

BUFFALO BILL
BORDER STORIES

Buffalo Bill at Close Quarters
By COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM

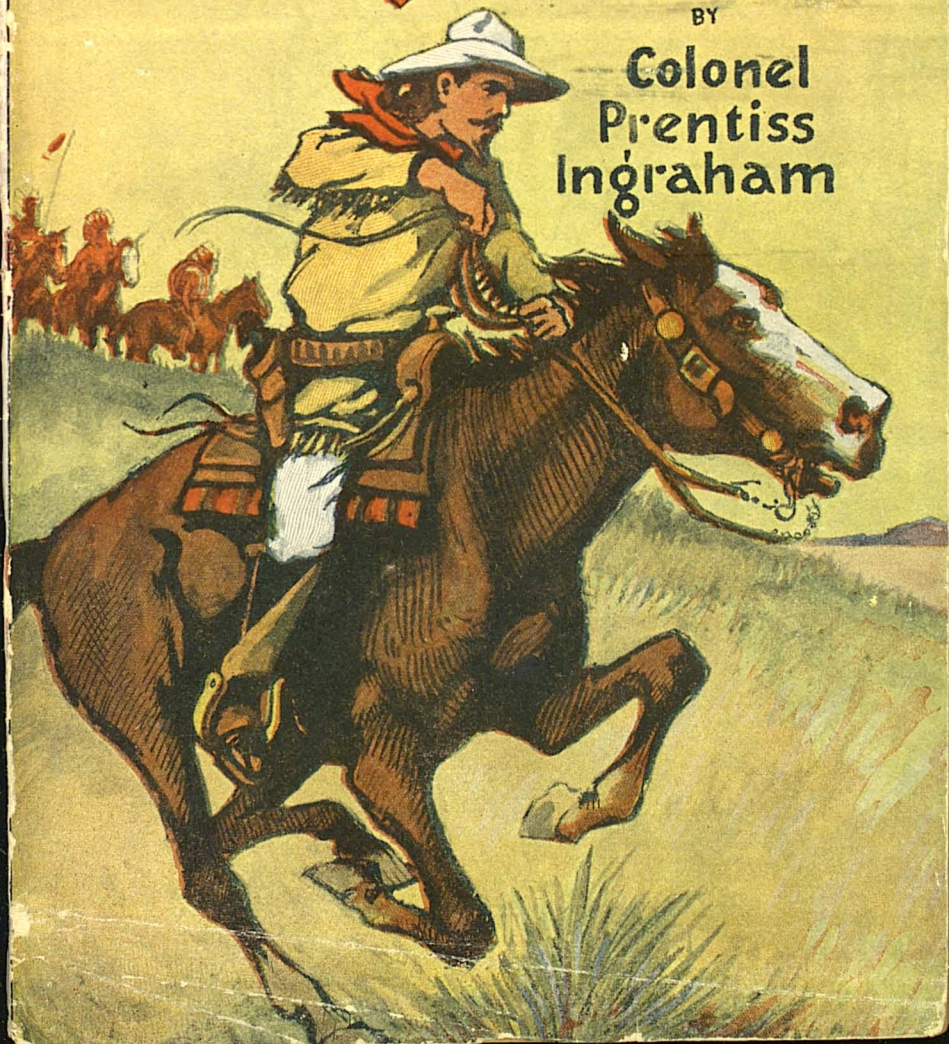
NUMBER
183

BUFFALO BILL BORDER STORIES - No 183 -

BUFFALO BILL AT CLOSE QUARTERS

BY

Colonel
Prentiss
Ingraham



Buffalo Bill at Close Quarters

OR,

IN A HAIL OF LEAD

BY

Colonel Prentiss Ingraham

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



STREET & SMITH CORPORATION

PUBLISHERS

79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

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

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

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

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

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

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

In 1868 and for four years thereafter Colonel Cody

Copyright, 1914
By STREET & SMITH

Buffalo Bill at Close Quarters

(Printed in the United States of America)

All rights reserved, including that of translation into foreign languages, including the Scandinavian.

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 AT CLOSE QUARTERS.

CHAPTER I.

BUFFALO BILL'S VOW.

When Buffalo Bill, chief of scouts at Fort Blank, made a vow of vengeance, all who knew him felt certain that he would keep it.

All knew, too, that he had come to utter a revengeful oath against the Trail Raiders, for their chief had very nearly cost the great scout his life—in fact, he had caused him to have a very narrow escape from death by hanging, for, as an honored scout at Fort Blank, a man respected, if not liked, he had become second in command of the men in buckskin at the military post, and his charges against Buffalo Bill, backed by circumstantial evidence, had very nearly done the fatal act for William F. Cody.

But Buffalo Bill had not only proven Scout Monte a traitor and a plotter, but that he was in reality a spy of the outlaw band known as the Trail Raiders, and had brought him to justice.

In this good work the scout had been aided by Captain Cecil Lorne, an officer who was a warm friend of Cody's; Keno, one of his scouts, and Ben Hurst, a youth who was known as the Brave Boy in Buckskin, and whom Buffalo Bill had found on the prairie one night, alone with his dead, for the Trail Raiders had swooped down on the camp that night and wiped out his parents, brother and servants, and left the fate of his sister Lou unknown.

The bodies of the others the boy and the scout had found, but the sister's remains could not be discovered—in fact, no trace of her, dead or alive. Ben, then fifteen, was away from the camp searching for his pony, and so missed the massacre.

"I shall not rest with the execution of that man Monte, Colonel Barry," Cody had said, "for his band must be wiped out, and I believe that they know something about that poor boy's sister, as I cannot believe that she is dead. Dead or alive, however, I must and shall know; I mean it, while I solemnly vow, sir, that I will hunt down the Trail Raiders to their just doom."

Thus had Buffalo Bill registered his vow of vengeance, and Colonel Barry knew that it would be kept. What had drawn Buffalo Bill to the fatal camp was hearing the notes of a bugle plaintively, echoing upon the prairie and filling the night with melody. It was the boy, Ben Hurst, relieving his pent-up feeling by playing upon his silver bugle, and few could play as he did.

Colonel Barry, when Cody took the boy to the fort, gladly made him a bugler, and in several battles the brave youth had shown himself a hero. He fairly idolized Buffalo Bill, and was known as Cody's Boy Pard, Buffalo Bill's Boy Ally, and the Brave Boy in Buckskin, for he always wore a buckskin suit.

He was loved by all, but his hero and boon companion was the great scout. When, therefore, Buffalo Bill had told him that he would yet find out the fate of his sister, he had faith that he would do so.

The charge which Monte had pressed so hard against Buffalo Bill had been made from the dying

lips of Bill Bronze, also a traitor scout, as was later proven, who, in the pay of his chief, had ambushed the great scout at Padre's Rock to kill him, but had been slain by the man whose life he sought to take.

Riding on, believing Bill Bronze dead, Buffalo Bill later learned that Monte had appeared upon the scene, found his companion in guilt mortally wounded, and prevailed upon him to charge Buffalo Bill with shooting him down in cold blood.

For payment for this Monte was to see that the daughter of Bill Bronze, whose real name was Dallas, was to receive the blood money, the poor girl not knowing her father to be other than the rancher he represented himself to be. For the money, to be given to his daughter, Lulu Dallas, then at a boarding school, the dying man had uttered false testimony against Cody before witnesses.

"I will see to it that the girl gets the money her guilty father said she should have," said Buffalo Bill, earnestly, and he meant it.

So matters stood at Fort Blank a month after the execution of Monte, the Trail Raiders' spy, and, though matters had settled down in seeming quiet, Buffalo Bill was on the alert, for he had not forgotten his promise, nor his vow.

CHAPTER II.

A GIRL'S PLEDGE.

A horsewoman was cantering slowly over the prairie, on the border of the ranch settlements, about one hundred miles to the southwest of Fort Blank. She was a striking-looking girl, of about seventeen, and in the belt around her riding habit she carried a revolver, while to the saddle horn hung a shotgun.

"Come, Bird," she said, addressing her horse; "we will go to the spring in the timber yonder, and then go home, for we are all of fifteen miles away, and I am always on the lookout for trouble in this wild land, though I can take care of myself now, I think, for Mr. Brent says I am no slouch of a girl, and that is a compliment, I believe—ah! there is a chance for a shot."

Quick as a flash she drew the revolver and fired at a bird on the wing, and dropped it, while a second shot brought down its mate, startled from the grass on ahead.

"Was that not well done?" she said, preparing to reload as she rode along.

But there was something out of order with the weapon, some screw loose, and, with an impatient exclamation, she thrust it back into its holster, and rode on at a canter toward the spring she spoke of, and which she knew was in the shelter of the timber ahead.

The clump of trees was a favorite camping place for trains, scouts, and soldiers on the march, for there

was good water in plenty, the grass grew rich upon the surrounding prairie, and then there was plenty of wood for the cheerful camp fires.

Utterly fearless, she cared little for the wild characters that infested the region, for, if the speed of her pony failed her, she had her revolver left, she always said, when warned of her danger. Frequently before she had halted at the spring for a drink of water for herself and pony, and now she rode directly for the spring, where the crystal water bubbled up, cool and inviting.

"Don't be greedy, Bird, but wait until I have had a drink, for you muddy the water playing in it," she said, restraining her pony, and springing from the saddle.

An old tin cup hung by the spring, and, taking it, she bent over to fill it, when her arms were seized with a grasp she could not shake off, and, looking over her shoulder, she saw a fierce face peering into her own.

"Unhand me! how dare you seize me thus?" she cried, in stern tones, trying to free her arms from his grasp.

"Now, jist be still, leetle gal, and yer won't git hurted, fer I don't mean yer no harm, fer I hes jist tuk yer in fer tin."

"I have little money with me," said the maiden, knowing what he meant by tin. "What I have, you can take and let me go."

"No; I ain't a durned fool."

"What do you mean?"

"I means thet I hes had my eye on yer fer some

time, fer yer folks is rich, and they'll pay ter git yer back."

"You are mistaken; I am no kindred to the Brents, with whom I dwell."

"Waal, yer is in thar keer, an' I guesses they'll pay ter git yer back."

"Not one dollar will they pay."

"Waal, we'll see, fer yer goes with me, anyhow."

In vain she tried to free herself, for the man possessed giant strength, and said:

"Tain't no use kickin' against it, leetle gal, fer yer hes ter go. Ef yer goes quiet, all are serene, an' ef yer don't, then I'll tie yer, bind up that pretty rosebud mouth ter keep yer from yellin', an' take yer anyhow. What does yer say?"

"I will give you my word to meet you here to-morrow with your price, if you will let me go."

"Nary, fer yer mought hev comp'ny."

"No; I will come alone."

"Yer mought hev others ter foller."

"I will not, for I will not speak of my intention, and I will bring what I have of my own money."

"How much are that?"

"I have five hundred dollars."

"Waal, I wants more."

"I have no more."

"Yer has jewelry, fer thar is a watch and chain, an' some ear-bobs, while I guesses yer gloves hides some rings!"

"Well, I will leave my watch and chain with you as security, and return to-morrow with the five hundred."

"Say yer'll fetch the money, an' give me ther

trinkets, lettin' me have ther timer now, an' yer kin go. But yer hes ter promise 'pon yer sacred word yer'll be here."

"I will be here, I promise you."

"At what time?"

"At about this time."

"No, make it a leetle later, so thet I kin hev darkness ter skip in, ef thar were ter be a mistake."

"Very well."

"And yer'll come alone?"

"Yes."

"An' yer won't give it away thet yer is comin' ter meet me?"

"No."

"That are good, an' I knows yer'll keep yer word. Now, yer kin go as soon as yer gives me ther timer."

He released her as he spoke, and, taking off the watch and chain, she handed it to him. Then she very calmly took a drink of water, and allowed her pony to do likewise.

"Waal, yer is a cool one," said the robber, admiringly.

She merely smiled, sprang into her saddle, refusing his proffered assistance, and sallied forth out of the timber.

CHAPTER III.

THE BITER BITTEN.

"Waal, ef thet gal do keep her word, she'll be ther gamest piece o' calico I ever seen in my lifetime."

The speaker was the ruffian who had the evening before seized the maiden in the timber, and compromised by taking her word to bring him five hundred dollars, along with her jewels, for her freedom. To escape from his clutches, she had given him the promise, and with the intention of keeping it.

On his part the robber had been willing for the compromise, as he was then a hunted man, and had no place to take his fair prisoner while he was waiting for ransom. His horse stood back in the timber, saddled and bridled, ready for a race should it be necessary, and his rifle hung at his saddle horn.

The animal was a splendid one, and, in fact, his speed and bottom had saved his master from being suspended from a tree on several occasions. The man was clad in buckskin, wore a belt of arms, carrying a knife and four revolvers, and his face was repulsive in the extreme.

Bad Ben was the name he was known by, and he deserved it, for he was one of the most wicked rascals that haunted the prairie.

"With ther money," he continued, keeping his eyes on the distant trail, "I will dust out o' this, fer 'tain't healthy fer a man in a community whar they offers a thousand dollars fer him, dead or alive. I'll strike fer New Mexico, and I guesses that part o' ther kentry

will jist soot me. Ef ther gal comes, tho'?" and he peered anxiously into the distance in search for the hoped-for maiden.

"Ef I had er place ter take her, and some one ter negotiate fer me, I'd hold her fer ransom, es them Brents w'u'd pay a big sum fer her, being as she is left in their charge. But I might git a rope cravat while waitin', so I'll jist sail off with what I kin git. Ah! thar comes some one."

He looked earnestly at the person who had caught his eye, and then continued:

"Yas, I knows thet pretty hat o' hern. It are ther leetle gal, an' she are alone."

He fairly capered with delight at this discovery, and then kept his eye upon the coming horsewoman. Her pony was coming on at a long canter, and she sat upright in the saddle, her face pale, yet fearless. Turning from the direct trail, she came on toward the timber, bringing her pony down to a walk as she neared the spot of her meeting with the desperado.

"Waal, leetle gal, yer is gamer than a hungry wolf!" cried Bad Ben, as she rode into the timber and halted near the spring.

"And you are as vicious as a hungry wolf. But I do not fear you, and have come to keep my promise," was the bold reply.

"Did yer keep yer promise, tho'?"

"Am I not here?"

"Yas."

"Then why ask if I kept my promise?"

"Did yer bring ther money?"

"I did."

"An' yer gold trinkets?"

"You see that I wear my earrings, you have my watch and chain, and, see, here are my rings."

She drew off her gloves as she spoke, revealing two very pretty little hands, and upon several of her fingers were rings of considerable value.

"Waal, yer is a honey, an' ef yer is engaged to sum fine feller, I'll leave yer the engagement ring."

"No; I am not engaged."

"Will be soon, I guesses, fer yer ain't ther kind o' a gal that ther fellers will let alone."

The girl laughed lightly, and made no reply, while the desperado said:

"Waal, chuck off ther rings, an' ther ear-bobs, fer I don't want yer ter lose no time."

"Take the gold first."

"Whar is it?"

"In the saddle pocket."

The fellow stepped to the side of her horse and unfastened the flap of her saddle pocket, and saw within a buckskin bag, which was filled with gold.

"Thar is five hundred dollars thar?"

"Count them yourself, and see."

The man placed his hand upon the bag to take it out, but found that it was caught in some way, so used both hands.

As he did so a revolver muzzle was thrust squarely into one eye, while the silvery voice of the maiden said firmly:

"Bad Ben, I want you! Up with your hands, or I pull trigger!"

"Wolves an' coyotes! Gal, what does yer mean?"

"Just what I say, you villain! Up with your hands, or you die!"

He glanced up into her face, and saw that she meant every word that she uttered, and promptly he raised his hands above his head.

"Clasp your hands together!" was the next order.

Suddenly the desperado obeyed.

With her disengaged hand she took a lariat, which hung at her saddle horn, and slipped the noose over his arms and elbows, drawing them tightly together.

Then coil after coil was wound round his wrists and arms until the man was a prisoner and wholly at her mercy.

"Gal, this are a joke? Yer don't mean thet yer are in yarnest?"

"I do; in dead earnest, as you shall see."

"Yer 'hes broke yer word ter me."

"I have not."

"Yer said yer w'u'd come an' give me ther money an' ther trinkets, 'cause I was so good an' let you go."

"I said no such thing."

"Them lips is too purty ter tell lies."

The maiden again broke out into a silvery laugh, but said:

"I did not tell a lie. I told you I would meet you here, and bring the money you demanded, along with my jewelry. I have done so, and hence have kept my word. But I said nothing about quietly letting you rob me, and I did not then intend to submit to it in silence. My pistol was out of order yesterday, or I would have turned on you then; but now I have you safe."

"What does yer intend ter do with me?"

"Give you up to the officers of the law."

"They'll hang me."

"Doubtless. You deserve it."

"I never did anybody no harm."

"Oh, I know you, for I took your picture mentally yesterday, and, describing you, found out just who you are."

"An' who are I?"

"Bad Ben, a Trail Raider."

"Lordy! yer hes got me down fine, but yer ain't got ther heart ter see them hang me."

"No, for I shall not go to the hanging; but, knowing of your many red deeds, I would do wrong were I to release you. Were you a common robber, I would disarm you and let you go, but now you will have to suffer the penalty of your crimes. Come, move, and go on foot, for I will lead your horse, as I fear to trust you on his back."

"I'll not stir one step, gal."

"You must."

"I says I won't."

"Do you wish me to kill you?"

"Yas, fer it are better ter die now from a bullet than to go an' get my neck stretched," was the dogged reply.

The maiden was in a quandary, for what to do she did not know. To shoot the man, she would not think of such a thing, unless he attempted to attack her or to escape. She knew well that he deserved death for his many crimes, and she also knew that he would soon be disposed of if she took him to the settlement.

She would not shrink from her duty, though, and yet how was she to get him there?

"You will not go, you say?" she suddenly asked, as a thought flashed through her mind.

"Not a step."

"We shall see, then."

She made a noose in the end of the lariat she held, and threw it about his body.

Then she made it fast to the saddle horn, and said:

"Come, Bird, you will have to drag this gentleman, and I will ride his horse."

She sprang from her saddle as she spoke, and, approaching the splendid animal of the desperado, pulled up the lariat stake and leaped into the saddle.

"Come, Bird," she called out to her horse, and the animal, well trained and obedient, walked toward her.

From side to side Bad Ben bounded, but the mustang moved on after its pretty mistress, pulling the ruffian along, in spite of his fierce struggles, while the maiden, pistol in hand, rode on ahead, a beautiful guard over a particularly ugly human wretch.

CHAPTER IV.

BUFFALO BILL, THE SCOUT.

The violent struggles of the desperado to free himself and to hang back, could not last long, as the maiden captor of the ruffian well knew. But she was unprepared to see him, as his strength failed, suddenly throw himself at full length upon the prairie and allow the pony to drag him.

"If I allow my heart to soften toward him, he will give me more trouble, so I'll let Bird drag him a while, and he'll soon get tired of it," she said to herself.

But just then she saw a horseman coming toward her at a rapid gallop. Quickly she halted, calling to her pony to do the same, while she raised the rifle of the prisoner, which was hanging at the saddle horn, not knowing but that she might have to face a foe.

The appearance of the horseman was assuring, however. He was mounted upon a jet-black steed that came on at a swinging lope, with arched neck and graceful carriage that seemed to mind neither the weight he bore nor the distance he had traveled.

His saddle and bridle were of Mexican make, and were very rich in workmanship, being spangled with silver.

The rider was dressed in buckskin, and wore his leggings stuck in high and handsome cavalry boots, the heels of which were armed with massive spurs. About his waist, and half hidden by his short jacket, was a sash, in which were a pair of revolvers and a

knife, and at his back hung a repeating rifle, and to the saddle horn a lariat.

The face of the horseman was certainly very fascinating, darkly bronzed in complexion, with large eyes, most expressive, and a regularity of features that was perfect. His hair fell in clusters upon his broad shoulders, gauntlet gloves covered his hands, and a broad-brimmed sombrero, embroidered with gold, sat jauntily upon his head.

Raising his sombrero as he approached, he gazed with some surprise at the maiden and her prisoner, and said, politely and in a rich voice:

"Can I aid you, miss, for you have a very unruly customer there?"

"Thank you, señor! I shall esteem it a favor, as I confess he is more than I can manage."

"It does not look so, for he appears to be your prisoner."

"Yes; I captured him a while ago," and the maiden laughingly told the story of her adventure of the day before, and her determination to capture the wretch.

"Ah! you say he is known as Bad Ben?"

"Yes, señor."

"I recognize him, now that I get a good look at his ugly face."

"Yas, an' I knows yer, too, Buffalo Bill, ther scout," growled the prisoner.

"Then you know that you will have to obey, for I will stand no trifling. Now, miss, what are your orders?"

"I wish the man to get up and go with me to the settlement."

"He will do it, of course."

"In co'rse, I won't," was the sullen reply.

"Permit me to ask you to ride your horse, and I will place him upon his."

The maiden sprang to the ground, and held the rein of the desperado's horse, while the handsome man whom Bad Ben had called Buffalo Bill raised that worthy in his strong arms as though he had been a child, and threw him across the saddle.

A lariat then bound him firmly to the saddle, and, after giving the bridle rein of the animal to the maiden, he said, pleasantly:

"There is your prisoner, miss, and I think you will have no more trouble with him."

"I thank you, sir," and the young girl vaulted into her saddle, while the scout also mounted and rode by her side on toward the settlement.

CHAPTER V.

THE SCOUT'S DAUGHTER.

The sun was fast setting when the maiden, her prisoner and her escort, Buffalo Bill, rode into the settlement. Her coming created great excitement, for she was known to many as a dashing, daring girl, who preferred to ride over the prairies to moping in the hacienda where she lived.

Bad Ben, the desperado, was also known, and many had been the efforts made to capture him, especially since some deadly work of which he had lately been guilty. A reward for his body, dead or alive, had been offered, and this had stimulated a number of brave men to go on the hunt for him.

Now he had been captured by a girl, and all listened breathlessly while she sat upon her horse telling her story to the officers of the law.

"You are entitled to the reward, miss," said the marshal.

"I do not care for the reward, and, in fact, would not accept it, so leave it in your hand to give to the needy," was the answer of the maiden.

"You are most generous, but you will, at least, accept the horse of Bad Ben, for he is a superb animal," urged the marshal.

"Thank you, I will take the horse, and if you will unsaddle him I will take him to my home."

"Permit me to do that much for you," said the scout, Buffalo Bill, and he seized the bridle rein of the desperado's horse and rode off with the maiden, amid wild cries to hang the prisoner.

"They will give him no trial, I fear," said the young girl, addressing the scout, as the two rode away together, and the yells of the infuriated crowd grew wilder and wilder.

"I do not think that he deserves trial—see! they have seized him by force from the marshal, and are going to hang him."

"Oh, this is terrible!"

"Come, let us ride on and get beyond hearing of their voices."

She urged the pony into a rapid run as she spoke, and the scout kept close to her side, the desperado's horse running along without any trouble, as though glad of the change of owners.

"My home is there, and, after your kindness to me, I must ask you in, and Mr. Brent will welcome you. I reside in his family," and she pointed to a handsome hacienda far in the distance.

"No, thank you, for I have a duty to perform which admits of no delay."

"But another time I hope to have the honor of meeting you."

"I will be glad to see you whenever you can call."

"Perhaps you can tell me of the one I seek. She is at the convent, I believe."

"Yes, if you seek any one there, I can tell you of her, for only a few months ago I left the convent, having completed my studies, and Mr. Brent, an old friend of my father's, made me a member of his family. What is the name, please, of the young lady you would find?"

"Lulu Dallas."

"Indeed! Then you need go no farther to find her, for I am Lulu Dallas."

"You surprise me, and give me pleasure, too, for I came hither to seek you."

"Ah, sir; you speak in such a serious tone I fear you bring me ill tidings. Speak, I implore you! Do you come from my father?"

"I do, lady—come on his account," was the response.

"Has harm befallen him?" and, remaining on her horse, she gazed into the face of the man before her with earnest entreaty.

"I am the bearer of sad tidings for you."

"Speak! what of my father, for he is all I have in the world to hear ill tidings from?"

"Your father is dead."

"Dead! Oh, Mary Mother! have mercy upon me!"

As the prayer burst from the white lips, the beautiful head was bent forward and rested in the hands, while the poor girl burst into tears. The scout made no effort to check her grief, but sat in silence, gazing upon her. After a few moments she raised her head, and said earnestly:

"Ah, sir, do not think me a child not to control myself; but I have gone each afternoon for a week to meet my father, whom I expected to meet about this time. Long years ago, when my poor mother died, he placed me in the hacienda here, and twice each year he has visited me, and a dear, generous father he has been to me. Now you tell me that he is dead, and that I must look for him no more."

"Yes; your father met his death at the hands of a foe, I may say."

"Killed?" gasped the young girl.

"Yes; he was shot down while he was engaged in his duties as a scout at the fort."

"His duties as a scout?"

"Yes, miss."

"Is there not some mistake?"

"None."

"My father was a ranchero."

"Your father was William Dallas, was he not?"

"Such was his name."

"He was an American?"

"Yes."

"And married your mother in Mexico, for she was the daughter of a Mexican don?"

"Yes, señor."

"Then there is no mistake, for your father was not a ranchero, but a scout at Fort Blank, and there he was known as Bill Bronze."

"Indeed! Why, señor, my father led me to believe that he had a small cattle ranch long miles from here."

"Perhaps he did so, miss, to keep you from anxiety, knowing that you would fear for him, leading the dangerous life of a scout."

"Perhaps so, señor," said Lulu Dallas, in a dazed kind of a way.

"Such was doubtless the case, but a scout he certainly was, and he served under me at Fort Blank, where I am chief of scouts. Dying, he left his money for you, and I have come to turn over to you this package of bills, which contains something over three thousand dollars, as you will see by counting the money."

"Señor, there is some strange mystery in all that you tell me."

"Not in the least, miss. Your father was a scout, and the money which he had saved up he sends you here. It is all that he had, and I will ask you to let me go with you to the hacienda and receive from you a receipt for it."

"Certainly; but, oh, what a bitter blow you have given me!"

She moved on once more toward her home, and the scout entered with her and told again to the inmates of the hacienda the story which he had made known to the maiden.

"The señor speaks the truth, Lulu, your father was a scout, but for some reason wished the secret kept from you, and I never told you that he was not a ranchero, as he pretended to be," said Mr. Brent.

"I cannot understand it all," said Lulu.

"Well, my poor child, do not worry about it, and remember that I am now to be your father," said the kind-hearted ranchero, and then he begged the scout to become his guest.

But Buffalo Bill declined, saying that he was forced to return with all haste to the fort, and receiving from Lulu a receipt for the money paid her, he departed from the hacienda and rode back on his trail.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT BUFFALO BILL OVERHEARD.

"That was a very cruel ordeal for me, the cruellest of my whole life, to have to go to that girl, whose father I had killed, and give to her the money left to her by my unworthy friend, Bill Bronze," remarked Buffalo Bill as he rode along the trail after his visit to the Brent ranch, where he had taken Lulu Dallas.

Continuing to muse, the scout went on:

"I do not believe that the colonel considered, when he asked me to find the girl and hand over to her the money, that I had killed her father, but merely concluded that I was the best one to get safely through the country with it. Well, it is over with, and I do not wish another duty like it, for, though I killed Bill Bronze and did it because he fired upon me from ambush, yet it was death by my hands all the same, and well do I know that most of the money paid to the girl was paid to Bronze as a fee to kill me; but that she does not know, thank God, and she must not know that her father was an outlaw and a spy in the fort.

"Fortunately, the girl has a good home with Mr. Brent—but who would suspect her of being the daughter of Bill Bronze? Well, I wish her only happiness, and am mighty glad to have served her. But now I'll look up a camp for the night, for I could not bear to stay under the same roof with the daughter of Bill Bronze. As my time is not limited, I'll scout around and try to get a few pointers on the Trail Raiders, and once more go over the ground where

What Buffalo Bill Overheard. 27

the first train was attacked, for I cannot believe that my girl's sister was killed, or wandered off to die in that fatal night, but rather that she was made a captive by the Trail Raiders, and held her ransom.

Had he escaped from the camp, and then returned, he would have been guided back by the fire. When he had been found by Boy Ben, when he had seen and more, have heard his laugh, for I heard him come away over the prairie, and then heard him say, 'Well I have had a good supper, so will seek blankets for sleep,' and the scout rode into a grove of timber, staked his horse out, found a good place, and was soon fast asleep.

He was awakened soon after by hoof beats, and immediately upon his guard, for he had to dread both men and outlaws. Like phantoms two horsemen came and halted near him, one calling out: 'Is this a good camping place, Dark, and I've tired

'Well, Dark, so here we sleep,' was the answer to the scout's voice.

He had a pack animal, and the three horses were led out by the white man, while the negro followed and it revealed both distinctly.

Bill crouched in the thicket watching them, ready to act if they should discover him or to follow. They first built a fire and began to cook, and then they wrapped their blankets around them and went to sleep.

What Buffalo Bill had heard all that night, and he had heard him upon his plan of a

the Hurst train was attacked, for I cannot believe my boy pard's sister was killed, or wandered off to die on that fateful night, but rather that she was carried off a captive by the Trail Raiders, and held for ransom.

"Had she escaped from the camp, and thus missed capture, she would have been guided back by the fire, and there have been found by Boy Ben when he returned, and more, have heard his bugle, for I heard the notes miles away over the prairie, and thus found him. Well, I have had a good supper, so will seek my blankets for sleep," and the scout rode into a clump of timber, staked his horse out, found a good resting place, and was soon fast asleep.

He was awakened soon after by hoof falls, and was instantly upon his guard, for he had to dread both Indians and outlaws. Like phantoms two horsemen appeared and halted near him, one calling out:

"Here's a good camping place, Dark, and I'm tired out."

"So is I, Boss; so here we sleeps," was the answer in a negro's voice.

The man had a pack animal, and the three horses were staked out by the white man, while the negro built a fire, and it revealed both distinctly.

Buffalo Bill crouched in the thicket watching them, and ready to act if they should discover him or his horse. They first built a fire and began to cook supper, after which they wrapped their blankets about them, and went to sleep.

But Buffalo Bill had heard all that they had said, and it decided him upon his plan of action. One thing

that particularly had interested him was overhearing the negro say:

"Now, Monte has been done fer by de folks at de fort, does yer think de boss is gwine ter send more spies there, Boss, fer Bill Bronze were kilt by Bufler Bill, too, an' hit ain't no pleasant job?"

"I did hear old Catamount Kit say ther chief were goin' ter send you, Dark."

"Ole Catamount Kit are a liar, fer dis nigger don't go dar. No, sah, I'm willin' ter scout 'round wid de gang, an' ter watch de gal up by de hut in de mountings, but I ain't goin' ter no fort—no, sah, not dis nigger chile."

The white man laughed and said:

"Well, we got ter ther settlement all right, an' got ther provisions needed at ther hut, an' we hes got ter report to ther cap'n thet Bad Ben was captured by a gal, who tarned him over ter ther cowboys, an' they hanged him, so another man hes got ter be sent ter spy in his place."

"Yes, sah; an' we learnt that Bufler Bill was dar in de settlement, an' helped ther gal out in her capter o' Bad Ben; den he went back to de fort."

"Yas, so Bad Ben's blood is another one on Bufler Bill's head, an' I tells yer, Dark, he hes got ter be done fer afore we hes any rest in this kentry; but which trail does we take from here, fer we don't want ter run upon ther scout?"

"Fore de Lawd, we doesn't, so I says go 'round de long way by Red Rock, an' camp dar ter-morrer night."

"We'll do it."

All this did Buffalo Bill overhear, and it was enough to decide him upon his plan of action.

"I'll slip out of this and see what trail they take in the morning. They are Trail Raiders and they live at a hut in the mountains, and there is a girl captive there. They have been to the settlement after provisions, and they spoke of a man I have heard of—old Catamount Kit. I must get better acquainted with these fellows," and when all was quiet in the camp, Buffalo Bill slipped silently away, led his horse out upon the prairie, and then man and beast lay flat down upon the grass.

CHAPTER VII.

BROUGHT TO TERMS.

"Boss, I doesn't feel just easy campin' here, so I says, says I, we better had up and git out ter de hut-ter-night."

So said Dark, the negro, whom Buffalo Bill had seen the night before come into camp with his white companion and the heavily laden pack horse.

"I guess yer are right, Dark, fer scouts and sodgers from Fort Blank comes often ter Red Rock, so we won't stay long."

The two men drew rein near the spring, unsaddled their horses, and built a fire to get supper, which they had ready just as night came on.

"Hands up, there!"

"Oh, Lordy! we is dead niggers!" cried the negro, at the stern command from over Red Rock, while the white man made a bound to escape in the darkness.

"Halt! I will kill you if you don't!" cried the voice, and, as the man was disappearing out of the circle of firelight there came a shot.

Down dropped the white man, while the negro called out:

"I is halted, sah! Don' shoot!"

"Hands up!"

Up went the hands, and the next instant a form leaped over the rock and, revolver in hand, appeared before the frightened negro, who cried in awe:

"Massa Bufler Bill, de scout!"

"Yes, I am Buffalo Bill—and do you see that dead friend of yours over there?"

"Is he dead, sah?"

"He is."

"Lordy! ain't I glad I didn't skip!"

"It may have been better for you had you done so, for I am going to hang you."

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, Massa Bufler Bill, what has I did?"

"You are a Trail Raider."

"Lawd sabe me, I is a goner fo' sartin."

"You are, if you don't do as I tell you."

"I'll do it, sah."

Buffalo Bill took the negro's lariat and quickly bound him. Then he went to the silent form lying sixty feet away. The man was dead.

"Well, Dark——"

"You knows me, sah?"

"Yes; I know more than you think I do, for you live up at the hut of Catamount Kit in the mountains, and are one of the guards who watch a girl prisoner your chief has there, and you and Boss are just back from Rancher's Settlement, where you went to get provisions and see Bad Ben, the spy of the Raiders at that place."

"You knows it all, Massa Bill."

"Now, tell me who the girl is at the hut."

"What am hit wuth ter me?"

"Nothing, for I know, as you captured her from the Hurst train, and have kept her in hiding until your chief could get ransom money for her."

"Dere is no need yer askin' me nothin', sah, but I

guesses yer wants ter find de mountings, an' I kin trade wid you, sah."

"Your horses came from there, and they know the way back, so they will lead me."

"Lordy! I doesn't seem ter be no 'count fer nothin'."

"Well, I'll give you a chance to save your life, and, if you tell me the truth, we can trade for it; but, if you do not, I'll take you to the fort, and Colonel Barry will hang you."

"Massa Bufler Bill, I'll tell yer de truf, ef I never did it afore, sah—jist try me."

"And I will know when you lie to me."

"I beliebes yer, sah."

"How far is that hut from here?"

"'Bout twenty miles, sah."

"Where is it?"

"In Red Cliff Hills, sah."

"Whose is it?"

"Catamount Kit's, sah."

"He is a trapper and hunter?"

"Yes, sah."

"That is, he is so known at the fort, and has as pets several tame catamounts."

"Yes, sah; an' dey is same as cats, ter him, fer he riz 'em from kittens."

"But really he is a spy for the Raiders—one of the band?"

"Don't tell him I tole yer, sah, fer he is er howlin' terror."

"He is a Raider?"

"Yes, sah."

"Who lives at the cabin with him?"

"His catamounts, sah."

"Answer me!"

"De young gal."

"What is her name?"

"I don't know, sah; but I calls her missy, an' de cap'n sent me dah ter cook fo' her."

"And to watch her?"

"Yes, sah."

"Who else?"

"Only Boss, sah, an' Kit, and his catamounts."

"All right."

"You can get supper now, and then I'll talk further with you, for we go to the hut to-night."

"Oh, Lordy! dat ends dis poor nigger!"

"Not if you act right by me."

"But Catamount Kit will kill us bofe, sah."

"I'll take all chances as to that; but you know where the retreat of the Raiders is?"

The negro did not reply. Buffalo Bill took out his revolver, and the words came quickly:

"Yes, sah, I knows."

"How far is it from here?"

"In de West Mounting Range, sah."

"How many are there in the retreat?"

"About thirty, sah, in the fightin' band, now yer has got Monte, Bill Bronze, Bad Ben, Boss, thar, an' me; but dey is mostly trailin', only goin' ter de den at times."

"I see. Well, after you have cooked us some supper and buried your dead pard there, we will move on to Kit's cabin."

"An' when we gits dere, de debbil will be ter pay,"
said the negro.

The scout laughed and said:

"I'll take all chances, Dark, so don't scare yourself
to death, and I may want you for further work."

"Yer has got me," was the disconsolate reply of
the much-alarmed negro.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RESCUE.

The cabin of Catamount Kit would have been impossible to find, even for Buffalo Bill, had he not been guided thither, or, at least, been following a well-marked trail. But he had mounted the horse of the dead outlaw to have him take the trail should the negro play him false, which, however, he did not believe would be the case.

It was nearly dawn when the scout and the negro, after filing through a narrow cañon, came to the cabin and were greeted with a loud whine.

"Dat's de cattermount, so look out, massa, for he is er terror," whispered the negro.

He spoke just in time, for the animal came with a spring, and then there was just one thing to do, and the scout did it: He fired, and the beast dropped dead, while instantly came an answering shot, and it struck the negro fairly in the head, and tumbled him from his saddle a dead man.

"What is yer firin' on yer pards fer, Kit—it is I, Boss," called out Buffalo Bill, trying to appear as the negro's pard.

"Why didn't yer give ther signal I give yer, then?" growled Kit.

"I didn't expect it was needed."

"Waal, yer found it were, an' it don't do ter run on a man as is hunted fer crime, an' not sing out who yer is—did I kill ther nigger?"

"Yer is on foot, so come an' see."

"All right—an' yer got my rum?"

"I got this, too."

"What are it?"

"This—hands up, Catamount Kit!" and Bill thrust his revolver right into the face of the man.

With the quickness of one of his catamounts, the man darted right under the scout's horse, firing as he did so. He killed Buffalo Bill's horse, but, as the animal fell, his rider dropped behind him and fired at the man, who was bounding toward his cabin.

Quick as was the shot, it brought the man to earth, but Catamount Kit was game, and he opened fire upon the scout, and a rapid duel followed.

"It was hot while it lasted," said Buffalo Bill, rising from behind his horse, where he had been crouching, when there came bounding toward him two huge catamounts, howling and growling furiously.

Buffalo Bill just had time to draw another weapon and fire. He was not an instant too soon, and well for him was it that his aim was deadly.

"This looks like a slaughter pen," said the scout, grimly, as he stood in the early dawn glancing about him, his gaze falling upon the dead negro, the body of Catamount Kit, the three slain catamounts, and his horse, with the horse of Dark and the pack animal standing near.

He saw a cabin not a hundred feet away, and as he looked the door opened and a girl appeared, and called out:

"Oh! what has happened? Have those come who will rescue me?"

"Yes, indeed, miss; I am your friend—a scout from Fort Blank, and all of your guard are dead, if Cata-

mount Kit, Boss, and
Bill.

"Yes, they are a
and Kit was my o

"The three are a
well, which I belie

"Yes, he had th
you are not alone,

"Oh, yes, and I
believe you are Mi

"Yes, I am Lou
lead! But how di

"I found your br
There was a cry

giddy to the door
how he had found th

then she at the foot
the discovery of her

there to rescue her.

"Oh, sir, how true
at stay here, for Ca

"Monte is dead, m

"Have you killed

"He was captured
days ago."

"So, no, for he
and Boss and Dark t

"Not Monte?"

"Yes."

"Do you know Me
Can I ever forge

entered those I lov
and brought me

mount Kit, Boss, and the negro were all," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, they are all; but the negro and Boss are away, and Kit was my only guard."

"The three are accounted for, and the three cats as well, which I believe were all."

"Yes, he had three of the horrid pets; but surely you are not alone, sir?"

"Oh, yes, and I have come to rescue you, for I believe you are Miss Hurst?"

"Yes, I am Lou Hurst, and what have I not suffered! But how did you know I was here?"

"I found your brother, Ben, and——"

There was a cry of joy, and Buffalo Bill walked quickly to the door. Then he told her the story of how he had found the brave boy, Ben, and that he was then safe at the fort, and also of how he had made the discovery of her being at the cabin, and had come there to rescue her.

"Oh, sir, how much I do owe to you; but we must not stay here, for Captain Monte may come here——"

"Monte is dead, miss."

"Have you killed him, too?"

"He was captured, and was executed at the fort weeks ago."

"No, no, for he was here only five days ago and sent Boss and Dark to the settlement after provisions."

"Not Monte?"

"Yes."

"Do you know Monte?"

"Can I ever forget him; for was it not Monte that murdered those I loved, and when I escaped he caught me and brought me here, where I have been ever

since? I say it was not Monte you executed, for he was lately here, and is coming back to meet the men he sent to the settlement. Please take me away from here at once, sir."

"I will do so, miss, and when you get us some breakfast I will bury those bodies."

Lou Hurst turned quickly to get breakfast, while the scout dug a grave for the negro and Catamount Kit. He found also two very fine horses in the pen back of the cabin, and, saddling them, placed the girl on one of them, mounted the other himself, and, with the pack animals and two others in lead, he rode away before the sun was an hour high.

"If it were not for this poor, frightened girl, I would stay there and greet this Captain Monte when he comes; but I dare not risk it now, for if harm befalls me it will rest upon her," mused the scout, as he rode along.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RETURN TO THE FORT.

The fort was in sight, for the flag could be seen over the treetops far in the distance, and Buffalo Bill pointed it out to Lou Hurst, who clapped her hands with joy. And the scout said:

"Miss Lou, yonder comes a horseman toward us, and—yes, it is my boy pard, your brother, miss."

It was true, for it was the Boy in Buckskin—Ben Hurst—who now came at full speed toward them. In ten minutes more Ben dashed up, and Buffalo Bill called out:

"I have kept my promise to you, boy pard, and found your sister."

Words cannot tell the joy of the two, and Ben listened to the story of the rescue, but his face was pale, and he seemed worried, and said:

"Mr. Cody, I came out scouting for you, hoping to meet you, for you must not go to the fort."

"And why not, Ben?" asked the scout, in surprise.

"Well, Buffalo Bill, the colonel has outlawed you!" cried the Boy in Buckskin.

"How dare he do——"

"Don't blame him, sir, for appearances are fearfully against you."

"What appearances—what is against me?" hotly asked the scout.

"Well, sir, you know how the traitor scout got you into trouble, and nearly had you shot? Well, this time Paymaster Leigh comes in with an ambulance

and with two soldiers, one of them dying, and he was held up the day after you left and robbed by a masked man in buckskin, who got from him ten thousand dollars, after wounding one of the soldiers. The paymaster fired at the robber as he mounted his horse, and the bullet grazed his cheek and cut off his mask, and he was surprised to see that it was you."

"Nonsense!"

"But the paymaster swears to it, and he knows you well, while the two soldiers said the same, the dying man said the same—for he got to the fort some time before his death. The lieutenant called you by name, and added: 'You, of all men, to do this!' and you, he said, replied: 'Yes, I am Buffalo Bill, and the secret is out also that I am Monte, the Trail Raiders' chief.'"

"This is infamous!" cried Buffalo Bill, his face livid.

"I do not believe it, Pard Bill—would not believe my own eyes against you; but it is believed by all at the fort now, except Keno, for even Captain Cecil Lorne and Miss Barry do not doubt it, as they cannot doubt Lieutenant Leigh and the two soldiers."

"Well, boy pard, I doubt it, and to the fort I go."

"You must not."

"But I will."

"They say you will be tried by drumhead court-martial and shot."

"I'll take all chances, black as things appear against me. Come, let me not cloud the joy of your sister's return."

"But, alive, you can, in the end, prove that you are not guilty; but, dead, you cannot."

"I go, boy pard, but to the fort I go."

"I see your horse, saddle, form, face and all."

"So the lieutenant said so, and also the men in I talked with them, and so did old Scout."

"I go," said the scout, though also entreated by the lieutenant, to let the way on to the fort.

He rode, the scout meditated sadly upon his ill fate. He recalled how he had very nearly been hanged for the killing of Bill Bronze, and how, Monte, the traitor scout, had made charges against him, which many, with the circumstantial evidence against him, had really believed.

"There is plotting to hang me, I can plainly see; I'll get down them, if I can only keep them from me until I get the chance. But now I must take my chances—and will."

When they were discovered from the fort, and excitement there. Colonel Barry heard the news and stepped quickly to the window of his quarters and looked out.

