

BUFFALO BILL BORDER STORIES - No 208 -

BUFFALO BILL AND RED DOVE

BY Col. Prentiss Ingraham



52
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BUFFALO BILL

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There is no more romantic character in American history than William F. Cody, or as he was internationally known, Buffalo Bill. He, with Colonel Prentiss Ingraham, Wild Bill Hickok, General Custer, and a few other adventurous spirits, laid the foundation of our great West.

There is no more brilliant page in American history than the winning of the West. Never did pioneers live more thrilling lives, so rife with adventure and brave deeds as the old scouts and plainsmen. Foremost among these stands the imposing figure of Buffalo Bill.

All of the books in this list are intensely interesting. They were written by the close friend and companion of Buffalo Bill—Colonel Prentiss Ingraham. They depict actual adventures which this pair of hard-hitting comrades experienced, while the story of these adventures is interwoven with fiction; historically the books are correct.

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In order that there may be no confusion, we desire to say that the books listed below will be issued during the respective months in New York City and vicinity. They may not reach the readers at a distance promptly, on account of delays in transportation.

To be published in January, 1925.

- 204—Buffalo Bill's Pacific Power....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To be published in February, 1925.

- 205—Buffalo Bill's Impersonator....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To be published in March, 1925.

- 206—Buffalo Bill and the Red Marauders,
By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To be published in April, 1925.

- 207—Buffalo Bill's Long Run.....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To be published in May, 1925.

- 208—Buffalo Bill and Red Dove....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To be published in June, 1925.

- 209—Buffalo Bill on the Box.....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

Buffalo Bill and Red Dove

OR,

A LIVE GOOD INDIAN

BY

Colonel Prentiss Ingraham

Author of the celebrated "Buffalo Bill" stories, published in the
BORDER STORIES. For other titles see catalogue.



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Buffalo Bill and Red Dove

*Benjamin F.
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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."

In 1868 and for four years thereafter Colonel Cody,

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. Hecksher. 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 Roughriders 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 AND RED DOVE.

CHAPTER I.

THE REDSKIN HEIRESS.

Poker City was a characteristic border town in the heart of a mining region, and its denizens were of a type that did not inspire perfect confidence in a stranger at the first glance.

Still, beneath some of those bearded faces honesty and nobleness were hidden, the work-worn hands could give a square grip, and a true heart beat under the coarse woolen shirt.

Many—in fact, most of them—were men “on the make,” and adventurers living for the purpose of making a fortune in the easiest way to themselves.

But there were others who had come there to work hard for fortune’s smiles, and to take the yellow metal they had dug from the earth back to the loved ones in the far-away homes.

“The Irish Stew” was the principal hotel of the place, if it even could be designated under that title, and then there were the cabins of the miners, a score of stores, double that number of drinking shops and gambling saloons, the grandest of the latter being “Paddy’s Pasture,” as the sign read.

Then there were several blacksmith shops, a jail, which was used for preaching in, when there was a

parson to preach, the prisoners, if any, being ironed during the service.

Such was Poker City at one time, and it is no wonder that a young man, who alighted from the noon-day stage, before The Irish Stew, gazed somewhat curiously around him.

He was a man of large stature, well-formed, dressed in a corduroy hunting suit. He wore a sombrero and top boots, and had a face that was good-looking, resolute, fearless, and yet a trifle cunning.

If he was armed, he wore his weapons under his sack coat, and looked, what many believed he was, a huntsman, or a stage-line or express agent.

Upon the register of the hotel he wrote his name in a bold hand, and it read:

"Markoe Mann—St. Louis."

He asked for a pleasant room, said he expected to remain some little time, wished to know where he could purchase a good horse and procure a good guide.

These questions he asked of the "Governor," as the landlord was called, and who had come to the proprietorship of the hotel through the death of the former owner, Bouncer Brooks, who had laid a plot for the assassination of Buffalo Bill, and been promptly caught in his own death trap.

Governor Dave had been the "Boss of the Bar" before, and felt his dignity greatly by his promotion.

To Markoe Mann's question he answered:

"I can sell you as good a horse as you ever backed, and that belonged to my late lamented friend, the former proprietor of my hotel.

"I can give you pleasant quarters and good hash as long as you pay for them, and I'll find some one who can tell you about a guide.

"Come, take som'in' an' then go in and get your dinner while it's hot, for I hate cold victuals, an' you look as though you might do the same."

Markoe Mann accepted both invitations of the Governor, and when he had taken his seat at the hotel table he found next to him a man who had a youthful-looking form, but whose hair, worn falling upon his shoulders, and beard, which fell to his waist, were almost snow-white.

His eyes were black and piercing, his face bronzed and ruddy, and there were few that could guess within a quarter of a century of his age.

He wore black buckskin leggings, a hunting shirt of the same material, top-boots, a belt of arms, and a black sombrero lay by his chair.

"I heerd you ax fer a guide, stranger?" said the man, addressing Markoe Mann, after he had taken his seat.

"Yes, I wanted to engage a good man for some work I had on hand.

"Do you know of such?"

"I does."

"Is he in Poker City?"

"He are."

"And can be relied on?"

"For what biz?"

"As a man who will not shirk danger or hardship!"

"He can."

"And is thoroughly acquainted with this country and the Indian tribes?"

"He are."

"Then he will suit me. What is his name?"

"Buckskin, the Scout."

"Where can I find him?"

"Right here."

"Where?" and Mann glanced up and down the table at the few boarders still eating.

"I are Buckskin, the Scout."

"You?"

"Yas; don't I look it, pard?"

Markoe Mann looked at the buckskin suit and white hair and beard, and said honestly:

"You do."

"Ah! yer thinks I needs recommendations as ter bein' ther scout?"

"I do not doubt your capacity, sir, and if you are known here as a scout of ability I will engage your services."

"Ask ther Governor ef I hain't a man thet knows a pony track from a buffler bull huf."

"Well, come to my room after dinner and we will talk it over."

"I'll be thar, pard."

Markoe Mann, having finished discussing the dinner, sought Governor Dave.

"Do you know a man here by the name of Buckskin?"

"I do."

"Well, is he a good scout?"

"No one has a better reputation as such, though little else is known regarding him."

"Tell me what you know of him, please?"

"Well, he has led the vigilantes in several of their expeditions, is as brave as a lion, and was once the only survivor of a party of strangers that went over an Indian trail.

"He lives now somewhere in the mountains, and alone, comes to town very seldom, and only to buy provisions and sell pelts.

"He is in town now and might be willing to be your guide."

"He is willing, and I will engage him as such," and Markoe Mann went to his room, where soon after he was joined by Buckskin.

"Be seated, old man, and fill up your pipe," said Mann, as Buckskin entered his room, in answer to the call to "come in."

"I doesn't smoke, pard, fer it onsteadies the narves, an' seldom are it I takes tanglefoot, fer thet makes a man jerky, an' one in my biz hes ter be sure he kin hit dead center when he has call ter shoot."

"This is a pretty wild place, Poker City, and a man's life is not worth much here?" volunteered Mann inquiringly.

"Well, it are a leetle tough, in its ways; but then a man's life are wuff jist as much ter him here as it are in other places, only thar hain't as many as kin take car' o' the'rselves, an' ther law don't help 'em.

"As fer me, I are not meddlesome, but ef I are called on ter subscribe ter a entertainment, I allus tries ter be lib'ral. Now, pard, what are yer name?"

"Markoe Mann."

"Whar does yer hail from?"

"St. Louis."

"A likely village, I has heerd; waal, what kin I do fer yer?"

"You know this country well?"

"I does, from Oregon ter Texas."

"You are acquainted with the Indian tribes, who are in the vicinity?"

"Yas, an' they is acquainted with me."

"Do you know the tribe of Black Bear?"

"I does, and ther B'ar hisself."

"Indeed; then you are the man I want," said Markoe Mann eagerly.

"I guess I are," was the laconic response.

"Does Black Bear have his village far from here?"

"A purty long jump."

"He is a great chief."

"He is ther boss of 'em all, an' squar', too, fer an Injun."

"Has he any family?"

"Fambly?"

"Yes, a wife and children?"

"Waal, he had a white wife, which he tuk from a settlement, she goin' with him as his squaw, ter keep his warriors from massacrein' ther settlement."

"What became of her?"

"She were too high-toned ter live in a tepee, an' she tarned her toes up ter ther daisies jist one year an' a half arter she became Mrs. Black B'ar."

"Did she leave any children?"

"Yas, pard."

"How many?"

"Waal, some says two, an' then I hes heerd thet one are ther child of Bear's second wife, who was the daughter of a chief, whom he married shortly arter marryin' his first wife, ter consolidate ther tribes.

"Yer knows, I reckon, thet Injuns is like Mormons, they kin hev more'n one wife?"

"Yes, so I have heard.

"But, tell me, Buckskin, was this child by his first wife a boy or girl?"

"She were a girl, an' t'other one, by ther Injun wife, he were a boy."

"Do you know her name?"

"They calls her Red Dove, but she can show ther claws o' a wild cat, when she are cornered, and are as good on ther trail an' ther shoot as any warrior in ther tribe.

"Ther boy are calt Iron Eyes, an' he hev already won his eagle feathers, an' ther two tergether, an' they hunts as a pair, are a team as no man w'u'd find it healthy ter tackle."

The eyes of the young lawyer sparkled with joy at the discovery he had made thus far, and he mentally congratulated himself upon being so fortunate as to meet Buckskin.

"Tell me, my friend, when did you last see this maiden?"

"Red Dove?"

"Yes."

"About two weeks ago."

"Is she pretty?"

"Purty hain't no name, pard, for she are jist der-vine."

"How old is she?"

"'Bout sixteen or thereabout."

"She has the Indian complexion, of course?"

"Oh! she do show thet thar's Injun blood in her veins; but then ther white blood o' her ma are more evident, an' she were a beauty."

"You knew her mother, then?"

The old scout fairly started at the question, and a strange fire flashed in his eyes, while he seemed about to make some quick reply; but, checking himself, he said quietly:

"Yas, I knowed her."

"What was her name?"

"Lou Lorin."

"There can be no mistake," muttered the lawyer, half aloud, and then he asked:

"Does the Red Dove speak English?"

"As good as I does—— Waal, I'd better say as you does, fer my English are jist a leetle off color, as yer may hev observed, pard."

"But she is not educated?"

"Pard, don't yer show yerself a greenhorn, ef yer means by eddication ther l'arnin' she hev got out o' books."

"But ef yer means ridin' a bar'back mustang, shootin' a bow an' arrer, throwin' a lariat, hittin' dead center with a rifle an' pistol, an' throwin' a knife whar she aims it, she are ther best eddicated gal I ever seen."

"They do say a missionary what dwelt a long time

in ther tribe taught her book larnin', but I doesn't know that."

"Well, my man, I have come out West just to see the Red Dove."

Old Buckskin looked his surprise.

"What! does yer intend ter git her ter travel with a cirkiss as ther most beaut'ful Injun gal on top o' ther 'arth?"

"No."

"Does yer want ter marry a Injun gal?"

"No. I suppose I can trust you?"

"Yer kin ontill death do us part."

"Well, as I told you, I am a lawyer."

"You don't say?"

"I am in charge of a property that was left by one Captain Fred Lorin to the child of his daughter, the same Lou Lorin that married Black Bear."

"A Injun gal with money?"

"Yes, and it is a large fortune at that."

"Now, I have come here to meet this Red Dove, who is the heiress, and tell her of her good fortune, urging that she return to St. Louis with me and take possession of it."

"Lordy! but is yer hitched, pard?"

"I don't understand."

"Is yer married?"

"Oh, no, I am a single man."

"I see; waal, yer wants me ter arrange fer yer ter see ther Red Dove?"

"I do."

"What are yer willin' ter plank?"

"How do you mean?"

"What amount o' dust are it worth ter yer ter see ther gal?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"My scalp are worth more than that."

"Then it would be dangerous to go to Black Bear's village?"

"Jist try it, pard; but afore yer leaves let me hev a lock o' yer ha'r ter send yer parints, fer ther Injuns w'u'd take ther rest."

"I have no desire to be killed, but I will risk any danger to see the Red Dove."

"Yer see, old Black B'ar did love thet white wife o' hisn, thar's no doubt, an' she made a good Injun o' him, an' eddicated him all she c'u'd.

"Waal, all thet love, an' more, too, he hev give ter her child, an' ther man as goes to take ther Red Dove away from him hes a hard road ter travel, I kin swar."

"Then there must be some secret arrangement made to see her?"

"Yas."

"And can you arrange to do this?"

"I kin."

"What is your price?"

"Two thousand dollars."

"That is a large sum."

"I hev a large scalp lock."

"Well, you arrange for me to meet the Red Dove, and I will pay you the money."

"I tell yer, pard, jist leave it with a friend o' mine in town, ter pay it ter me when I brings a order from

you, or give it back ter you ef I doesn't take yer ter ther gal.

"Thet are fa'r an' squa', hain't it?"

"Yes, and I will do as you wish.

"Now, when shall we start on our trip?"

"In a week's time, fer I hes got ter l'arn ther doin' o' a feller o' ther gal's, an' who would fight ther devil ter save her, ef he thought we meant any harm to her."

"But, on the contrary, I mean only good to her. But who is this man?" asked Mann, somewhat anxiously.

"A fr'en' o' hers."

"An Indian?"

"No; he are cl'ar white, an' a terror."

"A bad character, you mean?"

"He are ther baddest man in these parts on ther shoot, an' Poker City knows it."

"But who is he?"

"You'll find his name on ther tavern register when he comes ter town, an' he do sometimes, as Buffalo Bill, ther Dead-shot Scout."

"Ha! Buffalo Bill, the famous frontiersman?"

"Ther same."

"He is known all over the country."

"He are ther terror in these parts, an' yet he are a peaceable man when they doesn't rile him."

"And he lives here?"

"No, pard; he has a ranch they say is haunted 'way off in ther mountains.

"Ther boys went thar ter git acquainted with him,

an' they succeeded, an' he hev helped ther Poker City graveyard along amazin'.

"He run ter cover ther Red Robin, a renegade of ther mountains, and then Devil Dan, our vigilante cap'n, who were playin' a double game, fer he were a road agent, too, an' Red Dove an' Iron Eyes, her half brother, helped him in them scrapes, an' ther gal an' old Black B'ar onct tuk keer o' Buffalo Bill when he were wounded, so he sits great store by thet Injun fambly."

"But I have come here for the good of the girl, and I shall allow no interference from Buffalo Bill or any other man," said Markoe Mann sternly.

"Pard, thet hain't ther question as ter what yer'll allow; it are what Bill will allow."

"He must keep clear of me or there will be trouble."

"You talks an' looks grit, pard, an' I believes yer'll back up yer words.

"But ther best plan are not ter let Bill know about yer wanting ther gal, an' then thar will be no trouble."

"Did yer ever write a letter ter ther Injun agint here about ther gal, an' a fortin' left her?"

"Yes," answered the lawyer, with surprise, and then he added:

"But I got no answer."

"More'n likely, as ther letter were tuk from ther mail by ther road agent, Chief Dan, an' fell inter Bill's han's as a inheritance, he hevin' got him strung up fer ther safety o' ther commoonity.

"Buffalo Bill 'vised the gal ter go East with a young man, an' see ef thar were any truth in it, an' thet young feller tried ter force ther gal ter marry

him, kept her tied in a cave, an' as Bill met a friend who had jist come ther way they went, an' hadn't seen 'em, he got anxious, struck thar trail, an' thet young feller jist tarned his toes up ter ther daisies.

"Then Bill tuk ther gal back ter her people.

"This didn't leak out in general, pard, but I knows about it; so yer see I hes heerd o' this fortin' fer a Injun heiress afore."

"So it seems; but does this Buffalo Bill love the girl?"

"No, pard, he be married."

"Well, arrange it your own way for me to see her."

"I'll do it, an' first find out jist whar Buffalo Bill are, an' what he are doin'."

CHAPTER II.

ON THE ROOST TRAIL.

The morning following the departure of Old Buckskin and the lawyer on the hunt for the Indian heiress, a horseman rode slowly into Poker City.

He was a man of splendid physique, over six feet in height, broad-shouldered, athletic, strongly and evenly developed—not like so many professional or semiprofessional athletes who are overdeveloped in arms, shoulders, or body, at the ridiculous neglect of leg muscles!—and he sat his horse, a superb animal, with the ease of one born in the saddle.

The bridle and trappings, the saddle and serape, the last in a roll behind the saddletree, were of the

finest kind, and very showy, and the black animal stepped proudly as though he had pride in his outfit and rider.

As his coat was open, a gold buckle that fastened the ends of a leather belt was visible, and this broad belt contained two revolvers and a long bowie knife, while above his bootlegs were sticking the butts of two more revolvers, most easily gotten at if needed.

The face of the man was a study for an artist, for it was clear cut in every feature, fearless to recklessness, and resolute to sternness.

The eyes were dark and full of fire, and seemed to look one through and through, and the hair was very long, falling below his shoulders, and of a dark-brown hue, and wavy.

A mustache with long ends but half hid the determined mouth and the rows of even, clean, milk-white teeth.

Altogether, he was a man to do and dare, to win love and cause fear, a bitter foe, a true friend, one who asked no odds and took all chances, calm as a May morn in the greatest danger, and deadly as death when attacked.

As he entered the street of Poker City he urged his horse into a canter, and, stopping before the Irish Stew, dismounted.

"Go to the stable, Midnight," he said quietly to his horse, when he had taken off his saddle roll, and the intelligent animal galloped around the hotel to the back yard, as though well knowing the place.

"Ah! Buffalo Bill. Glad to see you. Haven't seen you since the day we hung up Dan," said Gov-

ernor Dave, extending his hand in welcome, and in the other holding out a pen for him to register his name.

"Thank you, Dave. Is there any news in town?" asked Buffalo Bill, in his soft tones and quiet way.

"Not an item, an' things are stale since the gang got cleaned out, an' there's talk of a church and a temp'rance society. But the stage going west is due soon, and there may be something of interest to hear then. How's your ranch?"

"All getting along well, thank you; but is this person here?" and Buffalo Bill pointed to a name on the register, which he had been quietly glancing over.

"Ah! you mean Mr. Mann?"

"Yes; who is he?"

"A lawyer from St. Louis, I believe, and a reg'lar gent all over. Pays for all he gets, an' got good accommodations."

"Is he here now?"

"No."

"Gone?"

"Yes, last night."

"By stage?"

"No, on horseback; did you know him, Bill?"

"I have heard of him, and would have been glad to see him. Where has he gone?"

"Don't know."

"Which way did he go?"

"Up in the mountains."

"Not alone?"

"Oh, no; he had a guide."

"Who?"

"Buckskin."

"Yes, I have seen him; but, tell me, Governor, do you know what brought this lawyer to Poker City?"

"I do not. He said he had biz here, and went off with Buckskin."

"Which trail did they take?"

"You don't mean the lawyer harm, I hope, Bill, for he is a prime fellow."

"No, I wish to be of service to him."

"Ah! well, they took the Roost trail."

"Thank you, Dave."

Hardly had the words been spoken when the stage horn was heard ringing through the valley, and all the loungers in the room stampeded for the hotel piazza, followed by Buffalo Bill and the proprietor.

A moment after up dashed the Overland stage, six-in-hand, and driven by Rush, the crack driver of the road.

Upon each side of the driver sat an individual of striking appearance, as regarded size, looks, and general make-up.

They were almost giants in size, weighing fully two hundred and fifty pounds each, and measuring six feet six inches in their stocking feet. They were dressed in buckskin leggings, panther-skin sack coats, and wore caps of wild-cat skins, the heads in front, the tails hanging down their backs.

Their hair was very long, and their beards, too, and one was a blond and the other a brunette.

Their faces were cruel and brutal, and as they sprang to the ground from the box, they showed the

agility of cats, alighting very easily, it seemed, in spite of their weight.

They were thoroughly armed, that was evident, and a more savage pair even Poker City did not care to claim as citizens.

"Who in thunder be they?" asked one of the bystanders.

The question was answered by Rush, the driver, who called out to the landlord:

"Gov'nor, I hes brought yer this trip as hash eaters, these two pilgrims, as says they is trav'lin' fer fun, an' I told 'em this were ther place ter git all they wanted, an' inside ther hearse ar' a young lady thet are sunshine ter look onter, an' seems out o' place in these here wild diggin's."

All present were gazing at the two passengers designated as "pilgrims in search of fun," and now they glanced at the coach door at the fair passenger, just as she placed a small foot upon the step to alight, and seeing which, one of the pair of giant amusement seekers sprang forward to her aid, seized her in his arms, and carried her toward the piazza of the hotel to the astonishment of all present.

The huge borderman who had taken the maiden in his arms in spite of her indignant cry of alarm, was the brunette of the pair of giants, and he deliberately walked with her to the piazza, and, still holding her firmly in his grasp, for she was powerless to resist, said in an insolent tone:

"I charge a kiss from them pretty lips for my services."

As he spoke, he deliberately drew the face of the

maiden toward his huge, bewhiskered mouth, when there came a sharp report of a pistol, and the bully uttered a curse and started back, releasing the maiden from his grasp, and who took refuge with a glad cry inside of the door.

"Hold on, my man, for I've got you covered."

The words were uttered in the clear voice of Buffalo Bill, and a revolver in each hand covered each one of the bullies.

"Durn yer, yer has declar'd war, hes yer?" yelled the bully, facing Buffalo Bill, yet seemingly seeing that in the man which prevented him from drawing his revolver and risking a shot, while his companion seemed to feel the same way, for though his hand rested on his weapon, it was not drawn from the holster.

"Yes, I declare war against any brute who insults a woman, and I should have killed you; but instead, I was merciful and merely clipped a piece of your nose off to add to your beauty," was Bill's quiet response.

There was no doubt but that quarter of an inch of the bully's nose had been cut off by Bill's surely aimed bullet; but that it added to the beauty of the giant all doubted.

"You is havin' fun rather suddint, pards.

"I told yer Poker City were ther boss place ter enj'y yerselves," cried Rush, who had dismounted from his box.

"Who are you?" growled the brunette giant savagely, addressing Buffalo Bill, and walking to the side of his companion.

"I'll interdoose yer, pards; thet are Buffalo Bill, ther Dead Shot," cried Rush, and it was evident from the start both men gave at the name, that Buffalo Bill was not unknown to them, at least by reputation. "An' Bill," continued Rush, "these pilgrims are Blond Bill and Brunette Bill, from Montana, an' they hes been cirkilatin' around the kentry chawin' up leetle folks, so they tells me, an' hevin' lots o' fun.

"They are a-pressin' the'r notice on thet purty lady on ther way over, an' she give 'em ter onderstand she didn't want ter hev anything ter say ter 'em; but they kep' it up an' I was too durned skeert of 'em to chip in, so I thanks yer fer amusin' 'em, fer thet is what they hes comed here fer."

"Do you wish to press this matter, or let it drop?" asked Bill, addressing the man he had wounded, and from whose disfigured nose the blood was dripping.

"We are strangers an' you hold ther drop on us, so I say let up," said the man known as Brunette Bill. "And I say put up yer weepin' now, but sail in any other time yer likes," added Blond Bill.

"I seek no quarrel with either of you, and warn you to seek none with me.

"You go your way and I'll go mine, but, as I have resented an insult to that lady, I tell you now, if you repeat it even by look I'll hold you to answer."

As Buffalo Bill spoke, he lowered his revolvers, replaced them in his belt, and turned into the hotel, where the landlord said:

"The young lady wishes to see you, Bill."

"Tell her I've gone, Dave, for I hate to be thanked," and Bill turned to retreat, when a sweet voice cried:

"But I know you are not gone, sir, and I do so wish to thank you for your kindness to me, an unprotected girl."

Bill's face flushed, as he found he was fairly caught, for the young lady had headed him off.

"I saw your brave act, sir, and I thank you from my heart, though you punished that wretch rather severely."

"Not as much as he deserved, miss, and I was just in time to prevent a deeper insult to you," modestly replied Bill.

"You are certainly a wonderful shot, sir, and a bold one, to attempt what you did, for the bullet was within two inches of my face," and the maiden seemed to wish to continue the conversation.

"Ah! in this country a man has to be a dead shot, miss, or lose his life, for desperate games are played here for life and death every day."

"And you seem to have won the games you have played against death?" she said inquiringly, and with a smile.

"It is because I always hold trumps, miss."

She seemed mystified, and, seeing it, he said:

"I always play to win, whatever the game may be, miss, and pistols are trumps with me, and I am happy to say my two sixes generally win, no matter what is played against them."

"But I do not mean to boast, and will not detain you; but my name is William F. Cody, and if those rascals annoy you any more, just send for me."

"One moment, Mr. Cody."

Buffalo Bill hesitated.

"What was the name you were called by the driver?"

"Buffalo Bill, they call me."

"Are you the Buffalo Bill who has won such a famous name as a scout in Kansas and along the border?"

"I have been a scout, miss," replied Buffalo Bill.

"Now I have seen you, I do not wonder that men tell strange stories of your deeds.

"I expected to see, if I ever met you, a man not unlike the one who insulted me; but I find in you a true man and a gentleman."

Buffalo Bill bowed low, and again started to leave, when again the maiden detained him.

"One moment, please.

"I came here on an important mission, and am alone and friendless.

"This is no place for such as I am, I well know; but I am impelled by duty in coming here, and I need some one to aid and advise me.

"I have money and am able to pay for services rendered, and I ask you to continue to be my friend, and I will make known to you the secret of my coming."

"I will do all I can, miss, and——"

"My name is Ella Elsley, sir."

"Well, Miss Elsley, command my services in any way you wish, but remember, I do not serve you for pay."

"Nor would I ask you to, only there will be expenses incurred in serving me which I will defray; but I detain you now, I fear."

"Is it so urgent that I must act for you at once?" asked Bill, in a meditative way.

"No, not for several days, if you have other engagements."

"I have something to do that will keep me for a few days, and, perhaps, a week, and I intend starting at dawn to attend to it.

"Upon my return I will be wholly at leisure."

"Then I will wait until your return, Mr. Cody, but if disengaged this evening, I will make known to you my mission here, and then, perhaps, you can settle upon some plan that is best for me to follow."

Bill promised to see her after supper, and left, going into the bar, where Carrots was busy with the two Giant Bills, as already the huge pair had been christened in Poker City.

"Bill, I wants yer ter drink with me," cried Rush, the driver, as he espied Bill, and, drawing him up to one end of the bar, he continued in a low tone:

"All ther way over I was a-prayin' thet you might be in Poker City, an' them two pick you up fer a row, an' my prayer were answered.

"Yer see, they hes been ther terrors all through ther up kentry, an' I were warned, when I tuk 'em. on ther hearse, thet ther boys of Poker City had better look out.

"I tell yer they has tarned toes up ter ther daisies in every town they hes been in, an' I never expected ter see 'em wilt as they did ter-day.

"But they hes horse sense, an' they see you were dead sure of 'em so they squole; but yer keep yer eyes on 'em, Bill, boy, fer they means mischief, fer

they hes already said thet to-morrer they will drive yer out o' camp.

"Now, thet are ther Giant Bills' threat, an' I warn yer."

"Well, they may do it, Rush, for they are ugly customers to deal with, I am certain," and with a light laugh Bill turned away and went in to dinner, which was by no means a commonplace meal at the Irish Stew.

By the time he had finished his dinner he had been visited by a dozen friends, and received as many wretchedly scrawled notes, all telling him that the giants had made the threat to drive him out of Poker City the next day.

True to his promise, Buffalo Bill sent word to the fair guest of the Irish Stew that he was ready to see her.

Her coming had mystified the citizens of Poker City immensely, and all the miner swells and young shopkeepers, not to speak of the cowboys, who were quite numerous in the vicinity, had visited the hotel in the hope of seeing her.

The fame of her beauty had spread like wildfire, and also the act of Buffalo Bill, and the pair of strangers had come in for their share of talk, and the result was that Carrots was kept busy dispensing spirits to those who were athirst.

Now, the Stew was by no means a grand hotel, in any sense of the word, for it was built of boards, and was not even an imposing structure, but it was a comfortable tavern for that wild land; its table was

good, and some of its rooms that pretended to luxury were at least not uncomfortable.

Ella Elsley had been given the star chamber, which was a bedroom and small cuddy, designated a parlor, attached.

Into this private parlor Buffalo Bill was ushered.

"Be seated, Mr. Cody, and first let me tell you that the maid says those two wretches have openly threatened to drive you from Poker City to-morrow," said the maiden, somewhat anxiously.

Buffalo Bill smiled and answered:

"Their threat has been repeated to me by many, Miss Elsley, and, as I leave before daybreak, they may have the credit of driving me off—until I return."

There was a significance in the last three words of the scout which Ella Elsley could not fail to see, and she gave a slight shudder, but answered:

"Well, as you seem wholly capable of taking care of yourself, I will only say, be careful.

"Now, let me tell you why I am here."

"I will gladly listen, miss."

"Did you ever hear of a miner in this region by the name of Andrew Boyce?"

"I do not remember such a name, though I have not lived very long on this part of the frontier, Miss Elsley."

"I believe he was known as Moonlight Andy, as he was wont to work all day and on moonlight nights, too."

"Ah, I have heard such a name spoken of among

the miners, and believe that he died in the mountains."

"So it was said; he had a pard, as they call comrades here, known as Prince, from his elegance even in miner dress."

"I have heard of him, too, and he is now living in some Indian village, I believe, as it is unhealthy for a man of his constitution in Poker City."

"Mr. Cody, that is the man I am in search of," said Ella earnestly.

Bill looked his surprise, but said nothing.

"You wonder why I should wish to find a renegade?"

"I do wonder at it," was the frank reply.

"Well, I will explain by telling you that he is my father."

"Your father!"

"Yes, his name was Andrew Boyce Elsley, and he dropped his last name in coming here.

"When I was but fourteen years of age, now five years ago, my father, who was a merchant, was ruined in business by his partner, and we were left poor.

"Unable to behold my mother and myself in poverty, my noble father left us one night secretly, and then we found, from a letter sent us the following day, that he had gone West to try and dig a fortune for us out of the mines.

"He left us just enough to live on, and said he would return in three or four years.

"The gold fever here was then at its height, as you may remember, Mr. Cody, and my father struck a

good lead, and soon wrote that he was doing splendidly.

"He sent us money from time to time, and we changed our humble quarters for better ones, and I went to a fashionable boarding school.

"A year ago my father wrote that he had amassed a fortune, had sent his partner for wagons, and they were to come East and bring their gold.

"That partner was Henry Prince, who had saved my father's life one day, and thus had bound him in bonds of gratitude and friendship.

"Some time passed away and then my mother and myself received a visitor.

"Who should it be but Prince, who gave his real name as Henry Hamon.

"And a bitter story he had to tell of a robbery of the wagon train by mountain robbers, the killing of my poor father, and his own escape only by accident, after being wounded.

"He gave us some money, which he said had belonged to my father, and been on deposit in a border town, and neither my mother nor myself had reason to doubt his story.

"He was a man of fascinating manners, considerably older than myself, and, after a few weeks' acquaintance, asked me to become his wife.

"I admired the man, yet did not love him, and told him so, but he was urgent; my mother seemed anxious to have me marry him, for she was an invalid, and I told him I would give him my answer on the morrow.

"That night my mother awakened from a sound sleep with a ringing shriek, and, springing to her side I found her gasping for breath and bleeding at the lungs.

"Hurriedly I sent a servant for our physician, and then heard from her lips that she had had a fearful dream, and had seen Henry Hamon killing my father in a lonely mountain pass.

"The struggle to aid him, in her sleep, had been too much for her weak frame, and had brought on the hemorrhage which caused her death, for she died soon after the physician arrived.

"The next day Henry Hamon called, and I told him to leave me forever.

"Then the tiger in his nature broke out, and he swore and threatened in the very presence of my poor dead mother, until I told him I would have him arrested and tried for the charge, for I would have detectives sent to the mines to look up the facts.

"That caused him to leave me, and I have not seen him since.

"But some weeks ago I picked up a frontier paper and saw where Prince, a miner, had been implicated in robbing a stage, and was discovered to be one of a gang of road agents.

"Then the belief that my mother's dream was true took full possession of me, and, Mr. Cody, I have come here to find out if he is the murderer of my father, and, if so, to seek revenge."

"And you shall have it, Miss Elsley, for I will find this man Prince for you, and wring from him a con-

fession of what was the true fate of your father," said Bill earnestly.

"Only wait patiently my return, and while in Poker City keep out of the way of the giants.

"Good night."

So saying, Buffalo Bill left the room, and half an hour before dawn he was riding out of Poker City, and following the Roost Trail to the mountains.

CHAPTER III.

BUCKSKIN AT HOME.

"Pard, we hes got ter a place where we hes ter part comp'ny."

The speaker was Buckskin, the guide, and the one he addressed was Markoe Mann, the lawyer.

The two had drawn rein at what seemed the end of a small cañon, for before them was a towering cliff, and upon either side were walls of rock rising a hundred feet in height, and running back to the entrance, half a mile distant. The tops of the cliffs were fringed with mountain pines, and the cañon below, about a hundred feet wide, was covered with a carpet of grass, through the center of which was a rivulet, that came from a spring under the rocks.

Under this rocky shelter at the head of the cañon, and surrounded by a thicket of trees that hid it from view, until close up to it, was a log cabin.

It was stoutly built of logs against the wall of rock, and had but one room, twelve by twenty feet in size.

Two small windows in front, and one at either end

of the cabin, commanded the approaches to it up the cañon, and the door was just wide enough for a man to pass through, and so low that he would have to stoop.

"Who lives there?" asked Markoe Mann, pointing to the cabin.

"When I are thar, I lives thar; when I hain't, I don't.

"But it are my cabin, an' you are welcome ter make it yourn until I return with ther gal."

"It is by no means an uncomfortable place, I assure you, and my horse will also fare well, from the looks of the grass."

"Yas, he'll not starve, an' fer a fact you won't, uther, as I keeps a good supply o' grub in ther shanty."

The two men now dismounted, lariated their horses, hung up their saddles, and in a short time Buckskin had his cabin thrown open, a fire built, and a good dinner cooking, for he had brought game with him.

After the meal the two sat down for a talk, and Buckskin said:

"Now, pard ly'yer, we parts here fer a leetle time, fer I hes ter go on alone ter ther Injun camp.

"You stay here, an' I'll jine yer with ther gal, onless I goes under in ther trip, an' then yer'll ex-coose me, I knows, fer yer'll most likely hev ter die, too, fer no man kin find his way back ther way we come, onless he were born in these here mountains, or are a man as knows ther woods an' plains as you knows legal dokimints.

"Now, I hes a pard in these here mountains, who

are a paleface, as loves ther solitudes better then popylation, fer reasons he keeps ter hissself.

"Now he are friendly with ther Injuns, an' I looks ter him ter git ther gal, an' ef I should hev ter wait round a leetle, he'll fetch yer ther gal an' guide yer to ther Overland, whar yer kin git a stage as will hustle yer toward St. Louis."

"I care not who brings the girl, Buckskin, so that I can see her and convince her of the fortune in store for her, and urge that she go to St. Louis with me to obtain possession of it."

"Waal, she hev got a level head, an' ef she don't see thet Bill ter talk her out o' it she'll go all right."

"Who is this friend of yours?"

"Waal, the Injuns calls him Lone Paleface, but in ther settlements, where he ust ter go, they calls him Han'some Hugh, an' thet is ther handle I gives him."

"Handsome Hugh; then he may be a dangerous man for the Red Dove to be trusted with."

"Nary, fer he are as gentle as a kitten, ef yer don't rub him ag'in ther fur.

"I may fetch ther gal myself, but as I hes ter git him ter help me see her, he bein' mor' friendly with ther Injuns, I may find it convenient ter sen' him with ther Dove.

"Now, I'll be off, an' you kin jist content yerself here.

"Thar is game round about, an' thar is fishin' in ther streams, an' I guesses yer'll not starve."

Ten minutes after Buckskin mounted his horse and rode away, leaving Mann alone, and, indeed, a stranger in a strange land.

The village of Black Bear was situated in the very heart of the mountains, and in fastnesses where neither soldiers nor hostile tribes would dare attempt to attack him.

The chief was a man of natural genius, and for twenty long years had led his warriors to victory in battle, marches, and retreats.

Peaceful when allowed to be, he was an implacable foe to the paleface and Indian when imposed upon, and had won the respect and dread of all his enemies.

In the selection of a site for his village he had chosen a spot of remarkable beauty, as well as one calculated to give support to his people and pastures for his horses.

There were limpid streams flowing through the village, out of which the most delicious fish could be caught, and the mountains abounded with deer, elk, antelope, and the adjacent plains with buffalo.

Then there were bears, wolves, and panthers for furs, and the supply seemed never to be exhausted.

Taught by poor Lou Lorin, his white wife, many little ideas of civilization, he had built for himself a cabin of stout logs, and it was furnished in no mean way, through the skill of Red Dove and Iron Eyes, his children, while his Indian wife had done much to help along in the general advancement.

A plot back of the cabin was worked as a garden, and others of his tribe following his example in house building, the village, Man-ta-pa-ka, which means Home of Rest, was by no means an unpleasant place in which to dwell, while in point of law and

order it was certainly ahead of the festive town of the palefaces, known as Poker City.

Taught English by her mother, and to read and write French by a Canadian missionary, Red Dove had by no means grown up in ignorance, for she had read many books which the Indians, in their numerous raids, had brought home with them, regarding them as sacred relics.

The only one of her tribe who could read, having mastered the art of playing the guitar, her mother's, which Captain Lorin, with many other things, had sent his sacrificed daughter, to cheer her desolation, possessed of a weirdly beautiful voice, being able to write and sketch, and draw likeness of the various chiefs, it was no wonder that Red Dove was regarded in the light of a queen, especially when she was the child of the great chief, Black Bear.

Frequently had she gone on hunts, and even the warpath, with her half-brother, Iron Eyes, and his one hundred young warriors, none of whom had reached the legal age of white voters in the East; her horsemanship was wonderful, her aim deadly, and in hurling a knife and throwing a lasso none could excel her.

Whether it was the white blood in her veins that seemed to urge her on continually, I cannot tell; but certain it is that with her comfortable home, her power as queen, her numerous accomplishments, she never seemed happy far down in her heart.

Attracting the attention of a renegade white man, known by his deeds as Red Robin, the fate of Red

Dove might have been sad but for her rescue by Buffalo Bill.

But from that day of rescue the poor Indian girl seemed to lose her heart, which went out in all its warmth of affection toward the famous scout, and felt many a little ache, when she saw that he seemed not to love her in return.

He had saved her life, her honor, and again rescued her from the designing villain in whose charge she had started to St. Louis, to solve the truth or falsehood of her inheritance.

And yet her beautiful face seemed but to have won his admiration.

She was too womanly to show him how deeply she loved him; but then he seemed blind to her every action and look toward him.

Back to her mountain village she had gone, after the interruption of her trip to the East, and, to drown thought and to soothe heartaches, she had been constantly on the go, by the side of her brother, Iron Eyes, and at the head of the band of young warriors, which his powers and pluck had made him chief of, young as he was.

One day the band had started upon an extensive hunt, and Red Dove, with woman's fickleness of nature, which can be found in the tepee of the Indian as well as in the palaces of the metropolis, refused at the last moment to go, through a caprice.

Away then Iron Eyes and his band started for the plains, and hardly had they been gone an hour before Red Dove grew very lonesome.

Her father, the Black Bear, was in the council

tepee, with the head chiefs, and there seemed nothing for her to do.

She tried to work on a pair of moccasins she was making, but soon cast them aside.

Then she took up a pair of leggings she was fringing for herself, and that work did not suit her.

Her guitar caught her eye, and she tried to sing a little French song the priest had taught her, but the words were of love, the air plaintive, and it choked her with emotion welling up in her throat.

Impatiently she cast aside the guitar, and putting on her hunting costume, and telling her stepmother that she was going to follow on the trail of the hunters and overtake them, she caught her spotted pony, and seizing her rifle and belt of arms, she sprang into the saddle and darted away like the wind.

She readily struck the trail of the hunters, and was following it at a slow canter when suddenly while passing through a gorge in the rocks she was confronted with a horseman.

Instantly she brought her rifle around ready for use; but the horseman raised his hands above his head, the palms turned toward her, and said:

"I mean the Red Dove no harm."

The horseman who so suddenly confronted Red Dove, and in a spot where she had little dreamed of meeting any one other than from her own tribe, was a man of striking appearance.

His face was darkly bronzed by long exposure to the elements, and he had a black mustache and imperial, very long, black hair, and dark, earnest, fas-

cinating eyes. He seemed young at first glance, and yet had evidently passed his fortieth year.

His form was tall, elegant, denoting strength and quickness of action, and he was dressed in a corduroy hunting suit of dark brown, the pants stuck up in top-boots, the heels of which were armed with spurs.

A large soft hat sheltered his head, a belt of arms encircled his waist, beneath his hunting jacket, and a rifle was strapped behind him on the saddle.

"What does the Lone Paleface want with the Red Dove, that he stands in her path?" asked the maiden quietly, appearing to recognize the horseman.

"The Lone Paleface comes from the friend of the Red Dove," he answered in soft tones.

"The Red Dove has many friends."

"True; but she has one who looks to her good more than others, and he has sent the Lone Paleface to tell her to come to him."

"Who is this friend?"

"Buffalo Bill, the Dead Shot."

The bronzed face of Red Dove flushed at the name, and a glad light flashed in her eyes.

But she said quietly:

"Why did not the white chief come himself to see the Red Dove?"

"He could not, for he has a friend from the great city with him, and who has come to tell the Red Dove that the father of her mother is dead, and has left her gold to make her richer than her whole tribe."

"The Red Dove has enough to eat, warm furs to sleep on, a wooden tepee to shelter her, ponies, clothing, and all she needs. She cares not for gold, that

the foolish white man fights for, toils for, and dies to get."

"You are the first one I ever struck that didn't want gold," muttered the man; but he said aloud:

"The Red Dove has the blood of the paleface in her veins, and her mother came from the land of the rising sun.

"With the gold that is hers she can go to the birth home of her mother's people, in the great cities of the palefaces, and do much good for the tribes of the Black Bear.

"If she refuses the gold, she can but linger out here in these wild mountains, and when she is grown older be buried in the cañon.

"The palefaces march onward, and the red men go to their graves; but, with gold, the Red Dove can help her people here, and save them much sorrow."

The tone of the man was soft and insinuating, and his earnest eyes were bent upon her as he spoke.

It was evident she was impressed by the picture he had drawn, for she asked:

"Where is the Dead Shot?"

"At his home, the Haunted Ranch, with the friend of Red Dove, who has come from the city of the palefaces."

For a moment the Indian girl gazed searchingly into the face of the white man, as though to read his thoughts through his dark eyes.

But he met the gaze unflinchingly, and she said:

"The Lone Paleface hides here in these hills, the home of the red man, from his people, and goes not to the camps of the white men; but he has done no

wrong against my people, that I know, and I will trust him, though the Black Bear, my father, who saw him once, said he believed he was a snake in the grass."

"The chief Black Bear was unkind to me," said the white man, in an injured tone.

