

BUFFALO BILL BORDER STORIES - No 171 -

BUFFALO BILL'S BEST BET

By

Col. Prentiss Ingraham



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Buffalo Bill's Best Bet

OR,

A SURE THING WELL WON

BY

Colonel Prentiss Ingraham

Author of the celebrated "Buffalo Bill" stories published in the
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Buffalo Bill's Best Bet

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

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

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

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

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

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

In 1868 and for four years thereafter Colonel Cody

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

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

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

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

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

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

BUFFALO BILL'S BEST BET.

CHAPTER I.

TEMPTED.

"One thousand dollars for my life."

"You holds it cheap, pard."

"It is all I have with me."

"Guess not, fer men say as how you hes dimints 'bout yer clothes, ef yer goes broke with gold dust."

"I have diamonds with me; two splendid ones, and you shall have your choice if you aid me."

"And the thousand dollars, too, pard?"

"Yes."

"Say both dimints and nine hundred dollars, an' I'll aid yer, an' yer'll then hev a hundred dollars to speckilate on, an' yer is a born gambler, men say, so won't go broke long."

The speakers were standing in the shadow of a large tree. The scene around them was picturesque in the extreme, for the open prairie stretched upon the one hand, with twoscore horses lariatied out to feed upon the rich grass, and upon the other was a grove of timber, now illuminated by a dozen camp fires, around which sat a dashing, reckless set of men, smoking and talking over the dangers they had known.

The bivouac in the woods, with the red glare of the fires, the horses picketed upon the prairie, and the silvery light of the moon casting a halo over all, made up a scene for the brush of an artist.

But the two men standing in the shadow of the tree that stood alone, as it were, a few yards out of the grove, cared not for the scene of beauty before them.

Their eyes were bent on each other, and their thoughts were bent on some stern purpose. One was a prisoner, the other his guard.

The prisoner was none other than Kent King, known as the Gambler Guide, whom the Texas herders had taken prisoner, and were carrying with them to the Lone Star State, where the doom of death awaited him for crimes committed in the past.

Now, as he stood by the side of the man, who was that night his guard, and who was known as Poker Dick, the glare of the firelight on the one side and the radiance of the moonlight upon the other showed that he was securely bound hand and foot.

A bivouac or two more and the Revolver Riders, as the band of herders were called, would be in Santa Fe, toward which gay place they were destined, that they might pass a week or two there in spending their money, gambling and catering to their enjoyment in various ways.

Once in Santa Fe, Kent King knew that he was doomed, for, thence down into Texas the herders would doubtless go in company with trains, and all chances of escape would be cut off forever from him; or, perhaps, the Texans, in the height of their revels in the town, might take upon themselves to hang him, and try him for his crimes afterward.

A man of indomitable will and undisputed courage, he would meet death bravely, looking it squarely in the face, come when or how it might.

Bat, possessed of a fascination of manner that made him a dangerous friend to women, a talent for card playing that kept his pockets always full of gold, and a love of life that was as strong as his disregard for the lives of others, he was determined to make a bold attempt to escape.

To do so by physical force and daring he knew was impossible among the men who held him prisoner, and he therefore must use strategy.

"You look blue to-night, pard," Kent King had said to Poker Dick in his pleasant way, after the other herders had assembled around the camp fires.

"I is blue," was the answer.

"Why, I should think you would be happy, as we will soon reach Santa Fe, where you expect a good time, and after that you are going back home."

"Home is what makes me blue, pard. I hes lost to ther boys all I got fer my leefle drove o' hoof critters, an' I'm going back to ther old folks without a dollar, unless I kin win some dust in Santa Fe."

"I have some money with me," said the prisoner.

"Guess yer will keep it, too."

"Not if you want it."

"Pard, I isn't ther man ter take gold from a corpse, fer yer is leetle more, seein' as how yer'll be h'isted soon as we reach Texas."

"That is just what I wish to avoid. I have gold with me, and if by any chance I could escape, why, then, you wouldn't have to go back poor."

The guard started and turned pale, for the wily tempter had touched his sordid nature.

"Well, Poker Dick, what say you? I have gold and you have none."

"What will yer give me, pard, fer ter drop off to sleep an' let yer skip?" asked Poker Dick, in a whisper.

Then came the answer that opens this story:

"One thousand dollars for my life."

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW
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night, and you w
you need not free

CHAPTER II.

A DOUBLE REWARD FOR LIFE.

To the prisoner and his guard the time dragged wearily along, and the song and laughter from around the camp fires grated harshly upon their ears.

The guard, although knowing that nine hundred dollars, with diamonds worth five times that sum, would soon be his, was in no more cheerful mood than when he had been moneyless, for his heart told him that he was about to betray his comrades, and set free a man whose mission on earth seemed to be to kill and to bring unhappiness, and against whom he knew his captain had some bitter feud.

One by one the Texans wrapped themselves in their blankets and sank to sleep. Gradually the fires burned down, and only the moonlight lit up the scene, still picturesque in its silence.

"Well, are you ready to keep your word?" asked Kent King, in a low tone, raising himself on his elbow, for he was lying down upon his blanket.

"Yas, I hes promised, an' I'll keep my word; but I hes ter take some punishment fer it."

"Your conscience! Bah! What right have such men as you with conscience?" sneered Kent King.

"I hes no right ter it, fer it don't keep me from doin' wrong, only makes me sick at heart."

"You are a fool, Poker Dick; lie down and go to sleep; the boys know you have played cards late each night, and you were overcome with sleep; see here, you need not free my hands, for my sharp teeth have

gnawed the thongs, and I can easily untie those around my ankles."

Kent King held up his hands and the rawhide ropes fell off.

"You is a very devil," said Poker Dick. "Ef I hadn't promised ter let yer go, guess I might hev dropped ter sleep an' felt yer knife atween my ribs; but yer hes awful sharp teeth."

"And they are my own, not bought, pard; now where is my horse?"

"The last one on ther pararer, thar."

"And my saddle and arms?"

"Lie yonder ag'in thet stump; now whar is my dollars an' my dimints?"

Kent King ceased untying the thongs around his ankles, and unbuckled a belt from about his waist, which was heavy with gold.

"Here is the dust; but I want one hundred dollars to stake me for a game in Santa Fe."

"Cusses! Yer isn't goin' thar, be yer?"

"I am; there's no better place in the world to gamble, and there I go."

"But we goes thar."

"What care I? Free, I am on equal terms with Captain Dash, your leader."

"Better not gamble on that, pard, as ther capt'in is ther boss."

"I do not fear him, and to Santa Fe I go, though you may not see me there. Here is the money."

"All right, pard; now ther dimints."

"They are here in this little pocket in the belt—see?"

"I see, an' I is obleeged; now thar lies yer saddle,

an' yer rifle is tied to it, with yer pistols, tho' they isn't loaded."

"You will give me ammunition, of course?"

"Yer ammunition is in yer saddle pockets."

"Good! bring the saddle and bridle here, and then I will start."

The guard thrust the bag of gold into the bosom of his shirt, walked to the edge of the grove and took up the saddle, and returned to where the gambler stood.

"Yes, here are my pistols, and—take that!"

Down upon the head of the guard as quick as the lightning's flash fell the barrel of the revolver, and, with a low moan, the man fell in his tracks.

"Now the gold and diamonds are mine! Ha! Who is that?"

Kent King glanced over to one of the camp fires, where a man had suddenly raised himself to his feet and stood brightening up the coals as though he were cold.

Hastily Kent King thrust his hands into the pockets of the guard, and, not finding the bag of gold, uttered a bitter oath.

"Curse him! What did he do with it? But I have no time to lose, for life is dearer than mines of gold to me."

Quickly picking up his saddle, and keeping the tree between himself and the man standing at the fire, he ran swiftly out upon the prairie and soon stood by the side of his splendid horse.

"Ah! my brave old Mephisto, again I will be on your back with free hands to strike back at my foes, and then I fear not even Captain Dash and his band."

The saddle was quickly thrown on and securely girthed, the bridle followed next, and then the lariat pin was drawn up and the rope coiled.

With a bound the gambler was upon the back of his horse, which bounded away like an arrow from a bow, just as a loud shout was raised in the camp, and thirty Texans sprang to their feet in alarm.

"The prisoner! the gambler! there he goes!" cried a ringing voice.

It was the man who had arisen at the fire, and who, seeing the moving, crouching form, had approached the tree to find Poker Dick lying as though dead, and the prisoner free and mounting his horse fifty yards away.

"To horse! a thousand dollars to the man who takes him dead or alive," cried Captain Dash, in ringing tones.

Two minutes after he sped away in pursuit, and behind him came a score of his men. Far out on the moonlit prairie was seen the dark form of Mephisto and his daring rider flying like the wind, for life lay ahead of them, and death was hard on their track.

CHAPTER III.

THE FORFEIT.

"Pards, it's no use; thet horse o' his are a goer from Goersville, an' he jist kept right ahead o' ther cap'n's mare," said Prairie Pete, riding back into the timber, after half an hour's chase of the fugitive gambler.

"Lady ain't in good trim, Pete, jist now, as yer know she's a leetle lame; ef not, she'd hev overtook ther My-fist-toe, as that gambler calt his animile," answered a Texan, who had also just returned and dismounted.

"Did he kill Poker Dick?" asked a third, riding up.

"No; I guesses it were better ef he had, though," responded a young giant, with blond hair falling to his waist.

All looked at the speaker, who was known as Seven-foot Harry, on account of his great height. He shrugged his shoulders knowingly and made no reply. A moment after Captain Dash rode up, his brow stern, and his gaunt-bodied racing mare limping badly.

"The pace was too fast for Lady, boys, lame as she is, so he escaped; but only for a time."

There was something in the tone of the leader which told his men that Kent King would find a dangerous man upon his trail in Captain Dash, who seemed determined to track him to the bitter end.

In his fancy dress, half buckskin, half Mexican, Captain Dash looked exceedingly handsome, for his face was flushed with his rapid ride; but the beauty of his

expressive mouth was marred by the stern look resting upon it, while in his dark-blue eyes dwelt a light that was almost cruel.

"Captain, Ben Tabor wanted me ter say that he would like ter see yer, when yer returned," said Seven-foot Harry.

"Where is Tabor?"

"Over in ther woods yonder, nursin' Poker Dick."

"Ah, Poker Dick was on guard when Kent King escaped! Was he hurt?"

"Suthin' ails him, cap'n, as I'll show yer," and Seven-foot Harry led the way to where a camp fire had been made some distance off from the others.

Pacing to and fro before the burning logs was Ben Tabor, a frank-faced young Texan, who now wore a troubled look that ill became him. Before the fire was a prostrate form, rolled in his blankets, and as motionless as though dead.

"Well, Tabor, is that Poker Dick, and is he hurt?" asked Captain Dash, as he walked up to the two men.

"That is Poker Dick, captain, and he's hurt," was the quiet response.

"I was angry with him for allowing the gambler to escape, but I'll forgive him now, for——"

"Pard, don't yer say nuthin' kind ter me, or it'll break my heart, tough as it are."

The form arose from the blanket, and the blood-smearred face of Poker Dick was turned full upon his chief, a slight gash in the forehead showing where Kent King had struck him with his pistol, the blow momentarily stunning him.

"Why, Dick, old fellow, I don't want to blame you,

So tell me how it was," and Captain Dash rested his hand kindly on the shoulder of Poker Dick.

But the man drew back quickly and said, in trembling tones:

"Don't tech me, cap'n, don't tech me, fer I is awful wicked."

"The blow has turned your mind——"

"No, cap'n, my mind ain't hurt, but my heart are. Tell him, Ben, for I hesn't ther power, an' ther words would choke me."

Impressed with the strange manner of Poker Dick, Captain Dash turned to Ben Tabor.

"I hate to tell, too, Dick," said Tabor, "but I cannot help it. Captain Dash, I was the first one to get to Dick, and finding him senseless, I remained, while the other boys went in chase of King."

"You did right, as you saw that he was wounded," was the captain's response.

"I only wish some one else had been in my place, for they would have to tell what I found."

"And what was it, Ben?" asked the captain.

Before he got a reply Poker Dick spoke up:

"Cap'n, Ben hes a heart like a woman an' don't want to tell on his old pard Dick, so I'll spit the story out myself, an' I'll feel better, for it gives me a awful bad taste in my mouth an' pain in my heart.

"Yer see, cap'n, I was guard ter-night. Lately ther boys hes won all my dust from me, an' I got low-spirited; an' thet devil, Kent King, told me he'd give me a belt o' gold an' some dimints' ef I'd——"

"By Heaven! You turned traïtor and accepted his bribe?" cried Captain Dash, in angry tones.

"Jist so; you hes cut ther story down to ther kernel

darn quick, cap'n. He give me nine hundred dollars in gold slugs, an' two dimints as was worth five times thet much. Ben hes 'em. He found 'em on me. Knowin' as I was dead broke afore, he sighted my leetle game, knowed I were a darn rascal, and played ther trump on me, an' here I is."

"And thet blow on your head, sir?" the captain asked.

"Thet were a keepsake, given me as a partin' present from Kent King. Arter he hed gi'n me his gold an' dimints, an' I fotched him his saddle, he jist tapped me on ther head, ter get back his wealth, I reckon. But ther boys must hev crowded him too fast."

"And you found this belt of gold upon him, Tabor?"

"Yes, Captain Dash; and seeing it in my hand when he came to, Poker Dick told me all."

"You know the forfeit for one of our band to become a traitor, sir?" and Captain Dash turned sternly upon the prisoner.

"I does, cap'n; it are death," was the firm reply.

"Dick, never would I have suspected you of such an act. Your temptation was great; but you have set free a man whose life has been one long crime, and who injured me deeply, and is now at liberty to harm those I care for. That he will do so, if in his power, I know full well. I must start on his trail before it is too late."

"He said he were going ter Santa Fe, cap'n, for thar he would be on ekil terms with you!"

"Those are the terms I wish to meet him on; but now to the crime you have committed."

Captain Dash looked the traitor squarely in the face.

"Yas, cap'n, I is list'nin'."

"You have kindred living at Austin, I believe?"

"Ther old folks live thar, cap'n. My father an' my mother, an' I hes a leetle brother o' seventeen."

"This gold I will send to them, and put with it a hundred dollars of my own, and I know the boys will do the same."

"I'll give a hundred, cap'n," said Ben Tabor.

"And I'll chip in ther same," put in Seven-foot Harry.

"All that is added will go to your parents, Dick; they shall never know that you were a traitor, but believe you were killed by Kent King, instead of wounded."

"You intends ter kill me, then, cap'n?"

"You know the forfeit is death."

"Yas; ther's no gittin' round thet, an' I desarves it; but yer'll send ther old folks ther gold, fer they depends on me ter keep ther pot b'ilin'."

"Yes; but the diamonds I will keep for a special purpose."

"You kin hev 'em, cap'n. I s'pose they is mine, seein' as I made a swap with the gambler fer 'em; but when is I ter hev my chips called in, cap'n?"

"I will soon tell you; and Dick, if I can save you I will, as you have confessed all, and from my heart I pity you. Harry, you and Ben remain here until I return."

"I'll not attempt ter skip, cap'n; but ther boys hed better stay, so as yer'll feel yer've got me," called out the prisoner, as Captain Dash walked away toward the camp fire, around which the other members of the band were gathered.

With eager eyes, staring as a starving man at food he could not touch, Poker Dick watched Captain Dash as he joined the band of Texans. He saw them gather around the captain in an excited way, while the bright firelight falling upon their faces told that they were listening to the story of his crime.

Having heard the tale of his treachery, the prisoner saw them all sit down around the fire. Each moment then seemed an eternity. He knew that his life was in their hands, and that when he had joined the Revolver Riders oaths of membership bound them together which to break would bring death.

Once before a man of the band had turned traitor, and his life had been spared by the vote of all, and shortly after he had deserted and become a bandit, leaguering himself with Mexicans and Indians. With this recollection, would they spare Poker Dick?

He answered the question himself:

"I guess not; ef ther boys did, they'd be fools. I will hev ter pass in my chips."

He turned to Seven-foot Harry and Ben Tabor.

"They seems 'arnest 'bout suthin', pards."

"The captain seems pleading for you, Dick," answered Tabor.

"Yas, he's powerful good; but I guesses the boys will string me."

"I hopes not, Dick; I fer one decides ter pardon yer," remarked Seven-foot Harry.

"'Tain't no use, boys. I is ter be called on fer what chips I has got, an' ther game's agin' me, fer I don't hold a trump keerd; see, ther boys is comin'."

Not a quiver of Poker Dick's face showed any emo-

tion, as the silent, stern-looking men came near and formed in a circle around him. Then Captain Dash said, in a low but distinct tone:

"Dick Martin, I regret, more than I can express, to have to say to you that your act this night, in aiding the escape of Kent King, that accursed gambler guide, has cost you your life."

"I desarnes' all yer can say agin' me, pards, so don't let up on me," was the quiet rejoinder.

"No, I throw no abuse or words of unkindness in the teeth of a man who stands on the brink of his grave. I have urged that your comrades overlook your crime this once, and give you another trial; but there are only three of us to beg this favor against twenty-seven who say you must die."

At a word from their leader the men ranged themselves in line, and passed by the doomed man, grasping his hand in grim, silent farewell, and then continuing on into the darkness beyond the firelight.

"Now, cap'n, here's my last grip, an' it's not with ther hand thet tuk ther slugs an' dimints. Good-by, for I is goin' over ther dark river, an' you'll follow afore long."

Captain Dash grasped the man's hand, and then called out:

"Men, once more I ask it: spare this brave man's life."

A hoarse, low, stern answer came from back in the shadow:

"No!"

The leader bowed his head a moment, but quickly recovering himself, called out in stern tones:

"Are you ready?"

A low assent came from the darkness beyond.

"One! two! three! fire!"

Six revolvers flashed together, and without a moan
Poker Dick fell.

CHAPTER IV.

A RETROSPECTIVE GLANCE.

Some three months before the opening of this story, the Hale emigrant train had pulled out from Border City, bound for Colorado, under the guidance of a noted gambler, who had suddenly offered his services to run the settlers to their destination.

This gambler guide was Kent King, a man well known as a good prairie scout, yet supposed to think too much of his comfort to take to the hardships of an overland journey again.