"What is all that noise?" he asked.

"I asked the question, he saw a man riding toward his quarters, and exclaimed:

"Buffalo Bill!"

"It cannot be possible, sir," cried Captain Cecil Lorne, who was with him.

"Could he be riding as coolly up to my quarters and expect a pleasant welcome?"

"You must know that Leigh has reported him,"

said Captain Lorne.

His face was very stern and pale, while he asked:

"A good argument, boy párd, but to the fort I go."

"It was your horse, saddle, form, face and all," urged Ben, "for the lieutenant said so, and also the soldiers, for I talked with them, and so did old Scout Keno."

"I'll go," said the scout, though also entreated by Lou Hurst, led the way on to the fort.

As he rode, the scout meditated sadly upon his ill fortune. He recalled how he had very nearly been sacrificed for the killing of Bill Bronze, and how, later, Monte, the traitor scout, had made charges against him, which many, with the circumstantial evidence against him, had really believed.

"Some one is plotting to hang me, I can plainly see; but I will yet down them, if I can only keep them from hanging me until I get the chance. But now I must take the chances—and will."

Soon after they were discovered from the fort, and all was excitement there. Colonel Barry heard the noise, and stepped quickly to the window of his quarters and looked out.

"What is all that noise?" he asked.

As he asked the question, he saw a man riding quietly toward his quarters, and exclaimed:

"It is Buffalo Bill!"

"It cannot be possible, sir," cried Captain Cecil Lorne, who was with him.

"Yes—and he is riding as coolly up to my quarters as though he expected a pleasant welcome."

"Yet he must know that Leigh has reported him," answered Captain Lorne.

Buffalo Bill's face was very stern and pale, while, halting his horse, he asked:

"What does this mean—a soldier escort?"

"It means, Cody, that you are under arrest," answered Lieutenant Lancaster.

"Ah, what crime am I now guilty of?"

"You will soon know; but surrender your belt of arms, sir."

Without delay, Cody handed over the weapons, dismounting at the same time.

"Hold out your hands," came the next order.

It was obeyed, and the officer placed upon the wrists a pair of manacles.

"Sergeant, lead this man to the guardhouse," was the next command, and Cody was marched off, while his boy pard, Ben, and his sister, whom Buffalo Bill had rescued, went on to the lieutenant, their hearts full to overflowing.

"You may save him, sister Lou," said Ben, earnestly, as they reached the colonel's door.

CHAPTER X.

THE SENTENCE.

Whatever feelings Ben, the boy scout in buckskin, Scout Keno, and a few others felt for Buffalo Bill, in regard to his innocence, against all seeming facts, they were not held by those before whom he was to be tried for supposed murder and robbery.

Some one had been suspected of giving information to the Raiders, and, with the exception of the traitor scout, Monte, it was supposed that it would end; and yet it had continued, so now, of course, it was blamed on Buffalo Bill, for the great scout was not then known in the Southwest as he was in the northern country.

Although Monte was dead, there was still a spy in the fort beyond doubt, and, with the charges made by Lieutenant Leigh, Cody was considered to be that spy. It was a very painful position for Colonel Barry to be placed in, for twice had Cody saved the life of his daughter, Marie, and Cecil Lorne also owed the same debt of gratitude to the scout more than once; but the rumors, the innuendoes, and, lastly, the charges direct of Lieutenant Leigh against the chief of scouts, decided even those who had been the truest friends of Cody to believe him guilty.

When Ben went to the colonel, accompanied by his sister, and she told how the scout had rescued her, and how she had been held a prisoner by "Captain" Monte, the chief of the Trail Raiders, it was a surprise to the fort's commandant.

She also claimed that Monte was alive, and that the man executed was not the chief of the outlaws.

The colonel sent for Lieutenant Leigh, and, questioning him, found that Buffalo Bill could have held him up, as claimed, at the time stated, and then have gone on to Rancher's Settlement in time to see Lulu Dallas, as Ben told how he had done.

"The trial must show the truth, Lorne," said the colonel, and he sent for his daughter, to place Lou Hurst in her charge.

Buffalo Bill was to be tried on the past charges, as well as the present, although the death of Bill Bronze at his hands had been gone over at the former trial, the chief of scouts admitting the killing of the man, but because he was first fired upon from ambush by him, and not, as it was said in the dying confession of the man, that it was a murder.

If Buffalo Bill was really the spy of the Raiders, as Monte had been proven to be, as well as Bronze, why had he, Scout Cody, sought, as claimed, to kill Monte?

Monte had certainly been shot at on two occasions, and by Buffalo Bill, it was claimed; but why, if they were members of the same band? This puzzled many, and yet, as the mystery could not be solved, then a victim must be had, and Cody, being under suspicion, must be that victim.

But the last, and direct, charge of Lieutenant Leigh, the paymaster, that he had recognized Buffalo Bill as the man who had held him up; robbed him of government money and killed a soldier, convinced all, save a very few, that the scout was guilty as charged, and it was decided that there must have been some recent

quarrel between the scout and Monte, that caused the former to wish to get rid of him. Then the news was spread around that Lou Hurst, rescued from the Trail Raiders by the scout, claimed that Monte was not dead.

Altogether, it was a very complicated and mysterious case, and, if Buffalo Bill could not clear it all up at his trial, then he would have to suffer the death penalty, and that would end it—even satisfy those who demanded his life.

In trying a man thus accused, no time was to be lost, and a drumhead court-martial was at once ordered for the following day. The hour of trial came round, and the prisoner was led before his accusers. He was pale, yet calm, and seemed not at all afraid of the fate that he felt must be his, with the charges against him. The first witness called was Captain Lorne, who went over the testimony given at the former trial, regarding the dying confession given to him by Bronze—William Dallas—who had said that he was ruthlessly shot down by Buffalo Bill.

Then followed those who had witnessed the shot fired into the cabin of Monte, then chief of scouts, and the bullet was produced. It fitted exactly the weapon of Buffalo Bill, and no other weapon in the fort. Then, too, the timber from which it had been fired was too far off for any other rifle to risk a shot that far.

Then came the witnesses of the shot fired at Monte, which knocked away his cigar, and all who saw the horseman, lighted up by the discharge of the rifle for an instant, swore that it was Buffalo Bill.

No, there was one who said:

"He hed ther look o' Chief Cody, I admits, but I might be mistaken, fer, with all ther folkeses on the yearth, it w'u'd be strange ef sum o' them didn't look jist like ther others."

This was from the lips of Keno, the scout. Then came Lieutenant Leigh, the paymaster, and in a few straightforward words he told the story of the robbery of himself, and the knocking off of the hat, which revealed who the leader was that called himself Alva, or Monte.

"Was the prisoner masked in his attack upon you?" asked Colonel Barry.

"He was, sir."

"Did you hear him speak on that occasion?"

"I did, sir."

"You know that the prisoner has a ringing voice of peculiar tone?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did the voice of the outlaw leader strike you, as compared with that of the prisoner?"

"I had not thought of that, sir, but now I remember that the voice of Buffalo Bill was deeper then than ordinarily."

Then Keno was recalled, and told his story in his quaint way, adding:

"I don't do no swa'ring thet it were Chief Cody; but, ef it wasn't, then he were es much like him es twin peas, though I do now remember thet ther voices was dif'rent."

With all of this damning testimony, it seemed as though the prisoner had not a chance for life. But he was asked by Colonel Barry:

"Now, Mr. Cody, what have you to say against these charges?"

"I am not guilty, sir," was the calm reply.

"You deny having fired the shot from the timber that so nearly killed Monte in his cabin?"

"I do deny it, sir."

"You disavow having shot at him the same night when he was lighting his cigar?"

"I never shot at him in my life, Colonel Barry."

"You assert this on oath?"

"Certainly; for, had I shot to kill him, I would have done so."

"Do you also deny, prisoner, that you halted Paymaster Leigh on the trail?"

"Emphatically, I deny it, sir."

"And that you robbed him?"

"I did not see him, sir."

"Also, you gave to the daughter of Bronze the money which was sent to her by you?"

"I did, sir, and hold her receipt."

"You also disavow having attacked and robbed Paymaster Leigh?"

"I do, sir."

"Then you admit the truth of not a single charge against you?"

"Not one."

"This is strange, prisoner."

"I admit that appearances are terribly against me; but I am not guilty."

"Where were you after the last attack of the Indians in the mountains?"

"I dogged their steps on their retreat until they sent a special force after me. Then I retreated, the twelve

warriors pursuing me, and, in a fight with them, I killed two of their number, after which I showed them the speed of my horse, and they turned back, knowing how useless it was to follow me."

"And where did you go then?"

"I met a train whose guide had been killed, and I led it on to the upper country."

"And then?"

"I started for the fort, but struck a trail which I believed was made by the Raiders, and scouted on it for a day or two."

"And this is all you have to say?"

"All, sir."

"Your word is against the testimony of many, and those who have been your friends."

"I know it, sir, and I do not censure one of them for what they have said, as I believe that they labor under a mistake in identity. I have no more to say, sir, and am ready for sentence."

"And your sentence, William F. Cody, is that you be hanged for your crimes, at sunset, one week from to-day," impressively said Colonel Barry.

The prisoner never flinched, but said, in his calm way:

"Colonel Barry, I do not fear death; but I beg of you, for the sake of the services which you will admit I have rendered the government, that you allow me to be shot, and not die at the end of a rope."

"As a common murderer, he deserves hanging," boldly said a voice.

"Silence, sir! How dare you speak thus?" sternly said Colonel Barry, turning upon the man with flashing eyes, while Keno said:

"Yer struck ther wrong trail thet time, pard Brand."

"Prisoner," said Colonel Barry, "I change your sentence from hanging to shooting.

"One week from to-day you are to be led forth by a file of soldiers and shot."

"I thank you, Colonel Barry, and you will find that I will meet death fearlessly."

The prisoner was led away in double irons, and taken to the log cabin which served as a guardhouse, and left alone with his thoughts, while a sentinel was placed in front of his door, with orders to admit no one to see him without orders from the commandant.

CHAPTER XI.

KENO AND THE BOY PARD.

"Leetle pard, you heerd ther sintence in ther case?" said Keno, as he visited Ben in his cabin the night following the condemnation of Buffalo Bill.

"I did."

"Does yer think it were squar?"

"I think it was intended to be just, considering the testimony, Keno, but I believe that all who testified were mistaken as to the one whom they saw being Buffalo Bill."

"Thet idee kin'er haunts my mind. But what is we men goin' ter do about it?"

"I'll tell you what I am going to do about it," said the boy, abruptly.

"What are thet?"

"I intend to save the life of Buffalo Bill!"

"'Tain't so easy did."

"Are you afraid to help me?"

"Does I look skeery, pard?"

"No."

"Does I act skeert?"

"No."

"Waal, I ain't skeered in the least."

"Then we can get him out."

"Thar must be no killin'."

"There shall not be, for that would only get us into trouble, and ruin all."

"Fact."

"Have you got any plan to suggest, Keno?"

"Ther sentinel hes ther keys o' his irons?"

"He walks up and down afore the door, an' sometimes he sits on ther bench."

"So I noticed to-night."

"Thar ain't no one else in ther guardhouse now?"

"Fortunately for our plans, there is not."

"Ther nearest anybody are ter ther guard cabin are a hundred an' fifty feet."

"True."

"Waal, my plan are thet you rides ther pack horse o' Bill out o' camp ter-morrer, fer he gived him ter yer, an' yer sails off arter sum wild ponies. Catch a good one, an' then return an' tell how ther black got away from yer; but don't yer tarn up afore sunset, so nobody will be able ter go huntin' fer him. Yer can leave ther black over at ther edge o' ther chaparral, whar ther ol' military camp was, an' which are just three mile from ther fort."

"Yes."

"Then when night comes on, I'll dress up in some sojer clothes, fer I kin git a sergeant's suit, an' es I hain't got no beard ter speak of, I'll git thet false hair thet Captain Lorne wore at ther masked fandango some time ago, an' put it on, fer I seen it hangin' up in his room near ther window, and I kin reach in and git my grip onto it. I'll walk, bold es a billy goat, up ter ther sentinel, an' jist grab him by ther throat, so he can't squeal, an' yer knows thet ther ain't but one man in these camps es kin loosen my grip."

"And he is Scout Cody?"

"Yas, he kin loosen ther grip o' any man I ever seen. Waal, I won't hurt ther sentinel, but I'll jist hev you 'round ther corner o' ther cabin, dressed up

es one o' ther ol' squaws over in ther hanger-on camp, an' yer kin tie ther sojer tight es wax, an' I'll gag him. Then we kin take ther keys, open ther door, onlock ther irons, an' just tell Bill ter skip outer ther fortifications, fer he kin sling a lariat onto a limb o' thet oak near ther wall, and git over beautiful. You kin tell him whar his hoss is, an' then we kin shuck our duds, an' go up 'round headquarters an' hang 'round until ther relief guard goes 'round an' ther diskivery is made."

"Keno, your plan is splendid, and we will carry it out; but the weapons of Buffalo Bill are in the colonel's quarters."

"I would like ter hev him git 'em, pard Ben, but I does think he'll hev ter be satisfied without 'em, an' I hes enough an' ter spare."

"Yes, we cannot do more, for to take his arms would bring suspicion on me, as I have the run of the colonel's quarters."

"An' boy pard, yer must be perticler not ter be away in ther evenin' longer then yer kin help. Hev ther squaw's rig ready, which I hev in my traps, fer I hev played squaw myself in my time, when goin' inter Injun camps, an' yer kin slip it on, an' all kin be did in ten minutes, an' you be back ag'in and a-blowin' o' thet boogle o' yourn fer all yer is wuth."

"I will, and you must show up at headquarters, too, so as not to be missed. But we may get some soldier into trouble."

"Yas; waal, thar is plenty more in ther army, ef they hangs one fer ther settin' o' Bufser Bill free."

"I would confess that I did it, before I would see a man hanged, Keno."

"Waal, it depends on what they intended doin' with him."

"How do you mean?"

"Ef they was only goin' ter put him in ther guard-house, all right. Ef they jist puts him on double duty, all right."

"But, if they suspect a man, and order him out to be shot?"

"Then we'll step ter ther front, an' save him."

"Good! Now, I am ready for the work. I suppose they will not blame the sentinel for being overpowered."

"They w'u'dn't ef they knew thet my grip were upon him," said Keno, but with no idea of boasting of his strength.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOY MUSTANGER.

Bright and early the following morning, Ben, the boy bugler, was up, preparing for his wild-horse hunt. He asked permission of the colonel to go out upon the prairies for a chase of wild mustangs, and that officer said:

"What, Ben, do you intend to try wild-horse catching, too?"

"Yes, sir; I wish to see if I can do so."

"Well, you are a dead shot, a good fencer, an excellent horseman, throw the lariat as well as any man in camp, can play the bugle beautifully, and, I do not doubt, will soon become the champion wild-horse catcher."

"Thank you, sir; but I wish to catch a faster horse than my pony, for he is a little slow."

"Then you had better ride a fast animal to do the work on. How would my daughter's horse, King, suit you, for she would lend it to you, I know?"

"He is not trained for the work, sir."

"Ah, I forgot that."

"Why not take Cody's black, which he gave you, Ben?" asked Captain Lorne, who was present.

"True; why he is the very horse for you, and the swiftest on the prairies," put in the colonel.

"I did not wish to ride him, sir, until after—after—"

"Ah! I understand you—until after poor Cody's death. Well, do as you please, Ben."

"I will take him, sir," and Ben turned away, and soon rode out of the fort for his chase of wild mustangs.

He certainly was in luck, for, ere he had gone half a mile, a large herd was espied, driving along at a rapid pace, and heading north, the very direction in which the boy wished them to go. Instantly he gave the word to the black, and away he went at a terrific pace. Glancing over the herd, Ben picked out the animal he wanted.

It was a long-bodied, high-headed roan stallion, apparently in a gallop, while the rest of the herd were upon the run. Pressing him, the boy saw him bound away at a pace that showed his speed.

That the herd was strange to that part of the prairies was evident, for the leader was heading in a direction that would bring him upon a deep ravine. It was a split in the prairie which could not be crossed for a mile on either side of the point toward which the herd was driving.

"Now is my chance," cried Ben, and he pressed on the harder after the magnificent roan.

On dashed the herd, and, keeping back, the boy, Ben, urged them on at their utmost speed, and saw that the roan stallion had taken the lead and still kept up only a sweeping gallop, which showed that he had not let himself out as he could do.

Soon the ravine came in sight, and there was halting, swaying, and scattering to the right and left, and then Ben dashed to the front. The roan had halted in amazement, and was snuffing the air with distended nostrils and head up. Just then, as he was about to dart away, the lariat was thrown. It was a long

throw, and barely reached; but over the head it settled, and the well-trained black, throwing himself back upon his haunches, the wild mustang was thrown upon the prairie with stunning force.

Quickly Ben had sprung from the saddle and was at his side, thrusting upon him a bow stall. Then, unloosening the lariat from about his throat, he allowed the gasping animal to arise. But the daring boy was upon his back, and, instantly, like an arrow from the bow, and with a wild snort of rage and fright, the untamed beast bounded away. A call to the black, and he came following behind at a pace that kept him near. The herd scattered to the right and the left, and were flying in two gangs across the prairie, and up and down the ravine. Toward one of these bands the roan mustang headed, but he was quickly checked by a jerk upon the bow stall.

Then began a struggle for the mastery between the boy and his equine captive. And long it lasted, until the roan and his rider were well-nigh exhausted. But the horseman triumphed over the brute, and the mustang, tamed by a master hand, was ridden toward the point where Ben wished to go.

That was the place of the old encampment in the edge of the chaparral, which led on to Padre's Rock. Luxuriant grass was there in abundance, and plenty of water, so that Ben soon had the black unsaddled and lariatied out to rest and feed, while he hobbled his roan beyond chance of escape.

Lying down to rest, Ben fell asleep, and the day was drawing to its close when he awoke. His roan had made the best of the matter by eating the grass at his feet. the black was thoroughly rested.

Watering the latter at the spring, Ben staked him out again, and then mounted the roan, untied the hobble, and let him bound away at full speed with him, guiding him in the direction of the fort. Into the stockade he dashed just at sunset, and all were delighted at his splendid capture.

"You don't mean you lost the black, Ben?" asked the colonel.

"The last I saw of him, sir, he was a long way behind me, and I had my hands full with the Colonel here, for I have named him after you, sir, with your permission."

"Certainly, my boy, and at the christening I'll present him with a Mexican saddle and bridle," answered the kind-hearted colonel, while Keno remarked:

"Pard Ben, thet animile are a beauty, an' no mistake. But don't feel bad about the black, fer sometimes a horse gets tangled in his bridle, an' ef he don't come in to-night, we kin look him up ter-morrer fer you."

Then, as the two went off together, the scout continued:

"Yer hes done prime, boy pard."

"And did you get the uniform?"

"Yas. I tell yer, ther plot are a-workin' fust-class."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RESCUERS AT WORK.

Boy Ben was very tired after his severe struggle with the roan mustang, but he went up to headquarters soon after dark, and never appeared in better spirits. After the guards were posted at eight o'clock, he got out his cornet and began to play, and never did he play better, all thought who heard him.

Keno was also loafing around, smoking his pipe, and chatting now and then with an officer. Presently, he walked quietly away, and Ben saw him disappear in the direction of the soldiers' quarters.

He had not been gone long before the boy laid down his cornet with the remark:

"She needs cleaning, captain, so I'll get my box and clean her up. Then you'll see the difference."

Leaning the cornet on the bench, on the broad headquarters piazza, where he had been seated, Ben walked quietly away.

Straight to his cabin he went, and all was darkness within. But as he stepped in, Keno whispered:

"I is here, pard, and done up like a bold sojer, you bet."

"Good! Now, where is my rig?"

"Right thar, an' ef it don't make a squaw out o' yer, I lies. I made yer a headgear o' scalps, and in ther box yer finds on ther table are paint fer yer face an' hands, so jist jump inter ther rags in no time."

Ben rapidly found the articles referred to, and a couple of minutes was sufficient for him to thoroughly disguise himself.

"Is yer ready, boy pard?"

"I am."

"Then jist skip."

"For the guardhouse?"

"Yes."

"I will go to the rear of it?"

"Yas, an' when yer hears me come up, jist sail to ther front."

"Where are the ropes and the gag for his mouth?"

"Here they is in my hand."

"Now, I am ready."

"All right, sail out, boy pard."

Ben left the cabin and cautiously made his way to the guardhouse, arriving in the rear of that gloomy abode in less than ten minutes after he had left headquarters.

The sentinel was pacing to and fro, little dreaming of the plot to free the prisoner, and that he was then closely watched. Soon, from his place of lookout, Ben saw the form of Keno coming through the darkness. So upright did he walk, so soldierly did he look in the shadowy light, that Ben feared that it was not Keno, his pard.

Straight up to the sentinel he walked, receiving a salute, for the stripes on his arms were visible to the soldier, though he failed to recognize him. Seeing that he was a stranger, the sentinel was about to halt him, when, with the spring of a panther, Keno was upon him, his hand upon his throat, while he said, in hoarse tones:

"Resist, and you die!"

At that moment, the soldier saw the form of a squaw glide up, and instantly the musket was

wrenched from his hands, and he found himself in a clutch he could not shake off. Nor could he cry out, as the pressure on his throat prevented that. Half a minute was sufficient for the rescuers to bind and gag the sentinel securely, and then he was taken around the cabin, out of sight, and the keys were unloosened from his belt.

Unlocking the guardhouse, the daring allies stepped within. All was darkness, and Keno called out in a whisper:

"Pard!"

No reply; again he called:

"Pard Bufler!"

Still no answer.

"Waal, he do sleep sound fer a man what is goin' ter be shooted; it ain't like him ter sleep thet way."

"Keno, Buffalo Bill has gone!" cried Ben.

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"Whar?"

"Who knows?"

"Waal, it are so, fer here are his irons, and he hev skipped."

"Who has aided him, Keno?"

"Somebody has been sooner than we is."

"Well, he is gone, and I am glad of it, though I would have liked to have been the one who aided in his escape, but it seems he has friends here after all."

"So it do."

"Let us return to headquarters, so as not to be suspected."

"All right, pard."

Quietly the two left the cabin, the sentinel was

brought back and placed before the door, which they had locked, and tied to the logs, with his musket at "shoulder arms," so that any one seeing him when passing would suspect nothing wrong.

Then the two returned to the cabin, threw off their disguises, and Keno went to replace the uniform and false beard, and Ben washed his face, and, seizing his cornet case, hastened back to headquarters, not having been half an hour absent.

And there he played his cornet, with Keno and others sitting out upon the piazza listening, until the relief guard went around, and the startling news was made known that Buffalo Bill had escaped.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ESCAPE.

Buffalo Bill sat alone in his prison of logs. He heard the hum of the distant camps, the singing of the birds, and the steady tramp of the sentinel before his door. These were the sounds that reached his ears, while his eyes fell upon bare walls of roughly hewn logs, a table, a cot, a camp stool, and no more.

At last there fell into the room a tiny ray of light. It was a golden beam of sunlight, cast by the sun just as it was going down beyond the horizon.

"It seems like a ray of hope amid the gloom that surrounds me," murmured the prisoner.

Then the door was opened, and a soldier entered with the supper for the prisoner. No word passed between the two, the meal was placed silently upon the table, and then Buffalo Bill was alone once more. Darkness now fell upon the scene, and he sat by the table, his head buried in his hands, his supper untouched.

Suddenly, he heard a peculiar sound. It seemed like the gnawing of a rat, though from where it came he could not tell. Now and then it would cease, and then again he would hear it. What could it mean? At last the sound changed to one that was grating, and then he looked up, for overhead it seemed to be.

He knew that the roof was whole and firm, and yet now he distinctly saw light shining through. And on the roof he placed the sound. Instantly, he discovered the cause.

"That brave boy is trying to rescue me," he said.

Still the grating sound continued, unheard by the sentinel that paced to and fro in front of the cabin.

"He may not hear it. I will sing to drown the noise, though he works almost noiselessly, and if he is discovered, the guard will kill him."

Then the prisoner broke forth into a lively melody that caused the guard to mutter:

"That man has more pluck than generally falls to human beings. He sings well, too; but his voice will be hushed before long, and it's a pity, for I hate to see a brave man die, even if he is a bad one."

Thus mused the sentinel, little dreaming that on the other side of the roof a person was working like a beaver to prevent the prisoner from dying. And Cody sang on, running from one air into another until at last he beheld a square opening in the roof fully large enough for him to get through.

Then the space was darkened, and a human form was visible, relieved against the clear sky. The next instant a human being stood by his side, having come down by means of a rope.

"Mr. Cody, I have come to save you," said a low voice.

"You here, to save me?" he cried in a whisper.

"Yes."

"I am sorry you came, for I must remain and meet my fate."

"You must do no such silly thing, for after I have risked so much to save you I will not hear of your refusing to go."

"But——"

"I will hear of no excuses. You are sentenced to

die within five days, and die you must if you remain here. I believe that you are innocent, and once free from here you can prove that you are not the guilty one it is claimed that you are."

"God bless you for those kind words."

"Then you will go, for I have the keys, which I took from the colonel's desk. I secured your arms and left them outside."

"You have risked much to save me."

"Then lose no time; but go at once."

"But who has helped you?"

"No one, for I dared not trust any one, fearing that it might get them into trouble."

"And you have done all this to save me?"

"Yes, and hope you will not delay now. I bored into the roof with an auger, and used a small saw to open a space. The rope is made fast, so will hold your weight."

Then the scout climbed to the roof, and he saw that the rope had been made fast to a tree growing in the rear of the log cabin and overhanging the roof.

Quickly, yet noiselessly, the rescuer slipped into the branches of the tree, and dropped upon the ground, the scout following closely.

"I was unable to get a horse for you, Mr. Cody, but the chaparral is not far away, and, once there, you can defy pursuit, knowing the country as you do. Besides, you have a long start. Here are your arms for you."

"Oh, how good you have been to me!"

"Do not speak of it. Here is also your lariat, and you can scale the stockade at the large tree yonder. Now, go, and if you are innocent, prove yourself so."

"And if I am guilty?" he said, in a low tone.

"Then go your way with your conscience, and that will be enough punishment for you, in my mind."

"It will."

"Good-by."

He held out his hand, and it was firmly grasped by his rescuer, who then motioned him away. Following slowly, and keeping the scout in sight, the one who had risked so much and accomplished all that was intended, saw him throw his lariat at the naked branch of a tree, and then quickly run to the top of the stockade.

The rescuer at once ran nimbly in the direction of the officers' quarters, disappearing from sight in the shadow of a large cabin. A moment later, that same person sank down upon a lounge, as though overcome with excitement and fatigue, and cried earnestly:

"Thank God, I saved him!"

The speaker appeared to be a youth, and was dressed in a soldier's uniform. But as the light fell full upon the face, it revealed the pale, beautiful face of Marie Barry, the colonel's daughter.

Half an hour after, she had cast aside her uniform and was seated upon the piazza of her own home, listening to the boy bugler's music, while her father sat near by smoking a cigar in silence, and little dreaming of the bold part his daughter had played to save the life of Buffalo Bill, the condemned scout, who was then going across the prairie at a brisk walk in the direction of the chaparrals, where, he knew, there was safety for him from all pursuit.

CHAPTER XV.

KENO SPEAKS.

The excitement that existed at Fort Blank and its adjoining camps was intense when it became known that Buffalo Bill had escaped. How he had done so the hole in the roof showed conclusively, and yet there was a deep mystery about it. When the relief guard went to the cabin, the sentinel there was discovered in a very disagreeable and embarrassing situation.

He stood against the walls of the guardhouse, firmly bound and gagged, and his musket was secured to his side as though he held it there on duty. His story was told to Colonel Barry, before whom the sergeant at once brought him.

"Now, sir, what have you to say for yourself?" sternly asked the colonel.

The man's mouth was in by no means good talking condition, after his having been gagged so long, but he blurted out:

"I'll tell you, sir—I'll tell you."

"That is what I wish you would do, sir, and lose no time about it."

"Well, sir, I was pacing my beat after the prisoner had stopped singing——"

"Singing?"

"Yes, sir, he was singing awful gay for a long time. Then he stopped, and presently I saw a soldier coming toward me."

"Who was it?"

Keno Speaks.

67

"That I do not know, sir, but he wore a sergeant's stripes and had a long beard."

"What man answers that description, Lorne?" asked the colonel, turning to Captain Lorne, who answered:

"Corporal Dunn has a long beard, sir."

"But this man was not the corporal, sir," said the guard.

"And you do not know who he was?"

"No, sir."

"This is very strange, my man."

"I know it, sir, but he came right up to me, and, seeing that I did not know him, I was about to halt him, when he jumped upon me and took me by the throat, at the same time telling me that he would kill me if I resisted."

"Were you not strong enough to resist him, for you appear to be a very powerful man, Richards?"

"I was like a baby in his hands, sir, and then came an old Injun squaw."

"A squaw?"

"Yes, sir—one of them that lives over in the camps."

"Which one?"

"Lor', sir, they is all alike."

"That is true."

"Well, what did the squaw do?"

"She helped to tie my hands and feet, sir, and shoved the gag in my mouth. See here, sir, she cut my lips opening my mouth, and you can just see that that man hurt my throat," and the soldier exhibited the results of Keno's grip upon him.

"Yes, you were not handled with gloves; but I am glad that it was no worse, my man."

"Now, tell me what was then done?"

"They took me around the corner of the cabin, sir, and laid me down, taking my keys from me. They then departed for a few minutes, but returned and tied me up as the guard found me."

"And you did not see them bring the prisoner out?"

"No, sir."

"And know nothing about the hole sawed in the roof?"

"No, sir."

"Nor heard the sawing?"

"No, sir, I am just a trifle deaf."

"Ah! Well, my man, I think you have **overdone** your part, for I believe you are guilty."

"Guilty, sir?"

"Yes—for you, and you only, had the keys, excepting those in my desk, that unlock the guardhouse and the prisoner's irons. You overdid the matter in allowing the prisoner to cut that hole in the roof and then tie you up as the guard found you."

"Ah, sir, I am not guilty."

"Have you searched the man, sergeant?"

"No, sir."

"Do so."

The soldier was searched, and in his pockets was found a large roll of bills, amounting to several hundred dollars.

"Ah, this looks bad. Where did you get this money, my man?"

The soldier hesitated, and said:

"I found it, sir, in the Indian camp, at the last fight."

"I do not believe you, Richards, and it pains me to say so, for you have been a good soldier. Sergeant, lead him to the guardhouse, and, if the prisoner is not captured, I will take the responsibility of having Richards shot, for his crime is worse than desertion, for he has accepted a bribe to set free a man who had cost the government many lives and hundreds of thousands of dollars."

The soldier turned piteously toward his commander, but was sternly ordered off, and the sergeant was just putting the irons upon him when Keno stepped into the room.

"Col'nel, them irons belongs on my wrists, and not on hisn."

"What do you mean, Keno?" asked the colonel, starting to his feet in surprise, while all looked upon him with astonishment.

"I means thet ther sojer did find ther money in ther Injuns' camp, as others did, too, fer I seen 'em with it, an' he didn't get it ter let Scout Cody go free."

"How do you know this, Keno?"

"From hevin set Scout Cody free myself."

"What?"

"Fact."

"Do you mean it?"

"Waal, I'll confess thet I stole Sergeant Bodine's uniform an' hat, gobbled up thet false beard thet hangs in ther cap'n's room, an' walked up beautiful to ther sojer. He were goin' ter bay'net me, I guesses,

but I are a trifle too quick in movin', an' so I jist got my squeezer onto his throat and tied him."

"But who was the squaw that aided you?"

This was a poser for Keno, and he remained silent.

"What squaw was it that aided you?"

"Lordy, col'nel, you ain't goin' ter visit my sins on thet ole Injun gal?"

"I must know her name."

"Ain't I enuf ter suffer?"

"No, you must tell me who aided you."

"Waal, col'nel, fer ther fust time in my life, I disobeys orders, so jist sot Richards loose an' take me out an' shoot me, ef yer wants ter, fer I'm durned ef I tells who helped me do it!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A FAIR PRISONER.

"And do you mean, sir, that you set Cody free?" sternly asked Colonel Barry.

"I means jist thet, sir, so put ther irons on me, fer thet sentinel ain't ther one ter punish," was the frank reply of Keno.

"Sergeant, set Richards free."

This was done, and then the colonel continued:

"Richards, I ask your pardon for my suspicions of you; but it looked so thoroughly against you that——"

"It looks ag'in Bufler, too, col'nel, but I believes he ain't guilty," put in Keno.

"Silence, sir! I wish the scout could have been proven innocent as you are, Richards. Now, you can go, and to-morrow I shall promote you to be ordnance sergeant in place of poor Burns, who was killed the other day. I do this to make amends for the wrong done you."

Richards bowed his thanks, and waited to hear what Keno would say now, for he said:

"I'd like to know, sir, please, about the hole in the roof."

"True; how came that there, Keno?"

"Col'nel, I hev confessed to you thet I set Bill free. I am ther man thet seized Richards here, an' I is willin' ter take ther consequences. More, I doesn't intend to say."

"But you can tell me why you made that hole in

the roof of the guardhouse, when you had the key to let the scout out of the door."

"Waal, yer see, I hed dif'rent plans fer freeing him, an' when I got ther keys, I didn't need ther hole in ther roof fer him."

"Well, sir, do you know that you have taken your life in your hands in setting free the Raider chief?"

"Col'nel, it were Scout Cody I set free."

"And he was found guilty of being an outlaw."

"It did look thet way, sir, but he ain't been executed as sich yet, an' maybe he won't."

"But you have set all discipline at defiance in freeing him."

"I am here to take ther consequences," was the cool reply.

"And you shall, for I do not intend that you shall escape, and, as I said to Richards, so I say to you, that you shall be shot for your act."

"You knows best, col'nel."

"Pardon me, Colonel Barry, but Scout Keno is not the only guilty one, for I aided him," said Ben, stepping into the room.

"You?" gasped the colonel, for he had learned to love the boy bugler as though he were his own son.

"Yes, sir, for I am the old squaw," and Ben smiled pleasantly, as though he had been playing a joke in impersonating the old squaw.

"Ben Hurst, this is a most serious matter for you," sternly said the colonel.

"It was more serious for poor Bill," was the answer of the boy, though not with any desire to be impertinent.

"You are young, deeply attached to Cody, and

hardly knew the gravity of the crime which you were committing, so——"

"You are mistaken, Colonel Barry, for I fully knew all that I did, and I expect my punishment to be the same as that which you threaten Keno with, for I am equally guilty."

"Boy pard, why in thunder didn't yer keep yer mouth shet, fer they'd never hev diskivered the old squaw ter be you?"

"You should not suffer alone, Keno."

"Waal, we went inter ther big end o' ther horn together, an' we comes out o' ther leetle end, side by side," said Keno.

"Sergeant, put that boy in irons, too, for he is equally guilty," sternly said Colonel Barry.

"One moment, sergeant."

The speaker was Marie Barry, and she stepped between the sergeant and the boy bugler, while she took from the hands of the former the iron handcuffs which he held. No one had suspected her presence until she had glided into the room.

"Marie!" cried the colonel, as she approached.

Quickly she clasped the irons upon her own wrists, and, holding out her little hands toward her father, she said, in calm and distinct tones:

"Colonel Barry, now you have the guilty one."

"Marie, for God's sake, what does all this mean?" cried the mystified colonel.

"It means that I set Buffalo Bill free."

From every lip came an exclamation at this calm assertion, while Keno said:

"Waal, thet do beat all, an' no mistake. Don't it, boy pard?"

But Ben's gaze was fixed upon the beautiful girl as she stood boldly before her father.

"Are you mad, child?" gasped the colonel.

"No, sir."

"Then why do you make such an assertion?"

"Because it is true."

"This man says that he set Buffalo Bill free, and Ben confesses to having aided him in the act. Now, you say that you are the guilty one."

"Permit me to explain, father; then, as a soldier's daughter, I am willing to suffer punishment, if you so will, with Keno and Ben."

"Then explain at once."

"You know that I have never believed that Buffalo Bill, as the scout is called, was guilty of the charges against him?"

"Yes; you have foolishly so said."

"You will also remember, father, that he thrice saved my life?"

"I do remember, my child," and the voice of the kind-hearted father trembled.

"Owing him my life, and in my heart believing him to be innocent, it was not in my nature to see him perish. I, therefore, determined to save his life, if possible. To do this I reconnoitered the guardhouse thoroughly, and observed that a tree grew close to it in the rear. This was an aid to my purpose, and I secured a stout rope, an auger and a saw for my use. Then I got Nita, my maid, to bring me the new uniform the regimental tailor had just made for Ben, and I dressed up in it——"

"Oh, Marie, my child!"

"I could not climb the tree with skirts on, father," innocently said Marie.

Then she continued:

"I took the keys of the guardhouse and the manacles from your desk, recovered the weapons belonging to the scout, and set to work. I bored auger holes in the roof, and the saw did the rest. Then I fastened my rope to the overhanging limbs and went into the cabin, unlocked the irons that held Mr. Cody in durance, and bade him fly. He at first refused; but I told him I believed him innocent, and to go and prove himself so. Then he departed, scaling the stockade wall by the help of the oak tree that grows near it, and, thank Heaven, he is free! As for Keno and Ben, they doubtless meant to rescue their friend, but I was before them," and Marie smiled.

"Durned ef yer wasn't ahead, an', ef yer ain't a glory, then set me down fer a weepin' liar," bluntly said Keno, lost in admiration of the act of the brave girl.

"Marie, my child, I know not what to do, for you have been equally guilty with this man and boy."

"Permit me, Colonel Barry, to suggest that you release the trio, for Keno and Ben intended releasing Cody, and Miss Barry did so," said Captain Cecil Lorne.

"It will be said that I do so on account of my daughter."

"It makes no difference, sir, what is said, so long as Miss Barry is not made to feel unpleasantly for acting on an impulse that was right—to serve one who had saved her life."

"Then I will drop the matter here; but, if ever such

a thing occurs again in my command, I will punish the guilty one, even if it be you, Marie.

"Keno, you and Ben are discharged."

The two pards bowed and left the room, followed by the soldiers, and Marie remained alone with her father, who certainly was in no pleasant mood with her for her daring act.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PLEASANT SURPRISE.

After he had thrown his lariat upon the naked limb of the tree growing near the stockade wall, Buffalo Bill drew himself up into the tree, loosened the noose from about the limb, and then, passing the lariat around it, lowered himself to the other side.

"I am free, and it will be a daring man who attempts to retake me now," he said, as he stood on the outside of the stockade wall.

But which way to go he seemed at a loss to decide for a moment or two.

"I will go to the chaparral, and once there I am safe. But it pains me deeply to give up my beautiful horse, but Ben will treat him well, I know. Well, I can soon get another animal, and it will not be my fault if I don't get a good one. To the chaparral I go, then."

With this he set off across the prairie at a rapid walk, his belt of arms around his waist, his rifle slung at his back. A strange circumstance directed his steps toward the old encampment before referred to.

It may have been that he knew that the entrance to the chaparral was easiest at that point, and it may have been accident. But certain it is that he went straight to the old encampment. With no expectation of meeting any one there, he was not approaching with caution, but was brought to a sudden halt by hearing the snort of a horse.

"Ha! some one is there," he said.

Instantly he threw himself flat down upon the prairie, and lay thus listening and watching.

"Can it be that some wild mustangs are there?" he muttered.

For a long time he waited, twice hearing the snort of the horse again.

"Some Indian scout may be there, or it may be a Raider."

For some time longer he remained quiet, and then he crept along toward the chaparral, which rose dark and gloomy before him. Nearer and nearer he drew, circling around the old encampment, so as to gain the shelter of the chaparral.

At last he gained its shelter, and then, standing upon a slight rise of the ground, he beheld a horse. The animal had ceased feeding, and was standing with outstretched head, watching and listening, evidently having scented the presence of the scout.

"That is no wild horse," muttered the scout.

And creeping nearer, he continued:

"He is staked out, and that proves that his master is near. But I need a mount, and I'll just borrow that horse."

Moving through the grass, he approached within a few feet of the animal and a low neigh greeted him. Instantly he was upon his feet.

"By Heaven! it is my own beautiful Nighthawk!"

With these words he sprang to the side of the animal, who rubbed his nose lovingly against the broad breast of his master, whom he had, without doubt, recognized from the first.

"But what are you doing here, Nighthawk? Perhaps Ben is here, for I left you with him when they

said I must die. No; some one must have stolen you, and, if so, woe be unto that man. Where is he, Nighthawk? Where is he, old fellow?"

Following up the lariat at the stake, he found to his surprise his own saddle, bridle, and lasso, with his saddle pockets filled with ammunition, evidently taken from his store at the cabin.

The haversack was also full of provisions, and, seeing this, he said:

"Well, whoever ran off with you, Nighthawk, prepared for a long trip, I am glad to see. Now, old horse, we'll be off, and, mounted upon you, I'll have no fear of capture."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SCOUT VINDICATED.

It was ten days after the escape of Buffalo Bill, and the scouts and soldiers sent in pursuit of him had all returned to report that no trace of him could be found, when a courier arrived at the fort, and, after delivering dispatches to Colonel Barry, sought a private interview with Captain Cecil Lorne.

"I have a letter to you, sir, which I promised to deliver only to you, and I was not to let any one see me do so," said the courier.

The captain took the letter, and his face flushed as he read it through slowly.

"My man, say nothing to any one about this, for, of course, you know who gave this to you."

"Scout Cody, sir."

"Poor fellow, he got into trouble here, you know."

"He told me all, sir, and asked me to help him by seeing you, and I was only too glad to do so, for I feel sure he is not guilty, and he says that he can prove it."

The captain and the courier then had a long talk together, after which the officer went to headquarters, and, two hours later, he rode away from Fort Blank at the head of his troop of cavalry, while Keno went along as scout, and Ben, the Boy in Buckskin, as bugler.

Captain Lorne had only asked the colonel to allow him to go upon a scouting expedition for a few days, and said nothing about a letter brought him by the

The Scout Vindicated.

81

The letter had been a short one, and to the effect that it was his duty to deliver it to the captain.

As one who has proven himself my friend, it is now in your power to aid me to dispel the shadow now resting upon my life.

I have told the bearer of this the cruel story of my trouble, and he will explain what I cannot write. I waited on the trail of his passing just to send him, and hoping it would be the courier it has proved to be.

You will bring your troop and my friends, Keno and Ben, on the second day from this, and meet me at the Red Rock. I will take you on a trail that will prove my honor and also clear my life of the shadow upon it.

What do this for me, and confer a lasting debt upon me.
Yours with respect,

"BUFFALO BILL."

At the appointed time, Captain Lorne reached the fort with the troop and went into camp. From the place, Buffalo Bill saw the soldiers arrive, but did not yet show himself. Suspecting that Cody was not yet shown, and was cautious about approaching, Captain Lorne walked alone away from camp. When he was out of sight, Cody suddenly appeared before him. "I am still your friend, for I cannot believe you guilty, but I have come as you requested." The officer held out his hand.

"Will you take your hand, sir, only when I prove myself as black as appearances and circumstances have painted me. But does any one else have come?"

"Keno and Ben are with me, and I have nothing to make?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SCOUT VINDICATED.

It was ten days after the escape of Buffalo Bill that the scouts and soldiers sent in pursuit of him had returned to report that no trace of him could be found when a courier arrived at the fort, and, after delivering dispatches to Colonel Barry, sought a private interview with Captain Cecil Lorne.

"I have a letter to you, sir, which I promised to deliver only to you, and I was not to let any one else do so," said the courier.

The captain took the letter, and his face flushed as he read it through slowly.

"My man, say nothing to any one about this, of course, you know who gave this to you."

"Scout Cody, sir."

"Poor fellow, he got into trouble here, you know."

"He told me all, sir, and asked me to help him. I was only to do so, for I feel sure he is not guilty, and he says that he can prove it."

The captain and the courier had a long talk together, after which the courier went to headquarters, and, two hours later, he returned from Fort Blaine at the head of his troop, while Keno went along as scout, and Ben as bugler.

Captain Lorne had the colonel to allow him to go upon a mission for a few days, and said nothing more brought him by the

The Scout Vindicated.

81

courier. The letter had been a short one, and to the point, for it said:

"DEAR SIR: As one who has proven himself my friend, it is now in your power to aid me to dispel the cloud now resting upon my life.

