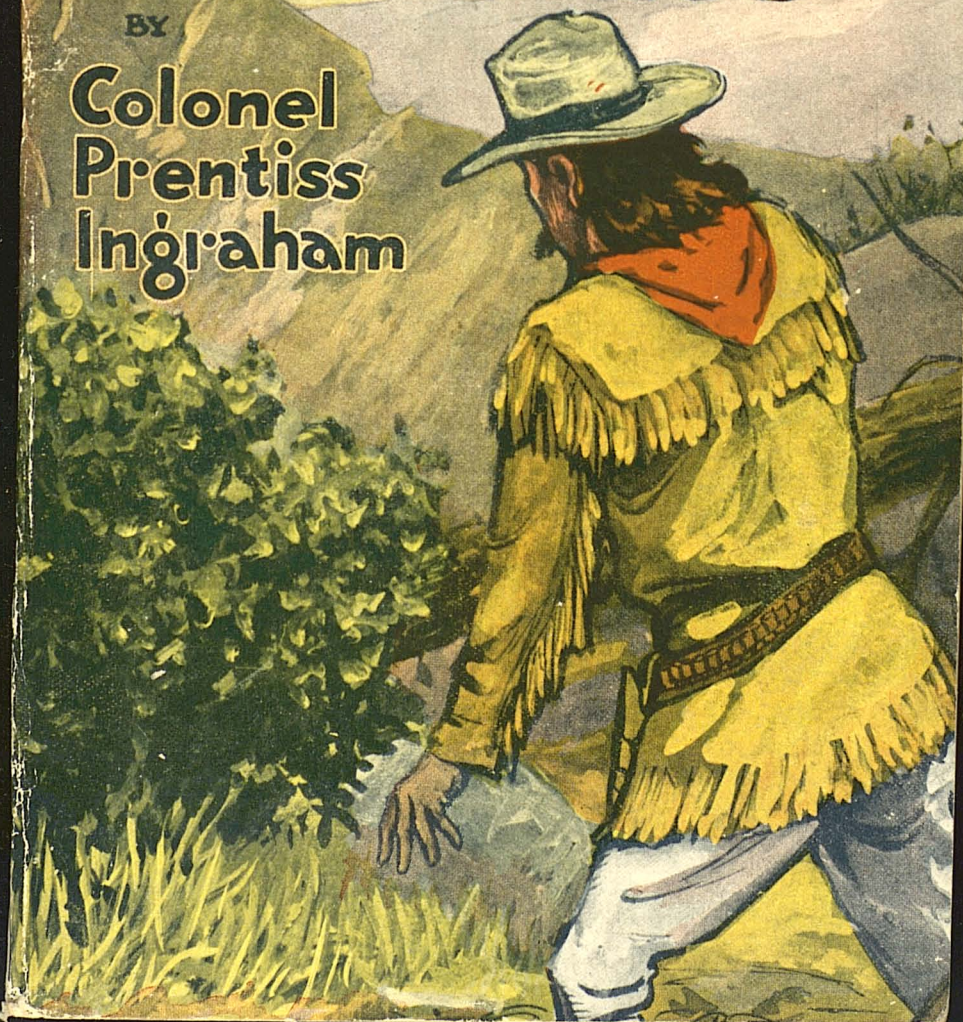


BUFFALO BILL BORDER STORIES ~ No 152 ~

BUFFALO BILL IN HARNESS

BY

Colonel
Prentiss
Ingraham



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

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

To Be Published in July, 1924.

- 191—Buffalo Bill and the Red Renegade,
By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
192—Buffalo Bill's Mailed Fist.....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To Be Published in August, 1924.

- 193—Buffalo Bill's Round Up.....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
194—Buffalo Bill's Death Message..By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To Be Published in September, 1924.

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

To Be Published in October, 1924.

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

To Be Published in November, 1924.

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

To Be Published in December, 1924.

- 202—Buffalo Bill and the Skeleton Scout,
By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
203—Buffalo Bill's Flag of Truce..By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

Buffalo Bill in Harness

OR,

A Well Fought Battle

BY

Colonel Prentiss Ingraham

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



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Buffalo Bill in Harness

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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 IN HARNESS.

CHAPTER I.

DIANA RAISES OBJECTIONS.

It was a hot afternoon in the border town of El Paso when two frontiersmen might have been seen sitting on the piazza of a hotel sipping drinks and smoking.

They were both unlike the ordinary type of men to be seen on the Mexican border and attracted no little attention, apart from their own individuality, by the fact that the two were as unlike one another as black and white.

One was a stalwart giant, apparently in the prime of life. He was bronzed by the sun and open air of the plains, but although many of the strollers on the plaza of El Paso thought there was something familiar about this man, Buffalo Bill was known only by repute at that time so far south as the border line.

However, in the past few days it had been noised around that Buffalo Bill and some companions had actually penetrated the region of the Cimarrons in the face of the fierce Indian tribes up there, and had not only brought back gold, but also rescued from the In-

dians a beautiful young woman who had been regarded as their priestess.

The other person who sat on the hotel piazza with Buffalo Bill, for the tall man was no other than the great border scout, Colonel William F. Cody, was an extraordinary if no less picturesque personage.

The latter wore a suit of buckskin clothes that must have come out of the army. One of his ears was missing, as one might easily have noticed when the tail of some furry animal which formed a cap fell away from the side of the man's head.

The picturesque character was none other than old Nick Wharton, the eccentric trapper, who had been a companion to Buffalo Bill in many a tight corner, many a pleasant trip and many an unpleasant one.

The two had just returned from the Cimarrons and had been taking it easy for a few days, after parting with the others who had accompanied them on their adventurous errand into Yucatan.

"Where's Wild Billiam, anyway?" Nick Wharton suddenly demanded. "I ain't seen nor heerd tell o' the boy f'r over a moon an' a half. I reck'n he must ha' tumbled inter a love affair ter keep him away from the firin' line so long."

Buffalo Bill smiled.

"No fear of that, Nick," said he, lazily crossing his legs and blowing smoke rings into the air. "Love

affair, or no love affair, Wild Bill Hickok is always on the qui vive for a fight, and if I am not mistaken he's mixed up in one now that may drag us into it in a few days—a few hours, perhaps."

"You don't say!" said Nick. "Waal, speakin' f'r myself, it won't take much draggin' ter get me outer this yer hole. Diana don't agree with this yer hen-coop o' a town. I hed five scraps wi' the durned waiters wi' the b'iled shirts already, an' I hed ter pay out near half o' that gold dust we got in the Cimar-rons payin' the management o' this roost f'r the horses thet my ole mar' Diana hez killed in them stables. Ye see, they won't let Diana wander about the durned flower gardens like what she's used ter doin' out in the chaparral. Goldurn it, ye should ha' seen her yesterday!"

And the old trapper indulged in a merry chuckle before he told the cause of his mirth.

"I wuz settin' right here in the moonlight last night when all o' a sudden I hears a squeal and no end o' a galumfin' over thar in the stables. 'Lord,' ses I, 'thet's Diana killin' another o' them swell horses f'r spite, cos they locked her up in a box!

"Thar wuz lots o' ladies and gents in b'iled snirts settin' out heer at the time, when suddenly ole Diana comes a-tearin' aroun' ter the front hyar an' starts in ter lick up all ther flower beds. What she couldn't

eat she trampled an' smashed down wi' her heels. The waiters in the b'iled shirts an' the whole durned crew o' housemaids an' suchlike comes tearin' out an' tries to coax Diana to leave off an' have some hay by way o' salad, but that wuz jest what riled Diana.

"She looks up at the management o' ther El Pasado Hotel as much as ter say, 'Ef yer hay's ez cheap es yer flowers, flowers'll do fer mine. Goldurn ye, me an' Nick sleeps on this kin' o' flower bed out in the purary ev'ry durned night,' ses Diana.

"I wuz settin' hyar laughin' fit ter bust while them swell ladies wuz scowlin' at me an' sayin' things about 'Ojus crecher' an' sechlike. Finally the hull management gits scared o' Diana an' comes up ter me beggin' fer mercy.

"'Mistah Wharton, sir,' ses they, 'will ye be so durned obligin' ez ter call yer dog off?'

"'Sure,' ses I, an' without gittin' out o' my chair I ses, 'Diana, ye ole pirit, git back ter ther sarvants' entrance,' and Diana she went like a lamb, an' the ladies changed their tune all o' a sudden an' axed if I wuz Nick Wharton an' ef this wuz the mar' that could do such wonderful tricks.

"An' say, Buffler," added old Nick Wharton, with a chuckle, "the ladies all said that I wuz durned fortunate ter be acquainted wi' Buffler Bill. What a fine-

lookin' man Buffler wuz, they said, an' I mus' reely interdooce them to Buffler Bill.

" 'Ladies,' ses I, 'keep cl'ar o' Buffler Bill. He's a bad man wi' the ladies,' ses I, 'an' he bruk three hunder hearts already wi' his handsome face an' manners. Keep cl'ar o' that man,' ses I, 'fur he's what they call a destroyer o' happy homes,' ses I."

"You did?" shouted Buffalo Bill, hardly knowing whether to be angry or otherwise.

"Sure thing, Buffler," said Nick Wharton.

"And what did they say when you told them these infamous lies?" said Buffalo Bill.

"Why, goldurn 'em," cackled the old trapper, "they got reel mad an' walked away, sayin' ez how they allers knew ez how Buffler Bill wuz a deceitful-lookin' man, an' they wondered besides how the management allowed such ojus crechers into ther hotel."

Buffalo Bill burst out laughing, for he knew perfectly well that Nick Wharton had either been having a joke at his and the ladies' expense, or that he was just pitching one of the fluent lies for which he was famous.

"But jokin' aside, Buffler," said Nick Wharton, "I'm durned tired o' this joint, an' ef Wild Billiam's in the neighborhood raising a scrap, me an' Diana's goin' ter settle the bill hyar an' join in. Whar's Bill, anyway?"

"You remember that I told you some time ago," said Buffalo Bill, "that Hickok had gone to the border after a gang of cattle thieves. I would have gone with him had it not been for the Cimarrons expedition. But I promised as soon as that was cleared up I should join him in the job of cleaning them up. At the present moment, if I am not mistaken, Wild Bill's camped on a big ranch about seventy miles along the border line, an' as I am just as sick of loafing around this conventional hotel as you are, and as the horses are pretty well rested, judging by Diana's acrobatic feats and general restlessness, I propose a start as soon as the sun goes down."

But the start was destined to come off even sooner than that. At that moment there was a clattering of hoofs, and Diana appeared in front of the hotel, followed by several other horses, one of which, Buffalo Bill's mount, stopped in front of the hotel, while the others, all except Diana, scampered off up the main street of El Paso, followed by a crowd of stableboys yelling and brandishing lariats.

"This looks like a stampede," said Buffalo Bill. "The horses have evidently broken loose from the stables."

"An' goldurn it," roared Nick Wharton, "look at ole Diana grinnin' from ear to ear!"

As a matter of fact, Diana was not grinning, but

there was a mischievous look in her eyes that somehow told a story of its own. Diana was the horse that had kicked the stable door to bits and given all the horses a chance to escape.

Just as Buffalo Bill and his companion came to this conclusion the proprietor of the hotel came rushing out, and, throwing out his arms to Nick Wharton in a gesture of pleading, cried:

"For the love of Heaven, señor, please pay your bill and leave the hotel with that demon of a horse! Or if that does not please your excellency, never mind the bill, only take the fiend away! Between you and the caballo you are frightening all my trade away."

"Thet's all right," said Nick Wharton. "We wuz jest thinkin' o' goin', anyway. Ye see, Diana's not used ter bein' cooped up in the servants' quarters. She ought by rights ter set down at the dinin' table f'r her meals. Anyhow, ez you do things different hyar, me an' Diana won't obtrude, as the sayin' is. Ef you'll just bring another round, includin' a rum punch f'r Diana wi' three straws in it, we'll be tickled ter death ter leave."

"Anything—anything!" gasped the hotel keeper, and darted off to fill the order.

"An' say, ye greaser," cried Nick Wharton after him, "put eight cherries in Diana's drink."

Before Buffalo Bill's laughter had subsided the

hotel owner came back with a tray upon which rested three cool-looking drinks of rum and lemonade with straws in them.

Nick Wharton and Buffalo Bill helped themselves from the tray and then the proprietor wanted to know how Diana's drink was to be served.

"Why, ye yaller dago!" shouted Nick Wharton, "same way ye'd sarve it to any other lady—on the tray!"

With beads of perspiration standing out on his brow at this indignity, the hotel owner proffered the tray to Diana, who had walked onto the piazza and was watching the proceedings with a look of almost human intelligence.

No sooner had the hotel man offered the tray, however, than the mare lowered her head and butted the tray upward with such force that the rum punch was dashed into the face of the hotel owner, who, half blinded with rum and rage, darted back into the hotel with wild cries.

He was considerably mollified, however, when half an hour later Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton paid the huge bill for board, lodging, and damages which he presented, and, mounting their horses, rode out of El Paso in a northwesterly direction.

The two comrades were off to join Wild Bill in a fight against border cattle thieves.

CHAPTER II.

WILD BILL CAPTURED.

"Lay low, Nick Wharton. They're coming!"

It was Buffalo Bill who had spoken, as he and his old trapper friend lay in the shadows, which even the moonlight on the prairie could not chase from a small timber situated a few miles to the south of the range of foothills from which the two bordermen had shortly emerged.

It was the second night of our friends' journeying from El Paso to join Wild Bill Hickok in the fight against the border cattle thieves in which the latter was supposed to be engaged.

For the last hour Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton had been intently watching a large black mass which had been slowly moving across the plain in the direction of a gulch in the foothills.

Long before the moon had arisen, and while our friends were yet climbing down the trail on the foothills, the keen hearing of Buffalo Bill had detected a low, rumbling sound which, to his experienced senses, denoted the advance of a large herd of cattle.

That they were tame cattle he had no doubt, for ad they been wild buffalo they would not be moving

at that time of night. Besides that, now and then above the rumble of hoofs could be heard the cracking of whips like revolver shots in a skirmish.

Briefly, it did not take Buffalo Bill and his companion, Nick Wharton, long to decide that a herd of cattle was being driven over the prairie by a gang of cattle thieves. Their reasons for thinking so may be summed up as follows:

The part of country in which the bordermen now found themselves was that said to be infested by cattle thieves.

The hour for the last round-up was long gone by.

The speed at which the cattle were being forced along, and at such a late hour, showed that the drivers feared pursuit or interference of some nature.

And what was the conclusive evidence of cattle thieving was the fact that the cattle were being headed for that line which our two friends had recently been exploring, the line which divided two States not at all similar in their laws—the Mexican border.

On reaching this conclusion, Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton had immediately ridden out in the double darkness that comes before the moonrise to investigate.

The beat of their horses' hoofs was quite inaudible in the roar of the driven steers, and they had to exercise but little caution in their reconnoitering tour.

After having ridden out on the prairie about two miles, aided by their keen ears and eyesight, the two bordermen had been able to locate the herd and place the direction in which they were traveling. It was just as Buffalo Bill had surmised—straight and pell-mell for the Mexican border.

Our friends took shelter from the rays of the rising moon in the darkness of a small timber in order to better watch the movements of the cattle thieves, who, with their stolen stock, suddenly appeared much nearer than the scouts had imagined they were under the deceptive rays of the moon.

"We had better lay low until they pass, don't you think, Nick," said Buffalo Bill doubtfully, "or do you think——"

"Yes, that's jest what I do think," Nick Wharton replied, as if in answer to an unspoken question. "We're safe as a possum in a tree from bein' seen so long's we stay right hyar, but, goldurn it, so long as we do stay here we can't do a thing but let these fellers get outer sight before we show ourselves."

"Yes," said Buffalo Bill, "before the moon gets too high I think we ought to make a bolt for it back to the gulch, keeping this timber between us and the gang. Once we get into the shadow of the hills it will be a hundred times easier for us to trail them to

their rendezvous, for they must have some place where they exchange their cattle or turn it over to other members of the border gang. If we could find this place and learn something of the habits of the cattle thieves we would have something of importance to tell Wild Bill, if this is the gang he is after."

"You bet your boots!" said Nick. "Let's get on the nags and make a bolt fur the hills. It's an angel to a dead coon that they won't be payin' much attention to what's doin' ahead, but keepin' their blinkers well skinned to what's goin' on behin'. If we got in their flank or rear guard, as the sayin' is, they'd spot us in a wink, bein' ez how they're lookin' fur pursuitousness. But gee whilikins! What's thet, Buffler? Waal, ef thet don't beat anythin' I ever see!"

Buffalo Bill glanced quickly in the direction in which Nick Wharton was staring with a queer grin on his face, and saw the thing that had caused the old scout's involuntary exclamations of surprise. A steer had broken away from the main herd, and a rider, swinging a long lariat, was in full pursuit of the rebellious animal.

But it required only a glance to see that the lissom, supple figure in the saddle was not a cowboy, but a woman, and a young woman of no mean beauty, either. She rode her horse astride, as many of the frontier girls did in those days, and handled her steed

and her lariat with the manner of one born and bred to cow-punching.

It was a nervous, bad-tempered cow that had broken away from the herd, and it seemed determined either to return to the ranch from which it had been stolen or to take liberty on its own account.

The chase drew near to the timber where Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton were concealed, and the two men had an opportunity of studying and admiring not only the features of an exciting round-up, but also the skill and beauty of the young equestrienne.

Just as the steer seemed about to dash right into the timber, which would have been disastrous for Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton, the lariat shot from the hands of the young girl "cowboy" and fell with a swish over the head of the steer.

At the same moment a touch of the bridle caused the girl's mount to stop suddenly and stand erect on its hind legs, thus bringing the rope taut around the horns of the steer.

The girl sat in her saddle as if she were part of it, notwithstanding the violent plunge of the captive steer and the accompanying check movement of the horse. Buffalo Bill could scarce repress an exclamation of admiration for the youth, beauty, skill, and pluck of the young girl.

As for Nick Wharton, he nearly betrayed their

whole plan by whispering, much to the discomfiture of Buffalo Bill, whose sense of humor never left him even in the tightest corners:

"Say, Bill, ef ever I become kwainted wi' thet gel I'm goin' ter let her go buffler huntin' wi' ole Diana."

The chuckle of mirth that burst from the throat of Buffalo Bill was not heard, however, and the girl, leading her captive steer, now quite tame, returned to join the herd and the gang of cattle thieves.

"Now's our time, and our only time," whispered Buffalo Bill. "Every moment we lose brings the gang nearer the west, which, if we mean to keep the timber between us until we reach the hills, will mean a wider stretch for us to cover to the east."

Hastily skirting through the timber to the eastern side of it, Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton were just about to mount and ride for it, when suddenly one of the horses of the cattle thieves, evidently smelling his kind in the vicinity, neighed vociferously.

Immediately the two bordermen, as if by instinct, clapped their hands over the nostrils of their horses. Buffalo Bill's mount, and Diana, Nick's mare, made no attempt to reply, for both of the well-trained horses knew exactly what that hand on the nose signified.

"Do ye think they'll notice that whinny?" asked Nick Wharton anxiously.

"No," said Buffalo Bill: "they won't notice it with

that roaring and trampling. Horses are apt to neigh when there is a row, but if either of our mounts replied it might be different. Anyhow, I don't suppose they are looking for danger from this quarter of the compass."

And Buffalo Bill was right in this, for as the cattle thief's horse opened its mouth and whinnied, the rider, a tall, handsome outlaw, wheeled suddenly in his saddle and, clapping his hand to his brow to shade his eyes from the glare of the moon, swept the prairie to the southeast as if he expected pursuit from that quarter.

In the meantime, Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton were speeding across the two-mile stretch of plain that extended from the easterly side of the timber to the range of low hills for which the cattle thieves also were heading.

The moon, rising directly behind those hills, cast a long, black shadow for half a mile over the prairie, and, therefore, it did not take the bordermen long to reach the belt of shadow where their movements would have escaped notice even had they been dressed in white.

Having reached this belt of safety, the border king suddenly wheeled and galloped as hard as his horse could go, due west.

Nick Wharton understood his tactics perfectly well,

knowing that the scout was heading for the gulch, hoping to find a place where he could observe the cattle thieves pass by, and so the old trapper followed his leader without a word.

The two kept up their rapid pace for about a mile and a half; when Buffalo Bill suddenly drew rein and looked steadily at the black mass moving over the plain.

After a moment he turned to Nick Wharton and said:

"We've hit it just about right. They will enter the hills just here."

And the scout pointed over his shoulder to one of the numerous little gulches that the rain of many years cuts into the hills everywhere.

"Let's get under cover," said Buffalo Bill, leading the way into the brush.

The horses were taken as far back as possible and left standing, with a few words of command to be silent, and a further hint in the shape of a twisting of the bridles around their noses.

Then Buffalo Bill and his companion returned to the side of the gulch, where they were no sooner ensconced in a clump of brush than the first of the outriders of the cattle thieves cantered into the defile.

To Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton what followed was like the marching past of an army of the enemy.

First came the outriders with their long whips keeping the steers from going too fast or breaking away from the mass which the drivers behind urged them into.

Then came the steers themselves, a mêlée of horns and hoofs and heads, flanked on each side by the same grim sentinels with their long cowhide lashes.

There must have been about two hundred cattle in all, and it was a fine sight to see and hear them thunder past. The cattle thieves must have made a rich haul somewhere that night.

To Buffalo Bill and his companion, however, the group that came in the train of the cattle was the most interesting and astonishing sight of all.

There were three of them—two men and one woman—and a queerly situated trio at that.

A man who was evidently the chief of the cattle gang rode about a hundred yards to the rear of the herd. He was a tall man, and in the uncertain light of the moon he looked like a cavalry soldier, so erect was he in the saddle and so powerful in build. He was a fine specimen of handsome manhood.

By his side rode the girl who had won the admiration of Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton a short time before. She was singing a strange little lullaby, half to herself, and ever and anon her eyes turned to a horse which at first sight seemed to be riderless.

But as Buffalo Bill glanced in the direction taken by the young woman's glances he saw that on the back of the horse was a man, bound hand and foot, face upward.

The scout stared in surprise for a moment; then he suddenly stretched out his hand and gripped the arm of Nick Wharton.

At the same time he placed his disengaged hand to his mouth, and a moment later the distant call of a prairie dog seemed to travel for miles.

None of the thieves appeared to notice this call, for it is like the ticking of the clock to them. But the man bound on the saddle might have been seen to turn his face slowly toward the clump of brush from which the call of the prairie dog had really come.

At that moment the moon, rising over a ridge of the hills, fell upon the face of the man. Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton both stared at it in silent astonishment.

It was the face of Wild Bill Hickok!

CHAPTER III.

ROSARIO.

To say that Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton were surprised at the dilemma in which they found Wild Bill situated would be to put it in the mildest terms.

But it was no time for words. Hickok was a prisoner in the hands of the cattle thieves whom he had gone out to capture or disband, and the two bordermen who had just discovered him tied to a horse realized that the first thing to do was to get him out of the dilemma before the cattle thieves decided to get him out of the world.

The only way by which this could be accomplished, Buffalo Bill knew, was to trail the cattle thieves to their rendezvous, or to wherever they took Wild Bill, and seize an opportune moment to free the daring frontiersman. One advantage which Buffalo Bill knew would count big in the long run was the fact that Wild Bill knew whence and from whose lips came the call of the prairie dog.

That call was an old signal agreed upon by the two comrades for use in an emergency like the present one, intended to apprise one another of the other's presence and assistance. No sooner had the tall form of the

leader of the cattle thieves disappeared up the gulch in the rear of the band than Colonel Cody and Nick Wharton emerged from the shelter of the brush.

Running quickly to where they had tethered the horses, the frontiersmen allowed them an extra length of heel rope, as they did not know how long they might be gone. They might have ridden the animals in pursuit of the cattle thieves, but Buffalo Bill had already reasoned that this would be dangerous and at the same time quite unnecessary.

The scout had already observed that the border line of the two States was only about two miles up the gulch, and had reasoned that as soon as the cattle thieves got their loot across it they would probably camp for the night, allowing the steers to blow.

Furthermore, Buffalo Bill thought it was probable that in the morning a relief gang from the Texan side would meet the band at their mutual rendezvous, either to trade for the stock or take charge of it.

The scout was, of course, anxious to release Wild Bill from his quandary first of all, but he also hoped to be able to turn the tables on the cattle thieves by securing all information with regard to their mode of operations.

It might prove an easy matter to smash the cattle-stealing system, which was as frequent as it was

daring in those days, by learning to whom and where the stolen steers were disposed of.

Buffalo Bill knew that the key to every theft is the receiver.

It did not take Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton long to overtake the cattle thieves, whom they trailed at a safe distance from the rear. As the scout had surmised, the chase did not last long. The moment the gang crossed the line and found themselves safe from all interference on the Mexican side of the border, they set up a cheer of defiance, at the same time waving their whips in the air.

They did not dismount there, however, although they allowed the cattle to blow for a few minutes. When Buffalo Bill saw the gang start ahead again, although at a slower pace, his heart sank for a moment, but only for a moment.

He quickly came to the conclusion that the cattle thieves were only moving ahead so as to get out of sight of the border line and at the same time to find a suitable camping ground where there would be plenty of water for the tired animals.

In this he was right, for in a few minutes he and Nick Wharton had the pleasure of seeing the cattle thieves come to a halt in a little cul-de-sac formed by a contorted ridge.

In the heart of this there was a clear pool of water

which shone like burnished silver in the moonlight. By the same light the forms of the cattle stealers could be seen plainly silhouetted as they moved about preparing for a good night's rest.

Having fixed upon a hiding place where they could watch every movement in the camp below without being observed themselves, Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton filled their pipes and started a desultory conversation, the main tenor of which was the release of Wild Bill from the hands of the cattle thieves.

For the reason already mentioned—briefly, that Buffalo Bill wished, if possible, to learn how the thieves disposed of the stock—the scout was not particularly anxious to let the gang know of the presence of an enemy until that information had been secured. So long as Wild Bill remained unharmed it would not hurt the robust frontiersman's health or complexion to be tied up for a few hours longer when such an important issue depended upon it.

But Wild Bill himself and yet another had plans of their own, which, although they did not materially injure Buffalo Bill's, caused the border king no little surprise.

It must have been nearly midnight, for the moon was high in the heavens, when Nick Wharton, who had been on the watch, suddenly laid a hand upon Buffalo Bill's shoulder.

"Something doing here, Bill," he whispered.

Buffalo Bill sat up and stared at the camp.

Before the thieves had turned in, the prisoner, Hickok, had been stowed away in a little natural cell formed by several bowlders. A man with a rifle in his hand had been posted there to guard the one spot where Wild Bill or anybody else could pass through. The fact that Wild Bill was bound hand and foot made the guard careless, for at that moment, when Buffalo Bill looked into the ravine, he was leaning his chin on his rifle barrel, and the way his body swung to and fro indicated that he was half asleep.

But that was not what interested and fascinated the two frontiersmen hiding up in the hillside brush. Across the camp, with cautious, pantherlike steps, the figure of a woman was creeping.

At the very first glance Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton recognized her as the one who had roped the refractory steer, and later ridden by the side of the chief of the gang, singing that plaintive lullaby.

There was something about this woman that mystified and interested Buffalo Bill. Already he felt that this girl was a friend, if not to their cause against the cattle thieves who seemed her companions, at least to the man known to fame as Wild Bill.

As the thought of a friendship between the iron-hearted Wild Bill and this slip of a girl occurred to

Buffalo Bill, he could not help smiling, particularly when there flashed through his brain the memory of certain words of Nick Wharton:

"I reck'n Wild Billiam must ha' fallen in love to be keepin' away from the firin' line so long."

But the smile disappeared from the scout's face as he saw the girl creep up toward the sentry. He knew instinctively that she was not going to attack the man for the simple reason that, as she was supposed to be a friend of the gang, she would hardly have needed to advance upon him with caution.

It was perfectly clear that she was anxious to pass that man unobserved, and the only reason that could be assigned by Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton was that she wished either to reach Wild Bill's side, or, at least, to speak to him.

A stern look, with which was mingled a light of admiration, filled the face of the chivalrous knight of the plains as he watched the girl creep nearer and nearer the sentinel by the bowlders.

All at once Nick Wharton turned his head at the sound of an ominous click close by his side. Buffalo Bill was kneeling on one knee, and, his rifle leveled from his shoulder, had the guard covered. That click had been the working of the Remington lever, so that the weapon was ready to send death to the guard

should he make the slightest move that threatened harm either to Wild Bill or the brave girl who was creeping toward him.

The girl, with the skill born of long training in the wild life of the cattle thieves' camp, managed to pass the sleepy sentinel without raising an alarm, and in another moment she had disappeared from sight behind the bowlders where Wild Bill lay bound hand and foot.

Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton watched this little affair with as much interest as the critic views the first-night play. Presently there was a slight movement in the shadows of the bowlders, and in another moment the girl reappeared, closely followed by a man whom Buffalo Bill immediately recognized, by his great height and carriage, as Wild Bill Hickok.

"Goldurn it," muttered Nick Wharton, as the girl and the frontiersman moved silently away in the direction of the brush. "Didn't I tell ye Bill's gone an' got hisself tied up wi' a purty face an' a petticoat! Wild Billiam, he, he!"

And the old trapper chuckled to himself in great glee at the thought that Wild Bill, the hero of some of the wildest fights in the West, a man whose heart was supposed to be as much of chilled steel as his nerves, had fallen in love with a slip of a border girl. Buffalo Bill's face wore a look of mingled concern

and amusement, but suddenly the cloud cleared away as he saw what was transpiring in the ravine.

Wild Bill and the girl had come to a halt close to the edge of the ravine, and it was evident that the frontiersman was urging the girl to escape with him, which she apparently hesitated to do. From her gestures it was easy for a student of "sign," like Buffalo Bill, to read what was passing between them.

The girl was obviously pointing out to Wild Bill that it would arouse more suspicion that she had aided in his escape if she did not return to camp. On the other hand, the guard had been asleep, and not having seen her figure in the matter in any way, it was probable that he would have to accept all the blame of negligence himself.

At that Wild Bill apparently agreed to go alone whereupon the girl dropped on both knees, and, seizing a hand of the stalwart frontiersman, she passionately kissed it. The next moment she had run across the open space like a frightened deer, and was presently reclining on the rough couch which she had previously occupied.

Wild Bill stood motionless by the side of the brush, and watched her departure like one in deep thought.

"Poor girl!" muttered Buffalo Bill, lowering the rifle now that all danger was past. "It is clear that

she is in love with Hickok, but Bill's heart is as cold as ever."

Just at that moment something else occurred to distract the attention of the scout from vain moralizing. Although the sentinel was in plain view of Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton, he was not so to Hickok, who was still watching the place where his fair rescuer had disappeared.

All at once the sentinel woke up with a start, and, as if he instinctively divined that something was wrong, turned and strode back into the natural boulder prison.

A moment later he bounded out, and it appeared for a second as if he meditated giving an alarm of Hickok's escape, but obviously his fear of the chief's anger caused him to be discreet.

Unfortunately for him, his discretion proved almost fatal to himself. The guard crept slowly around the boulders and suddenly came to a standstill as his astonished eyes fell upon the form of Wild Bill, standing by the edge of the brush and gazing wistfully at the camp.

At the same moment Buffalo Bill's rifle was at his shoulder, and had the sentinel made any move to fire his weapon he would have dropped dead in his tracks.

All at once Wild Bill turned his head and saw the

man crouching, rifle in hand, quite close to him. A look of mortification crossed the face of the frontiersman. It was the first time he had ever been caught off the alert, and it was all through thinking of that woman, which bore out Wild Bill's lifelong contention that no good ever came of having women around when there was trouble in the wind.

"Up with your hands!" commanded the guard in a low voice, for he wished, if possible, to recapture Wild Bill without the gang knowing that he had very nearly escaped.

Wild Bill smiled

"What's the use o' my puttin' up my hands?" he asked. "You know I haven't got a weapon on me."

"You must have," retorted the guard. "How else did you manage to cut the cords?"

Wild Bill's smile broadened, for by this remark he immediately divined that the sentinel did not know how he had got away.

At the same moment the faint whoop of an owl traveled on the night air.

"All right," said Wild Bill, as he threw his hands above his head, "you've got the full house this time, pard."

"Advance and get back into the coop," said the guard.

Wild Bill obeyed, but just as he was about to turn

into the boulder prison, he suddenly wheeled around, and before the astonished sentinel knew just what had happened, a crashing blow with an iron fist caused the stars to dance before his eyes and suddenly go out into utter darkness.

The next moment the prostrate man upon the ground was alone, and Wild Bill was standing in the camp of his friends.

CHAPTER IV.

WILD BILL'S STORY.

"Goldurn it, Wild Billiam, you do beat all the cock-fights I ever seed," said old Nick Wharton, as he squatted by the camp fire which our friends had built in one of the timber buttes with which the plains of the border are dotted.

About a hundred yards away were tethered out three horses. One was Diana, the other Buffalo Bill's fine steed, while the third was a strange animal, which Wild Bill had taken from the camp of the cattle thieves to fill in the gap in an emergency.

After the escape of Wild Bill from the sentinel, whom he had left stunned in front of his own prison, our three friends had ridden all night long until the first faint stirring of the dawn found them camped in a timber but a few miles from the ranch from which most of the cattle had been stolen by the outlaws on the previous night.

As it was yet a very early hour and our friends were tired, they decided not to disturb the rancher until a later hour, employing the interval in giving themselves and their mounts much-needed rest and something to eat.

Wild Bill's Story.

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The three had just finished their rough breakfast and were contentedly smoking their pipes, while the horses grazed in the fresh, green grass of the butte, when Nick Wharton emitted his own peculiar brand of chuckle and said:

"Goldurn it, Wild Billiam, you do beat all the cock-fights I ever seed!"

Wild Bill, who had been strangely reticent and taciturn ever since his escape, only grunted by way of reply.

"Come, out with it, Hickok," said Buffalo Bill, with a laugh. "I really think you owe us some explanation of last night's doings, particularly as we walked three miles in the darkness to do what we could for you."

"Much obliged," said Wild Bill briefly.

"You are entirely welcome," retorted Buffalo Bill, employing a stereotyped, formal phraseology that jarred upon the nerves of Hickok, who was nothing if not unconventional.

"Well," he growled, "I suppose if you put it that way, it is up to me to tell you, at least, how I came to get in that scrap. You seem to know as well as I do, if not a great deal better, how I managed to get out of it."

"Yes, it wur quite a purty little romance," interpolated Nick Wharton.

Wild Bill frowned and Buffalo Bill cast a warning glance at Nick.

"As you know," said Wild Bill, unheeding Nick Wharton's interruption, except as we have already described, "I got this commission from a cousin o' the rancher on this place to come down an' see if I couldn't do something to smash up this cattle-thieving gang.

"The name o' the ranchero is Sanderson, a Britisher, I believe. He is an old man and doesn't know any more about a cow than a hoss knows about a beef-steak. But ranchin' is his fad, an' the main work o' the place is done by an overseer, or boss cowboy, named Rodriguez.

"First thing when I got down here I tumbled to it that Rodriguez was a crook—not a bad one, as crooks go, but a fellow easily led where money is concerned, and more easily where his heart is concerned. Right from the outset I suspected that he was in league with the cattle thieves, who are not blind to the advantage of having a man in the camp who is trusted to the fullest extent by the ranchero.

"But I learned also that Rodriguez had been in the employ of the Silvera Ranch, as it is named, for years, and, therefore, it seemed to me that there must be some good cause for his turning crooked all of a sudden. I did not know the truth until last night when I was—well, goldurn the luck—I was kidnaped!"

"He, he!" chuckled Nick Wharton. "Wild Bill—ham kidnaped! Wuss an' wuss!"

"Be quiet, Wharton," Buffalo Bill admonished.

"I managed to get the information that the cattle thieves intended a raid on the Silvera Ranch to-night."

"To-night?" echoed Buffalo Bill. "It evidently came off very successfully last night."

"Right again; worse luck!" growled Wild Bill. "I was tricked, and that's all there is to it—and by that cunning scoundrel, Rodriguez. Of course, as I told you, old man Sanderson is not wise to anything, and naturally I had to deal with Rodriguez to a considerable extent. It was he that informed me of the proposed raid of the cattle thieves to come off to-night.

"The moment he told me so I knew he was lying, but I decided, particularly as old man Sanderson would hear of nothing else, to get the boys ready for a surprise for the gang when they came along. Sanderson has forty cowboys there.

