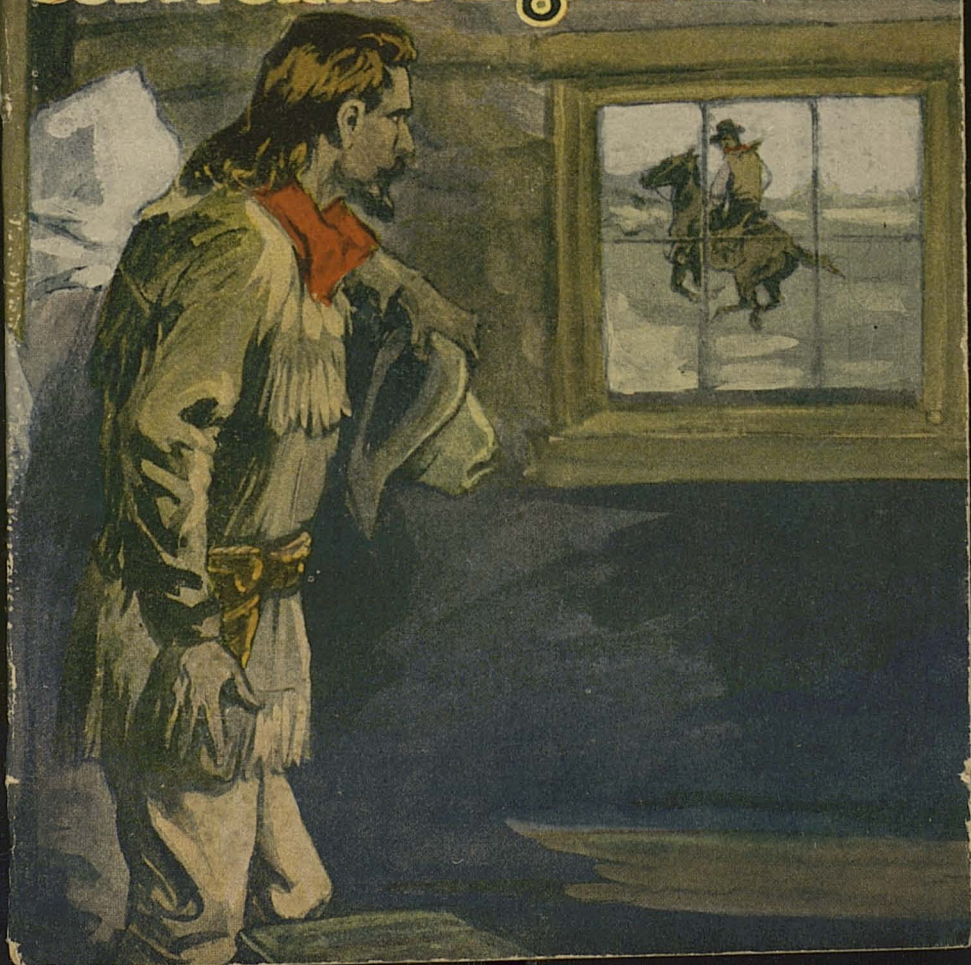


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Col. Prentiss Ingraham



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To Be Published in January, 1924.

- 178—Buffalo Bill's Worst Tangle....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
179—Buffalo Bill's Clean Sweep....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To Be Published in February, 1924.

- 180—Buffalo Bill's Texas Tangle....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
181—Buffalo Bill and the Nihilists..By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To Be Published in March, 1924.

- 182—Buffalo Bill's Emigrant Trail..By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
183—Buffalo Bill at Close Quarters..By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To Be Published in April, 1924.

- 184—Buffalo Bill and the Cattle Thieves,
By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
185—Buffalo Bill at Cimarron Bar..By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
186—Buffalo Bill's Ingenuity.....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To Be Published in May, 1924.

- 187—Buffalo Bill on a Cold Trail....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
188—Buffalo Bill's Red Hot Totem..By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To Be Published in June, 1924.

- 189—Buffalo Bill Under a War Cloud,
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190—Buffalo Bill and the Prophet..By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

Buffalo Bill and the Klan of Kau

OR,

OLD PORCUPINE'S GRAND FINISH

BY

Colonel Prentiss Ingraham

Author of the celebrated "Buffalo Bill" stories published in the
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Buffalo Bill and the Klan of Kau

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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 Federci, 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. Heckscher. In entertaining these visitors at Fort McPherson, Cody was accustomed to arrange wild-West exhibitions. In return his friends invited him to visit New York. It was upon seeing his first play in the metropolis that Cody conceived the idea of going into the show business.

Assisted by Ned Buntline, novelist, and Colonel Ingraham, he started his "Wild West" show, which later developed and expanded into "A Congress of the 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 THE KLAN OF KAU.

CHAPTER I.

THE UNSEEN FOE.

Nick Nomad rode into the mystery of the Klan of Kan on the hurricane deck of a house, but he didn't know it until afterward.

He had been investigating an unoccupied cabin, two miles above, when the flood water struck, knocked the pole-and-mud cabin into smithereens, and sent the old borderman adrift down the raging Perdidas on a section of the cabin roof.

On the high bank, as he was whirled downward, he heard the whinny of Hide-rack, his horse, and the clumping of hoofs, showing apparently that Hide-rack had witnessed the disaster and was sending his rain-soaked body along in pursuit of his master.

Rain! How it did rain, for about fifteen or twenty minutes!

"Yit," muttered Nomad, as he clung to the clumsy raft that bounced him along, "et kain't be er sarcum-stance ter ther way et must er rained some'eres west o' hyar, jedgin' by ther way this crick is h'istin' etself."

At the end of fifteen or twenty minutes, when the storm wrack broke asunder, Nomad beheld ahead of him a pole-and-brush wikiup, on the right bank of the stream.

Anything in the shape of a shelter looked good to Nomad, just then.

"Ef I go on," he thought, "I'm goin' ter bu'st right through ther middle of some mighty bad falls I'm

knowin' of, a mile er two below, an' how I'll come out thar ain't two ways o' guessin'—et will be in pieces. So ef I c'd h'ist a line ter one o' them wabblin' willers, I'd try er pull myself ashore, thar whar thar river bends."

Just in front of the wikiup the river shot to the right, in an elbow bend, where the willows grew. All but their tops were under water, which rose to within a foot or two of the wikiup.

Nomad loosed the wet rope at his belt, while sizing up the situation. As the roof raft drove into the bend, he stood up, the rope in his right hand.

"Grass has been tromped down, t'other side o' thet house; so mebbly some un is occypin' et," he muttered.

He sent a yell to the shore as he braced for the throw of the rope.

Old Nomad's yell, made up of Indian war whoop, scream of wild cat, and the growl of a grizzly, was famous, and a fearful thing to hear. He put all his breath into it now, and hurled it at the bank with the force of a thunderclap.

When no one appeared in answer to that wild cry, he braced himself again, with the rope lightly swinging, and shot it at the willows as the bit of roof sucked into the bend and made its turn to go out again.

It was a cast worthy of the lariat-throwing abilities of Pawnee Bill. The noose settled over the outthrust limb of a willow, and was drawn tight with a jerk.

Nomad, clinging to the rope, sprang into the flood as the roof swung on under propulsion of the torrent. The next moment he was over his head, for the water was deep.

"Whoosh!"

He blew out the muddy flood water that had choked

him, as he came to the surface. Then he began to swim, hampered by his clothing, the rifle strapped to his back, and the heavy revolvers, cartridge belt, hatchet, and knife that sagged downward at his waist line. Though armored like a cruiser, he had been unwilling to throw away any of his armament.

The weight pulled him under again, but, as he clung fast to the rope, the current swung him downstream, and round until it brought him close to the shore.

Here he made a final frantic effort, and got ground under his feet, with the line still in his hands.

"Whoosh!" he exploded again, as he waded and splashed ashore. "Tork erbout yer tork-about! I feels wetter'n a muss-rat and meaner'n a wart hawg."

He pulled himself up on the bank.

"Now, why couldn't this hyar bend an' this hyar wikiup been on t'other side er ther crick, stead o' this side?" he grumbled. "Ole Hide-rack is over thar, an' I'm over hyar. An' how we're ter connect ontel the river goes down gits me."

He turned to the shelter of poles and brush.

"Wah-hoo!" he squalled. "Is anybody ter home? Don't all tork at onc't!"

Dripping streams of muddy water at every step, he made his way to the house, when no one appeared in answer to his call.

"All ther folkses erway, ther cat extinguished, an' ther dawg killed—frum ther looks!" he muttered. "Waal, in this hyar kentry ther latch string is gin'rally out; ef't ain't, I'll kick ther door in."

He peered through the one little window as he passed it, went on to the heavy homemade door, and rapped.

"Wake up—ef ye're thar. Ef ye ain't, say so. I'm drowned."

There was no answer.

"Ain't no name plate on ther door," he muttered,

standing back and looking at the wikiup shanty. "Waal, I ain't goin' ter leave no card an' depart in peace; I'm goin' inside, whar I can build a fire, and git some o' this hyar ice water out er my blood. Br-r-r!"

He shivered as the cold wind from the mountains struck through his soaked clothing.

When the door latch did not yield to his fingers he catapulted against it, and forced it.

This precipitated him into a small dark room. The opening of the door let in enough light to enable him to see on one side a fireplace that belonged to the mud-and-stick chimney he had seen outside, and a hole in the ceiling of poles, indicating that a cubby-hole garret was above.

There was wood by the fire, and kindlings, and on a nail over them a tin box holding a few matches. There had recently been a fire in the fireplace, for when he put on some of the kindling he discovered that the ashes were warm.

Then he made another discovery that rather astonished him. Near the door was a moccasin track outlined in dried mud.

"Wow!" he breathed, blinking at it. "I has, et seems, butted inter ther home of a red. I reckon ther comin' o' 'thet flood skeered him, and he cut an' run, along wi' his squaw and papooses."

He looked round the little room, which was almost without furniture. There was a log, adzed off on one side, which stood up on clumsy pegs, like a rude sawhorse, and had apparently been used for a table, as appeared from the fact that there were grease spots on it, and a shred of old meat.

In a corner of the room was a stool, of similar manufacture.

"Looks like old Mr. Ki-yi, ef he hed a fambly, occypied ther seat o' honor himself, an' let ther squaw

an' children set round on ther floor. Ef thar war any beds, he kerried 'em off with him. Waal, I ain't no call ter worrit my brains erbout thet. I got ter git a fire ter goin' and thaw out."

He built the fire carefully, and soon had a roaring blaze leaping up the big chimney.

Removing some of his clothing, he laid the garments over the stool and the log table, which he dragged before the fire for the purpose. Then he took off his water-filled boots, poured the water out of them as he stood in the door, and, looking across the stream, saw on the other side his faithful horse.

"Whoop!" he yelled to Hide-rack. "You an' me has parted comp'ny, seems like. Come on in, ther wor-ter's fine."

Hide-rack whinnied and raced up and down the bank, but he had no notion of trying the water.

"Waal, ye'll jes' haf ter stay over thar then, fer I ain't no swimmer like thet."

Nomad turned back into the house, making his way to the fire.

As he did so a stunning blow fell on his head, and he sank to the floor with a groan.

He had seen no man, heard no man.

CHAPTER II.

A SINISTER WARNING.

Into the camp of the border pards old Hide-rack bore Nick Nomad.

The trapper's hands were bound together behind his back, his legs were tied under the horse's belly, and a rope round his middle helped to hold him in the saddle. In addition, he was gagged.

On his breast was pinned a large placard, signed with the staring signature, "The Klan of Kan." Above the signature was a warning, written in big letters, denouncing Buffalo Bill and his pards for being meddling interlopers, and threatening them with death if they did not depart from the country.

The Klan of Kan had sent old Nomad in, tied and gagged, with that warning pinned to his breast.

As he came thus into the camp, the borderman's eyes seemed starting from his head.

In the camp were the scout pards, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill, with Baron Schnitzenhauser and Little Cayuse. All sprang up and rushed to Nomad's aid as soon as they saw him.

"Up against it hard, eh?" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, as he and Pawnee got busy with their knives and cut away the cords.

Not until afterward did they observe that it was Nomad's lariat that they had been hacking to pieces.

Nomad fell over into the arms of Buffalo Bill as soon as the rope holding him in the saddle was cut. His strength, which had enabled him to sit up, gave way with the snapping of the rope strands.

Pawnee jerked open a blanket roll and flung the

blankets open, as the strong arms of the scout bore the trapper toward it.

The baron waddled along, trying to aid, while he filled the air with German expletives.

Little Cayuse took charge of Hide-rack, and, incidentally, made a close examination of the rope and gag, and of the saddle and bridle. He was looking for clews. The horse and its belongings, even Nomad, showed indications of having been in mud and water.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "Plenty bad hombre—plenty bad tinhorn, make um trouble for Nomad."

He picketed Hide-rack where the grazing was good, with the other horses; then the Piute returned and re-inspected the saddle, bridle, and lariat.

Pawnee took a bottle of liquor out of a pack, and pressed it to the lips of the panting borderman.

They bathed his head, and chafed his arms and wrists.

"The villains who did this trick, necarnis, will need looking after," growled Pawnee.

"That's right, pard," assented the scout.

"From der lookings, oof mudt unt der likes," grunted the baron, "he got caught in dot storm. Yiminy! His clodings iss muddy."

"Perhaps the scamps who fell afoul of him," Pawnee guessed, "rastled him round some, in a lively fight. But the queer thing, necarnis, is that he brought all his weapons in with him."

Buffalo Bill looked at the big placard that had been on the bosom of the borderman.

"WARNING.

"This is to notify you and your friends to git out of the country quick, or suffer the consequences. We mean this, and will git busy if you don't.

(Signed)

"THE KLAN OF KAN."

"A lot of low-down, cowardly ruffians did this," said the scout, scowling at the writing. "Well, they can proceed to get busy."

"Some others are going to get busy, too," said Pawnee significantly.

Nomad coughed, and breathed more heavily.

"Have a little more of this wine of life," said Pawnee, lifting the liquor bottle.

With a violent motion Nomad pushed it away.

"No!" he broke out. "I don't want et—I want er tork."

"Old Diamond, we're anxious to hear you. This is a singular——"

"Wow! Waugh! Waugh-h!"

"Now you're getting better."

"What time er day is et?"

"About two o'clock."

"An' thet flood in ther Perdidass struck, when?"

"About nine this morning. It caught you? We rode over that way, when it broke, and that was the wildest river I've set eyes on in some days. It was a corker of a flood."

"Et c'ot me."

"You sure look it, Nomad," said the scout.

Nomad thrashed about until he was able to sit up-right, caught his breath with a gasp, shot out a few anathemas, then wobbled on, trying to tell what had befallen him.

"I war pokin' 'long thet crick, jes' afore thet flood come roarin' down et, and went inter a leetle cabin I found up thar, ter look round. Warn't nobuddy in et. But looked like ther had been lately; and as we war investigatin' gin'rally, I takes thet look."

He spat out a few more expletives, coughed again, as if trying to clear his throat of river mud, but really because the pain of the gag still troubled him.

"Waugh! Waal, what I has been through is ther limit. Look on top er my head, will yer, an' see ef 't's all thar."

Taking off his cap, they looked, and saw an ugly, bloody lump.

"You were struck——"

"Waugh! Don't I know et? Et war after I rid down ther crick on ther roof o' ther cabin. Flood busted ther cabin into logs and splinters, tore ther roof ter pieces, and I went travelin' down thet flood worter on one er ther pieces."

He scratched his head, which began to itch when Buffalo Bill emptied some of the whisky on it.

"Thet war some of a v'yage, I'm tellin' yer," Nomad declared. "Sometimes I war travelin' sideways, an sometimes hind-end on, an' sometimes I war jes' spinnin' round an round, like er worter bug. Whoosh!"

"But what struck you on the head? Some member of this Klan of Kan?"

"I'm gittin' ter et."

He stopped again, breathed heavily, and glared round as if he ached to put his fingers on his foes.

"Bumby I see er sort of a wikiup, or pole cabin, er leetle house er thet kind, settin' off on ther right bank, with a lot o' drowned willers flappin' in ther worter in front of et. I roped one er them willers, and in thet way got ashore.

"Now you jes' listen ter this what I'm goin' ter tell ye. Thar warn't anybody in thet wikiup. I busted in ther door, fer I was half froze, and went in an' started er fire, thar bein' wood and matches in thar. When ther fire war goin' good, I pulled off my boots, hung my coat on suthin'; and then went ter ther door, ter turn ther worter out er ther boots. Aire ye listenin'?"

"Everybody is listening," said Buffalo Bill.

It was true; even Little Cayuse had joined the group round the old trapper.

"Recklect thet no one war in thet leetle house! Et had no furn'cher wuth speakin' erbout. Thar war er big fireplace thet ther fire war goin' in. In ther middle o' ther ceilin' war er hole leadin' ter er garret; an' I seen on ther floor by ther door ther muddy track of er moccasin. As I turned ther worter out er them boots I seen ole Hide-rack on t'other side o' ther crick; ther critter had follered me downstream. He seen me, and nickered back when I hollered ter him. Then when I sot out to go back ter ther fire, ther top o' my head war caved in, and right then an' thar I stopped knowin' anything—ontil a leetle while ergo."

"The Indian who made that track," said Pawnee, "came in at the door as you turned away from it and dropped you one on the coco."

"Mebbyso."

"Go on, Nomad," urged the scout.

"Waal, thet's erbout all. A while ergo, when mebbby I'm a mile or more from this hyar place, I comes back ter myself. I am then settin' on old Hide-rack, jes' as yer found me."

"You brought in a warning note that had been pinned to your shirt—warning us to get out of the country or take the consequences, said note being signed by The Klan of Kan," explained Pawnee.

"Which," said the baron, "soundts kveer, oof idt vos put dare by an Inchun."

"Quar as anything," added Nomad, "is thet when I went off ther hooks I war in thet wikiup, on one side er thet flood, an' Hide-rack on t'other. Another thing, when I got thet love tap on my think-shop I didn't have no boots on, seein' that I war kerryin' 'em in my hands; an' I didn't have no coat on. And I didn't have no revolvers, er knives, er ca'tridge belt, an' no

rifle; fer I had piled them all down on ther floor. When I come ter myself I war tied up tight, wi' my boots and coat on, an' all my hardware in ets proper place. Thet's what gits me. And I'm beginnin' ter wonder now ef I hain't been a leetle out in my head lately."

"The whole thing," remarked Buffalo Bill, "seems clear enough, though a bit unusual."

"Whoosh! Waal, I sh'd say so."

"There were outlaws, and perhaps Indians, hiding in or close by that house, when you went in. One of them dropped you with a crack on the head. They didn't care to kill you; they preferred to send that warning to us, and have you bring it, with your condition to emphasize the fact that they mean business. So they put you across the river, with a boat, perhaps; put your boots on you, and your coat, and your weapons; then tied you to the horse, with a gag in your mouth; and sent the horse in this direction. Old Hide-rack did the rest; he brought you in, as he could be expected to do, seeing that you left the camp on his back this morning."

"Ther way yer eloocidates et, Buffler, makes et seem plum' plain."

"Dhis Klan oof Kan, who iss idt?" asked the baron.

"Ask us something easier, Schnitz, as there seems to be a good many answers to that."

"Eenyhow," said the baron philosophically, "idt iss look like some exciting pitzness iss coming ower vay, unt dot suidts me."

"Ef yer follers ther trail I has been over, baron," remarked Nomad, "you'll soon be torkin' out o' the t'other corner o' yer mouth."

"You haf got enough, huh? Vale, you can sday py der camp in, vhide me unt der odder vellers iss——"

"Stay nothin'!" Nomad blurted. "When we hits

ther trail o' uner critter thet opened my head, I'm goin' ter be leadin'. You hear me!"

"Hoob-a-la!" The baron straightened up. "Cody, oof ve do somet'ing pefore der darkness iss seddle town, ve haf got to be adt idt, yaw!"

The scout asked the borderman more questions, and had him repeat slowly, and with much detail, the entire story of his adventures.

"I didn't know thet cabin ner thet wikiup war thar," Nomad confessed. "But thar aire Utes in this kentry, an' I'm figgerin' thet moccasin track on the floor war made by er Ute. But thar aire also more tin-horns an' outlaws in an' er-round Silver Bow than honest men."

Nomad was offered food, when he felt able to eat. Slowly his strength was returning, and with it his fighting courage, which had been shaken by his rude experience. He was getting his ire up, too, and that was ominous for his enemies.

"We war on our way ter Silver Bow," he said, as he tucked food under his belt, and washed it down with generous gulps of hot coffee, "when we stuck down our camp hyar; er call havin' come from thar fer Buffer, on account of tin-horns and road agents being that noomerous an' buzy thet 'tain't no longer healthy fer a honest man ter sleep outdoors er hit a trail. Bein' also thar war a call on account o' s'picion p'intin' fingers at certain whisky-guzzlin' Utes.

"So I ambles out on Hide-rack, inhalin' ther pure mounting air, while sniffin' round fer anything thet might set us wise, an' I strikes this streak o' adventoor, endin' up wi' er head clubbin' thet cuts all my idees adrift, an' brings me up hyar, not knowin' much of anything whatever. Now, et is plum' cl'ar ter me thet nobody ain't goin' to pound in my headpiece without er reason, which I has sense ernough ter know

before I brings in thet writin' identifyin' ther men what has done it. But—who is ther Klan o' Kan?"

"Idt iss der kvestion vot I haf asked already yedt," reminded the baron.

"An' nobuddy ain't answered et?"

"I haf myselluf, but nopody else he ain'dt. Idt iss Injuns, or oudtlaws; meypso bot' oof 'em togedder, or some oof each. Der oudtlaws iss in der down, unt der Inchuns iss outside oof der down, unt——"

"Waal, thet don't git anywhar, does et?" the borderman snarled, being in a mood of irritation; and the baron subsided.

"As soon as you are able to travel and guide us," said the scout, "we will visit that wikiup, and see what we can find out there."

"Whoop! I'm ready now," Nomad cried.

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERIOUS UTE.

Much as old Nomad desired to go, when Buffalo Bill set out with Pawnee and the baron, he was left at the camp, in the care of the Piute, who could always be depended on to do guard duty right up to the limit, and was a good nurse and attendant as well.

They back-tracked the trail of the borderman's horse, and, without difficulty, found the wikiup, on the other side of the Perdidas. That roaring mountain stream had disgorged its flood water, but was still swift enough, and sufficiently turbulent to try the strength of the strongest swimmer, human or animal. Nevertheless, the scout pards and the baron swam their animals across it, some distance above the makeshift of a house, and descended on the flimsy structure from that direction.

Before they reached it they were made aware that it now had occupants, whatever may have been the case before. They heard a dog bark, followed by guttural voices, which ordered the dog to keep still.

"Utes!" said the scout, as he drew rein and listened.

"Idt iss a skinch dot ve are going to findt at der house der vellers vot haf giv' Nomadt dot head-aches," breathed the baron, standing up in his stirrups on the back of Toofer, his mule, as he strained his eyes to see the little house; "unt oof ve do——"

The dog barked again, and once more Indian voices shouted at the animal.

"Vot iss?" queried the baron, looking at Buffalo Bill. "Do ve fight mit brafery, or do ve make des sneaks?"

"We'll not charge in where bullets may be flying, and heroes would fear to tread, until we know first what we are charging," said Pawnee, amused by the baron's enthusiasm for a fight.

Buffalo Bill slid from the back of Bear Paw and tossed his reins to Pawnee Bill.

"Stay here a minute," he directed.

He was quickly out of sight, keeping bowlders and bushes between him and the house, which he had not yet seen on that side of the stream.

In a few minutes he came back.

"A lot of shiftless Utes, apparently," he reported. "We'll just ride down there and ask some questions."

On the back of Bear Paw he led the way, and they arrived quickly before the wikiup. The dog barked at them, and then a man and a young woman came to the door.

The man was old enough to show a wonderful head of gray hair, thick and coarse as a horse's mane, which fell into his eyes, and was tossed back by him as he stared with wrinkling visage at his visitors.

The young woman was lithe and comely, really a superb young creature, but for the fact that she was muffled in a blanket, and her face showed streaks and stripes of paint, applied with Indian lavishness.

Behind them were some Indian children, another man and a squaw or two, and still another dog, which gave tongue on beholding the horsemen.

"How!" cried the scout, lifting his hand as a token of amity.

"How!" responded the old Indian. "White man lose way, huh?"

"We didn't lose our way," the scout answered. "We swam our horses across the river above here, and rode down, to see who was in this house."

"Me here—all same old Porcupine." The Indian

replied, grinning amiably. "This my gal." His hand fell on the shoulder of the young woman. "Back there other Injun."

He kicked at the dogs and scolded them away.

"We not see very many white men here," said the young woman; "too far from town."

"How many miles is it to Silver Bow?" asked Pawnee Bill.

"Ten, if you walk; five if you ride," said the girl. "You go by Silver Bow?"

"Do you live here?" the scout questioned.

"Ai. We live here, when we are here," said Porcupine; "when we are away, we live somewhere in the other place."

"Were you here this forenoon?"

Porcupine shaded his eyes with his hands and stared at the scout before answering; then, when he was about to speak, the girl interjected something in Ute which the scouts did not get.

"No," he said, shaking his head, after he had apparently taken time to think, "we not here this mornin'."

Buffalo Bill brought out the warning placard taken from the bosom of old Nomad, and held it up for their inspection. They stared when they beheld it.

"Where you git?" asked old Porcupine.

"Did you ever see this before?"

"Not me—no."

"It is writing" said the young woman; "I can read writing—yes."

"Read it," said the scout, fixing his eyes on her.

She spelled it through.

"What do you know about the Klan of Kan?" he queried.

She shook her head.

"Me no know anything."

"Did you see any white men round here this morning—about the time that flood came down?"

"No see um," said old Porcupine.

"You'll be willing to let us look through the house?"

At that the Indian frowned and seemed displeased.

"Why for look house?" he demanded suspiciously.

"I'll tell you," said the scout. "We had a pard who came down the river on a raft, in that flood. He stopped here, went inside, built a fire, and was drying his clothes, when some one knocked him on the head. That's what we want to look for. Maybe we can find something in there that will help us to fix the blame for that."

"No can look," said the Indian, frowning.

"Then, why not? We'll not hurt anything, or any of your people."

"No can look."

The girl studied the faces of the horsemen; then she turned to the old Indian, and whispered something in his ear.

"Yes, can look," he said, changing instantly.

The pard scouts dismounted and went inside, leaving the horses in charge of the baron at the door.

The Indian and the young woman followed them inside, and stared at them as they began to glance round the single room.

"Nothing in here to show who did it, Pard Bill," Pawnee grumbled.

The track of the moccasin seen near the door by Nomad was no longer there. The room was littered with blankets, a few furs and skins, and a quantity of other bedding and camping material. In the fireplace a fire was burning, and on it was a black pot and a stewpan, in which food was cooking. That was about all the scouts saw, in addition to the inmates, already mentioned.

"If you don't object," said Buffalo Bill, "I'd like to climb into that place up there."

He pointed to the hole in the ceiling.

The old Indian and the girl looked at each other.

"Very good," she said, as if she had received permission from the Indian to make this answer; "nothin' up there."

So the scout found it, when he had been hoisted on the shoulders of Pawnee Bill to the hole, and had crawled into the dark and unattractive upper room, which lay close against the mud-and-pole roof.

"Nothing doing," he said, as he slid down out of the hole, planted his boots on Pawnee's broad shoulders, and sprang down into the room.

"Nothing up there; no hole that would let one get onto the roof?"

"Not a thing."

"Still, that club wielder could have been hiding up there and dropped down on Nomad."

"It is possible."

Thanking the Indian for the permission which he had given them, they went outside.

"Vot iss der outdcome?" the baron inquired.

"Not a thing," said Pawnee.

"Rightt down dare iss dracks, leading to der rifer py," the baron reported. "I can seen dhem from here."

They found them—moccasin tracks—and followed them to the river. There they saw where a boat had been launched—undoubtedly the boat in which Nomad had been taken over; but the boat itself they could not see.

"Right across there," said Pawnee, pointing, "is where the boat touched on that side."

"Moccasin tracks there, too," said the scout. "When

we cross we'll have to take a look at them. But what do you think?"

"I've stopped thinking."

"There are two possible conclusions."

"That's easy. Either the Indians did it, or they didn't."

"Either that Indian did it, or some one tried to lay it at his door."

The scout pointed to the moccasin tracks.

"There are several tracks coming and going, but they were all made by one man."

"Right-o. I didn't notice that, at first," Pawnee admitted.

"No doubt we'll find the same state of affairs on the other side. An attempt has been made, not to hide the tracks, but to make them look as if a number of Indians had been here. We might get some other ideas if we could find the boat. Now, I'm going back to take a look at that old redskin's moccasins."

"By the way, necarnis, how does that girl strike you?"

"The old man said she was his daughter?"

"I think she is a half-breed. For one thing, her eyes are not dark enough, nor snappy enough, for those of a genuine red. Take a look at them when you go back."

"Vot dit you seen now?" the baren demanded, when they had returned to the house.

"Tracks," said Pawnee—"moccasin tracks, and the imprints of the prow of a boat."

Buffalo Bill went on into the house, looked at the eyes of the young woman, with a glance that seemed to shoot over her head, then turned to the moccasins of old Porcupine.

"About the right size," he thought; "and those

tracks out there seem to have been made by an Indian; they toe in, after the ki-yi fashion."

"There are tracks down by the river that I'd like you to look at," he said to the Indian.

The latter turned to the girl, for advice, or a translation.

"Tracks," she repeated; "he says there are tracks by the river, that he wants you to look at."

Staring at Buffalo Bill suspiciously, old Porcupine was seen to hesitate.

"For why?" he demanded.

"I want to see if your moccasins fit them," the scout answered bluntly.

One of the squaws voiced a warning, which the scout caught. But the girl urged old Porcupine to let the white man see. And when he went out with the scout she accompanied him down to the margin of the stream.

"There are the tracks," said the scout. "My pard, whom I told you about, was brought out of your house to this spot; then he was put into a boat and taken across. You can see where the boat touched."

The girl's gray eyes flamed.

"You are think that Porcupine did that!" she cried. "No!"

"Let him step in that track, and see if it fits; that's all," said the scout.

"You want take Porcupine to jail," she murmured.

"We are simply trying to find out who it was struck our pard on the head when he was in that house; and we intend to do it. We are not charging this Indian with anything. But if he wants to seem fair and honest he won't hesitate to put his moccasin in that track."

The Indian looked at the girl, hesitating.

"Better you do," she advised.

When he set his moccasin in the track indicated, it was seen to fit the imprint exactly.

"But, see," said the girl, as if a thought struck her; "he have left this moccasin here in the house, while he is gone. Somebody maybe else they took it. Is it not?"

Old Porcupine was plainly confused by this damaging evidence.

"You don't know any white man here who could have done this—come here while Porcupine was gone, put on his moccasins, and then struck our pard?"

The girl spoke to old Porcupine.

"The old white man on the mountain," she said, turning to the scouts. "You have him seen?"

"No; we don't know anything about him. Where does he live?"

She pointed.

"Off there. Been not long time; live now in old house, where was the miner last year. Him what you call—old hermit? Live by himself—dig in the ground, git roots, git berries, git tree bark—sell in Silver Bow."

"That doesn't look promising," said the scout; "but we'll investigate this old hermit. What's his name?"

She said something in Ute to the old man, in a low tone.

"Old White Hair," she reported.

"Me no like um!" declared Porcupine, with a scowl. "Very bad white man."

"Porcupine thinks the old white man kills children and sells um to drug-store men in Silver Bow," she explained.

"But that's nonsense," said the scout.

"Him no good," said the Ute, with a black scowl.

"No love lost there, necarnis," said Pawnee; "which

makes it barely possible that the old hermit might want to commit a crime here and lay it on Porcupine."

"How often do you go to Silver Bow?" the scout asked the girl.

"Once in wik; once in two wik; once in mont'; mebbyso."

"You haven't seen any of the town men round here?"

"Yes, las' wik—two—t'ree men come out for hunt."

"Does the stage trail pass near here? I think it does."

"'Bout five miles off," said the girl.

The scout returned to the subject of the hermit.

"Has there been any trouble between old White Hair and the Utes?" he asked of the girl.

"One time old White Hair rob stage, and say Utes done it."

"Wow!" Pawnee gulped. "How do you know that he robbed the stage?"

The girl could not answer this. All she could reply was that the Utes said it, and in this she was backed by old Porcupine.

"There have been a good many stage robberies, I think?" Pawnee queried.

"I don't know," she said. "We no go to town by stage trail—go other way, 'cross the mountains—pony path up on the mountains. One time old White Hair shoot at Ute."

"White Hair very bad man," interjected Porcupine. "White Hair do all bad thing, and say it is Ute done it."

They got not much more out of the Utes, and that little was not very clear or satisfactory. The Utes did not like the old hermit, who lived somewhere near, in the hills, and who sold roots and herbs to the drug

stores in Silver Bow. That was about all that could be made out of the Ute charges against him.

The scout pards left the little house as much puzzled as when they approached it.

"We are up in the air," remarked Pawnee. "Either the Utes hammered Nomad on the head, or they didn't; that's as far as we've got, and I can't say that it makes a plain trail. What's the next move, ne-carnis?"

"We'll go to Silver Bow, and continue investigations there."

CHAPTER IV.

A HOSPITABLE SHERIFF.

Buffalo Bill and his pards were in the Silver Bow district for two reasons.

There had been a number of mysterious stage robberies, and several murders, with various outrages, committed against the Utes dwelling in the valley of the Perdidas.

It was feared that these friendly Utes would be driven to acts of retaliation, which might result in a general slaughter of white people. On the other hand, there were not a few to claim that the Utes were themselves to blame for the robberies and murders which were being laid at the door of white desperadoes.

The second reason called for the investigation of the mysterious Klan of Kan. What that was no one seemed to know, so far as any written information had come to the scouts. Now and then some one was killed, and on his breast was found pinned a warning, signed Klan of Kan. Nearly always the person killed was a Ute.

So it can be seen that the scouts were pretty much in a fog as they made their way to Silver Bow, and though their attention was more sharply drawn to the Klan of Kan by what had happened to Nomad, it cannot be said that any enlightenment had come.

Nomad was able to resume the journey in the morning. His head still ached, and the lump on top of it was bigger and more sore than ever, while his faculties tended still at times to haziness. But he could ride his horse, and, though he was a bit feverish, his condition was improving.

A Hospitable Sheriff.

29

Silver Bow was a town of the usual border class, given over to the business of mining, filled with liquor saloons and gambling dens, variety theaters, pawn shops, and the customary run of business houses; with a big floating population, in which the tough element predominated.

The best hostelry in the town was the Silver Nugget, a fairly good hotel, with a thriving barroom attachment; all run by a man known as Tybee Johnson, who was also the sheriff of the county, and had all the earmarks of a crook.

Tybee Johnson was a Southerner, tall and courtly in appearance, with a soft drawling Southern voice that was signally at variance with his evil-looking, shiny, brown eyes, and hawklike profile.

As soon as the scouts were established in the Silver Nugget, Buffalo Bill sent for Johnson.

"Well, I'm certainly glad to see you-all," said Johnson, chewing at his cigar, as he came into the room, and flicking his shiny eyes over all the occupants at once, as if he wanted to size them up for a possible scrimmage.

He extended his hand, soft and white, with a big diamond blazing in a ring on the little finger. He was clothed in spotless linen, and on his head was a white Panama.

Johnson was followed into the room by a little colored boy, bearing a tray that held a bottle and glasses.

"You-all will take a little snifter with me," said Johnson, "just to wash the trail dust out of yo' throats?"

The boy set the tray on the table, and produced a corkscrew.

"Thank you just the same," said the scout; "but in the beginning of work we make it a rule to cut out all intoxicants."

Johnson, about to manipulate the corkscrew, stood up and looked his mild amazement.

"Suh, you surprise me! A drink all round is just the thing, suh, with which to begin any business matter."

"Bein' as I'm outer ther game right now, count of a clip on ther head," said Nomad, "I'll jine in a glass o' thet stuff; fer et shore looks good."

"You delight me, suh," said Johnson, beaming on the borderman. "Won't you other gentlemen join us? No offense, of course, if you don't; it's just an old Southe'n custom that I keep up out here. Got tuh do something, you know, like that, so that a man can still feel that he is civilized."

He poured a glass for Nomad, and one for himself; and looked with a sort of hopeless pity at the empty glasses remaining on the tray.

"Yo' good health," he said to Nomad, lifting his glass and clinking it against the one the borderman raised.

"Same ter you," Nomad responded, and swallowed his liquor with a wry face.

Tybee Johnson took a chair, after the "chasers" had followed the liquor, and glanced inquiringly at his guests.

"Yo' fame, Cody," he declared, "has reached here ahead of you. And Pawnee Bill, I've heard of him, too. These other gentlemen," he included even Little Cayuse in the sweep of his glance, "have been, up to the present, strangers to me, even by reppytation. But I'm mighty glad to meet you-all."

With promptness, Buffalo Bill proceeded to make clear the reasons that had brought him and his pards to Silver Bow. In doing so, he gave an account of the unpleasant happening to Nomad, and of the visit to the wikiup where the Utes had been met.

"You're the sheriff, I understand," he explained; "so I thought I'd go to headquarters first thing, and see if you had knowledge that would lay open for me this trail."

"Well, suh," said Johnson, crossing his legs, throwing his Panama on the table, and resuming his cigar, "you have stacked up against a mighty blind proposition. I've tried to investigate this thing a little myself, suh; and I can't do it. I can tell you what I know, though; which isn't much, and maybe won't be wuth yo' while."

His shiny brown eyes again searched the faces of his guests, with an apparently careless glance, that passed swiftly from one to the other.

"Gold is being mined oveh in the San Juan country, as you-all know," he drawled, in his soft voice; "and it goes, fo' the most part, over the trail down the Perdidas. It's from placer mining, and so is in the shape of nuggets and dust. In addition, silveh is being taken out here in consid'able quantities, and afeh it is reduced that, too, is sent oveh the trail. There have been some holdups and stage robberies, but they haven't, suh, been frequent. And there have been a few men killed—not many; also a few of the Utes. I've tried to find out who was doing the hold-up work, but I haven't succeeded. And that, suh, is all I know."

"This Klan of Kan?" inquired the scout.

"I've heard there is such a thing, suh; but I don't know anything about it, and I don't believe in it."

Buffalo Bill took out the warning sent to him on the breast of old Nomad.

While Tybee Johnson sucked at his cigar and looked it over, the scout repeated the information of how it came into his possession.

Johnson looked at Nomad.

"I've heard of this Klan of Kan," he declared again, "but, as for knowing anything about it, suh, I don't. This, suh, is the first tangible ev'dence I've ev'eh seen on the subject."

"What of these Utes?" asked the scout.

"Well, you saw old Porcupine. And, by the way, that's a handsome young woman with him that he says is his daughter. You've seen her, suh! I've heard it said she is a half-breed; and, again, it's been said that she is all white. I don't know about that, suh; but I've seen her in the town here, and she is certainly a good-looking young woman."

"She visits the stores, I suppose, occasionally?"

"Yes, suh; that's the way of it. She rides over the mountain trail, sells the things she brings in, and goes out again in the same way. Sometimes old Porcupine comes in with her."

"Do you know anything else about those Utes?"

"They're a lazy, good-fo'-nothing set, suh. As for the danger that they may take up the hatchet, it's all nonsense. As long as they can get whisky they won't work, and the whisky makes them too shiftless for fighting. As a general proposition, suh, I'm opposed to furnishing whisky to Indians, and, personally, I never do it; but there is some gain in it. Keep an Indian's brains cooked in alcohol, and all he wants to do is to sleep and booze; there isn't, suh, an ounce of fight in him. Them's my sentiments, suh."

"So old Porcupine is a boozier?"

"All of them, suh."

"And the girl?" queried Pawnee.

"I couldn't say as to that, suh; I don't know."

"Then, you don't," said the scout, "seem to be able to help us."

"Suh, I'm exceedingly sorry that I can't."

"There's a good deal of the tough element in the town?" said the scout.

"That depends, suh, on what is called the tough element. The town of Silver Bow, suh, is what is called 'wide open.'"

"A town in which gambling, and drinking, and all the other vices, are not only permitted, but encouraged!"

"That's one way of looking at it, suh; but not my way. In the West, suh, a wide-open town makes business good; the miners come in, and spend their money freely, suh. They want to do so, and the merchants and othehs are quite ready to relieve them of their money. A miner's money, suh, is no good to him until he spends it."

"You don't have much work to do, then?" said the scout quietly.

"Not much, suh; there's very little trouble. Now and then one of the boys takes a little too much liquor, and shoots some one; and then, of co'se, I've got to interfere."

"After the shooting is done?"

"Certainly, suh. I can't arrest until afteh the offense is committed."

"I see."

"Now and then," continued the drawling voice, "some miner makes a howl about being robbed in some gambling place. Generally, when it's investigated, it's found that he was trying to cheat some one, and got cheated. Usually, suh, it turns out that way. So I lecture the miner, and tell him to go back to work."

"And make more money for the gamblers and the confidence men."

"It amuses you, suh!"

"Oh, no; I'm just investigating."

"You'll find, suh, that Silver Bow is a lively town. It does mo' business than any two towns of its size in these mountains. It sends out mo' in silver bullion than any three towns. Of co'se, that furnishes a temptation to holdup men, and the like. But my business as sheriff doesn't call me, suh, to investigate things not coming under my jurisdiction; so I neveh look into the holdups that take place out on the trail beyond the limits of Ute County. But, if I can help you-all, suh, within the county, or in the town, I shall be happy to do so."

He sucked again at his cigar.

"Thank you very much," said the scout.

The way he said it not only made Tybee Johnson stare, but made him wonder what the meaning could be. A slight flush came to his face. As if to hide it he turned to the liquor tray.

"You'll have another snifter with me?" he said to Nomad. "And perhaps now, after talking, these gentlemen will feel that their throats are consid'able dry, and will want to join us."

"Thank you—nothing," said the scout.

"No more for me," added Nomad. "Thet stuff is purty strong, Johnson; er else my head ain't in proper kelter fer et."

"Must I drink alone?" exclaimed Johnson, in mild surprise. "Gentlemen, this doesn't suit my ideas of hospitality! You-all come here as strangers and pilgrims, seeking whom you may devour; and I meets you as the proprietor of this house, and sheriff of the county. And you make me sop up my liquor without help? Is that the fair deal?"

Buffalo Bill laughed; and so did Pawnee and Nomad.

The baron, who had been silent as the sphinx, waddled forward.

"Yoost to do der honors oof der occasion," he said.

Tybee Johnson stood up and poured the liquor.

"Mr.—er—I believe I have forgotten yo' name!"

"Schnitzenhauser."

"Mr.—er—Snitzenhowser, I drink to yo' health and happiness."

"Misdar Yohnson, I am looking adt you!"

With due solemnity they clinked their glasses and drank.

Then Tybee Johnson sent the tray out by the colored boy, shook hands all round effusively, and took his departure, sucking at his cigar.

"Yer opinion o' thet gent?" asked Nomad, as Johnson departed.

"I'll give it to you later," replied Buffalo Bill.

"Mr. Johnson," said Pawnee, "is a smooth piece of goods."

CHAPTER V.

A MOUNTAIN HERMIT.

When Buffalo Bill and his pards went out on the veranda, on the lower floor, some time after the departure of Tybee Johnson, they found that the scout was being inquired for there by an elderly man, who came up in a hesitating manner when the scout was pointed out to him.

"You are Buffalo Bill, I believe?" asked the stranger.

He was small and dark, and was dressed shabbily, but he was given a venerable appearance by the white hair that fell down to his shoulders.

"I am Johnson Tybee," he said, "and——"

He was cut short by Nomad's woof of astonishment.

"That surprises you, and I wonder why. Still——"

"Et don't," Nomad protested; "I war jes' chokin' from some o' ther wool my teeth collected out'n them last mutton chops I et."

"I think," said the scout, "that we are all a bit surprised, because your name is so like that of the sheriff of the county, with whom recently we were talking. His name is Tybee Johnson, and yours is Johnson Tybee."

"A mere bag o' shells," said the little man dryly. "I suppose he was born down about Tybee, Georgia, and that his parents, for that reason, gave him that name; he's Southern, I think. As for me, I was born down there, too—or I suppose I was. I don't happen to have any recollection of it. All I know is that I found myself down there at an early age, an orphan,

A Mountain Hermit.

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and was told that I had been picked up on the banks of the Tybee, and had been called Tybee. Johnson was a handy name, and common, so that had been tacked on that I might have the usual and proper amount."

"You're not acquainted with the sheriff?"

"I've seen all I want to of him."

"That so? How's that?"

The little man glanced round. Several strangers had edged along the railing, as if they wanted to overhear what was being said.

It probably meant nothing, for wherever the noted scouts appeared strangers were always doing that sort of thing.

Nevertheless, it annoyed Johnson Tybee.

"Can't we go somewhere an' talk in peace and privacy?" he demanded. "If 'twas a speech I wanted to make I'd be glad of a crowd, I s'pose; but this here ain't no speech."

"Come up to my room," the scout invited.

The entire party went upstairs again, this time with the little old man in their midst; and once more the door was closed on the hall.

"I don't suppose you've ever heard o' me," said Tybee, beginning to fumble at the bosom of his shirt; "but in this town, by them that don't know my name, I'm called the white-headed hermit of the mountain, or just old White Hair."

Nomad woofed again.

"The wool from that mutton chop is still troubling you!" said the hermit.

"Et is goin' ter plum' choke me next, I reckon," said Nomad, in a tone of apology. "So ef I explodes thet erway erg'in, don't notice et."

Having unbuttoned the bosom of his flannel shirt, the little old man drew out a sheet of paper.

It was another placard of the Klan o' Kan.

"Take a look at that," he invited, handing it to Buffalo Bill.

All in the room looked at it, and they saw that the general shape of the characters was similar to that on the placard brought in by Nomad. The warning was much the same; it ordered the hermit to leave the county inside of two days, or suffer the consequences.

"This morning I found that tacked to the door of my hut up in the hills," he said; "and when I opened the door, before I knew it was there, a dozen shots were fired into the house from the brush out in front. I think whoever shot at me intended to kill me."

"You didn't see the person who did the shooting?" asked the scout.

"I didn't. But, after I had closed the door and got back into the room, I heard the hoofs of horses galloping off. Later, when I went out, I found this thing on the door."

"That's a queer business," remarked Pawnee. "First, they ordered you to leave; and then, before you had even seen the notice, they tried to kill you."

"I figgered it out that way."

"You have enemies?" said Buffalo Bill.

"The Utes."

"You think they did it?"

"I don't know who did it."

"You saw the tracks of those horses?"

"I think the horses were Indian ponies—as well as I could judge."

"And you came in to see the sheriff—bringing in this notice with you?"

"I came in to see you, Colonel Cody. That sheriff is no good; I wouldn't go to him, unless I knew that I had done some crime and wanted protection; then I might git it. I wouldn't git it if I was innocent, and some criminal had tried to get me."

"You don't, then," said Pawnee, "think highly of the man who bears your turned-around name?"

"He's a gambler and thief himself; that's my answer."

"If you didn't come to see the sheriff, whom did you come to see?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"You, Colonel Cody."

"That's singular."

"Why is it? You're known to stand for law and order, for right, and all that goes to make right. I am threatened by this mysterious Klan of Kan, and I come to you because I know you're here to look after the men who are in it."

"I meant it was singular, for the reason that I don't see how you knew that we were coming here. We didn't send word of it ahead of us, and we arrived only to-day, and haven't been two hours in the town."

"Is that so?" questioned Tybee, apparently nonplused.

He took off his shabby hat, and looked even more venerable with it off.

"So, der kvestion iss," cut in the baron, "how dit you know dot ve are coming?"

Tybee scratched his head.

"You think that's a puzzler," he said; "but it ain't. I didn't mean to mention it; but it was the Utes that told me."

"Der Utes?"

"Some of them Utes livin' over in the Perdidas Valley. You know old Porcupine?"

"We've met him," the scout admitted.

"Well, it was old Porcupine told me."

Nomad woofed again.

"Thet mutton-chop wool has got into a ball," he exclaimed; "so don't pay no 'tention ter me! Ef I chokes erg'in I'll go outside an' do et proper."

"When did you see old Porcupine?" the scout inquired.

"This mornin'."

"That was after you had been shot at, and had found that notice on your door?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Old Porcupine is a friend of yours?" asked Pawnee.

The hermit turned his shabby hat round and looked at it thoughtfully; then he brushed off some of the dust.

"Sometimes he's my friend, and sometimes he ain't."