"I have told the bearer of this the cruel story of my trouble, and he will explain what I cannot write, for I waited on the trail of his passing just to send you this, and hoping it would be the courier it has proven to be.

"If you will bring your troop and my friends, Keno and Ben, on the second day from this, and meet me at sunset at Red Rock, I will take you on a trail that will bring you honor and also clear my life of the shadow now upon it.

"Please do this for me, and confer a lasting debt of gratitude upon
Yours with respect,

"BUFFALO BILL."

Before the appointed time, Captain Lorne reached Red Rock with the troop and went into camp. From a hiding place, Buffalo Bill saw the soldiers arrive, but did not yet show himself. Suspecting that Cody saw them and was cautious about approaching, Captain Lorne walked alone away from camp. When well out of sight, Cody suddenly appeared before him.

"Cody, I am still your friend, for I cannot believe you are guilty, but I have come as you requested," and the officer held out his hand.

"I will take your hand, sir, only when I prove that I am not as black as appearances and circumstantial evidence have painted me. But does any one know why you have come?"

"No; and Keno and Ben are with me. But you have a report to make?"

"Yes, sir; I have been scouting to find out the retreat of the Trail Raiders, which my arrest caused me to relinquish. In the fort are the horses I got from Catamount Kit and his two pards, and which I depended upon to take me upon the trail to the outlaw retreat. But I learned enough from the negro, Dark, to enable me to find my way there, and, having done so, I returned to the Overland Trail to head off the courier and report to you. Now, sir, I can guide you to the retreat of the Raiders, and we can strike it at dawn, for all of the band will be there then, as some important move is intended, and, if possible, Captain Monte must be taken alive."

"Why, Monte was executed, as you know, Cody."

"Wait and see, sir," was the answer, and, after some further conversation together, the two went to the camp, to the great amazement of the soldiers, who, after a moment, gave the scout a rousing cheer, while Keno and Ben rushed forward and grasped the hand of the man they had tried so hard to save.

It was just one week later that the troop returned to Fort Blank one pleasant afternoon, and with a score of prisoners, several hundred horses, and a number of animals loaded down with packs.

At the head rode Captain Lorne, with Buffalo Bill by his side, while behind came a man mounted on a black horse, dressed in buckskin, and in appearance, size, form and face the very double of Buffalo Bill!

It was Captain Monte Alva, the chief of the outlaw band of Trail Raiders, and whose twin brother, Monte, the traitor scout, had been executed at Fort Blank, was also much like Cody, though the leader of the robbers was made up as much like the great scout

"Yes, sir; I have been scouting to find the retreat of the Trail Raiders, which my army me to relinquish. In the fort are the horses from Catamount Kit and his two parids, and I depended upon to take me upon the trail to the retreat. But I learned enough from the negro to enable me to find my way there, and, having so, I returned to the Overland Trail to head a courier and report to you. Now, sir, I can go to the retreat of the Raiders, and we can strike down, for all of the band will be there then, an important move is intended, and, if possible, Monte must be taken alive."

"Why, Monte was executed, as you know, Captain."

"Wait and see, sir," was the answer, and after some further conversation together, the two went to the camp, to the great amazement of the soldiers. After a moment, gave the scout a rousing cheer, and Keno and Ben rushed forward and rescued the man they had tried so hard to kill.

It was just one week later that a scout returned to Fort Blank one pleasant afternoon with a score of prisoners, several horses, and a number of animals loaded down with booty.

At the head rode Captain Lorne, with Buffalo Bill by his side, while behind came Keno and Ben on black horses, dressed in buckskin, and of the same size, form and face the very same.

It was Captain Monte, the traitor scout, who had led the band of Trail Raiders. He, too, was executed at Fort Blank, was also much wounded, and though the leader of the robbers was made like the great scout

as possible, and for the very purpose of getting the man he hated and who was his ruthless foe put to death for his crimes.

But though he had nearly been successful, through his escape Buffalo Bill had run Monte Alva and his band to earth, and the soldiers had killed half of them when they surprised the camp early in the morning, captured all not slain, got their chief, found the money that had been taken from Paymaster Leigh, and much more, and secured booty in large quantity, with horses and cattle, also.

Colonel Barry heard Captain Lorne's report, and then said:

"Cody, thank God that, through my daughter's act, and Keno's and Ben's efforts, you escaped; while, as you were tried by drumhead court-martial and condemned on suspicion, this man Monte and his men shall also be so tried, and on facts against them. You have suffered much, been terribly wronged; but we will do all in our power to atone for it all," and the voice of the colonel quivered with emotion.

"It is all over, sir, and shall be forgotten," was the answer, just as Marie and Lou Hurst came in to offer their congratulations to the scout, the former saying, when Buffalo Bill thanked her for saving his life:

"If I had not done so, Mr. Cody, your boy ally, Ben, and Scout Keno would have done so."

"I could never forget you, pard Bill, nor could sister Lou," and placing his silver bugle to his lips, with the remark, "we are pards to the end," the boy played, with deep feeling, the melody of "Auld Lang Syne."

Two days later Ben's bugle sounded "Taps" over

the graves of Monte Alva and his men, and Buffalo Bill's vow of vengeance had been kept, and his double had passed off the scenes of his crimes forever.

Buffalo Bill did not remain long at Fort Blank, but, at his own request, was transferred to Fort Pioneer, in Colorado. The scout left Fort Blank, followed by the best wishes of his many friends at that post, and began his trip westward.

CHAPTER XIX.

BUFFALO BILL IN DANGER.

It was a balmy Sabbath Day in the mining country of Colorado, and the miners had knocked off work, as was the wont with most of them, for rest, enjoyment, a hunt, card playing or carousing, as the humor suited them.

A mile distant from one of the camps was situated a lonely cabin upon a mountain spur, and under the shelter of a cliff. It was a pretty spot, with a spring trickling from the cliff, forming a pool of clearest water a few feet distant from the door, and with a grand view of mountain, valley, and river spread out before it.

There was a winding path up to the cabin, down to a trail which led to the cluster of mining camps down the valley, a pile of wood at the door ready for use, a freshly killed deer hanging on a tree near, with several hungry wolves crouching in a thicket sniffing the meat and gazing longingly at it. Within, the log cabin was rudely furnished, with cot, table, a bench and some cooking utensils, and without, seated by the door in an easy-chair made of hickory boughs and rope, sat the miner whose humble home the place was.

It was Carrol Dean, known in the mines as Dead-shot Dean, from the fact that he had been attacked in the camps one night soon after his coming by a crowd of desperadoes, and had shot the leader dead by a bullet sent into the very center of his forehead, and broken the right arms of four others, thus disarming them with five shots, in a fight of one against five.

With this adventure he had stamped his claim to the name of Dead-shot Dean and won the respect of the better men of the community, and the fear of the bad element.

A handsome man he was as he sat there smoking his after-dinner pipe and with an open letter in his hand. With a slight but wiry form, about the medium height, well dressed for a miner, and with a face that was honest, fearless, and full of determination, he looked just what he was, a true manly man.

More or less luck had attended him since coming to the mines. He had found the claim his father had bought from a retired miner, had struck it rich one day and held high hopes of a fortune, to discover the next day that the gold streak did not hold out.

Then poor luck had followed for months, with another streak of good fortune for a few days. And so on it had gone with him, though he was slowly but surely getting ahead if fortune would only favor him.

With this end he had struggled for more than three years in his hard work, hoping for luck some day to "hit him big," as they called it in the mines. The miner had just read a letter from home over and over again, and sighed that his loved ones were so far away and that perhaps years more might go by before he saw them.

Suddenly the sound of angry voices came to his ears, and he saw a group of men coming down in the trail, on the way to the settlement. In their midst, and there were a score of them, was a man on horseback; his feet and hands were securely bound while

about his neck was a rope, the other end held by several men who were leading the way.

One glance at the man was sufficient to reveal to Carrol Dean that it was a man different by far from those who had him in their power, for he knew them as a wild and lawless band in the mines—men who were ready for any deed of violence and rapine.

The horseman was a man of striking appearance in face, form, and general make-up. He rode a fine horse, long-bodied, clean-limbed, and well-equipped. The rider was tall, graceful, and sinewy in build, with massive shoulders, and looking, just as he was, a giant in strength, quick in action as a panther, and evidently one who possessed wonderful physical endurance.

He was bound hand and foot and looking like a captive lion worried by a pack of yelping human wolves, for they were clamoring in noisy tones for his life, and when they reached Hangman's Gulch, half a mile below in the valley on the way to the settlement of the miners, that they would hang him was evident from their actions and speech.

"Ha! it is Buffalo Bill, the scout. The hill gang have got him and they intend to hang him—hang brave Buffalo Bill!" and the speaker seemed deeply moved.

"This must not be!" he at length cried, and he darted down the path to head off the desperadoes and their prisoner.

Carrol Dean had once met Buffalo Bill, when as the guide of a troop of cavalry he had camped one night by the wagon train in which he had made his way westward, after leaving the railroads. He had heard and often read of the scout, and had been glad

to have a talk with him, finding him a courteous and pleasant companion.

Now he recognized him at a glance, though several years since he had seen him, and he at once knew that there was some deviltry going on—that the scout was in great peril. So down the hill he bounded, as agile as a deer, following the path which brought him into the trail just ahead of the crowd of men and their prisoner.

"Yes; it is as I thought; they are the cutthroats of the mines, and Buffalo Bill is at their mercy. He needs a friend now, and I'll be that to the brave scout or perish with him," was the young miner's resolve.

Then, as the desperadoes approached, the resolute fellow called out:

"Ho, pards, what are you doing with Buffalo Bill a prisoner?"

"It ain't Bufler Bill, Dead-shot Dean; but he's a pris'ner, and if yer wants ter see what we is doing with him, jist come along ter Hangman's Gulch and yer'll find out," responded Powder-face Pete, the leader of the gang.

The ruffian's face was blackened with powder specks and also disfigured by a wound from a knife, showing that he had had some very close calls from sudden and violent death. He was a gambler and a desperado, and few men in the mines cared to risk a quarrel with Powder-face Pete.

"I tell you that it is Buffalo Bill, the government scout and guide, for I have met him and I recognize him."

"Yes, I recall your face now, sir. I met you with a wagon train bound west and we camped together one

night. I remember that you showed me a picture of your wife, and how beautiful she was," said the scout.

"True, sir, you have a good memory indeed; but what is the trouble between you and these men?"

"Oh, they lariatd me and my horse, and got me foul before I had time to use my weapons, and they say that I am Silk Lasso Sam, the road agent."

"It is false, as I can swear."

"And I kin swear thet he is not Bufler Bill," said Powder-face Pete.

"Then you would swear to a lie, though that would not surprise me in the least, Powder-face Pete, knowing your ugly record as I do," said the miner, quietly, and in spite of his peril Buffalo Bill laughed and said:

"You've got him down fine, sir."

"See here, Dead-shot Dean, is yer seeking trouble with me?"

"I do not seek it, Powder-face Pete, and I shall not avoid it, for I do not fear any such bully as you are; but I shall not allow you to harm this man."

"Yer won't, won't yer?"

"No."

"Waal, he's our pris'ner, and I knows he is Silk Lasso Sam, while I hev got a big bulk o' money I tuk from him, and which he has robbed a government paymaster of."

"He did take a large sum of money from me, sir, and I got it from Captain Lennox, the fort paymaster, whom I found dying by the side of the trail, for he had been fired upon by road agents and wounded. He gave me all he had with him, and wrote his will, which that wretch also has, and I was on my way to

the fort when these devils caught me. That is all there is to it, sir."

"It is enough to enlist me on your side, in spite of the odds, and you have me to fight, Powder-face Pete, if you do not release that man and his possessions at once."

"Waal, I won't do it, fer he's a road agent, as I knows, and we intends ter hang him in the gulch yonder, and try him arterwards."

"I say no, and I feel that your comrades will side with me," and Dead-shot Dean placed himself before the crowd now, and faced them.

There were some who felt that it was best not to push matters against the scout, as the recognition of him by Dead-shot Dean had done away with any doubt as to his identity, if they had felt any before.

But there were others who still clung by their leader. He had the money, and they could say that they thought that Buffalo Bill was Silk Lasso Sam, whom they knew to be not unlike Buffalo Bill in appearance.

"Does yer mean ter say, Dead-shot Dean, that yer intends ter chip in here ag'in me?" asked the desperado in a tone which he meant should terrify the one who had dared to interfere with him.

"It is just what I do mean to say, Powder-face Pete, for I shall resist the murderous intention of yourself and your cutthroat band, if I lose my own life in the attempt. And if I do I will at least have the satisfaction of knowing that you and others will accompany me upon the last long trail."

This was spoken with utter fearlessness, and the crowd saw that they had brought a dangerous and brave

"Waal, Dead-shot Dean, as yer seems ignorant of whom I be, I has got ter edicate yer, I guesses, and so I'll tell yer thet I has a record in these mines of killin' over a dozen better men than you be, and ef yer interferes with me yer'll be writ down on my list as one who didn't know I was loaded for tenderfeet."

"Oh, I know that you are a desperado of the worst kind, and have a record as a murderer, a bully, and a thief; but for all that I do interfere and tell you that you shall never raise hand against Buffalo Bill, bound hand and foot as he is and at your mercy. Now play your hand, Powder-face Pete, and play for life or death," said the young miner coolly.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MINER KEEPS HIS WORD.

By a strange act of forgetfulness the desperadoes had not disarmed Buffalo Bill. His rifle hung to his saddle horn, his revolvers and knife were still in his belt. They had bound his hands securely, and his feet were tied under his horse, and with him thus secure they had felt no dread even of him.

The crowd had stood grouped together, during the words passed between their ringleader and Dead-shot Dean, the miner. They were with their leader wholly, though there were some who felt that their prisoner was not the outlaw, Silk Lasso Sam, and the slightest thing would have caused them to show a willingness to compromise.

Such was the intention when the miner, so pluckily and alone, threw the gauntlet of defiance in the teeth of Powder-face Pete. The latter gave a glance into the face of the miner, and then at Buffalo Bill. He saw that Dead-shot Dean meant all that he said, and more, he knew his record. Then he looked at Buffalo Bill, and the latter said with a mocking laugh:

"You got it pat that time, Powder-face, so what are you going to do about it?"

Before replying the desperado turned for a look at his companions. He saw the situation at a glance. About half were in favor of retreating from their position of hanging their prisoner.

The others looked undecided, with perhaps two or three who were heart and hand with Powder-face

the Miner Keeps His Word.

93

Pete. The latter was disappointed. He had hoped to be fully backed up. Were the prisoner any other than Buffalo Bill, he would have been.

But he was not a man to retreat when odds were in his favor, and so he turned again to the miner, drawing his revolver as he did so. When he faced him, however, he found himself covered by the miner's pistol.

"Yer darned fools, why didn't yer tell me he was drawin' on me?" he queried.

"It was done so quick, pard," answered one.

"Yer axes me, Bufler Bill, what I intends ter do about this chipper young man's chin music?"

"Yes, and I notice you call me by my name."

The man uttered an oath at having been so cleverly picked up.

"I tells yer now what I'll do."

"Well, talk quick or act!" came in the commanding voice of the miner.

"I intends ter hang you, Bufler Bill, and this pilgrim, too, who has chipped in when it wasn't his play."

"All right, Powder-face Pete! Fire away!" said the miner coolly.

"Yer has got me covered, Dead-shot Dean, so I calls upon my friends ter tackle yer."

"If one of them attempts to carry out your threat against Buffalo Bill, I shall plant a bullet between your eyes, Powder-face Pete, and I make no idle boast," assured the miner.

The men hesitated, for they knew just how the miner had won his name as a dead-shot.

"Pards, is yer goin' ter let one man bully yer all?" cried the ringleader savagely.

"It ain't fer us ter say, Pete; so tell us, if you says crowd him."

"I says rush him, pards," suddenly cried Powder-face Pete, and with his words he threw his rifle to a level to fire.

But quicker than was his movement came the pull upon the trigger of the miner's revolver. Just as Dead-shot Dean had threatened, he sent a bullet between the eyes of the leader of the desperadoes as they rushed upon their prisoner, Buffalo Bill.

The stricken Pete sprang high in the air, and fell all in a heap just as Dead-shot Dean fired a second and a third time, and in each instance broke the bone of the right arm of one of the desperadoes as they leveled their weapons to fire. Then, quick as a flash, Dead-shot Dean, with his knife in his left hand, severed the rope that bound Buffalo Bill's hands, still keeping his revolver at a level upon the crowd of now surging and infuriated desperadoes.

The moment that the crowd saw that Buffalo Bill had been set free by Dead-shot Dean, they broke and fled for cover, leaving their leader dead upon the scene, while the two men with their right arms shattered by the bullets of the miner's unerring revolver followed them, writhing with pain—all the fight taken out of them.

"Well, pard Dead-shot, you are a dandy in a scrimmage and no mistake. That was the prettiest work I ever witnessed—so cool and neat. Give me your hand, and let me tell you that I owe you my life, and when Buffalo Bill tells you that he is yours to command—he means every word of it," and the scout

grasped the hand of Dead-shot Dean and wrung it warmly.

"I am most glad to have served you, Buffalo Bill; but let me set your feet free, and then you can take from the body of that man all that he robbed you of. He knew well enough that you were not Silk Lasso Sam, the outlaw, only in some way he had heard of your having a large lot of money with you, and sought to get it. Now, come to my cabin up yonder on the hill, and leave these vultures skulking there to look after their dead and wounded," and the miner pointed to the crowd of desperadoes, who had halted some distance off and were anxiously watching the scout and that man with the terrible gun—Dead-shot Dean.

They were cowed; there was no doubting that fact. The death of their leader, a man who had been a terror in the camps, and the groaning and whining of the two wounded men gave them a wholesome example of what death and suffering were.

But they viewed with anxious eyes Buffalo Bill bending over Powder-face Pete, and taking from his body the things he had stolen from him.

"I will call some of those men, here, Buffalo Bill, to see that you simply take your own," said the miner.

"Yes, that is a good idea, sir, or they will accuse me of robbing him."

"Ho, men; three of you come here."

In answer to the miner's call there was a stir among the desperadoes, and yet none of them obeyed.

"You are in no danger. I wish to talk with three of you."

After some delay there were three who ventured to approach, the others watching them anxiously.

"See here, men, I wish you to take notice of just what Buffalo Bill intends taking from the body of your leader. You know what he was robbed of, and he wants only that which you took from him," said the miner.

"I told Peter he were making a mistake, thet I knowed Bufer Bill, and he were wrong," said one.

Buffalo Bill turned and eyed the speaker a moment. Then he said quietly:

"You lie, and you know it, for you were the one who urged him on; but the quarrel is over, unless the colonel sends a troop here from the fort to find the men who first attacked and wounded Paymaster Lennox and then ambushed and captured me, and robbed me, threatening also to hang me."

The words of the scout seemed to impress the men greatly. They began to feel that they had gone too far. Then the scout continued:

"You may tell your friends, too, that if this miner has any harm befall him for his act this day in protecting a government officer, that the colonel will see to it that every man in this gang who attacked me to-day—and I have you all spotted—will be hunted down as though you were wolves. See, here are the papers taken from the paymaster, and here is the money. Now comes his watch, chain, ring, and sleeve-buttons, with his pocketbook. Yes, and here is my watch and chain and my money, too. You see, of his own he has two packs of cards, half a dozen finger rings—all stolen, I'll guarantee—his weapons, and a roll of money, which I will count so that you three cannot divide it among you. Yes, just sixty-three dollars, see! Now I have done with you."

"As I am also, only carry away your dead leader for burial, and you had better take your two wounded men on to the camps to the doctor there. Now, Buffalo Bill, I am ready," and the miner led the way up the steep path to his cabin, Buffalo Bill following on foot and leading his horse.

As they reached the cabin they looked back, and saw the desperadoes moving off on the trail with their dead and wounded, and going in the direction of the camps.

"You have a snug little home here, sir," said the scout.

"No place is home, Mr. Cody, without one's loved ones," returned the miner.

"Very true, sir, and it is a hard life one leads here, hunting for a fortune, away from all he loves; but I hope you are doing well?"

"I am making a little money, sir, and hope for a change for the better, for I am anxious to get back to my home in Tennessee."

"Now, with me it is different, for upon the border is my home, and my duties call me here. You would make a great scout, sir."

"You think so?"

"Oh, yes, for though I have heard of Dead-shot Dean, I had no idea he was one I had met before. I heard of your affair that gave you your name, sir, and to-day's act will add to your fame."

"Such as it is, though, I am not ambitious to pose as a man-killer."

"No, I can understand that, for had you been you would have killed those other two men instead of breaking their arms as you did."

"Yes, I did not wish their lives upon my hands, but Powder-face Pete I was forced to kill, and he was one of the worst men in the mines."

"Look out for his gang, let me urge you, for they will try to avenge him; but now that I have met you I will try to give you a call now and then, show myself and my scouts among the camps, and see if the colonel will not send a troop through occasionally, for it will have a good effect and show these lawless fellows that we are watching them."

"I thank you, Mr. Cody, but I keep close to my cabin, work hard, and only go to the camps for my mail and provisions. But you will remain with me to-night, for I have a spare cot and plenty to eat."

The scout accepted the invitation willingly, and so his horse was staked out near, a good supper prepared, and until late into the night the two friends talked together.

CHAPTER XXI.

PIONEER POST.

Fort Pioneer, or Pioneer Post, as it was generally called, was located about sixty miles from the Yellow Dust mining camps, where Carrol Dean had been so long toiling for a fortune. In the mining camps of Yellow Dust Valley, which extended some twenty miles along the stream, were some three thousand souls, scattered in the cañons, mountains, and glens contiguous to the central mining camp, which was known as Pocket City.

The element of such a community was naturally vicious, where so many reckless souls were gathered in the struggle to win fortune. Where two-thirds were honest workers in their claims, one-third was the disturbing element of professional money-makers in any way it could be obtained, with fugitives from justice, cutthroats, and rowdies in general to make up the population.

Here and there some gold hunter, or perhaps store-keeper had brought his family, so that occasionally a woman and a few children were seen, but seldom. A coach ran from the mines once in a week, and returned as often, bringing the mail and what passengers cared to go or come.

Beyond the gold belt of this wild community was the danger line of the Indian country, and this extended north and south for many a long mile. Over these camps and the Indian country, with the settlements of cattlemen farther eastward, the commandant

of Pioneer Post held jurisdiction, and the work was such as to keep him busy.

There was an overland stage trail running westward, another going to and from the settlements, and a third that had its terminus at the post, all weekly lines, and these had to be guarded from the road agents that infested the way. The cattlemen had to have their herds protected from horse and cow thieves and Indians, and the miners looked to the military for protection also from an organized band of gold robbers and an occasional dash of the Indians upon them.

About the post were some settlers, farmers, and herders—there were large herds of government cattle to look after; and altogether Colonel Oscar Dunwoody had his hands full in caring for those who were under his especial protection. To aid him he had five companies of cavalry, one battery of light artillery of eight guns, and three battalions of infantry of three companies each.

Then there was a troop of scouts, thirty in number, under the captaincy of Buffalo Bill, who had as a reserve to call upon in need half a hundred daring fighters and riders who were part scout, part guide, part Indian fighter, and the balance cowboys, and they were in charge of the government herds.

In case of a large uprising among the Indians, Colonel Dunwoody could call to his aid over a thousand volunteers, of miners, cattlemen, and settlers, so that he could place a force in the field, on a couple of days' notice, of over two thousand fighters, and good ones, too.

Pioneer Post was located upon a bluff overhanging a river, and heavily timbered. Around the base of

the bluff ran a stockade wall, crescent-shaped, extending from the river below, around to the river above the fort proper, and the space was held in reserve for the cattle and horses, should they be penned in by a siege of the Indians.

There were fields of corn, oats, and wheat near, a vegetable farm, sawmill, and gristmill, so that the fort was almost self-supporting. The top of the bluff was a level plateau, many acres in size, with the barracks of the soldiers built at equal distances on the crescent line of fortifications, the guns having positions between them, and the rear of the cabins being made into a fort wall with a breastwork of logs upon the roof.

The officers' quarters extended along the bluff, with the headquarters the dividing line, the hospitals, storehouses, sutlers' and officers' clubhouse being beyond the stables at the farther end. A stockade wall ran along the bluff its whole length, to protect the garrison from shots upon the other side of the river, and there were ports for the artillery and rifles, with a lookout tower, and sheltered pumps to draw up water in case of a siege.

Into this frontier post it would have taken an immense army of redskins to gain an entrance, or do much damage, and all in the fort felt their security, for nearly all of the married officers, and many of the soldiers, had their families with them. That the chief of scouts, William F. Cody, was popular at Pioneer Post was evidenced by the manner in which he was received upon his arrival there the afternoon of his return from the Yellow Dust Valley mines, where, but for Carrol Dean, the Lone Miner, he would have died at the rope's end.

The sentinel saluted him, the cowboys gave him a wave of their hats as a welcome, and several officers he passed spoke pleasantly to him.

Some soldiers grouped together near the stockade gate welcomed him back, and the children, as he rode toward headquarters, cheered him, and uttered many a hearty greeting.

"The chief of scouts wishes to see you, sir," said Colonel Dunwoody's orderly, entering the room where that officer sat, conversing with Captain Dick Caruth and Lieutenant Vassar Turpin, two of his officers.

"Show him in at once, orderly," was the colonel's reply.

Then, as the scout entered, he said pleasantly:

"Ho, Cody, you know the old saying about speaking of the devil, for we were talking of you when the orderly announced your name."

"It came nearer never being announced on this trip, sir, than ever before, but, thanks to a brave miner, I am here to report to you, Colonel Dunwoody, and I regret to say, sir, that I have sad news for you," said Buffalo Bill quietly.

"Indeed; I am sorry to hear this. Sit down, and tell me if there has anything gone wrong, and I hope the Indians are not on the warpath, for I have just told these gentlemen why I had sent you off on a scout, to see what the redskins were about."

"The Indians are uneasy, sir, as they always are when hatching trouble, but I do not believe they will go on the warpath for some time yet. I went into their country, and watched their villages closely, unseen, of course, by them. I returned by Yellow Dusk

Valley, and fortunately, for I came upon Captain Lennox, your paymaster, dying by the roadside."

"Lennox dying?" cried the colonel, with some excitement.

"He is dead, sir," was the sad response.

There was a silence of fully a minute as each one present recalled the honest, good face of the comrade they had lost.

"He had arrived at the station sooner than he expected, sir, he told me, so would not wait for an escort, nor would he take the stagecoach, as he feared being robbed. He therefore decided to come through alone on horseback, and bought a horse and outfit at the station for this purpose."

"He should have awaited an escort."

"There was one thing against that, sir, as he said he was fearful of being robbed if he remained, for the station was overrun with desperadoes. Some of them must have suspected him of having money, and sent word ahead to the road agents, for he rode into an ambush, and when he was ordered to halt, broke through."

"Brave fellow."

"But he was wounded three times, sir, and his horse received a slight wound, which, however, did not retard his speed, for he distanced all pursuit. But the noble animal at last fell from fatigue, and, after going some miles farther, Paymaster Lennox sank down on the side of the trail, unable to go farther. There I found him several hours after, and he was dying."

"Poor Lennox," said the colonel feelingly.

"While I was with him two horsemen passed, who said they were miners, and I sent word by them for

the surgeon at the mines to come to my aid at once. But he died soon after, and I took from him the money and other things he had of value. Here they are, sir, and, as you see, he had a large sum of money with him," and Buffalo Bill placed the several packages upon the table.

"He had, indeed, and you were fortunate to be near, Cody."

"I wrote down what he asked me to do, sir, for the government, and of a private nature, and here are the papers."

"You have done well, Cody, and you deserve the highest praise."

"Thank you, Colonel Dunwoody.

"Of course, I had to bury the captain there, where he died, wrapping the body in his blanket and digging a grave with my bowie. I covered the grave with heavy stones, and then, as it was night, remained for rest until the following morning. The next afternoon as I was near Yellow Dust Valley I rode into an ambush."

"What?"

"My horse was lassoed, and I had three lariats thrown over me, sir, while some dozen men sprang out and covered me with their revolvers."

"They dared do this in that valley?"

"It was near Pocket City, sir, and they were the wicked element of the mines who did it, and I think I recognized the two men among them whom I saw when I was with Captain Lennox, though they had changed their appearance to deceive me."

"The scoundrels!"

"Of course, sir, resistance was useless—out of the

question, and not thinking they would dare harm or rob me, I could do nothing else than surrender. I was at once bound to my horse, however, robbed of all I had of the captain's and my own, and then led toward Hangman's Gulch to be hanged as Silk Lasso Sam, the outlaw chief, for whom they pretended to take me."

"You were taken for that infamous scamp Silk Lasso Sam?" cried the colonel in utter amazement.

"Yes, sir, and as far as looks go I believe I was complimented, for he is said to be a handsome devil," said Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"Yes, and a vicious devil as well, with a heart of iron and a conscience of india rubber."

"I have heard him described, sir, as being a man very much of the style of Cody," said Captain Dick Caruth, who was one of the handsomest men in the army.

"Doctor Powell has seen him, sir—in fact, was robbed by him, and can tell us," Lieutenant Vassar Turpin remarked.

"Who takes my name in vain?" said a cheery voice at the door, and in walked the one whose name Lieutenant Turpin had just uttered.

It was Doctor Frank Powell, the post surgeon, and a man whose name and fame is world-wide, for in addition to being a skilled physician, a most expert surgeon, and perfect soldier, he was noted as one of the heroes of the plains, a scout and Indian fighter whose record is second to that of Buffalo Bill alone.

"I am glad you have come, Powell; sit down and hear Cody's story," said the colonel to the dashing,

handsome surgeon, with a nature as gentle as a woman's and a heart like a lion's when aroused.

"Cody was just saying that he had been mistaken for Silk Lasso Sam, the outlaw chief, though first let me tell you that he brings the sad news of poor Lennox having been killed by the road agents."

"Ha! Lennox killed, and by those cowardly coyotes. They shall pay for this," and the face of the surgeon changed in a flash, showing what he could be when aroused by hatred or anger.

Buffalo Bill told of the death of the paymaster, and of his capture for Silk Lasso Sam, and Doctor Powell said thoughtfully:

"Well, you do look like the fellow, Cody. You are about his build, and he wears his hair as you do, with mustache and imperial, also. But his face is darker, his eyes are blue, a bad combination, by the way, black hair and blue eyes, for they do not go together, and he has a sneer, a grin, a smile, all combined, upon his mouth like a hyena showing his teeth, while you, Bill, you know, have the sanctimonious look about the mouth of an army chaplain, old in the service. Still you might be mistaken for Silk Lasso Sam, especially if there was reason for so doing."

"Well, I came very near being hanged for him, and would have been but for the rescue by one of the gamest men I ever crossed the trail of."

"That is saying a good deal, Cody," said the colonel, with a smile.

"I will tell you what he did, sir, and you can judge. His cabin was upon the spur of a mountain, and he was enjoying his pipe and rest, after a Sabbath-day dinner, when my captors came in sight with me. He

recognized me, having met me several years ago with you, Captain Caruth, when we camped one night near a wagon train of emigrants and kept them from being attacked by Indians."

"Yes, I remember the circumstance," said the captain.

"He at once came to my rescue, halted the gang, and asked why I was a prisoner. The leader, a gentleman by the name of Powder-face Pete, and one of the worst men in the mines, said that I was Silk Lasso Sam, and had killed and robbed an army paymaster, and I was to be hanged when we reached Hangman's Gulch, half a mile beyond. The miner, who is known as Dead-shot Dean——"

"I have heard of him," said Surgeon Powell.

"Yes; he made his record as a shot one night when attacked by a band of ruffians. He said that I was not Silk Lasso Sam, that I was Buffalo Bill, and he would protect me; so invited Powder-face to play his hand. There was some talk, and next Dead-shot Dean said that if any of the band made an effort to attack him he would plant a bullet between the eyes of Mister Powder-face Pete. The leader then made an effort to fire, but the miner kept his word, nailing him squarely between the eyes, and breaking the right arms of the two men who had been most anxious to back up their chief."

"Well, Cody, he has rendered the government splendid service in saving you and the money poor Lennox was robbed of, and anything I can do for him I shall be most happy to do," said Colonel Dunwoody.

"He is not a man to accept aid, I am sure, sir, but

I think he might be put under good pay as a government detective and spy on the movements of the road agents, and this would help him, sir."

"The very man I want, and in the very place I need him, for this Silk Lasso Sam and his band must be wiped out," said the colonel, with determination.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MINER SPY.

The story of Buffalo Bill had been listened to by all three of the officers with the deepest interest. That the miner Carrol Dean had won the admiration of all by his daring and nerve was certain, and Colonel Dunwoody said, after the scout had finished his story:

"Well, Cody, your friend deserves all the praise we can bestow upon him, and I will certainly be glad to reward him in any way he will accept recompense."

"As I said, Colonel Dunwoody, I am sure that he is not one to be paid for a service, for he is a gentleman of refinement and education."

"But you think his claim is not a paying one, Cody?"

"He did not say as much, sir, but he told me he hoped it would improve."

"And any services he might render he would accept pay for, you think?"

"I am sure, sir, if given some such position as I referred to, he would feel that he was earning his pay."

"Well, I am entitled under late orders, to employ a detective on the Overland to get some clew to the robbers who have of late been rifling the mails. The position will pay fairly well, say a hundred dollars a month, and I can offer it to this miner, telling him to devote what time he can to obtaining clews to the retreats of these robbers, their number and identity."

"I feel sure, sir, that he would do this, for he told me he would be glad to aid in any way in his power to drive off the robbers that infest this part of the

country, and spoke of it as a shame that Silk Lasso Sam had not been caught in spite of all the traps laid to ensnare him."

"Yes, it is a pity and a shame, and yet I feel that we have done all in our power to entrap that outlaw chief and his band."

"Yes, colonel, and he is getting bolder," Captain Dick Caruth said.

"He is, indeed, but I hope we will soon be able to run him to earth. But, Cody, this robbery and murder of poor Lennox was not by Silk Lasso Sam, you say?"

"You misunderstood me, colonel, for if it was not by Silk Lasso Sam, I cannot but believe that Powder-face Pete was one of his men, and so thought Dead-shot Dean also."

"He did have that idea, then?"

"Yes, sir, and was confident that Pocket City was the headquarters of Silk Lasso Sam's spies."

"Then the miner will be in the very spot to act as detective, and when you return for the body of Captain Lennox, as I wish you to do, you can carry word to Dead-shot Dean that he is to serve as a secret-service man for me, under the pay of one hundred dollars per month. He will have to report to me in some way any discoveries he may make, and endeavor all in his power to break up this band of frontier law-breakers."

"Yes, sir, I will so report to him your wishes, and I believe you will find him just the man you wish in your service."

"I sincerely hope so, Cody; but now you need rest, especially as I wish you to start back upon the mor-

row with an escort to get the remains of Paymaster Lennox, and bring them to the fort for burial."

Buffalo Bill now arose and departed, the colonel remarking after he had left:

"There is one of the gamest men I ever knew, and as modest as he is brave. I only wish I had more like him in my command."

"He is all that you say he is, Colonel Dunwoody, as I have had reason to know a hundred times or more, for Buffalo Bill has saved me from death on many an occasion," remarked Frank Powell.

"And it appears to me, Powell, that there is a tradition that you have often saved the life of Buffalo Bill, and are just as modest about your achievements as he is," Captain Caruth remarked.

"What is the use of boasting of one's own deeds, Dick, when I can leave it to such good friends of mine as you are to do it for me?" Frank Powell responded with a smile.

After some further conversation upon the subject, Colonel Dunwoody decided that it would be well to send a few soldiers under Captain Caruth to Yellow Dust Valley for the body of Paymaster Lennox, and that Surgeon Powell was to accompany them, while Buffalo Bill was to act as guide to the spot where the body had been buried.

Of course, the soldiers were not to visit the cabin of Dead-shot Dean, as it might arouse suspicion against the miner, but, if possible, the officers were to see and have a talk with him upon the new duties he was to enter upon. This being decided upon, the next morning the soldiers rode out of the fort with Buffalo Bill leading as guide.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SILK LASSO SAM.

Among the greatest worries which Colonel Dunwoody had to contend with upon the frontier was the band of road agents who infested the trails, holding up coaches, travelers on horseback, wagon trains, and now and then robbing a ranch or mining camp. These were said to be from a dozen to half a hundred in number, never struck their blows twice in the same spot, and were as cunning as foxes, defying capture in spite of the most vigorous pursuit by ten times their number sent against them.

They were more troublesome than the Indians, equally as much to be feared, and from their chief down rewards had been offered upon their heads, dead or alive. One reward was from the government, of five thousand for their chief and one thousand for any of the men of his band.

This was duplicated by the reward offered by the Overland Stage Company, while a third reward was offered by the settlers of like amount, and the miners of the camps equaled it. Then there was a fifth reward in a purse of one thousand dollars put up by Colonel Dunwoody and his officers at the fort for the capture of the outlaw chief, dead or alive.

It was not to be wondered at that with the sum of twenty-one thousand dollars offered for his head the chief of the outlaws was greatly sought after, while the capture or killing of one of his men would bring four thousand dollars to the man who captured or killed him.

Silk Lasso Sam.

113

The band was known from their appearing first in one place and then in another as "The Will-o'-the-wisps," and their leader had won the name of Silk Lasso Sam from the fact that he carried a beautifully woven lariat of real silk, which he was capable of using with astonishing skill.

What his real name was no one knew, or where he had come from, though it was said, as his equipments and dress were Mexican, that he had been a Texan bandit driven into Mexico, and then had made his way northward to the frontier to again turn to his deeds of outlawry. His men spoke of him as captain, calling him by no name, though to the people of the border he was Silk Lasso Sam. He had once left for the East, promising to reform and become an honest man, but he was soon back again, engaged in new deeds of crime.

The deeds of this outlaw were numerous and cruel, and he handled his band with the skill of a trained soldier. Where his retreat was had puzzled the best scouts, and yet that he had a hiding place for the quantities of plunder he often got possession of, and a herding place for the horses and stock he robbed the post, settlement, and mining camps of, there was no doubt whatever.

But where it was located had not yet been discovered. To-day he was seen upon one stage trail, and to-morrow at the mining camps. One day he was seen at the fort, or near it, and again in the settlements, always in a different disguise and yet always leaving a proof that Silk Lasso Sam had been in the midst of his foes.

The man seemed to love to play with the most

deadly danger, and would laugh at all efforts to capture him. That he had spies in the mining camps, settlement, and even at the fort was without doubt true, for he seemed to know of the movement of trains coming westward that were valuable, and of the sending eastward of gold from the mines.

If a stagecoach brought passengers with money or jewelry of value, that coach was almost certain to be held up by Silk Lasso Sam. He always demanded implicit obedience to his orders, and if resisted in his robberies he would at once become merciless.

The most thrilling and terrible stories were told of the cruelties of Silk Lasso Sam, and yet few could vouch for them as being true. Surgeon Frank Powell had once been in the coach which had been halted by the Will-o'-the-wisps.

The surgeon was asleep at the time, and, awakening suddenly, discovered the situation. Resistance was useless, for the coach was covered by a dozen rifles.

"You are Frank Powell, the surgeon scout?" asked the outlaw leader, looking curiously at the officer.

"I am, and you are Silk Lasso Sam, the outlaw?"

"I am, and as I admire a man of nerve I shall not rob you," was the answer of the outlaw.

"Oh, I ask no favors of you, and I accept the situation with the others, be it what it may," answered the surgeon.

"As you insist, I will rob you, and having refused the favor I sought to show you, remember that the next time we meet it will be your life I will take, for I never forgive a slight."

"Just as you please, sir, and let me state that I will accept the gauntlet you throw down when next we meet, that it be your life or mine."

"It is a bargain," was the smiling reply of Silk Lasso Sam, and all who knew the two men felt that it would be a duel to the death when and wherever they met each other.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ACCEPTANCE.

The sun was just setting on the Tuesday following his Sabbath-day adventure with the band of desperadoes under Powder-face Pete, when Dead-shot Dean lighted his pipe and took a seat in his rustic easy-chair in front of his cabin.

He had worked hard in the mine all day, and had gotten but a few dollars in precious metal. Returning to his home, he had eaten his supper, and then sat down to rest and view the grand sunset, a delight he enjoyed immensely while he thought of the loved ones at home.

Suddenly the sound of hoofs fell upon his ears, and he saw coming around the bend in the trail where he had seen the desperadoes approaching with Buffalo Bill no other than the scout himself. Following him were two officers in uniform, and close upon their heels came a score of soldiers, with two negro servants and several pack horses bringing up their rear.

"Ah! the scout is back soon, and I suppose intends to hunt down those ruffians who attacked him. It is nightfall, and there is a fine camping place there on the brook, while I can take care of the officers; so I will hail them."

So saying, Carrol Dean arose and hastened down the path toward the trail.

"Ho, Scout Cody, glad to see you again. Will not those gentlemen share with you my hospitality for the night, while the men can find an excellent camping place near? I will be glad to have you, gentlemen,"

The Acceptance.

117

and the miner turned to the two officers who just then rode up.

Buffalo Bill shook Carrol Dean warmly by the hand, and presented him to Captain Dick Caruth and Surgeon Frank Powell, who greeted him warmly.

"Mr. Dean, our desire is to have a talk with you," said Captain Caruth.

"Yes, gentlemen?"

"We are aware of your splendid service so daringly rendered Buffalo Bill, and through him to the government in saving the large sum of money of which Paymaster Lennox had been robbed."

"A man would be a cowardly cur indeed, sir, to sit by and see a pack of wolves destroy a man and not go to his aid, no matter what the odds."

"There are men who would take such chances, true, but they are not found every day, and Colonel Dunwoody, commanding this military district, is anxious to show his appreciation in some way of your services."

"Permit me to request that he do so by utterly ignoring anything that I did, Captain Caruth."

"If you feel thus about it, I will say no more, sir, for I can well appreciate how a brave man, acting from a sense of duty, must feel. But there is one thing that we are anxious to have you do for us?"

"Certainly, if in my power."

"You are aware that this frontier is cursed by the presence upon it of a band of outlaws known as the Will-o'-the-wisps?"

"Yes, sir; they attacked my home one night, a year ago."

"Indeed, and robbed you?"

"They only got a little lead, sir, in the place of gold."

"Ah! you beat them off?"

"I opened fire, sir, from the roof of my cabin, which you see has a log breastwork in front and on the sides, and a ladder runs up along the chimney to a trap in the roof."

"I fired two shots, sir, and they ran off."

"Did you do any damage?"

"As you go down the trail, to-morrow, you will notice two graves under a large pine tree, sir, and therein are buried the two Will-o'-the-wisps;" and the miner spoke with the utmost modesty of his exploit.

"You have had cause to dread the country, sir; but while you remain here it is the wish of Colonel Dunwoody that you accept the position of secret-service man for him. In other words, become the detective, the spy upon the movements of the Will-o'-the-wisps, and endeavor to gain some clew by which they can be cornered and captured."

"I understand, sir."

"I may remark, incidentally, sir, that the pay is one hundred dollars per month, and I will leave with you a good horse, and arrange with you regarding your reports to headquarters. I certainly hope you will not refuse, Mr. Dean."

"Permit me also to urge your acceptance of the offer," said Surgeon Powell, while Buffalo Bill remarked:

"Yes, Dead-shot, you are just the man we want in this place, so do not refuse."

"I shall accept," was the response of the miner.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE AGED HORSEMAN.

Carrol Dean saw the soldiers ride away from his cabin with mingled feelings in his breast.

"I have another chance to make money now, and at odd times from my mining work, and though the peril is great, I am glad that I accepted the position, for it will get me home that much sooner, and if my mine should fail, enable me to lay up a few more hundreds," he said as he sat musing in front of his cabin. "Now, what is the best way to go about this detective work? I have half a mind to confide in Bonnie Belle, for she always has seemed friendly to me; but then one does not know whom he can trust out here, and the suspicion will come upon me that she is secretly leagued with the Will-o'-the-wisps."

Bonnie Belle was a woman who owned the hotel and gambling den at Pocket City. She was a young, pretty, well-educated woman, and admired and respected by all the miners, desperadoes, and rough characters in the town, who stood greatly in awe of her.

"No, I will not trust her until I am certain she will not prove a traitress, for in spite of her velvety ways she may be a tigress," he added.

"Now to change my mode of living somewhat, and mingle with those wild spirits at Pocket City. I will have to gamble, too, I suppose, and drink, but a professional gambler and a drunkard I never can become."