"But, incidentally, although I am not as strong on the detective bumps as you, Cody, I thought I would see if I couldn't catch Rodriguez with the goods on. Just about dusk last night he started out on foot from the ranch, saying' he was going to do a little detective work himself.

"I suspected this was only a move to get in touch with the gang and discuss the game with them. Of

course, it would be half the battle if I knew just exactly where our side stood, so I followed. That's where friend Rodriguez showed himself a master of cunning.

"He had thrown out that bluff to old man Sander-son about doing a little scouting on his own hook, knowing that I wouldn't believe it, for under the surface that man knew as well as I did that we didn't love one another with a mighty affection, like the love of David and Jonathan, for instance."

Buffalo Bill smiled at the bitter tone employed by his old comrade, and wondered what could have happened to so upset his usual philosophy.

"I suppose Rodriguez guessed right away that I would follow him, for I hadn't more than entered this same butte here, where the gang assembled last night, than I found myself trussed up like a fighting cock. That's all there is to it. The raid was pulled off last night, and the rumor that it was to be to-night had only been circulated as a blind, and to get me out of the way before the real one came off.

"They had a clear field last night, for the boys were taking a good sleep getting ready for the scrap to-day. Only the usual guards were around the steers, and these couldn't cope with the cattle thieves, who swooped down on them like a thunderbolt, killed three of them, and got off with a good bunch of cows be-

fore the others could get out. I suppose they didn't chase 'em far, knowing the start they'd got and that the gang would be pushing for the border like hell bent for election.

"This is no feather in my cap, Buffalo Bill," added Wild Bill savagely, "but I was hampered with a lot of greasers, and what could one man do against that crowd? Now that you and Nick are here, however, I won't rest until I've either landed the bunch where they belong or have 'em strung up in the nearest timber butte."

Having finished his recital of his defeat, Wild Bill swore many strange oaths and then relapsed into taciturn silence.

"But how about the woman?" asked Buffalo Bill, indifferently. "Where does she come in?"

"Meaning as how?" demanded Wild Bill, with a tinge of anger in his tone.

"Bill Hickok," said Buffalo Bill sternly, "you and I have been pards for a long time, and by this time you ought to know better than to suppose that I am trying to interfere with your private affairs. When I ask about this woman, it is simply with regard to her connection with this gang and possibly with this Rodriguez."

"All right, Bill," said Hickok. "I'm a bit crusty about things to-day, and——"

"I don't blame you, Hickok," said Buffalo Bill.

"I knew you wouldn't," said Wild Bill, considerably mollified. "I'll tell you about the girl, and you'll understand right at the beginning that it isn't my fault if she's gone, and——"

"That'll do, Bill," said Cody. "I want to hear about her connection with the gang. That's all."

"Well," said Wild Bill, "the boss of that outfit is a dare-devil adventurer named Luzimo. The girl is his sister, and her name is Rosario. Luzimo is a pure Castilian, but a scapegrace son of some family in the city of Mexico. He broke the heart of his father, who was a widower, and afterward got into a duel with some grandee, whom he killed. He had to fly the coop, and as his sister Rosario was alone in the world, he took her along with him.

"I do believe the fellow has a sneaking kind of affection for the girl, but he loves himself better than anything else in the world, and, when he became a cattle thief, he found her in the way. Still, she has been playing the game with him for two years now, and seemed to enjoy the adventure and excitement all right until a few weeks ago when Luzimo got his eye upon old man Sanderson's stock.

"The Silvera cattle are the best in the country, and Luzimo wanted them bad for his agents across the

Mexican border, where the cows are shipped right to the city and sold at fancy prices as Silvera beef. The girl was used to the game, and was not surprised at the proposal to sack Silvera Ranch until she heard the conditions laid down by Rodriguez.

"The overseer had been brought to the camp of the gang—practically forced to come—and there he was offered a good round sum to lend his aid. He refused at first, but afterward, when he saw Rosario, I suppose the idea entered his head of using his advantage to win the girl's hand.

"The proposition was put up to Luzimo, who wanted to shoot Rodriguez for his nerve, but presently the avarice in the man conquered his scruples, and he agreed that if Rodriguez would arrange for the haul of a good number of the Silvera stock, and also be the inside agent of the gang on the border ranches, where the overseer has considerable influence, Rosario would be his.

"The girl was not consulted at all, and, as a matter of fact, she resented the advances made by Rodriguez at first. But later, when she saw that her brother wished to get rid of her in a half-honorable fashion, she became resigned, or, at least, pretended to be willing to fill her end of the contract. That is how Rodriguez and the girl came into the deal. She was a good friend to me when I was trussed up on that horse, and

a better friend when she cut me loose behind the rocks. That's all."

"But, say, Billiam," Nick Wharton suddenly asked, with a gleam of devilish humor in his eyes, "whar do you come in? That wur a durned purty sight down the——"

For answer, and before Buffalo Bill could interfere, Wild Bill drew a revolver from his belt and leveled it at Nick Wharton's head.

"Well, I'll be goldurned!" gasped Nick Wharton, although he showed not the slightest trace of fear.

"Nick, old man," said Wild Bill fiercely, "if you saw a girl make a fool of herself when she thought nobody else was looking, it isn't for you to discuss it."

With that vocal shot, Wild Bill shoved the revolver back in his belt, and, rising to his feet, walked off in silence to his horse, upon which he fastened the saddle. The other two followed his example.

Just as they were about to mount, Buffalo Bill turned to Nick Wharton and said:

"Nick, old man, you were wrong. That's Bill's affair, not yours or mine."

To Wild Bill he said:

"Hickok, Wharton's not strong on tact. He's a bit blunt at times. You were dead right, but Nick and you will shake and forget it."

Wild Bill turned around and held out his hand. Nick grabbed it in his own horny paw.

"I'm durned sorry, Billiam," said he honestly. "Tell 'e the truth I didn't know ye had a heart, an' mine's sorter dead sence Mirandy—but say, we're chasin' cattle thieves, ain't we?"

At that they all laughed.

For the first time in many a long year the sparks had been flying in the camp of the three comrades, but that little difference of opinion served to heighten their respect for one another.

CHAPTER V.

NICK WHARTON ON WARFARE.

To say that Major Sanderson, as the English owner of the Silvera Ranch was named, was overjoyed, not to say surprised, to see Wild Bill return alive, would be to put it very mildly.

He had been awakened from his sleep the night before by the sound of shooting out on the plain, and had at once come to the conclusion that a fight was in progress between the cowboys and the cattle thieves.

The old major at once dispatched a servant to the quarters which had temporarily been assigned to Wild Bill, only to find that he was absent.

Later in the night, however, Rodriguez returned to the ranch suffering from several wounds, which he said he had acquired in a single-handed fight with some of the cattle thieves whom he had encountered near the timber butte. Wild Bill, he said, had been killed.

When Major Sanderson heard this astonishing and terrible news he was in despair. The Britisher had always had a longing for free life and fresh air, and had torn himself away from the insipid society of London drawing-rooms to Texas, hoping that there he might find enough to interest and excite him for the rest of his years.

Nick Wharton on Warfare.

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As a matter of fact, he had found a great deal too much of this kind of thing. First the cattle thieves had stolen his stock; now they seemed determined to wipe out the owners and guardians of the stock.

The old major was not a bit scared at the idea of a fight at any or all times, but as each misfortune came along the Britisher began to chafe at his own lack of knowledge and experience of Texas and Texas ways, with side information on the manners and customs of Mexican greasers.

The old major, who had stormed the redan at Sebastopol, would have given a good few of his plentiful English thousands to get into the middle of a thick fight, but this sneaking in the dark and assassinating individuals was not like war to him.

"My dear fellah," said the major to Colonel Cody, whom he singled out on account of his military rank and for other reasons, when Wild Bill had introduced the scout and old Nick Wharton; "my dear fellah, you do have such a doocid funny way of fighting over here. I am glad to see our friend Hickok back—inexpressibly gratified—but it isn't his fault that he hasn't come back with a bullet in his system. Now he is one of the generals of this campaign against the cattle thieves, isn't he?"

"I suppose he deserves the title, anyway," said Buf-

falo Bill, with a laugh that made Wild Bill look rather sheepish for a moment.

"Well, then," blustered the fiery British major, warming up to the subject in hand, "what the devil do these fellahs mean by shooting at generals? It isn't fair! It isn't war! If they want to shoot the generals, let them meet us in the open field and do it like gentleman, demme!"

At this old Nick Wharton cleared his throat and said:

"I dunno ef Gen'ral Nicholas Wharton hez got a call to shove in his pipe here, but—with all doo respecter the British army, as represented by ther major hyar—I do feel like p'intin' out thet the conditions o' warfare is difrint ez the sarcumstances is difrint."

"Bravo, General Wharton!" cried Buffalo Bill, who had never heard Nick utter such an elegant speech before in all his acquaintance with him.

But, unfortunately, Nick presently spoiled the elegance of his oration.

"Ez I wur sayin', conditions and sarcumstances differ. In this case the sarcumstances is wuss'n hoss or cattle stealin'. It ain't no warfare at all, but jest plain stickin' in the dark, an' ef ye want ter make warfare outer it, yer conditions hez jest gotter be the same as theirs. You three gen'als can go out in ther open field an' get plugged ef ye wants ter, but Gen'ral Nick'las

Wharton ain't no sech fool possum ez that. Me and Mrs. Gen'ral Diana believes in killin' greasers whenever we run acrost them. Injuns is pizen, as I allers said, but greasers is wuss'n pizen—wuss'n cactus f'r a sore throat. Greasers is wuss'n dead buzzard—waugh!"

Having delivered his soul of his inelegant but comprehensive definition of Mexican greasers, Nick Wharton filled his pipe and went out to see how Diana liked Silvera Ranch.

"Excuse me," said Major Sanderson, after Nick Wharton had taken his departure, "your friend is rather—er—peculiar, to say the least of it. He employs the most extraordinary language—most extraordinary, b' Jove."

"Where is Rodriguez?" Wild Bill suddenly asked, without heeding the major's remark about the peculiarities of Nick Wharton.

"Rodriguez?" echoed the British rancher. "Why, that fellow is a wonder."

"That's what he is," said Buffalo Bill dryly.

"A most indefatigable worker for my interests. Wounded as he was when he returned last night, he immediately insisted upon saddling a fresh horse and going off in pursuit of the cattle thieves."

Cody and Hickok exchanged swift glances. Rodriguez was evidently up to some new game, for they

were perfectly well aware that the Mexican overseer had not followed the cattle thieves at all.

Up to the present Wild Bill and his companion had said nothing that would have opened the eyes of Major Sanderson to the perfidy of his chief executive, and Wild Bill was just about to tell him the truth when the major suddenly pointed from the piazza of the ranch house out to the plain where the cattle were browsing in the sunshine.

"There is the faithful fellow now, if I am not mistaken," he said.

Buffalo Bill and Hickok shaded their eyes. They could see a horseman cantering slowly toward the house.

"I do not wish that man to see me," said Wild Bill suddenly, entering the ranch house and standing just inside the door. "My friend Cody will do the talking with that fellow, if you please, Major Sanderson."

The major looked surprised, not so much at what Wild Bill had said, but at the tone which he employed.

"Very well, sir," he said.

Presently Rodriguez rode up to the house and dismounted. He looked fatigued, as did his horse, which was hanging its head as if it had been ridden for a long distance, and hard at that.

"Rodriguez," said Major Sanderson, as the overseer came up the steps to the piazza, "this is Colonel Cody,

of whom we have heard so much. He has come to help us wipe out the cattle-thief pest."

The sudden start of alarm that Rodriguez gave did not fail to escape the notice of Buffalo Bill, although the chivalrous knight of the plains, strange to say, quite failed to notice the cordial hand that Rodriguez extended to him.

"I am pleased—very pleased—to meet you," said Buffalo Bill coldly. "Perhaps you can tell me what has become of my friend and comrade Wild Bill Hickok?"

"Ah, señor," said the overseer with well-feigned sorrow, "your friend and comrade, it grieves me to tell you, has suffered at the hands of the cattle thieves."

"You don't mean that," said Cody, feigning an alarm which he had good reason not to feel.

"As I said before, it grieves me much, señor, but, as man to man, I must tell you of his sad fate."

"You mean that he is dead?" cried Cody.

"*Si, señor,*" said the Mexican, lowering his head to hide the smile of triumph that for a moment illumined his sinister features. "But rest assured, señor, that he died like a man at his post of duty. He and I together met the thieves after their unexpected raid upon the ranch, while they were driving the cattle to the border. Had we been better prepared for the encounter things might have turned out differently. As it

was, I only escaped with my worthless life, leaving your friend dead in the timber butte about seven miles from here."

"I think that proves him a liar and a deceiver to your entire satisfaction," said Wild Bill, emerging, revolver in hand, from behind the ranch door and addressing Major Sanderson, who had been listening to Rodriguez with amazement depicted upon his face.

The overseer turned a peculiarly green color when he saw Wild Bill standing in the doorway. It was impossible to tell whether he thought he saw a ghost or feared the businesslike Colt which Wild Bill was in the act of cocking.

Quick as thought, however, the hot-blooded Mexican whipped out a revolver, hoping, perhaps, to convince Sanderson of his integrity by this show of insulted honor.

But the major, who had heard enough to convince him that either Rodriguez, or Wild Bill, or Buffalo Bill was a liar of the first water, stepped in between the two men, and sternly commanded them to explain the matter.

"This man," said Buffalo Bill, "has betrayed the confidence you reposed in him, sir. He it was who arranged the raid of the cattle thieves to come off one night sooner than it was expected, from the information which he cunningly supplied you with as a blind.

He it was who lured Wild Bill to the timber butte and caused him to be carried off by the cattle thieves, with whom he is in league and has been for some time."

As if his eyes were suddenly opened to a number of things upon which a different construction might have been placed, the major's face suddenly blazed with anger.

Before either Buffalo Bill or Wild Bill could have prevented him—even had they wished to do so—the major's fist shot out and Rodriguez was treated to a British smash right between the eyes.

The Mexican fell down the steps of the ranch house with a howl of rage which quickly changed to a Spanish curse as he scrambled to his feet, with the blood streaming from his face, and leveled his revolver at the head of his employer.

But before he could pull the trigger the quick hand of Buffalo Bill was before him. There was a sudden explosion, and the revolver dropped from the injured hand of Rodriguez.

With a scream of pain the Mexican grabbed his wrist and, whining like a beaten cur, he turned and ran toward the horse, which was still panting where he had left it. Just as he had with difficulty scrambled into the saddle, the voice of Nick Wharton chuckled from behind the barrel of a long gas-pipe rifle.

"Will ye let the cuss go or shall I plug him afore he gets out o' range, major?"

"No, let him go," fumed the major. "He is not worth a shot."

"Anything that is as pizen as greasers is wuth a dozen shots," said Nick Wharton, lowering his rifle in disgust.

"Say, major," the old trapper added, "that was a great wallop ye guv him on his yaller face. Ye see sarcumstances alters the conditions o' warfare. Guess Gen'ral Wharton wins on that p'int. But I dunno but that ye ought ter hav let me plug that galoot in the back. He's gone to hatch up more mischief."

"Not a bit," said Buffalo Bill. "That man's power is broken. Having lost his advantage as overseer here, Luzimo, the cattle chief, will regard him as nothing more than one of his own ruffians. As for Rosario, I think she will be delivered from his odious attentions now that the brother can get nothing for them."

"At the same time," said Wild Bill, "that man is a clever crook. I bet you he is gone right to the Luzimo camp with some new lie or some new scheme, which I think I can circumvent."

"How will you manage it?" asked Major Sanderson.

"Wait and see," was the terse reply of Wild Bill.

And Buffalo Bill knew better than to urge the point

CHAPTER VI.

WITH THE CATTLE THIEVES.

A few hours later Rodriguez might have been seen in the camp of Luzimo and the cattle thieves, just over the Mexican border line. He was seated in the tent which was erected to the honor of the chief wherever he pitched his roving camp.

Luzimo and Rodriguez were in close conversation about something which may be easily guessed, particularly as the rage of Rodriguez pointed to the recounting of a tale that did not redound to the credit and prospects of either the late overseer or the chief of the cattle thieves.

"How in the name of a thousand devils did that Hickok escape?" Rodriguez demanded, hoping that by this defense he might be able to throw some of the blame for the general catastrophe upon the gang and Luzimo himself.

"I cannot tell, worse luck!" fumed Luzimo. "That fool who let him go has not yet recovered consciousness. It may have been he who cut the ropes."

"Pah!" retorted Rodriguez. "Does it seem consistent that a man like Wild Bill would strike down his deliverer?"

"No, no, señor—no, no," added the disgruntled overseer; "there is another hand behind this."

"It may have been this Buffalo Bill, who trailed us and watched his chance to liberate his friend," suggested Luzimo.

That he was quite near to the truth the reader knows, and that he would have been perfectly right in the surmise that Wild Bill's friends had been to the rescue, had it not been for the accident of chance that brought Rosario into the scene first.

"Whether it was Buffalo Bill or some traitor in this camp, I do not know—or much care, señor," said Rodriguez savagely, "except that I mean to get my revenge for the insult and humiliation offered me to-day."

"What can you do?" asked Luzimo. "You have lost your advantage on the Texas side. There is nothing for you to do now except become one of the gang. You have done good business for the gang—not forgetting your own interests—and I suppose you have the right, at least, to share and share alike with us. You had better give up these ideas of revenge for the present, and become one of us in truth."

"Of course, that was my first intention," replied Rodriguez. "I am ready and willing to marry the fair Rosario, and then—"

"Well," said Luzimo calmly, "the situation is a bit

changed now, and I can hardly force my sister into marrying a man whom she hates, I have reason to believe, when there is no advantage to be gained by either of us in such a contract."

Rodriguez turned upon the chief of the cattle thieves as a viper turns at the whiplash.

"And so," he almost shrieked, "now that you think there is nothing left to be got out of me, Manuel Luzimo, you break your contract! But, wait. Presently you will change your tone, señor. Do not think for a moment that your friend Rodriguez accepts defeat as easily as that! You do not suppose that all the way from the Silvera Ranch, while my wrist was paining like a thousand fires and my face was bleeding from the blow of that cursed Englishman, that my brain was not at work. Ha, friend Luzimo, you have yet to know more of me!"

"What do you mean—that you have some scheme for revenge that will be of benefit to both of us?"

"Exactly."

"What is it?"

"Aha!" sneered Rodriguez, "I knew that you would begin to sing a more gentle, plaintive air when you saw something yet to be gained out of me. But, before I utter a word, you and I have to come to an agreement."

"What is your complaint now?" demanded Luzimo. "Have I not treated you fair?"

"Sometimes," was the bitter answer. "Were it not that by nature I can make myself a factor in whatever I lay my hand to, you would throw me back now like a worn-out glove. Listen to me," he went on: "How much did you haul on the last lot from the Silvera Ranch?"

"Three thousand dollars," was the reply.

"Good!" said Rodriguez. "You will please hand over to me a thousand dollars."

"You ask too much," said Luzimo, with a laugh.

"Unless you immediately turn over the gold, I will raise it to fifteen hundred," was the equally calm retort.

"Why this importunity?" asked Luzimo, with a sudden gleam of anger in his face. "You cannot play with me, Señor Rodriguez."

"Nor you with me, Señor Luzimo. I hold the winning hand."

"How so?"

"If I am any judge of the Silvera cattle, I should think that not only did you receive at least the sum you have mentioned, but an appreciative request for a further lot of the same brand. Is it not so?"

"You guess well, señor," replied Luzimo, "but what

good is that to us now that you have not the advantage of the English rancher's confidence?"

"What good? Señor Luzimo seems to think that my brains have been woolgathering. I foresaw the request for more of the Silvera stock, which is the best in the country. I have already prepared for all that, and am ready to unfold my plan when you turn over that money and renew your promise of the hand of Rosario."

For answer Luzimo arose to his feet and took a bag of leather from a small pack which stood in a corner of his tent. He flung the bag to Rodriguez, into whose hands it fell with a suggestive, chinking sound.

"And Rosario," said Rodriguez, with the lust of love and gold in his eyes.

"She's yours," replied the brutal-hearted brother; "she's yours as soon as this raid is carried off successfully. Tell me your plan."

Rodriguez hesitated a moment, as if he felt a lingering distrust of the cattle thief, but seemingly came to the conclusion that to doubt him further, to his face, would not help matters any. He unfolded his scheme for the raiding of the Silvera Ranch a second time.

"Last time I tricked them back there on the plains I did it in a very daring fashion. I told them of the intended raid myself, and put them on their guard on every detail of the proposed attack except for the one

small point on which I misled them—the exact night when the raid was to come off.”

“It was a clever ruse,” said Luzimo, nodding his head and while he rolled and lighted a Mexican cigarette.

“This time, of course, we would not dare to raid the Silvera Ranch so soon after the first daring coup. Does not that seem clear enough to you?”

“It does,” said Luzimo. “I must admit that it would be almost foolhardiness to attack the same ranch two or three days after the first raid.”

“Exactly,” chuckled Rodriguez. “That is just what they are thinking down on the plains. In fact, the ranchers for miles are preparing themselves in the expectation of their being next. At the Silvera Ranch such a daring repetition is not dreamed of, and that is just why we are going to do it.”

Luzimo jumped to his feet and shook hands with the cunning Rodriguez.

“Splendid!” he cried. “You will forgive me, Rodriguez, for my previous behavior. I now see that even if you have lost an advantage to the gang, the gang cannot suffer by the presence of such a strategic genius. When do you propose I carry out this scheme?”

“The sooner the better,” was the reply. “Why not to-night? I am positive that coming on the top of

last night’s raid they are looking for no trouble to-night. There are a good three hundred cattle out on the plain at the present moment. We will let the vaqueros round them up to save us the trouble of doing so, and then just as the herd is together you can make the dash. A few shots and then—drive like the wind for the border!”

“Good!” cried Luzimo, his face afire with the excitement of his imagination. “Good! It cannot fail, Rodriguez.”

“But remember,” added the scoundrel of an overseer, “remember that if you fail me, I will kill you!”

“Two can play at that,” laughed the handsome Spaniard; “but why need two friends talk of killing?”

“And the girl is mine?”

“The moment this raid is carried off successfully, Rosario will be yours.”

Had the tent door been open, the two plotters would have seen the face of Rosario close to the canvas, burning with a determination that if her honor depended upon the success of the raid, the latter would be a dismal failure.

CHAPTER VII.

BUFFALO BILL'S CHECKMATE.

Buffalo Bill, Major Sanderson, and Nick Wharton were seated on the piazza of the Mexican ranch house on the afternoon of the same day. Wild Bill was not there, but the three men were watching a horseman who was galloping toward them, but taking pains not to show whence he had come or what was his exact route.

The rider, whoever he was, kept dodging in and out of the small timber buttes that were numerous in the well-watered section of the ranch around the house. All at once Major Sanderson, who had been watching the horseman through a pair of field glasses, laid them down and said:

"Ah! it is a peon servant of my neighbor—I mean my nearest neighbor, who lives fifteen miles away. He must have sent me some message, and I should not be at all surprised if it concerns the cattle thieves."

Presently the peon rode up to the house. He did not stop in front of the piazza where our friends were sitting, but rode around to the yard, or compound, to the rear, without so much as honoring our friends with a salute.

Buffalo Bill's Checkmate.

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Presently, however, another servant came through from the rear of the ranch house and held out a letter to Major Sanderson, who opened it and read as follows:

"DEAR SANDERSON: I want you to be on the qui vive. I have it on good authority that Luzimo and his gang are planning another raid for to-night. I learn from the same reliable source, which I have sworn not to divulge, that the place is likely to be my ranch here. After what happened to you last night I am sure that you and the redoubtable Northern friends, who are staying with you, will be glad of this chance for a scrap with those thieving greasers. Boot and saddle, and get here before dusk.

"Yours, et cetera, J. DIXON."

"Huh!" said Sanderson. "We are getting daring, eh?"

As he spoke he passed the letter to Buffalo Bill, who read it with a keen look on his handsome face.

"You are well acquainted with this Mr. Dixon?" he asked, when he had finished reading.

"Oh, yes," said Sanderson. "He also is a Britisher, and birds of a feather, you know."

"I see," said Buffalo Bill, in a tone that meant that he saw something. "Who is this man who brought the message?"

"A very decent fellow, I believe," replied Sander-

son, fixing a monocle in his eye and surveying Buffalo Bill in surprise.

"You believe?" echoed Buffalo Bill. "If you will pardon my saying so, it was believing too much in what your supposed friend Mr. Dixon calls 'those thieving greasers' that is responsible for the loss sustained last night."

"My supposed friend Mr. Dixon!" shouted Sanderson. "Why, sir, what the devil do you mean?"

"Hush, not so loud. This supposed faithful servant, who brought the letter, is undoubtedly listening with all his ears."

"Supposed faithful——" began Sanderson. "Excuse me, sir," he added helplessly. "Will you please explain? Certainly, the conditions of warfare in this country are peculiar."

A chuckle from Nick Wharton was the only comment on the latter remark anent warfare. The old trapper had been sitting smoking his pipe in silence, but with a sharp eye turned askew upon Buffalo Bill, as if he were paying keen attention to what the scout was saying.

As Nick Wharton became aware that the major was glaring at him, he tried to turn the drift of things back to the letter in the hands of the border king.

"Go ahead, Buffler, you're on the right trail."

Now Buffalo Bill was certain of what he was say-

ing, and thinking about that letter himself, but he had only hesitated for fear of wounding the major's feelings with regard to his friend, Mr. Dixon. Nick Wharton's opinion, however, so coincided with his that he decided there and then to try and explain things to the fiery Britisher.

"Major Sanderson," said Cody, "I have not the slightest doubt in my mind that your friend Dixon is all you say he is, and probably more of a fine fellow than you have troubled to describe him. At the same time, is it not possible that just at this moment the strong friendship, which you say exists between you, may have been used as a decoy, and that this letter was written by some one among the cattle thieves who is acquainted with Mr. Dixon's style of writing and dictation—some one who is acquainted with both of you?"

"Nonsense!" said the major, a little testily. "I recognize the handwriting. I could not be deceived in such a small particular. Besides that, this peon is his trusted servant, and I have no doubt that he obtained the letter directly from the hands of Dixon himself."

"You would have only the man's word for it. However," added Buffalo Bill, whose detective instinct was as strong as ever it had been, "we will let that go as one of the small particulars, about which you make a serious mistake, major. It is the small particulars

that are of the first importance in a matter like this. We are dealing with a clever rascal somewhere, and that rascal is Rodriguez, if I am not mistaken. Do you happen to have any other letters written by Mr. Dixon?"

"I have," said Sanderson, "and will show them to you, for I think the sooner you get rid of this crazy idea the better. We can't fight the cattle thieves until we stop suspecting our friends, and the friends get together."

So saying, the fiery major stamped into the ranch house and presently emerged with several letters in his hand, including the envelopes in which they had been inclosed.

The first thing Buffalo Bill noticed as he took them was that the flaps of the Dixon letters had scarcely been broken in the opening of them.

"I see your friend Dixon is one of the men who seal their letters with a lick and a stick," observed the border detective, with a smile.

"I have often spoken to him about that. Peon's apt to read 'em," said Sanderson.

"He must have taken your advice for once," said Cody, holding up the warning letter. "He has sealed this very carefully from corner to corner."

The Britisher knitted his brows. What was Buffalo Bill driving at?

"Your friend seems also to have a special taste in note paper," continued Colonel Cody, with a laugh, pointing to the similarity in the quality and texture and watermarking of the paper used in the Dixon letters.

"I am afraid that Mr. Dixon must have run out of paper when he wrote this last letter, although why he should use a paper which is exactly the same in appearance, with the only difference that it is not the same paper at all, is rather remarkable when we come to consider that such an imitation must be as different for your friend to get as it is easy for him to get his own favorite kind."

The major turned, and, screwing the monocle tight into his eye, regarded Buffalo Bill with a note of interrogation that needed no voicing.

"Briefly, Major Sanderson," said Buffalo Bill, "this letter is, as I at first supposed, a clever forgery, for, besides the things which I have pointed out to you, there are several other small points which conclusively prove this, the main one being that, although to the eye at first glance these letters were all written by the same person, it will be noticed that, besides using an imitation of his ordinary note paper, your friend Mr. Dixon has kept in line with the rest of the missive by using an imitation of his usual handwriting."

Buffalo Bill then pointed out a few of the simple

for the one that is to conceal the gang later on. Hello, who is this? Wild Bill, if I am not mistaken."

The man to whom Buffalo Bill referred was cantering with indifferent gait toward the ranch house.

"It is Wild Bill," said Sanderson. "He appears to have given up his suspicions of a further attack and is at present engaged in giving an eye to the ranch, until I can get a new overseer. Unfortunately, I am too old physically, if not in spirit, to do anything so violent as cow-punching."

Buffalo Bill smiled, for, although he felt sorry for the old, hot-headed major, the fact that he was too old for violent pursuits insured that he would be out of the way when the real trouble began, and, besides that, the thought of Wild Bill settling down to quiet ranching amused the scout, who knew it was a bluff of some kind.

As soon as Wild Bill had reined up in front of the ranch, the major proceeded to communicate to him, as overseer, what Buffalo Bill's suspicions were with regard to the Dixon letter and the supposed treachery of the robbers' movements.

Wild Bill listened with the usual taciturnity, which had been peculiarly marked ever since he had met his friends in the border gulch after his delivery from the hands of the thieves by Rosario.

When Sanderson had finished telling his story, not

without a degree of sarcasm in his manner of narration, which tended to indicate that he for one did not agree with Colonel Cody, Hickok relighted his pipe in silence, and much to the surprise of every one, and of Major Sanderson in particular, he said:

"Buffalo Bill is right—dead right. He has hit the nail right on the head, and it is more credit to him, because he sized up the situation, while I didn't tumble to it until I had the right information delivered into my hands in black and white."

"What do you mean?" cried the major.

For answer Wild Bill drew a small, neatly folded missive from his pocket and handed it to the major without a word:

The Britisher unfolded it and read:

"To-night, *querido mio*, they will again attack the Silvera. They will first try to convince you that an attack is to be made upon the Dixon Ranch, hoping to draw off your men. Do not believe this, but lay your plans accordingly. You know who writes—and why. Would I deceive you?"

"And—and who wrote this?" stammered the major.

"A woman wrote it," replied Wild Bill, with a certain sadness in his tone; "I cannot tell you further."

The major stared at Wild Bill as if he thought a woman in the case was the most mysterious thing that

could happen—as it was really—in those wilds traversed by few.

"The ways of warfare, demme," said the Britisher, "are the strangest here I ever heard of."

And Nick Wharton, sitting on the piazza rail at the other end of the house, simply quivered with suppressed laughter.

But Colonel Cody was regarding his taciturn comrade, Wild Bill, with a certain sadness of expression and wondering what sentiment existed between the iron-hearted frontiersman and the little Rosario.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIGHT BEGINS.

About an hour before the dusk of that eventful day Wild Bill emerged from a long conference with his comrades and Major Sanderson in the house of the Silvera Ranch, and prepared to mount his horse for the last round-up of the steers. Buffalo Bill came with him to the piazza and said to him:

"Well, old man, let's shake over it. I have an idea that we are in for a hot night in more senses than one. I see the weather is gathering for a bad thunderstorm, but that will be the least of it when we come to tackle that gang, not knowing how many traitors are among our own vaqueros. Good-by and good luck."

Wild Bill took the proffered hand and wrung it in silence.

"I haven't got much heart to-night, Cody. I have a feeling that something is going wrong somewhere—I mean with our plans," he added hurriedly.

Buffalo Bill, still holding his comrade's hand, laid the other on Wild Bill's shoulder.

"Hickok," he said quietly, "you and I have been ards for many a young year. Come—out with it.

You know it's safe with me, and we always understood one another. It isn't unmanly. You know I've been there myself several times."

Wild Bill turned and looked at the dim hills on the border where the dark thunderclouds were passing.

"It isn't that, Cody," he said sadly. "If I were in love with the girl it might be better, but the trouble is that I'm not. I'll tell you, old pard, what is worrying me. This little woman is one of the best ever. She happens to have a brute of a brother who would sell her to a greaser for a hundred dollars. I have reason to believe that she has taken a fancy of some sort to me. Although I don't see why I should worry about it under the circumstances, I feel that it is my duty to take her out of that hole.

"But the question is, once having rescued a girl who has shown me that she—well, likes me, what am I to do with her? You know what my life has been, Cody. You know that the call of the frontier is too strong in me to allow of this girl's being happy, particularly when the only sentiment I have for her is one of pity and respect. There's the trouble, but, by Heaven, if I get a line on that brother I'll shoot him dead!"

"Then it will be 'Hobson's choice' between you and the girl. Better leave it on the knees of the gods for

the present, Hickok," added Buffalo Bill. "We have our work cut out for to-night, I fancy."

"Yes, I'm a fool," said Wild Bill, suddenly straightening up. "Remember, then, the moment old Sanderson flashes the light three times you will know that the cattle are rounded up and that the attack will follow almost immediately. You will see them from your point of vantage, if you find one, but, as I understand it, you will immediately ride in anyhow when the lights go."

"That's it exactly," said Buffalo Bill. "Now, good-by, and leave the rest to fate, Hickok."

"I will," said Hickok, as he swung himself into the saddle and rode off in the direction of the herd.

Buffalo Bill watched him go with a queer look in his eyes; then turned and swiftly reentered the house. Nick Wharton was waiting inside for him, ready to mount his old Diana. The trapper had the light of battle in his eye, and his horny hands lovingly clutched the old gas-pipe rifle.

"Goldurn it, Buffler!" he said. "They think they're goin' ter have a walk-over to-night. He, he! Guess me an Diana's goin' ter make 'em smell hell on a ghost hoss!"

Buffalo Bill carefully examined the locks of his pistols and rifle, and then turned to Major Sanderson, who was standing by, bareheaded, but with a look in

his eyes that denoted that he would like to be in the skirmishing party instead of remaining at home as the director general of battle.

"Is all ready?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Everything, Colonel Cody," was the reply. "You are doing a daring thing, but it is the life of a soldier of fortune."

"It has been mine for twenty years," was the laughing response.

The three men shook hands, Buffalo Bill remarking to the major that he would look for the lights the moment the cattle were rounded up, so that he would know when to expect the attack in case he and Nick Wharton failed to locate the gang of cattle thieves beforehand.

Presently Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton, at the head of about twelve vaqueros of the Silvera Ranch, rode out in the direction of the Dixon property. Buffalo Bill had arranged this move for a double reason.

First, the cattle thieves, who would probably be spying upon every movement of the Silvera party, would believe that the major was leading his men to the rescue of Dixon from the supposed raid on the latter's ranch.

And, in the second place, it was the border king's purpose to get a line on the whereabouts of the gang's hiding place, and play them at their own game

of watching, once they were deceived as to where the party of men had really gone instead of to Dixon's.

As a matter of fact, Buffalo Bill had already fixed in his eye the timber butte in which the gang were concealed. He had watched carefully all the afternoon, and seen no sign of the thieves emerging from the Mexican border at any point of the low foothills.

He, therefore, surmised, and correctly, too, that if they had come out at all they must have done so directly at a spot where a timber butte stood between the vision and the border. They could have crept up—and the thieves really had—directly in the line of that butte and concealed themselves there.

It was now Buffalo Bill's plan to ride in the direction of Dixon's, to a spot about two miles away, where another timber butte would cover up their supposed trail.

Once he and his men got behind that timber, the scout knew that they could stop behind it, and the gang in the other timber would be none the wiser that they were not still traveling in the direction of Dixon's.

It was a game of six and half a dozen, or diamond cut diamond. The vaqueros whom Buffalo Bill had chosen from the major's retinue were all men who

were believed to be honest to the cause of their employer, but, in order to run no risks of betrayal, Buffalo Bill had not told them what their orders were. He had simply given the order through the major for them to saddle up, and he himself had led them out into the dusk, while Wild Bill, in order to still further deceive the raiders, had gone out alone to attend to the round-up of the steers.

Once Buffalo Bill and his party reached the timber butte which hid the Dixon trail from the gang in the other timber, Cody ordered a halt, and, leaving the party in charge of Nick Wharton, he himself advanced on foot into the trees.

He had gone hardly ten yards before a hand and arm shot out of the brush and a low voice said:

"Another step, Buffalo Bill, and you are a dead man!"

Colonel Cody laughed softly, which seemed to disconcert the man in the brush, for he stepped out, and, still pointing his weapon at the scout's head, waited as if for Buffalo Bill to speak first.

