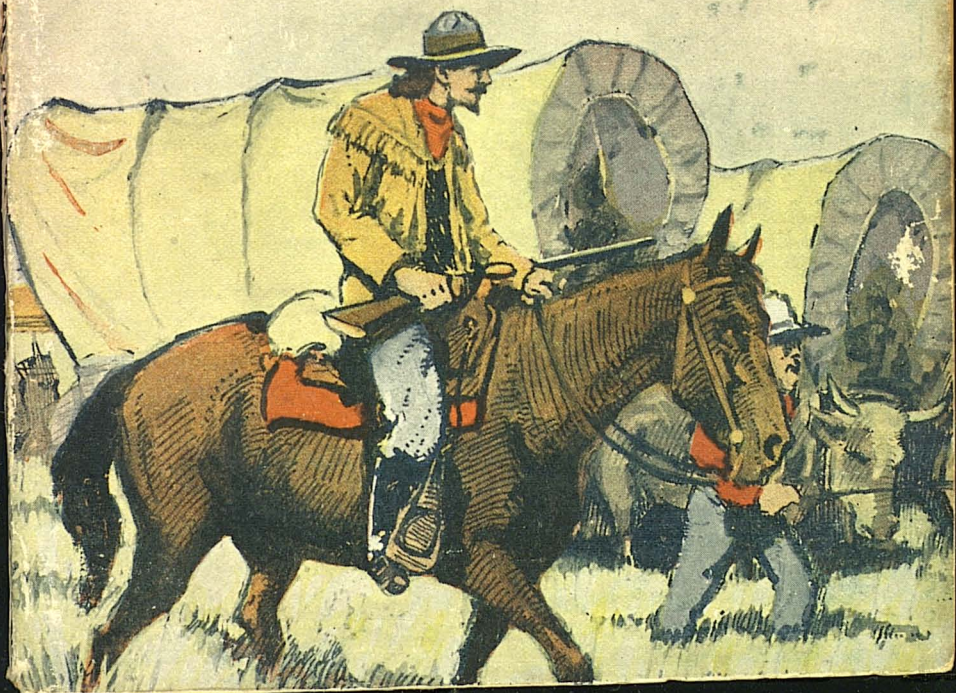


BUFFALO BILL BORDER STORIES - N° 179 -

BUFFALO BILL'S CLEAN SWEEP

By

Col. Prentiss Ingraham



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To Be Published in January, 1924.

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

To Be Published in February, 1924.

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

To Be Published in March, 1924.

- 182—Buffalo Bill's Emigrant Trail..By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
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To Be Published in April, 1924.

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

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

To Be Published in June, 1924.

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

Buffalo Bill's Clean Sweep

OR,

THE KING OF THE PRAIRIE

BY

Colonel Prentiss Ingraham

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



STREET & SMITH CORPORATION

PUBLISHERS

79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

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Buffalo Bill's Clean Sweep

(Printed in the United States of America)

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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 CLEAN SWEEP.

CHAPTER I.

THE MURDER AT THE SMITHY.

The hacienda of the Junipe Rancho, belonging to Don Luis Junipe y Morada, was not only hospitable in appearance—for its roof spread over an enormous area for a single homestead—but its proprietor was one of the most generous hosts in the Southwest.

Lying in sight of the Rio Grande, the hacienda was beautifully, as well as prominently, situated. The rancho included many square miles of grazing lands; indeed, Señor Junipe y Morada's cattle grazed on both sides of the river.

But, notwithstanding the undoubted hospitality of the Junipe Rancho, there was at least one member of the party of visitors now at the hacienda that its roof could not shelter.

Pitched on a small green, between the horse corrals and the great house, with its rambling verandas, and a whole string of outbuildings, or "offices," at the back, was a skin tent, and before the tent burned a small fire over which was smoking several strips of beef which were being "jerked" to the consistency and taste of very tough shoe leather.

Tending the beef were two men—one dressed for the most part in skins and with a coonskin cap on his head, while his unrazored face and bright, hard eyes gave him a rather wild appearance. That he was a

trapper and woodsman—his like found more often along the headwaters of the Missouri and Platte than down here near the Mexican border—there could be no doubt.

The other was a rosy-cheeked, yellow-haired man with rather innocent, staring eyes, and of a pronounced Teutonic appearance. And his speech bore out the appearance, for Wilhelm von Schnitzenhauser, dubbed baron by courtesy, was very Dutch indeed, and had never mastered the English tongue, though he grappled with it daily.

"I toldt you vot, Nomat," he was now saying to the man in the skin cap, "you vas su-ah missing de pest oof eferyt'ing—yes! You vas madt to stay in dis leedle skin tent, ven you might sleeb mit a fedder ped ofer you in dot hacienda yedt."

The trapper laughed shortly.

"Old Nick o' th' Woods would sure be done fur, and they'd tie his carcass on th' tall poles ter dry, sure 'nuff, ef he ever slep' in a feather bed," he chuckled, turning one of the strips dexterously in the smoke. "Why, baron, I ain't slep' like that since I was weaned—I don't b'lieve!"

"Vell, py Shimminy Grismus! De Señor Shoonipe is von fine man, undt he gifs us de fairy best dot iss in his larder, undt treadts us like de nopility. Such peds—undt such eatings—undt such trinkings—ach, himmelblitzen! you vos missing idt, Nomat."

Old Nick Nomad shook **his head** decidedly.

"That's all right, baron, for them thet likes et. But it ain't fer me. I git my cut of fresh beef when the señor's butcher kills—and this stuff we're smoking never cost me a skin. The señor's generous ez they make 'em; but I kyant breathe under a ruff—'r **it** seems ez though I couldn't. And it makes men soft, too.

"Looker this yere nevvv of the señor's thet wants ter go huntin' with me. It's fair shameful fer 'em ter shut a younker like thet thar up in skule an' fill his head full o' book l'arnin', instead o' lettin' him live out in God A'mighty's free kentry an' l'arn sumpin' useful."

"You vas meanin' dot poy vot iss de son of de señor's wife's sister—meppeso?"

"Thet thar's th' critter. An' looker him 'side o' Leetle Cayuse! W'y, thet thar young Injun would take this yere book-fed young feller out two mile from this yere ranch an'—though 'tis sure er strange kentry ter Leetle Cayuse—the Injun'd lose the señor's nevvv in ha'f an hour."

The baron looked a little doubtful, and shook his head. Perhaps, even to his mind, there was something worth while in life besides a knowledge of wood and plains craft. But before he could speak his gaze, wandering down the trail which led past the horse corrals, fastened upon a figure hastening toward them.

"Py Shimminy!" he ejaculated. "Here iss dot Leedle Cayuse yedt—aind't idt? Undt he iss runnin'."

Old Nomad looked up quickly, and stood up, too. He searched the wide expanse of rolling country in view from this spot.

"This ain't no Injun kentry," he muttered. "Thar kayn't be no redskins broke loose yere. Th' nearest red rascals is the Mescalero Apaches——"

"But issn't dere Inchuns on de Mexican site of de rifer—meppeso?"

"Buffler says they're only Yaquis, an' ef they air left erlone they don't trouble nobody."

It was natural that the two frontiersmen should expect only Indian alarms to disturb any community. The reds were on the warpath almost everywhere in the West at that day.

And by the way Little Cayuse ran, Nomad and the Dutchman knew that the Indian youth was much excited. He came panting to the camp fire, the sweat beads standing on his chest and his face flushed with his exertions.

"Put a name to it, Cayuse!" cried the old trapper. "Wot's a-troublin' yer?"

"Ovick!" cried the baron. "Is it Inchuns?"

The boy stretched a pointing arm down the trail he had come.

"It is a man—dead," he said.

"A white man?" demanded Nomad.

"Ugh! Yellow face," explained Little Cayuse briefly.

"One o' these greasers," grunted Nomad.

"Ach, himmelblitzen! von of Señor Shoonipe's men. Meppeso it vas Inchuns—yes?"

Little Cayuse, getting his breath, explained more fully, and in his staccato fashion, the discovery he had made down on the river trail. He had passed a little smithy where the yellow-faced man was at work, early that morning when he had left the vicinity of the hacienda.

Little Cayuse had gone to the bank of the river, in sight of the nearest ford, and there he had caught a glimpse of a single horseman crossing the river toward the American bank. The man swam his horse part of the way, the water was so high; and he was so far from the Indian lad, anyway, that even with his keen eyes Little Cayuse had been able to make out little, except that he looked like a Mexican.

The man disappeared; then, after a time, the Indian had heard the sound of a hammer at the forge on the trail. This smithy belonged to Señor Junipe y Morada, but was patronized by many riders and teamsters who passed that way.

It was Little Cayuse's opinion that the man who had crossed the ford stopped to have a single shoe set. At least, the hammer rang only long enough to have nailed a single shoe in place.

Then, after a moment, Little Cayuse had heard a shot. The sound had been followed by the pounding of hoofs along the trail. He ran up the hill to the trail, and could see the smithy again. There was nobody in sight—there was not even a balloon of dust to show which way the horseman had ridden.

Curious, the Indian lad had crept up to the forge. Nobody moved about it, and there was no sound from within. When he reached a point where he could see into the shop he found that the Mexican smith lay upon his face on the floor, his shoeing hammer grasped in his hand, and a bullet hole bored through the middle of his forehead.

"So I come—I hurry. Tell Pa-e-has-ka. Yellow man heap dead."

"You bet Buffler ought to, know it!" cried old Nomad, and instantly he turned toward the hacienda and uttered a full-throated yell.

"Buffler! Hey, Buffler! Co-ee! co-ee! Rouse out o' thet an' hear th' news! Buffler! Pawnee! yeou Bill Hickok! Wake up yere!"

His bellow awakened the echoes and must have been heard in every part of Señor Junipe y Morada's great house.

CHAPTER II.

SILVERNAIL.

On one of the shady verandas of the rambling ranch house a quartet of very interesting-looking men sat smoking around a table on which stood tall glasses which had held the customary morning drink. Señor Junipe y Morada was a handsome old gentleman, with silvery hair and beard, a deeply tanned complexion, and an agile body that belied his sixty-odd years of age.

He boasted of the purest Andalusian blood; but he had married a Texas ranchman's daughter, a lady twenty years younger than himself, and had thus bound himself more closely to the United States than most of his brother rancheros on the American side of the river.

His guests this morning were three true-blood Americans, and three very famous ones at that. One was Buffalo Bill Cody, the border king and the most famous scout throughout the Western country; his comrades, Pawnee Bill and Wild Bill, were the other two guests.

The scouts, and their aids, the baron, old Nomad, and Little Cayuse, were not usually idle; therefore, it may be taken as a fact that the party were guests of the Junipe Rancho for a purpose. And the four men sitting around the table had been discussing the business which had really brought the scouts into the neighborhood.

"What you say, Señor Cody, is true," the host was saying, nodding his head vigorously. "We are troubled indeed, more by bandits than by savages. The

Apaches haunt mostly the caravan trails and do nothing but run off a few head of our stock, now and then. The Yaqui, in the hills beyond the Rio Grande, do not strike often, although they hate our people. But the bandits ride the border all the time, and they are a growing menace."

"That was the tale we heard before we reached Fort Bolder," returned Buffalo Bill. "Our orders are to clear out the whole small fry of brigands——"

"And how about the whale, Señor Cody?" interrupted the old gentleman quickly.

"The whale?" repeated the scout, puzzled.

"The big one of them all. The chief bandit of the whole crew, señor. It is true there is a great shoal of small robbers and border desperadoes along the Rio Grande. But they—many of them—would not dare be so bold were it not for the example of the greatest rogue of them all," declared Señor Junipe warmly.

"And who is he?" questioned Buffalo Bill.

"Silvernail."

"On-she-ma-da!" exclaimed Pawnee Bill, starting. "That's the critter Captain Bullfinch spoke of, ne-carnis."

"Silvernail?" repeated Wild Bill. "That feller is a reg'lar Dick Turpin of the border, isn't he?"

"He is the one big rogue," declared Señor Junipe, his eyes flashing. "He has had the impudence to send word to some of us rancheros that unless we pay him tribute he will raid us."

"And did you pay?" demanded Buffalo Bill quickly.

"Not I," declared the señor grimly. "I have a body of seventy armed men within an hour's call of the hacienda, and even he, with all his impudence, would hesitate to strike me. But I fear that some of my poorer neighbors have bowed their necks to the yoke of Silvernail."

"But why Silvernail?" asked Wild Bill suddenly. "That ain't no common cognomen, sure."

"He rides like a hidalgo, that bandit," said Señor Junipe. "He might be called 'Goldenspur,' as well. And the buttons on his garments are of bullion, they say; while the cord on his sombrero must weigh five pounds of silver weight. He is more richly dressed than any gentleman ranchero along the whole Rio Grande. But his name is for another reason.

"It is said that there is at least one silver nail in the fastening of each shoe on his horse's hoofs. Whether it is true or not I cannot tell. These vaqueros are half-wild fellows themselves, and superstitious to a degree. They tell all kinds of fanciful stories about this bandit, and they fear him as they fear the devil. Some of the tales may be true, or not—*quien sabe?*

"However, smiths who claim to have fastened on a shoe for a singularly dressed lone horseman are always stopped before driving the final nail, and the rider of the horse presents to them a nail of his own to be driven in the last hole and clinched upon the front of the hoof. It is a nail of silver—or, at least, silver and some alloy.

"He is a bold man thus to give a clew to his identity wherever he has a shoe fixed," said Buffalo Bill.

"Bold is no name for it, señores!" cried the ranchero. "He is as bold as the devil himself—who is not afraid to go about with horns and a tail. And this Silvernail defies us all. He is what you call 'quick on the trigger'—yes! My smith yonder, Pasquale, swears that if he ever stops at his forge to have a shoe set he will strike Señor Silvernail down with his hammer. Ha! But Pasquale is a bold young man——"

It was at this juncture that old Nomad's shout disturbed the group upon the veranda. It brought the three Bills to their feet on the instant.

"What is the matter, gentlemen?" cried old Señor Junipe. "Why does your strange amigo shout like that? He is in the good humor, perhaps?"

"There's trouble brewin'!" declared Wild Bill.

"Nick ain't hollering for fun," agreed Pawnee Bill.

Their chief was already vaulting the railing of the veranda. The other two put after him and they ran across the sod toward the tent where the trapper, the baron, and Little Cayuse were standing. In a moment Buffalo Bill turned and shouted for their host to follow.

"Here is something you should know, Señor Junipe," declared the scout, as the old gentleman approached and the others hurried to the corral to rope their horses.

"What has happened, Señor Cody?" gasped the ranchero.

"Where is this smith of yours—this bold boy, Pasquale?" demanded the scout.

"Yonder is his forge—on the river trail," said the old gentleman wonderingly.

"I am sorry to tell you, señor," said Cody, shaking his head, "that the bold Pasquale is probably dead."

"Dead!"

"Shot down—and after tacking a shoe on the mount of a traveler; or, so it would seem," and the scout repeated rapidly the tale that Little Cayuse had brought up from the river.

Instantly the ranch owner turned and shouted for a peon to bring him his horse, and at the master's voice half a dozen servants bustled about the corral, along with the visitors, roping a horse and cinching a saddle on it, into which Don Luis mounted almost as quickly as the scout and his friends got into theirs.

It was a race to the shanty where the smith had worked, near the ford of the great river. A real

ford it was not, for a man had to swim his horse more than half the distance, and most of the crossing was done by punt, although there was no regular ferry.

When he arrived at a point a few yards from the shack Buffalo Bill pulled in his mount, and held up a warning hand.

"All off here! Be careful of the trail, gentlemen."

"On-she-ma-da! you're just right, necarnis!" exclaimed Pawnee Bill. "No use in tramping all over the map till we get a squint at it."

"Nick," said Buffalo Bill, "see what you and Little Cayuse can find. We want to know which way the killer went."

The others approached the blacksmith shop from the rear. There were no marks of hoofs on this side of the structure, and by removing a sun-warped plank from the rear partition they all crowded through into the shop.

"Caramba!" ejaculated Señor Junipe. "It is poor Pasquale."

The three scouts and the baron each examined the dead man in his own way; but the baron was the first to make audible comment:

"Vot a terribleness!" he sighed. "He vas shodt down like a tog—aind't it? Ach! dere vos pad peoples in dis blace—vot?"

"Shot like a dog, indeed," murmured the señor.

Buffalo Bill had tried to take the hammer out of the dead man's hand; but, although the body was barely cold, the fingers had stiffened upon the handle. He looked significantly at Pawnee Bill and Hickok.

"Fight, eh, necarnis?" muttered Pawnee Bill.

"If the other feller hadn't been quick on the trigger that hammer would have done the work, maybe?" questioned Wild Bill.

"That's the way it looks," returned Buffalo Bill, in the same low tone.

At that moment the señor uttered a startled exclamation. They all looked at him in wonder. He had just risen to his full height again, after having stooped to the ground. He did not look directly at the scouts.

"It was nothing, señores," he said cheerfully. "One gets these little cricks in the back when one passes his sixtieth milestone."

CHAPTER III.

RAWDON SMART.

Old Nick and Little Cayuse now appeared, one from either direction, in front of the smithy. The Indian boy spoke to Buffalo Bill eagerly:

"Ugh! Little Cayuse tell Pa-e-has-ka truth. The man ride from the river—so," and his gesture indicated the ford below.

"And th' critter went upstream—an' a-goin' lickerty split!" declared the trapper. "His horse scurce hit th' ground at all, only th' high spots, w'en oncet it gotter goin'."

"And you were not near enough to see the man's face, Little Cayuse?" demanded Buffalo Bill.

"Pa-e-has-ka says true. Little Cayuse saw the man only as he crossed the river."

"Could you tell if he was a white man?" demanded the scout.

Little Cayuse pointed at Señor Junipe.

"Ugh! white man like him."

"Mexican?"

"So I t'ink," declared Little Cayuse. "Him dressed like this man."

Pawnee Bill smote one fist into his palm.

"On-she-ma-da! It's as plain to be seen as a Jew's nose," he cried. "The traveler stopped to have a shoe set. Then there was a wrangle—if not a fight. This Pasquale would have brained him, maybe—don't it look so, necarnis?"

"I believe you are right, pard," admitted Buffalo Bill.

"Put vy for shouldt de placksmith fight mit de man?" demanded the baron. "Idt vould spoil gustom—yes? Aind't dot a foolishness?"

Señor Junipe suddenly strode forward. He seemed to be deeply moved, and his voice shook.

"I have solved it, caballeros," he cried.

They all looked at him, Buffalo Bill with particular interest.

"It was Silvernail," said the ranchero. "I am sure it was that bandit. See! what was I just telling you about this same Pasquale, gentlemen? He had sworn to me that if the bandit ever came this way, and had a shoe set, he would brain him before he could get away."

"Ah!" ejaculated Pawnee Bill. "What do you think, necarnis?"

But the señor hastened on:

"Your Indian boy, Señor Cody, says he heard the ring of a hammer long enough for the setting of one shoe, and one shoe only. And then, in a moment, came the shot; the traveler rode off at a swift pace. Our friend, Señor Nomad, has found the hoofprints of the running horse. There was an altercation just as the shoe was fixed. If, as I believe, Silvernail rode this way, when he gave his usual nail to Pasquale there was bound to be trouble. Valgame Dios! yes, it must be so. Pasquale attempted to apprehend—perhaps to kill—the bandit, and was killed, instead, himself."

"Well!" ejaculated Buffalo Bill suddenly, "it may be so, or not. The fact remains, the man who had the shoe fixed here this morning should be found. You are sure of the trail, old man?" he added, turning to Nomad.

"Dead sure, Buffler."

"Then get your horses. We'll see if he rides a better horse than is to be found in Señor Junipe's corral."

They hurried for the horses, but Señor Junipe re-

mained in the shop. Before Buffalo Bill and his friends were more than gone a newcomer appeared. The moment he saw the dead man and the old señor standing over him he hurried to the spot.

"Uncle!" he exclaimed. "What has happened?"

He was a young fellow in his teens—rather a good-looking youth, but slim and not as tanned or hardy-looking as most boys of the frontier were. And he was dressed in citified clothes not at all common upon a Southwestern rancho.

"Rawdon Smart," said the old señor sternly, "did you know about this?"

"It is Pasquale! poor fellow!" exclaimed the youth, without noticing the old gentleman's accusing manner, or speech. "Who did it?"

"That is what we would all know, boy," declared the señor. "Our friends, Señor Cody and his companions, have started on what they believe to be the trail of the murderer."

"Which way did he go?" cried the youth eagerly.

"Up the river."

Rawdon Smart shook his head. "No. I have been walking in the other direction—below the ford, uncle. I could not have seen the murderer."

"But you were here at the smithy this morning?" demanded Señor Junipe.

"No, uncle. I was not," returned the youth mildly.

"You have not been in the smithy to-day?"

"No. I haven't seen Pasquale—poor fellow!—for two days."

The old man seized his nephew's sleeve suddenly, and from a pocket in the breast of his fine linen shirt brought forth a small object that lay flat upon his palm.

"Then how do I find this lying here on the floor, by the forge, Rawdon Smart?" he demanded.

The boy looked, and uttered a cry of surprise. The article in his uncle's hand was a flat locket of gold, set around the frame with several small but pure white diamonds; and in the center, upon ivory, was painted a woman's face. It was a beautiful face, but the boy's own features were enough like those of the picture to establish the relationship.

"Mother!" he gasped.

Then, after a moment of paralyzed surprise, he thrust his free hand into his own breast and brought out, hung upon a stout cord, the mate to the miniature—the mate in frame, setting, and in the workmanship of the picture!

"See, Uncle Luis!" he cried. "I have my own. There was never but one other—Clifford wore it away with him."

"Your brother Clifford," murmured the señor, and his head drooped.

"Surely. And it couldn't be that Clifford is here!"

The señor wagged his head negatively and did not look up.

"He is still at San Enrife? That was where he was—working with that odd Professor Cralé—isn't it so? He is there now, isn't he?"

"As far as I know—yes."

"And if I go hunting with this strange old fellow who calls himself Nick o' the Woods, we can go across the river and as far as San Enrife—can't we?"

"True. You may see your brother there," muttered the old man. "Clifford has not crossed the river since—since his trouble. Si, si! he would not be here. He lost the miniature."

"Or it was stolen from him," suggested Rawdon eagerly.

"I will keep it—for the present," muttered Señor Junipe. "If—if you see your brother while you are

on this trip, Rawdon, tell him I shall keep it for him."

"But you, yourself, say he will not cross the river," said the boy doubtfully. "That old trouble—I know, uncle! you have forbidden me to talk about it. But with our mother, I believe Clifford was more sinned against than sinning."

"He killed the man!" exclaimed Señor Junipe.

Rawdon Smart started back with a faint cry. His uncle was still standing over the dead body of Pasquale, the smith.

"Oh, uncle! don't be harsh," begged the youth. "And you scared me. It was as though you lay the death of this poor fellow to Clifford's door, as well."

But Señor Junipe turned on his heel, and without another word went to his horse, mounted, and rode back to the hacienda. His nephew, troubled deeply in mind and spirit, awaited the coming of the peons that the owner of the great ranch sent to care for the dead body of the murdered smith.

Rawdon remained at the shack, too, until the troop of horsemen under Buffalo Bill returned from their hard ride up the river. The man they had followed, whether murderer or not, had got across the Rio Grande again, and the scout and his friends were not prepared at that time to comb the other side of the river for any such game.

"But such deeds as this along the border have got to stop," declared the famous scout, when they were sitting on the veranda again. "We shall scour the Mexican side of the river, and far back into the hills, searching out every border rider we can find—and with a special view of taking this Silvernail, whoever he is."

"Bet your life we will, necarnis!" agreed Pawnee Bill.

"I would like to see you up
side to see the Pasquale fellow—and it's
the way. By Jimmy Crawford he told
me that he was a shivering yolk,
and he was afraid of me. I was the one
who was afraid, and I will be just the same
as he is now to me in all."

the young Rawdon Smart came along and
told him.

He then began with old Mr. Smart, Mr.
Bill. "It's all the same to you, I'll travel
with you. Smart says he can show
you the way, and the Indian boy
says he can show you the way, and you haven't anything else but
the way."

He then began with old Mr. Smart, Mr.
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Bill. "It's all the same to you, I'll travel
with you. Smart says he can show
you the way, and the Indian boy
says he can show you the way, and you haven't anything else but
the way."

"You can pet me dot I would like vonce to meed up mit de feller dot shot dis Pasquale feller—aind't it?" grunted the baron. "Py Shimminy Grismus! de coldt-ploodedness of dot murder makes me a shiverings yedt, up undt down mein shpinal golumn. Vonce me undt Toofer gits his trail on, undt it vill pe goot-pye Misder Slivertail, or votefer his name is idt!"

Just then young Rawdon Smart came along and spoke to Buffalo Bill.

"I've made my bargain with old Mr. Nomad, Mr. Cody," he said. "If it is all the same to you, I'll travel with your party a ways. Nomad says he can show me some good hunting by the way, and the Indian boy will go with us, too, if you haven't anything else for him to do."

Señor Junipe started suddenly, raising his head as though to speak; but Buffalo Bill acted as though he did not notice his host's interest.

"That's all right, Rawdon," the scout said hastily. "You're welcome to join us. But Little Cayuse and the baron, here, will probably travel together, while Pawnee and Hickok go off on their own hook. You and I and Nomad will stick together, and while we're looking for some big game perhaps we will run against other game."

"Two-footed, eh, necarnis?" grunted Pawnee Bill.

"That's the meaning of my remarks, pard," returned Buffalo Bill.

"My nephew will not be in your way, gentlemen?" questioned Señor Junipe doubtfully.

"Not a bit of it," declared Buffalo Bill, with heartiness. "The more, the merrier—and the wider the territory down there we can comb over."

But the old señor was silent for a long time, shaking his head now and then, and gazing at his nephew.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEAD LINE.

The sun came up—a huge round ball of fiery hue—almost as though shot out of a mortar gun somewhere below the eastern horizon. Its first beam shone spang into the eyes of Rawdon Smart, who, sticking his head questioningly out of a shelter of pine and hemlock boughs built against a huge bowlder, had just rubbed his lids apart.

He had stood the middle watch the previous night, and it seemed to him as though he had only closed his eyes again when old Nomad half dragged him out of his nest of sweet-smelling pine boughs. Stretching his arms above his head, with a prodigious yawn, he announced ungratefully that he was really awake.

"Bundle out o' thar, ye lazy young trollop!" growled Nick Nomad. "Take them two buckets, and bring 'em down yere full from the waterfall. Them that eats must work in this world, now mark me thar, son! Git er move on now."

"You sure are in an awful hurry this morning, old man," returned the young fellow, laughing. "Buffalo Bill led us a harder pace yesterday than any day since we crossed the river. And I feel it."

"Say, but ye air a tenderfoot, boy," growled Nomad.

"I don't know about my feet being tender," chuckled Rawdon; "but other parts of my anatomy sure are!"

"Git arter thet thar water!" ejaculated the old man, who was busy making a fire over which to prepare breakfast. "It'll limber ye up."

Thus adjured, the youth picked up the buckets, and disappeared up the rocky path, which led out of the cove and toward the sound of falling water. The bare ridge of rock, where the water fell thirty feet into a granite basin, was too exposed for a camp, so it had been pitched back there in the cove.

Above, the forest was impenetrable to the eye; and from the waterfall the trail fell away steeply as it entered a descending cañon. A twist in this cañon shut off Rawdon's view in that direction, and he could trace no farther than that turn in the course of the flume through which the outflow of the water passed.

It was a wild-looking spot.

Not a leaf grew in this cañon, as far as Rawdon could see. No shrub clung with its roots to soil between the rocks. No grass grew along the path.

It was just as though a line had been drawn here by the waterfall, and Nature had forbidden any verdure to appear beyond that place.

It was the dead line.

The youth began to scowl and wrinkle his nose a little as he looked along this sloping cañon.

"By Jove! There's a peculiar sort of a smell somewhere here—isn't that odd?" he muttered.

"Humph! quite kills the odor of the pines. And an unpleasant smell, too."

But after a moment he gave up the puzzle, and stooped to fill his buckets at the pool.

He scooped one full of the clear water, set it aside, and then filled the other.

Then he dropped upon his knees, rolled his sleeves higher, turned back the collar of his shirt to bare his throat and chest, and, being already bareheaded, was about to plunge hands and face into the water, when something already in the pool halted him.

It was a reflection—and not his own!

The pool at this side was comparatively quiet, despite the splashing of the falling stream at the other side.

He could see his own face—oh, yes. But he likewise saw an apparition on the surface that held him for a long half minute in the grip of a deadly fear.

It was the round, eager, whiskered face of a huge cat.

The puma crouched upon a rock by his side, overhanging the pool, and its head and shoulders only were visible in the water.

Its eyes—like balls of fire—were fixed upon the young fellow, and already the beast's claws were bared and its muscles taut for the spring!

Rawdon Smart had not spent his life in the open as had his companions at the camp. So he was naturally not as keen a woodsman as old Nomad, for instance.

And because of that fact he had made a mistake—an all but fatal mistake—when he had risen and left the camp in the cove to fetch the buckets of water.

As he knelt there at the edge of the pool, he grabbed for the guns which should have swung, one on either side, in front of his body, as he had been told to carry them.

The belt was there—and well filled with cartridges for both his pistols and rifle. And the holsters for his guns were in place.

But he had left both guns in his bed of pine boughs—and even his hunting knife was not in its sheath behind!

He was completely at the mercy of the puma.

CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE FLUME.

As a quivering scream rent the air, that—
a roar and echoing and reaching from the
a shrill, terrible chorus.

The halting cry of the puma as it leaped
its body straight for the unarmed youth.

Rawdon had not even sprung to an upright
he seemed to have been held there, by
a sudden surprise, in a crouching attitude.

A splendid mark for the ravenous brute.

His dishevelled, jaws agape, and eyes blas-
phemous excitement and the lust of blood and
the great cat dove the air and landed—where
it had been!

And as he was, Rawdon's wits returned to
the puma's shriek. He uttered no sound him-
self, but his tongue to the roof of his mouth;
his muscles were not paralyzed.

The puma shot downward from the rock, he
leaped forward, passing under the beast, and
dropped into the pool!

Missing its prey, sprawled on the rock,
over both water buckets, and getting en-
tangled in the leather vessels.

In its blind rage, the puma seized upon one
bucket, and, with teeth and claws, went to work
to smash it. It was the boy that it had missed.

With a mad, maddening rage, it cast the shredded leather from
its mouth, however, and whirled to the edge of
the pool.
The bucket had come spluttering to the surface.

CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE FLUME.

Suddenly an agonizing screech rent the air, shattering the silence and echoing and reëchoing from the rocks in a perfectly fiendish chorus.

It was the challenging cry of the puma as it leaped from the boulder straight for the unarmed youth.

Rawson Smart had not even sprung to an upright position. He seemed to have been held there, by his terror and surprise, in a crouching attitude.

He was a splendid mark for the ravenous brute.

With claws distended, jaws agape, and eyes blazing with savage excitement and the lust of blood and hunger, the great cat clove the air and landed—where the youth had been!

Frightened as he was, Rawson's wits returned to him at the puma's shriek. He uttered no sound himself. Fear clove his tongue to the roof of his mouth; but his muscles were not paralyzed.

As the puma shot downward from the rock, he flung himself forward, passing under the beast, and went headfirst into the pool!

The puma, missing its prey, sprawled on the rock, knocking over both water buckets, and getting entangled in the leather vessels.

Indeed, in its blind rage, the puma seized upon one of the buckets, and, with teeth and claws, went to work on it as though it were the boy that it had missed.

Yowling with rage, it cast the shredded leather from it in a moment, however, and whirled to the edge of the pool.

Rawdon had come spluttering to the surface. He

found the water much deeper than he had supposed. He took one good stroke toward the edge of the pool, and there was the puma, open-mouthed and yelling, awaiting the victim's coming ashore!

"Great Jimminy!" spluttered the youth. "The beast sure means business."

He tried to stand on the bottom of the rock-hewn pool; but the rock was slimy, and his feet were quickly sucked from under him.

Besides, the water was up to his armpits, and there was a pulling current toward the flume.

And how cold it was!

His teeth chattered, for the mountain torrent was like a stream of ice water. And he was dreadfully hampered in his movements by the clothing he wore.

Every time he made a dive for the edge of the pool, the puma was right there—its jaws open for a welcome, and snarling threatening beyond peradventure just what it would do to the boy if it got hold of him.

Rawdon glanced around the basin in which he was swimming. At the farther side was the waterfall. Everywhere else the big cat could meet him if he tried to crawl out—save at the point where the stream flowed out of the pool.

And the opening of that flume was not an attractive-looking place!

There was a strong setting of the current to this outlet, where the stream took another plunge, although a short one.

Through a ditch cut in the rocky soil, and with high, smooth sides—for the water was not at flood height at this season of the year—the overflow poured along beside the trail, and down the cañon, beyond the point where the youth had viewed the trail itself.

What lay beyond that turn in the cañon Rawdon

had no idea. There might be a greater danger below on the stream than the big cat now scratching its claws and screeching upon the brink of the pool.

Besides, the old trapper might hear the catouse, and come to his rescue. At least, that was the boy's hope, although he knew that the distance to the camp was considerable, and the wind was blowing in the wrong direction.

This hope, however, was really all that he had. He was "in bad," and he knew it!

The clothes weighted him; the current tugged at him every time he tried to stand on the slippery bottom of the pool.

"And I can't swim around and around in this ice water forever," numbled the boy.

Now and again the current drew him toward the outlet, and he had to fight his way back to the safer side of the pool.

And there the snarling puma was ready for him. The beast seemed tireless—or else it was certain of its prey!

But Rawdon grew weaker and weaker. He realized that if he did not crawl out of the water while a little strength remained in him, he would soon be whirling down the flume perfectly helpless.

"If I've got to fight," was the thought that suddenly stung him to life again, "I'll fight the unknown."

"There may be a chance for me below. I'll take it while I have some strength with which to fight."

"This blamed old cat is too much for me. It would tear me to pieces as it has the leather bucket. But what——"

He did not finish the thought, but suddenly let himself go. The current quickly sucked him down to the mouth of the flume.

He went over the slight fall feet first. His moc-casins struck the bottom of the flume, and he was completely under the surface.

But as he bobbed up, got his breath, and shook the water from his ears and eyes, he heard the long-drawn yell of the disappointed puma behind him.

"Your breakfast is getting away from you, kitty!" muttered Rawdon Smart.

But the youth had neither the time nor inclination for light thoughts. The water hurrying him on was bearing him toward unknown perils.

He could not retard his progress. The current gripped him as though he were a featherweight.

He bobbed along, like a chip in a mill race, and in no way could he better his condition.

The sides of the ditch were sheer walls, mostly of creviced rocks. But these crevices were slimy as far as he could reach with his hands as he was whirled along.

Had he clutched at a crack and tried to hold on, he would merely have bruised his hands, and—possibly—his body.

The current would have immediately torn him away from any handhold he could have obtained.

On and on he was swept, sometimes whirling like a top in an eddy, again dragged swiftly along, his head just above the surface, but so dizzy that he could scarcely see the barren sides of the flume.

Suddenly he realized that he was nearing the turn in the cañon, around which he had been unable to see from the top of the ridge.

There was no help for it; he must go with the current.

Whatever lay behind that corner, he would have to take—and take like a man!

Rawdon did not become panic-stricken; he did not

lose his head. He stopped fighting the current; that was useless. He closed his eyes; he was only made dizzy in this awful race down the flume.

Whatever was coming must come; he did not need to see it. He allowed himself to be carried on in darkness and in ignorance of what lay before. And he was successful in keeping his head above the water.

Suddenly he felt the mighty tug of an increased current. It was as though a huge hand had seized upon his body, and was hurling it forward with irresistible force.

The spray dashed over his head; he was completely submerged for a moment; then he swerved around the corner, where the water dashed high upon the rocks, escaping a like fate, it would seem, by a miracle.

But the middle current had gripped him. He came to the surface, and shook the water drops from his eyes.

The flume had broadened. He was aware of this fact, and soon noticed that the pitch of the stream was less abrupt.

The tug of the current was not so great. He took a few tentative strokes, and found that he was somewhat master of his own fate again.

The cañon widened, and then the bare walls of rock ended abruptly. He was too far below the top of the flume wall to know what manner of country he had come into; but he looked sharply for a place where he might crawl out of the flood.

There came to his nostrils, too, an odor that he had noticed before—but now it was much stronger.

It was a choking, gaseous smell, and had a most unpleasant effect upon the young fellow's throat.

But he paid little attention to this odor when he chanced to see a dead limb of a tree stretched out over the water, and not far ahead of him.

He leaped for this, caught it, and the wood snapped in his hands.

Disappointed, he was swept on; but the current was no longer his master.

Suddenly he beheld something on the other side of the flume, at the edge which was lowest. The water sucked in here in an eddy, and Rawdon found himself borne easily toward the spot. And there on the bank was stretched the body of a man.

The boy saw clearly enough to know that it was a Mexican, lying on his face, his head and shoulders partly over the water, and one arm stretched out as though to seize the half-drowned youth as he was carried by!

Rawdon Smart uttered a choking cry for help, and flung himself toward the bank. He grasped at the hand stretched down toward him—and missed it!

He felt the current tugging him back toward the middle of the stream. It flung him half around, but he managed to lift his head and shoulders out of the water. And, with a cry of triumph, he reached the down-stretched hand of the Mexican with a grip that spelled desperation.

And then an utterly unexpected thing happened—a thing that fairly chilled the imperiled youth to the heart. There was no pull back on the Mexican's part; the youth's course in the river was not for a moment retarded.

Instead, the man he had seized slipped forward, and plunged headfirst into the stream. The weight of Rawdon Smart carried the man beneath the surface. Both were whirled away from the bank, and shot down the middle current.

It was then, as the two struggled to the surface once more, that Rawdon realized he was clutching a dead man in his arms!

CHAPTER VI.

BUFFALO BILL'S GREAT CAST.

Rawdon Smart, with the two buckets, had scarcely disappeared beyond the heaped-up bowlders at the break of the pass when the third member of the camping party appeared suddenly in the chaparral below the fire, over which old Nomad was at work.

"Hi, Buffler!" cried the trapper, "I'll have er pone slapped down yere afore the fire in a jiffy, an' ef thet thar 'tarnel boy ever gits back with the water, we'll make some coffee. Señor Junipe was sure generous with these pervisions—— Hullo! Wot ye got thar? Fresh meat?"

The scout bore upon his shoulders a doe, tied by the feet so that her weight hung down his back. He quickly discharged his load upon the ground beside the fire.

"Picked it up down in the bottoms yonder, Nick," he said.

"You been takin' th' back track, Buffler?"

"I've been running over it a little. It won't do any harm to be cautious. I thought those peons we met yesterday with the string of pack mules looked at us kind of curiously. It's my belief, old man, that many of these poorer Mexicans would rather help the brigands than the authorities."

"Waugh!" grunted Nomad.

"And not to be wondered at. The peons are no better than slaves. The half-breeds and half-civilized Indians are worse off. And the Mexicans are mighty cruel to the wild tribes themselves."

"Waal, an Injun is an Injun," grunted Nomad.

"But these bandits rob the rich and give to the poor, I have no doubt. Especially is it so of this Silvernail, so I am told."

"Waagh! He's a heap big feller, Buffler—ain't he? D'yeou s'pose he killed thet thar blacksmith at th' Junipe Rancho?"

"Now you're asking me some question, old man," said Buffalo Bill. "I've got to pass it up—at present."

"D'ye reckon ol' Junipe, or this here nevvv of his, knows more erbout thet killin' than it seemed at th' time?" queried Nomad reflectively.

"What's the trouble with you, old man?" demanded the scout. "What gave you that idea?"

"Waal—I dunno. Sort o' got it fixed inter my noddle an' kyant git it out, Buffler. And it's a fac' thet this yere nevvv of the Mexican big chief is a hull lot more int'rested in thet thar Silvernail then he is in trackin' big game."

"I thought he was more anxious to reach San Erife and see his brother than anything else," suggested the scout. "Well, we'll reach the town to-day."

"Ef Injuns don't pop down on us."

"Oh, we'll be cautious. The two Bills told me yesterday that there was a party of reds afoot."

"Oh! W'en ye smoked 'em up on th' top o' thet thar spur?" queried the trapper. "Ye don't expect 'tis a reg'lar war party?"

"Not Apaches. They may be Yaquis—and that breed are not particularly sore on real white men, Nick. It's only Mexicans they are after."

"Thet's all right, Buffler. But reds is reds. And, besides, this here kentry ain't my reg'lar stamping ground. I feel strange yere."

"I presume you do, old man."

"Put me on the old Misson', or on the Platte, an'

ye kyant lose me—nussir! But these Mexican bad lands keep me guessin."

"And some of these bad Mexicans have kept the government guessing," chuckled Buffalo Bill.

"I shouldn't wonder."

"It would be cheaper for the United States if there was built a high barbed-wire fence along this border—and if the Rio Grande was unfordable for its entire length."

"Sufferin' catamounts!" ejaculated Nick suddenly; "whar's thet thar younker gone? He's sure fell down er crack, 'r sumpin'. I mout as well hew gone fer that thar water myself, an' no mistake!"

He wiped his skinning knife, and talked up the hill. He was scarcely out of sight when his voice floated back to Buffalo Bill in a sudden mighty shout. The scout sprang up from the doe, and listened. There was, combined with the cry of the old trapper, another sound—one that Buffalo Bill did not understand.

His horse stood, saddled and bridled, in the chaparral. The scout reached the steed in half a dozen strides. Flinging himself into the saddle, and slashing the horse with his quirt, he rode swiftly up the rocky path, which Rawdon Smart and old Nomad had followed.

And he arrived upon the open ridge just in season to see—and be in—the final scene of a most exciting and perilous wilderness drama—the like of which was seldom played by actors who came through the adventure alive!

Old Nick Nomad had rounded the pile of rocks at the head of the pass on the keen jump, for he had heard the long, disappointed wail of the puma as Rawdon Smart had disappeared down the flume, and

the old frontiersman recognized the brute's blood-curdling cry.

His first prey gone, the puma turned its attention instantly to the man dressed in skins.

Such promptness to fight showed that the huge cat was both hungry and irritable. From the rock on which it had bounded to follow the course of the helpless Rawdon down the stream, with its covetous gaze, the beast sprang at least twenty feet in its eagerness to meet Nick Nomad.

The trapper jerked out one of his derringers, and took a pot shot at the tawny-bellied brute as it sailed through the air. But, for a good reason, he missed his shot.

His moccasined foot slipped in the water which had been spilled upon the edge of the pool, and he fell flat just as his gun exploded.

His right elbow struck with sufficient force upon the rock to jar the nerves to the very tips of his fingers. The derringer flew from his powerless hand.

And then the puma made a second flying leap.

There was no mistaking the fact that the huge cat meant business. Having been balked of its first victim, this second one would have a fine time trying to dodge the slobbering jaws and razorlike claws of the spitting cat!

"Whoop-ee!" gasped the old trapper, as he saw the puma sail through the air toward him like a monstrous bat, "yere's whar ol' Nick o' th' Woods gits his—an' gits it good."

For when he tried to jerk the second gun from its scabbard, and with his left hand, the weapon stuck. There was a place torn in the lining of the sheath, and the trigger of the derringer was caught.

He manage^d to get to his knees, however, just as

the cat landed right before him. Ten feet scarce separated the puma from the man.

They stared at each other, the cat yowling and the trapper fumbling behind him for his skinning knife.

Nick's right hand was out of service; indeed, the whole forearm felt paralyzed.

He crouched there, seemingly at the mercy of the savage beast. The latter gathered its forepaws under its breast, and the muscles of its legs swelled for its third leap.

The trapper had secured his knife. In his left hand he held it, and watched the green and glowing eyes of the puma as though they belonged to a human antagonist.

The eyes flashed sudden lightning; the beast sprang from the ground.

Nick Nomad threw himself forward, on his side along the rock; and the blade in his hand flashed in the air like a streak of sunlight.

A terrific shriek was emitted by the puma, and the blade of the trapper's knife dripped blood!

The wound showed crimson along the creature's belly; but it had not been deep. It merely excited the puma to greater anger and more reckless courage.

Turning within its own length, it sprang again directly upon the prostrate man.

Nick Nomad threw his bent right arm forward, across his throat, and the puma's jaws closed upon it. The knife blade sought its depth in the brute's side, but was diverted by, and slid along, the ribs.

The fetid breath of the beast stifled the unhappy trapper. The play of the beast's mighty claws would, the next instant, have stripped the man's clothing from his body and his flesh from his bones had not another's hand intervened.

It was this terrible tableau that Buffalo Bill espied

as his steed leaped out upon the barren ridge. And it was the scout's telling stroke that finished this wilderness drama.

As the puma sprang upon the prostrate trapper, the revolver in Buffalo Bill's right hand began to spit. He was a marvelous marksman, and with this weapon few were ever his equal.

The stream of bullets from the small gun were a deadly hail, under which the puma sank like a wilted rag.

The scout had to take the risk of hitting his old friend, Nick; but every bullet, fortunately, found its billet in the puma's body.

A mighty paroxysm contracted the beast's limbs. It uttered a high, almost human-sounding shriek, and rolled off its victim.

When Nick Nomad staggered to his feet, the brute was kicking its last on the very edge of the pool.

"But where's the boy?" demanded Buffalo Bill, re-loading his gun.

"I ain't seed th' leetle varmint," gasped Nick, holding onto his right elbow.

"But he must have been here. There are the buckets."

"And one of 'em chawed ter bits—th' careless young sprout!"

"You can't lay that to Rawdon," said Buffalo Bill, with a smile. "Evidently the panther was guilty of injuring your bucket."

"Why didn't the boy look out for 'em——"

But the scout's keen eyes had been searching the vicinity as he talked. He guessed rightly as to what had happened to Rawdon Smart.

"He had filled the buckets when the puma jumped on him," declared Buffalo Bill.

"Ye're right thar, Buffler," agreed Nick.

"And the youngster was knocked off his pins."

"He might well be—so was ol' Nick."

"Or else he leaped into the pool."

"Waugh! thet thar younker never let hisself git drowned in thet puddle of water, Buffler!"

"He's been carried downstream—that's what happened him!" declared the scout, and, with the words, he set spurs to his horse, and galloped down the rocky path, which bordered the flume.

Directly through the crooked, sloping cañon the scout rode, and he rode as wildly as ever he had in his life. The mountain torrent, into which he believed Rawdon Smart had fallen, might offer a most dangerous bed through which the current would hurry the boy.

Buffalo Bill chanced to know little of the country that lay ahead. He was not familiar with this portion of the Mexican border.

Luckily his steed was sure-footed, for the scout gave the creature no attention whatsoever. His gaze was fastened upon the foaming stream; he searched it for some sign of the missing Rawdon.

But until he passed through the cañon and came out upon the mesa, or tableland, the rider saw no sign of the missing one.

There the stream did not flow so swiftly, and it broadened. But the banks in most places were steep.

Buffalo Bill charged on, scarcely noticing the dreary region into which he had come so suddenly. The foam-streaked water held his attention completely.

Suddenly he uttered a shout of exultation.

"Whoop-ee! Yip, yip, yip!" he shrieked, spurring his horse again, and seized the rope that hung coiled on his saddle horn.

In a moment he was whirling the noose above his

head, while he guided his steed close to the brink of the river.

Down below there, in the brown stream, he had caught sight of two heads. One of them was surely Rawdon Smart, and who the second person in the river was didn't signify at that moment.

The scout, his horse on the keen jump, overtook the pair in the current, and fortunately a vagary of that same current brought them in near the bank.

With unerring eye and hand, he cast the rope. The loop sailed through the air, hovered a moment over the stream, and then dropped neatly over the struggling figures in the flood.

Buffalo Bill spoke to his well-trained horse, and the animal lay back, bracing his body for the shock. The loop had dropped below the shoulders of the two victims, and its tightening could do no harm.

The taut rope snatched the two in toward the shore. Buffalo Bill sprang from his saddle, ran down to the water's edge, and laid hold upon them.

Exerting his mighty strength, he dragged both of them out upon the bank, which here, fortunately, sloped a little.

As the scout had believed, one was Rawdon Smart. The other was evidently a Mexican of the laboring class—perhaps a peon; and from all appearances he had been some time dead.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MESA OF DEATH.

The scout immediately turned his attention to resuscitating his young friend. It was plain that the Mexican was beyond all earthly help.

The latter lay with his eyes rolled up, showing their whites only; his jaws were set; he did not seem to have been drowned.

At least, the Mexican appeared different from any person whom Buffalo Bill had seen taken from the water.

As for Rawdon Smart, his eyes opened feebly, and he groaned, even before old Nomad, running as fast as a hound, appeared on the scene.

"Have ye sure enough got him, Buffler?" demanded the trapper, while still at a distance.

"Of course I've got him—and he'll be hearty in a minute," declared the scout, aiding Rawdon to sit up. "Spit again, son. You sure swallowed enough of that river to everlastingly rust your constitution."