"He may have been, but he said the face of the Lone Paleface came before his eyes like a cloud that drifts up from the past.

"But I will trust the Lone Paleface, and we will see if the Black Bear was wrong in calling him a snake."

There was a flash of joy in the eyes of the man, but he made no reply, and, placing himself by her side, the two rode on together, their track leading toward the south and the Haunted Ranch, where Buffalo Bill made his home.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INDIAN GIRL BETRAYED.

After he was left alone by Buckskin, Markoe Mann felt most keenly his situation.

He was far from the nearest camp of his own race, in the heart of the mountains, through which roamed the most savage beasts, and where at any moment a human foe, in the shape of Indians, might come upon him.

He had his rifle and pistols, his cabin was a strong one, and ample food was about him, it was true, but, should aught happen to Buckskin, how would he, unaided, find his way back to the settlements?

He was a brave man and had confidence in himself; but he was not a plainsman or a mountaineer, and he knew how powerless he was to save himself, should he be discovered by Indians.

But, after one night passed alone, he became more easy in mind, and enjoyed himself the next day in hunting for game.

The following night passed in undisturbed silence, save the howling of the wolves, and hooting of an owl, that perched himself upon the roof of the cabin to toll forth his doleful notes.

The next day he fished in the streams, and was delighted at his luck.

But while at his dinner he was startled by the sound of hoof falls, and glancing down the valley saw two persons approaching on horseback.

One was a man who was a stranger to him.

The other was a young girl, whose splendid, barbaric costume, and darkly bronzed face he felt must be the Red Dove, the Indian heiress, to see whom he had risked his life in coming to the border.

"By Heaven, it is the girl! but who is the man?" he cried, springing to his feet and confronting them as they drew rein in front of the cabin.

"Do I see Mr. Markoe Mann?" asked the stranger politely.

"My name is Mann, sir," answered the lawyer.

"I am the friend of Buckskin——"

"Ah!"

"And men call me Handsome Hugh, and among the Indians I am known as Lone Paleface."

"I know now who you are, sir, for Buckskin said

Arnold and you'll be old and return himself. But where is he?"

"He was detained and asked me to take his place." "It is just as well, sir. This then is the Red Dove, the Indian queen?"

"Permit me to ask you to dismount," said Mann, and the sturdy gray animal to him, advanced to the side of Red Dove.

With eager eyes, she listened to the conversation, her brow clouding, and her dark eyes flashing, for she had now begun to feel that she had been led into some snare by the Lone Paleface.

As Markoe Mann advanced toward her she suddenly cried:

"The Black Bear's tongue is straight, for the Lone Paleface is a male in the grass."

As she spoke she suddenly reined her horse back and turned to fly.

But as though anticipating some such move on her part, her white companion had taken his horse in hand, and sent it flying through the air, ere the Indian young had made a second bound.

His well-trained horse prepared himself instantly to meet the shock, and the noose, settling down over the head of the spotted mustang, brought him to the ground with a heavy fall, throwing the Indian girl over his head.

She fell upon her knees, but ere she could spring to her feet Handsome Hugh had jumped from his horse, and bounding forward, caught her in his arms.

"No, my sweet Dove, you cannot fly."

he would send you if he did not return himself. But where is he?"

"He was detained and asked me to take his place."

"It is just as well, sir. This, then, is the Red Dove, the fair Indian queen?"

"Permit me to aid you to dismount," and Mann, with the courtly grace natural to him, advanced to the side of Red Dove.

With eager eyes, she listened to the conversation, her brow clouding, and her dark eyes flashing, for she had now begun to feel that she had been led into some snare by the Lone Paleface.

As Markoe Mann advanced toward her she suddenly cried:

"The Black Bear's tongue is straight, for the Lone Paleface is a snake in the grass."

As she spoke she suddenly reined her horse back and turned to fly.

But as though anticipating some such move on her part, her white companion had taken his lasso in hand, and sent it flying through the air, ere the Indian pony had made a second bound.

His well-trained horse prepared himself instantly to meet the shock, and the noose, settling down over the head of the spotted mustang, brought him to the ground with a heavy fall, throwing the Indian girl over his head.

She fell upon her knees, but ere she could spring to her feet Handsome Hugh had jumped from his horse, and, bounding forward, caught her in his strong arms, while he cried:

"No, my sweet Dove, you cannot fly away from us."

All this had transpired in an instant, and before the astonished Mann could interpose a word or act.

He was not in the habit of seeing persons of any sex have to be caught with lariats in order to get them to take fortunes left them, and as the horseman approached, holding the indignant Red Dove in his arms, he cried:

"Hold, sir! Is this force necessary to get the maiden to remain?"

"You would think so, if she could get back and tell that savage father of hers," was the response.

"But, my dear girl, I mean you no harm, but, on the contrary, I have come a long way to do you a service," said Mann kindly.

"The Red Dove wishes to go to the village of her people.

"She trusted that man, for he said he would lead her to a friend, the great white chief, and he has been a snake in the grass.

"See, he has thrown her pony to the ground with a lariat, and now has her in his power, and she is alone, for you are not her friend."

The young girl spoke indignantly, and the lawyer answered:

"Listen to me, Red Dove, and I will prove to you that I am your friend.

"Will you sit there and hear me, if the Lone Pale-face releases you?"

"No, the Red Dove will not hear," she firmly said.

"Pard, there is but one thing to do, and that I know," said Handsome Hugh.

"And that is——"

"To bind the girl and leave at once for the lower settlements.

"Once you get her away from hope of rescue from her people, and she will listen to you quietly and go with you. But here she will not."

"Will the Red Dove not go quietly with me, without being bound?" asked Mann.

"No! let the Red Dove fly back to her home in the village of her people."

"You see, so let us lose no time. Get those wide buckskin straps from my saddle, and I will tie her so the thongs will not hurt her."

Markoe Mann seemed reluctant to bind the girl, but then he had risked much to get her into his possession, and did not care to lose her.

He saw that she would be a dangerous person at liberty and she had already shown how willingly she would take chances to escape, so he said:

"Well, if the Red Dove will not promise to go with me, I must let you bind her."

"The Red Dove makes no promise to those she hates," was the spiteful reply.

Without further parley, Handsome Hugh tied her arms securely behind her back, and then the cabin was closed up, and, mounting, the party started for the lower settlements, Lone Paleface being the guide.

That night the three camped in a cañon, and Markoe Mann, to win the confidence of the girl, told her all about her inheritance.

He spoke of her beautiful mother, and her marriage with the Black Bear, the wanderings of her paleface grandfather, Captain Lorin, and his death

upon the banks of the Mississippi, and of his being appointed by the captain to give to the Red Dove the gold that he left.

He told her how he had buried her paleface grandfather in honor, and then, neglecting his own affairs, had come to the Far West to seek her.

He had risked his life to find her, and they had told him she would not leave her wild life to get her gold.

But he had determined to let her see the great cities in the land of the rising sun, give to her the gold that was her own, and then, if the Red Dove wished to return to her red people in the mountains, she could do so.

The young girl listened without a word to all that was said, and then Mann asked:

"Does the Red Dove not believe now that I am her friend?"

"Do palefaces bind the arms of their friends, and drag them from their homes and their people?"

"It is for your good, Red Dove."

"The Red Dove is happy as she was. Let her go back to her father."

"Not until I have kept my pledge to your dying grandfather," was the firm response of Markoe Mann, and, almost discouraged, he turned away from the red-skin heiress.

The next afternoon Handsome Hugh went into camp early, as he said there was no other good place on the trail for many miles.

In riding, Red Dove, at Markoe Mann's suggestion, had had her arms free of the thongs, and had only

been bound to the saddle, so as not to make her any more uncomfortable than was necessary to guard against an attempt at escape.

But when they halted they were forced to secure her beyond possibility of getting away.

In various ways Mann had tried to win her confidence, and prove himself her friend; but she kept a stolid, silent manner toward him, and he could not tell what was passing in her thoughts.

"Once I get her where she has to depend wholly on me, it will be all right," he said to Handsome Hugh.

The place chosen for the camp was in a clump of timber, and where several large bowlders made a shelter against the wind.

The horses had not yet been lariatied out to feed, and Red Dove had just been helped to the ground by Markoe Mann, when Handsome Hugh approached, after having hitched the animals, and said:

"Pard, don't you think this is a one-sided game you are playing?"

It was the manner of the man rather than the words that caused Mann to look up in surprise.

"I repeat: Don't your conscience tell you that this is all one-sided?"

"I don't understand you, sir," said the lawyer, nettled by the manner of the other.

"I will explain so that you shall. What do I get out of this little affair?"

"You mean that you want pay for your services?" hotly said Mann.

"I do."

"Then you shall have pay; but, having paid Buckskin once, I deemed that he settled with you."

"You thought wrong, pard. I collect my own dues."

"Well, this is no time to dun me for money."

"It is the very time."

"Complete your task and I will pay you."

"What task?"

"Guide me to the nearest station where I can get a stagecoach."

"We are going from the Overland line, pard, and not to it," was the cool reply.

Markoe Mann turned pale with anger and said hotly:

"What do you mean, villain?"

"Be sparing with your epithets, for I am no man to brook them, and you are in no condition to be insulting."

"Your words have some deeper meaning than I can see through."

"I mean that I have led you into the heart of the Indian country, and I doubt if even the Red Dove could find her way back."

"Then I shall, as her friend, be protected, while you shall suffer," sneeringly said Mann.

"As usual, you fail to understand, my dear Mr. Mann. This is not the country of the tribe to which the Red Dove belongs, but of the bitterest foes to that tribe, as she will tell you."

"Is this true, Red Dove?" and Mann turned to the young girl, who answered calmly:

"You are the Lone Indian who was spoken of."

"Yes, you said me this at once."

"You are no partner to this man, Lawyer Mann."

"I have taught you my lesson."

"It is the man of the nation, what means your lesson?"

"I have no judge to you, and I only wish to be free."

"You are my guide."

"You are the man who has led me to this place."

"You are a man of your word."

"I will not move from this spot until I know."

"I have told you we are in deadly danger here."

"I will not move, no."

"In the country, I am a chief in this tribe."

"I am a man of my word."

"I am a man of my word."

"I am a man of my word."

"I am a man of my word, you do."

"I am a man of my word, and you are."

"I am a man of my word, and you are."

"I am a man of my word, and you are."

"I am a man of my word, and you are."

"I am a man of my word, and you are."

"I am a man of my word, and you are."

"I am a man of my word, and you are."

"I am a man of my word, and you are."

"I am a man of my word, and you are."

"I am a man of my word, and you are."

"For once, the Lone Paleface has not spoken crooked."

"By Heaven, you shall rue this act, man."

"You are in no position to threaten, Lawyer Mann," was Handsome Hugh's quiet rejoinder.

"In the name of the saints, what means your treachery?"

"I made no pledges to you, and I only seek to benefit myself."

"Then name your price."

"First, what is the amount that this girl inherits?"

"That is none of your affair."

"Then I will not move from this spot until I know, and I again tell you we are in deadly danger here."

"And you will suffer, too."

"On the contrary, I am a chief in this tribe."

"A renegade?" sneered Mann.

"Yes."

"A confessed one?"

"Yes."

"If ever man deserved the halter, you do."

"We are not in St. Louis, my friend, and you are not appealing to a jury, but before one man, who can be your executioner."

This remark Mann seemed to clearly see the truth of, for he said sullenly:

"I ask you to name your terms?"

"And I ask you the amount of this girl's inheritance?"

"I refuse to tell."

"Then I refuse to guide you farther, and your life and hers be on your head."

As he spoke Handsome Hugh turned away as though to mount his horse.

"Hold!"

"Well?"

"I cover you with my revolver, and if you do not return and swear to guide me to the Overland in safety, I will kill you, for I shall make this a game that two can play instead of one."

CHAPTER V.

REVOLVERS ARE TRUMPS.

Instead of cowering before his aim, as he had expected him to do, believing, as a double-dyed villain he must be a coward, and thereby making the mistake that many do, Markoe Mann was astonished to see Handsome Hugh burst into ringing laughter at his threat.

"What! do you dare me?"

"Yes."

"I am a dead shot."

"I doubt it."

"Beware, for patience is ceasing to be a virtue, and if I kill you the Red Dove can be guide."

"What do you wish?"

"Pledge yourself to guide me to the Overland."

"And the Red Dove?"

"Goes with me."

"If I refuse?"

"I shall kill you."

"You mean it?"

"So help me, Heaven."

"Then I refuse."

"And I fire!"

As he spoke the hand of Markoe Mann touched the trigger, the hammer fell, the explosion followed, but the man upon whom he had deadly aim neither flinched nor fell.

"I told you that I doubted your being a dead shot," sneered Handsome Hugh.

Again the crack of the revolver followed, and with a like result.

"Do you pledge yourself now, for I will not miss every time?"

"No."

"Then you die."

Again the pistol flashed, once, twice, thrice, in rapid succession, and yet no sign of a wound upon the daring man who stood sneeringly before the weapon, and not ten paces away.

"You have one more shot, try that," was the taunt.

"I will."

And, for the sixth time, Markoe Mann pulled the trigger, and, as before, without result.

"There is no need of your wasting your powder, so you need not draw your second weapon, as it, too, is unloaded."

"Unloaded?" gasped Mann.

"Yes; I extracted all the bullets while you slept last night; but my weapons are loaded, and you are now in my power, for a turn about is fair play."

Quickly his hand went to his hip, and his revolver sprang to a level.

Mann saw that he was fairly caught.

He had been outwitted by a desperate and designing villain, and was in his power.

"Now, Mr. Mann, it is for me to dictate terms, and again I ask you what is the amount of inheritance left that girl?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"To gauge the price I ask you thereby."

"Well, it amounts to something under a quarter of a million."

"Indeed! a large sum. I always knew that the old captain salted away his gold, but had no idea he had accumulated so much."

"You knew Captain Lorin?"

"I did."

"Well, now you know, what are your terms?"

"Are you serving this pretty Indian heiress for nothing?"

"No; her grandfather left me a handsome sum as a fee, with expenses for looking her up."

"Who is the executor of the will?"

"I am."

"You hold the entire property for her?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Now let me tell you what I propose to do.

"I propose to marry the Indian heiress, send her to boarding school, and bring her out in a couple of years as a rival to the St. Louis belles."

"You are a villain that I yet hope to hang," hissed Markoe Mann, hoarse with passion at the words of the other.

As for Red Dove she stood like a statue, gazing upon the two men, and her eyes only moving from the face of one to that of the other.

Not a movement of her beautiful countenance showed that she heard, or was interested in their conversation, and yet not a word escaped her little ears.

The threatening revolver alone prevented the lawyer from springing upon the man who so coolly made known the terms he demanded.

"Devil! what do you mean?" cried Markoe Mann, as he glared upon the cool face of the man known as Handsome Hugh, and whose looks did not belie the name.

"Just what I say."

"That you demand that this young girl become your wife, in payment for your services as guide?"

"You put it exactly."

"How dare you make such a base proposition?"

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and I am looking out for myself! The Red Dove being my wife will not prevent her inheritance of her fortune, and, as her husband, I can urge that she go to St. Louis and attend boarding school, and can place her under other guardianship than yours.

"Also, I will put the matter in the hands of lawyers, and make you disgorge her wealth, and, when she gets it in possession I will come for her, and we can then be happy together, for I speak her tongue. I am a roamer of the mountains and plains like her people, and can and will be to her all that a husband should be, and devote my every energy to the improvement and comfort of her tribe.

"I knew her father, and knew her mother years ago, and I love her.

"Can you bring stronger claims?"

"Yes."

"Name them."

"I am an honorable man."

"And I?"

"You are a desperado, a hunted renegade, and a villain."

The words were said boldly, and again the dark face of Handsome Hugh flushed.

"I would rather see her dead than your wife," added the lawyer.

"She may die yet before she reaches St. Louis with you, especially if there is a codicil in that will that, in case of Red Dove's death, *you* are the next heir."

"I am no murderer, man, to kill for gold, as you doubtless have done."

"When you come to need gold, crave it, as I have done, you may kill, too," was the savage reply.

Then, regaining his calm, sinister manner at once, he continued:

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

"Will you take the girl and pledge me the fortune, then?"

"It is not mine to pledge, as you know."

"Then there is but one way to decide this matter."

"How is that?"

"It is a way I have of deciding all things for or against myself."

"Well?"

"Do you play cards?"

"Yes."

"You have gambled?"

"Yes."

"Are you an expert player?"

"I am."

"So am I."

"What has this to do with the matter?"

"I will play you a game for the girl and her fortune."

"Nonsense."

"I say yes, for if you win I will guide you to the Overland in safety.

"If you lose, I marry the girl, you pledge yourself to take care of her until she is of age, and then to turn over her fortune to me."

"I will not agree."

"So help me, Heaven, this is your only way out of the trouble; for, if you refuse, I take the girl, kill you, make her my wife, and go to St. Louis and claim the fortune of my bride."

Markoe Mann saw that the man was in deadly earnest, and, always noted as a good and successful card player, he said:

"Well, I accept your offer; have you cards?"

"Oh, yes! I never go without them, any more than I would go without my arms."

He took a pack of cards from an inner pocket as he spoke and continued:

"Come, Red Dove, I'll make sure of you before we begin."

He led her, unresisting to a tree, and bound her to it.

Then he walked to where a tree had been blown down by the wind, and took a seat upon it, his feet upon either side.

With a pale, stern face, Markoe Mann followed, and seated himself opposite to him.

The cards were then carefully shuffled, cut, and dealt, and the game begun.

It was to be the best two in three games, so as to give each a more equal chance.

Both men played slowly, and the first game was won by Mann.

His face flushed at his triumph, but Handsome Hugh showed no emotion.

Another deal, and the second game was played through in the same deliberate manner, and was won by Lone Paleface.

His face was as immovable as before, but Markoe Mann's paled slightly.

Then for the first time Red Dove showed deep interest, and she bent her head eagerly forward to watch the players.

The third game was begun, played slowly through, and at last Lone Paleface cried exultantly, as he threw down a card:

"Diamonds are trumps, and I win the heiress!"

But just then a dark shadow fell upon them, and a ringing voice was heard:

"Hold! Revolvers are trumps in this game of deviltry, and Buffalo Bill plays them!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE RESCUE—THE OATH.

To Handsome Hugh, Buffalo Bill's coming was even a greater surprise than to Markoe Mann, for he had little dreamed of the appearance of the daring scout in that locality, and at a moment so very inopportune to him.

As for Markoe Mann, he was taken aback, not dreaming of a white man's presence anywhere in that vicinity, and yet, though at first fearful of trouble, he was the next instant glad of his coming.

He had often heard of the famous frontiersman, and well remembered what Buckskin had told him about him, and that he was the avowed friend of Red Dove. The Indian girl's lips, at sight of her brave defender upon former occasions, and the man she so fondly loved, parted in a cry of joy as she saw him spring upon the rock, and then she became perfectly calm, and was contented to let matters take their course, wholly confident that Buffalo Bill would regulate them.

That Handsome Hugh was a brave man, there could be no doubt, and one who could use weapons unerringly, too.

But he was fairly caught this time, and he knew it. The revolvers of Markoe Mann were unloaded, and those of Lone Paleface were in his belt, and he had heard enough of the man who played his pistols as trumps in any game of life and death to know that

the slightest movement on his part would be his death warrant.

It was a thrilling tableau, certainly, the two men seated across the log, the cards between them, and their bodies bent to one side, and eyes turned up to the ranchero, and hands half raised, as though to ward off the deadly bullets, while, standing upon the rock, both hands thrust forward, and each holding a revolver upon the gamblers for the possession of a young girl, with Red Dove bound to a tree, and the indifferent horses in the background, certainly made up a picture of striking interest and action.

For a moment only the tableau lasted, yet it seemed an age to Lone Paleface and Markoe Mann, and then came in ringing, clear, and cutting words:

"Which one shall I kill first, Red Dove?"

"Let the Dead Shot make that man prisoner first, and then the Red Dove will tell him all," she answered, motioning her hand toward Lone Paleface.

"And the other?"

"His claws are clipped, for the Lone Paleface had him in his power."

"Ah! you, then, are the Lone Paleface, the hermit of the mountains?" said Buffalo Bill.

"So men call me. And you are Buffalo Bill?" was the cold, almost indifferent reply of Handsome Hugh, who had regained his nerve.

"So men call me," answered Buffalo Bill, repeating the other's words. "And you are Mr. Markoe Mann, a lawyer from St. Louis, I believe?" and he turned to the lawyer.

"Yes, my name is Mann."

"Well, I will deal with your case after a while.

"Now, Lone Paleface, you are my prisoner, and if you have any desire to live, make no foolish effort to escape."

Springing down from the rock, Buffalo Bill quickly disarmed the Lone Paleface, and with some stout thongs he took from his hunting-shirt pocket securely bound his hands behind his back.

Leaving him standing by a ledge, Buffalo Bill walked toward the tree to which Red Dove was bound, and had nearly completed the task of releasing her, when a cry from Markoe Mann attracted his attention.

One glance was sufficient to show him that Lone Paleface was gone.

With the bounds of a tiger, Buffalo Bill reached the spot.

But nowhere was the prisoner he had so securely bound to be seen.

"I was watching you, sir, and forgot him for the moment, and when I looked again he was gone," explained Markoe Mann.

Buffalo Bill gazed all around him; but the shadows of night were darkening the forest, and nowhere could he see the fugitive.

He listened attentively but there came to his ears no sound of running feet.

"Let him go, for we shall meet again," he said quietly, returning to the spot where he had left Red Dove and the lawyer.

The Indian girl had in the meantime been freed by Markoe Mann, and the two were standing together talking when the scout returned.

"The paleface stranger has released me," said the maiden.

"Yes; but what right had he to make you a prisoner?" was the stern question of the scout.

"It does seem a strange way, sir, to give to an heiress the possession of a fortune left her; but I came here to find her, and employed as my guide an old hunter by the name of Buckskin, who led me to the mountains, where I could have an interview with Red Dove.

"He left me at a cabin, and several days after the man who has just escaped came and said that Buckskin had sent him with the girl, for she accompanied him.

"The Red Dove suspected treachery, and tried to escape, and the man called Lone Paleface bound her securely.

"Upon arriving here I found that he was as treacherous as a snake, and as he had both the Red Dove and myself in his power, I yielded to his demand to play a game to see who should have her.

"That game he won, and——"

"Pardon me, I played my revolvers as trumps and won the game."

"True, and I am glad that you did. You have heard my story, sir, and when I show you the proofs of the fortune left the Red Dove, I feel that, as her friend, you will urge that she go with me to St. Louis and take possession of it."

"I thank you, sir, for your explanation, which seems a manly one, and if the Red Dove says you have

not been unkind to her, I will consider you as her friend."

He looked toward the Indian girl as he spoke, and she answered:

"The stranger has treated the Red Dove kindly, though he wished to take her from her people.

"It was the Lone Paleface that was the cruel snake."

"Enough! Mr. Mann, I frankly tell you, sir, that I saw your name on the register of the hotel in Poker City, and remembering it as the same that was attached to a letter to the Indian agent some months ago making inquiry about Red Dove, and finding you had come to the mountains under the guidance of Buckskin, a mysterious old hunter, I at once took your trail and followed you.

"I trailed you to the cabin, and from thence here, and I heard, for I stood behind that rock, much that passed between you.

"The Red Dove saved my life once, and as her friend I would not allow harm to befall her.

"But go with us to the village of her father, Black Bear, and show us all your proofs of her good fortune, and I assure you I will urge that she return with you to St. Louis and get her inheritance.

"But I here swear to you that if harm befall her there I will trail you to the ends of the earth until I avenge her."

There was no doubting but that Buffalo Bill meant just what he said; but Markoe Mann met his gaze unflinchingly, and promised him that all should come around right in the end.

CHAPTER VII.

PROS AND CONS.

When Lone Paleface found himself a prisoner to Buffalo Bill, and securely bound, despair at first seized his heart, for remembering his treatment of Red Dove, and also that the scout had doubtless not only seen but also heard what had happened in his game with Mr. Mann, he felt that the chances of his being hanged if taken back to the camp were far too good.

But the man was a deep schemer, and he had nerve as well, and it came over him that he had been in many tight places before and his own pluck and shrewdness had helped him out.

If there was one man on earth whom he really feared, that man was Buffalo Bill.

And now he was in that man's power.

He was a gambler by nature, and he began to plot for chances for and against his escape.

This very plotting encouraged him, and seeing that Buffalo Bill was leaning over the Indian girl, unfastening the hard knots in the thongs that bound her, he knew that it would be no short and easy work.

The eyes of Mr. Mann were not on him, but upon Buffalo Bill, and with a look of admiration as though he was awed by the pluck of the great scout.

This allowed Lone Paleface to look to himself.

He thoroughly knew the locality where he was, for he had often camped in that very spot, and as an idea flashed through his busy brain his face flushed

with pleasure. He saw a possible way out of his trouble.

Whatever the odds against him, he would meet them, if he held but one chance in a hundred.

He quietly rolled over and over until he got behind the shelter of a large rock.

His hands were bound behind him; but his feet were not secured.

The rock rose thirty feet above him and the sides were steep, so to scale it with bound hands was very hard work and very dangerous, in case he should slip and fall.

Bound as he was, he could not save himself, and a fall might so injure him he would have to cry out to his foes for aid, even if it did not kill him by his head striking a rock.

Using his chin to help in his climb, he wound his way up the steep sides of the rock, which shielded him from the view of his enemies, even had they been watching him, suspecting escape possible for him under the circumstances.

Even Buffalo Bill, well aware of the desperation of the prisoner, did not for a moment consider, after he had bound his hands, that escape, almost from their very midst, was a possibility.

He progressed slowly, and seconds seemed minutes to him.

He would hold on hard with his chin until he was sure of a foothold, and thus raise himself higher up the side of the rock.

That the effort cut and bruised his chin he did not mind.

That he would be alone in the wilderness, with hands bound behind his back, far from any help never entered his mind.

That he would have no weapons, no food, was not then considered.

His one aim then was to get away—to save his life then.

He would let the future take care of itself.

After a couple of minutes of terribly hard work he reached the top, and wedged himself into a crevice of the rock.

Then he waited the result, panting, anxious, yet jubilant.

Hardly had he gained this point of vantage when his absence was discovered.

He flattened himself out as Buffalo Bill sprang upon a rock and gazed about him.

The scout could not believe a man bound as he was could climb to the top of that ledge—he never looked there for him.

Buffalo Bill believed that the man, with his feet free, had glided away with the noiseless tread of a panther.

Lone Paleface heard what was said and he knew that he was safe.

He gloated in the thought that he had escaped, for his yet unfortunate condition he would face when the time came.

His enemies—and certainly Buffalo Bill, Red Dove and Mr. Mann were bitter foes—then, must first get away from the camp, and then he would meet his other troubles and dangers as they arose.

His pluck and cleverness, if turned to a good cause, would have worked wonders for him.

As night came on he hoped to escape, and then make his way to a friendly Indian village, recuperate rapidly, and once more start upon his evil deeds.

He had not yet given up the hope of recapturing Red Dove and the lawyer before they got out of the Indian country.

He well knew that he had a dangerous man to deal with in Buffalo Bill; but he argued that a bullet properly aimed, a knife blade rightly placed, would cut short the career of even Buffalo Bill, charmed life though he was said to possess.

But the hopes of Lone Paleface for quick escape were thwarted by Buffalo Bill, who made known that they would camp there for the night.

A shelter was made for Red Dove by the scout, while blankets were spread for himself and the lawyer.

Meanwhile Red Dove prepared supper.

The firelight brought the rock where hid the renegade into full view, and the fumes of the supper reached his nostrils, rendering him very uncomfortable.

But then he was not seen, and he forced himself to be contented if not happy.

To attempt to escape then, with such ears and eyes as had Buffalo Bill and Red Dove within twenty feet of him, would be madness.

Even if he got down from the rock without a fall to betray him, a step upon a dry twig would do so.

After Red Dove had taken supper she retired to

her little shelter to sleep, while Buffalo Bill and Mr. Mann sat down, with their backs against the rock and began to talk.

Every word that they uttered came distinctly to his ears, though they spoke in low tones.

The lawyer went over his story completely, and having heard all and convinced by it that the man was acting in a square way toward the Indian girl, Lone Paleface heard Buffalo Bill tell him that they would lose no time in going to the village of the Indian chief, and he, Cody, would use his influence to get him to consent that Red Dove should go East to get possession of, by proving her claim to it, the fortune left to her by her grandfather.

Lone Paleface also heard other matters discussed, that Buffalo Bill wished to return to the camp, as he had promised to aid a young lady in the search for a man who had been her father's mining partner, and whom she was assured had killed and robbed him.

"I believe I know the man, from her description of him, and he is a very hard citizen."

"I hope the lady will find him, and under your guidance, Mr. Cody, I feel sure that she will do so," said Mr. Mann.

"If the man does not find Buffalo Bill first," muttered Lone Paleface from his place of hiding on the rock. All that the two men talked of seemed to hold a fascination for him, for he listened like one whose life depended upon every word uttered.

He seemed to be deeply moved, too, for he had to stifle his hard breathing for fear it would betray his presence to his foes.

When at last Buffalo Bill and Mr. Mann retired to their blankets the man in hiding breathed more freely.

There, with a force of will power, he went to sleep, for he knew that he needed the rest.

Often he awoke, however, and the night seemed to him as though it would never end.

But at last the dawn began to appear, the camp was astir, and after a hasty breakfast Buffalo Bill and the others departed.

Lone Paleface was glad indeed of their going, but cursed bitterly when he saw the scout carrying off his horse, and his weapons swung on the horn of his saddle.

As they disappeared he felt fully his lonely and helpless condition.

But his first act was to rise and get the cramps out of his limbs after his long waiting.

His next was to free himself of his bonds.

During the night, whenever he could do so, he rubbed the thongs that bound his wrists against the sharp edges of the rocks.

It was very slow and very tedious work, and more, he rubbed the skin off his hands and wrists in the effort.

But it had worn the thongs nearly in two, and he went on in his effort to complete the task.

After an hour's longer work he felt a strand give way, and he soon slipped one hand out.

It was bleeding and painful, but what did he care for that? He was at least free, for he quickly released the other hand.

It was hard for him not to break out in a yell of

joy; but he very wisely did not do so. He slipped down from his high perch, quickly ate the leavings of the breakfast the scout and those with him had had, bathed his face and bleeding hands in the stream, and then started off at a swinging trot through the timber. He decided to go to the nearest Indian village, where, as a renegade, he would be welcome.

There he could secure food, a blanket, and a pony, if not weapons, and he would start at once on the trail of Buffalo Bill, for he would be thus certain to find Red Dove and the lawyer.

If he could capture them, with the aid of the Indians, or others whose services he could command, he would once again hold the winning hand, and, as well, have his revenge against Buffalo Bill.

The lawyer and the Indian girl he felt he could force to make terms with him.

Stopping on a hill for a moment and shaking his fist in the direction in which the scout and those he had rescued had gone, he cried in vindictive tones:

"Yes, I yet live, and you, Buffalo Bill, will find it to your sorrow, for woe be to you the next time you cross my path!"

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE INDIAN VILLAGE.

To the village of Black Bear, Buffalo Bill went with Red Dove and Markoe Mann, and the story of the maiden's capture and rescue was made known, though the lawyer was shielded in the matter, as the

scout had become convinced that he was acting really for the good of the Indian girl. He had impressed this also upon Red Dove, so that Markoe Mann received a warm welcome from Black Bear.

The inheritance was talked over, and both Buffalo Bill and Mann convinced the chief that it was best for Red Dove to go to St. Louis and get possession of her fortune, which, if she so willed, she could spend in the improvement of her people and their comfort.

After a while, and much urging, Black Bear gave his consent, if her brother, Iron Eyes, went with her, and this was agreed to by the lawyer.

Iron Eyes, however, had not returned from his hunt, and they were compelled to await his arrival.

At last he came, and old Black Bear himself, with a large force of warriors, escorted the party to the nearest point of the Overland road where they could catch a stage, and the passengers bound East were somewhat alarmed at having the coach halted, and beholding around it a large force of Indian warriors.

They gave sighs of relief, however, when they found their scalps were safe, yet cast sly glances at their new fellow passengers, who consisted of Markoe Mann, Red Dove, and Iron Eyes.

When the stage had rolled on out of sight Buffalo Bill bade farewell to Black Bear and his braves, and hastily wended his way back to Poker City.

It was growing late in the afternoon when he arrived, and the loafers had begun to assemble at the hotel and on the piazza, their favorite resort.

He was spied a long way off, and soon recognized,

and the citizens of Poker City drew long breaths, for they saw that Buffalo Bill was returning, and alone, and therefore could not have been so terribly frightened by the giant sports.

That very morning the second of the pair had brought himself up even with the other's death score, and four apiece within two weeks was what they summed up, and they were therefore in a good humor.

"We have got this here town by ther tail, Blondy, fer ther hain't a man, woman, or child dare open thar heads agin' us," said Brunette Bill to Blond Bill, as the two sat together upon the piazza that afternoon, and their remarks were heard by scores of men who were in reality afraid of them.

"Thet are so, Brunette Billy Boy, an' we'll hev' ter imigrate an' look up another sojournin' spot, whar ther fellers hes got more sand."

"Yas, an' we'll go down through ther locality whar they say thet Bill Cody feller comes from, which we skeert out o' town, fer they do say as thar is men down thar in thet part o' Kansas, thet kin out-jump, out-run, out-ras'le, out-shoot, an' out-anythin' any other feller a-livin', an' thar is whar we live, Blondy Boy."

"I did hope to be entertained here in Poker City, an' were sartin of it, when Buffalo Bill sailed ter ther front; but he tuk cover durned quick, an' a clipped nose are all he has left ter remind us of him.

"What are thet yer say, guv'nor o' this hash factory?" and the giant turned to the landlord, who had been glancing down the valley.

"I said that Buffalo Bill was coming back."

"No."

"There he comes."

"Then we is likely ter be around," said Brunette Bill.

"Nary; he thinks we has gone, an' are coming sneakin' inter town," added Blond Bill, with a sneer.

"Waal, whatever his game, we win," said Brunette.

"He holds a full hand of trumps, pards," said Governor Dave, gaining courage as Buffalo Bill drew nearer.

"Yas, revolvers is trumps with thet highflyer," cried one of the crowd.

"Shet up, or I'll tarn yer toes up ter ther daisies," cried one of the giants, in answer to the last remark, and the one who had made the reckless remark quickly disappeared in the crowd.

In the meantime Buffalo Bill had reached Sloan's store, and all along the street, as he advanced, people were welcoming him with shouts and waving of hats.

"They is shoutin' fer his fun'ral," growled Brunette Bill.

"Waal, we'll atten', seein' as we pervides ther corpse," was Blond Bill's reply.

Mounted upon his splendid jet-black horse, Midnight, Buffalo Bill came on at a swinging walk toward the hotel.

He had been by his ranch and was dressed with far more care than usual, and looked the ideal border cavalier that he was.

Straight for the hotel Buffalo Bill certainly was coming, and his face was as serene as a May morn,

and he sat in his saddle with an air of utter indifference to the style of welcome he would receive.

The shouts of those who had recognized him had ceased, and only the low hum of voices broke the silence.

Those on the hotel piazza had scattered to either side, leaving the two giants alone.

The people on either side of the street already began to move out of direct range, so that it was evident a clear field was to be left for the combatants.

There were men in the crowd who had avoided the giant sports, but now were determined, whatever might be Buffalo Bill's fate, if the trouble once began, the two desperadoes should die then and there.

The huge pards had risen, as they were left alone, and each had taken the shelter of one of the stout piazza pillars, which were trees sawed off smoothly at either end, and some feet in diameter, a fair protection for a man to dodge behind.

That Buffalo Bill was blind to all these movements, and to the fact that the giant sports were prepared for him, was not to be thought of, for his eyes were too near akin to the eagle's not to have recognized the immense forms half hidden by the piazza posts.

He had come into town without a thought of the giants; but warned by the crowd of their presence, he remembered their threats, and was also made aware that his departure from Poker City so suddenly had been construed by them into flight.

This angered him, and though he sought no difficulty with them, he was not the man to avoid one.

The Irish Stew was his destination, and thither

he was going, and not an inch would he swerve from his purpose.

Suddenly, when within thirty paces of the piazza, he saw the sports drop their hands to their hips.

The first man he had met on the edge of the town as he came in had told him how the giants had been disporting themselves, that Poker City was terrorized by them, and that they were dead shots at any range, and had already killed four men apiece.

As Bill saw their hands drop upon their hips he seemed suddenly to decide upon some course of action, for, to the horror of everybody, he wheeled to the right-about and cantered down the street.

This act brought derisive laughter and yells from the sports, and a groan from every admirer of the hero, for it looked like a clear backdown.

But he did not ride far, halting by the side of a horse that was hitched in front of Sloan's store.

It was a clay-bank mustang, and an animal he knew well, for he had sold him to the storekeeper but a couple of weeks before.

"Sloan, lend me your horse, and if he is hurt, I'll pay you double his price," said Buffalo Bill.

"All right, Cody, take him."

"If I am killed you can have Midnight."

So saying, Bill quickly transferred his saddle to the back of the clay-bank mustang, and springing upon him, again rode up the street toward the hotel.

The crowd that had begun to gather at his seeming flight once more around the hotel, now scattered again.

In a walk the mustang advanced, and Buffalo Bill sat in the saddle with the same indifferent air he had

before shown. What his change of horses meant none could understand, and the giant sports seemed more puzzled at his strange conduct than any one else.

The upper windows of the hotel, and of the adjacent buildings were now crowned with faces, and a death-like silence reigned upon all.

Reaching the spot where he had before turned to the right-about, Bill called out, as he drew his horse to a halt:

"Is it war, or peace?"

"It are war to ther death, an' thar goes my card; so trump it ef yer kin," shouted Brunette Bill in hoarse tones.

With the last words he threw his revolver forward and fired.

The bullet was well sent, for it turned the sombrero on Bill's head half around, as it cut through the crown, and many believed it had struck him fair, as he suddenly slipped from the saddle.

But, as his feet touched the ground, he gave a ringing cry to his mustang, that bounded forward at a run.

And, sheltered by the horse, Buffalo Bill advanced upon his foes.

Rapidly the shots rang out from the two giant sports, and the mustang snorted with fright and pain and bounded high in the air; but Bill held him on his course and at a run, and the space was soon gone over.

Then the steps were reached, and with revolvers in each hand the giant sports fired, and with evident

nervousness, for they could not bring down the mustang, and Bill, if wounded, did not show it.

Not yet had he fired, and, at a ringing cry from his lips, the wounded and terrified mustang bounded upon the dozen steps leading to the piazza.

Then, upon the very top step he reared and fell dead, and springing upon his body, Buffalo Bill shouted:

"Now, I play revolvers as my trumps, pards."

In each hand he held a revolver, and each weapon seemed to flash together.*

Then, down in their tracks sank the giant sports, one stone-dead, Brunette Bill, and Blond Bill, with his weapons falling from his hands, swaying wildly and reaching out as though to grasp some object in the darkness.

Once the tigers were down the crowd rushed forward, and one man bounded to the side of the wounded and disarmed giant, who yet lived, and placed a pistol to his head.

But ere he could draw trigger there was a report, and a bullet shattered his wrist, while Buffalo Bill shouted:

"I trump your game, you cursed coward, to shoot a man on his knees."

A yell of pain broke from the lips of the wounded miner, and the crowd fell-back with a rush; while Bill advanced upon Blond Bill, as he crouched against the side of the house, bleeding from a wound along the side of his head, which seemed to have half dazed him, and said, in a kindly tone:

"Come, pard, the fight is over, and your friend has

turned his toes up to the daisies; but you are hurt, and I hold no ill will toward a man who can't strike back."

Blond Bill put his hands to his head, as though to recall his scattered senses, and, with the aid of Bill, staggered to his feet, and then turned his eyes upon the man who had defeated him, and slain his comrade.

One look into his face was sufficient to show all that his mind was gone, for the bullet had maddened him.

"Look out, all! he's mad!"

The cry came from Governor Dave, and helter-skelter went the crowd.

But Buffalo Bill stood firm, and his dark eyes fixed upon the madman caused him to shrink back from that gaze.

But only for one instant, and then with a wild shriek he bounded from the piazza and darted down the street, scattering the citizens of Poker City in terror from before him.

A few shots were fired at him, but none took effect, and coming suddenly upon a horseman turning a corner, he dragged him to the ground, sprang into his saddle, and darted away like the wind toward the mountains.

"After him, Bill, for you are the only man that dare follow him, and your horse is the only one that can catch my mare," shouted the owner of the kidnaped animal, and who was the captain of Poker City vigilantes.

"Then he must escape, for I am wounded and cannot follow him.

"Governor, give me a room and send for Doctor Medwin," and Bill walked into the hotel, with no sign of emotion upon his stern face as a trace of what he had just passed through, or that he was suffering from three severe wounds received in his battle with the giant sports.

Buffalo Bill was given the best room in the Irish Stew Hotel, and there the doctor found him and remarked:

"By Jove! it was beautiful, and I congratulate you, for I certainly expected to see you pass in your chips, for the two were such devils I was sure they would euchre even you, Bill.

"Ah! now I can see how they played their cards.

"This is but a flesh wound in the shoulder, and amounts to nothing.

"This one in your side glanced on the rib just over your heart, a close deal that—no, the bone is not hurt at all, and the mark of the bullet will soon heal up.

"See, it cut its way out through your clothing!

"That one in your arm? Well, that is another lucky escape."

"This one on my left leg, doctor?" asked Bill.

"Ah! that is a little dubious. I'll probe for the bullet. Why, there it is."

"Thank you, doctor; so I am not hurt?" said Bill, smiling.

"A man with four bullet wounds not hurt?

"Well, you are game, Cody, and to a man who

bears the scars as you do, I suppose you are not much hurt with these flesh wounds, which will heal in a short time."

"I have some work to do at once, so please dress them for me, and they'll not trouble me much."

The doctor did dress the wounds most skillfully, and Buffalo Bill, refusing to see the crowd that were anxious to grasp his hand, lay down to rest, after sending for the landlord.

"Dave, I wish you to send some one after that poor, maddened fellow and fetch him back to the doctor to care for—I'll pay his bill when I return, for as soon as I can I must start on the trail of Buckskin and Miss Elsley, for they may need me."

"From what I heard her say, Bill, I guess it's the man known as Handsome Hugh, whom the Indians call Lone Paleface, she wishes to find, and, if so, he's a bad one."

"Yes, very bad."

The giant desperado was sent after and found, and in the care of the good doctor of Poker City was nursed back to life and strength.

But he was a changed man since his and his pard's battle with Buffalo Bill, and went to mining in the mountains as though taught a lesson, and, glad to escape death, was willing to work hard for a living.

Buffalo Bill, as soon as he was able, set out upon the trail of Buckskin and Miss Elsley, and found them in the cabin of Lone Paleface, who was lying there desperately ill from the hardships he had endured after his escape from Buffalo Bill, bound as he was.