"I thought as much," said the latter calmly. "They were determined to make no mistake, so Rodriguez, who knew of this timber and its strategic possibilities, sent you here to watch that we played no trick."

The man stared at Buffalo Bill in dismay. He realized suddenly that he had made a mistake in let-

ting Buffalo Bill become aware of his presence, when he could have signaled the gang of what was doing.

Buffalo Bill seemed to divine his thoughts, for he said:

"Of course, you understand that if the pistol in your hand should go off—which, under the circumstances, I hardly think it will—you would stand a very poor chance with my men out there of getting back to your friends alive. Incidentally, you would spoil the fine plan of Rodriguez and Luzimo by provoking a fight too soon, thus ruining the cattle game, which is not due until the cattle are rounded up."

The cattle thief growled in his exasperation at his own lack of foresight in this respect.

"You will please put away that pistol, then, and do as I tell you," were Buffalo Bill's next daring words. "Figuratively speaking, I have the drop."

The man realized it and lowered the weapon with a curse.

"Will you please tell me," said Cody, with polite sarcasm, "what the agreed signals are?"

The man's eye brightened, for he saw a chance of getting the danger signal to his friends without compromising himself with Buffalo Bill, who, by the way, did not fail to notice the look and understand it.

"The signal for 'all clear,'" said the cattle thief,

"was to be a serape waved up and down. If you stopped here it was to be from right to left."

Buffalo Bill smiled.

"I think you make a mistake," he said coolly. "Anyhow, I should hate to deceive your friends. Suppose you give them the signal that we have stopped here. You will wave the serape right and left."

The look of disgust and annoyance on the man's face convinced Buffalo Bill that the waving right and left meant the very opposite, and that the man had deceived him. Now, if the serape was waved that way, the thieves would believe that the field was all clear.

A moment later Buffalo Bill and his brainless captor were at the edge of the timber looking toward the gang's hiding place. Buffalo Bill had now a revolver pointed at the head of the cattle thief. The man had a loose serape in his hand.

"Unless you tell them by signal that we have 'stopped,'" said Buffalo Bill humorously, "I shall have to stop you. Waving the serape in any way other than from right to left will be fatal to your prospects."

"All right, señor," said the man. "I lied, and you are more clever than Rodriguez even."

"Thanks. Now wave!"

The man did so. Immediately a serape was to be seen waving in similar fashion from the distant timber

butte. At the same time a growl of thunder arose from the hills on the Mexican border.

"I am afraid that your friends are in for a difficult task to-night," said Buffalo Bill. "With the disadvantage of a surprise awaiting them they will find it hard work to drive cattle, with a thunderstorm making the latter crazy."

"That is so, señor."

"That being so, as you say," said Buffalo Bill, "I think the best thing you can do is to turn honest in your present dilemma and join our side. I will guarantee you safety when this is over, and your companions are being strung up."

The Mexican was clearly impressed with Buffalo Bill's manner, for he said simply:

"I thank you, señor. I accept."

Buffalo Bill then allowed the man to bring up his horse, which had been hidden in the brush, and afterward conducted him to where Nick Wharton and his men were waiting.

Having done this, the scout presently returned to the edge of the timber, where he could watch the movements of the gang. The darkness was now falling rapidly, hastened on by the fast-gathering thunderstorm, which was sending out rumbling warnings, but as yet no lightning.

From his point of vantage the border king could

see the ranch house and the gang's hiding place, but a low hillock on the prairie hid the herd and Wild Bill from view.

Presently, while Buffalo Bill was surveying the scene of battle, the figure of a man arose from the hillock and started to run as fast as he could toward the timber clump where the cattle thieves were watching.

"Something happened," muttered Buffalo Bill, "or, perhaps, that is their scout. I wish the major would light up."

The man presently reached midway between the hillock at the butte, when Colonel Cody suddenly saw a number of mounted men steal out from the timber and form up in a body. They apparently knew what message the man was bringing and were ready.

Almost at the same moment the keen eyes of Buffalo Bill discerned in the gloom the flash of a lamp three times repeated at the window of the major's sitting room. The scout jumped to his feet, and running like a deer to where Nick Wharton was waiting, bounded into the saddle without as much as touching the stirrups, and issued the order in quick, stern tones:

"Now, ride! Charge!"

The next moment the party was thundering along at a terrific gallop. As they sped along Buffalo Bill, peering to the westward through the gloom, could see

a second large body of horsemen tearing down in the direction of the same hillock to which they were bound.

It was a race for the same goal, and the party that reached the herd first would be the winner.

Fortunately for Buffalo Bill and the major's cause, the majority, if not all of the picked vaqueros, were on the side of honesty, and if any were not they seemed anxious to be on the winning side, and the party flew along without hitch.

They were yet on the wrong side of the hillock, behind which the speeding cattle thieves had disappeared a moment before, when suddenly a few desultory shots rang out from beyond.

Buffalo Bill feared for a moment that the attack had started already and that Wild Bill's cowboys would be wiped out before a united stand could be made.

But when the scout's party rode over the top of the hillock with a rousing cheer, they discovered that the cattle thieves were yet a hundred yards away, and that Wild Bill had simply fired off a few shots to signal Buffalo Bill, lest in the darkness of the storm the scout had failed to see either the major's lights or the advancing cattle thieves.

As the scout appeared, a cheer went up from Wild Bill and such of his men as were faithful, while a howl of rage went up from the cattle thieves, who

realized that two had played at the same game of surprise attack.

Wild Bill and his men had formed up on the danger side of the cattle, which were now left unprotected. But what matter if they did scatter? If they did, it would be better for the major and more difficult for the thieves to round them up, should the latter win.

While Hickok and his vaqueros were pouring a leaden hail into the advancing raiders, Buffalo Bill and his stanch party swept around the edge of the panic-stricken steers, and in another moment, just as the heavens opened to a flood of lightning, thunder, and rain, the combatants met in a wild crash of exploding firearms and colliding horses.

It was a glorious charge!

But the battle was the strangest and probably the most short-lived in border history. The two sides had not fought for more than a minute when there came a terrible roar of thunder, followed by a different kind of sound—one that has quailed the hearts of the bravest before now.

The cattle, panic-stricken by the noise of the fight and the uproar of the elements, had broken mass and stampeded.

The crazy animals did not, strange to say, run from the cause of the trouble, but, infuriated as they were

charged in a solid, roaring mass right into the middle of the combatants.

At the same moment a voice arose in a wild shriek from one of the vaqueros.

"A stampede! Ride for your lives!"

The next moment, with the surging mass of horns and heads charging after them, friend and foe alike were riding side by side in the direction of the border, all animosity forgotten in the instinct of self-preservation.

Many of the cattle thieves, who had been on the outer circle of the fight, had had time to skirt around the edge of the stampeding herd, but among those who were caught in the midst of the battle were Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, Nick Wharton, Rodriguez, Luzimo, and several others, among whom, strangest of all, was the cattle chief's beautiful young sister Rosario.

Even while they were riding for life, a flash of lightning showed her beautiful face turned to Wild Bill with a look of supreme disregard for her own danger, and her voice rang out:

"Ah, señor—*carissimo mio*—you must save yourself—you must not die like this!"

At the same moment Luzimo urged his horse toward hers.

"Curse you for a fool!" he said. "This is all your doing, you traitress!"

By a flash of vivid fire he was seen to raise his hand as if to strike the brave girl. There came another flash, followed by a sharp report, and the chief of the cattle raiders was seen to reel in his saddle and fall to earth right in front of Rosario's horse.

The latter stumbled and would have thrown its fair rider had not Wild Bill, throwing away the smoking revolver which he had just fired, spurred his horse to her side and caught her up in his arm.

"Cling on behind!" he shouted.

In the slight delay that followed this daring rescue, Buffalo Bill and his friend Nick Wharton reined in, while the cattle came thundering up.

But Rosario was safe in a moment, and the three started on again, while the cattle thieves had gained a considerable distance.

At that moment the heavens seemed to burst in fury. A roar of terror went up from the stampeding cattle.

Buffalo Bill and his companions spurred on.

It was truly a ride for life, and, in the case of Wild Bill, one that was fraught with terrible disadvantages.

CHAPTER IX.

A NOBLE HEROINE.

"Where is Wild Bill?" asked Buffalo Bill hoarsely, as he and Nick Wharton stood by their panting horses in the safety of the timber butte for which they had headed, knowing that this would break the charge of the steers where nothing else would.

Across the plain every flash of lightning showed the cattle dashing along in twos and threes, for the moment they had struck the timber belt, into which our friends had ridden, they had been forced to spread out. As it was, the edge of the butte was strewn with steers, whose brains had been dashed out in the awful contact with the timber.

But where was Wild Bill?

The last time either Cody or Nick Wharton had seen him he was riding for dear life on a horse that was literally staggering under its double load. Buffalo Bill had repeatedly urged him to transfer his charge to his horse, which was practically fresh, but Wild Bill had refused to allow the transfer on the ground that the change would entail a delay that would give the panic-stricken steers time to come up on them and then all might be lost, instead of two unhappy

people, who were the victims of peculiar circumstances. At last, in despair, Buffalo Bill had seen the horse which Wild Bill was riding, with Rosario clinging on behind, stumble as if about to fall.

"For Heaven's sake, Hickok, don't be a fool!" Cody had shouted. "I'll risk it, and the timber there will break them."

But even as he had spoken the tired horse had stumbled and fallen, and before Cody or Nick Wharton could even check their flying horses, Wild Bill, Rosario, and the unfortunate animal had disappeared under the terrific sea of horns, hoofs, and heads.

Now that the danger was all over, both Nick Wharton and the border king had a chance to realize what had taken place.

Colonel Cody leaned against a tree and covered his face with his hands.

"And so that's the end of you, old man!" he muttered hoarsely. "By God, Hickok, if you're dead, I'll tell it to the world how you died—as a man, trying to save a woman who once saved his life!"

Nick Wharton stood by in silence, waiting until Buffalo Bill's dry-eyed agony of spirit had passed away. The old trapper himself did not seem the same man, although even in this terrible moment he fumbled aimlessly with his pipe.

The two comrades must have stood there for an

hour, lost in deep thought, when suddenly the cold, wet moon stole out from behind a ragged storm cloud.

At the sight of it Buffalo Bill suddenly looked up.

"Now that there is some light, we might be able to find him and give him a decent burial out here in the prairie," he said quietly.

In silence the two men walked back over the blackened, hoof-beaten trail of the stampede. Here and there was dotted a black mass that on investigation proved to be the body of a horse. Generally near it lay the form of a man.

Only one of these interested Buffalo Bill, and that was when, turning up a dead face in the moonlight to see if it were Wild Bill Hickok, he discovered instead the sinister features of Rodriguez.

"You have gone to settle your account, anyway," said Buffalo Bill.

"And if ever a skunk deserved it," said Nick Wharton, "that durned buzzard wuz the man!"

A little farther on the frontiersmen came upon the body of Luzimo, who had been shot down by Wild Bill.

"It seemed the finger of Providence—that," said Buffalo Bill, half to himself.

"Wharton," he added, aloud, "it was after that. We must have missed them."

They retraced their steps, and, suddenly, when they had gone about a mile, Buffalo Bill whipped his hat from his head and advanced to where a black mass denoted what had been the body of a horse.

From underneath it was to be seen an outstretched hand. It was the hand of a woman.

"We have found them," said Buffalo Bill reverently.

Aided by Nick Wharton, the two managed to drag away the body of the horse, which partially covered what was underneath.

No sooner was this done than a sight met the eyes of the border king—a sight that he has not forgotten to this day.

The body of Wild Bill lay outstretched on the ground, and over it lay the body of Rosario. The girl's arms were spread like a shield over the frontiersman's head.

Although every bone in her body must have been broken, her face was not even scratched, because, with the first instinct of a woman, she had buried it between her outstretched arms, but a glance at the beautiful face was enough to tell Buffalo Bill that she was dead.

"Nick Wharton," said Buffalo Bill hoarsely, "I have known many times of what a woman will do for

the man she loved, but this is the most noble thing I have ever seen, or heard of."

Nick Wharton gave a peculiar coughing grunt and nodded. He saw what had happened. Rosario had given her own life to try and save Wild Bill's.

"What a pity she failed in her noble attempt," said the knight of the plains.

"Goldurn it!" shouted Nick Wharton. "She didn't fail by a long shot. Look!"

But Buffalo Bill had seen it, too. Wild Bill had given a convulsive sigh, and his eyelids had flickered. In a moment the two friends had tenderly lifted the crushed body of the noble Rosario from that of the man whom she had tried to save from the hoofbeats of the cattle.

Then Buffalo Bill applied a flask to the lips of his old comrade. It took a long time to bring it about, but at last Wild Bill opened his eyes and stared up at the moon.

* * * * *

In spite of the tragedy of that night, many things had happened that served to somewhat balance the account. Only about four or five, including Rosario, had suffered death in the stampede. Among the more deserving ones were Rodriguez and Luzimo.

A mixed band of cattle thieves and vaqueros had

ridden up to the Silvera Ranch and told the terrible tale of the fight and the subsequent events.

The cattle thieves were completely unmanned and swore to lead a decent life and to work for Major Sanderson, if he would only have them.

The major, however, was too much concerned for the fate of Wild Bill, Buffalo Bill, and the old trapper, to listen to them just at that moment, although he afterward employed them.

He was greatly relieved, therefore, when, at an early hour of the morning, Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton appeared, half leading, half carrying Wild Bill, who, however, was suffering more from the terrific ordeal than from any actual injuries.

He was nursed back to health slowly, although he was not able to attend the burial of Rosario, who was interred on the very spot where she performed her noble deed.

With the death of the evil genius and the leader of the cattle thieves, the gang shortly went out of existence, and the men were employed everywhere along the border on Buffalo Bill's recommendation.

Buffalo Bill and his companions started North as soon as Hickok was able to travel:

CHAPTER X.

A SHOT FROM THE MOUNTAIN.

"Where in the name of the seven seas did you come from?"

"I might ask you the same question."

The speakers were stalwart, handsome young fellows. Under ordinary circumstances each would have been more than glad to meet the other in that wild and lonely place.

Now each had drawn a revolver at the first sight of the other. They were in a peculiarly formed ravine on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains, surrounded on three sides by almost perpendicular walls of rock.

The trend of the gorge was to the south, and it lay almost level, ending at a rocky face looking south. Below, it faded away in the valley which lay between the foothills. The walls to the east and west were not high. The mountain spur to the north seemed to pierce the clouds.

At the summits of the lower elevations grew ragged lines of hardy bushes, with here and there a stunted tree lifting its head like a grim sentinel in guard of the secrets of the lonely ravine.

High up on the steep side of the spur to the north was a small shelf of rock, fairly well grown over with bushes and trailing vines. There seemed to be no way of reaching this miniature plateau, either from the ravine or the summit beyond.

From the high, north wall, at about surface level, a small stream of water bubbled forth from some giant reservoir set by the cunning hand of nature far in the body of the mountain. The opening from which the water proceeded was large enough for a stream ten times its size.

In some distant age a torrent had poured into the ravine, hewing away the solid rock and roaring on to the valley lying in a mist of distance off to the south.

But age had reduced the size and the impetuosity of the torrent until it now ran a mild brook which might have turned a mill wheel in staid old New England. The place of its exit from the mountain resembled an arched doorway leading into subterranean chambers.

The time was early morning in the month of June of a year long gone by. The level light of the sun shone upon the weapons lifted against human life, turning the shining steel to burnished gold.

After the first exclamations of warning the men remained silent, each watching the other closely for some indication of purpose. Their anger appeared to cool somewhat as they looked into each other's face.

Each recognized in the other not only a formidable antagonist but apparently a person who usually acted "on the square."

"What are you doing here?"

"I might ask the same of you."

"Are you the man who followed me all night?"

"I believe you are the chap who has been dogging my footsteps ever since I left Broadway."

"I dog no man's footsteps, sir."

"Glad to know it. You look like a decent sort of a fellow, but I want to tell you right now that if you are here on the same mission as myself only one of us can leave this place alive."

The speaker paused. He read in the face of the other the truth. It seemed to him that it would be no wrong to bring to an end the life of the person who stood there thwarting the purpose of a weary journey across the continent.

Still, he was not a man to shoot even an enemy without giving him a chance.

Three months before Grant Millman had left New York in quest of Hellgate Mine, said to be the richest in the West. Two months before Glen Wilmes had left Chicago on the same mission.

Each had possessed a small amount of money, a spirit of determination and an imperfect map of the district in which the mine was situated. Traveling

by day and by night to the limit of their strength, they had come to the ravine at the same moment.

How these men, living in widely different circumstances and far apart, had received the message that a mine richer than greed for gold had ever pictured lay there at the end of that ravine will be known as the story progresses.

Grant Millman was a lawyer's clerk, blue and pleasant of eye, broad of shoulder, and quick and strong with the training of the gymnasium. His clothing was worn with the journey he had taken, but the life and vitality which showed in his face, the flush of bounding health on his cheek, more than compensated for this.

Glen Wilmes had been trained in a different school. He had been through all the grades of promotion on a morning newspaper from office boy to reporter. He was quick of movement, alert, keen-witted, and inclined to look upon life as a huge joke. He, too, was dressed in garments which looked like those of a tramp, but they sat gracefully upon his muscular form for all that.

"I guess we're after the same roll, my friend," he said. "What do you propose?"

"Walk to the bush there by the projecting rock, turn, and come back. When we come to the brook we'll shoot."

"You're a cold-blooded chap."

"You know the secret of the mine?" demanded Grant, a faint hope springing into life at the apparent carelessness of the other.

"Oh, no," replied Glen, with a half smile, which looked woefully out of place on his tense face, "I just came into this infernal country for my health. Just a little walk before breakfast, you see. What do you know about the Hellgate, anyway?"

"We are wasting time," said Grant. "If you prefer I will walk to the rock and return."

"Look here," said Glen. "I'm something on the shoot myself, but this looks a little like the Indian dramas. There may be enough of the yellow stuff in there for both of us."

"Are you a coward?"

The word did the business.

The young reporter wheeled away, walked with a strong step to the spot indicated and turned back. Grant Millman had also turned and walked away. They now stood about thirty yards apart, with the brook midway between them.

"Are you ready?"

It was Glen Wilmes who asked the question.

"Ready," was the reply. "When you come to the brook fire."

Silently, watchfully, the men advanced. There was

in the heart of neither a desire for an unfair advantage. One movement of a treacherous finger on the part of either and it would have been decided.

But that would have been murder. These men were not murderers. When only a few paces apart Wilmes paused and lowered his revolver.

"My God!" he gasped. "I never thought of her."

"I give you warning now," said Grant, "that if you do not come on like a man I will shoot you like a dog where you stand."

"Up there beyond the clump of bushes on the west elevation," said Wilmes, without appearing to notice the words of the other, "you will find a camp if you come out of this alive and I do not. Go there and tell——"

Grant Millman bent forward to listen. Had the man friends there? He might be attacked in the rear at any moment. This hesieation on the part of his antagonist might be a plan to gain time. He resolved to bring the trying scene to a close immediately.

"Come!" he cried. "I step out now for the brook. When my foot touches the water I shall begin shooting. See that you are ready."

The young law clerk advanced steadily. The reporter did not move. The foot of the former was within a yard of the moist margin of the little stream. Both revolvers came swiftly to the front.

In another instant the shooting would have been on. But a strange interruption occurred. A piercing scream came from the west bank of the ravine. It was the voice of a young girl crying out in alarm.

Fearing treachery, Grant Millman reserved his fire. His opponent threw his weapon to the ground and faced the direction from which the sound had proceeded.

As he swung about his eyes rested for an instant upon the patch of thicket high up on the north wall of the ravine. There, clearly outlined against the comparatively smooth surface of the mountain, was the figure of a man holding a gun covering both young men by the brook.

It was an evil-looking figure. Masses of matted hair covered the head and face and fell down to the waistline. Only a small spot of tanned and wrinkled skin about the eyes was visible. The whole appearance of the fellow was disgusting as well as threatening.

He was one of the class of men who frequented the gold-bearing district of the West during the early days of mining. The miners feared them, for they were merciless and cowardly. When a rich lead was discovered, the fortunate finder had need of double care. These men murdered to possess themselves of what others had won by hard and persistent labor.

The type still exists in the slums of great cities, but their manner of acquiring a living is not so bold. As Glen caught a glimpse of this figure he instinctively reached for the revolver which he had permitted to fall to the ground at his feet. As he did so a shot was heard, coming from the thicket at the west of the ravine.

The report indicated that it was not a large gun which had been fired. Glen knew what that meant. He understood what was taking place at the little camp on the western elevation.

As he lifted his revolver from the place where it had fallen another shot was heard. This shot came from the weapon held by Grant Millman.

The report seemed to ring like that of a cannon, out of all proportion to the caliber of the weapon used. As the answering puff of smoke wafted away in the clear mountain air Glen turned his eyes to the shelf-like place upon the face of the rock.

The man who had stood there threatening the two young men with his gun lay upon his face, half off the rocky shelf, clinging to a swaying bush for support.

For a moment the bush held. Then a feeble effort to regain the shelf brought too great strain upon its shallow roots and it came away in the grasp of the

doomed man, who had caught it as he had fallen, from a bullet wound in his breast.

Just an instant he poised in the air at the edge of the shelf, then fell. Striking projections here and there and bounding away with an awful breaking of bones and mangling of flesh, the body finally came to the floor of the ravine and lay, a mass of bruised flesh and bones, at the feet of the two men.

"That shot was just in time," said Grant, advancing and bending over the body. "I wonder where I hit him?"

Glen turned away with a shudder.

"It's worse than an emergency-hospital assignment," he said. "But you did get him just in time, I guess."

Grant, who was examining the dead man closely, now stepped back with a cry of amazement.

"What do you make of this?" he asked, pointing downward.

"Make of what? We ought to make a grave for it, I think."

"Look here," continued Grant. "The wound is on the breast in plain sight. It was not made by a bullet from my revolver. It is too large for that. Where did that other shot come from?"

"Why," replied Glen, like one restored to his senses after a sudden shock, "it must have been fired by Clellie?"

"And Clellie is——"

"My sister."

"Here? Your sister here in this wild land?"

"Yes. Clellie has a mind of her own, you see, and would come."

"And suppose I had killed you a moment ago?"

"Then you would have cared for the girl; that is, if she did not return the compliment by placing you in the cold, cold ground by my side. She might have done that, you know."

"You believe she fired the shot that killed this man?"

"Is it a large wound?"

"It is."

"Then she did not fire the bullet that killed. She has a small pistol—little larger than a toy."

CHAPTER XI.

A CALL FOR HELP.

"Who did kill this man, then?"

Glen shook his head.

"It is a mystery," he said.

"Your sister may have seen some one do the shooting," suggested Grant.

"True," replied Glen. "We may as well go and see. If there are more enemies about here we ought to know it. Come. Clellie is a brick, and she'll be glad to see you. Oh, we've had a peach of a tramp since we've seen any one but Indians and outlaws. Yes, she'll be glad to see you. Come. What's your name? Let's do the thing up in Prairie Avenue style. My name is Glen Wilmes, late reporter in Chicago. Now I'm in search of a treasure buried by nature somewhere here."

Grant Millman smiled at the frankness of his former opponent. He explained his name and occupation, and the two men who had so nearly come to bloodletting a moment before cordially took each other by the hand. The attack from the mountain had for the time being put other fears—at least, fears leveled against each other—from their minds.

In order for the young men to gain the summit of the rocky ledge which shut in the ravine on the west, it was necessary for them to follow the brook for a short distance and then mount upward through a steep and ragged break in the rock.

Centuries before the floods had found a soft place in the barrier of the mountain there and had eaten it away. The cross ravine ended at the brook and at a cluster of bushes and dwarfed trees standing on a comparatively level spot a hundred yards to the west and half a hundred yards above the floor of the ravine proper.

Halfway up this natural staircase, the climbers heard once more that shrill call for help which had reached their ears just before the mysterious shot.

Glen sprang forward with almost superhuman energy.

"My God!" he shouted. "Hasten! It is Clellie!"

They almost bounded up the steep pathway.

Before they gained a view of the place they sought, however, they heard another shot, coming, apparently, from the opposite elevation.

The sound of the explosion came like the discharge of a piece of field artillery. It rang down the ravine and echoed through the foothills away to the south.

"Hurry, hurry!"

In his excitement Glen seized Grant by the arm and attempted to quicken his steps.

"Don't get excited," said Grant. "That was a friendly shot."

"How do you know that?"

"The owner of that gun killed the man on the mountainside, the chap who was about to take part in our duel."

"You may be right."

"Of course I am right," panted the other. "I know that sound. And he did not protect us then to engage in mischief later on."

They were now at the upper end of the cross ravine. Before them, half hidden by a clump of bushes, was the small tent which had been occupied by Glen and his sister, in front of which a clear fire was burning. A little to the left a young girl, perhaps not more than sixteen years of age, was struggling to release herself from the hands of a powerful man who was exerting all his strength in an effort to carry her away.

Grant stopped short in his swift walk and lifted his revolver. The ruffian saw this new danger and held the girl up as a shield.

"Don't shoot!" gasped Glen. "You will kill my sister."

Grant lowered his weapon.

As he did so, the girl's assailant lifted her in his arms and backed away into the thicket.

"Keep back," he shouted, drawing a knife. "Come one step nearer and I'll cut this chicken's throat."

"What can we do?" groaned Glen.

"Nothing at this time," replied Grant, "for yonder bully will keep his word. We must follow them, hoping for the best."

"Help me, Glen!" cried the struggling child, for she was little more than a child, though endowed with many womanly charms.

Enraged by the struggles of the girl, the captor lifted one huge hand and struck her a smart blow on one soft cheek. At that instant, before the arm which had been raised for so unmanly a purpose could be lowered, another shot came from the opposite side of the ravine.

The ruffian fell to the ground, shot through the heart. The raising of the arm had given some distant marksman one chance in a thousand to relieve the girl of his insults. The bullet which killed the fellow passed through the waist of the girl's loose dress. A fraction of an inch to the right and she instead of the ruffian would have been killed.

The girl, thus released, sprang from the nerveless grasp of the dying man and threw herself into the arms of her brother. She shuddered hysterically for

a moment and then, for the first time in her young life, fainted.

Hardly knowing what he did, Glen laid the insensible form into the arms of his companion and dashed into the tent, crying out that he had a restorative there.

Grant Millman looked down upon the fair face and thought that he had never seen so sweet and womanly a creature of such tender years. The girl was slim, graceful in every curve and outline, and the charm of maidenhood lay upon her pure face, upon her waving brown hair, upon her blushing cheeks, and upon the red lips which even the temporary insensibility had not marred.

Grant thought then, as he thought on many subsequent occasions of less peril, that he could die willingly with the fair burden in his arms.

Glen returned presently with a restorative, and the girl was soon restored to consciousness. Ten times more beautiful than ever she seemed to Grant as she slipped from his arms with pink blushes coming and going in her face.

"That was a close shot," said Glen, in a moment.

Grant looked puzzled.

"I don't understand the situation at all," he said.

Glen laid a finger on his companion's arm.

"We heard three shots," he said, pointing. "Look there and there and there!"

At the bottom of the ravine lay the bruised body of the man who had fallen from the mountainside.

Almost at the feet of the speaker was the body of the ruffian who had been shot while attempting to carry away the girl.

A dozen yards away, half concealed by a rim of bushes, lay still another body, that of a brawny fellow dressed in rough garments and with marks of dissipation plainly showing on his dead face.

"Yes, there has been something doing here," said Glen. "We seem to have struck a camp of toughs."

"Do you think they have followed us?" asked Clellie, blushing prettily under the admiring glances of Grant Millman.

"They are just mountain rovers," said Glen. "Why should any one follow us?"

"Why, indeed?" asked Grant, with a smile, pointing to the arch in the mountainside from which the waters of the brook were issuing. "Do you forget what lies yonder?"

"I can't forget that what we believe lies there came near making one of us the murderer of the other," replied Glen.

"The curse of gold is working," said Grant, indicating the three dead men with one sweeping gesture. "But tell me how you came to possess knowledge relative to this mine?"

Before Glen could make reply the sharp report of a gun cut the air and a bullet whistled close to his face.

"That was another close one!" he said, springing into a less exposed position behind a tree. Grant Millman and Clellie imitated his example and both men cast hasty glances about in order to discover, if possible, the source of this new peril. They had not long to puzzle over the matter.

Two more shots came, and they saw by the rings of smoke rising from the green plateau from which one of the outlaws had fallen that the point of danger lay there.

The last two shots were quickly followed by others from the east side of the ravine. Then all was still, for one of the bullets, searching in the light foliage of the plateau, found its mark and another man fell from the lofty perch, rolling and bounding from point to point until a mass of wrecked manhood lay on the ground by the brook.

"This gets me," said Glen. "I'd like to take that fellow by the hand. He's doing some hot shooting."

As if in answer to the wish, the foliage of a small thicket at the opposite side of the depression parted and a tall, handsomely built man stepped into view. He was faultlessly clad in hunting costume, and carried a long, repeating rifle in one hand.

"I should know that man," said Glen.

"I never saw him before," said Grant. "I wonder why he cut into the game here?"

"To save our lives," said Clellie enthusiastically. "And I know the man, too. You took me to see him once, Glen. Down at the old Palmer House. Don't you remember? Why, it's Mr. Cody! Buffalo Bill!"

"That's as sure as I'm a foot high," cried Glen. "I wonder if he will remember me?"

"That was a frightful story you wrote about him," said the girl.

Glen smiled at the recollection of an interview with the great scout which he had written for the *Tribune* a year before.

"He is coming over here!" cried Clellie.

"Now do not try to make a mash on Buffalo Bill," said Glen, with a smile. "He would be a valuable acquisition to the family, I admit, but I am afraid you are too late, sis."

The famous scout and Indian fighter stood for a moment on the opposite ridge and then swiftly descended to the floor of the ravine. He did not appear to be making an effort at great speed, for his movements seemed cautious and deliberate, but it was only an instant before he stood by the wondering group on the west elevation.

"I would suggest," he said, with a faint smile, "that

you choose some less exposed position for your conferences."

"I was right! I was right!" cried Clellie, without waiting for any formal greeting to the man who had saved her from the clutches of the dead ruffian. "I knew it was Buffalo Bill!"

The scout glanced keenly at the young girl and then turned his steady eyes in the direction of her brother. In a moment an amused expression came to his face and he advanced to where the young reporter was standing.

"If I had only known a moment ago," he said, extending his hand, "that the man being threatened by these sneaks was the chap who built that story in the *Chicago Tribune*, I really can't say whether I should have chipped into the game."

At the recollection of the breezy story which Glen had written the scout threw back his head and laughed heartily. In writing the interview with Buffalo Bill, Glen had caught the vivid personality of the man and had repeated his stories in his own words. At the time the interview had made a decided hit in Chicago.

"I call that a pretty fair interview," laughed Glen. "I even let you do the talking. That's unusual with newspaper men."

"It was a pretty fair account of what occurred," said Cody. "But I never expected to see you out in this

country. Do you realize the dangers that surround you?"

"Until five minutes ago," said Grant, advancing, "we had no idea that these wilds were so populous."

"And, there being no one else to murder, you two young hot-heads set about killing each other, eh?"

The great scout glanced keenly from one young man to the other as he spoke. They both flushed under his inquiring eyes.

"That was all my fault," said Grant. "Glen wanted to split the pot, but I objected. It seems to me that the devil has been in control of me ever since I learned of this mine."

"You are not the first man gold has sent near to the gallows," said Mr. Cody.

"That is all over now," said Glen. "I guess there is enough for both."

Buffalo Bill now turned to Clellie.

"Why did you bring this girl here?" he demanded of Glen.

"He didn't bring me," said the girl. "I'd just like to see him try to make me do anything! I came because I wanted to."

"To help dig out the gold? To assist in removing the millions from Hellgate Mine?" asked Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MINE.

A perplexed look came into the faces of the three listeners. Grant Millman had believed an hour before that he alone of all living men knew the secrets of Hellgate Mine.

He had traveled thousands of miles to unearth the golden treasures alleged to be hidden there behind the arch in the mountain wall. At the very entrance to his treasure house he had encountered a claimant who seemed as thoroughly versed in the secrets of the place as himself.

And now Buffalo Bill, the most powerful and far-seeing scout of modern times, had also revealed a certain knowledge of the treasure.

"You know of the mine, too?" asked Grant. "Tell me," he added, in a tone of discouragement, "is every man, woman, and child west of the Mississippi River posted regarding Hellgate Mine?"

"Hardly so bad as that," replied Buffalo Bill, "but there are naturally a few who are contesting for the gold said to be there."

As he spoke he pointed to the dead men lying about.

"There are more around here," he added, "and we must get away."

"We were away before we started," said Glen, with a laugh. "Now that we are here, I suggest that we remain and fight it out."

"That's my idea," said Grant. "Have you any idea how many people know of this mine?" he added, turning to the scout.

"There are at least a score," was the reply. "These fellows," pointing to the dead men, "were not miners. They were city toughs, sent here to guard the mine and murder any one who came. The man who is at the bottom of all this has not yet made his appearance on the spot."

"Who can it be?" asked Clellie.

"Are you working in the interest of some claimant?" asked Grant suspiciously.

"Certainly," replied the scout.

"Of course that settles it. You appear to have reached the mine first, and so you have the better argument to advance," Grant said, glancing significantly at the gun which the scout still held in his hand.

Cody laughed.

"Come, come, hot-blood," he said, "wait until you know more about the matter before you decide to make a meal of me. I represent a claimant, as I remarked. It is a lady, and I am helping her because she

is in no position to help herself. She should never have been brought into this wild land, but as she is here I cannot allow her claims to be ignored."

"You mean——"

Cody pointed at the spot where Clellie stood, a pretty picture in that rough setting.

"I saw you coming in with that child," the scout said, "and I just drew cards myself. I have been in the game for three days."

Clellie impulsively threw her arms about the neck of the scout, that is, as nearly as she could do so, he being so very tall and she such a mite of a creature.

"You are a prince!" she cried. "I don't believe we would be alive now but for you."

Grant, whose eyes had for some time been fixed upon the level plateau, high upon the cliff, from which the shots had been fired, now turned to the scout.

"There is some one moving about over there," he said.

"I can't for the life of me understand how they get up there," said Glen.

"There is a subterranean passage leading to that shelf," said Buffalo Bill.

"If that is true," said Grant, "these men know all about Hellgate Mine. It lies under that shelf."

"How do you know that?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Straight through the arched opening in the south

face of the rock at the end of the ravine, up the brook twenty paces, to the left six paces, to the north ten paces, and there the lode juts into sight."

It was Glen who spoke. Grant regarded him curiously.

"The very words," he said. "Where did you get that description of Hellgate Mine?"

"It is a description of the route to the gold, then?"

"As I understand it, yes."

"You have the same?"

"Exactly, word for word."

"Well, I received an old map, drawn in pencil on brown paper, and the verbal description from a broken-down old miner we sheltered at our home in Chicago. And you?"

"I received a map similar to the one you refer to and the verbal description from an uncle who returned to New York four months ago after spending many years in the West. He owned the mine by right of purchase, so it is free from all danger from claim jumpers."

"Where is this uncle?" asked Buffalo Bill, in surprise.

"He died within a week after his arrival at New York."

Leaving no further data or instructions?"

"Leaving only the map and the words I have quoted."

"Did he ever mention the fact of having a partner in the mine?"

"Never. On the contrary, he declared that no one else knew of the existence of the mine."

"Was he the original discoverer of the lode?"

"No. He bought the mine of an outlaw who sought it first as a place of refuge."

"And this outlaw?"

"He believed him to be dead."

Buffalo Bill pondered for a moment before speaking.

"Let me tell you this," he said. "Hellgate Mine is known to more people than you suspect. By many it is regarded as a myth. Others believe that gold in small quantities can be secured there. To others it is a magician's cave—a source of fabulous wealth."

"But there is another point to mention. Up to this time a human life has been taken for every ounce of gold drawn from this strange mine. There is said to be a tinge to the gold which discolours the purest water and leaves it a stain of blood in appearance."

"There is said to be a curse on the mine and all the money taken from it," continued the scout. "There are plenty of people who believe all the tales of the richness of the ore to be found there, yet who would

not venture a yard beyond the entrance for the undisputed possession of the entire hoard."

"Then the mine has already been worked?" asked Grant.

"It is believed that, some years ago, a considerable quantity of ore was taken from it, probably by the original discoverer of the vein which crops out there under the mountain. There is a story current that the original owner communicated his discovery to a few friends, and that every one of them has since died a violent death."