Nomad had by this time come to the spot on the bank where Buffalo Bill had drawn out the two victims of the river's current.

"Sufferin' catamounts!" he chortled. "Was there two of 'em?"

"Yes! Who's your friend, Rawdon?" demanded Buffalo Bill.

"My friend?" repeated the half-drowned youth, looking around.

"And he's er greaser," grumbled Nomad.

"Oh, I remember!" stammered young Smart. "He tried to save me——"

"That man tried to save you?" cried Buffalo Bill.

"Why—er——"

"He's been dead twelve hours if he has a minute," said the scout confidently.

"No! No!" cried Rawdon suddenly. "That was not it."

"I reckon ye better go back over thet trail," grunted Nomad.

"I remember now. He lay on the bank. His arm was stretched down toward the water. I thought he tried to help me; but when I seized the hand, I pulled him in."

"Thet thar blamed tomcat didn't chase him inter th' drink same's it did you, then?" said Nomad.

"Surely not; surely not, Nick," said Buffalo Bill briskly.

"And I didn't bring him to his death," Rawdon said, with confidence.

"Surely not," repeated Buffalo Bill.

The scout was now giving the body of the dead Mexican a more thorough examination.

"Do not be disturbed," continued the scout. "The man was long since dead when first you saw him."

"Nor was the cause of his death drowning. I should say he had been suffocated, but not by being under water."

"Waal, sir!" ejaculated Nomad. "Wot's this yere mean?"

"It surely wasn't water that killed him, and I find no bullet wound or knife mark upon him."

Old Nomad was standing up again now, and he was wrinkling his nose and snuffing the air as though he smelled something mighty unpleasant.

"Wot d'ye make of thet thar, Buffler?" he suddenly demanded.

"Make of what, old man?"

"This 'ere stench. Waugh! it's wuss nor a dose of red-eye lick'er goin' down th' wrong way."

Buffalo Bill likewise stood up, and began to sniff. There was a penetrating, choking odor which seemed to come and go with every fluctuating breath of wind.

"There is a bad smell," admitted the scout.

"Say! I noticed it up yonder," said Rawdon Smart, struggling to his feet.

"Up where?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"By the waterfall—before that puma jumped me. By the way, is the creature dead?"

"Deader'n a chipmunk under th' paw of a March b'ar," grunted the trapper. "But he come nigh ter gittin' th' skelp of ol' Nomad fust."

"My! but he was savage," remarked Rawdon.

"Ye don't hafter tell me nawthin' erbout it," said the trapper. "Ef Buffler hadn't snapped his derringer on him as he did, ol' Uncle Nick would ha' gone whar th' good niggers go, an' no mistake!"

"But this smell," muttered the scout, staring around about them.

And this was the first moment that he had taken to observe the locality. He marked well the awful desolation of the mesa. As far as the eye could see, over a broad tableland, perhaps ten miles square, there was not a living thing in sight!

Such an abomination of desolation the scout had never seen before, for the desert itself was not so barren and so evidently smitten as this mesa.

Here had been vegetation in plenty—trees, shrubs, grass, flowers; but all were withered and brown—the leaves rustling on the trees, the blades of burned grass brittle underfoot, the faces of the flowers stricken with death.

And yet it was not fire that had done this. It was no burned expanse of country that they looked upon.

A blight had breathed upon the mesa—or so it seemed—and this breath of death itself had killed every living blade, every tree, every bush, and——

“Sufferin’ catamounts!” ejaculated old Nomad suddenly. “Hev I sure lost th’ use of my eyes, or wot is that thar that I see?”

He was pointing to an object beyond the stream, and not many yards away.

“A dead cow!” cried Rawdon Smart.

“And thar’s more of ’em—I see two of ’em, Buffler.”

“Three!” cried the youth.

But the scout had already swept the plain with his glass.

“There’s at least a dozen in sight,” he muttered.

“Injun raid!” cried Nick.

“Not on your life, old man,” said Rawdon. “Look how everything’s burned up. What do you reckon it means, Mr. Cody?”

“Thar’s dead birds, too—an er jackass rabbit,” grunted Nomad. “Why, folks, et looks like th’ critters fell right down an’ died yere like they was struck by lightning.”

Buffalo Bill closed his glass, and said confidently:

“It is a matter for serious investigation. Go back to our camp, Nick, pack up our truck, and bring down the mule and the horses. Here! Ride my horse. Rawdon isn’t fit to travel much yet, and I want to take a look at things the other side of that stream.”

“All hunky-dory, Buffler. Jest as you say,” returned the trapper, and, vaulting into the scout’s saddle, he was quickly out of sight up the crooked cañon.

“It’s an awful sight!” murmured Buffalo Bill. “Ah! What is that yonder?”

Rawdon Smart struggled to his feet again, and gazed along Buffalo Bill’s pointing arm. In the dis-

tance he could see several uprights, like beams, or the legs of a derrick.

"Men must have been over there," muttered the border king.

"Let's see what it means," said the eager youth. "Can we cross the stream?"

"We'll try," returned the scout, and together they started down the edge of the riotous river.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HOLE IN THE GROUND.

Rawdon Smart was getting stronger every minute now; but he staggered some as he followed his benefactor down the bank of the river.

This stream cut the desolated plain almost in half, and on either side of the stream the mysterious blight had fallen on every leaf, on every blade of grass, and probably on every living creature that had remained upon the plain when the phenomenon occurred.

The leaves hanging to the twigs were shriveled and brown. The scorching heat of several rainless months could not have so utterly destroyed all vegetation.

The grass blades broke off under their feet as they stepped upon them, as though made brittle by the blight that had fallen on the plain.

"Do you suppose, sir, that the man yonder was killed by the same thing that has struck all this vegetation?" demanded Rawdon.

"I do not know. The man was strangled," declared the puzzled scout.

"But his throat bears no mark——"

"No man strangled him. He died of some awful thing that smothered him—or poisoned his lungs."

"This smell that we get occasionally—there it is! Choking, by Jove!" ejaculated the youth.

"Yes. It is choking. Hold on!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, stopping suddenly.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know about your going into this thing any further, my boy," said the scout earnestly.

"Why not, I'd like to know?"

"You have passed through enough already this morning, my boy."

"Oh, say! I'm not a child," grumbled Rawdon.

"But there may be peril in crossing this stream."

"Can't be any wetter than I am already. So I'd better keep moving."

"I don't mean that," chuckled the scout.

"What is the danger, then?"

"I'm not afraid of your getting cold, my boy."

"Well?"

"But there may be danger of our being smitten just as that man was back there."

"Jimminy!"

"And the cattle—and birds. This thing may happen suddenly."

"You'll be in danger yourself, sir," said Rawdon anxiously.

"Better for only one of us to cross the river, then if anything——"

"I don't see it!" cried the youth. "Why is there any more danger on that side than on this?"

"Because I believe, son," returned the scout, "that whatever has brought about this terrible destruction has more power that way than here."

"Eh?"

"The man was lying on the farther bank of the river, wasn't he?"

"Sure enough!"

"And the cattle are dead over there."

"True. But this whole plain—both sides of the river—has suffered alike."

"The danger is increased yonder—I feel sure," muttered Buffalo Bill, shaking his head.

"I'm not going to leave you," declared Rawdon. "In fact, I don't want you to leave me."

"Well—let us take precautions, then," said the scout slowly.

"For Heaven's sake, sir, what precautions can we take?"

The border king was standing stock-still again, and gazing off into the distance—perhaps at the upright beams that were visible clear across the mesa. Rawdon Smart watched him, and was silent, knowing well that he was working out some problem in his mind to a finish.

"Yes," Buffalo Bill muttered, at length, "the man was strangled—his lungs were poisoned—probably by some vapor. Has that vapor caused all this terrible destruction? Has this plain become the abomination of desolation it is, because of some gas thrown off by the earth through a suddenly opened fissure? Is that the explanation of this mystery?"

"The man dropped dead. The cattle were stricken in their tracks. The birds and rabbits—birds that fly and rabbits that run like the wind—were overwhelmed and killed instantly. And this inexplicable odor——"

"There's a sniff of it again, sir," said Rawdon, beginning to cough once more.

"Whatever it is, it is so mixed with the atmosphere now that its poison is greatly modified. But it may come again—and in volume. Plainly, it comes suddenly, and we must be prepared for it."

Buffalo Bill untied the handkerchief knotted about his throat, and wrapped it about his mouth and nostrils, tying it at the back of his neck.

"Do the same, Rawdon," he said, in a muffled tone. "If you cross the river with me, you must only breathe through the cloth."

He started on, and the youth quickly obeyed his directions, and followed in his footsteps. So they came to a turn in the stream where there was a sand bar.

It reached out from their side of the river, and gathered, on its upper side, were several logs and other debris.

Buffalo Bill led the way out upon this spit, secured a log that would float, and a long pole, and on this teetering raft the two managed to make the other bank of the river without an overturn. They both leaped off, and climbed upon the plain.

The upright beams in the distance were the objective point, and the scout set off immediately across the mesa. As they went onward, they saw many things which made them marvel.

Many small animals lay dead upon the ground. At one point was the half-picked carcass of a horse, and half a dozen vultures lay dead around the carrion.

Buffalo Bill halted to examine this ghastly exhibit. When he started on again, he said to his companion:

"That horse was not killed at the same time as the man and the cattle. He is a long time dead, and the flesh is putrid. Besides, his shoes were knocked off. But the vultures were overcome by the same mysterious thing that knocked down the cows and the man."

"There is a dog!" ejaculated Rawdon, pointing.

They went nearer, and saw a lean and hungry-looking hound stretched upon the ground. Now, a dog can run fast!

"It seems, indeed, strange that the phenomenon should have overtaken and killed creatures like that—and the jack rabbit—that are so swift of foot," repeated Buffalo Bill.

"But if the gas burst forth suddenly from the earth?" suggested Rawdon.

"That, indeed," agreed the scout.

Before they reached the scaffolding, they passed several more dead cattle. This mesa had evidently offered good grazing for some poor man's stock, and

the scattered herd had been wiped out completely by the phenomenon.

Rawdon Smart suddenly uttered a cry. He pointed a shaking finger at something lying beyond the upright timbers. Buffalo Bill started forward on the run, and, with his companion at his elbow, came to three bodies, lying side by side, in the shelter of a rock.

A glance told the awful story. Here were three more human victims of the catastrophe—all Mexicans.

Rawdon Smart looked positively frightened. Here was something inexplicable, and it gripped him hard. Buffalo Bill, who had knelt to examine each corpse, finally arose, and shook his head.

"No use," he muttered. "All are as dead as that other one that you pulled into the river, young man."

"It's an awful thing!" sighed the other, shaking his head.

They looked about the place with interest. There were some tools and hand machinery, the uses of which Rawdon Smart could not imagine. But the scout looked at the articles with more intelligence.

"This is digging machinery," he explained. "Yonder they have been digging and piping a well. It must have cost money to get such stuff as this 'way up here on this mesa."

"And they got water, too," said Rawdon suddenly.

The two explorers approached the spot where the Mexicans had evidently been at work before they were stricken. The ground for some yards in diameter had plainly been water-soaked. A little pond had lain there, but now it was dried up, and the earth was cracked.

In the middle of this place was a hole in the ground, not more than two feet across. Four feet down was some slimy water, its surface covered with oily bubbles. The odor that had come to them before rose

from this place, and was so choking that both investigators stepped back hastily.

"This is no place for us," declared the scout. "We can do nothing to help these poor fellows, and we cannot stop to give them decent burial here.

"If we follow that trail yonder, we will reach San Enrife—at the foot of the mesa. So I believe, at least. Somebody there must know about these poor fellows. And, besides, there must be somebody who was bossing this outfit. I see no reason why several poor peons should have been digging for water here, when the stream yonder would supply more cattle than could possibly find sustenance on this mesa when the vegetation was in its thriftiest state.

"Come! We will go back and meet old Nick Nomad, and go down to the valley. I don't like the look of this," concluded the scout.

"And I don't like the smell of it," grumbled Rawdon. "It's enough to poison one."

"That it is," agreed Buffalo Bill. "And the outburst of gas that killed these poor fellows may come again at any moment. There is more danger here than is to be apprehended from roving bands of Yaquis or Apaches—or from the bandits of the border," concluded the scout.

CHAPTER IX.

JUAN CASEANO.

The scout and his companion crossed the river on the log again, and there met old Nomad with the horses and pack mule—for the party was in heavy marching order. Buffalo Bill expected to join forces with the others of his party before many hours, and the bulk of the extra camp equipment was packed on a sure-footed mule, whose leading rein was knotted to a ring in Nomad's saddle.

"Wot d'ye make out o' this place, Buffler?" queried the old trapper, as the scout and Rawdon Smart climbed into their saddles. "This yere mesa looks like it was struck wi' th' wrath ter come!"

"It has been struck by something, and that's a fact, Nick," agreed the scout. "What it is I am not prepared to say now. But there are other men dead over yonder, so there is no use picking up this poor fellow." And he pointed at the body which he had dragged out of the water with Rawdon Smart.

"Say! Mebbe th' greasers will think we killed their friends," grumbled the trapper. "We don't want no trouble with them."

"We'll have to run the risk of being misunderstood. The people in the village below here must be told."

"That is San Enrife, isn't it?" asked Rawdon Smart eagerly.

"Sure-ly."

"I expect to find my brother there. He will be known to these Mexicans, and he will vouch for us," declared Señor Junipe's nephew.

"Waal," granted Nomad. "I kyant say. I admire

his taste—livin' ermong these yere yaller faces. Not but wot some of them is mighty fine folks," he added; "yer uncle, fer instance. But most of 'em 'pear ter me ter be purty small pertaters in purty poor hills."

"But Clifford has been among them for some years," Rawdon hastened to say. "He has assisted Professor Pasquale Cralé for a long time."

"An' who mout this yere perfessor be?" asked Nomad.

"He is a great scientist, I believe; but he is peculiar. He is spending his life developing the mineral and other resources of the country for the benefit of the people. But some of the poor and ignorant do not understand him, I am afraid. He has been in trouble in several parts of Mexico."

"He is a Mexican himself, isn't he?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Oh, yes, sir. But the government at Mexico City is so unstable that it seems to be unable to protect the professor while he is making his investigations. I believe my brother acts as a guard for him—and his daughter—as much as anything."

They had already reached the steep pitch of the winding trail that led down the face of the lower bluff into the rich valley. They could see the village—a goodly number of 'dobe houses, some quite important looking—and a church of considerable size.

The cavalcade crossed the river by a rustic bridge, and reached the first house—a neat cottage with a paling fence about it, and a porch on which the proprietor sat smoking. He was a short, bulky man, with very long arms and a massive head surrounded by a halo of black hair and whiskers. When he rose up, the better to address Buffalo Bill and his friends, he displayed his dwarfed figure more plainly.

"*Buenos días, señores,*" he said, eying the party curiously.

Buffalo Bill answered him in his own tongue, which, of course, Rawdon Smart likewise spoke.

"What is the news up above?" asked the man.

"I bring bad news, señor," said Buffalo Bill gravely.

"*Por Dios!* What has happened?"

"Do the men and cattle on the mesa belong to this village?"

"The cattle belong to me, señor. My brother watches them. There is nothing happened the cattle, is there?" cried the man eagerly.

"A very dreadful thing has happened," began the scout, but the dwarf interrupted him with an angry scream:

"Don't tell me that my cattle have been stolen? What has happened to them—let me hear the worst, Americano!"

The dwarf seemed only interested in his cattle—not even the brother he spoke of troubled his mind. Buffalo Bill looked at him sternly.

"What matters the cattle, señor, when men's lives are in danger?" he demanded.

The dwarf fairly gnashed his teeth. His rage was ungovernable.

"Tell me the truth, Americano!" he shrieked. "Have my cattle—my precious cattle—been run off?"

"Say, that thar greaser is the limit!" growled old Nomad.

The scout now spoke more roughly to the Mexican.

"Your cattle are dead—all of them," he said. "And if your brother was with them, he is dead, too."

"*Madre di Dios!*" screamed the dwarf, seizing great handfuls of hair and tugging at it like a madman. "I am undone! I am undone!"

"There are four men dead up there," pursued the

scout, and his sympathy for this madman was nil. "One of them may be your brother, man!"

The dwarf spat out Spanish curses in a torrent; he seemed to have no compassion for the dead men.

"If there were four, then one is my brother," he cried. "And serve him right—the pig! To lose my cattle——"

"Waugh!" grunted Nomad. "I'm gittin' th' itch ter knock thet feller in the head," for the old trapper understood enough Spanish to realize the tenor of the Mexican's screams.

But Buffalo Bill rode close to the dwarf, and seized him roughly by the shoulder.

"Listen to me, hombre!" he exclaimed. "This is an act of God—this terrible massacre. Men, cattle, wild beasts, and all have been smitten dead upon that mesa. The mesa itself is accursed. What were those men doing up there—the men digging in the ground?"

"*Caramba! Quien sabe?*" snarled the dwarf, trying to wrench himself free from the scout's restraining hand. "They are working for that crazy señor, who lives in the big house below."

"Were they digging for Professor Cralé?" cried Rawdon Smart quickly.

"Aye—for him. He is accursed himself, I think," declared the dwarf.

"Where is the professor?" demanded Buffalo Bill.

"He is away—he is gone. Only his daughter, the señorita, and the young Americano, are at present in the village. So I, Juan Caseano, believe. Curses on the crazy caballero——"

"So you are named Juan Caseano, eh?" interrupted Buffalo Bill. "Well, Juan, go down yonder and rouse your neighbors. Tell them to bring four stretchers, for there are four dead men to bring down from the mesa. I will go back with the party. Do you, Nick

and Rawdon here, go along to Professor Cralé's house and warn them there.

"And," he added, in an aside, as the dwarf loped off down the hill, running as fast as a dog, "you'd better warn the professor, if he is there, or whoever else is in charge, that there may be trouble rising out of this. These people are superstitious. If there are many of them here like this Juan, old Cralé may be threatened because of the death of his workmen."

"But if they died from inhaling poisonous gases that belched forth from that well!" cried Rawdon.

"For that very reason the Mexicans will believe it is magic, or something quite as bad. Indians are no more superstitious. Be off with you," commanded the scout.

He turned his own mount, and slowly went up the trail again. He would not allow the rescuing party to go back without his own presence. They might run into peril without realizing it. The scout was confident that he had solved the mystery of the stricken mesa; and he believed, likewise, that he would be able to apprehend the appearance of the gas if it belched forth in volume again.

Before reaching the bridge, he observed a path branching off up the bluff toward the spot where the men were lying dead by the hole in the ground. By following this trail one did not have to cross the river. So he waited here for the coming of the Mexicans from the village.

And he had not long to wait. Half the village, it seemed, suddenly appeared at the bottom of the trail, and swarmed up it in the wake of the dwarf. It was evident that Juan Caseano had been a bad messenger to send to arouse the people of San Enrife.

Their voices reached Buffalo Bill as he sat on his great stallion at the intersection of the paths, and the

tone was one of anger. There could be no doubt of that. Some of the men were armed, too, and screaming women made up the tail of the mob.

"This will never do in the world," thought Cody, as he viewed the onrush. "These people will get up there, spread all over the mesa, and if there is another outburst of the gas—or whatever killed those poor fellows—the massacre will be dreadful!"

So he barred the way, and stopped the first men with warning voice and uplifted palm.

"Stop where you are, amigos," he commanded. "Let men with some caution follow me. The women must be sent back—and the children. There is danger yonder on the mesa; we want none but brave men."

"He is a devil, that Americano!" shrieked Juan Caseano. "He knows what the trouble is—the thing that has killed all my fat cattle! Yet he will not explain."

"What is this man?" demanded Buffalo Bill, pointing at the dwarf. "Is he mad—or what? His own brother lies dead yonder, and he prates of his cattle. Pah! He is a miser."

Another man pushed forward—one who seemed to have some authority, as well as some sense.

"We do not know you, Americano," this person said, "nor do we understand what you say. Who has killed our friends?"

"Bring such men as you can trust, amigo," said the scout quickly. "Send back the others—or make them wait here. We need men to carry four corpses—for I tell you the men above have been stricken by the hand of God."

The women burst into shrieks again; it seemed that wives of two of Professor Cralé's workmen were with the mob. But Buffalo Bill was firm. Only men were

allowed to accompany the party to the mesa, and only enough of them to carry the dead men down.

Juan Caseano continued to shriek maledictions upon the Americano, upon the professor, and upon animate and inanimate objects in general, as they went along. The fellow who seemed sane, however, told Buffalo Bill that the dwarf was not only a miser, but that he was counted as half-witted by his neighbors. Yet he certainly had managed to stir these other Mexicans with some superstitious dread.

And when the party arrived upon the mesa and beheld the lifeless appearance of the plain—the dead cattle and other beasts, and the dead vegetation—they were stricken with fear. For some minutes none dared advance across the barren tableland.

"And my cattle! My cattle!" yelled the dwarf. "All dead—all dead! Curses on the name of that Señor Cralé—I, Juan Caseano, spit upon it!"

He fairly vomited forth vile phrases against the scientist, and his neighbors, without doubt, believed that, in some way, Cralé was at fault for this awful thing that had happened on the mesa.

This was no time to try to explain the phenomenon, as Cody very well knew. Indeed, he did not understand it sufficiently himself to explain clearly what had happened here. The men were dead; that was sufficient. And there was need of haste in getting the bodies down from the tableland.

The scout spoke to the man who seemed to have more sense than the others, and he urged his companions to follow the mounted scout across the plain toward the upright beams—to the spot where the well had been dug. As they neared the place, many of the men began to cough, and to the nostrils of the horseman was wafted that same-choking smell which he and Rawdon Smart had before suffered from.

Buffalo Bill tied his handkerchief across his mouth and nostrils again, and advised the Mexicans to do the same. Several of the men were so frightened that they ran back, and scurried down the trail again toward the village. The dwarf would do nothing but run from one fat cow to another and yell his maledictions at the man whom he believed had caused all this trouble. The other Mexicans hastened their movements, slung the three dead men upon the stretchers, and hurried away from the vicinity of the well, as the scout advised.

The brother of Juan Caseano was the man whom Rawdon Smart had dragged into the river. His body lay beyond the stream, and would have to be recovered later. And, as the little procession started from the place of the well to return across the mesa, two startling facts suddenly became apparent to Buffalo Bill.

He saw what looked like a curl of smoke rising from the hole in the ground—and the fumes which thickened the air became more choking than before. The second thing which disturbed the scout was a series of eerie shouts, or war whoops, from the distant side of the mesa. He whirled his horse around, and stared in that direction.

Two horsemen, riding like the wind, had suddenly appeared from a gulch which debouched upon the mesa. They were evidently looking back for some pursuit, but meantime spurred their mounts madly toward the scout and the little procession of the dead that had started across the stricken tableland.

CHAPTER X.

THE BREATH OF DEATH.

The Mexicans were scurrying along, casting fearful glances over their shoulders at the distant riders. They did not at all understand what had stricken their comrades down; the whooping riders might be enemies who threatened their own lives, and some of the bearers dropped the handles of the stretchers, and would have legged it off the mesa at their best pace had not the American scout threatened them with dire punishment for the cowardly act.

"Carry your dead off—do you hear, you yellow hounds!" cried Buffalo Bill, and there was no mistaking his determination to make them obey, for he drew a gun and threatened the scoundrels. "Would you leave the bodies here to rot? Come! I will remain behind and defend you from these fellows; but escape with your dead while you may."

Juan Caseano, observing the two strangers dashing toward the spot across the mesa, left his examination of the dead cattle, and scurried after his neighbors. But Buffalo Bill faced about to welcome the newcomers. And in a few moments he realized that they were not enemies at all.

One was astride a big mule that ran like the wind, while the other—and slighter—figure was riding a pony that skimmed the ground at a splendid pace. Their voices, too, came down wind to the scout, and, while the slighter rider was emitting shrill war whoops—unmistakable Indian war whoops—the man on the mule spoke an entirely different language.

"Donner undt blitzen!" he bawled. "Dot iss Puf-

falo Pill, or I am a Dutchmans! Ach! such a habbiness is idt—yes? Undt I vos su-ah ve vos all slaughtered, undt skeluped yedt alretty! Aind't it?"

There could be no mistaking the baron, on board of Toofer, his trained mule. While his companion was the Indian lad, Little Cayuse.

Buffalo Bill spurred forward to meet them, swinging his hat over his head.

"What's the trouble, brothers?" he shouted. "You're stampeding these Mexicans to a finish."

"Undt dot vos righdt!" bawled the baron. "Himmelblitzen! dey vould petter run. De Inchuns is after us."

"What Injuns?" demanded Cody, in some doubt, bringing his horse to a sudden stop again.

Here Little Cayuse took up the tale:

"It is true. Pa-e-has-ka is warned. A war party is behind. Ugh!"

"What kind of Injuns?" demanded the scout.

"Vot kindt of Inchuns? Vot a foolishness!" groaned the baron. "Dere iss only two kindts of Inchuns—goot vons undt pad vons; undt all de goot vons iss deat, yet alretty! Dese dot chase us are pat Inchuns, you can pet mein life on idt!"

The man on the mule and the boy on the pony were now beside Buffalo Bill. They saw the scout adjust the handkerchief again across his face.

"Himmelblitzen!" gasped the baron. "For vy do you dit dot, Puffalo Pill? Iss idt to pe masked like them pandits dot ve vos afder yedt alretty? Undt pefore dose Inchuns took afder us—ach, like so many fiendts from de pit yedt—ve struck de trail of dot Slivertail vot kilt de placksmit' feller at Señor Shoonipe's ranch—yes!"

"You did!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, in astonishment.

Just then the Dutchman began to choke, and so did Little Cayuse. The scout, in a muffled voice, cried:

"Cover your faces, boys! Quick! I'll explain this later. This is no time or place to chew language. Hurry up—pronto!"

"Undt dere iss anudder reason for hurryin'—aind't idt?" squealed the baron. "Here gomes de Inchuns—you pet me!"

The scout glanced back. Out of the gulch from the mouth of which his two friends had raced poured a squadron of wild riders, lashing their ponies with quirts; their faint, high yells announcing that they were really savages. One brave was far in the lead, however, having much the better horse, it would seem.

"Those are never Apaches!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, without hurrying his own mount.

"No. Dey vos odder Inchuns den any I effer seed," admitted the baron.

"Yaquis, by the living thunder!" ejaculated the American scout.

And then his attention was attracted to something entirely different from the horde of wildly riding Indians. This something lay between the scout and his two friends, and the squadron of flying red men.

The Mexicans, chattering their fear like parrots, were already at the brink of the bluff, which pitched down into the valley where lay the village of San Enrife. They were comparatively safe.

But the scout and his friends had still some distance to ride before descending the path down the bluff. And rolling toward them along the ground was a black cloud—a cloud that spread rapidly, did not rise more than breast-high for a tall man, and seemed to be emitted from the earth just where the skeleton of timbers surmounted the mysterious well that the dead

Mexicans had dug under the direction of the scientist, Professor Pasquale Cralé.

The gas—just as the scout had suspected—came from the earth. In boring this well with the machinery that was evidently an invention of Professor Cralé himself, the peons had struck a pocket, or vein, of gas, which, under intermittent pressure from below, was spurted out of the hole.

It was too heavy to mix easily with the air, or to rise far above the ground. It was visible, but its deadly nature was unsuspected by the workmen, and it had rolled over the mesa completely, killing every live thing it touched. And this gang of pursuing Yaquis were riding right into the cloud of poisonous vapor!

Buffalo Bill half pulled in his mount again. He had nothing against these aborigines of the Mexican border, even though they had given the baron and Little Cayuse a ten-mile run for their lives. The reds had likely taken the scout's friends for Mexicans, whom the Yaquis hated.

And the band of savages was going full pelt into the mass of vapor that was spreading over the mesa. Whatever they might think the cloud was, the Yaquis evidently were not afraid of it. Perhaps they knew this mesa, were aware that cattle usually grazed upon it, and believed that there might be a chance for them to drive off a part of the herd, at least, even if they lost the men they were chasing.

"Come on, bard! For vy do you stay to be gopped up py de Inchuns?" bawled the baron, restraining Toofer with difficulty.

Then the first waft of gas smote him, and he choked and near fell from the saddle. Little Cayuse was coughing, too, and the pony that the Indian boy rode displayed sudden difficulty in his breathing.

Buffalo Bill did not wish to lose Bear Paw. He knew that retreat was the wisest thing for him to do just then. Yet he wondered what would happen to the Yaquis when they charged into the rolling cloud of poisonous gas—or whatever it was.

The leader of the Yaquis was a powerful young brave, and he had now approached near enough for Cody to see his face. It was a keen countenance, and not unhandsome, as Indians go. And he was evidently possessed of abundant courage, for he rode far ahead of his comrades, and lashed his pony to greater exertions as he saw the three mounted men ahead following the Mexicans to the trail, which descended to the valley.

The rolling black cloud had now spread for many square rods about the vent in the earth, which had been opened under the direction of the scientist. There was a little wind, and it drifted the pall toward Buffalo Bill and his friends. It was, therefore, a fact that they suffered more quickly from the poison odor of the belching gas than did the charging Yaquis.

Indeed, the handsome young brave in the lead of the mob of savages appeared to pay not the least attention to the black vapor. He rode his pony through the outer edge of the cloud, and rode so quickly that neither the pony nor he himself was overcome.

He uttered a high and shrill war cry as he came out upon the near side of the cloud and saw the scout, the baron, and Little Cayuse, their faces masked, just before him. He was armed with a feather-tufted spear, a bow and sheaf of arrows at his back, while, hung by a thong to his sash, was a heavy knife—the only weapon of civilized manufacture that he carried.

Seeing the trio, he stopped his pony suddenly, tossed his spear into the air, and caught dexterously again, and recited in high, staccato tones what was evidently

a challenge to combat. Buffalo Bill and the baron, having their faces covered, plainly looked like Mexicans to the Yaqui, and there was a deadly feud between the Indians and the greasers.

But ere the young man had more than recited his challenge, panic broke out among his followers. There were shrieks and fearful wailings from the Yaqui band, and their leader wheeled his pony in amazement.

The band had run plump into the poisonous fog. It lay so heavily upon the ground that Buffalo Bill and his companions could see the tossing headdresses and the plunging ponies. More than one pony went down, stifled by the poisonous breath. And the braves were pitched off their mounts in the struggle of the dumb brutes to get out of the vapor.

Now that he was facing the advancing cloud, and, being on the windward side of it, the stifling odor smote the young chief, too. He wavered in his saddle; his shout of encouragement was choked in his throat. He spurred the pony forward, but the brute gave one leap only, and then stood, shaking and coughing, unable to charge into the vile and deadly cloud.

With wild shrieks, those Yaqui who could still escape fled back across the mesa, toward the ravine by which they had reached the place of death. How many men and ponies had gone down, and were hidden by the spreading cloud of vapor, Buffalo Bill could not tell.

The scout's attention was then fixed upon the gallant leader of the savage band. The defection of his pony first troubled the Yaqui. He tugged at the rawhide thong that was affixed about the lower jaw of the animal; he beat the brute with his moccasined feet.

But to no purpose, for the pony groaned, bent its forward knees, and sank suddenly upon the ground, rolling over helplessly upon its side. The poisonous

gas had finished the Indian's mount, and Buffalo Bill had a final view of the young Yaqui staggering upon his feet beside the dead pony as the cloud rolled across the spot.

The brave had plunged to the earth before Buffalo Bill got into action. The scout could not save the other Yaquis from death; indeed, there was no reason why he should, for they were savage beings, bent upon blood and slaughter.

But the American was suddenly smitten with the idea that the young chief might be of value to him. Buffalo Bill had done many favors to single red men in his long career; and he had usually found the savage grateful. Ingratitude was not, indeed, a fault of the Indian nature.

Now, with his old battle cry, and, without a word of explanation to his two comrades, Buffalo Bill spurred his mount forward, directly toward the spreading area of death.

"Ach, himmelblitzen!" bawled the baron, seeing what the scout was about. "You will be killt already yedt! Vot a foolishness—undt all for a gopper-golored headen vot he iss! Idt vas soosancide—dot iss de trut'!"

However, both the baron and Little Cayuse knew better than to follow their leader into the fog. One life endangered was enough; and, after all, they both expected to see Buffalo Bill come out of the place alive.

The famous scout bore many scars on his body; but he had slipped through so numerous a collection of "tight places" that both the baron and Little Cayuse considered that he bore a charmed life.

Yet, never, perhaps, had Buffalo Bill so recklessly taken his life in his hand as when he charged into the

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Buffalo Bill so reckless
when he charged into

poisonous vapor that was again covering the plain of destruction like a deadly miasma.

The scout had marked well, however, the spot where the young Yaqui warrior had fallen. In half a dozen leaps his noble charger reached the fallen pony and the Indian beside it.

The scout whirled his steed, saw dimly the Yaqui on his hands and knees below him, and reached suddenly and seized the Indian by the sash that bound his body about the middle. Then, shaking his mount's reins, and actually holding his own breath, Buffalo Bill dashed out of the fog, swinging the Indian by one hand, and clinging to the pommel of his saddle with the other!

The scout's own horse staggered for a few paces, breathing deeply and shaking as though about to fall. But the rider dug his spurs into the creature; and, thus inspired, Bear Paw leaped ahead, and out of the range of the suffocating gas.

Cody swung the now limp body of the Indian across his horse, and waved his hand to his friends in a gesture they understood. They must all flee the terrible, advancing death. The Mexicans had already disappeared down the lower trail; even the dwarf had departed, and the mesa was deserted completely when the scout and his companions rode over the brink and took the trail toward the village in the wake of the bearers of the three dead workmen.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RISING OF SAN ENRIPE.

In the cleaner air of the valley, and at the intersection of the two trails to the mesa, the three halted, and Buffalo Bill allowed his insensible captive to slip to the ground. The scout got down, too, and knelt beside the Yaqui brave.

"For vy do you trouble mit dot Inchun?" demanded the baron, in disgust. "He iss det alretty yedt—undt you risked your life to pring him de smoke oudt. Ach, himmelblitzen! Vot a blace dot iss up dere."

"He isn't dead yet," declared Buffalo Bill, working over the Yaqui with determination.

"Vell! Den he iss esgaped begomin' a goot Inchun—a'ind't idt?"

At that moment the Yaqui caught his first long breath, groaned, and opened his eyes. They were black and beady and sparkling, and they looked intently into those of Buffalo Bill.

"He's coming around all right," said the scout, in English.

"Undt worser for him," muttered the Dutchman.

"Why so, baron?"

"Dese greasers, I pelieve, make short vork of de savages ven dey got dem—a'ind't idt?"

"Well, the greasers haven't got this fellow."

"But dere vill pe a riod in dot village down dere!" cried the baron. "Vot a foolishness!"

At this juncture the Yaqui spoke. His speech was evidently a Spanish patois, and Buffalo Bill could understand but a few words. One thing he knew, however: the Indian knew that his captors were not Mexicans.

"I am Americano—si," said the border king.

The Yaqui, who was now sitting up, nodded vigorously and, pointing downward into the valley, said something eagerly. The scout made a shrewd guess as to what it was.

"We go to the Mexican village; but the Yaqui brave is my captive; he shall not be given up to the Mexicans."

The beady eyes of the Indian darted from face to face of the trio. They rested longest upon that of Little Cayuse. The fact that the youth was of copper color, and had other marks of his Indian parentage, seemed to impress the Yaqui chief. He suddenly shouted a word at him, evidently in his, the Yaqui's, own tongue. But Little Cayuse did not understand, and merely shook his head.

But the Yaqui had recovered much of his strength and agility now, and he proved this to be the fact the next moment.

With a second yell he bounded to his feet, kicked wickedly at the face of the scout who had been bending over him—and had his foot reached its mark Buffalo Bill would doubtless have been knocked out.

The scout, however, merely side-stepped the kick and caught the brave's ankle in a grip that almost crushed the small bones in that ankle. Then he twisted the brave's leg and threw him heavily.

"You're quick, my friend, but there's one that's quicker!" grunted the king of scouts.

Before the Yaqui could make any further trouble the scout knotted his wrists together behind him and dragged him to his feet. The captor carried a line from the knotted wrists of the Indian to the ring in his own saddle bow.

"Now, my friend, you will walk ahead—and walk

straight!" commanded Buffalo Bill, with a gesture that the captive could not mistake.

So they proceeded down the trail, coming first, of course, to Juan Caseano's cottage. That amiable dwarf ran out just as the little cavalcade with the prisoner reached the spot.

A volley of Spanish expletives burst from the lips of the dwarf, and he leaped from the porch and through the gateway. From his sash he dragged a knife with a ragged edge and a horn handle, which looked as though it might have done duty in the kitchen before Juan seized upon it as an offensive weapon.

"Blood! blood!" yelled the Mexican. "Kill the hated Yaqui!"

But the baron pushed his mule suddenly between the gateway and the helpless captive.

"Py Shimminy Grismus! I guess yedt dot you dont't do it! Vot you t'ink? You vos killing beoples vot Puffalo Pill wants to live? Ach, himmelblitzen! vot a chance, aind't idt?"

Snarling like a mad dog, Juan tried to dart around Toofer to get at the captive. The baron spoke some German words to the mule which Toofer seemed to understand. The intelligent beast backed around and jammed the little Mexican against his yard fence.

"Dond't mofe!" commanded the baron, glaring down upon the frightened Mexican. "If you do, dot Toofer vill landt you mit pot' of his heels, undt you vill pe stuck to de fence so pad dot dey vill haf to scraped you off mit a drowel—aind't idt?"

Juan Caseano evidently believed this to be true. He was only courageous, anyway, when his antagonist was helpless. He would have killed the Yaqui in cold blood; but he remained very quiet now, his eyes rolling and the breath expelled with a hissing sound from his lungs.

Buffalo Bill and his captive, with Little Cayuse, had now ridden some rods ahead.

"So!" exclaimed the baron, speaking to Toofer. "Ve vill march vonce again, yedt. Undt you sday here, greaser, undt dont't effer dry to interiere mit Puffalo Pill, or any of his bards."

The baron quite plumed himself upon this incident; but it was really Toofer's heels that the dwarf had been afraid of.

They rode slowly down into the village, and the dwarf, yelling defiantly, followed some distance behind. As they passed other houses the men in them came out and joined Juan. They listened to his complaint, and in a body followed the strangers toward the middle of the settlement.

The bodies of the three men had been taken to their homes. The church was now opened, and somebody was tolling the bell mournfully. The tragedy that had happened upon the mesa had already brought pain and trouble to many people in San Enrife.

Yet Juan Caseano, who had lost his brother, seemed to care nothing about that death. He was only eager to stir his neighbors up against the strangers who rode toward the church. It looked as though the trio and their captive would be mobbed before they could join forces with old Nomad and Rawdon Smart.

Some of the men were armed with knives, and one old grandfather ran out with a broken scythe, with which he tried to mow down Toofer's legs as the baron trotted by in the rear of his companions.

"Ach, du lieber!" yelled the baron, and spurred the mule into a gallop.

Brickbats began to fly, and the mob came crowding down the narrow street, cursing the Americanos and threatening their captive.

"Vot dit I dell you vonce alretty?" shrieked the

baron to Buffalo Bill. "Dot Inchun vould mooch petter haf been left up dere on de mesa. He makes t'ings vorse as dey are for us alretty!"

But Buffalo Bill hadn't any time to reply. He had snatched the prisoner off the ground and held him astride his horse, Bear Paw. They were now racing through the narrow, paved streets, which seemed to have been arranged in a maze about the church. The church itself was the scout's objective point, for usually the priest is the most influential person in these little Mexican towns, and the scout was sure that the good father would listen to reason.

Suddenly they burst into the market place, or plaza, which the church faced. But the open space was already partly filled with excited people.

They seemed to be gathered before a 'dobe house, surrounded by a high wall, likewise of mud, which stood opposite the church. The house was plainly an important residence, and for a moment Buffalo Bill was puzzled over the evident attack upon it.

But as he and his comrades rode out into the plaza ahead of their own particular little mob of unfriendly citizens, a gate in the high wall opened and the voices of the crowd before it fell to a murmur. Buffalo Bill was startled himself, for the person standing in the gateway and facing the angry mob was a woman—aye, a girl!

She was handsome, in the Spanish way, with flashing eyes and plenty of color in her dusky cheeks. She was taller than Mexican women usually average, and her attitude as she addressed the mob was certainly commanding.

"What do you wish here, disturbing us all and rioting?" she cried. "What do you mean?"

"It is the señorita!" cried some.

"The daughter of the old coward and imbecile!" roared one other. "We want him! Give him up!"

"Give him up! Give him up!" shrieked some hysterical women on the outskirts of the mob. "Has he not brought our men to death? The black magic of him! He should be burned for it!"

"My! vot a dispositions to haf—dem beoples!" gasped the baron in Buffalo Bill's ear.

But the scout had no time or attention to give to his Dutch pard just then. The brave girl in the gateway was replying to the rough demands of the throng.

"My friends," she was saying, "you are making a great mistake. It was by no act of my father's that this awful thing has occurred on the mesa. From what I understand of it, nature herself overwhelmed the poor men—and unexpectedly."

"And my cattle!" shrieked a voice, and the dwarf, Juan Caseano, ran into the plaza from a side alley and began to heap imprecations upon the girl who faced the mob.

"It is not my father's fault!" she cried, making herself heard. "You are disgracing San Enrife. You batter at our gate——"

"Let him come out and talk to us!" roared an angry voice. "Why does he send a woman to defend him?"

"Professor Cralé is not at home," declared the girl desperately.

"Where is he, then?"

"Send out los Americanos—the young man can tell us," shrieked the dwarf, dancing up and down on the edge of the mob, so as to get a sight of the girl in the gateway.

"Señor Clifford Smart is likewise away. I am here only. Do you war against women?" demanded Professor Cralé's daughter, with scorn.

"You have others in the house, señorita," snarled

one of the women. "There are strangers here—they say there are accursed Americanos in the house."

"They are my father's guests——"

At that instant some scoundrel on the outside of the throng threw a flint. It struck the girl a glancing blow upon the forehead, and the red trail of the wound showed instantly upon her smooth skin.

The act brought a shout of anger to the lips of both Buffalo Bill and the baron. Already the baron had lost his very temperamental heart to the beautiful señorita. He was filled with rage at the cowardly attack.

The scout and his two companions charged through the mob then, caring little who their horses trampled underfoot. But another person had leaped to the aid of the girl as she drooped, and would have fallen under the blow that had been dealt her.

The rescuer of the girl was a tall young fellow, who flashed out of the gate, caught the señorita in his left arm, and presented a most businesslike proposition in the shape of a forty-four revolver at the heads of the nearest Mexicans.

"You dogs!" shouted Rawdon Smart, in Spanish. "I'll shoot the man dead that makes another move toward hurting this young lady!"

CHAPTER XII.

BESIEGED

"Pully for de poy!" yelled the baron, spurring old Toofer toward the gateway. "I su-ah didn't pelieve he hat idt in him."

The Mexicans backed away from the gate, and they likewise gave the three horsemen plenty of room to reach it.

"Right in here, Mr. Cody!" cried Rawdon, helping the half-fainting girl inside. "Old Nomad is back at the stables, and he will take care of the horses."

As the three mounted men rode through with their prisoner there was a flash of brilliant skirt and blouse; a woman ran down the steps of the house and banged shut the gate in the faces of the again advancing mob of Mexicans.

"*Madre di Dios!*" shrieked this apparition. "Have they killed you, my mistress?"

The speaker had instantly flown to the side of the señorita. She was a solidly built Indian girl, with her black hair in plaits and a lot of silver gewgaws stuck into it. The baron pulled in Toofer and took a long look at the maid. Then he clapped a hand upon his heart and bowed deeply.

"Mein gracious!" he babbled. "Such pootifulness I haf not seen—no, nodd in mont's. De mistress is su-ah von peach; but de maid—Ach, himmelblitzen! she is a whole pasket of peaches, aind't idt?"

Rawdon and the Indian maid assisted the señorita into the house. The wound in the young lady's brow was slight, and when it was dressed by the maid the señorita was able to see Buffalo Bill and his Dutch pard. While she talked with them, Mojé, the Indian

girl, hovered about her mistress as though she feared some other harm might befall her. And while they talked, too, the baron could not keep his eyes off the maid.

Nomad had remained with Little Cayuse at the stables to watch the captive Yaqui brave.

Rawdon had already told Señorita Cralé the particulars of the tragedy on the mesa. The professor's daughter was in greater mental trouble than she was in physical pain.

"My poor father will be horrified, señor," she said to Buffalo Bill, "when the report of the death of his three faithful workmen reaches him. He left San Enrife early yesterday morning. He rode by the way of the mesa. This dreadful tragedy has all happened since then, I am sure."

"I believe that the fumes of gas burst from the well last evening, or some time during the night," admitted the scout.

"When he was at the mesa the well was not finished. They had been boring for days and had struck nothing—not even water," she said. "Señor Clifford rode as far as the mesa with my father, and so brought back the report."

"Boring a well?" queried Buffalo Bill curiously.

"It is an invention of my father's," she said. "He believes there is oil under the mesa. He has been investigating the wealth of these hills for some years."

"I see," admitted the scout, nodding. "It is what I suspected. This terrible odor which comes from the ground is some kind of natural gas, and might easily be found in an oil field."

"It must be so," said the señorita sadly; "but these poor and ignorant people cannot understand that it is an act of nature. They attribute the tragedy to the work my father has carried on here. They have al-

ways been afraid of him. They say he uses black magic."

"And his assistant, Señor Clifford Smart?" said Buffalo Bill suddenly. "Where is he?"

"He was called away early this morning, too."

"He did not ride toward the mesa?"

"Oh, no, señor."

"Where did he go?"

"I—I am not informed of that," replied the young woman, but with some hesitation.

"Does your father leave you alone here without any guard?" demanded the scout, with some sharpness.

"Not as usual. But there really has been no danger to apprehend. Padre Josefo is my friend——"

"The priest here?"

"Si, señor."

"And where is he now?"

"He went this morning to attend an old man who is dying in the suburbs."

"Well! So you were left alone?"

"Only Mojé and I were in the house when Señor Rawdon, here, and the old man with him arrived and told me of the terrible catastrophe up above," said the señorita simply.

"And you may believe I was mighty disappointed in not meeting Clifford, Mr. Cody," interposed Rawdon Smart.

"Does Señor Smart often travel?" asked the scout thoughtfully.

"Oh, my father frequently sends him about the country on business," said the señorita.

"He will return—when?"

"That I could not say, señor."

"And your father?"

"When will he return?"

"Yes."

"Day after to-morrow he is expected," declared the girl, in a worried tone. "And if he does come back I tremble to think what these mad people will do."

"That's so. We should get some word to him, Mr. Cody," cried Rawdon.

"We'll take that up later," said the scout. "Has he gone far?"

"Into the mountains—to the headquarters of the Touvas Mining Company."

"Where is it?"

"By the way of the mesa it is not so long a ride, I believe. One strikes the Olando trail up there——"

"Mein gracious!" interrupted the baron. "Dot iss vere I und Leedle Cayuse met up mit dose Yaqui In-chuns alretty."

Mojé, the Indian maid, started and said something in a swift whisper to her mistress. The señorita asked the scout:

"Is your prisoner a Yaqui, señor?"

"So I believe."

"And a savage warrior?"

"He was savage enough until he ran into that gas," said Buffalo Bill shortly.

"He would know a quicker way than the Olando trail to reach the Touvas Mine holdings—or so Mojé believes."

"Your maid is a Yaqui?"

"Full blood, señor. But she is devoted to me."

Buffalo Bill turned this thing over in his mind, but said nothing further about it for the moment. Instead, he asked:

"Señorita, in what direction did your father's assistant go when he rode away this morning?"

She pointed northerly.

"What trail would he strike?"

"The Olando trail likewise; but much farther east

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than the point where my father entered it on his way to Los Touvas."

Rawdon looked sharply at the scout.

"What has my brother to do with Señor Cralé's peril, Mr. Cody?" he asked.

"Nothing—that I am aware of," returned the scout quietly.

The boy stared at him, but his brow was corrugated with a puzzled frown.

"If the Yaquis are abroad I am doubly anxious both for my father and Señor Clifford," explained the señorita.

She turned away for a moment, and Rawdon sidled closer to the scout.

"My brother and she are affianced," he whispered. "She told me so herself."

"Ah!" said Buffalo Bill cheerfully; "we will hope then that nothing will happen to the young man for her sake, as well as your own, Rawdon. Now, just step out and see that old Nomad keeps a watch on the walls. Those fellows out yonder might try and swarm over and visit us when we least expect them. Chase along with him, baron, will you?"

"Su-ah, bard—if it is orders," said the Dutchman, with a languishing glance at Mojé, who only giggled at him.

The boy and the baron retreated. Instantly the scout returned to his cross-questioning of the señorita.

"Will you tell me," he asked quietly, "if Señor Smart has been absent from San Enrife much of late?"

She looked at him with vague alarm.

"Why do you ask that, señor?"

"I will tell you, señorita," said the scout, with guile, "that his friends upon the other side of the river have given me a message for him, and it is very necessary for me to meet the young man."

