIATION OF WILLIAM F. CODY (BUFFALO BILL).

It is now some generations since Josh Billings, Ned Buntline, and Colonel Prentiss Ingraham, intimate friends of Colonel William F. Cody, used to forgather in the office of Francis S. Smith, then proprietor of the *New York Weekly*. It was a dingy little office on Rose Street, New York, but the breath of the great outdoors stirred there when these old-timers got together. As a result of these conversations, Colonel Ingraham and Ned Buntline began to write of the adventures of Buffalo Bill for Street & Smith.

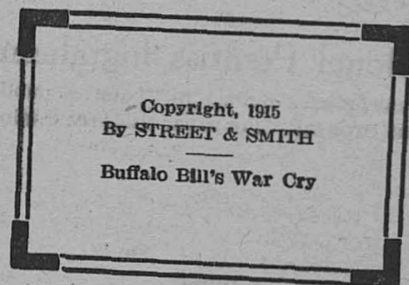
Colonel Cody was born in Scott County, Iowa, February 26, 1846. Before he had reached his teens, his father, Isaac Cody, with his mother and two sisters, migrated to Kansas, which at that time was little more than a wilderness.

When the elder Cody was killed shortly afterward in the Kansas "Border War," young Bill assumed the difficult rôle of family breadwinner. During 1860, and until the outbreak of the Civil War, Cody lived the arduous life of a pony-express rider. Cody volunteered his services as government scout and guide and served throughout the Civil War with Generals McNeil and A. J. Smith. He was a distinguished member of the Seventh Kansas Cavalry.

During the Civil War, while riding through the streets of St. Louis, Cody rescued a frightened schoolgirl from a band of annoyers. In true romantic style, Cody and Louisa Federici, the girl, were married March 6, 1866.

In 1867 Cody was employed to furnish a specified amount of buffalo meat to the construction men at work on the Kansas Pacific Railroad. It was in this period that he received the sobriquet "Buffalo Bill."

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served as scout and guide in campaigns against the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians. It was General Sheridan who conferred on Cody the honor of chief of scouts of the command.

After completing a period of service in the Nebraska legislature, Cody joined the Fifth Cavalry in 1876, and was again appointed chief of scouts.

Colonel Cody's fame had reached the East long before, and a great many New Yorkers went out to see him and join in his buffalo hunts, including such men as August Belmont, James Gordon Bennett, Anson Stager, and J. G. Heckscher. In entertaining these visitors at Fort McPherson, Cody was accustomed to arrange wild-West exhibitions. In return his friends invited him to visit New York. It was upon seeing his first play in the metropolis that Cody conceived the idea of going into the show business.

Assisted by Ned Buntline, novelist, and Colonel Ingraham, he started his "Wild West" show, which later developed and expanded into "A Congress of the Rough-riders of the World," first presented at Omaha, Nebraska. In time it became a familiar yearly entertainment in the great cities of this country and Europe. Many famous personages attended the performances, and became his warm friends, including Mr. Gladstone, the Marquis of Lorne, King Edward, Queen Victoria, and the Prince of Wales, now King of England.

At the outbreak of the Sioux, in 1890 and 1891, Colonel Cody served at the head of the Nebraska National Guard. In 1895 Cody took up the development of Wyoming Valley by introducing irrigation. Not long afterward he became judge advocate general of the Wyoming National Guard.

Colonel Cody (Buffalo Bill) died in Denver, Colorado, on January 10, 1917. His legacy to a grateful world was a large share in the development of the West, and a multitude of achievements in horsemanship, marksmanship, and endurance that will live for ages. His life will continue to be a leading example of the manliness, courage, and devotion to duty that belonged to a picturesque phase of American life now passed, like the great patriot whose career it typified, into the Great Beyond.

BUFFALO BILL'S WAR CRY.

CHAPTER I.

THE OUTLAW'S PLEDGE.

The scene is the wild West, the borderland which lies just beyond the halting place of the star of empire upon its march toward the setting sun.

This scene opens at night in the confines of a mining camp, where are gathered hundreds of wild spirits, struggling hard in the fight for fortune.

A man is pacing to and fro in a trail along a mountain ridge, stopping at every turn a second or two to listen, as though in fear, or expectation of some one's coming.

The moonlight falls upon his face and form, revealing the latter to be one of fine physique and powerful, while the former is clean-cut and handsome.

His garb is the rough dress of the miner, and about his waist is a belt of arms.

"The day is not very far distant, and every moment of delay is dangerous to me. Why does she not come?" he said impatiently.

As he uttered the words, he heard the sound of hoofs approaching, and quickly stepped back into the shadow of the thicket bordering the base of the mountain range.

"There she comes at last. But I must not be too sure, for it may be some one else."

In a short while two horses appeared in sight, one of which had a rider on his back.

"Yes, it is Ruth," said the man.

As he spoke there arose in the air, as the rider came to a halt, the plaintive notes of a whippoorwill.

The man stepped out of the shadows at once, and said:

"Here I am, Ruth."

The rider sprang from the back of the horse, and said:

"I rode the saddle I had for you, and these are two of the best horses in the mines. Where is your pack-saddle, brother?"

"Here it is," and the man drew it from among the bushes and proceeded to put it upon the led horse.

As the one who had joined him there stood where the light of the moon fell upon her, a face of wondrous beauty was revealed and a form of exquisite gracefulness of outline.

She was dressed in a close-fitting suit of buckskin, fringed and embroidered, wore a slouch hat, with gold cord and sable plume, and about her slender waist was a belt of arms.

The man finished saddling the pack upon the horse, then made a halter of the long stake rope, and fastened it upon the horn of his saddle, which he carefully looked over to see that all was safe.

Apparently satisfied, he said:

"Now, Ruth, I am ready to go, and I have about an hour and a half to travel before dawn."

"Yes, and you can get out of the creek before light, and after that you have a good trail to travel."

"Give me your instructions then."

"There is the creek, you see?"

"Yes, I see it," and the man turned toward a small brook a short distance away, which crossed the trail they were standing in.

"Now put that pine bush down by the water and attach this rope to it, for I shall drag it back to the camps, wind it around a tree, and have it appear as though a horse had broken loose from it. Dragging it over the trail will destroy the tracks of these horses, brother."

"Yes, it is a good idea. But now to my directions?"

"You are to follow down the stream until you come to the trail crossing it at Chalk Cliffs. There turn into the trail, which is well traveled, and bend your course southward at your will toward New Mexico; only push your horses all day, and when you halt to camp at night, be careful to be on your guard, for Buffalo Bill can almost follow the trail of a bird, and if he pursues you, well you know what the result will be, my brother."

"Oh, yes, the gallows for me."

"Then be careful, I beg of you, after all I have done to save you from dying upon the gallows."

"I shall risk my life no more than is necessary, you may be sure, sister mine."

"I trust so. But, now, brother Arden, here is the money I promised you; some gold, but mostly bills, and in all ten thousand dollars. You have told me that you were going to South America to begin life anew; to redeem your past, and atone for it. If you need more money, you know my address, at your old home, so write, and I will send it to you, for I will not see you suffer.

"I have done all I could for you, Arden, and have now snatched you almost out of the hands of the hangman, to give you another chance, to save your life and your soul, and I must again ask you for the pledge you have already given me, that you will reform, and atone for your past crimes, which are many. Will you give me the pledge once more, brother Arden?"

"Certainly, if you ask it."

"I do; so take this sacred book again, and take solemn oath that you are sincere in your repentance and intend to lead a new life from this very night; that you will bury your sins of the past, and your later crimes under the name of Silk-lasso Sam, the Outlaw of the Overland."

The outlaw took the little book handed to him, pressed his lips to it fervently, and took the solemn pledge asked of him.

Then he drew the beautiful girl toward him, embraced her lovingly, and said:

"Farewell, my noble sister, and trust in me, your unfortunate brother."

"I will," was the sincerely uttered response, and

with a bound the outlaw was in his saddle, and riding into the stream, had started upon his way, while his sister, taking the end of the pine bush, began to drag it slowly back over the trail to the camps half a mile away.

* * * * *

The home of the beautiful girl who had proven herself such a devoted sister to the outlaw, Silk-lasso Sam, was in one of the wildest mining camps in that wild land, of the Far West.

It was situated in Yellow Dust Valley, and, though the miner's cabins were scattered far and wide along the ranges, they did most congregate at one end of a picturesque glen, which was known as Pocket City.

The place was, as it were, in a pocket of the mountains, and also there had been found innumerable "pockets" of gold, hence it was doubly entitled to its name.

It was beautifully located, upon the banks of a limpid brook, with fine old trees about, and overhanging mountains, while there was an outlook far down Yellow Dust Valley.

A typical border settlement, it yet was noted for one peculiarity, its hotel and principal gambling saloon being run by a young girl.

The hotel was known as "The Frying Pan," and apart from it was the saloon known as the "Devil's Den."

The hotel was a log-and-board structure, built in

the shape of a cross, and with two stairs in the center, while the den was an acre in size and had been built as strong as a fort.

A stockade fence led from the rear of the Devil's Den to one wing of the hotel, which it surrounded, for there was the house of Bonnie Belle, the mistress of the place.

She had her flower garden, arbor, piazza, and several rooms, and not a soul ever dared intrude upon her.

The former proprietor of the hotel had been wounded by road agents when returning home in the very coach with Bonnie Belle, who was upon her way to Pocket City, for reasons she had kept to herself.

The maiden had defended herself so well that those in the coach had escaped robbery, and, caring for the wounded landlord of The Frying Pan up to his death, he had made her mistress of his fortune.

Landlord Lazarus had been noted for keeping a good hotel and an orderly gambling den; but when Bonnie Belle had come into power, she had, as a miner expressed it, "made Rome howl."

To interpret, she had made the hotel neat in every particular, set as fine a table as could be found upon the border, allowed no liquor to be sold there, and ran the Devil's Den upon business principles, allowing no fraud in games, and selling liquors that were not as deadly in their effects as a bowie knife and revolver.

She was respected by all, and no matter what had

brought her there, she was protected by one and all.

It was the second day following the departure by night of Silk-lasso Sam, that three horsemen rode into Pocket City and drew rein at The Frying Pan.

Two were in uniform, one wearing the shoulder straps of a major of infantry, the other of a captain of cavalry.

The third horseman was a most picturesque-looking individual, tall, graceful, fearless, and handsome-faced.

The three horsemen dismounted, their horses were led away to the stable by a Chinese servant, and entering the office, they registered their names as follows:

"Lionel Lester, Major —th Inf'try, U. S. A.

"Richard Caruth, Captain —th Cav., U. S. A.

"Buffalo Bill, Chief of Scouts, U. S. Army."

Leaving the two officers to get the dust of the trail from their faces and uniforms, Buffalo Bill walked toward the right wing of the hotel, which was the quarters of Bonnie Belle.

Suddenly he met her face to face.

The maiden's face flushed, then paled, as she stretched forth her hand and said:

"Buffalo Bill, I am glad to see you."

"Is this sincere, Miss Arden—"

"Ah—do not speak of me here as other than Bonnie Belle. It was the name given me by Landlord Lazarus, who made me his heiress, for his daughter was so named, and he said I reminded him of her."

"Then, Bonnie Belle, are you sincere in saying that you are glad to see me?"

"Why not?"

"You know why I am here?"

"Yes, for you now know that I went to the fort as Miss Arden, the sister of Silk-lasso Sam, the outlaw chief under sentence of death, and for the sole purpose of rescuing him. I would not have done one act, had I known bloodshed would follow; but I planned to have pretended detectives go for him with a requisition from the governor of Illinois, and thus have him escape.

"He, with their aid, attacked Pawnee Bill and Horseshoe Ned, the driver of the coach, wounding the former, and, I fear, killing the latter. There was no cause for this, and I feel deeply that it should have been done.

"Pawnee Bill I brought here with me, and I am glad to say that he is not badly wounded."

"And I am glad to say that Horseshoe Ned was only stunned, not seriously hurt; the only man killed, Bonnie Belle, being your pretended detective, Raymond, whom Pawnee Bill shot."

"He can be spared," was the cool reply, and then Bonnie Belle continued:

"The scout you will find here, as I said."

"And your brother——"

"'Sh! he is not known here as the brother of Bonnie Belle. I came here to find him, to save him, and

Heaven grant that I have done so. He is now far beyond your reach; but are not those friends of yours?"

"Yes, Major Lester and Captain Caruth, whom you met while you were at the fort, and there is a troop and my band of scouts camped some miles from here, for we came upon the trail of Silk-lasso Sam."

"And he has escaped you; but I will send for Pawnee Bill, and be glad to meet you and your friends in my quarters, for we shall hardly meet again, as my mission on the frontier is done, and I go East very soon."

CHAPTER II.

A VIGILANTE LOVER.

The chief of scouts, Buffalo Bill, with Pawnee Bill and the two other army officers, set out upon their return to the fort where they were stationed, seventy-odd miles from Pocket City, with only feelings of kindness for the very remarkable maiden, who seemed to hold the destinies of the Yellow Dust Valley miners in the hollow of her little hand.

They did not harbor any unkind thought of her, for her clever rescue from a fort of her outlaw brother, Silk-lasso Sam.

The miners, knowing her only as Bonnie Belle, and not aware that Silk-lasso Sam was her brother, supposed that searching for the escaped outlaw had brought the troopers and scouts to the mines, and were glad, with few exceptions, that Bonnie Belle had treated them with such cordial hospitality, for they wished to remain on the right side of the army in case of trouble.

After the departure of Buffalo Bill and the soldiers, affairs settled down as before in Pocket City among the miners.

But all the while Bonnie Belle was making her preparations to go East.

She would not say that she was going, not to return, for she well knew the result of such an admis-

A Vigilante Lover.

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sion; and so she sent for Scott King, the big store-keeper of Pocket City, and told him that she was compelled to go East for a while, and wished him to assume the management of affairs at The Frying Pan and the Devil's Den until her return, or the coming of Dead-shot Dean, a miner with whom she had started East some time before, but had turned back to accomplish the rescue of her brother.

Scott King was the captain of the Vigilantes of the valley, and also the "judge of the frontier court," as it was put, and that meant that his word was law.

"The clerk will report to you each day, Captain King, the earnings and expenses of the hotel, and my manager at the Devil's Den will do likewise, so that you can have as little trouble as possible, while I will also pay you liberally for your services."

"Don't mention it, Bonnie Belle," said the Vigilante captain, who had a soft spot in his heart for the maiden.

"Yes, but I must mention it, for I intend you shall be well rewarded for your valuable services. Now, when Dead-shot Dean returns, you will turn over to his keeping all moneys and the charge of the hotel and den, for I so arranged before his going East."

"I will strictly obey your orders, Bonnie Belle. But when do you leave us?"

"Within the week."

"So soon?"

"Yes."

"And it is necessary for you to go?"

"It is important that I should do so."

The Vigilante captain sighed, and said earnestly:

"I am very sorry, Bonnie Belle. You have endeared yourself to every man in these mines, and we will all miss you sadly. How long will you be gone?"

"That I do not know."

"You will give me an address in the East, where I can write you?"

"No, for I leave all in your management, and there will be no need to write, and Dead-shot Dean will be back again before long."

"Well, you know best. But when do you depart, did you say?"

"I shall take Four-in-hand Frank's coach out one week from to-day."

The Vigilante captain sighed and said, after a moment's hesitation:

"Of course I know that you have had half a hundred men wish to marry you, Bonnie Belle, and you know just as well as I do, that I love you with all my heart and soul, yet still I must tell you that I do."

"I am getting rich here, and I am of considerable importance here in the mines, being captain of the Vigilantes, judge, and also storekeeper, so if you do feel that you can care for me, then I want you to say so as frankly as you will if you don't care anything for me—see?"

"I do like you very much, Captain King, for you have been one of my best friends while I have been here, and I thank you for the honor you show me

in wishing to marry one of whom you know nothing whatever as to what I was before I came here."

"As for that, Bonnie Belle, you know nothing of me, for I may have been a burglar, a murderer, or anything else bad before I came here."

"I believe that you were not a bad man, and came simply to better your fortune. But yet I have only friendship for you, can never feel other regard for you, and so we will not speak more upon this subject. That I place confidence in you is shown by my placing my property here in your hands, and I feel that you will do your best to protect it for me."

"I'll do it, Bonnie Belle, see if I don't," was the earnest reply of the handsome Vigilante captain, who had earned the reputation since coming to the mines of being an honest man, peaceable, yet dangerous to arouse, and one who was a terror to evildoers.

The day at last came around when Bonnie Belle was to say "Good-by" to the miners for a while, and in honor of her departure, all of them had struck work in Yellow Dust Valley, and had assembled to bid her "Good-by" and wish her "Good luck."

After her going, two-thirds of them had decided to get drunk, and thus drown their grief by painting Pocket City a crimson hue.

* * * * *

The coach bound East on its weekly run always left Pocket City after an early breakfast, and, therefore, from daylight the miners began to gather about The Frying Pan to bid farewell to Bonnie Belle.

Four-in-hand Frank, the driver, had kept two men rubbing up the coach and harness for a couple of days before leaving, in honor of the fair passenger, and he had his very best team of horses, six iron grays.

He was a stalwart fellow, six feet in height, full-bearded, clear-eyed, and with a certain devil-may-care air about him that was very taking.

Generous of nature, fearless, and a superb hand with the reins, he had come to Pocket City with a record as the best driver of four or six-in-hand on the Overland trails; his only rival being Horseshoe Ned, who carried the coach out weekly from the fort.

"You'll ride on the box with me, Bonnie Belle?" he said, as she came out prepared for the start, and dressed in a neat traveling suit, that was very becoming to her.

"Oh, yes, Frank, for I cannot bear to be housed up inside a coach," was the smiling reply.

A box had been placed for her feet to rest upon, and the softest cushion put by the side of the driver's seat.

"Good-by, comrades, and Heaven bless you for all your kindness to me," said Bonnie Belle, as she mounted to the box, Frank handing up her satchel after her, while her trunk had been placed in the boot behind.

There were no other passengers, and so, as Bonnie Belle was station agent, as well as postmistress at Pocket City, she gave the order to start.

Then Four-in-hand Frank placed his bugle to his lips

and gave a few ringing notes, while the miners yelled, cheered, and shouted words of farewell as Bonnie Belle kissed her gloved hand to them again and again, her beautiful eyes being filled with tears at this demonstration in her honor.

Then away rolled the coach, while Bonnie Belle, seizing the bugle, sent forth with skill and pathos, the notes of the song:

Farewell, farewell is a lonely word
And always brings a sigh;
But give to me when loved ones part,
That good old word good-by.

And up the valley after the departing coach rolled a mighty chorus of voices, united in singing:

"Auld lang syne."

"Waal, Bonnie Belle, I has been a long time on the plains, but I never seen anything quite come up to that farewell o' the miners to you," said Four-in-hand Frank, when the coach had swept by the weird cañon known as Hangman's Gulch, and was well upon its way.

"They have always been most kind to me, Frank. I came among them an unknown, unprotected girl, and they have treated me in every respect as they would have their own sister."

"It would have been a bad break for any man to make who treated yer different, Bonnie Belle; but yer will see Dead-shot Dean, I believes, when yer goes East?"

"Yes, I am going to his home."

"His leetle house thar on ther hill looks mighty lonely now, don't it, all shut up as it is?" and the driver pointed to a little cabin situated under the shelter of a mountain spur, around which the coach trail ran.

"Yes, but he will soon be back to work his mine."

"So I has heard, and I is glad of it, for he's square as they make up; ain't afeerd o' ther devil, and no other man in the mines would live and hunt gold this near ther Hangman's Gulch as he did.

"I liked Dead-shot Dean a heap, Bonnie Belle, and I does hope as how he'll strike it rich some day and make a fortin."

"I hope so, too, Frank, for he deserves success."

And on swept the coach, Frank keeping his team at a steady gait until some score of miles had been gone over, when suddenly, as he halted to water his horses at a brook, a horseman wheeled into the trail before him, a rifle at his shoulder, and called out in threatening tones:

"Hands up, all, for I claim toll on this trail!"

"Thunderation, ef it ain't a road agent, I hope I may die!" cried Frank, though he quickly obeyed the order, expressed as it was by the muzzle of the rifle covering his heart.

"And I have not my belt of arms on," said Bonnie Belle sadly.

The horseman was well mounted, and his face was completely masked, so that recognition was impossible.

He rode close up to the wheel horses, still keeping the driver covered, and said:

"Well, I said I demanded toll on this trail."

"Who in thunder is yer?" growled Four-in-hand Frank.

"A man whom it is not safe to trifle with, as you will find out if you delay longer, for my men are in ambush and have you covered."

"I has nothing to give yer, and yer ain't goin' fer rob a lady?"

"I know no sex when gold is my game. Come, girl, I want money, or you go with me as ransom until I get it for your release."

"I have some money with me, yes, and I will give you all except what I need for my expenses," calmly said Bonnie Belle.

"Be quick about it, then."

She took from her satchel a leather case with considerable money in it, and this she handed down to the masked road agent.

"This is not all that you have, and you have jewels as well. Come, I know you, Bonnie Belle, and I want your money and jewels, or you go into captivity."

"Not that, surely, when gold will buy me off. Here, take this money, too, and it is all I have, except a couple of hundred in my pocketbook."

"I want that, too, and your jewels, also."

"Would you rob me of those?"

"Of everything, for I show no mercy."

With a sigh the young girl took a . . . of jewels

from the satchel, her pocketbook, and a few other valuables, and handed them down to the robber.

"Ah! that is something like. Now, drive on, Four-in-hand Frank, and keep me in mind, for we shall meet again." And the masked road agent still kept his rifle covering the driver until the coach rolled out of view.

CHAPTER III.

MET ON THE TRAIL.

"Of all mean critters I ever seen, Bonnie Belle, thet one are ther worst, and some day I'll see him hanged for this day's work."

So said Four-in-hand Frank after they had left the masked road agent out of sight behind them.

"Do you know how much he has robbed me of, Frank?" calmly asked the maiden.

"I does not. Maybe a couple of thousand or so?"

"Of ten thousand dollars in money, and of jewels worth half as much more. Fortunately I have some things with me, old souvenirs, which he did not get."

"Oh, Lordy! but I wish I could hang him."

"You could have done nothing, Frank, for had you shown the slightest resistance, he would have killed you."

"Sure, and I have just sense enough to know it, too. But, Lordy! you have lost big money, and the miners will be red-hot when they hears it."

"Did you ever see the man before, Frank?"

"Now yer has me, Bonnie Belle, for I thinks I has and I thinks I hasn't."

"Who do you think he is?"

"Waal, yer heard thet Silk-lasso Sam, the terror o' ther upper trails, has escaped from the fort?"

"Yes, I heard of it," was the low response of Bonnie Belle, while her face paled and her heart beat convulsively.

"Waal, Silk-lasso Sam has held me up quite often, and I kinder thought there was something in thet feller with the mask to remind me of him."

"But it is said that Silk-lasso Sam was slender of form."

"The't's so, and this man were quite stout. Yas, I guesses it c'u'dn't hev been him, onless his weight hev increased a heap since he held up my coach last time."

Bonnie Belle gave a sigh of relief, and said:

"Well, I am glad to feel that it was not Silk-lasso Sam, Frank."

"So is I, miss, for he'd hev done more deviltry, sich as killing one o' my horses, slashing up my harness and coach curtains, for he were given ter doing ther meanest o' acts a man c'u'd do, especially when he got no boodle. I were in hopes thet we was clear o' robbers on the Overland, but it seems we has still got ter risk 'em."

Bonnie Belle made no reply, for she was busy with her own thoughts.

The words of Four-in-hand Frank had half added to a suspicion that flashed upon her, when she heard the voice of the highwayman.

But then, when she recalled that her brother's form was slender and graceful, and this man's was stout

and awkward, and that she had seen that he wore a beard beneath his mask, she felt that she wronged him, and so said to herself:

"No, no, I will not doubt him, for surely it was not Arden. No, it could not be that he would so soon forget his pledge to me, and turn at the first opportunity to crime again, and, worst of all, could rob me. No, I will banish the suspicion at once."

After noon the coach turned into the trail that led from the fort to the Overland junction, where the branch trails joined the main stem.

There they beheld a horseman suddenly appear before them, and Frank called out quickly:

"Another holdup!"

"No, that is Buffalo Bill," cried Bonnie Belle, as the horseman came, at a lope, toward them.

"So it be, and thet means no road agents is near," was the relieved response of the driver.

As the scout drew near, Frank brought his team to a halt, and doffing his sombrero politely, Buffalo Bill drew rein by the coach, and said:

"I am glad to see you, Miss Bonnie Belle."

"And we is glád ter see you, Buffalo Bill," the driver remarked.

"Ho, Four-in-hand Frank, I greet you, and congratulate you upon your pleasant company. Any other passengers?"

"Not one, Buffalo Bill."

The scout glanced into the coach, and asked:

"And have you had no others than Bonnie Belle?"

"Not a soul, Bill."

"You expected there was to be one more, did you not, Buffalo Bill, and so headed off the coach?" and Bonnie Belle smiled wickedly as she asked the question.

The scout's face flushed, but he replied:

"I was not certain, but I thought I would be sure that there were no wolves in lamb's wool traveling East with you, Bonnie Belle."

"I am glad to say there is not," was the maiden's reply, and then she added: "But let me tell you that we have been held up on the trail to-day."

"Held up?"

"Yes."

"When and where?"

"Some few hours after leaving Pocket City, at the Willow Creek; was it not, Frank?"

"That's where it were, Buffalo Bill."

"And who held you up?"

"Don't know, 'cause he wore a mask thet hid him complete, Bill."

"And you were robbed?"

"Yes, he took from me my jewels and about ten thousand dollars in money; in fact, I will have to get money at the station to go on East with."

"This is an outrage. Describe the man, please."

"He was mounted upon a large blood bay, was a stout man, clad in buckskin, wore a black mask, and carried a repeating rifle and belt of arms."

"It was at the Willow Creek?"

"Yes."

"About two hours ago?"

"Just two hours ago."

"Did you see more than this one man?"

"No, but he said that he had others with him."

"You have heard nothing of Silk-lasso Sam, Frank?"

"Not a word, unless that robber was him, which I don't think he was."

"The description does not suit Silk-lasso Sam. I will go on and strike his trail, however. Good-by, Bonnie Belle, and good fortune attend you;" and, raising his sombrero, the scout was off like a rocket, to find the trail of the masked highwayman.

* * * * *

Two days after meeting the coach of Four-in-hand Frank, Buffalo Bill rode into the fort, better known along the border as Pioneer Post.

A more picturesquely situated post, officers and men could not have asked for, or one more delightful as a frontier home, in spite of the dangerous locality it was in, as it was the sole barrier to keep back the Indians from sweeping down from their mountain strongholds beyond, and laying waste the settlements and mining camps.

Colonel Dunwoody, the commandant, was a true soldier and an accomplished gentleman and scholar, cour-

teous to all, a severe disciplinarian, yet the idol of his men.

He was the youngest man of his rank in the service, and had won fame upon many a field, and was a bachelor and a man of large wealth.

Light artillery, cavalry, and infantry comprised his command, and situated upon a bluff overlooking the river, the fort was looked upon as impregnable, with its force of a thousand soldiers, a scouting band under Buffalo Bill, half a hundred cowboys, and a hundred or more hangers-on.

Many of the officers had their families stationed there with them, so that there was plenty of society, and every enjoyment that a frontier post could indulge in.

There was Lieutenant Colonel Ravel de Sutro, next in command to Colonel Dunwoody, and he had his wife, a beautiful Mexican woman, and his maid and adopted daughter, Nina, a kinswoman of Mrs. de Sutro, dwelling in the fort.

The next officer in rank was Major Lionel Lester, and his lovely wife had, as a member of her household, a cousin and schoolgirl chum, Clarice Carr, who, with Nina de Sutro, was a belle at the fort. In fact, the two were known as the Rival Belles.

Captain Dick Caruth, or "Dashing Dick," as he was familiarly called, a gallant cavalry officer, one who was put down in the bachelor list, and a man of considerable wealth, also figures in this story, along with Lieutenant Vassar Turpin, the colonel's aid-de-camp, a

handsome young officer, who, like his chief, was well blessed with this world's goods.

The colonel's headquarters were built at his own expense, and were really fine for a border post.

Then came the quarters of the married officers, fronting on two sides of the plaza, the bachelor quarters in a row to themselves, with a large clubhouse in the center.

A dance hall and a church were over on The Bluffs, which was the social rendezvous and parade ground of the officers and their families.

Then came the hospitals, storehouses, sutler's stores, scouts' quarters, and the barracks of the men, with the "settlement" beyond.

Having ridden into Pioneer Post, Buffalo Bill left his horse at his own quarters and made his way to the home of Pawnee Bill.

The scouts' quarters were at the end of Bachelor Row, and Pawnee was lazily swinging in his hammock upon the piazza, and at the same time enjoying a cigar and a book.

He sprang up at the coming of the great scout, and said, in his hearty way:

"Ah, Bill, back again, I am glad to see, and I'll wager my word you have news."

"I have news, Pawnee," answered the scout. They were born comrades, and had been for many a long year; in fact, each owed to the other his life, saved time and again upon many a deadly field and trail.

"I knew when you told me you were going off on a lone scout, that you had some particular object in view."

"I did, Pawnee, and I'll now tell you just what it was, for I wish to ask your opinion of certain happenings."

"Fire away, Bill." And the scout, having taken a seat, Pawnee Bill threw himself again in the hammock, after holding out a cigar to Buffalo Bill, who said:

"Thank you, no, I will not smoke now."

"My idea was when you left that you went upon a still-hunt for Silk-lasso Sam, Bill."

"It was just what I did do."

"I believed all the while that Bonnie Belle had the outlaw concealed in the hotel."

"What made you think so?"

"Well, you know when he had me a prisoner, after his escape from the coach, he dispersed the men who had aided him, and set out with me for Pocket City?"

"Yes."

"When we reached within a few miles of the mines, Bonnie Belle came out to meet him and found me a prisoner. She set me free in short order, made me give my promise to have no trouble with her brother, and took me to The Frying Pan at night to care for me, leaving him at Hangman's Gulch when we went by.

"She then left the hotel, and I am sure went after

him and brought him there, and later, either hid him there, or sent him to Hangman's Gulch. I saw that you had the opinion that he was not far away and so determined to try and find him."

"That is just what I did go for, Pawnee, after our return to the post," said Buffalo Bill firmly.

CHAPTER IV.

BUFFALO BILL'S OPINION.

"And what was the result of your lone scout, Bill?" asked Pawnee Bill, impressed by the look and words of the scout.

"I will tell you."

"I am all attention, pard, so fire away."

"My idea was that the outlaw chief was being hidden by Bonnie Belle, and that she had not already sent him away as she said. Of course, with full appreciation of her clever rescue of him, her sisterly regard and desire to have him escape the country, after his pledge of reformation, I had to do my duty, for he was to me no more than Silk-lasso Sam, the Outlaw of the Overland."

"Very true, Bill."

"You know, too, I regarded his pledge of becoming a better man as I do deathbed repentances, for he seemed incapable of doing further harm, so was willing to reform."

"Doubtless, as deathbed penitents do."

"Now, I wanted to catch Silk-lasso Sam, and thus wipe out the shame of his escape from the fort."

"It was so clever, though, Bill."

"Granted; yet it was the girl's work, not his, and, being free, I feared he might be tempted to do as Rip van Winkle did, swear off, but not count that time."

Buffalo Bill's Opinion.

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"Very likely, for his rescue might embolden him to turn outlaw again."

"That was just my opinion, and so, believing that he was in or near Pocket City, I decided to try and catch him by going down the Overland Trail for a hundred miles and meet the coaches as they went eastward."

"I see."

"Bonnie Belle told us she was going East, and it entered my mind that in disguise Silk-lasso Sam might accompany her."

"Bravo for you, Bill."

"So I camped on the trail and met the coaches. At last I came upon the coach out of Pocket City with Four-in-hand Frank on the box, and by his side was Bonnie Belle."

"Good!"

"They evidently at first thought I was a road agent, but Bonnie Belle recognized me, and the coach halted."

"And who was inside?"

"Not a soul."

"Then you were wrong in your surmise?"

"As far as Bonnie Belle taking the man East with her was concerned, yes. But they had a story to tell."

"Yes."

"I glanced into the coach and saw that they were not deceiving me, that it was empty; and then Bonnie Belle told me that a masked road agent had held them up on the trail, some hours after leaving Pocket City."

"Ah! that is startling news, for I supposed all of the road agents were accounted for."

"This man held up the coach, covering Four-in-hand with a repeating rifle, and he robbed Bonnie Belle of every dollar she had, and jewels as well."

"Infamous! But it could not have been her brother who did this."

"That is just what I wish your opinion of, Pawnee, when you have heard my story."

"You shall have it, Bill."

"This road agent I got a description of. He was mounted upon a large, blood-bay horse, with cowboy saddle and bridle, and the man carried a repeating rifle and belt of arms, and was dressed in buckskin."

"And was masked?"

"Yes."

"Then it was doubtless Silk-lasso Sam or one of the band we missed catching, though I cannot understand why the outlaw should rob his noble sister."

"Silk-lasso Sam would stop at the commission of no crime in the calendar of wickedness, Pawnee. But this man was not the outlaw chief, unless he has grown a long beard and has increased in weight some sixty pounds in the ten days since I have seen him."

"A long beard, you say?"

"Yes, it extended below the mask curtain."

"And has increased in weight."

The highwayman was a very stout man, both Bonnie Belle and Four-in-hand assured me."

"Might the beard not have been false, and the fat, extra padding to more thoroughly disguise him, Bill?"

"Just my opinion, Pawnee, and now that you are of the same way of thinking, I believe we are on the right trail."

"We will talk it over."

"I could see that Bonnie Belle had the same dread, and it was a relief to see that the man had a long beard and was stout, or otherwise she would have vowed that it was her outlaw brother."

"As I now begin to feel that it was, though I did not believe that the wretch could be so base as to rob the noble girl who had saved him from the gallows and provided for him so liberally."

"That cuts no figure in my opinion of the man, Pawnee, for he would do anything."

"Well, what did you do?"

"Went to the scene of the holdup, of course."

"And then?"

"I found where the man had been lying in wait, and his trail led from the spot by the way he had come."

"You followed it?"

"Yes, I followed it to the main trail southward, and there lost it, amid the many tracks that traveled that way. I decided that the man had a hiding place somewhere along the trail leading to Pocket City, and yet I could not find where it branched off."

"That was a pity; but if it came from that direction and went around to where the coach was held up, it would appear to me that it was either a miner in

Pocket City playing road agent, knowing that Bonnie Belle would have plenty of money with her, or——"

"Or what, Pawnee?"

"Or that it was Silk-lasso Sam, who, before leaving the country, lay in wait to rob his sister to get more money to take with him, and disguised himself so as not to be recognized by her."

"That is just my opinion," was Buffalo Bill's emphatic response.

* * * * *

Colonel Dunwoody sat in his pleasant quarters, lost in deep meditation.

His thoughts seemed far away, and his face showed varied emotions as his mind flashed from one memory to another.

There was a romance in the life of Colonel Dunwoody which the public eye had never penetrated.

It was said that in his early life he had loved and lost, but such was not the truth.

He had loved, and it was a portrait that he had fallen in love with.

He had seen it at an art exhibition, and learned that it had taken the first prize, a medal of gold and a thousand dollars, which had come too late for the artist, who had taken his own life in the despair of unrequited love.

The portrait was the likeness of the artist's lady-love, one who had refused him for another, and thus wrecked his life.

The colonel bought the portrait, and said to an intimate friend:

"I shall never marry unless I can meet a woman who has that face, for I could not love another."

And so the colonel had gone through life, carrying the portrait with him, and watching and waiting for the real of the ideal.

It was thought by close observers that Clarice Carr had won him, with her superb face and form, a queen among women; and then others had asserted that it was not Clarice, but Nina de Sutro, with her Spanish beauty, who had caught the colonel in the meshes of love.

Both Clarice Carr and Nina de Sutro had had romances of their own, too, in life, but they were not open to the gaze of the curious, but locked in their own hearts.

But it was soon whispered that the colonel was still heart-whole and fancy-free as far as they were concerned.

Then there had come in the coach to the fort one day a maiden in mourning.

She had sought the colonel and introduced herself as Miss Ruth Arden, the sister of the outlaw, then lying in irons, awaiting the day of his execution upon the gallows.

Colonel Dunwoody had started at sight of her.

Was it because such a woman was the sister of the outlaw chief, Silk-lasso Sam?

Not altogether, for he had seen in Ruth Arden the

real of his ideal love, the image of the portrait he had so long loved and treasured.

And in talking with her when he showed her the portrait, he had discovered that it was her mother who had been the one whom the artist had loved.

Of course, Ruth Arden saw her brother at will the few days she was at the fort, and she was the guest while there, at the colonel's request, of Clarice Carr at the home of Major and Mrs. Lester, and she won their hearts completely, for she was known as Bonnie Belle, the idol of Pocket City.

And though, while there, Miss Arden had successfully plotted the rescue of her brother, going to Chicago even to accomplish her end, Colonel Dunwoody had felt for her no unkind thought, but had regarded her the more highly for her splendid pluck and cleverness.

When Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill told him that Miss Arden was none other than Bonnie Belle, he said that she had written him a full confession to that effect, and had offered no other excuse for her rescue of her brother than that she loved him, and wished to save him from a death upon the gallows.

And now, as the colonel sat alone in his quarters, he was thinking of Ruth Arden, the woman whom he had said in confidence to Pawnee Bill that he hoped some day to win.

"She came here, Pawnee, playing the part she has, to save that outlaw; to find and reform him.

"She believes that she has done so, and she has gone

to her home in the East. I believe wholly in her purity and honesty, and one of these days I shall seek her and ask her to be my wife."

So the colonel had said, and Pawnee Bill had replied:

"And I feel, sir, that you can never find a nobler woman, one to make you a truer wife, for I have studied her well from the first time I ever saw her, Colonel Dunwoody."

With this little secret love affair known only to Pawnee Bill, Colonel Dunwoody was content to bide his time until he could go East and seek Ruth in her own home, for she had written him, in reporting the rescue of her outlaw brother, and her regret that life had been taken, and Pawnee Bill was wounded; that she intended to give up her life on the frontier; for, with Silk-lasso Sam free, there was no further need of her leading it.

In the midst of his reveries, as he now sat alone in his quarters, the orderly entered and announced Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill to see the colonel.

"Admit them, orderly," was the prompt reply.

The colonel arose and greeted his visitors in his courtly way, and Pawnee Bill said:

"Colonel Dunwoody, Cody has just returned from a scout, and I suggested that he lose no time in reporting to you that the Overland trails are not free of road agents."

"Ah! you surprise me. But sit down, please, and, Cody, tell me at once what you have to report."

CHAPTER V.

THE TELLTALE KNIFE.

Colonel Dunwoody heard the scout's report of his waiting on the trail, hoping to catch Silk-lasso Sam making his escape eastward, and he said:

"Well, Cody, I cannot but feel that you were right in wishing to catch this man, and it would be my duty, and one I would not shirk from, to hang him immediately upon his capture.