Glen gave a start of surprise, which his companions were quick to note.

"That is a new one," he said. "Why, it may be true—all that is said about Hellgate Mine. The man I received my information from was found dead—murdered—in the street within a week of his surrender of the map, and his clothing had been roughly torn apart, as if a search of his person had been made."

Buffalo Bill turned a pair of inquiring eyes toward Grant.

"And your uncle," he asked, "the man who gave you the map and the information which brought you here? Did he die peacefully in his bed?"

"He was drowned in the North River," was the reply, "and his body was never recovered. The evil

spirits of the mine could have had little to do with his taking off."

"How do you know he was drowned?" demanded Glen. "He might have been pounded on the head or thrown into the river after death."

"He was aboard an ill-fated excursion boat," said Grant, "and went to the bottom with a score of others."

"How do you know he was drowned?" demanded Glen, whimsically insisting on the theory referred to by Buffalo Bill. "There are many cases where men and women are discovered to be alive after long years of absence from their friends."

"We believe him dead," replied Grant sadly.

"You may be right," said Glen, "but still he might have been murdered or carried off, you know. Mr. Cody believes that there is some powerful influence behind all this killing."

"The point just at present," said Buffalo Bill, who had been making a careful examination of the surroundings during the conversation, "is to get away from this exposed position."

"Why not get into the mine?" asked Glen. "Surely, that must be a safe place."

"The very thing,!" cried Grant. "For my part, I am more afraid of the men who are disputing our

right of possession than of the evil spirits said to exist there."

Clellie shuddered.

"Must we go into that awful place?" she asked, clinging to the arm of her brother. "Why can't we remain in the free air and the sunshine, Glen?"

"There is little prospect of getting into the mine at this time," said Buffalo Bill. "It is already inhabited."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Grant.

"While we have been talking here," said the scout, "we have every instant of the time been under observation from the little plateau up on the mountain, and the men up there have been trying to communicate with some one down the valley."

"What has that to do with our occupying the mine?" asked Grant.

"That plateau is the top opening to the mine," replied the scout.

"Then we must enter at the arch by the stream and drive them out," declared Grant. "They have no right in there. The mine was given to me by my uncle."

Buffalo Bill checked Glen, who was about to make some hot reply to this cool assumption of ownership, and pointed to the little patch of green and gray under discussion.

"See!" he said, "they are preparing to signal with fire. Rather an awkward thing on a clear day."

"If you know so much about this mine," said Grant, addressing the scout, "why can't you show us a way to get in, and a way to drive these intruders out? You appear to know a whole lot about the place."

"I know very little of it," was the good-natured reply. "Don't get excited. We shall be wiser in a short time."

"I mean to know all about it before I leave," said Grant.

Then the thing Cody was waiting for took place. From the shelf above a clear, bright flame shot up into the air. It burned steadily like a signal for an instant and then died down.

Again it was repeated, and again, while the little party about the tent looked on and waited. In another moment three gunshots came from the direction of the plain. Faintly heard, coming at regular intervals, it was evident that they came from a considerable distance and that they were in answer to the signals from the rock.

"We must get away from here," said Buffalo Bill. "The ridge will be too hot for us in a very short time."

West of the elevation upon which the little party stood ran a long gorge, following the trend of the foothills, which here formed a brief north-and-south

line from the plain up to the cliff, or succession of high elevations.

This gorge was a wild product of some powerful convulsion of nature, which had tossed great boulders here and there and left in the hard floor the marks of whirling currents in deep caverns.

The waters which had swept the locality, hundreds of years before—perhaps while the stones they ground against each other were still hot with the internal heat which had cast them forth from the bowels of the earth—had cut and carved along the lines of least resistance. Where there were soft veins in the rocky mass there were great caverns.

Fissures, which had been widened to torrent beds, were now dry breaks in the face of the mountain, leading from the gorge to dead ends wherever the hardness of the rock had successfully resisted the action of the torrent.

"Our only chance of safety lies there," said Buffalo Bill, indicating the rocky ravine.

"Why not stay right here and fight until we can reach the mine?" asked Grant. "I don't like this running away."

"I have no wish to control your actions," said the scout, with a smile. "You are at liberty to remain here if you see fit."

CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNEXPECTED PERIL.

"I shall remain, even if you desert me!" declared Grant.

Buffalo Bill made no reply. The answer came from the enemy. Without warning, and with a precision which showed careful preparation, a volley of bullets came from the eastern ridge. They whistled viciously about the ears of the little party, but as the aim was much too high no one was injured.

It was clear that the enemy was now out in force, bent on revenge for their fallen comrades, as well as possessed of a desire to protect the mine from the strangers. Buffalo Bill threw himself face down upon the ground, and the others were not slow in following his example.

It was well that he did so, for the next instant another storm of bullets swept the ridge. Following the last volley came a peculiar cry, which rang over the wild scene for an instant and then died away, only to be taken up again and again, and finally repeated from a distance.

It cut the temporary silence of the place like the hiss of a snake. Buffalo Bill made answer to the inquiring glances of his companions in one word:

"Indians."

The two young men and the girl, crawling upon their hands and knees, now gathered about the scout.

"Indians?" repeated Grant.

"Sure," replied the scout. "They are over there in force."

"Then it's me for the mine," said Glen. "I have no hair to spare."

Buffalo Bill was too busy making observations to engage in conversation just then. He saw that the savages were creeping away to the south, as if to round the ravine and make an attack from the rear.

"It strikes me," said Glen, "that things are getting rather warm in this vicinity. I don't mind outlaws and haunted mines, but when it comes to Indians I draw the line. Suppose we move on?"

"I'm getting tired of rolling about on the ground like a hog," said Grant. "Suppose we take a shot, just for luck, and get out?"

"Better not," warned Cody.

But the scout spoke too late. Just as the words left his lips the impulsive young man caught sight of a savage face on the opposite ridge and fired.

"The rocks below are good enough for me now," said Glen, as an answering bullet whizzed over his head.

The young girl arose from her uncomfortable posi-

tion on the ground and moved toward her brother. Before she had taken three steps she was seized and drawn back to the shelter of the little ledge of rock where she had been lying.

Then another volley of bullets swept over the heads of the party. Had she remained in a standing position another instant she would have been riddled with bullets.

"Don't try that again," said Cody. "Keep down and make for the gully. The Indians are making a flank movement. That shot told them just where to look for us."

The hum of bullets is not a pleasant sound, even to the trained and reckless soldier. To persons unused to such experiences the sound is a strong incentive to flight, so the two young men and the frightened girl made good time down the west bank of the ridge upon which they had been in hiding.

They finally came to a halt on a level surface of rock many yards from their former position. Looking about for the scout, they saw that he was nowhere in sight.

"He may have deserted us," said the suspicious Grant. "He seems to know a lot about Hellgate Mine, especially for a man having no interest in it."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Clellie indignantly. "He saved all our lives a moment ago."

If he had wanted us out of the way, all he had to do was to keep away. We should have been murdered only for him."

"He is keeping away now, all right enough," said Grant.

"I'll stake my life on his loyalty," said Glen.

"You are both right," said Grant, in a moment. "I'm getting to be a common scold, I guess."

They remained quiet about ten minutes without seeing a sign of the scout. They knew little of what was going on about them on account of the peculiar character of their hiding place.

The shelf of rock where they stood had once formed a part of a cave or tunnel leading into the face of the great cliff. Through some freak of nature the roof of the cave had fallen in, leaving the shelf like a court, with rock on three sides, the other, that facing the south, looking over the valley beyond the foothills.

The north end of the shelf was still covered by a hood of rock, and beneath it was what seemed to be a shallow opening into the rocky face of the mountain spur.

These two ravines or gullies ran parallel with each other, the one where the brook ran to the east of the rougher one where the three young people had taken shelter. They were separated only by about a hun-

dred yards of rock, and at the face of the mountain the distance was much less than that.

If a small brook had proceeded from the opening at the rear of the shelf where they stood, that opening might well have been taken for the opening to Hell-gate Mine. It will be seen that the young people were comparatively safe from attack except from the south, and their guns could well protect that approach.

They could only be driven out by starvation, or forced out by some treacherous scheme. Their principal trouble now was over the absence of Buffalo Bill. That he had not engaged the enemy they knew, for there was no sound of shots. Valley and hill and towering cliff all seemed asleep in the sun. Now and then a bird paused in its flight at the ledge and gazed at the refugees with cunning eyes, as if wondering what sent them in hiding there. Away to the south the foothills and the valley lay like a green-and-brown map, with no hint of human enmity or murderous design to mar the peaceful aspect of the scene.

"I can't stand this much longer," said Glen, presently. "I am going out to look for Mr. Cody."

"Why not go together?" suggested Grant.

"And leave me here alone?" demanded Clellie.

"Don't think it! I'll go with you."

"And retard our flight in case we are pursued!" said Glen, with all a brother's thoughtlessness. "We

may as well remain here and permit Cody to die out there alone if he has been wounded, or be scalped and tortured by the Indians."

This put a new phase to the front.

"Do you really think Mr. Cody has been wounded?" asked the girl anxiously.

"That is the only way I can account for his absence," replied Glen.

"We shall not be gone long," urged Grant, "and it is very important that we know what is going on."

"And Cody may be in need of assistance," added Glen.

This argument completely won over the tender-hearted girl, and she saw the young men depart with a brave face, but with a sinking heart. Neither suspected how many painful hours would elapse before they met again.

Glen and Grant, after leaving the shelter of the walls of rock surrounding the shelf, cautiously crept over the course by which they had left the ridge. As if their appearance had served as a signal, the sound of firing now came from the south. There was for a time a spatter of shots, then came one mighty roar which awoke all the sleeping echoes of the hills.

"That was Buffalo Bill's gun," said Grant.

"He is safe, then," said Glen. "The question now is, what is he doing off there?"

Glen stood for a moment, lost in deep thought.

"Is it possible," he finally asked, "that he is thus exposing himself to the fire of a score of guns in order to draw off the savages and give us a chance to get away?"

"That is about the size of it," replied Grant.

"And here we are loitering about like a couple of old women," cried Glen, in a disgusted tone. "Come, let us get back to Clellie and make our way out of this accursed country."

"Not I," said Grant. "I am going to get into the mine."

The firing continued, the reports indicating that the combatants were drawing nearer to the place where the young men stood.

As they faced about, and during a brief lull in the shooting, a sharp shot came from the shelf where the girl had been left. Then a cry of horror, and all was still.

"That was Clellie's revolver," cried Glen, turning pale at the thought of the girl being there alone. "What fools we were to leave her! Come!"

The young men bounded away, paying little heed to concealment, and in a short time stood again in the open court, on the shelf where the young girl had been left. She was not there.

There were no signs of a struggle.

A light cape, which Clellie had thrown about her shoulders on leaving the tent, lay on the floor of the cave some distance beyond the point where the hood covered it.

"My God!" cried Glen. "What can we do now?"

"Sit down and study it out," said Grant.

"Oh, it's easy enough for you to say that," cried Glen. "It is not your sister who is lost in this God-forsaken place! Lost! A hundred times worse than lost! What can we do? What can we do?"

Grant sat coolly down and examined the cape. Strong emotion was showing in his face. There were tears in his eyes. So he bent his head over the precious cape and seemed to be trying to read from it the mystery of the girl's disappearance.

Glen raved about the rock like an insane man for a moment, and then paused at the opening at the north end.

"She may have been carried into the mountain mine by way of this opening," he said.

The young men stepped into the place and looked about. The entrance was like a vestibule, with a door opening into a room beyond. Only it was the framework of the door which they saw. Where the door should have been was a wall of solid rock. Glen glanced down at the foot of the obstruction.

"See?" he shouted. "There are marks of feet here

—or marks of something, for the stone is worn smooth. Clellie has been carried through that wall!"

"Your trouble has turned your head," said Grant.

"The place has doubtless been for years a retreat for wild animals, and wolves and bears, not human beings, have worn the floor smooth."

"Perhaps a bear carried Clellie away," suggested Glen.

Grant shook his head.

"There are no wild animals about here, after all this shooting," he said. "I fear the child has been captured by some of the toughs who have been brought here to protect the mine."

As Grant ceased speaking a peculiar call came from the depression at the south end of the shelf of rock.

"Whoa, Diana!" they heard a shrill voice saying. "You tarnal varmint, there ain't no redskins here! Don't you git no bad dreams into that fool head of yours on a bright day like this. Whoa, Diana."

Creeping cautiously forward and looking down, the young man saw as peculiar a combination as ever the Rockies produced.

A man long past middle age, clad in the garb of a scout, with fur cap and leather breeches, was urging forward a lean and scrawny horse upon which he was mounted.

CHAPTER XIV.

A. J. HATCH, FROM NEW YORK.

"That looks like a friendly face," said Grant.

"It's a wonder that old horse doesn't sail right up into the air, she's so light and thin," said Glen, always with an eye for the comical and ridiculous.

"Now, then, Diana," urged the rider, "you jist git along. What do you suppose I feed ye, and keep yer fat as butter for, ye ornery critter? Up ye go!"

The beast, thus urged, made a jump at the steep path leading to the shelf, and by a succession of the most wonderful leaps and springs succeeded in gaining the top, landing within a few feet of the place where the young men were standing.

"Scuse my abrupt butt in, as the goat said to the feller he had ducked in the river. I'm old Nick Wharton, an' this is Diana, the cussedest mare that ever learned a trick or took a red nigger by the nape of the neck."

"As you appear to know the place," said Grant, "it seems that we are the intruders."

"I've known the place for a hundred years. Have, by mighty! Why, when we was building these mountains and putting the water in that brook over there, I says to——"

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The sentence was never finished, for Diana began a series of antics which caused the owner to exert all his strength in keeping her on the rocky shelf.

"She's my nigger barometer," explained the odd old scout, with a humorous gleam in his eyes. "Show 'em, Diana!"

The mare stuck her neck straight out for an instant and sniffed the breeze, which was faint, coming from the valley. Then she reared on both hind feet, pawed the air, and gave vent to a series of low snorts. The young men looked on in wonder.

"That means Indians," said Nick Wharton. "An' they're not far off at that, by mighty. Diana hates an Indian worse than the one with split feet hates holy water."

"There is a large band of them down there," said Grant. "Buffalo Bill is engaging them now."

"Buffalo Billium, eh?" said Nick. "He's all right, is Billium. I saw you fellers up here an' thought some-thin' might be wrong."

"We think we ought to be down there fighting, with Mr. Cody," said Glen, "but he slipped away from us, just as if he wanted to have all the fun to himself."

"You bet he does," said Nick. "When he wants help he'll ask fer it. He will, by mighty. What's goin' on here?"

In a few words the situation was explained, the at-

tack on the ridge, the retreat, and the disappearance of the girl. Nothing was said regarding the mine, the scout being left to suppose that the young men were merely hunters in quest of wild sport.

"That's bad," he said, when Grant had concluded. "Mighty bad fer the girl. But we'll git her. We will, by mighty. You know Wild Bill Shoot-'em-quick?"

The young men looked at each other in wonder, half believing that they had come upon a lunatic. Still the keen gray eyes, lighted always with a humorous twinkle, gave the lie to the rambling words.

"Scuse me, I mean Wild Bill. He does shoot 'em quick, but his name is somethin' else. He's down there in the valley. O-o-o-o!"

The peculiar call was answered from below, and the next moment Wild Bill made his appearance, leisurely ascending the path leading to the shelf.

Arriving at the place where the young men stood, he was introduced by Nick in his eccentric way to the boys, whose names he asked during the course of a humorous speech, in which Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, Diana, and himself were all mixed up.

For purposes of his own, the scout seemed determined to cause the young men to consider him a freak rather than the keen scout he was known to be.

Wild Bill was soon posted as to the happenings of

the day. He seemed greatly excited at the story of Clellie's disappearance.

"The first thing to do," he said, "is to locate the girl. She can't be very far away. Buffalo Bill will soon be here, and then we will decide what to do."

Like all border men of that time, Wild Bill deferred to Mr. Cody in all cases where sound judgment was needed. A brave and sometimes reckless Indian fighter, Buffalo Bill still had a reputation for coolness and correct thinking which made him a much-sought man on the plains and in the mountains.

The shooting now died away, and in a few moments Buffalo Bill was seen approaching the shelf of rock. He had met both Wild Bill and Nick Wharton in the running fight among the foothills, and they had had a perfect understanding as to the course to be pursued in the succeeding operations, but the disappearance of the girl changed all their plans.

Cody seemed perplexed and annoyed at the incident, but he uttered no words of reproach, knowing the keenness of regret felt by the young men.

"There is but one way to look," he said. "The girl was not taken to the south, and her captors could not have crossed the ridge there to the east without our seeing them. We must look out there to the west, among the hiding places in the foothills along the cliff."

"Then let us be quick about it," said Wild Bill. "Only it might be well to leave one man here."

"One man an' a mare," said Nick. "I reckon Diana an' me will hold the fort here."

Buffalo Bill consented to this, and Nick was soon alone on the shelf, that is, as fully as he ever was alone when with the mare, with which he talked and argued and reasoned as with a human being.

As the four men disappeared in the gully Diana began rearing and plunging, shaking her head and showing her teeth.

"What is it, old girl?" demanded Nick. "You act like a young miss expectin' a beau what she had no use for."

The peculiar antics of Diana indeed presaged the approach of a stranger.

Presently a silk hat showed above a ledge of rock, and then a tall, slim man of middle age, faultlessly dressed, with gold eyeglasses which kept falling from their perch on his nose, and gray mutton-chop whiskers, came into full view.

Nick said not a word until the stranger stood by his side.

"This seems to be callin' day," said the scout.

The stranger bowed, produced a gold-mounted card-case from somewhere about his person, and handed out a card. It read: "A. J. Hatch, Capitalist, New York."

Nick eyed the bit of cardboard with the humorous light in his eyes deepening and then passed it over to Diana.

"We're chums, stranger," he said, "an' so one card will do for us both."

The mare took the bit of pasteboard between her teeth, shook her head viciously, and trampled it underfoot.

"Most extraordinary," said the stranger, lifting his eyeglasses.

"Diana says she is glad to make your acquaintance, but this is her busy day," said the scout.

"I am here," said the stranger, "to warn all trespassers off this property. As you see, I am Mr. Hatch, of New York, the owner of all this land. I shall enforce the law upon all trespassers."

"You'll need a pretty good brand of law to stand this climate," said the scout.

"The law," said the stranger, "is supreme everywhere."

"You bet it is," said Nick, "especially when it's got guns behind it. Does your brand go with a corkscrew or a repeating gun?"

"I have all the force necessary to protect my interest in this mine, which you appear to be seeking," said the stranger, "and I warn you all away."

He concluded his demand with a sweeping gesture

of both hands, as if brushing all intruders away. His eyeglasses fell off again.

"That's why I asked about corkscrew law," grinned the scout. "The red niggers you've brought here to kill white folks will do a whole lot of mischief for a barrel of bee juice. I suppose God Almighty, when He planted the gold in this mine, put a brand on it: 'Fer A. J. Hatch, Capitalist, New York?' Didn't He, now, stranger?"

"Your levity is impertinent as well as sacrilegious," said Hatch, swinging his eyeglasses with becoming dignity, "and has nothing to do with the case in point."

Nick was watching the stranger closely. It seemed to him that he was making signals with his waving hand, the one swinging the glasses. Presently his suspicions were confirmed, for three skulking forms soon became visible in the gulch below, moving stealthily from rock to rock.

They had awaited the departure of Buffalo Bill and his companions before presuming to approach the rock, which was a point of vantage very desirable to be possessed of at that time, as the story will show.

But Nick was not to be caught so easily. Hatch was indeed the man who claimed to own the Hellgate Mine.

He had bought some sort of a title from a drunken miner, and now proposed to take possession and work

out the greater share of the gold before his claim could be successfully disputed.

Those were not good days for lawyers in the West. Courts were not easy of access, and the few officers of the law, as a rule, saw nothing wrong in the code of the rifle.

Stealing horses and jumping claims were capital crimes then. Taking advantage of this state of affairs, Hatch had caused to be put forth the rumor that there was danger of his claim being jumped, and had forcibly taken possession of Hellgate Mine.

Grant and Glen had arrived on the scene at a time when the mine was in the thoughts of all, when it formed the topic of conversation wherever miners or hunters met.

It is needless to say that Buffalo Bill was not in the least interested in the squabble going on, except that, with his natural sense of fair play and justice, he was aiding the weaker party.

While out on a scout in company with Wild Bill, he had observed the two young men and Clellie making for the mine. He knew what a hot nest the young men were getting into, and so trailed along to watch events. And it was very fortunate that he had done so.

After leaving the shelter, in company with Wild Bill and the young men, Buffalo Bill made a wide detour and returned to within a short distance of the

place. Wild Bill and the boys were now some distance away to the west.

As he approached the place he saw several savages moving about in the gorge, and it was with difficulty that he gained a good position without making his presence known to them.

The object of the scout in getting the others away from the hiding place will soon be seen. As soon as they were out of sight he had business back there, and lost no time in returning.

When Buffalo Bill reached a position from which he might have a good view of the place he saw Hatch talking with Nick.

He also saw the Indians creeping toward the place. The first thing for him to do was to warn the old scout.

He did this by a birdcall which they both understood, but, as the reader already knows, this was not necessary, as Nick had discovered the scheme of the savages and was preparing to thwart it.

As Cody watched the two figures on the shelf, he saw that Nick was drawing a long hitching strap nervously through his fingers. There was a long running noose in the strap, and the scout smiled as he awaited developments.

He saw Nick draw back to that portion of the re-

treach covered by the hood of rock, Hatch following along, as if engaged in persuasive argument.

The extreme rear of the retreat could not be seen from the gorge below, but Buffalo Bill smiled as he imagined what was going on there, beyond the reach of the shots of the savages skulking below.

Taking advantage of a rise in the surface of the covert where he lay concealed, Buffalo Bill crawled up until the whole place was in view.

The shelf was empty.

Scout, capitalist, mare, had disappeared.

The Indians had discovered the fact, too, for they were swarming up the rocky path leading to the shelf.

CHAPTER XV.

STUDYING IT OUT.

Buffalo Bill smiled grimly as he watched the Indians searching the shelf of rock, yet he was not altogether easy in his mind. He knew that they could never muster force sufficient to thrust aside the great stone which guarded the entrance to the cave beyond the vestibulelike entrance.

Only those who knew the secret might gain entrance there. But he did not know, had no means of knowing, how many there were who were possessed of the secret.

He believed that Clellie had been carried away by means of that secret opening, was certain of it. He had led the young men and Wild Bill away on a fruitless quest in order that he might enter the cavern in search of her without revealing its existence to the others. Nick Wharton already knew of the cavern behind the rock, and understood the manner of getting into it.

Buffalo Bill had known of the place for years. He had always believed that somewhere in the interior of the mountain the fissure leading from the retreat connected with the wider and loftier chambers of Hellgate Mine.

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In fact, it was his notion that the mine had originally been entered through the dry opening. Certain it was that the great rock which guarded the opening had been fashioned by human hands to perform its office.

Seemingly stanch and a part of the solid wall, it was really a great ball, flat on the outer side, which might easily be moved from side to side by taking away the supports which blocked and kept it in position before the crack in the mountainside which formed the entrance.

Buffalo Bill had often speculated as to the origin of the odd gate to the cavern. For all he knew it might have been contrived by the cave dwellers of old, when the gorge and even the valleys below swarmed with their enemies. At any rate it made the retreat a perfectly safe one, although very simple.

In fact, its simplicity was its best protection, for almost any curious person, well versed in mountain work, might have discovered the wedges which kept the circular stone in place.

Cody sighed as he realized that the secret was known to some of the toughs who had been brought there to defend the mine. He had little doubt that they had brought the knowledge of the entrance with them, gained from some drunken miner in some Eastern drinking place.

"The jig is up," he thought. "If there is any connection between Hellgate Mine and that fissure, and the mine is really as rich as it is claimed to be, it is time to act. The mining experts brought here by those trying to steal the mine will discover the connection, and then it will be the man who can shoot fastest for a few days."

Knowing that Nick would block the rolling door so that even those possessed of the secret could not open it from the outside without the use of explosives, Buffalo Bill left the Indians flying about the shelf, trying to discover some rational theory to account for the disappearance of the two men and the mare, and made his way to the west, where the line of the great cliff rounded away to the north, gaining a western elevation.

The spur of mountain wherein Hellgate Mine was located stood out from the great north-and-south sweep of the Rockies like a tower on a rambling roof of many heights.

Two faces open to the foothills looked south and west. To the north and east the outlines of the peak were less distinct, sloping away into the undulating surface of the main chain.

As has already been described, the foothills crept up to the very foot of this great cliff, breaking into ravines and gorges to the west as well as to the south.

Buffalo Bill crept cautiously around the open spaces, through thickets, and out and in miniature tunnels and caverns until at last he stood in a thicket close to the west side of the cliff proper.

Here he threw himself on the ground and waited. There was no indication of a fight in the direction the young men had taken. The noise on the shelf, where the Indians were still grunting over the loss of their prey, was shut out by distance.

It was a peaceful scene, and the scout enjoyed it. Man of war though he was in those days, Cody possessed a keen love for nature in all her moods. He had not long to ponder, however. The bushes which hugged the very wall of the mountain parted and a wrinkled old face was put out.

"I did, by mighty!"

Those were the first words the scout heard.

"Hello, Nick," said Cody, without turning his head.

"Worth six shillin' to hear him kick."

"What are you talking about?"

"A. J. Hatch, capitalist, New York."

"What of him?"

"He wants us to keep off his land, consarn him."

"Where is his land?"

"Here, and especially the mine."

"So that is what he was saying to you up on the cliff?"

"You bet it was."

"Where is he now?" asked Cody.

Nick put his hands to his sides and chuckled.

"Diana's got him," he said.

"Down there?"

Cody pointed toward the mountain.

"You know it."

"Safe?"

"Safer'n a lobster put up in a can," replied the old scout. "You see, he's tied, all good an' tight, and dumped down on the rock, all neat an' purty, gold eye-glasses an' all, and Diana stands there just waitin' to eat him up."

"Remarkable horse that," said Cody.

"Every time he moves, or offers to argue the p'int, she just gives him a nip. He'll stay there a spell, I reckon."

"And the girl?" asked Buffalo Bill.

Nick shook his head.

"What!" cried Cody, springing to his feet. "She is not there?"

"Not in sight in that part of the hill. She may be in the mine."

Buffalo Bill did not speak for a moment. He was keenly disappointed. He had believed that the girl had been hidden there by the outlaws, and would be easy to find.

"Any signs?" he asked, in a moment.

"Plenty."

"Showing violence?"

Nick shook his head. Unless he was telling the story himself, he did not care to talk.

"Well," said Cody, "it's a queer combination. She was taken in there, and I have good reason to believe that no one save us two knows the western exit to the place. Therefore, she must be there at the present time."

"There's a lot of crooked places I did not see, of course," said Nick, "but I called out to her and there was no answer."

"She might have fainted or been gagged," suggested Bill.

"She's a gritty little cuss and wouldn't faint," said Nick, "an' I don't believe they would gag her. Where would the use be?"

"I wonder if Hatch, who claims to own all the land about here, knows where she is?" muttered Buffalo Bill.

"He does if them infernal toughs had time to get back to him and report."

"Then we shall soon know."

The expression on Buffalo Bill's face boded no good to the New York capitalist. At that moment a call came from the valley to the south and west.

"That's Wild Bill and the young fellows," said Cody. "And now the question is, shall we admit the three of them to the cave, permitting them to take part in the search?"

"I reckon them young fellers would jist about eat us up if we didn't," replied Nick.

"Well, I suppose we must trust them," said Cody. "The young men claim to own the mine, like a good many others; and we can trust Wild Bill."

"I reckon we'll have to be realizing on that there investment right soon," said Nick, pointing to the secret entrance to the mine which he had just made use of in getting out. "If there's a mighty lot o' gold in there we might as well grab a heap of it an' go on a long vacation. Think I'll go to Parry an' see where Little Nap swatted the mob with a cannon loaded with mud. I will, by mighty!"

The exit which Nick had just emerged from and to which he pointed was an open fissure hidden by bushes and vines. It was not a hard place to find, but that part of the scene was rarely visited, even by those claiming an interest in Hellgate Mine.

Once in the tunnel, however, one must know the way well, for the interior of this cliff was cut by a hundred cracks, fissures, and little roomlike openings. It would by no means be a difficult thing to lose a stranger

there and cause a wearying journey of hours in the pitch darkness.

The Devil's Tower, as the cliff where the mine was situated was called, had long had an evil reputation because of its peculiar construction. It resembled a mighty rock which had been heated to a white heat and then doused with cold water, cracking it in every direction, though the larger breaks were not in view from the outside.

This may really have been the cause of the peculiar condition of the great rock. Or volcanic action might have rent it. At any rate, the interior was by no means safe and stable. Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton both knew that the passages there were constantly closing and opening; that the very plateau upon which the great cliff shot out from the main chain of the Rocky Mountains was uncertain as to foundation.

But in all mountain ranges of volcanic formation these phenomena exist. There may be great chambers far below the surface of the earth which swell and shrink with the heat of internal fires. There may be great basins filling and emptying when the rains and snows act upon them. Either may cause the mass of earth and rock to lift, or may contribute to its sinking down in the most inexplicable manner.

Buffalo Bill and his companions were not interested

in studying out the phenomenon of swelling and shrinking mountain masses at that time.

Clellie Wilmes was in the caverns somewhere. She was in the power of a gang of toughs who had been brought thither to capture the mine by fair means or foul.

Another thing. For the first time in years the wealth of Hellgate Mine was actively in dispute. It had often been threatened by miners who had crept to it in the dark of night, alone and unprepared to carry it away.

It had formed the subject of day and night dreams in miners' camps, and in the piled-up brick and marble structures of large cities, but now, for the first time since the scout had possessed knowledge of the mine, a claimant was there prepared to remove the gold by force.

Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton were not commercially inclined. In fact, both might have been very wealthy had they seized every opportunity for money-making which had come their way.

Still, they had no notion of permitting all the gold to be carried off without their getting a share. They might have enriched themselves from the mine at any time during the past decade, but they had not done so.

The mine was a very rich one. They had little doubt that ten millions in gold might be carried out

of it in a few days, and without the use of expensive machinery.

The yellow metal lay in nuggets. It lay in lumps in the rock like pebbles in conglomerate formations. Grant Millman and Glen Wilmes had arrived upon the scene just in time to be in at the finish.

They had believed themselves approaching a deposit of gold known to no living persons except themselves. They had found all the forces of civilized and savage life on guard. Lawyers with documents to serve, and toughs with guns for arguments, and Indians to skulk and murder and torture, were there to be dealt with.

The young men were thinking along this line as they, accompanied by Wild Bill, approached the spot where Cody and Nick awaited them, being directed there by an answer to Wild Bill's call.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BLUFF THAT DID NOT WORK.

As they approached the place where the two scouts stood, they heard some one calling to them from a rocky depression but a few feet away.

"Hello, there!" came the voice, muffled by reason of the speaker keeping a huge boulder between himself and the persons addressed.

"What do you want?" demanded Wild Bill.

"A parley," was the reply.

"So you are one of the chaps in charge of these red devils?" asked Wild Bill, moving toward the unknown's place of shelter.

Buffalo Bill and Nick now joined the party, being attracted by the conversation.

"Show yourself," said Cody.

"Don't shoot, then."

"Show yourself," repeated Buffalo Bill. "We have no time to lose now. What is it you want?"

A bald head appeared around an angle of the rock, and the scouts made up their minds that they had a veteran to deal with, but when the owner of the head came into view they saw a comparatively young and fashionably dressed man.

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He was prematurely bald, and the little hair that remained was white as snow. He looked like a young man who had worn himself out by a life of dissipation. The expression of his glittering black eyes was anything but reassuring.

"Who are you?" demanded Buffalo Bill. "Show up!"

"I never saw anything like the manners of this blasted country," said the stranger, making his way cautiously forward. "You don't give a fellow a chance to breathe, you know."

"What is your business with us?" demanded Wild Bill angrily, for he had no doubt that the parley was simply for the purpose of learning the strength of the scout's party.

"I am Rufus Markham Hatch," said the stranger. "I am here in the interest of my uncle, A. J. Hatch, capitalist, New York."

"Then run right along and attend to your business, Rufus Markham Hatch," said Nick. "If you want another name, we'll look around an' find one for you."

"Rather clever," said Hatch, "only, you see, I don't want another name. I want my uncle."

"Oh," said Grant. "Then, perhaps, you'd better send for him."

"If you think I've got him," said Glen, "you may search me."

"But you've abducted him, don't you know?" said Hatch, with a perfectly sober face. "You've gone and chucked him away."

"I'll bet a cooky Diana knows something about this," said Nick.

"That is neither here nor there," said Hatch. "I demand that you produce him. I'll have you all arrested. You can't resort to any such high-handed means, you know."

"Look, now," said Buffalo Bill. "We may as well understand each other. You have caused the sister of this young man to be abducted, and you won't see your uncle until the girl is restored to us."

"You hold my uncle as a hostage, then?"

"That's it."

"I do not admit that we are responsible for the disappearance of the girl to whom you refer," said Hatch, "but I inform you now that if my uncle is not produced in ten minutes that we will attack you and put you all to death."

"That seems to be a cheerful sort of compromise," said Buffalo Bill.

"And if we are not able to carry out this program we shall blow up the mine. We have dynamite enough in there to destroy the entire spur."

"You seem to be a clever sort of pirate," said Wild Bill, making a motion as if to spring upon the stranger.

"Wait," said that worthy. "If you attempt violence your lives are not worth a brass farthing. You are covered by the guns of my men."

Cody saw that it was no ordinary villain with whom he was dealing. He knew that the mine was in the possession of the paid hirelings of the man who stood before him. He understood that an explosion in the mine would be fatal to the young girl held a prisoner either there or in the adjacent passages.

He thought fast for a moment.

"You are a brave man," he finally said, "to stand there unarmed and make the proposition you have made. Now, listen to me: If you lift hand or finger to signal to your murderers, that motion will be your last. I have you covered with a gun concealed in my pocket. If you blow up the mine, your uncle will be killed, and the Federal troops will be brought here to punish the savages you are inviting to warlike methods in a time of peace."

"Your counterthreats have no weight with me," said Hatch stubbornly. "If uncle is killed, why, I am his heir. If the mine is dynamited, why, it will be all the easier to pick up the gold."

"We have talked enough," said Buffalo Bill. "Face about and return to your assassins. Produce the girl

here, unharmed, in ten minutes' time. The ownership of the mine may well be settled by the law."

Hatch opened his lips to reply, but Wild Bill cut him short by thrusting a revolver into his face.

"Only for the fact that we have need of you as a messenger," he said, "your game would be called right here. Under the circumstances, we will permit you to go, leaving the hangman a job later on."

Without a word Hatch faced about. As he did so, at a signal from Buffalo Bill, every member of the little party dropped to the ground and made instant flight to the secret entrance to the cavern.

The action was taken none too quickly. A chorus of shouts came from a fringe of bushes as they fell to the earth, and a volley of bullets whistled over their heads.

The treachery of the stranger was now apparent. Before another volley could be fired the party was out of danger, concealed by the winding passage leading to the subterraneous rooms in the heart of the cliff.

"I'm sorry I didn't kill that chap," said Wild Bill, wiping his face grimly. "He put up a fine job."

Grant and Glen looked about the place in which they now found themselves in wonder.

They were still near enough to the entrance to see by the light of day, but all about them dark passages

led into the interior of the cliff. There seemed to be a large central chamber from which the tunnels ran in all directions.

Nick busied himself for a moment preparing torches, material for which was at hand, and then proceeded to close the opening by rolling a great rock against it.

"We're all right now, by mighty," he said. "All we've got to do is to live on air until we can figure this proposition out. Once I found myself in a cave like this, a thousand feet from the——"

"We are safe for the present," said Buffalo Bill, interrupting him, "and the first thing to do is to locate the girl."

"Do you think she is hidden here?" asked Glen.

"I am sure of it," was the reply.

"But the dynamite," said Grant. "The devils may blow us all to kingdom come."

"We'll have to take our chances on that," said Buffalo Bill. "It looks like it was up to us to find that store of explosives, however."

"I wonder what they are doing out there," said Wild Bill, as a chorus of savage yells came from the outside.

He crept to the sealed up opening as he spoke and looked cautiously through a crevice between the rocky door and the wall of the opening.

"They are piling brush and inflammable material against the entrance," he said, in a moment. "They are going to attempt to smoke us out."

