

BUFFALO BILL BORDER STORIES ~ No 140 ~

BUFFALO BILL'S DETERMINATION

- BY -

Col. Prentiss Ingraham



WESTERN STORIES ABOUT
BUFFALO BILL

Price, Fifteen Cents

Red-blooded Adventure Stories for Men

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

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

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

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To Be Published in July, 1923.

- 165—Buffalo Bill's Yellow Guardian..By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
- 166—Buffalo Bill's Double "B" Brand, By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To Be Published in August, 1923.

- 167—Buffalo Bill's Dangerous Duty, By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
- 168—Buffalo Bill and the Talking Statue,
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To Be Published in September, 1923.

- 169—Buffalo Bill Between Two Fires,
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170—Buffalo Bill and the Giant Apache,
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- 171—Buffalo Bill's Best Bet.....By Col. Prentiss Ingraham
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- 176—Buffalo Bill Among the Sioux,
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THE WEST

Never, in the history of publishing, have there been so many stories of the West published in book and serial form. These books are even reprinted in England to be read there just as eagerly as they are sought after here.

Some of the best Western stories ever written are listed in Buffalo Bill Border Stories a list of which will be found on the pages immediately preceding this.

Buffalo Bill's Determination

OR,

A PLEDGE REDEEMED

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's Determination

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IN APPRECIATION OF WILLIAM F. CODY (BUFFALO BILL).

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

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

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

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

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

In 1868 and for four years thereafter Colonel Cody

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

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

Colonel Cody's fame had reached the East long before, and a great many New Yorkers went out to see him and join in his buffalo hunts, including such men as August Belmont, James Gordon Bennett, Anson Stager, and J. G. Heckscher. In entertaining these visitors at Fort McPherson, Cody was accustomed to arrange wild-West exhibitions. In return his friends invited him to visit New York. It was upon seeing his first play in the metropolis that Cody conceived the idea of going into the show business.

Assisted by Ned Buntline, novelist, and Colonel Ingraham, he started his "Wild West" show, which later developed and expanded into "A Congress of the Roughriders of the World," first presented at Omaha, Nebraska. In time it became a familiar yearly entertainment in the great cities of this country and Europe. Many famous personages attended the performances, and became his warm friends, including Mr. Gladstone, the Marquis of Lorne, King Edward, Queen Victoria, and the Prince of Wales, now King of England.

At the outbreak of the Sioux, in 1890 and 1891, Colonel Cody served at the head of the Nebraska National Guard. In 1895 Cody took up the development of Wyoming Valley by introducing irrigation. Not long afterward he became judge advocate general of the Wyoming National Guard.

Colonel Cody (Buffalo Bill) died in Denver, Colorado, on January 10, 1917. His legacy to a grateful world was a large share in the development of the West, and a multitude of achievements in horsemanship, marksmanship, and endurance that will live for ages. His life will continue to be a leading example of the manliness, courage, and devotion to duty that belonged to a picturesque phase of American life now passed, like the great patriot whose career it typified, into the Great Beyond.

BUFFALO BILL'S DETERMINATION.

CHAPTER I.

THE RAID OF THE DOZEN.

"There, take that! Get off the street or else put on a mask!"

A shower of rice rained down on Wild Bill Hickok. A motley crew of Mexican hacendados, Spanish conquistadores, columbines, and harlequins surrounded the Laramie man and pelted him with rice and struck him with inflated bladders.

With a whoop of laughter he flung up an arm to protect his face and ducked through the cordon that surrounded him.

It was the last, or Fiesta Night, of the Phenix carnival—a wild, tumultuous night, with Washington Street crowded from end to end with a fun-loving, riotous mob. Every one was *en masque*; or, if not, should have been. The luckless person caught without a disguise of some sort was driven from the street just as Wild Bill was being driven.

Everything was a joke. If a person lost his temper he was made to suffer for it. At any other time, if a person had walked up to Hickok and slammed a bladder full of dried peas in his face, there would have been fireworks; but now he entered into the spirit of hilarity

that had gripped the town by the throat. All he wanted to do was to protect himself and get out of the way.

For half a block the Laramie man was chased; then he jumped around a dark corner into a cross street, and his pursuers left him alone and went looking for another victim.

"By gorry," chuckled Wild Bill, "there's a bushel of rice, more or less, down the back of my neck. I'll have to go somewhere and stand on my head in order to shake it out of my clothes."

Pulling off his sombrero, he dumped half a peck of the stuff from his hat brim, then shook himself and threw off the white grains like so much water. While he was at work, some one touched his arm.

"Wild Bill!" exclaimed a voice.

The Laramie man whirled. It was too dark to see much of his interrogator, but Hickok could see that the man was in some sort of a costume.

"You've got the bulge on me, neighbor," returned Wild Bill. "You've called the turn on my label, but the handle you tote is too many for me."

"Bly, deputy sheriff," whispered the apparition. "Where's Buffalo Bill?"

"Pass the ante. He's mixed up in that locoed gang in Washington Street somewhere, but I don't reckon you could find him with a search warrant."

"Disguised?"

"Not at last accounts; but maybe," and Wild Bill chuckled grimly, "he's thought better of it by now."

"Well, come with me. I've got to see you on business."

"Business? On Fiesta Night? Say moo and chase yourself! Nobody thinks of business at a time like this."

"Nobody but officers of the law. This is important, Hickok!"

"Oh, well, if there's excitement back of it, I'm not going to step high, wide and handsome to get away from it. Lead on, my festive deputy, but don't steer me back in the main street."

The deputy turned, walked a dozen steps along the dark cross street, passed through a door into a dimly lighted corridor, then passed through another into a small, square room furnished with a table and two chairs. The officer turned up the wick of a low-burning lamp on the table and faced around.

Hickok, who had come tight at his heels all the way from the street, saw a swaggering fellow in galligaskins, huge jack boots, a felt hat with a brim a foot wide and a turkey feather in the crown, a short jacket and a sash about his middle supporting an arsenal of ancient pistols and toad stickers.

"Suffering Sarah!" muttered Wild Bill. "Say, but you're a bloodthirsty specimen, Bly."

"Never mind that," grinned Bly, laying aside his half mask. "Sit down so's I can talk with you. There's hot work on for to-night, and Bangham, the sheriff, wants the scout and his pards to help."

"That sounds good," returned Wild Bill, sinking into a chair. "I hope it's a fair shake and no false alarm. What's to pay?"

"Bangham, and two or three other men, are out hunting for the scout and his *compadres*," went on Bly. "Have you heard of Baker and his Dozen?"

"Never."

"Well, I don't wonder. They haven't inhabited this part of the country much. They're pretty new to Bangham and the rest of us. The sheriff found a letter on his desk, about an hour ago, and it's that that has stirred us up. The letter was in a woman's hand. I haven't the let-

ter with me, nor a copy of it, but my memory is pretty good. A fellow named Baker got out of the Yuma pen, several weeks ago, and every officer in the Southwest has been on the lookout for him. According to this letter, this same Baker is loose in Phenix to-night.

"With him are a dozen card sharps, fan-tan gamblers, and monté thieves, all bent on making a raid of some kind, under the cover of the carnival, and then getting away. What the raid is to be the letter didn't state. Bangham wants to nip it in the bud before it's pulled off, and lay Baker and as many of the Dozen as possible by the heels. Consequently, he needs all the help he can get."

"I see," returned Wild Bill, deeply interested. "It strikes me, though, that Bangham and the rest of you fellows are up against a hard proposition. This Baker and his Dozen, I take it, are in disguise, same as all those other hooting, tooting maskers in Washington Street. How are you going to spot the convict and his men until they do pull off their raid?"

"Well, the letter on the sheriff's desk tells how the outfit is going to be disguised."

"Ah! Now you're getting down to brass tacks."

"According to the information contained in this letter, Baker, and one or two more of the gang, are to be costumed as friars and wear long, hooded cloaks."

"I see."

"Two or three more are to wear pirate rigs, like this of mine."

"Ah!"

"And some more of the dozen will be Spanish conquistadores."

"*Buenos!* Why have you got on a pirate rig?"

"Why, in the hope that a friar, or another pirate, or a Spanish conquistadore will speak to me and give me a tip regarding Baker and the plans he has in mind."

"Fine-o."

"You see, Bangham considers it absolutely necessary that this Baker is captured. He was sent up for life, for killing a man over in Harqua Halas. He is desperate to the last degree, and if he can be run to earth, the activities of the rest of the Dozen will probably be given a deathblow."

"That sounds reasonable. But you say that two or three of the gang are dressed as friars. How are you going to know when you get the right friar?"

"Why, by playing off on the friar that speaks to me. Suppose a man, in that sort of disguise, should give me a tip without letting out a whisper as to who he was, or where Baker can be found. I'd shadow the friar. When I made sure of him, I'd nab him."

"Keno. Who are in the gang?"

"Greasers, chinks and Americans."

"Sort of an international combine, eh? And they'll all look more or less alike on this Fiesta Night. What's for me to do?"

"You'd better get into this rig of mine, Wild Bill. I'll get another. Then you can get into the crowd on Washington Street, look out for friars, conquistadores, and other pirates, and also try to discover the scout and the rest of his pards and tip them off as to the work on hand. If you nail anybody, bring your prisoner to the sheriff's office in the jail. The main thing Bangham wants, however, is to capture Baker."

"Correct. Peel off those buccaneer togs and I'll proceed to make a pirate out of myself. I can wear all my

usual clothes and put my hat inside my coat, but what am I going to do with my boots?"

"They'll be safe in this room," answered Bly. "This is a private wine room in the rear of the Buena Vista gambling hall, and it has been reserved for the use of law-and-order men. Any property you may leave here will be safe."

Bly was already stripping. Wild Bill, pleased with the work ahead of him, crumpled up his sombrero and put it in the breast of his coat. Then he pulled off his boots. As fast as Bly took off a piece of his costume, the Laramie man put it on.

The short, baggy breeches, the coat, the sash, and the arsenal of ancient weapons were duly donned.

"Suppose," remarked Wild Bill as he worked, "that that letter on the sheriff's desk is only a joke?"

"Bangham thought of that," returned Bly, "but the letter rings true, and doesn't sound like a joke. Anyhow, we're chancing it. When last heard of, Baker was in this part of Arizona. That, of course, makes the information contained in the letter look reasonable.

"A woman wrote it, you say?"

"It's in a woman's hand."

"Then I reckon it's no joke. But, no matter what the game, I'm with you."

"Bangham knew he could count on the scout and his parás."

When Wild Bill had got into his jack boots and his big hat with the trailing feather, and had put the half mask in place, his imitation of the skull-and-crossbones sea rover was all that could be desired.

"I'm off," he chuckled, moving toward the door. "If

there's anything to happen, Bly, you can gamble a blue stack it'll happen to me."

"Take care of yourself, that's all," cautioned the deputy.

Hickok gave a light laugh, opened the door, and vanished.

CHAPTER II.

THE MEXICAN WITH A DUTCH ACCENT.

Near the corner of Second Avenue and Washington Street, a crowd had collected around a boxing bear. The bear was a big "cinnamon," and wore a muzzle to keep him from using his teeth, and a pair of boxing gloves to keep him from using his claws.

The owner of the bear was dressed in paint, feathers, and buckskin, representing a specimen of the northern Sioux. But the brogue he used in exploiting the trained bear was vastly different from the grunts, whoops and falling inflections of the speech of the Dahkotahs.

"F'r two bits, ladies an' gintlemin, any wan av yez can box wid Gin'ral Jackson. Av yez knock him out, yez git a goold piece to the amount av twinty dhollars; av he knocks yez out, begory yez git a sore head. Who's th' nixt happy mon t' put on th' gloves wid Gin'ral Jackson?"

"Py shiminy Grismus, I vill take a leedle oof dot mein-seluf! Oof I can't knock dot pear oudt, I vill call mein-seluf a pack numper und nefer do some more poxing mit anypody."

A fat little man in Mexican clothes that were too big up and down, and too narrow the other way, shoved to the front, and stood holding out his hands for the gloves.

"Glory be!" cried the Sioux Indian. "Oi'm a Fenian av this scrapper ain't a grayser wid a Dootch tongue in his head!"

"Pedder dot," returned the other, his eyes glimmering through the holes in his mask, "as some Inchns mit talk

like an Irisher feller. Pud on der gloves und see me knock der pear py der mittle oof next veek."

The prospect made the crowd delirious with joy. The Dutchman, as soon as the gloves were put on his hands, waltzed up to the bear and tapped him on the nose.

General Jackson seemed to have been in a somnolent condition, but that rude touch caused him to brace back and take notice. He sniffed, and with one padded paw fanned the air in front of his face.

"Vat's der madder mit Chenereal Chackson?" jeered the Dutch greaser. "He iss so keviet as a Suntay school bicnic. I vill haf him on der mat in doo minids."

Dancing in again, the little fat man gave the bear a ringing slap on the right ear. Then the bear grunted, rose up on his hind legs, and fell on the Mexican with the Dutch accent like a thousand of brick.

The little man was batted first to one side and then to the other. As he reeled to the left, a paw caught him and sent him reeling to the right. The bear seemed to be juggling with him. Suddenly General Jackson gave his antagonist a straight-out hit, knocking him into the air, and landing him in the middle of the crowd with a back somersault.

A grunt was jolted out of the Dutchman as he struck the street. His mask was jarred off and his Mexican clothes were more or less demoralized.

He sat up, under the bright, overhead street light, rubbed his forehead dazedly, and looked around.

"Dit anypody else ged hit mit der eart'quake?" he inquired; "oder vas it a cyclone, oder schust a plock oof brick puildings dumpted ofer on me? Oh, see der lights, der pooty pright lights!"

A roar of laughter surged through the crowd. Some one picked the hazy Dutchman up and set him on his

feet, then grabbed his arm and rushed away with him. The Dutchman didn't know who had him, or where he was being taken. He merely resigned himself passively, went ahead, made turns, and finally was pushed into a chair.

Then he started, rubbed his eyes, and looked around with some realization. He was in a small room—a room lighted by a lamp and containing a table and two chairs. In front of him stood a man in a helmet with a steel corselet over his breast. About his waist was a belt, and from the belt hung a sword. This individual was just removing a mask.

"You are Villum von Schnitzenhauser, otherwise the baron, hey?" inquired the man.

"Yah, so," murmured the baron, "aber I peen more as dot. I peen some fools to dry und pox mit a pear."

"You're a pard o' Buffler Bill's ain't ye?"

"All der time."

"I thought I reckernized ye the minit yer mask come off; so I grabbed ye, an' rushed ye in hyer fer a quiet talk."

"Who you vas, yourseluf? For vy do you vant to talk mit me?"

"My name's Sproul. I'm a deperty sher'ff. The sher'ff an' his deperties are all out lookin' fer the king of scouts and pards ter-night."

"Vy iss dot?"

"There's business on, an' Bangham, the sher'ff, needs help."

"So?" The baron slapped his chest to waken himself up. "Vat iss der pitzness? Tell me."

Then, as Bly had already talked to Wild Bill, so Sproul talked to the baron. He told him about Baker and his Dozen; about Baker's escape from Yuma;

about the raid the gang was intending to make during the Fiesta Night; about the necessity of capturing Baker and as many of the gang as possible; and about the disguises the lawless persons were using.

"This disguise o' mine," added Sproul, "is that of a Spanish conquistadore. I was wearin' it hopin' some o' the gang would see me an' put me next ter where I could find Baker. I'll give ye this here disguise, an' take yourn; then ye kin go out an' find some o' the gang yerself. Also, if ye see Buffler Bill an' any of his pards, give 'em a tip as ter what we're tryin' ter do. Sabe?"

"Yah," chuckled the baron, "you bed my life I savvy. I peen so glad as I can't say dot der pear knocked me ofer. Oof dot hatn't habbened, den you vouldn't haf foundt me, und I vouldn't be doing someding to help run down der Paker's Tozen. Eferyding habbens for der pest in dis vorld. Gif me dot tisuise, und I vill gif you der vone vat I got on."

As he spoke, the baron began getting out of his greaser clothes. Sproul put the helmet over his head and buckled on the rusty corselet.

The baron was rather thick for this mediæval armor, and when breastplate and backpiece came together, he was badly squeezed. But he did not complain. The prospect ahead of him was so alluring that he would have submitted without a murmur to discomforts a dozen times more trying.

Sproul pulled up the belt around the baron's waist and hung on the sword. The sword was so long that the point of it dragged on the floor.

Lastly, Sproul fastened to the baron's heels long, ancient-looking spurs. There were no rowels on the spurs, but the ends were merely ground to sharp points.

"There you are," said the deputy sheriff, standing back and surveying the baron with a grin.

The plume of the helmet was swishing in the baron's face. He slapped it away and peered at Sproul.

"Vat for you make some laughs?" he inquired.

"I was laffin' ter think what would happen if ye ever got a whack at one o' the Dozen," explained Sproul.

"Vell," returned the baron diffidently, "I bed you I would go droo der whole Tozen like a virlyind." He walked up and down the room, rattling like a pile of scrap iron. "I peen a Spanish gonkvistator, hey?"

"That's what it's called, baron."

"I feel like a lod oof boiler plate, und——"

The long sword swung in between the baron's legs, and tripped him. He pitched forward over a chair and rolled to the floor like a human rattlebox. When he tried to get up he jabbed himself with the long spurs.

Sproul gave him a hand and helped him to gain his feet.

"Ach, vat a lod oof shtuff for a man to vear!" muttered the baron.

"It'll come easy fer ye when ye git used ter it," encouraged Sproul.

"Meppyso. Now, tell me vonce: I moost go outt indo der shdreed und look for some friars, some birate fellers, und some odder mens fixed oop like vat I was, hey?"

"That's it. Be careful, baron. If a friar, er a pirate, er an old Spaniard whispers to ye' an' gives ye a tip regardin' Baker, mind ye play it up right an' proper."

"I can do dot, you bed my life! Dot's easy for a bard of Puffalo Pill's."

"An' don't ye fergit, baron," went on Sproul, "that ye're ter look fer the scout an' the rest o' his pards. If ye find 'em, tell 'em jest what I've told you about this Baker an' his Dozen. Get the hull posse ter huntin' fer the gang. Between you fellers, an' us from the sher'ff's office, I reckon we kin lay Baker by the heels."

"Vell, I bed you!"

"It won't be no easy job, though. Jest remember that. On a night like this, when half the people in town are masked, it's some difficult to mingle with the mob an' pick out Baker and his gang."

"Vell, ve know how dot Paker feller und der Tozen vill be rigged outd mit clothes, und dot makes it easy."

"There's plenty o' chance fer trouble."

"Vat a habbiness to hear you say dot! Anyding vat has drouple mixed oop in it iss some bleasures for der sgout und his bards. Nodding iss vort' vile vat comes easy. Der harter vat a t'ing iss to do, der more vat I like to do it. Yah, so. Subbose I grap holt oof dis Paker—vat shall I do mit him?"

"Why," said Sproul, "bring him to the sheriff's office at the county jail."

"Meppy you see me dere pefore long alretty. Ven I ged shdartet I vas a rekular cyclone."

"Well, baron, the quicker you get started the more chance you will have for success. I'm going out and see what more I kin do."

"Dot's me, on der chump."

The baron rattled to the door, and then clanked and rattled his way into the side street. The fun in Washington Street was growing fast and furious, a perfect bedlam of mirth resounding all up and down the thoroughfare.

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"Now for pitzness," muttered the baron, picking up the long sword and carrying it in front of him, "now for pitzness, vich iss, ad der same dime, a bleasure. Vat iss a friar, anyway? Und how vill I know vone ven I see id?"

CHAPTER III.

IN THE PALACE OF CHANCE.

Buffalo Bill, not caring to don a mask and take part in the riotous fun of Fiesta Night, escaped the rice and the inflated bladders of the street by dodging into a gambling resort known as the Palace of Chance.

Here he found plenty to claim his attention.

On Fiesta Night it was the custom of the ladies of Phenix, their identities safely hidden under mask and domino, to visit the various gambling resorts and gratify a curiosity to see the tiger in its lair. Gentlemanly ushers met the fair maskers at the broad street door and showed them around, explaining the mysteries of roulette, faro, keno, draw poker, and the various other games. More than one of the disguised ladies, unable to resist temptation, paused at some lay out and recklessly wagered. Thus was some profit returned to the gamblers for keeping "open house."

The scout, withdrawn in a quiet corner, listened to the cracked piano and the cracked voice that accompanied it, to the hum of voices, the rattle of chips and the drone of the ball in the whirling wheel.

The comments of the masked ladies amused the scout. Some of the fair ones were evidently familiar with a few of the games and needed no coaching in making their plays.

"If no one knows us," mused the scout, "a whole lot of things come easy for us to do which we wouldn't think of doing if our identities were plain. That's a comment on human nature that's not at all flattering. Now

for instance, take that woman in the witch regalia. She acts as though she was scared to death. Such a person ought never to have come here."

The witch's gown, with its pointed hood, clothed a slender, graceful figure. The figure fluttered back and forth as though half afraid and half ashamed to be in such a place.

Evidently the masker was young, and because of that and because of her manner, she caught and held the scout's attention. Wherever the witch moved through the jostling throng the scout's eyes followed her.

Most of the ladies who visited the Palace of Chance, that evening, came in parties; but this witch was alone. The fact that there was no one with her may have explained her timidity and frightened air.

Here and there the witch fluttered. At last the scout saw her pause and stare fixedly at some one in front of her. The person at whom she stared was a man—a man in the cowl of a friar. So closely was the man enwrapped in his costume that only his gleaming eyes were visible. They were not eyes to inspire any one's confidence.

As the scout watched, his interest growing by leaps and bounds, he saw something like a shudder pass through the slender form of the witch. The friar started toward her, evidently with the intention of speaking. The witch evaded him and tried to get past him and reach the street door.

The crowd was so dense, in the front part of the gambling establishment, that the witch could make no headway against it. Giving up the attempt to reach the street, the girl whirled and glided toward the rear of the long room—this move bringing her nearer and nearer the scout.

She came so close that he caught a glimpse of her eyes, and in them he read a deadly fear. He was on the point of springing up and offering the girl the protection of his strong arm, when she turned abruptly and passed through a door in the side wall of the room.

This door, the scout knew, led into a small wine room, where people sometimes went to play and drink in private. The girl, it seemed to him, had entered the room with the mistaken impression that it might lead her out of doors. The door closed behind the slender form and the scout turned his eyes upon the friar. The man had his gaze fixed on the door and stood as though debating some question in his mind; finally, with a cautious glance around, he moved upon the door and laid hold of the knob.

The door did not yield readily. There was no bolt nor key to fasten it, but seemingly the witch was trying, with all her frail strength, to hold it shut.

The friar pushed sharply. The door gave under his strong hand, and Buffalo Bill caught a fleeting glimpse of the witch hurrying away. Then the friar closed the door.

By then the scout had started to his feet.

What sort of drama was being enacted behind that closed door? he asked himself. Who were this witch and this friar? And why was the witch afraid of the friar and trying to avoid him?

Perhaps the matter was none of the scout's business. Nevertheless, a woman in distress always appealed to him; and, certainly, this witch was in some deadly fear of the friar.

Assuming a careless air, the king of scouts sauntered toward the closed door and stood there.

He heard a mumble of voices, his keen ear readily

distinguishing them from the babble of sound in the gambling hall. One was the man's voice, and the other the woman's. The man's voice was harsh and threatening, and the woman's tremulous and a bit defiant.

Then, suddenly, there was a sound of a quick movement, followed by a stifled scream.

No other, in the big gambling hall, heard that subdued cry. It remained for Buffalo Bill alone to act. Nor did he hesitate.

Catching the knob, he twisted it and quickly threw open the door.

What he saw, when the interior of the little room lay under his eyes, was enough to fire his blood.

The witch was pressing fearfully back against the farther wall. In front of her stood the friar, his arm lifted and a quirt with rawhide thongs in his raised hand.

The girl cowered under the threatening lash, and a wild cry rang through the room.

While the scream was still on the girl's lips, Buffalo Bill flung himself through the door and caught the friar's uplifted arm.

The man had been so wrapped up in his brutal work that the entrance of the scout had not been heard. As his hand was caught, he struggled around and gave a savage look at the intruder.

"You'll not strike the girl," said the scout. "Drop that quirt, you cur, or I'll lay it over your own shoulders."

With a most unfriar like oath, the man flung down the whip, wrenched himself clear of the scout's hand, and leaped through the door, leaving his dark robe behind him.

Buffalo Bill took a couple of steps in pursuit of him, but a call from the girl drew him back.

"No, no! Let him go—don't follow him."

"All right," answered the scout, "if that's the way you want it. I don't care to pry into your affairs, young lady, but allow me to say that this is hardly the place for you. If you wish, I'll see that you get safely to your home."

"My home," was the dejected answer, "is no safer for me than this place—nor as safe."

There was evidently a skeleton in the family closet. The scout was puzzled as to what he should do next.

"I'd like to help you, if I can," said he, "but I don't want to force my services upon you. I've been watching you for some time, out there in the big room, and it struck me as though you were a little out of your element. Even if you don't go home, you had better leave here."

The girl dropped into a chair. She was calmer now, and seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Will you tell me your name?" she asked, lifting her eyes to the scout's.

"Cody," he answered.

The eyes brightened, gleamed with unexpected pleasure.

"Not Buffalo Bill?" she returned.

"The same," he smiled, bowing, "and very much at your service."

The chivalrous manner of the king of scouts still further added to the girl's confidence. She put out her hand.

"I couldn't have asked for better fortune than this!" she exclaimed. "You say that you want to help me. Buffalo Bill, I am going to put you to the test."

He took the small hand in a reassuring clasp.

"I think," said he, "that you will find me equal to the test. What is it?"

"My name is Baker," went on the girl, "Bessie Carmelita Baker. My parents are dead, and the man you just saw in here used to be my guardian. He is a distant relative, and his name is also Baker." She leaned forward and dropped her voice to an ominous whisper. "Two years ago," she added, "he killed a man over in the Harqua Hala Mountains, and he was sent to the Yuma penitentiary. He escaped from there, and all the officials in Arizona are looking for him."

"If that is the case, then——"

The girl lifted her hand restrainingly.

"Please wait, Buffalo Bill. Last night Lorenzo Baker came to the house where I live with old Manuelita, who has been my nurse and foster mother ever since I was a child. He came to the house, locked me in a room, and, with several other men, planned lawless things for to-night, during the fiesta. Manuelita heard them planning, and she contrived to let me know about it. Lorenzo Baker, and the rest, thought Manuelita had run away without recognizing Baker. But she hadn't run away; she had hidden herself in the house."

"With whom was Baker plotting?"

"Why, with Mexicans, Americans, and Chinamen, Buffalo Bill. It seems to be an organized gang. Baker called them, so Manuelita said, his Baker's 'Dozen.'"

"What are they intending to do?"

"I don't know, Buffalo Bill, but I do know they are planning something desperate. All the gang are to be disguised. Two or three will be dressed as friars; then there will be two or three pirates, and ancient Spaniards."

An idea seemed suddenly to strike the girl. Jumping up from her chair, she ran to the door, which Baker had left open, and closed it.

"You are a brave man, Buffalo Bill," she went on, turning toward him, her eyes sparkling with excitement; "everybody knows of your daring and your success. I have a plan to propose. If you will agree to it, you can do a great stroke for right and justice. Will you listen to me, and accept a suggestion which I have to offer?"

"Before you offer any suggestions, Miss Baker," said the scout, "there is something else we ought to do, and without delay."

"What is that?" the girl inquired.

"Why, if this Lorenzo Baker is an escaped convict, he must be run down and captured. The longer we delay notifying the authorities, the harder will be the work of apprehending the fellow."

"The suggestion I'm going to make is about that. A slight delay will not matter."

"All right, then." The scout sat down. "Go ahead, Miss Baker."

"I want to tell you first," proceeded the girl, "that I have already notified the sheriff that Lorenzo Baker is in Phenix, that he has a gang with him called the Baker's Dozen, how the members of the gang are to be disguised, and that they are planning lawless work of some kind during this Fiesta Night."

"You say you told the sheriff that!"

"No, I wrote the sheriff a letter. The letter wasn't signed, for I didn't want Lorenzo Baker ever to find out that I had told the officers about him. He—he would kill me if he ever knew that. Manuelita took the letter to the sheriff's office and dropped it on his desk. No one saw her."

"That was right," approved the scout, "although it would have been better, Miss Baker, if you had gone

In the Palace of Chance.

to the sheriff personally and had a frank talk with him. It is quite possible that he will not pay any attention to an unsigned letter."

The girl looked startled.

"It's his duty to pay attention to it, isn't it?" she asked.

"It's his duty to act according to his judgment. Not many of us pay much attention to anonymous communications. When Baker and his Dozen left your house, I suppose Manuelita let you out of the room in which you had been locked?"

Admiration crossed the girl's face.

"Manuelita is old," said she, "but she is very brave. Baker left a Mexican to watch the house and make sure I didn't get away. He had a bottle of pulque and he drank until he was sleepy. While he slept, Manuelita took the key of the room from his pocket and let me out. Then we both ran from the house as fast as we could."

"Where did you go?"

"To a house owned by one of Manuelita's friends, in the Mexican quarter."

"Why didn't you stay there, Miss Baker? Why did you leave the Mexican quarter and go roaming around?"

"Why, because Manuelita was afraid that Lorenzo Baker, or some of his gang, would find out where we had gone and come after me. Manuelita got this disguise and told me to go out into Washington Street. She thought I was safer in the town as a witch than I would be in the Mexican quarter."

The scout could scarcely restrain a smile at the false logic of Manuelita. The old Mexican woman's fears had run away with her reason.

"Well," went on the scout, "even so, Miss Baker, it would have been better for you if you had stayed in

Washington Street and not have come into this gambling hall."

"I was obliged to come into the gambling hall, Buffalo Bill!"

"How so?"

"Why, I saw the friar on the sidewalk in front. I knew Baker was to be in a friar's costume, and I thought he had heard of my escape from the house and had come looking for me."

"As soon as you saw him you hurried in here?"

"Yes."

"Then Baker saw you running from him and suspected that you were his former ward. Probably, if you had not tried to avoid him, he would never have known."

"That may be so," admitted the girl, "but I was so scared I thought of nothing but getting away from him."

"When Baker came into the gambling hall," continued the scout, "your actions still further aroused his suspicions."

"I suppose you are right," breathed the girl; "but I couldn't help acting the way I did. When I came through that door I hoped it would let me out at the rear of the gambling hall, and my heart sank when I found I was in a little room and couldn't lock the door. I tried to hold it against him, but I wasn't strong enough. He recognized me the moment he got in here, and he was in such a rage that he would have lashed me with his quirt had you not come."

"How did he happen to have the quirt with him?" inquired the scout.

"I don't know, Buffalo Bill."

"That would seem to indicate that he and his gang have horses waiting for them somewhere, and that they

are to make a run for it as soon as this raid they are planning is finished."

The scout stooped down and picked up the quirt. It was the ordinary sort of quirt, with a short handle, a thong loop for the wrist, and half a dozen strands of buckskin. But the end of the handle, where it was pierced for the loop, was heavily weighted and made a dangerous weapon.

"I suppose," said the girl, "that Baker will not stay in Phenix long after he and his gang carry out their evil intentions; but I hope," and an expression of fear crossed her face, "that the sheriff will be able to capture Baker before he can get away. He suspects me, now, and if he is not captured I should not feel safe a minute."

"Don't worry about that," returned the scout reassuringly. "I and my pards will look out for you. But what was the suggestion you were going to make? I feel as though I should like to be on the trail of this man Baker myself."

"That is in line with the suggestion I was going to make, Buffalo Bill. I believe you can do more to capture Baker than any one else." She bent down and picked up the friar's robe from the floor. "Why not put this on?" said she. "The main thing, now, is to locate Baker. The rest of the gang, knowing he wears such a costume, might speak to you and give you some sort of a clue to Baker's whereabouts."

"Good!" exclaimed the scout, pleased with the clever suggestion. "If you had trusted more to your good sense and less to Manuelita's advice, things would have gone better with you."

Crushing his sombrero together, the scout placed it

in the breast of his coat; then he got into the friar's gown and drew the hood over his head.

"Will I pass?" he queried, pulling the robe together in front of his face.

"Good!" murmured the girl. "No one could tell——"

A tap fell on the door at that moment. The girl broke off her words in a panic, and flew to the scout's side, as though for protection.

"If that is Lorenzo Baker," she whispered, "I—I——"

"Lorenzo Baker would not knock in that way," answered the scout. "I wish it was Baker, for in that event, I can promise you he would be in the jail inside of fifteen minutes. But no such good luck. He'll not come back to this Palace of Chance."

The scout stepped to the door and threw it open. Little Cayuse, his Piute boy pard, pushed into the room. The scout laughed and Little Cayuse gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"Where have you come from, boy?" asked the scout.

"All same out there," and Cayuse waved a hand in the direction of the gambling hall. "Me see um Pa-e-has-ka (the Indian name for Buffalo Bill, meaning Long Hair) watch um. Pa-e-has-ka come here. Man come out, heap mad. Pa-e-has-ka stay long time. Me no sabe why. Come in so me sabe. Ugh!"

Cayuse wore his usual natty costume of trim buckskins, medicine bag at his girdle, and eagle feather in his black hair.

"I reckon, Cayuse," smiled the scout, "that everybody on the street thinks you're white and painted and rigged out in Indian togs. You got here just in time to do something for me."

"*Buenos!*" exclaimed the lad, his eyes glowing. "You

got um queer clothes, Pa-e-has-ka. Me no see um face, no sabe."

The scout explained about the friar's robe, about Baker and his Dozen, and about Bessie Carmelita Baker. Cayuse listened attentively.

"Now," added the scout, "what I want you to do, Cayuse, is to put on this robe"—he pointed to the witch's garb worn by the girl—"and take Miss Baker safely to a house in the Mexican quarter, where she has friends. Baker, wherever he is, will be looking for a girl in a witch costume, so he will probably try to entrap you. You'll have to use your wits. If Baker follows you, take him to the house of Garcia, in the Mexican quarter. You know that house well. It was vacant, at last accounts, and I suppose it is vacant now. I will find some of our pards and have them go to Garcia's and wait there to take care of Baker in case you can lure him to the place. If nothing happens to you, and you can't carry out the plan, come back to this room and wait for me to show up here. If Baker won't bite, we'll try something else."

"Wuh!" answered Little Cayuse.

Buffalo Bill turned to the girl.

"The move I have planned will be best, Miss Baker," said he. "Cayuse is my little pard, and you can trust him as you would me. He will see that you get safely to the house of your Mexican friends."

"But we will be seen going," said the girl.

"I will let the two of you out through the rear door of the gambling room," the scout returned, "and Cayuse will take you into the Mexican quarter through the alleyways and the dark streets. You can be sure he will look well to your safety."

Cayuse was nearly the girl's height and build. When

he had got into the disguise, only his moccasins, which showed now and then, revealed his identity—and even the moccasins might be construed as part of his disguise.

Buffalo Bill left the small room first and made his way to the rear door. The coast seemed clear, and he opened the door and watched the girl and Cayuse as they faded into the night.

Then the scout shut the door, turned, drew the robe carefully up under his chin—and strode out into some of the weirdest adventures fate had ever thrown his way.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FRIAR AND THE PIRATE.

The scout's first move was to make his way to the hotel and try and corral some of his pards in order to send them to the deserted house in the Mexican quarter once used as a dwelling by Garcia.

On his way to the hotel Buffalo Bill kept a sharp eye out for friars, pirates, and Spanish conquistadores. In traveling the two short blocks that lay between the gambling hall and the hotel, he saw no one in the suspicious costumes.

At the hotel a disappointment awaited him. Neither Nomad, his trapper pard, Wild Bill, nor the baron were about the place; nor had they been there since supper, when they had thrown themselves headlong into the gayeties of Fiesta Night.

To the scout's knowledge, only the baron had put on a disguise. That costume of the baron's had aroused the mirth of all the pards.

"I peen oudt for some goot times," averred the baron, "und you bed I ged him."

Leaving word with the clerk at the hotel for Nomad, Wild Bill or the baron to wait in the office in case any or all of them happened to stroll in, the scout once more made his way out into Washington Street.

The fun in the street was waxing fast and furious. All sorts of costumes were to be seen. Devils hobnobbed with angels in white with homemade wings; a flower girl was dancing airily down the middle of the street, while a man in exaggerated cowboy rig hopped along

and played a concertina; an Italian, with a stuffed monkey, played a jew's-harp on the sidewalk and gravely passed his ragged cap; there were witches aplenty, Mother Hubbards, and one or two King Coles. There was not one in the whole, pleasure-loving crowd who was not making all the noise he or she possibly could.

As the scout forced his way through the press, he kept a sharp watch for friars, old-time Spaniards, and pirates. The first of the suspicious characters broke on his sight some distance ahead of him.

The man was a Spanish conquistadore, but his ill-fitting armor made him look like a freak. As the Spaniard wobbled along, the plume of his helmet tossed like the plume on a circus horse, and his long sword got between his legs and tripped him at nearly every step. Not only that, but the long spurs at his heels compelled him to walk pigeon-toed in order to avoid puncturing his shins.

As this apparition galloped along it afforded unlimited mirth for the other maskers.

"That's one of 'em," thought the scout. "Miss Baker said the gang was made of greasers, Americans, and Chinamen. By the looks, that fellow ahead is a chink. He handles himself like a washee washee, who has bit off a little more than he can chew. I'll trail him."

The scout hurried on in order to come closer to the awkward conquistadore. The ancient Spaniard halted at a place where the Irish-Sioux was exhibiting the boxing bear. Buffalo Bill saw the fellow pull his long sword from its scabbard, and, unseen by the Sioux, jab the point into the bear's ribs.

At that moment, Buffalo Bill was so close that another minute of jostling would have brought him to the Spaniard's side. But the bear, unused to the treat-

ment he was receiving, turned and made a lunge at the Spaniard with his padded front paws. The lunge jerked the chain out of the Indian's hand. Then, with an angry grunt, the bear took after the Spaniard.

Here was fun, and no mistake. The bear was muzzled, and as his front paws in their big boxing gloves flop-flopped on the street, the maskers howled with delight and pushed out of the way.

The Spaniard yelled and raced like a madman, waving the long sword, the empty scabbard tripping him again and again, and the long spurs jabbing him roughly every time he went down.

There was humor in the spectacle. The Spaniard was two yards ahead of the bear, and the bear was two yards ahead of the Indian, and the Indian was two yards in the lead of a motley crew of hilarious maskers.

Finally the Spaniard, just as he was on the point of being overhauled, flung himself headfirst through an open door, and the door banged shut in the bear's face.

This gave the Sioux Indian a chance to get a fresh hold on the bear's chain and to rap the bear over the head.

"Begorry," spluttered the wrathful Sioux, "thot omadhoun wid th' kettle hat ought t' make a supper f'r th' bear, so he had; an' faith, Oi'd have let him but f'r th' fear he'd have choked his loife out on th' boiler plate."

The Irish-Indian led away the bear, and Buffalo Bill went through the door into which the ancient Spaniard had vanished. The shop was a little Mexican *tienda*, and there was no one inside but a Mexican.

"Where's the man that just came in here, señor?" inquired the scout.

The shopkeeper was sputtering wrathfully in peon Spanish and picking up a basket of overturned red

peppers. He pointed toward the rear of the shop. A door there was open and suggested the method of the Spaniard's escape.

The scout passed into a dark alleyway, but could see nothing of the Spaniard.

"Great guns!" he muttered disgustedly. "That chink has given me the slip—and all on account of the bear. I'll have to go among the maskers and try again. Cay-use ought to be on the job by this time. I'll keep an eye peeled for him, as well as for some of the Dozen."

He was about to pass back through the *tienda*, when he halted in the open rear door. A big fellow in galligaskins, jack-boots, sash, and a wide-brimmed hat with a long feather was talking with the shopkeeper.

The scout had never seen a real, live, flesh-and-blood pirate, but this specimen certainly looked like one. By the same token, the scout was as eager to find pirates that night, as he was to locate ancient Spaniards.

The shopkeeper waved a hand toward the rear door and kept on picking up his peppers. Buffalo Bill jumped to one side and watched cautiously around the edge of the door.

The pirate, his wide jack-boots flapping against his shins, was hurrying toward the rear of the establishment.

"I played in hard luck to lose the Spaniard," muttered the scout with satisfaction, "but right here is where good luck shakes hands with me again. I'll lay for that fellow."

Drawing to one side of the door, he waited, drawing a revolver from his belt for use in case of emergency.

The pirate stepped through the door, saw the silent figure in the friar's robe, and came to a dead halt.

"Baker?" he asked in a husky whisper.

The voice was plainly disguised, and the scout was positive he had spotted one of the Dozen. If he could play the scoundrel right, he might learn something about the leader of the gang.

"No," and he also disguised his voice, "but I'm er lookin' fer him myself. You one o' the Dozen?"

"Si."

"Baker's had trouble," remarked the scout, edging a little closer to the pirate.

"What kind o' trouble?" asked the pirate, edging away.

"The gal got loose from the house, an' Baker lost his make-up in ther Palace o' Chance. I seen the hull game. Any notion whar we kin find the ole man?"

The scout's disguised voice and talk seemed to go very well with this member of the gang. He resolved to make the most of his opportunity.

"Ef that's ther case, pard," proceeded the pirate, "mebbyso Baker's gone ter the hang-out?"

"Mebbyso," agreed the scout, "s'posin' we go ter the hang-out?"

"Buenos!"

"Pass on an' I'll foller."

The pirate passed on, but he did not lay a return course through the store. On the contrary, he took his way through the alley.

The gloom was thick, there in the narrow passage between the huddled buildings, and the scout, congratulating himself that he was now to learn something worth while, pressed the pirate close.

But, just before the cross street was reached, something happened.

At a place where the gloom lay heaviest, the pirate

suddenly whirled. Without any ifs, ands, or whyfores, he hurled himself at the scout and grabbed his throat with both hands.

Buffalo Bill was taken at a disadvantage—but not for long. He and the pirate went down on the hard earth and rolled and squirmed, each fighting for the breath in the other's throat.

The scout's superior skill and prowess enabled him to wrench the gripping fingers from his neck and whirl his antagonist underneath. But it was a fierce set-to the pirate was giving the scout, and the battle was not won by any means.

"By gorry," breathed the pirate, fighting like a demon, and using his natural tone—a tone that astounded Buffalo Bill—"I'll put the kybosh on you, Baker, if it's the last thing I ever do."

"Hickok!" gasped the scout, his muscles growing suddenly lax. "How in Sam Hill did this happen?"

The astonishment was paralyzing—and mutual.

"Pard Cody!" muttered Wild Bill. "Well, suffering cats! How did it happen? You tell me."

Both pards got up. Then Buffalo Bill began to laugh. The shock of surprise over, Hickok also gave way to mirth, leaning against an adobe wall and shaking until the ancient weapons in his sash rattled.

"Say," gasped Hickok, "but this takes the banner! Here's a friar and a pirate, each playing fast and loose with each other, and never suspecting, for a holy minute, that they're pards! Why, I thought you were Baker, Cody."

"And I had a notion you were one of the Dozen," answered the scout. "It's a mix-up, and no mistake. But I'm mighty glad I met up with you, anyway."

"Same here. Things are not what they seem, on this

blooming Fiesta Night, not by any manner of means. I've been following you down the street. When you came into this hotel, I came after you. The greaser in the *tienda* said you'd left by the back door; so I sailed along and—and——"

Again mirth seized the Laramie man, and he fell against the wall.

"But how did this happen, Hickok?" asked the scout. "We'll have to talk quick. A lot of things are to happen, this night, and if we want to do anything worth while, we can't be hung up here for very long."

"Right-o," answered Wild Bill, sobering. "I met Bly, a deputy sheriff, and he was wearing these buccaneer clothes. He took me to a place where we could have a quiet talk, and said that Bangham and a force of deputies were looking for you and your pards. It seems that the sheriff found a letter, written in a woman's hand, on his desk, and it told about an escaped convict, named Baker, who is loose in Phenix, this Fiesta Night. Baker has a gang with him and is planning to make a raid, of some sort. The gang's called the 'Dozen,' and—but I reckon you know as much, or more, about the gang than I do. Did you meet up with Bly, or Bangham, or some of the other deputies?"

"No, I haven't seen any of them," answered the scout. "I got my information from the girl who wrote the letter."

Then, as quickly as he could and leave out none of the important details, Buffalo Bill told his pard of what had taken place in the Palace of Chance, and how he had sent Cayuse, garbed as the witch, to take Miss Baker to her friends and then to try and lure the leader of the gang to Garcia's.

"This here is the queerest tangle I was ever up

against," muttered Wild Bill. "The first suspicious character I see, when I leave Bly, is a friar. I follow the friar and he turns out to be you. Bly suggested that I get into this piratical rig."

"And the girl," said the scout, "suggested that I play the friar."

"Both suggestions were A one, pard, seeing that we couldn't know each of us was to have a hand in the cross fire. It's an easy shot that something worth while will happen if we keep pegging along in these get ups."

"I reckon I'd better do most of the pegging along. I want you to go to Garcia's old place in the Mexican quarter, and see if Cayuse drops in there, trailing Baker. There are a good many side issues to this night's work, and we've got to cover every one we can."

"Keno!" agreed Wild Bill, "I'll put right out for Garcia's old roost. But, look here, pard. Did the girl tell you where she lived? That would be a good place to hunt trouble, seems to me. According to her account, she and the old Mexican woman left a greaser member of the gang at the place. The greaser was so full of pulque he couldn't get away. If you could go there and nab him, maybe he'd give you a line on Baker and the raid the Dozen are intending to make."

"The girl didn't tell me where she lived," said the scout. "The information might be important, but I'm inclined to think that, by now, some members of the gang have dropped in at the house, found their drunken comrade, the door open, and the girl gone. That would mean, of course, that they'd dust, and give the house a wide berth during the rest of the night. So it's dollars to chalk marks that there'll be nothing doing at that particular house."

"You've got the leader's Mother Hubbard," chuckled the Laramie man, "and what sort of a rig do you reckon he's wearing now?"

"Give it up. Have you seen the baron or Nomad?"

"Not since we scattered for a time, right after supper. But you can easy find the baron in that greaser make-up of his—he's a mark. As for Nomad, he's not in costume at all. Probably he's in some of the places along the street."

"Well, pard, hike for Garcia's. No matter what happens, meet me at the room in the Palace of Chance about midnight."

"Correct."

The pards walked to the cross street and separated, Wild Bill moving off through the gloom in the direction of the Mexican quarter, and Buffalo Bill retracing his way to the glitter and glare and frivolity of Washington Street.

The scout had no more than pushed into a crowd of maskers before he got a straight tip. A voice whispered huskily in his ear:

"Watchword fer the night's been changed ter 'pesos.' Ole man's in trouble. Lost his disguise, an' is got up as a cowpunch—white handkerchief around his neck. Watch fer the sign an' look sharp."

In spite of the hood that enveloped his head, the scout heard all this distinctly enough. Just as the last word was spoken, and the scout was turning to take note of the speaker, a man in the garb of a negro minstrel struck him in the face with an inflated bladder.

"Yah, yah! Ho yo' lak dat, huh?"

The scout didn't like it. The fun was harmless, but it caused him to lose sight of the man who had done the

husky whispering. Although he peered sharply in every direction, he could see nothing of another friar, an old-time Spaniard, or a pirate.

"Well," mused the scout, "I've got hold of something, anyhow. So the watchword has been changed to 'pesos,' eh? And Baker's in trouble and wearing a cowboy's rig with a white handkerchief around his throat. What's the sign to be? If I can see a cowboy with a white handkerchief, that'll be sign enough for me."

Buffalo Bill, feeling a certain amount of satisfaction because he had sent Wild Bill to help Cayuse, continued his watchful roaming. He moved the other way along Washington Street, this time in the direction of the city hall plaza.

On the street corner, directly across from the plaza, he saw two men crossing toward the umbrella and pepper trees in front of the city hall. One was a pirate and the other was a Spaniard.

"Great guns," muttered the scout, "here's more luck. There are two of the Dozen, and no mistake. That's not the same Spaniard I saw before, and I'm dead sure the pirate isn't Hickok, because Hickok is in the Mexican quarter, by now. I'll trail along."