"We are gravely reflected upon in the East for not putting down outlawry on the border, and for not preventing outbreaks among the Indians; but I wish those who are offering criticisms all the time would but come West and take command for a short while and see if they would not be more lenient toward us. Now, what is your idea about this highwayman?"

"I think, sir, it was Silk-lasso Sam."

"And yet, would he rob his sister in such a way?"

"Yes, sir, he would do anything that was mean."

"And what do you think, Pawnee Bill?"

"I agree with Cody, sir."

"Then he must have been disguised, or, if some one else did the robbing, he was in the background as the leader."

"There was but one trail of a horse, sir, leading to and from the place of the holding up of the coach," said Buffalo Bill.

The Telltale Knife.

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"Then that is proof that there was no one else there?"

"It is, sir."

"Well, I would give much to know that it was the outlaw chief."

"I think I have proof that it was."

"What is your proof, Cody?"

"Silk-lasso Sam had a very small foot."

"I observed that when he was my prisoner."

"He wore cavalry boots, and had very high heels on them."

"Yes."

"He had them on when he went from here under the charge of the pretended detectives."

"Yes, so he did."

"Now, in following the trail of the horse that went to the Yellow Dust Valley, I noticed that there was a footprint along, as though a man was walking either by the side of the horse or in front of him at times."

"That is so, Bill, for the outlaw walked, while I, being wounded and in irons, rode his horse."

"I saw as much, Pawnee Bill, and I noted the footprint well."

"Now, after robbing Bonnie Belle, this highwayman rode to a stream some miles distant and dismounted, I believe, to count over his booty."

"He led his horse to water at a creek, for there were his tracks, and he sat down upon a drift log to count his money, for I saw his tracks there, and more, found

this penknife and a ten-dollar gold piece, which he had dropped.

"The knife was stuck in the log where he sat, and he had taken it out to cut the strings which bound up the bank bills."

The colonel took the knife and gold piece and looked at them critically.

Then he said:

"What about the tracks, Cody?"

"They were made by a small foot, sir, arched and with high heels."

"That is pretty fair proof that it was not the footprint of a man weighing as much as this highwayman appeared to be."

"I am very sure of that, for the track was made by a boot under a five in size."

"And the knife, can that not be made a clew, sir?" asked Pawnee Bill.

"How so, Pawnee?"

"When the outlaw was brought in a prisoner, sir, he was doubtless searched by the officer of the day, and all that he had was taken from him, that might prove dangerous for him to keep."

"You are right, and the officer of the day would recognize the knife, you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"It was Captain Caruth who searched him, Colonel Dunwoody," said Buffalo Bill.

"Orderly!"

In answer to the call of the colonel, the orderly appeared.

"My compliments to Captain Caruth, and say that I would like to see him at my quarters immediately."

The orderly saluted and departed, and the colonel went on to say:

"If it is proven that this highwayman is Silk-lasso Sam, then he is still determined to hang upon the Overland trails, and we will have our work to do over again, Cody."

"Yes, sir, and I am going to brand every outlaw I can catch, so that we will know him should we meet him again," said the scout, with a sudden earnestness.

"But how can you brand them, Cody?" asked the colonel.

"I do not just now know, but there are men I suspect even in this fort, and I am determined that if guilty, they shall not escape. If that highwayman was Silk-lasso Sam, then I am going to ask, Colonel Dunwoody, to at once pick my men and go upon the trail, for he is too dangerous a man to go at large."

"I agree with you there perfectly, and should he organize a band, he can give us no end of trouble; but here is Captain Caruth."

Just then handsome Dashing Dick Caruth entered, and the colonel asked:

"Captain Caruth, I would like to know if you searched the prisoner, Silk-lasso Sam, when he was captured?"

"I had it done, sir."

"What did you find upon him?"

"His weapons, a belt of money, a large penknife, a map, watch and chain, and some jewelry."

"What was done with the things?"

"All were returned to him, sir, when he went off with the supposed detectives."

"Would you know the penknife?"

"Yes, for it had a very odd handle."

"Is this the knife?"

"It is, sir," was the reply, after a quick glance at the knife held up for him to look at.

The telltale penknife seemed pretty positive proof that the man who held up Four-in-hand Frank's coach and robbed Bonnie Belle was none other than the maiden's unworthy brother, Silk-lasso Sam.

If not, then it was some man who had just as small a foot, and in some way had gotten hold of his penknife.

The colonel seemed the most disturbed of all at this discovery.

He had been glad of the escape of the outlaw chief, for it had kept him from signing his death sentence, a fact which would have stood in the way of his winning the love of Bonnie Belle.

Though acting in the discharge of his duty, Ruth was not the one to wed the man whose signature had sent her brother to the gallows, no matter what that brother might have been.

The colonel had most sincerely hoped that Silk Lasso Sam, taught by his narrow escape and past experience, had gone at once on his way out of the country.

But if this was not the case, then he had remained with the sole motive of again haunting the Overland trails.

That he had, if he had been the lone highwayman, begun in a most merciless way, was proven by his having robbed his own sister, and to others he certainly would be wholly without mercy.

The colonel wanted an end put to the man, but he did hope that he would be killed by Buffalo Bill and not brought again a prisoner to the fort.

"Well, Cody, I guess the man who robbed Frank's coach was none other than Silk-lasso Sam, after all, if this penknife is any proof," said Colonel Dunwoody.

"I feel certain of it now, sir, and I would now like to ask, sir, to be allowed to hunt him down in my own way, and with my own men, sir, as the Indians are very quiet now, and we can be spared," said Buffalo Bill.

"All right, Cody, go your own way about it and take your own time, and I hope you may catch him, or kill him, before he holds up any other coach."

"I hope so, too, sir, and I thank you for the permission, Colonel Dunwoody." And the scout and Pawnee Bill soon after took their leave, the latter remarking, as they walked along:

"Bill, do you wish to do the colonel a favor?"

"I do, indeed, Pawnee."

"Well, I am very sure that if you caught Silk-lasso Sam alive, and then did some little hanging upon your own account, you would confer a lasting obligation upon the colonel."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, for if you did not take him alive—killed him, in fact—and brought in his lamented remains as proof of your good work, it would please him the more."

"I see; the colonel does not wish to have to hang the man himself?"

"I am sure that he does not."

"Thanks for the advice, Pawnee, and now I have a favor to ask of you."

"Granted, of course, Bill."

"I know that red-hot iron will brand a man, but I do not wish to be cruel even to a foe, and I am also aware that you can prick in a brand with India ink, but life is too short to do that upon an enemy, you know."

"Rather."

"Now, as you appear to know everything, I want you to tell me something I can use for a brand so that it will be lasting, and if I put it upon a man I suspect, he cannot get rid of it."

"I do know, Bill, just what will do."

"Good! What is it?"

"When I lived among the Indians, I studied all their tricks and devices, as you know, and from an old medicine chief I learned just what will come into use for you now."

"I shall be more than glad to get it, Pawnee."

"There is an acid the Indians make from the juice of certain plants, and it is of a blood-red color. It blisters when it touches the flesh, and when the sore heals it leaves a light-red scar."

"That is just what I want, Pawnee, for I happen to have a cut of my initials, B. B., and I can put buckskin over them, then dip it into this acid, and stamp my brand upon the flesh. Now, I shall put my brand on any man I catch in lawless work, and if he escapes in any way afterward, I will know him when I see him."

"Now, there is one of the prisoners here at present, one of the band of Silk-lasso Sam, but he proved his innocence in some way and so escaped sentence with the others, and yet, though ordered to be set free by the colonel, he still hangs around the fort, so I shall try my brand upon him, and then keep my eye upon him, for if his chief goes on the trail to rob again, that fellow will know it and become his spy."

"Well, Bill, come to my rooms and you shall have the acid I speak of, for I happen to have a small bottle of it which I saved."

"I'll do it, sir, and I'll bring that outlaw with me to try an experiment on him of the brand."

"All right, I'll be ready for you, and if I tell you to first try the brand on yourself, do not fear, for it will be red ink in your case, and when I hand it to you again, it will be the acid for the man you wish to mark."

"I understand," said the scout, and a quarter of an hour after he returned to Pawnee's quarters with the

man who had so narrowly escaped sentence with the comrades in whose company he had been found.

"Pawnee and I are trying experiments, Buck," said the scout, and after applying red ink on the stamp to his own hand, he dipped it into the acid for the back of the other's hand.

There was little pain felt, but the man was branded for life with a red scar of the letters, B. B.

And that night the suspected man mysteriously disappeared from the fort.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MINER'S ROMANCE.

In a pretty cottage home in the suburbs of a Southern village lived those whose lives and romances are interwoven with the threads of this story.

The house is a pleasant one, and all about rests an air of comfort and contentment, for a cow feeds in a pasture near, a horse is cantering about an adjoining field, at play with a little pony, fowls are in the backyard, a vegetable garden is in the rear, and flowers innumerable blossom near the house.

In a pleasant room in one wing sits a man with gray hair and beard before an easel, painting a portrait of a man who is sitting for him and dressed in miner's costume, with belt of arms about his waist and pick and shovel in his hand; the background being a hole dug in a cliff, the mine.

The miner is represented as glancing earnestly upward, as though in thankfulness at having "struck it rich," for in his hands are several lumps of yellow gold.

The miner is a splendid specimen of manhood, handsome in face, of superb physique, and with an expression which only one who had a good heart could possess.

Near him, upon the floor, playing with a puppy, is a little boy, bright and fearless-faced, while by the window, sewing, is a young and lovely faced woman.

Such was the home and family of Dead-shot Dean, as the miner was known in Pocket City, for these were his wife, child, and father-in-law.

The son of a widowed mother, who had been beggared by the death of her husband, Carrol Dean had fallen in love with pretty Kathleen Clyde, the daughter of a poor artist, to find that he had a rival in the son of a rich planter living near.

Mrs. Clyde, then living, in her ambition had sought hard to have her daughter wed the rich planter's son, though he had led a wild, dissipated life, young as he was; had taken the life of a fellow student in a duel in Germany at a university; afterward had been dismissed from the navy of the United States, and was known to be generally bad.

But Arden Leigh had at last returned to the parental roof-tree and vowed to his father and young sister that he intended to lead a different life, and they had believed him.

They had seen his attentions to Kathleen Clyde and hoped that she would be the saving of him.

But, ever arrogant, he had wooed her in a commanding way, and meeting there Carrol Dean, had demanded that she take her choice then and there between them.

She had not hesitated an instant in doing so, and Carrol Dean had been that choice.

Maddened by her act, the young planter had drawn a pistol and fired full at his successful rival, who fell, as all believed, dead at the feet of Kathleen.

Arden Leigh made good his escape, and, forging his father's name, went off upon his wanderings with a large sum of money, to go still farther downward in his evil career, until he became Silk-lasso Sam, the outlaw.

Carrol Dean, by the devoted nursing of Kathleen, at last recovered, and his mother having died, he found among her effects a map and claim to a gold mine in the Far West, bought by his father from a friend in distress.

He wedded Kathleen, and at last, as ill fortune seemed to dog his steps, he went West to see what luck had in store for him in the old mine.

To his delight, he found that he could make it pay, and hoping for greater success in the end, he had struggled on for years at his work, sending his gold home as he dug it.

He had not hidden himself under a false name, but he had won a record as a shot, and a man it would not do to press too far, and was known in Yellow Dust Valley as Dead-shot Dean.

Planter Leigh, after his son's act and flight, had disinherited him and gone abroad with his young daughter Ruth.

He had, as his health failed, gone to California and purchased a ranch, where he had died, leaving Ruth his sole heiress.

But she had never ceased to love her wicked brother; had secretly corresponded with him and aided him, and

after her father's death she had decided to hunt up Arden Leigh and reform him.

It was this resolve which had carried Ruth to Yellow Dust Valley, where she had hoped to find her brother.

At last she found her brother in Silk-lasso Sam, the outlaw chief of the Overland.

It was a cruel blow to her, but she did not despair of yet saving him, when suddenly she learned that he and his band had been run down and captured by Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill under the guidance of Dead-shot Dean, the miner.

Though she was unknown to him, Ruth had recognized her brother's old rival, Carrol Dean, and she made herself known to him, and having discovered that there was no hope of her brother, decided to go East with the miner, who was going to visit his family after a long separation.

On the way, she had a letter from her brother appealing to her to save him from the gallows, and pledging his word to live a different life.

She had heeded this call, had let Dead-shot Dean go on without her, and that she saved the outlaw's neck has been seen.

And such is the romance of the man who sits there in his home, while the old artist, his wife's father, paints his portrait.

Presently a servant enters and hands to the miner a letter.

He breaks the seal, and after a glance at it, cries:

"It is from Bonnie Belle, wife, and she is at her old home."

The miner had told his wife and her father all of his adventures upon the far frontier.

He had told them how he had won his name of Dead-shot Dean when attacked by a gang of desperadoes, and again how he had been forced to defend himself, his cabin home, and his mine, until men began to feel that he was able to take care of himself, and hence let him alone.

He also told them how one day he had seen a gang of desperadoes having Buffalo Bill a prisoner, bearing him to Hangman's Gulch, under the plea that he was Silk-lasso Sam, the outlaw.

He had met the scout once before, and recognizing him, had gone to his rescue, saving him from being strung up, but not until he had killed the ringleader of the gang, Powder-face Pete.

It was thus that Dead-shot Dean had been made the secret spy, or detective, for the government in Yellow Dust Valley, and had aided in tracking Silk-lasso Sam and his band to earth.

Of course, the miner told of his strange meeting with Ruth Leigh, in the character of Bonnie Belle, the idol of Gold Dust Valley, and how she had gone there to find and reform her wicked brother Arden.

Of course, then, when he said that the letter was from Bonnie Belle, all knew whom it was from, and Kathleen said quickly:

"Oh, I am so glad!"

"Read it, Carrol, at once!"

"You say that she has returned home, Carrol?" the artist asked.

"Yes, sir, she is now at her old plantation home of Eden Valley, for this letter is sent from there."

"Read it, Carrol," urged his wife again, and her husband obeyed, reading as follows:

"EDEN VALLEY, Thursday.

"MY DEAR BROTHER CARROL (for as you said you would be a brother to me, so I call you):

"You will doubtless be surprised to have a letter from me, written from Eden Valley, when you supposed I was away out West, in the wilds of Yellow Dust Valley.

"But no, I am here at my home, the birthplace of three generations of our name, and I arrived but yesterday, greatly to the surprise of the old family servants who still cling to the last of my race, myself, for my brother is dead to all here and will never return.

"But let me tell you all that has happened since you and I parted upon the Overland Trail.

"You remember that Arden's appeal for help caused me to turn back.

"Well, I plotted to rescue him, and I did so.

"How, it matters not, but where I had planned a bloodless release, it turned out that one of the men in my pay, with my brother, sought the lives of Pawnee Bill and Horseshoe Ned, and the result was the man was killed by Pawnee Bill.

"Pawnee and Horseshoe Ned were both wounded, but my brother escaped and came to Pocket City with me.

"As Buffalo Bill was upon his trail, I at once decided to send him away, and he departed at night, well equipped and supplied with money, and having given me his solemn oath never to do a wrong act again, and to atone for the past all that lay in his power.

"He made his way to Mexico, and from there goes to South America, to enter into business and make it his home."

"He never will, for Arden Leigh can never repent, reform, or be guilty of a good deed. Poor girl, he had cruelly deceived her," said the miner earnestly.

Then he resumed reading the letter:

"Having accomplished my purpose in becoming what I had, I at once decided to start East, and so placed Scott King, the storekeeper and Vigilante captain, in charge until your return, when you promised you would settle up my affairs for me.

"Of course, I did not let the people know I was not coming back again.

"I rode on the box with Four-in-hand Frank, whom you know, and we were held up by a masked road agent, and I was robbed of ten thousand dollars in money and all my jewels."

"I'll wager my mine that Arden Leigh was that masked road agent!" cried the miner excitedly.

"Oh, Carrol, you surely wrong him this time, for

would he rob his own sister after all she has done for him?"

"Aye, would he, Kathleen, he would rob the dead body of his mother, for I know him," was the indignant reply of the miner.

"You certainly have had reason to know him, Carrol," said the artist, still busy with his painting. "But the letter, Carrol."

So the miner continued:

"I had to get money at the station to come on with, and gave an order to Frank for it on Scott King when he went back to Pocket City

"I fear there are those who will say that the road agent was my unfortunate brother, but he was not, as he was a large, stout man, with a long beard."

"There, Carrol!" said Kathleen, in an exultant tone.

"The beard could have been false, and he could have padded his form to make it stout, but let us read on:

"Well, my brother, I have not more to say other than that I am at home, and here you must all come to live, for it is your home, and what is mine shall belong alike to you all.

"I shall patiently await a visit from you and your sweet wife, who, I know, will be a sister to me.

"Do not fail to bring your little boy, and Mr. Clyde also, for all are more than welcome at Eden Valley Plantation, I assure you.

"Awaiting your coming, believe me, affectionately,
"RUTH LEIGH."

CHAPTER VII.

LEAVES FROM THE PAST.

When the letter of Ruth Leigh had been read, Carrol Dean glanced at his watch and said:

"Wife, shall we go at once?"

"I was just going to suggest it, Carrol, for I long to see Ruth, whom I remember as a sweet little miss of fourteen, and loved dearly. Only think through what she has passed since those days when she was entering her teens. She saved your life, you have told me, and she shall, indeed, be my sister."

"And a daughter to me," the artist said, and then added:

"Yes, we'll hitch Monarch to the carryall and drive down to Eden Valley this afternoon."

"I'll ride Dot," suddenly spoke up Master Kit Clyde, the son and heir of the Deans.

Half an hour later, Monarch was trotting briskly along, with the grown people in the carryall, while Kit came behind, riding upon Dot.

Eden Valley had been closed for many a long year, but the grounds had been kept in good condition by the overseer, and the house had been regularly aired, so that it by no means looked like a deserted place.

There were many sad memories clinging about it for Ruth Leigh, but she had learned to face the severest ordeals and to cast them behind her relentlessly.

Clad in a well-fitting dress that was very becoming to her, she looked very beautiful as she paced up and down the broad piazza, gazing upon the grand scene spread out before her.

The plantation was at the head of the valley; the large, old-fashioned mansion nestling in a grove of majestic oaks on a hill, and commanding a superb view of the vale and river that came under the gaze of one standing upon the piazza.

Suddenly the eyes of Ruth fell upon a carriage turning into the massive gateway.

"Ah, they are coming! It was kind of them to come so soon." And as the carryall halted at the steps, she was there to receive them.

Warm indeed was the greeting given her by Kathleen Dean, and both the artist and Carrol Dean extended the same cordial welcome to her, back to her girlhood home.

"And this is little Kit?" said Ruth, and the boy was clasped to her arms and carried up the stairs, while Kathleen called out anxiously:

"Ah, Ruth, he is too heavy for you, for I cannot lift him."

"Oh, no, not too heavy for me, as my wild-West life has given me muscles of iron and——" She paused for a moment, and then added bitterly:

"And a heart of flint, as your husband can tell you, Kathleen."

"No, he can tell me no such thing, for he has already said that you were all tenderness and goodness."

"Yes, you could never grow callous, Bonnie Belle—I beg your pardon, for it is Ruth now. No, you have never been hardened by contact with the world."

"And yet, brother Carrol, you know that I have been forced, in saving life, to take human life. Do you think these are cheery memories for a young girl—for I am still young, am I not, Kathleen—to have upon her conscience?"

"I lay no act at your door, Ruth, that is not just. The surgeon often has to cut deep to cure, and you have acted often with seeming heartlessness that good may come of it. No, no, you are all honor to-day and true as steel to yourself and those you love; so do not expect me to disparage you, for I could not if I would."

"That is right, Carrol, do not let her slander herself," said Mrs. Dean, while little Kit looked up into Ruth's face and said:

"You could not be bad, for I can see your heart in your eyes."

Ruth drew the boy convulsively to her an instant, and then said:

"But what a hostess I am, not to ask you into the house, a house that is to be your home, for I will not have it otherwise. I will not live here alone, so you must rent or sell your cottage and come here, all of you. Now come in."

She led the way into the grand parlor, furnished with handsome old-style furniture and portraits upon the walls.

There hung the likeness of her parents, her mother's strangely like the portrait by the artist in the possession of Colonel Dunwoody, and a striking likeness to it was Ruth Leigh herself.

"What a startling painting!" said the old artist, standing in front of a large painting, representing a handsome young man seated at a table, throwing dice with a skeleton form of Death, while in the background was an angel form, beckoning to the young man, and with the same face that was in the portrait of Mrs. Leigh.

"That painting, Mr. Clyde, was the last work of the young artist who loved my mother. Refused by her, he became dissipated, squandered his all, and then painted this picture, and with the last touch of his brush, died, for he was found dead in his chair. My father bought the painting, and I prize it highly," said Ruth.

Then, turning to the likeness of a handsome youth of sixteen, in sailor garb, she continued:

"That is a painting of my poor brother Arden when he was a midshipman, before he had stamped his brow with dishonor and crime. It is a noble face there, yet how little we can judge what is behind the human face, for what has not poor Arden become!" And, seeing that her eyes were dim with unshed tears, Carrol Dean hastily changed the subject from bygone memories.

* * * * *

As Ruth Leigh was determined in her resolve to have no refusal, but that the Deans should come to

Eden Valley to live, they were at last won over to consent to do so.

The cottage was rented at a fair sum, and those who had so long found a home there were removed to Eden Valley.

The mansion was a very large one, with over twenty rooms, and was furnished throughout most comfortably, so that there was a studio for Mr. Clyde, a room for little Kit, and everything was done for the happiness and luxury of all.

Horses and carriages were in the stables, and no one could have desired a happier home.

Ruth had tried to persuade Carrol Dean not to go back to the West, but to take the management of her estate, for she was a very rich young lady.

But the miner urged that he had just begun to "strike it rich" when he left, and he had hopes that his mine would pan out a fortune for him yet.

Thus far it had afforded a fair living for his loved ones, and also enabled him to lay something by, and he trusted a year or two longer there would make him independent, perhaps a rich man.

Kathleen hated to see him go, but said that he must do as he deemed best, and her father said the same.

The miner also urged that in The Frying Pan, Devil's Den, and other interests she held in the mines, Ruth had quite a fortune that should not be sacrificed, and he would go back and settle up her affairs for her.

So it was decided that Dead-shot Dean should re-

turn, and all began to look forward with regret to the day of his departure.

The day before the one set for his going, a letter came, addressed as follows: "To Mister Carrull Dean, Dead-shot Dean, Miner of Hangman's Gulch."

"I have a letter from Four-in-hand Frank, Ruth," cried the miner, and all laughed at the address.

"Read it, brother Carrol, for I know it is rare reading," Ruth said.

Then she added, while a sad smile crossed her face:

"I am anxious to hear the news from Yellow Dust Valley."

Opening the letter, which was written in a very remarkable manner, for Four-in-hand Frank handled the reins far better than he wrote, the miner read about as follows:

"At Frying Pan Hotel, on a Sunday.

"DEAR PARD DEAD-SHOT DEAN: I takes my pen in hand and sits down to communicate to you a few tidings which has tuk place since your going from these parts.

"As Bonnie Belle was a going ter your home, I s'pose she have seen yer and told yer how my coach were held up and she were robbed of all her money and jewels, so I won't write about that, seein' as it's not easy for me ter drive a pen as it is ter handle six critturs o' ther trail by night.

"Soon arter the holdup o' my coach, Buffalo Bill come a nosing along ther trails and stayed a few days in Pocket City.

"Some o' his old foes jumped him fer a tenderfoot and started in ter make wolf meat of him, and ther result were thet thar was a couple o' funerals up in Sunset Rest graveyard next day, for Bill, he seen ther leetle game ter kill him and so played his sixes ter win, and he won.

"Then thar came Pawnee Bill in a hurry from ther fort and Bill tuk off with him mighty quick.

"Next day I come across them on ther trail, and I larnt that poor Sandy's coach had been held up by a masked road agent.

"Sandy had tried ter push by and had been kilt, shot through the head, and his passengers was then robbed of all they had, ther horses of the coach shot, and ther masked gent went on his way.

"Two days arter, news come into the station thet this same masked road agent had held up Horseshoe Ned and got a box of valuable plunder he was carrying through to ther fort to Colonel Dunwoody.

"This last scare has jist got all who travel ther trail pretty badly frightened, and I is looking for ther masked man ter hold me up ag'in, or ter put a bullet inter me.

"When yer comes West, come light, and tell Bonnie Belle not to bring no money and diamonds with her.

"Scott King paid her order on him O. K. and business in Ther Frying Pan and Devil's Den have been only fair, not booming as when Bonnie Belle is here, for she is the drawing keerd, and t'other saloons is picking up what she loses.

"But let me tell yer thet news hev jist come in thet Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill went through as passengers on Horseshoe Ned's hearse, and was held up, when they opened fire, and a bullet cut ther mask from ther face o' ther road agent, and Ned swears that it werē no other than Silk-lasso Sam, who hev let his beard grow out so as ter help disguise him.

"But if he be, then he have grown awful fat since I seen him last, and somehow I don't believe it is him.

"Waal, I has about writ you, and so I must say give my love to Bonnie Belle, and your folks, and come back soon, for I hates ter see yer cabin all closed up.

"Nothing more at present from your true pard,

"FOUR-IN-HAND FRANK, of the Overland."

The miner glanced at Bonnie Belle as he finished reading the letter, and catching his eye, she said earnestly:

"You must find out the truth for me and let me know as soon as you return; but remember, I must know only the truth, whether it be Arden or not."

"I will tell you the truth," was the miner's promise.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MINER'S RETURN.

"It's Dead-shot Dean, as I'm a sinner!"

The speaker was Four-in-hand Frank, and he sprang forward and grasped the hand of Carrol Dean, who had just alighted at the station from the incoming coach from the East.

From there, Four-in-hand Frank was to take his coach westward to Pocket City, though the start was not to be made until the travelers had had breakfast.

It was just sunrise, and, tired and hungry, Dead-shot Dean hastened in to get the best breakfast the station master could set before his guests, and he was particularly urged to please the miner, as Four-in-hand Frank said:

"Sarve this gent up a square meal, and ther best thar layout kin git, or I begins ter shoot permiscuous-like all around."

As soon as breakfast was over, Dead-shot Dean, whose baggage had been transferred to Frank's coach, mounted the box with his driver friend.

There were no other passengers, so Frank sent his team away at a brisk trot, while the first question he asked was:

"Did yer git my communication?"

"I did, Frank, and thank you for it."

"Has yer seen Bonnie Belle?"

"I have, for I left her only three weeks ago."

"Why didn't she come along back with you?"

"To be candid with you, Frank, she is not coming back."

"Not coming back?"

"No, she has decided to remain East, and I have all legal authority from her to sell out her interests in Pocket City."

"Dead Shot?"

"Yes, Frank."

"I'd 'a' rather been shot then hev yer tell me Bonnie Belle ain't a-coming back, for I loves that gal, I does, with all my soul, and I ain't ashamed ter tell it."

"Yes, Frank, but you know that Bonnie Belle was out of place in this wild land, and when she went back to her old home she realized that her duty lay in remaining there. She came West for a purpose, to do good, and having accomplished it, as she believed, she decided to remain away."

"Waal, that is true as gospel, and I wishes her luck through life. I am no more fit to love her then I is ter preach, for I has no eddication and is a hard cuss generally. But we can't help which way our hearts leads us, Dead Shot, and so I got dead gone on thet pretty gal. I is glad she ain't a-coming back, for I c'u'd never hev made her happy."

"That is the way to look at it, Frank."

"Yes, that's so. Now tell me how yer left yer folks."

"Well, and they sent kind remembrances to my pard

Four-in-hand Frank, as did also Bonnie Belle, who also gave me a present or two for you."

"A present?"

"Yes, they are in my luggage, and when we halt I will give them to you."

"I'll halt only too quick, pard." And Frank drew rein.

Opening a large bundle, well wrapped up, Dead-shot Dean drew out a whip with a long handle and lash.

The handle screwed together, and was gold-mounted, while it was long enough to reach the leaders of the six-in-hand team.

Upon the handle was engraved: "To Four-in-hand Frank, of the Overland Trail, from his girl pard, Bonnie Belle."

The yell of delight which the driver gave frightened the birds in the forest a quarter of a mile away, and the six horses got a taste of the lash in short order.

"It's the best I ever seen, Dead Shot."

"And my wife sent you these, Frank." And a pair of fine buckskin gloves were produced, with the name of the driver embroidered upon the gauntlets.

"My father-in-law sent you this rubber coat, Frank; while my little boy Kit told me to give you this Mexican blanket to throw over your knees in cold weather; so you see all remembered you."

Into the large blue eyes of the honest driver came teardrops, and he faltered, in a voice that quivered:

"I doesn't deserve it all, Dead Shot."

"Yes, you do, for you have always been a true

friend to me, Frank, and many a little kindness do I owe to you. But now tell me the news."

Four-in-hand Frank had first to try his treasures, so drew on his rubber coat, then spread the blanket over his knees, next put on his gloves, and seizing his whip, sent his horses along, while he cracked it loudly, causing the rocks to send back echoes like pistol shots.

"All is prime fust class, Dead Shot, and I thank you over and over again. Now I'll jist lay 'em aside and we'll hev a talk, for I suppose yer wishes ter hear ther news."

"Yes, Frank, I would like to know what has happened since you wrote your letter to me."

"Waal, it's believed ther masked road agent hev got out o' ther country, fer he hev not been seen since he were shot at by Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill."

"Might he not have been wounded, and have gone off somewhere to die?"

"It might be, but they could not find his trail, though they got his horse."

"And it is believed that it was Silk-lasso Sam?"

"Yes, they knows it war, for the capture of his horse proved that," answered the driver, and as the words left his lips, sharp, clear, and stern came the command:

"Halt that coach, and hands up, both of you!"

By a strange oversight, Dead-shot Dean had not taken his belt of arms from his baggage and buckled them on, though in a land where they might be needed at any instant.

He had been of late where to go armed was con-

sidered cowardly as well as being against the law, also, so that he had gotten out of using them.

The driver had his weapons on, however, but only in rare cases was an Overland driver expected to use them, as, traveling the trails as they did, liable to be held up at any time, they were, as though by the courtesy of the outlaws, almost invariably spared.

In fact, the drivers of the coaches were looked upon by the outlaws as the ones who brought them their riches, and hence were spared in many instances.

It was very evident that Four-in-hand Frank had been taken completely by surprise by this sudden command to halt, and the miner also seemed taken aback as they were just discussing the probable death from being wounded of the masked outlaw.

Now he suddenly dashed out before them, his rifle leveled and the muzzle covering the heart of the driver.

Four-in-hand Frank put his foot upon the brake, and drew rein with great alacrity, for the horseman was none other than the man whom he had hoped was dead; it was the masked outlaw and no mistake.

His mask covered his face completely; a long beard was visible below it, his hair was worn long, and his hands were gloved, while his form was tall and heavily built.

"If that is Silk-lasso Sam, then he has greatly changed," was the thought which flashed through the mind of the miner, who, finding himself so cleverly entrapped, took the situation with remarkable coolness.

"Up with your hands, too, Dead-shot Dean!" cried

the masked outlaw, as he saw that the miner had not obeyed his command given when he halted the coach.

"Suppose I refuse?" was the cool query of the miner.

"Then I shall kill you."

"Bad as you are, I do not believe that you would deliberately kill an unarmed man."

"Are you unarmed?" was the outlaw's question.

"Wholly."

"I do not believe you."

"You can see for yourself, for I have not buckled on my belt of arms, as I just come from the East, from Eden Valley, your old home, Arden."

The words had been uttered at random, but the eyes of the miner were upon the masked outlaw to note the result.

And, watching as he did, he saw a start of the outlaw, and then followed the words:

"What nonsense is this about having been to my old home?"

"It is not nonsense, for I penetrate your disguise, as I know that your beard beneath that mask is false, that your hair is a wig, and that you are padded to make you appear stout."

The outlaw moved uneasily, and yet laughed at the words of the miner, while he said:

"It is false, Carrol Dean."

"Then how do you know my name?"

"I have often heard it."

"Where?"

"In the mines."

"That is false, for there I am known only as Dead-shot Dean."

"I know you and that is enough; but come, I will stand no nonsense, so tell me what valuables you have with you."

"Very little, as I brought no money back with me, for I did not have the faith in your pledges that one other did, so feared I might be held up on the way by the masked outlaw, whom I recognize as Silk-lasso Sam."

"I am not Silk-lasso Sam."

"Then why do you carry his silk lasso at your saddle horn?"

There, hanging from the saddle horn, was the handsome red silk lasso of the outlaw chief.

"I captured that," he said, in an embarrassed way.

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Well, do you not care to hear from home, from the woman you once loved, now my wife, and the one who still is so devoted to you?"

"I do not know what you are talking about, Dead-shot Dean."

"Well, I recognize you, and I tell you frankly that you will have a man upon your track who will never rest until he places the rope about your neck."

"Who is that man?"

"Buffalo Bill."

"Bah! A threatened man is long-lived, and, besides, Buffalo Bill has been upon my track the past six weeks, and cannot find me."

"He will do so yet; and if he does not, another will."

"Who—yourself?"

"Well, I have cause to hunt you down, as you know, but for the sake of one other, I would be merciful."

"And who is this that will not be, other than Buffalo Bill?"

"Pawnee Bill."

"Yes, a dangerous man, I admit, but I fear no man, as my actions show."

"It is a long lane that has no turn in it, Arden."

"Why do you call me by that name?"

"Because I know you."

"You just said I was Silk-lasso Sam."

"As you are, on this frontier, while in the long ago you were known by the other name."

"You are mistaken; but come, I am tired of this long talk."

"Had you not been he whom I say you are, you would have held no conversation with me."

"Come, I want gold, not talk, so out with what you have!"

"It is a mere pittance, but here it is," and the miner tossed his pocketbook to the road agent, who said:

"Thank you. Now, Four-in-hand Frank, what have you along of value?"

"Nothing."

"Then I must be content with what I have, so drive on."

Frank needed no second command, and as the coach rolled on once more, the miner said:

"Yes, that is Silk-lasso Sam."

CHAPTER IX.

THE WELCOME.

"Waal, Pard Dead Shot, that were ther gamest talk yer give thet masked outlaw I ever heerd. Durned ef yer didn't seem ter back him right down," said Four-in-hand Frank, as the coach got well away from where they had left the masked outlaw standing in the trail.

"I was trying to see if he was really Silk-lasso Sam or not."

"And yer has decided?"

"I have."

"Which way?"

"That he is."

"Waal, yer seemed ter read him like a book; but how much did he git away from you?"

"Only about twenty dollars."

"You was in luck; but ther pocketbook seemed fat to me."

"It had a letter in it."

"And he got ther letter?"

"Yes."

"What a pity!"

"No, for it was intended for him."

"I don't quite catch on."

"Well, there was a letter in there which I wanted him to read, and if he does, then he will doubtless be

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led into a trap, and that is what I was after. But do not speak of this to any one, Frank."

"I'll keep dark, you bet," was the answer, and then Frank continued: "Now I is in great luck, for I expected to see my whip and t'other things go, and I has aboard a thousand in bills I got gold dust exchanged for, which Scott King got me ter fetch back for him, and so the outlaw missed that."

"You were fortunate."

"It were all owing to ther talk yer give him, Pard Dead Shot. But, my! Won't ther boys be glad ter see yer back ag'in, though they'll feel awful bad at ther news yer brings."

"That Bonnie Belle will not return?"

"Yas, pard."

"For her sake, I am glad that she will not, though she did a great deal of good in the mines, and ruled the wild spirits there in a wonderful way."

"So she did, for her word were law."

As the day drew near its close, they came to the cabin home of Dead-shot Dean, situated upon the mountain spur.

"I'll stop and leave my traps there, Frank, and then go on to the camp with you. It does not look as though any one had been to my cabin since I left."

"You remember Tom and Jerry, don't yer?"

"Yes, two very hard citizens, as I remember them."

"Waal, they paid yer a visit, and they was a-knockin' ter git in with an ax, when Buffalo Bill happened along and invited 'em ter take a walk with him up ter Pocket

City. He were thet polite they c'u'dn't refuse, so he gave 'em over to ther Vigilantes and they was tried thet same night and made two more gallows fruit for Hangman's Gulch—don't yer see?"

"Yes, I can understand that the Vigilantes made quick work of them."

"Waal, now they did, pard, and I hasn't heerd o' no more visitors to your cabin since."

"I should think not." And the miner unlocked his door, and in a secret way raised a bar on the inside so that he could enter with his traps.

He gazed about him for a minute, as though overwhelmed by a flood of memories, and then, with a sigh, locked his door again, and returning to the coach, mounted and drove on once more with Four-in-hand Frank.

When the coach dashed up to the door of The Flying Pan, Scott King, the Vigilante captain, was there to receive any passengers, and he welcomed the miner with a yell of delight.

The shout was taken up by others, and as the news spread that Dead-shot Dean had returned, the greeting that he received on all sides proved that he had many friends in Pocket City.

Of course, the first questions asked were about Bonnie Belle, and when the miner made known that the idol of Yellow Dust Valley was not to return, that she had decided to remain in her home in the East, a shadow fell upon all, and Dead-shot Dean had to tell over and over again that it was from no cause of

ill treatment in Pocket City that she remained away, but for the reason that her friends there insisted that she should give up forever the wild life she had led upon the frontier.

"We gits drunk this night from sorrow," said a miner, and his sentiments were echoed by scores of others, who at once proceeded to carry out their intention to drown their grief, at Bonnie Belle's not returning, in the intoxicating bowl.

The result was that the camps were very soon in the wildest of orgies, and yelling, profanity, gambling, drinking, and fighting ran high.

Maddened with drink, the men at last began to get into a very ugly mood toward the one who had brought them the news of Bonnie Belle's determination to remain away from Pocket City, and it needed but a spark to turn them like hungry wolves against the miner.

That spark was soon supplied by one who hated Dead-shot Dean, and who was glad to vent his hatred upon him through others.

"I tell yer, pards, I doesn't believe he's squar'. Bonnie Belle went East under his care, and now he comes back here and tells us she ain't a-comin' home ag'in, while he says he brings papers fer him ter settle up her business, and all thet. I say, pards, maybe he hes kilt Bonnie Belle ter git her gold, and I fer one say that he sh'u'd hang."

A wild chorus of those of the same opinion greeted the suggestion, and five minutes after a hundred rum-maddened desperadoes were upon their way to the

cabin of Dead-shot Dean to wreak vengeance upon him.

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Dead-shot Dean had held a long conversation with Scott King, in whose hands Bonnie Belle had left the management of her affairs during her absence.

"I tell you, Dead-shot, the business pays dead sure, only it is not what it was when Bonnie Belle was here. The fact is, the girl was a magnet and drew the boys, while half of them were in love with her.

"Many of them boarded at The Frying Pan just to catch a daily glimpse of her sweet face, and, of course, it was the same way with the Devil's Den. Men went there to play only to see her.