A skillful card player, he always had plenty of money; and, with the education of a gentleman, he was very popular in the society of that day. Judge Hale, the head and front of the settler's train, was warned against the Gambler Guide.

Hale was told that Kent King was only going in that capacity on account of Mary Hale, the only child of the judge; but the warning was unheeded, and the train pulled out on its way to the Far West.

As Kent King was a thorough plainsman, a dead shot, and a man of undisputed courage, there were many along who congratulated themselves upon their luck in securing as good a guide. But, from the first, it was evident that Mary Hale was the attraction which drew Kent King. It was also evident that the judge seemed willing that his daughter should receive the attentions of the guide.

In fact, Judge Hale encouraged them to such an extent that Parson Miller, an emigrating preacher

along with the train, was notified to hold himself in readiness to perform a marriage ceremony within a few days.

That the wedding would have taken place there is no doubt but for the timely arrival in camp of Buffalo Bill, the army scout. When Buffalo Bill heard that the girl, with the consent of her father, was to be forced into an immediate marriage with the gambler, he decided at once that she should not be so sacrificed.

Buffalo Bill knew that the Gambler Guide was one of the most desperate characters on the border. Therefore, he sought out a character of the train, whose bargaining propensities had gained for him the name of Old Negotiate, and held a conversation with him, the result of which was the conclusion between them that without a parson there would be no wedding.

And there was no wedding, for the next morning the parson and Old Negotiate went on a hunt; the former got lost and was found by Buffalo Bill, and when they at last reached the train, weeks after, they were accompanied by a band of Texas herders known as Revolver Riders.

This band the reader has already met in this story, in the party of Captain Dash and his men.

Their arrival in the camp of the settlers caused a change. Kent King was taken prisoner by Captain Dash, who determined to carry him to Texas, to be tried there for crimes committed, and Buffalo Bill was made the guide of the train to Denver.

The judge seemed delighted at the change, for he had been acting under a power held over him by the gambler, who held some secret of his past life.

CHAPTER V.

BUFFALO BILL'S BET.

In one of the most popular resorts of Border City, combining hotel, bar, and cardroom, a large crowd of men had assembled, as was their wont every evening, to while away the time.

The shuffle of cards, click of faro chips, clink of glasses, and hum of voices, mingled together continually, with now and then a hearty laugh and fearful oath rising above the other sounds.

It was a motley gathering, for there were returned miners, gambling away their silver and gold dust; plainsmen, back after a long trip westward; teamsters, bullwhackers, scouts, soldiers, cattlemen, a few Indians, vagabonds, and general dead beats, hanging around to be treated, and to pick up a dishonest penny when possible.

At one table were gathered some cattle herders, lately arrived from Texas, and as they were playing for large stakes, those uninterested elsewhere in the room had been drawn to the point of most interest to them.

"Pards, hasn't I seen yer physymyhogamys before?" suddenly asked a queer-looking character, forcing his way through the crowd, and confronting the Texans, one of whom answered pleasantly:

"I think you have; you were one of the Hale emigrant train we struck on the trail."

"You hes it right; I were ther boss teamster, but I'll lay yer a prime pelt agin' that pile o' money thet yer can't call my handle."

A general laugh followed the remark of the borderman, and the Texan who had before spoken answered:

"I will bet you wine for all round that I can, for the money is not mine, and I guess you haven't a pelt along with you."

"Done; wine fer all 'ceptin' ther dead beats."

"But how are we to pick them out?"

"Oh, I knows 'em, Texas; now, come, what's my appellations?"

"Old Negotiate," answered the Texan, with a laugh.

A shout followed his reply, and the borderman said, in a lugubrious tone:

"By ther Rockies! Yer hev calt me, pard; I is gettin' too darned well known in these parts; waal, what do you an' yer pards drink?"

"We are one against many, and I believe in fair play, so you and your friends drink with us," frankly answered the Texan, and turning to the crowd he continued:

"Gentlemen, join us; wine here, barkeeper."

"Hold on, pard; let me sift ther dead beats out, fer——"

"No, no, Old Negotiate; I include all in my invitation; fill up all around, barkeeper."

The corks popped, the wine went round, and the health of the handsome Texan was drunk with a cheer, after which Old Negotiate said:

"Pard, when last I see yer, thar were in your comp'ny a man by ther name o' Kent King."

"Yes, the Gambler Guide, whom our captain was taking to Texas."

"Thet were ther man; has he passed in yit?"

"No, he escaped from us, when we were near Santa Fe."

"Escaped!"

"The Gambler Guide free?"

"Kent King not dead?"

Such were the expressions that ran round the crowd, after a general exclamation of surprise that followed the Texan's announcement.

"Yer say he escaped, an' from you?"

"He certainly did."

"Didn't go by the way of a h'ist to a tree?"

"No; he gnawed the thongs from his wrist, secured his saddle and horse, and, though we gave hot chase, managed to escape."

"Boys, thar'll be music in ther air afore long in Border City, fer every man, woman, an' kid heur hes been giving' Kent King ther devil, as wuss nor a horse thief. He'll come back fer a reckoning, or I are a screechin' liar, and I bet a lariat agin' a horse on it."

"On which, Negoshy, that you are a liar, or thet King comes back?" asked one of the crowd.

"I'll bet both, or t'other way, jist fer ther negotiate, pard, ef it suits yer; but, by ther Rockies, Buffalo Bill better look out, now thet wolf are on his trail."

"You refer to the scout who was instrumental in his capture?" asked the Texan.

"Come ag'in, pard, fer I isn't great on book larnin'."

"Buffalo Bill was the one who run him to cover, I mean?"

"Yer has it; he are, an' thet Kent King will kill him yet."

"I fear you is right," answered another. "Buffalo

Bill hes got ter look sharp. I'll bet high the gambler kills him."

"I'll take the bet."

The clear voice caused all to start and turn. The subject of the conversation was before them.

"Buffalo Bill! Three cheers!" cried a voice; and a ringing salute was given him as he forced his way to the table and asked quietly:

"Who is betting against my life?"

"Put it thar, pard; now I'll tell yer," cried Old Negotiate.

After grasping the hand of the scout, he continued:

"These Texans an' myself were havin' a leetle chin music, an' I l'arns from one thet Kent King escaped——"

"Ah! This is Mr. Tabor, I believe; an' Seven-foot Harry," and recognizing the different men around the table, Buffalo Bill greeted them warmly and asked:

"Has Kent King really escaped?"

"Yes, as I have just told these gentlemen, he escaped from us near Santa Fe."

"An' he'll raise a breeze here when he comes back, an' we was bettin' thet he'd kill you, Bill," said Negotiate.

"And I take the bet; who will wager, and what sum?" said the scout.

"I'll take your bet, sir," and a heavily bearded, stout-formed man stepped forward.

"You are a stranger to me, sir, and will have to plank down your dust, unless some one here knows you," said Buffalo Bill, eying the man closely.

"I am a stranger in Border City, but I have the money to deposit, and as I know Kent King well, I'll

bet on his killing you if you have wronged him," replied the stranger.

"Wronged him! Why, who could wrong a wolf? If he is your friend, I will say that you keep low company; but what will you bet that he kills me?"

The man seemed angered for an instant by the outspoken words of the scout, but answered quietly:

"Say a thousand dollars."

"Done! It's the amount you name, and I'll seek a stakeholder!"

"I'll get one," the man answered.

"Hold on, pard; as you are a friend of Kent King, I am a little doubtful about your stakeholder."

"Sir, do you dare say mine came differently?"

The man turned fiercely upon Buffalo Bill, who answered:

"Take it as you please; you certainly look like a——"

"What?"

"Horse thief!"

Two hands fell upon their pistol butts at the same time, but Ben Tabor, the Texan, sprang between the stranger and the scout, and said, in his calm, forcible way:

"Hold! This must stop here."

"True, Mr. Tabor; I forgot that he was like a cat in a strange garret; for he is a stranger here, while I have a host of friends; come, sir, let us conclude our bet," said Buffalo Bill frankly.

"All right; I was a fool to get angry; but who holds the stakes?"

"There is the very one; here, Panther Kate! This way, please," cried the scout.

The one to whom he called had just entered the room. She was a young girl. Her form was perfect, and her fancy dress of beaded buckskin, with short skirt and tight-fitting waist, set it off to perfection, while her soft gray hat, turned up upon one side, gave her face a fearless, saucy air that was very winning.

In her belt hung holsters that held two ivory-handled revolvers, and a knife was suspended to a short chain, while with a jaunty, devil-may-care air, she held a small rifle upon her shoulder. Beautiful she certainly was, and her dark eyes had won many a heart that had failed to make hers ache in return.

In Border City all knew her. She had come there over half a year before with a traveling dramatic company and had remained when they departed, and was engaged as a singer and dancer at the town theater. After appearing each night, she would mount her mustang and ride out to a little ranch she had purchased, two miles distant, where she lived alone, caring for her cattle herself, and devoting her days to hunting.

She was a superb horsewoman and a crack shot; in fact, her deadly aim with the revolver had gained her her name, for one day she had killed two panthers with her revolver as they were springing upon her. Having finished her act at the theater, Panther Kate, or as she was known on "the boards," Kate Kearney, took a stroll through the various saloons.

This she did each night, as though she were constantly on the search for some one; and, though no other of her sex dare go amid the wild set of men to be seen there, she showed no fear, and was welcomed whenever she appeared.

"Buffalo Bill, I am glad to see you back; did you

call me?" she asked, coming forward, the crowd giving way for her, while many shouted:

"Yes, make Panther Kate stakeholder!"

"Kate's the gal fer ter hold ther dust!"

"Kate don't gamble her duckits away!"

"Nor drink 'em up!"

Such were the cries heard on all sides. The girl turned to Buffalo Bill, who said:

"Yes, Panther Kate; I have just made a bet with this—this stranger here that I kill Kent King——"

"Hold! Is that your bet, sir? I thought it was to be that Kent King killed you," interrupted the stranger.

"Make it as you please, and in either case let the winner get the money."

"All right; if he kills you, I win; if you kill him, you win."

"Yes, and, Kate, you are to hold the stakes; here's my dust."

"And here is mine, girl."

"Let me fully understand the bet," she asked quietly, and it was explained to her.

"Thank you; I hope you will win, Mr. Cody; you know where to find me, and this gentleman can look me up should he be the winner; good night!"

And taking the bag of precious metal, Panther Kate left the saloon.

Scarcely had the man departed from the saloon, when, like a returning memory, there came to Buffalo Bill the knowledge that he had *seen this man before*—that in truth he was none other than *Kent King* himself, so disguised as almost to defy detection.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD NEGOTIATE'S WARNING.

The next day, when Old Negotiate entered the hotel—which had been named the Cody Hotel in honor of Buffalo Bill—he found there a motley crowd.

There were tradesmen of the town, miners from the camps, cowboys from the surrounding ranches, sports, idlers, and a few strangers who had just arrived in Border City.

They were miners, they said, from up the country farther, and having dug out a rich harvest of golden metal, they had come to Border City to spend a little of it in having a good time.

There were five of them present, and they were evidently having a "good time," according to their ideas, for they were drinking heavily. One of their number, dressed in corduroy, the same man who had made the bet with Buffalo Bill the day before, was "standing treat" continually for the thirsty souls in Border City, whose thirst seemed to increase after every drink they took.

"Come, Old Negotiate, let me interdoose yer ter my pertickler friend, Cap'n Corduroy, o' Calamity City, up ther mountains," cried a tipsy idler, whose friendship with the "captain" had begun but half an hour before and increased according to the treats he had received at his hands.

Old Negotiate accepted the outstretched hand of the man in corduroys, who then presented him to his four pards from Calamity City.

Captain Corduroy, it was evident, wanted to win the favor of the denizens of Border City, and he sought the hearts of the masses by filling their stomachs with liquor at his own expense.

"I understand this is called the Cody Hotel, in honor of that desperado, Buffalo Bill?" said Captain Corduroy, addressing Old Negotiate.

The latter turned and laid his hand upon the captain's shoulders and said, with solemnity:

"Stranger, this house were named in honor o' Buffalo Bill; but don't you whistle out no such word as desperado whar that clean-grit white man are concerned, or thar'll be trouble."

"You don't mean thet he will cause me trouble?"

"I does mean that, and more."

"What more?"

"Thar be friends o' his heur as won't hear a word said agin' him."

"Bah! I have heard that he is hated here by all who know him."

"You hes heerd a durned lie, ef yer mother told it to yer."

"What?"

"I say it are a lie, fer Buffalo Bill hev done more fer this town than any other man, an' thar ain't no one in trouble as he don't help out, while he sometimes are on hand ter clean out them as come heur fer a fight. I wants ter be friendly with yer, stranger pard, but don't yer say nothin' agin' Buffalo Bill, fer he are my friend."

"Well, I don't wish trouble with you, or any other man in Border City, for we came here to have a good time, and are not quarrelsome. We'll spend our money

free, and do the square thing all around; but I have met Buffalo Bill, and I owe him a grudge I hope one day to settle."

"Pard, yer talks squar'; but onless yer keeps yer tongue atween yer teeth, ther fust thing yer know, up will go yer toes to ther moonlight, an' Buffalo Bill will be payin' ther expenses o' buryin' yer."

"I do not fear him!"

It was evident that the potations he had indulged in were making Captain Corduroy very reckless of consequences.

"I don't say yer is skeert; but onless yer wants deadly trouble, don't say nothin' as will bring yer ter drawin' agin' Buffalo Bill."

Having given this advice to Captain Corduroy, Old Negotiate called for drinks, and when they had been disposed of, he slipped out of the crowd. Going to Buffalo Bill's room he failed to find him, and then he strolled down to the store where the scout always traded.

There he found him laying in a supply of provisions for a trip, and also filling his cartridge boxes with ammunition.

"Waal, Bill, yer is fixin' fer ther trail, it seems?" he said.

"Yes, for I start soon."

"Bill, I'd oughter let yer go without tellin' yer suthin'; but somehow I cannot."

"What is it, Negotiate?"

"Waal, fust and foremost, there are five galoots in ther hotel who says that they have come down from Calamity City ter hev a good time."

"Well, can't they be accommodated here?"

"Yas, fer as fer thet, their graveyard are not full, an' there are room fer more."

"Ah! They want a row?"

"Thet seems ter be thar way o' thinkin', Bill."

"Well, you keep out of it, Negotiate. There are five of them, you say, and you are too good a man to be killed."

"Bill, I is jist a leetle afeared thet it are a better man than I be they is lookin' fer."

"Who?"

"You!"

"No!"

"I means it."

"Who are they?"

"Ther cap'n calls hissself Cap'n Corduroy, an' ther handles o' ther others I didn't fasten ter."

"I know no such man, at least by that name."

"Names is slip'ry out heur, Bill."

"Yes, but what makes you think they want a row with me?"

"I was interdooced to ther cap'n, who interducted me to his pards, and he told me he had a grudge agin' you, an' calt you a desperado."

"Well, I am often called pet names, Negotiate."

"Yas, and thar are many who holds ill feelin' agin' yer, too; but I thinks these fellers mean biz."

"We can soon find out," said the scout calmly.

"I knows it, an' after that thar'll be shootin'. But I wants ter tell you thet after I left this Cap'n Corduroy and his men, the Chinees at the hotel come ter me and said that Panther Kate wanted ter see yer. She seems ter be afeared that thar's trouble in the air, jese the same as I am."

Buffalo Bill seemed undisturbed.

"Negotiate," he said, "will you do me a favor?"

"I'll do it, ef it's ter git drunk, Bill."

"I have an idea that I know who this Captain Curoroy is. If I am right, he is after my hair. Therefore, I want you to go back to the hotel and take a seat on the piazza, where you can watch them."

"I'll do it, Bill."

"I'm going up there to see what they want. When you see me coming up the street, call out:

"'Here comes Buffalo Bill!'"

"But that'll give 'em warnin', and they'll be ready for ye, an' lay ye out a cold corpus."

"I'll be ready for them quite as soon as they can get ready for me. If they show signs to prove that I am their game, you wave your hat to me, and I'll set the circus going. Now describe them to me."

This Old Negotiate did. Then, while Buffalo Bill went after his splendid black horse Midnight, Old Negotiate returned to the hotel.

CHAPTER VII.

BUFFALO BILL'S CHARGE.

When Old Negotiate returned to the Cody Hotel he first sought the parlor, for the Chinese waiter told him he would there find Panther Kate.

"I found Bill, miss," said Old Negotiate. "I found him at the store, and he will be up heur soon, and ef yer wishes ter see a immortal row, just you lie low in this heur parler an' wait fer ther music ter begin."

"Will you allow a number of men to attack your friend?"

"Oh, I'll be thar, miss, an' thar shan't be no underhan' game played agin' Bill. But I must leave you. Jist you wait heur a leetle."

With this remark Old Negotiate left the parlor. Panther Kate, riveted by a fascination she could not resist, remained standing at the window, half hidden by the heavy, coarse curtains, and waiting breathlessly for the coming of what the scout had called a "circus."

In the meantime Old Negotiate reëntered the bar and found the crowd still drinking heavily and getting more intoxicated each moment.

But he saw that Captain Corduroy and his comrades, though they had seemingly drunk freely, were apparently more sober than when he left them, which further convinced him that they were playing a part and were not allowing themselves to lose control of their faculties.

The reëntrance of Old Negotiate was greeted with

a shout of welcome, and of course he had to drink, and Captain Corduroy treated; but Negotiate did not swallow the liquor, and watching closely he saw that the strangers also failed to drink the contents of their glasses, a circumstance none of the drunken crowd observed.

Going out upon the piazza, Old Negotiate called out:

"Pard strangers, thar comes a man, ef yer wants ter see one, who hesn't got his ekal in these heur parts."

Captain Corduroy looked out and cried:

"Buffalo Bill! Be ready!"

Old Negotiate heard the words and asked quickly:

"Say, pards, does yer mean harm ter Bill?"

"He means harm to me, and I will but protect myself," said Captain Corduroy.

"All right; that are squar'; but as he don't see yer, I'll jist shout an' tell him."

Then he raised his voice and shouted:

"Ho, Bill! Thar are danger camped on yer trail heur."

The warning caused a dead silence to follow, and Captain Corduroy and his pards dropped their hands upon revolvers, as though to first turn them on Old Negotiate. But he had his weapon out already, and the strangers seemed to realize that he was not the man to pick a quarrel with then and there, for a dozen friends were around him.