"This morning he was your friend?" queried the scout.

"Yes; that's the way of it."

"And he told you that I was on my way into this town?"

"That's the way of it."

"How did he know my name? He called me Buffalo Bill?"

"Well, now I'll tell you, seein' that I've got to. After I had been shot at, and found that notice, I piked down toward old Porcupine's."

"Where does he live?"

"Why, you ought to know! He said you was at his house yesterday. He told me that, when I showed him this notice. He said you was there, and that you had showed him one just like it. And he said this morning he had seen you riding toward the town. So, that's the way of it. Thinks I, Buffalo Bill is here to investigate this Klan of Kan, and I'll just go in and show him what I found sticking on my door."

He put on his hat, and looked at the scout, smiling now.

"Yet, when I talked with that Ute yesterday," said the scout, "he gave me to understand that he was your enemy!"

"He is, at times: I said that."

Buffalo Bill read the notice again.

"Seeing that you know about this other one," he said, "we'll compare them here."

He brought out the notice he had.

Except as to wording, they were seen to be identical, when laid on the table together and compared.

"How far is it out to your house?" the scout asked Tybee.

"Four or five miles."

"What do you know about the Klan of Kan?"

"Not a thing."

"Why should this Klan of Kan want to run you out of the county, and shoot you?"

"I thought maybe you could tell me that."

"You've got enemies?"

"Only some of the Utes—so fur's I know. Still, there aire some men in town here who don't like me. For instance, the sheriff and his gamblers don't like me, because I don't patronize the games and the dance halls. One time he ordered me to git out of the town. He said I was a loafer and vagabond. I'd 'a' shot him for that then, if another man hadn't held me."

He said it in a manner so smiling that it was hard to believe he meant it.

"What do you know about the young woman who lives at old Porcupine's?"

"He says she is his daughter."

"You don't think so?"

"Why shouldn't I believe him? I don't know nothing about it."

"What do you know about those Utes—particularly Porcupine?"

Tybee looked at the scout earnestly.

"Well, them Utes took part in the Meeker massacre. You know about that—when Meeker, the Indian agent, was killed, and some terrible things was done?"

"We know about it."

"That's enough to know about 'em, ain't it?"

"Was old Porcupine in that thing?"

"He was one of the chiefs. There ain't a bloodier Indian in this country than Porcupine."

"Yet he is one of your friends?"

"I've answered that question."

The scout handed back the warning notice brought in by Tybee, and stowed away the other.

"I'm going to ride out to your house," he said; "and some of my friends will probably want to go along. We'd like to get on the track of this Klan of Kan, and maybe the information you have brought has furnished us a start. You've got a horse?"

"He's outside."

The hermit of the mountains was clearly delighted when the scouts set out with him over the mountain trail.

Nomad had been left behind, with the baron, and so had Little Cayuse.

Though the trail was blind and rough, it did not take a great while to make the five miles out to the hermit's cabin.

This cabin was situated in a hollow of the hills, well above the Perdidas, and commanded a good view of that turbulent stream and its valley. The bend which held the wikiup could be seen from there, but not the little shelter house itself.

"Here are the bullet holes, shot into my house," said Johnson Tybee, pointing them out; "and right off there in that scrub is where the bullets were fired from. When the first ones come I was standin' in the door, and you can see that they come nigh gittin' me."

He indicated the ragged rents in the door jamb, and in the sill under his feet.

Twenty bullets or more had been fired into the house.

and the distance had not been so great but that they had torn through the walls, and the door, while some had gone out through the rear walls.

"Close croppin'," said Pawnee. "The one that slid along there came near giving you a hair cut, I judge."

"That was shot as I jumped back to close the door," said Tybee. "Yes, it was reachin' out its hot hand for me!"

He drew himself more erect, and seemed to gain importance, as he skipped about, showing where the bullets had lodged inside.

"That'n that crossed the table," he declared, pointing to the crease of a bullet on the top of the box that he called a table. "It come nigh gittin' my tin lamp that was settin' on it."

He brought out the battered lamp, and exhibited that as evidence; though it had not been touched.

The cabin was almost as bare of furniture as was the house in which the Utes had been seen; though it had a homemade bed in one corner, and in another a sheet-iron stove.

"The stove saves wood," Tybee explained. "It's a lot of work to cut wood on these mountains and drag it down here for a fireplace. So I have given up that luxury."

He cackled, pleased with the attention the scouts were giving to his little house and its poor belongings.

"You have weapons?" asked Buffalo Bill. "This would be a poor place to stay, I think, if one wasn't ready to defend himself."

The hermit brought out an ancient muzzle-loading rifle.

"I've got this. I never have used it, except to shoot at a deer now and then, or rabbits. The bore is too big for rabbits, though; tears 'em up too bad."

When they had finished with the house, he led them out to the bushes from which the shots had been fired, and showed them a trail of pony tracks.

"Ten in this bunch," said Pawnee, when he had counted them. "They went in the direction of the river."

"I was follering them when I ran against old Porcupine, like what I told you," the old man explained.

"Maybe we'd better tackle this trail?" Pawnee suggested.

They followed it, Tybee accompanying them. It led down toward the river; and then was lost where the hillside became hard and rocky.

"I lost it here myself," Tybee informed them. "Maybe you can pick it up again; but I couldn't."

"How long did you spend trying?" asked the scout.

"Three or four hours."

"And began, when?"

"Oh, about seven or eight o'clock. Must have been nigh twelve o'clock when I left off; that was after I'd met Porcupine."

The tracks were not found again, though the scouts spent a good deal of time at it.

"Pony tracks," said Pawnee to the scout, "usually spell Indian."

He turned to Tybee.

"Where do the Utes keep their ponies?"

"All round, down in the valley; they've got near a hundred, I reckon. I see 'em grazing in bands, sometimes."

There were plenty of pony tracks down in the valley, they found; but whether they were made by the ponies that had been near the hermit's cabin no one could have told.

"You'll go on down with us and see old Porcupine, now that we're so near his place?" said the scout.

Tybee held back.

"I dunno," he said, shaking his head; "as I told you, sometimes Porcupine is a good friend, and, again, perhaps, he ain't. I reckon it depends on how he feels."

"Or how much booze he may have swallowed?" suggested Pawnee.

"That's how I mean. When he is drinking, he is likely to be bad and ugly, and I like to keep away from him."

"Who furnishes whisky to the redskins?"

"They git it in Silver Bow. You could find that out if that sheriff was willin' to tell you. Likely he sells it to 'em himself. Anyway, I've heard that. I don't claim to know."

Johnson Hybee would not go down to the wikiup, so they went alone; but when they got there they found it abandoned.

Old Porcupine had moved out, bag and baggage.

"Hoop-a-la!" cried Pawnee. "Now, what does that mean?"

"Ask me something easy," said the scout.

"Well, you can call me a greaser if it hasn't a queer look."

"We seem to be connecting with a number of queer things."

"Right-o."

"Not the least of them is Johnson Tybee."

"Well, I reckon he's lived so much alone that he has started up a nut factory. I never met with a hermit yet who wasn't a little bit off the top; they wouldn't be hermits, otherwise. What a life to live, necarnis—up on that mountain, with not a soul near except wandering Utes, who may or may not be friendly, depending, so he says, on the amount of foolish water they happen to have absorbed that day. Excuse me from being a hermit."

"Well, shall we go back?"

"There's nothing else to do, is there? And it's getting late."

"It will be time for the dinner bell when we see Silver Bow again."

"And old Nomad and the baron, to say nothing of Little Cayuse, will be ramping out this way, if we don't get in before dark. Still, I hate to give up, and am disappointed; for we haven't done anything."

"Apparently not. We'll have to look over the town."

"Something tells you that Tybee Johnson, sheriff of Ute County, is mixed up in this?"

"He may be."

"Queer about those names—Tybee Johnson, and Johnson Tybee. Does that mean anything?"

"Just an odd coincidence, probably."

"Odd enough. Well, let's be jogging back."

It was sundown when they reached the town.

CHAPTER VI.

A CLOSE CALL.

As the pard scouts rode back through the main street of Silver Bow toward the Silver Nugget, a flashily dressed man came leaping down the steps of one of the many gambling hells, and fired point-blank at Buffalo Bill.

The scout felt the bullet give a quick tug at his Stetson, and he dropped over on the neck of Bear Paw, expecting a second bullet. His hands went in search of his revolvers.

Pawnee Bill fired, and saw the man's revolver jump into the air as it was struck and knocked out of his hand by the bullet.

This was followed by a surging roar in the street.

Pawnee's weapon came up again, for he intended to defend his pard to the death, believing him wounded.

But the duel that had opened so suddenly was checked by Tybee Johnson, who leaped out of the crowd and pinioned the arms of the man who had tried to shoot Buffalo Bill, and had now lost his revolver.

"Here, Hank!" Johnson was heard to say, in his drawling voice: "We ain't going to have this!"

Then Pawnee Bill discovered that the man pinioned by the sheriff was reeling drunk, or pretended to be.

"Leggo o' me!" he snarled, in a thick voice. "That's Buff'lo Bill, an' I'm—I'm goin' to git his meat."

Buffalo Bill, before this time, was erect on Bear Paw, a revolver showing in each hand.

"That's right, Johnson," shouted Pawnee; "hold him; otherwise, I may be called on to do something more than shoot away his revolver."

He turned to Buffalo Bill.

"Hurt, necarnis?" he asked.

"Not at all."

"Just keeping out of the way of getting hurt, eh?"

Pawnee's relieved laugh showed that his nerves had been suddenly strained to high tension.

Buffalo Bill slipped from his saddle, flung the reins to Pawnee, and advanced on Johnson and the man struggling in his arms.

"Who is this fellow, Johnson?" he demanded, as the gathering crowd fell back.

"Hank Sims," said the sheriff; "but he's drunk!"

"Just the same, he made a good try for me."

"He didn't hit you."

"I felt his bullet pull my hair. That wasn't pleasant, you know, and I'd like to understand what Hank Sims meant by it."

Hank Sims uttered an oath, and tried to lunge at the scout.

"Tha's all right," he said, in a thick voice, as the sheriff began to pull him away.

"Come along, Sims," urged Johnson; "you're going back into the house!"

"I want to know of Sims why he shot at me?" the scout persisted, following.

"Because he was drunk," said the sheriff.

"But that is no reason."

"Maybe you can git it out of him, when he is sober," said the sheriff. "Right now you-all can see that it ain't any use to try. Come along, Hank!"

He pulled Sims up the steps of the gambling room. After giving Sims a shove, he turned to the scout.

"That's over," he said, with a breath.

"No, it's just beginning," Buffalo Bill declared. "I don't know this man Sims, but he knows me; and he tried to get me. I'm going to learn why."

"Well, you can't do it to-night, Cody, sorry to say. Sims don't know why he shot at you, any more than I do."

His voice was nettled, and had lost its drawling tone.

"You don't intend to do anything about that shooting?" Buffalo Bill demanded.

"What's to be done, so long as he didn't get you?" Then the drawl came back. "Suh, a gentleman that's been drinking isn't responsible for what he does."

The scout turned away displeased.

"I'll get you yet!" Sims yelled, as he disappeared through the door into the gaming house.

Seeing that Hank Sims was out of the way for the present, Tybee Johnson came down the steps, approaching the scout in a conciliatory manner.

"Cody," he said, "the gentleman didn't know what he was doing."

"Whatever he knew, or didn't know," retorted the scout, "I can see that you intend to protect him!"

"You-all had better let up on that!" said Johnson, to a rough crowd that had hurried up and seemed inclined to hustle the scout. "Cody, gentlemen, is a guest of this town, and he's going to be treated right while he is here."

With pistol ready, Buffalo Bill backed to his horse, which Pawnee Bill, watchful of eye, was holding with one hand, while he fingered his revolver with the other.

"Johnson," said the scout, as he climbed into the saddle, "I'll see you about this later."

Through the crowd that now packed the street he and Pawnee rode on, heading for their hotel.

"That was a raw deal, necarnis," Pawnee commented, as they swung down before the hostelry, and gave their horses to an attendant. "What do you make of the ornery antics of Mr. Tybee Johnson?"

"That he is a crook, and a leader of crooks."

A Close Call.

"And Mr. Flashy Gambler tried to get you, perhaps with the knowledge and consent of Johnson. When he failed, Johnson had to protect him."

"It sure looks that way, Pard Lillie, doesn't it?"

"I'm beginning to think," said Pawnee, "that if we went back to that gambling hell and searched round with a lighted candle we'd find the leader of the Klan of Kan, and his name would be Tybee Johnson. That is put as a suggestion, necarnis; but think it over."

"I'm already thinking it over."

Nomad and the baron, with Little Cayuse, had come out into the street, drawn by the shooting and the noisy crowd.

"Vot iss idt?" the baron demanded.

"Well, we don't know, Schnitz, what it is," Pawnee admitted; "but it looks plain as signal smoke that the Klan of Kan is all scared up, and tried this evening to get Cody's goat. We'll tell you more about it, and various other things, when we get inside."

In the scout's room, upstairs, they talked it over.

In the end, the opinion that the Klan of Kan, through one of its desperate and drunken members, had made a deliberate attempt to assassinate the scout was not changed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BARON'S SHADOW ACT.

With his hands thrust into the pockets of his jacket, and the stem of his long pipe gripped lovingly in his teeth, the baron had sauntered forth into the street, where the lights were flashing, desirous of collecting a few tangible facts concerning the mysterious attack on the scout.

He was diverted from his purpose by seeing the blanketed figure of an Indian girl glide past him.

As he turned to stare at her, he knew that she was the girl who had been seen with old Porcupine; whereupon, with German pertinacity, he set out to follow her.

"Yiminidy grickets!" he muttered. "Idt iss now der nighddimes, unt vot iss she doing here?"

At the end of ten minutes he had trailed her to the door of a pawnshop, which, perhaps because the hour was yet early, was doing no business.

The proprietor, standing outside by the door, backed into his shop when he saw the girl, indicating that he recognized her, and knew she had come on a business errand. She followed him inside.

The baron came up in front of the shop in time to see them vanish together into a back room.

"Dot iss a kveerness," he thought, as he peered through the window. "Vot haf an Injun dot she can sell py a pawnshob, eenyhow? When you ton'dt know any'ing idt iss dime for you to investigate."

With his pipe still in his mouth, he ascended the steps of the shop as lightly as he could, and, finding that the door had not been locked, he opened it softly and went in.

Low voices reached him from the back room, and to the door of that room the baron tip-toed. At the same time he looked about, picking out mentally certain articles he would pretend to be interested in, if the proprietor came out suddenly and accosted him.

When he gained the second door, he found it slightly ajar; and, as he had not been heard, he stopped there, and stood listening.

The Jew proprietor was apparently trying to beat the girl down from her demand.

Then there was a rattling of scales, and apparently something was being weighed.

The baron, peering through the aperture of the door, saw the interior of the little room, with the Jew on one side of a small counter and the girl outside of it. There were two buckskin bags on the counter, and the contents of one the Jew was pouring into his scales.

"Yiminidy grickets!" the baron mumbled. "Idt iss goldt dust! Now how——"

"I want more'n you offered for that," said the girl, in good English; which seemed an astonishing thing, for the baron understood that the girl spoke English very imperfectly, after the Indian manner.

"You take vot I geef you," the Jew snarled.

"I can go somewhere else."

"Vare vill you go?" he sneered. "If you go roundt, somepody vill be asking questions, will dhey not—yes, no? You know idt. You don't vant beople to know how you git dhis goldt, no? Dhen you dake vat I gif you."

"Yumpin' yack rappits," the baron breathed, incautiously pushing his nose farther in. "Here iss a mysteriousness, huh? Vare iss der Inchun git der goldt dust?"

The Jew weighed out both bags of dust, figured a minute on a scrap of paper, meanwhile urged by the

girl to hurry up; then he pushed across the counter a few gold coins.

"It is not enough," said the girl, in a tone of irritation.

The heavy breathing of the excited German caught the attention of the Jew. He turned his head, and saw the face in the aperture of the door.

Seeing that he was discovered, the baron pushed in, holding his long pipe in his hand.

"Goldt dust?" he said. "Idt iss vot I vouldt like to half some oof meinselluf. But der t'ing vot I haf come to see apowet iss——"

With a cry of dismay the girl caught up the coins that the Jew had pushed roughly across the table, fled from the room, and out into the street.

For an instant it seemed that the livid-faced Jew meant to do the baron bodily damage.

"Yoost dake idt easy," urged the phlegmatic German. "I ain'dt seeing notting to be scared oop apowet. Who iss dot girl?"

"Vot you vant?" roared the Jew.

"Meppysso I vandt some vatches, or bistols, or a nigger panjo; budt, fairst I vant to know who iss der girl vot pring you in der geldt?"

"Dot is none of your pitzness."

"No—yes? Idt iss my incuriosity vot make me seek der information. She iss Inchun?"

Putting his hands against the baron's rotund stomach, the Jew pushed him back into the front room.

"You vouldt sdeal dot goldt, heh?" he snarled, though he knew better. "Now, you dell me kvick vot idt is dot you vant."

"I oxbecdt dot you sbeak Cherman," said the baron, blandly, not put out in the least by the Jew's manner.

"I do," said the Jew, in German.

"I am a German," the baron needlessly declared.

"Oh, I t'ought dot you are Irish!" the Jew came back, in English. "You vill excuse me for my mis-dake!"

"I am oxcusing you," said the baron, "vhen I haf some information by dot girl. She iss Inchun, unt she iss bring you goldt dust. Der meanness oof dot iss mebbysso imbortant."

"You are a boliceman, no?"

"I am a blain-clothes boliceman," said the baron. "Misder Dybee Yohnson, he haf yoost abbointed me."

"Dot is a lie!" snapped the Jew. "Misder Yohnson is der sheriff uff der gounty, and he haf notting to do mitt abbointing a boliceman."

"Ledt idt go," said the baron, with a wave of his fat hand. "Vot iss der cosdt oof a nigger panjo?"

The Jew looked at him critically.

"Vhich vun you vant to seen?" he demanded.

"Vun dot iss plack, of gourse."

"I haf no plack panjos. I haf nefer seen vun yidt."

"Dhen I don't buy idt; good nighdt."

The baron waddled to the outer door.

"Say, you—coom pack here unt——"

But the baron walked down to the street, and hurried away, looking for the girl who had brought in the gold dust. He failed to see her at first; but, as he rambled on, he heard a clatter of pony hoofs, and she passed him, galloping down the street in the direction of the open country.

"Going pack home," he said. "Unt idt iss darker as plack cats outside oof der down. She haf got some nerfs mit her, you bedt. Budt, oof gourse, being dot she iss an Injun, dot can be oexpected."

Plowing his way through the increasing crowds, he thought over his peculiar discovery, and built up a theory to present to Buffalo Bill.

"Der girl iss a roadt agent. No oddervise iss idt to

be explained. Der stages haf been ropped oof goldt dust many dimes. So idt musdt be so. Der Jew, he iss knowing all apowet idt, and dakes der stuff vot she prings in. Der girl unt old Borcupine iss a roadt agent, yes. Der hermit he iss act kveer, unt meppysso he iss vun also-o. Misder Dybee Yohnson he iss anodder. So iss der gampler vot dry to shoodyt Cody. Efer'pody he iss a roadt agent. Vot a down! Himmel! My headt iss going roundt. I musdt haf a glass oof peer to take der kinks oudt."

He drifted into a liquor store—there was one at every turn—and there he found the men talking of the shooting on the street.

Ordering his beer, and drinking it in the leisurely German way, he listened.

A man stumbling past whispered to another who stood by the baron, and went on toward a back door. The word, as the German caught it, was "Woozle."

"Some more kveer pitzness!" thought the baron, as he watched the man disappear through the back door. "Vot iss der meanness oof 'Voozle'?"

He saw another man drift leisurely to the same door and disappear.

His suspicions aroused, the baron drifted in the same direction. When he thought he was not observed, he passed through.

Somewhat to his surprise, instead of the room he had anticipated, he was now in a back alley.

"Voozle! I ton'dt know der meanness, but I am idt. Dare iss notting in here but darkness, unt dhen some plackness, mit a liddle more for goot measurement. Voozle!"

"You've got that wrong," said a voice near him. "You are one of the Sons of Rest?"

"I pedt you!" the baron answered, controlling his astonishment.

"Well, the word to-night is Wolseley; the boys will sure all be there to-night."

"Dot's vot I t'ink," the baron answered, trying to see the face of the speaker.

The man seemed to float away, but the baron heard a latch lifted and dropped.

"Voozle! Volseley! T'ings ar-re caming my way. Vonce more der luck oof Schnitzenhauser iss at der top. Now, vare dit he go mit himselluf?"

Following the man through the darkness, the baron brought up against a wall. Feeling along this, his hands touched a latch.

When he tried to lift it he failed.

"Voozle! Volseley!"

Unintentionally he had said the words aloud. just the same, he seemed to have struck the magic sesame, for the latch lifted, and a black door opened on more darkness. The baron knew that a man stood in the doorway, looking out at him.

"Volseley!" whispered the baron. "Haf I got idt righdt?"

The man leaned out, staring into the baron's face. The door was closing as the man jumped back, when the baron catapulted his weight against it, and shot into the dark hall, overturning the doorkeeper in his rush.

"Voozle! Volseley! I am still idt! Budt vare I am I ain'dt knowing."

CHAPTER VIII.

A FORTUNE TELLER.

Banging up against a wall, the baron came to a full stop, and was aware that the doorkeeper was following.

Suddenly in the hands of the doorkeeper flashed a pocket torch, lighting the hall, and revealing to the baron that the man who held it was advancing on him.

The baron glanced round desperately. He was at the end of the hall, and the only door he saw, except the one by which he had entered, was in the side of the hall, much nearer the man than himself.

"Voozle!" stammered the baron in desperation.

"I guess you're drunk. What d'ye want, anyway? Do you want to see the fortune teller? But she won't see you, if you're drunk."

"I want to see Voozle. I mean Volseley. You know vare he iss, yes? You obened der door vhen I said idt."

"I heard you scratchin' at the latch, and opened the door; and then I thought you was drunk."

"Unt so you triedt to shudt der door in my face?"

"That's right. Do you want to see the fortune teller?"

"Vare iss he?"

"That door, there. But it's a 'she.' It'll cost you five dollars; things don't come cheap in this town."

"Dare iss notting cheap here budt der town idtselluf."

"That's right. But do you want to see the fortune teller? If you don't, you'll have to go outside again."

"Budt who iss Voozle?"

"I don't know. Ask the fortune teller; she knows everything."

"Me for der fordone deller, oof dot iss so!"

"Come on, then."

He led to the side door of the hall, and threw it open. The baron beheld a flight of stairs, revealed by a red lamp.

"At the top of the stairs, turn to the right—second door."

Still clutching his pipe, to which he had clung desperately, the baron puffed to the stop of the stairs, hearing, as he did so, the door close behind him.

"I ton'dt know vare I am going, budt I am on my vay!" the German muttered.

At the top of the stairs he stopped.

"Turn to der righdt, unt der second door."

Following the directions, he came to the door. Another red lamp burned here, and revealed a shield-shaped sign, bearing the inscription:

"MADAME LE BLANC.

"Fortune teller. Palmist. Card reader. Hypnotist. Foretells all past and future events. Locates lost treasure. Unites separated lovers. The Seventh Daughter of a Seventh Daughter, and gifted with marvelous powers. Fee, Five Dollars. Ring the bell."

The baron, standing before the door, hanging to his big pipe, read this aloud in his queer German accent.

"I ain'dt losdt no dreasures, unt I ton'dt vant to sebarate unidedt loafers. Budt I haf a skinch dot der Schnitzenhauser luckiness iss on der boom. Unt I haf got fife tollars. Ring der pell."

He rang it.

In response the door opened, and the head of a woman appeared, looking out at him; the face was painted, and the head looked frowsy.

"I vant to know apowet Voozle," said the baron, "unt I haf godt fife tollars."

The information that he had five dollars won the day.

"Come in," the woman invited.

Ushered into the room, and glancing round as the door was closed behind him, the baron discovered that he was in a stuffy hole, lighted by a red lamp that cast queer shadows in the corners and brought out with startling distinctness a stuffed white owl perched over a desk.

Then a black cat rubbed against his legs, and the baron jumped and dropped his pipe.

Picking up his pipe, he cast a deprecatory look at the cat, then turned to the woman.

"You ar-re der fortune deller?"

"I am. Have you got five dollars?"

The baron dug down into his jeans and brought up the needed money.

"Take a seat over there," said the woman, when she had made sure the money was not counterfeit.

The baron sat down, with his pipe between his knees.

"What is your name?" the woman asked, as she took a seat at a table before him.

"You ar-re to dell me dot," said the baron. "Der doorkeeper saidt dot you knowed eferthing."

She laughed and looked at him; then pulled a stack of cards together and began to slip them noiselessly through her nimble fingers.

"All right," she said. "Your name is William Von Schnitzenhauser, and you came here to-day with Buffalo Bill's men."

She piled the cards, took up the first from the pile nearest, and looked at it.

"You have been sent to this town to look into the mystery of a number of murders and stage robberies."

She picked up other cards, and shaped them into a fan, looking at them.

"Another reason is, there have been wild newspaper reports sent out from here, saying that the Ute Indians, because some of them have been killed by the holdup men, are about to rise and massacre the people and the men working in the outlying mines."

The baron, bending his round body forward in his chair, was staring with all his might.

"You seen all dot in dose blaying cardts?"

"Certainly."

She put down the cards, and took another pile, which she shaped into a fan, and studied.

"Buffalo Bill will not get at the heart of the mystery of the holdups and murders if he trusts the sheriff."

"No?"

"For the reason that the sheriff is the leader of the holdup men himself. So he will try to throw Buffalo Bill off the track. You must tell Buffalo Bill to look out for that."

"Yiminidy grickets! You see all dot in der cardts?" She laughed.

"That's five dollars' worth, ain't it?"

"You see some more?"

"I might, for another five dollars."

The baron's hand went to his pocket.

"I am easy," he said; "all you got to do is to bull my leg unt shake oudt der money. Budt I vill gif you anodder fife tollars oof you answer me some kvestions."

"Pass over the five."

The baron rang the gold coin on the table and shoved it across.

"Der fairst kvestion."

"Yes, the first question."

"Who iss Voozle? Or oddervise Volseley?"

"You will have to make that plainer."

"You ton'dt seen dot in der cardts, no?"

"I may, when I look further."

She took up more cards, and slipped them through her fingers.

"But I have to have help sometimes; you see, I don't know everything."

"Oh, I t'ought you dit. Vale, idt iss dhis vay."

The baron explained where he had heard the word, and what had followed.

She laughed.

"Oh, the Sons of Rest! That is a secret organization, I think, something like the Masons or Odd Fellows. You happened to get hold of their password."

"Idt iss not der Klan oof Kan?"

She put down the cards and stared at him over them. Then she laughed again.

"I can't afford to know everything for ten dollars!"

"I haf paidt you for answering some kvestions," reminded the baron. "Den tollars iss den tollars. I haf to keeb some money for my hodel pill."

"The Klan of Kan is Tybee Johnson, Hank Sims, Bill——"

"Der man vot to-nighdt triedt to shoodt Cody!"

"Yes; those two, and a lot more of the gamblers of this town. They are going to kill Buffalo Bill before he leaves the town, because he came here to look into their business."

"Himmel!"

"It surprises you?"

"Nodt etzactly. Budt I vill be more surbrised oof dhey carry idt oudt."

"Hank Sims made a good try to-night. He pretended to be drunk, so that he could get off on that account; but he was no more drunk than you are this

minute. Tybee Johnson knew it, but wanted to shield him."

"Himmel!"

"I'm giving you your ten dollars' worth."

"I believe idt. Budt yoost vun more kvestion."

"Go ahead."

She had almost forgotten to look at the cards.

"Idt iss apowet an Inchun girl, vot iss der taughter oof old Borcupine, der Ute. You can dell me some t'ings apowet her?"

"I can. But she is no Indian."

"No?"

"She is white."

"Your meanness iss dot she iss half vhte?"

"She is pure white. And it's a shame that old Porcupine keeps her down there."

She looked again at the cards, as if remembering.

"Let me tell you about her."

"Idt iss vot I vant."

"You have heard of the Ute massacre?"

"I haf, I pedt you."

"It was at Meeker. The agent, whose name was Meeker, was killed; and some others. Old Porcupine was one of the Ute leaders in that. It was a good many years ago—so many that the one you call an Indian girl was then but little more than a baby. Old Porcupine carried her away, and he has held her ever since, and done all he could to make an Indian out of her, And it's a shame!"

"Himmel!" gasped the baron, bending forward, his mouth dropped open.

"That surprises you, too?"

"Do you readt dot in dose cardts?"

"I do. And a good deal more."

"Yiminy! You ar-re a vonder. Yoost vun more kvestion."

"I'm afraid that I'll have to charge you another five dollars."

"Yoost vun more kvestion. To-nighdt dot girl proughdt to a bawnbroker oof dhis down two pags oof goldt dust, vvhich she soldt to him. Der kvestion iss, vare dit she gidt idt, unt iss she unt old Borcupine making some oof dose holdtoops on der stage drail?"

"That's two questions—big ones."

"Yoost you answer."

"Give old Porcupine enough whisky, and he'd hold up anything. But I don't think the girl would; she's not that kind, unless some of his crooked teachings has at last taken effect."

"Who iss killing der Utes?"

"That's another question. I see I'll have to charge you five dollars more."

Desperately the baron flung on the table another coin, which she quickly raked to her side.

"Dot iss enough for eeny fordune. Who iss killing der Utes?"

"The Klan of Kan."

"Unt dot iss Dybee Yohnson?"

"Him and others."

"Vot do you know apowet der hermit in der hills—Yohnson Dybee? Dot iss a funny t'ing—dose two names!"

She looked at the cards.

"His name is Mark Merrill?"

"Vot?"

The baron, rising quickly, looked at the cards in her hands as he leaned over the table.

She laughed, and drew the cards away.

"I ton'dt seen notting budt der kveen oof tiamonds, unt der jack oof clups, unt some spades unt heardts!"

"But I see the hermit, and his name written under—Mark Merrill."

"Yiminidy grickets!"

"And I see that girl, and old Porcupine, and the sheriff, and Hank Sims, and you and Buffalo Bill and his men."

"Vot a imachination you haf godt!"

"Think so?"

"Iss dis hermidt in der holdtoop pitzness?"

"The sheriff and his men are doing all of that; that's what I see now."

"Yiminidy!"

"And I can see that they're going to kill Buffalo Bill, and you, and all of Buffalo Bill's men, unless you strike the sheriff and his gang at once, and strike them hard."

"Iss idt in der cardts vlich iss to vin oudt?"

"Buffalo Bill, if he strikes at once. Otherwise, it will be the sheriff."

"Unt me—I am to be kilt, too?"

"If you don't move at once."

"Vot kindt oof a mofing?"

"Arrest the sheriff and Sims, and their gang, and throw them into jail, charging them with the stage-trail murders and robberies. When you do, tell Buffalo Bill that you can call on me to testify against them."

"Efidence from ler cardts von'dt go in a courdt oof law."

"I'll have the right kind of evidence, when the time comes!"

The baron saw her eyes glitter.

"I've given you fifteen dollars' worth, I think, if you take my advice and it saves your lives."

"You ton'dt like dot sheriff," said the baron shrewdly.

"Oh, ves, I adore him! He's as gentlemanly a mur-

derer and all-round scoundrel as there is in the West to-day, and as dangerous."

"All vot you haf toldt me iss imbortant, oof drue," observed the baron, sitting back in his chair and reflecting.

"Pay no attention to it," she warned, "and you'll be a dead man inside of a week."

"Dot iss all der fordune?"

"It's enough, ain't it? I can tell you more—along other lines; about your sweetheart and——"

"Ach, no!" the baron objected, struggling out of his chair. "I am diworced. I haf hadt enough oof sveet-heartds. Der fairst day oof der honeymoons idt vos a bail oof hodt vater by my head on; der secondt day idt vos der vlat iron; unt der nexdt day I yoomped oudt. When I am t'inking oof marrying again idt iss me dot haf gone grazzy."

He waddled to the door, pipe in hand.

"Vhy ton'dt you kill dot cat?" he ejaculated, as it rubbed against his legs again and made him jump.

"Because it is my mascot," she answered; "my luck bringer."

"Oof idt vos mine I vouldt preak idts neck py der mittle oof idts pack."

Gaining the door, he swung it open, and began to descend the stairs in the dim red light.

"Fifteen tollars oudt," he muttered; "unt more information in as I haf efer gollccted. Der star oof der house oof Schnitzenhauser iss vaving on high. Hoob-a-la!"

He was let out of the lower hall by the doorkeeper who had admitted him, and he stumbled through the black alley to the liquor house, thence to the street out in front.

CHAPTER IX.

OLD PORCUPINE'S STORY.

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee were extremely busy that night and the next morning, and the forenoon was half gone before the baron met them for a talk.

Before he was through there came an interruption.

The sheriff, Tybee Johnson, shuffled into the scout's room, conducting old Porcupine.

"It's a queer case, suh," said Johnson, presenting the old Ute. "A while ago the Ute comes to me at my place of business"—it was a barroom—"with the complaint that his daughter has been robbed in the trail last night, and kidnaped. Accordin' to the Ute, suh, she came into town last evening on her pony, to trade some things, and buy some goods. She was due at his wikiup about midnight. When she hadn't come in this mornin', the Ute started out to see what had happened, along with some others. About halfway from the town, in the trail, they finds her pony, crippled, with a bullet in its shoulder, and plenty evidence all round of a hot fight, suh."

He turned to the Ute.

"Show the gentleman what yo' got."

Fumbling in his blanket, old Porcupine brought out a strip of cloth, evidently torn from a woman's dress; which the baron recognized as being like the material of the dress he had seen her wearing when she visited the pawnshop.

The baron took the cloth and looked it over.

"Vot else?" he said, breathing hard.

"We make um pasear—no can find," said Porcupine.

He means he trailed round with the others, suh; but

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they lost the trail of whoever it was that held her up. And so he has jumped to the conclusion, suh, that she was not only robbed, but kidnaped."

"Who would be likely to do that?" demanded the scout.

"Now, suh, you've got me. But p'r'aps the Ute has some notion about it."

"Old White Hair," said the Ute.

"The hermit?"

"Ai."

"What makes you think that?"

"White Hair no like um Utes."

"That's no good reason. Have you been at his house?"

"Him gone!"

"He couldn't be found there?"

"Him gone."

"But you don't know where?"

"Not know," said Porcupine, spreading out his hands.

"What did your girl bring to town last night?"

"Two deerskin."

"Vot!" gasped the baron.

"Two deerskin."

"What did she take out? She must have had something valuable, to attract robbers—if they were robbers, and not the hermit?"

"A little tobac' for pipe; a little coffee, flour, salt; some meat; it is all."

"She had no money?"

"No money."

"Vot!" gasped the baron again, wriggling in his chair.

"In the trail where she was attacked," said the scout, "how many pony tracks were there? They would likely show at one side of the trail, you know."

"No see pony track."

"Then the man, or men, happened to be on foot; which made trailing difficult for you."

"Ai."

"Had your daughter ever done anything to gain the enmity of that hermit?"

"He no like Ute."

"Do you know why?"

The Ute shrugged his shoulders.

"No, no know why."

"Is it true," the scout snapped at him, "that the girl is white?"

With a scared look old Porcupine backed to the door, as if he thought of bolting.

"Answer my question. Is the girl white?"

"She half-breed," said old Porcupine.

"And your daughter?"

"She is child of my daughter."

"See here, I believe you were in that massacre at Meeker, some years ago. I've heard that."

"No—no!" he said, clutching the handle of the door.

"You didn't take part with the Utes in that massacre?"

"Me no there; me far off then."

"Isn't it a fact that the girl is white and you stole her away at the time of that massacre, after her parents were killed by the Utes?"

"That lie," said Porcupine spitefully.

"You didn't?"

"That heap lie!"

"Well, I'm going out with you, to look at that trail. I've been up all night, but that doesn't matter. Pawnee will go with me."

"Same over hyar," said Nomad. "Ef trail s'archin' is ter be done I reckon me an' ther Piute is g'ua' ter be needed."

"Me also," said the baron; "I am going along."

"You'll have men enough, suh," commented Johnson, "to lick the whole county."

"And may need them," said the scout. "I was thinking of inviting you, Mr. Sheriff. This is in your county, and so, in your line of duty, I'd like you to take some good men and accompany us."

"I never mix up in these Ute matters, suh," said Johnson. "That's the reason I brought the Ute to you. That seems to be yo' line, and it certainly, suh, isn't mine."

"Then you won't go?"

"I shan't have time to-day, suh; that's the truth of it."

"More important business needs your attention, I suppose," suggested the scout, with double meaning. "Well, we'll go out with the Ute and take a look round out there."

After the sheriff had left the room, they again questioned old Porcupine, who, suppressing his desire for flight, answered as before.

Five miles out, in a little trail that ran over the mountains between the town and the Perdidas valley, they came to the spot where, according to Porcupine, the girl had been attacked.

The pony was still there, hobbling about with a bullet in its shoulder.

"Here me find um," said Porcupine, again producing the strip of cloth torn from the girl's dress, and placing it on the ground where he had discovered it.

There were no tracks, except those made by the wounded pony.

"It's plain that whoever did it was afoot," said Pawnee, as they looked about.

But they found no tracks. Still, this was not strange, as the trail led over hard and stony ground.

"Everything evaporates right here," the scout admitted, when the Piute and Nomad, aided by the scouts, had failed to find even a clew. "So," he added, "we'll go on now to the hermit's."

The report of the Ute was confirmed; the hermit was not at his hut. Whether it was customary for him to be away from it at times, they did not know; but when they forced the door and went in, they found no signs of hasty departure. The few belongings were in place, so that appearances indicated that he might be expected to return at any time.

When they had made a search and failed to find a trail, other than the beaten path by the door and round the house, the scout turned again to the Ute for information.

"We have discovered," he said, "that the girl, when she came to town last evening, had two bags of gold dust; and that she went with them to a pawnshop, and got gold coins for them. What do you know about that gold dust?"

Again old Porcupine showed signs of a stampede. He declared that he knew nothing about any gold dust, and she had had none.

"But she was seen, by one of my men, with the gold dust. He was in the pawnshop; and he saw the pawnbroker give her coins for the dust. Now that is straight. You had better tell us what you know about that gold dust, Porcupine."

"No gold dust," stammered the Ute.

"Apparently, she was robbed on her way home. But that doesn't explain why she was carried away, or disappeared. And it doesn't prove that the hermit had a hand in it, simply because he isn't now at home, and doesn't like the Utes."

Old Porcupine stuck, with terror, to his story that

the girl had no gold dust, and had been bringing no gold coins home with her.

"We'll question that pawnbroker, and we'll make a search," the scout said to him.

Then they let him go; and he was in a great hurry to get away.

On their return to the town, the baron conducted them to the pawnshop, and the Jew proprietor was confronted with the knowledge the baron had gained.

"It is a meesdake," he insisted. "Dare vos no goldt dust."

"What was it you weighed out that she gave you?"

"Notting." He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands in a deprecatory gesture. "I am a honesdt man. I wouldt nodd lie to you."

"But she sold something to you, or pawned something."

"Ah, yes; it vos a liddle lockedt."

He brought it out. But it was only the half of a locket. In it was the picture of a woman.

"Dot vos nodd vot you vos veighing lasdt efening," insisted the baron.

"She gave this to you?" asked the scout, looking into the shifty eyes before him.

"Ubon my honor as a shentleman, idt iss der troot'."

"If she gave you this, it was some time before—not last night."

The Jew shrugged his shoulders again.

"If you ton'dt belief me, how can I hellup idt?"

"I'll write you a receipt for this, and keep it a while, until we can make an investigation. I am an officer of the law."

The scout wrote a receipt and passed it over.

"Idt is always I gedt indo trouple when I lendt money."

"Trouble must be chasing you hard, then," laughed Pawnee Bill.

"Dare is blenty trouple, budt no money in dhis pitz-ness. All der dime I am in trouple, yoost pecause I haf a kindt heardt and lendt beople money."

"At about how many per cent?" asked Pawnee.

"I neffer sharge ofer dwenty ber cent."

"You mean a hundred and twenty."

"Unt more as half der dime I am loser, pecause I am nodd aple to sell der goots for vot I haf paidt. If I hadt nodd peen ledft money by my uncle I wouldt longk ago haf peen in der pankrubtcy gourt."

"And you gave no money to the girl?" demanded the scout.

"One fife-dollar goldt biece for dot half of a lockedt—unt idt is nodd vort' idt. Dot is all."

"I'll buy it of you," said the scout; and threw a five-dollar gold piece before him.

"If I sell idt I must have inderest. I sharge ten dollars vhen I sell idt."

The scout added another five, and took the locket for his own.

When they were outside they inspected again the picture which the locket held. It was an old-time photograph of a white woman.

"Queer about this," muttered Pawnee, "if the Jew told the truth; but he lied so fast that I'm afraid to credit anything he told us. Do you think he got this of the girl, Pard Bill?"

"It would seem to go far toward proving true what the fortune teller told the baron about her—that she is a white woman, and was stolen at the time of the Meeker massacre by old Porcupine."

"Still, she looked Indian."

"She had gray eyes, you will remember; and Indian paint could easily make her look like an Indian."

No doubt she thinks, even if she is white, that she is a half blood; that could easily be, if it was told her in childhood by the Utes."

"Yes, that's right," said Pawnee thoughtfully. "It's a matter that will have to be investigated. But, first, we've got to find the girl."

CHAPTER X.

VALUABLE INFORMATION.

Late that afternoon, having snatched some needed sleep, Buffalo Bill called on the fortune teller, not because he believed in her fortune-telling abilities, but he was convinced that she was the possessor of important information.

She was not surprised by his coming, and recognized him at once.

"So you, too, have come to get your fortune told, Buffalo Bill!" she said.

The same red light was burning in the dim room, the same white owl looked with glassy eyes from the top of the desk, and the same black cat appeared, and rubbed against the scout's legs as he took the seat pointed out by the woman.

"I am willing to have my fortune told, if that is the best way to get what I seek," the scout answered, as the woman took the chair on the other side of the table and began to finger her cards.

"A seventh daughter of a seventh daughter," she said, and laughed, "has no limit to the bounds of the things she knows. I hope your friend, Schnitzenhauser, gave me a good advertisement."

The scout took out a five-dollar gold piece and laid it on the table.

"Your fee."

She stopped manipulating the cards and swept the money into her lap. Then she began again to slip the cards through her fingers.

"I'm a mind reader, as well as a fortune teller, so I know what you are thinking about," she declared.

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"You want to know about Tybee Johnson, first, and Hank Sims, and the Sons of Rest. And you want to know about the Indian girl."

"I suppose your mind-reading ability has conveyed to you the news that the Indian girl was attacked in the trail last night, and robbed, as she made her way home, and can't be found."

She did not try to conceal her astonishment.

"No," she admitted, "I hadn't heard that, and you will kindly give me the particulars. You see," she added, with another laugh, "my mind-reading faculty works only when I have focused it on some subject, and it hadn't been turned on that."

"The girl came into the town, and visited a pawnbroker, last night," the scout explained. "She brought two bags of gold dust, and sold them to the pawnbroker. Then she took the trail on her pony. When nearly to the Perdidas she was attacked in the trail. I have been out there and looked the ground over. The news that she had been attacked, robbed, and kidnapped was brought to the sheriff by old Porcupine. We found her pony limping round, with a bullet in its shoulder. But—that was about all. Old Porcupine charged the crime on the hermit. You know about him. So we went to his cabin. He was not there. We failed to follow the trails; the ground was too hard."

The face of the fortune teller had grown serious.

"I'm doing some of the fortune telling for the purpose of giving you a good start," the scout went on. "Perhaps your cards, or your mind-reading, will help you untangle some of the mysteries that have been presented."

She turned the cards upside down on the table.

"I think we don't need any cards to come to an understanding," she said. "You think I can help you, and that's why you are here."

"And I am willing to pay for reliable information, if that is necessary."

"I'm interested in that girl, Buffalo Bill, only because I have pitied her. I've seen her here in the town, and have made some inquiries about her. I think she is a white girl, and was stolen from some white family by old Porcupine at the time of the Meeker massacre. I tried to get her to come up here once, for a talk, but I couldn't. She seemed shy and fearful, and drew away from me."

"The general opinion, as I get it, is that she is a half-breed," remarked Buffalo Bill.

"I know it. But that time, when I talked to her, I noticed her arm, where her sleeve had slipped up, as she put her hand out to pin her blanket together. I could swear it was the arm of a white girl. Her face and hands were painted. Very likely she has been told that she is a half-breed, and thinks so herself. You have seen persons who were called negroes—and so have I—who were as white as I am, in appearance; yet they were called negroes, and classed themselves with negroes. So, if this girl was always taught that she had Indian blood, she would not be likely to doubt she had Indian blood, she would not be likely to doubt it."

"That sounds very reasonable," asserted the scout, thoughtfully.

"Old Porcupine has had her with him since she was an infant, and no doubt he has become fond of her. That is my opinion."

"He was much wrought up over her disappearance; there's no doubt of that."

"I wish I could help you find her, Colonel Cody. Some one, I think, discovered that she had money, and waylaid her in the trail. The fact that the pony had a bullet in its shoulder shows that she put up a fight. So,

it is possible she was killed, and her body concealed to cover up the crime. It's a terrible thing, if that is so."

"We'll make another search, with that in view. Now, about the gold dust which it's certain she turned over to the pawnbroker for money."

"You say you're certain of that?"

"Baron Schnitzenhauser so reports—he saw it; and he is a reliable man."

"Also a good deal of a fool, colonel."

"The baron has his weaknesses, but he is no fool. For instance, he was not half so much taken in by your fortune telling as he appeared to be."

The flush that leaped into the woman's face could not be concealed by the coating of paint.

"I have no idea," she admitted, "where the girl could have got that gold dust. But there are two ways only by which gold dust can be got—perhaps I ought to say three ways. It can be worked for, or stolen; the third way is, one may tell fortunes for it."

She took up the cards through habit, and put them down again.

"It's been hinted that old Porcupine and some of his Utes have been doing a lot of this stage holdup business," she went on. "If so, the gold dust was got in that way."

"I've heard that hinted. It has also been suggested that the hermit was in it."

"Utes have been killed, you know. Generally, it has been given out that they met with accidents, or were killed in family fights. I have heard of more than half a dozen killed in the last year. Now, it's possible they may have been shot in holdups, and that those stories were told by the Utes to cover it up."

"That will have to be looked into, too," said the scout.

"And now that we have come round to the holdups,

it's no secret, I think, that you are here because of them."

"And the Ute murders," he added.

"Whom do you suspect?" she asked, smiling.

"Right now, I hesitate about giving names."

"You know what I told your Dutchman. And you haven't forgotten that Hank Sims tried to assassinate you. You know who Sims stands in with here—Tybee Johnson, the sheriff."

"This fortune grows more interesting every minute!" laughed the scout.

"Johnson and Sims, with some others, have a thief-and-thug organization here, which they call the Sons of Rest. This, they say, is only an ordinary secret society. It was odd how near your Dutchman came to blundering into the rooms of that society!"

"They are near here?"

"There is another door in the hall below, which your friend didn't see. If he had taken that, he would have been in the right path. But I am glad he came up here. I have spied on that thug organization myself, Colonel Cody, and could a tale unfold that would stir the quills upon the fretful porcupine."

"Old Porcupine?"

"If you ever want to do some of that spying yourself," she evaded, "find that other door in the hall below, and climb some stairs that are beyond it. You then will be at the door of the thug lodge room. They are meeting every night now, since you came."

"Because of my presence in the town?"

"Hank Sims wouldn't have tried to assassinate you if they hadn't been afraid of you," she declared. "I warn you to be careful when you go out to-night, on any other night."

"The sheriff is at the head of the gang?"

"He is, assuredly."

"The question comes up now," said the scout, looking at her fixedly, "of why you are telling me this."

The fortune teller's face became suddenly fiendish in its expression, under the red light of the lamp. She leaned across the table.

"A long time ago, Colonel Cody—but I'll never be so old that I can forget it—Tybee Johnson did me an irreparable wrong; and I've sworn to get even with him!"

"I can easily see that you hate him."

"Hate him!" she whispered. "That doesn't describe it. If I hadn't been a coward, I'd have shot him long since. Instead, I have waited, feeling sure that my time would come. It has come now, and you brought it."

"So, when you saw the baron, you deliberately told him those things, that you might excite my curiosity, and bring me up here?"