The end was near when Buffalo Bill arrived, and soon after the hunted man passed away, after, in a lucid moment, he had had a talk with Miss Elsley which seemed satisfactory to the lady and appeared to greatly relieve the mind of the man.

Bad as he was, he had one to shed tears over him, as Buffalo Bill and Buckskin placed him in his lonely grave, and what was his secret of the past, and whatever were his many sins, the woman kept locked in her heart; but the scout when he bade her good-by as the eastbound stagecoach started, felt that he had done her a service she deeply appreciated.

As for the Red Dove, she, with her brother, Iron Eyes, accompanied Lawyer Markoe Mann to St. Louis; and a square man, the attorney, placed her fortune in safe hands so that the interest would make a handsome income for her. He also placed Red Dove at a fashionable boarding school, to be educated, and he sent Iron Eyes back to his people, loaded down with presents for the old chief and all of the tribe.

Iron Eyes rejoiced to return to his former domain, for, unlike most Indians, he had sense enough to realize that he never could be contented in a state of belated civilization.

Two years after Red Dove, who had come to realize that she could never win Buffalo Bill's love, married her faithful attorney, Markoe Mann, and her wedding trip was out to the Far West to see her people, and it took a dozen pack horses to carry the presents she brought to the tribe, while Buffalo Bill had been written to by the lawyer, and he was the guide of the party to the mountain stronghold of the tribe.

"I am coming East some day, and will see you in your home," said Buffalo Bill, when he said good-by to the bride and her husband.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MASKED STRANGER.

Some weeks later, two men stood talking together in a frontier fort, watching from a distance the Overland coach about to start upon its eastward run, and aware of the fact that it carried a lady passenger, young, very handsome, and daring enough to risk the dangers of the trails, whether from Indians or road agents.

The two men were striking-looking personages, about the average height, splendidly formed, handsome as pictures, with faces of determination, pluck, and will power.

One was dressed in the fatigue uniform of a surgeon of cavalry in the United States army, and wore the rank of a captain upon his shoulder straps.

The other was attired in buckskin leggings and jacket, top-boots, broad sombrero, and wore his hair long. He was Cody, the army scout, then winning his great fame as Buffalo Bill.

The army officer was Surgeon Frank Powell, also known as the Surgeon Scout; and the two were devoted friends, pards on many a deadly trail. Often had they shared dangers and hardships untold, fought Indians and wild beasts, led settlers and "homesteaders" across the frontier deserts.

Horseshoe Hal, the driver of the coach, seemed proud to have as a passenger a young and beautiful woman, and all at the fort knew, as he did, that she had visited the commandant to plead for a wicked brother, then a prisoner there under sentence of death for his many deeds as an outlaw.

In her pleading it was said that she had been unsuccessful, and her sad face indicated that this was so. She had bravely met her brother, did all she could to cheer him, bade him good-by, and was going her way, a great sorrow at her heart.

As the coach rolled away Surgeon Frank Powell and Buffalo Bill were standing near the latter's quarters.

"Bill, she is really going," said the surgeon, as he saw Miss Ardell upon the box with Horseshoe Hal.

"So it seems, doc. What you said to her must have frightened her off."

"You mean about being aware that she came here to rescue the prisoner?"

"Yes."

"It may be."

"She is really, then, the sister of that outlaw?"

"Oh, yes; as there are no others in the secret, I can tell you now that the miner, Deadshot, told me as much."

"Well, she is a brave, noble girl; but here she comes."

The coach rolled by just then, and both Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill raised their hats, a salutation which Miss Ardell returned with a very gracious bow.

They watched the coach until it left the stockade through the gateway and then Buffalo Bill said:

"Doc?"

"Yes, Bill."

"I am on the trail of knowledge."

"Well?"

"I wish to see what she is going to do."

"Miss Ardell?"

"Exactly."

"She can do nothing else than go east now, for Deadshot said he intended taking her with him."

"She may, and she may not go east."

"No one in the fort knows her, other than you and I, as Bonnie Bess, of Red Pocket, for she has guarded that secret, I am sure?"

"Yes, wholly."

"Now she may go back to Red Pocket."

"Suppose she does?"

"She came here to rescue her brother beyond all doubt, and finding that you were aware of that fact, having recognized her, she has gone her way."

"Very wisely."

"That remains to be seen."

"What are you driving at, Bill?"

"Well, that woman idolizes that wicked brother of hers, and all the miners in Yellow Valley idolize her. Did she wish to make a dash and rescue her brother, she could get every man in the valley to follow her lead, so I am going to see just what her destination is."

"A good idea," responded Doctor Powell, and half an hour after Buffalo Bill rode away from the fort, following the trail of the stagecoach.

"They is two dandies from 'wayback, miss."

Such had been Horseshoe Hal's comment regarding Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill as the coach rolled by them.

"Who are they?" innocently asked the girl.

"Ther one in fatigue uniform is Doctor Frank Powell, miss, better known as ther Surgeon Scout, for he's one of the best Injun fighters and trailers on ther plains, and no man has had a more dangerous life than he has lived. He's a dead shot, and don't know no more what fear is than I does about preachin' ther gospil—and thet's little enough, you kin bet!

"Ther ain't no squarer and better man in the wild West than White Beaver, as the Injuns calls him, nor a better surgeon, scout, and all-around man, either."

"You certainly give him a most delightful recommendation, Horseshoe Hal, but who is the one in buckskin and the broad sombrero who was talking to him?"

"That's Buffalo Bill."

"Ah! I have heard of him, as I have also of the Surgeon Scout, for they are known everywhere, it seems, through their deeds."

"Yes, miss, they is, for a fact.

"Buffalo Bill is chief of scouts at the fort, and he is a man to tie to when one needs a friend.

"It was them two, if you'll pardon me for saying it, along with the miner from Red Pocket, thet captured Silk Sam and his gang, and stopped highway robbery on this trail."

"Then you think there will now be no more hold-ing up of coaches on the Overland?"

"Not on ther trail I runs, miss, I'm thinking."

So on the coach went along its way, Horseshoe Hal delighted at exhibiting his skill as a driver and striving hard to keep Miss Ardell from dwelling upon the fact that she had parted with her brother forever.

Just as the coach drove down into Deep Brook, Horseshoe Hal said:

"I tells yer, miss, it's a comfort ter feel yer kin halt in thet stream ter water your horses and not be expecting a shot all ther time."

"Yes, for you have risked dangers enough to enjoy some sense of security now," was Miss Ardell's answer.

But hardly had the words been uttered when suddenly down the trail beyond, leading into the stream, rode a horseman.

He was dressed in black, but rode a snow-white horse, though all of his trappings were of sable hue.

The horseman was masked, and wore a black sombrero, but his hair fell in heavy waves upon his broad shoulders, concealing even his neck, while, as he wore gauntlet gloves, no one could have told, from his appearance, whether he was paleface, Indian, Chinese, or negro.

"Hands up, Horseshoe Hal, for you carry a rich prize," cried the horseman, as he reached the water's edge, and leveled his rifle at the driver.

"Waal, I'll be eternally roasted, ef thet don't beat all, for I were jist sayin' ther trail were clear o' varmints like you."

"Silence! Hold on there, my pretty lady, for I'll send a bullet through your brain as quickly as I would

shoot Horseshoe Hal if you attempt to show your claws," sternly cried the highwayman.

This command was caused by seeing the action of the woman, for she had drawn toward her a small valise she had behind her upon the top of the coach, and in which she had a revolver, which had before rendered her good service.

Not expecting a holdup, she had not kept the weapon near her.

There was something in the tone of the man that indicated his intention to be as good as his word, and she raised her hand from the satchel.

"Say, robber, if yer don't consider me rude, I'd like ter ask yer who yer be, for I thought ther old gang had been wiped out?"

"The old gang was, but I have come to hunt the trails, and I am here to stay.

"The lady is well fixed, as I happen to know, so I will trouble her for her money, and all else of value she may have with her.

"If she refuses, I will kill you, Horseshoe Hal, and hold her a captive until she pays far more than I can now rob her of.

"I hope you both understand the situation."

"I understand you is a thief I'd like ter get a rope onto once," growled the driver, while Bess said:

"Yes, I understand the situation perfectly, robber.

"You have power to rob me, and so I submit to your brute force only.

"I have with me considerable money, a thousand dollars, perhaps, and some jewelry, as you have said, and I will give all up if you demand it, but I would

like to ask to keep a little money, and several trinkets, which, of little value to you, are most valuable to me from association. May I keep these and a hundred dollars in money?"

It would seem that few could resist this appeal, but the robber had the power and he meant to use it.

"Not a dollar, or anything of value shall you keep.

"I risk my life to rob, and I demand all, so give it up, or I draw trigger on Horseshoe Hal, and you are my captive.

"Come, no nonsense, so hand over your wealth," and the robber rode nearer to the coach.

CHAPTER X.

DEADLY WORK.

The man who had halted the coach moved nearer to it, riding into the stream to do so.

The team of horses looked at him askance, as though appreciating the situation, while the face of Horseshoe Hal grew black with rage.

"Ter think I can't protect her," he muttered.

To have his fair passenger robbed of her money and jewels while in his keeping was a terrible thought to the driver.

Yet he was powerless to protect her, as the slightest resistance on his part meant instant death to him.

The road agent, still covering the driver with his rifle, rode nearer to the coach.

"You will force me to give up all?" said Bess, in a voice that showed she was deeply moved.

"Every dollar and valuable," was the stern rejoinder.

"Then I suppose there is no help for me," and she opened the satchel and placed her hand within it.

"None to be hidden, my pretty miss, for I need all you have and more, too."

"Then take all I have to give!"

As the words were uttered the hand came quickly out of the satchel, it was thrust forward, and a sharp report followed.

With a cry of pain, the road agent dropped his rifle into the stream, for his right arm was shattered, and then with a savage oath he dropped his left hand upon his revolver on his hip.

But quickly a second shot rang out, and unmindful of the plunging horses, which brought all of Horse-shoe Hal's energies to bear to stop them from turning short around in the stream, the bullet was truly aimed, and the left arm dropped to his side, the weapon falling into the water.

"Ah-a! miss, don't kill me!" cried the road agent, and he wheeled his horse by a movement of his body and a word, to dash away.

"I hate to harm that beautiful animal, but he must not escape," cried Bess, now thoroughly aroused, and for the third time her revolver was raised.

A quick glance along the barrel and the third shot rang out.

Although the horse was bounding up the hill at full speed, the aim was true, and the noble animal dropped upon his knees, stumbled, and went down, throwing his rider hard.

"I'll catch him, miss, if you can hold the team," cried Horseshoe Hal, after giving vent to a wild yell of admiration for the girl's crack shooting and the success she had met with.

But as he spoke there came a rushing sound behind them, a plunge, and a horseman was crossing the stream with mighty leaps.

"Buffalo Bill!" yelled Horseshoe Hal wildly, and in an instant the scout had crossed the stream and was by the side of the wounded outlaw.

"Don't kill me, for I cannot resist," said the road agent faintly.

Snatching the mask from his face, Buffalo Bill said: "Ah, I know that face.

"You are one of Silk Lasso Sam's band who escaped.

"Ho, Hal, you did some crack shooting here, even if you did not kill him."

"It wasn't me did it, Buffalo Bill," responded Hal, who had now driven up to the spot.

"Not you?"

"Nary."

"Who, then?"

"This young lady, and she knows how ter use a gun, says I."

"I did not wish to kill him, so broke his right arm. Then, as he drew a revolver with his left, I sent a bullet through that, and my third shot was to bring down his horse to prevent his escape."

"Well, miss, you are a crack shot, and the fellow is the last one of Silk Sam's band, so that now there will be a clear trail to travel, I guess.

"I will have you take him on with you, Horseshoe Hal, and bring him back to the fort with you on your next run."

"I'll die if I am not cared for," groaned the man.

"Well, if I was in your place, pard, I'd want to die, as yer'll hang as sartin as I knows yer name," put in Horseshoe Hal.

"I did no harm," whined the man.

"Oh, no, yer didn't, but it wasn't your fault, all ther same, for yer intended ter rob this young lady and threatened to shoot her, too."

"Well, Hal, I'll do the best I can for his wounds until you reach the station where the doctors can care for him, and you must be careful that he does not escape."

"Yer won't go along, then, Bill?"

"No, for I am on a little scouting expedition I cannot neglect.

"I heard your shots, Miss Ardell, so rode on to see what was the matter.

"I congratulate you upon your nerve and splendid shooting."

"I thank you, sir; praise from such a man as Buffalo Bill is worth having."

"It was just splendid the way she did it, Bill," said Horseshoe Hal, who now, with the scout, set to work to dress the wounds of the road agent.

Taking from her satchel several handkerchiefs, she tore them into strips for bandages and aided in dressing the wounds which she had made.

At last the work was done, the road agent was

placed in the coach and the doors secured firmly, and his traps were placed on the top.

Mounting the box again with Horseshoe Hal, she said good-by to Buffalo Bill and the team moved on once more.

Buffalo Bill followed on the trail of the coach, with no desire to be seen again by the woman whom he was watching.

He had not intended to be seen, only the firing had quickly taken him to the rescue.

"If she goes back to Red Pocket she means mischief of some kind, for having failed to rescue her brother by strategy, she will do so by force, I feel sure.

"If she was really the ally of her brother it is certain that the outlaw she wounded did not know it, for no look passed between them that I did not see, and she would not have fired on him had she known him.

"I would find it hard to believe that Bonnie Bess is in league with outlaws."

Thus he mused as he rode on after the coach.

It was night when he reached the station where Horseshoe Hal's run ended, and he went at once to the hotel.

He found Hal there and learned that his passenger had taken the outgoing coach eastward.

"That settles it," mused the scout.

"She goes east, and not to Red Pocket, for she has given up the idea of rescue as impossible.

"Poor girl, I pity her, and only wish she loved one in some way worthy of her deep regard."

Then he said:

"Well, Hal, what do you think of Miss Ardell?"

"I think she is just the dandiest girl I ever crossed ther trail of, Bill.

"But, Bill, ef yer hed seen Miss Ardell work up thet leetle racket to a climax, yer'd hev died o' joy.

"Yer see, I give up all for gone, when she talked ther same way and invited thet sarpint ter take ther things.

"She opened ther satchel and out come a gun, and oh, my!

"Bill, she's ther deadeest shot I ever seen, barrin' you."

"She has nerve of an uncommon order, Hal, and she sends a bullet to dead center. But where is your prisoner?"

"He's in ther tavern under guard, the doctor havin' fixed up his wounds."

"Are they very bad?"

"Ther leetle bone in his right arm were smashed, and ther bullet grazed the one in his left, but he'll be well enough to hang with t'others of ther gang, for it's his neck we wants in prime condition for that occasion.

"But whar is you goin', Bill?"

"I thought I would ride on here and see if you needed any aid going back with your man?"

"No, indeed, for I'll tie him on the box with me; but I'll be glad of your company, Bill, if you will go along."

"Thank you, no, for I'll continue on in my scouting along the range to-morrow."

Staying that night at the tavern, Buffalo Bill left bright and early the next morning, taking the trail for Yellow Valley.

He was well mounted, and it was not yet sunset when he rode by the lonely cabin of the miner, Dead-shot Dick, a good friend of his. The cabin was closed and doubly locked, and an air of desolation and desertion was upon all.

The scout had hitched his horse down in the valley and walked up to the cabin.

Going to the rear of it, around the cliff, he stood gazing at the fine view from that point until suddenly he heard blows toward the cabin.

Quickly he made his way there and felt sure that some one was striving to break in.

Voices reached his ear, too, for one said:

"Yer hain't moved her, Jerry, so let me git a whack at her, as I fer one don't intend ter be caught in this neighborhood arter dark, for this is too near ther Hangman's Gulch ter suit me."

"And it don't please me a little bit."

"Take ther ax and let fly, for thar's money inside, I is dead sartin," was the reply.

The scout placed his foot on the projecting ends of the logs and quickly ascended to the roof, which was nearly flat and of board on top of logs, slanting toward the cliff under which the cabin stood.

He drew a revolver in each hand, knelt down, and, peeping over, saw two men hard at work to break in the door, with a log held between them as a ram.

So far they had made no impression upon either

the locks or the door, and, covering both of them with a revolver, Buffalo Bill said sternly:

"Hands up, pards, for I want you both!"

The voice coming from over their heads, and just after their expressed dread of being so near Hangman's Gulch when night came on, brought from the lips of each man a cry of fright.

They shrank back, looked up, and saw their danger.

"Hands up, I say!" roared Buffalo Bill.

Quickly they dropped the log and obeyed, and in an instant the scout had leaped down from the roof and confronted them.

"Breaking into Dead-shot Dick's home, are you?"

"Well, I am glad I happened along at this time, for the miner is a friend of mine, and I guess you are citizens who will not be missed if you are called suddenly away from Red Pocket.

"I'll take your weapons, sir," and the scout slipped the revolver and knife from the belt of one of them.

"And yours, too," and the second one was disarmed.

"Hain't you Buffalo Bill?"

"So I am called."

"Waal, I might have knowed it, for yer is allus around when yer ain't wanted."

"I'm a scout, you know," was the smiling answer.

"Waal, what does yer treat us this way fer?"

"When I get you to Red Pocket, it is more than likely you'll find out," was the scout's reply. "Until then, you infernal rascal, I'll give you plenty of time to guess what will be your finish!"

CHAPTER XI.

A PAIR OF BAD ONES.

The men felt that they must get away at all costs, for an enraged border crowd was hard to manage and would only argue the matter after they were hanged.

"I say, Buffalo Bill, this is a darned good joke," said one of the prisoners.

"What is?"

"Your making us prisoners."

"Yes, it is funny."

"I doesn't see ther joke," growled the other.

"Your haven't the sense of humor that your companion has, for he sees it," said the scout.

"But I means this, Pard Buffalo Bill, we was sent here by Dead-shot Dick ter git some things for him, and as he hed lost his key he told us ter knock in ther door, don't yer see?"

"I see where you did the knocking, yes."

"Now, jist go with us ter Dead-shot Dick and he'll say it's all right."

"Where is he?"

"Up ther cañon thar.

"We'll show yer."

"Look here Dead-shot Dick went east days ago, and you cannot play any bluff game on me."

"I tell yer ther truth."

"You couldn't tell the truth, either one of you, except by accident.

"No, I am going to Red Pocket and you go with me.

"I caught you breaking into the cabin of an absent miner, and I shall so report to the miners and give you up to them."

"They'll hang us."

"That is your misfortune, not my fault."

"And we so innercent," whined one.

"See here, Buffalo Bill, we don't want ter hand in our chips no more than you does, so if yer plays quits with us, we'll divvy."

"What will you divide?"

"I've got nigh a thousand in money here with me, and Jerry have got about half as much, so you kin have all if ye'll let us go."

"Yes, all of fifteen hundred dollars."

"Well, it is more money than I make in a year with chief of scout's pay, but if it were ten times as much, you could not bribe me to do it.

"I know you two scamps, whom hanging would be only justice, and as I caught you housebreaking, I'll report your acts. Come, you go with me. Stand close up behind this man, sir."

"Tom, we is goners."

"Dead sartin, Jerry."

Having placed the men at close step, Buffalo Bill buckled their belts together, and fastened them about their waists.

"I'll carry ther weapons, Buffalo Bill."

"No, thank you, Jerry, I can do so," was the smiling reply.

Shouldering the ax and iron bar, the two men had

brought with them, and sticking their weapons in his belt, until he looked like a walking arsenal, Buffalo Bill made his prisoners march down the hill before him.

There he found his horse, and, mounting, ordered the men to face toward Red Pocket and march.

They did so with low curses.

It was just before sunset as they passed Hangman's Gulch, and they glanced up into the dark recesses of the cañon, with many a misgiving that they would soon be more intimately acquainted with the weird and dreaded spot.

Just as twilight was falling, the scout heard the supper horn of the Frying Pan Hotel, and from that moment a stream of humanity began to pour out of the mines and cabins, and flow toward the rendezvous of the miners on every night.

They quickly caught sight of Buffalo Bill, whose handsome face and form were seldom seen in Yellow Valley, and, beholding his prisoners, they began to call out, in many an odd question, as to what it meant.

"Ho, Tom and Jerry, what's up?"

"Hain't thet Buf'ler Bill?"

"What has yer got 'em in limbo fer, pard?"

"Has they been robbin' a henroost?"

"Say, pard, what has they been up ter?"

"Is yer goin' ter hang 'em?"

"They'll be no loss."

"How did yer git yer foot inter it, Tom and Jerry?"

Such questions flowed too fast for replies, and though the scout remained silent, the two prisoners

tried to explain, but were constantly cut off by fresh questions.

At last a commanding voice said :

"Ho, scout, what have those fellows been doing?"

The speaker was a storekeeper in the camps, and a man of considerable prominence, being captain of the vigilantes.

He stood in front of the Frying Pan, where he had gone to get his supper.

"I was coming along the valley, near Dead-shot Dick's cabin, and went up to take a look at it, when I saw these two men trying to break in the door.

"Here is the ax and bar they used.

"I climbed upon the roof and had them where I wanted them, so made them prisoners, determined to bring them to Red Pocket and turn them over to the miners, with a statement of the facts."

"They have a very bad record, sir, and have got their heads at last into the noose. Remember, Tom and Jerry, it has not been a week since I warned you that you were getting to the end of your rope.

"You, sir, I am told, are Buffalo Bill, chief of scouts at the military post?"

"I am, sir."

"Then turn over your prisoners to me for trial by our miners' laws, sir, for I am Scott King, captain of the vigilantes, and proprietor of the Miners' Market, as my store is called. I am glad to meet you, Buffalo Bill, so dismount and be my guest at the hotel to-night."

Invited, as he was, by the vigilante captain to become his guest at the Frying Pan, Buffalo Bill could

not decline, so he dismounted and led his horse to the stables.

Presently he was shown to a room, where he freshened up for supper, and found every attention bestowed upon him by the clerk whom Bonnie Bess, the fair landlady of the tavern, had left to manage her affairs in her absence, and who seemed anxious to treat the scout well.

Bonnie Bess' private quarters were all securely locked up in her absence, but otherwise the hotel was in full blast, and the vigilante captain and Buffalo Bill sat down to a very tempting supper.

The prisoners had been placed in safe hands, and, with their guards, were eating supper near, so the scout had an opportunity to see how much kindness was bestowed upon the two men.

"You see, the boys wish to do the best they can for them, as they regard them as dying men," explained the storekeeper.

"Dying men?"

"Well, it amounts to that, as we shall try them after supper, and that means a verdict of guilty."

"What is the use of trying them if the verdict is assured?" asked Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"Well, for effect. You caught them trying to break into Dead-shot Dick's cabin and rob it, and you brought here with you the implements they used, while you bear testimony to their guilt."

"True, but why not run them out of the camps, under penalty of death if they return?"

"That would never do, for, of course, every fellow that is run out has his purse made up for him by the

sympathetic miners, and hereafter every man wanting money would do some act to be sent away for, whereas, if we try these men, find them guilty, and hang them, Red Pocket will rid itself of two notorious scoundrels, and their end will serve as a wholesome lesson for others."

"Well, if they are all you say they are, they deserve hanging, yet I suppose it would have been better for me to have taken them to the fort to get justice."

"They will get justice here, for we will try them by the law of right. Now let me go and arrange for the trial."

"Need I appear in the matter, sir?"

"Well, as I am judge, I'll ask you to take a seat with me on the 'bench.'"

"You are very kind, sir; but I am only a witness."

"Well, you will have to face the prisoners and the crowd, so take a seat with me on the bench."

The "judge" evidently felt the importance of his position, and as he left the supper room, lighted his pipe and took up his position upon the piazza, where seats had already been placed for him and the prisoners.

The bench was one in reality, and Buffalo Bill sat down next to the judge, while the prisoners were placed in front of them.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRIAL

The crowd had now increased to several hundred men, yet they were not noisy, and their silence was more expressive than their shouting would have been.

The prisoners were white with fear, for they sat where the light of a number of lanterns fell upon them.

They cast uneasy glances at the judge, baleful ones of hate at Buffalo Bill, and pleading ones over the crowd, where they looked in vain for some sympathetic face.

The vigilante captain called the meeting to order by rapping with his bowie knife upon the bench.

It was as effective, however, as a golden gavel in Congress would have been.

Instantly there was a deathlike silence.

"Gentlemen," began the vigilante captain, who was now acting as "judge," after clearing his throat: "You have honored me by making me captain of the vigilantes of Yellow Valley, and also have bestowed upon me the more honored title of judge of the criminal court of Red Pocket. I thank you for the double honor, which, I assure you, is appreciated.

"There are many of us present who remember that Yellow Valley was a very dangerous place of abode before the vigilantes were organized, for lawlessness and disorder reigned supreme.

"But since they began to hunt down criminals and

this court to sentence them for their crimes, see the change.

"Why, there has not been a murder in Red Pocket for thirty-six hours.

"A short while since this gentleman, Buffalo Bill, the military scout, now occupying a seat upon the bench with me, was ambushed by a gang of desperadoes, and would have been hanged but for the intervention of our honored fellow citizen, Dead-shot Dick, now absent, in the East, and who killed the ring-leader and saved a valuable life.

"Two of that gang are now arraigned before you as prisoners, charged with another offense against law and order.

"This gentleman, my fellow citizens, I desire to introduce to you as a man whose name has spread from pole to pole, from the rising to the setting sun, as you will know when I tell you that he is William F. Cody, well known to you all as Buffalo Bill."

A wild roar like thunder answered the words of the judge, and Buffalo Bill arose and bowed to the compliment bestowed upon him.

"Now, gentlemen," resumed the judge, "let me tell you that on his way to Red Pocket this evening, Buffalo Bill saw a sight which I am going to ask him to relate to you."

Thus urged, the scout arose and simply told his story as it is known to the reader.

Then the judge resumed:

"You have heard, gentlemen, and this case is tried according to law and gospel, for as soon as we have heard your decision in the matter, and I can guess

what it will be, I will pass sentence, after which I will read a chapter in the Bible and the Ten Commandments to the prisoners, and end by singing the Doxology.

"Now, gentlemen, are these men guilty or not guilty?"

There was a brief pause, only for a moment, while the wretched prisoners glanced uneasily over the crowd and then desperately, hopelessly, at each other.

"Guilty!" came with another voice like thunder.

CHAPTER XIII.

HANGMAN'S GULCH.

The two prisoners fairly quaked under the angry response of guilt to the question of the judge, and Buffalo Bill quickly arose and signified his desire to speak.

The judge rapped for silence and said:

"We will hear what the great scout has to say."

"I would say, gentlemen, as a government officer, it is my wish to have full justice done these men.

"It is true I caught them robbing a miner's cabin, or attempting to do so; but there are crimes far more heinous than that, and I beg that you will, in their case, give them as light a punishment as possible, for I am sure they will heed the warning they have had."

The words of the scout fell upon deaf ears, when he made an appeal for mercy. He might as well attempt to stay the current of a river as check that element of mad humanity, for all eyes turned from him to the judge, who said:

"You have heard the appeal of our distinguished friend for mercy, and we will be merciful.

"As these men have been unanimously pronounced guilty, our mercy will be to keep them not long in the agony of their approaching doom, and hence I do hereby sentence them to be taken within the hour to Hangman's Gulch, and there to be hanged until all life shall leave them, for the good order of this community must and shall be preserved."

Again there was a roar, and once more rapping for silence the judge said:

"Officers, do your duty."

The two guards stepped forward, and over the head of each prisoner placed a noose.

Then the judge opened the Bible and read, just why, Buffalo Bill did not know, the story of Daniel in the den of lions. There seemed to be no apparent reason why this particular portion of Scripture should be chosen for the occasion! Nevertheless, he was soon to discover a peculiar appropriateness in the choice.

This edifying selection the judge followed with the Ten Commandments, dwelling particularly upon the eighth: "Thou shalt not steal," and making it more impressive by the question put to the prisoners as to whether they heard it or not, and repeating it to them.

Following this, three hundred voices sang the Doxology, and then the judge arose, and, locking his arm in Buffalo Bill's, led the way to Hangman's Gulch.

Buffalo Bill would not have dared refuse to go, and

well he knew it, so he reluctantly submitted in grim silence.

The guards and their prisoners followed, the twelve men who were to draw the doomed men into mid-air, each grasping the rope of their respective victim.

A slow and solemn step was kept to Hangman's Gulch, the many lanterns casting flickering shadows over the faces and forms of the procession as they marched along.

At last the place was reached, already dotted with the graves of many men who had thus been tried and executed.

Into the dark, loathsome, weird place they filed, and soon approached the gallows where so many others had died.

The two prisoners were moaning like men in physical pain, for they were cowards at heart.

Then they began to plead for mercy, to plead desperately, frantically, with all the earnestness they could command.

But they might as well have appealed to the cliffs about them as to the crowd, for while some there were doubtless merciful, they were too greatly in the minority to dare speak what they felt.

The ropes were thrown over the beam, which was greased, and, at a signal from the judge, the twelve men upon each line drew their victims up into mid-air, silencing their cries for mercy.

Then back from Hangman's Gulch surged the crowd, laughing and talking as they went over the

affair, and it was generally agreed that Red Pocket would be the better for the hanging.

The vigilante captain felt that he had done his duty, so he calmly repaired to his store in a very self-satisfied humor, while Buffalo Bill accompanied him for a short time, and began, in a quiet way, to question him about Bonnie Bess.

All he could learn was the fact that not a man in Yellow Valley was there to say one word against her, all holding her as above reproach.

Nothing was known of her antecedents, and there was not the slightest suspicion that she was connected in any way with the road agents under Silk Lasso Sam.

She had gone east upon some business of her own, the storekeeper said, and Dead-shot Dick, the miner, had been her escort, and Scott King hinted that he believed there was a strong feeling of friendship between the two.

This might result in marriage, and the "judge" hoped that it would, as the miner was a splendid fellow in his opinion.

Then learning that the driver of the stagecoach was in Red Pocket that night, Buffalo Bill sought him out.

He found him at the Devil's Den, having just won all the money at poker which his adversary had.

The driver greeted the famous scout pleasantly, said that he had come in a couple of hours before, and was glad to feel that the trail was free of outlaws.

"I wish to ask you, Sands, something about a young woman called Bonnie Bess," said Buffalo Bill.

At once Sands was all attention.

"Waal, pard, what kin I tell yer?"

"You took her in your coach when she went east?"

"Sure."

"And the miner?"

"Dead-shot Dick?"

"Yes."

"He went along, too."

"Where did you leave them?"

"Waal, she left me at the Trail Junction."

"What became of the miner?"

"He went on east on the regular coach."

"And Bonnie Bess?"

"She took the upper branch trail via Omaha."

"East?"

"Yes."

This answer caused Buffalo Bill to ponder deeply. It was not what he expected.

The manner in which Buffalo Bill meditated was thus:

"Now Bonnie Bess surely started east.

"Why, then, did she leave Dead-shot Dick at the Overland junction and take the upper trail?

"Why did she turn back unless she had received some word from the fort, where her brother was a prisoner?"

Texas Jack, he recalled, had gone off on a special mission, which had not been reported to him.

He would inquire if Texas Jack had been to Red Pocket.

So he asked Sands if he had seen Texas Jack, his scout pard.

"Oh, yes."

"Where?"

"He came to Red Pocket, and then followed on after the coach."

"Why?"

"He had a letter for Bonnie Bess."

"From whom?"

"I don't know."

"He had overtaken the coach?"

"Yes."

"Did he deliver the letter?"

"He did, pard."

"And received an answer?"

"Not a written one, pard."

"A verbal one?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what it was?"

"I heard her say, 'Tell him simply that I will.'"

"Ah! and then?"

"Texas Jack went back on the trail, and I drove on with my passengers, Dead-shot Dick leaving me by one trail at the junction and Bonnie Bess going by the upper trail, as I said."

"And you did not hear of her passing back over the trail?"

"See here, Buffalo Bill, you is chief of scouts at the post I knows well, and you has a right ter ask all questions of me; but I wants ter say if it's ter get Bonnie Bess inter trouble, I'll be a dumb man, sartin, and don't you fergit it."

"Pard Sands, that little woman has no better friend than I am, and I would protect, rather than do one act to cause her trouble; but I am on a secret trail, which I wish to see the end of, and you can help me by answering my questions, and, perhaps, save much trouble, for I believe there is a plot on hand to rescue Silk Lasso Sam and his men by force, and you surely do not wish to see those devils again turned loose upon the trails, more revengeful than ever?"

"I does not, and I thanks you for being square with me, Buffalo Bill."

"The fact is, I did not hear of Bonnie Bess' going west ag'in, but I happen to know thet she did go, and that's all I can tell you."

"Well, I'll ask no more, Sands, to-night, at least. Good night," and Buffalo Bill remained in the Devil's Den, while the driver left with his winnings in his pocket, and quite satisfied with having won two months' pay within an hour, never taking into consideration that he had lost far more in the past few weeks.

The scout was the center of all eyes as he leisurely strolled about the gambling saloon, going from table to table, risking a few dollars at faro, and winning, then being equally as lucky at dice throwing, when he received a challenge from a miner to play him a game of cards.

"Oh, yes, I'll play if you wish, though I had not intended to when I came in," said the scout, who had no fondness for gambling.

"Waal, I plays for big stakes and don't you forgit it," was the answer of the challenger.

Buffalo Bill took his measure in a steady look at him. He thought that the man's face was familiar, but he was not sure, for he could not recall where he had seen him before.

The miner was a man even larger than the scout, for he was more brawny, weighing over two hundred pounds, and as hard as iron.

His face was bearded, his hair worn long, and he carried no knife in his belt, but, instead, four revolvers, two in front and one on each hip, so that no matter where he dropped his hand it must fall upon the butt of a "gun."

He wore no superfluous clothing, either, his miner's shirt, corduroy pants, top-boots, and slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, making up his wardrobe.

The carrying of four revolvers had gained him the name of "Guns," and that he knew how to use them, too, several graves upon Sunset Hill gave testimony.

However, he was peacefully inclined when not drinking, but when under the influence of liquor his best friends avoided him religiously, and those who saw him challenge Buffalo Bill to play cards felt that the scout had made a mistake in accepting, for they discovered that Guns was drinking, and that meant a row, they were certain.

In answer to the remark of the man that he played for big stakes, Buffalo Bill asked in his quiet way:

"What do you call big stakes, pard?"

"What does I call big stakes?"

"Yes, that is the question I asked."

"Waal, I call without a limit big money."

"Are you able to stand a game without a limit?"

"Is I? Ask my pards if I can't call ye at a thousand and pay if I lose."

"Oh, a thousand is your limit, then?"

"Can you match me?"

"If I could not I would not play with you; but when you said without limit, I wished to know what you meant, as you can size my pile at a thousand. Now you know what I can do, so say whether you will play or back down?"

"Back down?" yelled the miner savagely.

"Yes," was the perfectly calm response.

"I never backs down agin' any odds."

"Then play," said Buffalo Bill, in the coolest manner possible.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DANGEROUS GAME.

The interest in the games going on in Devil's Den very quickly were centered in the match between Buffalo Bill and Guns.

"I'm out for scalps," the miner had said, in a voice that was heard all over the saloon.

At this Buffalo Bill looked him squarely in the face, and there was something in the look that controlled the man, and he said:

"I see now that you have been drinking.

"Had I supposed this I would not have played with you, for I never play with a drunken man.

"Behave yourself, now, or quit before trouble follows."

There was that in the words and look which mas-

tered the man, for he made at first no reply; but then he said:

"What did I say to make you mad?"

"Nothing, for I am not angry; but you said you were out for scalps, and I wish you to understand that I take the same trail when there is need for it."

The man appeared cowed, for he said:

"We don't want trouble, Buffalo Bill, so shall I git a fresh pack of cards, and will yer take a drink?"

"Thank you, I do not care to drink, and you take my advice and let it alone. But get the cards."

An angry gleam came into the eyes of Guns.

But he made no reply, and walked to the bar after a fresh pack of cards.

"Grimes, give me a fresh pack, and some whisky, too," he said.

"Here's the cards, Guns, but take my advice and don't drink any more, for Buffalo Bill is a stranger here," said Grimes.

"Waal, he wants ter git better acquainted with ther folks. Whisky, I said, straight, strong, and blistering."

Had Bonnie Bess been there, Grimes would have refused.

But to do the best he could he took a half-empty bottle, hastily poured water into it, and set it before the man, hoping to have him get but half the quantity.

The miner found it out, held it up to the lamp, and looked at it.

"Is this pale sherry, Grimes?"

"It's whisky."

"You lies, for you have drowned it with water, so you kin hev it!"

Quick as a flash, he dashed the stuff full into the face of poor Grimes, who, blinded and maddened, drew his revolver and fired a shot at random.

It was the last act of his life, for he dropped dead with a bullet in his brain, while Guns called out:

"He put water into my whisky, pards, and then shot at me, so I kilt him.

"Thar he lies behind the bar."

To put water in whisky was a criminal offense which the miners of Yellow Valley could not forgive or forget, and so Grimes lost the sympathy of the crowd by his heinous act, while Guns rose in their estimation for visiting just punishment upon one who would do such a thing.

"Now, pard, I want some whisky," and Guns turned to the bartender nearest, who quickly placed a fresh bottle before him, while the miner took the other which had caused the trouble and, dashing it against the wall at the rear of the bar, shattered it to atoms.

"Yer shan't p'izen no one else with watered whisky," he said.

Then turning to those who had gathered about him, he said:

"Jine me, folks, in a leetle beverage, for I'm bettin' high it will be ther Simon-pure article.

"Does yer catch on?"

They "caught on" with alacrity, and with the upturned, pallid face of Grimes, the eyes wide open staring into his own, Guns poured his glass full to the brim and dashed it down his capacious throat.

A hush had fallen upon the crowd during this scene, and a few of the timid ones, or, rather, those who wished to avoid being in a row, silently withdrew from the building.

There were several who felt that Buffalo Bill was making a sad mistake in having accepted the challenge of Guns, while others knew that had he not done so, in the then temper of the man, a row would have been precipitated at once, for he would certainly have insulted the scout then and there.

A few now hastened to tell Buffalo Bill, who had not risen from his seat, that Guns had just killed Grimes and had then taken a tumbler full of whisky, so was in a dangerous mood, and, having braced himself up to the right pitch by the liquor, he would seek an encounter.

"He didn't have quite enough ter brace him fer trouble with you, pard, for he has heerd o' you, as we all has, and that's why he got more.

"He's primed now and will go off like a hair trigger," a miner said.

"Yas, so jist go out and let him alone," another said.

Buffalo Bill smiled serenely.

It was a smile that some who saw it felt boded mischief.

Then he said complacently:

"I never seek trouble, gentlemen, unless I am after a man I know needs running down, and duty compels me.

"I sought no trouble with your comrade, and

merely accepted his challenge, so he can turn it into any game that suits his humor best."

"Here he comes now," cried a voice, and just then Guns was seen approaching the table where Buffalo Bill sat, a cigar between his teeth.

With a lurch, Guns dropped into his chair and glared at Buffalo Bill.

"I has come back," he said.

"So I see."

"There's ther pack o' cards," and he tossed them upon the table.

Buffalo Bill picked them up, glanced at them, and said:

"Yes, they are all right."

"Did yer think I'd git any as wasn't?"

"Not being acquainted with you, I didn't know."

"Waal, we'll git better acquainted, I'm thinking."

"Perhaps."

"Come, don't git skeered, for I hain't goin' ter shoot, only I had to kill a feller over thar, just now, and I is loadin' my gun ag'in."

"You are very wise."

"Yer see, he insulted me."

"I can hardly believe that possible."

There were a number who heard this reply who appreciated its sarcasm.

Guns felt that there was a meaning in it he could not fathom, so he did not try, and said:

"Yes, he put water in my whisky."

"Did he not know you?"

"Yas, only he tried to play a underhand game on me."

"We has been mighty good friends, Grimes and me, for he has twice saved my life, and he meant well toward me, I is sart'in, fearin' I sh'u'd git too much, so he put water in my whisky, and I'd kill my brother for a insult like that."

"I can believe you; but may he not have been only wounded?"

"Yer don't know me, pard, for I never wastes powder and lead, but shoots to kill."

"I is sorry my poor pard, Grimes, committed suicide, for he should have know'd me well. But he's out o' misery now, and I'll pay all ther expenses of ther funeral, and give him a beautiful send-off on ther trail ter glory, an' put up a stone over him with a inscription as a warnin' to them who puts water in whisky, which I drinks ter git all o' the leetle devil out of it I kin. Does yer tumble?"

"Oh, yes; but do you still wish to play with me?"

"Does I?"

"Yes."

"Why, pard, I is in fer a game o' anything with you."

"Then let us begin."

The words were so quietly uttered, the look of the scout was so calm, that it checked the devil gaining the ascendancy of the man for a minute, for he saw that they meant:

"Whatever your game with me, begin when you please."

But he did not interpret it into that way of meaning, so said:

"All right, pard, I is ready."

The cards were shuffled, cut for the deal, and Buffalo Bill won.

Then the cards were thoroughly shuffled, and the game was begun.

All who watched the two men, and they were all who could crowd about them, saw that the scout was as cool as an icicle, showing not the slightest dread of what any one who was near felt sure must end in a deadly combat between the two players.

Buffalo Bill serenely smoked his cigar, his face remaining impassive, and yet those who watched him closely saw that his eyes were rather upon his adversary than his cards.

The game was played more carefully by Guns than those who saw him believed possible, for he was cautious in all he did and leered maliciously at Buffalo Bill when he gained a point.

At last he seemed to brighten up and said:

"A hundred on my hand, Buffalo Bill."

"Mine is worth twice that sum."

"I'll add that more to mine."

"So will I," was the quiet response.

"I calls yer," said the miner, without showing his hand, and the scout pocketed the money.

That Guns felt his loss was evident to all, for his face grew darker, and an uglier look came into his eyes.

"Well, how much is your hand, Mister Guns?" asked the scout, when the climax of the second game came around.

"It's worth a hundred." Guns appeared confident then. "Yep, a cool hundred."

"No more?"

"Well, what is your hand worth?"

"Just five hundred dollars, no more, no less."

The miner started. Could it be possible that the scout held a better hand than he did this time?

No, it could not be. The lightning would not strike twice in the same spot.

"I jist says show up to ther tune of five hundred."

Buffalo Bill put up the money he had just won, adding more to it, and said:

"There, match that with five hundred."

The miner drew out a greasy buckskin bag and took out a roll of bills.

He counted out very slow five hundred dollars, and it could be seen that very little remained in the bag.

"Thar she goes, and yer needn't squint at ther bag, fer thar is more whar thet come from. Now I'm thinkin' your money is mine, so show yer hand."

"Four aces," said the scout, without a change of muscle.

"Four aces!" roared the miner. "Four aces agin' my four kings! How comes that?"

"You dealt, pard, and were more generous to me than to yourself," and Buffalo Bill very quietly put the money in his pocket, while he said:

"I'll play you another game to give you a chance to win back your money, or lose more, if you wish it."

"There's but one more game I'll play with you, Buffalo Bill, and that's with these," and the miner quickly leveled his revolvers.

CHAPTER XV.

A CRITICAL SITUATION.