"Why—he is usually here."

"But he has been away much of late?"

"Er—perhaps."

The scout drew out a notebook and consulted some dates written down therein. Then he asked:

"Was he away on May twelfth and thirteenth, señorita?"

"I—I could not say now. I have forgotten," she replied wonderingly.

"Well, how about June first—and possibly the second day likewise?"

"Why, that was only last week!"

"Quite so."

"He was absent most of last week."

"Ah!" ejaculated the scout enigmatically, and just then there came a violent interruption.

Several shots were fired in the courtyard of the house. Then voices were raised in excitement, and the scout leaped up and dashed out of doors, carrying his rifle with him.

The voices of the mob without the wall were then louder. Old Nomad, Little Cayuse, and Rawdon were piling boxes and kitchen furniture against a part of the wall to enable them to climb up. The upper rungs of a ladder were visible at that point, and it was the evident intention of those who had brought the ladder to mount from the outside and so enter the garden of Professor Cralé.

Uttering his famous war whoop, the scout dashed toward this place; but scarcely had he taken two strides across the court when the excited voice of the baron spluttered from the other side of the house:

"Himmelblitzen! Idt iss here dey iss comin'. Ach, vot a herd of de greasers! Hellup, Pard Pill! Hellup, olt Nomat! I am like Horachus adt de pridge yedt—I fight de whole town alone, aind't idt?"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE YAQUI GUIDE.

"Follow me, Cayuse!" cried Buffalo Bill, and dashed to the assistance of the spluttering Dutchman.

And he was barely in the nick of time. A dozen Mexicans had mounted to the wall on this side, and they had dropped a short ladder into the courtyard. In the lead was the vicious dwarf, Juan Caseano, who was descending the ladder with the long butcher knife in his hairy hand; and behind him his neighbors were pressing with scythes, mattocks, and a few firearms.

Already Buffalo Bill had warned his friends not to shoot to kill if they could help it. The American scout knew that he would be "in bad" if his people actually killed any of these greasers. They were some miles below the border, and at that day there was even more ill feeling between the two peoples that faced each other across the Rio Grande than there is at the present time.

So the baron was using his rifle as a club, and was threatening to mow down the attacking horde of greasers, instead of using cold lead upon them. Their weight of numbers would have borne him down in another moment.

Indeed, before the scout and Little Cayuse reached the place Juan and his friends were upon the baron. The Dutchman went over backward, and Juan leaped upon him like a wild cat.

"Oof!" grunted the baron, the wind being fairly driven from his chest by the weight of the dwarf. "Hellup! Aber he killit me yedt!"

Juan Caseano certainly looked like a fiend as he

poised the rusty old knife over the baron's throat. But Cayuse leaped in and side-swiped the dwarf with his gun butt, while Buffalo Bill used the handle of his pistol to beat a ragged tattoo upon the pates of the swarming Mexicans.

The baron, with a whoop, staggered to his feet.

"Now, ledt dem goom!" he roared.

He chanced to wear heavy boots at the moment, and he landed a kick on the dwarf which lifted that miserable little rat and tossed him twenty feet away! Then he tore into the mob of greasers with his bare fists, and in a very few seconds the fight was all over at that particular spot.

The greasers turned tail and ran up the ladder like monkeys. Cayuse and the scout followed them and made them jump from the wall to the side alley, for they had been unwise enough to have but one ladder here, and that one was now the spoil of the victors.

"Toss up that little runt, baron!" cried Buffalo Bill.

"All right, Pard Cody!" returned the Dutchman, and, catching Juan by his collar, he heaved him up in his arms, and then, with a mighty toss, sent him spinning to the top of the wall, where the scout caught him.

Like the other Mexicans, the dwarf was tossed down to the alley, and then, with a few shots fired in the air, the scout and Cayuse cleared the lane of the enemy.

"You remain here and guard this side," said the scout to Cayuse. "Stay on the wall. Don't let them pot you from some of the other roofs."

"Ugh! me no let um greaser kotch me," grunted the Indian youth.

The scout and the baron went back to the other side of the house and found that old Nomad and Rawdon Smart had scattered the Mexicans in that alley, too. Buffalo Bill left Nomad to guard that wall, and then

he returned to the stable to get a squint at his prisoner.

Just as he reached the door he saw the serving maid, Mojé, bending over the prisoner, who had been left, lashed hand and foot, lying on the floor. Buffalo Bill stepped forward softly in his moccasins and saw that the captive's eyes were sparkling, and that he was speaking in a low and tense tone to the maiden. If an Indian ever looked pale, the pretty Mojé did at that moment.

The captive's words were hissed at her in a stream of guttural sounds, and the girl shook her head rapidly in the negative. It was plain, however, that she was both frightened and excited.

The rage in the beadlike eyes of the captive increased. He writhed on the floor, trying to tear his hands from their bonds. The girl crouched back from him, making a low moaning sound.

It was plain to the scout what was going on. The girl was being tempted almost beyond endurance to be false to her white friends. This man was one of her own blood—perhaps of her own tribe, or family. He was pleading with her, threatening her, forcing her by his own strength of will to cut his bonds. The brown hand of Mojé crept to her breast. Within the loose blouse she wore her fingers touched something hard. She hesitated—then brought it forth. It was a tiny stiletto such as Spanish women and half-breeds not infrequently carry.

But ere she could use it, Buffalo Bill stepped forward and touched her on the shoulder. With a stifled scream she leaped up—agile as a cat despite the fact that she was an exceedingly plump young woman.

Then she saw the scout, and the knife rattled on the floor at their feet.

"I wouldn't do that, Mojé," Buffalo Bill said quietly. "What is that man to you?"

"I too, am a Yaqui," she murmured, but looking the scout straight in the eye now.

"True. But he is an enemy of the people who have been kind to you for so long."

"He is my brother," she said, bowing her head.

"Your brother! your real brother?"

"Si, señor."

"How do you know?"

"I nursed him in my arms when he was little, señor. I cannot be mistaken. Nor can he. He is Xuku, and I am Mojé. We be brother and sister."

"Well, that's lucky!" ejaculated Buffalo Bill.

He immediately drew his own hunting knife and approached the prisoner. The girl flung herself upon his arm, and shrieked.

"No! no! do not kill him! Kill Mojé instead!"

"Pshaw! don't be a fool, girl," grunted the scout. "If you knew Pa-e-has-ka as the Indians across the border know him, you would not think him capable of doing such a thing."

Then he stooped and severed the bonds of the young Indian, and then waited quietly until the fellow had chafed the blood back into his wrists and ankles.

"Tell Xuku," said the scout to the girl, "that I am his friend, although I may have captured him. Remind him that I saved him from death on the mesa up there."

Mojé obeyed, and it was evident that her words carried something like truth to the Yaqui's mind.

"Now, tell him," said the scout, "that if he escapes from this inclosure the Mexicans who are mobbing the place will kill him of a certainty."

The girl explained this, too, and the young chief nodded.

"Now," said Buffalo Bill, "tell him that if he will guide me the shortest way to the Touvas Mines that I will there free him, give him a white man's gun and a pony, and he can return to his people."

The girl eagerly translated the message. The Yaqui looked doubtfully at the scout, and the latter folded his arms dramatically, looked straight into young Xuku's eyes, and declared:

"He must likewise be told, Mojé, that I am Pa-e-has-ka, the Long Hair, and that I never break my word."

Buffalo Bill well knew the effect that a melodramatic statement always has upon the aborigine mind. The Indians were always posers themselves, and the white man who could pose well—and keep his word into the bargain—always had an influence over the reds.

Finally the young Yaqui began to speak rapidly to his sister, and after a time she interpreted his statement. It was to the effect that Xuku agreed to take the white man to the mines—he could do it in the dark if need be—inside of twelve hours.

"That is exactly what we want," declared Buffalo Bill. "Tell your brother to remain here out of sight. Feed him well. Give him what he may wish. As soon as it is dark we will start."

As he went out and left them together, Buffalo Bill found the baron hanging about, evidently with the hope of seeing the girl, Mojé. As a usual thing the baron was not fond of ladies with Indian blood in their veins; but this Yaqui maid was a different proposition. She was as pretty as a picture, she had that plumpness of form that naturally appealed to the Dutchman as it reminded him of his own lady friends back in the Faderland, and she was naturally a coquette, and had already given the Dutchman encouraging smiles.

"See here, you lovesick swain!" chortled Buffalo

Bill. "I've got a question to ask you that has been working in my mind ever since this morning."

"Led idt oudt, Bard Cody," grunted the baron.

"You said something when I first saw you this morning, about having struck the trail of Silvernail, the bandit."

"Ach, himmelblitzen! idt iss so!" cried the baron. "Pud I forget since den, dere has been such a riotous proceedings yedt."

"Riotous is the name for it," chuckled Cody. "Now, what did you mean?"

"Aboutt dot Slivertail?"

"Silvernail—yes."

"Vell, see here," grunted the baron, and he began to pull and haul at his waistband until he finally brought forth an object that he laid in Buffalo Bill's hand.

"Why, hello!" ejaculated the scout.

What he had in his hand was a cast horseshoe—an ordinary horseshoe, it seemed, the emblem of "good luck."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CAST SHOE.

"Say, is this a joke?" demanded Buffalo Bill.

"No choke at all—nix!" declared the baron, shaking his head vigorously.

"Well, what has this horseshoe got to do with Silver-nail, the bandit?"

"Ach, himmelblitzen!" exclaimed the baron. "Idt has efferyt'ing to do mit dot Slivertail—su-ah!"

"Explain—elucidate," cried the scout.

"Loog you foist," said the Dutchman, "adt de shoe vot iss in your handt."

"I'm looking at it all right," grunted the scout.

"You see dot idt iss a horseshoe—vot?"

"It surely wouldn't fit your foot—or mine!" declared Buffalo Bill.

"Undt you see de nail vot iss in de front of de shoe?"

Instantly the scout became highly interested in the iron shoe. He saw that, although the nail indicated was bent, it could be, without much difficulty, slipped out of the hole in the shoe. He did this, and held the nail close to his eye.

"You see, Bard Cody, vot iss de madder mit dot nail?" demanded the baron.

"I—don't know——"

"Vot is dot nail made of?" demanded the baron.

"Well—now that you ask me——"

"Vot iss idt yedt?" cried the baron excitedly.

"You win!" declared the scout, finally satisfied that his eyes had not deceived him.

"Dot iss de silver nail—aind't idt? Vot you t'ink, Buffalo Bill?"

"I think you've hit the bull's-eye."

"Schust de same as effer, eh?" crowed the baron, swelling himself like a turkey cock.

"At least, you have found a good clew this time," admitted Buffalo Bill.

"You bed me!"

"And where did you find it?"

"Dot vas on de Olando trail yedt," declared the baron eagerly. "You see, like you toldt us, Bard Cody, de Leedle Cayuse und me rides clear down from Olando, an' veneffer I seen vonce a man dot couldt English speak, I axed him vos he acquainted mit dis Slivertail."

"Well?"

"Und some of dem would not answer pecause dey vos scaret; und some I pelief vos friendly in deir feelin's mit dot feller yedt—so dey would tell me nottings. Bud dot iss a neffer-mindts yedt, pecause I knowed by de vay dey acts dot if Slivertail rode py dey would know him."

"You made out that the bandit frequently rides the Olando trail?"

"Su-ah! Dot iss oxactly so, Bard Cody."

"Go on."

"Vell, dot's vot we did idt," said the baron cheerfully.

"You did what?"

"Ve dit go on," declared the Dutchman phlegmatically. "Und idt vas adt a vork in de trail dot Leedle Cayuse pig oop dot horseshoe yedt."

"It was lying in plain sight in the trail?"

"Dot vos idt, Bard Cody. Idt vos lyin' dere, where the horse of dot Slivertail cast idt yedt alretty."

"Anybody else see the shoe?"

"Not mooch!" cried the baron. "Cayuse, he gif idt to me und I hit idt ervay till now I show idt you."

"And that's all?"

"No, py Shimminy! dot iss only bard of idt," declared the baron, with pride. "Dere vos a seguel."

"Let's have the sequel, then," said the impatient scout.

"Vell, de momendt dot I knowed dot feller, Slivertail, hadt peen py dot vork I axed efferybody as I met up mit if dey see dot feller—vich vay he went, yes. And I found two beoples vot seen de feller ridin' up the branch trail to the vest—yes."

"How do you know it was the man whose horse had cast a shoe?"

"Vell, bot' mens say idt vas a feller ridin' a horse dot limp-pet, py Shimminy! Aind't dot enough? De horse lose de shoe, undt go lame; und I learn dere iss no smith on dot trail for a long way."

The baron seemed very positive in his conclusion, and, although the scout was far from sharing his belief in the identity of the rider of the lame horse with Silvernail, he could not doubt the fact that the shoe in his hand had once belonged to that bandit's horse. The nail of silver was a conclusive proof of this fact. Two men would certainly not have such a fad as this which had given the brigand his name.

Silvernail had recently traveled the Olando trail; if the baron had learned anything at all from the natives whom he had talked with, the bandit frequented that particular trail a good deal. Buffalo Bill knew well that it was a straight road to the Rio Grande and to the border country where the famous bandit was reported as having done most of his work.

"Well," said the scout thoughtfully, "we'll take the trail up later. There may be something in it; but we must do what we can for this Professor Cralé first. He will have to be kept away from home for the pres-

ent—and I'm not so sure that it would not be well to remove his daughter from the town, too."

The townspeople were certainly up in arms—and remained so that day. Mojé later crept out of the inclosure and circulated about among the people. She even went to the priest's house; but he had not yet arrived home. The Indian girl learned, however, a very important fact. A number of men, well mounted and heavily armed, had already started from San Enrife into the hills, and it was supposed they had gone to meet Professor Cralé, on whom they were determined to wreak vengeance for the death of the three workmen.

It was evident that somebody besides his daughter knew of the professor's destination. And at the head of the vengeance seekers was the half-mad dwarf, Juan Caseano. The fate of the mild and unmilitary professor, if he was caught by the ignorant Mexicans, was too dreadful to contemplate.

The señorita was in despair. But the scout could offer her some small hope, at least. Despite the fact that the rabble had gotten such a start, Buffalo Bill believed that Xuku, the Yaqui, knew the country so well that he would be able to lead a rescue party to the Touvas Mines before the professor left in the morning.

The Touvas Mines were owned and operated by an English syndicate under a franchise from the Mexican government, and Buffalo Bill learned that there was a bunch of well-armed men there who would be sufficient to overawe the mob from San Enrife. The latter would doubtless seek to ambush the professor on the trail home, and would not go clear to the mines.

As soon as darkness fell the scout put into execution the plan he had conceived. He left the baron with Rawdon Smart to guard the girl and the house from

attack. Taking Nomad and Little Cayuse, and buying of the señorita a pony for Xuku as he had promised, the party slipped out by a rear gate, Mojé accompanying them to the outskirts of the town as guide.

Then the girl returned to her mistress, while Buffalo Bill and his companions spurred 'cross country to the foothills, carefully avoiding the mesa of death.

Once away from the town Xuku showed that he had made a close study of the wilderness thereabout. Perhaps the young chief of the Yaquis had contemplated at some time making an attack upon San Enrife, good-sized town that it was. He, at least, seemed to know every approach to the place upon this side.

They struck a trail up a ravine and began immediately to climb into the hills. Before midnight they crossed the Olando trail. Little Cayuse was even able to tell the scout in which direction was the spot where the cast shoe of Silvernail's mount had been found.

The Olando trail was a fairly well-beaten road, and there was a diligence, or stagecoach, which passed over it triweekly. The holding up of this diligence and the robbing of its passengers had been one of Silvernail's favorite tricks.

"And according to all I could find out from that professor's daughter," muttered Buffalo Bill, "this brother of young Rawdon's is fond of riding this Olando trail, too. He was absent from San Enrife the very day that old Señor Junipe's blacksmith was shot down. I don't know, Clifford Smart had to leave Texas for killing a man, and I gather from the old señor's remarks that the boy always was wild.

"I hate to believe the worst of a fellow on whom I have never set my two eyes, and cannot therefore judge personally. But, you take it from me," concluded the scout to himself, "there is a whole lot of

suspicion aroused regarding this young assistant of Professor Pasquale Cralé."

He kept these thoughts to himself, however, and plodded on with Nomad, Cayuse, and Xuku, the trail which they followed after leaving the stage road becoming more and more difficult as they went on. In the gray of the early morning they passed over a ridge and struck a wider thoroughfare. And it was one evidently traveled, too, for they heard voices.

Xuku and the scout slipped off their horses and went ahead. They found the mob from San Enrife encamped for early breakfast in a glade. There were at least fifty of the Mexicans, and Juan Caseano evidently led them. That they had determined to kill Professor Cralé if they caught him, there could be no doubt, for Buffalo Bill understood their conversation.

There were enough of them, too, to rush the men at the mines, perhaps. Xuku pointed to the outlines of a flume, which had been built from the summit of the mountain to the valley, where a narrow-gauge railway had been laid to connect with the Mexican National down Chihuahua way.

The ore was coasted down the flume in punts, the water being supplied from a torrent that pitched down from a still higher mountain, of which this one was merely a spur. Professor Cralé, as Buffalo Bill had learned from the Señorita Maria, had come to the mines for the purpose of making some ore tests for the company. He would doubtless start down this trail soon after sunup, intent upon hastening back to San Enrife.

And these villains, under Juan Caseano, were bent upon meeting him on the way, and—fifty to one—attacking the scientist.

Had the scout had with him Pawnee and Wild Bill, with his other pard left at the professor's house, he

would have been greatly tempted to make an attack upon these greasers and try and put them to flight. And evidently Xuku, the Yaqui, had some such idea, too. He glared at the encamped Mexicans with glittering eyes, and then uttered a few broken words of Spanish to the scout, which showed how his thoughts ran.

"Ugh! Mucho pronto bring Yaqui—heem keel!" he exclaimed, with a savage gesture at the unconscious mob from San Enrife.

"Cut that out, Xuku," advised the American promptly. "We'll take the professor out of this, and leave these greasers barking at an empty tree. You can be on your way; but don't you bring back a gang of your cattle thieves to do these fellows. There's been murdering enough done already. Besides, you will have to explain to your tribe the loss of several of your companions up there on the mesa—sabe?"

Whether the young Yaqui did or not, he kept still after that, and the two spies returned to Nomad and Little Cayuse. But as they were about to strike off the trail and lead their mounts around the camp of the San Enrife mob, the sharp ear of the Yaqui caught the sound of a galloping horse behind them. A single horseman was coming hurriedly from the direction of the Olando trail.

"Quick!" the scout ordered. "Get under cover, you fellows. No gunwork unless I give the word."

He seized the excited Yaqui by the shoulder and held him tightly while they waited for the single rider to appear. Soon he came into view, riding at a good pace, and, in the half light of the early morning, it was impossible at first to distinguish what manner of man he was.

CHAPTER XV.

THE NAILING OF SILVERNAIL.

"Droor er bead on th' critter, Buffler," whispered old Nomad. "I'll rope his hawse, if ye want me to."

"Steady there!" returned the scout. "Whoever he is we want to stop him without much hullabaloo. A shot will rouse those greasers ahead."

"Better snatch him clean off his hawse with th' rope, then," grunted the trapper.

"And break his blessed neck, perhaps," said Cody.

"Waal, screechin' catermounts! wot kind of a song and dance shell we hand him?"

"Ugh!" ejaculated Little Cayuse suddenly, dropping his rifle. "Let um go past. Then Little Cayuse, him jump on behind, grab him so, stop horse. Pa-e-has-ka see um done before."

"Sure, I've seen you do it," admitted Buffalo Bill, who was staring sharply at the approaching rider. "And perhaps——"

"No, by thunder! Wait!" he exclaimed. "If it ain't—— Why, it's Gordon, as I'm a living sinner!"

Instantly he gave a long, low, peculiar whistle—but it was so penetrating that it was heard by the lone horseman at once. He pulled in, glanced sharply right and left, and repeated the note himself. Pushing back his hat brim he revealed the keen features of the prince of the bowie.

"Pawnee!" sang out Buffalo Bill, in a low tone, and stepped into the trail.

"Shades of Unk-te-hee! but ain't you just the critter I was hoping to run against?" cried the rider, and, leaping from his horse, he seized his friend's hand. "Pard Bill, put her there!"

"You were looking for me this way?" queried Buffalo Bill, in surprise.

"Well, I was making a circuit around this part of the country, hoping to cross your trail—— Hello! here's old Nick—and Cayuse? Then the baron found you first?"

"He did. But you and Wild Bill—— By the way, where is the Laramie man?"

"All hunky-dory. He stayed at a little town we struck back there in the hills. He's on watch."

"On watch?"

"Surest thing you know, necarnis."

"Who's he watching?" demanded the border king.

"Just the feller we set out to nail, old son," declared Pawnee Bill, bursting into laughter.

"What!"

"Silvernail—that's the lad, necarnis," said the bowie man.

"You astonish me," cried Buffalo Bill.

"I reckoned I would," said Pawnee. "Hello! who's the red?"

"A Yaqui Indian," returned the scout. "Good Indian."

"Umph!" grunted Pawnee Bill. "What you fellows doing here? And where's the baron and that young Rawdon Smart?"

"Your own story first, Pawnee," said Buffalo Bill, with a laugh. "Just explain yourself. The baron picked up what he thought was a clew to Silvernail on the Olando trail——"

"What was it?"

"A horseshoe with a silver nail in it."

"On-she-ma-da, necarnis! warn't that Dutchman just right, though? He has the luck to fall into things."

"But——"

"It was that cast shoe that brought about the capture of Silvernail."

"By whom?" demanded Buffalo Bill eagerly.

Pawnee took off his hat and made the scout a sweeping bow, as he replied:

"By yours very truly, necarnis—and Wild Bill."

"Let's have it—briefly now, Pawnee. There is something afoot that we must attend to."

Thus urged, the prince of the bowie related the following facts:

Wild Bill Hickok and Pawnee had reached the little mining town of Ciudad Sonora in their search of the region for border riders and bandits. Like the baron they had talked with every traveler they met, and with every ranchero along the route. As both the Bills spoke Spanish fluently, they had learned a good deal more than the baron.

There were people in the region that would be glad to see Silvernail, and all his tribe, apprehended and punished. Some of the bolder bandits along the border laid actual tribute upon the farmers and rancheros.

These people, who had talked freely with Pawnee and his companion, described the famous Silvernail as a young and good-looking man, richly caparisoned, and usually riding a bay horse with a white tail. The previous afternoon, while near the town of Ciudad Sonora, the two Americans had spied upon a cross trail a young and well-dressed stranger riding a bay horse with a white tail. The horse had cast a shoe and was lame, having stepped upon a flint before its rider was aware that its foot was bare.

The two Bills had followed the stranger to the outskirts of the town, where there was a smithy. Here the rider halted, treated the lame foot himself, and then ordered the smith to put on a shoe. Pawnee and Hickok halted for the ostensible purpose of having the

...the smith looked after, but really to see
...of the bay horse.

...and forth respectively, saying
...and then with utterable con-
...it could not be accused of in-
...thing.

...and in the weather apparently
...and Silvernail about the clothes,
...and as well. And in the
...of silver-mounted guns. The
...saying that they had asked
...and got out of it. There was a
...and a man!

...the stranger was nearly done, the
...and appeared to pick up a nail from
...It was a very sharp
...and he looked at it to the

...and in Spanish, "he said
...and hurry!"
...and then waiting for a nail to
...and to mount the silver-
...stranger had tossed the
...and would have been in

...Silvernail," explained Pawnee
...and a gun under his arm
...saying that he was Silvernail. He
...and found the stable with fields
...on our showing. "Wild Bill,"
...and here—of course—and I'll not be
...and the other point."

...there shown him?" de-
...and I'll not be

shoes of their own steeds looked after, but really to watch the shoeing of the bay horse.

Its rider walked back and forth impatiently, eying the two Americans now and then with unfavorable eye. He seemed nervous, yet he could not be accused of displaying a lack of courage.

He was not only dressed as the wealthier Spaniards are, with a good deal of silver bullion about his clothes, but the gear of his horse was rich, as well. And in his belt was thrust a pair of silver-mounted guns. The two Bills hung around, believing that they had nailed their quarry, but not quite sure of it. There was a test they waited for—and it came!

Suddenly, when the horseshoer was nearly done, the stranger stooped and appeared to pick up a nail from the floor of the smithy. It was a very shiny nail—almost white, indeed. He tendered it to the man.

"Here, smith," he said, in Spanish, "use this nail in that last hole—it is a good one. And hurry!"

The smith had just been reaching for a nail; he took this one instead, and in a moment the shoe was completely fastened, the stranger had tossed him a silver coin, and in a moment would have been in the saddle again.

"But just here, *necarnis*," explained Pawnee, with a laugh, "yours truly stuck a gun under his nose. He made a holler, denying that he was Silvernail; but we marched him into town and found the *alcalde*, who held him for examination on our showing. Wild Bill is watching the bum jail they've got there—I could get out of it with a rusty pair of scissors—and I lit out to find you, *necarnis*, and the other pards."

"None of the townspeople there know him?" demanded Buffalo Bill.

"The *alcalde* will give him a hearing and round up

witnesses to-day. He'll wait till afternoon, however, to give me a chance to bring you in."

"Sounds good to me," declared the scout, with satisfaction. "And you two boys are sure the real stuff to grab the man so easily. I had an idea there would be more trouble about it than that. But now we must move quickly. We got a little business here that I'll tell you about, Pawnee, as we mosey along."

At once the party was on the move, passing through the forest and so around the camp of the Mexicans, leading their mounts with them. While they made this maneuver, Buffalo Bill, in a whisper, related to his pard all that had happened on the mesa, and in San Enrife, and told him of the cause of their visit to Los Touvas at this early hour in the morning.

It was scarcely more than sunup when the party struck the trail above the Mexican camp, mounted again, and rode up the hill toward the shanties that they could now see perched upon the shoulder of the mountain. They passed under the straddling legs of the flume before they reached the mine; but the head of the column of Mexicans was not yet in sight on the trail behind them.

The thing that impressed Buffalo Bill and his companions the most when they reached the level of the mine buildings was the lack of activity about the place. There were only two or three men in sight, and there was no fire under the hoisting engines, that was sure.

There was a long barracks building at one side, and this seemed quite deserted. At the other end of the plateau was a dwelling of more dignity of appearance, and out of this came a tall, thin man, who hailed the horsemen with a pronounced English accent.

"Hi say, me men! Is there anything I can do for you? I'm Gradgrind, in charge here at present, don't ye know."

Buffalo Bill rode directly to the man and asked:

"Have you a visitor here, Señor Gradgrind?"

"Bless me! the professor, d'ye mean?"

"Professor Cralé—yes."

"He is just now eating his breakfast, señor."

"Good! then we are not too late," cried Buffalo Bill.

"What is the matter, gentlemen?" asked Gradgrind, seeing that the whole party seemed much excited.

Quickly the scout explained the trouble at San Enrife, and then went on to tell of the mob of some half hundred neighbors of Professor Cralé on their way to Los Touvas.

"Fawncy that!" gasped Gradgrind. "To—to murder him?"

"Well, they are not likely to present him with any token of their love and respect, other than a hemp necktie," grunted Pawnee Bill.

"Mr. Gradgrind," said the scout, "rouse out your men, arm them, and show that we are so strong up here that those greasers will be afraid to approach the mine."

"But, my dear fellow!" cried the overseer; "I can't do that, doncher know."

"Why not?" demanded Buffalo Bill.

"And the old man's life is in danger!" ejaculated Pawnee.

"But I have no men here—or scarcely any," explained Gradgrind. "This is a holy day—St. Josefo's, or St. Christofo's, or somebody or other's. The whole gang has gone down to the foot of the mountain to the village of Mondrego to celebrate. I haven't half a dozen men within call."

As he spoke Little Cayuse, who had ridden back to look down the trail, swung his horse around and came tearing back to the group in front of the overseer's house.

"Pa-e-has-ka!" he shouted. "Much heap greaser come quick!"

The Indian boy spoke truly. The noise of the approaching Mexicans from San Enrife was already audible. They had evidently learned that the camp was well-nigh deserted and that Professor Cralé was practically at their mercy.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SLIDE FOR LIFE.

Of course Buffalo Bill and his companions could fight for the professor's life. And they were likely to win out, too; but at what cost?

The Americans were down here below the border—really in an enemy's country; and if there was a fight and Mexicans were actually killed, there might be an international inquiry. Buffalo Bill had not been sent down along the Rio Grande to stir up any such strife. The Mexican authorities had not seemed able to control the bandits of the border, and it was up to Buffalo Bill and his pards to do what the Mexican rurales could not.

But there would be an inquiry from Washington, and, of course, from Mexico City if a lot of simple countrymen, like these men from San Enrife, were shot by the American scout and his pards. And if it were reported that the Americanos had stirred up the Yaquis against the greasers, there surely would be trouble.

"Xuku!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, riding close to the Yaqui youth and thrusting one of his own handsome revolvers into the Indian's hand, "here is the gun that was promised you. You are astride a good pony; it is yours. We part here and are friends, for both you and I have fulfilled our promises."

The young chief understood some of the Spanish at least, for he nodded gravely, and then shook hands with the American scout.

"Pa-e-has-ka," he said gutturally, having picked up the word from Little Cayuse, "friend of Xuku. Xuku no forget!"

He wheeled his pony and rode rapidly away, going in a direction opposite to that from which the Mexicans were coming. As he disappeared, the door of the house opened again and a small man with a gray beard and little, black, birdlike eyes came out upon the porch.

"Professor Cralé!" shouted Gradgrind. "There is a mob after you, doncher know, and you must hide. This is a terrible thing—it really is!"

The old scientist peered through his thick spectacles from one horseman to another, finally croaking:

"I have never—no, never!—seen any of these men before. What do they want of me, Señor Gradgrind?"

Buffalo Bill urged his steed forward then and interrupted. He related briefly what had occurred near San Enrife, and in that town itself, which had so set the natives of the place against the professor. The latter listened to the tale of the mysterious happening on the mesa with evident interest; the rest of the tale did not seem to excite him so much.

"This really is remarkable, señores!" he cried. "I must look into it. The oil must be there then, as I believed——"

"Say! the old greaser is sure crazy!" growled old Nomad. "All he thinks erbout is the scientific end of it. Ain't thet thar jest like all them book-l'arned sharps?"

"I will leave you at once, Señor Gradgrind," cried the professor sharply. "I must see this place where the gas has escaped——"

"You're likely to see the happy hunting grounds quicker!" exclaimed Pawnee Bill.

"Is there a horse track in any direction but the one we came?" asked Buffalo Bill quickly, of Gradgrind

"No, sir! There is not."

"And those fellows coming have got comparatively fresh horses, while ours have traveled all night," ex-

claimed the scout. "Pawnee! stir your wits, old man! We mustn't fight if we can help it; but those fellows will sure kill this old greaser if we don't find some way of getting him off the mountain—and in a hurry!"

"What do you mean, señores?" cried Professor Cralé.

At that moment the head of the mob appeared. Juan Caseano, his head tied about with a red bandanna, and looking like a cross between an anarchist and a pirate, was in the forefront, waving his broken butcher knife and yelling like a loon.

"Here come your friends, professor!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "Recognize them?"

"I—I see men from San Enrife," stammered the old man, peering through his spectacles, in the nearsighted fashion, at the mob.

"And you can see how much they love you just now!" snapped the scout. "Come on with us, professor! We'll do our best to save you—if we can."

He and his friends had already leaped down from their tired horses. Gradgrind ran out of the house with a double-barreled shotgun and was evidently bent upon helping in the defense of the professor.

"Say! hold your fire, Britisher!" exclaimed Pawnee Bill. "This doesn't want to be a shutzenfest if we can help it. Sabe?"

In another moment the little party were among the sheds and out of sight of the mob. The latter spread over the front of the open space before the mine buildings. They did not seem to observe Buffalo Bill and his party at first, but dismounting, left their horses at the break of the trail, and began to search the barracks and the overseer's house.

Little Juan Caseano ran about like a lively—and very vicious—bug, and, finding nothing else to mutilate

at the moment, slashed the tail off of an unfortunate yellow hound that ran snuffing about the horses.

Meanwhile, the scout had given a glance to the hill as it fell away from the plateau behind the mine buildings. The hill was steep and so rocky and thickly grown with trees that horses could not be forced down that way to the trail, which, of course, was now empty.

Buffalo Bill contemplated a dash on horseback, through the greasers and their horses, and so downward; but as he had pointed out before, their own mounts were winded, while the Mexicans' were fresh. Besides, to charge the mob would be to court the very thing he wished to escape—bloodshed.

But suddenly Pawnee Bill, who had been running about examining the gear and rigging of the mine, uttered an exultant whoop. He was at the flume, through which a part of the mountain torrent was turned. This flume was built of heavy planking, and was a straight trough down the mountain side, the water deep enough to float a heavily laden box, or punt. An endless hawser, working over a drum and turned by the engine, dragged these empty boxes from the bottom of the mountain to the plateau again.

One of the boxes, half filled with ore, was already in the flume, and the bowie man's reckless mind had conceived a plan of escape for the professor that surely would have been vetoed by Buffalo Bill had he not, at that moment, had his full attention taken up by the mob which, with much yelling and threats, was charging the sheds behind which the Americans and the professor were ensconced.

"Here, you Britisher!" shouted Pawnee Bill. "How does this thing work?" Then, as Gradgrind started toward him, the prince of the bowie added: "Bring that scientific sharp with you—mucho pronto!"

The Englishman and the professor hurried to the

head of the flume. At the same moment the mob appeared around the far corner of the sheds. Juan Caseano, shrieking maledictions upon the head of the helpless scientist, was in the lead.

"Halt there!" cried Buffalo Bill, and he and Nomad and Little Cayuse covered the leaders of the mob with their guns.

But, with the Mexicans, they were startled the next instant by a wild cheer from the bowie man:

"We're off, necarnis! Tell the greasers bye-bye!"

His friends as well as his enemies were stricken with amazement by what they saw. Pawnee Bill had climbed into the partially laden box or ore, and with him was the professor. At Pawnee's yell, Gradgrind pulled the lever that released the ore box!

Like a shot from a gun, the box and its human freight started down the flume.

The Mexicans, as well as Buffalo Bill and his two pards, were stricken dumb for the moment. This slide for life was a most reckless act on Pawnee's part, for there was absolutely no surety that the box would reach the foot of the mountain without jumping out of the flume altogether. Sometimes boxes full of ore did just that, and if the receptacle chanced to collide with one side, or the other, of the flume, the two men would be flung either into the water or out of the flume altogether.

For many hundreds of yards the men at the top of the chute could see the course of the box. Its speed increased each second. The Mexicans, as well as Buffalo Bill and his pards, forgot everything but the peril of the two men, and they crowded around the head of the flume to watch the shooting boat.

Suddenly it disappeared! But it was merely the overhanging trees that hid the flume from sight. From

that point to the foot of the mountain the boat was completely lost to their view.

The scout turned upon the Mexicans sternly. He seized the dwarf by the shoulder and shook him.

"See you, Juan Caseano!" he exclaimed, in Spanish; "what your villainy has brought about? The professor has never done you any harm; surely my pard Pawnee Bill has not hurt you men of San Enrife. Let me tell you that if harm befalls them below there I will see to it that you are all punished—if I have to go to Mexico City myself and report the matter to your government."

But Juan only snarled at him and slunk away. The disappointed Mexicans chattered together at one side. Gradgrind, who had disappeared for a minute, suddenly appeared from a shed and beckoned Buffalo Bill to him.

"It is all right, sir," he whispered. "We have a wire and a bell here for signaling. My man at the foot of the flume has rung twice—that means that the punt reached the foot of the mountain in safety."

"That is sure good news!" gasped the scout, and wrung the overseer's hand with delight. "And now," he added, "is there a trail to the bottom of the hill?"

"To Mondrego? Surely!"

"Then we will sneak away from these San Enrife fellows and pick up Pawnee and the professor," the scout said eagerly. "Mondrego is a good-sized town, eh?"

"Larger than San Enrife—yes, indeed," declared Gradgrind.

"These Mexicans won't be likely to follow the professor there, then. I'll telegraph, too, and have a band of rurales sent to San Enrife to put down the riot. Then it will be safe for Professor Cralé to go home."

With Cayuse and old Nomad, Buffalo Bill started

at once down the trail they had come, to the place where the road to Mondrego branched from it. Just at the fork of the trail, however, they were halted by a vociferous whooping—and it did not come from behind them. They were not being pursued by the angry Mexicans. Instead, the sounds came from toward the south—the direction of San Enrife.

There appeared a galloping mule with a figure astride it that could not be mistaken.

"Ach, himmelblitzen! vot a habbiness!" crowed the baron, riding into their midst. "I haf foundt you yedt!"

"How came you to leave San Enrife?" demanded Buffalo Bill sharply.

"Dot vas all righdt, Bard Cody. I vas nod needit dere no more," declared the Dutchman.

"How is that?"

"De brudder of dot Rawdon feller haf gome home, undt dey two are enough to loog oudt for de laties. Su-ah! I vas sorry to leave dot purty Mojé so suddenly; but I pring de goot news. De Padre Josefo iss gome home, undt he make all does grazy beobles at San Enrife valk a chalk line yedt! Ach! he vas a greadt man. dot briest."

But Buffalo Bill was less interested in the priest than he was in the baron's first statement.

"You say Clifford Smart has arrived at the professor's house?"

"Yah! Dod vas so."

"When did he get there?"

"Early dis morgen—yah. Undt he could tolt you a lod apout dot Slivertail, too, meppeso. He vas vonce heldt up und ropped by de sgoundrel—I heard him dell idt his brudder so—yes!"

Buffalo Bill smote his gauntleted hand heavily on his thigh.

"That's good news, if anything else is," he grunted. "Silvernail is safely caged at Ciudad Sonora, and Wild Bill is on guard. Pawnee is safe at Mondrego with the professor. The row is over at San Enrife and those fellows above at the mine will go home, I reckon, like whipped curs, to meet their priest.

"Well, we'll ride on down into Mondrego and pick up Pawnee. I reckon our job in this part of Mexico is finished, properly packed, and the strings all tied. Come on, pards!" and the scout gave rein to Bear Paw and led the cavalcade rattling down the hillside trail.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE AMERICAN AT CIUDAD SONORA.

Ciudad Sonora, a little Mexican town among the hills and just across the Rio Grande Del Norte from the Big Bend country of Texas, had a visitor—in fact, it had two. Visitors were not common to Ciudad Sonora, and there was some small stir in the town. Beside, one of the guests was in the little 'dobe jail situated right behind the bank of Señor Enrique Dejais, and not far from the office of the alcalde.

The guest who remained free was an Americano, and the people of Ciudad Sonora did not love Americanos. The nativity of the man in the jail was in question; but he had been dressed like a Spaniard of wealth and rank, and the Americano was the cause of this man's arrest and detention by the alcalde.

There was a buzz of excitement in the town, especially after night fell and the supper had been eaten, and everybody appeared on the plaza as usual. The arrest, and the meaning of it all, was the single topic of conversation.

To begin at the beginning: in mid-afternoon three men had ridden into town, all halting at the smithy of Pedro Hojaré, who was the best horseshoer within miles. Pedro himself, after the incident, had closed his smithy, washed up and put on holiday attire, and appeared now on the plaza eager to tell his tale to all who would listen—and who cared to pay for the sour wine that the blacksmith favored.

"It was like this, neighbors and caballeros," he said: "I was at work in my shop—you all know it. There rode first to the door the handsome young stranger

—oh! so richly caparisoned!—and his bay horse with the white tail is lame of the right forefoot. The shoe is missing.

"The caballero dismount; he treat himself the bruised foot. Then he request me to have a care with the shoeing. While I work, two strangers—Americanos and determined-looking men—come also to my shop and dismount. They stare at my customer; they are offensive, without doubt. These Yenkhees have no manners, as you well know, brothers."

His listeners agreed—unanimously—with this statement.

"As I am about my task to finish," pursued Pedro Hojaré, "my patron pick up for himself a horseshoe nail—a bright, white nail—and hand it to me. I am in need of one for the last hole at the moment. Instantly I use it—I drive it home, caballeros. It drive like any other nail; but it is bright—it may be of silver, like they say; but—caramba!—it is a hard-finished nail, and how may I tell?"

He shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

"You see how it is, caballeros; but I am innocent—quite. Then the two Americanos they spring upon the man whose horse I have just shod. They hold pistols to his head. They disarm and tie him. Then they carry him before the alcalde and accuse him of being that Silvernail whose name has become a household word along the Rio Grande Del Norte.

"My patron deny—he deny vigorously—the accusation; but the alcalde must hold him for examination to-morrow. The Americanos are vociferous. They speak grandly of one Buffalo Bill, a famous Americano officer of the law, with whom these two associate. This Buffalo Bill is now here, across the border, so they claim. One of them—he is called Major Lillie, and must therefore be a military man—ride away in

search of this Buffalo Bill, who is likewise an army man and bears the title of colonel.

"The man who is left remains about the jail to watch. He does not trust to its walls and bars, it would seem. Ha! there will be amusement enough before the alcalde to-morrow. And the beautiful bay horse with the white tail is in my care."

"It is said that Silvernail rides such a horse, Pedro," said one listener.

"Ha! if he does? Who am I to say there are not more than one bay horse with a white tail in the world?" cried the smith.

"But," said another, "it is also said of the famous bandit that he always has a silver nail driven into each shoe that is put on the feet of his horse."

"Well! And what then?" snorted Pedro. "I am not a miner; I do not know silver—perhaps."

"Is he a Mexican—a brother—this Silvernail?" demanded a third.

"Chito! it is foolish to ask. What know I of Silvernail?" returned the smith, shaking his head.

"This strange caballero, then—the man in jail! What is he?"

"He may be Americano for all I can say," declared Pedro. "It is not my business. We shall all learn at the examination to-morrow before the alcalde."

"But what, I wish to know, is the business of these Americanos over here?" demanded another hotly. "Is their own country not large enough? Why do they act instead of the rurales?"

Pedro laughed. "When was it thou sawest a rurale last, Felipe?" he demanded. "These bandits ply their trade on either side of the Rio Grande Del Norte. If this Colonel Buffalo Bill, and this major, and this third man who guards the jail—it is whispered he is a wild man, too!—see fit to chase outlaws through our back

yards, will not the government at Mexico City uphold them in their actions, Chito! Thou knowest!"

And so the groups about the plaza buzzed. Some blamed the alcalde for holding the accused man at all—as only the Americanos were his accusers. Yet all men knew that Silvernail was the most atrocious brigand that had been let loose on the Olando trail for many years. If this were he——

Not many of the townspeople cared to cross the path of the Americano who had remained on watch. He marched around the small square on which the jail was situated, and his determined face, and the guns swinging from his belt, made him seem a ferocious object to these people who, if they fought at all, fought mostly with knives.

Wild Bill Hickok—for it was the Laramie man—had mighty little use for greasers, and he was distrustful of the whole lot of them at Ciudad Sonora—from the alcalde down!

Just as Pedro, the smith, had said, Wild Bill and Pawnee Bill, Buffalo Bill's pards, had run by chance upon an individual whom they were confident was the king-pin bandit of the whole gang then infesting the boundary country between Mexico and the United States.

Having captured this man whom they believed to be Silvernail, Pawnee Bill had hurried away to find their chief, while Hickok remained to watch proceedings in the town. They knew that this fellow, Silvernail, must have plenty of friends among the poorer Mexicans, for he robbed the rich and gave to the poor—which has been the habit of pirates and brigands of all ages, and down to our present-day financial outlaws.

So Hickok determined to remain awake all night and to hang about the little 'dobe building in which

the suspect was locked and barred. At the back this building adjoined the bank of Señor Enrique Dejais, which faced the public square. At about ten o'clock, while still the majority of the townspeople were on the plaza, a cavalcade of horsemen rode up to the side entrance of the bank building.

Hickok was merely curious. He halted at the corner of the jail and watched. There had been a light in the bank building all the evening. There were four of these men who had arrived, and two of them bore heavy saddlebags, which they removed from their horses when they dismounted.

It was plain that the party was expected, for a rap on the side door of the bank brought somebody to that portal, which was opened. The four passed within with the bags. Hickok made it out to be a guarded messenger—or messengers—from a distance, with coin for the local bank; or, it might be, the arrival was from some neighboring mine and the bags contained gold dust, or bullion, to be deposited for safety in Señor Dejais' bank.

Two of the men came out after a bit and rode away, taking the other two horses with them. There chanced to be no passers-by at the time; at least, nobody but Hickok paid the least attention to these maneuvers. And an hour slipped by. Then the whole town's attention was called to the bank of Señor Dejais!

Hickok was again at the corner of the jail building. He had heard nothing from the bank, nor had he seen anybody leave the building. There was still the half-shrouded light inside.

Suddenly the air rocked with an explosion—aye, the whole town seemed to rock! Hickok was thrown to the ground. With a splintering crash a big piece of the side wall of the bank building was blown outward into the street and a flying chunk of the wall hit Wild Bill

such a blow that he lay down and went to sleep for the next few moments!

When he aroused and scrambled to his feet, bleeding like a stuck pig from the wound in his brow, the narrow alley and the square before the bank were full of excited folk.

The Mexicans chattered like parrakeets. The robbers had failed and had ridden away at breakneck speed. Many had seen them fly; many more had heard them.

The alcalde recognized the Americano as he staggered into the building, his neckerchief tied about his head.

"There is indeed need of rounding up these brigands, señor," he cried to Hickok. "How bold this was! How easily they might have blown the door from the vault——"

Hickok shot a keen glance about this rear room of the bank. The door of the vault was somewhat scratched with tools, perhaps, but the explosion had not marred it. It was the wall of the building—at the corner—that had suffered from the explosion. And the rear wall had a gap blown in it, too.

"Where does that go to?" demanded the American, pointing to this yawning hole.

"Into the rear part of the jail, señor," said one.

Instantly Hickok doubled up and darted through the opening. He found a smoking lantern hanging from a peg, and with it searched the jail thoroughly. There was no sign of human inhabitant!

He came out into the bank room amid the chattering throng. The alcalde was about to speak to him again, but Wild Bill got to it first.

"You thundering fool!" the Americano yelled. "That gang didn't try to blow open the bank vault. They were after Silvernail—and—by the jumping horned toad!—they got him, too!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

WILD BILL IN THE TOILS.

If he had thrown a giant cracker into a cage full of monkeys, Wild Bill would have got quite as much sense out of the long-tailed bunch as he could out of those greasers during the next few minutes. And the alcalde and Señor Dujais, the banker, were quite as excited as the rest of them.

And, in addition, the American was not at all sure that there wasn't treachery afoot. Somebody had been in that bank all the evening, and had let in without question the four men who had plainly wrecked the wall and allowed Silvernail to escape.

"A little more and they would have croaked me, too, perhaps," muttered Hickok. "It's me for the tail timber. These oilers are as treacherous as all get out. This very Señor Dujais may be in cahoots with the bandits. From private banker to brigand is—sometimes—only a step!"

He slipped away from the chattering mob and found his horse in a shed beyond the jail. He had been unconscious while the jail breakers—and the prisoner—were making their actual getaway, and did not know for sure the direction they had taken.

"But, by gorry!" exploded Wild Bill, as he straddled his steed again; "it's dollars to the hole in a doughnut that this yere Silvernail never went without making a play for that silver-tailed horse of his!"

Hickok rode straight for the smithy on the outskirts of the town where he and Pawnee Bill had captured the man they believed was the bandit. This was in the direction of the Olando trail, a well-used highway through that part of Mexico.

The smithy of Pedro Hojaré and the cottage alongside of it were deserted. The stable and shed behind needed no searching. Hickok saw the corral gate open and was assured that the bay horse with the white tail and mane had been removed. He got down and examined the ground, however, and was surprised to discover that there were few marks of hoofs, or of men's feet, near the gateway of the blacksmith's corral.

It seemed as though the escaped prisoner must have come to the place alone and ridden away without companions. The marks of the bay charger's hoofs were the only fresh ones in the trail.

"If they separated, all the better for me—and all the worse for Brother Silvernail," grunted Hickok, mounting into his saddle again. "It's me for the dust of this 'tarnal outlaw—for a spell, at least. Happen-chance, it seems to be aiming straight for the Olando trail, and Pawnee will bring Cody and the others back that way. And won't my report just about make them sick? By gorry!"

His mount was fresh, and he used the quirt unsparingly for the first half hour; but then he halted to listen, and could hear not the faintest sound up the trail. If the bandit—or his friends—had gone this way, they were better mounted than Wild Bill. So he jogged on after that at an easier pace.

He knew just enough of this country to be pretty sure that Pawnee Bill would be obliged to bring their leader over some part of the Olando trail to reach this road to Ciudad Sonora; therefore, when he reached the junction of the two trails, he unsaddled, picketed his horse, and camped in the open for the remainder of the night.