With Buffalo Bill it was different. Negotiate's hail had given out a declaration of war. A man ever cool, Captain Corduroy was only an instant nonplused; then he cried:

"Yes, pards, I have come on Buffalo Bill's trail. He killed my two brothers, and right here I intend to avenge them."

This caused a general scattering of the crowd from the piazza. They were not too drunk to forget that self-preservation is nature's first law, and they dashed into the barroom with an alacrity that was amusing.

Old Negotiate went, too, though not from fear. He thought that from a window he could the better aid Buffalo Bill, and he took up his stand just inside, and stood ready for what might follow. The strangers had held their ground.

They had proven themselves generous fellows in facing the bar, and they would not flinch now when it was a case where there were five against one man, no matter what the reputation of that man might be.

"Give out ther hymn, cap'n, an' we'll shout ther doxology," cried one of them.

"I will meet him first," sternly said the captain.

"Thet bein' ther case, we'll fall back a leetle," and the first speaker gave a backward step or two, which was followed by his immediate comrades.

"You lose your gold if you desert me," savagely cried Captain Corduroy.

"Ain't desertin', only takin' up a more safer posish, cap'n."

In the meantime Buffalo Bill was coming toward the hotel, his horse in a slow walk. He had answered the hail of Old Negotiate with a wave of the hand, and shown no other sign that he understood it.

He saw the sudden decamping of the crowd and smiled. Then his eyes fell upon the form of Captain Corduroy, and he gave a slight start. Buffalo Bill was

mounted upon his matchless black, Midnight, sat easily in his saddle, and was evidently equipped for a journey. As he drew near the steps leading to the hotel piazza, he drew rein and said:

"So it is you, Kent King, known as the Gambler Guide! I know you in spite of your disguise."

Captain Corduroy, revealed now as Kent King, drew his revolver.

"Then it is war?" said Buffalo Bill, at the same time drawing his weapon.

"Yes, war to the death," shouted Captain Corduroy, and with the last word he threw forward his revolver to fire.

Before it could flash, the report of Buffalo Bill's weapon was heard, and the bullet shattered the pistol of his foe, knocking it from his hand.

"Come, boys; at him!" yelled Kent King, shaking his hand, which was stunned by the shock, though he was not wounded.

With his war cry ringing on his lips, a revolver in each hand and his spurs held to the flanks of Midnight, Buffalo Bill rushed to the charge. It was a thrilling, desperate scene. Shot after shot was poured at the daring man. One of Kent King's followers fired upon the scout from the barroom window.

Instantly the miscreant dropped, cut down by the deadly aim of Buffalo Bill. Another fired at him, and went reeling with a bullet through him.

Up the steps Midnight bounded with his daring rider, while the scout's revolvers flashed fire. It was more than Kent King and his murderers could stand.

In another second Midnight was upon the piazza, and charged right into the barroom, from which men

were scattering by the dozen. Within a minute the barroom was empty, though one of Kent King's miscreants lay dead on the floor.

Old Negotiate, racing at Midnight's heels, entered the barroom at this juncture, and bawled:

"Bill, he hev lit out!"

"Who?" Buffalo Bill demanded.

"The boss of 'em all."

"The leader?"

"Yes, Captain Corduroy."

"I shot to kill him."

"Waal, you missed him."

"I did not, for I saw him fall."

"Then the bullet glanced on his hard skull, and he played possum to get away."

"That may be; but let him go."

Going out upon the piazza, Buffalo Bill saw that Kent King was indeed gone, though two of his allies lay dead where they had fallen, and a third he had just left lifeless, lying on the floor of the barroom.

CHAPTER VIII.

A VILLAIN SURPRISED.

When Buffalo Bill made his desperate charge for the piazza, there was one of Kent King's followers who felt that he had made a mistake in volunteering upon a service so dangerous as the killing of the noted scout.

He was a good shot, yet both the shots he had fired at long range were fruitless, and he noticed that those of Kent King and his comrades also failed to bring down the human game they had flushed.

At once, when the eye of Kent King was not upon him, he turned and darted into the hall. An open door attracted his attention, and he glided into a large room, rudely furnished, yet comfortable.

It was what was called the parlor of the Cody Hotel, and was devoted wholly to distinguished guests and ladies.

It was no place for the deserting stranger, but it was, he observed, apparently unoccupied, and it afforded a delightful haven of refuge for him just then. He halted in an uncertain manner for an instant, while the rattle of revolvers without proved to him that he had been wise in decamping when he did.

The tremendous racket of Midnight's iron-shod hoofs upon the piazza coming to his ears, a sudden thought seemed to seize him. He darted to the window, which was open, and looked out upon the piazza.

There was his game, mounted still and boldly forcing his matchless horse upon the piazza. Kent King,

sheltering himself behind the furniture and creeping toward the opposite door by which he managed to make his escape, also caught the eye of the desperado.

"Ha! Now is my chance, Buffalo Bill. I never miss at close quarters!" hoarsely hissed the villain; and, with the side of the window for a rest, he ran his eye along the barrel of his revolver.

Buffalo Bill was not six feet from him, and the curtain concealing his foe, he did not see him, and it looked as though death must certainly follow the shot.

But before the finger drew on the trigger a form glided from the shelter of the curtain at the other window, and a revolver muzzle was pressed hard against the head of the desperado, whose startled ears were greeted with the words:

"Drop that weapon, sir, or die!"

The alacrity with which the villain chose the former alternative proved his appreciation of life. The weapon fell upon the piazza, and then came the words:

"Drop down on your face, sir, and lie there!"

Never in his life before had the villain lain down in such haste.

"Put your hands behind you, sir."

The order was obeyed.

"Who in thunder are yer?" he growled.

"A girl."

"Blarst yer petticoats, what in thunder is yer playin' this on me for?"

"Mr. Cody is my friend, and you sought to kill him."

"Waa! is do beat all!"

"Hold your hands closer together—there, now I can tie your wrists firmly together."

Then, with her silk scarf, taken from around her waist, Panther Kate bound the desperado's hands behind his back.

"Now you are safe."

"I doesn't think so, gal, for I'll be chewed up as soon as the wild man comes in here."

"Yes, he may kill you," was the unconsoling response.

"Lordy!"

"It is what you would have done for him had I not prevented you."

"You is mistook, gal. I were jest lookin' out at the circus."

Panther Kate laughed lightly, but it was a laugh the villain did not like. As the firing had now ceased, the girl went to the door, and her eyes fell upon Old Negotiate.

Negotiate had boldly stood in the doorway, his revolver in his hand, ready to aid Buffalo Bill with a shot, should he need it; but his admiration of his friend and the great feat he was performing caused him to keep back unless he was actually needed.

"Bill will slew 'em all, darned ef he don't," he muttered.

"Waal, miss, yer did see the circus, an' hed a front seat. Wasn't it han'some?" he said as, in obedience to the call of Panther Kate, he entered the parlor.

"It was a most thrilling scene, sir; but is Mr. Cody wounded?"

"Guess not, miss. Leastways he didn't look thet

way, tho' yer kin never tell, as Bill kin carry a skin full o' lead an' not show it."

"I wish you would kindly go and see if Mr. Cody is wounded, and——"

"Lordy! What hev yer thar?"

Old Negotiate's eyes had discovered the prostrate and bound prisoner.

"A present for Mr. Cody."

"Waal, he are a healthy one, and one o' ther Calamity gang, too—yas, he are ther one thet never treated, but allus dranked when t'others treated. I guess he are a sneakin' cuss, miss."

"Yes, for I captured him in some deadly work."

"I'll fetch Bill, miss, an' he will be more than pleased. Ef he don't kill ther varmint, guess he'll mark him."

Then Negotiate went in search of Buffalo Bill, while Panther Kate and her prisoner breathlessly waited, the former fearing that the scout had been killed or fatally wounded, the latter fearing that he had not.

It was certainly a surprise to Buffalo Bill, upon entering the parlor of the hotel, to find Panther Kate standing guard over a man lying prostrate upon his face and bound securely with the girl's scarf.

"Mr. Cody, I am so glad to see that you have not been wounded," and she stretched forth her hand.

"No, strange to say, I escaped unhurt, and I am surprised at their wretched firing; but whom have you there, Panther Kate?"

"One of your foes, who, fearing to face you, ran in here, and would have shot you from the window had I not prevented him."

"Pard, pretty as her mouth are, it's a-dodgin' truth now," put in the prisoner.

"Silence, sir! Are you one of Kent King's gang?" the scout demanded.

"Who are he, pard?"

Buffalo Bill stepped out of the parlor and soon returned with Old Negotiate.

"Is that one of them, Negotiate?"

"He are."

"That settles it, and I have to thank you, Panther Kate, for saving my life. Now, what shall I do with your prisoner?"

"I hope you won't kill him," said Panther Kate.

"No, I never hit a man when he's down."

"Better mark him, Bill," suggested Old Negotiate.

"No, as he has done me no harm, I'll let him go, and I will send a message to Kent King by him."

"I'll carry it, Pard Bill, an' I'll rastle in prayer for yer," cried the villain.

"Prayer from such as you is a mockery," said Panther Kate, with a look of contempt.

"I suppose you know, sir, that Captain Corduroy, as you call him, escaped?" said the scout.

"No, pard, fer I came in heur, not wishing to shoot yer or git hurted myself."

"I have no doubt that you wished to escape injury yourself, sir, and it is well for you that you came in here, for three of your comrades lie dead out there; but it would have been the end of me, your coming in here, had not this lady been here to thwart your little game."

"An' she are a screamer, pard. She jist took me in out o' mischief, an' yer see she hev got me fixed."

"Yes, and you are fortunate to escape death at my hands, for I was sorely tempted to shoot you," said Panther Kate indignantly.

"Lordy! I'd 'a' sot heavy on your conscience, miss; but yer do look as though yer'd hev clipped my spurs fer me, ef yer didn't let daylight inter my head."

"Now, sir," said Buffalo Bill, "I suppose you know where to find Kent King?"

"I might be able to strike his trail."

"Well, see that you do, and also see that the sunset finds you out of Border City."

"It will, fer a fact."

"Tell Kent King that now that I know him to be on the path of revenge against me, that I, too, will strike the same trail against him, and kill him when and wherever I find him. Go!"

He unfastened the scarf as he spoke, and, glad to escape, the villain darted out of the door, his haste causing Old Negotiate to laugh heartily.

"I'm glad that you let him go," said Panther Kate as she left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE AMBUSH.

A few moments after the departure of Panther Kate from the hotel, Buffalo Bill also left, having received word from Ben Tabor, the Texan, that he wished to have a few words with him in private.

Tabor, as has been stated, was a member of the band of Texans known as the Revolver Riders; and a number of his comrades were in Border City.

Buffalo Bill's intention on leaving the hotel was to go to his temporary home, some distance out of the town.

"You are going out home, I take it?" said Tabor, addressing the scout when the two met. "Where is your horse? I want to speak with you, and if we ride out together that will give me the chance I want."

"My horse is at the hotel stable," said the scout.

"All right. I'll get mine."

They parted, to meet again in ten minutes.

"Where is your captain—Dash?" asked Buffalo Bill, as they started on the way to Cody's cabin, which was distant perhaps five miles from Border City.

The direction took them along a trail passed over a short time before by Panther Kate as she went toward her ranch.

"It is from Captain Dash that I came here to see you," said Tabor, in reply to the scout's question.

"To see me?" asked Buffalo Bill in surprise.

"Yes; after the escape of Kent King we went to Santa Fe, and there we remained a week, looking for

the gambler; but not finding him, and hearing that he had gone to Denver, the captain determined to go on to his home, being compelled for some reasons to do so, and offered me liberal terms to take half a dozen of our riders and come and seek you, he promising to join us in Colorado as soon as possible."

"But why should he take so much trouble to send word to me?"

"Because he says you, believing the Gambler Guide dead, would be taken unawares, and he felt that he would attempt your life; but, warned, you could be on the lookout for him; and he sent you this little package, and you will find instructions written inside."

As the Texan spoke, he handed the scout a small package, which the latter placed in his pocket until he should get home.

"I thank you, Mr. Tabor, for your kindness, but when do you start west?"

"As soon as our horses have had a few days' rest."

"Good! I shall set out myself in a few days, and I will accompany you."

"I am glad to hear that, for we had a dangerous trip of it coming east by ourselves, as we waked up several bands of reds; but listen! There is trouble there—hark!"

A shot was seen to flash out ahead, near a thicket of cottonwoods, and a cry of pain followed.

"Come!" cried the scout, and driving their spurs into their horses, they dashed forward, their revolvers ready for use.

A moment after they came upon a startling scene, for by the starlight they discovered a form lying upon

the ground and two men struggling with a third person.

Hearing horses' hoofs, one of the men turned quickly and fired. At the flash both Buffalo Bill and the Texan replied with a shot. The man dropped in his tracks; while, with a curse, his comrade turned to run into the thicket, with the one he had been struggling with in his arms.

But quick as was his motion, quicker was the act of the Texan, who sent a lasso whirling over his head. With a sudden jerk the fugitive was brought to the ground. Throwing himself from his horse, Buffalo Bill bent over him, and placed his revolver to his head, while he cried:

"It's Panther Kate he's got!"

"Yes, Mr. Cody; they lassoed me and jerked me from my horse, and though I managed to draw my pistol and killed one of them, they caught me at last," said the girl, rising from the ground as the scout released her from the lariat of the Texan, which had encircled her head also.

"Don't p'int that durned iron at me, pard, fer I is surrendered," said the ruffian pleadingly.

"I've a mind to let it go off, and save trouble; shall I, Tabor?" asked the scout as the Texan approached, and raised his sombrero politely to Panther Kate, who stood by with folded arms, perfectly cool after her adventure.

"As you please, Cody; I guess nobody'll mourn for him."

"Oh, Lordy! Pards, yer wouldn't do it; I knows yer, Bill Cody, an' yer heart is too tender."

"And I know you now, Vagabond Joe. Now tell me why you attacked Panther Kate?"

The villain squirmed as if he did not wish to reply.

"Tell me why you attacked Panther Kate?" the scout demanded, covering the man with a revolver. "What were you and your villainous companions up to?"

"Don't shoot!" the fellow whined.

"Then speak!"

"Well, yer see, it war this way: We knowed that she had the gold you an' ther captain put up in that bet you made, and——"

"Your captain?" said the scout.

The man squirmed again.

"Who is your captain—out with it?"

"I calc'late that you know who he is, Buffalo Bill."

"You mean Kent King, the man I made my bet with—though I did not know at the time he was Kent King—and the man who tried to kill me at the hotel a while ago."

"Yer got ther best of us, Pard Bill, in that row!"

"Then you were one of the scoundrelly crowd that came in disguise to the hotel to kill me?"

"'Tain't no use ter lie to you. Yer knows everything," the rascal whined.

"I do not believe Kent King left the town!" said Panther Kate, who seemed to be made unduly excited by these disclosures. "Was his name really Kent King?"

"That was his name," the scout answered; "and a greater scamp never went unhung. He intends to kill me, if he can. But what do you know of him, Kate?"

The girl did not answer. It was evident that she

was deeply moved by something, but she did not speak. Buffalo Bill turned again to the prisoner.

"If your captain is in the town, you know where he is!" he declared sternly.

"That's right," said Tabor. "Blow the devil's head off if he refuses to tell!"

Buffalo Bill's revolver was again pointed at the man's head.

"It would serve him right; he tried to kill me, and——"

"Don't shoot; I'll tell all I know," the man promised.

"Where is your master, Kent King?"

"Does yer know Dandy Daly, ther card sharp?"

"Yes; only too well."

"Well, ther captain is bunkin' t'-night at Daly's cabin."

"Do you speak true?" asked Tabor.

Buffalo Bill did not need to ask, he saw that the rascal, filled with fear, spoke the truth.

"Is Daly with him?" he asked.

"No; ther captain is there alone to-night."

"And went there after our little shooting circus at the hotel?" said the scout.

"Right ye aire, ever' time. You're allus right, Pard Bill."

"Come, let us go back to the town, and then out to Daly's cabin," said Panther Kate, with strange anxiety.

The scout turned to Vagabond Joe.

"Joe, I can see that you have spoken the truth once. For that you may go free. We are after bigger game than your master!"

Vagabond Joe con

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Vagabond Joe could scarcely believe that he heard aright.

"Does yer mean it?" he inquired, in bewilderment.

"Yes, you may go, because you have told me the truth."

Thereupon the scout released the man.

"Bury your dear pards, Joe," Buffalo Bill commanded. "It's work we haven't time for."

Bringing Panther Kate's horse to her, she sprang lightly into the saddle, and the three set off at a rapid gallop back to town, leaving the vagabond standing in the road gazing after them. As they disappeared, he gave one glance at his two dead comrades, and with superstitious dread uttered a yell of terror and darted away like a deer.

CHAPTER X.

A MYSTERY.

Upon arriving at the town, Ben Tabor suggested that Buffalo Bill and Panther Kate should wait until he went to the gambling hall and called out his half dozen Texan pards, so that there would be no doubt of capturing the gambler.

When the Texan had left, Buffalo Bill turned to the girl and said inquiringly:

"So you know this Kent King, too, Kate?"

"Yes, I have known him for years."

"I believe his real name was Kenton Kingsland?"

"Yes, such was his name when I first met him; but tell me, do you think he can have escaped, Mr. Cody?"

"Oh, no; he hardly expected to have his disguise known to any one except his friends, and is doubtless at Daly's cabin."

"I hope so, for if he should escape me now I would almost give up hope; but he cannot, for fate will yet bring him face to face with me, whom he has so bitterly wronged."

She had spoken the last words more to herself than to the scout, and he remained silent, not wishing to pry into her sorrows of the past until she suddenly asked:

"Did you ever hate any one?"

"Oh, yes, and I'm a good hater when I try."

"So am I; I hate as I love, with all my heart and soul, and I now hate where I loved, for once, in the long ago, Kenton Kingsland was the very idol of

my heart; but now, Mr. Cody, I hate him more than I ever loved him, and I have sworn to track him to death.

"It was to find him that I came to Border City. I heard he had left but a few days before for Colorado, and I determined to await his return; now, at last, it seems as if I could keep my oath, for you will not stay my hand in my revenge, which is so sweet to me! You will not, Mr. Cody, will you?"