Following the pair, the scout crossed the street and came to the corner of the plaza. The pirate and the Spaniard were moving in under the umbrella trees, and their forms were dim in the shadows.

Buffalo Bill strolled in under the trees. He was not a dozen feet into the plaza before he heard a muttered impercation, the sound of a blow and of a fall. The pirate came rushing back toward the street. When near Buffalo Bill he slackened pace.

"Pesos," hissed the scout.

The pirate seemed reassured.

"Pesos, señor," he answered. "Mucho trouble. Eighteen, Geronimo Street, muy pronto!"

With that, he rushed on without waiting further. In ordinary circumstances, the scout would have followed him, but just then he was eager to see what had happened under the umbrella trees.

Why had the pirate knocked the Spaniard down? What was the trouble between them? Possibly the Spaniard could tell something valuable to the forces of law and order?

Hurrying on into the darkness, the scout was suddenly seized by the Spaniard, who sprang to his feet to make the attack.

"Consarn yer pizen pictur'!" whooped the Spaniard. "Ye never'd a-bumped me like thet ef I hadn't had on this hyar pesky iron coat an' headgear. Now I'll make ye think ye're buffaloe!"

Again the scout was nearly paralyzed. The pirate was pinning him against the trunk of a tree and hauling back a fist.

"Nick!" cried the scout. "What the nation are you up to, old pard?"

The trapper let out a wheezy breath of consternation. "Buffer!" he mumbled, "Pard Buffer! Waal, I'm er Piegan ef I ever dreamt ye was what ye aire! Thunder an' kerry one! Waugh, er-r-r-waugh!" The old trapper backed off a step and fanned a hand in front of his face. "Did thet crack on ther block loco me? Am I seein' things at night? Ye ain't ther pirate, but ye're a monk. I don't keer a picayune whether I find monks, er pirates, er old Spaniards—they're all part o' the Dozen, they say. Buffer, speak ag'in. Reassure my puzzled intelleck."

"Of course it's Buffalo Bill," returned the scout.

"Nary 'o' course," returned Nomad; "no more 'o' course, Buffler, than me bein' a pirate. When I met up with Bangham, an' he took me ter the sher'ff's office an' crowded me inter this iron coat, he didn't say nothin' erbout findin' you an' fixin' ye out as a monk. Mebby he done et arter him an' me had our palaver? An' yit, I kain't sabby thet, neither, kase I jest left ther sher'ff's office an' was strollin' down ther street when I run inter thet pirate. Snarlin' catermounts, but this hyar Fiesta Night is shore razzlin' me er heap."

Old Nomad sat down on a bench, which happened to be handy, and rubbed a hand over the top of his mask and drummed his knuckles against the helmet.

The scout sat down beside him.

"You saw Bangham, Nick," he queried, "and he told you about Baker and his Dozen, and suggested that you get into that costume and go looking for the gang?"

"Keno, kerect, an' then some. I thort I had thet pirate ter thinkin' I was one o' the Dozen, kase he was takin' me ter the gang's hang-out; then, all ter oncet, biff! He ketched me with his fist afore I knowed. Reckon he must er suspected somethin', an' never let on. Whar'd he go?"

"I didn't follow him. My principal concern was to find out something about you."

"But, ef ye didn't see Bangham, how'd ye happen ter make a monk o' yerself?"

Then, just as he had explained to Wild Bill, the scout now explained to Nomad. When the scout had finished, the whole situation, so far as the scout knew it, was before the old trapper.

Nomad chuckled, laughed, and then grew sober and wrathful when he felt of the bruise on his forehead.

"Eighteen Geronimo Street, huh?" he growled, starting up from the bench. "Thet must be whar thet thar pirate hiked to. Ye got ther watchword, so let's pull out fer the place an' see what we kin find."

This was a suggestion that had already appealed to the scout. Without delaying further, he got up and moved off toward the street with the old trapper.

CHAPTER V.

NO. 18 GERONIMO STREET.

The Chinese quarter of the town was across Washington Street from the Mexican quarter. Geronimo Street ran along the edge of the section given over to the Celestials. In spite of its proximity to "Little China," the thoroughfare was inhabited by many fairly well-to-do citizens.

To find No. 18 was no easy task. Some of the houses had no numbers, and some of those that had been numbered had lost the figures through wear and tear by wind and weather.

"We don't want ter make no mistake, Buffler," grunted Nomad. "Thar'd be a purty how-d'ye-do ef we picked out ther wrong house an' got run in fer bein' burglars. Thet would jest erbout wind up ther mistakes o' this hyar night."

"If there's a house on every lot," said Buffalo Bill, "and we began counting from Washington Street, the ninth house would be the one."

"On which side?"

"Left side; even numbers are all there. Sit down here and wait while I do a little scouting."

Old Nomad took off his helmet. It was heavy and the night was hot, so that a suit of armor was anything but comfortable. He would also have removed the corselet, but that buttoned down the back, and he was no contortionist. Dropping down at the foot of a pecan tree, he followed the shadowy form of the scout with his eyes.

There was a palm tree in front of the ninth house on the left. The scout ducked under the broad, drooping leaves, jumped a little irrigating ditch, and vanished from sight. He was back in a few minutes.

"What did ye find, pard?" inquired Nomad.

"That's the house, all right," was the answer. "The number's on the porch post. The house is two stories and built of sun-dried bricks."

"Any one eround?"

"Not that I can see—or hear. If any of the gang are inside, they're certainly lying low."

"It's a heap healthier fer 'em ter do thet, ther way things is goin'. Let's knock, an' make a call. I'm some anxious ter git within arm's reach o' thet pirate person. Say, he turned right eround, thar in ther plaza, an' lambasted me afore I knowed. Ther pizen whelp!"

The scout stood for a moment thoughtfully under the pecan tree.

"There are a dozen of them, Nick," he observed, "not counting Baker. With Baker added, the Dozen becomes a baker's dozen. Suppose we knock and are let in among the whole thirteen?"

"What's ther odds?" grumbled the old trapper recklessly; "what's thirteen chinks, greasers, an' outlaw Americans ter you an' me? Waugh! I'll take six an' I know you kin man-handle t'other seven."

"I wouldn't think of it if circumstances indicated that all thirteen of the gang are in the house; but a lot of them must still be over in Washington Street. Come on, pard, and we'll chance it. The quicker we put the kybosh on Baker, the better it will be, all around."

"Thet's ther tork, pard!" Nomad sprang up. "I reckon I'll leave thet tin headpiece hyar till I come back."

"I reckon you won't, Nick. You may need that full

suit for a disguise. You're too plain a Cody pard without it."

"Kerect! I'll dive inter et ag'in."

Nomad pulled the helmet over his head, and he and the scout turned boldly into the yard, mounted the steps to the porch and knocked on the door.

A muffled sound came from inside. There was a window near the door and it seemed as though some one was looking from the window to make sure of the callers before opening the door. Apparently the view of the two on the porch, although made in the semi-darkness, was reassuring.

"*Que quiere* (what do you want)?" came a low voice from the other side of the door.

"Pesos," said the scout.

"Pesos," answered the unseen speaker.

The door was open and the scout and the trapper stepped into a dark hall. No word was spoken. The door was closed and bolted; then the man who had admitted the pards could be heard groping his way across the hall. He opened a door at the farther side of the hall, and the dull glow of a candle pierced the heavy gloom.

The man had on a friar's cloak, and was muffled to the eyes.

"Come in here," he said gruffly.

The pards followed him into a neat little sitting room. There was nothing very elegant about the room, but the rocking chairs, the matting carpet, the rack of worn books over a table, all spoke of quiet and comfort.

This sitting room was at the back of the house, and the doors communicating with the front room and the kitchen were closed. Also, the two windows of the

room were draped with heavy blankets to keep the light from being seen by any one on the outside.

"I'll be back in a minute, señors," mumbled the man. "Got ter go out in front an' watch fer some more o' the Dozen."

He went into the hall again, closing the door after him.

"Snakes an' taranches!" muttered old Nomad, "Whar's thet pirate?"

"Pass the ante, Nick," answered the puzzled scout, likewise in a guarded tone. "Queer lay out here, and no mistake."

"Thet ombray thet jest left us ain't no greaser. He's Americano."

"That's my idea."

"Whyever did he hail us at the door with words in ther greaser lingo?"

"Maybe that's the gang's custom. There's been more than one man in here, and not many minutes ago," the scout added.

"How d'ye figger et?"

"The room's blue with tobacco smoke. One man couldn't have made all that."

"Right ye aire! No more one man couldn't. But whar ther blazes hev they all gone?"

"Listen!" whispered the scout, dropping a hand on the trapper's knee.

A gurgling noise, faint, but distinct, was heard. It stopped, then come again, then stopped once more.

"What is et, Buffler?" whispered Nomad.

"Sounds like a man breathing," answered the scout.

"Then his breathin' is some diffikilt."

Nomad got up and crossed the room to a couch. The couch was covered with the usual Navajo blanket. The

trapper lifted the edge of the blanket and gave vent to a muttered exclamation. A pair of jack-boots could plainly be seen.

Buffalo Bill hurried to his old pard's side, and, together, each laid hold of a boot and drew into sight the pirate with whom they had parted in the plaza.

The man was tied, hand and foot, and gagged. The gag was tight between his teeth, and, as he breathed, he emitted the peculiar sound that had attracted the pards' attention and led to this discovery.

"Waal, sufferin' horntoads!" growled the trapper. "Nice way this Dozen has got, treatin' one o' their gang in sich fashion."

The bound pirate tried to talk. His eyes begged for release, but there was a puzzled look in them.

"He reckernizes us as not bein' two o' ther Dozen," went on Nomad, "but ef we kin——"

"Throw up your hands!"

The hall door had opened suddenly, revealing another friar, a man in an ill-fitting Mexican costume, and another pirate. All three of the men in the hall had weapons in hand and leveled.

"Up with 'em!" went on the stern voice. "This makes two more of the Dozen, and if we wait long enough, I reckon we'll get the rest."

"Steady," called the scout in a warning voice.

He pulled the friar's robe back from his face. A surprised exclamation broke from the three in the doorway.

"Buffalo Bill!" cried the man who had been doing the speaking. "Well, well!"

Revolvers were lowered and the three stepped into the room.

"If this ain't a surprise party," laughed the man in the greaser clothes, "I don't want a cent."

"And we thought we had some more of the Dozen!" chuckled the pirate.

Nomad gave a disgusted grunt and took off his helmet.

"Nice game ye're playin' on a feller, Bangham," said he, "gittin' me inter this hyar rig an' then tryin' ter shoot me up."

The three men were Bangham, and Bly, and Sproul. After they had all laughed a little over the contretemps, they sat down to talk it over.

"I didn't think there'd be such a mix-up on account of the disguises," said Bangham, "or I wouldn't have been putting them on you fellows in such a wholesale way."

"Bly fixed up Wild Bill," said the scout, "and you fixed up Nomad, Bangham, and——"

"An' it was me as fixed up yer Dutch pard," grinned Sproul.

The two pards started.

"Is the baron masquerading, too?" inquired the scout.

"Shore he is! I got on his greaser clothes. Bangham had run out o' Dozen disguises, so I couldn't change. The baron's an ole Spaniard, an'——"

"And I'll bet money he's the fellow that got into trouble with the bear!" laughed the scout.

"But how do you happen to be playing the friar?" demanded the sheriff of Buffalo Bill.

For the third time the scout went over that part of the matter. The officers listened with absorbed attention.

"Here's a great cross play," commented Bangham, "and all because none of us knew what the rest were doing. An old Mexican woman called at my office, an

hour ago, and told me to come here and I'd find one of the Dozen too full of pulque to move. Bly, Sproul and I came at once, but we didn't find the man. While we were thinking about it, that fellow showed up"—he pointed to the man on the floor—"and we nabbed him. He's one of the Dozen, all right, but we couldn't get him to say a word. After that, you two came, and we thought we had another pair of rascals. We pushed the pirate under the——"

The sheriff was interrupted by a fist banging on the door. Buffalo Bill jumped for the hall and shoved back the bolt. He had the door open in short order, but there was no one on the porch. He hurried out on the porch and peered up and down in the darkness. But he could see no one.

"Here, Cody," called the sheriff, "I reckon this is what the fellow came for. He brought this and shoved it under the door. It's a communication of some sort."

Bangham, with a folded paper in his hand, retreated to the sitting room, the scout and the rest following him.

The paper was addressed, on the outer fold, to "Bangham, the Sheriff."

Unfolding the note the sheriff read it aloud:

"You can't beat us out. Call off your men and tell Cody to call off his pards. We've got Wild Bill and Little Cayuse, and if anything happens to *us*, something will sure happen to *them* BAKER'S DOZEN."

Here was a blow between the eyes, mysteriously delivered, but none the less stunning for all that.

"Consarn ther pizen whelps!" whooped the old trapper. "Is this what this hyar the-ay-ter actin' is er comin' to? Us fellers go gallivantin' eround, makin' fools o'

ourselves kase the sher'ff an' deperties so advises, an' now we l'arn thet Hickok an' Leetle Cayuse hev been trapped an' aire bein' held ter answer fer whatever we do agin' the gang. Say, I'm some mad, I am, an' a heap gloomed up! How did et ever happen, Buffler? How was et possible fer Leetle Cayuse, who's sharper'n a steel trap, an' fer Pard Hickok, who kin match wits an' shootin' irons agin' any gang thet ever walked, ter git buffaloes an' kyboshed like what thet thar note says?"

"Mebby the note's a fake," suggested Sproul.

"Maybe it is," returned Buffalo Bill; "but it's got a genuine ring—to me."

"One of the gang must have toted it to the door," averred Bly. "How did he know the lay of the land in this quarter?"

"Probably," answered Bangham, "the fellow has been spying on the house here. It's a nervy gang, anyhow, to appropriate a private house like this as a hang out for hatching their villainous schemes."

"If that note is really genuine, Bangham," mused the scout, "then Baker himself must have written it."

"The impudent tone of the thing rather suggests that the leader is back of it."

"Then the spy has informed Baker of what is going on here, and Baker is making a threat in the hope that he will keep us from interfering with his schemes."

"I'm sorry for Cayuse and Wild Bill," said the sheriff, frowning, "but I can't conscientiously hold off just because they may get hurt."

"Certainly not," returned the scout a little sharply. "Two wrongs don't make a right; but, while you're doing all you can to lay Baker by the heels, Nick and I will do our best to see that Cayuse and Hickok get clear of their trouble. That's our first duty, just as your first

duty is to let nothing get between you and this Baker's Dozen of scoundrels."

Nevertheless, although Bangham was of one mind with the scout in this, the logic of the situation left him uncomfortable.

"I wish to thunder the thing was shaping up in a different way," he growled fretfully. "That note settles one point, even if the capture of that pirate over there didn't."

"What's that?"

"Why, the fears of a couple of women haven't stirred up this trouble all for nothing. I'm positive now that Baker is really at large in the town, and that he has a pack of villains with him who are bent on making a raid of some kind."

"You should have been positive of that when I told you about Bessie Baker and repeated the information she gave me."

"She's a young girl, and her fears may have caused her to look at this Baker's Dozen through a mental telescope."

"Didn't the old Mexican woman impress you as being in earnest?"

"She was in earnest, all right—so earnest, in fact, that she was half hysterical. Usually there's not much sense to be got out of a woman in that condition."

Buffalo Bill walked over to the prisoner. With Nomad's help he lifted him to the couch. The fellow's mask had already been pulled away. The scout removed the gag.

A brutal, thoroughly criminal face looked up at the scout as the latter bent down.

The man was a Mexican.

"You belong to this gang of thugs and thieves, do you?" demanded the scout, staring hard at the fellow.

He glared defiantly, but would not answer.

"What sort of a raid is this that Baker is intending to make to-night?" went on the scout.

Still no answer.

"Thar's er way ter make him tune up his bazoo," scowled the old trapper fiercely.

"You have horses hidden away somewhere," pursued the scout, "so that you can make a quick getaway as soon as you pull off the deal that brought you here. Where are the animals?"

The man persisted in his sullen silence.

"You'll not get anything out of the greaser, Buffalo Bill," spoke up Bangham. "We tried the scoundrel in a dozen ways, and couldn't get a thing out of him but that glare of the eyes."

"I got somethin' out o' him," muttered Old Nomad. "He handed me one under the rim o' thet thar teakettle ye shoved onter my head. I wisht he wasn't tied up, an' thet I had him ter capter."

"Put back the gag, Nick," said the scout, turning away from the couch. "What's your plan for the rest of this work, Bangham?" he asked.

"I'm up a stump, as you might say," returned the sheriff. "This fiesta complicates things and makes it hard to do any work of the law-and-order kind. Whatever is done, too, must be done in a hurry. Baker and his men will work quick in order to make their raid and get away before morning. Do you think there's any use going to the Mexican quarter, to this deserted house of Garcia's, you mentioned?"

"Nomad and I will cover that part of it, Bangham.

You and your men can turn your hands to something else."

"What would you suggest beyond loafing around the street and waiting for some of the gang to approach us?"

"I doubt if there'll be any more of that. It must be pretty well known by now that Buffalo Bill and pards and the sheriff and his deputies are abroad in costumes similar to those worn by the Dozen. Baker and his gang will be more than careful now. Don't forget, too, that Baker is wearing cowboy clothes, and that he has a white handkerchief tied around his throat."

"Who ever heard of a cowboy with a white handkerchief!" exclaimed Sproul. "Mostly their handkerchiefs are of the red cotton bandanna kind."

"I think, Sproul," said the scout, "that Baker is wearing the white handkerchief so the rest of his gang will know him. Can you get me a cowpuncher's rig, Bangham," he asked, turning to the sheriff, "on short notice?"

"I can get you anything you want in that line," replied the sheriff. "My office, over in the jail, has looked like a Jew clothing store ever since six o'clock. Sproul!"

"Here!" answered the deputy.

"Go over to the office and get Buffalo Bill what he wants."

"Take it to the Palace of Chance," added the scout. "I'll meet you there."

"What then, Bangham?" asked Sproul.

"Come here and keep house with Bly," was the answer. "Some of the gang may show up in this place. Anyhow, the prisoner is to be guarded. We can't bother to tote him to headquarters at this stage of the game."

Sproul left in a hurry.

"You haven't told me anything else I might do, Buf-

falo Bill," went on the sheriff. "Something has got to be done and done quick."

"I'd suggest, then," said Buffalo Bill, "that you go looking for the horses which the gang has in readiness to carry them into the hills when they make their haul. If you can find the cattle, that will go a long way toward foiling the gang in case they do what they plan and are ready to make a dash for the hills."

"Good idea!" approved Bangham. "There should be thirteen horses in the bunch, and that number couldn't be very easily hidden. Still, it's a large order I've got, and not one to be quickly filled. Where'd be the best place to look?"

"Well, there are both Chinamen and Mexicans in the gang. Why not prowl around the Chinese quarter, for a while? If you don't have any luck, cross the street to the place where the Mexicans live."

"I'll do it. I'm of the opinion, though, that you and Nomad are going to have the best show at this Garcia place."

"I wish I was of the same opinion," returned the scout. "If Baker was clever enough to break out of the Yuma penitentiary, he's certainly clever enough to know it won't do for him to keep his prisoners at that old house. My little Piute pard must have coaxed some of the gang there—so, the minute Wild Bill showed himself, Baker must have known the whole scheme was a frame-up."

"That's a fact. I wonder if this girl, Miss Baker, could give us any further information?"

"Don't try to find her—don't go near her. She has helped you enough as it is, Bangham, and if Baker found out where she has gone he might take a chance and try

to get even with her. We want to protect Miss Baker instead of unloading any more trouble upon her."

"Ther easiest way ter help her," put in Nomad, "is ter capter ther leader o' ther gang and send him back ter ther Yuma pen. Let's be goin', Buffler."

The old trapper was putting on his helmet. With the scout and Bangham he walked into the hall.

"Keep your eyes open, Bly!" called out the sheriff warningly. "I don't think anything will happen here, but you never can tell."

"I'm on the job, Bangham," answered Bly confidently.

With that the three men let themselves out of the house. They separated by the palm—Bangham turning toward the Chinese quarter and the scout and the trapper making for Washington Street.

CHAPTER VI.

GOING IT BLIND.

On the way along Washington Street to the Palace of Chance, Buffalo Bill and Nomad saw no friars, no pirates, and no Spanish conquistadores.

"That means," said the scout, after Nomad had remarked on the circumstance, "that Baker has got his gang pretty well informed regarding operations against him."

"Either thet, Buffler," observed the trapper, "er they're gittin' ready fer the raid."

"The information is out and the gang is hurrying the raid."

"Then what's the use o' disguisin' ourselves any longer ef Baker an' his crowd aire leery o' armor-plated gents, friars an' pirates?"

"Well, Nick, I am of the opinion that disguises will still be of help to us. If I hadn't been, I'd never have asked Bangham for the cowboy rig."

"What I want," grunted the trapper, "is ter git clear o' these fool things I got on. Sufferin' blazes! I feel like I was in er hay press."

"We'll fix that," said the scout. "When I step out of this hooded cloak and into the cowboy fixings, you can be the friar."

"Thet'll help some, I reckon," answered Nomad.

It was getting along toward midnight, but the fun in Washington Street was as fast and furious as ever. The revelers were going a pace that increased with the

passing hours. They would stop and go home when they were tired out, and not before.

Buffalo Bill had a faint hope that he might find Little Cayuse waiting for him in the small room off the rear of the gambling hall—a hope that the note sent to Bangham might turn out to have been merely a “bluff.”

But, in this, he was disappointed. Sproul was waiting for the pards with a bundle, and as soon as he had delivered the bundle he hurried back to Geronimo Street.

The change in costumes was quickly effected in the back room. Old Nomad, with much rejoicing, left behind him his pile of boiler plate. The loose robe with the hood was far and away more comfortable.

In leaving the Palace of Chance, the pards went out the rear way, just as Little Cayuse and Miss Baker had gone, some time earlier in the evening.

Through dark byways they gained the Mexican quarter. The quarter was gloomy enough, at that hour. It had an ominous look at all hours, but its silence was more menacing at the dead of night.

Buffalo Bill and Nomad were not long in reaching that part of the narrow street which lay directly in front of the deserted dwelling once occupied by Garcia.

For the scout and his pards, a number of thrilling incidents clustered about the squat adobe structure.

“No light thar, Buffler,” muttered the trapper.

“I didn’t think there would be, Nick,” was the answer. “The Dozen are not showing any fire signals at a time like this.”

“I’ll bet ye a bushel o’ dinero thar ain’t a single on-bray in ther place.”

“That was my notion before we left Geronimo Street. We’ve been going it blind, pard, without much hope of

finding Cayuse and Hickok. Nevertheless, we've got to run out the trail. On the supposition that there may be some of the gang in the house, I'm going to go in the back way while you go in at the front. If I stir up any one, he'll run toward you, and so the other way around."

"I'm hopin' some o' ther pizen whelps'll be stirred up, but I ain't countin' on it much."

They separated, Buffalo Bill going off through the gloom toward the rear of the adobe and old Nomad moving upon the front door.

The building was as silent as the grave. Nor were the doors locked.

Without difficulty the scout, hand on revolver grip, entered the kitchen.

No hostile movement of any sort greeted his entrance. The stillness was so intense that it seemed almost as though he could hear the beating of his own heart.

But the house had been occupied, and recently. Here, as in the place at 18 Geronimo Street, the stench of tobacco smoke was most pronounced.

He struck a match.

A broken bench stood near one of the kitchen walls. On one end of the bench stood a bottle with a half-burned candle thrust in its mouth.

That candle was further proof that some one had lately been in the place, some one besides Cayuse and Wild Bill. Neither the Piute nor the Laramie man would have shown a light.

The kitchen windows were screened with pieces of dirty canvas.

Passing on through the kitchen, the scout met the trapper in the only other room the adobe contained.

"Nothin' hyar," commented the trapper gloomily, "jest as we reckoned."

"There has been some one here," said the scout, and returned to the kitchen to point out the evidences of recent occupancy to the trapper.

"Waal," said Nomad, "ther fact thet some un has been hyar ain't er helpin' us none."

"It helps us this far, pard: It confirms that note sent to Bangham in Geronimo Street. Cayuse lured some of the Dozen to this place. Wild Bill tried to help him. Through some mischance our pards failed in their calculations, and instead of making a capture they got captured. All the evidence we find supports that theory."

The scout had already lighted the candle. He now carried the light around the interior of the house, searching all corners. He found an ancient flint-lock pistol.

"That," said he, kicking the old gun toward Nomad, "is part of Wild Bill's pirate make-up."

"Mebby not, Buffler. Thar's others o' the gang in pirate rig. Some one o' the Dozen may hev drapped et."

"Possibly; but I could almost gamble it was Wild Bill."

There was nothing else to be found. Candle in hand, Buffalo Bill stepped through the back door and held the light close to the ground.

The hard, clayey soil was beaten hard and held no imprint of passing feet. Not until he had gone carefully over the rear of the premises did the scout give up and return to old Nomad.

"Our hands are in the air, Nick," he announced.

"Thet's what I thort, some sort of er while ago," was the trapper's response.

"We've got to do something for our pards, and do it in a rush."

"Name ther move an' I'll climb inter et with both feet."

"Naming the move" was a difficult proposition. The scout paced thoughtfully up and down the kitchen. However, he turned the situation over in his mind to some purpose.

There were but two sections of the town where a lawless gang, even on Fiesta Night, would have headquarters for criminal operations.

These were the Mexican and the Chinese sections. In those quarters more or less unsavory operations were going on constantly.

Baker, having both Mexicans and Chinamen in his gang, might have chosen either quarter. Geronimo Street was close to "Little China," and perhaps that was the reason he had first made his headquarters at No. 18. Driyen from Geronimo Street, he might have resorted to the Mexican section of the town; but would he stay in the greaser quarter after Little Cayuse had tried to lure him into Garcia's old house?

The scout thought not. Only the Chinese quarter remained. The chances were ten to one that the Dozen—minus the Mexican captured in Geronimo Street—had gone to "Little China."

Buffalo Bill explained the results of his reasoning to Nomad.

"I reckon ye've made a bull's-eye hit, Buffer," agreed the trapper, "but chinkdom, in this hyar town, is purty big fer its size an' full o' all sorts er places whar om-brays kin hide."

"It hasn't many places where thirteen horses can hide," said the scout.

"Bangham is lookin' fer ther ridin' stock."

"We'll look, too. If we find the horses, Nick, we'll have a line on the place where Baker and his men are operating."

"Yore judgment is allers ace-high with me. In travelin' er blind trail, I'd ruther foller Pard Buffler's head-work than a bloodhound. Le's climb fer ther chink headquarters."

Without wasting any more time they left the deserted house, turned into the first cross street, and made their way to the opposite side of the brilliantly lighted main thoroughfare.

For the most part, the fancy of the Chinamen ran to long adobe walls covering a block. In these walls were window and door openings. Partitions made each house separate and distinct from its neighbor—so far as the police or "foreign devils" had any knowledge—but the long front wall was a partnership affair.

There was not the same silence here that had distinguished the Mexican quarter. The slant-eyed men were night owls, and yellow light gleamed around the edges of more than one window curtain, and from more than one interior came the click of dice thrown in an earthen bowl as heathen gambling went on.

The pards slowly traversed one long adobe wall. In front of the corner shop a gaudy lantern was burning over a red sign covered with white hen tracks. A click also came from within this house, but it was the ringing click of coin. Under the red and white sign was an American interpretation of the shopkeeper's business. The American sign read, "Dealer in Dollars."

A dealer in dollars is usually a fat, well-to-do Celestial, who takes American gold below the Rio Grande and turns it into Mexican silver pesos at a ratio of about

two to one. Bringing back the silver coin, the dealer sells it, at a premium, to Celestials who are transmitting money to the Flowery Kingdom. There is more silver in a Mexican dollar than there is in an American dollar. This the Chinaman knows, and he profits by his knowledge.

While the pards were standing on the corner they heard a clanking noise as of some one rattling a chain. It did not come from inside the shop of the dollar dealer, but from the darkness along the side wall.

The rattle came closer and closer; then, all at once, it ceased with a clatter, as though a dozen chain hawsers had been dropped.

"*Ach, du lieber!*" muttered an angry voice, "oof I vasn't sooch a goot feller I vould svear like anyding. Draveling mit a scrap bile on your pack is tough vork. Now den, vonce more vill I try it, py shinks."

The sound of rattling chains was resumed; and the scout and the trapper, with subdued laughs, hurried around the corner and into the gloom by the side wall.

CHAPTER VII.

LITTLE CAYUSE PLAYS HIS PART.

None of the scout's pards was more worthy of confidence than Little Cayuse. He took a great pride in carrying out orders; and this pride was backed with an ability far beyond the boy's years.

Safely he conducted Miss Bessie Carmelita Baker to the Mexican quarter, and left her in the hands of old Manuelita. The aged Mexican woman was just getting back from the sheriff's office, and Cayuse and the girl met her in front of the house where the two had taken refuge.

While Manuelita was clasping the girl in her arms, and snuffing and crying over her as one returned from the grave, Cayuse had whirled away, without a word, and vanished in the direction of Washington Street.

Once in the crowded thoroughfare, the boy made it a point to take short steps, in order to keep his moccasins from showing beneath the bottom of the long witch's robe.

Only his keen, restless little eyes showed from under the pointed hood. He must look out for men in long robes, for men in big boots and big hats, and for men in iron coats.

Pa-e-has-ka had described these disguises to him carefully, and he had them distinctly recorded in his mind. Here and there darted his weasel glances. While he looked he became suddenly aware that he was being followed—and it was by a man in a robe!

The boy's heart beat high with exultation. He had

been no more than an hour strolling through the mad street when this lucky thing happened. He was followed by the Long Robe, and so closely did the Long Robe resemble Pa-e-has-ka that he could almost have thought it Pa-e-has-ka himself.

But the Long Robe was trailing Cayuse and drawing closer and closer.

Cayuse, concerned in drawing the trailer after him to the Mexican quarter, did not notice how the Long Robe whispered to left and right as it came on in his footsteps; nor did he see how men in iron coats and in big hats and big boots dropped behind and trailed the Long Robe.

The Piute thought only of getting the Long Robe to the place where Pa-e-has-ka had said he would have pard waiting.

With a delightful feeling of doing his full duty, Cayuse turned out of Washington Street and laid a meandering course for the deserted house.

He was careful not to get too far ahead of the Long Robe, and careful not to get so close that the Long Robe could catch him before the vacant adobe was reached.

Playing with the paleface as some venturesome mouse might play with a cat, he led the man into dark ways and narrow passages, finally darting into Garcia's old place.

Six men came up to the Long Robe in front of the house; then the six divided into two parties of three each, and each party went to the sides of the house. After that, the Long Robe went in.

"Bess!" called the member of the gang from the door, in an angry voice.

No answer was returned from the darkness.

"You little fool," went on the man in the long robe, "did ye think ye could play lame duck with Baker? He's fergot more erbout this hyar bizness in a minit than ye know in a y'ar! He seen me, arter Buffler Bill come meddlin' in the room at the Palace, an' he told me ter foller ye ef I picked up yer trail. That's what I done. Now, then, ye ain't goin' ter give away this hyar gang no more! Come for'ard an' give yerself up. Don't try ter sneak out ther back way. It ain't possible. Six o' the gang aire out thar, waitin'. Thar's only you agin' seven o' us, an' ye mout as well drap yer hand inter the discard."

Little Cayuse, at the other side of the room, heard all this with a dejected heart. He had failed! This man in the long robe was not Baker, but one of the Dozen. The boy remembered, then, that the scout had told him there were probably three or four of the Dozen in long robes. As ill luck would have it, Cayuse had lured the wrong man to the old adobe.

Cayuse had but one thought, and that was to escape. If there were six men at the rear of the house, his most likely course was flight by the front, where only one man was on guard.

Quick as a flash he darted toward the open door. But if the Piute was quick, so also was the Long Robé. The sound of the pattering moccasins guided the man, and he hurled himself forward. His hands encountered Cayuse and held to him with a grip of steel.

The boy tried with all his might to wriggle free. He tried, too, to draw a weapon. One attempt was as fruitless as the other. The gown hindered his movements, so that the costume he had used to entrap Baker was now entrapping himself.

The struggle carried the boy and the man to the floor. They fell heavily.

"Hyer! Come hyer, some o' you duuffers!" called the man.

There was a fall of feet in the kitchen as several men ran toward the front room through the darkness. Their excited jabbering was in several tongues.

"Shet the door," puffed Cayuse's captor, "an' git a light."

The door was shut and a match struck.

"Better so, señor," said one of the six who had entered through the kitchen, "dat you take heem to de back room. Dere is a candle dere, an' de windows is darkened."

This was good advice. Cayuse was dragged by his captor into the back room. Here the candle was lighted and the man in the long robe had a chance to discover his mistake.

Cayuse, with his arms folded, the pointed hood dropped from his head to his shoulders, stood defiantly against the adobe wall of the kitchen. The Long Robe used the language of an army teamster.

"Who ther blisterin' blazes aire you?" he demanded.

"Me all same Little Cayuse," answered the boy; "all same pard Pa-e-has-ka. Why you make um trouble for Piute, huh? Me try have um good time; you come make um rough house. Ugh!"

The boy's wits were at work. If he could make these men think that he had not been trying to trap the Long Robe, then they might let him go.

"Stow yer chatter!" scowled the Long Robe. "It ain't no mistake we're makin'. Whar'd ye git that dress? Whar's the gal thet was wearin' of it? Tell me, er I'll strangle the breath out o' yer body!"

The brawny scoundrel advanced upon Cayuse with his big hands outstretched. The boy never flinched.

"What for you strangle Piute boy?" he inquired. "You make um trouble for Cayuse, Pa-e-has-ka make um heap trouble for you. Me all same Pa-e-has-ka's pard."

"Who's Pa-e-has-ka?"

The Long Robe was mighty ignorant, Cayuse thought, if he did not know who Pa-e-has-ka was. Everybody in the Southwest knew Pa-e-has-ka.

A pirate pushed forward from among the six. Pulling off his mask, he showed almond eyes and high cheek bones.

"My savvy Pa-e-has-ka," said the Chinaman. "Him allee same Buff' Bill. Whoosh! My no likee Buff' Bill."

"Is that right?" growled the Long Robe.

"*Buenos!*" spoke up a Mexican. "De muchacho speak straight, Señor Chick." He is not de gal, but de *compadre* of de scout king. *Si!*"

"Then this hyer opens up a bag o' tricks that's mighty important to the Dozen. Pablo!"

"*Si!*"

"You know whar the ole man was ter be. He's a cowpunch now, with a white han'kerchief around his throat. Go arter him an' bring him hyer. He's got ter know erbout this."

"Pronto, Señor Chick."

Pablo vanished; and Señor Chick fell upon Cayuse with both hands, held him squirming on the floor, and helped the others tie him.

Cayuse felt like a squaw. He had not accomplished what Pa-e-has-ka had sent him to do, and his heart grew heavy.

But where were Pa-e-has-ka's other pards? They

were to be there, waiting. And here the little Piute found himself alone, and at the mercy of seven of the Dozen.

Still—and the thought gave the boy some measure of comfort—they had sent for Baker! Baker would come! Might it not be that the scout's pards were waiting for Baker to come before making their attack?

Fairly contented, therefore, the boy yielded to the situation.

There had been a mistake, he reckoned. Baker was not wearing a long robe, but a cowboy costume.

How had Pa-e-has-ka missed this knowledge?

Pablo was back shortly and announced that Baker was coming. He—Pablo—had come ahead, and by the back way, but Baker was coming by the front.

The Mexican had hardly finished his report when there came sounds from the front of the house that proved Baker was close at hand.

The door opened softly. Only sharp ears could have heard that opening door.

"We've got you covered, you vermin!" roared a familiar voice, as the door leading into the kitchen was flung ajar. "One move, and there'll be fireworks!"

The glow of the candle fell dimly over the form of a man in piratical rig. Through the man's mask his eyes glimmered fiercely.

It was Wild Bill!

Behind him stood a man in cowboy clothes, with a white handkerchief around his throat.

While Cayuse was guessing and wondering, the cowboy caught Wild Bill from behind and hurled him backward.

CHAPTER VIII.

WILD BILL'S MISTAKE.

It will be recalled that it was *after* Buffalo Bill met Wild Bill that the scout received his tip to the effect that Baker had changed his disguise. The Laramie man, therefore, had not been informed; and, because he lacked this knowledge, he fell into a costly error.

He came in front of Garcia's old adobe at the time when the six members of the gang were separating. Little Cayuse, in his disguise, was just passing through the door, and Señor Chick was close after him.

Wild Bill made his observations from across the street, hugging the shadow of a house wall.

"By gorry," he muttered, as he watched, "I'm company front with a larger order than Pard Cody thought he was giving me. Cayuse has trailed more than half the Dozen to the adobe, and there are seven against us. I'm ready to take any chance, but I've got to think of Baker, and making a safe capture."

He paused and frowned perplexedly.

"That was Baker, of course," he went on, to himself, "who's wearing that friar's gown and just went in the front way. The other six have separated to make the capture of the supposed girl a success. What's for me to do?"

It was not like the Laramie man to consider results so carefully. Usually it was touch and go with him. Now, however, the fact that Baker must be captured appealed to him so powerfully that he was prone to consider ways and means.

Cayuse would be made a prisoner. That would debar him from any set-to with the gang. All the work devolved on Wild Bill. He had plenty of confidence in his own ability, but he hesitated about facing seven and trying to cut out their leader, single-handed.

The thought occurred to him that he might send to the sheriff's office for help. If he got reënforcements it must be from the county jail, for there was no finding the scout or any of the other pards in that crowd of bedlamites on Washington Street.

But, the Laramie man reasoned, while he was away getting some messenger to go to the sheriff's office, the seven, with their prisoner, might leave the adobe. If that happened, Wild Bill would lose track of them entirely.

He made up his mind that he would not leave his post, but that he would stay where he was and trust luck to help him out.

Luck had always dealt kindly by the Laramie man. He had trusted blindly to it a good many times, and it had not failed him.

Having come to this conclusion, he crouched down in an angle of the adobe wall and waited and watched.

Muffled voices came to him from the house across the narrow street. Things were happening there, there was no doubt about that. He itched to have a hand in what was going on, but caution still held him back.

When Pablo left to bring Baker, he left by the back way, and escaped the Laramie man's prying eyes; and when Pablo returned he came the same course he had followed in leaving, and so escaped Wild Bill's attention for the second time.

Having exhausted his patience in waiting, Hickok got up, with the intention of scouting around the adobe and

seeing what he could discover. As he moved across the street he saw some one approaching. The man walked in a leisurely way, and as he came closer, Wild Bill saw that he was neither a friar, a pirate, nor an old Spaniard. He wore the costume of a cowboy.

Now, Wild Bill knew very well that nothing was so deceiving, that night, as the clothes a man wore; and yet, in spite of this, he felt that here was an accommodating character, in no way connected with the Dozen, who might lend a helping hand.

The man came up to Wild Bill rather confidently. Stopping within a foot of him, he looked him over carefully.

"You're American, ain't you?" asked Wild Bill, in a low tone.

"Sure," was the prompt response.

"That's a disguise you have on?"

"Not for Joe! You don't ketch me bogglin' myself up with furrin clothes. I stand fer what I am every day you can find in the almanac."

This line of talk pleased the Laramie man.

"Will you help me pull off a piece of work?" he asked.

"Well, podner, that depends. What's the work?"

"I've got a little pard in that house," and Wild Bill pointed to the adobe. "He's in a heap of trouble. Seven lawless chaps have him, and I want to get him away and capture the boss of the outfit. Will you come in on the deal? The gang consists of chinks and greasers, with maybe one or two whites. You know how the ordinary run of chinks and greasers stack up in a set-to. What d'you say?"

The man hesitated.

"What's yer label, podner?" he asked. "When I works fer anybody, I kinder like to know who it is."

Wild Bill gave him the desired information.

"Bully!" exclaimed the cowboy. "Say, that ole rawhide, Buffler Bill, cuts a heap o' ice with me. I'm glad to help. As fer chinks an' greasers—why, pard, I eat 'em."

"Wow!" chuckled Wild Bill, grabbing the cowboy's hand. "Supposing we go in and have supper?"

"Keno! Take the lead an' count on me ter foller."

Revolvers in hand, the Laramie man led the way to the door, pushed it open softly, and moved across the dark front room.

He was on familiar ground, and hardly needed the yellow light, that rimmed the kitchen door, to guide him. Close at his heels he could hear his cowboy aide pushing after him.

To throw open the kitchen door, level his guns, and shout his defiance took the Laramie man but a moment. Then, the next moment, he was paralyzed with amazement.

Some one grabbed him from behind. Without a chance to resist attack from this unexpected quarter, he was flung to the floor, his revolvers clattering uselessly down beside him. Two knees dropped on his chest.

"A rope here—pronto!" called the cowboy.

There was no rope convenient—Cayuse having already requisitioned what hemp was handy—but the captors made shift to use the sash which they stripped from Wild Bill's waist.

The lashing occupied about five minutes; and during those five minutes the Laramie man was trying to lay hold of something tangible in the way of ideas.

It was not until he had been dragged out into the kitchen and saw Cayuse that reason returned to him.

"You low-down, two-faced puncher!" cried Wild Bill. "What did you do that for?"

"I'm Baker," said the man, with an ugly laugh. "You dropped into my hands so easy that I didn't want to disturb your plans until the last minute."

"Baker!" Wild Bill's jaw fell and a glassy stare crept into his eyes. "Baker! Say, are you the ombray that slipped out of Yuma?"

"Let that go," was the answer. "I'm the ombray that's doing some private business in Phenix to-night, and these are some of my men. I reckon we'll put you on the retired list, Mr. Wild Bill, until our game is over with. We may do a little more than that—can't tell till I get the right hitch on this situation."

He turned to one of the men.

"Tell me about this, Chick," said he, "and be quick."

Chick described the manner in which Little Cayuse had been captured, and had proved to be a different person from what he had supposed.

"It may hev been er mistake," said Chick, "an' only a happenchance thèt the Piute wore clothes like the gal's an'——"

"Mistake nothing!" snarled Baker. "I've just been talking with Siwash. He tells me that Bangham and his deputies are at the house in Geronimo Street, and that, as near as he could figure out, the girl tipped our hand and put not only the sheriff and his deputies, but Buffalo Bill and his pards on our track. Siwash was spying around the Geronimo Street place, and he heard a lot. This proves"—and he waved an angry hand toward Little Cayuse—"that Cody and his pards are hot on our trail; it proves that, after he butted in on me when I was talking with the girl at the Palace, she let him in on everything. Cody rigged up the Piute to play the

girl's part, hoping to catch me; and he sent Wild Bill to the front of this adobe to help the Piute pull off the job. Two and two make four, Chick, and this is as plain as that—just about. Give me a piece of paper, somebody."

It was one of the Chinamen who found a piece of paper. Baker had a pencil.

Sitting on the bench, he wrote for a few minutes industriously. When he had finished, he folded the paper and called Pablo. The Mexican moved forward.

"As I just said, Pablo," remarked Baker, "the sheriff and a couple of deputies are at the Geronimo Street house. They're disguised, same as the Dozen—a fact that's fooled us not a little this night. I want you to take this note to eighteen Geronimo Street, push it under the door, knock, and get out of the way. Sabe? When you leave, go to the coulee back of the dollar dealer's, where we left the horses. Stay there. We've got to wind up matters muy pronto and get out of town. I reckon that note will set Bangham and Buffalo Bill to thinking. They'll hold their hands, I'll gamble, until we can make a getaway. If they don't——"

Baker finished with a hard laugh.

"*Si*," said Pablo, taking the note and leaving the house.

"What was in that?" demanded Wild Bill wrathfully.

"Why," answered Baker, "I merely informed Bangham that we had Little Cayuse and Wild Bill in our hands, and that if he and the scout didn't call off their men and leave us alone, Little Cayuse and Wild Bill would have cause to regret it."

A cry of defiance broke from Hickok.

"You'll not lay a murderous finger on me or the Piute!" he declared. "You haven't the nerve!"

Baker got up from the bench and walked over to the Laramie man. Looking down on him with glistening, malevolent eyes, he muttered:

"Let Cody or Bangham get between me and the work I'm planning to do, and you'll find out how much nerve Lorenzo Baker has! I reckon you never heard what happened in the Harqua Halas, eh? You'd better get the girl to tell you about that!"

He whirled away. The impression that short speech made on Wild Bill was far from reassuring.

Baker, his face stern and inflexible, turned to Chick.

"We can't stay here," said he. "This roost is known to Buffalo Bill. Before he makes trouble for us we've got to get these prisoners where they'll be safe from him and safe for us. Sabe the burro, Chick? And whatever we do, man, has got to be done in a hustle."

"Whar'll we take 'em?" inquired Chick. "It ain't possible, not noways, ter take 'em acrost Washin'ton Street ter the chink quarter. Too many people ter savvy."

"Right. I had already decided that. I think I know a place that will answer. Gag 'em."

This work of gagging was thoroughly and expeditiously performed. Wild Bill was sputtering his wrath and defiance when the twisted handkerchief silenced him.

"Tote 'em along," ordered Baker, "and follow me. The last man out shut the door and blow out the candle. And throw away those cigarettes, you men who are smoking, but throw 'em away outdoors. Come quietly; you know the need of that as well as I do."

Cayuse and Wild Bill were lifted and borne from the adobe. Baker led the bearers between two dark houses

at the rear of the unused house, then half around the block to a gravel pit.

A steep descent led into the pit, and the prisoners were pulled and hauled, and dropped once or twice, before the bottom was reached.

No better place for hiding prisoners could have been devised. Daylight, of course, would have lifted the veil of secrecy that shrouded the pit, but Baker and his Dozen were manœuvring to finish their nefarious work and escape long before sunrise.

"Yore head's all right, *amigo*," chuckled Chick, when the prisoners had been laid down in the pit's bottom. "Thar's ain't no houses clost ter the rim o' this hole, an' no reason on airth that them fellers should be diskivered. What's the next move?"

"Our next move," answered Baker, "is in the direction of the dealer in dollars."

"Goin' ter leave the pris'ners hyer alone?"

"Well, not exactly. We'll let Joe Wing stay with them. You know the trick of the cord, Wing?"

"All same yellow cord, hey?" returned one of the Chinamen.

"All same."

"My savvy cord tlick."

"If I send some one to you, Joe, with orders to get busy with the bowstring, you don't want to lose any time."

"Can do," answered the yellow man calmly.

"Let me git holt o' this right, *amigo*," said Chick.

"We're now goin' ter make our raid. Joe Wing stays hyer with the pris'ners. If we git away with the stuff, then the pris'ners is left hyer. Is that it?"

"That's it."

"An' if thar's any interference with us, then ye send

one o' the Dozen ter the pit with a cord an' orders. Hey?"

"You follow me nicely, Chick."

"An' if we make the raise——"

"Then, Chick, some one comes for Joe with a led horse, and they follow us into the hills. When tomorrow comes, the prisoners will be located by some one in the quarter. They'll be released, and can go to Buffalo Bill and tell the scout how Baker fooled 'em."

Chick laughed huskily and clapped his leader on the back.

"Say, *amigo*, I wisht I had yore head!" he exclaimed effulgently. "You got an eighteen-karat brain, an' I'll match it agin' Buffler Bill's any day. But how erbout the divvy when we grab the swag? I'd like that settled."

"Share an' share alike, Chick," answered Baker. "All I want is enough to see me to some Mexican port with nothing to worry over until I reach the Sandwich Islands, or Japan, or South Africa. I'll treat all you fellows white—chinks, greasers, and Americans. But you know I've got to put several thousand miles of ocean between me and Yuma, and you know I've got to have money to do it."

"Ye're ace-high with all o' us, Baker!" declared Chick. "Thar ain't a yaller streak in ye, not nowhar."

"Well, let's climb out of this hole. Keep your guns handy, Wing," he added to the Chinaman who was to be left on watch. "Buffalo Bill and his pards are a slippery lot, and you've got to be on the job every second."

"My savvy," answered Joe Wing; "can do."

Then Wild Bill and Cayuse, lying sprawled on the hard gravel, watched the dusky figures of the men climb

upward, stand clear cut and distinct for a moment on the rim of the pit, then fade from sight.