After musing for a while longer Carrol Dean took

his way toward his claim. It was beyond the spur, up in a cañon through which flowed a small stream. He had "worked" the cañon up to the end at the cliffs, hunting in the stream among the rocks and at the roots of trees for the precious metal, and at last had found streaks in the cliffs into which he had dug with more or less success.

He entered the cavity, and began work, carefully sifting the loose earth as he dug it, and when he stopped for his dinner had gathered the largest quantity of golden grains which he had found in many a long day.

"Buffalo Bill has brought me luck," he said cheerily, and, keeping on with his work, he only left off when the shadows began to deepen.

"Fully twenty dollars to-day," he said, weighing the tiny grains in his hand, as he started homeward.

As he turned into the trail he came upon a horseman. He was a man with long iron-gray hair and beard; wore iron-framed spectacles, and was dressed rather shabbily, while his horse and outfit were of little value.

"Ho, pard, I'm glad ter meet yer, fer I wants ter know if this be ther trail ter Pocket City?" called out the old man.

"Yes, sir, it is the trail, and Pocket City lies only little over a mile and a half beyond."

"Thankee; but does yer know a man there by ther name o' Peter Swain, for he is my son, and I'm a-hunting his camp, as luck hev gone hard with me of late?"

"No, sir, I do not know such a man; but will you not halt fo' night with me?"

"Thankee, no, for I must git on and find Peter. It's strange yer don't know him, for he gits acquainted easy, and though some thinks he is a bad lot, he's been a good boy ter me, and he's all I has got in ther world now ter love."

"Peter Swain, you say his name is?" said Carrol Dean thoughtfully.

"Yas, pard, and yer'd know him if once yer seen him, fer his face looks like a turkey egg with ther powder burn in it, and they does call him Powder-face Pete, I l'arn."

"Powder-face Pete!"

The miner started as he uttered the words, and his face changed color. The old man was going to seek his son, one whom he would never find, one who was in his grave, placed there by his hand.

"'He's been a good boy to me, and he's all I has got now in the world to love,'" mused Carrol Dean, repeating the old man's words.

How could he tell him that his boy was dead, slain by himself? No, he could not do so, and so he said nothing about knowing him, and the old man rode on his way toward Pocket City.

This meeting affected the miner greatly, and as he ascended the hill to his cabin he halted by the graves of the two men whom he had killed when they attacked his cabin.

"Oh! the curse of killing one's own kind, even in self-defense," he said bitterly, as he went on his way.

He did not get his supper, for his usually good appetite was gone. At last he said:

"I will go on after that old man, and see that he is cared for at the Frying Pan. I will ask Bonnie

Belle to give him food and lodging at my expense, and some money, too. Poor old man, how I feel for him!"

Closing up his cabin, he shouldered his rifle, with which to kill any game that might cross his path on the way to Pocket City, and set out back along the spur, taking a way that was nearer, and which he knew would bring him out into the trail in Hangman's Gulch.

His path led him to a cliff overhanging Hangman's Gulch, and it was a steep climb down this of some sixty feet. But Carrol Dean halted upon the cliff suddenly, his eyes having become riveted upon something he beheld in the cañon below.

That something was the old man who had left him a short while before, and yet he was not alone. The one with him was Bonnie Belle, the fair landlady of the Frying Pan, and the two had dismounted from their horses, and were talking earnestly together.

The miner would not have ordinarily seen anything strange in the meeting of Bonnie Belle and the aged horseman in Hangman's Gulch. But in this instance he did, for there was hardly a man to be found in the mines who would pass through that place alone.

The trail to Pocket City led around it, around the base of the mountain, not through the cañon, which was a longer distance to the camps. It seemed hardly probable that an old man would turn from the well-marked trail into the cañon, where there was no trace of tracks, without some object in view.

Yet this old man had done so. And then, too, there was a young woman alone going through a place where men seldom went, and only then in crowds to

hang some unfortunate who was deemed guilty of breaking border laws.

The place was alive with cruel memories, for there had been half a hundred men put to death there. There were graves by the score to mark the place, and they were scattered about in places according to the humor of those who laid the bodies of the dead away.

There was a scaffold erected there, hewn of heavy logs, with the platform working on hinges beneath, while nailed to the beams were remnants of each lariat, rope, or chain which had served as the means of execution.

And on another part was cut the name of each individual hanged there—that is, the name the victim had been known by when hanged. How many of those had really been victims, innocent of what accused, was not stated; but where lynch law tries for a crime the innocent seldom are punished or the guilty escape, as is so frequently the case with the justice of civilization.

A damp, dark, weird place was this same Hangman's Gulch with its ghastly and ghostly memories, a strange trysting place for a young lady to go to meet any one. Carrol Dean had no dread of the place. There was not an atom of superstition in his composition, and he often took the short cut that way, whether by day or night, in going to Pocket City.

In fact, his was the nearest cabin to the weird spot within the limit of half a mile, where other miners would not pitch their houses within the circle of a mile of it, or search for claims there as though by common consent.

The miner stood like one spellbound, looking at the

two in the valley for fully a minute before the idea struck him that he, too, might be discovered by them. Then he drew back out of sight, and hunting another position, crept up to where the edge of the cliff was fringed with bushes.

Through them he peered, and was nearer the two in the gulch than before. But though he could hear the voices, he was too far distant to overhear what was being said.

Bonnie Belle looked very handsome in her buckskin riding habit, gauntlet gloves, and slouch hat and plume. Her horse stood near, patiently awaiting her, and the saddle was ornamented with silver until it shone gorgeously.

She had a lasso hanging at the horn, and a rifle hung from the cantle, and she knew well how to use both, having proven herself to be a very apt scholar in mastering border accomplishments. She was switching a bush somewhat viciously as the old man was talking.

He had hitched his horse near, and stood before her, but no longer in the half-bent attitude he had shown in the saddle when talking to Carrol Dean. Now he stood upright, and his movements were quick and decided, for he paced to and fro near the woman.

"That is no old man," muttered the miner, as he eyed him from head to foot. And he is no stranger here. Yes, his story to me was false, I am sure, now that I see him here and with Bonnie Belle. What can those two have in common, I wonder?"

It was growing dark now, and the two turned toward their horses, the man mounting and riding toward a rock and placing his hand in a crevice of it,

while the woman nodded her head, as though understanding his action.

Then she leaped lightly into the saddle, and rode rapidly up the cañon. The man turned down the cañon, riding within a short distance of the miner. Carrol Dean watched him until he neared the opening into the trail, and saw that he again resumed his bent position in the saddle, his whole attitude changing.

The miner then went upon his way, down the steep path from the cliff, into Hangman's Gulch, and thence on the way which Bonnie Belle had gone. He soon came out upon the trail, and just after the aged horseman had gone along, for, hearing the sound of hoofs, he had hung back out of sight.

"Now to go on to Pocket City, and see if I can get at the bottom of that mysterious meeting," he muttered as he turned into the trail to the valley camps.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SPY AT WORK.

Nighttime was when Pocket City was in all its glory, if the scenes enacted under cover of the darkness could be so classed. The miners were then ready for rest, carousing, gambling, or spinning yarns, with their ever-ready revolvers to settle any disputes.

As has been said, the Frying Pan was an orderly house, and Bonnie Belle so kept it. No saloon being there, it was thus not the scene of revels, and a good bed and excellent, well-cooked food could always be obtained.

As hostess of the Frying Pan, Bonnie Belle was always gentle but firm in her management, and one saw in her almost a different person from the Bonnie Belle of Devil's Den, her gambling and drinking saloon. She was wont to appear there each night about ten o'clock, remain until midnight, and she always went there dressed in velvet and wearing jewels, while her face, it seemed, became somewhat hardened in its expression from the contact, and thus she ruled them with a rod of iron.

The bartenders, faro dealer, and soon the frequenters of the place seemed to stand in awe of her when she visited Devil's Den. No matter how wild the orgy, how boisterous the men, when she came into the room there followed a hush, and all seemed subdued.

She had checked a dozen rows by simply commanding a cessation of hostilities, and if appealed to, as she was almost invariably, to settle a dispute, she de-

The Spy at Work.

127

cided with impartial justice, and her decision was final. On this account she was often called "Justice" by the miners.

Devil's Den stood against an overhanging cliff, and a high stockade wall ran from the rear of it around the spur of the Frying Pan, which gave Bonnie Belle an opportunity to travel the three hundred yards between the hotel and the gambling saloon under cover.

The back of the hotel was also against the overhanging ridge, and the wing in which Bonnie Belle had her quarters was cut off by a stockade fence, forming a yard where innumerable wild flowers and trees had been planted.

There was a spring there, a rustic arbor, too, all to make the quarters and their surroundings as pleasant as possible. Devil's Den was a very spacious building, built of logs and tough boards, and with a bar across the rear end, a faro table upon either side, a couple of other chance games and then a score of small tables for from two to half a dozen players.

Bonnie Belle was not as grasping as a landlord might have been, and she therefore sold no bad liquor nor cabbage-leaf cigars, but furnished a fair equivalent for the money. She aided the needy, was a good nurse to any one who was ill, and sent from the Frying Pan any delicacy that she could prepare to tempt their appetites.

When Miner Carrol Dean arrived at the hotel he decided to take supper there, and, seeing Bonnie Belle, asked if it were too late to get a meal.

"It is never too late, Mr. Dean, to get anything to eat in my house," was the smiling answer, and supper was ordered.

Carrol Dean was anxious to have a talk with Bonnie Belle, so was glad to see that she did not avoid him.

"I saw some soldiers on the way to Pocket City, Bonnie Belle," he said as a means of starting the conversation.

"Yes, they put up with me, and I learned of your rescue of Buffalo Bill last Sunday."

"Did you learn the truth?"

"Perhaps not, but I was sure that you were in the right."

"I saw the scout in the hands of Powder-face Pete and a dozen of the gang that so often are seen at his heels. They claimed to have captured Silk Lasso Sam, the outlaw, but I knew that their prisoner was Buffalo Bill, for I had met him, and recognized him. They declined to give him up, and I was forced to kill Powder-face Pete and wound two others to get the scout free."

"There were a dozen, you say?"

"More than that, Bonnie Belle."

"Do you know any of the men?"

"Every one of them."

"Then look out for them, Dead-shot Dean," was the significant reply.

"Thank you; but now let me ask if you have seen an old gray-haired and bearded man, who seems to be in hard luck?"

"There is such a man here who came half an hour ago."

"Do you know who he is?"

"He gave his name as Peter Swain, and said that he was here to search for his son."

"I saw him as he passed my cabin, and offered him

shelter, but he said that he must come on. His son, he told me, was Powder-face Pete, and being in hard luck, he had come here to look him up and get help. Of course, having killed his son, I felt sorry for him, and I came here to-night to ask you to give him several weeks' board at my expense, and also, say, a hundred dollars in cash, from me, only he need not know where it comes from."

Bonnie Belle turned her eyes full upon the miner. Then she said, speaking very slowly:

"Dead-shot Dean, you are too true a man to live in this wicked community, and I hope you will strike it rich very soon, and go away, for I suppose you have a home to go to?"

"Oh, yes, Bonnie Belle, and those there whom I dearly love; but is this old man here now?"

"Yes; I gave him a pleasant room and some supper."

"Does he know of his son's death?"

"Yes, for I told him, and the miners are going to make up a purse for him."

"Then put in my hundred, Bonnie Belle," and Dead-shot Dean handed over his buckskin bag of gold dust.

"Thank you, I will, and I will urge him to leave the mines at once; but here he comes, now," and as Bonnie Belle spoke the old man came slowly toward them.

The old man came toward Bonnie Belle and Dead-shot Dean with halting step and bent form.

"Ah, lady, your supper was tempting to me, but my appetite was gone with the tidings you gave me of the death of my son, his cruel murder by the hand of a cowardly assassin," said the old man, in a trembling voice.

Dead-shot Dean started at these words, and bit his lips nervously, while he turned his gaze upon Bonnie Belle in a pleading way.

"No, sir, let me tell you how it was; but do you not recollect this gentleman, whom you met on your way here?" and she turned to the miner, who said:

"You passed my cabin, and I directed you how to reach Pocket City. I hope you did not miss the trail."

"Yes, I remember you now, but my eyes are dim, for I am getting old, you see. No, the trail was broad and I followed it without a miss, and I was directed to come to this good lady's house and she has cared for me, and she also it was who told me of my good boy's murder."

"No, no, I did not say he was murdered, for he it was who brought his death upon himself, as he had captured the noted scout Buffalo Bill and intended to hang him as Silk Lasso Sam the outlaw chief of the road agents known as the Will-o'-the-wisps. A miner interfered, recognizing the scout, and your son attacked him with others who were with him."

"Ah! that was it, was it?"

"Well, I always said poor Pete would die with his boots on; but you, sir, will you not go with me to my son's grave, for, see, the moonlight makes it as light as day, and I could sleep better once I saw poor Pete's last resting place. You will go with me, will you not?"

Bonnie Belle had not given a hint that the miner who had killed Powder-face Pete was Dead-shot Dean; but she did not appear to have anticipated such a request as to have the man who had killed the des-

perado go to his grave with the father of the dead man.

She glanced quickly at the miner and said:

"No, Mr. Swain, I will accompany you to your son's grave to-night if you insist upon going."

"On the contrary, Bonnie Belle, I will go with Mr. Swain," was the unexpected response of the miner.

"But do you know the grave?" asked Bonnie Belle, with intense surprise.

"Oh, yes, he was buried in Angels' Row, I heard from a miner who was at the burial."

"How good of them to bury him in Angels' Row," said the old man.

"Do you really insist upon going to-night, Mr. Swain?" asked Bonnie Belle.

"Oh, yes, for I cannot sleep until I see my son's grave."

"And do you insist, Dead-shot Dean, in going with Mr. Swain?"

"Certainly, as he wishes it," was the response.

"Then I am ready, sir, as soon as I have gotten my supper," was the cool reply, and the miner went in to supper, which a Chinese servant had just announced with:

"Melican man come eatee."

Whatever Dead-shot Dean had lost his appetite for, after just meeting the old man at his cabin, the cause was removed upon sitting down to one of Bonnie Belle's good suppers, which tempted him to eat heartily.

Then he came out and joined the old man and Bonnie Belle, whom he saw talking earnestly together, but

whose manner changed when they saw him approaching.

"I am ready, sir," said Dead-shot Dean politely.

"I'll be with yer at once," and the two walked away together, the old man going with a tread as though it was hard for him to walk.

But the miner recalled how he had seen him move in Hangman's Gulch, and so kept a brisk step purposely, watching his every movement. The way led up on the ridge back of the hotel and camps, and by a winding trail.

It was all of half a mile before the miner halted upon the summit of the ridge, in the midst of a number of headstones and boards marking the last resting place of those who had died in Pocket City, or more properly perhaps been killed there, for nearly all of those lying in that village of the dead had died with their boots on, if not shot on purpose in some personal encounter, killed by accident in some free fight, a state of affairs so common in Gold Dust Valley as to cause Bonnie Belle to wittily remark that she would as soon be killed on purpose as by accident, as the result was about the same.

To one row of graves apart from the others Dead-shot Dean led the old man, and said:

"This is Angels' Row, and the newest-made grave is that of your son. There it is, sir."

The moon shone brightly down upon the row of graves and the fresh earth readily marked the one where Powder-face Pete lay. With a moan the old man sank down by the mound and rocked to and fro in deepest grief, the miner watching him closely the while.

When at last they turned away and retraced their steps toward the Frying Pan, Dead-Shot muttered to himself:

"The old man is a fraud, I am sure, and he and Bonnie Belle are allied in some plot without doubt. That plot I must know."

CHAPTER XXVII.

BORDER CHARITY.

Arriving at the door of the Frying Pan, Dead-shot Dean parted with the old man and started on his lonely walk back to his cabin. He was in deep meditation, for he was worried about this secret alliance between the fair Bonnie Belle and the man whom he now regarded as a fraud.

He was sure that the man was not a stranger to Pocket City, for he had caught him quite cleverly on the way up to the burying ground by allowing him to lead at times, though not appearing to do so, and in each instance where a trail branched off he had taken the right one.

The way of the miner homeward lay around the spur and past the Devil's Den. He had not intended entering there that night, but hearing laughter and loud voices, decided to go in.

Quietly entering the door, he sought a seat in an obscure corner and viewed the scene.

It was then eleven o'clock and the place was in full blast.

Glasses were clinking, the atmosphere was dense with smoke, for nine out of every ten were smoking, and profanity, boisterous laughter, and loud talking made the place a perfect pandemonium. The miner glanced about for Bonnie Belle, but she had not yet put in an appearance on her rounds.

Walking over to the faro bank, the miner stood watching the players for a while and then calmly put

Border Charity.

135

down a ten-dollar bill upon a card. He won on the next deal, and without a miss kept in luck until he had won five hundred dollars.

The miners about him were surprised, for he had never been known to play before. Just as another winning was handed over to him, Bonnie Belle came in from the rear of the saloon, through the door back of the bar.

She wore a dark-blue velvet dress, which fitted her form to perfection, and it was trimmed with gold lace and brass buttons, a sombrero richly embroidered in gold thread adorned her head, and a sash about her waist held her revolvers. If she saw the miner Dead-shot Dean she did not notice him, but coming forward, while instantly a hush fell upon the place, she said, in her full, rich voice:

"My pards, I have something to say to you, if you will hear me."

The silence was intense, money and glasses no longer clinked, every hat was doffed, every voice stilled, and the hush was an answer to her wish to be heard.

"I wish to say to you, my pards, that an old man came into the valley to-night, one whom I believe to be in distress. He was poorly mounted, poorly equipped, and had but a few dollars in money, he told me. Luck has been against him of late, his years are many, and he came to Pocket City to find his son and ask his aid. Last Sunday his son was killed, and the news of his death I broke to him as gently as I could, and already has he been under the guidance of a kind miner to visit the grave of that son. I did not disguise from him the fact that his son was

in the wrong, that he, with others, had ambushed and captured Buffalo Bill, the noted scout, and intended hanging him, under the belief that he was Silk Lasso Sam. We all know what a calamity such an act would have been for Gold Dust Valley and all in it, and the miner deserves our thanks for saving us from it."

"But it was Silk Lasso Sam," called out a voice.

"It was not, for Buffalo Bill and a number of soldiers were here yesterday, and from the scout's own lips I had the truth of the affair, and I warn those who are plotting mischief against the miner who rescued him, claiming that he aided an outlaw, that they must desist or take the consequences."

As Bonnie Belle cast her eyes over the crowd there were some present who moved nervously, and eyes met eyes all over the room. But not a voice was raised in reply, and Bonnie Belle continued:

"But now to this old man, who came here only to find his son dead. He does not wish to remain among strangers, and that he may go East to find his friends I have decided to raise a purse for him. One generous miner has already placed in my hands a most liberal gift, the sum of which I will not name, as I do not wish to influence your offerings. But I will pass around my sombrero, and I wish you, my pards, to give what you can."

A cheer greeted the words of the woman, and then followed special calls from many voices:

"Pass her round, Bonnie Belle."

"Throw in ther dust, men."

"Pards, don't be mean."

"Bonnie Belle holds ther hat, pards, so give yer dust freely."

"Now set ther pace, Bonnie Belle, and we'll keep up with ther procession."

In the midst of these cries the old man himself had come into the saloon, and spying him and feeling that he was the man, as he was a stranger, a voice called out:

"There's the old pilgrim now, pards, so three cheers for Powder-face Pete's old dad."

Whatever the feeling had been for Powder-face Pete, and the delight that he had been called away, the white hair of the old man commanded respect and the cheers were given with a will.

Among the first whom Bonnie Belle faced when she was passing around the sombrero for contributions for old Swain was Dead-shot Dean.

She started at seeing him, his presence there evidently being a surprise to her.

"You have given far more than your share, Dead-shot Dean, so I pass you by," she said quietly.

"Pardon me, no, for I desire to contribute again, having just been a large winner at faro," he said.

"You a winner?"

"Yes."

"I did not know that you played cards?"

"Oh, yes, but I never gambled before."

"It is unfortunate, then, that you did not lose, as this may cause you to gamble again."

"Perhaps, but here is my contribution for the old man," and he tossed a twenty-dollar bill into the hat.

The woman passed on with a strange look upon her face, one Dead-shot Dean could not fathom. Here

it was a handful of gold dust from one, then a dozen silver dollars from another, next a buckskin bag of golden grains, again a bank note, to be followed with a gold piece, and so on until the hat became heavy, and calling a man near her to take it and lend her his, she went on her rounds.

"No, Barney, you are in ill luck yourself, so I'll chip in for you," she said, as a sickly-looking man held out a dollar.

Then she added:

"Come take your meals at the Frying Pan for a couple of weeks on my invitation, and you may build up."

"Bless you, Bonnie Belle," were the low-uttered words, and tears came into the man's eyes.

To another, an evil-faced man, who affected to be a miner dandy in dress, she said:

"Thorny, you chip in generously. Come, no nonsense, for you are well able, and have won heavily of late. Come, nothing less than a hundred will I take from you."

"A hundred devils!" growled the man.

"No, a hundred dollars. Put it in, or never darken the door of my house again."

"This is robbery," and the man drew some money from his pocket.

"If so, it is in a good cause."

"If you were in need to-morrow I'd do as much for you, so put in your money."

"There's fifty."

"I said a hundred."

"Then here goes," and the money was thrown in, while the woman, with a triumphant smile, passed on.

"That's the first time Thorny ever gave a dollar ter charity, I'll bet," said a miner near.

"Yes, but Bonnie Belle gits 'em all," remarked one near.

At last she had gone the rounds of the saloon, and having kept a rapid calculation, as nearly as she was able to do, of what had been put in, she said:

"Here, Mr. Swain, there are about twelve hundred dollars in these two hats, and I am glad to say a very liberal contribution for you."

"I am more than thankful, Bonnie Belle," was the response.

"Now I kin give ther tiger a turn."

The crowd were momentarily paralyzed at the words of the old man, if I may use the expression. They looked at him, as he advanced toward the table, and then from one to the other, and when they saw him cover the ace of hearts with his money, fully fifty dollars, there arose a shout of admiration mingled with laughter, and cries of:

"Go in ter clip ther tiger's claws, old man."

"Pull ther financial tail clean out of him, daddy."

"Clip his ears, old pilgrim."

"Break the bank, grandpa."

"Waal, now, you hev got ther cheek o' a government mule and no mistake."

"He's Powder-face Pete's dad, that's sartin."

"Of all old Methuselahs I ever seen he takes ther premium."

Such were the cries that went the rounds, until the old man having lost a hundred dollars, turned away from the faro bank with a look of disgust.

"Maybe thar's somebody w'u'd like ter play me?" he said, glancing unabashed over the crowd.

"I don't mind gettin' my hundred back ag'in," said the man Thorny, and the crowd cheered.

They sat down to a table and the old man drew from one of his many and capacious pockets an old deck of cards.

"Give me a new deck, Bottles," cried Thorny.

"Oh, no, yer don't ring in no marked keerds on me," cried the old man, and the crowd laughed.

"These keerds is good enough ef they be a little worn; but they is honest keerds, and ef yer don't play with them I sets yer down as one who don't play fair."

"I'll go yer, old man, with any cards, so name yer limit."

"I ain't got none, fer ef I loses, I'll git ther pretty girl ter pass ther hat around ag'in."

"Call it a hundred."

"I'm yer man."

The game was begun, and the old man won. Again they played and it was with the same result. The third game was of the same kind, and the crowd was with the gray hairs in sympathy, for they cheered him all the while. At last the miner Thorny had lost a thousand dollars, and, rising from the table, said:

"I believe you're a cheat, old man."

"Prove it and let ther boys hang me," was the quiet remark, and, pocketing his money, he left the saloon, went to the Frying Pan's stables, and mounting, rode back upon the trail he had come.

But there was one watching him, from the moment he saw him enter the Devil's Den, who never lost

sight of him until he rode away from the Frying Pan, when he ran on ahead of him upon the trail he had taken.

The old man rode away from the Frying Pan slowly. Before going he had seen Bonnie Belle for a few minutes, and this had not escaped the eyes of the spy upon his actions. He waited until he had gotten away from the camps and then urged his horse forward at a pace which the animal had hardly seemed capable of going.

He no longer rode bent in his saddle and like an old man. As he neared the entrance to Hangman's Gulch he drew rein. The moon peered through the foliage here and there, lighting up the trail, but it did not reveal a form crouching by the roadside.

On came the horseman, to behold suddenly a dark object rise before him, run his arm up through the bridle rein of his horse and level a rifle full at his heart.

The old man was taken completely aback. He did not offer resistance, for he was too fairly caught to attempt it.

"Hold, old man, for I wants a few words with you," said the man who had so quickly and successfully brought him to a halt.

"Who are you?"

The voice was no longer feeble with age, but stern and ringing now.

"I'm ther pard o' ther man you cheated at cards to-night."

"Who says I cheated?"

"I does."

"You lie!"

"Oh, no, your keerds was marked and yer cheated Thorny out o' his money, so hand it over or I takes you back and hands yer over to ther boys, and old as yer is they'll hang yer, thinking they is doing yer a favor ter save yer ther trouble o' dying."

"You would rob me?"

"I wants that money, and it's in yer left pocket."

"You must have watched me very closely."

"Oh, I did, and I wants that pack o' keerds fer luck."

"If I refuse?"

"I'll take yer back to ther boys."

"Curse you, here's your money."

"Hold on, yer might hev a gun in thet pocket, too, so I'll jist git it myself."

Then the man disarmed the old fellow, after which he took the money from his pocket.

"Now you are satisfied, I hope," queried the old man.

"Oh, no, I ain't, for yer as much as stole thet money was raised for yer, and I wants it, too, for there's a dozen poor fellers in ther mines as is desarving, and it would help them along mighty."

"You are going to rob me of all I have, then?"

"Oh, yes, for it's a case o' dog eat dog, yer know. Come, I wants all ther contribution yer got ter-night."

The old man cursed bitterly, pleaded, and became savage again. But all to no use, for he had to give up his ill-gotten gains. He could not tell who the man was who held him up, for he had a handkerchief stretched over his face with holes cut in it to see through.

He saw that he could do nothing but yield, but as the man robbed him he suddenly said:

"Here is money yer didn't git thar ter-night, so I hands it back to yer, and I doesn't want yer watch and chain, and ther diamonds yer wears. It's a queer beggar you is ter wear a fine watch and a diamond, but as yer didn't steal 'em in Pocket City, yer kin keep 'em."

"You are very kind," sneered the old man.

"Oh, yes, I mean's ter be just as well as generous. Now I'm going ter place yer belt o' arms right here in ther trail while you rides on ontill yer counts a hundred. Then turn back and come and git 'em, only yer won't find me here. I doesn't wish ter send yer unarmed through ther country."

"Thank you," sneered the old man.

"Now, go."

As he spoke the masked man placed the belt of arms in the trail, and the horseman rode on. He counted a hundred very rapidly, turned, and rode back to the spot where he had been held up. Quickly he dismounted and seized his weapons, leaped into the saddle again and dashed away.

He did not see or hear the man who had robbed him. But that individual saw him, and muttered to himself:

"That leap into the saddle was the act of an athlete. Yes, he is no old man."

Then he took his handkerchief from his face and walked on up Hangman's Gulch. He passed on to the secret path up the cliffside, took the trail then along the ridge, and halted only when he reached the door of Dead-shot Dean's cabin.

Unlocking it, he entered, closed and barred the door behind him, and then struck a light. The light revealed that the robber of the horseman was none other than Dead-shot Dean himself.

He took from his pocket the money he had gotten, in gold dust, silver, and gold coin and bills, and spread it out upon the table.

"One hundred and twenty dollars of this I gave him, so that I take back again. Thorny's money was won by cheating at cards, for I have seen him cheat, so that I will not give back, but put with the other to go to charity. Let me see, here are about two thousand dollars, or its equivalent, which I will turn over for the poor sick miners in the camps, for they need it, and that man is no more old than I am, and is an impostor. What his game is I do not know, but I shall fathom it I feel certain by keeping my eye upon Bonnie Belle. Well, Carrol Dean, you are coming out, for you are detective, spy, gambler, and road agent, all within twenty-four hours. But thank Heaven I robbed a robber and am not tempted to take a dollar for my own use, except that which I won to-night, and by the laws that govern betting that is honestly mine. Now for some rest," and throwing himself upon his cot, he was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS TRAIL.

The sun was well above the horizon the next morning when Dead-shot Dean arose from his cot. He cooked his breakfast, hid away his own money and that which he had taken from old Swain, and then started down the valley, where he had left the horseman during the night.

His life as a miner and upon the frontier had made him a good trailer, and he at once started off on the tracks of the horse ridden by old Swain. He saw that he had halted at the path leading to his cabin, and the tracks showed that the horse had stood there for a few minutes, at least.

"Yes, he doubtless dismounted and went up to my cabin, but finding all quiet, went on his way again, anxious not to have daylight find him in this vicinity. I wonder if he suspected me of being the one to hold him up. I hardly think so. Now to see where his trail will lead me."

He followed along on foot at a good, swinging step that cast behind him four miles an hour, and kept it up for several hours.

He had no difficulty following the trail, and halted only for a short rest and dinner. That he was well hardened for work was shown by the springy step he kept up when again starting upon his way.

He did not halt again for some three hours, and though not mounted, was putting the miles behind him at a good pace. What caused him then to halt was at

finding the track he was following turn sharp off from the trail between Pioneer Post and Pocket City!

He turned off on the trail at once, and followed on up into a wild and rugged cañon for a mile or more. Then it widened into a valley, fed by mountain streams, and with rich meadowlands, in which were traces of several horses having lately been feeding.

Up against the rocks were the remains of a camp fire, the ashes still warm, and there had evidently been a camp for a couple or more days. A close search revealed that there had been three horses staked out there and a couple of men had been camping at the place, for there was a wikiup just large enough to shelter two.

The tracks of the horse he followed led directly to this camp, and Carrol Dean also made note of the fact that the same animal had left the place to go down toward the mining camps, the trail being a day or so older than the one coming back.

For some time the miner pondered over the situation, and then he decided to camp there all night. He built up the fire, put his blankets under the shelter and after eating supper sat down for a quiet smoke in the gathering darkness.

"I think I see the intention," he muttered. "That man came here with two or three men, doubtless only two, and while they camped in the cañon he went on to the mining camps for some purpose. Then he returned here, and the party went on their way, wherever that is. Now, who was that man, and who were his followers? I noticed that his hands did not look like those of an old man, and if his hair and beard

were real, then he is prematurely gray. I can go on to-morrow following the trail, for it will be easier with four horses to follow than one. If I could run these Will-o'-the-wisps to earth it would be a fortune in my pocket, that is certain, and a good service done. Then, too, I would like to repay the confidence placed in me in that way, by those gallant army officers and that splendid fellow, Buffalo Bill. Well, I am tired, and have a hard day's tramp before me to-morrow, so I will turn in."

With this he sought his blankets and was soon fast asleep. But at dawn he was up and had breakfast, and pushed on his way once more, now following the trail of the four horses.

He had gone but a few miles when he saw a horse feeding ahead of him upon the trail. The animal had no saddle or bridle on, only a stake rope which had caught in some bushes and held him fast.

"It is the horse of the old man, and he has gotten away from him in the night, I suppose. He is thin, but a fine animal, so I will be glad to have the use of him."

He went up to the horse now and soon had his blankets made into a temporary saddle and the stake rope into a bridle. Then he gave the animal rein and set off on the trail as before.

"If this horse could only talk, what could he not tell me?" he muttered.

With a halt at noon of an hour he once more renewed his way, to come suddenly to a broad, well-traveled stage trail. There was the track of a coach having lately passed that way, going westward, but

the trail he followed of these horses now went eastward.

On he pushed, now and then catching sight of the tracks not obliterated by the coach, until suddenly he heard the rapid clatter of hoofs. Instantly he rode into the shelter of some bushes and waited ready to greet friend or foe.

On came the horseman, for there was but one, and he was riding like the wind. A moment more and he dashed around a curve in the trail and from the lips of the miner broke a cry, followed by the words:

"It is Buffalo Bill!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TWO TRACKERS.

Buffalo Bill drew rein quickly, and the miner noted that the scout was riding with his reins held taut in his left hand, while in his right he carried his revolver for instant use. There was something going wrong for the scout to be riding thus fast upon the stage trail and prepared to give battle in a second of time.

"What! my gallant rescuer, it is you?" cried Buffalo Bill, as he saw the miner ride out of his place of concealment.

"Yes, friend Cody, and I have just struck the stage road while following a most mysterious trail."

"Ah! the Will-o'-the-wisps, I'll wager high on; but, how about that gothic steed of yours keeping up upon a run, for though an animal of fine points, he does not look like a racer and long stayer. Yes, and your equipments are not according to army regulations."

The miner laughed at the scout's criticism of his horse and outfit, and said:

"I started on the trail on foot, and overtook this horse upon the way. But let me tell you in a few words just what I have to report, so that I may go back to my cabin."

"Certainly; I can spare the time, as I suppose I can be of little service now in overtaking the stage."

"Has anything gone wrong?"

"Yes; the coach was attacked two miles up the trail, and what happened to the driver and his passengers I

do not know, or that they were robbed or not. But there is a dead outlaw lying in the trail back at the scene, and there seems to have been a hot fight, for a horse is also dead there, and another wounded. I had started upon a scout along the coach trail, as Horse-shoe Ned, the regular driver, is laid up this run, and a new man is in his place. I came out into the trail beyond where the holdup was, and heard distant firing. From the rocks coming echoes, I could not at first ascertain whether the firing was up or down the trail. But I saw that the coach had passed the point where I was, and so rode in this direction. Coming upon the scene, after a ride of a couple of miles, I found the dead outlaw as I said, a dead and a wounded horse. How many passengers there were in the coach I do not of course know, but some of them had the nerve to resist robbery, and they called in the chips of one of the road agents. What damage the people of the coach sustained I cannot find out until I overhaul it. The outlaw had been robbed by his fellows, I judge, for they were gone, though in my hurry to overtake the coach I could not take time to find their retreating trail."

"If it were the party I followed, there were but three of them.

"And one dead? Oh, how I would have liked to have come upon that scene, for I am sure I could have caused the Will-o'-the-wisps to have to recruit their forces."

"I only wish that you had, or that I had been a little earlier on the scene, that I might have prevented a tragedy at least. But as you are going on after the coach, can I not ride on to the scene of the holdup

and find the trail, leaving you a line about what I discover, so as to save you time, as I suppose you will return?"

"Certainly; as soon as I have overtaken the coach and got what information I can. It is a rough road ahead for wheels, for miles, so I can overtake it readily, and if you will only get what points you can and leave me word, I will feel obliged, while I may get back before you leave."

"Perhaps so."

"Now make your report, pard Dean, in case I do not see you soon again."

"I will tell you just what has happened and leave you to be the judge of what the situation is."

"Fire away."

Carrol Dean then made known to Buffalo Bill the fact of the old horseman coming by his cabin, and how going on to the valley he had discovered him in Hangman's Gulch, talking with Bonnie Belle, together with the other events of the evening before.

"Now go slow, and don't run yourself into trouble or too great danger, for I cannot afford to lose you, and I have perfect faith, as has Colonel Dunwoody, after what Captain Caruth and Surgeon Powell told him of you, that you are the right man in the right place. Now I am off," said Buffalo Bill, after listening carefully.

With a grasp of the hand the scout was away, once more riding like the wind. Buffalo Bill rode rapidly to make up for lost time. The trail was rough and dangerous at places, but he eased his horse over like the skillful rider that he was.

The miles flew behind him rapidly until in an hour

he had gained so much on the coach that, halting to listen, he could hear the distant rumble of the wheels ahead. Another half hour and he saw the red coach flashing in the sunlight as it moved along the foliage-clad trail.

"That is not Ribbons on the box, and it is certainly not Horseshoe Ned, for I am sure that he did not come out on this run," he said, as he saw a stranger on the box.

"Well, he drives like an expert, and is sending the horses along at a slapping pace. Come, old fellow, stretch your legs at a better rate, if you wish to overtake that train soon."

So saying, the scout touched his spurs to the flanks of his horse and away the animal bounded with increased speed. The clatter of the hoofs behind then caught the ears of the driver and he turned his head quickly.

A moment more and he had drawn rein, seized his rifle from alongside of him upon the box and stood like a man at bay.

"Ho, he shows fight, taking me for an outlaw, I guess, for he is a stranger in these parts."

So saying, the scout rode forward at a walk, while he raised his hands above his head in token of peaceful intention. As Buffalo Bill approached, he eyed the stranger upon the box closely, and muttered:

"The driver has been killed, that fellow is a tenderfoot, and will fill me full of lead if I don't go slow."

The man on the box was dressed in a suit of stylish, dark-gray clothes, and wore a black slouch hat. He wore no mustache or beard, was a handsome man,

scarcely thirty, and had the look of one who would be a dangerous foe if aroused.

"Ho, pard, I am no enemy, so put up your gun and we'll get acquainted," said Buffalo Bill.

"Who are you?" asked the stranger on the box.

"Chief of scouts at Pioneer Post, and I am known as Buffalo Bill."

"Buffalo Bill! How much I have heard and read of you! But, how am I to know that you are telling me the truth? For, I have discovered, one knows not whom to trust in this country."

"Well, sir, I came out upon a scout to look after the safety of Ribbons, who was to drive the coach through this run. I heard firing, and upon riding to the scene found a dead outlaw there, two horses, and every evidence that the coach had been held up by road agents. I then put spurs to my horse to overtake the coach and find out what had happened."

"I believe you now, sir, after getting a better look at you, for a man with such a face as you have is no villain."

"Thank you, sir," and the scout raised his hat.

"You were right in your surmise, for our coach was attacked."

"Yes, that is evident."

"We were in a stream, watering the horses, when we were held up. There were two of us inside, fellow passengers, and I, not caring to be robbed, opened fire. The result was that the coach was riddled, as you see, the driver was shot, my fellow passenger was killed, and after I was robbed, with only the satisfaction of killing one of the scoundrels, while I got this wound in my shoulder, as you see;" and Buffalo Bill

noticed that the speaker's shoulder and sleeve were stained red.

"It was a mistake to fire upon a force whose strength you did not know, sir; but let me see your wound, for it may be serious."

"Oh, no, I think not, for it has stopped bleeding, and the surgeon at the fort can soon put me to rights. By the way, how far is the fort from here?"

"Some fifteen miles, sir. But I congratulate you upon your nerve;" and the scout saw the dead body of Ribbons, the driver, in the boot, and in the coach another face upturned in death.

"One needs nerve to knock about the world, sir, and that is about my occupation, I may say profession, for I am going out to the frontier for a short run for sport, but suppose I will have to remain now some time to get an outfit and remittances from home; for, though an American, I live in Cuba, and the outlaws stripped me of all I had with me."

"That is unfortunate, sir; but you will find warm and generous friends at the fort, if you have no acquaintances there."

"Not a soul, sir. I am friendless and penniless, a bad situation to be in, is it not?" and the stranger smiled.

"Well, yes, but as I am your first acquaintance in the wild West, I will indorse you, sir, at the sutler's for all you may need."

"You are very kind, sir, just the man that I have read that you were. Permit me to introduce myself as Austin Marvin, a United States citizen, but for years a Cuban sugar planter, who, having a fair in-

come, manages to get rid of it in knocking about the world."

The scout was pleased with his new-found friend, and after looking at his wound, placing upon it a bandage of cold water, and telling him to let the horses show the way, as they would take the right trail where there were dividing ones, he set off on his ride back to search for the road agents, asking Mr. Marvin to request Colonel Dunwoody to send a dozen of his scouts out to join him at Deep Dell Brook with all speed.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MINER'S NOTE.

"There's a fellow I like: frank, brave, and whole-souled, with nerve enough to get him out of any scrape, unless he tackles a wild Western road agent. There he made a mistake."

So mused Buffalo Bill as he rode on his way back to the scene of the tragedy.

He did not go back at the speed he had ridden to overtake the coach, for he wished to spare his horse, and it was just three hours after his crossing Deep Dell Brook that he returned to it. He hoped to find the miner there.

But in this he was disappointed. Instead, he found a stick stuck up in the trail, and in the top, which was split, was a slip of paper,

The scout felt that he had work before him, so he first watered his horse and then staked him out to feed, after taking off the saddle and bridle, so that the animal could have a complete rest. Then he sat down to read the note, which had been left by the miner and was quite lengthy.

It was as follows, written in an educated, legible hand:

"I examined the cliffs on either side but found only trace of two places where men had been lying in ambush, and so I feel sure that they must have been those I followed. There is but the track of one horse leading away from the spot, and that one went into the stream. I went up the stream for half a mile and found the spot where the trail left the water.

The Miner's Note.

157

You can ride direct to an overhanging rock and there you will find it, and it bears away to the northward up the ridge."

Having read it, the scout at once wrote on a slip of paper:

"Come to overhanging rock up Deep Dell Brook half a mile, and take my trail from there. B. B."

Then he started up the stream, following the water, as the banks were impassable. Half a mile up he came to the overhanging rock which Carrol Dean had referred to, and he had not the slightest difficulty in finding the trail.

He at once followed it on up the ridge and on for several miles, when it became too dark for him to go farther. Then he went into camp for the night. He had marked the trail for his men to follow, and knew that they would be on hand at Deep Dell Brook that night, ready to start on after him at daylight.

As he would have but a few miles the start of them, and would have to find the trail as he went along, while he would mark his for them to follow, they would be able to travel more rapidly and overtake him before noon.

He was surprised that the coach had been held up with only three men, as every evidence revealed, and said to himself:

"Silk Lasso Sam was there, for no other would dare do it. The outlaw killed was not Silk Lasso Sam, and there is only one horse trail here, but two men must have escaped. One of them went on foot and the other on horseback, and the latter must be Silk Lasso Sam, with the booty. I should much like to get

that young man's money and valuables back for him, so I will find out just where this trail ends. Thanks to Dead-shot Dean, I have a chance to go on without delay, and the boys will not be long in overtaking me."

Wrapping himself in his blanket, Buffalo Bill slept as serenely as though upon a bed and in perfect safety. Just as the first ray of light came, however, he was up and on the trail again, to follow it to its end.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RUN TO EARTH.

He rode on at an easy gait, for the trail of the single horse was readily followed, and at last the country became hard and barren—to such an extent that he could no longer follow the tracks.

He tried all he could to go on from where he could see the last indentations of hoofs in the ground, but in vain. So he decided that his only course was to wait until his men came up, and then he could divide the force into three parties.

One of these could move away to the right in a semicircle. Another could go in a semicircle to the left, and the third hold straight on, and the three could meet at a certain point ahead. In this way they must cross the trail at some place, most surely.

He had just decided upon this course, when he heard the sound of hoofs, and a band of scouts, which had been sent from the fort when the robbery of the coach was learned, came into sight. At their head was the surgeon scout, Frank Powell, and that they had ridden hard, their horses showed.

"Ho, doc, I am awfully glad to see you, for I have run aground," cried Cody.

"And we are glad to find you, Bill, so soon."

"It was good of you to come."

"Oh, I thought I saw a chance to be in at the capture of the fox, so I came along."

"Good!"

"We got to Deep Dell just at nightfall, and found

your note, so we went into camp, but were at the rock before light, and pushed on from there on your trail. Now, what have you found out?"

"Nothing."

"There is no trail here."

"The ground won't allow a horse track to show."

"That is bad."

"And it is the same thing as far as Sandy Creek, I guess, so I waited for you to come up."

"Here we are."

"Well, we'll have breakfast, and then my plan is to push a party straight ahead to Sandy Creek. Another can circle to the right, another to the left, and all meet at the creek, and if we do not find a trail, I shall be greatly mistaken."

"We can but try, Bill."

There was a halt of an hour for rest and breakfast, and then the scouts were divided into three parties. One went directly forward, the two others separated to the right and left—one under Surgeon Powell, the other commanded by Buffalo Bill.

The country was very wild, very barren, and there was not a chance for any animal to live there upon vegetation, it was so scant, and only found here and there in spots. There was, far in the distance, a mountain range, rugged, lofty, and the base washed by the waters of Sandy Creek, a stream which from a small brook in dry weather becomes a mighty river when the floods come.

It was full of quicksands, and only here and there was there a crossing made by buffalo, deer, and other animals, but these were not frequently traveled, as

the range was as devoid of vegetation as the surrounding country.

The stream ran in a crescent around the range, which ended there abruptly, and the sides were precipitous, and not broken even by cañons. It was upon the banks of the creek, just at nightfall, that the three parties met. They had had a hard and fatiguing ride of it, and horses and men felt the jaunt.

