

BUFFALO BILL BORDER STORIES ~ Nº 141 ~

BUFFALO BILL'S BATTLE AXE

By
Colonel
Prentiss
Ingraham



WESTERN STORIES ABOUT
BUFFALO BILL

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To Be Published in July, 1924.

- 191—Buffalo Bill and the Red Renegade,
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To Be Published in August, 1924.

- 193—Buffalo Bill's Round Up.....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
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To Be Published in September, 1924.

- 195—Buffalo Bill's Redskin Disguise..By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
196—Buffalo Bill, the Whirlwind....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To Be Published in October, 1924.

- 197—Buffalo Bill in Death Valley,
By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
198—Buffalo Bill and the Magic Button,
By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
199—Buffalo Bill's Friend in Need..By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To Be Published in November, 1924.

- 200—Buffalo Bill With General Custer,
By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
201—Buffalo Bill's Timely Meeting..By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To Be Published in December, 1924.

- 202—Buffalo Bill and the Skeleton Scout,
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Buffalo Bill's Battle Axe

OR,

VICTORY TO THE STRONG

BY

Colonel Prentiss Ingraham

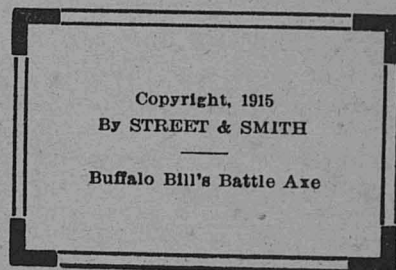
Author of the celebrated "Buffalo Bill" stories published in the
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IN APPRECIATION OF WILLIAM F. CODY (BUFFALO BILL).

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

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

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

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

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

In 1868 and for four years thereafter Colonel Cody

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

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

Colonel Cody's fame had reached the East long before, and a great many New Yorkers went out to see him and join in his buffalo hunts, including such men as August Belmont, James Gordon Bennett, Anson Stager, and J. G. 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'S BATTLE-AX.

CHAPTER I.

PRISONERS OF THE REDSKINS.

The scene is an Indian village on the southern border of Arizona, near to the Rio Grande. The time is the summer of a year toward the close of the seventies.

The village, which belongs to that fiercest of all redskin tribes, the Apaches, is bounded on two sides by the Rio Grande and one of its tributaries, and on the third by wooded mountains.

Rudely constructed tepees and huts are scattered among the trees. In the center of them is a large, open space, marked by the ashes of the fires of the council and the torture.

The squaws and their numerous children are hurrying from the wigwams with yells of welcome and triumph to greet a large band of their own lords, the Apaches, who are entering the village in company with a war party of the Comanches.

Usually at war with one another, the Apaches and Comanches had combined on this occasion for a grand raid on the white settlements in Texas and Arizona nearest to their own hunting grounds.

The result had been very satisfactory to them, for,

though they had lost several braves, they had taken many scalps and much booty, and also—what was even more pleasant to them—some prisoners.

Every conceivable sort of plunder was carried on by the warriors. There was clothing torn from the bodies of murdered women and children, and still stained with their blood; merchandise of all kinds from the gutted stores of the frontier traders; horses and cattle from the plundered ranches of Texas; and the arms and clothes of the brave men who had vainly tried to protect their homes and dear ones.

All this varied pillage was distributed without any regard to propriety.

Here a stalwart brave was attired in a woman's petticoat and shawl, the bright colors of which had captivated his savage fancy. There his copper-colored squaw stumbled about in a man's trousers and heavy riding boots; while the boys swaggered about in quilts and blankets, which they had wrapped around their bodies as if they were mantles.

There were even some braves who had no part or lot in all this finery, but strutted about in their native and naked ugliness.

This was because they had taken out their share of the common plunder in "skit-ta-wa-bee," as they called the rum of the palefaces, which inflamed their savage natures to more than ordinarily ferocious deeds of violence and blood.

The squaws, assisted by the boys and the dogs, were striving, with a great uproar, to get the frightened

cattle and horses into a corral which had been formed for them by a circle of ropes tied from tree to tree.

Others were lighting fires and setting up pot poles. Soon all along the banks of the stream and river the camp fires were crackling and blazing, and the steam and smoke were curling upward in fifty places.

Among the throng of yelling savages there was one sad-eyed white girl, who watched the strange, weird scene around the camp fires with horror not unmixed with fear. She sat, bound and trembling, in the midst of all the hubbub.

The daughter of a Texas rancher who had been noted for his exceptional kindness and generosity to the red men, she now mourned the loss of her father, slain by the very braves he had so often helped. And she had cause, too, for grief and fear upon her own account, for she had been set apart to be the wife and slave of the paramount chief of the Apaches, Lone Wolf.

Soon the slaughter of cows and oxen began on a large scale, and in a short time the ground was thickly strewn with hides, horns, and chunks of raw beef.

With the usual savage greediness of redskins at a feast, the bucks of both tribes seized the meat and devoured it eagerly, scarcely even waiting to roast it at the fires.

The quarrels over the meat, and the large amount of bad spirits which many of the men had drunk, caused knives to be drawn, and several savage encoun-

ters were narrowly averted by the stern commands of the chiefs.

In spite of all this savage and undisciplined turbulence, however, it was apparent to the young girl prisoner that this was a regular camping ground of the Apaches, and that they and their temporary allies were making preparations for a great feast or a sacrifice, or both.

A strange feeling, partly of pain and partly of that faint hope which companionship in misery gives, came over the girl as she saw other parties of Indians dragging more prisoners, both Indians and whites, into the camp.

The redskin captives were a few Navahos. Their tribe, under its gallant young war chief, Red Cloud, had taken the side of the white men against the Apaches and Comanches, with both of whom they had an ancient feud.

The parties with these captives had suffered badly in their fights with the Texans and the Navahos, and had lost many braves.

As each dead warrior was borne into sight the women and children raised the mourning cry:

"Wah-no-ho-min!"

Repeating it over and over again, in wild, varying cadences, they stooped to the ground and caught up the fallen leaves and handfuls of earth, which they tossed into the air in token of their grief.

But the warriors themselves would not mourn. They answered the doleful cries that greeted them by wav-

ing their tomahawks and lances, to which the scalps they had taken were affixed, and they shouted with joy and triumph instead of with grief.

Suddenly the lamentations of the women and children were changed into cries of anger and execration.

A mounted warrior, evidently an important chief, by his plumes and ornaments, rode rapidly into the village, followed by a picked band of breech-clothed, bare-bodied braves.

They were the best fighters of the Apaches, and their leader was the paramount chief, Lone Wolf, himself. It was not at him that the angry cries were directed, but at a white prisoner who rode, bound to a horse, between the two foremost warriors of his band.

The prisoner was a tall, athletic frontiersman of kingly presence, with handsome, sun-tanned features and eaglelike eyes that looked unflinchingly around upon his captors and smiled at the gleaming weapons which were brandished within a few inches of his face.

"Long Hair! Long Hair!" was the cry of the redskins, squaws and bucks alike, as this man rode into view.

"Buffalo Bill!" the lonely girl prisoner whispered to herself, in wonder.

It was naturally a source of surprise to her that he should have been taken, for his great reputation as an Indian fighter was well known to her, as it

was to all the dwellers along the southwestern frontier.

She knew that he was not only the bravest but also the most slippery and cunning of all the daring scouts of the border—the leader of most of the successful expeditions and the terror of all the marauding hostiles. Even while the savages gave vent to their joy at his capture, they looked on him with fear and respect.

Not so, however, the widows of the slain. Following the mourning custom of their tribe, they had already cut the hair from their heads with knives, and now, with wild shrieks, they rushed upon the helpless captives, slashing them with the knives and beating them with the severed tresses.

The first act was as dangerous as the second was ridiculous. The other women and children, as well as several of the bucks themselves, had provided themselves with clubs and rods with which to batter to death the unfortunate prisoners condemned to perish by the torture of "running the gantlet."

But the mourners were too much exasperated to wait for that ceremony, and all the other prisoners save Long Hair were too insignificant to satisfy their mighty craving for revenge.

With frightful yells, that would have terrified any but the stoutest heart, they rushed upon the pinioned scout. Their flashing knives and flaming eyes might well have made the blood of even a brave man run

cold, but the king of scouts faced them without a tremor.

The warriors became alarmed lest their prisoner should receive too sudden and easy a release from life, and they cried aloud, in guttural tones:

"No kill! No kill!"

But even this did not prevent the shorn-headed squaws from cutting the cords that bound the border king to the horse and dragging him to the ground. The preliminary torture of captives was one of the privileges given to them in atonement for their grief.

Buffalo Bill remained calm even when the yelling she-devils seized him.

"One at a time, ladies!" he cried in English. "Be calm. You will all have a chance to be satisfied before you get through with me, I don't doubt."

As they halted for a moment, amazed at his coolness, he wriggled his lithe body from their grasp and gained his feet. Quick as a flash he made good use of that advantage.

"Stand off, you crowd of petticoated bruisers!" he cried.

As he said this he planted his knee beneath the chin of one of the knife-flourishing squaws with a force that nearly dislocated her dusky neck. The knight of the plains was not used to war upon women, but this was a case in which he had no alternative. Almost at the same moment the stomach of a warrior who had been feasting too well on the raw beef received the heel of the scout.

Then, with a quick shove of either shoulder, Cody sent a couple more redskins sprawling, and he burst away from the midst of the savages. Pinioned though he was, he ran like a deer in the direction from which they had brought him.

The warriors had stood laughing at the discomfiture of the overturned squaws. Like all redskins, they had a keen sense of the ludicrous, and they liked a prisoner to show fight; he promised more sport that way than if he whined for mercy.

But when they saw him vanishing like a shadow in their own dodging manner among the trees, they became afraid that he would escape. Seizing their weapons, they yelled loudly and started in hot pursuit.

The hearts of the other prisoners, red as well as white, palpitated wildly, for they knew that their own hopes of escape were bound up with that of the border king. If he got clear away he would not desert them. Buffalo Bill was not the man to do that.

He would hasten to the nearest military post and bring a force of white soldiers at express speed to their rescue. They knew, as well as the famous scout himself, that the Indians would only fire on him as a last resort. They would much prefer to capture him alive, if that were possible.

With strained ears and eager eyes, the captives awaited the issue of Cody's race for life and freedom.

CHAPTER II.

BUFFALO BILL'S FAILURE.

They were not left long in suspense. The sharp crack of rifles came to their ears, followed by wild yells of triumph from the pursuers, and more distant ones answering them.

They knew that the brave scout had been either killed or recaptured. He must have run into another party of braves as he tried to escape through the wood.

The captives soon saw their worst fears confirmed. The pursuing redskins reappeared, trailing the border king along by his feet. His body was covered with sand and blood, and they threw him brutally into the ash-covered clearing in the center of the village.

He was not dead, for he strove to rise to his feet. Instantly the squaws who had been widowed sprang upon him with wild howls.

The last moment of the border king would have surely come had not a tall, powerful chief, on a spirited horse, dashed suddenly into their midst and sternly ordered them away.

Buffalo Bill, though almost fainting with weakness from the blood he had lost and the many injuries he had received, saw that this man was Lone Wolf, the great Apache chieftain.

The savage leader was dressed in a hunting shirt

of crimson cloth decorated with quills and beadwork. He wore also a mantle of buffalo skin, and his big, dusky head was befeathered and bedecked with glass beads in the most approved fashion of the Indian dandy.

"How!" he cried. "Lone Wolf owns the prisoner. Long Hair shall be tortured by the Apache chief, and by none other. Let the women leave him alone, unless they wish to feel the weight of Lone Wolf's hand!"

The chief sprang from his horse and strode up to the side of the king of scouts, upon whom he looked with an expression of demoniacal triumph. The scout had understood his words, for he was familiar with the Apache tongue, as well as with most other Indian dialects.

The look on Lone Wolf's face warned him that he had nothing to hope for but a lingering death by the most horrible torture the brain of the savage could devise. As his hope grew less, his reckless spirit of resistance grew great proportionately.

"Well, old hoss," he said, with a cool laugh, "you've done pretty well this trip, haven't you? But don't you think you'll get away with it, because you won't. There are plenty of white soldiers and borderers still left in the country besides those you murdered; and the Great White Father will put them on your track pretty soon. Then, if you don't get shot in the fighting, you will be swung up on the branch of the nearest tree——"

The daring speech of the scout was not finished.

With a yell of rage, Lone Wolf kicked with his moccasined foot at the breast of the speaker, and dashed him back to the ground, from which he was trying to rise as he said these words.

At the same time the Apache chief drew his knife, with the intention of scalping Buffalo Bill. But the king of scouts had by this time recovered from his weakness. He was tightly bound with rawhide thongs, but still he was not utterly helpless.

Quickly drawing his feet up to his chin, he dashed his two heels into the pit of the redskin chief's stomach, sending him tumbling into the dirt and ashes of the clearing.

In an instant the savage was on his feet. Mad with passion, he flung his hatchet at the white man's head.

His very rage made his aim unsteady, and the tomahawk went whizzing past Buffalo Bill's head and was buried, quivering, in the tree behind him.

Seeing that he had failed in his aim, Lone Wolf drew his knife, and would have killed the prisoner with that, but several of his chief braves stepped forward and persuaded him to keep Long Hair for the torture, rather than send him out of the world in such an easy manner.

"Ugh!" grunted the chief, whose rage had now somewhat cooled. "It is good. My brothers speak the words of wisdom. We will see how brave Long Hair is. The squaws will drive splinters into his fingers and cut off little pieces of his flesh, while the boys will shoot at his heart with little arrows that will

not kill him quickly. Lone Wolf has spoken, and it shall be done."

Then the chief turned on his heel, and commanded that the girl prisoner who was introduced at the beginning of this narrative should be brought before him. She was dragged forward by two braves, and Lone Wolf ordered that she be unbound.

They cut the cords, and she stood trembling before him, ready to sink with terror and disgust. She was very beautiful in spite of her pallor and the disorder of her dress caused by the rapid journey she had been forced to make as a prisoner.

The eyes of the old chief shone with pleasure as he looked upon her. His communication at various times with the whites had taught him to scorn the dusky beauties of his own race, and he wanted a paleface wife for his wigwam.

"How!" he cried. "The lily is as white as the moon! The heart of Lone Wolf is on fire with love for her. He will take her to his tepee to be his squaw. Ugh! Come!"

The girl screamed loudly as he caught her by the arm. She called frantically to Buffalo Bill, who was lying bound near by, to save her. Cody, maddened by rage, struggled desperately to get to his feet, but he was struck down again by a club in the hands of one of the savages.

"You cowardly skunk!" he roared. "If you touch a hair of that girl's head——"

What he would have done in that event was never

told, for a motion of Lone Wolf's hand prevented him from using his tongue, now his only weapon. Two of the Apaches dashed forward in obedience to the chief's command, and, taking a beef bone from the ground, dexterously gagged him with it so that he could not speak, and even breathing was difficult.

Burning with rage at this indignity, he yet kept enough control over his keen faculties to distinguish the sound of hoofs approaching the camp long before any one of the redskins did so. For a few moments his breast swelled with hope and his heart bounded with joyful expectation.

He thought it was possible that the hoofs might be those of the horses of a party of the white soldiers or their Navaho allies. The sound soon alarmed the Indians, also. Lone Wolf let go his hold of the girl and hastened to send some of his warriors out to reconnoiter.

The hopes of the border king were dashed to the ground speedily when he heard the war cries that told of another victorious party of redskins, and saw them soon afterward ride into the camp.

These braves were Comanches, and the Apaches, not long since their bitter foes, now gave them a hearty welcome. Cody knew by these new arrivals that a great feast and war council must surely be at hand.

He was, therefore, not in the least astonished when, after all the prisoners, himself included, had been beaten with clubs and pelted with stones and dirt, they were bound still faster and dragged away toward the

tepees, so that they would be out of hearing of the grand powwow. But Lone Wolf could not enter the council until he had slaked in some degree his lust for blood and vengeance.

He split the skulls of three of the Navaho prisoners with his tomahawk and scalped them. Then he called up some of his braves, and made them throw the bodies into the river, as if they had been so much rubbish.

Buffalo Bill strained at his bonds fiercely when he saw this atrocity perpetrated on his redskin allies—braves of the tribe with whom he had long ago sworn blood brotherhood, braves by whose side he had fought again and again—but he could do nothing to save them. He could only look on helplessly at their fate, and swear to avenge them if ever he got the chance, which seemed at that moment in the last degree unlikely.

"Red Cloud will make the Apaches and Comanches pay for this," he muttered between clenched teeth. "He is not the sort of brave to let his warriors perish without taking vengeance."

Buffalo Bill saw that Lone Wolf, who was busy receiving the newly arrived Comanches, had handed his girl prisoner over to the custody of two of the squaws. The scout was happy to think that she was safe for the present, and his busy brain began at once to devise plans for her rescue as well as for his own escape.

He would have been glad to have called out a word

of encouragement to the girl, but his gag prevented him from doing so. He saw that there was going to be a grand war council, for the newcomers had brought a red-painted hatchet with them. It was now sticking in the war post in the center of the encampment, and the savages had already commenced their terrible war dance around it.

The scout's regret at his inability to hear what was going on at the council was made the more bitter when he thought what would be the fate of the other prisoners, the girl as well as the men, if the savages should drink much more of the rum they had pillaged from the settlements they had attacked. He knew full well that, naturally cruel, the redskins became fiends incarnate under the influence of liquor.

CHAPTER III.

THE GUARD BECOMES A CAPTIVE.

Bruised, bound, and bleeding as the border king was, he was thrown into one of the huts among the trees. A stalwart Apache, dressed from top to toe in the clothes of some murdered frontiersman, stood guard over him.

This particular redskin had taken great delight in the cudgeling of the prisoners, and had done his best to wield his own club with good effect. Even now, as his enemy lay bound and helpless, he seemed to find huge delight in his sufferings from the rough bone gag in his mouth, which almost choked the scout.

He laughed repeatedly, in his guttural way, as he squatted on the floor and listened to the prisoner's laborious breathing. Buffalo Bill would have given all he had in the world, or was ever likely to have, for the privilege of having his hands at liberty for a few brief moments, so that he could clutch that Apache by the throat and tear the life out of him.

The howling and yelling of the war dance went on for some time outside, mingled with the high-pitched laughter of the younger braves. They were fast becoming drunk, and were making a perfect pandemonium of the scene. The blood of the border king boiled with rage at his own helplessness, especially when

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some shrieks told that certain of the luckless prisoners were being still further tortured.

How he longed for his freedom and a weapon, so that, even alone, he might attack the whole horde of red fiends and die fighting! But it was in vain that he wished, and in vain that he tried to wrench his hands free from the rawhide thongs that bound them.

At last the din became less, and finally died away almost entirely. Buffalo Bill, well versed in Indian ways, knew that the council had opened. He could even faintly hear the voices of the speakers, but he was not able to distinguish the words they uttered.

At last two hideously painted savages entered the hut, bringing with them a wooden bowl containing some black, greasy substance, and some bunches of wool. With this stuff they proceeded to paint the scout's hands and face perfectly black.

Cody, brave though he was, could hardly repress a shudder at this, for he knew that it was the signal that he had been condemned to death by torture. He had expected nothing better, however, and he racked his brains in the hope of hitting upon a feasible plan of escape.

It came soon, in the last way he would have expected. The two grim anointers of the doomed disappeared, going probably to perform the same office to some other condemned wretch.

When they had gone, the Apache guard sat down by Buffalo Bill's side again, and grinned more than

ever at the sight of the white bone in the now black mouth of the prisoner. Suddenly he ceased his laughter and looked at the captive thoughtfully.

The idea seemed to strike him that Buffalo Bill's fine suit of buckskin was more valuable than the frontier homespun he was himself wearing. He immediately set to work to get possession of it. Buffalo Bill saw his intention, and lay quiet, trembling with expectation.

There were three ways in which the Indian could accomplish his object: First, he could rip the seams with his knife, and take the clothes off the prisoner piecemeal. Second, he could kill the prisoner, and then take them off him. Third, he could loosen the bonds in order to get them over Cody's hands and feet.

The border king knew that the savage would not do the first, because he wanted the suit whole; he knew, too, that he dared not do the second, as he himself was a captive destined for the torture; and he prayed Heaven that he would venture to do the third.

The savage rubbed his head, as if in doubt. The temptation was very strong, but his fear of the consequences was also great. Cody pretended to be suffering extreme distress. He gasped and groaned, and at last, with a faint gasp, seemed to faint dead away.

The bait took, as the crafty scout guessed that it would. The Apache bent his face down to his and watched him keenly for a few moments. But not so much as the twitching of a muscle showed that the brave scout was in full possession of his faculties and

eager to fight for life and freedom as soon as he got a chance.

When he was convinced that the paleface had really fainted, the red man drew his knife and severed the bonds that confined Cody's ankles and knees. Then, with the expertness of a corpse stripper of much practice, he had the hunting boots and trousers of the border king off in a twinkling.

Cody's heart beat fast as he heard the voice of some dusky orator in the council ring, declaiming loudly, swelling with the intoxication of his own grandiloquent words.

Still as a mouse, he waited. The savage who was stripping him was prudent, for he immediately tied the bare feet of the scout as tightly as before. Buffalo Bill suffered this without moving a muscle or twitching a nerve.

It was not his feet that he wanted free, but his hands. Once he had them at liberty, the freedom of the feet would soon follow.

The long wait was, nevertheless, torture to him, for the Apache proceeded coolly to divest himself of his old clothes and put on the new ones he had just taken from his captive. Buffalo Bill resented every moment that passed, for he knew that at any moment the torturers might come to drag him to the stake.

At last the redskin got things below fixed to his liking, and then he turned his attention to the upper garments of the king of scouts. Before he did so he threw away contemptuously the plain homespun coat

which he had torn from the body of some murdered borderer.

Wary to the last, like all his race, he leaned over the apparently helpless form before him and listened intently to the breathing. He seemed to have a suspicion that the man was shamming, but Cody played his game so well that there was nothing to confirm the doubt.

Nevertheless, the Indian was not convinced. He pricked the scout's body sharply with the point of his knife to test the depth of his insensibility. Buffalo Bill stood it like a stoic.

Not a nerve moved as the keen steel entered his flesh. The Apache was satisfied at last. His eyes gloated over the coat which the border king was wearing. It was just the kind of garment that would naturally appeal to a redskin.

The mind of the savage reverted to the thought of the figure he would cut among the bucks of his village when he was wearing it. Buffalo Bill was quickly turned on his back.

He held his breath at this supreme moment, and the very breathing of his heart was inaudible. The Indian paused.

Was he going to go back on his resolution when it came to the point?

No! He was only reaching back for his knife. With one stroke, the bonds that held the hands of the knight of the plains in their iron grip were severed.

Next moment the coat was plucked from his back and the savage was busily engaged in putting it on his own body. With the spring of a panther, Buffalo Bill leaped to his feet and seized the Apache by the throat, giving him no chance to yell out for help.

His strong grasp nearly strangled the man. Rolling him over on the floor, he got on top of him and snatched up the knife from the ground. But he did not pick it up with the idea of killing the redskin. He could have done that by simply compressing the grip with which he held his throat. Already the eyeballs of the man were starting from their sockets and his tongue was lolling from his mouth.

The scout had other designs than killing him. With a rapid movement he thrust the knife between the pieces of deerskin that tied the bone gag in place in his own mouth. They parted, and the bone dropped to the floor.

In another instant the scout had inserted it in the mouth of the savage who had laughed so heartily at seeing it in his, and had bound it fast. With the cords that had bound his own wrists and feet he now bound those of his vanquished foe. This was all done in about the space of time he would have taken to skin a rabbit.

He buttoned up the coveted coat on the new captive and hastily clad himself in the despised homespun, for the Apache had left him with nothing, but his shirt. Then, donning the plumed headdress of the savage,

and taking his arms and accouterments, he speedily transformed himself into a passable-looking Apache.

Thanks to the men who had painted him for the torture, his arms, hands, and face were as dark, or even darker, than those of his captive.

Cody's habit of wearing his hair long stood him in good stead now, for it materially assisted his disguise.

Only just in time was this double transformation made. The scout had hardly got the thong of the powderhorn over his neck, and the scalping knife fastened to his side, when the drums of the Apache medicine men began pounding as if for dear life.

Buffalo Bill knew that this was the signal for the breaking up of the council and the beginning of the torturing of the prisoners. The wild whooping and yelling of the war dance started again.

In a few moments, the white man, straining his ears eagerly, caught the sound of approaching footsteps. Squatting on the ground, with the Apache's rifle across his knees, he started to rock himself to and fro, and to laugh gutturally at the bone gag in the redskin's mouth, as that worthy had done when it was in his.

It was horribly ludicrous to see the contortions of the Indian's face and hear his teeth crunching on the bone in his wild efforts to give the alarm. The evening was now rapidly closing in. The red light of the westering sun, shining through the trees and glinting through the chinks in the walls of the hut, made the eyes of the bound savage gleam like living coals.

Now came the critical moment. The door of the hut was suddenly thrown back, and the heart of Buffalo Bill throbbed wildly as he saw the tall figure of Lone Wolf appear in the entrance, with several of his braves at his back.

CHAPTER IV.

A CLEVER DISGUISE.

Buffalo Bill's spirit rose to meet the crisis. He rocked himself to and fro more violently than before, and his laughter was louder and still more guttural. Some of the half-drunken gang with Lone Wolf joined in his mirth, as they noticed the captive's grotesque endeavors to make signs or speak.

Fortunately, the hut was very gloomy in the gathering twilight, or the deception could not possibly have been carried through.

"Dog 'of a paleface!" yelled Lone Wolf, striking the bound man across the face with the butt end of his tomahawk. "Your face will be pale no more! My young men have darkened it so that the paleness may not make their hearts weak as the hearts of squaws."

So the chief went on, striking the helpless Apache again and again, and rolling out high-sounding speeches about the torture he was going to inflict on him. The prisoner groaned and writhed, to the intense delight of his fellow savages, who had not thought that the renowned Long Hair would ever weaken and display so much emotion.

Buffalo Bill was, in truth, a little ashamed of the man who was involuntarily playing the part of his substitute, but his own cue, of course, was to keep silent, save for an occasional grunt. One of the sav-

ages, more playful than the rest, began to strike with his tomahawk at the end of the bone gag which happened to protrude from the captive's mouth.

Cody could not help thinking what the consequences would be if the keen-edged weapon should accidentally cut the deerskin thong which held the gag in place, and so should make it possible for the Apache to disclose his identity by a few frantic words. Even Lone Wolf paused for a moment in his grandiloquent talk to laugh as the poor wretch tried to dodge away from the tomahawk, and crunched savagely on the bone in his effort to talk.

Buffalo Bill thanked Heaven, in that stirring moment, that his hands were at liberty, and that he was armed. If he had to die, he would at least die fighting, and send some of the redskins before him to their happy hunting grounds.

"Now, white man, listen to the words of Lone Wolf," said the chief. "They call you Long Hair, but I will call you the Snake, for you are he who has many times crawled into our camps to hear the talk around the council fires, and then carry word to the Great White Father that the Apaches were preparing for war.

"But now at last we have you, bound and helpless, and you shall surely die. You are the prisoner of Lone Wolf, and the council has said that you shall die by the tortures that Lone Wolf orders.

"The stomach of Lone Wolf is sore from the kick of your heels, but it will become easy again when Lone

Wolf sees you writhing in the agonies of the torture. He will be revenged, for he will make you sore from the heels to the head. The squaws shall shoot at you, and the arrows in your flesh shall be more in number than the thorns on the prickly pear.

"Your mouth we will keep shut, so that you may not call on your gods to send down their vengeance on the Apaches. Beat him, braves! Beat him, so that every bone in his body shall ache with soreness!"

Thereupon the warriors—Heaven save the mark!—commenced to thrash the poor wretch whom they took for their foe most unmercifully. It was pitiful to see the helpless writhing of the victim, and his vain efforts to make himself known to his torturers.

Buffalo Bill got up and shook himself, Indian fashion. He could not stand this scene, although he owed no love to the Apache who had treated him cruelly enough when he was guarding him. Still, the sight of his sufferings was too much. He wanted to get outside.

He felt like taking the tomahawk from his belt and splitting Lone Wolf's head open with it. But he knew this would never do. His own safety and the rescue of the girl prisoner whom he had seen were the first considerations.

He spoke to Lone Wolf in the Apache tongue, with the deepest guttural he could command, and told him that as he had now discharged his trust he would turn the prisoner over to him and go in search of some more

food before he witnessed the scenes around the torture fire.

Lone Wolf did not even turn his head. The supposed brave was nothing to him. All his attention was taken up with the captive whom he fondly supposed to be the renowned Long Hair.

"Ugh! Go!" he grunted.

Buffalo Bill did not require a second permission. He turned at once and left the hut, but not so quickly as to awaken suspicion in the minds of the most suspicious people on earth. As he passed out, he lowered his head, so that the low door top should not strip him of the tall-plumed Apache headdress which did not fit him any too well.

He strode out into the open. Such a hubbub met his ears as might have been made by all the denizens of the bottomless pit if they had suddenly broken loose together.

The shades of night were fast closing down, and the forest threw a deep shadow over the scene. But the light of the numerous camp fires was beginning to have effect, and to show in a dusky glare the surrounding tree trunks and the squalid huts and wigwams of the redskins.

The dark forms of men, women, and children flitted to and fro across the scene, like evil spirits in a nightmare. Torches were flashing to and fro, and drunken squaws and braves bellowed and chattered and whooped and sang. The horses, frightened at the noise—as well they might be—neighed and whinnied

from the corral. The cattle lowed a deep bass accompaniment to the tremendous discord.

But Buffalo Bill did not wait long to take note of the scene. He had witnessed its like before, and he had more important work on hand. If the bonds of his unfortunate substitute should give way—if the gag should slip! The thought was startling, and it spurred him to instant activity.

He knew that the deception could not be kept up for long, and yet he dared not hurry from the spot. At all risks, he must keep up the character he had assumed. An Indian never hurries, except in the fight or in the chase; and then he makes up for his ordinary indolence by being as swift, almost, as a thunderbolt.

So Buffalo Bill, well knowing the ways of the people among whom he was, threw the Apache's rifle in the hollow of his arm, and walked away with as much slow dignity as any redskin of them all. He was soon met by a crowd of men, women, and children, including some of the crop-headed widows who had been so painfully attentive to him during the day.

They were going toward the hut where he had been confined, and they were headed by an enormous savage, who carried a scalping knife as big as a carver and a huge tomahawk that might have done service as a woodchopper's ax. This brave recognized the homespun suit which the king of scouts was wearing, for he had been present when it had been torn from the corpse of its original owner.

He immediately stopped Cody, without suspecting

his identity, for the glare of the fires did not fall on the face which the scout kept carefully averted.

"Ha, Silver Dog!" he exclaimed. "Where is Long Hair, the paleface chief? Were you not to guard him?"

The women and some other warriors crowded round the border king at this question. It was a dangerous moment, for if he had been recognized he would have been instantly torn to pieces; but the brave scout did not turn a hair.

Slowly and deliberately he grunted:

"Ugh! Silver Dog hungry. He goes to eat. The great chief, Lone Wolf, and many braves are with the paleface. They beat him in the hut. Soon lead him to the torture fire."

Then he declined to say another word, though a volley of questions were flung at him by the women. He took refuge in the well-known mortal dislike of an Indian to be interviewed, especially if he knows anything worth telling.

"Ugh, ugh!" he grunted impatiently, striking at one of the squaws as he knew an Indian buck would do under like circumstances.

Then he gave his knife a flourish around his head, with the scalping gesture, as if to imply that unless they made haste Lone Wolf would kill the paleface and take his hair.

That was enough! With shrieks of rage, the angry widows ran toward the hut, followed by the boys and

the men. They would not be robbed of their revenge if they could help it!

Lone Wolf should not kill the captive. They would see to it that he died by torture at the stake. In a moment Buffalo Bill found himself left alone.

CHAPTER V.

THE GIRL CAPTIVE.

The king of scouts hastened on as fast as he dared toward the center of the camp, where he had seen the girl prisoner taken earlier in the day, before he was himself dragged to the hut. He was determined that he would save her at all events, even if he had not been able to help the slaughtered Navahos, and might still be able to do nothing for the other prisoners in the hands of the merciless savages.

He wound his way carefully through the crowds of Indians who were still engaged in a riotous debauch. It was a bold venture, and he expected at every moment to hear a yell that would tell that his trick had been discovered. Lucky it was for him so many of the savages were drunk, or he could hardly have passed so boldly through their midst without being detected.

So far as he could he avoided the groups of Apaches, easily distinguishable by their striking headdress, and walked where the Comanches were thickest.

He argued wisely that his disguise was more likely to be detected by the people of the tribe to which he pretended to belong than by their allies. Many a man would have fled at once while there was still time, and would have thought only of his own safety, but the knight of the plains was made of finer, sterner stuff.

He could not bear the thought of deserting the beautiful, innocent girl to the terrible fate that awaited

All their faces were painted black.

Buffalo Bill knew by these signs that they were going to dance the "Paw-Paw," or Black Dance, a solemn ceremony in which the medicine men pretend to raise the devil. As the border king stood for a moment in doubt as to what was the best course to pursue in his dangerous predicament, a loud uproar of shrieks, yells, and wild whoops came from the direction of the hut which had been his prison.

His blood tingled in his veins with wild excitement, but, nevertheless, he grew deadly calm, and thought with that instant swiftness and decision characteristic of him when in a tight corner. He felt sure that his ruse had been discovered. That was the meaning of the noise—it was the starting of the hue and cry for his recapture. He must hesitate no longer, for no good, either to the girl or to himself, could come of it.

The corral lay beyond where she was held prisoner—he could tell this by the neighing of the horses; and it was a point of the greatest importance to know. With a quick step, he went toward the tree where the girl was sitting.

There was only one brave there. He would cleave his head with the tomahawk of Silver Dog, and then try to deal with the squaw in some way that would prevent her giving the alarm too soon. As he came up, he saw that the warrior was eagerly looking into the gloom and evidently wondering what all the noise and excitement were caused by.

Suddenly the man looked straight at him and with-

out the slightest hesitation or suspicion hailed him in the Apache tongue.

"Brother!" he cried.

Buffalo Bill's breath came in a quick gasp. He nerved himself for a fight. Glancing back, he saw the excited crowd rushing about among the trees. They were looking for him, and several of them had lighted torches.

Clutching his scalping knife, he approached the Apache with quick, firm steps.

"What now, brother?" he cried, in Apache, thanking his lucky stars that he had long ago been at the pains to master that difficult dialect.

"Be good, brother," appealed the Indian, "and stand guard in my place until I come again."

Buffalo Bill had hard work to avoid showing his joyful surprise. The sentry wanted to go off for a little while to see what was the matter, and had actually asked him to stand guard in his place. Was there ever such incredible luck?

He managed to master his amazement, and stepped forward and took the other's place with a guttural assent. The savage did not even wait to look at him. He picked up his gun, threw it over his arm, and stalked away with a slow, stately dignity that contrasted strangely with his eagerness to be relieved of his watch.

Cody watched his slow movement with impatience, and longed to put a bullet into him, but he restrained himself, for he knew that it would not be wise.

In watching him, he saw the stir beyond, and he began to wonder whether his escape had in reality been discovered. It struck him that if it had been, there would have been a more widespread alarm. As a matter of fact, the commotion seemed to be confined to one particular place, or, rather, one portion of the crowd; for it moved on toward the railed inclosure.

Elsewhere, the drunken revelers still yelled and shrieked, and the maskers in the buffalo skins were quietly adjusting their horned helmets for their performance. A grotesque-looking set they were, the manner in which some of them staggered about showing plainly that they had drunk not wisely but too well of the fire water of the palefaces.

Cody wondered hard how he was to get rid of the squaw without raising an alarm. He could not become so much of an Indian as to slay a woman, and yet that seemed the only way for safety's sake. A cry from the girl prisoner called his attention to the crowd.

He saw that they were dragging his unfortunate substitute, still unrecognized, to the torture. The cruel procession passed near to them, and he could plainly see the man's wild, flowing hair and frenzied eyes in the occasional gleam of a torch. The bone gag was still in his mouth, and the fatal jacket of buckskin still fastened tightly around his neck, hiding part of the face.

It was strange, Buffalo Bill thought, that he had not been recognized; but his features were now so distorted by semistrangulation, blows, and agony that his

own mother would hardly have known him, let alone his friends and fellow braves.

Those of his own tribe looked on at him and laughed at his sufferings as the inhuman women beat him along with sticks and whips. What must his feelings have been as he was thus dragged along to a fearful death by his own people—those with whom he had often feasted and side by side with whom he had oftentimes fought? True, he was himself a bloodthirsty savage and had often taken part in such scenes with cruel enjoyment, but, nevertheless, it was a terrible retribution.

The drums began to beat, and the horned heads of the maskers went bobbing to and fro as he was dragged on. He was plainly in sight of their position as he passed, and Cody was startled from his pitying glance at the man by a sob which burst from the captive girl.

She had recognized the hunting suit he wore, and she thought, of course, that he was Buffalo Bill. She knew the great scout by reputation, and he had been a friend of her father's, although she herself had never had the occasion or opportunity to speak with him.

She sank down on the ground and wept and sobbed bitterly out of sheer pity at the terrible fate which she thought the great borderer was to suffer.

"Poor man! Brave man!"

These were the only articulate words that escaped from her lips, and even they were hardly audible. A thrill ran through Buffalo Bill, and he was now more than ever resolved that he would rescue the girl or perish in the attempt.

He stooped forward to make himself known, and drew his knife to cut the rope by which she was bound, with a few feet to spare, to the tree. He knew the girl's name, for her father—a well-known rancher—had once shown him her photograph. Cody possessed, and still possesses, the faculty of never forgetting a face once seen, even for a moment.

"Miss Brandon," he ventured, in the lowest of low whispers.

She looked up with a start of surprise. When she saw his dark face and plumed headdress, and caught the gleam of the knife in his hand, she gave a frightened scream, which made the squaw turn her eyes curiously upon them.

It was now or never! In another moment he might be detected by the woman's sharp eyes, and the alarm given.

Cody gave a quick glance around. All save themselves were crowded around the cruel exhibition going on in front. The noise of the drums and the yells of the horde of savages were a great advantage to him, for they would drown the noise of the scuffle if the woman fought.

With a quick movement, he sprang around the tree to the squaw's back. He seized her and pressed one hand tightly over her mouth, while with the other he held the knife before her eyes menacingly.

"Be quiet, and I won't hurt you," he whispered, in her own language. "Scream, and I'll cut your throat instantly."

CHAPTER VI.

ATTACKED BY WOLF DOGS.

Buffalo Bill pulled the woman back of the tree trunk, where the grass was thick and would hide her. She was too much surprised and terrified by the knife to struggle, and the white girl was almost as much alarmed by the sudden, inexplicable attack as she was herself. Cody saw this, so he whispered:

"Don't be afraid, Miss Brandon. It is I—Buffalo Bill."

"You—the knight of the plains!" she exclaimed, in intense wonder. "I thought they had dragged you out there to die. Thank Heaven! My prayers to be saved from that brutal chief have been answered. You will save me!"

"That's what I'm here for," said the scout briefly. "But we have no time to talk. We must get away at once."

He untied her hands, and then, with a quick slash of his knife, cut the thong that bound her to the tree.

"Quick!" he demanded. "Give me your scarf—your neckerchief—anything! I must gag this woman, or she will give the alarm."

Lucy Brandon, for that was the girl's name, untied the kerchief around her neck and handed it to the knight of the plains.

"Don't hurt the woman, if you can help it," she begged. "She has been kind to me."

Even without this recommendation, Cody would have been as gentle as the circumstances permitted, for it was always his way to be kindly and chivalrous toward all women he met, without regard to their color or their station in life. It was this quality that had gained for him his nickname of the knight of the plains.

In a few moments, he had the squaw bound to the dark side of the tree, with her hands behind her and the kerchief tied tightly over her mouth. Even if she had been able to slip it aside and cry out, it is doubtful whether she would have been heard by her people, so great was the din made by the dancing party, which was increasing every moment.