"I don't deny it. I knew he was one of your men, for I had seen him in the street with you, and, when he came up here, I saw my opportunity. But, if he hadn't come, I should have gone to you myself. I'm afraid of Johnson, and I don't deny it. He'd kill me in a minute, if he knew of this. But you're not going to let him know that I've said anything."

"No, of course not; if you wish it so."

"Then I'm willing to help you all I can. This fortune-telling trade has a detective bureau beat out of sight, when it comes to learning things. You'd be surprised if you knew of the many people who come to consult me. Half of the thugs and gamblers in Johnson's gang are in here at one time or another. The gamblers think I can give them pointers about winning at cards, and about lucky numbers, and lucky days. I let them think so, for I need the money. If they had any sense they'd see that if I was so wise I could go

into gambling myself and make all sorts of good money, and wouldn't need to fool with people who are silly enough to believe in fortunes."

"Do you know anything about the hermit?" the scout asked.

"Nothing. He isn't fool enough to come in here. But his name isn't Johnson Tybee. I saw him once, over in Ouray, some years ago, and his name then was Mark Merrill."

"I wonder why he changed his name?"

"For the same reason, likely, that so many men out here change theirs—for the reason that I changed mine. If you don't want to be remembered, it's an easy way to make the world forget about you."

"And suspect you, too, if it sees you again!"

She took up the cards again, and shuffled them absent-mindedly.

"I think that's all," she said. "But I'd advise you to raid that lodge room of the Sons of Rest just as soon as you get evidence enough to hang suspicion on. And the reason I advise it is that if you don't move soon some one of that gang will put a bullet into you."

"Is five dollars enough?" Buffalo Bill asked, as he rose to go.

"Yes," she said, standing on the other side of the table; "and I oughtn't charge you anything, for I'm anticipating the finest bit of revenge imaginable, when Tybee Johnson is shot down in a fight in that lodge room, or is sent to prison for the balance of his natural life. Really, Colonel Cody, I am the one who ought to pay."

She led the way to the door, past the purring black cat, and let him out into the red-lighted stairway.

"Good-by," she whispered, as he turned to descend the stairs. "Take my advice and strike quick, and you'll never regret it."

CHAPTER XL

A SUMMONS TO ACTION.

Night had come, and the street lamps were shining, when Buffalo Bill left the fortune teller's establishment, and set off toward the Silver Nugget.

He believed he had received information of value, and he was turning it over in his mind. Still, as always, when danger might be near, he kept close watch about him.

At the street corner above he saw old Porcupine, hooded to the eyes in his blanket, yet easily distinguishable, turning into the side street that ran past the pawnbroker's.

As soon as he saw the old Ute, the scout abandoned his intention of going on to the hotel, and began to follow.

As the scout anticipated, on reaching the pawnbroker's the Ute looked furtively up and down the street, then, thinking himself unobserved, he sprang quickly up the steps, and disappeared in the shop.

Buffalo Bill, following quickly, was in time to see him vanish into the inner room of the place, with the pawnbroker at his heels.

But the scout did not enter the shop. Feeling sure that he knew why the Ute was there, he retreated across the street, and took his stand in a dark doorway.

After a time the Ute came out. As before, he glanced round, then he hastened back by the way he had come. The scout again dogged him.

Instead of going to get his pony, which the scout supposed was near, the Ute turned down the street, and, after looking at the signs above the doors of the

stores, he turned into a store where arms and sporting goods were sold.

With his hat pulled well over his eyes, the scout sauntered past the place, and, glancing in at the door, he discovered that the Ute was looking at revolvers which the clerk had heaped on the counter before him.

When the scout sauntered back, the revolvers were gone, and the Ute was looking at cartridge belts and boxes of cartridges.

"Getting ready for red work," thought the scout, anathematizing the custom which permitted such things to be sold in this town to the Utes.

After a long delay the Ute came out. Apparently he was as empty-handed as he went in; but the keen eyes of the scout detected a bulging of the blanket, and he knew that under it, probably in a gunny bag, were the revolvers, cartridge belts, and ammunition which old Porcupine had purchased.

Now was the time to arrest Porcupine; but the scout had no charge he could substantiate against him, other than that of buying weapons and ammunition, which, it seemed, was allowable in the town; and, furthermore, Buffalo Bill wanted to know now what the Ute would do.

This time old Porcupine struck a hurried gait, which took him into an alley where his pony was tied. The scout was at one end of the alley when the Ute rode out of it at the other end.

After that, by listening to the clatter of the pony's hoofs, the scout readily made out that Porcupine had hit the trail at a rattling gait for the Perdidas valley.

When he arrived at his room in the hotel, Buffalo Bill found his pards there. They had been out trying to make investigations, and had gathered to talk over their various discoveries and failures, while awaiting the coming of their leader.

What they had learned appeared to be inconsequential, but the news the scout brought seemed highly important. They were still discussing it when a rap sounded on the door:

"Come in!" the scout invited, without rising.

The door opened, and the head of a boy appeared.

"Are you Buffalo Bill, mister?" the lad asked, looking at the scout.

"Yes. Is there something I can do for you?" the scout questioned.

"Well, I was told to give you this," said the boy, entering the room.

He held in his hand a sealed letter.

"For Buffalo Bill," he said. "That's who I was told to give it to."

"You have applied at the right shop, my son," the scout declared, as he slit the envelope open and took out the contents.

He saw that it was from the fortune teller. The letter ran:

"COLONEL CODY: Since I saw you, news has come to me that you may want to know. The stage from San Juan will pass over the Perdidas trail at eleven or twelve o'clock to-night, loaded with dust from the San Juan placer mines. It is making a night trip to avoid the holdup men, and is a day ahead of time. But they know all about it, and they will hold it up. It will have to stop at Cactus Springs, for there they change horses, and it's the only watering place, unless they come into the town, which they don't intend. A tip to the wise is sufficient. How I know this is, one of the gang has been in to get his fortune told. I wormed it out of him, and made him think I saw it in the cards, when, in fact, he told me himself, or led me to its discovery. He is to be one of the holdup men, and he is afraid

that maybe there will be a fight, and he will get killed. He wanted to know if the cards indicated that he would be killed to-night. Perhaps you will know what to do; I don't.

Faithfully,

(Signed) "MADAME LE BLANC."

The scout emitted a low whistle, and passed the letter to Pawnee Bill.

"The fortune teller gave you this letter?" he asked the boy.

"Yes, sir."

"Take this to pay you," he said, giving the boy a coin; "and go tell her that I have the message, and she has my thanks."

The boy thrust the coin into one of his pockets and went out.

When the letter had gone round the circle and had been read by all, even by Little Cayuse, the scout turned to Pawnee.

"Some work cut out for all of us, as I see it, to-night," he said.

"Line et out, Buffler," Nomad requested.

"I'm going to ask Pard Lillie to go with you and Cayuse, and follow old Porcupine over the Perdidas trail. We must know what is the meaning of that bunch of fighting hardware he lugged out of this town to-night. It has an ugly look.

"I'll take the baron and ride hot-footed for Cactus Springs, and determine what we're to do when we get there."

The German lifted his round body out of his chair.

"Yoost so soon as kvick I am ready," he announced.

"Same hyar," said Nomad.

"I suppose it's safe to trust that woman?" muttered Pawnee.

"We'll not trust anybody. But if she isn't the big-

gest liar alive, she has opened some trails for us that are going to prove mighty interesting and instructive. As for old Porcupine, I discovered that myself, you know."

"Ther baron," urged Nomad, "ort ter take a good hoss, instead o' Toofer."

"Dot Toofer mooel," returned the baron, "iss yoost so fasdt as eeny odder animal, vhen I keek him goodt py der sites in. Oof he ton'dt go enough I vill sdick a gactus under der saddle."

He adjusted his revolver belt and waddled toward the door, eager as a schoolboy starting out to play, for the life of the baron was danger and excitement.

"Vare do ve meedt mit each odder vhen dhis iss ofer?" he demanded, as he gained the door.

"Here, in this room."

"All richt."

He hit the stairs with a bound, and stamped heavily down.

"You're going on a dangerous mission, pard," said Pawnee, as he and the scout left the room together. "And don't forget that the woman may be deceiving you. But, of course, I don't need to feel anxious, for you're always able to take care of yourself."

"I hope so. And look out for yourself, Pawnee. The girl was held up and her pony shot on the trail you're to take. Don't forget that."

Though serious-minded, they broke into a light laugh; for Little Cayuse was "anointing" himself by running over his body and breast the famous medicine hoof he always carried with him—the dried hoof of a mustang, which he believed possessed remarkable powers to preserve from all kinds of ill whoever used it.

"Me make you safe, too, huh?" he asked.

"If it pleases you, son," said Pawnee, as he drew out

and lighted a smoke weed. "Scrub away with it all you want to."

The Piute passed the medicine hoof lightly over the shoulders, the body, and the head of Pawnee Bill; then he did the same for Buffalo Bill, as the pards stood in the doorway quietly talking.

"All same safe, now," he said, when he finished. "Bullet no ketch um, knife no ketch um, nothin' ketch um."

"Thanks, son," said Pawnee. "You're all right the mascot of this bunch, and the best all-round little trailer in these mountains. We never forget it."

"Pawnee heap big brave."

"Bouquets are plentiful to-night, Pard Bill," laughed Pawnee.

Then they walked downstairs, with the Piute trailing softly after them, his precious mustang hoof snugly concealed in his blanket.

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE HOLDUP.

It was after ten o'clock when Buffalo Bill and the baron reached Cactus Springs.

The stage was not in, and apparently, the keeper of the stage stable knew nothing about its coming.

The place was a desolate spot in the mountains, but the water of the springs caused it to be visited, and used as a stage station.

Buffalo Bill and the baron, without disclosing their identity, asked if their animals could be put in the stables overnight, and if they could be given accommodations.

The stable was full, said the man in charge, and the same was declared to be so by his helper. But the pards found that there was room in the stable; and this denial of its use made the scout suspicious of the honesty of the two men.

"No room in the shanty, either," said the keeper. "You'll have to bunk out; but I'd advise you to hike on for the town."

They had reached the place from the other direction, circuiting for that purpose; and the men thought they were headed toward the town.

Having discovered the kind of men they had to deal with, they made a pretense of starting on.

But when they had gone a little way they swung another circuit, and came into the trail on the other side—the direction in which the stage was expected to approach the springs.

A mile or more beyond the springs they stopped, dismounted, and got ready.

The scout had with him a dark lantern, which he now examined, to make sure it was in working order. They also inspected their weapons, for after their reception at the stage station, they did not know what to expect. If the keeper of the stables and his helper belonged to the holdup gang, as seemed now probable, it was possible that the stage driver was also a holdup man, or in with the band.

The baron held the animals out in the bushes, when the stage was heard coming. Buffalo Bill took his position in the trail.

As the stage came rattling up, the scout uncovered the lantern, and threw up his revolver.

"Halt!" he commanded.

The driver whooped in surprise, put his foot on the brake, and surged back on the lines, thinking this a holdup, coming where it was least expected.

"Got any passengers?" the scout demanded, throwing the light of the lantern on him.

"Nary a pilgrim this trip."

"Then we'll ask you to take on two."

"Ag'inst the rule—this trip."

"Why is that?"

The scout advanced toward the right front wheel, still with the lantern flashing on the driver, which threw his own person into the shadow.

Suddenly the scout uttered an exclamation.

"Hello!" he cried, for he recognized the man at the reins.

"Well, what is it now?" demanded the driver.

"You're Brick Moffat."

"The same. But—"

"You don't know me?"

"Nary. Pull the light out of my face, and turn it on yerself, and mebbly I might."

"You've always been straight, Moffat."

"A man don't live long in this country if he ain't—gin'rally he don't live long, nohow. Seems like I've heard yer voice."

"But can't quite place me?"

"I can't."

"You're sure you haven't a passenger?"

"Sure as shootin'; I ain't got one."

"I'm Buffalo Bill!"

The driver whooped again.

"Say, if that's so, I reckon I can take down my hands. Likewise, as I'm already too blind to see anything, you might choke off that blasted light."

The scout turned the light aside.

The baron broke through the darkness, dragging at the reins of the horses.

"Shucks!" grunted Moffat. "I reckon I'm easy! This is a holdup, after all."

"Nodt on your bostage stamp!" shouted the baron. "Dot iss Puffalo Pill, unt I am Schnitzenhauser."

"Never heard o' ye," said Moffat; "but I'll sure know Cody when he gives me time to git my eyesight back—if it's him."

"How does it come, Moffat," asked the scout, "that you're driving the stage to-night?"

Moffat did not answer that until he was able to see the scout clearly enough to recognize him, when the scout turned the light on himself.

"Simple enough," he said, then. "Jake Heffern was the reg'lar driver, and the express company which runs this line has stumbled to the fact that Heffern has been actin' foul, so they stowed him in jail, decided to send the stage through in the night ahead of time, and asked me to handle the ribbons fer 'em. It was a dangerous job, and I said so; but they made it worth while, and I took it. But when I heard you yell out, I thought I was caught, anyway."

"So you're carrying gold dust, and a lot of it?"

"I didn't say so."

"All right. But I knew it, and that's why I am here. When they pulled Heffern, there must have been other men of the same kidney there; and they hustled the news through to Silver Bow. The road agents there got it, anyway; and they're going to hold the stage up to-night. That's why I'm here with my pard."

"Wow!" Moffat screeched. "Where is this to be?"

"Somewhere beyond the stage station."

"I reckon I'd better hit the back trail."

"I've another plan, Moffat."

"Name it."

"I'm going to ask you to take me and my pard as passengers. We'll leave our horses near here. When you reach the stage station you're to say nothing about having passengers. The horses will be changed, and you'll drive on, and we'll be stowed snugly inside. The reason I think that is best is that we suspect the stage-station keeper and his assistant. We're almost sure they know this stage is coming to-night, and know that a holdup has been planned. So, if they should get onto the fact that we are inside, they might contrive a way to send the news on ahead."

"It'd puzzle 'em," declared Moffat.

"Not at all. A fire built on some convenient hill could be seen for miles, and would be all the signal needed, if something of that kind had been arranged for in advance."

"I guess you're right, there," Moffat admitted.

"So we want to go as your passengers."

"I know you, Cody, and I know you're all right; and your guarantee for the other man is good. But I was ordered by the owners of this line not to take on passengers this trip. I don't deny I've got a load of gold dust aboard, and that's why. But if you——"

The scout flashed the light of his lantern on his authority—his commission as United States deputy marshal for Colorado.

"That takes the bun," said Moffat. "Holdin' that, you're boss. Climb in, but don't kick the bags of dust so hard that you'll spill out their vallyble contents."

Having picketed their animals out in the brush, they climbed in and closed the stage door.

Moffat snapped his whip, and the stage was off again.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE REPULSE.

The station keeper and his assistant asked no questions about passengers while the horses were being changed. But they jocularly warned Moffat to be on the lookout for road agents, saying that a couple of men had gone by an hour or so before, on their way toward Silver Bow.

"Maybe that was a bluff," said the keeper; "an' they may've racked back onto the trail, ahead of you. They pertended they wanted to stop here overnight, but I didn't like the looks of 'em, and they went on. They had a sort of ruffyun look."

The baron poked his elbow into the scout's side.

"Vot funny t'ings you can hear apoudt yourselluf v'en you ain'dt listening," he whispered, as the stage moved on.

A mile or more out beyond the stage station there sounded a sudden rattling of spurs and thumping of hoofs, and the command came:

"Hands up!"

Moffat gave a bellow, and swung hard on the lines; then shot his hands over his head.

"Jump down and open the stage door," was the order.

Before Moffat could tumble down from his perch, both doors of the stage flew open, and revolvers there began to spit fire into the darkness.

One man tumbled, on the baron's side.

It was through a chance shot, for the baron was firing wildly; as was Buffalo Bill.

But that rattle of revolvers, with the bullets cutting

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through the brushwood, the fiery flashes, the fall of the horseman, and the baron's bellowing roar had effect.

"Trapped!" was shouted by some one ahead of the stage. "Boys, git Number Two, if you can, and dig out!"

One of the road agents drove his horse past the stage at a gallop, shooting into it as he passed, and, springing down, made a brave effort to catch hold of the clothing of the fallen man, for the purpose of dragging him away.

Failing, he uttered a curse, fired into the stage again, and went on, like a whirlwind.

"Hit?" asked the scout anxiously, in the momentary lull.

"Nit. But I t'ink I hit somed'ings."

Within two minutes the attack on the stage had been abandoned, one of the outlaws lay unhorsed close by the trail, and the other outlaws were in flight.

"Hoob-a-la!" roared the baron.

He tumbled out of the stage, while Moffat, pulling on the lines, was trying to quiet his plunging horses.

"All right back there?" Moffat called.

"Fine as silk," the scout answered.

"Oxcebt vun oof der roadt agents," amended the baron. "He iss here close py. Oof somepody vouldt strike a lighdts!"

The scout sprung the slide of his lantern, and turned its light on the trail.

Then he, too, leaped out.

"Here he iss," said the baron, "unt I t'ink dot he iss sniffed oudt. Dot iss a bity."

Moffat inclined his head in the direction of the retreat of the outlaws, to ascertain if they were returning. Then he swung to the ground, still hanging to the reins.

"That was quick work," he said approvingly. "Then fellers thought it was a trap, and the stage was chock-full of fightin' men. I don't blame 'em for thinkin' so, the noise you made."

"Which shows," replied the scout, "how easy it would be to protect this trail, if proper methods were used. It makes me think that some one at the starting point is responsible, or he'd send out fighting men in the stage when it had a load of dust."

"Looks it," Moffat admitted. "These road agents has got friends in places where you wouldn't expect it." Flashing the lantern in the face of the fallen man, Buffalo Bill bent over him. He regretted to see that the man was young.

"One of the reckless young fellows of the border," he observed, in a tone of pity. "Not a bad face, that, Moffat—just reckless, and a bit hardened."

To his surprise, the fallen man opened his eyes. After a wild stare, they fixed their gaze on the scout. "Cody!" he exclaimed hoarsely, in surprise. "We might have knowed it. Well, I'm gone. I had a feeling that this was goin' to happen."

Giving the lantern to the baron, the scout dropped down.

"Too badt," said the baron, dashing away a suspicious tear. "I t'ought I vos shoodting too high to giddit eenypody."

"You got me, all right," said the outlaw. "But I knowed it was comin'."

"Why did you come out here, then?" asked the scout.

"A man can't show the white feather."

The outlaw's strength was failing fast. Seeing it, the scout asked a question.

"We'd like to know your name."

"Madden," was the reply. "You'll find it in my in-

side pocket, with the address of my mother. When you write, just tell her I was killed in a disaster—needn't tell what kind. I put the name and address in there before I set out."

"You're the man that called on the fortune teller this evening?" queried the scout.

The man's eyes, which had closed, opened again.

"How'd you know that? But it's all right. She give me good advice. But it was too late then to take it."

The eyes closed again.

"Is Tybee Johnson at the head of this gang?"

There was no answer.

"This band was the Klan of Kan, I think?" said the scout.

"I've got my ticket," the young fellow groaned, "but I don't blab; think what you want to."

"He iss der clear grits!" muttered the baron sympathetically.

"Isn't there something we can do for you?" asked the scout.

"Nothin'. Just let me alone."

Stripping off his own coat, the scout tucked it under the bandit's head, trying to make him comfortable.

"Better stand out in the trail, baron," he advised.

"They might take a notion to come back."

"Thank you," said Madden to the scout. "You're white. But it don't make any difference whether I have a pillow or not, now."

"You don't want to make any statement?"

"None."

Five minutes later he was dead.

"What are we goin' to do now?" asked Moffat.

The scout had been considering that.

"You could go on," said he, "and no doubt you'd get through safe. Still, those road agents might come into

the trail beyond, and take another whack at you. Besides, we have the body of this man to look out for. I'd advise that you drive with us to Silver Bow, and we'll take this body there, and the gold dust. We can store the dust in the vault of the bank."

"It was what I was thinkin'," said Moffat. "Only, I wanted orders. If you take the responsibility, I can say that I was obeyin' you—see?"

"Then we'll drive to Silver Bow."

"Dot Toofer moeel, unt your horse?" questioned the baron.

"They'll be safe where they are until we can come out and get them."

They put the dead bandit into the stage. After that, the scout and the baron chose to ride outside, with the driver.

The stage was swung round, and raced back to the stage station. There they found the keeper and his assistant in an anxious frame of mind.

"What's up?" he demanded. "We thought we heard a lot of shootin'."

"Your t'inking vos goot," said the baron. "Dare vos a holdtoop. You didn't know dot me unt Puffalo Pill vos passengers py dhis stage in, vhen idt vent py here; oddervise——"

The baron checked himself, being about to accuse these men of something he could not prove.

"Buffalo Bill!" the keeper gasped, when he heard the scout's name and saw him. "So you had passengers, Moffat; and didn't mention it!"

"A still tongue saves the gold dust, sometimes," said Moffat.

The stage rocked on toward Silver Bow.

When it arrived there the hour was late. But the streets were thronged. It seemed, from this, that the

road agents, or some of them, had reached the town and spread the news of their failure.

Tybee Johnson was on hand when the body of Madden was taken from the stage and borne into the room of an undertaker.

"Madden!" he cried, as if astonished. "Why, he had the reppytation of bein' about the whitest man in this town! Nobody ever dreamed that he was one of the agents."

"That can be said, no doubt," the scout observed, "of a good many other men here—some of them, perhaps, being close enough now to see and hear me."

But Johnson was not thrown out of poise by this bold declaration.

The baron stood guard over the gold dust until it was safely deposited in the vault of the First National Bank.

CHAPTER XIV.

OLD PORCUPINE'S TRAIL.

Pawnee Bill, Nomad, and Little Cayuse were having quite as interesting a time, in a different way. Striking into the thin trail which led over the mountain to the Perdidas valley, they followed it down to the place where old Porcupine had his flimsy shanty. They reached this point, after crossing the Perdidas, shortly before daybreak. And, after hiding their horses, they made a crawl which brought them close up to the house.

The first thing they were to investigate related to the Ute's surreptitious visit to Silver Bow and his purchase there of arms and ammunition.

Old Porcupine was at home. In addition, other Utes, before unseen in his company, were with him—a half dozen in number. All were down in the water, which was shallow at that point, after the receding of the flood, and were scratching round in what seemed a mysterious manner.

"Whatever aire they up to?" queried Nomad, when the increasing light revealed the Utes and their puzzling work.

"Old Diamond, that's to be found out," Pawnee answered.

"Mebbyso fishin'," the Piute grunted.

Soon one of the Utes came out of the water with a basket of sand, which he dumped into a big stone jar.

This jar he poured water into, shook the contents round violently, then poured off the water, and followed this by pouring out most of the sand. Then he began to search through the sand that remained.

Old Porcupine's Trail.

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"You can guess it now, old Diamond; I can."

"Waugh! Placer minin'. Quar way ter go at it, though."

"It doesn't matter so much how you go at it, if the method yields the dust."

"Gittin' gold dust," said the Piute.

"Thet's whatever," Nomad agreed. "They're pan-nin' fer gold dust."

"I think I see the hole in the doughnut," said Pawnee. "Old Porcupine last night sold dust to that pawnbroker, which he got in this stream by this primitive method of placer work."

"Key-rect. An' et likewise seems ter account fer ther dust thet ther gal had, and traded ter thet pawnbroker."

"So the idea that old Porcupine was mixed up in the stage robbing flickers out," said Pawnee. "I'm glad of it. Too many seemed to be in that road-agent trade, and it was puzzling. It's pleasant to be able to eliminate the Utes."

"Good thing ther white thieves at Silver Bow ain't onto this placer diggin'," muttered Nomad. "They'd be down hyar on top o' these reds, and wouldn't leave a grease spot of 'em, if they stood in the way."

"Wherein, old Diamond, you have hit the nub of the secrecy mystery with which the Utes have surrounded their hunt for gold dust here. Old Porcupine seems to have been wise enough to know that if it got out that the Utes had found gold, they wouldn't have been able to hold this placer long. The white men in the town would have taken it from them."

"Pore Injun got no show when white thieves round," said the Piute sympathetically.

"I guess thet's right, Cayuse. When et comes ter stealin' by high-handed means, an ornery white man

can give a redskin all the kyards in the pack, and then beat him."

"But that doesn't explain the revolvers and cartridges the old sinner toted out here hid under his blanket," Pawnee observed. "That seemed to whisper of war."

But they were not long left in darkness even on that point.

When a bag or two of gold dust had been scratched out of the rich placer, a Ute mounted a pony and set off for the town with it.

"Goin' ter take et ter thet thievin' pawnbroker, and git more money, to buy more pistols an' ca'tridges with," Nomad surmised. "Or mebbysso goin' ter buy whisky, ter raise ther fightin' sperets o' ther Utes."

"That pawnbroker probably charges them something like two thousand per cent for making the exchange," suggested Pawnee. "Talking about stealing! How does that hit you, for the pure unadulterated article?"

"Pore Injun got no show when white thieves round," said the Piute again.

Half an hour or so after the departure of the rider for the town, old Porcupine and the other Utes, who had retired into the house, came out of it, this time gay in war paint and feathers.

They had revolvers belted to their waists, with plenty of cartridges.

"Ready for the war trail," said Pawnee. "I'm sure now they're going to take the trail of the hermit, because he has carried off that girl. If it's so, there will be a dead hermit, as soon as they find him."

"Et's berginnin' ter look ter me," remarked Nomad, as the Utes went down to the river and from some unseen point brought forth a boat for the purpose of crossing, "thet we had better back-track and git our

animiles, ef we expect ter hit their trail, and be anywhars er-round when they tackles thet white man."

They acted on this at once; for Pawnee agreed that it was the thing to do.

Considerable time was consumed in getting their horses and crossing the stream; so that when they came into the valley below the Ute's shanty and found there the trail, the Utes had already a good start.

The Ute women were still in the little house, and set up a howl when they saw Pawnee Bill and his companions go by.

"Et's a good thing we're on this side, and them women on t'other," remarked Nomad; "otherwise, one er them might outrun us, with ther news o' what we're doin'. Ther way some o' them young squaws kin run is plum' scan'lous."

But when they put spurs to their animals and took the Ute trail, they felt sure that they could keep easily ahead of the best squaw runner that the Utes possessed.

Still, on looking back, they discovered that two of the squaws had got out the canoe and were paddling hurriedly across the river.

Ten minutes later they beheld the smoke of a signal fire, on one of the hilltops.

"Hard ter git erhead of an Injun, sometimes," Nomad grunted.

"Injun heap smart!" said Cayuse approvingly.

The fact that the Utes went first to the point where the girl had apparently been attacked, and there took up a trail which the scouts, in searching, had not found, delayed the Indians, and gave Pawnee's party a chance to decrease the distance so materially that he felt sure he was soon gaining rapidly.

Two hours of brisk but careful riding brought them within hearing of the sound of firearms.

"Them's pistols whangin' erway mostly," Nomad said.

Now and then a heavier report rang out, apparently that of a rifle.

"The question, old Diamond, is whether we want to do the heroic, and make a whirlwind charge, or do the cautious, and try a sneak," said Pawnee.

The Piute slipped from the back of Navi.

"You hold um pinto," he requested, "and me see."

He was not gone long.

"Gun shooter in cave," he reported on his return; "outside Utes."

"But you don't know who the gun shooter is?"

"Think um hermit."

"Et is er safe guess," admitted Nomad. "But ef so be he has got the gal in thar, et's too bad ther Utes aire slingin' lead. Right whar is this shootin' match goin' on, Cayuse? Et sounds near; but ther distance?"

"We leave um caballos," the Piute advised; "make um sneak, and then see. Not far."

When they had done this, they came in sight of old Porcupine and the Utes who had followed him. Before them was a small hole, apparently the entrance to a cave, which they were watching, and now and then they sent into it a volley of revolver shots.

"You see um," said the Piute.

What to do, was the question.

"While their mad is up is a poor time to argue with Indians," observed Pawnee. "The thing to do is to throw a scare into them, and drive them away from the cave. Then we can find out who is inside, and what it means; though I'm figuring in advance that our guesses about the hermit and the girl will be found to have hit the bull's-eye."

"Make um charge—huh?" asked the Piute.

Pawnee Bill was turning the matter over.

"Cayuse, when you let yourself out, you can make as much war music as any dozen ordinary ki-yis," the Pawnee said.

"Me make um heap holler," the Piute admitted.

"Son, you sure do, when you go to the limit. Here is a call for the limit. So I'm going to ask you to crawl round until you are on the other side of the Utes. Nomad and I will spraddle ourselves out, while you're doing it. I'll crawl right off there, where you see that rocky nest; and Nomad will creep over into that bunch of aspens. That will put us on three sides of the ki-yis; but down there where the trail leads will be an open space, more so than elsewhere, and we'll hope they will stampede into it. You catch on?"

"Ai. Me sabe."

"Slide, then, pronto!"

The Piute stopped only long enough to adjust his head feather, give himself a few rubs on the head and shoulders with his medicine hoof, and clutch revolver and knife; then he slipped away.

"Over there, Nomad," said Pawnee; "and me for the rocks. When I open, you're to do the same; and make all the racket you can. If we can make old Porcupine think that all the dogs of war are baying him he'll jump sudden for the tall timbers. Again, pronto."

They were in place in a few minutes. Pawnee waited until he considered that the Piute had been given ample time.

The Utes were steadily firing at the opening into the cave, keeping themselves concealed behind rocks.

Suddenly Pawnee's revolver rang out. This was followed instantly by his wild war cry.

Nomad's weapon cracked like an echo, and his yell thundered at the sky.

This being the signal, the way the Piute made the welkin ring, over on his side, was little short of a won-

der. He seemed to be working revolvers with both hands and his feet, while the gurgling and bloodcurdling yells that came from his lips outdid the squawls of a tribe of tomcats.

No one shot at the Utes to hit them. But the result could not have been better. Old Porcupine stampeded for his pony, which he had left lower down the hill; and all the other Utes ran with him.

The revolvers of the hidden trio continued to bark, and their yells were increasing, while the scrambling flight of the Utes was on.

In the midst of the uproar they heard the clattering hoofbeats of the Ute ponies, as their riders drove through the underbrush, and plowed up the bushes in their mad efforts to reach the trail leading down the mountain.

"Hoop-a-la! Hooroar! Yee-ee-eep! Halleluyah!" Nomad howled. "Hear them skeered reds splittin' through ther atmospheric!"

CHAPTER XV.

A MYSTERY CLEARED.

Pawnee Bill, after the flight of the Utes, stood out in front of the entrance to the little cave, and called.

A delay followed. Then the head of the hermit appeared. Apparently he had taken time to ascertain what the call meant.

"Oh, it's you, Major Lillie!" he said.

Behind him was then seen the head of the girl who had been with the Utes.

"We come as friends," said Pawnee. "The only needed proof of it, seems to me, rests in the fact that we are the howling bunch that sent Porcupine and his Utes running."

"You are alone?" asked the hermit.

"Think I could make all that noise myself? Hardly. I've got two friends with me—Nick Nomad and Little Cayuse. We followed the Utes to this place, discovered that they were trying to damage you and the young lady, and then we proceeded to get busy."

He turned round.

"Come out and show your handsome countenances, Nomad and Cayuse," he cried.

The borderman and the Piute obediently placed themselves on exhibition.

The hermit turned about and talked with the girl. Then they came out of the cave together.

But there had been a remarkable change in the girl's appearance. The Indian paint was gone. She stood forth plainly as a young white woman.

"Whoo-ee!" cried Nomad, in staring admiration. "Looks like ther young critter thet war with ol' Por-

cupine, yit it don't. Et's a good thing I ain't a young feller, er I'd be cryin' ter quit ther war trail and hook up matrimonyul."

The girl regarded the noisy trapper with an uneasy look and a flush of self-consciousness.

"Gentlemen," said the old hermit, "I'm proud to interduce you to a girl that I have discovered is my own daughter."

Nomad whooped again.

Explanations came fast, after that.

The hermit and the girl talked readily, when they were sure that the Utes were gone. They seemed anxious to justify themselves.

"I've been crazy," admitted the hermit, unabashed, "and that's the truth; prob'bly I'm a little bit that way yit; but now I've arrived at knowledge of the fact that, whatever I am now, I have been crazy."

"Yit it ain't to be wondered at," he added, as an apology. "You see, when the Utes pulled off that Meeker massacre, they killed my wife, nigh about killed me, and run off with my daughter that then was little more than a baby."

"For a time after that I was plum' loony, and was somewhere in a sanitarium. Then I wandered round. I done some minin' at Ouray. Finally, a sort of recollection of the fact that the Utes was at the bottom of my trouble got hold of me, and I moved down here. I reckon, if I confess it, I'll be pitched into jail; but, anyway, I'm confessin' that I went into the business, then, of wipin' Utes off the map."

"I had sense enough to know that if I played the game bold, I'd soon be rubbed off the map myself. So I used a leetle strategy. Now and then I'd lay out a Ute. Allus I tried to make it seem that they had been killed by road agents, or had cashed in while doin' the road-agent act. The mortality among the Utes be-

come kinda bad, after I started in on 'em. I'd made up my mind not to stop until I had put all of 'em underground.

"That brought Buffalo Bill and you fellers into the country. I found that out, and that you had come. I seen your camp off there. I had gone down to old Porcupine's, sort o' havin' it in mind to settle up with him, when that flood struck, and brought Nomad down it on top of that cabin roof. Porcupine happened to be away. So I slipped on some moccasins he had left, and shinned into the upper room. Then I laid for Nomad. It wasn't my intention to kill him. But I wanted to make Buffalo Bill's crowd think that the Indians were the guilty ones—that they had attacked Nomad—so that Buffalo Bill would go for them. I pictured myself settin' back laughin', while he was wadin' into them."

Nomad was staring and flushed.

"So you did thet?" he roared.

The hermit stepped back, as if he feared he was about to be attacked by the borderman.

"Oh, go on," said Nomad; "this hyar is shore interestin'—thet's what I mean."

"When you came back from the door I dropped out of that hole in the ceilin', and as I shot down I whacked you on the head with a club. Hit harder'n I meant to. Then I put your boots and clothes back onto you, took you across the river, and tied you on your horse, with that Klan of Kan notice stuck to your breast; and sent the horse on."

"Waugh! Er-waugh-h!"

"It hurts me to tell it," said the hermit.

"Et's hurtin' me ter remember et!"

"I offer my apology."

"Go on. Et's accepted."

"What is the Klan of Kan?" asked Pawnee.

The hermit tapped himself on the breast.

"I am," he said.

"You?"

"I done that to fool people. I wanted it to be thought that some o' the things I done was done by that gang of thieves in the town."

"Whoosh!" Nomad exploded. "Tork erbout yer tork-about!"

"But that notice of the Klan of Kan that was stuck on your house?" questioned Pawnee.

"I put it there."

"And the bullet holes in your house?"

"I shot 'em there myself."

"Whoosh!"

"You were trying to fool Cody, along with others?" asked Pawnee.

"Certainly I was," admitted the hermit. "I thought I had acknowledged as much."

"Why?"

"I've given the reason. I wanted him to get after them thieves, as well as after the Utes; and to let me alone. I wanted him to think I was innocent, and needed protection."

"And the girl—this young lady?"

"I'll explain that," she said, "if he wants me to."

"Go on," said the hermit.

"I've been with the Utes ever since I can remember. But I can speak English well, when I want to, and I learned how to read. Lately I discovered that I was not an Indian—not even a half-breed. Several times the herm—I mean my father—has had a talk with me; but he didn't come right out and say what he thought until day before yesterday. Then he told me. But I wouldn't at first believe him.

"When I was on my way from Silver Bow he stopped me in the trail, in the dark. I thought he was

a road agent, and tried to shoot him; and he shot my pony in the shoulder. When I knew who he was, we had another talk, in the trail; and he got out a locket, and lighted a lantern, and showed it to me. It was half a locket, I ought to say; and it had a picture in it—just like the picture in the half of a locket that one time I sold to the pawnbroker in Silver Bow. And, after we had talked, a good many things began to come back to me; and I knew that he was telling me the truth—that I was not a half-breed, and that, instead of being some one I ought to like, old Porcupine was the man who had murdered my mother and carried me away.

"Old Porcupine hadn't been treating me well lately. He seemed to suspect what I was thinking about; that's the way I make it out now. So I decided to go with the herm—I mean with my father—and that's why I am here."

"Then," said the hermit, "old Porcupine followed us, and, when I wouldn't surrender and give up my daughter, he and them with him began to shoot at us in the cave, in which we had taken refuge."

"Waugh!" Nomad woofed again.

"It's a remarkable story," said Pawnee Bill.

"And every word true," said the hermit.

"You are willing to go to Silver Bow with us?"

"If I don't have to go to jail," answered the hermit.

"You'll have to risk that."

In the end, they went.

"That name of Johnson Tybee, the hermit said, when, in the town, he talked with Buffalo Bill, 'I picked up by a sort of happen-chance. I knew my name was Mark Merrill, but I didn't want to use it. Looking round for another, that came to me somehow. I knew afterward, when it was too late to change it, that I had heard the name, and it belonged to the sheriff of the county—only it was turned round; but I had to

hang to it then, and explain it as well as I could, which I had to do reg'lar about once a week, fer nearly everybody was surprised to find that I had the sheriff's name hind side first for mine. Well, it was peculiar."

He looked earnestly at the scout.

"By the way," he said, "what about Tybee Johnson, the sheriff? I know that he is the head of the Silver Bow road agents."

"But can you prove it?" asked the scout.

"No, I can't."

"That's the condition I'm in, Merrill," said the scout. "I know that he is the head of the road agents, but I can't prove it—at present."

"Still," said Merrill, "you've done a good deal this trip; you and your men have helped me a whole lot to get my daughter. Maybe if you go ahead you'll get Johnson yet."

"We're going ahead," said the scout, with determination.

CHAPTER XVI.

STAKING THE PLACER.

"If the man in the moon has eyes and can see this far, he must think that Buffalo Bill's bunch is engaged in peculiar business."

Pawnee Bill stood up and looked about, with a glance thrown over his shoulder at the moon, low down over the mountain behind him.

He had been digging in the sandy bed of the Perdidas River, in the gray of early morning, and now stood in the water, which came halfway to the tops of his high boots.

"He'll think shore thet a colony o' beavers er mus-rats is splashin' round wi' human clo'es on," said old Nick Nomad, who was planting a stake in the bank of the stream near by.

Buffalo Bill, also standing in the water, was sighting at the stake, to make sure that Nomad was placing it where it was wanted.

Baron Von Schnitzenhauser, on the other side of the narrow stream, was planting another stake, with the assistance of Buffalo Bill's young Piute Indian, Little Cayuse.

"If the man in the moon is as wise as he is high up in the universe," Buffalo Bill remarked, "he'll know that it's a hurry-hustle that's driving us."

"Oddervise," the baron commented, "ve wouldt be sleebing sweet treams py our liddle beds in, adt der hodel, insteadt oof sblashing roundt in vater vot iss coldt enough to make a man t'ink he iss an icicle. Oof dot Inchun girl——"

"But she ain't Injun," corrected Nomad; "she is as white as I am."

"Which ain't saying mooch."

Having scooped up some of the river sand, Pawnee Bill "panned" it, and found in the bottom of his mining pan a number of grains of shining gold.

"This Perdidas placer is rich as cheese," he confided to Buffalo Bill. "As soon as Tybee Johnson gets a hunch that it's here, he'll be down, you can bet."

"It won't do him much good after we get the placer claims staked off," said the scout. He sighted, and waved his hands to Nomad. "Over that way, Nomad—a little bit to the right!"

"Thar she is," said the borderman, moving the stake.

"That's the place; now drive it down."

They talked, as they measured out and staked the placer claims, and their conversation revealed an interesting state of affairs.

After the fight of the Utes with the hermit, and the stampede scare thrown into them by Pawnee Bill, the Utes had abandoned the shanty near the Perdidas; but that they were still near, and ready to make trouble, was believed.

It was not fear of the Utes so much as of Tybee Johnson and his scoundrelly followers that had moved Buffalo Bill to make this night descent on the silent Perdidas, and stake out the boundaries of placer claims.

"We'll stake enough claims to make sure that we cover the whole of the placer, or the richest part of it," he said, as he worked and talked. "The girl says it isn't very wide."

They were finishing the work when the sun rose, and men came galloping down the valley.

"What did I tell you?" cried Pawnee, climbing out of the water. "There comes Johnson now, or I miss my guess."

It was Tybee Johnson, sure enough, at the head of a dozen armed horsemen.

He drew rein on the opposite bank of the stream, where the baron had set several stakes.

"What are you-all doing here?" he demanded, his face red with anger, on discovering that Buffalo Bill had got ahead of him.

"We have been staking out claims on this placer," the scout answered. "There are certain forms to be gone through with, when taking mining claims, and this is the first thing to be done."

"But you didn't discover that placer!" Johnson roared, unable to conceal his rage.

"Perhaps, then, you did!" retorted the scout quietly.

"That placer was discovered by old Porcupine," said Johnson, "and he has sold his rights to me and these men. We're down here to take possession."

"Don't you think you're a little bit late, Johnson?" the scout asked, with a twinkle in his blue eyes. "It seems to me that you are."

"I'm sheriff of this county," said Johnson, "and I order you to pull up them stakes and git out."

"By what authority?"

"By authority of my office as sheriff, and because we have bought this placer of its discoverer."

Buffalo Bill laughed in a manner to increase the sheriff's ire.

Ordinarily Tybee Johnson was a smooth-spoken individual, who prided himself on his Southern politeness.

"That amuses you, suh?" he snarled at the scout.

"It certainly does."

"You don't intend to obey my order as sheriff, suh?"

"I suppose we might as well come to an understanding about this, Johnson," said the scout, refusing to be irritated. "The one who is entitled to a mining

claim is the one who, on discovering it, follows the forms of the law and regulations. You say this placer was discovered by the Ute, and you bought it of him. If that is so—"

"If it's so! Then you doubt my word, suh?"

"If it is so old Porcupine sold you a gold brick. For he had no title to this place. He had not staked it, nor filed papers."

"He told me, suh, that he had staked it."

"You see the stakes we put here ourselves; there were no others."

"How do I know—how does any one know—that you didn't pull up old Porcupine's stakes and throw them in the river?"

A bit of color came into the scout's cheeks.

"My word is usually accepted by those who know me! We staked these claims, to cover the placer—not because we intend to hold them, in the end, for ourselves. We intend to hold them for the one who really discovered the placer—Mark Merrill's daughter."

"If she says that she discovered the placer, is her word any better than Porcupine's?"

"Perhaps not to you; it would be to me. But that is beside the point, anyway."

"What is the point?" demanded Johnson. "All I know is, this placer belongs to me and my men here, and we're going to have it."

"This is the point: We believe the girl found this placer. But she did not take the legal steps to hold it for herself—because she did not know about them, or that she could hold it. So we are arranging to hold it for her."

Tybee Johnson sneered, and some of his men laughed scornfully.

"You're a healthy lot of philanthropists, you'd have

us believe. But that oily gammon don't go down with us."

Nomad was beginning to show symptoms of a loss of self-control, and the mutterings of the baron were quite as loud. The Piute was silent, and Pawnee Bill was smiling.

"And, having staked out the claims," said the scout, "of course that makes them ours, for the present."

"Lick the crowd and pull up the stakes," shouted one of Johnson's followers.

Johnson's men drew about him, as if waiting for him to give such an order.

"If you should, by force, pull up our stakes, it would do you no good," argued Buffalo Bill; "for, you see, that would not change the fact that we had set them there, and the land courts would be forced to uphold our claims. So don't you think, Johnson, that you'd better go slow? Besides, we might take a notion to have something to say about it."

"You'd defy me—sheriff of the county?"

"So long as I know I am in the right, I'd defy any man living," was the scout's statement.

"Waugh!" Nomad bellowed, unable to curb his emotions longer. "Let ther ornery whelps try ter jump us, Buffler!"

"Dot iss idt!" panted the baron, fingering his revolvers. "Ve ar-re wanting a fighdt, eenyhow. Der excitement iss goot fer der indigestion."

"You cheap skates, come on!" squalled Nomad. "Fust man what lays a hand on these hyar stakes gits his medicine—you hear me!"

"My friends seem to be losing their temper," remarked the scout quietly. "You're sheriff, Johnson—I don't deny it; but I deny that a sheriff, or any other man, has a right to drive me from these claims."

For a minute it seemed that Johnson's rage would

cause him to give way before the mutterings of his men. But the fact that he knew he was in the wrong cowed him.

Finally, he pulled back on his reins, drawing his horse away from the stream.

"We didn't know you were here, suh," he said, "and we didn't come down for a fight. But I want to warn you that, in defying my authority as sheriff, you become a lawbreaker, and this thing will be settled."

"We'll let the land courts settle it," said Buffalo Bill.

"By the way," asked Pawnee, "where is old Porcupine right now? You must have seen him recently, and we haven't been able to locate him."

As a matter of fact, Johnson had not seen old Porcupine; that had been a lie out of whole cloth.

"If you want to see him, hunt him up yourself," he shouted. "I don't have to guide you to him."

"Because you can't," said Pawnee. "I'll give you a hundred dollars if you'll show us where that Ute is, right now."

"Don't talk!" snarled Johnson.

"You don't know where he is yourself, eh? I thought so."

"I'll exhibit him when it's time to prove that I bought this placer claim of him," said Johnson.

He disliked to ride away—disliked to back down; but he knew that, if it came to a fight, he and his dozen men were not the equals of the men who now faced him on the other side of the stream.

But he went away fuming and threatening.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CHANGE.

Nothing could have been more noticeable than the change in the manner of Tybee Johnson, when Buffalo Bill and his friends went back to the town. His old courteousness had returned.

"Suh," he said, as the scout dismounted before the door of the Silver Nugget, "I must ask yo' pardon for my seeming discourtesy this morning. I wasn't just myself, suh."

He put out his hand, but the scout affected not to see it.

"That's all right, Johnson," was the answer. "He laughs best who laughs last, you know."

"As my guest here"—Johnson was proprietor of the hotel at which the scout was stopping—"you were entitled to proper treatment, suh, and I didn't give it. We'll step into the barroom, suh, drink our mutual healths across the bloody chasm, and forget that it ever existed."

"You're kind," responded the scout, with a mental reservation; "but we shall have to ask to be excused. We make it a point never to touch liquor when we have important business ahead of us."

"But with this cruel wah at an end," urged Johnson, a queer light flickering in his shiny dark eyes, "that business comes to an end, so far as I am concerned, suh."

But the scout refused again, and went on into the hotel, and to his room on the second floor. He soon was followed by the members of his party.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Pawnee,

as he tossed his Stetson into a chair and took his seat in another.

"Ware, Mr. Johnson," said Nomad, drawing out his black brier and loading it for a smoke. "Thar aire snakes, like the rattlers, thet gives ample warnin' when they aire meanin' ter bite ye; an' other kinds thet aire plum' quiet. I likes ther rattler style ther best."

"Yoost der same," agreed the baron. "Misder Yohnson iss seeing dot he made a fools oof himselluf, unt so he iss now changed. Dot iss all. He iss der same Misder Yohnson."

The scout got busy at his desk in the room, making out the papers which he was to file at he local land office to complete the preliminary steps to gain title to the placer claims they had staked that morning.

"Ve ar-re all goin to be rich as cheese—nit," said the baron. "I haf a blacer claim, unt so has Nomadt, unt all der odder vellers; budt idt ain'dt belong to us; idt iss belong to der Inchun girl. Ve are gidding rich fasdt—I don't t'ink."

"If we can keep these scoundrels here in the town from getting them, it's all I want," declared Pawnee.

"By the way, Pard Lillie," said the scout, "I wish you would slip down to the other hotel, where the hermit is stopping with his daughter, and have them come up here."

Pawnee Bill was gone about ten minutes.

There was a queer look in his face, when he returned.

"Deserted Jericho!" he exclaimed. "They're not in the town, so far as I can discover."

The scout, startled, wheeled around.

"No?" he said. "Where are they, then?"

"I don't know. They left that hotel early this morning, after paying their bills. The hotel keeper

don't know where they went; but he said they had left the town."

"You didn't look elsewhere?"

"I thought I ought to jump back here with that information first."

"Waugh!" gulped Nomad. "Am I seein' the fine Eyetalian hand of Mr. Tybee Johnson in this hyar thing?"

"You can call me a greaser if it don't look it," said Pawnee.

"Vale, idt makes a liddle excidementd," drawled the baron. "Pefore I can gidt me anyt'ing to eadt, unt dry der vater oudt oof mine clodings, somet'ings else iss habben. I am going oudt to see vot iss der meanness, oof I can."