At daybreak there was not a sign of his friends on the Olando trail; indeed, he could not really expect them so early. Pawnee Bill might be until noon strik-

ing the trail of Buffalo Bill and Nomad—and the whereabouts of the baron and Little Cayuse had been a mystery to the two Bills the day before, although they had "smoke-talked" with the king of scouts.

Being supplied with a light camp outfit, some jerked beef prepared by old Nomad while they were all at the rancho of Señor Junipe y Morada, across the river, and some parched corn, Wild Bill made his own breakfast beside the trail, where he could watch the road in three directions. Being so much engaged in looking three ways, however, he could not pay attention to the fourth—which was behind him. Therefore, he was quite unprepared for what happened to him.

Of a sudden a sash, or scarf, was flung over his head, drawn tight across his face, and tied, and he was jerked backward to the ground, with another lashing holding his elbows together pretty near the small of his back!

He was helpless, although his feet were still free; but he could not speak, nor could he reach either of his guns. He could see, however, and he looked with surprise into the faces of three Indians!

They were not of any breed that Wild Bill Hickok had ever seen before.

"By gorry!" he thought; "they have new styles in Injuns down on this side of the big ditch. And it looks to me as though I were It!"

The trio of savages were painted for war, and stripped pretty close to what they had on when they were born. He did not see that they bore firearms of any kind, however, and they did not even take away the guns that swung at Bill Hickok's belt.

They showed no tenderness for their prisoner; one kicked his little camp fire into a better blaze, while another went to a near-by thorn bush and plucked a

handful of sharp barbs some three or four inches in length.

The quiet, businesslike way of them held Wild Bill's undivided attention. Unlike most of those aborigines with whom he was more or less familiar, they did not seem to be in the habit of saving prisoners for the torture. They went right to work at the game, evidently intending to have the fun all by their lonesome.

"By gorry! it won't be no fun for me—that's sure," thought the Laramie man.

One of the Indians ripped open the white man's shirt and bared his breast. With only a guttural grunt now and then to each other, the other two knelt down and began the operation.

And it was no pleasant experience for Wild Bill. However, the immediate pain of having the thorns stuck into his flesh, in a tasteful, if not ornate, Indian scrollwork pattern, was as nothing to the agony that was promised when the thorns should be set afire.

So eager were the trio of red devils to bring the game to its gayest state, that the third man hovered around with a lighted brand long before his brothers had finished puncturing Wild Bill's carcass with needle-like thorns. And, therefore, Hickok got in the first good blow. He landed the toe of his riding boot, as the third man bent over, just where a certain prize fighter at a later date found his opponent's "solar plexus." Mr. Injun doubled up like a decrepit jack-in-the-box, and rolled completely through the fire—suffering some of the same pains that they had hoped to inflict upon the white man!

The others set up echoing yells, leaping about the prostrate white in their rage; and one of the scoundrels began kicking Hickok soundly in the ribs with his moccasined foot. Wild Bill couldn't object, for his mouth

was covered by the bandage; but he did his best to roll over and over to escape the kicks.

He had enraged the three Indians, and as he rolled over he drove the thorns deeper into his own flesh. They surely would not spare him now; but they did not kill him at once, as the frontiersman had almost hoped they would. He saw no escape from the torture, and that torture could only end in death. A quick end would be preferable.

CHAPTER XIX.

DISAPPEARANCE OF THE SMART BOYS.

But just as the kicked Indian got his breath again, and the two others stretched Wild Bill out to finish their game, a fourth person appeared from the chaparral. But it was only another Indian!

Instantly, however, it was apparent that this fourth savage was a person of authority. He was young, rather handsome, as copper-colored folk go, and spoke as though he expected to be obeyed on the jump. And it was certain that the trio who had started to have so much fun with Wild Bill bowed to this newcomer's directions without question.

The scarf was removed from Wild Bill's face, and his features were the better revealed. Instantly the newcomer, who swung in his sash a revolver of American make, began to berate his tribesmen volubly—for, although Wild Bill could not understand a word of the gibberish spoken, he knew what was meant by the tone of the young chief's voice, and by his actions.

With his own hands the chief unbound the Laramie man, and then, as he would have risen, he pushed him gently back upon the ground and as easily as possible drew the thorns from his flesh. Hickok's breast was a sight; but the smart was all that was serious about it.

"You're an all-right hombre," grunted the American, as the young chief ministered to his wounds by smearing upon them the healing salve which every Indian carries in his pouch.

"You Americano," said the young chief. Then, tapping his breast, he added: "Me Xuku—me friend Pa-e-has-ka. You sabby Pa-e-has-ka?"

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"Bet your sweet life I do!" cried Hickok. "Where is Buffalo Bill? You see Pa-e-has-ka hoy? Sabby?"

"*Si; esta mañana,*" declared the Indian, nodding emphatically.

"Where?"

Xuku pointed to the south, along the Orlando trail, and said:

"Los Touvas. Pa-e-has-ka, him there temprano."

"Bully for you!" cried Wild Bill, getting to his feet and pinning his torn shirt together over his wounded chest. "And do you know if Pawnee got to him?"

This query was beyond Xuku's comprehension; but then Hickok reverted to the sign language—some form of which every wild tribe knows. After a little he learned that just at sunup a lone American had joined Buffalo Bill, and the Laramie man was convinced that this must be his partner, Pawnee Bill. Then he likewise made out that the only plain trail from this place, Los Touvas, to the junction of the Ciudad Sonora trail with the Orlando stage road was by the latter highway.

"Bueno! then it's me for this trail—and I'll hit it now," thought Wild Bill, "before this Xuku Injun changes his mind."

Therefore, he saddled his horse, shook hands with the young chieftain of the Yaquis, and galloped down the stage road. He was mighty sore, and the hard riding shook him up a good deal; but he felt safer away from those redskins than he did in their immediate neighborhood. He had seldom come so near going to the happy hunting grounds by the torture route!

It was past noon when a balloon of dust in the distance announced the coming of a cavalcade of riders—and they were coming fast. Wild Bill pulled off the trail and waited for the party to be revealed to him. When he finally saw a pair of long, mouse-colored ears

wagging through the dust cloud, and in the forefront of the cavalcade, the Laramie man could have no doubt, at least, of the presence of Toofer in the party. And where Toofer went, the Baron Villum von Schnitzenhauser was bound to go also—if he could.

There was no doubt of the baron's presence, for an eruption of "delicatessen" English, of the true Schnitzenhauser brand, came from somewhere back of the mule's ears.

"Ach, himmelblitzen! idt vos so-o! I haf nod hat dime to schleeps, aber I ged de chancet I schleeps me a veek, yedt! Schust you vaid und see, Pawnee. I dr-ravel all lasd night to dell Puffalo Pill dot de oltest Smar-rt poy he gome home to San Enrife, to de house of de Perfessor Cralé; und now ve ride away to dis blace where you and Vild Pill ketch de Slivertail bandid—aind't idt? Vot chancet haf I vor sleebin' yedt?"

"You could have remained at Marengo, at the foot of the mountain," Pawnee Bill said, with a laugh.

"Und miss seein' dot Slivertail triet und hung-nix!" cried the baron excitedly.

Just then the head of the procession came opposite Wild Bill, and he spurred out into the trail to confront his friends.

"Hi, hombres!" he cried. "If you're going to the hanging of that ornery Silvernail, you got another guess comin'—and that's no dream!"

"Vild Pill, or I'm a Dutchman!" gasped the baron, jerking on Toofer's bit till he managed to stop the mule.

The compadres were all there—Buffalo Bill himself, Little Cayuse, old Nomad, as well as Pawnee and the baron. The report of the release from jail of the famous bandit and his escape from Ciudad Sonora was counted by all as a disaster.

The border king took the announcement of the bandit's escape composedly, however. While the others were expressing their disappointment and anger, he drew Wild Bill aside and got the particulars. He learned, too, of the Laramie man's holdup by the Yaquis and his rescue by Xuku, who had been Buffalo Bill's guide across the country from San Enrife the night before.

"Lucky we made a friend of that Yaqui," said Cody. "I believe that the greasers are going to have trouble from that quarter. There will be a general uprising."

"And, holy smelts!" groaned Wild Bill, "they're some Injuns. Their taste in the line of torture needs no training from the Apaches across the boundary."

"You are right there, old pard," said Pawnee. "You're in bad shape."

"I can ride yet. Where are we going now?" demanded the Laramie man.

"We certainly shan't go to Ciudad Sonora at present," returned the scout thoughtfully. "Silvernail will fight shy of that place."

He remained thoughtful for some moments and then turned to Little Cayuse, asking:

"How about it, boy? Can you take the back track to San Enrife that we came through with that Yaqui last night?"

The Piute nodded emphatically.

"Cayuse can. He sabby trail. Pa-e-has-ka say so, Cayuse go."

"We're all going," grunted Buffalo Bill, with decision. "There may be something due to happen in San Enrife yet. Professor Cralé telegraphed for rurales to be sent there, and he has gone home by way of the death mesa—the old fellow is more interested in that oil well his men struck there, the gas fumes from which killed three of them, than in anything else. For a non-

combatant, the professor has 'em all skinned alive on courage."

"Hasn't he, though!" cried Pawnee Bill. "Why, he never showed the white feather for a moment when he was shooting down that flume with me in the ore box—though I'll tell you the fact, *hombres*, I scarcely expected to get to the bottom alive!"

"Take the lead, Cayuse," ordered the king of scouts, and the party rode on. While the others were full of talk and chaff, Buffalo Bill did a little serious thinking. There had been a thread of mystery running through the work of the last few days, like the red string in the rigging ropes and hawsers of the old British naval vessels.

Exciting incidents happening in and near San Enrife had rather sidetracked Buffalo Bill's original plans. It had been necessary for the scout and his friends to make their stay in that village very brief, and at the time Clifford Smart, as well as his employer, was away from home. The scout had learned several things, however, which had lent color to the suspicion gradually growing in his mind that the assistant of the famous Professor Cralé and the bandit Silvernail were one and the same person!

When the report had been brought to him that Silvernail was captured by Pawnee Bill and Wild Bill at Ciudad Sonora, and almost simultaneously—and this by the baron—that Clifford Smart had returned to San Enrife, the king of scouts had been forced to believe, with huge satisfaction, that his suspicion was unfounded.

Now, however, the matter was again in an undigested state. The notorious bandit had escaped from the jail at Ciudad Sonora the evening previous; whereas Clifford Smart had only returned to San Enrife at sunrise this very morning. A swift horse could have

made the journey between Ciudad Sonora and San Enrife, if its rider knew the blind trails through the wilderness!

It was these facts, therefore, that had set Buffalo Bill upon the road back to San Enrife. He felt that the matter must be settled immediately—and not alone for his own peace of mind. If Clifford Smart was an outlaw, his young brother—who was a high-tempered and imaginative youth himself—must not be left an hour under Clifford's influence. And, too, if Clifford Smart was an outlaw—having committed crimes on both sides of the big river—he must be apprehended and brought to punishment!

These were the serious thoughts in Buffalo Bill's mind as the cavalcade rode on. Little Cayuse, with that extra sense which is the possession of the American Indians of all tribes, seemed fairly to smell out the trails over which the savage Yaqui had brought them during the night. Before sunset they came to the valley in which San Enrife lay, surrounded by its great fields of maize and beans.

There was no mob now before the casa of Professor Cralé. Nevertheless, when the party rode up to the gateway, the king of scouts was astonished.

Mojé, the Indian maid who served the professor's daughter, Señorita Maria, opened the gate and giggled a welcome to the amorous baron—who had been delighted to return to press his suit for her hand—but nobody else was in evidence.

"The señorita?" demanded Buffalo Bill, before he dismounted.

"Is within, señor, and will gladly see you at once," declared the maid.

Therefore, while his friends rode around to the rear courtyard to feed and care for the horses, the king of scouts entered the house and presented himself be-

fore the lovely girl who, he understood, was affianced to Clifford Smart, the mysterious.

"The brothers are here?" ejaculated Buffalo Bill. "Surely they have not deserted you, *Señorita Maria*?"

"Oh, we need no guard now. Little Father *Josefo* is guard enough," and the girl laughed.

But Cody thought that the laugh was not natural. There seemed to be anxiety in both her face and voice.

"Where has *Rawdon* gone?" demanded the scout.

"He rode away with his brother."

"And where has his brother gone?"

"Why, really, Colonel Cody, I could scarcely say. They will probably be back shortly. Some little matter of business called *Señor Smart* out of town again, and his brother begged to ride with him."

The reply troubled Buffalo Bill greatly, and his keen eyes tried to read the girl's features as he sat silent before her.

CHAPTER XX.

A NUT TO CRACK.

"My dear *Señorita Cralé*, I wish to be your friend," said the scout, at last.

"Why—surely—*Señor Cody* has already put me under sufficient obligation," she stammered. "You and your friends fought for me——"

"Pshaw! that was nothing, possibly, to what I may be able to do for you in the future," he said crisply.

"But—but——"

"Beating off a few ignorant villagers is a small matter——"

"No, no! that *Juan Caseano*, the dwarf, is as vicious a man as ever lived in *San Enrife*. He would have had my life had you and your friends not beaten off the mob," declared the professor's daughter. "*Juan*, of them all, has not dared return to the village, I understand. He is a bad man."

But Buffalo Bill would not be led away from the subject he proposed to discuss. He pinned her right down to it now:

"We will let *Juan Caseano* pass—and all the other *Johns*. I want you to be frank with me, *señorita*."

"About what?" she breathed.

"Tell me," he said bluntly, "what you fear regarding *Clifford Smart*?"

The girl half rose from her seat, but sank back again, too stricken to stand. Her dark and usually glowing face was pale; her eyes wide open with fear; and her lips, when finally she spoke, trembled visibly.

"I do not understand you, *Señor Cody*. I do not know what you mean."

The lie could be forgiven, for it was on delicate ground that Buffalo Bill was treading—and well he knew it. But he believed that his duty called him to interrogate the girl, and he did it with the feeling that a surgeon must have when he operates for the life of a patient.

"Do you know anything of Clifford Smart's past life?" demanded the scout, kindly yet firmly.

"You—you mean——"

"Exactly. Of his life before he came into your life?"

"Before he came to **work** for my father?"

"Previous to his residence in Mexico—yes."

"He—he has told me all," she said, her graceful head sinking upon her breast.

"Are you sure you know all?"

"We are to be married, Señor Cody!" cried the girl, with a little flash of anger. "I am not a child. Yes—he told me of the man he shot down."

"Ah!"

"I do not condone his fault—aye, his crime!" cried the girl. "But I believe he is truly remorseful. Are you hounding him for that?"

"I am not hounding him at all."

"But you are suspicious of him."

"And you?" suggested the scout pointedly.

The girl suddenly wrung her hands, and the tears streamed from her eyes.

"*Madre di Dios!*" she sobbed. "I do not know what to think."

"Why has he gone away so suddenly—and so soon after his return this morning?" asked the scout.

"He said——"

"That does not exactly answer my question," interposed Buffalo Bill, but smiling kindly upon her. "I do

not wish to know the excuse he gave; but tell me why you think he went away?"

"Oh, Señor Cody! you are so hard!" wailed the girl. "I—I believe he went so hurriedly because he feared you would return."

"Just as I supposed. And why should he fear me if he is not guilty——"

"But he is guilty!" she cried. "We both know it. I told you that he has confessed all to me."

"Humph!" returned Cody slowly. "You mean he has told you all about the shooting of Snip Rogers, some years ago?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"But that should not make him fear to meet me," returned the scout gravely. "Don't you see? I could not touch him for that crime. He is in Mexico, I have no warrant, and at the time the crime was committed there was no extradition treaty between Mexico and the States."

She looked at him wonderingly. "Then, oh! why is he so troubled by your presence here?" she cried.

Buffalo Bill had proved his suspicions. Clifford Smart had deliberately left San Enrife so as to escape any meeting with the scout—that was plain enough.

"I do not understand it. It is a hard nut to crack. I admit to you, señorita," said the scout. "But what worries me more than aught else is the fact that he has taken young Rawdon away with him, for the boy is really in my care and I am answerable to his uncle, Señor Junipe y Morada, for him."

Buffalo Bill's anxiety was deep-rooted, although his suspicions of Clifford Smart were so intangible. He feared the elder brother's influence over the high-strung, courageous Rawdon.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAIL ROBBERY.

The National Railroad of Mexico connects with the Southern Pacific at El Paso, Texas, and that junction was a long way from San Enrife, the little town where Buffalo Bill and his companions were at the moment located. But the Mexican National—scarcely completed at that time—ran south through Chihuahua State, and its route lay within a sharp two days' ride of the Orlando trail on which Silvernail, the bandit, was so prone to appear.

A fast mail train going south halted briefly at the little station of Del Norte di Bois. This was not a stopping place; but the time was early evening, and there was a red lamp setting between the rails just beyond the station.

With much profanity the engineer brought the locomotive to a panting stop with the pilot almost touching the red lamp. Nobody appeared about the little station, and there was only a handful of 'dobe houses in sight. A figure ran out from the gloom beside the roadbed and snatched up the red light; then disappeared.

The engineer cursed the forgetfulness of the station master at Del Norte di Bois, all his works and ways, and his latter end! Meanwhile, he put up the speed again and the train—which had merely hesitated—thundered away into the south and into the night.

The second car from the tender was the mail car. The narrow front platform of that coach and the back platform of the baggage coach ahead were dark. Unknown to the train crew, when it had pulled down so

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abruptly at Del Norte di Bois, two figures had flitted out of the darkness on the side opposite the lighted station, and crept up the steps between the mail and baggage cars.

There was a single-paned window in the door of the baggage car, and, although little light came through it, anybody inside might see out upon the narrow platforms, especially if the door of the mail car chanced to be opened!

The two men who had crept upon the platforms were masked with black cambric sacks that passed over their heads and flowed upon their shoulders. In the starched fronts of these bags narrow slits had been cut for the eyes to peer through—that was all. A more effectual mask could not be imagined.

Now the smaller man of the two produced a piece of black cambric and a box of glue. He touched the four corners of the oblong piece of cloth with the glue, and so spread it softly and smoothly across the window in the door of the baggage car. If one looked through that window—or tried to—he would see nothing but darkness—supposedly the darkness of the night. If the door across the platform was opened, anybody in the baggage car would be none the wiser.

Instantly the taller man upon the platform forced the point of a jimmy into the crevice of the sliding door of the mail car right beside the lock. Having got it into place, he beckoned the smaller man to take hold with both hands and prepare to swing out upon the bar, his back to the open steps of the car, for this was long before the era of vestibuled trains.

The taller man prepared to throw his weight against the bar as well. As they stood, the little man would almost be sure to be flung backward down the steps of the rapidly running car, if the lock burst, or the jimmy, for any other reason, gave suddenly.

But the small man wore a broad leather belt about his waist, and to it was attached a shorter strip of leather, with a hook in the end. This hook he fastened over the brake wheel so that, when he swung back, the connection of the taut leather to his belt would hold him from falling down the steps.

A grunt from the bigger man, as he forced himself forward; the little man threw his weight back. The door splintered all about the lock. Another jab of the bar into place, and another struggle, and back rolled the door!

The small man would surely have toppled over and fallen off the train had his leather and hook not held. For the taller robber paid him not the slightest attention.

The moment the door sprang back in its groove, he dropped the bar, tore the sliding door wider open, and leaped into the lighted mail car. Like magic a gun had appeared in either hand. The two mail clerks, amazed by the splitting open of the door while the train was running at such speed, had not time to grasp their guns.

"Hands up, señores!" shouted the man in the mask, and upon the tail of the words he fired a single shot at the nearest clerk. The bullet struck the unfortunate fellow in the mouth, and blood spurted from the wound. The villain had not waited for his victim to obey.

The second clerk stood on tiptoe, the higher to hold his hands. The shorter robber remained on the platform, guns out, and watching alternately the door of the baggage car and the whole length of the lighted mail coach. If anybody opened the rear door of the latter car, the little man on the front platform could easily have shot such a venturesome person down while his companion held the two mail clerks at bay.

Indeed, the wounded clerk was already collapsing when the taller robber commanded the other clerk to grab his friend and drag him into a closet. There the mail robber turned the key on both clerks, and then proceeded to go through the registered mail pouches, slitting open with his knife such bags as were locked.

He stuffed a black cloth bag that he had brought with him with the packages and letters which he had reason to believe contained money. This he finally tossed to his confederate, who immediately put up his own guns and slipped down on the lower step of the mail car, preparatory to getting off.

They were running through a black forest—as black as midnight; but the robbers must have had some means of knowing just where they were, for they waited some moments, the taller man staring ahead, his neck craned out beyond the side of the car, until he saw some landmark known to him. He was in this position—the lower part of his body revealed in the light from the mail car—when the conductor, chancing to come through from the rear of the train, opened the other mail-car door with his key. He beheld the open front door and the figure of the principal robber.

He saw the velvet trousers, flaring wide at the bottoms, and all trimmed with bullion cord and silver buttons up and down the legs. The jacket—such as he saw of it—was likewise ornamented with silver gewgaws.

Then he saw the man spring back, reach a hand for the bell cord, and pull it twice.

"Here! what's that for?" yelled the conductor, charging into the car.

The locomotive engineer, however, had answered the signal with a single toot of his whistle, and the brakes already bit upon the wheels. While he ran, the conductor tried to draw a gun from his hip pocket—where

it was about as much use to him as a last year's bird's nest!

Before his fingers more than clutched the handle of the pistol the man who had pulled the bell cord put his masked face around the angle of the doorway and let drive with one of his own guns. The conductor plunged forward on his knees, and the blood spurted from his mouth, but the wound was much more serious than that of the mail clerk. The robber's bullet had torn through the unfortunate conductor's right lung, and before the train came to a slow pace the man was dead, with the blood still pumping from his lips.

The train did not really halt; as it pulled down the murderer reached and again signaled the engineer by the bell cord—this time for "full speed ahead." The locomotive jerked the string of cars faster. The two robbers dropped off safely and disappeared instantly in the darkness as the lighted cars swept by. Several miles beyond, the baggage-master, going back, found the curtain pasted over the window of the rear door, and, knowing that something was wrong, he opened the door and beheld the looted mail car, and the dead conductor on the floor.

There was the station of Parabeaua just ahead, and the express was bound to stop there. Mail should have been flung off, too. The baggageman and forward brakeman rescued the two clerks from the closet, and the wounded man was taken off at Parabeaua, while the blood and torn papers were cleared up from the floor of the mail car, and the single clerk went back to his work of sorting mail.

The two robbers, who had probably obtained several thousand dollars in cash, were miles away, and neither the railroad officials at Parabeaua, nor the rurales, seemed to consider it their duty or desire to pursue the bold rascals.

CHAPTER XXII.

A COLD TRAIL.

"It's a peg above me, necarnis," said Pawnee Bill, when the king of scouts took the bowie man into his confidence regarding the mystery of Clifford Smart. "As far as I can learn from the Indian girl, Mojé, this assistant of the old scientific sharp don't own a bay horse with white tail and mane."

"He, of course, has confederates—this Silvernail," returned Buffalo Bill thoughtfully. "The old professor—or the girl—are not in on any crooked game."

"On-she-ma-da! I should say not," declared Pawnee, with decision. "That innocent old guy who took the ride down the flume with me has got a nose for science—and that's all. If the young fellow is crooked, the Cralés don't know it."

"My belief exactly," agreed Buffalo Bill. "That's why I am so sorry for the señorita—if the fellow is really an outlaw."

"And you really haven't anything but suspicion to back you in that belief, necarnis," said Pawnee.

"Quite right. Clifford Smart may really have business that calls him away from here so frequently. The baron says that Clifford told him he had once been held up and robbed by this Silvernail. That would account for his not having this picture of his mother in his possession at present," and Buffalo Bill tapped his breast pocket where the miniature safely lay.

"Sure, Pard Cody; but it might have been told just to throw dust in the eyes of us—sure! He may suspect that the lost picture has been found."

"More than likely Rawdon told him of it."

"Keno!"

"And I am worried that young Rawdon should be in his company as long as this suspicion hangs over the elder Smart," declared Buffalo Bill. "And I tell you what I am going to do, Pawnee."

"Shout it, pard—shout it!"

"We will divide forces again; but this time I am going to send you alone, Pawnee."

"What'll I do, necarnis?" demanded the willing bowie man. "Just put words to it."

"You will ride the border—ride it from the bottom of the Big Bend as far up the river as El Paso. Get familiar with the people, with the traders, with the smugglers even; and particularly, if you can fall in with any bunch of cattle thieves, or others outlaws, who work with Silvernail, so much the better."

"You mean for me to join with such a bunch?"

"If you can—and without raising their suspicion," admitted Buffalo Bill.

Pawnee chuckled. "I'm to be the wooden duck floating ahead of the gun cover—eh?"

"Something like that," returned the king of scouts.

"And how will I communicate with you?"

"You won't. Keep out of trouble if you can, but make a name for yourself as a border rider. You'll know us when we get busy—and we'll be busy soon, you can bet."

"Suppose I take this Silvernail alone, necarnis?" chuckled Pawnee, in high fettle because of the danger and daring of the scheme Buffalo Bill had mapped out for him.

"If you do, pard, it will be one of the best things you ever did," declared the king of scouts, wringing his friend's hand.

Pawnee Bill rode away that next morning, and the remainder of the party—all save the baron—was not

far behind the bowie man in leaving the house of Professor Cralé and San Enrife.

Because of the baron's assumption of innocence, and the fact that most people were bound to take him for a fool, Buffalo Bill considered him the best one to leave here to watch events. As long as Wild Bill, or Pawnee Bill, was about the casa of the professor, Buffalo Bill could not expect Clifford Smart—if he were the mysterious Silvernail—to show up, for both the Bills had observed the outlaw keenly and closely. The baron had not, however, been able to give a sufficiently intelligent description of Clifford Smart to identify him with the man the two Bills had captured at Ciudad Sonora.

The baron was not altogether loath to remain at San Enrife. He had a really desperate flirtation under way with Mojé, Señorita Maria's maid. Mojé giggled at the pink-cheeked baron, and said: "Heem owful funny mans!" Nevertheless, it was noticeable that she put on all her finery for him, wore red ribbons and silver ornaments in her hair, and every moment she could spare from her duties she put herself in the baron's way.

In riding out of San Enrife the famous scout and his cavalcade met the good priest, Father Josefo, as he was coming from a sick parishioner.

"Señor Buffalo Beel," said the little man, in tolerable English, "I would thank you—and your brave caballeros—for helping my good friend, Professor Cralé's daughter, and for the restraint you lay upon yourselves in handleeng these poor, ignorant people of mine when they would have attacked the señorita. They have learned now, señor, that the terrible tragedy on the mesa above was a mysterious act of nature, and not attributable to the hand of man. You see, they are at peace again—all but that vagrant Juan Caseano! Ah! he is a trouble indeed."

"What has become of the dwarf?" asked Buffalo Bill, with interest.

"Por Dios! That I could not say," declared the priest, wagging his head under its shovel-shaped hat. "But he will come to the bad end—mark me that, señor!"

"He'll come to a bad end ef ever I meet up wi' him again," growled old Nomad, as the troop rode on after saluting Father Josefo. "Thet thar leetle Mexican John is sure a bad aig."

"He's all of that, old man," agreed Wild Bill. "From what yoti-all have told I judge this Juan Caseano person to be more kinds of uselessness than you can shake a stick at."

Buffalo Bill did not consider it wise to institute any further inquiries regarding the course followed by the missing Smart boys—especially among the rancheros around San Enrife. He did not know who might be Clifford Smart's friends—aye, who might be Silvernail, the bandit's, friends! And, if his suspicions should in the end prove wrong, the wily scout did not wish to inspire others with his own doubts.

He could trust his friends and companions; yet old Nomad and Little Cayuse, the Piute boy, and even Wild Bill Hickok himself, did not entirely understand what their chief was aiming at.

This chasing around the country seemed to them only aimed at the discovery, and—if possible—arrest of such outlaws as fell into their clutches. Thus far other adventures had taken preëminence on this side of the Rio Grande Del Norte. From now on the king of scouts kept his force together, and they rode hard, up and down the trails, to and from distant ranchos, and all on the chance of coming upon some of the bandits of the border country whom they had heard were so bold.

But news of the presence of the Americanos had evidently gone abroad from San Enrife, as well as from Ciudad Sonora, where Pawnee and Wild Bill had captured the supposed Silvernail. Now Buffalo Bill rode west and north of the Olando trail, and so, in the early morning of the third day, came into the railroad town of Parabeaua.

The people of Parabeaua were wildly excited; there had that happened in the night which set most folks by the ears this morning. There were groups of chattering Mexicans in the streets and at the drink shops. The principal posada was crowded; the market on the plaza was more noisy than businesslike, while about the railway station lingered a curious crowd.

Not far from the railway was the casa of Doctor Mogelian, and a rurale stood here to warn the excited people away. There was a wounded man inside the good physician's house. He had been brought there from the train before midnight. Buffalo Bill and his companions heard the story long before they galloped up to the railway station, and later rode to Doctor Mogelian's door.

The mail car on the evening express to the south had been robbed. The details were as varied as the number of the men who had eagerly discussed the incident with the Americanos. They had run the gamut from a lone highwayman to a band of fifty in these stories; Buffalo Bill and his friends had no idea of the real facts in the case until they reached the physician's house.

There the scout had his friends await him while he insisted upon seeing the physician. Finally the rurale called the doctor out. He was a little man with the alert, brisk manner of a bird, and he shook hands with Buffalo Bill and welcomed him in English.

"Eet ees to you, Señor Cody, that we may look for

some help to punish these villains," he cried, ushering the scout into his office. "Pah! these constables of ours—pooh! they are as nothing. Besides, there are too few of them—far, far too few, señor. Now the outlaws become bolder and bolder; they come far south in their raids. Look you to last night's beezness."

"And what happened?" queried the scout, interested.

Very clearly, as he had heard it from the uninjured mail clerk at the station, while the express train had yet delayed, the doctor repeated the account of the bold robbery. The details were exact—as far as they went. Buffalo Bill obtained a good account of the methods—and work—of the two train robbers. Any description of the two villains was not forthcoming, however; the little doctor had not gone into that particular with the mail clerk who had gone on, while the wounded man now in his care could not speak.

"Is he dangerously ill, doctor?" asked Buffalo Bill, with anxiety.

"He is seriously hurt—but not necessarily in danger. We have found the bullet; he lost two teeth; he was shot in the mouth."

"Ah! that is why he cannot speak?"

"*Si, señor!*"

"Can he understand questions, and can he write?" eagerly demanded the American scout.

"Sure—surely, Señor Cody—in moderation."

The scout explained quickly what he desired. He wanted as clear an account as the wounded man could give of the personal appearance of the two men.

"But they were masked, my friend—both of them," cried the doctor.

"Their clothing—especially that of the larger man—the man who did the shooting. Particularly his dress," urged Buffalo Bill, and then he waited impatiently for

the doctor to go in to his patient, question him, and bring out the written reply.

It was written in English, and it was evident that the wounded mail clerk had powers of observation beyond the ordinary—which was only to be expected considering his business! He wrote:

"There were two robbers; one, the smaller man, being entirely under the direction of the leader. The latter was tall and slender, quick of movement, and graceful. I watched him carefully until he shut us in closet; I was not senseless at any time until I fainted from loss of blood in closet. He wore gold spurs with long rowels of steel—wheel rowels. He was dressed like a rich Mexican caballero; his pants flared at the bottom and were trimmed heavily with silver. The jacket likewise. His linen was of fine quality. He wore two handsome guns, and in front of him, American style. His sash was of fine silk, and was arranged to partly hide his loaded cartridge belt. His hat was high in the crown and loaded with silver braid, or chains. His hands and feet were small, the former having long, dexterous fingers. . . . The other man was shorter and slighter, and did not speak. He remained upon the half-lighted platform, and I could not tell how dressed."

The particulars of the principal robber's dress led Buffalo Bill to believe that Silvernail had left the Olando trail and had turned his attention to another branch of the profession; but more than that, the brief description of the second robber unfortunately fitted the terrible suspicions that the scout held regarding Clifford and Rawdon Smart. These mail robbers might be the two brothers, as far as the description went. At least, if the elder Smart were the famous Silvernail, and had engineered the murderous attack

On the train, young Rawdon fitted the description of the second robber!

Buffalo Bill came out of the doctor's house and swung into his saddle. His face was set grimly, and the lines of determination in it assured each of his companions that there would be "something doing."

Twenty-five miles—or thereabout—above Parabaua, the two mail robbers had left the train after rifling the registered mail bags. That is where the trail began. It was a cold one, at this distance and time, but the famous scout had made up his mind that he would find it, stick to it, and that wherever it led he would follow till he had run his cunning—and dangerous—quarry to earth!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN.

The details of where the two robbers had left the express train, Buffalo Bill had received from not only the doctor, but from the railroad men at the Parabaua station—and they hit it within five miles. From a greaser trackwalker the scout finally got the exact facts—and saw the steep sidehill of sand into which both men had jumped.

The robbers had doubtless laid their plans carefully. They had known just where they were when they left the train. They had timed their act carefully, for not many rods from the sidehill of sand, old Nomad found the spot where the horses had been tied to await the coming of the mail robbers.

"Them hawse hoofs tells me thet th' trail is nigh a day old," declared the trapper. "But they foller a course yander through sloppy ground. They warn't expectin' ter be follered at all, I reckon."

"Good chance has put us on the trail, cold as it is," said Buffalo Bill. "But we'll stick it out if we can. And if not we'll beat up this whole country for the scoundrels."

With such trailers as old Nomad and Little Cayuse the party could not go far wrong, even on as ancient a spoor as this of the two escaping mail-train robbers. Besides, for miles the robbers had made no attempt to hide the trail, and it was only the fact that they finally reached a hard-beaten path that made the footprints hard to follow.

Their course swung around toward the Olando trail and nearer to the great river. For the reason, if

for no other, Buffalo Bill was more and more inclined to believe that the larger of the two train robbers was the king-pin bandit of the border, Silvernail.

They asked no questions of the stray Mexican whom they occasionally passed; but having reached this beaten highway, which seemed to head for the river, they were fain to drop a query here and there regarding two riders who might have rapidly passed that way within the previous twenty hours. At one rancho, however, they struck a quite foreign, but interesting, bit of news.

The boss of the outfit was a wrinkled old Mexican who was evidently shrewd and far-seeing. He welcomed the American scout and his party, and insisted that they share the family dinner of beans and coffee.

"The señores, I have heard much of," he declared. "You are the br-rave Americanos who have come here to drive off the brigands that infest our country. It is to you we must look for help; our own rurales are inadequate. The border riders laugh at them."

"Are you often troubled by these bandits, old man?" queried Buffalo Bill.

"Caramba! has not this Silvernail himself run off one of my best stallions? He rides the creature now, I am told—a bright bay with silver tail and mane. That horse, señores, was worth five hundred good Mexican dollars—not less!"

"Has this Silvernail been seen lately in your neighborhood?" queried the scout.

"Of that I am not so sure. He rides the Olando trail, as you must know, señores, and he stops the stagecoach when he chooses. But another ruffian has joined him now, I understand. He has a partner."

When they were in the saddle again, and, with refreshed steeds, rode once more toward the river, Wild

Bill, who had been studying pretty hard for a time, urged his mount close to that of Buffalo Bill.

"Look a-here, Pard Cody," he said. "Do you know what's a-eatin' of me?"

"Couldn't guess," laughed Buffalo Bill. "Out with it, old man."

"That greaser back there mentioned the fact that this very bay critter that Silvernail rides was a stallion."

"So he did."

"Now, do you know, Pard Cody, I had an idea that the horse that feller rode when Pawnee and me caught him at Ciudad Sonora, was a gelding."

"Humph!"

"Reckon the old man made a mistake—or didn't I notice pertic'lar?"

"I reckon that you were too excited to notice what sort of a horse he rode," chuckled Buffalo Bill.

"Waal, I'm going to put it up to Pawnee when I see him. If he says it was a gelding, then you take it from me, the old greaser lied—and he lied intentional!"

This idea, though it made some impression upon the mind of Buffalo Bill, did not disturb him much, for there were quickly other matters to take up his attention. Little Cayuse, ever on the sharp lookout for strangers in their vicinity, was beating the side of the trail they followed when he suddenly wheeled his pinto and came tearing back to his friends, using the quirt unsparingly.

"Hello! wot's the matter wi' thet thar young red-skin?" grunted old Nomad. "Hez he took er kernip-tion fit right out yere on the per-rarie?"

Little Cayuse brought his pony to a stop by the simple process of jerking so hard on its bit that it sat down, and, leaning from his saddle, cried eagerly:

"Oh-ee! Pa-e-has-ka, him know Injun?"

"Thunder and Mars, boy!" grunted Wild Bill. "Long Hair knows 'most any kind of Injun you could name."

"What is it, Cayuse?" asked Buffalo Bill, seeing how earnest the Piute was.

"Pa-e-has-ka sabby Injun we ketch—him go free?"

"Xuku, the Yaqui!" ejaculated Buffalo Bill. "Sure!"

"Wow, wow!" cried Wild Bill. "And I got good reason to know that same redskin, too!"

Cayuse stretched an arm to the northward with a sweeping gesture.

"Him ride that way, Pa-e-has-ka," declared the red youth.

"The Yaquis!"

"Jest same—Yaqui, Pa-e-has-ka. Much brave——"

"A war party!" cried Buffalo Bill.

"Where'd ye see 'em, Leetle Cayuse?" demanded old Nick Nomad. "Ef we're goin' ter mix it w' a passel of reds we wanter know how many they is of 'em."

"We're not going to mix things, as you call it, old man, with any Yaquis—not if we can help it," declared Buffalo Bill firmly. "That's one thing we're going to dodge, if possible, while we're this side of the big river. We've made friends with Mojé's brother; his friendship may stand us in good stead yet."

"It sure was good for me," muttered Wild Bill, patting himself softly on the chest, where he was still sore because of the thorn pricks that had been inflicted upon him by the Yaquis before Xuku had come on the scene and saved the bowie man from further torture.

"Come on!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "Show us the reds, Cayuse."

The young Piute charged across the open country again to a hillock from the summit of which he had

beheld the tossing spear points of a cavalcade of Indians descending an arroyo in the distance. The feather-trimmed spears could belong to none but the Yaquis—for Little Cayuse and the baron had once been chased by these same Indians, and he knew very well how they were panoplied for war.

"We'll trail on behind these for a while—they seem to be going our way—and see what they are doing," suggested Buffalo Bill. "Keep your eyes open for ambush, boys, for unless young Xuku is with this bunch we may have to trust to our horses' legs to get us out of trouble."

"Then wot air we gittin' inter the zone of trouble fer, Buffler?" demanded Nick Nomad, with solid good sense.

"Because I am curious, Pard Nick—mighty curious," said Buffalo Bill gravely. "If you have noticed, wherever this Silvernail bandit is supposed to be, the Yaquis seem to be busy, too. I am not at all sure that the scoundrel is not friendly with Xuku's folks, and that the reds cover his retreat after he makes a raid."

"Sho, now!" exclaimed Nomad, in surprise.

"Silvernail was on the Olando trail, and Little Cayuse and the baron found the shoe his horse cast. Immediately the Yaquis appeared, and they were chased by the reds as far as the mesa of death above San Enrife. Isn't that so?"

"Betcher life, Pard Bill!" cried Hickok.

"Wild Bill, here, was following Silvernail, after the bandit's escape from the jail at Ciudad Sonora, when he was pounced upon by those Yaquis who seemed anxious to send him to the happy hunting ground over the torture route."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Hickok again. "Ain't you mighty right?"

"And now we are trying to trace these two mail robbers, one of which is more than likely Silvernail, and here a bunch of red warriors appear."

"By gorry!" agreed Wild Bill Hickok; "it looks like a safe bet."

"Reckon yer right, Buffler," declared old Nomad.

But Buffalo Bill had another reason up his sleeve for suspecting that the chief bandit of the Mexican border was working with the Yaquis. He said nothing of it at the time to his pards, but he remembered that Mojé, the Indian handmaiden who served Señorita Cralé was own sister to the young Yaqui chief, Xuku. Perhaps, through Mojé, Clifford Smart had become acquainted with Xuku and his tribe. And if Clifford Smart were Silvernail, the bandit's connection with the Yaquis was all the more probable!

In fact, it was another rivet to clinch the structure of evidence that was being built upon the supposition that Smart and the bandit were one and the same person.

The party soon reached the place where Little Cayuse had seen the tossing spears of the Yaquis disappear. And he had not been wrong in his surmise. There—plain as could be—was the trail of the Indians—and there must have been more than a score of them.

The trail was so worked over that it was impossible for even old Nomad to untangle it and state positively the number of redskins that had ridden that way within the half hour.

"But I'm handin' it ter ye straight, Buffler," said the old trapper, "when I say thet thar is a hull lot more o' 'em than I'd fancy meetin' up wi', day or night. Mebbe this yere Xuku chap ain't with this yere bunch. Mebbeso he ain't so high er muck-y-muck in his tribe ez he gives off he is. We might run right

into a hornet's nest wi' th' hull hornet fambly ter hum!"

"But he stood for Wild Bill, here, and saved him," said the scout.

"Thet's all right," commented Nomad. "Thar warn't but three o' them braves thet grabbed Bill—and them young fellers—heh?"

"By gorry! you're right," admitted Hickok.

"We'll go slow," said Buffalo Bill. "But follow this gang I will. Especially as it seems that they are going in the same direction that those train robbers took."

"You're th' doctor, Buffler," said old Nomad, and he spurred Hide-rack, his bony steed, along the sandy trail.

The king of scouts took few reckless chances, however. As they followed on in the wake of the Indians, he sent Cayuse out on the right, and Nomad out on the left, and so swept a wide territory as they pressed on, making it impossible for the Indians to send back any party to flank them. And at the pace the reds seemed to be traveling they plainly had no intention of watching their rear. They had a destination up ahead, and were evidently riding for it full tilt!

It was mid-afternoon when Little Cayuse had first sighted the bunch of reds and Buffalo Bill and his friends had taken up their chase. Just before dusk a house was sighted ahead—a lonely hacienda. They approached it very cautiously, but need not have done so. One end of the dwelling had been destroyed by fire—and that evidently at a time now long since past.

Grass and weeds overgrew the paths about the house; the stables and sheds were tumble-down. The entire vicinity seemed peculiarly lonely and deserted. And the Indians had ridden by the ruined hacienda without stopping!

But Hickok, who had undertaken to examine the outbuildings, suddenly called his friends to him with a shout of surprise.

"Hold on, old man! go easy on the voice-culture business," advised Buffalo Bill. "We don't know who may be lingering about here, after all."

"Say!" declared the excited Hickok; "I can tell you right now, Pard Cody, who has been about this yere place, if they ain't yere now."

"The reds?"

"We know they've gone on, don't we?" snapped the Laramie man. "Well, see yere!"

He came forward with his hands full of torn papers. Buffalo Bill examined them for a single moment and then emitted an excited exclamation himself.

"Torn envelopes—letters—stamped and all!" he gasped. "By the living jingo, Hickok! the mail robbers have been here."

"Right in that shed," said Wild Bill, with confidence, "those two scalawags tore open the letters they stole, and sorted out the cash. You can take my steer for it!"

"Can't call the turn on that card, Pard Hickok!" admitted Buffalo Bill. "The mail robbers were here that's—"

At that instant there came a shrill call from old Nick Nomad. It was, for all the world, like the hoot of an owl, but the two Bills knew that the old trapper summoned them to the presence of danger.

The horses of the party were hidden back in the chaparral, with Little Cayuse to watch them. Nomad had gone nearer the hacienda, and now the Bills, replying to the hooting owl, and following the trapper's cry, found the latter ensconced in another ruined building very near the half-burned dwelling house.

"What's the matter, Nick—reds?" queried Wild Bill.

"'Tain't no Injun I seed," responded the trapper, in a whisper. "But thar's et least one critter movin' erbout thet thar greaser's domicile—waugh!"

His friends saw a shadow suddenly flit across the veranda. The moon was coming up, and long shadows moved across the open space in front of the ruined house. But this which had attracted the attention of the three Americans was the shadow of a man!

The moon rose higher, and every minute the space before the house was more brilliantly lighted. The shadow of the man did not appear again. The trio looked at each other to see if each man's opinion was the same. Something should be done to stir up the nest. If there was one man in the house—or a dozen—Buffalo Bill and his pards wanted to know it.

Suddenly the old trapper uttered a sharp hiss. He craned his head out of the broken doorway of the shack. He cocked his keen old ear to listen.

There was the sound of a step—but not the footstep of a man. Rather it rang like that of metal upon stone. A horse stamped upon the other side of the ruined building.

"By gorry! can it be the Yaquis are come back for us?" breathed Hickok.

Before he could be answered—by either Buffalo Bill or Nomad—another shadow floated out upon the level green before the hacienda. It was the gigantic reflection of a man on horseback—and in a moment the horse and rider in reality were revealed to the three watching Americans.

The horse seemed to be a large, black animal—and of fiery temper. It curvetted and stamped for a moment on the plain, while its rider seemed to hold the beast in with difficulty.

"Lay yer peepers on that feller, Pard Cody!" whispered Hickok. "We're goin' to get him, ain't we?"

"Wait!" breathed the scout.

"I got him covered—— Holy salamanders!" ejaculated Wild Bill, suddenly speaking right out loud. "Where's the feller's head?"

And at the selfsame moment his two companions had likewise seen the phenomenon that had startled Hickok out of all caution. The powerful black horse was being ridden by a figure of a man of ordinary size. At least the legs, the torso, the shoulders, seemed all right—as though they belonged to a man of good build and weight.

But the figure stopped at the shoulders!

The head was seemingly lopped off. The apparition possessed neither head nor neck!

Old Nomad shook like a leaf. The trapper could face anything in nature that was alive and understandable; but this was too much for his courage.

"Oh, Lordy-mighty!" he gasped, and groveled on the earth floor of the shed.

Nor were either of his companions—for the moment—much braver. The sight of the headless horseman was sufficient to shock any human being.

But Wild Bill Hickok's exclamation had evidently startled the strange being. Without a sound—save only the ring of the horse's hoofs—the black steed was put under spur, and, with its headless rider, in a few seconds disappeared from the wide-eyed vision of Buffalo Bill and the Laramie man.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE YAQUI ATTACK.

Old Nick Nomad believed—and naught could shake that belief—in what he termed "whiskizos." Other folks might call them ghosts, or banshees, or just the ordinary effects of punishing too much "red licker."

Therefore, when Buffalo Bill and Hickok looked at each other, and both demanded at the same moment: "What was it?" Nomad came in with his famous declaration:

"Whiskizos—an' don't you two gents say it ain't!"

Wild Bill shook his head and really looked serious.

"I dunno exactly what the old man means, Cody, but by the piper that played before Pharaoh! I believe he's right."

Buffalo Bill had been shaken for the moment, but he was too level-headed and too broadly educated to be very superstitious. He shook off the feeling that had gripped him when the headless horseman appeared, and walked out of the shed, staring down the trail after the flying mystery. Horse and rider were now entirely out of sight; indeed, the sound of the hoofs was drowned in the silence of the evening.

"That was no Injun," declared Wild Bill.

"I tell ye——" began old Nomad angrily, but the scout held up a warning hand.

"Never mind what it was," he said. "It is a mystery that we must look into later. We have other work now. Go and tell Cayuse to bring up the horses, Nick."

"All right, Buffler," grumbled the old man, and shuffled off.

"Now, Hickok," said the king of the border crisply,

"neither you nor I believe in such things as headless horsemen!"

"By gorry! only when we see 'em!" chuckled Hickok.

"Or when we think we see them?"

"Well, what did you set your peepers on, Pard Cody?" demanded Wild Bill seriously.

"A horseman who appeared to have no head."

"Humph! then you been drinkin' the same kind of lick as me," said the Laramie man, still chuckling.

"Neither of us has been drinking. And neither of us believes in ghosts. Some masquerader has been trying to fool us——"

"And, by gorry! he succeeded."

"Perhaps."

"I wish I'd plugged him."

"I don't know but it would have been a good thing if you had."

"But a man without a head——"

"Stop it, Hickok!" commanded Buffalo Bill. "You know very well—as I know—that he must have had a head!"

"Well, I'm a jumping sand flea if I saw it!" declared Wild Bill, with decision. "And my eyesight ain't so bad, as I ever heard."

"In some way he gave us the impression that his head had been lopped off——"

"He gave us that impression, all right, all right!" grunted Wild Bill.

"And it's likely he is not masquerading entirely for our benefit."

"Say! do you think he was one of the train robbers?" demanded the Laramie man suddenly.

"I certainly don't think that an Indian would have played such a trick," admitted Buffalo Bill.

"Then one of these chaps that we have been trailing—and who surely were here——"

"They most certainly tore up the money letters here," said Buffalo Bill.

"Then this guy was one of 'em——"

"And was it Silvernail? That is the question," said Buffalo Bill thoughtfully. "It is a puzzle, Hickok. It's a puzzle that gets blacker and more complicated every moment—or so it seems."

"We'd ought to chase that headless horseman," suggested Hickok. "We got him betwixt us and the Injuns."