"You would not kill him, would you, Panther Kate?"

"As I would a snake in my path," she answered fiercely.

Before she could say more, Ben Tabor and his comrades came out of the tavern and joined them.

"Now to the cabin of Daly; and this man says he will guide us," Tabor announced.

"Yas, I knows ev'ry crook an' hole near Border City, don't I, Buffalo Bill?" said the man.

"You do, indeed, Old Negotiate."

"I also know that Dandy Daly, the card sharp."

"A precious rascal, too; where is your horse, Negoshy?"

"Chewin' grub in ther stable; I'll go foothack."

"No, jump up behind me, for my horse will carry double."

"She'll carry a awful load o' sin with me on her back," answered Negotiate, and with a nimble spring he mounted behind the scout, and the Texans having returned with their horses, the party set off at a gallop, Old Negotiate remarking:

"Is yer huntin' in company with gals now?" and he cast a sly glance at Kate Kearney.

"Yes, Negoshy," Buffalo Bill answered. "You are not opposed to pleasant company, are you?"

"Nary; I likes her, an' she gits a pinch o' my dust ev'ry night at ther theater. Soon as she hes slinged her pretty feet, an' sung a song, I skips, fer durn ther balance o' ther crowd, they is so doleful; she's jist ther gal I'd like ter splice with fer life."

"Why don't you ask her to marry you, old man?"

"Ask her to marry me? I'd fight the Sioux nation fust; but thar's ther cabing o' Dandy Daly, the card sharp."

Negotiate pointed to a log cabin standing alone, and about a hundred yards back from the road. After a short conversation it was agreed to approach the house on foot; and that Old Negotiate should knock and tell the stranger that Dandy Daly wanted to have him come back to the hall.

It was planned that when he stepped out of the door they were to seize him, but under no circumstances to take his life.

"He must not be hurt, for I have to deliver him to Captain Dash, who will take him to Texas to be hanged," said Tabor.

"I would go to the end of the earth to see Kent King die," said Panther Kate fiercely.

Having arranged their plan to capture the disguised gambler, the party approached the house, in which a dim light was burning, and Old Negotiate knocked at the door.

"Well, who is it?" came from within in a deep voice.

"It's only me; an' ther dandy card sharp says as

how he wants yer at ther hall ter chip in a leetle game," said Old Negotiate in an innocent tone.

"Tell him I have gone to bed and am not well."

"I'll tell him, but he's got a prime chip in fer yer," urged the teamster.

"All right, I will come."

With a muttered oath at having to dress and retrace his way half a mile to the gambling hall, the man arose and began to put on his clothes.

Presently the heavy bar was removed from the door, the key was heard to turn in the lock, and a head was thrust out carefully, the eyes narrowly searching the surroundings.

As if assured of no lurking danger, the man stepped out, and turning, locked the door, just as two dark forms bounded around the corners of the cabin, and he was seized in a grasp he could not shake off.

In vain did he strive to beat off his assailants and to draw his weapons; he was held in the clutch of Seven-foot Harry and Ben Tabor.

Seeing around him half a dozen more, while the cold muzzle of a pistol pressed against his temple, he ceased resistance, and said, in surly tones:

"Well, who are you, and what do you want with me?"

"We are Texans," said Ben Tabor quietly.

"Ha!"

"Yes, and Revolver Riders, who acknowledge Captain Dash as our chief."

"I know nothing of him or his cutthroat band."

"You are mistaken; you escaped from us when we were on the trail for Santa Fe; but this time you shall not escape, Kent King."

"Yes, I am Kent King, and you have me fast, but I do not despair," was the reckless reply.

"You have no hope, Kenton Kingsland, for I am on your trail."

"Great God! Kate Colvin! Is it you or your ghost?"

The man shrank from Panther Kate as though from a spirit of the other world, while a bitter laugh broke from his lips as she replied:

"I am no ghost, sir, as you will find out!"

"A healthy ghost she is, pard," put in Old Negotiate.

"Come, let us be off," said Ben Tabor.

"But where will you take him?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"I hardly know. Our horses need rest before we take the trail again, and——"

"I will take charge of him," said Panther Kate.

"You, Kate?" asked Cody in surprise.

"Yes; I will not lose sight of this man; and more, if you know no place to take him until you start west, bring him to my cabin; he will be safe there."

"No, no; she will kill me when I am bound and cannot defend myself," said Kent King.

"I will pledge my word not to do so; I will cancel my engagement at the theater and guard this man, for I will revel in seeing him die."

The voice of the woman proved how deeply she was moved.

"What say you, Cody?" asked Tabor.

"I see no other plan; Kate certainly can keep an eye on him."

"Well, to your cabin we go; and, boys, you can return to the tavern, and I will come in and see you

to-morrow. My man, do you want to join our party in going west?"

Tabor had turned to Old Negotiate, who answered promptly:

"I'll bet yer ther Gambler Guide agin' Panther Kate I does. I hes a horse as is lightnin', an' Billy knows I is good on ther shoot."

"Very well," said Ben Tabor.

"Go up to ther tavern and bunk in with my pard; but not a word of our night's work, mind you."

Tabor called to Seven-foot Harry to throw the bound prisoner up behind him; and, with Buffalo Bill riding on one side and Panther Kate on the other, they started for the ranch of the latter.

It was a small, stoutly built, two-roomed cabin, with several outhouses near by. Two huge dogs acted as guardians, and these greeted the party with savage barks. A word from Panther Kate quieted them. She dismounted and threw open her door; and, carrying the prisoner in their arms, the Texan and Buffalo Bill entered.

"Lay him there, please; here, Satan, watch this man, and if he attempts to free himself take hold of him."

The huge dog seemed to understand fully his mistress' command, for he crouched down by Kent King, who lay bound hand and foot upon the floor.

"I think we can leave him now, Mr. Cody," said Tabor.

"I think so, too; good night, Kate," answered the scout.

"Good night, gentlemen," she said; "I thank you for saving me from those villains to-night, but more for bringing me face to face with that man."

She pointed to the prisoner, who had closed his eyes to avoid the stare of the dog. Mounting their horses, Buffalo Bill and Tabor rode rapidly away.

Arriving at his own cabin, the scout turned to the lamp to examine the package sent him by Captain Dash. To his surprise he saw that it contained a large and beautiful diamond, and upon a piece of paper was written in the Texas chief's hand:

"Load one chamber of your pet revolver with this diamond as a bullet; mark which it is, and keep it to send into the heart of Kent King, the gambler, whenever you again meet him.

"I have the mate of the stone I send you, and keep it for the same purpose should he cross my path.

"CAPTAIN DASH, of the Revolver Riders."

CHAPTER XI.

THE HEART OF A WOMAN.

"While there's life there's hope, so I'll not despair yet; but I would rather be at the stake than facing this monster, whose eyes glare into mine whenever I open them. Bound as I am, it is enough to drive me mad; and yet I dare not appeal to Kate for mercy; no, no, for a woman's love turned to hate is deadlier than the serpent's sting."

Thus thought Kent King as he gave a glance toward the door through which Panther Kate had gone into the other room. As he turned his head, Satan gave an ominous growl, and once more he closed his eyes.

Yet with closed eyes, Kent King could see those red lips, white teeth, and glaring eyes above his face. Brave man though he was, the sweat stood in beads upon his forehead, and he became strangely nervous, which increased until human nature could bear no more, and he shrieked forth:

"Kate! Kate! For the love of God, kill me and end this misery."

At this cry the huge dog sprang upon the prisoner, his teeth ready to bury themselves in the man's throat, while he growled savagely. A quick tread followed. Panther Kate entered the room and asked quietly:

"Well, sir, did you call?"

"Great God! Have you no heart, woman? Do you not see this monster upon me, and that I am going mad?" he groaned.

"Ha! ha! ha! Then you can be made to feel,

Kenton Kingsland? I believed you callous to every emotion, though time was when you professed feelings such as other people possess. I am happy now, sir, for I gaze on you writhing in mortal anguish."

Her voice was hard, her eyes burning, and her bosom heaved convulsively, as though the inmost depths of her being were stirred.

"Kate, I have wronged you bitterly; more than human being can forgive, yet I beg you to remove this devilish beast from my breast or I will go mad," he said pleadingly.

Something in his tone told her that he spoke the truth, and she called to the dog. It at once obeyed her, and, walking to the corner, lay down.

"God bless you, Kate, for that act," said the prisoner. "If you desire my death, kill me, but do not torture me beyond human endurance again."

"I have sought you to kill you, Kenton."

"Then do so; life has no charm for me now, and I have often sought death, but it would not come to me."

"You speak falsely, Kenton, for you have ever clung to life with strange tenacity."

"Once I did; but, Kate, since—since——"

"I am listening, sir."

"Since that night that—that——"

"Let me complete your sentence; since the night you saw me raise to my lips the fatal drug you had prepared for me, you have been haunted by a phantom."

"Yes, Kate, and bitterly have I been punished for that crime. I was mad then, for I knew that you loved me, and I loved you more than all else in the world; but I owed large gambling and others debts,

and had no money to pay them with. I had an opportunity to marry an heiress, who was to turn over into my keeping her vast wealth.

"My marriage to you was a secret one, and none knew of it, and, driven to desperation by my debts, I one night prepared two glasses with poison, intending that you should drink the one and I the other, and we would die together.

"Coward that I was, I saw you drink the fatal draft, though I touched not my lips to mine; and before I could summon aid you were, as I believed, dead. Oh, Kate! No one knows my misery then. In terror I fled and sought a refuge amid wild scenes and wilder men."

"Have you told me all the truth, Kenton Kingsland?" she asked in a low, stern tone.

As if determined to hide no atom of his guilt, he continued:

"No, Kate, not all; for, possessing, as you know, a strange power of imitation, I wrote a note, copying your hand, and saying that you were tired of living and had ended your own life."

"I have that note with me, sir."

"That caused people to believe you had committed suicide; more I cannot tell you, Kate."

"But I can, sir; I was believed dead, dressed in my shroud, and buried, aye, placed in my grave, Kenton Kingsland, and left to my last sleep among the dead.

"But avaricious eyes had seen that my diamond rings were left on my fingers, and that night ghouls of the grave came to rob me. When they broke open the casket, the effects of the drug had worn off, the fresh air revived me, and I arose in my shroud and

put to wild flight the base robbers of the dead. Can I forgive you that, Kenton-Kingsland?"

"No, I do not ask it—yes, I do ask it, for you can forgive me if you love me as I do you; forgive, forget me, and I will go happy to my death."

The man tried to stretch forth his bound hands, and half raised himself from the floor, while his voice was full of pleading, and his eyes bent on her with all the fascination he could throw into them.

She was a woman, and she had loved him with all her soul. She had suffered much, but she believed he had also. Her love had turned to hatred in a night; but now, in a minute, it flew back from hate to passionate idolatry, and she flung herself upon him, bound as he was, and cried:

"Kenton! Kenton! I do forgive you all, and I will forget all; only come back to me, and love me, as in that olden time when we were both so happy."

A triumphant light flashed in his eyes; but he said sadly:

"This is beyond all hope, Kate; now I can die content."

"Die! You shall not die, Kenton, for I will protect you; see, I sever your bonds, and—aye, we will fly together from here, for I have two fleet horses in the stable. Come, throw off those suits that disguise your form; pistols, rifles, and all I have here, so come with me, and woe be to him who would stand in our path."

The woman was now almost hysterical with delight and nervous dread combined; but a few calm words of the man soothed her, and an hour after they left the cabin, both of them disguised beyond recognition.

CHAPTER XII.

BUFFALO BILL RECEIVES A LETTER.

After a substantial breakfast, which both the Texan and Buffalo Bill ate as only plainsmen can eat, the two mounted their horses and wended their way to the cabin of Panther Kate, determined to make arrangements for an early start west.

The huge dogs greeted their arrival with ferocious barking, but no answer to their call came. The cattle had spread over the prairie, and the chickens stood around the cabin as if waiting for their morning meal. Riding up to the door, Buffalo Bill knocked loudly, but still no answer came.

"Great heavens! What can have happened?" said Ben Tabor.

"I hope he has not released himself and harmed Kate," replied the scout. "I don't know what to think; but there is a way to find out."

He attempted to dismount, when the dogs rushed to attack him. Regaining his saddle, the scout drew a revolver, and two shots ended the career of Satan and Beelzebub, as Panther Kate had named the canine monsters.

With a rail, Buffalo Bill and Tabor then burst in the door. They found the cabin vacant; and more still, evidences that it had been purposely vacated, for articles not convenient to carry were strewn about, while other things of use had evidently been removed.

The thongs that had bound the prisoner lay upon the floor, and the lamp still burned on a table. Going

to the stable, they found Panther Kate's two riding horses gone.

"Well, who would ever have believed that woman to be treacherous?" said Ben Tabor.

Buffalo Bill looked blank.

"I never thought Panther Kate would go back on her word, but she certainly has helped Kent King to get away. Let us go on to town and see if we can strike a new trail."

Rapidly the two now rode on into Border City. There a new mystery awaited them, for Jack Coes, the keeper of the tavern, handed Buffalo Bill a note, which he said had been brought him from Panther Kate. Opening it, the scout read:

"MR. CODY: If I have broken faith with you, blame a woman's love, for in such cases the heart, not the head, governs her actions.

"The stake money I still hold. As you know with whom it was you made your bet, you will see that I can continue to hold it, until one or the other wins it, a consummation I devoutly pray shall never happen; not that I wish to keep the gold, but that I hope that neither you nor Kent King will die as the wager suggests.

"He befriended me as an orphan child, and laid the foundation for a career that would have made me famous had not circumstances forced me to follow him, believing myself to be wronged by him.

"Now the dead past is buried between us, and hope beckons us on to a future of bliss, and we fly far from here. Your friend,

PANTHER KATE.

"Now Mrs. Kenton Kingsland."

"Well, that settles it, and I fear we will never find them," said Ben Tabor, when he had read the letter which Buffalo Bill handed to him.

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"Kent King will never leave this country," said the scout, "no matter what he may promise Kate. Here comes Seven-foot Harry."

"Yes, I sent him to the cabin of Dandy Daly. What news, Harry?"

"He has taken his horse, saddle, bridle, and arms from the cabin, and were seen at one o'clock making tracks on the trail west, along with a boy I judge were Panther Kate."

"All right; we will spend this day in striving to find their trail, and if we do not succeed we will have to wait and go west with the bull outfit."

"It is all we can do, Ben," answered Buffalo Bill.

And at once the hunt for the fugitives began, many of the citizens joining in the search, for it was whispered around that Kent King, the Gambler Guide, had come in the night and kidnaped Panther Kate, and no one who knew the truth contradicted the statement.

CHAPTER XIII.

PARSON BRISTOW HOLDS TRUMPS.

The day for the train to start on its long western trail rolled around, and all was bustle and confusion in and around Border City. Russell, Majors & Waddell were sending out a larger bull outfit, as it was called, than usual, and a quantity of beef cattle for the Western forts were to be driven along in company with it.

Ben Tabor had been appointed chief herdsman, and, with his men, was very busy getting the cattle together. Buffalo Bill was to accompany the men, intending, when the train struck the South Platte, to branch off to Julesburg, from which place he was to continue his journey alone.

A short while before the train pulled out from its encampment, the stage from the East rolled up to the tavern, and the driver, Bob Briggs, sung out in his cheery way:

"On time, landlord, fer ther western-bound train?"

"Yes, just in time, Bob; you have driven hard, and are ahead of time."

"Yas, always clever to obleege calicos and preachers, fer I hes some bound West. 'Light, parson, fer our journey hes ended right heur, an' ef yer were a gin-slinger, I'd ax yer in ter take a drink, out o' thanks fer yer pra'ers fer me, an' ther sweet voice o' yer darty, though I hasn't seen her face."

Then Bob Briggs sprang nimbly from his box and assisted down an elderly gentleman, with smooth face,

long white hair, gold spectacles, a suit of clerical black, and high hat with a band of deepest mourning surrounding it.

Behind this pious-looking individual came a young girl with a wealth of golden hair peeping out from beneath her nunlike headdress and heavy black veil.

"This are Parson Uriah Bristow, landlord, and his darty, whom he calls Rebecca. They is goin' West as missionaries ter convart ther red heathen from ther bernightedness. So fill 'em with provender, fer we didn't stop fer breakfast. Then hunt ther parson up a hearse o' some kind ter travel West with, fer he's got ther dust ter pay fer it."

Turning to the clerical individual, Bob added in a low tone:

"Won't you hev a drink, parson, jist fer yer stomick's sake, an' good-fellowship?"

"No; I never drink; it becometh not my cloth," answered Uriah Bristow in a sepulchral tone.

"Never rastle tanglefoot? Why, pard, yer doesn't know what is healthy. Then hev a smoke?"

"I never use the intoxicating and damning weed."

"Ther dickens! What do yer do, pard, ter make yer cheerful?"

"I am never cheerful."

"You look it. There, landlord, lead him in to ther hash bar. I'll bet he kin git away with viands, or he ain't like ther parsons as uster come ter my old mammy's home when I were a kid. Jerusha; ther chickens uster skip, ther sheeps bleat, ther turkeys gobble, an' pigs squeal whenever they saw 'em comin', fer they knowed thar was ter be eatin' done."

The landlord came to the rescue and led the doleful

preacher and his deeply veiled daughter into the house; which they left an hour after in an ambulance, drawn by two large mules, to follow the western-bound train.

Behind the ambulance were hitched two splendid horses, which the parson had purchased for himself and daughter, to enable them to vary the long ride by horseback exercise, and in the vehicle were many little things to add to their comfort. To the captain of the train, Lew Simpson, Parson Bristow brought a letter of introduction from the general in command of that department.

The letter asked that every courtesy be shown the minister and his daughter, who were going West as missionaries to teach the Indians at the agencies. For several days the train wended its way westward, making slow marches on account of its size and the large number of cattle along.

At night, when gathered around the camp fires, the train people tried to draw the dismal-looking parson and his veiled daughter into their enjoyment. The girl pleaded illness, and the parson said he never indulged in light amusement, and besought them to prayer and psalm singing.

This course naturally caused the cheerful members of the outfit to leave the parson and his daughter severely alone, a circumstance with which they seemed to be pleased. Each day the daughter, whom persons at first thought to be shamming, grew more indisposed, until at last she was unable to leave her ambulance, and her condition excited the sympathy of all.