There was much that Hickok yearned to tell the little Piute, and a good deal that the Piute would have liked to tell Hickok, but they could only turn their heads toward each other and stare through the dark.

Baker was pulling his wires in clever fashion; and it was not a comfortable reflection for the Laramie man that he had helped.

Why, Wild Bill asked himself, had the scout made such a mistake in Baker's costume? Baker was supposed to be wearing friar's clothes, and he had turned up in front of Garcia's old adobe in cowboy rig.

Then Wild Bill remembered that the scout had appropriated Baker's hooded gown. This left the leader of the Dozen without a disguise, and very likely the "chaps," sombrero, and flannel shirt were all the garments he had to fall back on.

It was easy for the helpless man in the gravel pit to look back and see where he might have proceeded differently. But there was no use fretting over what could not be helped, and Hickok began trying his strength on the twisted sash that held his hands.

He was not able to accomplish anything. The sash was a good substitute for rope, and held firmly. Furthermore, Joe Wing had eyes like a cat's, and seemed able to observe in the dark what was going on.

"No makee tly bleakee loose," he grunted, stepping to Wild Bill's side and poking him in the ribs with the muzzle of a revolver. "You makee tly some mo', my no waitee fol yello' cord."

What Wild Bill thought about Joe Wing would not have looked well in print. He talked wrathfully behind

the gag, but the words merged into a long, wheezy gurgle without sense or any particular sound.

The Chinaman sat down between the two prisoners, his revolvers on his knees. Suddenly, as Wild Bill watched him, he pricked up his ears, listened intently, then lifted his eyes to the rim of the pit.

Something had rattled at the pit's brink. Wild Bill and Cayuse had both heard the noise, and their eyes were not slow in following Joe Wing's.

A man was standing at the edge of the wide hole, standing quite still and looking down. Against the lighter background of the stars he was seen to be wearing a helmet and plume, and there was a sheen of steel on his breast that suggested armor. There was a long sword at his side, too.

Joe Wing lifted one of the revolvers and squinted along the barrel. The man above offered a good target, but the Chinaman had reasons for not wishing to make any noise.

"Another of this blooming gang!" thought Wild Bill. "Maybe it's the fellow sent back by Baker to tell the chink to use the bowstring. He looks like an ancient Spaniard. Has he brought the yellow cord or a couple of horses?"

On the answer to this question hung the fate of the two prisoners.

Evidently the Chinaman was doing a little speculating along the same line. Lowering the revolver, he gave vent to a low whistle.

The whistle was answered from the top of the bank. No sooner was the answer returned than the man began clanking down the steep slope.

It was quite plain that his disguise was more than he could handle, for he made hard work of the descent.

"Baron!" gasped Hickok.

"Dot's me," jubilated the baron. "Vat you t'ink oof der vay I got you oudt oof dot fix, hey? Py shiminy grickeds, bard, it dakes more as a shink to put me ou der mat!"

CHAPTER IX.

FINDING THE HORSES.

The baron quickly released Wild Bill and Cayuse, then sat down for a little rest.

"I haf hat more fun do-nighdt," he laughed, "as a parrel oof monkies, yah, so helup me. Fairst vone t'ing, den anodder t'ing habbens py me vat I don'd opect, und all der time der oxcidement iss more as I can tell. Say, bards, I vish dey hat a fiesta efery nighdt in der veek. You no sooner ged oudt oof vone subbrise as you fall indo anodder. Und dot's der vay."

"Where did you pick up that rig, baron?" asked the Laramie man.

"Der feller vat toldt me aboutt Paker shanged rigs mit me. He say oof I got on some gostumes like dis dot meppyso I connect mit some oof der gang. Ach, vat a time, vat a time!"

The baron heaved a long, happy sigh, then caught himself with a sudden grab at his chest.

"Ouch, a leedle!" he muttered. "Dere iss a sblinter in dis iron coat vat shticks me py der ribs efery vonce und some more. I vould haf got oudt oof der t'ing long ago oof I couldt. Say, Vilt Pill, I haf dit somet'ing for you, und vill you be so goot to do a leedle for me? Take an axe, or somet'ing, und shop me oudt oof dis poiler blate."

Wild Bill got behind the Dutchman and unbuckled the straps. As the corselet dropped, the baron gave is a joyful kick; then he pulled off the helmet and kicked it atter the other piece of armor.

"No more oof dot for Villum von Schnitzenhauser!" he declared.

"Easy, there, baron," cautioned Wild Bill. "There is work ahead. Do you want a hand in it?"

"You bed my life I vant a handt in vatefer dere iss going!"

"Then it's safer to wear that costume for a while longer. We've got to get busy."

"Vat aboutt? I vould suffer all der discomfortings bossiple for more oxcidement! Dot iss pread und trink to me. It makes no odds aboutt der tifference vat I haf to vear, schust so dot you gif me some lifely times. Aber, I tell you dose, it vas hardt to be lifely mit t'ings like dot holding you down."

"First off," went on Wild Bill, "tell me how you managed to find Cayuse and me?"

"Dot's easy. I see a pirate on Vashington Shdreet. You bed you I peen on der lookoudt for dem fellers. I come along mit der pirate to dot Garcia house. He go in py der pack door, und I vait around. Den dere iss some noises in der house, und den pumpy some fellers come oudt mit some odder fellers vat is carried. I findt me oudt, pooty soon, dot der fellers vat is carried vas Vild Pill und Leedle Cayuse. Vat a subbrise iss dot! I valk along und vait py der edge oof der pig hole; den, afder a vile, ven eferyt'ing seems bromising, I show meinseluf und make some shtar blays. Vat you t'ink? Ain'd I some rekular virlvinds?"

The baron was intensely proud of his exploit.

"You're a regular cyclone, baron!" declared Wild Bill.

"Tell him to Puffalo Pill, vill you? Led him know vat a fine feller he got for a Dutch bard."

"I'll tell him, you can gamble on that."

"How you ged in dot fix, huh, you und Cayuse?"

"We haven't time for that now. While Cayuse and I were in the hands of the gang we overheard some of their plans. They've gone to make their raid."

"Ah-h-h, so! Gone for der raid! Und vere iss dot?"

"At a place in Chinatown where a chink deals in dollars. That's as much as I know."

"Py shinks, I teal in tollars meinseluf, in some limidet vays. You don'd know der blace?"

"No, baron, but we'll have to find it. The horses are behind the dollar dealer's shop."

"Den ve make some dracks, eh? Ve go ofer py Chinatown und find der blace vere der feller teals in tollars. Vat a funny pitzness! Eferypody teals in tollars, some more; und some less, aber——"

"What did you do to the Chinaman?"

"Vell, he tumbled down mit himseluf und hit his headt on der rock vat I hit on, a leedle vile pefore. He lost his vits, afder dot, und I dook mein swordt oudt oof der t'ing vat holdts der plade und run him droo more as a tozen times!"

"What a bloodthirsty Dutchman you are, for a Fiesta Night! Cayuse will help you into your iron shell, baron, while I go and see what I can do for the Chinaman."

"Dig some holes for him," answered the baron, "dot's all vat you can do."

Although the Laramie man hunted high and low, he wasn't able to find the Chinaman. He found the baron's sword, however, and a lighted match failed to show any grewsome stains on the blade. When he got back to the Dutchman and Cayuse, the corselet and helmet had been put in place.

"Dit you findt der sword, Vild Pill?" demanded the baron.

"That's all I did find," was the answer. "The Chinaman is gone."

"How you make dot oudt? How could der Shinaman leaf mit himself all cut oop like some bepper boxes?"

"You never touched him with the sword, baron. That was a dream. The Chinaman hit his head on the stone and lost his wits; then, while we were talking, he got out of the pit and ran away."

"Vell, vell," muttered the baron, "I t'ought I hit him mit der sword, und I don'd do dot ad all! Vere you t'ink der feller vent?"

"Into Chinatown, of course! He's gone to tell Baker what's happened. The quicker we follow him, the more success we will have. Come on!"

"Shall ve do dis mitoudt Puffalo Pill to help?"

"We haven't time to look up Pard Cody. I have made a big bobble to-night, and I'd like to do something to make up for it."

Cayuse grunted approvingly. His ideas and Wild Bill's were running in the same groove.

The baron had to be helped up the steep slope, but when the party reached the crest they had clear sailing in the direction of Washington Street and the Chinese quarter.

The costumes of the three had suffered considerably in the rough experiences that had overtaken the pards. Cayuse's disguise was torn and crumpled, Wild Bill was minus his sash and half of the wide brim of his hat had been torn away, and the baron's armor was badly battered.

They reached Washington Street, to find that the crowd was thinning somewhat at that end of the thoroughfare. There was still plenty of noise and plenty

of hilarity, but the revelers were beginning to tire of the foolishness.

The pards crossed the street and dived into the gloomy alleys of Chinatown. At one of the long adobe walls the three paused while Wild Bill knocked on a door. There was lamplight inside, for a glow shone around the edges of the window shades.

A bolt was drawn, the door opened by a couple of inches, and a Celestial peered out.

"Whachee want?" he inquired.

"Where's the dollar dealer?" asked Wild Bill.

"Wanchee buy Mexican dolla's?"

"That's what the chink sells, ain't it?"

"Las' house in block. Yuen Moy sellee you cheap. You go ketchee dolla's aw ri'."

The door closed and the bolt was shoved into place.

"That chink must be a capper for Yuen Moy," muttered Wild Bill. "Last house in the block, eh? That's the place on the other corner."

"Don'd waste some more time," urged the baron, starting off with rattling briskness; "led's ged some moofs on ourselufs."

Wild Bill grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

"Not so fast, baron," he whispered. "We're after the horses, you know, and they're behind the dollar dealer's shop. Our trail leads us along the rear of the buildings, and not along the front. This way."

Little Cayuse, as usual, was saying nothing. But he was all eyes and ears. Nothing escaped him. He and the baron followed Wild Bill around that end of the adobe block and, in the rear, found a swale, overgrown with greasewood bushes.

This block of shops was at the very edge of that part of town. Beyond the rear doors lay the open country.

"That coulee is where the horses are," whispered Wild Bill, "and I'll gamble my spurs on it."

"Und so vill I, py shinks!" spoke up the baron. "Vat a fine blace to hite some horses."

"You stay at the top of the bank, baron," said Wild Bill, "and Cayuse and I will prospect the coulee."

"For vy can't I go?"

"You rattle too much. If there's any one guarding the horses, Cayuse and I will have to come up on them without any noise. Wait here until we come back."

The Laramie man and the Piute slid down the bank and vanished among the bushes. The baron waited fifteen or twenty minutes. By that time his patience was exhausted, and he was just on the point of rattling down into the swale and looking for his pards when Wild Bill suddenly emerged from the bushes.

"Baron!" whispered Wild Bill.

"On teck!" answered the baron. "Dit you findt something?"

"We've spotted the mounts," was the answer, "and there are thirteen of them, all togged out with riding gear, water canteens, and haversacks. The Dozen are ready for the run of their lives. No one was with the horses. Cayuse and I are going to take them to the Ranch Eight corral. He'll lead five and I'll lead six, and we'll each ride one. After Baker makes his raid, he'll be bothered some in making his getaway; and that, you see, will give Bangham and his deputies a chance to nab him."

"Pully!" chuckled the baron. "You und Cayuse rite away der horses, und vat does dot leaf for me?"

"That's what I came back to tell you. Hang around the dollar dealer's, baron. Keep a weather eye out for Baker and the gang. As soon as Cayuse and I get the

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horses into the corral, we'll come to the corner shop. Meanwhile, you locate a good big bunch of trouble so we can help you handle it."

"Yah, so. I vill see vat I can do. For all oof haluf an hour, now, dere has nod been anyding going on. Someding vill durn oop, I bed you."

Wild Bill dropped back into the coulee, and the baron rattled away to the farther end of the block and moved through the shadow of the adobe wall in the direction of the front of the shop.

The long sword continued to bother him. Half a dozen times it swung between his moving knees, and he barely saved himself a fall; then, the last time, he was thrown headlong, and landed on the plume of his helmet.

He felt like saying things, but restrained himself. Barely had he climbed to his feet when he saw a cloaked figure and a man in what seemed to be cowboy fixings rushing toward him. Drawing the sword with some difficulty, he placed his back to the wall.

"Keep off!" he threatened; "keep away from me, oder py shinks I cut you in doo!"

"Waugh!" muttered the man in the cloak, "how he does tune up! Snarlin' catermounts! Why, ye'd think he was a hired man instid of er pard."

"Put down that long sword, baron," said another voice; "you'll be getting yourself into hot water with it, next thing you know."

The baron dropped the long blade.

"Puffalo Pill!" he gasped. "Iss dot bossiple? Und olt Nomat! Afdere all vat I peen droo, here vas der pig-gest subbrise oof all. Shake, bards! I half peen doing someding. Ask me aboutit it."

"This hyar takes ther persimmon!" exclaimed old Nomat. "We never expected ter see you hyar, baron."

"Dit you oxbect to see me got oop like some Spaniards?" queried the Dutchman, with a smothered laugh.

"We expected that, pard," answered the scout. "You see, we have met the deputy that borrowed your Mexican clothes. This meeting is a lucky thing. You are in time to help us locate Wild Bill and Cayuse. They have——"

"Shtop a leedle," put in the baron, swelling up as much as his steel coat would allow, "I vish to rebort, Puffalo Pill, dot I haf foundt der bards und made some resgues. Vild Pill und Cayuse vas as safe as anypody. Me, Paron von Schnitzenhauser, iss der vone vat dit it."

He slapped his steel breastplate, and just then the "splinter" dug him in the ribs and doubled him up.

"All thet sounds too good ter be true," said old Nomad.

"Where were our pards, baron?" asked the scout, "and how did you work through the trick?"

"Fairst, blease," answered the baron, "unputton der iron coat so dot I can take him off. Dere iss someding insite vich cuts a hole in me efery time vat I take a long breat'."

He backed up to Nomad, and the latter freed him of that part of his armor.

"Ye kain't tell me nothin' erbout how the thing feels, baron," said the trapper consolingly; "I had the same kind of er outfit on fer a spell. Them things is cruelty ter animiles, an' no mistake."

The baron kicked the corselet out of the way.

"I vill tell you all aboutt dot shtar blay oof mine," he remarked. "Dis iss der vay how it habbened. Vile I vas——"

He was interrupted by a revolver shot. The sharp crack of the weapon came from the other side of the

mud wall. It was followed by a screech, as of a Chinaman in distress, and then by a scuffling of feet, a mumble of voices speaking hurriedly, and other sounds of turmoil and violence.

The scout gave a startled jump.

"The dealer in Mexican money, pards!" he cried. "Baker is making a raid on the chink! Here's our chance to lay the scoundrel by the heels!"

Buffalo Bill whirled away and rushed back to the front of the building. The baron followed him. Nomad, thinking swiftly, turned toward the rear of the structure.

With the scout and the baron blocking escape from the shop at the front, it was reasonable to suppose that some of the gang would attempt to escape at the rear. The old trapper, seeing this point, covered it without waiting for orders.

To the scout's surprise, the front door of the money dealer's shop was locked. Nomad, at nearly the same moment, discovered the same condition of affairs at the rear.

Lifting one of his heavy boots, the scout planted a kick beside the door latch. The door shook under the attack. The baron, hurling himself against the frail barrier, burst it inward.

At the same instant, old Nomad crashed in the rear door with a four-foot length of ironwood taken from Yuen Moy's woodpile.

The scout and the baron rushed into a small room, and found an old Chinaman lying on the floor. He was groaning, and had evidently been injured.

An iron door, set in the adobe wall, was swung outward, revealing the place where the Chinaman kept his

Mexican dollars. The vault was shallow, and one glance showed that it had been stripped of its wealth.

There was a short counter on the opposite side of the room, with an ink pot, a brush, and a pile of yellow paper. A nargileh pipe stood in a corner, on a low stand, and there were three or four chairs scattered about.

But there was no one else in the room besides the Chinaman.

Buffalo Bill ran to the Celestial and knelt down beside him. One of the man's yellow hands was pressed to his right shoulder, where a blot of red was seeping through his yellow blouse.

"Did some one steal your money?" asked the scout.

The Chinaman jabbered in his native tongue.

"Talk English—quick!" cried Buffalo Bill.

"Melican man takee money! Chinaman, greaser man, help takee. Melican man shootee Yuen Moy!"

"Where are the thieves?"

"No sabe."

"How did they get in here?"

Before Yuen Moy could answer, he fainted from the shock. It could not have been anything else that sent his Celestial wits wool-gathering, for the scout's keen eye told him the wound was not serious.

At that moment a man rushed into the shop from a room in the rear. He had a revolver in his right hand, and, with his left, was carrying a matting bag.

"Thar's one of 'em, pard!" whooped old Nomad, from behind the man. "I was watching the rear door, an' he tried ter git out thar! Grab him!"

The trapper's shout died in the vicious bark of a six-shooter. The bullet fanned the scout's cheek and plunked into the adobe wall.

With a furious yell, the baron leaped at the man, only to meet the flying bag which the fellow had launched at him. The matting sack was filled with silver pesos and made rather a formidable missile.

The baron, struck squarely, toppled to the floor beside the Chinaman.

"Keep away from me, er I'll wipe ye out!" roared the fugitive.

The next moment he had thrown himself over the counter. Buffalo Bill plunged after him, getting over the counter just in time to see a panel in the wall slide shut.

It was a concealed panel, and had the scout not seen it close, he would not have believed there was any opening in the wall.

With a kick he smashed the panel, and a black hole, three feet square, gaped in front of him.

Baker and his men, he reasoned, must have come into the money dealer's shop through the opening, and all had made their escape in the same way.

Without hesitating a moment, he climbed through the hole.

"Both doors was locked, Buffler," panted Nomad, following the scout, "an' ther tin horns must hev broke in on the ole chink this hyar way. Whar did thet ombray go?"

The two pards were in blank darkness, but from some place ahead of them they could hear muffled sounds of feet hurrying away.

"We're on the right track, Nick," the scout flung back. "Trail along, and we'll see where we land. It's Baker, all right, who's doing this."

"Shore et's ther Dozen! But et's a sneak game fer twelve men ter play on one lone chink."

Buffalo Bill, crossing a cleared stretch of floor, came abruptly to a solid wall. He fumbled in his pockets for a match and struck one.

There was a door in this partition. He was about to lay hold of the latch when the trapper stopped him with a yell.

"Look hyar, pard!"

The scout whirled around. Through the broken panel came a glow of light. Nomad, standing well within the yellow gleam, was pointing to a hole in the roof.

"That's the way they went," exclaimed the scout. "There's a ladder leading up to the trap."

He began climbing the ladder, and soon was head and shoulders above the roof. The starlight, which fell over the whole block of roofs, revealed none of the Dozen.

Stepping from the top of the ladder, Buffalo Bill walked to the rear edge of the roof. Here there was a second ladder. Dark forms were scurrying away toward a brushy coulee less than a hundred feet from the back doors of the long building.

"I've spotted them, Nick!" called the scout. "Their horses are over in that swale, and they're making for 'em full kelter. I reckon they'll dodge us—unless Bingham found the mounts."

"Foller 'em, anyways!" cried the trapper, jumping from the top of the ladder.

The urging was unnecessary. Buffalo Bill was already halfway down the second ladder.

He was six yards in the lead when Nomad touched solid ground, and the last of the gang was just vanishing duskily over the top of the coulee.

At any moment the scout, running at his best speed,

expected to hear a pounding of hoofs, announcing the escape of the gang. But no such sound reached his ears. Instead, there came the rattle of half a dozen revolver shots, fired at irregular intervals. To this ominous noise was suddenly added yells of an attacking force.

"It's Baker and his gang! They're looking for their mounts—and they'll never find them. Now's our chance, Bangham."

"Whoop!" cried the old trapper. "Did ye hyer thet, Buffer? Ef et wasn't Wild Bill a-torkin', then I never heerd him."

The scout did not reply—he needed his breath for something else. While Nomad was speaking, the scout dropped over the top of the coulee and was in the thick of the set-to.

CHAPTER X.

FOILING THE DOZEN.

There, among the bushes of the dark coulee, it was difficult to distinguish between friend and foe. The branches crashed, there was a sound of blows, an occasional shout of anger, and now and then the sound of a man running.

The scout, the moment he was in the brush, encountered some one who tried to lay hold of him. A word from the man proved him to be Bangham, and it came just in time to stop the scout's fist.

"Sheer off, Bangham," called the scout; "it's Buffalo Bill. Where are the raiders?"

"All around us," was the answer; "you can't move without——"

At that instant the sheriff came to close quarters with a foe, the suddenness of the encounter lending point to his words.

The scout ran on down the slope of the coulee, calling loudly for Wild Bill.

The Laramie man answered from a distance. In trying to reach him, Buffalo Bill ran into a hurrying form. No questions were asked, and the two men came to hand grips without delay.

Buffalo Bill's hand slid along his antagonist's right arm. Instinctively the scout knew there was a knife in the hand, and at the wrist he brought his fingers together in a viselike clutch.

A gasp of pain came from the man, and something dropped from his fingers. The scout released the wrist

and caught at the man's throat. His fingers came in contact with a knotted handkerchief—a white handkerchief, unless the deep shadows of the coulee were playing deceptively with the scout's eyes.

"Baker!" cried Buffalo Bill, twisting his fingers in the handkerchief.

"Who are you?" gritted Baker.

"The man who caught your wrist once before—in the Palace of Chance."

An oath fell from the convict's lips.

"You're responsible for this!" he hissed. "But for you, I'd have won out. You'll pay for it!"

Then, with all the skill and with every ounce of strength in his control, the convict tried to exact from the king of scouts a debt of vengeance.

Baker was not long in finding that he was in the hands of one who had mastered every detail of such a rough and tumble.

Struggling and fighting, the two fell into the bushes. There they rolled and twisted until the scout got his fingers fairly about his antagonist's throat.

By that time lanterns were bobbing up and down the coulee like so many fireflies. The Chinamen, angered at the attack made on Yuen Moy, had come with lights to the scene of the battle.

Little Cayuse, taking a lantern from one of the yellow men, went looking for Pa-e-has-ka. Wild Bill, having captured a thieving Chinaman, found himself with nothing more to do, and joined the Piute in his search.

"Pard Cody!" shouted the Laramie man, as he and Cayuse weaved their way through the bushes of the coulee.

The scout heard and answered. A moment later Wild Bill and the boy were at the scout's side.

"Who've you got there, pard?" asked Hickok.

"Baker," was the reply.

"Glory! He's the one we want, and I was afraid he had given us the slip."

"Take off his belt, Hickok," said the scout, "and let's get his hands lashed. He's quite a handful, and he don't seem to know when he's beaten."

While Cayuse held the lantern, the Laramie man bent down, unbuckled Baker's belt, and then, while the scout twisted the squirming form over on its side, the wrists were brought sharply backward and made secure.

The instant the scout got up, Baker also staggered to his feet. Wild Bill laid hold of him.

"It's your old friend, *amigo*," murmured Wild Bill grimly, "the old friend you helped so neatly at Garcia's house in the Mexican quarter. You ought to know I'd do anything for you, after that. But don't give me a chance to do too much."

The veiled significance of the words was not lost upon the convict.

At that juncture Bangham rushed up.

"Seen anything of Baker?" he asked, distinguishing the little group in the lantern's light.

"Here he is," answered the Laramie man. "Can't you see him, Bangham?"

"Fine!" exulted the sheriff. "I reckon this is worth all our trouble. See you later."

"Where are you going?" called the scout.

"Nomad and I are collecting loot," he answered. "The chinks have flocked down here from that row of 'doves, and are finding bags of dollars all through the chaparral. Nomad and I are holding them up as they come out of the swale."

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"I reckon they're mostly friends of Yuen Moy's, and that they'd turn the stuff over to him."

"That's what I reckon, but you never can tell what a chink'll do."

Bangham hurried off.

"What were you doing in this coulee, Hickok?" queried the scout.

"Cayuse and I found the gang's horses hidden away here," answered Hickok, keeping one arm through Baker's, and touching him now and then with the muzzle of a six-shooter, "and we started to take them to the Ranch Eight corral. Bangham stopped us before we'd got out of the quarter. When he found out who we were and what we had, he got Bly and Sproul from somewhere in Geronimo Street, and the live stock was turned over to them. Bangham, Cayuse, and yours truly came back here. We reached the coulee just as the trouble was turned on in that corner 'dobe, so we were nicely fixed to give the gang a warm welcome. But the brush and the darkness rather worked against us. Baker and one chink are all we managed to capture. The rest, unless later returns change the result, have faded away. They didn't take the loot, though. The tinhorns couldn't bother with that when their necks were in danger. They dropped their bags and took to their heels."

"That straightens the matter out, to some extent, Pard Hickok," said the scout; "but how did the baron get you away from Baker and his men?"

Hickok explained, going back far enough in his talk to acknowledge his costly error at Garcia's adobe.

"I reckon, by gorry," he finished, "that I've sawed off even for that. If it hadn't been for Cayuse and me, Baker and his men would have found their horses and made good with their clean-up."

"You and Cayuse certainly rang the bell," declared the scout. "There's nothing left to worry you about this night's doings."

Buffalo Bill, leaving the Piute and the Laramie man to take care of Baker, climbed out of the coulee and made his way back to Yuen Moy's Mexican-dollar emporium.

The Chinaman was lying on a cot in the back room of his house, and a slant-eyed doctor was tying a dried frog over his bandaged wound.

The baron was leaning over a wash basin, in one corner, bathing a bruised place over his right eye.

"How dit you come oudt mit yourseluf, Puffalo Pill?" asked the baron, drying his face on a handkerchief and turning upon the scout.

"Fairly well, baron," was the reply. "We've got Baker."

"Hoop-en-de-doo!" crowed the baron. "I vas so madt as I can't tell pecause I ditn't have somet'ing to do mit der scrimmage, aber I vas knocked oudt mit dot pag oof dollars. Vat a plow! Mein headt rings mit it more und more. I ditn't know nodding ondil a minid ago."

The scout stepped to the side of Yuen Moy's cot.

"How much money did the robbers take from you?" he inquired.

"So many bags," and the Celestial held up nine yellow fingers; "allee same fi' hunnerd dol' in each bag."

"That would have been quite a haul if they'd got away with it."

"They no ketchee money?" asked Yuen Moy, with deep interest.

"You'll get some of it back."

This was plainly more than the dealer in dollars had expected, and he drew a long breath of relief.

"My heap poor Chinaman," said he; "no likee lose so muchee dinero."

"Didn't you hear the robbers coming?"

He shook his head.

"They makee come ffrom othel side wall," he explained. "Sabe li'l do' in wall. My sabe; no thinkee any one else sabe."

"Who lives in the house next to this—the one through which the thieves came?"

"Him vacant long time."

"Then it's clear how you were taken at a disadvantage. The gang came over the roof, into the next house, and through the secret door. This ought to be a lesson to you, Yuen Moy, not to have anything to do with secret doors."

A Chinaman runs to rabbit-like burrows and concealed doors as naturally as a horse takes to his oats, and Yuen Moy merely shook his head without replying.

"How did you happen to have the door of your money vault open?" went on the scout.

"Countee money. Lobbers come in by tlap do' when me no see; makee shoot; Yuen Moy makee fall. Whoosh! Plenty bad."

Hearing footsteps approaching the door, the scout turned away, to see Nomad coming with a Chinese prisoner, Bangham with Baker, and Cayuse and Wild Bill toting matting bags of coin.

"We found six," reported Wild Bill, dropping his load of bags. "Maybe some of the chinks held out a few on us, and maybe some of the Dozen got clear with a few. How many were taken?"

"Nine," said the scout. "The six you bring, and the

one thrown at the baron and left here, make seven. That leaves only two to be accounted for. Yuen Moy is getting off pretty well, I think."

"Better than he deserves," declared Bangham, stepping to the door of the other room and taking a look at the Chinaman's vault. "He might as well keep his silver dollars in a dry-goods box as to lock 'em in there. Let's see, Nomad," he added, returning into the rear room, "if we can't get that Chinaman to tell us a few things."

"His name's Joe Wing," grinned Wild Bill, "and Cayuse and I have met him before. He ought to be able to give you some reliable information—if he only will."

Yuen Moy had twisted around on his cot and was looking at Joe Wing. Joe Wing averted his eyes, evidently troubled by the old Chinaman's stare.

"I reckon they savvies each other," observed old Nomad.

The Chinese doctor and Yuen Moy jabbered with each other for a moment. Joe Wing listened and shivered.

"What they say," spoke up Wild Bill, "don't seem to set well with Joe Wing. What do you think, Pard Cody?" and the Laramie man turned to the scout with a wide grin. "That's the man"—he nodded toward the yellow prisoner—"that the baron ran through a dozen times with his sword."

"I took it pack," cried the baron. "I tell you in der grafel pit dot I made some miscalculations aboutt dot. Vat for you mention sooch a t'ing, hey?"

"Joe Wing knows the baron pretty well, Pard Cody," went on the Laramie man; and then did the Dutchman full credit by describing the rescue in the gravel pit.

"That work of the baron's, pards," declared the scout,

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"is what prevented Baker and his men from using their horses and making good with their raid. Now let's see what we can get out of Joe Wing. Who is he, Yuen Moy?"

"Him workee fol me, one piecee time," replied the money dealer.

"Ah! Then he must have known about that sliding panel in the wall, eh?"

"All same. Him sabe. Mebbysso him tellee Melican lobber. Joe Wing plenty bad China boy."

"How about it, Joe?" asked the scout.

"My tellee Blaker," admitted Joe Wing, bending his head to avoid the eyes of Yuen Moy and Baker.

"When did Baker reach Phenix?"

"Las' ni'."

"And went directly to the house in Geronimo Street?"

"Him makee go there Fiesta Ni'."

"Where did he get all those horses?"

"Señor Chick gettee hlorsee. Señor Chick makee come with Blaker."

"Who got the gang together?"

"Señor Chick."

"Señor Chick is some punkins," put in Wild Bill.

"Cayuse and I know the gentleman. Too bad he slipped through the net. The penitentiary will have an appointment with him one of these days, all same Baker."

"Joe," pursued the scout, keeping to his line of questions, "why did Baker and his gang dress up in costumes and fool around Washington Street?"

"Wanchee makee laid on Palace gamble hall," said Joe Wing.

"That's news," muttered Bangham. "They must have been planning two raids. To raid the Palace of Chance would have been as reckless a job as a gang of ruffians

ever tried. Why didn't the gang carry out the scheme, Joe?"

"Blaker 'flaid Buff' Bill; 'flaid Melican girl makee too much chin."

"Miss Baker scared them out of that job, then," said the scout. "When you gave up thinking of the Palace of Chance as a place for a haul, Baker, you fell back on Yuen Moy, eh? Better small pickings than none at all?"

"You're talking with that two-faced yellow whelp of a chink," snarled Baker, "and not with me."

"You overplayed your hand in Geronimo Street, didn't you?" continued the scout, still addressing Baker. "You went right there with your gang and did your plotting. You forgot about the old Mexican woman. Then, when you left and put the Mexican in charge of the house, you made another misplay. The Mexican drank too much pulque, and old Manuelita took the key from his pocket and released the girl."

"That's the how of it, hey?" cried Baker savagely. "That greaser dog told me the officers came to the place, and that he had to make a run to get clear of them."

"From which," laughed the scout, "it seems that I'm giving you a little gratuitous information."

"I don't care a picayune how it seems to you! That yarn of the greaser's is what scared me away from the Palace. We could have turned that gambling joint inside out. I had men enough."

"You haven't pulled your wires very well, Baker," said the scout. "A great many things were in your favor, but, more than all, the fact that this was Fiesta Night counted for you. Escaped convict though you were, you could roam the streets of the town, and nobody suspected you."

"If it hadn't been for that girl, I'd be in the hills with all my Dozen men, about now, and more loot than we'd know what to do with. I reckon, even if I am down and out, the girl will be taken care of."

"She will," returned sharply, "she'll be taken care of by the scout and his pards. I reckon we're equal to the job."

"Waugh!" rumbled the old trapper. "Ef ter-night's work hesn't proved et, I don't reckon anythin' could."

"Don't overlook the important fact, Baker," spoke up Wild Bill, "that your gang is a mighty short dozen about now. No horses, no loot, no leader. Anyhow, you can't herd greasers and chinks together and get ahead any—even in your line."

"Allow me to return you this letter," said Bangham, handing Baker the note that had been slipped under the door of the house in Geronimo Street. "Perhaps," Bangham added, with a laugh, "you'd like to add a post-script to it?"

The paper dropped on the floor, and Baker set his heel on it with a muttered imprecation.

"This won't be the end!" he hissed, with a savage look at Buffalo Bill.

"The end—so far as you're concerned," averred the sheriff, with a snap of the jaws.

"What about the prisoner in Geronimo Street, Bangham?" asked the scout.

"Bly and Sproul landed him in the lockup some time ago," was the answer.

"I'm some interested in him," remarked old Nomad. "Ef he gits out o' yer ole skookum house, Bangham, send me a telegraft."

The trapper rubbed his head thoughtfully.

"I dit someding to helup keep der Tozen from gedding off mit der tollar pags," said the baron.

For some time he had been worried about what the scout had said concerning Bessie Carmelita Baker, and how she had been the one to cut the largest figure in events just past.

"Honors, baron," returned the scout, "are about evenly divided between you and Miss Baker."

The baron brightened.

"It vas goot to do somet'ing dot's vort' vile," he went on.

"We have stayed here long enough, pards," said the scout. "Suppose we set out for the hotel? Aren't you all satisfied that we've made a night of it?"

"I hat more adventures in dis vone night, py shinks," gloried the baron, "dan in any mont' vat efer I put in pefore."

"For which, I reckon," said Bangham, "that Sproul, and Bly, and I are somewhat responsible. But the first fellows I thought about, when I found that letter on my desk, were Buffalo Bill and pards."

"That started the cross fire," answered the scout. "Leave what's left of your fiesta clothes here, pards," he added, "and we'll try and get back to our hotel respectfully."

"I've got a pair of boots somewhere," remarked Wild Bill. "Have Bly get them for me, will you, Bangham?"

The sheriff agreed, and the party, with the two prisoners in tow, left the establishment of Yuen Moy, and made their way through the silent town to the jail.

Here Baker was left to await the coming of a prison official from Yuma, and Joe Wing to receive what punishment he merited, along with the Mexican, and Buf-

falo Bill, Wild Bill, Nomad, the baron, and Little Cayuse turned their weary feet in the direction of the hotel.

The first gray of dawn was silvering the east, and the pards crunched through rice at every step.

"There's only one real, genuine fiesta," remarked Wild Bill, "and that comes once a year, and happens right here."

"I bed you!" came enthusiastically from the baron. "Vat a habbiness oof it come vonce a veek!"

The baron's love for excitement was destined to be satisfied without waiting for another Fiesta.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ORDER OF THE TONG.

"Moy hanna! Moy hanna!"

An alley, cut through the darkest and most unsavory section of the Chinese quarter, echoed with the drone of these alien words.

"Moy hanna! Moy hanna!"

Somewhere, farther in the block, a Chinese theatre was in full blast and making the night hideous with bells and tom-toms. Through this subdued jangle of sound crawled serpent-like the drone of the gambling-house "barker" and lookout.

"Moy hanna! Moy hanna! Moy hanna!"

Thus was it announced to gambling Celestials that the game was open. Any slant-eyed brother who could pass the inspection of the lookout was privileged to pass through a door into a corridor, and through the corridor into a room where fan-tan, boockaboo, joe-far, pi-gow and other heathen games with heathen names were in full blast.

But the hip-boy, or lookout, served other places. In this same establishment, any one—white, brown or yellow—who could speak the yin-yin slang might "hit the pipe," and drive another opium nail in the coffin of his degeneracy. The hip-boy sorted the patrons. Some he sent to the games of chance, and some to that other game which leads swiftly and surely to the grave.

On this particular night, however, the hip-boy's duties were tripled. From "San Flisco" had come, earlier in the day, a bazaar man, a dealer in pearls and a writer of

epitaphs. These three, representing the Hip Sing Tong, were in solemn conclave in a secret room.

Witnesses were to come and be examined, and six chi-looks, from Rat Alley in the city by the Golden Gate, were to be admitted for the purpose of carrying out the sentence of the three in authority.

The hip-boy in the dark alley was to watch for the witnesses and the chi-looks, admit them and show them the door to the secret room.

As may be supposed, more gamblers came than "smokers" or witnesses. Yet the witnesses drifted along, were questioned by the lookout and spirited into the corridor and along it to the secret room.

After an hour during which the witnesses—laundrymen, curio dealers, sellers of powdered dragons' teeth and ginseng and restaurant keepers—came and went, there arrived the six chi-looks.

Now, a chi-look is a slave. The Six Companies having paid good money for a Chinaman's passage from Canton, own that Chinaman body and soul until he has settled his indebtedness. Thenceforth, until the obligation is canceled, the Chinaman is a chi-look, and waits upon the will of his imperial masters.

The chi-looks, having satisfied the hip-boy of their identity, were ushered into the narrow, evil-smelling hall and along it to a high panel. A knock in the Chinese way—with the tips of the fingers and not with the knuckles—caused the panel to slide ajar.

A smoky, dim-lit interior was revealed. The bazaar man, the dealer in pearls and the writer of epitaphs, sat unconcernedly in the haze, their yellow faces inscrutable.

The chi-looks passed through the panel, and the panel closed. The chi-looks, moving toward the three men

in the chairs, prostrated themselves and touched their yellow foreheads to the floor.

Then, as they lifted themselves to their knees, the tallest of the six spoke:

"Divine excellencies, sons of the sun, princes of the three coral buttons, we are here. What is the verdict?"

The bazaar man rolled himself another cigarette. Picking a candle off a low table near him, he touched the flame to the rice paper and tobacco and exhaled a little ring of smoke.

"Yuen Kai, thou Buddhist dog," said the bazaar man calmly, "we have found Yuen Moy, the dealer in Mexican dollars, guilty of revealing the secrets of the Tong. With this foreign devil, whose hair is long and unbraided, and whose head is unshaved, this man called by other white foreign devils, Buffalo Bill, Yuen Moy has conspired. Joe Wing, faithful follower of the tong, is imprisoned in the big stone yamen of the town. Joe Wing, with the help of the white Señor Chick, brought opium across the Mexican line for the San Francisco tong. Yuen Moy has told this to Buffalo Bill, and Joe Wing will now pass many years of servitude for this in the foreign devils' yamen for what Yuen Moy has done. The dealer in Mexican dollars must die."

The bazaar man could not have been more complacent had he been ordering a dish of sharks' fins in his favorite restaurant in the 'Frisco Chinatown.

The chi-looks again prostrated themselves.

"So be it, illustrious ones," said Yuen Kai, once more lifting himself to his knees.

The bazaar man nodded toward the dealer in pearls. The latter, drawing a golden cord from his sleeve, threw it toward Yuen Kai. It is not good for a Taoist to touch a Buddhist, and the three judges were all Taoists.

"Decide which of you shall be the one to perform the despatch," went on the bazaar man. "Let it be by lot. When it is finished, and you return to 'Frisco with the proof, you six will be free of your debt to the Six Companies. Leprosy rot you if you fail!"

The chi-looks arose and stood silently, Yuen Kai thoughtfully twisting the golden cord into compact coils around his fingers.

"The white men's yamen will open for you," continued the bazaar man, "if you bungle your work. Buffalo Bill is the friend of Yuen Moy. He has pledged himself to see that he is kept safe for his prattling. He is your chief danger, and more to be feared than all the other white men of the town. Look well that he does not cross your track. Unless you would fall on the Mountain of Naked Knives, be cautious."

"What, supernal one, is to become of Che Lao, daughter of Yuen Moy?"

"We have considered that," said the bazaar man gravely. "Che Lao will be spirited away to San Francisco. She is very beautiful, and the dealer in pearls will make her his wife."

The dealer in pearls was as ugly as one of his Taoist idols. He smiled and nodded.

"It is done," murmured Yuen Kai.

Again the six chi-looks salaamed and passed through the secret door into the corridor, and along the corridor into the alley. There they paused in a compact group.

"I will meet you at My Lee's restaurant in two hours," whispered Yuen Kai. "Then we will draw the lots. Wait for me there."

The five chi-looks faded away like so many evil wraiths. Yuen Kai, leaving the alley by the other end,

skirted the rear of the long adobe wall that formed the back of the block of stores and came to the corner.

Here he paused, peered around him carefully through the gloom, then stepped to a rear door and tapped with his finger ends. After a short delay the door was opened by a Chinese girl of sixteen or seventeen.

The girl stepped back quietly, and Yuen Kai entered the kitchen of the dollar dealer. Here, in a rocking-chair, sat Yuen Moy.

"Well?" queried the dealer in money.

"It is a bitter day, friend of my father," said Yuen Kai, "when I came from across the water with the help of the tongs. The high men of the Hip Sings have decided, and the order has been given."

"What is the order?"

The girl, leaning against the wall, pressed one hand fearfully to her heart. Already the white was beginning to show in her round, olive cheeks.

"The yellow cord!" answered Yuen Kai, with a black frown of discontent.

Yuen Moy sank limply back in his rocking-chair, and Che Lao stifled a scream.

"It shall not be my hand that sends the friend of my father to his ancestors," went on Yuen Kai. "When the lots are drawn I will see to that! I have warned you. This white man, Buffalo Bill, can he not help you? See to it. If help comes it must be to-night."

Yuen Kai, with a final look at the dealer in dollars and the girl, shuffled to the door, opened it, and let himself out into the night.

Che Lao approached her father, trembling. Yuen Moy's head was sunk on his breast. For several minutes he was bitterly reflecting.

"Buffalo Bill has pledged himself," said the money

dealer, suddenly lifting himself. "Now let him redeem that pledge in my hour of peril. Blossom of the Lotus," he went on gently to the girl, "bring hither my ink pot, my brush and a paper slip."

The girl, still shaking and her feet unsteady, brought the writing materials and a piece of board. With the board on his knees and the paper on the board. Yuen Moy took his brush, dipped it into the ink and painted hieroglyphics that told of his trouble and called for help.

"You know the place, Blossom of the Lotus," said he to his daughter, "where the brave American stays?"

The girl nodded.

"You will take this to him. I have no one else to send. Go swiftly and carefully. No one in the quarter must see you. It is my life, Jasmine Flower, that swings in the balance."

Che Lao put away the ink pot, the brush and the board. Then, with the message in her hand, she moved toward the door and followed Yuen Kai into the night.

"Moy hanna! Moy hanna!" came to her ears as she passed the foot of the alley, and a burst of tom-toms split through the words. The girl shivered and glided on.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CALL FOR HELP.

"You can't tell much about a chink, Buffalo Bill," declared Bangham, the sheriff, "unless you're a chink yourself. They have their own code, and they work it out without so much as a 'by your leave' from the legal authorities."

"I understand that, Bangham," said the scout. "This isn't the first time, by a long shot, that I've been mixed up with the yellow men. They do about as they please, and they're so sly about it that it's not often an officer of the law has a chance to interfere. But what are you getting at?"

The two were in the scout's room at the hotel. It was the sheriff's custom to drop in for a chat now and then, and the talk focused on events of the recent Fiesta Night.

"This is what I'm getting at," said the sheriff. "Baker has been returned to Yuma, and the Mexican and the chink are as good as sent up, now that Yuen Moy has given his testimony. Now——"

"All that is a thing of the past," laughed the king of scouts. "Suppose we forget it and give our attention to something else."

"I don't believe that Fiesta-night tangle is a thing of the past, Buffalo Bill. If I'm any prophet, other events will trail along in the wake of that Fiesta Night."

"You mean that Señor Chick is at large with a few of the gang, and that they will go ahead with their lawlessness just as when Baker was with them?"

"No. I'm concerned more about Yuen Moy than I am about this Chick person and the rest of the gang now at large. The dealer in Mexican dollars has furnished the information which will do the trick for the greaser and Joe Wing. Smuggling opium is the principal count in the indictment. The stuff was brought in by some of these underhand tongs in 'Frisco. They won't forget what Yuen Moy has done, those 'Frisco chinks."

"I don't suppose they will," agreed the scout.

"In order to get Yuen Moy to testify, you had to pledge yourself to look after his safety."

Buffalo Bill nodded.

"That was rather a large order you took on," proceeded Bangham.

"I had to take it on in order to get the testimony."

"Sure you did; but I'm in doubt whether you'll be able to live up to that pledge."

"I shouldn't have made it if I didn't think I could live up to it."

"Of course not. But how could you and your pards fight a few hundred hatchet boys?"

"We're not planning to fight a few hundred highbinders, Bangham. If the time comes when we have to protect Yuen Moy, we'll protect him without facing an army of yellow men sent by the Six Companies."

"Well, I reckon you can do it, but you've hit the tongs good and hard by getting that information from Yuen Moy. They'll not forget you, either."

"The tongs keep clear of the whites, Bangham. They'll not tangle up with the laws of this country by making a fight against me. They'll only come at me when they find it necessary to do so in order to get at Yuen Moy."

"That's where the rub will come. You——"

The door opened and old Nomad thrust in his head.

"Chink gal in ther office askin' fer Buff' Billee," grinned the trapper.

"I'll come down and——"

"She wants ter see ye alone, an' she's in er powerful rush."

Bangham started to get up.

"Stay here," said the scout. "I've a notion this has something to do with Yuen Moy."

"My idea, too," returned the sheriff, resuming his chair.

"Have her come up, Nick," said the scout.

A few minutes later the girl, on her deformed feet, tottered into the room.

Viewed by every Chinese standard, Che Lao was a beautiful girl. The Chinese standard, however, is far from being the American standard. Still, even to American eyes, Che Lao was at least interesting.

Her hair was black and bright, her face round, and her oblique eyes gleamed brilliantly.

There was little color in her face now, and she was breathing hard.

"Ah!" exclaimed the scout, getting up and pushing out a chair, "it is Yuen Moy's daughter. Sit down, Che Lao."

But Che Lao would not sit down. She was so excited she must needs keep her feet.

"Buff' Billee, my fadder wanchee help," she cried in a shrill, tremulous voice. Then, as her command of pidgin was limited, she broke out in a torrent of Chinese.

"That sounds exciting," commented Bangham, "but it's too many for me. Gee Yup, one of our chink helpers over at the office, could translate that all right if he was here."

"Talkee pidgin, Che Lao," requested the scout. "I know a little Mexican, some Chinook, and some Crow and Sioux, but not a word of Chinese."

"Help fadder pronto, pronto!" said the girl, crowding a yiece of yellow paper into the scout's hand; "no waitee morning—helpee now! Savvy?"

"Of course I'll help him, if he's in trouble," answered the scout. "But what's the matter?"

The girl began in Chinese to tell what was wanted; then pointed to the paper, turned and pattered out of the room.

"Not much to be learned from her," grinned Bangham.

"And not much from this," added the scout, holding up the note. "It's written with a brush, in Chinese. Who's this fellow you just mentioned who can read and talk the lingo?"

"Gee Yup," answered Bangham. "He's a thoroughly reliable chink, and does duty in the quarter. I'll go after him if you say so. He's generally at the office about now."

"Send Nomad," said the scout.

Stepping to the door he called his trapper pard. Nomad came at once, received his instructions and left.

"The Tongs are getting ready to play even with Yuen Moy, Buffalo Bill," averred Bangham. "He wouldn't send his daughter here after you unless there was something mighty important on the string."

In ten minutes Gee Yup entered the scout's room. He was an Americanized Celestial. His education had been secured in San Francisco missions, and he had parted with his queue and his baggy silk clothes and was dressed like an American.

"What you want?" he queried, standing before the sheriff.

"Want you to translate some chink pothooks for us, Yup," answered Bangham.

The scout measured the Celestial with his eyes. The sizing reassured him. A Chinaman without his queue is an object of derision and contempt for all other Chinamen who still keep their pigtails. Between Gee Yup and the others in the Chinese quarter there could be no collusion, no pulling together in the interests of the tongs.

Gee Yup took the yellow paper from the scout's hands and studied it for a few moments.

"Plain enough," said he. "I'll write it off."

The scout furnished a piece of paper and a lead pencil and Gee Yup, in a fair hand, translated the note into English.

"There you are," said he, pushing the translation toward the scout. "I thought Yuen Moy would get into trouble. He has—plenty of it. I wouldn't be in his sandals for all the cash in the Chinese empire."