The miner's words and act at once cleared a lane behind Buffalo Bill and himself between the crowds that had gathered around.

But the act did not appear to disturb the scout.

If caught off his guard by the sudden drawing of his revolvers by Guns, Buffalo Bill remained as cool as before, and said:

"Then you are willing to play a square game with me with revolvers, are you?"

"I is going ter play a game with you, yes, but there's others in it, besides, for I has something to say to you, Buffalo Bill."

"Talk fast, then, old man, for life's short, you know."

"Oh, it'll be short enough to you, when I tells what I knows agin' you."

"What do you know?"

"I knows that you was ther cause o' havin' two innocent men strung up in Hangman's Gulch this night. I only wish I'd been at ther hangin', for they wouldn't hev been ther men thet got choked."

"I am listening."

"But me and my pard Dunn got in too late ter save them poor murdered men, and when I heerd what had been done, says I, thet as Buffalo Bill has got ter die ter-night, I'll just be his heir by winning his money first."

A Critical Situation.

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"So I axes yer ter play me."

"And I did."

"Yas, for sure."

"And I became your heir, as you put it."

"So far."

"Well, what else?"

"A heap, for I wants ter let ther folks know thet Dunn and me were up in ther range and seen you breakin' inter ther cabin o' Dead-shot Dick."

There went a murmur through the crowd at this, while Buffalo Bill said indifferently:

"Is that all? Why, I feel relieved, for I was afraid you were going to accuse me of cheating you."

"Oh, no, yer played square enough, for I was a-watchin' yer; but we seen yer breaking inter Dead-shot's cabin, and Tom and Jerry caught yer at it."

"But you was too soon for them, got them under ther muzzle of yer gun, and trotted them off as house-breakers, when you was the thief."

"Why did you not at once come to their rescue?" asked Buffalo Bill, when the uproar which these words created had in a measure subsided.

"We was up in Eagle Mountain, and it took us a long time ter git down ter ther valley and up to Red Pocket."

"Then we found thet ther folks hed believed you, Buffalo Bill, agin' them men, and it were too late."

"So we talked it over, and thar is just a large-sized community here to-night as says you has got ter hang, too."

"Why not make it by unanimous consent, Mister

Guns, for it would sound better when reported at the fort to Colonel Wood?"

The crowd gave vent to a murmur of admiration at the scout's pluck.

He did not appear to be in the least degree disturbed by the danger he most certainly was in.

"Oh, I knows yer is game, and I has just seen that yer kin bluff, but thet don't go now."

"What does?"

"Ropes is trumps."

"You intend to hang me, then?"

"We does."

"Without judge or jury?"

"We have set on your case, and it is agin' yer."

"When am I to be hanged?"

"Afore daylight."

"Isn't that crowding matters a little?"

"No more crowdin' than agin' ther two poor boys as was hanged ter-night."

"And you saw me break into Dead-shot Dick's cabin?"

"I did."

"And the other witness?"

"Was Dunn."

"I do not believe anybody here who has common sense will believe any such charge against me," said the scout, while, with his elbows resting upon the table at which he sat, Guns held his revolver in both of his hands, covering the heart of the scout.

"Yer don't believe it?"

"No, I don't."

"Pards, does I tell the truth?"

In his excitement, the miner turned his head, and in that instant his revolver was struck upward and knocked from his hand by Buffalo Bill, who now held him covered with his weapon.

"A turn about is fair play, Guns."

Some laughed at this, but Guns swore roundly, yet dared not move, for he saw he was caught, the left hand of the scout lying upon his own weapon where it had fallen upon the table, the right holding his revolver within a foot of his eyes.

But the words of the miner had been answered by a savage chorus of voices, crying:

"You is right, Pard Guns, for Buffalo Bill is the guilty man."

Still, the pluck of the scout did not desert him, and he never changed expression at the outburst.

Taking courage at the cries of his comrades, though under cover of the scout's revolver, the miner said:

"See here, Buffalo Bill, you has half a hundred guns on you, but we don't intend ter shoot yer, but hang yer, as you got poor Tom and Jerry strung up, so up with yer hands, mighty quick, says I."

"Yes, up with your hands, Buffalo Bill!" shouted the crowd savagely, while scores of revolvers covered the scout as he still sat at the table, facing the ring-leader, whom he yet held his revolver upon, the muzzle within a foot of his eyes.

It certainly did look bad for Buffalo Bill, and for two reasons:

First, the charge of Guns, backed by Dunn, a reputable miner, seemed to be believed by a great many of those present.

Second, the crowd that backed Guns was not only numerous, but composed of the very worst element in the mines.

This shut off many who felt that the accusation was utterly false from lending any aid.

Guns was certainly in danger of instant death at the hands of the scout, but the latter was equally in danger of sudden death from the backers of his accuser.

Thus the situation rested until Buffalo Bill broke the silence with:

"See here, Guns, I recall that ugly face of yours, now that I get a better look at it, and I remember you as one of Powder Pete's gang who ambushed me some time ago, under pretense that I was Lasso Sam."

"You wished to get rid of me then because I make this country too hot for just such men as you."

"Now, what are you going to do about it, Mister Guns, for if I am facing death, you are just as close as I am to it, so begin business when you please, and you'll find that I'll never hang, and, dying, will take a companion along, so as not to get too lonesome on the trail across the Dark River."

The splendid pluck of Buffalo Bill, at bay against a crowd, delighted many present.

But those who surrounded him were his foes, and the better element hung back, feeling that a terrible scene must follow the first shot fired.

Guns felt the situation keenly.

The danger had sobered him, and his desire was to be able to see Buffalo Bill hanged by the crowd, and

it began to look as though he would not be there to witness it.

This he did not want, and he felt how certain death was to him if his comrades pushed the scout to extremes.

Such was the situation, and the suspense to all was fearful, and especially to Guns and the scout, though the scout was, as a miner expressed it to a pard:

"Beautifully serene."

What the result would have been was assured, for the crowd was becoming restless, and there were those who did not love Guns, and so would push matters to a climax to get him killed that they might then hang the scout.

But just as it seemed that another instant must come a crash, a loud, stern voice rang out with:

"What does this mean, holding a government officer under your guns? Room, there, men!" and hurling men right and left by his giant strength as though they were children, the Surgeon Scout strode to the side of Buffalo Bill, who still sat at the table, covering the miner with his revolver.

A perfect yell of joy burst from many in the crowd who thus gave vent to their pent-up feelings as they saw the splendid form of Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout, in uniform, stride into the midst of the scene.

"Ah, Frank, just in time to keep me from killing this gent, and being the target myself for half a hundred bullets," said Buffalo Bill, still unmoved by his rescue.

"It seems that I am just in time, Bill, and if I mistake not, there are men in this crowd who will

dangle at a rope's end for this work, if they harm a hair of your head.

"What does it mean?"

The ugly element in the crowd was still paramount.

It had only received a temporary check by the coming of the Surgeon Scout.

The greatest number of the miners present were now, however, decidedly on the side of law and order, but the devil in the nature of the others was destined to lead them on to trouble.

They did not care whether Guns died or not at the hands of Buffalo Bill. They hated Bill because he was the foe of the bad element in the mines.

They hated the army because it put down lawlessness.

Here was a chance to wipe out the chief of scouts and Surgeon Powell, both of whom they stood in the greatest awe of.

They, this ugly element, were sixty to two, and they had nothing to lose.

The army would sweep down upon the Yellow Valley, of course, but who could be found who would be punished?

Thus the men who had backed Guns argued, and with a desire for a row, a wish to sacrifice Buffalo Bill and the Surgeon Scout, and having had enough whisky to make them reckless of consequences, they began to crowd closely upon the center of attraction, where Cody sat still covering Guns, and with the Surgeon Scout by his side, a revolver in each hand.

It was a most critical moment, for the officer and

the scout saw that the authority of the latter was going to be defied.

"Men, don't mind what brass buttons says, for as he's chipped inter the game he goes with Buffalo Bill.

"Don't shoot, for that means innocent men hurted, but capter them two gamecocks alive and hang 'em.

"Does I say right?" and the burly ruffian who had constituted himself leader gazed at the crowd with a look that demanded recognition.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TABLES TURNED.

"I am sorry you came, Frank, for it only brings you into a tight place," said Buffalo Bill, in a low tone, to the Surgeon Scout, and he at once drew a second revolver from his belt to have it ready, though he did not take his eyes off the miner whom he covered.

"I don't mind it, Bill, and I'm always ready to die, if need be, for a comrade. If they make a rush, kill that ruffian, then stand back to back with me and let us make a record before we go under," was Powell's response.

"I'm with you until sunset, Frank," replied Cody, and he added, addressing the miner:

"You started this circus, Mister Guns, but you won't see the end of it."

"Cuss you, I'll call 'em off if you'll call it quits," returned Guns eagerly, now thoroughly terrified when he saw another leader in the field who meant to precipitate matters independent of him.

"Pard, you talk in your sleep, for you could no more call off that pack of hounds than you could tell the truth!

"No, you set the tune, and the song must be sung through."

In the meantime the Surgeon Scout was watching the wildly swaying crowd, which was gradually drawing closer about them, and he was just about to open fire when there suddenly rang out a clear voice above the noisy hum:

"Hold! What does this mean, I should like to know?"

Instantly there was silence; intense, in that it followed such an uproar.

Then hats were doffed, the crowd swayed apart, and toward the table, where Buffalo Bill still held the miner under cover of his revolver, and the Surgeon Scout stood at bay by his side, glided Bonnie Bess.

She was dressed in a blue dress, trimmed with silver braid, wore a slouch hat with a heavy sable plume, and carried a revolver in each hand.

Behind her came Sands, the driver of the Overland, and then Scott King, the captain of the vigilantes.

But Bonnie Bess neither needed aid nor asked it.

Her simple presence commanded respect.

They had deemed her far away in the east, and, like an apparition, she had glided into the door she always entered by, leading to her own quarters, and her white face, now stern and threatening, showed that she was in no humor to be trifled with.

"Ah, Surgeon Powell, it is you, and you also, Buffalo Bill, whom these roughs hold at bay?

"And what for?"

"I was scouting, Bonnie Bess, and came upon two men, Tom and Jerry, they called them, breaking into Dead-shot Dick's cabin.

"I made them prisoners, brought them here, and the vigilantes hanged them.

"To-night this man, whom I have covered, accused me of breaking into the cabin, and he was not long in getting willing hands to hang me, and but for the coming of Surgeon Powell it would have all been over ere this."

"And I only checked the trouble for a few minutes, Bonnie Bess, as the men turned upon me, also.

"I took Buffalo Bill's trail and followed him here, for somehow I feared he might need aid.

"You have saved us both by your timely coming, unless the gentlemen wish to push their quarrel to a conclusion."

But "the gentlemen" did not seem to be so inclined, or, if they did, the words of Bonnie Bess checked them, for she said sternly:

"No, there will be no trouble here, for the man who raises a weapon against you I will kill.

"As for you, Guns, if you ever enter my hotel or this saloon again, I will see that you do not do so a second time.

"Grimes, do you hear what I say about this man?"

A silence most fearful followed, and as no answer came, Bonnie Bess called again:

"Grimes!"

"If you are calling your man you left in charge

here, Bonnie Bess, he is dead," said Buffalo Bill, as no one else seemed to care to speak.

"Grimes dead!" she repeated, with a start.

"Yes."

"When did he die?"

"To-night."

"Ha! he was killed."

"Ask one of your men here to tell you about it, Bonnie Bess."

She called a bartender and was told the story.

She listened in silence, making no comment, and then turned to Scott King and asked:

"Captain, is this not a case of murder?"

"It looks so, Bonnie Bess."

"This man Guns has been carrying too high a hand for the safety and comfort of the good citizens in Yellow Valley, and it appears to me that he needs disciplining by the vigilantes."

"Say the word, Bonnie Bess, and he travels the trail to Hangman's Gulch," the vigilante captain said, very decidedly.

Bonnie Bess was lost for a moment in thought, while Guns gazed at her with a look of pleading and despair commingled.

At last she spoke:

"No, Captain King, I will not say the word, for I wish no man's life upon my conscience, where it can be avoided.

"The mines will be the better for the taking off of those men, Tom and Jerry, and it would make it more respectable to rid us of this man Guns.

"He has no mine or claim here, carries his fortune

with him, I believe, so give him until sunrise to get out of the camps, while, that he may not be lonesome, let this man who was leading the attack upon Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill go with him.

"Shall it be so, comrades?" and Bonnie Bess glanced over the crowd, which answered with a yell that nearly raised the roof.

Guns was too happy to escape with his life to grumble at anything that might be put upon him, and he was but too anxious to get away from the saloon and start upon his exile, feeling that there was safety only in placing many miles between himself and Yellow Valley.

Dunn, the other alleged witness against Buffalo Bill, had been led into making the charge by his comrade, Guns, and, seeing how matters were going, had slipped out of Devil's Den and hastened to his cabin to prepare for an immediate farewell.

The burly fellow who had made himself a leader against Surgeon Powell would have been glad to have escaped the notice of Bonnie Bess.

But her words had brought the eyes of the vigilantes upon him, and he was anxious to get away, and so, with Guns, skulked out into the darkness.

They had hastened to their respective quarters then, making an agreement to meet at Dunn's in half an hour's time, and when the sun rose the two were making lively tracks down the valley, carrying their belongings upon a pole slung between them, and with all the wealth they possessed in their pockets.

"I would like to see you and Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell," said Bonnie Bess, in a low tone.

"We are going at once to the hotel."

"I will see you there," and Bonnie Bess circled about the room, greeted everywhere with the most cordial welcome.

In the meantime, Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill were congratulated on all sides, and by those who had not shown the nerve to come to their rescue.

But they received all that was said coldly, gauging it at about what it was worth, and passed out of the saloon to the hotel.

The scout already had a room there, and the surgeon was given one next to him, and so they repaired to them at once.

"It came over me, Bill, to follow you, that I might be of service.

"I am not superstitious, as you know, but I had a dream in which I saw you in a close place with Indians about you, and when I awoke it was so vivid to me that I wrote the colonel a note and started upon your trail without waiting until dawn.

"I went on to the end of Horseshoe Hal's run, and he told me you were going down to Red Pocket, so here I came."

"And just in time, Frank, to save my life."

"It seems so. I was told you were there. I went over to the Den and saw what was going on, so chipped in only too quickly.

"But though I postponed matters for a while, we both would have been food for coyotes at this present time, had not Bonnie Bess arrived."

"And how did she come?"

"I do not know."

"She started east from the Junction."

"Well, she came here instead, fortunately for us. Come in!"

A Chinese servant entered and said:

"Misse say 'Melican men come with Chinaman."

This invitation was promptly accepted by the surgeon and the scout, and they were led by the Chinaman to the private quarters of Bonnie Bess.

There she had a supper spread out for them, though it was after one o'clock, and, receiving them cordially, said:

"I wish to have a talk with you, gentlemen, and you will join me at supper, please."

They readily consented, the Chinaman waiting upon the table, and Bonnie Bess showing herself to be a most charming hostess.

The supper being over, and the Chinaman having departed, Bonnie Bess handed her guests a couple of fine cigars and said:

"I enjoy the fragrance of tobacco smoke, for to me a good cigar is fragrant, so please light them."

They did as told, and then Bonnie Bess threw herself into an easy-chair in a tired way and said:

"I am really fatigued, for I have had a long ride since leaving the fort.

"I knew that you were on my trail, Buffalo Bill, and I am glad that you were, as you came up in time to serve both Horseshoe Hal and myself as well."

"You are fully able to protect yourself, Bonnie Bess," said the scout.

"And others, too," remarked Surgeon Powell.

"Well, as I wished to throw you off the scent, I

went on eastward by stage; but only for a couple of stations, where I secured a horse and guide, going across country to head off Sands on his way here.

"I caught his coach and made him promise not to tell of my arrival, so he drove, as there were no other passengers, at once to the stables, and I got out there and ran to my rooms here.

"It was Sands who heard of the row in the Den, and he came for me, just as I intended going into the saloon as a surprise.

"Now, I have a favor to ask of both of you."

"Granted before asked," said Surgeon Powell.

"So say I," responded Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XVII.

BONNIE BESS' SECRET.

"You are very kind, to offer to grant me a favor without knowing what it is. Suppose I ask you something that you cannot conscientiously do?" said Bonnie Bess, with a smile.

"That is impossible, for you would not ask anything of us which we cannot conscientiously do," was the response of the surgeon.

"It is not too much to ask, I feel."

"It would have to be much indeed for us to refuse you, Bonnie Bess, for both of us owe you our lives, and you may be sure, if not profuse in thanks, we appreciate all that we are under obligations to you for," said Surgeon Powell, and his manner was sincere.

"Do not speak of what I did, for one does not

deserve either thanks or gratitude for doing one's duty.

"No, I only wished to ask you both not to betray me."

"Not betray you?"

"Yes, for no one knows here, except you two gentlemen, that I am the sister of the condemned outlaw, Silk Lasso Sam. Not a soul do I wish to know it."

"And no one shall through me."

"Nor through word of mine," added Buffalo Bill.

"I believe that Captain Carr suspected me, and yet when I met him face to face at the fort he did not by any act show that he did.

"He simply looked as though he recalled Bonnie Bess in Miss Ardell, and, if so, I wish that you would ask him also to keep my secret."

"I will."

"And he will do it."

"I do not care to have any one here know that I am the sister of the outlaw, for it would bring me under a suspicion with many which I would not care for.

"Now I can do good, and I have a certain power over the wildest spirits here, which you had an opportunity to see yourselves to-night."

"We did, indeed," said Buffalo Bill.

"And it was in our behalf."

"You have indeed wonderful power over the wild savages that congregate here in Red Pocket," the surgeon remarked.

"As the sister of the outlaw chief, no matter how

innocent I might be, you can well understand how I would lose my power.

"A wicked man might influence them, yet not a wicked woman.

"It is only by holding myself pure in all things that I retain my influence, and I wish to be so respected unto the end."

"You are a very remarkable woman, Bonnie Bess, and one whom both of us hold in the highest respect.

"Let me tell you, if it is a pleasure for you to know it, that you are most highly respected and admired by all at the fort, especially the warm friend you made in Colonel Wood.

"Did they know you as Bonnie Bess they would not change their opinions regarding you.

"But I can well understand that this community knowing you to be the sister of Silk Lasso Sam, the road-agent chief, would at once suspect you of being secretly his ally in wrongdoing, so your secret shall be kept."

"I thank you most sincerely, Surgeon Powell."

"And permit me to say, Bonnie Bess, that I switch off of your trail at once. I followed, for I believed that you intended to rescue your brother," said Buffalo Bill. "I believed that you went to the fort to accomplish it by strategy, and finding yourself thwarted gave it up. Then, I frankly confess, my idea was that you intended to accomplish by force what you had failed to do by strategy, that is, secure a number of men here who would follow your lead and thus rescue your brother."

"No, I would not accomplish his rescue, save his life, even, by the taking of another life.

"What I could not accomplish by strategy I would not do by force."

"I can believe that of you now, since what you have done and said to-night."

"Let me tell you, Buffalo Bill, what I could have done to-night," said Bonnie Bess eagerly.

"Yes."

"I could have seized both you and Surgeon Powell, sent you into hiding where your best scouts could not have found you, and there have held you as hostages to be given in exchange for my brother, or put to death if he was executed."

"You are right, for you surely could have done that."

"Without doubt," said Powell.

"But I would not do so, and I would not wish to be known as connected with the outlaw in any way, and I thank you both for your promise not to betray me. It is late now, so I will say good night."

"Good night."

They bowed themselves out, both impressed with the thought that they had stood in the presence of a very superior woman and one as pure as a pearl, in spite of her surroundings and the calling she followed, as mistress of the Frying Pan Hotel and the Devil's Den gambling saloon.

"Frank, I would not place a straw in the way of that girl to do her harm," said Buffalo Bill, as the two friends reached their room.

"I would protect her from harm with my life, Bill," was the rejoinder of the surgeon.

"Do you know she takes the coming execution of her brother, loving him as she does, very coolly?"

"Yes, Bill, and it sets me to thinking."

"And me."

"You have an idea?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"That she may accomplish by strategy, after all, the rescue of Silk Lasso Sam."

"It may be, for she is a very clever woman, and one dangerous to balk when she sets her mind upon carrying out a plot."

"She is, indeed."

One of the rules of Bonnie Bess, and one which was religiously respected, was that the Devil's Den should never open on Sundays, and the miners seemed really glad of this respite from the noisy bustle of the place, and the gambling and drinking which were sure to come.

The more that Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill saw of the strange woman, who seemed to hold the destinies of Red Pocket in her little hand, the more they were pleased with her, and mystified.

They knew that there was an unreadable page of her history to which she alone held the key. She talked like one who had seen much of the world, young as she was.

Her reading had been varied and instructive, and she seemed glad of a chance to discuss something else than hotel fare, camp news, gambling, and mining.

When the officer and scout bade her good night and good-by, for they said they were to leave at an early hour the next morning, she asked, with a smile:

"And is this to swing around the circle, Buffalo Bill, and still play the detective upon me?"

"No, indeed, it is not," answered the scout, flushing at the insinuation.

"I am glad of it, for we must be friends, you know."

"We certainly shall be, if I am to have my way," said the scout warmly.

"And we are also to be friends, Doctor Powell, for, candidly, I will not do aught to cause either of you any trouble, and if I fight you, should anything turn up to cause me to do so, it shall be by strategy, not force."

"Then we may as well acknowledge ourselves beaten when we are to measure strength in strategy with a woman," said Surgeon Powell.

"For shame, to acknowledge defeat before the combat. It is not like you, Doctor Powell."

"I am dealing with a woman now, Bonnie Bess, not a man."

"Well, do not you, Buffalo Bill, track me, for it will do no good, I assure you. I know that you wish to thwart me in setting my brother free, and from your standpoint you are right.

"But all that I could do in the matter I have done."

"And failed?" said Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"I leave that for you to decide, gentlemen. But good night."

She grasped the hand of each in her frank way, and they left her.

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When they went to pay their score the clerk told them that there was no charge against them, as they were the guests of the fair mistress of the Frying Pan.

They could but accept the courtesy, and the clerk said that an early breakfast had been ordered for them.

And so the next morning they turned their backs upon Red Pocket, and took the trail for the post.

Their way led by the Hangman's Gulch, and they turned in there to have a look at the numerous graves of the victims who had suffered there, dying at the end of a rope.

The two freshly made graves of Tom and Jerry were there, and as he looked at them Buffalo Bill said:

"Twice have I come very near being placed here, Frank."

"You have indeed, Bill."

"Once Dead-shot Dick saved me from Powder Pete and his gang, and you saved me the next time by your timely arrival, for those fellows intended hanging me."

"And Bonnie Bess saved us both, Bill," was the answer.

As they neared the fort they came in sight of the stage trail, and upon reaching it heard the rumbling of the coach behind them.

A few minutes after the coach came in sight, and by the side of Horseshoe Hal sat a stranger upon the box.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN OFFICER OF THE SECRET SERVICE.

"Ho, Surgeon Powell, how is yer, and you, too, Bill?" cried Horseshoe Hal, as the coach drew up to the two pards just as they came within sight of the fort.

"All right, thank you, Hal. Have you seen any road agents this trip?" asked the scout.

"You bet I hain't on the run back, doctor, but I has a pilgrim inside who held me up when I was going east, as I guess Buffalo Bill told you."

"Yes, he told me what a dead shot your lady passenger proved to be."

"Dead shot? Now, I should remark; but she is, ther deadeest of ther dead shots, and no mistake. She's one among a thousand, and no harm said agin' t'others, but I guesses yer'll hev ter doctor my man up, sir, for he's been in the hands o' that old pills at ther station, and maybe he don't know much about doctorin'."

"All right, Horseshoe Hal, I'll do all I can for him; but you appear to have several passengers along on this run?"

"You bet I has, sir, three passengers besides ther outlaw who is crippled in both arms."

"This gent ridin' with me I don't know by name, or I'd introdooce yer."

Thus urged, the man riding on the box said:

"My name is Ray, sir, Henry Ray."

"Oh, yes, I remember hearing your pards call yer by thet name now. These gents, Mr. Ray, is Surgeon Powell o' ther cavalry, and Buffalo Bill, chief of scouts, and they is among the best men thet ever is seen in these parts."

All bowed at the introduction, and the scouts kept up with the coach until it reached the fort.

The man who had given his name as Ray was one who possessed the look of one to be depended on in time of need.

He was well built, quick of action, and had a dark, piercing eye that was most penetrating.

The other two passengers were heavily bearded men, such as might be found anywhere on the frontier.

As Henry Ray dismounted from the box he turned to Surgeon Powell, who had just gotten off of his horse, and said:

"You are an officer of the fort, I believe, sir?"

"Yes, the surgeon of the post."

"I would like to see the commandant, sir, Colonel Wood."

"I will conduct you to him if you wish," said the surgeon, who, with the scout, was going to headquarters to report their return.

Colonel Wood was seated upon the piazza of his headquarters smoking an after-dinner cigar, and was alone when the party arrived, for the two other passengers had come along also, Henry Ray remarking that they were friends of his.

"Ah, Powell, glad to see you back again, and you, too, Cody, for after getting word that you had gone off on the trail of a dream I began to fear that, after

all, the redskins might have gotten hold of Buffalo Bill."

"No, sir, the redskins did not catch him, for we have not seen an Indian; but, strange to say, colonel, my dream was not all a dream, after all, for I found him in a very tight place.

"But I'll explain later, as this gentleman, whom Horseshoe Hal introduced as Mr. Ray, for he and his comrades came in on the coach, desires to see you, sir."

The colonel turned at once to the strangers, and said, addressing the leader of the three:

"How can I serve you, Mr. Ray?"

"I desire, sir, to present my card and this letter, given me by General S——," said Ray, and he handed over a card and letter.

The letter bore the official stamp of the military headquarters at Chicago, and was as follows:

"Sir: A question having arisen between the civil and military authorities, regarding the right for you to hold and try the prisoner now in your keeping, known as Silk Lasso Sam, the outlaw chief, and now under sentence of death, I have consulted the attorney general through the secretary of war, and the result is that you are hereby ordered to turn over to Detective Henry Ray the said prisoner."

When Horseshoe Hal's coach went east the next day it carried as passengers Henry Ray, and the outlaw chief, Silk Lasso Sam, the brother of Bonnie Bess.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SECRET REVEALED.

Horseshoe Hal, always an important personage in the eyes of many, was particularly so on the morning of his departure for the east with no less a person as a passenger than Silk Lasso Sam.

He had told over and over again the story of his last runs out, and had brought with him, as evidence of Miss Ardell's deadly shooting, the outlaw wounded in both arms, and who had been placed under guard in the hospital.

Now he was to go out with Silk Lasso Sam and the three officers.

The coach rattled up to its starting place, the mail was put aboard and instructions given, and the three detectives stood ready to receive their prisoner.

Presently a squad of soldiers was seen approaching, and in their midst was the tall form of the outlaw chief. He walked upright, with soldierly step, and looked about him as he halted, with calm and scornful indifference.

A very large crowd had gathered to see him off, and as the guard halted they were anxious to get a look at his face.

The officer in charge, after coming to a halt, asked:

"Is Mr. Ray, the detective, here?"

Henry Ray stepped forward and said:

"I am Detective Ray, sir."

"I have orders to surrender into your keeping this prisoner, known as Silk Lasso Sam."

The Secret Revealed.

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"I am ready to receive him, sir."

"Then please sign this receipt."

The officer drew from his belt a paper which the detective carefully read, and stepping into the stage office, he signed it.

"Thank you, sir."

"The prisoner is now in your charge," and, ordering the sergeant to march the guard back to the guard-house, the officer turned upon his heel and walked leisurely away, as though there was no more interest in the case for him.

The detective ordered the prisoner to enter the coach, assisting him, as both his hands and feet were manacled, the others followed, and Henry Ray called out:

"All ready, driver."

"Then she goes."

The whip cracked, and the team went rapidly away down the hill toward the stockade gate.

Soon after the stage rolled out of sight in the distance, and Horseshoe Hal, having given the idea to the uninitiated in stage travel that he kept up that speed all the way, now drew the horses down to a slow pace for the long drive ahead.

Hardly had the coach disappeared when Buffalo Bill walked up to headquarters.

The colonel, with a relieved look upon his face, sat upon the piazza, talking with Captain Carr.

"Ah, Cody, any news?" asked the colonel.

"Not any, sir; but I came to ask leave to go on a trail for a few days."

"Any definite point in view, Cody?"

"Well, no, colonel; only I thought I would like to follow Horseshoe Hal's coach."

"You have some motive for asking this, Cody?"

"Yes, sir."

"Out with it."

"The coach carried a very valuable freight, sir, in the person of Silk Lasso Sam."

"Yes, and you think that he may escape?"

"Well, sir, it has been rumored about that he was to go by this coach, and it may be that an attempt at rescue might be made."

"Impossible!"

"Why impossible, sir?"

"He is well guarded by three determined men."

"Still, sir, Silk Lasso Sam has many friends, and those who sought to curry favor with him might attempt a rescue."

"There is something in that."

"There is much in it, I should say, colonel, and if you wish, I will take some troopers and escort the coach past the danger line," Captain Carr said.

"It would be a hard ride for the troops to overtake the coach now, Captain Carr, and Cody is ready, I see, for the trail, so he can go."

"I will start at once, sir," was the scout's reply, and he saluted and walked rapidly back to his quarters.

Anticipating that the colonel would grant his request for him to follow the coach, Buffalo Bill had already prepared for his going, and his horse awaited him, the very best animal that he had, and he was never known to have an inferior one.

Ten minutes after his request was granted, the scout

was riding out of the stockade, and once out of sight of the fort, went on at a very rapid pace, for the coach had all of ten miles the start of him.

Buffalo Bill's long life upon the border had made him watchful, cautious, nervy, and cunning.

He had all the attributes to make a great border-man, and he could bring into play his every talent and energy when it was needed.

He had a suspicion that constantly grew upon him that there might be a rescue of the prisoner attempted.

Did not Bonnie Bess know something, he wondered, of this intended requisition.

Might she not meet the detectives on the way with their prisoner, and with unlimited money at her command gain by strategy and bribery what she could not do by force?

So argued the scout, and that was why he wished to go on the trail of the coach.

CHAPTER XX.

IMPORTANT EVIDENCE.

Cody rode at a lively rate until out of sight of the fort.

Then he dismounted, gave his horse a drink of water at a stream, tightened his saddle girths, and, looking at his watch, began to consider what he would do next.

"Just two hours since he left," reflected Buffalo Bill. "That means, as he drives, all of twelve miles from this point. That's a safe guess, anyway."

"I should overtake him about Deep Brook, or a little beyond, only I do not wish to get close enough to be seen by them."

Mounting then, he put his horse into a swinging canter and held him to it for miles, when he reached the country where the hills grew steep and long.

Two hours after leaving the fort he halted for a short rest and said:

"The coach is about six miles ahead now, I take it, if Hal is on schedule time."

Again he resumed his way, and for another long time held on until he descended into Deep Brook.

Just as he halted his horse for water, confident that the coach could not be very far from him then, his eyes fell upon the trail beyond.

There was something in it which caught his eye.

It was a revolver.

At once he spurred toward it, dismounted, and cried out in surprise:

"It's Hal's revolver."

He looked about him and saw tracks of horses, bloodstains, footprints, and the evidence of a fierce struggle.

Instantly he leaped into his saddle, and his horse was sent flying on up the hill.

A mile ahead he caught sight of the coach, and it was driving rapidly. He had no time to lose in overtaking it, so drawing his revolver he fired several shots in rapid succession.

The sound reached the ears of Horseshoe Hal, who glanced back, saw who it was, and, wheeling his team in a broad space of the trail, drove back to meet the

scout with all speed. He soon drew rein, and the scout dashed up and leaped from his panting horse.

"Ho, Hal, what is the matter?" called out Buffalo Bill.

"Matter enough, Bill, for the detectives and the prisoner is gone."

"Gone where?"

"Don't know."

"Why don't you know?" angrily said the scout.

In answer, Horseshoe Hal turned the back of his head and said:

"See here, Bill. See this wound. It's something to excuse my——"

"My poor fellow, what has happened?"

"Durned if I know, for I'm kinder dazedlike."

"Tell me what you can."

"I will."

"You were held up?"

"I don't know." The driver passed his hand across his head and said: "It pains me, Bill, pains like sixty!"

"Come, Hal, get down from your box, for there is a brook, and let me dress that wound, for I have a needle and thread and can stitch it up for you, for it is an ugly looking gash. Then tell me all you can remember."

The driver obeyed without a word, allowing the scout to take the stitches in the wound without flinching and fixed his handkerchief over it, wet with arnica, which Buffalo Bill always had with him.

"It feels better now, Bill, thankee."

"Oh, you'll come round all right soon," and the scout said no more, for he did not wish to hurry the

driver and perhaps fret him in the condition in which he then was.

After a few minutes of silence Hal said:

"I think it was a rock, Bill."

"What was?"

"That struck me."

"Ah! and it was at Deep Brook?"

"Yes, the horses were drinkin' thar, when suddenly came a blow that knocked me clear off the box, for I was down on the ground just out of the stream when I came round.

"The team was standing near me just waitin' like humans for me ter come round, and when I tried to git up, I found I was uncommon dizzy.

"But I did git up at last, and then I see thet all was gone, and I scrambled up to my box as best I could, and come on.

"I don't know no more about it than you does, Bill, only the law officers and the prisoner was gone when I come round to my senses, and I got on the box and drove on."

"Well, you can make it all right now, Hal, as I shall take this trail."

Leaping upon his horse, Buffalo Bill began to search around and soon struck the trail of five horses. He followed it at a swift gallop, and just as night came on he caught sight of a camp fire a short distance ahead.

Dismounting, he crept near to the fire and saw a group of persons.

One was Miss Ardell, known in the mining camps of Red Pocket as Bonnie Bess.

Another was the freed prisoner, the unworthy brother, for whom she had risked so much, and the others were Detective Ray and his men.

What was being said Buffalo Bill distinctly heard, and Bonnie Bess was speaking.

"Now I must return to Red Pocket, Sam, and as you are now a free man, and I have well supplied you with funds, I beg you to keep your word to me, and, going far from here, to lead a different life.

"I have plotted as I did to save you, and I am very sorry that Horseshoe Hal was struck a severe blow with a revolver, for he may have been badly hurt.

"I did not intend that there should be any bloodshed when I sent Dead-shot Dick to get these official papers and employed you, Ray, and your men to act as detective officers.

"I have paid you your price, Ray, and I advise you to get out of this country with all haste, for I shall soon settle up my business at Red Pocket and go to join the man I love, Dead-shot Dick, and whom I am to marry.

"Brother, good-by—we shall never meet again."

She stepped to the side of her brother as she spoke, and just then Henry Ray held a revolver upon them and cried:

"Men, let us get all the gold while we are about it."

His revolver was fired as he uttered the words, and Silk Lasso Sam dropped dead in his tracks.

It was the traitor's last act, for out of the darkness flashed Buffalo Bill's revolver, and just in time to save the life of Bonnie Bess, and down went Henry Ray.

His comrades fired at random and sprang to cover, but one fell, shot by the girl, who had regained her presence of mind, while Buffalo Bill brought down the other. Then the scout appeared upon the scene.

"Three tongues are silenced. Buffalo Bill, I owe you my life, and though my poor brother is dead, he did not die on the gallows."

"Bonnie Bess, I alone know your plot to save your brother, and the secret I will only tell after you have gone far from here, for I heard all that you said a while since.

"You met your brother with those horses at Deep Brook and saved him from the gallows.

"Fortunately, Horseshoe Hal is not badly hurt; but I wish you to go back to Red Pocket, settle up your affairs there, and go from this country, and may you and Dick Dean be happy, is my wish.

"The money you gave these men and your brother is honestly yours, so take it and I will ride to the nearest stage station, have Horseshoe Hal come by here on his return run, and carry these bodies to the fort for burial.

"Hal will tell his story, and it will be known that the rescuers of your brother were members of his band, and I will report my finding of them, and the fight that ended the game, while you need not be known in the affair."

"Buffalo Bill, I will do as you say, and I take your advice, and believe me, as long as I live I will be your friend.

"I came here to Red Pocket to redeem my poor brother from his evil life, and I failed.

"Bury him decently, and God bless you."

She knelt by the body of Lasso Sam, kissed the face of the wicked one she had devotedly loved, sprang into her saddle, and held forth her hand when Buffalo Bill said:

"Here is your money I took from the bodies for you."

"Thank you; I had forgotten it. Heaven bless you!"

Soon after this she rode rapidly away in the darkness, Buffalo Bill following on his way to the stage station.

The next morning, on his back run, Horseshoe Hal got the court's message, left with the stage station stockman, and drove by the lone camp where Buffalo Bill waited as guard for the dead.

The bodies were put into the coach, which arrived without adventure at the fort, and Hal reported the attack upon him by the pretended detectives.

Then, to Colonel Wood and Surgeon Powell alone, Buffalo Bill made his report as it truthfully was.

"Let her go in peace," said the colonel, "as no one was killed save the outlaw chief and his rescuers, the ones who deserved death."

Months after, Buffalo Bill received a letter from England which said simply:

"We are living here and are happy. God bless you.
"DICK and BESS."

And after the sudden departure of Bonnie Bess, Red Pocket became the worst place on the frontier, while to-day it remains but a memory in the eventful

life of Buffalo Bill. How eventful his life was may be known by the stirring adventures that soon followed his return to the fort. The new developments began at Overland City, not very far away.

CHAPTER XXI.

"CHIPPING IN" ON TIME.

Overland City sounded big, but it was great in name only, for in reality it was a den of thieves, as far as the majority of its people went, and could only boast of being the toughest place on the great Overland trail.

This proud boast was sustained by the fact that its graveyard had as many occupants as had the town itself, and those who had gone to their long sleep in the village of the dead, had, with very rare exceptions, "died with their boots on."

It was a place on the Overland stage trail where the trails crossed, and the "city" consisted of a few dozen shanties scattered about a large structure known as the Overland Inn.

Seen from the trail coming over the mountains, when he got within view of the place, Buffalo Bill likened it to a hen and chickens.

There were mines not far away, a few settlers scattered about the valley, and it was important from a stage point of view, and one which passengers never forgot during a lifetime.

The tavern was a board-and-log structure, with a very large barroom, small bedrooms, and no comfort

anywhere, while the meals obtained in the Overland Inn were something to remember.

Perhaps five hundred souls dwelt in Overland City, and the main business of the place was staging, drinking, and gambling.

There were sheds for the stage horses, and others for the stages, while here and there gathered scores of men and youths connected with the Overland line.

Those important personages—the stage drivers—had their homes there, and then there were wagons and teams to transfer settlers from Overland City to any point off the line where they wished to go.

The Pony Express also had Overland City for its station, and a dozen of the small, lithe, sinewy riders could be seen there at any time. Occasionally a renegade Indian or half-breed rode into town, and degraded his savage manhood by visits at the saloons.

A number of saloons, three stores, a wagon and a blacksmith shop, and half a dozen gambling dens could be seen.

The rest of the city was made up of boarding houses, such as they were—for there was not a private dwelling in the place, as all took boarders.

It was nearing noon when Buffalo Bill came in sight of Overland City, and at a point on the mountains twelve miles away. He had turned into the stage trail a mile back, and saw the tracks of a coach which had just gone by toward the station.

In fact, as he drew rein, he could hear the distant rumbling of the coach ahead. He decided not to halt for dinner, but to go on to Overland City.

As he rode into full view of it, far down the valley,

he stopped for a few minutes to enjoy the grand view spread out before him, and then it was that he likened the station with its big tavern and sheds, and smaller houses scattered about, to a hen and her chickens.

He was about to continue on his way when he heard a loud command ring up from the valley; the rumbling of wheels ceased, and all was silence.

The scout knew but too well that terrifying command:

"Halt! and hands up!"

The coach had been halted by road agents.

How many, Buffalo Bill did not stop to ask, or consider. He was not a man to count odds, to hesitate or delay when prompt action was required.

Upon the border his duty was to protect those who needed his aid, uphold the weak against the strong, to support the law against the lawless.

With a word to his horse, he was off down the winding stage trail toward the scene, and, suddenly turning a bend, dashed upon the coach and those who halted it.

There were two of them—one standing in front of the horses, his rifle leveled at the driver's head, the other standing by the side of the coach, revolver in hand, demanding the money and jewels of what passengers there were.

The ground was soft on the trail, and the coming of Buffalo Bill had not been heard by the road agents, though the keen ears of the driver had detected it.

The moment he came upon the scene, Buffalo Bill saw that but one man stood in the way of the forward

movement of the coach, and quick as a flash he leveled his revolver.

It was one of those running shots, of which he was the master.

His nerve and aim did not fail him now when he was firing at a human being any more than when he aimed at a target, for his bullet sunk into the outlaw's head.

The moment the man fell, the driver gained his nerve, and his whip fell upon the backs of the horses, and away dashed the coach, trampling and crunching over the body of the road agent.

The man who was at the coach door was taken completely by surprise, for he was about to secure a very rich booty from an army paymaster, who was the only passenger.

But the open door, as the coach dashed on, knocked the outlaw down, and his revolver fell from his hand.

Around the bend swept the coach, the driver only anxious to take care of himself and his passenger, and leaving his daring rescuer to his fate, if he could not fight his way out.

But still the road agent had not seen from whence came the shot, and, half-stunned by the door striking him and his fall, he was incapable almost of resistance when the scout drew rein over him, sprung from his horse, and, revolver in hand, tore the mask from his face, while he cried:

"Hands up, pard! or die!"

But, with the words, the mask had been torn off, and then came from the lips of the scout in amazement:

"Boss Brewer, the stage master!

"You a road agent? The very man I came to find."

"Buffalo Bill," gasped the stage master.

"Yes."

"Then I am a dead man."

"Your comrade is, there."

"Yes; you killed him?"

"I did, and you deserve the same fate."

"I know it, and I suppose I will hang."

"Are there any more of you?"

"No."

"You are sure?"

"Only we two."

"Who is he?"

"One of my men at the station."

"You are still stage master at Overland City?"

"I was, up to date, but it's over now."

"Who was the driver of the coach?"

"Cal Kirk."

"I do not know him."

"No. A new hand from eastward, or he'd not have run off and left you."

"Why did you put your neck in the noose by such an act, Boss Brewer?"

"Oh! Buffalo Bill, it's a sad story.

"I had laid up a snug pile, and I got to gambling, and it all went—my house, horses, and all—and I was to be sold out in the town where I lived, and where my old mother has her home, for she is old and feeble.

"I was desperate, Buffalo Bill, and I knew from papers that I got that a paymaster was coming through

on Kirk's coach to-day, with a large sum of money, and so I was tempted to get it.

"I would not have robbed a man or woman for anything, but the government would not miss it, and out of all the stock I had saved and all I had done for the soldiers, I had never even been thanked.

"So I just told the man lying there to help me, and we would play road agent, and get the paymaster's money.

"He left Overland City yesterday, and I came out this morning, and we met here, put on these clothes and masks, and—well, you know the rest, and, Buffalo Bill, you will hang me, I know."