Quick as thought, Buffalo Bill drew round the trembling girl the hooded mantle which he had torn off the squaw. Then, holding her hand tightly in his to give her courage and save her from stumbling, he started on a run toward the corral where the horses were neighing and champing.

The girl was weak from excitement and the great strain which had been put upon her nerves during that terrible day. She would have fallen but for the strong support of the border king's arm.

As it was, her trials and dangers were not yet over. They reached the boundary of the corral, and were stooping to pass beneath a rope, when a ferocious wolf

dog sprang out of the darkness with a fierce growl, and buried his terrible fangs in the girl's clothing.

One blow from Buffalo Bill's hatchet struck him dead on the earth, but his death yelp brought several of his fellows to the spot. A dozen of the savage brutes snarled and snapped at the scout and his trembling companion.

Worse than that, the frightened cry of the girl and the barking and yelping of the dogs had aroused the Indian sentinels on all sides of the corral, and they came hastening to the spot where the noise had so suddenly broken out. Cody kept between the girl and the dogs as he retreated, striking at the beasts with his hatchet and yelling at them in the Apache dialect.

This last was his salvation. The sentinels were luckily all Comanches.

They instantly called their dogs off, for they thought they were attacking some of their Apache allies whom they knew to be strangers. But for this, the two would have stood a remarkably good chance of being pulled down by the savage beasts and torn in pieces.

Cody, with his arm around the girl, continued his retreat back toward the lights. He knew that, between the dogs and the sentinels, now thoroughly aroused, he would have no chance of getting a couple of horses out of the corral. If he tried it, the fate of his companion and himself would, in all probability, be speedily sealed.

It was doubtful whether he would even be able to

steal through on foot on that side of the camp, where the sentries were now so vigilant.

"You must be brave and strong now, Miss Brandon," he said. "I'm going to try the boldest plan—for it's our only chance.

"We must cut directly through this crowd of redskins, dodging them as best we may, and try to get to the canoes in the stream on the other side of the camp."

The girl tried to speak, but her terror made her voiceless for a moment. Then she conquered it with an effort, taking courage from the fearless confidence of the king of scouts.

"I'll do whatever you think best," she said. "You are so brave and clever in the ways of the Indians that with you I cannot be afraid. I know we shall get through. Lead on, and I will follow."

"I must fix you up so that you will look like a squaw—or enough like one to pass in this dim light," the king of scouts went on. "It's a shame to spoil your beauty, Miss Brandon, but it must be done."

The girl blushed at the compliment, but she was pleased at it even in that moment of peril, as all women were pleased with the compliments which the knight of the plains was so fond of paying them.

"The redskins rubbed enough black on my face to do easily for both of us," the border king went on. "Rub your hands on my face and then on your own. You must blacken it, for we would be lost if they caught even a glimpse of your white skin. And we

mustn't hurry, more's the pity, as that would excite suspicion sooner than anything else if any redskin happened to be watching us.

"Work the black well into the corners and cover the whole of your face and hands. It's disagreeable, but our lives are at stake. Don't leave a single white spot, for these people have terribly keen eyes. Are you finished? Well, then, let us go!"

As they approached the spot where the squaw was tied, they saw a brave approaching from the direction of the dancers. He was the Apache sentinel, coming back to resume charge of his prisoner.

Buffalo Bill knew that if he was permitted to reach his post, he would give the alarm, and their lives would be at once in even greater jeopardy than they were at present.

"Stay where you are for a moment, and lie down," he said to Lucy, in a whisper. "Don't move or cry out, whatever you see or hear."

The girl sank to the ground, and nodded in token that she would obey implicitly. The king of scouts glided rapidly forward, and arrived at the tree first.

As the Apache came up, he looked round in amazement. Where was the girl prisoner, he wondered, and where the squaw he had left?

His surprise swiftly changed to suspicion, and his hand went down to his belt to grasp his tomahawk. As he was drawing it, Buffalo Bill leaped upon him.

The savage had not even time to utter a yell before

the hatchet of the scout descended upon his head with a crashing blow, and he fell lifeless to the ground.

Hardly had the man fallen before the scout seized his corpse by the heels and dragged it away into the darkness, where it was not likely to be discovered in a hurry. This done, he returned to Lucy Brandon, and signed to her to follow him.

CHAPTER VII.

DETECTED AT LAST!

The scout and his companion hurried on toward the crowd, on the fringe of which they must pass if they hoped to get out of the camp and set their feet in the path that led to safety.

It might seem to many a strange way to escape an enemy—by going straight toward him; but the border king knew Indian nature as well as any white man could, and he felt that in the very boldness of the plan lay its chance of success.

They might have hidden in the woods or stolen to the river edge; but in case of discovery of their flight, which was likely to be seen, all such refuges would be searched, and they would offer but a slight chance of hiding.

No, Buffalo Bill felt that they must get clear away, and the canoes down by the stream offered the best means of flight. As they came opposite to the maddened crowd of dancers they saw that the scout's unwilling substitute was bound to the stake.

Inspired by the liquor they had drunk, the savages—men and women alike—were jumping about and yelling with the wildness of maniacs. Had they been more sober, they would probably have recognized the identity of the man bound to the stake, much as his features were distorted, for he was now in the center of the bright light cast by several fires.

He had been badly tortured, and as the scout and the girl watched him, rooted to the spot by the fascination of the scene, the head medicine man of the Apaches, decked out in all the gaudy finery of his rank, advanced to apply a torch to the fire that was to burn the wretched man at the stake.

"I can't stand this!" said Buffalo Bill, in a hoarse whisper. "After all, I'm responsible for the poor devil being in this position. He is taking my place, and the least I can do is to put a speedy end to his misery."

As he said this, the border king whipped his rifle up to his shoulder, and in another moment would have put a bullet through the head of the man at the stake.

Lucy said nothing to stop him, though she knew full well that the sound of the shot would, in all probability, be their own death warrant, since it was almost sure to lead to their discovery and capture.

Like Buffalo Bill, she could not endure the sight of the Apache's sufferings. She would rather die herself. But just as the scout was about to pull the trigger, he saw a sudden change come over the face of the medicine man, and he knew that at last he had recognized the captive.

"Silver Dog!" the priest yelled, in a high-pitched voice, nearly tumbling backward in his amazement. "Not Long Hair!"

At this, even the drunken yells of the redskins were hushed for a moment.

They were so stunned into wonder by this startling discovery that for a second they could not utter a

sound. Now that the priest had pointed it out to them, they all saw it for themselves—at least, the Apaches did—and they wondered they had not seen it before.

Eager hands unbound the wretched prisoner and tore the bone gag out of his mouth. Buffalo Bill saw his substitute stagger forth into the midst of the throng, now sobered by surprise, and heard him cry, as he fell gasping to the ground:

"Brothers, you have been fooled! I am not Long Hair, but your brother, Silver Dog. The paleface stole my clothes and arms and bound me. Look quickly for him. He may be still in the camp."

Instantly all the savages burst out into a roar of fury, and great confusion followed, every brave looking round eagerly for his gun. Luckily the weapons had been stacked at some little distance, and this gave a moment's delay, which Buffalo Bill hastened to use to good advantage.

The girl gave a smothered cry of alarm, which smote the heart of the border king. He was responsible for her safety as well as for his own, and of the two he thought the more of her.

A man of quick decision, he saw what must be done in a flash.

There was an Apache, one of the dancers, standing within ten yards of him, in the shadow cast by a tree and out of the direct line of light cast by the fires.

As Buffalo Bill turned and walked toward this man, he saw that he was recognized, or that at least the red-skin was suspicious about his appearance. The brave

drew his knife, but he was hampered by the heavy buffalo-hide robe that he was wearing for the dance.

Buffalo Bill sprang upon him, dodging a thrust. The warning yell that the brave was on the point of giving to his comrades was changed to a death gurgle as the keen blade of the border king stabbed him to the heart.

With incredible swiftness, the scout stripped off the buffalo robe from the man's body and put it on himself.

"Come!" he said, turning to Lucy. "We must continue to be Indians, and join in the hunt for ourselves."

With these words, spoken very rapidly, he ran forward with the girl, in and out of the groups of yelling savages. Cody was brandishing his rifle and yelling as loudly as any redskin brave of them all.

The revengeful redskins were scattering in all directions, using the torches they had employed in the dance and also blazing brands hastily snatched up from the fires.

Under cover of the wild confusion, Buffalo Bill and Lucy struck out across the camp in the same direction they had been pursuing when they halted to watch the Apache at the stake.

The ordeal of passing through that furious horde of savages, all eager for their blood, was a terrible one to both of them. Their hearts palpitated between hope and doubt. Even Cody himself, inured though he was to a thousand perils, felt a chill of cold fear.

run over him—not for himself, but for the helpless girl under his charge.

Her steps were wild and trembling, and in vain the border king begged her to brace up. At last, as she stumbled and would have fallen to the ground, he was obliged to catch her by the arm and steady her, helping her for a few paces.

This was the worst thing he could have done, but for the moment his natural, chivalrous instinct overcame his feeling that he should at all costs keep up his assumed Indian character.

He was passing one of the fires at the time, and a warrior, glancing at the pair, noted the border king's most un-Indian action. He knew perfectly well that no Apache or Comanche ever born would help a woman in that way, and in a flash he suspected that the man in the buffalo robe was the escaping paleface for whom the entire camp was seeking.

He sprang in the path of the fugitives, lifting his tomahawk, with an inquiring grunt. That grunt was the last sound but one that he ever gave. The next was a smothered death cry.

Buffalo Bill rushed forward and struck him a terrible blow behind the ear with his clenched fist, and the man fell like a stricken ox.

The border king leaned over him, to see whether it was necessary for their own safety to dispatch him. It was not. He thought at first that the brave had been knocked out by the blow, and was simply lying unconscious, but when he felt his heart and pulse he knew

that he was dead. That one terrible blow of the fist had killed him as effectually as any stroke of the tomahawk could have done.

The fall of the brave had been noticed by several of the Indians, men and women, from a little distance; and they rushed to the spot with loud cries, hemming the fugitives in the center. The king of scouts grasped his tomahawk more firmly in his hand and tried to still keep up his character of an Indian warrior and pass unobserved through the circle.

But the fright of the girl overcame her, and, with a little cry of terror, she clung to his arm. This action was noticed by the redskins, and they gave utterance to cries of surprise and suspicion.

They knew very well that it was not the kind of thing that a squaw would do. At the same moment, wild, vengeful cries arose from some little distance back. A party of the redskins had found the slaughtered sentinel's body lying on the grass, and had cut loose the squaw whom Buffalo Bill had tied to the tree.

These savages came rushing toward the fires in a great body, the squaw leading them. As the woman's eyes fell upon Lucy, who was wearing her own mantle, she gave a loud cry of recognition.

The poor girl, unable to keep up her disguise any longer, sank to the ground with a low cry. Her voice was drowned by the furious yells of the savages as they closed in on the two palefaces, whom they had detected and brought to bay at last.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NAVAHOES TO THE RESCUE.

Buffalo Bill stood over the prostrate girl, and with his clubbed gun kept back the braves who rushed to the attack. Lone Wolf, a few paces behind, yelled to his men not to throw their hatchets or to fire. He wanted the prisoners to be taken alive.

He had set his heart on making Lucy his squaw, and he was equally anxious to have the keen joy of torturing the border king. Possibly, too, the wily savage had the good sense to realize that rifle bullets and other missiles, if fired in that densely packed mass, would be quite as likely to slay his own people as the enemy.

For an instant there was a pause, but Cody knew that it could not last for long. He might keep them back for a few moments, but he could not hope for victory, or even for escape, with that infuriated horde pressing all around him. He only fought on with the grim courage of a brave man who despairs of his life, but is determined to sell it as dearly as possible.

Suddenly, Silver Dog, who had somewhat recovered from the tortures inflicted upon him, and had run up to the crowd, pressed to the front, and sprang straight at Cody, burning with the desire for revenge.

Buffalo Bill was too quick for him. With one crashing blow of his rifle butt, he smashed the brave's skull as if it had been an eggshell.

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At the same instant he was struck on the head by a rifle from behind, and several hands seized him at once, before even he touched the ground. Meanwhile, the furious squaws seized Lucy by her hair and clothes, and began to drag her away, in spite of her struggles.

Cody struggled like a madman, especially when he saw Lone Wolf rush toward the screaming girl. He shouted loudly to her to have courage, and at the sound of his voice Lone Wolf turned, with a look of the most savage ferocity upon his dark face.

He ran back to the border king, holding a drawn knife in his hand, and grinning evilly in his triumph. Buffalo Bill's efforts to free himself were almost superhuman, but they were unavailing. The cries of the terrified girl cut like a knife in his heart.

"Ha, paleface!" cried the Apache chieftain, approaching him. "You have laughed at us, but you will not laugh much longer. You have tricked us and killed our people. The chief of the Apaches will have his revenge. He will kill you as he would kill a dog—but not so easily."

The savage leader raised his knife. The bright blade was about to descend on the helpless form of the prisoner—not to kill, but to wound and torture—when a loud and long-drawn yell, more frightful than any that had been uttered that night, smote upon the ears of the redskins.

The chief dropped his knife in sheer amazement and momentary terror. Many of his braves fled into the darkness, and others huddled together, stricken dumb

with fear. As for Buffalo Bill, he rose to his knees, hurling aside the three Apaches who were holding him down; and he responded to the yell with a loud, ear-splitting shout.

Well did he know that yell! He had heard it again and again in the heat of battle, when he was fighting side by side with the men who uttered it.

It was the war cry of the Navahos—the foes most dreaded by the Apaches and the Comanches! It was the yell of Buffalo Bill's redskin allies, with whom long ago he had made the oath of blood brotherhood, after he had saved their war chief, Red Cloud, from the claws of a grizzly bear.

Bitter cause had the Apaches, in particular, to dread that fearful cry; for they had never heard it uplifted without suffering the loss of many of their best braves. The majority of the Indians fled at once in terror, but Lone Wolf rallied a score of his best warriors, and made a determined effort to carry off the prisoners.

When he realized that this would be impossible, as the war cry of the Navahos sounded nearer and nearer, he raised his knife again, fully determined this time to plunge it up to the hilt in the breast of the king of the scouts.

But by this time Buffalo Bill had managed to struggle to his feet and seize his tomahawk. As the Indian struck at him, he dodged aside, missing the keen blade by an inch; and he brought his weapon down on the head of the Apache chief with frightful force.

Cleft through to the chin, Lone Wolf fell in his

tracks. At that moment, a band of redskins, led by a tall, stalwart young chief, burst into the circle of light cast by the camp fires.

With them were half a dozen frontier scouts, clad in buckskin and armed to the teeth. The small force of Apaches who had disdained to flee faced them, but they might as well have tried to stop a tornado.

Two or three of the Navahos went down, but in a few moments there was not an Apache left alive or unscalped. The rifles and revolvers of the white scouts who were with the attacking party accounted for many of the enemy.

Buffalo Bill, standing over the dead body of Lone Wolf, with his dripping tomahawk in his hand, came face to face with the chief of the Navahos and the leader of the white allies.

"How! Red Cloud," he said. "You came in the nick of time, as you usually do. This is another life that I owe you. Hello, Wild Bill! I'm thundering glad to see you. Where is the girl?"

They looked around at once, and found that Lucy, abandoned in sheer terror by brave and squaw alike, had swooned upon the grass.

CHAPTER IX.

RED CLOUD'S OATH OF VENGEANCE.

Buffalo Bill bent down and attended to the girl at once, using his practical knowledge of medicine to bring her to her senses in short order. When he had succeeded, he turned to Red Cloud and Wild Bill, and asked:

"How many men have you in your party?"

"Forty Navahos and ten scouts," replied Wild Bill. Buffalo Bill laughed.

"Is that all?" he said.

Red Cloud showed his handsome white teeth in an expansive grin.

"Ha, my brother!" he laughed. "It was what you call a bluff!"

"Then we had better get away at once," said the border king. "The Apaches and Comanches outnumber you many times, and if they recover from their panic and rally, they may give us a pretty warm time. We had better head for the corral—it is near here—and get horses, if you have none."

"We have them," returned Wild Bill. "They are picketed a hundred yards back, in charge of half a dozen of the Navahos."

The horses were speedily brought up, and Buffalo Bill found that Red Cloud had thoughtfully provided half a dozen fresh mounts for any prisoners whom he might find in the Apache village.

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"There are other captives here," said the king of scouts, as his rescuers were preparing to mount. "We must find out what has become of them before we leave. Some of them, I fear, have been killed by the Apaches; but a few may still be alive, and we cannot desert them."

Red Cloud agreed heartily. He was with the white men heart and soul, and had all the chivalrous impulses which distinguished Cody himself. In brief, he was a fine type of the noble red man of fiction—but, alas! only too seldom of fact.

Swiftly the Navahos and scouts searched the deserted village. In three of the huts they found five white men and two Navahos. They had all been beaten and maltreated, but they had not yet been seriously injured.

A few more minutes would probably have sealed their doom, for all their faces were painted black, as Buffalo Bill's had been, for the doom of the torture fire.

After Long Hair—as the Apaches regarded Cody's redskin substitute—had been offered up on the wings of fire to the Great Manitou, the other and lesser prisoners would have been tortured to death.

The joy of the captives at their unexpected release was only equaled by Red Cloud's rage when he heard of the murder of several of his warriors by Lone Wolf. The Apache chieftain, dead at the hand of Buffalo Bill, was beyond his vengeance; but he swore a mighty oath

of vengeance upon the whole Apache tribe and their Comanche allies.

"Hearken unto me, Great Wakantanka, and smite me with thy terrible vengeance if I swear falsely!" he cried, raising his scalp-decked tomahawk above his head. "Red Cloud will take no rest or peace until he has bitterly repaid his foes for all the ill that they have wrought to him and to his tribe. He will fight them and slay them by night and by day. By the light of the sun and the light of the moon, he will seek them out and take their scalps to appease the wrath that burns in his bosom.

"If Red Cloud shall fail in this, his oath of vengeance, visit him and all his people with thy wrath, O Great Manitou! Let the crops of the Navahos fail, let there be no rain to nourish their corn, let their warriors be slain, and their squaws and their children murdered! Let their villages be stamped flat by their enemies, and the name of them utterly lost as a people!"

The other Navaho braves waved their tomahawks aloft in the air and echoed this terrible oath. Buffalo Bill—after all that he had seen of Apache and Comanche atrocity—felt very much like indorsing it, but he contented himself with saying:

"Come, Red Cloud, we must be going. The enemy will rally and return when they find you are not numerous enough to pursue them. We must gather together a larger war party of your braves, and more of the white scouts and settlers. Then, if we find that the

and soldiers are still slow to move, we will take the trail against the Apaches and Comanches ourselves, and make them sorry they ever dug up the hatchet."

"Ugh! My paleface brother speaks good words," responded Red Cloud. "We will go now—but we will soon return."

Mounting their horses, the allies, redskins and paleface alike, rode off past the corral, now deserted by the frightened Comanche sentinels, and were soon lost in the darkness of the night.

Buffalo Bill rode by the side of Lucy Brandon, and cheered her with his bright talk, so that she might forget the fearful perils through which she had passed and the equally serious ones that might yet await her in the future.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHINESE GHOULS.

Three days later, Buffalo Bill and the scouts separated from their Indian allies. Red Cloud and his braves were to return to their villages and get together a stronger war party which would be capable, with the help of the frontiersmen, of coping with the combined forces of the Apaches and Comanches.

The scouts, at the same time, were to beat up the strongest force of settlers and cowboys they could, and meet the Navahos at a rendezvous fixed near the Rio Grande.

Buffalo Bill's first care was to place Lucy Brandon in a secure position.

He sent her, under charge of three of the scouts, to the nearest military post, with a letter of introduction that would insure her being carefully looked after by the wives of the officers of the garrison. At the same time, he sent a letter to the commandant, urging him to take the field against the redskins at once, without waiting for orders from Washington or for reinforcements.

But, although the king of scouts knew very well that the commandant would bestir himself, he was too much acquainted with the inevitable delays in preparing a military expedition to care to wait for the soldiers before taking the offensive against the hostile redskins.

He decided that he would strike as soon as possible, with his scouts and the Navahos. By so doing, he would give the Apaches and Comanches plenty of serious occupation that would prevent them from attacking the border settlements which they had not yet sacked.

In less than a week, Cody had rounded up about forty good frontiersmen, all of whom were fine shots and daring riders. With these he set out to reach the rendezvous made with Red Cloud.

He had little fear but that together they could hold the hostiles in check for a time, until the soldiers got after them, even if they could not inflict an absolute and crushing defeat upon them.

After they had ridden a day and a half, the scouts sighted, coming toward them across the sandy, rock-strewn plain, a curious figure—one of the most curious to be found at that time all through the Western country.

As the man drew nearer, Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill recognized their old friend Nick Wharton. He was dressed in clothes made roughly out of deerskin, coarse canvas, and the skins of rabbits and foxes. Indeed, his hunting jacket resembled a patchwork quilt more than anything else. His clothes were so tattered and torn and patched that it was almost impossible to recognize the original material.

A cap made of rabbit's skin was cocked on one side of his head, disclosing a terrible gash where almost

the whole of his right ear had been shorn away long ago in some battle with a redskin enemy.

His wrinkled face puckered every now and then into mirthful wrinkles, and his eyes danced with laughter, as if he were enjoying some quiet joke all to himself. Old Nick Wharton, the veteran trapper, was never at a loss where wit and humor were concerned, and Buffalo Bill was overjoyed to meet him, for he knew that he would make the expedition cheerful, as well as fighting and trailing better than the average scout in his party.

"Gosh! my cats, but I'm durned glad ter see yer, Buffler!" exclaimed the old trapper, as he pushed his rawboned, shambling mare Diana alongside the fine horse ridden by the border king.

"How did you manage to fall in with us?" asked Cody, in surprise. "I didn't know that you were anywhere in this part of the country. I had an idea that you were still trapping up in Wyoming."

"I left thar two months ago," said Nick, "an' I come down hyar ter see what chances thar was fur some good prospecktin'. When I was in Silver Creek, twenty miles south, t'other day, I heard as you was gettin' up a gang of boys ter smash the redskins. So I sagashuated I'd find you an' offer my vallyble services."

"Bully for you, Nick!" exclaimed the border king. "There's nobody I'd be better pleased to see. With you and Wild Bill and myself together again it's like old times. We'll make the Apaches wish they had

never dug up the hatchet, just as we did before when we fought them for the sake of Red Cloud."

"Tell you what, pard," said the old trapper. "Why don't you bear down a bit more to the south and strike Silver Creek? When I left it, the day afore yesterday, thar was some boys who was blind crazy ter jine you and hev a smack at the red varmints. I kalk'late you could get a dozen men, easy, thar."

"We'll do it," agreed the border king. "How far off is the settlement? I never heard of it before."

"No, it's a new place just sprung up. Thar was some coons thought thar was good prospecktin' thar, but it's kind o' peterin' out now. It's about twenty miles south. We kin reach thar by evenin', I sagashuate."

"It's strange that the Indians haven't attacked the settlement," remarked Cody. "It lies very near the border of their country."

"A good many of the people wanted ter git out and make tracks ter the fort," said Nick Wharton, "but the others persuaded 'em ter wait, 'specially when they heard that you an' the Navahos was goin' agin' the hostiles."

They rode on, and toward evening they came in sight of Silver Creek. As they approached the little frontier settlement, they saw, to their surprise, that there were absolutely no signs of life about the place.

"It seems ter hev gone busted," observed Nick Wharton. "Queer, fur it was live enough two days

ago. I guess they must hev had a scare of redskins, an' cleared right out."

"That's what it looks like," agreed Buffalo Bill.

"Waal, the place is sure busted now," said Wharton. "Queer, ain't it, how these goldurned boom towns peter out?" Yo' come along to one o' the kafoozlin' places an' see them puttin' up a town hall an' a jail, an' even talkin' of a theater. They mean ter make the big cities of the East look like thirty cents. Next week you ride back, an' you find thet the whole galumpin' contraption has vamosed the ranch. You s'arch round among the ruins, an' you find nothin' but a stray Chinaman or two. He kin manage ter dig up a livin' whar a white man would starve."

"Well," said the king of scouts, cutting short the loquacious old trapper, "let us ride on ahead and see what's left of this place."

He pressed the flank of his horse with his knee and galloped forward, followed by old Nick. By this time they were well into the settlement. Suddenly the border king's horse shied at an object which was lying almost covered in the long grass that grew by the side of the roughly made village street.

"It is a woman, by thunder!" exclaimed the border king, in amazement. "What can she be doing here when all the rest of the people seem to have fled?"

"Is she dead?" asked Nick Wharton hoarsely, his weather-beaten cheeks turning pale. In spite of his rough exterior, the old trapper had the tenderest of hearts.

Buffalo Bill had already jumped to the ground and bent over the form of the girl.

"No, she lives," he said, "but she is very badly hurt. I'm afraid she's going fast. See, she has been stabbed twice in the breast."

"Who kin hev done it?" growled the old trapper savagely, between clenched teeth. "I'd like ter hev him by the throat right now! It don't look as if it war redskin work."

Buffalo Bill was too busy to reply, but he saw at a glance that what his friend suggested was the fact. The Indians had had nothing to do with this particular atrocity. There were no marks on the ground to indicate that redskins had been there. Not even a single footprint of a moccasin was to be seen. Besides, the girl had not been scalped, as she surely would have been if the Apaches or Comanches had stabbed her.

"The man, whoever he was, thought he had finished his evil work," said the border king, "and I fear he has. There! That's the best I can do to stop the flow of blood. Hand me your brandy flask, Nick. I'll force a little down her throat. Maybe it will revive her and give her a little more vitality."

Buffalo Bill poured some of the fiery spirit down the woman's throat, and bathed her forehead with water from his canteen. Soon she opened her eyes and stared at him feebly.

"The Chinamen!" she gasped, with a look of fear. "Don't let them come near me. They stabbed me after

all the others had gone. No matter, I'm goin', too, now——"

She closed her eyes again, and her breathing became slowly fainter and fainter, until, after a few minutes, she breathed her last.

Buffalo Bill reverently lowered her dead body, which he had been supporting in his arms, to the ground. He called up two of the scouts, who had halted near by, and told them to watch over it while he investigated the settlement and tried to find out what the dead woman had meant by her words about Chinamen.

Revolver in hand, he looked into house after house, but he found one after the other absolutely deserted.

At last he came to a low, one-room cabin on the farther edge of the settlement. He flung the door open with a kick of his heavy riding boot, and he saw that two Chinamen were bending over the body of a dead man.

As he watched them through the open door, he saw that they were going through the pockets of the dead man's clothing, and one slit open his belt. Evidently, they were looking for any money or valuables he might have hidden away on his person.

But they were disappointed, for one of them rose to his feet, with a snarl of rage, and spurned the dead body. As he did so, his eyes fell upon the tall and menacing figure of the border king standing in the doorway.

He recoiled a few paces, in sudden fear, and shouted a warning to his companion. Next moment both of

the yellow fiends rushed upon the border king, with long knives flashing in their hands.

Before either of them had advanced a pace, however, his revolver had covered them. Two reports rang out almost as one, and the little room was filled with smoke.

When it cleared away, Buffalo Bill saw that one of the Chinamen lay upon the floor, stone-dead, with a bullet clean through the center of his forehead. The other, fallen prostrate across the body of his companion, was beating a tattoo upon the floor with his heels in his death agony.

The scout mercifully ended his pain with another bullet through his head, and as he did so Nick Wharton, who had been searching other houses near by, came running up, called to the spot by the sound of the shots. The story of the tragedy that had happened was plain enough for their experienced eyes to read.

The dead man and woman had chosen to stay in the settlement when all the other people moved off, probably scared by some report that the hostiles were in the neighborhood. Just before the arrival of the scouts, the two Chinamen had reached the settlement and had promptly proceeded to murder the solitary couple there, so that they could loot the place at their pleasure.

The man had, no doubt, been taken by surprise and stabbed to death before he could defend himself. Then his wife had fled for her life, but had been followed and cut down, after which the yellow-skinned ghouls

had returned to the man's dead body to look for plunder, in which occupation they were interrupted by Buffalo Bill.

It was the kind of frontier tragedy which occurred at many lonely or deserted settlements, especially in the mining regions, and the two scouts had known others like it before.

"Goldurn it, Buffler, but you do hev all the luck!" exclaimed Nick Wharton, when he realized what had happened. "I'd hev given my other ear ter hev had the chance of puttin' a bullet into each of them yellow devils. They war wuss than redskins."

Buffalo Bill returned to his men, and gave the order to mount again and resume the journey.

"We can do no good by staying here," he said. "Bury the bodies of the man and woman as quickly as you can, and then we will be off. We must travel fast and far to-night. We ought to join Red Cloud tomorrow, if possible."

"What shall we do with the bodies of the Chinamen?" asked Wild Bill.

"Leave them to the coyotes," answered the king of scouts, in his grimmest tones.

CHAPTER XI.

RED CLOUD'S SIGNAL.

"By thunder, Cody, Red Cloud's in trouble! Look over there!"

Wild Bill, who had been ahead reconnoitering on the morning following the slaying of the Chinese murderers, rode back at a furious gallop to his leader and called out these words.

He pointed to a thin cloud of smoke which was rising up lazily to the sky, far off on the southern horizon. The king of scouts had already seen it, and his eyes were intently fixed upon it when Wild Bill spoke.

Neither of the two scouts, trained as they were in all the tricks of Indian warfare, was at a loss to read its meaning. It was a Navaho smoke signal.

Such signals were commonly used at that time by all the Indian tribes of the West and Southwest in the chase and on the warpath. By means of them they could communicate at great distances with one another as accurately and quickly as the white men could do by means of the telegraph.

Each tribe had its own special code of signals, and Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill, watching the smoke column intently, knew that this was the Navaho secret code. Like all other tribes, the Navahos always kept their signals secret. It was a matter of the greatest possible importance in war time that the enemy should

not be able to read their messages, but the scouts, of course, were in the secret because they were the allies of the tribe and had made blood brotherhood with Red Cloud and others among the chiefs and braves.

"Two long, heavy columns; twenty seconds; one thin column. Then the blanket kept down for a minute," muttered Buffalo Bill, as he watched the smoke signal and read off the message it was intended to convey. "You know what that means, don't you, Hickok?"

"Yes," Wild Bill answered. "It's a call for help. It means that Red Cloud and his braves are surrounded by the hostiles, and are fighting them off as best they can, in the hope that we'll come to their aid before their scalps are all lifted."

"We must hurry," said the border king. "Red Cloud hasn't enough men to put up a successful fight against both the Comanches and the Apaches, if they are in the force I expect them to be."

Calling to the men under his command, he pushed forward at a rapid pace in the direction of the smoke signal. It was not long before the scouts heard the faint sound of firing. It was repeated again and again. Evidently a big fight was in progress.

The ground that separated them from the scene of conflict was rolling prairie, with many rises and small hummocks that made good cover for riflemen. Buffalo Bill soon discovered, by careful scouting, that there was a strong force of Apaches and Comanches between his men and the position held by the Navahos.

"Red Cloud must know we are advancing by this time," the border king said to Wild Bill, who was riding by his side. "As soon as we make a decisive attack, he is sure to break out of cover with his braves, and then we will have the hostiles between two fires."

"There seems to be an almighty lot of them, judging from the firing," said Wild Bill. "Red Cloud's men are outnumbered clearly. See, they have their main position on that wooded hill, and there are a few scattered round among the hummocks at the base."

"You had better take half the boys and keep the hostiles busy with a frontal attack, while I try to flank round and reach near Red Cloud's position," said the border king.

The enemy did not display their usual eagerness to get at close quarters. Their main body remained under cover, firing steadily at the Navahos, while a fringe of skirmishers rode forward to attack the body of scouts, now plainly in view coming over the rolling plain.

Wild Bill went forward at once with his party, and as soon as they got within range of the hostile skirmishers, who were nearly all Apaches, they made their presence felt. They were far better shots than either the Comanches or the Apaches, and they did a good deal of execution, although the skirmishers clung to cover as much as they could, hanging down behind their horses' flanks when they could get no better protection.

Slowly and sullenly the hostiles gave ground until

at last they reached the place where the horses of their dismounted comrades were tethered. Here they made another stand, but the cowboys and scouts charged toward them and emptied several of their saddles.

The skirmishers were driven clean back on their main body, and they had to retreat so precipitately that they could not unhobble all the horses, but had to leave many of them as prizes for the white men.

In this first brush the whites had won a decided victory, although it was, of course, an unimportant one, as they had not yet come into contact with the main body of the hostiles. About thirty of the Apaches and two or three Comanches had been killed in this affair of outposts, and when they retreated they were seen to carry away several wounded men with them.

The loss of the scouts was much smaller. One man had been shot dead and two others wounded, but so slightly that they were still fit for fight. Buffalo Bill had followed Wild Bill's advance with the rest of the men.

Seeing that the enemy showed no signs of leaving cover and attacking his little force, he said to his comrade:

"We came here to fight, and fight we will! If they won't attack us, we'll attack them. Push forward with your men, and I'll work around at the same time toward Red Cloud, as we arranged."

Soon the whole of the scouts were advancing on the hostiles' position, taking cover and firing rapidly as they did so. Red Cloud and his warriors, who had

been losing heavily before help came, now came out of their cover, with wild whoops of joy, and pressed forward to take their revenge.

The Apaches and the Comanches showed no inclination to stand up against the two bodies of their enemies. They gave way and retreated, fighting as they went, and trying to get into the open from between the two lines in which they had been caught.

The ground over which they fought was advantageous to the hostiles. Their main body retreated from the open country into rocky and timbered country surrounding the base of a low range of hills. There, intrenched behind bowlders and fallen tree trunks, they held their foes at bay for some time.

The Navahos, who were nearer to the position they had taken up than the scouts were, inflicted some loss on the hostiles, but Red Cloud could not come into close touch with them without exposing his braves to a disadvantage and risk that no wise Indian chief would run.

Unfortunately, however, he had given the command of a party of braves on his left wing to a hot-headed young chief named Fighting Bear.

While Red Cloud was waiting for the white scouts to come up, this chief recklessly led his men in a fierce charge on the intrenched hostiles, without waiting for any orders from his leader.

"It was magnificent, but it was not war!"

Red Cloud stamped with rage when he saw the movement, for he saw clearly that it was foredoomed

to failure, and that many of his braves would be shot down like sheep from cover.

Fighting Bear and his warriors ran forward, tomahawk in hand, toward the rocks and trees behind which the Apaches lay hidden.

They yelled their war whoop loudly, but it was soon changed into their death cry. They were met by a withering fire from all along the front and from both flanks.

Before they could cover half the distance that separated them from their foes two-thirds of their number were shot down. The remainder halted for a moment, and then fled back to cover at the top of their speed.

All save one.

The young chief, Fighting Bear, seeing the blunder that he had made, determined that he would at least atone for it by dying with his face to the foe.

CHAPTER XII.

A DUEL TO THE DEATH.

The Navaho, a tall, splendidly built savage, disdained to run. He stood erect, with his face toward his hidden foes, brandishing his tomahawk above his head and yelling his war cry defiantly.

Instantly there fell a lull in the firing on both sides.

No orders were given to cease, but instinctively all the braves, Apaches as well as Navahos, paused to gaze admiringly on this splendid and fearless figure.

Many of the hostiles could have picked him off with ease. Some, indeed, even had him covered with their rifles. But, savages though they were, an innate feeling of chivalry made them hesitate to press the trigger.

But this pause in the battle did not last more than about half a minute. An Apache chieftain, as tall and fine-looking a barbarian as the defiant Navaho himself, stepped from behind a rock, where he had taken cover, and accepted the challenge.

He carried a rifle in his hands, and for a moment the white scouts, who were riding up as quickly as they could to the aid of the Navahos, thought he was going to use it to shoot down Fighting Bear. But that was not his intention, for he threw it to the ground and drew his tomahawk, the weapon with which his Navaho challenger was armed.

The two Indians drew slowly closer and closer to one another and glared with the earnestness of mortal hate into one another's dark, fierce eyes.

Suddenly they bounded forward at the same moment and grappled in deadly combat. The Apache aimed the first blow, hoping to cleave his opponent from crown to chin. But Fighting Bear, though a bad leader, was a well-trained and agile brave.

He threw up his arm just in the nick of time to catch the other's wrist. He was not quick enough, however, to entirely stop the blow, but he diverted its course, the Apache's hatchet striking him on the shoulder and making a deep wound.

Before the man could strike again, Fighting Bear's tomahawk split his head open, and he dropped dead in his tracks. As his enemy sank to the ground, the champion of the Navahos tottered from the pain of the wound in his shoulder and from two bullet wounds he had received when he was leading the charge, but which, up till now, he had disregarded.

He had lost much blood, and he knew that he was a dying man; but before he went to the happy hunting grounds of the Great Manitou there was one thing for him to do, and he meant to do it:

He must take the trophy of the victory he had won. Bending forward, he drew a knife from his belt, and in a moment had taken the Apache's scalp.

Then, drawing himself up to his full height, he yelled his war cry and waved the reeking trophy defiantly toward the hidden hostiles. That action broke

the spell which had made the braves keep quiet while the duel was going on.

Fighting Bear reeled with the pain of his wounds, but before he fell to the ground he was pierced by half a dozen Apache bullets.

The Navahos greeted his death with a wild yell of rage. They wanted to dash forward and avenge him promptly. But all these incidents, that have taken so long in the telling, happened in the course of a few moments. Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, and the men with them, had not yet come up to take part in the charge, though they were riding at top speed.

Red Cloud, like a good general, restrained his eager braves until the white men, with their unerring rifles, could fight shoulder to shoulder with them. Buffalo Bill had seen the death of Fighting Bear, and he realized in a flash that it might precipitate a hand-to-hand combat.

He came thundering into the midst of the Navahos on his splendid gray stallion, with a dozen scouts at his heels, and more a short distance behind.

At the same moment a number of Apaches made a sortie from their cover toward the body of Fighting Bear, which lay about midway between the two forces.

They were determined that, at all costs, they would rescue the scalp of their chief, which was tightly gripped in the hand of the dead Navaho.

Buffalo Bill and his cowboys opened fire on them as they advanced, and shot down several; but the remainder, some thirty in number, pressed eagerly on.

The rescue of the scalp was a point of honor with them.

Red Cloud was equally determined that they should not get it. He yelled his war cry and led his braves in a fierce charge.

In a few seconds Navahos and Apaches were fighting hand to hand over the bodies of their dead champions. The Comanches had not advanced from cover, for the rescue of the scalp was the Apaches' business, and it would have been an affront to offer to help them.

For the same reason, Buffalo Bill and his men left the Navahos to fight that battle in their own way, charging the cover instead, and soon coming to close quarters with the intrenched Comanches and the rest of the Apaches who had not joined in the sally.

The Indians battled fiercely around the bodies of the slain champions for several minutes, using their tomahawks, clubbed rifles, and knives.

The Apaches were outnumbered, and their foes did terrible execution among them. Nevertheless, they refused to give an inch of ground, so keen was their desire to rescue the scalp of their chief and take that of the Navaho who had slain him.

Some of their comrades charged to their aid, but the most of them were too busily occupied in defending themselves against the desperate charge on their cover led by Buffalo Bill.

Scores of the Navahos hastened to the help of

their chief, until the foe was outnumbered by more than three to one.

The Apaches then, seeing that they were doomed, sought to give up the hopeless fight and flee back to cover, but they found that their retreat was cut off by Buffalo Bill and his men.

They struggled vainly to cut their way through, but they were shot down and cut down on every side.

Out of more than sixty Apaches who had sallied forth to do battle for the scalp, only three or four got back to cover and rejoined their comrades.

The rest lay dead or dying on the ground, and the Navahos promptly went to work to scalp them.

The death of Fighting Bear had been amply avenged, though it had cost the lives of a good many Navaho braves. Pressed by Buffalo Bill and his men, the Apaches and Comanches were being driven in hot retreat all along the line.

The battle was virtually over. The pursuit was kept up for some hours, until dusk closed down on the scene, and many of the hostiles were killed or taken prisoners.