"I have heaped up money, it is true, and have got a snug sum to turn over to you in cash, above all expenses; only if Bonnie Belle had been here, it would have been just three times the amount."

So had said Scott King, and the miner saw for himself that he told the truth.

"I'll see you as soon as I get settled, Scott, and we'll talk it over," the miner had said. And then, tired with his long journey, he had gone to his cabin to go to bed.

But before retiring he had arranged all in order, unpacked the luggage he had brought with him, and among which were many contributions from Bonnie Belle and Kathleen to make him more comfortable.

Then, too, the artist had given him a painting of the

little cottage home, with the familiar faces of those who dwelt there visible upon the piazza.

This was hung in a prominent place, a new repeating rifle was loaded and placed within reach, his ammunition was stored close at hand, his new cooking utensils set upon the hearth, and the provisions stored in the cupboard.

At last, after midnight, and utterly worn out, he threw himself upon his bed to rest, and at once sank into a deep slumber.

A loud rap at the door answered him.

"Who is there?" he asked.

"Friends, pard, ter see yer on business."

Fortunately for the miner, he recognized the voice of one who was the man he had most cause to fear in the mines, for he was a secret foe.

He was known as Cast-iron Bill, and was a giant in strength, a desperate hand with a knife, and a crack shot.

He had been the friend of Powder-face Pete, and was often away from the mines.

When the outlaws had been captured, he claimed to be their prisoner, and after the trial had been released, as there was no real proof against him.

He had drifted back to the mines, and soon made himself a terror among the camps, having taken the name of Cast-iron Bill, shaved off his beard and cut his hair short, as though wishing to disguise himself among those who knew him but too well.

Dead-shot Dean had seen him at The Frying Pan

when he arrived, and in spite of the change in his appearance, had recognized him, while he had caught the scowl that he gave him and overheard his words:

"That gerloot ain't back in Pocket City fer no good, pards."

Now he recognized the voice of the man, and soon he thought he heard a certain suspicious sound like the shuffling of many feet and the low hum of many voices.

"All right, pard, wait a minute," he said, and quickly he stepped upon a chest, turned a slide, and looked through a peephole in the logs.

What he saw were a hundred silent men, evidently there for no good.

Quickly he took down his new repeating rifle, buckled on his belt of arms, and asked calmly, as he stood one side of the door:

"Who are you, pard?"

"A friend o' yours, who has something to tell you."

"How many are with you?"

"I'm all alone."

"What do you wish to see me about?"

"A leetle matter o' business which I'll tell you about when you opens the door."

"Cast-iron Bill, I know you for as great a scoundrel as there is in the Yellow Dust Valley, and I shall not open the door."

"That's flat-footed enough, for sure, but we'll break it in."

"Touch the door to break it in, and I shall open fire."

"We kin fire, too, Dead Shot, and thar is men here who can shoot as good as you kin."

"Say, men, what means this demonstration against me?" called out the miner.

Cast-iron Bill responded:

"It means that we believe you have kilt Bonnie Belle to git her money, and now has come back here to rob her of it."

"That charge is in keeping with your devilish character, Cast-iron Bill, and I warn you that I am well armed, well fortified, and shall defend my life against you and your ruffian gang." And the voice of Dead-shot Dean rang out like a trumpet and was heard by every man outside the cabin.

CHAPTER X.

BUFFALO BILL AND HIS BACKERS.

A silence followed the ringing words of Dead-shot Dean, and then came muffled voices, and the loud command of Cast-iron Bill:

"Pards, let him hear ther guns, and he won't talk so game."

At once there followed a deafening roar of shots, for every man fired one or more bullets into the stout door.

But the door was built of three-inch slabs, grooved together and iron-clamped, and not a bullet passed through the hardened oak into the cabin.

Hardly had the sound of firing died away, when, suddenly, from the roof of the cabin rang out in rapid succession shot after shot, and the crowd, with cries of terror rushed close for shelter from the deadly aim of the dauntless miner.

His fusillade was answered, and the bullets rattled upon the roof like rain.

The shots of the Dead Shot had not been thrown away, for two men had been killed and three wounded.

This, of course, infuriated the assailants only the more, and Cast-iron Bill's voice was heard ordering:

"Burn the wolf out of his den, men! Quick—pile up this wood and set it on fire!"

A wild cheer answered this command, and the pile

of wood the miner had gathered for use was hurriedly thrown against the door, with papers, hay, and all things that would ignite easily which could be gathered close at hand.

"Now light the fire, pards!" yelled Cast-iron Bill, and a flame was visible at once, while the crowd yelled like Modocs on the war charge.

But suddenly there came an answering yell, and in the rear—a yell which many of those men had heard, and which was wont to spread terror wherever heard.

It was an outburst that always struck upon the ear of the redskin with horror, and was wont to send the outlaw flying for his life from a scene where he was caught in the deviltry of his calling, or in his long tramps in the fastnesses of the hills.

It was the wild war cry of the scouts of the plains—of Buffalo Bill and his men!

They were coming like an avalanche up the hill, straight for the scene, and advanced with revolvers in each hand, ready to enforce the menace of their terrible war cry.

The jubilation of the desperadoes was turned in an instant to alarm, while at once Cast-iron Bill uttered the warning:

"It's Buffalo Bill and his buckskins! It is fight, or run sure, pards! Which shall it be, men?"

"Fight!" came a yell from several, while others scurried for shelter behind the cabin.

A moment more, and the crowd of sixteen horsemen were brought to a halt before the cabin, thirty-two re-

volvers were leveled, each holding six dead shots, while Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill headed the buckskin cavalcade!

Pawnee Bill was the spokesman.

"What means this attack upon the cabin of Dead-shot Dean?" cried Pawnee Bill.

A silence fell upon the crowd of desperadoes, though the hand of every man was upon his "shooter."

There upon the ground, visible and most distinctly in the moonlight, lay the dead forms of two of the outlaw gang, and the three who had been wounded, proving that there had already been hot work going on there.

The crowd were in an ugly mood; they now had arisen to the fighting point, against the intruding scouts, and they were now determined to capture and hang Dead-shot Dean, to revenge their comrades.

The scouts were but sixteen, and easily counted, while the outlaws were over a hundred in number, and had the advantage of position.

Why should they be interfered with by the buckskin riders?

They saw no reason, and their mood became more ugly.

"It means that Dead-shot Dean has murdered poor Bonnie Belle, and have come back here ter steal her belongings, that's what it means," answered Cast-iron Bill doggedly.

"You are an infamous liar, to make such an assertion against Dead-shot Dean, for I know that Bonnie

Belle is alive and well, and that she has authorized the miner Dean to settle up her business here for her," responded Pawnee Bill.

"Waal, we knows our business, and we intends ter burn him out and then hang him in Hangman's Gulch, and if you and Buffalo Bill chips in, we'll just wipe you out, too."

"This is your decision, then?" sternly asked Pawnee Bill.

Before Cast-iron Bill could answer, there came from within the cabin the voice of the miner:

"Ho, Pawnee Bill, these men are in desperate mood, and I would urge that you do not get into a conflict with them upon my account; for, though it may not look so, I am well able to take care of myself."

"You are a brave fellow, Dean, and we will not desert you, but defend you, and again I warn these men off." And the voice of Pawnee Bill was full of determination to stand his ground.

But Cast-iron Bill called out:

"Pards, stand yer ground, for we holds ther fort, and thar won't be a scout left ef they makes ther bad break o' firing on us."

A silence then followed for a few seconds, and it was broken by Buffalo Bill, who said, addressing Pawnee Bill, but in tones that all heard:

"I believe these fools are going to resist us, so would it not be well to give the signal for Captain Caruth and his troops?"

The words of Buffalo Bill reached every ear, and

instantly there was a movement of uneasiness seen in the crowd.

Sixteen horsemen might be no match for over a hundred desperate men, even though led by Pawnee Bill and the chief of scouts, Buffalo Bill, with Texas Jack and other plainsmen in the background.

But the fame of Captain Dick Caruth was well known in the mines, and he was known to have deserved the name of Dashing Dick, the dragoon.

It was recalled that he had offered his troop once as a sacrifice for the army, and had held in check thousands of warriors until reinforcements came, and he had saved the day.

With his troop camped within hail, the desperadoes knew how quickly their weakness would be revealed.

They now felt that the scouts had been encamped down in the cañon, not a quarter of a mile from Dead-shot Dean's cabin, and had come at the first sound of firing.

Pawnee Bill was known to be the surgeon of the cavalry regiment to which Dashing Dick Caruth's troop belonged, and had come, as was his wont, with the scouts to the rescue.

The miner's cabin was upon a spur, under a cliff, and upon one.

There was but a single approach, up a steep path from the stage trail winding around the base of the mountain a few hundred yards below, and the scouts had come this way, and so cut off the retreat of the desperadoes.

They could rush along the ridge to Hangman's Gulch, but not a man cared to go near that weird place of terrible, haunting memories.

The troop, if signaled, would come directly along the valley to the steep path and cut them off, and if Dick Caruth was called upon to quell a mob, he knew that the best way to do so was to wipe them out, and he would do it.

So it was that the men pondered, and eagerly watched for the signal to be given which would call in Dick Caruth and his wild riders.

The desperadoes turned their gaze upon their leader, Cast-iron Bill.

He moved uneasily and began to feel that he had made a mistake.

He saw that Buffalo Bill had his eye upon him, and he stepped back as the scout dismounted and approached him.

It was a desperate thing for Buffalo Bill to do, but then he was a man to take desperate steps when needed, and this very boldness won in nine cases out of ten for him.

"See here, pard; you are Bill Sykes, are you not?" said the scout, facing the ringleader, and all were silent as death, awaiting reply.

"I is known here as Cast-iron Bill," was the dogged response.

"Oh, you are, are you?"

"I is that, an' no mistake."

"Under most circumstances, I would feel that I was

mistaken, and offer an apology, but now let me tell you that you were one of Silk-lasso Sam's gang."

"It's a lie!"

"You were the man who got off by pretending to be the prisoner of Silk-lasso Sam, and though many believed you, I doubted you; in fact, I felt so sure that you were really an outlaw that I was determined to know you the next time I saw you."

"Yer don't know me, though, for I ain't ther man that you mean."

"Oh, yes, you are; for, though you have chopped off your long locks, and mowed your whiskers, to try and look innocent, I recognize you as a man who should have been hanged with the other ruffians some weeks ago."

"I tells yer I ain't ther man, Buffalo Bill!" shouted the ringleader of the now menacing desperadoes.

"And I say that you are the man."

"Boys, does yer hear him insulting me?" cried Cast-iron Bill, anxious to create a movement in his favor, which would allow him to escape from the piercing eyes of the scout.

"We does!" came in a roar, and at the sullen, threatening chorus, Pawnee Bill raised a small silver bugle to his lips, but gave forth no sound.

The crowd moved uneasily at this, for they knew that meant a call upon the troopers of Dick Caruth.

Then every eye was centered upon Buffalo Bill, and the hearts of the buckskin scouts were "in their throats," choking them in the moments of terrible

suspense they were enduring at the daring action of their chief.

As for Pawnee Bill, he sat upon his horse as serene as the moonlight that streamed down upon them, his bugle held to his lips with his left hand, his revolver in his right, facing the desperate crowd gathered before Dead-shot Dean's cabin; sat watching, with eagle eyes, Buffalo Bill, as he confronted the leader of the desperadoes.

"You say that you are not the man I accuse you of being, but I have the proof that you are," said Buffalo Bill.

"Show yer proof!" shouted Cast-iron Bill.

Instantly his right wrist was grasped by Buffalo Bill; when, pointing with his revolver held in his left hand, at the back of Cast-iron Bill's hand, where was visible as a red scar the two letters, "B. B.," the scout shouted:

"There is my proof—my red brand upon your hand! You are the man I accuse you of being."

The revolver of Cast-iron Bill had dropped from his hand under the crushing grip of Buffalo Bill, and the scout now held him covered, while the crowd swayed wildly, and it looked as though a conflict was inevitable.

CHAPTER XI.

A STAMPEDE.

At the very second when all felt that a conflict must come—that the desperadoes realized that they must wipe out the scouts or be wiped out, and the buckskins felt that the inevitable was upon them, Pawnee Bill saved the bloodshed which another moment would have precipitated, for loud-ringing and appealing rang out the notes of the bugle now pressed to his lips, calling Dashing Dick Caruth and his troopers to the rescue.

The effect was electrical. A wild cry of apprehension broke from the desperadoes, and, almost as one man, they turned and stampeded in a desperate rush along the ridge leading to Hangman's Gulch.

In this mad rush, Buffalo Bill was swept apart from the leader of the outlaw horde, and borne along for some yards before he could extricate himself from the fleeing mass of now thoroughly terrified humanity.

Not a shot was fired, not a shout was heard, after that first cry of alarm following the bugle notes.

The chief of scouts, freeing himself from the crowd, turned and glanced toward his men in buckskin.

They sat upon their horses, clutching their revolvers, silent as specters, and awaiting the word to charge upon the flying crowd.

But they waited in vain, for the word was not given by Buffalo Bill.

A Stampede.

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Turning to Pawnee Bill, they saw that his face was convulsed with laughter, and from his lips came the words:

"Look at them! Oh, if I was only in Hangman's Gulch with a sheet around me, they certainly would run themselves to death!"

The situation was, in truth, most ludicrous to the scouts, when suddenly the cabin door flew open and out sprang a white-robed form.

"Give me a chance now, and I'll keep them stampeded!"

It was Dead-shot Dean, looking like a ghost, as he ran like a deer around the cliff and disappeared.

"He'll scare every mother's son of them to death, for he has gone by a short cut to the gulch!" cried Buffalo Bill.

The scouts laughed, and then became silent, as Pawnee Bill cried:

"Silence, all, and hearken for the climax!"

It was not long that they had to wait, for soon there were heard the wildest yells up toward Hangman's Gulch, and the trampling of feet in rapid flight also reached the ears of the listeners.

The scouts had dismounted, and were, some of them, rolling upon the ground in convulsions of laughter.

Pawnee Bill had gone up to the forms that lay silent upon the ground.

One of the wounded men had felt able to get up and stampede with his comrades; another had just

breathed his last; and, bending over the third, Pawnee Bill said:

"He is going fast, too. I can do nothing for him."

A moment after, and he, too, slipped out of life, and just then the white-robed form of the miner was seen returning.

He threw off his sheet as he came, and, walking up to Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill, grasped a hand of each, while he said earnestly:

"I am more than glad to see you, gentlemen, and what I owe to you, and to your brave comrades here, I fear I can never repay."

"Don't mention it, Pard Dead-shot, for we were mighty glad to be near," Buffalo Bill replied feelingly.

"Yes, we visited your cabin just after dark, and not finding you, we camped in the cañon, where we had camped before. Then we heard the firing and came to your rescue, of course," Pawnee Bill added.

"And where are the troopers?" asked the miner.

"What troopers?"

"Captain Caruth and his men, sir."

"They are at the fort."

"I thought they were near."

"Oh, that was a clever ruse of Buffalo Bill's—to make those fellows think we had aid near, and I blew the call when I saw that there was going to be trouble."

"It stampeded the gang very quickly, Pawnee Bill."

"Oh, yes, and if I mistake not, you added to their speed in the Hangman's Gulch."

The miner laughed and replied:

"I simply showed myself near the graves of the men who have been hanged there and ran upon the gallows which you know stands there, and from which, let me add, I might have been forced to step off into eternity but for your coming to-night."

"The effect was wonderful, for those fellows were sure that they saw the ghost of a man who had been hanged, and with yells of terror, they went pell-mell through the gap toward the trail for Pocket City. I never ran so many men in my life before."

"But what is this story they told about your murdering Bonnie Belle?"

"It is all nonsense, originating with my foes, and I suppose fomented by bad liquor into a determination to hang me."

"Then you will not remain in Pocket City longer, Mr. Dean?"

"Oh, yes, I have come here to complete certain work for myself and Bonnie Belle, and those men shall not drive me away. But let me see to these dead men now." And the miner turned to those who had fallen by his hand.

The dead bodies of the men who had fallen under the fire of Dead-shot Dean were laid at one side of the cabin, and covered over with a blanket, and the scouts returned to the camp, excepting Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill, who accepted the invitation of the miner to pass the remainder of the night with him.

The next morning, they were up bright and early,

and having breakfasted, sat down to talk over matters.

"Colonel Dunwoody had a letter from Bonnie Belle, in which she said that she had decided to remain East and that you would look after her affairs here, and asked, as you might have trouble with the miners, to kindly lend you what aid we could," said Pawnee Bill.

"It was very kind of her, and I did not know that she had written," the miner said.

"The colonel called me into his confidence, and I volunteered to come down here and see if you had arrived.

"Buffalo Bill and his men were scouting on the stage trail to Pocket City, to see if any clew could be found to the masked road agent that has been seen lately on the Overland trails, and I came across them last evening, and they came on here with me to find you. Finding your cabin closed, we went into camp in the cañon, and I am glad that we did, indeed."

"Yes, it was fortunate for me that you did so, gentlemen. But I arrived by Four-in-hand Frank's coach last night and went on direct to Pocket City. I made known the fact that Bonnie Belle was not to return and that I was to arrange her affairs there, and I supposed all would be peaceable, though I did see a few scowling at me and heard some doubts cast upon my story.

"It doubtless grew into an indignation meeting under the influence of rum, and they came here, ac-

cusing me of the murder of Bonnie Belle and of returning to Pocket City to get her property."

"That shows what rum will do," said Buffalo Bill, with a serious expression.

"Have you joined the water tanks, Bill?" asked Pawnee Bill.

"No, but I know better than to drink frontier rum, for two drinks of that would make a man throw stones at his grandmother."

"Well, Mr. Dean, I am glad to see you back again, and I shall take good care to let it be known in Pocket City that you are here under the protection of Colonel Dunwoody. Now, as to these bodies?"

"Well, sir, if Buffalo Bill will let his scouts carry them to Pocket City, I will go ahead and explain the situation."

"And Cody and I will accompany you," said Pawnee Bill.

"You are very kind; but may I ask if you came along the trail, Mr. Cody, after the coach?"

"We did."

"And saw no trace of it being held up?"

"Ah, were you held up?" quickly asked Buffalo Bill.

"Yes."

"When was this?"

"An hour after leaving the station."

"And we turned into the trail this side of the station some twelve miles, and a couple of hours after the coach had passed, but rode rapidly on after you."

"I am sorry you were not near when we were held up."

"Who was the man that halted you?"

"A masked horseman, the same, Four-in-hand Frank told me, who held him up when Bonnie Belle was going East, and robbed her."

"A man on a large, blood-bay horse?"

"Yes."

"A stout man, and masked?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who we think that man is?"

"I know who he is."

"Ah! And will tell us?"

"Yes, though I think it had better be kept quiet for the present that we suspect him."

"It is Silk-lasso Sam?"

"It certainly is."

"And yet the man is said to weigh sixty to seventy pounds heavier than Silk-lasso Sam."

"That flesh is manufactured with pads, or extra clothing."

"Exactly the opinions of Pawnee Bill and myself," Buffalo Bill remarked.

"Well, Mr. Cody, the man held up the coach, and I had quite a talk with him. He knew me, and I led him on that I might study the tones of his voice and actions. At last I felt that there was no mistake, that Silk-lasso Sam had broken every pledge made to his noble sister and once more gone back to outlawry on the road."

"Yes, and next time he is captured there will be nothing that will save him, for that noble girl is not here now."

"Mr. Cody, let me urge that if you, Pawnee Bill, or your men get the chance, kill Silk-lasso Sam; do not make him a prisoner."

"You have some good motive for this request, Mr. Dean," Pawnee Bill said.

"I have."

"You will tell us?"

"Yes, for I am convinced beyond all doubt that this masked highwayman is Silk-lasso Sam. If he is killed, his career is ended; but if captured, I know his sister well enough to be certain that she will at once come here to rescue him," said the miner impressively.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MINER'S PLAN.

The remark of the miner regarding **Bonnie Belle** was a surprise to both the scouts.

They did not believe that the devoted sister would again attempt the rescue of the man who had so betrayed every trust placed in him.

"Do you really believe that she would not leave him to his fate if he was captured again at his lawless deeds?" asked Pawnee Bill.

"Let me tell you, gentlemen, that Ruth Leigh is made of no ordinary material. She learned to love her brother with all her soul, and his escapades of youth he so tinged with romance that she regarded him as a hero.

"At last her eyes were opened to his evil heart, and yet, though she censures and pities, she yet could not banish her love for him. Her nature is to love once, love forever, unless that love should turn to hatred, and then she would hate as intensely as she had loved.

"She is a very remarkable girl, and never had any companions and friendships beyond her father, mother, and brother. Her parents passing away, all of her affection became centered upon her unworthy brother, and she sought to find good in him, to force him out of his evil life.

"She came here to find him; and, doing so, she sought to save him from himself, from the gallows. You know how he acted toward her, and when she offered to share her fortune with him, he preferred robbery and murder to get his gold.

"He was captured, and she had decided to give him up. Then came his appealing letter, his pledge of reformation, and you know the clever part she played to rescue him, and how well she did it.

"Believing in him, she went East; and yet, if she knew that he was a prisoner, she would come here at once, and, plan as we might to hold him, she would successfully plot to rescue him. That is why I say to you to kill him, not to make him a prisoner."

"That is just my view of it, and I have told Cody that such a fate would meet the views of Colonel Dunwoody better than to have to hang the villain, much as he deserves it," said Pawnee Bill.

"But what a remarkable misfortune that such a woman as is Miss Leigh should have such a brother!"

"It is one of those strange things in life we cannot account for, Pawnee."

"Now tell me, Mr. Dean, if this man robbed you of anything valuable," asked Buffalo Bill.

"Only a few dollars, which I had put as a bait into an old pocketbook I intended he should take if he met us on the way."

"I do not exactly understand."

"Well, Buffalo Bill, I decided to try and get rid of

this man for his sweet sister's sake. So I wrote him a letter, folded it into a small compass, and placed it in my old pocketbook, with a few dollars and slips of paper.

"You may not be aware that this man, Arden Leigh, was my rival for the hand of my wife. When she chose between us, honoring me, he drew a revolver and very nearly caused my death.

"That act, and forging his father's name, and receiving by it a large sum of money, caused his flight. Of course, he knows that I knew his sister as Bonnie Belle, and that she had gone East to her home.

"When, therefore, he receives in my pocketbook his letter from me, telling him to come to my cabin to visit me, that I have tidings of importance for him, he will come.

"When he does, I must stand ready to face him as man to man, and should I capture him alive, then I will see to it that the miners try his case. Should I have to kill him, Ruth Leigh should never know that my hand took his life. When he demanded money of me, I threw him the pocketbook containing the letter, and it will not be long before I shall have a visit from him."

"You are a brave man, Dead-shot Dean, and a powerful one, while your name indicates what you are with a revolver and the nerve you have; but you are too good a man to risk what you must singly with that man, unless it is a case where you are forced to do so."

"Yes, so I say, too, Pawnee Bill, and I will just ask Mr. Dean to allow me to be his guest, to lie in hiding here in his cabin, and wait for that visitor to come," Buffalo Bill remarked.

"Yes, both of us might remain," Pawnee Bill added.

"No, indeed. I could not think of it after the letter I have written him. I could only feel that I was not acting a cowardly and treacherous part, even toward him, by meeting him as man to man, single-handed. If he betters me, then I must take the consequences, and I will, without a murmur," was the response of the brave miner, and his words won the greater admiration of Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill.

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It having been decided that the scouts should go on with the miner to Pocket City, the men were called up, and Texas Jack was told to follow with four men and the dead bodies of the slain, across horses of those who were to remain at Dead-shot's cabin.

Mounting one of the scout's horses, the miner then rode on with his two comrades, and they entered Pocket City, riding side by side.

The news had, of course, gotten out of the attack on the miner, but those who had been in it did not care to talk of the affair, and it was only known through those who had not joined the crowd, but had seen them depart.

Judge Scott King had heard of it only after break-

fast, through Four-in-hand Frank, who had picked up the news by accident, and had gone at once to report it.

"If they have killed Dead-shot Dean, then there shall be a weeding out of desperadoes in these mines that will make many a grave," the Vigilante captain had said.

"Waal, they has hanged him, for over a hundred of them went to his cabin ter hang him," was Driver Frank's reply.

"Then over a hundred of them shall hang, for there are good men enough here to put down the bad ones. I will at once sound the tocsin, calling my Vigilantes together, and then bring my jury together to try the scoundrels who have done this deed. If Bonnie Belle was here, she'd make Rome howl," said the angry Vigilante captain, and there was an expression upon his face that went to show that if he had his way there should be some howling in Rome, even if Bonnie Belle was not present.

The "tocsin" was an old gong which Landlord Lazarus had used at The Frying Pan before Bonnie Belle made the cornet serve as a substitute to call the miners to their meals.

It, the tocsin, had a roar on it like muffled thunder, interlarded with peals and lightning strokes, and Scott King knew just how to get the most noise out of the thing.

He began with a mournful cadence that was soon sputtering out crashes of thunder, and when it reached

the ears of every one in Yellow Dust Valley, no matter what he was doing, that man went on the jump for The Frying Pan.

The whole community were on the *qui vive*, anyhow; at the whisper going the rounds that Miner Dead-shot Dean had been hanged by a crowd under cover of the night.

The men who had been in that fracas were afraid to go at the call of the tocsin, and yet they dared not stay away.

So they went, and Cast-iron Bill was alone conspicuous by his absence, for he went up into the cemetery and viewed the scene with a spyglass, having a saddled and bridled horse awaiting him over in the valley beyond.

The tocsin had given its ear-splitting summons just as the miner, Pawnee Bill, and Buffalo Bill rode into the camps.

"What in thunder does that mean?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"I guess the Vigilante captain has just learned that I was hanged last night, and is calling the men together," assured the miner.

There had gathered a large crowd about The Frying Pan, and there stood Judge Scott King upon the piazza with Four-in-hand Frank by his side.

Back of him were gathered the "dignitaries" of the miners; that is, the men whose word had some weight in that wild community.

"Gentlemen," began Scott King, and those who knew that they were not gentlemen looked pleased at being caught in good company.

"It has just reached my knowledge that a foulest of foul deeds was perpetrated last night in our midst by a gang of ruffians, all of a hundred strong.

"These ruffians, hating a man they feared, filled their skins with bad liquor—and let me here remark that they did not get it at the Devil's Den, for there only the best is sold—I say those ruffians filled their skins with liquor, gotten at low dives in our midst, and then went to the house of the noble citizen of whom I speak.

"They went there with rum-maddened brains, with murder in their hearts, and a rope in their hands, determined to drag from his bed, in the gloom of night, the citizen whose name will soon be upon every man's lips coupled with revenge; and, with malice and cruelty, did hang him until he was dead, upon the gallows in Hangman's Gulch, where only the basest of criminals are taken to end their guilty lives.

"Gentlemen, this news began in a whisper at first, and then ended in a thunder roar which has brought you together at my call, for justice to the dead is demanded, and as the judge of the court of Yellow Dust Valley, I shall try those, be they a hundred in number, whom the Vigilantes, of whom I am captain, hunt down and bring to me as the guilty ones.

"Gentlemen, the man who was thus foully murdered was our esteemed fellow citizen, Dead-shot

Dean, the miner of Hangman's Gulch, and, Vigilantes, I call upon you to do your duty and first find the corpse, then the murderers."

"There's the corpse, jedge, and a lively one it be," called out a voice, as the miner suddenly rode up with Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XIII.

A THREAT.

At the words of the man whose eyes had fallen upon the miner as he rode up, every one turned quickly and beheld Dead-shot Dean and his two companions.

A cheer went up from the crowd, and then they all looked first at Judge Scott King, who had made his speech about avenging the death of the miner, and then at Dead-shot, as though for an explanation.

The judge never allowed himself to be cornered, so said quickly:

"I'm glad to see you, Dead-shot Dean, for news came to me that you had been taken from your cabin and hanged. Explain, please, what it means."

"I can only say, Judge King, that a band of over a hundred came to my cabin last night, drunk and with murderous intent. They were led by a desperado whom I fail to see in this crowd, but hope to meet again, as I have a score to settle with him.

"They sought to get into my cabin, and when I would not open my door, fired bullets into it and said that they had come to hang me for murdering Bonnie Belle and then coming here to rob her.

"It was, of course, only the work of men who sought to get rid of me, and they had prepared to set fire to my cabin when Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill and his scouts came to my rescue.

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"They were determined still to show fight, until made aware that there was Captain Caruth's troop encamped within call, and when the signal was given for them by Pawnee Bill, the cowards fled like the pack of cowardly coyotes they are.

"In defending myself, I killed and wounded some of the gang, and the bodies are now being brought here by Buffalo Bill's scouts. Is my report satisfactory, Judge King, for if not, Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill are here to verify it?"

"Your report is perfectly satisfactory, Dead-shot Dean, and that lawless men may understand that the law of right and justice is supreme here, you have only to point out to me any of the men whom you recognize as participants in this outrage, and they shall sleep the sleep that knows no waking in Hangman's Gulch to-night."

A wild yell of approval from the better element answered these words of the "judge," and there was many a face blanched as Dead-shot Dean's eyes rested upon it.

He allowed his eyes to linger a moment upon the faces of men whom he knew were in the crowd, but, though he showed such that he knew them and held them in his power, wholly at his mercy, he did not pick out a single man, but said:

"I could name many to you, judge, but I am sure that they will not offend again, so I will not do so."

"It is your duty, Dead-shot Dean, to name any man you know was there."

"I decline to do so, sir, other than in one instance, and I cannot see him here in the crowd."

"You decline to name them?"

"I do."

"This is wrong on your part."

"Some were sufferers, as they fell under my fire, and the others stampeded from the soldiers, so let that be their punishment, judge."

"As you wish, but I fear you are making a mistake in being merciful."

"I shall take the chances, Judge King."

"Very well, and let me now say for the benefit of all, that there are men in these mines who are playing too bold a hand, who do not even respect the military powers that be, and to such I give warning that they are doing that which will make Yellow Dust Valley and Pocket City a wilderness, for if there is a scout or a soldier killed here, we may expect a force to sweep over us that will destroy us. Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill, I bid you welcome, gentlemen."

The scouts dismounted and returned the greeting of the judge most kindly, after which they went in with the miner to dinner, and were entertained in the quarters of Bonnie Belle, for Dead-shot Dean had the keys of the wing she had occupied.

Soon after the scouts came in with the bodies of the slain men, and all crowded around to see just who they were.

The judge was surprised at several among them

whom he had not expected to find in such bad company.

But he gave orders for a grand funeral, and the miners remained on hand to attend it.

Up to Sunset Rest they filed, Dead-shot Dean, to his great regret, feeling that it was his duty to attend the burial.

"It looks too much like a doctor attending the obsequies of his patients for me to go," he whispered to Pawnee Bill, who smiled at the conceit.

The whole town turned out, not so much from respect, as from a desire to be on hand and see all that was going on.

One of the miners read the funeral service, and it seemed to be expected that Dead-shot Dean would make some remarks at the graves, but he disappointed all by remaining silent.

But the judge gave a discourse that was a regular funeral sermon for "frightful examples" of what the road to wickedness led.

As the miner, Pawnee, and the scout rode back down the hill, they did not see a pair of fierce eyes glaring at them from a thicket, or hear the savage threat:

"There are three men that I must kill."

The man was Cast-iron Bill.

His face wore an anxious look, his mouth was set, and his eyes roved restlessly in their sockets like one who was expecting momentarily to face a foe.

He saw the miner and his two comrades ride away from Sunset Hill.

Then he waited until nearly all of the crowd had followed them.

He was back in a position that commanded a view of the burying ground, and down in the valley, hidden in a thicket, was his horse and his traps, for Cast-iron Bill had left his cabin with a view of taking a long trail out of that part of the country, if necessary, to prevent his going upon the last long trail which could end only in the grave, his exit from life being made at the end of a rope.

The man stood pondering for some time, and then at last his face brightened as he said:

"I'll do it!"

After a moment he began to muse aloud:

"Let me see. I dare not remain in Pocket City, except with the sure prospect of trouble, for, if Dead-shot Dean does not dog my life, and I have every reason to believe he will, then it will be Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and perhaps the people, for they were turned dead against me at that meeting to-day, and this burial of the men goes against me. If I leave Pocket City, I must take my life in my hands also, for I come out at once as an outlaw.

"The danger of staying or going is about equal, with big chances if I go that I will make plenty of money. My surest plan is to go and hunt up the masked road agent.

"If it is the old chief, Silk-lasso Sam, then I am

fixed, for he will be glad of a pard. If it is not Silk-lasso Sam, then I will have to make his acquaintance and do the best I can.

"I can find out by the old signal of the red lasso, I guess, and I have to take my chances, of course. It will be best for me to hang out to-night and catch on to some of the boys who I know will join us, if the chief wants to get a band together.

"Let me see, there is Grip Saunders for one, Ugly Dan two, Card-sharp Dave three, and Wild West Will for four. And four will be enough to start in with, and if more are wanted, I can get them.

"Now to see what it shall be, whether I shall go on the trails to earn my living at the revolver's muzzle, or remain in Yellow Dust Valley and take chances on being allowed to live. This decides for me."

He took a bright silver dollar from his pocket as he spoke, and glanced at it with almost a look of affection.

"Well, old dollar, you have been my companion for many a long year, a pocket piece I have never dared allow to leave me. It is heads I take the trails, and tails I remain in Yellow Dust Valley. Here goes!"

He tossed the dollar into the air some thirty feet high, and watched it as it turned and fell.

It dropped within ten feet of him, and, stepping forward, he picked it up.

"Heads it is! I go on the trails. Now to have a talk with my four pards before I go, and I must be cautious, or, perhaps, I may take my departure through

Hangman's Gulch, for that was an angry crowd a while since in front of The Frying Pan, and Scott King, I believe, really loves to hang a man. Ah! there is Wild West Will now, and he is alone. I will call him.

He placed his hands to his lips and gave a perfect imitation of the soft cooing of a dove.

The man in question was walking among the graves in Sunset Rest, and had halted near a number which was known as "Angels' Row," from the fact that all who had been buried there were avowed devils, the antitheses of angels.

The man was a tall, well-formed fellow, dressed as a miner, and wearing a belt of arms, two revolvers, and a bowie knife.

At the soft notes of the cooing dove, he looked up quickly, waited until the sound was repeated, and then moved away in the direction whence it came.

As he reached the timber he was met by Cast-iron Bill, who said:

"I gave you the call, Wild West Will."

"Oh, yes, I got on to it; but, Bill, this is a very dangerous locality for you, for there was a hot meeting at Frying Pan to-day."

"Ah, I know that, and I wish to have a talk with you, for I am going to leave the valley."

"Where are you going, Cast Iron?"

"On the trails," was the cool response of the man.

CHAPTER XIV.

TAKING TO THE TRAIL.

"Does yer mean yer intends taking to ther road as a agent?" asked Wild West Will, dropping into the dialect of the border, as men were wont to do.

"I does," was the answer of Cast-iron Bill, also using the dialect.

"Yer means ter tarn road agent?"

"I does."

"Waal, I believes yer had some experience in thet line."

"No, I were only a spy fer Silk-lasso Sam, but got caught in his camp when Dead-shot Dean led Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and t'others in on us. I knows ther ropes, though, and I thinks I kin make money a little bit."

"Maybe."

"Now, I knows you is no parson, Wild West Will, and so I wants ter understand ef I kin count on you if I sees a chance ter make it pay?"

"I'm with yer, fer yer knows thet I wants dust awful bad."

"And ain't particular as ter how yer gits it?"

"Thet's so."

"Waal, I wants three more, so who would yer name?"

"Say, Grip Saunders."

"Good!"

"And Ugly Dan."

"The very man."

"And Card-sharp Dave."

"Just the men I named to myself, Will."

"We kin make a good quintet."

"Yer think all kin be depended upon ter go?"

"Yer bet, fer like myself they is uncommon uneasy, and we don't want no ropewalk in ourn. I tell yer, Pocket City ain't ther place it was, for it's gittin' too goody good, yer know."

"So says I, fer we can't string up a man now without having a row on our hands. But ter business."

"Go ahead."

"I takes ther trail frum this place."

"A bad place is a burying ground ter take ther trail frum."

"I has got ter, fer I ain't goin' inter Pocket City ter git strung up."

"Yer has a big head, Cast Iron."

"I hope it'll git me a big fortin yit before I dies. But now for a rendezvous for us."

"S'pose yer say ther Hangman's Gulch."

"Ther what?"

"Ther Hangman's Gulch, fer it are convenient, and few folks goes thar by day and nobody by night."

"You warn't along last night, Wild West Will?"

"I started with yer, but I were too drunk ter travel, so lay down on ther trail ter camp."

"That is why yer says Hangman's Gulch."

"I did hear as some of ther boys seen a ghost thar."

"All of 'em seen ther ghost."

"Did you?"

"Yes."

"Then I believe in ghosts, Cast-iron Bill, if you seen him, for I knows you has laughed at others for sayin' so."

"I did see him."

"It wasn't what yer hed been drinkin'?"

"Not much."

"A real ghost?"

"Yas, a deader from 'way back in ther grave. I tell yer, Wild West Will, we got stampeded from Dead-shot Dean's cabin when Pawnee Bill blew his bugle for ther troop o' that wild soldier captain, Dick Caruth, who would fight a buzz saw. We stampeded like one man, and the result were we hed but one way ter travel."

"Thet were through Hangman's Gulch?"

"Yas, it were through the upper end o' ther gulch, for we took along ther ridge, then down across ther cut, and out inter ther trail. We looked like we was a-playin' football, and I were still ther leader, I admits."

"Well?"

"When I got down inter ther gulch, and were a-lookin' toward ther gallows, where all them men was hanged, and ther graves was visible beneath, standin' out big in ther moonlight, I seen the ghost."

"What were it?"

"It were a form in white, standin' upon ther gallows and wavin' its arms wildlike."

"Yer seen it?"

"I did."

"And then?"

"I jist lit out at a pace thet no horse c'u'd hev caught me."

"And t'others?"

"They seen it, too, and it came down from ther gallows and started arter ther gang. We hed been makin' peert time on our stampede from ther soldiers, but you bet ther boys yelled like mad and jumped about a mile a minute faster, and I hed ter keep a-goin' ter hold ther lead. We scattered at ther camps, and, waal, yer knows ther rest, Wild West Will."

"Then we don't make ther Hangman's Gulch ther rendezvous."

"We don't, that's a fact."

"Then whar?"

"Right here."

"All right."

"Yer sees thet tree?"

"I does."

"Thar is a hole in it jist above yer head."

"I sees it."

"Then come thar fer news, and I'll do ther same. Now, you is ter see t'others named and all is ter be ready fer my call."

"O. K., Cast-iron Bill."

"If yer finds out any treasure is goin' by ther coach, or comin', write me a line and leave it in thet tree."

"I'll do it."

"Now I is off, so expect ter git a word of writin' soon from me."

"I'll look fer it."

"Good-by, pard," and with a grip of the hand, Cast-iron Bill went down the valley toward his horse, while Wild West Will sauntered back toward Pocket City.