Buffalo Bill was silent for a minute, and lost in thought. Of course, he had no intention of hanging the man, even if it had been in his power to do so.

CHAPTER XXII.

PLAIN WORDS, PLAINLY SPOKEN.

At last he said:

"Who is that dead man?"

"One of the black sheep of the Overland layout, Buffalo Bill."

"He has no kin in Overland City?"

"None in all the world, Buffalo Bill, that I have ever heard of."

"Good! Now, can I trust you, Boss?"

"Yes, indeed, for I'm as penitent as a whipped cur."

"You are sure you were not recognized by Kirk?"

"Sure; he would never know me in this rig and the mask there."

"And the paymaster?"

"I don't know him."

"What excuse can you offer for being away from Overland City?"

"I don't know."

"Have you a horse?"

"I came on foot."

"How about your pard?"

"His horse is in the thicket yonder."

"Leave him there, and now tell me one thing."

"Yes, Bill."

"Is there not a near cut on foot to Overland City you can take?"

"Yes; it is half the distance of the stage trail."

"Well, Boss, I will tell you that I came here to see you."

"To see me?"

"Yes; you were wagon master years ago for a settler by the name of Ranger Golden?"

"Yes, yes, twelve years ago. I remember now. He and his whole people were afterward massacred by the Sioux."

"Well, that is the man I have come to see you about, and I just have this to say to you."

"Yes?"

"I believe your story about this intended robbery, and that you are repentant now."

"Lord knows, I am! If I could undo my act I would be a happy man."

"Well, I am going to trust you, for there is a chance for you to reform your life, and I'll help you."

"Oh, that's mighty decent of you, pard! I can appreciate when a man treats me white."

"As no one knows you are the robber, I'll go in to Overland City, carrying that dead man," said Cody, ignoring the man's professions of gratitude. "I'll report that his comrade left, which will be the truth."

"You strike out on foot for Overland City. Make good time, and meet me there to-night."

"Then we will talk over the Golden matter, and there may be some money in it for you."

"I'll do just as you tell me, Buffalo Bill."

"If you do not meet me in Overland City to-night, then I will tell that you were the other road agent, and I'll hunt you down as sure as my name is William Cody, mark my words."

"I won't fail you, Buffalo Bill—I will be there."

"As your comrade was killed, as you did not get the money, and as I believe it is your first offense, I will keep your secret and see what I can do for you. Now be off, and lose no time in getting to Overland City. I will get the horse and come on with the body."

"I'll be there, never fear."

Wringing the scout's hand, the "penitent" stage master, with an awed glance at his dead comrade, bounded away down the trail to go on foot to Overland City. As he ran, he glanced back over his shoulder and saw the tall form of the scout erect and motionless upon the brown slope of the hill. Soon he turned a bend in the trail and continued on his way.

In the thicket indicated, Buffalo Bill found the dead

man's horse, and, strapping the body to the saddle, he mounted his own horse and rode down the stage trail to the station, which he knew would be in a furor of excitement at the report of the holding up of the stage, as soon as Cal Kirk got in to tell his story.

At one place in the trail he saw far on the trail, and his field glass, which he never went without, showed the coach thundering along the valley, half a dozen miles ahead.

"That fellow, Kirk, is frightened half out of his wits, and will kill his team at the rate he is going.

"I suppose I'll have a hundred men coming out to kill or capture the road agents.

"Well, I believe Brewer was in earnest in what he said about it being his first sin of the kind.

"The temptation was too much for him, and it was lucky that his pard handed in his chips, for, if he had not been killed, then I would have had to tell on him.

"I ought to do so now, I suppose, but I want to find out all he knows about the Golden affair, and I guess he will profit by the fright and the lesson he has had, and not go wrong any more.

"At least, I hope so; and if he does, why, I can find him.

"But how that wild driver goes! He'll resign from the trail after this, I'm sure."

With a laugh at the man's fright, Buffalo Bill coolly went on, leading the horse with his dead master tied to the saddle by the stake rope.

When he arrived within half a mile of Overland City, he saw half a hundred mounted men coming toward him at a gallop, and all armed to the teeth.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PROVEN A COWARD.

The driver of the coach that had been held up was a new hand.

Or rather, though a splendid driver, his run had been farther east, where such a thing as a road agent was unknown. He had been on several trips out of Overland City, and had always gone through in safety and on time.

But, then, no one looked for a stage to be held up within twenty miles of Overland City, and it was said that the road agents had all left the neighborhood.

When, then, Cal Kirk beheld a man step out of the thicket with a rifle leveled at him, and take a stand in front of his leaders, and another appear with a revolver, while he uttered these ominous words, "Halt! and hands up!" Kirk was not the man to disobey the command. He halted with dispatch, dropped his reins upon his knees, and held up his hands with alacrity.

There was in the coach, he knew, a paymaster of the United States army. He had been told that the paymaster carried considerable money, and had been directed to put him through in safety.

But, with trembling limbs, he sat upon the box, his hands elevated, and wondering if he was to be allowed to go on with his life.

Then came the fall of hoofs, and the scout dashed into sight.

A shot dropped the man before his leaders, and Cal Kirk sent his team ahead with a rush.

It was lucky that he was a splendid driver, or he would have dashed the stage to destruction.

But he kept his flying horses on the trail, his foot upon the brake, and went on in the same mad rush, and unheeding the calls of the paymaster to halt.

It was down hill, and that caused the horses to fairly fly.

The crunching of bones as the wheels passed over the dead road agent yet resounded in his ears, and his heart was in a tremor of fear and horror.

The valley was reached, yet still he pushed his team to a run.

Had the rescuer been killed, and would the outlaws pursue?

How many more outlaws were there than he had seen?

Such thoughts filled his brain as he urged along, and not until the first cabins in Overland City were close at hand did he draw rein.

Several times had the paymaster called to the driver to slacken up and see if the road agents were following.

Then he asked him to halt and turn back and see what had become of their brave rescuer.

But Cal Kirk would neither halt nor slacken rein. Nature had endowed him with an unusual talent for "looking out for number one"! It was Cal Kirk that he wished to save from the road agents, and only when safe in the tavern would he feel that his life was spared. The rest might be shot, hung, drawn and quartered for all he cared—so long as his worthless hide was unharmed.

When he blew his horn to announce his coming it had a wild, weird, startled sound that brought the people out quickly to welcome the incoming coach.

Then they stood before the Overland Inn—a hundred or more—and a glance was sufficient to show them that something had happened on the trail.

Once he put his foot upon the brakes and came to a halt, Kirk felt his importance. He saw himself a hero, for his coach had been held up on the way and had escaped—by his own remarkable prowess.

That was the way he wanted it, and so he would put it.

"Pards, all, I was held up on the mountain by a gang of road agents, but, by gad, I pushed over them, and here I am!"

So said Cal Kirk; but out of the coach sprang the paymaster.

His face was white with anger and his eyes flashed as he heard the cheer that greeted the driver's words.

"You infamous liar and coward!" he shouted; "you ran off and left the brave man who came to our rescue to fight it out against the road agents alone, after he had killed one. I'd like to shove that lie down your throat—only I wouldn't soil my hands!"

"That man is a splendid driver, men, but he has no right to sit on the coach box when he acts as he did to-day."

Kirk was terribly aroused, but he did not draw at the angry words of the army officer. He was not "on the shoot" against one whom he instantly saw meant what he said.

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So he replied doggedly:

"You army officers say what you please, because the government protects you! If you was any one else, I'd——"

"Bah! you would not dare draw a weapon to use it! You are a coward and you know it. Don't talk to me, you paltry sneak! I am out of all patience with you, for the man you deserted was Buffalo Bill."

"Buffalo Bill, was it?" cried many voices.

"Yes, the chief of scouts at Fort Beal, where I was stationed some months ago. Come, men; who will follow me back to the scene?"

A hundred voices answered with a ringing:

"I will!"

"Then get your horses, and I will secure a mount and lead you back to see if Buffalo Bill is dead or alive."

But it was an hour before all were in readiness to start, and then, as the cavalcade got out on the trail, they beheld Buffalo Bill coming toward them at a canter, the led horse following with a dead body hanging across the saddle.

"Where is Boss Brewer?"

"Where is Boss Brewer?"

These were the cries that went up on all sides as the men about the Overland Inn sought to procure horses on which to follow the brave paymaster back to the scene where Cal Kirk's coach had been held up.

The boss was in charge of the Overland horses belonging to the Pony Express company and coach line, and, without his say-so, they could not be taken out.

The boss was known to be a great hunter, and the stablemen said he was off on a hunt somewhere; but they dared not let the coach horses or Pony Express animals go out in his absence.

In vain the men pleaded; the stable boys were firm.

"We knows the boss, and don't you forget it," said one.

"If he was here it would be all right; but if we'd let 'em go without his say-so, then, when he comes in, he'd begin to practice shootin' on us," added another, with a grin.

"Oh, we knows him, we does."

As the men willing to wade in road-agents' gore had no horses of their own—for outside of the coach and Pony Express animals, horses were scarce in Overland City—they did not know what to do, and went scouring over the place in search of something to ride.

In the meantime, the paymaster had gone into the inn and called the landlord aside. He asked for the man in charge of the coaches, and that individual was sent for without delay.

It was Boss Brewer, and he could not be found.

Then Paymaster Lloyd informed the landlord that he had fifty thousand dollars in government money in his keeping, and that this had to be put away in a safe place.

This was done, and a receipt given for it, after which the paymaster asked for a horse on which to lead his band of volunteers to the rescue.

The landlord did not aspire to horsemanship.

Walking was good enough for him, and, as he

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weighed three hundred pounds, he did not, as a merciful man, feel that he had a right to keep a horse.

"Where can I get one?" asked the army officer.

"If the boss was here, at the Overland stables."

"Where is this man, Boss Brewer, as you call him?"

"Off on a hunt, the stable boys say."

"Then I will take a horse."

But when the paymaster emerged into the open air, he saw that his anticipated cavalry had degenerated into foot soldiers.

He belonged to the cavalry himself, and this would never do, so he demanded a reason.

He very soon got it in full, and with emphasis most decided against the stable boys.

"I can fix that," he said.

And he did, for, upon the authority of a United States officer, he seized the stables of the Overland company, and the volunteers were mounted forthwith.

There were, doubtless, a number in that motley gang who were outlaws, in hiding themselves, and regretting that they had not been along to rope in the paymaster; but, under the garb of honest men, they now went forth to capture the road agents.

One and all had heard of Buffalo Bill, and many knew him, so that when the scout was discovered a wild yell went up from the crowd.

"Buffalo Bill, we were going to your aid," cried the paymaster.

"Paymaster Lloyd, I am glad to see you. It was you, then, whom the road agents were after?" said Buffalo Bill, as the paymaster ranged alongside and shook hands with him.

"Yes, but thanks to your coming I was not robbed, and I shall so report it at headquarters, Cody.

"I was asleep when the coach was halted, and woke up to find the door open and a revolver in my face.

"It was useless to kick or plead. I was caught, and the fellow knew I carried big money, so I was forced to fork over.

"I delayed all I could, and was hoping for aid, when lo! I heard a shot, and then the coach dashed off, knocking the masked leader down.

"I looked back and saw you, and alone. You took big chances, Bill."

"There were only two that I could see, Mr. Lloyd, and, though I got this one across the horse, here, the other escaped capture."

"What a pity; but this one you certainly did get."

"Oh, yes, sir; he is all right, and when we get him up to the inn some one may be able to recognize him.

"Shall we ride back, sir, for I am tired and hungry as a bear, having come in from Fort Beal?"

"Yes, we will go back at once; but how are all at the dear old fort?"

"All goes well, sir; but who was the driver of that coach?"

"A man known as Kirk, one not used to outlaws."

"He is used to running, sir, for, if he didn't hoof it down that mountain, I am a sinner.

"Why, it is a wonder that he did not break your neck and his own, too."

"His would have been no loss, for I told him he was a coward."

"Then I need not do so, as I intended, or he may

believe it," was the scout's cool rejoinder, just as they rode up to the inn and were greeted with a wild hurrah for "Buffalo Bill, the Prince of the Plains."

CHAPTER XXIV.

GOOD ADVICE.

Upon arriving at the Overland Inn, Buffalo Bill at once secured a room, while Paymaster Lloyd was to take the stage eastward, the scout telling him that he believed there was no danger of another attempt to rob him, but, if he wished, he would escort him beyond the danger line.

But this the paymaster declined, and so he started upon his way on the incoming coach, from the northward, and aboard which he was glad enough to find several soldiers going east on furlough, and who would be a protection to him and his money.

Cal Kirk, the driver, had not gone on the hunt for the road agents. He dared not trust himself so far from civilization, with a party of men who had seen him fall from his exalted pinnacle as a driver to a man accused of lying and cowardice.

The more he regarded the situation in the light of what he had done, the more he felt convinced that he had acted in a very shabby way.

"It'll stick to me, unless I ups and shoots the paymaster.

"That will square me with the boys, but, then, it might get my neck into a rope cravat.

"I'll see what Boss Brewer has to say about it."

Kirk had gone to his room after his denunciation by the paymaster, one of the best rooms, too, in the inn, by the way, though that was not saying much in its favor.

He saw the road-agent hunters ride off, and was thinking of going in search of Boss Brewer, when he heard a step go by his door.

The stable master had the room beyond Kirk's, so he knew it must be he, and, glad that he had not to go out and look him up, he at once went to his door and knocked.

"Come in," said a faint voice.

The stable boss was there, his face dripping wet and pale, his eyes sunken, and his whole manner that of a man who had been in some trouble.

"It's you, is it, Kirk?" said the boss, not rising from his chair, and his hand resting as though by accident upon his revolver.

"Yes, boss, and I've come to have a talk with you; but what in thunder is the matter?"

"I was hunting, and a man told me that there was trouble in Overland City, and that all the horses had been taken from the coach stables, so I ran all the way here."

"Well, you look it; but it's only that infernal paymaster, who took them to go and hunt down the road agents who attacked my coach."

"Ah! that is it, is it?"

"Yes."

"So *your* coach was held up, Kirk?"

The man breathed more freely as he put this question.

"Yes; I should say it was."

"I have not been told this, but it is true that I came right to my room. Tell me about it, Cal."

"Well, it was back in the mountains, twelve miles from here, that a gang of road agents held me up."

"How many of them?"

"Lord knows, but I counted half a dozen."

"Yes."

"And they went for the paymaster, as was inside, and had lots of money."

"Did they get it?"

"No, for Buffalo Bill and his scouts came up, and killed one; so I drove on for all I was worth, not wishing the paymaster to be robbed."

"The paymaster, as soon as I got here, said I was a liar and a coward, and I want to ask you if I had not better kill him to square myself with the boys?"

"Did he say it to your face?"

"Yes, and before the whole crowd, who gave me the laugh and many a groan and hiss."

"Because you ran off?"

"Yes."

"Well, Kirk, I think the paymaster was so near right that, as you did not do it then, to do so now would be to get you lynched."

"You did act in a mean way to desert your rescuer, and the only thing I can say for you to do is to take the first coach east, for you may be sure the boys won't let you live on the Overland trail, and I'd change my name, too, if I was in your place."

"So you say I acted like a coward, too?"

"I say you acted the part of a cowardly cur, and if

you don't like my language, resent it now—and not wait to shoot me in the back."

"But I have given you good advice, straight from the shoulder, and you had better take it."

"I can get my money, I suppose?"

"I'll give you an order on the Overland paymaster for your money, and a free ride back over the line."

"Now, go and get ready, Kirk, for if you stay here the boys will do you harm, mark my words."

"I'll go, you bet."

"Well, come here soon, and get your money order, and then light out down the trail to take the coach, for there will be trouble if you leave from the tavern."

"I'll do it, and I rely upon you, Boss, not to let them hunt me," said the cringing coward.

"Do as I tell you, then, and lose no time about it, either."

So saying, the boss dismissed the man, and then set to work to get himself in presentable shape. He had plunged through streams, slid down hills, gone through thickets at a run, and was tattered, bruised, wet, mud-covered, and tired.

But he put on some clean clothes, after washing up, took a stiff drink of whisky, and then went down into the stable yard, where he was met by the paymaster and the men, who were returning the stage horses pressed into service for the hunt after the road agents.

"Ho, Boss, how are you, pard?" cried Buffalo Bill, and the station master went forward to greet the scout, his heart and brain in a whirl, though he was outwardly calm.

"I've got a dead man here, Boss, whom the boys say is one of your stablemen."

Buffalo Bill pointed to the body across a horse, and which the station master approached in a timid sort of way.

Who can tell what were the feelings of Boss Brewer as he moved up to the body of the man whom he had tempted to become his ally in an act of crime which had cost him his life?

William Brewer was getting along in years, for his hair and beard were iron-gray. He had dwelt long upon the frontier, and he had held a place of trust for many years, though he was known to be a dangerous man.

What money he had accumulated he had sent east, and bought the home where his old mother dwelt, and, led into desperation by gambling, he had mortgaged it to the landlord of the Overland Inn, who at last threatened to sell him out unless it was paid.

It was this situation which had driven him to rob the government; and now, in the dead body of his comrade, and in the presence of Buffalo Bill, he saw the result of his evil scheming.

The stableman had once saved the life of the boss, and he was greatly attached to him, and men spoke of "Andy" as the "pet of the boss."

Now, every eye was upon him, as he advanced and gazed upon the dead man's face.

Suddenly he started back, for the open eyes glared into his own when he removed the mask. He acted well his part, as Buffalo Bill thought, for the eye of the scout was upon him.

"Andy! What does this mean?" he cried excitedly.

"It means, Boss, that he was one of the men who held up Kirk's stage in the mountains, for I killed him, standing at the head of the leaders, his rifle covering the driver.

"I shot him, but his comrade got off easy.

"That is all there is to it, except that you had better muster your men, find out who is missing, and make them give a strict account of their absence, for this looks bad."

"It does look bad, Buffalo Bill, and it is bad, very bad.

"Tobe, call all the men together, and I will see who is missing.

"Then take this body away and have it buried."

The men were mustered, those who were asleep being called out, too, and, fortunate it was for them, not one was missing.

Andy had been the only black sheep in the band of forty-odd stablemen.

CHAPTER XXV.

BREWING MISCHIEF.

Night now came on, and in the saloons, the holding up of the coach, the cowardice of Kirk, and the treachery of Andy filled every mouth.

At last the eastbound coach came in, and the passengers took their leave, the paymaster going also, and riding with the driver.

Then, as the men had begun to drink heavily, mis-

chief began to brew, and it was decided to take Kirk out and hang him.

A coward could not be tolerated upon the Overland trail.

So the crowd, inspired by a drunken leader, made a rush for the room of Kirk.

The door was open, the room in disorder, and the driver was gone.

The men were wild with maudlin rage, and sought Boss Brewer for an explanation. He simply said that he wanted no such man in his employ, that in his fright he had driven his team to death, and so he had discharged him, while, fearing trouble, he supposed the man had gone down the valley to take the coach away from Overland City.

The crowd then went howling away, to see if Kirk had really left the place, for they were on the warpath for blood and meant to have it.

Finding that the driver had escaped them, they compromised by going to the cabin where Andy's body lay, and, taking it out, gave it a midnight burial, with "three cheers and a tiger" as a burial ceremony over the unfortunate stableman.

They were determined to put down lawlessness in Overland City, they said, and after the burial they returned to the saloon and got beastly drunk all around, ending up in a row that cost two lives and many hurts and swelled heads.

Such was law and order in that far frontier town!

In the meantime, a somewhat strange scene was going on in the private room of Landlord Lund, of the Overland Inn.

That worthy had become a very rich man, of late years, and the more he got, the more he wanted, until he became a perfect gouge, and grasped at every means of getting gold, fair or foul.

Buffalo Bill had known the man years before, and, whatever hold he had upon him, he determined to use it in behalf of Boss Brewer.

So he went to the stableman's room and said:

"See here, Boss, the talk I want with you cannot take place to-night, but when I leave to-morrow, you accompany me on the trail a few miles, for I have something to say to you of importance."

"I will, Bill; I'll do anything you say."

"Now, let me tell you that I'm superstitious on the point of good or bad luck," said Cody, with a smile that belied his words.

"You are?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"Well, I think you were playing in great luck to-day not to catch my bullet."

"Oh, if that's what you mean—well, I don't deny it. But life never has brought me much luck, so far, and I guess——"

"You got here on time, which was lucky, and you stood the ordeal well of facing Andy's body."

"It was awful, I tell you!"

"Now, you are having a run of luck, and I want you to go to Landlord Lund and challenge him to play you three games for what he holds of yours."

"But I have nothing to stake against it."

"Give him your I O U, and I'll indorse it. Come, let us see if your luck has deserted you."

"Lund won't play, I'll bet you. He's too mean and stingy to risk losing a red cent."

"He will," was Buffalo Bill's decided rejoinder. "I have good reasons for saying this. Now, go ahead, Brewer, and challenge him. Brace up!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A GAME OF CHANCE.

Landlord Lund was seated in what he called his "parlor" when Buffalo Bill and the boss knocked at his door.

It was his parlor, bedroom, and office combined, and it was arranged with a special view to his own protection in case of trouble.

It was of logs, and boarded without, while a tunnel ran from the cellar to a point some distance away, where the landlord had a pard ever ready to aid him.

No one knew the ups and downs of life better than Landlord Lund.

He was counting over his gold, a favorite amusement of his, when Buffalo Bill and the stable master came.

But he had hastily put it away before admitting them, and had reconnoitered from a secret point of observation to see who were his visitors before doing so.

"Sit down, Buffalo Bill, and you, too, Boss, and we'll have a glass while you tell me what I can do

for you," he said, getting out a bottle and glasses as he spoke. "The boys are on the war trail hot to-night, for it broke them all up to have Kirk show the cur and Andy play the road agent. Confound them! What's eating them, anyway? It hits you, too, rather hard, Boss."

"Yes, for I wish my men to go straight."

"Here's to you, gents, and now say if you came for a social call or on business."

Boss Brewer looked at Buffalo Bill, and the latter said:

"We came on a little matter of business, Lund, for Brewer has been telling me how he got into a losing streak in gambling, and you won all he had laid up in years."

"Yes, but he would not heed my warning and quit."

"I never knew you to warn me, landlord, and you bought up every debt I owed any one else."

"Yes, for they would have given you trouble—pressing you."

"Yet you cowed me."

"I've been awful patient, Boss, for I've waited six months."

"How much do you owe Lund, Boss?"

"He holds my house in the East, my horses here, my watch and chain, and claims on three months' wages in all."

"What does it foot up?"

"Well, the place is worth five thousand, the horses a thousand more, the watch and chain were given to me by the drivers, and cost five hundred, and there is three months' pay at three hundred."

"Nearly seven thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"Well, play Lund for it now, best two in three games."

"What has he got to put up against it?" asked the landlord.

"His I O U."

"It's no good."

"I'll indorse it," said Cody.

"What's your interest in this game, Buffalo Bill?"

"Oh, I have known Boss Brewer for some time, and don't wish to see him lose all without a chance to win it back."

"He doesn't get it without putting up good money."

"I said I would indorse his paper."

"What have you got?" inquired the landlord, with a sneer.

"Mighty little, it is true, besides my outfit and horses, and a few hundred in the paymaster's hands."

"Then you indorse what is no good."

"I have the liberty, though, to draw upon my friend Gordon Lillie, whom you may know as Pawnee Bill, or upon Doctor Frank Powell, if Boss Brewer loses."

The landlord started, and his face changed color, but he said:

"Well, I'll play, so come right into the saloon."

"No, the game is to be played right here."

"Why?"

"I prefer it."

"I'll send for a pack of cards, then."

"No, for I have a pack here never opened."

"I prefer my own pack."

"I know that, but you do not play with any pack you may get. Understand, Lund, this is to be a square game."

"What do you mean?"

"Bah! don't assume the virtuous, Lund, for you know we were pards long ago, and I have a good memory, so do as I say or I will go and ask White Beaver Powell to come here and play a game with you."

Whatever dread there might be in the magic name of the surgeon scout, it had the effect of commanding obedience from Landlord Lund, for, with a muttered oath, he sat down to the table, cleared a space, and said gruffly:

"Where are your cards?"

"Here."

"Are they square?"

"Oh, yes, for you have not had the handling of them."

A muttered oath was the landlord's only reply, and, seating himself at the table, Boss Brewer wrote out the I O U and Buffalo Bill indorsed his name upon it, with the following lines above it:

"To be presented for payment to Doctor Frank Powell, 'White Beaver, the Surgeon Scout,' in case it is not paid by William Brewer."

"That goes," said Buffalo Bill quietly, as the landlord glanced over it.

Lund made no reply, but chewed his lips, and the cards were cut for deal and dealt.

"Best two in three, is it?"

"Yes, landlord," answered Boss Brewer.

Both men were noticeably nervous, but the scout stood looking on, unmoved.

The boss won the first game, and at once became perfectly calm, as Buffalo Bill remarked:

"Your luck is good."

But Landlord Lund became the more nervous.

The second game the boss won, and the landlord gave a groan, while he said:

"This is robbery to force a man to play."

"It was played with unmarked cards, Lund, and you are the robber.

"Come, hand over the claim papers and property of Boss Brewer that you hold."

The landlord obeyed without a word, and, rising, the two men left the room and went to their own.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SIMPLE EXPLANATION.

"How did you control that tiger, Buffalo Bill, as you did?" asked the stable master.

"Oh, I saved his neck once, years ago, when he was caught cheating at the mines, and both Major Lillie and Doctor Powell know a secret about him that would stretch his neck, that's all."

"And you have saved me, for I shall never touch a card again or a drop of liquor. I am a new man, Buffalo Bill, and I owe it to you that I am," was Brewer's trembling reply.

The morning after his strange adventures, Boss Brewer rose with a comparatively light heart.

It is true, that his crime of holding up the coach weighed upon him, but he bitterly repented that mad act, and had decided to lead a different life to atone for it.

Having his property back again, he looked at his handsome watch and chain over and over again, went to the stables and petted his horses, and mailed east a deed to his little home, putting it in his mother's name.

Presently he glanced wistfully at the bar, where he had always gotten his morning "eye-opener," then braced up courage and walked in. He had resolved to put his newly acquired morals to the test.

"The same, Boss?" asked the bartender.

"No, Ike, I won't try anything this morning," said Brewer, with an air of virtuous self-denial.

"My land, you hain't sick, be you?"

"No, but I've cut rum."

"Cut rum?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"Forever."

"So they all say."

"Well, see if I do not tell the truth."

With another wistful glance at the tempting bottles, Boss Brewer passed out, hoping—and knowing—that the barkeeper would spread the news of his reformation.

Outside, he met Landlord Lund, and said good morning.

The salutation was not returned, and then came gruffly:

"See here, Brewer, I've got parties that want the room you've got, so just vacate to-day."

"I shall be glad to, now that I know what kind of a landlord I have had!" quoth Brewer. "But don't go too brisk, or the boys might hear a story I could tell. Go slow with me, Lund, old skinflint, and I keep a quiet tongue—see?"

The landlord evidently did see, for he said no more.

The stable master breakfasted with Buffalo Bill, and told him how Andy had been buried by the moral community of Overland City, who had finished up by causing two more funerals.

"I don't know any other life, Buffalo Bill, or I would leave it; but if I don't gamble or drink, I can make money and lay it up, and in a couple of years or so will have enough to go home and take care of the old lady."

"That is right, Boss, and I believe you will stick to your resolve."

"Now, I must be off, and, under pretense of visiting the scene of the road agents' attack yesterday, you will go with me."

"I'll be ready, Buffalo Bill, in half an hour."

A crowd gathered about Buffalo Bill when he went out in front of the tavern after breakfast, and when, soon after, he rode off with the boss, men wondered why Landlord Lund did not say good morning.

"How far is your camp from here, Bill?"

"I have no camp nearer than Fort Beal."

"Why, you said last night you would go to camp after Surgeon Powell."

"That was a bluff."

"And it went."

"Oh, yes, I knew it would, for if there is a man on earth that Landlord Lund fears, it is Doctor Powell."

"But, now, Boss, I have some questions to ask you, so let us halt here."

They did so, and Buffalo Bill got out his notebook and pencil.

"You were a wagon master for Ranger Golden, a settler, years ago?"

"Yes."

"How was it?"

"He came out West, as I remember it, with his family."

"How many?"

"His wife, little child, and his wife's younger brother, a handsome and fine fellow of sixteen, I guess."

"That was all?"

"There were two negroes, a man and a woman."

"Well?"

"He came in one coach with them, and the other coaches and an ambulance brought his baggage and provisions, and he had plenty."

"I remember, too, there were some cattle, sheep, and fowls, and all else to make them comfortable."

"And then?"

"They stayed several days at a station where I then had charge, Medicine Mound, you know it was, and he hired some men to go with him, cowboys up from Texas they were."

"Yes?"

"And he engaged me and an outfit of wagons to take them to their new home."

"And you did so?"

"I did."

"Well?"

"We were a week on the trail, and he acted as guide, for he had been to the settlement and bought a ranch there, and a good one, for I was surprised when I saw it."

"Did you get well acquainted with his family?"

"You bet I did, and they were just as nice people as I ever saw."

"What about his wife?"

"She was a beauty, and very young. She was a Southern lady, she told me—a planter's daughter."

"And the child?"

"Was a smart little one."

"What was its name?"

"They called it only baby, as I recollect."

"And the boy?"

"Her brother?"

"Yes."

"They called him Hugh, I think."

"And her name?"

"Golden's wife?"

"Yes."

"Her husband called her Cille, as I remember, and I now recall she said her name was Lucille Hammond, and she was so sweet, so good, all of us loved her, and the baby, too."

"You knew nothing of Mr. Golden?"

"Only what he told me, that he was an English-

man, had been a soldier and a sailor, and was in the mines out here for a while.

"Then he became a settler."

"Have you heard from them since?"

"I heard that the Indians raided the valley and killed all the settlers, and mighty sad I felt over it."

"Well, Boss, I thank you for what you have told me, and if I have to send for you I wish you to come, for it will be important."

"I'll come, Buffalo Bill, if you say the word, for never will I forget you," and tears came into eyes that had not known a tear since childhood.

Soon after the two parted, the stable master to return to Overland City, and Buffalo Bill to start for the fort, well pleased with what he had accomplished.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DEATH GAP.

Buffalo Bill parted with Boss Brewer with a firm belief in his reformation and honesty of purpose. He saw that the narrow escape he had made had been a great shock to him, and would make a lasting impression. Also, he wished to feel that the man would not go astray again.

Having accomplished the purpose of his errand, gleaned all the information he could from the man who had taken Ranger Golden to his frontier home, he felt that there was little more to do.

"I will hurry back, for I will have a couple of days' rest at the fort, I guess, before starting for Massa-

cre Valley," said the scout to himself, and he pressed on more rapidly.

He wished to camp but once on the way, reaching the fort the next night.

Taking advantage of mountain cuts, he shortened his way, and by walking up and down the mountains, thus resting his horse, he made rapid progress.

He did not camp until some time after nightfall, and broke camp very early in the morning, so that he was well on his way when the dawn came.

At noon he halted for an hour, for he saw that at the rate he was going, he would reach the fort by dark if his horse did not give out.

But the animal was a fine one, and, spared all that was possible by his rider, he held on pluckily.

The trail he took back was partly over the one which he had come, especially as he neared the fort.

The sun was yet above the horizon when he crossed the river at the ford above Ranch Isle, and he gazed at the place with considerable interest, even putting his glass to his eyes.

Ranch Isle had always been a place of interest to the scout, in that he looked upon those that dwelt there as a very mysterious party.

"They are a queer outfit, and, somehow, I cannot get to bed rock as to what and who they just are," muttered the scout.

To cut off a mile, he turned into a cañon, which was shunned by all who were at all superstitious.

Even the most plucky confessed that they always shunned the place.

Texas Jack was a scout known to have no fear, but

what he had seen one night in the Death Gap, as the cañon was called, caused him to avoid the place ever after.

"I'm not afraid of live men, but I draw the line at dead men, when I see skeletons dancing in the moonlight, and that is what I did see, pards.

"You know, when I got to the fort, I was scared clean through, and my horse had been run to death."

So said Scout Texas Jack, and it was useless to tell him some one had played a joke on him.

"I saw what I saw, and I know a picked skeleton from one with human flesh on it," he would answer.

And if a man of Texas Jack's pluck would avoid the Death Gap, after that the other scouts of the command religiously did the same.

"We'll ride round, for we don't mind cutting off a couple of miles or so," they would say, when told to go through the gap.

Buffalo Bill had gone through by day and night several times, but he admitted that it was a most desolate place.

The soldiers avoided it, too, and, as for the cowboys and settlers, they never had business to call them in that direction, or said so.

The gap, or cañon, had its unwritten history, and a sad one it was.

A train of emigrants had been caught there by the Indians, and put to death.

They were a jolly party, and they were enjoying a dance by the light of a camp fire when the attack was made.

The violin and banjo were silenced, the voices of

the dancers and the laughter of the children, as a volley of bullets and a shower of arrows came in upon the happy group.

Then followed the wild war whoops, and, though the men fought bravely for life, and all they loved and possessed, they sunk down under the attack of the outnumbering foe.

The morning sun arose upon a sickening, sad scene, and there lay the massacred emigrants, until the coyotes and the vultures picked their bones, and left them to whiten upon the death-stained sod.

Years after, Captain Taylor's troop of the Fifth Cavalry, scouting to find a good place for a frontier fort, and under the guidance of Buffalo Bill, came upon the spot and decently buried the bones of the dead.

With such a memory haunting the spot, with the stories told of the cañon, it was no wonder that all avoided it.

Captain Taylor had given it the name of Death Gap, and had erected there a monument of stone over the dead.

Then the troop had gone on to pitch upon the spot where Fort Beal was afterward founded.

But, unheeding its memories, unmindful of the ghost stories told of it, Buffalo Bill had decided to cut off a couple of miles, and go through Death Gap to the fort.

Death Gap was a wild-looking place, weird in its surroundings and solitude as well as in its memories.

There was one thing that might have influenced

Buffalo Bill in going through that way to the fort, and that was a fresh trail that he saw.

It turned from the main trail toward Death Gap, and was the track of a horse ridden in a canter.

It was a surprise to see the trail going that way, and so Buffalo Bill followed it.

Leaving the prairie lands, he got into the foothills, then came to the rugged country and the ridge which the gap cut through.

The trail still held on toward the gap, and the scout stuck to it.

On he went until the country grew more rugged, and the ridge tops were fringed with pines, and all around was desolation.

The unfortunate victims of the massacre had without doubt penetrated there to seek a good and safe encampment, but which, alas, proved their death camp.

The scout noticed, as he rode along, that the trail he followed, though very fresh, was pursuing the tracks of another horse, which had often gone that way.

"This is strange," he muttered. "Can any one live in the Death Gap, I wonder?"

The sun had set to him down in the valley, but upon the hilltops its light shone brightly.

"I shall reach the fort a little after dark," he said.

At last the valley narrowed, and he soon found himself under the shadows of the cliffs which formed Death Gap.

It looked gloomy ahead of him, and he saw the spot where the emigrant train had encamped, and he recalled the time of his first coming there, and the horror

of all at the discovery of the skeleton forms of the dead.

The stone pile, made in the form of a cross, lying upon the ground, was just before him, not far from a spring, where he was going to give his horse a drink.

A thick growth of pines surrounded the spring, and he could not see through them.

The sod beneath the hoofs of his horse left no sound, and the scout muttered as he glanced about him:

"It is, indeed, a spooky-looking place.

"If it was dark now, I might get a look at the skeleton dance that Texas Jack saw.

"They sell some awful snaky liquor over at the store in the settlement, but I don't see how it could make Jack see a skeleton fandango.

"I'd like to see one myself, for it would be a new sensation to behold a Virginia reel danced by skeletons under the shadow of the cliffs at the spring.

"There goes the trail, straight for the spring, and it was not made by a skeleton horse, I will take oath on.

"Well, I must know who it is that is not afraid to associate with skeletons, and to come here often—from the trails I see—Ah!"

He drew rein suddenly, as he uttered the exclamation, and had his rifle ready for use on the instant.

But he slung it to his back immediately, and rode on, for he saw that he was discovered.

"Their second meeting that I have caught them in," he muttered, as he raised his hat and said aloud:

"This is an unlooked-for pleasure, Miss Bessie, as

well as a surprise, to find you and Don Eduardo here, for I thought you both were afraid of Death Gap."

The faces of the man and woman showed deepest chagrin at their discovery by the scout.

They were seated upon the rock monument to the massacred emigrants, while their horses were feeding near by.

They had seen the scout about an instant after his discovery of them, and they seemed speechless with amazement and anger.

But, in response to the words of Buffalo Bill, came the woman's ready answer:

"It is a surprise to see you, also, Buffalo Bill, but I am glad you have come, for I want you as a witness."

"A witness to what, Miss Bessie?"

"Why, Don Eduardo made a wager with me of his beautiful iron-gray mustang, that I would not come here alone at night and place my glove among these rocks as a proof of my being here, and he was to come and find it."

"And you have come?"

"You see me?"

"Yes, but it is not yet dark."

"True, but I intended to place the glove in the spot and wait till night before I left."

"Yes, and I have lost my horse, for Miss Bessie has done what I did not believe she would, brave as she is."

"I could have told you, Don Eduardo, that Miss Bessie would not take a dare, but you seemed doubtful of her coming, to be here to watch."

"Yes, wasn't that mean, for, while I was waiting,

he rode up, and you should have seen the don's sheepish look when he found me here.

"I am so glad that I have you as a witness, Buffalo Bill, for now he will have to give me the iron-gray mustang."

"Yes, don, I am a witness that she came."

"I'll surrender! the horse is yours, Miss Bessie," said the don, while Bessie Bond asked:

"And, how on earth came you here, Buffalo Bill, for I thought every one dreaded this spot?"

"We all do, Miss Bessie, but I am just back from a long scout, and, as you see, my horse is broken down, so I wish to save him two miles by cutting through the gap, as it was not dark."

"Well, I must return home, and Don, as you go to the fort, you will have company."

"Will you not allow me to escort you, señorita?"

"No, I never do. Good night, gentlemen."

And, springing into her saddle, the strange girl darted away like an arrow.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PEOPLE OF MYSTERY.

Buffalo Bill was too true a reader of human nature not to see that his coming was a source of deepest regret, as well as anger, to both Don Eduardo Vincente and Bessie Bond. He saw their faces pale and flush with the emotions they felt at his surprise of them.

The maiden had shown instant tact in turning it off

as she had, that she had come there on a wager, and then the man had seconded her clever ruse.

But the scout had muttered to himself:

"They lied to me."

Not a shadow showed that he had other belief but that they had come as stated.

His manner was pleasant, and he had laughed over the wager, and joked the don upon betting upon anything a woman should not do.

"My experience has been, Don Eduardo, not to bet with a woman—nor dare one. You'll get left every time.

"Miss Bessie, too, is the last one to bet against, where her courage is taken into consideration, for she would tackle a bagful of wild cats."

As they rode toward the fort together, Buffalo Bill could see that the don was trying to regain his composure.

Something had evidently upset him, to move him from the even tenor of his manners, his cool, suave way.

Pretending not to notice this, Buffalo Bill chatted on, which he suddenly broke off by saying:

"You see, Don Eduardo, my horse is used up, so please do not let me delay you, if you care to ride on more rapidly."

"No, indeed, for I like your company, Cody. You must have ridden a long way."

"I have, sir, since I met you on the trail the other day, and you know, after leaving you, I saw trails I could not account for, and, as Miss Bessie had gone on alone, I was anxious about her, so went by her

ranch, but found her all right. She's a strange little lady, Don Eduardo, for she never receives company at her home."

"Yes, I have never been invited there myself; it is her mother's wish, I believe; but did you think the trails you saw might be Indian?"

"I did not know, sir, but thought it best to be on the safe side."

"Always, but you have seen nothing suspicious in your scouting?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Did you go far?"

"Yes, sir; I went to Overland City," was the frank reply.

"It's a long ride, and you made it quickly."

"Yes, sir."

"Did not stay long?"

"No, for my business was soon transacted, for you know the Pony Express riders start from there," and Buffalo Bill led the don to believe he had taken special documents from the colonel to be sent by the Pony Express riders.

"Oh, yes, and it's a quick way of sending news through, but nothing serious, I hope?"

"No, sir, I guess not, though you know a dispatch bearer is never let into the secrets of the commanding officer."

"I thought you were an exception?"

"Oh, no, though Colonel Royal and all of his officers treat me as though I held a commission, for they are very kind to me."

"I am glad to see it, and the ladies like you, too; in

fact, you are a very popular man, Buffalo Bill," and the scout raised his hat at the compliment.

Cody had got the don at his ease now, and felt sure he had disarmed him of every suspicion of his having been watching him when he went into Death Gap.

"A desolate place, that gap, Señor Cody," suddenly said Don Eduardo Vincente, his thought reverting to his being discovered there with Bessie Bond.

"It is, indeed, sir, and a place I would shun by night."

"You surely do not believe the stories told of its being haunted?"

"Do you, Don Eduardo?" asked Buffalo Bill, in a mysterious way.

"Well, I hardly know what to think."

"You are superstitious, then, sir?"

"You know I come of a superstitious race, Señor Cody, and I have heard people whom I dared not doubt say what they had seen in the way of ghosts, but then I try not to believe such stories, and yet——"

"Well, Don Eduardo?" asked Buffalo Bill, as the Mexican paused in what he was about to say.

"I was going to remark, señor, that I would not care to go alone to that place after dark."

"It was from this reason that I felt sorry that I had done that which might make that brave girl go, and so I went before nightfall to pass through and head her off, telling her that I gave up the wager."

"But there I found her, as cool as you please, and not in the least ruffled, though I admit it was not nightfall."

"She would not have cared for that, sir, for I do not believe she knows what it is to fear."

"That is my opinion, Cody, and she is a very clever girl, beautiful, accomplished, and a mystery, for I cannot understand her."

"No one else does, either."

"True, very true; but my opinion is that she has had some great heart trouble, and that is why her mother brought her here to these wilds and settled upon that ranch in the valley, where one and all are most mysterious persons, even to Miss Bessie, who has become as reckless as a cowboy."

"She does not seem to be at all times happy, sir."

"No, she does not, and I only wish she would fall in love with some nice fellow and marry him, for it would make her life a happy one."

"Perhaps, though, it depends upon the man, and she is one to have strong preferences."

"Have you noticed this, Cody?" quickly asked the don.

"Well, yes, though perhaps I should not say so."

"Will you tell me the one you supposed her most partial to?"

"Pardon me, Don Eduardo, for saying so, but I considered you to be her favorite," and the scout smiled, grimly, for it was night now, and the don could not see his face.

The don was silent at the words of the scout, and, as the fort lights were now in sight, Buffalo Bill changed the subject.

Soon after they rode into the stockade walls, for

the don was going to the Officers' Club, and not to his own quarters toward the settlement.

The scout went to his own quarters, looked well after his horse, and then, brushing off the dust of travel, and making his toilet, he went to report his return to Colonel Royal.

"Well, Cody, glad to see you back again; but did you reach Overland City?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, sir; I passed some hours there."