"Maybe. But first, before Nomad and Cayuse come with the horses, I want to examine this half-burned hacienda."

"By gorry! suppose some more headless horsemen are hived up in there?" suggested Wild Bill.

But he was reckless enough for any venture, and especially ready for any venture that Buffalo Bill might suggest.

"Just you go around one end of that house, Hickok, and I'll go this other way," commanded the king of scouts. "And keep a gun in your hand. Don't shoot me, but if you see anything else moving it might be well to take a shot at it and inquire into what it is afterward!"

"I'm with you, Pard Cody," declared the Laramie man, and he started off at once. The partners rounded the ruined hacienda, however, without starting even a rat. Buffalo Bill had a bottle of sulphur matches, and one of these he lit and investigated the space underneath the high gallery that had once run clear across the rear of the house.

Here was plainly a sort of stable. There was straw and stubble sufficient to make a good bed for a horse; and there was a ring set in a stanchion to which—

without much doubt—the steed of the headless horseman had been tied.

"What do you think of it, pard?" demanded Hickok breathlessly.

"I don't know what to think," returned the scout, letting the match drop from his fingers. He carefully put his foot on the glowing spark and made sure that the fire was out before they left the empty stable.

Nomad and Cayuse came up with the horses, and the two Bills got aboard their own steeds.

"Where away, Pard Cody?" asked Hickok. "After the Injuns—or the man without a head?"

"Both," was the reply, "especially as they both seem to have followed the same trail."

The moon now lighted the track brilliantly. The party moved cautiously and not too fast, for, as easily as the trail was revealed to them, so their moving figures must be revealed to whoever might be watching the trail for them.

They were not molested, nor did anything of moment happen, until they had ridden quite half an hour from the hacienda. Then it was Nomad who, looking back, uttered a characteristic grunt:

"Waugh! somebody's lit up fer us, pards, an' no mistake."

A light glowed in the sky behind them. Soon leaping flames appeared, and suddenly Wild Bill shouted:

"That's the hacienda, boys! Cody, you must have set it afire again when you dropped that match in the horse litter."

"No," said Buffalo Bill decidedly.

"But that's what is burning," declared the Laramie man.

"Waugh! Ain't you jest right, Wild Bill?" grunted Nomad.

"I admit that the fire is at the old casa we just

passed," said Buffalo Bill. "But it has been set afire by another hand than mine. I was particular in putting that match out, Hickok."

"I reckon you was," said the puzzled pistol king.

"You think am Injuns?" demanded Little Cayuse.

"I—don't—know. But the fire was set for a purpose, we can be sure of that," said the king of scouts. "Keep your eyes peeled, partners. There may be as many enemies behind us as there are ahead."

It was impossible for the party to note the tracks of the single horse that had come this way from the hacienda. It was easy to trace the Indian ponies, however. The moonlight was amply sufficient for that until long after midnight. The party of Americans had rested but little since leaving Parabeaua, the horses were now showing fatigue, and the men were hungry.

"But it's got to be a cold bite," said Buffalo Bill, when finally he gave the word for a halt. "No smoke or light here. The moon will soon be beyond that line of hills yonder. Then we must go on carefully—and lead the ponies. I have a hunch that those Indians are not so far ahead of us."

"You can bet that they are near," grunted Wild Bill. "Injuns don't travel much by night if they can help."

"Waugh! that's right," agreed the old trapper. "They'll start airy in the morning, mebbeso."

"And we want to be near them when they start. They certainly won't cross the river," explained Buffalo Bill, who knew a whole lot more about these Yaquis than any of his friends. "They belong back in the mountains. They're out of their element so far toward the river. I believe they propose to make an attack, and they certainly will do that about dawn."

Here Little Cayuse became excited. The boy was anxious to distinguish himself, for he was as vain

as a schoolgirl with her first long dresses, and craved Pa-e-has-ka's praise as a dog craves its master's commendation. He stood up suddenly before the three men.

"Wuh! Pa-e-has-ka let Piute brave go on. Him find um Injun camp—count Injun—see when Injun start. Come back—tell um Pa-e-has-ka."

"Thet thar sounds all right, Cayuse—only th' part erbout you bein' er brave ain't so," chuckled the old trapper. "I never see sech a perky boy in all my life, did you, pards?"

The Indian lad grew red under the copper hue of his skin, and his eyes sparkled. He liked to "swell all up," as Nomad called it; and the old trapper was always the one to puncture the bubble of the Indian boy's conceit. However, Buffalo Bill, who knew well the Piute lad's ability, nodded slowly, as he said:

"Let Little Cayuse remember Pa-e-has-ka's words—and have a care. If the Yaquis are encamped, they will have two lines of sentinels out—and the first line will probably be a long way this side of the camp—so far that the Piute cannot count the fires of the Yaquis."

"Cayuse, him be careful," grunted the boy submissively.

"Very well; you may go. Return in two hours at the longest. Understand what Pa-e-has-ka says?"

"Wuh! Me understand um," said the boy, and instantly he glided away, and the shadows swallowed him as though he had dived into the sea!

"Thet thar's sure er smart lettle feller," admitted Nomad; "but he's got ter be took down er peg—and took down frequent."

Buffalo Bill laughed. "You feel as though it was your fatherly duty to teach him his place, eh, old man? But Little Cayuse has made us all sit up and take notice before this day—eh, Hickok?"

"That's right," mumbled Wild Bill, who was already rolled in his blanket; and in a moment more he was snoring.

It was old Nomad's watch—they had cast lots for it, and the chance had fallen to him. To keep awake he remained standing, while the two Bills snored in their blankets. The minutes crept on, as slowly as usual at that hour of the morning. It was long before there was the least streak of silver in the east to announce the coming of the sun.

Then suddenly there was a rustling in the bushes just behind the position of the old trapper. Like a shadow he slipped behind the nearest tree trunk and listened and watched. The rustling went on; then there was a little grunting squeak.

"Waugh!" muttered the trapper. "A porkypine, I reckon."

One of the horses stamped upon the other side of the camp, and Nomad turned to look in that direction. Almost instantly a hand fell lightly on his shoulder—and had not Cayuse's other hand seized the old fellow's wrist, Nomad would have popped away at him with his gun before he turned!

The Piute boy grinned into the trapper's flushed face.

"Piute brave no porkypine," he whispered. "What um say now—wuh!"

"Ye 'tarnal leetle nuisance!" grunted Nomad. But then he laughed. He was too honest not to admit that the boy had fooled him—had caught him napping. "I reckon ye got th' best of it, son. What erbout th' Yaquis?"

"Me 'wake Pa-e-has-ka," grunted Little Cayuse, who would never report to anybody but the chief, if he could help it.

In a moment he had both Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill

on their feet. The Yaqui camp was not three miles beyond this spot, and it was already astir.

"Yaqui make um quick move—early start—Wuh!" declared Cayuse. "Them braves paint for war."

"They will attack somebody—or some place—at sunrise," declared the scout. "I wish I knew this country better."

"Well, what will we do—try to put the greasers wise to what's coming to them?" demanded Wild Bill.

"The Mexicans are white men," said Buffalo Bill. "Although I really feel much interest in these Yaqui Indians, and know that they have been ill-treated since 'way back when the first Spanish conquistadors struck this country, still we must admit that the Indians' own cruelties put them beyond the pale. White men should help white men——"

"Is these yere greasers re'lly white?" growled old Nomad.

"Well, they're not red," said Wild Bill. "I reckon Pard Cody is right. If we kin put a crimp in these Yaquis it's our duty to do that same—muy pronto!"

Buffalo Bill led the way, and he led his own horse, too. They could not risk riding farther along the trail. The sky grew rapidly lighter as they advanced. Soon they could very easily trace the hoof marks of the Indian ponies. But they came, too, to the place where they had left the more or less beaten path and plunged down a gulch. Below, so Little Cayuse said, was the camp itself.

At that moment certain sounds reached Buffalo Bill's ears which assured him that the Yaquis were in the saddle. Then there sounded the rush of unshod hoofs, which rapidly died away.

"They're off!" ejaculated Wild Bill.

"Air we ter foller 'em, Buffler?" demanded old Nomad, as he climbed upon Hide-rack.

"No. Follow the beaten trail. This leads soon to some settlement, and the Indians will—like enough—make a flank attack upon that very settlement. Come on, boys!"

In a moment their own horses were racing along the narrow path through the woods. The way was rough, and they could not see twenty yards ahead at any time. But suddenly they rounded a spur of the hill and came out upon a narrow plateau. From this height they could see down into a valley where a small stream meandered.

The group of houses below could scarcely be called a village; it was like an enlarged rancho. And at this hour—before actual sunrise—there was not a soul in sight about the buildings or in the cultivated fields which surrounded the group of human habitations.

The grain was yellow for the harvest, and there were acres and acres of it about the rancho. At that hour it was a most peaceful scene that the scout and his friends looked upon as they drew rein upon the plateau.

Then, in an instant, it was changed. Out of a gorge across the valley there suddenly rode the head of the column of Yaquis that they had been following for fifteen hours or more. It was too late for the Americans then to warn the people of the big rancho.

The Indians divided their forces, and the two columns rode away from the mouth of the gorge in either direction. One column forded the stream and spurred around the valley to the east. The other came in the other direction, and, as the thin line of reds strung out, they began to yell! Their war cries must have been the first sounds to arouse the inhabitants of the group of houses in the middle of the plain by the river.

Out of these houses ran the people like ants—and most of them just as they leaped from their beds! The

Americans could see women and children running about in terror; the men seemed to get their arms and try to make preparation to receive the Yaquis when they should charge near enough to meet the Mexican bullets.

But this did not happen at once. The Indians seemed determined to surround the whole plantation first, and, although there were more than twoscore of the reds in sight, they were still entering from the gorge. The war party was much larger than Buffalo Bill and his three companions had believed.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BURNING OF THE GRAIN CROP.

Old Nomad smelled the battle like an old war horse, and the fact that the people threatened by the Indian raid were "only greasers" was seemingly forgotten by the old redskin fighter.

"Sufferin' catamounts, Buffler! D'ye see wot them poor critters down thar is up erg'inst? Thar'll be er massacre!"

"Not if we can prevent it!" cried Wild Bill, quite as excited.

But the king of scouts restrained his companions.

"Wait a little. Let us see what it is all about. There looks to be too big a party for us to swallow down and digest comfortably. We must go slow," was Buffalo Bill's advice.

And it seemed to be mighty good advice, for the Indians continued to appear from the gorge until there were between fifty and sixty of them in sight. They seemed to follow a strict plan, and their discipline was quite perfect.

By this time the Mexicans at the center of the valley were buzzing about like a nestful of bald-headed hornets. But they did not accomplish anything. The Indians circling the valley kept out of the reach of the guns, and Buffalo Bill and his friends, being out of sight of both parties, watched the trend of affairs with keen interest.

Racing their hardy ponies, the Yaquis sped around the valley, keeping close to the rising ground and on the outer edge of the grain fields. As they traveled, however, the leading Indians were allowed to get

farther and farther apart until, in a very few minutes, the entire valley was surrounded by the chain of reds. There was no escape for the Mexicans unless they fought their way through this chain.

And it did not seem to be the Mexicans' intention to try this. Although some of the settlers were armed with rifles, and the Indians appeared to have no firearms, the whites did not possess any great degree of courage. Besides, there was but a handful of the armed Mexicans, and sixty Indians was an army.

From the plateau the Americans could see all that went on. They saw the half-dressed women and children driven back into the principal house. The armed men did not venture forth from the settlement; but, posted on the roofs of the outbuildings, they could watch every move of the redskins.

And the actions of the Yaquis seemed to have been deliberately planned, and the plan was being carried out without a hitch. Once stationed around the valley, it suddenly became noticeable that the redskins—every mother's son of them—bore something beside their ordinary arms.

Behind each man was a bundle of straw, or *débris* of some kind, and this had been strapped with a thong to the pony's back. At the far end an Indian tossed up his spear and caught it again dexterously. It was a signal. Instantly every red slid off of his pony, and, holding the beast by its long riata, plumped the bundle of straw upon the ground and stooped above it.

"Whatever in the world are those reds doing now?" demanded Wild Bill, vastly interested by these strange proceedings.

"It's a grand-stand play they are making, whatever it is," said Buffalo Bill, but he was puzzled himself.

It was Little Cayuse who first discovered what the reds were really up to.

"Wuh! Pa-e-has-ka see spark fly? Injun, him got flint stone and steel. Sabby?"

"And by the e-tarnal fishhooks!" burst out old Nomad. "He's right. Them red raskils is a-strikin' fire. Waugh!"

"They're burning the bunches of grass they got," murmured Wild Bill.

"By Heaven! I see through it now," ejaculated Buffalo Bill. "It's the grain—there they go!"

Indeed, as he spoke, more than half the Indians had succeeded in getting their bundles of *débris* alight. Instantly they leaped to the backs of their ponies, and with the blazing bundles of rubbish bounding behind them at the ends of the riatas, they charged directly through the grain fields!

These fields were divided by no fences. Here and there was a path which the Mexicans used; but the Indians paid no attention to these. Following routes which made the spokes of a wheel toward the group of houses, the reds tore through the maize and other grains, the flaming packages at the ends of their ropes setting a dozen fires a minute!

It had to be quick work; otherwise the hair ropes would burn off and the fire would not spread as rapidly as the Indians wished.

The Mexicans dared not go out and face the Yaquis, nor could the four spectators on the hill overlooking the scene do aught to halt the destruction.

"It's a blamed mean job, Pard Cody," grunted Wild Bill. "But it ain't our funeral."

"I am not sure whether it is our business or not," said Buffalo Bill, much troubled. "If those redskins charge that crowd there and try to kill the women and babies——"

"Waugh!" grunted **old Nomad**. "**Then it's sure our**

bizness, Buffler. "We can't stand fer thet thar per-ceedin'."

"No, we can't," agreed Wild Bill. "But if they don't do anything but burn the corn——"

"We'll hold off for a while," said the famous scout. "The Indians are too many for us to monkey with if we don't have to——"

Just then the rifles began popping in the valley. They could just hear the explosions, and the puffs of white smoke betrayed the fact of each discharge. Suddenly one of the cavorting Indian ponies went down in a heap. A bullet had evidently found its billet in the beast's body—and in a vital spot, for the pony did not rise.

Its rider, however, got up in a hurry. He had been one of the most successful in setting the grain afire. He was now surrounded by leaping flames—flames through which he would have cruelly forced his pony, but which evidently intimidated the warrior.

The onlookers could see him running about—first in one direction and then in another. He was evidently a frightened redskin, and just here the fire burned brightly and threatened completely to surround him. He was shut off by the wall of flames from all sides save that directly toward the settlement.

Buffalo Bill and his friends, from the heights, could see all this drama; and it was evident to them that the dismounted Indian's tribesmen had not observed his trouble. They continued to ride swiftly back and forth through the grain, carrying the fire wherever they rode. None paid the slightest attention to the one dismounted.

Desperately this fellow plunged toward the Mexicans who, partly hidden as they lay on the roofs, could see him plainly. Several took pot shots at him, and

just as the Indian got beyond the line of fire for a moment, one of the bullets evidently struck him.

He whirled about and fell—knocked down by the impact of the rifle ball. But the wound did not appear to be serious. At least, through his powerful field glasses Buffalo Bill could see the wounded Yaqui streaking it through the unburned grain—wriggling like a serpent, and close to the ground in an attempt to reach the river.

But two of the Mexicans, emboldened by the fact that the reds did not seem to have the courage to attack them, dropped off the roofs of the buildings and ran after the escaping and wounded enemy. The Yaqui stumbled on, unnoticed by his friends, but his course revealed both to the pursuing Mexicans and the Americans on the heights.

Suddenly the Mexicans both fired again at the Yaqui. The latter plunged forward on his knees, and, for a moment, lay still. Then the wind carried a sea of flame between the Mexicans and their prey—indeed, the fire seemed actually to pass over the spot where the latter lay.

The Mexicans turned and ran back out of the grain field, and were pursued to its edge by the fire.

"Waugh!" exclaimed old Nomad. "Thet thar was a near 'scape fer them oilers—wot? And th' Injun is done fer."

"Not so!" ejaculated Buffalo Bill, with enthusiasm, for he could admire courage and grit displayed by either red or white. "There goes the Yaqui!"

"Where, Pard Cody?" demanded Wild Bill.

Then they all four saw the smoking, blackened shape that dashed forward, out of the smoke, and plunged into the river! The wounded Indian had been able to reach the stream.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MAKING FRIENDS ON BOTH SIDES.

Buffalo Bill shut the glasses with a sharp snap and slipped them into their case again.

"That's a plucky redskin. He's paddling downstream this minute, with only his face above water. See it, Hickok?" said the scout.

"I bet you're right," declared Wild Bill, with interest.

"We can mosey along that way," said Buffalo Bill, with a gesture. "There's a good scrub growth to hide us from the reds on the mountain side. Besides, they're too much interested in what they're doing below. They haven't spotted this fellow in the river at all."

"But say, Buffler!" objected Nomad. "S'pose them reds charge the settlement?"

"They are not going to attempt it. They have a hearty respect for the Mexicans' guns. They are merely doing them as much harm as possible. The spoiling of the grain is a trick that beats killing off a few of the greasers. Whoever is engineering this campaign against the Mexicans is quite a general—for a red!"

Little Cayuse already had his pinto under way, for he was interested in the Indian that had made the break through the fire line and plunged into the river. There was an increased hubbub in the valley, and the smoke and flames hid many of the wildly riding Yaquis. The smoke drifted across the houses, too, and only the flashes of the guns from that vicinity revealed the presence—and alertness—of the Mexicans to Buffalo Bill and his friends.

The quartet rode swiftly down the hillside to the

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river's brink. They were hidden there by a piece of wood that touched the river in this vicinity. And they were not far ahead of the half-drowned Yaqui.

The current of the river was so swift that, when he was out of sight of the besieged Mexicans, the injured Indian could not beat his way ashore. Nor did any of his tribal friends observe him.

Little Cayuse, with old Nomad, a lariat around his waist, rode his pinto straight out from the bank, and there, while the pony fought to keep his feet against the current, the Piute youth coiled his own rope and flung the noose of it over the bobbing head of the Yaqui.

The red man struggled to escape the coil, and was nigh choked to death before they could get him ashore. But once on dry land the prisoner quickly discovered that he was among friends, and not enemies.

The fellow seemed to understand that these Americans would not have taken the trouble to save him from the stream if they had meant him harm. Besides, he could understand some Spanish.

"You are a follower of Xuku, the Yaqui?" demanded Buffalo Bill, when the red had coughed the water out of his lungs and could sit up on the shore of the river.

"*Si, Americano.*"

"Is Xuku with those Yaquis now attacking the Mexican village?"

"*Si, Americano.* You are Pa-e-has-ka?" returned the redskin, with some difficulty.

"I am," said the scout.

"Then Yaqui and Pa-e-has-ka friends. Pa-e-has-ka's braves my friends," he added, with a gesture that took in the scout's three companions.

"Glad to hear it," grunted Wild Bill.

"Who is your chief—who leads yonder?" demanded

Buffalo Bill, pointing toward the valley where the noise of the desultory firing proclaimed that the battle was still in progress.

"Xuku," said the young Indian, with pride.

"But he does not expect to kill those Mexicans?"

"We spoil harvest. We drive out yellow-faced men. They steal our lands. We spoil their crops. They starve if stay. Ugh! Xuku cunning man."

Buffalo Bill was somewhat relieved at this news, however. He had suspected that the Indian attack would not compass the death of the Mexicans because of the Yaqui's hearty respect for firearms.

This Yaqui's name proved to be Sindra, and he was an intelligent fellow. From him Buffalo Bill gained a considerable knowledge of the movement of the Yaqui Indians against their age-old oppressors. It was a young man's movement. The young bloods of the tribe were following Xuku and other young chieftains. They were forming war parties and striking small settlements and villages where the Mexicans had trespassed upon what the Yaquis believed to be their own lands.

The headquarters of the fighting tribesmen was in the mountains to the westward—in that great range lying between the States of Chihuahua and Sonora. From those mountain fastnesses the bands of young bucks were riding forth to strike the whites and to lay waste their fields.

This Sindra was an enthusiastic partisan in the fight, and Buffalo Bill was careful to drop no hint that he and his friends were friendly with the Mexicans. But before letting the Yaqui go to rejoin his party, that was then drawing off through the same gorge by which they had entered the valley, the scout made him a present of a good pocketknife and told him to carry to the chief, Xuku, the news that Pa-e-has-ka was in the neigh-

borhood and would like to have a conference with the Yaqui chieftain.

They fed the Yaqui then, and let him go. And the four travelers were themselves glad to get a comfortable meal again before moving on. Fear of attracting the attention of these very Indians had kept the party from having a fire the evening before.

Now they saddled up again, and, before mid-forenoon, rode into the flame-scorched valley. The destruction of the maize fields had been complete. The Mexican farmers had lost their entire crop, and, when Buffalo Bill and his friends reached the settlement, they learned that all the stock of the place had been run off, likewise—save a cow or two that were being milked for the children and were therefore kept close to the houses overnight.

The active men were already marching about the valley, their guns on their shoulders—very brave indeed now that the redskins had disappeared. Nobody had been in the least injured by the Indians, although several flights of arrows had been shot at the houses before the Yaquis retired.

The oldest man at the place—his name was Manuel, and he was as little and as wrinkled and as aged-looking as a grandfather monkey—sat on a bench beside the door of one of the casa. He wagged his head and talked with the Americanos in broken English:

"*Madre di Dios!* these young folk would not believe me—me, Manuel, who haf lived so long! I told them trouble on wings was coming. I awoke my son—Ugh! he is a fool, señores. He would not believe what Manuel say."

"And you knew the Indians were coming?" asked Buffalo Bill, smiling.

"*Si, señor.*"

"How was that, old father?"

"Because, as I sat at the window before dawn—oh, an hour and more before dawn—I saw the spectral rider pass the house—*Si, señor*, I, Manuel, saw him."

"The spectral rider!" exclaimed Wild Bill, nudging the scout. "Hear that, Pard Cody?"

"And what is this spectral rider?" demanded Buffalo Bill, with interest.

"The headless horseman," replied Manuel, wagging his head. "It betokens trouble—always!"

"Waugh!" gasped Nomad. "Whiskizoo! Wot did I tell ye, Buffler, erbout thet thar critter we seen?"

But Buffalo Bill hushed him and turned to the old Mexican again, asking:

"Who is the headless horseman, daddy?"

"*Quien sabe?* Nobody knows, but many have seen. Anciently he rode the border, it is said. Now he returns. It foretells trouble—much trouble and danger."

Later, when the scout interrogated the younger Mexicans, all were unanimous in scoffing at Father Manuel. The old man said he had seen a strange and headless man ride furiously through the settlement before dawn. Such a rider was the subject of a legend in the country thereabout; but nobody had of recent years spoken of seeing the apparition.

"Ah!" mumbled Manuel, wagging his head; "all the young are fools. It is only the old who know."

But, although they were plainly on the heels of the mysterious being Buffalo Bill and his pards had seen back at the ruined hacienda, there was another thing that was not at all clear. The scout made inquiries of the Mexicans regarding the bandit, Silvernail. Had he been observed in this vicinity recently? Did they know anything at all about the outlaw?

And while the denials were vociferous, they did not sound honest. At least, so Cody confided to Wild Bill.

"I believe that either the greasers are more scared

of Silvernail than they are of the Yaquis, or else the outlaw is friendly with the whole crowd here. And, perhaps, their scoffing at the headless horseman has a meaning, too. For that masquerader is an outlaw, also. You can take my word for it."

"I'll take your word, all right, Pard Cody," grumbled Wild Bill. "But, by gorry! I'm mighty sorry we lost him so easy last night. And we've lost the mail robbers, too. And this Silvernail seems as elusive as a drop of quicksilver."

"Ah! but all these trails seem to lead toward the Rio Grande. We'll be there in less than twenty-four hours, Hickok," declared the king of scouts. "Perhaps something will turn up then."

CHAPTER XXVII.

TROUBLE AT DEL VERDE.

"Major Gordon Lillie," read Albona Ben, slowly spelling out the writing on the register of the Grand Hotel at Del Verde, just across the Rio Grande in the Big Bend country of Texas. The Big Bend, in those days, was famous for its border riders, and bad men generally. Two hundred miles wide, from point to point on the Rio Grande, it was sparsely settled and made good hiding ground for smugglers and the like. The few towns scattered along the river's edge were bad places for a timid man to be caught in—especially if he rode alone.

And the guest who had written his name as quoted above on the Del Verde hotel book, had ridden into town alone that very afternoon.

"Who is this hombre?" demanded Albona Ben, of Chihi Pinkney, the bartender.

"Thet thar's all the statement he gimme," replied Chihi, nodding at the book.

"What-for sort of a lookin' feller is this hyer major?" asked another idler, who had trailed in after Albona Ben, hoping for a drink.

"Is he er sure-nuff major in the army?" gruffly demanded the big and ugly frontiersman known as Albona Ben. "We ain't welcomin' no sojers down in this yere kentry."

"You better ax him," said Chihi carelessly. "He got a room, turned in, an' didn't even buy no drink."

"Didn't buy a drink!"

It was uttered in a simultaneous roar of horrified surprise, and by the whole company before the bar.

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That is, by all but one man save the bartender. This individual was the only man who looked like a Mexican in the establishment. He wore velvet, bell-muzzled trousers, and a jacket of the same material, all trimmed with silver braid, and his high-crowned hat was heavy with bullion cord. He wore a tightly curling black beard, and his eyes were very sharp and bright, while his full lips were startlingly red. He was not with the riotous fellows at the bar; but that was not to be wondered at, as they probably would not have welcomed a greaser as a familiar companion.

Albona Ben was taking the lead in the discussion of the stranger who patronized a Del Verde hotel without likewise patronizing its bar.

"Sech a crawfish as thet ain't got no right to a decent lodgin'!" the big borderman bellowed. "Why, 'twas a insult to the Grand Hotel of Del Verde, an' to them that does patronize et. Ain't thet so, pardners?"

"You're mighty right, old son!" cried one who was eager to see trouble begin for the stranger.

"Whar is this yere major?" roared big Ben.

The barkeep told them which room the guest occupied.

"Rouse him out o' that!" commanded the bully. "We want see him. We want see him drink. An' ef he won't drink, gosh-all-Friday! we'll see him dance! Ain't thet so, boys?"

The boys were eager and willing to see any tenderfoot or stranger made a monkey of, and they acquiesced joyfully in the program that Albona Ben laid out. The bartender, nothing loath, seized a piece of two-by-four scantling and went to a certain part of the long barroom. The house was mainly all one room on the first floor, the kitchen being in a shed at the back. The big barroom was not plastered. The beams and planks of the single floor above were uncovered. Those

beams and planks were marked off in red chalk into squares, or oblongs, the marks following the partitions of the sleeping rooms on the second floor. It was a handy arrangement when a guest left word for an early call; there being no bell boys in this hotel. The barkeeper and clerk merely walked out under that section of bare floor above which the aforesaid guest lay, and thumped upon the boards with a piece of scantling until he was assured that the sleeper was aroused.

Now the bartender proceeded to pick out the square which marked the bedroom occupied by the guest who had signed the register that afternoon, and then beat a tattoo on the planks which made them jump.

Instantly somebody in boots was heard to spring off the couch upon the floor. Albona Ben led the roar of laughter that followed. The gang became quiet, however, as the bartender returned to his usual place, so that they might hear what the man upstairs was doing.

They were not left in doubt upon this point for a moment. The guest had evidently been lying on the bed fully dressed. He walked firmly across the floor, opened the sagging door of his room, which moaned painfully as it was drawn back, and then they heard him start for the stairs.

The stairway was open, and for half its length could be viewed from the big barroom. The gang before the bar stared eagerly as the guest began to appear coming down the stairs. First came his high, polished riding boots, with good-sized spurs in the heels. Above the boots appeared yellow riding breeches. And then came into view a belt, with a pair of holsters, and those holsters each contained a most businesslike-looking gun, with a long barrel. Beside this hardware the gold-adorned handle of a great bowie was in evidence at the belt as well.

There was a murmur from the gang. This man coming down the stairs was armed for war, and no mistake!

And he was no tenderfoot, decked out in weapons that he did not know how to use. That was evident the moment that his face came into view. He was bronzed, handsome, with keen eyes, and a devil-may-care air about him that made even Albona Ben hesitate.

The stranger shot at the group a single glance; noted their attitudes and weapons, and then shifted his gaze to the bartender. And he looked somewhat irritated as he strode to the end of the bar and beckoned the server of liquid refreshments to him.

"Are you the inconsiderate son of a road runner who just disturbed my siesta?" he demanded, in a low voice, but with a glint in his eye that made the barkeeper feel a draft on the back of his neck. "Don't you allow a guest a night's occupancy of a room when he has paid for it in this shack? Come! I'm speaking to you."

The chill traveled straight down the fellow's spine and back again, and he swallowed hard before he could speak. The guest made no threatening move toward his weapons, but his eyes punctured the very lining of the barkeeper's soul.

"These—these gents was wantin' you to drink with 'em," faltered the barkeeper stammeringly.

The stranger overlooked the gang before the bar in a way that made some of them shiver. But Albona Ben bluffed well.

"Say, you Major What's-yer-name!" he growled. "Ye needn't walk all over thet sandpiper. It's me called you down."

"Oh, it was you, eh?" returned the stranger, and he slipped along the bar with a catlike motion that made

several of the other men get quickly out of his path and left him face to face with their leader.

"That's wot I said!" said Ben. "I want ye ter drink wi' me—understand?"

"On-she-ma-da! I understand what you say," purred the other. "But I don't understand what right a big stiff like you has to interfere with a gentleman's peaceful dreams! That is what I don't understand."

If he intended this for a stick to stir up the caged wild beast in Albona Ben's soul, it succeeded. With a roar the bully swept his left arm aside, pitching his nearest friends away from the bar, and with his right he grabbed a gun. And then he found that he had hold of one of the most foolish and useless weapons that the brain of man ever invented!

A loaded revolver, in the hand of a man with a quick eye and steady nerves, is sometimes a most appealing argument in an emergency. But there are times when such a weapon is of less value than a lone deuce in a poker deck. This was one of those occasions!

Big Ben had scarcely gripped his gun when he found the point of a long and glittering bowie tickling his bewhiskered chin. The razorlike point of the bowie man's blade fairly scratched Albona Ben's cuticle. The fellow might have pulled the trigger of the gun he had drawn, but his antagonist would have pitched forward upon him, and that terrible knife would have slit Albona Ben's wizzand like that of a dressed fowl.

The Del Verde gang of ruffians had tried to "start something" with this stranger. It looked right then as though that "something" wasn't going to work out altogether as the ruffians expected.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TWO STARTLING EPISODES.

"Put up your gun!"

The stranger in Del Verde, who had so astonished the gang that evidently ran the town about as it pleased, spoke no louder than before; but Albona Ben obeyed just as quick as his trembling hand would let him.

"That's better," said Major Gordon Lillie, and he flashed his knife back into its sheath. "Gun fighting is all right, my friend; but the man with the bowie can slit you down the vest like a dried codfish, while you are trying to crook your finger around the trigger of a gun. Sabby?"

"You murderin' greaser!" panted the evidently frightened bully. "I believe you'd ha' plunked me wi' thet thar toad sticker, too!"

"On-she-ma-da!" exclaimed the bowie man; "you're just right! I certainly would have punctured you before you could bore a hole in me with that gun."

"And I was only invitin' ye ter have a drink!" whined Ben.

"I don't drink."

"Waal! a re'l white man don't fight wi' a knife," grunted Albona Ben. "Thet thar's a greaser's trick."

"You ought to tell that to Colonel Jim Bowie," chuckled the stranger.

"Waal, we don't count a man a re'l man yere in Del Verde 'nless he kin shoot some," declared Albona Ben, gradually getting back some of his courage.

"Oh! is that what's eating you?" returned Pawnee Bill good-naturedly.

He turned to the frightened barkeeper and asked for a handful of corks. The man handed over five. Pawnee Bill placed two of them on the end of the bar, and at a distance of four or five inches apart. Then he turned with the other three in his hand and waved the men aside as he drew one of his guns.

"I'm perfectly willing, gents," he said, "to prove that I can shoot, but it isn't my way to practice on any man's carcass. A man is a big mark, anyway—a greenhorn ought to hit him at almost any distance with a good gun. But here are three corks—and there are two standing on the end of the bar. My back's to the bar, and the two corks are eight yards away—eh?"

"About, stranger," grunted Albona Ben.

"All right. Now, I'm going to toss these three corks into the air. I'll split all of 'em, one shot to each, and, as I'm shooting, this bewhiskered old son," indicating Albona Ben, "can sing out which o' them corks at the end of the bar he wants shot off with the fourth ball—the left one, or the right. Savez, old son?"

"I'm on," grunted Albona Ben, while the others were backing out of range.

At once Pawnee Bill tossed up the three corks. They spread apart in a fan shape, and his gun popped three times in lightning succession. Above the explosions of the cartridges the booming voice of Albona Ben shouted:

"Left!"

And the left cork on the bar leaped against the distant wall in pieces, for Pawnee Bill whirled like a top and caught it with his fourth shot.

An exclamation of wonder burst in chorus from the lips of the eight or ten men present. The shots brought into the hotel a number of loiterers from the street, and the barkeeper was instantly made busy passing out liquid refreshments to the men who wished to pour

libations to the stranger who had proved himself such a clever shot.

Pawnee Bill was excused from drinking, even Albona Ben admitted that such a quick trigger and handy man with the bowie deserved to have some indiosyncrasy—like being tee-total—if he wished. The noisy crowd gathered around Pawnee Bill and congratulated him, being as suddenly friendly as they had been unfriendly in the beginning.

"I reckon you air the Gordon Lillie that's pard wi' thet thar Buffler Bill Cody we hear so much erbout down yere, heh?" queried one old-timer. "Ain't you the feller they calls Pawnee Bill?"

"That is what I am called at times," agreed the visitor to Del Verde.

"Waal," declared Albona Ben, "ef ye'd signed thet name to the hotel register ye wouldn't hev been disturbed in yer sleep, friend."

"What's yer business down yere, Pawnee Bill—not that I'm cur'ous?" queried another of the men.

"I expect to meet Buffalo Bill and some of my other pards along the river here," returned Pawnee carelessly.

"They 'round yere, too?"

"They were across the river when I saw them last," said Pawnee.

"Wot! in greaser territory?"

"Yes. I only crossed over from Mexico myself last evening," said Pawnee.

"I kin tell ye wot's brought ye down inter the Big Bend kentry," said Albona Ben, "an' I kin tell ye quick." He smote his hairy hand on the bar in emphasis, and flung another glass of liquor under his belt.

"All right, old son. Maybe you can," admitted Pawnee, noncommittally.

"I heered tell of yer bein' down on old Señor Junipe's rancho a fortnight ergo. And I hearn tell thet the old señor had a visitor thar from acrosst the Rio Grande."

"Well?"

"Thet visitor was Silvernail!" declared Albona Ben.

"Humph! we don't know that," said Pawnee Bill.

"He shot down Pasquale, the blacksmith, didn't he? And Pasquale was a decent sort—for a greaser. Silvernail done it, all right—and Buffalo Bill and his pards have been after that same holdup gent ever since. Ain't I right?"

"You think you are, anyway," grunted Pawnee Bill, not at all anxious to have the affairs of his chieftain discussed in this open manner.

At that moment the Mexican—he with the black, curling beard—stole out of the hotel. He went no farther than the porch that ran the entire front of the building.

Nightfall was approaching. There were few people in the single street of Del Verde. The man who appeared to be a greaser cast swift glances up and down this street; then he crept to the nearest window, looking into the barroom which he had just left.

Pawnee Bill, surrounded by several of the natives of the settlement, including Albona Ben, was now seated at one of the round tables. The Del Verdeans were drinking, but the bowie man refused their pressing invitations to partake of the liquid refreshments on sale at the bar of the Grand Hotel.

The man outside the window glared in upon the scene, his black eyes glittering like those of a rock rattler when it is about to strike. Another glance he shot in either direction along the darkening street. There was no human being in sight at the moment!

With the rapidity of lightning the bearded man

drew a gun from beneath his blouse. He aimed quickly through the window, and his hand was as steady as a rock. The finger pressed the trigger the next second, and there was a crash of glass and a wild yell of agony from within the room!

Leaping away from the window, the murderer vaulted the porch rail and then ran like the wind for twenty yards up the street. There was a horse rack in front of the general store, and tied to the rack were several ponies. The bearded man selected one to mount, slashed the tie reins of the others with his knife, and, leading the ponies behind his own, set out up the road at a pounding gallop.

His little cavalcade was at the edge of the town before anybody appeared from the hotel, for everybody in the barroom had run first to see who had been shot.

Circumstances had favored the murderer thus far. At the edge of the town he let the other ponies go where they listed, while he spurred ahead on the back of the best of the bunch. If there was pursuit it was so far behind that the fugitive heard no sound of it!

CHAPTER XXIX.

BESIEGED.

The man who looked so much like a Mexican, and who dressed like a well-to-do ranchero from across the Rio Grande, had been paid very little attention while he was in the barroom of the Grand Hotel. He had watched all that went on; he had observed the marksmanship of Pawnee Bill; he had seen him make friends with the rough hangers-on of the hotel.

And he had heard, too, all that was said at the bar. He had been present when Silvernail's name was mentioned, and he had observed that Pawnee Bill did not deny that he and his friends were endeavoring to mark and run to earth the border bandit who was known far and wide by that name.

For some reason—and that reason could be found among the facts above related—the man with the curling black beard, which made his face look so long and sallow, was an enemy to Pawnee Bill. It was the bowie man whom he watched through the window, and it was at Buffalo Bill's pard that he aimed his gun when he fired the fatal shot that threw the barroom of the hotel into confusion.

But at the very moment of pulling the trigger Pawnee Bill had flung himself sideways in his chair. He had chanced to look up, seen the evil face at the window, and intuitively realized that peril threatened.

It was an act quite involuntary; but it surely saved Pawnee Bill's life. The bullet smashed the window-pane, raised the hair upon Pawnee's forehead, and a wild yell from beyond him marked the impact of the ball. A man sitting at another table—an entirely inoffensive fellow—received the ball at the base of his

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brain, and was probably dead before the yell was well out of his mouth!

The rabble rushing together, overturning chairs and tables, held Pawnee Bill in the midst of the crowd for several moments. But he was first to get outside the door and see the murderer, with the band of ponies, disappearing in the distance. And right behind Pawnee was the huge figure of Albona Ben.

"Thet's th' greaser!" roared the big fellow. "An' gosh-all-Friday! He's got my hoss!"

"And mine! And mine!" was the chorus of several who appeared from the store and the hotel.

In fact, the murderer had been smart enough to grab every horse in sight, and so retard the chase which, he knew, would be begun as quickly as possible. No Mexican could shoot a white man down in Del Verde without paying the final penalty—if he were caught.

But while the Del Verdeans scurried hither and yon for horses, Pawnee Bill knew just where his mount was—in the shed behind the hotel. He got it in two minutes. When he arrived before the hotel again big Ben, and a few others, had managed to secure steeds.

"Come on!" shouted Pawnee Bill. "Let the others trail after us. You boys know the trails hereabouts. Let's stick close to the tail of that skunk!"

"Right you are, major!" roared Albona Ben. "Stick to me, and I warrant we'll run down thet thar greaser. He had no bizness killin' Lone Joe Appleby. Appleby never did him no dirt."

"The pistol ball was meant for me," said Pawnee, as they rode out of town. "No doubt of that."

"Think so?" gasped Ben.

"I saw him at the window. I flung myself back just in time."

"Then you know that greaser?"

"Never set eyes on him before—that I know of."

"Didn't you see him in the hotel?"

"Why—I saw him," admitted Pawnee; "but I didn't give him any particular attention, old son."

"He's been hangin' around yere for a day or two," said one of the other Del Verdeans, who rode close to Pawnee Bill, now in the lead of the furiously riding cavalcade.

"Gosh-all-Friday!" yelled Albona Ben. "He'll sure hang around yere a hull lot—w'en we gits our fins on him."

There was no time for further conversation. The crowd of pursuers were riding just as fast as their horses could lay hoofs to the ground. The evening was deepening, and the greaser had every chance of escaping—if he knew the territory at all.

The fellow had taken the trail up the river, however. Big Ben yelled to Pawnee that the path led to a ferry run by a man named Liscom, who lived on this side of the river. There was scarcely a chance that the fugitive would leave the trail until after he passed the ferryman's house.

"And, unless I'm much mistook!" was shaken out of Albona Ben, as his mount pounded along, "the greaser will try and cross by old man Liscom's boat. Ef he ain't too fur ahead we'll have him sure, then."

"How's that? If he takes the ferryboat across the river—"

"We'll cut the rope—sabby?" shouted big Ben, his eyes shining ferociously in the semidarkness. "Ef th' current once gits holt of thet thar driftin' punt we kin ride erlong the bank an' pick Mr. Greaser off in time."

But it was still some miles to the ferry, and the gang behind the fugitive plied spur and quirt without mercy. The hare had never so eager a pack of hounds behind

him. This murderer should have laid a better plan had he desired to commit this crime at Del Verde.

It might have been different, however, had the person killed been the man whom he aimed at!

It was a question in Pawnee Bill's mind if these Del Verdeans would have so eagerly taken up the trail of the criminal had the man killed not been one of their own friends. But his prompt leadership of the posse had made him popular with these rough fellows. The dead man had been well liked; the supposed Mexican was going to have the time of his life escaping from the posse.

And, although it was fairly dusk by now, as the pursuers mounted a hillock and sighted the river they sighted something else. It was a single horseman lashing his steed along the path, and almost at the ferry. Even Pawnee Bill knew that it was the ferry ahead, for he saw a single point of light dancing out there on the river.

It was the lantern on the big punt with which the riverman, Liscom, ferried his customers—and their horses—across the Rio Grande. This boat was aided in the crossing by a great hawser that worked around a drum on either bank.

The question was, was Liscom then pulling over to the Mexican shore, or was he approaching the Texan side? If the latter, the fugitive would be likely to reach the ferry just about as Liscom pulled in at the shore. Under duress, the ferryman might help the murderer away from Texas, and to cut the hawser and shoot the fugitive, as Albona Ben suggested, would be to injure the ferryman's property and endanger his life as well as that of the murderer!

So, it was with great anxiety that Pawnee Bill watched the moving light on the face of the turbulent waters. And, in a very few moments, he saw that the

ferryman was drawing his punt closer to the Mexican shore.

"We'll either get that greaser at the ferry, or he'll go on beyond," Pawnee Bill shouted to his companions. "He'll be stuck there if he waits for that boat to come back."

"Ain't you mighty right!" roared big Ben. "We got the oiler—dead!"

As it proved, Albona Ben was a mighty poor prophet. The fugitive was undoubtedly halted at the ferry. But he was better than a dozen dead men when the posse reached that spot.

In the first place they found big Ben's horse lying on the ground before the door of Liscom's cottage. The beast had fallen and was unable to get up.

"The cruel critter!" roared the owner of the steed. "That's another count against the greaser. Whar's the murderer gone?"

His answer was a shot from the darkened house and a bullet that spun the hat from Ben's head. Instantly the posse scurried to a distance.

The fugitive had got into Liscom's house. Liscom himself was across the river, but the men from Del Verde looked at each other in horror and amazement.

"We can riddle that house—it's nothing but a shack. Some of you men carry heavy rifles," said Pawnee Bill eagerly.

But Albona Ben put up his hand.

"Gosh-all-Friday!" gasped the big fellow. "We can't do that, major."

"Why not?"

"It's Liscom's house," said another of the Del Verde men.

"What of it?"

"And Liscom's folks air maybe thar," said Albona Ben.

"On-she-ma-da!" cried Pawnee Bill. "Has he a family?"

"Yep. And they sure air white folks," said Ben. "Liscom's wife an' darter."

This statement put another complexion on the state of affairs. Pawnee Bill was, for the moment, as much at sea and quite as helpless as his companions. But finally he said:

"We've got to find out if the women are really in that house—and we want to surround the building and be sure that the greaser doesn't escape."

"That's right, too," agreed Albona Ben. "Liscom himself will be soon back, and he can tell us, of course."

Meanwhile, under the directions of Pawnee, the men spread out, keeping well away from the shack, and made a cordon around the ferryman's home. The fugitive would stand small chance of getting through the line, for the moon was already rising, and it would soon make the river bank as light as day.

Pawnee went down to the shore with Albona Ben when the bobbing lantern proclaimed the fact that the boat was near the Texas shore.

"Hello there, friends!" cried the ferryman. "Want to git across?"

Ben was known to Liscom, and in a few words he told what had happened. The ferryman leaped ashore, and would have torn up the slope to his house—and been shot down by the fugitive, had not Pawnee and the other held him back.

"Gosh-all-Friday! don't do that!" yelled Ben. "We got ter use strategy. That greaser's got us whar th' ha'r's short, an' no mistake."

"But it's my old woman—an' Bessie—he's got in thar wi' him—ef he ain't killt 'em a'ready," gasped Liscom.

"That's very true," said Pawnee. "But it isn't going to help matters a particle for you to be shot, likewise—is it?"

"But the villain! wot will he do to them?"

"Probably nothing."

"I don't b'lieve myself he'll hurt the wimmen, Liscom," added Albona Ben.

"You ain't got no surety for that," groaned the ferryman.

"And you're mighty right there," admitted Ben. "But it stands ter reason th' pesky sarpint won't make matters wuss for himself by doin' them harm."

"He knows what you boys will give him when he's caught," groaned Liscom. "He's bound to die."

"You bet he is!" agreed Ben. "He killed Lone Joe Appleby—an inoffensive cuss as ever drew the breath of life."

"Then wot does he care?" cried Liscom. "He kin do any old thing to my woman and Bessie."

"Don't you believe it, mister," said Pawnee Bill soothingly. "He's got his hands full. He don't know when we will rush him. He is too scared, it's likely, to pay much attention to the women."

"I got to try and git them out o' there!" declared Liscom wildly.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Pawnee Bill. "You leave it to me. Let me try first, will you?" and without waiting for the two to reply the bowie man started up the bank toward the ferryman's house, in which the murderer lay.

CHAPTER XXX.

PAWNEE BILL'S BRAVERY.

The bowie man had a deep scheme in his mind, but it took some courage—and that of a high quality—to put it into execution. He did not believe that a fugitive lying under the guns of more than a score of desperate men would add to his bad estate by injuring Liscom's wife and daughter. But he did not blame the ferryman for fearing for their safety. And Pawnee wanted the women out of the house, too.

With the women out of the way the posse could advance and riddle the thin-walled shack with bullets. Some of those bullets would be pretty sure to place the supposed Mexican on his back. But this attempt could not be made while the women were with the fugitive.

Pawnee made a quick circuit of the house and spoke to each of the Del Verde men on watch. He told them what he was about to try to do, and gave them instructions how to act. The door was heavily barred, and the windows of the shack were shuttered, and the shutters clamped into place on the inside. But there were portholes in the shutters and in the upper part of the heavy plank door, and through these holes every moving object about the cabin could be scanned by the fugitive within.

Suddenly Pawnee appeared right in front of the house, but so far away that the murderer—who had secured Liscom's own rifle to help him out—would not be likely to try a shot at the bowie man.

"Hello, the house!" called Pawnee loudly.

"Well, you know I am here, señor!" shouted back the man who held them all at bay.

"You know who I am?"

"I can see you clear enough to shoot you, señor," snarled the man in the shack.

"If that was so," chuckled Pawnee to Albona Ben, who, with Liscom, stood near him, "he'd shoot me at once. For I am the fellow he is after.

"I am Pawnee Bill. You tried to shoot me in the hotel and killed another man. If I give you a fair shot at me will you trade something for it?"

The man in the house evidently could not understand what the bowie man was getting at. He was silent for some minutes.

"Aren't you a little hard of hearing this evening?" drawled the bowie man.

"I don't sabby what you mean," grunted the besieged.

Pawnee repeated his statement.

"What do you want in exchange, señor?" asked the other quickly.

"Liscom's wife and daughter," said Pawnee quickly. "Remember, if you injure them it will be all the worse for you. They are in your way there. Let them out and give them a running chance, and I will stand out here—without my guns—and give you a shot at me."

"It is a trick, señor. Am I a fool?" cried the fugitive.

"I don't know whether you are a fool or not. But my offer is no trick. It's bona fide!"

"I shall shoot you, señor," cried the man from inside.

"Well, I'm taking that chance."

It was evident that the fugitive was secretly considering the idea. He wanted to "get" Pawnee. No doubt of that. That desire had been the starting of his whole trouble. In shooting at the bowie man he had killed Appleby, and he now had a chance to bring about

the death of Pawnee Bill and so fulfill his first intention—even if, in the end, these men from Del Verde got him.

"Come a hundred yards nearer, señor!" shouted the fugitive from justice.

"All right."

"And leave your guns behind."

"All right."

"Let us see you start, señor," said the scoundrel, with a hoarse laugh.