Just upon the bank there were a few stunted trees, and some grass—enough for a night's feed for the horses, while water could be gotten from the creek.

"We will camp here to-night, doc," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, we can do nothing else."

"It is lucky we found these trees and grass, or we would have it rough among the rocks."

"You saw no trace of a trail, Bill?"

"Not the photograph of one, doctor."

"Nor did I."

"If the outlaws have a retreat in these lands, then I do not know where it is, and the stories of having large numbers of cattle and horses are not so."

"No, indeed, for nothing could live here."

"Nor in the range yonder."

"So it seems, but we will have a look at that to-morrow, returning in time to get back to grass at night, for the horses will begin to suffer."

The night passed without disturbance, save the yelping of a wolf or the cry of a panther coming from the Rocky Range, as the ridge was called, across the stream.

The next morning the party crossed at a buffalo

ford, and went to the range. They had not ridden far when they came upon the trail of three horses.

Immediately a cheer arose from the band of scouts, and their horses were pushed forward at their topmost speed. It was a hard ride, but in an hour they came in sight of three horsemen.

One of these was the old man who had claimed to be the father of Pete Swain; the other two looked the part of outlaws. At the command of Buffalo Bill to halt, the fugitives wheeled and opened fire.

The conflict was short and sharp. Two scouts were wounded, and all three fugitives were killed. When Buffalo Bill rode up to examine the dead bodies he found that the old man was no old man at all. The whiskers and hair he wore were false, and when they were removed the face and features of Silk Lasso Sam—the Will-o'-the-wisp of the Trails—were revealed. The other two were recognized as members of the band, and, with the spoils of the coach robbery, which were discovered in the saddlebags, the party rode back to the post.

A week later Bonnie Belle, the owner of the hotel at Pocket City, explained to Dead-shot Dean that Silk Lasso Sam, the outlaw, was her brother. This fact had been known only to Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Frank Powell, and it explained her private conferences with the graybeard who afterward proved to be an outlaw.

Bonnie Belle had for years been trying to persuade her brother to leave his course of crime, and once had assisted him to escape, and sent him East, on his promise that he would leave the West forever. He had returned, however, and now that he was killed Bonnie

Belle bade good-by to Pocket City to go East, as her only object in remaining in that wild country was to reform her brother.

* * * * *

The depredations of the Red Hand Riders in the vicinity of Red Dog had caused the commandant of Fort Advance to request the service of Buffalo Bill to clean out the bandit-infested region. The scout was delighted at the possibility of serving at Fort Advance, and left Fort Pioneer for that post just as soon as he could arrange matters with Colonel Dunwoody.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MYSTERIOUS SERGEANT.

"There's Buffalo Bill now, miss, the very man I spoke of, and with him on the trail now, I do not fear road agents."

The speaker was Jack Jessop, the driver of the coach running between Red Dog, a mining camp and settlement, and Fort Advance, a military post near which was the miners' camp and a few settlers' cabins.

It was a most dangerous run that Jack Jessop had, not only on account of the hard trail to drive, but because it bordered the Indian country, and, more, had been haunted for a long time by a band of road agents known as "Red Hand Riders" and "Birds of Prey."

But Jack Jessop was a daring fellow, an expert driver, had faced death many times, and mounted his box each week for his run with no sign of dread but that he would get through all right. On this run, when he is presented to the reader's notice, Jack had his misgivings, for on the box with him was a beautiful young girl, the daughter of a sergeant of Fort Advance, who was going to make her home at the fort.

Though only a sergeant's daughter, Jack had found that she was an heiress, and had lots of baggage along, wore jewels of value, and she had hinted that she was well supplied with money. In addition to this fair passenger, who rode with him on the box, Jack Jessop had three passengers inside the coach, a young

officer, who had told him he had a large sum of money with him belonging to the government, and two spectators who were also well supplied with gold for purchases they might make in the mining settlement.

It was on account of carrying such passengers that Jessop was nervous over his run, but he hid his dread from his lady companion on the box, and had entertained her as he drove along with stories of the frontier and spoke of several men who had become famous there from their many daring deeds.

The young girl had been intensely interested in all that he told her, and had been lost in admiration at his splendid driving, seeing him go along places where only the coolest nerve and greatest skill saved them from destruction.

"I tell you, miss, this be a strange country, and a strange people live in it," went on Jack, delighted at having so good a listener.

"Now, thar's ther Injuns. They is queer folks, and trained to kill, and does kill, whenever they gets the chance. Ther soldiers is out here also to kill and get kilt, and in the settlements and mining camps somebody nightly turns up the'r toes under a bullet, or a knife."

"And yet you like it here?"

"Like it, miss? I love it, for we gets the fresh air, the beautiful scenery, the fine drives along the trail and has the pleasure of risking life and danger each day. Now take Buffalo Bill, for instance."

"Buffalo Bill—yes, I have heard of him as a great scout."

"The greatest of 'em all, miss, is Bill. He were born and bred in ther wild West, and he'll die here,

too, I guess. He was reared to a life of danger and death, of hardships and struggles from a boy, and he's made his name famous as an Indian fighter, a scout, guide, and all-round game fellow. It's only such a country as this could turn out such a man."

"Where is he now?"

"At Fort Advance, miss, where he's chief of scouts, for he has under him about two dozen jist such fellers as he himself, and he makes a record for them 'most every day. Your pa knows him, miss, and they is good pards. Now there's your pa, miss."

"And what about him?" asked Lucille Fallon, with a smile.

"He saved the life of a soldier one day at the risk of his own; then again, he saved Colonel Carr's life, and was made corporal, then sergeant, and is now fort ordnance sergeant, with a strong chance of a commission.

"When you see Buffalo Bill, miss, yer'll see a man yer'll never forgit," continued the driver.

"Is he at the fort now?"

"Maybe he is, and maybe he isn't, miss, for he's more oftener away on the trail looking up danger from Indians and the road agents, for the latter has lately cut a warning of death to him in the monument erected on Monument Hill, the spot where Six-horse Sam, my pard, lost his life, along with others who was passengers."

"What kind of an accident was it?"

"It wasn't no accident, miss, but sheer deviltry, for the road agents—the Red Hand Riders we calls 'em—jist kilt poor Sam and others. Now they has put

out a warning agin' Buffalo Bill, that they will kill him if he don't leave this country."

"And will he leave?"

"Lordy, miss, you don't know Buffalo Bill, or you'd never ask that! Why, he'll stay right here, if death is sartin; but he's got no idea of dying, and we all think he has a charmed life, don't you see?"

"And these outlaws, the Red Hand Riders, you called them, infest this trail?"

"Yes, miss, first my run, then another trail on the south branch, again striking the one going north out of Red Dog, and sometimes hitting the main line which you come along."

"And they cannot be run down?"

"Well, they ain't been yet, for you see they is friendly with the Injuns, they has spies in the fort and settlements, and so get posted when a force is to move against them and retreat to the redskin country or disperse. Who they is nobody knows, for they goes masked, and they is called by birds' names, their captain being known as Captain Eagle."

"A strange lot of men, indeed, and I hope we will not meet them."

"So does I, miss, for your sake; but, yonder is Monument Hill, miss, and—there's Buffalo Bill now—the very man I spoke of; and with him on the trail I do not fear road agents," and Jack Jessop pointed ahead to where a horseman was visible near a white wooden cross erected as a monument on the trail.

It was the monument erected to the memory of Six-horse Sam, who had been killed there, and upon which had been cut the warning, or "death knell," to Buffalo Bill, the scout, who now bowed his disre-

gard of it by calmly waiting there on the fatal spot for the coach to come up. Looking fixedly at him as she approached, Lucille Fallon saw a man who was, indeed, one to never forget.

He looked the hero she had been told that he was, while, reining back his horse as the coach came to a halt, he raised his broad sombrero with a courtly grace that was very winning, and bent low at the introduction given him by Jack Jessop to the sergeant's daughter.

"Well, miss, what does yer think of Buffalo Bill?"

So asked Jack Jessop as the coach rolled on its way once more toward the fort, after a short talk held with Buffalo Bill, the scout, at Monument Hill.

Lucille Fallon did not at first reply. She seemed to be thinking of the man she had just met.

Then she answered:

"Think of him? Why, I think he is the finest specimen of manhood I ever beheld. He looks the hero that he is, and were I in trouble, he is just the man I would go to, or seek help of."

"You've got him down fine, miss, and let me tell you now that I feel better since we has met him on ther trail. Yer see, ther Red Hand Riders is a bad lot o' outlaws, wicked, merciless, and daring, and they has spies, I is sartin, who in some way gets them word when the stages is coming through with booty, or anybody worth holding up. Now your comin' has been known, and it's about pay time at the fort, and Lieutenant Leslie, an officer who is comin', is expected to have government money with him, while I heard the two men inside, strangers to me, was going to the mines to look into speculations, so they must have money

along. You has got the dust, and plenty of baggage, and I tell you it would be bad to see the Red Riders on this run."

"But you feel no anxiety now that you have seen Buffalo Bill?"

"I don't exactly say that, miss, for there's danger clean up in sight of the fort, where we is due at sunset, though I'm pushing to get in ahead of time so you can have daylight to welcome you."

"You are very kind, Mr. Jessop."

"Don't mister me, please, miss, for I is plain Jack, or Jessop, as you please, called by my pards Champion Driver of the Overland," and Jack Jessop added the last with pardonable pride, while Lucille Fallon remarked:

"From what I have seen, you deserve the title, and I was told a long way back that the worst piece of road I would have to go over I would find that Jack Jessop, the Ribbon Sharp, would be the driver, so I would have nothing to fear."

Jack seemed hardly to hear the complimentary words, for his eyes were scouring the horizon, where waves of inky clouds were rising and obscuring the skies.

"I fear we is going to have a storm, miss, and a bad one, and it is not what I care to meet on this trail, as there are cliffs to go round, cañons to pass through, and heavy timber along the trail, not to speak of streams that rise like lightning into torrents. I'll force 'em along a little more," and as Jack Jessop called to his horses to quicken their pace, there suddenly burst out of the black clouds a livid flame, followed by a deafening crash of thunder.

"This is grand," cried Lucille Fallon, unmindful of the danger, and she smiled as she saw the heads suddenly thrust out of the coach windows, for the passengers inside had had no sight of the rising storm.

The coach rolled rapidly on, the eyes of the driver upon his team and the gathering tempest, which he saw was increasing in fury as it rose.

"We is going to have the worst storm I ever seen in these parts," he muttered, as he still urged his horses on. "I'm anxious to get over Cañon River Bridge afore it breaks, for that be a dangerous place to cross even in good weather; but beyond is an old camp we kin strike for if the storm gets very bad, as we cannot cross some of the streams, I fear; but you bet, miss, I'll push on, if there's a chance to get you there."

"The storm I glory in, for I never saw anything more magnificent, and I only hope it will keep the Red Riders off."

"I hope so, miss; but I seen Buffalo Bill was a trifle anxious about you, and so is I, for them Red Riders is devils."

Along the trail swung the coach, the six horses going at a pace that few men would have dared force them over such a perilous trail. But Jack Jessop was showing his just claim to being called the "Ribbon Sharp of the Overland," and he pushed along with nerve and skill that won Lucille Fallon's admiration, dividing it with the grandeur of the rising tempest.

At length they came to a long, winding descent down a cañon, to the Cañon River below, the river dashing along through clifflike banks that rose hundreds of feet above the water, which surged swiftly along through its narrow chasm.

"There's the bridge, miss," said Jack Jessop, and as he uttered the words, a party of horsemen rode out into the trail ahead of him, causing him to cry out:

"The Red Hand Riders have got us!"

The bridge, a narrow structure of long timber stretches and split logs, was but a few hundred yards away; but the horsemen had ridden into the trail between the coach and it.

There was a pine thicket on each side of the trail, the cañon towering overhead, and from the shadows had come the outlaws. There were about a dozen of them, two standing like sentinels in the trail, four riding on each side up to the coach, and one man who appeared to be the chief seated upon his horse and waiting.

Not a word was spoken, the outlaws had just shown themselves, formed for work, and the eight went at a canter until they passed the coach, when they wheeled and halted on each side like an escort.

Jack Jessop seemed to know their way of procedure, for he drove on until his leaders were up to the chief and then he halted, but called out:

"I'd like ter run yer down, but I dasn't, yer Imp o' Hades."

Lucille was surprised and alarmed at the bold words of the driver, and gazed at the outlaws, they having now supplanted the storm in her mind. She saw that all were mounted upon blood-bay horses, that they wore a kind of uniform, were masked, and their hands were covered with buckskin gloves dyed to a carmine hue.

Whether white, redskin, or negro she could not

tell, for nothing could be seen to testify, so shielded were they by their masks.

"Well, Jack, you thought you would get through this time, but here we are," said the chief.

"Does yer think I'm blind that I don't see yer?" growled the driver.

"Neither deaf, dumb, nor blind, Jack, are you, so answer questions, for that storm is not far away."

"What does yer want?"

"Who have you along?"

"This young miss, ther daughter of a sergeant at ther fort, a young officer, and two gents I don't know."

"Any money?"

"No! yer won't git nothin'."

"Jack, you are not as well-informed as I am, for though that young lady is a sergeant's daughter, yes, the daughter of one who has been hot on my trail more than once, she is an heiress in her own right, and has plenty of money, along with jewels, too, and lots of valuable baggage."

"Yer pertends ter know it all."

"I don't pretend, Jack, but know, as I will show you."

"Waal?"

"The lieutenant inside is sent out as Colonel Carr's aid, but he is really paymaster, and has his boodle along and plenty of it."

"You is 'way off."

"I will also tell you that the two other passengers are gold sharks, men looking for paying mines, and with the money to buy them at low prices from poor miners. I am posted, you see, and a regular of

your passengers not only have money, but are valuable to ransom, I shall capture the outfit and hold them for future payments."

"I say, Lieutenant Leslie kin drive a team well, so let me stay as hostage, and he take the coach on to the fort and state your terms."

"No, Jack, you are not valuable enough as a hostage; but I shall keep you also, for the coach company have got to pay to get you back, as this is my star holdup, my champion haul, and should get me a fortune, and I need it, for Buffalo Bill has vowed to run the Red Riders off the trail, I hear, and I'm a little afraid of him, I admit."

"I'll bet you ten to one Buffalo Bill hangs you yet, payable the day you is strung up," savagely said Jack Jessop.

"What good would the money do me if I won, and was hung through the agency of some other scout?" laughed the outlaw chief.

"Give you a good funeral."

"My executioners will see to that; but come, no man can hold the reins as you can, and I'm going to play a deep game with the aid of this team, so you are to drive."

"Where?"

"Down the river valley through the night, for the storm will destroy the trail."

"I'll not drive an inch."

"Then one of my men shall, and that may mean an upset and death to the young lady."

"I'll drive."

"You are wise; but I'll put the gentlemen in irons

first, have the young lady enter the coach, and disarm you."

"I will still ride on the box," said Lucille firmly.

"But you will be drenched, Miss Fallon, and——"

"I have rubber wraps, and can keep perfectly dry. I will not ride inside the coach," was the determined reply of the young girl.

"As you please, if you are willing to take the consequences," was the reply of the road-agent chief.

There was every indication that the storm would break before very long, and the outlaws were preparing for it by getting their stormcoats ready.

The chief called to three of his men, who, dismounting, disarmed the driver of the coach, and got roundly cursed for doing so, though, of course, Jack Jessop dared not offer resistance.

Then they called to the passengers to get out and they, too, were disarmed and then their ankles manacled together, while the inside of the coach was thoroughly searched. Lucille Fallon, having put on her rubber coat and a slouch hat she took from her satchel, Jack Jessop arranged the leather aprons and blankets about her, and then said, in his brusque way:

"Well, cutthroat chief, I'm ready, for there is no need of staying here."

"And I am ready, but there is work for some of you men to do; after a while you can follow, for that storm will destroy all trails and I shall play a cunning game now, Jack Jessop, which will throw even your famous chief of scouts, Buffalo Bill, off the trail."

"You've got to make it clever to do that; but I'm

betting big money you can't blind no trail so Buffalo Bill can't follow it."

"Can I not?"

"We shall see," and with a confident tone he called out:

"Sparrow, take six men with you, get axes from the pack horses, and go and destroy the bridge across Cañon River.

"Cut it away as though the storm had caused it to go down, see?"

"Yes, Captain Eagle," answered the man addressed as Sparrow.

"Make a clever job of it, and then follow on the trail down the river, and hold on until you get to camp, for I shall keep on until after midnight, so as to be far away in the morning where my trail will not be seen."

"And you mean that those at the fort shall believe that the coach, and all with it, went down with the bridge, does yer, Cap'n Eagle?"

"I do, Jack Jessop."

"Waal, you is about ther worst piece o' humanity I ever come across."

"Thanks, Jack. What do you think now of your friend, Buffalo Bill, following our trail?"

"He'll follow it if it leads to Perdition, mark my words," was the energetic response of the Overland driver, and with a mocking laugh the chief ordered two of his men to get their lanterns from the pack horses and have them ready to light when night came on.

Soon all was in readiness for the start, seven of the band having gone to the bridge to destroy it, and

the others riding to the rear of the coach, the chief taking the lead.

"Follow me, Jack, and remember, this must be the drive of your life, for you'll have a new trail to go over, and darkness that can be felt, not to speak of that storm, which threatens to be about as bad as any I ever saw in these mountains."

With this the chief rode on, and after casting a longing look toward the river, and another back up the trail he had come, as though hoping for aid, Jack Jessop gathered up his reins and followed the outlaw leader.

The horses did not seem to at first relish this turning off the trail they knew so well, but Jack used his whip and soon had them well at work. It was growing late now, for the sun was nearing the horizon, and but for the holdup the coach would have been near the fort.

The whole skies were overcast now with black clouds, the lightning was vivid and blinding, the thunder terrific, and far off on the mountaintops the trees could be seen swaying wildly under the force of the hurricane, for it was nothing less.

The storm was breaking, and before long would sweep down the valley with irresistible force. The scene was a grand one, though appalling, as the Red Hand Riders began their flight through the storm. Jack Jessop looked at his companion, as she sat by his side. She was pale, but perfectly calm.

"You has got nerve enough for a man, miss, and no mistake," he muttered.

"That storm is appalling, and our situation but adds to the terror; but I have confidence in you, and do

not believe those outlaws will really harm us," was the answer.

"Do you not think you had better come into the coach, Miss Fallon?" called out Lieutenant Leslie; but, thanking him, the brave girl replied:

"No, I shall be just as safe here, and I am too well wrapped up to get wet."

In a short while the storm was upon them, and with a fury and power that startled the horses and caused the coach to sway wildly under the force of the wind. But Jack Jessop urged them on, and followed the leader steadily.

Then the rain fell in sheets, but, fortunately, at their backs, and small rivers of water flowed about them. Darkness soon followed, two of the outlaws rode to the front with lanterns, and through the blackness and storm the flight was continued, in spite of the desperate danger.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ISLAND RETREAT.

Gazing upon an island in the center of a broad, swift-flowing, and shallow river, no one would have believed that within its towering cliff banks of rocks was a garden of beauty. The island was a hundred acres in size, and in the upper cliffs began a cañon, widening into a valley that was fertile, dotted with trees and through which wound a tiny stream fed by springs.

In the cañon stood a large cabin of heavy logs, with a rock chimney, and farther back a smaller one. Horses and cattle dotted the valley, a few sheep were there also, and a garden spot where grew various vegetables was walled in against the cliffs.

It was an ideal border home, with its rude, broad piazza, its comfortable surroundings and quiet repose. To reach this island home one had to ford the river at two places, for it had to be crossed to one bank which was bold and precipitous, along which the trail lay, and from that shore at a certain point to where there was a split in the rocky bank through which one passed up into the little cliff-guarded valley.

Seated upon the piazza of the cabin was a woman, reading a book, while working in the garden was a negro man who had passed his half a century of years. A negress of nearly his age was bustling in and out of the cabin, engaged in preparing the evening meal, and the picture was one of peace and contentment, apparently.

The Island Retreat.

179

The smoke curled upward from the chimney, the horses and cattle grazing quietly about the valley; saddles, among them a sidesaddle, with bridles and lariats, hung under the roof of the piazza, with a rifle on pegs and a belt of arms near it.

There was a bench and a couple of rustic easy-chairs on the piazza, and in one of them sat the woman. She was young, scarcely over twenty-five, and her buckskin dress revealed a perfect form.

Her face was very beautiful, darkly bronzed by exposure, yet it wore a look of sadness, but was intelligent, refined and with a certain look of daring and determination upon it which had been stamped there doubtless by the wild life of freedom and danger which she could not but lead in that far-away home.

Within the cabin there was an evidence of comfort one would not expect to find in that remote retreat, while there were shelves of books, a guitar, pencil sketches, and paintings, evidence of refined tastes and accomplishments in the fair dweller in the little home.

"Oh! will this life ever end?" suddenly said the woman, dropping the book in her lap and proving by her words that her mind was not upon what she had been reading. "With Lloyd Lamar all that I once believed him, I could be happy in the wilderness. But some day the end will come, for he cannot live the life he does and not sooner or later meet his fate for defying, as he does, the laws of God and man—oh! there he comes now, and—as I live, he is not alone. What does that mean, for he never allows any of his men to know of this retreat?"

As she mused, the woman's eyes, bent down the valley, had fallen upon a horseman who had emerged

from the split on the rock, or cliff, that formed the wall of the island, and through which was the only means of ingress and egress to the valley.

The horseman was not alone, however, for behind him came another rider, and following were half a dozen pack animals heavily laden.

"It is a woman, not a man! What does it mean? Ah! what can it mean other than that he has made some poor, unfortunate woman suffer through his lawless acts. And he has brought her here? Well, I am glad at least that he has done so."

The woman continued to gaze upon the horseman and his companion, at the same time calling to the negro man to come to her.

As the negro approached, she said:

"Here is the chief, Uncle Toby, and he is not alone."

"So I sees, missy; but it am a leddy with him, and she do look like a mighty pretty young girl."

"Alas, yes," and just then the horseman drew rein, leaped from his saddle and called out:

"Here, Mildred, I have brought company for you, a young lady who is to be your captive guest until I can collect the liberal ransom I shall demand for her release."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE OUTLAW'S VOW.

Several weeks after the arrival of the horseman in the island, accompanied by a fair guest, a man rode along a ridge toward the base of a lofty spur that broke off suddenly, with a drop of hundreds of feet, in the higher summits of a range of mountains.

He had climbed slowly up a steep and zigzag trail to the ridge, glancing back now and then at the view spread out before him of wildest grandeur and desolation, for within the scope of the vision there was not visible a single house, no curling smoke from a fireside, no cattle dotting the valleys and plains.

All was solitude, vast and wild. Reaching the summit of the ridge, along the trail that led up from the river flowing at the base of the hills, he followed it toward the cliff.

But suddenly he halted, just as he came in sight of a number of cabins nestling away under the cliff. There was no sign of life about them, and something caught his eyes that caused him to cry out:

"My God! what does this mean? Some one has been here, or they have deserted me!"

He put spurs to his horse and dashed forward, but stopped almost as suddenly and said:

"Am I mad? There may be a trap set for me there?"

Dismounting, he left his horse standing unhitched, and with a rifle unslung from his saddle, he moved cautiously forward, making a flank movement from

rock to rock upon the cabins. He was a man of commanding presence, wearing military boots, a slouch hat encircled by a gold cord, a military fatigue suit, and a belt of arms.

But strangest of all, he was masked and wore red gauntlet gloves. The man was the same who had held up Jack Jessop's stagecoach weeks before, the leader of the Red Hand Riders of the Rockies.

From rock to rock, tree to tree he made his way toward the cabins, and as he advanced he saw continued evidence that the place seemed deserted and that some one had been there since his departure.

"What can it mean?" he muttered.

Then he answered his own question:

"Why, what can it mean other than that Buffalo Bill has tracked me here and ended all. It is lucky for me that I was not here, for, from the appearance of things, the band has been entirely wiped out, and I would have shared the same fate had I not been at my other retreat on the isle."

With this he moved on once more, and with the greatest caution, for he was looking for a trap. At length he came near two cabins that stood in the entrance of a small cañon penetrating the overhanging cliff or spur.

Back in the cañon was another cabin, and these three comprised the living quarters of the Red Hand Riders in their retreat in the mountains a hundred miles from Fort Advance. There was a wall of rock around the mouth of the cañon, which had been thrown up to serve as a breastwork from behind which to resist attack and also as a barrier for a cattle corral, for there were bars in one side of it next to the cliff.

The cabins were large, roughly built, and had a roof shelter around them to sit under in bad weather. In the cañon, close to the cliff, were a number of newly made graves, and seeing that the cabins were utterly deserted and that they had been robbed of their contents, the outlaw chief walked over to the mounds that marked the last resting place of about a dozen dead.

There were two groups of graves, apart from each other, and upon the rocks over the large number was painted: "Here lies buried seven men, names unknown, but members of the outlaw band of Red Hand Riders slain by United States cavalry, under command of Lieutenant Walter Worth, and tracked down by Buffalo Bill, scout and guide."

The other group of graves were three in number, and painted by the same hand on the rocks were the names of two soldiers and a scout who had fallen in the attack upon the outlaw retreat.

"Well! this means that my band has been wiped out, that I am a chief without a following, and I owe it to Buffalo Bill, the man whom I warned to leave this part of the country or he should die by the hands of the Red Hands. Jack Jessop has won his bet, in that Buffalo Bill has tracked them here."

After walking over the camp, and seeing that the victors had made a clean sweep of it, the outlaw chief mounted his horse and rode rapidly over the miles that intervened between the retreat and the island.

He arrived at night, and loud and bitter were his words when he found that the scout had unearthed his secret island retreat also. Climbing up to the cliff top, he built a signal fire, and savagely muttered the words:

"Yes, my signal will call Chief Iron Eyes to my aid, and I will start at once on the trail of the despoilers, for they are not far away, and cannot travel fast, hampered as they are."

From the top of the tallest cliff overhanging the river valley, in which was the rock-bound island where dwelt a mysterious woman, whose life held some strange, cruel secret, there flamed up a fire which could be seen far away.

The outlaw chief had ridden as far up the steep ascent as his horse could go, and then on foot he had climbed on up to the top. All was darkness and desolation as he glanced around him over the many miles of mountain, valley, and plain.

Dark and deserted was the island which had been his secret retreat, or, rather, where Mildred, the mysterious woman, had dwelt. The summit of the cliff was covered with a few trees, pines, and several of these were dead and dry.

At the base of one of these dead trees was a pile of wood placed there evidently for the purpose it was then to be used for.

Lighting a match, the outlaw built a fire, and as the flames grew brighter they kindled the tree, and, shooting upward and upward, soon there was a tall column of fire rising nearly a hundred feet above the top of the mountain. Having set his signal of flame against the black skies the lone highwayman went back down the hill, and, mounting his horse, rode to the valley a mile distant, and where there were signs of a former large encampment.

"They will see the signal and come here," he mut-

tered, as he dismounted, the glare of the burning tree even falling in the valley.

He knew that the pillar of fire would be seen many, many miles away, by the Indian sentinels stationed upon the lofty mountaintops where were their villages, and, reported to Chief Iron Eyes, his young warriors would at once be dispatched to his aid, for warring against their own people the outlaws had as their allies the redskins, who were repaid by booty taken from the whites, and the fact that the Red Hand Riders were ever ready to give them warning of any intended move against them.

In fact, the outlaw band, living by murder and robbery, were renegades to their own race and the friends of the Indians. Having set his blazing signal against the skies, the outlaw leader retreated to the camp where the redskins were wont to make a halting place when in that part of the country, and there rested for the night.

It was just dawn when he arose and was on the watch, for he expected aid would not long be delayed. He was right in his surmise, for he saw from his point of lookout a band of horsemen pushing swiftly along toward the spot where he was.

He watched them closely through his field glass, and, counting the long line of warriors, said to himself:

"It is the young chief, Death Face, in the lead, and he is a hard fighter and able commander. Yes, he has a hundred braves with him, enough to make an ambush with, but not sufficient for an open attack, for the trail of Buffalo Bill and his accursed followers shows at least forty men."

It was a short while before Death Face and his braves came up, and the outlaw chief stepped out of his place of covert and revealed himself to them. He spoke the Indian tongue fluently, and in an earnest manner said:

"My red brother, the great chief, Death Face, is welcome, and has come quickly to my aid. The fire signal was set to call my red friends to help me, for the scout chief, Buffalo Bill, has been to my retreat and killed and captured my people, has robbed me of all I had, and is retreating slowly to the fort, so I want my red brothers to help me."

The chief was a young man, and of fine physique and dignified mien, while he was most gorgeously attired in the barbaric fashion of the Indians, though his weapons were a belt of two revolvers and a bowie, and a repeating rifle hung at his saddle horn, for his horse, a fine animal, was equipped with a silver-studded Mexican saddle and bridle.

His hair was worn long, and upon his head was a gorgeous war bonnet of eagle feathers dyed in various hues. The face and hands of the young chief were curiously and weirdly painted, for upon a black foundation was white skillfully put on to resemble a human skull, and bony fingers.

He had made a record for himself as a fighter, and was feared and respected by his braves, while he was next in command to Iron Eyes, the head chief.

Having explained the situation to Death Face, the outlaw chief added:

"I am sorry my brother has not more braves with him."

"The Death Face has more braves coming, two

more bands, each equal to this one. The signal of the white chief was seen, and the Death Face came quickly to his aid, telling other bands to follow. Where are the foes of my paleface brother?"

Glad to know that he would have about three hundred braves to make the pursuit with, Captain Eagle explained the situation fully to the young chief, while the warriors rested and prepared breakfast, while waiting for their comrades to come up.

"I had, as the Death Face knows, just returned from a visit to Iron Eyes, and death and ruin greeted me, so I signaled for help. The warriors of the Iron Eyes met defeat only a short while ago at the hands of the palefaces, but now they can get their revenge," said the outlaw, and an hour after, leaving a warrior to bring on the others when they arrived, he led the redskin band in pursuit of those who had dealt him a deadly blow.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SCOUT'S REPORT.

Fort Advance was known as the "Plucky Outpost," from the fact that it had been established in the very heart of the Indian country, and had held its own against all odds. The commandant, Colonel Carr, was one of the best officers in the service and an Indian fighter of renown, and he had picked his command to hold his own.

Having been given a battery of eight guns—four twelve-pounders and four sixes—a battalion of infantry, with horses enough to mount them if necessary, and five troops of cavalry, he also had with him, by special request made to the general commanding the department, Buffalo Bill and two dozen scouts, all of them picked men.

The colonel had also found among the miners who worked in the mountains near the fort a company of volunteers, so that he had no reason to dread any force the Indians might attack him with if given warning of their coming in time to call his men to arms.

There was, a day's coach ride from Fort Advance, another mining and ranch settlement, combined, known as Red Dog, and this place could turn out a couple of large companies of fighters in time of need, and had, in conjunction with the military, lately defeated a raid of redskins that had swept down upon them, Buffalo Bill having given timely notice of the intended surprise.

The Scout's Report.

189

It was just after the defeat of Iron Eyes and his band that the raid of Lieutenant Walter Worth, guided by Buffalo Bill, had been started against the outlaw band of Red Riders, and Colonel Carr was feeling considerable anxiety regarding the fate of the little force of heroes who had gone to the rescue of the captives held by Captain Eagle, when his orderly announced that the chief of scouts had just arrived and asked for an audience.

"Show him in at once," cried the colonel in a tone that showed his desire to know the exact situation of affairs in the front, from one so well able to inform him as was Buffalo Bill.

The scout entered, and his appearance indicated rough riding and hard service.

"Ho, Cody; glad to see you. Sit down, and tell me what the news is from your expedition, for I have been more than anxious about all of you."

Buffalo Bill dropped into a chair like a man who was tired, indeed, and said in his quiet way:

"No cause for anxiety now, colonel, for all goes well."

"I am delighted to hear this; but you were pursued by the Indians and had a hot fight of it; but I hope the reinforcements I sent got there in time to aid you."

"In the nick of time, sir, for we were hard pressed, and it was Captain Eagle, the outlaw leader, who urged the redskins on, and they were anxious for revenge after their late defeat."

"Then you did not reach the outlaw retreat as you had hoped?"

"Oh, yes, sir; we got there with both feet, and wiped out the band, save the chief, who was off visit-

ing old Iron Eyes, his ally, so escaped death or capture; but shall I make my report from the first, sir?"

"Yes, do so," and the colonel called for his clerk to take down the scout's report in shorthand and then make a copy of it to be filed.

"To begin, sir, I never believed that the coach had gone down with the River Cañon Bridge the night of that fearful storm, and so I went down the river to look for some trace of it, of the horses, or bodies of the passengers. I found the wreckage of the bridge all right along the banks, then a camp with no trail leading to it, but a big one leading from it, and this proved that it had been made during the storm. I found in the fires iron and other traces of the coach, showing that it had been burned, and so, taking the trail, I sent for Lieutenant Worth, as agreed upon, and then, alone and ahead upon the track of the outlaws, I met one who warned me of the Indian raid upon you, so I came back with the warning, and you know how well they were beaten off, sir.

"The one who warned me was a white woman, living with an old negro man and woman alone upon an island retreat far up in the mountains. I had met her before, when my horse fell with me, injuring me severely, and she had found me and taken me to her home under an oath of secrecy not to betray her. Our second meeting was when I saved her from Injun Nick, whom I drove out of Red Dog, and who intended to kill her, for it seems he had known her in the past.

"Her fall, dragged from her horse by his lariat, hurt her so severely she was unconscious, and so I carried her to her retreat, and she it was who gave

me warning of old Iron Eyes' secret raid. Leaving her delirious and to the care of the negroes, I came with the warning, and when, after the Indians were beaten back, I went on with Lieutenant Worth's command, I took Surgeon Denmeal to her home and he soon checked her fever and started her on the way to recovery. That beautiful woman, Colonel Carr, is the wife of Captain Eagle, chief of the Red Riders."

"Poor woman."

"She believed him an honorable man, and he brought her to these wilds, with the two negroes, and there she has lived. I owed her my life, and we owe it to her that the Indians did not surprise the fort and settlements, sir. With her, where the outlaw chief had taken her with her baggage on pack horses, was Miss Lucille Fallon, the sergeant's daughter."

"Thank God for that! Cody, you are a wonder for getting at the bottom of a mystery," and the colonel warmly grasped the hand of the man who had brought him such a cheering report. "But go on with your story, Cody, for the safety of the sergeant's daughter assures me of the rescue also of Lieutenant Ernest Leslie and the others who were with her on Jessop's coach."

"It does, sir, for where the chief took Miss Lucille to the retreat of his wife, not even known to his own men, he carried the others to his lair in the mountains, and there we found them when we surprised their den."

"Glorious! and where are they?"

"Coming on with Lieutenant Worth, sir, for he told me to come on ahead and make the report, and then I wished to ask you, sir, if I could not guide a

troop or two toward the Indian village and cut off the band under the outlaw leader and Chief Death Face in their retreat, for we can do so?"

"A splendid idea, if you are able to make the ride, Cody, for you look jaded."

"Don't mind me, colonel, for I am all right, sir."

"Where did you last see the Indians?"

"They were beaten off, sir, in their last charge about twenty miles above the camp in Cañon River Valley. They tried to get ahead to ambush us, but we thwarted them in that, sir."

"And they are now on their retreat?"

"Yes, sir, but will go very slow, for they have plenty of dead to bury and a number of wounded to carry along."

"What force would you suggest, Cody?"

"Two troops, sir, mounted and equipped for fast riding and hard fighting, sir, to strike a blow and then retreat."

The colonel sent his orderly after Captain Taylor, of the Fifth Cavalry, and upon the appearance of that officer gave him orders to get two troops ready at once for a long ride and a fight with Indians.

"I will be ready, colonel, within the hour, sir," was the reply, and the officer took his leave, Buffalo Bill remarking:

"I will take ten of my men along, sir, as scouts."

"Do so; but now finish with your report, Cody."

"There is little more to add, sir, save that the outlaw's wife was most kind to the sergeant's daughter, and she is along with Lieutenant Worth and his command, accompanied by her two faithful negro servants who have shared with her her exile here in this wilder-

ness. Mrs. Lamar, for such is her name, is being carried on a stretcher, as she is still quite ill, and Miss Fallon is her devoted nurse. In Mrs. Lamar's island home, the secret retreat of Eagle, the outlaw, we found the treasures of the Red Hands, and all that Lieutenant Ernest was robbed of, along with what was also taken from Miss Fallon and the two other passengers."

"And they are all along?"

"All of them, sir."

"It is fortunate none of them were shot by the outlaws."

"They were not, sir, even Jack Jessop, the driver, escaping this time."

"I am glad, for he is a brave fellow, but I fear will not wish to drive the trail again."

"On the contrary, sir, he is anxious to do so, and will relieve Toby Hart at once, he says."

"And Eagle's outlaws?"

"Except those whom we buried, sir, are prisoners along with Bat Brindley, whom I did not have to offer his pardon to if he guided us to the retreat, and so brought him back."

"He richly deserves a rope about his neck."

"No one more so, sir."

"But now you must get ready for your expedition, only I wish you could get a few hours' rest."

"I can rest in the saddle, sir, thank you."

"When will Worth arrive with his party?"

"Not before to-morrow afternoon, sir, for he is forced to travel by very easy marches. I hope we can give you a good account of our expedition, sir, and return with the outlaw chief a prisoner," and, with a

heartily grasp of the colonel's hand, Buffalo Bill went to his quarters to half an hour after leave the fort with Captain Taylor and his gallant troopers.

They were picked men and horses, seventy-five in number, with rations for ten days, ammunition in plenty and armed with the best weapons. Half a dozen pack animals carried the outfit in the way of camping equipage, and the men were riding light for fast and hot work.

Buffalo Bill and ten scouts accompanied the expedition, bringing the force up to eighty-six fighters, all told. The scout led the way, and after they were well out upon the trail Captain Taylor rode forward and joined him.

"You see, sir, Captain Eagle, as the Red Hand Riders call their chief, was not at his den, but off on a visit to old Iron Eyes, so we missed him," said Buffalo Bill.

"He discovered our raid and pursued with the young chief Death Face and his band, and we beat them back with heavy loss. They are retreating with their dead and wounded, and I thought, sir, by striking this trail from the fort, we could head them off, ambush them and perhaps capture the outlaw chief, at the same time giving another severe blow to the redskins."

"And their force, Cody?"

"As well as I could judge, sir, in their spursuit and attack, about three hundred warriors, though, of course, they may have sent for more braves, which we can look out for."

"That is right."

"Yes, sir; it was for that reason I brought so many

of my scouts, as they can be on guard while we are lying in wait, to report any force coming from the Indian villages."

"Well, with my seventy-four gallant fellows, and you and your brave scouts, I do not fear any force less than a thousand, if it comes to a square fight."

"I suppose you want to push on hard?"

"Yes, sir, for, should they retreat more rapidly than I believe they will, we will just be on time, and be able to get into position. The horses will then have a chance to rest."

It was late at night when the command went into camp for supper and a few hours' rest, and when dawn broke they had been in the saddle for an hour again on the march. At noon they had reached the pass, and an hour after were in ambush, for the Indians had not yet passed there on their retreat to their village, thirty miles farther up in the mountains.

The situation chosen by Buffalo Bill as the right spot to place an ambush for the retreating redskins was formed by nature in a way to suit the scout's views exactly.

There the river was broad, saddle girth deep, dotted with rocks that formed rapids, and flowed with great swiftness. The fording place was not over a hundred yards wide, with deeper water above and below.

The trail on the other shore led down a steep and rugged hillside to the river, and on the shore where the scout had placed the soldiers there was a rocky lowland for a couple of hundred yards and then the trail led into a narrow cañon several miles through to a valley beyond.

The scout had crossed the river at a ford some miles

below and picked his way up along the lowland bank to the pass, thus leaving no trail from the Indian village, or to it. Across the river half a dozen scouts and twice as many soldiers had gone, crossing on horses which had then been led back again, and these men, under a lieutenant, had taken up a position to advance from when the fight began and thus check the retreat of the redskins in a measure, for the latter would at once start for another ford a dozen miles up the river the scout felt certain.

The rest of the scouts were sent through the cañon toward the Indian village to give timely notice of any force advancing from that direction. This left Captain Taylor, Buffalo Bill and about sixty soldiers to go into ambush at the mouth of the pass, so as to command the ford.

The ambush had not been formed a moment too soon, for a signal came from one of the scouts on the other shore to be on the lookout, as the Indians were approaching. The scout signaled from a hilltop from which he had a view of the trail beyond the ridge for half a dozen miles.

"They have retreated more rapidly than I expected they would, sir," said Buffalo Bill.

"Well, we are ready for them, or soon will be," answered Captain Taylor, and he ordered his men into their positions of hiding, scattered among the rocks on the steep side of the ridge which the cañon, or pass, split in twain.

"They are pushing to cross the river and camp for the night where our horses now are," added the scout.

"Well, they won't get there, Bill, if we can help it."

"No, sir; but I do hope that Captain Eagle is along."

"Yes, and I have given all the men orders not to fire on him, for he must be taken alive and hanged."

Buffalo Bill slightly started at this, and then, as he turned to go to his point of observation, for he was to give the signal when to open fire, he muttered:

"Well, it would be a good thing to capture and hang that fellow, the chief of the Red Hands with the rest of his gang of cutthroats; but should he be carried in a prisoner it would be a cruel blow to his beautiful wife, to feel that he would die at the rope's end, and perhaps set her back in her recovery. If he was killed, she would be readily resigned to his fate, though he does not deserve the mercy of such a death. I guess I will make the outlaw's pretty wife a widow by putting a bullet through his brain, for that will be merciful to her—yes, that will be best," and the scout took up his position among the rocks at a point that gave him a good view of the ford and approach to the pass.

The defeat of the redskin army under Chief Iron Eyes some time before and again in their attack on the rescue party under Lieutenant Worth, Buffalo Bill felt would be two lessons they would never forget, while the ambush then laid for them would really strike a panic to their hearts and command a peace along the frontier for some time to come.

If they could also kill the outlaw chief, then the work would be a glorious one, indeed, for his men who were prisoners would be quickly hanged for their crimes. While the chief of scouts was thus musing the man on the hilltop across the river waved his flag three times around his head:

"The Indians very near."

"Now to shoot the outlaw chief and spare his lovely wife greater sorrow," was Buffalo Bill's resolve as he prepared for the fray.

As silent as death, the soldiers lay in their ambush, awaiting a call from the scout to rise and begin work, for not a man was visible. Buffalo Bill, alone on the watch, was to call out to Captain Taylor the moment when it would be well to open fire, and that officer's clear voice would give the command to his men to begin their deadly work. Watching the top of the distant ridge, shielded by a rock and pine bush, Buffalo Bill saw a redskin horseman ride into view.

The scouts then had already skipped to their hiding places. The Indian halted a moment, gazing at the scene as though enjoying the picturesque beauty spread out before him.

Then he rode slowly on down the trail. Soon after a dozen other horsemen appeared, and behind them came a band of thirty, at their head riding two men whose appearance at once riveted the scout's gaze.

"There they are, Death Face, the young chief, and Captain Eagle."

They were riding side by side and behind them came their immediate bodyguard of warriors. Following this party came a number of Indian ponies dragging travois, bearing the Indian dead and wounded, for they had rigged up a means of carrying the bodies and the injured from the field.

Buffalo Bill counted the ponies dragging the travois, and muttered:

"Sixty. If every travois means a dead or wounded redskin we hit them hard; but wait until we open fire, pard, and we'll hit you harder still," and the scout

smiled grimly at the gruesome work before him, for, though he held sympathy for the Indian, he yet felt that the severest means of punishment would soonest teach them to bury the tomahawk and be content to live in peace.

The ponies bearing the dead and wounded were followed by the main body of the Indians, some two hundred in number, and by the time the last of these, the rear guard, had crossed the ridge, the advance was in the river.

Stopping for their horses to drink, those in advance were quickly overtaken by those in the rear, and the whole party were heaped together.

The wounded were lifted to the backs of ponies now, for they could not be dragged through the river, and those most seriously hurt were held on by braves mounted behind them. The dead were not taken from their resting places on the travois, for nothing could harm them.

When the advance reached the other shore, they at once turned off for the lowland beyond the ledge and willows, as Buffalo Bill had surmised they would do, to camp there for the night. When about half the force had crossed, and the balance were in the river, Buffalo Bill decided to give his signal to Captain Taylor.