"That's bad, by mighty," said Nick. "This won't be no lady's bedwar when it is filled with smoke."

"Won't they smoke out their own crowd while they are trying to get us out?" asked Grant.

"That's just it," said Nick, a little soberly. "The crowd they have in here, or in the levels of the mine beyond, is wise to hiding places we are not next to."

"Perhaps we may be able to find them," suggested Glen, as the smoke began pouring into the passage, driven by a strong wind from the west. "I am sure Clellie is hidden in one of the places to which you refer."

At this moment the sharp whinny of a horse came to the ears of the little party. It echoed through the cavern almost like the call of a human voice.

Nick inclined his head to one side and listened, his wrinkled face taking on a look of anxiety.

"Diana's in trouble," he said, moving swiftly away in the direction of the place where he had left the mare guarding the senior Hatch.

"I presume she doesn't like this smoke," said Buffalo Bill, following.

Guided by the torch the old scout carried aloft, the

party advanced into the heart of the cliff. The whole great pile seemed to be hollow.

The passage they were now traversing was simply a great crack in the rock. The walls sloped away on each side, so the place was in the shape of a letter V.

A perfect network of cracks branched off on either hand. Some were large enough to permit the passage of a man. Others were not wide enough to allow a cat to enter.

"It's a wonder this rotten old shebang don't tumble down," muttered Nick, as he hurried along. "It's all bunged up, an' w'en it does take a drop some one will get hurt. Whoa, Diana!"

The last ejaculation was addressed to the mare, now snorting viciously in a passage off to the right.

"The manners of that there animile has been neglected," said Nick, as he approached Diana. "She jist wants to show off every time she gits a new beau. Whoa, Diana!"

The mare stood with her forelegs far apart, shaking her head and snorting with rage. Hanging from her mouth was a long streamer of cloth torn from the coat of her recent prisoner.

But Hatch, "capitalist," was nowhere to be seen. He had escaped in some strange manner.

"I'll be dodgasted if this don't take the bakery," said the old scout. "How did you come to let him git

away, old girl?" he added, addressing the mare as he looked about the place.

The beast only shook her head. Smoke from the fire kindled by the Indians was now rushing fiercely into the caverns of the cliff. The great central chamber was filling rapidly.

"If Hatch was helped away," said Buffalo Bill, "it means that there are some of the toughs in this part of the mine right now, and that we may run up against a bullet any minute."

Nick made a motion to extinguish the torch.

"No need of that now," said Buffalo Bill; "we should have heard their guns and felt their lead long ago if they were in here. I was only wondering how Hatch got away."

"Now, don't you go castin' any reflections on Diana," said Nick crossly. "The feller just got away, that's all."

Cody laughed.

"I've had people get away from me before now," he said consolingly, "so, perhaps, Diana is not to blame. Anyway, I think there is no need of looking for the red devils or their friends in here just at present."

"They'll be here quick enough," said Nick, "when they find out we're here, which they will as soon as the devils at the west exit communicate with them

They'll come through the opening from the mine, all right."

"It is up to us to find that opening, before we are smothered," said Buffalo Bill, moving away.

The passage they had been following ran east. When Cody and Nick came up with Wild Bill and the young men, they found them at a point where the passage turned at an acute angle and ran northwest.

The curious fissure formed a wedge, and through the wedge, exactly in front of the place from which Hatch had escaped, was a narrower fissure connecting the two arms of the main passage, which was very lofty.

As Cody and Nick approached, Grant was pointing to a ray of sunlight far up the passage, quite to the roof, it seemed.

No ray of sunlight was ever more welcome.

"That's a queer thing," said Wild Bill. "That ray comes from the wrong direction. The body of the cliff is five hundred feet thick there if it's an inch."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GHOST OF THE MINE.

"You've got me," said Nick.

Buffalo Bill regarded the starlike gleam steadily for a moment.

"It is a ray of sunlight falling on a polished surface," he said.

"But how could a polished surface come there?" asked Grant.

"That is for us to find out," replied Buffalo Bill. "Now, this light seems to come from the northwest, a manifest impossibility. A break in the rock there would only show blue sky. The sun is in the southwest, it being long after noon. Now, the sun shines in from the southwest and strikes something up there which reverses the ray. That something is metal. It must have been placed there by the hand of man. If we can reach the place we shall find a chamber there, perhaps the entrance to Hellgate Mine."

"Well, I'll be consarned!" said Nick. "Who'd 'a' thought o' figurin' that bit o' light out in that way?"

"There is no other way to size up the situation," said Buffalo Bill, "and the quicker we find out what is up there the better it will be for us."

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The condition of the atmosphere in the passage was now positively threatening. The savages were feeding green leaves and twigs to a roaring blaze, and the volume of smoke which swept into the passage was enough to smother an army.

"There are plenty of vents somewhere," said Buffalo Bill, "else the smoke would not pour in here so. This cavern is now practically a great chimney for the fire outside."

"I propose that we go outside and put out the fire," said Wild Bill.

"I was thinking of that," said Cody. "I guess it is the only thing to do."

"It's a mighty bad situation for a rush," said Nick, "but if you say so I'll turn Diana loose an' she'll kick blue blazes out of the red skunks."

"Diana couldn't watch one man and keep him," said Buffalo Bill, with a smile. "How's she going to defeat a whole band of Indians?"

Any trifling or critical reference to Diana always angered the impulsive old scout, and he now began a long explanation of the escape of the elder Hatch.

"He just sneaked away," he said. "The Indians didn't interfere with the mare. She would 'a' cuffed 'em all to a peak if they had monkeyed with her. By mighty! It's funny how that feller with eyeglasses got away, with Diana right there!"

"Well," said Cody, "you stay with Diana, and soothe her ruffled temper, while we go out and do a little shooting."

"Nick grumbled and turned away. While under no definite obligations to obey Buffalo Bill, he always did so, as did most of the rough-and-ready characters of that time.

Led by Buffalo Bill, and creeping low in order to avoid the smoke as much as possible, the little party made its way back to the west exit—secret now no more, as it had been used in the presence of the outlaws and Indians.

As they approached the place, half suffocated by the smoke, Glen caught hold of Wild Bill's foot and came near receiving a hearty kick for his pains.

"Wait," he whispered.

"Oh, I thought it might be some blasted savage," said Wild Bill, turning about and rolling over on his face on the bottom of the passage in order to get out of the smoke as much as possible. "Almost anything might happen here in this black hole."

"Well," said Glen, "back here a few feet I lost the sound of your advance for a moment and turned into a side passage. I soon found out, for the trend of the floor was upward, and I knew that this should be downward. Then I turned back, but not before I saw a shaft of light ahead and felt a rush of fresh

air. Do you think there is a way we can get out and surprise the Indians?"

"I guess you have found one, boy," was the reply.

Wild Bill was not long in communicating the information received to Buffalo Bill and Grant.

"If the opening is only large enough for us to get out," said Cody, "we may yet punish them for trying to smoke us out like rats in a cellar. Go on ahead, boy, and watch for the place where the upward slant begins."

Glen went on ahead, groaning, coughing, and muttering inaudible anathemas against the Indians and the smoke they were making. It seemed to him that he would give a year of his life for one breath of fresh air. The others of the party were similarly affected, but said less about the discomforts of the situation, the two scouts being used to trying scenes and Grant being too smothered and choked to use his voice.

Added to the misery of the situation was the possession of the knowledge that at any time they might come plump into advancing Indians or cutthroat border men.

Presently, more by good luck than anything else, Glen came upon the mouth of the passage he had referred to. He crawled swiftly along for a few feet, listened to see if those behind were following, and struck a match.

As the blaze flared up Glen raised it aloft and looked about. No one was in sight! He had supposed Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, and Grant to be close behind him. Where had they gone?

He could now feel the fresh air blowing on his face, and the pain in his mouth, throat, and lungs was so great, as a result of the smoke, that for a moment he forgot the absence of his companions and crept along the passage in the direction from which the current came.

He came to a wall of rock through which apertures like loopholes could be seen. These holes were not more than six inches in diameter, and there were three of them in the form of a triangle.

This convinced Glen that they had been made by human hands.

"The old cave dwellers must have had a hard time fixing up this cliff," he thought, looking over the valley spread out below.

He could only see straight ahead. The formation of the windows would not admit of his looking down to the mouth of the main passage.

Glen saw that the place was fairly well lighted from the apertures, and that at no distant time it had been occupied by human beings. The passage became larger as it approached the surface wall, and formed a room of fair size.

Crowded against the wall were a couple of good boxes, one having the appearance of having been used as a table.

Back of this a wide crack extended into the wall quite beyond the circle of light.

Listening now for some indications of the approach of his friends, Glen heard a slow, swishing sound, like that caused by the moving of a woman's train across a carpeted room. Then a long-drawn sigh came to his ears.

"Clellie! Clellie! Clellie!" he called, wild for the moment with excitement and hope. "Are you there?"

There came no response for a moment, then a strange form fluttered forward from the shadows at the rear of the tunnel.

"Clellie?" called the boy.

There was no answer. Glen saw a bearded face, a pair of shining eyes, unnaturally bright, a glimmer of gray as of the movement of a robe, and that was all. Without motion, without seeming to turn to the right or left, to front or rear, without a sound of departure, the vision vanished!

Glen was about to follow after it when the sound of Buffalo Bill's voice reached his ears.

"Come, young man! We are waiting for you," said the scout.

"Where are you?" asked the young man.

"Here, at the mouth of the tunnel," was the reply. "What are you doing there?"

"Looking up ghosts, I guess."

"There will be plenty of ghosts here directly," said Buffalo Bill. "We have found the passage you referred to, and there is an exit large enough for a wagon to get out. We're going to attack the Indians."

"Why," said Glen, "this is the passage I told you of."

"Well, we turned into another one a few yards away," said Buffalo Bill, "and found just what we were looking for. How did you come to get in here? Quite a room, eh?" added the scout, advancing toward the loopholes.

"A room," said Glen, "why, it is a charnel house, a grave. I saw a ghost there just as you came and called to me."

Buffalo Bill did not attempt to reason this ghost story out of the young man's mind. He was satisfied that if Glen had really seen anything resembling a human being it was either one of the Hatch crowd or a prisoner.

Another reason, there was little time for discussion. Cody decided to let the matter go for the present. He could investigate later on. Now there was work to do.

"It is a good thing you called out," said the scout. "Only for that we might have gone off and left you."

"I thought that—that—it was my sister at first," said Glen, with an involuntary shudder. "Oh, it had awful eyes."

"We will soon find your sister," said Buffalo Bill encouragingly, "after we clear this cliff of sneaks and Indians. She must be here somewhere. It would have been impossible for them to have taken her away."

"We have already delayed her rescue too long," replied Glen angrily. "One thing after another has kept us busy, while the poor girl is breaking her heart in captivity somewhere. I tell you that I am going to begin the search right now."

"In ten minutes' time," replied Buffalo Bill, "we shall all be on the trail. You can do nothing alone. I appreciate your feelings, but you must see that we have acted for the best."

"Who knows what usage the girl is receiving?" cried the young man. "It makes my blood run cold to think of it. We have waited too long already. Oh, the devils! To drag that child away!"

"Come out and take a few shots at them," urged Cody, "and we'll all join in the search. Come!"

Thus urged, Glen followed the scout to the passage where his companions awaited him. The entrance was

but a short distance from the one he had penetrated, which accounts for his error.

The smoke in the passage was stifling. As soon as the young man left the little chamber where the air came in through the loopholes he was almost overcome by the villainous smudge set up by the Indians.

Realizing his condition, Buffalo Bill seized him by the arm and half dragged him along, the others going ahead and making for the end of a passage running at right angles with the main one.

Presently they came to a sharp turn in the wall and the light of day, the pure, free air of heaven, became things of fact once more.

The opening in the rock, which admitted the light and the air, was high up in a wall of the cliff facing to the north. It was at the very end of an L which jutted out from the main wall. This L carried a steep and difficult face, with here and there dizzy ledges upon which stunted trees and shrubs found root.

The opening was concealed in such a thicket, on a ledge perhaps fifty feet above the spot where the savages were piling more fuel on the blaze they had started, at the point where the scouts had disappeared.

Every move of the Indians, intent now on smoking the whites out of the cavern, in order that they might be tortured and murdered, was within view of the scouts from their point of vantage.

There were a dozen savages, led by a white man who, in manner and conversation, appeared to be a stranger to the section and the members of his party.

"Get ready and shoot quick," said Wild Bill, in a whisper. "My repeating rifle is good for three before the smoke hides them. I get the white man. Let him alone, you."

"It seems rather like murder," said Buffalo Bill. "We ought to give them some sort of a show."

"What show are they giving us?" cried Glen hotly. "They are trying to smoke us out like rats. They have carried my sister away. I'll shoot if you wait another minute."

Almost before the others were ready the boy began shooting. Half a dozen volleys were fired and then the smoke shut out the scene, floating before the hidden opening like a cloud.

Groans came from below, and Buffalo Bill, after whispering a few words to Wild Bill, hastened away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STORY THE TORCHES TOLD.

In a short time the cloud of smoke drifted away, and then the result of the shooting could easily be observed. Ten Indians lay dead not far from the fire they had kindled. One, fatally wounded but not yet dead, lay with one foot close to the blaze he had helped to keep going.

He was wounded in the back and could not move the limb, which was getting hotter and hotter. His appeals for help were piteous.

"I guess we got them all," said Wild Bill.

"Nick Wharton should have been here," said Grant, who had taken a great liking to the eccentric scout.

"He would have enjoyed this."

"Nick is guarding the rear," said Wild Bill.

"Oh, he was told to stay there and console the mare," said Grant, "and I couldn't make it out."

Directly the scorched bushes near the mouth of the lower exit parted and Buffalo Bill appeared. His first move was to drag the suffering Indian from the fire. Then he looked carefully over the ground, in search of the white man who had acted as leader.

At length he discovered him, lying at some distance

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away, where he had dragged himself after being fatally wounded. The fellow glared at Cody as he approached.

"Well, your game is up," said the scout.

"Oh, I'll get over this," was the reply.

Buffalo Bill sat down by the side of the wounded man and talked and listened for some moments. At first the fellow was angry and would not talk. The Hatches had brought him from the Bowery to die there, just when visions of wealth filled his mind, and he was too enraged at fate to do anything but curse.

Finally he quieted down and answered all the questions asked by the scout.

"There," he said feebly, "you know all about it that I know. Now take me to some place where I can have my wounds treated. Oh, I'll get over this, all right. I'll be back on the Bowery, the king of the bunch, in a month."

Buffalo Bill made a short investigation of the locality before returning to the cave with the wounded man. There was no one in sight. The scout was of the opinion that all the savages and renegades on the outside of the mine had engaged in the attack there.

If not there at the beginning of the firing, the sound of battle would have attracted them to the scene. Therefore, if none had escaped, the scout had nothing

to fear until those in Hellgate Mine became alarmed and sought their companions.

"And when they are looking for me among the foothills," smiled the scout, "I'll be looking over the ledges in the mine."

Taking the wounded man, who refused to give his name, in his arms Cody entered the passage and proceeded to the little chamber discovered by Glen, where the wounds of the dying wretch were cared for as well as possible under the circumstances.

The fire having been scattered and burned itself out, the passages were now comparatively free of smoke.

"Has that man been in the mine?" asked Glen, who had followed Cody to the place where the wounded man had been left.

"Yes," was the reluctant reply.

"Was my sister there?" was the next question.

"He did not see her there," answered the scout.

"Is there a way of getting into Hellgate Mine from this place?" persisted Glen, made doubly anxious by the scout's reticence.

"This man says there is," replied Buffalo Bill, "but he does not know where it is. He says the men pass back and forth from one place to the other, but he insists that he does not know the route."

"We must find it," said the young man. "We have waited too long now. Clellie must be found."

"I am ready," replied Buffalo Bill, "but we must proceed cautiously. You all heard what that man said out there? Well, he may keep his word for once in his life and blow up the mine."

"Ghost and all," said Grant, who did not believe Glen's story of the ghostly visitant.

"Now, see here," said Nick. "Them chaps mean biz. If they see we're gettin' the best o' 'em, why, they'll blow up the whole kedewy. That won't be good for our health. Diana never did like to be blowed up. Sort o' disagrees with her anatomy."

"I warn you that there is danger in every step you take," said Buffalo Bill. "So be careful what you do. Be careful and do not fire a gun. Just keep close to the ground and watch and listen."

"Glen and I will go together," said Grant. "I want him to produce that ghost."

"The point now," said Buffalo Bill, "is to locate the passage leading to Hellgate Mine. The girl is unquestionably there, and the outlaws are there."

"For all we know," said Glen, who was determined to investigate what he had seen, "for all we know, the passage the ghost stood in when he disappeared may lead to the mine."

"Well," said Buffalo Bill, not a little annoyed at the

obstinacy of the young men, "go there if you want to, but when you see the ghost again don't shoot. You might commit murder."

The young men hastened away in the gloom of the passage, and Buffalo Bill, accompanied by Nick, turned away in the direction of the passage from which the reflected light had been seen.

"There must be an upper passage there," said Cody, as they moved along. "As Hellgate Mine is higher than this place, the connecting tunnel must be there."

"Seems to me," said Nick, "them boys is pretty hot on the scent w'en they go after that ghost."

"Why do you say that?" demanded Buffalo Bill.

"Cause Diana's been a-snuffin' an' a-snortin' in the direction of that den ever since she came in here."

"You think she objects to ghosts?"

"She knows there's somethin' mighty peculiar goin' on," replied Nick, "an' it's dollars to doughnuts that the boys find some one there."

The two scouts were now climbing steadily upward, from ledge to ledge, and further conversation became impossible.

In the meantime, the two young men were advancing up the narrow passage leading from the room of the loopholes, where the wounded man had been left.

They carried torches which Nick had provided, and peered and poked into every hole and crevice as they

moved along. Presently they came to a place where the passage seemed to end in a wall of solid rock.

"This must be calling day for the ghost," laughed Grant, "for he's not at home."

As he spoke a rustling of garments came from his very feet, accompanied by low sighs and moans of pain.

"There must be a cellar here," said Grant, flashing his torch about. "There surely is no one in sight."

"See," cried Glen, "there is an opening at your feet. You might have had a tumble there. The man we seek has fallen into it."

The young man advanced to the place indicated and lowered his torch. It revealed just a hole at the end of the passage, probably five feet in depth and a couple of yards in diameter. If there was a passage leading from it there were no indications of the fact.

"There is your ghost at the bottom," cried Grant. "It is a man. Help me down. Some poor prisoner, probably."

Grant fastened his torch in the wall, and with the help of Glen descended to the bottom of the well-like place. There were no steps, no ladder, just rough edges to the wall, with now and then a hand hold cut or worn into the rock. When Grant reached the bottom Glen handed down his torch.

The figure from which the groans proceeded lay in

a heap on the floor. Grant shuddered at finding a human being in such a place.

"We must get him out of this," he said to Glen, who was bending over the opening, watching all that was going on below.

"See if you can't lift him up so I can take hold of his hands," said Glen. "He appears to be ill, or wounded."

Grant stooped over and turned the face of the prostrate man up so that he could see it. The next instant he fell back with a cry of terror.

"Grant!"

"Help me out of this," cried the young man. "The man who in life took this shape lies at the bottom of the North River."

"Grant! Grant!"

"He is calling to you," said Glen. "Out of the way and let me down there."

In a moment the two young men stood side by side in the gloomy place. But it was no ghost they bent over. It was a suffering man. One whom suffering and hunger had rendered insane for the time being.

"Who is it?" asked Glen. "He called your name."

Grant bent closer and moved the matted hair away from the wasted face. Then there was no longer cause to fear the supernatural. The wreck of humanity lying there was his uncle, believed by all to have been

drowned weeks before in the Hudson River, at New York.

"My God!" cried Grant. "Uncle! How did you come here?"

"This is no time to ask questions," said Glen impatiently. "We must get him out of here."

After calling in vain for assistance from the others, who were too far away to hear their voices, Grant and Glen finally succeeded in getting the now unconscious man to the chamber of loopholes, as it was now called. There he was placed on a moderately soft bed hastily made of the young men's coats.

The wounded renegade, though suffering great agony and very near to death, looked on with a smile as the young man bent tenderly over the moaning man.

"There's the secret of the mine," he whispered. "He knows where the yellow lodes are."

"How did he come to be here, and in such a plight?" asked Grant.

"We brought him here," was the reply.

"We believed that he was drowned."

"He never got on board the wrecked boat."

"Why is he so treated?"

"He is obstinate."

"You mean that he refuses to give information regarding the mine?"

The renegade nodded.

"He will tell now," said Glen, "and you fellows have lost the game."

The renegade grinned maliciously.

"Don't be so sure of that," he whispered. "One of the boys gave him a bump on the head one night, and he's been plumb daffy ever since. He's nutty. You won't get a thing from him."

"You are a brood of devils," cried Grant, enraged beyond control at the treatment accorded the real owner of the mine, "and I mean to end your life right here."

He would have been as good as his word only that Glen restrained his lifted hand.

"Don't murder a dying man," he said.

"I was wrong," said Grant, quick to make amends for his hasty temper, "but I can't hear his voice—which sounds like a hiss—with any degree of patience."

Glen now turned back to the wounded renegade.

"You assisted in the capture of the girl?" he asked.

A nod was the only reply.

"Where is she?"

"I do not know."

"In the mine?"

"Yes, but you must get her away from there before night."

"We shall get her away as soon as possible," replied Glen, "but why before night?"

"Her life will not be safe an instant after the slaughter of the Indians becomes known."

"Have they harmed her?" asked Glen, his face gray with terror at the thought.

The wounded renegade had but a few moments to live. The blood from his wound choked his utterance. Glen bent closer.

"I don't know," came a faint whisper. "Get her away."

"But how can we get into the mine?"

CHAPTER XIX.

A SUPPLY OF DYNAMITE.

The wounded man lifted himself feebly on one elbow in order to relieve his throat of the blood gathering there.

"It's up there, the entrance," he said. "There's a passage leading to the roof. It's there, only——"

Grant bent over the fellow anxiously.

"It is of no use," he said, in answer to Glen's anxious look; "he is dead."

"We shall have to locate the entrance ourselves, then," said Glen.

"And we must act quickly."

"We must not leave your uncle here with this dead man," said Glen.

"Where can we take him?"

"Suppose we carry him to the little niche where Diana is," said Glen. "She will take care of him, all right. Anyway, the company of a horse is better than none."

This was agreed to, and the still unconscious man was conveyed to the stall occupied by Diana and laid upon a bed of hay which Nick had in previous days gathered for the intelligent mare.

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"Now," said Grant, patting the mare on the neck, "don't let a soul touch him."

The mare whinnied as if she understood, and the young men hastened away, taking, by chance, the exact passage pursued by Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton.

The underground passages were now clear of smoke, but were dark and forbidding. All unused to such experiences, these boys from the city felt many twinges of uneasiness as they crept along, but they had no notion of turning back.

They knew that Buffalo Bill was somewhere within reach. They understood that he was engaged on the same quest as themselves and the knowledge gave them hope.

Besides, Wild Bill and Nick Wharton were there, doing their utmost to rescue the girl, which was now of greater importance in the estimation of the young men than the location of the lodes of gold.

In the meantime, Buffalo Bill and Nick were pursuing their toilsome way upward. Passage after passage they passed, keeping always the one leading straight up.

There was no sound of pursuit. No sound indicating the presence of an enemy. In fact, the remaining Indians and renegades were busy in Hellgate Mine, searching for the great stores of gold said to be located there.

Only one of their number remained in the part occupied by the scouts. Hatch, who had been captured and who had escaped from his bonds and from Diana's watchful care, had not been able to find his way out.

In the haste attendant on the incident, Hatch had not been securely tied, and had escaped without assistance. The searchers passed him in the darkness many times as he peered from out narrow fissures as the torches trailed by.

He had heard the conversation at the chamber of the loopholes, and while Buffalo Bill and Nick were ascending the passage leading to the point from which the reflection of light had been thrown, he was making his way at the heels of Grant and Glen, who were conveying the former's uncle to a safer place in Diana's stall.

Hatch was not a murderer by instinct, but he was there to gain the wealth of Hellgate Mine. He had paid an irresponsible miner quite a large sum for information concerning the place, and had made a large expenditure in fitting out the expedition which now swarmed the place.

He was determined to "make good" before returning home, and was afraid that Grant's uncle, who had been kidnaped by his orders, might regain consciousness and convey to his nephew the information which

torture and hunger had not been able to force from him.

He, therefore, followed the young men, resolved to commit murder as soon as left alone with the wounded man.

As Buffalo Bill and Nick mounted upward, with Grant and Glen not far away, and Wild Bill prowling about after his old fashion, no one knew where, Hatch stood by the side of the uncle, or as near as he could get, for Diana objected to his presence there, and would not permit him within reach of her hoofs and teeth.

It was pitch dark in the stall occupied by Diana, but Hatch resolved to take the chance of lighting a match and using his revolver, which by chance had not been taken from him.

The match was already in his hand, burning brightly, his weapon pointed at the prostrate man, when a shout from the darkness above unnerved his arm and the match dropped down and the flame died out.

The shout heard from above was from Buffalo Bill, and was a cry of warning to the young men whose torches flamed below him.

Buffalo Bill and Nick were standing on the ledge from which the reflected rays of the sun had come. Their torches lit up the place dimly, but there was

enough light to show the rays had been tossed back by a disk of solid gold.

The wealth of the cliff was not in Hellgate Mine at all. It was in the adjacent passages. Worn smooth by the forces of nature, polished by water or grinding rock, brought to a surface finish superior to the handiwork of man, the broken ledge displayed to the eye a circle of pure gold.

How far it ran into the body of the cliff there was no means of determining, but there was enough of the precious metal in sight to make every member of the party rich. The scouts had reached the place only by the most careful work.

On the way up they had passed a silent Indian, guarding the passage between the two sets of passages. Their attention had been attracted to him by a faint light which crept into the tunnel from the mine proper.

Extinguishing their own torches, they had succeeded in passing the sentinel without alarming him. When, however, they saw Grant and Glen approaching with their torches in full view, the scouts knew that they must be stopped.

It had been the idea of Buffalo Bill to collect his little force, kill or capture the sentinel, and enter the mine before the inmates knew that the entrance had been discovered.

The rash appearance of the boys defeated this plan.

If he would save their lives, the scout must warn the enemy of their presence in the passage, and the attack must be made at once.

The young men heard the warning none too soon. They had scarcely extinguished their torches and crept into a side fissure when a volley of bullets swept down the passage.

The torches carried by Buffalo Bill and Nick had been extinguished at the moment of giving the alarm, and for an instant darkness reigned. Then a great shaft of light burst out of the opening between the two mines. The renegades and Indians had bunched their torches there.

The opening was exactly opposite the small fissure which cut across the rocky wedge. The shaft of light struck the place where Diana had been left, and where Hatch stood with murder in his heart.

Wild Bill, prowling about the cavern, bent on the discovery of the famous lode of gold, saw what was going on, being but a few feet away. Only for his presence there another tragedy would have taken place that instant.

Buffalo Bill and Nick were too high up on the ridge to see what was going on below, and, besides, were not in position. The hiding place of the young men was not in line with the fissure through which the light flowed.

The capitalist from New York was determined to secure what he wanted by fair means or foul. Wild Bill crept closer and watched him.

The light from above shone like a limelight on the spot where the cowardly Hatch was preparing to murder an unconscious man. The armed hand which had fallen to Hatch's side at the warning cry leaped into position when the shaft of light revealed his mercenaries at the other end.

It seemed that the fate of the suffering man was sealed, but there came a pause before the shot was fired. The unconscious man was, in his ravings, revealing the location of the store of gold mined and hidden away.

Hatch dropped his hand again and drew nearer. As he did so, there was a quick movement behind him, a muscular figure loomed up in the stream of light for an instant, and Hatch was borne struggling into a dark corner, the fingers of Wild Bill closing about his throat to prevent any outcry.

"You would murder an unconscious man!" said Wild Bill, whispering the words in Hatch's ear. "I've a mind to close you out right here."

Wild Bill was now at a loss what course to pursue.

The shaft of light pouring straight down from the opening to the mine revealed to him only the guarded entrance for which so much searching had been done.

He could not see the ledge where Buffalo Bill and Nick lay, nor was he aware that Grant and Glen were peering out of a dark corner but a short distance from the source of the light.

The first thing to do was to keep out of range of the guns above. The second was to locate his companions. But the matter was solved for him in a manner bordering on the supernatural.

As Wild Bill stood there grasping his trembling prisoner, the unconscious man who had been brought there by the young men moved uneasily about on his rough couch. The strong light falling full upon his face in a measure restored him to consciousness.

He struggled to a sitting position and looked about. His dazed eyes followed the stream of light, quite naturally, and rested upon the Indians and the renegades, his old tormentors.

To his crazed brain they appeared to be moving around in a circle of fire, and to beckon him to approach.

His first thought was of escape; to place himself beyond the reach of those who had treated him so cruelly. With this thought occupying his mind, his hand came into contact with Diana's nose. Here was a way out of the trouble and peril.

In an instant, much to the surprise of Wild Bill, who considered the man as good as dead, he was

mounted on the mare's back, saddleless and without bridle, urging her away.

He had no definite notion as to direction. Motion appeared to satisfy him. Diana reared and plunged for a moment, but did not succeed in shaking off the burden. Then she saw the Indians outlined sharply against the circle of light.

Her hatred of the brood brought her into action. She tried to charge through the narrow fissure through which the light came, but it was much too small for that, so she wheeled to the right and shot like a musket ball around the sharp point of the ledge.

From their position in the opening the Indians could not see the approach of the horse and her mad rider. They could only hear the clatter of her hoofs, which rang in a thousand echoes through the place, still resounding with the reverberations of their shots.

Diana darted past the spot where Glen and Grant had hidden themselves and came to the entrance of the fissure leading into Hellgate Mine.

The renegades and savages then saw a horse rearing and plunging and striking with both front feet. With eyes blazing with fury she charged at them, her hatred of Indians amounting almost to insanity.

The figure was a weird one, but the object upon her back seemed to accentuate the apparition. Mr. Mill-

man's eyes were almost starting from their sockets, flaming with insanity. His long beard and hair swept back from a face as pale as death.

To all intents and purposes the ghost of Hellgate Mine was at large and out in defense of its golden treasures. The renegades and Indians turned and fled. The mare charged on.

Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton knew the call of the mare as she advanced against her enemies. Glen and Grant followed on at the best of their speed. Wild Bill urged his prisoner to greater exertion.

All six met near the opening just as Diana, still carrying the insane man upon her back, dashed into Hellgate Mine—the first one of the party to gain the much-sought place!

"My God!" cried Grant, stepping into the entrance. "It is death for them both, and for Clellie!"

Buffalo Bill drew the young man roughly back.

"You must be tired of life to stand there," said the scout. "The panic in there will last but a moment, and then they will begin shooting. Down, every one of you!"

Buffalo Bill was flat on his stomach almost before the words were out of his mouth, making for the open passage to the mine. The others needed no second command. They were close at his heels, Wild Bill

still dragging the New York capitalist with him. Hatch was by this time in a pitiful condition mentally and physically.

He was begging to be released, declaring that the Indians would shoot down the whole party, not knowing that he was there.

His clothing was torn, his eyeglasses lost, and there were marks of the rough usage he had received on his neck and face.

"You caused all this killing!" said Wild Bill, as he dragged him along over the rocks. "You caused the girl to be stolen! Now you just take your medicine!"

The party entered the mine unopposed, for the hoofs of the mare were still clattering down the passage she had chosen upon entering, and the maniac rider was driving all before him.

There was still light, for the savages had fastened torches in the walls when they began shooting. The scouts and their companions found themselves on a ledge of rock overlooking a great cavernlike chamber, which was dark except for two lights burning at the bottom, perhaps a hundred feet away. The mare was following the ledge, and as the party came into view she reached its end and stood upon the level floor below.

The Indians were now recovering from their fright.

The sight of Buffalo Bill and his companions creeping into the mine brought the renegades to their senses. A shot rang out, aimed at Cody.

It just grazed Hatch's shoulder, creating a burning sensation, but not an actual wound.

"For God's sake!" cried that worthy, "let us fix this matter up in some manner. We shall all be killed."

Another shot sang past the head of Buffalo Bill, and then came intense darkness on the ledge and a blaze of light at the bottom of the chamber.

Buffalo Bill had thrown every torch down. This gave the momentary advantage to the scouts, for they were not in view, while the others were.

The renegades were huddled together in the cavern. Diana stood threatening a stalwart Indian with her teeth.

The maniac was standing erect upon the mare, waving his arms and calling upon an imaginary bunch of devils to come on.

"Shoot!" said Buffalo Bill calmly. "We must reduce the number if we can, for there is warm work ahead."

With guns and revolvers pointed downward, each picking his man, they waited for the word. While they waited Hatch crept up to Cody and laid his hand on his arm.

"Listen to me," he cried, in an agonized tone. "For the love of God, listen to me! Don't shoot. On the floor of the cavern below there is stored dynamite enough to destroy the whole range. One stray shot and we are all dead men."

CHAPTER XX.

BUFFALO BILL'S DARING DEED.

"We must take our chances," replied Buffalo Bill.

But Nick Wharton interfered just as the shooting was about to begin.

"You just wait until I call Diana," he said. "I ain't a-goin' to lose that consarned-fool mare fer all the dynamite in the earth. Gee whiz! But didn't she make time there? Where'd she git that ghost? Looks like her brother, the old dev. It does, by mighty!"

The eccentric scout gave a peculiar whistle, at which the mare pricked up her ears. Another whistle started her back up the ledge, at a slower pace than was made on the first trip, but she constantly looked back as if anxious for battle.

But the Indians, now recovering from their fright, did not propose to permit the mare to escape. They knew her by reputation, now that the scales of terror had fallen from their eyes, and any one of them would have given much to possess her.

Besides, they recognized in her mad rider the New Yorker who knew the secrets of the hidden gold. They could not afford to allow him to get away.

Half a dozen stalwart Indians sprang toward her,

seizing her by neck and ears and muzzle. The mare wheeled round and round and fought with teeth and heels and forefeet. The rider fell to the floor of the cavern, but the fight went on.

Nick was for rushing down the ledge and getting into the mix-up, but was restrained by Wild Bill.

While the unequal battle was on a girl's shrill scream came from a ledge at the opposite side of the cavern. Glen sprang forward.

"Clellie!" he cried. "We are coming, Clellie!"

Doubtful of the outcome of the fight for the possession of the mine, now that the scouts had actually gained entrance, two renegades had entered the nook where Clellie had been imprisoned since her capture and attempted to convey her to a safer prison.

The poor girl was struggling with all her strength as the three appeared in view. Glen and Grant prepared for a rush.

Buffalo Bill sternly ordered a halt. The torches which he had tossed down were now dying out, and the place would soon be in darkness. Whatever was to be done must be done at once. The scout seized Hatch by the arm.

"Where is that dynamite?" he demanded. "Point it out to me or I will end your life here and now."

"There," replied the trembling prisoner. "Under that shelf which projects from the opposite side of the

cavern. There, where they are struggling with the girl. For God's sake don't shoot."

Buffalo Bill dropped his rifle and crawled over the edge of the ledge. Thirty yards and more below was the floor of the cavern. The wall of the ledge seemed perpendicular and smooth. No human being had ever attempted that descent before, but the scout caught at a slight crevice in the wall and began lowering himself.

The battle about Diana attracted the attention of those below and the movements of the scout were not noticed. Falling a dozen feet to strike upon a slender projection, digging with his fingers into tiny fissures to keep himself in an upright position until he could make another drop, ever clinging like a fly to the inhospitable surface of the wall, Buffalo Bill finally reached the floor below, landing in a dark corner.

The members of his party watched him from the ledge above wondering if they were not witnessing a miracle. Half burned and extinguished torches were scattered about the floor of the chamber. Buffalo Bill gathered them in his arms and crept to the shelter of the shelf where the dynamite was stored.

Clellie was still calling for help, but the renegades were slowly bearing her away. This was what the scout was waiting for.

Three Indians lay upon the floor groaning with pain.

as a result of Diana's stout resistance. It seemed impossible to capture the mare, and the Indians were about to shoot her.

As the girl and her assailants gained the floor a bright light shot up. The savages turned to see a fire, composed of torch ends, burning under the ledge.

A little to one side stood Buffalo Bill, a revolver in each hand. He was instantly covered by a dozen guns. His companions leveled their weapons from above, but they gave him up for lost.