"Let the women out of the door first. Hold them under your guns. Make them wait until I am near enough to suit you, Mexican. Then, when you fire at me, they can run."

"Great heavens, sir!" gasped Liscom, behind the intrepid partner of Buffalo Bill. "You are accepting death in their stead."

"It's all in the day's work," laughed Pawnee Bill, with a wave of his hand.

"Gosh-all-Friday!" grumbled Albona Ben. "I don't like sech day's work."

"There's the chance that he isn't as good a shot as he thinks he is—especially with your rifle, Liscom."

"It's murder, sir!" cried Liscom.

But Pawnee stood out farther in the moonlight and shouted toward the house:

"I'm ready, Mexican! Let the ladies out."

"Throw down your guns!" commanded the man within.

Pawnee Bill did this, tossing both his pistols to Albona Ben. But as the fugitive said nothing about his bowie, the major did not remove that from its sheath.

Suddenly the voice of the fugitive was heard more clearly.

"Remember!" he shouted. "If any trickery is tried

I will kill the women on the doorstep! Am I understood?"

Albona Ben swore at him heartily, and Liscom muttered threats in his beard; but Pawnee Bill yelled in reply:

"Go on, Mexican! Nobody's going to trick you. You're such a fine shot that I'm going to give you another chance—that's all. Let the women out."

The door of the shack swung suddenly halfway open. Through the aperture appeared two slender figures—evidently the wife and daughter of the ferryman.

"Now let that dog come forward—one hundred yards!" cried the fugitive strongly. "If he doesn't do it, I'll shoot the women. If any other men try to creep up on me, I'll shoot the women. Do you all understand?"

A groan answered him. Every man there knew that the wife and daughter of the ferryman were in greater peril than they had been before. This thing must go through now to a finish. If Pawnee Bill's courage failed him, the women would doubtless be sacrificed to the rage of the murderer.

But Pawnee Bill was laughing. He showed no signs of developing a case of "cold feet." He had agreed to a daringly desperate act, and anybody who knew the bowie man well would have been sure that there was no chance of his going back on his word. He would pace forward the hundred yards as agreed. And the women would be saved.

The result to Pawnee Bill himself? Ah! that was another matter entirely!

But the bowie man was the least disturbed individual—to all appearances—at present gathered about the ferryman's house. He calmly secured a cigar from his hat, bit off the end, ignited a match and then the cigar,

and, complacently puffing on the weed, advanced the number of paces demanded by the murderer.

The ignited cigar glowed brightly, and, even if a shadow chanced to cover the moon, its glowing point would reveal Pawnee Bill's situation to the man who desired his life. It would seem as though this cigar smoking was a bit of uncalled-for bravado.

On the other hand, however, it was the single thing Pawnee did to try and keep from being shot. That red point of the cigar could not fail to attract the attention of the man drawing a deadly bead upon him. If a man aims a gun at your heart he stands a pretty good chance of hitting some part of your anatomy. But the head is a much smaller object, and much more difficult to hit at a long range. The glowing cigar point, if it caused the murderer to aim at Pawnee Bill's head, would lessen the chance of the bowie man being hit at all.

Finally the man in the house yelled: "Stop!"

Pawnee Bill had not advanced the hundred yards; nor had he expected to. The fellow in the house was fearful of trickery, and, despite his wishing to make a target of Pawnee Bill, he feared to let him come too near.

On the other hand, Pawnee was very sure that the fellow would shoot first at him; then the women would run and their chance for escape was excellent. It would help the murderer not at all to shoot down either of the women.

The moonlight revealed objects before the house very clearly. Yet there is a quality about moonlight that makes it difficult. It casts such very black shadows—and so uncertain. Figures standing in the flood of white brilliance seem, too, to have a halo about them.

Pawnee, when he was told to stop, turned his side

to the partly open door of the shack and folded his arms. But his face he kept full-front to the house and puffed strongly on the cigar. The glowing point was plain enough, but the smoke helped to make the position of his head uncertain.

"Stand there!" yelled the man behind the barricade.

Pawnee Bill made no move. He seemed quite unconscious of any danger. Yet at any moment might sound the shot which would be the signal for the two women to run—that shot which would be aimed to take the life of the brave bowie man!

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE OLANDO STAGE HOLDUP.

The Baron Villum von Schnitzenhauser was having the time of his life. For the baron certainly loved good eating, and in the establishment of Professor Pasquale Cralé, at San Enrife, the culinary operations were conducted by Mojé, the handsome Yaqui girl, and the baron stood ace high with Mojé!

The baron, however, although he was stationed most frequently near the kitchens of the Cralé domicile, knew all that went on in the front of the house. He had been left here by Buffalo Bill to watch proceedings, see when Clifford Smart and Rawdon returned—if they returned at all—and report to the scout any important happening which, to the baron, seemed of particular moment.

The baron had been taken into Buffalo Bill's confidence regarding the king of scout's suspicions, and he was on the sharp watch for anything which might bear upon the mystery of Clifford Smart's seeming determination to keep away from Buffalo Bill.

For fear that Señorita Maria might suspect that she—and her household—were being watched, the reason given out for the baron's remaining at San Enrife was Toofer's indisposition. But the only real indisposition that the big mule ever had was a distaste for work. There was nothing the matter with Toofer but laziness, and at times he was so stuffed with meanness that he seemed to be skin-full of it!

It was several nights after his friends had departed from San Enrife—Pawnee Bill to ride along the big river, and Buffalo Bill and the others to try and strike Silvernail's trail beyond the Olando road—that the

baron was awakened out of his sound sleep by a disturbance in the stable yard. The room in which he slept overlooked this courtyard, and the baron crept to the latticed window and peered out.

Professor Cralé himself was now at home—a little, absent-minded man, with a pointed gray beard, who peered through very thick spectacles and seldom listened to what one said to him. Since his return to San Enrife he had been more than ever deeply engaged in the problem of rock oil that he believed richly underlaid the mesa back of the town. Although his fellow townsmen looked at him askance, the professor paid no attention to their ill looks, and went mooning about as was his custom. The only thing that seemed to trouble him was the fact that none of the San Enrife men would work on the mesa again, and that he missed his assistant, Clifford Smart.

Now, there were no other men about the Cralé premises—that the baron knew anything about—save the professor and himself. But here was another man in the courtyard, and Mojé was with him. The baron's eyes fairly bulged out at that, and he felt poignant pangs of jealousy.

The Indian maiden led the horse on which the man seemed to have ridden very hard into the stable and brought out another—one of the professor's best. This she began to saddle, while the man who had ridden to the house at that strange hour of the night went in through the kitchen.

Now, the baron wasn't altogether a fool; but sometimes he did unnecessary things. He knew that he was clumsy, and prone to stumble over things when he tried particularly to be quiet. He wanted to know what the stranger did in the house, and he dared not go downstairs and search about for him without a light.

Therefore he pulled on his pants and socks, and still wearing a voluminous nightgown, which he affected whenever he got a chance to sleep in a real bed, he took a lighted candle and started through the long hall which led to the front stairway. If he had chanced to meet any member of the family—or the intruder himself—he might have been taken for a ghost.

But on reaching the head of the flight of stairs he heard voices below in the main saloon. He soon learned that both the professor and his daughter were there, and the third voice must proclaim the presence of the stranger who had ridden in at this hour.

Down the broad stairway crept the baron in his nightshirt and carrying the lighted candle like *Lady Macbeth* in the sleepwalking scene. He came close to the curtained doorway, and there stretched his ears. And immediately he knew that the midnight visitor was Clifford Smart!

"Rawdon will be here with the mules—and with some workmen—to-morrow," the elder Smart was saying. "I merely rode on ahead, because I knew that you would be anxious to communicate with the University of Mexico."

"Very true, my boy, very true," said Professor Cralé. "I thought I might have to go myself; but as you have come——"

"I will start again in half an hour. Mojé is saddling a horse for me."

"But, Señor Clifford, to go away again so quickly!" cried the señorita.

"I wish to catch the Olando stage," said Clifford hurriedly. "I can ride straight across to the trail and meet it going down to Olando at Manuel Alsando's house. The up stage passes the other there, and there is usually a wait for the passengers to get refreshments

from Manuel's woman. Thou knowest," concluded the young man.

At that moment the girl uttered a terrified scream. She had glanced through the parted curtains at the doorway. There, projected across the floor, was a distinct shape—a figure in flowing draperies with what seemed to be a sword in its hand, the tip of the weapon being of flame!

Perhaps both the professor and his daughter were a bit superstitious; they were Mexicans. But Clifford glided swiftly to the door, and he drew a very businesslike-looking gun from his belt. What he saw halted him in surprise, if not in terror.

Stalking across the wide hall was the pot-bellied baron, the nightgown flapping about his thin shanks, and the candle held rigidly in one outstretched hand. The Dutchman walked straight to the big front door, tried all the fastenings, seemed satisfied that they were secure, and then wheeling, started back toward the stairway. His eyes were wide open, but he passed Clifford Smart without appearing to notice him, and started up the stairs again.

"'Sh! he's walking in his sleep," whispered Clifford, with a chuckle, as the professor and his daughter crept forward, too.

They saw the baron disappear at the head of the flight of stairs, and gave him no further attention. But the baron was very much awake. He was very much excited, too. He felt that Buffalo Bill should know that Clifford Smart was starting on the journey of a thousand miles and more to Mexico City.

Smart was going south by the Orlando stage to the railroad; Buffalo Bill—so the baron believed—was looking for the professor's assistant, and for Silver-mail, near the Rio Grande.

From his window he saw the young man start away

on a fresh horse. Mojé sleepily closed the stable and the gate after his departure, and then went to her bed.

"Undt in de morgen she vould haf toldt me noddings—noddings!" grunted the baron, shaking his head. "Sich iss de perfidty of vomens!"

But the baron spent no time in bemoaning this fact. He merely waited for the house to get quiet again. Then he descended from his window, got Toofer out of the stable, opened the rear gate of the Cralé premises, and was quickly riding rapidly into the hills, in the direction that he supposed Clifford Smart to have taken.

Toofer had had such a good rest that he should have been grateful and willing to travel. Instead, he seemed to take a distaste for traveling, and threatened to balk a dozen times before the baron reached the well-trodden road known as the Orlando trail. This was after sunrise, and there was but one house in sight. This was Manuel Alsando's house of call.

The baron got down and examined the trail. A coach had passed to the south already. He hurried to Alsando's and made inquiries; the coach going north was late. He did not need to ask if Clifford Smart had gone on the diligence toward Orlando and the railroad, for there was the horse he had ridden away from San Enrife in Manuel's stable. The baron put Toofer in the stable, likewise, after making a bargain with Manuel for his keep. It was almost with tears that the baron left the mule; but Toofer's peculiarities of temper were too evident at present for Schnitzenhauser to risk trying to make the trip to the river on the mule's quarter-deck!

The northern-bound diligence came into sight shortly, and the baron climbed to the seat beside the driver. The mules were changed, and shortly the heavy vehicle, with several passengers inside as well

as the Dutchman beside the driver, rolled away toward the distant boundary. The baron didn't know whereabouts he would hit Buffalo Bill's trail, but he felt that his friends must be somewhere toward the big river, and wherever the stage halted during the following four days he inquired for news of the Americans.

They had not been seen on the Olando trail, however; at least, the baron heard nothing of them.

As they bowled along, just at evening of the fourth day, through a wooded glen, the baron was nodding on his seat, running the risk of rolling off at every jolt, when suddenly he heard the driver utter a frightened cry.

The baron came awake in a hurry—and just in time to seize the lines slipping from the hands of the stage driver. That individual, with another horrified cry, rolled off the seat, leaped over the front wheel, and plunged into the underbrush like a jack rabbit into its burrow.

The baron, busy with the mules for a minute, did not understand what ailed the fellow. He brought the six draft animals down to a walk, and then stopped them dead. And, looking up, he found that there was good reason for their stopping. Directly in the middle of the road was a horseman.

"Ach, himmelblitzen! A holdtoop!" gasped the baron.

And then he came near tumbling off the seat as the driver had. He was held speechless and motionless by terror. The horseman that confronted the diligence was without a head!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TRAGEDY AT THE FERRY.

The astonishing figure on horseback was no apparition, however. There was nothing melting about it; it didn't disappear like a wraith. Instead, it rode straight up to the stage, and there was light enough for the baron to see two big pistols, one held in each of the headless horseman's hands, and aiming straight at him!

The figure seemed to have had its head lopped off at its shoulders; but this decapitation had evidently caused it no physical trouble. It had not even stifled the voice of this strange and gruesome holdup man!

"Put your hands above your head, señor!" said the voice of the road agent, said voice appearing to proceed from his chest.

The baron's hands shot into the air. He knew when it was well to play caution three ways! Although the robber seemed to have lost his head, Baron Villum von Schnitzenhauser did not lose his.

Having lost his head, it would seem that the headless horseman must have parted with his eyes, too; but when one of the passengers opened the door of the coach and started to climb down, a pistol ball in his direction seemed to indicate that the robber's eyesight was particularly good.

"Stay in there—every man of you!" cried the voice from the chest of the headless horseman. "Throw your purses and valuables into the road; but do not alight, señores!"

A chorus of appalling shrieks came from the interior of the diligence at this. Not until then had the

passengers beheld the robber in the full horror of his masquerade.

"The Headless Horseman!" they bawled, and were too panic-stricken for the moment to obey the robber's command.

And then something intervened—a quite unexpected something.

From down the trail—from up the trail—and from both sides of the trail—there appeared mounted men. A shrill war whoop brought the baron to sudden life and action.

"Ach, himmelblitzen! idt iss Puffalo Pill!"

The scout and Wild Bill, with Nomad and Little Cayuse, jumped the headless horseman as successfully as he had jumped the diligence. A lariat hurtled through the air, and the masquerading robber was noosed by Little Cayuse. The villain's pistols exploded, but they did no harm to his captors. Indeed, he was forced to drop them in the road, and his horse went mad with the pain of one of the bullets!

It cavorted across the road, and then started to run. Little Cayuse could not release the rope from his saddle horn. The headless robber was snatched from his saddle and came with a fearful crash upon the ground.

Buffalo Bill and his mates, who had been following the road agent for more than two days, immediately dismounted and surrounded the fallen man. The entire upper part of his body was covered by a brown sack which looked like a coat, the top of it being held expanded like a pair of very broad shoulders. But the man under the sack was a much smaller fellow than he appeared to be before his costume was disarranged.

When they tried to lift him he screamed with awful agony. The fall had seriously injured his spine, and there were internal injuries, too. Buffalo Bill cut the

sacking away and revealed—the evil face of Juan Caseano, the dwarf of San Enrife.

The unfortunate man was almost at his last gasp. Buffalo Bill bent down and asked him if he could do anything to alleviate his suffering.

"Señor, you can do nothing," whispered the dwarf. "I—I haf been one wicked man—*si, si!* The leetle Padre Josefo told me how it would be. I am dying—dying!"

"You were one of the men who robbed the mail car near Parabeaua—were you not?" asked the anxious scout.

"*Si, señor.* We robbed the mail. Some of the money you will find inside my clothing. *Si!* I haf been the wicked one."

"And you rode to that ruined hacienda and there divided your spoil?"

"*Si, Señor Buffalo Beel.* Thou knowest. When you came I set the old casa afire on the inside and escaped."

"And your partner in crime? Where was he?"

The man was silent, staring up into Cody's face with a wild look.

"Was he Silvernail?" demanded the scout earnestly.

"He—he——"

The dwarf's voice trailed to a whisper. He glared up at the American. He said no more, for the breath had left his body.

A little later the driver of the stagecoach came in, the inside passengers were pacified, and the coach went on toward the river with Buffalo Bill and his friends riding as a guard to it. On the way the baron found time to make his report to Buffalo Bill regarding the whereabouts and future intentions of Clifford Smart.

"Then it looks as though Silvernail and Smart are two distinct persons," said Buffalo Bill.

Of this he was sure the next morning when they arrived at the ferry run by a man named Liscom. Across the river the scout and his friends could see a small house surrounded by some twoscore men, who seemed to be besieging it.

The ferryboat came across and took Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill, with their mounts, across first; and on the way Liscom, the ferryman, related the incidents which led up to the besieging, in the ferryman's house, of the Mexican renegade.

Pawnee Bill had borne off all honors here. He had risked his life to save the wife and daughter of the ferryman from harm. He had boldly approached the house, without his guns, at the murderer's command. The women had been allowed to run and the man inside the shack had tried his best to shoot down the bold pard of Buffalo Bill.

But at the first shot Pawnee cast himself forward on hands and knees. He had escaped the bullet, and, quickly rolling over and over, got into shelter while the villain emptied his gun.

Pawnee came through the scrimmage without a scratch. All night the men from Del Verde had kept up a terrible fire on the shack, which was now riddled with bullets; and just as Buffalo Bill stepped ashore from the ferryboat the house started to burn, having been set afire in some fashion.

The watchers gathered in a closer circle about the shack, expecting the Mexican to appear, in a sudden dash for life and liberty. If he remained he would be burned to death amid the ruins of the rapidly burning shack.

"He has a horse here, Colonel Cody," said Liscom. "I remember the dog—a handsome fellow, with a beard—"

"Oh, father!" cried the daughter, Miss Bessie, sud-

denly. "That beard was false. He is a smoothly shaven young man. And I am not sure at all that he is a Mexican."

"A false beard, eh?" exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "How do you know that, miss?"

"Because it became disarranged when he came into the house last evening and forced mother and me to help bar the windows against our friends."

"Well," said the ferryman, "we've got the horse. A handsome bay with a white mane and tail. He left it here when he went into Del Verde."

"Silvernail!" cried Buffalo Bill, startled by the description.

"By gorry! and that wouldn't be surprisin'," said Wild Bill. "We thought he was working this way."

"Screechin' catamounts!" grunted old Nomad, "ain't ye jest right? It's thet thar scoundrel, I bet er good b'ar hide!"

Pawnee Bill, who had come forward to welcome his friends, added:

"That bee has been buzzing in my head all the time. I believe he is this Silvernail, necarnis. That's why he was so anxious to put the kibosh on me."

"It looks like it, old man," agreed Buffalo Bill. "And if he doesn't come out of that hot box mighty soon he——"

As the scout spoke the roof of the ferryman's house fell in. Instantly the walls caved. A great geyser of flame shot into the air. Then it simmered down very quickly into a great heap of glowing coals in which no creature could have remained alive.

"On-she-ma-da!" ejaculated Pawnee Bill. "It's a center shot that Silvernail, the king-pin bandit of the border, is a very dead issue!"

And they all agreed with this statement.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A PUZZLING CIRCUMSTANCE.

"It sure is a puzzling circumstance, necarnis."

"I believe you. I certainly thought that phase of the mystery of Silvernail was finished with his horrible death," said Buffalo Bill.

"And it looks like we couldn't be sure of it until we hear whether that Clifford Smart really has gone to Mexico City for Professor Cralé."

"You're mighty right, old man. But there's one thing very sure about it—eh?"

"And that is——"

"If the young man returns to San Enrife, we will know that he certainly was not the king-pin bandit of the border," and Buffalo Bill laughed as he puffed calmly on his after-breakfast cigar.

They had established an open camp upon the Texas bank of the Rio Grande, just above the big drum of Liscom's ferryboat, and there were twoscore men from Del Verde, sitting around the camp fires, over which coffee and hog meat had been cooked for the hungry men by Liscom and his wife and daughter.

A little way beyond this camping ground the ruins of Liscom's house were still a smoking heap of ash and charred timbers.

But the Liscoms were thankful that they fortunately had provisions stored down in the ferryhouse itself, and they were very glad, indeed, to minister to the wants of the hungry men.

"And yet, necarnis," Pawnee Bill continued, "that Smart fellow could have reached this place on a fast horse from San Enrife if he had chosen to turn north

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on the Olando trail, instead of taking the stage south from Manuel Alsando's house."

"You mean he could have reached the ferry at the time Liscom says this murderer did—two days ago?"

"On-she-ma-da! You've got it," said the bowie man.

"Well, it might be. But it's far-fetched," said Buffalo Bill, and just then Wild Bill Hickok lounged over to them.

"Did you take a squint at that horse, pards?" he asked. "By gorry! He's a beaut."

"Silvernail's mount?"

"Yep!"

"That reminds me, Hickok," Buffalo Bill said. "Do you remember what that old Mexican ranchero said who used to own the bay horse?"

"By gorry!" cried the Laramie man, suddenly waking up.

"Is this the horse the bandit rode when you and Pawnee captured him at Ciudad Sonora?" continued the scout.

"Why—why, it looks like the same," said Hickok slowly.

"Is it a stallion?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Well, if it is," declared Pawnee Bill confidently, "it's not the horse he was riding when Hickok and I got him into jail up there in the hills."

Hickok at once grew much excited.

"Do you mean it, Pawnee?" he cried. "Was that horse he rode then a gelding?"

"Surest thing you know!" declared Pawnee Bill.

"That's what I thought," cried Hickok. "Cody, there's a mystery here."

"I should say there was," admitted Buffalo Bill.

"The old ranchero who claimed to have lost the horse to the bandit said he was a stallion."

"And I am as sure as Pawnee is, now, that the bay

critter Silvernail was riding when we caught him at Ciudad Sonora was a gelding."

"Two horses, by glory!" ejaculated Pawnee Bill.

"Two Silvernails!" cried Buffalo Bill.

"By gorry! I wonder which of you is right?" murmured Hickok. "If there are two Silvernails, which one is roasted yonder?"

But Buffalo Bill looked earnestly at Pawnee.

"That isn't just what I mean," he said. "I am wondering if Silvernail and Clifford Smart had horses so much alike? Perhaps that's foolish——"

"The baron doesn't say that he ever saw any such bay horse about the stables of Professor Cralé," objected Pawnee.

"No. As you said yourself, Pawnee, it's a puzzle. But I am troubled—deeply troubled," said the famous scout. "Clifford Smart's relatives asked me to look him up, and he has dodged me every time I have been at San Enrife. I am carrying right now a beautiful miniature of his mother which was once worn and treasured by Clifford. Rawdon Smart, his brother, should be in my care, too. I—I——"

"On-she-ma-da! Let's have it, necarnis," cried Pawnee Bill. "What's troubling you?"

"I'll tell you," said Buffalo Bill. "We're going to camp right here until that ash heap cools. It will be a gruesome business, but I must examine the remains of the man who lost his wicked life in that fire. It will settle some questions much quicker than waiting to hear from Mexico City."

As the breakfast Liscom had supplied was over, the Del Verde men began saddling up for the return ride to town. They had promised their fellow townsmen a lynching; but they were mainly agreed that the burning of the murderer in that ferryman's shack had been more spectacular.

Most of them, before riding away, were particular to shake Pawnee Bill by the hand, for he had made himself exceedingly popular with them by his gallant action in saving Mrs. Liscom and Miss Bessie. There were several of the Del Verdeans who lingered, seemingly curious as to the future activities of Buffalo Bill and his pards.

One of these fellows was the big ruffian known as Albona Ben who had, when Pawnee Bill first entered Del Verde, tried to make it very disagreeable in that burg for the bowie man. Indeed, those men of the town who lingered at the ferry were all of Albona Ben's ilk.

"Who is that big bluffer?" inquired Buffalo Bill of his friend, seeing Ben swaggering about. "He looks like bad medicine to me, Gordon."

"He's a tough character," admitted Major Lillie. "I had to call his bluff in the hotel at Del Verde. But he seemed to have shown a decent streak last night while we were trying to get that murderer. Guess he's a bad egg, however."

Albona Ben was strutting about in a way that was bound to make him unpopular with old Nick Nomad, if with nobody else. The trapper wasn't afraid of any human being, despite the fact that he believed in "whiskizoos"—whatever breed of specters those might be—and he dearly loved to puncture the baloon of any man's conceit.

"Say, he remin's me of th' bullfrog thet reckoned he could swell up ez big ez a ox," grunted Nomad. "But th' frog busted—an' ef thet thar Albona Ben goes monkeyin' much wi' th' baron, he'll likely git busted—— Er-waugh! Wot did I tell ye?"

The exclamation from the old trapper was brought forth because of the following incident:

The baron, as might have been expected, immediately

had conceived a fancy for the ferryman's daughter when he observed that she was a plump and fresh-faced prairie girl. He had insisted on helping her—and her mother—get breakfast, and was now assisting in the "clearing-up" process, while the brand of broken English that dribbled from his lips evidently amazed the Liscom girl.

"Ach! Idt a bleasure has peen to hellup you, Miss Lizgum—I assure you from my heardt oudt! Undt vot a gook you vos yedt! Sich goffee-trinks I haf nodd het—no, nodd since I Chairmany left and gome bumming eroundt in dis vestern gountry, alretty."

The girl laughed immoderately at this, and at the eye-rolling with which the baron accompanied his remarks. But just at this point the swaggering Albona Ben butted into the tête-à-tête of Buffalo Bill's Dutch pard and the ferryman's daughter.

"Say! Wot kind of a breed is this lathe-shanked critter?" demanded the bully. "Hop erlong, furriner, an' give er white man er show."

He pushed in between the baron and the girl, and added, addressing Miss Bessie:

"I reckon this yere kentry is big enough, an' ter spare, but I ain't never cared for emigrants. Wot say, miss? Amurricans—an' bred-in-th'-bone Westerners—is the best kind of folks—heh?"

"Oh, I don't know, Mr. Ben. I think the gentleman is all right," returned the young girl, who seemed by her manner to stand in some fear of the bully of Del Verde.

"Gosh all Friday! He's nothin' but er Dutch emigrant," snorted Albona Ben.

The baron wasn't a patient man—especially when his pride was spurred. And here was a case where he was being flouted openly—and before a lady!

"Vell, vot a sheek you got!" he growled, an' rudely,

shouldered the Del Verde man aside. "Undt I am no Dutch emigrant; aber I vos Puffalo Pill's pard."

"Huh! You're a pill, all right," exclaimed Albona Ben.

"Su-ah I vos; but idt iss Villum I brefaire to be called yedt—especially py sheap sgkates vot you iss like alretty!"

"Gosh all Friday!" roared the big man. "Air you plum an idjit, or wot? Ef I thought you knowed wot you was talkin' erbout, Dutchy, I'd fill ye ez full of holes as a seive!"

"I know vell vot I iss talkin' erpoudt, ain't idt!" cried the baron. "But you do nodd know who you vos talkin' to—dot is de drouble here."

"Shut thet face of yours, Dutchy, or——"

"Py shiminy Ghristmas! Wond't you talk like dot to me, you pig. Ledt me dell you vonce dot I am de Baron Villum von Schnitzenhauser, undt for a loafer like you I haf no use yedt!"

"Wow!" Albona Ben let out the roar, and his hand sought the gun at his hip. But the baron was not caught napping. He had been helping Miss Bessie wash the pans, and there was a bucket of greasy water at hand. He grabbed it and "swish" the slops drenched Albona Ben completely!

He fell back snorting and blowing, making as much noise as a grampus; and the pistol fell from his hand, and he was so blinded that he could not immediately find it. But he was furiously angry, and he was not a man to "take water" from any antagonist.

But, while he scrambled after his gun, Buffalo Bill himself walked over to the fire. The girl looked frightened, for it was plain that Albona Ben was furiously angry, and there was every likelihood of there being bloodshed. The baron had meanwhile slipped on his holster belt, and was ready for his antagonist.

"If dot feller wants ter doodle mit me, vy ledt him come on!" cried the baron, in much heat. "I vill shoot mit him at den baces, or I vill dake a rifle yedt, undt shoot him from hossback—aber I get Toofer again to ride idt!"

"Oh, Mr. Schnitzenhauser!" cried Bessie Liscom, at this bloodthirsty statement of the baron. "Please—please—don't have any more killing about here. I shan't sleep peaceful at night for months, as it is, after seeing that poor creature destroyed in our old house. Don't—please don't—fight."

The baron bowed, with a smile that could have been tied in a bowknot behind his neck!

"Mein lieber fraulein! Itt iss mit bleasure dot I mitholdt mein handt yedt! His life iss safed. Ve do nodd doodle—"

"Gosh all Friday!" roared Albona Ben, getting his breath after spitting out the last mouthful of dirty water. "I'll show you whether we fight or not—and whether we 'doodle' or don't doodle; you're a dead man!"

He had got to his feet, and with the gun in his hand. The wetting had not injured its shooting qualities, and he brought the weapon down deliberately on the baron. That rosy-cheeked nuisance bowed again to the frightened girl, and then folded his arms across his breast and looked steadily at the infuriated bully.

"You haf heardt me vot I haf saidt," he declared. "De Paron Villum von Schnitzenhauser vos nefer known to preak his vord—undt to a laty? Aber nit!"

"You goldurned Dutch emigrant! Say your prayers!" howled Albona Ben.

He was so exasperated that, without much doubt, he would have deliberately shot down the baron; but here Buffalo Bill interfered. The scout seized the man's gun hand in his own grip—and such a grip was

it that he crushed the big fellow's fingers upon the metal so tightly that Ben could not pull the trigger!

"Hold on! Let us have no more bloodshed—as the lady says," Buffalo Bill observed, looking the bully in the eye. "One murder has been done in Del Verde, and it looks as though another man—the murderer—had been done to death here. That is enough carnage for the present—don't you think so yourself, Mr. Albona Ben?"

The ruffian looked into the face of the scout, and his own countenance was rage-inflamed, and what should have been the whites of his eyes were yellow!

"We've hearn tell of you an' yer crowd, Buffler Bill Cody," he snarled. "We know how you've set up th' high hand in other places. But it won't go yere—sabby?"

"It will go all right," said the scout, unmoved. "I never interfere in a community where law and order is prevalent. But I opine that right here and now this part of the Big Bend country needs cleaning up. If I have to begin by cleaning you, Albona Ben, it will be one good—and dirty—job out of the way. Git!"

He shoved the bully aside, not even taking the trouble to disarm him; and that very fact seemed to fill Albona Ben with cowardice! He moved off muttering, shamed before the girl, and unable to carry on his argument with the baron.

"Ach, himmelblitzen!" complained the latter, "idt would haf gifen me mooch bleasure yedt to haf doodled mit dot feller."

"We have no time for dueling," returned Buffalo Bill. "As soon as that heap of embers cools a little, we must rake it over."

"Shiminy Ghristmas! For vy vos dot?" demanded the baron.

"I want to find the remains of that Mexican, or

whoever he was, who made his last stand against Gordon and these Del Verdeans."

"Oh, Colonel Cody!" exclaimed Bessie Liscom. "The poor creature is certainly dead there. He never ran out. He would have been shot had he done so."

Buffalo Bill looked at her thoughtfully, and finally asked:

"Miss Bessie, how long had you lived in that house?"

"Oh, mother and I only came here last month. But the house was an old building. A Mexican used to own it and lived here for twenty years. I am not sorry that it was burned—for we hadn't much in it. Now father will build us a new one as he promised."

"Your father has not been ferryman long?"

"No, Colonel Cody. He bought out the business this year from a man named Miller. Until we came, father slept in the ferryhouse down there—where mother and I shall camp now while we are building the new house."

The scout glanced down the steep bank to the building in question, right behind the huge wooden drum around which ran the ferryboat hawser. The river bank here was almost a bluff, it was so high and steep. The burned house had been within ten yards of the edge of the bluff. The bluff itself was rocky and few trees grew on the steep side of it.

"Any cellar under your old house, Miss Bessie?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Oh, no, colonel. It was just a little, old shack," she replied.

But, as Buffalo Bill walked away, he recalled vividly the fact that he had seen a hollow place under the heap of burning rubbish that looked like a cellar. He went as near as he could to the embers now, secured a green sapling, and began poking about the heap—"sounding," as it were, in the rubbish.

Albona Ben had slunk away to his horse, had now cinched on his saddle, and was about to mount into it when he observed Buffalo Bill's operations. Major Lillie, old Nomad, and Little Cayuse were likewise attracted to the fire at about the same time, and the trapper and the Piute began to poke over the embers.

"Hyer!" bawled Ben, riding down to them. "Wot th' blitherin' blazes air you fellers doin' thar?"

"We want to be sure the Mexican's dead, old son," chuckled Pawnee Bill.

"Say! Air you goin' to sift the ashes ter try an' recover th' silver bullion th' poor devil wore?" snarled the bully scornfully.

"That might pay," returned Buffalo Bill, smiling.

"You fellers air gittin' altogether too permiscuous around yere!" declared Albona Ben, who was, without doubt, in a fine rage by now. "You're the bosses at present; but thar's a gang at Del Verde that'll have something ter say about these doin's."

"What doings?" snapped the scout sharply. "Objections filed against our examining this rubbish for traces of the dead man, eh? That's what I thought!"

With an oath, Albona Ben pulled a gun on the scout; but, before he could shoot, there was an explosion off at one side, and the bully dropped his gun to the ground, while the blood dripped from his fingers. Wild Bill, some yards away, had caught him in the act!

"You git!" advised Pawnee Bill, likewise covering the Del Verde bad man. "I reckon I ought to have killed you yesterday."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SECRET PASSAGE.

But at that none of them just understood what Buffalo Bill was getting at when he began poking over the embers of the burned shack.

"I'll tell you boys," he said, to hush their clamor. "I want to see some of that bullion they say that Silver-nail wore. And silver will only melt in such a fire. There must be some traces of him."

"His bones," grunted old Nomad. "Er-waugh!"

Liscom, the ferryman, came up from his boat—he had been across the river—and was interested at once in the proceedings.

"I see that Ben went away peeved," he said. "Bess says betwixt you all and the Dutchman he seemed to have a bad time. Mebbe you don't know that Albona Ben is some feller in this neck o' woods?"

"I believe he did mention that there would be a gang at Del Verde who might object to our presence in this locality," returned Buffalo Bill, smiling.

"More'n object. They'll run ye off—'nless you are mighty careful," said the ferryman.

"Thet thar is suthin' thet's been tried by a hull passel of fellers," grunted old Nomad. "But ye ain't heered of Buffer and his pards gittin' th' run in many places."

"Wuh!" exclaimed Little Cayuse. "Me saddle um pony—foller um big paleface. Watch um—heh—Pa-e-has-ka?"

"Oh, we won't be in a hurry," said the scout easily. "We want to poke over these cinders first——"

"But what are ye looking for, Colonel Cody?" demanded Liscom.

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The scout told him briefly. "You see yourself there is a cave under that house. Didn't you know it, Liscom? Didn't you know there was a cellar there?"

"I swear to goodness! I sure didn't," said the ferryman.

"And I fail yet to see anything that looks like the partly incinerated body of a man," said Buffalo Bill. "You know that he would not have been destroyed completely. He did not run out before the roof crashed in. And Pawnee says that for some time before that happened, there had been no shot from the house."

"That's right," admitted Liscom. "We all thought that he might have got a bad hurt and couldn't run. We was firing all the time into the house."

"Well, he'll show up if he met his death in the fire," said Buffalo Bill gravely. "There's no doubt of that. And if he didn't meet his death there—how did he get out?"

"Waugh!" growled Nomad. "Thet thar's er c'nundrum!"

"Say!" whispered Liscom. "I heard tell there useter be smugglers yereabouts——"

"And you might say that their generation ain't dead yet!" interposed Wild Bill, laughing.

"On-she-ma-da!" exclaimed Pawnee. "It looks like we might find something under this heap of embers—eh, necarnis?"

"Quite right, Gordon," said the king of scouts.

"I dunno," said Liscom. "I ain't seen nothin' since I come here to the ferry."

"And you would be a blamed fool if you did see anything," said Wild Bill Hickok bluntly. "A man with a family has no business to mix up with such fellers as this Albona Ben."

"You're on, old man," said Pawnee. "I reckon I

should have shot him up some yesterday when he gave me the chance down in Del Verde. But Pard Cody to keep out of frouble."

"And he looks like he was goin' ter git us all neck deep inter trouble himself, this same Buffler!" cackled old Nomad, with a thumb in Pawnee's ribs.

"Have a care with that old, gnarled twig of yours!" exclaimed Major Lillie, cringing at the thumb. "I can take a joke without having it punched into me, you old savage!"

At that moment Little Cayuse let out another howl. A part of the refuse caved in, revealing a hole or cellar under the house. It was not large, but seemed to have the walls stoned up.

"By Joshua Edwards!" gasped Liscom. "There is a hole under thar!"

"I reckon we all see the same thing you do, Liscom," said Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"But if that goat ripped up the floor and got into the cellar, where is he now?"

"That is what we propose to find out," returned the scout grimly.

"By gorry!" cried Hickok. "How'd he know the cellar was there?"

"If he is Silvernail, he'd be likely to know, old horse!" declared Pawnee Bill. "These border riders and smugglers are all cut off the same piece of goods, I reckon."

"Now, ain't ye mighty right, Pawnee?" grunted old Nomad.

"But where is the man now?" demanded Liscom.

"That's something more than a cellar hole," said the scout. "You can bet a blue stack on that!"

"Er-waugh!" growled Nomad. "This yere is some

mystery, heh? Them fellers wot useter run this yere ferry an' live in this yere house, had other ways of gittin' ter th' river b'sides goin' out th' front door—wot?"

"That is what I believe," returned Buffalo Bill. "Let us scratch this hot débris out of the way and see what we can find in that hole."

And, as the ruins were rapidly cooling now, it did not take long to accomplish what the scout suggested. The first to jump into the still smoking hole was the Piute. He leaped about rather lively on the still warm rocks with which the cellar was floored, but poked vigorously between the flags with a hardwood stick, the point of which had been hardened in the fire.

While he capered about and Hickok and Nomad chaffed him, he began to chant one of his own folk songs—a song of the Piutes:

"Ta-si-va ku-mai-a
Ma-na-pa win-ka
So-ku-nas so-ma
Wi-a wi-ga-va,"

which meant: "The little red ant descended the hill with one arrow only."

"You're heap red ant, Cayuse," chuckled Nomad. "But what d'ye expect ter prick out with thet thar arrer ye're talkin' erbout?"

As an answer the Piute uttered a long, shrill yell. The others crowded forward with excited exclamations. The redskin had found a loose flagstone—one of the largest forming the flooring of the cellar.

His fire-hardened staff lifted its edge. He pried it farther open, and then, inserting his fingers, lifted the stone on edge. It had fitted snugly on a tip of masonry. There was a stone-lined passage leading downward in a steep slant, and toward the river!

But Buffalo Bill quickly ordered the mouth of the passage closed again.

"That's only one end of the burrow," he said. "You stand here and guard this end, Nomad. What we want to do is to find the other outlet—if we can. It may be that the rabbit is still at home."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE HAND OF SILVERNAIL.

Liscom, the ferryman, went to the shed and corral to attend to his stock, there being no business at the river for him just then. He was evidently determined to keep neutral in this affair between Buffalo Bill and his pards, and the men of Del Verde, who, without doubt, were interested in the smuggling that had been going on here in the past.

Meanwhile the scout, his friend Lillie, Little Cayuse, Wild Bill, and the baron—who was finally pried away from the vicinity of Miss Bessie—went to work to search the bluff for the riverside opening of the tunnel, the other end of which the Piute had found.

The foot of the bluff was lapped in places by the river itself. In the season of flood, the waters sometimes rose several yards above this present mark. It did not seem probable that the smugglers would have excavated a secret passage that opened below the high-water mark.

It would have been simpler to have entered at the upper end of the burrow and followed it through; but Buffalo Bill figured that the man they were after might still be in the passage, and either he would be looking for them with his shooting irons in readiness, or he would escape by the farther exit while they explored the subterranean passage.

They raked the side of the bluff as though with a fine-tooth comb—and found no sign of the opening.

"And yet, by gorry, it must be here!" declared Wild Bill.

"Dot iss like de ground hawg vot olt Nomat dells

erpout yedt," drawled the baron. "Dot feller, Silver-tail, he makes him er hole, undt crawls into idt yedt—und den he pulls mit de hole in after him!"

"You got it right, Dutch!" laughed Pawnee Bill.

Little Cayuse was still running back and forth along the hillside like a hound that had lost the scent. The Piute was muttering vengefully to himself, and seemed to consider it a personal insult that the elusive Silvernail should be able to hide his trail so well.

The others were gathered at the top of the bluff when suddenly a shrill scream reached their ears. Buffalo Bill—and all—turned to look toward the distant corral, which was beyond the burned home of the ferryman. The sound came from that direction.

"By gorry!" ejaculated Hickok. "I saw the girl go up there just now."

"Her father's there," muttered Pawnee Bill.

"Something's happened to Liscom," announced the scout, and he started to run toward the shed and corral. The others followed; but Little Cayuse, smelling something in the wind, overtook his white friends, and quickly bounded ahead of them. As they passed the burned ruins Nomad yelled:

"Thar's sumpin' doin' up thar, Buffler. Ye got me watchin' er empty burrer!"

"Stay where you are," commanded Buffalo Bill. "We don't know what this is."

And when they reached the corral what they found was utterly unexpected. The girl was on her knees over her father, and his head lay in a pool of blood. He had received a terrible blow just above the ear; the skull was broken, and blood had matted his hair and beard.

"That Mexican!" gasped Pawnee Bill. "An-pe-tu-we!"

"Silvernail!" echoed Hickok.

"The scoundrel has gouged us," agreed Buffalo Bill. "It could have been none of the Del Verde men. Besides, they had no reason for disliking Liscom."

"Ach, himmelblitzen!" murmured the soft-hearted baron, stooping down and patting the shoulder of the sobbing girl. "Dond't gry like dot, fraulein. Hey! Call olt Nomat. He is de doctor."

"Right!" said Pawnee Bill. "The old man may be able to do something for the poor fellow."

Buffalo Bill sprang out of the shed and beckoned to the trapper.

"Come on, old faithful!" he shouted. "You are right, and I was wrong. The snake wriggled out of that gopher hole, and no mistake."

Little Cayuse was running about the corral, searching the ground. Suddenly Hickok uttered a broad oath, adding:

"The bay horse has been taken! It was Silvernail, sure as shooting!"

"By the sacred O-zu-ha! But you're right, Bill," agreed the bowie man.

Cayuse leaped to the farther gate of the corral with a shrill yelp. He went through the opening, running so low that his nose almost touched the ground. Behind the corral was a draw that might, at its farther end, become a deep gulch. At least, it was a scooped-out, shallow place, hidden by the higher ground about it.

"But he's made for the backland," declared Hickok. "He couldn't reach the river that a-way—heh?"

He and Pawnee and Buffalo Bill were saddling rapidly. The baron remained to comfort the girl. Besides, Toofer, his mule, was miles from this spot, far down the Orlando trail in Mexico. Old Nomad had come running and, seeing the wounded man, without delay went to work on him. The old trapper and back-

woodsman had the hand of a gentle woman when it came to such a case—and as much skill and learning as many college-educated medical men of that day and wild country could boast!

The three Bills were in the saddle, and racing after the running Indian whom they did not doubt had struck the trail of the fleeing murderer on his bay horse.

The draw did, as they expected, open out into a deeper gully—indeed, a valley. The Piute was like a bloodhound on the trail. He shrilled back a yell to his white friends, and dashed on, keeping far ahead of the horses, for the way was rough.

At the crossing of a stream that meandered through the valley, he stopped a moment only. Then he leaped the rill and disappeared in the chapparal. When Buffalo Bill and his pards came to this place, they saw plainly that the horse they were following had halted to drink.

"He's a long way ahead of us, pards," declared Buffalo Bill, with decision. "Otherwise the scoundrel would not have dared let the bay fill his belly with water."

"An-pe-tu-we, necarnis!" cried Pawnee Bill.

"By gorry! He got here before the gal screeched back there at the sheds," said the Laramie man.

They rode on, the valley seeming to lead away from the river; but suddenly it took a sharp turn in the other direction. They rode more swiftly down a deepening gulch. They overtook the panting Indian. He stretched a pointing hand toward the locality from which they had ridden, gasping:

"Pa-e-has-ka! Listen to Cayuse. That man, um go back—go back!"

"I believe the red is right, necarnis," cried Pawnee. "The skunk is doubling on his trail."

"Then Nomad and the baron will get him," declared Hickok.

"Will they?" grumbled Buffalo Bill. "That is to be proven."

Wild Bill swerved his mount about suddenly.

"I'll pick up the redskin and go back," he said. "It looks to me like Silvernail has made back for the ferry. How else will he cross the river?"

"That sounds like good sense, Hickok!" returned the scout, looking back for an instant. "Come on, Gordon!"

They lashed their horses to a gallop, and kept close on the trail of the bay, the prints of whose hoofs were now plain. Hickok, with Little Cayuse clinging like a limpet behind him, tore away on the back track.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A BOLD PLAY.

The king of scouts and his chief partner used quirt and spur without mercy during the next few minutes. It was in both their minds that they were on the track of a most desperate, as well as an ingenious, criminal.

Whether he was Silvernail, the famous, or not, this man who had tried to kill Pawnee Bill at Del Verde, and had escaped death himself in the burning of the ferryman's house, was a fellow such as Buffalo Bill and his comrades had seldom been up against.

The scoundrel must have known of the smuggler's tunnel under the old shack that the Liscom family occupied. In that case, might he not, after all, expect help from some of the "bad men" about Del Verde? Although Albona Ben had been one of the foremost pursuers of the supposed Mexican, there might, after all, be a bond of sympathy between the Del Verde bully and the hunted murderer.

It was the task of Buffalo Bill and his mates to capture the fugitive before he could gain any help from the other criminals infesting this portion of the Big Bend country, and before he could cross the river into Mexico.

Over there Buffalo Bill's power was limited—he had no real official authority behind him. On this side of the Big Ditch, as Pawnee called the famous Rio Grande del Norte, almost any peace officer or sheriff, as well as the judges and other court officers, were glad to play into Buffalo Bill's hands. And behind them were the officers of the army and the grateful War Department itself!

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Indeed, the two friends were of a single mind just then. It was better to get the fugitive—even to get him dead—at once than to allow him to mix with any of the white men or Mexicans in that locality. No knowing who might be his friends.

Therefore, it was ride hard! Buffalo Bill and his companion could follow the tracks easily enough, for the soil was soft and damp and the shoes of the big bay that carried the fugitive cut plain spoor.

"He's turning up river again, necarnis!" exclaimed Pawnee Bill.

"I'm on, Gordon," replied the scout.

"Do you reckon he'll dare go back to the ferry? Why, the boys will cut him down——"

"It's what I've been fearing," interrupted Buffalo Bill. "The baron and Nomad are up at the corral—and the girl. Like enough the woman will run up, too."

"Shades of Unk-te-hee! You're a prophet, necarnis!"

For even as Buffalo Bill spoke, the trail took a decided turn and suddenly they came into the path that Pawnee Bill had ridden so hard the evening before from Del Verde, with the posse bent on hanging the Mexican murderer.

Buffalo Bill made no reply at the moment. In three minutes they came to the summit of a long rise and saw the river—and, in the distance, the ferry. Not a soul was in sight about the big drum. The boat could not be seen, for a spur of the river bank hid it from their view.

"He's doubled on us, necarnis!" cried Pawnee Bill, loosening the gun in his holster.

"There!" cried Buffalo Bill.

Even at this distance they could see the hawser to which the heavy ferryboat was attached move. It

began running over the drums. Then the head of the boat appeared.

"He's there! And, by gad, he's got his horse with him!" yelled Pawnee Bill.

The ferryboat appeared in whole, and the bay horse was plainly visible, while the figure of a man tugging like mad at the heavy hawser was likewise in the picture.

The scout and Pawnee lashed their horses to top speed; but the escaping fugitive ran back and forth along the deck of the punt, shoving the boat farther and farther into the stream.

At that day there was only one bridge across the Rio Grande between the old International, between El Paso and Juarez, and the sea. But the river was narrow enough here to make a bridge possible—and the pursuers wished with all their hearts that there were such a structure instead of this ferry.

It was evident that, before they could reach the ferry, the fugitive would be most of the way across and practically out of rifle shot. They could easily stop the hawser at the drum; but the man could finish the distance by poling or by using the huge oar with which the boat was provided.

If Nomad—or even the baron—had only been called to the ferry in time! Mrs. Liscom had doubtless run to see what was the matter with her husband at the sheds, and none of the party would see the escaping murderer.

But suddenly Pawnee Bill voiced a shrill cheer. A mounted man appeared upon the bluff above the ferry, and forced his mount headlong down the hill. He was out of sight in an instant, but they had recognized him.

"Hickok has beat us to it, Pawnee!" shouted the scout.

"More power to him! If he can pick that scoundrel off——"

But Pawnee's sentence was not finished. In the first place, he had seen that Wild Bill was not armed with a rifle and the fugitive was now more than pistol shot away from this shore.

Indeed, it would have been a long shot already for a rifle. And Wild Bill doubtless realized that fact. He did not waste a cartridge. Instead, he did the only thing there seemed to be to do—he slashed through the hawser at the drum, and the scout and his companion saw the hemp fall loosely into the stream. Instantly the punt began to swing down stream!

As the two Bills on their winded steeds came to the brink of the bluff, Little Cayuse bounded up with a rifle, dropped on one knee, and began to shoot rapidly, but without much reason, at the distant boat.

Buffalo Bill flung himself from the saddle, and grabbed the gun out of the Piute's hands.