* * * * *

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill left Pocket City with Dead-shot Dean, and the scouts who had taken the bodies into the camps for burial.

They saw that the wild community was cowed, that the attack on Dead-shot Dean, what followed, the sight of a "ghost," and the belief that Buffalo Bill and his scouts, with Captain Dick Caruth and his troopers were in the vicinity, had put a damper upon the most desperate of the men in the camps.

"There will be peace on this part of the border for a while," Pawnee Bill had said, as he parted with Dead-shot Dean at his cabin.

"I sincerely hope so, sir, for I dislike turmoil and bloodshed, and yet it seems my fate to have to take human life, deeply as I deplore it."

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature, you know, Mr. Dean, and killing out here is both a trade and a profession. Silk-lasso Sam makes it a trade to take human life, while you, Buffalo Bill, and myself

may class it as a profession, as we do it for a living, so to speak; that is, that others and ourselves may live.

"Look sharp, now, and don't be surprised, and rest assured if you should be killed, both Cody and I will avenge you, if that is any satisfaction to you."

"It is, and I'll do as much for you both," answered the miner, with a smile.

Then farewells were said and Pawnee Bill rode on with Buffalo Bill and his men, for the miner would not hear of either of them remaining with him in anticipation of a visit from the outlaw chief, Silk-lasso Sam, in answer to the letter put in the pocketbook.

A few miles up the trail Pawnee Bill branched off, going toward the fort, while Buffalo Bill and his men were to go on the stage trail, hoping to catch up with Silk-lasso Sam, or find some clew to him.

The fact was that all were now thoroughly convinced that the outlaw who appeared alone and masked upon the trails was none other than Silk-lasso Sam, and Buffalo Bill, with fourteen picked men, had received the permission of Colonel Dunwoody to haunt the Overland Trail and its branches, until they captured the mysterious and daring robber.

"You will explain the situation to the colonel, Pawnee," said Cody, as they were about to part.

"Wholly, Bill, and let him know of the attack upon Dean and just what the opinion of the latter is about the masked outlaw."

"That he feels sure that it is Silk-lasso Sam?"

"Yes."

"And that he has written a letter as a decoy?"

"Yes, and which I hope will get Silk-lasso Sam into a place which will enable the miner to handle him."

"I hope so, though he is taking big chances."

"So I think."

With this the two friends parted, Pawnee Bill pressing on at a good speed toward the fort.

He did not spare his horse, nor halt when night came on, and so arrived in the fort just as the bugle was sounding "lights out."

He sent his horse to the stable and went at once to the quarters of Colonel Dunwoody, who was just bidding farewell to some callers.

They were Major Lester, his wife, and Clarice Carr.

"Ah, Pawnee Bill, glad to see you back again. Let me ask, for the benefit of Major Lester, and, of course, the ladies who are curious to know, if you have any news of the masked highwayman?"

"Yes, sir, I have, and if you do not mind, as it is hardly a secret, I will tell what has occurred before the major and the ladies."

"Certainly, so sit down again and hear what Pawnee Bill has to say; for I may say he has been away, as usual, upon one of his special scouts."

The three visitors resumed their seats, and Pawnee Bill went on to relate his adventures:

"As you requested, Colonel Dunwoody, I went to see Dead-shot Dean, and met Buffalo Bill and his men

on the way. It is well that I did, for the scouts went with me to the cabin of the miner, and, not finding him there, we camped in the valley near, but were awakened by hot firing, so mounted and went to the rescue, for it came from Dean's cabin."

Then Pawnee went on to tell the story of the rescue, the mob they found there, how well the miner had defended himself with his fatal aim, and the clever ruse of Buffalo Bill to prevent an attack upon the scouts, followed by the stampede at his call for troops that were not there, and the increased speed of the fugitives when a ghost appeared in the Hangman's Gulch.

All laughed heartily at this, and then the events of the following day were related, and the parting with the miner at his cabin and Buffalo Bill upon the trail, while he returned to the fort.

CHAPTER XV.

A FAT OUTLAW.

"And you say that the miner was held up, when on Four-in-hand Frank's coach going to Yellow Dust Valley?" asked the colonel.

"He was, sir," replied Pawnee Bill.

"And by this same solitary, masked horseman?"

"Yes, sir."

"And robbed?"

"Of a pocketbook, sir, containing a few dollars, and a decoy letter."

"A decoy letter?"

"Yes, sir, and that is just where I feel a dread of the result to Dean."

"Explain, please."

"Well, sir, Dean had just come from the East, and if the masked road agent is Silk-lasso Sam, he, of course, knew that the miner had seen his sister. So Dean wrote a letter, saying he had seen Miss Leigh, and telling the outlaw that he had news for him, if he would come to his cabin to get it."

"Then, Miss Leigh sent her brother word by Dean?"

"Oh, no, colonel, for she faithfully believes that he has kept his pledge to her."

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For some time after the departure of the major and

the ladies, Colonel Dunwoody sat in silence, a silence which Pawnee Bill seemed not to care to break in upon.

But at last the colonel said:

"Pawnee, you are in my confidence, and after my letter from Miss Leigh, which you know of, it was very kind of you to offer to go to Pocket City and see Dead-shot Dean for me."

"I was very glad to do so, Colonel Dunwoody, and will be happy to do anything in my power for you, sir."

"I feel that, and I shall not hesitate to ask you, if aught comes up you can help me in.

"Now, Miss Leigh's letter to me told of Dean's return, and asked me to give him all the protection needed, as she understood well the nature of the people he had come back among.

"It seems, sir, that she does not know them thoroughly, for, but for our arrival at his cabin, those demons would have hanged him, and under the ridiculous charge of having murdered Bonnie Belle, as you know Miss Leigh is only known in the mines."

"Yes, I know, and I trust she will only so remain known. But I felt that you were the one to help him if he needed aid, and you did so. Now, tell me if you had any talk with him about that strange and beautiful woman?"

"I did, sir, and I can tell you that it was her brother, this outlaw whom we know as Silk-lasso Sam; that shot Dean as his successful rival, and caused him to fly to the West. Miss Leigh would force the Deans

to go to her home with her, and they live there together, and hence her interest in the miner."

"And why did he return here?"

"He believes he has to work a new lead that will pan out rich for him, sir, and he is anxious to get a large enough fortune to become independent."

"Well, he is a noble fellow, and I suppose you told him that it was my wish that he resume his position as the detective of the mines, which he held before going East?"

"I did, sir."

"And his answer?"

"That he thanked you, sir, and would obey orders."

"I believe he will render good service, too."

"There is no doubt of that, sir; but I have a suggestion to make, colonel, if you will permit?"

"Certainly."

"Would it not be well, sir, for Dean to pick out half a dozen good men whom he has every confidence in, and have them ready to obey his command, if necessary?"

"A good suggestion, indeed."

"He could pay them a small sum, have them secretly his allies, and they would be near if needed at any time."

"The very thing, and when you go again to the mines I will have you tell him to do so, and he can, of course, send the pay roll to me for monthly payment of himself and the men.

"They would also be a protection to him, should he

get into trouble, and I cannot but feel that he is living in hourly peril of his life."

"He is, yet he is a man who knows how to take care of himself, as I have had every reason to know."

"Still, a man's life hangs by a very slender thread, as no man knows better than you."

"That is true, sir."

"Now, what is Cody doing?"

"Haunting the trails like a nightmare, sir."

"Good!"

"He is first upon one trail, then another, and he is sleepless in his watchfulness and determination to run that masked outlaw to earth."

"And will do it if it can be done."

"He will."

"You suggested to him that I did not wish to have to hang him, and then have to meet his sister with her brother's blood upon my hands?"

"I said enough, sir, to assure you that if Silk-lasso Sam is taken alive, if it cannot be avoided, and he has to be, then his captors will pass through Pocket City upon their way with their prisoner to the fort, and he will never get out of the mines alive."

"Should it not be necessary to take him alive, he will be killed most assuredly, sir, while, should he keep this appointment with Dead-shot Dean at his cabin, unless he kills the miner, he will never live to tell the story."

"I am glad of this, and I do hope never to see the man again alive."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SIGN OF THE RED LASSO.

The desperado known as Cast-iron Bill was a man, under ordinary circumstances, fully capable of taking care of himself.

He went back from the burying ground, after parting with Wild West Will, his ally, to where his horse awaited him in the valley.

He mounted and continued on to what he had spoken of as the cliffs.

It was just sunset when he came to where the trail ran through a narrow cañon, and there was a smaller one branching off to the right.

Just as he was about to turn into this, a voice from seemingly overhead, called out:

"Halt! You are covered. Hands up!"

Cast-iron Bill obeyed with remarkable alacrity, but, as he raised his hands over his head, the red lasso was in them.

"Aye, pard, my hands is up, and let yer eyes rest on ther red lasso," he called out.

Cast-iron Bill looked at him as one might whose life hung upon the say-so of the man.

"Well, sir, I am the toll gatherer of the Overland trails, so what have you to offer?" came the stern words as the revolver looked up into the face of Cast-iron Bill, while the eyes through the holes in the mask also peered into his.

"One who carries the red lasso does not pay toll, Silk-lasso Sam. I am your old pard. I am Cast-iron Bill. I want to join forces with you again."

"Come with me," was all the masked outlaw said.

The result of this meeting of the two outlaws on the trail was that both put in an appearance at the cabin of Dead-shot Dean; Silk-lasso Sam announcing that he had come in accordance with instructions set forth in the letter found in Dean's purse, and had thought best to bring a pard with him.

Five minutes later both the outlaws were taken out of Dead-shot Dean's cabin as prisoners. The cabin had been surrounded by Buffalo Bill and his men, who were on the watch for the expected appearance of Silk-lasso Sam. When it was seen that the outlaw chief was accompanied by Cast-iron Bill, the chief of scouts congratulated himself upon the fact that he would now be able to take both men at the same time.

While the outlaws were parleying with Dean, Buffalo Bill and his men stole into the cabin, covered the two victims, and took them prisoners.

Later that day, when Pawnee Bill rode into Pocket City—having come over from the fort—he said to Cody, after hearing the news:

"It was a great capture, Bill, and Dean could have no objection to the manner in which it was done, for he had no knowledge that you were near. But all the same, the colonel at the fort will be mighty sorry to

hear that it is really only a capture, instead of a killing.

"Leave the killing to the Valley Vigilantes," replied Cody. "I'm of the belief that Captain Scott King and his Vigilantes will string up both men before Colonel Dunwoody hears of the capture."

"And the Bonnie Belle need never know," said Pawnee Bill.

"No," answered Cody. "She is happy now, and I'm sure Dead-shot Dean will encourage her belief that her brother really reformed and went to South America. In that way the Bonnie Belle will remain happy. Well, our work is done in Pocket City. Let's get back to the fort."

CHAPTER XVII.

HOPES REALIZED.

Two horsemen, splendidly mounted, galloped up to the door of the hotel in Picket City, dismounted, nodded to a group of miners who were loitering near the door, then entered the building.

"I'm glad to see you, gentlemen," said the landlord, addressing them. "If you act with your usual promptness, Pard Buffalo Bill, I'm sure you will round up those desperadoes before they have time to hold up any more stagecoaches on the Overland Trail."

"Tell us about their escape," said the man who accompanied Buffalo Bill.

"Well, Pard Pawnee Bill," replied the landlord, "they just scooted in the night. I had some of my Vigilantes watching the cabin which we used as a jail. How the prisoners managed to get out, is a mystery."

"They were aided in their escape by some one in Pocket City," said Colonel Cody.

"Has anybody picked up their trail?" asked Pawnee Bill.

"Yes," answered the landlord. "One of my Vigilantes found their trail. He followed it for some distance, then suddenly lost it, for the reason that the escaped outlaws made a bee line for the place known as Point o' Rocks, where their footprints were

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no longer discernible. But my own deduction is, gentlemen, that Silk-lasso Sam was making direct for the cabin of Dead-shot Dean, while Cast-iron Bill was making for the trail to inform Silk-lasso Sam's comrades of their leader's escape from our hands."

"Thank you," said Buffalo Bill. "We'll get to work at once."

And forthwith the two great scouts left the hotel, mounted, and rode away.

When they were beyond the limits of Pocket City, Buffalo Bill said to his companion:

"Pawnee, you better go to Pioneer Post and remain there until I send word that you and the soldiers are needed. Meantime, I'll post Texas Jack and all my scouts along the trail in such a way that we will be sure, ultimately, to round up these two desperadoes."

Accordingly, Pawnee Bill hastened on alone to the Pioneer Post, as the near-by fort was called, while Buffalo Bill dashed on to where he had left his boys in buckskin on the Overland Trail.

Meantime, Scott King joined the miners who were loitering at his door, and told them to pass the word to the Vigilantes to be ready to respond to a summons to go on the trail.

"I expect to hear at any moment from either Buffalo Bill or Pawnee Bill," the landlord said; "and then the Vigilantes will be needed to aid in running down the outlaws."

* * * * *

Dead-shot Dean was preparing supper in his cabin

when suddenly a form darkened the doorway, and, looking up quickly, he beheld the masked road agent of the Overland peering at him, and covering him with his rifle.

The miner was caught at a disadvantage.

His belt of arms hung over on the wall of his cabin, ten feet from him, and the outlaw had him covered with his rifle.

But Dead-shot Dean was a man of iron nerve.

He did not flinch or show the slightest sign of fear, but turning squarely toward the outlaw, said in his cool way:

"We meet again, sir, it seems."

"We do."

"You have accepted my invitation to call upon me?"

"I have come to see you in response to a letter found in a pocketbook, which you gave me at my urgent request, at the time I held you up."

"Yes, I wrote the letter for you to come, and I am glad to see you."

"That remains to be seen."

"The fact cannot be contradicted, sir, that I am really glad to see you."

"You believe that I am Silk-lasso Sam?"

"I know that you are."

The outlaw laughed, and replied:

"You must not be too sure."

"But I am sure."

"And upon what grounds?"

"Your bearing, voice, and the fact that you have gone back to your old trade of outlawry."

"You are mistaken, for I am not Silk-lasso Sam."

"I do not believe you."

"What can I do to prove that I am not?"

"Unmask."

"I unmask for no man. But what is it you want with Silk-lasso Sam, for his mantle has fallen upon my shoulders and I shall wear it."

"If you are not Silk-lasso Sam, I have nothing to say to you."

"I represent him."

"That may be."

"Do you know Silk-lasso Sam?"

"Only too well."

"Then you should know that we are of far different build from each other."

"It appears so, but appearances are often deceiving."

"Well, I wish to know, for Silk-lasso Sam, why that letter was written?"

"Can I not see Silk-lasso Sam?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"He has left the road."

"Given up outlawry?"

"Yes."

"How do you know this?"

"Because I am his friend."

"Who are you?"

"The Masked Outlaw of the Overland."

"Where is Silk-lasso Sam?"

"He has gone!"

"Gone where?"

"South."

"To what part of the South?"

"He is going to South America after a while."

"Why has he delayed?"

"Because he needed some more money."

"How will he get it by delaying?"

"From me."

"How is that?"

"Well, I am to pay him a certain sum, and I am doing the work for him."

"Well, what I wished to see Silk-lasso Sam for was just this: He was saved from the gallows under certain conditions, and I believed, as all others do, that you were Silk-lasso Sam."

"I left his sister East a few weeks since, and she was robbed on her way, on Four-in-hand Frank's coach, of all that she had with her."

"She was led to believe that the robber, yourself, was Silk-lasso Sam, who had given her his solemn pledge to give up outlawry and leave the country. I know she gave him a large sum in money, and if he got what she was robbed of, I know that he had a small fortune, for he had the money, which she did not know of, that had been found upon him when he was captured."

"Now, Bonnie Belle asked me to see this masked outlaw and have a talk with him, and if confident that he was Silk-lasso Sam, to say to him that she would not raise a finger to save him again, after his broken pledges to her, and that he must accept all of the consequences of his act, with no ray of hope that she will lend a hand to help him, for she is done utterly in making any effort to redeem him."

"Well, as Silk-lasso Sam has not broken his pledges to her, and has gone from the scenes of his lawlessness, and will go from the country when he has added, through me, a certain sum to what he has, what you say does not apply either to him or to me."

"And you expect to go on, as you have begun, in your lawless acts?"

"Why not?"

"You seem to forget that there is a rope end to your deeds."

"It is catching before hanging."

"Very true, but you cannot expect to escape in the future as you have in the past."

"Why not?"

"There are those upon your trail who will yet bring you to justice."

"I doubt it."

"Don't be too sure, for Buffalo Bill is not a man to give up a trail until he gets to the end of it."

"And when Buffalo Bill makes a dash at me, be-

lieving that he has only the masked outlaw to deal with, he will find that he rushes into an ambush that will be the end of his career. Hold; do not move an inch, Dead-shot Dean, or you are a dead man. I came here to capture you, and I shall carry out my intention. Ho, men, come in and bind this prisoner!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISSING

Judge Scott King felt disappointed that there was not a hanging in Hangman's Gulch, to follow the attack upon the cabin of Dead-shot Dean.

As the "judge" of Pocket City, he wished to sentence some one to death.

But as the captain of the Vigilantes of Pocket City, he must first find the criminals and capture them, upon the principle of first catching the man needing to be hanged.

The judge had his hands full, for his store was doing a big business; The Frying Pan was paying fairly well; Devil's Den was bringing in a fair income nightly, he had certain legal cases to decide upon, and there were directions to give the Vigilantes.

Altogether the judge had more than he could stagger under, and he was very glad to know that the miner had returned to take the management of Bonnie Belle's affairs.

The fact was, Scott King was an honest man, and he worked harder to have Bonnie Belle's accounts straight to a cent than he would have done for himself.

He already had it in his mind to buy the property of The Frying Pan and the Devil's Den, and take full charge as owner, placing a manager over his

store, which could be run with far less trouble than the hotel or gambling and drinking saloon.

He had only his salary for the care of The Frying Pan and Den, as long as they belonged to Bonnie Belle, but as his own he would be far differently situated.

Hence he was anxious for the miner to come and look over figures under his management, name the price which Bonnie Belle wished for her properties, and, if he could do so, to become master himself.

Dead-shot Dean had asked several days, and the judge had granted the time for him to get settled after his return.

But the days passed and Dead-shot Dean did not appear.

Then Four-in-hand Frank, the driver of the Overland stagecoach, came in one afternoon, and stated that he had halted at Dead Shot's cabin and the place was all locked up and had a really deserted look.

He had gone to the mine, but found no one there, and as there had been rain a couple of days before, not a track was visible since then about the cabin or the claim.

"What does it mean, Pard Jedge?" asked Frank.

Judge Scott King was alarmed.

He did not know what it meant, but he had a suspicion, so he said:

"I don't exactly understand it, Frank; but suppose we say nothing about this and go over early in the morning to the miner's cabin and look for ourselves."

"Don't yer think we hed better go ter-night, jedge?"

"It's dark now."

"Yes."

"You seem to forget the Hangman's Gulch, Frank."

The driver started, and said, in a whisper:

"Durned ef I hadn't, in my anxious feelings about Dead Shot. We'll go to-morrow, jedge."

"Yes, with the sunrise, and we will look about to-night to see if we can find any one who has seen the miner; only don't let it be thought that we suspect foul play, only ask if he's been seen in the camps to-day."

"We'll do it, jedge."

And yet that night, in questioning cautiously about regarding the mining man, they could get no clew to the miner, for he had not been seen for several days.

The next morning the judge and Four-in-hand Frank mounted their horses and rode over to the cabin of Dead-shot Dean.

They found that it held no tenant, or if so, the one within was either ill or dead.

They looked all about, visited the mine, and still found no trace of the miner, or that he had been about the place the past few days.

Then they considered how they could get into the cabin, for they knew it would be no easy task, when the judge said:

"See here, Frank!"

The driver came to his side.

"Sick, well, or dead, he is not inside this cabin."

"How does you know, jedge?"

"Do you not see that the door is padlocked on the outside?"

"So it is."

"He has a secret way of putting a bar up across the door inside, from the outside, but he could not put the padlock in these staples and lock it unless it was done from the outside."

"No, judge, unless some one kilt him inside and locked the door themselves on ther outside."

"That is so, Frank. Now, how can we find that out?"

"There is a trapdoor upon the roof."

"Yes."

"I'll go up and see if I can't see into the cabin in some way."

"Do so."

Frank did so, and soon called out:

"I kin see all over ther cabin, and ther bed is made and not a thing is disturbed."

"Then that means that Dead-shot Dean is missing."

"Yes, he's been kilt away from his cabin, or captured, to my thinking."

"Then our duty is to find him, dead or alive, and hang the guilty ones."

"Sure, judge," and the two returned to Pocket City.

Meantime, Horseshoe Ned was on his way to Pioneer Post, the near-by fort, his eyes on the alert to see if danger lurked ahead, for he was fearful of

being held up by the masked outlaw, as had been the case several times before.

The horses were jogging along at an easy pace, and Horseshoe Ned was hopeful that he would get through without being halted, when he suddenly beheld a party of horsemen ahead.

The heart of the driver sank within him, for his first thought was that he was to be held up by not only the outlaw who had before appeared in mask upon the trails, but by others.

He had one passenger with him, and one who he felt would be a rich haul for the robbers, for he was an old man and one who had the appearance of being well off in this world's goods.

So he called out, as he leaned over:

"Look out, old gent, for I guess we is in for a racket with the road agents."

"My dear sir, don't tell me that I am to be murdered," came in a startled voice from within the coach.

But Horseshoe Ned had taken another look up the trail and quickly called back again:

"No, no, old gent, don't be skeert, fer it's Buffalo Bill and his men."

"Buffalo Bill, that terrible murderer of the West!" whined the old man. "Then we are to have our throats cut."

"Go slow, old man, for yer has got things mixed a leetle. Yer is a tenderfoot in spite o' yer white hair, when yer mixes Buffalo Bill up with ther outlaws o'

ther Overland, for he's chief of scouts at the fort, and now on ther trail of the robbers."

"Pardon me, my friend, but I had heard the name and supposed he was a cutthroat."

"Yer s'posed wrong, old pard, for it's Silk-lasso Sam yer has in mind."

"Ah, yes, that is the man. But where is this Buffalo Bill?"

"He's a-layin' fer us on ther trail. We'll soon git thar."

The old man ducked his head back into the coach and remained quiet, and soon after a cheery voice called out ahead:

"Ho, Ned, have you seen the masked outlaw this trip?"

"Not a shadow of him, Buffalo Bill, and now I meets you and your men I guesses we won't, and glad I is, for there's a old party aboard I'd hate to see done up, for I respect gray hairs, I does."

"You have one passenegr then?"

"Yes, an old gent, who is going to tne fort to visit Colonel de Sutro."

"I am glad you are going through all right then, for I was pretty sure you would be held up on this run by Silk-lasso Sam, who, I had reason to believe, had come up this way."

"Whar's ther other boys, Bill?"

"Scattered along the trails, Ned, for we are anxious to stop this road-agent business as soon as we can."

"And you and your men is ther ones ter do it. Any word for the fort?"

"Hand this letter, please, to Pawnee Bill," and the scout handed over a letter to the driver.

"I'll do it, Bill."

"Are you the famous Buffalo Bill, may I ask, sir?" the passenger now said, thrusting his head out of the stage window.

"I am Buffalo Bill, but whether famous or not, I cannot answer," was the scout's smiling reply.

"I am glad to meet you, and if you will go on with the coach to protect it, I'll pay you well for your services."

"Thank you, but I am paid by the government for my work, and I do not think you need have any fear of being robbed now."

"Name your price, and you shall have it, for I've got a deal of money with me, and other things I would not like to lose."

"As you are situated, I will ride on with you past the danger line, but please do not speak of paying for my services, for that is out of the question."

Horseshoe Ned now drove on, and the scout and the four men with him dropped back, out of sight, behind the coach.

They were not seen again, but Ned knew that they had remained within call until they had passed the danger line, beyond which even the masked outlaw would not dare hold up the coach.

An hour after, the stage rolled into Pioneer Post,

and the passenger alighted slowly, like a man who felt his years.

He was a man of slender form, bent, and with shoulders that had a considerable stoop.

His hair was snow-white almost, his face clean-shaven, and he wore gold eyeglasses.

He was dressed like a gentleman of the old school, with gaiters, straps to his pants, a blue cutaway coat with brass buttons, ruffled shirt, in which glittered a fine diamond, buckles upon his shoes, and a fob chain with massive seal.

He leaned somewhat heavily upon his gold-headed cane, and wore a light soft-felt hat, which he raised politely to Pawnee Bill, who was passing, and said:

"Pardon, sir, but I am anxious to see Colonel de Sutro, please."

"I will conduct you to his house with pleasure, sir."

CHAPTER XIX.

COLONEL DE SUTRO'S GUEST.

Pawnee Bill conducted the passenger by the coach direct to the quarters of Lieutenant Colonel de Sutro.

He told him to lean upon him for support, as they went along, and said:

"You must feel the fatigue of your long journey, for it is no easy work to come this far by coach even for a young man."

"I am beyond sixty, yet still quite strong, and a day's rest will bring me around all right. I hope the colonel is at home."

"I think that he is not, but his wife is, and he is about the post somewhere, for I met him at the club a short while since. Here is his home."

"I thank you for your kindness, and trust we will meet again. My name is Mayhew, Carter Mayhew."

"And I am Major Lillie, better known as Pawnee Bill. There is Mrs. de Sutro now. Good evening," and Pawnee Bill took his departure.

Mrs. de Sutro, a Mexican woman, was very handsome, and her rich olive complexion and large black eyes showed her Mexican blood.

She advanced gracefully toward the visitor, seeing that he was a stranger and an old man, and greeted him pleasantly.

"You are the Señora de Sutro?" the old man said,

grasping both of her hands in his own, and gazing earnestly into her face, while he spoke in perfect Spanish.

"Yes, señor, I am, and am I so remiss as to forget where we have met before, for I recall your face though not your name?"

"Did you ever hear of Carter Mayhew?"

"Ah, yes, an American gentleman who was my father's partner, and afterward went to Brazil?"

"Yes."

"I was a very little girl then, sir, but I recall you now, and I am most happy to see you. Come in, and let me send for your baggage, for I know that you could have only come by the stage just arrived, and you are to be our guest. My husband will be delighted to see you, as also will our adopted daughter and the ward of Colonel de Sutro, the Señorita Nina de Sutro," and Mrs. de Sutro rattled on, seeming happy to speak her own language once more.

"It is to see the Señorita de Sutro more particularly that I have come, señora, and yet I do not wish to intrude."

"On the contrary, you shall be an honored guest—oh! here is the colonel now."

Colonel de Sutro had met Pawnee Bill and learned that a guest had gone over to his quarters, so he had at once hastened home.

The colonel was at once presented by his wife.

He recalled having often heard of Carter Mayhew, a Texan gentleman who had had large business in-

terests with his wife's father, but more particularly with Nina's father, and it was a known fact in the family that there was a certain amount of property that could be obtained for Nina, could the whereabouts of the said Mayhew be found to give certain testimony, but, since his departure for Brazil, no clew could be obtained to his location.

Colonel de Sutro was a money-loving man, and he was the guardian of Nina, and he took pleasure in managing her affairs and handling her money.

The will had given him control of her fortune until she was of age, which was to be very soon, and then he would have to turn all over to her.

He had the satisfaction of knowing that all she had inherited, with a certain interest, less expenditures and his claim as executor, he could place in her hands, and she would be a very rich girl.

But he also had the satisfaction of knowing that he had taken big chances in investments, and that all profits had been put aside to his credit, as well as religiously kept from Nina, as he argued that there was no need of her knowing it.

Now, with the reappearance of Carter Mayhew, he hoped that there would be more for him to care for as Nina's guardian, if only for the short while which must elapse between them and the young lady's coming of age.

So Carter Mayhew was welcomed most cordially by the colonel, who led him himself to the best room

in the house, and saw that he was surrounded with every comfort.

"Rest yourself for an hour, then have a bath and join us at dinner, when you will meet my adopted daughter. But how did you ever find us?"

"I think, colonel, that I was the one that was lost, for I have dwelled many years in Brazil, as I suppose my dark complexion shows. I was at first most unfortunate in my business there, but at last managed to get into a streak of good fortune and made money.

"I married a wealthy Brazilian lady, and after some years she died, leaving me childless. At last I had a yearning to come back and die in my own country, and in looking over some papers, I discovered that I possessed one which would keep the heirs of my old partner out of a large fortune.

"I at once disposed of my interests in Brazil and came to Mexico to look them up, and so traced you here. That is my story, and now I will take your advice about that rest for an hour."

Punctual to the second was Carter Mayhew at dinner, a meal which Colonel de Sutro's foreign training always made him make much of in his family.

He dressed for dinner religiously, and expected all others to do the same about him.

Mayhew's trunk had been sent to his room, and he came down in a toilet which even Colonel de Sutro could find no fault with.

His ruffled shirt was a wonder, and he affected the fashion of South Americans and wore much jewelry,

for he had three diamonds sparkling in his shirt bosom, a pair of diamond cuff buttons, and wore upon his left little finger a seal ring of rare beauty, with a ruby of great size and brilliancy upon his right.

His shoe buckles were of gold, and his white hair was scented and clustered in ringlets all around his head, while his perfect white teeth caused Nina to wager with herself that they were false.

He bent low when presented to Nina, kissed her hand, and offered his arm gallantly to Mrs. de Sutro to lead her in to dinner.

His very dark face, spectacles, and snowy hair, with his rich toilet, gave him a very distinguished appearance, and they soon found him a very brilliant talker.

"If he wasn't so round-shouldered and did not have false teeth, I'd marry him, old as he is," said Nina, with a laugh, as she left the dining room with Mrs. de Sutro, leaving the gentlemen to their cigars and coffee.

"I do not believe his teeth are false, Nina, but his stoop and almost hump shoulders are a drawback, I admit. But I judge that he is a very rich man, and has no children to father."

"Yes, that is something, and he is very rich, I am sure, and money covers a multitude of faults. But what a jolly old sport he is; takes his whisky straight without flinching and emptied his glass of wine with

military precision, while he tells a funny story with the look of an undertaker, and is certainly a most entertaining companion."

"Yes, you had better be an old man's darling than a young man's slave," said Mrs. de Sutro.

"I could never be any man's slave now—that time has gone by," was the almost fierce remark of the beautiful girl, and while her eyes flashed for a minute, they at once dropped and became sad and dreamy in expression as memories of the past flashed over her, called up by Mrs. de Sutro's words.

A pleasant evening was passed in the parlors; a game of whist being played, in which the guest showed himself an expert.

But, remembering his long journey, they retired early, and all felt that their guest was a very superior man, and were in ecstasies over the thought that his coming would enrich Nina by a very large amount.

"If his hair was not so white, and he did not have that stoop in the shoulders, he would not appear at all old," said Mrs. de Sutro to her husband.

"But he is old, and the old sinner has had a very gay life of it, I am sure. It would not be so bad if Nina caught him, for he is enormously rich and would leave her very soon a millionaire widow," the colonel replied.

The next day the guest met some of the people at the fort.

He was introduced to the commander, Colonel

Dunwoody, and Major Lester, and at the club that night met Pawnee Bill.

He joined in a game of cards with a party of young men, and two hours after arose from the table with all the cash they had to spare for a month.

This started others, who felt that he was rich, to seek for a game with him, hoping to make a good haul, but somehow the "Ancient Sport," as they called him at the officers' club, was always the winner.

He took a horseback ride with Nina, and if he did stoop in the saddle, he yet showed himself an excellent rider.

There was a shooting match in which he was asked to join, and he sent his bullets to dead center, explaining his good aim by saying:

"You know in Brazil we often had duels on our hands, and down there they shoot to kill, so I had to drop my man or die myself, and I preferred the former, you know."

The colonel, to do honor to the De Sutros, invited their guest to dine with him, and Major Lester did the same; and for the first time the Ancient Sport met Clarice Carr, the beautiful cousin of Mrs. Major Lester.

He seemed at once impressed with her, and devoted himself to her all the evening.

Upon returning to the home of his host, he said:

"I think she is a phenomenal beauty, handsomer than you are, Señorita Nina, and with perhaps a more exquisite form, for she is willowy grace itself. I

never saw a woman more catching; but do you know I have thus far forgotten to give you and Mrs. de Sutro some little souvenirs I brought for you," and the Ancient Sport hastened to his room, while Nina frowned at the compliment he had paid to Clarice Carr.

CHAPTER XX.

A LEAF FROM THE PAST.

The "souvenirs" referred to by the Ancient Sport were a superb gemmed bracelet for Mrs. de Sutro, and a ring of rare beauty for Nina, which at once brought back the smiles to her face.

There was also a very elegant meerschaum pipe for Colonel de Sutro, all of which were most highly appreciated.

The guest had been a week in the fort and thus far had made no other allusion, than what he had at first said, about the property he had in his keeping for Nina.

The colonel and Mrs. de Sutro anxiously talked over this oversight together, yet they dared not ask him about what he had come so far to make known.

Nina also was anxious to know about the inheritance she had been kept out of thus far, what it amounted to, and what it consisted in, yet she, too, felt a delicacy about bringing up the subject.

One afternoon the Ancient Sport asked Nina to go on a ride with him, and she readily consented, though the colonel urged that they should not go far from the fort.

"Though Buffalo Bill and his men are out on the trails, there is yet dread to be felt of this masked out-

law, for he moves about in a most mysterious way," said Colonel de Sutro.

"We shall get into no danger, Señor Colonel," responded the Ancient Sport, and mounting, the two rode away.

They took a trail leading down the river, and, coming to a few trees growing upon a point of land, Mayhew said:

"Let us dismount here, Señorita Nina, and sit on that log, for I have something to say to you."

Nina acquiesced at once, wondering if it was an avowal of love, for the old man had seemed most devoted.

He aided Nina to alight with the courtly grace which distinguished him, hitched the horses to a tree near by, and seated himself by her side.

"Señorita Nina, I must refer to your past life, if you will pardon me, and you must tell me wherein I err, for it is my right to know all, before I come to an understanding with you about the business that has brought me here."

"Certainly, sir," and Nina de Sutro turned pale, for she had a history she was not willing for stranger eyes to read.

But then this man, of course, must know all, she thought.

"Of course," he went on, "my intimacy with your family in the past made me acquainted with many facts regarding your people which otherwise you might be surprised at. Now, see if I am right?"

"I will hear all that you have to say, sir."

"You were left to the guardianship of Colonel de Sutro, and it was decided that you should be sent to Mexico to be educated in a convent there."

"Yes, sir."

"A nun came after you, and in returning, while crossing the Rio Grande in your carriage, your coachman was drowned, and you and your protectress would have shared the same fate but for your rescue by a young man, an American."

"It is true, sir."

"Later, when on a vacation from the convent, and visiting relatives in the city of Mexico, you met, at a tournament, this same young man, who proved himself the victor over all he met, and that meeting ended in your running away with him and becoming his wife. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"He deserted you soon after, and you returned to the convent, the good nun alone knowing your secret."

"It is true."

"Why did this man desert you?"

"Because he married me for my money, and finding I could not touch my inheritance until I was of age, he left me."

"You loved him?"

"With all my heart and soul."

"And now?"

"I hate him with more intensity than I ever loved him."

"Have you seen him since?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"A few months ago."

"Where?"

"Here at this fort."

"Ah!"

"Yes, he came here."

"How?"

"In disguise, under an assumed name, pretending to have been robbed on the way."

"And you recognized him?"

"I did."

"And he knew you?"

"Yes."

"Why did he come?"

"To see me."

"For what reason?"

"I will be of age very soon, and he wanted money."

"And got it?"

"Oh, no."

"Why not?"

"I would not give him other than a small sum."

"Yet he held your secret?"

"True, and I held his."

"What was that?"

"He killed the driver of the coach in coming here, also a passenger, and robbed him, and he was, in fact, nothing more than an outlaw himself."

"An outlaw?"

"Yes."

"Did you know this?"

"Of course."

"Who was he?"

"Silk-lasso Sam."

"Ah! and yet escaped the vigilant eyes that must be upon him here?"

"He was so well disguised, played his part so well, and his game was such a bold one, that he conquered success," was Nina's reply, almost in admiration of the man's brilliant wickedness.

The old man seemed deeply interested in what Nina de Sutro had said about the outlaw, and remarked:

"It seems to me as though you really admire this man's wickedness."

"I admire his pluck and cleverness, though regret that it was not in a good cause instead of an evil one."

"And what became of him?"

"He held me at his mercy, of course, as I did him. He sought to win more gold than he could get from me, so boldly had his band, with whom he was in communication, kidnap Miss Clarice Carr and himself, while they were out riding together, and the result was that he got men upon his track who trailed him to his den, wiped out or captured his outlaws, and brought him back a prisoner to the fort, after rescuing Miss Carr, whom he expected to hold for ransom."

"And he was executed, of course?"

"No, he was rescued by his clever sister, Ruth Arden, who came here for the purpose."

"Where is he now?"

"It is said that his sister rescued him on condition that he would reform and leave the country."

"And he did so?"

"On the contrary, he did not, for it is said that this masked outlaw, of whom you have heard so much, Mr. Mayhew, is Silk-lasso Sam."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, so it is said."

"And your opinion?"

"I should not be surprised, for he is capable of anything."

"And you are still his wife?"

"I am."

"And no one knows this secret at the fort?"

"Colonel de Sutro and his wife know that I married when I was a mere girl, but they believe the man to be dead."

"Then you have kept your secret well?"

"Why should I not?"

"I think you are wise."

"May I ask how you knew it?"

"From the good nun."

"Ah!"

"She was forced to tell me all, for you know I went to the convent to seek you, about this inheritance, you know?"

"No, I do not know, Mr. Mayhew, and I shall be glad to have you explain it all to me."

"In good time I will do so, fair Nina. But now let me ask you if there is no one that you are interested in in the fort?"

"How do you mean?"

"Are you in love?"

"Why do you ask the question?"

"From no personal motive, I assure you, for if I cannot win Miss Clarice Carr, I shall never marry."

"You are frank, at least."

"You will find me more so, when you know me better."

"Well, I like frankness, and I'll be frank, too, and tell you that if you expect to wed Clarice Carr, you will never marry."

"Why not?"

"In the first place, she is a woman to have but one love affair in life, and that I am sure she has had."

"Well?"

"She is very rich, so would not marry for money, and that is about the only motive that I can see that would make a young girl marry an old man, even as brilliant and entertaining a one as yourself."

"You are frank, indeed. But who is it Miss Carr has loved?"

"That is her secret, and she neither has father nor mother confessors."

"And you have not learned to love again?"

"I suppose I must still be frank with you."

"Yes, for I shall be the same with you."

"Well, since my girlhood was wrecked, I learned to hate the man that I thought I loved. Then I met another, believing my wicked husband dead, whom I could love, and did."

"Well?"

"I soon found that he loved an ideal, and when he met the reality, she won his heart, of course, so I had to give him up."

"Who was that?"

"Colonel Dunwoody."

"That is right, aim high, even if you miss the mark. But then?"

"I centered my affections upon another, a man known as a splendid fellow, with prospects of rapid promotion, handsome, dashing, and, better than all, very rich."