"A quick trip you made of it, indeed."

"You must be tired, so sit down."

The scout was tired, and accepted the invitation.

"Did you find your man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Our English friends will be glad of this. Have you seen them?"

"No, sir; I came first to report to you."

"They are spending the evening at Chaplain Burton's, for both seem deeply interested in the Daughter of the Fifth; but they will have to become American citizens and join the Fifth as privates, if they wish to win her," and the colonel laughed.

"Yes, sir, and it would tax a man's love rather strongly to give rank and wealth for a ladylove."

"She would be sure, at least, he was in earnest; but is your news for Lord Lonsfield and Sir John important enough for me to send after them to come here?"

"Oh, no, sir. I saw Boss Brewer and took down in my notebook all that he said."

"He did take Mr. Golden to the settlement, then?"

"Yes, sir, and told me much about Mr. Golden and his family."

"Was it the same man?"

"Without doubt, sir?"

"He must have been married then?"

"He was, sir."

"Well, I'll hear it all later; so now tell me if you have any news to report outside of your mission."

"I sent your dispatches, sir, by Pony Rider Express."

"Thank you."

"And, now, I have a report to make, sir."

"I am ready to hear it, Cody."

"Colonel Royal, I have to take you into my confidence, and make known to you a secret which you will not be supposed to know."

"Well?"

"I know you will hold my confidence, sir, and I trust you will feel I have acted for the best."

"But I deem it my duty to tell you the truth, and will ask you to kindly allow me to manage the affair as I have begun, and as I deem best."

"I rely sufficiently upon your honor and discretion, Cody, to make you such a promise, and I do."

"Thank you, Colonel Royal, for your words remove a load from my mind, as I did not wish to hold a secret in which I had taken the grave responsibility of allowing a guilty man to escape punishment."

"Ah, so serious as that?"

"You shall hear, sir, the whole truth, and if you decide that I have not overstepped my authority, I will

feel that you will consider the secret as unknown to you."

"I will not go back upon my word to you, Cody."

"I feel that, sir, and I feel the greater boldness to make the request, as I have saved the government a large sum of money."

"That is good news, and you are always rendering the government valuable services, I am glad to say, Cody."

"Here is a letter, sir, given me by Paymaster Lloyd for you."

"Oh! you saw Lloyd, then?"

"Yes, sir; I was so fortunate."

The colonel took the letter and read it.

It was as follows:

"I beg to report to you that upon the morning of the tenth the coach in which I was a passenger was held up by road agents in the mountains, twelve miles from Overland City, and they having knowledge of my carrying with me a large sum of government money, I was being forced to yield it up at the muzzle of a revolver, when, I am pleased to report, Buffalo Bill came to the rescue alone, though not knowing the odds he had to face."

"He shot down one of the robbers at the head of the horses, when the cowardly driver dashed away, in spite of my commands and entreaties to him to stop, and left Cody to his fate."

"The fellow never drew rein until he reached Overland City, going at breakneck speed."

"I seized the horses at the Overland stables, in the name of the government, and with a number of ready

volunteers, started out to the scene, but met Cody coming in, with the dead outlaw hanging across his saddle.

"Cody will himself report to you what followed after his arrival upon the scene, and through which act the government money was saved, and, perhaps, my life.

"I have the honor to be, et cetera."

Such was the letter of the paymaster, who was a man well known to the colonel, and one whom he knew had made no exaggerated report of what had occurred.

The colonel read the letter through most carefully, and when he had finished, he looked up at the scout and said:

"You took big chances, Cody, to run on a party you did not know the strength of."

"I saw that the coach was held up, and trusted in a surprise to put the outlaws to flight, sir."

"Fortunately, your confidence met with success, and I congratulate you upon your nerve and achievements.

"But you have a report to make to me, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, I have," was the reply of Buffalo Bill, and he began his story at once.

CHAPTER XXX.

BUFFALO BILL'S REPORT.

Buffalo Bill began his report to the colonel in a low, clear, modest tone. He knew that he had to make a confession which would show that he had assumed considerable authority, but he believed that he had acted for the best.

How the colonel would regard it remained to be seen.

"I arrived on the stage trail, sir," he began, "just after the coach had gone by, for I could hear the rumbling of the wheels.

"The trail wound just there, forming quite a bend, and I heard the order of the road agents to the driver to halt.

"I at once spurred to the scene, and, the ground being soft, my approach was unheard, so I ran in on the outlaws, dropping one with a shot.

"The starting of the coach knocked the other down with the open door of the stage, and this gave me a chance to rush on him before he could fire on me.

"I saw no more than the two, and they were masked.

"Unmasking my prisoner, I found, to my amazement, he was the very man I was going to see."

"What! the stage master?"

"Yes, sir; it was Boss Brewer, and this is my secret.

"He recognized me, as I did him, and then we had a talk together.

"He was thoroughly repentant."

"Doubtless," dryly said the colonel.

"He was in earnest, sir, and told me how he had gambled away his entire earnings, and his home where his old mother lived in Iowa.

"He had tried to get time from the landlord of the inn at Overland City, and, failing, in his despair, knowing of the coming of Paymaster Lloyd, and thinking he could rob the government where he would not an individual, he was tempted, led one of his men to join him, and the result I have told you.

"I was in a quandary, for, if taken to Overland City, he would be lynched, and I would thus fail to get from him the news I might."

"That was true, Cody."

"So I took chances, sir, and told him to cut for Overland City on foot, as he had not come mounted, when his comrade had, and to meet me there."

"I told him I would keep his secret if he did as I demanded, and hunt him down if he failed me."

"He promised, and kept his word, for I met him there."

"I reported only the killing of one outlaw, and that the other got off, which was true, sir."

"Yes, and lucky for him that he did."

"Well, colonel, the paymaster left on the eastbound stage, and Kirk, the coward driver, too, for the boys intended to string him up."

"But they failed to find him, so buried the dead outlaw by night, had a row, in which several were killed, and the town was painted red."

"I should think so."

"In the meantime, I saw Boss Brewer, and had a talk with him, and we went to Landlord Lund's private room, and I made him play the station master for all he had won from him, best two in three games."

"You forced him to play?"

"Well, sir, I knew he was a card sharp in the mines, and that he had cheated there, playing with marked cards, and was a man who, I was sure, had swindled Boss Brewer."

"As he played with a pack of cards I furnished, he lost his nerve and the games."

"And Boss Brewer?"

"He swore off from cards and liquor, sir, and I believe will keep his pledge, but, if not, my pledge to him does not hold good."

"The next morning he rode some distance on the trail with me, and I learned all the information I wished about Mr. Golden."

"Now, Colonel Royal, it is for you to say, sir, if I overstepped my authority in what I did?"

"Well, Cody, I can only say that I would have done just as you did under the circumstances, and I only hope your man will prove his appreciation of your kindness toward him."

"I shall not consider the secret as told to me, but if that man does fall from grace, it will be well to remind him that his remaining at large depends upon his conduct."

"I will, sir, but I have faith in him."

"I hope it will not prove misplaced, Cody. Now, I will send Paymaster Lloyd's report to the commanding general of the department, and you will at least receive honorable mention in special orders for the valuable services rendered."

"Now, you had better get your supper and rest, for you can report to Lord Lonsfield in the morning, and I suppose that he and Sir John will wish to start soon upon their search for their kinsman, or his grave, and you are to guide him."

"It would be well, sir, to send an escort along, for it is near the Indian country."

"Yes; Captain Taylor, Lieutenant Onderdonk, a sergeant, a corporal, and twenty-four men will go, and

Surgeon Powell will be also along, for I know what a powerful ally of yours he is."

"With such an escort, sir, we need have no fear of raiding bands of Indians."

"Yes, for those two Englishmen are royally good fellows, both of them, Cody."

"They are, indeed, sir, and I am glad to do all I can for them."

"As I am, and I hope their visit there will be crowned with success. As I will see the gentlemen to-night, I will tell them I sent you to bed, for I can see that you need rest badly."

Whereupon the colonel extended his hand in good night, for he had a great admiration and sincere friendship for the handsome and manly scout.

Buffalo Bill was very willing to take the colonel's sensible advice and go to his quarters for the night. He had been constantly in the saddle for days, had had little rest the night he was at Overland City, and at his camp on the way back, so even his iron frame was worn out.

Eating a hearty supper, he retired, and was soon as sound asleep as a child, for within the fort he could dismiss all cares and fears, while without he had to sleep with an eye open, as it were, and every sense on the alert.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BREAKFAST PARTY.

When he awoke in the morning, Buffalo Bill found slipped under his door two cards, one bearing a coat of arms, the other a crest.

One card read: "Lord Lucien Lonsfield, Colonel British Hussars."

On the reverse side was written: "Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder desire the pleasure of having Chief of Scouts Cody to breakfast with them at ten, in their quarters."

The other card read: "Sir John Reeder, Captain British Hussars."

"I shall accept the invitation, for it is a kindness I appreciate," said Buffalo Bill, and at the appointed hour he was about to leave his quarters when Surgeon Powell called.

"Hello, Bill! Glad to see you back again. "I saw the colonel last night, and he told me of your saving Lloyd.

"You were in luck, but come, you are going with me to breakfast with Lord Lonsfield and Sir John, and Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Onderdonk are to be there, so you will meet only the best of good fellows.

"Are you ready?"

"I am, and I feel like a morning glory, for I put in just ten hours of gilt-edged slumber last night."

"You needed it, I am sure."

Then the two pards walked off together.

The quarters assigned the two Englishmen by Colonel Royal were about the most pleasant in the fort, a snug cabin, with five rooms, well furnished, and with a piazza across the front and rear.

Lord Lonsfield and Sir John met them at the door and greeted Buffalo Bill as they would a dear friend, and Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Onderdonk also welcomed him warmly, the former saying:

"You had a little warpath all to yourself, Bill, the colonel said?"

"Yes, sir; it looked like war for a minute, and I guess Paymaster Lloyd was glad of reinforcements.

"You just should have heard him yell, pray, and swear at the driver as he ran away, hoping to come back some other day and fight it out, at least, it looked to me as if that was what he was going for."

"It's a wonder Lloyd did not shoot him."

"I think he would have done so had he not expected to wreck the whole outfit and kill himself.

"It would have done you good to see the regiment he raised to come out and rescue me.

"They were nearly all drunk, and were mounted upon the coach horses and express ponies, with and without saddles and bridles.

"But they meant well and Paymaster Lloyd seemed proud of being in command of a brigade."

"A brigade?"

"Well, then, half a dozen of them called each other colonel, and nearly all the rest were captains.

"I only wish you could have seen them."

"I only wish we could!"

"They kept celebrating my rescue."

"Your rescue?"

"Yes, sir; for they found me within half a mile of Overland City, and they celebrated all night, hunted for the driver of the coach to promote him to a tree, buried with great relish the dead outlaw, and then provided grave fruit for a couple of funerals the next day.

"Overland City is a great place when it gets started."

All laughed at Buffalo Bill's stories of his experiences, and then sat down to breakfast.

As the best cook in the fort, Chips, a negro, had been detailed to care for the two Englishmen during their stay, the breakfast was something to remember, and all enjoyed it hugely, Lord Lonsfield and Sir John being surprised and delighted to discover in the scout a most charming companion, for he told a good story, was very witty, and had a dry humor that seems a part of the nature of men brought up in the wild life upon the plains.

The breakfast being over and cigars lighted, Lord Lonsfield said:

"I wish to say now that our little group here are the ones that are to go upon this search after Ranger Golden, whose name has now become so familiar to you all, through Sir John and myself dinging it into your ears.

"The colonel has kindly allowed Captain Taylor, Lieutenant Onderdonk, Surgeon Powell, and twenty-four men of the captain's troop, with two noncommissioned officers, to accompany us.

"As Chips and a comrade are also to go with us,

along with a number of pack animals, we will form a very imposing party."

"You have only to say the word, Lord Lonsfield, when you wish to start, for we will all be ready," Captain Taylor said.

"I well know that, captain, but now we must hear the report of our friend Cody on his mission."

"Certainly, sir."

Taking out his notebook, Buffalo Bill read the questions put to Boss Brewer by him, and the answers to them.

"There is no doubt as to the person being Ranger Golden, gentlemen, for of that we are assured, but we cannot, Sir John Reeder and I, understand about our kinsman's family.

"Still, there is no reason why it should not be so.

"Now, suppose we can start on the second day from this?"

This time seemed satisfactory to all, and arrangements were to be at once made for the starting on the trail of the lost heir to an English title and estates, to find whom, or his fate, the Englishmen had gone to Fort Beal.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT.

There was at Fort Beal a young girl, who was known as "Mustang Madge, the Daughter of the Regiment," and she called them all save the colonel, her "brothers," while she gave him the title of "father."

She was a waif of the plains, and Chaplain Burton

and his wife had adopted her, while from the colonel to the scouts and private soldiers, they all loved her.

It was some years before the time the two Englishmen went to Fort Beal to try to find a lost kinsman who had come to America and been traced to the Far West, that the Fifth Cavalry, then stationed at Omaha, was out on a hunt for redskins, for the Indians were raising Cain at that time.

Crossing the prairie one night, they saw what was supposed to be a horseman. It was moonlight, and, as it was thought to be an Indian, the order was given to surround, and soon the horse and rider were corralled.

Imagine the surprise when they discovered a young girl of six years, tied to the back of a mustang.

The girl was in a Mexican saddle, the stirrups shortened to suit her. She was riding astride and strapped to the saddle.

A canteen of water was hanging at one side of the saddle horn, and upon the other a bag of coarse food, with an Indian whip fastened to her wrist.

This strange girl gazed upon the soldiers in a wondering way, with her large, dark, soulful eyes, and her lips quivered with fear at first, for she had evidently passed through some terrible ordeal of horror and suffering.

What that ordeal was, no one knew; she could not tell, or would not.

But her face was blanched from its recollection, and once spoken kindly to, she put her arms around Buffalo Bill's neck and burst into tears.

Chaplain Ben Burton was along, and took the little one in charge, and brought her to the fort.

She was strangely well dressed, and upon her clothing was embroidered the name "Baby Madge," while about her neck hung a locket of gold, in which was the miniature of a beautiful woman.

Upon the locket was engraven the words: "Mother to Baby Madge."

Chaplain Ben Burton had no children, and, as the Fifth adopted Baby Madge, she was given into the care of Mr. and Mrs. Burton, who devoted their lives to her.

Of course, she belonged to the regiment, for all had a claim on her. Every soldier gave her a salute when meeting her, while the sentinels all presented arms when she passed their posts, as though she were the commandant.

She had an income, for each soldier of the Fifth chipped in twenty-five cents a month, from his pay, and the officers a dollar, which went to a fund for her.

Such was the story of Mustang Madge.

But Madge had a rival in beauty and frontier accomplishments in Bessie Bond, the fair maid of Ranch Isle, a home where her mother had settled, some distance from the fort, a few years before.

But, though visiting the fort, neither Bessie nor her mother ever invited guests to their home.

At the fort, Bessie Bond had met Don Eduardo Vincente, a Mexican gentleman, who had come with letters of introduction to the colonel, and who said that his mission was only one of pleasure and sport, to see the wild life upon the plains.

It was thought by many of the regiment that Mustang Madge had fallen in love with Don Eduardo, and the Mexican was accordingly unpopular.

With this explanation of some of the more important characters in and near Fort Beal, I will go on with my story as it happened in detail.

It was late at night when the two Englishmen bade farewell to Colonel Royal, expressing their appreciation of his many kindnesses and true hospitality over and over again, and started for their quarters to mount and away upon the trail of their missing kinsman, Ranger Golden.

They had been told to leave their quarters as they were, to carry nothing with them excepting camp traps, and to return to the fort to stay at their pleasure when some discovery had been made to their satisfaction about Golden being alive or dead.

This they had done, and going to their quarters, they found awaiting them there Captain Taylor, Lieutenant Onderdonk, and Surgeon Powell.

"The men are ready to mount, gentlemen, the animals all packed, and we are awaiting Buffalo Bill," said Captain Taylor.

"Is it not strange of him to be behind hand?" asked Lord Lonsfield.

"It is, but I have received a line from him, telling me he had an important matter to attend to, and begging our consideration for a while."

"Certainly, we can easily await his pleasure, and in the meantime have a glass for good luck," said Lord Lonsfield, and they sat down to the table together.

The scout, however, was detained longer than he had expected to be.

As he was preparing to start, there had flashed into his mind an idea which caused him to sit down, write a note, and dispatch a scout with it.

The note read:

"SCOUT'S RANCH, Thursday.

"MY DEAR MISS MADGE: It is late, I know, and perhaps I have no right to disturb you, but may I come and see you for ten minutes on an important matter? Faithfully,

CODY."

An answer was soon returned:

"MY DEAR BUFFALO: I had retired for the night, but am up and awaiting your visit.

"I was aware that some one was going to sneak out of the fort to-night and not say good-by to me.

"Come. Yours,

MUSTANG."

This arranged, Buffalo Bill went to the chaplain's pleasant quarters.

Madge opened the door for him, and ushered him into the chaplain's "sermon mill," as she called his working room.

"Oh, but I have a scolding for Lord Lonsfield, Sir John, Captain Taylor, and Lieutenant Onderdonk, on their return, for I see and hear, if I do not appear to, and I know that a lot of military fathers, rank and file, are going off on a racket of some kind to-night, and I am left out.

"I'll forgive you, Buffalo Bill, because you called."

"I have but a moment to tell you why I called, Miss Madge, for I am detaining the party now, for, as you

seem to know we are going, I will not hide it from you.

"We are going upon a hunt for the pleasure of the two English gentlemen."

Madge slowly closed one eye and asked:

"Why all this mystery and midnight departure merely for a hunt?"

"You may know both; but now to my visit to you, which is of importance."

"You are not going to make love to me as you shoot—offhand, are you, Bill?"

"No; I have better sense, for I would miss my aim—yes, the target—while, as a scout of the Fifth, I am not making love to my daughter."

"Well said, father."

"Now to business.

"I am going away for an indefinite time, and I wish to intrust you with a secret."

"I am a woman, you forget."

"Yes, and one who can keep a secret."

"Thanks."

"I wish to tell you that I have no confidence in Don Eduardo Vincente."

"Oh!"

"Nor in Miss Bessie Bond."

"Don't slander a woman, Cody."

"You understand just what I mean, for you do not like her, or trust her, either."

"Ah!"

"It is true, for I have watched you closely."

"As I am found out, I'll own up."

"I cannot tell you now, Miss Madge, all the rea-

sons I have for suspecting them, or what I suspect them of, but I am sure that they knew each other before they came here, and I am almost sure that the Texan trader, Norval, is the brother of Bessie Bond."

"Bill, I heard her call him brother yesterday."

"As I did, and with these points in our knowledge, and also that she meets Don Eduardo regularly in Death Gap, it shows that they are leading a life of mystery."

"It does."

"If so, it is for some purpose."

"If for a purpose, it cannot be a good one, or it would not be hidden."

"I have certain beliefs and suspicions, which now I have not time to make known to you; but I am not acting wholly blindly in this affair, and I ask you to go on as before, but to be my scout upon them and jot down all that you see or hear. Can I depend upon you, Miss Madge?"

"Every time, Buffalo Bill, and I'll start upon the trail to-morrow; there's my hand upon it."

"Well, good-by, my secret pard, and when I return I am sure your woman's wit and tact will have made discoveries beyond my power to do so."

A moment after the scout was gone, and, looking after him, Madge said, aloud:

"So he suspects, too, as I have done?"

When Buffalo Bill arrived at the Englishmen's quarters, he found them awaiting him.

If impatient at the delay, no one showed it, and Lord Lonsfield said cheerily:

"Come, Cody, join us in a glass to our success."

"Thank you, Lord Lonsfield, and let me ask pardon of you all for my delay, for I was unavoidably detained."

"Do not speak of it, for there's no hurry, so we get out of the fort between midnight and dawn."

"The hour was set for midnight, sir, and it is now nearly one; but I was afraid to go away and leave some scouting work undone which I had begun upon, and I had to find some one to put upon it."

"I hope you did so."

"Yes, sir, one of the best of scouts."

"Then let us drink to light upon the blind trail."

The glasses clinked, the bumpers were drunk, and five minutes after, the party were in the saddle.

The scout rode in the front, his cloak drawn about him, for it was chilly, and Captain Taylor and Lord Lonsfield followed, Surgeon Powell, with Sir John next, and Lieutenant Onderdonk, with a corporal and twelve soldiers in the rear.

Next came the negro servants and the pack animals, and the sergeant and twelve more troopers came behind, with Texas Jack, as far back as Buffalo Bill was in the lead, bringing up the rear.

The scout led the force at a trot, for he wished to get well away from the vicinity of the fort by sunrise, so as not to be seen by any of the garrison or settlement that might be going about the neighborhood.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE PROOF.

The party of searchers for some clew to the fate of Ranger Golden went dangerously near to the Indian country—in fact, to Massacre Valley, the home of the settlement in which the lost Englishman had had his home.

They were watched by Indians, and discovering the fact that the redskins were in force, Buffalo Bill led the expedition to a hill where they could fight off big odds.

He also said that he had been told by an old trapper that, if he ever got into trouble with the Indians there, to build a "three-snake fire," and the signal would bring to his aid a mountain dweller known as "the White Spirit," a man who held great influence with the Indians, though not a renegade, but one who had some great sorrow in his life, which had driven him to shun his fellow men.

Buffalo Bill had confidence in the word of the old trapper, and he built the signal fire.

But he was too good a scout to depend upon chance aid alone, and he said, as he knew there was no escape from the surrounding Indians, that he would make his way through the hostile lines, capture a redskin's pony, and ride to the fort for aid.

An Indian chief, approaching too near the party, had been seen by Buffalo Bill, who crept out, and, in a duel, hand-to-hand, had killed the redskin.

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When night came, he shaved off his mustache and imperial, painted his face, and, putting on the rig of the dead chief, bade farewell to his comrades, and started upon his perilous death gantlet. He walked boldly along in a circling direction, as though an Indian on the rounds, and soon came in sight of the line.

The scout was glad to see that it had been thinned to a sentinel line at night only, and, with a word to a warrior on his blanket, about being wounded in the foot, he mounted the horse of the brave, and coolly rode away.

At the timber belt, toward the lofty mountain range, was the camp of the wounded, and he rode within the circle of the camp fire's light without a challenge, or a suspicion was cast upon him that he was not a redskin. He circled toward the outer line, and when he saw a redskin sentinel near him, he called to the sentinel to come to him, as he was wounded.

"The Gray Eagle was scouting, and was shot with an arrow," he said, in his choicest Sioux.

Whether the sentinel knew the Gray Eagle or not, he believed the story, for he came and bent over the scout, as he was lying on the ground.

The Indian made a mistake, and when he realized the fact it was too late to help it. He found himself in a grip like a grizzly's, and when Buffalo Bill arose, the Indian was dead.

Taking him in his arms, he bore him to the horse feeding near, put him across his back, and started for the timber. He had made up his mind to say that his red brother had been killed on the sentinel line, if met and questioned.

But he did not meet any one to offer an explanation to, and, finding that no redskins barred his way, he led the horse rapidly on to a spot where he could conceal the body.

This done, he was about to ride on, when he heard a voice say:

"Who is my red brother, the chief?"

The language was the Sioux, but the deep voice, the speaking of his "red brother" convinced Buffalo Bill that the speaker was a white man.

"I am a chief of the Sioux," he answered.

"So I know, and I asked your name. I am the Spirit Chief of the mountain and valley.

"Do you know me now?"

Buffalo Bill answered in English:

"I set a signal on the mound in the valley. Did you come here to answer it?"

"Ah, you are no Indian?"

"I am not," and Buffalo Bill had his revolver ready.

"You are not Trapper Dick?"

"No, but I am one whom Trapper Dick told how you—for I feel that it was you—saved him from the redskins.

"I set that signal to-day, as Trapper Dick told me to do."

"You had faith, and it has been rewarded. I am here to answer it. Who are you?"

"Buffalo Bill, men call me, and guide and scout to a party of besieged soldiers on the hill. I dressed up as an Indian to escape and go to the fort for aid, and met you."

"No need of going, for I will aid you.

"I know you well, Buffalo Bill, and the Indians fear you as they do an evil spirit."

"But can you aid me and my comrades?"

"I will show you. Get out of the danger line here, and at sunrise return and you will not find a redskin in the valley."

"If I only could believe you."

"See here, Buffalo Bill, I am a man who never intentionally told a lie. I am not a renegade, for I do not dwell among the Indians, though I have done so.

"I am free as the air, and hold a power over them they dare not disobey."

"Who are you?"

"Nameless and unknown. A man who has come to these wilds to spend the remainder of his days. A man who long ago left the world, and is ready to die when his time comes. Will you believe me?"

"Yes; but you say you have lived among the Indians?"

"I did so, for years."

"The Sioux?"

"Yes, they named me the White Spirit of the Mountains."

"Will you answer me a question?"

"Yes."

"Have they any prisoners?"

"White, you mean?"

"Yes."

"They had."

"But have none now?"

"No; all are dead."

"Did they have a man prisoner by the name of Ranger Golden?"

"They had," was the reply.

"And is he dead?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me aught of him, for Lord Lonsfield is with the soldiers now—he and Sir John Reeder—and they came here to find him, dead or alive, or some one of his family."

"His family were massacred in the valley here, their home; he was taken prisoner, and, after a few years, died."

"You know this?"

"I knew him well, for I was with him when he gave up his life."

"See here: I wear upon my finger a ring which he gave me, so take it to your English friends as a proof of his death."

"Where was he buried?"

"He was buried in the mountains."

"Could you find his grave?"

"No, not now; but I have here another memento of him—his wallet, with his will in it, and I have never parted with it."

"That is certain proof, so take that to your English friends, along with the ring."

"I have much to thank you for, sir, and I hope we may meet again, for you will go with me to the camp?"

"No; I shun all men now. We shall not meet again. Wait here, and when the sun rises return to

your camp, for then there will not be a redskin in the valley. Good-by, Buffalo Bill."

With this the man strode away in the darkness, and left Buffalo Bill to meditate upon his strange adventure.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE END OF THE SEARCH.

However, the king of scouts trusted the strange man, and, waiting till dawn, started back toward the camp.

At last the valley was before him, and there was not an Indian in sight. Everything seemed peaceful and serene.

On toward the mound rode Buffalo Bill, and as he did so he beheld his comrades watching his coming.

They, of course, supposed him to be an Indian, but, as he came alone, no one offered to shoot.

"That's Buffalo Bill. He has run every redskin out of the valley," cried Scout Texas Jack.

All greeted him with a cheer as he came nearer, and then they heard this very strange story of the remarkable man he had met in the timber.

"Old Trapper Dick was right, after all, for the signal fetched him, and no mistake," said Buffalo Bill.

Those in the basin explained how Texas Jack, acting as scout, had reported the Indians moving before day, though for what purpose was not known.

It was certain that every redskin was gone.

Taking Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder aside,

with Captain Taylor, Buffalo Bill told them just what he had asked the strange man about Ranger Golden, and his answers.

Then he handed over the ring and the wallet, and, after glancing at them, both gentlemen asserted that they knew the ring very well, and the wallet had the name of Ranger Golden upon it in gilt letters, much worn.

Within were some papers and letters, and the will of the lost heir—leaving his property in England to his nearest kin.

At the end of the will was written:

"I married in America and had one child; but wife and child were massacred in my frontier home, and my death ends my ill-fated race.

"RANGER GOLDEN."

"We need no further proof, for this is poor Ranger's writing," said Lord Lonsfield, and both he and Sir John Reeder were deeply affected.

Though there was no reason for longer stay in the valley, they desired at last to go to the ruins of their kinsman's home, and Buffalo Bill guided the party thither.

"I will have a monument carved and placed here," said Lord Lonsfield, and then, mounting their horses, the party started upon the return trail.

Upon their return to the fort, Buffalo Bill was appointed to be the one to tell Mustang Madge that the discovery had been made as to who she was, for papers found in the wallet, given the scout by the White Spirit of the Mountains, had told how Ranger Golden

had married in America, and moved with his young wife to the settlement on the border.

There a young daughter had been born, and they had named her Madge, after Golden's mother in England, and there could be no doubt but that the Daughter of the Regiment had in some way escaped by being put upon a horse, for she had been found only a dozen miles away from Massacre Valley.

Thus Madge was an heiress to an English fortune.

Madge took the good news quietly, and told Buffalo Bill that she had something to tell him.

"The mysterious dwellers at Ranch Isle have gone to Mexico, Buffalo," she said, and continued:

"And the don went with them, for Bessie Bond confessed to me that she was his wife, he having married her several years ago in Mexico, and she had come here to escape from him, her brother—Norval, the Texan—having tracked him here to the fort, for Don Eduardo had followed the girl and her mother, knowing that Mrs. Bond had been left a large fortune, and he was trying to make it up with Bessie on that account.

"Now, you see that, leaving me as your scout, did me a good turn, for I confess that I was fascinated by the don. It was very foolish of me, I suppose; at least, I've been told so a dozen times by Lieutenant Onderdonk. And now you have done me another great service in finding out who I am, so go and bring those two English kinsmen, for I wish to tell them how much I appreciate their goodness in coming to look up an heiress to a fortune that they would have got if you had not discovered me."

Some weeks later, Mustang Madge left the fort under the escort of Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder, and, going to England, she got possession of the property that was hers.

But nothing could induce her to remain there, for in a few months she returned to Fort Beal, and once more became the Daughter of the Regiment, making the contract more binding by marrying Captain Onderdonk, while Buffalo Bill was appointed as the "father" to give the bride away.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ONLY A BOY.

"Now, pards, we've got him! Throw!"

Half a dozen lassos thrown with vigor and skill fell about the head and shoulders of a rider passing along a trail near Fort Beal, about a week after Captain Onderdonk's wedding, and in an instant the horseman was dragged heavily from his saddle to the ground, while his horse, attempting to bound away, was also caught in the coil and brought to a sudden halt.

Half springing to his feet, the one who was lassoed gave suddenly three loud, ringing, distinct whistles that could be heard almost a mile away.

Were they a signal for help? Or were they intended as a warning of danger?

With a bound the men who had cast their lassos sprang from their hiding places behind the rocks upon either side of the trail, and in an instant had their prey bound fast.

"Why, pards, it's only a boy!" cried the leader.

"So it is!" cried the others, half a dozen in number, gazing at their captive.

"Yes, I am a boy, for I am but eighteen, but I am man enough to face your coward gang if I only had my arms free," was the plucky response.

The men showed their amazement at his nerve and appearance. He was tall, slender, yet wiry in build, while his broad shoulders denoted great strength.

Bronzed was his face by exposure, yet every feature was well molded and characteristic. He was a handsome youth. His hair was long and waving, and he looked just what he was—a bold adventurer into a wild West, with a wilder class of men frequenting it, and from which the Indians had not yet been beaten back, and where lawlessness reigned almost supreme.

Dressed in a blue woolen shirt, beneath his collar a knotted scarf, a pair of corduroy trousers stuck in the tops of high boots, and wearing upon his head a slouch hat, his appearance was both bold and picturesque. Furthermore, he was armed with revolvers and bowie; a rifle hung at his saddle horn, and he carried a roll of blankets, bag of provisions, another of cooking utensils, saddlebags well stocked, and a lariat, while he was mounted upon a clean-limbed, hardy, plains pony.

His captors, seven in number, were typical border desperadoes.

Their horses were back down the slope, and they had been lying in wait on the trail for some purpose, when they saw the youth coming up the range toward them.

"You're a plucky one, and no mistake, for a kid;

but, we don't scare a little bit, so just go slow, if you wish to find favor with us," warned the leader.

"I ask no favors, but I do ask why you dared lasso me and drag me from my saddle?" was the angry retort.

"It's for me ter do the questioning, young feller, not you, and I asks you what yer give thet whistle signal fer just now."

"That is none of your business."

"Is you alone?"

"I was until I met your gang."

"What are you doing out here?"

"Hunting."

"Where did you come from?"

"Texas."

"I might hev know'd thet from yer narve. Where is you goin'?"

"Anywhere; anywhere I take a fancy to go."

"We may have something ter say as ter that."

"Say yer say and let me go."

"Does yer know who we is?"

"No, and I don't care."

"Say, cap'n, he's too fresh. I'd say just clip a ear off ter let him know we ain't tenderfeet he has ter deal with," said one of the men.

But the youth did not flinch under the cruel threat; he merely looked at the speaker and smiled.

"He'll know who we is soon enough," answered the captain.

"How is you fixed with pocket change, young feller?"

"Just what I thought: you are road agents."

"Well, yer know we ain't ter be fooled with. We wants yer dust."

"I am poor, for all I have in the world I have with me, and surely you would not rob a boy of a few dollars."

"What does yer call a few dollars?"

"I have just eighty-five dollars."

"We'll take it, and along with yer horse and outfit, and you can hoof it whar you is going—see!"

"I will not be robbed! Stand back!"

The youth, having managed to get each of his hands upon a revolver, drew them, half bound as he was, and faced his captors defiantly.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN UNSEEN FRIEND.

The attitude of the youth was a bold one in the face of such odds. He determined in his desperate situation to make a bold stand, for he did not believe the desperadoes would dare to kill him.

Not having been bound, further than to have the coils of the lassos about him, he had half freed his hands, and had managed, by a sudden move, to reach his revolvers.

The outlaws were astonished by his bold act, and each seemed to feel that one of the boy's weapons covered him in particular.

In such a position they waited for their captain to speak. He now did so, and said:

"Don't be a fool, kid, for we don't wish to kill you."

"Then let me go my way."

"That I won't do, for you has got money, and we wants it."

"If I give you what money I have will you let me go with my horse, weapons, and outfit?"

"Can't think of it, for we wants it all."

"And you would leave me afoot to starve out here?"

"It ain't over thirty miles to the first of the mining camps, and a chipper lad like you is can git work there—maybe yer'd strike it rich."

"I know that you are big odds against me, but I feel that I can drop two of you, anyhow, so if you kill me I will have company. Now, what is your game?"

Still undismayed, the lad stood at bay, and the men were facing him, yet not one dared a move to draw a revolver.

The boy's eyes seemed to rest upon each man, and no one dared make a spring in upon him.

"Say, young feller, as I said afore, we don't wish to kill yer, but yer is going to make us do it."

"Well, I have but one time to die, and, though I did hope to accomplish much by coming out here, I shall meet my fate without fear, and if I die some of you go the same trail with me."

There was no bravado in his words or look; it was simply resignation.

"Well, you do be a nervy one, and no mistake," avowed the captain.

"Then let us compromise, come to terms of some kind, so that neither side backs down."

"You are a good one, kid."

"No thanks for the compliment. I've got your seven men afraid to blink an eye or move a hand, and you've got me at bay, and are sure of me, as I am of some of you, so let us strike for a bargain."

"What does yer mean?"

"I'll give up the money I told you I had if you'll let me go with my outfit."

"You've got more than you said."

"I have only got what I told you I had."

"You have got ter let us search yer?"

"I will not."

"Then we don't strike no bargain."

"You had better, for you will be the first one I drop if I am forced to pull trigger, and I warn you that I am like a cat, hard to kill, while I know where to send a bullet for life, and can take several of you along before I go under. So you'd better come to terms."

These, his fearless words, and bold front fairly dismayed the desperadoes; they did not know just what to do. The boy's leveled weapons did not quiver. Firm as a rock were his hands, and his eyes were upon each one of his foes.

The desperado captain saw that there was but one thing to do. Once he had come to terms with the youth, those revolvers down, he would act as he pleased. So he said:

"All right, boy pard; I'll strike a trade with yer, for yer jist beats all I ever seen in a youngster, and I likes yer style. I wouldn't kill such as yer fer a good

deal, and I'll show how I likes yer by saying thet yer kin jine our band if yer wishes ter do so."

"Join a band of cutthroats to save my life? You don't know me! I'd rather die honest than live a thief and a murderer."

These bold words greatly angered the men, but the captain said:

"Keep quiet, pards, fer every one has a right to his opinions. I said I'd make terms with the kid, and I will, fer I agrees to take the cash he has and let him go with his life and the rest of his outfit.

"You, Sam, jist step forward and let him pay you over the cash."

The man addressed as Sam did not seem to relish the duty of being collector, but he stepped forward while the youth called out:

"You mean square, captain, for it's honor among thieves, you know."

"Yes, all is square," and, as the youth lowered his revolvers, each desperado whipped out a weapon and covered him, while Sam called out:

"I has yer now, young feller."

They were Sam's last words, for a sharp report rang out in the distance, and the desperado dropped dead.

Some unseen friend had "chipped in!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

The outlaw band, with the one exception of the man who had dropped under the unseen shot's deadly aim, sprang to the cover of the rocks, while the youth was left standing alone in the open trail, his horse near him.

Almost at his feet lay the dead desperado, while now half a dozen revolvers were covering him, and those who held them were under cover of the rocks.

"Men, I'll keep my eye and gun on the kid, while you looks around to find out who fired thet shot," said the captain, seemingly more anxious to guard his prisoner than to reconnoiter for the one whose aim had been so unerring.

The men looked about them anxiously. They were not desirous of looking for the unseen and unknown foe any more than was their leader.

"I say, cap'n, it's ther one he gave thet signal to," suggested one.

"Yes, I kinder thought he wasn't alone," the captain rejoined. "Ther shot came from over there in thet thicket, so you men flank around both ways and see if you can get a shot at him."

The men slowly prepared to obey. They crept along among the rocks upon their hands and knees. This seemed to amuse the youth, for he laughed, as he said:

"Better crawl like the snakes you are lest your heads be seen above the rocks and bushes, and you get another shot."

The heads went down at once, the leader crouching lowest. But no shot came, and he called out:

"Make haste, men; I'll keep this kid under cover and bore him, too, if he makes a move."

"Better tie him afore we go," suggested one.

"That's so. Jist rope him!" ordered the captain.

The men all crawled to where the youth stood, the leader keeping his revolver resting upon a rock and leveled at their captive, who now knew well that a move on his part to resist or to escape would be fatal.

The lariats were still about his body. With these the men tied the boy's hands behind him, his feet were secured, and one lasso was left with the noose about his neck, the other end in the hands of the leader.

Then the five crept among the bushes, while their captain, crouching low among the rocks, still kept his revolver aimed and the lariat in hand to drag him down should he attempt to move off.

"Say, who fired thet shot, young feller?" asked the leader.

"I did not see who fired it, but it was a dead shot, wasn't it?"

"Too dead for poor Sam, and for you, too."

"What have I got to do with it?"

"You knows who did it. You has a pard, and he is hanging around; but, my men will git him soon."

"I'll make you a bet that they don't."

There was such cool assurance in this wager that the outlaw looked anxiously about him, as if expecting he would be the next target for the unseen dead shot.

"I don't bet with a dying man, young fellow."

"I don't understand."

"You is jist the same as dead."

"I'm all right."

"Don't yer believe it, for you'll soon have yer toes turned up."

"You intend to kill me?"

"Yes, I does. Out here ther game is a life fer a life."

"I have taken no life."

"Yer pard did, an' es we can't git ther man as did it, you'll hev to be ther one ter suffer."

"I am sure you and your gang would be guilty of anything, for you broke faith with me a while since."

"Did you think we was fools to let yer go with half when we had all?"

"I thought you might acknowledge the truth of honor among thieves and let me go as you agreed."

"You was away off; and, as you is guilty of Sam's death, we'll jist hang you when the boys come—"

A shot rang out over in the thicket, and then others were fired in rapid succession.

Then came a loud call:

"Thar he goes, pards; and he's a boy!"

In a few moments the outlaws came back, one of them with his head bleeding where a bullet had cut its way along the side to the skull.

"Is yer much hurt, Pete," called out the captain

"My hard head alone saved me, fer the bullet was aimed straight."

"Who shot you, Pete?"

"A boy as is about like this one. He were creeping up to git another shot, and we seen each other about ther same time, but he was quicker than greased light-

ning, and got a pull on me fust, and give me this remembrance.

"He were coming fer me, but ther boys showed up, and he ran back to some pines, got on his horse, and skipped, and I don't believe a bullet touched him or his critter, fer he did actually laugh at us."

"Well, we have scared him off, so now let's lose no time but hang this kid, and then git ont'er trail of t'other one, fer maybe he's well fixed, too."

"Yes, cap'n, hang him up, fer I says a life fer a life," urged one of the gang, and the others answered with a shout to show their satisfaction in the decision.

"Say, young feller, git ter work, an' say what prayers yer ain't fergot, for we is going ter dig a grave fer yer and Sam, and when it is done, yer is ter hang, and don't yer fergit it!" announced the outlaw captain.

"I won't forget it," was the reply, and the pathos in his voice showed how fully he felt the position he was in.

If the one who had fired the shot was indeed a friend, he reasoned that he could give him no further aid against such odds.

But he was still game, and showed no fear as he turned his eyes upon them while they set to work digging his grave.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

The trap into which the unfortunate youth had ridden had been avoided by one who was following him, and perhaps half a mile in his rear.

This other one had halted on the trail to cut a few choice steaks from a deer he had killed, while his companion had ridden on ahead to find a camping place for the noonday meal and to build a fire.

It was to this companion that the whistle signal had been given, and it was heard and recognized as a warning of danger.

"Ah! Harold is in trouble—what can it be?" said the one who was following on the trail, and he urged his horse onward to see just what trouble his companion had met with.

Like the captured youth, he was a youth also, scarcely as old, yet well formed for his years, and with a clean-cut, resolute, daring face. He was attired like his friend, well mounted, armed and equipped, and certainly looked like one to tie to in time of need.

Having ridden at a gallop until he came to where he would be seen from the ridge ahead, he flanked off to the right through some pines and gained a position where he could scan the trail his friend had been following. He saw at some distance off, in a hollow, seven horses feeding and secured by stake ropes. Dismounting, he made his horse fast to a tree, and proceeded on foot with the greatest caution. Creeping

closer and closer, he at last gained a position from which he could see back over the trail. He beheld his comrade, dismounted, encircled with lariats, and his horse hitched near.

But that was not all, for seven heavily bearded, long-haired, rough-looking men were grouped about his companion, and their actions showed that they were trying to intimidate the prisoner.

"It is a band of road agents, and they have held up poor Harold.

"No! Is it true? He has the money I placed in his keeping, besides all his own! What shall I—what can I do?"

He swung his rifle around as he spoke, and his face was white and anxious looking.

"Ah! I believe they are going to kill him!" he suddenly cried.

"I will risk a shot, though it is taking chances at this distance with Harold in their midst. But, at least, I may scare them off."

With this he took deliberate aim, as he saw one man level a revolver at his comrade, and pulled trigger. The result the reader knows, and the youth laughed lightly as he saw the other outlaws spring to cover. But his friend remained in sight and bound, it seemed to him, while he could see that he was under cover of several revolvers.

"I will snake my way around and see if I can get nearer by way of the trail we were on," he muttered, and at once began to retrace his steps to his horse, watching as he went to see if he could get in another shot.

But the outlaws were also on the watch for him, and suddenly he beheld a man before him in the pines.

Instantly his rifle flashed again and the man dropped.