"Here! Let your betters try that game, Cayuse," cried the scout, and brought the gun swiftly to his face.

The next moment the report echoed across the river, and simultaneously the figure of the man on the punt jumped. Either the bullet had tapped him lightly, or it had sung so near that the fugitive was frightened. He seized the horse by the bridle, spoke to him, and the creature knelt with the swiftness of much practice. At once the Mexican—if that were his nationality—crouched behind the body of the bay horse, and was entirely hidden from the Americans.

"Now, by the sacred O-zu-ha!" cried Pawnee Bill. "What do you think of that?"

"I think he has stumped us," said Buffalo Bill gravely, handing the rifle back to Little Cayuse.

"Kulux Kittybux take it?" questioned the Piute, offering Pawnee Bill the gun.

But "Little Bear" knew as well as his "necarnis" that a rifle ball would be so spent by the time it reached the boat that even if the horse was struck, it would be scarcely harmed, and the man using it for a living fortress would almost certainly not feel the bullet.

The punt was drifting slowly with the current, the hawser running through the loop that attached it to the craft. As the fugitive did not dare rise from behind his shield, he could not retard the drift of the boat. The distance to the farther shore of the river was still great, and, although there were shoals and an occasional rock in the part where the punt floated, beyond it was deep and swift water.

Buffalo Bill knew that there was no other craft at the ferry; yet he was suddenly startled by a yell from Wild Bill, and, looking down in the direction of the ferryhouse, beheld an object floating on the river, and just pushing out from the shore, that made him think for a moment that there was another boat in the vicinity.

But then he and his companions realized that the floating object was a long plank, astride of which was a man propelling it with some swiftness by means of a paddle. The plank had been launched just above the ferryhouse, and was being pushed out into the stream with no little skill.

"Shades of Unk-te-hee!" gasped Pawnee Bill. "It's the baron!"

It was indeed the baron, who had started single handed to cope with the murderous outlaw who, lying on the punt behind his faithful horse, would have every chance of picking the baron off!

"Come back, you fool!" bawled Wild Bill, from the foot of the bluff.

But the baron did not even wave his hand at him. He had all he could do to force the plank out into the current. It was plain that he had his pistols with him, and he hoped to get near enough to the punt to do some damage to the fellow who had caused all this trouble.

"He's a dead Dutchman!" groaned Pawnee Bill. "Don't it look that way to you, necarnis?"

"Death's a long road," returned Cody gravely. "The baron has been in tight squeaks before——"

"There!" cried the bowie man excitedly.

There was a shot from the boat, and they saw the baron's dinky little traveling cap skip off his head and float away on the stream. The baron ducked, evidently having felt the heat of the rifle ball; but he continued to use the paddle as hard as he could plug it.

A cheer arose from his companions on shore. Whether it was a foolish attempt or not—whether the baron succeeded in driving the outlaw from his refuge, or was killed himself—the courage displayed by their Dutch pard inspired the three Bills with delight.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE ESCAPE—AND SOMETHING ELSE.

Without paying any more attention to the cheers of his pards ashore than he did to the lead and powder of the enemy on the boat, the baron paddled steadily into the current.

It was a courageous—indeed, a desperately brave act he was performing. And it was inspired by the baron's own chivalrous nature. Over the body of the ferryman pretty Bessie was weeping her heart out, and the baron couldn't stand that!

Unable to do aught to bring her father back to his senses, or to help old Nomad in his ministrations, the baron was eager to do something to show the ferryman's daughter that he would "do or dare" for her.

And recklessly indeed had he set about showing his chivalrous desire. It looked a safe bet that the outlaw would pot the baron before the baron could get his plank near enough to the boat to put his own guns into play with effect.

His friends ashore, after that single hearty cheer, almost held their breaths while they watched him. The loss of the baron's cap did not in the least deter him from his purpose.

He kept on pushing out into the stronger current, and, although he was traveling on a slant, he was drawing nearer and nearer to the other side and, therefore, to the drifting punt.

Suddenly the boat ran against a shoal, or a rock. At least it stuck in mid-current, and began slowly to swing around.

Buffalo Bill waited for the boat to swing until he

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could catch a small view of the outlaw again, and let drive once more with Cayuse's rifle. But it was too great a distance.

"You're burning powder for nothing, necarnis," advised Pawnee Bill.

"I believe you, Gordon," admitted the great scout. "It looks like it is the baron's fight—and we are helpless."

"More power to the Dutchman say I!" cried Pawnee Bill.

Meanwhile the outlaw had fired thrice at the approaching baron. None of his subsequent shots had passed so close to the baron as that first one. The very boldness of the man on the plank seemed to have made the outlaw less skillful.

The punt swung slowly. Soon the man whom they all believed to be Silvernail was plainly revealed. The horse no longer shielded him from either the view of the men on the shore or from the baron.

The latter now had propelled his plank into the very middle current. He was going swiftly downstream, and would soon be opposite the punt.

He deliberately laid the paddle before him, balancing it across the plank, and drew one of his guns. The water had splashed to his waist, but the cartridges in the weapon were perfectly protected. He raised the weapon and slowly drew bead upon the man lying on the raft.

Before he could fire the outlaw emptied a quick-firing, six-shot revolver at the baron. The bullets must have whistled all about him, but the man on the plank never turned a hair. When the smoke of the outlaw's gun was dissipated, the baron was still upright on the plank and ready to draw a deadly bead upon his enemy!

"By the sacred O-zu-ha!" gasped Pawnee Bill, in

Cody's ear. "Did you ever see such pluck? Not me—*an-pe-tu-we!*"

The deadly earnest of the baron—and his miraculous escape from the leaden hail shot in his direction—certainly sent fear through the heart of the bandit!

He sprang up, and, with a shout to the great bay horse, made the animal struggle to its feet. Thus standing, the man got behind the horse, and was for the moment sheltered from the baron's deadly aim.

The plank was drifting rapidly downstream. In a few moments it would pass the ferryboat, and soon the distance would be too great for the baron to get a sure shot at the bandit. Besides, he would then have his back to the shoaled boat.

"Come oudt off dot!" yelled the baron. "I haf gifen you blenty off dime to shoodt me alretty. Now, pehave like a man vot you aind't, undt ledt me half von leedle shot—yes?"

The outlaw had no intention of doing any such thing, however. He did not shoot again at the baron; but he kept the standing horse between him and his antagonist.

"Ach himmelblitzen!" bawled the angry baron. "If you vill nodt pe a man den I must shoodt dot horse—who iss a petter man as you undt I vould vish to safe him yedt."

But the bandit was not encouraged by these remarks to show himself. The baron raised his pistol with the determination to shoot the horse through the neck. The distance was not great, and he believed he could knock the bay off his feet, at least.

But suddenly the bandit swung himself into the saddle. He turned for a moment to look at his enemy, and revealed the fact that he still wore the beard that Bessie Liscom declared to be false.

With a shriek to the horse, digging spurs into its

glossy sides, he urged the beast to leap, while yet the baron hesitated!

The outlaw had already swung the animal around with head to the Mexican side of the river. A branch of the swift current ran between him and the shore, yet he evidently considered the baron a far greater danger than the peril of drowning!

His yell and his treatment of the horse made the beast leap from the ferryboat. Splash it went into the river, bearing the outlaw in the saddle, and so astonishing the baron that that individual did not fire.

The horse struck bottom; the river was so shallow here. But instantly his rider urged him into the deeper stream beyond, fear riding hard upon him.

He need not have been so frightened by the baron just then, however. The German's tenderness for the handsome horse had caused him to lose his chance to pot the king-pin bandit of the border!

For, immediately it was relieved of the weight of man and beast, the punt swung free of the shoal and set off down stream again. And its course was sure to bring it into collision with the plank on which the baron floated.

Indeed, the forward end of the plank bumped the boat before the baron could get the gun back into its holster. Therefore, he lost his paddle and immediately he was at the mercy of circumstances—and the river!

As usual, when the baron did a really courageous thing, he ended with a big splash. And this time it was a literal one.

He reached for the lost paddle, and the jar of the plank's collision with the boat caused it to tip. At once he was headlong in the current, and went down like a chunk of lead!

"Woof!"

That was the sound the baron emitted as his mouth

came above the surface once more. He was kicking like the famous frog in the milk can—and if it had been possible he would have churned a lump of butter in the next few moments big enough for him to roost on!

As it was, however, and quite blindly, he kicked himself to safety. He had lost the plank; but he reached the boat. He grabbed it and finally, with much puffing and spluttering profanity, drew himself out of the flood.

There he sat, draining water off, and out of him, and fairly bubbling with rage. He had lost his chance of making good when success seemed to be entirely in his grasp.

The boat was drifting steadily down the main current of the Rio Grande; and far toward the Mexican shore he could see the head of the bay horse who was swimming gallantly, and beside him the black, bobbing head of the bandit whose life had been, a few minutes before, in his hand.

Meanwhile old Nomad, to the delight and deep gratitude of Mrs. Liscom and Bess, had brought the ferryman around. At least, he regained consciousness. The trapper could not properly dress the wound in the poor fellow's head—not properly according to surgical science. But in the wilderness men suffer remarkable wounds and live to tell of them!

At least, the man knew his surroundings, and his wife and daughter, and the trapper could leave him in their care—although he warned them not to try to move him at present. They had made a bed for him under the horse shed, and in that climate and at that time of year the shelter was sufficient.

Now the trapper joined Buffalo Bill and the other pards on the bluff overlooking the scene which has just been described.

The Americans had cheered the German in his wonderful efforts to "get" the bandit. And when he missed his chance they set up a chorused groan. The outlaw was getting nicely away, while the German was drifting down the stream on the ferryboat that the outlaw had deserted.

"Will you look at that?" cried Wild Bill Hickok. "Never did I see the beat of that Dutch punkin! By gorry! First he comes near pulling off the job of his life, and then lets it fall through—punk!"

"Him heap no good—wuh!" grunted Little Cayuse.

"Well, he evidently did his best," said Cody, with a sigh.

"Waugh!" growled old Nomad, just then coming into the conversation. "Wot thet thar Dutch peewee intends ter do don't save him from makin' th' derndest bad breaks I ever seen. By th' horned frogs of Texas! He's sure gone th' limit this yere time!"

"In other words, there is a place paved with good intentions—eh?" suggested Pawnee Bill. "And our present chance of catching Silvernail is now nil. Well we'll——"

"But wot erbout th' Dutchman?" interrupted Nomad. "We can't let him float clean down ter th' gulf thet air way."

"Come on!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "Old Trusty here is right. We have got to save the baron to keep out of any international brawl with the German Empire."

But it was really no laughing matter. The baron had got himself into a most unhappy mess, and as he sat, dripping and forlorn, upon the drifting ferryboat, he had evidently lost all his chivalrous feelings. And his guns were saturated, and all his pride fallen.

Little Cayuse ran after the horses, and they rode down the shore in pursuit of the drifting boat. There

chanced to be a bend three miles below—and it was well for the baron that this was so.

Here a point of sand stuck out into the water. The party descended the bluff, and raced out upon the sand-pit. There it was seen that the drifting boat would come none too near the shore even here.

Therefore, Little Cayuse prepared to ride into the river on his pinto, with Nomad's lariat noosed about his saddle horn. His own the Piute swung in circles about his head, prepared to cast it into the baron's outstretched hands; but the boat kept provokingly far away.

"Get busy there, you Dutch roustabout!" yelled Wild Bill, scarcely able to keep in his saddle. "Work the boat over this way!"

But either the outlaw—or the baron himself—had lost the paddle. The big punt drifted as the current pleased, and there was no way in which the baron could force it a yard nearer the Indian, whose pony was now swimming.

Nomad walked his own horse into the river, letting the Piute out to the end of the lariat. Pawnee Bill rushed his own mount into the water, and fastened another line to Nomad's saddle.

"Hold hard, boys!" advised Buffalo Bill. "You'll all be strung out yet at the mercy of that current, and I'll see you all going down stream."

He likewise rode into the river, but diagonally, and below the others. Cayuse swung his lariat for the last time and let her spin!

The baron made a frantic effort to grab it, and came within an ace of pitching off into the river.

"Donnerwetter!" he bawled. "Iss dot de pest you can do, Leedle Cayuse? Idt iss a foolishness den—dot iss wot! I gould t'row a petter rope mit bot' handts

tiedt behindt my pack yedt—undt mit mein eyes closed!"

Just how he was to perform this feat he did not explain, but made another spread-eagle grab for the next cast of the Indian's rope.

"Ach, himmelblitzen!" he yelled. "Jest as I haf it, I haf idt nodt! Py shiminy graciousness! If dot mu-el off mine—Toofer—vos here, he couldt petter as you flng a rope yedt."

Cayuse only grinned at this insult, and made a third cast. This time the baron managed to grab the end of the rope; but he teetered on the edge of the boat for a moment so that his friends expected to see him splash into the river again.

He managed to recover his balance, however, and lay back on the rope. It was a stiff weight, but he really managed to draw the boat a little nearer the Indian. The latter was now trying to turn his pony, and steer him shoreward again. Nomad helped in this, and the others cheered their work.

But it was Buffalo Bill who noticed that the baron was trying to fasten the end of the rope around his own waist!

"Here! You fool Dutchman!" cried the scout, "don't do that. Do you want to be yanked off the boat after all? Tie that rope to a cleat."

The baron managed to do this, and then he had a fair chance of being saved without being dragged through the river again.

The Piute got his pony to a shallow place where the creature could stand on its own feet, and there Nomad rode to him and flung his extra rope to the baron. With two strong lariats hitched to the ferry-boat, there was a chance of saving the craft as well as the baron.

And this they did in half an hour. Liscom's boat

was drawn near the shore, where Nomad and Wild Bill jumped aboard it, and, with poles cut in the forest, they managed to push the boat upstream to the ferry landing, about dark.

The day had been spent excitedly, but without much gain to Buffalo Bill and his pards. The man they believed to be Silvernail had escaped. They had seen him climb out with the bay horse on the other side and ride away.

Nobody had come up from Del Verde to trouble them. Liscom was better and they moved him down to the ferryhouse before dark. But they could not repair the hawser and put the ferryboat in commission again before the next morning.

But after supper that night, Buffalo Bill proceeded to make the investigation which circumstances had halted early in that day. In other words, he proposed thoroughly to examine the tunnel, or subterranean passage, or whatever it was, the entrance of which they had discovered under the burned house.

Because of the evident unfriendliness of Albona Ben when he rode away in the morning, the scout did not think it wise to leave the horses unguarded, and they were removed from Liscom's corral and picketed nearer the river. The baron and Little Cayuse were left to guard them, while the remainder of the party gathered torches and proceeded to the opening of the subterranean passage.

Rum, tobacco, opium, and many other valuable commodities were in those days brought across the border without paying the customs duties. At the regular places of crossing—like Laredo, Eagle Pass, El Paso—the internal revenue officers watched keenly those who went to and fro; but there were many places like this ferry in the Big Bend country where the outlaws made themselves quite at home.

However, for a train of laden mules—or a boat—to cross the river at any one point frequently, would finally reach the ears of the government officers. Therefore the smugglers had probably worked mostly at night, and had prepared a hidden storage house for the illicit wares they dealt in.

At night it would be an easy matter to bring across boatloads of goods, discharge the cargoes on the shore above the ferryhouse, and hide away the goods in some cavern in the bluff. That was what Buffalo Bill expected to find—a cavity in the rocks which was connected with this old house that had been burned by the passage through which Silvernail had escaped the fire.

At least, there was surely a second exit, for Nomad had watched the end under the ruined dwelling like a hungry cat at a rat hole. Now, with the torches, the three Bills and the old trapper got down to business.

Buffalo Bill went ahead, while Nomad trailed behind, keeping a sharp ear on their rear, for they had shut the stone cover of the passage down when they entered, and it scraped so that they believed they could hear instantly if it was touched, no matter how far they got into the tunnel.

And it was a long passage. Much time, patience, and hard work had been expended in its digging—that was sure! Yet fifty feet beyond the house it seemed to melt into a natural cavity in the rock. They descended a ladder into a deep well—thirty feet down at least; and landed at last in a cavern like a huge cistern—and with walls almost as smooth and round.

"By gorry! There's no outlet to this," declared Wild Bill, voicing the general surprise.

"There doesn't seem to be. It's a good storage place, and it must be down pretty near to the level of the water. But if the smugglers ever used it for

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storage purposes, how did they get the stuff in here?" demanded Buffalo Bill.

Instantly old Nomad let out a howl that startled the hollow echoes into life.

"By the horned frogs o' Texas!" he yelped. "Looker thet thar ladder!"

The others wheeled to look. The ladder had been drawn several feet into the air. They could not see who manipulated it above, but now it was raised more quickly, being drawn back into the slanting passage down which they had come to the brink of this well.

With a shout, Wild Bill leaped for the ladder. He caught the last rung and swung in the air, his weight bearing the ladder down again. But the rung snapped, tore away from the ladder itself, and he was precipitated upon the floor of the well.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SAND RILL.

There was a moon, and it rose early. The picketed horses in the glade some distance back of the burned dwelling grazed peacefully, and the baron snored inharmoniously, for Little Cayuse had the first watch. It was not necessary for both to be awake at once while their friends were investigating the subterranean passage, and the baron was not averse to storing away sleep against future emergency.

The glade emerged on the edge of the bluff, and there Little Cayuse took his stand, where he could see in both directions along the rough and steep hillside, all of the river for miles up and down, sparkling in the moonlight, and most of the plain, that was not tree-encumbered, up to the ruins of the burned house.

Thrust out of the side of the bluff were many great rocks among the trees—some of the clumps of saplings and trees apparently growing upon the rocks themselves. But there were stretches of sand and gravel, too, as the Piute could easily see.

Buffalo Bill's Indian pard was broadly awake. The squeaking grunt of a porcupine in the brush, the chirping of a bird disturbed in its nest, the lap-lapping of the river as it flowed past, as well as the champing of the horses in the grove, were all plainly audible to his keen ear.

And suddenly there came another sound. There was a faint movement on the hillside below him, but toward the ferry. It was a faint sound—as though somebody had made a misstep upon the shifting sand and gravel down there. He heard a pebble rattle—

then another and another. A stream of loose soil was trickling down the bluff.

The Piute had been standing motionless, with folded arms, and in the shadow. When he moved—and he did so swiftly—he was careful not to step beyond the shadow of the trees, or to stand so that the moon would cast his own silhouette down the hill.

Stepping as slyly as the fox when it is approaching the chicken roost, Little Cayuse peered down the hill. Beside an outcropping piece of sandstone, and under the roots of some scrubby trees, the sand was in motion. He could see it trickling down the hillside—down, down to the very foot of the cliff. It was a rill of sand that slid steadily downward, occasionally carrying a pebble with it that rattled against other pebbles in the descent, or at the bottom.

How had it started?

A few moments before the sand had not been in motion. Little Cayuse had heard no small creature moving in this direction. Indeed, so wise are the wild creatures that, unless frightened, no animal would have made the mistake of stepping upon a place that moved like this sand stream. They would have instinctively avoided it, as would the Indian himself had he been climbing the bluff.

He now peered carefully into every clump about the spot where the sand rill had been started, and maneuvered so as to see around the outcropping boulders. His suspicions were aroused; yet so vague were they that he did not return to the glade to arouse the baron. He had actually heard no sound but the rattling of the pebbles; and his suspicion—though alert—was indefinite.

Like the ghost of an Indian, Little Cayuse let himself down the steep hillside, from boulder to boulder, from footing to footing, trying each carefully before

he bore his weight on it, and always moving toward that place where the rill of sand had begun to run. It was still slipping down the hillside—he could see it; but the cause of it he neither understood nor saw.

An Indian on the watch for an enemy, or fearful of surprise, seldom leaves any mystery—no matter of how small moment—unexplained. His curiosity is insatiable regarding every leaf, branch, stone, or blade of grass in the trail that he follows.

This rill of sand, Little Cayuse believed, could not have been started running without some active agency. Was that agency human, or was it caused by some frightened creature running over the sandy slope? The Piute did not believe that it was caused by any wild creature unless it were one that had a lair under that outcropping sandstone and the roots of the scrub trees. And if there was a hole in that place, he wanted to know it!

It was along here that Buffalo Bill and his friends had looked for the farther outlet of the subterranean passage—that passage which the three Bills and Nomad were at this very time exploring. They had really expected to find the second opening—if there were such, far down the bluff, near the level of the river. This disturbance in the sand was scarcely halfway down the face of the bluff.

The possibility that the trickling sand had something to do with the tunnel the smugglers had used impressed the Piute. His was a keen, if uncultured, mind. And, although his ability to speak the language of the whites was limited, his understanding of what they said when they had talked together about the subterranean passage was quite clear.

By aid of this passage Silvernail, the bandit, had escaped the fire, and later got out into the open, attacked Liscom, the ferryman, and run away with the

bay stallion. Little Cayuse understood that there were other ruffians who knew of the existence of the tunnel from the burned house. If there was an opening into that tunnel under that rock——

Well, the Piute knew just what to do. He lowered himself from tree stub to rock, and so carefully that no pebble was detached to roll down the side of the bluff, nor did he crack a twig. His own shadow moving over the ground made fully as much noise in its passage as the body of Little Cayuse itself!

In a few seconds he had slipped down to the clump of saplings and brush that overhung the spot where the sand had begun to slide. The trickling had not yet ceased, but it was slowing down. Whatever cause had first started the sand rill, it was now removed.

The Piute, on his knees, carefully pushed aside the twigs and small branches with one hand, holding one of his pistols in the other. Indeed, he used the barrel of the weapon to assist in making this aperture through the screen of vegetation. But all so noiseless!

Then he craned his head forward and peered over the edge of the sandstone block. His eagle feather cast a shadow on the hillside, but none of his body was thrust forward sufficiently to be reflected by the moonlight. The feather looked much like a twig among the other twigs.

Yet there was a pair of watchful eyes—as keen as those of the Piute—that saw this shadow of the eagle feather. The owner of the eyes, however, might never have realized that the shadow was not that of one of the other twigs had not Little Cayuse bobbed his head back and forth in his endeavor to see down under the boulder.

Now, there was no wind; therefore, why should one of these twigs be darting here and there—its shadow running about like a weasel on a hot rock? The owner

of the pair of eyes watching the reflection of the eagle feather did not for a moment know just what the shadow was.

Under the rock and the tree roots was a narrow opening in the hillside—just the opening that Buffalo Bill and his comrades had searched for that previous morning. There had been a slab of rock before the hole—and so ingeniously fixed in place that it had looked like a part of the huge boulder of sandstone, and immovable.

The sliding back of this slab, greased on its upper and lower edges and running smoothly in grooves cut into the soft rock—had started the trickle of sand down the face of the bluff. Out of the aperture was thrust the head and shoulders of a man.

The shadow of the eagle feather flickered about. For some moments the man in the hole tried to make out the meaning of it. Then suddenly this thought permeated his mind:

"Buffalo Bill totes a Piute Injun with him; that Injun wears an eagle feather in his scalp lock; and that Injun is poking about just above here."

No sooner had the thought shot the man's understanding than he yanked out a gun, threw himself farther through the hole, making the sand slide all the faster, and getting a quick squint at the top of Little Cayuse's black head and his long braids, he fired point-blank at the Piute!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BARON TIES THE BAG OF TRICKS.

That bullet, coming so suddenly and shattering the stillness of the night, "creased" the Piute neatly. It cut a groove through his topknot, and the blood flowed; but it did not cut his eagle feather—that precious possession of the red warrior, almost as precious as his medicine—and for that Little Cayuse was thankful—afterward.

Just then he was in the act of throwing himself forward over the edge of the boulder. The shot did not stay him. Indeed, he slid still farther forward, his eyes glaring like a wild beast's down into the eyes of the man who lay halfway out of the hole!

As the blood dripped from the wound in the redskin's head, he dove over the rock, and his sinewy hand gripped the throat of his enemy. He had lost his own pistol; he knocked the gun out of his antagonist's hand, and the weapon went sliding and slipping down the hillside with the rill of sand, the beginning of which had led the Piute into this mess.

For it was a mess. He had a grip on the throat of the man who had shot him; but how long he could hold that grip it was hard to say!

The man was twice the weight of the Piute. His own great fists shot upward and his brown fingers gripped the throat of the redskin. In doing this he had heaved himself out of the hole under the boulder, however.

Little Cayuse came down plumb upon the man's head and shoulders. They grappled like a pair of tiger cats. Neither could utter a sound, for the throat-grips were deadly!

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One or the other would swiftly choke his antagonist to death.

The Piute, so much lighter than the man from the hole, had only the advantage of position. He was on top—for the moment.

While his lean fingers dug frantically into the throat of his enemy, the calloused and thicker fingers of that enemy squeezed the redskin's neck as though it were that of a kitten. ♥

The blood roared in the ears of the Piute like the fall of the water in the Shoshone. The hot breath of the man who sought to kill him, and whom he sought to kill, was breathed into his face like the fetid breath of the panther. The man growled in his throat, too, like a mad beast!

Little Cayuse heard nothing—saw nothing—scarcely sensed anything but the fact that either he or his antagonist would never get out of this grip alive. Had the blood not roared so in his ears, and his senses been deadened to everything but the battle, he would have heard the drumming of horses' hoofs upon the prairie.

While he and the unknown struggled together, rolling upon the little cup-shaped hollow in the side of the bluff, a band of horsemen drove down upon the little glade where the steeds of Buffalo Bill and his friends were tethered, and where the baron slept in utter unconsciousness of all that was going on.

The drumming of the ponies' hoofs did not awaken the German. He lay on his back and snored as melodiously as a distant sawmill, while the gang bore down on the grove. They reached the place, threw themselves from their saddles, and rushed the camp. The Baron Villum von Schnitzenhauser continued to blow melodious blasts on his horn, and, lying in the

deep shadow of a fallen tree, was not—at first—observed by the raiders.

The mysterious riders gathered quickly in a whispering knot near the mounts belonging to Buffalo Bill and his pards.

"Where are they?"

"This here is a trap, boys!"

"Go on! We know where those skeezicks have gone—didn't Ben tell us?"

"But they wouldn't have left the nags alone——"

"Why not? Who would touch 'em?"

"We-uns!" guffawed one of the fellows.

"Shut up! Want to advertise our presence here?"

"Who's to hear—if Buffalo Bill and his gang have gone into the gopher hole?"

"There's folks at the ferryhouse below."

"Wimmen. Ben says Liscom is bad hurt."

"That son of a gun of a Mexican must have knowed about the tunnel, too," intimated another.

"Sh! There's too much yawp bein' let off."

Just about this time the baron began to stir. He opened his eyes and his bugle ceased its tune. There were five men grouped together just before him. He knew instantly that they were not his friends.

"But where is Ben gone?" he heard one say.

"Hang him! He told us to drive right down here and seize the ponies and whoever was watchin' 'em."

"And there ain't anybody watchin'," declared one of the strangers.

"Undt dot vos a lie yedt!" declared the baron—only he said it to himself. "I am vatchin'—de Baron Villum von Schnitzenhauser. His iss de eye dot nefer schleeds yedt!"

He said it proudly, and really believed it. Little Cayuse might neglect his duty and disappear at such a

time as this; but the baron—let him tell it!—never failed in an emergency.

And this belief in himself was a good thing at this present moment. The baron considered himself quite a match for five scoundrels who had evidently come here for the express purpose of attacking the owners of the horses tethered in the glade.

"Ach, himmelblitzen!" thought the doughty baron. "Ve vill a different tune show dem, undt dey vill a different bicture vistle!"

And he proceeded to bring this rather impossible happening about in the following manner:

He had a gun in either hand the moment he awoke. He now rose up silently, and with velvet footfall approached the unconscious group of raiders. When he was within ten feet of them he gave the strangers the surprise of their lives.

"Up mit dose handts! Up, I say, or py shiminy Christmas! I shoots de lodt oof you!"

In the country of the Big Bend, when a command like this was voiced, no man—if he had any sense at all and was sober—refused to obey instantly. It was well enough to inquire what it was all about afterward. A lead pellet was very likely to cure the disease of curiosity if that disease were allowed to hold sway at such a time.

It is told of one of the itinerant preachers who traveled the Western country in the old days—men as rough and fearless as the settlers themselves, but usually respected for their courage as well as for their religion—that he opened the door of a dance hall and gambling hell one night, and, standing unnoticed for a moment, overlooking the men in the place, half of whom were blaspheming criminals, he shouted:

"Hands up!"

The order was obeyed by about everybody in the

room, and no preacher ever obtained the undivided attention of a congregation so suddenly and surely. Then the "sky pilot" proceeded to preach a scathing sermon against the pet sins of the crowd before him, and they listened in sheeplike silence. They neglected to go and hear him in his church, therefore he had brought his preachments to them, and there wasn't one of them that did not admire his courage in doing so.

The point is, that men who are habitually "heeled" know that "to get the drop" closes the game. The man who draws first holds the winning card.

These five fellows, without asking who the baron was, or how many backed him, put up their empty hands first; then they turned slowly to look at him afterward.

"It's Buffalo Bill's Dutchman!" cried one.

"Shut oop, you!" warned the baron, holding both guns steadily on the five. "Here! you leedle feller. Shteb oudt undt t'row down your guns yedt." The man referred to obeyed. "Undt de knife in your pelt," added the baron sternly.

The fellow disarmed himself, quite. He made no objection. It was quite as a matter of course. This Dutchman might talk a brand of desiccated English, but the blue barrels of his two guns talked as plainly as the man who made the dictionary!

"Now, feller," said the baron calmly, "you vill disarm dem odder vons—undt if dey git funny yedt you vill die qveek—onderstandt?"

"You needn't be so mighty pertic'lar," growled the fellow. "I see what you mean."

So he was very careful to stand, as he disarmed each of his companions, so that the baron could plainly see all that was done. There was no chance for any "funny business."

The pile of hardware—a formidable pile indeed—lay at the feet of the baron in the moonlit glade.

"Oof dot Leedle Cayuse vos here it would be such an easiness!" thought the baron. But he did not show the five strangers that he was at all disturbed in his mind. He said to the smaller man:

"Put oop your handts yedt! Now, turn aroundt—all of you do idt! Qveek!"

The five wheeled about, their backs to the doughty baron. Quickly the latter slipped one of his guns in his belt and drew from the pocket of his hunting coat a ball of strong twine. This he tossed on the ground.

"Hi, you leedle feller!" he said to the man whom he had used before. "Come here."

The man obeyed, for the baron now had his two guns in hand again.

"Big oop dot tvine. See idt?"

"I see it," grunted the man.

"Now, tie does fellers' handts—undt I am vatchin' mit you yedt, undt if you droubles make yedt, I vill plow you all full mit holes!" threatened the baron.

CHAPTER XL.

A HALF DOZEN BAD EGGS.

The baron had been so sound asleep when the shot was fired at Little Cayuse that he had not heard it. Little Cayuse was now struggling for his life—deaf and blind to all else—when the baron had five outlaws under his guns and scarcely knew what to do with them!

By frightful exertions the young Piute had maintained his advantage of being on top in the struggle between him and the man from the hole. This man was really a gigantic fellow; it seemed ridiculous that the Piute could so long keep up the struggle.

The man—and he was white—finally tore Little Cayuse's hand away from his windpipe. He heaved himself up over the edge of the little hollow. And then——

How it was done it would be hard to tell. He had been about to throw the Indian off his body entirely. Yet Little Cayuse in the final struggle bested him!

The Piute's knee came into play. It shot with terrific force into the white man's stomach. The latter uttered a startled "woof!" and fell backward, loosening his own grip on the young redskin's neck.

The huge body of the white fell over the edge of the cup-shaped hollow. He slid headlong down the steep descent—following, indeed, the course of the rill of sand that had first called Little Cayuse to the place. The Indian flung himself upon the man's body, and his weight urged the descent.

Breathless, unable to more than cling to the white

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man's body, Little Cayuse coasted down the hill, and in half a minute they were at the bottom. "Splash!" they went into the water; but the Piute remained on shore. The lower part of the white man's body remained on the land, too.

He struggled feebly for a minute, with Little Cayuse holding his head and shoulders under water. Then the man lay still—drowned!

The Indian crept back from the edge of the river, exhausted and panting. He felt tenderly of his neck, where the cords and ligaments were swollen and already discolored. But his eyes gleamed when he saw clearly the size of the man he had worsted. The white man was a veritable giant.

But it was some time before he felt able to climb to his feet. This spot was far below the glade where he had left the horses and the baron; and, to tell the truth, Little Cayuse had something else to think of just then than the temporary camp on the bluff. This fellow with whom he had fought had come out of a hole in the hillside. The Piute believed that the hole connected with the tunnel Buffalo Bill and his comrades were searching.

What had happened to the white men in the tunnel? The question smote upon the mind of Little Cayuse and lashed him to renewed effort. He struggled up and began climbing the hill again. So weak and beaten was he that he had to crawl on hands and knees for most of the distance to the sandstone boulder.

The opening at which the white man appeared was still uncovered. Little Cayuse wriggled into the hole and found it a crooked passage. He had no means of lighting his way, and he did not know where the tunnel led, or what and who he might run into—head-first!

But he believed that Buffalo Bill and his companions were somewhere in the tunnel, and now he suspected that they were in trouble. There might be more of the enemy here. They may have completely overcome the Piute's white friends.

The crooked passage was not long. It stopped suddenly at a hole in the floor of it, and into this hole the Piute came near falling. He crept over the edge and let his head and shoulders down into the darkness and listened.

Suddenly he discovered that there was a light somewhere, for the darkness was not so thick down here as it was in the passage where his body lay. He could vaguely see the outlines of the walls. Far, far away—so it seemed—there was a hazy glow of light.

And then—suddenly, sharply—a voice reached the straining ear of the redskin:

"Hold hard, Nomad and Wild Bill. Let me stretch my fingers. By the sacred O-zu-ha! the edge is just above my reach."

The voice was that of Pawnee Bill. The Piute quickly wriggled through the hole and dropped upon all fours on the floor of the lower tunnel. He had recovered his lost gun at the mouth of the burrow under the sandstone boulder, and now he gripped it in one hand as he crept along the passage. The passage descended at a mild slant. Suddenly the Piute found the end of a ladder lying on the floor. He crept along this and saw the light growing stronger and stronger. Then a second voice spoke:

"It looks like we'd have to stretch you out some, Pawnee, before you reach the top of that wall."

"Pa-e-has-ka!" breathed Little Cayuse, suddenly thrusting his face over the edge of the tunnel and looking down into the deep well.

Pawnee Bill uttered a startled exclamation and fairly fell backward off the shoulders of Wild Bill and Nomad. But Buffalo Bill was underneath and caught him.

"It's the redskin!" cried old Nomad. "By the jumping horned frogs!"

"Little Cayuse!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, steadying Lillie on his feet once more.

"Pa-e-has-ka!" replied the Piute, grinning widely.

"By gorry! you're a sight for sore eyes," exclaimed Wild Bill.

"Put down that ladder, younker," commanded Pawnee Bill. "We're caught like rats in a trap."

Swiftly the Piute obeyed, and the men swarmed out of the well. In brief sentences the Indian youth gave his experience of the last few minutes, and then led his friends out of the tunnel by way of the opening in the side of the bluff.

"The rascal was up here when we went through and down the ladder," said Buffalo Bill. "Then he easily dropped down, removed the ladder, and made us prisoners."

"But who the deuce was he, necarnis?" demanded Pawnee Bill.

"Come! me show," grunted the Piute.

The redskin led the way down to the river and showed them the dead man, half in the stream and half out.

"Shades of Unk-te-hee!" ejaculated Pawnee Bill, when the dead man was drawn out. "It's Albona Ben! That rascal has come to the end of his rope, after all."

"And look what done it!" cried old Nomad. "Why, the Injun wasn't half the size of thet thar same Albona Ben."

They all praised the Piute, and Little Cayuse was mighty proud; but his neck was so stiff that for several days he could scarcely turn it.

Now, however, the party merely dragged Albona Ben a ways up the bank, and then bore him between them to the ferryhouse. Miss Bessie came out hurriedly to meet them.

"Oh, Colonel Cody! Something is happening up on the bluff!" cried the girl. "Fifteen minutes ago I saw a crowd of horsemen dash past the corral and down toward that grove where your horses were taken this evening."

"By the horned frogs of Texas! This redskin has misled us," growled Nomad. "He left the baron asleep, and like enough Albona Ben's gang have pitched into the Dutchy, done him up, and vamosed with the critters."

But old Nomad for once was a bad prophet. The scout and his friends hurried to the glade in which the baron and the horses had been left. They approached with great care, just in time to see one man marching five others around and around in a circle. Each of the five prisoners had his wrists tied behind his back, and with a threatening gun in either hand, the baron was making them do a sort of a lockstep around the little hollow.

"It iss petter as dey vos nod idle," he explained, broadly a-grin, when Buffalo Bill and his companions burst through the bushes. "De teufel, dey says, iss mighty fresh findin' vork for idle handts—yes? Undt dese fellers gannodt say I haf ledt dem suffer mit idleness. Dey iss pad aigs yedt."

"There were six bag eggs together," said Buffalo Bill. "I reckon you are right, baron."

And the next day Buffalo Bill and his companions

handed the five live outlaws over to the sheriff, and they buried Albona Ben. Then the ferry was repaired, and the scout and his friends moved once more into Mexican territory, again on the cold trail of Silver-nail, the king-pin bandit.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CARVEN STONE.

While Buffalo Bill and his pards were working along the Rio Grande, as we have seen, rounding up certain "bad men," incidents in which they were all bound to be interested—especially the famous scout himself—were happening some miles to the south and west—namely, in and around the little Mexican town of San Enrife.

It was the harvest time, and San Enrife was a grain-growing community. Indeed, it had originally been but a settlement of rancheros, who had built their homes together for mutual protection against the Indians. It was a fertile valley, well watered, and the village had grown. It was now long since there had been an Indian raid; yet it was known that the Yaquis were on the warpath, and not many miles away a party of young bucks had descended upon a smaller settlement and destroyed the grain in the fields, although they feared the Mexicans' guns too much to approach the houses.

San Enrife, however, had a church, and numbered several hundred souls. It did not seem likely that the redskins would dare approach within gunshot of the town.

Young Rawdon Smart played the cavalier to the beautiful Señorita Cralé as he should, for his brother, Clifford Smart, was the Mexican lady's fiancé. And the youth could not fail to notice that the Señorita Maria was disturbed in her mind—more disturbed, indeed, than the mere absence of Clifford on a journey to Mexico City seemed to call for.

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"Why, Cliff will get back, all right, señorita," declared Rawdon cheerfully. "He is a really wonderful fellow, that brother of mine. And such a rider! The most reckless I ever saw. Even that redskin of Buffalo Bill's is not a mark to Cliff when it comes to riding."

"It is his recklessness I fear and deplore," sighed the señorita.

"Oh, Cliff will take care of himself," declared the younger brother. "You should see him shoot!"

"Oh!" cried the girl, and this was almost a groan. Rawdon saw that he had taken the wrong tack with her. He had forgotten that she knew that, years before, his brother's ability to shoot and his quickness "on the trigger" had made him an exile from his own land.

It was more than that, however. Señorita Maria knew that Buffalo Bill suspected Clifford Smart of being none other than the famous bandit, Silvernail. Clifford had been careful to keep away from San Enrife while the scout was there. And when Clifford had started for Mexico City, supposedly on an important errand for her father, the Señorita Maria knew that the baron, who had doubtless been left at San Enrife to watch, had set out likewise secretly, either to follow Clifford, or to report his movements to Buffalo Bill.

Since that night when Clifford had arrived at the Cralé casa so unexpectedly, and had departed at once for the railroad, the fears of the señorita had increased. The baron was missed early in the morning, too. She knew then that instead of walking in his sleep, the German had been eavesdropping. He suspected Clifford Smart. He had now gone either to report his movements, or was keeping close on the trail of her father's American assistant.

And trouble was brewing. She was sure of it. Even Mojé, her Indian maid, added to the young lady's worryment of mind. The young Yaqui girl went around with red eyes that showed she had been weeping, and she refused to explain the reason for her unhappiness.

It could not be that she was weeping because the baron had disappeared between daylight and dark, and without a word to her. For, although the baron had made desperate love to the handsome maidservant, the Señorita Maria was aware that Mojé had half a dozen beaux in the village, and that she cared little for any of them—the Dutchman included!

Early one morning Rawdon Smart passed through the courtyard of the Cralé casa and out at the rear gate, beside the stables. In doing this, he almost stumbled over a figure crouching by the gate, and upon the outside. This was a narrow lane, and was deserted at this early hour.

"A blanket Indian!" exclaimed Rawdon, under his breath.

The figure arose as quick as a cat. It had been shrouded—head, face, and all—in a striped blanket. When it was fully erect the white youth saw that it was indeed a "blanket Indian;" but it was a young buck of about his own age. He was nearly bare save for the blanket and breechcloth, however, and the hand that held the blanket close around him likewise held a knife!

Rawdon Smart had been well instructed by Buffalo Bill and old Nomad during the few days that he had spent in their company in the wilds. He carried a gun at his belt at all times—and he knew how to use it. Instantly that gun was out of the scabbard, and its barrel was pointed at the Indian youth, not two feet away.

"Friend!" grunted the redskin. "Wuh! White boy no shoot."

"You look just like a friend," returned Rawdon. "Especially with that knife in your hand. Drop it!"

The redskin hesitated.

"Drop it, I say!" repeated the white youth, and he poked the barrel of his gun into the side of the blanketed redskin.

This was too much. The knife—a wicked-looking thing of native manufacture—rattled on the flagstones. And just then Mojé flew out of the gate.

"No, no!" she shrieked. "Señor Rawdon will not be reckless. Let the man go, señor."

"Let us see what he looks like first," said the white boy, and he twitched the blanket away.

"An Indian runner, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "One of your people, Mojé?"

The girl was suddenly silent. But the strange Indian mouthed a few guttural words and then moved slowly off. He had dropped at her feet, too, a small stone. When Rawdon stooped to seize it she grabbed it up from under his hand.

"Hold hard, my girl!" exclaimed the American, his face flushing. "Let me see that."

The blanketed Indian was now out of sight. The girl struggled to free her arm from Rawdon's grip.

"It is nothing. The señor would not care for it. I will fling it away."

"Let—me—see," said Rawdon firmly, and he fairly wrenched the stone from her fingers. The girl's eyes shone with an angry light. She looked as though she contemplated leaping at his throat. There was plenty of savage blood in Mojé's veins, although she had been among whites since she was a small child. "I thought so," muttered Rawdon. "It is a message to you, Mojé. What does it mean?"

The stone in his hand was oblong, smooth as an egg, save upon one side where a curious irregular figure was carved. What this hieroglyphic meant the youth did not know. And the Indian girl refused to tell.

"It is nothing. It is only a stone," she declared defiantly, when urged again to explain the mystery.

"Oh, very well," said Rawdon, flinging the stone upon a heap of debris. "I believe it is a message, just the same, that your brother, Xuku, sent you. You see I know that you and the chief of the Yaquis are in communication. I shall warn your mistress," declared the boy.

He left the girl standing sullenly in the gateway. He had no intention of adding to Señorita Maria's troubles by telling her of the Indian and the carved stone; but, when Mojé was gone, he intended to go back and secure the stone and show it to Señor Cralé himself.

However, when he came back later for this purpose, he found the stone gone. Whether Mojé herself had removed it, or some passer-by had picked it up out of curiosity, Rawdon could not imagine. But he was disturbed by the incident.

The activity of the Yaquis in the mountains and more distant valleys was known to the people of San Enrife. But they did not believe the Yaquis would dare raid so far from their own lands, or such a large village as San Enrife. Even the good Father Josefo pooh-poohed such an idea when Rawdon suggested it to him on this very day, chancing to meet the little priest in the plaza.

"Why, some of the Yaquis who come here to sell Indian curios and trade are Christianized, Señor Smart," declared the priest. "Many of them, I hope, will some day worship with my people. I cannot believe they would harm us."

"But they have burned grain and frightened settlers to the north and west," declared Rawdon. "We are not immune."

But the gentle old priest would not believe there was a possibility of peril from the redskins. The youth did not wish to disturb Señorita Maria. The professor was immersed in some work in his laboratory, and Rawdon hadn't even the green stone to show him. So he kept his suspicions to himself.

Evening came. The flaming western sky faded, the lights in the plaza sparkled, the village showed its usual liveliness until ten o'clock, or later. Then gradually the townspeople retired, and there was not even a sentinel left on guard.

In the suburbs the men had worked all day on the grain. Some fields were cut and the grain stacked. Rawdon climbed to the roof of the Cralé house, from which place he could view many of the fields surrounding the town—a good part of the valley, in fact.

The moon was sinking. Soon her silvery light disappeared entirely, and then darkness wrapped the whole plain. Only the outlines of the edge of the high mesa was showed clearly to the youth. And along that mesa he saw riding the silhouettes of several horsemen.

The Mexicans of San Enrife would not venture upon that height. It was there that Professor Cralé had hired men to bore a well for oil, and a pocket of deadly gas that had been tapped had killed four of the villagers outright, and even now the Mexicans shrank from the place as being accursed—for they were ignorant peons.

Rawdon observed these riders, therefore, with suspicion. They disappeared, however, and he beheld nothing else for some time. Then he thought he heard something at the front door of the casa—or at the front gate which opened upon the plaza. It was so

dark down there that he could not see any moving figure; but he thought he heard the iron bars that fastened the gate rattle in their sockets.

He crept down from the roof, and, while descending the wide stairway to the lower floor, a shadow drifted across the marble-paved corridor, toward the rear of the house.

"Mojé!" he thought. "What does that Indian girl want out here to-night?"

He went on, opened the huge door, which he found bolted and chained as usual, and so crossed the front courtyard and tried the wrought-iron gates. They were fast. He opened them softly. The plaza was deserted—and dark.

But as he was about to close the gates again he saw something unnatural stuck upon one of the leaves, on the outside. He scratched a match and looked closer.

There, upon the outer portal, was the engraved green stone that the Indian runner had dropped at Mojé's feet that morning—it being fastened to the iron by a dab of mud!

What did it mean? The stone bore an Indian sign. These Yaquis made their own heiroglyphics—a language of arbitrary signs, each of which might mean many things. Why was the engraved stone sent to Mojé? And why did the Indian maidservant stick it to the outer gate of the Cralé mansion?

Rawdon was sorry now that he had not taken the professor into his confidence earlier in the day. Should he disturb him with this matter?

If he did, Señorita Maria would likewise be disturbed, for she slept next to the savant.

Greater than all did the American youth wish that Colonel Cody and his companions were in or near San Enrife. He did not know where they were at this moment. Had he known, he would have started that

hour to reach them. He feared that trouble threatened—and awful trouble.

He went back to the roof, after locking the gates and the door again. The whole valley was now dark. The distant stars shed little light upon the earth. Nothing moved that he could see upon the grain fields, or on the heights.

The dark hours crept by. Why he watched Rawdon could not have told; he could not explain what he feared, nor what he expected to happen. By and by his eyelids drooped and he was off in a sound sleep.

What awoke him? No sound, for the silence of the night was intense. Yet he started upon his knees, clinging to the coping of the roof, and all in a cold sweat. There was a faint light in the east—a faint light only.

But as he turned to look westward a red glow burst out on the ground—at the farther side of the valley. It spread rapidly—trailing in both directions from the first point of flame. Aye, it was flames leaping high in the air, and tearing over the ground at express speed!

"The grain is afire!" he cried, and leaped to his feet. The village was still wrapped in silence. It was that hour before dawn when man sleeps the deepest.

But in the distance he heard something—something that smote his mind with quick and keen understanding. The rapid rataplan of shod hoofs descending the rocky trail from the mesa!

Not Indians! Their ponies would be unshod. These were the steeds of white men, and they were thundering down into the town in a mad scramble. Yet suddenly, out across the valley, was raised the long, shrill, blood-curdling yell of the red warriors. The Yaquis were burning the maize; but who were these white men riding like mad into the town of San Enrife?

CHAPTER XLII.

THE LOOTING OF SAN ENRIFE.

Rawdon Smart was the first person aroused in all the village—or on its outskirts—by the raiders. Perhaps, because he had been the one expecting that something would occur of this nature.

In sixty seconds, however, the screams of women and children, and popping of firearms, and the hoarse shouts of men aroused suddenly from their beds to defend their goods and firesides arose in deafening chorus.

The fields of grain blazed briskly, for there was a keen wind. The Yaquis had followed their usual tactics. They had divided into parties and ridden through the grain fields, scattering fire as they went. Then they rushed the outlying habitations and fought, hand to hand, with the Mexicans whom they hated for so many past disasters and unkindnesses.

On the other hand, a troop of horsemen had thundered down into the town from the mesa. And Rawdon Smart remained on the roof of the Cralé house only long enough to be assured that these were not white rescuers.

The men might be white, but they were certainly working with the Indians. They drove the frightened people toward the plaza, where the church was of course their only refuge, and looted the houses thus left undefended.

"Bandits—white devils working with the Yaquis," groaned Rawdon Smart, and he darted down from the roof and found the professor and his daughter and Mojé clinging together in the lower hall of the house.