"Who is he?"

"Captain Richard Caruth, whom his men call Dashing Dick."

"And he loves you?"

"Oh, no."

"What then?"

"He idolizes Clarice Carr, and I don't believe she sees it, but I only wish I had such a man to love me as he does her."

"And then?"

"Why, I have transferred my affections now to Lieutenant Vassar Turpin, the colonel's handsome young aid, and who is also rich."

"With what success?"

"I halfway believe he is in love with Clarice Carr; for, in fact, all the men are."

"Can you blame them?"

"Though a woman myself, I must answer with all honesty, no."

"And failing with the aid?"

"Well, if you would promise to kill Silk-lasso Sam, my outlaw husband, and die soon after the marriage, I believe I would take you."

"You are most kind; but now, as you have been so frank, so confidential with me, I will be equally so with you, and make a confession. I happen to know that Miss Carr has a very large fortune, and if she were kidnaped, she would pay a big ransom for her release, and so I came to the fort to carry her off; for, as you hate her, I shall expect your aid."

Nina de Sutro sprang to her feet now, her face white as a corpse, and cried:

"Great Heaven! Now I penetrate your disguise. You are Silk-lasso Sam, the outlaw, and my husband!"

"You are right; I am," was the cool reply of the pretended old man.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ALARM.

Back to Pocket City went the Vigilante captain and Four-in-hand Frank after their search for Dead-shot Dean at his mine, wondering at the miner's strange disappearance.

The judge looked at Four-in-hand Frank, and the latter looked at the judge.

"What does it mean, Frank?"

"You is ther jedge, and must find out; but it looks ter me as though somebody needs hanging."

"So it does, Frank. I'll sound the tocsin and call the people together, and then we must find out the facts of this mysterious disappearance of Dead-shot Dean."

And then the judge arose in his wrath, seized the gong, which he called the tocsin, and sent its roaring sound up and down the valley and echoing against the hills, bringing the people of Yellow Dust Valley quickly assembling in front of The Frying Pan.

The judge lost no time in calling the meeting to order, a thing far more easily accomplished than it is with a political convention, where every man wishes to do the talking.

These men were willing to let the judge talk, while they acted when the time came for action.

The judge was always polite and never failed to

begin his addresses with the catching word of "Gentlemen."

Now he added:

"And my dear fellow citizens of Yellow Dust Valley."

After this preliminary, he went on to say:

"The ring of the tocsin has called you together upon a most serious matter. It casts a deep reflection upon our beautiful valley, the shadow of which will hang over it like a threatening storm cloud until it is sent rolling away by the execution of those who have been guilty of the foul deed.

"You are well aware that we had in our midst a man who minded his own business; who was ever ready to do a good act; whose hand was the first to be put in his pocket to help one in distress, and who was as peaceful as a lamb until set upon, when he became like an enraged lion if aroused, and protected himself nobly.

"This man has just come back to us from his far-away home, and his loved ones, and started again at his work of mining.

"He came back the authorized agent of Bonnie Belle, who told me that I was to give over to his keeping her affairs here upon his return. This was the condition I took it upon.

"And now, ere he has been back with us but a few days, what do we find? A gang of ruffians seeking to hang him upon a false charge, and would have

done so had he not been protected by Buffalo Bill with his scouts.

"Thwarted in their work there, these ruffians have now done away with this noble man, Dead-shot Dean, for his home is closed, and he is missing from our midst. To tell you this, gentlemen, is why I have called you together."

The announcement of the Vigilante judge was received by the crowd with a silence that was far more impressive than the wildest shouts would have been.

Dead-shot Dean was a genuine favorite, and greatly admired.

It was only the worst element of the mines, who, fearing him, wished to get rid of him as they did other good men; only the lonely life of Dead-shot Dean offered better advantages for doing so.

Now that the Vigilante judge had said that the arrangement of Bonnie Belle with himself, was, should she not return, for the miner to take charge of her business, the people knew that there was no mistake, no charge that could be made against Dead-shot Dean.

The affair, therefore, of the miner's disappearance must be looked into with a will; yes, with a vengeance, so to speak.

The Vigilantes went off on a still-hunt, divided in two parties, while the judge, Four-in-hand Frank, and a special jury polled for the occasion, went to the cabin and claim of the miner to take in the full situation and make what discoveries they could to help obtain some evidence.

But two days failed to unravel any clew whatever, more than that the miner had either been spirited away or murdered, and there could be nothing found of those suspected of the deed, whatever that deed happened to be.

At last the day came for Four-in-hand Frank to start upon his way, and he carried out with him a letter to Bonnie Belle, written by the judge, to whom he had given the address at Eden Valley.

Frank looked sadly at the cabin as he went by, for he was deeply attached to Dead-shot Dean, and said to himself:

"It will be sad news for Bonnie Belle when she knows he has gone, and for his loved one in their Eastern home."

And the tender-hearted driver wiped away a tear.

The more Four-in-hand Frank pondered on the situation, as he drove along the trail eastward, the more he was perplexed to know what had become of Dead-shot Dean, and why some clew could not be found to his whereabouts.

So wrapped up was Four-in-hand Frank in his meditations, that he had lost all thought of his being possibly held up by the masked road agent, until brought to a sudden realization of the fact by the loud command:

"Halt, there, Four-in-hand Frank, and hands up!"

He halted with a suddenness that threw his wheelers back upon their haunches, and saw in the trail

before him the blood-red bay, and the masked face and stout form of the outlaw.

"Waal, yer gits serenely left this time, fer I ain't been paid off yit, ther hearse don't hold a passenger, and I ain't got a dollar's worth of truck along," said Frank, regaining his composure in an instant.

"No passengers?"

"Nary."

"No booty?"

"Not a dollar."

"I'll see, with your permission."

"I ain't goin' ter give yer permission, and I isn't sich a fool as ter say yer shan't."

"Throw me down yer mail bag."

"Thar's nothin' in it."

"That I shall see."

The bag was under the box, and with the muzzle of a rifle upon him, Frank could only obey.

The man let the bag fall upon the ground, and then said:

"Come down off that box."

Frank obeyed.

"Lie down upon your back."

This order was also obeyed.

Then the man dismounted, the belt of arms of the driver was unbuckled and taken off, and then with his knife the road agent cut open the mail bag.

No registered letter was there, but any that felt full were opened in the search for an inclosure of money.

"A poor bag this, but here is a letter I wanted."

"It's got no money in it, and it's only to Bonnie Belle," said Frank.

"That is why I want it."

"I tell yer it has no money in it."

"That may be, but it has news."

"Don't take that letter, Pard Outlaw, and I'll give you a month's pay for it."

"I prefer the letter. Now you can go on."

"Darn yer ugly pictur', some time it will be my laugh, and you'll be ther one thet gits left, and it'll be at the end of a rope," growled Four-in-hand Frank, as he mounted to his box and drove on.

He left the agent standing in the trail, gazing after him, the letter to Bonnie Belle still in his hand.

"Waal, that beats my time, and Bonnie Belle don't git her letter. I ain't much on edication, but I guesses I knows how I can reach her, and thet is through Pawnee Bill or Buffalo Bill, who is her friends, and they should know of his holdin' of me up and robbin' of ther mail.

"Let me see, if I pushes ther critters hard, I can catch Horeshoe Ned at the junction of ther trails, and I'll tell him all, and have him tell Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill jist what hev happened, so they kin write ter Bonnie Belle.

"Come, critturs, yer has got ter keep ther grass from growing on this trail by cuttin' dirt lively as though you was bein' chased by road agents."

With this Frank gathered up his reins and sent his team flying along.

It was a race against time, but he had to drive fifteen miles within two hours, and the trail none of the best.

If there on time, he headed off Horseshoe Ned, and if not, then he might not see him for a couple of weeks, for the station where he went to, at the end of the run, the driver from Pioneer Post never reached at the same time, so they seldom saw each other, unless one or the other lay over a trip at the eastern end.

The team of six horses was a good one, and the coach being light and the driver in earnest, they went sailing along at a great rate.

The result of his hard drive was that within an hour and a half Four-in-hand Frank reached the place where his trail from Pocket City turned into the one from Pioneer Post.

He checked his horses, after giving a whoop at discovering that Horseshoe Ned's coach had not passed, and that he had a resting spell before he did so.

Soon after, the coach of Horseshoe Ned was heard rumbling over the trail. It turned a bend and drew rein, while, springing from his box, the driver met his brother King of the Overland, as these two great masters of the whip and reins were called.

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO STORIES TO TELL.

"Pard Frank, I greets yer," cried Horseshoe Ned, as he warmly grasped the hand of his fellow driver.

"Ditto, Ned, and I has druv ther tails off my critters ter git here at ther junction and see yer."

"Anything wrong, pard?"

"Thar is."

"Waal, ef yer observe, I is half a hour ahead o' time, for I was a drivin' rapid also."

"So I seen. Anything wrong?"

"Thar is."

"Waal; I'll tell yer my story, and then hear what you has ter say."

"Go it, for I was a-drivin' ter catch up as quick as possible with Buffalo Bill, seeing as I wants him bad."

"Waal, so does I."

"What has yer ter say?"

"I has been held up."

"So has I."

"What?"

"Gospil truth."

"Ditto, for I were held up by ther masked outlaw, back on Paint Branch."

"That are fifteen miles from here."

"Yes."

"And I were held up by the masked outlaw at Robbers' Run."

"No."

"Yes."

"That are five miles from here?"

"Yes."

"It c'u'dn't hev been ther masked outlaw."

"Yes, but it could."

"He held me up."

"And he held me up."

"Not ther masked outlaw?"

"Yas."

"But it were Silk-lasso Sam."

"He were ther one."

"Thet held you up?"

"Sartin."

"Thar ain't two of him."

"Waal, it were Silk-lasso Sam."

"Ther same."

The two kings of the Overland looked at each other fixedly.

At last Four-in-hand Frank asked:

"Is yer playin' me fer a fool, Horseshoe Ned?"

"Jest what I were goin' ter ask you, sir."

"Now see here, we don't want any quarrel, but ter git at ther facts of ther case."

"Jist so."

"I were at Robbers' Run when I were halted."

"Was he on a blood-bay horse?"

"He were."

"Masked?"

"He were."

"A fat man?"

"He were."

"With beard showing under his mask?"

"It were."

"Held a rifle on yer?"

"He did."

"And talked deep and stern, like Silk-lasso Sam?"

"He did."

"Then he were Silk-lasso Sam."

"He were."

"And ther same man held me up."

"Well, he c'u'd hev cut across ther ridge and did it, for it were two hours ago he tackled me at Paint Branch, and half an hour ago he tackled you."

This poured oil upon the troubled waters, and then Four-in-hand Frank went on to tell his story of how he had been robbed, and all that had been said and done, until he came to the letter of Bonnie Belle which had been taken, and this, he explained, was why he had wished to head off Horseshoe Ned to have him tell Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill about it, so that they should write at once to the idol of Yellow Dust Valley, as Bonnie Belle was called, and acquaint her with the situation at Pocket City, and how Dead-shot Dean had either been killed or made a prisoner for some purpose.

Horseshoe Ned listened attentively to all his fellow driver **had to say**, and then said:

"Now I'll tell you my story, pard."

"I wants ter hear it."

"Yer see, I hed give up ther thought o' being held up, knowing Buffalo Bill hed men on each trail, and was himself ter be found between this point and ther post."

"I see, but I didn't see none of ther scouts on my trail."

"They seen you, I guesses, for they is there. But I were suddenly brought to a halt by the masked outlaw, and his horse were mighty fresh looking for a animal as had been ridden as he hed ter ride ter hold you up at Paint Branch and then stop me at Robbers' Run."

"Waal, he did it," growled Frank.

"I ain't disputing your word, for I allows no man to dispute mine. But I does say that his horse looked uncommon fresh fer sich a gallop."

"Waal?"

"He told me I must excuse him, said he were sorry he were skeering all travel off ther trails, and hoped I hed something of value along. I lied to him and said I hed not, and he knows me to be thet truthful he tuk my word, only said as how he'd make a leetle search ter see if my memory were failin' me, fer he said I might hev forgot. Ther result were thet he got a boodle of small change going to the sutler at the post, and amounting to a couple of thousand dollars. Then he told me ter travel, and not ter let my memory fail me next time. So it were thet I drove

hard ter catch up with Buffalo Bill and his men, and put them on ther trail o' Silk-lasso Sam—Lord! see thar!"

As Horseshoe Ned spoke, Buffalo Bill came riding along the trail.

The faces of the two drivers of the Overland brightened as they saw the chief of scouts coming toward them.

Horseshoe Ned felt that he was repaid for the delay, as the scout came from a direction by which he would have missed him, but for his halt to talk with Four-in-hand Frank.

Buffalo Bill saw at a glance that something had gone wrong.

Horseshoe Ned was not due at the junction for half an hour yet, and Four-in-hand Frank was all of two hours ahead of time.

What it meant he must at once know, so he said, in his cheery way:

"Ho, pards, what's up?"

"You was first on ther spot, Pard Frank, so do your shoutin', and then I'll whisper my story ter Buffalo Bill," said the driver of Pioneer Post.

The story of Frank was soon told, and Buffalo Bill listened without a word.

Then he turned to the other, and said, without making any comment:

"It's your turn now, Ned."

The story of Horseshoe Ned was also told, the scout listening in silence.

Then Buffalo Bill asked:

"Ned, just when were you held up?"

The driver gave the time.

"How long have you been here?"

"Just twenty minutes."

"And it was at Robbers' Run that you were halted?"

"It were."

"Now, Frank, you were held up at Paint Branch?"

"I were."

"At what time?"

"Twelve o'clock, sharp."

"How long have you been here?"

"Just twenty-five minutes."

"You both say that it was Silk-lasso Sam who held you up?"

"We does."

"He was a stout man?"

"Yes, weighed all of two hundred and fifty."

"That's the man," echoed Ned.

"Had a mask?"

"He did."

"His beard shoved under it?"

"For sure."

"Rode a blood-bay horse?"

"Fact."

"Used a rifle instead of revolvers?"

"Yes, but had ther leetle guns strapped onto him."

"Well, the man could have gone over the range and done both the holding up of you, Ned, and Frank."

"But I do not believe it was the same man."

"I say my man was Silk-lasso Sam," said Ned.

"Says I thar same," chimed in Frank.

"Well, that is the question we are to solve. Now, Ned, you say he got a batch of money from you?"

"Yes, the sutler's."

"And a letter from you, Frank?"

"One ther jedge wrote ter Bonnie Belle, and other letters he opened, but that were ther only one he tuk."

"And Dead-shot Dean has disappeared?"

"He have."

"And all search for him has been of no avail?"

"We c'uldn't find him, Bill."

"You suspected Cast-iron Bill and others?"

"Yes, his gang of four are ther meanest galoots thar be in ther mines."

"You saw some of my men on your trail?"

"No."

"That was because you drove so fast you were ahead of time, for they were to have met you at Eagle Rocks and come on here behind you, but within hearing."

"I see."

"They will soon be here; but now, Ned, I wish you to push your team through on the jump to Pioneer Post."

"I'll do it, Bill."

"You will meet some of my men on the trail, so tell them to come to Robbers' Run to find me."

"Yes, Bill."

"When you reach the fort, go at once to Colonel Dunwoody, without a moment's delay, and tell him what has happened to you and to Frank."

"Yes."

"Say to Colonel Dunwoody that I would esteem it a great favor if he would send Pawnee Bill at once to meet me at Robbers' Run, for I need his valuable services; and more, to please write a letter to Miss Bonnie Belle, explaining to her the situation as you know it from your own experience and what Frank had said, that Dean has disappeared, and that there is no doubt but that this masked outlaw is Silk-lasso Sam."

"I'll be as exact as Scripture, Bill."

"And now get away with all speed."

"I'm off."

"And mounting his box, Horseshoe Ned sent his team rapidly away along the trail.

"Frank."

"Yes, Bill."

"I shall wait here the coming of my men, who should have followed close in behind you; but you push on until you meet some of my scouts and tell them to wait for me at Robbers' Run."

"I'll do it, Bill," and the driver of Yellow Dust Valley drove on, leaving the scout alone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NO CLEW.

Buffalo Bill did not have very long to wait for his men.

Soon after the departure of the two coaches, the clatter of hoofs was heard, and five scouts dashed into view.

They were on the trail of Four-in-hand Frank's coach and were coming at a sweeping gallop.

They soon arrived, and the leader called out:

"Ho, chief, have you seen Four-in-hand's coach?"

"Yes, Charlie, he has gone on the way to the station fifteen minutes ago."

"He had passed when we struck the trail, and the schedule must have changed, for he was ahead of time. We followed, but when we came to where the tracks showed he had been going at full speed, we saw that he was running from somebody, or the team was running away, so we let out in chase."

"He was held up by our masked outlaw, boys, and I have just sent to the fort for Pawnee Bill by Horseshoe Ned, who was also held up at Robbers' Run. I waited here for you, and now I wish three of you to go back to Paint Branch and pick up the trail of the outlaw there, for there is where he halted Frank's coach.

"See if it does not cross the range, and head toward Robbers' Run. I have sent by Ned for our boys between here and the fort on the trail, and we will all go to Robbers' Run and pick up the trail there. Now, Charlie, you and your two men go to Paint Branch, and try to get well along on the outlaws' trail before night."

"And then, chief?"

"Camp on the trail and pick it up at daylight, sending a man to report to me if it goes astray from my expectations, and look for me, or some one to tell you where I am, at Robbers' Run."

"All right, chief," and Charlie, the scout, and two others started back upon the trail by which they had come.

Buffalo Bill and the other two then mounted and rode back toward Robbers' Run, for there they must meet their comrades who were patrolling that part of the run, and perhaps find some clew to the man who had robbed Horseshoe Ned of the fort sutler's money.

Robbers' Run was in about the wildest part of the trail, and situated in a deep cañon between two lofty ranges.

It was a cut-off in good weather, but in the rainy season the "run" was a foaming river, and the drive that way could not be made.

The run had been the retreat of a band of outlaws at one time, and so gained its name of Robbers'

Run, though never before had there been known a coach to be held up there.

When Buffalo Bill and his two scouts with him reached Robbers' Run they found there the five men under Texas Jack, whom Four-in-hand Frank had met and sent to the spot according to orders.

Soon after they had gone into camp, the four from toward the post, informed by Horseshoe Ned, put in an appearance.

These completed the fifteen scouts, including Buffalo Bill, who were stationed on the three trails, so as to be within easy call, and from one to the other of which the chief of scouts went as he deemed necessary.

By so placing his men, having them each patrol some thirty miles of their respective coach trails, and going from one party to the other, Buffalo Bill hoped to at last catch the masked outlaw, be he Silkllasso Sam or not.

The moment that he reached the Robbers' Run, the chief of scouts looked over the situation.

There was the trail of the outlaw's horse, and it came down the run, and out of the bed of the shallow stream.

It had also gone back that way, entering the stream at the same place it left it, and what led the scout to feel that it was the same man who had held up Four-in-hand Frank was that the trail came from toward the range into the stream, and returned that way.

The next thing to do was to find where else the trail had entered and left the little stream.

It was nearly camping time, but leaving one man in camp to prepare supper, all the others were put upon the hunt for the trail.

Some went on horseback; some on foot.

A number went up the stream, and the rest went down it, the chief going with the latter party.

But just after sunset the men began to straggle into camp.

They came mostly alone, and they all had the same story to tell, which was that no trail could be found where it entered or left the stream.

Buffalo Bill was the last to come in, and he, too, admitted failure, as he remarked:

"That masked outlaw must be Silk-lasso Sam, for he is a wonder, and can cover up his tracks better than a redskin can."

The hope of Buffalo Bill was that the three scouts sent to the Paint Branch had found the trail of the man who had held up Four-in-hand Frank's coach, and would follow it on up to Robbers' Run.

That the two coaches had been robbed by the same man was the belief of all the scouts.

The night passed away and the scouts took the trail the next morning with the same result, however.

The three men sent to Paint Branch came in at noon with the others, and they had nothing gratifying to report.

They had found the trail at Paint Branch, leading from and into the water.

But further than this they had made no discovery.

They had searched thoroughly, up and down the stream for miles, but without result, and had come to where no horse could go up or down farther in the water, yet there was no trace on the banks to show where one had gone into it or left it.

Hence they had come to the Robber's Run as ordered.

As the coaches were both at rest and not on the trails east or west, they were in no danger, and so Buffalo Bill felt that he could devote his whole time and force for several days to searching for the outlaw, or outlaws, as the case might be.

He wondered at the nonarrival of Pawnee Bill, who was always so punctual.

Could Pawnee be away from the fort, or ill, he thought?

But in such a case, after his earnest request of Colonel Dunwoody for the services of his officer comrade, would not a courier have been sent to him with word of some kind?

Buffalo Bill was in a quandary as to just what to do, when he heard a cheer from his men, and a courier dashed into camp.

He had a letter from the colonel to Buffalo Bill, and another, which he said was to be sent on to the nearest station and mailed.

The letter from the colonel was as follows:

"DEAR CODY: Horseshoe Ned brought in last night your message, and told his story of having been held up, and that Frank, the Pocket City driver, had also been halted, presumably by the same man.

"Ned's coach had a breakdown, so he was delayed a couple of hours, coming in just as help was starting to him.

"Pawnee Bill started yesterday for Pocket City, so will learn all the news regarding the mysterious disappearance of the miner Dean, and will doubtless return at once to the fort.

"For fear he might not do so, I sent Wild Bill last night to Pocket City to find him, and have him go via the coach trail from Yellow Dust Valley, to join you at Robbers' Run, as requested.

"I have written the letter to Ruth as you suggested, and send it by this courier, to mail at nearest mailing station.

"I have told her that it is believed that the masked outlaw, who robbed her, and has since pretty regularly held up the coaches, is Silk-lasso Sam, and that she must not censure any of us if he is killed, or if captured, quickly put to death.

"I have also told her of the unaccountable disappearance of Dead-shot Dean, and hinted that which may not have occurred to you, that perhaps the masked outlaw had done away with him.

"I feel that you are doing all in your power to capture this man, and are going the right way about it, by your persistent hanging upon the trails.

"There is an odd old character here who came in on Horseshoe Ned's coach, some runs ago, and who is Colonel de Sutro's guest.

"He is called to Ancient Sport at the officers' club, has white hair, dresses like a dandy, and devotes himself to the ladies, while he will persist in taking long rides on horseback alone, or with company if he can get it.

"He is very rich, and wears jewels amounting to a small fortune, so keep an eye as close to the fort as possible, as if he was taken by the masked outlaw, he could be bled for a very large sum.

"I trust Pawnee will be with you soon after my courier arrives, and I know well what you two are worth, once you put your heads together on a trail.

"I have just ordered the commissary to send you ample stores, and a score of fresh horses will go along, too, for those of your men who may need to make a change of mounts.

"Send the courier on at once, and let me have word by him of what has been done, when he returns by your camp.

"Wishing you success, yours, DUNWOODY."

The scout told the courier just where to go, after he had read this letter, and as he had ridden hard, gave him a fresh horse and ordered him to push on

and catch the coach that left the junction station with mail on the next morning.

Hardly had the courier departed, when the scouts gave another cheer, and looking up quickly, Buffalo Bill saw Pawnee Bill ride into camp, and he was not alone, either.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PAWNEE BILL IN ACTION.

Judge Scott King, the Vigilante captain, had decided that it would be a good thing to let the news of Dead-shot Dean's disappearance be known to Pawnee Bill.

He had accordingly employed a hanger-on about the mines to take a letter to Pioneer Post and deliver it into the hands of Pawnee Bill.

It was this letter which had caused Pawnee Bill to set off at once for Yellow Dust Valley, and not sparing his horse, he had gone there in rapid time.

After an interview with the "judge," he had, having asked many questions, and studied the case pretty thoroughly, come to his own conclusion in the matter, and which he expressed to Scott King as follows:

"The miner may, or may not be dead; but my opinion is that the masked outlaw has to do with his disappearance."

"The masked outlaw?"

"Yes."

"I don't see how."

"Why not?"

"It's the men who hated him in Yellow Dust Valley."

"It may be, but why not the masked outlaw, who

also had reason to hate him, and to do away with him, too?"

"One man could hardly get away with Dead-shot Dean."

"I have had the same opinion of some men, and found myself deceived, for treachery and ambush can kill the strongest of men."

"You are right there, sir."

"Now, I happen to know there is the best of reasons for believing that this outlaw went to the home of Dead-shot Dean, and went there prepared to act threateningly, if need be. Perhaps he may have had Cast-iron Bill and his gang as allies, for he does not care to play a lone hand in the work he is doing."

"That's so, but I hardly thought of them as the allies of the outlaw."

"Yet Cast-iron Bill bears upon the back of his right hand the brand of Buffalo Bill, and it stamps him as an outlaw, for he was found among Silk-lasso Sam's men at his retreat, but escaped as he claimed to be a prisoner of the outlaws. Now, if caught in any other work, he will quickly suffer for it, wearing that brand as he does, for you remember he was the ringleader of the attack upon Dead-shot Dean's cabin."

"So he was."

"And if the outlaw comrade or spy, of Silk-lasso Sam before he was captured, why not afterward, for you know that the chief came here after his escape?"

"Very true, sir."

"So I say that he is the ally of Silk-lasso Sam, or of this masked outlaw, be he whom he may. I happen to know how to enter the cabin of Dead-shot Dean, for he showed me the secret, and I will go there and see just how matters look, as regards his intentional going away or not, though I believe that it was unintentional, and, furthermore, my opinion is that he is not dead, but a prisoner."

"I hope so, for then we can hope to see him again."

"I will go to his cabin to-night, remain there, and take the trail on the morrow, and follow it to the end."

"You are the man to find the end, Pawnee Bill, once you start on it. But stay to supper here to-night with me, and go on later to the miner's cabin; that is——" and the judge paused.

"Well, judge?"

"That is——" and the judge looked confused.

"You appear to wish to say something, judge, and yet you feel a hesitancy about it."

"Well, you know, Pawnee Bill, Dead-shot Dean is the only man in these parts who will go and come by the Hangman's Gulch after dark."

"Ah!"

"He is the only miner who lives beyond the line of cabins in Pocket City in that direction, and on account of its bad name, that it is haunted, no one cares to go by there after sunset, and, in fact, they shun it, most of them, by sunlight, too, and I thought maybe you would not wish to go either."

"Do not worry on that account, judge, for I don't believe in ghosts."

Pawnee Bill enjoyed his supper at The Frying Pan, and a cigar after it.

His horse had a rest and was well cared for, and later on he mounted and rode away for the cabin of the miner, Dead-shot Dean.

The judge saw him ride away with many misgivings, in spite of his assertion that he had no fear of spooks and the supernatural in general.

The judge promised to ride over to the cabin after sunup.

Pawnee rode quietly on his way toward the cabin of Dead-shot Dean.

Those who saw him leaving the camps at night, and going toward Hangman's Gulch, wondered at his temerity, and shook their heads ominously.

He passed on until he came to Hangman's Gulch, and boldly rode in.

Pausing by the gallows, he sat upon his horse, gazing about him silently, his eyes resting upon the graves of the dead, and they were many who had perished there at the rope's end.

Presently he turned his horse and rode slowly out of Hangman's Gulch, and then on to the cabin.

He staked his horse out near, then went to the door and went to the hiding place where the miner had shown him and Buffalo Bill, where he would put a duplicate key to the padlock.

It was there, and he opened the lock and then carried out the instructions given him to open the door.

A hidden string drawn upon, raised the bar that crossed the door within, and then he had free entrance.

Lighting a match, he soon had a lamp lit, and closing the door, looked about him.

There was no indication that the miner had intended to leave the cabin.

His clothes were there, save those he had on when he left; his new repeating rifle was hung on the wall, and his belt of arms was there, though, of course, he was supposed to have that on about his waist.

"That looks bad, as though he had been caught without his weapons. I have not forgotten his letter in his pocketbook, making an appointment here with Silk-lasso Sam, and hoping thus to catch him, or kill him.

"Both Buffalo Bill and myself warned him that it would be best for one of us to remain here with him, and aid in the capture, and the result is he has been caught at a disadvantage.

"Now, to find out what has become of him, and Buffalo Bill must help me do this, for Dean is too noble a fellow to desert when he needs our aid."

Pawnee Bill now made himself comfortable for the night, slept soundly until daybreak, then went out, led his horse to water, and staked him in a fresh pasturage, when he returned and built a fire to get his breakfast.

He had no difficulty in finding plenty of food, and had just finished his breakfast of coffee, crackers, and broiled bacon, when up rode the judge.

"Ho, judge, did you see any ghosts as you came by Hangman's Gulch this morning?"

"No, but the place looked awful damp, dismal, and weird. Did you see any last night?"

"Sorry to say I did not, sir."

"You got into the cabin all right, I see."

"Oh, yes, and all I can discover is that whoever came here surprised Dead-shot Dean unarmed, and so got the advantage of him."

"That's about it, for if he had not been surprised, there would not have been some deaders around to show for it."

"Yes, and if killed, his body would have been found."

"But I'm not done, Pawnee, for there's a courier here from the fort, and he's hitching the horses."

"A courier?" and Pawnee Bill stepped forward and greeted the messenger, who handed him a letter from Colonel Dunwoody.

"Ah! Four-in-hand Frank was held up on his run out, judge, and Horseshoe Ned on his run in, and I have instructions to go and join Buffalo Bill at Robbers' Run, so I will start at once."

Ten minutes after, Pawnee Bill was following the stage trail, and about noon reached Paint Branch.

He had just ridden out of the water, when there came the sharp crack of a rifle from ambush, and, reeling in his saddle, Pawnee Bill fell heavily to the ground as his horse gave a spring forward, startled at the shot.

CHAPTER XXV.

UNMASKED.

The shot from ambush, the puff of smoke revealed, came from over the top of a boulder on the side of the hill sloping down to Paint Branch.

Hardly had Pawnee Bill fallen from his saddle, when a man's form appeared, standing on top of the boulder, his rifle held in hand, the muzzle still smoking.

The man was very stout of frame, his face was masked, and, in fact, he was none other than the mysterious outlaw accused of being Silk-lasso Sam.

He saw Pawnee Bill writhe as though in agony, give a convulsive movement, and then lie motionless.

"That fixed him. I took dead-sure aim, and knew it would, though knowing who he was, my hand was a little trickery toward me, as not to kill meant a fight for life for me.

"Yes, he's dead, and I'll see what it sums up more than revenge, a horse, and weapons." With this the masked outlaw walked toward the prostrate form of Pawnee Bill.

On the way he started to catch Pawnee Bill's horse and had to run for his life, as the infuriated animal came dashing at him savagely, his ears laid back, teeth showing, and eyes flashing.

The outlaw sprang into a thicket to save his life,

Unmasked.

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and also because he did not wish to kill the horse, which was a splendid animal.

The horse followed him, his loose bridle reins caught on the bushes, and he was secured.

"The vicious devil! Now I have him secure," said the outlaw, and, making a flank movement, he again approached the prostrate officer.

Bending over him, he turned him upon his back, when, suddenly, the two hands flew up, and he was seized in a grip of steel and dragged down upon the ground, while, with a wonderfully active movement, Pawnee Bill wheeled himself on top of his foe and had him wholly at his mercy.

A quick blow in the face partially dazed him, then a grip was caught upon his throat with one hand, while the other drew and thrust a revolver into his masked face.

"Surrender, or die!" was the stern command.

"I does."

The weapons of the man were then taken from him, and he was searched for others that might be hidden about him.

But nothing more than his belt of arms and rifle were found.

Then Pawnee Bill drew his mask quickly from his face.

With it came a false beard, and then a face was revealed that only a villain could possess.

"Who are you?"

"Nobody."

"Well, you soon will be."

"Why?"

"I think you will be hanged in just about three days."

"What fer?"

"Because you deserve it."

"What has I done?"

"You fired from ambush at a scout in discharge of his duty."

"I wish I had kilt yer."

"You came very near it, for your bullet grazed my head, and, fearing a second shot, I dropped from my horse and played 'possum."

"I thought you was a outlaw I was a-hunting fer."

"Well, you are an outlaw I was hunting for, as you are the man who held up Four-in-hand Frank's coach in its outward run."

"'Tain't no such thing."

"Oh, yes, and you are the man whom we have supposed was Silk-lasso Sam in disguise."

"I ain't."

"Yes, and you have a very good grip, for I know you, having heard you called Grip Saunders at Pocket City when I was there."

"I ain't."

"Oh, yes you are, for I know your face, though with all this wadding on and extra clothing, you have made a regular Barnum's fat man of yourself. Why did you do this?"

"I was cold."

"You'll be still colder soon."

"Don't talk that-a-way, pard, 'cause it makes chills chase up and down my back."

"With all that clothing on, you have chills?"

"Ain't yer goin' ter let me go?"

"When you get to the end of your rope, yes. Now I'll see if I can find a letter I was told the coach was robbed of."

The search quickly revealed the letter to Bonnie Belle the mail bag had been robbed of.

"I want no further proof. Where is your horse?"

"I ain't got none."

"That I shall see, when I have left you in the keeping of mine."

"Oh, don't, for I has a horse."

"Where is he?"

"Over yonder, behind the rocks."

"We'll find him."

Pawnee Bill now went to his own horse, and, taking his lariat, quickly bound his prisoner.

The horse eyed the man viciously, but considered him in safe keeping, for he did not attack him as the outlaw feared he would.

"Stand there, sir. Now, Lucifer, watch, and if he attempts to bolt, you know what to do."

Then the scout left and soon returned from among the rocks with the horse of the prisoner.

He was a fine, large, blood-bay animal.

The man then mounted upon his own horse, and Pawnee Bill said:

"Now, Grip Saunders, we will go and find Buffalo Bill."

"Oh, Lordy," groaned the prisoner, and he turned a shade whiter than he was.

* * * * *

When Pawnee Bill rode into Buffalo Bill's camp of scouts at Robbers' Run, he was greeted with a shout of welcome.

This quickly was changed into shouts of triumph as he was seen to be accompanied by a stranger.

For the first time in his life, Buffalo Bill felt a pang of envy, when he saw that the stranger was a prisoner; was mounted upon a large, blood-bay horse, and wore a mask, beneath the skirt of which a beard was visible.

He was also dressed as it was always reported the masked outlaw had been, and apparently a fat man.

"Well, you've got him, I see, and I envy you," said Buffalo Bill, holding out his hand to his friend.

"I've got this one, yes, Bill, but he gave me a close call, for do you see this cut on my head, within half an inch of my temple?"

"He ambushed you?"

"He did."

"I tuk him fer a man as was lookin' fer me ter kill me," growled the man.

"Well, you were not far wrong, for I was looking for you to kill you, and though I did not do so when I could have shot you down, for you believed me to be dead, the chances are that you will hang, if we get

you to the fort, and if I took you back to Pocket City, Judge King would be sure to turn you over to the Vigilantes."

"Don't take me thar, I begs you."

"Well, we know you for what you are, for Bill, here is the letter which Colonel Dunwoody wrote me had been taken from the mail bag, and which was addressed to Bonnie Belle."

"That hangs him," muttered Buffalo Bill, as he took the letter and glanced at it.

Then he said:

"Hold out your right hand—there!"

The man did so, not knowing what the scout was doing, when he took a small bottle from his pocket and a stamp.

Quick as a flash the brand of B. B., with the liquid upon it, was pressed down upon the man's hand, and the outlaw started back with a cry of alarm.

"You need not be alarmed, for save for a slight smarting, it will not harm you, and yet if you live a hundred years you will wear my brand."

"Your brand?" gasped the man, glancing at the red letters upon his hand.

"Yes, I have branded you for future reference."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DISGUISED OUTLAW.

The conversation held between the pretended old gentleman Mayhew and Nina de Sutro, when he revealed to the astonished girl just who he was, left Nina de Sutro as hard hit as she had ever before been in her life.

She was white as death, and glared at the man with a look that showed how she longed to be able to kill him then and there.

"Yes," she at last said between her teeth. "You are Silk-lasso Sam."

"I am."

"Now, I ask you what is going to be the ending of all this, the result of your coming here, other than my total destruction?"

"I do not see how it will affect you."

"Are you not the guest of my adopted father and guardian, Lieutenant Colonel de Sutro?"

"Yes."

"And you have come for deviltry?"

"I have come for money."

"Then I will give you all I can and let you go."

"What you can give me is not to be taken into consideration."

"What then?"

"How much can you give me?"

The Disguised Outlaw.

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"A thousand dollars, or so, for you got from me all I could spare when you were a prisoner here before; yes, and I hurt myself and nearly got into trouble from going to see you."

"A thousand dollars, you said?"

"Yes."

"Why, girl, I have five times that sum in jewels about me, and I had ten thousand in money when my sister gave me as much more at the time she rescued me."

"Yes, and you stole her jewels and as much more money when you held up the coach in which she was a passenger on her way home."

"Who said I did?"

"I say so."

"Can you prove it?"

"I know that your disguises are wonderful, and you are Silk-lasso Sam, and you are, therefore, none other than the masked outlaw of the Overland, whom all fear so."

"Then, if you know this, be warned and give me the aid I demand, for I have come here to better my fortunes by many thousands of dollars, and then go my way to where I can enjoy my life free of deadly peril each day."

"I must know all that you demand."

"First tell me," said the outlaw very quietly. "Have you looked over your accounts with Colonel de Sutro?"

"What do you mean?"

"You will be of age very soon?"

"Yes."

"Then you are to have your fortune turned over to your keeping, by the terms of the will?"

"I am."

"You were left some three hundred thousand dollars?"

"Just that."

"The legal interest on that sum would bring in, in the eight years the colonel has handled it, say about fifty thousand dollars."

"Well?"

"How much have you had?"

"I have had on an average two thousand a year, for as a girl I got less, of course, for my needs. Yes, I have had in all twenty thousand dollars."

"And the balance of interest?"

"I remember that Colonel de Sutro told me that he had in interest some thirty thousand to turn over to me, above my principal and expenditures."

"Then you consider that correct?"

"I do, and is it not?"

"Well, yes, in law, but not morally."

"What do you know about morals?"

"Everything, though I possess none."

"Well, what about this inheritance, which I believe you are trying to make me believe my guardian is defrauding me out of?"

"Nothing of the kind, for he will turn over to you

your three hundred thousand dollars and your interest."

"What do you mean, then?"

"I mean that he has the handling of the money, and, though giving all to you back again, he has invested sums that have paid him well, has lent money out at a large interest, and hence has made, in the eight years' use of your money, a large fortune, half the amount of yours, for himself. Now, I want you to get from him ten thousand dollars, as a gift to me from you, a parting gift, for I never shall see you again."

"So you said before."

"You will still have twenty thousand interest money and your fortune besides, and I need what you will give me."

"And you will go then?"

"That is your gift to me, remember."

"What else do you demand?"

"You hate Miss Clarice Carr?"

"I do not love her."

"Well, with a woman that is equivalent to hate."

"What then?"

"She is very rich, and can command big money if need be. If she has none here, the paymaster, under the colonel's order, will pay it, and I shall place her ransom at twenty thousand dollars."