"Read it aloud," urged the sheriff.

"'Illustrious and never-to-be-forgotten friend,'" read the scout, with a half smile breaking around his lips.

"They know how to pile it on," commented Bangham, "when they want a favor."

Gee Yup chuckled in his throat, nodded, and began rolling a cigarette. He knew his people—he had been raised among them.

"The Hip Sing Tong,'" the scout went on, "have sent their big high men to Phenix to consider my case. They have considered. Witnesses were examined. I am to have the golden cord before the next sun. Noble friend, in my misfortune, I would ask you to remember your pledge. Redeem it now, or I shall be gathered to

my ancestors and my daughter be left fatherless. It must be done soon."

"Yuen Moy's in a heap of trouble, sure," declared Gee Yup. "They'll kill him with the cord—strangle him. No one can help it."

"I'm going to help it," returned the scout. "I'm bound by a promise."

Gee Yup shrugged his shoulders. Clearly he doubted the scout's ability to prevent a deed the Hip Sing high boys had ordered.

"How'll you go about it, Buffalo Bill?" asked Bangham.

"The first move," said the scout, "is to get Yuen Moy moved to a place of safety—a place where the minions of the tong can't get at him."

"The jail is at your service. They'll not get at him there."

"But he has got to be looked after for a long time. He can't stay in the jail for the rest of his natural lifetime."

Gee Yup nodded.

"Some other tong must take him under protection," said he; "then the Hip Sings won't dare make a move against him."

"How'll we get another tong to protect him?"

Gee Yup shook his head. He didn't know.

The scout got up, took his revolver belt from the bed-post, and buckled it around his waist, under his coat.

"Now for Chinatown, eh?" queried Bangham.

"Yes," the scout nodded.

"Want Gee Yup to go along?"

"Not me," said Gee Yup promptly. "If I go to help Yuen Moy, I'll never dare go into the quarter again."

"I don't want anybody but Pard Nomad," observed

the scout. "We know the lay of the land and, I think, will have no difficulty in bringing Yuen Moy to the jail. It will be well to keep him there for a time until we decide what is best to do with him. I made a pledge to the money dealer, and it is going to be redeemed."

Followed by the sheriff and Gee Yup, Buffalo Bill stepped from the room.

Wild Bill Hickok and the baron had left the hotel for a little pasear directly after supper. Little Cayuse was also abroad. The scout and Nomad, therefore, were the only ones who could answer immediately Yuen Moy's call for help.

The sheriff and Gee Yup left Buffalo Bill and Nomad in the office.

"What's in ther wind, Buffler?" asked the old trapper.

The coming of the Chinese girl and the summoning of Gee Yup had convinced Nomad that something of importance was afoot.

"Got your guns, Nick?" whispered the scout.

The trapper opened his coat and showed his weapons.

"Then trail along with me," the scout went on, "and I'll explain while we walk. There's not much time to be lost."

Together the pards passed out of the hotel, crossed Washington Street by the courthouse plaza, gained a side street and headed toward Chinatown.

"We're p'inted fer Little Chiny," muttered old Nomad. "Somethin' onusual goin' on thar?"

"I'm going to redeem a pledge I gave to Yuen Moy," returned the scout.

"Waugh! Then the ole dollar dealer is in diffikilties bekase o' thet information he give about Joe Wing?"

"That's the idea, pard. One of the tongs, or societies, who were back of the opium smuggling business,

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have sent some big high boys here from 'Frisco to examine into Yuen Moy's doings. They have found him guilty and have sentenced him to the yellow cord. The execution is to take place some time to-night. Che Lao, Yuen Moy's daughter, brought the information."

"Hatchet boys!" snorted Nomad. "Them ombrays aim ter do erbout as they please on the Passyfic slope. We've met 'em before, Buffler! They never had no bulge on us t'other time, an' I ain't a-fearin' they've got any on us now. It'll take more'n a bunch o' yaller stranglers ter buffalo you an' me. Ever'body said as how Yuen Moy 'u'd git inter trouble by openin' up on ther gang like what he did; but ever'body said, too, thet he needn't ter worry, seein' as how Buffler Bill an' pards was behind him."

"I made a promise to Yuen Moy," said the scout, "and that promise has got to be kept. The hatchet boys know that I and my pards are mixed up with the dealer in dollars, so this move of theirs is a direct defiance to us. They don't seem to think that we can do anything to stop them."

"Consarn their pizen picters! We'll show 'em a thing er two, an' ye kin spread yore blankets an' go ter sleep on *thet!* Pusson'ly, I'm tickled more'n I kin tell thet they're feelin' so high an' mighty, an' darin' us ter do our best an' put ther kybosh on 'em; but we got ter make shore nothin' goes crossways with Yuen Moy. Thet slant-eyed ombray took a long chance, an' he took et jest bekase Buffler Bill agreed ter stand by him. Et 'u'd be a black eye fer the lot o' us ef er hatchet boy an' a yaller cord p'inted him erlong ther one-way trail."

"That's the thing we've got to prevent. We've got to make these lawless chinks understand that the white man's law is to be respected by them."

The course the scout took led him and Nomad through unfrequented ways to Geronimo Street, at the edge of the quarter, then through an alley to a point within a stone's throw of Yuen Moy's shop.

This establishment, as already stated, was at the end of a long adobe block. The pards, gaining the front, tapped on the door. There was no response to the summons, and they rapped again and again. No one came to let them in.

"Sufferin' catermounts!" muttered old Nomad. "Aire we too late, Buffler? Hev them yaller stranglers already got in their work?"

"They must have done it quickly, Nick, if the orders of the tong have already been carried out," Buffalo Bill answered.

"Thar ain't no light in ther place, an' no more noise erbout ther house than as ef et was er tomb."

"It is to be supposed that Yuen Moy, considering his perilous situation, wouldn't be showing a light or making much of a commotion."

"But he must be expectin' ye! He sent the gal, an' et seems ter me he'd be on the lookout ef he was eround an' able ter move er talk."

"We'll go around and try the rear door," said the scout.

Failure to get a response from inside the house had aroused unpleasant misgivings in the scout's mind. He wanted the lawless yellow men to understand that they couldn't do as they pleased when their work ran contrary to the laws of the land, and he wanted them to know just what the protection of Buffalo Bill and his pards amounted to in a practical way.

The rear door also was locked, and a summons there, loudly given, was equally futile.

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"Yuen Moy ain't feelin' as chipper as he mout, I reckon," ruminated the trapper, "on account o' that bullet he stopped on Fiesta Night, but ther gal could answer. Whar's she that she don't show herself an' let us in?"

The scout was trying the windows. They were securely fastened and, short of breaking the glass, there was no way of getting through them.

"There's a mystery here, old pard," said the scout, "that looks mighty ominous. Do you remember how we got out of Yuen Moy's place on Fiesta Night?"

"Shore! An' I remember how we got in. You busted through ther front door an' I busted through ther rear. Them doors hev been fixed, but I reckon we could do ther same trick ef ye thort best."

"No. You remember the sliding door in the wall of the shop? We got through that and into the place next door, which was vacant; then we climbed a ladder to a trap in the roof. If we could find a ladder somewhere, we could get up on the roof, go down through the trap and get into Yuen Moy' place in that way."

"Kerect! Let's hunt fer a ladder."

They looked around as well as they could, there in the rear of the adobe block, but were not able to find a ladder. They did discover some empty tea chests and packing cases, however, and they made a pile of these back of the unoccupied store.

The block was only one story in height, and a brief scramble over the heap of empty boxes got them on the roof. The trap was closed, but they wrenched it open.

The noise they made was drowned in the weird screeching and banging of the Chinese "orchestra" in the theatre. The show was still in full blast.

"No ladder down there, either," muttered the scout.

leaning over the hole and reaching a groping hand downward.

"Hyar et is, pard," answered Nomad, lifting a ladder that lay at the edge of the roof. "Some un else has come out o' thar sence we did, an' the feller pulled up ther ladder arter him."

"How did he bolt the trap on the inside?"

"Pass ther ante. I reckon he left somebody below ter shove ther bolt."

"And stand on the air while he did it! No, Nick, this is the ladder that we found on Fiesta Night, reaching from the edge of the roof to the ground. The other ladder is probably lying on the floor below. Anyhow, this one will help us to get where we want to go."

The ladder was being lowered through the opening while the scout talked. When it was firmly in place, Buffalo Bill descended into the darkness of the empty store. Nomad followed.

"Wait here, Nick," said the scout, striking a match. "Watch out for hatchet boys on the roof. I'll look for the broken panel and see what I can discover in Yuen Moy's place. Whistle if anything suspicious happens."

"I'll do et, Buffler."

Nomad looked around through the faint circle of light cast by the match. The storeroom was empty save for a pile of white bags, laid in tiers, against the wall separating the room from its neighbor on the north.

The scout hunted for the opening through which he and Nomad had come on the night of the carnival. He found it without much difficulty. The panel was still broken, just as he and the trapper had left it.

Crawling through he dropped into the apartments of the dealer in dollars. Silence and darkness hemmed him

in. The only sounds he heard came from the Chinese theatre in muffled tones.

He struck another match, eager to examine the premises and yet half dreading what his eyes might find. In front of him stood a short counter with ink pot, brush and a pad of yellow paper. As he stepped around the end of the counter he saw a tin lamp on a shelf. Taking down the lamp he lighted it.

The outer room, used by the money dealer for his business transactions, was all in order. The scout saw nothing to reassure him or to arouse his fears.

With his eyes sweeping keenly about him, he passed into the rear room, where the old Chinaman and his daughter had their living quarters.

Here, also, everything was in order. There was absolutely no sign of Yuen Moy or Che Lao. The money dealer's rocking-chair stood by a table, the cushions still bearing the impression of the old Chinaman's form. There were chopsticks and bowls neatly arranged in a cupboard, and a nargileh pipe stood on a low stool in one corner.

A matting curtain, swinging across another corner of the room, made a sort of closet. Buffalo Bill looked behind the curtain. There was nothing there but clothes.

Greatly perplexed, the scout put down the lamp and leaned against the wall to study the situation. Hardly had he begun turning the matter over in his mind, however, when a sharp whistle was borne to his ears.

That was Nomad. Something had happened in the empty storeroom!

Drawing a revolver, the scout hurried back into the front room and to the broken panel.

CHAPTER XIII.

SEÑOR CHICK.

The pasear of Wild Bill and the baron, strangely enough, had carried them down Washington Street and into the Chinese quarter. They were out hunting a little excitement, and the quarter given up to the slant-eyed yellow men seemed to offer better inducements than any other part of town.

The crash and bang from the Chinese theatre attracted their attention and they made for the block in which the building was located.

"Py shinks," declared the baron, recognizing the landmarks, "dis vas der blace, Vild Pill, vere ye hat some ructions on Fiesta Night, hey?"

"The same place, baron," said Hickok.

They stopped at the mouth of the alley, heard the "Moy hanna! Moy hanna!" of the hip-boy and watched dusky figures passing in and out by ones and twos.

"Iss dot der vay to der t'eatre?" queried the baron.

"Hardly," answered Wild Bill. "The chink who's doing that spieling is telling his heathen brothers that games of chance are now running inside."

"Led us go in und take a shance! Dot vouldt be a leedle fun, huh? I nefer blayed mit a Chinese game yet."

"I doubt if they'd let us in," said Hickok, "but we can try."

They tried. The lookout took their measure in the dim light that burned over the door.

"San-mone! San-mone!" said he.

Hickok took the baron's arm and drew him back out of the alley.

"Vat he say?" queried the baron.

"No go," replied Hickok. "That 'san-mone' yell put all the yellow gamblers inside on their guard. They don't want any foreign devils taking a hand in the games. We'll try the theatre. Our money's as good as a chink's at the box office."

The theatre was a storeroom improvised for the occasion. The stage was in the rear and the front part of the long room was filled with benches. There was a good-sized audience, and every man was smoking a cigarette. The place was hot and stuffy and the smoke was thick enough to strangle a white man. Then, too, the bang and shriek of the "orchestra" set a white man's nerves on edge. As for the acting—well, that was a queer name for what the baron was looking at.

The hero of the piece seemed to be a dragon that crawled around the stage and said things in a husky voice. All the actors wore masks. Whenever the dragon looked at one of the actors, the actor would throw away his mask, fall down and die. Then the dragon would swallow him.

"I reckon I've had all this I can stand, baron," coughed Wild Bill. "Let's get out in the clear air where we can breathe."

"Dot's me," said the baron promptly. "I vish dot der tragon vould swallow oop eferypody. Vat a funny pitzness! Und id was a blay! Vell, meppy, aber I don'd like sooch blays."

They crawled out into the street again. The baron said he was hungry, so they dropped in at a restaurant and ordered some chop suey.

The sides of the restaurant were partitioned off into

little rooms, or stalls. The front of the stalls were open, the partitions merely enclosing the sides.

From their stall, the Laramie man and the baron saw five gloomy-looking Chinamen come in. They were herded into a stall on the opposite side of the room. There they sat, silent, eating rice and drinking tea.

"Dot's a keveer looking gang, I bed you," observed the baron. "I would hate to ged mixed oop mit dot gang on a tark nightd mitoudt any gun handy. Py shim-ing grickets! Say, bard, a shink iss vorse as a 'Pache Inchun."

"I wouldn't trust a chink any farther than I would a 'Pache," declared Wild Bill; "and I've had dealings with 'em both. Now——"

The words died on Hickok's lips. Two more men had come into the restaurant and had headed toward the stall occupied by the five Chinamen.

"Shove back, baron!" hissed the Laramie man. "Get along the bench and as far into the shadow as you can. Here's something I wasn't expecting."

The baron, patterning after Wild Bill, shoved along the bench until he was close to the wall.

"Vat's der madder?" he queried excitedly.

"Look at those two who just came in and are drawing up chairs to join the five across the way."

The baron looked. One of the men was a Chinaman; the other was muffled in a Navajo blanket, but under the lower edge of the blanket could be seen cowhide boots and wicked-looking spurs.

"Vone iss a shink," returned the baron, "und der odder iss a vite feller."

"Si!" muttered Wild Bill, "and that white ombray, baron, unless I'm far wide of my trail, is Señor Chick!"

"Ach, du lieber!" fluttered the baron. "But how you

guess dot? I can only see his poots. Dey vas der same poots vat anybody vears, hey?"

"I got a look at the villain's face as he came into the restaurant," said the Laramie man, "and I'm sure I'm not mistaken. That's Chick. And what's he doing here with those six men?"

From the darkness of their stall the pards watched the group opposite. Chick and the Chinaman who had come with him had seated themselves with their backs to the middle of the room—and, consequently, to Wild Bill and the baron.

There was a little talk among the seven, in which the white man bore some part, but it was all in low and guarded tones. The clatter of dishes and the shuffle of waiters and the jabbering of others in the stalls would not have let the conversation of the seven drift very far if they had talked in their natural voices.

Holding something in his yellow hand, the Chinaman with Chick leaned towards the Celestial on his left. The man took something out of his closed hand, then the next man to him took something, and so on around the table.

"They're drawing lots," muttered Wild Bill. "There's some kind of a deal on."

"Shick don't draw some lods," put in the baron. "He ain't in der deal, I bed you."

"What'll we do with Chick, baron, queried the Laramie man. "He's wanted just as badly as Joe Wing, and would go over the road just as quick if he was taken and tried."

"Vy nod take him?"

"In this place, with six of his chink friends around and every yellow boy in the restaurant to help? It looks like too large an order."

At that moment a Chinaman entered the restaurant hurriedly, looked into the different stalls and then moved to the one occupied by Chick and the Chinaman. He leaned down and spoke quickly to the man with the white smuggler.

All of those at the table rose to their feet. Some news had been brought, it was evident, that was of vital importance. Following the messenger, the six Chinamen and the white men left the restaurant.

"That's our cue, baron," said Wild Bill. "We'll trail along and keep an eye on Señor Chick."

The bill was hastily settled and the pards passed from the restaurant to the sidewalk. The group that had just emerged from the place had separated; three were moving along the block toward the shop of the dealer in Mexican money, and the rest, with the tall form of Chick overtopping the others, were turning into the alley.

"Vich vay, Vild Pill?" asked the baron.

"Toward the alley, of course. Chick is the man we're after. We may get a chance to lay him by the heels and take him to the skookum house."

There were quite a number of Chinamen on the sidewalk, either moving about or gathered in groups and talking. The pards made their way through these chattering Celestials and turned into the alley.

Chick and his companions had not stopped at the door leading to the gambling rooms and opium-smoking den, but had pushed on toward the lower end of the alley.

When the pards reached the end of the narrow passage, they could look out and see four dusky forms vanishing in the direction of a bushy coulee that stretched like a line of black shadow parallel with the block of shops and dwellings.

"Dey vas going into dot olt swale, Vild Pill," muttered the baron. "For vy iss dot?"

"Crooked work afoot, pard," answered the Laramie man. "How could it be anything else if Chick is mixed up in it?"

"Vat's for us to do, eh? Ve could shkip indo her swale un take dot feller away from der shinks. I haf my guns along."

"And so have I. That move might be tolerable easy, baron, but why not wait and see what the fellows are up to? Then we could catch them red-handed."

"Schust as you say, bard. Ach, vat a bleasant oxcitement! I nefer t'ought ve would findt someding like dis."

They crouched down at the rear of the buildings and watched the stretch of ground between them and the rim of the coulee. They had not been long in hiding when they saw some one moving through the gloom near the edge of the dark swale. The person was making toward the lower end of the block of buildings.

As the form came closer, the keen-eyed Laramie man saw that it wore Chinese clothes; and, a little later, he hazarded the guess that it was a woman.

He had no more than announced this surmise to the baron when four specter-like forms arose out of the coulee and rushed at the Chinese girl. The latter gave a scream, and then was roughly seized.

"Now's our time, baron!" cried Wild Bill.

With a warlike whoop, the baron sprang to his feet and flung himself after Wild Bill, in the direction of the coulee.

Any one, at all acquainted with Villum von Schnitzenhauser, knows that, next to a good meal, he loved a nice little set-to more than anything else in the world. But the baron always wanted right and justice on his side.

To help a woman in distress—even a Chinese woman—was noble and chivalrous. Urged on by these beautiful sentiments the baron was determined to star himself. He counted on doing something fine, and in his most magnificent manner. He failed signally, miserably.

Afterward, the baron was a little hazy as to just how it happened.

He was short and fat, consequently he couldn't keep up with the pace set by Wild Bill. The Laramie man's long legs carried him far into the lead. The baron, while he was still at a considerable distance, had a vague glimpse of Wild Bill engaging the men from the coulee and striking out right and left.

Then—did the baron trip, or was he pushed?

He couldn't tell. All he knew was that he plunged forward headfirst and measured his length on the ground.

This confused him a little; and he was more confused when he tried to get up and found some one holding him down. He made a frantic attempt to yell and to fight with his hands and feet. Relentless fingers went round his throat and the cry on his lips became a mere gurgle; at the same instant, his fists and ankles were gripped and drawn together.

A pause followed, during which the baron sighted three Chinamen working over him. A brief view was all he had, for a sack was pulled over his head and secured with smothering tightness. He felt a tight compression at his wrists and ankles.

Presently the forms arose from him, leaving him mute and helpless. He fought with the ropes and again tried to cry out. The cloth sack, however, stifled the yell even more effectively than the Chinese fingers had done.

The baron lay gasping like a stranded fish. He could hardly breathe. The blood drummed in his ears and he

was conscious of the fact that his wits were scattering. Where was Wild Bill? Had he suffered the same fate?"

While the baron was marshaling his wandering senses and trying to guess what had become of the Laramie man, he was gathered roughly off the ground and borne away at a trot.

He was in too much discomfort to give any attention to himself; and, as his discomfort increased, he failed to give attention to anything.

He was almost unconscious when he was roughly dropped on a hard floor and the cloth was torn from his face. Although the air he gasped into his lungs, when the sack was removed, was vitiated and overloaded with tobacco smoke and other odors, yet it rapidly revived him.

First, lying on his back and looking upward, he saw a shadowy roof, lighted by a red roof lantern. He turned his head a little and saw a squatting thing of ebony with a face that made him shiver.

Was he asleep and having a terrible nightmare?

The squatting ebony thing had jasper eyes that seemed to be focused on him. They shone ruddily, like living eyes, in the red glow of the lantern; and yet, unless the baron was still out of his wits, he knew that what he saw was a heathen idol.

While he stared up into the jasper eyes as though fascinated, he heard a jabbering on the other side of him. Rolling his head in that direction he saw four Chinamen—the three who had captured him and another who seemed to have authority and was dressed in silk clothes, richly embroidered.

The gorgeously clad Chinaman, seeing that the baron had recovered his senses, stepped toward him and looked speculatively into his face.

"Whasa mallah you?" he asked.

"Vat's der madder mit me?" repeated the baron, in a rage. "Vy, you dinhorn rat eaders, dere vasn't a t'ing der madder mit me, aber you fellers vill get hail Golumpy for vat you haf dit, yah, I bed you! Vy you catch dot shink girl, huh? Vy you make some brisoners oof me? Und vere iss my bard, Vild Pill? Say, ve peen der bards oof Puffalo Pill, und ven he hears aboutd dis, den I tell you somet'ing: He vill be so madt dot he vill durn Chinatown oopsite down. Vere iss Vild Pill?"

"You Buff' Bill's pard, huh?"

"Am I dot? Vell, you can bed someding for noddng dot I vas. Schust led me go rightd away or you will haf more drouples as you know."

The baron's eyes wandered to a bench that projected a little from behind a yellow screen. He could only see the end of the bench, but a pair of sandaled feet were on the flat top. A rope bound the feet together.

The baron, then, was not the only prisoner in that joss house. There was a Chinaman on the bench behind the screen—a Chinaman as securely lashed as was the baron.

What the baron had said set the gorgeous Chinaman to thinking. He turned to the other three and jabbered rapidly. The other three nodded humbly.

The baron could not tell whether the three with the richly clothed Chinaman had formed part of the party he and Wild Bill had seen in the restaurant, or not. All Chinamen looked alike to the baron.

After easing his mind of what was preying on it, the gaudily clad Celestial once more turned to the baron.

"Where Buff' Bill?" he demanded.

"Vell, I don'd know, aber I t'ink he vas ad der hodel," answered the baron. "Ven I don'd come pack, und ven

Vild Pill don'd come pack eider, den Puffalo Pill vill pegin to ged vorried. He vill shtart oudt und look; und, py shinks, he nefer takes a drail mitoudt running to der end oof id. Ach, oof you don't led me go, I vouldn't shtandt in your shoes for all der money vat iss in Shina-town."

"Buff' Bill him savvy Yuen Moy?" asked the Chinaman.

"Yuen Moy iss der feller vat sells Mexican tollers, eh? Yah, you bed you he knows dot feller! Vy you ask dot?"

"Che Lao, Yuen Moy's girl, go see Buff' Bill allee same hour ago?"

"How you t'ink I know someding like dot?" returned the baron, thinking hard. "Say, vonce, vas dot Yuen Moy's girl vat vas coming along py der svale ven some fellers run oudt und grapped ad her?"

"You makee plenty guess, no guessee right. My no tellee what you wanchee know."

"Iss dot so?" growled the baron. "You vant me to gif all der information, und you don'd gif nodding. Vell, I always did hate shinks like raddlesnakes. But you vill ged vat iss coming, I tell you dot. You are mixed oop mit Señor Shick, und he iss a pad-feller. Der bolice vant Señor Shick."

The Chinaman's yellow face hardened.

"How you ketchee one piecee pidgin 'bout Señor Chick?" he demanded.

"Ask me dot," taunted the baron. "You don'd tell vat you know, und neider do I. Ven you say someding, den I say someding, too."

The Chinaman stared hard at the baron; then, spinning around on his heel, he jabbered a little, walked to a door and vanished in a haze of smoky darkness.

The three Celestials walked to the prisoner, and one of them knelt down beside him with a twisted cloth. This was forced between the baron's jaws. Another of the three then produced a long canvas bag and the baron was put into it and the bag tied at the top.

Here was a go, and no mistake!

The baron had heard of the sack trick. A prisoner was put into the bag and then tossed into a river.

He was glad to think there was no river near the town that could be used. Salt River was close at hand, but Salt River, like other Arizona streams, was just then flowing under the surface of its channel—its bed was dry in the vicinity of the town.

This sack, being roomier than the one that had been drawn over the baron's head by the coulee, did not trouble his breathing so much. But his direful apprehensions were giving him sufficient trouble without any further discomforts on that score.

He was again lifted and carried. Swaying and doubled up he was borne—as he judged—across the joss house and then into a corridor. He knocked against walls on each side, and this seemed to prove that he was in a narrow hallway.

Presently a stairway was climbed. It was a long stairway and creaked under the feet of the Chinaman.

Next there was movement along a level and the baron gratefully found his head on a horizontal plane with his feet.

A door was opened and closed. After that there was a confused manœuvring, then another climb—this time, if the baron could judge by the roughness of the ascent, up a ladder. Then there was a short walk across a level stretch and a descent down another ladder.

A moment after the bottom of the second ladder was

reached, the baron was laid on a shelf—or, at least, so it seemed to him—and the shuffling sandals of the Chinamen could be heard retreating and fading into silence.

Where was he? the baron asked himself. Why had he been left where he was? Were the Chinamen waiting until a more favorable time for coming back and giving him his ticket across the divide?

A thousand years passed, as the baron reckoned the time, and then he heard more footsteps. They seemed to be walking overhead. Then somebody could be heard doing something, not a great way from where he was lying. He heard voices—the voices of Buffalo Bill and Old Nomad—and his heart gave a great bound of joy.

He gurgled and wheezed and tried to talk. Finding this impossible, he began to roll around and finally dropped off the shelf, landing with a thump on the floor.

Bound as he was, movement was difficult; nevertheless, he managed to struggle to his knees.

Buffalo Bill and Nomad ought to see him, he reasoned, even if they couldn't hear the sputtering behind the gag. In trying to get to his feet he fell over and rolled, finally being caught in a strong grasp while a hand jerked at the mouth of the sack.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CLUE.

When Buffalo Bill reached the broken panel behind the counter in the money dealer's shop, he saw Old Nomad looking through with a bewildered face:

"What's the trouble?" demanded the scout.

"Waugh!" was the answer; "blamed ef I knows what et is, Buffler. Come in hyar an' see fer yerself."

"Had I better bring the lamp?"

"Et won't do no harm, pard. I been usin' matches, but matchlight ain't strong enough ter settle this difficulty."

The scout, satisfied that there was nothing of a peculiarly menacing nature in the other room, went back for the lamp and climbed through the opening to the trapper's side.

"Look thar at thet pesky bag," said Nomad, pointing toward the tier of bags against the wall. "I examined one o' them bags, while I was waitin' fer ye, an' they're full o' dried prunes. But I never seen a bag o' dried prunes ack like thet thar bag is doin'. Obsarve et, Buffler."

Buffalo Bill observed it.

The bag to which Nomad had called his particular attention was on the floor at the side of the pile. It was crumpled to a right angle, at a third of its length, and was swaying weirdly back and forth.

A laugh escaped the scout.

"Why, old pard," said he, "there's a man in that bag."

By the same token it's Yuen Moy, the missing Chinaman, and from the way the bag moves Moy is very much alive. This is a lot better than I hoped for."

The bag fell forward and began to roll over the floor. The scout gave the lamp to Nomad, stepped forward and caught the rolling bag and untied the string at its top.

"All right, Yuen Moy," said he, cheerily. "You're with friends, now, and your troubles are about over."

Catching the bag by the bottom, he gave it a jerk that pulled it off the form inside. Then he gave a gasp of astonishment, and the old trapper staggered back and nearly dropped the lamp.

The baron, badly crumpled, lay before them.

"Thunder an' kerry one!" breathed Nomad. "Ef er ain't our Dutch pard, Buffler, I'm more kinds of er Piegan than I know how ter tell."

"The baron!" muttered the scout, recovering from his astonishment and working at the Dutchman's bonds.

The moment the baron was free, he sat up and jerked the twisted cloth from his teeth, gulped down a breath of air and gave a chirp of delight.

"Vat a fine bard it iss!" he cried. "Puffalo Pill iss der pest feller vat efer hit der pike, yah, so! How dit you efer do dot, hey?"

"Do what, baron?" asked the scout.

"Vy, findt oudt dot der shinks hat me und come und ged me loose like dis. It vas a fine pitzness, I bed you."

"Ye're shy a few chips, baron," put in Nomad. "We never knowed ther chinks had ye, an' we hadn't a notion, when we come hyar, thet you was within er mile o' ther place. Why, pard, we thort ye was Yuen Moy, right up to ther minit we got our eyes on ye."

The baron was puzzled.

"Vat iss der madder mit Yuen Moy?" he asked; "und for vy vas you here?"

Buffalo Bill told him. When he spoke of Che Lao coming to the hotel with the hurry-up call from her father, the baron slapped his hands.

"Dot's vy der feller shpoke to me aboutt der girl in der choss house!" he exclaimed.

"Where's Wild Bill?" inquired the scout.

"I vish dot I knew, aber I don'd. Ve vent to safe a shink laty from gedding gaptured py Señor Shick und some China fellers, und all I know aboutt dot iss dot I vas gaptured meinseluf."

"What sort of rhinecaboo is this hyar, anyways?" queried Old Nomad, flashing a perturbed look at the scout.

"We won't do any guessing until the baron tells us all that happened to him—where he met Señor Chick and why a Chinaman questioned him about Che Lao. Fire away, baron, and cut 'cross lots with your talk. We're in a hurry."

The baron always talked around the point, more or less, but the scout, by shrewd questioning, managed to keep him to the main issue. When the conference was finished, so far as the baron was concerned, the scout and the trapper were in possession of every important detail.

"This," mused the scout, leaning thoughtfully against the wall, "tangles up our work."

"Et does, shore," returned Nomad, picking up the riata with which the baron had been tied and beginning to coil it neatly and slowly in his hand. "I'm clean ker-flummuxed, an' don't know what ter think."

"Let's take the Chick end of the story first," said the scout. "Evidently he has been hanging around Phenix

ever since Fiesta Night. He has joined himself with the hatchet boys. The messenger who came to Chick and the Chinamen, in the restaurant, told them that Che Lao had been to the hotel to see me, and that Che Lao was coming back to her father's house. The messenger was a spy. Armed with the information he brought, Chick and the three Chinamen hid in the coulee and captured, or tried to capture, the girl as she came along on her way home from the hotel."

"Ef we knowed what Pard Hickok was er doin'," put in Nomad, "we could tell whether Chick had won out er got ther wust o' ther bargain. I'll gamble thet no three chinks and a white tinhorn like Chick could git the best o' Wild Bill."

"Let's hope," went on the scout, "that Wild Bill succeeded in rescuing the girl. The plans of these big high boys of the tong, who came here from 'Frisco, must have included the girl as well as her father. The girl succeeded in getting her message to me; on her return, she was waylaid—and captured, if Wild Bill was not successful. That's as far as we can follow that end of the yarn. The baron, while he was in the joss house, saw the feet of a bound Chinaman projecting from behind a screen. That man, I feel sure, was Yuen Moy."

"Kerect, Buffler. Ef we wants ter do somethin' fer Yuen Moy, we got ter find ther joss house. How we goin' der do thet? Ye kain't tell us which way ter go ter git thar, kin ye, baron?"

"I don'd know noddin' aboutt dot," answered the baron. "I couldn't see noddin' ven I vas dook py der blace, nor ven I vas dook away from it. Vere it iss I don'd know no more as you."

"Listen," said the scout.

All three inclined their heads. What they heard was the muffled jangle of discords from the Chinese theatre.

"You hear that noise, baron?" went on the scout.

"Yah, you bed you!" answered the baron. "Dot's der vorst moosic vat I efer heardt anyveres."

"Do you remember whether or not you heard it while you were in the joss house?"

The baron scratched his head. He had a faint recollection that he had heard it, but it must have been very faint or his memory would have been clearer.

"For vy you ask dot, Puffalo Pill?" he queried.

"Well, baron," replied the scout, "if you heard the music of that Chinese theatre in the joss house, then it's pretty certain the joss house is somewhere in this block of 'dobies."

The baron brightened, and Old Nomad let out an excited gurgle.

"Thet's what et means ter do headwork," said the trapper. "I'd never hev thort o' thet in a thousand y'ars. But, pard, why did them thar chinks bring ther baron hyar an' leave him on thet pile o' dried prunes?"

"I suppose they wanted to leave him here until they had time to attend to him further," was the answer. "We dropped in at just the right time to save our pard further consequences. But let's get back to our figuring on that joss house. You had a general idea of how you were being carried, baron, didn't you?"

"Vell," said the baron, vaguely, "it vas pooty cheneral."

"Where were you taken first?"

"Agrost der choss house und droo a door into a hall-vay—dot's vat I t'ink."

"And where then?"

"Oop some shdairs."

"Ah, now we're getting at it. Was it a long flight of stairs, baron?"

"Pooty blamed long, I tell you dot. My headt vas down und my feet vas oop, und I vas panged aroundt like anyding."

"You were taken out of the joss house and into a hall, then up a long flight of stairs. After that——"

"Meppys I vas dook oudt toors, den aroundt und aroundt, den oop a latter, den town a latter, den laid away on der shelf—only it vasn't a shelf, aber a pile oof dried brunes in pags. Dot's all vat I know ondil I hear you und Nomat saying dings."

"That's an underground joss house," declared the scout. "This chink quarter is full of all sorts of burrows, and traps, and pitfalls. If there was a Chinaman, in all the quarter, that we could trust, we might be able to get him to show us the way to this joss house. But, even if we could find such a man, the chances are that the move wouldn't work. The Chinamen wouldn't let us enter the joss house; and, if we forced our way into it, Yuen Moy wouldn't be there when we arrived. If we could get to the place secretly, without letting any of the Chinamen know, we might be able to do something. That, however, seems impossible. The outlook seems mighty dark for Yuen Moy!"

"We got ter do something fer him," said Old Nomad. "Ye made a promise, Buffler, an' we kaint none o' us go back on et. We——"

The old trapper's words were lost in a crash of glass. Some one had thrown a missile, struck the lamp and plunged the room in darkness. Some one—but who?

As the pards whirled around to meet this unforeseen contingency, a shuffling of sandals was heard from all sides, coming in on them rapidly.

"Hatchet boys!" cried the scout. "'Ware the chinks, pards!"

The next moment he was using his fists right and left.

Where these attacking Chinamen had come from so suddenly, Buffalo Bill had not the least idea. There was no time for solving the mystery of their appearance just then, however. They were there, and it was enough that they were hostile.

There followed a sharp give-and-take, the hard knuckles of the pards dealing blows that brought grunts and squeals. Hatchet boys are partial to cold steel, yet, for some reason, none was used.

How many there were of them it was impossible to compute. There seemed enough, in all conscience, for the six fists recoiled from one mark only to reach out for another and another.

At last, something like panic set in. At a cry from some one who was evidently the leader, the yellow men scuttled away. Two or three could be seen climbing the ladder to the roof—the square opening showing their hustling forms against the stars.

"Up ther ladder, baron!" roared Old Nomad. "We got 'em on the run!"

"Gif 'em fits!" puffed the baron. "Dey haf blayed hop mit me, und I bed you I do der same mit dem! Hoop-a-la!"

As the second of the two Chinamen disappeared through the opening, the old trapper rolled out after him—and the baron rolled out after the trapper.

The scout, suddenly left in ominous and deserted silence where, but a few moments before, all had been noise and confusion, was about to strike a light and

investigate the manner in which the Chinamen had arrived and by which all but two of them had retreated.

"Buff' Bill!" called a voice while the scout's fingers groped for a match.

It was a Chinaman's voice, certainly. But why that friendly tone? The scout was instantly suspicious.

"Well?" he asked, facing the direction from which the voice came.

"My allee same fien Yuen Moy," went on the voice; "allee same chi-look fien. My gottee one piece pidgin my tellee you, Buff' Bill."

Buffalo Bill was still suspicious. His thoughts ran, that this Chinaman, seeing that he and the other hatchet boys had not been able to make a capture by force, was trying craft and treachery. Still, while keeping an eye to his own safety, he could play the Celestial out and, perhaps, discover something of importance.

"Were you one of the men who just roughed things up with me and my pards?" demanded the scout.

"My no makee chin-chin thisee place. China boy come back, makee see. Plaps you come allee same Yuen Kai?" My take you place we makee chin-chin."

"Your name's Yuen Kai, is it?"

"Allee same."

"You're planning to get me into a trap."

"No makee tlap."

The voice, at least, was earnest and sincere. For all that, however, the scout was taking no chances.

The Chinaman had drawn quite close to Buffalo Bill. Suddenly the scout struck the match he was holding in his right hand. At the same time he drew one of his revolvers with his left hand, ready for any sudden move the Chinaman might make when the light flared up.

Yuen Kai, no more than three feet from the scout, stood passively under the scout's keenly appraising eyes.

"You flaid Yuen Kai makee touble, huh?" said the Chinaman. "Ketchee hold pigtail, holdee gun to Yuen Kai's head; him makee touble, shootee. Yuen Moy gettee yellow cord plenty soon now. You wanchee keepee plomise? Makee pidgin chop-chop."

The yellow face of the Chinaman was full of sincerity and earnestness; but, then, a Chinaman is past master of the art of simulating truth and frankness. Still, if the scout held the end of Yuen Kai's queue and kept the man constantly under the revolver's point, there would be no treachery if the Chinaman valued his life.

The match flickered out between the scout's fingers. Should he go with Yuen Kai before Nomad and the baron got back from their pursuit of the hatchet boys? There was no sound to indicate that they were returning. Anyhow, if they reached the empty storeroom before the scout did they would probably think the scout was in pursuit of the Celestials himself.

"Give me the end of your queue, Yuen Kai," said the scout. "If you're talking with a double tongue, and if you try any underhand work, don't forget that you'll be the first man to suffer for it."

"My allee same flen Yuen Moy; allee same gottee kind thought fo' Buff' Bill."

The end of the queue was tucked into the scout's hand.

"Makee go by Yuen Moy's place," went on the Chinaman, and climbed through the broken panel in the wall.

With the end of the queue in one hand and a revolver in the other the scout had, perforce, to keep very near his conductor.

Yuen Kai passed through the front room of the money dealer and into the kitchen. With a certainty of move-

ment born of familiarity, he led the way to the curtain that swung across a corner of the kitchen.

'Clothes hidee do',' murmured Yuen Kai. "Makee come, Buff' Bill."

There was a rustle of garments as the clothes hanging against the wall were pushed aside, then the sound of an opening door, and a cold rush of air struck the scout in the face.

"Wachee fine," cautioned Yuen Kai; "no makee dlop down step."

The scout placed his feet firmly on the steps of a stair and descended a short flight into the underground regions of that part of Chinatown.

Half a dozen steps from the foot of the stair Yuen Kai turned sharply to the left and closed the door.

"Now we aw ri," said he, with a long breath of relief. "Lightee candle, Buff' Bill. We makee one piece chin-chin, then you savvy."

Still hanging to the queue, the scout put up his revolver and lighted another match.

He found himself in a small underground room. The walls were hung with tinsel garments and hideous masks. On a small table, near the door, stood a half-burned candle in a tin candlestick.

He leaned over to touch the match to the candlewick, then dropped the queue and placed his back against the closed door.

"Now let's get to the bottom of this," said he curtly.

"Big high boys say Yuen Moy die by yellow cord," remarked Yuen Kai. "My allee same fien, no wanchee Yuen Moy to die by yellow cord. You makee plomise you stand by Yuen Moy. Plenty soon Yuen Moy makee go top side, then how you stand by him?"

"Why are you such a friend of Yuen Moy?"

"Him fadder helpee my fadder in China, so me helpee Yuen Moy in Melica countlee."

"Do you live here in Phenix?"

"My livee 'Fisco; my come to Phenix allee same othel chi-look men makee do what big high boys say."

"Ah! Then you're a friend of Yuen Moy, and you've been told to put him out of the way?"

"Chi-look men makee dlaw lot. Sing Wan gettee long stlaw. Him givee Yuen Moy yellow cord."

"You drew these lots in the Chinese restaurant?" asked the scout, his mind recurring to the baron's story.

"Allee same."

"Why was the white man with you?"

"Him Señor Chick. Flen big high boys. Him come with Yuen Kai to lestaulant place."

"When you left the restaurant, three of you went towards Yuen Moy's house, and three more, with Chick, went through the alley into the coulee and then tried to capture Che Lao."

"My go with Señor Chick. He no ketchee Che Lao. Melican man makee tlouble."

"Then," said the scout eagerly, "the 'Melican man rescued the girl?"

"Allee same."

"Where did he go with her?"

"My no savvy. My ketchee othel Melican man."

This "othel Melican man," the scout felt sure, had been the baron.

"Where did you take this other 'Melican man, Yuen Kai?" the scout asked.

"Allee same temple. Big high boy come, makee talk. Him say givee Melican man yellow cord allee same Yuen Moy. My tellee chi-look men, when big high boy go, we takee Melican man to empty sto', leavee

him till bymby. We takee. Buff' Bill come, gettee Melican man flom bag. Hatchet boys heap mad. Gettee plenty mo' China boys, tly ketchee Buff' Bill in sto'."

"Where did those fellows come from when they made that rush at me and my pards?"

"Flom othel loom, thloo do' in wall. You no savvy do'—nobody savvy one piecee do' but China boy. He savvy."

"Where is Señor Chick now?"

"No savvy. Him makee chase Melican man and Che Lao."

This story of the Chinaman's ran straight enough. The scout, after having heard the baron's account, was able to prove Yuen Kai's recital.

"What place is this?" Buffalo Bill inquired, looking around.

"China boys' show place," was the answer. "Stage actor keepee clothes in thisee loom."

"Who is this man who drew the long straw and is to use the yellow cord on Yuen Moy?"

"Sing Wan."

"Yuen Moy is in the joss house?"

"Allee same."

"When is Sing Wan going to use the cord?"

Yuen Kai stepped to the wall and lifted some of the trailing tinsel garments. A box, fully six feet and a half long was revealed. On the sides, at each end, long handles were fastened.

"When long box go to temple," said Yuen Kai, "then Sing Wan go 'long."

"What's the box for?"

Yuen Kai lifted a piece of canvas that covered it. The scout saw nine canvas bags—bags that had a familiar look to him.

"Bags gottee Mexican money," explained Yuen Kai. "Mexican money b'long allee same Yuen Moy. Temple pliest takee money, lettee Sing Wan usee yellow cord in temple."

"Then it's got to be a cash deal, eh?" commented the scout drily. "The priest won't allow the execution to take place in the temple until he has the money in hand?"

"Temple god no lettee," said the Chinaman gravely. "When pliest gettee cash, Sing Wan makee use long box fo' bling Yuen Moy out. Savvy?"

The scout "savvied" the whole heathen game. With the tong, it was a case of revenge—revenge on a countryman who had helped the white officers of the law convict a smuggler of opium; with the priest of the temple, it was a commercial transaction, selling the temple for an execution chamber, and making the superstitious Chinaman believe that it was the idol's will.

"Buff' Bill," said Yuen Kai, "you plenty brave man. We takee out money bags, you gettee in box, lettee chli-looks cally to temple. Then you savee Yuen Moy. Savvy?"

The scout, as this idea drifted through his brain, drew a quick breath. It was a daring idea, but so daring that he wanted to consider it further.

CHAPTER XV.

LONG CHANCES.

"You say," pondered the scout, "that the chi-looks are coming here after this long box; that we're to take the money bags out of the box and I'm to get inside; then that the chi-looks are to carry me into the temple so I can save Yuen Moy. Is that your notion?"

"Plenty fine," chuckled Yuen Kai, his eyes glowing.

"What's to prevent the chi-looks taking a glance at me either here, or on the way to the temple, or in the temple?"

"My go 'long with chi-looks. My no lettee chi-looks see what's in long box. Good pidgin!"

"With me inside the box will be so heavy the chi-looks will suspect something."

Yuen Kai shook his head vigorously.

"Money bags heap heavy," he declared; "allee same heavy as Buff' Bill. Chi-looks no savvy."

"After we reach the temple, then what?"

"All makee leave temple. Leavee box, leavee Yuen Moy on bench, leavee Buff' Bill in box. Savvy? Buff' Bill makee hide behind idol; makee wait fo' Sing Wan. Then savee Yuen Moy."

"There are a few flaws in your reasoning, Yuen Kai," said the scout.

"No flaws," insisted Yuen Kai; "heap easy."

"If it's so easy, why don't you pull off the trick yourself?"

"Chi-look boys watchee Yuen Kai."

"Suppose I get into the temple, take care of Sing

Wan and then take the ropes off Yuen Moy: How are Yuen Moy and I to get out again?"

"Puttee Sing Wan behind idol; puttee Yuen Moy in box. Chi-looks bymby takee box away. You savvy? Then my helpee Yuen Moy."

"What will you do with him?"

"Takee some place where chi-look boys no ketchee."

"That means you'll take him to the big stone yamen of the white men, Yuan Kai. I've arranged for the big high man at the yamen to take care of Yuen Moy."

"Plenty fine!" exulted Yuen Kai. "You makee pidgin?"

"The way we've figured it out," pursued the scout, "if everything works according to programme, then Yuen Moy makes his escape and I'm hung up in the joss house. How'll I get out?"

Yuen Kai's face fell, at that. Here, plainly, was a point he had not covered in his plans.

"Well," said the scout, "maybe we can manage that. You know my pards—the two who were in that empty room with me?"

"My savvy."

"As soon as Yuen Moy is out of the temple, and safe, go to that empty room, find my pards, and bring them to the temple. I reckon the three of us won't have any trouble getting away from the place."

"Mebbyso no can do," answered Yuen Kai, with a troubled look.

"Will you try?"

"My makee tly, but suppose no can do?"

"Then it will be up to me to get out in some other way. I'm putting a lot more confidence in you than I ever put in any other Chinaman, Yuen Kai. What you tell me has the true ring. I know I could go and

get a force of officers and raid this temple, but, while we were doing that, Yuen Moy would be spirited away. I can see, plainly enough, that the trick will have to be worked as you propose, and that it's a one-man job, and that the one man is me. I pledged my word with Yuen Moy that he should not suffer if he told me what he knew about Joe Wing and the smugglers, and I'm going to take long chances to make good that pledge. But you'll have to help. If you fail to do all you can, then you'll run up a score that my pards will make you settle."

"My hones' China boy," declared Yuen Kai, throwing back the canvas that covered the top of the long box and beginning to remove the bags.

Buffalo Bill helped in the work.

As soon as a bag was taken from the box it was carried to the opposite side of the room and hidden under the bottom of the trailing garments that swung from the wall.

"Who took Yuen Moy from this house?" inquired the scout, as they worked.

"Thlee chi-looks who come ffrom lestaurant," answered Yuen Kai.

"How did they get into the house when the doors were locked?"

"All same way we come out."

"Then they bound Yuen Moy and toted him to the temple?"

Yuen Kai nodded.

"Who watched the girl and came to the restaurant and told you and Señor Chick about her?"

"One chi-look. Chi-looks no findee girl in house; one chi-look go makee hunt."

As the last bag was kicked out of sight under the bot-

toms of the hanging garments, shuffling footsteps were heard in the passage outside.

"Chi-looks come!" whispered Yuen Kai; "makee hurry, Buff' Bill!"

The scout stretched himself out in the box. Yuen Kai had brought with him from the storeroom the riata which had been used in tying the baron, and which Old Nomad had neatly coiled. He dropped the rope into the box beside the scout.

"Usee lope on Sing Wan," he whispered.

Then he pulled the canvas cover over the box. Another moment and the door opened.

In spite of the scout's confidence in Yuen Kai, there was still a chance that the wily Celestial was playing a treacherous game. A very few minutes would settle that point. While the scout, scarcely breathing under the canvas cover of the box, waited for proof of Yuen Kai's fidelity or treachery, he clung grimly to his revolver.

If the chi-looks had laid a trap, then they would pay dearly for it.

There was some talk between Yuen Kai and the Chinamen who had just arrived. Nothing went contrary to Yuen Kai's program, as he had arranged it.

Presently the talk ceased, the box was lifted and the yellow men staggered away with it.