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"Quick!" cried the young American. "Do not waste time. There are arms. We must defend the house, professor!"

"Quite right, my boy," declared the old man. "But how? Defend it from whom?"

"Both whites and reds," said Rawdon, and he told them briefly what he had seen. "Yours being one of the finest and largest houses in the town, those men on the shod ponies will surely select it for attack. The greater the house, the richer the loot."

"Oh! oh!" moaned the señorita.

"Be not afraid, my dear mistress," cried Mojé. "No harm shall befall us," and she spoke confidently.

Rawdon darted a suspicious look at the Yaqui girl; but he said nothing then. He wondered if the stone fastened to the gate was merely a mascot, or if it held some significant meaning for the attacking party of reds and whites.

However, he and the professor had their hands full just then. There were plenty of firearms, and there were two short ladders in the courtyard. By the aid of these ladders the professor and the American youth climbed each to one of the side walls and from those vantage points could not only command the plaza before the house, but the side alleys as well. The sheer wall of the stables defended the back of the premises.

The swarm of frightened villagers had, by this time, crossed the plaza and burst into the church. These Spanish-built churches were really fortresses. The men of the village that were left behind had either been killed, or were fighting the Indians desperately at the edge of the grain fields.

The whole valley was now illuminated with the burning grain. Where the grain had been cut and already stacked, these stacks were set afire, and the flames rose

forty and fifty feet into the air. The plaza was made as light as day.

Now, into the open market place rode the gang of shod ponies. As Rawdon had suspected, they were not ridden by redskins. Every man was white in all probability, and every man was masked!

There was more than a dozen of the renegades. That they were outlaws working with the Yaquis in this raid on the Mexican town, there could be no doubt.

An unfortunate villager, running like a scared rabbit across the plaza toward the refuge of the church, was spied. With a yell half the gang rode after him. He reached the church steps, staggered up them, and pounded upon the great doors.

But the people behind those doors were afraid to open them. He screamed for help, but the headmost ruffian threw a lariat and noosed the unfortunate about the neck.

The man was snatched off the porch and was dragged across the plaza, over the pavements, at the end of the rope. He was dead before he had half encircled the market place. Then the murderer leaped off his horse and robbed him of such jewelry and gold or silver as he had.

Most of the others advanced and fired a volley of rifle and revolver shots into the church door. They had no respect for the sacred edifice.

But the door was thick. It would necessitate much work to break it down. These fellows realized this fact very shortly.

Some of them had already looted near-by houses; but they evidently had gained little to repay them. Now, one sighted the wall and grillwork gate of the Cralé casa.

With a cheer they spurred their horses across to it. The leader of the band was a man dressed richly in

the Mexican style and wore a curling black beard. The beard, with the mask he wore through the slits of which his eyes peered, made it really impossible for Rawdon Smart to tell what manner of fellow he was.

This man threw himself from the horse he rode—a beautiful bright bay with white mane and tail—and rattled the gate. Rawdon ran along the wall, lay down within easy pistol shot, and aimed his gun at the man's heart. Then he shouted:

"Keep off! there are white men in here, and they know how to fight. Keep off!"

The leader looked up, and for an instant Rawdon thought that the masked man must see him. But then a figure darted between the horses and appeared at the gate, too. It was that of a blanketed Indian, and he spoke eagerly to the leader of the ruffians.

What he said was unheard by Rawdon Smart, but it was easily understood. The Indian might have been the blanketed Yaqui who had appeared at the rear of the Cralé premises the morning before. He made plain his meaning, too, for his gesture drew the attention of the white men to the carved stone stuck to the gate, and then he drew his figure up to its full height, and with folded arms stood threateningly before the gate. It was plain that the Yaquis had determined upon saving the Cralé house and its inmates from all harm!

But the white ruffians were not of that mind—even the man who led them would not listen. With a quick and savage movement he flung the Indian aside—throwing the Yaqui, indeed, prone upon the pavement.

Then—seemingly with scorn—he snatched out his hunting knife and pried the stone and mud off the gate. He kicked the green stone to one side and coolly rattled the gate to discover how it was fastened.

His followers raised a cry of delight. Among the

oaths and joyful exclamations, Rawdon Smart heard this plainly:

"Good for Silvernail! he's the man to lead us. Down with the gates!"

At the very moment there was a feminine shriek from within the house. The front door of the Cralé domicile opened and the señorita, her hair flying about her shoulders, and plainly quite out of her mind for the moment, flew into the courtyard.

Seeing her danger, Rawdon leaped from the wall and quickly reached her side.

"Go back! Go back!" shouted the young American. "We will beat the scoundrels off! We'll beat them if there were a dozen Silvernails in the gang!"

As he spoke the boy aimed point-blank at the breast of the richly dressed leader of the outlaws. The bullet would surely have reached its mark, for there were not half a dozen feet to part them.

But even as Rawdon pulled the trigger the Señorita Maria struck up his hand, and the pistol ball flew wide of its mark.

"Reckless!" she cried. "Would you murder him?"

"Why not? He would not spare you if he got in here!" cried the maddened youth, half beside himself.

"Then let him kill me!" cried the girl, and thrust herself between the two antagonists—for Silvernail now had a gun in his hand and would have, in a moment, shot down the young American.

For half a minute they were held there—amazed, astounded by her words and act. And then there came a shrill war whoop from beyond the plaza, and there poured into the open space a horde of red devils, with torches and lances, and these rushed toward the gateway where the bandits stood.

CHAPTER XLIII.

FACE TO FACE.

A chorus of Mexican cries and oaths arose from the white outlaws. Their leader—he of the black beard—leaped again to the saddle. The Yaquis who had entered the town had just one object in view, and that object was plain.

Instead of halting to attack the church, or to enter any of the open houses that had been deserted by their inmates at the first alarm, the Indians swept across the plaza, their fierce yells and threats directed against the gang of whites that had been their allies. The attack upon the casa of Professor Cralé had evidently not been in the program.

Mojé rushed out of the house shrieking in her own tongue, and she was answered by the Indian in the lead of the throng. This doubtless was Xuku, the maid's brother; only he was so disguised in war paint that he did not look human!

The leader of the white men grabbed out his pistol again and aimed through the grillwork of the gate at Rawdon, who was holding the half-fainting señorita in his arms.

"See! see! he will kill him!" shrieked the young lady, and she again covered young Rawdon's body with her own.

The man outside the gate laughed harshly. "It is that you love him, señorita?" he cried, in Spanish. "Shall I spare the young puppy?"

At this Rawdon placed Maria Cralé in Mojé's arms and dashed to the gate.

"Villain!" he cried. "Shoot me if you can, for I will kill you if my aim is true!"

The leader of the outlaws laughed again—and fired! The ball glanced from the iron bar, and Rawdon was spared. But the boy heard a terrible scream behind him, and he looked back to see the señorita fallen limply into Mojé's arms. A growing crimson stain had appeared like magic upon the thin silk waist she wore—and right above the breast!

"Adios, señor!" cried the outlaw, as he wheeled his steed. "*Hasta tener el gusto de volver á verle á V!*" (Till I have the honor of seeing you again!)

Then the Yaquis rushed in between the mounted men and the gateway. There were more than twenty of the savages, and only Xuku was armed with a white man's weapon—a handsome revolver that Buffalo Bill had given him.

But their attitude threatened trouble, and the white scoundrels evidently considered that they had already gotten their share of the loot of the town. Xuku would not see the casa del Cralé robbed, and the doors of the church were too ponderous to be broken down by such means as there were at hand.

So the whites rode away—by the path they had come toward the mesa. In five minutes there was not an Indian in sight, either. They had swarmed out of the town as they had come in, joined their brethren in the burned grain fields, and, mounting their ponies, dashed across the valley and so disappeared—perhaps over one of those secret trails by which Xuku had once led Buffalo Bill and his friend into the hills.

The raid was over. San Enrife was impoverished and was threatened with a famine. But few of her inhabitants had been killed—and not many wounded.

At the house of Professor Cralé, however, all was excitement and despair. The glancing bullet from the pistol of the chief bandit had lodged in the señorita's

shoulder, above the right breast, and the wound was deep and dangerous.

When the physician had been brought he probed for the ball, and could not find it. Mojé's wails were sufficient to wake the dead. Rawdon Smart took the Indian girl by the arms, outside the door of her mistress' room, and threatened her with the lash if she did not keep her mouth closed.

"None of that whining! Your mistress is not dead. There must be a better doctor at Olando. I will go for him—at once. Come and help me get out my caballo."

The girl was ready to act—when her duty was pointed out to her. In a few moments the boy's horse was saddled, and he rode out the rear gateway of the premises. But there was more than the possibility of bringing a good physician in his mind.

Every drop of Rawdon's blood boiled with rage and a desire for vengeance. That the outlaw should have cruelly shot the girl—even by accident—was more than the chivalrous youth could calmly endure.

He believed, too, that the villain was none other than Silvernail, the king-pin bandit of the border. The beautiful bay horse the villain bestrode led the young American to that belief, if the man's own rich dress and his bold manner did not prove his identity.

Rawdon Smart rode off—and rode hard—on the trail of the outlaws. He believed now that he had seen them riding on the edge of the mesa before the attack. He had heard the hoofs of their horses rattling on the rocky path as they descended into the town, and he believed they returned by the same path to the wilderness.

The youth was reckless to a degree. He came of that kind of folks! And he had nobody to advise him, for the professor was buried in his daughter's trouble.

and did not even know that the boy had left the house—much less that he was riding out of the village on the trail of the outlaws.

Rawdon pushed his horse smartly, even up the steep path to the mesa. At the summit of the incline were fresh hoofmarks. He could follow them easily, and at a hand gallop.

He loped across the burned plain and reached the forest-covered slope beyond. The trail was as plain as need be, and he followed on through the forest. Ten miles he traveled after leaving the mesa, and then—of a sudden—he heard a fusillade of shots. The noise of the battle was ahead. It lasted for at least two minutes, and then all was silent again.

Rawdon spurred his horse forward, riding hard toward the sounds. He heard nothing more—nor did he see anything—until suddenly coming to an open glade the scene of the short battle was displayed to him. He was shocked by the blood on the ground and the sight of a dead horse.

And that horse was a beautiful bright bay stallion, with white mane and tail!

Rawdon brought his own steed to a quick halt. Here was the horse the leading bandit had ridden—he was positive of it.

And then he saw another object that troubled him more than the dead carcass of the horse. On a log sat a man, his head bent forward and leaning on one hand, and his hat off. Rawdon started again when he saw this figure plainly. He recognized it—he could not be mistaken.

For several moments he sat trembling in his saddle, unnoticed by the man on the log, and unable to urge his own horse forward to the spot.

Finally Rawdon spurred his horse onward. The

glade chanced to be turfied, and the boy's horse made little sound as he paced to the side of the man on the log. But at length the man looked up, and, seeing the boy, made a grab for the gun in his holster.

"Hold, Clifford, my brother!" cried Rawdon Smart. "Have you not done enough wickedness already this morning?"

CHAPTER XLIV.

TOOFER COMES TO A CONCLUSION.

One pleasant forenoon the stage bound down to Orlando came with a flourish to a stop before Manuel Alsando's house of call. This was a regular station at which the diligence changed mules, and if the passengers so wished they could obtain refreshments here.

One of the inside passengers was bent upon getting out, for he climbed over the feet of the other passengers, creating much disturbance in his passage, and sprawled finally upon the ground.

"Oof! Ach, himmelblitzen!" he ejaculated. "I haf meinselluf sit so mooch in dot vaggon yedt dot I haf not de powers of lo-cum-u-a-tion alretty! Ach! mein feed iss ersleep yedt!"

He climbed slowly and painfully to an erect posture, pushed the foolish little fore-and-aft cap he wore off his forehead, and stared about him.

"Vale, Schnitzenhauser, ole feller, you iss here at lasdt, aind't idt?" he declared. "Undt idt vos a goot, long, hardt, oongomfortable ride! Whew! De saddle burns must be cured on Toofer's pack py now, undt he vill pare me away from here at vonce to meed de dree Pills, undt olt Nomat, undt Leedle Cayuse——"

"Dunnervetter! Idt iss Manooel himselluf!"

The baron shook hands with the keeper of the roadside tavern who came forward to welcome him in the polite Mexican fashion.

"The Señor Baron is returned in healt'—is it not?" inquired the Mexican.

"You can pet me mein life I vos vale!" declared the baron heartily. "Undt how iss dot moo-el oof mine, Manooel? Toofer is vale—yes?"

"You may well say so, amigo," declared the Mexican. "He has the appetite of a goat!"

"Ach! dot means nodd so mooch to Toofer," muttered the baron. "Vare a button-goatd vould starve himselluf to death, dare Toofer vould gif fat yedt! Put ledt us see dot Toofer—ledt us see him!"

Manuel showed the fond master of the big mouse-colored mule the private corral into which the beast was turned, for, as the baron had warned the Mexican when the animal was left here, "Toofer vould kick de stuffin's efery oder animile oudt yedt" if he was allowed to circulate freely with Manuel's modest herd, and with the mules of the diligence company's.

The baron ran into the corral with a cry of joy at seeing his big-eared comrade. Toofer, seeing him coming, backed briskly around, and, looking over his shoulder, "took aim," his tail twitching and his huge teeth bared.

It was just as though Toofer said to himself: "Here's that fat lummo coming again—and he means to make me work. I work not!"

"Himmelblitzen!" roared the German. "Vos iss? Iss dot de vay mein olt gollege chump receifs me yedt? Vale! if you can avoord to pe oogly mit me, Toofer, you vill findt yedt dot I oogly can pe alretty. Gif me a glub!"

Securing a stick of stove wood the baron marched on the mule, and their affectionate meeting would have brought tears—of laughter—to old Nomad's eyes could he have been on the spot to view the excitement. In something like half an hour a chastened mule, with drooping ears and a much more modest demeanor, was saddled and bridled. But the baron's coat was pretty, nearly torn off his back; he had received a glancing kick—that—had it reached him the way Toofer intended—would have laid him out nicely, without the

need of an undertaker; and he certainly was "all het up!"

"Pelief me!" groaned the baron, as he mopped his forehead of sweat beads preparatory to bringing forth his great pipe for a nerve-quieting smoke. "If effer I gif dot peast a chanct to rest oop again—aber nit! Vot foolishness yedt! Vot dot Toofer mu'el needts iss vork at de stone pile in chail yedt! Ow! Life bunishment in some moo-el benetentiary iss nodt too pad for dot peast! Nefer again vill I gif him de chanct to rest oop! Ach, no!"

When the Bills and their pards had crossed again into Mexican territory by the ferry near Del Verde in the Big Bend country, the baron had hired a pony to take him to the Orlando trail; there he had come to Manuel Alsando's tavern, as we have seen, in the stage-coach. Now he prepared to ride out alone, over about the same course, to meet Buffalo Bill and his compadres, whom he knew planned to work along the Orlando trail again.

One thing the baron had been instructed by Buffalo Bill to discover here at the stage-road tavern; and he had already obeyed the command of his superior and friend. The horse that Clifford Smart had left here when he was supposed to have gone to Mexico City on business for the professor, was still in the care of Manuel Alsando. And the tavern keeper declared that Señor Smart had not yet returned from the south—at least, nobody about there had seen him.

When Manuel learned that the baron was about to set out alone over the stage road he gave the German a word of warning.

"There have been no stoppages of the diligence for some time, it is true, señor. But you see for yourself that there is an armed guard rides with the driver."

"Ach! dot vos so-o."

"There are evil men about, however, señor," said Manuel.

"Dose outlaw fellers—eh?"

"Silvernail is reported to have been seen on some of the byroads—his horse was seen, at least."

"Vale! Slivertail iss dot ferry feller I would like to meet oop me mit," declared the baron, most courageously.

"Perhaps so—and perhaps not, señor. He is a very terrible fellow."

"Undt so am I a ferry terrible fellow!" declared the baron, with much dignity, as he sat Toofer's saddle and swelled his own chest. "Dot same Slivertail would petter pevare!"

"He has been seen recently, señor."

"Goot! Meppeso I vill findt him yedt, undt gapture him all py meinselluf!"

"This morning was he seen, señor—and not two miles from this place. I have it from José, my daughter's husband."

"Petter as petter!" cried the baron. "Does he ride to de nort'?"

"He was so riding—it is reported," said Manuel anxiously.

"Den, if Toofer has nodt losdt his speedt yedt, ve vill findt him—meppeso," grunted the baron, with immense satisfaction.

"But, señor!" wailed Manuel; "there is worse yet to tell you."

"Go on den," said Schnitzenhauser, who began to be suspicious. "Dell me de virst."

"The Yaquis are on the warpath!"

"Ach, himmelblitzen! Dot iss nodt goot news—idt iss true, yes?"

"By the sacred name! Yes, yes, señor!"

The baron was staggered for a moment—it was true.

And then he grinned genially upon the anxious Manuel.

"Say! Dot iss funny yedt. Undt I vas forgedding alretty. I vill dell you, Señor Alsando: Dot Inchun uprising dond't gut no ice mit me."

"Cut no ice!" gasped the puzzled Manuel.

"Nicht! Idt does noddt meinselluf drouble—noddt adt all!"

"But they are burning and killing——"

"Dey vill noddt purn undt kill Puffalo Pill, or Puffalo Pill's bards," declared the baron, with confidence. "I rememper me now dot Puffalo Pill iss de friendt oof de high mucky-muck Inchun himselluf—yes, sir! Me undt Toofer vill go on undt run de risk oof meedin' oop mit dot Slivertail yedt, undt mit de Inchuns."

So he knocked his heels against Toofer's fat sides and urged the lazy mule away from the inn. But Toofer did not care for the journey. Rest had spoiled him. Every half mile he stopped to argue the question with his exasperated master.

The baron wore out the stick of stove wood. He was so lame and tired by that time that he could not cut another club, but cried:

"Py shiminy grasciousness! Oof I hat de sense oof a moo-el meinselluf yedt I vould haf pud de saddle on mein own pack, undt ledt you ride. Dot vouldt haf suited you yedt—eh?"

Toofer did not say, but his actions seemed to imply that he thought it was about time there was a distinct change in their relationship. If the baron wanted to tackle the job of carrying him, instead of his carrying the baron, the wise old mule probably would not have objected. It was a fact, at least, that Toofer was a direct descendant of Balaam's ass and had fallen heir to all that famous creature's supposed wisdom.

He stopped again and again as though he actually

now "hins in the way," but it was after mulling before the exasperated baron saw anything which might have suggested to Toofer the advisability of stopping so frequently. At least the mule deliberately set down on his tail and waggled his ears like fans. The baron did out of the saddle whether he would or no. It seemed that Toofer had come to a settled conclusion: he would go no farther!

The baron came around to look the mule in the eye, still holding the bridle. He clenched his fist and shook it threateningly in Toofer's face. But at the moment he was beyond speech.

And just then somebody tapped the excited baron on the shoulder. He turned like a flash to see who had accosted him. An Indian in war paint—and mighty little else—had stepped out of the brush and stood before him. He bore a very threatening-looking hatchet in his hand, and the hatchet was poised just as though he contemplated splitting the baron's round skull with it!

"Himmelblitzen!" squealed the baron.

Out of the brush, from behind trees and rocks, now came a high bank where they had been hiding, swarmed fully twoscore Indians. They were of the same breed that had chased the baron and Little Cayuse once before. He knew they were Yaquis.

But, although he had spoken so confidently to Manuel regarding the friendship existing between the Yaquis and Buffalo Bill, there was nothing to shake his belief in the attitude of these redskins.

"Wah!" grunted the man with the hatchet. "Wah!"

The meaning was so plain that the baron shrank, and he got crosseyed looking at the hatchet!

saw "lions in the way;" but it was after midday before the exasperated baron saw anything which might have suggested to Toofer the advisability of stopping so frequently. At least the mule deliberately sat down on his tail and waggled his ears like flails. The baron slid out of the saddle whether he would or no. It seemed that Toofer had come to a settled conclusion: he would go no farther!

The baron came around to look the mule in the eye, still holding the bridle. He clenched his fist and shook it threateningly in Toofer's face. But at the moment he was beyond speech.

And just then somebody tapped the excited baron on the shoulder. He turned like a flash to see who had accosted him. An Indian in war paint—and mighty little else—had stepped out of the brush and stood beside him. He bore a very threatening-looking hatchet in his hand, and the hatchet was poised just as though he contemplated splitting the baron's round skull with it!

"Himmelblitzen!" squealed the baron.

Out of the brush, from behind trees and rocks, and down a high bank where they had been hiding, swarmed fully twoscore Indians. They were of the same breed that had chased the baron and Little Cayuse once before. He knew they were Yaquis.

But, although he had spoken so confidently to Manuel regarding the friendship existing between the Yaquis and Buffalo Bill, there was nothing to encourage that belief in the attitude of these redskins.

"Wuh!" grunted the man with the tomahawk. "White man prisoner. No speak—no run. See? Wuh!"

The meaning was so plain that the baron could only blink, and he got crosseyed looking at the keen edge of that hatchet!

CHAPTER XLV.

BUFFALO BILL WITH HIS HANDS UP.

Buffalo Bill and his other pards did not make as good time coming down the Olando trail as the baron had in the diligence. Besides, they made many little excursions aside from the trail, actually beating a broad expanse of country as they came south.

Everywhere they heard accounts of the raiding of the Yaquis; but these raids were usually attended with little bloodshed. Accompanying the attacks of the redskins, however, were frequent reports of the activities of white outlaws. And Silvernail himself had left a trail through the country broader than before!

The Bills and their companions picked up news of the famous bandit before they were a single day over the river. They learned that the bright bay horse had come flying from the Rio Grande only twenty-four hours ahead of them, and that his rider had ridden into one small town, held it up single-handed, and gotten away with more than two thousand dollars in coin, notes, and jewels.

A little farther along they found a burned rancho. The owner and his family had escaped; but he told a tale of a lone bandit on a bright bay horse that had ridden up at night, demanded his surrender of the family wealth, and had fired the house and finally robbed him in the end, when he had run out with his wife and child for safety.

The description was the same everywhere—the richly caparisoned man, his bay steed, his black, curling beard, and his desperate courage! Nothing turned the bandit aside. He worked alone now, but that was,

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perhaps, because he had not yet found the mates whom he had left to cross the big river and play his murderous tricks around Del Verde.

Buffalo Bill was confident that the man whom they had come so near capturing at Liscom's ferry was this villain whose trail they now followed. And the Americans were not far behind the bandit. They rode into one town where the smell of powder smoke was scarcely out of the air. He had held up a citizen just off the main street and robbed him in broad daylight!

They passed, too, more than one hamlet, the fields surrounding which were blackened by the fires that the Indians had set. Famine threatened many of the Mexican settlers. The Yaquis were really attempting to drive the whites from the foothills which the reds considered as belonging to their own hunting grounds.

So it came to the very morning on which San Enrife was attacked—the very morning when Rawdon Smart, riding recklessly after the band of outlaws came upon his brother Clifford beside the dead bay stallion—the very morning that the baron had so much difficulty in cudgeling Toofer, the mule, along the Olando trail.

Buffalo Bill and his close counselor, Major Gordon Lillie, had discussed frequently the mystery of Silvernail and the possibility of the king-pin bandit being Clifford Smart, the young American exile. On this very morning information had reached the great scout which led him to believe that the famous bandit was in the neighborhood—so close to them, in fact, that he was likely to appear at any time.

"And we are approaching San Enrife. He is never long away from this vicinity," declared Buffalo Bill. "Gordon, I hate to believe it—I shrink from having it proved beyond a doubt; but it looks to me as though

Professor Cralé's assistant—that pretty señorita's fiancé—Cliff Smart, and the worst bandit that ever infested the border betwixt the States and Mexico, are one and the same!"

"There's much that points that way, necarnis," said Pawnee Bill reflectively. "That bay horse puzzles me, though."

"You mean the fact that the horse ridden by the man whom you and Wild Bill put into jail at Ciudad Sonora, was a gelding while this critter ridden by the murderer at Liscom's ferry was a stallion? It's a puzzle. There are two horses. Are there two men?"

"And both of them bandits? Plumb reckless ones, too, necarnis!" cried Pawnee Bill.

"You're right. It doesn't seem reasonable."

"But there certainly are two horses," admitted Lillie.

"It is a hard nut to crack. But if I could just for once meet this man, Silvernail—and meet him alone I——"

"You're right," grinned Pawnee Bill. "One of 'em dead would settle the question very quickly."

"I had not thought of that," said Buffalo Bill slowly. "Nor do I really want to kill the man—not until his identity is established."

"If it is Smart you want to take him alive?"

"Yes. Though I don't suppose his friends would thank me. Better death for such a creature."

"If Smart is Silvernail."

"Ah, if he is, Gordon!" exclaimed the puzzled scout.

"And then——"

"I have a way, I think, of settling the matter of his identity if I should meet him," said Buffalo Bill. "By Jove! I would like to be held up by him."

"Shades of Unk-te-hee!" ejaculated Lillie.

"And not only would I like to; but I'm going to do it."

"Do what?"

"Be held up by this Silvernail."

"By the sacred O-zu-ha, necarnis! You are raving."

"No."

"How will you work it?"

Buffalo Bill halted in the way, and in a few brief sentences explained the plan that had leaped to life in his brain. It was complete. It was reckless—death-defying! But it was worthy of the scout's high courage.

The two friends were riding ahead of old Nomad, Little Cayuse, and Hickok. The trail was winding and sheltered by a dense growth of trees. That Silvernail was in the neighborhood—or had been in the neighborhood the evening before—three different Mexicans had assured the scout and his partner since sunup.

When Buffalo Bill had explained his intention and instructed Pawnee Bill regarding his own part in the campaign, Lillie wheeled his horse to the right-about face; but he stayed his charger long enough to wring the scout's hand.

"Nis-is-shin necarnis i-to," he said, in the Sioux tongue. "What you say, goes. I obey. But I tremble for you, Cody!"

The scout waved his hand and cantered away along the trail. As soon as he was out of sight of the bowie man, however, he brought his horse down to a walk. He had entrusted most of his weapons to Pawnee Bill's care. To all appearances he was unarmed as his horse carried him quietly over the trail. He really invited attack from any outlaw who might see him.

The American was well aware that the man he was after—if it was the scoundrel who had escaped him and his friends so narrowly at the ferry—would recognize him as an enemy at once. This fellow, whoever he might be, had already tried to shoot Pawnee Bill. Un-

doubtedly he knew that the three Bills and their pards were on his trail. He might shoot on sight.

Nevertheless, Buffalo Bill was taking the chance of being held up, and of getting some conversation with Silvernail before the latter attempted to commit another murder. The bandit might balk at trying to stick up Cody's whole crowd, and he knew the trails and by-ways so much better than they did, that he might easily escape them. But the temptation of a single and apparently unarmed man traveling this trail might bring the elusive scoundrel to the fore.

However, Buffalo Bill had not imagined the circumstances that really brought himself and Silvernail together; he did not, indeed, dream of such a train of events as had occurred on this morning. The scout was still too far from San Enrife to smell the smoke of the burned grain fields, and thus far he had observed no Indian signs, either.

But suddenly along the hard trail toward him he heard approaching a horse ridden at frantic speed. It really sounded as though the mount was running away with its rider. The scout pulled his own horse out of the trail and waited, on the alert, to see the strange horseman come around the bend.

In a few seconds the horse and rider dashed into view. And at the first view of them the scout, although astonished, was not confused. The horse was coming at a furious pace, but Buffalo Bill spurred his own mount directly into the path, where he cavorted and danced sideways on the trail, and so presented a living barrier to the coming rider.

The latter sawed on his mount's bit and managed to bring his steed to a halt. It was a great, bright bay horse with a tossing white mane and tail—a beautiful creature indeed. But immediately Buffalo Bill saw

that this was not the horse which had been ridden by Silvernail at Liscom's ferry!

This was a bay gelding, while the horse the bandit swam across the river was a stallion. Nor could the scout be sure that the rider was the villain who had tried to kill Pawnee Bill at Del Verde.

At the river the scout had not seen the face of the bandit. Only the Liscom women had seen the black beard disarranged upon his face.

This man who now faced Buffalo Bill upon the handsome bay was smoothly shaven, save for a little, curled, black mustache. He was a handsome man, with olive-tinted complexion, a bold black eye, and a smile that somehow hardened the whole expression of his face.

"*Que es, señor?* Do you stop me?" he demanded, and his manner and keen look warned Buffalo Bill that the stranger was on the alert.

Meanwhile the scout had taken in every peculiarity of the man and of his costume. He was richly dressed—much more richly dressed, indeed, than the bandit at the ferry was. This man's hat was heavy with silver cord; he had many dollars' worth of silver buttons on his clothing. And thrust into his sash belt were a pair of gold-mounted pistols.

He was young enough to be Clifford Smart. Buffalo Bill had never met the exiled American who, some years before, had killed a dishonest gambler at a Texas cattle town and had crossed the border to escape the wrath of a newly aroused public conscience.

The smile on the stranger's lips belied the fire in his eye. As the scout hesitated the other jerked out a gun and aimed it steadily, despite the prancing of his own horse, at Buffalo Bill's heart.

"Answer me, *Americano!*" commanded the stranger. "Put your hands up! Do you hear?"

The scout obeyed, and immediately his own horse became quiet.

"Ah! so I thought," breathed the man on the bay steed. "Stand still, fool!" This to the horse he rode which he did not seem to have under as firm control as he might. "You have intentionally halted me, señor," he declared, his fiery glance searching Buffalo Bill's calm face.

The scout was silent. He kept his empty hands above his head and watched the fellow keenly.

"I believe, señor, that I know you, although we have never met before—not face to face. If you are whom I think you, this meeting is surely a most curious one—and I propose to make it interesting for you!"

He snapped this out suddenly, like the crack of a whip, and his countenance was marred by a grimace of hate. He glared at Buffalo Bill in a most murderous fashion.

"Come, señor! Let us see what you carry. No arms in sight, eh? And if there are hidden ones, don't try and touch them—*me entiende V?* I have my pistol ready to pour hot lead into your vitals. Ah! Give me your purse—if you have one. I will make this meeting pay me, at least, if nothing more."

Buffalo Bill as yet had not spoken. Nor did he speak now. He was permitted to take down his hands by this order, and he unbuttoned his blouse and thrust one hand within his breast. But it was not for the purpose of drawing his purse.

Instead his hand came forth again with a small flat packet—really a bag of soft deerskin. There was something hard and oval-shaped within the packet, and when he placed it in the outstretched hand of the road agent the latter started and his countenance changed color.

"*Para que es bueno eso?*" he cried sharply. "Is it all the valuables you carry?"

He flirted the deerskin wrapping open with one hand, and there fell into his palm a miniature, painted on ivory and with a gold frame of simple, but elegant, design. The portrait was of a beautiful, but matronly-looking, woman, whose clear, pure eyes seemed to gaze straight into the one who looked at the picture. That the robber was startled there could be no doubt. Had Buffalo Bill wished at that moment to kill the scoundrel he could have done so!

But the doubt still remained. If this was Clifford Smart who sat on the restive bay steed before him, the scout wished to save him if possible. Had Cody been sure that Silvernail was not the exiled American, he would surely have shot him out of his saddle, for the scout had a revolver hidden within his blouse that he could have got in a flash.

The man looked strangely at the miniature and then recovered himself and glanced again at Buffalo Bill. His lips opened to speak; but at the very instant the words might have passed his lips which would have explained to the watchful scout the mystery of Silvernail's identity, the thunder of heavy hoofs sounded upon the trail. Along the path from the direction which the bandit had approached a cavalcade approached at breakneck speed.

With an oath the bandit dropped the miniature into his pocket and drove spurs into his mount's flanks. But as he dashed past the scout he fired his pistol, and Cody toppled sideways and fell from his saddle, while his own horse was all but knocked down by the rush and collision of the bay!

CHAPTER XLVI.

PAWNEE BILL'S RIDE.

If there was one thing that Toofer, the baron's mule, disliked more than work it was the smell of an Indian. The redskins that had so unexpectedly surrounded the baron and the mule displeased the latter quite as much as they startled and made anxious the former.

And the baron was certainly troubled a-plenty!

"White man get up!" commanded the red, who held the threatening hatchet. "Go quick. Take care."

The orders were not to be mistaken. The baron quickly kicked Toofer till he stood on four legs again, and then he heaved himself into the saddle. The Indians seemed to be afoot; but when the party had gone several hundred yards along the trail, with the baron in the middle of the mob, Buffalo Bill's Dutch pard saw a break in the forest, and down a glade was a small herd of Indian ponies, feeding.

At once the bulk of the gang that had captured him darted off the trail to bring up the mounts. The baron considered this an excellent time to show the reds the soles of Toofer's hoofs. He knew by the snorting of the mule, and his rolling eyes, bared teeth, and wagging ears that Toofer was now in a mood to run! The beast would show two fast pairs of legs to get out of the vicinity of the savages.

And, in addition, the baron's arms had not been taken away from him. Only one redskin remained close to him—and that was the fellow who had shown the baron the edge of the ax.

"I haf idt in for dot feller, anyway!" thought the baron. "Undt here goes mit me payin' de score oop, undt tr-r-rusting to Toofer's heels!"

With the decision came immediate action. He grabbed his pistol by the barrel, and the redskin's eyes being turned away, the baron batted him smartly over the head! He shrieked to Toofer, dug his spurs into the mule's flanks, and flew off along the trail at a terrific gallop.

The reds—all but the one knocked senseless—raised the war whoop and the ponies soon began to pad over the turf in the direction of the trail, but on a long slant so as to head the baron off. He had not had sense enough to wheel his mount and race back toward Manuel Alsando's house.

But suddenly he came upon a fork in the roads. There was a branch trail leading in the direction of San Enrife, and down this he guided the mule. He gained some distance in the race, and spurring Toofer forward thought that he had completely bested the reds. But, after traveling some miles he heard the ponies coming again, and they seemed as fresh as ever. In some way the reds had taken a short cut, and, at the moment the mule and the ponies came within earshot of Buffalo Bill and the bandit that had held him up, the baron was using the quirt unsparingly to try and make the mule run away from the pursuing mob.

As the scout rolled off his horse and the bandit, after firing point-blank at him, rode away on the bay, there was a shout from down the trail. Around a bend came a single horseman, lashing his mount to a foaming pace, and lying low on the neck of the steed. This rider uttered a shrill war cry when he saw Cody on the ground, and the bandit headed away from the unhorsed scout.

"Hi! hi! Whee-yip!" yelled the newcomer. "Hold hard, necarnis! Here we come!"

As instructed by his partner, Pawnee Bill had kept the others back until now. But the sound of the pistol

shot had brought the bowie man onto the scene on the keen jump. And some yards behind rode Wild Bill, Nomad, and Little Cayuse.

The bandit, however, did not wait to see the latter appear. The charge of Pawnee Bill was sufficient to make him pull his bay horse around and dash back along the trail. He fired once at Pawnee, and the bowie man dodged and laughed. He tried to get another shot at Buffalo Bill; but the latter had rolled behind a boulder.

And then, as Silvernail tore on, there appeared in front of him the big, mouse-colored mule and its Dutch rider!

"Whoob! de Inchuns! de Inchuns!" bawled the baron, waving his arms to halt the oncoming white man whom he did not recognize.

But the redskins evidently had no terrors for Silvernail. He raked his mount's ribs with his spurs and passed the astonished baron in a flash.

Pawnee Bill would have pulled in when he saw his friend on the ground; but Cody started up and waved to him to go on.

"Follow him! Capture him—capture him alive, Gordon!" shouted the scout.

"De Inchuns iss coming!" bawled the baron again, now recognizing the two Bills. "The Inchuns iss chasing me!"

Indeed, already the head of the Yaqui column was in sight. But the reds opened out instantly to let Silvernail through, and Buffalo Bill yelled after his intrepid friend:

"Pay no attention to them, Pawnee! They are friendly."

Indeed, he had recognized Xuku, the young chieftain of the Yaquis, who had joined his men after the

baron had made his escape from the reds. And Xuku recognized Pawnee Bill as a friend of Pa-e-has-ka.

As the mob of Indians had opened up for the passing of Silvernail, the bandit, so they spread apart to let Pawnee Bill through. The latter bestrode a fiery mustang that was not yet two years off the wild range—a beast that possessed the endurance of a grizzly and the swiftness of a deer. The bay gelding that Silvernail now rode might be a thoroughbred; but the tamed mustang could not be shaken off in a long chase.

Pawnee Bill was not an eighth of a mile behind the bandit when he was free of the mob of Yaquis. He yelled to the mustang, shook the bridle reins, and they fairly skimmed the trail during that first burst of speed. The bowie man knew the piece of horseflesh he had under him, and he was not afraid to use it—or even to misuse it!

Sometimes the bay disappeared; but Pawnee Bill could hear the hoofbeats ahead and knew that he was not being distanced. Indeed, within ten minutes it was plain that the bowie man possessed the better mount—or, at least, the speedier. The mustang was steadily gaining upon the bay.

Then the bandit came in sight again. He was within easy pistol shot. Pawnee Bill saw him look back over his shoulder. The bowie man remembered what Cody had told him. He must spare the villain's life!

It was probable, then, that Buffalo Bill believed this bandit to be Clifford Smart. Pawnee Bill did not seek to draw his own gun, but he knew instinctively that Silvernail would take a shot at him in a moment.

And it came! He saw the puff of smoke and threw himself along his horse's side, Indian fashion, with just the toe of his right foot clipped under the saddle. The bullet sang over him, and his mustang, used to this sort of warfare, did not lose his stride.

Instantly, when the bandit had turned away, Pawnee Bill was upright in the saddle and urging his mount on. Once more Silvernail turned and fired, the bowie man going through similar tactics. And then the game was played a third time.

Within three minutes Pawnee Bill had decreased the distance between the nose of his horse and the big bay by more than half. It was merely a few rods' distance between fugitive and pursuer—and they were alone on the trail. If Pawnee Bill's friends had followed him in this race after the bandit, they were far behind.

There was just these two—man to man. The fact seemed suddenly to smite the bandit's mind. He pulled in his horse, wheeled him dexterously, and suddenly charged back at Pawnee Bill!

"On-she-ma-da!" muttered the bowie man. "Here's where we clinch—or he gets me!"

Pawnee Bill had only a second or two to decide upon his course. The bandit's pistol blazed once—the bullet clipped Pawnee's hat from his head and sent it spinning in the dust.

If Buffalo Bill's pard drew his own gun and fired, the ball might find lodgment in the vitals of the bandit. Therefore, the brave fellow refused to use a firearm.

But like a flash—as the bandit spurred upon him—Pawnee Bill reached behind, jerked a heavy-handled bowie knife from below his collar where its sheath lay between his shoulder blades, and like a streak of blue lightning the knife sped through the air!

Silvernail may have seen it coming; but no man could have dodged the singing blade.

The pistol in the bandit's hand exploded once again, for the point of Pawnee Bill's knife had bitten deeply into the scoundrel's shoulder and paralyzed his arm!

That all this time the bandit had been seriously in-

convenienced by his mount could not be doubted. The pistol shots had angered the brute still more. Now, the wound to its rider was so painful that Silvernail forgot his horse, his enemy, and all—this wound brought matters to a climax. The bay bolted!

It flew past Pawnee Bill like an express train. The bowie man stretched out a hand to seize the reins of the flying steed; but luckily his fingers did not close on them!

The bay was running away, and its rider swayed uncertainly in the saddle. Pawnee Bill put spurs to his own steed and followed, but at last the bay had found its stride. The frightened creature was rapidly leaving the bowie man behind in the race.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE END OF SILVERNAIL, THE BANDIT.

On, on they flew, the hoofbeats drumming deafeningly on the hard path. Pawnee Bill saw the figure of the bandit swaying to and fro in the saddle. The villain had dropped the bridle reins and clutched at the bowie knife sticking in his shoulder.

When he drew the knife from the wound the blood gushed forth. Pawnee Bill rose in his stirrups and uttered a yell:

"Yi-yi! Yip-ee! Whoop!"

His mustang responded to the cry and leaped forward; but the iron-jawed bay had the bit in its teeth and was running at fearful speed.

Weaker and weaker was the wounded man becoming. Pawnee knew this—he saw that the bandit grew dizzy and that in a moment he would fall from the saddle.

Suddenly there appeared around a bend in the road a cavalcade of wildly riding horsemen. The bay was running into these newcomers.

Pawnee Bill recognized them. His gladdened eye saw Buffalo Bill himself in the lead. If the famous scout had been wounded by the brigand, the wound was slight.

Beside the scout rode an Indian in full war paint—Xuku, the Yaqui chieftain. Then came Wild Bill, the baron spurring Toofer to do his wicked best, and old Nomad and Little Cayuse in the rear.

The wounded bandit may have seen this squadron of horse riding him down; but it is doubtful if the sight meant anything to him in his present pain and weakness.

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But the maddened bay horse saw the approaching riders and swerved from his straight course. Crash! the bandit was flung to the ground, landing with sickening force upon his head and shoulders!

The accident could mean but one thing. Such a fall spelled instant death, and both Buffalo Bill and the bowie man groaned aloud when they saw it.

If this bandit were Clifford Smart, the exiled American, then his friends across the border need be troubled by him no longer. And the girl waiting down there at San Enrife—How about her?

Little Cayuse and Nomad caught the bay horse. The others pulled their steeds in around the dead man in the path. Buffalo Bill leaped down and turned the man over. His neck was broken.

"Yes, Pa-e-has-ka," said Xuku gutturally. "That him bad man—him Silvernail. He go with Injun—raid San Enrife. He shoot white squaw through gate of big house where Mojé live. Wuh!"

As the Yaqui uttered these words there was again the clatter of hoofs on the trail—the sound approaching in the wake of Pawnee Bill's own coming. In his fight and race with the now dead Silvernail, the bowie man did not know that he was being pursued.

It was but one horse that came into sight, however; but he bore two riders. And the moment the person in front saw the group about the dead bandit, he hailed them delightedly:

"Buffalo Bill! Mr. Cody! And there is Mr. Nomad—and Major Lillie—and the others. Isn't this luck!"

Rawdon Smart was off his horse in a moment and shaking hands. His companion dismounted, too, but more slowly. He was taller and older than Rawdon; and there was a slight family resemblance between them. He came forward with gravity to meet Raw-

don's friends, and as he approached, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill stepped aside, and the man on the ground was revealed.

"Ah! there is the scoundrel!" ejaculated Rawdon's companion suddenly. "It is Silvernail, the bandit."

"So we have just assured ourselves," said Buffalo Bill dryly.

"I ran into him this morning when I was riding up from Olando toward home," said the young man. "I shot his horse—— By Jove! there's mine that he took away from me!" he cried, spying the bay that Little Cayuse was leading forward.

"You, I take it," said Buffalo Bill, "are Clifford Smart?"

"At your service," returned Rawdon's brother, eying the scout curiously.

"You were just returning from Mexico City, then?"

"That is right."

"And you ran into this Silvernail?"

"For a second time. Once, months ago, he stuck me up on the trail and robbed me. He took everything I had of value then, indeed. He stole a keepsake that I thought a great deal of——"

Buffalo Bill had stooped quickly and thrust a hand into the side pocket of Silvernail's jacket. He brought forth the miniature and held it up before Clifford Smart's eyes.

"You mean this?" he asked.

"By Jove! that's it. The scoundrel kept it all this time?"

"Not he. He lost it—— Well, he lost it some time ago, and on the other side of the border," admitted Buffalo Bill. "I have been carrying it for some time myself——"

"Uncle Junipe found it after Pasquale, the black-

smith, was murdered on his ranch," cried Rawdon Smart. "I saw it then, and knew it was Clifford's."

"And I have been carrying it for your brother since then," said Cody. "But to-day this dead man here held me up and took it once again."

"And he had just left me," cried Clifford, "after robbing me of my horse and weapons. He has certainly had an exciting morning, for Rawdon tells me that he and his mates raided San Enrife at sunrise."

"Er-waugh!" ejaculated Nomad, listening with all his ears. "Thar's more than thet thar to explain."

"How came you by this bay horse—so much like the one Silvernail rode?" demanded Buffalo Bill.

"They were alike, weren't they?" returned Clifford Smart. "I did not keep this beauty at San Enrife. He got me into trouble more than once, too. I was taken for Silvernail——"

"An-pe-tu-we!" interrupted Pawnee Bill. "And you are just right," and he clapped his hand upon the shoulder of Clifford Smart. "It was you, not Silvernail, that Wild Bill and I captured at Ciudad Sonora and clapped into jail, eh?"

The young Texan shrugged his shoulders and nodded.

"Not a pleasant experience that. If you had taken the pains to have examined the nails in the shoes of my horse, you would have found that I was not given to the habit of loading the shoes with precious metal."

"But, by gorry!" interposed Wild Bill, pushing forward, "who were those fellows who blew open the bank and the jail to get you free?"

"Ordinary outlaws who did not know much about the use of giant powder, I believe," said Clifford coolly. "The explosion injured one of the men and failed to break the vault door. I ran out after them and escaped."

I see plainly, gentlemen," he added, "that I have been under considerable suspicion in all your minds."

"Circumstances certainly led us into the error of believing you had taken to the highway," said Buffalo Bill.

"I cannot blame you when my own brother accused me this morning of being the notorious Silvernail, and of having wounded the Señorita Maria Cralé during the attack on her father's casa.

"And, gentlemen, as I am the affianced husband of the lady, I am much wrought up over the accident, as you may believe. With your permission I will hasten on to San Enrife—using my own horse for the journey. If you will follow me, Colonel Cody, I will be at your disposal at Professor Cralé's house."

"And let Mr. Nomad go with us, colonel!" cried Rawdon Smart, following his brother's example, and climbing into his saddle again. "I do not think much of the Mexican physician who treated Señorita Maria. Nomad is a good surgeon, I know."

"Er-waugh!" grunted the old trapper. "Hear the thar boy throwin' bouquets at me, Buffler?"

"Go with him and do what you can for the poor young lady," said Cody. "We will follow you—with the remains of this unfortunate wretch whose wicked course is at last run out."

"Vale, vale! vot a mixed-oo-ed-ness idt vas yedt!" murmured the wide-eyed baron, as the Smarts and old Nomad rode hastily away. "Dit you effer seen de peat oof idt, Vild Pill?"

"It sure was a crooked trail," admitted the pistol king.

"Undt you, Bawnee Pill? Vot you t'ink?"

"It was a hummer!" announced the bowie man.

"Undt vot do you says, too, Leedle Cayuse?" demanded the astounded baron.

But all that the Piute vouchsafed as comment upon the outcome of the matter was a single:

"Wuh!"

Meanwhile, Buffalo Bill and the Yaqui chieftain were talking aside. Soon they clasped hands, and the Indian rode away alone.

"You wise man—you great friend—Pa-e-has-ka," he said, looking back at the scout. "Xuku remember—Xuku do as Pa-e-has-ka says."

"I've managed to get the redskin to promise to call off his bucks from this side of the Olando trail," explained Buffalo Bill. "And he will keep his word. I have shown him that we intend to clean up the bad whites in this vicinity, and that if the reds are caught over here, the rurales will clean them out along with the outlaws.

"He has given me, too, information which will aid us in getting the smaller outlaws that occasionally worked with Silvernail. He knows their rendezvous."

And in this Buffalo Bill was prophetic. Xuku had not lied to his white friend. Pa-e-has-ka and his mates made San Enrife their headquarters for some days, and during their stay they captured nearly a dozen of the smaller banditti and frightened the others out of the country.

Silvernail, the king-pin of them all, having been erased from the map, no other leader sprang up at once, and before long the scout and his friends had pretty well eliminated the outlaws and holdup men, as well as the smugglers, from both sides of the Rio Grande.

Meanwhile, as we have said, the party were the guests of the Cralés. Old Nomad had been able to do what the local doctor could not in regard to Señorita Maria's wound. He found and extracted the split bullet, and the young lady recovered rapidly.

This result made old Nomad mighty popular in the

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household, and the baron began to grow jealous. Mojé made more of the old trapper than she did of Schnitzenhäuser, and the latter went around with a very long face and usually hidden in a cloud of tobacco smoke. Nomad took delight in increasing the baron's jealousy; and had excitement not soon broken out beyond the border that recalled Buffalo Bill and his pards to the States, the baron might have been tempted to demand that the trapper "doodle" with him for the hand of the buxom Indian maiden.

Buffalo Bill satisfied himself that Clifford Smart had been leading a correct enough life since he had been exiled from home; indeed, when he became better acquainted with the young man, and found him so frank and agreeable, the scout could not fail to like him. He felt sure, at least, that it was perfectly safe to leave young Rawdon in his brother's care when the party went North again.

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill did not leave the Cralé casa without promising to return to enjoy a certain very interesting occasion which was scheduled some months ahead—in other words, the wedding of Clifford Smart and the Señorita Maria Cralé. Whether Clifford considered it still unwise to cross into the States, or even if he did shrink from meeting Americans because of the trouble that had made him an exile, the scout was confident that the young man was sincerely remorseful for his fault and that he was worthy of his own friendship and—to a degree—worthy of the love of the professor's pretty daughter.

THE END.

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