Like a tender, loving nurse her father hung over her, riding in the ambulance, supporting her head through the long day's march, and attentive to her

every want. Touched by the suffering of the girl, several of the emigrants' wives and daughters offered their services; but the father said he alone would care for her, and she seemed unhappy if he was out of her sight for an instant.

At last, one beautiful moonlight night, when a hush had fallen on the train encampment, the spirit of the young girl took its flight.

The wails of the stricken old man were pitiful to hear. Two of the women of the train dressed her for her grave, a shroud of blankets encircled the fair form, and in a snowy bank, by the edge of a crystal creek, her grave was dug and the body was placed in it just as the sun arose above the prairie horizon.

"Do not hide her from my sight; I will fill the grave myself; leave me, my kind friends, leave me, and ere long I will follow you," said the parson.

One by one the people departed, the train pulled out of camp, the last wagon disappeared over a rise in the prairie, and the voices of the cattle drivers grew fainter and fainter in the distance. Still the old man stood, his hands resting on the spade, which had been left with him.

His dead daughter lay in the shallow grave, enveloped in the blanket shroud, and her face veiled as she had worn it in life. A short distance away stood his horse, and no sound broke the silence after the shouts of the cattle drivers had died away.

At length he went to work and shoveled the earth into the grave with a strength and quickness one would not have looked for in a man of his age.

Casting the spade aside, he mounted his horse and rode down the stream instead of following the trail

of the train. His thoughts seemed far away, his head was bent, and he seemed unmindful in his grief which way his horse was taking him, or that he had been warned of Indians lurking in the vicinity.

Hardly had he gone from sight before a horseman appeared through the timber from the opposite side. At a glance he was recognized as Buffalo Bill, mounted upon his faithful horse Midnight.

As though with a set object in view, he dismounted, and his eye falling upon the spade, he began to throw out the loose earth from the newly made grave. Diligently he worked, using great care as he dug nearer and nearer to the body, and so intent upon his work as to be oblivious to all else.

At length the spade touched the blanket, and his hands were then used to scrape off the dirt until the veil was visible. Tenderly he drew it aside and gazed upon the face of the dead. The eyes were closed, the hair was blond, not black, but it was a face he knew well. From his lips broke the cry:

"It is Panther Kate."

"Yes, it is Panther Kate, and I am Kent King, the Gambler Guide!"

Buffalo Bill started, and glanced up, to realize that he was trapped. His belt of arms lay some feet distant, and he gazed into the face of Parson Bristow, but the spectacles, shoved up on the forehead, displayed the vicious eyes of Kent King.

CHAPTER XIV.

CLOSE QUARTERS.

"It looks as though I was going to win my bet, Cody," said Kent King, with a sneer.

"You have got the stakes, anyhow, by murdering this poor girl, and, of course, I need expect no mercy," was the cool reply.

"Murdered Kate! What do you mean?" and the man's face turned white.

"I had a suspicion that you were not what you represented yourself, and when Mrs. Dooley, who had dressed poor Kate for the grave, told me that her hair had been dyed yellow, I determined to ferret out the mystery, and I have done so."

"You have run yourself into a death trap, and whether I killed Kate or not, you will never be called as a witness in the case."

"I'm not dead yet, old man."

"No, but you will be within the minute; for I intend to kill you," was the deliberate reply.

Then Kent King's revolver covered Buffalo Bill's heart, while he continued:

"I want you to die with the pleasant thought that I am going West to marry Mary Hale——"

"I doubt it."

"Well, as you will not live to see if I do, you must take my word for it. After I have got possession of her fortune, for she has one the judge knows nothing about, she, too, will die of the same disease that killed Kate Colvin—namely, poison!"

"Devil! If you don't kill me, and I ever have you in my power I will carry you to old Rain-in-the-face and have his warriors torture you to death."

Then, with a cry more like an enraged beast than a human being, and reckless of consequences, Buffalo Bill sprang from the grave toward his foe. The flash and report of Kent King's revolver followed; but, taken so thoroughly by surprise, he missed his aim.

A second shot, as he ran backward, struck Buffalo Bill in the arm and turned him half around. Mad-dened now, it did not check the scout. The third, fourth, and fifth chambers of the weapon missed fire. A yell of triumph broke from Buffalo Bill as he still pressed his enemy, who steadily retreated before him.

But the yell was answered by a score of war whoops, and through the timber came dashing a number of painted savages. Buffalo Bill saw that it would be madness to press his attack on Kent King, unarmed as he was. Turning quickly, he sprang across the open grave, and, seizing his weapons, started in flight, at the same time calling for Midnight, whom he had left in a thicket near by.

An answering neigh was heard, and the noble horse came at a run, the reins and stirrups flapping wildly. Kent King, who had not fled at sight of the redskins, called out:

"There's your game, men! A thousand dollars for his scalp."

With wild yells they started in pursuit; but the scout had already reached his horse, was in the saddle, and had unslung his rifle from the horn and brought it to his shoulder.

A shot, and down went a pursuer. A volley was sent after him, but flew harmlessly by, and like the wind Midnight sped away, for he knew well that his master depended wholly on him for his life.

“They are bandits of the trail, disguised as Indians, and Kent King is their chief!”

CHAPTER XV.

MARY HALE.

In a comfortable log cabin, containing four rooms, and surrounded by every evidence of a well-to-do borderman's home, sat Mary Hale. She was thinking of her noble friend, Buffalo Bill, who had saved her from marriage with the Gambler Guide.

Her father had brought her sad news only a short while before to the effect that the expected train had arrived from Border City and along with it Ben Tabor, his Texas pards, and Old Negotiate, who had been initiated as a member of the band, but that no tidings had they had of Buffalo Bill for weeks.

He had left camp before daylight one morning, it was said, to go on a hunt. Since then he had not been seen. Though the train had halted for two days, and parties had been sent out in all directions, no trace of him had been discovered.

The last to see him was Parson Bristow, who had reported that while he was throwing the earth into his daughter's grave, the scout had joined him and aided him in his sad work, and that when he had left the timber to overtake the train, Buffalo Bill had said he would remain and hunt for game.

Ben Tabor and his Texans had gone back to the timber, where was the lone grave of the young girl, and had seen the tracks of the scout and of Midnight. But they had also made a discovery which filled them with dread, for there were signs of a large party of horsemen having passed that way, and not far distant was another new-made mound.

They had thrown the earth out of the grave, expecting to find the body of Buffalo Bill, but with glad hearts they saw that it was not the face of the scout. What they saw was a painted face and a form clad in Indian costume. But the paint was a disguise—beneath it was the fair skin of a white man.

Farther upon the prairie, as they followed the trail of over a score of horses, they found a dead mustang, a bullet in his head.

"Ther gerloot in ther hole had a wound in his head, an' this mustang died suddint like o' ther same disease, an' I'm thinking thet Buffler Bill were the one as did ther shootin'."

Such had been the comment of Seven-foot Harry, and so had all agreed. They followed on the trail to the hills, where they lost it, and, with their small force dare not go farther, and gave the scout up as dead. Suddenly a hoof fall caught the ear of Mary Hale, as she thought of these things, and, glancing up, she saw a horseman approaching the cabin.

Then, as she gazed, she recognized the rider, and her face flushed crimson. A moment after he dismounted, and met her upon the piazza.

"Why, Captain Dash, who would have expected to see you here?" she said, in the innocent way a woman can assume in deceiving a lover, while she well knew she had expected and hoped for his coming for months.

"You said I might come, Mary," answered the captain of the Revolver Riders, in his sincere way.

"Did I?" she asked archly.

"Yes; have you forgotten the time when I struck your train with my Revolver Riders, and captured Kent King, the Gambler Guide?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Cody led you there, and you both did me a noble service."

"Yes, noble Cody, whom some of my men report dead. I intend to start on his trail to-morrow with my men."

"I fear it will be useless, from all my father tells me," she said sadly.

"It may be useless, as far as finding him is concerned; but not to avenge him," and his voice became deep and stern.

"But you know not whom to strike as his murderers, Captain Dash."

"I do know; the man who pretended to be Parson Bristow——"

"Pretended to be, captain? Why, he certainly seemed a sincere Christian. He came to supper with father last night, and was very entertaining, I assure you."

"As he knows how to be, for he is none other than Kent King."

"Kent King! That wretch! Impossible, for you——" and Mary's face turned white as she paused.

"No, I did not kill him, for he escaped from me before we reached Santa Fe. He was captured in Border City in disguise by Buffalo Bill and some of my men, and again escaped, through the love of a girl who had sought him to kill him, but changed her mind, and fled with him. In the disguise of a preacher he boldly joined the westward-bound train, though Buffalo Bill and some of my men were along; and he passed the girl, Panther Kate, also disguised, off as his daughter.

"That poor girl he poisoned by degrees, she not even

suspecting it, and she was buried on the side of the trail. At her grave Buffalo Bill found him, and recognized him by some means. Then Cody was forced to fly for his life, pursued by the Trail Bandits, who just then came up, painted as Indians."

"Can this be true?" gasped Mary Hale, trembling violently.

"I got it from one of his own men, whom I recognized, and hanged an hour ago, knowing him to be a renegade and murderer."

"And where is Kent King now?" she asked, in almost a whisper.

"He has fled. It seems he saw us hanging the man, though we did not then see him, and he took to the prairie, with his band."

"His band?"

"Yes, he is chief of the Trail Bandits now."

"This is fearful, indeed."

"But I shall soon be on their trail. My Revolver Riders now number half a hundred, and we will bring back Bill Cody, or avenge him fearfully."

"And you start to-morrow?" asked Mary, her voice faltering.

"Yes, I arrived in Denver a couple of days ago from Texas, where I had some business to attend to, for I am not altogether what you believe me, Miss Hale."

"What! Do you wear disguises, too, Captain Dash?"

"Only when necessary to track villainy to the fountain seat; but I mean, I am the owner of a large cattle ranch, and not a poor man, as being in command of a band of herders would lead you to believe. I have a score to settle with Kent King. To find him,

I joined the Revolver Riders, who made me their captain, and they are all now under my pay until I accomplish the task I have set out to perform."

"And God grant you may do it, Captain Dash."

"My name is Dudley Dashwood, Miss Hale; my men called me Captain Dash," said the handsome young Texan, with a smile.

Then he resumed:

"When we parted on the trail, long months ago, I asked that I might visit you here, and you said yes."

"And I assure you I am glad you have come."

"Thank you; but I was so bold then as to say that I loved you, although we had met but that once; yet, in all the time that has gone by since then, I have grown each day to love you more, until you are now necessary to my happiness, and I have come to ask you to be my wife."

He took her hands in his own, and gazed down upon her bowed head; but she remained silent, and, raising the beautiful face until he gazed down into it, he asked:

"Have I come in vain, Mary?"

"No."

The answer was very low, but he heard it, and drew her gently toward him, while he asked:

"When am I to call you wholly my own, Mary?"

"When you have found Mr. Cody, or run Kent King to earth," she said, almost sternly.

"Enough, I ask no more; but here comes your father, and I will ask him for your hand, now that you have given me your heart."

The young Texan turned and greeted Mary's father as he came upon the piazza, evidently greatly excited.

"Glad to meet you, Captain Dash; but, sir, the devilish old parson was no parson at all, but Kent King, the Gambler Guide, who has escaped and swept down the valley at the head of twoscore renegades, burning and pillaging as he went."

"He has already begun his mad work, then?"

"He has, indeed, and the vigilantes are organizing to go in pursuit; and more, he would have paid us a visit had not a band of miners turned him back."

"I will leave at once on his trail. Mary, I leave to you to say what I would have said to your father; good-by."

Two minutes after, Captain Dash was riding like the wind toward the encampment of the Revolver Riders, some ten miles distant and in his heart were commingling the antipodes of emotions—hatred for the Gambler Guide, and love for Mary Hale.

CHAPTER XVI.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

When Buffalo Bill fled from the horsemen, whom he now knew to be outlaws in the disguise of Indians, as they hailed him in perfect English, he felt that he was in almost as much danger as when he stood in Panther Kate's grave, with his worst foe standing above him holding a pistol leveled at his heart.

His arm was bleeding freely, and he bound his silk neck scarf around it below the shoulder as well as he could, fastening the knot with the aid of his teeth. Though Midnight was running well, he had seen hard service of late. There were half a dozen horses in pursuit, and, fast as he was, they were holding their own with him, and one was steadily gaining.

To the hills, visible before the scout, it was half a dozen miles. If Midnight could keep up his rapid pace until they were reached, and Buffalo Bill did not faint from loss of blood, he felt he would have a chance to stand off his foes.

If his horse should fail him now, in his hour of need, or if he should fall in weakness from his saddle, he knew his hour had come to die, for he was certain no mercy would be shown him. With his lasso he secured himself firmly in the saddle, and with his knife gave the scarf around his arm an extra turn to tighten it, sticking the blade into his sleeve to hold it in place. Then he again looked behind him.

A long line of horsemen was strung out. In advance, some four hundred yards away, he saw Kent

King and a man disguised as an Indian, riding side by side, and driving their horses on with spurs that brought blood at every blow of their heels.

"I wish that the train people could see that parson now; I guess they'd think he needed praying for," was the scout's thought.

Then, as his own position struck him, he added:

"A little praying for me just now wouldn't do any harm; come, Midnight, come, for they are gaining on you, and the hills are yet two miles away."

The splendid animal seemed to feel all that was expected of him. He made a still greater effort, though no spur or lash had touched his glossy hide, and again held his own with the pursuers.

"That's it, my bird of the plains, fly from your foes, and save me now, as often you have before!"

Still more encouraged by his master's voice, the fleet steed sped on, indeed like a bird, until the hills were not far away, and his pursuers yet two hundred yards distant.

"Another effort, Midnight; try again!" cried Buffalo Bill.

The next instant the horse dashed into a low thicket, while, around a base of jutting hill, suddenly appeared half a hundred mounted warriors.

"Sioux, as I live! Now, Kent King, look out," cried the scout, while a glance showed him that the Indians had not seen him, and were taken by surprise at the sight of the pursuing party.

That Kent King and his band were also surprised, there was not the shadow of a doubt, for they quickly drew rein, a bugle call rang out over the prairie, and

those in advance began to fall back and form for protection with those who were in the rear.

"They'll stand the Indians off and get away, though I wish they'd be like the Kilkenny cats. Ha, they are sending a party to see who Kent King was in pursuit of; it's out of the frying pan into the fire with me!"

Buffalo Bill, who had temporarily drawn his panting horse to a standstill, now urged him on into the hills. But though Midnight did his best, the redskins steadily gained upon him.

Worse still, the scout became weaker and weaker from loss of blood from his wounded arm, his head reeled, and presently, as he penetrated into a dense cañon, he fell forward on the neck of his horse, consciousness having left him. A few moments after the Indians came in sight and saw the faithful horse standing still, and his rider hanging over upon his neck, his lariat alone holding him in the saddle.

Recognizing them as foes, Midnight, in spite of the dead weight upon him, and his fatigue, endeavored to escape; but the cañon soon ended abruptly, and the redskins, pushing him hard, he was soon in their grasp.

At first they seemed inclined to scalp the scout without ceremony; but, seeing that he was not dead, they released him from the saddle and laid him upon the ground.

His weapons were quickly distributed among them. Midnight fell to the possession of a brawny savage, another of the party claiming the very handsome Mexican saddle and bridle, which were profusely decorated with silver.

Finding that the outlaws were his superior in strength, owing to their rifles, the redskin chief with-

drew his party toward the hills, content with scalping a renegade in Indian toggery, who had fallen under their fire.

But, as they retreated toward the hills, with the outlaws sullenly retiring, they saw the man they had scalped spring unexpectedly to his feet, and run for his comrades, who at once started to his rescue, expecting the Indians would attempt to capture him.

But the savages had his scalp, and cared little for him, and he reached the band in safety, a piteous sight to look at, and told how he had heard of the capture and death of Buffalo Bill.

"Haddock, for those cheering words I would give a year of my life to save you; but you are badly wounded, besides being scalped, and—hold him up, men, for he's falling!"

Before any one could catch the man he fell dead on the prairie; and, remembering only himself, Kent King muttered:

"Now I can return to the train and continue on to Denver. Then, my sweet Mary Hale, we meet again, and you will have no champion knight to protect you, for the coyotes will feast upon him, and the vultures will flap their wings in his handsome face. By Heaven! Sioux, I could almost love you for the service you have done me, and grasp your hands in fellowship."

Giving his instructions to the band of outlaws, he returned to the people whom he was deceiving under his disguise of a parson—a veritable wolf in the clothing of a lamb.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FOE'S GRATITUDE.

When the chief of the Sioux band entered the hills, and came to the spot where Buffalo Bill still lay insensible, he glanced into the upturned face and then at the long hair, and said, quickly, in his native tongue:

"It is Pa-e-has-ka, the white brave; my warriors have done well not to touch his scalp or kill him, for he served me long moons ago."

Bending over the scout, who showed signs of returning consciousness, he quickly stripped the sleeve from his arm and skillfully checked the bleeding of the wound. Then he dashed water in the scout's face, and the eyes of Buffalo Bill, opening, met the savage countenance above him. But he showed no sign of fear, and simply said in the Sioux tongue:

"Rain-in-the-face, is it you?"

"It is the Sioux chief, whose son's life you once saved near Fort Laramie; the chief has not forgotten Long Hair."

"Do you intend to kill me?" asked the scout.

"Is the heart of Rain-in-the-face so bad that he would kill one who saved his son from death?"

"The chief has a good heart to remember; but I am sick and weak, for I cannot rise."

"My warriors shall aid you."

"They ought to, for I see they have stolen everything I had," muttered the scout, and he glanced at the dignified thieves as they stood looking at him, evidently regretting that they had not killed him.

The chief saw his look. Recognizing that a raid had been made upon the scout's personal effects, he ordered every article to be restored at once, which order was only partially obeyed.

"The very things I can get along without they give back; what I want they keep, chief," said Buffalo Bill boldly.

Rain-in-the-face turned boldly upon the offending braves. One put down the knife of the scout, another a revolver. At an angry motion from their chief, the other weapons were produced, while one young buck brought forward a dilapidated army saddle, and still another a United States cavalry bridle the worse for wear.