So far, thought the scout, so good. With Yuen Kai to see that nothing went wrong, the long box was being carried through underground labyrinths to the joss house.

While the scout swung along on the shoulders of the chi-looks, he had time to think of another phase of the matter. It was one that should have occurred to him before.

The temple priest wanted Yuen Moy's money in hand before Sing Wan would be allowed to use the yellow cord on the victim. What if he insisted on examining the box to make sure that the bags were in it as soon as the chi-looks had placed the box in the temple?

It was natural to suppose that the priest would do this. If he did, then the scout would be discovered before he had a chance to do anything for Yuen Moy.

The present dangerous venture had many angles. It was hardly to be wondered at that the scout should neglect to consider one of them.

Well, he was in for it now. If the priest got too meddling, there remained always a resort to weapons. The scout, in taking his long chances, would hope for the best.

Step by step Buffalo Bill was rocked along on the shoulders of the chi-looks. More steps were descended, several turns made, and now and then a door was opened.

"Little China," underground, seemed quite an extensive place.

At last, however, the end of the journey was reached. The box was set down. Here there was more talk. The scout was able to distinguish Yuen Kai's voice from the rest, and the voice was angry and imperious.

Sandals shuffled on the temple floor, the voices died away, and the scout carefully pushed the canvas cover aside and looked out.

The joss house was lighted by a red fire burning in an urn in front of an idol. It was the idol of the jasper eyes, squatting close to the wall—the one the baron had become acquainted with.

With that lurid glow as the only light, the joss house was a "spooky" place

Over near another wall stood a bench. There was no screen in front of the bench now, and the scout had a good view of Yuen Moy, stretched at full length and awaiting the vengeance of the tong.

Quickly and quietly the scout stepped from the box. Lifting it, he carried it to the wall, back of the idol, and leaned it there. After that, with the coiled riata hanging over his arm, he crouched behind the idol and waited.

Buffalo Bill's apprehensions all clustered about the priest of the temple. What part was he to play in the proceedings?

The scout had feared the priest would be in the temple to examine the bags of silver as soon as the box was placed on the floor. Fortunately for the scout, he had not been there. But it could not be long until he presented himself. Such a scheming Celestial, who would rent out a joss house for a performance with the yellow cord, would not long delay the examination of his ill-gotten gains.

For the scout to have released Yuen Moy at once would not have helped. Sing Wan, the executioner, must come to the temple, and the other chi-looks must be under the impression that he had done his work. Yuen Moy, the condemned man, would have to be carried from the temple in the covered long box, supposedly slain.

Once in the box, with the chi-looks under the impression that he had paid the penalty, Yuen Moy would be safe from investigation. Only the society known as the Ang Horn Corps may look after the dead. No Chinaman outside that society would dare look upon or touch a lifeless body.

How Yuen Kai was to deal with the Ang Horn Corps was a secret he had not divulged to the scout. Yuen

Kai seemed like a thoroughly capable man, however, and the scout felt that he was qualified to deal with the situation after Yuen Moy had been removed from the temple.

While Buffalo Bill's mind was circling around these phases of the situation, a Chinaman came briskly into the joss house. He was careful to close the door after him. There were no priestly robes upon his person, and he was carrying a yellow cord in his hand.

This was not the priest, but the executioner!

The scout experienced a deep feeling of relief. He would have the murderous chi-look to deal with first; after that, he could give his attention to the greedy priest. All this would make for success in the rescue of Yuen Moy.

The chi-look's first move was to prostrate himself before the idol. He wanted the heathen god to understand that he was merely obeying orders and was not using the yellow cord for the pleasure it gave him; also, no doubt, he was anxious for the god's forbearance. Such a profanation of the temple was not the chi-look's design: *that* was planned by the big high boys of the tong, all Taoists.

After bumping his yellow forehead on the hard floor the chi-look arose and approached the bench.

The executioner and his intended victim offered a spectacle, there in the ghastly red glow from the urn, that Buffalo Bill was not likely soon to forget.

Not a sound came from the lips of Yuen Moy. He yielded passively and silently while his head was raised by the chi-look and the loop of the cord pushed under it.

Undoubtedly the dealer in money had seen the scout step from the box and was counting upon a rescue. This may have had something to do with his air of fortitude.

Rising softly, Buffalo Bill stepped without noise from

behind the idol. With his left hand he was holding the coils of the riata, and with his right he was shaking out the noose.

The chi-look began taking up the slack in the cord. The loop tightened about Yuen Moy's throat, and the chi-look increased the pressure by degrees.

The noose described two circles in the air over the scout's head, then it was thrown and settled upon the shoulders of the Chinaman.

"That's a game two can play at!" tried Buffalo Bill, laying back on the riata.

The astonished chi-look attempted to cry out, but the tightened coil strangled the cry in his throat. His claw-like hands relaxed and the yellow cord dropped.

By hurling himself backward, Buffalo Bill jerked the man from his feet. He fell heavily, striking the back of his head on the stonelike floor with a thump that echoed grewsomely through the temple. Pulling in his arms and legs with a convulsive motion he flung them out spasmodically and lay still.

The scout hurried forward. Yuen Moy, hands bound at his back, was sitting up on the bench.

"Chi-look go top side, Buff' Bill?" he inquired calmly.

"No," answered the scout, after a brief examination, "but he got a crack on the head that he won't forget for a while."

"How you makee do now?"

"I'll have to tie the fellow and put him out of sight behind the idol."

"My gottee heap better way. Takee off lopes, my show how we can do."

The scout removed Yuen Moy's cords. As soon as he had placed his feet on the floor and stood up, he silently clasped the scout's hand.

He had been bound for some time and his old limbs had suffered from the pressure of the cords. Staggering to the idol's side, he pointed to something the scout had not seen before.

This was a rope, passing through a pulley attached to the wall on a level with the top of the idol's head. One end of the rope was made fast to a ring in the idol's neck, and the other end dangled free against the wall.

"Pullee lope!" whispered Yuen Moy; "makee end fast to cleat."

There was not much time to debate the plan Yuen Moy had in mind. He was a Buddhist, had often come to the temple, and it was to be supposed that he was familiar with the place.

The scout pulled the rope. The back of the idol was hinged and tilted backward. Yuen Moy, with his trembling hands, caught the front of the idol and pulled it over and downward.

A seat was revealed in the hollow idol—a seat carved out cunningly to receive body, legs and arms of a person who could sit inside the idol. Such a person, when the hinged parts of the idol were in place, would be powerless to move, but he would be able to breathe through air holes cunningly contrived in the idol's breast.

The scout was astounded.

"Pliest gettee inside, makee idol talk," explained Moy. "Mebbyso we tie cloth ovel chi-look's mouth, makee sit in idol, huh?"

"I'd hate to be in that chi-look's place," said the scout, grimly. "Yes, we'll put the fellow there. We'll have to. We're both in a hard place, Yuen Moy, but my place is likely to be a little harder than yours."

"Makee pidgin chop-chop, Buff' Bill," urged the money dealer.

The yellow cord was twisted between the chi-look's jaws, then the scout lifted the limp form and placed it in the carved seat. The arms and legs of the Chinaman lay where they were placed and, as he was reclining backward a little, his head did not fall forward.

By unwinding the rope in the rear from the cleat, the head, shoulders and back part of the idol closed naturally down. The front part was then lifted into position and the baffled chi-look was securely closed in his novel prison.

Yuen Moy heaved a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"Him tly makee me go top side," said he, "and Buff Bill fool him heap fine. Now, how we go flom temple?"

The scout carried the long box to the centre of the room and explained that Yuen Moy was to play 'possum and let the chi-looks carry him out. After that, Yuen Kai would take him in hand.

The old Chinaman chuckled and rubbed his hands. He had his own full amount of Oriental craft, and the proceedings pleased him. But suddenly his face fell.

"How you makee 'scape?" he inquired anxiously.

"I'll work that somehow," answered the scout, indefinitely. "You're the one who's bothering me, Yuen Moy. I told you I'd keep you from any trouble that might come on account of your testimony against Joe Wing, and it looks as though I was going to keep my word."

"My no likee leavee you," protested Yuen Moy.

"Don't be in a taking about me. I'm Melican, and the tong will think good and hard before it lays hands on a white man. Get into your box. Some one may be along here before we're ready for them."

Yuen Moy got into the box, stretched himself out and closed his eyes.

"My leddy," he announced.

Carefully the scout pulled the canvas cover over him.

"Do you know the bargain the big high boys of the tong made with the temple priest?" asked the scout, his voice low and his lips close to the canvas.

"My no savvy," came the muffled response.

"The priest was to receive your nine bags of Mexican dollars for letting the chi-looks use the temple in wiping you off the slate."

"My savvy that. My likee die in temple. My givee money to pliest."

Here was another surprise to the scout. Yuen Moy himself had traded his wealth for the privilege of suffering the yellow cord in the temple of his gods!

"Well," went on the scout grimly, "won't the priest be here after his money?"

"Him bad pidgin fo' pliest to come to temple while chi-looks around. Him no come till chi-looks cally me off. Then him come, gettee money."

The scout, it appeared from this, had had the most of his worry about the priest for nothing. The priest might interfere with the scout's own attempt to escape, but he would not present himself in time to meddle with Yuen Moy and the chi-looks.

Before the scout could talk further, the sound of approaching footsteps was heard.

"Hist!" he whispered, "they're coming, Yuen Moy."

With that he started up and glided out of sight behind the idol. Five chi-looks showed themselves, Yuen Kai at their head.

The scout, peering cautiously from the gloom at the base of the idol, saw Yuen Kai sweep an anxious glance around and then lead the way to the box.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BOLD MOVE.

Four of the chi-looks were looking around, evidently for Sing Wan. Failing to see him, they jabbered across the box at Yuen Kai.

The latter, from his tone and manner, was seeking to reassure them. The scout was well up in "sign" language and he gathered that Yuen Kai was explaining that Sing Wan, having accomplished his work, had fled from the scene without waiting for the rest of the chi-looks to appear.

Satisfied on this point, one of the chi-looks took a glance around and went through the motions of dropping money into his open palm. He was wondering what had become of the bags of Mexican dollars.

Once more Yuen Kai dropped into his plausible tone and manner. By words and signs he seemed to be telling the other chi-looks that the priest must have come for the bags and have taken them away.

Nothing more remained, and the four chi-looks lifted the box to their shoulders and bore it away. Yuen Kai trailed behind them, casting a look in the direction of the idol. Buffalo Bill pushed out a little farther and waved his hand. Behind his own back Yuen Kai fluttered a gesture—of reassurance or warning—the scout could not tell which.

The door leading into the narrow passage closed, and Buffalo Bill was alone in that underground hole in Chinatown, alone with treacherous yellow men swarming above—perhaps below—and on all sides of him, alone

with the gagged chi-look in the hollow idol, alone and to work out his own salvation as best he could.

With the removal of Yuen Moy from the temple a weight of responsibility had fallen from the scout. His word to him was sacred. He had redeemed the pledge made to Yuen Moy, and to accomplish that was willingly facing the difficulties that now hemmed him in. But he faced them with a light heart and his usual dauntless courage.

But one door seemed to be used by those entering and leaving the temple. This was the door through which the baron had been brought into and removed from the temple, the door used in the comings and goings of the chi-looks, and by which Buffalo Bill had been borne into the place.

That door led into the narrow corridor, and to the long flight of stairs that led upward to the surface. It was to be presumed that the corridor had many rooms opening upon it, and that there were Chinamen in these rooms. Certainly there would be many yellow men around the top of the stairs.

To attempt escape by the corridor apparently offered more difficulties than the scout cared to face. He resolved to look for some other avenue of escape and to try the corridor only as a last resort.

With this object in mind he began a tour of the temple. He found nothing that even looked like a door, save the one giving upon the corridor.

At intervals around the walls oblong screens of soiled white silk were set. These screens gave a paneled effect to the room and were embroidered with storks, little twisted trees and blazing suns.

In a far corner of the room there was a table loaded with incense sticks and willow baskets with short strips

of paper of different colors. Each short strip had Chinese hieroglyphics traced upon it—prayers, to be burned by the devotees on paying a certain amount of cash to the priest.

The scout saw nothing else, for the room was remarkably bare of furnishings.

While he stood at the table, trying to decide what he should do, he saw one of the screens open inward.

Ah, there was the door, the usual secret door! At least one of the panels offered a mode of ingress and egress to the Chinamen who were engaged about the temple.

The table was in a shadowy corner of the room. Sinking to his knees the scout backed under the table. From this point of vantage he watched sharply.

A figure in a flowing robe, embroidered with tinsel, had come through the panel. The figure was capped by a helmet-like hat grotesquely ornamented with peacock feathers.

Here was the priest—at last. The chi-looks, with their supposedly slain victim had left, and the priest was coming for his bags of Mexican silver.

"There'll be doings when he fails to find the bags," thought the scout. "If that tinhorn gets away from here, and spreads an alarm, he may make things warm for Yuen Kai and Yuen Moy. I'll have to keep the fellow here if I can. I wish there were two hollow idols. The priest would look mighty fine to me if he was in one of those wooden statues, the same as the chi-look."

The priest fluttered to the front of the idol and swept his eyes over the floor. Muttering something, he passed to the bench.

Here lay the cords with which Yuen Moy had been

bound. They offered mute evidence of the work with the yellow cord and the removal of the body.

But it was something else the priest wanted besides that sort of evidence.

Still sweeping the floor with his eyes he moved along the length of the shadowy room, each step bringing him nearer and nearer the scout. With his eyes lowered as they were, the Chinaman would not be long in discovering the intruder.

Buffalo Bill pushed farther back under the table, hugging the corner.

The rustle of the priest's robe whispered of danger and discovery, but the scout watched and listened with steady nerves, ready at any moment to do his best for his own safety.

Foot by foot the slow pace of the priest brought him to the table. He paused there to look at the objects on the table-top.

The scout moved forward to clutch the priest's knees and overthrow him. Before he could carry out the manoeuvre, the priest dropped on all-fours and peered under the table, hoping no doubt that the money bags had been concealed there.

For a moment the scout and the Chinaman were staring into each other's eyes, their faces no more than a foot apart.

The priest seemed thunderstruck. His surprise held him mute and motionless for a moment—a moment that spelled opportunity for the scout.

Quick as two darting serpents, the scout's hands jumped outward, seizing the priest by the throat.

The priest proved a powerful man and, with the scout clinging to him like a leech, staggered to his feet, scratching and clawing like a trapped wildcat.

The nails of the Chinaman's fingers were nearly an inch in length, and filed to sharp points; hence they were weapons not to be despised.

Buffalo Bill's cheek was raked, and he felt the warm blood follow the priest's claws. Exerting every ounce of his strength, the scout floored his man, bringing him to the floor with a jar that tipped one of the baskets from the table and deluged white man and yellow with a choice assortment of heathen prayers.

The priest's peacock helmet fell off, and his gaudy robe opened and dropped away down its entire length. Like the chi-look, the priest drew in his hands and arms convulsively, and then flung them out and lay limp and still.

"Great guns!" muttered the scout. "All these chinks seem to have thin skulls. But this is a fortunate thing for me. Why not put on his helmet hat and his robe and make a dash for freedom through that secret panel? By Jupiter, that's just the ticket!"

Roughly he rolled the priest out of his robe and ran his own arms into the sleeves; then he picked up the hat and pushed it on his head, ready for the bold move he had planned.

But he must work quickly. If possible, he should be clear of the underground burrows and of the adobe building overhead before the priest regained his wits.

In front of the idol he stopped.

Why should he try the unknown regions beyond the screen when the corridor lay open to him? He knew almost as little about the corridor as about the rooms and passages beyond the screen; but he *did* know that the corridor communicated with the upper world, and the screen might lead him into a cul de sac.

The scout turned to start toward the door and the

corridor. Then the shifting kaleidoscope of his fortunes shifted again, and he was forced to throw himself into the unknown at the other side of the embroidered panel.

The priest pattered across the temple floor at a run. He had kicked off his straw sandals and was hustling for the corridor in his bare feet.

He had feigned unconsciousness—playing 'possum for the purpose of evading capture and effecting escape.

This flashed through the scout's brain like lightning, and he sprang after the Chinaman.

But the priest was too fleet, and had too good a lead. Yelling like a demon, he flung through the door and into the corridor.

His howls resounded in the underground passages and rooms with thunderous reverberations. The scout heard the cries taken up by other voices, some far and some distant, in the regions beyond the open door.

"Here's a pot of trouble," muttered the scout, "and it's boiling some. I'll *have* to try the screen—there's nothing else for it."

Jumping for the other wall he caught the screen and tried to open it, but it resisted his efforts.

"Maybe it's the wrong one," he thought.

He hurried to the next, and was likewise baffled. Then he paused to give a little cool attention and locate the proper screen.

No, the first panel had been the one through which the priest had entered. Of that he was positive. But why hadn't it opened?

Angry yells and a shuffle of swiftly approaching feet came along the corridor. A mob of yellow men was returning with the priest and clamoring for vengeance.

As a last resort the scout could put his back to the

wall and use his guns; but, first, he would make another attempt on the screen.

He could not budge it. Striking it with his fist to ascertain whether it was thin enough to be broken, he was surprised when his clenched hand tore its way through the rotten silk into space on the other side.

The next moment he had flung himself bodily against the embroidered storks and ran on into darkness, leaving a flapping rent behind, and a howling crew of yellow men just dashing into the temple.

The passage into which the scout darted was like the level of a mine. It was filled with musty, noxious vapors, but the floor was flat and smooth. He had only to keep going and avoid running into the walls.

Behind him he heard the hubbub of his pursuers; ahead of him—well, he knew nothing of what lay ahead of him. He must race on through the gloom and trust to luck. Unless that was a blind passage, he must surely come to a stairway soon.

Suddenly a door opened a few yards in advance and a glow of light flooded the passage. The scout paused, waiting to see what form this new peril was to take.

A Chinaman, barelegged, barefooted and nude to the waist stepped through the door. He carried a bowl of opium "dope" in one hand and a lamp in the other. The scout's swiftly falling feet had aroused his curiosity.

The scout took a rapid survey of the corridor. He saw a door opposite that through which the Chinaman had come, and another door farther along. Close to the second door was the stairway, which he so much desired to find.

Bending his head so that the Chinaman could not see his face, Buffalo Bill ran on.

The Chinaman stared. Thinking it was the priest hurrying toward him, he called something in his native tongue.

Just when he had almost reached the Chinaman the scout's lowered head caused the peacock hat to fall off. The Chinaman gave a yell and hurled the bowl.

The throw, made on the spur of the moment, sent the missile wide, and it crashed to fragments against the wall.

The scout's fist shot out, straight from the shoulder, and the Chinaman dropped the lamp and crumpled to his knees. The light was extinguished, and the corridor was once more in darkness.

The pursuers, however, had made good use of the delay which the scout had caused. They were carrying lights, and a look over his shoulder showed the candles moving rapidly forward, well down the passage.

Without halting to give further attention to the Chinaman, the scout started on. But the Chinaman had caught the skirts of the robe, and was hanging to the garment like grim death.

The scout was brought up short and almost thrown from his feet. The quickest way out of the difficulty was to get out of the robe, so he allowed it to slip from his arms, leaving it and his compliments with the Chinaman.

Now for the stairs.

There was a veritable bedlam in the passage. The yellow pursuers knew that they were drawing close, and the scout imagined that they were making an increased uproar to attract the attention of others who might be able to head off the fugitive.

In this the scout was right.

When he reached the foot of the stairs, a glare ap-

peared at the top. The sudden illumination enabled Buffalo Bill to see a crowd of yellow men pushing into view at the upper landing. They pushed and crushed each other in their eagerness to reach the scene and discover the cause of the wild hubbub.

One thing was sure, and that was that the scout could not climb those stairs. The narrow flight was already choked with flapping blouses and pig-tailed heads.

Where now?

In front and behind his enemies were massed. The light on the stairs was stationary, but the lights in the rear were moving swiftly. The two jaws of the trap were coming together.

Was the situation hopeless, or was there still a chance for the king of scouts?

The Chinamen on the stairs had taken in the situation. Excited jabbering, flung at them by those from the temple, had helped them to get at the gist of the matter. Filling the narrow stairway they established a blockade.

Something flashed from the press as a yellow hand and arm were lifted over the shaven heads. A hatchet sailed downward at the scout and plumped into the floor of the corridor.

"They're hatchet boys, all right!" muttered the scout.

He whirled to the left and tried the latch of the door he knew to be there. The door yielded to him in his extremity, and he jumped through and slammed the barrier shut.

He groped for a bolt. Was there one? It was a useless supposition. Bolts were necessary to these doors in the yellow man's underworld—bolts and bars and everything else that would guard against attack from white devils.

The scout shoved the bolt, turned breathlessly and stood leaning his back against the door.

What sort of a place was he in?

The darkness was more than opaque; it was almost thick enough to cut with a knife.

And there were other things there besides darkness, and that was the stale stench of burnt opium, the odor of a poorly ventilated human habitation, far immured from the antiseptic sunshine.

The two detachments of his enemies had come to a halt outside the door, crammed into the narrow passage, shouting, gabbling and rattling at the latch.

Buffalo Bill knew that he was in for it, but he also knew that he was not yet taken, and that there remained a good hard fight between a resolute man at bay and his capture by enemies.

Unheeding the rattling of the latch or the noises outside, he struck a fire stick and peered around him.

The room was small. There was no other door but the one opening upon the passage and, of course, there were no windows.

Four bunks, built in tiers of two each, were against one reeking wall. From a lower bunk was stretched a limp, naked arm.

The hand of the extended arm rested listlessly on a low stool. A pipe lay on the stool—an opium smoker's pipe with its long stem and diminutive bowl. Close to the pipe stood a small glass vessel with its opium and its "dipper." Near the glass receptacle was a spirit lamp.

Coolly but swiftly—there could be no uncertainty in the scout's movements at that critical time—the scout stepped to the lamp and touched the match to the wick.

This gave him a little more light, and he saw a table

and two chairs. Catching these away he flung them against the door as an additional support for the barricade. Then, setting the lamp on the floor, he dropped down on the stool and drew one of his revolvers.

"I hold the lives of twelve chinks in these guns," he thought grimly, "but I'll just make a bit of a demonstration as a warning and lessen the possible fatalities by two."

Lifting the weapon he sent a bullet over the edge of the upturned table and into the door.

The crash of the revolver was almost deafening in that confined space.

A second time he pulled the trigger and hurled lead into the barricade.

A whoop came from without, there was a sound of scrambling and the latch ceased to rattle.

"That will turn their attention to something else, I reckon," muttered the scout, "and give me a chance to do the same thing."

Sliding his revolver back into his belt, he picked up the lamp and examined the bunks. Only one was occupied, and the coolie was well into the opium smoker's seventh heaven. He lay like a log, deaf to all the excitement so near him.

"I reckon he'll not bother me much," thought the scout. "I'm cornered fast enough—bottled up. A rat in a trap couldn't be more securely caged. How long can I hold out?"

Putting the lamp down again, he resumed his seat to reflect upon the situation.

He could hold the fort until lack of water and food played havoc with his strength. There was no doubting that.

Two days, forty-eight hours, he might hold his ene-

mies in the outer passage; then, when they broke in on him, he would still be able to use his revolvers. After the last cartridge was expended——

Well, he would not think of that. There was Yuen Kai, still at large and unsuspected. And there were Nomad and the baron who must, by then, have been a long time in the empty storeroom.

The faithful chi-look would find Nomad and the baron. Perhaps, too, Nomad and the baron might find Wild Bill. These three pards were a host in themselves. They would discover that the scout was trapped and, if necessary, they would fight their way to him through all the yellow scoundrels in the quarter.

The longer the scout thought, the more he felt that he had reason to congratulate himself.

He had redeemed his pledge. If he had got himself in a tight corner on account of it, then his reliance could still be placed in Nomad and the baron and Wild Bill.

In two days his pards would surely be able to get to him.

Leaning back against the side of the bunk he calmly awaited developments.

When developments finally came they were of a startling nature.

A little puff of vapor came out from under the edge of the table, accompanied by a peculiar wheeze, wheeze, wheeze which caused the scout to wonder.

Then a pungent odor manifested itself. It was an odor of burning sulphur.

Springing up with a muttered exclamation the scout sent bullet after bullet into the door. Still the wheeze, wheeze, wheeze continued, and the vapor floated into

the room, festooning itself in airy rings or little clouds about the dark corners.

"They're burning sulphur," thought the scout, "and blowing the fumes into the room with a pair of bellows! The cunning, murderous fiends! They're hoping to strangle me!"

In a fury he jerked the table and the chairs from the door and sprayed lead through the bottom of the board barrier.

Still, amid a silence that of itself was deadly, the vapor floated in at the crack over the threshold. His bullets did not reach the Chinamen.

Grabbing a thin blanket from the bunk occupied by the coolie, the scout folded it and wadded it into the crack.

Thereupon the vapor entered at the side of the door.

He took a blanket from another bunk and, with his knife, forced it into the crack at the door's side.

Relentlessly the caulking at the bottom was pushed away and the vapor continued to float into the room. The scout pushed the wadding into place again. It was then pushed away from the door side to let the noxious fumes enter.

As fast as he replaced the wadding, patient, tireless hands pushed it out.

Little by little the small room was filling.

The scout's eyes smarted and a heaviness oppressed his chest. His nose and throat were becoming raw.

How long could he keep up the losing battle with these yellow demons?

Not two days, surely; perhaps not two hours.

CHAPTER XVII.

WILD BILL MAKES A RESCUE.

Even if Wild Bill Hickok had seen the baron stumble and fall, then ultimately drop into the hands of the chi-looks, he would not have turned aside from the work that lay before him.

The rescue of the Chinese girl was what he was planning, and he had hopes of capturing Señor Chick.

The white ruffian had caught the girl in his arms, and the chi-looks had given their attention to Hickok. A few blows gave the Chinamen all they wanted.

It is to be presumed that, as Yuen Kai was one of the chi-looks, he was not at all eager to help capture the daughter of the man who had once befriended his father.

Yet, be this as it may, the Chinamen gave Wild Bill but scant trouble. They left him and fell upon the baron.

The Laramie man overhauled Señor Chick just as he was carrying Che Lao over the crest of the coulee.

"That'll do for you!" cried Wild Bill savagely. "Drop that girl, and give me about a minute of your time, Señor Chick!"

Señor Chick was obliging. He allowed the girl to fall, whirled around and found himself looking into the muzzle of Wild Bill's six-shooter.

The starlight gave the weapon plenty of prominence, and Chick's hand, on the way to his hip, hung in the air.

"Put your little hand in mine, Señor Chick," said Wild Bill, "and we'll take a pasear in the direction of

the big stone yamen. You're wanted there, and I've my doubts whether you're wanted here—very much."

"Hickok!" breathed Señor Chick.

"Right-o," was the answer. "Kindly push your paws in the air, Señor Chick, while I confiscate your arsenal. I always believe in pulling a rattler's fangs before I fool very much with it."

"How did ye know I was hyer?"

Chick was trying to gain time. Wild Bill, used to such tricks, ordered him again to lift his hands or take the consequences.

A muffled oath came from Señor Chick. Another moment and Wild Bill would not only have rescued Che Lao, but he would also have made a most important capture. But something happened.

Che Lao's wits were in a terrible state. She was thinking many awful things, and perhaps is not to be blamed because she could not understand a situation so purely Melican.

Her fears were unreasonable; and when one has unreasonable fears, he or she is quite apt to be led into unreasonable actions.

So it happened with Che Lao. Paying no heed to the critical stage of Wild Bill's affairs, she tottered toward him, gave a cry of fear and—caught his revolver arm with both hands.

Wild Bill had been brought up in a school where kindness to the gentler sex is a shining principle. He tried, not too roughly, to free his arm; and while he was trying, Señor Chick was facing about and rushing down the brush-covered slope into the coulee.

Wild Bill said things as he broke loose from the girl, but he said them to himself. Che Lao, seeing her pro-

pector dive down the slope, gave a heartbroken cry and dove after him.

More by chance than design, she caught Wild Bill's flying coattails; and while the Laramie man plugged onward, he dragged after him, without much effort, that small mite of a Chinese lady.

Hickok was hampered more or less, and the result was that he heard a thump of galloping hoofs diminishing southward along the bottom of the coulee.

Che Lao lay sobbing in a little heap behind him. He turned, spoke soothing words, and lifted her to her ridiculously inadequate feet.

"There, now, moharrie," spoke the Laramie man coaxingly, "if I don't find any fault you hadn't ought to. He's a bad Melican man, that's what he is, so let's go somewhere and shoot off a bunch of fireworks to celebrate his escape. Tut, tut, tut! Why those copious tears, little chink-a-wink?"

The Lao leaned against the Laramie man's breast and sobbed, and gurgled, and caught her breath until he was at his wits' end.

"I'd give a dollar," he wailed, "if I knew the chink for 'quit it.' But I can't stay here as solacer for this piece of distressed China when that Dutch pard of mine is fighting lonehanded with three yellow men."

Without more ado he picked Che Lao up in his arms and mounted the slope to the scene of the late encounter.

The baron wasn't in sight. And neither were the Chinamen.

"Baron!" cried Wild Bill.

No answer.

"Dollars to doughnuts," chuckled Wild Bill, "that Dutchman is chasing the chinks. He never lets go when

he takes a holt. Now, sis, who are you?" he added, turning again to the girl.

The light was better, there at the top of the slope, and Wild Bill had time for a leisurely and close inspection.

"I'm a tinhorn," said he, "if it ain't Little Morning Glory, daughter of the dealer in pesos Mex. What are you doing by the coulee at this hour, Clover Blossom?" he asked, in a fatherly way; "why do you roam the purlieus of chinkdom at such an hour?"

Che Lao had given up crying. She couldn't understand Wild Bill; but Wild Bill got even by failing to understand her.

"Let's call it off, Cherry Flower," laughed Wild Bill. "My English and your chink won't mix worth a cent. I'll just tuck you under my arm and take you to your dad."

They started for the end house in the adobe block. When they got there the house was as dark as Egypt, and as silent as a tomb. Once more the girl began to cry.

"D'you think pop is asleep, Liiy Bell?" demanded Hickok. "And what's the reason he went to sleep and locked you out?"

"Yuen Moy allee same heap trouble," sobbed Che Lao.

"Good! We're getting down to brass tacks now, Cactus Blossom. Keep it up. What sort of trouble?"

But Che Lao suddenly forgot her English and boggled things again with her Chinese talk.

After trying for all of five minutes to find out what he wanted to know, Wild Bill gave up and led his charge in the direction of Washington Street.

There he found a policeman whom he knew and turned the girl over to him.

"There's something rotten wrong with little chink-a-wink's paw," explained Wild Bill. "You take her to the jail and ask Mrs. Bangham to look after her, will you? I'm going back to the quarter, hunt for Yuen Moy and a stray Dutchman who happens to be my pard, and I'll be too busy to bother with a young lady whose talk is over my head."

The policeman accepted the commission, and Wild Bill whirled back into the confines of the Chinese quarter.

He proceeded to Yuen Moy's front door, and did everything he could, short of breaking it in, to gain admittance. Then he tried the windows. No one answered. He went around to the back door again.

He was standing there, trying to guess what he should do when a noise from overhead claimed his attention.

The noise came from the next roof south. Somebody dropped from the edge of the roof and landed on the ground with a *chug*. Then some one else dropped. A moment later, a third form ran to the edge of the roof and looked down.

"Thar they go, baron, consarn their pesky picturs!" called a voice. "Git a ladder."

"Dot's me—on der chump!" called another voice.

Wild Bill was dazed. He had supposed that the baron was chasing chinks, and that old Nomad was at the hotel, but here they were, big as life, mixed up in a mysterious difficulty.

They were chasing the two men who had just dropped. This was a cue for Wild Bill. Instantly he started after the dim forms speeding away into the night.

He caught one of them—almost. He reached for the end of a flying pigtail, and at just that moment tripped over an empty box behind a Chinese bazaar.

When he picked himself up, old Nomad grabbed him and threw him down again.

"Waugh!" jubilated Nomad. "I've got one of 'em, baron! Quiet, ye pizen varmint," the trapper added, to Wild Bill, "er I'll choke off yore wind with the end o' yore pigtail."

As he spoke, he ran his hand around Wild Bill's head, trying to locate the queue.

"By gorry, pard," laughed Wild Bill, "what kind of a chink do you think I am? Take your fist out of my face, please, and remove your knees from my chest. Nice way to treat a pard!"

Old Nomad got up with a murmur of astonishment.

"Hickok!" he exclaimed; "et ain't never Hickok!"

"It's no one else. Baron! Are those two of the chinks that tried to capture Che Lao?"

"Vy, vot a funny pitzness dot ve shouldt meed you like dis!" fluttered the baron. "Sooch a many t'ings haf habbened since ve barted, Vild Pill. Meppy dose vas doo oof der fellers, aber I don'd know dot."

"What's happened?" asked the Laramie man,

"Come back ter ther storeroom, Hickok," counseled the trapper. "Buffer's thar, an' we'll hev er leetle round-up an' explain everythin'. Hot times aire on fer this sleep—an' don't ye fergit et. Pards git a good many fun this grass, ef I knows ther signs."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SURPRISE.

On the way back to the roof top, old Nomad and the baron saved time by explaining about Yuen Moy's predicament, and his call for help. How the call was answered, Yuen Moy found to be missing, the baron discovered on the pile of dried prunes, and the sudden attack of the Celestials in the storeroom, was all gone over between the place where Wild Bill had just missed the Chinaman and the foot of the ladder.

The Laramie man was astounded.

"Well, baron," said he, "we can't find any fault. So far we've had our share of what's been going on."

"Dit you ged der shink girl away from dot Shick feller?" inquired the baron.

"I did."

"Und gapture der Shick feller?"

"I did not, for which I feel mighty meaching and out of sorts. But the girl has been sent to Bangham's home for Mrs. Bangham to look out for. I hadn't any very great reason for doing that, but I'm glad I did it, now."

They had begun climbing the ladder. When they got to the roof, the baron pulled the ladder up and lowered it through the trap.

"How you vas, Puffalo Pill?" the Dutchman called down through the hole. "Vat you t'ink, hey? Vild Pill is mit us, und der shink girl iss ad der chall."

Most unexpectedly, the scout's hearty voice failed to float up from the dark depths below.

"He don'd vas dere!" exclaimed the baron.

"Ef them thar chinks hes done anythin' ter Buffler," growled the trapper, "we'll blaze our way through ther quarter with er gun in each hand. Whatever d'ye think's ther matter, Hickok?"

"Suppose we go down and look over the situation?" suggested Wild Bill. "Maybe we'll find some sort of a clue to work on."

They went down and, with matches to light their investigations, roamed about the storeroom. They found the bag in which the baron had been tied, and they crunched through pieces of the broken lamp, but they failed to find anything that gave them a clue to the scout.

"I'm stumped, I am fer fair!" exclaimed old Nomad. "Why, I kain't even find ther lariat I coiled up—ther same lariat thet them chinks used fer lashin' ther baron."

"Ah!" exclaimed Wild Bill, in the tone of a man who sees the truth dimly.

"For vy did you shpeak like dot, Vild Pill?" inquired the baron.

"Listen," said the Laramie man. "Is it like our old pard to loaf around with his hands in his pockets when a lot of Chinamen are to be chased?"

"Nary, et ain't!"

"Nix, you bed you!"

"Then what makes you think the scout stayed here while you fellows went up and over the roof? There were more Chinamen than the two you took after, and they came in on you by some secret way. Isn't it reasonable to suppose that Pard Cody followed some of the others? And that he took the riata with him for possible use in case he made a capture?"

"Shore!" declared old Nomad. "We mout es well

sit down an' wait. Buffler'll come back. He never went erway yit but he come back—an' with somethin' ter show fer et."

Lounging upon the pile of bags, the pards waited as patiently as they could for the scout's return, beguiling the time with talk.

"Tough luck, Hickok," said Nomad, "thet thet thar Chick person showed ye his heels."

"That worried me a heap," returned the Laramie man, "but I did better than I thought I was doing when I rescued the girl. I wish to blazes I knew where this chink joss house is located. I'd like it fine if we could get there and rescue Yuen Moy while Pard Cody is hunting Chinamen."

"Dot would be some greadt pitzness!" murmured the baron. "Couldn't ve make some hunts for der choss house? I vould know der itel der nexdt time vat I see id."

"Et's underground," said Nomad, "an' ef Buffler was stumped ter find er way to et, baron, I don't reckon us rawhides could ever git ter whar et is."

"There's nothing like trying, Nick," returned Wild Bill.

"An' while we're tryin', Buffler'll mebbysso come back hyar an' fail ter find us. We better all git tergether, an' stay in a herd. These chinks is easy ter handle, in half-a-dozen-er-dozen lots, mebby, but when ye're stacked up agin' a row o' 'dobies whar yaller boys is as thick as bees, we'd better go slow, an' in comp'ny front."

"It will be best, I reckon," admitted Wild Bill, "to wait for Pard Cody to get back. But we can do something, in the meantime, pards."

"What's ther ante?"

"Why, we can hunt for the places those Chinamen came from when they made that dead set at you. Perhaps that will help us to find the temple when the scout gets back."

"Dot's a mighty fine itea, you bed you!" approved the baron.

"Where can we get a piece of candle, Nomad?"

"Mebbyso in Yuen Moy's hangout, Hickok."

"Go in there, baron," Wild Bill requested, "and see if you can find anything that will make a light."

"On der vay!" called the baron, groping toward the broken panel.

"Sometimes," said old Nomad, after the baron had scrambled through the break in the wall and dropped on the other side, "sometimes, Pard Hickok, I gits notions."

"We all get notions, I reckon," answered the Laramie man. "But what particular notions do you refer to, Nick?"

"Why, I got er feelin' thet ye didn't hit et off erbout whar Buffler is, arter all; or, ef ye did hit et off thet Buffler's in some kind o' trouble. Pard, as clost ter each other as what Buffler an' me is, has feelin's when one o' 'em's in diffikilties. I dunno no more how ter explain what I think than er 'Pache Injun, but mebby ye kin sabe what I'm tryin' ter rattle out o' me."

"I reckon I can," answered the Laramie man. "When Pard Cody is in trouble, your right ear begins to itch. You think it's a premonition, but nine times out of ten it's a flea come visiting."

"Waugh! Don't go fer ter josh erbout somethin' serious."

"How can you be serious and talk like that, Nick? If Buffalo Bill's pards were as able to take care of

themselves as Buffalo Bill is to look out for Number One, you might talk of having premonitions about the scout. But, as a matter of fact and record, the premonitions are all on his side."

"Waal," grunted Nomad, "I'm er closin' my trap an' not sayin' nothin' more erbout et. Mebbyso et's plumb foolish, as ye say. What's become o' the baron? He's been gone long enough ter go ter the hotel arter thet candle. This hyar lull in purceedin's is gittin' on my narves."

At just that moment a prolonged hissing sound came from the direction of the broken panel.

"That you, pard?" inquired Wild Bill.

"Sure it iss!" came back in a husky, guarded whisper. "Come ofer here vonce, und don'd make some noises. Dere iss a funny pitzness vat I don't vas aple to onder-shtand."

This was enough to fire the curiosity of Nomad and Wild Bill. Quietly they made their way to the opening.

"Well, what is it?" asked the Laramie man.

"Id seemed like et was in ther kitchen, aber it ain't," answered the baron.

"What seemed like et was in ther kitchen?" demanded old Nomad.

"Der funny pitzness," answered the baron.

"What is the funny business like, baron?"

"Like nodding vat I know."

"Kain't ye describe it?"

"Vell, subbose some voices, far away, far, far, away. Dey shpeak some jabberings vat you don't know, und you fool yourseluf vondering iss id imachination. Dot's it."

"We know purty nigh as much now as we did before,"

muttered the trapper. "Let's go ter ther kitchen an' listen fer ourselves, Hickok."

"That's the best way to get at it," acquiesced the Laramie man.

He and the trapper crawled through the broken panel and, with the baron, moved carefully through the darkness to the rear room.

Once in the kitchen, they stood silently in a group and listened intently.

There were noises, certainly; indistinct, muffled, and apparently coming from a distance. But it was impossible to say in which direction they came from.

"Waal, snarlin' coyotes!" murmured old Nomad. "Them thar voices ain't in ther kitchen, an' they ain't no tellin' jest whar they aire. What d'ye think, Hickok?"

"I'm by," was the answer. "But they're voices, that's sure. Chink voices, too, I should say."

"Meppysy dey vas underground?" suggested the baron.

"That's once, baron," said Wild Bill, "that you landed on the bull's-eye. They're from underground; and they prove that this wall of Yuen Moy's is thin in places. I'd give a hundred pesos, this minute, if I could locate the point where we could get through and find the fellows who're doing that palavering. We——"

He stopped short, grabbed the baron and the trapper each by an arm, and pulled them through the door and into the front room.

"Somebody's coming!" he whispered. "Quiet, now, and use your eyes through the door. I'll draw it partly shut so as to screen us."

Suiting his action to the word, Wild Bill pulled the door toward him; then, through an inch-wide crack, all three watched the kitchen.

A sound was heard back of a curtain that draped one corner of the room. The sound was followed by a glow of light. Then, suddenly, the curtain was pushed aside and a Chinaman came through with a lighted candle.

A tenseness that usually precedes action ran through the trapper and the baron. Wild Bill, however, kept a restraining hand on each of them.

Four Chinamen followed the candle bearer. They came by twos and were carrying a long box between them.

CHAPTER XIX.

YUEN KAI'S SUCCESS.

The Chinaman with the candle placed the light on the table, sat down in a chair, and spoke hurriedly to the others. The four vanished back of the curtain, and the pards, from their place in the other room, heard the sound of a closing door.

Wild Bill thought, just then, that he had been too careful in restraining the baron and Nomad. A concerted movement of the three pards would have resulted in the capture of all the Chinamen. Now four of them had vanished.

Nevertheless, the pards knew the route to the underground regions, and later they could follow the Celestials, find the temple and perhaps do something for Yuen Moy.

The same thoughts were revolving in the minds of the baron and Nomad. While the pards were thinking, the Chinaman in the chair leaned down and pulled a canvas cover from the long box.

Under the amazed eyes lay the form of the old money dealer, Yuen Moy. His eyes were closed, and his parchment-like face was hueless. All the pards thought alike—that Buffalo Bill had come too late and that the yellow cord had done its work.

In another moment the pards were undeceived.

Yuen Kai leaned down and whispered. Yuen Moy opened his eyes, sat up, and the two Chinamen grasped hands.

"Well, by gorry!" cried Wild Bill, throwing the door wide and stepping into the kitchen.

"Thunder an' kerry one!" added old Nomad, as he and the Dutchman followed the Laramie man.

"Dot's vat I say," piped the baron. "Dis iss funny pitzness, all rightd. Ketch dot chink!" He pointed to Yuen Kai. "He's vone oof der gang vat gaptured me py der coulee."

The baron, as he spoke, jumped toward Yuen Kai. Yuen Moy, however, stepped in front of the baron and put up his hands.

"No hurtee Yuen Kai!" quavered the old Chinaman. "Him my fien, my mos' good fien. Him helpee Buff' Bill savee Yuen Moy."

"What's thet?" exclaimed old Nomad, amazed. "Ye say, Yuen Moy, thet this other chink helped Buffler Bill save ye from them hatchet boys?"

"Allee same."

"Where's Buffalo Bill now?" demanded Wild Bill, stepping forward and measuring both Chinamen with two eyes hard as agates. "That's what we want to know, and we want to know it quick."

"Him in temple," said the money dealer.

"What's he doin' in ther temple?" asked Nomad harshly; "an' whar is this hyar temple? Thet's what we're pinin' ter savvy."

"Chi-look men," explained Yuen Kai, his slant eyes glimmering, "cally Buff' Bill to temple in long box." He touched the box with his foot. "Chi-look men think allee same plenty bag money in box, you savvy. No money in box; Buff' Bill in box. Heap fine tlick."

"Heap fine!" chuckled Yuen Moy.

"Blamed ef I kin see et," frowned Nomad. "By yer own tork ye say Pard Buffler was put inter thet box an'

kerried ter ther temple. Yuen Moy was thar, waitin' ter git ther happy dispatch with er yallar cord. Why'd Buffler let them chinks kerry him inter ther temple?"

"Allee same savee Yuen Moy," chattered Yuen Kai.

"How'd he save him, eh?"

"Ketchee Sing Wan when he makee tly usee cord," explained Yuen Moy. "Box all same to cally out Yuen Moy when yellow cord send him top side. Yuen Moy no go top side. Chi-look men thinkee, blingee box back. My now makee getaway chop-chop."

All the pards were rubbing their foreheads and trying to catch the drift of the pidgin English.

"Buffalo Bill pretended to be several bags of money," said Wild Bill, "and got into that box. He was carried into the temple. The handy boy with the yellow cord tried to get in his work, and our pard interfered and saved Yuen Moy. Then Yuen Moy played dead, and the chi-looks brought him up here. Only you knew he was alive?" The Laramie man turned on Yuen Kai.

"My savvy," answered Yuen Kai, "Buff' Bill savvy, and Yuen Moy heap savvy."

"You are one of the chi-looks?"

"Allee same."

"Then why in Sam Hill are you playing fast and loose with orders from the tong?"

Wild Bill was still suspicious, in spite of the fact that the condemned money dealer was alive and well before him.

"My savee my fadder's flen," explained Yuen Kai.

"A case of gratitude, eh?"

"That's lite. Glat—glat—glat-tude. My feelee heap glat—glat——"

"Pass ther ante, chink," muttered old Nomad. "I hadn't no idee a chink could feel sich things."

"Vere iss Puffalo Pill now?" asked the baron.

"Allee same temple," said Yuen Kai.

"Why didn't he come up with the rest o' ye?"

"Chi-look men no savvy Buff' Bill. They savvy, they makee go top side."

"Waugh!" snorted the old trapper. "Then Pard Buffler is down in thet heathen joss house, never a-knowin' which minit is goin' ter be his next. Sufferin' cater-mounts! Pard Buffler is down ther an' he kain't git out. Chinks aire all eround him, an' he's li'ble ter be choked with er yaller cord hisself. Let me git ter whar he is!"

Impulsively the old trapper made a break in the direction of the swinging curtain.

"Wait a second, Nick," counseled Wild Bill, grabbing Nomad's arm. "We've got to get some more information before we go below."

"Pronto, pronto!" clamored Nomad.

"That curtain conceals a door that leads to this underground joss house?" demanded Wild Bill facing Yuen Kai.

The Chinaman nodded.

"Go thloo do'," said he, "ketchee one piecee stair; go downstair, ketchee one piecee hall; follow hall, ketchee mo' stair; go down, ketchee hall, ketchee do' makee lead to temple. My plomise Buff' Bill my findee flens, tell flens 'bout come to temple."

"How many Chinamen are down there?" proceeded Wild Bill.

"Heap plenty."

"Will they try to send Buffalo Bill top side if they catch him?"

"Sure."

"Oh, consarn ther pizen bag o' tricks!" blurted out

the old trapper. "Who knows but somethin' has gone wrong with our pard now, hey? Let's get ter movin', Hickok."

"No use moving until we find out all it may be necessary for us to know," returned the Laramie man calmly. "What are you going to do now, Yuen Moy?" he asked of the money dealer.

"My makee go allee same Melican yamen. Buff' Bill say that. My makee go."

"If our pard told you to go to the yamen, then it's your business to go, and before the chinks find out that a trick has been played on them."

"Makee go chop-chop."

"My makee go 'long," said Yuen Kai.

"Nary, chink," returned Wild Bill. "You'll stay here and show us how to find this temple."

Yuen Kai's face blanched until it became the color of old cheese.

"My tellee you how you makee go," he protested.

"We got that, but it's not so good as having a guide."

"China boys killee Yuen Kai," quavered the chi-look.

"They makee find out tlick, then my go top side. Whoosh!"

"That's right, Pard Hickok," put in old Nomad. "This hyar chink seems ter hev done somethin' big fer Buffler, no less'n fer Yuen Moy. I reckon Buffler'll be glad ef we do somethin' fer him."

"Him my flen," said Yuen Moy eagerly. "No makee go to temple. Lettee him come 'long allee same Yuen Moy."

"First off," went on Wild Bill, "how did you meet the scout when you told him about getting into the box? That's what I want to know. You've got to prove you're straight goods, Yuen Kai."