The Indians had ridden along strangely silent and subdued, evidently pondering over their heavy losses of late and hoping for revenge. Not a thought of danger ahead disturbed them until suddenly, echoing from cliff to cliff, wild and terrible, rang out the well-known war cry of Buffalo Bill.

It at once caused a terrible scene of excitement in

the Indian ranks, which was added to when Captain Taylor's commanding voice called to his men to fire, and threescore carbines rattled forth a shower of leaden hail. Ponies and warriors went down, the redskin braves shrank back, staggered, bleeding, and demoralized.

Some answered the fire of death with defiant war-cries and shots, and those in the river began to retreat. Again the carbines flashed, and in one mass of confusion and terror the redskins began the retreat across the river, just as the scouts and troopers on the other shore opened a hot fire upon them.

But they seemed to realize that their greatest danger lay ahead, and they surged frantically back upon the trail they had come, leaving their dead and dying behind them, and driven to desperation by the savage blow dealt upon them. But there was one who did not turn back with the others.

He had started to do so, hesitated, and then, deciding upon his course, had wheeled to the right and dashed up along the river bank.

It was the quickest way to get out from under that terrible death-dealing fire. It was the outlaw chief, and he went alone, for no redskin followed his example, and their young chief had pointed to retreat the way they had come.

The soldiers, remembering their orders, did not fire at the flying chief, and Buffalo Bill was not able to do so in time to check his flight, being down the stream from the ford. But he saw his act, and, leaping out of cover, ran, at the risk of his life, for the bullets of the redskins pattered about him, to where the pony of a chief had run, his rider having been slain.

Leaping upon the back of the animal, he had turned him in chase of the fugitive outlaw, to find the horse was of little speed. Instantly he wheeled about, and, dashing the spurs into his flanks, he drove him at full speed down toward where the troop's horses were corralled.

In a few moments he dashed out of the willow thicket, mounted upon his own splendid horse Lucifer, and went off like a rocket in pursuit of the outlaw.

"Don't mind me, Captain Taylor, for I want that man's scalp, and you have won the fight," called out Buffalo Bill, as he dashed by Captain Taylor, who, with his men, had now come out of ambush and were preparing to mount their horses as they were brought up by the men in charge of them, to make a show of pursuit of the Indians.

Captain Taylor made reply, but Buffalo Bill did not hear him as he dashed away, a lone pursuer upon the outlaw's trail.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

The redskins had been rallied from their panic by the skill and cool courage of their young chief, Death Face. He had quickly realized that the ambush had been ahead, that the scattering shots from the other shore showed but a small force in their rear for effect, and that his course was to recross and strike up the river bank for the upper ford, especially as a mile away there was a place where he could make a stand and beat back the soldiers on his track.

He picked up what wounded he could, but felt compelled to leave his dead, and in solid force crossed the river in spite of the double fire now poured upon him. He saw that the outlaw chief had acted wisely in the course he had pursued, but then he could not have rallied his warriors to go in that direction, so did the next best thing and recrossed the river.

It was his intention to hurl his whole force upon the small party there and wipe them out; but this had been anticipated by Captain Taylor and Buffalo Bill, and orders had been given the men in charge of the horses to bring them up the moment they saw the Indians attempt to recross the stream.

This they did and the quick mounted pursuit saved the soldiers and scouts across the river. Forcing his wounded on ahead, Death Face rallied his braves in the rear to retreat slowly and protect them, and showers of bullets and arrows were fired upon the soldiers as they crossed the river in chase.

After the Fight.

203

But they did not dare tarry long, for from the rocks the little band on the ridge poured a hot fire upon them, forcing them to quicken their pace and give up all idea of displacing them in the short time they had to do it in. It was true that the redskins emptied half a dozen saddles, and brought down twice as many horses as the troopers crossed the river, but it did not check them and the pursuit was pressed so hotly by Captain Taylor that the Indians were forced into a run in spite of their young chief's cries for them to make a stand.

Reaching the rocks, where they could make a stand, they halted, and Captain Taylor wisely and promptly checked the pursuit, knowing that he would lose heavily, and that the Indians would continue their flight for the upper ford, and thence on to their village as soon as night came on.

The captain, too, had seen several couriers ride on ahead, among the first to get across, and he knew this meant a rapid ride to the Indian village for aid, and that by morning, or soon after, a force would be upon him which he could not withstand. There was then but one thing for him to do, and that was to make a show of pursuit until nightfall, and then retreat for the fort at once, taking the trail back the way the Indians had come, but dispatching scout-couriers on the trail the troopers had come to the ford to warn Colonel Carr to send a force out in that direction to guard against a surprise, which in their frenzy the redskins might attempt upon the fort, seeing that the soldiers had retreated in the other direction.

A council was quickly held among the officers, and two scouts were ordered as soon as darkness came on

to recross the river and go back to the fort by the trail they had come, with dispatches for Colonel Carr, and to ride rapidly, but not break their horses down. The rest of the command, after burying their dead comrades, would retreat on the redskins' trail to the river, carrying their wounded with them.

The redskins' dead and wounded would be left to the care of the braves who would come in the morning to look after them, when they found the soldiers gone.

"But how about Cody?" said Captain Taylor when their plans had been arranged.

"I fear he has placed himself in a very perilous position," the captain of the troop that had come with Captain Taylor's own command said.

"He went off on the track of that outlaw like a whirlwind; but it is a dangerous undertaking, as the man being pursued can go into ambush and kill his pursuer."

"Yes, captain, and, having gone up the river, Buffalo Bill is on the side of the Indian village, and if he pursues the outlaw far he will be between the redskins coming from their camps and those now in retreat," a lieutenant said.

"Well, I shall leave a couple of scouts on the other side to watch for his return, and two men here, in case he should cross before those Indians yonder get up to the other ford and come down this side. I am sorry that he went, but the men I leave will know how to take care of themselves when morning comes, and their horses will have a good night's rest. As for ourselves, as it is growing dark, we will set out on the march, for we must get well beyond the ridge before

we camp, and then be off again at dawn," said Captain Taylor.

It was a strange coincidence that, as night was coming on, both Indians and soldiers were preparing to run away from each other. The former feared, as the soldiers did not press the pursuit, they had other forces near who were marching around toward the other ford to catch them, with overhanging cliffs on one side, a river on the other, and between two squadrons of foes.

They longed to get across the river by the upper ford, and then they would make a stand until help came from their villages, help they had sent after already, and which would come in two columns, on the trails to both fords.

The soldiers were anxious to get away, for they had no help; they knew their weakness and were well aware of the strength the Indians could bring against them within twelve hours. By a night retreat they could go many miles before halting to camp for rest and food.

Then, after another ride before dawn and after, by the time they halted for breakfast they would be many miles from the scene of conflict just about the time the Indian reinforcements were arriving there. With such a start they had nothing to fear, for, no matter if hundreds of warriors were in the saddle against them, they would not dare venture far across the river in pursuit, after the bitter and deadly lessons they had lately learned.

The scouts left on the scene, with a night's rest for their horses, the captain was sure would easily dis-

tance all pursuit as far as the Indians would venture, for they would expect to be led into an ambush.

But it was the absence of Buffalo Bill that troubled Captain Taylor and all of his men. The chief of scouts had dashed away in pursuit of his bitterest foe. He had gone alone, and on the Indian side of the river, where small bands of hunters might be met at any moment.

He had gone in chase of a man who was skilled in border craft, cunning, fearless, and dangerous, and was as artful as a redskin. A man who had had his band of outlaws wiped out by the very man who pursued him, who had been forced to fly to safety among the Indians, and whose treasures had been taken from him, and his wife also had gone with his enemies.

Was it a wonder then that he would seek revenge upon Buffalo Bill and risk life to get it? The scout, anxious also to capture the outlaw chief, would strain every nerve and take chances that at another time he would not do. These thoughts flashed through Captain Taylor's mind, and he told his officers how he felt regarding the safety of the scout, and they, too, shared his anxiety.

And yet, to have remained on the river bank awaiting his return would have been madness, so the order to march had been given as soon as darkness fell, and just as the Indians, too, were pulling out in hot haste for the upper ford. The dead were carried along by the soldiers, to bury when they made their camp, and the wounded were cared for as well as circumstances would admit.

During the night march one of the worst of the wounded troopers died, but his body was strapped

upon one of the captured Indian ponies and carried along with the others. It was just an hour before midnight when the scout who was guiding, and who had been on the trail before, led the way to a camp where water, wood, and grass were plentiful. The tired horses were staked out, fires were built, supper put on, and graves were dug for the dead, while the surgeon dressed the wounds of those who had needed his aid most.

Then supper was served, sentinels placed, and the tired troopers threw themselves down and slept soundly. Buffalo Bill's scouts were the self-imposed guards, for, like their chief, they had wonderful powers of endurance and were glad to let the soldiers rest.

After four hours' rest they roused the camp, as ordered by Captain Taylor, and fifteen minutes after the march was again begun. Until eight o'clock they held on, and then a halt was made for breakfast and a long rest, for there was no danger of pursuit then, and Captain Taylor was anxious to have the scouts overtake him.

It was nearly noon when the two left on the ridge arrived. They reported the hasty retreat of the Indians under Death Face, the arrival of several hundred warriors on the other shore soon after sunrise, and the going of the two scouts left across the river, and seeing their signal that Buffalo Bill had not joined them during the night.

Nor had the scout joined the two scouts who brought in the report, and a gloom fell upon all for dread that Buffalo Bill had met his doom at last.

Captain Taylor called his officers together and held a council of war. It was at last decided that as the

expedition had been simply to ambush the retreating Indians and administer to them a severe lesson, this having been accomplished, there was nothing left to be done but to return to the fort and report the result, with the fact that Buffalo Bill was missing, and it was feared harm had befallen him.

Then several of the scouts came up and asked to be allowed to remain behind and search for their chief. This request was granted, Captain Taylor calling for volunteers, and Hugh Hardin and four of his scout comrades went back on the trail in search of Buffalo Bill, while the troopers continued on toward Fort Advance.

It was a sad march of the troopers back to the fort, for another of the wounded men died on the way, running the death roll up to seven men, with twice as many wounded. But they had accomplished their purpose—hit the redskins a terrible blow, slaying many of them, wounding many more and capturing half a hundred ponies.

But there was gloom on account of Buffalo Bill's disappearance, more sorrow being felt for the popular scout's fate than for the dead soldiers. Soldiers could be replaced, there were many of them, but only one Buffalo Bill, the idol of plainsmen, and one whose fame was earned by deeds of desperate daring.

After an absence of five days, the company came in sight of the fort. All hoped to find Buffalo Bill there, and the first question of Captain Taylor was:

"Has Cody arrived?"

"No, Taylor; and we hoped he was with you."

Captain Taylor at once went to headquarters to

report, and Colonel Carr was seated upon his piazza and said quickly:

"Glad to see you back, Captain Taylor, and congratulate you upon your victory, which the scouts brought news of, but is Cody with you?"

"No, Colonel Carr; I did hope to find him here."

"No, and his two men reported that he went off alone in chase of the outlaw chief, Eagle."

"This is bad, very bad; but he is like a cat and may yet turn up, for I've set him down as dead many times; in fact, he has nine times nine lives."

"I hope he may put in an appearance, for our victory was wholly owing to him, and it was one the redskins will remember. I felt it best to return to the fort, sir, over the Indians' trail, but I left Hugh Hardin and four other scouts to look for Buffalo Bill."

"Heaven grant they find him, and Hardin is the man to do it if any one can. If they do not return with him to-morrow I will send out another searching party, for Lieutenant Walter Worth has asked to go."

The captain retired to his quarters, where a few moments after Sergeant Fallon came and asked for an interview.

"I am happy to hear that your daughter was restored to you, sergeant, and trust that she is well, as also your invalid guest."

"Yes, sir, my daughter is well and loves the life here, while Mrs. Lamar is improving rapidly; but I came to ask you regarding the chief of scouts, sir, for it is said that he is thought to have been killed and by the outlaw chief?"

"It is only surmise, sergeant, as Cody dashed off

in pursuit of the outlaw, and did not return. Five of his scouts are searching for him, and if they do not return with news of him to-morrow, the colonel will send out a search party after him."

"I should like to go along, sir, and have a hand in his rescue, for I owe more than life to him, sir, in returning to me my child."

"I will speak to the colonel for you, then, and it will be Lieutenant Worth who commands the party."

"Then if Buffalo Bill can be found, sir, he is the one to do it," earnestly said the sergeant, and he added:

"I will report to Mrs. Lamar and my daughter then, sir, that Buffalo Bill is only missing, for they urged me to come to you and ask about him, sir," and the sergeant returned to his quarters.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SEARCH PARTY RETURNS.

Anxiously a watch was kept up by the sentinels and others at the fort for some sign of the scout's return. The fort was well situated on two sides of a swift-flowing stream, and where the land sloped from it on every side.

It was well timbered in the inclosure of a dozen acres, and in the meadows below were gardens fenced in, and corrals for the cattle and horses to be placed, in threatened danger from an Indian raid. Off on the hills near the cowboys and horse herders had their cabins, and down the valley was a settlement of several hundreds, with miners dwelling up in the mountains a few miles distant.

The fort was a strong one, with stockade walls and earthen breastworks; it was delightfully situated and surrounded by beautiful scenery, while game of all kinds abounded near, rendering it a most desirable post for officers and their families. There were a number of officers' wives and children at the fort, a school for the latter, a chapel in which the chaplain officiated on Sunday, a dancing hall, and all sports were encouraged.

Colonel Carr was an ideal officer, a perfect disciplinarian, but courteous and kind to all, and life at Fort Advance, in spite of its dangerous situation, was much enjoyed by all dwellers there.

Buffalo Bill, as chief of scouts, and on account of his record and personal attractions as well, received the same respect and consideration bestowed upon a

commissioned officer, and with one and all he was a favorite, so that the dread that he had met with death at the hands of the outlaw chief cast a damper upon all of them.

His late brilliant deeds had endeared him still more to all, and there was a cloud of gloom hovering about every cabin and camp fire as long as his fate was unknown and it was feared that he had met his death. Particularly did his corps of scouts grieve for him, and, though he had been reported killed and looked upon as dead time and again before, yet it seemed now that he must have been slain, or why had he not returned to camp?

If he had been captured by the Indians, all knew what a terrible fate would be his. That the five scouts who had gone back to look for some trace of him did not return looked ominous for Buffalo Bill, the men in the barracks thought.

In the officers' club the missing scout was the theme of conversation, and all felt glad when it was known that Lieutenant Walter Worth had volunteered to go out with a party and find him, or know what had befallen him.

In the home of Sergeant Fallon the tension felt was great regarding Buffalo Bill's not coming in. The part the scout had taken in the rescue of Lucille Fallon had greatly endeared him to the sergeant, while his daughter had learned to admire him by ties of the strongest friendship.

The outlaw's wife, Mildred Lamar, had nearly regained her strength again, after her long sickness, but the suspense she was in could not but retard her recovery.

She had once dearly loved her husband, believing him noble and true; but her idol had been shattered when she found him out to be a vile murderer and robber. Freed from him by going to the fort with his fair captive, Lucille Fallon, she had hoped never to hear of him again.

But in vain the hope, for the truth became known to her that he had allied himself with Indians, openly leading them against Lieutenant Worth and Buffalo Bill's rescue party, and then, when attacked by Captain Taylor's command he had been at their head with the young chief, Death Face.

Pursued by Buffalo Bill, the fate of the scout and the outlaw chief was unknown, and hence the suspense fell heavily upon the wife, more so than upon others. Had she known that her lawless husband was dead she could have rested content, but that he had killed Buffalo Bill and still lived on for further red deeds was a cruel burden to bear.

As night came on the sentinel reported a party of horsemen coming down the mountain trail. They were counted, and found to be five in number. They were then recognized as Hugh Hardin and his four comrades, left behind to find their chief. Buffalo Bill was not with them.

Upon arrival at the fort Hugh Hardin went to headquarters to make his report. They had scouted up and down the river, and discovered that the Indians had placed camps of sentinels at each of the three fords, so that they could not cross to reconnoiter on the other side.

They had found no trace of Buffalo Bill, and in vain tried to capture a brave to learn if they could,

if he had been killed or captured. That the outlaw chief, Captain Eagle, had not been killed was certain, for all of the scouts had seen him with Chief Death Face, ride to the redskin camp at the ford and scan the shores across the river with his glass.

The dead Indians and the wounded had all been removed by their comrades, and no one else than themselves, the five scouts, had been seen on the other shore of the river. Believing and hoping that Buffalo Bill had escaped death or capture, they had returned to the fort, trusting to find him there and make their report.

Colonel Carr listened to the report with a clouded brow. It seemed to foreshadow the fate of Buffalo Bill.

"Well, Hardin, you have done your duty, all that you could do, and were right in returning. How many redskins were in the sentinel camps?"

"All of fifty, sir."

"At each ford?"

"Yes, sir."

"You went to each ford?"

"We did, sir."

"And they just camped there?"

"Yes, sir, but they had scouts patrolling up and down the river, we could see, and once or twice we thought they were coming across, and then we intended to capture them; but they thought better of it and never ventured more than halfway over."

The colonel soon after dismissed the scout, just as Lieutenant Worth made his appearance.

"Pardon me, Colonel Carr, but I have come to again request, sir, that I may go in search of Scout Cody."

"I was just going to send for you, Lieutenant

Worth. Sit down, and we will talk it over. I have just had a report from Scout Hardin that he could find no trace of his chief, that the three fords are guarded on the other side of the river by fifty Indians, and he saw both the redskin chief and the outlaw Eagle visiting these sentinel posts."

"That means, sir, that the outlaw captain was not killed?"

"Yes, he is not dead."

"The scouts were sure?"

"Yes."

"It looks as though Buffalo Bill might have been killed, then, by the outlaw?"

"I am sorry to say it has that appearance, Worth."

"May I not go, sir, and try to ascertain the real situation?"

"You may do so; but what is your idea about going?"

"Sergeant Fallon is anxious to go, sir, so Captain Taylor informs me, and I would wish for no better man."

"Very true; but you surely would not go only with the sergeant?"

"No, sir, for I would like to have Scouts Will Palmer, Hugh Hardin, and four others of their comrades whom these two may select, along with Corporal Kane and eight of my troop, sir, picked men and horses all of them."

"That would give you sixteen men under your command?"

"Yes, sir, six of whom are Buffalo Bill's own men, nine of my own troop and Sergeant Fallon, who is a host in himself, sir."

"Very true," and the colonel was silent a moment in thought.

Then he said:

"Lieutenant Worth, I have every confidence in the world in you, and I also feel that a small force is better than a large one, so I am willing you shall go, but I desire to send with you also Surgeon Denmead, for you may need his services. Then, too, I will send an officer, your inferior in rank, of course, with thirty men and a light gun to be within call, close call, should you need aid, on the trail Buffalo Bill led Captain Taylor by, and a like number with a gun, by the trail Taylor returned by to camp at certain points you may designate where they can be called upon, if necessary, or you can retreat to. Of course, with each command I will send several scouts, and thus aided, by knowing you have relief at hand, you can venture much more than otherwise would be prudent, and you know the Indians are just now in a frenzied mood at their losses and defeats."

"I thank you, Colonel Carr, for your kindness, for this aid you give me will be of great benefit, sir. I will talk over the matter with Hardin and Palmer, and decide upon the camps for the relief forces to remain and inform you, sir, and I would like to make a start to-night, with your leave, they starting at dawn."

"You can do so, starting at your will."

It took the lieutenant little time to arrange matters, and two hours after he rode away from the fort at the head of his little command to go on the search for Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A CLEVER DEVICE.

Lieutenant Worth rode away from the fort with his command, while the sun was yet two hours high. He wished to press on to a camping ground thirty miles away, and with an early start the following morning, be able to reach the scene of the late battle while it was broad daylight.

With his scouts well ahead, they would soon discover if the Indians were yet encamped at the ford, and the two other crossings could be reconnoitered to discover if they were also guarded.

If the three crossings of the river were guarded, then there must be some way planned to capture a redskin, or get across to the other shore and begin a scout in search of Buffalo Bill.

The camping place was reached in good time, supper was had, guards placed, and the command was soon fast asleep. But they made an early start, and it was while the sun was yet an hour above the horizon that the halt was called within a few miles of the center of the three fords, to await the reports of the scouts sent to see if they were still guarded.

The scout sent to the lower ford first returned and reported having seen the Indians encamped on the other shore, for he had climbed a high tree and looking over a ridge, had seen half a hundred ponies staked out, but no redskin visible.

The next scout to report was Will Palmer, who had gone to the middle ford, the main trail across

the river, and the scene of Captain Taylor's fight with the Indians. He had surveyed the other shore with his glass and had discovered an Indian sentinel among the rocks, but could not see others, though he was sure they were there.

It was just at sunset when the third scout returned. He had gone to the upper of the three fords, riding ahead of the command slowly in the morning, and he had discovered a camp of about half a hundred Indians on the other shore.

This proved that the Indians were still guarding the fords, either from the fact that they expected a raid from the soldiers in force, or knew that Buffalo Bill was across the river and they wished to capture him, for the banks of the stream were such that only crossings at the three fords could be made for many long miles.

As he was now convinced that there was no chance of crossing the river, save by strategy, Lieutenant Worth decided to move his command to a good camping place a mile back from the center ford and from there send his scouts out to work.

The rendezvous for the two commands to come to his support were to be on the river trail, and the one across country, some twenty miles away from his camping place.

The camp was reached after nightfall, but Hugh Hardin knew it well and it was found to be a very secure hiding place, with fine pasturage for the horses, a good stream and wood in plenty, though cooking could only be done at night, as the smoke in the day-time would betray them to the Indians.

That night the lieutenant, leaving Sergeant Fallon

in command, went with Scouts Hardin and Palmer and reconnoitered to the ford. They saw the glimmer of the Indian camp fires upon the other side, and the young officer said:

"I shall to-morrow see if we cannot trap a redskin, for some of them must cross to this side. We will be in wait for them."

So the next day the scouts and soldiers were in ambush all day, but no redskin came across the stream, though at times a dozen or more were discovered on the other side.

"May I suggest a plan to catch one, sir?" said Sergeant Fallon.

"Certainly, sergeant."

"My horse is trained, sir, and I will take position myself to-morrow before dawn down among the rocks, and he will stay about feeding near me. He will come at my low call, and the redskins, seeing him, and thinking he is a stray animal, will come across to catch him. Seeing them, he will draw near to me, and I can catch one with a lasso, for hardly will more than one come across, but should more come, I will retreat up the trail, the horse will follow me and he will draw them into an ambush."

"The very thing to be done, sergeant, and you shall carry it out as you have planned," said the lieutenant.

The next morning the sergeant was in position before daybreak, and his horse, stripped of saddle and bridle, was feeding near him. The position chosen was a good one, for from the other side no one could see what occurred, unless they were just directly opposite.

It was about an hour after sunrise when from his

point of observation Lieutenant Worth saw an Indian horseman ride into view on the other side. He came down to the river, rode in, and had his lariat in hand as he drew toward the shore, when his gaze fell upon the sergeant's horse calmly feeding.

Reaching the bank, he came slowly forward, all ready to throw his coil, and as he drew near the horse, the animal slowly retreated before him, but came to a halt after going a short distance, and the redskin prepared to catch him.

The redskin eyed the horse anxiously and longingly as he went toward him. He had seen the animal from across the river, and saying nothing to his companions, had mounted his own pony and ridden over to capture a prize.

Being the sentinel on duty, he could not be seen from the camp of the other Indians over in the meadow beyond the willows, and he was anxious to get possession of his prize before any one else knew of its being there. That the horse had gotten away from the soldiers, after the battle, he believed, and he certainly had the appearance of being a very fine animal.

So, when he got near the horse, which stood calmly surveying him, he coiled his long lariat and prepared to catch him. His lariat flew from his hand with great force, and straight as an arrow went toward the head of the horse.

But the sergeant's horse seemed trained to avoid a noose, for he quickly ducked his head and the coil struck him on the neck and failed to catch. But at the same instant there came a whizzing sound from one side of the redskin, a dark object floated in the air, a noose circled the body of the Indian, and with

a sharp twang he was dragged from the back of his horse to the ground.

The pony, wheeling in fright, the redskin fell heavily, with stunning force, and before he could realize what had happened, there bounded a form toward him, a quick turn of the lasso was taken around his neck, and he was choked so as to prevent an outcry or resistance. Raising him in his strong arms, the sergeant bore him back into the cañon, where Lieutenant Worth and Scout Palmer were waiting, having seen the clever capture.

"I'll bring his pony in, too, sir," said Sergeant Fallon, and in a short while he came back with his own and the Indian's pony and suggested that they take the prisoner beyond the hearing of an outcry, should he attempt to give warning of danger to his comrades.

So the prisoner was taken quickly back to the camp, and there, under the care of Surgeon Denmead, rallied from the choking he had received from the sergeant. To the surprise of the lieutenant and those about him, who did not know that he spoke the Indian tongue, the sergeant addressed his captive in Cheyenne, speaking fluently.

The Cheyenne seemed surprised at hearing his native language spoken by a paleface, then glanced fixedly into his face for a moment and responded.

Then the sergeant turned to Lieutenant Worth and said:

"I told him, sir, that we knew of his camp across the river, and at the other fords, but that we were searching for Pa-e-has-ka (Buffalo Bill), and unless he told me the truth about him, I would scalp him and send him back to his people a disgraced squaw."

"And what does he say, sergeant?"

"That he only knows that the scout pursued the white outlaw chief on the day of the battle, for he was with Death Face in that fight, belonging to the young chief's band, and that the Red Hand stated that he had gone on to the Indian village, to bring more warriors to the scene, and had not seen the chief of scouts."

"Do you believe him, sergeant?"

"I do, sir, for he would only be too glad to let me know that Buffalo Bill had been killed or captured. He says also, sir, that when the outlaw captain heard that Buffalo Bill had gone in chase of him, and had not crossed the river with his troops, he asked Death Face to send his young warriors on his trail and capture him, but all had come in with the same report, that they had tracked the scout to a spot on the river bank, where the trail ended, for either the horse had been forced to leap from the cliff or he had been thrown off for some purpose, and that Buffalo Bill had taken the chances of swimming across the stream, where the river was wide and dashed along at a rapid rate, though upon the other shore it was possible to land, if he reached it. Indian scouts had gone up to the spot on the other shore, and searched for some sign of a trail where a horse or man had left the water, but none was found, and it was the belief of Chief Death Face, and also of Captain Eagle, that the great scout had attempted to swim across the river and both he and his horse had been drowned."

"Then that means that Buffalo Bill is dead," sadly said Lieutenant Worth. "The only thing for us to do is to return to the fort and report our failure."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE SCOUT'S PURSUIT.

It will be well now to follow on the trail of Buffalo Bill, when he dashed away in hot pursuit of Captain Eagle, the leader of the Red Hands. Having to ride the Indian pony he had captured to the corral, and there get his own matchless horse, Lucifer, had delayed him so that the outlaw had all of ten minutes' start of him.

But Buffalo Bill, in his lone scouting expeditions, had ventured into the neighborhood of the Indian village, and he knew the country thereabout well. He was aware that the chief could only retreat by one trail up the river for miles, and then, by a flank movement, would reach the other ford.

From it the trail would lead to the Indian village, and that would be the way the chief would doubtless go. As there was no turning-off point, speed was what would be required to overtake the outlaw, and the scout was anxious to come up with him as soon as possible and end the affair.

He felt glad that it would be a death shot for the outlaw, rather than capture and being taken to the fort, where he would be hanged, thus bringing a deeper sorrow upon his unfortunate wife. Under other circumstances, were it not for that poor wife, the scout would have been more than content to let the outlaw suffer the penalty for his many crimes as he justly deserved, at the rope's end.

But now, should he come up with him, it would be

a duel to the death between them. The trail of the outlaw in his flight showed that he was urging his horse to his fullest speed. Coming to a place among steep cliffs on either side, the scout saw that there was no trace of a trail.

But the outlaw could not have turned off, and so must have gone on, only the nature of the ground preventing any hoof tracks being made. Noticing ahead that there were places among the rocks where a horse and man could hide, Buffalo Bill went more cautiously.

The outlaw would doubtless expect to be pursued, and therefore he would prepare against a foe. But the scout went on, though with greater caution only. Did it come to a trial of speed, he knew that Lucifer was more than a match for even the far-famed fleet steed of Captain Eagle.

The nature of the ground still prevented any trace of the trail being seen until suddenly the scout came to where it was revealed again. It led on ahead along a cañon for a short distance, and then there was a cliff on the one side, and a hundred yards away the bank of the river.

The scout halted for a moment, and then a search showed that the trail of the outlaw's horse continued on around the cliff, here and there revealed where there were patches of earth covering the rocky ground. It was not over three miles to the upper ford, and Buffalo Bill concluded that the outlaw must be all of a mile ahead of him.

So he decided to ride on to the upper ford, and if he did not come up with him to cross, make a wide detour so as not to meet the retreating Indians on

the other side, for he had seen them turn up the bank of the river, and thus regain Captain Taylor's command again at the lower ford, for they would remain there all night, he supposed, or retreating, would march slowly, as there were wounded to carry along.

But he hoped that the outlaw would come to a halt, or he would overtake him, and thus bring on a duel between them, for there was a feud of long standing between Buffalo Bill and the Red Hand Riders, and he was more than willing to take his chances in an encounter with the chief.

Just as he started on again, happening to glance over toward the river, Buffalo Bill was startled to see the outlaw ride into view, and coming down the river. This seemed to indicate that he had doubled on his trail on ahead, ridden over to the river and followed along the edge of the cliff as though to return to the lower ford, when believing he was not followed.

He did not see the scout, that was certain, but rode leisurely along, having just come into view from riding out of a ravine which he had to cross to continue on along the bank. Buffalo Bill waited until he got directly opposite to him, so that he would not be able to dash at once to cover, and then he prepared to act.

He could have dropped the man from his saddle without a word; but he was too brave a man to take an advantage even of the outlaw. No, he would give him a warning at least of his presence, and that it must be a fight to the death between them.

The outlaw's gaze was across the river, as he rode along, as though he was looking in that direction for danger, little dreaming that it was so near at hand.

"Hands up, pard!"

The voice of the scout rang out clear as a bell, determined and threatening, and he had his rifle across his arm as he gave the ominous order. Lucifer stood like a statue, facing the river, and the scout had the outlaw within four hundred feet of him, his rifle ready for use.

At the first word the outlaw's horse was reined back suddenly, and first dropping his hand upon his revolver, he then grasped this rifle and swung it round for quick use, wholly unmindful of the command to raise his hands that came from Buffalo Bill.

Buffalo Bill felt that he had done his duty in warning the outlaw of his presence. He had called out to him to raise his hands, with the hope that he would refuse, and refusing, attempt to fight it out, for, as I have stated, he did not wish to capture him and have to carry him to the fort.

The outlaw did just what the scout expected him to do, that is, attempt to fire on him.

He saw that the distance was beyond revolver range, and so he grasped his rifle. The scout was not hurried in his movements. He could have fired at the end of his sentence. But now as the outlaw had his rifle in hand he ran his eyes along the sights and pulled trigger.

The quick movement of the fugitive, however, startled his horse, and as he grasped the rein to restrain the animal, he did so with a jerk on the bit that seemed to madden the beast, as he reared wildly just as the scout pulled trigger.

The bullet sped on, but whether to a target in the horse or his rider, Buffalo Bill did not know, for the rearing animal staggered backward as the leaden mes-

senger sped on its errand, and with a cry of fright almost human in its tones, went over the cliff.

There was a human cry, too, as the rider went down with his horse, still in the saddle, and it came from the outlaw's lips. Over the cliff with a crash went horse and rider, and Buffalo Bill cried:

"My God! they have plunged over together.

"That means the end of the chief of the Red Riders of the Overland."

With the utterance of his words, he spurred forward at full speed, halting within a few feet of the edge of the cliff, leaped from the back of his horse and gazed over.

He saw nothing of the man, but the horse was struggling madly with the swiftly flowing waters.

But the animal lasted only an instant, and was rolled under by the current out of sight, just as the outlaw arose and threw up his arms in a mad struggle for life. Could Buffalo Bill have saved the man's life then he would have done so, for he felt all the horror that comes to the one who looks on helpless to aid, and see a fellow being drown.

A moment passed and horse and rider had disappeared forever from sight. There was no doubt of their death, for the torrent of waters rushed on, and though the scout turned his glass down the stream, they did not rise again.

For a moment Buffalo Bill stood in silence, his fine face saddened by what he had witnessed. Then, with a sigh, he said to his horse:

"The end has come, Lucifer, and we ran the outlaw chief to his death."

Mounting again, Buffalo Bill started off, anxious

to avoid any bands of the retreating Indians who might be in the vicinity. It led a few hundred yards to a ravine, and here it was lost. But some impulse caused the scout to ride down into the ravine, and the rocky surface left no trail.

He held on, supposing that the ravine would lead him out to the cliff trail again, and suddenly came to the river.

There he saw the trail of the outlaw's horse, as it came in view directly at the water's edge.

"Well, I did not know there was a break in the cliff banks along here that one could reach the river by. If the redskins crowd me, I can swim across, though I would not relish such an undertaking. But the outlaw rode into the river here, for it is shallow, and to have gained the cliff where I saw him, he must have come down the river, so I will go up."

With this, keeping close along under the high cliff banks, where there was a sand-and-gravel deposit, and the water was but a foot in depth, he held his way for several hundred yards. Then he came to another chasm in the cliff, and he entered it, the rocky walls towering a hundred feet above his head, and the narrow passageway not five feet wide.

A stream, clear as glass, flowed down the chasm to the river, but here and there was the track of the outlaw's horse, so the scout held on. At the mouth of the chasm where he had turned in he saw, up the river half a mile, landmarks that were familiar, revealing to him the upper ford.

After a ride of a quarter of a mile up the chasm, it suddenly spread out into a veritable bowl, for it was a couple of acres in size, surrounded by precipitous

cliffs hundreds of feet high, and which a squirrel could not climb, the edges all fringed with pines. But the bowl was like a garden of beauty, a bit of meadowland dotted with trees, with a deep, clear pool in it, into which from the cliff above fell a veil-like fall of water.

The scout halted his horse and looked long and earnestly about him. Buffalo Bill, in his surprise, did not dismount from his horse for full ten minutes, but stood gazing about him. Then he saw what surprised him still more. It was a shelter of pine boughs at the head of the dell, and by it were the remains of a camp fire, the ashes still warm.

"Well!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, in surprise, and he at once staked his horse out and began a further search of the place.

There was evidence of some one having spent several days there at least, as the ashes of the camp fire revealed, and the spots fed over by a horse staked out. Going again to the entrance to the little cañon, Buffalo Bill from there again made a detour on foot, but with the same result, so see that there was but one entrance and exit.

Returning to his horse, he mounted and rode down to the entrance to the cañon at the river. There he saw traces of a horse having made a landing on the gravel bar above the mouth of the chasm.

The tracks were still there upon the upper edge of the bar, for there it ended, shelving off into deep water. Going back down the stream, on the bar, the way he had come, Buffalo Bill took in the whole way carefully, and reaching the little ravine, went up it to where he had turned in.

From that point two trails were visible, that of the outlaw's horse going on down the bank, and his own coming to it.

"Why, this looks like the same trail, would be taken for your own tracks, Lucifer, showing apparently that you had come this far, turned and gone back again. This is lucky, for the Indians will see it, following my trail to the river, then here, back to the cliff, and their keen eyes will soon read that the horse went over there. They will think I lost my head, backed you over, good horse, and struck out afoot; but they are mistaken. Now, how on earth did the outlaw chief reach that place from above? He could do it but in one way, and that is in crossing the ford half a mile above, lose his footing and have his horse swept on down by the current to the bar. I hear the war cries of the redskins now, and the shots of the soldiers, so they must be coming on up the trail, either one side of the river or the other. I will take you back to that little valley, Lucifer, and then find out what is going on."

Back to the retreat the scout rode, and Lucifer was unsaddled and staked out to feed, and he seemed greatly to enjoy the chance to crop the green, juicy grass about him.

Then Buffalo Bill stripped off his lower clothing, and, carrying them in his arms, waded along the bar back to the ravine, then up it to the cliff, and thence back to where he had turned off the outlaw chief's trail. Dressing himself again, Buffalo Bill went forward cautiously to reconnoiter. He dared not retrace his way down the trail he had come, until he knew the redskins were not there.

Going up the river, following the trail of the outlaw, his experienced eye told him that the rapid pace at which the horse had been kept had been slackened, and the scout went with greater caution.

Continuing on, he took in the situation between him and the river, and he was glad to see that there was no way of scaling the lofty cliffs and peaks, to get into a position whence one could look down into the little valley where he had left Lucifer.

He did not believe that a human foot had ever trod that little retreat, until the outlaw had found it from having been swept down the river and accidentally hit upon it. A careful reconnoiter showed that the hiding place where he had secured his horse was perfectly safe, as it could not be seen from any direction, unless one was close upon it.

He intended to take no chances of falling into the hands of the retreating Indians, who, he knew, would show him little mercy. Finally, the shooting died away, and Buffalo Bill remained at his retreat all that night.

He had provisions with him in the saddlebags on Lucifer, and he decided to spend the next few days exploring in that vicinity, as the country was new to him, and he made it a business to know every inch, if possible, of the wild country in which he gained his fame as a great scout.

CHAPTER XL.

THE SCOUT'S RETURN.

Late in the evening some days later the watchers at Fort Advance caught sight of a body of men marching toward the fort. It proved to be the expedition led by Lieutenant Worth and Sergeant Fallon, in search of Buffalo Bill, and the whole fort crowded out to meet the newcomers.

Everybody there loved and admired the great scout. And besides that, everybody knew that his loss would be a terrible blow to the army. Once the Indians learned that the great Pa-e-has-ka, as they called Buffalo Bill, was dead, their depredations would break out afresh, for they feared the great scout more than they did a brigade of artillery or cavalry.

And so there were many anxious faces turned in the direction of the party approaching the fort. When the force came nearer and Buffalo Bill's well-known form was not seen among the horsemen, a groan went up from the crowd that had assembled.

And then, when Lieutenant Worth told the story of their unsuccessful attempt to track the scout, every heart sank, for it was clear to every one that there was little hope now of the rescue of Buffalo Bill. Just as that expedition was filing into the fort, a private soldier called out that there was another horseman approaching across the plain.

"And it's Buffalo Bill, too," yelled out a sergeant, who had known the scout for years.

"Either Bill or his ghost," cried Worth, and every eye was fixed upon the approaching figure.

The Scout's Return.

233

Nearer and nearer came the horseman, and at last his face came into plain view in the rays of the setting sun. It was Buffalo Bill, alive and well, and the ringing cheer that went up when he drew his horse to its haunches before the fort, shook the fort to its foundations. Buffalo Bill had eluded the Indians by swimming the river, instead of fording it, and was saved. That night was one to be remembered in Fort Advance, for a great dinner was held in honor of the scout's return, and he was forced to tell again and again the story of his run-down of the Red Hand Rider.

Having accomplished his mission at Fort Advance Buffalo Bill hit the trail for Devil's Cañon, where he was destined to meet with more thrilling adventures.

CHAPTER XLI.

A YOUNG SPORT.

"Who is he?"

"Thet young un yonder thet looks as purty as a gal?"

"Yes."

"He's ther boy sport."

"And who is the boy sport, pray?"

"Don't know a little bit, or no more than he's a all-round good fellow."

"Where did he come from?"

"Don't know."

"What's his name?"

"Don't know."

"What does he do?"

"Gambles a leetle, rides about a heap, shoots game, and has kilt a couple o' men since he has been in Devil's Cañon, while he rakes in ther dust of all them as is fool enough to play with him at keerds."

"He's a dandy."

"That's what he be."

"I'd like to get acquainted with him, Bunco."

"Thet's jist what that big feller thar' is goin' ter git, or I don't know myself, for that boy is gittin' ready ter use his gun, if I knows signs when I sees 'em."

"I half believe you are right, for the man seems to be looking for trouble with the boy."

"He'll git it, never fear."

"Who is the man?"

"One of the worst men in Devil's Cañon, and they do say he belongs to ther band of Silent Slayers."

"Who are they?"

"Don't know; only there is a band o' killers about here thet takes a man's life every now and then in a secret way, and a number has handed in their chips in that way. But nobody knows 'em, only when a man don't do to please 'em he are found dead in his cabin or on ther trail somewhar leadin' to his mine, and a knife is diskivered a-stickin' in his ribs, fer thet is ther way, whoever they be, and thet's why they is called ther Silent Slayers. See?"

"Yes, I see, and this camp of Devil's Cañon appears to be a very tough place."

"Tough is a tender name for it, pard, for it are ther worst community on earth as dwells here, as you'll find out."

"And yet I find that boy here, for he is nothing more than a youth, with a face as handsome and gentle as a woman's."

"Well, he kin rough it with the toughest of 'em, when they riles him."

"Does he seek trouble?"

"You bet he don't. He kinder tries ter slip away from it, until they pushes him too hard, and then he jumps in with both feet. I tell, yer, pard Bill, he are a queer one—thet queer thet I can't make him out, for he's as gentle as a sister in caring for ther sick, nursin' 'em so kindlike, and yet I has seen him dress a awful-looking wound for a man that was knifed, and another as was shot, and never flinch no more than a doctor would; but look at him now, as he's playing keerds, thar, with Red Sam, and you'll see that, though he's takin' ther man's bluster talk mighty

coollike, he hes quietly loosened one of his revolvers in his belt."

"Why, he is a perfect walking arsenal, Bunco, for I see two revolvers in his belt and three knives."

"Yas, Bill, he carries six bowies and two revolvers, not to speak of a derringer or two whar a Chinaman carries a trump keerd—up his sleeve. I tell you, he knows how ter use 'em all, too, fer he gave a exhibition one day jist fer fun, of drawing his weapons and using 'em, fer some one stuck up a tin plate on a tree fer him, and, firing with both hands, he put twelve revolver shots in it at ten paces, two derringer bullets, and stuck them six knives he carries in it, too, by throwing 'em, and all in the time of just thirty seconds, and that meant ther drawing time, ter boot! I tell yer, pard Bill, ther folks 'round Devil's Cañon hev respected him mighty since then, and I does believe he done what he did jist ter let 'em see what he c'u'd do, so they wouldn't crowd him too much, bein' he were a boy—now look thar!"

"Yes, that man you called Red Sam seems trying to force him into a quarrel."

"He does, and I guess he will do so."

"Well, I won't see the boy imposed on by a great overgrown bully like that, and who has his pals with him."

"Don't you chip in, pard Bill, for I tells you ther boy kin take keer of himself—didn't I tell yer so?"

The boy had suddenly risen from his seat and faced his partner, while a revolver, quickly drawn, covered him.

"Red Sam, you are robbing me!" he cried.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN DEVIL'S CAÑON.

My story opens in Arizona in a camp on the line of survey for a railroad into California from New Mexico, and in a locality where, ages ago, lived the Cliff Dwellers, and later the half-Indian, half-Mexican people, who were content to be what they were—nominally cattle raisers, yet, in reality, little better than outlaws.

Devil's Cañon was in the midst of a country well watered, wooded, and where grass grew plentifully, and a number of rancheros were scattered about that vicinity. Then, too, it had become a camp for overland freighters, where gold had been found in the mountains near, where a number of miners had therefore made it their abiding place.

Devil's Cañon was on the direct line of survey across Arizona, and thither had congregated several hundred of as rough a sample of humanity as could be found anywhere, for one-fourth of them were desperadoes, another fourth gamblers, living wholly by cards, and the balance were not much better.

The two men who had been discussing about the youth who had made Devil's Cañon his abiding place were not to be classed with the rest of the community, for one was none other than Buffalo Bill, a man who was not to be found in such a place as that wild camp unless duty demanded his presence there.

He had arrived in the camp at sunset, had found a place to put up, in what was called Wide Awake Inn,

and kept by a man known as Brad Burns, whatever his real name might be, and who was also proprietor of the Sports' Delight saloon next door, which was never closed, day or night or Sundays.

Buffalo Bill had gone to Devil's Cañon for a purpose, as will be told hereafter, and the first man he met was an old pard, who had served under him as a scout—had struck a gold find in his wanderings one day, picked up a bagful of the precious metal, and disappeared. The next heard of him was that he had gone East, but having been buncoed out of all his money, he had to return to the Far West, though not to his old haunts, as he was ashamed to face his former pards.