"You name large sums."

"Yes, for I intend to fly high when I get to a foreign land. I have already won a few thousands in

money since I have been here, and shall take in much more, for I will have a game with young Turpin, who thinks he plays well, and with Caruth, another expert with the cards.

"I shall also get a few thousands out of Colonel de Sutro, so I will pick up all of ten thousand in the fort, and with the ransom of the beautiful Carr and your money, along with what I have, I will be able to get out of the country with quite a handsome sum."

"Have you any other demands to make of me?" she said, almost savagely.

"Yes."

"What are they?"

"You are outwardly friendly with Miss Carr?"

"Yes."

"You can ask her to go with you for a ride."

"Why?"

"Well, that is my plot."

"What plot?"

"You are to go with her for a ride, and I am to happen to join you and go as an escort."

"Well?"

"We are to take a certain trail."

"Yes."

"And we are to run into a trap."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE REFUSAL.

The prisoner, Grip Saunders, was brought before the chief of scouts and his captor.

He looked anxious, yet sullen, and glared at the red scar on his hand as though he could eat it out.

"That is only a blister now, Grip Saunders, and when it heals will be a pretty red mark, my brand," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, and some day it may be my chance to brand you, Buffalo Bill."

"It may be, but I doubt it. The fact is, Outlaw Saunders, that there has been so much doubt raised as to who is and who is not an outlaw, that I am determined to stand it no longer, and every man I know to be one, I shall brand, so that when I see him again, I will know him.

"Now, should you escape, and be recaptured, I will be sure of you, and can appear against you at a trial anywhere as one who wears my brand.

"Then, too, there is your friend, Cast-iron Bill, for he wears my brand, and when we get him to the fort with you——"

"Get him to the fort?" yelled the startled prisoner.

"Yes, why not, for we shall get you there?"

"Is Cast-iron Bill a prisoner?"

"My dear Mr. Saunders, unless you take advantage

of the offer we make you to tell where the balance of your comrades are—name them please, Pawnee Bill."

"The original five allies of Silk-lasso Sam, who left Pocket City to join him," said Pawnee Bill, glancing at a paper as though reading, and looking as if he had all the facts in the case, "were Cast-iron Bill, who was leader. Then came Grip Saunders, Ugly Dan, Card-sharp Dave, and Wild West Will.

"Now, we have yet to account for Silk-lasso Sam, Wild West Will, Ugly Dan, and Card-sharp Dave, for you know about Cast-iron Bill and the prisoner here, Cody."

The serious tone of Pawnee Bill, and his referring to a paper, threw the prisoner off guard.

Buffalo Bill had made a clever play to cause the prisoner to believe that Cast-iron Bill was also their captive, and Pawnee Bill had cleverly carried out the play.

The prisoner looked very crestfallen as the thought came over him that Cast-iron Bill might win the freedom now offered to him.

But he was determined to go about his plans very slowly, to act for himself and against his comrades, so he said:

"Waal, ef yer has Cast-iron Bill a prisoner, why do you not get what you want ter know from him?"

"You have the prior claim, that is why," answered Cody.

Buffalo Bill then called Texas Jack and said to him

that the prisoner was left in his keeping, and they would be gone for some little while.

At the same time he slipped a paper into the hand of Texas Jack, and the two mounted their horses and rode away, the prisoner appearing several times as though about to call them back, though he did not do so.

When Texas Jack slipped off to himself and read the slip of paper, which had been given him by Buffalo Bill, he found it as follows:

"We can force the prisoner to no terms, for he knows, as government officers, we dare not either hang him, or turn him over to Scott King's Vigilantes.

"When we are gone, upon some excuse, pretend that you intend to hang him, and only spare his life upon condition that he makes a clean confession of where his confederates in crime are, but under no circumstances do him the slightest injury."

Texas Jack read this over twice, and then sought one of the scouts.

"Tom Ribbons, who was killed by Silk-lasso Sam, was your brother?"

"Yes, and I want ter see him hanged before I'll sleep well o' nights, Jack."

"Now read this, what Buffalo Bill has written me, and then you pretend the man is the one who killed your brother, Ribbons, the driver of the Overland, and call on the boys to help you hang him.

"I'll see the boys and we'll try and scare him into a confession, for he refuses to tell anything to Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill."

"All right, Jack, you see the boys, and I'll do my part first class," was the answer of Trailer Tom, the scout.

Texas Jack gradually got around among the boys and told them his plan, and then gave the signal to Trailer Tom.

He soon after sauntered up to the prisoner and said:

"See here, ain't you Grip Saunders?"

"I is so called."

"Don't yer know me?"

"I does not."

"Don't I remind you of somebody?"

"Who?"

"Somebody you kilt?"

"I never kilt nobody."

"Oh, yes, you did."

"Who did I kill?"

"My brother."

"I never seen yer brother."

"Yer has."

"Who were he?"

"Ribbons."

"Ther driver on ther Pioneer Post Branch trail?"

"Yes."

"It were Silk-lasso Sam kilt him."

"Oh, no, you is ther man, and I has vowed to

avenge my brother. Ho, pards, help me hang this feller, for I knows him now."

Quick as a flash he had cast the noose of his lariat over the neck of the prisoner, who was securely bound, and the scouts came rushing toward the two.

Grip Saunders saw his danger at a glance, and he turned very pale.

"Pards, this is the man who kilt my poor brother, Ribbons, showing him no mercy. I recognize him, and I say if he goes to ther fort then he gets a trial and maybe goes free. We kin hang him, then I'll put a bullet in him and say he tried to escape, and I shot him, so that will be all the obituary he'll need. Pards, who's with me to string him up?"

A chorus of voices came in response, and a dozen hands grasped the other end of the lariat.

It was Texas Jack who spoke.

"What is it, Jack?"

"That man has valuable information which Chief Cody wants to get from him, I am pretty certain, and if you hang him, then the trail's ended."

"Then he shall talk afore we hangs him, Jack."

"Well, boys, set him free, and we'll hear what he has to say, for I know that you'll side with me, and not with Trailer Tom."

"We'll do it, Jack, and woe be unto him if he slips up on the truth," said one of the scouts, and he set Saunders free.

"Now, Saunders, tell your story, and if it is not

true, and we'll soon know, then the boys will hange you and I'll not raise a finger to protect you."

"What does you wish to know?"

"Where is Silk-lasso Sam?"

"In hiding."

"Where?"

"At Paint Branch, in a cave there in the cliffs."

"And his men?"

"They are there with him."

"How many of them?"

"Four."

"Who are they?"

"Cast-iron Bill, Ugly Dan, Wild West Will, and Card-sharp Dave."

"Where is this cave?"

"There is some bushes grows right whar I was when Pawnee Bill captured me, and behind them is ther cave."

"And the outlaw chief is there with his men?"

"He is."

"Five in all?"

"Yes."

"You can guide us there when Chief Cody comes back?"

"Yes."

"Then you have saved your neck by your confession," said Texas Jack.

A few minutes later, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill appeared and were told what had happened.

The party then mounted, and, with the prisoner

riding ahead with Buffalo Bill, they set off for the Paint Branch.

It was an hour before sunset when they came within sight of the branch, and Pawnee Bill called a halt.

"Bill, let me speak to you a minute."

"Yes, Pawnee."

"I am going to play fat outlaw, mask and all, and you must play prisoner."

"I don't understand."

"Why, I shall rig up in that fellow's clothes and mask, mount his horse, pretend to tie you to your horse, and we will go forward, while we'll bind and gag our man, leave him here, and the scouts can creep near on foot to be within call, for I do not like the look upon that fellow's face, for he means treachery."

"We'll do as you say, Pawnee," was the ready answer of Buffalo Bill.

Later, Pawnee Bill, in his disguise, mounted the bay horse of the prisoner, and, leading the animal ridden by Buffalo Bill, the two set off together for the cave.

The scout appeared to have his hands bound behind him, and his feet fastened under his horse, but it was not the case, for he could free himself in an instant.

They boldly rode up to the cliff, in which was the cave, and suddenly from the top of a large tree came a voice:

"Is that you, chief?"

Then peered a man out of a large tree, growing close to the cliff, and a limb ran back against the rocks.

"No, I'm Grip Saunders," answered Pawnee Bill, and he added:

"Yer see, I has got Buffalo Bill fer a prisoner."

"I does, and we thoughted you hed been kilt, but thar is nobody here now."

"Whar is they?"

"Cast-iron Bill come arter Ugly Dan and Card-sharp Dave, ter go up and help the chief kidnap some prisoners, and I remained, ter look arter ther horses and ther camp."

"All right, come and help me with my prisoner, fer I expects ther scouts is on our trail."

"Then we ends them with ther cave-in, as we is sworn ter do, for any one who enters ther secret cave and don't know ther ropes, that ends 'em, yer know."

Pawnee Bill gave a quick glance at Buffalo Bill, for both saw the fate the prisoner had intended for the scouts, to get his revenge.

In response to Pawnee Bill's request to come down and help him with his prisoner, the man disappeared by walking along the limb to the cliff, upon which he leaped.

Then he went up the rocky wall for a short distance, and was lost from sight in a crevice.

"What do you think of that, Bill?" asked Pawnee Bill, in a whisper.

"If you had not played outlaw, we would have been trapped by that fellow."

"It is just what he intended to do, and how we

must find out, so be ready to capture this one when he joins us."

"I'll be ready. It must be Wild West Will, as we have Grip Saunders, and Cast-iron Bill took Card-sharp Dave and Ugly Dan off to join the chief."

"Yes, to aid in kidnaping some one."

"But who?"

"Some one from the fort; but here he comes."

There was heard a rustling sound toward the rocks, the bushes were pushed aside, and the outlaw who had been up in the tree appeared.

"Fetch him along, Grip," he called out.

"Come here, Wild West Will, and help me, for Buffalo Bill ain't no slouch ter handle," said Pawnee.

"All right," and Wild West Will approached the two, while he said, without any slang:

"I hate to see you a prisoner, Buffalo Bill, for I have always admired you, and this will be your end, of course, for Silk-lasso Sam shows no mercy, except for gold."

He had approached the two now, and Pawnee had dismounted, and suddenly Buffalo Bill threw himself from his horse directly upon the outlaw.

At the same time Pawnee Bill clapped a revolver to his head, and said:

"You must surrender, Wild West Will, for you have no chance."

"I haven't, that's a fact, so I do surrender. But what a clever rope-in!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE GAME FOR GOLD.

It was with a very heavy heart that Nina de Sutro rode back to the fort with the Ancient Sport.

She felt that she was again in the power of the man whom she had most reason to dread, and knew that he traded upon her fears that he would expose her secret of her marriage to him to force her to obey his wishes.

That she held him in her power, too, was simply to her mind an offset of her secret, without the power to force him to yield to her demand that he should either leave the fort and her forever, or be exposed.

She had, therefore, been forced to tacitly consent to his plot, hoping that when his game was played through, his plot accomplished, she would be forever free of him.

So it was that she asked Clarice Carr to accompany her upon her ride one afternoon, following the plot with her outlaw husband.

Clarice had been wishing for an outing, so had gladly consented, and the two had ridden off together.

Not far from the fort they had been joined by the Ancient Sport, and he had urged to be their escort.

Nina had consented, and so Clarice could not do otherwise, though she did not like the supposed old man.

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Away they had gone then together, the escort urging them to go with him to a glen where there was a great quantity of beautiful wild flowers.

It was rather farther than they had wished to ride, but "Mr. Mayhew" urged so earnestly, that they acquiesced, and rode rapidly to get back to the fort before dark.

The glen was reached, and it was seen that their escort had not exaggerated in the least, for there was a wealth of wild flowers.

The two ladies dismounted, their escort led their horses away to make them fast, and the flowers were plucked with many expressions of delight at their beauty.

But suddenly Nina uttered a cry that startled Clarice, as she beheld Mr. Mayhew struggling in the grasp of two men, who had suddenly sprung upon him.

At the same moment a man sprang toward them, and grasped each by the arm.

"Hold on, my beauties, for you are my game!" he cried.

Resistance was useless, for Mr. Mayhew had been overpowered, and was seen to have been manacled, and the two men came rapidly to the aid of the one who had made the two ladies captive.

Both Clarice and Nina always carried a weapon, when riding, but they were in their saddle holsters.

"Young ladies, I mean you no harm, nor any to that old gentleman, if you will accompany me quietly.

I want money, big money, and I can get it through ransoming you, for I know, Miss Carr, that you are a very rich woman; Miss de Sutro is also, and I take it the old cove there has plenty of gold at his command.

"I must take you all to my retreat, and just as soon as I can do so with safety, I'll open negotiations for your ransom and restoration to your friends."

"Are you Silk-lasso Sam?" asked Clarice coldly, for the man was masked.

"I am not, but I am a man just as much in earnest in what I say as he ever was."

"We can but submit, only do not bind us."

"You must be tied to your saddles, for you are both dangerous, as I know."

Their horses were brought up, and they both mounted.

Then a lariat was passed around their waists and under their horses, so as to secure them from slipping from their saddles on the way when darkness came on.

The Ancient Sport was also told to mount, and he, too, was tied in his saddle, and his hands being manacled, escape for him seemed impossible.

The outlaws then mounted their horses, and one leading, the other two following the prisoners, they started upon their way.

"Where are you taking us?" asked Clarice, as the sun drew near the horizon.

"To my retreat."

"Is it far from here?"

"Yes, for we will not reach there before dawn."

"You are not Silk-lasso Sam?"

"I am not."

"So I see now."

"How?"

"You have a brand upon your hand which he did not have."

"Curses upon that hand, and the man who put it there!" came with savage earnestness from the outlaw's lips.

"Ah! It is B. B.; that must have been put there by Buffalo Bill, as his brand," continued Clarice.

The man gritted his teeth, but made no reply, and soon after Clarice asked:

"When do you intend to restore us to our friends?"

"When your ransom is paid."

"How are you going to get it?"

"I will find a way."

"May I suggest a plan?"

"What is it?"

"As we are more likely to be ransomed out, being women, than a man would be, suppose you send this old gentleman back to the fort with your terms, appointing a place to meet him, and, when you receive your money, giving us back into his keeping?"

"Yes, and have him bring Captain Dick Caruth and his troopers to pounce upon me and capture me and my money?"

"No, I would not do that, if I vowed not to do so," said the pretended old man.

"What ransom do you intend to ask for us?" persisted Clarice.

"I shall put the figure high for you, twenty thousand dollars, for you are worth it, Miss Carr."

"That is high, and a sum not readily obtainable here; but large as it is, I would rather pay it than remain a moment longer than necessary in your hateful keeping; but would you not accept that sum for all?"

"Oh, no!"

"Why not?"

"Well, I want ten thousand for the old man, and ten thousand for you, Miss de Sutro, and I know that I can get it."

"I doubt it for one, unless my good friend, Colonel de Sutro, will honor my order for it," said Mayhew.

"You will have to pay it or die; that is all there is about it. Outlaw business is playing out on this frontier, and we have got to strike for big money and get away before our necks are stretched. I want just what I say, and not one of you go free until I get my money in hand, paid."

"And how will you get it?"

"I will have to let the old man go back as you suggested, Miss Carr, and get it. When he does get it, he can go in Horseshoe Ned's coach on its eastward run, and I'll meet him somewhere on the trail and have you not far away to give into his charge

when I get the money. That is the game I play, and no other."

"And when will he go back to the fort, for our friends will be anxious about us?" asked Clarice.

"He can start back now, for nobody can follow our trail once night comes on, for we know how to hide it," was the outlaw's response.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DASHING DICK TAKES THE TRAIL.

Captain Dick Caruth was fond of long horseback rides alone.

Especially was this the case when he had any work to perform, and upon the evening when Clarice Carr and Nina de Sutro went out on a ride, he felt that he had work to do, and set about its accomplishment in a very systematic manner.

The truth was that Captain Dick Caruth did not like the Ancient Sport.

He had played with him and caught him cheating, he felt sure.

He had seen him on several occasions when he did not move like a man with the weight of his years.

Again, he had observed him take too many horseback rides alone.

He said nothing to any one about suspecting the old man, for the two whom he would have consulted, both Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill, were absent.

But he decided to watch the old man.

On the day in question, when the Ancient Sport had joined Clarice and Nina in their ride, Dick Caruth had observed him, from a distance, with his glass, meet three horsemen and hold a conversation with them.

He had seen him meet a horseman twice before, and say nothing about it upon his return to the fort.

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So he decided to follow these horsemen.

He did so, at a distance, not wishing to have them see him, and, after a dozen miles, they had halted in a glen.

Captain Caruth took up a position a long way off, upon a hill, and watched through his glass.

He saw them go into ambush, as it were.

Soon after, up came three others on horseback, and the horsemen had disappeared.

These were the Ancient Sport and the two ladies.

Captain Dick Caruth regretted that he was not half a mile nearer to the scene, for he soon saw that his services were needed.

He saw, in fact, the capture of the party from the fort.

To dash out then and attempt a rescue would have been madness, and so he felt that all he could do would be to bide his time and follow.

This he decided to do, for he could keep in sight, and thus track them to their den.

He had now come to the conclusion that the old man was a fraud, a scamp playing a kidnaping game.

So he quietly took up the trail, and followed, as he was determined to go to the end of it.

"If I only had Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill with me, or half a dozen of my own gallant troopers," he said over and over again.

But wishing did no good, and he stuck to his trailing, and a good trailer he was.

As it grew toward sunset he suddenly drew his

horse back behind a rock, for he saw that the party ahead had halted.

After a short halt, one of them came riding back upon the trail, while the captors with their captives went on at a more rapid pace.

It was the one who was coming back who interested the captain now.

It was the old man, he saw.

The captain always carried a lariat, and he knew well how to use it.

He now got it ready for use, and then drew his revolver and held it in his left hand, ready.

Soon the old man came within range, and the lariat was thrown.

As it left his hand, the captain threw himself from his saddle and ran forward.

He was just in time to clap his revolver upon the old man as he fell to the ground, for the lariat had dragged him from his saddle, the captain's well-trained horse having stood firm as a rock.

In the fall the gray wig had come off with the hat, and when the captain had torn off the gold spectacles, he said:

"Well, Silk-lasso Sam, we meet again."

"Who calls me Silk-lasso Sam?" and the man groaned as though in anguish.

"Come, you are not hurt, and can play no tricks on me. See, this hump is a false one, and—take that!"

The outlaw had been groaning in apparent anguish, but had suddenly made a spring at his captor, to re-

ceive a blow from the revolver of the captain full in the face.

Before he could rally from its stunning effects, he was bound securely by the captain, who said:

"This time, Silk-lasso Sam, there will be no escape for you. Come, you are to mount your horse and go with me, and I'll pick up that trail to-morrow at daylight, for I'll be on the spot ready, and without you to guide them, your men will soon be run down."

He had now bound his prisoner beyond all chance of escape, and, catching his horse, led him up.

"You must mount, Silk-lasso Sam."

"I will not."

"Then I will see how much torture you will stand," and the captain drew his knife.

"Do not do that; I will mount."

And he did.

Then he was secured to his saddle, and the captain was about to start for the fort, when, suddenly, he saw a party of horsemen approaching.

"Ah! They are the fort cowboys. Now I can send you on with them, and word, too, for my troop to follow, while I go on and keep up with the captors of those young ladies. You have made a misdeal this time, Silk-lasso Sam."

"Those cowboys will hang me, if you give me over to their keeping."

"It is just what I hope they will do," was the vehement response.

The cowboys, a score in number, now came up,

having just been relieved from duty at one of the government cattle ranges, and were on their way to the fort.

They saluted the captain politely and looked with wonder at his prisoner.

"Cowboy Charlie, this man is none other than Silk-lasso Sam!"

"Hang him!" came in a roar from the cowboys.

"I have been upon his track, and saw him meet his men back in the glen, and capture Miss Carr and Miss de Sutro.

"He turned back for some reason, and I captured him. You are to take him to the fort, if you can resist the temptation to hang him, while I go on after those captors of the ladies.

"I will keep in sight of them; mark the trail, and do you, Cowboy Charlie, ask Colonel Dunwoody to send my troop after me with all haste.

"Send them directly to this place, and from here on I will tie a bush to the tail of my horse, so that the trail can be followed readily, a part of the way with lanterns.

"Now, Silk-lasso Sam, I leave you in safe hands," and the captain dashed away, for now it was about sunset.

CHAPTER XXX.

INTO THE TRAP.

It was Cast-iron Bill who had charge of the captives, and Silk-lasso Sam had left him with every hope that his well-schemed plot was going to pan out just as he had planned it should.

He had told Cast-iron Bill to hide the trail by muffling the horses' feet, and not to push too fast for the ladies' comfort.

"Give them three halts at least during the night, for no pursuit can start until after dawn, as I will pretend to be too fatigued to know anything.

"Go to the secret cavern at Paint Branch, and as soon as I get the money, I will take the coach of Horseshoe Ned, change to that of Four-in-hand Frank, get out near Paint Branch, and come on to the retreat.

"We can then make our start, leaving the two girls to wait until dawn, when they can follow the stage trail into Pocket City, for my prisoner I shall put to death."

"I understand, chief," said Cast-iron Bill, who had been apart with the pretended old man, as he had said he wished to give him some instructions out of hearing of the two ladies.

Then had Silk-lasso Sam started back upon the trail to fall into the dangerous hands of Captain Dick

Caruth, while Cast-iron Bill, aided by Ugly Dan and Card-sharp Dave, had continued on with the captives.

In the mountains matters at the secret cave were not exactly as Cast-iron Bill and his pards expected to find them, nor as Silk-lasso Sam believed they would be.

Wild West Will had made a clean breast of the whole affair to the two scouts, and told that Silk-lasso Sam had not left the frontier at all, as he had promised his sister, and had been the one who had robbed her.

He had arranged a disguise, and had gone upon the different trails, and then had, through Cast-iron Bill, the others join him.

All of them had been disguised and masked alike, and mounted upon blood-bay horses, so as to appear like one and the same road agent.

Wild West Will also told Pawnee Bill and Buffalo Bill that the chief had gone to the fort in disguise to kidnap Miss Carr, and had taken Cast-iron Bill with him.

The latter had returned for help, and Ugly Dan and Card-sharp Dave had gone with him, and they were expected back soon with their captive.

"We are in just the right place," said Buffalo Bill, and Pawnee Bill agreed with him.

But they were still more of that opinion when, in the camp of the outlaws, they found a prisoner there in irons.

He was wan and wretched, for the cruel chief was slowly starving him to death.

In fact, he would have been still more emaciated except that Wild West Will had been secretly giving him food and water, and had told him he would help him escape when the opportunity offered.

And that prisoner was none other than Dead-shot Dean, the miner.

The meeting between the poor man and his rescuers was an affecting one, and he frankly said that Wild West Will was the cause of his being then alive, as he had given him a little food and water each day.

The miner had told how he had been entrapped in his cabin and brought, blindfolded and bound, to that retreat, the chief telling him that he had never forgiven him for marrying the woman he had loved, pretty Kathleen Clyde, and intended to have his revenge by starving him to death.

That he was carrying out this threat was proven by the appearance of the prisoner.

But food and water, administered sparingly by Pawnee Bill, had begun to show good effects, and the prisoner was carried by the scouts to the distant camp, where Grip Saunders was held a prisoner, and there made comfortable.

In the camp, hidden away, were stationed a dozen scouts under Buffalo Bill, and the others were to remain outside and follow the outlaws on into the cavern when they arrived.

Pawnee Bill was drilled by Wild West Will, who

took his position upon the cliff with him, to play the part of Grip Saunders, and hail the outlaws, when they came from the secret, natural sentinel box in the hollow tree.

This was all arranged at the retreat for the return of Silk-lasso Sam and his men, with their captive, for it was supposed that only Clarice Carr was to be taken prisoner by the outlaw chief.

It was the third morning of their stay there, soon after sunrise, when Pawnee Bill gave the signal that the outlaws were approaching.

They came up from Paint Branch, over a rock road that left no trail, and the hoofs of all the horses were muffled, besides.

First came Cast-iron Bill, masked, and following was Clarice Carr, with Nina de Sutro riding close at the heels of her horse.

The two ladies appeared to have felt the fatigue of their long ride, since a little after noon the day before, when they left the fort.

Behind the captives rode Ugly Dan and Card-sharp Dave, also disguised and masked.

"The chief is not there," whispered Wild West Will from his place of concealment to Pawnee Bill, who was in the tree.

Then Pawnee hailed and Cast-iron Bill called back:

"O. K., pard, we has got here with ther gals, and all as hungry as wolves."

"Where is the chief?"

"He's back arranging ransoms, and we will be rich

men, all of us, before the week is out." And, dismounting, Cast-iron Bill led the way into the cavern.

The others followed slowly, and then Wild West Will said:

"Now, sir, come and you can see the fun in the camps."

They ran to the cliffs, and Pawnee Bill looked over to find Cast-iron Bill in the grasp of Buffalo Bill, and the other two outlaws in the clutches of the scouts.

And Wild West Will was then allowed to go in peace.

The surprise and joy of Clarice Carr, at finding Buffalo Bill and his scouts in the den of the outlaws to receive them, cannot be told.

Explanations soon followed, and when Clarice Carr told how the Ancient Sport had been captured with them, and had been allowed to go back and get their ransom money, Buffalo Bill asked:

"And where is Silk-lasso Sam?"

"We have not seen him, sir."

"Did he not capture you?"

"No, it was the man the others call Cast-iron Bill."

"This is strange," said the scout; and, after a talk with Pawnee, they went to question Cast-iron Bill.

That worthy and his two comrades were too anxious to have their chief remain unknown, that he might aid them in their escape, to betray him, and so they denied all knowledge of Silk-lasso Sam.

What had become of Wild West Will and Grip Saunders they did not know.

But the latter was soon brought to where they were, and they feared that the end of their band had come.

As the ladies needed rest, Pawnee Bill suggested that they go with him to The Frying Pan at Pocket City, there to remain until Captain Caruth could come after them as an escort to the fort, and that Buffalo Bill should go on with his prisoners and report what had occurred at the fort.

This had just been decided upon, when up dashed Captain Dick Caruth and his men.

The gallant captain had tracked the outlaws through the night, marked his trail well, and from a distance in the morning, seen them enter the cañon.

Then he had gone back to hurry on his troop, who he knew had not spared horseflesh.

They had been soon found, their horses in a foam, and the lieutenant reported that they had followed the trail with lanterns.

The captain received a joyous welcome, and he it was that made known that their captor was Silk-lasso Sam.

The surprise was great to all, but Nina de Sutro seemed the most affected by it.

When the first shock was over, Captain Caruth continued:

"I sent the man to the fort under the charge of Cowboy Charlie, but Lieutenant Loudon now reports to me that the cowboys reported that the prisoner attempted to make his escape, and so was shot, though it is the

general belief that he met his death at the end of a lariat."

"Thank Heaven!" broke from the lips of Nina de Sutro, and she reeled and would have fallen, had not Captain Caruth caught her in his arms.

It was still decided to give the ladies a rest at Pocket City, so thither went the troop to escort them, while Buffalo Bill started for the fort with his prisoners.

On the way, Dead-shot Dean stopped at his cabin, for he was recuperating rapidly, and when the party arrived at Pocket City, Judge King was wild with delight, and gave the ladies Bonnie Belle's rooms.

After a day and night's rest the start was made for the fort, and the welcome of the captives upon their arrival is beyond description.

But soon after reaching home, Nina de Sutro received two visitors.

They were Captain Caruth and Pawnee Bill, and the former said:

"Miss de Sutro, Pawnee Bill found in the secret cavern the private papers of Silk-lasso Sam. These papers gave the story of his life, and told that he was your husband, and, from all I saw, I believe you were in league with him here, though from fear, not willingness to do wrong.

"Whatever your motive, let me say to you that we, Pawnee Bill and myself, expect you to take leave of this fort forever, just as soon as you can do so, and cast no suspicion upon yourself. Do you appreciate

the situation, Mrs. Arden Leigh, enough to take our advice and thus avoid all publicity?"

"I do. I shall go from here very soon. My life was a wreck not from intension of my own, and now I can only hide myself within the walls of a convent.

"When you ask about me in the future, gentlemen, you will learn that I have taken the veil. I thank you for the mercy shown me, and bid you a last farewell."

They left her with deepest sympathy in their hearts for the poor woman, and I may say here, long after they did hear that she had shielded her life in the walls of a convent in Mexico, her native land.

Why Nina de Sutro left the fort was not known, except to Captain Caruth and Buffalo Bill, for the scout was let into the secret, and her being the ally of Silk-lasso Sam was never suspected by the outside world.

As for that outlaw chief, whose life had been one of such strange mystery and crime, the cowboys' word was taken for it that he had "escaped," said escape being generally set down by knowing ones as death at the end of the lariat.

Colonel Dunwoody wrote a long letter to Ruth Leigh, telling her that at last the end of her brother's career had come.

* * * * *

"Orders for you, Buffalo Bill," said an orderly, approaching the king of scouts and Pawnee Bill, as they were seated on the porch of their quarters at Pioneer Post.

"Thank you," replied Cody, taking the envelope from the orderly and breaking the seal.

"What is it?" queried Pawnee Bill.

"Marching orders," was the reply. "We are to proceed at once to Fort Fetterman."

"That sounds interesting," said Major Lillie.

Two hours later the two famous bordermen were on their way to Fort Fetterman, where they were destined to meet with more unusual experiences.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A MYSTERIOUS CRY FOR HELP.

"Hello! Hello! For de Lord's sake, hello!"

The voice came echoing down from the side of a rugged mountain, and, floating not unmusically across the plain, reached the ears of Buffalo Bill, riding alone, his eyes watchful, and his whole bearing that of one aware that danger surrounded him on every hand.

At the hail and call for help, the scout drew rein, his rifle gripped for use, and his eyes keenly scanned the mountainside; but no person was discerned.

Thus a minute passed, and Cody again rode on, when once again there pealed forth the now plaintive cry:

"Hello! For de Lord's sake, hello!"

Again the rider came to a halt.

"That was a negro's voice, surely. Is one of the black cavalymen at the fort playing a joke upon me? He would not dare do that, I think. So I must see what it means."

The horseman once more moved on, when once again came the cry, more earnest and plaintive than before:

"Hello! Hello! Massa, for de lub of de Lord, hello!"

Again the scout drew rein.

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This time his face assumed a puzzled, almost anxious expression. He seemed wholly at a loss what to do.

Indians might be lurking anywhere in thicket or cover to send a bullet into his heart, but that was the voice of no redskin, and was an appeal for help which he could not ignore.

No other than a redskin was supposed to be nearer than the frontier government post at Fort Aspen, half a hundred miles away, and the scene was among the then unknown wilderness of Wyoming.

The horseman sat, watchful and waiting—horse and rider forming a magnificent picture.

Stationed at Fort Fetterman, Buffalo Bill had been sent on this lone and daring ride to Fort Caspar, and from thence to Fort Aspen, as the bearer of important dispatches.

Fort Caspar had been left behind, and it was while following up the Sweetwater toward Aspen that the scout, soon after his noonday halt, had heard the cry for help as he rode across a plain bordered by the range from whence had come the call, which he must investigate at all hazards.

As the cry had been repeated each time he started to ride on again, he once more urged his horse forward, when again came the piteous appeal:

"Don't lebe me, massa! For de Lord's sake, don't!"

The scout halted quickly, deeply affected by the voice and words.

"I must know who he is, and the situation he is in," muttered the scout.

With this he called in a voice clear as the tones of a bell, and far-reaching:

"Hello! Who is it calls?"

"Me, massa! An' I wants yer awful bad."

"Who are you, and where are you?"

"Jist by de cliff, massa."

"What are you doing there?"

"Tryin' ter find 'em, sah—my people."

"Where are they?"

"Dey is lost, sah, and I is lost."

The scout was almost as much puzzled as before.

He had located his man, yet it might all be a lure—a cunning dodge for his own capture or destruction.

"Are you sick or hurt? If not, then show yourself."

"Who is you, massa?"

"I am known as Buffalo Bill, chief of scouts at Fetterman."

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! At las', at las'! Why, Massa Buf'ler Bill, I was lookin' fer yer, sah!" And the next instant the still unseen man broke forth in merry laughter.

"That nig's as mad as a jack rabbit," muttered the scout.

"Well, my man, if you are glad to have found me, come out and show yourself."

There was no reply, and Buffalo Bill waited fully a minute before he spoke again.

"Where are you?" he demanded.

Still no response.

Was it, after all, a mere blind? Was it a darky? Was not some game to be sprung on him?"

Again he called out, and his voice rang back echoes from the cliff.

The next instant there stepped into view upon the cliff the form of the mysterious caller for help.

The man so suddenly appearing upon the cliff stood there like an ebony statue.

His feet were upon the very edge of the cliff, and he looked down from a dizzy height of three hundred feet or more.

Like a great image he stood, one hand supporting a rifle slung across his shoulder, the other resting upon the hilt of a large knife in his belt.

His attitude was half offensive, half defensive, and the better to view him, Buffalo Bill turned his field glass upon him.

Attentively the scout scanned the stranger. He beheld through his glass a negro, all of six feet four inches in height, with rather slender but wiry and athletic frame, and the shoulders and heavy neck of an athlete.

He was dressed in buckskin, of dark-red hue, from moccasins to cap, and carried upon his back, strapped there like a knapsack, a large pack.

Armed with a rifle, he had a belt about his waist, into which were stuck a pair of revolvers and a large bowie knife.

What might also be called another weapon in skillful hands, a lariat, hung over the pack on his back.

Too far off to see the features of the man, Buffalo Bill yet discovered that the face was as black as ink, and the features boldly cast.

"Now, who is he and just what is his little game I should like to know," mused the weary borderman. He evidently decided to ascertain, for he rode quietly toward the base of the cliff.

As he approached closer to the cliffs, the scout called out:

"Well, my man, come down."

"Massa, I ain't jist able, for I has been cut up a little bit in a fight wid de red niggers, sah, and, 'sides, I is almost starved ter death, an' jes' as weak as a newborn calf."

Buffalo Bill heard the words, and pondered a moment; then, in a low tone, murmured:

"I'll chance it."

With this he called out:

"I will come to you, my man."

"Oh, thankee, massa, thankee, sah!"

The scout dismounted, undid a haversack slung to his saddle, and, leaving his horse to graze, started boldly for the cliff.

He could but experience a sense of relief when he got close in under its shelter, and, though starting on one side of it, as if then to ascend, he quickly changed and went up on the other side.

After a rough but noiseless climb, he reached the

ridge, some hundred yards back from the edge of the cliff. Then he peered cautiously through the cedars, and the first thing his eyes fell upon was a dead body—that of an Indian. A close search ahead of him and he saw a second body!—also that of an Indian.

Moving forward, ready for action, the scout beheld the negro seated upon the ground, leaning against a cedar and looking down in the valley as though watching Buffalo Bill's horse.

"Well, pard, I am here."

The negro started, turned, and arose with an effort, leaving his rifle lying upon the rocks.

A glance into his face, and Buffalo Bill saw that it was haggard and pinched; the eyes were sunken, and the negro was certainly suffering.

Large as the scout was, the negro towered above him.

"Why, you are suffering, my man, yes, and bleeding, too. You have been in hard luck."

"Yes, massa, I has had a wery hard time, but you has come now and I'll git all right, sah."

"Where are you from?"

"From Purgatory, sah."

The scout's face wore a pitying expression, while his good heart grew sympathetic.

"What is your name, my poor fellow?"

"Dey calls me B'elzebub, massa, which means de devil."

"The negro is a madman," decided the scout, and he felt that he must be upon his guard, for the man,

a giant in strength, could be desperately dangerous if aroused.

After a moment's hesitation, Buffalo Bill said in a kindly tone:

"Well, Beelzebub, calling you a devil don't make you one, and now I am going to help you."

"Thankee, massa."

"First, you must have something to eat. I brought my bag of provisions up with me."

"Dat's good news, for I is almost starved, sah."

"I see that, but you must eat sparingly at first, and after a while take a good meal. Now, first take some water from my canteen."

The negro drank ravenously until checked by the scout.

Then he was given a piece of hoecake and some cold, broiled venison.

This he ate with the eagerness of one half starved.

"Now, lie down there and take a nap while I plant those two bodies."

"Dey is Injuns."

"Yes, but they are human. I never leave the dead unburied if I can help it."

"You is a mighty good man, sah. I'll help you."

"No, rest is what you need. I can bury the Indians; so go to sleep."

"I does as you tells me, sah."

The scout took the pack from the negro's back, spread the blankets, then, with water from his can-

teen, bathed the man's hurts and was glad to see that he almost at once passed off into a sound sleep.

Going to the dead Indians, the scout saw that they were Shoshones and that each had been killed in a death struggle with the black, for each had a knife thrust in his breast.

Both of the reds were armed with rifle, bow and arrows, and knife, and as they must have been mounted, the scout concluded their ponies could not be far away.

The soil was too rocky on the cliff for grave digging, so he went off in search of some spot where he could find soil, and, a few hundred yards away, came upon their ponies, staked out.

Both were good animals, so the scout led them to the cliff, put the dead bodies upon them, and took them down to a little meadowland in the valley below.

Here he set to work, wrapped them in their blankets, and, after an hour's labor, had a grave excavated.

Into it they were placed, and the grave filled in. Over the mound heavy rocks were put to guard the remains from the wild beasts.

This sacred duty done, Buffalo Bill returned with one of the ponies to the cliff, to find the negro still asleep.

Arousing him, the poor fellow awoke with a start and a wild glare in his eye.

"It is you, massa. I didn't had a dream, den?"

"No, I am here to care for you. How do you feel?"

"Hungry, sah; mighty hungry."

"All right; I see that you are better. I buried the reds, and found their ponies, so have one here for you to ride down into the valley, where there is a stream and plenty of wood, so we can have a fire and good supper."

"You is mighty kind, sah."

"You would do the same for me if you found me in distress. Now mount the pony."

The black rose with an effort, stiff and sore as he was, but Buffalo Bill helped him mount, and led the way down to the valley.

A snug camping place was found and a fire built. That done, the rescuer went after his own horse, unsaddled him, and staked the three animals out near the camp.

The negro lay upon his blankets, watching him, but was forbidden to do any work.

A good supper was prepared by the scout, and the black ate a substantial meal.

"You is a good gemman, sah—a mighty good man. I got somethin' ter tell you, too, sah, so I has, fer you is Massa Buf'ler Bill."

After supper the negro lay back against a tree, and the scout said:

"You are not able to go on to the fort, Beelzebub, for you could not stand the ride; but I'll go on and come after you with the ambulance some time to-morrow."

The man started, a frightened look came over his face, and, in a voice that quivered, he said:

"Don't leab me, sah."

"But I am carrying important dispatches and must go on, while you will be all right here until I get back, for I can be here by noon to-morrow."

"Is you really Massa Buf'ler Bill?"

"Yes, my comrades call me so."

"Den I sure done found Massa Buf'ler Bill?" and the negro spoke eagerly.

"Yes, sure."

"Den you is de man I was lookin' fer, sah, de man dey sent me ter find. De good Lord be praised, I has found yer!" and there was a world of earnestness in the way the words were uttered.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A STRANGE STORY.