"Go back to the hotel, Lillie, and see if you can pick up the trail there. It may be that they merely have changed boarding places. And the rest of you—scatter out and make a search while I finish these papers."

They scattered out; and had not returned by the time the papers were finished. The scout stood ready to go over to the land office with them.

He waited until, one at a time, they came in, for he wanted their signatures to the papers, as well as to hear their reports.

They had discovered nothing. The girl and her father could not be traced after leaving the hotel.

"I found out that they went very early," said Pawnee. "There is a stage for San Juan that goes at five o'clock. That's about the time they left; but at the stage stable it's said no one went out on that stage. The old fellow and his daughter paid their bill, walked out of the hotel somewhere round five o'clock, and disappeared."

Buffalo Bill went over to the land office with his

friends; and there, after the papers were properly signed and attested, they were filed.

The filing clerk looked them over curiously.

"Going into the mining business, I see," he said. "A new deal for Buffalo Bill, isn't it?"

He made a few entries on a slip of paper before him, and the scout and his friends went out.

"There is another stage for San Juan at noon," said Buffalo Bill, "and I'm going to run over to San Juan in it. We have got a lot of San Juan gold dust in the vault of the bank here, and I want to ask the men in authority at the San Juan mine what to do with it, as I got no answer from the telegram I sent them."

"That dust came near costing you your life," objected Pawnee, "and I don't think you are called on to trouble about it further. It's here in the bank vault, and ought to be safe. You kept the road agents from getting it, then stored it here; and you aren't called on to do any more. Let them look out for it themselves."

"But I want to have a look at the works over there, and particularly the men, for you'll remember that we thought it suspicious that news of a shipment of dust from there always seemed to be known to the outlaw gang in Silver Bow. While I'm gone, I'd like to have you continue your investigations. Locate the girl and her father, if you can. Also, I'm hoping you can get on the track of information that will enable me to land Mr. Tybee Johnson."

"Just now we've got a whole handful of suspicions about Johnson, and some half proofs, with a lot of guesses that ought to come near being true, yet nothing worth talking about that could be brought against him, if he was hauled before a court," said Pawnee.

"Just so," the scout admitted. "Maybe you can corral some of the evidence we need, while I'm at work over in San Juan."

The scout started on the stage that left at noon, and was in San Juan at four o'clock.

One of the first persons he saw there, as he got out of the stage, was Mark Merrill.

The scout postponed his intention of going to the office of the superintendent of the San Juan reduction works, and walked across the street to see Merrill.

"Hello!" he said. "You've given us heart disease to-day, Merrill. The amount of energy we have wasted over in Silver Bow hunting for you and your daughter might have been turned to better use."

The white-haired man, who was known as "the hermit" turned, stared, then extended his hand.

"Why, it's Cody!" he said. "And you're jest the man I want to see."

"You heard what I said? We've been hunting all over Silver Bow for you and your daughter."

"Cody, she's gone!"

"Your daughter?"

"Yes. And, because of her disappearance, I was never so glad to see anybody in my life as I am to see you right now."

"Tell me all about it," said the scout.

He pulled Merrill into an alley, so that their conversation might not be overheard.

"That's all I can tell you," said Merrill helplessly. "She's gone!"

When the scout now asked the particulars of the disappearance of Merrill's daughter, they were given; yet, as he said, Merrill seemed to know nothing.

"I was afraid to stay with Olive in Silver Bow," he said. "Tybee Johnson and his crowd stood ready to murder me, simply because they thought I stood in with you. And, with old Porcupine's Utes rovin' round outside the town, I knew it wasn't safe to leave the

streets a minute. So I had a talk with Olive and decided to come here. It's some distance from Silver Bow, and I thought maybe we could stay here in peace until you had thrashed out that matter with Johnson, and the Utes had been moved out of the county or killed. I didn't want to go clean out of the country, and Olive didn't, on account of that placer, which you said you was going to take up in such a way that Olive could have it. That was kind of you, to think of that, Cody; but I believe it lays back of this trouble here. Olive disappeared after we reached San Juan. We went to a hotel. I'll take you to it as soon as you'd like to go. Then she went out to do a little shopping. She was tired of the Indian clothes she'd been wearing, and she said she wanted something to wear different from an Indian blanket. So I let her go.

"Well, she never came back!

"She dropped out of sight right here! That's the way of it, Cody."

"You've made a search?"

"Couldn't have hunted for a needle in a haystack more close than I have hunted for Olive. I've been to all the stores where it seemed likely she had gone. I've been to the town marshal, and I've looked everywhere."

His trembling voice broke, and the scout thought the hermit was about to give way to grief.

"Now, I'm comin' to what I meant to say. I stated that I thought that placer claim was at the bottom of it, or something like that. You see, Johnson wanted that placer. I knowed you was going to get ahead of him. And I reckon he found out the same. But if he held my daughter, he'd have a club with which he could break both our heads. That's what I mean. He could bring us to time. He'd say, 'I've got Olive; you've got the placer. Make that property over to me, and you can have her. Otherwise——'"

He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands in a deprecatory manner.

"I think that's the size of it, Cody," he went on. "Johnson found out we was comin' to San Juan. He sent word to some of his friends here, and when Olive meandered out to look for a pretty dress and bonnet and so forth, she fell into the hands of them men. Otherwise, I can't account for her disappearance."

"I'm afraid you're right," Buffalo Bill admitted.

"You see," continued Merrill, "there's a telegraph line from Silver Bow to this point, and it'd be easy, that way, for Johnson to notify his men here, and that he has men in San Juan I don't doubt a minute."

"But your suspicions haven't been drawn to any particular men here?"

"Well, yes; but not in jest that way. I want to warn you against the superintendent of the San Juan mines. I went to his office, when I was hustling round looking for Olive. He seemed mightily interested in knowin' what you and your crowd was doin', and he asked me more'n a dozen questions."

"Ah!" said the scout. "Tell me about that."

"Well, you know that the San Juan mine has been shippin' a lot of gold over the trail, and that the road agents have been gobblin' it. You saved the last load he sent through, and he began by inquiren' about that."

"To have a talk with him about that is what brought me here," the scout confided. "The gold is in the bank vault at Silver Bow now."

"I know it. Well, you just watch him, when you talk with him. He's slippery and he's crooked. I think he is in with Johnson's gang. That's a pretty mess, Cody. Here is Johnson, sheriff of the county, at the head of the road agents, as we're both convinced. And here is this San Juan mine superintendent in with them, according to my belief; sending out word

to the agents when he gets ready to ship out a load of gold, so that they can rake it in."

"Thank you for that suggestion," said the scout. "If it should turn out that even the superintendent of the mine is in with the outlaws, the stockholders of this San Juan gold mine haven't much of a show to ever see any dividends."

"Look out for the stage drivers," warned Merrill, "they're likely to be in with the agents, too; in fact, you can't trust anybody. And if you don't keep your eyes open, you'll disappear, just as my daughter has."

"You don't feel that they have harmed her?"

"I'm hoping not. I think they are holding her, and when they think the time has come they'll show their hand, and offer to exchange her for that placer you are trying to take and hold for her. But I want your help, Cody."

"You shall have it."

"It gives me heart to know it," said Merrill, his voice again breaking. "You and your men will find her, if it can be done. And jest recollect that I'm on the job with you, when it comes to bucking against Johnson's outfit."

"Where is the telegraph office?"

"In the mine building—the last place you'd look for it."

"A private line?"

"I reckon it is, in a way; but it takes public messages. I warn you, though, that if you send anything over it, you'd better send it in cipher, if you ain't willin' for your enemies to know what you're sendin'."

Buffalo Bill promised to institute a search for Olive Merrill, the hermit's missing daughter, and went on to the office of the San Juan mine. The disappearance of the girl worried him. Like Merrill, he felt sure that the hand of Tybee Johnson was back of it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BLOW AT THE SCOUT.

Buffalo Bill soon arrived at the office of the mine superintendent. The superintendent, whose name was Gilfillan, was rotund and smooth-faced, but with a watchful manner at variance with his oily speech. He thanked the scout, in many words, for his bravery in saving the latest consignment of gold dust from the "raiding hands of the outlaws of the trail."

"Your visit here to-day is fortunate, too," he added; "for to-night we have planned to send out another consignment of gold. We have every reason to believe that the road agents have no knowledge of our intentions; yet if, as you say, you are to return to Silver Bow to-night, and you can go in that stage, I shall consider that the safe transit of the gold is assured, to a point beyond Silver Bow."

The great scout studied Gilfillan, while turning over in his mind a reply.

"I'll go," he said at length.

"We will be willing even to make it worth your while," said Gilfillan, his round face beaming and his eyes narrowing to slits in their beds of adipose. "Name what you think would be a proper remuneration, and a check for that amount will be drawn for you. In fact, if we could employ you to act as a regular guard on our gold stages we should consider the sum so spent a good investment."

The scout refused to accept anything.

"I may, in the end, conclude not to go on that stage," he hedged; "for I've a good deal of work to do here in San Juan."

"But if you get your work done, you will go?"

"Yes."

"That's satisfactory. If you can't go, we will hold the stage until you can."

"There is no means, so far as you know, by which the road agents get advance information of when one of your treasure stages is to set forth?" the scout asked, his eyes lingering on the face of the superintendent.

"Absolutely no way."

"How do you account for the fact that your stages are lately held up so regularly? It indicates a leak of information."

"Nearly all stages have been held up lately; but we have been able to slip through one now and then."

"If I may suggest, wouldn't it be a good idea if a band of reliable armed men was sent out with each?"

"We have considered that, and abandoned it. If we had such a band, we would have just that many men in the secret of when the stage is to start. And how could we know that one of them, if not more, was not a road agent, or in the pay of the road agents?"

"It might be difficult, unless you knew your men. But I think I could furnish such an escort."

"You would use your own force?"

"I would."

"That might be excellent—if your men were here. In lieu of them, I'm going to trust you to take that gold through alone. I anticipate no trouble whatever—for the stage will start unheralded; but if a holdup should come, with you in the stage, the road agents would have an unhappy time."

As Gilfillan smiled, saying this, a flush stole into the scout's cheeks. He had a feeling that the mine superintendent was guying him.

"I'll tell you this evening whether I can go or not," Buffalo Bill promised as he went out.

All that day, as he conducted a search for the missing girl in San Juan, the scout had in mind that queer smile, and he kept asking himself what it meant.

The hermit helped him in the search, and warned him that Gilfillan would play crooked.

"I'm so certain of it, Cody," he declared, "that if you say you are going in that stage, I go, too."

"To help me fight the road agents?"

"You'll need help, if they appear," said Merrill emphatically; "don't ever doubt it. But what I'm going for is to continue my search for my daughter in Silver Bow; for the feeling is growing in me that she was captured here and taken back to that town."

"I hadn't thought of it, but it may be so," the scout confessed.

"You remember that fortune teller, who calls herself Madame Le Blanc?"

"I remember her well. She pretended to tell the fortune of Baron Von Schnitzenhauser, and put him wise about many things concerning Tybee Johnson, whom she hates as she does poison. I'm hoping to learn something more about Johnson from her."

"Well, I thought of consulting her. She knows everything. And she has been interested in my girl."

"She knows many things, but not through her fortune telling."

"Yes, through her fortune telling—in this way: Men and women go to her to get their fortunes told, and they tell her a lot of things, while she is pretending to read their future. She has a way of worming out information. So it's occurred to me that if Johnson or some of his gang are holding my girl, news of it may come to Madame Le Blanc."

About six o'clock that evening the scout sent word

to Gilfillan that he would take the stage that night for Silver Bow. As this information went in a sealed letter, and an answer came back from Gilfillan in the same way, acknowledging its receipt, he had as good evidence as he wanted that if news of his intention got out it would be because Gilfillan was treacherous, or because it leaked out through Merrill. And he had, so far, been given no reason to believe that Merrill was otherwise than strictly honest.

The stage that night did not start from the stage station, but from a side street some distance away.

When the scout reached that little street, which was in darkness, he found the stage waiting for him, with the driver in his seat. Merrill was walking about nervously.

"All ready," said Merrill, in a low tone. "I hope you've got plenty of fighting hardware on you."

"You've talked with the driver?"

"You can't tell by talking with a man whether he's straight or not. The thing you ought to have done would have been to hang round the telegraph instrument and see if word didn't go over the line to Silver Bow about this. I'm bettin' it did."

The driver seemed surly and taciturn, when the scout spoke to him.

"I ain't likin' this job none," he grunted. "They told me this mornin' I wasn't goin' to have no passengers; and hyar I've got two."

"What's your objection to passengers?" the scout asked.

"Passengers aire liable to fight if there comes a holdup, and so I'm in line for gittin' shot; while, if thar ain't any passengers, all I have to do is to stick up my hands when ordered, and set safe in my seat. A man's a fool that will fight with road agents for a lot of stuff that don't belong to him."

He was still grumbling when he cracked his whip, and the stage rolled on toward the Silver Bow trail.

But there was one thing the scout noted, as this start was made, and this discovery he mentioned to Merrill.

A man who seemed to have been concealed in the shadows near by set out in the direction of the mining buildings as soon as the wheels were rolling.

"Oh, I saw it," said Merrill. "He was a spy, I bet you, and he is on his way now to tell Gilfillan that you're shore goin', so that Gilfillan can wire word of it. If this here stage don't meet with a holdup I'm goin' out of the guessin' business."

"Merrill, I'm taking this risk, not because I am so interested in saving the company's gold dust, as for the purpose of discovering if Gilfillan is the villain I begin to think he is. He, you, and myself are the only men in San Juan who can rightfully know that I intended to be a passenger to-night. Of course, I now add the stage driver; though, unless he was able to recognize me, he would have no means of knowing my identity."

"Any man seein' Buffalo Bill onct would know him when he clapped eyes on him the second time. And as for leakin', I didn't. I'd have no cause to. I'm standin' in with you, because I'm expectin' you to help me find my girl, and because I think you're the fightin' kind, that will take this stage through, and I want to git to Silver Bow quick's I can."

The more the scout thought of it, as the stage bounced on, the more sure he became that word had been sent to Silver Bow and that the stage would be waylaid; the reason for the latter being the desire of Tybee Johnson's bunch to "put him out of the way."

It was characteristic of the scout that whenever he discovered or began to suspect strongly that his enemies

were counting on a belief that he would do a certain thing, he did the opposite.

"I know this trail, Merrill," he announced, in a low tone, "and if there is a holdup it is more likely to come at Dead Man's Gulch than elsewhere."

"That place shore furnishes a stage settin' fit fer molodramer—high rocks on both sides, with the trail windin' like a cañon between 'em."

"I see you know the place, Merrill. If a holdup comes there, the passengers have a mighty poor show for their white alley. The agents come in front and jump in behind, and on each side are the cliffs, so they're hemmed in all round."

"It'd take a bird to git out o' there then, an' I shore ain't got no wings. But, gin'rally, the holdups are pulled off farther along. Dead Man's Gulch ain't clost enough to Silver Bow. Them Silver Bow agents don't like too much wild night ridin'; so they're inclined to make their tackles closer to the town."

"When they are after gold only. But if they come for me to-night it will be my life they're striking for; and they'll want to get me in a tight place, like that gulch. That's the way I'm figuring it now, Merrill."

"You may be right, Cody. I reckon you are."

"Before we get to the gulch we shall pass through a stretch of firs. The trail is dark there. What do you say if we open the door softly before we reach those firs; then drop out quietly after we are in them, and let the stage go on? We could follow it, and if it was brought to a stop in Dead Man's Gulch we'd know it."

"Then what? It'd make us safe, though. But we'd still be a mighty long ways from Silver Bow."

"I'd have proved to my own satisfaction that Gillan is a traitor to the men who employ him. And

we could have the sweet assurance of knowing that we were still in the land of the living."

Merrill rubbed his chin reflectively and stared out of the stage window on his side.

"About another mile will bring us to them firs. I reckon, Cody, it's the thing to do. The man that don't fight, and runs away, may live to fight another day; and it's the future I'm thinkin' about. It's a deal better for me to have to walk to Silver Bow than to be lugged in there dead, and a lot better for my daughter. She's a-goin' to need me."

The scout opened the door softly on his side and dropped out, as the firs were reached. Merrill, slower and clumsier, was still fingering with his door as the stage was jerked on.

Then the unexpected happened.

Apparently, the road agents had followed the line of the scout's reasoning, and had set their trap in the firs. For as the stage swung on, with Merrill still in it, the command of "Hands up!" was shouted.

There was a roar of grinding wheels and clattering hoofs as the stage was drawn to a sudden halt, and the scout slipped into the firs at the side of the trail under cover of the noise.

At the same instant the door of the stage slammed, and it was apparent that Merrill had jumped to the ground.

This was followed by a cry of "Halt!" and a revolver shot.

Peering from his screen of firs, the scout dimly saw the horsemen surrounding the stage. They were half a dozen or more in number, with a few men on foot.

"Come out o' that!" was bellowed at the stage—a command emphasized with angry exclamations and a clicking of revolvers.

"They think I'm in there," muttered the scout. "This

is sure proof that Gilfillan wired word ahead. Well, that much is settled. But I wonder what has happened to Merrill?"

This last seemed answered by exclamations from men farther on; but the scout could not tell whether Merrill was still alive and trying to escape, or had been shot down.

"Come out o' there, Buffalo Bill!" was yelled at the stage.

One of the horsemen rode up to the stage door, swinging his revolver.

"Better surrender!" he cried; "for if you try any monkey-doodle bizness you'll shore be shot to pieces the next minute. Come out and show yerself."

The silence vexed them.

"How's this, Wilson?" was shouted to the driver. "Buffalo Bill is in there, ain't he?"

"Shore he is," the driver asserted.

"You had two passengers, and one was Buffalo Bill?"

"That's right. He's in there. Better look out for him, though."

When the scout did not appear in answer to their commands, they clustered round the stage, with weapons ready, while the horseman who had ridden up to the door swung it open.

Having done that, he struck a match and flung it in.

A roar of astonishment and rage followed, when it was seen that the stage was empty.

"What's the meanin' of this, Wilson?" was roared.

"I'm ready to swear that he was there not five minutes ago," said the driver; "I was listenin', and heard them two passengers talkin'."

"Scatter out and look for him," was the loud order.

Some of the horsemen came charging along the trail, brushing past the scout, who stood back in the fire

and saw them plunge by. They were followed by men on foot.

Still others ran ahead of the stage, as if they were interested in the other man who had been in it.

As one of the men on foot swept by, the scout recognized him as Hank Sims.

"Sims is still trying to get me," was his grim thought. "And that he is with this gang of thugs is sure proof that Johnson is backing them."

That he would have been foully murdered if caught in the stage the scout had not a doubt.

The road agents, accepting the statement of the driver, were so sure that Buffalo Bill was close at hand and hiding, that they began to beat about in the firs. They even boldly brought out and lighted lanterns, to assist them in this work.

Some of the outlaws were still roaring round the stage, and seemed inclined to hold the driver responsible for Buffalo Bill's escape. What the scout overheard of that talk made him sure the driver was also a member of the band, or in sympathy with it.

Backing away from the trail, when the search of the firs began, Buffalo Bill was trying to get round, so that he could come close to the trail ahead of the stage and discover what had befallen Merrill, when he was suddenly confronted by a man who had heard him coming, and, dropping down, had laid for him.

A rope shot from this man's hand.

The scout knocked the noose aside, and flashed through the gloom at his antagonist with a panther leap.

His springing jump and the impact knocked the man down; the next moment the scout's sinewy fingers were playing with the muscles of the rascal's throat.

"What's the row over there?" was shouted, for the noise had been heard.

The scout's assailant was wheezing weakly from the pressure on his windpipe. When the fellow relaxed and slid downward with sagging muscles, the scout picked him up deliberately and began to get back farther, carrying the man in his arms.

The scoundrel recovered enough, in a minute, to gasp a choky question, and the scout discovered that he had captured Hank Sims.

But he was being followed by men who could move faster because they were unburdened. So he put Sims down, and stood at bay with drawn revolver.

"If you speak," he whispered, "I'll put a bullet into you. I'm going to hold you, for I want a talk with you."

Before dropping Sims to the ground, he had, as he thought, taken all of Sims' weapons. But now he discovered his mistake. A revolver flashed almost under his nose. So close was it that the flare of the fire and the powder smoke were blown into his face. He fell back, with the feeling that he had been hit, and heard Sims scrambling off before he could recover.

A shower of bullets coming at him, the scout dropped down, and began to crawl away.

"He's there!" was yelled. "Rake the bushes, boys, and you'll get him!"

Another shower of lead came through the darkness.

Buffalo Bill did not fire back, for he did not want to guide their aim. He crawled on, keeping close to the ground, and the bullets flew over him harmlessly.

It was a clever and successful retreat, but it took the scout so far from the stage trail that, before he could get back to it, the stage and the outlaws had gone on.

Anxious about the fate of Merrill, he came cautiously up through the firs. When he was sure the coast was clear, he began to make a search.

This search, covering an hour's time and much ter-

ritory, revealed nothing, except that no body could be found.

But certain conclusions could be drawn, and the scout drew them.

It seemed unlikely that Merrill had been killed, or his body would have been left in or near the trail. The road agents would not have taken it to the town in the stage or on horseback.

If he had not been killed he had escaped, or had been held as a prisoner. Recalling Merrill's belief that his daughter was so held, it did not seem so unlikely that Tybee Johnson's friends would desire to hold the father. That would put in their hands another club with which to fight the scout for the possession of the placer.

It was a long walk to Silver Bow. But the scout was a good walker. And he set out, over the trail, when he had finished his search.

He had been given conclusive proof, that night, that the gang of thieves and thugs, who recognized the leadership of the sheriff of Ute County, was far-reaching in its membership, and stood ready to try any murderous method for his removal.

"My life isn't safe a minute, until I land Johnson and Sims in jail, with enough proof against them to send them over the road. But so far," he reflected, "I haven't that proof. I can't substantiate the claim that Johnson is at the head of these men. He wasn't with them, and I saw none of their faces. And as for Sims, I didn't see him; I only heard his voice."

Burdened with this lack of proof, together with his fight for the placer, and the search he felt he must make for Olive Merrill and for her father, if he was found missing, Buffalo Bill saw clearly that his dangerous work at Silver Bow was only beginning.

It was four o'clock in the morning when he reached

the town. He went cautiously up to his room in the Silver Nugget.

He expected his coming would be looked for by Tybee Johnson, who was the proprietor of the hotel; but he met no one.

In his room, awaiting him and anxious, he found Pawnee Bill.

"Still safe, necarnis," was the pleased comment. "The stage came in before midnight. What have you been up against?"

Dropping into a chair, the scout detailed to his friend the events of the night.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FORTUNE TELLER

The next day, while Buffalo Bill tried to get some sleep, with Nomad camped before the door of his room as a guard, Pawnee Bill, aided by the scout's faithful Piute, Little Cayuse, and by Baron Von Schnitzenhauser, tried to get track of Olive Merrill in the town, and learn the fate of Merrill himself.

One of the men whom Pawnee visited was Tybee Johnson.

Reasonably sure that Johnson knew everything, nothing was to be gained by any plan of concealment; and, though Pawnee did not expect that Johnson would admit knowledge, or make any truthful statement, there was always the chance that, by look or manner, he might disclose something worth while.

Johnson, in his own quarters at the Silver Nugget, knew that Buffalo Bill was in the house, and in his room, and that it was guarded by the watchful borderman. This he made no effort to conceal, as he sent for his colored boy, and ordered in a tray of "something cool, with ice in it."

Pawnee turned down the beverage offered.

"I always take a little snifter with friends, you know," said Johnson. "Sorry, suh, that you feel you have to disappoint me. But here's looking at you."

He filled and drained a glass.

"As for that placer, suh," he said, "and I suppose that is what you are here to talk about, I have definitely abandoned any present attempt to get it. Later, I may do something—in a legal way, I mean. But that, suh, being in the future, needn't come in to disturb our friendly relations now."

"You've heard, of course," said Pawnee, narrowly watching the sheriff, but without apparent effort, "that the stage from San Juan was held up again last night?"

"Yes, suh; the driver told that as soon as he came in. He was a mighty frightened man, suh. But one thing he reported I couldn't believe. He said that Buffalo Bill had been in the stage, and the agents were after him more than the gold. He also said that when the holdup was made it was found that Cody had jumped out just befo'. They had a so't of running fight with him, according to the driver, suh; but, as Cody is now in his room, and I presume all right, it's plain the agents didn't touch him."

"There was another passenger in that stage—Mark Merrill, otherwise known as the hermit," said Pawnee.

"Yes, suh, I heard that, too. He jumped out of the stage, and ran, and escaped; so the driver reported."

"The road agents got the gold?"

"Yes, suh; they collected it. Anyway, the driver didn't bring it in, and he says they took it."

"You've done nothing about it?"

"Yes, suh. I sent men out as soon as the driver made his report. They're still out."

"Merrill has not been reported in the town?"

"No, suh."

"I suppose you haven't any idea who any of those agents were, Johnson?"

"Not in the least, suh. If I did, I'd have them in jail before nightfall. This holdup business has got to stop, if I can stop it; but when I don't know who the scoundrels are, and can't find out, suh, what is there for me to do?"

"Apparently nothing."

"That's just it. I can't do a thing, suh."

"The girl is missing, too—the hermit's daughter," reported Pawnee, looking Johnson squarely in the eyes.

"Is that so, suh?" said the sheriff, filling his glass again, as if to cover his confusion. "I certainly hadn't heard it. When and where did that happen—if you have the particulars handy?"

"In San Juan, it's supposed; but, really, we don't know much about it. We're going to make a search for the girl, and for her father."

"I certainly wish you luck, suh," said Johnson, as if he meant it. "If I can help you by giving you a couple of my deputies, I'll be glad to do it. And any time, suh, when you or Cody want aid, if you'll let me know, I'll assist you all I can. That's what I'm here for, suh."

Pawnee Bill thanked him with quite as much suavity. But neither was deceived. Each had studied the other, and they came together and parted as sworn foes.

When the town of Silver Bow had been raked thoroughly, as it seemed, without dragging up so much as a scrap of information, Pawnee Bill set out with the baron to visit Madame Le Blanc.

"Idt iss yoost as I seen idt vhen I vos here py der odder dimes," whispered the baron, reading the card on the fortune-teller's door. "Unt insite is anodder redt lambp, unt a white owl, mit a plack cat. Vhen der white owl stares adt you, unt der plack cat rups py your legs, you see der fortune deller."

The stuffed white owl was there; so was the black cat and the fortune teller.

"Five dollars," she said, when Pawnee dropped into the chair before her.

"Yoost like der odder dime," muttered the baron, still standing; "but, pefore I got me oudt oof der blace, idt cosdt me feefdeen tollars; yedt idt vos vort' idt."

On that previous occasion, to which the baron's mind returned, the fortune teller had given him valu-

able information, and proved herself an enemy of Tybee Johnson, who had wronged her, she claimed, for which cause she hated him heartily.

Pawnee Bill was bearing that in mind, when he opened up with:

"There's the five dollars; but I don't want a fortune told. What I'm seeking is some information that I hope you can furnish."

She had taken up her cards and was shuffling them.

"Yes?" she said, beginning to throw the cards out into little piles.

"You were much interested in the hermit's daughter."

"She is a dear girl!" said the fortune teller, lifting her painted face and giving Pawnee an inquiring stare.

"She is now missing."

Madame Le Blanc picked up one of the card piles, spread the cards fan-shaped in her hand, and looked at them.

"Yes, that's what the cards say," she declared.

"Perhaps, then," said Pawnee, smiling, "the cards will enable you to determine where we can find her."

She slipped the bits of pasteboard through her fingers.

"You haven't any idea where she is yourself?" she asked. "If you have, there is no use of my looking here."

"I thought you might tell me what you know, if anything," Pawnee urged.

"I know nothing, only as the cards tell me."

"What do they tell you?"

"You don't know anything yourself?"

"Not a thing; that's why I am here."

She looked at him again, with that intent gaze that made him feel that she was looking past his eyes, or through them, into the back of his head.

Then she picked up another pile of cards.

"Ah!" she said, breathing heavily. "Here it is."

The baron, seeming much interested, tiptoed nearer, and tried to crane his short neck to look at the cards the woman held.

"The Utes have her," she announced.

"You seen dot in der cards?" the baron exploded.

She laughed nervously.

"I haven't seen *your* money yet," she reminded.

"You hadt a kveen oof hearts, der king oof spates, unt some tiamondts. Dot vos all. I seen idt."

"Well, isn't that enough?" she demanded. "The girl is the queen of hearts, the old Ute chief is the king of spades, and that placer mine out in the Perdidas is represented by the diamonds. Isn't that plain enough? But, remember, I'm not talking to you now, but to this other gentleman."

"Go on," urged Pawnee. "The Utes have got her. But you only know it from the cards?"

"They never fail me," she declared. "The Utes have captured the girl."

She took up another pile of cards.

"Yes, it's as I thought. They are holding her, thinking if they do they can get that placer."

"Do you see anything there about her father?" asked Pawnee, not believing in the cards, but believing in the possible knowledge of the woman.

She arched her painted brows.

"Oh, he is missing, too? Yes, here it is, all plain enough."

"Perhaps the Utes have him, too?" said Pawnee, in a tone of skepticism.

"That's right; you're a good guesser. The Utes have him, too; and they are holding him for the same reason that they're holding her. You see, the Utes were working that placer, even though it is claimed by

you and your friends. I believe that she was the one who discovered it, and, naturally, they will not be willing to surrender it. So they intend to force Buffalo Bill to give it to them, and no doubt they will desire to exchange the girl and her father for it."

"Go on," said Pawnee again.

"That's all there is about her; but I can tell you something about yourself."

"That's good. I'll receive all kinds of bouquets now."

His light manner did not please her. She frowned and bit her lip.

"I can see only bad," she declared, as she consulted her cards, "if you go on in the route you have chosen."

"I suppose I'll have to change it."

"You are to be killed soon—if you stay in Silver Bow."

"Wow! Then I'll have to get out."

"I'm afraid you won't do that, and that you'll be killed. These cards look ominous, Major Lillie, I assure you. If I had any influence with you, I'd advise you to leave Silver Bow at once. But, of course, you won't."

She shrugged her shoulders deprecatingly.

"This sudden and undesirable taking off—how is it to occur?" said Pawnee. "If I can know that in advance, perhaps it won't occur."

"By a bullet; that's all I can tell you."

"Vare iss dot pullet?" broke in the baron, leaning over again and looking at her fan of cards.

"That ace of spades, standing as it does in relation to the cards about it—right after it, you see, is the ace of diamonds, indicative of a coffin. Before it is the king of spades, standing for the man who is to fire the bullet. The king of spades stands for a dark man."

"He iss to be shot py a nigger, huh?"

"By an Indian, I should say—or a dark-complected white man."

"Himmelblitzen! Dot iss awvul."

"I see that you and Major Lillie are inclined to treat this matter lightly," she said, with a flush that showed even under her rouge; "but it will be no funny matter when this killing happens."

"Then you think it will happen?" asked Pawnee.

"I do, unless you get out of the town at once."

"You don't find anything good in the cards about me—no handsome sweetheart ambling my way, no treasure of diamonds, no——"

"Nothing," she said, her voice rising with irritation, "nothing but death for you, Pawnee Bill."

"And for this I have paid five good dollars," said Pawnee, assuming an expression of disgust.

"It will be worth your life, if you heed it."

CHAPTER XX.

THE BARON'S ADVENTURE.

"The question rises," said Pawnee Bill, when reporting this to the scout, "as to whether this woman is as friendly to us as she has seemed to be."

"She claims to hate Tybee Johnson, and there is no doubt that she helped us before," Buffalo Bill reminded.

"I don't forget that, necarnis. Anyhow, she has given me fair warning to get out of the town."

"Which she'd ort ter know that you won't do, ontill some er these hyar troublin' matters aire settled," growled Nomad.

"Oh, yes, I'm going to get out of the town."

"Waugh! Ye aire? When, I wonder?"

"To-night. If Pard Bill seconds the idea, I'd like to take you and Little Cayuse, and rack out toward the Perdidas, and investigate that tip she gave, that Olive Merrill is a prisoner of the Utes."

"Me like to go pronto," Little Cayuse declared.

"Of course you're getting tired, son, of hanging round this town, and I don't blame you," said Pawnee.

"Piute like to git out where can smell the air," said the young Indian. "Too mucho no-good white man here—too many tinhorn—too many everything me no like."

"Waugh! I'm agreein' wi' ye!" Nomad grumbled.

"This hyar lay ain't no ways to my notion."

Pawnee grinned.

"There ought to be danger enough here to suit you, old Diamond."

"Jumpin' sandhills! 'Tain't thet. Et's this hyar

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sleepin' in er hotel, an' w'arin' yer feet out on hot pavements, eatin' hotel grub, breathin' air all tainted up wi' coal smoke, an'——"

His voice dropped with a rumble, and he applied himself again to his pipe.

"That all the inventory?"

"Et's jest everything! Waugh! Me no cumtux."

"Same here, Little Cayuse," put in the Piute.

"Well, then, I can count on it that you'll go with me when I amble toward the Perdidas, which I'll do to-night, if Pard Bill consents."

"While you're gone," said the scout, "I'll rake the town over again, with the help of the baron. We ought to draw something, if his luck hits a winning streak."

"Der luckiness oof Schnitzenhauser iss on der bum ladely."

"It doesn't seem to me that the hermit's daughter can be in the hands of the Utes," the scout added. "Still, it's worth investigating. And there is the hermit, too. I've got to learn what happened to him. I haven't been able to sleep well to-day, for thinking of that old man."

Pawnee Bill did not set out for the Perdidas until he had the shield of darkness for himself and his companions, and he stole away with them as if bent on some purpose of evil.

Buffalo Bill and the baron went out into the streets of the town, where danger lurked for them on every corner.

But there was one thing making for safety on which they relied. Tybee Johnson and his thugs were not of the kind to strike openly. It is true that Hank Sims had once jumped into the street and shot at the scout, but he had been drunk, or was making a pretense that he was.

Dark alleys were therefore avoided, as the scout and the baron went along. Likewise, they kept out of pushing crowds, where an enemy might think it would be safe to drive a knife into one of them. Out in the open, under the flare of the gas lamps, and in well-lighted rooms, they felt immune.

But, at last, a man who brushed by the baron and entered a gambling house changed this plan.

"You seen him?" whispered the baron, with a tug at the scout's sleeve. "Dot iss der scambp dot once said 'Voosle.' Budt I hadt no luckiness in vollering him. Oof macaroni hadt peen selling adt a cent a mile——"

"Follow him," said the scout.

"Yah, I am idt," said the baron, as he hurried off in the wake of the man. "Budt oof my luckiness iss no petter as der odder dime, I couldt not make enough to buy me a bair oof shoe laces oof macaroni, oof idt vos selling vor a cent a mile. Budt here iss a gone-ness."

Tracking the man to the gambling place, he saw him disappear through a rear door. So the baron made for that door, and brought up in a dark alley beyond it.

Once before, having heard this man whisper "Wolsley," which the baron called "Voosle," Schnitzenhauser had followed into the alley; then had found his way to the fortune teller's above, and by her had been given information of importance; but he had missed his man, and considered that he was "unlucky."

Remembering now that the fortune teller had said there was another door in one of the blank walls of the alley, he felt along them in the darkness.

After a hunt of five minutes his hands touched the knob of a door.

"Voosle, Volesley," said the baron, scratching the door.

To his amazement it opened.

"That's not the password to-night," said a man,

whom he saw dimly in the doorway. "You'll have to——"

The baron, catapulting against him, knocked him aside, and the next moment was running on, not knowing where he was going, but with the idea that he was likely to break his head, if not his neck.

The man shouted something, banged the door, and the baron heard him following.

"I ton'dt know vare I am, budt I am here," the baron whispered, as he hurried on.

The flashing of a light from a room ahead of him, and the sound of voices there, made grateful to the baron his discovery that on his right was a passage.

There was a velvet curtain or hanging of some sort, and a door which was not locked. The baron stood ready to ram the door, to get through it, when it yielded to him, and he stumbled into a black passage.

The doorkeeper who had followed whisked by, and the baron heard him asking questions, apparently of the men whose voices had helped to turn the baron aside.

"Oof vun keeb going," muttered the baron, "he iss on der road."

His toe stubbed against the bottom step of a flight of stairs.

The next instant the baron was softly ascending.

"Oof dhis iss Voosle, der acquaintance mit him ain'dt going to bay me mooch," he was thinking, when he reached the top of the stairs, and a curtain brushed his face.

It was like the curtain below. Behind it was another door, closed, but not locked. Beyond the door was a room, that held an odor like sachet powder.

"Der fordune deller she haf been burning sveet smoke in here, too," was the baron's thought, as he paused on the threshold to listen.

The querulous inquiries of the doorkeeper who had chased him had died out, but somewhere behind him was a stir that made him think he was being pursued.

"Der broper t'ing vor me to do righdt now iss to findt some vay to der-streedt, unt make a skib oudt pefore I am kilt."

Still, that was not the baron's way. He wanted to investigate the Sons of Rest, the mysterious secret organization composed of thieves and road agents, of which Tybee Johnson was supposed to be the head. It was now his intention, if he could find a hiding place, to remain concealed until after the search for him stopped, then creep back and continue his investigations.

Hence, instead of searching for a way of getting safely down to the street, Baron Von Schmitzenhauser continued his search for a hiding place.

"Varefer idt iss I ton'dt know idt, budt I am here, unt oof I can findt me a safeness——"

Moving quietly into the room, his knees butted against something soft. This he discovered to be a lounge, that had over it a fringed covering which hung down to the floor.

"Yoost der t'ing!"

The baron dropped down, and was investigating the depths beneath the lounge when he heard some one coming, and squeezed under without more ado.

He had no more than concealed himself and drawn his revolver for emergencies when the footsteps entered the room—footsteps that were soft and gliding, with a slippery movement that made him think he had been spotted and followed and was being looked for.

But a light flashed instantly—a red light, that threw a few streaks of gory color under the lounge where he lay; and the baron saw that he had entered the room of the fortune teller.

"Yiminidy grickets!" he breathed, fairly paralyzed. "How dit I dood idt? I am adt der odder endt oof der puiliding!"

For a moment he was so confused he could not think clearly. Of course, in striking the stairway he had been turned round, and had arrived at this room, while thinking he was moving in the opposite direction.

A further sense of confusion was caused by the discovery that the room of the fortune teller plainly connected with the lower hall that led directly to the secret lodge rooms of the Sons of Rest.

Madame Le Blanc had set the red lamp on its shelf and was moving about the room. The baron could see only her shadow, now and then, but he had no doubt as to her identity.

That feeling of confusion persisting, he pinched himself, to make sure he was not dreaming.

"Somedimes yhen I feel so, der nighdtmare iss ridt-ing me unt I am having treams. Budt I haf hadt no peer to-nighdt unt no sissage! So I musdt be awake."

He was almost on the point of crawling from under the lounge and revealing himself, when he heard feet on the stairs by which he had ascended.

"Der doorkeeber vot chased me iss coming oop to gidt his fordune toldt, so dot he can know vare I am. Vale, oof she can seen me t'rough dhis lounge, unt tell apoudt idt——"

The door on the stairway opened, and the voice of Tybee Johnson sounded:

"Did a man pass through this room a while ago?"

"No," the woman answered.

"You're sure of it?"

"He couldn't have got through without being seen by my man below," she declared. "Some one came up this way?"

Johnson came on into the room.

"Well, it's a funny thing. Some one who had last week's password got by the guard and into the hall. The guard came into the lodge room asking about it. He had followed the man to the lodge room, but no one in there had given last week's password. So we thought the fellow might have come up this way and got down to the street."

Going to her front door, which opened into the red-lighted hall, Madame Le Blanc called a question down to her doorkeeper.

The baron heard the doorkeeper's answer, declaring that no one had passed him recently.

"Yiminidy! I am now in a closeness!" thought the baron. "Oof I am bulled outd oof here py my headt unt my heels, somepoty is going to gidt hurt."

After going to the rear door, by which he and the baron had entered, and shouting to some one at the foot of the stairs that the man being searched for had not passed through the madame's room, Tybee Johnson came back into it.

"One of the boys must have been lying," he said. "Queer ideas they have of a joke, sometimes. No one not a member could have had even last week's password."

"I don't know about that," said the woman.

She dropped into her chair behind the card-covered table.

"Last week Baron Von Schnitzenhauser got hold of it. He came up here asking me what it meant."

Johnson sat down in the chair on the other side of the table.

"How'd that happen, I wonder?"

"One of your men was fool enough to whisper the word to another member, down in the gaming room,

and the baron, who happened to be standing by, heard it."

"You threw him off the scent, I hope?"

"I'm not sure that I did."

"That thick head would never tumble, unless you put him wise," said Johnson.

"Dot t'ick headt!" muttered the baron. "Some dime I am going to bay you for dot."

"I hope you didn't," Johnson went on uneasily. "We were at outs then, and you're a spiteful cat sometimes."

"What I told him was that the Sons of Rest was a society like the Odd Fellows, and it might be he had heard their password. I am a spiteful cat at times, and we weren't as sweet as honey toward each other right then."

"Oh, I know you were trying to help Buffalo Bill against me," Johnson declared, in no pleasant tone. "And you made a lot of trouble."

"That's why you came back, and want to be good now! I thought as much. You'd rather have me on your side than against you."

"That's no joke," he admitted; "but it isn't the reason I came back. We can't get along without each other, you know. You're the only woman in the world for me, and that's a fact."

"Some sveetheartd pitzness now," mumbled the baron. "Idt iss gif me a sickness by my sdomach!"

A good deal of the "sweetheart business" followed. To his amazement the baron discovered that this woman was, or had been, Tybee Johnson's wife. They had quarreled and separated and been bitter enemies, now they had made up and were again friends.

"Unt dot means danger for Puffalo Pill unt der resdt oof us, while ve ar-re peliefing vot she iss say to us."

Proof of the correctness of this view came immediately.

"The very fact that I was against you, and trying to help Buffalo Bill as a matter of revenge, will enable me now to undo all the harm I have done, and more," she urged. "Pawnee Bill was up here not long ago."

"Does he believe in fortune telling?"

"Certainly not. He was after information. That girl and her father have both disappeared, and he thought perhaps I had got some information about it. I told him they were held by the Utes, and sent him off to the Perdidas searching for them, for I supposed you had them, and didn't want a close search made here in the town."

"Well, we haven't," said Johnson, bringing his hand heavily down on the table. "And we don't know where they are."

"You don't? I jumped to the conclusion that you were holding them, to play them off on Buffalo Bill for the possession of that placer."

"The girl and her father got out of here hurriedly," said Johnson, "thinking they would be safer in San Juan. I wired about it in cipher to Gilfillan. But, before he could get busy over there, the girl had vanished. Her father was bawling about it through the streets, claiming he did not know what had become of her. Perhaps that was a bluff."

"Mercy me!" the woman exclaimed nervously.

"About that time Buffalo Bill set out for San Juan, perhaps to look for them there. He went on the stage, and that indicated he meant to come back on it. So we planned to trap him, in Dead Man's Gulch. Well, it worked out in the strangest way. Merrill started to return with him in the stage. The holdup was pulled off according to program, but Buffalo Bill wasn't in the stage when it was done, though Merrill was. Merrill

jumped out and got away. And when a search along the trail was made, Buffalo Bill captured Hank Sims. You see, he was lying right there, close by, which showed he had jumped out of the stage, somehow, when it was halted, or just before."

"He captured Sims!"

"But he didn't hold him. And we didn't hold Buffalo Bill. It was an utter fiasco."

"He's here in the town!"

"I know it. Sims has lost his nerve, and so have the others. So Cody walks round, bold as you please."

The woman was silent a moment, as if thinking this over.

"Let me tell you one thing, Tybee," she said: "I'd rather have a band of wolves after me than the officers of the United States government. If you kill Buffalo Bill, and it can be proved against you, nothing can save you."

"Don't I know it?" he said uneasily.

"So you'll have to be careful."

"That's what's the matter with us now. We're so careful, that we act scared. Every man jack of us is so sure that the shooting of Buffalo Bill or any of his men means hanging that we're afraid to move. Yet, if we don't down them, they'll get us sooner or later."

"Perhaps you had better get out of the town," she suggested.

"To run away would be a confession of guilt."

"Well, you want to be careful."

"If Pawnee Bill bumps into the Utes and gets done up by them——"

"You'd like it. That may happen, though he took Nomad and that Indian with him. But if you had some men down at the Perdidas disguised as Indians!"

"That might work," he said. "Yes, it's a bright

idea. I'll attend to that. Let's see, when did they set out?"

"Shortly after dark."

"And they followed the mountain trail, of course. My Utes could meet them as they come back. I'd as soon lay that on the Utes as not. It would clear up more than just Pawnee and his bunch. It would put the Utes to flight, probably, and stop them from further claiming that placer."

"Do you think you can ever get that placer away from Buffalo Bill now? He's got the start of you."

Johnson laughed a bit triumphantly.

"If you should see the land-office records you'd discover that those claims have been filed on in the name of myself and others."

"But I thought Buffalo Bill got his papers in."

"He did. But they were lost somehow. Then I put mine in. The records don't show that he ever filed any papers."

"It's a good thing, Tybee, that you've got your scoundrels holding down positions everywhere."

"I've been working up this organization for five years," he declared proudly, "and the men who are in the gang can be found in about every place. I'll get that placer, all right, in the end, if Buffalo Bill can be pushed aside."

"He couldn't be bought off?"

"Never. That's been tried before, and the men who tried it didn't think well of the plan afterward."

"And the placer is very rich?" she asked.

"I think so. From what little investigation I've been able to make, it's worth more than the San Juan gold mine."

"We ought to have it," she said softly. "We must have it."

"It would be easy, if only Buffalo Bill was out of the way!"

She sat silent again, and, through habit, shuffled her cards. The baron could hear them slipping through her fingers, and the breathing of Tybee Johnson.

"Sooner or later," she said, "he will be up to see me—not because he believes in fortune telling, but he thinks I discover things in that way, and am disposed to aid him. That's what I meant, Tybee, when I said that our recent break, and the help I gave him because of it, have put it in my power now to help you as I never could have done otherwise."

"Perhaps so," he said doubtfully.

"Thinking that I dislike you and am disposed to help him, he will be likely to believe whatever I tell him."

"Maybe so."

"How would it do if I told him about the Sons of Rest? He knows what I said about them to the baron, and that would incline him to believe more."

Tybee Johnson shifted nervously in his chair.

"The closer we keep that whole business a secret the better, it seems to me," he urged.

"I can tell him the truth—that you meet on certain nights in those rooms, when men he would never suspect meet with you, and that there plans are laid and—"

"And have him jump in there with a lot of deputies, and capture the whole bunch!"

"You didn't let me finish. I fancy I foolishly told the baron enough to enable him to locate those rooms. So you'll have to meet the danger that Buffalo Bill will jump in there, anyhow."

"A woman's tongue!" growled Johnson.

"A woman who hates is always dangerous, you know! I thought I hated you, then, but now I want to help you. If you have got to get rid of Buffalo

Bill, the only safe way is to make it seem it was done by a mob, or a gang of toughs. He has many enemies here. If he should lead his men into that alley—at the other end, where the secret door is, with the idea of raiding the place from that point, a gang of town thugs might rush on him and his men there and kill them. That's my idea. But I hate——"

"It might be done—with Sims to lead 'em."

"And you'd keep out of it?"

"I'd be somewhere else—in San Juan, maybe."

"Well, if Sims would do it the plan would work out. Still, I'm afraid for anybody to try it. But if Sims has the nerve——"

"Sims thinks he has got to get Cody's goat, or do a dance on air. You see, Sims killed a miner up in Fargo, a year ago, and he has got it in his head that Buffalo Bill is here looking for him. Though he has changed his name, and his looks, he thinks Cody has him spotted."

"And maybe he is right."

"Maybe he is; it wouldn't surprise me."

"Shiminidy!" thought the sweating baron, cowering beneath the stuffy lounge, where the heat began to be unendurable. "Efery minude vot I lif I am learning somedings. When Cody knows dot apoudt Sims, he vill squeeze dot willain undil he iss ready to dell der whole troot apoudt Misder Yohnson. Der luckiness oof Schnitzenhauser she iss vaving again some more. Whoob!"

"You can put it up to Sims," continued Madame Le Blanc, "and see if he has the nerve. But I hate to suggest it."

"For why?"

"Oh, I don't know; it makes me feel queer. Ugh!"

"When Buffalo Bill comes here again, try to find out just what he is planning against us—against me. I'll

give this tip to Sims. Then, if you conclude to send Cody and his bunch into that alley—say to-morrow night—perhaps something will happen. But we won't talk about it, if it gives you the shivers. Mum's the word, here and elsewhere. And, for goodness' sake, don't let your tongue run away with you, for Cody is sharp as tacks, and more suspicious than a rat before a trap."