But yells were heard here and there, shots were fired, bullets came dangerously near to him, and he bounded to his horse, threw himself into his saddle, and was off like a flash, a defiant shout upon his lips, as he knew that neither his horse nor himself had been touched.

Determined to get back upon the trail he had been following, and to approach the spot where his comrade was in trouble, as he felt that they would not be on the watch for him from that direction, he rode swiftly along through the pines to get at the bottom of the range he was on and then follow it up until he came to the trail leading up the slope.

To do this he had nearly a mile to ride, and was just nearing the plain, by the best way he could pick out, down the slope, when a break in the pines gave him a view that brought him to a sudden standstill.

Along the base of the range rode a well-defined trail, and behind a large rock crouched three Indians.

One of them wore a chief's war bonnet and had a rifle, while the other two were braves and were armed with bows and arrows. They were there evidently for some purpose, and their backs were toward the youth, while they were a couple of hundred yards distant.

The pine straw had deadened the sound of hoofs, and the youth's presence was not known or their danger from the rear suspected.

Having moved back until the pines hid himself and horse, should the Indians look around, the boy began

to search for the cause of the ambush he saw. He looked out upon the plain, and at once located the one for whom the Indians were waiting.

It was a horseman, following along the trail that must bring him within fifty feet of the redskins in ambush.

A closer look showed it was a white man, and he was coming along at a walk and wholly unconscious of the hidden danger before him, as were the Indians of the foe behind them.

"They intend to kill him, but I will save him," muttered the youth, and, rifle in hand, he began to get nearer to the trio of redskins.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

With great caution, the youth, himself a fugitive from merciless foes, and anxious to save his comrade from death or captivity, crept through the pines until he gained a position within a hundred yards of the ambushed Indians. He could also see the plain and command a view of the trail, along which the horseman was coming for fully a quarter of a mile.

Thus he waited until this rider should come into view.

The chief, who had the rifle, would be his game, he decided, for, by bringing him down he would not only prevent the firing upon the horseman, but put the latter upon his guard and scare the two surprised redskins who were armed with the bows and arrows.

"I can take care of them with my revolvers," muttered the youth.

Then, as the horseman did not appear, he added:

"How long it takes him to come! He must be riding very slow. I am very anxious, for Harold must be saved from that gang, and if the man I now keep from being killed will help me we can do it, I guess.

"But what if the man is one of the gang? He is very likely to be; but I'll save his life anyhow, now, if I have to kill him afterward.

"Ah! He is coming into sight at last!"

As the youth spoke, the horseman came into view, his horse at a slow walk.

The Indians crouched close behind the rocks, and the chief leveled his gun with a rest.

The braves fitted their best arrows to their bowstrings, and all three were as still as statues.

Nearer and nearer drew the horseman, wholly unconscious of his danger. As he approached the youth had a chance to see him well, and he was at once impressed by his striking appearance; for his horse was a noble animal, a clean-limbed roan, equipped with a handsome Texan saddle and bridle.

The rider sat his saddle like one perfectly at home there, and a pair of saddlebags, saddle roll, blankets, and provision bag showed that the horseman was upon a long trail.

A rifle hung from the saddle horn upon one side, a coiled lariat upon the other, and a belt of arms encircled the rider's waist.

All this the youth took in minutely.

But, it was the superb physique and the face of the horseman that most impressed the watching boy.

The horseman was of perfect form, clad in buckskin leggings, hunting shirt, top-boots, and a large, gray sombrero.

His face was one to remember when once seen; darkly bronzed, clean-cut, handsome, fearless, with military-looking mustache and imperial, long waving black hair, and eyes that were large and piercing.

"If he isn't every inch a square man, then his looks lie terribly," muttered the youth, as he took his almost fascinated gaze off the horseman and ran his eyes along his rifle barrel aimed at the Indian chief.

The latter had his eye on the sights of his rifle, and another moment he would have sent a fatal bullet upon its flight; but ere he touched the trigger as firm a hand sent a shot on its way to end his career, for there was a sharp report, a whiz, and a bullet entered the brain of the ambushed chief.

In a heap he sank behind the rock, while his two companions, with startled eyes, sprang to their feet and turned to face the foe behind them. As they did so, the youth had his revolver out, and another shot struck one of the braves squarely in the face, just as the other dropped also in his tracks, for the horseman had taken a hand in the fight, also.

The youth saw that he had slipped from his saddle, and, sheltered by his horse, was standing with his rifle thrown across his saddle. He had realized the situation with the eye of a perfect plainsman, and, seeing the two braves over the rock, had fired at one as the youth brought down the other. But he still maintained

his position. He had foes in front of him, how many he did not know, yet he certainly had a friend also. Who was he, and where was he?

The youth saw that a minute of time had wiped out the trio of Indians, and that the horseman whose life he had saved still stood at bay, watching and waiting, and the cool nerve of the man under the surprise won his admiration.

But there was no time to lose, so the youth stepped out into view, and with a shout waved his hat while he called out:

"We got them all, pard!"

The horseman at once raised his hat and came forward, while, going back for his horse, the boy joined him at the foot of the range, and just where the three dead Indians lay. Each gazed at the other fixedly as they met. The horseman was the first to speak, and, stretching forth his hand, he said in a deep, sonorous voice:

"I do not know that we have ever met before, my young friend, but we will be firm pals from this day, for I owe you my life beyond a doubt, and I am not one to forget a favor."

"I was skipping from some outlaws who held up my pard and have him a prisoner, if they have not already killed him, when I saw those redskins lying in ambush; and then I caught sight of you off on the plain," said the youth; "so I just waited to chip in where I could do the most good."

"And you chipped in just right, young pard; but, let us not hesitate here if you have a friend in trouble."

"We can save him now, sir, if he is not killed, for I

know you from the pictures I have seen of you in the papers."

"Ah! And who do you think I am?" asked the man.

"W. F. Cody—Buffalo Bill, sir."

"Yes, I am Buffalo Bill," was the modest response.

CHAPTER XL.

GETTING ACQUAINTED.

The youth had heard of the great scout, had read of him, and had made him his ideal of splendid manhood.

It had been his dream, his hope, some day to meet the border king in buckskin face to face, and now his acquaintance with his ideal had begun by his saving his life.

"Well, pard, as you know who I am, suppose you tell me who you are, and what brings you out into this wild land, though that you are at home here I have had reason to know?" said Buffalo Bill, with a smile, as he gazed into the face of the boy, beaming as it was with admiration for him.

"I can hardly realize my good fortune, sir, in having met you, for I have known of your deeds since I could read."

"Thanks for the compliment, and let me return it by saying you have begun to make a hero of yourself in great style, for two Indians with as many shots is wonderful work for a plainsman even. You are a dead shot, young man."

"They called us the boy sure shots, sir, my pard and I—in Texas, where we used to live."

"That is the State to produce great plainsmen."

"My father has a large ranch there, sir, and my pard was chief of cowboys on it, young as he is; but then, he is not like ordinary fellows."

"Not if he is like you; but your friend, you said, was in trouble?"

"Yes, sir; I stopped to cut up a deer I had shot, while he rode on to find a camp, and he ran upon seven road agents, who held him up."

"Ah, we must see to this!"

"I heard his signal of danger when he was caught, so I was careful not to be seen, and I shot one fellow, who was aiming a revolver at my pard. Then the gang came for me, but I gave another a dose of lead and got away."

"I came this way to flank them when I saw your danger."

"I see, and halted to save me?"

"Yes, sir, though I was a little scared that you might turn out to be another of the band."

The scout made no reply, but turned to the Indians, and after looking closely at them, said:

"They are Sioux, and this chief I knew as one of my most vindictive foes. Often before he has tried to kill me."

"This brave was at the fort yesterday, and there learned that I was coming this trail, so skipped off to where Black Bonnet, this chief here, was evidently waiting, and the three went into hiding to kill me. There may be more of them about, but I hardly think so."

"But, pard, we must be off. We will now put them

on the top of yonder rock, and not wait to bury them. They will be safe there from the coyotes, and a few logs or stones and pine straw will hide them from the vultures.

"But you have not yet told me your name."

"Leonard Ashley, sir, and my friend's name is Harold Hart."

"Then, Leonard Ashley, we will go and see what we can do to help your pard."

With this the bodies of the Indians were put upon the top of a boulder out of reach of the coyotes, and some logs were placed over them, after they had been covered with the pine droppings.

This done, the scout and the youth remounted and rode along the base of the range until they came to the stage trail leading over it.

"They are over the range, eh, on this trail, are they?"

"Yes, sir, or were."

"They are there yet, for I know just what they are waiting for."

"What is that, sir?"

"The Overland coach passes here an hour before sunset."

"I expect that is it."

"I know it is, and having plenty of time, for it will not be along for an hour yet, they first roped in your pard to rob him, and perhaps to kill him, if he did not pan out rich."

"He had nearly a hundred dollars of his own, sir, and a large roll of money for a man in the mines, to

whom he was carrying it, so that he might return home, for the miner has been ill and unlucky out here.

"Then he had my money, also; and that amounted to several hundred more."

"The outlaws will get a rich haul from him, then, if we do not thwart them."

"Wait here while I go on ahead, but be ready to come on at my command, for they must think I have a strong support."

"I understand, sir. Give the signal or call and I'll answer, and make them believe there are more than one coming to your aid."

"That is just it," and Buffalo Bill rode up the trail to find the road agents.

CHAPTER XLI.

A SURPRISE.

Buffalo Bill dismounted before gaining the top of the ridge.

At its base, several hundred yards away, was Leonard Ashley awaiting to see him go over out of sight, when he would ride up to the place the scout then was passing.

The outlaws, if still where they had held up Harold Hart, were but a short distance from the top of the range, and the scout, with the pines and boulders on either side of the trail, knew that he could get near to them unseen unless they had a sentinel on the watch.

Knowing the trail well, Buffalo Bill was sure of the spot of the holdup, the very place for the coach to be halted by men in ambush.

Leaving his horse over the ridge, the alert scout advanced with the noiseless step of an Indian through the pines for some distance. He then halted, for voices came to his ears.

"They are there, and that boy is indeed in dire danger. No delay now!"

"I am not afraid to die, only do not hang me, but shoot me instead, for I know now that you intend to kill me," was what the scout distinctly heard uttered by the brave lad.

"He shall be saved, be the risk what it may," was the instant resolve of the dauntless plainsman.

He dashed back through the pines, mounted his horse, and rode at a gallop over the pine straw until he came within a short distance of where the Desperadoes of the Overland, hidden by the boulders, were about to commit a foul crime.

They had robbed the youth of his money, had taken his weapons from him, and, with a lariat noose about his neck, were proceeding to hang him.

A tree was near with a limb that stretched far out over the trail. Over this one end of the lasso had been thrown, and it had been pulled taut, while four men held it, awaiting the leader's command.

The boy's hands had been bound behind him, his feet were also tied, and he stood with pale face awaiting his end, yet he did not show a quiver of fear as he looked upon his merciless foes.

There lay the man his young pard had killed, and seated upon a rock supporting his aching head, which was bound up, was the one who had been wounded.

The outlaw leader stood before Harold with tri-

umphant face, and the four men who were detailed as executioners were ready for the word to swing their victim into mid-air.

The stage would not be along for some hours, so they had plenty of time for the "fun," as they deemed it.

Upon the lad's coat, on the ground, lay the money taken from him, with his belt of arms and all else valuable, awaiting division after the hanging.

"Say, men, I have done you no wrong; you have robbed me of all I possess, and money that is not mine, so why hang me?" said the youth, and there was no entreaty in his voice, only reproach.

"You lied to us about the money you had, and your pard killed Sam there and wounded Ben right bad, so you have ter answer fer his work," was the unfeeling response of the outlaw leader.

"I do not want to die, though I will not be a coward if I have to; but I came out here on a mission of great importance to me, to save a man's honor, perhaps his life, and you will do no good by killing me, so let me go on my way. Moneyless though I will be, I can do some good."

"Not you, for you are too dangerous to turn loose and thus put the government trailers upon our tracks. No! Yer has ter die, and that is all there is about it, so git yer prayers said mighty quick, fer we won't be mean enough ter hang yer and not let yer pray."

"To pray in the presence of such as you would be blasphemy. No! My heart is open to my Maker, and I will die with hope of a hereafter, but I will utter no appeal to Heaven to be greeted with jeers from

you! So, do your worst, for I am ready to meet my fate!"

Did not this pluck of the boy win their admiration, or his fearless face and lone, helpless position touch their hearts?

Not so! Such brutes in human guise had hearts callous to all mercy. They would keep their threat and hang him.

"Up with him, boys, and——"

"Harm one hair of that brave boy's head and by Heaven it will be the last act of your coward lives!"

The words were uttered stern and threatening, and the men who had dragged the youth off his feet let go the lariat and turned to find that a horseman had spurred into their midst and had them covered with a revolver in each hand.

CHAPTER XLII.

AT THE REVOLVER'S MUZZLE.

"Buffalo Bill!"

The name broke from the lips of the outlaw leader, and it was echoed by his five followers.

Every eye was upon him, and not a man of the six dared make a move to draw a revolver.

The scout had ridden right up to the group of rocks unseen, had drawn his revolvers and spurred his horse into the open space, halted suddenly, and faced the six road agents.

A swoop of Indians would not have startled them as this sudden appearance of the great borderman.

Of course he was not alone. His followers must be near; perhaps even then held them under cover of their rifles.

Even a man of Buffalo Bill's great daring would not risk the odds of six to one against him, so must have a force at his call.

So they stood, helpless from sheer fright.

The youth had dropped to the ground, but, bound as he was, had risen to his feet again. There he stood, his eyes not upon his foes, but riveted upon the scout. The color had surged back into his face as he saw before him the man of whom he had heard since his boyhood.

Harold Hart beheld him in all his splendor of true courage—a single man confronting six desperadoes, and for his sake!

Breathing hard with suppressed excitement, the boy, a moment before upon the very brink of a terrible death, gazed in awe and wonder, and waited the outcome of Buffalo Bill's intrepid act.

His revolvers were ready for the trigger touch, and his eyes seemed to be looking upon each man before him.

They were now grouped close together, and a rapid shower of bullets into their midst would do deadly work. They did not speak; they waited for the scout to do that.

In a moment came the order:

"One of you cut the bonds off of that youth, but if another of you moves a finger it will be the last act of his life."

The ruffians stood silent and motionless; not one

of them moved to obey. They saw not only the loss of the boy to them, and his money, but also of the Overland coach they were waiting for.

"Doc Driggs, I order you to free that boy!"

It was the leader he addressed.

The man hesitated.

"See here, Buffalo Bill, this young fellow and a pard of his fired on us, and kilt our comrade, Sam, thar; so we caught this one, and he's our game."

"You do not intend to obey, eh? Then I will give you the whole dose of government medicine!"

Raising his voice, he called out:

"Ho, men, stand ready there!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" came the answer back in the ridge, and Buffalo Bill, leveling his revolver quickly at the left ear of the man he had called Doc Driggs, pulled trigger.

The report and a yell came together, and a clean-cut hole was made through the ear of the outlaw leader by the unerringly aimed bullet.

"Hands up, Doc Driggs! I have always suspected you of leading a gang of outlaws; now I have the evidence. Off with your belts and lay them before you on the ground—all of you, or be shot as you stand!"

With alacrity the order was obeyed, Doc Driggs being the first to unstring his belt. He was deadly pale, and the blood was trickling from his wound and falling upon his shoulder.

"Now free that youth, or I will shoot to kill!"

The man sprang to the boy, and his nervous hands quickly began to untie the lariats that bound him.

This done, he said savagely: "He's free, Buffalo Bill, but you have made me yer foe fer life."

"I would rather have your hate than your friendship, Doc Driggs," was the rejoinder. "It will afford me sincere satisfaction to even now shoot off your other ear!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

WELL MET.

The youth was set free with no gentle hand by the maddened road ruffians.

"Did they rob you, pard?" asked the scout.

"Yes, sir; of all I had."

"That is your money with those other things there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take it, and see if you have all. If not, I will search these fellows myself."

"They did not have time to hide anything, sir, so all is here."

"It is well for them that it is. Is that your horse?"

"Yes, sir."

"Buckle on your belt and arms, then mount your horse, and go with me. No, Doc, I do not want your company now. I have no time to run you all in to the fort. I shall let you off this time with the warning that I have my eye upon you and every one of your gang, so beware!"

"Hands up, all of you!"

The men did not move.

"Hands up, or I'll mark the man for life who refuses!"

Up went the hands of every one of the now infuriated gang. They caught a glance of their leader's bleeding ear.

"Now, then, turn your backs and stand in line."

The men sullenly but promptly obeyed.

"Young pard, pass along behind that gang and gather up their belts of weapons lying there."

The youth did so; every belt was secured.

"Doc Driggs, as I said, I shall let you go free now, and you will find your weapons in the trail, a quarter of a mile farther on.

"Send only one of your men after them, and while waiting bury your dead companion there; then go your way. Only, remember, I am watching you in the future."

"Thanks for nothin'," growled the disgusted leader.

"Now, pard, my way lies westward, so come with me if that is the way your trail goes."

"Yes, sir; but I have a comrade whom I must first find. He did not desert me, and I am not going to leave him in trouble."

"Well said; but I can take you to your comrade."

"You have met him, then, sir?" eagerly asked the youth.

"Yes; when we start on our way we will find him not far ahead, for he has flanked this spot, and had his guns ready for work on this crew."

"That's good news, sir, and I owe even more to you than I thought!"

Buffalo Bill now turned into the trail just where the horses of the outlaws were hidden in the pines. He regarded these animals closely, then looked back at

their riders, now grouped together a couple of hundred yards away, and called out:

"You are horse thieves, I see, as well as road agents, for I recognize a government horse here, so shall take him along."

"Go on, Buffalo Bill, if you think thar is nothing to stop yer; but my time will come some day!" yelled Doc Driggs savagely.

"The sooner the better; but I take this bay with the U. S. brand upon him."

And throwing off the saddle and bridle from the fine cavalry horse he had recognized as having been stolen from the fort, the scout led him by his stake rope and continued on the trail just as Leonard Ashley rode up.

The hands of the two youths were clasped in the warmest greeting, while Leonard said:

"I owe to this gentleman, Harold, that they did not hang me; but who do you think he is?"

"I know, for we met an hour ago and got acquainted."

"Modestly said, boy; but let me tell your friend that he saved my life, and his telling me of his comrade in trouble sent me to your rescue. Now, we will leave their weapons here, and then ride on our way, for there is work for all three of us ahead."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE SCOUT'S FLANK MOVEMENT.

The weapons of the outlaws were dropped in the trail; then the scout and the sure shots rode on, the former remarking:

"There is a valley just ahead, and the desperadoes will watch to see if we cross it."

"Do you think they will follow us, sir?" asked Harold.

"Oh, no. They will not leave their place of ambush, but remain to hold up the coach, as they think we know nothing of their real game."

"But can't we prevent that, sir?" asked Harold.

"It is just what I intend to do with your aid."

"Count on us, sir."

"Yes, indeed, for we will be only too glad to help you best that gang, sir, and we are not fearful of the odds when you lead us, Mr. Cody."

"Two to one are not such big odds, boys, if one is in the right," answered the scout, and then he continued: "I'll tell you how we'll do it."

The two boys were all attention, and the scout went on:

"Once we have entered the timber across the valley we can ride for it at full speed. It will be a ride of ten miles, and at a clipping pace, but we must do it to head the valley and get back on the stage trail beyond the ridge, and be there in time to catch the coach, if it is on time."

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"You will warn the driver and turn him back?" suggested Leonard.

"Not much! For we don't turn back out in this country, either in a good or bad cause, as you will learn when you have been here a while."

"Then you will ride on to guard the coach as they often do in Texas?" suggested Harold.

"We will not ride on our horses, but in the coach! Buck Dawson is the driver on this run, and he is as good as they make them, and ever ready for a scrap."

"And there may be passengers along?"

"No, I think the coach runs empty this trip. I hope so, for passengers don't count for much in a holdup or shooting scrape, for they seem anxious to present the outlaws all their valuables and money, so they can save their lives."

"No, I have known nine men in a coach, and all of them fully armed and alleged fighters, quietly submit to be robbed by one man at the muzzle of a revolver."

"I have read of such things, sir, but could hardly believe it, for it seems to me I would fight if I went under, where there was one chance in twenty of winning."

"You two boys are made of stern stuff, and I feel I can tie to you."

"But the coach goes through on this run with a very large sum of money aboard, and the colonel at the fort asked me to scout the trail and see if there were road agents abroad, so as to warn Buck Dawson in time to save his treasure."

"I have no doubt but that their spy at the fort, who-

ever he is, sent the Chief Black Bonnet and his two braves ahead to kill me, having found out that I was going. So you see, Ashley, that you did more than you counted upon in saving me as you did."

"But I only did what I deemed my duty, Mr. Cody."

"True, duty has a strong claim upon a brave man, and I feel that I have two mighty strong allies here now to help me."

The youths were much pleased to be complimented by Buffalo Bill, who continued:

"Now, I happen to know that Buck Dawson will be very anxious to get through, and will fight if he has any chance of escape, for he is that kind of a man."

"We will head him off, and then, leaving our horses, take passage with him, and give the outlaws a surprise party, I take it."

"You think they will dare to remain to hold up the coach after the scare you gave them, sir?" asked Harold.

"Oh, yes! Those fellows are not easily bluffed, and they will watch us out of sight, and feel sure that we have continued on the trail, so will think they have nothing to fear."

"But, I guess they will," observed Leonard.

"I hope so; and they will be all the more anxious to rob the coach after having lost your money. I have suspected Doc Driggs and his gang of being outlaws, but could not get a grip on them before."

"But here we are across the valley, and when we are concealed by the pines we will take a look back on the hill and see if they are not watching us."

When wholly out of sight from any one on the hill

they had left, Buffalo Bill halted, dismounted, and, seeking a point of observation with the youths, got out his field glass for a look back over the trail.

"There they are! They have picked up their weapons and three of them are watching to see that we continue on across the valley."

"Take a look at them, boys, and then we'll ride for it, as we have no time to lose if we want to head off Buck Dawson's coach."

The youths took a hasty look through the field glass; then the three remounted and went off in a sweeping gallop, Buffalo Bill in the lead, and the recaptured bay horse keeping close up behind him.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE OVERLAND COACH.

Buffalo Bill had spoken truly when he said it would be a long, sharp, and hard ride around the head of the valley to stop the coach upon the trail.

Leading the way, he set a very rapid pace, but the led horse kept well up, and the two boys were close upon the heels of the bay.

The valley was headed without a pause, and the dozen miles gone over in quick time.

Just as Buffalo Bill reached the trail and glanced down at it to see if the fresh wheel marks were there to tell that the coach had gone by, the rumble of wheels was heard.

"He is coming now. We are just in time, and nothing to spare."

A few moment after, as the three stood by their panting horses, the coach came in sight.

The driver half drew rein at sight of them, but, recognizing Buffalo Bill, waved his hat and came on. He was a large man, with full beard, long hair, and a determined face.

"Ho, Bill Cody, glad to see you, but you gave me a scare. Who are the kids?"

The driver drew rein, while the "kids," as he called the two youths, gazed not only with marked interest at him, but also at a passenger he had seated by his side on the box, and which was no less than an enormous black dog, with a most savage cast of countenance.

"Yes, Buck, I am here to head you off. Any one with you?"

"My pard, Grip, here, that's all. I fetched him to kinder help me out, for he's my good luck, as when he's along I generally goes through."

"I believe that is so."

"It is. I sets a heap of store by that dog, Bill."

"I know that you do, Buck."

"But I have news for you."

"Good or bad?"

"About even."

"Road agents were about, and you found 'em?"

"I was riding into an ambush Black Bonnet set for me, when this young man here saved my life, and his pard having been corralled by seven outlaws—we got him out of trouble."

"Toes were turned up?"

"One man was killed by this youth, another wounded

by him also, and I had to bore a hole in Doc Driggs' left ear, so that was all the blood spilled."

"Well, I'm glad you found 'em, fer that saves me. But who are your chums?"

"Two young pards that are out here for reasons they have not told me; but they are game, and are in the game with me to help you through."

"Then there is trouble ahead?"

"Doc Driggs and five of his men are lying in wait for you over the next range across the plain, two miles from here."

"That is bad."

"Not if you take me and my two young pards here for passengers."

"Now, I see how it goes."

"You swung around to head me off, and I guess five of us can wipe out six."

"What five?"

"You, me, the kids, and Grip."

"Ah, yes; your dog counts as one every time."

"And the kids look in it to stay."

"You can count on them every time."

"Going to leave your horses here?"

"I will put them in a camp a half mile ahead before we go over the range, and come back and get them when it is all over."

"That's so."

"Going inside, Bill?"

"Oh, yes."

"I'll let Grip go in with you, for he might git a bullet first thing up here."

"True; and you, Buck?"

"I'm paid ter take chances; ther dog ain't. He runs with me fer friendship's sake."

"A strong claim, Buck. But let us move on and have it over with before sunset."

"Right you are! I'm ready."

The scout rode ahead of the coach, the youths followed, and at the foot of the slope they crossed a stream.

Up this a short distance was a good camping place, and here the horses were unsaddled and staked out to rest and feed.

Then the scout and his two young pards jumped into the coach, and, leaping down from the box at a word from the driver, Grip joined them, taking a front seat. Savage as he was, he made friends at once, seeing that the youths were his master's friends.

"Jog along across the plain after crossing the slope, Buck, for they will be on the watch for you, and the ambush is at the group of bowlders over the ridge."

"I know the place, Bill, for I have been corralled right thar before."

"I know you have. When they halt you, draw rein at once, for they are in an ugly mood, and would shoot quick. Have your gun ready, for we will lay low until they are sure you have no passengers and approach the coach."

"I will go out one side with one of my boy pards, and the other with Grip out of the other, and I think we can make it lively for Doc Driggs and his gang for a couple of minutes at least."

"The sarpint! I'm sartin we can."

"Now we'll push on," and the coach rolled on its way to meet what lay in its trail for good or bad.

CHAPTER XLVI.

LYING IN WAIT.

That Buffalo Bill had known just what Doc Driggs and his followers would do was proven by the fact that they did watch him until he had disappeared from sight with the two boys and the horse he had taken from them.

Their first duty was to get their weapons which he had left in the trail, and then having seen them cross the valley and disappear in the timber over on the ridge, Doc Driggs said:

"Pards, they have gone."

"Bad luck to 'em!"

"The scout is on some duty as courier, I guesses, or he'd a tuk us in when he had us foul."

"I guesses so."

"Jist ter think, he held us up all alone."

"Six of us."

"Yes, but he had help."

"T'other boy, the fellow as kilt Sam and must hev met Buffalo Bill."

"Yes, but he didn't show up, thet boy didn't, at first."

"Well, he needn't to, fer we was that scared we thought the scouts were along with ther chief."

"Thet's a bold game Buffalo Bill has of playing."

"Oh, yes, but he's played it once too often for me," growled Doc Driggs, who had been listening in no good humor to the comments of his men.

"I hopes he has, cap'n. But it are lucky for us he didn't think of ther coach coming along and wait until it had."

"Yes, for we'll git that anyhow, and from all I have heard it carries big money this trip."

"We hopes so."

"If it wasn't ter git this coach we'd push right on after Buffalo Bill and them two kids, and have it out, for we is two to one agin' 'em."

"Yes, cap'n, we is, only it's Buffalo Bill, and I wants more odds than two to one when I goes for his scalp."

"We could git him all right if we faced the music, and you bet we'd avenge poor Sam."

"I hope we will some day, cap'n."

"We must, for he knows us all now, does Buffalo Bill, and you bet we have got ter down him if we wants ter strike it rich from stagecoaches, and yer all knows them is a mine as pans out big at times, pard."

"So it does; but we has got ter lay low in camps now, or he'll light down onter us, and no mistake, when we are least expecting."

"Yes, that's what we'll do."

"I wish we'd been masked."

"What fer, cap'n?"

"So he wouldn't hev seen our faces."

"Lordy, that are funny, cap'n, for he'd a yanked our masks off as he did our weepsons."

The "captain" swore at this, and said:

"Come, we'll go back and bury Sam, and then lay

for thet coach; but I wants my ear fixed up, fer it hurts."

"I guess so, for ther hole are clean cut through it," and the men gazed upon their leader with commiseration, at having to wear "Buffalo Bill's mark," as they called it.

They soon returned to the place of ambush, and the chief, after having his wounded ear cared for, sent a man to watch that the scout did not come back over the trail to surprise them, and another to guard the plain for the coming coach.

The others then dug a grave for their dead companion, and he was decently buried, with a few words that Doc Driggs remembered of the burial service, though it seemed a mockery uttered by such vile lips as his.

Rocks were then put upon the grave, the guard that was watching for the return of Buffalo Bill was called in, and no longer had they any fear from that quarter.

The guard watching for the coming coach was, however, kept on post, for from his point of observation he was able to see it over a mile away, when it came into view on the plain. He had a glass to observe it with, and if there was seen to be a cavalry escort along they knew that they would have to light out very suddenly to save themselves.

But they had little fear of this, as the coaches seldom were escorted by soldiers.

It was therefore without much dread that the outlaws went again into ambush for their prey.

If the coach was not guarded they felt that they were all right.

If it was, they would have to skip into hiding and bear their disappointment as best they could.

They were in no pleasant humor at the loss of one of their number, their recognition as a lawless lot by Buffalo Bill, who had cowed them into submission single-handed, and taken from them their prisoner, and who was to satiate their vengeful feelings, while in losing him they had also to give up what money they had taken from him.

But they had seen Buffalo Bill and the two boys disappear, had placed their comrade underground, and had hope that the coach would pan out so well for them as to be a salve for their misfortunes thus far.

With this belief they awaited the coming of Buck Dawson's stage, the fact that he might have passengers playing no part with them, as they all knew how little it took to subdue men when under cover of a surprise and a revolver.

At last came the sentinel with his report, and the word was given:

"Ther coach is a-coming, cap'n."

Buck Dawson drove leisurely up the trail to the top of the ridge, his face in no way showing that he was in the very face of death.

Sometimes the road agents were wont to halt a coach by shooting the two horses in the lead. Then it was done by killing the driver without a word of warning to halt.

Again a volley would be turned upon the driver and coach with no regard as to who might suffer.

All this did Buck Dawson know, yet he did not flinch. If he was shot from his box without warning,

he would die in the discharge of his duty. What man could die more honorably?

The bowlders were beyond his leaders only a short distance, the revolver he intended to use lay by him upon the seat, and he held his reins well in hand.

It seemed that he was driving along careless and unsuspecting of danger. Instead, he was painfully on the alert.

The leaders had reached the rocks, then the spot where Harold Hart had been lassoed.

Had the outlaws taken their departure?

Another step answered the question, for loud came the command:

"Halt, and hands up, if you love life, Buck Dawson!"

The foot of the driver was put hard upon the brake, and the team was reined to a standstill.

Then the hands of Buck Dawson went up above his head.

"What does yer want, yer thieving varmints?" he growled forth.

"You knows," answered a voice from the rocks.

Still no one appeared.

"Yer'll go as light in pockets as yer is in head if yer expects ter git money from this coach on this run," he said.

"Yer lies, Buck Dawson, and yer knows it, for we ain't no fools not ter be posted."

"Search the old hearse, then, and me, too, if you don't believe me, for I tell yer ag'in yer git nothing."

"I intends to search the coach and you, too, and we'll get a big haul, for I knows what you carry."

"All right, I suppose you have got the force to back up your words."

"I have."

"How many in your gang, Doc Driggs, for I knows yer, so yer might as well skulk out of yer hiding place?"

"I have seven."

"Under other circumstances that would be too many fer me to tackle," said Buck Dawson coolly.

"Maybe yer think so."

"Has yer any passengers aboard!"

"Yes, but I guess yer'll hev ter wake 'em up."

"How many?"

"Four of 'em."

"What?"

"Don't get a big scare onter yer, for it's only a' old woman, two kids, and a leetle dog."

"Well, we don't scare a little bit if you had a hearse full of men."

"Come, Doc, talk less and git to work, for my time is too valuable to chin here with you."

"Your time is mine just now, Dawson, but I is in a hurry, too, so come, men, and we'll search him and his passengers along with ther coach. Now, git down off of thet box, Buck."

The driver rose as though to obey, just as the outlaw leader came into sight on one side and on the other appeared the other three of the band.

Hardly had they done so before three shots were fired as one, and three outlaws dropped in their tracks.

They were the three men on the opposite side to the

leader, and who, from the position of the coach, could only be seen by those from within it.

At the same moment the doors flew open upon either side and just then bounded out the huge dog Grip, followed by Buffalo Bill and his two boy pards.

But the outlaw leader and the two men with him had not hesitated an instant, but bounded away among the rocks like deer, straight for their horses.

The way they took shielded them from the rifles of Buffalo Bill and the boys, though Buck Dawson got a shot at the one in the rear and sent a bullet through his arm, causing only a slight flesh wound, however.

The man gave a yell of pain as he bounded forward, and then glancing behind him he uttered a cry of mortal terror.

What caused it was the sight of the huge dog upon his track.

The same glance had also shown him a tall form leaping from the coach which he knew but too well, and he shouted:

"It's Buffalo Bill, cap'n!"

This name gave wings to the feet of the outlaw leader and the man running by his side. He knew just what to expect. He did not glance behind, but he heard a loud bark, and a yell of terror, followed by the words:

"Oh, pard, save me!"

It was too late, for the dog was upon him, and though the man twice fired upon the savage brute, both times his bullets went wild.

There was heard a fierce yelp, and the dog was upon

the back of the fugitive outlaw, his teeth buried in his shoulder.

Loud rang his screams of fright and pain, and as he went down under the weight of the angry dog, Buffalo Bill came flying toward him in hot pursuit, the two boys not very far behind him, while Buck Dawson stood upon his coach shouting in glee at the surprise and terror of the intended coach robbers.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE ESCAPE.

For Buffalo Bill to have gone by the man in the grip of the stage driver's dog and leave him to his fate would have been impossible.

In spite of the wild life he led, his heart was too tender to allow Grip to harm the outlaw more than he had done.

By continuing on in his pursuit he knew that he could either bring Doc Driggs and his companion to bay, or kill them.

But he halted at the side of the fallen man and called to the dog to release his hold upon him.

But Grip deserved the name given to him, and hung on like grim death.

The scout therefore had to give up the pursuit and call to the two boys:

"You push on, pards, and try and capture them."

The horses had been changed from where they had been when Harold Hart was a prisoner, and having lost sight of the two fugitives, he took the wrong direction.

Thus the outlaw leader and his single companion were able to reach their horses, throw themselves into their saddles, and dash away in the pines, followed by a few shots at long range from the boy pards, who saw too late their mistake.

In the meanwhile Buffalo Bill could not make Grip release his hold upon the shoulder of the writhing, fright-dazed man, who was pleading pitifully:

"Take him off! Take him off! I surrender! Don't let him kill me!"

The scout did not wish to harm the dog, but his entreaties and commands for him to let go his hold were useless.

Grip still held on.

"Ho, Buck Dawson, come quick and call off your dog, or he'll kill this man!" he shouted.

"Small loss if he does," came the reply. But the driver called his dog, and the animal reluctantly let go his hold.

Buffalo Bill bent over the man, who was bleeding from Buck's bullet wound and the tear of the dog's teeth, and said:

"If you can walk, come with me and I'll see what I can do to help you."

"Oh, lawk! oh, confound the brute!" groaned the man, but he struggled to his feet as he uttered the words, giving a wild look at the dog, who was watching him closely.

Supporting the man, Buffalo Bill led him back to the coach and said:

"This man is badly hurt, Buck, and we must do what we can for him."

"Cert, but he had ter take his medicine, as he expected me ter do.

"I'll get my canteen and medicine case, for I allers goes prepared," and springing upon the box Buck Dawson handed down a canteen filled with water and a leather case with lint, medicines, and bandages in it.

"Them fellers don't need no doctoring, Bill," and he pointed to the three dead men.

"No, those boys are dead shots and fired to kill, as I did."

"Them boys is dandies, and no mistake, but they took the wrong trail after Doc Driggs and ther feller with him, so they got away."

"We will hope for better luck next time," said Buffalo Bill, as he washed and dressed the wounds of the outlaw.

"Better luck," groaned the latter.

"This morning there were seven of us, and now Doc Driggs and Scotty are all that is left, save me, and I s'pose I'll hang, if these wounds don't kill me."

"The wounds are not so bad, though painful," said Buffalo Bill, adding:

"If you put your hand in the fire you must expect to get it burned."

"I has."

"Well, Bill, I'm in luck, for I saved ther boodle, and I owes it to you that I did."

"And the boys, Buck."

"Yes, I must count 'em in, for they did great.

"Thar they comes now."

As the driver spoke Harold Hart and Leonard Ashley came up, the former calling out:

"We didn't get them, Mr. Cody, I am sorry to say, for I supposed the horses were where they were this morning, so ran in that direction."

"And they had their horses close by, so skipped off before we could get a good shot at them," said Leonard Ashley.

"Let them go, though I should have been glad to have captured Doc Driggs.

"But you have done your duty well, boy pards, and four out of six is doing mighty well."

"Now, I think it is doing great, I do, Bill; but what are you going to do with thet gerloot thar thet Grip were making his supper of when you made me call him off?"

"I have a pair of steel handcuffs in my pocket, so will put him in irons, and you must carry him on to the fort at the end of your run, Buck."

"I'll do it.

"But ther stiffs?"

"Take the dead with you, also, for we cannot bury them, and report to the colonel just what occurred."

"I'll do it.

"But say, Bill Cody, them stiffs will make a real hearse of my coach."

"You do not care for that."

"Now, I doesn't like it, for I ain't stuck on dead folks, a little bit."

"They are harmless, Buck, so keep your eye upon the live one, for he may give you trouble."

"He'd better not, or I'll carry into the fort four stiffs instead of three," was the significant reply of the driver.

Spring Semester

"I know he was well, but I never believed
any more of nothing the night, for he did not
live in a prison."

一、凡我同胞，如有不法之徒，
 二、凡我同胞，如有不法之徒，
 三、凡我同胞，如有不法之徒，
 四、凡我同胞，如有不法之徒，
 五、凡我同胞，如有不法之徒，
 六、凡我同胞，如有不法之徒，
 七、凡我同胞，如有不法之徒，
 八、凡我同胞，如有不法之徒，
 九、凡我同胞，如有不法之徒，
 十、凡我同胞，如有不法之徒，

is an apt. Back: the youth is strongly like
"Hugot Mani Baker," replied Buffalo Bill, grinning
his teeth.

1991

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the

...which neither the driver nor Buffalo was

the youth asked with some degree of exuberance.

Did you say his name was?

...he called himself, though out here
...go under their name he did East, except in
...are cases, but I think it were his real

...did you see him
...year ago. He
...mining camps
...he took twice a

...not riding now
...for he hev been

"Yes, and he always had a dog with him that he called Scout, and that there Grip is ther brother of thet

same dog, for he had two of 'em as like as two guns, and would take one on one ride, t'other on the next, and so on, and he did ther same with his ponies."

"Yes, I remember the man well, but I never believed that he was guilty of robbing the mail, for he did not seem that kind of a fellow."

"You are right, pard, he didn't, and he wasn't, fer I know'd him well, and more than once he saved me and my coach from ther road agents. Hart were a square man clean through, and it were him that this young feller is ther living picter of."

"You are right, Buck; the youth is strangely like the Midnight Mail Rider," replied Buffalo Bill, gazing at the youth.

The face of Harold Hart had flushed and paled by turns, as he heard what the driver had said.

His comrade had glanced at him and said something in a low tone which neither the driver nor Buffalo Bill had caught.

Now the youth asked with some degree of excitement:

"What did you say his name was?"

"Hart is what he called himself, though out here a man don't go under ther name he did East, exceptin' in mighty rare cases, but I thinks it were his real name."

"When did you see him last, sir?"

"Three year ago. He was ther mail rider of the mountain mining camps, and had a run of fifty miles which he took twice a week each way."

"Is he not riding now?"

"No, for he hev been missing fer three year "

"Missing?"

"Well, I calls it so, for somehow I can't believe he is dead, any more than I can that he robbed ther mail."

"He was accused of robbing the mail, then?"

"Yes, there are them as says he got big money out of ther bags and skipped."

"And he has not been seen since?"

"No."

"You do not believe he is dead?"

"I does not."

"What has become of him, in your opinion, sir?"

"I thinks the Indians captured him and holds him a captive, or maybe the road agents, and then again he might have been kilt by one or t'other."

"Did they have no proof of his being alive or dead?"

"His horse came in one afternoon, jist as a band was going out to search for him, for he was due at daybreak."

"Ther horse seemed dead beat, and there was blood on ther saddle."

"Ah!"

"Then his dog was missing also, the twin to Grip here, and ther mail bags was gone, and that is all we have ever know'd of ther fate of poor Hart, ther Midnight Mail Rider."

Buffalo Bill was watching the youth as he questioned the driver, and he saw more in all that was asked and answered than did Buck Dawson.

The scout felt sure that the youth knew the man whom all knew as the Midnight Mail Rider. He recalled now the story of the missing man, who had been a miner, but an unfortunate one in striking pay-

"Hart?"

"Well, I told it so, for somehow I can't believe he would say more than I can that he robbed the mail."

"He was accused of robbing the mail, then?"

"Yes, there are those who say he got big money out of the bags and shipped."

"Did he live not been seen since?"

"No."

"You do not believe he is dead?"

"I don't."

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"Ah?"

"Then his dog was missing also, the twin to Grip here, and the mail bags was gone, and that is all we have any knowledge of the fate of poor Hart, the Midnight Mail Rider."

"Bill was watching the youth as he questioned, and he saw more in all that was said than did Buck Dawson."

"More than that the youth knew the man was the Midnight Mail Rider. He recognized the missing man, who had been a fortunate one in striking pay."

ing dirt, and who had volunteered to ride the mail when big money had been offered to carry the bags through the run of the mining camps, a ride that was considered an almost fatal one, sooner or later.

The scout recalled also that the mail rider had been famous as the possessor of two splendid horses and a couple of large, savage dogs, one or the other of which went with him on each ride.

Then he had suddenly disappeared, and it was said by many that he had skipped off with the mail, which was most valuable on that last ride.

So Buffalo Bill was not surprised when the youth said:

"Hart is my name, and I feel sure that the one you speak of is my father."

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE SURE-SHOT BOYS' MISSION.

The words of Harold Hart caused Buck Dawson to spring toward him, and grasping his hand, he cried:

"You is right! Now I knows yer, fer you is ther image of yer father, and I can swear yer is the son of ther Midnight Mail Rider. Boy, I is yer friend fer yer father's sake, for I loved him as I did a brother."

Harold Hart was touched by the earnest manner and kind words of the stage driver, and replied:

"We will be friends, sir, and let me tell you now, as I intended to tell Mr. Cody here when we camped, that I came out here to find my father."

"And I came to be his friend, come what might," said Leonard Ashley.

"And a true, good friend he has been, for he left a comfortable home and those dear to him to come with me.