And at Devil's Cañon Buffalo Bill had found him, calling himself Bunco, as a reminder of his folly, and engaged in no other work than prospecting for another find of gold, with the firm belief that he would strike it rich again before he died, and yet live like a gentleman once more, for he had been well-born, well reared, met with ill success, and had sought his fortune in the West as so many others have done and will continue to do.

Once he had said to Buffalo Bill with not a hint of dialect in his words:

"Some day I hope to be a gentleman again, pard Cody, but as long as I am out in this wild land I am what I am, and the same as the rest in looks and conversation."

And the man with a college education, courtly manners, fine form and handsome face, still young, and with life before him, appeared on a par with those about him, only not a crime ever had been laid at his

door, and with his comrades he had been a manly fellow, true as steel, brave, and liked by all who knew him. Only his intimates knew that he was acting a part, and they wondered what cloud hung over his life, what mystery there was about him.

The young sport whom the two old friends were speaking of, and observing so closely, sat at a table in Sports' Delight saloon, playing cards with three men, who were as hard-looking characters as could be found even in Devil's Cañon.

The four were playing partners, Red Sam and the boy sport against the other two, and they were the losers, too, in the games thus far played, the other couple having piled up big winnings on the table by each man. Somehow the losses of Red Sam and the young sport were all laid at the latter's door by his big partner, who now and then uttered some savage words against him, calling him names and asking him bluntly if he was in league with the others to get his money.

The youth took it all quietly, though there was a dangerous gleam in his eye. That he did not resent the words of Red Sam no one wondered at, for the latter was known as one of the most dangerous men in Devil's Cañon—a bully and desperado, who seemed to enjoy taking human life, for he was always looking for trouble until he had become a terror even in that wild gathering of roughs and bad men.

Large, rawboned, ugly-faced, strong as a mountain lion, quick as a wild cat, with a voice of thunder and a record as a man-killer, Red Sam deserved his name from his deeds as well as from his long red hair and beard.

The young sport was as totally his opposite as it was possible to be. Slight in form, but splendidly built, with thick, jet-black, wavy hair, a face darkly bronzed, but perfectly featured, strong, determined, handsome, yet gentle as a woman, and with a low, strangely musical voice, he seemed like one to cower in terror before the man who was his partner in that game of cards. His slouch hat sat jauntily upon his fine head; his blue woolen shirt, black silk scarf, gray corduroy pants, stuck in top-boots, his weapons, even, were all of the finest material and make—that was his make-up.

But boy that he seemed, not yet eighteen, Buffalo Bill thought, he seemed vastly out of place herding with the hard crowd of Devil's Cañon.

CHAPTER XLIII.

REVOLVERS LEVELED.

Buffalo Bill and Bunco had been seated at a table apart from the others in the Sports' Delight saloon, but they could see the young sport distinctly, and heard above the murmur of voices, for there was half a hundred men in the place, the bold words which he had uttered. They saw his lightninglike act in drawing his revolver, and noted how quickly he had risen to his feet and covered his man before he uttered the bold words:

"You are robbing me, Red Sam."

The big bully was caught off his guard for once. He had roared out his words against the young sport from time to time, had insulted him openly, and had not heard a word in resentment. Those who had seen the sport's behavior upon other occasions wondered at his silence, and supposed that Red Sam had cowed him.

But the boy had played calmly on, watching every play like a hawk, and Bunco had said:

"Yer'll hear suthin' drap suddenly afore long, pard Bill."

Buffalo Bill had been watching the boy's face. It was pale, perhaps, but serene, and the burning light in the fine eyes alone showed that he felt what the bully was saying. But suddenly had come the burst of indignation, the covering of the man with the revolver, and the charge that he was being robbed.

Red Sam knew enough of the hand that held that

revolver not to make any effort to grasp his own. He was covered, and the youth was known to be a dead shot. There was not the slightest tremor in the hand that leveled the weapon, either.

For once Red Sam was willing to temporize. At least until he could get the upper hand or triumph by treachery. So he said, and his voice was no longer a roar:

"Yer accuses me, young sport, because I knows you was playin' agin' me, yer pard, in this game."

"It is a lie! You are secretly the partner of these two men to rob me, for you are their friend, not mine. You asked me to play with you to make up a game, and said we could win big money. I watched you clear, through, and you played into their hands to rob me. You played against me, and the three of you have robbed me of three hundred dollars, and you shall give it back to me, Red Sam. Come, I mean business, and your life isn't worth a cent if you refuse to do what I say."

Now the boy's voice rang through the large cabin, and every man was upon his feet. Other games ended there and then. All saw that there was to be a larger game played, where the stakes were human lives. The boy was aroused, he was on his mettle, and about four-fifths of the men in the saloon knew that his charge was doubtless true.

Many had been surprised to see him play as a partner of Red Sam, while the other two at the table were of the worst desperado stripe. Buffalo Bill and Bunco had been watching the game. They had seen enough to convince them that the assertion was right the youth had made. Both had seen that looks were

passing between the three men, and several times they were sure cards had been slipped under the table from Red Sam to the others to play against his own partner.

There was a moment of deep silence after Red Sam's words, followed by the bold utterance of the youthful sport. His accusation against the other two men fell like a thunderbolt.

Then he covered the boss bully, and yet put his life at the mercy of the other two men he accused. Did he trust in his youth protecting him? Did he trust in a love of fair play in the crowd which would not allow him to be attacked while he held Red Sam under cover?

Whatever it was that prompted him to be so utterly reckless, the other two men determined to take advantage of his having his hands full, and quickly they whipped out their revolvers and leveled them at the youth.

There was no move among the crowd as they did so. Emboldened by this, one of the men blurted forth:

"Now draw yer gun, Red Sam, and squar' it fer yerself and us, fer we has got him dead to rights with our weapons."

"Pardon me if I take a hand in this unequal game, for I have you two covered." /

It was Buffalo Bill who spoke, and he held a revolver in each hand. And each weapon was aimed at one of the men who had so suddenly turned upon the youthful sport.

CHAPTER XLIV.

ON THE EVE OF DEATH.

The sport did not move a muscle at the words of Buffalo Bill. He did not even take his eyes off of Red Sam. His revolver still covered the bully, and he had simply said, with the other two leveled at him:

"They may kill me, Red Sam, but you go first."

The crowd, however, all looked toward this man who had championed the cause of the sport. They beheld one who was a stranger to them, but yet one who had a look about him that was square and plucky. He had "chipped in," and he seemed just the man to maintain his hand. The two men who had their weapons upon the youth could not but turn their gaze upon the speaker. They saw a tall, splendidly formed, handsome man, with a most distinguished air in spite of his border dress.

They saw that though he was not cross-eyed, he yet seemed to be looking at both at the same time. There they stood, with revolvers leveled at the youth, eyes turned upon Buffalo Bill, and his weapons covering them. The youth's revolver covered Red Sam, who did not dare show a weapon.

It was a five-cornered tableau, with death on the instant threatening four of the five. The crowd stood spellbound. It was a grand situation for the lookers-on, if some shots did not come their way. They had never seen its equal before.

Fights they had seen in a crowded saloon, when half a dozen men gave up existence, but such a thrilling

fatal-appearing tableau was new even to the desperadoes of Devil's Cañon. Buffalo Bill, having stepped in to the aid of the young sport, was not a man to let matters hang fire for want of action. He realized that he had taken his life in his hands by doing what he did.

He knew that he was a stranger there, hence would be regarded as a foe by more than half of the men present. Bunco was the only one he knew; but he was well aware that he could depend upon him to the death. He had seen him tried too often before when a scout under him. But Bunco had wished to keep him out of this affair.

He knew but too well just what Devil's Cañon men were. As a stranger he feared that the men would consider Buffalo Bill an officer of the law, and as about four-fifths of the community were dodging justice, he was well aware that they would be only too anxious to have him put out of the way by a bullet fired among others.

But Bunco saw it all coming. He knew that Buffalo Bill was the last man in the world to seek trouble, that he had always avoided it. But then, too, he was not one to see the weak imposed on by the strong. The boy had seemed at the mercy of the desperadoes, and, reading his former chief's face, Bunco saw that he would go to the rescue of the boy. Having done so, he went in to stay, to see it through.

"Come, down with your weapons, both of you, from covering that young man, for I say you were cheats, and I saw you and that man slip cards under the table. You are a trio of rascals, and were robbing the boy."

There was no mistaking this utterance, and the crowd enjoyed it.

"Who is you, and what has you got ter do with it, stranger?"

It was Red Sam who spoke. He had asked the question with a motive. That motive was to have Buffalo Bill turn on him, giving his pards a chance to level at him and kill him. Bunco saw the trap, and his hand crept near the butt of his revolver.

Would Buffalo Bill fall into the trap? No, he was not to be caught like that. He saw through the ruse. Without taking his eyes off the two men he had covered, Buffalo Bill answered:

"My name is William Cody, and I am not ashamed of it, while I take it upon me as a right to defend that brave boy, whom you three scoundrels were robbing and then sought to kill. Come, drop your weapons, or I'll kill you both."

The men hesitated, but they obeyed. The crowd was becoming anxious and nervous.

"Will some gentleman who believes in fair play disarm those two men? Boy sport, keep your gun on that fox, or he'll down you yet," and, without taking his eyes off the two men, Buffalo Bill first addressed the crowd and then the youth.

CHAPTER XLV.

FORCED TO TERMS.

"I'll clip their claws, for it isn't a square deal to see three against the boy, and you did right to chip in, pard."

The speaker was Brad Burns, the keeper of the Sports' Delight saloon, and landlord of the Wide Awake Inn. He was a man that was respected, and also feared, and one who could be as rough as the roughest, any way they pleased, if he was roused to it. All saw when Brad Burns acted that the stranger was gaining ground. He quickly stepped up to the men and disarmed them, remarking:

"You two knew better than to try on a sneak game in my saloon. Now get out, and send a pard for your guns. If you come in here again you'll have to deal with me, so if you intend coming I advise you to go down to the cañon first and pick out your burial lot."

The crowd laughed. Matters looked better. Then some one called out:

"Now, Brad, go for Red Sam."

The one who spoke evidently didn't like the landlord, and supposed he would vent his spite through Red Sam. But the landlord was equal to it, for he said:

"No, the sport's got him covered, and that is not my row. But if Red Sam intends to play thief here, he'll find it can't be done, and I know it."

A faint cheer greeted these words. Some felt that honesty should be encouraged. But the first situa-

tion remained unchanged. Buffalo Bill had lowered his weapons, but the sport still had Red Sam under cover.

The latter was white-faced now. The situation was growing very irksome to him. What would the boy do? Then a thought flashed through the mind of Buffalo Bill.

He had but half done his work, in going to the aid of the youth. If the boy had been robbed, and there was no doubt on that score, the two men whom Landlord Burns had bade leave the saloon had the money.

They had not yet gone out of the saloon, but, with black, malignant faces, were slowly moving toward the door.

"Hold there! Come back, both of you."

Buffalo Bill's voice rang out. There was no weapon leveled at the men, for they had been disarmed by Brad Burns.

But there was a look in the scout's eyes that meant all he said. The men turned at his command, for instinctively they knew that he had addressed them.

"What does yer want?" one of them growled.

"Boy sport, how much money did those men rob you of?"

"Three hundred dollars."

"Hold there! or I'll send a bullet through you, for I saw that."

Others saw it, too. The two men had attempted to hand to a pard near them their money.

"Come back here and lay on that table three hundred dollars!"

"I won't" "I one.

"I won the money," the other replied.

"Obey or refuse. Which shall it be?"

Buffalo Bill's revolvers were out now. Again the two men were covered. And they were cowed as well. Slowly they approached the table, and each reluctantly threw a roll of bills upon it.

"Will you, sir, count that money?"

Buffalo Bill spoke to the landlord. Brad Burns did as he was told, and called out:

"Sixty in this pile, and seventy-five in this."

"Hand out the balance. I mean it."

"I ain't got no more."

"The boy lies."

But Buffalo Bill did not take these answers.

"Come, hand out the rest of that stolen money."

There was no getting around it, and the two men sullenly obeyed, one of them saying:

"We'll even up with you, stranger, when you don't hold ther full hand yer is playin' to-night."

"All right, any time," was the scout's careless reply.

The two men then moved again toward the door, while the crowd once more turned its attention to the young sport and Red Sam. But the crowd were awed by the pluck of the stranger, though only Bunco knew him as Buffalo Bill, chief of scouts for the department of the Platte.

The rest wondered who he was. And all this while, which was only a few moments, though it had seemed so long—an age to some, perhaps—the young sport stood covering Red Sam, the desperado, with his revolver and his hand was as steady as iron; his look as **determined as ever.**

CHAPTER XLVI.

TWO FATAL SHOTS.

All eyes were now upon the young sport and Red Sam. The other affair with Buffalo Bill had thus far passed off without bloodshed. How would this scene end.

"There's your money, boy pard, they robbed you of, when you have done with your man before you," said Buffalo Bill.

Was this a hint for the youth to end the suspense? What could he do? Before the boy could act, before any one could surmise what he would do, there came four shots.

They were fired so rapidly and so close together that it seemed that the four reports were but the echo of one.

The four shots were fired by four men. The two desperadoes had reached the door, and then turned. That Brad Burns had not done his work well, in disarming them, was proven by the fact that each had a smaller weapon in an inner pocket of his shirt.

These, with mutual consent and determination, they had drawn as each man reached the door, which was open. They turned together, each man leveled a weapon at the same instant, and each one had selected his game.

The man on the right had picked out Buffalo Bill for his victim. The man on the left had selected the boy sport as his game. No one had seemed to notice these two men. They were supposed to be out of the

Two Fatal Shots.

251

game. So when they thrust their right hands into their woollen shirts and drew out their concealed weapons, it seemed but two persons saw them.

One of these two was most deeply interested. It was Buffalo Bill. He saw only that the man had drawn a hidden weapon and was about to kill the boy.

So, with lightninglike rapidity for which he has always been noted, he raised his weapon and fired. He was just a second too soon for the other man, whose aim was at the boy sport. But his aim was quick enough and sure enough to save the youth.

His bullet pierced the brain of the murderous desperado, and the aim of the latter was wild, for the convulsive clutch of death upon the trigger had exploded his revolver, and the muzzle was jerked upward. At the instant Buffalo Bill saw the act of the desperado to kill the boy, he did not see that the other man also had a concealed weapon.

He did not see that he had also drawn it, and, more, that his aim was at him. But he was protecting the young sport. Still, there was one to protect him. There was one who did not see the desperado draw a weapon and aim at the sport, but did see his pal thrust his hand into the bosom of his shirt, snatch out a revolver and aim at Buffalo Bill.

And he was one who was marvelously quick on the draw, the aim, and in pulling a trigger. He was a dead shot, too. So he got his shot in just two seconds ahead of the one who intended to kill Buffalo Bill. But those two seconds counted, for when the man drew trigger he was already dead.

His bullet also went up into the roof of the cabin.

And both desperadoes went down together, one on each side of the door. The one who had thus saved the life of Buffalo Bill was Bunco, the ex-scout.

And Brad Burns, the landlord, had seen the little side game, and would have chipped in, only Buffalo Bill and Bunco were too quick.

Thus had the four shots been fired, two men were dead, and the crowd stood amazed, for it was not so easy to see just what had happened. It took but a moment, however, to discover. Then they saw that Buffalo Bill was a quick and dead shot, and that he had saved the life of the young sport. They saw, too, that Bunco, a man whom all liked, but no one knew well—a man who had kept clear of any trouble in the camps—had suddenly shown himself the friend of the stranger, and had saved his life.

He had shown that he was a dead shot, too, when necessity demanded it. Both of the desperadoes had been shot fairly and squarely in the forehead. And all this while the young sport was still keeping Red Sam in dread of his life and under cover of his revolver.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE SPORT'S LUCK.

With the two desperadoes dead, Buffalo Bill and Bunco, standing, as it were, ready to be challenged for their act, and the boss bully of them all, Red Sam, standing in the very face of death, the crowd were beginning to feel that the situation was something they would not have missed for a great deal.

To some it was even enjoyable. To others it showed plainly what Devil's Cañon was capable of in an emergency. Buffalo Bill had fired at one he knew to be an out-and-out scamp, to protect the life of the boy sport, whom he had taken a fancy to.

Bunco had fired to save his friend, the scout. And both stood ready to accept the consequences. But the eyes of the crowd were not upon them. They had acted well their part. Now, what would the boy sport do? He did not keep them long in waiting to find out. Without looking, he knew what had happened. Words about him told him that much. He had not even seen his defender, Buffalo Bill.

His eyes were all for the man confronting him, and who was becoming nervous under the steady stare of that deadly revolver. When the hum of exclamations were over, that followed the four quick shots, the young sport spoke.

"Red Sam, you have shown nerve, and you are in luck that you have not gone on the same trail your pards have just taken. I don't wish to kill you, for I raise my hand against no man that I have not just

cause for doing so. You cheated me, and I caught you at it. You and your pards robbed me, and though I play only for sport, the excitement of the game, I will not be cheated. I have gotten my money back, through the kind interest in my behalf of some unknown gentleman, and I am perfectly willing that you should go."

"Better kill him."

"He'll down you if you don't."

"You'll only turn a snake loose ter bite yer, young sport."

"Shoot him now, and say no more about it."

"No, have a square duel atween yer."

"That's the talk!"

Such were the expressions heard upon all sides. The boy sport did not move. But the eyes of Red Sam were ranging over the crowd to mark those who were expressing an opinion against him.

"No, there has been enough of bloodshed for one night. You can go, Red Sam, for I do not fear you."

Pluckily uttered were the words, and then the revolver was lowered. It did look, just for a second, as though Red Sam was seeking his revolver when the boy sport's weapon no longer covered him. But somebody, just who nobody knew, called out:

"Take care, Red Sam!"

Whatever had been his intention, he checked it. He was glad that he had, for somehow his eyes met those of Buffalo Bill, and he saw then that he would have been a dead man had he attempted to draw his revolver.

He was much delighted for that warning cry that had saved him. But Red Sam knew that he was ex-

pected to say something, and he wished to still get out of the affair with honor to himself, from his way of viewing it.

So he called out:

"I thanks yer fer nothin', boy pard, but ef yer was a man I'd say jist let us settle ther matter in a squar' stand-up fight."

"I was man enough to keep you cowed, Red Sam, for five long minutes, and I would meet you as you say, but I don't wish to kill you."

"Yas, yer backs down now, when it's a square game, but yer crowed mighty big when yer had ther drop on me," roared the desperado.

"No, I accused you of robbing me, and it was proven. Your pals lost their lives, yours I gave to you and I got my money back. Let it go at that."

"I says no."

"What do you wish, Red Sam?"

"A stand-up fight atween us, with weapons in our hands."

"Yes, that's a squar' deal," cried a number of voices.

"Yer can't back down, boy sport, and hang out arter it in Devil's Cañon."

Buffalo Bill seemed about to speak, and, noticing the fact, the young sport cried quickly:

"I will meet you, Red Sam, if you will let me choose the weapons."

A perfect yell of admiration at the sport's pluck greeted these words.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE BOY SPORT AND HIS SECONDS.

The pluck of the boy sport, in thus offering to face the huge and terrible desperado, a giant in strength, and as merciless as an adder, won for him a tremendous round of applause. All eyes were upon him now. But he stood wholly unruffled, and waited for Red Sam to reply.

Every eye then turned upon the desperado. He seemed too amazed at first to speak. But the crowd demanded a reply, and at once. He saw it, and said:

"See here, it ain't no squar' game ter put a boy agin' a man, and so I says let it go as it are."

"No, you were going to kill me, but thought better of it, and then you said I must fight you. Now you say let it stand as it is, and I say no, for if I was man enough to rob you, I am man enough to fight, unless you confess yourself a coward."

At the decision of Red Sam all looked pleased, save a few. Among those few were Buffalo Bill, Bunco, and Brad Burns, the landlord. Then they exchanged glances, and they read each other aright. They did not intend to allow it. But as Red Sam, having urged what he called a square fight, had now been forced to back up his words, and had said he would meet the sport, the latter said pleasantly:

"All right, Red Sam, we'll fight. But I choose the weapons."

"I don't keer what yer chooses," growled the man. Then the sport glanced over the crowd, his eyes rest-

The Boy Sport and His Seconds. 257

ing an instant upon the two dead forms lying by the door, and then upon the table, where his money still lay.

Stepping forward, he picked this up, and, tossing it to Brad Burns, said:

"Landlord, just keep this to deal out to poor fellows who are hard up and need it, or who are sick and in distress."

"I'll do it, sport, and it's just like you, while I know half a dozen it will help," said Brad Burns, and a cheer was given for the youth, whose eyes still roamed over the crowd.

At last they rested upon Buffalo Bill, and, stepping forward, the sport held out his hand, while he said:

"Are you the gentleman who came to my aid?"

"Yes, for I do not believe in seeing a boy roasted by a man."

"Your shot saved my life."

"I hope so."

"And you made them disgorge my money."

"They robbed you, so had to give it up."

"You are a stranger in Devil's Cañon?"

"Yes."

"Then, if you have no business here, take a boy's advice and get out, for it's no place for an honest man."

"Thanks, but I came here to look about, to prospect a little, and I think I shall hang my hat up here a while, as I may strike it rich; at least, I'll have a try at it before I leave."

"I am sorry; but will you do me a favor?"

"If I can."

"I have told this desperado I would meet him."

"I was sorry to hear it, for no man would blame you if you had refused."

"I did not wish to kill him; at least, not until he forces me to do so," and there was a strange significance in the way the last few words were uttered.

"He will kill you, if he can."

"Oh, yes, but that is just where I am determined that he shall not, and I am going to ask you to be my second."

"Certainly; only I urge against your meeting that man, and have a proposition to make."

"Name it."

"Let me take your place."

All looked surprised at this, while Red Sam, who had listened attentively to all that had been said, roared out:

"I'll try it on with you after I've done ther kid up."

"No, I will fight my own battle, but I thank you just the same, sir; and let me tell you that I can take care of myself better than you know."

There was a confidence in the look and words of the youth that encouraged Buffalo Bill, who said:

"Let me suggest, as I am a stranger, that I invite two other gentlemen here to also be your seconds."

"As you please, sir."

"Then I will ask the landlord and this gentleman," and he pointed toward Brad Burns and Bunco.

"I will aid you, sport," said the landlord.

"Count me in, boy pard," added Bunco.

"Now, sir, name your seconds, and we will quickly settle this matter," said Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A SURPRISE.

Red Sam was not exactly pleased with the turn matters were taking. He wanted a draw-and-shoot, rough-and-tumble, knockdown, and drag-out affair, not one where all was arranged.

This looked too businesslike to please him. Then, if he killed the boy, many would be against him, he well knew, and he would get no credit for pluck. He did not like to see Buffalo Bill brought into the affair as a second. There was a look about the scout he feared, a certain calm carriage and a dignity that impressed him.

He did not know who he was. Had he known him as the celebrated border scout and detective in buckskin, Buffalo Bill, Red Sam would have gotten out of the Sports' Delight saloon in double-quick time. Then, too, he had a secret dread of Bunco, whom he looked upon as a mysterious man, too quiet by far for any good in Devil's Cañon.

Brad Burns, the landlord, he had another wholesome fear of, because he was an honest man. But the facts were before him that the three were the boy sport's seconds, and he determined to square matters by picking out the storekeeper and two other men who stood as not of the lawless class.

They would give him standing he felt. So he made the demand upon the three by calling them to his side as seconds. Not one of the three moved, but Bent Tobin, the storekeeper, said bluntly:

"You make a mistake in calling upon me to serve you, Red Sam, for I am not of your kind, and I don't believe the others you name will serve you."

"For what reason?"

"Well, I, for one, don't go in your set."

"Count those my sentiments," said a second one of the three, while the third called out:

"Yes, don't try to mix oil and water, Red Sam, for it don't go."

"I'm one of the few in Devil's Cañon for law and order, and you are dead against both."

"You is too blamed good ter suit me," growled Red Sam, while Bent Tobin said:

"That's a compliment, Red Sam. Take men of your stripe to do your dirty work, for to fight that boy is about as mean a thing as even you could do."

"Ther boy pushes ther fight upon me, whar I'd jist spank him and be done with it."

"Come, get your seconds, if you can find any one to serve you," sternly said Buffalo Bill.

Red Sam calmly looked over the crowd. He had failed to get good men to act for him, so he would now pick out the worst there were in Devil's Cañon. They were all there, good and bad, and the latter predominated five to one. He soon spotted three men, and simply motioned to them. They stepped out without more ado.

"Here's my gang to serve me, stranger, and they is all gents from 'way back, and thar's no slouch about 'em, or goody-good style nuther. Thet one be Pete Dunn, this one are Ben Lucas, and ther third are Doc Stone, all at yer service."

Buffalo Bill nodded indifferently to the men at Red

Sam's introduction, and said, addressing Doc Stone, as the best of the three, where all looked bad:

"My young friend here, whom you know as the boy sport, has decided to give Red Sam satisfaction, and we are to arrange for a meeting between them, and, as the challenged party, we have the choice of weapons. I will select revolvers at ten paces."

"Hold on, sir, please, for revolvers are not my choice," cried the boy sport, to the surprise of every one present.

"What is, then?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"I will fight with no other weapons than those nature has given me—fists."

A loud laugh greeted this announcement, and no wonder. Red Sam gave a rude chuckle, and all were surprised at the daring of the young sport.

Red Sam was considerably over six feet in height, with great, broad shoulders, a bull-like neck, arms of great length and corded with muscle, while his hands were of enormous size, and like iron in hardness. He was well set upon his legs, and weighed some pounds over two hundred, while he was known to strike a blow that would kill a mule.

The young sport was as completely his opposite as well could be, weighing seventy-five pounds less, eight inches less in height, and of a slender, yet compact build. His hands and feet were small enough for a woman, and it seemed as though one blow of Red Sam must kill him.

"You surely do not mean what you say?" said Buffalo Bill.

"Certainly I do."

CHAPTER L.

THE SPORT AND THE DESPERADO.

"That man has been a prize fighter, and it was because he killed a couple of men by his blows that he had to fly, for I've seen him in the prize ring," whispered Doc Stone to the young sport.

"Yes, you cannot stand against him an instant, sport," said Brad Burns.

"I know what I think I can do," was the confident reply.

Buffalo Bill had said no more. He was used to the strangest of surprises, and he had said to Bunco:

"Science and quickness are better than brute strength. I believe the boy knows what he is about."

"As I does," returned Bunco.

So the arrangements were made for the battle with nature's weapons, the youth whispering to Buffalo Bill:

"Stick for a big ring, and to begin the fight with each man in his corner."

This Buffalo Bill did hold out for, and it was agreed upon, Red Sam seeming hardly interested in the affair any longer.

"I will tackle the stranger when I polish the kid off, and it won't be in a prize ring," he muttered so his admirers should hear him.

The crowd was delighted at the prospect of more trouble still. The man and the boy stripped for the fray, or, rather, the boy did, as Red Sam merely took off his weapons.

The sport took off all of his weapons, his boots, his

The Sport and the Desperado. 263

hat, and jacket, and then the comparison between the two seemed ridiculous.

"See that your man strips himself of every weapon, for if he shows any I shall deal with him in a way he will not like," was Buffalo Bill's threatening remark, and Red Sam was seen to hand something else to Doc Stone, as though the scout's words had frightened him.

Then the two took their stands opposite each other, in a ring that had been formed of tables put end to end in the saloon, thus forming a circle. The crowd stood around on the outside, the seconds of the two fighters had a bench to stand on, and the space thus encircled was about twenty-five feet in diameter.

"Are you ready?" called out Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, indeed," glibly said the sport.

"Yas, come, kid, an' git yer spankin'!" said Red Sam, and his admirers laughed.

The "kid" did come, and with a rush. It startled the big man, who quickly made a spring toward him, then threw himself on his guard and made a lunging blow. But up into the air went the boy, higher than the head of the desperado, and then with terrible force his bare feet were driven full in the breast of his antagonist, who staggered backward under the blow.

But the sport was off from him in an instant, before he could be grasped by the half-dazed bully, and then he came with another flying leap and landed right in the face of his big foe. This time Red Sam went down, the crimson flying from his nose, cut lips, and brow. He fell like a log, and the sport stood over him, ready for another spring.

"Knocked out, by thunder!"

"He's kilt him!"

"Yas, he's dead!"

"Ther kid fights with his feet."

"Is he dead, doc?"

Such were the comments from all sides by many. Others stood dazed with surprise. Doc Stone, once a physician before he turned desperado, had been listening to Red Sam's heartbeat.

"No, he's not dead, but that first blow broke his collar bone in two places and knocked him breathless, while the second stunned him, and cut him on the brow and lips, while it bruised his nose and broke out a couple of teeth. Boy, you are a terror."

A yell greeted the words, and the friends of Red Sam bore him out of the saloon and off to his cabin for Doc Stone to work upon, while the crowd ranged alongside of the bar and began to drink.

"Come, kid, and take somethin'!" was an invitation the sport refused scores of times.

But he refused all; no one had ever seen him take a drink or smoke a cigar, nor had heard him utter an oath, but he would play cards, and men called him a terror.

As soon as he drew on his boots and jacket, and put his sombrero jauntily upon his head, he turned to Buffalo Bill, and, thanking him for his services, slipped quickly out of the saloon. The scout accompanied Bunco and Landlord Brad Burns to the quarters of the latter, and when they were seated in what was the best room in Devil's Cañon, Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, Mr. Burns, I wish you to tell me all that you know about that young sport, all that you can tell!"

CHAPTER LI.

A SECRET AMONG THREE.

In answer to the question of Buffalo Bill, Brad Burns took his pipe out of his mouth, and said:

"You know about as much as I do, Mr. Cody, regarding that strange youngster."

"Do you know his name?"

"I do not. And more, I do not believe there is a man in Devil's Cañon who does. To every one he is only known as the Kid and the Boy Sport."

"When did he come here?"

"A year ago."

"From where?"

"No one knows. He just came quietly into the camp one night, well mounted and armed, and set to work."

"Doing what?"

"First he located himself in a cabin in an obscure spot in the hills, just at the head of a little valley, and where there was a small spring. The cabin was built by the Mormons as a stopping place when they followed the trail through here, but it was too far from the camps to suit any one here, and the boy's taking it didn't conflict with any one, so he has lived there."

"Then what did he do?"

"Well, he calls himself a gold hunter, and prospects for ore, I know, while he comes into the camp every night and often gambles, winning far more than he loses."

"He has been in several difficulties?"

"Yes, and come out on top, for he has killed two men to my knowledge, and for just cause. He is a wonderful young fellow, and utterly fearless, for it has been said the Silent Slayers would nip him in his cabin some time, but he shows no fear of them whatever."

"You have talked to him?"

"Often, but he is as silent as a clam about himself. He pays cash for all he gets, and just appears to enjoy the wild life he leads."

"How old do you think he is?"

"I should say, by his looks, seventeen, but by his deeds and experience, twice that."

"And he will not talk of himself?"

"Not one word."

"But he is not one to forget a favor, and all like him because he goes the rounds helping the sick and those in distress all he can. You saw him give me that money to-night?"

"Yes, and it was a most generous act."

"It is his way of doing business, and you may be sure he will never forget the service you rendered him to-night."

"It was but my duty."

"True, but you did it well, and took big chances in doing it. You must look out for Red Sam, though, and also for his three pards, you know, and he has others you do not know, but I will spot them for you, as will Bunco here also, for he knows them all."

"Yes, I think I do," was Bunco's quiet reply.

Then Buffalo Bill asked:

"Now, landlord, what do you know about the Silent Slayers?"

"Nothing."

"You mean that you do not know who they are?"

"I mean that I know that there is a secret band in Devil's Cañon known as the Silent Slayers, from the fact that they seem to be avengers, and kill their victim in a most mysterious manner. A man is found dead with a knife in his ribs, and a slip of paper is pinned on his body, upon which is written in red ink: 'Avenged. The Silent Slayers. No. —.' The number of the victim is given, and thus far they foot up twenty-one victims. Our best men and our worst have been among the list of victims, and so no one can tell why they are killed, or by whom."

"That is strange."

"It is, indeed, and it is causing Devil's Cañon to thin out, for men are moving away, for fear of being secretly slain by these assassins, whom no one can place."

"Do you think the young sport knows anything about these Silent Slayers?"

"How so, Mr. Cody?"

"Could it be possible that he can be in any way connected with them, for Bunco tells me that it has been since his coming to Devil's Cañon the first secret murder by them was committed."

"Bunco is right as to that, but I can hardly believe it possible that the boy knows of these murders, or can be in any way interested in them."

"Nor can I, but you know I wish to get at the bottom of all the facts."

"True, and I will tell you all that I can. As to the Silent Slayers, they are as mysterious as death, and they are unknown to every one, it seems, for we men,

not of the lawless kind, can find no clew to them, and I have been afraid to talk to any one on the subject, fearing that I was conversing, perhaps, with one of the secret band of assassins."

"Well, we three know that we are to be trusted. I have told Bunco I came here for a secret purpose, and brought a letter to you. He is an old friend of mine, and I would trust him with my life—yes, you saw him save me from death to-night. Now, I am determined to find out who these Silent Slayers are, and bring them to justice, as well as discover the fate of the one I came here to find, for that he is dead, I feel assured, and it may be that these assassins are the guilty ones. I like that boy. I don't wish to believe him bad, but I must know just who and what he is, and we three must work secretly, and I believe we will meet with success in the end. Now, you both know me only as a prospector, and that it is not gold that I am prospecting for."

CHAPTER LII.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

The occurrences in the Sports' Delight saloon created a sensation that was not forgotten in a night. Red Sam had met more than his match, not only in the young sport, but in Buffalo Bill, who was at once named "The Man with the Iron Nerve."

Bunco had loomed up, too, out of his usually calm and retiring ways, and, altogether, there had been a decided change in affairs in Devil's Canon, especially as two desperadoes had been wiped out, the pardons of Red Sam. The young sport had gone quickly to his home after the fracas, and his stock had gone up a hundred per cent. Men did not know just how he had done it, but he had made a leap of six feet in height, had dealt two terrible blows with his feet, blows that were bone breakers, and Red Sam had been most effectually prevented from doing further harm, at least for some days.

When he was able to get about again, there was not the slightest doubt, in the minds of those who knew him, that he would again go on the warpath. That there would be trouble between him and the stranger, Buffalo Bill, no one doubted.

Then, too, he would not readily forget or forgive the fact that Bunco had sided with the young sport and the stranger. What Landlord Brad Burns had done all knew would stand, and more, he would not be brought to book for it, as he had a hold upon the wild spirits of Devil's Cañon that not even Red Sam dare go against.

Such was the situation the morning after the affair at the saloon. The stranger was known to have taken up his quarters at the Wide Awake Inn, and it was said that he had come to prospect for gold, and Bunco was reported to have known him before, somewhere farther north, and said he was an all-around good fellow, a skilled prospector, and if paying dirt was to be found about the camp he would unearth it.

As gold finds were scarce, he was just the man the workers of Devil's Cañon wanted, and he was welcomed. Those who did nothing in the way of work saw him start out after breakfast, mounted upon a horse he had bought from Brad Burns, to give his own animal he had ridden there a rest, and they reported that he rode by the cabin of Red Sam.

They had seen him halt there and speak to a man who was seated in front of the cabin smoking a pipe. That man afterward came up to the saloon to get some "medicine" for Red Sam and himself, and he reported that the Man of Nerve had asked him about the lay of the land and the prospects of gold finds, that was all, until he told him that it was Red Sam's cabin, and then he had politely asked how he was.

The man also said that Doc Stone had set the broken collar bone, straightened up the mashed nose, dressed the cut lips and brow, and had otherwise fixed Red Sam up as best he could, and added:

"But he's a wreck to look at. His face looks as though he'd tackled a wild cat, and with his two teeth knocked out, eyes blackened, face cut, and his bad temper, he's terrible, I can tell you. My! but there will be music when Red Sam gets around again, for

he does nothing but look at himself in a glass and cuss, an' you know he's an expert in swearin'."

"Did the Man o' Iron Nerve know 'twas Red Sam's cabin?" was asked.

"Guess not, for he's a stranger in these parts, but thar was a look in his face that told me thet it wouldn't have scared him a little bit if he had."

"Did Red Sam know he was thar?"

"Yes, after he had rode on, and he wanted to take his rifle and go gunning for him, but Doc Stone told him if he'd look at himself in the glass he'd think better of it, and he did; but he would not have let any other man tell him that but doc, for he knows he depends upon him to fetch him around all right. Put me up a pint, Jerry, fer internal use," and the man turned to the bartender, who did as requested.

Armed with the flask, he returned to the cabin, and there sat Red Sam, black as a thundercloud.

"I s'pose all ther fellers hes ther big laugh on me."

"No, they said no man c'u'd fight a feller that had wings, like that boy has, and they hoped you would be about soon."

"I will, and then there will be a few funerals in Devil's Cañon."

"When is ther boys to be buried who were killed last night?"

"Yas, they has got ter be planted, and it's my treat to 'em, I s'pose. Jist fix 'em up a good send-off, git all ther boys ter go who will, and tell them as is curious ter know thet I'll be on hand afore long and give a picnic sich as Devil's Cañon ain't yit seen."

And the man went off to obey instructions and bury the two dead desperadoes.

CHAPTER LIII.

A WITNESS TO A DUEL.

Buffalo Bill rode on his way beyond the cabin of Red Sam, then struck out across the cañon, which was a wide valley, in fact, and made his way toward the lonely home of the youth in whom he had taken such an interest.

He did not care to have outsiders know of his visit to the youth, and so, when aware that he was not far from the cabin, he dismounted, hid his horse in the brush, and, with his rifle slung at his back, started on foot. He had not gone very far, and was making his way up the little vale leading to the lone cabin of the sport, when he heard several shots fired in quick succession.

At once he bounded forward into a rapid run. He felt sure that some of Red Sam's gang had gone to even up matters with the boy sport. As he ascended a rise out of the vale he came upon a strange and thrilling sight.

He saw the boy sport, and he saw a bearded man, whom he recognized as Pete Dunn, one of Red Sam's seconds of the night before.

The man was backing off from the cabin, revolver in hand, and threatening the youth, who was boldly advancing upon him, also grasping a weapon. Who had fired the shots he had heard, Buffalo Bill could not tell.

The sport's back was toward Buffalo Bill, but the desperado saw him, and at once leveled at the youth

A Witness to a Duel.

273

and fired. Instantly the youth returned the shot, and down upon his knees fell the man, but as he did so he showed that he was game by firing a last shot. And that shot hit its human target, for the young sport reeled and fell across the body of his foe, just as Buffalo Bill came upon the scene.

A glance showed the scout that Pete Dunn was dead, and, fearing also that the young sport might be, he dropped down by his side. No, he was breathing. As he raised him in his arms, to bear him to the cabin, the hat of the youth dropped off, and Buffalo Bill saw that he had been wounded in the head. Just above the forehead the bullet had struck, and quickly, and with considerable skill, from experience with wounds, the scout made an examination, and was delighted to find that the bullet had cut along under the scalp for several inches, and then made its exit, passing out through the crown of the sombrero.

He bore the youth to the cabin, and, placing him by the spring, began to bathe the wound and the head and face, to revive him. To his joy he saw soon that the youth was returning to consciousness, and before long he opened his eyes, fixed them upon the scout, and, after a moment, said:

"It is you, sir?"

"Yes, your friend of last night."

"But Pete Dunn came here to kill me."

"Yes."

"He fired three shots at me as I went out of the cabin and ran, supposing he had killed me, but he did not hit me, though he came very near it."

"And then?"

"I sprang for shelter, and then ran out with my

revolver to fight him, for I was unarmed at first, and going with a bucket to get water from the spring."

"He had evidently been lying in wait for you to come out."

"That was just it, sir."

"And you went after him?"

"I called out to him to halt and have it out, and he seemed frightened, supposing I was dead."

"But he halted?"

"Yes, and we had it out, for I am sure I killed him, and when on his knees, falling, he gave me this wound. It came pretty near finishing me, too."

"It did, indeed."

"But how did you get here, sir, and in the nick of time to help me?"

"I rode out here to see you."

"To see me?"

"Yes."

"Can I do anything for you, sir, for I most gladly will?"

"We will talk of that later. Now, if you have a handkerchief I will dress your wound, as I have some arnica with me in my saddle. I will go and fetch my horse."

This the scout did, and when he came back the youth handed him a clean and fine cambric handkerchief, on one corner of which his quick eye detected the initials:

"L. L."

But Buffalo Bill said nothing about the letters, and set to work to dress the wound with a skill past experience had given him.

CHAPTER LIV.

GETTING ACQUAINTED.

When he had finished dressing the wound, Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, how do you feel, pard—by the way, what is your name?"

"Call me Sport, if you will," was the quiet answer.

"All right, Sport."

"Does your wound pain you?"

"It feels sore, but I don't mind that, for I have been accustomed to hard knocks."

"You don't look it."

"Appearances are deceitful often, you know."

"Why, I half suspected you of being a girl," and Buffalo Bill looked the young sport fixedly in the eye.

"But I am not, and God pity the girl who would have to do what I do," was the sad reply.

"You certainly know how to take care of yourself."

"Well, I have had to do so from force of circumstances."

"Where did you learn that leap and blow with your feet?"

"I have been an athlete from babyhood, I may say."

"You used Red Sam up pretty badly."

"I had to, for he had a knife in his shirt, as I knew, and he had threatened to cut my ears off to mark me, as a man whispered to me he had overheard him say so. I was therefore harder with him than I intended to be, though he certainly deserved no mercy, for he's a very bad man, Mr. —, Mr. —. I forget the

name you called yourself by last night; in fact, hardly heard it."

"Cody; but call me simply Bill."

"Cody, and Bill."

"See here, I have heard of a man by the name of William Cody, who was known as Buffalo Bill, and is a famous scout and Indian fighter. I have much admired him."

"Yes?"

"Yes, I have. Do you know him?"

"I have met him."

"Where?"

"Up in the Northwest."

"Are you Buffalo Bill?"

"Why, do you suspect me of being Buffalo Bill simply because my name is Cody?"

"Well, many people bear the same name, it is true, but you have another claim to the title of Buffalo Bill other than your name."

"What is that?"

"Your pluck, your looks, your face being stamped with heroism."

"You are so complimentary I must acknowledge my identity."

"Then you are Buffalo Bill?"

"I am."

"I am glad to meet you."

"I have often hoped I would do so. But if you are Buffalo Bill and here in Devil's Cañon, you are not here, as I heard last night, as a gold hunter."

"You don't think so?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Well, that is not your calling, and, knowing you now as I do, I feel sure you are here for some secret-service work, such as hunting deserters from the army, or other bad men who have been guilty of some crime."

Buffalo Bill laughed and replied:

"Well, you are a pretty clever youth, I may say."

"Thank you."

"Suppose I tell you that I am not to be known here as Buffalo Bill, as I am here on secret service?"

"Well, I'll not betray you, sir."

"I believe that."

"But now, as you have identified me, let me see if I cannot find you out."

"That will be impossible."

"Why?"

"I am no one to find out, in the first place."

"I beg to differ with you."

"I am but a boy, for I am not yet twenty, though near it, but look younger than I am."

"Yes, I supposed you were about seventeen."

"No, I am nineteen, though I have gone through enough to make me look much older."

"You will tell me about yourself?"

"No, not now."

"When?"

"Perhaps some day. But I can help you here, for I know this country perfectly."

"You may; but what is your calling?"

"I am a hunter."

"What are you hunting for?"

"Well, gold, say."

"That is not all."

"Why do you think so?"

"Some other motive than to find gold brought you here to this wild land."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

"Well, I am like you, on a trail I do not wish known."

"You are prospecting for gold, and something else in particular, and so am I, let me admit, and if I can help you I will gladly do so, for you have already helped me more than I can ever repay."

"We'll let that go."

"But tell me, why did that man, Pete Dunn, seek to kill you?"

"Ah, I had forgotten him. It was because he was one of Red Sam's pards, I suppose; but do you know we must look after that body, as it would cause some trouble if found there, and I am not looking for more trouble just now, as I have plenty on my hands," and the sport's face wore an anxious look, the scout noticed.

CHAPTER LV.

A TELLTALE MARK.

Going out of the cabin with the scout, the sport led the way to where the body of Pete Dunn lay, just as it had fallen. While in the cabin, Buffalo Bill had noticed almost every object.

It had two rooms, one used as combined kitchen and eating room, the other to sleep in. There was a cot bed there, and the blankets were good ones and clean.