"Cody iss nodt some fool, you pedt me!" thought the baron. "Unt me, I am some t'ick headt, eh? Petter you vatch a liddle oudt, Misder Yohnson."

Tybee Johnson and the woman talked longer, but covered much the same ground. Johnson wanted to send after Pawnee Bill a band of thugs who could play the Ute trick to perfection. And the thought of being able to get Sims to strike the scout a deadly blow allured him.

Still, ruled by caution, he had reached no definite decision when he left the room.

Yet the baron was sure that the plans would be carried out, so far as the road agents were able to carry them.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BARON'S ESCAPE.

The departure of Johnson caused the black cat, that was the especial pet of its mistress, to dart in fear under the lounge.

Discovering the baron, though previously aware that he was there, caused the little beast to arch its back and spit angrily.

Thereupon Madame Le Blanc came over to the lounge, giving the baron a shiver of fear.

"What is it, Pluto?" she asked. "Is there a rat under the lounge?"

"Fairst I am a t'ick headt, unt now I am a rat! Himmelblitzen!"

The baron tried to lie snug and quiet, intending to remain there until the woman's departure from the room gave him a chance to escape. But the cat threatened his hasty undoing.

It spat at him again, gave him a rake on the shoulder, and backed away, though it did not depart.

"You're a foolish Pluto," said the woman; "there isn't anything there."

"Notting at all," breathed the baron. "Yoost you go away kvick."

But Madame Le Blanc stooped down to draw the cat from under the lounge, and, in doing so, put her hand on the baron's leg.

If she had been an ordinary woman she would have screamed, and, perhaps, would have run from the room. But, being of a very different order, she simply lifted the edge of the loose lounge covering enough to make sure she was not mistaken, and pulled out the cat.

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Then she pitched it to the floor, and, moving to the head of the lounge, she drew from her bosom a revolver.

"Come out of there!" she commanded, cocking the weapon.

For a second the baron "sweat blood."

"Come out," she ordered, "or I shall shoot you where you are!"

But the momentary delay had given the baron time to think, and he now acted. He rose up under the lounge, lifting it bodily, and turned it over on its end, with a push that smashed it against her and threw her down.

As the lounge fell with a crash, carrying Madame Le Blanc before it, her revolver was discharged. The baron caught away the lounge covering and drew it round his head and shoulders, so that it enveloped him, as it fell about him, from head to foot.

The next instant he was leaping toward the door which opened into the red-lighted hall.

Though dazed by her fall, Madame Le Blanc fired again, sending the bullet through the door panel not a foot from the baron's head. Then he crashed through the door, nearly tearing it from its hinges, and went down the stairs in a series of wild jumps that came near being his undoing, for the lounge covering caught and tripped his feet as he reached the bottom.

But it was as well that this happened. The lower door flew open, the knob turned by the doorkeeper, who had heard the shot and the crash; and the baron was hurled against him, so that both went through together, falling in the alley.

The baron fell on top, and the next instant he had wrapped the red lounge covering round the head of the doorkeeper, and was making tracks through the alley.

Instead of trying to escape through the gaming place, which he had used before, he looked for another way out, for he did not want to disclose his identity to any one in the gaming room, as he would surely do if he ran through it.

Behind him he heard the startled yells of the doorkeeper, and, farther off, the high-keyed voice of Madame Le Blanc.

"I ton'dt know vare I am going, budt I am on my way!" he muttered, as he flew for safety, seeing ahead of him a dim light.

He fetched up in another short alley that had walls like a house. Two minutes later he was in a narrow street. Here he recognized his surroundings. Half a block away was the main street, brilliantly lighted, filled with night crowds, and lined with saloons and gambling houses.

Before reaching this street the baron stopped, and stepped into a doorway.

"I ton'dt vant to go on mit heavy pants. Somepody mightt dake me for a locomoteef, unt t'row der switch. So I vill yoost roosdt here a liddle vwhile, so I can gedt my lungs kvieter. Himmel! Dot vos an exciting in-experience. I am looking for oxcitementt, unt I am gitting idt in punches."

As he rested he drew out his big pipe and jointed it together—no mean feat. He also got out his tobacco bag.

"When I go aheadt I vill nodt haf der pants eeny more, unt vill be schmoking so kviet unt nice."

His big pipe was going, and he was walking slowly, as if he had been enjoying a stroll, when he came into the main street of the town. Here he passed boldly by the gambling house, edging his thick body through the crowd, with an eye out for danger, and a hand thrust into his coat pocket, where a big revolver rested.

He would have given much for the clairvoyant power of seeing through the building into the regions occupied by Madame Le Blanc and her friends; but he pictured mentally what was going on there, and hit close to the truth.

Madame Le Blanc had come tumbling down the stairs, screeching to the doorkeeper not to let the man escape, and had run plump into the arms of the doorkeeper, who had gone in wild pursuit of the baron and then had run back again.

"Where is he?" she cried.

"I don't know. He got away. Who was it?"

"You let him get away?"

"Madame, he knocked me down, and fell on top of me, and he smothered me in this rag. I never——"

She snatched it away from him and held it up in the dim light.

"My lounge covering," she said. "He was hiding under the lounge in my room."

"Who was it? That Garry McKeown, I'll warrant. Three times, in the last two days, he has tried to get into these rooms. And he's the biggest thief in Silver Bow."

"Garry McKeown!"

"You've seen him—that fat slob that's always tryin' to pry into places and steal whatever he can lay his hands on. He stole ten dollars from the till of the saloon next door only yesterday. They saw him in there, and, after he went out, the money was gone. He'd steal the barroom furniture, if he could get away with it."

"Garry McKeown!"

"That's who I think it was. I was gone from the door here a few minutes, and he must have slipped in then. It was while you was out of your room up there. You can tell, maybe, if he got anything."

"I hope you're right, as to who it was. I'll look round and see if anything is missing."

When she got upstairs, with the lounge covering trailing over her arm, and turned higher the red lamp, she found the scared cat perched on top of the desk behind her chair, close by the stuffed white owl.

The contrast between the snowy owl with its staring glass eyes, and the black cat, arching its back in terror and ready to fly at her, caused her to laugh.

"You silly Pluto!" she said.

But when the cat scratched her, as she sought to take it, she knocked it to the floor.

As it scurried under the lounge again footsteps were heard at the door leading to the stairs that led to the rooms of the Sons of Rest.

"What's the row?" demanded Tybee Johnson, opening the door and entering.

"Why, there was a man under this lounge all the while we were talking!"

"No!"

"Pluto ran under there after you had gone, and, when I tried to get him, I discovered the man. I ordered him out at the point of my revolver. Instead of crawling out, as I expected he would, he rose up and threw the lounge on me. I tried to shoot him as he ran out at the door over there, but he got away. Lofton says he thinks the fellow was Garry McKeown."

"I hope so. You didn't get to see him?"

Johnson dropped into a chair. His face looked suddenly pasty under the red light, and he was trembling.

"He threw the lounge on me, and knocked me down with it. Then, when he ran, he had that lounge covering round him, so I couldn't see who he was."

She picked up the cover from the chair where she had thrown it.

"I hope Lofton is right," the sheriff said. "But I can't forget that a man with last week's password tried to get into the lodge rooms, and he may have come this way when he was chased. If he did, and——"

"You're a nice, loving husband, you are, Tybee Johnson!"

"What's the matter now?" he demanded.

"You haven't asked whether I was hurt, or anything—after I had told you that the lounge was thrown on me and I was knocked by it to the floor. All you're thinking about is your own possible danger."

"It's enough to think about," he grumbled. "Were you hurt?"

"I don't think so—not much, anyway; though, at the moment, I thought I was half killed. Whoever it was under that lounge, he must have heard all we said, and you know what we were talking about. I think you'd better see Garry McKeown and find out if it was him."

"He wouldn't admit it. But I'll see him and accuse him of it, and maybe I can find out. If it was, I'll slip him a hundred dollars and tell him to keep still."

He got out of the chair heavily and walked round the room. The cat ran out of its hiding place, and he kicked at it.

"If it hadn't been for the cat I wouldn't have known the man was there," she urged.

"And if you hadn't lost your wits when you made the discovery you'd have kept quiet and slipped me word, and the fellow could have been captured."

"I was a fool, there," she admitted bitterly.

"But it's too late to talk about that. If that was one of Buffalo Bill's men——" He stopped in his walk.

"Well, they'll be on, and you know what that means. We said enough to condemn both of us."

"Now, you're getting scared."

"I am—if it was one of Cody's men! But I'll see McKeown."

He went down by the front way, and had a talk with Lofton, the doorkeeper, after which he felt better, for Lofton, letting his imagination rove, was becoming more certain every minute that the man who had been in the fortune teller's room upstairs was the sneak thief, Garry McKeown.

In the main street outside, the baron was moving along slowly, making his way toward the Silver Nugget, where he expected to find Buffalo Bill. The placid manner with which he puffed at his big pipe gave no hint of the thoughts stirring in his shrewd German mind.

Tybee Johnson, hastening to the Silver Nugget, of which, as has been said, he was the proprietor, passed the slow-moving German, and flashed him a look.

"A fine nighdt, Misder Yohnson," said the baron.

CHAPTER XXII.

CAPTURED BY UTES.

Pawnee Bill, out in the Perdidas valley, had adventures of his own, though the time was a bit later.

It will be recalled that Pawnee had taken old Nick Nomad and Little Cayuse, and had started out in the night for the Perdidas, to try to discover if the missing girl, Olive Merrill, was with old Porcupine and his Utes; the tip on which he was working having been given by Madame Le Blanc.

But, while Pawnee was still resting in the belief that the fortune teller could be depended on to aid Buffalo Bill against Tybee Johnson, he was taking no chances, for Tybee had swarms of spies in Silver Bow, and the likelihood that men would be sent out to ambuscade his party was never absent from Pawnee's mind.

To guard against surprise, Pawnee and his followers deviated from the mountain trail, when they were no more than a mile or so beyond the town, and descended into the valley of the Perdidas by another way, as day was breaking.

From a hill they now took a look over the valley, searching it for signs of Ute occupancy.

"Them ki-yis, ye recklect," observed Nomad, "warn't nowhar round when we set them claim stakes. Tharfore, I reckon we can safe slide down an' see ef Johnson's gang has moved 'em."

"No see um Utes," said Little Cayuse, shading his eyes with his brown palm.

"Still, they may be there," declared Pawnee Bill. "But we'll go down and have a look."

They forded the river and descended on the farther side.

When they got down to the placer claim they found that the claim stakes had not only been moved, but that others had been set up instead.

"Waugh!" Nomad rumbled. "Tybee Johnson has been at work hyar."

"Well, it won't do him any good. He can't take away men's rights in a mining claim by doing something wrong himself," Pawnee declared. "I'm no law sharp myself, old Diamond, but it doesn't take a lawyer to know that much."

"He can make work for law sharps a heap, though, and a whole lot o' worry fer Buffler, by doin' et; and I reckon thet is his game."

"A funny thing was hinted to me in the town to-day," said Pawnee. "It was said that *we* have run the girl out of the country, so that we could hold these claims for ourselves, and that we had planned to take them for our own when we went into the thing. And there are men in Silver Bow believing it. So, you see, we have got to find her, if for no other reason than to prove we couldn't dream of doing a thing of that kind."

Swinging down from Hide-rack, Nomad began to inspect the new claim stakes.

"Waugh!" he exclaimed. "Looky hyar. A Ute moccasin track. Great snakes! Ye don't allow thet ther Utes could 'a' changed these stakes, do ye?"

Little Cayuse flashed his revolver and swung round. "Plenty Ute!" he whispered. "Wuh!"

He and Nomad were on the ground, but Pawnee was in the saddle when the discovery was made that they were surrounded by Utes. Every bush and rock had hid one, but now they were sliding into view, more than a score in number. The remarkable thing, which did

not escape attention, was that the Utes were in war paint.

These Utes, heretofore, had not been of the war-paint variety; they had seemed to be a degraded type of redskins, existing only for the purpose of loafing, begging, and drinking whisky when they could get it. Old Porcupine, their chief, had been as bad as the rest of them.

"Wuh!" exclaimed the Piute. "Me no like."

Pawnee's hand had dropped to his revolver, and Nomad was fingering the lock of his rifle, at the same time moving toward Hide-rack.

"I reckon, Pawnee, et's a fight," said Nomad; "plum' looks et."

"On-she-ma-da! You're right. But mebbys so there's some misunderstanding. Can this be old Porcupine's dirty crowd?"

"Off ther is ole Porkypine hisself, ef my eyes ain't in er eclipse. He's got a shiny new rifle, and seems ter be ready ter plug ye, an' is w'arin' feathers ernough ter fit out a bonnet fer any s'ciety lady. I can get him frum hyar, ef ye gives me ther word, and then we can jump fer et."

"Recklect," Nomad added, when he saw Pawnee Bill hesitating, "thet ole Porkypine ain't got no likin' fer ye. We dipped in, ye know, and whipped his crowd good, or, ruther, skeered 'em half ter death, thet time when they war tryin' ter git at Merrill and his gal, and Porkypine ain't forgot et."

Suddenly old Porcupine called out a command to surrender, wording it in fair enough English, and threw up his shining rifle to emphasize the command.

"Is this the way to treat friends?" cried Pawnee, with a grim attempt at humor. "We come seeking you, with honey on our lips and——"

He stopped suddenly.

The object of their search, Olive Merrill, had risen into view, close beside the threatening Ute chief.

"Don't make a fight," she urged, "for you will be killed if you do."

"Waugh!" grunted Nomad. "She is shore with 'em. Yit she don't seem ter be no pris'ner, like what we expected."

Little Cayuse, reaching the side of Navi, sprang nimbly to the back of the pony.

A dozen rifles and revolvers covered him.

"Don't try it!" cried the girl. "You'll be killed."

"Wuh!" the Piute shouted, ready for a fight and a race. "Mebbyso we be killed anyhow, huh?"

"You'll be killed, if you try to get away," she said, coming forward. "You see the Utes, and there are more farther back. You can't get away."

"It begins to look as if we chased ourselves down here on a fool's errand," Pawnee said to her. "We came down here looking for you, because it had been suggested you had been captured by the Utes, though it seemed unlikely."

"I was," she declared.

"You don't seem to be a prisoner."

"I am, and so is my father!"

"Waugh!" sputtered Nomad. "He's hyar, too! Thet's plum' cur'us, fer he war missin' out of a stage over on ther San Juan trail."

"I'll explain it as soon as I can. But Porcupine has asked me to tell you to surrender."

"An' be hashed by Ute hatchets arterwards," growled Nomad. "Young lady, I prefars ter die fightin', ef so be I has ter go under."

"You'll die sure, if you begin the fighting. So you'd better surrender," she advised.

Old Porcupine shouted something in angry Ute.

"He says he will open on you at once, if you don't

surrender," she added. "For Heaven's sake, men, don't you value your lives? Put down your guns."

Pawnee Bill shifted his revolver so that it bore on the Ute chief.

"Tell my friend, Porcupine, that I've got him covered, and if any one goes under he'll go first. We're not anxious to fight, but we don't intend to surrender and be slaughtered. You know these ki-yis, Miss Merrill, and you'll know if it is safe for us to surrender to them."

The girl spoke quickly in Ute to Porcupine. And he answered.

"He says there will be no fight if you surrender, and he will not hurt you."

"Can you guarantee it?" demanded Pawnee. "You know them!"

"Yes, I guarantee it. The trouble is about the placer. If you will promise to drop this placer matter, they will let you go."

"Waugh!" grumbled the borderman.

"So that's the milk in the coconut—the African in the woodpile?" muttered Pawnee. "We'll surrender, but we'll promise nothing. That's up to Pard Cody, who is engineering the placer business. But say to Porcupine that if he will send us to Cody, we'll bear any message he desires."

The result, ultimately, was that Pawnee Bill and those with him surrendered to the Utes—not because they wished to, or did so without great fears, but because it seemed the only thing possible, without a fight in which the chances were they would be cut down.

"I'd rather be a prisoner than a dead man, old Diamond," said Pawnee to the grumbling borderman; "that's the way I look at it. So I vote to lay down our arms and be peaceable. If we don't like conditions afterward, we can probably jump out. At any rate, we

won't be held long before Pard Cody will be down here seeing what is the matter."

Not without many expressed misgivings did old Nomad yield up his weapons to the Utes who hustled forward to get them.

But the power of the girl with these Utes was shown to be considerable. At any rate, she was able to sway old Porcupine, and, through him, rule them, even though, when the surrender was made, some of the more vicious of the redskins showed a lively desire to want to make use of their hatchets.

The prisoners were conducted away from the river, and were held without being bound. They were permitted to talk with Porcupine and the girl. Mark Merrill was there, also as a prisoner, but not bound, and he showed an eager readiness to enlighten the new prisoners. But the girl did most of the speaking, and Pawnee's questions were chiefly directed to her.

"It's the placer," she repeated. "Porcupine says that it belongs to the Utes, because I was living with them when I found it, and they first worked it. They kept all knowledge of it from the white men as long as they could, for they knew the white men in Silver Bow would try to take it from them. When trouble came first they fled, being afraid of the white men; but then they met a large number of Utes that had gone down to the Perdidas from the Nueces. You've noticed how many Utes there are here."

"It's too apparent," said Pawnee, with a smile. He was determined to meet the unpleasant situation in a light-hearted manner. "When the rocks blossomed with their head feathers I thought the land was suddenly sprouting bushes with plumes for flowers."

"An' ther paint!" said Nomad. "They must er been robbin' a paint store recent."

"There are a hundred Ute warriors here, and near

here," said the girl; "and more are coming. By tomorrow Porcupine will have two hundred warriors. It has made him bold, and he is ready to fight."

"Ai!" the chief grunted. He understood every word. "Fight white tinhorn quick for the gold in river."

"And you?" asked Pawnee of the girl. "I admit that I don't understand your attitude."

She lowered her voice.

"All this trouble was started because that placer is being claimed for me; so the Utes understand it, anyway. They say that Pa-e-has-ka and the men of Silver Bow have said they will take it for me, but the Utes believe the white men are thieves and want it for themselves. The Utes say that if I send word to Pa-e-has-ka and the white men that I don't want the placer, but want the Utes to have it, that will show if the white men are honest. If the Utes are permitted to have it they will not take up the hatchet, but will let me and my father go, and also will release you and your friends."

"So that's the way the land lies?"

"For that reason I have decided to give up any claim I may have to the placer."

"You'd turn it over to the Utes?"

"Young lady, ye don't seem ter know ther great vally o' thet sand bank o' gold!" said Nomad.

"I value people's lives more," she declared. "The Utes are ready to fight; some of the younger men are wild for it. They will raid the country. Houses will be burned, and men, women, and children will be killed. I should feel responsible, so I give it up. The Utes can have it."

"I rather think," said Pawnee, dropping his voice, "that these Utes would turn tail and chase themselves out of this country faster than they ever came into it,

if they once butted into the white men. So I think you're foolish."

But she was obdurate on that point. She felt that she was called on to sacrifice the mine to save lives.

Then she told how she had fallen into the hands of the Utes.

"That 'ere's been er puzzler ter me," Nomad urged, questioning her about it. "You war over ter San Juan an' so was yer dad; an' ther Utes war out this erway. Besides, you war in ther town; and how ther Utes got ye out, an' down hyar, has gummed up ther cogs o' my thinkin' machine."

"Make um pasear over to San Juan," grunted old Porcupine, overhearing this.

"The Utes had fled from here, you recollect," explained the girl. "They went toward San Juan, then. They were under cover close by the trail when father and I went through to San Juan in the stage, and so they saw us."

"That afternoon, when I went out to buy a few things, a Ute woman, whom I knew well, came up to me on the street, and said that her baby, in a tepee just outside of the town, was very sick. She begged me to go out and see if I couldn't do something for it. She had come in to look for a doctor, but preferred that I should go. She said several of the Utes who had fled from this place were in camp together, and most of them were afraid to enter San Juan."

"So I went, for I had helped her once before. When I got there I found there was no sick baby, and I was held. She had been sent in by the Utes to get me to come out, so they could hold me."

"Which et plum' proves that er Ute's word ain't wuth shucks," said Nomad, who still refused to resign himself to the situation.

"The Utes pulled down their tepees and started off

with me, in this direction. But they camped that night by the trail. They were not far off when the stage came by and was attacked. Father was in the stage, and he escaped by running. But he ran into the midst of the Utes. That explains why he is here now."

"Easy as easy," assented Pawnee, "when you know how it all happened. It looked like a big mystery, and it isn't."

"Then," said the girl, "they came on to the Perdidas."

"And laid fer us," growled Nomad. "They shore collected healthy specimens."

"Which is the same as to say that we were all fools," said Pawnee, with a laugh, still determined to face the situation with a light heart.

"I ain't plasterin' any burs and nettles in with my words," declared Nomad, "but ef anybody thinks that he feels 'em stickin' him, et ain't my fault."

"You old cinarron, you'd rather have loped off with a load of Ute lead under your hide! Is that it?"

"Mebbyso," the borderman admitted, with a grin. "Anyhow, thar'd shore been some Utes carryin' mine."

"Me no like um git killed," said the Piute, "but me no like um this."

"You've got company, Cayuse," said Pawnee.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PAWNEE'S PLAN.

"Aire we goin' ter set hyar like er row o' bumps on er log, an' wait fer ther skies ter rain down friends an' liberty, er aire we goin' ter try ter carve out our own salvation?" grumbled Nomad, some hours afterward, when his patience was becoming overstrained.

"I have been some time planning how we can do a little of that kind of carving, old Diamond," Pawnee answered mildly.

"Well, I ain't heerd et!"

"I haven't planned it yet, to my own complete satisfaction. I don't want to raise your hopes, and then have 'em drop with a squash like a rotten melon."

"Waal, suthin' has plum' got ter be did. Night is a-comin' on, an' this hyar hunkerin' down 'mongst these Utes is makin' me as tired as a settin' hen. What's yer plan, so fur as you has shaped et?"

"They're too many to fight."

"Don't I know et? A hundred red ki-yis, wi' knives an' guns, not ter mention revolvers an' lances. Shore we can't fight 'em. Et will have ter be er sneak in the dark. Off thar is ther Perdidas, and down by et is ole Hide-rack, tergether with Chick-Chick and Navi, along o' the Ute caballos. Ef I c'd git my legs over Hide-rack, with good dark round me, I'd shore give ther Utes er run fer their money."

"We want to take the girl and her father with us, when we make our break," said Pawnee. "It seems to me that's almost as important as getting away ourselves."

"Waugh! They wouldn't go. Thet gal is plum'

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bent on sacerfcicin' her fool self, and her dad with her. Jes' bercause she has lived wi' ole Porcypine's Utes, and knows 'em so well, bein' brought up with 'em frum a baby, she thinks duty is bawlin' at her through er golden trumpet, to stand by 'em now. Er waugh! An' thet, arter ther scan'lous way they has treated her!"

"That's hardly a fair statement, old Diamond!" Pawnee urged. "She thinks if she stays now with the Utes, for a time, and gives over all claim to the placer, she will keep the Utes from rushing out and killing a lot of white women and children."

"She'd ort ter know they'd git wiped out tharselves doin' et."

"She does know that—and has said so to Porcupine; but she believes, too, that white people would be killed and white homes destroyed before the Utes could be conquered."

"It wouldn't happen. They'd chase toward Silver Bow, then they'd chase back; an' thet would end et."

"As she believes otherwise, we've got to consider her viewpoint."

"Waal, what do *you* think?"

"That she's mistaken about that. These Utes aren't such fire eaters, even though they have put on paint and feathers. If they were the genuine old sort, they'd have fried us before this in torture fires, instead of letting us loll round and smoke good tobacco. Whisky and contact with white men have done that for them."

"Glee-ory tér whisky! I ain't never had call ter praise ther pizen truck before."

"She doesn't think that, and she is controlling her father."

"Ef these hyar Utes only knowed thet ther ole hermit is ther man what stuck up them Klan o' Kan notices, and hid out in ther brush and shot Utes by

ther dozen with his ole rifle, he shore wouldn't last ne longer than a snow bank in Sahairy."

"As you might be overheard," said Pawnee, casting a quick glance round, "you'd better keep still here about that. What they don't know won't hurt them, nor him."

"Still, they don't like him, you bet!"

"The influence of the girl is protecting him now. So, if we get her out of this Ute camp, we've got to take him, too; otherwise, he wouldn't last long."

"Shore he wouldn't. You aire thinkin' o' kanga-rooin' out er this Ute camp wi' 'em by main force?"

"In two hours or so," said Pawnee cautiously, "it will be dark down here by the river. The Utes have got spies sashayin' round in the direction of the town. Give them two or three hours more for the spies to get in. That will be along about ten o'clock. Up to that time a lot of the braves will be crow hopping here, to keep their courage up; and that means that the camp will be filled with noise. It means, too, that nearly all the Utes who aren't crow hopping will be watching those who are. Now, if we could get hold of the girl and her father, and make a safe crawl down to the horses, the rest would be easy, wouldn't it?"

"So that's yer plan?"

"Yes."

The old borderman passed his fingers through his beard, while he reflected on this.

"Thar ain't but three of us—you an' me an' Little Cayuse," he muttered. "An' we aire asked ter handle two live people, and git out er ther camp with 'em. Still, I reckon we c'd do et—at a pinch."

"What do you think of me sounding Merrill?"

"Waal, he's a bat, so ye can't tell what he'd do. It'd be as safe guessin' which way er cat would jump. Las' week he war wild erg'inst ther Utes, 'cause they

war holdin' his gal, and had massacred his fambly. Now he's hyar, meek ez a vi'let an' apeerently as dang'r-ous. Whatever he reckons is ther best fer his gal he'll do."

"I think that's a safe guess. And if I could get him to see that it is best for his daughter to be taken out of the camp and back to Silver Bow, he might fall in with my plan. Then he would be helping instead of hindering us."

"On ther other hand," said Nomad, "ef he didn't fall in with et, an' blabbed et to his gal, yer fat would be in ther fire. Still, mebbe ye c'd resk et."

Though Pawnee Bill now made up his mind to put this to the test, he found no good opportunity for a talk with the old hermit until after the Ute supper time, when the night was settling down.

Merrill was sitting apart, gnawing at a bone given to him by one of the Utes.

"I don't know whether this here is beef bone er pony," he grumbled, as Pawnee dropped down by him; "'tain't big enough fer elephant, and it's too big for dog, an' tastes like a mixture o' charcoal and burned leather. Hope they're givin' you enough to eat, Major Lillie; they ain't me!"

"I think I'd order more and better, if I could hit a restaurant. I don't find it any fun, being held in this way, even if the Utes aren't swingin' hatchets at our heads."

"Me neither."

"Still, you think you'll stay?"

Merrill glanced round warily.

"But fer Olive I wouldn't—not a minute longer'n I had to."

"You haven't any cause to like Utes, of course."

Merrill choked on the meat he had chewed from the bone, and snarled wolfishly.

"Not me! There are some things I'll never forget. But it don't do to think of 'em here now. If I let my mind run on 'em I'd grab the first knife I saw handy and jump for old Porcupine. But, then, what'd happen to Olive? That's what keeps me quiet."

He applied himself to the bone, and looked round again.

"You know what her idea is. Her mother was killed by the Utes, and she was carried off by 'em when she was little. She don't want that to happen to any other mothers and children."

"But would it?" asked Pawnee.

"These are some o' the same Utes that was at Meeker. You know what was done, then. They killed the agent, burned houses, slaughtered, then run off stock. What was it they didn't do? Old Porcupine was one of 'em, the old fiend!"

"Conditions have changed since then," said Pawnee, studying his line of attack. "The Utes were powerful, and the whites were few, at the time of the Meeker massacre. Off here a few miles is Silver Bow, filled with white men. The knowledge of that will make the Utes go slow."

"Olive don't think it."

"The Utes have been partially civilized since then."

"Huh! Do they look it now, with their paint and feathers?"

"They have learned the taste of whisky, and it has weakened them. And they have learned to love the white man's gold, and the things it will buy. That's why they want this placer, and——"

"And they say they're goin' to have it or blood!"

"Between this spot and Silver Bow are only a few miners—no women and children; and the Utes would move along that line if——"

"They'd strike the settlers in the valley further down—that's what Olive says."

"If we should jump out of the camp to-night, the Utes would move in the direction of Silver Bow, in pursuit of us. This would draw them away from the lower valley, with its settlers. And, before they could back-track and do harm there, my pard, Buffalo Bill, would have enough fighting men behind him to make them hike for the tall timbers."

"I'd like to be in his crowd chasin' 'em, with my old rifle across my saddle," Merrill growled.

"You don't think your daughter would be willing to leave to-night?"

"No, she wouldn't. She's a curious girl, on account of being with the Indians so long, I reckon; she's got a streak of Ute stubbornness in her, mixed with a new and ingrowin' desire to help the Utes and save the lives of white people. I've had a lot of talk with her about it. She wouldn't go, if she had the chance, and the Utes wouldn't give her the chance, nohow."

"But you'd go, if *you* had the chance?"

"I wouldn't leave Olive. She might need me. Utes, as I look at 'em, are half human and half wolf. Mebbyso when they are lookin' the most amiable they'd turn against her for somethin'. Then I'd be needed. My old life ain't worth much any more. More'n ten years of it was spent in a lunatic asylum, on account of that Meeker business, and what's left of me ain't nowise valuable. But I can still swing a knife and wield a gun, and, if trouble comes, I shore would stand up for Olive against the whole Ute nation."

It was a sentiment which Pawnee Bill could applaud.

"Her danger is great here, then, as you see it?" queried Pawnee, continuing his attack.

"Yes; but she don't see it. She don't want to see it."

"Then it isn't right for her to be left here, where she is exposed to such danger."

"Well, what can I do?" whined Merrill. "She's got her own ideas, and won't see mine. What can I do?"

"I've been thinking of this," said Pawnee, "and I'm now going to put it up to you. Olive ought not to be permitted to follow the course she has chosen, and should——"

"But what can I do?" Merrill interrupted.

"To-night my friends and I are going to get out of this Ute camp. We think we can make it by a sneak, while the Utes are enjoying their usual vaudeville performance. Our horses are with the Ute caballos, down by the river, and, as they're not far off, we ought to reach them without trouble. We could take along some of the caballos, for good measure, if we need them. I'm inviting you and your daughter to go with us."

"She wouldn't," Merrill declared.

"But wouldn't you think yourself justified in using force? All that the Utes are holding her for is because they want the placer. Yet it is her property, by right of discovery. You know that my pards and I have filed claims for it, which we intend to turn over to her. The Utes think the placer spells for them unlimited whisky and laziness. They deserve nothing at her hands. Old Porcupine is the murderer of her mother, and for years he kept her in his dirty tepee, as one of his family, trying to make her believe she was a half blood. Now he is still trying to hold her, after having kidnaped her through deceit. She owes to Porcupine and his Utes nothing but everlasting hatred and contempt."

"You're right in that," said Merrill, his voice rising.

"So it seems to me that you ought to see it as we do—that she is, through a whim, foolishly sacrificing

herself for a lot of undeserving whelps who, if they had received their just deserts, would long ago have made the acquaintance of the hangman's rope."

"I'm ready to tell her so," said Merrill.

"No; don't do that. Just now she is looking at everything crooked. But my plan is, when the proper time comes, to throw a blanket over her and run with her down to where the horses are. I'll send Nomad and Cayuse ahead; they're so slippery they can do it; and they can have the horses ready—enough horses for the five of us."

Merrill had dropped the bone and sat breathing heavily, the old Ute hatred clutching him by the throat.

"You're right, Major Lillie," he said; "you're everlastingly right!"

"And my plan—what do you think of it?"

"It's a good one," he declared, nodding his head; "and I'll help you carry it out."

But when the darkness thickened, the prisoners found they were not to have things their own way.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PLAN ALTERED.

Porcupine was a shrewd old rascal. Perhaps he suspected the plan that Pawnee Bill had been incubating. At any rate, he set armed guards over Pawnee and his pards, soon after dark. He made no show about it, no threatening announcement, but, one after another, Utes, with arms in their hands, dropped down close to the three prisoners, filled their pipes, and sat cross-legged, smoking while they watched.

When the first of the guards came, old Nomad fumed, because the Ute was armed with the borderman's own rifle. Still, he was not displeased.

"I sees whar et's up ter me ter break a ki-yi's head when ther time comes, an' collect thet gun," he reflected.

But when more guards came and deposited themselves on the ground he disliked the looks of the situation.

Merrill and his daughter were not guarded, apparently; though Pawnee Bill shrewdly suspected that they were closely watched.

He tried to get word to Merrill of the change in the situation, but Merrill did not come near. However, he was sure Merrill could not be unaware of it.

"What's ter be did, Pawnee?" Nomad fumed.

"We'll see later," said Pawnee.

"I'm seein' now thet ther trail is tore up an' ther programmy has had a wreck."

"Don't sweat, old Diamond," Pawnee urged; "the night isn't done yet."

"More plans has gone to pot by countin' chickens before they aire hatched than—"

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"We're not in the hen business, pard," commented Pawnee serenely.

Furious with impotent rage, the borderman glared round.

"Waugh!" he growled. "Ther hermit is potterin' down toward ther river. D'ye reckon he's goin' ter kite out by hisself?"

His attention thus drawn, Pawnee Bill saw Merrill moving at a sauntering gait in the direction indicated. As Utes were down by the stream, it did not appear that Merrill had thoughts of trying to get away. He seemed only taking advantage of the license afforded, to stroll about and stretch his legs.

But, after a few minutes, it was observed that Olive Merrill left the cooking fire, where she had been crouched with some of the Ute women, and followed her father.

Nomad cast a glance at the guards, saw that they were not heeding these movements, and, after hitching closer to Pawnee Bill, commented again:

"Thet gal, with her crooked idees o' Utes, is figgerin' thet her dad is thinkin' o' makin' a sneak; an' is plannin' ter give him ther double cross, ef he tries et. Waugh!"

"Mebbyso," said Pawnee; but he did not seem convinced.

"Ef not—what?"

Merrill was now learning that for himself, down by the river.

He had not gone down there to try to get away. He had seen the armed guards. Puzzled, he had sought for a quieter place, where he could think. His head was beginning to spin in a way that disturbed him. It was not a new feeling. In the old days it had come to him, more than once, as a precursor of a term of insanity, in which he became a crafty and murderous

avenger of the wrongs the Utes had done him. It frightened him now. Pawnee's words had seemed to start it, and he knew, if it went on, he would soon be running amuck through the Ute village to his death, wild as a Malay.

Turning about, with the new frenzy shaking him, he encountered his daughter.

"Olive!" he exclaimed.

She did not see the fire in his eyes and the froth that was flecking his lips.

"Father," she said, putting her hand on his shoulder, "I have been wanting a talk with you."

"Yes?" he said, softened.

"We can't talk long, for the Utes will be watching us; but—I want to get away!"

A cool wind seemed blown through his heated brain, cleansing it.

"What is that?" he asked, his voice shaking.

"I wanted to ask if you didn't think we might get away to-night?"

"You would leave the Utes?"

"I don't want to, but I must. Something has happened which makes it seem that I can't stay here any longer. I can't think of the Utes now; I've got to think of myself."

"Yes, I'm listening," he said, his voice trembling; "I'm listening."

"It came with the other Utes—this new trouble. There's a chief with them, a young subchief; and—he has been insulting me."

Merrill uttered a hoarse growl.

"Now, don't get excited!" she begged. "Just listen to me. This young chief is afraid of Porcupine. But if anything should happen to Porcupine, the young chief would make me become his wife."

"Point him out to me!" said Merrill, his voice rising,

"No! Listen to me. If you should attack him, every white man here would be killed. Can't you see that? *You* would be killed. That is not the way to go about it. The thing for us to do is to get away together to-night."

Instantly Merrill's mind returned to the plan that had been proposed by Pawnee Bill.

"Some of the things you used to do were smart—you've told me about them," she reminded; "so maybe we can do it."

"Yes, I've got a plan," he declared. "Major Lillie suggested it, not two hours ago. But it will have to be changed. Let me see!"

The old-time cunning and craft began to come back to him, lacking the old insanity, however.

"Let me see! Nomad and the Piute was to sneak down and get the horses ready. Then I was to force you to go with us, and Lillie and I was to get you out of the camp. But Lillie didn't figure on the Ute guards. Now, the thing for you to do will be to get the horses ready; five horses we'll want—their three and two of the Utes'. Hide some revolvers and cartridges under your blanket before you start. Another thing that might be a good idea: This time you haven't put Indian paint on your face; but you used to put on Ute paint, and can do it quick, I reckon. Paint up, and the Utes will think more than ever you're one with 'em again. My notion for it is that if they should be watchin' you to-night, as is likely, with your face painted and a blanket about you, in the dark, you could slip round easier without being noticed all the time; you'd look a good deal like the Ute women. That would help you in sneakin' out of the camp. And for me—I'll take a chance to get down under the willows by the river. I'll pinch a pistol, or you can furnish me one; and then, when I think you've had time, I'll

begin to shoot holes in the air and yell like a band of wild cats. That ought to stir the attention of them guards so that it would give Lillie and his friends a chance to make their jump for life and liberty. That's it—that's the ticket."

Now, that it had started, his mind was working like lightning.

The mental shock the girl was given by the discovery that Pawnee Bill had contemplated rather high-handed methods passed away before Merrill had finished his hurried outline.

"It seems desperate," she said; "but, of course, we oughtn't think of going without helpin' them to go, too."

"We ain't going to think of it—no need to. And if a fight follows, we'd want them men bad. That's why I said for you to rake together what revolvers and ca'tridges you could. The Utes will make a chase—you can count on it. They're holding you to get the placer, and Lillie and his crowd to use as a club to break Buffalo Bill's head with, if he comes out with a lot of men from the town. I understand Indians—specially Utes. I've had a reason to understand Utes. So they'll follow, and there will be a fight, if we can't outrun 'em. We've got to whip 'em off; otherwise—well, our last case would be a deal worse than our first. What do you think of it?"

"I don't know what to think of it," she said, pressing her hands to her forehead. "You haven't given me time to think! But I've got to get out."

"That's the plan, then."

"Suppose they should catch you down by the river?"

"Maybe I'd turn my revolver on the Utes, and maybe I'd play that I had gone sudden crazy; it would depend. If you had the horses goin' and was getting away, I reckon I'd fight the Utes, and try to get to you.

But if you hadn't done that, I reckon I'd play crazy; and then wait for another chance."

"But if your noise didn't help Pawnee Bill and his men?"

"It'd depend, as I said. Nobody can see to the end of a plan. We'll have to take the chances, and they'll have to take 'em. But if word could be slipped to 'em about this, so's they'd be ready, we'd all be ready to take advantage of openings. And it will be better for me to try my plan. You can be face paintin' and sticking feathers in your hair and making a Ute out of yourself again, while I do it. How I hate them Utes!"

"We'll try it," she said, in her desperation.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE GET-AWAY.

When Olive Merrill saw the dancers stripping and painting for their savage performance, she understood full well that old Porcupine was urging them on that he might get them in fighting trim for a possible clash with the whites. Her determination would have faltered, but for the annoying attentions which the young subchief again began.

He came into the tepee of old Porcupine, where she was painting her face and feathering her hair, and, regardless of the other occupants, he recommenced his blunt love talk.

Old Porcupine was outside, receiving messages from certain scouts who had come in, and giving attention to the dance preparations.

"He does not care," said the young chief, nodding his feathered head in the direction of Porcupine. "He knows if my Utes help him I must have my way."

But when he tried to put his arms round her, and she drew out a knife, he stepped back.

"You ought to be pleased," he said; "for, see, I am a chief! I have thirty warriors who follow me; only one other chief of the Utes has more, and I have a herd of a hundred ponies. When I saw you painting I thought you intended to be all Ute again."

She warned him angrily to leave her. And then one of the squaws coming to her rescue and lashing him with her tongue, he got up with a scowl and went out.

The girl feverishly finished her face painting, smearing the pigment where once she had taken delight in fancy touches. Then she wrapped her gray blanket

round her, and, lifting the tepee covering at the rear, stepped out there, instead of leaving by the front.

Her father was suggesting the revised plan to Pawnee Bill at the time, she judged, for he was sitting near him, close by the fire that lighted the prisoners and their guards.

When Olive turned in the direction of the river she became aware, before she had gone far, that the young subchief was following her.

She turned back, then. She remembered that she had no weapon but the knife in her blanket, and her father had told her to collect revolvers. She would need a revolver, and would use it, she resolved, if the subchief persisted in his annoyance.

It was not easy to collect revolvers and cartridges. Nearly all the braves who had weapons of the kind were proudly wearing them, with crammed cartridge belts.

But in Porcupine's tepee she got two new pistols, without the knowledge of the squaws, and in another tepee, which she found deserted of its occupants, she got two more, with two belts of cartridges.

"I ought to have five—one for each," she muttered. "But the men can have the revolvers, and I'll keep the knife."

Again, when she turned toward the river, she saw that the subchief still was behind her. She clutched tighter the revolvers she had collected. It began to seem that she would need to use one against him.

Though she hurried on rapidly as she approached the stream, she did not throw off her red pursuer, who called to her, as she gained the high bank overlooking the water.

She stopped then, and turned defiantly.

"If you come on," she warned, "I shall shoot you!"

The threat was in good Ute, and he understood it; but it only made him laugh.

"Shoot!" he cried. "A woman does not shoot a chief who is in love with her."

A revolver flashed in her hand, and he saw its glimmer under the starlight; but he only laughed again and continued to advance.

Shaken by a terror she had never felt before, Olive raised the weapon and fired straight at him.

She saw him throw up his hands and tumble to the ground, as the weapon drove out its cloud of smoke and fire; then she turned and ran as if all the furies pursued her.

For a minute Olive lost her head; but, on hearing a roar break forth in the camp, she remembered what it was she had meant to do.

The girl was still so blinded with terror, and the horror of the thing she had done, that she was thinking only of herself. But, when she saw the ponies before her in the starlight, and made out the larger forms of the white men's animals, she began to wonder if she could not still help the white men, and particularly her father. She could not desert her father.

With the wild thought of getting horses and riding back into the camp, she began to cut the rope hobbles. Then she heard men running toward her.

"It's too late!" she thought, sure that the runners were Utes.

But when she heard the voices of white men—with others, the voice of her father—she clung blindly to the mane of the horse she had been losing.

The plan, formed by Pawnee and revised by the hermit, had been disordered through the interference of the ardent subchief.

Merrill had been flinging scrappy fragments of the new idea to Pawnee, under cover of the drum beating

which had started up, while he warily guarded against the armed watchers understanding him.

Then came the revolver shot by the river.

The drum beating ended, the dancers stopped their howls and their posturing, the tepees were vacated by their occupants, while the guards sprang up, and every one stared in the direction of the river.

The Utes, bewildered, anticipated the beginning of an attack by white men.

Pawnee's company did not know what it meant; but they had seen the girl pass toward the river. That she had been followed by the young chief they had not observed, as they were not watching for that, and Indians were moving about more or less all over the camp.

One thing they knew, however. The thing they had been planning—the attraction of the guards' attention—had been accomplished without and act of theirs. It seems to be up to them to take advantage of it.

They acted instinctively, without orders.

Nomad's roar rose—a terrifying sound whenever it ripped through the blackness of night, and he jumped for the guard who had his rifle.

The guard went down under the rush, and Nomad, catching up the rifle, struck him on the head with it, and tore on, yelling like a maniac.

Pawnee followed, snatching a lance from another guard as he kept at the borderman's heels. Then came Merrill, and the young Piute; the yells of the Piute equaling those of Nomad, though they had a wolfish variety that the old man's whooping lacked.

The dazed Utes and the startled guards did not recover their faculties until the prisoners had covered a dozen big leaps. But the uproar was so vociferous that Nomad's maddest howling paled into insignifi-

cance; and it was little wonder that the scared girl down by the pony herd came near losing all sense of what she was trying to do.

Mingled with the wild Ute yells and roars of rage came a popping of rifles and revolvers and a whistling of lances. The dazed redskins now got in motion and charged toward the river, hard after the escaping prisoners.

But, having previously located the pony herd and laid out the line of their flight, the white men and the Piute, who were good runners, kept well in the lead. In the excitement all the Ute bullets went high over their heads, and the lances fell far short.

The girl had unhobbled the horses and the ponies that she had selected blindly; but they were startled and showing signs of running away, when the border-man drew near, with the others close behind him.

"Whar away?" he bellowed.

"Here!" she shrieked. "Here!"

"All right, little gal; we're all comin'."

Everything was coming, apparently—even the Indian dogs had joined in and were baying in loud-voiced chorus.

"Here they are!" she chattered.

"All right," Nomad roared at her. "Climb the one thet's nighest ye. We'll look out fer ourselves."

She scrambled to the back of the pony, though it had on neither bridle nor saddle, and turned it, snorting, into the river trail.

Nomad made for Hide-rack, and Pawnee for Chick-Chick. Little Cayuse seized an Indian pony for Merrill, flung it round to him with a jerk on its mane, and then, with a jump, straddled Navi.

His Piute yell rang out again, this time defiantly.

The Utes once more opened with their rattling fire

of rifles and revolvers, but they seemed to be shooting at the stars, for the bullets went high and wild.

After that it was a race and a running fight.

As the Utes began to get ponies and drive in pursuit, old Nomad dropped behind and began to bang away at them with his rifle. This caused the girl to slow her pony, a thing she found trouble in doing, and she passed over to the men the revolvers and cartridge belts. Having done that, she led the way again, being familiar with the trail, while the men behind her tried to make it interesting to their pursuers.

But the Utes were still close behind, when the river ford was reached, and the pursued rode their horses into the water. They had gained the bank and were shooting into the darkness, when the fugitives clambered out on the opposite side.

"Sech a waste o' vallyble amminition never war seen sense ther world war young!" Nomad grunted, as he wheeled Hide-rack and pumped shots from his revolver. "Not a Ute bullet has teched hide ner ha'r; an' half this yar ca'tridge belt is empty, an' I reckon I ain't done no better."

But again they drove on, hearing the Ute ponies splashing the water on the other side.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HAMMER AND TONGS.

On the high ground beyond the river the Utes were baffled. In crossing the stream a confusion had resulted in their ranks, caused by the overeagerness which made them all try to drive their ponies into the water at the same time. In the mix-up, some of the floundering ponies unhorsed their riders, and a pony was drowned.

When the pursuit was continued, it was at first of a scattered character, with the fugitives well ahead; then the Utes, when they drew together, found that they could not hear the clatter of hoofs.

There is no warier man in the world than an Indian. Sure that the fleeing party had left the trail, and perhaps had abandoned their animals, the Utes began to suspect that an ambushade would be the next revelation. The firing of the white men had shown them to be armed.

So old Porcupine called a halt.

After a brief conference, scouts were thrown out to feel the trail, the main body of the Utes following slowly.

Pawnee Bill and his companions had left the trail, as soon as they found they could do so safely. It broke the danger of a direct pursuit. Another reason, as important, was that it lessened the danger of running into any set of thugs that might have followed them from the town of Silver Bow.

As a result, a thing not deliberately planned, but highly satisfactory, took place.

Tybee Johnson had sent along the Perdidas trail a

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number of assassins in command of Hank Sims. They had taken time, after leaving town in the night, to disguise themselves as much as possible to resemble Utes. The disguising was not of a first-rate order, but it promised to pass in the darkness. Johnson's plan, assented to by Sims, was to waylay Pawnee's party of three, annihilate it, and make it seem that the murders were the work of Utes.

Fate, guided somewhat by Pawnee Bill's shrewdness, willed otherwise.

Hank Sims and his assassin band heard the approach of the Ute scouts who scurried ahead of the main party looking for the missing fugitives, and jumped to the conclusion that Pawnee and his companions were approaching.

When the Ute scouts had come close enough with their ponies, Sims rose up beside the dim trail, and shouted a plain command to halt.

The Ute scouts, believing they had found the white fugitives, fired a ringing volley, and began to drop back to the main party.

Seeing, as he believed, that his holdup game was not working with precision, and believing he had only three men to deal with, and that these must be wiped off the slate at all hazards, Hank Sims ordered his men to pursue and kill them.

Each side, being deceived as to the nature of its foes, furnished a singular situation.

The retreating Ute scouts fell back no farther than the main body. Then the Utes under old Porcupine charged through the darkness, with ear-splitting yells and revolvers blazing.