Over the fate of the latter Buffalo Bill came near to having a serious quarrel with his blood brother, Red Cloud, around the camp fire that night.

CHAPTER XIII.

SAVING THE CAPTIVES.

The Navaho chieftain called a war council around the main camp, and Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, and Nick Wharton, being all blood brothers of the tribe, were asked to be present at it and take part in the debate.

The first question discussed was what should be done with the prisoners that had been taken in the pursuit. There were ten Apaches and six Comanches.

One after another the Navaho braves and chiefs gave it as their opinion that the captives should be tortured to death in accordance with the time-honored custom.

Buffalo Bill knew that this fate would have been meted out to them if they had been caught by their foes, but, nevertheless, he felt that he could not stand coldly by and allow helpless men to be done to death by the most frightful tortures.

He sat silent, wrapped in deep thought, until he was asked to speak.

"Give us your judgment, my brother," said Red Cloud. "Do you not say that the men should die at the stake, as they have slain many of our braves whom they have captured?"

"Nay, Red Cloud," the border king replied. "The face of the Great Spirit is turned away, and His heart is angered, when the red men torture one another."

A growl of disgust went around the circle of bronze

figures, and a young brave leaped to his feet and cried angrily:

"Who is Long Hair, that he should say what we are to do to these dogs? It is not for the white men to settle, but for the Navahos. I have spoken!"

Buffalo Bill was about to reply when Red Cloud interposed, with a gesture of authority, and commanded the young brave to sit down.

"Long Hair has the right to speak of the fate of the prisoners," he said. "Did not he and his paleface braves help us to win the fight? Did they not help us, even, to capture some of the enemy? But Long Hair will not go against the will of all his blood brothers. The Navahos have said that these men shall die at the stake. It is the will of the whole council, and it shall be done."

The young war chief had a strong will of his own, and he faced Buffalo Bill with a determined look that showed he meant to have his own way.

But the king of scouts was a man of even more resolute nature. He thought of the frightful scenes he had witnessed only a few days before in the Apache camp—of the people of his own race and blood who had been tortured to death, as well as some of the Navahos themselves.

The very men for whom he was now pleading had probably taken part, with fiendish delight, in these very scenes; and if they were themselves tied up to the stake they would only be receiving back the measure they had meted out to others.

Nevertheless, he could not, as a decent white man, stand by and see torture done.

"I say they shall not be tortured," he declared, in a firm and decided voice.

Red Cloud's dark face flushed darker with anger, but he conquered his gust of passion and did not speak for some moments.

Then he said, in a voice that he strove to make appear calm:

"What will my brother do to prevent the Navahos from working their will on these men? How far will he go to back up his words?"

"If you drive me to it, Red Cloud, I will fight for them, and I'm sure all my white comrades will stand by me."

"You bet we will!" said Wild Bill.

"You kin jest put thet in yer pipe an' smoke it, Red Cloud," chuckled Nick Wharton. "Yo' know best how you'd come out o' thet fight."

Several of the Navahos leaped up, drawing their tomahawks, and declared that they would not be dictated to by the white men. It had always been the way of their people to torture prisoners of war. They would keep to the customs of their fathers, and not learn the ways of the white men.

Red Cloud alone kept silence, looking sadly at Buffalo Bill, for whom he had the deepest respect and affection.

"Are we to part thus, my brother?" he said. "Are we, who have sworn the oath of blood brotherhood,

and saved one another's lives many times, to quarrel and part now—perhaps even to fight and slay one another?"

"It rests with you and your people, Red Cloud," replied the border king. "I have tried to be a good comrade and blood brother to you and a good friend and counselor to all your people; but there are some things that no self-respecting white man can stand by and see, and one of them is the torture of helpless prisoners."

A struggle went on for a moment in the breast of Red Cloud, and then his mind was made up.

Rising to his feet, he addressed the council as only a born Indian orator can, pointing out to the braves how many things Buffalo Bill had done for the benefit of the tribe, and appealing to them to reward him by placing the fate of the prisoners in his hands.

The eloquent appeal was not without its effect on the council. One by one, the chiefs and leading braves were won over as they recalled the past deeds of the border king, in battle and council, for their benefit. At last, with a unanimous shout, they voted to leave the prisoners at his disposal.

"Let them be kept prisoners in the lodges of the Navahos until the hatchet is buried," said Buffalo Bill. "If any of them are willing, let them be adopted into the tribe, to take the place of the braves who have fallen in the battle. The squaws will be glad to take them for husbands to take the place of those who are dead."

This suggestion was quite in accordance with Indian custom, and several of the prisoners, on being asked, said they would rather be adopted into the tribe than kept in captivity perhaps for months.

One old chief, however, to Buffalo Bill's secret admiration, steadfastly refused.

"Snake Eye was born an Apache, and he will die an Apache," he declared. "He will not be adopted by the Navahos, whom he hates. He would rather die at the stake."

He drew himself up to his full height and uttered the terrible war cry of his tribe, as he imagined, for the last time, since he fully expected that he would be tomahawked on the spot.

His bold defiance enraged the Navahos, and they might have slain him, had not Buffalo Bill instantly interposed to save him.

Snake Eye, as he was led away from the council fire by the king of scouts, showed that he was not ungrateful.

"White man," he said, in a whisper, "you have saved my life and the lives of all my people who are captive here. Snake Eye will speak to you with a straight tongue, as he never thought to speak to a white man."

Buffalo Bill looked at him keenly, and saw that he really had something of importance to tell.

"Speak, chief!" he commanded. "The ears of Long Hair are open to your words."

CHAPTER XIV.

TWENTY AGAINST ONE.

"Long Hair was in the camp of the Apaches, a prisoner. He escaped with a white maiden whose beauty was as the beauty of the moon. They were taken again, in spite of Long Hair's great cunning, and they would have been killed had not the Navahos and some other palefaces thrown us into a panic and rescued them. Are these not all straight words that Snake Eye speaks?"

"Yes, they are," Buffalo Bill admitted. "But what about it all? It's over now."

"Yes; but the paleface maiden is again a prisoner among my people," said the savage.

Buffalo Bill recoiled a step in surprise and horror.

"How do you know that?" he cried.

"Snake Eye knows because he saw her yesterday," and the savage gave an accurate description of Lucy's appearance and even of her clothing.

"She was captured while riding to the fort," he explained. "There were two paleface scouts with her, and they were killed. They would not give up the fight while they remained alive. They slew many of our young men before we took their scalps."

Buffalo Bill gave a groan at this news, but he was somewhat comforted by the thought of the splendid fight the two men must have put up before they went

under. The problem now was—how to rescue the girl?

He asked the Indian where she was, and Snake Eye, grateful for the sparing of his own life, did not hesitate to tell him.

He said that she was hidden in a cave about thirty miles from that spot, under the guardianship of two squaws and several braves. The cave was a secret one in the hills, and difficult of access, but Buffalo Bill felt confident that he could find it from the directions the old chief gave him.

Lucy, Snake Eye explained, was to become the wife of Kicking Horse, a chief who had succeeded Lone Wolf at the head of the Apache nation. He had confined her in the cave until the war was over, and he could marry her with the pomp and circumstance befitting a great Indian chief.

"The paleface may be disappointed," Snake Eye warned Buffalo Bill. "He may find that the girl whose beauty is as that of the stars and moon has been moved from the cave; but I do not think so. Kicking Horse will probably leave her there, for there is no safer place in which he could keep her, especially after the defeat of yesterday."

Buffalo Bill decided that he would go in search of Lucy with a small party. If he took a large force, its approach would probably be detected by the redskins who had been assigned to guard her, and then they would either put her to death or flee with her to some other retreat. It was essential to the success

of his enterprise that he should take them by surprise.

He repeated Snake Eye's story to Wild Bill, Nick Wharton, and three of the best of his other scouts, and asked whether they would go with him, to which they all returned an eager assent. There was not one among them who would not have followed the king of scouts anywhere.

Without saying a word to Red Cloud, or any of the others, the six men got their horses and rode out through the darkness in the direction given by Snake Eye.

They rode all night, and at daylight they were drawing near to the cave. They could see the range of hills in which it was located, far distant across the prairie. There were no redskins in sight.

"When we get near the hills I will go forward alone," said the border king. "I will go on foot, and climb up the slope in which Snake Eye said the cave was located. The timber is very thick, so I ought to be able to get to the cave unseen. I want to find out how the land lies, and what sort of a watch they are keeping. Then I will come back to you, and we can make a sudden attack that will give them no chance of killing the girl or getting her away."

The other men approved of the plan, and when they got within a mile of the nearest slope they halted and picketed their horses in a small belt of timber that broke up the flat expanse of the prairie. Wild Bill and Nick Wharton offered to accompany Cody, but

he insisted that it would be better for him to go alone, as there would be less chance of his being detected by the redskins, if they were keeping a careful watch around the mouth of the cave, as was probably the case.

"Take this before you go," said Nick Wharton, just as Cody was about to leave the belt of timber and make his way toward the hills. "I guess the timber's almighty thick on that slope, an' you may hev ter cut your way through before you find the cave."

As he said this, the old trapper handed a large and heavy ax to the border king. It was one which he usually carried slung to the saddle of his horse whenever he was on the trail.

Buffalo Bill did not think he was likely to need it, but he took it, in order to humor his old friend, and to that circumstance he was soon to owe his life.

As he crossed the prairie, under cover of the long grass, he saw no signs of Indians; but when he got within a few hundred yards of the base of the hill he ran suddenly into a party of about twenty Apaches.

He did not see them until he was right upon them, and escape was impossible; for they were sitting or lying down in a small hollow, the view of which was concealed by the long grass as he approached.

There was nothing for it but to fight them—twenty to one—and his comrades too far away to be of any assistance to him until probably it would be too late. The hearts of most men would have quailed at such

a frightful peril, but Cody's only bounded with the joy of battle.

He did not wait for the Indians to attack him, though they rose to their feet at once and grasped their weapons. Uttering a loud shout, he ran forward toward them, firing the seven shots in his repeating rifle as he did so, one after the other, in such rapid succession that there was not a single distinct report.

Not a single shot missed its aim. Seven of the Indians fell, three of them dead and four wounded.

Throwing down the empty rifle and the ax, Buffalo Bill drew his revolver, and met the charge of the now infuriated redskins with another stream of bullets.

Luckily, only two of them had firearms, and those were cheap-grade guns, and carried by men whose marksmanship was poor. They blazed away at Cody, but the nearest they got was to graze his temple with a bullet and cut away part of the brim of his sombrero.

Meanwhile, Cody had emptied his revolver just as the seven survivors of his score of enemies came within striking distance. Buffalo Bill had fired his last bullet, but he snatched up the ax, and, wielding it like a viking of old, still defied the savages.

There was one thought that ran through his brain in this supreme moment. He must kill all the Apaches, and not let one escape and go back to the cave to warn the sentries there and perhaps kill the girl prisoner. He fought as he had never fought before, with such

savage recklessness that the Apaches, although seven to one, and armed with tomahawks and knives, recoiled in terror before him.

Cody, in that supreme moment, looked more like an avenging god than a man, and the thought that he was fighting to save the girl from the terrible fate of being married to an Indian chief nerved his arm and made his spirit sublimely fearless.

One after another the redskins went down before the blows of his terrible ax. He himself was wounded again and again, but he paid no more attention to the wounds than if they were mere pin pricks.

Cody could never afterward give a clear account of that greatest of his battles. He fought like a man in a dream, but he slew every one of his foes single-handed. Only one fight in border history ever bore comparison with this great encounter, and that was Wild Bill's single-handed wiping out of the McKandlas gang.

At last each of the redskins was dead. Cody dropped his bloodstained ax to the ground, and his head reeled with the pain of his many wounds and the blood he had lost.

Now, for the first time, he realized that he was badly hurt. He tried to keep on his feet, but his head swam, he lost consciousness, and fell prone on the grass.

When his companions, alarmed by the firing, rode out from the timber, they found him lying in a pool

of blood, covered with wounds, and almost dead, with twenty slain redskins around him.

While Nick Wharton and one of the other scouts looked after Buffalo Bill and bound up his wounds, Wild Bill led the rest in search of the hidden cave.

It was found without much trouble by following the Indians' tracks. Only one brave and two squaws were there on guard, and they were surprised and overpowered before they could offer any resistance.

Lucy Brandon was found in perfect health, although she had been reduced to the verge of despair at the thought that she had been once more dragged into captivity, to become the squaw of a savage, and that Buffalo Bill was not at hand this time to save her.

Soon afterward she married a rich Easterner, who took her to live in Boston, far away from the wild and savage scenes which had caused her so much horror, and for which she was by her gentle nature utterly unsuited.

Red Cloud and the scouts pursued their campaign against the Apaches and Comanches, and an expeditionary force of United States troopers also got after the hostiles, who were soon glad to sue for quarter.

The border king's wounds were of a more serious nature than was at first thought, and by the time he was again able to mount a horse the Indian troubles had been settled, and once again peace reigned on the frontier. Buffalo Bill, however, did not remain inactive any longer than was absolutely necessary, and as soon as he was able to do so he hit the trail.

CHAPTER XV.

BUFFALO BILL STOPS JUDGE LYNCH.

"El Paso Jack, this yere miners' court of Lone Dog, duly convened by Jedge Lynch, has fairly considered the evidence brought before it, an' it finds you—guilty!"

The scene was a rough miners' camp near the border of Texas and New Mexico.

It was a summer day, a short time after Buffalo Bill and his allies had put down the Apache uprising. A crowd of about fifty red-shirted miners and cowboys were grouped around a tree from one of the lower branches of which a noosed rope dangled.

In the center of the group was a young man, strikingly handsome, with dark complexion, black hair, and singularly beautiful and piercing eyes.

It needed hardly a glance at him to show that he had Indian blood in his veins—that, indeed, he was a half-breed.

Such was the prisoner at the bar of Judge Lynch's court at the mining settlement of Lone Dog.

The solemn, condemnatory words were repeated:

"El Paso Jack, we have found our verdict. It is guilty!"

The silence was so profound that the men grouped near the prisoner might have heard a pin drop. They averted their heads from him, and from one another,

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for, rough characters though they were, they nevertheless were deeply impressed by the solemnity of the occasion.

Only the man whose name had been called lifted his eyes and fronted the speaker boldly.

In spite of his youth, there was a grim look on his face, his teeth were firmly set, and his lips were closed in a hard line.

"Yes, you aire guilty, El Paso Jack, an' of course, you must pay the penalty."

There was a slight movement among the crowd at this last word, and then a long-drawn breath of excitement, which was speedily suppressed by the men who uttered it.

But the condemned man, who stood in the center of the crowd, a few paces apart from the rest, never so much as winked an eyelid or opened his lips. He stood doggedly silent, waiting for the end.

He had no hope of mercy, for he was accused of having stolen a quantity of gold dust belonging to a fellow miner, and that was a crime which was always punished with the utmost severity in any mining camp.

In his own heart, El Paso Jack, as the handsome young man was nicknamed, knew that he was innocent; but the evidence, circumstantial in its nature, seemed to his stern judges to be all against him.

The tall, black-bearded miner who acted as president of the lynch-law court, after pronouncing the verdict, went on grimly:

"We consider you aire guilty, El Paso Jack, an' those of us as hev been app'inted ter try you hev all agreed in sayin' so. Nary a soul in the camp knowed whar thet dust was, 'ceptin' you, the side partner of the man what lost it. It vamosed yesterday, an' no one knows better nor you whar it's gone. We know you say you struck a pay streak yesterday, an' that's why we found sech a pile o' dust in your tent, but sech tales don't go down with us."

"He struck it by hookin' his own pard's dust, I reckon," interrupted a loud voice from the background of the crowd, and all the men laughed grimly and significantly.

"We made a mistake in ever allowin' a half-breed ter locate in our camp," the president of the court went on. "Blood will tell. It has shown up now. We believe you aire guilty, an' so thar's only one thing ter do ter end the business——"

He was about to pronounce upon the young man Judge Lynch's sentence, to be hanged by the neck until he was dead; but suddenly a clear, ringing voice, sharp as steel, interrupted him:

"Hold! Don't sentence that young man yet! You may be sorry for it!"

The leader of the miners and his friends turned in astonishment to the speaker, who, seated upon a horse, had been quietly watching the trial, a few yards away from the little crowd of men.

El Paso Jack had already been placed under the tree, from one branch of which the noosed rope was

already hanging—a grim token of the fate which his late comrades destined for him.

The man who had so suddenly interrupted the proceedings of the court at their most critical moment was none other than Buffalo Bill.

After a few moments of general hesitation, the bearded miner who acted the part of Judge Lynch growled out:

"Waal, now, stranger, an' who might yer be, thet wants ter butt inter this yer social party?"

"My name is Cody—William F. Cody, at your service," replied the horseman.

"Buffalo Bill, by thunder!" burst from the lips of several of the men who were standing around.

"Waal, Buffalo Bill, we're all mighty glad ter see yer in this camp," said the leader of the miners, after he had recovered from his surprise. "We take it as an honor thet ye hev dropped in ter pay us a visit."

"I just happened to ride up as you were beginning to try this man," explained Cody, "and I stopped to watch the proceedings."

"An' what did ye think?" asked the judge eagerly. "Ain't the durned skunk guilty, sure enough? Ain't it up ter us ter swing him up on the branch over thar?"

The miners gathered around eagerly to hear what Buffalo Bill had to say about the case, for they entertained the greatest possible respect for his opinion. The famous scout paused for a moment before he

replied and looked keenly at the young prisoner. Then he said slowly and judicially:

"He may be guilty—for almost anything is possible—but most certainly he has not been proved guilty at this trial, and therefore you have no right to hang him."

"Not guilty!" ejaculated one of the miners, in sheer amazement. "Why, we caught him with the goods on!"

"All you have against him," Buffalo Bill went on, without heeding the interruption, "seems to be this:

"His partner lost some gold dust, and when the prisoner's tent was searched some gold dust was found in it. There is no proof that it was the same gold dust, and in the very nature of the case there can be none.

"Suppose I lost some dust to-morrow, and were to look in the tent of any man in this crowd, wouldn't I be likely to find some dust there? Of course I would. What more likely place to find gold dust than in the shacks of a gold-mining camp? Yet I might swear that that dust I found was mine, and want to have the man who owned the shack hanged. It would be just as fair as in this case, would it not?"

The miners, who were rough men, but not willfully unjust, looked at one another doubtfully. They were evidently struck by the force of Buffalo Bill's argument, but they had been expecting a lynching, and they were still unwilling to let their prisoner go.

"He's only a lad, too," Buffalo Bill went on, look-

ing compassionately at the prisoner's slim figure and youthful face. "Even if his guilt had been proved as clear as daylight, you might still give him another chance because of his youth."

The leader of the miners, whose name was Jim Horton, called several of his comrades around him and consulted in low tones for a few moments.

Then Jim Horton came forward, and, fronting the prisoner, said in a stern, impressive tone:

"Thank your lucky stars, boy, thet Buffalo Bill came up when he did. He has saved your life. Most of us still believe you are guilty, but bekase of what he's said we'll let you go. We'll call the case 'not proven.'

"But all the same, El Paso Jack, if ye value yer life, you'll make yerself powerful scarce around this section. We don't want ye in the camp. If ye are found anywheres around, after twelve hours has passed, somebody's gun may go off kind of accidental, and put a bullet in yer carcass."

The proud, stern expression on the young prisoner's face did not change in the slightest degree when his life was given to him thus grudgingly.

He bowed to Buffalo Bill, and briefly thanked him for his intervention. Then he turned on his heel and walked to his shack, to collect his few possessions, which were necessary to him when he took the trail for some other settlement, in compliance with the order of the lynch-law court.

Not a single one of the miners spoke a word to

him as he passed through them. They had spared his life, owing to Buffalo Bill's influence, but none the less they regarded him as a dog—a thief—a pariah.

Some children ran out of near-by cabins and greeted him, for El Paso Jack had always been fond of children, and they of him. But their mothers, with angry looks, came out and shrilly called the children back.

Then, indeed, the young man's set face quivered with sorrow and rage, but in a moment he had mastered himself and walked steadily on to his tiny home—the home that was to be his no longer.

In a few moments he got together the few things he needed—his gun, revolvers, some ammunition, a few provisions, and his scanty accumulation of gold dust.

He did not own a horse, but, returning back to the crowd of miners, he offered to buy one with his stock of dust.

Jim Horton laughed at him sardonically.

"Thar's nary a man hyar'll take yer dust, boy," he said. "You can't buy anything in this camp with that dust, for we all think it's stolen."

The young man's face flushed, and he raised his clenched fist as if he could strike the man who insulted him; but there were a score of other miners standing around, and he saw that it would be useless to try to fight.

With a sigh, he turned away from the group, and

in a few minutes was walking swiftly along the trail to the nearest settlement, where he hoped to be able to buy a horse.

Buffalo Bill, standing by the side of Jim Horton, watched him leave the camp with mingled feelings of regret and curiosity. He believed the young man had been too harshly dealt with, and he wondered who he was.

His face, once seen, was not easily forgotten. It was very different from that of the average half-breed, for it seemed to be the index of a noble soul.

"If that boy is a scamp," said the border king, "then I'm no reader of faces."

CHAPTER XVI.

BUFFALO BILL TAMES COMANCHE BILL.

Regretfully the border king turned to Horton and asked for more information about the young half-breed.

"How is it that you came to have a half-breed in the camp at all?" he asked. "That is very unusual in the Southwest. As a rule, neither redskins nor half-breeds care for the hard work of a miner, any more than they care for ranching or farming. And if they do happen to care for it, the white miners are not usually willing to welcome them to a settlement."

"That's so, pard," said Horton, "but the circumstances in this yer case were peculiar. The young feller, as you must hev noticed, looked a heap better an' straighter than the or'nary half-breed. Thet was the trouble. We all kind o' cottoned on to him, spite o' the fact he wasn't white. We liked him real well till this affair come ter light; but blood will tell in the end, yer know."

"How long has he been staying at the camp?" asked the king of scouts.

"Only a few weeks."

"And who is this partner of his, whose gold dust he is supposed to have stolen?"

"Comanche Bill."

"What!" exclaimed Cody. "Comanche Bill! I've heard of him, though I never had the chance to meet him; and, to speak the truth, what I have heard is not altogether to his credit."

"I guess not," said Horton, with a grim smile. "Comanche Bill ain't the nicest of men, an' that's a fact. I'd like ter see him run out of the town, but he's never done anythin' to justify it—or, at least, he's never been caught in anything."

"He's got a bit of Indian blood in him, too, hasn't he?" asked Cody. "I have been told so by a man who met him once, my pal, Wild Bill Hickok."

"He certainly looks like it, pard," admitted Horton, "an' it's said that his mother was a half-breed Comanche woman. On that account, he's said ter be thick with some o' the tribes on the plains, an' also with some gangs o' half-breeds who call themselves hunters an' scouts, but ain't really any better than bandits."

"But all this is rumor," the miner went on, "an' we ain't got anything we can prove against Comanche Bill. We can't even prove that he's got redskin blood in his veins. He denies all the charges—even that one, though his face shows it pretty plainly."

"Why don't the men run him out of camp on general principles?" asked Buffalo Bill.

A flush of shame mounted to the miner's brow.

"Well, ter tell yer the truth," he admitted, "I've wanted them to do it more than once, but I could never get them to the point. Some of them are afraid he

might stir up his redskin and half-breed friends ter raid the camp, an' others fear the man himself. He's a bad man ter handle, an' that's a fact. He's mighty quick with his shootin' irons. More than one man who went up agin' him has had ter eat lead."

"Is that so?" said Buffalo Bill, his lips setting in a grim, determined line. "I'd like to meet the fellow. Where is he?"

"Over there; the big man in the red shirt, talkin' to those two miners."

Buffalo Bill strolled over to the little group of men indicated. His face showed that he was thinking anxiously. Horton's information had worried him, for reasons known only to himself, and he regretted more than ever that he had allowed the young half-breed to leave the camp without speaking to him.

He was, indeed, half in mind to follow on his trail and catch up with him; but now he was given something else—and something more pressing—to think of.

The bully of the camp, for such Comanche Bill unquestionably was, looked at him in a most surly and offensive manner when he approached.

He knew quite well that the stranger was none other than the famous Buffalo Bill, with whom most persons would have hesitated to pick a quarrel; but during his career as a "bad man" Comanche Bill had been so uniformly successful that he had got a "swelled head," and now imagined that he could fight anybody.

"Are you Comanche Bill?" said Cody, going up to him.

"Yes; that's what they call me," growled the bully. "But I'd hev yer ter know, right off, thet I ain't got nothin' ter do with the Comanches, nor no other Injun tribe."

This statement was belied, in a measure, by the fellow's appearance. He was dressed in the ordinary rough garb affected by the white miners with whom he associated, but his complexion was much darker even than their sun-tanned faces, and to Buffalo Bill's expert eyes his features bore an unmistakably Indian cast.

"I would like to ask you a few questions about your late partner," said Cody quietly.

"You can't ask me nothin' about him," replied the fellow, in a rough tone which he evidently strove to make as offensive as possible. "I don't know nothin' about him, 'ceptin' thet he was my pard, and' he tried ter rob me. You saved him by yer buttin' in when yer wasn't wanted, an' I'm in the mind ter make yer smart fer thet."

Buffalo Bill laughed lightly.

"It is my habit to 'butt in,' as you call it, Mr. Comanche Bill, whenever I think that injustice is being done," he replied, "and I'm afraid I shall continue to do so, whether you like it or not. You can try to make me smart, if you like; but, of course, that's a game two can play at."

The bully, maddened by a defiance which was very unusual in his experience, rushed at Buffalo Bill with his fists uplifted. The border king stepped aside

lightly, warded off the blow, and countered with a left uppercut which sent the man heavily to the ground.

Comanche Bill got up slowly and unsteadily, stanching the blood which flowed freely from his nose and mouth. He showed no desire to renew the pugilistic encounter, for he had sense enough to know that he had met his master in the fist fight. But he had by no means given up his idea of having revenge on Cody for the injury which he imagined the latter had done him.

"I'll fight ye with guns!" he shouted. "Right here an' now, if ye like!"

"As the challenged party, I believe I have the right to choose the weapons," replied Buffalo Bill calmly, "but let it be revolvers, if you wish."

The miners had, by this time, gathered around eagerly. They saw that something out of the common was going on. Comanche Bill had been the bully of the camp for a long time, but they had a lively hope that Buffalo Bill, about whom they had heard so much, would be able to master and tame him.

"We must hev this thing done in reg'lar an' shipshape order, boys," cried Horton, coming up. "It's got ter be a proper duel. I'll be yer second, Cody. Jim Robur, you take the same job fer Comanche Bill."

"Sure!" said the man addressed. "I ain't got no pertiklar love fer Comanche, but I'm willin' ter help see fair play."

"Will revolvers at ten paces suit ye both?" asked Horton, addressing the two duelists.

"Fix it how you like, I'm agreeable," said Cody.

Comanche Bill signifying the same, Horton paced off the required distance and placed either combatant at the points he had marked out. They were placed with their backs to one another.

"Now, boys," said the miner, "when I shout 'Fire!' ye will turn an' pepper one another as fast as ye like. Six shots apiece, all you have in your guns. If you don't kill one another with those—well, I reckon you never will, an' you'd better quit tryin'."

Buffalo Bill smiled slightly at this. Modest though he was, he knew very well that he did not need six shots to get the better of his adversary. It would have been a simple task for him to bore a hole through a half-dollar piece at that distance, much less hit a man.

"You'd better not try to turn an' fire before the word's given, Comanche," Horton added warningly. "If you do, there are half a dozen men here who'll fill you full of lead as quick as they'd shoot a coyote. We kinder suspicion all ain't been right with those other duels of yours. You fired a second or two before the word. That's why we've placed you both back to back now."

Comanche Bill glared at the speaker in murderous rage.

"All right, Jim Horton," he muttered. "You can fight me for those words after I'm through with this yer man."

"I'm yer game!" yelled Horton, undaunted. "But

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I guess you won't feel much like fightin' anybody else when Buffler Bill has done wi' ye."

He walked up to both men and examined their revolvers carefully, to see that they were loaded in every chamber.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

Both men replied in the affirmative.

"Fire!"

Both men wheeled around instantly, and the crack of their revolvers was simultaneous.

The bullet of the bully whizzed within an inch of Buffalo Bill's head, but his own shot struck Comanche Bill on his trigger finger, crushing the knuckle and making him drop the weapon and wring his hand with pain.

Quick as thought Cody fired two other shots.

One grazed the left temple of Comanche Bill and the other his right temple, in an exactly similar place.

The miners gasped. It was evident that the king of scouts was simply playing with his adversary—that he had hit the exact place he had aimed for every time.

Comanche Bill knew that, too, for his face turned as white as chalk and his limbs trembled violently.

"Do you want the other three bullets?" asked Buffalo Bill, lowering his revolver and looking sternly at the man. "If so, pick up your revolver and fire the two shots that are coming to you with your left hand. Then, if you don't kill me with them, I'll shoot again

—and I warn you I shall aim for the center of your forehead.”

But Comanche Bill, pallid and shamefaced, made no effort to pick up his weapon from the ground.

“I’m satisfied,” he growled, not daring to look at the men whom he had been used to bully so unmercifully. “I give you best.”

“Then apologize!”

The words rang sharply from the lips of the border king.

Comanche Bill promptly made the most humble and abject apologies he could think of on the spur of the moment.

“Very well. Now you can pack your traps and move out of this camp within half an hour. Go to your redskin and half-breed friends, if you like. You had better leave promptly, for your own sake. You’ve been a bully around this camp, but you can’t boss the shack any longer. When a bully has once ‘taken water,’ as you have done, his day is over, and his life isn’t safe. The men you have tyrannized over will try to get even with you unless you clear out in pretty quick order.”

Comanche Bill knew very well that this was good advice. He turned on his heel and went for his horse at once. In less than the time given to him he was riding away from the camp, following the same trail that his late partner had taken.

CHAPTER XVII.

BUFFALO BILL'S DOUBLE MISSION.

The king of scouts was warmly congratulated and thanked by the miners for having rid their camp of a public nuisance, but he paid little heed to their words, and as soon as possible he went off with Jim Horton to the latter's cabin.

He recognized that burly miner as the leading man in the settlement, and there were some matters of importance which he wished to speak with him about.

After he had partaken of Horton's hospitality, which, in true Western fashion, was both ready and generous, he said:

"I suppose you have been wondering what my lay is out here, although you have been too polite to ask?"

"Yes," Horton admitted. "I suppose you've come down hyar on some mining proposition, but that's not the kind of game you generally tackle, judgin' from all the stories I've heard told about you."

"No, I'm not much stuck on mining," said the border king, "and my mission down here is of an entirely different character. Have you ever heard of Loud Thunder, the great war chief of the Comanches?"

"Yes," replied Horton. "He's one of the most famous of all the Indian chiefs, I reckon, and, what's best of all, he's a good friend and neighbor to the white settlers."

"That is so. He and I have been great friends for a long while. We have fought together against the Sioux and the Apaches, and saved one another's lives more than once. I visited his village, down by the Rio Grande, about four weeks ago, and found him in deep distress. His eldest son had run away from the village, having quarreled with his father because he was not allowed to marry the girl he loved.

"She was a half-breed, the daughter of a minor chief. Loud Thunder didn't think the match was good enough, and he wouldn't have anything to do with it. As the young man—the Red Whirlwind, as they call him—was a full-fledged warrior, who had proved himself in battle, he could have married even without his father's consent; but there was a difficulty about that.

"Although his father is the richest man among the Comanches, the young warrior himself is poor. He hadn't the cattle and ponies that the minor chief wanted as the price of his daughter's hand. He asked a high price, as she was very beautiful, and much sought after by chiefs from several tribes. Loud Thunder wouldn't help the poor young fellow out, so Red Whirlwind shook the dust of the parental village off his feet and set out to the white settlements, intending to earn money and return rich enough to buy his bride.

"As he had lived for two years in Dallas—Loud Thunder wanting him to learn the ways of white men

—he was less reluctant to make such a venture than most redskins would be. Then, too, he was half a paleface himself, for his mother, Loud Thunder's principal wife, was a Mexican white woman who was carried off by the Comanches when a baby and adopted into their tribe."

"It's a strange story," commented Horton. "But where do you come in?"

"I found my old friend, Loud Thunder, very repentant for his part in the business," Cody went on. "He would give anything to get his son back, and would cheerfully consent to the marriage."

"And so?"

"I promised, out of the great regard I have for the old chief, to make the round of some of the settlements and try to strike the trail of his son and bring him back. I have been on the job now for several weeks, and thought I had him cinched, but I lost the trail about eighty miles west of this place. Red Whirlwind seems to have disappeared completely, and I can't get the slightest clew to his whereabouts."

Horton thought for a moment.

"Did he answer the description of that young fellow whom we nicknamed El Paso Jack?" he asked. "We called him that because he told us he had lived in El Paso. He was a half-breed, too, you know. May they not have been the same? Half-breeds with a taste for mining ain't so common."

"The very thing that I thought when I first saw the young fellow," said Buffalo Bill. "But I don't

think he answers the description. I never knew Red Whirlwind, but according to what his father told me of him I think he must be an older and bigger man. Nevertheless, I think I shall ride after El Paso Jack and question him. It is just possible, after all, that he may be the man I seek. If not, he may know where Red Whirlwind is to be found."

"What about the girl in the case?" asked Horton. "Is she really pretty? Is she waiting faithfully for the young warrior to come back with enough riches to marry her?"

"I haven't seen her, so I don't know whether she is pretty or not," replied the king of scouts. "Her father, so I understand, took her away to another Comanche village, some distance from the one over which Loud Thunder rules. Her name is Prairie Flower, and from all accounts she is a very good and beautiful girl."

"Well, pard, here's luck to the Red Whirlwind and his Prairie Flower," said Horton, raising his glass to his lips. "Love's young dream! It's the same in an Indian village as it is in an American city. The stern parent always makes trouble. Here's hoping you find the young buck and take him back to the girl he left behind him!"

"But that isn't the only business that has brought me here," the king of scouts went on. "Have you heard anything of the Hooded Riders of Texas, as I believe they call themselves?"

Horton started.

"I surely have!" he cried excitedly. "They are the worst band of ruffians and outlaws in the whole of the Southwest, I reckon. They are all Indian half-breeds, so I've been told. The tribes won't have them, and they've been drummed out of the white settlements, so their hands are against every man. Red or white, it's all the same to them, so long as there's loot to be gained or murder to be done. To tell you the truth, I've heard that Comanche Bill, the fellow you licked to-day, is connected with them, but there was no proof of that, and it may be only an idle story."

"Likely enough it is true," observed Buffalo Bill. "He's the sort of man who might be trusted to take part in any villainy. I've a feeling that I shall meet him again, some day, and settle accounts finally. Well, the second matter that has brought me to this section is this same gang of the Hooded Riders. Their outrages have become unbearable, and the governor of Texas asked me to see what were the best steps to take to break up the gang and bring its members to justice."

"First, I must do my mission for Loud Thunder, for I undertook that first; but then I shall tackle this other proposition, and perhaps you and some of the other boys at this camp will be able to help me."

"You kin surely count on us!" exclaimed the honest miner. "We hev no use fer sech cattle anywhere 'round our location, and we'll be mighty glad ter help yer smoke them out."

"When I get back I'll remember that, and call on you to redeem your offer, if the occasion serves," said Buffalo Bill. "Likely enough, too, Loud Thunder will help me with a party of his Comanche braves. The Hooded Riders have made two or three raids on his territory and he's hot for vengeance."

The king of scouts then arose, saddled his mustang, which had been cropping the grass outside, and bade farewell to his host.

Before departing, however, he wrote a letter to his old friends and partners in many a desperate adventure, Wild Bill Hickok and Nick Wharton.

He had left them behind at Dallas a few days before, while he rode on to Lone Dog. They had some business to do in that city, but he knew they would be delighted to help him track down and round up the Hooded Riders as soon as he was himself at liberty to return to the mining settlement.

"I'm off again on the track of the Red Whirlwind," the king of scouts wrote to his friends, "but I hope to be back here soon to see what can be done to break up that wretched gang, the Hooded Riders.

"If you have finished your business in Dallas, will you come here and await my return? I hope that I won't be long. From all I can learn, the Hooded Riders are a pretty tough gang, and there ought to be some good sport in fighting them."

The border king could well imagine how eager his warlike friends would be to join him as soon as they got his note. He gave it to Jim Horton, before he

mounted his horse, and asked him to see that it was sent to Dallas as speedily as possible.

"The mule post won't be here for two days," said Jim. "It only comes once a week. But if this yer letter is mighty important, I'll get my eldest boy ter saddle up his cayuse and ride into Dallas with it."

"Don't bother to do that," replied Buffalo Bill. "I want to get a couple of my pards, Hickok and Wharton, to help me round up the Hooded Riders, but I guess the mule post will be plenty time enough."

As the border king was about to ride away the miner gripped him warmly by the hand and gave him a parting word of warning:

"Look out fer thet all-fired galoot, Comanche Bill," he said earnestly. "The goldurned skunk has vamoused the ranch, and we're all mighty glad to see the back of him, but he ain't fergotten you, an' you must look out fer yourself. He'll do ye a mischief, if he can, as sure as you're born."

"He's a bad man ter hev fer an enemy, an' he may be layin fer yer even now—waitin' fer yer ter leave the camp. Keep yer eye skinned fer him!"

"Thanks, pard; I usually do," laughed Buffalo Bill, as he shook the reins of his mustang and cantered away. "Comanche Bill isn't the only enemy I have—not by a long shot."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S STRANGE DISCOVERY.

After he had traveled about three miles, the border king entered a cañon that wound between two lofty hills, the sides of which were densely covered with trees and brushwood.

"This is a pretty good spot for my friend Comanche Bill, if he is really lying in wait for me," thought Cody.

He carefully scanned the thick cover on either side of the path and held his rifle in readiness for instant service. Next moment there was a shot from the hillside to the left, and a bullet whizzed a few inches in front of the border king's face.

It was rapidly followed by several others, none of which, however, took effect. The luck of the king of scouts, which was the standing wonder of all who knew him on the frontier, had again stood him in good stead.

At the first shot, Buffalo Bill put his mustang to a tearing gallop and dashed up the rocky slope of the cañon, firing at the spot from which the smoke came, as he passed it. He was sorely tempted to dismount and search the thick cover for his enemy, but he thought better of it after a few moments' swift deliberation.

"What's the good?" he said to himself. "The fel-

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low has me at a decided disadvantage, and might easily shoot me down if I tried to catch him. I dare say Comanche Bill and I will meet again some day and settle our little differences. When I shoot at him next time, I'll certainly shoot to kill."

By this time the king of scouts was out of rifle shot of the ambush. He passed beyond the cañon into the open country which led to his destination, a settlement called Lucky Valley. He arrived at that mining camp in the afternoon, for it had been early in the morning when he first struck Lone Dog and saved the prisoner who was about to be hanged.

He immediately set to work to make inquiries for the young half-breed, but several of the miners shook their heads, and declared that they had not seen any one who answered to that description pass through their camp.

"But I seen him!" suddenly broke in a woman's voice. "I guess you mean a young, dark feller, who looked kinder like a gal in men's clothes. While I was down gettin' water from the spring this mornin' this boy rode up, an' I says ter him, 'Whar aire ye goin', young feller?'"

"'Goin' minin',' says he.

"'Why don't ye just camp down right hyar?' says I.

"'No,' says he. 'This yer ain't fur 'nuff away fur me. I'm away ter the woods.'"

"And what do you suppose he meant by that?" Buffalo Bill asked the woman. "Did he not give you any more definite idea of where he was going?"

"No, stranger, he didn't. He 'peared kinder broken up, an' was short an' huffy in his talk. 'Looked an' spoke as if he had a grouch agin' all the world. But as fur whar he's gone, I reckon that's easy guessed. He's strikin' fur Cedar Hill, 'bout thirty miles farther to the east. He took the trail toward thar, an' it's the only place thereabouts.

"If so be ye aire really anxious ter find the lad, you'd better follow that trail, boss. Thar's only a few settlers' cabins between thar and hyar, but mebbe you kin pick up some news of him. Call to-night at the house of the Widow Ruggles. It's right on the trail. Mebbe she kin tell you somethin', fur she's the biggest gossip anywhar around these parts.