Some clothing and a hat or two hung upon the wall, and there were a rifle and shotgun in addition to the weapons the youth carried. There were also extra revolvers and knives, a saddle, bridle, ax, hatchet, and pick and shovel.

The cooking utensils were plentiful and well burnished up, and the table was white and clean.

In fact, all about the cabin indicated a neat inmate. Without the cabin, in the rear was a shed for a horse, the animal, a wiry roan pony, being staked out near, feeding.

"You live here all alone?" suggested the scout.

"Yes, with Whalebone, my pony."

"Don't you get lonesome?"

"Well, no; I am more contented alone in my cabin than with such company as I find at Devil's Canon. They are a bad lot, ain't they?"

"About as tough as I ever saw."

"But here is your enemy."

"Yes."

"You shot him through the heart, from this wound."

"I aimed to do so. What was he?"

"Gambler and hard citizen in general, and that's saying nothing of the dead victim."

"You play cards yourself a little?"

"Yes, when I have a motive for doing so."

"To win money?"

"No, I care nothing for the money; in fact, I give all I win at cards away to those who need it more than I do. But see here."

The young sport had taken a slip of paper from a pocket of the dead desperado, and held it up.

"What is it?"

"This slip of paper."

"What does it mean?"

"Here is a pin, you see, and on the paper is written: 'Avenged! The Silent Slayers.'"

"Bunco told me something of a secret band of murderers."

"Yes, they have done a great deal of deadly work, and this is the badge they pin on their victims. Yes, here is the number twenty-two, and that was intended for me, I am sure. I have suspected Pete Dunn of being one of the band, and this is proof, for see, here is the knife that was to go with it, and it bears the number also, you see, twenty-two."

"You are right, and you took it from his pocket?"

"Yes, with this slip of paper."

"That tells the story."

"It does to me. He came here to kill me, and ran off, thinking he had wounded me, and intending to come back after I died and fasten this telltale badge on me to have it known how I met my death. Now,

what shall I do with this body, for I do not wish it known that I killed him, as it will cause trouble, which I am anxious to avoid just now."

The youth looked puzzled, and Buffalo Bill, after a moment of thought, said:

"Let us put it upon the Silent Slayers."

"How?"

"Where does he live?"

"Over in the range, two miles from here, by a claim he pretends to work, though I do not believe he has dug out of it an ounce of gold in all."

"Does he work the mine alone?"

"Yes."

"And lives alone in his cabin?"

"No, a pard lives with him, but he runs a saloon over in the camps."

"And where is that pard now?"

"At his saloon, I think."

"Very well, leave it to me and I'll relieve you of all responsibility about this body."

"But that will not be right in me."

"Oh, yes. I'll carry the body to the mine and place it there, and put this paper and knife on it, so it will look as though he had been knifed, where your bullet cut its way. The body will be found by his pard, and the Silent Slayers will get a setback that will surprise and worry them, while you come over to the Sports' Delight to-night, if you feel able."

"Oh, yes. I'll be there, and this will be a good one on the Silent Slayers, to do as you say; but suppose you are seen with the body?"

"I'll take all chances, and if I am, I'll simply say the man went out to kill and was not quick enough."

CHAPTER LVI.

SECRET WORKINGS.

Buffalo Bill showed his training as a plainsman in making his way to the home of the dead desperado and most skillfully covering up his tracks. As he rode along he pondered over all that the boy had said, and had become convinced of one thing, that he was in no way connected with the Silent Slayers.

But he did believe that the sport knew something about this mysterious band of murderers—perhaps really more than any one else outside of the secret league. He had noticed the unwillingness of the youth to tell who he was, but felt sure that it was not on account of any crime of which he had been guilty.

He had also recalled that he had hinted at what he had passed through, and that he had said he was in Devil's Cañon for a purpose, and also that he played cards for a purpose, and not taking his winnings for himself, had given the money to those who needed it more than he did. All these things the scout thought over, and then he said to himself:

"Well, we shall become acquainted, for if I am not mistaken, he is the very one I need to help me in my work."

After a roundabout trail, Buffalo Bill came to the cabin of the dead desperado. It was hidden away in a cañon, with signs about it that work had been done all about there in search of gold.

It was on the banks of a small stream, and the tools of the miner, if so he might be called, stood

where he had left them when last at work. The cabin door was closed, but not locked, and there was no one there.

Taking the body off the horse, Buffalo Bill stretched it out upon the floor, as though it had just fallen there, upon receiving a death wound. His revolvers were loaded, when the shots had been fired at the young sport, and the weapons were placed in his hands.

Then the knife was put upon his breast, stained with blood, and the slip of paper was pinned upon his breast. His belt of money, and all else were left untouched, and, closing the door, the scout mounted his horse, which he had left standing in the little creek to cover up his tracks.

He had approached by way of the creek, so that there was no trail to follow, and going back to the range, he continued on a wide circuit, not caring to return to the camp until later. It was late in the afternoon when he reached the Wide Awake Inn, and Landlord Brad Burns greeted him.

"I was anxious about you, Cody, for I tell you this is the worst community it was ever my misfortune to dwell in."

"Oh, I'm all right, landlord; but there has been trouble."

"Again?"

"Well, Pete Dunn got himself into a scrape."

"Who with?"

"It's a secret, you know, but I wish you to keep about your saloon as much as you can and watch all hands when the report comes in that Pete Dunn has been killed by the Silent Slayers?"

"Do you mean it?"

"Well, call it so, anyhow, for he'll have their badge on him, knife and all."

"Where is he?"

"In his cabin."

"And dead?"

"He couldn't be more so."

"Where was his pard?"

"In the camp, I guess."

"Yes, this is his day on duty, and he'll find him when he goes out to supper, and then report it, and it will create a stir."

"I wish to be on hand to see just how much of a stir, and Bunco must also, for you know a great deal can be learned sometimes by just watching the faces of men when taken by surprise, and I feel sure that the Silent Slayers will be surprised when they know, or think they do, how Pete Dunn died."

"Well, Mr. Cody, you know your business and just what you are about, and I will be guided by you, for I have confidence in you. But I have something to tell you."

"Yes?"

"The boy hurt Red Sam more than at first appeared."

"Yes, a pard of his told me he was a wreck."

"And he seems to bear more ill will toward you than against the boy."

"That is all right."

"I have it from good authority that he intends to keep quiet until he gets perfectly well, and then come out boldly against you."

"I shall meet him as he may desire; but will not be

idle meanwhile, for perhaps I may be on the warpath after him before he fully recovers."

"Then you have some clew by which you can in-snare him?"

"Not as much as I could wish, but if he is not one of the Silent Slayers, then I am very much mistaken."

"Well, you may be right, but have you seen the boy sport?"

"I have, and he'll be on hand to-night, though I must not be too friendly with him in public."

"Now, I'll go to Bunco's claim and look him up and post him."

CHAPTER LVII.

BUFFALO BILL'S PLAN OF ACTION.

The claim of Bunco was down the cañon. He worked it by himself, and now and then was rewarded by finding a handful of paying dirt. If he got more he did not make it known to any one, or at least to the public of Devil's Cañon. He worked hard, and was trying to build up a fortune again.

Buffalo Bill walked through the camp this time, leaving his horse at the Wide Awake Inn. The men who saw him pass eyed him with considerable interest, and there was much talk about him. With a number of men in the camp he had already rendered himself popular by his acts.

With others he was a cause of dread. As a stranger, he was suspected of being there for no good to many who dwelt in Devil's Cañon. A few, in fact, decided to lie low until it was found out just what his game was.

"Somebody will bring him up with a sudden turn," said one.

So it went around the camp, the wonder increasing as to just why that good-looking stranger had put in an appearance at that time at that hard hole. Buffalo Bill found Bunco hard at work with pick and shovel.

"Ho, pard Bill, glad to see you. Come in and have a pipe, for you know I keep nothing strong to give you."

"Thank you, Bunco, I just dropped in for a minute for a little talk. How is luck?"

Buffalo Bill's Plan of Action. 287

"Better than I let it be known, pard, for this hole is not so nearly worked out as the lazy fellow I bought it from thought. No, it pans out fairly well, with a steady improvement, and I may get another fortune; but next time I'll be less a fool than I was before. Why, Bill, I deserve all I suffered for being such a greenhorn as to squander my fortune on others."

"We learn by experience, Bunco; but I want you up at Sports' Delight early to-night."

"I'll be there; but is there to be more trouble?"

"I hope not. Still, one cannot always tell in a country like this just what to expect. You see, Pete Dunn will be found dead in his cabin by his pard, Hal Hastings, when he goes home for supper."

"He's no loss—just the kind that we called in last night."

"But Hastings will find that there is a knife on his breast, a wound, and a slip of paper saying as much as that the Silent Slayers did the work."

"Well, you surprise me, for my idea has been that he was one of that gang."

"Well, he may be, and it is just to watch the surprise of the men when they hear of it that I want you at the Sports' Delight."

"I'll be on hand."

"Landlord Brad Burns will be there, and so will the boy sport."

"You have seen the boy, then?"

"Yes, and had a long talk with him."

"Well, I remember now you were wont to give us surprises, pard, when I was a scout under you at Fort Hays, and it is just like you to call in Pete Dunn's

chips when he gave you cause. Yes, it is just like you, pard."

"But I did not kill him, Bunco."

"Then who did?"

"I'll tell you all later; but I have seen the boy, and I believe matters are shaping to get my work through here much quicker than I thought."

"I hope so, for as long as you remain in Devil's Cañon I shall be anxious about you."

"And how about yourself, Bunco?"

"Oh, I don't count. I just go on in the even tenor of my way, and have no trouble with any one, while you are already suspected as having come here with a slipknot around somebody's neck."

"Well, I was the cause of bringing you out last night in a way that may cause you trouble."

"No, it was the boy sport, Bill, and I did but my duty in killing the fellow before he could draw trigger on you."

"You know I appreciate it, Bunco."

"Oh, yes; I know that, as I do that you have saved my scalp half a dozen times; but here I am talking in the old way, because I am with you, an' it don't go here, pard, so I must drop into ther border lingo agin'," and Bunco went on to speak in the frontier dialect the few minutes more that Buffalo Bill was at his cabin.

Back to the Wide Awake Inn for an early supper went Buffalo Bill, and soon after he was in Sports' Delight saloon, where he discovered that the boy sport and Bunco had arrived before him.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE NEWS IS HEARD.

The Sports' Delight saloon began to fill up early, for after supper the men commenced to congregate there, to gossip, drink, gamble, and to idle away the early hours of the night. The young sport soon found a man to play cards with, and they were deep in a game, while Bunco sat at a table alone, smoking his pipe, as was his wont.

Landlord Brad Burns was there, with an eye upon all, and Buffalo Bill was seated at a table talking to two very hard-looking customers. Suddenly there was heard without voices raised in an excited way, and the next instant Hal Hastings, the saloon keeper, sprang into the saloon, his face white and manner unnerved as he called out:

"Pards, my friend Pete Dunn has been kilt dead in our cabin. I found him thar when I went home ter supper, and ther shock nearly upset me. But, pards, who does yer think did ther deed?"

He looked over the crowd as he uttered the words, and every eye was upon him. The saloon keeper was not an unpopular man in Devil's Cañon, while Pete Dunn, his partner, had been.

The worst said against him was that he was Dunn's friend. But the two were not partners, really, though they occupied the same cabin together. The saloon keeper's life had been once saved by Dunn, and the latter had been invited to make his home with him and work his mine on shares.

As the one had the saloon, Pete Dunn was generally set down as the owner of the claim. With his partner the saloon keeper arranged his hours of work, one day on and one day off of duty, with both serving their customers when business was brisk in the evenings.

But the Sports' Delight saloon was the one of the camp doing the great bulk of business, and where ten men congregated to one in the other places. So the comrade of Pete Dunn had rushed right to the Sports' Delight to make known the fatal news, knowing he would find there about half the people in the camp.

His tidings were received with a start by many. This secret assassination of a man in his home awed them, where half a dozen men might be killed in a saloon and not create more than a flurry.

"Tell us about it, pard," said Brad Burns.

In response the saloon keeper told his story.

"Pards, I ain't got over ther shock yit. Yer see, Pete saved me from death once, and though many here didn't like him, I did, and I shared my cabin with him. We was good friends and always talked at supper time when we wasn't busy. Well, I goes to my cabin after knocking off work, and, though Pete always has supper ready, I didn't think nothin' at seeing the door closed, and no smoke coming out of ther chimney, for I thought as how he were with his pard, Red Sam, ther sport done up so bad last night, fer I heerd all about it, and they do say it was beautiful, and how he just done it. Ther fellers I heerd talk about——"

"But to Pete Dunn's death, pard, and never mind the sport and Red Sam!" broke in Brad Burns.

"Oh, yes, as I was a-telling ye, I opened the door, and yer c'u'd hev knocked me down with a feather, for thar lay Pete, dead. And more, he had been murdered, for laying on him was a knife and slip of paper, ther latter tellin' how ther Silent Slayers hed done ther work."

A perfect yell went up at this startling information. Men here and there sprang to their feet, and exclamations broke from many lips, while half a dozen voices broke out with:

"It ain't so.

"Ther Silent Slayers didn't do it!"

The eyes of Buffalo Bill, Brad Burns, Bunco, and the sport were busy. They were taking in the whole situation. Their eyes were upon the men who asserted the innocence of the Silent Slayers.

"I tell yer they did, fer their knife was thar, and ther slip of paper tellin' thet they was avenged. Yes, pards, it's only a third of a mile, so come to my cabin and see fer yerselves thet ther Silent Slayers done ther deed, fer it ain't dark yet."

There was a move of many as though to go, but Brad Burns called for order, and said:

"Pards, this killing done by the Silent Slayers is getting to be too frequent. Pete Dunn was a rough one, but he was a man in our midst, and his death thus must not be passed over. We must stand together in this matter and find out just who are the men who belong to this secret band. I say, therefore, that we must go about it in an orderly way, and as you have been pleased to make me a leader in Devil's Cañon, I will appoint a jury of six men to return with our pard here, turn the effects in the cabin over to

him, for I guess he owns about all there is, and to see just how Pete Dunn did die, and discover, if possible, the causes that led to his death."

There was a chorus of cheers at the words of Brad Burns, but a few wished to go as a crowd. These were frowned down, however, and the landlord appointed six men to accompany the saloon keeper back to his cabin and investigate. Others wished to go along, but Brad Burns was firm, and in refusing he "spotted" those who were most urgent, and they were the ones who had said the Silent Slayers had not killed Pete Dunn.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE "JURY'S" REPORT.

Buffalo Bill had watched all with an eagle eye, but in silence. As a stranger he had taken no part in the affairs of the camp. Glancing at the boy sport, he saw that the news did not seem to impress that cool youth in the slightest that Pete Dunn was dead, and had been murdered by the Silent Slayers.

The scout also saw that Bunco, in his quiet way, was taking all in. The plan of Brad Burns had pleased the scout. He saw that the landlord was acting with a fixed purpose, and more, he was sure that he knew what it was, and they were in perfect accord.

The six men had been selected among those who were the best of the dwellers in Devil's Cañon. Not one of the loud criers against the Silent Slayers being the murderers of Pete Dunn had been selected. When several of these started to go with the "jury," Brad Burns called out that he felt the crowd would uphold him in saying only those he had picked out should go.

This the crowd did with a yell of approbation. But as two men still attempted to leave the saloon, Brad Burns halted them in no uncertain tones.

"See here. The men of Devil's Cañon have selected a jury to investigate this murder, and if any one not appointed dares to go, I shall hold him up as a suspected person. Let them beware, for this Silent Slayer work has got to be put down. Do you all understand?"

It seemed that they did, for the malcontents dropped in their seats, when Doc Stone said:

"I'm going to see my patient, Red Sam."

"He will keep until after we know about this jury's report," answered Burns, and he continued:

"Remember, we are acting now for the safety of all, for no man's life is safe with the Silent Slayers at work in our midst. The man who fights against our purpose will have to answer for it."

The roar of assent that greeted this showed the malcontents that they dared not attempt to leave the saloon, and the jury departed, led by the saloon keeper.

Then the games were resumed, and all went on as before for a while. Believing himself unnoticed, Ben Lucas, one of Red Sam's seconds of the night before, quietly slipped out of the saloon.

"Hands up, there!"

He found himself covered by a man who stood just outside the door, and he quickly obeyed, for a rifle was leveled at him.

"I was going to the Golden Nugget saloon, landlord, for I has a engagement to play a game thar," he said, recognizing Brad Burns.

"I could report you to that crowd within as a suspicious character, one who might belong to the Silent Slayers, but I will not this time. Get back into that saloon, quick!"

Ben Lucas obeyed with an alacrity that was amazing, and when he had dropped into the first seat he came to, he looked over toward Doc Stone and several others, and strange glances passed between them.

There were three in that saloon who saw those significant looks, had seen the man hold a few whispered words with several others, and then slip out.

They were Buffalo Bill, the boy sport, and Bunco.

But the three knew that Ben Lucas would find Brad Burns just outside, and the way in which he returned white-faced into the cabin assured them. In an hour's time the jury returned.

The spokesman of the six made his report, when Brad Burns came into the saloon from the little room back of the bar.

"Well, Pard Wooten, what is your report?" asked Brad Burns quietly.

"We found all as was reported by Jerry, sir, and there had not been a thing taken from the cabin, and Pete Dunn's belt of gold was about his waist, also his weapons. Upon his breast lay a knife and this slip of paper. Here they are."

He handed over the things named, which Brad Burns held up to the view of all, and then placed on the table by him.

"The wound was in Dunn's breast, and that the Silent Slayers had done the work was our unanimous opinion, for it is just as they have done twenty-one times before. Whoever dealt the blow must have been an unsuspected friend of Dunn, for his weapons had not been drawn, no charge was missing from his revolver, and it looked to us as though he had been taken wholly unawares, and that, to our minds, proved that he held no dread of harm against the man who murdered him.

"There was no trail near the cabin, sir, and the whole affair was as mysterious as the twenty-one other murders of the Silent Slayers of Devil's Cañon."

CHAPTER LX.

A PLOT OVERHEARD.

All had listened with the deepest attention to the report of the jury of six, and when the spokesman had finished, Brad Burns said:

"Pards, you heard what your comrades say, and the death of Pete Dunn makes the twenty-second man who has been killed by the Silent Slayers. It now is for us to keep our eyes open to discover just who these men are, for I tell you frankly that there are members of that band of murderers now listening to me, now in our midst. If they were not those we deem our friends they could not do the work they do. They have a purpose, too, in their red deeds which we do not know, cannot fathom, but it is for us to get at the bottom of their deviltry, and when we find one of them, hang him, and so on to the end. I have no more to say to-night, except that I desire a few words with the jurymen in my office. If I have demanded that you remain here until the jury reported, it was for the good of all. Now you are at liberty to go and come at will."

The words of Brad Burns were generally received with applause, for the deeds of the Silent Slayers were beginning to come home to all of those who were not really members of the band.

"All I have to say to you, pards," said the landlord heartily, as the jury filed into his office, "is that you pass out of that door, and, as you can arrange it, follow those who go to the cabin of Pete Dunn, and

A Plot Overheard.

297

report to me who they are. Do not let them suspect you are watching them."

The six men passed quickly out of the office, and soon after Brad Burns entered the saloon once more.

He walked over to where Buffalo Bill sat, and the two entered into ordinary conversation. Bunco had left the cabin, and the boy sport was just ending up his game with the hard citizen with whom he had been playing, and from whom he had won quite a little sum of money. Tossing it on the table before Burns, he said:

"Put that with the other, landlord, for the benefit of those in need. Good night, for I am going home."

He passed out of the door, while Buffalo Bill arose and accompanied Brad Burns into his office.

The moment he entered, however, he said:

"I'll join you later in the hotel," and with this he slipped out of the office and disappeared.

Once outside the boy sport walked quickly away up the cañon, and was lost in the darkness.

Mounting his pony, for he always rode in at night to the camp, the young sport rode to a position beyond the settlement and came to a halt. He drew into the shadow of some timber, and had waited for perhaps half an hour, when he saw a man coming rapidly toward him. And the man was carrying a bundle.

"Ho, pard, are you there?"

"Yes, sir."

"I only caught your word to wait for you.

"What is up?"

"I heard one of those fellows in the saloon mention your name and say:

"We'll wait at his cabin.'"

"Ah! that means that I am booked for the happy hunting grounds, Mr. Cody."

"About that way, I took it."

"Bunco will be here in a minute, and see, I have brought a bundle here which we can dress up to appear to be yourself, and we can tie it to your saddle and then follow your pony to your cabin and watch results."

"Good! We will give them a surprise party. But who are they?"

"They are men whom I spotted, among others, as belonging to the band of Silent Slayers."

"I got down six, Mr. Cody."

"And I seven."

"And Bunco was watching, too."

"Yes, and Landlord Burns, also, and we'll see how our reports tally, for I took the men whose faces revealed their guilt, as well as their actions."

"That is the way I picked them out—here comes Bunco."

Just then Bunco appeared, and he had with him several lariats, a sombrero, coat, and pair of boots.

Buffalo Bill had brought a roll of blankets, and they soon had a very respectable-looking man dressed up and mounted on the boy sport's horse.

"I just caught your words, Pard Bill, to get a rig to make up a dummy man, and you'd find the material for the body," said Bunco.

"Yes, I felt sure three of those fellows determined to entrap the boy sport here to-night at his cabin, and thought it best to use a decoy. Now, they left some time before sport did, and the fellow you were playing cards with, boy pard, was in league with them,

for, though losing his money, he kept urging you to remain until a certain time, when he knew that his pals could get to your cabin ahead of you. I watched the whole plot, and do not think I have made any mistake."

"I'll bet you haven't, Pard Bill!" said Bunco.

"Now, sport, your horse is trained, you told me, so let him go on ahead, when Bunco and I have been gone long enough to get to your cabin. You follow behind your pony, and keep out of sight when you get near your cabin. If they are there, they'll show their hand when your pony arrives, especially as they will suppose you are asleep when you do not dismount. When they show their game, Bunco and I will show that we hold trumps."

CHAPTER LXI.

THE DECOY.

When the roan pony belonging to the boy sport started up the trail at a walk, any one passing him in the darkness would have supposed that it was the youth that was mounted upon him, so well had the dummy been made. It sat upright in the saddle, boots in the stirrups and all.

At first the sport allowed the pony to keep just the length of a lariat ahead of him, until he taught him just what was wanted of him. Then he took off the lariat, and the well-trained animal faithfully kept the same distance ahead.

Buffalo Bill and Bunco had walked rapidly on toward the cabin of the boy sport, keeping as much off the direct trail as was possible, for the latter knew the country well and acted as guide. Arriving in the little valley that led up to the cabin, they advanced with the greatest caution, flanking the little home, and gaining the rear, crept up to the shed of the pony in the rear.

There they concealed themselves, and waited in grim silence, for they now knew that the sport's foes were on hand. Buffalo Bill had not been wrong. There were men in the front of the cabin, waiting for the return home of the youth. Their voices were heard by Buffalo Bill as they talked in low tones, evidently in hiding against the dark cabin.

Distinctly, after waiting for a quarter of an hour, the two pards on the watch heard:

The Decoy.

301

"Thar he comes! Lie low, now, and jump onter him ther moment he gits off his horse. I'll do the knife act, and they'll see that threats don't skeer off ther Silent Slayers."

Buffalo Bill and Bunco were not twenty feet from the assassins in hiding. The hoof falls of the pony had been heard, for it was too dark to have seen the horse and his rider. Up the little valley came the pony at a walk, and soon drew in sight of the three watchers, for there were that number.

Nearer and nearer came the decoy rider, and the pony walked straight up to the cabin door and came to a halt. But the rider did not dismount. The assassins decided from the bowed head and silence that the rider was asleep, so with one accord they leaped out from the dark shadow of the cabin and seized, not the boy sport, but the decoy!

There was a dull thud as a sharp knife was driven with force into what was supposed to be the body of the boy sport! Then two bright flashes revealed the scene for an instant, and before the reports had died away, two men lay prostrate upon the ground. With a yell of terror the third had bounded away in flight, when there came a swishing sound in the air, a lariat noose settled over his head, and he was dragged violently to the ground, just as Buffalo Bill came bounding after him like a deer.

The boy sport had caught the man in his flight most cleverly!

"Well done, boy pard. I almost feared he would get away," and the scout had the man by the throat now, as he knelt over him, and his revolver muzzle was in his face.

"It is Doc Stone!" said the boy sport.

The man was silent, feigning to be stunned by the fall. But the prick of a pin in Buffalo Bill's hand quickly brought a yell of surprise and pain from him.

"See here! No playing possum with me. Get up and come on, for we want you. Boy sport, just light up in your cabin, and we'll see what game is lying yonder under Bunco's care."

The weapons of the man were taken from him, and then the scout led his prisoner to the cabin, where the sport soon had a light. The other two were brought in, both dead, and placed upon the floor, and Bunco said quietly:

"Ben Lucas and Barney. Two of a kind and pards of Red Sam. Doc Stone, you have gotten into pickle."

"What has I done?" asked the prisoner, who was terribly scared, as could be seen.

"Nothing, for we were too quick for you. But we wish to have a talk with you, and unless you wish to hang before daylight, you had best do some quick talking," said the scout.

"I don't know nuthin'!"

"Now, these two dead men came here with you to kill this youth. You are all members of the Silent Slayers' band, as is also Red Sam; and of late no less than five of them have been wiped out—two in the saloon, Pete Dunn in his cabin, then two here, and Red Sam is used up and you are a prisoner, so you see we have got facts down fine against you, and if you care to talk we are willing to listen. If not, then you go back to the Sports' Delight saloon this night and hang," and Buffalo Bill spoke in a tone that showed he was in deadly earnest.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE PRISONER.

Doc Stone was in a very bad fix, and he had the good sense to perceive it. He was above the men with whom he herded, or had been, that was evident, for he still had the bearing of a gentleman at times. He now looked from Buffalo Bill to the boy sport, then at Bunco, and back again at the scout.

At last he said, in a helpless sort of way:

"What do you want?"

"I'll tell you, and then be guided by your own feelings wholly. I came down here to prospect, it is true, but not for gold exactly. It has come to the ears of the commandant of the fort, where I am an officer, that Devil's Cañon is as black a place as could be found. The deeds of you lawless men here have given it a very bad name, and I was sent here for a specific purpose. I supposed that it would take me months to shadow to the gallows the men I was after, but I discover, through meeting the boy sport here, and my old friend Bunco, I will accomplish what I came for in a very short while. Now, the acts of the Silent Slayers are known away from Devil's Cañon. It is also known that they kill for some purpose unknown to us. They have a motive that I can only guess at, and when I hear from you, I will know if my guess was right. The members of that secret band of murderers may number twenty, perhaps more, perhaps less, but I set them down as at least a dozen. As I have shown you, that with the five dead, Red Sam

laid up for repairs, and your neck in the noose, six of them are accounted for."

"Does yer mean I'm an assassin?" indignantly asked Doc Stone.

"Yes, for I caught you in the act, and I overheard you say to your men that you would knife the boy sport. Bunco and I fired as we sprang into view, and two fell, and you might have escaped but for the sport's clever hand with his lariat. Yes, you are an assassin and one of the band of Silent Slayers, for there were several who watched you and your pards to-night, when it was reported that Pete Dunn was dead and had been killed by the Silent Slayers. And more, there are three more men whose looks betrayed them, and I can go and put hands on them to-night. Yes, you are known, for you betrayed yourself in more ways than one, and let me tell you right now that I can account for Pete Dunn's death, and in the morning those two bodies lying there will be found in their cabin, for Bunco says they live together, and upon their breast will be discovered the knives of the Silent Slayers and the slips of paper that have been pinned on the dead after your secret murders have been committed, for we have here the one you were to put on this boy. See?"

Doc Stone trembled from head to foot. He seemed to feel that he had been caught in a trap from which there was no escape. He had heard the scout unravel the secret of the mysterious murders, and felt that he was wholly at his mercy.

After a moment of thought, he cried out in a tone of pleading that was most pitiful:

"What do you want me to do?"

"Confess."

"Confess what?"

"Everything."

"About what?"

"I see that you do not appreciate the danger you are in."

"You'll hang me?"

"No, I think we had better play the Silent Slayers' act, knife you and leave you at your home to be thought to have been killed by that band. Then we can go on in our own way and find out who the others are, but I'll take good care that Red Sam, whom we know, does not escape."

"You wish me to confess my guilt?"

"Oh, no."

"Do as you please about it."

"If I confess?"

"Well?"

"What terms do you grant me?"

"Ah! now you are talking like a sensible man."

"You will give me my terms?"

"No."

"What then?"

"I'll give you my terms," was the stern rejoinder.

"I must know what they are before I utter a word."

"You shall. My terms are that you shall answer every question I ask you truthfully. In return your life shall be spared, you shall not be known as one of the Silent Slayers, though I would advise you to dig out from camp, as some of your pards might give you away, as soon as we have found out whether you have deceived us or not. Those are my terms."

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE DESPERADO'S TERMS.

Doc Stone heard what the terms of the scout were, and then asked:

"What will you do with me while you are waiting to find out?"

"We will leave you here a prisoner under the care of the boy sport."

"That won't do."

"It must."

"It will not do, then."

"Why?"

"If you do as you say with those bodies there, the real Silent Slayers will be puzzled as to how they died, and it will be laid upon the band."

"Well?"

"If I am missing they will at once suspect that I have sold out, betrayed them, and they will skip, and you will be thwarted."

"There is reason in that," said Buffalo Bill.

"Now, I alone of all the band will know the game's up, and I will not attempt to escape. Let me go back to Red Sam's cabin. I'll give him a quieting medicine to keep him there all right, and pretend he is not so well. Then you can go on with your work of catching the rest of the band, and when you feel sure I have been square with you, then you can set me free. Now listen to the terms I have to propose."

"You wish us to play the decoy game again—use you as a decoy to catch the rest of the band of Silent Slayers?"

The Desperado's Terms.

307

"That is just it."

"But you have terms to propose? Let us hear them."

"I will. In the first place, I can give you information that will not allow another member of the Silent Slayers to escape. Remember, I am selling out."

"Yes."

"I know that I have got valuable goods to sell, and I am aware of their full value."

"Go ahead."

"Those two bodies there have both got belts of gold on them."

"Well?"

"Now I have, say, some twelve hundred laid up, and they have not as much. But Red Sam can treble my amount, and I want what they have and he has."

"You will want a gold mine next, and have us work it for you."

"I've got the gold mine, or, at least, the means of getting it, and I am high-priced, for I won't reap from it, and you will, when I have told my secret."

"Go ahead."

"You see I am to start out in the world again to make my fortune. I cannot stay in this country, for I'd hang. I must make my way to another land. I have a profession that will support me, and I am tired of this life of crime. To go away from here, I wish to have money to live on until I can get a support by my practice. Therefore, with what I have told you I wish, and which is no loss to you, I must have a couple of good horses and a complete outfit, and be allowed to light out at dark some night when you are sure that I have kept faith with you."

"All right, granted!"

"But now to my price."

"You have named it."

"Not the money for my secret."

"Then go ahead."

"As I said, my secret is valuable. It is of a gold mine, and I want for it just five thousand dollars."

"You will never get it."

"Then you'll have to hang me, for I'd as soon die as go from here without money to dodge about these Western camps. I tell you that by my capture you have destroyed me, and ruined my prospects on the very eve of success, as it were, and I will die before I tell what I know unless I get my terms. I ask for a paltry five thousand dollars and you refuse. So be it. I can die, for I'd be worse off than dead if I lived."

There was that about the man that Buffalo Bill read aright. He was desperate, driven to despair, and would do just as he had said. So the scout said, for he felt certain that the man must have some valuable secret:

"Do you avow that your secret is worth five thousand dollars?"

"Yes, many, many times over. I am so convinced of it that I will take your promise to send me the sum named, when you discover that I tell the truth."

"That is square certainly; but I neither have the money nor can I get it."

"I have it, and will hand you the amount to send him, Mr. Cody, if he tells the truth," said the boy sport, speaking for the first time, while Bunco added:

"I can also raise the money, pard Bill."

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE PLEDGE.

"I guess I've struck a nest of millionaires," said Buffalo Bill, in his dry, humorous way, when both the sport and Bunco offered to put up the five thousand dollars demanded by Doc Stone.

"Well, I happen to have the money, and I'll risk it on what Doc Stone says, upon your pledge to pay him if his secret is worth it," said the sport.

"Me, too, pard; or I'll go in halves with you, boy sport," Bunco replied.

This was satisfactory to the scout, if so to those who were to take the risk, and Doc Stone said all that he asked was Buffalo Bill's pledge to send it to him in a certain way if all was as he said it was.

"I'll give the pledge," said the scout.

"Then it's settled, pard, and I'll talk. Now, let me tell you when I decides on a thing I goes through with it——"

"You talk good English, Stone, so drop your dialect," said Buffalo Bill.

"All right, I will.

"What do you wish to know?"

"You are a Silent Slayer?"

"Yes."

"And so is Red Sam?"

"He is."

"And the two men killed in the saloon, the two lying dead there and Pete Dunn were all members of the band?"

"Ah."

"How many members were there?"

"Before this late epidemic of death struck them, there were thirteen."

"If that was the original number, besides the five dead, yourself and Red Sam, it leaves six more to account for?"

"Yes."

"Where are they?"

"In the camp."

"Bunco, you and Sport call out the ones you suspect and let him answer as you name them."

"Bill Wirt?" called out Bunco.

"Yes."

"Jerry, the saloon man?" suggested the sport.

"No, though Dunn, his pard, was one of the band."

"Buck Adams?"

"Yes, sport."

"Tom Hazel?"

"Yes, sport."

"Dan Drake?"

"Yes, Bunco."

"Lanky Bob?"

"Yes, Bunco."

"That is the last one I suspect, Mr. Cody," remarked the sport.

"I can name no one else for a certainty, pard Bill, though there are a hundred men I know in the camp bad enough to belong to the band," Bunco assumed.

"Then I'll name one more, and it's Wallace, the storekeeper."

Both the young sport and Bunco seemed

at this assertion of the desperado, for the man spoken of was supposed to be one of the "good citizens."

"You are not giving the name of Wallace because you have a grudge against him, Doc Stone?"

"No, Bunco, I am not. I could add a half dozen if I wanted to, on that score, but I'm on a square trail now. Wallace is one of the leaders and the worst devil of all."

"All right; we'll put him down, and then consider the whole band all present or accounted for," said Buffalo Bill.

"Well, you wish to hear more?"

"Yes, tell what you know, for, as the sport here and Bunco knew the men named we can readily get them when wanted. Now, what was the motive of your band in committing the murders which you have perpetrated?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Gold."

"Explain."

"You see, Wallace, the storekeeper, was one of the first men in this part of the country; but when he came, there was one man here before him, and one who had struck it rich. Just where this man's gold was, Wallace could not find out, so the miner was safe until the storekeeper, then a gold hunter himself, could discover his secret. I next came along with a gang of miners; then others followed, until the camps were established in Devil's Cañon. Still Wallace made no headway with the solitary miner whose secret he wanted to ascertain, but who lived far away from here—that is, some dozen miles or more. Wallace opened his store, miners went to work, and some gold was found; a few went down the valley to raise cattle,

and thus a settlement grew up. Wallace got scared at last, for he did not wish too many here, so he decided that all, except those to go in with him in his plot, must be scared off. There was but one way to do it, and that was to try and convince all there was no gold here in paying quantity, and to make Devil's Cañon so bad, men would get out of it. He tried both ways, and finally decided upon a secret band of men-killers. The result was the forming of the band of twelve Silent Slayers, for Wallace was to be a silent partner, as it were, known to the captain and his lieutenant only. In that way he could aid those who got into trouble, for no one ever suspected him of being a villain. But he was the real leader, and we began the work of the Silent Slayers to scare men out of the camp and leave the field for ourselves alone."

CHAPTER LXV.

THE BAND'S LAST VICTIM.

Buffalo Bill and his two comrades listened most attentively to the story of Doc Stone, and when he came to a pause, as though he had said all that he intended to, the scout asked:

"Who was the real leader of this band of murderers?"

"Red Sam."

"And his lieutenant?"

"I was. I could say some one else, but I will tell the truth. I can, however, truthfully avow that I never killed one of the twenty-one men the band put out of the way, for Pete Dunn, as you now know, was the victim of some one else."

"Yes, I killed him, for he came here to take my life," added the sport.

"He was ordered to do so, and these two men lying there, and myself, were sent here to-night to kill you; but this is the first time I was detailed for the work, being an officer of the band. Excepting Wallace, however, all the living ones have taken life under orders, and were killers on their own account, too, in a number of cases outside of the band."

"Well, we will have to see to them and to this fellow Wallace as well; but where is the man whose secret mine Wallace wished to find?"

"Oh, I'll tell, now I have started in on it. He is a prisoner in his cabin up in the mountains, and ironed hand and foot. He seldom left his cabin, only to get

provisions, but we went there and made a prisoner of him. His mine we could not find, search as we might, but Wallace thought he'd give in some day, and only five of the band know where his cabin is—Wallace, Red Sam, and myself, now the other two are dead. It was the plan of one of us who did know to visit him every other day with food, and to see that he was safe. I'll tell you, too, that it was my intention to let him know the next time I went that I would set him free and escape with him, if he'd share with me the gold he had hidden away, and when I hinted as much to him the last time I was there, he said we'd talk it over next time. But you've got me, and that is why I sold out my secret to you for what I could get, while you will have the money back for rescuing the man, and more, too, if you will demand it, I am pretty sure."

"Do you know anything about this man whose gold find has caused him to meet with such treatments at the hands of Wallace and the members of the band of Silent Slayers?"

"I only know that he is a striking-looking man in appearance, with gray hair and beard, with the step and bearing of a soldier—a very handsome man indeed, and with courtly manners."

"Do you know his name?" asked Buffalo Bill, with more interest than he had yet betrayed.

"No, I do not know his name, but I do know that I saw on a handsome saddle which he had a name which I supposed to be his engraven upon a silver plate on the horn."

"Do you recall what that name was?"

"Louis Lomax!"

"My God! It is my father! At last I have found him!"

The cry came from the young sport in a voice that thrilled all who heard it, and every eye was upon the youth.

"Your father?" cried Buffalo Bill, eagerly.

"Yes, sir."

"Major Louis Lomax, late of the —th Cavalry, United States army, and who resigned his commission some years ago?"

"Yes, sir; he is my own father. He resigned his commission because he married a second time, and, believing himself a rich man, went home to enjoy his fortune. Instead he found that the friend in whose hands he had left the management of his estate had squandered his last dollar. That was such a terrible blow to him he left home, as he said, to make a fortune by his own hands. The lady who was his second wife was my governess when I was younger, and a lovely woman, loving my father very dearly. As a distant relative had left me a handsome legacy, we, my stepmother and myself, decided that I must come West and find my father. I had full control of the money left me, had been much the last few years on the Texas ranch of a relative, was young, possessed of great strength and endurance, was a champion athlete, a good rider and dead shot, and so I was glad to start on the search for my father. I tracked him out to this country, and I learned from a man whom I befriended that my father had discovered a gold mine, but had been killed by parties to whom he had told his secret. Those parties I now know to have been members of the Silent Slayers' band, but as

this man died soon after from a wound he had received in a fight, I could learn no more."

"Was this man's name Dick Trench?" asked Doc Stone.

"Yes."

"He was a member of our band."

"And so were two men whom I killed some time ago in Devil's Cañon, for he told me they had murdered my father, and that Red Sam was in it, too."

"Red Sam is in the band, yes; but those two men you killed never were. Dick Trench told you a lie to have you kill them, as they had wronged him and he wished you to square the debt. But they were both escaped jailbirds, murderers, and as bad as they make 'em, so you did right, especially as they intended to take your life," Doc Stone asserted.

"Well, I have promised you the five thousand, and gladly will I pay it to you, if you will lead me to my father, for I have been here to avenge him and to find his grave, ever since I believed him dead."

"I ought to have struck a higher price."

"Silence! You are fortunate to get off as it is," put in Buffalo Bill; and then turning to the boy sport he continued:

"I was sent here to hunt down this gang of Silent Slayers, and it appears about done, as we now have spotted all of them, not yet in hand or who have not been killed. I knew your father well, and admired him greatly, for I have served under him. No one will be more pleased at rescuing him from his misfortune than will I."

"As I will be also, pard Bill, for you remember I

served under Major Lomax also when we were together."

"Yes, Bunco, and it will be a great surprise for him to see us. Now, Doc Stone, we will see to carrying out the plans we have formed, so we will take those bodies to their cabin, let you go to Red Sam's home. You may be sure one of us will be near you to punish with death any treachery upon your part, though, I tell you frankly, I trust you, and it is to your interest to act squarely with us. To-morrow, after we have had a talk with Brad Burns, we will corral those men yet at large, and Red Sam, too, and no suspicion will fall upon you, Doc Stone, and you can then guide us to the cabin of Major Lomax."

Thus it was arranged between the four in the cabin, and to the satisfaction of each and all.

CHAPTER LXVI.

CONCLUSION.

There was a stir in Devil's Cañon, when, the next morning, two more supposed victims of the Silent Slayers were found dead at their cabin. Brad Burns had called a meeting of the people for that night in the Sports' Delight saloon to decide upon some plan of action, but, meanwhile, he had asked certain men to come to his hotel to there consult with him.

Those asked looked upon it as an honor, and all came at the hour named. But not any two had the same time set, and as they entered the "private office" they found themselves "covered" by Buffalo Bill with a revolver, while Bunco and the boy sport quickly slipped handcuffs upon them.

The last two to arrive were Red Sam and Wallace, the storekeeper. Red Sam, who still looked very shaky, wilted when he found that he was entrapped, while Wallace, the "good citizen," seemed deprived of all power of speech or action.

These two were also made secure; but fearing that a rescue would be attempted, should it be known just who had been arrested, and the charge against them, the prisoners were hastened away at dark, under the guidance of Doc Stone, who came out boldly and said he did not care if they did know of his treachery, now that he saw them all secured.

He led the way to the cabin of the unfortunate major, who was found just as Stone had represented. The meeting of father and son we will not attempt

Conclusion.

319

to describe, nor that between Major Lomax and his two scouts, Buffalo Bill and Bunco.

As Major Lomax said he would remain there with his son, to await the return of Buffalo Bill and a force of cavalry, with which to pay a visit to Devil's Cañon, the prisoners were hastened on through the night under guard of the two scouts, accompanied by Doc Stone, who was now very anxious to get well away from Devil's Cañon as quickly as he could do so.

It was noon the next day, after a very hard ride, when the scouts and their prisoners reached the fort, their horses broken down. Buffalo Bill held an immediate consultation with the commandant; the prisoners were given into his keeping; Doc Stone was allowed to go free, and the draft given him by the boy sport on an Eastern bank for the sum promised him was safe in his pocket.

From that day he was never heard of again, and it is hoped that he led a different life. With a hundred cavalymen under a gallant captain, Buffalo Bill made the return to Devil's Cañon, and there was a perfect stampede from the place, though a number of hard citizens were corralled to be taken back for trial.

Brad Burns said that the prisoners would have been rescued, he was sure, and as he had had enough of Devil's Cañon, he left, and to-day it is a deserted camp of odious memory.

Bunco had found a snug sum of gold in his claim, and carried it off under guard of the soldiers, going East to enjoy it, and, as Mr. Frank Brandon, he is now well off and a very respectable citizen.

Major Lomax also unearthed his gold from its hiding place, and it was for him a new fortune; so he,

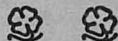
too, went East to a happy home, accompanied by his son, Louis Lomax, junior, the whilom boy sport.

As for Buffalo Bill, he remained on the plains to win new laurels in the discharge of the very dangerous and very important duties which the government and army post commandants assigned him.

THE END.

His long and varied experience in the West made Buffalo Bill capable of dealing with every species of malefactor, whether white man or red. "Buffalo Bill and the Cattle Thieves," by Colonel Prentiss Ingraham, describes the famous scout's fight on a band of rustlers. It is No. 184 of the **BUFFALO BILL BORDER STORIES**.

Only One Best



The best paper-covered books are S. & S. NOVELS; consequently they are imitated.

When you ask for an S. & S. NOVEL, be sure that you get an S. & S. NOVEL, and save yourself disappointment.

We have 1500 different titles to offer you, most of them copyrights.

A complete catalog may be secured from your dealer or we will send one free upon request.



Street & Smith Corporation

79 SEVENTH AVENUE

NEW YORK CITY