Two bands of painted and feathered men had rushed at each other in the gloom of the mountain trail, and each received a surprise to be remembered. Hank Sims discovered that he and his men were fighting a

band of genuine Ute warriors. And it took no longer to inform Porcupine's braves that the force which smashed into them was too large to be that which they had followed.

It was a *mêlée*, and a wild one while it lasted, which was not long. Each was as anxious for a break-away as is an overmastered pugilist whose antagonist is hugging him and hammering his face.

Hank Sims roared to his men to retreat before they were annihilated. Old Porcupine shrieked the same thing to his warriors.

The combatants fell apart.

Hank Sims had two men down, but he did not stop to get them, or even to see if they had been killed or were merely wounded. At the head of his demoralized party he hit the trail, in the direction of Silver Bow, every man driving spurs mercilessly and lashing furiously with bridle reins.

Porcupine's warriors, after their recoil, seeing that the white men were flying, stopped, in huddled and staring wonder; but they did not pursue.

When the last hoof sound had died out they made a search of the trail where the wild fight had taken place, and found two men dead. They had one warrior killed and several wounded.

Under the flare of flimsy torches, it was seen that the dead white men were striped wondrously with paint and wore the most marvelous assortment of head feathers they had ever beheld. Roosters and turkeys had given up their tail feathers, and millinery stores had parted with their plumes.

In addition, in and by the trail were found a number of gray blankets of the kind used by Utes. But these were new, and were eagerly appropriated.

Old Porcupine and his followers were not so dull but that they understood quickly something of the

meaning of the things they saw. The white men had been playing Utes for the purpose of committing some outrage that could be safely laid at the door of the Indians.

Naturally, the discovery enraged them.

The torches were cast aside, the dead were left in the trail, and the Ute ponies bore a frantic band of angry redskins hard on the heels of the demoralized party that was making its way back to the town.

They did not overtake Sims' party, but they came near enough to it to throw into it the liveliest scare the villains ever had been given, and hurled them upon the town in a pell-mell panic.

Not until they were in the outer fringe of streets did Hank Sims and his men remember that they were wearing paint and feathers. Then they drew rein, which they could safely do now, as the Utes had stopped farther out.

They took stock, too, of their condition, as well as their appearance.

"Two missing," said Sims; "and three of the ponies lame, with bullets. We'd ought to have left the ponies outside. And them two men! Who's missing?"

They counted noses and found out.

"Well, they're dead, all right," said Sims. "If they wasn't dead when they dropped, the reds sure finished 'em. But the bodies will be found, with the paint and——"

"That will be a sure give-away!"

"Not necessarily," said Sims. "I reckon you fellows know how to keep your mouths shut? If you don't, this is a good time to learn. Them two men are dead. So they can't talk. And the talkin' that the men do that find 'em can't prove anything against us, if we're wise. The worst trouble will come if we're seen here; and, later, it will be as bad when we have

to explain about the ponies. You boys that have got hurt ponies, and hired 'em, will have to use money to satisfy the owners and keep 'em still."

He looked round grimly, glad of the friendly darkness; for out there were no street lamps, and the hour was late.

"Scatter, and get in the best way you can," Sims ordered. "When questions are asked, you don't know a thing—not a thing! Recollect it."

They were about to separate, when one of the men inquired mildly what Sims supposed had become of Pawnee Bill.

"Don't mention him!" said Sims. "Forget it—forget it! Now pike out, and hide this paint and feathers. Wow!" he grunted unamiably. "We're some Ute, we are!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ATTACK OF THE THUGS.

The hour was late on the night following that of Pawnee's departure.

The baron had related, with much unconscious humor, his curious experience in the room of the fortune teller, and the talk he had overheard between the woman and Tybee Johnson.

It was a particularly interesting recital, and so informing that Buffalo Bill had the baron go slowly in his narration and repeat certain things several times.

"So the woman that lately was so anxious to have all sorts of evil things happen to Johnson used to be his wife, and is now in with him again and ready to throw the lance into our crowd! I admit I didn't suspect it."

"Since my inexperience mit my owen vife, vot haf tiworced me, I am oxbecting anyt'ing," the baron declared. "Unt for kvickness, dot change haf all der odders beadt a mile. Ve ar-re beaches unt cream unt honey, unt all der odder sweet t'ings, pefore ve ar-re marriedt. Budt der fairst day oof der honeymoons, idt vos a bail'oof hot vater on my headt. Der secondt day she iss hidt me mit der vlatiron. Der nexdt day idt iss der rolling-bin vot I am handedt. Unt der next day I am looking for a tiworce. Yiminidy! Some vomans she vos somet'ing awvul."

"We might go down into that alley and look round," said the scout. "Her plan was to send me and my men there, by telling us that at that point we would be able to find a door which would let us into the lodge rooms of the Sons of Rest; then we were to be done up by a lot of Johnson's bruisers."

"Budt ve von'dt go now. Vhen you are invited to haf your headt cafed in, you ton'dt."

"My idea is that we could look at this trap quietly in advance, without the knowledge of the bloodthirsty madame; then consider how we can take advantage of her plan, after Pawnee gets in."

"Dot crowd ought to haf peen here py dhis afdernoon."

"And here it is after midnight!"

"Yoost so. Dhey may have hadt some tiffiguldy mit der Utes."

"Cowardly white men to fight in the town, and scheming redskins to placate outside, surely provides a hard combination," said the scout.

"Budt I am petting on Bawnee."

"While we're waiting, we might as well take a look at that alley."

They went down to the street together. This compelled them to pass the door of the barroom of the Silver Nugget. In the barroom was Tybee Johnson, who gave them a sharp look as they passed.

Having observed this, they halted on the steps outside.

Johnson came out then, oily of manner.

"I haven't seen your friend, Lillie, round for some time," he said. "And old Nomad, and that Indian."

"We don't know just where they are ourselves," the scout answered; which was true enough.

"You haven't got word of that girl yet?"

"No word."

"Nor of her father?"

"Not a shred of news of either of them."

"That's singular, suh."

"We think so," assented the scout.

"My thought," said Johnson, "was that perhaps, suh, your friend, Pawnee Bill, and the others might

have set out to look for her. But of co'se you would know, suh, if that is so."

"We seldom worry about Pawnee," said the scout easily, "knowing that he is so well able to take care of himself."

"That's so, suh. Pawnee Bill is a mighty capable man."

The sheriff turned back into the barroom, and the scout went on down the street with the baron.

"Vot iss der meanness?"

"Curiosity, for one thing; also, I suspect, he thought by talking with me he might be able to discover if we had been put wise in any way. Though you say the madame and her doorkeeper didn't see you, she may have suspected you. But that is only a guess. Johnson always feels called on to make a display of friendliness."

They did not turn in at the alley when they came opposite it, for they did not know but they had been shadowed. They went on toward the end of the street, every moment wary and watchful.

The baron got out his long pipe and smoked it, and the scout gratified his love of a good cigar. Apparently they were merely idlers, finding interest in the life and movement of the streets under the garish lights.

When they came to the end of the street, where it started off as a beaten road into the open country, they turned aside, walked a block out of their way, and returned by another street.

For an hour or more they seemed to be merely strolling about. At the end of that time they were near the alley, close by the point which Madame Le Blanc had chosen for the death trap.

"You heard them say there is a secret door in the

wall of that alley, and perhaps if we're now a bit cautious we can locate it," said the scout.

"Oof ve can findt idt, I vill try to see py der insite off der lodge room oof der Resdting Sons," declared the baron. "Dere mightd be some more oxcidemendt vaidting for me."

"And you might not get out so easily as before."

They approached and entered the alley.

"Well, we're here!"

"Unt notting pefore us budt some plackness, mit a lighdt adt der odder endt. Dhis is der hole vot I come outd oof, vhen I made dot kvick git-away. Vare der lighdt iss shining iss der door leadting indoo der blace vot I fall outd oof vhen I hit der doorkeeper."

"So this ought to be the end of the alley where the secret door is located, leading to the lodge rooms of the Sons of Rest."

"Oof idt iss a segret door, how can ve findt idt?"

Walking along the wall on that side, the scout pushed here and there against it, to see if it showed a springiness suggestive of a door. Having done that, he walked along the other wall, doing the same thing. The baron followed him curiously.

The scout had turned, and was walking again in the direction of the light, when it disappeared. At that moment he heard, near at hand, a suggestive sound of running feet coming toward him.

"Der segret door iss oben, and der men haf come outd oof idt!" whispered the baron.

Five men were leaping out of a black hole in the dark wall, where before there had been no hole. Even though the light was so poor, the scout saw that they were masked.

"Look out for yourself, baron," he said.

The men had appeared between them and the alley end by which they had entered, cutting them off from

escape in that direction. What was ready for them at the other end of the alley the scout did not know.

He was hardly given time to think before the masked ruffians were on him. Then he saw that they were swinging clubs.

The discovery was followed by a blow on the arm from a club, as he drew his revolver—a blow that sent the weapon spinning to the ground.

The doughty German was jumping nimbly to the scout's side, when a club cracked him on the head and stretched him out at the scout's feet; the whole thing happening with bewildering quickness.

One of the men, with an oath, now jumped at Buffalo Bill. That oath, with the man's size and general appearance, made the scout know the fellow was Tybee Johnson himself.

The scout did not intend to desert the baron, even though five men were assailing him, so he drew his knife and backed against the wall.

"It's you, Johnson!" he panted.

The masked scoundrel snarled an anathema and struck at the scout's head with his heavy club.

The knife turned it aside, so that it banged against the wall heavily. The next instant it was torn from Johnson's hand and transferred to that of the scout, who mowed a swath with it. Two of the five rascals dropped beside the baron.

Johnson rushed again; but the swinging club knocked him back.

Then the dazed baron got into action. Hardly knowing what he was doing, for the blow that had knocked him down had made him wild, Schnitzenhauser rose to his knees, and began to work the trigger of his revolver.

One of his bullets sent down a masked man: the

next flattened against the wall so close to another that it spattered lead in his face.

Only two men of the five were on their feet.

Johnson flashed a revolver and fired at the scout, and followed it with a desperate jump, that bore back the club and hurled him against the scout's body.

"Now I gidt you!" cried the baron, and let drive at the other man.

The bullet cut into the rascal's arm, and drove him out of the alley.

Johnson, clubbing his revolver, closed with Buffalo Bill by the wall.

The scout did not want to kill the villain, even though Johnson was striking with a knife. He clutched him, and they went down together, as the baron smashed another bullet at the wall.

The oiliness of Tybee Johnson had passed away. He had thought to assassinate the scout easily; but now, with the scout clutching him, sudden fear transformed him into a fighter of a sort to be dreaded. He was as tall as the scout, of somewhat different build, but as strong; and he felt now that he was fighting for his life.

As the fighters went down together, the man who had been stung by the baron's bullet, and had rushed from the alley, ran wildly out into the street beyond.

The first men he set eyes on were Hank Sims and three of the rascals who had been with him out in the Perdidas trail.

They had been given time to dispose of their ponies, remove the paint and feathers, and get into their own clothing. On their way toward Johnson's barroom they had heard the cracking of the baron's revolvers, and had turned aside because of it.

"In there—in the alley," panted the scared ruffian.

His mask, made of a handkerchief, was gone; his face was bruised and bleeding, and the arm with a bullet in it hung limp.

"In there!" he repeated. "Buffalo Bill is killing Johnson!"

"In the alley?" cried Sims, and leaped toward it.

With men at his heels, Sims did not know but the long-sought-for chance for settling his score against the noted scout had come. He had sworn to kill him!

Sims' favorite weapon was the knife, of the bowie variety. This he drew, as he dived into the alley.

In the struggle on the ground, Tybee Johnson had come uppermost, and was trying to break the strangle hold of the scout. He accomplished it, and began to rise.

Misled by the darkness, and by the report of the man outside, who had wildly declared that Buffalo Bill was killing Johnson, Hank Sims made the entirely natural mistake of supposing that the man on top, who seemed to be free, was Buffalo Bill.

He jumped at this figure, and drove home his knife. Johnson dropped.

He fell across the scout, who was trying to rise.

The baron, having shot away his cartridges, was spinning round like a water bug, vainly snapping the trigger of his revolver.

Hank Sims, believing he had killed the scout, did not care to come close to the baron's revolver—nor did he know at the moment whom the baron was; but he wanted to get out of the alley before his identity was disclosed. And he went.

Other men came plunging into the alley. Word that a wild fight was taking place there drew them. Some were friends of Johnson, others his enemies.

With their coming, lights appeared—pocket torches, flaring matches, and even lamps.

Johnson was dead.

But the other men who had fallen were not seriously hurt, though one was unconscious. This rascal still had the handkerchief mask on his face.

The men who had rushed in with lights saw that a handkerchief mask was on the face of Tybee Johnson, also; they did not know whom he was, until they pulled this away.

An officer, one of Johnson's numerous scoundrelly deputies, hustled forward now, and placed the scout and the baron under arrest.

The scout did not object.

"All right," he said. "I'm extremely willing to have this matter investigated."

There was no investigation, of a serious character, then, or later. The masks told their story. Even if that had not been so, one of the men who had fallen, chilled by the fear that he was about to die, made a confession, in which he admitted that Johnson had got him and the other men to follow him into the alley for the purpose of there finishing the scout and the baron.

Tybee Johnson, it appeared from this confession, had sent a spy after the scout, had known of his entrance into the alley with the German; then had tried this coup, simply because he had been driven desperate.

Pawnee Bill and his companions came into Silver Bow an hour or two after this tragedy, entirely ignorant of it, and of the fight that had taken place between Hank Sims' thug gang and the Utes under Porcupine.

Thieves sometimes hang together. The outlaw who confessed did not implicate Hank Sims, and perhaps did not know about the part Sims had taken in both affairs. No one who might desire to do so could say positively that Sims was not in bed in his room, asleep,

when these things were happening—a thing Sims claimed to be true, then, and afterward.

"Johnson got what he deserved," said the scout, talking it over with Pawnee Bill; "but I don't like to have some rascal jump in and cut the Gordian knot in that way, even when I benefit by it."

"From what the baron says," declared Pawnee grimly, "if this unknown rascal, whom we think is Hank Sims, though we can't show it, hadn't done that, another cord would have been cut—the cord of your life."

"I don't think so. And, sooner or later, I would have had Johnson tied up so snug that he couldn't escape. I'm sorry it happened in that way."

Pawnee Bill was sorry, too, when he thought it over. Not so with the other members of the scout's company, however. Old Nomad averred, referring to Johnson:

"It served 'im right!"

The fact that the placer stakes had been changed made Buffalo Bill so suspicious that all was not right with the filings that he caused an investigation to be made. This was done, the day following, by an officer from the Washington end of the United States Land Department, who happened to be in the town, and took the matter up at the scout's request.

The scout's papers had been "lost." The filings on the placer were in the names of Johnson and certain of his friends. Moreover, the clerk who had accepted the papers from the scout's own hands denied baldly that he had done so. But he wilted, when placed under arrest, and his confession, following immediately, the matter was cleared up with a promptness that gave the scout great satisfaction.

Buffalo Bill had acted without selfish motives, and

the thought that Olive Merrill might, in the end, lose her rights to the placer had troubled him.

The day following the death of Tybee Johnson there was a great exodus of rascals out of the towns of Silver Bow and San Juan. Among those who disappeared was Gilfillan, the superintendent of the San Juan mine.

That same day Buffalo Bill, with Pawnee and the other members of his party, cantered over the mountain trail to the Perdidas.

Some knowledge of the fight of the night had sifted into the town; and the bodies of the men who had played Ute to their own undoing had been brought in.

Old Porcupine had fallen back beyond the Perdidas, and had gone into camp.

The scouts did not venture to cross the river. From the trail they scanned the camp of the Utes with powerful glasses. The Utes had beacon smokes on certain hilltops, and there was evidence that the braves were dancing.

"Looks like er Ute outbreak comin'," prophesied old Nomad.

"I dislike to think so," said the scout.

"But yer sees ther signal smoke, Buffler. The Utes aire wigwaggin' thet way fer help. They've got mebbyso a hundred or two waryers down thar, an' they want more, and et may thet they'll git 'em."

When the scout and his friends rode back to the town of Silver Bow, with their report of the warlike look of things down on the Perdidas, a number of other men, who were timid rather than scoundrelly, suddenly discovered that urgent business matters called them to distant places. The stages that day and the next went out loaded.

Buffalo Bill called on the marshal of the town. He did not think highly of this officer, who, apparently,

had been one of Johnson's friends, but he thought he ought to consult with him in this emergency.

"There will be no trouble," said the marshal. "I know the Utes."

"Olive Merrill knows Porcupine's Utes better than either of us can know them," said the scout, "and she is filled with fear. She has been wishing to go back to them, and I think she would do it but for the fact that she is afraid to now. Besides, her father isn't willing, and in that he shows his sense."

"I've heard about that placer trouble," said the marshal. "But it don't change my opinion."

"You'll get men ready?"

"Oh, yes, if it's necessary; but it won't be necessary. You and your crowd won't be called on to do any Ute war trailin' this trip."

"I hope you're right," said the scout.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A QUEST FOR INFORMATION.

As Buffalo Bill stopped at one door, Baron Von Schnitzenhauser went on toward another, at the farther end of the alley.

"At the top of the stairs," said the obsequious doorkeeper, standing in the dim red light of the stairway; "turn to the right, second door."

Buffalo Bill mounted the stairs, on his way to the room of Madame Le Blanc, the fortune teller.

The hall to which the stairway led glowed with a red light; and, when Madame Le Blanc had admitted him to her fortune-telling establishment, he found there the same red illumination.

"I think you haven't come to get your fortune told, Mr. Cody. You don't believe in fortunes," said the woman, as she pointed to a chair before her table.

"I believe in fortunes—of another kind," he said, looking sharply into her painted face. "But you're right in saying I didn't come up here to get my fortune told."

Studying his face, she played with the cards on the table while waiting for him to go on.

"You know that Tybee Johnson was killed by Hank Sims," said the scout. "We are looking for him, to arrest him. I want you to tell me where we can find him."

"What makes you think I can do that?" she demanded.

"Because you know the secrets of the Sons of Rest."

"That is a secret society of men, something like the

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Odd Fellows, I think; so how could I, a woman, know anything about it?"

"It is not at all like the Odd Fellows, though you have said that more than once. But it is a secret society. Tybee Johnson was at the head of it, and Hank Sims an influential member. Tybee Johnson was at one time your husband. When I came here, at first you declared to me that Johnson was your bitter enemy, and offered to assist me in trying to break up the road-agent band that had headquarters here in Silver Bow. Then you turned against me, to assist Johnson. He tried to kill me, and by mistake he was killed by Sims, who rushed to aid him. So I am thinking you may be willing to help me find Sims."

The answer of Madame Le Blanc was a derisive laugh.

"That doesn't appeal to you?" he said. "I hardly thought it would. So we'll go at it in another way. I know that you, Madame Le Blanc, if you are not yourself a member of that society of thieves and thugs, know who they are, and all about them; and know at this minute where Hank Sims is hiding. You will be permitted to leave the town, if you tell me where he is. If you don't, I shall have to arrest you."

Though she trembled slightly, the fortune teller maintained a defiant attitude.

"That's a serious charge," she said, pressing her fan of cards to her lips to conceal their trembling. "You couldn't prove it, if you tried to; and I'm puzzled to know what you base it on."

"I'll tell you what I base it on, in addition to certain facts that are now known to everybody. Baron Von Schnitzenhauser, while concealed under that lounge, heard you and Johnson talking in this room; he heard you and Johnson plan to trap me in the alley, where I was later attacked, and Johnson was

killed; he heard you and Johnson talking of the road-agent holdups in a way that showed you to be aiding the road agents; and he heard you say to Johnson that you stood ready to help him against me and my men."

The hand holding the cards dropped, with a nerveless gesture, to the table, and the woman, for a moment, seemed to shrivel in her chair.

"It's a lie!" she whispered hoarsely.

"So," the scout went on calmly, "now that you're aware that I know what I know, don't you think you had better tell me where Hank Sims is hiding?"

While she sought for self-control, he added:

"It will not be easy for either you or Sims to get out of the town."

"I can deny," she said, "that your Dutchman heard anything of the kind."

"You won't deny that you know there was a man hid under that lounge while you and Johnson talked in this room. You discovered that a man was there, after Johnson had gone; and you drew your revolver and ordered him to come out. He up-ended the lounge against you, and bolted for the stairs, and so got away. Your doorkeeper told you he thought the man was Garry McKeown, the notorious sneak thief; and I suppose you have been resting in that belief."

The scout's penetrating knowledge frightened her.

"I am willing to leave the town," she said, "if that will satisfy you; but, indeed, I don't know where Hank Sims is."

"I see you intend to protect him, even though he killed Johnson."

"I don't know where he is—that's all," she persisted.

"All right," said the scout, rising; "but, bear in

mind, that if you try to leave Silver Bow without my permission you will be arrested."

When the doorkeeper let Buffalo Bill out of the red-lighted stairway into the alley, he followed the alley in the direction taken by the baron, instead of returning through the gaming room to the main street.

Apparently he had failed in his purpose. In reality, he had not. He had heard that Madame Le Blanc, since the death of Johnson, had become the ally of Hank Sims, the gambler. He had doubted it; but now he knew it was so.

Sims was wanted for the murder of a man in Fargo, the year before. That was one of the baron's discoveries. Sims thought the scout was in Silver Bow to arrest him for that, and had tried to assassinate him. Now Sims was frightened and in concealment, and the thieves and thugs of Silver Bow had been fairly falling over themselves in getting out of the town.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BARON'S SHADOW ACT.

The baron's marvelous spying ability he called luck, and there was much to bear out that idea. No one seeing the heavy, German face, and hearing his stumbling and awkward speech, would be willing to credit him with the keen mental ability he possessed. His round, fat body, on its pipestem legs, did not indicate physical agility; yet he had that, too. Even when he seemed to be thinking of nothing but the enjoyment of his big pipe, as he strolled along, he saw everything, and heard everything.

Under all, he had a restless nervousness, which made him want to be all the time on the move and doing things. The greater the danger into which he was plunged, the better he liked it; and he often declared that he was the "Flying Dutchman," and lived on excitement.

While inspecting the alley, after the fight in which Tybee Johnson was killed, the baron had discovered that a big wooden box, filled with rubbish, hid a coal-hole connected with a cellar under the building in which were the lodge rooms of the Sons of Rest.

He was on his way to that coalhole when he left the scout.

On reaching it, after making certain that no one was in the alley to observe him, he shoved the rubbish box aside, and dropped into the hole.

Having done that, he pulled the box back into place by lifting on it.

"Vare I am I ton'dt know," he muttered, as he stood in the darkness, "budt I am here."

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Somewhere above were the lodge rooms in which he believed Hank Sims was now hiding, and he had determined to penetrate to them.

Feeling about, he began to follow the cellar wall; and came to the object of his search, the cellar stairs.

At the top of the stairs was a door. After trying a number of keys, the baron unlocked it. Leaving it closed behind him, but unlocked, the baron advanced along the half-lighted hall. At its end he found another stairway, and ascended to the second floor.

When he did so he heard voices, in a room at the end of the upper hall. Behind the baron was now a window, overlooking the alley. It was curtained with a heavy green shade, and fastened. The baron undid the fastening. Though the baron was "lucky," he believed in taking precautions; so he wanted the window ready for quick hoisting, so that if caught on the stairs, or pressed for time, he could lift it and jump out.

One of the men he heard talking was Hank Sims, and the baron did not need to tiptoe to the door of the room, which opened into the hall, to know what was taking place; for the talk told him. Sims was hurriedly packing a hand bag, preparatory to getting out of the town.

"Yoost vot I t'ought," muttered the baron. "Ve vill haf to sdop idt."

Sims intended to change his clothing and personal appearance, and take the next stage for San Juan; but he was afraid the stage would be attacked by the Utes.

"Oof der Schnitzenhauser luckiness vos nodt on der bum, I vouldt haf Cody mit me now, so dot ve could rush in unt capture him. Budt ve will gedt him vhen he goes py der stage in. Yiminidy! I am gladt I haf came."

"Buffalo Bill started that Ute business, too," he heard Sims declare.

"You're bound to lay everything on him," said the other man in the room, with a laugh.

"Well, ain't it so?" Sims snarled. "Everything was peaceful when he come. Old Porcupine and his Utes were happy, over in the valley of the Perdidas, so long as they could laze round and sop up a little rum. Now they're threatening the warpath."

"Idt iss gorrect," whispered the baron; "dose Utes ar-re vildt."

"I reckon you're forgettin'," said the other man, "that before Buffalo Bill got here that old hermit of the mountains, Mark Merrill, was whacking away at 'em in secret; and they were gittin' ready to fight, thinkin' that the white men of the town was doin' the killin'."

"The whole thing's a snarl, and a funny bit all round," said Sims, as he threw his clothing about and stuffed various articles into the bag. "There was that daughter of Merrill's livin' with the Utes, not knowin' she was his daughter, but sort o' believin' she was a half blood, and kin to old Porcupine. Then she found that placer in the Perdidas. That was the beginnin' of the trouble, I reckon. Cody's crowd tried to hold it for her, the Utes wanted it, and our gang wanted it. I reckon if anybody's holdin' it now it's the Utes, for they're out there with their paint and feathers on, threatenin' to shoot to pieces any stage, or anything else, that goes over the trail. But I've got to get out of the town now, Utes or no Utes."

"I am vondering," thought the baron, "oof I can't make dhis capture all py my owen selluf; idt vouldt be a fedder in der top oof my hadt."

Though the baron was ready for any desperate play, how to accomplish that was too much for him.

So, when he had listened a while longer, he concluded to get down into the alley and notify Buffalo Bill of his discovery.

He was halfway down the stairs when Hank Sims stepped into the hall and called to some one; and in answer a door opened in the hall below, with a flooding of light.

Sims came along the hall above, and the occupant of the lower room was emerging into the hall there.

"Maybe I am caught," thought the baron, as he jumped for the lower stair step, knowing he could not get back to the window; "budt, eenyhow——"

He knocked the man flat in the hall with his rush. Then he pulled open the door of the cellar stairs and flew for the bottom of the cellar and for the coal-hole.

But his sudden leap from the light into the darkness of the cellar blinded and bewildered him, and, in the middle of the cellar, he brought up with a crash against a supporting post.

He dropped to the ground, his faculties numbed and his energies paralyzed for an instant.

"Yiminidy!" he grumbled, as he pulled himself up, and heard voices and running feet above. "I am deadt!"

He must have lost more time than he thought, for when he gained the coalhole, which he expected to find covered with the box, it stood open; and a man in the alley there, hearing his painful approach, bawled to him to "come out of that!"

"Bistols pehint me, unt bistols in frondt oof me— idt iss der sharge oof der Lighdt Prigade!"

A man behind the baron, descending the cellar stairs, was shouting in the darkness to him to surrender.

"Nodt oof I am knowing myselluf," thought the plucky German.

He could see the feet and legs of the man standing in the alley by the coalhole. This man undoubtedly had a pistol leveled; but the baron had to disregard it, as he leaped for the man's legs.

The revolver flared and roared as the man came down, his legs jerked suddenly from under him; then he fell headlong through the coalhole, and dropped to the bottom of the cellar. The baron used him for a platform from which to climb to the coalhole.

One of the two men who had followed the baron into the cellar was Hank Sims. Thinking the baron had fallen beneath the coalhole, Sims rushed up.

"Surrender!" he said, and flared a match while his companion dived blindly at the prostrate form.

"What do you think you're doing?" was growled back by the man seized. "You pair of blockheads, the man you're after went out through the coalhole, after walking all over me!"

Sims lifted himself to the coalhole and looked out cautiously. He heard a clatter of feet, but in the half darkness of the alley he could not distinguish the vanishing runner.

"Who was it?" he asked, as he dropped back.

"How do I know?" was the querulous question of the man whom the baron had jerked into the coalhole.

"You didn't see him?" said Sims.

"I shot at him, but he got past me, and then I fell into the hole; I didn't see him."

"Wow!" Sims growled, in disgust. "We're sure a set of mutts."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MAN HUNT.

Buffalo Bill stopped in the alley, when he saw the baron bounding toward him.

"Oudt oof der lighdt!" the baron panted, clutching the scout by the arm as he came up and pulling him against the wall. "I am pursuedt."

"What's up?"

"I am oop, oudt oof der hole fairst. Behint me iss Hank Sims, unt——"

"Sims?"

"He iss in dot house. I am on der boint oof capturing him, when I haf to run, unt I can't. I am purseudt py der coalhole, vare a man shoodts adt me unt falls in der hole when I bull his leg; afdher which I valk on his face unt gidt me oudt. Unt now iss der time, oof ve mofe kvick; ve can gatch Sims. Vare iss Bawnee?"

Pawnee Bill swung into the alley, by way of the gaming room, at that moment, and heard the baron's question; behind him came Nomad and Little Cayuse.

"Speak of angels," he commented, "and you'll hear their tread. Schnitz, you seem excited."

"Idt iss der ooxidemendt oof choy. I haf located Sims. He iss pehint der coalhole, in der house oof der Sons oof Resdt. Oof ve do der pitzness kvick ve can gidt him. Here iss fife men now, unt in der house iss nodt so many."

"Waugh! Mebbyso, then," said Nomad, "we piled in hyar jest at ther right time. We war gittin' thet het up wi' anxiety, out in ther street, thet Pawnee said we'd take er look inter ther alley, hyar, an' see why- ever you war gone so long."

"I vosn'dt gone fife minudes."

"Seemed like an hour, all right."

No one had emerged from the coalhole, and no sound came from the house; but at the farther end of the alley men had appeared, drawn from the near-by street by the revolver shot.

Buffalo Bill took but a moment for consideration. Not far off were a number of men whom he could summon to his assistance, yet that would take time.

"Come on," he said, and stepped out into the alley, in an advance on the coalhole.

When they reached it, they found that the box had been slid back into position. The baron pushed it aside.

"In dare," he said, "unt I vill go fairst. I am nearly kilt py running indoo a bost, unt so I vill leadt der way. Budt petter look oudt for pullets."

He squeezed his round body through the hole and disappeared before he had finished speaking. Buffalo Bill dropped into the black hole after him, and was followed by the others.

When the cellar stairs were gained and ascended, the door at the top was found locked. Here the baron had recourse again to the key with which he had unlocked it. A table had been shoved into the hall, and a chain ran from a leg of the table to the door-knob. But they got the door open far enough to crawl into the hall, where the lights were now out.

They were beginning to think that, speedily as they had moved, they were raiding an empty house, when they heard sounds of scurrying feet upstairs.

"Follow!" said the scout.

He jumped for the stairs at the far end of the hall, and went up them hurriedly, revolver ready for use.

When he was near the top of the stairs, a man ran through the hall there, which was also now unlighted,

hurled a suit case at the scout's head, and leaped to the window.

In the light from the window, as the curtain flew up, the scout recognized Hank Sims. But the next moment Sims had gone through the window, carrying away the sash, landing in the alley below in the midst of a shower of tinkling glass.

When the scout reached the window, Sims was sprinting off under cover of the shadows, close by the wall. By leaning out, the scout could see him, and observed that he dived into the door of the gaming room.

"Yoost my luck," the baron fumed. "I feex dot vinder so dot I can make a kvick gedt-away, unt an-odder man iss gedt der penefidt."

"Hustle to the street, Pawnee," the scout ordered. "It was Sims, and he has run into the gaming house. If he lingers, you may be in time to nab him as he reaches the street."

Pawnee retreated, with Nomad.

Switching on the light which was found in the hall, the scout and the baron continued their search of the house.

It was now as empty as a last year's bird's nest.

When they got down to the street, Pawnee and Nomad met them with a story of failure. Sims either had got into the street before they reached it, or was in hiding in the gaming place.

"I think he's in there still, in hiding," said Pawnee.

Buffalo Bill went into the place.

But the proprietor and the dealers declared that Sims had not been seen by them.

"I saw him come in here," said the scout.

"Well, then, he took the door that leads to the upper story, off there, and got out on the roof: he did not come in this room."

They searched the upper story, and found a window that gave on the roof of another building; without, however, being convinced that Sims had gone that way.

In the end they were baffled.

"If these deputies we have sworn in do their duty," said Buffalo Bill, "Sims will have trouble in getting out of the town."

Pawnee pulled a smoke weed from the crown of his hat and set it alight, as they made their way again to the street.

"Silver Bow," he said, "like all Gaul, is divided into three parts. If you want me to name them, they are: Road agents, near road agents, would-be road agents. All your deputies, necarnis, I believe are men of Silver Bow."

This cynical observation of Pawnee seemed borne out by the results. Hank Sims was not found in the town. None of the men wanted could be located. And in the morning they learned that Madame Le Blanc was numbered with the missing.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ON THE SAN JUAN TRAIL.

When Olive and Merrill went down to the stage station, at about five o'clock in the morning—for the first stage of the day for San Juan left at a very early hour—she found Buffalo Bill and his friends there.

"So you're going?" said the scout, greeting them. "You'll be the only passengers, unless others come soon. The stage starts in five minutes."

"*You* ain't goin', then?" said Merrill, in a tone of disappointment. "When I seen you here, I hoped you was. But I reckon we'll get through all right. I've been telling Olive that. The Utes haven't made a crack at anything yet, and they're not likely to begin it this mornin', or jump at the stage first thing. They'll go for the settlers first. That's the Ute way. Hit the weakest—even if it's a baby. Well, pile in, Olive."

"I'm doing this against my wish," she said to Buffalo Bill. "Maybe I couldn't do anything to stop the Utes; but if any women and children are killed, I know I shall just be haunted by it as long as I live."

"Tut, tut!" said Merrill. "What's the use of talking foolishness?"

He climbed into the stage after his daughter.

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee stood by the open door, talking with them, until the stage was ready to pull out.

"We've been chasing wild geese all night," remarked Pawnee, "and didn't know but maybe we'd locate 'em down here."

"Not meanin' me and my daughter?" said Merrill. "Olive sort of thinks we're geese; but I don't."

"We tried to capture Hank Sims to-night," explained the scout, "and made a failure of it. We're trying to have the town watched; and we came down here to make sure he didn't leave in this stage."

The driver climbed to his perch atop, Olive and her father bade good-by to their friends, and the stage lurched out to the San Juan trail, in the gray of the early morning.

About sunrise, or an hour after it had left the town, the stage was held up. There was a sharp command to the driver to halt, and, when he obeyed, a man and a woman walked out of the bushes beside the trail.

The man was Hank Sims; the woman Madame Le Blanc.

"We're going to San Juan," said Sims, in a tone of authority. "Got inside passengers?"

"Two," said the driver.

Sims swung a revolver round so that it covered the stage door.

"Jest now," he said, addressing the passengers, as well as the driver, "I ain't taking no chances whatever. I don't know who them two passengers are; but if they're wise they won't try no funny business with me." He glanced up at the driver. "Either o' the passengers belong to Buffalo Bill's bunch?" he asked.

"Friends o' his, I believe," the driver answered, after hesitating; "but, as one of 'em is a lady, I don't reckon there'll be any call for shootin'."

Sims was still pointing his revolver at the stage door, when it flew open, and revealed the head of Merrill.

"The hermit!" said Sims.

"And my daughter," said Merrill. "We're friends

of Buffalo Bill, because he has treated us well; but we didn't come out here to fight."

"Take a look in at that door," said Sims to the woman by him, "and see jest who is in there."

Madame Le Blanc obeyed, while he stood guard.

"The report is right," she said; "Merrill is in here with his daughter, and no one else."

She put out her hand to Olive, who hesitated, then took it.

"This is pleasanter than we expected," said Madame Le Blanc; "I was afraid we should find armed men in the stage."

Hank Sims was speaking to the driver.

"We're going to get in, and you're going to drive on. If there's an attempt at a holdup, you're to pay no attention to it. I'm rather expectin' that there will be one. You drive right ahead as hard as you can tear, if any one sings out for you to stop. If you don't, you'll find me combing your hair with bullets."

"Pleasant outlook for me," the driver growled; "if I'm ordered to halt and don't, I'll get shot. And if I halt, then you'll throw lead into me. I reckon I'd better resign this job right here."

"You obey my orders, and you're all right," said Sims. "If there's any fighting, I'll attend to it."

He glanced in at Merrill and Olive. Madame Le Blanc had stowed herself at Olive's side.

"Anybody at the stage station lookin' for me, when you started?" he asked. "I'm gamblin' there was."

"Nobody but jest Cody and his crowd," replied Merrill, not at all abashed.

"So he was there! I knowed he would be. That's why we concluded to make our start from here. Seeing that you are his friends, I don't need to say anything to put you wise; except maybe you may need to be warned that Hank Sims, when he's started, ain't

a man to stand for nonsense. I'm goin' to invite myself now to climb in and take a seat alongside of you, Merrill."

He climbed in, and shouted to the driver to go ahead.

"Funny thing about that name of Merrill," he commented, as the swish of the driver's lash was heard: "When I first seen you, you was Johnson Tybee—wearin' Tybee Johnson's name hind end foremost. I believe you explain that now by sayin' you hatched that name in a nut factory, when you was sufferin' from a streak of the bats; but it always seemed a funny thing. Not that we're going to quarrel over it. Any name suits me."

"Any name but your own," said Merrill; who disliked Sims, and was not pleased with having his company and that of the fortune teller forced on him and his daughter.

Hank Sims laughed harshly.

"Likely that ain't no joke," he admitted. "If, for various reasons, the name your parents picked for you don't suit, change it; it's good doctrine, out in the woolly West, where at present we happen to be at."

The stage, starting with a lurch, kept Merrill from replying.

"You're on your way to San Juan?" said the woman to Olive.

"No," said Merrill; "we're jest ridin' out for the air."

"For a man that has been loony so recent," growled Sims, "you seem to be exceeding witty, Merrill; but don't git too bright."

"I never was so loony," Merrill retorted, "that I'd be thinkin' I could git away from Buffalo Bill, if onct

he was reaching his hands out for me; and that's what you're tryin' to do now."

"I reckon you've got inside information that he will have men waitin' to land us in San Juan, soon's we hit that place?" said Sims. "Well, let me tell you, if he has, they'll not find us in this stage; for we expect to step out of it before we get there, see! Buffalo Bill is a wise guy, and he wasn't born yesterday; but I've come of age, too, and have thought out a few thoughts for myself. I don't think that your friend Buffalo Bill will get us this trip."

"I might try it myself," said Merrill.

Hank Sims' laugh was insolent and irritating.

"I guess you won't try it, old man; unless your headpiece has gone to pot again!"

"It's too bad that a couple of men can't come together without quarrelling," said Madame Le Blanc. "You don't hear any such talk as that over here, between me and Olive! I think you had better drop it."

"Oh, all right!" Sims growled; and began to look out at the rough country through which the stage was passing.

"We'll not quarrel, my dear," she said to Olive. "I was your friend, you know, and tried to help you, when you didn't have many friends. And now I find that I'm in need of friends myself."

Olive Merrill had been astonished to find Madame Le Blanc with Sims. Sims had slain Tybee Johnson. She knew that had been an accident; but, as Johnson had been Madame Le Blanc's husband, she had not thought it would draw the madame and Sims together, but the reverse. Other thoughts were pouring through her mind, but she was not speaking them.

"I don't suppose it would be possible," said the fortune teller insinuatingly, "to induce you and your father not to mention that we got in the stage, when you

reach San Juan? That would help us in our plans for getting safely out of the country."

"I'm sure I'm not anxious to have any harm come to you," said the girl.

"You're a dear! If you will keep still about that, when you get to San Juan, and will coax your father to, I'll never forget it. And I did try to help you."

"I think you did—I've heard so."

"I took an interest in you when you were still with the Utes; for I was sure you were a white girl, and I thought it a shame that you should be there. I told Buffalo Bill what I thought about it; perhaps he mentioned it to you."

"He spoke of it."

"And if you would only be willing to help me now!"

Olive was wondering if she ought to give the promise, when the driver swung back on the reins and yelled something. The passengers were fairly pitched at each other, as the stage slowed with sudden jolts and a heavy grinding of the brakes.

"Dead man in the trail right ahead!" yelled the driver.

Sims, who had never put down his revolver, muttered a suspicious question, and swung open the stage door on his side.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Dead man in trail—right ahead; looks like the Utes got him."

"The Utes?" said Olive, and swung open the door on the other side.

"You stay in here, Olive," commanded Merrill, clutching her arm. "If there are Utes out there, this is as good a place as any."

"No Utes there now," said the driver. "Anyhow,

I ain't seein' 'em. Looks like that feller was scalped and stripped. I'll swing down, and go see."

He wound the lines round the brake handle, and leaped to the ground.

Leaning out of the doors, the passengers watched him.

Rifles cracked in the bushes, when he was halfway to the dead man, and the driver tumbled on his face in the trail.

The horses, frightened by the rifles and the Indian yells that rose instantly, began to swing round, cramping the front wheels of the coach and threatening its overthrow.

With an oath, Hank Sims sprang to the wheel on his side, then swung to the driver's seat. With a jerk, he pulled the twisted lines from the brake handle, and caught the whip out of its socket. Then, with a yank on the lines and a snap of the whip, he straightened the horses out, and began to turn them.

"Hold tight!" he yelled to the people in the stage. "It's a fight or a finish, now, and p'r'aps both. But maybe we can make it."

The horses came round in a wild rush, under Sims' control, and took the trail, in a mad gallop, snapping the coach along at their heels.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MAN WHO WENT MAD.

Thrown into a heap in the bottom of the stage, the occupants extricated themselves as best they could, then clung blindly to anything they could lay their hands on, while the stage bounced and rattled as though bent on tearing itself into splinters.

The ear-splitting yells with which the Utes pursued the stage were punctuated by the sharp cracking of rifles. Bullets cut through the wood round the heads of the scared passengers.

On top of the stage, Hank Sims had thrown himself down to escape the Ute rifles, but still clung to the lines, and plied his whip with a vigor which the frightened horses did not seem to require.

As soon as he could steady himself, the hermit got his old rifle, that was lurching round his feet, and began to shoot at the Utes, boring his lead through the wood of the stage and firing blindly.

Olive begged him not to do this.

"It will make it worse if we are captured!" she urged.

"Nothin' can be worse than death," he yelled back at her. "And that's what we're goin' to get if they overhaul us."

The overhauling came quickly.

Sims was bounced from his place on top, when one of the wheels hit a rock, and dropped at the side of the trail.

The striking of the rock swerved the horses, and they left the trail, slammed the pole into a tree, and came floundering to the ground, kicking and struggling in their snarled harness.

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The yelling Utes rode up at a victorious gallop and surrounded the stage.

With her nerves jumping, yet sure that a show of bravery was the only wise course left, Olive Merrill opened the stage door on her side. As she did so, she forced down the muzzle of her father's rifle and kept him from using it.

Behind her, Madame Le Blanc had collapsed, her face so pale that even its coating of paint could not hide the pallor.

"The white daughter of Porcupine greets you!" Olive cried to the Indians, in their own tongue. "Whom did you think was here?"

Then she became as pale as Madame Le Blanc; for right before her, seated on a painted pony, in command of this band of braves, was Cornflower, the young chief whose love she had repulsed by firing a bullet at him.

Cornflower and his warriors were apparently as much astonished as Olive herself; but the young chief mastered his amazement, and his face lighted with a triumphant smile.

"Gray Eyes," he said, "has come back to the Utes in a strange way. We did not expect it! And she sees that Cornflower did not take the spirit trail."

"So she didn't kill you!" Merrill snarled at him. "Well, I'll finish the job right here!"

He swung up his rifle, pointing it at Cornflower. Olive clutched it again, to push it down. A roar of yells greeted the hermit's movement, and a lance was shot at him from the hand of a brave.

It struck Olive, instead of Merrill, and she tumbled forward out of the stage. Madame Le Blanc screamed. Then Merrill went mad.

With a maniacal leap he jumped to the ground, over the body of his daughter, and rushed at the

brave who had hurled the lance, trying to brain him with the rifle. The brave dodged, as the rifle cleft the air; then he caught it, with a jerk that twisted it out of the hermit's grasp.

Merrill drew a knife, and thrust at the warrior's pony—a blow that fell short; then he made a dash with the knife at the chief. Then he fell, writhing, on the ground.

Madame Le Blanc, after her first frightened scream, gathered her womanly energies and courage. She swung to the ground, with the aid of the stage steps, taking care that her clothing was not caught, for the horses were still plunging and kicking and the stage rocking; then she stooped over the fallen girl and lifted her head and shoulders.

Pillow her head, she looked into the girl's white face, brushed away the dark hair, where a trickle of blood showed, and, discovering that the girl was not dead, looked up with singular calmness.

"Do any of you Indians understand English?" she demanded.

There was an indescribable confusion all about her. Braves were in the trail trying to free the frantic horses; some were staring at the hermit, who was tearing the turf in his frenzy; others had gone back to the point where Hank Sims had been tossed to the ground; while still others seemed to be riding frantically here and there simply because they had lost their wits.

But Cornflower, though shouting orders and apparently much excited, heard the woman, and swung his pony round.

"Me," he said, "understand English!"

"Then, bring me some water," Madame Le Blanc commanded.

Cornflower yelled an order, and one of the braves near him disappeared along the trail at a gallop.

While he was gone, Merrill passed from his frenzy into unconsciousness, and Hank Sims was brought up to the stage, scratched and bruised by his fall, but apparently little hurt.

"You're alive!" he gasped to Madame Le Blanc, as if it surprised him. "The horses were too much for me."

He dropped to the ground, ringed in by warriors. "What's happened to her?" he asked.

"A lance struck her."

"Killed?"

"She fell out of the stage. There's a cut on her head, where I think the lance touched her. But she's breathing, and her pulse is good."

"The old man seems to have gone off the hook," said Sims callously.

"It was his fault. He was going to shoot at the Utes; then they threw a lance at him, and it struck her. That set him crazy. I wonder if he's dead; he seems so quiet!"

A brave came galloping up with an old tin can spilling water, and lowered it to the woman, while reining in his pony beside her.

"Heap good!" he grunted. "Old woman use um for Gray Eyes."

Sims laughed again in his callous way.

"Even the reds are payin' you compliments!" he said. "And you're the center of attraction here as always."

"This isn't a time for nonsense," she flung back at him, as she began to trickle water into the face of Olive Merrill.

"I guess that's right," he admitted, looking about. "These Utes act as though they want to begin scalp

collecting. Well, we done the best possible. I might have kept the old stage goin' longer, if that rock hadn't bounced me off. Still, I reckon it would have been the same in the end. We couldn't have been worse off, Nell," he added, "if we had stayed in the town and took our chances with Cody's crowd."

Having trickled water into the girl's face, Madame Le Blanc splashed it generously on her head.

"I wonder if you couldn't do something for Merrill?" she urged.

"I might try, if the devils would let me. Still, what's the use?"

But when he saw the Indians open a lane, proving that they understood him, he got up heavily and limped over to the fallen man.

"Hello, Merrill!" he cried, prodding him. "Come out of it!"

"Is that any way to do?" Madame Le Blanc demanded, with scorn.

Sims dropped down by Merrill.

"Merrill," he said, "rouse up! your daughter ain't dead, nor she ain't going to die. Pull yourself together, old man!"

Merrill lifted himself on his elbows and stared round. But he did not seem the same man, so great was the change in his appearance. His bearded face was hollowed as if an invisible plane had passed under the skin and cut away the flesh; the skin was gray and drawn tightly, the lips were pulled back as if in a perpetual snarl that might change in an instant to a scream; and his eyes were fiery and glaring; yet at the moment they seemed blind, or not able to see over a few yards ahead of him.

Having pulled himself to his elbows, he lifted himself higher, then twisted about and sat down.

So they killed her!" he said, looking at Sims as if

he did not see him. "The Utes have killed her at last! Now you hear what I've got to say: For every year she has lived, and every year she might have lived, there will be a Ute life taken to pay for it. You hear me! I am Merrill, the hermit of the hills. I have been a killer of Utes. I'm going at it again."

If one could have forgotten or ignored his appearance, his manner might have seemed dispassionate; he did not swing his arms, nor writhe, and he did not lift his voice.

"I hear you," said Sims. "But you're mistaken about your daughter being dead. She's over there by the stage, and the madame is bringin' her back again. Go over and see, and you'll feel different. Here, let me help you."

Merrill stumbled heavily to his feet and clutched at Sims to keep from falling. Then Sims led him over to the stage, between the lines of staring Utes, some mounted, others on foot.

Olive Merrill had not regained consciousness; the blood from the cut on her head, mixed with water, had flowed down on her face and neck; with her eyes closed, that deathly pallor and the bloody stains gave her a look of death.

"I knew that you lied about it," said Merrill, his tone monotonous, and for that reason strange and chilling. "I knew you lied about it!"

"She'll be all right in a short time," said Sims. "That's the truth, old man."