"I hope you find the lad, stranger, fur I'm free ter admit I'm kinder worried about him, though he's only a durned half-breed. He didn't look ter me ter be the sort o' young feller thet should be hangin' around these rough mining camps. He looked as frail as a gal, though he had plenty of pluck all the same."

The border king thanked the loquacious woman and rode away, pondering deeply over her words. It now struck him, as it had not struck him before, that the young fellow had seemed to be of particularly slight and weak build, quite unfitted for the rough, strenuous life of the frontier.

This being the case, he could hardly be the Red Whirlwind, the missing young warrior whom he sought. The Red Whirlwind was a warrior of some

renown, in spite of his youth, and although Buffalo Bill had never seen him, he had not the slightest doubt that he was as sinewy and athletic as most young Comanches.

Indeed, Loud Thunder's son had been called the Red Whirlwind because of the lightninglike and irresistible way in which he had led charges on the enemy when the Comanches were at war with other tribes. Such a title could hardly have been earned by the slim, weak-looking youth whom Buffalo Bill had seen at Lone Dog.

But if that young half-breed was not Loud Thunder's son, who was he? The king of scouts felt that there was a mystery in the matter somewhere, and he made up his mind that he would do his best to clear it up.

As he rode along, through the afternoon the scout made inquiries of a few settlers whose cabins he passed, but none of them had seen any wayfarer answering to the description of the young half-breed.

They one and all assured him, however, that Cedar Hill was the best place to search for the youth, as it was the latest "boom" camp, to which adventurous miners were flocking from all parts of the country.

About sunset Buffalo Bill reached the cabin of the Widow Ruggles, to whom he had been recommended by the woman at Lucky Valley. When he asked the widow if he could put up at her cabin for the night, and promised to pay her well for the accommodation, she said:

"I hev five children, stranger, an' you'll hev ter sleep with two of 'em, if yer stay."

The border king assured her that that would be all right; but there was still a troubled look on her face as she continued:

"Stranger, I fergot 'bout Mose Johnston. It's his night fur comin' hyar."

"And what about Mose Johnston, my dear madam?" asked the knight of the plains politely.

"It's his night fur droppin' in an' makin' love ter me."

"Well, I shan't object to that, if you don't," said Buffalo Bill, trying hard to repress a smile. "You can both go ahead and do your love-making just the same as if I wasn't here."

"But he's a powerful quare man, Mose is," the widow urged, with a great deal of earnestness. "He's awful tetchy. He wouldn't sit down within ten feet of me if he knew thar was a stranger in the house, an' he might get mad an' go home. I've been a widder now goin' on fur four years, an' Mose is the first fellow that ever come sparkin' around."

"And you don't want to lose him, of course," remarked Cody.

"Of course not. I don't want ter turn you away, an' yet I hev ter look out fur Mose. I'm sorry I'll hev ter put you up out of the way as soon as you hev finished your supper."

"Don't mind me at all," said Buffalo Bill. "I'll be out of the way in about ten minutes."

As soon as supper was finished, one of the children climbed a ladder leading to the garret, to light the way, and the border king followed.

After a smoke, he turned into a bed that was made out of corn husks, and, being dead tired, he was soon asleep, and did not open his eyes until morning. When he descended the ladder the widow met him with a radiant countenance.

"Stranger," she said, "I wish ter thank yo' from the bottom of my heart."

"But for what?" asked Cody, in amazement.

"Fur takin' so willingly ter the garret an' keepin' out of Mose's way last night. Most men would ha' butted in an' made no end of a bother. Yo' had just begun ter snore when in he walks, an' half an hour later he had popped the question, an' I had answered him."

"What did you say—if I may make so bold as to ask?" said Cody.

"I said yes—you bet! D'ye think I want ter be a lone, lorn widder all my days? But if yo' had been sittin' around, Mose would ha' gone straight out an' rounded up some other critter ter marry. Sit right down, stranger, an' eat an' drink all you can hold. Thar will be no chance fur yo' to pay a bill on sech a joyful day as this. May the Lord bless yo' fur your hoss sense and willingness ter help the widdered an' the fatherless!"

When Buffalo Bill had done full justice to this

heartly invitation, and had finished his breakfast, he called to his hostess, and said:

"Widow Ruggles, can you tell me if a lad of about twenty—a half-breed dressed as a miner—passed this way some time yesterday afternoon, before I came?"

"D'ye mean a young feller what looked tiredlike,, an' was ridin' a bay hoss? If so be yo' mean him, he did pass hyar, an' stopped to get a drink an' to water his hoss. He looked as if he was about done up, so he did—poor youngster!

"I wanted ter give him a shakedown fur the night, but he wouldn't stay nohow. Said he wanted ter push on, an' anyhow he had jest given all the dust he had fur his old hoss, an' he wouldn't stay an' not pay me fur the bed an' the food. Said he didn't wanter ter be beholden ter white people. Lord, he was real proud!"

"Poor chap!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "He must be right up against it. I think he may be a young man whom I want to find and take back to his father, who is a Comanche chief I know."

"Waal, home's the best place fur him," said the widow, as the border king made her a parting salute with his sombrero and rode off down the trail.

He soon struck a wild and rugged country which led away up to the slopes of the hills. It was barren and inhospitable. There was not a house or a cabin anywhere in sight—nothing but rocks and bowlders, with here and there a few ragged pine trees.

After he had ridden for about two hours, the scout

suddenly reined up his horse and gazed intently at the sky.

Two or three tiny specks circling in the blue vault had caught his alert eye. He knew at once that they were vultures, and from the manner of their circling he could tell that they saw the body of a man or some other animal lying upon the ground, and were about to descend upon it.

He rode recklessly over the bowlders that were scattered thickly along the trail, heading toward the spot over which the vultures were circling.

In a few moments he came to a big pile of rocks that had fallen from the hillside. He leaped his horse at them, and the gallant animal cleared the obstruction at a single bound.

As soon as he came to the ground, the mustang reared straight up on his haunches, with a sudden halt that would have unseated a less expert rider. There, almost under his horse's hoofs, Buffalo Bill saw the prostrate, unconscious form of El Paso Jack, the out-cast from Lone Dog.

With a quick turn of the rein, the knight of the plains swerved his steed around and brought the fore-feet down to the ground without touching the recumbent form.

Then he dismounted and bent over the body, with an anxious face and a heart beating wildly with fear. El Paso Jack looked as if he were about to "pass in his checks"—if, indeed, he had not already done so.

His face was as white as marble, and the blue

veins stood out distinctly upon it. Touching his cheek, Buffalo Bill found that it was cold and clammy.

It was the face of one who had gone through just about as much hardship and rough usage as a human being could stand. It was the face, too, of one unused to the rough side of life—refined and delicate as that of a girl!

As that of a girl!

In the brief moment that he paused, looking down at the unconscious figure, the conviction forced itself upon Buffalo Bill's acute mind that it really was the face of a girl. He recalled the words of the woman at Lucky Valley—that the young fellow she had seen looked like a girl dressed up in a man's clothes.

There was the explanation of the secret! The border king had to deal, not with a stern young warrior of the Comanches, but with a weak Indian girl who had dared and endured more than her frail strength was able to bear.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HEROISM OF PRAIRIE FLOWER.

These thoughts flashed through the border king's mind so swiftly that they did not make him hesitate at all in attending to the charge which had fallen so strangely to his lot.

He felt the girl's pulse at once, and found that it was still beating, although very feebly. Unscrewing the cap of his water flask, he bathed her forehead and then chafed her hands, worked her arms to and fro, and used all the other means he had heard of for restoring unconscious persons.

After he had worked hard for about five minutes, the girl began to show signs of returning animation. She opened her eyes and sighed feebly, and then tried to rise from the ground. But her weakness was too much for her, and she sank back again into the arms of the knight of the plains.

Buffalo Bill forced her to drink a mouthful of brandy from the flask, which he always carried for just such occasions as the present one, although he himself was not fond of strong liquors.

The ardent spirit revived the girl, and she sat up, with a shudder of disgust at the unaccustomed taste of the liquor.

"Ah! Where am I? What has happened? Who are you, paleface?" she asked wildly, as her beautiful dark eyes met those of her rescuer.

Buffalo Bill noticed that she spoke in the Comanche tongue, her own language, which he thoroughly understood. Afterward, as the conversation progressed, she drifted into English, which she spoke exceedingly well for a half-Indian maiden. Her mother had taught her.

"I am a friend who is anxious to serve you," replied the knight of the plains.

"Yes, I remember you now. You are Buffalo Bill, the mighty Long Hair, the paleface friend of my people. You saved my life from those bloodthirsty men who wanted to hang me."

The girl, in spite of her stoical Indian training, shuddered violently as the thought of that terrible experience came back to her.

"Don't worry about that now," said Buffalo Bill soothingly. "It is all over. You are safe. Nobody will hurt you, my girl; and you shall be restored safely to the wigwam of your father. Am I right in supposing that you are Prairie Flower, the Comanche maiden?"

By this time the girl had recovered her senses, and she was able to understand the full import of the border king's words.

"You know my name! You know that I am a girl!" she gasped. "I thought I had hidden my secret so well that no man could find it out."

"Yet I saw it plainly enough when you were lying unconscious," said Buffalo Bill, in his gentlest tone.

The girl covered her face with her hands and began to weep. The chivalrous king of the scouts could

never bear to see a woman in pain or sorrow. He did his best to comfort the girl, and she soon looked up at him and smiled through her tears.

"Well, it can't be helped," she said brightly, in English. "After all, I had rather you found me out—a brave man who is friendly to my people—than those cruel men at Lone Dog."

Buffalo Bill heard the ripple of a stream near by, and led the girl toward it, the two horses following them.

"I believe you are faint from hunger," he said. "Let us camp by this stream, and I will prepare a meal. Then, when you feel better, we will see what can be done. If you will tell me your story, I will see what I can do to help you."

The girl nodded, and lay down upon the ground. She was utterly worn out and exhausted. Buffalo Bill busied himself building a fire of dried twigs and boiling some water from the stream to make the girl a cup of coffee. He always traveled with his saddlebags well supplied with the necessities for camping out.

After she had drunk the coffee and eaten some jerked meat and biscuit, the girl said that her faintness had completely passed away and that she felt ready for anything. Nevertheless, she seemed shy about telling her story; and the knight of the plains delicately refrained from pressing her to do so. But at last, after a long pause in which he pretended to be busy with other things in order to avoid embarrassing her, she began:

"You know that I am an Indian girl—a half-breed; and you must wonder what led me to go among those rough miners dressed in a man's clothes. But I think, when you have heard my story, you will say that I did right."

"I am sure of that already," said Cody gallantly. "There is no need for you to justify yourself to me. I only want you to tell me your story in order that I may be able to help you, for you plainly stand in need of help."

"Alas, I do!" sighed the girl. "As you have guessed, I am Prairie Flower, the daughter of Black Arrow, one of the Comanche chiefs."

"I have met him and smoked the peace pipe with him when I dwelt in the lodge of Loud Thunder," said Buffalo Bill.

The girl went on to tell the king of scouts the story he already knew, of the mutual love of herself and the Red Whirlwind, and Loud Thunder's opposition to it. It appeared that when the young warrior departed, she became alarmed for his safety among the palefaces, and she ran away from her father's lodge to try to find him.

"Do you know where Red Whirlwind is now?" asked Buffalo Bill eagerly. "I am seeking for him. His father has repented, and wants me to bring him back to the village. He is willing now that you should be married."

"Alas!" said the girl. "~~I do not know~~ where he is.

He sent me a message by a wandering brave of our tribe from Dallas, saying that he thought of trying his luck in the mining district around Lone Dog. He knew the ways of the white people, as I did myself; for I, too, have lived among them.

"I was growing more miserable every day in my father's lodge. I could not work; I could only sit still and worry about him, wondering what dangers he was falling into among the palefaces.

"At last I could stand it no longer. I made up my mind to leave my people and go among the palefaces in search of him, for I feared that all kinds of dreadful things might be happening to him in the mining settlements, where Indians are not loved. I got to Dallas safely, traveling in the disguise of a boy. There I met Comanche Bill. Do you know him?"

"Yes—a little," said Buffalo Bill, smiling grimly.

"When he learned I was a Comanche—a young brave, as he thought—we became friendly. I asked him if he knew anything of my lover, whom he had met a few years before in the village of Loud Thunder. That was before he cast off his own people and pretended that he had no Comanche blood in his veins.

"Well, as it turned out afterward, the man was a scoundrel; but I trusted him at first. He discovered that I had a little money, which I had made by selling my ponies and wampum ornaments; and he determined that he would get it from me.

"In order to do this, he pretended that he knew my lover. **The Red Whirlwind**, he said, had been at Lone

Dog, and was expected to return there soon. He had gone on a prospecting tour in the neighboring country. On this pretense he persuaded me to go there, and to pay him all my money for a share in a worthless claim which he had staked out.

"I waited for some time at Lone Dog, working hard at placer mining; but my lover did not appear, and nobody else in the camp had ever heard of him. Yet, from certain things Comanche Bill had let fall, I was convinced that he really did know the Red Whirlwind, and could tell me what had become of him if he chose to do-so.

"I kept asking him to tell me, until at last I suppose he must have thought I knew too much about him for his own good. The result was that he trumped up that charge against me of stealing some of his gold dust."

"It was a frightful charge to bring," observed Buffalo Bill, "for in a mining camp the stealing of dust is looked upon as severely as horse stealing in a ranching district."

"So I found," said the girl. "Unluckily, I happened to have a good deal of gold dust in my tent when they searched it, for I had struck a rich streak the day before and worked hard at it.

"The miners were prejudiced against me because I am not white. Jim Horton and the others at once jumped to the conclusion that I was guilty, and they would surely have hanged me if you had not come into the camp just in the nick of time and saved my life."

Buffalo Bill listened to this story with the greatest indignation. He regretted that he had not sent a bullet through Comanche Bill's head when he had the chance.

He told the girl the story of the duel, and she was immensely delighted to know that the ruffian who had conspired against her life had at last met with his deserts, at least partially.

They sat by the camp fire for some time, discussing the mystery of the disappearance of the Red Whirlwind; but they could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion.

At last Buffalo Bill said:

"Have you ever heard anything about the Hooded Riders since you came to this part of the country? They are a gang of half-breed outlaws," the scout went on, "who have been a great annoyance to the white settlers and have also raided the Indian reservations. I believe that Comanche Bill is connected with them in some way. He knows how very wealthy Loud Thunder is. He knows that the old chief would give any number of ponies and other valuables as the price of his son's life. Is it not just possible that these outlaws have kidnaped the Red Whirlwind and are holding him for ransom?"

The idea seemed to strike the Indian girl forcibly. She pondered over it for a few moments, and then said:

"Yes, I have heard about these Hooded Riders, and I have every reason to believe that Comanche Bill be-

longs to them. Jim Horton told me about them once; and another time Comanche Bill, after he had got into a quarrel with several of the miners, came raging to my tent and said that he was in league with a gang of men who would wipe out the whole camp if only he gave them the word."

"That settles it!" declared the border king emphatically. "I suspected it before, but now I'm morally certain of it. I expect Comanche Bill met the Red Whirlwind in Dallas, made friends with him, and then lured him into the clutches of the Hooded Riders. Probably they are holding him prisoner now, and have sent messengers to Lord Thunder demanding a ransom."

As the likelihood of this theory dawned upon the Indian girl, she looked at the knight of the plains with frightened eyes.

"But they may kill or torture him!" she gasped. "I am a half-breed myself, but I know what half-breeds are. Such men as these are more cruel and savage, as you palefaces would say, than the pure-blooded red men."

"Don't be afraid of that, Prairie Flower," said Buffalo Bill, pretending a confidence which he certainly did not feel. "We whites have a saying that men do not kill the goose that lays the golden egg."

"If they have got him—and we are only guessing that they have, anyway—they must know very well that he is much more valuable to them alive than dead. You may be sure that they will take good care of him

until they hear from Loud Thunder, and perhaps get the ransom they demand."

"Loud Thunder may pay the ransom in order to save his son," said the girl, "but it will be a great blow to his pride. He will not rest until he has taken the scalps of all the Hooded Riders, and he has braves enough in the tribe to do it."

"I believe you, Prairie Flower," agreed Buffalo Bill. "I know Loud Thunder pretty well, and that's the way I read his character, too. If I had been in the place of the Hooded Riders, I certainly wouldn't have meddled with him. He's too dangerous."

"But that's all in the future. For the present, you need not worry about the Red Whirlwind. Things might be very much worse with him, and I've no doubt but that they'll come out all right in the end."

"The best thing I can do, I think, is to take you back to Lucky Valley and leave you in the care of one of the women there. Then I will skirmish around the camps, and it will be hard luck if I don't get some information that will put me on the track of these Hooded Riders."

"No, I can't agree to that plan," the Indian girl protested. "I must go with you and help to search for the man I love. I should wear my heart out at the settlement, waiting and doing nothing. I couldn't stand it for long. I should soon go off alone into the hills, looking for the Hooded Riders."

Buffalo Bill tried to persuade the girl to follow his

original plan, but soon found the attempt vain. She could not be moved. She had made up her mind, and nothing could induce her to change it.

At last the border king reluctantly gave in, and the two mounted their horses and rode onward, through the hills, toward Cedar Hill, the "boom" camp.

CHAPTER XX.

BUFFALO BILL'S PERIL.

That evening, the two pitched a camp in the hills near Cedar Hill. Buffalo Bill, having made his fair companion as comfortable as the circumstances permitted, rode down to the settlement in search of news.

He thought it the wiser course not to take her there, as the fact that she was a woman might possibly be discovered. He found at the settlement that the Hooded Riders were very well known, but nobody could tell him where he was likely to strike them. Their haunts in the hills were unknown, and not even guessed at.

"If we only knew that, stranger," said one burly settler, whom the border king questioned, "you could stake your bottom dollar we wouldn't be long before we smoked the coyotes out of their hole.

"We'd have a party of vigilantes out after them in a brace of shakes; but the trouble is, it's just like chasing a rainbow. You can never tell where they'll turn up next, or where they go to after they commit their depredations. They are cleverer at hiding their trail than even the pure-blooded redskins."

Somewhat disheartened, Buffalo Bill rode back to his little camp in the hills. He saw clearly that he must trust to luck and to his own efforts. The enter-

prise upon which he had entered became more and more difficult the nearer he got to it.

When he reached his camp, he found, to his surprise, that several Indians were there, talking freely and excitedly with *Prairie Flower*. Their horses and pack mules were tethered near by.

Buffalo Bill recognized one of the redskins as *Leaping Fox*, a prominent brave of the Comanches. The others were his wife, his three grown-up sons, and two daughters. Following a track through the hills on a summer hunting and traveling expedition, such as many Comanches and Apaches indulge in, they had come upon *Prairie Flower* sitting by her camp fire, and had been amazed when they recognized in her a maiden of their own tribe.

Prairie Flower explained frankly how she came to be there, and the surprise of the Comanches was not lessened by the tale she told. They were not used to such love as hers. They were accustomed to think of wives being sold as if they were cattle.

That a girl should insist on being married to one particular man, and to no other, amazed them. It was opposed to all Indian ideas, but it was, of course, accounted for by the strain of white blood in both *Prairie Flower* and her lover.

Just as *Buffalo Bill* came up, *Leaping Fox* was trying to persuade the girl to return with him and his family to the Comanche village where her father lived. If the border king had not been present to protect her

in case of need, it is possible that the old brave might have tried to take her there by force.

Cody added his persuasions to those of the Comanche, but in vain.

"I will not go back to my people until I have found my lover and married him," the girl declared, and Buffalo Bill knew by her tone that she meant what she said. "I will stay with Long Hair in the hills and look for him. If the braves of his tribe cannot find him, or will not search for him, I—a weak girl—will do so."

Leaping Fox felt rather uncomfortable under this indirect accusation. He declared that he and two of his sons would stay and help to look for the Red Whirlwind, while the other son took the women to the Comanche village.

But Prairie Flower would not hear of this idea, either; and as she was a masterful young woman she eventually got her way.

She insisted that Leaping Fox should go to the Comanches and bring Loud Thunder, with her own father and a number of braves, to hunt down the Hooded Riders and search for the missing man.

Buffalo Bill told him that the party of braves had better go to Lone Dog and there combine with Wild Bill and Nick Wharton and any party of vigilantes which they might have got together.

He sent letters to his own friends by the Comanche, urging them to make all possible speed to a

rendezvous in the hills, which he appointed; and there join with him in his campaign against the half-breed gang.

"Leaping Fox not like to leave the Prairie Flower in the hills," said the Indian. "She should return to her people and leave the braves to do braves' work. But he knows she will be as safe in the charge of Long Hair as she would be in the hands of her own father; so he leaves her. He will bring Loud Thunder and the braves soon."

The Comanche warrior turned to depart, with his wife and family following him; but Prairie Flower, with a rosy flush mounting beneath her olive skin, called to them to stop.

She drew the three women aside and spoke earnestly in whispers to them for a few minutes. The mother nodded and smiled, and then whispered to her husband.

"Come!" said Leaping Fox, to Buffalo Bill and his sons. "The squaws wish to be alone."

He led them around a corner of the hill trail to a point where they were out of sight of the women. After a wait of about a quarter of an hour, there was a call to them to return, which they did—Buffalo Bill wondering what could be the matter.

To his amazement, he saw that Prairie Flower had discarded her masculine garments, and was attired in the picturesque costume of an Indian maiden of high degree. She was dressed in garments made of the

finest and softest deerskin, and plentifully adorned with beadwork, quills, and wampum ornaments.

She had obtained the clothes from one of the pack mules with the Comanche party. They formed a holiday costume of the wife of Leaping Fox. Buffalo Bill's face showed his admiration of the girl, who looked ten times prettier than before, now that she had clothes which could properly set off her charms; but, nevertheless, he doubted the wisdom of the change.

"We are going to do rough work, Prairie Flower, and we are going among rough men," he said. "Would it not have been better for you to remain in the disguise of a man?"

"I am tired of it," replied the Indian girl. "I want to be my natural self again. Besides, the disguise has not saved me from danger. Was I not nearly hanged at Lone Dog? The miners would not have dreamed of touching me if they had known that I was a woman."

Buffalo Bill had to admit the force of this argument, and he had nothing more to say against Prairie Flower's transformation. After the Comanches had departed, he suggested that it would be well to shift the camp to a better position, instead of having it on the open trail. The girl agreed, and, after searching around for some time, they found a dry, rocky cavern on the side of the hill.

Buffalo Bill examined it thoroughly, by the light of a torch, and found that it was not the den of any wild beast. It was roomy and clean, and the floor was

thickly strewn with dry, sandy dust. A better place to camp in could not have been found.

"We will stay here and make this place our headquarters," said Cody. "The Hooded Riders work in this neighborhood more than any other, so far as I can make out. From the cave we can make excursions around the hills and try to strike on their trail. I can leave a message at that rendezvous I appointed, telling Loud Thunder and my friends to come here to meet us.

"I wonder that such a good place as this has been overlooked by the Hooded Riders. We might have expected them to make it one of their hiding places. But there is no trace of its having been lately occupied. Men have been here before and camped; you can see the traces of their fire there in those blackened stones. But that must have been a good time ago, and probably they were merely wandering hunters or prospectors."

The girl nodded, but did not reply. She was thoroughly tired out with the exertions of the day, and wanted to sleep. Buffalo Bill saw this, and hastened to make up a fire inside the cave. After the girl had eaten her supper, he made a comfortable bed for her out of brushwood and leaves, over which he spread the horse blankets.

In a few minutes she was fast asleep, but the ever-watchful king of scouts did not follow her example. Rifle in hand, he went to the entrance of the cave and took up a position as sentry for the night. He

knew that the hills were full of bears, mountain lions, and other wild beasts; to say nothing of the Hooded Riders, whom he had made his especial foes.

The scout intended to stay on watch until morning. Then he would take a few hours' rest, leaving Prairie Flower on guard, before he resumed his quest. Hour after hour passed without anything happening to disturb the starlit stillness of the night.

At last, when dawn was not far off, the border king put down his rifle against a near-by rock, and got up. He intended to gather some more fuel for the fire. He turned, and had only gone a few paces, when he heard a light scuffling of feet among the loose stones behind him, followed instantly by a low and menacing growl.

Wheeling quickly, he saw by the firelight two huge panthers. He had never seen larger beasts of their kind, nor any that looked more ferocious. They were within a few paces of him, and the nearest one was crouched, as if about to spring.

Instantly, the scout uttered an ear-splitting yell. It was not a cry of terror, but a calculated effort to frighten the panthers back, so that he could dash past them into the cave and pick up his gun and a flaring brand from the fire.

But the animals were not to be scared so easily. They were hungry and ferocious. With a low but terrible growl, the foremost shot straight into the air and leaped for Buffalo Bill's throat.

The scout dropped to the ground, at the same time

instinctively drawing the bowie knife in his belt. The panther went over his head, but instantly turned. The next moment, an excruciating pain in his left arm told Buffalo Bill that the wild beast had sunk its sharp teeth into it.

But there was no time for him to stab at the animal that held and worried him, for the other was now attacking him, and he had to slash at its face to keep it away. Now, indeed, the king of scouts was in the deadliest peril. There is little doubt but that he would have perished had not Prairie Flower come promptly to his rescue.

She had been awakened by his cry when he first saw the panthers, and it only took her a second or two to realize the position, for she came of a race which was trained from childhood in all the perils of the chase and of war.

There was a hatchet lying on the ground near by the entrance of the cave. It was always carried by Buffalo Bill, attached to his saddle, for it proved invaluable in wooded country. Now it came in for a new use.

One panther had Buffalo Bill by the arm, while he was slicing into the other; and then the Indian girl caught up the hatchet and sank it in the brain of the beast which held him.

Almost at the same moment, the king of scouts thrust his bowie knife deep into the throat of the panther he was fighting, and it fell over dead, with a

choking growl. Both of the huge beasts had been overcome, but Buffalo Bill had not escaped unscathed from the terrible conflict.

His left arm had been badly bitten by the panther that had held him, and the long, sharp claws of the other had scratched his right leg severely.



CHAPTER XXI.

CAPTURED BY THE HOODED RIDERS.

With the help of Prairie Flower, Buffalo Bill dressed his wounds as well as he could; but in the morning he was annoyed to find that his mauled leg had stiffened so that it was impossible for him to walk or mount his horse without suffering the most excruciating agony.

"Curse the luck!" he growled, after he had made two or three vain attempts to stand upright and walk. "I'm afraid I won't be fit for much to-day, Prairie Flower."

"Lie down!" the girl commanded. "I am skilled in herbs and simples, for I learned much about them from the wise women of the Comanches. I will get you your breakfast, and then go out into the woods in the valley and gather some plants. I can make a lotion and a poultice from them that will soon reduce the stiffness and swellings of your leg."

Buffalo Bill consented to lie down, and allowed the girl to boil the coffee and make breakfast. But when it came to her proposing to leave the cave to go down into the valley, he made a decided objection, urging that she would be exposing herself to too much danger.

Prairie Flower laughed in silvery tones.

"How do you think I managed to live before you met me?" she asked. "Was I not often in danger then? I can look out for myself quite well, for I have been

trained to do so from my youth. Remember, I am not one of those paleface girls who are sheltered and guarded from their babyhood. I am a Comanche—the daughter of a chief and a warrior.

“If I do not gather these simples and attend to your wounds, you will not be able to move for many days. But I can cure you in a couple of days. Is it not well to do so, that we may at once try to find my lover?”

Buffalo Bill had to admit that she was in the right, and reluctantly consented to her going down into the valley. She returned safely in about a couple of hours, and the compounds and lotions she made out of the herbs she had gathered gave great relief to the scout, whose wounds were by this time torturing him.

“Ah, we despised Indians know secrets of medicine that are beyond the understanding of the paleface doctors,” said the girl gleefully. “If you let me attend you for a couple of days, you will be well.”

Nothing happened that day. Following the orders of Prairie Flower, who assumed all the authority of a doctor, Buffalo Bill reclined all day on the bed in the cave.

Next day passed in the same way. On the third day the king of scouts was able to stand and felt very much better, but Prairie Flower insisted that she must go down into the valley again and procure some more herbs to give him one last treatment.

She always collected the herbs every day, for it was necessary that they should be quite fresh; otherwise part of their virtue was lost.

Hour after hour went by, until at last Buffalo Bill grew much alarmed at the failure of the Indian girl to return. What could have happened to her, he wondered.

Toward noon, he could stand the suspense no longer. With infinite trouble and pain, he mounted his horse and rode down to the valley, following the trail which Prairie Flower had made.

He came to the spot where she gathered her herbs, and found a bunch of them lying on the ground. Near by were many hoofprints, and the marks of boots and moccasins.

What had happened was as plain as print to the eagle eye of the knight of the plains. Prairie Flower had been surprised and carried off by a party of horsemen.

"She is in the power of the Hooded Riders!" groaned Buffalo Bill.

But he wasted no time in vain regrets. Mounting his horse—and caring nothing now for the pain that he still suffered from his wounds—he rode swiftly along the broad and easily followed trail which had been made by the party of horsemen.

And, as he rode, he resolved that he would do his utmost to rescue the Indian maiden, single-handed. If he failed, he could at least die with her.

* * * * *

That evening, about forty desperate-looking, hard-featured men were gathered around a big camp fire in a rocky cañon, about twenty-five miles from the cave

where Buffalo Bill and Prairie Flower had established their camp.

A glance at the faces of the men told plainly that they were all half-breeds. Some of them were almost white; others had a distinctly Indian physiognomy, and could hardly have been distinguished from full-blooded redskins.

Similarly, some were attired in the red shirts, hunting jackets, and big boots affected by the white frontiersmen; while others wore a costume that was almost entirely Indian, even to streaks of war paint on their faces and the scalp lock on their heads.

But all of them wore a peculiar hood of black cloth over their shoulders, so arranged that it could be instantly thrown over the head and face, entirely concealing the features.

This was the distinguishing mark of the members of the gang, for they were none other than the infamous and dreaded Hooded Riders, the half-breed outlaws who preyed upon Indians and whites alike.

These men had knocked about the settlements for the greater part of their lives, and had learned the rough dialect of the white men there, as well as the white men's vices. On the faces of all of them were the indelible marks of dissipation, cruelty, and every form of wickedness.

Some of them were feeding and watering their horses; others were stretched by the side of the fire, eating their evening meal and drinking corn whisky

as if it were water. Still others were playing games of chance, with a rough stone for a table.

It was noticeable that these men had their hoods drawn over their eyes when they shuffled and cut the cards. The hoods were not thrown back until every man had drawn his card, when, of course, it was necessary to play and see who the winner was.

These half-breeds were all of them gamblers of the most crooked kind, and they could not even trust one another when it came to a card game. Therefore, they had made the rule about drawing down their hoods, so that the chances for cheating would be reduced to a minimum.

Most Indians are passionately fond of gambling, and these half-breeds had had their original taste for it cultivated by association with the lowest class of white men in the settlements. Presently one of the card players rose up from the ground and exclaimed angrily:

"Curses on the luck! I've lost enough fur to-night! Let's get down to business! Where's the Red Whirlwind?"

He spoke in English, the language always used by the members of the gang in talking to one another. As they hailed from a dozen different tribes, the use of their own dialects would have created a veritable babel.

"He's in the cave, tightly strapped up," replied another of the Hooded Riders. "He's so fierce that we

have to keep him tied with rawhide ropes all the time. We dare not let him loose, even for a minute."

"He's too much trouble altogether," said a third outlaw. "I guess we've waited 'bout long enough fur thet durned ransom from Loud Thunder, Comanche Bill. We don't see it comin' our way."

"What I told you was straight enough, boys," declared Comanche Bill earnestly, for he was the man who said that he had gambled enough for the night. "Old Loud Thunder is the richest chief of the Comanches—the richest chief among all the tribes. He has hundreds of ponies, hundreds of cattle—all the wealth an Indian wants; and he has plenty of the white man's dollars, too. He's so fond of his son that I'll reckon he'll give anything to get him at liberty."

"Waal, we don't see any o' the stuff hyar," growled one of the other men. "We've heard nothing from the second messenger, an' you know the first one was found dead—shot by the sheriff's posse. I don't see the use o' waitin' any longer. Ef we can't get the ransom, we'd better take our satisfaction out of the young brave's hide."

Several of the outlaws sitting around growled out their approval of this bloodthirsty suggestion. They were always ready for deeds of bloodshed and cruelty.

"Loud Thunder is more likely to come after our scalps than give us a ransom," said a half-breed Sioux, who knew something of the warlike fame of the old Comanche.

Comanche Bill made another effort to persuade his

comrades that the ransom would undoubtedly be forthcoming, but he saw that the feeling was against him, so at last he said:

"Very well, then, have it as you like! I'm sure I don't mind. I've got no use fur Red Whirlwind, or any other Comanche brave, either. Loud Thunder chased me out of his village once, and I swore I'd get even with him."

The men gathered in a circle around the fire, and took a vote as to the fate of the captive. With only three exceptions, they all voted in favor of torturing him to death, instead of waiting any longer for the ransom.

As two of the burly ruffians arose from the fire to go to the cave near by and bring out the helpless prisoner to his doom, a young fellow not quite so hardened as the rest interposed.

"Let us give the man a chance for his life!" he urged. "We are all gamblers here, and this is a gamble I want. It will be exciting. Let him play for a delay in the sentence. If he wins, let him have two weeks longer. If he loses, let him die at once."

This proposition appealed to the gambling spirit of the gang, and they applauded it heartily. It was agreed to with hardly a word of dissent.

"Bring out the man, then!" growled Comanche Bill. "We'll let him decide his fate by cutting the deck of cards. I suppose anything he cuts above nine is in his favor, and anything under nine means death?"

The other men nodded their agreement. Before

the order to fetch the prisoner could be carried out, however, there was a sharp challenge from a sentry who had been placed lower down the cañon to guard the camp.

An answer was given—evidently the countersign; and in a few minutes a party of twelve mounted men rode into the camp, with a woman bound to a horse in their midst.

She was *Prairie Flower*—caught by a detachment of the Hooded Riders and now brought into their stronghold. She was under no doubt as to who they were, and she immediately disclosed her identity and begged for the life of the Red Whirlwind, if he was indeed in their power.

As she was dressed in Indian costume, her late partner, Comanche Bill, did not recognize her at first in the uncertain light cast by the camp fire, but he soon guessed that she was the boy of Lone Dog, for he remembered how he had been cross-questioned about the Red Whirlwind by that same half-breed partner.

"You can't hev yer sweetheart," he said, laughing brutally at her distress, "bekase he's just been tried and found guilty by this yer court of the Hooded Riders. He's got ter gamble fur his life. If he wins, he gets time fur his ransom ter come. If he loses—waal, he's got ter die at once, an' I reckon his death won't be specially pleasant."

A few more words from the other outlaws made the position clear to the girl. Their stony hearts were not in the slightest degree touched by her grief. *Prai-*

rie Flower now showed her Indian training. She rose to the occasion with sublime courage.

Wasting no time in tears and entreaties—which she saw would prove useless with such men—she appealed to them on their weakest point, their passion for gambling.

“Let my life be the stake instead of his,” she pleaded. “Give me the cards, and let me cut. If I win, hold us both until we are ransomed, and until you think you can safely let us both go. If I lose, kill me, and hold the Red Whirlwind until he is ransomed. Is not that a fair offer?”

The half-breeds looked at her in amazement. Such sublime self-sacrifice as this was beyond the comprehension of their brutal and selfish minds. Before they could reply, the clatter of a horse’s hoofs was heard coming up the cañon at a terrific pace.

A shot from the sentry’s rifle rang out, but the man evidently missed, for in a few moments Buffalo Bill, mounted on his fine mustang, rode into the circle of light cast by the glow of the camp fire.

CHAPTER XXII.

A GAMBLE WITH DEATH.

The border king was immediately covered by a score of revolvers, but he made no attempt to draw his own guns. The outlaws, amazed by his sudden and dramatic appearance, did not fire; they waited, instead, to see what his mission was—what he had come to say to them.

Buffalo Bill dismounted quietly from his horse, moving steadily and calmly, though his wounded leg still pained him greatly. Then, taking off his sombrero, he walked over to Prairie Flower and greeted her.

"I followed your trail as fast as I could, hoping to catch up with you before they reached their camp," he said. "I should not have let you go down into the valley."

"You should not have risked your life by following me here," exclaimed Prairie Flower. "It is noble of you, but it will cost you your life, alas!"

The outlaws showed signs of interrupting the conversation, but in a few hurried words the Indian girl explained to the scout the compact she had just made to gamble for her lover's life. Buffalo Bill was furious when he heard of it.

"Do you call yourselves men or fiends?" he cried, facing the outlaws with blazing eyes. "I will fight

the whole gang of you here and now if you will let the girl go first."

The half-breeds laughed at him and declined to do anything of the kind.

"Here she is and here she stays, boss," said one of them. "We caught her and we'll keep her. As for you—waal, I reckon we've got you, too."

The dangerous light that flamed in the eyes of the king of scouts might have warned the man not to be too sure of that.

"The gal'll hev ter carry out her dicker, too, as she offered," growled another of the men.

This was the spirit of the rest of the half-breeds, as Buffalo Bill saw at a glance. They were all gamblers to the core, but they had never seen such a stake as a girl's life played for before—and they were not going to miss it.

In the few moments that followed, the border king did the hardest and quickest thinking that he had ever done in his life. His first impulse was to draw his guns and fight the whole band of outlaws. But a moment's reflection showed him that, if he did this, the girl's life would almost certainly be sacrificed in the hopeless struggle.

This being so, there was only one thing that remained to be done. He turned to Comanche Bill, who had been watching him with a look of the deadliest hatred in his eyes, and said:

"Look here, Comanche Bill, I know you don't bear

me much good will for what I did to you at Lone Dog."

"I reckon not," growled the bandit.

"Then let me put my life on the gamble, instead of the girl. I will cut the cards, if the gang will let her go free."

Comanche Bill longed to take a shot at the man who had humiliated him, but he feared that Buffalo Bill would be too quick for him, and that he would contrive to kill him, even though he was in his own death agony.

"I ain't got no objection to that," he growled. "Cut the cards if yer like—an' I hope ter thunder ye lose!" he added, with a string of frightful oaths.

But some of the other outlaws would not agree to this proposal. They urged that the girl had first offered to place her life upon the hazard of the cards, and that, therefore, the girl must draw. After arguing for some time, Buffalo Bill gave up and said:

"Very well, then, let us both cut—the two of us—in order to see who shall be the one to gamble for life or death."

The outlaws wrangled again over this suggestion, which was exactly what Buffalo Bill wanted. He was anxious to hold them in talk as long as possible and gain time.

Long experience amid the dangers of the frontier had taught him that the gaining of time when in a perilous position generally meant the difference between life and death.

Besides, he guessed that Loud Thunder, with his Comanche braves, and Wharton and Hickok, with some of the men of Lone Dog, were probably even now in the hills, looking alike for him and for the Hooded Riders.

Leaping Fox, the Comanche, must have delivered his message and letters some time ago. At last the half-breeds came to an agreement. They decided to do what the border king had suggested. It would prolong the agony of the fatal gamble, and therefore gratify the more keenly their depraved passion.

"You must be blindfolded," said one of the gang, coming up to the side of the king of scouts. "It is one of our strict rules that, whenever a gamble is on, not only the parties who are playing, but everybody else who is present, must have their eyes concealed. By this rule, we try to do away with the chance of cheating."

"That rule shows you are not able to trust one another very much," sneered the border king, as the man tied a handkerchief tightly across his eyes.

Two of the half-breeds then took hold of Buffalo Bill and Prairie Flower, and led them to the big, flat stone which served for a gambling table. They sat down beside it, and one of the men placed a deck of cards between them, shuffling it as he did so.

"Highest wins—lowest gambles again," he announced.

"Shall we make it the best two out of three?" sug-

gested the king of scouts, still anxious to gain time, if only a few moments.

"Sure—if you like," replied the man, drawing back a few paces, and leaving the two players seated alone in the midst of the ring of half-breed outlaws.