They did not understand that Buffalo Bill was only carrying out a deliberately planned act of heroism which meant victory for him or death for every person in the cave.

"Stop!" shouted the scout, in a voice which rang through the cavern.

The savages paused, wondering that the scout should so place himself in their power.

"You all know what is stored here," said the scout calmly. "It was hidden by your own hands."

"Dynamite!"

The Indians and renegades fell back in terror as the word was spoken by one of their number.

"There is enough of the explosive here to demolish the entire cliff," continued Buffalo Bill. "You may kill me where I stand, but my companions on the ledge above have their guns pointed at the dynamite. At

the first hostile movement they will shoot into the mass of explosive, and we will all die together."

"Don't shoot!" roared Hatch, from above. "Reason with him! He is mad to think of such a thing."

Wild Bill released his hold on the cowardly schemer and gave him a kick.

"Go and tell your friends that at short range," he said. "And remember that I have you covered."

Hatch rushed down the ledge, gesticulating with his hands and calling to those below to withhold their fire. In a moment he was engaged in a low-voiced conversation with them.

"What do you want?" he finally asked, in a low tone, addressing Buffalo Bill. "We will do whatever you require."

There was treachery in the voice, and the scout knew it.

"Put the girl upon the horse and deliver her to her brother."

A short pause was followed by the click of a revolver high up on the ledge. In another moment the girl was in her brother's arms. But Buffalo Bill's work was not yet accomplished. His purpose was to capture every member of the outlaw party.

Again the light in the cavern was dying down. There was no knowing what the Indians would do in the darkness.

"Get together, there," Buffalo Bill called out. "Stack your arms in the corner and line up. Nick, you come down and tie them."

There was no verbal reply. The renegades and Indians complied sullenly with the order, while a movement from the ledge above told that Nick was advancing.

"Consarn this dodgasted rheumatiz," Cody heard him grunting. "I could 'a' got down there at a hop a year ago."

Wild Bill was cautiously following Nick, while Grant, Glen, and Clellie stood on the ledge at the opening, hardly daring to breathe. The terror of the situation almost drove away the great pleasure of the meeting between brother and sister.

For some seconds the only sounds heard were the cautious footsteps of the descending scouts, the faint snapping of the burning torches, and the sound of falling water from a remote corner of the cavern, through which ran the brook which found exit in the ravine.

The fountainhead was evidently far above the roof of the chamber, for the water fell in a steady stream from the roof and ran away through a gully at one side.

During the silence, and while the torches were flickering faintly, Hatch and one of the renegades crept away unseen by the scouts.

"There is but one thing to do," said the treacherous capitalist. "If we can block the flow of water at the arch in the ravine and replace the stones at the entrance up there, it won't be long before all these people will be drowned, and then we can drain the mine."

The greed of the man would have led him to destroy even those who had risked their lives in his service.

"I'm for getting out while I can," replied the renegade. "I can make it by the brook, I guess, now that you speak of it."

Knowing how large the outer entrance was, the renegade stepped into the stream of water as soon as he came to it and, creeping low on his hands and knees, essayed to reach the ravine.

Presently he came to a narrow passage, through which the water rushed fiercely, there being a fall just above.

Summoning all his strength in order to pass quickly through, the renegade forced his head through the aperture. Then, too late, he discovered that he could not get the rest of his body through. Neither could he draw back.

The water swirled about him, filled his mouth and ears, and backed up into the cavern. The renegade

died there struggling, and the water crept back to the place where Hatch stood.

The capitalist understood what had taken place. His retreat was cut off there. He moved back to the room, where Buffalo Bill still lifted a threatening revolver above the sticks of dynamite.

His mercenaries were being bound with leather thongs, prepared by Nick Wharton. Grant and Glen, armed and alert, stood at the opening above, with the vicious mare looking meditatively over their shoulders to the place where her master was busy with the Indians.

Millman, the insane uncle of the young prospector, arose from a sitting position on the floor and advanced as Hatch crept up to him.

"The gold is up there!" he cried. "Down there! All around. It is where you will never find it."

His outcry attracted the attention of the scouts and he was lifted in their arms and carried above, being placed on the ledge just inside the entrance, where he raved and moaned for a moment and fell into a deep sleep with his head on Clellie's knee.

Wild Bill used a great many hard words when he discovered that Hatch was not among the prisoners. He searched about among the corners of the echoing place for him, but the trembling capitalist kept out of his way.

No one observed the water slowly rising, creeping inch by inch back from the gully in which it ran to the level floor of the room.

"Now," said Buffalo Bill, when the prisoners were all safely bound, "we'll leave these inhumans here and get into the fresh air. It will do them no harm to meditate here for a few hours."

"What are you going to do with them?" asked Grant, after the scout had ascended to the ledge at the opening.

"Turn them over to the authorities."

Wild Bill said numerous uncomplimentary things concerning the proposed course of procedure, but did not oppose Cody. He never did that.

"We may as well close this place so they can't get out, even if they do escape their bonds," said Grant. "They are a slippery lot."

They all went into the other cavern and began piling rocks into the opening. Strangely enough, they for the moment forgot that the elder Millman lay within the cavern. Clellie had arisen and left him sleeping there.

"You don't git me into no more holes like this," grumbled Nick, as he tugged away at a great rock. "It's me for the woods after this."

"What's the matter, Nick?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Sneakin' through holes in the ground like snakes,

and tuggin' at rocks like a road builder ain't the thing for me," said the scout. "Now, we'll have to take these all away before long."

"Better pile them up and take them down a dozen times than to attempt to guard those Indians in the open forest," replied the scout.

The little party sought the western exit and stood once more in the outer air. The memorable day had drawn to a close—the day inaugurated by the meeting at the brook—and the stars were shining above the ragged cliffs of the Rocky Mountains.

Night was over the foothills and the valleys, with the rustle of dewy leaves and call of wild bird.

"Why," said Clellie, as they emerged from the passage, "what have you done with the wounded man?"

"Left in the cave, by mighty!" cried Nick, starting back on a run. "Now we've got a mess with them rocks ag'in! Oh, it's me fer the tall timber after this!"

Grant and Glen followed on after the scout, knowing the removal of the rocks to be no trifling matter. While they were on their mission, leaving Buffalo Bill, Clellie, and Wild Bill at the entrance, a strange scene was taking place within the cavern.

Hatch saw the water rising fast and knew that all would be drowned unless something could be done at once. Of course, it would take a long time to fill that great place with water from the brook, but fill it would

in time, and then there would be no assistance possible.

He cut the bonds of the captives and flew about the place like a madman. It was no use trying to clear the arch so that the water might escape.

The body of the renegade was too tightly wedged in, and even the outlaws, rough and cruel as they were, did not care to dismember the dead.

The next thing was to clear the passage into the next mine, so they went at it tooth and nail, taking care to carry Millman away into a deep niche where he would not be discovered should the scouts return. This new prison was just a pocket in the solid rock of the mountain. It was like a grave when they rolled a rock against the exit.

Presently the stones began to give way. The sort of animal anger which leads one to curse and do violence to an inanimate thing caused one of the renegades to seize a round stone which had fallen upon his foot and hurl it, with an oath, far down into the cavern.

It struck the floor with a crash, whirled away with mighty force and plunged straight at the hidden dynamite.

Earth and air seem annihilated in the explosion which followed.

Nick Wharton and the two young men, ascending

the long passage behind the wedge-shaped rock, were thrown from their feet. The walls between the passages fell like glass.

The whole top of the cliff was blown off. When at last Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, Nick, the two young men, and the girl stood looking down into the cavern they saw only a tangle of rocks, flooded with water from the choked brook.

The outlaws were buried many feet deep, and that was their grave. Shining in the broken stones, showing wealth beyond all their dreams of riches, the members of the party saw gold in nuggets and in long, slender veins torn open to their view.

The explosion had placed all the wealth of the cliff ready to their hands. As they turned away, sadly because of the loss of the elder Millman, a faint groan attracted their attention.

They found him there in the niche where he had been hidden. In no other spot during all that wreck would he have been safe.

And they found that the concussion had lifted the clouds from his brain, so that he recognized his nephew and told him where the gold he had mined was buried. Fortunately it was not so deeply covered by the explosion that it could not be recovered, although it was many a day before it was all removed to a place of safety.

All members of the party shared in the riches of the mine, and all were made rich. Even Diana was whimsically treated to a set of gold shoes by the eccentric scout, which she disdainfully turned up her nose at and kicked away at the first opportunity.

I am not going to tell you the story of Grant and Clellie here. But it may be as well to say that when the scouts visit them in New York they are not obliged to visit at two houses in order to be with them.

And Grant and Glen are partners in something or other in the city, just to keep themselves out of mischief, Clellie says.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OUTLAW.

"Reward, five thousand dollars; for the identification and capture of the murderer of Lon Becker. One thousand dollars for information leading to the capture of the murderer."

These words, rudely printed on a board, greeted the eyes of three horsemen as they rode into the copper mining camp of Morenci, early one bright morning. The riders were Buffalo Bill, Bill Hickok, and Nick Wharton. They were on their way to join a detachment of the United States army at Tucson. The Indians were on the warpath, and a courier had reached the scouts, while they were loitering in the vicinity of the Hellgate Mine, bearing a request from army headquarters that they join the Tucson detachment as soon as possible.

"It might pay us to stop over here a day," said Wild Bill; "we ar'n't due in Tucson for six days yet, and five thousand plugs would fill our pockets nicely."

"It might sure be good shootin'," said Wharton; "I love to go huntin' after bears, but bears ain't in it when it comes to murderers. I'm ready to track him down, whoever he is."

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"Money and sport are both good things," answered Cody, as his companions turned to him questioningly, "but it will be to rid the country of a bad man, that I will stop over and attempt to find this murderer. We will learn more about it in a few moments, and know just who Lon Becker was."

The good horses of the men soon brought them to the office of the camp superintendent, Mr. Wilson, an elderly gentleman of genial appearance, who greeted the scouts warmly.

"Who was Lon Becker?" he said, in reply to Cody's questions. "He was a Mexican, as are most of the miners here, and his body was found in the cañon yesterday, horribly mutilated. This makes the sixteenth murder inside of a month, and we suspect that all may have been the victims of one man. At any rate, if we could find the murderer of Becker, we would know that soon enough. As it is, every one is afraid of their lives, and we do not know who will be the next unfortunate. The reward was only offered last evening. If you could remain here a few days and assist us in the discovery of this fiend, you would be doing the Territory a great service."

"This interests me extremely," replied Cody, "and I think we'll stay in camp overnight, at least."

"Then you must be my guests," said the superin-

tendent cordially, as the three scouts dismounted and accepted his invitation to breakfast.

"Did Lon Becker have any particular enemies?" asked Cody, when they had entered the small adobe house.

"Only one, and that is Salsido, one of our few educated Mexicans; a man of remarkable acuteness, and possessing a small fortune. He and Becker were never friends. I think that one discovered the other cheating at cards, although which one did the cheating, I don't know."

"All we've got to do, then," said Wharton, "is to round up the Mexican Salsido, and fill him with lead."

"No," exclaimed Wilson, "Salsido isn't your man, because he was here with me when Lon Becker was killed."

"Shucks!" cried Wild Bill, who had already pictured himself as slinging the noose over Salsido's head.

"You don't suspect any one else?" asked Cody.

"No one; it is all a mystery," replied the superintendent as a door of an inner room opened, and Gloria, his daughter, entered. She was a beautiful girl of eighteen years, and the scouts found her as entertaining as beautiful, while she talked to them during the rest of the meal.

Before they had finished, however, there came the sound of a body falling against the outside door, and

a second later the door swung open, and a man, bruised and bleeding, staggered in upon them.

"Harding! What has happened?" cried Mr. Wilson, as the men sprang to their feet.

"Arthur!" screamed Gloria, in fear.

"It is nothing serious," answered the young man, attempting to stop the flow of blood from his shoulders; "I was attacked by a mountain lion, that was all!"

He sank down, weak and exhausted, in a chair, while Gloria ran for bandages to bind his wounds.

"That isn't much of a clue for us," said Wild Bill to Cody. "If he had been attacked by a bandit now, we might track the murderer down."

"It might pay us to track down the lion," answered Buffalo Bill.

"How on earth did you get away?" asked Nick, of Harding.

"Just simply by agility," replied the wounded man. "I was walking down to the smelter, when I heard quick running behind me, and, turning, I saw a large mountain cat come leaping down the trail toward me. Its jaws were open, and it showed its sharp, white teeth, as it growled hoarsely. I saw there was no time for escape, so I seized one of the sharp cactus leaves from a Spanish bayonet bush that grew near by, and drove it into the animal's breast as he sprang upon

me. Then I turned and ran toward the nearest house, which happened to be this one."

"Do you mean to say," asked Hickok, "that the lion was chasing you when you entered here a moment ago?"

The young foreman nodded his head.

"Yes," he said; "it overtook me just outside the door. I felt a heavy weight strike my back and sharp claws sink into my shoulders; with a great effort I twisted myself free of the animal, and managed to struggle through the door, closing it just in time to prevent the entrance of the cat."

"Thunder!" exclaimed Nick, jumping up in excitement; "why didn't you say so afore? We could have killed the beast. Perhaps he's out there yet;" and the old huntsman made for the door.

"No, he's gone," cried Harding, stumbling to his feet and barring Wharton's way. "I must beg you not to pursue him."

"Well, I'll be darned!" muttered Nick, utterly at a loss to understand this strange behavior of Harding's. Buffalo Bill saw that there was something which the foreman did not wish to speak of, and he abruptly changed the subject, as Gloria returned, and went about binding the young man's wounds.

"Do you know this Salsido?" inquired the great scout.

"Yes," answered Harding. "Why do you ask?"

"Because we are looking for the murderer of Lon Becker, and I have reason to believe that Mexican may know something of him. May I ask if he is a particular friend of yours?"

"He is not," answered Harding; "on the contrary, there is no friendship between us at all."

"Ah!" said Buffalo Bill, with a smile; "perhaps you played cards with him?"

"No," replied the young man; "he has simply done his best to drive me from camp, that is all. He is jealous of me because I hold the position he covets—that of foreman of mines—and he is jealous, too, because we both like the same girl," and he gazed with admiration at Gloria.

"Then if it had been Salsido who attacked you instead of a mountain lion, you would not have been surprised?"

"No," came the answer, in a firm voice; "but why do you ask that?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said Hickok; "you're off the scent, Cody."

"One thing more," remarked the great scout, turning to the superintendent; "these other fifteen men who were murdered, were any of them friends of Salsido?"

"Not that I know of," answered Wilson. "Come

to think of it, none of them were, although I don't know that they were his enemies."

"Oh, well!" laughed Buffalo Bill, in an offhand manner; "it does not matter. We'll go call on Salsido this evening, and then set out to find the murderer of Lon Becker. In the meantime, I agree with Nick that a little lion hunting would be amusing. Are there many of the cats around here?"

Any one not acquainted with Cody would have thought this desire to go hunting a sincere one, but Hickok detected an undertone in the great scout's voice, which told him that this postponement of the pursuit of the murderer was merely a ruse to obtain some valuable information in regard to the matter, and so Wild Bill stretched himself lazily and repeated Cody's question.

"Yes, are many cats around here?"

"Very few," answered Mr. Wilson quickly, while Gloria finished her task and attended to the conversation eagerly.

"You've got enough to have 'em tracken men in camp by daylight," said Wharton; "I should judge they was plentiful."

"You must believe Mr. Wilson," cried Harding, "when he says there are very few. Morenci is too large a camp to attract them; they go farther back in the hills where there are less people."

"But there is one here, at least," exclaimed Buffalo Bill, "and a mess of lion meat would make a very nice supper."

"Excuse me!" cried the superintendent as Cody and his companion got ready to depart; "but I must forbid you to kill that mountain lion."

"Why?" inquired the scout. "Is he your property?"

"No," replied the superintendent, "and I would be very glad to see him dead, as far as I am concerned, but it cannot be."

"I, too, must forbid you to hunt the beast!" exclaimed Harding, "although I have no love for the animal, as you can see."

Buffalo Bill turned an inquiring face from one man to the other.

"If you have no more to say," he cried, "I shall continue in my attempt to bag that lion. These objections are childish."

"Stop! I will tell you the real reason," cried Gloria; "and it is because the real reason seems childish that my father and Mr. Harding have refrained from giving it. It is true that the mountain lions around here are very scarce; so scarce, that only one has been seen in years—the one that pursued this man to our door to-day. He makes his home in a deserted cliff dwelling about a mile from the camp; a cave which is in the heart of a great copper crag, and every Mexi-

can in camp looks upon him as the guardian of Morenci. Through some horrible superstition they hold this lion sacred, and many even take meat to his cave to propitiate him and obtain his good favors. Over three-fourths of the camp is composed of Mexicans, so that should any one kill the cat there would be an uprising immediately, and we should, perhaps, all be killed; at least, the mines would have to be closed down. That is why you must not attempt to slay the cat of the Copper Crag."

"This is more to the point," exclaimed Cody; "we'll call the lion hunt off, and look up Salsido at once. Come along, my good fellows."

The stalwart scout strode to the door, a dangerous gleam in his lustrous eyes, as though he already pierced through the mystery, and beheld the murderer whom they sought.

"Here's blood," cried Hickok, as they stepped outside; "you hurt the beast, as well as he hurt you, young feller; we could trace the cat easily by this trail."

A thin stream of blood led away from the door over the hill, showing which way the wounded lion had departed. The three scouts followed it with their eyes until it disappeared—still a clear trail, although a spotted one. Gloria uttered a low exclamation at sight of it, and ran to get some water with which to

wash it away. Wharton laughed at what he considered her squeamishness; yet a distant murmur, like the sound of a stormy wind, told him that the girl had good sense.

But Gloria was too late. The distant murmur came nearer, and those at the bloodstained door recognized it as the confused muttering of many voices. A moment later, and over the hill, following up the trail of red, came a great crowd of gesticulating Mexicans, led by a dark-skinned, handsome man, clad in the picturesque garb of old Mexico. The muttering swelled into a great cry of indignant wrath, as the crowd saw where the blood led them, and the Mexicans came swooping down upon the little adobe, as though they meant to sweep it from the face of the earth.

"The worst has happened," cried Mr. Wilson; "the Mexicans have discovered that their sacred cat is wounded, and have traced the guilty one to this door. We are doomed!"

"I will give myself up!" exclaimed Harding; "better for me to die than for the whole camp to suffer."

"Stay where you are!" commanded Cody, and then taking his revolver from his belt, he stepped forward and twirled it before the approaching miners.

"Any one who comes a step nearer," he shouted, "will get a bullet for his trouble!"

Abruptly the crowd halted, although the man in the lead urged them on.

"That is Salsido!" exclaimed Gloria, pointing to the leader of the Mexicans.

"I thought as much," answered Cody calmly; "we met him earlier than we expected to."

"Who tried to kill the great cat?" demanded Salsido fiercely; "which one of you is guilty of this crime? Give us the man who stabbed our lion and we will leave you in peace, and in peace return to our work. If you refuse to give him to us, you must take the consequences."

"It was I who tried to kill your animal," answered Cody, "and I refuse to give myself up. Come on, we are ready for you."

"You lie!" screamed Salsido. "It was not you!"

"What do you know about it?" asked Buffalo Bill quickly. Before the Mexican could recover from the confusion into which this question cast him, Harding stepped out from the house, and addressed the crowd before any one could prevent him.

"You are right; it was I who injured the cat of the Copper Crag, but in self-defense. This man is noble to attempt to take the responsibility, but if any one is to suffer, it must be I—and I alone. Will you not accept an apology?"

"No!" came the answer, as if in one voice. "It is your life we must have."

"We can defy them," whispered Cody to his friends. "Those men don't know how to fight."

"But the camp will be in terrible disorder," cried the superintendent; "the men know how to strike, at least."

"Will you be satisfied with my leaving the camp?" asked Harding of the mob. The foreman saw that the Mexicans could not be easily pacified, and he was determined on sacrificing himself. At the question there was prolonged argument among the miners; some were for accepting this proposition; others would be satisfied with nothing short of the man's death.

Salsido saw a chance for his own advancement in this solution, however, for if he persuaded the men to agree to Harding's outlawry, the foreman would be well out of the way, and Mr. Wilson, recognizing the influence of Salsido in saving Harding's life, might give the Mexican the position he coveted.

"The cat was not killed," he cried, to his angry followers; "why should we kill this man. Let us banish him and be content."

And so the miners agreed to let Harding live, on the condition that he should leave camp at once, and never return. Buffalo Bill was for not allowing the foreman to sacrifice himself in this manner, but on

second thoughts, determined not to interfere, at least for the present.

"Here is your horse, señor," said Salsido; "you had better ride away on it at once."

"No, take mine!" cried Cody, leading his splendid steed Midnight from the corral, where he had placed him, and then as Harding mounted painfully, he whispered in his ear: "Ride only a few miles out of camp to the north; wait there until night and I will join you. Fear nothing; everything will come well soon."

"God bless you," answered Harding, and then, waving a farewell to Mr. Wilson and Gloria, he rode away, followed by a mass of Mexicans who hissed like serpents about him and cursed him bitterly. Salsido smiled triumphantly.

"I'd like to bet that feller killed Becker, even if you was with him!" exclaimed Nick Wharton to the superintendent, as he saw the Mexican's smile.

"That's what I call quick work," said Hickok, as he watched Harding depart—an outlaw.

"No," answered Buffalo Bill, "the quick work is to follow!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LIGHTS ON THE HILLS.

"I would like to apply for the position of foreman," said Salsido, coming up to Mr. Wilson, before Harding was out of sight.

"I will keep you in mind," answered the superintendent coolly; "just at present I will look after the business myself."

"Nonsense!" returned the Mexican warmly; "you know that some one will have to take charge of the mines, and you know that I am the man who can best do it."

Both these things Mr. Wilson did know, but he was determined to put an inferior man in Harding's place, rather than do Salsido a good turn.

"If I want you I will let you know," he said, in a tone that closed the interview. The Mexican smiled, but Cody, who stood near, could see that he was gritting his teeth.

"Very well," he cried, with apparent gayety; "I shall expect to hear from you soon. May I call on you this evening, Miss Gloria?"

The girl raised her dark, but well-formed face to his, and went into the house.

"*Caramba!*" the Mexican exclaimed under his breath; "they will suffer for these insults."

He said nothing, however, but bowed himself silently away from the doorway.

"Feels badly," said Wharton, "and I must say, I'd like to make him feel worse." He touched the holster at his side and smiled.

"He'll feel bad enough before we get through with him," laughed Hickok.

"I shouldn't be surprised if he didn't feel at all," said Cody.

Salsido went straight from the trail to a little hut near the head of the cañon which he entered, still in a white heat of suppressed anger. A Mexican sat at the table, her head upon her hands as though she were in despair.

"What are you brooding over now?" asked Salsido roughly.

The girl raised her dark, but well-formed face to his.

"Oh, it's you, is it?"

"Yes, it's me!" replied the Mexican, with an oath. "Who should it be? Expecting any one else?"

"No one else—only my husband."

"Drop that!" exclaimed Salsido. "Haven't I forbidden you to utter that word?"

Rosita, for this was the girl's name, closed her eyes,

as if at a blow; when she opened them again, she started as if stung by a tarantula.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

The Mexican was cleaning a great forty-four-caliber revolver.

"Getting ready to go see the superintendent," he said; "he promised to let me know when he wanted me. I'm going to touch him up a bit so that he won't forget I'm waiting."

"You are going to kill Mr. Wilson?"

"Oh, come, don't get excited; you've seen me do worse things than that, and never turned a hair. And I didn't say that I was going to kill Wilson, did I? I'm going to send a bullet in his direction the first chance I get just to touch up his memory. If the shot happens to enter his heart, why fate must be blamed, not me!"

"I know why you want to kill that man," cried Rosita; "you are going to steal his daughter."

The Mexican smiled cruelly, but said nothing.

"For once I will defy you," exclaimed the girl, rising and placing herself before the door of the room; "you shall not slay Mr. Wilson!"

"How are you going to prevent me?" There was an ugly gleam in Salsido's eyes.

"I will warn him," Rosita turned and attempted to fly, but the Mexican caught her before she reached

the door, pulled her fiercely back and flung her to the floor.

"You snake!" he cried brutally; "you would turn and bite me, would you? I've got a cure for you, my proud girl—you will go with me to-night to the hill-side, and there——"

"No, no," interrupted the girl, with a shriek; "anywhere but there; I will not warn Mr. Wilson. Mercy! Mercy!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed the Mexican. "You repent, do you? But it is too late. As soon as the sun sets we leave this house, and you at least will never return. When I have you safe in the hills then I shall come back and send the superintendent my bullet;" laughing again as he finished these words, Salsido pinned Rosita's arms to her sides, and then bound them to her body by a stout rope.

Toward sunset, Cody came out of Wilson's house, and, mounting the superintendent's horse, rode away to the north to meet Harding. He had not been gone more than an hour when there came to the ears of Wharton and Hickok the beating of swift-running hoofs, sounding nearer and nearer. The men were at Wilson's, and Nick stepped to the door and opened it. Down the trail a horse sped toward them, as though on wings. At first the men thought he was riderless, but in another moment they saw that a figure crouched

low upon his back, and then they knew that it was an Indian.

"Don't shoot!" commanded Hickok, as Wilson raised his rifle, "I think this is an old friend."

The rider was almost up to them when the horse stumbled and fell, rolling over and over in the yellow dust of the trail. The man upon his back wrenched himself free just in time to save himself from being crushed beneath the body of the animal, and arose to his feet unhurt a few yards away. Without stopping to examine his pony, the Indian, for Indian it was, hastened to where the men were watching him.

"Quick!" he exclaimed, "warn your tribes—defend yourselves! My people on the warpath. The great Sioux, Chief Sivett, comes to scalp Morenci!"

"Where are Chief Sivett and his warriors, Snake Eye?" asked Hickok, stepping forward. At sight of the leader of the vigilantes, the face of the friendly Sioux beamed with delight, and he grasped Wild Bill's hand as though he never meant to relinquish his hold.

"My people there in the hills," answered the Indian; "they come down to-night."

"And Cody alone out there with Harding!" exclaimed the superintendent.

"Buffalo Bill?" asked Snake Eye, breathless; "he on the hills alone? I go warn the great white chief. Which way?"

"Good for you!" cried Nick; "to the north, Snake Eye, and ride like lightning if you want to save the best man in the country."

"Be ready," shouted the Indian, as he mounted his pony, which had scrambled to its feet uninjured by its fall; "Chief Sivett comes!"

"Now we have got our hands full," said Hickok, as the superintendent ran to give the warning. "I guess we'll have to let that murderer go till morning."

"Oh, I don't know," drawled Wharton; "this fire may drive the black jack rabbit from under cover."

"Look!" exclaimed Hickok suddenly, as the twilight deepened into dusk. The cry brought Gloria from the house, and the two men and the girl gazed intently through the first veil of night. On the distant mountains appeared little dots of fire, like sparks dropped on the hillside from a great tinder box. The Indians had come! And now the sparks kindled themselves into a great crude circle, with Morenci in its midst.

"We are completely surrounded," cried Hickok, as shouts from the camp told them that the Mexicans saw and understood the lights, too.

Slowly but surely the lights began to close in; the circle contracted until it seemed like a noose about to throttle a doomed man.

"Listen," cried Gloria.

From below them came the sound of singing—a hymn raised by many voices.

"Queer time to be havin' a concert," said Nick.

"The Mexicans are praying to the cat for protection," Gloria replied.

"It's time to go down to wake them up, then," cried Hickok, "or this camp will be wiped off the face of the earth."

The two men hastened to help Mr. Wilson, and Gloria stood alone watching the lights. They were so close now that they seemed a solid circle of fire, and on a sudden the shrill war whoop of the Sioux sounded in the girl's ears. She stepped into the house and loaded her father's revolver.

Salsido, returning alone from his dastardly mission, saw the lights, and heard the cries, too; he hurried back to Morenci, forgetful for the moment of his intention to kill Mr. Wilson.

Buffalo Bill and Harding were without the circle, however, and they gazed with quick understanding upon what they saw. Cody had found Harding without trouble, and the foreman had insisted upon changing horses, so that Buffalo Bill bestrode Midnight once more.

"That means Indians," cried Cody; "Morenci is going to be attacked to-night. We must hurry back and help Mr. Wilson and the men defend their homes."

"Will we ever be able to break through their line?" asked Harding, "without being killed?"

"We must," answered Cody firmly, "and, therefore, we will!"

"There is not much use in my going back," said the outlaw gloomily; "if the Indians don't kill me, the Mexicans will."

"Not if I know it," answered Cody. "I came out here to meet you, because I want to question you about Salsido and about this sacred cat; but it seems that we haven't much time to talk now. Fear nothing, however; stay by my side and you are safe."

Without further words, the two moved forward, when a sharp whisper from Cody brought them to a stop. Behind some cactus bushes there moved a figure.

"An Indian," muttered Harding.

"Yes." Cody brought his revolver to a cock and had his finger on the trigger when the Indian leaped into full view with a shout of joy. It was Snake Eye.

"I find you," cried the friendly Sioux, his eyes full of delight and admiration; "my people go kill all in Morenci; you hurry and save them."

"How did you know I was out here?" asked Buffalo Bill, pleased to see his old friend.

"Wild Bill he tell me," answered the Indian, as the three spurred their horses on.

"Now there will be no trouble in getting through

the Sioux line," said Cody to Harding, "for Snake Eye will guide us."

Suddenly there came to their ears the popping of rifles.

"The attack has begun!" cried Buffalo Bill; "on to Morenci!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT THE STAKE.

Chief Sivett had his attack on Morenci well planned. The Mexicans had little time to prepare for defense, and the Indians swooped down on them from all sides at once, with the intention of winning a complete victory at the first onslaught. This they did not quite do, however, owing to the good services of Hickok and Wharton, who commanded the miners and drove back the Sioux after many had fallen on both sides.

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. Wilson, as a piercing shriek came from the direction of his house; "Gloria is in danger!" and he dashed up the trail to his home. But he was too late.

Three Indians, one of them Chief Sivett himself, had crept unnoticed to the superintendent's adobe and confronted Gloria suddenly. The girl remained calm, however, and fired her father's revolver at the redskins without a tremor. Her shot laid one of the savages low. Before she could fire again, Chief Sivett sprang upon her and wrenched the weapon from her hand. It was then that Gloria uttered the cry which startled her father.

Mr. Wilson arrived just in time to see the two In-

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dians speeding off on horseback, with his daughter across one of their saddles. The girl's father sent a shot singing after them, and brought down one of the enemy; but afraid of killing his daughter, the man dared not fire again, and there was despair in his heart as he saw her being borne from him, and heard these words, uttered with a smile, as she turned and saw him: "Be brave, father; no harm will happen to me."

Stunned and dazed, the father was suddenly confronted by Salsido, who appeared on the trail in front of him. "Where is Gloria?" cried the Mexican excitedly.

"My God, she has just been carried off by that red-skinned devil!"

"Then I will never rest until I recapture her!" almost shrieked the Mexican.

"God bless you, man!" exclaimed Wilson, thinking he had been wronging Salsido the whole time; "bring me back my daughter, and I will make you foreman of mines with a bigger salary than Harding ever got."

"Do not forget that," yelled back Salsido, with a sinister smile, as he dashed away, "when I return with Gloria!"

The fight was going very much against the miners, for there were two Mexicans dead to every one Indian, and Wharton and Hickok were emptying their revolv-

ers, as fast as they could load them, without apparent effect.

The Indians pressed forward with slow steadiness, winning their way by terrible slaughter. Blood flowed on all sides; the corral where the miners had collected for a last stand was fast becoming weakened and in another moment Hickok saw that it would have to fall.

"Kill the women!" he cried, "before you let them fall into the hands of these savages."

"Why don't you pray to your darned cat to save you?" yelled Wharton, as he fired his last shell at a redskin who was aiming at Wild Bill.

As the Indian fell backward, dead, there came a cry from behind the Sioux, and three horsemen circled down upon the Indians with shouts and shots.

"Hurrah!" cried Wharton, "it's Buffalo Bill!" His words were audible to every one, and the Indians turned in fear at the very sound of the name, and beheld Cody and his two companions attacking them fiercely in the rear. In the darkness they could not be sure how many others might be with the great scout, and the Mexicans, with renewed hope, continued their defense with violence.

"Buffalo Bill!" ran the cry from mouth to mouth among the Indians, and looking about in vain for their chief, they broke up in terror and retreated to the hills with horrible loss, as the Mexicans followed them

up. By midnight there was not one left in the camp, and Morenci was in peace—to mourn its dead—and praise the man who had saved it from utter annihilation.

"Are you safe?" cried Cody, to the superintendent, as the two shook hands after the fight.

"Yes, but God help my poor Gloria!" moaned Wilson; "she was carried off by the Indians."

"Then the fight is not yet over," answered Cody. "Who volunteers to go with me and rescue the girl?"

"I will go—and I—and I," answered Hickok, Wharton, and Snake Eye all in a breath.

"I am ready to go," said Harding.

The superintendent agreed to make the sixth.

"Let us go at once, then," said Cody, turning to Wilson, "for if I know Chief Sivett, he never waits long before putting his captives to the torture. The Indians will probably camp on Grey's Peak, and it is there we must hasten!"

"Salsido is already in pursuit," said Wilson; "we wronged him, for he seemed honest in his intention to rescue Gloria."

"Heaven grant that we arrive in time to save her from that Mexican!" exclaimed Cody, "for the girl is probably safer in Chief Sivett's hands than she would be in Salsido's."

"What do you mean?" cried the superintendent.

"Come," answered Buffalo Bill shortly; and the six men mounted their horses, and, guided by Snake Eye, followed in the trail of the Indians. The outlaw pulled his sombrero well over his face, and remained unrecognized.

"The cat must have been asleep to-night," remarked Cody, as they rode, "and I mean to see that it will soon sleep forever."

The sky, which had been clouded, suddenly cleared, and stars, like fires on the hills of heaven, guided the men on their way.

Buffalo Bill was right when he said that the Indians would camp on Grey's Peak, for Chief Sivett collected his warriors there and raised his wigwams in a great pine grove in order to rest before continuing the long journey back to their home.

The council was called at once, however, and twelve of the leading redskins seated themselves about a bright fire, to hear the reports of their braves and to decide what should next be done.

As Chief Sivett called for his fighters to account for themselves, the warriors stepped forward one by one—tall, splendid-looking fellows, their skins copper-colored in the light of the flames—and threw down before the council the scalps they had taken. At the sight of these bloody trophies of triumph all the Indians raised their voices in a dismal howl of delight,

and when the last warrior stepped back, Chief Sivett counted the scalps and found they numbered eighty-six. The missing warriors were next accounted for, and a wail of grief went up as it was discovered that fifty of their braves were gone. When quiet was restored again Gloria Wilson was led into the midst of the council circle to hear her fate.

The eyes of the Indians all fired when they saw her, and as the girl gazed around at her captors she saw there was no hope for her, and she determined to die bravely.

"Death at the stake!" came the cry of the council, and in spite of her determination, the girl could not repress a shudder. But it was only for a moment, and by the time that two redskins had planted a huge pole in the ground before a tall pine tree she was herself again.

"Tremble," cried Chief Sivett, approaching Gloria, and putting his ugly face close to hers. But the Indian gazed into eyes as firm and defiant as his own and he drew back with an oath.

"Bind her!" he ordered; and three young braves leaped forward to do his bidding. They seized the girl and carried her without violence to the stake, binding her to it with strong thongs of leather, so that she could move neither hand nor foot. Still Gloria did not tremble nor cry out.

One of the young braves so admired her pluck that he went to Chief Sivett and asked that the girl might be spared this torture and become his squaw instead.

"What can you give for her," asked Chief Sivett.

"Ten scalps and the skins of twenty foxes," answered the brave.

"It is not enough," said the Indian chief; "the girl must die. She will cry out when the flames begin to burn her."

Dry brush and cactus leaves were now piled high about the feet of the girl, and the warriors began a wild and horrible dance about her as the young brave who had sued for Gloria touched a spark to the pile.

Gloria did not even close her eyes, but watched the painted faces as they whirled about her, with defiance still on her face, and even when the flames began to lick her feet, she did not tremble.

"Stop!" cried a voice suddenly, and Salsido broke through the torture dance, and trampled out the fire about the victim. The Indians were taken by surprise and gazed with astonishment at the handsome Mexican who stood with folded arms in front of the girl.

They knew him well, for they had had many dealings with him, and he had often been the means of their obtaining white men's scalps.