Buffalo Bill's face showed pity.

He felt that the negro was mad, that his assertion that he had been looking for him, had been sent to find him, was but the imaginings of a brain diseased.

"Well, you have found me, my man, and now tell me what I can do for you, for I will have to go on to the fort to-night, and when you go to sleep you will rest well and be much stronger to-morrow."

"You buried dem two red Injuns, sah?"

"Yes, right up the valley there, a short distance."

"Does Injuns' ghosts walk, sah?"

"I have never seen any," with a smile. "I don't go much on ghosts, Beelzebub, be they white, black, or red."

"I does, sah. Yer sure de Injuns, afore dey was buried, was sure dead?"

"Yes, no doubt of that. How came you to kill them?"

"You see, sah, I has been a long time lost, a-huntin' fer you, Massa Buf'ler Bill."

"Well?"

"My feed had given out, and I got a bullet choked in my rifle and c'u'dn't git it out, so I wasn't able to git no food."

"I see."

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"And I went along a-lookin' and a-lookin' fer you, sah, and growin' weaker all de time, and at last I come out on dat cliff and lay down mighty tired and hongry."

"Poor fellow."

"Yas, sah, I was dat; but I war fast asleep when I war awoke by what I thought was two panthers a-leapin' ont'er me, but it war Injuns."

"Den, sah, I begin ter fight fer my life, fer dey war tryin' ter tie me, as I know'd, to take me to dere camp and burn me, roast me for de pickaninny Injuns. But I fought 'em hard, weak as I war, and we rolled over and over, and, oh, my; what a time we hed uf it, sah!"

"I should think so."

"Ef I hadn't been so weak, sah, dey wouldn't hev been nowhar with me in a scrap; but I didn't have my weepins on; my pack war on my back, and dey hed dere knives, yer see."

"But you killed them?"

"Yas, sah, after a long fight, all over de top uf de cliff. Yer see, I jist got de knife away from one, sah, and killed t'other with dat; den we scuffle round, me and t'other one, fer long time; den I guv de knife p'int to him and dat ended it. But if dey was bofe of 'em dead, I wasn't much better, fer it tuck me a long time ter come round."

"I should think so."

"But I got rested and started ter crawl down the cliff ter find water, when I seen you, sah—yes, sah,

seen you, and you war de wery man I war a-lookin' fer, and hasn't you been good ter me—oh, my!"

"Well, Beelzebub, I wish you to tell me where you came from and what you wanted me for."

"I come from de Lost Valley, sah."

"What Lost Valley?"

"Up dere, sah," and he pointed toward the northern mountains.

"In the Big Horn Range or Basin?"

"About dere somewhere, sah."

"That is a long way from here. Where is your horse?"

"Had no horse, Massa Bill."

"Did you walk here?"

"Yes, sah."

"But what were you doing there?"

"Wid de settlers, sah."

"Impossible! No settlers there."

"Dey is dere, sah; dat's so; went dar a year ago."

"Which way did they go there?"

"Dey went in from Helena."

"How many of them?"

"About fifty."

"All men?"

"No, sah, dere is some women and chillen, too."

"In Heaven's name, what did they go there for?"

"Dey went gold huntin', and in case dey didn't find no gold, dey was all prepared to make homes dere."

"And the Indians have not troubled them?"

"Not now. They can't."

"Why, are you the last survivor?"

"Oh, no, sah; dey is all alive."

"Then why do not Indians trouble them?"

"Dey can't find 'em, fer dey is in de Lost Valley," was the mysterious reply.

"Can't find them because they are in the Lost Valley, as you call it, and Indians don't trouble them now. Fifty settlers, or gold hunters, and women and children among them, up in the Big Horn country somewhere—why, man, you are surely demented."

"No, Massa Buf'ler Bill, I ain't dat, not a little bit; I got heap good sense, sah."

"I can hardly believe the story. The Big Horn country is almost unknown, and there only an army would be safe, for hostiles swarm around it. To get there with such a company of men, women, and children would be utterly impossible."

"Dey is dere, sah," was the repeated response.

"Could you tell me just where they are?"

"No, sah, 'cause I is lost."

"You don't know your way back?"

"No, sah, but you kin find 'em."

"Did you just come from there?"

"Yes, sah."

"Which way did you come?"

The negro pointed northward.

"You are sure you did not come from down in Colorado or over from Utah?"

"No, sah; I come right from de North, where de mountains is way up in de clouds, where de rivers is

mighty few, and de water of one river smells, oh, so terrible—heap like polecat! But de country is so beautiful, de trees grows so fine, de grass so green, and de valleys is lubly. Oh, it es jes' a land o' milk an' honey, sah!"

"You must be describing the Big Horn country, with the sulphur springs flowing into the Stinking Water, as the Indians call the river, for it is a land of wondrous beauty, lofty mountains, fine timber, the greenest of rich grass, and loveliest of valleys, while it is said that gold has been found there, and thus lured other hunters on to their death," and again Buffalo Bill seemed rather to be musing aloud than speaking to the negro.

"Dat's de country, sah, dat's where dey-all is," declared Beelzebub eagerly.

"They are in the Big Horn Basin, then?"

"No, sah; I can't jist say dat; but dey is in de Lost Valley."

"I never heard of the Lost Valley."

"It is dere, sah, fer dey calls it so."

"Who does?"

"Dem people I done tole you about."

"Do you think you could go back there?"

"No, sah; but you could, Massa Bill."

"When did you leave there?"

"My rifle tell, sah."

Buffalo Bill got up, and, taking the rifle, saw on the butt a number of little nicks on the stock.

"What do these tell?"

"Days, sah, or most rather nights, fer I cut one each night I stop."

The scout ran hastily over the notches, and said:

"Why, there are sixty-seven! Do you mean to say it has been sixty-seven nights since you left the Lost Valley?"

"Yes, sah."

"Why, at ten miles a day you would have walked six hundred and seventy miles!"

"I walk farther den dat, sah. I is a good walker."

"How many large rivers have you crossed?"

"Seven, sah."

"Those might be the Big Horn, Wind River, Nebraska, and Sweetwater, but you have crossed some of them a second time. How did you get over?"

"Swim, sah, and push a log ahead of me with my outfit."

"Why did you not follow up the Big Horn?"

"Mountains was too big, sah."

"Then you have been ranging around in a mighty wild and dangerous country for over two months, and but for starving, you would have struck the trail to Fort Aspen and been all right."

"I hed come to de end of my trail, sah, ef you hadn't found me. You save my life, Massa Buf'ler Bill, and thankee, sah, not only fer myself, but fer dem as I left in de Lost Valley, sah."

"But why did you leave them?"

"I come ter find you, sah."

"Who sent you?"

A Strange Story.

"Dey-all sent me, sah; tell me fer de love of de Lord to find yer, fer dere is men dere as knows yer well, and wants yer to come and sabe 'em."

Buffalo Bill looked what he felt—decidedly puzzled.

Was the negro mad, and was all this story a hallucination?

The man certainly was not one of the colored soldiers, for, questioning him closely, Buffalo Bill found that he knew nothing of the army, nothing of any of the frontier posts, save Fort Logan and Fort Ellis, in Montana, which would carry out his story that the settlers had gone from Helena down into the Yellowstone or Big Horn country.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S RESOLVE.

For several minutes Buffalo Bill sat in deep meditation, the sable giant watching him eagerly, yet in respectful silence.

Night had fallen now. The horses were feeding quietly not far distant, the camp fire, well hidden by rocks and bushes, burned brightly, and its glare fell upon the fine face of the scout, and also upon the countenance of his mysterious black guest.

The Big Horn country was then an unknown region to all save perhaps a few roving hunters or trappers—a region dreaded by the great surrounding tribes as a land of spirits, so awed were they by its wonders of nature.

Its approach upon all sides was strictly and superstitiously guarded—every tribe ready to kill the paleface who dared venture toward that forbidden, mysterious spirit land.

Yet this giant black asserted that half a hundred palefaces, women and children among them, were dwelling there!

Deeply interested in discovering whether all told was the story of a diseased brain or a reality, Buffalo Bill quietly settled down to get at the truth.

He would ride the harder to make up for lost time in going to Fort Aspen.

neither; but I mind jist what you tells me, and de Lord bress you, sah," said the giant black earnestly.

The negro showed his delight in the scout's promise to return with him to the Lost Valley to save the people there from some unknown danger.

Of one thing Cody was convinced—that the negro had not told all—that he was keeping something back, though just what, could not even be surmised.

But the scout had made up his mind to fathom the story, get at the bottom facts, and so would proceed accordingly.

By going back to headquarters at Fort Fetterman he could get permission to go on the expedition and could pick from his band of scouts the men he wished to have accompany him upon this, the strangest of all his many trails.

Deciding upon his course as he sat there with the negro, he said:

"I will go on to the fort to-night, leaving with you my provisions and other things to make you comfortable, and I will also leave you my rifle, taking yours on to the fort to get it fixed. I wish you to remain right here until I come back."

"I will, sah, ef you orders it."

"I will take the Indian ponies on with me, and no one will find you here."

"I ain't scared of it, if I feels half well, for I ain't skeery o' nothin' 'cept dead folks."

"And they are the least to be afraid of. I will re-

turn to-morrow night or the day after, and will then see how you are."

"You find me here, sah."

"That is what I wish to do, for I am going to find your people of the Lost Valley."

"Thankee, sah; but, Massa Bill, yer won't tell about dem people at de fort?"

"Why not?"

"Well, dey don't want de sogers ter find 'em; only just you. Dey kin splain it all to you. But I can't. Only don't tell about 'em, and about me or de Lost Valley."

Here was yet more mystery. Why should the negro not wish the existence known of the people of the Lost Valley?

But Buffalo Bill only answered:

"All right, Beelzebub; I will not betray you or your people."

"Thankee, sah. You wanted ter send after me from de fort, but I had made up my mind I wouldn't been here when yer got back wid de ambulance."

"Aha! You were going to give me the slip?"

"Yes, sar, dat's it; but I won't do it now, sah, fer you done say yer won't tell."

"No, I will keep your secret. But, now, I must be off."

The scout piled wood up near, put his bag of provisions by the fire for the negro's use, and filled his own and the black's canteen with water. Then he sad-

dled his own horse, took the two Indian ponies in hand, and, with a word of "good-by," rode away.

Getting off his horse after going half a mile, he returned on foot, crept near, and had a look at the lone camp.

The negro had wrapped his blankets about him, and was apparently fast asleep.

"I believe I can trust him. He is at least too badly used up to go far," decided the scout, and he withdrew noiselessly.

It was then drawing on toward midnight, and, knowing that his horse had had a good, long rest and food, he put him into a canter, and kept up the pace mile after mile, wishing to reach the post by daylight.

It was dawn when he came in sight of Fort Aspen, but the flag had been run up when the sun rose, before he rode up to the sentinel on guard at the main entrance.

The officer of the day sent him to quarters, where he had his breakfast, and then, dispatches in hand, he went up to report to the commandant, Colonel Crandall.

That officer had just lighted his cigar, after breakfast, and, recognizing the scout, called out:

"Ho, Cody! Glad to see you! Anything wrong at Fetterman?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE COLONEL'S WARNING.

Buffalo Bill assured Colonel Crandall that nothing was wrong at Fort Fetterman, gave him the dispatches, and waited until he had read them.

After discussing with the scout various matters of interest along the frontier, the colonel said:

"When do you wish to return, Cody, for I suppose you desire several days' rest, as there is no need for haste?"

"I would like to start back to-night, if convenient to you."

"I can have my dispatches ready; but that gives you little time for rest."

"I am anxious to get back."

"Anything urgent on hand?"

"I desire to go on a scout up into the Big Horn country, sir."

"Surely not alone, but with cavalry?"

"Only a few of my scouts, colonel."

"It is dangerous work, Cody."

"Yes, sir, but I have a desire to get a better look at the Big Horn country than has yet been had. Have any of your men gone up that way, sir?"

"No, and they will not with my permission, for the Indians fairly swarm up there, knowing what a country it is for retreats, and it will be many a long day

before the government establishes any forts up that way, more than what we now have."

"Pardon me, Colonel Crandall, but did you ever hear of any one going into the Big Horn country?"

"There is a camp yarn that old California Joe and you went there some years ago, but I never believed it."

"It is true, sir. I was riding pony express then, under Alf Slade, and went with California Joe, who had penetrated there more than once."

"What on earth did you go for?"

"To find the band of men who had penetrated there in search of gold and who had not returned."

"I remember now. You found them?"

"Their bones in their camp, as all had died of starvation on their way out with their gold, which, however, they had hidden beyond all chance of finding."

"But, you have an idea you would like to try again for that gold?"

"No, sir; I gave that up, as California Joe did. I want to see more of the country, find out about what the strength of the Indians is, and if any one else has gone there."

"You will find only redskins there, and if palefaces have gone in, their bones will alone remain to tell the fate of their desperate foolhardiness. Take my advice, Cody, and don't go."

Buffalo Bill bowed in silence, but the officer's advice did not alter his purpose.

Telling the colonel that he would report for the dispatches, he went out, and, seeking the quarters assigned him, lay down for a few hours' rest.

When he arose, much refreshed, he found many friends to greet him, for he was a great favorite with officers, soldiers, and scouts, who were proud of him as the very king of bordermen.

As well as he could, without disclosing the secret of the negro giant, the scout questioned guardedly those likely to be informed of any one having penetrated the Big Horn country from any quarter, but he learned no more than that several daring bands had started for the Big Horn range to prospect for gold—that some of these parties had returned with terrible stories of hardships and death to tell, and others had never been heard of again.

Nothing could he learn of any party answering the description of those described by the mysterious negro.

Going to the fort traders, Buffalo Bill bought a lot of provisions and some camp equipage, and put all on a packsaddle, to be strapped on one of the Indian ponies.

He got also from the surgeon some bandages, arnica, and other things needed for wounds or injuries, and, after a hearty supper, reported to Colonel Crandall at headquarters.

The dispatches were ready, and the first thing the colonel said to him was:

"Cody, give up that foolish idea of going into the Big Horn country. I have been thinking over what

you said, and was half inclined to write Colonel Mason not to let you go."

"I am glad you did not, for I feel that I can accomplish good by going, otherwise I would not go. I must ask you, sir, not to speak of my intention, for it is a secret; but I feel that I am doing right."

"Ah! You know more than you will tell me? But that is your business, Cody, and I will not seek to know, for you have got a very level head; but, remember, I have warned you not to take such desperate chances. Good-by, and luck to you! I shall be most anxious until I hear from you again."

The scout thanked the officer, and rode away from the fort just as the flag came fluttering down from the staff, and the sunset gun was echoing far and wide.

* * * * *

It was after midnight when Buffalo Bill rode up to the lone camp in the cañon and saw the glimmer of the little camp fire, while he heard the sharply spoken words:

"Who is dat dar? Talk quick!"

"All right, Beelzebub. On the alert, I see?"

"Yes, Massa Buf'ler Bill, and mighty glad ter see yer, sah."

"Did you not know me?"

"Yer see, I has had another visitor, and I wasn't jist sartin who you might be."

"Another visitor, eh? When?"

"Ter-night, sah."

"Who was he?"

"A red Injun."

"And he got away from you?"

"No, sah; I put him to sleep."

"Killed him, eh?"

"Yes, sah."

"Where is he?"

"Sleepin' over yonder, sah, whar he tumble."

The negro pointed to a spot off from the camp, and, walking over there, the scout scattered a number of coyotes that were cautiously creeping near and waiting for a feast.

The Indian lay in a heap, as he had fallen, and, dragging him up to the camp fire, the scout saw a bullet wound in his head. While he still grasped, in the cold clutch of death, the rifle he had cocked, and was ready to fire.

"You just anticipated him, Beelzebub. You were fortunate, for he intended to kill you."

"Yes, sah. I seen him sneakin' round in de daylight, and jist laid for him, 'cause I knows he'd come when it got dark. I seen him coming along a-stoopin' when he thought I was asleep, and when he stop, I jist let him hab a shot. Dat's a first-class gun ob yours, Massa Bill."

"Yes, Beelzebub, and I have brought yours back all right, and an extra one besides, a new repeating rifle, presented me by an officer at the fort. I have also got an extra belt of weapons, another present, plenty of

ammunition, and provisions galore, with other things. How are you feeling?"

"Mighty stiff and sore, sah, and I is mighty glad yer hab come."

"How many Indians did you see?"

"Only that one, sah."

"He had doubtless become parted from the other two and was on their trail. I crossed their trail before I saw you the other day, and there were the tracks of three ponies, so that this one makes all present or accounted for."

"I hope so, sah."

"We are going to have some falling weather now, I am sure, so I wish to leave here at daybreak, and go to the place where I wish you to remain until I return with my scouts, for I have to go on to Fort Fetterman. You can ride, I guess, taking it slow."

"Yes, sah, I'll go."

"Then we'll get several hours' sleep and then start."

The horses were staked out, more wood thrown on the camp fire, and the scout turned in for a rest, for he was tired.

But he was up before dawn, the water was put on to boil, then the dead Indian was taken up the cañon to where the others were buried, and the scout hastily opened the grave, and placed the body in it.

Returning to the camp, he found that Beelzebub had breakfast ready, though it had been no easy task for him to do so, and each ate heartily.

The horses were saddled, and, with the extra

blankets Buffalo Bill made the negro as comfortable in his saddle as was possible.

It was daybreak when the scout mounted and led the way, the pack horse bringing up the rear.

He was glad to see that the black stood the ride well, and he kept steadily along on his way for hours.

The course of the scout lay northward, along the foothills of the Wind River Mountains, and toward the latter stream.

A halt was made at noon, the wounds of the negro were tenderly washed and dressed, dinner had, and then the ride was resumed.

Toward night the scout turned into a cañon, and said:

"There is a splendid spring ahead, Beelzebub, and of medicinal water. It will make a new man of you, and it is a fine, safe camping place. Old California Joe and I were here a couple of years ago, and this is as far as I know the country up this way.

"We are just in time, for it is going to storm to-night, and our trail will be washed out, so no one can track us here, and that is what I wanted. You have stood the long ride well, and now you can have a long rest, and I'll do the same to-morrow. But now to get a shelter to protect us."

The camp ground was, indeed, a safe one, and water, grass, and wood were there in abundance.

The old wikiup built by Buffalo Bill and California Joe still stood, and was quickly added to and made more comfortable.

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The packsaddle and provisions were stored away, the horses staked out, blankets spread, and a fire built of large logs.

Then supper was disposed of, the wounds of the negro cared for, and just as the scout turned into the snug and dry shelter, the storm burst with all its fury, and went howling through the mountains, while the rain came down in torrents.

But the campers were well sheltered and comfortable.

The storm howled through the mountains during the night, loosening rocks from the heights, uprooting trees, and roaring like a terrible duel of artillery.

In the thicket of cedars the camp was protected, and the horses stopped feeding, and sought the shelter of the grove.

It was well that the scout had made a secure shelter, or a miserable night they would have had of it; while, as it was, the two were well protected, and kept dry in spite of the torrents of rain, which at times threatened to put out the fire of large logs.

"Well, Beelzebub, our trails to this point will never be followed, and nothing will bring an Indian up here, and there are no palefaces to come, so you can rest content during my absence."

"Yes, sah, I'll be all right."

So the night passed, but though the rain ceased with the dawn, the sky still remained overcast, and the wind blew hard.

The fire burned up brightly again, and began to dry

out the camp outfit, while the scout got a good breakfast, after putting the horses in a new feeding ground.

During the morning, Buffalo Bill brought logs and piled them up close at hand, where the negro could roll them upon the fire, and had he been a brother, he could not have been more kind to the wounded black.

The wounds of the negro were doing well, he was getting his strength back by good food and rest, and he said he could easily look after himself and the horses during the scout's absence, for all he needed was close at hand.

The spring was within a few steps of the camp, and the scout hoped for great benefit to the negro from its medicinal waters.

Thus the day passed away, the sun set in a clear sky, and there was promise of fine weather.

After supper, the scout tried to get more information from Beelzebub about the unknown gold hunters up in the Lost Valley, wherever that was, but he seemed only to know that they were there, waiting for his return with Buffalo Bill to aid them from some dread peril.

That the black knew more than he would tell, the scout was assured, but he would not force him to say what he skillfully sought to avoid doing.

This but added more and more to the mystery about the negro and the people of the Lost Valley, whom he had come to seek succor for.

Retiring early to his blankets, the scout intended to

make an early start on the following morning, and he had had his breakfast and was ready to go by daylight.

"Keep as still as possible, Beelzebub; dress your wounds morning and evening, eat heartily, and try and be ready by the time I return to stand a hard trail. I will be gone perhaps a week, and will bring back with me a brave band of boys, who will follow me to death if need be.

"As you say we cannot ride there, we will come this far mounted, and bring pards to take our horses back. I will leave the two Indian ponies here with you, and if I should not return within two weeks, then you will know that something has happened to me, and my advice is that you then go to Fort Aspen and make a clean breast of it to Colonel Crandall, telling him everything, and he will help the people of the Lost Valley as you wish them aided.

"Now, I'll leave you and push right on to Fort Fetterman, striking through the Rattlesnake Hills and thence following down the north fork of the Nebraska River to the post. I have drawn a map, to guide you, in case harm befalls me, but if alive and well, look for me within ten days."

With this parting talk with Beelzebub, Buffalo Bill shook hands with him, mounted his horse, and rode away.

Looking backward, he saw the negro watching him closely, and felt sure that he felt his lonely condition greatly, wounded, alone, and far from a human being

that was not a foe, as he would be when the scout was gone.

Taking out his compass, after he had left the cañon, which he did by riding down the stream flowing from the spring, so as not to leave any trail up to the camp, the scout took his bearings and turned the head of his horse toward the eastward, by a little south, to strike the Nebraska Fork between the Sweetwater River and the Rattlesnake Hills.

The morning had nearly passed away, and his well-rested horse had made good time, when, suddenly, he came upon the fresh trail of a horse heading across his way, and toward a range of wild and rugged mountains on his left.

The hoofs of the horse were shod, and the trail had not been made over a few hours, the scout saw, and he at once determined to follow it.

So, giving up his intention to halt for the noon rest and meal, he pushed rapidly on along the trail.

Miles were gone over, and the trail led him into the deepest recesses of the mountains, and then up toward the summit of a range.

Still on he followed, and, ascending the range, to his great amazement, he suddenly came upon a strongly built rock fort there in an unknown wilderness, and of the existence of which he had not had the remotest idea.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE OLD FORT.

Buffalo Bill halted, and gazed with wonder at this strange find.

The trail he had been following branched off just where he then was, and did not lead up to the old fort.

Neither did the scout go on at once, either on the trail, or up to the rock structure.

He seemed lost in amazement, and trying to decipher how the fort came there.

It was a rock cabin, he saw as he the more attentively regarded it, rather than a fort, though it had narrow windows and a flat roof.

It was about thirty feet square, and very solidly built, being about twelve feet in height.

The rocks were large—square ones had been selected—and it was well built.

Situated upon the apex of a hill, it commanded an extensive view all about it, and could be well defended.

As he drew nearer, the scout saw that it had the appearance of having been long deserted.

Yet the trail he had followed led within a quarter of a mile of it.

But who had built it?

When had it been built?

Where were those who had erected it there in a wilderness?

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Why had it been erected?

These were the questions Buffalo Bill asked himself, yet could not answer them.

"My idea is," he said at last, to himself, "that it was built as a stronghold by men who camped down in the valley, but retreated here in time of need. But who were they, and where are they? I will leave my horse here and reconnoiter."

Dismounting, he hid his horse in a cedar thicket, and, rifle in hand, slowly ascended the hill.

As he reached the rock stronghold, there seemed desolation and desertion alone to rest there.

He stepped close up to the door, which had been built of hewn logs, and was hung upon hinges made from horseshoes.

He looked in cautiously, and saw that there was a ceiling of logs, some seven feet high, and a ladder led up to a loft above.

"Yes; horses could be kept below in time of danger, and the men stay above, while they could fight from the roof. I can't understand about it, though, for I never knew of a white man coming up into this country, unless it was old California Joe. I will take a look above."

With this, Buffalo Bill walked toward the rude ladder, and began the ascent.

But suddenly he was struck a violent blow on the head, that threw him down upon his back upon the hard dirt floor, and right on top of him came the forms of one, two, three men.

Stunned by the blow and fall, it was several seconds before he could recover himself, and by that time his revolver and knife had been taken from him, while his rifle had been knocked from his hand in his fall.

But Buffalo Bill was not a man to submit tamely to capture, and by an exertion of his wonderful strength, he rose, with the three men clinging to him.

One of them he hurled from him; another was dealt a blow that put him out of the fight, and the third was thrown against the wall with a force that stunned him.

Then it looked as though the scout was master of the situation, in spite of being disarmed.

His first thought was to regain his weapons, but as he stooped, a voice called from the loft, as a rifle barrel was thrust through the trap and covered him:

"Hands up, Buffalo Bill, or I pull trigger!"

It is doubtful whether the scout would have obeyed this threatening command, for he saw at a glance that the man was not visible, and would fire at random; but as he meditated a spring toward the door, the man he had hurled from him leaped upon him like a panther.

Then the others, shaken up by the fall and blow received respectively, rushed upon him, while the one in the loft dropped down, revolver in hand.

"You are a dead man if you resist further, Buffalo Bill," cried the latter, and his revolver was thrust into the scout's face.

Seeing that there was now no chance for him, Buf-

falo Bill submitted in his indifferent sort of way to the force of circumstances.

"All right, pards, I call it quits; so what is your game?"

Though shaken up by the blow on the head and fall from the ladder, the scout was in fair condition, had not the odds of pistols been against him, and he glanced from one to the other of his captors with a cool, searching glance.

He saw that his blow in the face of the one had told severely, the one thrown against the wall was badly bruised, and the third man appeared more than satisfied with what he had felt of the scout's grip of iron.

The one who had dropped last from the loft was all right, and appeared to be the leader.

And, more, the scout recognized the fact that he was in the hands of as dangerous a lot of men as it had been his misfortune to meet in many a long day.

The close inspection of the crowd which Buffalo Bill made was while they were binding him securely with lariats, two of them keeping him covered the while, as though dreading another struggle.

He saw in the four men the real types of border-men, and felt sure that they were gold hunters.

The leader was a well-formed, handsome man, with blond hair and beard, and was well dressed, as were also his three companions.

"I think I know you," said the scout, addressing the leader.

"Indeed?"

"Yes; we have met before."

"When and where?"

"You are a man I knew in Denver as Doc Miner, and you are doing here what you were there."

"What is that?"

"You are a gold boomer."

"Ah!"

"You led men into government lands hunting for gold, and keeping the Indians constantly on the war-path to prevent others from coming into the country where you were placer mining, and also thus making the soldiers cautious about scouting in small force."

"You've got me down fine, for that is my business, Buffalo Bill—we are gold boomers."

"I am sure of that; but, if these are all of your party, you are bold men to come up here."

"You are here."

"I am a scout, and my duty carries me everywhere in guiding a troop."

The handsome gold boomer laughed and replied:

"That was well said, cleverly put in, to try and make us believe you are now guiding a troop."

"Are you sure that I am not?"

"Yes; for I believe you are merely making one of your daring reconnoissances alone up into this country, and I am sure of one thing."

"What is that?"

"You crossed my trail a dozen miles back, but did

not know that my pard here, Ike Ellis, was following half a mile behind me."

"No, I didn't know that. I should have been more careful."

"Ike saw you, though, and he at once cut for our camp by a short trail that took off miles that you traveled following me, and he headed me off on foot, told me who was on my trail, so I rode on around to our camp, and then we came here to bag you. Had you not come here, we would have shot you from the roof."

"That means that all of your band are here."

"We are enough."

"You did not build this rock cabin?"

"Oh, no. It was built by a band of gold boomers years ago, and one only escaped, and he told me about it when he was dying from a bullet wound he got in a fight in Cheyenne, and I was kind to him."

"What became of the others?"

"They were killed by Indians, and we found their bones here when we came, and buried them in the valley near our camp."

"He told you, too, there was gold here?"

"Oh, yes, or I would not have come. He intended to get up a party and return here, but death crushed him, and we came."

"How long have you been here?"

"Nearly a year."

"Must have been successful."

"Yes, we have done well, and are all ready to start for the settlements with our find."

"Indians have not troubled you?"

"No."

"When do you start?"

"Ike and I were returning from gathering up some gold pockets we had hidden away, when he saw you, and we are to start at dawn to-morrow, so you came just in time."

"In time to find you breaking the laws in coming here as gold boomers."

"Yes, and that is not all."

"What else?"

"You have come to find your grave here."

"That means that you intend to kill me?"

"You are cool about it, certainly."

"I take things as they come."

"Yes, you've got to die, Buffalo Bill," said Ike Ellis, and the other two chimed in with him in the same assertion, the leader remaining silent.

"What have you against me?" asked the scout, with the utmost coolness.

"Simply that you are an officer of the law, as an army scout; we are lawbreakers. I have seen you before, and so have my pards, and we would be caught up and hanged, perhaps, for being gold hunters in the forbidden country.

"You have found us, discovered our secret, and, though we admire you as a man of nerve, and of deserved fame as a scout, self-preservation is nature's

first law, and to protect ourselves we must take your life."

"How can I, single-handed, harm you?"

"You could go to Fetterman and send couriers to the different posts to cut us off, and thus we would lose all; it might be, have to fight for our lives."

"Suppose I pledged my word not to betray you?"

"I'll take your word, Buffalo Bill," frankly said Doc Miner, the leader.

But the others shouted savagely:

"No, no; we will not take any man's word. He must die!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE COMPROMISE.

Buffalo Bill did not flinch under the cries of the other men for his life.

He realized that the leader was far the best of the lot, and he knew but too well that men who had risked life to get gold would not allow a life to stand between them and their successfully carrying it away.

The leader seemed alone then in his willingness to accept his pledge not to betray them.

A glance into the faces of the other three showed that they would be merciless.

The scout knew that their camp was not far away, down in the valley.

Were there others there? This he could not tell, but he would try and find out, and as cleverly as he could.

If there were others, they might take sides with their leader.

Buffalo Bill realized most fully that his situation was a desperate one.

The chances were a hundred to one against him.

But he was not one to give up while there was a spark of life left. So he said:

"Well captain, your men here seem to side against taking my pledge, but perhaps the rest of your band would take sides with you. You know I do not care to be killed if I can help it."

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"There is but one man in camp, and only five of us entered this country gold hunting," said the leader.

"And Drake Jones would side with us, cap'n," said Ned Turner, one of the men, while Jake Dunn, who had been the one most hurt in his struggle with the scout, and was nursing his bruises, said:

"Yes, we are four against yer, and having risked life ter get the gold we has, I don't see why we should let a man go free to betray us."

"My sentiments exactly."

"Kill him, say I," chimed in the others.

The leader showed no sign of yielding, however, and said earnestly:

"Pards, go slow. I grant all that you say; and I have just as much at stake as you have—yes, more, for it was my secret that brought you here, and I get one-third of the dust, as you all agreed.

"Now, this is no ordinary man that you would kill, but one that is doing his duty as an army officer. You all know who Buffalo Bill is; that he has won a great name, and has risked his life a thousand times for others.

"He has saved hundreds of lives, has stood between the Indians and the settlers, has put down lawlessness, and is the king of bordermen. I ask you, therefore, to spare his life, to accept his pledged word that he will not betray us if we will spare his life, and not have it upon your consciences that you cruelly killed a man who was at your mercy, and that man Buffalo Bill.

"You will feel better for it afterward, and the more enjoy the gold you have risked so much to get. Now, pards, prove yourselves men and do as I ask you—for this man will never beg for his life; he is not built that way."

The words of the leader were a strong appeal for the life of the scout, and they were earnestly uttered.

But there was no relenting in the stern faces of the gold boomers.

They were gold mad; they had made their fortune, and it should not be taken from them.

They would take no chances. Though admitting the truth of their leader's argument in favor of Buffalo Bill; though sorry, indeed, that he happened to be the man who had fallen into their power, they would not allow him to go free, and thus have the chance to betray them.

"No, Doc Miner, he may mean to keep his word now, when his life's at stake, but when we let him go, then he'll forget it, and make for the fort to betray us, and we can't travel fast, you know, as we only has two horses left," said Ned Turner.

"Then we wants his horse, too, and his outfit, cap," added Jake Dunn.

"Yes, he's got to die," put in Ike Ellis savagely.

The leader seemed deeply pained, and looked at Buffalo Bill, who still showed an iron nerve.

"I am awful sorry, Buffalo Bill, and I mean it. Why, pards, I'll give up half of my find if you spare him," said Doc Miner.

"Indeed, I thank you, and appreciate your kindness, but if you gave up, all these men would not yield, for it's blood they want now."

"That's it, and your life we are going to have," said Ike Ellis.

"Allow me to suggest a compromise," said Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"What is it?" eagerly asked the leader.

"These men fear that I will betray them, they say, and that is why they wish my life. As I do not care to go out of life at the will of several desperadoes, I suggest that you put it out of my power to do you harm—that is, take my horse and leave me afoot, and by the time I can get to a fort you can have reached safety."

"Good! I accept the compromise!" cried the leader.

But the men still looked black and threatening.

The eager acceptance of the compromise offered by Buffalo Bill for saving his life was not well received by Ike Ellis and the other gold boomers.

They did not seem to trust the scout, if even left on foot.

"I say no," said one.

"I am with you."

"He's like the old lady's gun—dangerous without lock, stock, or barrel," said the third.

"Your men still wish my life, I see," Buffalo Bill remarked calmly to the leader.

The face of Doc Miner became a study.

It grew stern and determined, and the scout saw that

he was making up his mind to some act, and his men saw it, too.

Handsome as a picture, he had that in his face that denoted nerve and strong will.

He had come to the mines to make a fortune, but luck had gone against him in gold digging.

Going alone into the mountains, he had struck it rich, as he supposed, but after piling up a fortune, he went to the camp for help to get his metal to market.

It was not gold. It had the look of it, but was worth nothing.

Then he had begun to practice medicine, and it paid him fairly well, as he only collected a fifth of the money he earned.

Next had come the secret of the fatal expedition and the rock fort, told by the sole survivor when he was dying.

Doc Miner, with four companions, had then started for the new El Dorado.

It would be hard for him to be ruined by a kind act, releasing Buffalo Bill.

Still, he would do so, and he had so made up his mind.

"Pards, you appear to wish the life of Buffalo Bill, in order to escape with our gold," he said quietly.

"We intend to make sure we get what we've earned, cap'n," said Ike Ellis.

"I have offered you half of my gold, and the scout has said we could take his horse, leaving him afoot,

and now I tell you right here that the compromise he offers goes."

"Does that mean that you go against us, Doc Miner?"

"Yes, Ike Ellis, for you shall not kill Buffalo Bill without cause, when it is in your power to escape without his doing you harm."

"I think we'll take issue with you, cap'n; for having got the gold, I take no chances."

"Ike is right."

"Yes, I say the same."

The face of Doc Miner did not change as he said:

"It was my secret that got you the gold, and I brought you here. I put up the money for all of you.

"For eight years I have struggled hard in this country, and I can see rest and luxury ahead of me now, when I return to my home in Alabama; but I tell you right here, and I am in deadly earnest, that I will kill the man who attempts to take the life of Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, leave him on foot, if you will, here in this wilderness, alone, and far from any help, and with his horse we can make good time and escape before he can put the soldiers on our trail; but, again I tell you, if my life is the forfeit, the man who attempts to kill him dies by my bullet."

There was no mistaking the words of the man.

He meant just what he said, and was ready to sacrifice his life in defense of the scout.

The men knew him, and saw that he quietly stepped before the scout, to shield him.

They looked at each other, then at their bold leader, then at the scout.

"Say, pards, if some of us dies, there remains yet the more gold. Shall we take the chances to see who goes and who stays?" said Ike Ellis.

The other two men did not answer, but Buffalo Bill remarked dryly:

"It is my idea that it will be the man in your camp that gets the boodle, for your captain has got the draw on you, and he can drop two of you, anyhow, before he goes under—perhaps three—and it would not surprise me, with my usual good luck, to escape free and fall heir to the gold myself."

The men looked at him in amazement, and Doc Miner said admiringly:

"You are certainly a cool one, Buffalo Bill."

The others thought so, too; but, as Ike Ellis was not backed up in his intention to let the one who remained alive get the gold, he wavered, and said:

"Well, cap'n, I'm not the man to wish to turn against you, and I'll offer a compromise."

"Name it."

"And I mean it; and say take Buffalo Bill's horse, outfit, weapons, and all, and give him his life, while we go on."

"And leave him to die of starvation, without covering at night, or a weapon to defend himself with—no!" indignantly said Doc Miner.

But Buffalo Bill broke in with:

"I accept the terms!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

"What! Do you mean that you are willing to be left here in this wild country alone, unarmed, without food?"

"Yes, Captain Miner."

"Why, it will serve the purpose these men desire—be your death."

"No; for I can go several days without food, and, though walking is too much like work to be enjoyable, I can reach the fort in three or four days."

"But at night?"

"I can build a fire to keep warm."

"But you are not to have a match," said Ike Ellis.

"All right; I won't build a fire, then."

"But you will have nothing to protect you from wild beasts."

"I'll risk them."

"Say, cap'n, we've given him his chance—he accepts—so what's the use of your chipping in any more?" said Ike Ellis.

With a bound, Doc Miner confronted the man, and his eyes were ablaze as he said:

"You utter another word, and I will kill you, so help me Heaven, if it's the last act of my life. Buffalo Bill has accepted the compromise, a cowardly one for you to offer; but I tell him right here if he refuses I will stand by him."

Ike Ellis was cowed. He felt he had gone too far. A quick glance at his two pards told him that the act of their captain had also subdued them, so he simply held up his hands in token of surrender.

He was really afraid to risk reply with those burning eyes before him.

"Buffalo Bill, I would see you better treated, but, rather than have a deadly scene here, I yield to the compromise which you accept. We are all ready to start, or soon will be, so here you are to remain until we pack up and get off; but you are to remain bound until the last moment."

"I am content. I accept the situation as it is."

"Jake, go after the scout's horse and bring him here, and you, Ned, go to the camp and tell Drake Jones we start within half an hour upon the trail."

"Ellis, you go over the range to the grazing ground, saddle our two horses, and bring them here, and, with Buffalo Bill's horse, we can travel along pretty well, carrying our gold and outfit, and having one animal to ride by turns and rest us."

Ike Ellis looked as though he intended to resent the order, but his two companions had already started off to obey, and he sullenly went his way.

"Well, I owe you my life, and that I am one to appreciate a favor I believe you know," said Buffalo Bill, when the leader remained alone with him.

"I have done no more than humanity demanded, and, let me tell you right now, that I happen to have a little food in my pocket yonder, and shall place it

for you in the old fort here, along with one of my revolvers, a few rounds of ammunition, and a knife."

"You are certainly a friend in need."

"When I leave the camp, I will, if I can do so without being seen—for I do not wish trouble—leave you a blanket, so you will have something to cover you by night."

"I will not forget you, Doc Miner," said the scout earnestly.