A handkerchief had been tied over Prairie Flower's eyes, and all the outlaws had drawn their hoods over their heads, in obedience to their rule. There was thus nobody in the encampment who could see, except the two sentries posted at either end of the cañon, each about three hundred yards from the camp fire.

It was a curious sight, awe-inspiring and weird, if any of those who were present could have witnessed it. Buffalo Bill delayed as long as he could, but at last, in obedience to the muttered commands of the outlaws, he groped for the deck lying on the stone before him, and drew out a card.

"Try to be as slow as you can," he whispered to his companion. "Whatever may be the result of this gamble, I don't suppose that they will willingly allow either of us to leave their camp alive. It would be too dangerous to them. But help may come to us, if we can manage to gain time. Our friends must be on the trail."

"What in thunder are ye sayin' ter the gal?" cried one of the half-breeds suspiciously, stepping forward as he heard the whispered tones.

"I was simply inviting her to draw her card," Buffalo Bill replied readily.

"Ye're both a thunderin' long time!" yelled the man. "This yer game is too durned slow!"

At this, Prairie Flower drew a card out of the pack, turned it, and laid it face downward on the stone, beside that which Buffalo Bill had already drawn.

"We've both drawn for the first time," cried the king of scouts. "Let us see what it is. This game is certainly interesting, even if one's life has to pay for it."

"You're a good gambler, stranger," admiringly remarked the man who had just objected to the whispering. He lifted the hood from his eyes, advanced to the stone, and looked at the two cards which had been drawn.

"Seven from the gal, an' a deuce fur the man," he announced. "Thet's one p'int chalked up agin' you, stranger."

"Plenty of time for the luck to change—but this is the way I would have it go," replied Buffalo Bill calmly.

As slowly as they could, the two strange adversaries drew again from the deck. This time the king of scouts had a queen and the girl had an ace.

"The ace counts low in cutting, so the girl loses this trick," said the bandit, who had taken it upon himself to act as a kind of master of the ceremonies.

"I object to that," said Buffalo Bill sharply. "The way I am used to playing, the ace always counts high."

His object was to raise another discussion and still further gain time. The chance of rescue was now a desperate and remote one, but he meant to play that chance for all it was worth.

After a long argument, it was agreed to cut again and rule out that turn.

The girl, however, lost again. She drew a six to Buffalo Bill's ten.

"Level pegging now," said the outlaw, as he picked up the two cards. "The next cut will decide it."

But it did not, for the two players drew level, each getting a ten.

The excitement of the half-breed gamblers was now intense. They had never before seen a game so thrilling.

Buffalo Bill strained his ears, and, at last, just as he was reaching his hand out for the cards again, his wonderfully acute hearing caught the sound of horses' hoofs, far off in the distance down the cañon.

It flashed across his mind, with irresistible conviction, that either the Comanche braves or the miners of Long Dog—or both together—were riding to the rescue.

"Gain time!—gain time!—gain time!"

These were the words that throbbed and hammered in his brain.

"They are coming—I hear them—be as slow as you can!" he whispered to the girl, so faintly that the men around him could not hear.

He knew very well that trouble would break loose

as soon as the half-breeds caught the sound of the horses' hoofs; but he was also aware that his own hearing was much more sensitive than that of most other men.

If he could only delay until the last possible moment, and then make a desperate fight for life, there was some hope that both the girl and himself might be rescued. He slowly drew his card from the deck, and then the girl—heeding his words—pretended to be afraid to finish the gamble.

She put out her hand for the deck lying upon the stone, and then drew it back again. This performance she repeated two or three times, and then she cried out, in a tone of well-affected alarm:

"Oh, I cannot! I dare not! I am too frightened."

The outlaws cursed and stormed at her, for they were anxious to see the end of the game. While the girl was still pretending to hesitate, Buffalo Bill plainly heard the noise of the horses' hoofs coming nearer and nearer.

"Draw the card now," he whispered.

Prairie Flower at once drew a card out of the pack.

"See what it is!" Buffalo Bill said, aloud.

The outlaw who had previously examined the cards threw back his hood again and stepped up to the stone.

"The girl loses!" he yelled.

The words had hardly left his lips when Buffalo Bill tore off the handkerchief from his eyes. Clench-

ing his fist, he sent the half-breed bandit reeling to the ground with a terrible blow behind the left ear.

Then, snatching two six-shooters from his belt, he leveled the shining barrels at the gang of hooded outlaws, and cried in stern and menacing tones:

"I have you all covered! Throw up your hands! The first man who tries to draw, or lift his hood, dies!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

COMANCHE BILL'S ESCAPE.

The outlaws were absolutely paralyzed for the moment by the audacity of the king of scouts. Not one of them attempted to draw his gun or to remove the bandage from his eyes.

The man whom Cody had knocked down was unconscious. Noticing this, Prairie Flower bent down swiftly, removed the revolvers from his belt, and stood on guard by the side of Buffalo Bill.

The scout, wise in the ways of frontier fighting, did not hope that he would be able to hold the half-breeds long in check—and he was right in that supposition. Only a few seconds after the Indian girl had armed herself and come to his assistance, the galloping of the horses up the rocky cañon was distinctly heard by all.

One of the bandits threw up his hood at once, yelling:

"We are attacked!—doomed!"

The words were no sooner uttered than he fell dead in his tracks, with a bullet from one of Buffalo Bill's revolvers in his brain. The next moment the sentry lower down the cañon fired his rifle, which was at once replied to by several shots from the advancing horsemen.

This was more than the half-breed gang could be

expected to endure. Better, they thought, run the risk of being shot down by Buffalo Bill than be caught like rats in a trap by the men who were galloping to attack them.

With one accord, therefore, they flung up their hoods and reached swiftly for their rifles and revolvers. As they did so, Buffalo Bill shot down four of them as quick as lightning; and the Indian girl accounted for another just as he raised his revolver and pointed it at the border king.

The half-breeds replied to their fire with a wild fusillade, but the smoke that now enveloped their two targets prevented them from taking accurate aim. Buffalo Bill felt a bullet cut through the fleshy part of his left arm, with a stinging sensation; but he still kept hold of both his revolvers, and blazed away merrily.

The sound of the horses' hoofs thundered nearer and nearer, and soon a mixed band of Comanches and white men came sweeping up the cañon to the camp fire, shooting at the Hooded Riders from the backs of their horses.

The splendid old Comanche chief, Loud Thunder, was in the lead, with Nick Wharton, Wild Bill, and Jim Horton riding half a length behind him. As they galloped forward, Buffalo Bill flung himself in front of Prairie Flower, just in time to receive in his shoulder a bullet that had been intended for her. Luckily, neither of his wounds was serious.

The Hooded Riders fired several shots wildly at their assailants, but made no real resistance. Outnumbered

and taken by surprise, they broke in panic almost at once and fled to their horses. Their enemies pursued them hotly, shooting down several and capturing more than a dozen.

Only about ten got away, and escaped down the other end of the cañon on their horses. But among this handful, as Buffalo Bill was annoyed to find when he examined the dead and the prisoners, was the arch-soundrel, Comanche Bill.

After the border king had greeted his friends and thanked them for coming to his rescue just in the nick of time, he told Loud Thunder that his son was lying bound, a prisoner, in a cave near by.

The Comanche chief immediately ordered two of the captives to lead him to the place; and they did so at once, for they saw by a glance at his stern-set face that he would stand no trifling.

Buffalo Bill, Prairie Flower, and several of the others followed. The Red Whirlwind—a tall, well-built, strongly framed young warrior—was lying in the cave on a bed of leaves, tightly bound hand and foot by rawhide thongs.

He was emaciated and weak from his long confinement and insufficient food; but he had borne all his sufferings with the stoicism which is second nature to the trained Indian brave, and when he saw his friends and knew that he was safe, his spirits immediately became buoyant again.

He cried out with joy at the sight of his sweetheart and clasped her eagerly in his arms. Nor did his

father, the proud old Comanche chief, make any objection. On the contrary, Loud Thunder looked at the young couple with a grim, amused smile; and then turned to his friend Buffalo Bill, and said:

"Ugh! Need marriage here heap quick!"

"Who's going to perform the ceremony?" asked Buffalo Bill, laughing heartily.

"They needn't wait any longer, pard, if that's their only trouble," said Jim Horton, who was standing by. "Here's their man, ready to tie the knot right now, as fast as ever they want it."

"But can you perform a marriage service, according to the law of the palefaces?" Red Whirlwind asked, looking at the rough miner doubtfully. His association with the whites had taught him something about the intricacies of the American law in regard to weddings.

"Sure I can," replied Jim. "Buffalo Bill here knows that I'm a justice of the peace, an' I reckon I've tied up more couples than any other jestic in this yer blamed State. None of 'em ever objected that I didn't play the game right."

"Then Prairie Flower and I are ready," exclaimed the young brave, gripping him heartily by the hand.

The Indian girl blushed, but, after a little persuasion from her lover, she agreed to have the ceremony performed at once around the camp fire, with her rescuers for the witnesses.

The miners from Lone Dog grouped themselves near by, taking the liveliest interest in the affair. The

Indians, out of respect for Lord Thunder and his son, stood a little distance farther away.

Not one of the miners recognized in the pretty young Indian bride the outcast of Lone Dog, whom they had once wanted to hang. She looked quite a different person in her woman's clothing.

"Who gives the bride away?" asked Jim Horton.

Prairie Flower's father was present among the Indians, but he did not understand what was expected of him. He was dazed by the suddenness of events, and was wondering how many ponies Loud Thunder would give him as the price of his son's bride.

So, as the chief made no motion, Buffalo Bill stepped into the breach.

"I'll give her away," he said, coming forward and taking his girl pard by the hand, with a low, chivalrous bow.

"Are both of the parties over the full age of twenty-one years?" asked Horton, with official solemnity.

The bride and bridegroom looked at one another for a moment in blank dismay. Then Red Whirlwind said:

"Is it the white man's law that we must be that age? I am over twenty-one, but Prairie Flower is only eighteen."

"Then she must hev the consent of her father before I can splice ye," said Jim. "Has she got it?"

As the two lovers gazed blankly at one another, Buffalo Bill again came to the rescue. Going up to Prairie

Flower's father, he explained the position to him in flowery Comanche.

"Ugh!" the old chief grunted. "Let girl go! Loud Thunder give me heap plenty ponies. Better have ponies than girl."

So, on this unsentimental basis, the matter was arranged; and Jim began to recite the fateful words that would make the two one. When he had got about halfway through the ceremony his eyes happened to meet those of the bride, and suddenly he recognized her as the outcast of Long Dog.

He turned as pale as a sheet, and tottered for a moment as if he had seen a ghost. Then he pulled himself together and went on with the service.

When it was over, the miners saluted the bride and bridegroom with a volley from their revolvers, led by Buffalo Bill; while the Comanches loudly whooped and yelled their congratulations. Jim Horton alone refused to join in the general rejoicing. He was very much disturbed by the knowledge that the young "man" whom he had been on the point of hanging at Lone Dog was in reality a girl.

Nothing would console him except to make such reparation as lay within his power. Stepping up to Prairie Flower, who was receiving the warm congratulations of her friends, red and white alike, he offered her his horse whip.

"Lay it on my back good and hard, Mrs. Red Whirlwind," he begged. "I deserve a good flogging for

being such a durned fool as not to know ye when ye war rigged out as a boy."

Prairie Flower looked at him in amazement for a moment. She could not quite understand what he wanted, but when Buffalo Bill explained to her, she burst into a merry laugh and handed the whip back to the chagrined miner.

"I have no quarrel with you," she said. "You have been my very good friend. You have helped to rescue me from my enemies, and you have married me to the man I love. As for trying to hang me—well, I suppose you were doing what you thought was your duty. But I was innocent—I never stole Comanche Bill's gold dust."

"I know that," said Jim, "and I wonder that any of us were ever fools enough to believe that skunk on oath.

"Perhaps your husband would like to oblige by layin' on the whip. No? Waal, then, if no one feels inclined to cowhide me, I'll guess I'll go 'way back an' kick myself!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ATTACK ON LONE DOG.

The miner rose and walked about twenty yards from the camp fire, Buffalo Bill following him.

"Cody," said Jim, when they got out of earshot of the rest, "it ain't easy fur a man ter kick himself. D'ye mind obligin' me by takin' me by the scruff o' the neck an' bootin' me down this yer cañon jest as hard as ye know how? To think thet I was sech a gol-durned fool at my time o' life, sech an' all-fired galoot, as ter take a pretty Injun gal fur a sneak thief!"

Buffalo Bill laughingly declined to do any booting, and, after much trouble, he managed to soothe his friend's wounded feelings.

"But what are we going to do about the rest of that gang?" he asked, when Jim was eventually appeased. "The Hooded Riders are broken up at last, but Comanche Bill and about a dozen of his comrades have managed to get away. We dare not let them go loose. I suppose you must have left Lone Dog almost entirely unprotected, for I see that most of the men are here."

"Yes," said Jim, turning pale, as he began to see the border king's idea.

"Is it not possible that Comanche Bill may attack the place out of revenge?" Cody went on. "He must guess that practically all the men are away from the

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settlement. It is likely enough, I should say, that he will ride there, with his scoundrelly friends, hoping to get there ahead of us, wreak his vengeance, and then get away safely before we return!"

Jim Horton turned as white as a sheet.

"I've got my wife and children down thar!" he gasped. "Thar are only two old men an' a few boys left in the camp. They can't put up much of a fight. We must saddle the horses, an' ride at once."

"We surely must," said Cody. "The idea only just struck me, or I would have spoken before. But the horses had to have a rest, anyway, for they were completely winded when you came to our rescue."

In a few minutes the whole of the party of rescuers—reds and whites alike—were riding at a clinking pace toward Lone Dog. They reached the settlement, by the shortest route, soon after daybreak.

As they drew near it, they heard the sound of firing, which naturally caused them to urge their flagging horses to renewed efforts.

"At them, boys!" shouted Buffalo Bill to the miners, as he saw a small band of men in the distance, circling on horseback around the largest log cabin in the settlement.

Loud Thunder and the Red Whirlwind, yelling the war cry of the Comanches, led their braves to the fight, side by side with the white men. Luckily, the people left in the camp had received timely warning of the approach of Comanche Bill and his half-breed outlaws.

They had all retreated to the village store, a building strongly built of logs; and were there defending themselves as well as they could. Several of the small cabins and shacks in the settlement had already been set on fire by the outlaws, but they had not yet succeeded in storming the store or harming any of the defenders.

When they saw the miners and the Indians approaching to call them to account, Comanche Bill and his little band beat a hasty retreat, galloping off in the direction of Lucky Valley as fast as their horses would carry them.

But they were not to be permitted to escape so easily. White men and redskins were hard in the pursuit. Soon the rank and file were left behind in the mad race. Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, Loud Thunder, and the Red Whirlwind being the best mounted of all the pursuers, drew up to the fugitives.

The four men were outmatched, so far as numbers went; for their adversaries were three to their one. But all of the four were fighting men of the very finest type.

The half-breed bandits turned, like cornered rats, and fought with the desperation born of the knowledge that they could expect no mercy. There was a short, sharp fight, in which some of the other pursuers took part as they came up.

All of the bandits were shot dead, save Comanche Bill, who managed to escape in the scrimmage, and got more than a mile's start before the chase was re-

sumed. Buffalo Bill, Loud Thunder, and his son chased him for two hours, with the others following them a little way behind. They finally ran him down within half a mile of Lucky Valley.

When they galloped up and got the drop on him, he threw up his hands and surrendered quietly.

"I give in to Buffalo Bill," he shouted. "Not to the Comanches. I demand the justice of the white men."

The king of scouts instantly lowered his rifle, and left those of Loud Thunder and the Red Whirlwind pointing at the head of the trapped scoundrel.

"I demand him!" yelled Loud Thunder, in Comanche. "He was born a member of the Comanche tribe; he has sinned against the Comanches; and he shall taste the sting of Comanche justice!"

"You shall have him, Loud Thunder, if you will promise to simply execute him, and not torture him to death," said Buffalo Bill. "If you won't do that, I must claim him; for he surrendered in the first place to me."

Loud Thunder looked chagrined and perplexed, but, after a moment, his brow cleared and he agreed to the condition demanded by the border king. The miners, coming up, wanted to take possession of Comanche Bill and hang him on the spot; but Cody told them of the bargain with Loud Thunder, and they were satisfied.

They knew that the Comanches would be satisfied with nothing less than the death of the man who had

done all in his power to dishonor their nation. Within a few hours, after enjoying the hospitality of their allies at Lone Dog, the Comanches commenced the journey to their village, taking with them their prisoner and the bride and bridegroom.

Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, and Nick Wharton accompanied them. As they rode along together, Loud Thunder said to the border king:

"My medicine men shall celebrate another wedding for the Red Whirlwind and Prairie Flower. The ceremony of the palefaces is good, but it is not enough to satisfy a Comanche. And then, after it is over, this dog of a prisoner shall die the death he deserves!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LOVER KILLS A BEAR.

Next morning they camped in the hills by the side of a stream. There was a large party of the Comanches, and it was necessary to go hunting to get meat for them; as they had been traveling at top speed in the lightest of light marching order.

The three white men, therefore, with Loud Thunder, the Red Whirlwind, and six braves, rode away from the camp to see what game they could find. They knocked over two or three small deer, and presently, as they were fording a little creek, their mustangs began to snort and rear, and to give plain evidence of their unwillingness to go any farther.

This was rather unexpected, as the water was not deep; and their riders looked about them for some explanation of the strange action of the beasts. As they clattered across the loose stones in the bed of the stream, they heard, above the noise made by the rushing water, the snap and clash of teeth and the peculiar, hoglike grunt of a grizzly bear.

Standing straight up on his hind legs, and stripping some bushes of their toothsome berries, the hunters saw a big "silvertip"—about the largest any of them had ever seen. The beast did not seem to be at all disposed to dispute the passage of the stream, but he did appear to be a trifle annoyed at the interruption to his feast.

He uttered a few belligerent growls, but he did not discontinue his meal, going on raking the branches through his open jaws and swallowing berries, leaves, and twigs as if they were all equally tasty.

Upon reaching the other side of the creek, the hunters rode up the bank and onto a level stretch of ground that lay at the base of some foothills.

Although they were fully two hundred yards from the bear, it was evident that his anger at their presence within his neighborhood had not entirely cooled down. The same low growls were borne to their ears, and the grizzly, still standing on his hind legs and devouring the berries, could be seen where his head appeared above the bank of the stream.

The men halted, to consider how best they could attack him. They were all most experienced hunters, and they knew well that an assault upon a grizzly was a most serious proposition, even for a party of well-armed hunters.

Suddenly the Red Whirlwind amazed the rest by begging to be allowed to tackle the grizzly alone. Taking his Winchester rifle—one that he had rescued from the outlaws after the fight—from its saddle sling, he looked at the magazine to see that it was fully loaded.

"Let your son fight the bear," he begged his father, speaking in Comanche. "The face of the Red Whirlwind is covered with shame. He let himself be captured, and his brothers had to rescue him. Suffer him, therefore, to do something to redeem his reputation as a brave."

The stern, Spartanlike Comanche chieftain was delighted that his son should show such a spirit, and gladly gave the desired permission.

"Goldurn the young feller!" growled old Nick Wharton. "I wanted ter tackle thet kafoozlin' beast myself. Grizzlies and me are old enemies. They've pretty nigh chawed me up two or three times."

"It's too late to speak now," said Buffalo Bill. "The Red Whirlwind has the floor, and we can't interfere with his quarry, unless it is absolutely necessary to shoot in order to save his life."

Old Nick knew very well that this was the hunting etiquette of the West, so he was obliged to agree to it, albeit with many grumbles. Seeing that some of his Comanche comrades were examining their firearms, the Red Whirlwind shouted that he did not want help from any one, and that if a shot was fired by any other man in the crowd, that man would have to answer to him for it when the fight with the grizzly was over.

The young brave rode down until he was about one hundred yards from the bear. Then he dismounted, and turned the head of his horse away from the game. As a plucky hunter eager to do a deed that men would talk about, he scorned to attack the grizzly except on foot. It takes a brave man to do this, but the Red Whirlwind was not the sort to shrink from the task.

He stood by the side of his horse, and drew a bead carefully on the animal. The barrel of his rifle steadied down for a brief moment. Then came a puff

of smoke and a sharp report. A second later the straining ears of his companions caught the impact of the bullet as it struck its target with a vicious thud.

The head of the bear fell violently back, as if it had been struck by a sledge hammer.

"Right in the snout!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "The Red Whirlwind knows how to shoot!"

The bear disappeared from view, but a moment later he was seen clambering over the bank. With his jaws open and his hungry claws extended, he came at a swift though ungainly pace toward the young Comanche.

The Red Whirlwind was quick to accept his challenge. He had no desire to dodge the combat—on the contrary, he welcomed it, because it gave him a chance to prove his mettle before his comrades.

Advancing, he leveled his rifle again and fired shot after shot, most of which found their way in the bear's body. The beast staggered and reeled. Blood poured in streams over its fur from many wounds, but it still rushed indomitably upon the man.

At last it was within a few paces of Red Whirlwind, and he had emptied the magazine of his rifle. His horse, alarmed by the firing and by the close proximity of the savage brute, had turned and galloped away, so that he was left without any avenue of escape.

But the young brave would not have mounted his steed even if he could have done so. He had come

out to do or die, and he had no thought of dodging the combat when it became hottest.

He flung his empty and smoking rifle in the face of the bear. It struck the beast violently on its wounded snout, halting it for a few seconds—just long enough to give the Red Whirlwind a chance to draw from his belt the tomahawk which his father had lent to him before the fight.

Bracing himself for the desperate encounter that seemed destined to end in his certain death, the Comanche whirled the weapon above his head and brought it down with terrific force on the bear's head.

The brute reeled, but, with marvelous vitality, recovered itself almost immediately. With one sweep of its terrible paw, it smote the Red Whirlwind to the earth; and in another moment would have torn him to pieces.

But now hunting etiquette was at an end. Half a dozen rifles cracked at the same moment, as the young Comanche fell; and the bear, pierced with several fatal bullets, rolled over dead on the body of his plucky enemy.

The hunters rushed forward, and found that the Red Whirlwind was not seriously hurt. The breath had been knocked out of his body for the moment by the great weight of the falling bear, and he had been slightly mauled by the blow of its paw; but that was all.

The bear was cut up and the meat taken back to the camp. All the rest of the morning was spent in hunt-

ing by the braves, and a large quantity of game brought in. During the afternoon they occupied themselves in drying out jerked meat, as they did not wish to delay their journey to hunt again.

In the evening they had a great feast to celebrate their victory over the Hooded Riders and the rescue of their chief's son. After the feast the warriors indulged in sports and games, chief among which was wrestling.

There was one brave—a minor chief named Bull Horn—who was admittedly the champion of the Comanches at this form of athletic exercise. He stood nearly seven feet tall, and his physical development was nearly perfect. The muscles on his limbs stood out like knotted cords, and the breadth of his chest and shoulders was proportionate to his height.

In all the tricks of wrestling, as the sport was understood by the Indians, he was an expert. One after another, he flung his comrades to the ground as easily as though they were babies.

Even the Red Whirlwind, although a noted athlete among his people, could not stand against this giant. This was hardly surprising, indeed, for Bull Horn had conquered the champions of many other Indian tribes at wrestling matches.

At last, flushed with victory, the giant brave stalked over to where Buffalo Bill and his two friends were sitting, and defiantly asked whether any one of the white men would care to try a fall with him.

Loud Thunder was on his feet in a moment to protest.

"The palefaces are the friends and the guests of the Comanches," he cried. "Be not insolent to them, Bull Horn. They shall not be forced to wrestle with you against their will."

"I did but ask them," replied the giant, rather sulkily. "They are not forced to accept the challenge."

"But I will take it," said Buffalo Bill, rising to his feet.

"Don't do it, Cody," urged Wild Bill Hickok, catching him by the arm. "I know you're a great wrestler, but that fellow is simply a marvel at the game. If you are beaten, it may hurt our reputation among these people."

"I won't be beaten if I can help it," replied the king of scouts, "and I certainly shan't back down now."

"Not on yer life, Bill!" said Nick Wharton, encouragingly. "Go ahead! You kin down thet red-skinned varmint, I calc'late!"

The two wrestlers faced one another in the ring of dusky braves assembled around the camp fire. In the front row, looking on eagerly and praying for the victory of Buffalo Bill, her preserver, was Prairie Flower. As the contest was about to start, she beckoned to the king of the scouts, and he walked over to her.

"Attack him, Long Hair!" she whispered. "Do not wait for him to get a hold on you. Attack him at once. He is weakest then."

Buffalo Bill nodded to show that he understood her

and would follow her advice. It chimed in exactly with the opinion he had formed, from watching the wrestling of the giant with the other Comanches.

As the two men circled around one another, watching for an opening, nearly all of the spectators thought that the result of the contest was a foregone conclusion.

The Comanche towered above Buffalo Bill, although the latter was much above the average height, and he seemed to be a man of far greater strength.

This superiority, however, was apparent rather than real; for every muscle and sinew of the border king's athletic body had been toughened by long years of hard work and open-air sport all along the Western frontier.

Suddenly Buffalo Bill darted forward, and, eluding the attempt of his adversary to clutch him, caught a good hold round the waist—a hold which he knew, by experience, to be almost always decisive.

It proved to be so in this case. The men swayed violently for a few moments, and then the champion of the Comanches stretched his huge length heavily on the ground. His comrades yelled with delight, drowning the cheers of Wild Bill Hickok and Nick Wharton. All the Comanches were overjoyed at Buffalo Bill's victory, for they felt that their champion badly needed "taking down a peg or two."

Bull Horn was on his feet again in a moment, ready for another tussle. But he fared no better in his second attempt. The border king was as strong as his

opponent, and knew a great deal more about the science of wrestling. For a second time, the giant went to the ground—and he did not try again.

"Wah!" he exclaimed. "Long Hair is the greatest of all braves. No man can stand against him. Bull Horn says he is master. Bull Horn will follow him to battle some day, and take many scalps."

Then the Comanche giant sat down calmly in the circle, heedless of the gibes of his fellows. Like all truly brave men, he knew when he had met his match, and he did not mind owning up to it. Soon the camp was wrapped in slumber, only a few sentries remaining awake.

The dawn of day brought with it a great surprise and a great sorrow. Neither Comanche Bill, the bandit captive, nor Prairie Flower was anywhere to be seen.

The prisoner had managed to release himself from his bonds in the night; and, as the marks on the ground clearly showed, had crawled through the grass and silently stabbed two of the sentries. Then he had gone back to the camp, probably bound Prairie Flower while she slept, and carried her off.

Two horses were missing from the corral. Comanche Bill had taken them. The wrath of Loud Thunder and the grief of his son were intense; but they were speedily swamped by a stern desire for vengeance, and steps were at once taken to follow swiftly on the trail of the escaped outlaw.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE TRAIL.

About noon on the following day, still following the tracks made by Comanche Bill, the pursuing party pulled up at the door of a settler's cabin. They wanted some water for their horses, and also as much information as they could get about the fugitive and the girl he had abducted.

Buffalo Bill, thinking that the people in the cabin might be alarmed at the sight of so many Indians, even though they were not in war paint, rode forward to parley. There was nobody in sight but a matronly woman who looked as if she had been born and bred in the West.

"Who aire yer red friends, stranger?" she asked, facing the king of the scouts boldly. "Do they happen ter be ferocious savages on the warpath, lookin' fur scalps?"

"Not at all, madam. They are perfectly harmless. They are Comanches—allies of the whites. They will not trouble you in any way. I take it that you are a widow living alone here."

"Yes, I'm a sort of a widow," replied the woman. "But I don't live alone. I'm a woman with five strap-pin' big sons ter take keer of her."

"Indeed!" said Buffalo Bill. "But where are they? They don't seem to be around here anywhere just now."

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"No, they ain't. My son Tom has dun gone over ter the settlement ter see the critter what traded mewls with him last week, an' didn't say nuthin' 'bout his mewl bein' blind in one eye. If he trades back, thar won't likely be any fussin'. If he don't—waal!

"Joe, he's gone down ter the bend ter look fur a wild cat thet was heard yellin' last night. If thet cat jest lays down an' dies, it'll be all right. If not—waal!"

"Yes? And what about the others?" asked the border king.

"Waal, thar's my son Jim. He's down ter the village, ten miles off, lookin' fur one of the Johnson boys who wants ter run him a foot race fur ten dollars. If Jim beats him, I'm ter hev a new kaliker dress. If young Johnson beats, I reckon they'll hev ter dig lead outer him."

"My son Dick got up early an' went up the mountain arter corn. It's corn he won at a shootin' match, an' mebbe the other feller won't let go. Dick took his shotgun along. My son Abe has gone down ter the river arter fish. If he has luck, he'll be mighty good-natured, but if he don't he'll likely pick a fuss with one of the Harpers. Thet accounts fur the hull o' the boys."

"They all seem to be strenuous!" remarked Buffalo Bill. "Then it's a sort of holiday to-day with your menfolks?"

"Yes, sorter; but nuthin' ter brag of. They're gwine ter take a real holiday next week."

"Picnic or camp meeting?"

"Sorter that way, stranger. The five of 'em are gwine over ter hev it out with the five Robinsons before takin' holt of the fall work. It'll be a sorter picnic, camp meetin', leckshun day, Fourth of July, an' shootin' match all rolled inter one—with funerals to follow.

"Say, if you meet any of my folks along the trail, you'd better make your Injun pards dodge inter the bushes an' lie close, fur they ain't got no use fur redskins. This is just the time when they gets cantankerous an' wants ter peel the bark off'n somebody, anyway."

"I guess we can look out for ourselves, mother," said Buffalo Bill, laughing heartily.

"Waal, an' who may you be who's so mighty sure of thet?" asked the woman, looking at him curiously.

"My name is William F. Cody, madam—at your service," replied the scout.

The name and fame of the border king had penetrated even to that remote spot, and the woman looked at him now with sudden respect.

"I guess you kin, Buffler Bill," she said. "What might hev brought you down to this yer section with yer Injun friends?"

Buffalo Bill explained how they were trailing down Comanche Bill, and the woman at once said that a man had passed there a few hours before, leading a horse on which sat an Indian girl who seemed to be half dazed and unconscious of what was going on.

Running out from her cabin, she had called out to the man; but he had merely turned round in his saddle and sworn savagely at her.

"An' I believe he'd hev cut my throat, Colonel Cody," she added, "if he hadn't seen that I had a gun in my hand. If only the boys had been here, I'd hev made them hold him up until he gave some account of himself. But what could a lone widder do?"

Buffalo Bill rode back to his companions, who had halted a little distance off, and told them the news. After they had watered their horses and heartily thanked the widow, they pushed on at top speed.

They had not traveled more than a dozen miles before they came to a narrow cañon, the sides of which were steep and densely covered with timber.

As they were passing through it, there was a sudden fusillade of shots from the cover on either hand; and the next moment the ear-splitting war cry of the Apaches rang in their ears.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FIGHT IN THE CANON.

When Prairie Flower awoke to consciousness from the dastardly blow which Comanche Bill had dealt her while she slept, she found that she was being borne swiftly away from the camp of her people on the front of the saddle of the outlaw's horse.

As soon as she realized the situation she struggled furiously—but in vain. Comanche Bill was a man of great strength and almost inconceivable brutality. He struck her again and again until she was dazed and dizzy, and then forced her to mount the horse he was leading, and tied her ankles beneath it.

"If you try to escape, or cry out when we meet anybody, I will kill you," he threatened, menacing her with a rifle which he had stolen from one of the Comanche sentinels he had stabbed.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked the unhappy girl.

"I am going to take you far away from the lodges of your people, and make you my squaw. You, the pride of the Comanches, shall be my slave! That will be a fine revenge on the Red Whirlwind and all the tribe for what they have done to me."

Prairie Flower shuddered at these words, but she had been trained in a stern school, and she was too true an Indian to lose heart or courage.

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"I will never be your slave," she replied calmly. "I can always die."

Comanche Bill swore savagely, and struck her several times violently with the mule quirt which he carried on the bow of his saddle. The girl laughed at the blows, though they hurt her painfully.

"My people will pay you for this," she said. "They are following on your trail even now. When Loud Thunder catches you, it will not be an easy death that you will die."

Mile after mile the ill-assorted couple sped on, until the girl's senses were reeling and she swayed from time to time in the saddle. But she strove still, with all her might and main, to retain consciousness, and to be ready to seize the first chance of escape.

At last they reached a rocky cañon, and at the entrance to it they were abruptly held up by a party of thirty Apache warriors, who were out hunting in the hills.

Comanche Bill recognized in the chief who commanded the party an old acquaintance of his, and he at once claimed friendship. When the Apaches heard that a party of Comanches, not any more numerous than themselves, were following him, they were intensely interested.

The Comanches were their bitterest foes, and again and again they had been worsted in combat with them. Now they thought they saw a chance to get a little revenge, which would be doubly sweet if only they

could secure the scalp of the famous old chief, Loud Thunder.

"Ugh!" said the chief of the Apaches. "We will take cover in the bushes. The Comanches will ride into the cañon, following your trail, and we will shoot them down as if they were deer."

He gave a few brief orders to his braves, and in a few moments there was not an Apache to be seen.

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As soon as he heard the shots in the cañon and saw some of the Comanches fall, Buffalo Bill reined up his horse beside Loud Thunder.

"What shall we do, chief?" he cried. "Ride on, and get through; or dismount and fight them in the timber?"

"Fight!" yelled the old Comanche, the fire of battle gleaming in his eye. "Loud Thunder never fled from the Apaches, and he never will."

Suiting the action to the word, he leaped from his horse and dashed toward the point from which the flashes of flame had darted thickest. Buffalo Bill raced side by side with him, firing rapidly from his magazine rifle as he ran.

The other two whites were at his heels, and the Comanches charged with desperate valor at every bush from which a shot came. The Apaches were disconcerted by the rapidity and resolution with which this counterattack was delivered.

Their ambush had not been so successful as they had imagined it would be. They were not particularly

good marksmen, and so they had not managed to shoot down many of their foes at their first volley.

In a few moments the warring redskins were at close quarters. Rifles were no longer used. Tomahawks and scalping knives did their deadly work. The Apaches were not only outnumbered, but they were outfought.

Loud Thunder's men were the very flower of the warlike Comanche nation, and they had three splendid leaders in the old chief himself, his son, and Buffalo Bill.

A few of the Apaches managed to flee through the timber and get safely away; but the greater part of their little force were shot down or tomahawked. But the joy of the Comanches and their white allies at this triumphant ending to the fight was largely tempered by disappointment when they found that Comanche Bill and his girl captive were nowhere to be found.

The outlaw had fled onward up the trail before the fight began, dragging his prisoner after him. Staying only to scalp their dead foes, the Comanches found his trail and pursued it relentlessly.

"We will catch him and save Prairie Flower if we have to follow him for a year," said Buffalo Bill.

"Ugh!" remarked Loud Thunder. "And when we catch him——"

The old chief did not finish the sentence, but he drew his bloodstained scalping knife from its sheath, and looked at it significantly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE END OF COMANCHE BILL.

But Comanche Bill had gained a good start, and the chase was a long one. All night the pursuers rode, and when dawn came they knew they were gaining rapidly on him; for the trail grew fresher and fresher.

It wound higher and higher through the hills into the mountains, and the narrow track up which they urged their flagging horses became more and more stony and rugged. At last, about nine o'clock in the morning, they ran their quarry to earth.

Turning round a sharp bend in the trail, they saw Comanche Bill about a quarter of a mile ahead of them. He had halted, and the reason for his doing so was obvious. His horse, pushed beyond the limit of its endurance, had dropped dead on the trail.

The half-breed, whose hand had been—like Ishmael of old—against every man, had at last come to the end of his tether. With a sullen, baleful glare he watched his foes as they came round the turning, Loud Thunder and Buffalo Bill in the lead.

Quick as thought, he placed Prairie Flower, who was bound hand and foot, in front of him; so that the pursuers would not dare to shoot.

"Go back!" he yelled, as his enemies drew near him, watching intently for a chance to aim. "Go back, or I will kill her."

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"Better that she died than remained in your power," cried Loud Thunder.

"The game is up, Comanche Bill," said Buffalo Bill quietly. "You may as well throw up your hands and surrender."

"Never!"

"You have no chance."

"No, but I'll die here in my tracks. I won't be bound to the stake to make sport for the squaws in a Comanche village. And I'll kill the girl before I go, unless you promise to give me my life if I set her free. Will you do that? I'll take your word, Buffalo Bill."

But the border king was not able to give it. If his party had been composed entirely of white men, such a bargain could have been made, and probably would have been kept. With the Comanches it was different.

All of them, save the Red Whirlwind, would rather have the scalp of their deadly enemy than save the life of a squaw—even though that squaw was Prairie Flower, the pride of the tribe.

This was shown by the next words that Loud Thunder uttered.

"Charge him!" he shouted, drawing his own tomahawk and dashing forward.

Instantly Comanche Bill lifted the girl above his head and flung her over the sheer precipice by the side of the trail.

Next moment he fell, pierced by several bullets, and

in a few seconds he had been hacked to pieces by the knives and tomahawks of the Comanches.

With a cry of grief and horror, the Red Whirlwind rushed to the edge of the cliff, expecting to see the mangled form of his wife far below. But the vengeance of Comanche Bill had failed of its deadly purpose.

At the foot of the cliff, forty feet below, there was a small but deep lake, into which the girl had fallen. She had received no harm by the fall, but was in danger of drowning.

Buffalo Bill, looking over, saw this, and without a moment's hesitation, dived over the precipice into the water to save her. This was a task which he easily accomplished, as, in addition to his other athletic talents, he was a fine swimmer.

The Comanches reached their home without further adventure, and the Red Whirlwind and Prairie Flower were then married again according to the rites of their tribe.

For Buffalo Bill, however, there was little rest. He had scarcely finished helping the Red Whirlwind, when he received a message urging him to report, with all speed, at the Arapahoe reservation, where his master mind was needed to solve one of the greatest mysteries of the frontier.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DANGEROUS QUEST.

Richard Eale, government agent and superintendent at the branch Arapahoe reservation, stepped out of his office and looked down the dusty road which led to the southeastern hills. "He's behind time," he muttered, "and that's strange."

There was something more than disappointment in his expression. There was uneasiness. "It would be terrible if he—— Ah, there he is now."

The cloud left his face and he began to whistle a lively tune.

A horseman was approaching the agency. He was coming at a furious gallop, and the pony was covered with dust and foam when its master brought it to an abrupt standstill in front of the agent.

The rider dismounted and addressed Eale with a laugh: "Made a late start, Dick. Had to. The colonel wanted to see me before I left, and I had to wait for him. There was a little dance last night, and the old man stayed up late, and as a consequence overslept himself."

Eale smiled.

"I know the old boy. He's sixty, and wants to be as frisky as his youngest lieutenant. But it's all right. You are here and I am satisfied."

After an Indian had led off the pony the two men

entered the office, which was on one side of the store. There was a little washroom at the rear, and pointing toward it, the agent said: "I think the water in there is calling to you. Go in and reduce your weight. I'll wait here."

The horseman was gone about fifteen minutes. When he returned to the office his handsome face was clean and shiny.

"Now, Cody," said Eale seriously, after cigars had been lighted, "I'll come to business. You have been told that I need the services of a bold, shrewd, determined man, but you have not been told what the services are required for. It is a very strange, and, I may truthfully say, a horrible matter."

Buffalo Bill flicked the ashes from his cigar. "Somebody has been killed, I suppose," he said.

"There has been more than one murder, Cody, and if you tackle the case you will run a terrible risk.

"Get to the point, Eale. What is the case?"

"It is one of mystery and no mystery. We know how and by whom the men were killed, but we do not know whether the murderer is man, devil, or beast."

"You have excited my curiosity. I am anxious to hear more. Hurry up with your story."

"During the past two months," Eale continued, "seven white men, three of them employees at this agency, have been put to death in a horrible manner. Twice the assassin has been seen, once in the act of

murder and once as he or it was retreating from the scene of the crime."

"How did he or it look?"