"Do my warriors wish my heart to fill with anger against them?" sternly asked the old chief.

The delinquents then brought forward the bridle, saddle, and trappings, while another came innocently to the front leading a horse that was a fair picture of what Midnight might become after a month's starving and hard riding.

"That is not my horse, chief."

"Yes," said the red pretender; "this Pa-e-has-ka horse."

"You are a red liar. If Midnight looked like that the buzzards would follow him, and his backbone would cut through the saddle and split me up the back," said Buffalo Bill.

Seeing that he could not fool the scout, ill as he was, the buck answered:

"It gooder horse than your horse."

"You are a howling liar. Chief, I want my horse, not that skeleton."

Afraid of his chief, the buck now brought Midnight. Rain-in-the-face saddled and bridled him for the scout, and placed him in the saddle, at the same time motioning to a young, light brave to mount behind him, and hold him on, for Buffalo Bill was too weak from loss of blood to keep his seat unaided.

Then up into the hills the party went, and, after a ride of thirty miles, with frequent stops on account of the scout, the Indians arrived in their camp.

There the chief carried his paleface friend to his own tepee, and ordered his squaw to do all she could for his comfort, while he went to bring the medicine man of the tribe.

The wound, the loss of blood, and the long ride to the Indian camp, brought on fever and delirium, and for weeks Buffalo Bill lay at the point of death.

All this time he was nursed tenderly by the Indians, in whose hearts, as soon as they knew how he had befriended their chief's son in the past, arose pity for him, while they had already felt admiration for his courage.

The strong constitution of the scout carried him safely through, and he arose from his bed of skins in an Indian tepee, restored to health once more, and with his wound almost well, under the treatment of the medicine chief, who was certainly skilled in the healing of injuries from firearms and knives.

As soon as he was able to ride, Buffalo Bill thanked the chief for his kindness to him, and presented him with one of his revolvers and a watch, and let him into the secret of winding it up—it was a stem-winder—and taught him how to tell time, adding:

"There'll be no excuse for you now to be behind

time in going into a fight, if you'll only keep her wound up."

Throwing his red silk handkerchief to Mrs. Rain-in-the-face, who had nursed him, Buffalo Bill mounted Midnight, and, with a shout of farewell to the redskins, struck off at a lively gait.

His faithful horse had had a long rest, and was better than ever before, as he evinced by his determination to cast the miles behind him and reach the settlements.

"That's right, Midnight; go ahead lively."

CHAPTER XVIII.

PARSON MILLER VISITS THE JUDGE.

While a number of miners and settlers, under the name of Vigilantes, were following Captain Dash and his Revolver Riders in the pursuit of Kent King and his outlaw band, an individual of peculiar appearance was riding slowly along a trail that led through the valley settlement, where Judge Hale and his train had found homes.

He was mounted on a mule, whom he had christened Goliath of Gath, and was dressed in a suit combining buckskin leggings, a miner's red shirt, a black clerical-looking coat, and a coonskin cap. This individual was Parson Miller, the chaplain of the Hale train on its route westward, the one whom Buffalo Bill had gotten lost with, to prevent his marrying Mary Hale to Kent King.

Settling near the sutler establishment in Deep Creek City, as the dozen log cabins comprising the place were called, Parson Miller had looked after his own bodily comfort, and the spiritual welfare of the flock which he claimed as his special charge. He was now on his way to the hospitable home of Judge Hale. The judge, believing him harmless, always extended to him a welcome, though Mary was never glad to see him darken the doors of their cabin.

"My dear brother Hale, I have come over to see you upon important duty: the wolves are abroad among my flock, and bloodshed is stalking forth in our valley."

This was his speech, as he dismounted from Goliath and picketed the mule.

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"Come in, parson," said Hale, "and we'll have a chat in my room, for Mary is busy, as you hear, with her guitar, on the back porch."

"It is of Mary I have come to speak, and moreover of one other, brother Hale; will we be wholly alone?" the parson inquired.

"Wholly so; is there any news?" asked the judge, feeling a dread of coming evil.

"None, other than that I have told you. Now let us talk to the point. Do you not know me?"

The parson's manner suddenly changed. He dropped the singsong way in which he always spoke. Judge Hale looked him fairly in the face, and answered slowly:

"No, though you recall one to me long since dead."

"Who is that one?"

"A clergyman who fell from grace, killed a friend, and was sentenced to prison for life."

"His name?"

"I care not to speak of it," said the judge, with a shudder.

"It matters not; I am that man."

"You! impossible, and yet——" and Judge Hale turned the hue of a corpse.

"It is not impossible, Andrew Hale. We were boys together, and devoted friends; we married sisters, and became brothers-in-law; you became a famous lawyer, and I a minister, until I at last, as you expressed it, fell from grace, and, taking the life of a fellow being, was sent to prison for life. My wife having died, I left you in full control of my large property, and the guardian of my son, and for some years all went on well.

"You met with financial embarrassments just at the time I escaped from prison, and was reported killed by the guard as I reached the river. I was not touched by his bullet. A man in convict's dress being found some time after, floating in the water, was said to be me, and so was buried. Believing me dead, you used the property of my son to squander in speculation, and, to escape his just anger, you fled with your child. Do you doubt my identity now, Andrew Hale?"

"You are certainly Mathew Kingsland," said the judge, in a hoarse tone.

"I certainly am. And Kent King, the Gambler Guide, as men call him, is my son Kenton, and the first cousin of your daughter Mary."

"The power he held over me, and which forced me to say Mary should be his wife, was because he held my secret," groaned the judge.

"Well, the boy you know now in a different light, for he is the chief of the outlaw band known as the Nighthawks."

"And he is free to do my poor child harm! God grant that these dashing Texans take him."

"Oh, the boy can take care of himself! You will soon receive a call from him in some disguise or other, for he is determined to marry your daughter."

"Heaven forbid! Why should he persecute her thus?"

"Simply because she is rich. He wishes to give up this wild life, and seek safety in another land, where he can live off of her money, as you did off of his," answered the man, in a sneering tone.

"Marry rich! why, man, all I have in the world is in this cabin and this ranch."

"Ah!"

"What! Do you doubt me?"

"I know to the contrary."

"I say you are mistaken. Had I money, do you think I would have come to this wild land to live?" angrily asked the judge.

"Yes. Dread of punishment for your crime, and a fear that the world would learn of it, brought you here. Now you are believed only unfortunate. Were the truth made known, it would be shown that you squandered a fortune left to your keeping, Andrew Hale."

"Alas! that I was ever tempted; but look at me now, a man at my years building up a new home, and penniless almost."

"You need not so remain, Andrew Hale," said the parson, in a meaning way.

"What do you mean, Mathew Kingsland? You have not come here and made yourself known to me without a purpose, I feel confident."

"I mean that if you will give me your note for fifty thousand dollars, payable six months from date, and agree to a certain plan I have in view, I will tell you where you can place your hands upon a million of money."

"What is your plan, sir?"

"That you marry Mary at once to my son."

"You ask this when you know that I am aware of what he is?" indignantly said the judge.

"Oh, yes; you gave your consent before, when you knew that Kenton had served in the penitentiary. Don't preach morality, Andrew Hale, for it does not set well on you," sneered the parson.

"Man, tell me what you have come here for, and at once."

"I need fifty thousand dollars that I may live on the interest it will bring. I am getting along in years, and I wish to provide again for my son, whose fortune you squandered. Therefore, I wish him to marry an heiress."

"And I tell you that I am little more than a beggar."

"Oh, no; a man died in the upper mines some days ago, and he made his confession to me, and left a will bequeathing a million dollars he had dug out of the ground to you and your daughter——"

"What?"

"True. I ask for only fifty thousand, and you will still have two hundred thousand, as he left you a quarter of a million, and Mary the balance."

"Do you mean this, Mat Kingsland?" and Judge Hale was very much excited.

"I do."

"Why was a man worth that sum working in the mines?"

"He was not; he had dug his gold out of California and gone East to find his relatives. Learning that they had come West, he sought them here in the mines, was taken ill and died as I told you. That man was Ned Hale, your oldest brother."

Judge Hale could not speak for a while, but at last he said fervently:

"Thank God!"

"You had better thank me, for you cannot get it unless I deliver up the papers. I wish your note for the

fifty thousand, and to see dear Kenton and Mary married before I turn the papers over to you."

"If this fortune has been left me, I can get it without your aid."

"Oh, no, for I have the papers, and the lawyers and the witnesses are all in my pay. Do you agree to the terms, Andrew?"

"I will give you one hundred thousand, if you will not hold Mary in the bargain."

"She will have vast wealth and a devilish handsome husband."

"She shall not marry him, and if you and your accursed son ever enter my house again, I will shoot you down as I would a mad dog. Now, begone, sir."

"Judge Hale, be reasonable. You are mad to throw away this fortune," urged Mathew Kingsland.

"You are acting only for self-interest, simply to get your reward out of it, and I will be happy in keeping it from you."

"But dear Mary will be made unhappy by——"

"Dear Mary is happy as she is with my father, Mat Kingsland. I order you from this house, for I have heard all that was said, and know your baseness," and Mary swept into the room as proud as a queen and defiant.

"Ah! you, then, know that your father stole——"

"Silence, sir! He invested funds in his keeping in speculations and lost thereby. It was, perhaps, a criminal act, but he is more than sorry for it. He has just refused a fortune rather than do wrong again, and I refuse it with him; go, sir, or I will call Daniel to put you out."

Mary pointed toward the door.

"Girl, you and this old fool, your father, shall rue this act. I go, but I warn you that you will yet beg mercy of me."

Mary laughed scornfully. The villain moved toward the door, and a moment after was riding away at a speed that Goliath of Gath had not been forced to for many a long day.

CHAPTER XIX.

MERCILESS.

"Mendez, I have service for you to perform."

The speaker was Kent King, the Gambler Guide, and he stood upon a rock that commanded the entrance to a cañon in his front, and from which he had a view of the prairie a mile beyond.

It was a wild, picturesque spot, the mountain retreat of the bandits, and a formidable position to attack. The night before, with twoscore of followers, he had gone to his retreat, after committing deeds of deviltry a savage would have revolted at.

Well he knew that the vigilantes would pursue him, and that once aroused they would hunt him and his band to the death. His men had urged that they keep the open trail and seek other scenes; but Kent King had an object in remaining, and was determined not to be driven from the neighborhood where dwelt Mary Hale.

Now, as he gazed far across the prairie, he saw a large body of horsemen approaching, and, with emotions of dread, he recognized in advance Captain Dash, the Texan, and his terrible Revolver Riders.

"We could hold out a week here, perhaps, but not longer, so I must act at once," he said; and then, having made up his mind, apparently, he called to a villainous-looking Mexican standing near.

"Yes, señor chief, what would you have me do?" asked Mendez.

"Serve me well, and you shall have a golden reward; you have a fleet horse?"

"Yes, señor."

"Go and get him ready for a hard ride, and prepare your traps, for I do not care to have you return here."

The Mexican obeyed, not sorry to avoid the fight he knew was coming. Soon he returned to where his chief stood.

"I have written a letter here. Take it to Parson Miller; you know where he lives, and he will tell you what to do. Go by the secret outlet to this retreat, and ride like the wind."

"Yes, señor chief."

The Mexican sprang on his horse and rode away, while Kent King turned to his men, who were rapidly gathering around him.

"We are going to have a brush with the enemy, boys, but we can stand them off for a few days, and then secretly retreat at night. Are you all ready for the fight?"

He ran his eyes over the villainous-looking band, which certainly was a hard crowd, for there were German, Spanish, Mexican, American, negro, and even Chinese bravadoes in the lot, and all of them men who were legal candidates for the gallows.

In half an hour more the Revolver Riders and vigilantes came in sight, and camped in the valley below, as if they had come to stay and meant business. Kent King watched them holding councils of war with a sneer upon his handsome, but cruel, dissipated face, and in his eyes shone a triumphant light.

When darkness at length came upon the scene, the camp fires were lighted below in the valley. It was evident that the vigilantes knew just where their game was, and intended to starve them out, knowing that

the entrance to the rocky bowl, or cañon, where the renegades were, was under their control, and escape could be prevented.

About midnight the settlers moved to the attack from different points, verging toward the pass leading to the retreat. Without, the rattle of firearms made lively music. The bandits met them with coolness. Their deadly fire beat off the assailants, who were forced to retire to their camp and plan some other method of attack.

Thus the night and following day passed, and the vigilantes remained camped in the valley below. As soon as darkness came on, Kent King went the round of his forces, and then suddenly disappeared from the sight of his men.

Gaining a secluded spot among the rocks, where a number of horses were picketed, he quickly bridled and saddled his own animal, and, mounting, rode quietly away. Taking a path that led still farther up the mountain, a most hazardous trail to follow even in daylight, he went fearlessly along, until he reached the summit of the hill, along the ridge of which he rode for half a mile.

Coming to a thicket of pines, he entered it, and found a path leading down the mountainside, opposite to the one on which the vigilantes were encamped. Gaining the valley and a broad trail, he was about to urge his horse into a gallop, when he heard the clink of iron against rock.

Instantly he dashed into the shelter of some huge bowlders, for he knew that horsemen were coming. There he quietly awaited. Presently dark forms came in sight, two horsemen abreast, and fully a hundred in

number. At their head he recognized by the starlight one whom he knew to be leading the vigilantes and Revolver Riders to his stronghold.

It was Prairie Pete, one of the best guides on the plains and in the mountains, and the direction in which he was riding proved that he knew the secret, though dangerous, path to the retreat.

They passed within six feet of the bowlder, over the top of which the outlaw looked. It was a moment of fearful suspense to him, for a movement of his horse, or a rider swerving from the trail, would have betrayed him.

With a sigh of relief, he saw them pass on. Then, though he knew he could dash across a nearer path, gain the secret trail and warn his men, who could, thus warned, easily beat off their foes, he rode on his way, saying savagely:

"Let them capture them! What care I, for sooner or later they would all be hanged! I will look after myself only; and, if Mendez served me faithfully, within twenty-four hours I will be far from here."

As he rode along, there came to him the sound of distant firing and shouting. Involuntarily he drew up and listened for a while.

"They have captured the retreat, and the Trail Bandits are no more, for that is the wild Texas yell of victory," he muttered.

Then, dashing the spurs into the flanks of his horse, he rode on like the wind.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FLIGHT.

The third night after the departure of the vigilantes rolled around, and the settlers in the valley were becoming anxious regarding their friends, for no word had come from them since they struck the bandits' trail. Mary Hale's beautiful eyes were dimmed with tears as she bade her father good night, for she dreaded evil to Captain Dash, whom she loved with all the fervor of her heart.

Hardly had she reached her room, when there was a loud knock upon the hall door of the cabin, and Judge Hale called out:

"Well, what is it?"

"News from the vigilantes, judge," said a voice, outside.

"Who are you?"

"Martin Burke."

"Ah! one moment, Burke, and I will let you in," answered the judge, recognizing, as he believed, the voice of a settler down the valley.

The door swung open. Then there came a flash, and, a cry upon his lips, Judge Hale fell to the floor, while three men sprang over his body into the hall. Those three were Kent King, Mathew Kingsland, and Mendez, the Mexican.

"This is her room, Kent; come!" cried the old villain.

With one kick he drove in the door, and the three dashed through into the comfortable chamber, which

the taste of Mary had made most beautiful and comfortable. But they suddenly stopped, for in the center of the room stood the brave girl, her face pale, her eyes flashing, her hand extended and holding a revolver.

"Back, or I will kill you," she said firmly.

"Bah, she's but a girl; come!" cried Kent King, and the three sprang forward.

But the flash and report came, and the bullet, speeding by the ear of Kent King, buried itself in the brain of Mendez, the Mexican, who fell dead in his tracks. Before Mary could again fire, she was seized in the strong arms of Kent King, her cries were checked, and she became unconscious.

When at last she recovered her senses, she found herself held in the arms of a man whose face she saw distinctly. It was Kent King, and she was held across the saddle before him. His horse was going at a rapid gallop. Ahead was another horseman, whom she knew must be Mathew Kingsland, the pretended Parson Miller.

Feigning unconsciousness, she remained quiet, and heard their conversation, for the man ahead soon dropped back and rode alongside, remarking, as he did so:

"I am not sorry she killed the Mexican, as he would have continually bled us."

"Yes; I promised him a reward for his services, and my sweet Cousin Mary gave it to him; only it was lead instead of gold," laughed Kent King.

"You think no one heard the shot and will pursue?"

"My reverend father, pistol shots are too common

to attract much attention out here; but if we are pursued, it will be by a few decrepit old men and young boys, for all the fighters are out in the mountains after me. They will return to-morrow or next day victorious, in all save my capture; ha, ha, ha!"

"You are a very devil, Kenton!"

"I am my father's son; but have you the relays of horses all right?"

"Yes, Mendez and myself placed them. The first relay is five miles from here, so we can urge these on faster."

"I wish Mary would recover, so I could force her to ride. Then we could dash rapidly along. As it is, her weight retards my horse."

"She certainly remains in a swoon long, Kenton."

"Oh! it won't hurt her, and being unconscious is better than hysterics or shrieks."

"You will find her a hard one to tame, my son."

"I think not; I have ever been noted as a woman tamer; but as I intend to reform now, and she gets a large fortune, and we go to Europe, I hope she will be sensible. If not, she seals her own fate, as soon as I get her money into my hands."

"I am sorry you shot her father, Kenton."

"Bah! regret nothing, my honored parent. If I allowed myself to regret the past, I should have troops of phantoms haunting me day and night. Hello! Mary is recovering."

"Fiend! murderer! release me!" groaned the poor girl, almost broken-hearted at the fate of her father.

"No, Cousin Mary, I cannot think of such a thing. Keep quiet, and I will not harm you, but if you cry out, I will gag and bind you."

"Oh, God, have mercy upon me!" cried Mary.

"Cousin mine, that prayer is more frequent on the lips of men and women than any other, and it is less answered," sneered Kent King.

Then, grasping her more firmly in his arms, he urged his horse on at a more rapid pace. Before long they came to a secluded spot, a ravine, in which stood three horses, and by one a sidesaddle.

"Now, my sweet cousin, if you will go willingly I will let you ride; if not, I will carry you," said Kent King.

"I will ride, if I must; anything to escape your loathsome touch."