"My plenty stlaight," declared Yuen Kai. "My findee Buff' Bill in empty sto' astel fight with China boys." He whirled on Nomad and the baron. "You lecollect fight in empty sto' huh?"

"Waal, I reckon," was the trapper's dry response.

"You makee go 'way, othel man makee go 'way. My findee Buff' Bill, makee chin-chin. Him come 'long below allee same Yuen Kai. My makee show box, makee show money. Chi-look men come, takee Buff' Bill to temple in box. You savvy? Buff' Bill my flen. My makee go 'long with Yuen Moy. Chi-look men, tong men, no makee see Yuen Kai ally mo'—no makee see Yuen Moy ally mo'. We go N'yo'k—makee flens othel tong."

"All right," said Wild Bill, "I don't care where you go or what you do, just so you stay at the yamen until you have a palaver with Buffalo Bill. Now for it, pards!"

The Laramie man picked up the candle Yuen Kai had brought to the room, and Yuen Kai himself pushed aside the curtain and showed the pards the hidden door.

With Wild Bill leading the way, the pards descended the stairs to the passage at the bottom. Presently their hurrying feet brought them to another and longer flight of stairs. As they descended this second flight, they heard a distant uproar of voices.

"Waugh!" cried Nomad, "I'm sniffin' all sorts er trouble!"

"Dot's me, too," answered the baron. "Meppy our bard needs us vorse as ve know. Hustle some more!"

The pards finished the flight three steps at a time, jumped into the corridor and raced along it in the direction of the joss house.

And, with every step they took, the frantic commotion ahead grew in their ears.

"We're in time, all right," said Wild Bill grimly.

It was a fortunate thing for the three pards that all the Chinamen in that part of the underground passages were beyond the joss house, centreing their efforts on getting the king of scouts out of his retreat.

The three pards met no one.

They bounded into the temple, and into the red light burning in the urn in front of the idol. They had fancied that all the commotion was in the joss house, and they were astounded to find the place empty.

The uproar which had carried them in haste along the corridor to the temple had died suddenly away. Weapons in hand, they stood in the centre of the joss house floor, sweeping their eyes around them.

"Has thet chi-look chink given us er wrong steer?" cried old Nomad savagely.

"I think he was talking with a straight tongue, pard," answered Wild Bill.

"Den," palpitated the baron, "vere iss Puffalo Pill? Vere iss der fellers vat vas making dot racket? Dere ain'd nodding here."

The Laramie man stepped toward the idol, his head inclined to one side and his whole manner rapt and intent.

"What ails ye?" fretted the trapper.

"Come here and listen," answered Wild Bill.

Both Nomad and the baron stepped to Hickok's side. There, in front of the idol, they heard a peculiar gurgling sound. It seemed to come from the squat figure of the heathen god.

"I don't like thet, blamed ef I do!" muttered the old trapper; "et's er bad omen."

"Vat makes it do dot?" murmured the baron.

"Look," whispered Wild Bill, pointing with the muzzle of a revolver, "the thing moves!"

The idol did move. It rocked back and forth, as though from some pent-up force. Then, suddenly, with a tremendous heave, it flung itself off its low platform.

"Look out!" shouted Wild Bill.

The three pards jumped just in time to avoid the huge figure, which came sprawling down, and, as it seemed, shivered apart in front of them. The urn, with its red fire, was barely missed.

A form rolled out of the idol—a bound form with a cord tied between its jaws.

"Dere iss our bard!" cried the excited baron; "dere iss Puffalo Pill!"

"Take another look," said Wild Bill. "Your nerves are bothering your eyes, baron."

"It's a chink," struck up Nomad. "Pull him out an' see ef he kin tell us anythin' erbout Buffler."

The old trapper started forward to lay hands on the Chinaman.

"He was inside the idol," said Wild Bill, "and he heaved it over. How did he get into the thing? And where——"

A clatter of shots rang out from a distance. Nomad straightened up before he reached the Chinaman's side. Wild Bill and the baron whirled and listened.

"That's Buffalo Bill's talk, and I'll bet money!" declared the Laramie man. "It came from that direction."

He waved the candle toward the rent screen and then bounded toward it.

"All apoard for der drouple drain!" shouted the baron. "Go for der shinks und gif dem hail Golumpy. Hoop-a-la!"

"Buffer! Buffer!" roared old Nomad, hurling himself through the broken screen, tight at Wild Bill's heels.

There was a sulphurous smell in the corridor. Far along it there were massed half a dozen candles, throwing their dim gleams over a crowd of pigtail heads.

"They're just ahead!" cried Wild Bill.

His revolvers barked, not murderously, but as a warning for the yellow men to realize that the Melican men were ready for any sort of trouble in rescuing their pard.

The Chinamen began to yell.

"Dey're going oop shdairs!" shouted the baron.

Yes, the Chinamen, in a panic of fright at the demonstration farther down the hall, were literally boiling up the stairs, fairly climbing over each other in their haste to see which should be first at the top.

The three pards, with their yelling and their shooting, made noise enough for an army.

"Buffer! Buffer!" roared the old trapper; "klat-a-way, Buffer, klat-a-way!"

Buffalo Bill, wherever he was, if he heard that well known cry, would do his utmost to join the man who shouted it.

There was a regular bedlam at the stairs. The pards, under the impression that the scout was a prisoner somewhere in the crowd of Chinamen, rushed to the attack.

It made no difference that they were outnumbered ten to one. They would have faced odds of a hundred to one just as readily. It wasn't a place where numbers counted. That charge was one of resistless courage and spirit, hurled upon a pack of frightened laundrymen, gamblers, bazaar men and vegetable peddlers. No wonder the Chinamen hustled to get out of the way.

When the three pards were a scant fifty feet from

the bottom of the stairs, a door was flung open directly in the faces of the scrambling Celestials at the foot of the crowded flight. Buffalo Bill, like a whirlwind, broke his way through the press and started toward his pards.

"Buffer!" shouted Nomad, in fierce delight; "hyar's Buffer!"

"Turn around, Pard Cody," panted Wild Bill, "and we'll teach these yellow rateaters a lesson."

"No time to teach anybody a lesson," answered the scout. "Push back along the way you came. This vipers' nest is full of traps. All the Chinamen are around here, and we've a chance to get away if we run through the temple. Don't let the chance slip through our fingers."

"Hoop-en-de-doo!" carolled the baron. "Ve haf got Puffalo Pill vonce again, yah, so helup me!"

The pards faced around and rushed back along the course they had recently covered. By the time they reached the rent screen, the Chinamen, taking courage from their flight, were in wild pursuit.

A few of them had firearms, and the pards dropped into the joss house to a tune of hissing lead.

"Any one hurt?" puffed the scout.

"Nod me," carolled the baron.

"Ner me," reported the old trapper.

"You're the one that seems to be hurt, Pard Cody," said Wild Bill, glimpsing the scout's face in the red light of the temple. "Your cheek's covered with blood."

"Scratches," answered the scout. "What happened to the idol?"

They were hurrying past the idol on their way to the door and the corridor.

"It tipped ofer mit itseluf," said the baron, "und sphilled outd a shink."

The scout laughed shortly.

"He tipped over the idol at a time when the move was least apt to bother me," remarked Buffalo Bill.

"How did ther chink git in ther thing?" queried Nomad.

"I was responsible for that. Yuen Moy helped. Is he safe?"

"Yuen Moy's safe," said the Laramie man.

"And Yuen Kai?"

"He's on the way to the jail with Moy."

"Buenos! How about the girl, Hickok?"

"She's been at the yamen for some time. I sent her there a long time ago."

"Better and better! I think we've done remarkably well to-night."

They were running through the corridor. When they reached the long flight of stairs the frantic yellow men were just jamming through the rent screen into the joss house.

By the time the pards gained the top of the flight, the foremost of their pursuers were coming into the farther end of the corridor.

"We've fooled 'em!" cried the scout. "It was nip and tuck, pards, but they've got the worst of it."

"Mebbyso we'll bunt inter another lot further erlong," said Nomad.

"Nod any goot luck like dot, Nomat," wheezed the baron.

He had run faster and harder in the last ten minutes than he had done before in the last ten months, and he was beginning to feel the effects of it. Noticing his weariness the scout slowed his pace.

"This is pretty hard on you, baron," said he.

"I vas puildt for fighting, und nod for running," answered the baron, between gasps. "Der breat' vat I got don'd shday py me."

"I'm some winded myself, baron," spoke up Wild Bill.

"Same hyar," chimed in old Nomad, "but I'm so plumb happy over ther luck we're hevin' thet I wouldn't keer much ef my breath was clean choked off."

No Chinamen showed themselves. The scout had feared that there might be ways for some of them to take to side passages and get ahead; but, if there were any such corridors in that underground network, the pards had moved too rapidly for the Celestials to take advantage of them.

The last flight of stairs was wearily climbed, and the pards broke through Yuen Moy's clothes closet and into the kitchen.

There was somebody waiting for them—but not a Chinaman. It was Little Cayuse. He had a lighted candle on the table and was sitting watchfully in Yuen Moy's rocking-chair.

"Ugh!" he grunted, as the pards staggered through the little closet and into the kitchen. "Heap hurry, huh?" he asked passively.

"Heap!" repeated the old trapper; "mucho heap, Cayuse. Douse that candle, son, and come along outdoors. It's safer; an', besides, I reckon I need the air."

"We all need the air," added Wild Bill.

"Come along, boy," panted the scout.

The baron had unbolted and thrown open the kitchen door. Gray dawn was just breaking over the eastern roof tops of the town.

"Mebbyso you have heap hot time, huh?" asked Cayuse as the pards dropped in their tracks and filled their lungs with the crisp morning air.

"Plenty hot, Cayuse," said Wild Bill.

"All same hot like Fiesta Night?"

"All same; maybe more so, but different, different."

"Und Cayuse vasn't in it!" chuckled the baron; "Cayuse, for vonce, vas not in der drouples vat ve hat."

"Me make un visit along Pima Injun," muttered Cayuse heavily. "Ugh! Heap hard luck. Me no like um."

CHAPTER XX.

THE PLEDGE REDEEMED.

There was a meeting in the office of the sheriff at the jail. The pards, on their way to their hotel, stopped to give their report to Bangham. The sheriff was summoned from his house for the occasion.

"You don't have to tell me much of anything, Buffalo Bill," said he. "Che Lao was brought in and turned over to Mrs. B., and a little while after that Yuen Moy wobbled along with a chi-look friend. Say, they're a pair! Both of 'em will be proscribed by the tong, but they're as happy as larks. Yuen Moy says he's lost nine bags of money, and that he won't dare put in a bid for his household effects; for all that, though, he calls himself a lucky man."

"What's Yuen Kai got to be happy about?" inquired Wild Bill.

"He's happy because he helped the scout get Yuen Moy out of that warm scrape. Yuen Moy didn't have all his money in those nine bags, not by a long shot. He's pretty well off, Yuen Moy is, and he has a neat little pile salted away in New York. He has been intending to move East for some time, he tells me, and so he had begun preparations. He swears by all his heathen gods that he'll help Yuen Kai buy his freedom and start a restaurant, or a bazaar, or something, in New York. Mebby that's partly the reason why Yuen Kai's got himself proscribed and still is happy."

"How will they get protection from the Hip Sings?" went on Wild Bill.

"Why, by joining another and more powerful tong. It's only a matter of 'squeeze,' anyhow. The tongs squeeze tribute out of every laundryman, bazaar man, restaurant man and every one else they can put the clamps on. If Yuen Moy pays a strong society enough, he'd be protected even if he had killed off all the big high boys of the Hip Sings. Queer freaks, these chinks. But, see here! I want to know all they tried to do to you and your pards in the quarter, Cody. I'm going over there and raise Cain with some of those yellow vermin."

"You'll have your trouble for your pains if you try to do anything of that sort, Bangham," said the scout. "If you paid a visit to Chinatown in an hour you'd find everything quiet and peaceful, and no sign that there had been any disturbance. As for picking out the offenders, Yuen Kai and Yuen Moy might do that, but it's hardly fair to ask them to get into further trouble. Yuen Moy has done enough."

"We'll let it go at that, then, but I'll have Gee Yup circulate through the quarter and send me a private report."

"If you could get at the big high men of the tong, who came here and brought Yuen Kai and the other chinks, you'd be tapping a pay-streak, perhaps."

"Those men are not in town now, Buffalo Bill. Yuen Kai told me they left pretty soon after they pronounced sentence of death on Yuen Moy."

"You could have the 'Frisco police pick them up."

"I doubt it. Yuen Kai would have to identify the men, and he tells me flatly that he won't do a thing of that kind. He never wants to see any of the Hip Sing Tong again, he says, and he's never going to 'Frisco. He knows it wouldn't be healthy for him."

"Et's too pizen bad thet somethin' kain't be done

ter git even with them yaller whelps," scowled Nomad. "No wonder they act like the 'Merican law wasn't no good. The law don't reach out fer 'em like et ort."

"There'll come a day when it will," answered Bangham ominously. "What's the matter with your face, Cody?"

"The priest of the temple and I had a little set-to," said the scout, "and he dragged his finger nails down my cheek."

"How did that happen?"

The scout felt very comfortable there in the easy-chair in the sheriff's office, so he did not object to recounting his experiences.

"Jumping sandhills!" exclaimed the sheriff, when the scout had finished and his pards had all had their say, "that reads like a mighty exciting book, and no mistake. Those yellow skunks would have had you with that sulphur smoke, if your pards hadn't come along just when they did."

"They would," smiled the scout, "but my pards generally come along when they're needed."

"We aim ter try," said Nomad, "but et was a purty close call fer Buffer, all right. What erbout ther coolie that was lyin' doped in thet smokin' joint, pard?"

"The Chinamen didn't worry any about him. They were perfectly willing to let him travel the one-way trail with me—providing they could get me started."

"Ain'd it time dot ve vent py der hodel und hat somet'ing to eat mit ourselufs?" queried the baron. "I feel so hungry as I can't tell."

"I want er squar' meal an' then I want ter sleep," spoke up the old trapper. "The quicker I eat an' hunt er bunk, ther better I'm going' ter feel."

"I line up in the same fashion," declared Wild Bill.

"Wait a minute before you go," interposed Bangham.

He passed out of the office and, in a few moments, returned with Yuen Moy, Yuen Kai and Che Lao.

The two men and the girl were smiling and happy. The stone walls of the yamen were between them and Chinatown, and they could defy the big high boys of the tong to do their worst.

Yuen Kai and Yuen Moy broke for the scout as soon as they stepped into the office.

"You savee Yuen Moy, Buff' Bill," declared the old Chinese money dealer. "My no fo'get. My sendee Lotus Flower gal to you, you makee come quick. My gone when you allive; you gettee busy chop-chop. Whoosh! Buff' Bill one heap plenty fine Melican man."

"You bettee!" declared Yuen Kai. "Him helpee Yuen Kai, all ee same like him long-time fien. Yuen Kai makee chin-chin, Buff' Bill b'leeve. Oh, heap fine, plenty fine. Blave man, Buff' Bill."

"Much obliged," laughed the scout. "You, perhaps, can tell me something I want to know, Yuen Kai."

"My savvy, my tellee."

"Do you know where Señor Chick is hanging out?"

"No savvy."

"Where did he come from?"

"Come ffrom countlee; lide hlorsee. While him makee stay in Chinatown, him hitchee hlorsee in coulee. Him get 'way, huh?"

Yuen Kai turned his eyes on Wild Bill.

"He did," answered the Laramie man. "I had to let him get away in order to save Che Lao."

"Him plenty bad Melican man," frowned Yuen Moy.

"Him tly takee Che Lao, makee mally himself," went on Yuen Kai. "Big high China boy wanchee mally; Señor Chick say no can do—him do. Savvy? My no

savvy when my tly helpee him by coulee. My savvy now."

"When are you going East?" asked the scout.

"Bymby. Stay 'long yamen plaps week. Makee talk with N'yo'k tong."

"Well, good luck to the lot of you. You've done a big thing, Yuen Moy, for the cause of justice, and the Melican high boys in the East ought to treat you well."

The scout shook hands with the Celestials. Che Lao cast roguish glances at Wild Bill, and the Laramie mat dropped a fatherly hand on her head and said she was a fine little girl and ought some day to make a mandarin happy. Was it disappointment that crossed Che Lao's face? If not, it was something very like it.

The pards filed out of the sheriff's office while the Chinamen and Che Lao went back to the safety of the guarded walls.

"I'm feelin' a hull lot better'n I did a spell ago, while we was in Chinktown," said the old trapper, with a long breath of relief. "When a feller makes a diffikilt pledge, an' then redeems et, I reckon thar's cause fer rejoicin'. Hey, Buffler?"

"There is," said the scout.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OLD PROSPECTOR.

Bangham, the sheriff, climbed the steps leading to the hotel veranda and made his way to the place where Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill were sitting.

That there was something on the sheriff's mind was evident from the expression of his face and the briskness of his manner.

It was several days after the scout's narrow escape, and the two pardes were alone at that end of the veranda. Bangham, picking up a chair, pulled it along and planked himself down in it close enough for a confidential talk.

"Bully!" he muttered, with considerable satisfaction. "This couldn't have happened better if I had ordered it."

"You seem to be bothered about something, amigo," remarked the Laramie man.

"I am," was the prompt response. "You'll be bothered too, in a minute."

"What about?" queried the scout.

"Señor Chick."

"If you know how we can lay him by the heels, just tell us," said the scout. "We're on the point of leaving Arizona for Texas, and if we could capture Chick before we go it would wipe the slate pretty clean."

"Here's a chance," said Bangham. "I could lay hold of this myself, but I knew mighty well that you'd want something to say about it. Anyhow, Buffalo Bill, I'd rather leave the matter to you than put my deputies on the trail. It looks as though it might be a hard matter to handle."

"Give us the details," returned the scout.

"I'll leave that for Pangborn. He's the chap that gave 'em to me. There he is, across the street by the assay office."

Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill turned their eyes in the direction indicated. A hairy-faced, stoop-shouldered, undersized man was leaning against a hitching pole, his hands in his pockets.

He wore clothes that had seen much rough usage. His trousers were tucked in his boot tops and he was pulling at an old cob pipe.

Bangham whistled. The man at the hitching pole looked toward the hotel. Bangham beckoned. Pangborn, drawing himself together, shuffled across the street and climbed to the veranda. He was introduced to the two Bills.

"Pull up a chair, Pangborn," said the sheriff, "and tell the scout and Wild Bill what you told me."

Pangborn kicked a chair close to the group and sprawled into it. Putting his pipe into one pocket, he pulled a plug of chewing tobacco from another and champed off a corner. For a moment his jaws worked reflectively, then he tongued the tobacco into the side of his cheek and began.

"I'm one o' those here prospectors," he observed. "Bang has knowed me fer six y'ars, off'n on, an' I reckon he'll tell ye I'm the clear quill an' not over-handy with the double-tongue."

"You can depend on whatever Pangborn tells you, friends," nodded the sheriff. "I never knew him to rough-handle the truth."

"There ye aire!" exclaimed the prospector. "Yesterday I was comin' in from the Phenix Mountings. I'd run out o' chuck an' was trekkin' townwards ter lay in a

fresh supply. Happenin' ter pass the water hole at the prospect known as the 'King Pin', I seen two fellers palaverin' on t'other side of a bunch o' greasewood. They didn't hear me come up—that burro o' mine is reg'lar cat-footed. When I seen who it was talkin', I knowed somethin' crooked was goin' on an' I didn't open my yaup, as I mout 'a' done if they was pilgrims an' friends. Nary, I didn't. I jess crawled through that chaparral an' opened my ears."

"Who were the men?" asked the scout. "Why did they arouse your suspicions?"

"Waal, one o' 'em was the ombroy as totes the label o' Señor Chick. I savvied that he was badly wanted by the Phenix sher'ff. T'other galoot was Mose Hockmeister, a Phoenix minin' shark. When two fellers like meister, a fugitive from jestic an' a minin' shark—git tergether, not much good kin come of it, kin there now?"

"You're acquainted with this Señor Chick?"

"He ain't on my visitin' list, but I'd seen him over to Mesa two 'r three times. He used ter be bar-keep in a drink emporium an' got fired fer tappin' the till. It was arter that he took up with Baker an' went ter dealin' in contraband stuff. That's how I come ter know him. Him an' Hock was palaverin' about that King Pin propersition. From what they said, I savvied Chick owned the King Pin an' that he'd put it up ter Hock ter sell it fer him ter a tenderfoot what's strayed in.

"Now, I savvies that same King Pin. It is a king pin fake with a litle limestone stringer that opens up inter a foot vein o' ore—an' that ore's so vallyble there's 'bout a dollar's wuth o' gold in a hunnerd tons o' it. Hock, as I gits it, is ter unload the King Pin outer Myrick—which same is the tenderfoot—fer ten thousand in cold cash. Hock, I gits it further, has

lugged Myrick out ter the King Pin, an' he's there durin' this palaver, crawlin' around in the shaft an' shippin' off a leetle bag o' samples. Chick is keepin' out o' sight in the brush, an' Hock, watchin' his chance, slips inter the chaparral fer a word er two with Chick. This Chick person is ter split even with Hock if the King Pin is sold ter Myrick fer ten thousand. A clean bit o' rob'ry, same as if Chick an' Hock had rammed their hands inter Myrick's pocket an' lifted out the cash without the King Pin not figgerin' in any ways.

"Chick an' Hock wasn't palaverin' long. When they got through, Chick slides out o' sight around a spur o' the mounting, an' Hock he goes back ter where a young feller is standin' by the ore dump with a bag, about the size of a terbacker pouch, in his hands. O' course, that feller with the bag is Myrick. Waal, bumby Hock an' Myrick gits inter a buckboard an' starts fer town. I mosey along myself, an' fust thing this mornin' I moves on the sher'ff's office an' tells what I seen. Bang says it looks like a good chance ter nab Chick, an' says I'm ter come along with him an' put it up ter Buffler Bill—which same it does me proud ter do. That's about all."

Pangborn drew a long breath, settled back in his chair, lifted his cowhides to the veranda rail and proceeded to expectorate between the elevated bootsoles.

"How far away is this King Pin prospect?" queried Wild Bill.

"Eighteen mile."

"Would it do, amigos, to hike out there? Could we put the kybosh on Señor Chick by such a straight-from-the-shoulder move, or would he be on the lookout and shy off?"

The scout shook his head thoughtfully.

"I think," said he, "that we'd be taking chances. Chick

knows he's wanted, and a man who knows he's wanted is always keeping one eye out for trouble signals. Besides, I'll bet a pair of spurs that Chick has a few of Baker's dozen with him."

"I agree with you, Pard Cody," put in the sheriff. "This is a hot tip Pangborn has brought us, but it must be handled right or there'll be a bobble and no Chick in the big stone yamen after the dust settles. And some of the Dozen are with him, that's a plain one. As I figure it, Chick wants five thousand in cash to outfit the gang for lawless operations. He mustn't get the money. It's a hard situation to take care of, but you're the one for it, if it can be done."

"You say, Pangborn," went on the scout, "that Hockmeister and Myrick came back to town yesterday?"

"That's what they done," answered Pangborn.

"Then it may be that Myrick has bit at the bait and that the ten thousand has already been handed over."

"Nary. There ain't been no assays made at the office across the road, which is the only assay office in town. Hock, it's a cinch, won't never let Myrick take the samples he chipped to the assayer. Bags 'll have ter be changed on him, an' mebbly that's takin' time."

"We ought to watch Hockmeister," said the scout. "The safest way to capture Chick is through the mining shark."

"My notion to a T!" declared Bangham. "But how?"

"That's a point to be figured out. Myrick is an Easterner, Pangborn."

"He looks it," returned the prospector, "but he don't look ter be no fool Easterner. I'll bet a side o' bacon that same Myrick has got sand an' sagacity, but he kain't come from the risin' sun an' beat a shark like Hock at

his own game. Hocks 'll change them bags on Myrick an' git Myrick's good money. You see."

Pangborn would have spoken further, but just then a young man passed the hotel. He must have been twenty-five, and from his hat to his shoes he was Eastern. His face was pale, but his eyes were clear and shrewd. In one hand he carried a small bag. Pangborn watched him until he turned the corner and vanished along Washington Street.

"There he goes now," muttered the prospector; "that's him, friends, pushin' past jess while we're palaverin' about him. That's his bag o' samples in his hand. Say, it's a dead open-an'-shut he's bound fer Hock's office now."

Buffalo Bill got up.

"Come on, Hickok," said he, starting toward the veranda steps.

"Where to?" inquired the Laramie man, leaving his chair.

"I reckon we'll call on this shark ourselves," the scout answered.

"Horner's Block, Buffalo Bill," called the sheriff. "You'll find Hockmeister's place on the second floor back."

"Things will begin to happen right from now," laughed Wild Bill, over his shoulder. "You can expect results before many sleeps, Bangham."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WILES OF A MINING SHARK.

The building to which one Horner had given his name was situated in the center of the block and faced Washington Street. It was three stories in height and a drug store occupied the lower floor. The two upper floors were given up to offices. A stairway at the side of the drug store led to the offices.

A small square sign was fastened to the side of the door leading into the hallway: "M. J. Hockmeister, Mining Broker."

At the top of the first flight was another sign with an index hand pointing the direction to the shark's office. Following the painted finger, the parads came to the rear of a long hall. The door at the extreme end of the hall bore the shark's name.

The scout and the Laramie man had approached quietly. Standing side by side in front of the door, they heard a mumble of voices from the office, with now and then a few words or sentences pitched in a loud enough key for them to hear.

"You've kept that bag of samples carefully, have you, Myrick?"

This, of course, was Hockmeister. Myrick answered something and, for a few moments, the talk was a mere drone of voices, with nothing distinguishable to those in the hall.

There was another door to the right of Hockmeister's, and it was standing slightly ajar. The scout moved to it, looked into the room beyond, then beckoned to Wild

Bill. The latter followed, and presently found himself in a vacant room. This room had only a partition between it and Hockmeister's office.

The voices of the men in the broker's office came with clearness and distinctness to the ears of the pards. A survey of the partition quickly showed why this should be. A stovepipe hole in the partition gave an opening between the two rooms, so that the voices leaked resolutely through.

Wild Bill smiled grimly in response to the scout's significant look, and both bent their heads and listened.

"One man," the mining shark was saying to the intended victim, "can see jest as deep into the ground as any other man. Once a shaft is dug, of course that's a horse of another color. Now, this King Pin proposition shows for itself what it is. You see the vein, and it's a regular 'true fissure.' It gets better the farther down it goes. Nine times out o' ten that's the way with veins. They widen and get richer as they drop. You went into the shaft and picked your bag o' samples. I hadn't a thing to do with that. You've kept the samples with you and, as you say, slept last night with the bag under your pillow. Now, all that remains is for you to take that bag to the assayer and find out how much gold there is in the sample. Before you do that, I want you to go with me to talk with old Colonel Berdyne."

"What's the use of that?" asked Myrick. "I promised to come here and see you before I took the samples to the assayer, and that was only a waste of time. If this King Pin mine is a good one, the quicker I can get hold of it the better. The assayer will tell me whether it's a fake or a fair shake."

"Sure," went on Hockmeister, "but Colonel Berdyne is in town, and he's a man who knows this country from

A to Izzard, and from the grass roots down. I want him to talk to you about the formations out in the Phenix Mountains. You're putting up ten thousand dollars, and it's right and proper that you should know as much as possible about every phase of the proposition."

The shark's voice dropped into a confidential purr as it went on:

"I've taken a liking to you, Myrick, and I don't want you to make a bobble. I want to see you get hold of something that will prove a bonanza. Berdyne is only in town now and then, and he don't stay long. I'd like to get his opinion on the King Pin for my own satisfaction. If he thinks that ain't the mine you ought to buy, then I've got others on my list that'll come nearer the mark. It won't take us more than an hour to run over and see the colonel. Leave your bag of samples there on the desk, and come with me."

"Why should I leave the samples here, Mr. Hockmeister?" queried Myrick.

"It will be safer to leave them than to tote them around town with you."

"Some one might tamper with the bag while we're gone."

"I'm glad to see you so careful, Myrick. That's the kind of caution that will help you out, and you can't have too much of it. But, my dear young friend, let me assure you that there will be no one in the office to tamper with the bag while we're gone. You can see for yourself that we're the only two here. When we leave we lock the door and take the key with us. Believe me, my friend, I am even more anxious than you are to keep that bag from being meddled with."

"All right," agreed Myrick, "but you might let me have the key to the office after you lock the door."

"I'll do that, sure."

"I don't want you to think that I suspect you, Mr. Hockmeister, but ten thousand dollars is a good deal of money—for me. I couldn't afford to drop it in a fake mining proposition."

"And I'd hate to have you, Myrick. I'm doing everything I can to keep you from makin' a mistake."

The two men were heard getting up and crossing to the office door, then the door opened and closed and a key rattled in the lock. After that, footsteps were heard retreating along the hall.

"It's a game of bunko, all right enough," muttered Wild Bill, "and I should think that tenderfoot could see it."

"Well," returned the scout, "it's hard for a tenderfoot to get onto all the curves of a fellow like Hockmeister. Something is going to happen to that bag of samples Myrick foolishly left in the office."

"Shall we stay here and listen? There's a box in the hall, pard. We could bring it in here, climb up on it and watch through that stovepipe hole."

"I'd rather look in from the alley windows. What I would like, Hickok, is to catch red-handed the fellow who changes the samples. We could see what was going on, through the stovepipe hole, but we couldn't get at the man. We'll go down into the alley and hunt for a ladder."

"Keno," agreed the Laramie man.

Leaving the empty room, they started along the hall toward the stairs. Just as they reached the head of the flight a wiry, roughly dressed rat of a man covered the last step and passed them. The man carried a short, stout fishpole and line.

Both pards gave the man a keen glance. He hardly

looked at them, but went straight on and turned into the vacant room the scout and Wild Bill had just left. Hickok drew a quick breath.

"What does that ombray expect to catch in there, Cody?" he whispered.

"Give it up," was the reply. "Let's get downstairs and around into the alley. If we can find a ladder, Hickok, I'll gamble that we're going to see something worth while."

Quickly they descended the stairs and hurried around the end of the block. The alley was strewn with useless litter from the stores. The pards made their way through it until they had reached the rear of the Horner block. They had no difficulty in locating the windows of Hockmeister's office, and they were pleased to discover that one of them was open.

"Everything is mighty handy for us," said the Laramie man, "excepting the ladder. If we go asking for one we're liable to arouse suspicions."

"Let's make a hunt through some of the sheds back of these stores," suggested the scout. "Sharp's the word, Hickok. If we don't hurry, that fellow with the fishpole may get in his work and leave before we get a look at the inside of Hockmeister's office."

"Right-o!"

They separated, Buffalo Bill going one way along the alley and Wild Bill the other. The scout had not carried his search far before a whistle from Wild Bill drew his attention. Whirling to an about face, the scout saw the Laramie man placing a ladder under the open window of Hockmeister's room.

"Where did you find it?" asked the scout, hurrying up.

"In the first shed east, pard," answered Wild Bill. "There was a bucket of paint and a paint brush along."

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side of it, and we'd better get through with the thing before the painter's ready to use it."

The scout was already climbing. He made his way carefully up the rungs, keeping sharp eyes on the windows of the empty room next Hockmeister's office. If the man with the fishpole should happen to look out and down, he would understand in a minute that he was being spied upon.

No face appeared at either of the windows of the empty room, however, and Buffalo Bill gained the top of the ladder and leaned over the window sill.

The office into which he looked was a small one. There were maps on the walls, a stand with a letter press in one corner, and in the middle of the floor a table with writing materials and the small bag he had already seen in the hand of the Easterner.

Everything inside the office was quiet and peaceful. On the other side of the partition, however, some one could be heard moving around. The man with the fishpole was doing something—but what?

"Anything doing?" whispered Wild Bill, from the rung below the scout's feet.

At that precise instant Buffalo Bill saw something that caused him to look down at his pard and lay a finger on his lips, then climb noiselessly over the sill and into the room.

Wild Bill quickly reached the top of the ladder, and he and the scout stared with interest at the novel performance taking place before their eyes.

What the pards saw was a hand thrust through the stovepipe hole from the other side of the partition. The hand and most of the arm were visible. The fingers of the hand clutched a fishpole. A bag, identically like the

one on the table, hung from the end of the fishline. The bag hovered over the table.

Here was a new kind of fishing, and Buffalo Bill watched it with interest.

A grim smile crossed the Laramie man's face. It was easy to understand what was going on.

Myrick and Hockmeister had gone away. The office was locked and Myrick had the key in his pocket. But the tricky mining man had arranged to have a scoundrelly confederate change the bags by means of the line and fishpole.

Slowly the suspended bag settled down on the table beside the bag Myrick had left there.

The two bags were exactly alike. Hockmeister had exercised considerable ingenuity in making his duplicate of the sack Myrick had brought in from the King Pin mine. A little time had been required for this—which was undoubtedly the reason the mining shark had requested Myrick to delay calling on the assayer.

Considerable angling was necessary in order to get the hook out of the bogus bag of samples. The man on the other side of the partition accomplished this finally, and then began fishing for Myrick's sack.

When the hook caught he lifted the bag slowly. As it rose in the air, the fishpole was slowly withdrawn through the hole. The hand was quickly disappearing and the time had come for Buffalo Bill to act.

Swiftly, noiselessly the king of scouts advanced to the partition. He carried a chair with him and quietly set it down and climbed to the seat. The next moment he had caught the vanishing hand in a firm grip and had drawn it through the hole to the elbow.

A muffled exclamation came from the other side of the partition.

There was no longer any occasion for secrecy, and a low laugh broken from Wild Bill's lips.

"By gorry, pard," he chuckled, "that ombray went fishing for ore sacks and caught a bag of trouble. What are you going to do with him?"

"Go down the ladder, pard," answered the scout, "and come up the front stairs to the empty room. I can't let this fellow go until you're on the other side of the partition with him."

"Correct."

Wild Bill vanished from the window. The scout, looking through the hole along the pinioned arm, found a pair of wrathful eyes staring into his.

"Le' go!" growled the man.

"Not just yet," was the stern response.

"This hyer ain't none o' yore bizness."

"We'll see about that—later."

"If ye don't take yer grip off'n that hand I'll put a bullet inter ye!"

"I wouldn't get careless with my hardware if I were you. It's a game two can play at."

With his left hand the scoundrel tried to bring the muzzle of a revolver into the stovepipe hole, but the space was too small, and the scout pulled the hand around so that it was in front of the revolver's point. At last the man gave up.

"Say," he breathed, "let me go an' I'll make this all right with ye."

"That's no inducement," returned the scout. "You're helping Hockmeister, I suppose?"

"Waal, mebby."

"What's your name?"

"Jim Finks."

"Why didn't Hockmeister give you a duplicate key to

the office? You could have changed the bags a heap easier."

"That's what he done, but I lost the key. Consarn it! I'm havin' all kinds o' tough luck this trip. You spoke ter some other feller a minit ago, didn't ye?"

"I did. He's going down the ladder and will come up the front way. He'll be with you in a minute or two."

"Is he an officer?"

"No. But it will be easy for us to hand you over to an officer."

There was a brief silence, during which Jim Finks struggled ineffectually to jerk away.

"Ye come through the winder, huh?" he asked.

"I did."

"Blame' queer I didn't see ye while I was fishin' around in the room."

"I was careful to keep out of sight."

"Say, ye hadn't ort ter rough things up with me," proceeded Finks, in a whining voice. "I'm only a pore devil tryin' ter make a little money helpin' Hock."

"The way you're making your money, Finks, is what gets me. You're helping Hockmeister swindle an inexperienced Easterner, and I reckon you could both be put through for it."

At just that moment Wild Bill could be heard entering the other room.

"Here I am, pard," he called, in a low tone. "What's first?"

"The man says his name is Jim Finks," returned the scout. "First off, Hickok, relieve Mr. Finks of his weapons."

There came a sound of quick movements.

"All right," announced Wild Bill.

"Have him pull through the hole this bag he was fishing for."

Wild Bill gave the order and Finks obeyed.

"What's next?" queried the Laramie man.

"Take the bag, and the fishing outfit, and Finks around to my room at the hotel. Better take him through the alley, or around the back street, so you won't meet Hockmeister and Myrick if they should happen to be returning."

"Right-o!"

The scout could hear a mumble of voices, and then a sound of footsteps leaving the empty room and fading to silence along the hall.

The bag of bogus samples, left on the table by Finks the scout did not disturb.

With a final look around, and a subdued laugh at the way events were playing into his hands, he got through the window and quickly descended the ladder to the ground. Without much difficulty he found the place where the ladder had been found and laid it down beside the keg of paint and the brush. Then he made his way through the alley and back to the hotel.

Wild Bill had Finks, and the fishpole, and Myrick's bag in the scout's room. Finks, his rascally face full of apprehension, was wriggling nervously in a chair. He cast a supplicating look at the scout as he came into the room.

"Ye're Buffler Bill, hey?" he asked.

"I am," answered the scout.

"Would ye mind tellin' me what ye're buttin' inter Hock's game fer?"

"I'm going to have a talk with you, Finks, before long." Buffalo Bill turned to the Laramie man. "Go

downstairs, Hickok," said he, "and watch for Myrick. He'll be going to the assayer's office in a few minutes. As soon as you see him, and before he calls on the assayer, bring him here. I want to have a talk with him, too."

"That's me," returned the Laramie man promptly. "What did you do with the other bag?"

"Left it in the broker's office."

"That's the bogus bag, eh?"

"Yes. I didn't want Hockmeister to think there was anything wrong. He can go ahead and play his game, pard, and we'll play ours."

Wild Bill couldn't guess what the game was, but there was not much time for further talk. He left at once, and the scout gave his attention to Jim Finks.

"I don't care to come down very hard on you, Finks," said he, "unless I find you're failing to give me correct information. Answer my questions truthfully, and do what you're told, and nothing will go wrong with you."

Jim Finks brightened appreciably.

"'Course I was only workin' fer Hock, ye know," he answered. "He hired me ter watch so'st I could change them bags when him an' Myrick left the buildin'. I'd lost the duplicate key, an' there wasn't no time ter tell Hock about it, so I figgered I could do some fishin' through the stovepipe hole."

"You have quite a resourceful mind, Finks," returned the scout dryly. "Do you know anything about this scheme Hockmeister is working?"

"Not a thing. He told me I was ter change them bags, and I was ter git a ten-spot fer doin' it an' keepin' my mouth shut arterwards."

"When were you to collect your money?"

"Any time I called fer it."

"Then, if you didn't call on Hockmeister for two or three days he wouldn't suspect anything was wrong?"

"He'd think it queer, I reckon, seein' as how I'm allers hard up, but I don't allow he'd suspect anythin' was goin' crossways."

"And if you stayed in this room for two or three days have you any relative who might get to worrying about you and start a search?"

There was something humorous in this question for Jim Finks. He grinned broadly.

"Ain't got no kin," said he. "Nobody 'u'd worry about me. I'm ter have my board an' keep as long as I stay hyer?"

"Of course."

"Then, by thunder, it might be a hull lot worse. I'm not ter be put through fer changin' them bags if I do what I'm told ter?"

"I'll let you go as soon as I'm through with you, providing you don't attempt any treachery while you're in my hands."

"I'm yer huckleberry. Got any terbacker?"

He pulled an old pipe from his pocket and Buffalo Bill tossed him a bag of "smoking." While the pipe was being prepared for immediate use, the door opened and Wild Bill entered, ushering in the Easterner, Myrick.

"I hadn't much more than got squared away in front of the hotel, Pard Cody," reported the Laramie man, "when our unsuspecting friend blew around the corner and pointed for the assay office. I headed him off before he had crossed the street, and here he is."

Myrick was carefully carrying the bogus bag. There was a look of surprise on his face.

"What's wanted?" he asked. "I'm in something of a hurry, gentlemen, and if this isn't important——"

"It is important," interrupted the scout. "Sit down a moment, Mr. Myrick."

The Easterner seated himself hesitatingly and awaited further developments.

"Mr. Myrick," said the scout, "my name, as you may have been told, is Cody——"

"I heard you were in Phenix," interrupted Myrick. "I guess there are not many people in town who don't know Buffalo Bill is here. You and your pards have been keeping yourselves pretty well in the limelight for the past few weeks."

The scout nodded.

"How long have you been in Phenix?" he asked. "You'll pardon me for being a little personal in my questions. It's for your own good, as you'll find before very long."

"I've been in town two weeks," answered the young man.

"You're figuring on buying the King Pin mine, aren't you?"

Myrick seemed puzzled.

"How'd you discover that?" he asked. "We've been keeping the matter quiet."

"Well, I discovered it quite by chance, but I consider it a very important discovery. You are planning to buy the mine?"

"Yes. My health hasn't been any too good in Kansas City, where I hail from, and the doctor said I needed the dry, bracing climate of this part of Arizona. I thought that if I could buy a fairly good 'prospect' I could make my own way while regaining my health. This ten thousand dollars I'm to hand over for the King Pin, if the assays prove what I expect, represents nearly every dollar I've got in the world."

"Ah!" murmured the scout. "In that case, Mr. Myrick, I'm doubly glad that fate has mixed me up in this deal. How did you happen to go to Hockmeister for a mine?"

"I didn't go to him. He came to me and began talking about the King Pin."

"Did he tell you who owned the King Pin?"

"Why, yes. The owner's name is Chester Lathrop. He's left the country, Hockmeister says, but placed a blank deed in the broker's hands so the King Pin could be sold and turned over to the purchaser."

"I see. Yesterday you were out at the King Pin getting samples of ore from the vein?"

"By George, Buffalo Bill!" exclaimed the young man. "I haven't any idea how you learned that, but it's a fact."

"You kept a firm grip on your bag of ore samples, slept with them under your pillow last night, and took the bag around to Hockmeister's office this morning?"

Myrick did not answer, but merely stared incredulously.

"Then," pursued the scout, with a smile, "Hockmeister wanted to take you over to talk with a man called Colonel Berdyne, and he suggested that you leave your bag of samples on the office table. You agreed, but when the office door was closed and locked you took the key."

"Well, well!" muttered Myrick, rubbing a hand over his forehead.

"That was rather a foolish thing to do, Mr. Myrick," said the scout.

"I got to thinking it was myself," was the answer, "so I hurried Hockmeister back to the office."

"Did you see this man Berdyne?"

"No. He wasn't where we expected to find him and

Hockmeister wanted to wait. We did wait a little while, and then I hurried the broker back to his office. It was a big relief to me to find the bag of samples just where I had left it."

"Are you sure it was the same bag?" asked the scout.

"I'm positive." The bag was on Myrick's knees and he lifted it as he spoke. "Do you see that spot of mud on the side?" he asked, pointing. "I dropped the bag at the edge of a water hole yesterday and wiped it off. But the stain was left."

The scout got up and stepped to the table. Removing a newspaper, he revealed the other bag to Myrick's astonished eyes.

"What's the difference between the two bags, Mr. Myrick?" he asked.

The Easterner started to his feet in a panic.

"Well, what do you think of that!" he gasped. "I can't see any difference between the bags."

"I thought not," laughed the scout, "and yet, one of the bags contains your samples and the other contains samples that Hockmeister has fixed up for you. This man," the scout nodded toward Jim Finks, "angled with hook and line through a stovepipe hole and changed the bags. You have to get up mighty early in the morning, Mr. Myrick, if you beat a man like Moses J. Hockmeister at his own game."

Myrick, staring from the bag to Buffalo Bill, and from Buffalo Bill to Finks, stood rooted in his tracks for a few moments. Slowly an expression of wrath and indignation crossed his face.

"So it's a frame-up, is it?" he inquired, a glitter in his eyes as they rested on Finks.

"A frame-up, pure and simple," answered the scout. "Hockmeister is trying to make you pay ten thousand

dollars for a proposition that has no value. But I want you to prove this for yourself. The bag on the table contains your samples. We'll mark that bag "Number One." The scout used a pencil on the bag as he spoke. "Now," he continued, "you mark the bag you have as 'Number Two.' When you leave here, take both bags to the assayer and tell him to give you his report, on separate blanks, as soon as he can."

"Is that necessary?" inquired Myrick wrathfully. "Why not, on this showing you have just made, have Hockmeister arrested?"

"Because," said the scout, "I'm working toward another object. This Chester Lathrop, who is supposed to own the King Pin proposition, and for whom Hockmeister is acting as broker, is none other than the fellow known as Señor Chick, a fugitive from the law and badly wanted by the Government. In this, my friend, I and my pards are working for the government, and what we want is to capture Chick. You can help us."

Slowly Myrick sank back into his chair. He was very much taken aback by the scout's revelations.

For his further information, Buffalo Bill went into matters more in detail. He told about the prospector, Pangborn, and the talk overheard between Hockmeister and Chick in the chaparral; and he also went into the work which he—the scout—and Wild Bill had done that morning. When Buffalo Bill was through, the scheme of the mining shark was plain before Myrick's eyes. The young man realized, too, how the scout had helped him, and how there might be a chance for capturing Señor Chick.

Getting to his feet, Myrick crossed the room and caught the scout's hand.

"I owe you a good deal, Buffalo Bill," said he grate-

fully, "and I want you to understand that I know it, and am anxious to pay the debt. How can I help you?"

"Here's my plan," answered the scout. "You're to take those two bags to the assayer and ask him for a report, on separate blanks, as soon as he can give it to you. Then you will bring the reports to me. You will find that bag number two assays 'way up in value, and that bag number one shows only a slight trace of gold to the ton, if any. I will give you ten thousand dollars. You will take the money, along with the assayer's best report, and go to Hockmeister. Turn over the money to him and get the deed. All I ask of you is to say nothing about what I and my pards have done, but to carry the deal through apparently in good faith."

Myrick drew a quick breath.

"Are you going to lose all that money, Buffalo Bill?" he asked.

"No," was the grim response, "I'm not going to lose it, Myrick. The point is here: Hockmeister will take half the money to a place where he can turn it over to Señor Chick. When he does that, I and some of my pards will be trailing him and will lay Chick by the heels. We'll get back the money, all of it."

"But you'll be taking chances," expostulated Myrick. "Something might go wrong."

"Nothing will go wrong," answered the scout reassuringly.

"Then why don't you let me use my own money?"

"Because I don't want you to gamble with it. The deal is more or less a gamble, but I know what I and my pards can do much better than you. If it was your own money you were using, Myrick, you'd have doubts and misgivings. That would make you nervous and you couldn't play your part as you should."

"Well, have it your way. It will be worth a whole lot to me to help you beat Hockmeister at his own trick. Still, here's something that you seem to have overlooked."

"What is it?"

"If I buy that King Pin prospect with your money, the deal is practically closed when I get the deed. What can you do to get back the ten thousand dollars? It doesn't seem to be a crime to salt a mine on a tenderfoot."

"Don't you fret about that part of it, Myrick," laughed Wild Bill. "When we're ready to hand back your deed for the ten thousand, this Hockmeister will be more than ready to give up his half the loot. As for Señor Chick, we'll simply take his half the money away from him—and he won't find any fault."

"Well, gentlemen, you know more about the ins and outs of this than I do," said Myrick. "My first move is to go across the street to the assay office with the two bags. I guess I'll be on the way. When I get the certificates, Buffalo Bill, I'll come back here before I go to Hockmeister."

"That's right. Be sure and get a certificate for each bag."

With a final word to assure the scout that he understood exactly what was wanted of him, Myrick took his departure with the two bags.

"Pard," remarked Wild Bill as soon as Myrick had left, "I don't want to seem at all fearful, but it strikes me that you're playing a blind game of tag with ten thousand of your own good money. The deal might work out all right, but there's a chance something may go crossways."

"It won't be my money, Hickok," said the scout, "and it won't be good money. Bangham was showing me more than fifteen thousand of the 'queer' which he has over in

his office safe, a couple of days ago. I'm going to borrow ten thousand of that. This little give-and-take of diamond cut diamond is to be bogus all around."

"Ye're Class A, all right," spoke up Jim Finks, admiringly. "I wouldn't be in Señor Chick's shoes, nor in Hockmeister's either, fer all the gold in the good mines in this kentry. That's right."

CHAPTER XXIII.

PERK DERRY, "HOT TAMALE."