"Like a monstrous tarantula. You have heard of or seen the gigantic turtles brought to this country from the Gallapagos Islands. Imagine a tarantula-shaped horror of the size of one of those turtles. Well, this hairy, creeping creature lives somewhere in the mountains to the west, and on the trail every one of the seven men have been slain. The body of each victim was horribly mutilated. Death was caused by strangulation."

"When did the last murder occur?"

"Only three days ago. A teamster, named John Dent, was the victim. He was on his way to Helena, Montana, and had camped for the night in a cañon, through which flows a tributary of the Snake. He was attacked in the morning, after breakfast, and the attack was witnessed by a government rider from a bend in the trail high up on the mountain. The rider was frightened half out of his wits and rode like the wind to the agency."

"And you want me to find and capture the slayer?"

"Yes. It's a thundering nasty job to undertake, but somebody must tackle it, for there is a reign of terror in these parts, and the cañon trail is not doing any business."

"What's your opinion, Eale? Is this creeping terror a white man or an Indian?"

"I have no opinion. The thing's face has never been seen by any one."

"It's one or the other," said Buffalo Bill, with positiveness. "No spider ever grew to the size of a large man. The creature is human. He, for, of course, it's a man, may be mad, but there is method in the madness. I'll take the job, Eale, and——"

He ceased speaking, for a woman on horseback had just turned into the road from the thoroughfare running between lines of tepees. There was a look of horror on her face, and she was unable to speak when she confronted the agent, who with the king of scouts had rushed to the door to meet her.

Buffalo Bill assisted her to dismount. She was trembling all over. The agent got a glass of water, and after she had taken a few swallows her voice came to her.

"My father," she began, and then stopped, gulped down a sob, and continued: "He is dead. A horrible thing killed him this morning."

"On the cañon trail?" asked Eale quickly.

"Yes, and—and"—she covered her face with her hands—"I saw the murder done and could do nothing. I screamed and tried to get to the spot, but I couldn't."

It was some time before she was able to give a coherent account of what had occurred. She was not more than eighteen years of age, and very comely. Her hands were rough from the effects of hard work, her dress was plain, and her face browned by the sun, but

there was a certain air of refinement about her, and her speech showed neither illiteracy nor provincialism.

"I was born a few miles out of St. Louis," she began, "and lived there until a month ago, when father, who had sold his farm, concluded to go to Idaho. My mother died many years ago, and I am the only child. Last night we camped in the cañon, near the banks of a stream. This morning I went up the trail to gather some wild blackberries I had noticed the afternoon before as we were approaching our camping place. I had gone about half a mile, when I heard my father cry for help. I ran down the trail until, through an open space, I could see the camp. My father was on the ground struggling with some horrible thing that looked like a monster tarantula. I screamed and tried to advance, but my feet refused to obey my will. I fell to the ground and screamed and screamed. At last I managed to crawl forward. I had my pistol, and I fired at the thing, who was then tearing at my father's throat and making strange, discordant noises. The bullet may not have struck the thing, but the report of the pistol had the effect of scaring it away. It bounded from the body of my father and was out of sight in the brush before I could fire again.

"I went to the scene of the struggle. My poor father was dead. He had been strangled, and—and, oh, I can't tell you any more." She looked piteously at her auditors.

For a few moments nothing was said. Then Buffalo Bill asked: "Did you see the face of the thing?"

"Yes. It was covered with black hair, all except the nose. The nose was red, very red, and was long and aquiline. The eyes were small and the expression was demoniacal."

"An Indian, probably," said Eale. "And that reminds me, Cody: The Shoshones, who have a village in a little valley over the hills beyond the cañon, are reported to have indulged recently in ghost dancing in honor of the Black Spider. The dancing means more, as you must know; it means war."

"I thought the Shoshones were preparing to come into the reservation, Eale?"

"So they were, but since this monstrosity has been cutting up they have begun to sing a different tune. I heard of the change two days ago, just after I had sent for you, and a messenger was instantly dispatched to notify Colonel Hoskins."

"Whom did you send?"

"Yellowstone Mose."

Buffalo Bill looked grave.

"I should have met him while on my way here, but I did not do so. What pony did he ride, the black or the chestnut?"

"Neither. Both are in pasture. The case was urgent, so he borrowed a pony of old Scar Head."

"I remember it—mouse color with a white face. Eale, I saw that pony two hours ago. It was without a rider and was in a hollow below the trail, saddle on, and munching bunch grass."

The girl, who had been weeping silently, raised her

head. "I saw that same pony yesterday afternoon," she said.

"With or without a rider?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Without a rider. It was in the bed of the cañon and acting very strangely. It was walking round and round a small tree. There might have been something at the foot of the tree, but from my position on the trail I could not observe what it was. Father would have stopped and investigated, if he had not feared that too much time would be lost. He wanted to reach a camping place before dark, and it was then within an hour of it, and we were several miles from the place that had been recommended to us."

"Strange that the pony should have been in the cañon," said the king of scouts. "It should have been on the trail to the fort, and that is in another direction. Mose started from here, didn't he?"

The answer increased Buffalo Bill's gravity.

"No," said Eale, "he started from the cañon. There is a cut-off leading from the cañon to the fort trail, and as an hour at least might be saved, Mose took it. I did not see him at all. He was in the cañon, looking for the Spider, when I made up my mind to post the colonel on the actions of the Shoshones. I sent out an Indian with written instructions for Mose. The Indian came back and said that he had found the scout, had delivered the instructions, and that Mose had set out for the fort."

"He will never reach there," said Buffalo Bill. "The Creeping Terror has got him."

The girl shuddered. Eale's face paled. The king of scouts got to his feet. His expression was hard, merciless.

"I am going down to the cañon and investigate. If Mose is dead, the thing that killed him is my meat, or I'll count as another victim. Mose was my friend. He was a good man. I could say more, but I reckon you know my mind, Eale."

The agent nodded. Then he said:

"Don't go alone, Cody. Take some of the redskins with you. They are all good trailers."

"All right; give me three. Your team is all right, isn't it?" he said to the girl. "We will want it to bring in the bodies."

"The wagon is there and one horse. The one I rode is the other."

"Then we will take that along with us. Now, I'll have you describe the place where you saw Yellowstone Mose's pony."

The description was given, and soon afterward Buffalo Bill, accompanied by three Arapahoes, set out for the cañon.

At the camp the body of the dead farmer was found. It was horribly mutilated, and Buffalo Bill, gazing at it, was sharply impressed with the danger of the undertaking he had set out to accomplish. And this impression was accentuated when, at some distance down the cañon, at the spot indicated by the girl, he came upon another dead body, with the mutilation

even more pronounced than in the case of the farmer. The body was that of the old scout, Yellowstone Mose.

Buffalo Bill did not attempt to control his emotions at the sight. The Arapahoes, usually stolid and self-contained, were wrought up to such a pitch of horrified excitement that they refused to touch the body. Expostulations, threats, failed to move them, and Buffalo Bill was compelled to carry the remains of his old comrade to the farmer's wagon.

When the team was ready to leave he asked one of the Arapahoes to drive it to the agency. The Indian refused, saying that if he did so the Black Spider would find and kill him.

"Him Shoshone," he said, "and Shoshone no like Arapahoe since Arapahoe go in reservation."

"What makes you think the Spider is a Shoshone?" asked the king of scouts.

"Must be Shoshone. We find tracks go toward Shoshone village."

"There's something in that. Well, if you won't drive, I will."

The bodies were conveyed to the agency, and the funeral was set for the next day. The girl, who gave her name as Ida Small, came out of Eale's office as the wagon approached, and with dry eyes thanked the king of scouts for what he had done.

"I shall cry no more," she said, in a hard voice. "I have work to do, and I am not going to give way while it remains undone."

Not understanding her, Buffalo Bill responded gently: "While I am gone Mr. Eale will look out for you. I am going back to the cañon immediately."

"I shall go with you."

Buffalo Bill looked at her in surprise. "Are you in earnest?" he asked.

"I was never more so in my life. That monster must be killed. You may not be able to find and kill it alone. You will require help. I will give it to you."

The king of scouts shook his head.

"You are courageous, Miss Small, and you would do what you could, but you would probably hinder me in my work. To speak plainly, what you propose is utterly out of the question. I am going out for a scout. I need no help. I want to discover, if possible, where the Spider hangs out. Having made that discovery, I will come back and obtain assistance in routing the thing out. So, you see, you could do nothing in the way of help."

"You may be in danger," she insisted, "and I might be on hand at a critical moment."

"The danger will be small," he replied. "Remember that the victims of the Spider were surprised. They were not expecting an attack. Mine will be a different case. I will be on my guard, for I will be looking for the Spider. If I should see it, I will not be at a disadvantage. I will be armed, and I know how to shoot. On the other hand, the probability is that the Spider carries no arms. Thus far he or it

has fired no shots. In each murder the hands, or claws, have been the weapons of death."

"You refuse, then, to allow me to go with you?"

"I must refuse, Miss Small."

She said no more, and the subject was not again mentioned while Buffalo Bill was preparing to leave.

It was middle afternoon when he rode back to the cañon. At the place where Small had camped he tethered his pony and then started up the cañon, following the trail of the murderer. It was not very clearly defined, and if Buffalo Bill had not been an experienced woodsman he would have failed in the undertaking.

When about three miles from the Shoshone village, and at a point in the cañon where traveling was difficult, his eye fell upon something that made his pulses quiver.

He was in the bed of the cañon and at the foot of an almost perpendicular wall of rock. There were a few stunted trees growing at projections on the wall, and at about two-thirds of the distance to the top was the opening of a cave.

It was a movement at the cave that had startled the king of scouts. He could see neither beast nor human being, but he knew there was a living body within the cave, for there was an agitation, not caused by the wind, of a small bush that partly covered the opening.

Soon from beyond the bush a rock of large size was

disclosed. It had been shoved forward by something or somebody concealed in the cave. Buffalo Bill quickly changed his position, and, as he did so, the rock came down. It struck the bed of the cañon at the very spot that had just been vacated by the king of scouts.

CHAPTER XXX.

ONE SURPRISE FOLLOWS ANOTHER.

Screened from view by a mesquite bush, Buffalo Bill again looked up the wall. He could see the mouth of the cave, but the occupant of it did not appear.

That the huge rock had been dropped for a murderous purpose the scout was certain. He had been seen as he moved along the bed of the cañon and his death had been resolved upon. Who could the enemy be? Who would be likely to inhabit a cave in such a queer and dangerous place? The Creeping Terror, of course.

The mission that had brought Buffalo Bill to the cañon was accomplished, and yet he was not satisfied. He had found the lair of the murderer, but the murderer had seen him, and if he went away to obtain assistance the horrible creature would, if it possessed a spark of intelligence, move to another retreat.

"I'm in for it, I reckon," the king of scouts muttered, under his breath. "I've got to rout out the murderer this afternoon, or perhaps lose all chance of ever getting at it."

He scanned the surface of the wall and made up his mind that an attempt to scale it would be the height of folly. If let alone, he might be able to reach the cave, but reason told him that he would not be let alone. There were probably more rocks in the cave,

and if he should start to climb the wall another rock might descend to his destruction.

He determined to go farther up the cañon, climb to the top of the bank, where traveling would be easier and safer, and then proceed to a spot directly over the cave, and study out some way of descending.

This plan was carried into effect. On his way, by this roundabout course, to the top of the bank, he kept his eye on the opening, but the occupant of the cave did not show himself or itself.

Lying flat on his stomach, Buffalo Bill thrust his head forward and looked down the precipice toward the cave. What he saw was encouraging. There was a sort of trail winding, in zigzag fashion, from the top to the cavern's mouth. Shallow steps had been cut in the rock and advantage taken of an occasional crevice.

Yes, he could reach the cave, but he hesitated, and well might he hesitate. To go down there would be to engage in the most dangerous undertaking of his checkered life. He might set foot in the opening, but it was certain that he would be instantly attacked. Would he have time to use his pistols? Might not his feet be seized at the moment they reached the cavern floor?

The king of scouts, brave though he was, reckless as he had on many occasions showed himself to be, debated the situation, and the more he debated it, the less inclined was he to make that downward journey. He told himself that it would be the act of either a

fool or a lunatic. The chances were one hundred to one against him.

As he lay there and pondered he saw down in the bed of the cañon the girl whose assistance he had rejected. She had refused to be guided by his advice, or, rather, by his order, and here she was in a position of deadly peril.

She was directly under the cave, when there appeared at the opening a portion of the body of the monstrosity which had been well named the Creeping Terror.

Buffalo Bill saw the hairy head and arms, but not the face, and then gave a shout of warning to the girl. The Terror instantly drew back out of sight, and the next instant the king of scouts felt something heavy upon his back. He tried to turn over, but the weight increased, and strong, murderous fingers clutched his throat.

"Lie still, no kill," said a guttural voice.

Buffalo Bill paid no attention to this command, but struggled fiercely with his adversaries. But they were too many for him, and, besides, he had been taken at a disadvantage. A dozen Shoshones had surprised him, and in the end he was vanquished.

That night he rested a prisoner in the Indian village beyond the cañon. He was stiff and sore from the beating he had received, but he minded not his hurts. All his thoughts were on the girl whom he had seen in the cañon. Had she been killed, or had she re-

ceived the warning in time to make her escape to the agency?

Addressing one of his guards, he asked if the girl had either been killed or captured.

"Go ask Black Spider," was the answer.

"All right. Turn me loose and I will go and ask him," said the scout quickly.

Indians seldom smile. This one did.

"Buffalo Bill heap smart," replied the Shoshone. "Maybe better see Black Spider here."

"Suit yourself. Fetch him along. I reckon it's a 'him'?"

"Don't know. Might be she. Don't know."

"What do you know about this mysterious devil?"

"Know he like Shoshone."

"You said he, and hereafter I'll speak of the thing as a 'he.' Does he speak Shoshone?"

"He no speak at all."

"Deaf and dumb?"

"No, not deaf. You speak, he understand."

"Does he understand English?"

"Same Shoshone, yes."

"Lives in the cave, doesn't he?"

"Some time, not all the time. Some time he go away and be gone two, three months. Come back, want to kill white man."

"How do you know he wants to kill white man? He can't talk."

"No, but he make motions."

"I see. Well, you tell him for me that I would like to see him."

"You see him soon enough. Shoshone give you to him by and by."

This was not encouraging information. Buffalo Bill turned his face away in order that the Indian might not see the expression of horror that was written upon it. Next morning the guard with whom he had talked told him that the Black Spider was in the village and might be expected at the tepee of the white prisoner in a very short time.

The news was gratifying, for Buffalo Bill had the greatest desire to look upon the monster who had murdered so many white men. Half an hour after the announcement there entered the tepee a creeping thing that made the king of scouts shiver as he looked at it.

Shaped like a mammoth tarantula, it was yet a man, for the face was not the face of either reptile or beast. It carried six legs, but Buffalo Bill observed that only four were used. The other two hung loosely from the sides of the body. Long, coarse black hair covered body, legs, and a part of the face. The eyes were small, keen, and savagely expressive. The nose was long and hawklike.

Shuffling along the floor, the hideous monster stopped in front of the king of scouts, and then raising one of its front legs pointed with sharp steel claws, indicated by gestures that the presence of the guards could be dispensed with.

The Shoshones went out, and then the Black Spider

squatted on the floor and indulged in a series of low chuckles. Buffalo Bill saw the mouth of the creature open to display four yellow tusks that served as teeth, and a great light dawned on his mind. The sober look left his face and he grinned at the Black Spider, and as he grinned he shut one eye.

"Alkali Pete, by the jumping jew's-harp!" he whispered.

The false Creeping Terror continued to chuckle.

"Ther boss racket, Buffler, ain't it?" he at last said. "I shore thought it would bring down ther persimmon. Took me some time ter rig up this yer disguise contraption, but I'm a bettin' it's all right. Fooled ther Shoshones, an' might ha' fooled you ef I'd kep' my mouth shet."

Buffalo Bill glanced anxiously at the door. "Those guards may come back," he said. "We'd better be careful."

"Don't ye worry none about them aire," returned Alkali Pete confidently. "I got permish from ther chief ter harry ye fer an hour, an' at ther eend of that time ye aire ter go off with me. Ye aire my meat, ye understand."

"But the real Black Spider may come to the village at any moment."

"Nary a come, Buffler. I met up with a Shoshone up ther trail who was on ther way to ther village with a message from ther Spider to ther effect that Spider would come here this afternoon ter pay his respects ter ther white prisoner."

"How came the Shoshone to tell you this?" regarding the lanky plainsman with admiration.

"Persuasion, persuasion, Buffler, made him open his mouth an' spit out ther words. It war this away: I war comin' along ther trail when ther Shoshone showed up. He war comin' from ther top of ther cañon an' goin' toward ther village same as I was. When he put his lamps onto me I thought he'd go all ter pieces. 'Why, why,' he stuttered, in Shoshone, 'I thought ye war up to ther cave an' war not comin' yet a while.'

"I shrugged my tentackles—I had only six of 'em, but they went all ther same—an' reached one of 'em out like as I war askin' fer somethin'. Ther Shoshone fished out a piece of bark an' handed it over ter me. I'd shore seen such truck afore, an' could read what war on it. Thar war higheroglitterics, an' they said as how Black Spider would visit ther village this artemnoon. I war on to my job an' knew what ter do, Buffler. I tore up ther bark an' p'inted toward ther village. Ther Shoshone nodded an' hit ther pike an' went on a-runnin'."

"But how did you come to put on this make-up? Where did you get your points?"

Alkali Pete worked up another chuckle. "Ye know Splay Foot Charley, ther Pawnee?"

"Of course I do. We have both worked with him."

"He put me on ter Black Spider. Seems as how he met up with ther critter two months ago when Spider war on his way ter start up his murderin' campaign."

"Twar over in Buzzard Pass, an' Spider has made a miscue an' sprained his ankle. Splay Foot comes on him, an' Black Spider, who can't speak none, makes signs that he is up ergin it. Ther Pawnee don't know nothin' ergin this yer Shoshone who is playin' tarantler, an' so he fixes up ther ankle an' stays with Spider fer a week.

"Yesterday, 'bout an hour arter ye'd moseyed out, Buffler, I hits ther agency. Splay Foot war with me. We kem from ther Yellowstone ter see how ther Shoshones war behavin' themselves. We'd heerd that they war dancin', an' I 'spicined that my sarvices might be wanted. Didn't know ye war over here, though. Well, Eale hed a pooty story ter tell, an' arter he'd got through talkin' Splay Foot ups an' reels off his yarn about Black Spider. When he quit, an' ijee comes ter me. I perceeded ter put it inter practice. Splay Foot helps me out, an' this mornin' off I goes ter ther cañon, rigged out as ther Creepin' Terror, an' fortified by what Splay Foot had poured inter my year. I never knowed how we'd come out, Buffler, until I struck ther village. Then I wormed out all ther details of ther plan ter send ye a-kitin' up ther flume. Black Spider is ter hev ye, an' what he aims ter do ter ye ain't hard ter guess."

"This Black Spider or the other one?" questioned Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"I reckon this Spider will hold ther fort fer a while," was the reply. "An' now ter bed-rock business. Ye aire goin' with me, an' I'm primed ter take

ye now. Delays aire plumb full of riskiness. I'll let ther redskins outside know that I have changed my mind. Stidder takin' ye away in halfun hour—I been hyer 'bout that time, heven't I?—I'll perceed ter do ther takin' immejetly, if not sooner."

Alkali Pete was about to crawl to the door when the king of scouts stopped him.

"One moment, Pete," he said. "Miss Small? Where is she?"

"Dunno. Didn't see nothin' of her."

"You came along the bed of the cañon, didn't you?"

"I shore did."

"And she wasn't at the agency when you left this morning?"

"No, an' Eale war worried about her. Told me ter look her up. Thought I'd look ye up first. Know ye, Buffler, an' didn't know her."

"I am afraid the Spider has got her," said Buffalo Bill sorrowfully.

"Ef he has, *we'll* get her an' make it warm fer ther Spider."

Alkali Pete crawled to the door and motioned to a group of Indians in front of another tepee. One of the group was the chief, the afterward notorious Thunder Cloud. He advanced to the false Spider and asked:

"Shoshones like to go and see how Black Spider deals with Buffalo Bill. Half an hour we be ready."

The disguised scout shook his head, and then made motions signifying that he wished to depart at once.

A piece of bark was put into his claw. With the point of a knife he scratched upon it some peculiar marks. The chief took the bark, and after looking at the marks informed his braves that Black Spider would attend to the king of scouts within the cave, and that the victim's dead body would be flung down the precipice.

There was no debate over the matter. Such was the power of the Black Spider that his wishes were always heeded.

In the strong arms of Alkali Pete the prisoner was borne from the village. Not until a bend in the trail hid the two scouts from view did the false Black Spider lay down his burden. He was perspiring freely and he prostrated himself with a sigh.

"Ye aire no baby, Buffler," he said, "an' if ther con-track war ter carry ye a quarter of a mile farder, I'd chuck it up an' quit ther game."

"No, you wouldn't, Pete," returned Buffalo Bill composedly.

After resting a while, the comrades, the one no longer disguised and the other free of his bonds, started forward.

Their faces were grave, for there was little hope of either killing or capturing the Creeping Terror before the arrival in the bed of the cañon of the Shoshones.

Alkali Pete would have objected to the coming to that spot of Thunder Cloud and his braves, but he

feared that such an objection would excite suspicion and might defeat the plan to rescue Buffalo Bill.

"With the Shoshones out of the way," said the king of scouts, "we might make it hot for Black Spider. One of us could go to the bed of the cañon and with a rifle I have hidden down there cover the mouth of the cave and shoot the Spider if he should come out to interfere with the game of the other, who would be taking the rock trail to the cave."

"Shore," said Alkali Pete. "Let's try it, anyhow."

They were over the cave as these last words were spoken. Buffalo Bill went to the brink of the precipice and looked down to utter an ejaculation of surprise.

The Black Spider had left his hole and was going rapidly down toward the bed of the cañon. Something had brought out the creature, and the king of scouts soon saw what that something was. A man, presently recognized as Richard Eale, the Indian agent, was riding along the cañon trail, utterly unconscious of the terrible danger that menaced him.

Neither of the scouts had a rifle, but Alkali Pete was provided with two pistols. He took them out and handed one to Buffalo Bill. They fired at the same time, and beheld to their satisfaction a huge, hairy form go tumbling twenty feet to the cañon bed.

The bushes hid the hideous form, and while they gazed, waiting for some movement, the air was filled with savage yells. The sounds came from the cañon

below them, and the scouts knew what they meant. The Shoshones had arrived.

Richard Eale also heard the yells, and just in time. The Indians could not see him, owing to the bushes, and he quickly turned his pony's head and went galloping back to the agency.

Buffalo Bill saw him ride away, and breathed a sigh of relief.

"Come," said Alkali Pete, "let's be meanderin'."

"No," was the determined reply. "Our work is not done. I am going into that cave to find out whether or not Ida Small is alive."

As he spoke he walked to a clump of cedars a few yards from the precipice and sat down. The lanky plainsman followed him.

"My hope is," said Buffalo Bill, "that the Shoshones will not come up here; at least, not in daylight. They know we are here, and they know that our position gives us an advantage. In all probability they will take Black Spider's body back to the village, leaving one or two of the band to keep an eye on us. We will soon know, for in about five minutes I intend to go down into the cañon and make an investigation. If the situation is as I think it is, I will imitate the cry of a coyote. On hearing it you will be at liberty to come down and help me dispose of the sentinels."

"Wouldn't it be better for me ter mosey along with yer?"

"No; for there is the possibility that Miss Small may

come out of the cave. If she does, I wish you to be here to take care of her."

"All right, Buffler, you aire runnin' ther circus."

Five minutes passed, and then the king of scouts glided cautiously away. Alkali Pete shook his head as he gazed at his comrade's retreating form.

"Buffler am a mighty good man," he said to himself, "but he's apt ter git impetuous. An' he ain't no call ter git impetuous when all he packs is a pistol. Ef he had two or a rifle, I shore wouldn't be a-beefin' none. Waal, I gotter stand it, I reckon."

Fifteen minutes went by and no one came out of the cave. And no cry of a coyote reached the ears of the waiting scout.

Alkali Pete began to get uneasy. Ten more minutes passed, and he was about to leave the shelter of the cedars and go down into the cañon to ascertain what had become of Buffalo Bill, when he saw, creeping toward him from the down trail, a Shoshone brave.

The lanky plainsman's first impulse was to shoot, but he restrained it as he observed that the Indian was not looking at the clump of trees. His eyes were directed toward the precipice.

Alkali Pete made up his mind that the savage scout believed that the region about was deserted. What his object was the watcher could not guess. But he was soon to know. On reaching the brink of the precipice, the Indian straightened up, glanced about him, and then started to descend the dangerous trail leading to the cave's mouth.

Then it was that Alkali Pete acted. Crawling out of his covert, he struck the Shoshone a powerful blow behind the ear. The Indian, with a scream of terror, went down the precipice to his death.

"Good boy, Pete!"

The lanky plainsman turned to face Buffalo Bill. "There were two of them," continued the king of scouts. "I have settled the case of the other. This one escaped me. He hadn't seen me, and was on his way up here when I went down to the cañon. Now for the cave. Stay here, and keep a lookout while I am gone."

He was at the mouth of the cave when Alkali Pete was startled by a hoarse puffing noise in his rear. He looked around to behold an immense grizzly bear.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE FIGHT IN THE CAVE.

The big bear was not more than ten feet away from the lanky plainsman and was standing still. For a moment beast and human looked at each other. Then Alkali Pete discharged his pistol. The shot took effect, but did not inflict a mortal wound. It served, instead, to infuriate the grizzly. With a fierce snarl it jumped for the man.

The scout fired again, and, avoiding the rush of the bear, ran for the nearest tree. This was several rods away down the trail, and he was near it when he stumbled and fell, his revolver leaving his hand and falling into a crevice that split the rocky eminence and ended close to the trail.

Alkali Pete gave himself up for lost. Before he could rise the bear would be upon him. But he made the attempt to get upon his feet, and as he was straightening himself up his surprise was profound as he saw that the bear had stopped within a few feet of him and was trembling as with a violent ague. It must be, the scout thought, that the wounds the brute had received were the cause of the trembling. Suddenly the big beast turned tail and began to run away from the scene.

The lanky plainsman, with a premonition of danger, wheeled and faced the downward slope. For several

seconds his heart stood still. There, but a few paces away, perched upon a boulder, was the cause of the grizzly's fright. There, leering at the white man, was the Black Spider of the Shoshones.

Alkali Pete pulled himself together and drew his knife. He had no other weapon. But he did not advance. He watched the monster and waited for it to either leave the boulder or make some hostile demonstration.

But the Spider did not move. It sat on the big rock and blinked its little black eyes. Its forelegs, or arms, were crossed on its hairy breast, and there was no sign of either knife or pistol about its person.

Alkali Pete was puzzled. What was in the wind? What thought did that evil brain hold? The situation was a most peculiar one, and he wished that Buffalo Bill was present. He raised his voice, and shouted:

"Oh, Buffler! Come hyer, ef ye kin. Got somethin' ter show ye."

"There was no answer. The king of scouts was probably out of hearing. He had found business in the cave.

The Spider showed its teeth and grinned horribly as the lanky plainsman's call was being made.

Something must be done. Not without misgiving did Alkali Pete set out to do it. He drew his knife and began to walk toward the boulder.

The Spider slid off the rock and gave a shrill whistle. Instantly from behind rock and tree along the

trail below the white man Shoshones, armed with tomahawks and rifles, sprang out.

Alkali Pete saw the savages, knew that he could not make a stand against them, and, preferring death on the rocks to death at the hands of his enemies, gained the brink of the precipice in two leaps, and before a shot could be fired sprang into the air and shot downward.

For half a minute the Indians stood in their tracks, dumfounded at the suicidal act of the desperate white man. Then they rushed to the edge of the gulf and looked down.

An exclamation of amazement fell from the lips of the chief as he pointed toward a stunted tree but a few feet from the mouth of the cave.

Just leaving the tree and crawling toward the cave was the man whose death had been looked upon as a foregone conclusion. He had been miraculously saved. His body had struck the tree, which grew about thirty feet from the top of the preeipice, and he had clung to it. Now he was making his way to a place that promised temporary safety.

Rifles were brought to shoulder and bullets rained about the head of the lanky plainsman as he crawled upward. But he seemed to bear a charmed life, for his progress was not stayed by the fusillade, and the Shoshones saw him reach and enter the underground hole.

Thunder Cloud, the chief, turned to the Black Spider and asked a question.

"Can the white scout hold the place?"

The hairy head of the Spider shook violently.

"He shall die, and be scalped by the Shoshones."

The hairy chin went up and down rapidly.

"Good! The Black Spider is the Great Prophet of the Shoshones. Let him tell Thunder Cloud what must be done."

The monster wrote on a piece of bark, and the chief, reading the hieroglyphics, found savage comfort.

While the enemies of the two scouts squatted about the cave and smoked, the scouts were having a serious talk within the cave.

Alkali Pete had been helped into the hole by Buffalo Bill, who was near the opening when the rifle shots were fired.

Within the mouth and out of range the lanky plainsman sat down and wiped the perspiration from his face.

"By ther limp in' cattawumpus! but that war a close shave, Buffler."

"Why did you jump?"

The whole story was told. Buffalo Bill looked grave.

"So the monster is alive, is he? I feared as much, for the fall he got was not a high one."

"We shore haven't seen ther last of him, Buffler." Then he asked: "Did ye find ther gal?"

"Yes, and, thank Heaven, she has not been harmed! She is in the back there, resting. I found her tied up and suffering. She will be all right shortly."

"What did she hev ter say fer herself?"

"She was on her way to the Indian village, determined to rescue me if such a thing were possible, when the Spider leaped on her from behind a rock where he had been hiding. She had no opportunity to defend herself, and was carried to the cave and bound hand and foot. Why the fiend did not kill her is a mystery."

"She aire a woman an' he may hanker fer a wife."

"Maybe. And, now, we'll go to her. No, that won't do. You stay here and I'll bring her out."

In a few minutes Ida Small appeared. She was very pale, but she had suffered no injury and could walk without assistance.

"I am glad you escaped," she said to Alkali Pete, after an introduction, followed by explanations, had been made, "for men like you cannot well be spared in these mountains. I know all about you: Your friend Mr. Cody has told me."

The lanky plainsman blushed. All he could say was: "I ain't a patchin' ter Buffler."

Then, to change the conversation, he asked:

"How's grub in this hole? Plenty of it?"

"Enough to last a week," replied the king of scouts.

"We are in for a siege, and we ought to hold out until the arrival of the soldiers. Eale knows what's up, and, of course, he has sent another messenger to the fort."

"I'm kinder afeered of ther nighttime," said Alkali Pete. "They kin attack us from two directions. I'll gamble I'm on ter ther scheme them Shoshones an' ther

Black Spider hev hatched up. Ther Injuns will come down ther trail from ther top and ther Spider will crawl up the cliff from ther cañon bed. See if I ain't right."

"The scheme is not a bad one, Pete," responded Buffalo Bill, "but I do not think it will be attempted. That Spider is as cunning as he is savage. He'll try some way of routing us out. And he'll try after dark. We have got to look sharp or he'll get us."

Ida Small shivered.

"If worst comes to worst," she said resolutely, "I will throw myself over the precipice. Mr. Allen," nodding to Alkali Pete, "has given me the cue."

To this statement of intention the king of scouts had nothing to say. Perhaps he was of the same mind as the girl.

At dark a fire was lighted at the cave's mouth, wood for the purpose having been found in abundance in the rear of the hole.

The cave consisted of one large, long chamber. It was provided with all the requirements of house-keeping, American and not Indian customs being followed.

The sight of the utensils and the provisions induced the belief in the mind of Buffalo Bill that the Black Spider had passed some part of his life in a white settlement. Perhaps he had been a ward of the government, and perhaps education and association had caused him to forsake many of the ways of the savages.

"That monster has a history," he said to his companions, "and some day, if we are lucky, we may learn it. I am satisfied he is an Indian, for no white man would act as he has done."

"I know he is an Indian," said Ida Small, "for I had excellent opportunity to study his features. And I learned other things: The hair on his face is false. It is bear fur, and his arms, legs, and body are inclosed in bearskin. The other two legs, or tentacles, are nothing but stuffed skin."

"I supposed the make-up was bearskin and paint," remarked Buffalo Bill, "and that he wore gauntlets with steel claws."

"Yes," replied the girl, "he has the steel claws, and," with a shudder, "he knows how to use them."

Time passed, and it was about eight o'clock when the inmates of the cave received a shock. A bullet flattened against the rocky wall of the chamber just over Buffalo Bill's head. It was followed by another bullet that whizzed past the girl's ear.

"Quick for the rear!" shouted the king of scouts, and they hurried to the back of the cave, turning a corner as they did so.

"We were fools to build that fire," said Buffalo Bill, in angry vexation. "If I had had my wits about me, I would never have lighted the fire. Don't you see what we have done? We have pointed out the location of the cave to Shoshone riflemen, who have taken a station at the top of the bank on the other side of the cañon."

"Don't blame yerself, Buffler," spoke Alkali Pete soothingly, "fer they could ha' seen ther cave without ther light. It's brilliant moonlight outside. Didn't think of that, I reckon."

Buffalo Bill's face cleared a little. "No, I didn't think of the moonlight. Yes, they would have located the cave, fire or no fire. And now we are in for it, sure. They know that the firing will drive us into the rear, and that's what they want. While we are here, away from the mouth, some of them will slip down from the top and enter the cave."

"Think ther Spider will come that way?" asked Alkali Pete.

"No, he will come from the bed of the cañon. That was your idea, I believe."

"I hev got a few cartridges left," said the lanky plainsman. "You'd better load up, I reckon." The pistol was charged, and then Buffalo Bill sighed.

"I like a fair show, Pete," he said, "and we won't get it. Here we are with but one pistol and one knife, and outside, thirsting for our blood and itching for our scalps, are a mob of savages and that hairy imp, the Black Spider, every one except the Spider armed to the teeth. The Spider needs no arms. His claws and his strength suffice for his requirements."

He turned to the girl.

"Miss Small," he said, with a tightening of the jaws, "we shall fight to the death, but take my word for it, no Indian bullet shall reach your heart, no Indian tomahawk shall cleave your skull."

"I understand," was the low reply, "and I thank you."

They heard the ping of other bullets, and then for the space of five minutes there was silence.

When the attack was renewed Buffalo Bill and Alkali Pete were where they could watch the outlet. The fire had burned down, and gave but little light.

As they watched, a huge, grotesque form, with a rope around the body, suddenly obscured the patch of moonlight beyond the red embers of the fire. It was the Black Spider of the Shoshones. The face could not be seen.

A pistol shot rang out, and the Spider fell beside the fire and lay still. Two more shots were poured into the body, and more still would have followed if Alkali Pete had not whispered to his comrade: "That's enough. He's shore dead, and ye haven't many cartridges left."

"Three, that's all," said Buffalo Bill.

With anxious hearts the scouts waited for the next move of the enemy. They had expected that an Indian or two would follow the Black Spider into the cave, and were puzzled when the moments went by without the appearance of a Shoshone.

At last there came the sound of something scraping against the rock outside the cave. Soon a log of wood swung in front of the cave mouth. The fire was now so low that its light was of no use to the watching scouts. They had to depend on the moon-

light, and as they looked they became aware of the fact that there was an Indian behind the log.

He made no attempt to step into the cave, but clutched the log and hung there, without movement. His arms and a part of his head could be seen.

"Ye kin fetch him, Buffler," whispered Alkali Pete. "Better blaze away, hedn't ye?"

"No."

During the minute which followed the appearance of the log Buffalo Bill had been doing some responsible thinking.

"Pete," he whispered, "we have been fooled, and if I had fired at that thing behind the log my foolishness would have reached the limit."

"What do ye mean? Some gum game we've run agin'?"

"Yes, and the object is to have me fire off every cartridge I've got. With no defense, except one knife, our capture or death, in the minds of those devils outside, would be easy."

"Then, that aire Injun huggin' ther log is no Injun, eh?"

"He is no more an Indian than that heap of skin and rags beyond the fire is the Black Spider."

Alkali Pete whistled softly.

"Dog my skin," he said, "but I shore believe ye're right. Who'd 'a' thunk it? Come ter think, we'd orter thunk it, fer ther fake Spider never moved arter it drapped to ther floor, nor made a cheep with its mouth."

"The Shoshones found the disguise you used, Pete, and, after stuffing it, made it play the game that came close to winning out."

The lanky plainsman nodded, and then said:

"I'm goin' ter cut that aire rope."

Before Buffalo Bill could open his mouth to remonstrate Alkali Pete had started for the mouth of the cave. He did not walk boldly in the middle of the passage, but hugged the wall on one side.

At the mouth he stopped and listened intently. All was still outside.

Reaching up, he cut the rope, and the log with the Indian dummy dropped to the bed of the cañon.

The fall of the log brought a rifle fire from across the cañon. When the fire ceased the reckless plainsman beat a quick retreat to the rear of the cave.

"Ye're right about ther Spider, Buffler," he said, "fer I gin ther corp a kick, an' it war skin an' rags that met my foot."

"The next to show a form will be a live Indian," said Ida Small.

"What makes you think so?" asked the king of scouts.

"Because the Shoshones must have come to the conclusion that all the ammunition in the cave has been exhausted. They hoped such was the case when you and Mr. Allen got through firing at the bogus Spider, but to make sure they lowered the log and dummy Indian."

"If you are right——" Buffalo Bill stopped speaking and raised his revolver.

Two Indians had reached the mouth of the cave. One had been lowered from the summit, the other had come from the side, by the trail.

They leaped over the red coals of the fire and then dropped to their hands and knees.

"Wait," whispered Buffalo Bill to Alkali Pete, "until they get to the turn."

The Shoshones crept rapidly along the floor of the cavern. At the turn they stopped and one of them thrust his head a little beyond it so as to locate the white scouts and the girl. What he saw he never spoke of, for a knife was buried deep in his neck.

As the blow was given Buffalo Bill dashed around the turn and grappled with the other Indian, who, assaulted so suddenly, had no time to fire his revolver.

The struggle was short. It was a case of pigmy against giant.

The king of scouts was rising from the conflict when a bullet struck him in the shoulder. Indians were pouring into the cave. Crack went his pistol, and quick upon the report he rushed into the midst of his savage enemies.

He was assailed on all side by Shoshones, and though he fought with desperate valor, he was at last laid low, his body covered with wounds.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BUFFALO BILL IN DEADLY PERIL.

Richard Eale, Indian agent, was in a peck of trouble. The Shoshones were up in arms, and a report had come in that the agency was to be attacked. The Arapahoes were excited, and Eale learned that they were considering the matter of revolt. They had not been friendly with the Shoshones, but, rather than stand by the agent and assist in repelling the expected attack, they might think it advisable, as a measure of personal safety, to side with the assailants.

No aid from the military was to be hoped for. Eale had sent another messenger to the fort as soon as he had reached his office after his escape from the cañon, whither he had gone to ascertain what had become of Buffalo Bill and Ida Small. The messenger had returned with news that the troop of cavalry, under command of Colonel Hoskins, had gone to quell an uprising of Cheyennes. It would be a week, at the earliest, before the soldiers would return.

Eale was in despair. The Shoshones might appear within twenty-four hours, and so large was their force that he knew he could not hold out against them. And if the Arapahoes joined the Shoshones an hour would suffice for the reduction of the agency and the murder of the few white men connected with it.

The whites were three teamsters, used to Indian warfare and brave, dependable men. And there was

the Pawnee, Splay-foot Charley, who had taken the message to the fort. He was worth half a dozen ordinary men. But what could even ten men accomplish when opposed by a small army of bloodthirsty savages? Eale was convinced that Buffalo Bill, Alkali Pete, and Ida Small had either been captured by the Shoshones, or had been murdered by the Black Spider.

A week had elapsed after the departure of Buffalo Bill from the agency. Arapahoe scouts had tried to ascertain the fate of the famous border fighter, but without result. The cañon was occupied by the Shoshones, and the scouts had not dared to venture far in its depths.