"So be it; father, please saddle that white steed for my cousin, and then change our saddles."

"And what must we do with these horses?" asked the man, turning to those they had just ridden to the spot.

"Draw your knife across their throats."

"What!"

"Of course, for it will keep pursuers from following on them; why do you hesitate to kill a brute, when you have taken human life?"

"Boy, don't call up that phantom from the past!" sternly said the older villain.

"Bah, don't be a child; don't let the 'boy be father to the man'; come, now, my sweet cousin!"

He raised the girl to her saddle, but securely held the reins, while his father drew his knife across the throats of the two noble animals that had brought them there.

"You have those papers with you, old man, that give this fortune to Mary?"

"Yes."

"Be certain, for I want no mistake."

"I have them here in my pocket."

"All right; come!" and at once the two villains set off at a rapid pace, their unfortunate captive between them.

But hardly had they disappeared from sight, when a dark form arose from behind a rock and muttered:

"I am glad I hid here to see who came for those horses; now to head them off."

Darting through the thicket, the speaker soon came to where a horse stood awaiting him, and five minutes after he was riding swiftly along a rough trail leading up the valley.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNEXPECTED HALT.

Swiftly flying along in their flight, neither Kent King nor his degenerate father looked for danger ahead, and were brought to a sudden and unexpected halt by blinding flashes in their eyes and two sharp reports from a revolver.

Down beneath them went their horses. As Mathew Kingsland struck the ground, a form darted out from behind a boulder, and, at close range, sent a bullet crashing through the brain of the man whose life had been a lie and full of crime.

As if confident of his aim, the assailant did not wait to see the effects of his shot, but turned upon Kent King, who had sprung to his feet and attempted to draw his revolver. The fall had broken the outlaw's arm. With a curse, he seized the weapon in his left hand and faced his foe, who was advancing quickly upon him, while Mary Hale, spellbound, sat on her horse like a statue, watching, waiting, and praying.

The weapon of Kent King flashed first. The aim with his left hand was untrue, for the one he fired upon still advanced upon him, and said, in clear tones:

"Kent King, I shall win my bet!"

"Great God! Are you man or spirit?" cried the Gambler Guide.

"Neither; I am Buffalo Bill," was the rejoinder.

With the last word, two revolvers flashed together, and again the aim of Kent King was untrue. But

not so with Buffalo Bill, for he sent his bullet straight to the center of the forehead of the man he meant to kill.

With a cry of joy, Mary Hale threw herself from her horse, and once more fainted, but Buffalo Bill caught her in his arms. In a few moments Mary revived. Then Buffalo Bill told her of his adventures in the Indian camp, and suggested that they strike the back trail at once, in which she gladly acquiesced.

Tying the dead bodies of Kent King and his father upon Mary's horse, the scout gave the girl a seat behind him on Midnight. Just as the sun illumined the valley they came in sight of the home of Judge Hale, around which was gathered a large crowd of horsemen.

As they drew nearer they were recognized, and such a shout of welcome went up as was never heard before in the Hale settlement. Then Captain Dash rode toward them and shouted:

"Bravo! bravo! Buffalo Bill, you're a man of men, and have saved us trouble, for we just returned victorious from the bandits' camp, and the judge told us of Mary's capture!"

"The judge! Is my father living?" gasped Mary.

"He is, indeed; the bullet grazed his head, and stunned him only; see, here he comes to greet you."

The next moment the girl was in her father's arms. Then the girl told her story, and Buffalo Bill told his, and, as the Revolver Riders had wiped out the band of outlaws, there was wild rejoicing in the valley.

* * * * *

The papers taken from Mathew Kingsland gave

to Judge Hale and Mary their fortune, for the witnesses were looked up, and the money was found to be deposited in the banks, subject to the order of the heirs of the deceased miner.

With Kenton Kingsland dead, Captain Dash's trail of hatred ended in the grave, and the loving sister, whom the Gambler Guide had falsely married, and who had died of a broken heart, was avenged.

But the young Texan, Dudley Dashwood, struck a trail that had a happier ending, for it led him to the altar, with sweet Mary Hale for his "pard."

Buffalo Bill was his best man, while Ben Tabor, Seven-foot Harry, Old Negotiate, and hosts of others went East to attend the wedding of their loved leader.

Soon afterward Buffalo Bill departed for the Black Hills, in Dakota, where he was destined to pass through many strange adventures.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RED RIGHT HAND.

A singular-looking man, dressed as a Western hunter, stood alone in a gorge in the depths of the Black Hills. On the hat that covered his handsome, well-shaped head was a large pin of red coral, shaped like a human hand.

The right hand of the hunter, which rested now on his rifle, was blood-red in color, thus resembling the coral hand pinned to the side of his hat. These two things gave him the name by which he was known—Red Hand, the scout.

As he stood thus, a deer leaped into view, and behind it came a man. The man's rifle cracked, and the deer fell. Then the hunter's rifle sounded, almost as if it were an echo, and the man who had shot the deer fell dead on the grass.

With rapid strides the man of the red right hand advanced and stood over the prostrate form of the man he had slain. Into his face crept a look that was hard to fathom, for it held hatred, sorrow, triumph, and remorse, all commingled.

Though limp and stiffening with death, the form of the man who had been shot was of splendid proportions, and clad in a full suit of buckskin. The head was sheltered by a soft felt hat, beneath which were clusters of dark curls clinging around the neck, while the face, pale and lifeless, was most striking in appearance, and had doubtless once been exceedingly handsome, before the stamp of reckless dissipation had been set upon it.

By the side of the slain lay a Spencer rifle, and in his belt were revolvers and knife, none of which had served him when face to face with the man who had taken his life.

At length the lips of Red Hand quivered slightly, parted, and he said, half aloud:

"At last we have met, Ben Talbot, you and I! Yes, met here, in the very heart of the wilderness—how different from our last meeting, seven years ago. Yes, met! you to fall dead at my feet, and your soul aurlled into the bottomless pit by my hand. Dead, Ben Talbot, aye, dead you are, for my aim could not fail when the muzzle of my rifle covered your heart.

"A strange fate brought your footsteps to this spot! A strange destiny led me alone into these wilds where I believed a white man never came. Your fate led you to death; my destiny led me to avenge. But for the sake of the olden time I will not leave you here to be torn limb from limb by wild beasts. No; I will bury you beneath that tree, and a grave in the wilderness will be your tomb."

A moment longer the scout stopd, silently and painfully musing, and then the night shadows creeping on, warned him to begin his work. Unslinging, from a loop behind his belt, a small but serviceable hatchet, he began to dig a grave in the soft earth beneath a sheltering tree.

An hour's work, and he had descended to a sufficient depth, and seeking the thicket, he cut a number of poles just the length of the grave. Then the stiffened form was tenderly raised and laid in its earthly bed, the feet toward the rising sun. Above it the poles were placed and securely fastened, for Red

Hand knew that wild beasts would attempt to rob the grave of its human occupant.

Carefully and compactly the grave was filled, and then, in the smooth bark of the tree at its head, Red Hand cut with his knife the name of the man he had slain and the date of his death. It read: "Ben Talbot, born in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, January 1, 1838. Slain in the Black Hills, July 10, 1866."

As Red Hand cut the last figure in the inscription, the darkness of night came upon the valley. Far above, on the eastward slope of the hills, was visible the rosy tinge of the departed sunshine, and upon the summit of the western mountains was the mellow light of the rising moon, tingeing with silvery radiance the forest-clad scenery, grand in its gloom, desolation and deathlike silence.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A STARTLING APPARITION.

Having completed his task, Red Hand replaced his hatchet in its sling, shouldered his traps, and started down the valley, with steps slow and uncertain, as if he hardly cared where he went. A walk of half a mile, and he came to a precipitous hillside, which suddenly brought him to a halt and recalled him to himself. He glanced quickly around and then said:

"Why, this is the way I came into the gorge—I am strangely moody to-night; and no wonder, when, two hours ago, my hand took the life of Ben Talbot. Well, I must get away from here. This steep slope forces me to go back, too, and I must pass his grave.

"I wish I had been less quick in my shot, or less true in my aim. Then his lips would not have been forever sealed, and he could have told me of her; but I forgot—she is dead—forever dead to me, even though she were living."

All at once he stopped his audible musings and stared about with a start of amazement. And no wonder he started, for there had burst forth upon the crisp air the sound of a voice in song.

It was a beautiful, clear voice, but it sounded strangely weird there in that wild gorge. Spellbound, Red Hand stood and listened as the echoes broke upon the hillsides and swept on down the valley.

It was a woman's voice. The man stood like one

A Startling Apparition.

III

in a dream as the woman trilled forth in rich tones a song unfamiliar to his ears:

"In dreams I sigh for those dark eyes
That ever lit with love for me;
But they are veiled, their light is gone,
And sorrow's night shades gather fast,
As through the vale I'm borne along—
An autumn leaf upon the blast."

Suddenly the man's gaze became fixed upon a form that appeared upon a rocky shelf overhanging the tree beneath which was the new-made grave of Ben Talbot. It was a woman's form, clad in a garb of white, and down her back hung heavy masses of golden hair.

The moon had risen above the eastern hills, and poured a full flood of light directly upon her. Distinctly Red Hand beheld the beautiful, sad face, the large eyes glancing down into the gloom of the gorge beneath, as if to penetrate the dark secret buried there.

Then the song ceased, and the clear voice called out in tones that again startled the silent depths:

"Ben! Ben Talbot! Come!"

With a startled cry of fear, Red Hand turned and dashed away at mad speed down the gloomy gorge.

With the speed of a deer he sped along, his teeth shut close, his hands fiercely clenching his rifle, and his whole being wrought up to a pitch of terrible excitement by what he had seen.

So wrought up was he that through the long hours of the night he pressed on, until the morning sun found him far from the scene where, as if in punishment for his deed of blood, had appeared before him a very phantom of the mountains.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED SIGHT.

Five years afterward the murderer of Ben Talbot returned to that grave. The inscription yet remained, though worn by time. Though five years had passed they had left no trace of their footsteps upon the face of the murderer, excepting to make the features harder and sterner.

He was dressed pretty nearly as upon his former visit to the gorge, his black felt hat still looped up with the red coral hand, though his knife and revolver were of a newer pattern, and his rifle was one of Evans' improved repeaters, capable of firing thirty-five times without reloading.

When, five years before, Red Hand fled from the Black Hills, he believed he would never again profane its unknown fastnesses with his footsteps. But as time passed and the eyes of adventurers and hunters were turned toward the country now called the "Miner's New Eldorado," a small band of hardy men determined to penetrate into its unexplored depths, and seek there the golden fortunes said to be buried beneath the rocky hills.

The guide of that party was Buffalo Bill, the famous scout. As the party neared the almost unknown depths of the Black Hills, he had decided to employ another as a guide, for army duty was soon to call him in another direction.

The guide thus chosen was Red Hand, for he was well known along the frontier as one of the most

daring men on the border, and his skill in wood and prairie craft, and ability to outwit Indian cunning, had gained him a widespread reputation among the bold bordermen and the soldiers of the outposts.

Of Red Hand little, if anything, was known regarding his real name, whence he came, or why he, a man of superior education and ability, had banished himself from civilization and become an Indian fighter and hunter upon the Western border.

Five years before his solitary pilgrimage into the Black Hills he had appeared upon the frontier, well armed and mounted, and possessed of considerable money, and his polite manner and ready generosity soon won for him many admirers, though no man among his companions could boast of being his intimate friend, or of any knowledge regarding him.

His blood-red right hand attracted attention. But only one man had dared to make jest regarding it, and he never repeated the offense, for he found the stranger not the one to trifle with.

At first, the life on the plains seemed strange to Red Hand, for by that name he now became known, and, as if to encourage it, or to hide his real name, he adorned his hat with the red coral hand.

However, he quickly learned the crafty ways of the Indian, could soon strike a trail and follow it across the prairies, became a dead shot with rifle and revolver, and a desperate fighter with the knife. Hence, before two years' stay on the border, he was noted as a scout and hunter of superior ability, and a man of undaunted courage.

After long days of travel the hill country was reached by the exploring party. Remembering a num-

ber of advantageous localities for a safe camp, Red Hand conducted the men to one of the most favorable positions.

After a short rest he set out alone to visit the gorge, several miles above the encampment, for an irresistible attraction lured him once more to the place which held the grave of Ben Talbot. For a long time after his arrival there Red Hand stood in silent bitterness at the grave, his eyes cast down and his hands resting upon the muzzle of his rifle.

On his stern face was a shadow of mingled sorrow and pain, as some haunting memory was recalled from the long-buried past. At length, with a deep-drawn sigh, he slung his rifle across his shoulder and strode away, his eyes carefully scanning the ground, for around the grave were traces that showed that other feet than his had lately been there.

Steadily following the trail, it led him, after a tramp of a mile, into a narrow gulch, where his ears were suddenly startled by the unexpected and ringing report of a rifle, followed by a series of yells, which he well knew to be the war cry of the wild Sioux of the northern tribes.

A single shot followed. Feeling confident that some one of his comrades had left camp and met with a band of Indians, Red Hand ran hastily forward, and turning a bend in the gulch, beheld a sight that for the moment deprived him of action, so great was his surprise.

Upon a ledge of rock, and partially protected by a huge boulder, stood a young girl, scarcely more than sixteen years of age. A suit of buckskin, with dressed skirt, and leggings elaborately embroidered, set off her

figure, and a soft hat surmounted her head, and half hid braids of golden hair that were in lovely contrast to her large black eyes and dark lashes and eyebrows.

The face was browned almost to the hue of an Indian's, yet the pure blood of the white shone in every feature of her beautiful and daring face. Though in deadly danger, the girl stood her ground with fearless determination, her small rifle, evidently just discharged, clubbed in both hands to beat back three painted Sioux warriors who were rapidly bounding up the steep hillside to the ledge where she stood.

Two more Indians lay farther down the slope, one motionless in death, the other writhing in agony, for a stream of blood poured from a wound in his side. That the girl had been surprised by the Indians and had sought the ledge for safety, was evident, and that her rifle had dropped two of her enemies was also evident, while her powder flask and shot pouch, attached to her belt, and lying halfway up the slope, proved that she had lost her means of further defense.

This fact the three remaining warriors knew, and with wild yells they bounded on up the steep ascent, while their pale but daring girl foe stood her ground with clubbed rifle to meet them. Such was the sight that greeted the eyes of Red Hand, and his surprise for a moment kept him motionless.

Another bound of the leading warrior carried him almost within reach of the clubbed rifle, and the uplifted tomahawk showed that the girl would be killed unless Red Hand acted quickly.

And Red Hand did act quickly. His rifle butt touched his shoulder, his red forefinger tripped the trigger, the splendid weapon hurled forth its deadly

pill, and the Sioux sank dead at the feet of the girl he would have slain.

Before the startled comrades of the fallen brave could fly, there followed two more quick reports from Red Hand's rifle, and the two dropped dead in their tracks. In utter surprise, and with astonishment upon every feature of her face, the rescued girl rapidly descended the slope, picking up her belt as she came, and stood before Red Hand, her manner that of mingled timidity and fearlessness, while in a voice strangely melodious she said:

"I thought the paleface hunters did not dare come into this unknown land of the Indian."

"Yet I find here a young girl, and one who it seems can take care of herself," and Red Hand pointed to the dead and wounded Sioux that had fallen by the girl's rifle.

"But I should not now be alive had it not been for your true aim, sir; and from my heart I thank you."

The girl grasped the hand of the scout, to let it fall next instant with a half cry of terror, as her eyes fell upon the red stain. At her sudden action, Red Hand's face flushed and then turned deadly pale; but controlling any emotion he might feel, he replied:

"I am glad my footsteps led me here to serve you; but can I ask if you live in these hills?"

"My home is far away from here, sir. Are you alone?"

The girl asked the last question almost in a whisper.

"No one is near us now; but I have comrades camped down the gorge."

The face of the girl took on a startled expression, and she seemed hesitating in her own mind as to the

best course to pursue. In silence Red Hand gazed upon her. At length she spoke, and her voice was firm:

"I am thankful to you for my life, sir, and there is one other that will bless you for it; but it couldn't be that you should meet—no, no, I must leave——"

"Hold, I beg you! You live here in this wild wilderness, you a mere child, and yet one whose language and address are not of the border, and you would leave me without one word of explanation?" said Red Hand, with surprise.

"Yes, sir; though I wish I could invite you to seek the shelter of my home after what you have done for me. But I cannot, for there is one other whom I must consult. One day, perhaps, we may meet again; now, we must part, and I beg you, as a true man, not to strike my trail and follow me."

"You increase my interest in you," said Red Hand. "But it shall be as you wish. Are there any white men in this country?"

"Yes, sir; now and then a white hunter has wandered in here, and down the gorge a mile is the grave of one who lost his life here several years ago."

Red Hand started, and glanced searchingly into the girl's face. A strange expression flitted across his own, as he asked:

"How long have you known of that grave in the valley?"

"I first saw it three years ago. I was hunting in the valley, wounded a deer, and he fell near the tree. Did you ever see the grave?"

"Yes, I passed it half an hour ago; you will not let me see your home, then?"

"No; your life might be the forfeit, and I would not have harm come to you. Good-by."

Without another word the girl threw her rifle across her arm, gave a quick, earnest glance into the face of Red Hand, and walked rapidly up the gulch to soon disappear behind a large bowlder, while Red Hand silently and in wonder gazed after her retreating form.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

So mystified was Red Hand by all he had seen and heard that he was tempted to break his word and follow on after the girl, that he might solve the puzzle of her existence there in the midst of the Black Hills.

Had her language and appearance been different, had she been some bold, rude girl of the frontier, he might have believed her the daughter of some reckless borderman, who, tiring of the society of his fellow men, had sought a home in that far-away country; or, he might have fancied her to be the waif of an Indian camp, stolen from some settlement during a redskin raid, and raised in the wigwam of a chief.

But her looks, her language, all belied these suppositions.

"Well, I'll never solve the mystery standing here," he muttered. "I'll go back to camp, and perhaps, as she said, we may meet again."

So saying, Red Hand slung his rifle across his arm, and stepped forward, when there came the sharp crack of a rifle, the whir of a bullet, and he staggered backward and fell, a crimson stream bursting from his left temple.