Every town has its dregs, and there were some Western towns, in the old days, that ran more to dregs than to anything else. Not, by any means, was this the case with Phenix. Nature had smiled too genially on the valley of the Rio Salado, so that more good people than bad have always been attracted to the town.

Still, the Mexican quarter and the Chinese quarter gave refuge to many who inclined rather too eagerly toward "ways that are dark and tricks that are vain." And even outside the two quarters might be found a few whose complexion was neither yellow nor red nor brown who would kick over the legal traces if interest counseled such a move.

Perk Derry was one of these.

Perk was twelve. "When a man gits ter be twelve year old," Perk was wont to remark, "it's time he showed a streak o' somepin wuth while."

Perk showed his "streak." He smoked cigarettes, rolling them *a la* Mexican; and, on some occasions, he used language which would have made an army teamster blush; also, he was somewhat mixed on property rights, and had been known to transfer to his own use and benefit certain articles which belonged to some one else.

The lad had lacked right training. His mother had died when he was three years old, and his father had ridden into Mexico on a horse that was not his own, followed by a man who owned the horse and some of his

friends. The pursuers got back with the horse, but nothing was ever heard of Perk's father afterward.

The boy laid around the town, learning in the Mexican and Chinese quarters how to smoke, and to play gambling games, and to steal. All the better class of people were too busy, or too proud, to pay any attention to Perk. The law officers gave him some attention, now and then, but it was nothing that helped him to better himself.

Perk, acquiring rather high and mistaken ideas about himself, annexed the sobriquet of "Hot Tomolla."

In a shed, back of a row of stores facing Washington Street, he had his sleeping quarters. He was sleeping late, on the morning Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill made their initial move against Hockmeister, and he would probably have slept even later had he not been aroused by some one in the shed.

Perk's bunk was an old piano box, the front screened with a piece of canvas. Pulling aside the screen, he looked out with blinking eyes.

A man was just going away with a ladder. Now, Perk knew the ladder belonged to a painter, and he also knew that the man who took it wasn't the painter. This situation appealed strongly to Perk, and he crawled out of the piano box and watched the man lean the ladder against the wall of one of the stores.

The man whistled. Then, to Perk's surprise, Buffalo Bill presented himself and began climbing the ladder.

Perk, of course, had heard of the king of scouts and knew him by sight.

He also recognized the man who had taken the ladder as Wild Bill, the scout's Laramie pard.

What were Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill going to do? It looked like "second-story" work to Perk, and he watched, breathing only when necessary.

Although he saw little, he knew that something exciting was taking place in Hockmeister's office. Wild Bill, after a time, shinned down the ladder and disappeared in the direction of Washington Street. What was his hurry? the boy asked himself; and why was Buffalo Bill staying in Hockmeister's office?

In order to probe at least one of these mysteries, Perk followed Wild Bill. The Laramie man was just vanishing in the hallway of the Horner block when Perk reached the Washington Street sidewalk.

"Kain't savvy the burro, not noways!" muttered Perk, digging his fingers into his tangled hair. "There's a heap of excitement up in Hockmeister's place, but I'm a tinhorn if I can guess it out."

He was hanging around the hallway door when Wild Bill came down with Jim Finks. Perk knew Finks, but Finks didn't seem to see Perk as he walked up the street with Wild Bill.

"Wonder if Finks has been tryin' ter make a raise, an' got ketched at it?" thought Perk. "Hard luck, if he has, but them Cody pards are some hard ter beat if ye git tangled up with 'em. I'll go 'round back an' see what's happenin' there."

The ladder was down when Perk reached the rear of the drug store, and had been replaced in the shed. The boy figured that Buffalo Bill must have done that.

"What's been goin' on," reasoned Perk, "wasn't open an' aboveboard, not so ye could notice. 'Course Buffler Bill an' Wild Bill ain't goin' ter do anythin' crooked, but—waal, I wonder if Hockmeister knows? Kin I squeeze four bits out o' Hockmeister by puttin' him next? Easy money, if I kin."

With the prospect of gain prominently in his hand,

Perk shuffled down the alley and around into Washington Street.

"Not fer nothin' I ain't called Hot Tamale," he chuckled, as he climbed the stairs to Hockmeister's office.

A young fellow with a small bag in his hand came out of Hockmeister's place and passed Perk in the upper hall.

"He's a tenderfoot, all right," muttered Perk, with a fine show of contempt. "I'll bet he don't know a mine from a gopher hole, an' Hock's workin' him."

Opening the office door, Perk stepped in quickly. The mining shark was walking up and down the room, chuckling and rubbing his hands.

"Git out, you guttersnipe!" growled Hockmeister, whirling on the boy.

"Not right off, Hock," returned Perk coolly. "Gi'me four bits fust."

"I'll give you a kick that'll send you through the window if I have to speak to you again," was the surly response. "Scatter!"

Perk Derry was used to being talked to like that. He would have been a different boy if his kind had treated him more like a human being and less like a coyote.

"Don't git all scrambled up, now, till ye hear what sort of a palaver I got ter hand ye," went on Perk, warily, placing the table between him and the broker. "The price has riz ter a dollar. Hand me any more o' that back talk, Hock, an' it'll go higher."

"You can't work me with any of your fool games," snorted Hockmeister, picking up a chair. "Are you going to clear out?"

"Waal, yes," was the answer, "if that's the way ye feel erbout it. A couple o' fellers come inter this place through that open winder, a while ago. I know who they

was, an I know a heap more, but if ye don't want ter palaver a dollar's wuth, I'll be goin'."

Perk started for the door, but was grabbed by the collar and thrown back before he had reached it.

"You'll tell me more about this before you get away from here," growled the mining shark, glaring menacingly at the boy, "or I'll skin you alive."

Perk was not to be scared.

"Aw, spell able," he muttered. "Gi'me a dollar right in my fist or I don't say a word."

Hockmeister studied over the matter for a moment, then snatched a silver dollar from his pocket and threw it at the boy.

"Now, then, what about it?" he snapped.

"Buffer Bill an' Wild Bill climbed through the window," said Perk, "an' then Wild Bill walked out the front way with Jim Finks. While I was watchin' Wild Bill an' Finks, Buffer Bill come down the ladder, put the ladder in the shed and hiked."

A lighted bomb, suddenly exploded at Hockmeister's feet, couldn't have caused him greater consternation. He stared hard at Perk, his face working convulsively. Suddenly he leaped and caught the boy about the throat with both hands.

"If you're lyin' to me," he cried hoarsely, "if you're——"

Like an eel Perk wriggled clear of the shark's hands and sprang to the other end of the room.

"I ain't lyin'," protested Perk; "I'm telling ye the truth."

Hockmeister walked up and down, muttering to himself and tossing his hands.

What were Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill doing in his office while he and Myrick were away from it? Why

should the scout and his pard be at the place when Finks was supposed to be there changing one bag of ore for another? And why should the two Bills come in the back way, and use a ladder? And Wild Bill had taken Finks off!

Here, certainly, was plenty of food for thought. Five thousand dollars was at stake, for Hockmeister, in this deal for the King Pin prospect. Why was Buffalo Bill meddling? Had he got wind of the transaction?

"Bothers ye some, hey?" chirped Perk Derry, wagging his bullet-like head. "Ye don't like what I told ye, fer some reason? Tryin' ter pull some wires, I'll bet, an' Buffler Bill's copperin' yer game."

"Never you mind what I'm tryin' to do," scowled Hockmeister. "Look here," he added, taking a five-dollar bill from his pocket, "d'you see this?"

"Not bein' blind, Hock, I kain't help seein' it."

"Well, if you'll slide around and find out what's become of Finks, then come back here and let me know, I'll give you the money; and if you can find out anything else about Buffalo Bill and his pards, I'll pay you for that, too. Now, clear out, and don't you come back here till you bring some news."

"That dinero is mine," piped Perk, starting for the door. "If you try ter do any crawfishin', Hock, I won't tell ye nothin'. That shot goes as it lays."

With that, the boy slipped out into the hall and Hockmeister dropped into a chair and mopped the perspiration from his face.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon before Perk Derry reported. Hockmeister waited for the boy in his office, letting the dinner hour pass unheeded, and worrying and fretting and pacing the length of the small room.

There were breakers ahead and the shark seemed in

danger of being wrecked. The loss of the five thousand dollars—his share of the King Pin proceeds—would be bad enough, but if Buffalo Bill ever got started on Hockmeister he would probably never stop there. The shark knew that his record would not stand investigation, and the king of scouts usually ran out a trail to the bitter end if circumstances once started him on it.

Hockmeister was a resourceful man, but he could not draw on his resources until he knew exactly how the land lay.

On the stroke of four Perk Derry shuffled into the office. There was a knowing grin on his shrewd face, and he took a chair and began rolling a cigarette.

"Wow, but I've had a time!" he piped, "a reg'lar ole sockdolager of a time, an' no mistake."

Hockmeister leaned over and slapped the rice paper and tobacco out of the boy's hands.

"None o' that, you little imp!" he scowled. "Give your attention to *me*, understand? That's what I'm paying you for. What's become of Finks?"

"Finks," Perk answered sullenly, his eyes on the scattered tobacco, "is up ter the hotel, bein' entertained by Buffler Bill."

"Entertained by Buffalo Bill? What d'you mean by that? Talk plain, if you know how."

"I mean that Finks is bein' kept in Buffler Bill's room," went on Perk. "Ole Nomad, the scout's trapper pard, is stayin' with him."

"Why?"

"Pass the ante. Ye wanted me ter find out where Finks was, an' that's what I done. Gi'me the five."

"Did you find out anything else?"

"Si, mucho plenty; but ye got ter squar' up with me

afore I give ye any more news. I was ter git five pesos fer findin' out what's become o' Finks."

"How do I know you're telling the truth?"

"Waal, jest take a pasear around ter the hotel an' climb ter the scout's room. I reckon ye'll know I'm givin' it ter ye straight then."

"How did you find it out?"

"Why, by loafin' around the hotel. They don't let me in the office, but I clumb inter the buildin' the back way an' nosed around. I piped off the scout's Dutch pard an' I heerd him tell ole Nomad it was his turn ter stay with Finks. Arter that, I sneaked up the stairs an' along the hall by the scout's room. Heerd enough by the door ter make it a cinch Finks was in the place, all right. He was talkin', an' he didn't seem ter be much worked up. Are ye goin' ter gi'me that five?"

Muttering angrily to himself, Hockmeister took the bill from his pocket and gave it to Perk.

"What else have you got to tell me?"

"How much more do I git?" countered Perk shrewdly.

"Just what I think it's worth. You stand to make another five, an' maybe you won't get a red. It all depends on whether or not I can use what you tell me."

Perk, sitting back in the chair and pulling the bank-note back and forth between his fingers, turned the matter over in his mind. He was already six dollars to the good. That was the best day's work he had accomplished in a long time. But there was more money where those six dollars came from, and he was getting greedy. He might as well make a good sized stake out of this trouble of Hockmeister's.

"Say, Hock," said he, "I dunno what this here bizness is, but ye're needin' some 'un o' my heft an' dispersion. I kin see that. You do the squar' think by me, an' I'll

do the same by you. I'll help ye as long as ye want, an' I'll tell ye what I know now an' spy around fer more news, if ye gi'me a ten-spot."

"You're a bloodsucker!" snorted Hockmeister.

"Waal, mebby," grinned the boy. "I reckon ye ort ter know a bloodsucker when ye see one. S'posin' I am? It's a cinch ye got Cody an' pards stacked up ag'in ye, an' ye need help. Gi'me a ten-spot an' I'll cut loose on yore side an' we'll put an everlastin' kybosh on the long-haired squad, from the king-bee trailer himself down ter the sawed-off specimen with the skelplock what's called Leetle Cayuse. How is it?"

Hockmeister took another tack.

"You're a bright kid, all right," he observed.

"Throw yer bokays out o' the winder. Otra vez, otra vez! Talk biz, same as one tinhorn talks ter another. Name yer play, ole sport, an' then stand by it. Rise ter that?"

"All right, Perk," said Hockmeister. "You help me and I'll give you the ten. That will make sixteen dollars, all told, that I've let you bulldoze me out of, but I'll give the other ten—if I find you're worth it."

"You say ye'll do it," said the boy, "but I want the dinero now."

"Then the deal's off," returned Hockmeister angrily. "If you won't trust me I won't trust you. Get out—if you're done."

There was finality in that. Perk did not get out, but thought it over. Why not take a chance? Hockmeister, he knew, had little regard for his spoken word, but Perk could bring him to time by threatening to call on Buffalo Bill and tell of his work for the shark.

"I'll go ye," said Perk. "This tenderfoot is mixed up in yer game, ain't he?"

"In a way, yes."

"In several ways, I reckon. His name's Myrick?"

"Yes."

"Waal, I seen him go ter the assay office an' leave two bags ter be assayed."

"One bag," corrected Hockmeister.

"I said two," answered the boy firmly. "When Myrick went ter the assay office he come out o' Buffler Bill's room."

A sickly pallor crept into Hockmeister's face. His worst suspicions were being realized. The pallor fled, leaving his face set and stern, and his eyes glimmering balefully.

"Go on," he ordered, between his teeth.

"Not more'n ten minits ago," proceeded the boy, "Myrick come out o' the assay office with two certificates."

"Sure he had two?"

"Sure."

"Well, what else?"

"He went ter the hotel ag'in an' went up ter the scout's room. I didn't wait fer no more but hiked fer here."

Hockmeister pulled his chair to the table and drew out a drawer. Taking a well-thumbed pack of cards from the drawer, he removed the four nine-spots from the deck.

"Your news is all right, Perk," said he, "and here's where you begin helping me put the kybosh on this gang of meddlers from the North. You know where Yuen Moy had his shop, over in Chinatown?"

"Si! There ain't many parts o' chinktown that I don't know."

"Well, there are two Chinamen in Yuen Moy's old place. You're to go there and give one of these cards to one of them and one to the other."

"What sort of a palaver goes with them keerds?"

"No palaver at all. Just hand the two chinks the cards and leave."

"Buenos! That leaves two more keerds. What's ter be done with 'em?"

"You know Garcia's old adobe in the Mexican quarter?"

"Garcia? Which Garcia? Little Mexico is full o' Garcias."

"This Garcia is the one who was mixed up with the eight vaqueros—the men Buffalo Bill and pards chased over the border, captured, or otherwise put out of business."

"Oh, that feller! Sure I know where his place is."

"Well, there are a couple of Mexicans in the old house. The other two cards you will give to them."

"That's all, huh?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm ter come back here an' tell ye?"

"No. If you deliver the cards as I tell you, I'll know about it by nine, to-night. When you have given out the cards, go back to the hotel, and watch Buffalo Bill and the rest of his crowd. If they do anything suspicious, run over here and let me know."

"That's me. Say, ye ole rawhide, ye're some on the scheme, an' no mistake. I reckon the two of us kin match up purty well with the bunch ter the hotel, huh? When do I git the ten-spot?"

"At ten o'clock to-night. Come here, at that time, and the money is yours."

"That's the talk!"

Perk Derry, with a grin and a wink, got out of the chair and walked to the door. He paused long enough to make a few gestures significant of the fact that the

"kybosh" was about due for Buffalo Bill and his pards, and left the room.

"That boy's no fool," muttered Hockmeister, "but he won't get any ten-spot out of me to-night."

Taking a piece of paper, he wrote on it, "Back at nine this evening," tacked it to the outside of the door, and left.

"The two chinks and the two greasers won't come until nine," he said to himself, "and, if Myrick comes at all it will have to be at the same hour. Myrick will find more than he's looking for, between nine and ten."

He chuckled to himself as he went down the stairs.

It was about four-thirty when Myrick came to Hockmeister's door and tried to get in. Then, with some perturbation, he read the memorandum on the door.

"What does this mean?" he thought. "He doesn't seem overly anxious to take the ten thousand and give me a deed to the King Pin prospect. Well," and Myrick laughed grimly, "maybe it's a part of his game not to seem anxious. I'll be here at nine, fast enough. After that, it will be up to Buffalo Bill and his pards."

He turned and went away.

The little play at cross-purposes was proceeding as well as could be expected. If Buffalo Bill had known how Hockmeister was gathering his clan, Myrick would have been given a different part in the programme.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BROKER SHOWS HIS TEETH.

It took the assayer several hours to finish the work with Myrick's samples. When the certificates of assay were finally ready, the result bore out the conclusion the scout had formed some time before.

The bag Myrick had taken from the office assayed \$560 to the ton, while the bag of samples he had brought from the King Pin prospect showed a mere trace of gold.

While the Easterner was at the assayer's, Buffalo Bill had borrowed ten thousand dollars of the counterfeit money in Bangham's safe.

The sheriff had secured the "queer" in a raid, some months previously, in the neighborhood of Wickenburg. He had been looking for horse thieves, at the time, and the counterfeit money had dropped unexpectedly into his hands.

He was willing to let the scout take all he wanted of it.

This ten thousand dollars the scout handed over to Myrick, and the latter, as we have seen, went to Hockmeister's office at four-thirty only to find that he could do no business with the broker until nine.

Returning to the hotel, Myrick reported to Buffalo Bill.

At that moment old Nomad was in the scout's room, playing seven-up with Jim Finks, and, incidentally, making sure that he did not get away. The baron was in the billiard room rolling a game of pool with Wild Bill. Little Cayuse was on the hotel veranda with the scout.

The work, done and to be done, had been duly placed

before Nomad the trapper, the baron and the little Piute. None of them considered a set-to with a mining shark like Hockmeister a very curious business, but they worked up a little interest in the proceedings because Señor Chick was somewhere at the end of the trail.

"Hockmeister," remarked the scout after Myrick had finished his report, "don't seem very anxious to wind up the King Pin deal. I reckon, though, the delay is merely for effect. He doesn't want you to think he's trying to rush things."

"That's the way I sized it up. I'll go back there at nine, I suppose?"

"Yes."

Myrick did not remain long with the scout. It was a part of their plan not to let people on the street see Myrick with the scout or any of his pards. If Hockmeister got wind of the fact that the Easterner was associating with Buffalo Bill or his friends, he might suspect that something was wrong.

At eight-thirty, Buffalo Bill sent Cayuse into the alley at the rear of the drug store. He was to keep an eye on the broker's office, and also on the broker if chances favored.

A little after nine o'clock Myrick again called on Hockmeister. A gleam of lamplight shone around the edge of the office door, and Myrick congratulated himself that he could now finish his deal for the King Pin prospect.

He knocked, and the broker's voice asked him to enter. Hockmeister, a cigar between his teeth, sat at his desk reading a newspaper. Myrick noticed that the shades at the windows were drawn, but the fact did not impress him.

"Well, neighbor," inquired Hockmeister genially, "how did your assay come out?"

"Fine!" answered Myrick, with well-feigned enthusiasm. "I guess that King Pin proposition will turn out to be a bonanza, and no mistake. Look there!"

He showed Hockmeister the certificate of assay for the bag of samples left in the office by Jim Finks.

The broker was a little surprised. He was in the dark as to what was going to happen. He was prepared to show his teeth, however, no matter how Myrick, acting under advice from Buffalo Bill, came at him.

"Didn't I tell you the prospect was A-one?" asked Hockmeister.

"I guess it's mine," went on Myrick, dropping into a chair. "You can't back out now, Hockmeister. A bargain is a bargain."

"I haven't any intention of backing out, Myrick. I hadn't a notion, though, that the King Pin was going to show up any such values; but I told you you could have the mine for ten thousand, and I'll stand by my word."

"Have you got the blank deed with you?"

"Have you got the purchase price?"

"Look at this!"

Myrick took a package of money from the breast of his coat. The paper was only a tolerably good counterfeit, but in the lamplight it looked good enough to pass muster at any United States sub-treasury.

Hockmeister's surprise continued to grow. He couldn't understand the course of events at all. If Buffalo Bill had captured Finks, and had learned that a "job of salt" had been thrown Myrick's way, why this exchange of money for a deed?

By nature, however, Hockmeister was suspicious. He was expecting some sort of a trap, and more than ever he was ready to show his teeth.

"Draw up a little closer to the light, Myrick," said the broker, "and we'll count this bundle of bills."

In the shifting of chairs that followed, the broker so manœvered that the Easterner was obliged to seat himself with his back to a closet in the corner of the room. Both men leaned forward as the broker placed the bank-notes on the table and began thumbing them, one by one.

Noiselessly the closet door pushed open and four faces came out of the gloom with shadowy distinctness. Two of the faces belonged to Chinamen and two to Mexicans.

One of the Mexicans glided out into the room and to the back of Myrick's chair. At the last moment the Easterner heard a sound behind him. He attempted to turn in his seat, only to feel two sinewy hands about his throat, strangling outcry and holding him in his chair.

Hockmeister laughed choppily and leaned back in his seat.

"Careful, amigos," he warned. "Not too much noise."

Myrick was surrounded by the four who had been in the closet. They were prepared for their work, and his hands were lashed at his back and his feet secured at the ankles.

Not until he was securely bound did the Mexican take his hands from Myrick's throat. As the Easterner gasped for breath, the Mexican produced a revolver and pushed the muzzle into his face.

"Don't speak above your ordinary tone of voice, Myrick," said Hockmeister, "or you'll wish you hadn't."

"What—what's the meaning of this?" gasped Myrick.

Hockmeister was finishing the cigar he had been smoking when Myrick came into the office. He seemed cool enough, this shark who preyed on the unwary.

"It means, Myrick," the broker explained, "that you've been playing lame duck with me."

"Lame duck?" Myrick stared into the yawning mouth of the six-shooter, cringed a little and then swerved his eyes back to Hockmeister. "I don't understand."

"No? Well, I think you do. Why have you been running around to the hotel and talking with Buffalo Bill? Why did you take two bags of samples to the assay office? Why is Buffalo Bill holding Jim Finks a prisoner in his room? What's back of this play you've just made here? Are you going to talk with me about all that?"

Myrick hardly knew what he ought to say. He felt that he should not betray the scout and inform Hockmeister of what had been going on at the hotel, and yet the broker's information seemed fairly complete.

"I haven't anything to tell you," said Myrick.

"You haven't?" The look of a fiend crossed Hockmeister's face. "You'd better think twice before you take that stand, my festive friend. You're in my hands. These four men will do whatever I tell them. They're part of Baker's Dozen—a gang that will jump at the crook of my finger. You're in a pretty deep hole, Myrick, and the only way you can get out is by telling me exactly what Buffalo Bill has got up his sleeve."

But Myrick had grit. If he told Hockmeister of the scout's plans, then the scoundrelly broker could take steps for saving himself and for warning Señor Chick to keep out of the way. The success of the scout's scheme, it seemed to Myrick, depended upon what he—Myrick—said at that critical time.

"I'm not saying a word," returned Myrick, his face whiter than usual, but his voice none the less firm and steady. "Go ahead and do your worst, Hockmeister. I know you now for a swindler and a blackguard. I suppose"—Myrick took a new tack—"that you never had

the King Pin prospect to sell, and that this is merely a move to steal my ten thousand dollars."

"I don't care a rap what you suppose," snarled Hockmeister. "For the last time I ask you to tell me what Buffalo Bill is trying to do. You've been talking with him, and he's up to something and you're helping. Give me the facts—*now*."

"I have no facts to give you."

A baffled oath dropped from the shark's lips. Myrick, daring a shot from the revolver that was pushed into his face, tried to give a cry for help. It did not seem possible to him that such high-handed work could be successfully carried out, there in a building facing the main business thoroughfare of the town.

But the Mexican with the revolver was watching the prisoner as a cat watches a mouse. The attempt to raise an alarm was met by a dropping of the revolver and another twisting of the lean, brown fingers around Myrick's throat.

One of the Chinamen was ready with a gag. Expediently this was twisted between Myrick's jaws and he was left gasping in his chair like a spent fish.

"The rope!" said Hockmeister huskily, starting to his feet.

The other Mexican produced a horsehair riata. One end of this was secured around Myrick's waist, under his pinioned arms.

Hockmeister blew out the light, stepped to one of the windows and raised the shade. Then he raised the window and looked out into the alley. All was quiet below, save for the uneasy tramping of five horses, huddled like shadows at the rear of the drug store.

"The coast is clear," breathed Hockmeister. "Now, *compadres!*"

The Broker Shows His Teeth.

Myrick was carried to the window, pushed through and lowered. The end of the riata was made fast to the window sill and the Mexicans and the Chinamen slid down it to the ground, one at a time.

When the four had descended, the rope was released at its lower end. Hockmeister wound it into a coil and stowed it under his coat; then he closed the window, left the office, locked the door and turned—to behold the shrewd, smirking face of Perk Derry in the dimly lighted hall.

“How about that ten-spot, Hock?” asked the boy. “I——”

Like lightning Hockmeister’s fist leaped out. Perk Derry threw out his hands, staggered and crumpled to the floor without so much as a groan.

The shark, having twice shown his teeth, whirled and hurried down the stairs.

Perk Derry had the suspicious, wary nature of the ordinary street gamin. It was a sad commentary on human nature that this boy of twelve should believe that life was a cheat—that nothing was to be taken at its face evidence, but ulterior motives always hunted for.

Hockmeister had told Perk to come back to the office at ten and collect the “ten-spot.” Perk at once began imagining that Hockmeister was concealing something from him about the ten dollars, still to be paid.

So, by a process of reasoning which was perfectly logical with Perk, he delivered the four playing cards as directed and, about eight in the evening, drifted back to Hockmeister’s and spelled out the writing on the paper attached to the door.

Getting at the gist of the written words required some time, for Perk’s education was still along in the second

grade. Even that amount of knowledge he had picked up casually.

"Mebby's he's meanin' all right," mused Perk, strolling along the hall, "but I ain't goin' ter let that ten-spot give me the slip."

He discovered the vacant room next to Hockmeister's office. It was dark inside, but he had no difficulty in discovering that it was unoccupied. Sitting down on the floor in one corner, he waited patiently for the broker to come into the next room. In due course his perseverance was rewarded. There came a step in the hall, a rattle of a key in a lock and the opening and closing of a door. Perk pricked up his ears.

A match was struck and a lamp lighted. A glow of light shone into the vacant room and the street Arab lifted his eyes to the stovepipe hole.

"Buenos!" he thought, with a chuckle; "mucho fino! There's a hole in the wall an' a box under it. I'll pipe off the ole rawhide an' keep tab on him."

Perk had never worn shoes—not since he could remember. The whole year, in Phenix, consists of barefoot days. Because he was unshod, Perk was able to move with certainty and silence. Climbing to the top of the box which Jim Finks had used, earlier in the day, the boy was just able to look through the stovepipe hole.

Hockmeister was at his table, stuffing cartridges into the cylinder of a revolver.

The breath came slowly through the boy's lips. This was warlike work, and he was deeply interested.

Having finished loading the six-shooter, Hockmeister stuffed it into a hip-pocket. His next move was to take a horsehair riata from a dark corner of the office, examine it critically, then lay it on the table. Following that, he procured from the same corner a piece of light,

stout rope which he cut into four sections. These sections he laid on the table beside the riata. Then he took a piece of cloth from his pocket and twisted it into a gag, dropping it with the rest of his materials.

Perk's curiosity and interest increased by leaps and bounds. Not for the world would he have paid a visit to Hockmeister, at that moment. In his high regard for his own prowess, he believed that these preparations were being made for him—that, rather than hand over the "ten-spot," Hockmeister was scheming to make him a prisoner and put him out of the way.

Perk took a morbid delight in these reflections. It spoke loudly of his importance, to have a man like Hockmeister lay plans for his capture with such exceeding care.

"I'll fool that galoot," thought Perk. "Watch my smoke!"

Then, a few minutes later, taps were heard on the office door. Hockmeister whirled around from the table.

"Pesos!" he breathed.

"Pesos!" came in muffled tones from the hall.

Passing to the door, Hockmeister threw it open.

"Come in, compadres," said the broker.

Four men entered—two Mexicans and two Chinamen. Each showed a nine-spot playing card and threw it on the table.

"Great horn-toads!" thought Perk, his eyes bulging. "That onnery Hock got me ter have them blokes come so'st they could help him put the kybosh on *me!* I wonder if the five of 'em could do it, purvidin' I was in my usual fightin' trim? Anyways," he wound up with the subdued chuckle, "watch my smoke."

Hockmeister faced the men and whispered instructions to them. The words were pitched in so low a key that

the boy could not distinguish them. The Mexicans and the Chinamen nodded. One picked up the riata, one the gag, and the others the four sections of cord. Then Hockmeister opened the door of the closet and the four scoundrels went inside.

"He's plannin' ter have them duffers run out an' land on me when I put up a holler fer the ten-spot," thought Perk. "Oh, I dunno. I'm some wise myself."

Presently there were footsteps in the hall. Hastily, Hockmeister lighted a cigar, picked up a newspaper and seated himself by the lamp.

The door opened and the tenderfoot came in. To all that followed, Perk Derry was an interested eyewitness. The bundle of money represented a value that made him fairly gasp. He wondered if there wasn't some way he could "lift" that package of bills, which shows how easily it was for his lawless mind to drop into criminal reflections.

When the attack was made on Myrick, Perk was conscious of a heavy disappointment. All those preparations, it seemed, had not been made for Perk, but for the tenderfoot.

The putting out of the light, the lowering of Myrick through the open window, the descent of the Mexicans and the Chinamen were all followed with more or less clearness by the keen little eyes at the stovepipe hole.

When Hockmeister stepped into the hall and locked his office door, Perk was there, waiting.

The boy asked for his "ten-spot." The next moment he felt as though the upper part of the building had dropped on him. For something less than a minute his mind was a blank; then, staggering to his feet, he reeled along the hall.

"He's beatin' me out o' that ten-spot," gurgled Perk,

half mad with rage and pain. "I'll fix him fer that!" he went on, between his teeth, doubling one grimy fist and shaking it savagely. "He handed me one on the block—an' I'll fix him fer that, too."

For a moment he staggered, getting the whip-hand of his wits and his strength. Suddenly pulling himself together, he ran down the stairs, out into the street and doubled the end of the block.

Five shadowy horsemen were moving down the dark cross thoroughfare, headed toward the outskirts of town. The boy watched them, made up his mind that they were the broker, the Mexicans and the Chinamen, and ran after them.

He passed a hitching-pole where there were three saddle horses secured. With characteristic promptness, Perk borrowed one of the horses—without the owner's knowledge.

Undoubtedly the animals belonged to cowboys, in town for a brief round of gayety. They had not left their mounts at the corral, thereby saving four-bits to be expended in carousel.

Just what the consequences might be for appropriating a horse in that manner, Perk did not stop to consider. He had made a vow. If he carried it out, it was necessary that he have a horse.

The stirrups were too long for the boy and he was almost lost in the big Mexican saddle. These were only minor inconveniences, however, and he hung to the saddle-horn with one hand and kicked the horse with his bare heels.

The animal went into the air and came down in what is technically known as a "bedpost" buck. Perk's spine was almost pushed out through the top of his head, but he ground his teeth and hung to the saddle like a leech.

Finally the horse must have come to the conclusion that the difficulty was too trifling to bother about, for he laid a bee line along the street.

Perk was on the trail! He passed the town corral, going out the Black Cañon trail, and then, hearing the distant patter of hoofs, slowed his pace.

His head ached, and there was a growing lump over his right eye. Such discomforts were not to be considered. The best salve for his bruises lay in fulfilling his vow and getting even with Hockmeister.

Just how he was to get even, Perk did not know. But he was wildly determined to do something. Luck, he hoped, would come his way and offer him what he most desired.

Perhaps a mile beyond the corral, where the cottonwood trees were thickest along the trail, Perk became aware of something else which might, or might not, be of importance.

There was a horseman behind him!

The clipity-clip of galloping hoofs reached his ears distinctly.

Was the man behind another of Hockmeister's outfit? If this proved to be the case, then Perk was between two fires.

Doggedly the boy pushed on, dividing his attention between the tattoo of hoofs ahead and the sound of galloping behind.

So far as the hoofs ahead were concerned, he was holding his own. As for the hoofs behind, they were overtaking him.

To ride faster and get away from the man in the rear would bring Perk too close to the five men in front. He would have to keep his present position and hope for the best.

While covering another mile of the trail, the horseman behind came close enough to call out and order Perk to halt.

"Ugh! Stop! Make um stop!"

"Injun!" thought Perk. "I'll bet he's one o' the gang."

Perk didn't stop. Turning around in the big saddle he leveled his finger at the rider in the rear.

"Keep clear o' me 'r I'll shoot!" said Perk.

To his surprise, the rider increased his pace. Another minute and he hove alongside.

The rider wasn't a very big Indian, as Indians go, but if he had been over six feet tall and large in proportion Perk would have done exactly as he did then. Without a word, the boy threw himself from the saddle and straight at the hostile stranger. The shock of compact hurled them both into the road.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE GAMIN AND THE PIUTE.

Little Cayuse had a grievance. Luck had counted him out of the high doings in the Chinese quarter. He had, apparently, taken the misfortune lightly. His face remained impassive, as usual, although his heart was consumed with bitterness.

Cayuse wanted a chance to do something especially brilliant, and to do it all by himself. When Pa-e-has-ka told him to go into the alley and watch the rear windows of Hockmeister's office, the order promised developments. If fortune was working as it should, Cayuse was scheduled for his chance. It came to him.

In moving through the alley, Cayuse passed five horses tethered in the rear of the drug store. In itself, this was not especially suspicious. The Piute wondered, however, why the animals should be tethered in the alley when there were convenient hitching-poles in the street. Then, too, the mounts were directly back of the drug store and almost under Hockmeister's windows.

Here, right from the start, events were most promising. Cayuse crouched in the shadow of the shed from which Wild Bill had that morning secured the ladder. He had not long to wait for something to happen.

The light was snuffed out in Hockmeister's office. He saw the yellow glow that edged the window shades fade into darkness. A second later there came to his ears the grating of a lifted sash.

A dark object was lowered from the window. This

was followed by four more dark objects, apparently slipping down a rope.

The gloom of the alley interfered with close appraisal of what was going forward, but the Piute's eyes were keen.

He heard the window close, and he saw four dark figures approach the five horses. There was hurried work, but just what the figures were doing Cayuse could not see. Some one came stumbling into the alley from the lower end.

"Hockmeister?" called one of the toiling figures in a guarded tone.

"Sure!" was the answer. "Are you ready, compadres?"

"Si."

"Got a horse for me?"

"Si."

"Then let's get away."

Here followed the business of mounting. Cayuse, trailing on foot at the heels of the horses, saw the riders wheel from the mouth of the alley into a cross street. The light was a little better here.

Across one horse lay a roped figure, limply as a bag of meal. The horsemen turned and struck into a leisurely gallop.

The Piute's pulses had quickened. Here, he felt, was his chance to do something; and the chance was his alone, neither Pa-e-has-ka nor any of his other pards could have a hand in that trailing.

For Cayuse to go back to the hotel and report was out of the question. The riders would get away and leave not a trace behind.

They might get away as it was, for the Piute had yet to secure his pinto, Navi, from the corral. As luck

would have it, however, the course taken by the riders led past the Ranch Eight corral where the scout and his pards kept their horses.

The party was heading toward the Black Cañon trail. Cayuse watched them until tolerably sure of that, then ducked in through the corral gate.

With his usual quickness, he led Navi from the stall, twisted the rawhide hitching rope into a hackamore, jumped to the mustang's back and raced through the gate.

Salvadore Octagon, the Mexican proprietor of the corral, had come out of his house by the gate to find out who was taking a horse, and why. He dodged aside just in time to escape the pinto's hoofs.

"Diable!" he muttered to himself. "It is the Piute pard of Buffalo Bill. He had a right to his horse, but why did he not speak to me?"

Cayuse, just then, had a little time to talk about horses as Perk Derry had had, some five minutes earlier.

Like the wind the boy raced through the town in the direction of the Black Cañon trail. Hockmeister, with the prisoner and his four men, was well in the lead, and it was the lad's purpose to cut down that lead as much as possible and make sure that he was following the right course.

He clattered over the bridge that spanned the town ditch, his ears attuned to any hoofbeats in the darkness ahead.

He heard what he was listening for. From far in the distance came the pad of horses' feet in full gallop; against the background of dull, almost inaudible sound, he heard the strokes of a single horse, clearer and more distinct.

The trained ear of the Piute told him that, between

him and the men he was following, there was another rider.

Who could this other rider be? Had he any connection with Hockmeister and his men?

Cayuse pressed closer to the solitary rider, one hand now and again touching the handle of the six-shooter at his girdle.

He must find out who this horseman was, galloping between him and the party ahead. If the man was not connected with the Hockmeister outfit, then Cayuse must pass him.

Bending low over Navi's neck, the Piute urged the pinto to top speed. Presently he saw the gliding blot of shadow in advance. By degrees the blot resolved itself into an exceedingly small edition of a hostile.

Cayuse called out his command for the figure to halt. The figure turned and apparently leveled a revolver, ordering the Piute to sheer off.

The Indian boy was not taking a very serious interest in his enemy's revolver. He was thinking only of settling this difficulty as a step toward settling the greater difficulty that lay farther on in the night.

He tore alongside the other rider. Then it was that the other rider catapulted from his horse, grabbed Cayuse, and the two bumped roughly into the road.

The breath was knocked out of both boys. Their rough landing, too, had separated them. Both, however, were tough as whalebone, and recovered quickly from the shock of their fall.

Regaining their feet, they rushed at each other, wrestled around in the trail, and finally went down again.

The horse "borrowed" by Perk Derry turned and shot back toward town at a wild pace. Navi, on the other

hand, halted as soon as he felt the absence of his rider, turned and trotted back. The pinto was the only witness of that set-to. He watched while Cayuse deftly turned the other boy on his back and came up top with both knees under him.

"Who you?" hissed Cayuse, two hands at the other boy's throat. "Make um talk pronto. Me in heap big hurry."

"Jumpin' taranches!" sputtered Perk Derry. "Ye ain't in no bigger hurry than me."

"Why you got um hurry?"

"I'm chasin' the gang ahead!" cried the frantic Perk, struggling fiercely. "Take yer hands off'n my windpipe! The gang'll git plumb clear afore ye're done with me. Doggone! Say, Injun, ye're the limit! What ye pesterin' me fer?"

"Who you chase, huh?"

"Hockmeister, consarn 'im! He owes me a ten-spot an' he batted me over the head. I'll git even, though. Le'me up an' watch my smoke!"

Cayuse had about made up his mind that here was a friend and ally instead of a foe. Releasing his hands, he jumped hastily erect. Perk, scrambling to his feet, looked around for his horse. The animal was not in sight. He made a rush for Navi. The Piute jumped in between him and the pinto.

"No take um Injun's caballo!" growled Cayuse.

"What do I keer whose caballo it is?" answered Perk. "Don't ye bother me no more. I've had plumb sufficient out o' you."

He attempted to hustle around the Piute. Finding this a misplay, he tried to knock the Piute clear of his path. This also proved a misplay.

The little Indian grabbed Perk's arm.

"No make um fight, white boy," said he. "Mebbyso you and me be friends, huh? Who you?"

"Perk Derry's the label I tote," was the answer. "Now scatter an' leave me alone. Didn't I tell ye Hock owes me a ten-spot? An' that he lambasted me when I tried ter collect? Yer ain't no friend o' mine if ye stand between me an' him."

"Make um listen," went on Cayuse calmly. "Me Little Cayuse, Piute Injun, pard of Pa-e-has-ka the Long-hair——"

"What's that ter me?" fumed Perk. "Bustin' cyclones, feller, I'm on the trail o' Hockmeister—an' he may be a hunnerd miles from here by now."

"Me trail um, too," said the Piute. "Mebbyso we trail um together, huh? You no got um caballo. My got um caballo. Mebbyso we ride together, huh?"

Perk Derry, by that time, had cooled off a little. Here was Buffalo Bill's Piute pard, and Buffalo Bill and pards were after Hockmeister. Why not join forces with the Indian?

"I'll go ye!" said Perk. "We'll do our trailin' tergether, but we're sure handicapped by not havin' more'n one hoss. Let's git aboard an' not lose any more time."

Cayuse turned, readjusted the rope hackamore, and bounded to Navi's back. Reaching down, he helped Perk to mount behind him.

"Now we ketch um," observed the Piute grimly, turning Navi northward and urging him into a gallop.

So they began their trailing in company, the gamin and the Piute. But recently foes, and flying at each other's throat, they were now friends and starting bravely along a hard and rough trail whose end was veiled in danger and uncertainty.

For some time the little pinto galloped swiftly, the two on his back saying nothing. Perk Derry was first to speak.

"Dollars ter doughnuts we don't ketch up with 'em," he growled bitterly.

"Mebbyso," answered Cayuse passively.

"Ye ack like it wasn't nothin' ter you whether we ketched up with 'em er not."

"Me want to ketch um," declared Cayuse. "They got um pris'ner, huh?"

"Waal, I reckon!"

"Who they got?"

"Tenderfoot name o' Myrick."

"Ugh! How you savvy um?"

"I savvy um bekase I seen um."

"Where you see um?"

Perk set forth the course of his knowledge. In order to make the recital clear, he had to touch upon his work for Hockmeister. But he was not backward about that. After the way the broker had treated him, he was eager to tell of his evil deeds—even though Perk had to incriminate himself.

"Ugh!" grunted Cayuse contemptuously. "Hockmeister tinhorn, you all same Hockmeister."

"Don't ye throw any back talk at me, Injun," cried Perk. "If ye do, I tell ye fair, I'll take another fall out o' ye."

Perk seemed to forget just who had got the "fall" during their previous set-to. Cayuse made no reply. He had a shell of reserve into which he withdrew himself on occasion. He took refuge in it now.

He was disappointed in Perk. He would have to put up with his company, and work with him, but nevertheless Cayuse was disappointed.

"Talkin' about gettin' a savvy on what's took place," said Perk, after a time, "how'd you come ter be shackin' along behind an' make me all this trouble?"

Cayuse was a lad of few words. And he used very few in explaining how he had come to be trailing Hockmeister.

"It looks ter me," remarked Perk, when Cayuse was through, "as though Buffler Bill had been tryin' ter block Hock's game, an' Hock had won out."

"Him no win out," flared the Piute. "Pa-e-has-ka wind um up bymby. Pa-e-has-ka heap big chief."

"I'm er reg'lar Hot Tomolla myself," said Perk, in a patronizing manner, "an' I've made up my mind ter do the bizness fer Hock. Buffler Bill won't git no chance. If you've got nerve, and'll stand by me, mebby I'll let ye help, Cayuse."

The Piute grunted. The more the white boy talked, the lower went the Indian's estimate of him.

"Perka Derry got um plenty mouth," said Cayuse. "Him talk heap big. You got um warrior's feather, huh? Me got um."

One of Cayuse's hands lifted to his scalplock and smoothed the eagle's plume that was secured there.

"I don't have ter have no Injun fixin's ter show where I stand," snorted Perk loftily. "I got a record behind me, I have. Ask nobody in Phenix about Perk Derry. Go on."

Of course, Perk didn't mean that. If his record was looked into there wouldn't have been found very much to his credit. He had to do some talking, though, in order to impress Cayuse with his importance.

"You savvy King Pin mine?" queried Cayuse, switching the talk into a more practical channel.

"Waal, I reckon," answered Perk. "I rode past there oncet with a freighter from Montezuma."

"Mebbyso we ketch um Hockmeister all same we go toward King Pin mine."

"We mout as well look in that direction as any other way," muttered Perk. "I ain't none cheerful about the outlook, I kin tell ye that. You butted in an' made so much delay that I'll bet we're down fer a losin' game."

"How we go ketch um King Pin mine?" asked Cayuse.

"Jest like we're goin' now."

Navi, although hampered with a double burden, was making good time. The boys were galloping across a flat that lay at the foot of the Phenix Mountains. The uplifts arose in black silhouette against the night sky.

"See that there notch in the mountings, dead ahead?" said Perk.

"Me see um," answered the Piute.

"We go through there, an' fer six mile right inter the hills. Then we hit the King Pin. No use bein' in sich a tarnation hurry, now. We got ter go by guess an' by gosh, from this on, an' I don't see no reason fer wearin' ourselves all out. My head's achin' ter beat four of a kind, an' the way this hoss comes down on his feet don't help it none."

"Mebbyso we make um rest when we ketch um hills," returned Cayuse.

They "caught" the foothills fifteen minutes later, and dismounted beside the trail in the notch. Cayuse turned Navi adrift, well knowing that he would not stray far, and the boys dropped down on the sandy soil. The moonlight threw a mellow glow into the notch, and Perk fished for a piece of rice paper and a bag of tobacco.

"I reckon a leetle smoke'll help this head o' mine, Injun," said he.

Cayuse leaned over and knocked the tobacco and rice paper out of his hand. Perk let out a howl of wrath.

"Say, that's the second time that's been done ter day, an' I'm hoppin' mad! I got a notion ter climb yer neck."

"Me no like um tobacco," said Cayuse calmly, "me no let um white boy smoke. Once me like um heap, now me hate um. Ugh!"

"I ain't tied ter things ye like, red," scowled Perk, "an' I ain't goin' ter let ye jump on me fer things I like. Savvy the burro?"

Then he began one of his army teamster imitations and Cayuse rolled over on him and clamped a hand over his mouth.

Perk was powerless against the Piute. He could struggle, but that was all the good it did him.

"Ye're the blamedest Injun I ever seen," grunted Perk, pulling his crumpled frame together when Cayuse got away from him. "What d'ye do that fer?"

"No like um palaver," said Cayuse.

"I kain't smoke," grumbled Perk, "an' I kain't sw'ar. Who says this is a free kentry?"

They remained in silence for a space, and then Cayuse jumped up with a sharp exclamation.

"What's ter pay now?" asked Perk.

"See um fire huh?" returned Cayuse. "Him all same signal fire. Mebbysso Hockmeister start um."

Perk followed with his eyes the direction of the Piute's pointed finger.

Farther along the notch, on top of the left-hand bank, a blaze had suddenly flared out. It darkened, and blazed

up again, at irregular intervals, reminding Perk of the snapping of a shutter in a bull's-eye lantern.

"Waal, horn toads an' crawlin' varmints!" muttered Perk. "All ye got ter do, when ye go trailin' trouble-makers, is ter set still an' let 'em show theirselves. Shore Hockmeister is back o' that blaze." He scrambled excitedly to his feet. "Let's run in on the gang, put 'em down an' out, an' release Myrick. Huh? What ye waitin' fer?"

"Me no make um fool play," answered Cayuse.

"Fool play?" echoed Perk. "D'ye call it a fool play ter rescue Myrick?"

"How we do um? Hockmeister got um four men; only two we got um. Ugh! We try um, no make um rescue. All same get kybosh ourselves."

"I thought ye had nerve!" scoffed Perk. "Say, I thought ye couldn't be a pard o' Buffler Bill's onless ye had sand! Wow! Injun, I don't b'lieve ye're any good."

Cayuse paid no attention to this outburst, but started toward Navi.

"We ride, make um scout," said he. "Bymby we found out what we can do."

Growling under his breath, Perk followed the Piute. After mounting, they rode carefully on through the notch, looking and listening for some sign of the enemy's camp.

They had not ridden more than a quarter of a mile before Cayuse pulled Navi to a halt and jumped down.

"What now?" demanded Perk.

"No speak um 'loud," cautioned the Piute. "We ketch um camp. Him all same in gully."

The white boy slipped from Navi's back and Cayuse hastily led the pinto into a clump of greasewood and

tied him. When he came out of the bushes, he and Perk crawled carefully along through the notch, keeping closely in the shadow of the left-hand bank. A short distance in advance of them the walls of the notch broke away into a gully. This gully was the boys' objective point.

Cayuse's sharp ear had heard voices coming out of the gloomy swale, and this had led him to abandon Navi and proceed the rest of the way on foot.

The gully was a little forward of the top of the bank where the signal fire had appeared. The fire had been smothered and as the boys crawled to the crest of the "rise" on the south side of the gully, they heard some one scrambling down the side of the notch wall.

"That you, Rafael?" called the voice of Hockmeister.

"Si, señor," was the answer.

"I reckon Chick'll see that fire, compadre. He'll be here before very long. Hey, you chinks! Make a blaze in the bottom of this swale. Let's have a little light."

There was a scurrying around in the heavy gloom below the boys, and presently a little flickering tongue of flame began licking at the shadows. The flame grew quickly into a rousing fire of greasewood tops, and the camp in the gully stood out clear and distinct under the eyes of Cayuse and Perk.