Splay-foot Charley advised Eale to leave the agency and seek the nearest white settlement, which was seventy-five miles away.

"You risk your life, stay here," he said. "Let agency go. Arapahoes take care themselves."

The agent shook his head.

"That would be an act of cowardice, Charley. I am here in a responsible position. I cannot desert my post. I am not sure that the Arapahoes will turn against me. I have had one talk with them. I am going to have another to-day."

Not long after this conversation a scout came in with the report that the Shoshones had fixed the time of attack. It would take place three days hence, after midnight.

The scout had managed to work his way into the

Shoshone village, and had been a listener to a conversation between Thunder Cloud and some of the members of the council.

Had he seen or heard anything of Buffalo Bill, Alkali Pete, or Ida Small? No, he had not.

Eale left the scout to have his last talk with the Arapahoes. If he could not induce them to defend the agency, he would gather all the arms and place them in the store. There, with the three white employees, he would make his stand.

While he was haranguing the Indians, Buffalo Bill, Alkali Pete, and Ida Small were in the cave, guarded by the Black Spider.

The king of scouts and his comrade had each received numerous wounds in the desperate fight in the cave, but as none of them were serious they were now so far recovered that if they had been free of their bonds they could have given good account of themselves.

The Black Spider was lying at the mouth of the cave watching the movements of a detachment of Shoshones in the cañon when Buffalo Bill, stretched out on the hard floor at the rear of the cave, said to Alkali Pete, who was at his side: "I have made a discovery. The Spider is not dumb. A little while ago he crawled in here, took a look at us, thought we were all sleeping, and opened his mouth and said, just above a whisper: 'To-morrow they die. No use to wait longer.'"

"Well, I'll be teetotally goldurned. Been workin'

ther Shoshones as well as us. Whatever hev he been doin' ther mum act fer? Got any notion, Buffler?"

"He's half crazy. That will explain the tarantula make-up and a lot of other things. When he comes in here again I'm going to tell him that I am on to his little secret."

"Did he speak in English, Buffler?"

"Yes, and I believe he can speak it well."

Soon after this the Black Spider crawled into the presence of his captives. "How's the weather outside?" asked the king of scouts pleasantly. "Look like rain?"

The little black eyes winked rapidly and the hairy chin bobbed up and down.

Buffalo Bill laughed.

"You are a pretty good actor, Spider," he said, "but the time has come when you might as well shed your disguise. You are no more dumb than I am. I have heard you talk."

The Spider stood up, folded his arms, and fixed a stern gaze upon the prisoner. In this attitude his appearance was nearly as grotesque as it had been when he was imitating the postures and actions of a tarantula.

"Yank off those fake tentacles and shed the chunks of bear skin on your face, and you'll look a sight prettier," sarcastically advised the king of scouts.

"Scum of the earth!" hissed the strange being, "your hours are numbered. Yes; I can talk, English

talk, too. You know it, but you shall never tell any one else."

The Spider's voice was like low thunder. It was the heaviest, deepest voice Buffalo Bill had ever listened to.

"Why have you let me live so long?" was the scout's cool inquiry.

"A sick man cannot suffer like a well man. I want you to suffer up to the limit."

Ida Small, who reclined a few yards from the scouts, and who had listened in astonishment to this conversation, now spoke:

"Do you intend to kill me, too?"

The Spider walked over to the girl, and, squatting down, brought his hideous face close to hers.

"No," he said, in a tone meant to be soft and tender, "I will not kill you. When you are my wife the cloud that had been so long in my brain will disappear."

She closed her eyes and tried to repress an exhibition of her horror and repulsion. The Spider continued:

"I have been to the white man's school. I can read and write. Some time I will be chief of the Shoshones. Then I will cast aside the mask of the tarantula."

"An Indian should not marry a white girl," she said, with all the calmness she could muster.

"Why not? We will found another and a more intelligent race. Pocahontas married Rolfe, and there

are many chiefs who have taken wives from among their white captives."

The girl changed the subject.

"Why do you hate the white men?" she asked. "You owe your education to them and you ought to be thankful."

His teeth gritted and his eyes glittered murderously. "Why do I hate them? I will tell you: They slew my mother and my sister. I was at school, the ward of the government, when the news came that my mother and sister, who had been living in a settlement of the whites, had been slain in their beds. Burglars, white burglars, had entered the house and had added murder to robbery."

"I remember the affair," said Buffalo Bill. "The burglars were caught and hanged. So you are the brother who went mad and was sent to an asylum?"

"I was sent there when I was only half mad. I escaped and came here to avenge the murder."

"It has been avenged," said the king of scouts. "The murderers were punished. They were not representative white men. They were outlaws, and as such were hunted down and killed by the law-abiding white people against whom you have foolishly registered an oath of vengeance."

"They were whites, and that was enough for me," was the harsh reply. "Bad Indians would not have done what they did. I have sworn that two hundred white lives shall pay for the lives of my loved ones."

He dropped to all fours, and without another word went back to the mouth of the cave.

The prisoners had been bound with reatas made of horsehair. They were never left alone more than fifteen minutes at a time, and all attempts to free themselves, made during the Spider's periods of absence, had resulted in failure.

In the back part of the cave the light was dim, and, though the prisoners had been many days in the hole, they had not been able to see all the details of the wall formation.

Above the spot where Ida Small lay was a jet-black space. It was about halfway up the wall, and around it the color was lighter. Buffalo Bill had many times fixed his eyes on the black spot.

"There must be a hole there," he said to his companions in misery, "and if I were free I would take pleasure in examining it."

"Yes, if ye war free," grunted Alkali Pete. "But ye ain't, an' so what's ther use ter be indulgin' in 'ifs'?"

There was silence for a while. Then Buffalo Bill startled the lanky plainsman and the girl by this quiet announcement: "I am going to be free."

"Ye aire?" said Alkali Pete, in a tone of utter disbelief. "I'm shore glad ter hear it. It's a statement that stamps ye as a man of resource, Buffler; likewise a man of genius. Ef ye will git yer idee patented, ye might be able ter git rich an' hev some fun outer life. So ye're goin' ter git free? Well, by gum."

Buffalo Bill took no offense at these words

"Think I'm joking, do you?" he replied. "Just hold your horses for a little while and I'll show you something."

But nothing was shown until after the next visit of the Black Spider.

"It is a wonder to me," remarked Buffalo Bill, when the Spider was out of sight, "that I have not thought of the scheme before, and it is still a greater wonder that the Spider, cunning wretch as he is, has not thought of it also and taken measures to prevent its being put into operation."

"Say, Buffler," said Alkali Pete, "I wants ter ask yer parding. Ye aire too serious ter be playin' with our feelin's. What's ther scheme?"

"It's an old one. Rats have tried it, so have other animals. What's the matter with using my teeth on your bonds, and then when you are free what's the matter with your untying me, and also Miss Small?"

"Ther jumpin' Guyascutis, Buffler, but ye sartinly hev struck it. Go ahead. Them biters of yourn aire better'n mine, or I'd perpose ter do ther bitin' myself."

Buffalo Bill rolled closer to the lanky plainsman, and then began to use his strong, sharp teeth on the hair rope which encircled his comrade's wrists. Before the expiration of ten minutes Alkali Pete was on his feet free of his bonds.

Before beginning the work of untying the ropes which secured the king of scouts, Pete looked around the bend to see if the Spider had moved. To his sur-

prise, the mouth of the cave had no occupant. The monster had gone.

"He has not gone far," said Buffalo Bill. "The Shoshones are probably near here, and he has departed to have a talk with Thunder Cloud."

"That'll gin us more time, Buffler. Hope he'll stay away an hour."

After Alkali Pete's work had been done, Buffalo Bill felt in his pocket for his match safe. He feared that it might have been taken from him, but it was there, and with his face in front of the black hole in the wall he lighted a match and looked in. It was as he had conjectured, a hole, and it extended inward about fifteen feet. An article lying a few feet from the opening made his eyes shine with delight. It was the pistol Alkali Pete had given him, and which he had used in the fight. He took it up. There was one cartridge in the magazine.

"I am going in this hole, Pete," he said. "I have a hunch that I will find something that will redound to our advantage. Keep an eye on the mouth while I am in the hole, and if you see the Spider, let me know and I will be out in a twinkling."

But no enemy came to disturb Buffalo Bill's work. He was out of sight, but not of hearing, and Ida Small, who stayed under the opening while Alkali Pete watched by the bend, could hear dirt or sand fall at the end of the hole. Fifteen minutes passed and then the girl, gazing into the hole, saw a ray of light at the end.

She was wondering what it meant when Buffalo Bill began to crawl toward her. At the opening he stopped and said:

"We have a chance to escape. This hole will take us to the top of the precipice. Tell Pete, and we will get out of here at once."

When the king of scouts entered the hole he carried with him a knowledge of the configuration of that part of the precipice above and in proximity to the cave. He had seen the crevice which split the summit, and a glance told him that the hole in the cave was on a line with the split. It then occurred to him that the hole might at some time have extended to the surface, and that the upper opening had been in the crevice.

The fact that the hole seemed to come to an end did not discourage him. The upper opening might have been small, and a succession of windstorms might have blown into the crevice sufficient sand or soil to stop the hole.

Investigation proved the correctness of his theory. There had been an upper opening, and the obstruction at the end of the hole was not more than a foot in thickness. This accumulation of soil and sand he easily removed, first using his feet and then his hands.

It was evident that the Black Spider knew nothing of the possibilities of the hole. He had been an occupant of the cave but a few months, and had probably taken the black hole for what it seemed, an aperture in the cave that had never extended farther than the obstruction at the end of it.

The two scouts and Ida Small were in the hole, Buffalo Bill in advance, when the Black Spider, who had gone a little way down the cañon, entered the cave and walked quickly to the rear where he had left his prisoners.

His amazement knew no bounds when he found that the two men and the girl were not there.

Without glancing at the hole, which, owing to the fact that Buffalo Bill's body was then filling up the opening to the crevice, looked then as black as ever, he rushed to the mouth of the cave, and, leaning out, looked up and down and sideways.

Seeing nothing, he returned to the rear and lighted a match. The hole at once attracted his attention. Buffalo Bill had just emerged from the crevice, Alkali Pete was in the act of doing so, and Ida Small was at the point that had been the end of the hole before the king of scouts had broken down the barrier.

The Spider saw her, and a savage scream escaped his lips. Then, inserting his body in the hole, he crawled forward and seized the girl, who when the scream came had ceased to move.

As he dragged her back into the cave, Alkali Pete shot after him. The lanky plainsman had heard faintly the voice of the Spider, and, being still in the crevice, had turned on the instant and crept back into the hole. Buffalo Bill was then upon the summit, some yards from the crevice. He had not heard the scream and was lying down with eyes searching the region roundabout. Hearing and seeing nothing, he crawled

back to the crevice, wondering as he did so why Alkali Pete and the girl had not come out of the hole.

His wonder gave place to alarm as the minutes passed and the two did not appear.

At last with a foreboding of evil he slid into the crevice a little way and then stopped. The opening he had made had been closed. A large rock had taken the place of the sand and soil he had removed.

Buffalo Bill left the crevice, his face set in grim determination. "The Spider has got them," he said to himself, "but he shall not keep them. Live or die, I am going to have it out with this devil in human form."

Without an instant's delay he began to descend the trail that zigzagged along the face of the precipice and led to the mouth of the cave.

If he had been in a passion, if his nerves had been a little steadier, he would probably have reached the mouth of the cave without accident. But in his reckless haste his foot slipped and he fell, only to strike the tree which had saved the life of Alkali Pete.

As he hung by the strongest limb he looked toward the mouth of the cave but a short distance away. The Spider was not there, consequently his fall had not been seen. He raised his body, and, in doing so, had to face the rocky wall. A hoarse cry made him cease his efforts. He again looked toward the cave, and his only hope fled; for there, creeping out of it and toward him, was the terrible Black Spider.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SURPRISING ENCOUNTER.

Buffalo Bill shut his eyes. He believed his time had come. There was no hope of escape from a terrible death. If he let go his hold on the tree and dropped, he would be a mangled corpse in a few seconds. If he held on, this Creeping Terror above him would drop a rock upon his head and down he would go in spite of himself.

He opened his eyes, resolved to hold on as long as he could.

To his surprise the Spider stopped a few feet from the tree and said, as he clutched a projection of the wall:

"You are not playing in luck to-day, as your countrymen would put it."

He grinned malevolently. "It is too bad, for if you had succeeded in getting away you would have found the road open to the agency. The Shoshones have left the cañon. They have all returned to the village to prepare for the attack on the agency. That little affair will come off three days hence. It is a pity you cannot be there to assist your friend, Mr. Eale. He is in a bad way. No one to help him but three white men. The soldiers are not at the fort. They have gone to kill a few Cheyennes."

The Spider chuckled over a situation so much to his liking. Buffalo Bill gritted his teeth in impotent rage.

"It was a wise thought of mine," the hideous wretch continued, after a pause, "to close that opening you made. I waited for some moments for you to come down, as did your comrade, and then the idea came to me that you were aiming to get at me from the mouth of the cave. So I closed the opening and hurried out here. Just in time, wasn't I?"

"What have you done to the girl and Alkali Pete?" asked the king of scouts, as he wound his legs about the tree.

"I have done for them," was the savage reply.

"Killed them?"

"No. They are alive, but their period of existence will be short. As soon as I have attended to you I shall go back to the cave and finish the job."

"You won't murder the girl, will you?"

"Yes, curse her! She called me a gimlet-eyed scarecrow, and tried to scratch my face. She shall die."

Buffalo Bill in changing his position to relieve the tension on the muscles of his arm felt some hard substance press against his side. His heart gave a thump. Something had been brought to his remembrance; something that spelled hope in large letters. It was the revolver he had so recently recovered. The magazine, as has been stated, held one cartridge. The fall, the shock it occasioned, added to the sudden appearance of the Black Spider, had driven all thought of the weapon from his mind.

Concealing his feelings under a mark of anxiety and fear, he asked:

"How do you intend to serve me? Throw me down the precipice, or lasso and drag me to the cave?"

The Spider's small eyes twinkled with evil pleasure.

"You've given me the idea," he said. "It's no satisfaction to chuck you down the precipice. I want to kill you with my own hands, to tear you to pieces. I had thought of a way to get you to the cave, but the plan you mentioned suits me so well that I shall adopt it. I'll go and get a lasso."

While the Spider was away Buffalo Bill drew out his revolver and hid it in his breast.

In a few minutes the Spider returned. In one hand was a hair rope. After the noose had been made and the coils prepared the Spider caught hold of the projection in the rocky wall and swung the lasso over his head.

"Now!" he yelled, and at the instant Buffalo Bill's revolver spoke. The lasso dropped from the Spider's hand and fell down the precipice. He gave a sharp cry and then turned and started for the cave.

The king of scouts waited. Soon the Spider began to squirm in agony, and it seemed as if he would fall. But though his progress was slow and difficult he managed to reach the cave.

When his feet touched firm ground he staggered forward a few paces and then fell in a heap.

Buffalo Bill went after him with celerity.

As he stepped into the cave he clubbed his pistol,

but when his eyes fell on the motionless heap he lowered the weapon and stood for some moments gazing at what had been but a short time before an active, satanic agency.

The Spider moved slightly and then groaned.

Buffalo Bill stooped and seized the outstretched claws. No possum game for him. But the Spider was not shamming. He was near death's door, and as he felt the grip of the white scout his eyes opened, and he said:

"The Indian is no match for the white man. I was a fool."

The words were spoken with difficulty. He tried to say more, but the only sound he could make was a hoarse gurgle. Suddenly his head fell back and he was dead.

Buffalo Bill did not leave the body until he was satisfied that life was extinct. Then he hurried to the rear.

"That you, Buffler?" said a faint voice, as the king of scouts turned the bend.

A great load was taken from his mind when he heard his old comrade speak.

"Yes," he answered, "and the Spider is dead."

"I heerd ther shot an' I shore thought ye'd fetched ther condemned critter. I'm not sorryin' any, bekase he's hit ther flume. He mighty nigh done me up, an' as fer ther gal I dunno what he done ter her."

In the dim light Buffalo Bill could see the forms of

Alkali Pete and Ida Small. They were lying a few feet apart, each bound hand and foot.

He went over to the girl, and, stooping, listened for the sound of breathing. "She's not dead, Pete," he said, in great relief. "Stunned, probably."

"Treated somethin' ther same as I war, I reckon."

There was water in the cave, and the king of scouts first untied the ropes about the girl's person, and then applied water to the face and head. The effect was immediate. She opened her eyes and sighed.

Leaving her for a time, Buffalo Bill proceeded to relieve the lanky plainsman of his bonds. "Hurt much?" he asked.

"No, Buffler. I got a crack on ther cabela that shore put me outer business fer a spell. But it's nothin' ter worry over. This yer skull o' mine ain't in ther mush class. I've felt of it an' its all thar."

But when Alkali Pete tried to get to his feet he found that much of his strength had departed. Staggering to the wall, he leaned against it and watched Buffalo Bill, who had returned to the side of the girl.

She was moaning and her hands were twitching.

The king of scouts lighted a match and looked around for a torch. He believed there was one in the cave. At last he found it. By its light he examined the girl's hurts. There was blood on her head, but in no other place. With water he washed away the blood to discover a long, ugly scalp wound above one of the ears. Feeling about it, he was relieved to find that the skull had not been fractured.

After he had bound up the wound he lifted her in his arms and carried her to the mouth of the cave, where the air was fresh. She smiled as he gently laid her down.

"I'm ever so much better," she said. "The pain doesn't amount to anything, and as soon as this faintness passes away I'll be ready to go with you."

"Or to follow my instructions, which amounts to the same thing."

"Yes, I'll do whatever you say. I have lost faith in my own intelligence." Her eyes fell on the body of the Black Spider. "Ugh!" she cried. "Take it away, please."

The body was dragged to the rear, and Buffalo Bill took Alkali Pete's arm and assisted him to the front.

There was blood on the lanky plainsman's head, and the king of scouts, with an apology for his neglect, brought out some water and played surgeon so successfully that Alkali Pete was soon able to execute a jig.

"Whoopee, Buffler!" he exclaimed as he shook his long legs on the rocky floor, "but this yer's a funny layout. Ther cave is hospittle fer broken heads. Or ye might call it Doctor Cody's Sammyterium. Hyer we be, Miss Small an' me, both in ther same fix. Orter hev our pictures took. Look pooty in a fotygraf, wouldn't we, Miss Small?"

The girl laughed. The cool, invigorating mountain

air, Buffalo Bill's efficient ministrations, and the unimpeded circulation of blood, all had contributed to strengthen her.

"Now is a good time," said the king of scouts, "for the telling of what happened after I left both of you in that hole."

"My story is a short one," replied Ida Small. "I was seized by that horrible monster, dragged back to the cave and flung brutally upon the rocky floor. I knew no more until I opened my eyes, Mr. Cody, and saw you bending over me."

"An' as fer myself," said Alkali Pete, "I got about ther same kind of a dose. I heerd Miss Small scream an' went back ter help her. Thar war no one in ther hole as I crawled through it, an' I knowed ther Spider war hidin' at ther end ter grab me. But I war too mad ter turn back. I did git out my knife, an' I had it in my hand when I poked my head outer ther hole ter look inter ther cave. An' it war about that time that I seen stars. Somethin' forcibly interdooosed itself ter my cabesa, an' ther next thing I knowed I didn't know nothin'. When I woke up I war lyin' on ther floor of ther cave tied up fer keeps. Ther Spider war thar in front of me, an' I spoke ter him an' asked fer a drink of water. I'll be everlastin'ly skyugled ef he didn't git ther water. Soon arter I'd imbibed he left me ter go ter ther front. Thar he met with ther surprise ye'd been fixin' up fer him, Buffler. How did ye work it?"

The explanation was **given**, and then the king of

scouts said: "As soon as Miss Small is able to walk, Pete, you must escort her to the agency."

"What!" exclaimed the lanky plainsman. "Ain't ye goin' along, too?"

"No. I shall remain here."

The girl and Alkali Pete looked at him in amazement. He continued calmly: "It is a case of must be. I'll explain. The Shoshones have laid plans to attack the agency three days from now. That attack must never be made. Instead, the Shoshones must be attacked. They must be taken by surprise while they are sleeping in their village."

"How's all this ter be done, Buffler?"

"By hard work and cunning. You'll have hard work, Pete, but I think you can do what is necessary to be done. From what the Spider said to me just before I shot him, I am of the opinion that there are squabbly times at the agency. Eale knows that an attack has been planned, and perhaps he knows the date. He can expect no help from the fort, and he has only three white men with him. It is probable that the Arapahoes are in two minds about assisting Eale in the defense of the agency. Now it will be your business, Pete, to bring those Arapahoes into a proper state of mind. Tell them that I am alive, and in the village of the Shoshones getting in work that will not help the Shoshones any when the fight is on. They know Pete, and they know me. With you to lead them for a night surprise their fears of defeat will vanish."

"I'll shore work 'em up, Buffler, but consarn me ef I kin git on ter thier part ye aire goin' ter play."

"I am going to play the part of the Black Spider," replied Buffalo Bill quietly.

"No, no!" protested Ida Small. "It will not be safe. The Shoshones know that Alkali Pete here played the Spider, and if you attempt it the deception will be suspected and you will be put to a test that will lead to exposure."

"I do not think I will be suspected," was the confident reply. "You do not understand what I have planned to do, Miss Small. I shall not use the disguise that Alkali Pete operated in, but the real thing. I shall strip the Spider, and in the Spider's togs, made up exactly as he appeared, shall proceed to the village of the Shoshones, and by using the influence the Spider possessed, make it possible for the Arapahoes, under Alkali Pete, to win a complete victory."

"That's shore somethin' like it," was the lanky plainsman's comment.

"When I start for the village," continued Buffalo Bill, "I shall take with me the disguise that Pete made use of. By doing this there will be little danger of any suspicion entering the minds of the Shoshones that I am not the Simon-pure article. It is necessary that the escape from death of you, Miss Small, Alkali Pete, and myself, shall not be discovered before the time set for the attack on the agency. Therefore, I must set out for the village to-day."

Late in the afternoon Ida Small and Alkali Pete

reached the agency. They did not take the cañon trail, but went a roundabout way which placed them beyond the radius of danger.

The lanky plainsman had been instructed to arrange for an attack on the Shoshone village on the night preceding that fixed for the descent on the agency.

Eale was delighted to see him, and when he learned of the escape of the king of scouts, and the daring work he had obligated himself to accomplish, his spirits rose and he declared that the Arapahoes would now be easy to manage.

"Trot 'em out an' let me hev a go at them," said Alkali Pete.

The Arapahoes were assembled and treated to a speech that had the effect desired. Without one dissenting voice they promised to support the agent.

The lanky plainsman was made commander in chief of the agency force, and he made good use of the time at his disposal in instructing both the whites and the redskins in the tactics he purposed employing in the coming attack.

It was late in the afternoon when Buffalo Bill, in the make-up of the Black Spider, left the cave and crawled along the trail leading to the Shoshone village.

He carried with him the Spider disguise that Alkali Pete had worn, and it was well that he did so, for on entering the cañon he met a Shoshone brave who had just come from the village.

The king of scouts had provided himself with a

number of strips of bark, and after he had made signs to the Shoshone to sit down he began to scratch on one of the strips.

He passed it to the Indian, who read this question: "Why have you come here?"

The answer came:

"Thunder Cloud would speak with Black Spider."

More writing to make this statement: "The Black Spider is on his way to the tepee of the great chief of the Shoshones."

"It is well," was the reply. "The Spider will go to Thunder Cloud, and Long Knife will go to the cave to keep guard while the Spider is away."

This proposition was not to the disguised scout's taste. He did some more writing.

"The Black Spider needs no one to look after the cave. His prisoners are dead."

"Thunder Cloud would have Long Knife stay in the cave until he sends for him."

The Shoshone spoke coldly. There was no suspicion in his face, but it was plain to be seen that he intended to obey the order of the chief.

Buffalo Bill knew it would be bad policy to set his authority against that of Thunder Cloud. And while he knew this he knew also that to allow the Indian to go to the cave would be fatal to his plan. Pretending to make a virtue of necessity, he bade Long Knife proceed to the cave.

To go on, the Indian would have to pass the false

Black Spider, who was squatted on the ground on one side of the trail.

Long Knife arose and stepped forward. He was within a foot of the disguised scout when two hairy arms shot out, and Long Knife, caught by the legs, was thrown violently to the ground. The fall stunned him, and when he opened his eyes he found that he could move neither hand nor foot.

"I ought to have killed you," said Buffalo Bill, in Shoshone, "but somehow, being William F. Cody, I reckon, I couldn't make up my mind to do it. I always like to give a man a show when the issue is life or death. You were too easy."

The Indian smiled, and noting that smile the king of scouts wondered greatly.

"Buffalo Bill would have been sorry if he had killed me," he replied.

"Would, eh? Well, maybe I would, for as I have intimated, I don't take any stock in cold-blood business."

"He would have been sorry if there had been a fair fight and I had been the loser. Let the great white warrior take a good look at Long Knife. Perhaps he will remember that he has before met his prisoner."

The king of scouts looked long and earnestly at the Shoshone. Then he shook his head.

"I am afraid it is one on me," he said. "To the best of my recollection I never saw you before."

"I am tall and slender, am I not?"

"Sure, and by the same token, you speak half the time like an Indian and half the time like a white man. Been to a white school, probably."

"The illustrious white warrior speaks with the tongue of truth. For sixteen long and never-to-be-forgotten weeks I studied grammar, geography, and the rule of three, under the late lamented Joshua Kooser, of Peoria, Illinois. He it was who originated the saying: 'The only good Indians are dead Indians.'"

Buffalo Bill gazed at this queer specimen of humanity and knew not what to make of him.

"You have as much as said," he remarked, "that we have met before. Will you kindly inform me when and where it was that we came together?"

The Shoshone burst into a laugh.

"I think I'll do," he said in English, and now his voice had changed and sounded strangely familiar. "I have fooled old Thunder Cloud, but I never expected to pull the wool over the eyes of Buffalo Bill. Cody, the cigars are on you."

The king of scouts felt like shouting.

"You old pirate," he cried, "you have fooled me down to the ground."

He cut the cords that bound the prisoner.

"Git up, you rank deceiver, and I'll put you right. I am not ashamed to say it, but on this occasion William F. Cody doffs his castor to James B. Hickok, otherwise the redoubtable Wild Bill."

The "Shoshone" was indeed the famous border fighter and old comrade of Buffalo Bill. Together they had fought in many Indian campaigns, and together they had served as scouts and shared in numerous dangerous and desperate undertakings.

"I suppose you are aching to know what this Indian disguise means?" said Wild Bill, after he had stretched his arms and taken a few deep breaths. "It didn't mean much of anything when I first put it on, but it acquired a big meaning when I struck the Shoshone village a while ago.

"I'll begin at the beginning and tell you all about it. Last month I was down in the Pinto Basin, where I met up with Long Knife, a pretty decent Shoshone I'd known for several years. He is or was, for the poor fellow is dead now, a mighty hunter. I am something of a hunter myself, and so when we came together we fixed it up to hunt in company for a few weeks. Long Knife was not much of a talker, but as he had taken a liking to me he let out the information that the Shoshone delegation, engineered by Thunder Cloud, might soon put on war paint and take a whack at Eale's agency.

"The day after he told me this a big elk made a sieve out of him. I killed the elk and then sat down and did a little serious thinking. The result was that I put on Long Knife's togs—he was about my build—and hiked for the Shoshone village.

"I knew all about Long Knife's connections and a

lot of other things, and I thought I could carry out the deception without losing my scalp.

"I arrived in the village this morning, and in five minutes learned that the attack on the agency was scheduled to take place three days from now.

"Thunder Cloud was glad to see me. Long Knife was a favorite of his, and this afternoon the old chief gave me this cave job to do.

"He said the Black Spider was a Shoshone who was gifted with strange powers, and that the tribe looked upon him as their prophet. The chief desired to consult with the Spider, and it was up to me to go to the cave and give the chief's instructions.

"Having done so, I was to stay in the cave until sent for. I asked Thunder Cloud what there was in the cave that required guarding, and he said that the Spider had two or three white prisoners.

"They might be dead and they might be alive, waiting for the Spider to kill them.

"Well, I set out for the cave—I had its location perfectly described to me—and it was my intention to release the prisoners, if I found them alive, and then hurry to the agency and let Eale know what the Shoshones proposed to do to him. Seeing you, I took you for the Spider, and I would have taken a shot at you if I hadn't thought that the Spider's death at this juncture might so work on the Shoshones as to cause them to change their program and come down at once on the agency.

"If after a reasonable time, the Spider did not

show up at the village, an investigation would be made and the truth discovered. So I started to pass you, Cody, and got handed out a little surprise."

"I think there's a stand-off in our accounts, Hickok," said Buffalo Bill. "You had a chance to shoot me and didn't, and I had a chance to put you to sleep and didn't. And now to be serious. I'll go on to the village and you—hanged if I know what to do with you, Hickok."

"Suppose you tell me why you are here and what you have been doing, and then I may be able to suggest something."

"All right, but I'll have to cut the story, for it's time the Spider was approaching the village."

The story told, Wild Bill bent his head in thought.

"I might go to the agency," he said finally, "and give Alkali Pete a hand. But there's danger in pursuing that course. Thunder Cloud told me to stay in the cave until he sent for me. Suppose he concludes to send for me to-morrow morning or to-morrow noon? Then the jig would be up. Either the Shoshones would retreat from the village or march at once on the agency. Whichever way the cat jumps you would be in for it. I wouldn't give a chew of tobacco for your life if the chief sends for me before to-morrow afternoon."

"You reason well, Hickok. What will you do, if you don't start for the agency?"

"I'll stay in the cave. Perhaps you can induce the chief to keep me there for twenty-four hours at least."

"I think I can. I'll insist upon your staying until to-morrow night. Well, I'll be going. Take care of yourself."

"Same advice for you. Don't get gay, Cody."

They parted, and Buffalo Bill hurried on to the Indian village.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A TICKLISH SITUATION.

Long Knife had told Wild Bill many things about himself, but concerning one very important matter he had said nothing. The Shoshone hunter was single. But his heart was happy when he set out on his hunting trip, for he was the accepted suitor of the chief's pretty daughter, Bending Willow. There had been another suitor, but he had been given the cold shoulder.

Hard Hand, the rejected one, was a surly, ill-favored redskin, and he blamed Long Knife for the words of scorn with which the chief's daughter had received his addresses. He vowed revenge, and he would have followed Long Knife to the hunting grounds if he had not at that time been ill with a fever. But he resolved to kill the successful suitor at the first opportunity.

Wild Bill, disguised as Long Knife, entered the village and left it without paying his respects to Bending Willow. True, he had spent but a few hours in the village, and in view of the excitement over the warlike preparations then going on, he might have been excused had the maiden been like the ordinary Indian female. But she was in a class above them. She could speak English, and she had adopted many of the customs of the whites, although, like her father, she both despised and hated them.

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She heard of Long Knife's arrival and waited in her tepee for him to come to her. Hard Hand saw her watching at the door and noticed that her expression of pleased expectation at the sight of Long Knife gave way at last to one of angry vexation.

He knew when Wild Bill, as Long Knife, departed in the afternoon for the cave, that Bending Willow had not seen him in her tepee, and his evil heart rejoiced. He believed that there was hate where love had been, and so believing, he went to her and told a lying yarn of a sweetheart that Long Knife had found in another village of the Shoshones.

Bending Willow listened and believed.

"I will kill him when he comes back," she said, and there was murder in her dark eyes.

Hard Hand went away in high spirits. The girl would be his. He would follow and slay Long Knife, and then tell Bending Willow what he had done. She would rejoice and—what he desired would follow.

So an hour after Wild Bill left the village, Hard Hand, bent on murder, took the trail for the cañon and the cave.

He was ascending the mountain that overlooked the cañon when he caught sight of what he supposed to be the Black Spider.

Dropping behind a bush, he drew his tomahawk and waited for the Spider to come on. He hated the monster, for the Spider had been much with Bending Willow, and the two were looked upon in the village as close friends. Hard Hand even suspected that the

Spider had given Long Knife some charm by which the heart of Bending Willow had been won. Now was his chance.

He would jump upon the Spider from ambush, and, after tomahawking him, would proceed to the cave and kill his hated rival.

He supposed that the Spider, crawling along the trail, had not seen him. In this he was mistaken. Buffalo Bill had seen the Indian, and Hard Hand's action in leaving the trail had set him to thinking.

The thinking caused him to leave the trail and ascend the hill. He saw the Shoshone behind the bush and saw also that the Indian's face was turned toward the trail.

The king of scouts noiselessly crept down the bank, and might have surprised and overcome the enemy if a stone accidentally dislodged had not rolled down the grade to strike the murderous-minded redskin in the back.

Fiercely clutching his tomahawk, he turned and beheld ten feet away the monster he had been waiting to slay.

Buffalo Bill had no serviceable weapons. He had fired the last charge in his pistol into the body of the Black Spider. No weapons had been found in the cave and none upon the body of the slain monster. A bluff would have to go as a starter. At close quarters his hands would suffice.

He whipped out his revolver and pointed the muzzle at the head of Hard Hand. But he did not speak.

He was not sure that the Indian suspected the deception. Hard Hand lowered his tomahawk and tried to smile. "Looking for white man, not Black Spider?" he said.

Buffalo Bill fished out a piece of bark and wrote this question:

"What white man is my brother looking for?"

This was a poser. Hard Hand was slow-witted, and it was half a minute before he answered:

"Hard Hand does not know his name. He come from agency to spy on village."

The king of scouts wrote again:

"Hard Hand has a forked tongue. He dare not tell the truth to the Black Spider."

The Shoshone read this and then looked steadily at the thing of hair and claws that sat in front of him so calmly. Suddenly he gave a start. Then he slowly raised his tomahawk.

"Drop it!" hissed Buffalo Bill, forgetting in the stress of the moment that the Spider was dumb, "drop it or I'll bore a hole in your head."

An Indian rarely laughs. In spite of his position, on the brink of death, as it seemed, Hard Hand laughed.

"I knew you were a fraud before you spoke," he said in English. "The Black Spider never carried a weapon. As a tarantula he had no need to. Didn't you know that? Who are you and why should we be enemies?"

Buffalo Bill did not reply. Looking down the hill,

he had seen three Shoshones coming from the direction of the village. They were looking at him, and one of them was gesticulating.

The situation was becoming serious. If these Indians should come up, and they probably would, Hard Hand would expose him as a fraud. There was but one thing to do, and that was to prevent Hard Hand from speaking.

The three Shoshones had been sent out to intercept and bring back the rival of Long Knife.

Bending Willow had seen him depart and had guessed his intention. Her vengeful feeling against Long Knife left her, and, running to her father, she told him how Long Knife had acted, what Hard Hand had told her, and where Hard Hand had gone.

Thunder Cloud chided her for her disloyalty. In his opinion Long Knife had committed no wrong. The air was filled with talk of war. Long Knife, as became a brave with a brilliant record, had, for the time, put aside love and was doing his duty.

As for Hard Hand, the chief swore that he should die. Three Indians were detailed to go out and arrest him.

The Indians were climbing the hill when they caught sight of the Black Spider. The bush concealed Hard Hand. One of them beckoned to the hairy monster, and as he did not move they started to go to him.

The noise they made in the climb attracted the attention of Hard Hand. He turned his head to look, and, in so doing, gave Buffalo Bill his opportunity.

He concealed his revolver, quickly rose, leaped and had the Indian by the throat before the tomahawk could be used.

The disguised scout was choking the victim into insensibility when the three Shoshones came up. They stood still, saying nothing while the false Spider bound and gagged his victim.

When the operation was over one of the trio said:

"The Black Spider has done well. Thunder Cloud will be pleased. He knows that Hard Hand is unfit to live. We will take him to the village and Thunder Cloud will give him to the squaws for torture and death."

So surprised was the false Spider at these words that he could only stare at the speaker. But his wits soon came to him. Bark talked for him, and he quickly learned the state of affairs. He had done well in silencing the enemy of Long Knife, but he saw there would be trouble if he allowed the Indians to take the prisoner to the village. Hard Hand would lose his life, but the villain would not fail, before he died, to denounce his captor.

On a piece of bark he wrote:

"Hard Hand tried to kill the Black Spider because the Spider is the friend of Long Knife. He must not go to the village. He is a dog and must die the death of a dog. The Black Spider will take him to the cave and turn him over to Long Knife. Go back to the village, tell Thunder Cloud what the Spider has said,

and tell him also that the Spider will come to him before the moon rises."

The Indians nodded in approval of this program, which suited their ideas of justice. Hard Hand had set out to kill Long Knife, and it was right that he should die at the hands of the brave whose murder he had plotted.

When they were out of sight Buffalo Bill lifted the bound villain and bore him down to the trail. He rested many times before he arrived at the top of the precipice over the cave, for Hard Hand was not a lightweight.

Here he stopped and gave the cry of the whippoorwill. Wild Bill knew the signal and answered it from the mouth of the cave. He was soon at the top, and when he learned what had happened he whistled softly.

"Cody," he said, "I am afraid you are taking too big a risk. The lookout is good, but the unforeseen may trip you up. See what has already occurred. You had no idea of meeting with this black-hearted Shoshone, nor of running up against a tough proposition. And yet here you are with an elephant on your hands. You don't know old Thunder Cloud as well as I do. He respects Black Spider, and will give up a heap to him. But when it comes to a matter of authority, the chief stiffens his back and his way goes. Now if you are not in for it, I'm no judge of Indian nature."

"What would you have done, Hickok, if you had been in my place?" asked the king of scouts quietly.

Wild Bill scratched his head.

"Derned if I know. Probably I would have played your game."

"What other game was there to play? I couldn't let those Shoshones take Hard Hand to the village. And I couldn't let him talk there on the hill. I simply had to bring him here, and, now that he is here, you'll have to take care of him until Alkali Pete and his company come down the cañon."

"What will I do if a mob of Thunder Cloud's braves come up here to-night and demand the surrender of the prisoner?"

Buffalo Bill had his answer ready. "You will tell them, if they come, that you have no prisoner, that his dead body lies at the foot of the precipice."

"They'll go to the spot and prove me a liar."

"No, they won't. That's not the way an Indian acts. Hard Hand is a traitor, an outcast. No good Indian will go near his dead body. It will be left as food for the vultures."

"It will be left, you say. Do you want me to kill him?"

Buffalo Bill smiled.

"No, of course not. I was supposing a case. But you will not be visited by any delegation from the village, and, therefore, you will have no lie to tell. I am going to start for the village right away. I'll tell Thunder Cloud that Long Knife killed Hard Hand in my presence, and then flung the body down the preci-

pice. He will take my word and the incident will be closed."

"Maybe it will be as far as Hard Hand is concerned, but it will open up another incident, and you'll be in it. Think you can smooth down Thunder Cloud when he jumps on your neck for interfering with his order?"

"I shall try to do so, Hickok. There is nothing more to be said, is there?"

"No," replied Wild Bill soberly, "I don't think there is. You have made up your mind, and that settles it."

The sun had set and the moon was rising above the hilltops when Buffalo Bill entered the village of the Shoshones. Thunder Cloud met him at the outskirts, and together, and no word being said by the chief, they proceeded to the council room of the tribe.

It was in the largest tepee in the village, and it was lighted up, and there were a dozen solemn-faced Shoshones squatted in a circle on the floor when Thunder Cloud and the false Spider appeared at the entrance.

The chief's lips were set and his brow was black as he strode forward to the center of the ring.

Buffalo Bill with a queer feeling in his breast, crawled a few feet inside the door and then stopped.

For five minutes dead silence reigned in the tepee. Then the disguised scout took the bull by the horns.

He had carried to the council room the Spider disguise that Alkali Pete had worn. This he threw into the ring. After it came the revolver. Every eye was turned on him, but not a word was said. After writ-

ing on a piece of bark he crawled into the circle and laid the bark on the chief's lap and then prostrated himself by the chief's side.

Thunder Cloud read what the false Spider had written, and the black look left his face.