Merrill turned away without even a look at Madame Le Blanc. As his eyes fell on the Indians, and passed from one to another with glances burning and wild, the Utes retreated as if they feared him.

"My rifle is gone," he said. "My knife is gone, and my revolvers; you have taken them! Very well.

There are more to be had. Then I will kill you and you and you!"

One at a time, he pointed his finger at them as he made his threats; and they drew back.

"Best to keep quiet now," urged Sims. "Your daughter will be all right in a little while."

Merrill walked away, his threats ending in wild laughter.

The Utes gave him plenty of room, fearing him now more than they would have feared a company of troopers. And with that wild laughter jarring on their ears and striking terror to their hearts, he passed through their midst.

"Can't you stop him?" Madame Le Blanc begged.

"Stop him!" said Sims. "Nobody could stop a man as crazy as that."

"He thinks his daughter was killed, and his insanity has returned. But if he could be kept here until she recovers, he might be all right again," Madame Le Blanc urged. "Can't you make the Indians understand that? Perhaps they'll bring him back."

Madame Le Blanc was thinking of the effect on Olive Merrill when she regained her senses.

"I don't know as it makes any great difference what he does, or she thinks, or what happens to anybody," said Sims. "For I don't reckon the chances of any of us are good enough to gamble on right now. They told us, in the town, the Utes hadn't struck yet, and there'd really be no trouble; but you see!"

Failing to stir Sims into action, Madame Le Blanc spoke to Cornflower.

"Have your men bring him back," she said, pointing toward the retreating hermit. "You must do it."

Cornflower jerked his shoulders together and stared. "You not understand?" he asked.

"Yes, I know he's gone crazy—and I don't won-

der; but can't you bring him back? Do it at once, before he gets farther."

"No can do," said Cornflower. "Muy malo! You sabe? Very bad."

"Tell some of your men to go!" she shouted.

"No can do. Brave mucho 'fraid. Old Whitehead got it here." He touched his feathered head. "Him heap bad medicine now."

"Isn't there a man here that's got sense and courage enough to bring that man back?" she demanded of Sims.

When even that failed to move him, she pillowed Olive's head on the ground, and, jumping up, began herself to follow the hermit, calling to him to return.

"Nell seems in the batty class, too," said Sims. "Still," he shrugged his shoulders, "I reckon nothing matters much now!"

When he withdrew his eyes and fastened them again on the face of the girl, he was surprised to see that she was looking at him, and that color was flooding into her cheeks.

"Hello!" he said. "Glad to see you're feeling better. Tell me if there isn't somethin' I can do for you?"

"I—I don't know," she faltered. "I think I've been hurt, haven't I?"

"The stage horses ran away, and——"

"Oh, yes, the Utes. I remember! And I was hurt."

"You fell out of the stage," said Sims.

"And where is the—where is Madame Le Blanc?"

"She'll be back directly."

She lifted herself on her elbow, and her eyes fell on Cornflower, who was sitting his pony near, gravely looking at her.

"Have you killed the woman?" she demanded.

"No kill," said Cornflower.

"What have you done with my father?"

Cornflower pointed to the hermit, climbing the hill beyond the thronging Utes; and to the woman who had tried to follow him and was still shouting to him to return.

"Nititchy!" he said.

Olive Merrill came to her feet, reeling and weak.

"Crazy! Do you mean that father has gone crazy?" she demanded.

She stormed the chief with questions in the Ute language.

Then she, too, when she got no satisfaction, started to follow the hermit. But she took no more than three or four steps when weakness overcame her and she fell to the ground.

As Hank Sims picked her up and began to prop her head with the coat he stripped from his back for the purpose, Madame Le Blanc arrived. And, seeing the condition of the girl, she took charge of her again.

"That's right—make her comfortable," said Sims. "But I'm figuring there won't none of us be overly comfortable in another quarter of an hour."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

Hank Sims' apprehensions seemed unwarranted. The Utes apparently had other purposes than the immediate infliction of torture and death on their captives. They began to make ready for a retreat from the vicinity of the trail. Runners were sent to follow the hermit; these, returning, made reports to Cornflower.

The young chief gave a good deal of attention to the condition of Olive Merrill. And while he appeared to approve the efforts of Madame Le Blanc, he evidently had more faith in the nursing abilities of two or three Indian squaws who were with the expedition; for he summoned them, and, after a talk with him, they pounded herbs in a stone mortar, and bound them to the cut.

North and south along the trail, Ute riders kept scurrying, so that a continual clatter of pony hoofs sounded. They were watching the trail to prevent a surprise; also to report the coming of any other stage, or any body of travelers on foot or horseback.

Madame Le Blanc, doing what she could for the girl, with the aid of the squaws, kept her fingers and her mind active. Hank Sims, astonished at finding that he was left to his own devices, walked up and down, wishing he could escape and wondering how it could be accomplished, yet seeing no chance.

The body of the stage driver had been brought in, stripped and scalped. The gruesome exhibit showed conclusively that the Utes had at last decided to take to the warpath and stood ready and eager to strike at the hated white men with all their old-time fury.

To Sims and Madame Le Blanc there came a revelation, as they watched and listened. This change in the attitude of the Utes had been produced by Cornflower and the young warriors he had brought to the Perdidas with him. Old Porcupine, in sending for help beyond the borders of his immediate influence, had overreached himself; now he was deposed, with Cornflower ruling in his place, his old friends relegated to inferior positions by the followers of the young chief.

Whether this made for their safety or otherwise, Sims and the madame did not know; but they were disposed to be hopeful.

"The young chief is in love with Olive," the madame declared to Sims, "and it isn't going to hurt me, that I've tried to be kind to her."

"But I reckon if that is so," said Sims sourly, "it would have been better for her if she was dead, as I thought she was at first. Still, I ain't going to kick, if it helps us."

"It will help us, if I can gain his good will."

"I reckon. It's easy to see he's boss here. Old Porcupine slinks round like a whipped dog, and, according to all reports, he used to be the whole cheese. But I'd give a dollar to know what they're goin' to do with us."

"They're getting ready to move, and they'll take us with them; that's as far as I can see now."

They had drawn apart, Olive Merrill having been taken in charge by the squaws; and they now discussed possible plans of escape, while the Utes made departure preparations.

For Olive's transportation, two ponies were brought up, with a blanket swung hammock wise between them. Into this she was lifted by the squaws, while Cornflower looked on and gave instructions. On the back of each of the ponies was an Indian.

Olive's condition had not improved since she had

fallen in charge of the squaws. In fact, Madame Le Blanc, surveying her now with keen-eyed curiosity and anxiety, was sure that she had taken a turn for the worse, which seemed strange, for the madame had not regarded the wound as serious.

"Improper treatment," she said to Sims, "is harming her. She is feverish now, and seems flighty. Can it be the result of those leaves they put on her head?"

"If you want to kill anybody, hand him over to an Indian to doctor," said Sims. "That's my opinion. I don't know about the stuff they put on her head. But it looks now as though that lance cut was deeper, and the blow a whole lot harder, than we were figuring on. If that pony-hammock ride is a long one, she'll be dead at the end of it."

Other ponies were brought up, jumping and prancing at the ends of lariats. Two were for Sims and the madame, others for the squaws, and still others for the escort that was to ride with them.

The scattered scouts and trail watchers came galloping in; there was much hallooming and yelling, and the Utes started, with their prisoners and loot, for the valley of the Perdidas.

It was sunset when they reached a camping place that pleased them; for they must have grass for their ponies, as well as water; also, they must have fuel for their fires.

There had been no pursuit.

As the poles and coverings took shape in the form of tepees, there was an addition to the Ute party. Another company of braves, with a number of squaws and children, appeared, bringing loads of bedding and supplies.

There was much hilarity, when the fires flamed and the flesh of cattle slain in the raid was cooked and sent forth appetizing odors; while out on the hills

scouts patrolled and watched for the approach of enemies.

Madame Le Blanc discovered that Olive Merrill had been shaken, by the ride, into a state of unconsciousness, and now had the look of a dead woman.

But when the madame would have entered the tepee in which the girl was placed, the squaws who had taken charge forbade her. However, she had another glimpse of the girl, on a blanket at the farther end of the lighted tepee, as the firelight of the lodge flickered on the white face and bandaged head.

"They'll kill her, with their tomfool treatment," asserted Sims, when this was reported by the madame. "It takes a mighty strong constitution to stand up against Indian doctoring."

"That frightens me," Madame Le Blanc declared.

"Why so?" Sims asked.

"Because, if Olive lives, she may be able to protect us; while if she's dead she can't."

"Your idea is that Cornflower is so stuck on her he'll do whatever she says, and she'll use her influence for us? I hope it's so."

"Cornflower will do what she says, to a reasonable degree; or so I think. There have been some mighty black looks given us; but Cornflower has evidently told the braves to let us alone."

"I hope you're right. But if we can jump out of here to-night, we'd better do it."

"You'll find that I'm ready for the risk, if a chance comes."

Only now and then did Sims and the woman seem to receive attention, and they were glad of it. But they discovered, quickly enough, that whenever they walked about, they were watched all the while.

They were given portions of the food cooked; but

the manner in which it was served was so unappetizing they were able to eat little.

With the coming of night, the fires were put out, some of the scouts came in, and the ponies were close-herded by the river; the few lodge fires were blanket-sheltered, to keep their light from showing beyond the camp, and a degree of quiet succeeded the noisy uproar.

To Sims and to Madame Le Blanc blankets were given; but they had no seclusion, and no chance to escape, for warriors were sprawled all about them.

Throughout the night there was much confusion, but little noise. Scouts slipping in and out of the camp passed and repassed. Besides, other warriors came in—a small band that had moved hurriedly to join Cornflower's force. In addition, it was discovered by Sims and the madame that a number of sick and wounded warriors claimed a good deal of attention. A medicine man went his rounds from tepee to tepee, with jingling bells, muffled drum beating, and low-toned chanting.

Nevertheless, they were not prepared for the revelation of the morning.

Old Porcupine came to them, after their morning meal had been tossed to them, and stood staring at them, with his blanket drawn to his chin.

"Neotha she be dead!" he announced gravely.

"Neotha?" queried Madame Le Blanc, with a sudden sense of calamity.

"Gray Eyes, white child of Porcupine."

"Do you mean Olive Merrill is dead?" almost shrieked the woman.

"All same," said Porcupine.

He looked grave and sad, almost benignant, his wrinkled cheeks and long gray hair giving him an appearance of dignity.

Hank Sims gave the woman an anxious glance, as she rose to her feet.

"Where is she? In that tent? Take me to her!" commanded the madame.

"Bumby," said Porcupine. "No can see now. Be buried bumby; then can see."

Madame Le Blanc dropped down, with a gasp, and Sims looked frightened.

"This is horrible!" she exclaimed. "Why didn't you," she demanded of Porcupine, "tell me in the night? then I might have done something for her. That wasn't right, you know. That medicine man killed her. If she had been given the right kind of attention——"

Old Porcupine turned sadly and began to walk away.

"That puts us in a hole," said Sims.

"Why, it's a terrible thing; and I'm not thinking about myself, but about her! That wound oughtn't to have killed her; and it wouldn't, if she had received right treatment. Maybe she isn't dead even yet. I think I'll——"

"Better not try to interfere," said Sims, as she started up again; and she sat down. "It won't be healthy to go against their wishes, or prejudices. She was hurt worse than we thought; though probably the medicine man's tomfoolery helped her exit. What's troublin' me now is that we can't get the help we expected to from her. So we'll be at the mercy, and the whims, of these heathen."

He stopped, when he saw that Madame Le Blanc was crying.

"She was nothin' to you," he urged.

"Well, she was a woman—a white woman. And to come to such an end, in such a place, when she had

just reached the point where it seemed she would be able to get away from it all forever!"

"Hard lines," said Sims, trying to be sympathetic and understand Madame Le Blanc's viewpoint. "But I can see how things might have been even worse for her. She might have been forced to marry that young chief, and I reckon she'd rather have died than that."

"I know she would. But that doesn't make her death any less horrible."

"Better eat what they've chucked to you, and try to forget it. We'll have to be thinking how we're to get out of this mess."

"Oh, I can't eat!" she cried. "This is horrible—horrible!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A WOMAN'S CLEVERNESS.

There were two burials that morning, by the banks of the Perdidas; that of Olive Merrill, and of a young brave who had been wounded and died in the night.

The bodies, wrapped in blankets, were brought from the tepees and lowered into shallow graves. Warriors bore the corpse of the young brave; but the other body was carried by the squaws who had watched over Olive through the night.

All the Utes in the camp stood in silence while the medicine man postured and prayed; then the graves were filled in.

Madame Le Blanc shed bitter tears. Sims, wishing to do something, and not knowing what else to do, carved a headboard, using a piece of pine box; and, gaining the consent of Porcupine, he set it up at the grave of the girl. It showed her name, and the date of her death.

But even through the mist of her tears, a new vision was coming to Madame Le Blanc. She spoke of it to Sims, after the burials.

"You've been thinking of yourself all along. You thought that Olive might protect us, and that with her gone we could expect the worst. But perhaps it won't be so bad, if I can put this plan over. You've had a good look at Cornflower, and you thought he meant to marry Olive. She's dead, and so that ends. But it won't end his fancy for a white face."

Sims looked at her inquiringly.

"What you gettin' through your nut now?" he asked.

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"Just this: I'm going to see if I can capture the fancy of this redskin Romeo. What do you think of it?"

Sims flushed.

"I think you're a fool," he said bluntly.

"Desperate conditions call for desperate measures. You agree that the outlook is bad."

"It couldn't be worse," he grunted.

"Then, something has got to be done. Maybe you've noticed how some of those squaws have been looking at me? Cornflower came over here and spoke pleasantly a while ago, and those squaws fairly stabbed me with their looks. It's what gave me the idea. Sooner or later, they're going to throw knives into me. And sooner or later, when these Ute braves have been whipped by white men, they're going to turn against you for revenge. And you can guess what that will mean. Both of us will be killed, but we'll be tortured before we're killed. We're now like mice that cats are playing with. By and by these Ute cats will tear us to pieces."

Sims glanced round with a shiver.

"So, that's my idea," she added. "And that's why I'm harboring it."

"You'd marry him?"

"Not if I know myself."

"Well, it's a dangerous game."

"Everything is dangerous here. And I've got to play it, or do something worse."

She, too, glanced round, but only to make sure she could not be overheard.

"I don't look like a desperate woman, perhaps. But I am, Hank Sims. I'm going to play this game, to save your life and mine, if it can be done. Then, if I fail, I intend to shoot myself."

She made a slight motion toward her bosom.

"Good Lord!" said Sims, staring open-eyed.

"I've got a revolver here that they don't know about. If the time comes that I have to do it, I'll shoot Cornflower, and then myself. But that will be when I simply have to."

"You've got more grit than I thought you had," he admitted, studying her flushed face, from which the paint was disappearing. "That's a terrible thing you're thinking about. But I'll say this: If it comes to the point where you think you have got to shoot yourself, just give me a bullet first, will you? I don't want to think of what would happen to me, after you had killed Cornflower."

She looked away, without promising.

"I'm going to believe," she said, drawing a long breath, "that I'm smart enough to carry this plan through without shooting anybody; and that in the end we can get away."

"Try it," he said. "And don't forget you've got that revolver, if these devils short-step and begin on us, at any time. A bullet and a quick finish looks better to me than torture."

Madame Le Blanc continued to talk of her plan, and elaborated it, with advice from Hank Sims.

At the first opportunity she began to put it into practice.

In her hands she had her pack of playing cards, and exhibited the cards, when next Cornflower passed by on a tour of the camp. Interested, he stopped, looked at the cards, and at the woman. It surprised him that she had them—that they had not been taken from her. And cards had a fascination for him, as, like all Indians, he was a born gambler.

Madame Le Blanc passed them through her fingers with a slippery motion, drew out one, and threw it into the air so that it returned to her with a rotary

movement, like a whirling boomerang; then restored it to the pack.

Cutting the pack, she held half of it toward him, in a way to make him sure she had not seen the card she exposed to him, and beckoned to him to take it.

When he did so she gave him the pack, indicating that he was to put the selected card in it as he chose.

When he did so, she gave the pack a twirling twist with thumb and fingers, and shot a card into the air. As it dropped to the ground at his feet, he saw that it was the one he had drawn.

They were the simple tricks of a card expert, but Cornflower had no knowledge of them, and they seemed to him miraculous.

"We play game," she said, inviting him.

Why she chose, then and afterward, the ignorant Indian method of using English words in addressing Cornflower, she could not have said. It is commonly done, perhaps because it seems simpler, and the speaker thinks he is making himself clearer. Olive Merrill had done that, when she talked with the Utes in English; and at first when, in the Indian lodges, she had talked with Buffalo Bill; even though, later, it was seen that she had read much, and used English well. She used it too well, in fact, for conversation; as she was inclined to imitate the style of her reading, and become bookish. So Madame Le Blanc found herself using childish wordings and phraseology, when she began to try to talk with Cornflower.

"What we play?" she asked. "You like um seven-up; you like um poker? We play plenty game, eh?"

She thrust the cards at him.

Fear of ridicule by his braves kept Cornflower from acceding at first. But from time to time he came back, and she always had some new card trick to

interest and hold his attention. The queer things she could do with cards made him marvel.

Other Ute warriors came, and watched her. But she did not encourage them. She always encouraged and invited Cornflower.

Finally, after some scouts had come in with the pleasant report that no white men were near and danger need not be apprehended for hours, Cornflower dropped down beside her, where she had spread her blanket; and took and shuffled the cards for her.

After that, for half the afternoon, she held him captive. Game after game he won from her, by the narrowest margins. His confidence in his ability so grew that, had he been playing for something besides the shining pebbles they used, he would have been willing to wager his ponies, even his chieftainship.

In an aside, Hank Sims whispered to her that now was the time to play for the high stake of liberty; but she knew better. Cornflower was chief; but an Indian chief is seldom a supreme ruler, and often he holds his position merely at the will of the warriors. So it had come about that Porcupine had been deposed and Cornflower held his place.

The excitement of the games drew nearly all the warriors round the young Ute chief and the crafty white woman; and they became so absorbed, and, at times, so enthusiastic, that they applauded, and even roared with laughter.

The Ute women were not so well pleased. Madame Le Blanc saw that. Though she knew that Indian women are supposed to hold a very inferior position, and to be obedient to their savage lords and masters, she knew also that no woman is without influence, no matter what her status may be considered.

Cornflower would have played all afternoon, but Madame Le Blanc put the cards away, when he was

still in a good humor and not too tired, and prepared to amuse the women.

In her younger years she had been a stage dancer. She was not as supple as then, but she had not forgotten what she had learned. She began dancing on the sward, for the benefit of the Ute women, not forgetting the Ute men, nor Cornflower.

When the dancing had ended, Cornflower brought her a pair of moccasins, declaring that her high-heeled shoes were not fit for dancing.

"You be my squaw bumby now," he announced, as if he conferred an honor. "Nother white squaw dead now, so I take you. How you like, huh?"

"You give me many pony, then, huh?" she asked.

"Heap many pony, many blanket, many moccasin," he said, beaming on her.

"When the fight is all done," she said. "But not till fight is all done."

He frowned.

"Long time that, mebbys!"

"It is what I say—me," she declared boldly.

"How you help?" he demanded, meaning to inquire how she could help herself, if he chose to take her for his squaw sooner than she was willing.

"Me?" she said, and laughed, as if she were not afraid of him at all. "I, too, am big medicine. What you think, I know it. You sabe me? I see what is in your mind. You do not believe, huh?"

She brought out her cards, slid them through her supple fingers, turned the faces of the cards to him, and asked him to select one.

"No let me see," she said.

He kept it carefully concealed from her.

"Put it back," she commanded.

She turned her face away, so that she could not see when he placed the card in the pack.

"Now I show you I read your mind—I know what the card is. See?"

She plucked it out of the pack, and gave it to him; and he saw that it was the card he had put in the pack.

"It is trick," he said.

"Take other card," she invited. "Two, three—like you want. Take 'em."

He again drew cards—three, this time. And he did not let her see them then, nor when he replaced them in the pack.

She drew them out, and showed him that they were the cards he had put in.

"I see inside your head," she said; "I know all that you think. I, too, am big medicine. You try hurt me some time, or do what I not want, and I use the big medicine on you. You understand?"

He stared at her, and there was fear in his black eyes.

Finally, he got up and walked away.

"You want to be careful how you handle that rascal," warned Sims, who had watched and listened with interest.

"Poof!" she said. "I've got him frightened of me already. Now I can do as I like."

"Can you get him to let us go?"

"Not now. But perhaps I can in the end. I shall have to go slow. This is just a beginning. Before I'm through he will think I've got as much power as an Indian medicine man. That's what I'm going to work for."

"You're a wonder," Hank Sims admitted. "But you'll have to be careful, and you'll have to go slow. And I'd advise you to make friends with the Ute women, if you can."

"I'll either make friends with them, or I'll frighten them," she declared. "Don't think I'm going to sit

down here, just because I'm a prisoner, and not try to work out something that will make for our security."

"You're a wonder," he repeated. "And so long as I have to be here, I'm glad that you're here, too."

She laughed, pleased with herself.

"Selfish creature!" she said.

"That's all right," said Sims, who was in earnest, and was growing hopeful. "I'm not saying that to praise you. But since this afternoon I'm beginning to feel better."

"Don't you forget it—we'll pull out of this all right yet, Hank Sims!" was her cheerful prophecy.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A LONE HAND.

While still some distance away, Buffalo Bill and his friends heard the whiplike crack of the rifle.

It caused them to draw rein.

"Where do you make that out to be, necarnis?" Pawnee Bill inquired.

"It sounded in the direction of Merrill's cabin," the scout answered. "We'll have to ride up there and see what it meant."

They were on the mountain trail that led from the town of Silver Bow, over the high divide, down to the Perdidas River. News of the Ute attack on the stage had been brought to Silver Bow. The next stage going out over the San Juan trail had found the demolished stage, the stripped body of the dead driver, with other evidences showing Ute work, and had returned as fast as the horses could be driven.

Many people had not expected that the Utes would attack the whites, even after all the war scare. The result was that Silver Bow was now in a turmoil of excitement. A company to repel the Utes was being organized, when Buffalo Bill set out over the mountain trail for the purpose of learning exactly what had happened and the worst that was to be feared.

As a measure of precaution, they had not followed the San Juan trail, where an Indian ambush was now to be anticipated.

"Mebbyso," suggested Nomad, "thar aire reds layin' fer us up thar, an' thet rifle shot is jest fer the purpose of leadin' us on."

"Unt meppysso," added the baron, "idt iss yoost some fool hundter shoodting at a deer."

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"You never can tell, Schnitz," Pawnee admitted. "So I reckon the way to know is to find out."

But the careful scout, agreeing with Nomad, that an Indian ambushade might be ready for them, dismounted, a movement which all imitated; then he sent Little Cayuse off on foot to make an investigation.

When the Piute came back, at the end of half an hour, his black eyes were big and bright, and he had returned with such rapidity that he was breathless.

"Waal, what did yer see?" demanded Nomad, when the Piute seemed at a loss for words with which to express himself.

"Me no sabe," said Little Cayuse, rolling his eyes at the borderman.

"Waal, did yer see er man, er a ba'r; er both?"

"No see man—no see bear."

"Waugh!"

"Man with gun in house," explained the Piute, "shoot out door at Injun."

"An' ye jest said ye didn't see anybody?"

"Injun no Injun, look like Injun; when gun go boom! no Injun fall."

"Waal, will yer listen ter thet?" grumbled Nomad. "This hyar Injun what ain't no Injun falls over dead when ther gun goes off."

They had heard the gun, during Cayuse's absence.

"When you don't understand a thing, the way to find out is to go and see," said Pawnee. "That's what I said before. Necarnis, if you can get any sense out of Little Cayuse, I wish you'd tackle the job."

"Tie the horses, and leave them here; and we'll let Cayuse show us what he has seen," the scout ordered.

With the horses tied to the trees, they slipped off at the heels of the Piute, and were led by him in a roundabout way over the ridge to the vicinity of the

cabin which Mark Merrill had occupied when he was the insane hermit of the hills.

Just before they reached it, the gun cracked again, whereupon Little Cayuse showed signs of wanting to bolt.

"No Injun killed ag'in," he said enigmatically.

"Then ther critter is still livin'," grunted Nomad. "I reckon, Buffler, we'll want ter git round by the front, so's we kin see ther door whar the gun is bein' shot frum."

They made a stealthy circuit, which brought them out in front of the house; though they kept well back from it, that they might not expose themselves to the chance bullets of the unknown rifleman.

Then the mystery which Little Cayuse had tried to make plain stood revealed.

Fifty yards out in front of the cabin, an effigy of a Ute warrior was standing, propped with poles. That was all that was seen at first, except that the cabin door was open. But in a little while a rifle cracked in the doorway, and the effigy fell.

"No Injun shot ag'in," said Little Cayuse.

"Waal, he is, Cayuse. And I cal'late he got thet hunk o' lead right through his bread basket, ther way he tumbled. Ef he'd been er real red, instid of an image togged out with blanket, paint, an' feathers, he'd been done fer. But whatever——"

A man appeared in the doorway with a rifle. The man was Merrill. He peered out, then sprang to the ground, and ran out to the fallen effigy.

When he had looked it over, he flourished a knife round its head, tucked the imaginary scalp in his belt, then proceeded to set up the image again.

"Waal, may I be jiggered!" Nomad gasped. "Did you see thet?"

"He's gone crazy again," said the scout.

"An' has gone to killin' 'maginary redskins. We allowed he war dead, er a pris'ner. Arter thet stage tackle he made a git-away, and hyar we finds him, harborin' a garretful o' ther wildest kind er wild bats. Whoosh!"

The baron was about to step out of concealment, but the scout stayed him.

"You might catch one of his bullets, baron."

"He iss valking pack to der house, to do some more grazy shoodting," the baron objected.

Buffalo Bill lifted his voice.

"Hello!" he called.

The white-haired rifleman whirled round, lifting his rifle, and stared.

"Who called?" he demanded.

"Cody."

"Let me see you, Cody! But if you turn out to be a red, you get this."

His rifle came up in position for quick shooting.

"Don't shoot," warned the scout, and stepped out of the bushes that had hid him.

Merrill dropped his rifle into the hollow of his arm.

"I have friends with me," Buffalo Bill announced.

"We thought we'd drop in on you."

"Injuns are barred," announced Merrill. "So I'll see who's with you, first."

They came out into view, behind the scout—Nomad and the baron, Pawnee Bill and Little Cayuse, the latter looking rather fearfully at the wild figure of the hermit.

Merrill stared at the group, counted them, then invited them to come on, ignoring the fact that one was an Indian.

When they reached the cabin he had returned to it, and was sitting in the door with his rifle across his knees.

"You're white," he said, "and you're welcome. And you were all friends of my girl."

"Where is she?" the scout asked.

A quick flush came into Merrill's bearded face.

"You don't know?" he said. "Then I'll tell you. She was with me in the stage, and the Utes held it up. They shot the driver, and overtook the stage. I was gettin' my gun ready for a fight, when one of the devils pitched a lance, and it killed Olive."

They clustered before him, questioning and sympathetic.

"There's no more to tell than that," he said, in answer to their inquiries. "They killed her! They took my gun, and everything else. But that didn't matter, and I told 'em so. This mornin' I met a Ute down by the river, laid for him, and smashed his head with a stone. Then I took his gun, and whatever I wanted, and come on up here. Them are his clothes out there. I've been shootin' at that thing, jest to git my hand in. To-night I start out for Ute scalps."

"Then you know where the Utes are now?" Buffalo Bill asked.

"By the Perdidas, a dozen miles from this place; but it ain't a long journey. They've got scouts out, and they're expectin' an attack, maybe. But they ain't got no scouts that can keep me from gittin' into their camp."

Thinking the attack on the stage had renewed his insanity, they asked other questions, trying to learn if it was true that his daughter had been killed. They did not want to believe that it could be true.

"Yes, she's dead," he reiterated. "Ain't no doubt about it. She's goin' to have Ute company, though; plenty Ute company. They'll rub me out, of course, in the end; but I figger that I can git a dozen or twenty of 'em before they do it. Oh, they'll pay for it!"

"As there was no one else in the stage," said the scout, "the——"

"There wasn't? There's where you're mistook," Merrill declared. "Hank Sims was in there, and that woman, Madame Le Blanc."

"We think they're hiding in the town somewhere."

"They held up the stage, five miles, more or less, out of the town, and got in; and now the Utes has got 'em."

Merrill spoke as a man who had knowledge, and for a little while he seemed sane, so they were puzzled.

"You saw old Porcupine with those who attacked the stage?" the scout asked.

"No, I didn't, though likely he was there. That bunch was in command of Cornflower. My daughter thought she had killed him, and I thought so. But there he was, big as life. Soon's I seen him, I tried to pull my gun on him. I'd have got him, if Olive hadn't pushed it down. Then one of the Utes slammed a lance at me. It was that lance which got Olive."

He subsided mournfully, looked at the rifle in his lap, then off through the trees.

"Before you begin this war on the Utes," said the scout, "perhaps you would like to go back to the town. You're beat out, and need rest, and there you could get——"

Merrill started to his feet, alarm in his manner.

"Back to the town?" he gasped.

"I'll send Pawnee Bill with you, and any others you'd like for company. The rest of us can go on and see what the Utes are up to."

Merrill saw through the scout's desire to return him to Silver Bow and have him kept there.

"No!" he yelled. "You'd shut me up there! You think I'm crazy!"

With an amazing jump he sprang away from the

door; then whirled with the quickness of a cat, and lifted his rifle.

"No town for me," he yelled, "until I've settled with the Utes. I'll bore the man that tries to stop me."

His eyes were blazing again, his features working convulsively; from comparative calm he had passed into frenzy. Slowly he began to back away with the threatening rifle lifted, shouting warnings.

Buffalo Bill tried to argue with him.

"Touch me," he shrieked, "and I'll drill you through! I'm going to stay out here and kill Utes till they kill me."

"But ef yer had more ammynition ter begin ther killin' with, you'd have er better start, ye know," said Nomad.

"You, too!" he shouted, covering Nomad with the wavering gun. "Stand back, I say!"

He backed ten steps or more, then he wheeled again, with the nimbleness of an animal, and ran, shouting, into the bushes.

"Ye kain't do nothin' with a critter like him," said Nomad; "still, ef he goes ter shootin' up ther Utes, like he says, ye're never goin' ter be able ter do anything with 'em, Buffler."

But to stop Merrill was impossible, without a sacrifice of lives. Nevertheless, still thinking he might change and hearken to reason, they moved toward the bushes.

But in another minute he came in sight again, this time mounted on the pony that had belonged to the Indian he had killed by the Perdidas, of whose presence they had been ignorant. With maniacal, blood-chilling, defiant laughter bubbling from his lips, he rode madly across the slope, with his rifle swinging, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN APPARITION.

Buffalo Bill and his friends rode slowly down to the Perdidas, watching for Indian foes, while keeping an eye out for the hermit.

They did not try to conceal the fact that they were depressed by what had occurred, and by the general outlook. The hermit's return to insanity, and the manner in which he had taken to the warpath, served to complicate a desperate and delicate situation. But the thought that distressed them most was that Olive Merrill was dead. And as they did not want to believe it, they used the hermit's insanity as an argument to refute his report.

"Thar ain't no use worritin' over what er crazy man says," urged the borderman; "start er nut fact'ry ter workin' overtime inside a feller's head, an' ther things he'll believe and tell ye aire plum' foolish ter rec'lect. I'm basin' my opinion on ther fac' thet Olive Merrill war so well a'quainted with ther Utes thet she'd be ther same as one o' them, an' would know how ter jine in wi' 'em."

"Yoost der same," said the baron, "oof a lance hit her mit der head on, idt wouldt——"

"Cut et out, Schnitz," growled Nomad; "I ain't goin' ter tork erbout et. The gal is alive."

"If Merrill was crazy, and hatched that notion," said Pawnee Bill, "what about his report that Sims and Madame Le Blanc were in the stage?"

"Likely a bit off ther same strand o' yarn," said Nomad.

Down by the Perdidas they connected with the Ute trail.

Nomad and Little Cayuse were now sent ahead, to nose out the situation.

When they returned, reporting that the Utes had moved on, the scout's party began to follow. Moving cautiously, it was dark by the time they reached the point where the Utes had been in camp after the attack on the stage.

Buffalo Bill's desire was to get in touch with the Utes and try to bring about a settlement of the trouble, without fighting. That might involve the capture of the young chief, Cornflower, before it could be accomplished; for it was known now that Cornflower was the animating spirit of the Ute uprising.

"You see," said the scout, discussing this with Pawnee Bill, "some things I have myself done make me anxious to do this."

"You feel that we are in part responsible for this unpleasant lay out," said Pawnee.

"Size it up for yourself, and you'll reach the same conclusion; though I am blaming only myself. Old Porcupine was quiet enough, until we tried to hold that placer for Olive Merrill. He wanted it."

"Though it wasn't his, but hers. And if we hadn't dipped in, those coyotes at Silver Bow would have gobbled it."

"True enough. But that got Porcupine started."

"That old ki-yi is the boss fool of the Perdidas ranges, necarnis; so don't waste any sympathy on him," Pawnee urged.

"I reckon, Pard Lillie, that he sees by now how big a fool he was. Not feeling strong enough to defend what he thought his rights, he called in Cornflower. And now the young chief has deposed him, and is going it alone."

"And going it strong, with a lot of crazy young bucks yelping at his heels. I'd like to get my rope

about Cornflower. That's the only way you'll get a talk with him; hog-tie him, and threaten to blow his light out, and he'll conclude he doesn't want war. But to get hold of him is sure going to call for some fine work, and I don't know how it's to be done."

The scout's party prepared camp for the night, but lighted no fires.

After a cold supper and a rest, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee followed the Ute trail on foot, through the darkness. But they did not find the new Ute camp.

As the scouts, on their return to their own camp, were dead tired, Nomad and the baron were detailed to take turns at guard duty, with Little Cayuse to scout round the camp.

A bright moon was in the sky, when the old borderman drew a match across his brier, and, with his rifle hugged between his knees, sat down at the edge of the camp to begin his vigil.

"Ef I git ter feelin' oncommon sleepy I'll call ye, baron," he said; "but otherwise I cal'late I won't. Thet round o' excitement you hed in Silver Bow rekwires thet you sh'd rest, same as others; an's fer me, 'count o' thinkin' o' thet gal, I ain't no more sleepy than er hoot owl."

"Idt vos a shame, dot she haf been kilt," the baron admitted; "oof id vouldt do eeny goodt I couldt criedt outt my eyes; budt crying ton'dt pick oop eeny sbilt milk. So I advise dot you t'ink oof somet'ing else. T'ink oof how ve ar-re going to put der kibosh on dot Cornflower."

"Oh, we aire! Huh! Waal, baron, le's hoipe so, anyhow. An' now you toddle off ter yer starlit bed an' snooze till I call ye."

The baron "toddled," smoked his big pipe a while, as he lay looking at the stars; then let the pipe slide to the ground and subsided into slumber.

Nomad smoked out his pipe bowl, filled it again, and puffed away once more.

He was still as wide awake as a cat. Before him flowed the Perdidas, between high and rocky banks; behind him was a rocky hill, pitted with gorges wherein Indians might lurk; and beyond the river rose other hills, even more wild and rocky. The Ute trail lay close by the river, and the camp occupied an open spot right in the trail.

The moonlight enabled the borderman to see a strip of silvery water, up and down stream, and he watched this closely. The Utes had boats, and they might pass.

"Ther only way fer Buffler ter connect up with thet slippery young chief is jest fer him ter git him right. Cayuse and me c'd wriggle inter ther Ute camp, and so could ary other member of this hyar crowd; thet is, ef we had dark nights. Ther trouble is, we ain't got 'em, and ain't goin' ter have 'em fer another week. Thet's ther thing right now stallin' Buffler. A night purty black, so thet ther Utes couldn't see us, is what we aire wantin'.

"But fer plum' enjoymment o' life, a night like this is ther kind thet knocks ther persimmon. I ain't reck'lectin' when I has seen ther old moon walkin' ther heavens so fair; and them stars aire like 'lectric lights strung across ther sky, down thar whar ther shadders o' ther hills makes the sky kinder black.

"Over 'crost ther river, them hills don't look like they kin be real—seem kinda smoky an' speretlike, like hills ye dream erbout; an' them black hollers an' gorges on this hyar side—waal, a man thet was mystical an' harbored fancies could easy believe he seen things movin' in 'em."

The old borderman loved the wilderness, loved the vagrant night wind, the sheen of moonlight falling

on the hills like a silver veil, the scent and even the dust of wide and wind-blown spaces.

On the bright hills the coyotes were calling. Now and then a bull bat boomed overhead. Occasionally a fish leaped and splashed in the stream. Round his head beetles dabbed and buzzed; and, down in the black hollows, fireflies now and then flashed a light and put it out again instantly, like prowling burglars.

Nomad was enjoying himself and his situation, in spite of troubled thoughts of Olive Merrill and her father, and of the Ute situation. He did not intend to call the baron, even when the period of his watch ended.

But a sudden shift was given to his thoughts, and the marrow of his courage froze with the quick chill of ingrained superstition.

For out where the moonlight played, Olive Merrill had walked in sight, in the trail. Either that, the borderman knew, or he was looking at her ghost.

"Waugh!" he grunted, as the pipestem dropped from his trembling lips. What is et?"

Apparently, she was as he had seen her last, in the town of Silver Bow, when he had gone with Buffalo Bill to the stage station, and discovered that she and her father were ready to leave the town.

When she came toward him, walking slowly along the trail, he would have run, but fright held him helpless.

"Whiskizooos erg'in!" he panted. "I reckon 'tis. An' et's er warnin'."

He tried to pull himself together, remembering the argument of the afternoon that was based on the supposition that Merrill, in his insanity, had reported a thing not believable.

His lips opened to call to her, but he could utter no sound.

Then a bit of song came to him. He thought it had a far-away, unearthly sound.

"Rippin' rivers!" he breathed. "I wish't Buffler war hyar ter see an' hear this. Wonder ef I cain't make er scramble over, and wake him up?"

He began the scramble.

Proceeding with haste, though trying to be quiet, he glanced round; the vision was no longer there. And the song had stopped.

He was about to take the dozen bounds needed to carry him to the side of the scout, when the quiet beyond was broken by a clipped Indian yell, followed by a threshing of undergrowth which brought every one in the camp to his feet.

"What's up?" came in the voice of Pawnee Bill.

Little Cayuse shot into view in the moonlight, running like a wild boy.

"Sufferin' snakes!" howled Nomad, getting his tongue. "Thet you, Cayuse? Waal, I'm glad ter know ye're alive. As fer me——"

"What's the trouble?" Buffalo Bill demanded. "Were you attacked, Cayuse?"

Instead of answering, Little Cayuse, after dashing in at a dead run, dropped down, wordless, and, fishing his dried mustang hoof out of his blanket, began to rub his body and head with it.

"Answer my question," the scout commanded.

"He iss gone off der handle, too," said the baron; "anodder candidate for der nut facdory! Vot iss idt you seen?"

They gathered round the Piute, hurling questions. Nomad came up slowly.

"Waal, why don't ye ask me what et war I seen?" he demanded. "I seen et, too."

"Zwei candidates for der nut facdory! Vot dit you seen?"

"Waal, now, let's argy this matter," said Nomad, realizing that he was in danger of derision. "Ef somebody what is dead is seen walkin' round in ther moonlight, whar she wouldn't be nohow ef even she war alive, would et mean——"

"Olive Merrill?" said the scout.

"Ye guessed et easy. Ef she's livin' I seen her, and heerd her singin'; ef she's dead, I seen her speret. I'm gamblin' dollars ter doughnuts thet ef Cayuse warn't too skeered ter tork he could report ther same."

"As you didn't have any valley tan to-night," said Pawnee, "I reckon that what you saw you saw; so be kind enough to tell us all about it."

"That's all. It war right off thar, whar ther moonlight is playin' in ther trail. She come erlong that p'int, walkin' soft—I didn't hear her; an' then she bergun ter sing."

Little Cayuse stayed the mustang hoof, and lifted his plumed head.

"Ai! Me all same, too."

Buffalo Bill walked slowly out to the point indicated by the borderman, with his revolver ready.

"While Pard Cody is explorin'," said Pawnee, "I'll have you go over that yarn, Nomad. Were you asleep?"

"When on gyard I never sleeps. And Cayuse saw et."

"What did you really see, Cayuse? Come out of that trance, and talk up."

"All same like Nomad."

"You saw Olive Merrill?"

"Ai."

"And you heard her singing?"

"Ai."

"Well, then, isn't it plain that she is alive? There's

no need of a panic. Merrill was simply loony when he said she was dead."

"Me close by, and see fine," said the Piute; "me see she look like um dead; and she sing low, like um dead."

"You've heard lots of that kind of singing, of course; and so you know how it sounds!" snorted Pawnee. "Well, I haven't, and it's plain enough to me that the young lady wasn't floating round out there on any spirit wings, but was walking on her feet. The moonlight made her seem pale. As for the singing——"

Buffalo Bill came back, and Pawnee stopped and turned to him.

"Anything, necarnis?"

"I couldn't discover anything."

"If Olive Merrill is out there," said Pawnee, "it's a safe gamble that the Utes are close by. Maybe they're holding her as a prisoner. They wouldn't watch her closely, and she could walk about if she wanted to. I think we're making too much noise, if Utes are near."

They dropped their voices. Then, at Pawnee's suggestion, they moved off quietly, so that if Indians stole near and charged the camp the danger would be lessened.

Nomad went over his story again, and the Piute became more explicit.

Little Cayuse had been returning in the trail when, so he now reported, the girl appeared suddenly and silently before him. He dropped down in fright. When she began to sing, his courage broke and he ran into the camp.

The old borderman did not need to guard the camp alone for the rest of the night—he had company. No one again went to sleep. Pawnee Bill and Cody watched, with the baron, for the coming of Indians.

Little Cayuse and Nomad watched for the appearance of specters.

None of them saw anything, nor heard anything unusual; the morning came, with the camp wide awake.

As soon as it was light enough Buffalo Bill and Pawnee went out into the trail and looked for tracks. But the ground had been beaten hard by pony hoofs.

They summoned Nomad, who came reluctantly, and who pointed out the place where he had seen the girl walking.

After that they searched the surroundings, looking for some hiding place; but they discovered nothing.

"Whiskizos," declared Nomad, as they returned to the camp; "and thet means er warnin'."

"Of what?" asked Pawnee.

"Nobody cain't tell thet ontill after et has happened."

"What good does a warning do, then? I'm down on warnings," was the humorous declaration, "if they don't help me."

The baron had extended his explorations in the opposite direction. Now he came whooping back.

"Yoost you come unt see vot idt iss," he shouted.

His blue eyes had a wild look, and the red had gone out of his face.

"Oof dot girl she iss alive, vot I haf foundt iss a buzzlemendt," he added. "How can a girl be alive, oof she iss puriedt? I am asking der kvestion?"

When they followed him, he led them to the grave of Olive Merrill, close by the river, where Hank Sims had set the headboard.

On the board Sims' knife had cut the words:

"Here lies buried Olive Merrill. Died in Ute camp, of wound from Ute lance."

The date was added.

"Deserted Jericho!" gasped Pawnee, as he read the inscription. "Can this be true, necarnis? If it is——"

"Whoosh!" Nomad cried. "Then I did see a speret las' night!"

The mustang hoof was again out, and Cayuse was using it vigorously.

"This seems to present a puzzle," Buffalo Bill admitted. "But so long as we don't know what is in this grave, or who put this board here, we've no good reason to change our opinion that Olive Merrill is alive, and that Nomad and Little Cayuse saw her."

"It doesn't seem likely that any of the Utes could cut letters like that, or that they'd do it if they could," said Pawnee.

"The headboard was set up here by a white man, is my guess. We can accept that, I think, as a fact. If it was done while the Utes were here, I'd guess Hank Sims. But I can't imagine why he would set it up, if Olive isn't dead; and I can't understand how, if he is a prisoner of the Utes, they would let him do it. Likely we've got to throw aside Merrill's story about Sims; and that leaves me in the dark."

"We can open the grave."

Nomad jumped into the air.

"Whoop! Don't do et, Buffler!"

"Why not? We've got to settle this mystery. If the girl is dead and buried here, you dreamed that you saw a ghost."

"But Cayuse? Did he dream ther same?"

"We'll have to open this grave, to settle it."

"Not right now, anyway, necarnis," said Pawnee; "for here comes Merrill."

The old hermit was afoot, with his rifle in the hollow of his arm. He had appeared in the trail and was coming toward them, walking briskly.

"Stand back," he ordered, as he drew near.

"You know what is here?" Buffalo Bill asked.

"It's the grave of my daughter," was the unexpected answer.

"Then you put this headboard here?" asked the scout.

"I didn't. I found the grave here yesterday. That headboard was there, then. Sims done that, I reckon."

He eyed them, with his rifle ready for use.

"You wanted to hold me, but let me tell you not to try it," he said. "I've killed two Utes since seein' you, and the count has jest begun. I'm ready to shoot down the man that sets hands on me. So I warn you."

He was crazy—a glance into his blazing eyes showed that. Still, he talked like a sane man at the moment, and the scout believed it possible to argue with him.

"We reached the conclusion last night that your daughter is not dead, Merrill. Last night Nomad and the Piute saw her walking in the trail up there, and they heard her singing. That ought to prove that she is alive."

The hermit lowered the butt of his rifle to the ground, folded his hands across the muzzle, and eyed them.

"I saw her, and I heard her," he said.

"Then, doesn't it prove that she is living?"

"It proves to me that she is dead, for it wasn't her I saw and heard, but her spirit."

"But——"

"I saw her when she was killed, ye know," Merrill added. "You think I'm crazy, but I ain't. Somethin' snapped in my head, then, when I saw that she was dead; and for a minute or two I know that I was wild. But I'm calm now. You can see that I am. And so, seeing her dead there by the stage, I know that it wasn't really her that I saw and heard last night."

"Where were you, when you saw her?" the scout asked.

"When I heard her I was asleep in a notch over there. Her singing awoke me, and then I saw her. I stepped out to speak to her, and then she was gone."

"You heard the Piute?"

"Did you s'pose I didn't, and him yellin' like a wolf? I heard all of you. After a while I back-tracked, and went to sleep again. This mornin' I heard ye again, and I come out here."

"What are you going to do now?"

Merrill stared at the scout, under wrinkled brows.

"What are *you* going to do?"

"My idea," said the scout, after a moment of hesitation, "was to open this grave, and see if your daughter's body is here. I don't think it is. Perhaps you will consent for us to do it. If she really isn't dead, you want to know it."

A scowl swept the hermit's face, and he lifted his rifle.

"Try it," he shouted, "and you're a dead man!"

His tone changed.

"Why, Buffalo Bill," he said, "you've been my friend, and you was Olive's friend; and now you talk of that! It hurts me."

"I hope you can see that my intentions are good, anyway."

"I want you to promise me that you won't do that—that you won't think of it again."

"I dislike to, for I think it ought to be done. If your daughter is alive, you ought to know it. Then you would hunt for her, instead of trying to kill Utes. Perhaps she is held in some hole round here as a prisoner. That is my theory."

"No, no!" said Merrill, shaking his head. "Promise me that you won't open this grave."

"In your own interest, Merrill, I must refuse to promise it."

"Then," the rifle came up, "I shall hide out close by, and I shall put a bullet through the man that so much as tries it. I mean it, Buffalo Bill. If you touch this grave I'll shoot you down like a dog."

There wasn't a doubt that he meant just what he said.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN THE ENEMY'S HANDS.

That Cornflower had ability was shown in the fact that he so quickly supplanted old Porcupine. Ability is usually accompanied by ambition, and Cornflower had that, too. Having secured his position through intrigue, he had to hold it, and increase his power.

Indianlike, however, his ignorance led him to underestimate the numbers and fighting quality of the white men near him. He believed he could whip any body of white men that might be sent against him from Silver Bow. Yet he was taking no chances. He wanted the benefits of ambushes and surprises.

Hence he kept scouts out, along the San Juan trail and by the banks of the Perdidas. Some of these scouts brought him news of the movements of Buffalo Bill, known to the redskins as Pa-e-has-ka.

When he heard that Buffalo Bill and his picked band, small in number, was following the Ute trail along the Perdidas, Cornflower resolved to try to trap this party. That would, if accomplished, not only put the biggest kind of a feather in his war bonnet, but would put a club in his hands with which he could hope to deal some smashing blows.