"Once my father was a rich man, a Texas planter, but he was robbed of his wealth and had to take me from college, while he accepted a position as chief herder on the ranch of the father of my friend here.

"It was not long after before a murder was committed, the victim being the man who had ruined my father.

"Circumstantial evidence pointed to my father as being the murderer, as he was arrested, tried, found guilty, and sentenced to be hanged.

"Len, my pard here, and I aided him to escape from prison, boys though we were, and I was given my father's position on the Ashley ranch. I was confident of the innocence of my father, and I set to work to prove him not guilty.

"Two months ago I did so, and then I decided, when the real murderer was known and my father's innocence proven, to set out and find him, to clear his name of the stain upon it.

"I had only heard from him once each year, for he feared to write me, and the last letter came from these mountain mines.

"So here I decided to come, and Len Ashley came with me.

"But now you tell me that my father has another cloud cast upon his name, that he is not here, and may be dead.

"No, no, there is no dishonor upon him, though he may be dead."

The boy's voice quivered as he spoke, and both Buffalo Bill and Buck Dawson held out their hands and grasped his in warm sympathy.

At this the boy raised his head and said earnestly:

"Yes, dead he may be, but he is no mail robber, no fugitive with stolen booty. But, I swear to you both that, dead or alive, I shall find him, know the truth, and clear his name of this last charge, as I did of the one of murder."

"Bravo, my boy, and mark my words, you will do it, for you have it in you to do so," cried Buffalo Bill, and then he quickly added: "And let me say right now that I will help you to find your father or know what his fate has been. I want two just such pards as you are, boys though you may be in years, and I will call you my boy sure shots, and we travel the same trail, for yours is a noble mission, Harold Hart, and I have seen you both tried and found true."

"That's ther music ter sing, Bill Cody, and I'll be with you in your hunt, so call on me for my steel, lead, or gold, as you may need it," Buck Dawson said.

Both Harold Hart and Leonard Ashley were much pleased at the words of Buffalo Bill and Buck Dawson, for that the latter was the scout's friend and had been the firm pard of the mail rider, as Mr. Hart had become, was enough recommendation for the two lads.

"Well, boys, does you go on with me ter the fort, or will yer remain with Chief of Scouts Cody, for it is getting late, and I has ter drive pretty fast ter make up ther time I has lost, and maybe I shouldn't

say lost nuther, when I saved my life, I guess, and ther boodle, too, by ther delay."

The boys looked at each other and then at Buffalo Bill, to see what he would say. He answered promptly:

"I will keep my sure-shot pards with me, Buck, for I guess they are willing to follow my lead."

"Indeed, yes," said Harold Hart, while Leonard Ashley responded:

"You say and we'll do, sir."

"Yes, that's the way to talk," put in the driver. "Follow Buffalo Bill's lead and you strike the right trail."

"And, Buck," said Buffalo Bill, glancing at the outlaw prisoner, who had been too far off to hear what had been said:

"It will be best not to let it be known who the boys are, that Harold Hart is the son of the Midnight Mail Rider, for it may help us in our effort to know about his fate not to let the miners discover that this youth is here looking him up."

"You are right, Bill."

"You see, Buck, I have my own ideas about the fate of the mail rider, and if I am right those who may know about him would be put on their guard if the old story is revived again."

"Right, you are, Bill; so we'll say nothing and leave all to you; but don't you forgit that Doc Driggs, the man who led the outlaws, and his close pard, Nugget Ned, escaped, and they are a bad pair to have at large."

"I have not forgotten them, Buck, nor shall I do so," quietly responded Buffalo Bill.

But his words meant a great deal to the driver, who knew him well.

"Well, I'll git along on my way, for night ain't far off, so I'll jist say good-by and set ther team a-going, with graveyard fruit inside, and a cuss on ther box with me thet ought ter be hanged.

"But I has jist this ter say afore I go, and that is thet I tuk ther belongings of Mail Rider Hart when he didn't git back, and I has his two horses ter-day, some traps as were in his cabin, along with some papers as may be important, and this dog, and you bet I tarns Grip over now to ther boy, and he'll find him useful as I has.

"Come, Grip o' Death, go with yer young boss now, for yer belongs ter him—that's him right thar," and the driver pointed to Harold Hart.

CHAPTER L.

THE SILENT SENTINEL.

The faithful dog seemed to have the intelligence of a human being, for he walked directly over to Harold Hart, wagging his tail as he did so.

The boy bent over and caressed him, saying in a low tone:

"Good old dog! We'll find your master yet, won't we?"

The dog rubbed his head against the cheek of the youth, while Buck Dawson said:

"I believe he knows who yer is, fer thet dog understands what many humans cannot. Yer see, yer looks so tarnally like yer pa, and yer voice is jist like his, so ther dog knows as well as if he'd talked it over with yer, as has Pard Bill here and myself."

"He does seem to take a great liking to you, boy pard, and if he will go with you we will find him most useful, for he used to go on the run once each week with your father, you know, and so knows his exact trail, for I do not believe he has forgotten it."

"He knows, I'll gamble on it," said Buck Dawson.

"And, Buck, let me ask you to drive out as your leaders, on your way back, the two horses that used to be ridden by the Midnight Mail Rider, and the boys here will change theirs for them, for we'll meet you on the trail somewhere."

"I'll do it, and you bet, pard, you is striking the right trail to find ther boy's father, or my name ain't Buck Dawson."

"I hope so, pard. But, now, good-by. Boy, see if the dog will follow you."

With a grasp of the driver's hand in farewell, Harold Hart turned away, calling to the dog.

Grip looked at him, then at Buck Dawson, ran to the latter, licked his hand, and at a word from his old master ran after the youth.

The latter patted him affectionately, while Buck, closing his stage doors, mounted to his box, by the side of his prisoner, and with a word to his team drove on, calling back:

"I guess I won't fergit this spot, pards."

"Be a good dog, Grip, for I'm bettin' big money on yer."

The dog wagged his tail, but remained by the side of Harold Hart, who made no effort to keep him, should he show an inclination to follow on after the coach.

"He's all right, boys. Buck is right, for the dog is next to human in his intelligence; has more sense, in fact, than many men I know. But now let us strike the back trail, for the camp where we left our horses."

With this the scout led the way back over the stage trail, and the boys followed at a brisk pace, for Buffalo Bill was a good walker.

Grip followed, keeping close to the side of Harold Hart, who seemed much pleased with his companionship.

Down the slope they went, across the plain, and over the next ridge, to the camp where the horses had been left.

The animals were found just as they had been left, and in a short while a fire was blazing brightly, blankets were spread, and Buffalo Bill was getting supper, a performance all were much interested in, even to Grip, for he watched the scout's every move as though calculating the minutes before he would come in for his share.

The horses had rested well from their long, hard ride of the afternoon, and were put upon fresh grazing grounds for the night.

Supper over and Grip well fed, the latter had been put upon guard for the night, all knowing that no human sentinel was needed with such a good watch

as Buck Dawson had said they would find the faithful dog to be.

It was after a long talk together that the three pards turned in for the night.

Buffalo Bill had learned fully the history of his young friends, and had asked many questions about Mr. Hart, the Midnight Mail Rider, to try and find some clew other than his having been killed, to account for his strange disappearance.

"We will find him, pards, or know what his fate really was, if dead," the scout had said cheerily, as he led the way to his blankets.

For a while Buffalo Bill lay awake, unable to sleep, for his mind was busy plotting for the finding of the lost mail rider.

At last he dropped to sleep, but after an hour or so he awoke with a start. He knew that something out of the usual run had awakened him.

The fire had burned low, it was about midnight, and yet there was light enough for him to see some form creeping toward the spot where Harold Hart was sleeping.

Instantly his hand sought his revolver, for he now detected, as he believed, that it was a huge mountain lion.

But quickly it came to him what it was. He had forgotten about Grip momentarily upon awakening. It was the dumb sentinel, and he went up to the boy and put his cold nose close to his face, at the same time giving a very low whine to rouse him.

"There is danger about," said the scout, and he called in a whisper:

"Harold, are you——?"

"Yes, I am awake," was the low response of the boy.

CHAPTER LI.

THE TIMELY WARNING.

Harold Hart had not gone to sleep, for his mind was busy with all he had heard from Buffalo Bill and Buck Dawson about his father's uncertain fate.

The dutiful son had cleared his father's name of the charge of murder, after having aided him to escape from the gallows by getting him out of prison.

That he had learned what he did about his father's supposed fate was a crushing blow to Harold Hart, and he lay awake thinking about it all long after he had retired to his blankets.

"Well, I have found some good friends here, in Buffalo Bill and Buck Dawson. I still have Len Ashley, and more, a new pard in my father's dog, Grip, so I——"

He paused in his musing, for he distinctly saw something within the firelight, his blanket, and those of the others having been spread off in the shadow.

"Why it is Grip," he said, and he watched the dog as he came toward him, sniffed the air, and then once more moved cautiously on, halting right by him.

Pretending to be asleep, he let the dog rub his nose against his face, then he uttered a low whine, and Buffalo Bill spoke.

"There is sure danger abroad, and the dog has come to warn you.

"His instinct is certainly remarkable," said the scout.

"What danger can it be, sir?" asked Harold.

"Indians, perhaps, or it may be Doc Driggs and Scotty trying to run off our horses and get a shot at us."

"I will wake up Len, sir."

"Yes, and we will slip out from the firelight, and I will follow Grip, while you and your pard remain here. The dog will show me what the trouble is."

Len Ashley was awakened, and the scout said in a whisper:

"What is it, good dog? Go and find them, and I will come."

The dog started off, saw the scout following, looked back at his young master, but was told to go on, and obeyed.

The scout followed close, and through the timber, Grip leading him, toward the plain where the horses were feeding.

Then the dog stopped, and Buffalo Bill began to reconnoiter. He had not long to wait before he saw several forms skulking slowly along.

They were making for the little camp fire.

"One, two, three, four, five," the scout counted, and these were increasing. "Indians, and a dozen of them, if not more," muttered Buffalo Bill, as he lay in hiding behind a fallen tree, the dog close by his side, and silent as a ghost.

The Indians halted not a hundred feet away, held a whispered conference, and moved closer to the camp.

"I cannot warn the boys, so must risk their discovering the redskins."

"They are creeping up to fire upon us asleep, as they believe, and one of them has already reconnoitered the camp and reported; yes, it was that which aroused the dog."

"If I fire on them now they will not stampede, but fight, but if the boys see them and open, then I can be of a great deal of service here where I am, and the surprise we give them will be worth much to us."

So mused the scout, and he counted just fifteen braves as they skulked toward the camp. He felt anxious for his boy sure shots, yet he did not feel that he should fire on the Indians then to put them on their guard. It would put the redskins against them with considerable advantage.

With his repeating rifle ready, Buffalo Bill crouched behind the fallen tree and waited.

At length the stalking, silent forms passed one by one between the firelight and the scout. He counted them again.

"Fifteen. That means there are more, ready to rush upon the horses when the attack is made upon the camp. Can the boys have gone asleep again? No, that is not their style, for——"

The scout's musings were suddenly ended by the shooting forth of two red flames from beyond the firelight, and the ring of two rifles, then of another louder shot.

The scout knew that one of the boys carried a carbine, the other a combined rifle and shotgun, a rifle and smooth-bore barrel.

The three shots had been fired, first the rifles, and

each dropped a brave, and then the shotgun barrel, loaded with buckshot, had been emptied into the crowd.

The Indians had just discharged a shower of arrows into the three blanket rolls where they supposed their foes lay asleep.

But the fire of the boy sure shots from another place, the killing of two of their braves, and wounding of several by the buckshot, was a complete surprise to them.

CHAPTER LII.

THE BATTLE IN THE DARK.

The very instant after the three shots from the two boys Buffalo Bill opened with his repeating rifle directly upon the group of Indians. In the darkness, of course, he fired at random. But he had seen the redskins crouching down not very far from the fire, and he had noted the spot whence the shots had come, so placed the exact locality of the young sure shots.

Half a dozen shots rang out from his rifle in quick succession, and the Indians were taken aback by the discovery of a foe in a new place, and as they knew nothing of repeating rifles then, they supposed that each shot meant a paleface enemy. At this they turned to stampede, for the shots of the scout, at random though they were, killed a brave and slightly wounded another.

Feeling assured that the Indians would not stand to fight after their surprise, Buffalo Bill left the boy sure shots to work out their own salvation while he

bounded toward the horses to protect them. Grip was at his heels. The scout and the dog were just in time, for several forms were seen running toward the horses to pull up their stake ropes and get away with them.

Being well-bred, Grip was not a noisy dog. He did not bluster and give warning of what he intended to do. He simply did his duty in his quick, quiet way. The redskins were before him, rushing from the timber to the horses. Away he bounded after them.

The scout saw them indistinctly in the darkness, and halting at the edge of the timber he raised his rifle. Then came the report, and that was a death knell to a brave. The others bounded forward the more rapidly. They must reach those horses. But again that fatal repeating rifle sent a messenger of doom upon its way just as there was heard in the timber the rapid rattle of revolvers.

"The boy sure shots are at it," cried Buffalo Bill, and he uttered his wild war cry, so well known by the Indians.

It was answered by the "Texas yell" from the boys, and the flashing of the revolvers in the timber showed that the sure shots were pressing on after the retreating Indians. But the redskins after the horses were still rushing on, when suddenly there rang out a cry of terror, of pain, of horror so wild and terrible that it fairly startled Buffalo Bill for the moment. He was quick to recognize, however, what it was, and as he saw the Indians wheel in their run toward the horses and dash away in a mad stampede, he cried:

"Grip has downed a brave!"

Rapidly he ran toward the spot, where he saw a man writhing upon the ground.

It was a struggle for life, for a brave was in the grip of the dog.

As the scout reached the spot, Grip released his hold and looked up. He seemed to say:

"I've got in some of my fine work, too. Look at him!"

Buffalo Bill did look at him.

The Indian was dead, and the dog was not hurt.

"You are a terror, Grip. I guess that redskin thought the Evil Spirit had him when you sprang upon him."

Then Buffalo Bill gave his wild halloo, and it was promptly answered by the two young sure shots in the timber, while the dog, for the first time, gave vent to a loud, long bark, to show his appreciation of the victory won against odds.

But Buffalo Bill was not yet satisfied. He had seen that the Indians had come from the direction that he had, and when they ran off they had started toward another point to enter the timber.

This convinced him that they had left their ponies somewhere between the two points.

"Come, old dog," he cried, and bounded away toward the timber midway between where he had left it and the Indians had made for in their flight.

Grip was in advance on the run, and as he entered the timber he gave a loud bark.

"I thought so," said Buffalo Bill. "They are there! but I will risk it."

Dashing into the timber, he came upon a small herd of ponies.

There were Indians there, too, trying to cut them loose, mount, and get off with them.

But a cry of agony from one showed that Grip had already got hold of one, and a shot from the scout's revolver brought down another.

Once more he uttered his war cry, just as three of the braves dashed away mounted.

But the remainder of the herd, though plunging with excitement and fright, did not break loose, and remained.

Again did the scout run to call off Grip from his prey. He was too late, for the dog had done his deadly work only too surely.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE FLIGHT.

"Well, Grip, I do not know what to say about you," said Buffalo Bill, as he saw the dog standing over the body of the redskin he had killed.

It was dark there in the timber, but yet the scout could see that there were over a score of ponies there. He called out soothingly to calm them, and then, as they quieted down, shouted:

"Ho, young sure shots, where are you?"

There was a dead silence in the timber toward the camp, and he was sure that the Indians had stampeded in their terror, or they would already have come for their ponies.

Determined to guard the animals at all hazards, he took his stand at the edge of the timber, where he could watch his own horses, and left Grip on duty, near the Indian ponies.

Had the boy sure shots escaped, however, without a wound, or worse still, had either or both of them been killed?

The silence seemed ominous to the scout; but he knew that when certain the redskins had fled far away he could put Grip upon the trail and find the boys, dead or alive—unless they had been captured.

Buffalo Bill knew that in the open, where his horses had been feeding, lay three dead braves, two fallen by his rifle and one killed by the dog. He knew that in the timber among the Indian ponies lay two other redskins dead, one brought down by a bullet, the other dragged to his death by Grip.

Up by the camp others dead were to be found, and if the Indians knew just what the force of palefaces were, would they not risk much to get revenge and recapture their ponies?

The scout felt sure that they would. He was anxious then to collect his forces and get away, if he could do so, as quickly as possible.

Once more he called out to the boys.

To his great relief, there came a quick answer:

"Aye, aye, sir, we are packing up to skip, for they'll be back."

"Either of you hurt?"

"Not to speak of, sir. Are you?"

"No."

"Where is Grip?"

"With me, and he is proud of his work. Bring the camp outfit here, for I'll get the horses, and I have the Indian pony herd, save those who escaped."

"We're coming, sir."

"Those boys know their business," said the scout, as he walked rapidly toward where their horses were staked out.

The three saddle animals were quickly ready, and with the bay were led back to the timber, where the boys had arrived bearing their blankets and camp outfit with them.

They were quickly strapped upon the bay, and Buffalo Bill called out:

"Now we'll be off—hark! They are upon us!"

"Surround the ponies and drive them up the valley, while I meet them with a few shots."

The Indians were returning at a run to get the ponies, not believing they had been found.

Stampeded at first in real fright, they had soon come to the conclusion that there were but three or four white foes, and they halted in their flight, held a pow-wow, and started on the back trail to get revenge and all else that came their way.

As they found the whites were in the timber where their ponies had been left, they held a hasty council and then came on with a rush, just as the boy sure shots drove the herd out into the open and up the valley.

A shower of arrows was fired into the timber as they came on, the most terrific yells were uttered, and the few braves who had firearms discharged them at random.

"Good luck, for all missed me," muttered Buffalo Bill, and, bringing his rifle to his shoulder, he rattled forth shot after shot until seventeen bullets had been sent upon errands of death by the matchless weapon.

Leaping into his saddle then, and uttering his cry of defiance, the scout darted away at full speed.

Grip had gone with his master, and he was found to be a good horse wrangler in turning refractory ponies back into the trail.

The fire of the scout had checked the redskin charge and made them seek shelter behind the trees.

But they beheld Buffalo Bill dash away, and with yells of fury rushed forward once more.

Gaining the edge of the timber, they saw the scout far away, and beyond their reach was the herd of ponies.

They had made their attempt to surprise the camp, had been foiled by the watchful dog sentinel, and, beaten at all points, dismounted, and in a wood range they were left to mourn the death of a number of their comrades and register silent vows for future revenge.

As he caught up with the sure shots driving the ponies, Buffalo Bill said:

"It was the Chief Black Bonnet's band, and they are as bad a lot as their leader; but, all counted, they have lost heavily in the last twenty-four hours, yet will be that much more revengeful.

"Now, for Stocktender Barton's stage station to leave these ponies."

CHAPTER LIV.

A CALL FOR HELP.

Stocktender Barton's stage station was reached before dawn, and he and his comrades were aroused by Buffalo Bill, and the herd of twenty-seven captured ponies were put into the corral.

"Barton, you must mount your best horse and ride for the fort with all speed, for three Indians got away mounted and followed us here beyond a doubt, so have sent word to the others on foot, and you may be sure they are now on our trail. I will send a line by you to the colonel, and my boy sure shots here, your companions, and I will hold the station until help comes."

"All right, Chief Cody, I will be mounted within five minutes," replied Barton, and by the firelight in the stocktender's cabin Buffalo Bill hastily wrote to Colonel Cameron, the commander of the nearest post—River Fort.

Buffalo Bill was attached to no field post at this time, being sent from place to place wherever there was trouble with Indians or outlaws, and so was well acquainted with all the frontier commanders. His letter was as follows:

"To Colonel Cameron, Commanding River Fort.

"SIR: I have to report that Chief Black Bonnet's pretended friendship was a fraud, for he ambushed me with two warriors and would have killed me but for a youth by the name of Ashley, who, with a comrade, is on a mission to the mines.

"Ashley and I killed Black Bonnet and his two braves, then got Buck Dawson and his coach out of trouble with road agents, five of whom were killed, two alone escaping, one being the leader."

"The youths, whom I call my boy sure shots, then took the trail with me, were tracked by Black Bonnet's band of thirty Indians, while in camp."

"We thinned out the number, captured twenty-seven of their ponies, but three escaped mounted, and I feel assured dogged me to where we now are at Barton's stage station, where the dismounted warriors will doubtless attack us by noon, or sooner, perhaps."

"I, therefore, respectfully ask for a cavalry force to come to our aid, and if we are besieged they can hear the firing and corral the whole lot."

"Pardon me if I suggest a larger force being sent northward on a scout, as Black Bonnet's band may have some support."

"I have the honor to be, sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"W. F. Cody."

This letter was sent by Barton, who went off like the wind, to get it to the fort with all speed, though he had a ride of over thirty miles to make.

Having seen that all the horses were safely corralled, and all made ready for an attack, Buffalo Bill and the boys lay down to get much-needed rest, Grip having already set them the example, as he deemed his duty as sentinel at an end.

Jim Barton was left on duty, and, a good plainsman, he scouted around the station, and just as dawn broke saw an Indian on foot skulking back over the trail. He half raised his rifle, but lowered it again with the remark:

"I could plug him, but I'll let him go and report, they don't expect our being ready for them."

"Buffalo Bill is right, though, in saying it is Black Bonnet's band, for that brave had the black feather headdress that chief warriors all wear."

"And yet Chief Black Bonnet passed our station two days ago and told us that he had come to love his white brothers, and Colonel Cameron and his soldiers all believed him, only Buffalo Bill did not, and he was right."

"I tell you he knows about Indians from heel to scalp."

With this tribute to the great scout, Jim Barton retraced his way to the fort, muttering:

"We are going to catch it, and within a few hours."

"I hope George will lead the soldiers back at a run, for somehow I believe Black Bonnet's band have more reds near."

Returning to his station, the stocktender set to work to prepare a good breakfast, allowing the scout and boys to sleep up to the last moment, knowing well they needed it. He was sorry the horses had to be penned up in the corral, but it was better to have them go hungry for a while than to be turned out to feed and be captured.

When Jim Barton at last called his visitors he had breakfast ready, and he told them of his having seen the Indian ride away.

"All right, we'll be ready for them when they come."

"I have had a good rest, a nice breakfast, and feel in fighting mood, and I believe you also do, boy pards."

They said they did, and they certainly looked it.

Then Buffalo Bill took his rifle, and, with a cheering word started out on foot to reconnoiter. He had a consciousness that danger was not far off.

At the station all was ready for the fight, and as the stocktenders were well supplied with arms and ammunition, they could make a good defense against big odds, for the cabin was strongly built, had a flat roof with a breastwork of logs on top, and the corral fence was high and built of heavy timber.

About half an hour after Buffalo Bill's departure he returned quickly and called out:

"We are in for it, pards, for they are coming, and, as I feared, the band of Black Bonnet has been reinforced by half a hundred more braves, and the dismounted gang are riding behind the others.

They have come to get their ponies, and we have got to fight for it, that is all."

"All right, let them come," said Harold Hart, and Len Ashley was feeling the same way and said so.

CHAPTER LV.

THE STAND-OFF.

There was no flinching in the four comrades, who felt that it was to be a bitter fight for them against very heavy odds. Buffalo Bill did not hide the situation, and the two boy sure shots did not show any weakening at what was before them. It was critical, as four men had to fight fourscore braves, and the latter rendered desperate by the loss of their chief and their companions slain the night before. There was

no backing down in the defenders, and Buffalo Bill placed his comrades in the positions he deemed best.

One thing was in their favor, and this was that the Indians did not believe their coming was known.

It was their belief that they would surprise the stocktenders, and recapture their ponies, along with the stage horses there, and get the scalps of the two Barton brothers, whom they knew were in charge. They had tracked their ponies there, and supposed that Buffalo Bill and his two boy pards had left them there and then gone their way.

In this the scout knew that he had the advantage of a surprise for the redskins that would amount to a great deal.

So the Indians dismounted out of sight of the station half of their force, and left the others to follow on horseback.

They crept cautiously forward, and when they got into the open space, free of the timber, saw no sign of the stocktenders.

All seemed quiet there, and the stocktenders were not apparently on the alert.

As they left the timber, some forty in number, and, stooped in form and with light step, approached the stockade, Buffalo Bill and his three companions were watching them, while Grip, unable to see, was anxiously waiting for another chance to show what he could do.

The Indians pressed nearer and nearer, wholly unsuspecting a surprise where they expected to catch the stocktenders off their guard.

To the edge of the timber came the mounted braves,

awaiting to charge when their dismounted force reached the stockade.

Buffalo Bill had the two boys on one side of him and Jim Barton on the other.

All the weapons in the stockade had been brought to that side, ready for use, and there were rifles enough to give each defender a couple.

Then there were half a dozen extra revolvers.

Nearer and nearer came the red line, until but a hundred yards away.

"Pick your men, aim true, and fire!"

With the command of the scout came the flash of the four rifles.

Then followed the louder shotgun barrel of Len Ashley's combined weapon, and with the constant rattle of Buffalo Bill's deadly repeating rifle were heard the reports of the others that had been hastily seized by the defenders.

The result was a terrible surprise to the Indians, and the rain of lead upon them was most demoralizing to one and all, especially as half a dozen fell under the fire and others were wounded.

In their stampede on foot the cry came for the mounted braves to charge, and at once revolvers were turned upon the red horsemen.

But they could not face the fire of the deadly marksmen, and quickly retreated to the cover of the timber.

"They will hold a war talk now, and send for reinforcements, if they have any near.

"Then they will surround us and attack later on every side.

"If help comes from the fort we are all right."

"I hope it will come, Cody," said Jim Barton, but the two boy sure shots said nothing.

Then several hours passed away, and not a redskin was visible all the while.

Noon passed, the defenders had dinner, and then Buffalo Bill called out:

"Each man to his post! See there!"

All saw that the Indians were mounted and coming to the edge of the timber. And more, they were now advancing from every side, while a single glance was sufficient to show that they had been reinforced to more than treble their force.

"It is as I feared, they had help near," coolly said the scout.

"And where is our help?" asked Jim Barton.

"Coming. But be ready, all, for this will be the fight of our lives."

The scout's voice was stern now, and rang like a bugle call. He was nerved for the desperate combat.

With wildest yells, the redskins now rode out of the timber into full view, and Buffalo Bill called out:

"They have found the body of their chief, boys, which we put on the rock, for that fellow on the white horse is wearing his magnificent black war bonnet.

"I will try him at long range, but no one else fire until I give the word."

Then Buffalo Bill ran his eyes along the sights, his rifle cracked, and the chief on the white horse, who had been made leader in place of Black Bonnet, fell from his saddle, amid a demoniacal chorus of yells from the two hundred braves.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE FIRST STEP TAKEN.

The splendid shot of the scout was greeted by cheers by his comrades, and each one nerved himself to face the deadly ordeal.

Their faces were pale, yes, but there was no wavering, and, glancing across the roof at the two youths, Buffalo Bill cried:

"Bravo, my sure shots! You are made of the right stuff, and if you have to die you'll face death gamely."

As the words were uttered the braves set their ponies into a run.

But suddenly, like a burst of thunder from a clear sky, came a deep roar, a whirring sound followed, then a shell burst in the midst of the mass of red horsemen.

They were dazed by the shot, for the shell came from a hill a mile away that looked down upon the stockade station.

A twelve-pounder piece of artillery had been taken there, and gotten into position.

The soldiers had arrived. Barton had done his work well.

Dismayed by the heavy roar of the gun and the shrieking, bursting shell, the Indians knew not which way to turn.

But in the moment of their hesitation there was heard a cheer from a hundred cavalymen, and out of the timber in the direction from whence had come the gun fire dashed two troops, with revolver in one hand, sword in the other.

The First Step Taken.

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There was no resisting that mad charge.

The gun had startled the redskins, and they had been surprised completely.

The charging troopers doubled up their line, spread out in a circle as they were nearing upon the stockade, and they dashed for shelter at mad speed.

Not a shot came from the stockade.

"Don't fire on them now, the poor fellows are whipped," Buffalo Bill had said, and he descended from the cabin roof to meet the officer in command.

"Hello, Cody, glad to find you all right, for I feared we would be too late, and your scouts reported several fairly large trails of redskins moving this way.

"The colonel took your suggestion and sent a large force, and it is well he did, for we have some three hundred Indians to fight. I've got them going now, so will drive them to their villages.

"Who are these good-looking young fellows there?" Major Timpson, the commander of the detachment, nodded toward the two youths.

"I call them my sure shots, major, and they are dandies. They are from Texas, and are up here searching for a friend in the mines. May I introduce them, sir?"

"Certainly, for Barton spoke of them, and I admire their pluck and like their looks."

Harold Hart and Leonard Ashley were called up and presented to the major, who cordially greeted them, and asked them to go with him in the pursuit.

Mounting their horses, and accompanying Buffalo Bill, they were glad to do so, and they had a good

opportunity to see what a cavalry charge of redskins was.

When the soldiers went into camp that night, as Major Timpson had five troops of cavalry and four guns, and could drive all the redskins back to their village, Buffalo Bill decided to leave Texas Jack in charge of his company of scouts, to continue the chase, and return with his boy sure shots to the stage trail to meet Buck Dawson on his run back. He had promised to help Harold Hart discover the fate of his father, and he was anxious to lose no time about it, for he well knew how desirous the youth was, since he had heard Buck's story, to know the truth.

So the trio left the camp the next morning early, and while the soldiers pushed on after the Indians, Buffalo Bill and his boy sure shots went on their way to head off Buck Dawson upon his return.

That night they went into camp just where they had been attacked by the Indian band, and Grip was the guard, as before, only the scout did not expect any trouble then, with the redskins in full flight to their villages.

They had gathered up their dead left there and taken them with them, as is their custom.

The horses were staked out, and, having replenished his supplies from the major's commissary, the scout and his young comrades had a most excellent supper, and were well provisioned for a week ahead.

The next morning, the night having passed without any alarm, they broke camp and rode toward the range to meet the stage.

Buck Dawson was on time, for the rumble of his

coach wheels was heard soon after they reached the scene where Harold Hart had so nearly lost his life at the rope's end.

In a few minutes more the coach came in sight, and, as it drew rein at sight of Buffalo Bill and his pards, Buck Dawson called out:

"You bet yer sweet life, pards, I is glad ter see yer, fer I has got some passengers in the old hearse I wants yer to hold up fer keeps."

At the voice of the driver two heads appeared at each of the coach windows.

CHAPTER LVII.

BUCK DAWSON'S FOUR PASSENGERS.

The words of Buck Dawson were a warning that Buffalo Bill acted upon at once. He knew that the driver had some one in the coach whom he had reason to fear, and he called out in his deep tones:

"Aye, aye, Buck! They are the ones my sure shots and I are after. We'll riddle the coach if they make a muss."

The men had drawn back at sight of Buffalo Bill. Would they submit or fight, was the question.

The scout did not allow them much time to make up their minds, for he cried in a commanding way:

"Sure shots, be ready to fire! If my orders are not obeyed by these men in the coach, I'll give the order to fire, and every man of you turn loose upon them."

"Aye, aye, chief!" called out Harold Hart; "the men have the coach covered, sir!"

At this Buffalo Bill stepped toward the coach, just as a man looked out and said:

"What does this outrage mean, Buffalo Bill, that you, an army officer, are holding up a coach and robbing honest passengers?"

"You have not been robbed to any alarming extent yet, Dud Ross. But come! No nonsense! Come out of that coach mighty quick, and one at a time. Get the lariats ready, Len, to tie these fellows. Do you hear, 'Out with you!'"

The man hesitated, and Buffalo Bill sent a bullet through the top of the coach just above their heads.

Instantly the man called Dud Ross jumped out, to be at once thrown to the ground by the scout, disarmed, and bound.

"Next!"

Another man came out, and was also quickly disarmed and bound.

"Number Three!"

Out came yet another to share a like fate.

"Number Four!"

There was some hesitation, and Buffalo Bill was leveling his revolver when Number Four stepped from the coach. He had a slouch hat pulled down far over his head, a bushy beard, and long hair.

The scout grasped him with no gentle grip, and off came his hat, a wig, and false beard.

"Why, Doc Driggs, it is you? Masquerading, eh?"

There was an exclamation from the two boy sure shots, and Buck Dawson uttered a cry of surprise.

"Well, I know'd they was a bad lot. Yer see, Bill, they tuk passage with me at the last of the mining

camp, and they pretended ter be awful afraid they would be held up and robbed.

"But, yer see, I had my eyes and ears open, and I seen and heard enough ter know they intended ter jump me somewhere on ther trail and git er big lot of yellow metal in ther rough as I has along.

"They know'd about it, yer see, and, though Doc Driggs got away t'other day, and Scotty with him, yer see he begun bad work ag'in mighty quick, and if ther feller yonder ain't Scotty in disguise, I'm lying like a Turk."

The man he pointed to had his beard and hair cut short, wore a changed hat, and suit of clothes, but was none other than Scotty, who had escaped with the outlaw leader.

"Well, Buck, they are safe now, and you can carry them on to the fort, but keep your eyes on them.

"Tell the colonel that I will make a full report to him of what I know of these men when I return to the fort."

"I'll do it, and I does thank you and them boy sure shots of yours fer all yer has done for me."

"Don't mention it, Buck; but keep your eyes open for any straggling redskins, for we have had a big fight with them and they scattered, yet a few may be about."

"Thankee, ag'in.

"But, yer see, I have ther horses yer wanted—the mail rider's; they is thar in the lead."

"And good animals they are. We'll just unharness them and put the boys' in their place."

With this the scout and Buck took the leaders out

of harness, and, having dismounted and stripped their animals of saddles and bridles, the boys led them forward, Len Ashley remarking:

"I don't know whether my horse will work in harness or not, Mr. Dawson."

"I never asks them, boy, for when I slaps ther leather on them they has to go as I wishes."

The two animals, however, took kindly to the harness, and the four prisoners, having been bound securely in the coach, Buck shook hands with Buffalo Bill and his boy sure shots and mounted his box.

"If I gits a load of deviltry to carry in on each run, Bill, we'll soon clean up ther trails of road agents," the driver said, as he gathered up his reins.

With a call to his horses and a whoop, Buck Dawson started up the team, the two new leaders going off well and at a lively pace.

Buffalo Bill and his young friends watched the coach out of sight, and then the scout observed:

"Well, Harold, we have the two horses your father rode the mail trail with, and one of his dogs, and none of them have forgotten it, I feel sure, for animals have lasting memories."

CHAPTER LVIII.

TRAILING THE MYSTERY.

"Now, pards, my plan to trail this mystery of the Midnight Mail Rider," said Buffalo Bill, when the three were in camp. They had had dinner, the horses were staked up, and Grip was doing guard duty.

Both of the boys waited eagerly for the scout to explain what his plan was, which he soon did.

"I happen to know something of the trails taken by the mail rider. He did not stick to one trail, but had several, but all were near each other. Sometimes he would go on one trail, then another, so that he was hard to head off by foes.

"Of course, the horses he rode, and his dogs, knew each one of these trails, and now the two horses and one of his dogs we have here with us.

"We will go to a spot I know of and make a crossing of the mail rider's trails. When we find them all—and I believe there were three, but not more than four—we will take one at a time and follow it from beginning to end.

"This will show us the way, and we'll search along each trail for some clew as to his fate.

"After the long time that has passed it will be no easy task to find clews; but I place great hope in our dumb friends here, and it is well known that the mail rider had his horses and dogs wonderfully trained. Buck Dawson, you know, told us that they were almost broken-hearted when their master disappeared.

"One of the horses, the bay, was with him on his last ride, and his dog Scout never came back.

"The more I think it over the more I am convinced that the mail rider was killed by road agents, and, if so, we will find either his grave or his skeleton by the trail.

"Now we will start on our trailing of this mystery of the Midnight Mail Rider's fate."

The two boys had listened with the deepest atten-

tion, and were convinced that if any one could solve the mystery of Mr. Hart's mysterious disappearance Buffalo Bill was the one to do it.

The start was accordingly made, Buffalo Bill riding the horse which the mail rider had ridden the day he disappeared.

Reaching a valley that cut through several ranges of mountains, Buffalo Bill turned up it, and, after proceeding a few miles, said:

"All the mail rider's trails crossed this valley. I feel certain that when we come to one this horse, or the dog, will turn into it, one way or the other."

He had hardly spoken the words when the horse he rode turned abruptly to the right, just where there was the crossing of a small stream.

The other horse and Grip did the same, though there was no trace of a trail.

"We have found the first trail, lads! Now to follow it!"

When the range was reached there was found a well-marked deer run, leading up the mountainside.

The horse that acted as a guide followed this without hesitation.

Arriving upon the mountaintop, the horse was given the rein, for the deer trail there branched out into a number, as the game had scattered to feed and for water, for a number of little lakes were visible upon the plateau, and about them the grass grew luxuriantly.

The horse ridden by Buffalo Bill stuck to one of the trails running straight across the plateau.

As he reached the other side large bowlders were visible and pines and cedars were plentiful.

Along went the dumb guide, and after a while, although the trail was plainly visible, he turned abruptly off among the bowlders.

Buffalo Bill halted the horse, but he was fretful under restraint, and anxious to go on.

The scout turned him back to the trail, started him once more back over it, but at the same spot he turned off again.

The other horse and Grip were tried, but they stuck to the trail.

"What does it mean?" asked Harold.

"I do not know," Len answered, but the scout made no reply; he was deeply thinking.

At last he said:

"Boys, this is the horse ridden by Mr. Hart on his last ride. I shall let him lead the way. I am certain he knows what he is about. See how nervous he is, and, as I said before, animals have good memories."

Mounting again, the scout allowed the bay to go on as he pleased among the bowlders.

After a quarter of a mile the horse halted, when his rider at once dismounted and looked about him for signs.

The boys did the same.

Suddenly the scout spoke:

"See there, boys! It is a broken revolver; and, yes, it is all rusted and has been lying there for a long time."

The scout picked it up, and saw that the butt had been shattered by a bullet and the hammer was broken off, but there were two loads yet remaining in the weapon.

As they were examining the little gun they were startled by Grip's long-drawn-out howl.

The dog had strayed off a short distance from the spot, and, hastening toward him they found him gazing eagerly at the ground.

As they approached him he raised his head and gave another dismal howl.

"Boys, Grip has made some important discovery," said Buffalo Bill, and as he searched the spot where the dog stood he beheld a well-like hole in the rocks, looking down into some dark recess below!

CHAPTER LIX.

TOLD BY THE DEAD.

The hole in the rocks was barely large enough to admit of a man's form, but Buffalo Bill said:

"Here will the story be told, pards. The bay horse has been a most faithful guide, and he knows what happened here. See, he is no longer nervous now!"

The horse stood quietly by, with the others, but the dog seemed wild to get down into the cavern, if such it was.

"We'll lower him, pards," Buffalo Bill decided.

A blanket was taken, lariats attached to the corners, and Grip was placed in it. He made no resistance, and was lowered into the opening.

The distance down was some twenty-five feet.

The moment the blanket touched bottom the dog sprang out.

Instantly the blanket was drawn up, while Grip began to bark, whine, and howl alternately.

"He has made a discovery. I will go down now."

"No, Mr. Cody, you are too large, I fear. Let me go!" urged Harold.

"I guess you are right, Harold; but, with the dog there, it is all right. Leave your belt of arms, so you can squeeze through better."

This the youth did, and Buffalo Bill instructed:

"Make your lariat fast to that tree and slip down, while I cut you some pine-knot splinters for a torch."

When Buffalo Bill came back with a handful of pine-knot splinters he found that Harold had slipped down the lariat and was in the darkness below, while Leonard Ashley was just preparing to follow him, having also laid his belt of arms aside.

"Here, Len, take these splints with you, and light them as soon as you get down into the cavern."

Then Len Ashley swung himself upon the lariat, and, after a slight effort, got through the crevice in the rocks.

Down he went, and, lying flat down, the scout peered over. He saw a match lighted, the pine torch caught, and in the bright glare he gazed upon a strange sight.

Buffalo Bill beheld the two boy sure shots, the dog, a skeleton, and some leather mail bags.

Grip was silent now, standing by the side of his young master, and there, on the rocky floor, lay the skeleton form of a man.

At his feet lay his rifle, and in a dark corner was another skeleton—that of a dog.

There, also, were two leather mail bags, still bearing the U. S. locks unbroken, but in each a slit had

been cut with a sharp knife, and the contents taken out.

Upon the floor, scattered about, were a few letters, all torn open. Many of them had contained money, beyond a doubt.

Harold Hart knelt by the side of the skeleton form, and he knew now that there was no doubt; it was all that remained of his father.

Upon the left little finger, around the bone, was a ring the youth well knew, and there were other marks of identification.

"I am too late," the youth said, in a choking voice. Then his eyes fell upon a package of letters in one of the bony hands. He grasped them, and a pencil fell from the hand also.

Upon the envelope of each had been written, in an unsteady hand, with lead pencil, what was evidently the story of a dying man.

Each envelope was numbered, and the boy read, by the light of the torch:

"If my body is ever found, know that it is all that remains of Harold Hart, of Texas, now known as the Midnight Mail Rider of the mines. I was attacked upon my ride by road agents, led by a masked chief, whom I did not know, but among his band I recognized men known as Doc Driggs, Scotty, Sam Bird, and others. They shot me because I resisted and killed two of the gang; and, believing me dead, they threw me into this cavern, along with my faithful dog, my rifle, and the mail bags, which they robbed of all in them of value. I write this, knowing that death is near, and the one who finds my remains will convey a lasting favor by sending the news of my sad end to

my son, Harold Hart, junior, Sunset Ranch, via San Antonio, Texas. I can write no more.

"HAROLD HART."

Holding out the last of the envelopes read, the one with the signature upon it, Harold called out to the scout, looking down through the crevice:

"Mr. Cody, the fate of my father is told here by his own dead hand!"

CHAPTER LX.

CONCLUSION.

The mystery was solved. The Midnight Mail Rider's fate was told by his own hand, having written the story with pencil upon the backs of the envelopes, the contents of which had been rifled by the road agents. The names, also, of the robbers had been revealed, one, Sam Bird, having met his fate at the hand of Len Ashley.

But Doc Driggs and Scotty were still alive, and had gone on to the fort in Buck Dawson's coach, bound hands and feet, as prisoners.

They would be safe when wanted.

The skeleton form of the mail rider and that of his faithful dog were taken up tenderly, and placed in the blanket, which Buffalo Bill drew up out of the cavern.

The mail bags also were taken, for they were to be sent to the United States Mail Department, to show that Harold Hart had been true to his trust, and had not been false, as many had assumed.

Conclusion

The rifle and other things found in the cavern were also drawn up by the scout, and then the dog, after which the two youths followed.

Down the mountainside, to a pretty spot upon the banks of a small stream the remains of the mail rider were borne, and there, going into camp, a grave was dug, a coffin of poles was made, and the much-wronged man was laid at rest, his dutiful son reciting over him the service of the dead.

That night the three pards spent in the little camp near the grave, and the next morning the trail was taken up for the fort.

The horses were given their time, and a camp was made on the way; but they arrived the next morning to find that Major Timpson had come in, after a most successful chase of the Indians.

THE END.

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