"What does Salsido want here?" asked Chief Sivett sternly.

"I come to get this girl," answered the Mexican; "you know me, and you know that I can be trusted. I come alone, and I will buy her from you."

"Are there no sentinels posted?" cried the chief; "how came this man upon us so suddenly?"

Half a dozen Indians slunk away to do guard duty, while Sivett turned to the Mexican.

"You cannot have the girl. She is doomed to die at the stake. Light the fires!" he commanded of the braves.

"I will give you a thousand dollars for her," cried Salsido.

"The Indian wants blood, not money," answered Chief Sivett.

"I will give you a thousand scalps then!" exclaimed the Mexican. "I will lead you into the camp of Clifton some night when every one is sleeping, and you can have all the blood you desire."

At these words Gloria could not repress a shudder.

"Good!" exclaimed Chief Sivett. "Do my warriors agree? Shall we let this Mexican, who has done us favors, have the white squaw if he leads us by night to Clifton, and shows us the way to great victory?"

"Be it so!" cried the council, and so it was decided to sell Gloria for a thousand scalps.

"Ah, you are mine at last!" cried the Mexican triumphantly.

"You will take me back to my father," said Gloria, "and he will reward you."

"No," answered Salsido, with a laugh; "you will never see your father again. You are mine, and I will take you where I please. As for Mr. Wilson, he will go the way of Lon Becker soon."

"It was you who murdered that man," cried the girl, shuddering again at these words.

"How could it have been? I was with your father," replied the purchaser, as two Indians started to unbind the girl.

"Do not untie me," cried Gloria to the braves; "light the brush again, and let the flames consume me. I would rather be burned to ashes than be in the power of this man."

"Brave girl," cried Chief Sivett; "but you cannot die; we must have the thousand scalps."

"Burn her, torture her!" exclaimed the young brave, who had spoken for her life a few minutes before; "I, too, would rather see her dead than give her to that man."

"Keep your mouth closed, young cub," cried Salsido; "who are you to order the girl burned?"

But the cry of the young warrior had its effect, for most of the Indians preferred to have a burning now

than run the chance of obtaining a thousand scalps later, and it looked as though Salsido might be foiled in his purpose, and the girl made to suffer the horrible death of torture.

While Chief Sivett was debating the matter there came a shout from the outposts, and then cries of triumph; and a moment later two of the sentinels brought in a man they had captured, and threw him, bound, onto the ground. It was the outlaw, Arthur Harding.

At sight of him, Salsido chuckled to himself and Gloria's senses nearly left her.

"Who are you?" asked Chief Sivett of the captive; but the man did not answer.

"I can tell you who he is," cried the Mexican; "he is the miner who attempted to kill the sacred cat of Morenci. Kill him, and my people will thank you, for they have outlawed him."

"How many men were with you?" asked the Indian of Harding.

"I was alone," answered the foreman, speaking for the first time.

"You lie!" cried Chief Sivett; "you had others with you. Where are they?"

"I don't think he lies," said Salsido, "for he left Morenci alone early in the morning. He has stumbled upon this encampment by chance, and in time to

allow the torture to go on. Give me the girl as you agreed, and tie this man to the stake in her place. His flesh will smell as sweetly in the flames as would hers."

"Good!" agreed the Indian chief; "unbind the girl and put that man in her place."

Quickly Gloria was set at liberty, and while the Indians were preparing to tie the foreman to the stake in her place, he found the opportunity to whisper to her: "What are they going to do to you?"

"Sell me to Salsido," cried the girl, in despair.

"Feel in my coat pocket," said Harding; "there is a knife there; take it and drive it into my heart; then stab yourself."

The girl had no time to do his bidding, for Salsido wrenched her away.

"Nothing of that," he cried; "no injury to yourself. We will stay here and see the outlaw burned, and then we'll be off on our honeymoon. Come, have the brush lighted."

Once more the match was applied to the foot of the stake; once more that horrible dance began. Gloria turned away with hope dead within her, and Salsido laughed aloud, brutally.

"You escaped the claws of the cat," he cried derisively to Harding, "but never the claws of death. You have nothing to live for, anyway; your position and your love are both mine!"

The fire suddenly sputtered and went out, as a shower of rain descended from the clear sky and quenched the flames. At the same time a deep and resounding voice seemed to float down from the heavens.

"Why do my children burn this innocent man?"

In an instant the wild dance ceased, and the Indians fell, face downward, on the ground.

"It is the voice of the Great Spirit!" cried Chief Sivett, trembling; "we have angered Him!"

Salsido staggered back, astounded.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE VOICE OF HEAVEN.

"What is it that the Great Spirit desires us to do?" asked Chief Sivett, still in a tremble.

"Release the man at the stake," answered the voice which the Indians believed to come from the happy hunting ground itself, and one of the braves arose, put out the fire, and released Harding at once.

"What is the further will of the Great Spirit?" inquired the Indian; "is He pleased?"

"I am pleased," replied the voice; "but I see a stranger in your midst. Who is he?"

"He is a Mexican, called Salsido," answered Chief Sivett reverently; "he is a friend of your people."

"No, he is no friend of my people," came the mysterious voice again; "he is a pretender. Tie him to the stake!"

"Don't dare to touch me," cried Salsido, at last finding his voice. "I don't know what deviltry this is, but I'll kill the man that lays a hand on me!"

"The Great Spirit is right," cried Chief Sivett; "this can be no friend. Bind Salsido to the stake," he commanded of his warriors.

The Mexican attempted to defend himself, but he

was overpowered in a moment, and found himself helpless in the same position which he had caused the foreman to be placed in, with the cactus brush ready to be ignited around his feet. Harding crossed to where Gloria stood and the girl kept a firm hold of his arm.

"What does it mean?" she whispered; "is it indeed the Indian's God speaking to them?"

"Sh!" answered the outlaw; "not a word; stand ready to do as I tell you. Thank Heaven, Salsido prevented you from reaching my knife!"

"Curse you," cried the Mexican, purple in the face from rage and fear; "kill me and I will haunt you forever!"

"Is it the will of the Great Spirit that we put the flames to the Mexican?" inquired the chief of the unseen voice.

"First, lay all your firearms together before the stake, that I may know you are doing this to make peace with me."

"It's a trick," cried Salsido suddenly; "don't you know——"

"If the Mexican speaks again," came the voice, "put a bullet through his heart. Place every weapon in the encampment at my feet that I may smile upon them and make them serve you well."

"We obey!" cried the Indians, and Salsido bit his

tongue to keep from uttering the word which he knew would be his death warrant.

Led by the chief, the Indians collected all their fire-arms, and arose and laid them in a great pile before the stake.

"Is every weapon there?" asked the voice.

"Every weapon, oh, Great Spirit!"

The branches of the pine tree which grew back of the stake trembled slightly, although there was no breeze stirring.

"Stand all before me," commanded the voice; "call the sentinels; I would count my children and bless them."

The Indians were summoned together, and stood, a great body of warriors, at a little distance from their weapons. Gloria and Harding could not repress an exclamation of admiration as they looked at the picked battlemen of the Sioux.

"Salute me!" cried the voice, with rising intonation; "do honor to the Great Spirit which watches over you!"

"We salute you," answered the Indians; and they raised their hands toward heaven in unison.

"Keep your hands where they are!" cried a voice, firm and powerful, and the startled Indians gazed down the muzzles of three rifles, held in the hands of Wharton, Mr. Wilson, and Wild Bill, the last of whom had

been the spokesman. The three had stepped in between the warriors and their weapons as the hands were raised on high.

Harding picked up a rifle and joined them, while Gloria embraced her father, and stood just back of him.

"I told you it was a trick!" screamed Salsido, struggling in vain to free himself; "your Great Spirit was the——"

"Buffalo Bill," finished Cody, as he climbed down out of the pine tree, and shook the needles from his coat; "and considering it's the first time I ever acted the part of a god, I think I did pretty well."

"Darned well," answered Nick, keeping his sight trained on the breast of Chief Sivett.

"How did you do it?" asked Gloria, breathless.

"I thought that if a cat could be considered divine," and Cody looked at Salsido meaningly, "a man's voice might be, too. I managed to get in here while the savages were trussing up Harding, and with a hat full of water from the spring yonder, I climbed the tree unseen. The rest you know."

"You are wonderful," said Gloria.

"You are a devil," hissed Chief Sivett.

"I'm sorry to sink so in your estimation," laughed Cody, "but I don't blame you for being riled. I guess

it's about time we were going back to Morenci," he added to his friends.

"What shall we do with the redskins?" asked Hickok. "Tie 'em up?"

"I have no wish to leave them all to starve on the mountain," answered Buffalo Bill, "and I certainly don't intend to kill them. Chief Sivett," he said, stepping forward, "if I let you and your warriors return to your homes in peace, will you give me your good faith never to attack Morenci again; to leave Clifton alone, and to take off your war paint?"

"The white chief has us at his mercy," cried Sivett, with a black face.

"Promise!" insisted Cody.

"I promise for my people," answered the chief; "now give us our arms and let us return to our homes." There was a crafty smile under the old Indian's meekness which did not escape the scout.

"That was no part of our bargain!" he exclaimed; "you must return to your homes without your weapons."

There was a snarl of anger from the Sioux.

"The women will laugh at us," cried a brave.

"You deserve to be laughed at," was all that Cody answered; and, assisted by Harding, he began to pack the weapons on the back of an Indian pony.

"Where is Snake Eye?" asked the foreman.

"He did not wish to triumph over his own people," answered Cody, in a low tone; "he holds our horses by the spring."

"Well, and what are you going to do with me?" demanded Salsido.

"You deserve to be burned," answered Buffalo Bill shortly.

"Then let's burn him!" exclaimed Nick; "he'd make a savory fire, he would, with that pretty face of his turnin' crisp around the edges."

"You certainly deserve death," remarked Mr. Wilson, "you, whom I thought were going to save Gloria."

"I did save her!" cried Salsido.

"Enough!" said Cody, as he strapped the last rifle on the pony; "answer me one question, and you shall be free: Where were you going last night after sunset, when you left Morenci with a girl wrapped in a blanket in front of your saddle?" Salsido shrank back.

"You thought no one saw you," went on Cody, "but I was riding away to meet a friend on the hills, and I saw you. Will you answer?"

The Mexican remained silent.

"Very well, we will take you to Morenci," said the scout, "and put a few questions to you concerning Lon Becker."

"You can prove nothing against me!" screamed Salsido.

"That remains to be seen," concluded Buffalo Bill, and, leading the heavy-laden pony out through the pine grove, he soon returned with horses for Gloria and Harding.

"Ride on ahead," he commanded of these two, "with the friend you will find by the spring. Take the Indians' weapons with you, and follow the trail directly to Morenci. We will come after you almost immediately."

When Gloria and the foreman had departed with Snake Eye, Cody cut the thongs which bound Salsido to the stake, but not those which were wound about his hands and feet. He secured the Mexican on a horse, and throwing the bridle over the horn of his own saddle, he mounted Midnight.

Hickok, Wharton, and Mr. Wilson mounted their horses also, but never for an instant leaving the Indians uncovered.

"If you come after us," cried Buffalo Bill to Chief Sivett, as they were about to ride away, "we will shoot you down without mercy. Take my advice, and go back to your homes."

"Take my advice," cried Salsido, "and return to Morenci, and scalp every one of these men. You can do it easily."

"Shut up!" commanded Wharton, cuffing the help-

less man across the face; "don't speak till you're spoken to."

The Indians answered nothing; but the scouts saw no more of them that day. It was long after day-break, when Buffalo Bill and his party rode into Morenci, where they were greeted with cheers by the miners until they perceived their favorite, Salsido, bound and helpless.

"What does this mean?" demanded the men.

"It means that your friend must explain the absence of a certain girl. Have you missed any one?"

"Yes," answered a dozen voices; "Rosita has been missing; we feared she was killed by the Indians."

"I saw Salsido leaving camp last night with a girl thrown across his saddle, bound. He must explain this before he gets his freedom!" The scout was firm.

This seemed quite just to the Mexicans, and Salsido was about to be transferred to the jail, when he whispered into one of his friends' ears: "Look at the man behind Wilson; do you not recognize him?"

"It is the outlaw," cried the miners, as they beheld Harding. "It is the man who tried to kill the sacred cat; kill him, kill him!"

"Stop!" commanded Cody; "you outlawed this man without a trial; I demand that he be given justice as well as Salsido. Hear his case before you convict him."

"That is just," cried a Mexican; "let us try him; what does it matter?"

"Do not be afraid," said the great scout, turning to the foreman. "I would not have allowed you to return here if I did not feel sure of convincing these miners of your guiltlessness. Be patient for a little while."

"I leave everything to you," answered Harding, "and trust in you implicitly."

As the foreman was being led away to prison, the Mexicans came forward with a purse of money hastily collected, and asked Buffalo Bill if he would accept it and put Salsido on his parole. The scout was at first going to refuse, but on second thoughts he agreed to do so.

"Will you promise to appear to-morrow morning before a set of men selected to try you?" he asked of the Mexican.

"Yes," said Salsido eagerly; "and if Rosita turns up before then I will not be tried at all?"

"Not on that charge," answered Buffalo Bill, as he set the man free. "Watch him closely," he said in a whisper to Wharton and Hickok; "don't let him out of your sight. See what he does, and where he goes, and report to me."

"Very well," answered Wild Bill, as the two men

made their way through the crowd of Mexicans after Salsido; "you can depend on us."

Cody returned with Gloria and Mr. Wilson to their house, after seeing Harding settled as comfortably as possible in the rock-hewn jail.

"But what of the murderer of Lon Becker all this time?" asked Gloria; "we had forgotten about him in the excitement of the Indians."

"On the contrary, I feel that five thousand already in my pocket," laughed Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CAT.

"Where in thunder's he going now?" asked Nick of Wild Bill, as the two men watched Salsido depart from the jail where he had been mocking at Harding, and take a trail that led away from the camp.

"That's for us to find out," answered Hickok, "and we'll have to be careful that he don't see we're tracking him. Wait till he reaches the top of that hill before we start. There he goes; come ahead!"

And the two men, faithful to their trust, followed the Mexican unobserved.

It was well that they were careful, for Salsido carried a revolver and kept his hand upon it constantly, looking about to see if he were watched. He soon appeared satisfied that he was unnoticed and walked on more quickly, with an evil smile parting his lips.

"To-morrow I will be free of the charge," he muttered, "and then this scout Cody will get his deserts. He suspects me, but he can't prove that I'm guilty—and I'm not!" he chuckled; "but if Buffalo Bill doesn't follow in the steps of Lon Becker, I will be."

He left the trail about a half mile from camp and walked across the bare rock of the mountainside to-

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ward a crag which arose straight into the air like a compact, solid wall, another half mile distant. He did not look around now, but went straight on, until he came to the foot of the cliff. Wharton and Hickok, who were not far behind, dodged back of a bowlder, for they thought the Mexican must turn. But to their amazement, they saw Salsido seize the side of the crag with his hands, and ascend on what must have been niches cut in the rock, until he came to a cave, the mouth of which was some dozen feet above the ground. The Mexican entered the cave and disappeared.

"Well, here's a nice thing," cried Nick; "what do you suppose he's doing in there? Got gold, likely. I suppose it's our duty to follow him right in."

"Seems foolish," replied Wild Bill. "I say we stay here and watch. Doesn't look like there was another entrance, and we can see if he brings any dust out with him."

The two men made themselves comfortable, but they had not long to wait before their watch on the cave was rewarded.

"There he comes," cried Nick, as something moved within the cavern.

"Looks to me as though he was on his hands and knees."

"By heck!" exclaimed both the scouts together.

Instead of the Mexican appearing, a large and mus-

cular mountain lion sprang from the cave and bounded lightly down the path past them, its eyes glaring, its tail swishing the ground as it ran.

"Heck!" cried Wharton again, unable to find another word in his vocabulary to express himself with. "The poor fool's dead by this time!"

"What did he go into the cave for? He must have known that cat was there."

"I don't know," said Wharton; "they said the animals were scarce around here; he probably hid some money there and this beast has made himself at home there since."

"I have it!" cried Hickok, in excitement; "that was the sacred cat we saw, Nick; sure, don't you see this is its home; this must be the Copper Crag, and the deserted cliff dwelling Gloria was telling us about."

"You're right!" answered Nick, "and the Mexican was coming to propitiate it, so he'd get off all right on the trial. Now he must be dead for sure."

The two men ran to the crag and Nick assisted Hickok to climb up the niches. A ledge projected out in front of the cave, and, standing on this, Wild Bill gazed into the depths of the cliff dwelling. After a moment his eyes became accustomed to the darkness within, and then he could see every corner and crevice of the cave, and he uttered a quick exclamation. In-

stead of beholding the dead body of the Mexican, he saw nothing at all; the cave was empty!

"What does it mean?" cried Hickok, as he rejoined his companion; "there's no one here."

"I don't like to say it's so," answered Wharton, "but it seems to me as though that cat we saw was Salsido himself."

The idea seemed absurd at first, but Hickok recalled stories of men who had the power to change themselves into wolves—were-wolves they were called—and it did not then seem impossible that this sleek-looking Mexican had the power to transform himself into a mountain lion. What other explanation was there?

"This explains the murders, too," cried Hickok; "no wonder they couldn't find the murderer; and all the victims were enemies of Salsido; Nick, that money's ours; come along and let's report to Cody."

The two men returned quickly toward Morenci, keeping a sharp lookout for the cat which they did not see, and went straight to Buffalo Bill with the whole tale when they reached the camp.

The next morning Cody collected ten men whom he thought would make fair-minded jurymen, and assembled them in the superintendent's office. Mr. Wilson and Gloria came in to listen to the proceedings, and Wharton and Hickok were present as witnesses. The remainder of the room was filled with Mexicans, and

many of the miners had to be content with standing outside.

"Where is Salsido?" asked Cody, who had been chosen as judge by common consent. Wharton looked up nervously, half expecting to see a mountain lion spring in at the door.

"Is Salsido here?" asked the scout again. There was a commotion among the Mexicans outside, and Salsido pushed his way through into the room.

"I am here," he said.

"He has the eyes of a lion sure enough," whispered Hickok to his companion.

"You are charged with the murder of the girl Rosita," said Cody; "guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty, señor," replied the Mexican, with a laugh, "the girl is not dead."

"That is for you to prove," answered Buffalo Bill; "do you know her whereabouts?"

"She is here!" exclaimed Salsido triumphantly, and before the astonished eyes of the scouts there stepped into the room Rosita herself. She was thin and wan-looking, but calm; and she never took her eyes off the face of Salsido.

"Are you Rosita?" asked Cody.

"That is my name," answered the girl, never looking at the border judge.

"Did this man take you forcibly from camp two nights ago?"

"I refuse to allow that question asked," cried Salsido; "you have accused me of the murder of this girl; I have proven my innocence and I demand to be set free!"

"Set him free," cried the crowd; "try the man who wounded the sacred cat."

"Have you any complaint to make against this man?" inquired Cody of Rosita. The girl shook her head.

"None," she said.

"I have a complaint," said Nick suddenly, as he saw the Mexican was about to be set at liberty; "I say that fellow killed Lon Becker and all the other murdered men."

"Guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," answered Salsido, with a scornful laugh. "What is the charge based on?"

"On your power to change yourself into a mountain cat," cried Wharton. The Mexican heard this charge in amazed silence; Rosita alone uttered a little cry, while Salsido gave vent to an oath.

"This is child's play," he said; "whoever heard of a man being able to change his form like that!"

"Many strange things happen in this world," said Cody; "but if you are not guilty, perhaps you can give

these men here some explanation of what they saw yesterday." He turned to Nick and Wild Bill.

While the Mexicans listened in speechless astonishment, Hickok related how they had traced Salsido the day before, and told all they had seen and done. More than once, the Mexican bit his tongue to keep himself from breaking forth in oaths, and more than once the Mexicans regarded him with doubt. When Wild Bill finished the account, the Mexicans surged about Salsido and begged him to explain this strange matter.

"It is all easy to understand," cried the accused, after a moment's hesitation. "I went to the cave to pray to the sacred cat, and ask for its protection to-day. The cat was not there when I arrived, so I took courage and went into its cavern, where I left some incense, hoping it might be pleased to grant me protection. If these men say they saw our good lion come out of the cave after I went in, they are mistaken; it must have been before, or else I should have been torn limb from limb. How can you deny that?"

"By saying that you changed your form in the cave," cried Hickok; "you went in a man, and came out a lion; and it was as a lion you killed your enemies here in camp, and attempted to kill Harding the day we arrived."

"That's right," cried Nick; "the lion came out after you went in."

The superstitious Mexicans recoiled from the prisoner with dread. Cody saw that they believed the man guilty, and he took advantage of this belief to put in a word for Harding.

"You see what kind of an animal your sacred cat is," he cried to the miners; "what is it you will do with the man whom you have outlawed for defending himself against it?"

"Free him!" answered the Mexicans; "free Arthur Harding!" and in this cry Salsido read his own doom. But a sudden thought came to him like an inspiration.

"If you do not believe me," he exclaimed, "you may believe your superintendent, Mr. Wilson."

"Mr. Wilson," he said, turning to Gloria's father, with a triumphant smile, "was I not with you when Lon Becker was murdered?"

Every eye was directed toward the superintendent as he cleared his throat to answer.

"You were," he said shortly, but quite clearly.

"Supposing I were able to change my form," cried the Mexican; "even as a lion I could not have murdered Becker, for Mr. Wilson acknowledges I was in his company."

"Darn!" exclaimed Wharton.

The Mexicans sent up a shout of joy at this clear truth, however, and took Salsido back into their favor at once.

"Isn't there anything we can hold him for?" asked Mr. Wilson of Cody. "I'm sure he's guilty of enough crimes."

"The story Hickok told is true," answered Buffalo Bill, "and there is still a mystery here to be cleared up. For the present I do not see but that we will have to let the fellow go, but we'll keep his wings clipped."

"Am I at liberty to leave?" asked Salsido, with mock politeness.

Cody turned to the men who made up the jury. They all nodded their heads in agreement, but said nothing.

"You are free to depart," said Cody; "only beware that your actions do not betray you."

The Mexican stepped out through the door and was greeted with cheers by his comrades. But he turned back suddenly.

"Let Arthur Harding be tried!" he demanded.

From the commotion which followed, Buffalo Bill saw that the foreman was no longer in favor, and he feared the worst, although he did not express his thoughts. Gloria shuddered as she heard this demonstration against the outlaw.

Before Harding could be brought in, however, there was a crash, and the window over Cody's head broke into pieces, while an arrow, quivering, struck the desk before the scout, and remained there. The miners

gazed in astonishment, and those outside looked to see who could have fired the shaft, but no one was to be seen.

Cody pulled the arrow from the wood in which it was embedded, and saw that a thin slip of paper was wrapped about the shaft. He unrolled it and read the name, "Mr. Wilson," written on it in blood by a cramped hand.

"Ah," said the scout, as he handed the slip of paper to the superintendent, "I recognize this writing; it is our injured friend Chief Sivett who sends this greeting."

Mr. Wilson opened the paper and found these words outlined in blood within it:

"The arms and weapons of the Sioux are in Morenci, and you are Morenci's superintendent. Send our warriors' children back to them before the sun has set to rise and set again, or the vengeance of Chief Sivett will fall upon you, and you will be with your people no more."

"What would you advise me to do?" asked Mr. Wilson of Cody, as he handed him the letter. Buffalo Bill read it and laughed.

"I would do nothing," he answered. "Chief Sivett's feelings are outraged, and he is merely trying to adjust his dignity."

For once, however, the great scout was mistaken.

"Let me see the letter," begged Gloria.

"No," said her father, crushing it in his pocket; "it is nothing."

"Bring in the outlaw," cried the Mexicans, with renewed vigor; "let us try the man who hurt the sacred cat; let us slay him!"

"Bring in Harding," commanded Buffalo Bill; and in a moment the young foreman entered amid the hisses of the miners, and took his place before Cody.

"Who accuses this man?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"I do," cried Gloria, suddenly stepping forward before Salsido could speak.

Even the great scout was struck dumb with astonishment.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONDEMNED TO DIE.

"Gloria!" exclaimed Mr. Wilson, trying to prevent his daughter from speaking further, "are you mad?"

"No," answered the girl, with a quick glance at Cody; "I speak in the interests of justice."

"Proceed with your accusation," ordered the judge, who interpreted the look which Gloria had given him, and understood that the girl was playing a game. "What is the charge?"

"I charge this man before you with criminal negligence. He did not kill the lion which attacked him when he had the chance to kill it. This morning that same lion pursued me when I was returning from the hill in front of our house, where I had gone to view the sunrise. It was only by good luck that I escaped its paws, and saved myself. If I had been murdered, it would have been Arthur Harding's fault."

There was a moment of intense silence when the girl finished, and a smile played about the mouth of Buffalo Bill. Salsido understood the girl's quick-witted action also, but he did not smile.

By speaking as she did, Gloria had prevented Salsido from uttering the accusation which he had on his

tongue's end, and which would have swept Harding to his fate at once; but now the court would have to prove the foreman innocent of criminal negligence before they could find him guilty of attempting to kill the sacred cat, and it was very plain that if he were blamed for not having slain the mountain lion, he could not be sentenced for attempting to kill it! It was a clever scheme hatched out of the brain of a clever girl.

"I accuse this man," cried Salsido, "of——"

"Silence!" commanded Cody; "we have the present charge to consider first. Arthur Harding, are you guilty or not guilty of criminal negligence in not having slain the mountain lion which attacked you recently?"

"Guilty," replied the outlaw; "I plead clemency of the court."

"His guilt must be proven," interrupted the incensed Mexican. "I say that this man is not guilty. It was not criminal negligence to refrain from shooting the cat of the Copper Crag."

"That is for the jury to decide," answered Cody. "Friends," he said, turning to the ten men who were following the case with evident interest, "you have heard the accusation and the prisoner's confession, but, nevertheless, it is your duty to consider also what this Mexican has just said. Arthur Harding was attacked by a wild animal which these Mexicans hold as sacred;

he did not kill the beast because he thought more of the superstition than he did of his own life. This morning that same wild animal attacked this young girl before you, and came near ending her life. This savage beast may attack any one of you before another night has passed. Was it not Arthur Harding's duty to have killed an animal which is a nuisance to all Morenci? Or is the superstition of the Mexicans to be held sacred even to the sacrifice of human beings? Before you come to your decision, consider again that the prisoner acknowledges his guilt and asks your clemency. A man does not declare himself guilty, my good men, no matter who he is, unless his guilt is plainly apparent."

"That's right," cried Nick. "What's the punishment?" he whispered to Hickok.

"The judge decides that," answered Wild Bill knowingly; "the feller'll get off sure now! Look at the Mexican; did you ever see a blacker face?"

The ten men who were to decide the outlaw's fate consulted together in low tones. It was plain that they disagreed, and after a few moments one of them arose and addressed Cody.

"May I ask the prisoner a question, sir?"

"You may."

"Did you wound the animal which attacked you?" inquired the man of Harding.

"Yes, in the breast with a Spanish bayonet leaf."

A murmur of anger arose among the Mexicans at this admission, which grew louder as the jurymen consulted among themselves.

"We'll have to guard those men after they give their verdict," said Hickok to Nick; "the Mexicans will try to mob them, sure."

"We have come to our decision," announced the head jurymen, and the room instantly became still again.

"Have you found the prisoner guilty or not guilty?" asked Buffalo Bill, while Gloria held her breath, and Harding stood ready to go to her side.

"In view of the fact that Mr. Harding wounded the lion, we agree that he may have tried his best to kill it and failed. Therefore, he was not criminally negligent. He is not guilty!"

At these words, Salsido sprang forward with a derisive laugh, which was echoed by all the Mexicans. Hickok bit his lip, while Nick swore roundly. "They was afraid of being mobbed," he cried; "they're cowards, every one of them."

"Order!" commanded Cody, looking at Wharton with sympathy in his eyes.

Gloria shrank back by the side of her father. She had done her best to save the outlaw, and it was not her fault that she had failed.

"Now it is my turn," exclaimed Salsido. "I accuse this man of having attempted to kill the sacred cat, and as the jury has already agreed that the prisoner wounded our lion, and probably did his best to slay it, I demand that sentence be passed at once."

"Not so fast," cried Cody; "it is true that the jury decided that Harding attacked the mountain lion; it must now be shown that the attack was a crime."

"How could it be anything else but a crime?" asked Salsido. "This cat is sacred to the people of this camp," he cried eloquently to the jury; "it is the animal that protects us and brings us peace and plenty. If it was killed, there is not a miner who would remain in Morenci. The attack which the prisoner made on it was, therefore, criminal in every sense." The crowd left the jury in no doubt that they were in favor of this sentiment.

"Have you anything to say in self-defense?" asked Cody of the foreman.

"Merely that it was in self-defense that I wounded the lion."

"Well, I've got something to say," drawled Nick; "if this cat brings peace to Morenci, and gives you people plenty, where was he with his peace when Chief Sivett came down on you?"

The old scout was speaking directly to Salsido, and his voice carried conviction with it.

"We both saw the Indians count out eighty-six scalps of Morenci heads; do you call that protection? Look at the blood spilled all around here; do you call that peace? Your cat was sleeping; or else it's a sham. Which was it?"

"The sacred lion permitted the attack," responded the Mexican glibly, "because it was angered at being wounded. It was in just wrath that it allowed eighty-six of our miners to die; and thus the prisoner is indirectly the cause of the murder of eighty-six of our men."

"Tommyrot!" exclaimed Nick, but his cry was not heard in the shrieking fury of the Mexicans, who now saw in Harding the cause of their friends' deaths. For a moment the foreman feared he was going to be mobbed. Cody looked at the jurymen and felt sure that they considered the prisoner innocent, in spite of the adverse demonstration.

Suddenly there came a shrill cry from Rosita.

"Look," she cried, pointing to a small window in the back of the building, a side on which none of the miners had collected. Every eye was directed toward the square opening, which had a moment before been empty, and every Mexican dropped, shaking, to his knees.

In the aperture was the head of a mountain lion, its great green eyes rolling about, as it looked at the men

within, and its mouth wide open in a snarl. It was the cat of the Copper Crag!

Hickok reached for his gun, but Cody stopped him with a quick gesture.

"Don't be the death of us all," he whispered; "now that I have seen the animal, and know that it exists, I am satisfied."

When he looked up again the window was empty and the mountain lion was no longer visible.

"Behold," cried Salsido, jumping to his feet, "the sacred cat comes to demand justice. Let the prisoner be sentenced."

Cody looked again at the jury, and his brow contracted; he saw that the men had been strongly affected by the appearance of the lion.

"Are you ready with a decision?" he asked of them. "Have you found that superstition is the only crime in the case?"

"We have agreed," answered one of the men, after a short consultation with his fellows, "but agreed that the prisoner is guilty of the charge on which he is held. We leave the sentence to you."

"Death!" cried Salsido, and the miners; "we will be satisfied with no sentence but death!"

"Silence," demanded Cody, rising to his feet; "it is I who am to pass sentence, and death is too great a

punishment for the crime committed. I sentence the prisoner to one year's outlawry."

"We will be satisfied with nothing but his death!" repeated Salsido, as the rest of the Mexicans pushed in about Harding. "He has returned to the camp after we outlawed him once, so he doubly deserves destruction."

Cody laid his revolver on the desk in front of him and raised his hand for order.

"The first man to cry death again!" he exclaimed, "will receive what he cries for."

There was quick consultation among the miners, while Mr. Wilson hurried out with Gloria so that no harm should come to the girl. Wharton and Hickok held themselves ready to back up Buffalo Bill, and Harding remained calm and motionless.

"We do not demand this man's death," said Salsido, after the miners had finished their quick conference, "but unless he is dead by dawn to-morrow every miner in camp will refuse to return to work, and no Mexican will be answerable for the safety of any white man in Morenci."

"Sentence me to death," cried Harding to his judge. "I know these men well enough to feel sure they mean what they say. I'll be killed in the end, and it seems useless to cause the shedding of innocent blood."

The great scout looked at the prisoner before him

intently for a full moment, while the Mexicans awaited in suspense for his answer. Buffalo Bill saw the truth of the outlaw's words, and he saw at the same time a possible means to save the man. Throughout the trial he had been piecing together incidents and facts, and he felt that he would soon be able to clear up the mystery of the cat as well as to restore the foreman to favor. Therefore, he accepted the outlaw's sacrifice.

"I sentence you to be hung by the neck until you are dead," he cried to Harding, "and that the hanging take place in camp to-morrow morning when the sun is an hour high."

The foreman bowed his head silently while the Mexicans burst forth in shouts of triumphant joy, and left the room tumultuously.

The jury was dismissed and Cody accompanied the doomed man to the jail to see that no harm came to him.

"It looks as though I were going on a vacation," laughed Harding.

"Don't worry about that till dawn," replied Cody; "just try to get a good night's rest, that's all." The foreman looked up inquiringly, but the great scout's face was inscrutable.

"My friends Wharton and Hickok will see that your slumbers aren't disturbed," he went on, "for it may happen that the Mexicans will mistake the moon for

the sun and call you too early. "You don't mind staying here all night, boys?" he asked of Nick and Wild Bill. The two scouts agreed willingly enough to guard the prisoner, and Cody returned up the trail alone. Before he reached the superintendent's house he was accosted by Salsido.

"Pardon, señor," said the Mexican, "but I have something of importance to tell you; I know who killed Lon Becker."

"Why don't you claim the reward, then?"

"Because I have no proof," answered Salsido, "while, perhaps, you have."

"What is the man's name?" asked Cody, with apparent eagerness.

"Arthur Harding!" exclaimed the Mexican; "and it may be that I can prove it to you."

"If you can, you will save me a short search," answered Buffalo Bill, "for I have sworn to find the murderer of Lon Becker and bring him to justice."

The Mexican bowed low so that Cody could not see the expression of his face.

"If you will meet me to-night," he said, "at twelve o'clock, upon the summit of this hill, I will give you every proof that you could ask."

"Why must we wait until midnight?"

"It is the only time I can procure the proof; will you come?"

"I will promise to see you before morning," replied the scout emphatically.

"Thank you, señor; if you are late, I will wait for you. You will never repent the meeting."

With an ill-concealed expression of delight on his face the Mexican passed on, and Cody made his way to Mr. Wilson.

"I am going to lie down a while," he said to the superintendent, as he entered the house; "be sure and call me before dusk. I have a hard night's work to do."

"Where are you going?" cried Gloria.

Buffalo Bill tossed his slouch hat upon the table and threw himself upon the lounge.

"I am going to kill the cat of the Copper Crag," he said.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CAVE BY MOONLIGHT.

Night was already beginning to fall when the door of the superintendent's house opened, and Cody stepped out on the hillside. He was dressed in his hunting clothes of buckskin and carried a repeating rifle, as well as his long hunting knife, which might always be seen in his belt. He had left his revolvers behind him, for he thought they would be an unnecessary weight, as he had determined to walk to the cave and risk the adventure on foot. Midnight might be in the way when it came to the struggle, and Cody did not wish the horse to run any chances of being torn by the mountain lion.

"Ah," said the scout to himself, as he glanced up to the summit of the hill, "so you want me to meet you there at twelve o'clock, do you, Salsido? It would be interesting to see what you would do, for I believe the meeting would be more of action than of words; but, unfortunately, I have another engagement for to-night. However, I am very glad to know that you will be here at twelve, for that means that you will not then be at the crag. It is at that hour that I shall call on the cat."

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Going down the trail, Cody looked toward the prison and beheld his two faithful companions keeping guard over the condemned foreman. He did not speak to them, however, for he did not want them to know of his mission, fearing they would insist upon accompanying him. Turning abruptly, he strode rapidly from the camp and soon left Morenci behind him.

"Where can Snake Eye be?" questioned the scout to himself as he walked on, stopping now and then to make sure that he was in no danger. "I have not seen the Indian since he returned from Grays' Peak with Gloria and Harding. Can it be that he has gone back to his people, or that harm has come to him?"

He wheeled about as a shadow slid past him in the darkness.

"Who is that?" cried Cody sharply.

At the sound of his voice, the figure turned and uttered a low cry of recognition.

"It is Snake Eye," answered the figure, and the friendly Sioux approached swiftly.

"You come in time to answer my thoughts," said the scout; "where have you been and what are you doing at this hour on the mountain?"

"I have been watching my people," replied the Indian, as he walked by the side of Cody. "After I came to Morenci with you I went back to the peak to make sure that my people had gone."

"And you found that they had gone?"