The gold boomer then did as he said, leaving some bread and broiled venison hidden away, with a revolver and a heavy clasp knife, calling to Buffalo Bill to see where he put them.

By this time the man had returned with Buffalo Bill's horse, and soon after up came Ellis with the two animals belonging to the gold boomers, and the only two that were left of the seven they had brought with them.

"Say, Buffalo Bill, we want your coat and whole outfit, for the terms are that you are left nothing," Ike Ellis said, with a quick glance at the leader.

"Except my life—thanks," returned Buffalo Bill, with a sarcastic smile.

"You are lucky to get that, for this is a case of life and death with us, and only because the captain is chicken-hearted you are allowed to live."

"I am not one to say die, Ike Ellis, and some day we may meet again—in fact, I am sure we will, for you are one of those men whom prosperity will ruin,

and you'll yet die on this border, and with your boots on, mark my words."

"That's a threat, Buffalo Bill," savagely said Ellis.

"Oh, no, only a prediction; for I've met your kind often before, and know what their fate has been."

The man laughed rudely, and replied:

"Well, I won't quarrel with a dying man; for, if you don't starve to death, the mountain lions will make a feast of you. I've got nothing against you, except that you came between us and our success."

"Come, we have had talk enough. Mount your horse and go on to camp," and Doc Miner stepped forward and took the bridle rein of the scout's horse, the latter remarking:

"I will make you a present of my horse and outfit, Doc Miner."

"I accept the gift with thanks," was the answer, and Ike Ellis grew black with rage, for his eye was already upon the scout's horse for himself.

"Have you any papers, or any little thing you wish to keep, Buffalo Bill?" asked Doc Miner, unheeding the look of Ike Ellis, yet careful the while to keep his eye upon him, and his hand near his revolver for quick use.

"Nothing, thank you."

"Then I will unbind the lariat and leave you, I am sorry to say, as I never believed I would be guilty of leaving any man, even my worst foe."

"I am ready when you are, and I surely will not be weighted down with what I possess," and the light-

hearted manner in which the scout accepted his fate won the admiration of even Ike Ellis, who called out, as he stepped to the side of one of the other horses:

"Well, you're game, and I hope you'll get through, but I doubt it."

"Don't worry about me, Ellis, for I do not need your sympathy," was Buffalo Bill's reply.

The two men with Doc Miner now stepped to their horses, and Doc Miner began to untie the lariat with which the scout had been so securely bound.

It was not such an easy task, but at last was completed, the gold boomer dropping the lariat in a coil upon the ground, as though thoughtlessly.

The scout stretched his limbs, like a man awakening from a sound sleep, and then thrust his hands into his breeches pockets, standing in an easy, dare-devil sort of way.

"Good-by, Buffalo Bill, and some day I hope to hear that you got through all right," said Doc Miner.

"Good-by, captain, and thanks for your kindness toward me."

Leaping into the saddle on Buffalo Bill's horse, the other two having already mounted and turned their horses toward camp, the gold-boomer captain waved his hand and called out:

"I will always remember you, Buffalo Bill, as I see you now, fearless in the face of an almost certain doom."

Buffalo Bill merely nodded, making no reply, and

stood in the same devil-may-care attitude until the men disappeared from sight down the range toward their camp.

Then he entered the rock cabin and began to reconnoiter.

He saw the floor above, with bunks around the wall, and the trap that led to the roof above.

He went up the rough ladder to the roof, and looked about him.

The situation was a good one for defense, but then, those who had built the cabin in the long ago, had lost their lives, save the one who had been absent at the time of the attack, and thus made his escape, to later die with his boots on, and, before his lips were silenced, tell Doc Miner his secret.

Curling up from down in the valley, the scout saw a column of smoke.

It told him just where the camp of the gold boomers was, and he knew he would have to lose no time in searching for it.

Descending from the roof of the rock fort, he went to where the boomer captain had hidden the things for him.

There was a piece of hoecake, a broiled venison steak, some matches, a revolver, several rounds of ammunition, and a jackknife.

"I could give Mr. Ike Ellis a rather lively hustle if he returned now to see if I felt lonesome," said the scout, in his dry way.

Then he continued to muse aloud:

"I am not so bad off, after all, for there is food enough to last a day, and I can reach Beelzebub's camp early to-morrow morning. I am lucky to have the Indian ponies there, and to be able to get another outfit for the trail. It will be a delay of a couple of days, but that won't matter so much, after all."

Waiting for an hour about the rock fort, Buffalo Bill then set out for the camp of the gold boomers.

He approached most cautiously, until he saw that the camp was deserted, for coyotes were already sniffing around it.

This told him that the gold boomers had been gone some little time, and he at once went to the camp.

It was well situated, sheltered, near a spring and timber, but with no grass near; so the horses had been pastured some distance off.

A search soon revealed a blanket hidden in some bushes, and in it was rolled a canteen for water, a second revolver, bowie knife, and a haversack, containing some coffee, a tin cup, and a piece of bacon.

"That man is, indeed, my friend," muttered Buffalo Bill, and he shouldered his treasures, filled the canteen at the spring, and returned to the rock fort.

Picking up the lariat as he went along, he was passing the open door, when out bounded a huge mountain lion.

Never in his life did Buffalo Bill draw a revolver quicker, and never fire a better shot, for his bullet en-

tered the eye of the savage beast as he was almost upon him.

"Another debt due Doc Miner, for it would have been the last of me had he not left me weapons to defend myself with," muttered the scout, as he put his foot on the huge brute lying dead before him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE GOAL REACHED.

Buffalo Bill fully realized the close call he had had from a terrible death.

The mountain lion had scented blood from the cut on the face of one of the scout's assailants, had trailed the fresh tracks into the old rock fort, and, doubtless very hungry, had rushed out at the sound of footsteps.

Cornered as he was, he made the spring, and, but for the scout's having been left a weapon, and using it with deadly aim, the fame of Buffalo Bill would have ended then and there.

It was a full minute that the scout stood gazing down upon the dead beast, a short while before so dangerous.

"A close call—a very narrow one," he muttered, and he started off on the trail by which he had come.

He knew that he had a thirty-mile walk of it, and a rough one.

But he did not complain, considering himself very fortunate to be able to go at all.

He kept up a steady pace until sunset, and then found a camping place.

Getting out his matches, he built a fire in a secluded place, roasted some bacon, warmed up the hoecake, and made a tin cup of coffee, congratulating himself

that he did not have to go supperless to bed, and that, with the large blanket left him by Doc Miner, he had a bed such as it was, and a fire, and weapons with which to defend himself.

"I would have been, indeed, in hard luck, had I been left without food, arms, matches, and a blanket, for there are savage beasts in these mountains here, I have had good reason to know," he mused.

Rolling his blanket about him, after throwing a large log on the fire, he was soon asleep, and awoke only at dawn.

Eating sparingly of his provisions, for he wished to guard against the accident of finding Beelzebub gone, he started on his way once more, and before noon came to the little camp, startling the negro by suddenly appearing before him.

"Lordy, Massa Bill, yer done scared me clean white," cried the black, who was greatly startled.

"You may feel pale, Beelzebub, but you don't look it a little bit. But I've had a scare, too."

Then the scout told the negro just what had happened to him.

Beelzebub listened with staring eyes, and said:

"Well, I do decla', you wasn't born ter be kilt, Massa Bill. But what you going to do now?"

"Have dinner, fit out again, mount one of the Indian ponies, and camp to-night at the old rock fort, for I must push on to Fetterman as rapidly as I can."

"Yes, sah, dat's so, fer it hab been some time since I left de Lost Valley."

"And you feel anxious about those there?"

"I does, sah, and I don't. Yer see, dey can't get away, only I don't want any of 'em ter kill themselves tryin' ter."

"I see that you don't wish to tell any more than you have to, Beelzebub."

"No, sah."

"How are you feeling now?"

"Gittin' better right along. Be all right in a few days, Massa Bill."

Buffalo Bill then set to work to get a good dinner, for he was hungry, and the negro aided him as much as the scout would allow him to do.

Then he selected the best of the Indian ponies, put on him the saddle and bridle of his redskin mates, took one of the rifles and some provisions, with an extra blanket, and again bade Beelzebub good-by, with the remark:

"I hope I'll have better luck this time."

"I thinks you had mighty big luck last time, Massa Bill," was the significant reply.

The Indian pony was a good one, and could carry the scout's weight well over the rugged country, so that the sun had not set when he rode up to the old rock fort and scattered the coyotes gathered about what remained of the dead mountain lion.

Going then to the deserted camp of the gold boomers, Buffalo Bill, as soon as he had taken the pony to where he could get good grass, filled his canteen and returned to the rock fort.

A fire was built, supper cooked, and then an hour was passed in the enjoyment of a pipe, for the scout wished the pony to get a good feed.

But at last he went after him, and both he and his horse enjoyed the safety of the little cabin for the night.

At daylight he was in the saddle, and all through the day the pony was not spared, save when the scout walked up and down the rugged steps that he came to.

The Rattlesnake Hills were reached before sunset, and the scout camped for supper on the river; but, after a couple of hours' rest, mounted, and pushed on again for the fort, for he had made the discovery during the afternoon that the gold boomers had not only traveled fast, but their trail was leading them up the north fork of the Nebraska River, doubtless intending to strike the Overland stage trail at Cheyenne or push on to Julesburg.

Feeling that he would not be able to travel fast in his supposed half-starved condition, and doubtless would fall a prey to wild beasts, in his unprotected condition, as four of them believed him to be, they concluded that he would go back to Fort Aspen as the nearest point, if, indeed, he got there at all.

They, therefore, felt little dread of pursuit, if any, and had directed their trail so as to strike the north fork of the Nebraska at its mouth.

"They are traveling slow, and I can reach the fort and head them off before they strike the plains," and with this intention, Buffalo Bill put the pony at it

again and rode into Fort Fetterman just as the sun rose, the brave little animal dropping with fatigue as the scout slipped from his back.

Tired though he was, Buffalo Bill's first duty was to go to his scouts' quarters and call out the famous scout, Pawnee Bill.

"I want you and six men, whom you must pick for nerve and endurance, to be ready to start on a long trail after noon to-day, Pawnee Bill.

"Carry extra weapons, a full supply of food, several pack horses, and plenty of ammunition, and the men must know that they will have to go on foot after reaching a certain point to which we will ride, and besides those to go with us for the trip I have in view, I wish five men to go along to remain in camp with the horses, and be a reserve force if necessary. Remember, plenty of food, extra arms, lariats, and five or six horses."

"I'll have all ready, chief, by noon," answered Pawnee Bill.

"Remember, I wish no footsore pilgrims, or men who are not willing to go with their lives in their hands. We have them in the band, and you know how to pick, so do the work well, Pawnee, for this is no child's play we are going on, but a trail from which not one of us may ever return."

"I am with you, chief, and so will be every man I select."

"I feel that. Now I am going to report to the colonel, then get some breakfast, and after that take

a few hours' sleep, for I need it," and Buffalo Bill walked off toward headquarters; Pawnee Bill muttering as he watched him:

"The chief has been in it with both feet, for he comes back without his horse and outfit, riding an Indian pony, and looking haggard, while he is going to start out upon some trail that must be desperate, from what he says. But I know just the boys that will stick to him if it's a trail to the infernal regions."

Arriving at headquarters, Buffalo Bill was at once received by Colonel Mason, who was an early riser, handed over his dispatches from Colonel Crandall, and made a report of his trip, save that he did not speak of having met Beelzebub.

That secret he would keep, as he had pledged himself to do.

He simply told the colonel that he had made a detour northward on his return, ran upon a camp of gold boomers, been captured, and of the narrow escape he had had, but fortunately had been befriended by the leader secretly, and thus been enabled to continue on his way.

"Now, sir, I have already ordered out some picked men, and I can head those gold boomers off, I am sure, but I wish your permission to allow Doc Miner, the leader, to go on his way with his share of the gold he got in the mountains."

"He deserves it, Cody, and shall go free with his gold; but the other four we must hold and their belongings be confiscated," said the colonel.

"Yes, sir, and then I wish leave to make a scout northward in search of other gold boomers."

"Then you have reason to believe that some have slipped into the Promised Land?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where, for instance?"

"I shall strike for the Wind River country."

"I hardly feel justified in allowing you to go."

"I will take picked men, colonel, plenty of provisions, extra horses, weapons, and ammunition, and be very cautious, and we will be strong enough to retreat if the Indians are too many for us, sir."

"I have every confidence in you, Cody, but it will be taking desperate chances for you and your men."

"I will be very cautious, sir, and I believe the result will justify the danger."

"Well, you have a way of getting out of all scrapes so well, and knowing the importance of keeping gold boomers out of the north country, I will allow you to go."

"Thank you, sir."

"When do you start?"

"After dinner to-day, for I wish to head off that party that made it so interesting for me."

"I hope you may. But do you not want some troopers, a reserve force?"

"I think a few men can accomplish more than many, and I will have a reserve at the gold boomers' camp, and go on with the others on foot, for it will be safer."

"I see that you have your plans all arranged, so you can go. But, remember, do not risk too much, Cody; far better that the mountains be full of gold boomers than to lose you and your band of daring scouts. Report to me when you go."

"Yes, sir," and Buffalo Bill went to his quarters, had his breakfast, and turned in for a few hours' sleep, for his intention was to push through the afternoon and night, strike a certain point upon the Nebraska River ahead of the gold boomers, and there await their coming.

If there was a trail to show that they had gained that point, then he would push on in pursuit and hold them up.

"I'll just make them think I've got wings on my feet," he said to himself, and he greatly enjoyed the surprise he would give the gold boomers at sight of him.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE PURSUIT OF THE BOOMERS.

Again in the saddle, and mounted upon his best horse, Buffalo Bill looked as fresh as though he had not just come off of a long and most dangerous trail.

He rode out of the fort at the head of as gallant a band of plainsmen as were ever congregated.

There were in the party one very handsome scout, Pawnee Bill, and then came all in single file, as scouts ride: Pony Bob, Mustang Mark, Lasso Larry, Gold Belt, Utah Charlie, and Sport Bender among those especially selected, with five others, all good men and true.

There were two large dogs along, half bloodhound, half mastiff, and half a dozen pack horses, all as good as the animals the scouts were riding, each one being an extra if needed.

The trail taken by Buffalo Bill upon leaving Fort Fetterman was to the southwest, to strike the river just about the foothills of the Rattlesnake Range.

He knew that the gold boomers had over two days' start of him, but he had lost no time in his walk back to Beelzebub's lone camp, had ridden his Indian pony steadily on the trail to Fetterman, and felt that by taking the trail he now did from the fort, he should be able to head off the gold boomers a little south of the junction of the Sweetwater and Nebraska, or come in not long after they had passed.

"We will keep a very steady pace, boys, for I wish to strike a gold trail to-morrow that will pan out rich, I think," the chief of scouts said, when they were well started, and his men knew that their leader had big game in view.

Until dark the ride was kept up, and then the men went into camp for a rest for their horses and for supper.

Two hours' stop was all the chief allowed, and then the trail was resumed and kept up steadily through the night; Buffalo Bill guiding, with an Indian's instinct of the country in which he travels.

At dawn the river was reached, and men and horses, completely fagged out, went into camp for rest and breakfast.

But Buffalo Bill began at once to look about him for a trail.

"Spring on a horse, Pawnee Bill, cross the river, and see if there is a trail there leading southward, of three horses."

Pawnee Bill did as told and soon returned with the report that there was no trail going southward, but a large one of Indian ponies going north, and very fresh.

"Ah! That looks bad. How many?"

"Some fifty ponies, I should say."

"When made?"

"Last night, I think; perhaps late yesterday afternoon."

"Then the gold boomers have not passed, and I do

not think they had gone by any other trail. I will tell you boys my racket when we have breakfast, and then it would not surprise me if those we are after will be glad to see us, if they happen to strike those Indians whose trail you saw, Pawnee."

At breakfast Buffalo Bill told why they had come, to head off five gold boomers, and said that not a shot must be fired, save in self-defense.

Describing Doc Miner, he told his men just how he had saved him from the others, and the scouts asserted that he should be spared under all circumstances.

More Buffalo Bill did not tell just then, but the scouts felt sure that he had not brought so large a force and come so well supplied merely to catch five gold boomers.

A rest of two hours, with water and grass, freshened horses, and the men were anxious for the trail; so, mounting, they pushed on, now going northward, some one side of the river, some on the other.

They had gone half a dozen miles, when Buffalo Bill halted suddenly.

His quick ear had caught the sound of distant firing.

All listened attentively, and the rattle of rifles came distinctly to their ears.

On the scouts pushed, and the firing grew louder and louder.

At last, as they dashed around a bend in the valley, the men all on the same side of the river now, they came in sight of a stirring scene.

There was a group of rocks in the valley, and right upon the river bank, while among them grew a thicket of cedars.

In this retreat were men at bay, while charging upon them were half a hundred mounted Indians.

The valley was dotted with horses and ponies slain, showing that the men at bay had fought well.

But the Indians were now closer upon their foes than ever before, and the fire of the defenders had grown more feeble.

The victory was about won by the redskins, for nothing now could check their rush in upon the men among the rocks and cedars, and wild yells of triumph were heard as the scouts dashed into view.

But that triumphant shout Buffalo Bill and his scouts echoed with their terrible battle cry as they rushed upon the Indians.

The war cry of the charging scouts was the first intimation the Indians had of a foe in their rear.

There in the valley was a group of a dozen warriors with the ponies of those of the party who were charging on foot, and the dead and wounded braves they had gathered up from the field.

Watching the last charge of their comrades, they had not seen the scouts until they were within a few hundred yards of them.

Then they turned in wild dismay and their cries gave warning to their comrades in the moment of their victory.

The Indians for a moment were dumfounded with amazement and fear.

Then they saw that there were about a dozen scouts, and they still had forty able-bodied braves.

But Buffalo Bill was not counting odds, and he ranged his men in line, advanced at a canter, and all fired as they went.

Their fire was first upon the little group in the valley.

So deadly was it that the few who escaped leaped upon their ponies and fled.

But the scouts moved on, giving the Indians no time to rally among the rocks, and their terrible fire drove the band in full retreat down along the river bank, where they kept in the shadow of the timber.

A chief and a dozen braves rallied for a short fight, and Buffalo Bill shouted:

"That chief has mounted my horse, boys, and I want him."

With a yell the scouts dashed forward, the chief and his braves immediately about him tried to check them in vain, but they fired wildly and were again in retreat when Buffalo Bill gave several shrill whistles, and called out:

"Here, Buckskin, here! Come to me!"

The whistles were repeated, and, with a joyous neigh, the faithful horse, in spite of all that the chief on his back could do, came at a run toward his owner and master.

The frightened chief gave a yell, and his braves half halted, as though to die with him.

But he had no such intention, for, finding that he could not check the horse, he slipped back out of the saddle, over the haunches of the animal, and, striking the ground, rolled over and over for a dozen feet.

There he lay perfectly limp, and, as Buffalo Bill rode up, he cried:

"His neck is broken, but see yonder, boys!"

All saw amid the flying redskins a paleface prisoner and two large horses, captured by the Indians and carrying heavy packs.

"It is my rescuer, Doc Miner! We must save him!" and Buffalo Bill led the way.

But the horses of the scouts were about tired out, while the ponies of the Indians seemed to be perfectly fresh, and rapidly dropped their pursuers.

"It is no use with our horses, boys. We'll catch what Indian ponies we can and pursue on them!" cried the chief.

This was done, and Buffalo Bill and six of his men went in chase, for one man had been left dead behind, and three had been wounded, others remaining to care for them.

But the Indians had meanwhile crossed the river at the only ford within miles, and at the other bank they found a natural breastwork, where they could have kept back a much larger force than their own.

"We must give it up, boys, I am sorry to say, at

least for the present; but I would have given much to have rescued Doc Miner, and we may do so yet."

With this, leaving a man to watch the Indians, the scouts rode back to the scene of the fight, the fringe of trees along the bank preventing the redskins from seeing them retreat.

When they arrived at the group of rocks where the gold boomers had stood at bay, Buffalo Bill counted a score of dead redskins and half as many ponies.

But a scout lay dead, too, among his surviving comrades, and three were found to have been wounded, though but slightly, fortunately.

But among that group of rocks lay four of the five gold boomers, and three of them were dead, each having received a number of wounds, showing how desperate had been their battle against big odds for their lives and their gold.

But the one of the gold boomers who was not dead was mortally wounded.

While their leader was a captive to the Indians, he lay there, dying.

As the scout approached him, his eyes turned upon him, and his face grew more livid as he cried:

"You are Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes, Ike Ellis," and the scout spoke in a kindly tone.

"My Heaven! How did you get here? But it matters not, for your prophecy is fulfilled; we meet again, and I die with my boots on, as you said I would," was the low reply of the dying gold boomer.

CHAPTER XL.

ATTACK BY NIGHT.

Buffalo Bill saw that his words had come true only too quickly.

The man who had been so anxious to have him die, and whose firm stand had left him alone, as that man had believed, helpless and to starve, had very quickly come to the end of his life trail.

But not by his hand had he fallen.

Instead, had Buffalo Bill come only a short while sooner upon the scene, he would have saved the lives of four of the gold boomers and the leader from becoming the captive of redskins to meet with a far worse fate perhaps.

Against a foe when down, a man in distress, dying, it was not the nature of Buffalo Bill to feel any grudge.

So he knelt by the side of the dying man, and said in a kind tone:

"I am sorry for you, Ike Ellis, and only wish that we could have arrived sooner."

"How did you get here?"

"I had help not so very far away, and so decided to head you off."

"I am glad to know, for I could not understand your presence here. So your gratitude for our sparing your life was to destroy us?"

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"I had no reason to feel grateful to you or those of your comrades, though your leader proved himself my friend."

"And the Indians got him?"

"Yes, but I trust he can be rescued."

"For what reason?"

"If only to show my gratitude to him."

"I will die?"

"I am sorry to say yes, for you have some cruel wounds."

"I can't last long."

"Did the Indians surprise you?"

"Yes, we were breaking camp when we saw them coming. We fought them hard, but they killed Drake and then Ned next, and Jake, too, and broke in on us. I fell and pretended to be dead, as I saw you coming, so they swept on, carrying the captain with them, though he fought like a devil at bay. And they got our gold, too, but that pleases me, for you'll never have it; so I have some little revenge against you, after all, Buffalo Bill, and——"

His voice choked up suddenly, he writhed for a moment in agony, and then the life strings snapped—the man was dead.

It was a painful scene to Buffalo Bill, and he arose from the side of the dead body, by which he had knelt with uncovered head, and turned away.

There lay one of the five extra scouts a short distance off, his hands crossed upon his broad breast.

"Boys, stake the horses out to feed and rest, for there is sad work for us to do here.

"How are the wounded, Pawnee Bill?"

"All right, for their wounds are not bad, and I have just finished dressing them."

"Collect the dead redskins and we will tie them on the backs of their ponies, lead them to the ford, and start them across for their comrades to bury."

"A splendid idea. But our pard and this dead gold boomer?"

"We will bury them, but not in the same grave."

"That's right, for Pard Dan was a good man, and that boomer was a bad one. Dan wouldn't rest well in the same grave with him," said Pawnee Bill.

The dead redskins were first gathered up, and tied upon the backs of the Indian ponies.

They were led to the spot where the scout sentinel was on duty at the ford, and driven into the river they were forced to cross.

The Indians at first suspected an attack behind this act of humanity, but, calling across to them in their own language, Buffalo Bill said:

"We send you your dead chief and comrades. Pale-faces do not scalp and mutilate the bodies of their dead enemies."

The redskins wondered at an act they could not understand, but shouted in triumph when the ponies crossed the river and came into their midst.

Still leaving the sentinel to watch the Indians, Buffalo Bill returned with the other scouts to the camp-

ing place, and buried their dead Pard Dan and Ike Ellis, the gold boomer.

While two of the scouts were preparing dinner, Buffalo Bill said:

"Pards, I wish to rescue that good fellow, Doc Miner, and to do so we will play a little game of strategy."

All listened attentively to what would follow, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"You, Pawnee Bill, after dinner, mount one of the Indian ponies and ride up to relieve Gold Belt. Halt where they can see you from across the river, and stake your pony out in full sight of them, leaving him saddled.

"Then you pretend to take up a point of lookout, but sneak away with Gold Belt, who will also bring his pony, for he is not in sight of the Indians.

"Return here, and we will start at once back on our trail, riding the Indian ponies, for we have enough of them, and resting our own horses of our weight.

"We will go down to the ford we passed, cross, and camp until night, when we can move on the Indians and attack them on foot, trying to stampede them in such haste that they will leave their prisoner behind, and that is what we want. What do you say, pards?"

To a man they said, "Yes."

A hint of what their chief wanted to do was enough for that band of scouts.

The orders of Buffalo Bill were obeyed to the letter; the Indian pony was staked out where he could

be seen by the redskins across the river; a fire was built to look as though the scouts had camped there to watch the redskins, and the dead having been placed in their last resting place, the chief mounted, and led the way.

He had gotten back his splendid horse, Buckskin, which the force of circumstances had made him give to Doc Miner, and upon him was his complete outfit as left by him; saddlebags, roll of blankets, and lariat; while on the ground he had picked up his rifle.

The scouts had gathered up bows and arrows, to carry them along as additional weapons, and there were ponies enough to allow each man one to ride, and thus spare his own horse.

The wounded scouts said that they could easily ride any distance, and so the back trail was taken to where the river could be forded.

Here a halt was made for supper, and then, crossing the stream, the band began to follow along the banks toward the Indian camp.

The scouts held on their way as long as they dared, then a halt was made, and Pawnee Bill and Pony Bob went on ahead on foot.

The two had been gone for over an hour, and then they came back to where their comrades stood by their horses, awaiting them.

"Well, Pawnee, did you get close to them?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"They have been playing it smart on us while we

were doing the same with them," answered Pawnee Bill.

"That is, they have gone?"

"Yes."

"Went off, doubtless, soon after they got possession of their dead?"

"About that time, we judged."

"Then they have twenty miles' start of us?"

"All of that."

"And as they had a number of extra ponies along, in spite of those killed and those we captured, they had enough to give every brave one, and their dead, too. It would be useless for us to follow them with our force, I think."

This the scouts all decided was true, so they moved on to the Indian camp to stop for the night.

The Indian pony across the river was brought over by one of the men, and, a guard being placed, the rest wrapped their blankets about them, and were soon fast asleep.

But at midnight they were suddenly awakened by Buffalo Bill.

"Boys, those redskins will not travel after nightfall, and they do not expect us to discover their going until after dark, if then. They will not think we dare follow them, and they cannot be camped more than twenty miles from here."

"Of course, they will follow the river, and I will go ahead alone, and at a good pace, so you follow,

and by a dash into their camp at dawn, we may be able to rescue that poor fellow, Doc Miner."

The scouts were more than willing, and a quarter of an hour after Buffalo Bill rode away in the darkness, they followed.

Keeping up a good pace for several hours, they yet did not overtake their chief, and they were beginning to wonder if they had followed on his trail, when they suddenly saw him riding toward them.

"Pards, they are camped just half a mile from here, and are getting ready to move. Leave two of the wounded boys to follow with the horses, and we will move ahead on foot and dash into their camp; but be careful not to fire at random, as you may kill the very man we wish to rescue."

Buffalo Bill and nine of his men then went forward on foot, and they soon came in sight of the camp, right on the river bank.

There were several camp fires, and the Indians had brought up their ponies and were about ready to start.

But ten rifles flashed together, the wild cry of the scouts was heard in the still morning air, and a dozen paces apart the men moved forward, firing at a foe only when sure that they were making no mistake.

The attack was so wholly unlooked for, that the Indians broke in a perfect stampede, leaving their dead comrades, which they were bearing back to their village, and those just slain, with several wounded behind them.

Thus the scouts were again victors, but Buffalo Bill

recalled his men from the pursuit and asked each one if he had seen Doc Miner, the prisoner of the redskins.

No one had done so, and then Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, we have one brave I caught with my lariat, as his horse fell with him, and was wounded, so we may be able to make terms with them. Find out, Pawnee Bill, the worst of the wounded redskins, and we'll send him on a mission to his comrades to try and strike a trade with them."

There were found to be six prisoners with the brave Buffalo Bill had lassoed, not one of the five who were wounded being fatally so, and the most serious of the lot, a warrior with his leg broken by a bullet.

"Let us fix him up and make him the messenger, Pawnee Bill," and Buffalo Bill sat down to dress the Indian's wounds.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE INDIAN MESSENGER.

The wounded warrior seemed surprised at the kindness of his foes to him, and submitted in silence to the rude surgery of the chief and Pawnee Bill, who, however, made very successful work with the broken leg.

Then the chief told the brave that the other wounded were to be also cared for, and that he was to be given a pony, and must ride on after his companions, hold a powwow, and offer to give up all their dead, their wounded, and the ponies, if they would in turn give up their paleface captive and his outfit.

The brave seemed pleased at this arrangement, and, being lifted to his saddle, started off at a run.

Buffalo Bill at once went into camp where he was, and where the river banks and rocks formed a good defense for him.

The other wounded Indians were tenderly cared for; the dead gathered together, now fifteen in number, and several of the scouts were busy preparing breakfast, while the horses were enjoying a rest and the best of grass.

Several hours passed away before the return of the messenger, and then the sentinel reported an Indian horseman in sight.

It was the same one, and he put at defiance the pain he must have suffered from his wound.

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He had overtaken his comrades, a halt had been called, and a powwow followed.

He told how he had been treated, and the offer the great white chief had made, but the young chief, then in command, had told him to return and tell how sad he was to say that the paleface prisoner was dead.

He had freed his hands and had gotten to the river, when he was discovered and fired upon.

He had gone beneath the waters and was swept away, to be seen no more.

And his traps, which included the gold, the chief had them asked about.

That had been lost in crossing the river after their first flight, for the horses bearing it had been both wounded and drowned in coming over.

Buffalo Bill then said sternly:

"I am sorry, for now we will have to kill your red brothers and scalp the dead, so they will be only as squaws in the happy hunting grounds."

The eye of every scout was upon the Indian, for they knew what this dire threat of Buffalo Bill meant to them.

But the brave did not change a muscle of his face, did not wince.

If he had been telling a lie about Doc Miner and the loss of the gold, his countenance in no wise revealed the fact.

He did not even glance at his fellow prisoners, but after a moment of silence, began to slowly chant his death song.

In this the others joined him.

This appeared to be proof to the scouts that the Indian messenger had told but the truth, that their prisoner had been killed, as stated, and the gold lost.

"Why did not my red brother tell me of this when I sent him to his comrades?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"He had been on sentinel duty, and did not know it had happened," was the quick reply.

As the other Indians had now heard the report of the messenger, it was useless to ask them, and the chief said, in a disappointed tone:

"I fear we have overreached ourselves, pards; but we can do nothing, though somehow I do not believe this redskin messenger's story."

But the other scouts thought differently, and so Buffalo Bill turned to the redskin, and said:

"Let my red brother know that we will not kill our foes or mutilate the dead. He is wounded and needs rest, so can remain here, while his brother, who is unhurt, can return to the band and tell them to come back after their comrades and their dead; but some of their ponies we will keep.

"I will take my young men across the river, and let my red brothers return at once to their village. If they refuse, I will send the braves from the fort upon their trail."

The death song had quickly ceased, and the prisoners seemed only too happy at the mercy shown them.

The brave whom Buffalo Bill had lassoed was then given a pony and told to go after his comrades and

bring them back, and the scouts left the dead and wounded in camp to await their coming, while they recrossed the river and went into camp.

This time the messenger was gone but an hour, and the redskins came back by twos and threes, as though dreading a trap.

But their wounded companions called to them that the scouts were not in ambush, and the braves were still rapidly coming up, and they lost no time in getting away.

As they filed away in the distance, Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, pards, we have not done so badly, for we have killed more Indians than we had men, wounded as many more, and broken the spirit of the band, while their chief is among the dead. Though we did not capture the gold boomers, we know that they did not escape with their treasure. Now, I have more work for you to do."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE AMBUSH.

Pawnee Bill and Pony Bob were the two who crossed the river, and kept watch upon the Indians.

Still outnumbering the scouts over three to one, they might halt on their trail, return by night, and make an attack upon their foes, whom they would expect to surprise.

But toward sunset, Pony Bob returned to say that the Indians had kept steadily on in their retreat, and Pawnee Bill would follow them until dark and then get near enough to try and hear what they talked about, or in some way discover what their plans were.

He would also try and do what the chief had particularly requested, to see if they still had their prisoner, Doc Miner, and the two large horses that had been carrying the gold, for Buffalo Bill was still doubtful of the story of the gold boomer's death and the drowning of the two animals in the river in crossing.

Feeling assured that the Indians, if honest in their retreat, would keep on to the junction of the two rivers to the north, and hold on to the headwaters of the Powder River, where their villages were, Buffalo Bill was anxious to get on his way back to the lone camp of Beelzebub, and carry out his plan to go to the Lost Valley with the negro.

To get an early start, he decided to cross the river and camp several miles farther on the Indian trail,

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which the scouts would have to follow until they branched off toward the Sweetwater.

This would also cause Pawnee Bill to meet them on his return trail, whatever were the tidings he brought, and if the redskins did intend to come back and attack them, in the hope of getting revenge, they could ambush them on the way.

So the river was recrossed, and a march of several miles made along the trail, when a good camping place was found just as darkness set in.

The horses had become rested, and if there was no disturbance that night they would all, both men and animals, be in fine condition on the morrow to resume their way.

Supper was over, a guard had been set, and the horses were staked out feeding, while the scouts were lolling about the camp fire, chatting, when there came the sound of hoofs.

It was Pawnee Bill, and he was coming at a gallop.

He had caught sight of the camp fire, and, riding up to it, threw himself from his saddle, and said:

"That's the worst gang of red cutthroats I ever ran against."

"What's up, Pawnee?"

"They are coming back."

"Ah, we must meet them."

"That's just it, and I know the very spot. I saw it in daylight as I followed them, and noted it as I came back to-night."

"What have the reds decided upon, Pawnee?"

"They dropped out just before dark, about thirty of their gang, and I tell you they haven't got many more. They picked their best ponies, and, while the dead went on with the wounded in charge of them and the outfit, then waited to come back on the trail and tackle us, hoping to give us a surprise."

"Thanks to you, they won't surprise us a little bit."

"Not much; but we have not got much time to lose, and we want every man, for this time it must be a lesson in manners they won't forget."

"It shall be. I will leave the camp here, and one man in charge, while the rest ride for the place of ambush, and get into position."

This was the plan, and it was quickly acted upon.

The place of ambush was not two miles from the camp, and to guard against all mistakes, the horses were left a quarter of a mile back from it in charge of another of the wounded scouts.

The spot picked out by Pawnee Bill could not have been better for an ambush, for it was where the trail ran down a very steep and rugged hill, filled with bowlders on the top and with timber shading them, while below was an open plain.

The chief and his men, ten in number, ranged themselves in the best positions, and each man was well protected by a bowlder.

Hardly had they gotten into position, when the distant thud of hoofs was heard.

"They are coming. We are just in time, pards. Let every man pick his redskin and fire when I give the

word. I hate to fire on a flying foe, but we must give them a lesson this time, for they have detained us too long already, and they will be only too glad to push on to their village after this outbreak. They are coming fast, pards; so be ready for them."

Each scout heard the words of the chief, and as the Indians came into view, like shadow horsemen, every scout was ready for the ordeal.

The Indians were coming along in single file and riding at a lope.

Each grim warrior was doubtless thinking of the revenge he was going to get when they should creep in upon the scouts' camp and strike a deathblow at daylight.

They knew that the scouts had some fine horses, wore good clothes, had plenty of blankets and provisions, saddles, bridles, lariats, and last, but by no means least, a splendid assortment of firearms, with plenty of ammunition.

Then there were the scalps to be taken into consideration, and they would dig up the dead gold boomers and get their scalps also.

It was to be a grand wipe-out, for it would take much to get complete revenge for all they had suffered.

Such was doubtless in their minds as they cantered on—to death.

Another moment and they had reached the base of the hill, or, rather, the young chief in the lead had.

He drew his pony to a walk.

The others came up, and the climb up the steep be-

gan, the braves still mounted, for an Indian never spares his horse as does a white man.

Like a squaw, the Indian pony is expected to do the work demanded of him—to go until he drops.

The young chief was not twenty-five feet from the muzzle of Buffalo Bill's rifle, and his braves were crowding close upon the heels of his pony, when, like a trumpet blast, came the command:

"Let them have it!"

A half score of flashes lit up the side of the hill—and the death volley had done its work.

"To your revolvers, men!"

The revolvers of the scouts rattled viciously, and wild cries were heard, echoing far and wide.

In one rush the braves not killed wheeled and fled. Not a shot had been fired by the redskins, so complete was their surprise. One-fourth of their number had fallen, and among them were several wounded braves. Buffalo Bill told one of the wounded, who could ride, to hurry away and recall his comrades to carry off their dead.

After the still terrorized Indians had returned and removed their dead, and after all the redskins had retreated, disappearing in the darkness, Buffalo Bill said to Pawnee Bill:

"That young chief I killed was mounted upon one of the large horses of the gold boomers, and that proves that the Indians lied in saying that both the animals were drowned. They may also have lied

about the gold boomer's attempted escape and death in the river."

And, strangely enough, just then a figure loomed up near the two scouts, and a voice said:

"Don't fire, pards. It is I—Doc Miner."

"Then you did not drown!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, in surprise.

"No! The Indians just now set me free, in return for your kindness, Buffalo Bill, in permitting them to return for their dead."

Great was the joy of all the scouts when they learned that the man whom their chief wished to rescue was at last among them, safe and sound.

Led by Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill, the entire band of scouts the next morning rode on to the camp where Buffalo Bill had left the negro, Beelzebub.

"Well, Beelzebub," said Buffalo Bill, "let me introduce my pard, Pawnee Bill. These other men are scouts in my command, and we are now ready to proceed, under your guidance, to the Lost Valley."

To Buffalo Bill's utmost astonishment, the negro broke into vehement speech, declaring that it was now too late to go to Lost Valley, as he was sure that all the people he had left there had by now perished.

In vain the two great scouts sought to get the negro to tell them why he now refused to guide them to the mysterious valley, where before he had been so anxious to take them. But Beelzebub remained obdurate, and would say no more, give no further information about the mysterious Lost Valley.

"Well, I believe the man is crazy!" exclaimed Pawnee Bill.

"That was my opinion at first," replied Buffalo Bill. "But afterward I learned to believe that he was sane. Now, however, it certainly does seem as if he were cracked mentally."

"He's led us on a wild-goose chase," declared Pawnee Bill.

"All hands prepare to return to the fort!" cried Buffalo Bill.

And the scouts at once began preparations for the return journey.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," said Buffalo Bill to Pawnee Bill, just before they broke camp. "This negro may have led us on a wild-goose chase, as you call it, Pawnee, but, in doing so, he furnished us with an opportunity to wipe out a goodly number of very bad Indians."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Pawnee Bill. "I don't think we'll be troubled by Indians in this region for some time to come."

THE END.

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