So the undertaking was conducted by Cornflower himself, that it might not miscarry. With the pick of his warriors, he back-tracked down the Perdidas trail, with his scouts well in advance.

At sundown on the day of the adventures narrated, Cornflower received word that Buffalo Bill's party had been sighted.

The scout who brought the word was sent out again,

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while Cornflower and his band waited for darkness. The red moon hung like a ball of fire over the ridge of the Perdidas hills, as Cornflower's band got under way.

Buffalo Bill's party had gone into camp beside the trail. Cornflower intended to strike the camp like a whirlwind and kill or capture the whole party.

But when the Utes approached the camp they discovered that a sentinel watched it, standing on a spur of rock that looked down on the trail by which it must be gained.

This sentinel was Little Cayuse. When he moved, as he did now and then, the moonlight silhouetted his figure against the moon-bright sky, so that even his eagle plume could be seen.

He was watchful and wary, pacing the little space of rock with catlike footsteps, in his left hand his treasured medicine hoof, his rifle gripped in his right. Whenever he reached the tip of the shelf, the trail lay under his gaze like a silvered ribbon.

To capture the wide-awake Piute was the first thing to be accomplished. To drop him from his place with a rifle bullet would not do, as that would arouse the camp of the white men.

Four warriors, led by Cornflower, set out to effect the snaring of the Piute; their plan being to gain the foot of the hill, separate, climb stealthily to the shelf, lure him to one side by a hissing sound, then leap on him and strangle him.

If this could be done, the way to the camp of the white men would lie open, and it might be swept by a sudden charge.

But before Cornflower and his braves had even begun the ascent of the hill, the Piute uttered a freezing yell and jumped madly into space. They saw him

cleave the air and drop like a plummet to the trail, thirty feet or more below.

Startled by a thing so inexplicable, Cornflower and his four braves crouched by the trail. Before the Piute landed in the trail, they heard exclamations and questions in the camp of the white men, and then running feet.

Buffalo Bill came into view, followed by Pawnee Bill, and after them the borderman and the baron.

To the strained ears of the Utes at this instant came the sound of moccasins, showing the approach of more Utes from the opposite direction. And as these came up behind Cornflower, while Buffalo Bill and his friends were bending over the Piute, Cornflower saw his opportunity, and charged.

More than a score of Utes were upon the scout and his companions in a twinkling, while they were lifting Little Cayuse and asking themselves why he had jumped, and if he had been killed.

A fight followed like the breaking of a cyclone. It lasted not a minute. When it ended, Pawnee Bill and the baron, as well as the Piute, lay unconscious, and Buffalo Bill and Nomad were struggling vainly against a harness of snaring ropes.

With rifles threatening them, they surrendered with the best grace they could, but with a chagrin too deep for words.

Dragged well out into the moonlit trail, Little Cayuse was the first to recover. Not knowing he was a prisoner, he started up with another yell, and was jerked flat by the rope that clutched his ankles.

The baron, at the same moment, snorted into renewed consciousness, and wanted to know where he was "at."

Only because they were sternly forbidden, were the

triumphant Utes able to repress their yells, as they gathered round their prisoners.

The contents of a water bottle, doused in his face, brought round Pawnee Bill, who had been clipped on the head with the flat of a lance blade.

"Waal?" Nomad roared, crumpled on the ground in his harness of cords, but glaring round. "Whyever am I livin' ter see er thing like this?"

"Hard lines, old man," said Buffalo Bill sympathetically.

"Oh, I ain't keerin' fer ther lines—ef yer mean ther things I'm tied with—though they're hard ernough; what's gnawin' my innards like er wolf in ther fold is thet er thing like this could er happened! Waugh!"

"Say it again, for me—I ain't able to make a noise like that," drawled Pawnee. "Now, all together—hip hip—"

"So, you're livin', too?"

"Did you think I was dead?"

"We ort ter all be dead and buried! What's bercome o' Cayuse?"

"He iss by der site oof me."

"Dead?"

"Cayuse all same be livin'," came in the voice of the Piute.

"Waugh!" Nomad roared again. "Whyever did ye make thet holler, an' take thet high dive frum ther rock?"

"Little Cayuse see um spirit ag'in."

"Wh-what? *What is that?*"

"Little Cayuse see um spirit ag'in."

"Wow! Whar?"

Little Cayuse chattered an answer; he was almost too scared to speak.

"What? Say et erg'in."

"Spirit come on top of rock, behind Little Cayuse;

then Cayuse give yell and jump off rock. Muche 'fraid."

"Waugh! Waugh-h! Waugh-h-h!"

The Utes were not silent, though they were not noisy; their tongues had been going, as they threatened their prisoners with rifles and threw cunning loops of rope with cowboy deftness. But those who understood English stopped their work, when they heard the words of the Piute.

One of the Utes who heard was Cornflower.

"What's that?" he demanded, stepping up to Little Cayuse.

The Piute, hesitating, flung a glance at Pa-e-has-ka, but when the point of Cornflower's lance tickled against his breastbone, he became communicative.

"Me see um spirit," he declared.

Cornflower was a believer in spirits—all the Indians were, and this excited his superstition and his curiosity. Also, it promised to throw light on the mystery of why the Piute had yelled in fright and leaped from the sentry rock.

"What um spirit like?" said Cornflower.

Little Cayuse struggled through the explanation that the spirit he had seen was like the girl whose body lay buried under the lettered board by the Perdidas, not far away.

The story did not stampede the Utes, because Cornflower was not of the stampeding kind; but it hurried their departure from the spot.

Other questions were asked by Buffalo Bill, Pawnee, and the baron.

Little Cayuse clung to his declaration that he had seen the spirit of Olive Merrill on the sentry rock behind him, and the sight had sent him from the rock in a reckless leap.

"Br-r-r-r!" shivered the borderman. "I don't blame

ye fer jumpin'; I'd er clim' out er thar same way, ef I'd had ter leap inter a rock cañon."

"It's no use arguing with a pair of addle pates like you and Cayuse," said Pawnee Bill; "but the rest of us know that the girl is alive, and we're wishing we could make another search for her."

"Vot I am blaming der Biute for iss dot I am a brisoner," groaned the baron. "Oof ve tidn't belief he vos deadt vhen he yoomped, ve vouldn't haf run ub, unt so ve vouldt nodd haf been caught by der Utes."

"Don't blame any one but our fool selves, Schnitz," said Pawnee.

The triumphant Utes hastened their departure with their prisoners, casting many half-frightened, backward glances over the trail as they posted along. They did not stop to look for the horses they had good reason to think were near.

An hour of brisk walking brought them into the Ute camp, where they were hilariously received, and the prisoners drubbed with insults.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE WONDER WOMAN.

Buffalo Bill and his pards were not long in the Ute camp before they had a talk with the Wonder Woman, as the Utes called Madame Le Blanc.

They found her occupying one of the largest tepees, with liberty to do pretty much as she pleased. Because she asked it, Hank Sims was brought into the big tepee at the same time. Into it came also, behind the prisoners, Cornflower and several of his choicest braves.

Madame Le Blanc sat on the ground, on a blanket, at the rear of the tepee, and they gathered before her, prisoners and captors, as if they came to do her homage.

"I'm sorry this has happened," she said to Buffalo Bill, "though maybe you won't believe it. You think I'm not your friend—and I'm not; but this isn't good for any of us. Still, you may work out of it; for the Utes will value you too much to want to kill you. As for your friends," she shrugged her shoulders, "I can't say. Cornflower has brought you in here, to exhibit you; just as the hunter likes to exhibit his game, and the fisherman his catch. Of course, you understand that."

"What I don't understand," said the scout boldly, "is your position here."

"My friend Cornflower," she threw a flattering glance at the young chief, "knows that I can help him with my magic. I was a fortune teller in the town—a witch, if you please; and here I am the same. He expects trouble with the white men of the town, and

I am going to help him with my magic. Already I have put a charm on his war bonnet, so that the bullets of the white men cannot touch him. And a knot of my hair, which I bewitched and put in his medicine pouch before he set out to-night, was what made him able to take you, no doubt."

"So this is your game!" thought Pawnee Bill. "Well, you're sure a smart woman!"

"Won't you sit down," she asked, waving her hand. "This seems to be a sort of conference. Is that your idea, Cornflower?"

"Me think mebbysso you like um see prisoners," said the chief.

"Me like see um, Cornflower; that's right. But me no like him!" She pointed out Buffalo Bill. "In the town, you sabe, him try to catch me and that man."

She swept her hand round, and pointed at Sims, on whose face was a sardonic grin.

"All right," said Cornflower. "You make um plenty talk. You hear 'bout spirit, huh?"

The madame looked inquiringly at Buffalo Bill.

"He means the thing that happened, which brought about our capture," the scout explained. "Little Cayuse was doing sentry duty on a rock over the trail, when he thought he saw a spirit. The Piute jumped into the trail with a yell that was something fierce to hear. We were afraid that he had been killed, for it was a big drop; and we rushed to him. Then, before we could think twice, the Utes were on top of us. They'd been hiding in the trail."

"But the spirit?" she said. "Your Piute seems to be imaginative."

"He thought he saw the spirit of Olive Merrill. But, as the same thing was seen before, we thought—oh, well," he glanced round, "you understand?"

"What?" she cried, with a start. "The spirit of that dead girl? What nonsense!"

Buffalo Bill looked round again. The Utes in the tepee had stilled their chattering, and were listening, their faces earnest and credulous, in the flickering light of the torch.

"The girl is dead?" he queried, in a tone which showed he did not believe it. "You think that is so?"

"She certainly is," replied Madame Le Blanc.

"You know that to be a fact?"

"Why, I saw her buried! She was struck by a lance, when we were in the stage, and she died in the camp to which she was carried. She was buried there by the river."

"That's right," Sims agreed. "You might have seen her grave, if you'd looked for it. I set a headboard up by it, with her name on it."

"We saw that grave," the scout admitted, "and we thought you set up the headboard."

"And ask questions like you do, after that?" exclaimed the woman.

"Well, let us say no more on the subject," said the scout, who did not care to talk about it or say what he thought before the listening Utes. "If she's dead, she is dead, and the Piute saw her ghost."

"Br-r-r-r-r!" shivered Nomad. "Cain't ye tork erbout suthin' soothin'er? Ef torkin' is all what we've got ter do in this hyar tepee, let's make et pleasant. Let some redskin tell erbout ther scalps he's tuck, er some white man count up ther notches in his rifle."

Pawnee Bill laughed.

"Our sanguinary friend doesn't object to tales of dead men, but he does object to stories of ghosts."

"What do you suppose it was your Indian saw?" asked the fortune teller of Buffalo Bill. "We don't believe in ghosts—you and I."

"I can't say any more than that he asserts he saw the ghost of the dead girl."

"Waugh! Same hyar; I seen et, too," Nomad declared.

"So there you have it," said the scout; "pick the truth out of it, if you can."

"Moonlight and imagination might account for it, don't you think," suggested Madame Le Blanc.

"I'm not thinking about it now," the scout replied, in a meaning tone.

"You'll think about it later?"

"That seems extremely likely, doesn't it?"

"Then I'll talk with you about it later."

"Br-r-r-r-r! Cain't ye cut et out? Waugh! Br-r-r-r-r!"

"Old Diamond's gray hair is turning kinky," said Pawnee. "Better stop it. Likewise, Little Cayuse over there is preparing to throw a fit. If you want to do a good turn by that young redskin, Madame Le Blanc, get the Ute who swiped his mustang hoof to return it to him. You'll see again a happy and contented Piute, if you do."

"His mustang hoof?"

"His big medicine—protection for himself, and a perfect hoodoo for all his enemies. He's as brave as a lion, when it's with him, and has no more spine than a jellyfish when it's gone. One of the Utes took it; that's what I mean. You'd think it nothing but the dried hoof of a mustang—but you'd be mistaken; as a wonder worker it can show points to the knot of hair you breathed on and poked into the chief's medicine pouch."

Madame Le Blanc looked at the young Indian.

"You might," added Pawnee Bill, "convince the Ute who has it that it's sure to give him smallpox and

measles, if he keeps it; and that it's safe only in the hands of Little Cayuse."

Madame Le Blanc smiled.

"I'll think about it," she said; "but you understand that here I'm looking after the interests of Cornflower chiefly. If it is good for Cornflower for the Piute to have the mustang hoof, likely that will happen."

At the end of the interview the prisoners were removed from the tepee. But, as they were taken away, they saw, through the tepee entrance, that the Wonder Woman had begun to posture, passing her hands through the flame of the torch, and that she was preparing some "big medicine" flummery with which to impress further the young chief.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PORCUPINE TAKES A HAND.

The Ute camp was thrown into a flutter in the early morning by the discovery that a strong body of white men had moved out from Silver Bow over the San Juan trail, and seemed to be getting ready to make an attack.

Cornflower, gay in war bonnet and face paint, rode out with a small body of warriors to verify the report and determine what should be done.

When he came back he had a talk with the Wonder Woman. Hank Sims was called into the tepee, and could be heard talking with Cornflower and the Utes who had gathered there.

When the conference ended, the war drums began their monotonous booming.

"Cornflower's goin' ter make ther tackle," Nomad confided to the baron, who was near him. "I reckon thar will be fur flyin' purty soon, and me not able even ter take er look-in. I'm wonderin' ef we kin hope thet the men frum ther town will win, and give us er show fer our white alley."

"Oof ve couldt yoost gidt away vrom der guardts, mit guns in ower hands," said the baron, "ve might shoot der Injuns behint dheir backs. Dot wouldt be some usefulness, eh?"

"But we ain't goin' ter be able ter."

Sims mounted a pony, at the side of Cornflower, and, with all the fighting young Utes behind them, they galloped into the San Juan trail, and rode forth to meet the white men.

Fifteen minutes later the wild yells of the Utes arose,

followed by a terrific uproar of cracking guns, cheering, galloping horses, and all the indescribable din of a conflict between armed forces being waged near at hand.

Old Porcupine appeared as soon as the noise of the fighting was heard in the camp. He had been relegated to the background by Cornflower and the young braves, and had taken no part in the conference, but had sulked in his tepee when the braves gathered round the young chief.

With Cornflower were eight or ten Utes, many as old as he, and a few women. They constituted half the Indians left in the camp. The only other armed ones were the guards detailed to watch the prisoners.

Two of these deserted, and turned, with old Porcupine's small force, on the other guards. This was done so quickly that the guards did not know they were menaced until they looked into the rifles held by Porcupine's followers.

Then they surrendered, yielding their weapons without putting up a fight.

Buffalo Bill and his friends barely had time to understand the situation before old Porcupine was in control of the camp.

"Hallelujah!" whispered Pawnee Bill. "When rebellion lifts its snaky head in the midst of our foes, we have a right to sing praises. But now what's going to happen?"

Porcupine summoned the Wonder Woman from her tepee, spoke to her, and pointed to the prisoners; at the same time he gripped his rifle, and seemed to be asking with which side she meant to stand—with his or Cornflower's.

Madame Le Blanc was frightened and puzzled.

"I don't understand what you mean to do!" the prisoners heard her say to the old chief.

Shaking his rifle with a threatening gesture, old Porcupine turned and walked over to the prisoners, Madame Le Blanc following him.

"Me make you sabe," he said to Buffalo Bill. "Me no chief here. Cornflower he be chief now. So me go 'way. You like go 'way, too, huh?"

"Glee-ory ter goats!" yelled Nomad. "Say, 'Yes,' Buffler—quick, 'fore he changes his mind."

The scout nodded assent.

"We'd like to go away," he replied to the old chief.

"This my girl," said Porcupine, indicating one of the Indian women with him. "My other girl she be with Gray Eyes. We go find Gray Eyes. How you like?"

"Gray Eyes?" exclaimed the scout. "That's what you call the girl we know as Olive Merrill?"

"All same Gray Eyes—all same ol' Mer'll."

"Then she is alive?"

"Plenty 'live."

"Whoop!" breathed the borderman. "Ye say she's alive? Wow! I don't believe et."

"You mak' the esplain," old Porcupine said to his daughter. "Me no good Engesh."

Porcupine's daughter could speak English with a good deal of fluency.

"She be hit wiz lance," she said. "Cornflower want to make her be his squaw. You un'erstand? Porcupine no like that. He say Gray Eyes be his girl, and he no want her be Cornflower squaw when she no like to be. You un'erstand? So he say, 'We make her dead!' And we do. When she is be taken to the camp, we give her the dead medicine—make her sleepy, then make her like dead. We let Cornflower see her when she be like dead in the tepee; and he say, 'Zat bad, she be dead!' So we send all out but the women—me, and she, and some ozzar women; and we sew up in the

dead blanket some wood what we make for look like body. Gray Eyes we take quiet out of camp in dark; and she go hide in cave with my sister. And she is now in the cave."

"Whoop!" Nomad exclaimed. "Do ye hear thet, Cayuse? Now, what does yer think o' actions like thet? Thet's plum' cheatin'."

The girl turned and looked at her father, as if seeking instructions. He said something in Ute, which she began to explain:

"Porcupine want be Pa-e-has-ka's friend now—want to be good Injun. He show Pa-e-has-ka where is Gray Eyes. He no like Cornflower no more. Mebbys, too, Cornflower git whipped by white men, then Utes be mucho 'fraid and run away, and Porcupine have no place to go. Mebbys then white men kill him, if him not Pa-e-has-ka's friend. Porcupine now help Pa-e-has-ka; then Pa-e-has-ka him help Porcupine."

"It's a bargain," said the scout, anxious to get out of the camp before the return of Cornflower, whatever the issue of the fight that was now raging.

If the Utes conquered in that fight, the position of the prisoners would be perilous, for, in their rejoicing, the warriors would revert to utter savagery and probably demand the lives of the prisoners.

On the other hand, if the Utes were defeated, it was likely that when they fell back on the camp they would kill the prisoners, so as not to be hampered with them in a flight.

Little Cayuse was still blinking in bewilderment, when Porcupine's knife and the knives of his friends got busy with the bonds of the prisoners. He could not easily make the mental shift necessary to a complete understanding that he had seen a living woman and not a spirit.

"Now, ef we can collect some good hardware," said

Nomad, looking round for weapons as soon as he was free, "we'll make things interestin' fer them Utes, ef they back-track on us too soon."

Porcupine began to speak to Madame Le Blanc, while the freed prisoners were "collecting hardware," and what went with it, in the shape of ammunition.

"You go Porcupine, or you stay Cornflower?" the old chief demanded,

For a moment the fortune teller hesitated; then, her sound sense coming to her aid, she saw how wise it was to put herself on the side of law and order while she could. Later, if she needed to, she could claim that she had gone with Porcupine because she feared to do otherwise.

"I'll go with you," she said.

He grunted his satisfaction. He cared nothing for her safety, but he thought it would be a good stroke to take the power of the Wonder Woman from Cornflower and annex it himself.

"A' right," he said. "Now we git ready."

From the few ponies left, the warriors who were with Porcupine were selecting the best, for their own use and the use of the prisoners. They brought them up, a string of animals that numbered several lame ones; but it was a time when beggars could not be choosers.

"A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" cried Pawnee, when the ponies were brought into the camp.

He had a rifle, cartridge belt, and a knife, and, with a horse under him, even though it was but a pony and had no saddle, he felt that he would be equal to almost any emergency.

Old Porcupine hastened his preparations and his departure from the camp, and the freed prisoners, with their Ute escort, were well under way while the rifles

were still cracking and yells rising in the San Juan trail.

Taking the route along the Perdidas, which offered good going, they pounded on at top speed, and did not slacken it until they had put a goodly distance between themselves and possible pursuers.

CHAPTER XL.

HARASSED BY DOUBT.

Standing on a rock by the side of the trail when the old camp was reached, old Porcupine called again and again the Ute name of Olive Merrill. Before him was a hole in the side of the gorge, screened by scraggly bushes.

Bugling with his wrinkled hands, he then shouted the name of his daughter. To none of his calls was there an answer.

Behind that bush-screened hole was a little cave, in which he claimed that Olive Merrill and his daughter had been hiding, and he had climbed to the rock with the utmost confidence to shout to them.

In the trail below, Buffalo Bill and the other members of the party sat on their ponies.

They saw Porcupine leap from the rock, and disappear among the bushes.

He was gone a few minutes. When he came back he seemed puzzled.

"All same fly away," he said, spreading out his hands. "Gray Eyes gone."

Shivers of fear had begun to shake old Nomad and Little Cayuse as this spot was approached; for near it the ghost had been seen by them, and just below, by the river, was the grave marked with that headboard which proclaimed that Olive Merrill was dead.

So that now, when the old Ute chief got no answer to his calls, and came back from the cave declaring that no one was in it, Nomad and the Piute were ready to believe that he had lied about it, and stood ready to bolt.

"Does it look as if they had been in the cave?" Buffalo Bill asked the chief.

Porcupine had found no evidence of their presence.

"Me show you," he invited.

"Ware, Buffler!" Nomad warned, as the scout swung down from his pony to go with the chief.

"I suppose you don't want company, necarnis?" inquired Pawnee Bill.

"Come along if you like, Lillie," said the scout. "The rest of you keep together and watch the trail."

He and Pawnee Bill followed old Porcupine, and were led to the ragged hole that was the mouth of the cave.

Here Porcupine produced a grass-and-withe torch which he had prepared and used, but had extinguished when he came out. Relighting this, he led the way into the darkness.

The cave was not large, so little time was consumed in looking over it and discovering that it was untenanted. To all appearance, it had not been occupied recently.

"Up a stump," muttered Pawnee, as they came out into the light. "What now?"

This was talked over, when they got back into the trail. Porcupine's English being poor, his daughter was questioned about other caves in the vicinity.

On foot, Buffalo Bill and his little party went on down the trail with Porcupine, then they explored the land on either side. Their work was not very thorough, for they feared the coming of Cornflower's Utes and proceeded hurriedly.

When they could find no trace of the women they sought, they held a conference. Porcupine, puzzled, got out his pipe, and passed it round. Like every Indian, when he did not know what to do he wanted to powwow.

As they were powwowing, Merrill, the madman, charged the Utes with wild recklessness. He was a startling sight, when he appeared unexpectedly in the trail, rifle in hand, on a pony that had neither saddle nor bridle, and bore down in his whirlwind dash, with maniac screeches issuing from his quivering lips.

The Utes scattered as if a bomb had been thrown into their midst, and the white men got out of the way with equal celerity.

Merrill flourished his rifle at the old chief as he fled past, then he rode on and away. It was like the coming and going of a thunder gust.

"Whoosh!" Nomad wheezed, as he pulled himself together and got back his breath. "We war jest sayin', 'Whar is Merrill now?' an' hyar he is."

"Your meanness is, 'Here he vos!'" corrected the baron, while he looked himself over to see that he was all there. "He iss now in some odder blace!"

The Utes hurried back to the trail, filled with excitement. They had recognized the Ute pony that Merrill rode.

Nevertheless, they showed no excessive desire to follow him. And if he had charged back they would have fled as before, regarding him as a madman, whom they were not permitted to kill.

Porcupine tried to resume his smoking; but his pipe had lost its tobacco, and his temper was ruffled.

But they talked again, of the hermit now, and also of the missing women.

"My idea is," said the scout, "that they became afraid to remain in that cave, so near the trail, and sought another. We'll find them after a while."

"And my idea is," Pawnee added, "that the scare was thrown into them when Nomad and Little Cayuse proceeded to have whiskizoo fits when they fancied they were up against a ghost."

"Don't rub et in," warned the borderman. "P'r'aps we did throw whiskizoo fits, and p'r'aps we had er right ter. I ain't seen nothin' yit ter make me believe thet Olive Merrill is in the land of ther livin', I ain't. Ef you has, be kind ernough ter name et ter me."

"You heard what Porcupine said," Pawnee reminded.

"And you heard what Sims and ther madame said. They war plum' sart'in ther gal war dead and buried. I never seen no Injun yit what wouldn't lie ef he thought et would benefit him, and old Porkypine is all Injun."

Buffalo Bill looked along the trail in the direction taken by the hermit.

"I'm of the opinion that Porcupine has told the truth, so far as he is able to. But the proof lies in that grave, under that headboard. It wouldn't take us long to open the grave and find out."

"Stop et!" yelled Nomad. "Br-r-r-r!"

"Pa-e-has-ka no do," begged the startled Piute. "Bad medicine."

"I think I'd have to laugh, if I wasn't so pesky nervous," Pawnee Bill declared.

"What's made you narvous?" demanded Nomad. "You don't b'lieve in no ghosts—you say!"

"I haven't had anything to make me nervous, of course—none of us have had. Here's a cure for it, and when we get out of here, if we ever do, you can get a patent on it, old Diamond, and get rich, by slipping the idea to people with money: 'Run into an ambush and get captured by the Utes, lie all night in their camp, with ropes on you, and the Utes making now and then pleasant remarks about taking your scalp, or digging your eyes out; escape by the skin of your teeth, when you don't expect to, and go hunting for

a woman that you can't be sure is dead or living; then be charged suddenly by a madman.' When the patient is cured of his nervousness he'll be dead, and you can take all his money."

"Wow! Now you're tryin' ter be sourcastic."

"Go ahead with your plan, if you've got one, ne-carnis," said Pawnee, turning to Buffalo Bill. "If old Porcupine will join you, the thing will be easy—that is, if Merrill doesn't cut in. You recollect what he said he'd do if any one tried to open that grave."

"Unt dot feller haf godt sooch a graziness he vouldt do idt," added the baron. "Oof you vandt to go ahead, go aheadt; but I am no grafedigger."

"When ye bergin et, I take ter ther woods," said Nomad.

Buffalo Bill, nevertheless, spoke to Porcupine and his daughter about it.

"Your daughter says that wood was sewed up in a blanket and buried in that grave. We don't doubt her word for that, but we're thinking of opening the grave and taking a look."

Porcupine hesitated in what Nomad regarded as a suspicious manner. But he quickly explained this by saying that the other Utes with Cornflower thought the grave a real one, for which reason it would not be healthy to tamper with it, and let them discover it.

"As they aren't here, we can afford to take that risk," said the scout, sweeping away the last objection.

But when they went down to the grave by the Perdidias they found the hermit sitting by it, with his rifle at his side.

He had tucked his pony out of sight, had cut across the hill, and got to the grave first, as if he feared it might be meddled with.

Seeing them approach, he stood up and lifted his rifle.

"Back!" he yelled. "I know what you want, but you can't do it."

To emphasize this he sent a shot which scattered the Utes. The bullet flew high, no doubt so sent purposely, but its whining z-zip among the tree branches was nerve-trying just the same.

Buffalo Bill held up his hand.

"We'd like a talk with you!"

"Say it there; that's close enough."

"Your daughter isn't dead. Porcupine can explain about that."

"If that old scoundrel shows his head I'll send a bullet through it. Tell him so. Tell him I haven't forgot the Meeker massacre, when that redskin devil and others murdered white people, my wife among 'em, and carried off my daughter. Tell him that. Believe old Porcupine? That old liar never got acquainted with the truth in his life. And tell him I'm going to kill him."

Old Porcupine, hearing this, writhed farther among the bushes, to get out of reach of the threatening rifle.

"Ugh!" the scout and his friends heard him mutter.

"But we think," said the scout, "that now he is telling the truth. He has tried to save your girl from becoming the squaw of Cornflower, and you ought to consider that. Let me tell you about that."

"I don't want to hear his lies. Tell him he killed my wife, stole my daughter, and drove me crazy, and that I'll git him for it."

Old Porcupine grunted again and scrambled into the bushes. It seemed that he was backing off, with the intention of running for safety.

Suddenly the hermit's rifle pitched to his cheek, and cracked flat and deadly.

Behind the scout, on the side of the hill, rose an Indian yell. And the body of old Porcupine came tumbling down the slope. In his scramble for safety he had exposed himself, and the madman had shot him dead.

The wild yell of Merrill rose like an echo, following that of Porcupine. The Utes who were with the scout fired at him, then, and broke into flight along the trail. Even Porcupine's daughter fled with them.

"That's too bad," said the scout.

"Waal, I dunno," said Nomad; "but I'll tork erbout et when I gits whar thet loonytic cain't hit me, ef he takes ter pluggin' at our bunch. I shore dunno but ole Porkypine got jest what war comin' ter him, all things bein' considered. He killed thet man's wife, and for y'ars he held his darter in his dirty tepee down hyar, makin' her think she war an Injun; and now jest because you think he's turned a new leaf, and is tryin' ter act squar', you allow the score ought ter be forgot. Seems ter me I dunno fer sart'in thet you're right. Thar's ther other side ter look at—Merrill's side. And," he added, as if this were a clincher, "we ain't yit had no proofs thet Porkypine warn't lyin' now and tryin' ter do ye."

Madame Le Blanc, courageous enough, more so than the majority of women, was staring at the dead chief as if she, too, had lost her mind.

"Take me away!" she begged. "Take me away! I thought I could stand anything, but I can't stand this."

Down by the yellow mound that showed the head-board with his daughter's name, Mark Merrill was dancing and swinging his rifle.

"Come on, Buffalo Bill," he shouted. "Try to do what you said, and you get my next bullet!"

CHAPTER XLI.

THE FLIGHT OF CORNFLOWER.

On his painted mustang, Cornflower fled alone down the Perdidas trail, deserted by his followers, who had scattered in flight, each seeking his own safety.

The battle had gone against the young chief and his warriors.

Not even the fact that at his side in the fight had ridden the white man, whom the Wonder Woman had proclaimed a victory winner, had been able to save the day. At last Hank Sims had fallen as he led in the wild charge, shot through the body and instantly killed.

With Sims were slain a number of Cornflower's best warriors. The fight had turned into a rout that became a panicky retreat in which every man thought of himself alone.

Sims had been a villain who had some good fighting stuff in him, notwithstanding the fact that he stood ever ready to use the weapons and methods of the coward.

He had proposed to the fortune teller to go with Cornflower. His safety and hers, he believed, depended on the defeat of the force sent against the Utes, for it seemed to him that if the white men won, he would fall, with the Utes, into their hands. But if the Utes were victorious, he and Madame Le Blanc could remain in security with them until such time as they could make a quiet escape out of the country.

Madame Le Blanc had told him to go, and had declared to Cornflower that he would be a victory bringer.

Cornflower thought of that promise, and specu-

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lated as to where the Wonder Woman was. He had found the Ute camp deserted, for the defeat of the Ute warriors had caused even those who had remained in the camp after Porcupine's departure to abandon it.

But he had seen that some of them, at least, had taken the Perdidas trail, and along it he plunged, his mustang apparently as panicky and bewildered as himself.

Hearing a rifle shot—the one that had dropped old Porcupine—the young chief pulled his mustang in.

Then he slipped to the ground, drove the mustang from the trail, and proceeded on foot, wary as a fox.

Farther down he took to the hills, and so proceeded.

He was creeping on for the purpose of determining who had fired the shot, when he saw two women come out of a hole in the rocks ahead of him and climb to a perch, which he perceived gave them a view of the trail and the river.

At sight of them, Cornflower dropped flat, with an expressive grunt, and began to finger his medicine bag. It had not protected him in the fight, yet he still believed in its virtue. He felt, however, that he needed strong protection now, for one of the women was the girl he had been led to believe was dead and buried. It was a singular and apparently inexplicable thing that she was alive and walking with Porcupine's daughter.

It came to him as a discovery, that this daughter of the old Ute chief had dropped out of his sight recently; though he had given it no thought until now. He could not recall that she had been in the new camp. Still, as he had not noticed particularly, of that he could not be sure.

"Ugh!" he grunted, as he lay staring at the women, while they looked off along the trail.

He did not move until after they descended and came

along a path which took them by him, and not far away. He heard them talking. They spoke Ute, but he did not catch what they said.

This close view of them made him sure that the white girl was alive; and, if not well, that she was able to walk about; and he began to scent that a trick had been played upon him.

Watching the women, he saw them disappear in the hole in the cliff.

For a time after that he sat staring at the black hole, uncertain what to do. Concluding that probably Utes were in there, and that it would offer the hiding place he desired, he decided to enter the cave.

He made a stealthy advance, which brought him to the hole. When he dropped flat in front of it, and listened, he heard the women talking.

A moment later he caught the dim flare of a torch or candle, and he moved toward it.

He was a bit amazed, when he had crawled in and found that the women were alone in the cave.

They did not at first see him, in the gloom of the entrance, and he had time to look about.

The cave was not large, but he judged it had been occupied. In one corner were moldy furs, and on one side a rude cupboard had been made from old box material. The cupboard looked as ancient as the furs. At the farther side of the cave a stream trickled across. Beyond the stream was a black area, that he did not think was of large extent.

The women had prepared a small torch.

He saw the white girl take it and deliberately jump across the little stream. The torch lighted the farther spaces, and he saw her remove from a shelf a rotting bag of deerskin.

She brought this across the stream, and, after some

words with Porcupine's daughter, she deposited the contents of the bag on the stone floor.

Cornflower saw that the stuff in the bag was gold dust. But as action promised better results than mere wondering, he stepped farther in, and revealed himself.

When they saw him the women stared stupidly, and the bag with the small quantity of dust which Olive Merrill had restored to it dropped from her hands to the floor.

"Gray Eyes not dead," he said, staring steadily at her. "It was a lie."

"What do you want?" demanded the daughter of Porcupine.

Cornflower squatted down in the path that led to the entrance, thus blocking it. He had his rifle and hatchet, and the women seemed unarmed. He was master of the situation.

"We will talk," he said. "Gray Eyes was dead and buried; but now she is living. Lies have been fed to Cornflower. He would know why?"

"Does a chief threaten squaws?" was the evasive answer.

"Cornflower does not threaten. He asks a question. He sees that Gray Eyes is alive and well. Why was the lie told, that she was dead? Who was buried in the grave by the river?"

The dazed women were not quick-witted enough to frame a ready answer. They looked furtively over him, at the entrance, as they hesitated.

"It was a trick of Porcupine," said Cornflower. "He is my enemy. Where is he?"

"He is near," said Olive, not willing that Cornflower should know they were so unprotected.

"It is as I thought," assented Cornflower, nodding his plumed head. "Porcupine calls Gray Eyes his

daughter, and, after he was no longer chief, he was not willing that Gray Eyes should be mine. Is it not so? For that reason he said she was dead. But who was buried by the river?"

The confused silence of the frightened women was their only answer.

"Perhaps no one was buried—it might have been a blanket roll. But no matter. Gray Eyes is alive, and that is good. She has a bandage on her head, which shows that she was hurt. Still, she looks strong again. She will need to be strong, for now we go a long journey."

"We would stay here and wait for the coming of Porcupine, who is near," said the daughter of Porcupine.

"Cornflower speaks a riddle," said Olive Merrill. "Why is he going a long journey?"

"The braves of Cornflower met the white men. Now the warriors are scattered. Cornflower goes back to the land of his people. He came here to help Porcupine. The old chief became a coward. He did not go into the fight after he had angered the white men, nor did his friends go into the fight. Cornflower and his braves met the white men alone."

"Porcupine is old," urged Porcupine's daughter.

"And a coward. But we will not talk of that. If Porcupine's daughter wants to seek for him, that is good, and she may. But Gray Eyes goes with Cornflower. His warriors will find their way back to their own land. He will be a chief there, and Gray Eyes will be the squaw of a chief."

"Will not the chief wait the coming of Porcupine?" Olive begged.

"Where is he? Who knows? He was not at the camp, but had fled. We may wait long. And there is

danger in the air. Down by the trail is my pony; it is for the use of Gray Eyes. Will she go?"

Perhaps the young Ute thought he was offering the girl an honor.

But he was not so dense that he did not see the fear in her eyes. She was terrified. Looking past him toward the entrance, she came nearer.

"Gray Eyes would run away?" he said, staring.

He rose to his feet, and clutched his hatchet.

In spite of this threat, Olive Merrill tried to dash past him.

She was joined in this rush by the Indian girl.

Porcupine's daughter struggled by, as he did not try to detain her; but he caught Olive Merrill by the wrist, and threw her back into the cave.

The Indian girl, as a scream rose from Olive's lips, gained the entrance and dashed out.

"Gray Eyes is a fool!" the young chief snarled.

"Let me go!" she begged.

"When she is willing to go with me," he declared.

She looked about. Close beside her flared the little torch. Catching it up, she flung it into the face of the chief, and made another effort to get out.

He writhed away from the torch with a howl, and, flinging out his foot, he sent the girl sprawling to the stones. Then his anger blazed out, and he swung his hatchet as if to brain her.

Beyond the cave Porcupine's daughter was running wildly, sobbing the name of her father.

Suddenly a strange figure barred the way—the wild-eyed hermit, rifle in hand, clothing in tatters!

"What is it?" he shouted. "I heard a scream. Am I mad, or was it the voice of my daughter? Yes, I am mad!"

"She is in the cave," chattered the Indian girl in Ute.

The hermit did not understand her, and smote his forehead.

"Yes, I am mad—mad! My daughter is dead. I have seen her grave."

"She is in the cave," cried Porcupine's daughter, changing from Ute to English. "In the cave!"

"My daughter?"

"She is in the cave!"

A scream came again, from the cave.

Merrill gave a start as if a bullet had whistled past his ear. Then he gripped his rifle and started for the cave entrance.

Porcupine's daughter frightened and trembling, ran on.

Olive Merrill, struggling to rise, had been thrown down again by the angry young chief.

"You go with me!" he yelled, swinging his hatchet, and giving her a push that sent her reeling back into the cave, past the torch that sputtered smokily on the stone floor.

She screamed with fear, as he advanced on her with the hatchet in his hand.

Merrill appeared in the cave entrance.

The sight he beheld caused him to reel blindly. In his crazed and dizzy brain was small room for reasoning, so he was not sure at the moment whether he really saw his daughter or her spirit.

But the hatred, which had become an instinct, driving him to kill Utes, caught him with choking force, and he brought his rifle to his cheek.

Cornflower heard the wild howl that issued from the hermit's lips, and turned.

He saw his peril, and his hatchet came up with a quick motion, shot from his painted hand, and whirled through the torch-lighted gloom, glistening red, like a wheel of rubies.

As it flashed, the hermit crouched and avoided it, and at the same time drew on the trigger of his rifle, which sent out a jet of fire and smoke.

The Ute chief straightened convulsively, clutched at his paint-disfigured breast, into which the lead had torn; then pitched forward on his face.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

The shooting of old Porcupine by the hermit, and the latter's flight, together with the scattering of the Utes, and the collapse of Madame Le Blanc, gave Buffalo Bill's party plenty to think about.

Madame Le Blanc, being a woman of uncommon intellect and courage, recovered quickly, but she begged that the body of the old Ute should be taken away.

Pawnee Bill had remained with her, had brought water for her from the river, and had tried to make her comfortable, while Buffalo Bill had followed the trail, in the hope of seeing again some of the Utes who had fled; and Nomad had climbed a peak, to look off in the direction of the scene of the fighting.

It was believed that the battle was over, for no longer could any rifle firing be heard.

Pawnee moved the body of Porcupine out of the trail, and left it wrapped in the blanket the chief had worn, under the trees.

"You didn't see anything of Merrill?" he asked, as Buffalo Bill returned.

"No; and nothing of the Utes."

"Well, they'd better keep out of the way of that madman; he's sworn to kill them, and I reckon he is setting out to do it."

When Nomad came down from the peak, he was also asked if he had seen Merrill.

"Nothing ter be seen nowhar," he said. "I reckon, ef we c'd jedge by ther present silence, everybody has been killed off, on that San Juan trail. My on'y regrets is thet I didn't git ter see any o' thet fightin'. Et would er been wuth lookin' at."

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"Ve ar-re going to haf some oxcidemendt roundt here pooty soon, also-o," said the baron, "oof der Utes haf vhipped. Vhen der Utes haf killed some vwhite men idt iss make dhem anxious to kill some more, to make idt efen."

"Waal, ef we're likely ter have ter butt inter them Utes, I cal'late I'd like ter have ole Hide-rack between my laigs," Nomad declared. "Thet Injun mustang ain't wuth shucks fer a ridin' hoss. Ef ye're willin', Buffler, I'll jest take ther Piute and we'll go see ef we can collect our caballos."

"Unt meppysso you von'dt findt 'em," said the baron; "ve haf been gone a longk time. Budt ton'dt forget to pring me dot Toofer moeel. He iss petter as Hite-rack."

Pawnee flung a glance at the spot where he had left the blanketed body of old Porcupine.

"I s'pose we'd better bury that," he said to the scout. "That old Ute was a good deal of a sinner; still I don't want the wolves to be fighting over him to-night."

"We can do it later," the scout urged. "You see, I want to make a further hunt for Olive Merrill. Some of you think that probably Porcupine lied; but I'm not so sure of it."

"Thet's all right," growled Nomad, "stick up fer him, ef ye want to! But ef me and ther Piute is goin' to sashay out fer them caballos, we're goin' ter do et in ther daytime, I'm tellin' ye. You don't git me ter roamin' through these hyar hills in ther night."

"Still seein' whiskizos," laughed Pawnee Bill.

"I ain't. But I'm no trouble hunter. So I'm goin' ter hunt caballos in ther daytime, ef at all."

"Take Cayuse and go for the horses," said Buffalo Bill. "While you're gone, some of us will scout round here and make a further search for that girl."

Nomad picked up his rifle.

"Come erlong, Cayuse."

But Little Cayuse hung back.

"Idt iss-dot musdang hoof, vot he haf not got," said the baron; "he iss skeered to go mitout idt."

"Come erlong, Cayuse," Nomad repeated. "I'll kill er Ute mustang fer ye, and ye can git another."

Little Cayuse mumbled something.

"That mustang hoof, of marvelous properties," laughed Pawnee Bill, "was collected, like a nigger's rabbit foot, in the dark of the moon, on the off side of a graveyard; and no other kind will do. Ain't that it, Cayuse?"

"Mucho fine medicine hoof," grunted the Piute.

"Aw, come erlong!" Nomad insisted.

After a time the Piute started away with him.

"One of you will have to stay with me," said Madame Le Blanc decidedly. "I'm not equal to fighting Indians, if they return and are hostile."

"Yoost choose me for der chob," urged the baron. "Climbing roundt on der hilldops ain'dt vot I like. I vill sday mit you."

"You are awfully kind, Mr. Schnitzenhauser," she said to him.

"Yaw," he said, as he dug out his pipe by sections from his capacious pockets, "all der vimmin likes me, oxeabt my wife; she iss gidt her a tiworce."

"You are kind, but," she added, "if we could go down the trail a short distance, I'd feel better, away from that body."

When they had made this change of position, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee set off along the hills, looking again for Olive Merrill.

"My idea," said the scout, "is that she was scared into shifting her hiding place, which accounts for the fact that Porcupine couldn't find her."

"Of course she must be living," Pawnee admitted;

"and your reasoning sounds good. But unless she comes out and shows herself, how we're to locate that young lady worries me."

As they wandered on, almost aimlessly, poking into fissures and cavernous places here and there, they heard the rifle shot that dropped Cornflower in the little cave.

"Another Ute has bit the dust, eh?" said Pawnee. "That sounded like Merrill's rifle, though it had a queer rumble, too."

The shot giving them the direction, they hastened on, and soon they saw Porcupine's daughter plunging along in blind fear.

"Sufferin' snakes!" gasped Pawnee. "An Indian woman scampering for her life! I hope Merrill hasn't taken to warring on the Ute women."

They placed themselves in her path, and brought her to a halt.

She came up, trembling, when they called to her.

"In the cave," she said. "Gray Eyes in the cave, and Cornflower; and the white father of Gray Eyes, and——"

"Where is that cave?" asked the scout. "Just point the way to it quick; likely we may be needed."

She turned and ran on before them, leading the way.

But before they reached the cave they met Merrill, who had emerged, and had brought out Olive.

She had fainted when he shot down Cornflower, but he had brought her back to consciousness.

Now he was sitting before her in a squatting attitude, while she reclined weakly against a rock. They were talking. Merrill's face was a feverish red. He was overjoyed.

Hearing the advance of Porcupine's daughter and the scouts, he turned and caught up his rifle.

But he put it down when he saw who was coming.

Then he rose to his feet. His face was still red, but the blaze of insanity had gone out of his eyes. He waved his hand, greeted the scouts with a shout that was like a horse croak, and stood, a tattered and pathetic figure before them, as they came on.

Olive arose at his side, weak and trembling. Her clothing showed rough usage, and she was pale. Round her head, over the wound, was bound a handkerchief.

"She's alive!" said Merrill. "She's alive!"

"It seems almost too good to be true," said the scout.

He took Merrill's hand and wrung it, and the hand of Merrill's daughter. Pawnee Bill was not backward in expressing his great pleasure.

"He's in the cave," said Merrill.

"Cornflower?" said the scout. "We were told he was in there."

"And dead!" Merrill added.

"Ah!"

"I was in time. Olive will tell you all about it later. 'Tain't a pleasant story."

"You're feeling all right yourself?" asked Buffalo Bill.

Merrill rubbed his fingers through his beard and beamed.

"I reckon I'm all right," he said. "What made ye ask? Yes, I'm all right. I had to kill Cornflower, and you know I had to——"

Then he stopped, with a glance at Porcupine's daughter:

"I'm goin' to git out of this country," he added, "and I'm goin' to take Olive with me. We was on our way to San Juan, ye know."

"But if I prefer to live here?" said Olive. "This seems like my home."

She, too, looked at Porcupine's daughter.

"Do you know where the Utes are?" Olive asked. "Cornflower said they had a fight with white men and were defeated."

"I reckon it's true, then," declared Pawnee. "He wouldn't have reported it if it hadn't been so. We heard the fighting."

"Porcupine," said the scout, "told us that you were taken out of the Ute camp, because he feared Cornflower would make you become his squaw. We came here, hunting for you; but I think you had changed your hiding place."

"Yes; we were scared. We heard Indian yells and other noises."

Pawnee Bill smiled with understanding.

"I guess you heard Little Cayuse and old Nomad, when they thought they saw a ghost and heard it singing."

"Was that it?" said Olive. "I got out of the cave that night—if that was the time—and went into the trail, singing. I was out of my mind, temporarily, I guess. She brought me back into the cave; after that we changed over to this one."

"Then that's the way of it," said the scout.

"If you don't object," said Pawnee, "I'll go on and take a look at your recent hiding place. Cornflower is there."

"And the gold," said Porcupine's daughter.

Merrill knit his brows.

"The gold?"

"We found a number of bags of gold dust in there," Olive explained.

Merrill went with Pawnee Bill, to show him the way. Memory returned to him as he looked about the cave.

"Sav," he said, "I think I must surely have been

crazier than a bat lately, or I wouldn't have forgot all about this! Why, this is my cave!"

"Your cave?" said Pawnee.

"You remember when I lived in that cabin on the hill, and roved round pottin' Utes because they had carried off my daughter and killed my wife? I found this cave at that time, and brought the furs in here, and brought in a lot of gold dust, which I had scraped out of the Perdidas. I stowed the stuff right there on those shelves; then I forgot all about it. I sure must have been crazy."

"But you're all right now, and that's the luckiest find I ever heard of."

"Maybe I'm going to play in luck hereafter," said Merrill. "I've got my daughter back safe and sound, and I've found myself again. And now this does top it all, eh?"

"What's troubling me most," said Pawnee, "is how we're going to tell that Indian girl out there that her father is dead."

"Yes, that's troublin' me, too; though that a thing like that could ever trouble me I wouldn't have believed possible. We'll shove that job off on Buffalo Bill."

It wasn't the first delicate task the scout had been asked to undertake.

But he didn't shirk it, unpleasant as it was.

Cornflower's daughter had been taught to conceal her grief—though on occasion Indian women howl and tear their hair, as a mark of mourning for the dead, and she had courage enough to witness the burial of her father, and later to seek for her sister and bring the Utes of old Porcupine's band together again.

The cave in which he had fallen became the grave of Cornflower. He was laid to rest in it, wrapped in his blanket, with his war bonnet on his head, then the

cave was blocked with stones to keep off prowling animals.

But before this was done the bags of gold dust which Merrill had hidden there were brought out.

This dust had come from the Perdidas placer, which was to become the property of his daughter.

Hank Sims was interred where he fell. Madame Le Blance saw to that. Then she went back to Silver Bow. Later she departed from that part of the West.

A woman of intellect and astounding resourcefulness, if she had devoted her talents to right uses, she could have lived an honorable and honored life.

Olive Merrill did not, in the end, leave Silver Bow. As she had stated, she did not care to live elsewhere. In addition, she had the placer to look after, and it proved a valuable property.

In her new position of wealth, she did not forget old Porcupine's daughters. She had grown to womanhood with them, and they had befriended her when she sorely needed help. In turn she became their friend and helper.

Porcupine's Utes, wiser than before, were content to become "good Indians;" but not the dead kind.

THE END.

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