"No, not all of them. Most of the warriors were no longer to be seen, but Chief Sivett was there with six of his best braves, and I saw him draw a knife across his arm and write a letter with the blood that flowed forth."

"Yes," answered Cody, "that was a letter to Mr. Wilson; he got it all right, although it came near taking a piece of my ear with it. Did the Sioux then follow the rest of their tribe, and return to their homes?"

"I watched them," replied Snake Eye, "and they are waiting for their messenger who rode away with the letter on a shaft. I listened and heard them say that if their weapons were not given back to them, they would come to Morenci and do murder. Already they have chipped spearheads from the rock, and bent the branches of trees into bows and made them also into arrows. Then I hastened back to Morenci to warn you. I found Mr. Wilson and told him, but he would not say where you were, and I was about to return to the mountain to see what Chief Sivett does next."

"The messenger has no more than reached him now, Snake Eye. If Chief Sivett comes to Morenci he cannot get here before to-morrow night, and what can a handful of crudely armed Indians do against a large, well-armed camp like this? Do not go back to the peak, therefore, but stay with me, for I have a great

hunt before me to-night, and may need your help in the sport."

The friendly Sioux readily agreed to accompany Buffalo Bill to the cave when he learned what the game was, and felt proud to be asked to assist the great scout.

They reached the cavern two hours before midnight, but Cody drew Snake Eye into the shadows at the foot of the crag and made him wait. He was not ready to risk an entrance until he knew just what the situation was, and whether the cat was at home or not. Silently and steadily the two men watched the cliff dwelling above them, while the moon came out back of the crag and cast a broad path of light down the approaching trail.

"That's bad," whispered Cody; "in another hour or so there will be no shadow here at all to conceal us." Still they watched while the moonlight crept slowly toward them, but no movement within the cave rewarded their patience.

When it was nearly midnight, and the strip of shadow in which they crouched was only three feet in width, Buffalo Bill arose to his full height.

"I am going into the cave," he said; "stay here and warn me if any one approaches. Give the call of a coyote. If I cry out, come to my assistance."

Returning the grasp of the Indian's hand, Cody saw that his knife was loose in its sheath and his rifle cocked, then he stepped silently into the light and began to climb the cliff.

The wall was precipitous and the niches not deep, but it took the scout only a few seconds to scale the rock, and lift himself upon the ledge before the cave. It was a dangerous position to stand in, for any one within the cavern could have marked him plainly, while he was unable to pierce the blackness beyond. He held his rifle before him, however, as he stepped slowly forward, ready to fire at the first hostile movement.

But neither man nor lion prevented his entrance. The scout walked into the cave, unchallenged, and stood listening. At first he thought no one was there, but in a moment he distinguished the sound of breathing, as of a person sleeping. Was the cat at his very feet? Quickly taking a match from his pocket, the scout put it between his teeth as he grasped his gun again with both hands. The breathing paused for a moment, and then went on as before. Throwing his head back, Cody brought the end of the match in contact with the roof of the cave, and then he threw his head quickly forward again. The match sputtered into light and revealed the cavern, empty, save for the form of a young girl on the floor before him. It was Rosita.

"Who is there?" cried the girl, awaking suddenly.

"Be quiet," ordered Buffalo Bill; "are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Is not this the home of the cat?"

"Yes."

"Then why are you sleeping in so dangerous a place?"

The girl did not answer. The match went out, but Cody did not light another.

"Do not be afraid of me, my girl. I am the man whom you saw as judge this morning; you must tell me why you are here."

"I am here because he commands it."

"Do you mean Salsido?"

"Yes."

"What has Salsido to do with the cat?"

"I must not tell you," moaned the girl; "he would kill me."

"Fear nothing," answered Cody. "I will see that no harm comes to you. Salsido is not afraid of the cat?"

"No," replied the girl, determined then to tell all; "the lion is his pet. He stole it from its mother when it was a cub, and he has trained it to do his will. The animal is afraid of no one but Salsido, and does everything that Salsido commands it to."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, "it was the cat, then, that killed Lon Becker, and all the others, at his bidding!"

"Yes."

"Why have you not told of this before?"

"Because I love Salsido," cried the poor girl, "and I would die if harm came to him. Promise me that you will not injure him."

"Where is he now?" asked the scout, avoiding a direct answer.

"He has gone with the cat to meet—ah!" cried the girl, suddenly burying her face in her hands, "it was to meet you."

"So that was what the meeting was for!" exclaimed Cody, "to have me pulled down by the cat!"

"Salsido brought me here," went on the girl, "when I threatened to warn Mr. Wilson that he was in danger. Then he made me go back to Morenci to clear him of the charge of murder. I wanted to ask you to save me then, from being brought back here, but I think Salsido has a mysterious power over me, for I cannot resist his will; I must obey him; and, ah! it is terrible here; the cat sleeps with one paw upon me so that I cannot escape, and Salsido drugs me whenever he leaves, so that I must sleep." The girl sank wearily back upon the floor.

"But why was the animal ever considered sacred?" asked Cody.

"That was Salsido's work, too," answered the girl, with an effort. "The Mexicans are all very superstitious, and he made them believe that this animal was their guardian. It took him a long while to do it, but he succeeded. The offerings which are brought to the cave he takes and keeps."

"Well, that cat has not long to live," answered Cody, "for I intend to kill it."

"God bless you if you do," replied the girl.

The call of a coyote suddenly rang out on the air near by. The girl thought nothing of it, for the animals were plentiful thereabouts, but the scout recognized it as a warning from Snake Eye. Some one was approaching.

"Promise me not to tell Salsido that I have been here, if he comes," commanded Cody.

"I promise," answered Rosita.

Quickly as he had entered the cave, Buffalo Bill left it, and in another moment was by the side of the Indian.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A man coming up the trail below, with a big dog."

The two crouched back in the shadow and waited, and this time they had not long to wait.

Up the hill, coming toward the cliff, in the full light

of the moon, there moved a man and a mountain lion, side by side, the beast turning every now and then to lick its master's hand, while its master cuffed it away. It was Salsido and the cat of the Copper Crag returning home.

Cody raised his rifle; but lowered it again as he whispered to Snake Eye: "Better to take them in the cave."

The lion ran past them, not three feet from where they stood, and crouching back, made one great leap which landed it upon the ledge of the cavern. Salsido climbed up the cliff after it, and the two men below could hear him upbraiding Rosita.

"Cody wasn't there," he snarled; "he was afraid to come. Well, I'll finish him when I go to settle accounts with Wilson. The superintendent refused again to give me the position of foreman. Here, lie down there and quit that growling!" this last was evidently addressed to the cat—"it wasn't my fault you didn't have your supper to-night."

"There are men coming up the trail," cried Snake Eye to Cody.

"Who can these be?" exclaimed the scout.

They soon found out, for over a score of Mexicans came into view and halted a little way from the crag. They were converts of the cat and came to offer sacri-

fice to the animal for fear that it was still angry with them. Salsido evidently saw them also, for his voice could no longer be heard, and silence reigned.

"This is the very audience we need," said Cody, with a smile; "the Mexicans shall now see how sacred their cat is."

The men had approached a little nearer, nearly opposite to where the scout and the Sioux were standing, and they laid their offerings on the ground—meat, incense, gold, jewelry, and even eggs, a curious assortment of gifts. This done, they retreated and fell to their knees with prayers. Thus they remained while the scout could see four eyes peering from the cave, two green, gleaming ones and two less green, but scarcely less glittering.

Snake Eye uttered an exclamation. The shadow in which the two men were standing was now a mere strip of black, and the hilt of the scout's dagger had flashed in the moonlight. In another moment they could no longer remain concealed.

With muttered invocations, the Mexicans arose to their feet and prepared to return to Morenci. They cast a last look toward the cave, and one of them cried aloud: "Guard us, oh! good lion, and cause no more of our blood to be spilled. At dawn we put to death the man that injured you. Reward us with peace and plenty."

Cody looked up suddenly and saw that there was a faint white streak along the eastern horizon. The Mexicans had been long at prayer.

"Stay where you are," he cried, stepping suddenly into the bright light of the moon; "stay where you are and receive your idol's answer!" Then he turned and aimed his rifle at the mouth of the cave: "Come out, Salsido, or I will fill you full of lead where you are!" he exclaimed.

There was a smothered cry from within the cave and then silence. The Mexicans stood still, too astounded at the apparition of the great scout to speak. Snake Eye jumped to the side of his friend and leveled a second rifle at the cavern.

"They are going to kill our cat!" screamed one of the Mexicans, suddenly understanding what was happening, and the entire body of worshipers rushed furiously toward the Indian and the scout.

"Keep them off!" cried Buffalo Bill to Snake Eye; "I didn't bargain for this."

The Sioux turned, and swept the approaching body of men with his rifle. The Mexicans, unarmed, came to a sudden halt. At the same moment there resounded a deep laugh full of mockery from the cave.

"You have put yourself in my hands," cried a voice from the crag, and it died away in the low growl

of an aroused animal. The Mexicans thought it was the cat which had spoken.

Cody looked quickly through the sights of his rifle and pulled the trigger. The explosion which followed seemed to shake the very cliff itself, and a cry of pain echoed throughout the cave.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CODY AND THE CAT.

When the smoke cleared away the Mexicans beheld a man roll out of the mouth of the cave and lie moaning upon the very edge of the ledge. In another moment they recognized the man as Salsido, and Snake Eye had no longer any trouble in keeping them back.

"Behold the master of your cat," cried Cody, "and the man whose dupes you have been for years."

The Mexicans retreated in fear and amazement, and watched what followed from a safe distance with slowly growing comprehension.

Buffalo Bill's shot had been well directed, and Salsido was painfully wounded, but not fatally, for he attempted to crawl back into the cave.

A shrill shriek sounded from within the crag. It was Rosita.

"Quick!" shouted Cody to Snake Eye, and started at once for the cliff. The Indian darted ahead of him, however, and reached the rock wall first, climbing up the niches without hesitation. Salsido saw him coming, however, and rolling back to the edge again, dealt the Sioux a terrible blow over the head. Snake Eye staggered, but held on to the rocks with dogged deter-

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mination. Again the Mexican raised the blunt stone he had used, and brought it down full in the Indian's face.

Snake Eye gave no cry, but his grip loosened and he fell backward through the air.

"Ha!" cursed Salsido; "come again if you dare," and he gave a shrill whistle for the cat.

Buffalo Bill saw the brutal deed of the Mexican and stepped back in time to catch the Indian as he fell.

"You did your best," he cried, to Snake Eye; "now I will do mine."

He laid the friendly Sioux, who was hardly conscious, on the ground, and, springing back again, aimed his rifle at the cave.

"Would you kill a girl?" cried a voice from above him.

Salsido stood in the mouth of the cave with Rosita held before him.

"Coward!" exclaimed Cody; "but do not think to escape me thus."

Rifle in hand he sprang forward, as the moonlight about him faded in the gray light of a new day.

The Mexican whistled sharply again, and out of the cavern leaped the mountain lion, every muscle in action, foam dripping from his iron jaws. Cody was face to face with the cat at last.

The animal uttered a roar that was heard in Morenci

itself, and crouched back on its haunches to demolish the man before it with one great spring. Cody did not tremble; the nerves of the great scout were never calmer than at just such moments as these. He aimed his gun carefully, and just as the infuriated animal hurled itself forward, he pulled the trigger.

The hammer snapped and the cartridge failed to explode!

Rosita uttered a horrified cry, Salsido gave vent to a loud laugh as he picked up his own gun, with the intent to riddle Cody's body with bullets, while the Mexicans were rooted to the spot with terror.

Buffalo Bill acted like lightning. With a motion quicker than that of the quick beast above him, he unsheathed his knife and drove it into the heart of the infuriated cat as it sprang upon him. At the same moment, Rosita, from the cave, knocked up the Mexican's gun so that the murderer's shot went wild.

The weight of the great brute was impossible to resist, however, and Cody fell backward to the ground, while the cat rolled over and off him to the ground—dead.

The Mexicans rushed forward with great cries in which were mingled emotions, for they did not yet understand all that was taking place. Cody jumped to his feet and snatched up Snake Eye's rifle.

Rosita, who had wrenched Salsido's gun from him,

and flung it away, now threw herself in front of the helpless and wounded man.

"Do not fire," she implored of the scout; "you promised me you would not injure him."

"He must meet his punishment," answered Cody.

"He is mine!" shrieked the girl, hardly knowing what she was saying; "leave him to me."

"I will leave him to his friends," replied Buffalo Bill. "Let these Mexicans decide his fate!"

The miners surrounded the body of their sacred cat, and shook their fists furiously at Salsido. At last they understood how they had been deceived, and they knew the man who had deceived them. They remembered all the gifts which this criminal had taken from them, and they thought of all the miners that had been killed by the lion at this man's bidding.

"What will you do with him?" asked Cody.

"Kill him!" cried the Mexicans; "he deserves death." They started to climb to the cave, but the scout sprang up before them, for he saw that Rosita would not let Salsido be hurt until she herself was dead.

"Take the man back to Morenci!" he shouted to the miners below; "let all the people see him in his guilt and weakness. Death is too easy a punishment for him; let him be scorned and hated and then cast out."

This idea pleased the easily swayed miners, and they cried that they would take Salsido back to Morenci and try him before a regular court, even as Harding had been tried, so that they should know everything that the cunning man had accomplished.

"You have heard your fellows' sentence," said Cody, turning to Salsido, "and if you will answer me one question, I will do what I can to save you from such a death as you deserve."

"Ask it," said Salsido bitterly, "and if I can answer with a lie I will."

Buffalo Bill shrugged his shoulders and started to descend, but Rosita stopped him.

"He will answer!" she cried. "What is it you would ask? Answer for my sake, if not, for your own," she whispered, to Salsido.

"How was it," inquired Cody, "that Wharton and Hickok saw you come into this cave, and then after seeing the lion come out, looked in here and found the cavern empty?"

"They did not see that," cried Salsido; "they lied to you."

"No," interrupted Rosita, "they did not lie, and I will tell you why it was they saw nothing. It was because there's a second cavern to this cliff dwelling, a room beyond this, and Salsido was there when your friends looked in. He did not know they came, how-

ever, for I was with him. See, you would never suspect there was another room, the entrance is so low and black."

"I am satisfied," said Cody; "let us go."

The journey back to Morenci commenced slowly. Two of the miners carried Snake Eye between them; and two others walked beside Salsido to assist him as well as to prevent his escape. Rosita followed behind, never taking her eyes from the man she was intent on saving. The body of the cat was borne on before.

Cody was leading the party, lost in thought, when he suddenly looked up and saw that the dawn had broken, and that the first rays of the sun were already turning the sky to a rosy pink.

"Look!" he cried; "there is not a moment to be lost if we are to save Arthur Harding. Oh, for Midnight to take me to the camp and save the fellow!"

Without waiting to waste his time on useless wishes, however, he started on a run down the trail. He had not gone a hundred yards when a horseman came galloping toward him. It was Hickok.

"Quick!" cried Wild Bill, as he dashed up; "the Mexicans have already taken Harding from the jail; if you mean to save him you have not a moment to spare. We could do nothing."

"Give me your horse!" cried Buffalo Bill, and,

springing on the back of the good steed, he wheeled the animal about, and spurred it back down the trail.

"Hurry the crowd to camp!" he called back to Hickok, without waiting to explain the situation, and then he was off, riding a race with the sun, while the life of a man was at stake!

CHAPTER XXIX.

SALSIDO IN THE TOILS.

The Mexicans had begun to collect about the camp jail at the first indication of day, and Wharton and Hickok had all they could do to keep them back from the little iron door. The miners did not become dangerous, however, until the sun sent a single ray of light piercing through Morenci, and then they clamored loudly for the outlaw to be brought forth and given to justice.

"You can't have him till the sun is an hour high," insisted the leader of the vigilantes; "that was what the judge ordered."

"I'll be hanged if I give him up even then," grumbled Nick.

"You probably will be if you don't," said Hickok grimly; "Cody's coming, though, don't you worry."

Wild Bill began to look worried himself, however, as the heavens grew brighter and brighter, and Buffalo Bill failed to appear.

"The sun is an hour high," cried the Mexicans, as they closed in about the prisoner.

"Nonsense!" yelled Nick; "'tain't more than a quarter up."

The miners could no longer be restrained, however, and they rushed upon the gate of the jail with intent to force it. As they did so, the superintendent hurried to the scene, leading a horse already saddled.

"Go look for Cody," he commanded of Hickok; "he went in the direction of the cave last night. Find him and tell him he must be quick if he is to save the life of this poor fellow."

Wild Bill sprang upon the animal's back and galloped off without a word. As he went he heard a crash behind him, and he knew that the gate of the jail had fallen.

"Don't resist with force!" cried Mr. Wilson to Nick, who would have defended the prisoner with his rifle; "that won't do any good now."

Arthur Harding was dragged roughly forth from his prison and carried to the place where a rude scaffold had been erected. His hands were secured behind his back, but his legs were left free, for the Mexicans hoped to see him kick and struggle in the agony of death.

"Wait," cried the superintendent, as the noose slipped over the foreman's head, "you must give the man a chance to say his prayers!"

"Three minutes!" cried the Mexicans, as four of the miners stood ready to pull the rope which should lift Harding from the ground, and send him to the

great beyond; "we give him just three minutes to say his prayers!"

"I have but one prayer to make," said the young prisoner, who had remained perfectly calm throughout all the proceedings, "and that is, that God will make you see the folly of your superstition and send death swiftly to your cat."

"Pull the rope!" shrieked the miners.

"The three minutes are not up," called Mr. Wilson, as he looked eagerly down the trail.

"Make him dance," insisted the Mexicans.

"He has a minute more to live!" exclaimed the superintendent, and he tried to prevent the miners from putting their weight on the rope, as he caught sight of a horseman hurrying over the hills.

"He dies now!" came the answer, and Harding felt the noose tighten about the neck.

"Tell Gloria that I died thinking of her!" he exclaimed.

The miners gave a derisive yell and lifted the doomed man off his feet.

At the very same instant there rang out a shot, and the cord above Harding's head shook as a bullet passed through it. Then the frayed rope broke and the outlaw dropped to the ground.

"Do not touch that man!" cried Buffalo Bill, riding up with Snake Eye's rifle still smoking in his hand;

"If any one is to be hung, it is I, for that man merely wounded your sacred cat—I killed it!"

The momentary silence following the sudden reprieve of their victim by the scout's wonderful shot was followed by a great uproar from the Mexicans. Cody kept the miners at bay, however, until he saw the procession headed by Wild Bill approaching; then he laughed aloud in triumph.

"Choose whom you will hang now!" he cried; "when your friends have told you what they have seen."

The Mexicans stood back and gazed with fear, as the dead body of their sacred cat was carried toward them and laid at the foot of the scaffold. Their companions soon spread the true story of affairs, however, and then fear gave way to fury.

Salsido was surrounded by the miners, who hissed and spat in his face; Rosita saw that he was in danger, and she cast an appealing look at Cody.

"Order!" commanded the scout, pushing his way in among the Mexicans; "give the fellow a trial and hear his case; at once if you will."

The men fell back and allowed Salsido to stand free. The Mexican was barely able to stand alone, however, and Rosita went to his side and supported him. Then the miners constituted themselves into a jury, and with Buffalo Bill as judge, proceeded to try Salsido on the charges of fraudulence, theft, and murder. Snake

Eye, who was now fully conscious, though in considerable pain, stood at one side with Nick and Hickok, and watched the trial with hatred of the prisoner in his eye. Harding stood near by with Mr. Wilson, regarding Cody with pride and gratitude.

"You are accused," cried Buffalo Bill to Salsido, "of keeping a mountain lion to murder your enemies for you, of beguiling these people into thinking that the lion was sacred, and of taking for yourself the gifts which they offered up to it. Guilty or not guilty?"

The prisoner did not answer, but he raised his head and there was defiance in his black eyes.

"You are accused," cried Cody again, "of the murder of Lon Becker, and those other men who were killed recently. Guilty or not guilty?"

Again the Mexican kept silence, and again the black eyes flashed a challenge to the judge.

"He is guilty," pleaded Rosita, "but he asks for mercy." The man beside her laughed.

"The prisoner deserves death," said the border judge to the miners, "but if you decide that he is to die, let me ask you to let him live until another morning for the girl's sake. Do not take him from Rosita too suddenly, or the shock will kill her. What is your will?"

"Let him be hanged," replied a Mexican, "and I for one am willing to let him live until to-morrow, for Rosita's sake."

"At sunrise we will hang him," cried the miners, and Salsido was dragged away to the jail, and the gate raised and strengthened so that he could not escape. Rosita alone remained outside the prison; still faithful, she stayed to comfort the man she loved.

"This ought to put a stop to murders in Morenci," remarked Cody to the superintendent, as the party climbed the hill.

"Yes," answered Mr. Wilson, entering his house, "and I cannot tell you how grateful we are to you. The reward which was offered is but a poor one for the service you have rendered; such as it is, it is yours, however."

And the superintendent handed Buffalo Bill a bag containing the five thousand dollars which had been left in his care.

"But this belongs to my friends, too," remarked Cody, "for if it had not been for Wharton and Snake Eye the cat of the Copper Crag would still be roaming the mountainside. Here Nick, take the money until we decide what to do with it," and the scout handed the bag to Wharton, who had entered the house with them.

"Gloria!" exclaimed Mr. Wilson, as the girl entered the room, "this great scout has brought a friend back to see you."

Gloria flushed as she looked from Cody to Harding,

but there was anxiety in her eyes as she turned to her father.

"What does this mean?" she asked, holding out a crumpled piece of paper.

It was Chief Sivett's blood-written letter to the superintendent.

"That is nothing," replied Mr. Wilson. "I must have dropped it from my pocket."

"How do you know it means nothing?" insisted the girl. "It seems to me that your life is in danger. Return the Sioux their arms."

"Snake Eye thinks there is, indeed, some chance of the Indians returning," said Buffalo Bill, "but if we are on the watch there will be no risk, while if we return the weapons we will be in great danger."

The friendly Sioux nodded his head in agreement. "But watch to-night," he advised; "if Chief Sivett come, he come before morning."

"At the first sign of a fire on the hills," said Wilson to Gloria, "we will collect in the corral for defense. Fear nothing. Now to breakfast!"

It was a merry party that sat down to the table in the superintendent's house, and the sound of the chatter and laughter, as the adventures of the night were talked over, could be heard in all that portion of the camp.

Salsido heard it and gritted his teeth.

"Listen," he hissed through the grating to Rosita; "go to my house and bring a file which you will find there. If we can loosen this bar, I shall be free."

The girl started to do his bidding, but returned.

"If I do this, will you go away with me and never leave me again?" she asked.

"Yes," whispered the Mexican; "only hurry, for there is no time to be lost."

The girl ran quickly away.

"I shall go away," said Salsido to himself; when he was alone, "but it will not be with you, my girl; it will be with Gloria!" He raised a threatening fist as the laughter from the superintendent's house reached his ears again.

"Laugh, Mr. Wilson!" he cried; "laugh, laugh, laugh—now, for you will never laugh again!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

Night came again to the camp, and one by one the lights of Morenci went out. Precautions had been taken to guard against a surprise from the Indians, and men were posted at all the higher points of the camp to watch for the war fires of the Sioux.

In the superintendent's house everything was still. There were three bedrooms, all on the ground floor; in one slept Cody, in another Gloria, and in a third, which was at the back of the house, slept Mr. Wilson. Nick, Wild Bill, and Snake Eye were quartered at Harding's adobe.

As soon as the darkness came, Rosita slipped aside the bar which she had slowly but successfully filed through, and Salsido stepped forth from the jail, a free and a dangerous man.

"Come," said Rosita, "let us leave Morenci at once."

"Not at once," answered the Mexican, with a guileful smile; "there are some things which I must attend to first; go to the cave in the Copper Crag and wait for me there. I will come soon after midnight with horses, and then we will ride down into old Mexico and live in peace."

The girl smiled at him with a great light in her eyes. "You promise to come?" she said.

"Yes!"

Her face still alight with happiness and trust, Rosita backed away. Salsido watched her until she was swallowed up in the shadows, and then he laughed his evil laugh once more.

"That was better than killing her outright," he said; "good-by, Rosita; we will never see each other again."

His words were truer than he dreamed them to be.

"Now to work," he cried, taking a knife from his boot where it had been cunningly concealed; "at last I am going to call on Mr. Wilson, and if I do not leave his house with Gloria in my arms, it will be because this knife is buried in her bosom."

He climbed the hill slowly and silently, stopping often to rest, because his wound weakened him.

"I would like to kill Cody, too," he murmured; "if the chance comes, I will not let it slip. I wonder what that man is doing there." He caught sight of one of the guards who was watching for the Indians. "Better to take the long way around," he thought, "than to risk discovery."

At last, after a circuitous route, he saw the superintendent's house loom up before him, and a wicked smile lit up his dark features. Cautiously he crept to-

ward the building, and beheld, with satisfaction, that it was in total darkness. His victims were sleeping.

He tried the door, but it was fastened within. Feeling his way along the front of the house, he fingered the first window he came to. It was locked. Carefully he continued his search, turning the corner and inspecting the side of the house. Here there was a window, and it was wide open, but in the blackness of the night the murderer overlooked it. It was well for him that he did, for it was the window to the room in which slept Buffalo Bill.

A second window Salsido found, but it was closed with inside shutters. Beyond it was lying Gloria! Still on, the Mexican made his way, until he turned the next corner of the house and came to the rear.

"Ah!" he exclaimed softly, as his hand touched a casement, and he felt the pane of glass open to his pressure; "this will let me into the place."

Listening, and hearing nothing, he flung one leg over the sill; paused to listen again—and then with a spring he slid into the room. Before him, sleeping soundly on his bed, lay Mr. Wilson!

At the sight of the superintendent, the Mexican's eyes dilated, and gloated for a moment over the form of his unconscious victim.

"You would not make me foreman," he hissed, although his words were hardly audible, "and you would

not give me Gloria. I shall now make myself master of both you and the girl. You I shall kill; the girl I shall—ah!" and the fiend drew in his breath with a menacing sound. The superintendent stirred and moved uneasily in his sleep.

With a quick step Salsido drew back into a corner of the room, and remained quiet. The man before him half turned and raised his head from the pillow.

"Who is there?" he asked drowsily.

The Mexican smothered the sound of his breathing in his hand.

"It is only my imagination," murmured Mr. Wilson drowsily, letting his head fall back on the pillow again; "I was dreaming that Chief Sivett had come."

Salsido waited until the breathing of the superintendent became regular again, and then he crossed to the side of the bed which was opposite the window and knelt on the floor.

"It is I who am here," he whispered, with flashing eyes, and, drawing his knife, he held it high over his enemy.

"It is I who am here," he repeated, as though the words fascinated him, and he lowered the stiletto slowly toward the breast of the sleeping man.

Inch by inch it descended, the murderer gloating over the terrible deed he was committing, as if sorry

to have it over with. Now the knife grazed the bed-clothes, piercing them, and now it touched the superintendent's bare flesh. There came a convulsive motion from the form under the sheets, but it was only for a moment. The knife had sunk into the very heart of the sleeper; the dastardly deed was done—Mr. Wilson lay dead!

With a low snarl of triumph, Salsido drew the dripping knife from the body of his victim.

"Now for the girl," he cried, as he raised his head, but the words died on his lips; directly opposite him, and through the window which had been the means of his entrance, there gleamed two eyes upon him. Frightened for once, the Mexican was unable to move.

As he looked, not knowing what was happening, the moonlight fell across the ground outside, and revealed a sight to the murderer which made him cringe back with terror. It was a face at the window, a face darker than his own, and on the head was hair darker than his own hair. Red circles were painted on the cheeks, and red feathers were fixed into the black locks; the eyes gleamed brightly, and more brightly as the moonlight lit up the scene in the room, and the mouth opened in a smile of terrible cruelty.

"Santa Maria!" cried Salsido, as he let his knife fall and sank back upon the floor. He watched the man at the window slowly creep through the casement into

the room, followed by other forms, and then his senses left him.

* * * * *

"Father," cried Gloria, knocking at the superintendent's door in the morning; "father, breakfast is ready; get up. Mr. Cody is waiting for you."

When there came no answer the girl opened the door, and uttered a shriek of horror.

"What is the matter?" cried Buffalo Bill, springing to her side.

"Look!" cried Gloria, turning away and bursting into tears.

On the bed lay Mr. Wilson, dead, with a blood-stained paper pinned to his breast. On the floor beside him, lay the Mexican, Salsido—his scalp torn from his head. Cody picked up the paper and read these words: "Chief Sivett is satisfied."

The great scout's face was furrowed with grief as he led Gloria away. "The Indian has taken his revenge in a despicable way," he said; "I feel that it is my fault. They must have come in very quietly, not to have awakened us."

"How did Salsido come here?" asked the girl.

"The Indians must have taken him from the jail and brought his body to throw in our faces, as it were," said the scout, giving voice to the only explanation he

could think of. "But Chief Sivett shall learn that he cannot deal death to a friend of Cody's without being punished. I spared his life once, but I will never again show him mercy!"

"Where are you going?" cried Gloria, as Buffalo Bill picked up his sombrero.

"I am going to find Wharton, Hickok, and Snake Eye," he said, "and you will not see any of us again until your father's death is avenged."

Cries of alarm just then came up from the camp below.

"Were any Indians seen last night?" inquired the scout of one of the guards who passed.

"No."

"What is the trouble below?"

"Salsido has escaped. The Mexicans are starting in pursuit."

"Bring them here," ordered Cody shortly, and in a few moments the miners of Morenci gazed with sorrow upon the body of their murdered superintendent, and saw with satisfaction the unsightly remains of Salsido.

"My people were here last night," cried Snake Eye, suddenly appearing; "I trace them."

"Then trace them now!" answered Cody, "and lead me to where the miscreants are hiding."

"Come," answered the Sioux, as Wharton and Hickok rode up on their horses.

"One more hunt!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, as he led Midnight from the corral; and a moment later the four men galloped off.

"Arthur!" cried Gloria to Harding, as the foreman approached, "get two horses at once, and ride with me after the scouts. It is impossible for me to stay here."

The young fellow saw that the girl was bent upon going, so he went to procure the animals.

"Excuse me, sir," said a Mexican, saluting, as Harding passed him, "but all the miners have voted that you would make the best superintendent for Morenci. We hope you will take the position."

"At last," exclaimed the foreman to himself; "at last I can ask Gloria to be my wife."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE END OF THE TRAIL.

"Chief Sivett and his braves are not far," said Snake Eye, as the four followed up the trail.

"What makes you think that?" asked Cody.

"They have passed by here within an hour," replied the Indian, as he fell on his knees and examined an imprint in the dust, made by the hoof of a horse.

"Strange," said Buffalo Bill; "they should have been farther away by this time."

The Sioux swerved about suddenly, and started in the direction of the Copper Crag.

"Ain't going to look for kittens, are you?" asked Nick, with a smile.

"Snake Eye knows what he is doing," said Cody, as he followed the Indian. When they came within sight of the cave in which the sacred cat had lived and died, they saw that their guide had indeed known what he was doing, for before the cliff, were standing five warriors of the Sioux nation in a circle. Something, or some one, was in their midst, and as our friends rode up they saw that it was the form of a man.

When the Indians beheld the approaching scouts, they raised the bows which they held, and prepared to

send their arrows spinning through the air in search of the hearts of the white men; but they dropped them to their sides, either because the scouts spread out and spurred on with rifles raised, or because the figure on the ground beside them commanded them to.

"It's Chief Sivett," cried Cody; "now I understand why they have got no farther on their way; something has happened to him!"

The old Indian leader raised himself with difficulty, and held up his hand in token of truce.

"Put down your arms, men," cried Buffalo Bill, "but keep your fingers on the triggers," he added, in a lower voice.

"Chief Sivett greets the great scout!" gasped the prostrate warrior, as the men from Morenci rode up, "and asks that he be allowed to die in peace, since he has no strength to fight and would not be murdered."

"Yet, Chief Sivett murders without compunction," answered Cody; "you deserve a bullet through your heart," he exclaimed, addressing the Indian directly, "for having killed Mr. Wilson!"

"I did not kill him," replied Chief Sivett; "there was a knife in his heart when I reached him."

"Didn't commit suicide, did he?" asked Hickok, with a sneer.

"No," came the answer in a proud tone; "he die by hand of Salsido. I kill Salsido!"

"That explains the Mexican's presence!" cried Buffalo Bill, "and makes me feel that the superintendent's death was less my fault."

"And what's the matter with you?" asked Nick; "didn't get bit by a rattler, did you?"

The Indian chief sank back exhausted on the ground, and one of his braves answered for him.

"The Great Spirit has called him," he said; "our chief go to happy hunting ground."

"It was even so; a mortal sickness had come over the Sioux as he was leaving Morenci after scalping Salsido; and his braves had brought him to the Copper Crag to die.

"The Great Spirit is just!" exclaimed Cody, thankful that he himself would not have to put Chief Sivett to death, for he knew the Indian to be a brave man at heart.

"But how did Salsido get out of jail?" asked Wild Bill.

"I filed through a bar and let him out," rang a voice from above them; "where is he now; why does he not come to take me to old Mexico and peace?"

The scouts and the Indians looked up astonished, and beheld a girl on the ledge in front of the cave. It was Rosita, and her hair was tossed and her eyes were wild.

"How did you come here?" asked Cody.

"Salsido promised to meet me here—we were going away together to a new life. Where is he?"

"He is dead!" cried Wild Bill.

Rosita raised her hands to heaven and made the crag echo with a shriek of anguish and despair that sent pity to the hearts of her hearers. A second time the girl cried out, and then flung herself forward with the intent of dashing her brains out on the rocks below.

Snake Eye had climbed up the niches, however, and caught hold of her just in time to prevent her falling.

The cry of the girl had no sooner died away than a wail, prolonged and mournful, arose from the throats of the Sioux warriors.

Chief Sivett was no more!

"Here comes Gloria and the foreman!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, as two riders approached.

"The superintendent, if you please," said Harding, jumping from his horse and helping Gloria to alight.

"I congratulate you." Cody shook hands with the young man. Then he turned to Miss Wilson. "Your father was not killed by this Indian," he said, "but by Salsido, who received his punishment at once."

"It could not have been prevented, then," answered the girl, smiling bravely; "but what is Rosita doing here?" she exclaimed, as she caught sight of the Mexican girl.

Cody told her.

"Ah!" cried Gloria softly; "I will take her home with me, and we will be a help to each other in our sorrows."

"Let's go up and look at the cat's cave," suggested Nick, and they all started to climb to the cavern, while the Sioux moved slowly off, carrying their dead chief and crying loudly.

"It's quite a place," said Hickok, when they were upon the ledge and Gloria was comforting Rosita; "good enough even for a sacred pussy cat."

"Look!" exclaimed Harding, who had penetrated into the inner room, and was standing there with excited eyes. His companions hastened to his side, and the room, which was considerably larger than Rosita had given them to suppose, seemed lined with burnished metal.

"It's native copper," cried the young superintendent; "now I see how the crag got its name. Why, it's worth a fortune!"

"Give it to the brave man who has done so much for us," cried Gloria to Harding. Buffalo Bill shook his head.

"No," he laughed, "I wouldn't have any use for a copper mine. If I were you," he said to Arthur, "I would give it to my wife on my wedding day."

Harding took the scout's hand. "That is a good

idea," he said, "and I rejoice to tell you that Gloria is to be my wife."

"Hurray!" sang out Nick, as he fumbled in his pocket. "I know'd it, and we fellers got a wedding present for you ready."

He drew forth from his coat the bag containing the five thousand dollars, which had been offered as a reward for the discovery of Lon Becker's murderer, and handed it to Gloria.

The girl would have refused it at first, but a look from Cody told her that the men would be offended unless she accepted it, so she received it with grateful thanks, while Wild Bill and Nick slapped each other's backs with delight at her pretty confusion.

"And now farewell," cried Buffalo Bill, as they went out into the light once more; "perhaps some day we shall meet again, and whether God wills it so or not, I shall never forget my friends in Morenci, and the cat of the Copper Crag."

The three scouts and Snake Eye were a moment later mounted and riding off in the direction of Tucson, to join and assist the United States soldiers in their pursuit of hostile redskins.

Cody turned in his saddle and looked back. On the ledge of the cave stood Harding with Gloria beside him, and the two were waving him a farewell. At

their feet shrank Rosita, burying her face in the skirts of her new mistress.

"Adios!" called back the great scout.

"Farewell!" answered Gloria, and then turning to her lover: "the Mexicans should have held that man as sacred," she said, "instead of the mountain lion!"

THE END.

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