"The Black Spider has offended," he said to the braves of the council, "and this is his defense: 'The skin worn by the white spy is before you. Remember that the spy was killed by the Black Spider. The revolver belonged to that valiant and dangerous enemy of the Shoshones, Buffalo Bill. Remember that Buffalo Bill was killed by the Black Spider. Is there a better friend of the great Thunder Cloud than he who has well been called by frightened palefaces the Creeping Terror? Who slew the palefaces who tried to climb the cañon trail?'"

"Who has been the steadfast friend of Long Knife, the lover of Bending Willow? Who stopped Hard Hand on his journey of murder?"

"The Black Spider has done all these things, and if he has offended by interfering with an order made by the great Thunder Cloud, let the Great Spirit justify him. Many messages and much advice has the Black Spider received from the clouds.

"It was because the Great Spirit whispered the warning in his ear that he was able to surprise Hard Hand and thus prevent the murder of Long Knife.

"And it was in accordance with the advice of the Great Spirit that the Black Spider took Hard Hand to the cave instead of bringing him here. What did the

Great Spirit say? The words were these: "Thunder Cloud loves justice. Hard Hand's gravest offense is against Long Knife. Therefore Long Knife must be Hard Hand's executioner." So let it be."

The members of the council grunted their approval of the defense.

Thunder Cloud lighted a pipe, took a few puffs, and then handed the pipe to the disguised scout.

Buffalo Bill took it and puffed thrice. Then he presented it to the nearest Indian in the circle. The pipe went round, and after the last brave had smoked, the pipe was returned to Thunder Cloud.

The chief now arose and spoke words that sent the cold chills down the king of scouts' spine.

"The time has come," he said gravely, "when the Black Spider may resume the speech of the Shoshones. Only Thunder Cloud has known that the Spider is not dumb. The dumbness was imposed in fulfillment of a vow. Ten palefaces, among them the great warrior, Buffalo Bill, must die by his hand, before he would be ready to open his mouth and talk with the tongue of his people. The ten palefaces have been slain. Speak, Prophet of the Shoshones, and let your words be those of wisdom and guidance."

Buffalo Bill was in a hole, but he had crawled out of tighter ones. He made a gurgling noise with his throat, and then began to roll about the ring. At last he brought up in front of the surprised chief. With his claws at his ears he lay on his back and gazed upward, as if listening and waiting. This attitude

lasted several minutes. Then he sat up and began to write on a piece of bark.

The chief read the communication: "The Black Spider cannot speak until the Shoshones are ready to march against the agency. Then he will tell them how to act so that not one brave shall fall, and so that every tepee and wikiup in the village may be decorated with scalps. The Great Spirit has just spoken to Black Spider and his message is contained in the words which the Spider has just uttered."

Thunder Cloud accepted the communication, and the council testified acquiescence by many grunts.

It was now in order for the reinstated Black Spirit to inform the council that vengeance on Hard Hand had already been executed, and that Long Knife would guard the cave and at the same time keep an eye on the cañon until the night set for the attack on the agency.

Thunder Cloud had no objection to make, and the council soon dissolved.

That night the disguised scout had a tepee to himself. He had had a narrow escape, and was glad that he now had opportunity to think and plan. He had not dared to speak in the council room, because he feared that he could not successfully imitate the phenomenally deep bass of the Spider.

A daring project came to his mind as he lay on his couch of skins with no thought of sleep. In the morning he would broach it to Thunder Cloud, and if the chief gave consent then Alkali Pete and his

force would have easy work in their night attack on the village.

The project required the presentation to the chief of another communication from the Great Spirit, but as the utmost faith had hitherto been placed in the Black Spider's pretense of intimate relation with the all-powerful god of the Indians, he did not fear a refusal to accept his proposal.

He would go to the chief and say, in writing, that the Great Spirit desired to bless, through the agency of the Spider, each and every bullet in rifle, pistol, or pouch, in possession of the Shoshones in the village. The blessing must be done in secret. The Spider would receive the cartridges at the door of his tepee, and when all had been given to him he would retire, and, in the presence of the Great Spirit, who would appear in the form of a bird, would perform the solemn rite.

The plan was to remove the powder in the cartridges and substitute sand. The sand was there on the floor. The work would take time, but Buffalo Bill intended to impress upon the minds of the Shoshones the fact that each bullet would require a separate blessing.

He was running over the text of the bark communication which he intended to make to Thunder Cloud, when his sharp ears caught the sound of heavy breathing behind the skin door of the tepee.

Turning his head quickly, he waited for he knew not what.

A minute passed and the skin was pushed aside, and the moonlight disclosed the savage countenance of Hard Hand.

The villain's eyes fell on the face of the false Spider, and, seeing that his presence was discovered, he leaped forward, knife in hand.

Buffalo Bill rose up as quick as lightning and grasped the murderous hand just as the sharp blade of the knife touched his breast.

Then ensued a short, silent, but desperate struggle.

Hard Hand was no match for the stalwart, determined scout, but he fought with savage valor and tried to use his teeth when he found that his hands did not avail him.

The knife had dropped to the floor at the beginning of the struggle, but the king of scouts scorned to make use of it. He brought his own head sharply against the head of Hard Hand when the Shoshone attempted to bite, and the concussion, owing to Buffalo Bill's judgment, made Hard Hand see planets while the assailant saw only stars.

For the second time the vindictive Shoshone was bound and gagged by the king of scouts.

The victor was picking up the knife when Wild Bill entered the tepee. In his arms was an Indian boy of twelve or thirteen years.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A CRITICAL STATE OF AFFAIRS.

The habitations forming the Shoshone village were placed in the form of a semicircle, with the open space looking toward the east, where loomed the mountain which Buffalo Bill had descended on his way from the cave.

The tepee he was occupying was at the end of one of the extremities of the arc. At the end of the other extremity was the tepee of the chief.

As Wild Bill, habited as Long Knife, came into Buffalo Bill's tepee, the king of scouts put his finger to his lips. He was not surprised at the appearance of his comrade, for the startling entrance of Hard Hand had prepared him for the sequel.

Wild Bill sat down by the side of his comrade, and pointing to the Indian lad in his arms, whispered: "He's a peach. He released Hard Hand."

"Tell me about it if you are sure no one saw you enter here."

"I am dead sure. We eluded two sentinels and the village is asleep. No Indian was stirring when I got to your tepee."

"I am glad to hear that. Now for your yarn."

In a low whisper Wild Bill told how the Indian boy had operated.

"He opened up and was as frank as you please,

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Cody, after I had run him down. He is Hard Hand's brother, and by spying he learned that three Shoshones had gone out to arrest H. H.

"He followed them and was a witness to the little interview you had with H. H. He did not interfere, for two reasons: first, because he is mortally afraid of the Black Spider, and, in the second place, because the three Shoshones came up while you were tying up his brother.

"When you packed Hard Hand to the cave this little redskin sneaked behind, and he said he was mighty glad when you left the cave and started again for the village.

"As soon as you were out of sight, he went down the shaky trail to the mouth of the cave and looked in. At that moment I was engaging my prisoner in conversation.

"I saw no harm in telling him that I was not Long Knife, for it was on the cards that he was to be held in the cave until Alkali Pete's men came along to take him. The talk was in the back part of the cave, and it was dark there.

"After a while I went to the front, never suspecting that I had left behind this smart little copper face in my arms.

"The dern cuss had made a quiet sneak while I was confabing with Hard Hand, and when I got up to leave he was stretched flat in a corner and was as silent as a mouse. Maybe I wasn't jarred in my egotism when he told me how he had played me.

"Well, the little pirate cut Hard Hand loose, and then they both started for the mouth of the cave to do me up. If luck had not stood in with me, I believe they would have succeeded.

"I wasn't at the cave's mouth when they got there. I had gone to the top to hunt for water.

"The stuff in the cave was foul. After quite a search I struck a spring in the bushes, and it was while I was getting the water that the kid and his brother came to the top of the rock.

"Not seeing anything of me, they concluded that I had gone down into the cañon. The kid said they did not spend any time hunting for me, because Hard Hand was anxious to get to the village as soon as possible and pay his murderous respects to a certain white man, who, disguised as the Black Spider, had made a monkey out of a certain Shoshone.

"You have a good imagination, Cody, and I'll leave you to imagine how I felt and what I said when I got back to the cave and found that my prisoner had escaped. There was no sulphur in the hole when I got there, but there was enough to start a small inferno when I left it.

"It was lucky that the kid and Hard Hand had got only about ten minutes' start of me. Did you ever see me sprint? Maybe I didn't make the sand fly on my way down that hill and up the other. At last I caught sight of the kid. He was meandering along in a tired way and Hard Hand was nowhere to be seen.

"I quickly sized up the situation. The big one,

spurred by revenge and aching to get at your gizzard, Cody, had left the kid, who was not as swift a traveler, and was now cutting the air for the village.

"I played wolf and swooped down on this little lamb when he hadn't the slightest notion that I was within miles of him. You observe that I have gagged him.

"I did that business after I had pumped him dry, and also made certain promises that I intend to keep.

"The kid is all right, for an Indian. He stuck up for his brother, and I'm not blaming him for that. I told him that his life was in no danger and that after a while I would turn him loose. After a while means after the scrap to-morrow night."

"Hickok," said Buffalo Bill earnestly, "you must go straight back to the cave. There'll be trouble if Thunder Cloud sees you."

Wild Bill went to the door of the tepee and looked out. "Too late," he replied, as he came back to the couch of skins upon which the king of scouts was sitting. "There are a number of Indians astir, and there is a light in Thunder Cloud's tepee. Something's up."

This was disturbing news. Buffalo Bill frowned. After a moment's thought he said:

"I must go over and see the chief. He will tell me what is the matter. Take your kid and get under these buffalo robes. Then I'll put Hard Hand beside you and cover you all up. Don't poke your head out until I return. No one will come in, for this tepee is under the spell of the Great Spirit, and no Shoshone will enter while I am in the village."

"Don't be gone long, Cody," said Wild Bill, after he was under the robe, "or I may take a notion to come out and raise hallelujah."

"If anything happens to me, I'll make a noise," responded Buffalo Bill, and out he went.

Thunder Cloud was in his tepee conferring with several members of the council when the false Black Spider pushed aside the flap of the door and crawled into the tent.

The chief showed pleasure at the sight of the monstrosity.

"Thunder Cloud was about to send for the wise prophet of the Shoshones," he said. "The young brave, Sharp Nose, who has been spying near the agency, has just come in to tell Thunder Cloud that the Arapahoes are drilling, and that Eale, the agent, must know the plans of the Shoshones. If this is so, the surprise Thunder Cloud had counted on will be no surprise. What must the Shoshones do? Let Black Spider speak."

Out came a piece of bark, and presently the chief read this communication:

"The Black Spider will pray to the Great Spirit, and at daylight he will come to the tepee of the chief and announce the result of his prayers. Be not dismayed. All will be well."

Comforted by this assurance, the chief instructed the members of the council to be on hand at daylight to receive the advice from on high which could come through the mediumship of the Black Spider.

Buffalo Bill withdrew and crawled back to his tepee. Wild Bill threw aside the robe and sat up, his face showing relief.

"Anything doing?" he asked.

"Yes, Hickok," replied the king of scouts soberly, "there is danger ahead, and we've got to take the sting out of it, or it will be all up with the agency."

After the story of the interview in Thunder Cloud's tepee had been told, Wild Bill put on a long face. "Think you can cook up a proper Great Spirit spiel?" he asked.

"I'll have to, Hickok, but it's going to tax my ingenuity."

"Aren't you afraid you'll work the Spirit racket for more than it's worth?"

"No. The Shoshones are very superstitious. The more Spirit business they get the better they like it. I'm a high-muck-a-muck with them just now. Of course, I've got to be careful and not make a bad break."

"You have got to be careful, Cody, with this interesting family of three on your hands. I wish I could do something. Couldn't you work me in as a deputy Spider?"

Buffalo Bill did not smile. The situation was too serious for indulgence in anything approaching levity. He sat with head bent for many minutes. When he spoke it was with decision.

"Hickok," said he, "I have got to do one thing: I have got to tell Thunder Cloud that the Great Spirit

advises that the attack on the agency be made when darkness again settles upon the earth. It is now early morning, therefore the attack must be made to-night, twenty-four hours ahead of the time fixed in the original plan."

"And to-night is the time set for the coming of Alkali Pete and the force from the agency. The two companies will meet in the cañon and one will be as surprised as the other. Thunder Cloud will have the larger force, and though he may be defeated he will make a big hole in the ranks of Pete's Arapahoes. You don't want that kind of a mix-up."

"No, I don't; and Alkali Pete must be informed of the change in Thunder Cloud's program so that he can surprise the Shoshones in the deepest part of the cañon."

He then explained the scheme to withdraw the bullets from the cartridges of the rifles and revolvers.

"I should have spoken of the scheme before, but the fact is, the talk with Thunder Cloud drove it out of my mind. Now I see daylight. I'll work that, and you shall help me, and when night comes and the Shoshones are making ready for the march you can slip out and run to the agency. Maybe you'll meet Alkali Pete and his men before you get there. In either event there will be time for the warning to have the wished-for effect."

"Cody, you are all right," said Wild Bill, with enthusiasm. "The scheme will win if—if nothing happens during the day to interfere with it."

"Let us hope that nothing will happen," responded the king of scouts.

Daylight came, and Buffalo Bill, with a piece of bark containing the message of the Great Spirit, crawled to the tepee of the chief of the Shoshones and found there awaiting him the chief and the members of the council.

Thunder Cloud received the bark, and read aloud the message, which was to this effect: "The attack on the agency must be made the night the enemy can be surprised. In order that every shot fired by the Shoshones might carry death the Great Spirit, through his prophet, Black Spider, will bless each bullet."

The chief was pleased with the message. The first item accorded with his desire, and the second seemed to make victory certain.

The disguised scout breathed more freely. Everything appeared to be coming his way. But soon his bright reflections fled. Thunder Cloud was again speaking.

"The Black Spider has said that when the Shoshones are ready to march he will open his mouth and speak. The Shoshones will be ready to march at sundown. Let Black Spider also be ready with the words that shall preserve the life of every brave who shall go forth to battle."

Buffalo Bill could but bow his head. He left the tepee with the feeling that his luck had failed him. He had avoided one pitfall to fall into another. If he spoke to the Indians, his reign as Black Spider

would be over and the brilliant scheme hatched for the defeat of the Shoshones would be destroyed.

Wild Bill heard his statement, and made this comment:

"I have felt ever since you went out, Cody, that something unforeseen would knock your plan into a cocked hat. If Thunder Cloud had not sprung that speech business on you, something else in the unexpected line would have popped up to worry you. Well, there is one thing we may be able to do. At sundown, while the army is forming, we may find a chance to make a sneak out of the village and get to the agency."

"Yes, we may be able to do that, but, Hickok, it would gravel me like sin to acknowledge defeat. I must put on my thinking cap again. Perhaps I can figure a way out of the difficulty."

"Don't call on the Great Spirit, Cody," pleaded Wild Bill, as he summoned up a most pathetic expression. "I'll admit that it has worked so far, but in spite of what you have said about Shoshone superstitions and gullibility, I believe there is such a thing as crowding the mourners."

"Have no fear, Hickok," replied Buffalo Bill quietly. "I'll put the G. S. on the shelf and try to crawl out of the dilemma in some other way."

"I hope you'll find it convenient to let me crawl with you. I want to be doing something. Staying cooped up here with these two dungasted Shoshones isn't what it is cracked up to be. If it could be arranged so I could untie their hands and get 'em into a game of

three-handed poker, I wouldn't have such a big grouch on me."

"You'll have enough to occupy your mind when the cartridges begin to pour in. And that reminds me, I must go out again and tell the chief to start up this cartridge game right away."

"Good! And while you are gone I'll rodeo my brains and see if I can't scheme up something that will save the day for us."

Half an hour went by. Wild Bill, tired of sitting down, got up and began to pace the floor. While at this exercise Hard Hand began to groan. He had managed to twist the gag, and, though the noise he made was muffled and not loud, yet Wild Bill feared that it had been heard. He readjusted the gag, and then going to the door peered out. An Indian was standing a few yards away, looking at the tepee with amazement in his eyes. Just then Buffalo Bill, as the Spider, crawled up. The Indian walked over and said:

"An evil spirit has taken possession of the Black Spider's tepee. He is groaning because the Spider is not there."

The disguised scout guessed the case, and he quickly got out a piece of bark and wrote:

"There is no evil spirit in the tepee. The Great Spirit is there and is calling for the Black Spider. My brother will wait here until I return to him with a story which he may tell to all the braves in the village."

Hurrying into the tepee, Buffalo Bill sat down and shook his head.

"The unexpected," he whispered to Wild Bill, "has given me another jolt. I suppose either Hard Hand or his brother groaned a minute ago. An Indian outside heard it, and I have got to present him with an unbreakable fairy tale, or he'll go off and sow seeds of suspicion."

"How are you holding him down in the meantime—Great Spirit business?"

"Yes. I couldn't think of anything else."

"Couldn't you induce him to come in? Say that you will introduce him to the G. S."

Buffalo Bill's countenance cleared. "You didn't mean that I should take you seriously, Hickok, but that is precisely what I am going to do. It's the only way to shut this Indian's mouth. I'll tell him that as he has heard the voice of the Great Spirit he is entitled to entry here. I'll force him to come and receive the Great Spirit's blessing, which will make him the most favored brave in the village."

The false Black Spider went to the door and beckoned to the Shoshone. The Indian came over and received a bark communication. After he had read it, Buffalo Bill took him by the arm and conducted him into the tepee. Once inside and the door closed the Shoshone was treated to an unpleasant surprise. He was tripped up, and while Wild Bill, who had come out from under the robe, where he had hidden himself, held a hand over the victim's mouth, the king of scouts attended to the tying.

After the Shoshone had been bound and gagged he was placed beside Hard Hand and his brother.

"How many Shoshones are there in the village?" Wild Bill asked.

"About a hundred."

"The tepee won't hold them. If it would, I would suggest that you call 'em in, one by one, for the kind of treatment we have given the outfit at our feet."

Buffalo Bill ceased to be grave. He smiled.

"Hickok," said he, "you'd joke if you were dying."

"But this is a joke," returned Wild Bill, as he tried to be serious. "It is the biggest joke of the season. We are in a tight place, but our woe is seasoned with the funniest sauce that ever went down the throat of a white man. Just look at the situation. You are boss of this bailiwick, and pretty soon, if your late errand panned out as I think it did, every Shoshone in the village will be at your door and we will be doing a land-office business in cartridges."

A noise produced by striking one flat stone against another brought Buffalo Bill to his feet. The noise came from in front of the tepee. Remembering his assumed character, the disguised scout became the tarantula, and, crawling to the door, looked out.

Thunder Cloud stood a few feet away, a black look on his face.

"Why has Black Spider admitted to his tepee the brave, Rushing Water?"

The king of scouts fished for a piece of bark, and was engaged in making marks upon it when the young

brother of Hard Hand brushed past him, and, clutching the arm of the chief, cried out:

"Not Black Spider—white man, Buffalo Bill."

The cry was followed by the appearance of Wild Bill.

One blow from Buffalo Bill's fist sent Thunder Cloud sprawling on the ground, and another flattened the brother of Hard Hand.

Then the two scouts started on a run for the mountain.

But few Indians had witnessed the assault and the retreat, as the majority of the braves were then in their tepees and wikiups, removing the cartridges from their weapons for the blessing rite.

The scouts were armed with pistols and knives, taken from the three captives. They were over a quarter of a mile from the village, when savage yells in their rear informed them that a horde of Indians were coming swiftly after them.

Many of the pursuers were on horseback, and the position of Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill was critical in the extreme.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BOYS OF UNCLE SAM.

During the run from the village Buffalo Bill cast off his disguise. The tarantula make-up impeded his movements.

At the base of the mountain were many boulders. The scouts did effective bullet dodging as they ran for the shelter of the big rocks.

Behind one of the largest they cocked their pistols and waited. It would be death to continue the flight.

"We've got to make a stand here," said the king of scouts, "and I expect it will be the Alamo over again, but on a smaller scale."

Wild Bill shut his teeth. He made no reply. His comrade, looking at him, saw that none was necessary.

The Shoshones, horse and foot, came to a standstill just out of pistol range.

"No hope, Hickok," remarked Buffalo Bill. "I know what the program will be. A part of the force will be sent to make a detour and get above us. Then we will be between two fires."

The king of scouts was right. Before many minutes elapsed a dozen horsemen left the main body and galloped in a circular course for the mountain.

The scouts were watching the horsemen, when out of the mass of Indians in the valley rode Bending Willow, the daughter of Thunder Cloud.

No effort was made to detain her. As she came on she waved over her head a silken scarf.

"Holy smoke!" ejaculated Wild Bill. "What devilment is on foot now?"

He still wore the garb that had served for the personation of Long Knife, the Shoshone lover.

Bending Willow reined up her pony when within a few yards of the boulder that concealed the scouts. Her pretty face wore an anxious expression.

"Let Long Knife, if Long Knife is there, step forth," she said.

Wild Bill was about to reply, but at a look from Buffalo Bill he kept silence.

The Indian maiden spoke again.

"If Long Knife is there and will not show his face, let Long Knife speak."

"If Bending Willow will stop the Shoshones who are about to go up the hill," said the king of scouts, in English, "Long Knife, whose life I saved, will feel easier in mind."

Bending Willow's face lighted up instantly. The words of the stranger carried the assurance that her lover was behind the boulder. She rode away, and at her request Thunder Cloud sent out a horseman to halt the Shoshones at the base of the mountain.

"What's your scheme, Cody?" asked Wild Bill, while the Indian girl was away.

"It is half baked and may not come to anything. I'll go into particulars after we get through with the girl."

Bending Willow returned and said that the wish of the white man had been honored.

"Then let us have an understanding of the situation," said Buffalo Bill suavely. "Have you seen and talked with that murderous scoundrel, Hard Hand?"

"I have, and I do not believe what he says. He would have Bending Willow accept as truth his story. He says that Long Knife is dead, and that the person who said he was Long Knife is a white spy. I came here to satisfy myself that Hard Hand is a liar. My father, who loves me, will wait until I have learned the truth. He, too, distrusts the story of Hard Hand, though he cannot understand why Long Knife should go away with the false Black Spider."

"There is good reason why Long Knife should desire to help me," replied Buffalo Bill. "Hard Hand went forth to slay your lover. He who for purposes of his own personated the Creeping Prophet of the Shoshones protected Long Knife and overcame the villain who would have slain him. Long Knife was grateful. He came to the tepee of the false Spider and urged him to leave the village and give up the plan that he had matured, a plan that boded no good to the Shoshones. The false Spider, because he had come to love Long Knife, agreed to depart, and he would have done so had not something happened that brought about exposure. He fled, and Long Knife, as his friend, fled with him."

Buffalo Bill paused long enough to peer around the rock and note the effect of his explanation. He

smiled in satisfaction as he saw that Bending Willow was taking his words for frozen truth. Then he continued: "The mind of the daughter of Thunder Cloud is large with intelligence. She can read the heart of Long Knife. He knows that he has offended Bending Willow's father and he refuses to speak or show himself until Thunder Cloud has pronounced judgment upon his case. He is willing to return to his tribe and bear arms against the white men if Thunder Cloud will permit him to do so. Go you, therefore, to your father and say to him that Long Knife desires to speak with him. If Thunder Cloud comes to the boulder, Bending Willow will come with him in order that she may hear the voice of Long Knife and be prepared to add her supplications to his."

The Indian maiden quickly replied:

"It shall be as the false Black Spider has suggested. Bending Willow will entreat Thunder Cloud to come and hear the plea of Long Knife. But I must carry with me the assurance that the false Spider will not try to kill my father while he is talking with Long knife."

"You may tell Thunder Cloud," said Buffalo Bill earnestly, "that the conversation will not be interrupted by any warlike action of the false Black Spider. My desire is to aid Long Knife and Bending Willow."

The girl rode away, and Wild Bill thus voiced his sentiments:

"Are you locoed, Cody? What in the name of the sainted Solomon have you got in your cabela? Your game is too many for me."

The king of scouts laid his hand on his comrade's shoulder.

"Hickok," said he, "I have laid the wires for our escape. There is but one chance for us, and the chance is coming. Here is the idea."

Then he proceeded to explain what his plan was. Wild Bill listened in surprise, mingled with admiration.

"Cody," he said, when he grasped the details, "I am myself a pretty good schemer, but I'll lay down to you. If we pull this thing off, it will be a mighty big feather in your cap. It will be something to talk about."

"Let's not count our chickens. I hope the affair will come off according to program, but I am not going to do any betting."

Ten minutes after the departure of Bending Willow Thunder Cloud rode up to the boulder. Behind him came his daughter.

The chief might have suspected treachery. If he did, his countenance did not show the feeling. It was cold and stern. He held his head erect, and when he reined up his pony he said, for the benefit of the pseudo Long Knife, whom he could not see:

"Thunder Cloud is here. If Long Knife has anything to say, let him say it."

Wild Bill had spent some time in the company of Long Knife and was able to imitate the voice of the young Shoshone who had been the lover of Bending

Willow. But as a matter of prudence he spoke in a low tone.

"If Long Knife has done wrong, his head must be blamed and not his heart. He is not a traitor."

"Why did he leave the cave? Was not that act one of disobedience?"

"He left because he wanted to pursue the assassin, Hard Hand, who had escaped."

"The white spy who came to the village disguised as the Black Spider told Thunder Cloud that Hard Hand was dead, that he died by the hand of Long Knife."

"The false Black Spider did not want Thunder Cloud to know that Long Knife had resolved to be merciful. Long Knife knew that Hard Hand loved Bending Willow, and he was willing to pardon the act of an insane lover."

The Indian maiden's cheeks glowed with pleasure at these words. Buffalo Bill bestowed an admiring look on his comrade.

Thunder Cloud, his countenance still stern, pursued his questioning.

"When Long Knife found Hard Hand in the tepee of the white spy, why did he not come and announce his discovery to Thunder Cloud?"

"Because Long Knife was overpowered by the false Spider. The false Spider meant Long Knife no harm, but he bound and gagged Long Knife to prevent an outcry that should bring Thunder Cloud and his braves to the tepee."

"But Long Knife was free when the white spy came to the door to talk with Thunder Cloud."

Buffalo Bill thought these words of the chief put Wild Bill in a tight place. He waited in great anxiety for the reply. It did not come promptly. The tall scout was doing some lightning brain work.

When he did speak his face was composed.

"The false Spider released Long Knife just before he went to the door to meet Thunder Cloud. He heard the noise in front of the door and knew that Thunder Cloud was outside. Then he said to Long Knife: 'I have saved your life. My own life is now in danger. Will you pay the debt that you owe me?' I answered that a Shoshone always pays his debts, and then the false Spider cut my bonds."

The king of scouts placed his hand over his mouth. Wild Bill winked at him.

"Why did not Long Knife stay in the village when the white spy left it? Why did he not tell Thunder Cloud what the spy had done?"

"Long Knife wanted to see the false Spider to a place of safety. His debt would not have been paid otherwise."

There was silence for a few moments. Then the chief's daughter spoke:

"Will not Long Knife come forth and allow Bending Willow to look upon his face?"

"Long Knife will come forth after Thunder Cloud has spoken words of pardon."

The chief took some time to make up his mind. A

glance at his daughter's face, upon which a pleading expression rested, decided him. He said:

"Long Knife is young. He has a generous heart, and though he has done wrong Thunder Cloud will pardon him. But the pardon carries with it one condition: The white spy must be surrendered. He shall be tried, and perhaps the good he has done to Long Knife may induce the council to decree death without torture."

"You are very kind," thought Buffalo Bill, a peculiar smile on his face. Then he spoke to the chief.

"Thunder Cloud," said he, "I have a strong objection to death in any shape. Couldn't you fix it so that I can present your tribe with an arm or a leg, and let it go at that?"

The chief frowned.

"The white spy must not jest with the grave matter before us. He cannot escape. Why not surrender at once and thus show that self-sacrifice is not a virtue confined solely to the Indians?"

The chief said this in English. Wild Bill grinned, and it was lucky for him that Thunder Cloud did not observe that grin.

"Come," said the chief sharply, "decide."

Wild Bill decided.

"Thunder Cloud," said he, "the false Spider desires that this talk shall come to an end. He made a certain promise to Bending Willow, and when my speech is ended the promise will have been kept."

Bending Willow started, and an alarming suspicion entered her mind, but it was driven away at the next words of the speaker.

"The false Spider will surrender. When I come forth he will come with me and give up his weapons. He has the hope that the council may consent to spare his life."

"It is well," responded the chief.

The two riders were a few yards from the boulder. Thunder Cloud was a little in advance of his daughter. Wild Bill stepped out and advanced quickly to the side of Bending Willow. She leaned from the saddle to receive the embrace that she fondly expected would be offered. But the embrace that did come was not of the loving kind. Wild Bill seized her outstretched hands, vaulted into the saddle behind her, with one hand grasped her tightly about the waist, and with the other took the bridle and sent the pony forward, the gait quickly turning into a furious gallop.

Buffalo Bill was not inactive while his comrade was carrying out his part of the program. He left the boulder at the heels of Wild Bill, and with pistol in hand, the stock turned toward the chief, walked briskly up to the side of the pony. Thunder Cloud reached to take the weapon and received a crack on the head that sent him out of the saddle. One leap and the king of scouts had the bridle in his hands.

Up the mountain he galloped, close behind Wild Bill and his fair captive. The Shoshones in the valley wit-

nessed the escape and a pursuit was speedily undertaken.

But the daring scouts had over a hundred yards' start and their hopes were high. Their ponies were the fleetest in the village, and they believed, if they could get into the cañon, where rocks and trees were abundant, that they could, from shelter, pick off the foremost of the pursuers and thus check the coming of the others.

The summit of the mountain was reached, and the distance between pursuers and pursued had been increased. One discovery, and that a disagreeable one, had been made during the ride up the grade: The pony of Thunder Cloud had made faster time than the pony that belonged to Bending Willow. The reason was obvious. The girl's pony was carrying double.

The plan of Buffalo Bill embraced the capture of the chief's daughter. If she could be taken to the agency and word could be sent to the chief that she would be killed unless the Shoshones laid down their arms and signed a new treaty of peace, the Indian trouble might be settled without the firing of a gun.

"We may have to drop her," said the king of scouts, as the descent into the cañon was being made.

"If it comes to a pinch, yes," replied Wild Bill, "but we'll wait for the pinch."

As he spoke a bullet cut the air above his head. "Cody," he shouted, "we're between two fires. Those Indians that were down at the foot of the mountain

have crossed the summit and are coming for us. We may make the cañon and we may end the game on this hill."

"We must make it."

Down the grade they went at breakneck speed, and as they went the bullets rattled like hail about their heads.

Wild Bill, for a reason that he would never explain, sheltered Bending Willow with his body while the rain of bullets was descending.

Both of the scouts were wounded, but luckily the wounds were trifling ones.

Their faces were bleeding when they halted their ponies in the bed of the cañon at a point where the trail took a sharp turn and where the boulders offered a fine barricade.

Wild Bill dismounted with Bending Willow in his arms. She had attempted no resistance during the ride, and she submitted quietly while her captor placed cords about her wrists. The tall scout, looking into her face, was surprised at the expression. It was not one of aversion. There was respect and admiration in it. Perhaps she knew that she owed her escape from the bullets of the Shoshones to the self-sacrificing precaution of her captor.

The two scouts and the Indian girl remained behind the rocks fully ten minutes before anything happened. There had been no pursuit down the cañon, and this fact puzzled Buffalo Bill.

He was looking out along the trail, when he saw Thunder Cloud riding alone down the grade. The chief was waving a white rag.

The king of scouts stepped from behind the boulder that had sheltered him and advanced to meet the Shoshone.

"Want to talk," said Thunder Cloud, his manner approaching humility. "This truce, you know."

"Yes, I know," replied Buffalo Bill.

"Bending Willow, my daughter," was the anxious query, "is she alive?"

"Yes, she is alive, and there is nothing the matter with her. No bullet reached her person."

The chief exhibited great relief. "Braves up on mountain fired," he explained. "They not know Bending Willow with white men."

"Well," said Buffalo Bill coolly, "what have you to propose?"

"Give up Bending Willow and Shoshones ride back to village and bother two white men no more."

This was a fair proposition, but the king of scouts was not inclined to accept it. He believed he could make better terms.

"Does Thunder Cloud love Bending Willow?" he asked.

The question angered the chief. He scowled and made no reply.

"Silence says yes. Then, if you want to save her life, you must deliver up all the arms in the hands of your braves and then come with me to the agency and

sign a treaty of peace with the representative of the white man's government. If you refuse, bring on your Indians and we'll fight it out. But the first bullet will be fired into the heart of Bending Willow."

A piteous cry from behind the rocks made Thunder Cloud wince in pain.

Then Bending Willow's voice was heard.

"Sign—do what the white man orders," she entreated.

Could the father have seen her before she spoke he might have replied in a different strain. Bending Willow's head was on Wild Bill's shoulder, and he was whispering these words into her ear:

"I am your friend. I did not carry you off to harm you. I do not like war. I want peace. Why cannot there be peace between the white man and the red man? Urge your father to accept my friend's terms. If you do not, my friend will kill your father. He is a desperate man, and he will not respect the flag of truce."

Bending Willow believed this statement of the wily scout, and so she spoke the words that have been written.

Thunder Cloud made this reply:

"I will gather the members of the council and submit to them the terms of the white warrior."

"Well, get a move on, for time is precious."

The chief rode away, and then Buffalo Bill rejoined his comrade.

"Hickok," said he, "it is an open question whether

the council will consent. This place of ours is under watch, but I think a man on foot might manage to sneak away without being discovered. Let you be that man. Go to the agency as fast as your feet will carry you—the distance is only a few miles—and tell Alkali Pete what the situation is. He'll know what to do. Thunder Cloud may be absent an hour, maybe two hours, for there'll be a debate, of course, and Indians are slow movers when it comes to taking action on a question of policy."

"I don't like the idea of leaving you here to play a lone hand," Wild Bill replied.

"Don't worry on my account. The girl is worth more to me than a stack of rifles. I'll manage to hold out until help comes. I am hoping that no help will be needed. Go on, Hickok, and give those long legs of yours a chance to show the best that's in them."

Wild Bill hastened away. He passed through the cañon without being discovered and was soon making race-horse time for the agency.

It was over an hour before Thunder Cloud reappeared. His face wore a dejected expression.

"No good," he announced. "The council will not consent to make peace with the white man. They say that Bending Willow has but one life and that she ought to be willing to give up that life for the sake of her people. Look," he added, "the Shoshones are coming! I will ride to meet them, and then——"

"Then," was the quick interruption, "Thunder Cloud will have no daughter."

"Liar!" shouted the chief, in a passion wrought by fear and love, and quick upon the word he flung his tomahawk at Buffalo Bill's head.

The scout ducked in the nick of time and then sent a bullet into the neck of Thunder Cloud's pony. The chief was raising his rifle as the animal fell and his aim was destroyed. The bullet struck the ground at one side of the scout.

To spring upon the chief, beat him into insensibility, and drag the body behind the bowlders, was the work of a few seconds. A number of shots were fired at the scout while engaged in his whirlwind work, but none reached his body.

Bending Willow saw the bloodstained face of her father, and, believing that he was dead, began a lamentation that irritated as well as pained the king of scouts.

"See here, young woman," he said curtly, "you're taking on without cause. Thunder Cloud is worth a hundred dead men. He's battered a bit, but he'll be all right in an hour or two. See, he is opening his eyes."

While the girl was bending over the injured chief Buffalo Bill watched his chance and secured the rifle that Thunder Cloud had dropped.

He had had only pistols to rely on before this time. Now he felt easier in mind. Before the Shoshones should get him he would fill the cañon trail with their dead bodies.

The Indians did not rush to the bend around which the valiant scout was stationed. But there was danger of an attack from the other side. A flank movement on foot, for no pony could climb the sides of the cañon, would be the means of soon ending the struggle.

Buffalo Bill, after looking up the cañon and noting the position of the Shoshones on the trail, turned his eyes in the opposite direction.

What he saw made his face grow a little paler. But he set his teeth and prepared for what he believed would be his last fight with the savage foes of the Rocky Mountains.

Half a dozen Indians, who had climbed the cañon wall on the side where the trees were thickest and stolen behind his place of shelter, were now creeping toward him.

One came within rifle range, and a bullet laid him out.

The report of the rifle was succeeded by a chorus of wild yells from up the cañon where the main body of the Shoshones were massed.

Buffalo Bill crouched behind the boulder, his eyes glancing continuously from right to left, and with rifle in hand and two pistols fully charged at his side, waited for the charge that should end all.

And as he waited, the clear, swelling notes of a bugle brought the blood to his face and made his heart bound with hope and joy.

Shot after shot announced the coming of the brave soldiers of the United States.

The Indians who had made the flank movement were the first victims of the troop of cavalry that was sweeping up the trail to Buffalo Bill's relief.

The bugle notes, the shots, and the ringing shouts of the soldiers checked the advance of the Shoshones in front of the bend.

Their chief gone, they became panic-stricken, and, turning, rode like the wind for the village.

Wild Bill and Alkali Pete rode alongside the colonel of the troop.

The officer shook hands with Buffalo Bill, and then the cavalry went on. The subjugation of the Shoshones had been resolved upon.

The comrades of the king of scouts stayed at the boulder.

Alkali Pete's comely face beamed with delight when he clasped hands with Buffalo Bill.

"Cunnel Hoskins got ter the agency this mornin'," he said, "an' he wouldn't listen to no waitin' until night. Couldn't spar' the time, he said. He'd other business to look arter. Well, off he started ter do up Thunder Cloud's aggeration of war-wantin' redskins. He didn't need ther 'Rapahoes. Had a hundred men, and they were able to clean out a thousand copper faces. I kem along with him ter show him ther way, and also ter do a little work if I seen ther chance. On ther way here we met up with Wild Bill, and when the

colonel heard his story he sent ther boys on with a whoop."

The scouts waited in the cañon for the return of the soldiers.

Late in the afternoon Colonel Hoskins and his troop rode into the cañon.

The Shoshones had been defeated and their village destroyed. Only ten braves had escaped to tell the tale of the battle.

Thunder Cloud and Bending Willow were taken to the fort. The girl was released after a short detention, but she refused to leave her father.

He was detained in prison for several months, and then, upon his promise to live in peace with Uncle Sam, was sent to a reservation. He remained there a year and then escaped to become chief of another tribe of Shoshones then at war with the whites. His daughter accompanied him in his flight from the reservation, but died a few months afterward.

In one of the most desperate fights in the Yellowstone country Thunder Cloud met his death.

Ida Small did not go to Idaho. She remained at the agency for several weeks, and then returned to her former home in Missouri. Many letters passed between her and Richard Eale, and one day the government agent received a communication from Washington, stating that his application for a three months' vacation had been granted and that his substitute would arrive at the agency in a few days.

Eale improved the three months. He journeyed

straight to St. Louis, met Ida Small, and before the end of an hour they were standing before a minister of the gospel listening to the words that made them man and wife.

The three scouts parted at the agency, Buffalo Bill to go with Colonel Hoskins as chief of scouts in an expedition against the Blackfeet, Alkali Pete and Wild Bill to make a long-contemplated hunting trip into the wilds of Wyoming.

During the last evening the comrades passed together, Wild Bill said:

"Cody, I don't wonder that the Indians regard you as a wizard. You have wriggled out of more tight places than any man who ever romanced through the Western scenery. Whenever I am with you I feel as safe as if I were sleeping in a fort with no enemy within a thousand miles."

"You didn't feel very safe while we were behind that boulder."

"Yes, I did. Did you hear any growling on my part?"

"No. You were too much engrossed with pretty Bending Willow."

Wild Bill blushed.

"She was a peach, wasn't she? Can you guess what she said to me a while ago?"

"Yes. She said, if you would join the Shoshones, she would marry you?"

"You are a wizard. Poor girl. . . was compelled to tell her that I am not a marrying man."

There were no more murders on the cañon trail.

The sign, "No thoroughfare," so arrogantly exposed by the Black Spider, had been removed and destroyed by the valiant king of scouts.

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