Hockmeister was there, walking back and forth in front of Myrick. The prisoner, still bound and gagged, lay at the edge of the circle of firelight. The two Chinamen and the two Mexicans were sitting on the other side of the blaze, smoking cigarettes.

Perk's hand closed like a vise on Cayuse's arm.

"Let's rush the camp an' put the kybosh on the hull outfit!" hissed Perk in the Piute's ear.

"Wait!" was the whispered response. "Watch um Señor Chick."

A sound of trotting hoofs was heard in the gully, on the other side of the camp. A moment later Señor Chick rode into the glow of the fire and swung down from his horse.

"I ain't interested in this here Chick none," muttered Perk. "If ye ain't got the sand ter j'ine with me in rushin' the camp, I'm goin' back ter the hoss an' stay there."

"Vamos!" grunted Cayuse, glad to be rid of the white boy while the scouting was going on.

He heard Perk leaving, but gave him no further attention. Unlike Perk, Cayuse was deeply interested in Señor Chick. Here was the man whom Pa-e-has-ka was so eager to capture.

Cayuse was wondering if he could capture Señor Chick? He pictured himself riding into Phenix and up to the hotel with the desperado, bound hand and foot, on a led horse!

It was a dazzling picture and set the little Piute's blood to leaping in his veins. But it was a dream! Sober second thoughts convinced the boy that capturing Chick was out of the question. There were six in the gang now, and he could hope to do little single-handed.

True, there was Perk Derry to help. Cayuse, however, was not counting on Perk Derry for anything.

"Buenos, Hockmeister!" called Chick, leaving his horse and walking toward the mining broker. "I wasn't expectin' a signal fire, but I seen it an' loped over. Got four o' my men, too, hey? An' a pris'ner! Who's the feller on the ground, an' what's the meanin' o' this?"

"The man on the ground, Chick," grinned Hockmeis-

ter, "is Myrick, the tenderfoot that was planning to buy the King Pin."

Chick swore.

"Wasn't the assay good enough fer him? Has he backed out?"

"I don't know what sort of a game he was trying to play, Chick. He came to my office and I got Jim Finks to change the bags on him; then he went with the bag of bogus samples to Buffalo Bill at the hotel——"

"Buffalo Bill!" Chick did some more swearing in his heartiest manner. "Has that long-haired meddler got mixed in my plans ag'in?"

"That's what he has," went on Hockmeister. "Myrick, there, went to the hotel with one bag of ore, and after he had talked with Buffalo Bill, he left the hotel with two bags and carried them to the assay office."

"Where'd he git two bags?"

"Well, the scout had Jim Finks in his room at the hotel. Maybe he got the other bag from Finks."

The strong, ugly face of Chick grew stronger and uglier in the dancing firelight.

"Was Finks a traitor?" he demanded.

"I think he was a prisoner, although blamed if I understand just how it happened. Anyhow, Finks is being held a prisoner in Buffalo Bill's room at the hotel. After Myrick got his assay certificates, he went back to the scout again. I'd got wind of what he was doing, and I sent a nine-spot to those four," he nodded in the direction of the Mexicans and the Chinamen. "They came to my office, bringing horses for themselves and one for me, hitching the animals in the alley. I put the greasers and the chinks in the closet, not knowing but that Buffalo

Bill himself would call on me with Myrick. But he didn't. Myrick came alone, bringing ten thousand in cash and asking for the deed to the King Pin."

"Why didn't ye take the money an' give him the deed?"

"Hold your bronks, Chick! Don't get ahead of the story. I took him, money and all, and didn't go to the bother of turning over the deed. He wouldn't talk to me in my office, and I knew it was mighty important for us to find out just how the scout and his pards are tangled up in this business. That's why I brought Myrick here, and sent up a fire signal for you."

"Ye done well, Hockmeister. I couldn't a handled the job better myself. We'll make him talk, I reckon." Chick cast a murderously vindictive glance toward Myrick. "He'll talk, er he'll cross the Divide, one er t'other. But whar's the money?"

"I've got it in my coat."

"Then take it out o' yer coat—my half of it, anyways. A short hoss is soon curried, an' I reckon we'll do the curryin' now."

"Suits me, Chick."

Hockmeister sat down, tailor-fashion, on the ground. Chick, standing over him eagerly, watched while he took the thick packet of green paper from his breastpocket.

"Bully!" cried Chick, in a rapture at the sight of so much wealth. "That's the stuff that talks, Hock. We git the money an' we don't give up the mine! I reckon——"

Just at that moment some object went rolling down the gully bank. The object started on a direct line with the place where Hockmeister was sitting. It turned end over end like a ball, struck the broker with a terrific concussion and knocked him against Señor Chick.

Chick plunged headfirst for the ground, swearing loudly.

The object that had caused all this havoc had rolled down the hill so fast that Cayuse had not been able to determine what it was. The mystery solved itself in a flash.

That rolling object was Perk Derry!

Either by accident or design, the boy had taken a tumble from the top of the bank. He had not gone back to the horse, as he had disgustedly told Cayuse he was intending to do, but had taken the bit in his teeth and gone scouting on his own hook.

Perk did not remain long in the camp of the enemy. While Chick and Hockmeister were scrambling to get upright, the boy darted back up the bank of the gully, Chinamen and Mexicans in hot pursuit.

"It's that little whelp from Phenix!" bawled the broker. "He's got the money! He's run away with the money! Stop him! Shoot him!"

The imitation which Chick gave of the army in Flanders would have made the army in Flanders blush for its reputation. He jumped up the slope after the Chinamen and the Mexicans, and the frantic broker followed at his heels.

There were three things which Little Cayuse could do in the present emergency.

Either he could get safely out of the way and take no chances with his own scalp in the present excitement, or he could help Perk Derry make his escape, or he could go down into the deserted gully and release Myrick.

To run for the purpose of getting himself out of harm's way was not a move that appealed to the little Piute; and to do anything for Perk Derry, who had got

into trouble by his own recklessness, appealed to him as little as did running away; but to take advantage of the situation Perk had caused, struck Cayuse as being a particularly bright and proper thing to do.

Jumping to his feet, he raced down into the gully and then along it to the camp fire. He drew his knife from his belt as he ran, and had it ready for use the moment he reached Myrick's side.

Two quick cuts severed the cords at wrists and ankles.

"You come, Myrick!" murmured Cayuse; "pronto, pronto!"

The Easterner lifted himself to his benumbed legs and staggered drunkenly while removing the twisted cloth from his jaws.

"Who was that that rolled into the gully?" he asked.

"No got um time for palaver," answered Cayuse. "Make um run, all same Sam Hill. Plenty quick Hockmeister come back, Chick come back, greasers and yellow men come back. You savvy? Bymby we have heap trouble if we stay here. Ugh!"

Myrick, rapidly regaining the full use of his limbs, ran after Cayuse. The two climbed the gully into the notch and kept well within the shadow of the farther bank.

From time to time, as they hurried on, they halted to listen. The yells of Chick and Hockmeister reverberated through the moonlit notch. A little later horses were heard at full gallop. The sound of galloping died away toward the flat lands and in the direction of Phenix.

"We safe now," breathed Cayuse.

"This is my day for luck, I guess," said Myrick. "Is Buffalo Bill around here?"

"Pa-e-has-ka all same Phenix."

"Phenix? Who's out here with you, Cayuse?"

"White crazy muchacho. Ugh! No like um."

"You came out here with that white boy?"

"Wuh."

"How did you know where that scoundrelly Hockmeister had taken me?"

"Me follow um from Phenix."

"Ah, you followed us! But where were you when I was set upon in Hockmeister's office?"

"All same alley."

"Now I'm beginning to understand. Who sent you to the alley?"

"Pa-e-has-ka."

"Buffalo Bill sent you into the alley to look out for me, eh? The scout never seems to leave any loophole unguarded! When I was lowered through the window, you picked up the trail. Why didn't you get word to the scout so he could come along?"

"No got um time. Me go for Pa-e-has-ka, all same Hockmeister get away."

"You're a mighty clever little Indian, Cayuse."

"Ugh! Come 'long, we get um horse. Navi carry us back to Phenix."

"Well," and Myrick gave a grewsome laugh, "I'll be glad to get back. But what'll become of the white boy who came with you?"

"No savvy; not much care."

Cayuse was leading the way toward the place where Navi had been left. He pushed into the brush, and then pushed angrily out again.

"White muchacho all same tinhorn!" he shouted angrily.

"What's the trouble?"

"Perka Derry steal um caballo! Whoosh! By jing!

Me take um Perka Derry's scalp next time me ketch um!"

And Little Cayuse forgot himself so far as to shake his fist in the air and to do a couple of steps of a war dance.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PARDS IN PURSUIT.

Buffalo Bill was not expecting results, in this game he was playing against Hockmeister, before the following day. As he figured it, Hockmeister would take the bogus money from Myrick and give a deed to the King Pin prospect; then, the next morning, the mining broker would take his buckboard and team and ride into the hills to meet Señor Chick and give him his half of the plunder. The scout and his pards, of course, would trail after Hockmeister, and thus be able to capture Chick.

Cayuse was sent to watch Hockmeister's office merely as a precaution. Myrick, when he received his deed, was to return to the hotel and report to the scout.

Nine-thirty came without bringing Myrick. The scout was not worried, however. Perhaps half an hour would be required to exchange the money for the deed.

But when ten o'clock came and brought no sign of Myrick, the scout got up from his chair on the porch.

"What's on your mind, Pard Cody?" asked Wild Bill, who was occupying a chair near him.

"Let's take a little pasear over to the alley in the rear of Hockmeister's," said the scout. "Cayuse is there and perhaps he can tell us why Myrick is so long getting back."

"Go you," was the prompt reply.

"Where's the baron?" queried the scout as he and the Laramie man descended the veranda steps.

"He's in your room playing seven-up with Nick and this Finks person."

"Nick and Finks have been at it all afternoon——"

"And from the looks of things, when I put my head through the door a while ago, the three of 'em'll be at it all night. Our trapper pard never gets his fill of seven-up; and the baron ain't much better."

The pards moved into the alley and drew near the place where Wild Bill had secured the ladder during the forenoon.

"No lights in Hockmeister's place," announced the Laramie man, looking up.

"Shades may be drawn," said the scout.

"We'd see some light, even if they were. I'll bet a pair of spurs, pard, that Hockmeister hasn't reached his office yet, and that Myrick is waiting for him."

"We'll find out about that." The scout gave a low whistle. "Cayuse!" he called.

There was no answer. The call was repeated, at different places along the alley, but without gaining a response.

"I'm stumped," muttered the scout. "You never knew Cayuse to fall down on a piece of work."

"Never!" returned Wild Bill. "If he's not here, then you can gamble a blue stack he had some good excuse for leaving."

"The only excuse would be to follow Hockmeister. Let's go around front and up to Hockmeister's office."

They reached the dimly lighted hall on the second floor of the Horner block. Hockmeister's door was locked.

"He hasn't got here yet," observed Wild Bill.

"He's been here, pard, and gone away again," said the scout.

"What makes you think that?"

"Why, you remember Myrick said there was a piece

of paper on the door stating that Hockmeister would return at nine. The paper's gone. That means that the broker has been here, I take it."

"Well, yes," admitted the Laramie man. "But, if he was here and transacted his business with Myrick, where's Myrick?"

"That's a conundrum. But I'm fretting more about Hockmeister's leaving."

"Where does he board?"

"I haven't heard. I don't think he has gone to his boarding place, though. If he had, it seems certain Cayuse would have dropped in at the hotel and told us. Hickok," and here the scout's voice thrilled with a deep disappointment, "I've a notion Hockmeister has fooled us. He got that bogus money and started at once for the hills with it."

"Well, even if he has done that, he hasn't fooled us. Cayuse is following him."

"Let's go over to the corral."

Five minutes later they were talking with Salvadore Octagon.

"Yees, señors," said the Mexican, "dat Injun boy he come an 'he say not anyt'ing to me. He get his caballo an' he sail t'roo dat gate like a streak."

"You haven't any notion where he went?"

"Diable, no."

"Which way was he headed when he left?"

"For de Black Cañon road, señor."

Buffalo Bill turned to the Laramie man.

"The Black Cañon road, pard," said he, "leads to the King Pin mine. If Chick is anywhere, he's in that vicinity. That, I reckon, is the place where Hockmeister is to turn over Chick's half of the money."

"Keno!" exclaimed Wild Bill. "It's up to us to get

saddle leather between our knees and ride for the King Pin."

"Spurs and quirts!" said the scout laconically, hurrying back across the corral toward the stalls.

Bear Paw and Beeswax were led out and saddled. The pards galloped through the gate, buckling on their spurs as they rode.

"I can't make head or tail of this situation," declared Buffalo Bill, dropping his foot into the stirrup with the second spur in place.

"By gorry," said Wild Bill, "that's the way I stack up. What's become of Myrick? Why didn't Cayuse, if time was short, have Myrick come to the hotel and tip us off as to what was doing?"

"That's the stone wall I'm up against. I wonder if this game of ours has sprung a leak?"

"Meaning which?"

"Why, Hickok, if Hockmeister, or some of his friends, saw Myrick dodging in and out of the hotel, the fact may have aroused suspicion. Then, again, if the fact that we're keeping a grip on Jim Finks was carried to Hockmeister, it's a cinch that he'd scent trouble."

"And, perhaps, knock Myrick on the head when he went to the office to hand over that phony stuff for the deed?"

"Possibly. I don't think Hockmeister would be above a play of that sort."

"Hockmeister is the worst kind of a thief. He operates just inside the law, goes as far as he can and takes all he can get. Here's another point, Pard Cody."

"What's the number?"

"Why, suppose friend Myrick flashed that bundle of green paper on Hock, and Hock wouldn't fall for it? Suppose the shark saw that it was spurious? Wouldn't

that lead to complications that would be unpleasant for the tenderfoot?"

"It might. Guessing is easy, however, and we have only eighteen miles to go before we may find something definite. We'll stop bothering our brains until we pick up something worth while to think about."

They raced through the night, for a time, in silence. They clattered across the town ditch, and plunged northward toward the place where alfalfa fields gave way to the open desert.

"Señor Chick is the last man I'd ever pick for a mine owner," remarked Wild Bill, when the silence had become monotonous.

"It's easy to own a hole in the ground," answered the scout, "and that, from all accounts, is exactly what this King Pin prospect is. The assay showed a pretty fair grade of country rock, and nothing more."

"Queer way for a rough like Chick to make a raise! Why, if he has enough of the Baker's Dozen left, he could hold up a stage and do better than this King Pin deal will bring him."

"The Dozen, since our work on Fiesta Night, is pretty badly demoralized, I should imagine. They haven't been heard of, except that night Chick blew into that swale back of Chinatown. His actions, then, were mild—for him."

"That's when he got away from me," growled the Laramie man. "If it hadn't been for that chink girl, Pard Cody, we wouldn't be mixed up in this net of guesswork. She kept me from putting the kybosh on Señor Chick. Great guns, how Chick did make tracks when the girl gave him the chance!"

The pards were on the level desert now, with the sand

of the trail flying from the horses' hoofs. For three days the animals had been living high in the corral, with nothing to do, and their freshness was showing in the speed which they had kept up from the start.

Suddenly Buffalo Bill pulled Bear Paw to a halt. He did it so quickly that the mettlesome black sat down on his hind heels and slid in the sand.

"See something?" asked the Laramie man, reining in his own mount.

"Heard something," was the reply. "Listen!"

Yes, there it was, a slap of hoofs on the sandy cushion of the trail. The sound came from the north, and was steadily drawing nearer.

"One horse," said Wild Bill. "Think it's Hockmeister?"

"If it is," answered the scout, peering toward the darkness of the hills, "he wasn't long in finding Chick and giving up half of that batch of queer. Here the fellow comes—I can see him."

The galloping horseman disentangled himself from the gloom, and came into greater prominence by swift degrees.

"Looks rather undersized for a shark like Hockmeister," said Wild Bill.

"The fellow is about Cayuse's size. But he can't be Cayuse. This chap is trying to dodge around us."

The approaching form had swerved from the trail. The pards swerved, and put their horses to a gallop, laying a course that would block the rider's attempt to pass.

"Hey!" cried a shrill voice. "Git out o' my way or I'll shoot ye out o' yer saddles!"

"My, my!" chuckled Wild Bill, "what a savage kid, to be sure. Here's at him, guns or no guns."

Beeswax made about six jumps, and the Laramie man

leaned sidewise, and deftly caught the rope hackamore about the mustang's lower jaw.

With a yell of defiance, the rider of the mustang slid to the ground, and started to run. Buffalo Bill had him in half a minute, grabbing him by the collar and pulling him up on Bear Paw's back.

"By gorry!" came the astounded shout of Wild Bill. "Say, pard, this is Navi, Cayuse's pinto."

"Well," said the scout grimly, "this lad isn't Cayuse, but I'll warrant he can tell us something about our Piute pard. Can you?" he asked, to his squirming prisoner.

"Take yer hands off'n me!" howled Perk Derry; "I ain't done nothin'."

"We'll know just what you've done, my lad, in about two minutes."

Thereupon the scout shook his feet clear of the stirrups, and dropped to the ground, keeping a firm grip on his small prisoner.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A CLUE.

"Strike a match, Hickok," said the scout, "and let's see what the boy looks like."

Wild Bill was also on the ground by that time. He tied Navi's hackamore to his saddle horn, tossed the bridle reins over Beeswax's head, and stepped close to the scout and his captive.

"Here's something worth bothering about, all right," declared the Laramie man.

The match flared so close to the boy's face that he blinked and drew back.

An old, ragged cap with a fringe of overlong hair topped a shrewd face that was none too clean.

"Who are you?" asked the scout.

"If ye don't know," was the flippant response, "ye can't tell nobody. See?"

Buffalo Bill gave the boy an admonitory shake. Something dropped from his coat, and he scrambled for it with a yell. The Laramie man, however, was too quick for him. Flipping aside the burnt match, he picked up the fallen object.

The mere "feel" of the packet caused an astounded exclamation to drop from his lips.

"What was it?" inquired the scout.

"Just a second, Pard Cody, until I get another match going," returned Wild Bill. "If I say what I think, you might reckon I was locoed."

The second match revealed the nature of the packet. Beyond any doubt, it was the ten thousand dollars the

scout had borrowed from Bangham and turned over to Myrick. The pards stared at the money, and then at each other.

"No," drawled Wild Bill, "I reckon we're not asleep and dreaming all this. There's a heap that kid can tell us, pard. Go after him."

"Le'me be!" roared the boy.

"What's your name, youngster?" asked the scout.

"Perk Derry, otherwise the Hot Tamale."

"He's warm enough, I reckon," laughed Hickok. "There's tabasco in his make-up, all right, or he'd never have hooked onto this."

"It's my money," said Perk Derry, "an' you ombrays keep hands off'n it."

"Why is it your money?" went on the scout.

"'Kase I had it," was the reply.

"Where did you get it, Perk?"

"Off'n Hockmeister."

"That sounds as though it might be true," dropped in Wild Bill.

"It is true," asserted Perk. "I ain't stringin' ye."

"Where was Hockmeister when you took the money away from him?"

"In the gully."

"What gully?"

"The one that runs through the notch."

"What notch?"

"Blame take it, ye got ter have a diagram drawn? It's the notch in the mountings, dead ahead, on the way ter the King Pin prospect."

"Something more that rings true," commented the Laramie man.

"How did you get this from Hockmeister?" proceeded the scout.

"I jest nacherly handed him one with my right an' grabbed the dinero with my left. Then I sloped."

"Have him come again with that, Pard Cody," suggested Wild Bill. "He's switched into a fairy tale."

"How did you get this money?" demanded the scout.

"Hold on a minit," said Perk Derry. "Are ye Buffler Bill? Ye look like him, an' t'other feller talks as though you was him, but I'm kinder mixed in my dates ter-night, seems like."

"Yes," answered the scout, "I'm Buffalo Bill. We're not going to hurt you, Perk. We'll be your friends, if you need friends, but you must tell us the truth."

There were kindness and consideration in the scout's voice—things Perk Derry was not accustomed to.

"Anyhow," said he, "that wad o' long green is mine. If ye'll agree ter le'me keep it, Buffalo Bill, I'll tell ye everythin' I know."

"Perk," answered the scout, "that stuff is worth no more than it will bring for waste paper. It's counterfeit."

The boy stiffened.

"Go on!" he muttered.

"It's the truth I'm telling you. I got it from the sheriff in Phenix to give it to Myrick. Myrick was to use it in a deal with Hockmeister for the King Pin prospect."

"Is that on the level?" gulped Perk.

"Yes."

"An' here I've been an' gone an' risked my skelp ter git it! Oh, whoosh! Jess as I'm beginnin' ter think I'm a millionaire, along comes you duffers an' pulls the pin on me an' my happy dreams. Ye're all ter the good, Buffler Bill, an' I'm takin' yer word fer everythin'. Say,

strike another match an' look at somepin I got ter show ye."

Wild Bill obligingly raided his match case for the third time. In the light of the firestick, Perk showed an ugly bruise over his right eye.

"Where did you get that?" inquired the scout.

"Hockmeister handed it ter me. That's why I've turned on him. I'll hang ter my friends as long as I kin use my fists, but when a feller plays lame duck with the Hot Tomolla, there's doin's."

Thereupon Perk Derry told all he knew that had any bearing on Hockmeister. Nor did he scruple about reciting his own work while in Hockmeister's service. He followed the account down from the time he had seen Wild Bill getting the ladder out of the shed; then, by logical stages, he came to the point where he had broken away from Cayuse at the top of the gully bank.

"The Injun was too slow ter suit me," he declared. "Whenever I do anythin' I'm rapid about it. He wouldn't rush the camp, so I made up my mind that I'd rush it myself. I didn't go back ter the hoss, not jest then. I moved farther along the gully bank, an' I seen Hock pullin' out that bundle o' bills fer a divvy with this Chick feller. The sight o' all that dinero made me plumb crazy. I wanted it, an' so I went arter it. I rolled down the bank. It was some steep, that bank, an' arter I got started I couldn't stop. I bumped inter Hockmeister, an' slammed him over agin' Chick. Hock dropped the bunch o' money. I grabbed it an' tore up the bank. Everybody chased me, but I laid a bee line fer the hoss, pulled him out o' the bushes, an' skihooted. I was goin' some, wasn't I, when ye stopped me?"

"He's a case," declared Wild Bill, drawing a long

breath. "Anyhow, he doesn't make any bones about telling us what he did."

"It was wrong of you to take that horse, Perk," said the scout.

"Think I was goin' ter let myself git ketched when the hoss 'u'd save me?" asked Perk. "Waal, nary, amigo, nary."

"But what do you think has happened to Little Cayuse?"

"In times like them I think o' my own hair. That's purty much all I kin do. The Injun's bizness is ter look arter himself. If he'd got ter the hoss fust, he'd hev took it, wouldn't he? Waal, he didn't. I was fust, an' so the hoss was mine. Was I wrong in takin' the money?"

"I can't say that you were."

"Then, how d'ye figger I done wrong in takin' the hoss?"

"I reckon we'll defer explanations on that score until we have more time."

The scout turned to Wild Bill.

"Myrick's in the hands of Hockmeister and Chick," said he, "and we've got to hustle into the notch and see what we can do for him."

"Right-o," agreed the Laramie man. "It's just possible, too, that, owing to Perk Derry's peculiar notions about the mustang, Little Cayuse may need help. Let's ride."

"What ye goin' ter do with me?" asked Perk.

"You'll have to go with us, I reckon," said the scout.

"If there's trouble, though, we'll send you to the rear."

"Why? Ain't I got as good a right ter git inter trouble as you fellers? I ain't had nothin' but trouble all my life, an' I'm used ter it."

"All right," laughed Wild Bill, "mount the mustang, and ride into trouble with Pard Cody and me."

The pards climbed into their saddles, and Perk jumped to the bare back of Navi. Then all three pointed the horses toward the notch.

"If I had a gun," said Perk, "I'd show ye what I'm made of."

"Where d'ye live, Perk?" inquired Wild Bill.

"In the palace where ye got that ladder when you an' Buffer Bill did yer second-story work," replied the boy. "Sleep there, an' git my chuck at the kitchen doors o' the hotels. Sometimes, when I got the price, I drop in at Coffee Bill's, an' have a swell feed. Oh, it's the gay live—I don't think."

Little by little, as they hurried on, the pards drew from Perk some of his family history. The scout and the Laramie man were touched. Considering the chances he had had, how could the lad be any better than they found him?

In the midst of their talk, a sound of firing floated toward them on the night wind.

"Great horn toads!" cried Perk. "They're shootin' over in the notch! Say, I'll bet that Injun pard o' you fellers is a mark fer them guns. I feel kinder meachin' over takin' his hoss. Le'me help ter do somethin' fer him."

The pards, from the moment they heard the reports of firearms, gave scant attention to Perk.

With a rattle of spurs, they darted into the notch, and along it toward the place where the shooting was going on.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONE GUN AND SIX CARTRIDGES.

Little Cayuse's wrath against "Perka Derry" subsided as rapidly as it had mounted. He heard some one riding through the notch—evidently one of the pursuers coming back. Springing to Myrick's side, the boy grabbed his arm, and pulled him into the brush that fringed the trail.

"What's this for?" asked Myrick.

"You hear um caballo?" returned Cayuse, in a hissing whisper.

"I hear a horse coming, if that's what you mean."

"Only one caballo comes. One man ride um caballo. Mebbyso yellow man, mebbyso greaser, mebbyso Señor Chink or Hockmeister. We ketch um rider, take um caballo. You savvy? We take um caballo, make ride all same Phenix."

"How are we to take the horse?" asked Myrick. "I haven't any revolver. If that fellow is one of the gang that had me in the gully, he's weighed down with hardware."

"We ketch um caballo," insisted Cayuse, his eyes glimmering like coals in the dark; "we got to ketch um. You jump, grab um caballo by bit. Savvy? Me jump for man on caballo's back."

"I'm game to follow your lead, youngster," returned Myrick. "I ought to be, I should think, considering what you've done for me to-night. If you hadn't come to my aid, there in the gully, your horse wouldn't have been taken from you. Now——"

"No make um palaver," warned Cayuse.

The horse was close by then. Peering out through the bushes, Myrick and Cayuse could see the galloping rider. To the Easterner, it looked like certain suicide to jump out in front of that running horse, but a mount was necessary if he and Cayuse were to avoid Chick, Hockmeister, and the rascals with them. Nerving himself for the work, Myrick made ready to do his part.

"Now!" muttered Cayuse.

The horse was almost abreast of them. Myrick threw himself into the trail, and attempted to grab the horse's head. The animal, frightened by Myrick's sudden appearance, reared back, and almost tossed his rider into the air.

An oath broke from the man, and a lurid flash spotted against the night. The flash accompanied the crack of a revolver, and Myrick felt a bullet fan his cheek as it hissed past him.

Before the man could fire again, the Piute boy, with reckless bravery, made a flying leap for the man from the trail. That leap would have been successful had not the horse shied. Cayuse just managed to catch the man's arm. He hung to the arm, while the horse plunged and pitched across the trail, Myrick all the while making frantic efforts to get hold of the bridle.

Neither Myrick nor Cayuse succeeded. With a wild oath, the man whirled the horse the other way, shook Cayuse from his arm, and galloped off for a few yards.

More horses were heard. The rest of those who had pursued Perk Derry were galloping back. They had been close enough to hear the shot that had been fired, and they had at once spurred their horses to faster pace.

Cayuse's plan had failed. Not only that, but it had drawn the attention of the gang to the boy and his com-

panion. Now there must be quick work if the two were to escape.

"Come!" cried Cayuse, bounding to Myrick's side and catching his hand. "This way—pronto!"

Pulling Myrick along after him, the Piute pushed through the greasewood bushes to the right-hand side of the notch. The bank was steeper there, the boy reasoned, and he hoped he and Myrick could climb it, and that it would prove too steep for the horses of their enemies.

The voices of Chick and Hockmeister were shouting back and forth.

"A couple o' ombrays tried ter stop me," roared Chick. "One of 'em looked like thet thar pris'nor we left in the gully."

"Get him!" shouted Hockmeister. "We'll be with you in a brace of shakes and help."

When he and Myrick reached the foot of the wall, Cayuse could hear the six mounted men riding through the bushes and closing in.

"We make um climb up bank," whispered Cayuse. "Come behind; watch um, Cayuse."

"I'll be right after you, my boy," answered Myrick.

Myrick's eyes could make out nothing of the contour of that black ascent. He followed the Piute blindly, mounting from one jutting rock to another, and clinging to every bit of brush that grew from the crevices of the rocks.

"They're climbin' the bank!" bellowed the voice of Chick.

A hail of lead struck the face of the steep slope. The bullets, hitting the hard rock, glanced in all directions, thus making the revolver fire doubly dangerous.

Presently, as he continued to fight his way upward,

Myrick felt Cayuse's hands groping down for him. He seized one of the hands, and was helped over a sort of shelf.

"What are you stopping here for?" he whispered.

"No make um climb any higher," was the answer.

The boy lifted his companion's hand, and it touched an overhang of solid stone. A brief examination showed Myrick that he and the boy were in a horizontal gash in the side of the steep slope. It was no more than four feet in width, and perhaps a dozen long. Myrick judged, too, that it was less than fifty feet from the bottom of the notch.

"We're holed up, and no mistake," muttered Myrick.

"Mebbyso they no see us," said the Piute hopefully.

"Heap dark in notch."

"They've stopped their pesky shooting, anyhow," growled Myrick. "That's some consolation. How many guns have you got, Cayuse?"

"One."

"That's tough luck! Only one gun and six cartridges between us! We won't be able to put up much of a fight."

"We keep still, lay low; mebbysso we fool um."

This was a wise suggestion, and Myrick sprawled himself along the lip of the gash and tried to follow the movements of their enemies by the noise they made.

There was not so much talking among those in the bottom of the notch now as there had been. They were moving around, however, very close to the foot of the slope.

"What are they up to, Cayuse?" whispered Myrick, his curiosity getting the upper hand.

"No savvy," was the stifled response.

"Was that Chick we tried to stop?"

"Ai. Make um heap bad bobble."

Deepest regret throbbled in the boy's voice.

"Don't fret about that," returned Myrick. "We did our best. If we're to be wiped out here, it won't be because we didn't try to have things different."

"Me take um scalp Perka Derry," hissed Cayuse, through his teeth; "me git away from this place, me take um scalp."

"I wouldn't come down too hard on that white boy. If he hadn't done as he did, Cayuse, you'd never have had the chance to do me that good turn."

"White boy no good," insisted Cayuse; "all same tinhorn. No like um tinhorn."

Just at this point, the two in the little niche were made unpleasantly aware of what their enemies had been doing. They had been collecting dried brush and heaping it high at the base of the slope. The pile was lighted, and the blaze flashed over the tinder-like pile, making a huge beacon of it in the space of a single heartbeat.

The whole face of the slope was lighted, and in the glare Cayuse and Myrick could be plainly seen flattened out at the edge of the gash.

An exultant yell broke from the men in the bottom of the notch. Myrick and Cayuse rolled over and got as far back as they could.

Revolvers began to crack once more, and every weapon sent a bullet into the gash in the steep slope. The peril of the Piute and the Easterner was great. Each piece of lead, striking the roof or the two lips of the gash, glanced and became doubly murderous.

Cayuse heard Myrick give vent to a sharp exclamation.

"You hurt?" asked the boy.

"My arm is scratched," was the answer, "but I don't

think it amounts to much. We'll have worse wounds to think about if some kind of luck doesn't head our way in a few minutes."

On elbows and knees, Little Cayuse crawled to the edge of the gash. His revolver exploded, and a yell came from one of the Chinamen.

"What did you do?" asked Myrick.

"Hit um chink in arm, all same like you get hit," replied Cayuse. "Ugh!" he added. "All take to brush—me no see um."

That one shot from the gash had sent Chinamen, greasers, and the two white men scurrying into the chaparral. They continued to shoot from the brush, but the bushes interfered with the aiming of their revolvers, and not nearly so many bullets reached the gash.

"Why don't you shoot some more?" demanded Myrick, excitedly. "Listen to the sound of the guns below. That will help you to locate the scoundrels."

"Me got um five shots left," returned Cayuse gravely. "S'pose they try climb up, huh? We use um five shots. We no got um, no use um, get caught."

The boy's broken English was hard to follow, but Myrick caught the sense of Cayuse's last remark.

"You're right, my lad," he approved. "Keep your last cartridges to stand off the scoundrels if they try to climb the slope. I wouldn't last long if they once got their hands on me, and I don't believe you would, either."

The boy, lying rigid as a statue of stone, was staring downward. A wild fear ran through Myrick that a bullet had perhaps reached him and taken his life.

"Cayuse!" he called, catching the lad's moccasined foot, and shaking it.

There was crashing in the chaparral, a wild tearing of bushes, and more shouts and defiant yells.

"We all right now," cried Cayuse, looking around.
"Pa-e-has-ka come! Hoop-a-la! Pa-e-has-ka!"

"Buffalo Bill?" returned the astounded Myrick,
scarcely believing his ears.

But Cayuse was not there to answer. He had rolled
over the edge, and was scrambling down the slope.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A "SURROUND" BY TWO.

The scout, the Laramie man, and Perk Derry had not galloped far through the notch before they saw the fire that had been started by the force besieging Cayuse and Myrick.

"Halt!" commanded the scout. "It's pretty clear what's going on, Hickok," he continued, when the horses had been reined in. "Some one's holed away in the side of the cliff, and a pack of scoundrels are shooting upward from the chaparral."

"It's the Injun feller up there!" muttered Perk Derry. "Let's go help him."

"Hold your yaup" answered Wild Bill sharply. "Your play, kid, is to stay here and hang onto these horses. Will you do it?"

"I want ter go an'——"

"Will you obey orders," said Buffalo Bill, "and stay here with the horses?"

"Y-yep."

"See that you do, Perk. If you don't I'll be making inquiries for you."

The scout handed his bridle reins to the boy, Wild Bill did the same, and both pards slid to the ground. In another moment they had plunged into the bushes.

"If Hockmeister's with this gang, capture him," said the scout.

"And Chick——"

"No such good luck. I'm afraid he won't be here. This is to be a 'surround,' Pard Hickok," said the scout,

with grim humor, "a 'surround' by two. Let's draw the net so tight that Hockmeister can't get through.

"Right-o!"

The pards separated, Buffalo Bill moving on so as to come upon the men in the chaparral from above, and Wild Bill swerving to the right so as to reach them from that side.

The scout got past the gang and well beyond the blazing fire; then, turning, he started back nearer the notch wall.

Suddenly, as he crept through the chaparral and drew close to the blaze at the foot of the slope, he halted, and stared. Could he believe his eyes, or was that really Chick looking through the parted bushes at the gash in the cliff? Chick was fingering his revolver, evidently biding his time for a telling shot.

The scout dropped to his knees, made a slight detour, and crept up on the hulking scoundrel from behind. Just as Chick had leveled his weapon to fire, the scout was upon him.

Seizing him by the neck and shoulders, Buffalo Bill hurled him backward. An oath was wrenched from the scoundrel's lips. As Buffalo Bill dropped down on the squirming form, he was recognized in the glare of the fire.

"You—ag'in!" The words boiled from Chick's bearded lips in husky rage. "It's you an' me fer it, then! One o' us'll never leave this hyer chaparral alive! Ye've meddled in my bizness oncet too aften, Cody!"

From some place, near at hand, came a yell from Hockmeister.

"Cody and his men! They're at us! They're——"

Wild Bill, at that precise moment, must have inter-

ferred with the shark's vocal apparatus. The words died out in a fierce crashing of bushes.

The Chinamen and the Mexicans began to yell and tear away through the chaparral. The name of "Cody" was enough. They did not pause to reconnoitre and learn how large a force had stormed the brush patch, but took to their heels, and bent every effort toward reaching their waiting horses.

Meantime, Buffalo Bill was at hand grips with Señor Chick. A powerful man was Chick, built on massive lines, and endowed with remarkable strength.

His revolver had been knocked from his hands when he was overthrown, but a knife was far and away better for such close fighting.

Chick succeeded, by an effort of all his strength, in getting his knife from his belt. The scout, however, grabbed his lifted wrist, and the ugly blade hung in midair.

Chick strained and wrenched at the fingers encompassing his wrist, but without effect. Those fingers of the scout's were like so many bands of iron.

Chick raised his head, and attempted to use his teeth. Taking his right hand from Chick's left arm, the scout struck a blow with his clinched fist that made the shaggy head fall back.

"You're mine, Chick," panted the scout. "You've given me a long run of it, but now you're at the end of your rope."

"I'll die afore I let ye take me!"

A torrent of profanity accompanied the words.

"No," said the scout. "You'll go to the Phenix jail. The law has an appointment with you—an I'll see that you keep it."

The scout gave Chick's wrist a twist that brought a

smothered groan to the big fellow's lips. The knife dropped from the palsied hand:

"Pa-e-has-ka!" called a voice at the scout's side.

"Bravo, boy!" returned the scout. "Get a rope."

"Me got um, Pa-e-has-ka."

Cayuse had an eye for the practical side of affairs always. Whatever he did was usually the right thing at the right time. On getting to the bottom of the slope he had started to find the horses of the gang. He had found only two, and from the saddles of these he had taken the lariats.

Binding Chick was a difficult job. The scout and the Piute, however, got ropes on the big, thrashing limbs, and soon had the captive helpless.

"Go and find Wild Bill, Cayuse," said the scout. "He may want that other rope."

As the boy hurried away, the scout sank down beside Señor Chick to rest for a few moments.

"I might 'a' knowed Hockmeister would make a misfire o' that King Pin propersition somehow," fumed the prisoner. "He allers tangles himself up if ye give him rope enough. I never wanted him in the gang in the fust place. I told Baker——"

"Ah," broke in the scout, "then Hockmeister, the mining shark, was one of the original Dozen, eh? Sort of a silent partner in the doings of the gang? What about that, Chick?"

Too late Chick realized that his anger had carried him too far. He fell silent, after that, and would speak no more.

"Hello!" called a voice. "Where are you, Buffalo Bill!"

"This way!" shouted the scout.

Myrick parted the bushes, and appeared in front of

Buffalo Bill. His right sleeve was cut away at the elbow, and a reddened handkerchief was tied around his forearm.

"Are you hurt, Myrick?" asked the scout, with some concern.

"Nicked, that's all," was the deprecating answer. "A bullet hit my arm while Cayuse and I were tucked away in that hole in the slope. I'm thankful. If you hadn't come just when you did, more bullets would have done business with us."

"Ye're right," growled Chick. "The one thing I'm sorry fer is that I didn't hand ye a piece o' lead in a better place."

"Lucky for you that you didn't," returned the scout sternly. "You'd have made a swinging job out of this, Chick."

"I'd ruther swing than go ter Yuma whar Baker is. Baker has told me about Yuma."

At this point, Little Cayuse came through the chaparral leading Chick's horse.

"Wild Bill all same ketch um Hockmeister, Pa-e-has-ka," reported Cayuse. "Him go to caballos; say for you to come."

"And that horse——"

"Him b'long Chick. Me find um. Got other horse that b'long to Hockmeister, to. Mebbyso we put um Chick on horse, huh?"

Between the three of them the big prisoner was loaded into his saddle, his feet tied under the girths and his hands made fast to the saddle horn. He fought like a demon to get away while he was being put on the horse's back, but a blow on the head dazed him and rendered him more tractable.

"You can't handle this scoundrel as you would an ordinary prisoner, Myrick," explained the scout. "Force is the only thing Chick understands, and you have to use it to the limit."

"I guess you're right, Buffalo Bill," said Myrick. "I never saw a worse looking scoundrel in my life. I thought Hockmeister wore his villainous ear-marks uncommonly plain, but Chick double discounts him for looks."

The party pushed through the brush to the trail, Buffalo Bill leading the horse. A little later they were at the place where Perk Derry had been left with the horses. The Laramie man was there, and he had Hockmeister roped to his horse in the same way that Chick had been lashed to his mount.

"Well, pard," laughed the Laramie man, "I reckon that 'surround' by two panned out some color, eh?"

"Better than I expected," answered the scout.

"Whoop!" tuned up Perk Derry. "We done the bizness fer that gang with ground ter spare. This, Hockmeister," he added to the mining shark, "is what it means ter try ter backcap the Hot Tomolla. See what's happened ter ye jest on account o' what ye done ter me."

An angry yelp escaped Little Cayuse. Walking over to the white boy he laid hold of him and jerked him from Navi's back. It was done so quickly that Perk could hardly realize what was going on until it was all over.

"Wow!" Perk cried, jumping to his feet. "That's the Injun of it! Here I come an' git him out o' his troubles, an' he slams me on the ground like that. I got er blame' good notion ter take another fall out o' him."

"Too much heap mouth!" grunted Cayuse, climbing to Navi's back. "All same tinhorn; no like um."

"Get up here behind me, kid," laughed Wild Bill. "I'll tote you back to town."

Myrick rode with the scout, and he and Perk were commissioned to keep their eyes on the led horses and the prisoners.

Eighteen miles less six was the distance the party had to cover in order to get back to town. The distance was all too short for the talk that beguiled the journey.

"The capture of Chick," remarked Buffalo Bill, as they clattered across the bridge over the town ditch in the light of early morning, "winds up our Arizona work. In a day or two we'll be off for Texas."

"I always did have a warm spot in my heart for Texas," said Wild Bill.

"Same here," piped a voice behind him. "I reckon I'll go 'long with you fellers an' help ye pull off a few stunts."

"I reckon you won't, Perk," said the scout. "I have a friend in Denver, and I'm going to send you to him and ask him to put you in school. If you stayed in this country you'd grow up into a worse ruffian than Chick."

Perk was silent for a few moments.

"Waal," he observed, "I allers liked Denver better'n Texas, anyhow. Never seen ither one of 'em, but that's how I stack up, anyways."

CHAPTER XXX.

OLD NOMAD'S DISGUST.

"Play kyards, baron," said old Nomad. "Ain't goin' ter sleep aire ye?"

The baron jumped in his chair and looked at the daylight streaming in through the window.

"Well, I haf been asleep most all der time vile I blayed for an hour pack," muttered the baron. "It iss do-morrow, now, und it vas yestertay ven ve gommenced."

"He ain't game like us fellers, hey, Nomad?" inquired Jim Finks.

"Trouble with ther baron is he don't know how ter keep awake."

"Dirty-six games, handt-running, iss keвите a lot," remarked the baron drowsily. "I vonder vere iss Puffalo Pill, und Vild Pill, und Leedle Cayuse?"

"Nothin' doin' with them," growled old Nomad. "We've hevin' more oxcitement right hyar than what they aire. What sort o' diffikilties kin er measly minin' shark bat up? Not any wuth noticin'."

"Hockmeister is quite a feller," ventured Jim Finks timidly.

"He ain't!" declared the old trapper. "He's nothin' but er claim salter, an underhand thief that ain't got ther nerve ter come out an' play his hand in the open. Buffler won't never find Señor Chick through thet om-bray. Ef——"

"Somepody iss coming," broke in the baron.

"I reckon et's Buffler, wantin' ter come ter bed. We've had this room o' his'n all night."

The door opened and Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill and Cayuse came in.

"Good morning, pards," laughed the scout, running his eyes over the drowsy trio around the card table.

"Buenos, Buffler," returned Nomad, facing around in his chair. "Heard anythin' new from Myrick or Hockmeister?"

"Oh, a few things."

"Any chance er gittin' inter a scrimmage?"

"Not now."

"Thet's what I reckoned," growled the old trapper disgustedly. "Thet pinch-penny desperado what ye call Hockmeister couldn't kick up er batch o' trouble Cayuse thar couldn't down with one hand tied behind his back."

"Nick," said Wild Bill, "you're far wide of your trail. Pard Cody and the rest of us have been busy all night. Myrick's ovér at the doctor's getting his arm dressed——"

"What!" cried the old trapper. "Ye don't mean ter say thar's been shootin'?"

"There has."

"An' Myrick got hurt?"

"It don't amount to much, as hurts go, but it might have been worse."

"Any chance o' bagging Señor Chick?"

"Not now. He's bagged."

The old trapper nearly dropped off his chair.

"Bagged!" he repeated; "Señor Chick is bagged! Not by reason o' anythin' Hockmeister done?" he asked.

"All on account of Hockmeister."

"Whar's Chick now?"

"Over in Bangham's hotel."

"An' Hockmeister?"

"He's over there, too. Hockmeister, Nick, it turns out, belonged to the Baker's Dozen."

Old Nomad scowled. Then he picked up the cards and threw them at the baron.

The baron's head was on one side, his mouth was open, his eyes were closed, and now and then a faint snore drifted through the room.

When the cards struck him, he roused a little and waved a hand feebly in front of his face.

"Shoo fly, shoo fly," he murmured. "Go 'vay, fly. Vat a pad blace for flies und—und—muskeets——"

Again he was nodding and rocking in his chair.

"An' we've been playin' kyards with Finks, hyar," snorted the old trapper, "all the while them things hev been goin' on."

"I trust, amigo," said Wild Bill, "that you enjoyed yourself."

"Waugh! Be hanged ter ye, Hickok. Tell me what ye done."

"It's up to you, Wild Bill," said the scout.

Hickok pulled up a chair and threw all the agony into the recital he could. He made the most of every detail, and not one part of the narrative, as he told it, but was thick with thrills. Old Nomad sighed heavily, now and then, as he listened.

"All thet—all thet happened while the baron, an' me, was playin' kyards with Finks!" mused the trapper, when Wild Bill had passed out his final thrill and wound up his account.

"We didn't miss you such a terrible sight, Nick," said the Laramie man, in mock seriousness. "Anyhow, Finks is a desperate character, and you helped us a lot by staying here and guarding him."

"Shucks!" said Finks diffidently. "I ain't so blame"

desprit as ye think. All I done was ter try an' change them bags. What ye goin' ter hand me, Buffer Bill?"

"You are free to clear out, Finks," replied the scout. "I reckon there won't be any indictments lodged against you. Did you know that Hockmeister belonged to the gang known as Baker's Dozen?"

"Never savvied a thing erbout it!" declared Finks.

"He must have kept it pretty quiet. Joe Wing, the chink member of the gang, who is also in jail, says he will tell enough about Hockmeister to take him 'over the road' along with him and Chick."

"I reckon," remarked Jim Finks, "that the town will be a heap better off without Hockmeister in it."

"I reckon," said Nomad dryly. "Mebby it 'u'd improve some if you was ter emigrate."

Finks laughed weakly.

"Good-by," said he. "Next time ye want an all-night whack at the keerds, send for me."

"Cl'ar out!" scowled the trapper.

Jim Finks left.

"I reckon Cayuse hes evened up fer thet leetle excursion we made ter ther chink quarter, t'other day, without invitin' him," went on Nomad.

"Wuh!" beamed Cayuse.

"Waal, I don't want ter be cut out o' the herd like thet ag'in. Sufferin catermounts! Why, Buffer, I thort I was doin' my duty, playin' seven-up with Finks an' hangin' onter him. But et was all plumb foolishness an' didn't help ye at all. The kid—Dirk Perry——"

"Perk Derry," corrected Wild Bill elaborately.

"Waal, et don't make no partic'ler difference ef I ain't got et jest right. The kid savvied ther hull layout, over hyar, an' told Hockmeister. Then Hockmeister got busy with Myrick, an' thet run inter the hills follered. I

was a wallflower durin' this dance. Set et out with the baron an' Finks, while the rest o' ye was balancin' on the cornders, swingin' yore pardners, an' sashayin' up an' down thet thar notch. I wisht ther baron 'u'd wake up an' understand jest what him an' me hev missed. Baron!"

The old trapper lifted his voice and pushed on the table. The baron slumped to the floor, quivered a minute and then rolled over.

"Vat—vat iss der nexdt sdation?" he inquired hazily.

"Texas!" called Wild Bill, leaning down.

"Vell," muttered the baron, "ven ve ged dere ve vill arrife. Puffalo Pill has der—der dickets, und—und—"

His voice faded into a snore.

"He's off again," muttered Nomad. "I'm goin' ter bed, pards."

They all went to bed, Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill first rolling the baron onto a cot and tucking him in.

THE END.

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