As Red Hand fell to the ground a tall form suddenly came down the steep hillside, his rifle, still smoking, in his hand.

It was no Indian that had thus turned his rifle upon Red Hand, to avenge his slain comrades, but a man of his own race, though the upper part of his face was

darkly bronzed, almost to the hue of the redskin, and the lower part of his face was concealed beneath an iron-gray beard, that fell in masses below his waist.

His eyes were dark, fiery, constantly restless, and his hair white and worn long, though age could have scarcely thus frosted hair and beard, and left the form strong and upright.

Over six feet in height, straight as an arrow, with broad shoulders and massive breast, and clad in a suit of buckskin, he was a majestic specimen of manhood, a manhood marred by a certain inquietude of manner, nervous restlessness of the eyes, and a look of cruelty and avariciousness upon his face.

Besides his rifle, one of the Spencer pattern, he carried in his belt a revolver, knife, and large hatchet, and as he came down the hill at a long, swinging pace, he seemed a dangerous foe to meet.

Upon his face rested an exultant smile, as if he rejoiced in his work, and he advanced toward the scout with a look hard to read. But the bullet sent in search of life had missed its aim. Only momentarily stunned, Red Hand suddenly sprang to his feet, and with drawn knife rushed upon his would-be slayer.

Unexpected as was the movement, the stranger leaped back quickly, and, drawing his knife, met the blade of his assailant in mid-air. With a loud clash, the weapons rang together. Then each man stood at bay, eyes glaring, breath hard drawn, and muscles nerved to iron firmness.

Both men were tall and of powerful build, and whatever their sins might be, they were as brave as desert lions, and the struggle between them must be

one of life and death, for neither would yield an inch to the other.

As for Red Hand, he had not sought the combat. A man he did not recognize had ruthlessly attempted to shoot him down. If, in return, he could avenge himself, he intended to do so, though why the other sought his life he could not understand.

For an instant thus stood the two men, their knives held firmly together. Then the glitter of Red Hand's eyes proved that he meditated action. But before he could make the slightest motion there came a loud cry of alarm, and the next moment a form bounded in between the two men.

It was the girl. As she bounded in between the two men her uplifted hands seized a wrist of each, and her voice fairly rang, as she cried out:

"Hold! This must not be!"

"Back, Pearl, back! I will have his life, for you know my vow!" cried the stranger.

"No, father; lower your knife, for not half an hour ago this man saved my life—see?"

The girl addressed as Pearl pointed to the dead bodies of her Indian enemies.

"Ha! You were in danger, Pearl, and he saved you?"

The man spoke in earnest tones, and turned his gaze again upon Red Hand, who had stepped back at the approach of the girl, yet still held his knife ready for defense.

"Yes, father; this brave man rescued me when those Sioux would have taken my life."

"True, I did assist the girl, after she had already sent two of the red devils to their happy hunting

grounds; but if you have anything against me, comrade, let not that act of mine stand in the way, for twice you have attempted my life now."

Red Hand spoke in a reckless, determined tone, peculiar to him when much moved. The stranger turned his gaze upon the man he had attacked, and something he saw there seemed to trouble him deeply, for he passed his hand across his face, muttering, as if communing with the past.

"Yes, it is his face—no, it cannot be—ha, the red hand!"

He staggered back a step or two, while the girl sprang to his side, crying:

"Father, are you ill?"

"No, child, I felt faint for a moment, when I thought how near I came to slaying one who had saved your life. Partner, do you journey often into these hills?"

Red Hand saw that the old man had given an evasive reply, but replied quietly:

"This is my second coming into the Black Hills. I thought this country far beyond the line where white men lived, yet I find you a dweller here."

"Comrade, I have sickened of life among my fellow men, and came here to shun mankind. Take the warning of one who does not warn in vain, and this very night turn your back upon these hills, for only dangers can surround you here."

"Comrade, I love dangers," was the answer, with a reckless laugh, "and if you can live here I can also. I bid you a pleasant good night."

So saying, Red Hand wheeled on his heel, touched

his hat politely to the girl, and strode away, to soon disappear around a bend in the gulch.

More and more mystified, Red Hand walked rapidly away in the direction of his camp, and arrived after nightfall. Then he was given another surprise. An old trapper had come in, and was telling to Buffalo Bill his story of how he had been hunting on the streams, and had struck the trail of a party coming to the hills.

Feeling assured that there was something up beyond his comprehension, the trapper said he had determined to strike the trail and follow it up, to see what could carry a party into this wild region.

The second night after starting upon the trail he camped in a piece of timber bordering the bank of a small stream, and was soon fast asleep, to be awakened an hour after by the arrival of a train of emigrants, who were also moving for the Black Hills.

From his retreat he observed that the train consisted of some thirty pack mules, instead of wagons, and about twenty men, all splendidly armed, while there were as many women and children accompanying them.

Not wishing to make himself known, for he believed from all he saw that the expedition was a secret one, the old trapper lay quiet all night. At early dawn he saw the party continue on their journey directly toward the Black Hills, and following the trail of the party that had gone before.

"Did you see the party again after that night, Lone Dick?" asked Buffalo Bill of the old hunter, whom he had met in the settlements now and then, and knew as

a brave man who always tramped alone, and never meddled with the affairs of other people.

"No, I skarted around them and struck your trail ag'in, and then come on, and here I is," replied Lone Dick, who was a real frontiersman in appearance and dress.

"And why did you follow us, Lone Dick?"

"I'll tole you: Yer see, Buffler, I has hearn how there was yellow metal up in these diggin's, and when I seed yer trail I knowed as how somethin' was up, and I detarmined to nose it out. I's been workin' at traps nigh onto twenty years, and I ain't got no fortin' yet, and I felt as how ef yer was a good set of fellers you wouldn't mind havin' another true rifle and arm with youarn, for this is an all-fired dirty Injin country, you know."

"Yes, and I have no objection to the aid of your good arm, Lone Dick, and will tell you frankly this party of ours did come here to prospect for gold. But, Lone Dick, I do not understand about the train you speak of, and think it strange that settlers should come into these hills, bringing their wives and children with them."

"It's all-fired strange, Buffler; but we kin soon nose out what they're doin' here, and whar they're goin' to squat."

"True, and you and I will start on a scout in the morning, and follow up their trail, while the boys are busy putting up a log fort."

"That's right! for the Sioux are not going to let us have peaceful possession here, and will soon discover that some of their warriors were killed to-day," said Red Han

"What? Blazes! Did yer riz the h'ar of some of 'em to-day?" asked Lone Dick, and Buffalo Bill and the other members of the party gazed upon Red Hand in surprise, while he quietly replied:

"I had a little skirmish to-day; not of my own seeking, however."

Turning away he rolled himself in his blanket and soon appeared to be fast asleep, leaving his comrades surprised at his unwillingness to make known the particulars of his adventure with the Indians, and feeling confident that, as blood had already been shed, it was their duty to make every preparation against surprise and attack.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN OLD FRIEND AND NEW FACES.

At the first glimmer of dawn in the east Buffalo Bill was on his feet, and, calling to Lone Dick, the two soon set out upon their way to strike the trail of the emigrants of whom they had been told by the trapper. Going in a southerly direction, and riding rapidly, for both were well mounted, shortly after noon the scout discovered fresh traces that proved the train had lately passed along.

Following up, they were not long in finding out that the newly arrived party were dogged by Indians, who were determined to resist this invasion into their territory. As the sun went down beyond the western hills, there came to the ears of the two men the sound of firing, and dashing on at full speed, they soon came upon a spirited scene.

In the mouth of a small cañon were gathered several persons, huddled together, and with their rifles were endeavoring to keep back some twoscore Sioux braves, who were pressing them hard. Several Indians lay dead here and there, and, infuriated by the loss of their comrades, the band of warriors were preparing to rush in force upon the small party in the cañon and end the combat by a hand-to-hand conflict.

At this moment Buffalo Bill and Lone Dick came in sight. A glance showed them that the small party were whites, and with yells infernal they dashed upon the Indians, firing their repeating rifles as they rode

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With never-failing aim, the rifle of Buffalo Bill sent many a warrior and horse to the ground. Its rapid, rattling fire, added to that of Lone Dick, caused the redskins to believe a large reënforcement had arrived to aid the palefaces, and they broke for cover.

Then from the cañon dashed three men, firing as they came, and greatly adding to the fright of the Indians, who hastily retreated into a gorge in the hills, leaving their dead upon the field.

"Hip, hip, hoopla! Buffalo Bill, as I live! Old fellow, I owe you one," and one of the besieged party dashed up to the scout, and warmly grasped his hand.

That the man who so warmly welcomed Buffalo Bill was a frontiersman was evident by his attire and general appearance, for he was clad in buckskin, moccasins, and all, and wore a slouch hat ornamented with a gold sun looping up the rim in front, which added to the bold and determined expression upon his fine face.

His form was graceful, wiry, and denoted great strength, while his movements were quick, nervous, and his dark eyes were restless. His features were French—in fact, he was a Frenchman, coming, it was said, from Michigan, where his father lived—a noble, exiled from his native land.

Thoroughly armed and equipped, and mounted upon a large, sinewy horse, Tom Sun—for such was his name—was a dangerous foe. In his frank, pleasant way, he greeted Buffalo Bill and Lone Dick, and then turning to his comrades, said:

"Here, Buffalo Bill, are friends I am guiding up into the hills to hunt a home. Captain Ramsey, this is Buffalo Bill, the scout."

"I am glad to meet you, sir, and your name is not unknown to me. This is my son, sir, and this my daughter."

The man addressed as Captain Ramsey turned to a young man, who rode by his side, and a fair young girl, who had reined her horse slightly back.

Buffalo Bill glanced first into the face of Captain Ramsey, and beheld a man of fifty years of age, with a noble face and stalwart form; but though he appeared like a borderman, his manner indicated that his earlier life had been passed amid far different scenes.

His son, Burton Ramsey, was about twenty years of age, and possessed a good-looking face and handsome form, and was clad like his father in a suit of gray homespun.

Ruth Ramsey, the daughter, seemed like a ray of sunshine in that group of stern men.

The scout looked at her a moment in earnest admiration before he turned to Tom Sun, and said:

"Tom, what brings you into this wild land?"

"My horse, of course; but, joking aside, Cody, the captain here was in the army some years ago, and, resigning his commission, settled down upon the border of the Southwest on a ranch; but he concluded he would do better up in these hills, and so his whole neighborhood up stakes, and here they are, I being the guide of the expedition."

"There is no more beautiful country to settle in if the Indians will only let you alone," remarked Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, and no richer country in minerals, I am con-

vinced, Cody, and I believe we can get a hold here and soon get the government to support us."

"I doubt the support of the government, captain, and it is a dangerous country into which to bring women and children."

"That is true, Buffalo Bill," was the answer; "but we will have to teach the Indians to let us alone, or pacify them with presents."

"That Quaker idea of dealing with redskins is losing ground, captain," said the scout, "and if the Indians know they can get all the presents by one grand fight, and a number of scalps to boot, why, it is their nature to do so."

"You paint a bad picture, Cody; but, can I ask, how is it I find you here in these hills, and with only one comrade?"

"A single man can go, sir, where a dozen dare not attempt it. I am here with a band of brave fellows who came for the same purpose that doubtless brought you—to search for gold."

"You are right, Cody! I have reason to know that there are large quantities of gold here," replied Captain Ramsey, with enthusiasm.

"There is certainly gold here, sir, and silver, too, for that matter; but all gold seekers in the Black Hills come here at the risk of their lives until the government sends troops to protect the miners; and that it is not likely to do for a number of years to come."

"You speak knowingly, Cody, and I feel that you are right; but here we are, and here we intend to remain, as long as it is in our power to do so."

"Still, it was wrong to bring women and children with you," Buffalo Bill protested. "A man has a right

to play with his own life, but not those of his wife and children, and already you have had a sample of how the redskins intend to receive you."

The scout spoke warmly.

"True; and had it not been for your brave dash to our relief, before now our end might have come; but let us on after the train. We can give you some good cheer, after we go into camp, and I beg of you not to paint a dark side to our expedition, for there may be a few faint hearts among us."

"I have said all I intend to, captain," was the scout's reply. "Have you determined upon where you intend to camp?"

"No, for we are in the dark regarding locations."

"Then I would advise that you bend more to the northeast. There you will find a fertile valley and good streams, and be also within a third of a day's journey from our camp, and you know there is safety in numbers."

"I have advised building a stronghold at once, and then, should the Indians prove troublesome, we have at least protection," said Tom Sun.

"You are right, Tom! You can reach the spot I speak of early to-morrow, and circumstances warrant that you make no delay in building your fort. How many men have you with you?"

"We have about thirty, Buffalo Bill, and about as many noncombatants, and we are well armed and equipped, I assure you."

"In our band there are a score of miners," said the scout, "and no women or children. If it comes to the worst, why, our united bands should make a good fight. But come, we had better go on."

Then the party rode rapidly after the train. It was several miles ahead, and Captain Ramsey had imprudently allowed it to proceed while he stopped to examine some traces of gold, accompanied only by his guide, son, and daughter.

Ramsey was most enthusiastic over the Black Hills, had a bad case of "gold fever," and was willing to risk life and all in the search for the precious yellow gold.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TWO STRONGHOLDS.

Somewhat alarmed, in spite of himself, by the words of Buffalo Bill, Captain Ramsey began to feel that he had allowed his enthusiasm to go perhaps too far in leading an expedition into the Black Hills when the lives of the whole party might be the forfeit for their foolhardiness.

But, having at length entered the promised land, it was not in the nature of the old soldier to turn back, and he contented himself with a determination to so fortify his camp as to make it impregnable to the attacks of the redskins.

His energetic example, as soon as the train reached the designated spot for encampment, soon set all the men to work at the log fort. Having conducted the train to this site, which was advantageous both for gold hunting and defense from the Indians, Buffalo Bill left for his own camp, accompanied by Lone Dick and Tom Sun, the latter going with his brother scout to learn the locality of the miners' camp.

As the three men rode along they conversed over the future prospects of the country which they had so boldly invaded. They did not doubt but that their example would be followed by others as soon as it became known that white men were living in the Black Hills, which had always before been considered the rightful land of the redskin.

Arriving at his own camp, Buffalo Bill found that his comrades had made rapid progress with their

work, and that the walls of the stockade fort were already assuming shape. The site selected by the scout was certainly a most advantageous position, being under the shelter of a huge hill of rock, inaccessible to the foot of man, and fronting on the bank of a mountain stream.

The stockade fence encircled a portion of rich, grassy land, where the horses could luxuriate and where a garden plot for vegetables was laid out. The only approaches were across the stream, and around the base of the cliff by a narrow pathway that half a dozen men could defend against a hundred.

The miners were delighted with the natural defense of their stronghold, while Tom Sun returned to his own encampment determined to take pattern after the example of Buffalo Bill and prepare for trouble ahead. Thus several weeks passed away and the two settlements in the Black Hills were made ready against every emergency.

At length the miners began to turn their attention toward gold seeking, the real object that had caused them to risk life in journeying thus far beyond the confines of civilization. As for Buffalo Bill and Tom Sun, they cared little for gold, and were thorough plainmen, spending their time in scouting and hunting for their respective camps.

But Lone Dick had caught the fever of avariciousness and was preparing to dig his way to fortune, if he had to go clear through to China. Separated only by a score of miles from each other, the different members of the gold seekers' camps became most friendly, and many were the young miners who loved to ride over to the Ramsey stronghold and sun them-

selves in the bright glances of Ruth Ramsey's eyes, for, of the half a dozen girls in her party, she was decidedly the belle.

Thus the days and weeks glided by. With the exception of a skirmish now and then, the Indians had not disturbed the two camps, and daily the miners worked away for gold, while Tom Sun and Buffalo Bill scouted and hunted through the hills and valleys.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WHITE AND RED CHIEFS.

Let us go back now to the point where that singular man, Red Hand, so nearly met death at the hands of the stranger. When Red Hand walked away from the girl and her father, there was a silence of several minutes; then the old man said:

"Pearl, you must not wander thus far from the retreat, in future, for my scouts bring me news of an invasion into our territory."

"Are soldiers coming into the hills, father?"

"Soldiers or citizens, they are all the same to me, and I am determined to make these hills too hot to hold them. The man who has just left us doubtless belongs to one of these invading bands."

"Father, why is it you so hate your race?" the girl asked. "Tell me why you hide away from our own people?"

"Pearl, never dare to question my actions again," almost shrieked the old man.

Then he continued:

"You have food in plenty, clothes to wear, and what more do you want? Here no one molests us, and in the settlements and cities life is a continual struggle and all men are evil. Against all men I have a hate that will go with me to the grave. Pearl, you know my vow, and I repeat it: I will kill, or cause to be killed, every white man that comes into these hills."

Pearl gazed upon the excited face of her father with a feeling of awe, and, accustomed to be wholly gov-

erned by him, she made no reply. After a little the old man walked up to the bodies of the dead Indians and examined them attentively. Then he said:

"Pearl, these redskins belong to the band of the young chief, White Slayer. Can he have ordered this attack on you?"

"I am sure I don't know," she answered; "but I do know they rushed upon me to make me a prisoner. I fled to that ledge for safety, and shot two of their number. Had not the brave man who has just left us come to my rescue, I should have been killed, I am certain."

"Strange, very strange," he declared. "Did you have any words with White Slayer when he was last at the retreat?"

"I told him I would never become his wife."

The man looked startled.

"Then he it was who ordered this attack upon you. Come, Pearl, we must be off."

Leading the way the old man started off up the gorge, followed by the girl, whose face had become strangely moody. After traversing a distance of several miles the man led the way up the steep hillside. For half an hour the two climbed up the mountain, until they came to a ledge, or shelf, half an acre in size, and above which the mountain towered to a vast height.

From this ledge a grand and extensive view was had of miles and miles of country. Far below lay valleys traversed by running streams and deep rocky cañons, where it seemed hardly possible for man to go.

Against the base of the cliff, and fronting the magnificent view, was built a log cabin, constructed for

both defense and comfort. It was large but compactly put together, and the two windows commanded the only visible approach to the ledge, the one by which the old man and the girl had come.

The cabin had one door in front. This was open, and in it sat an old Indian woman, pounding coffee in a stone jar. Within, the cabin was divided into two rooms, the first containing a rude table in the center, a cupboard with dishes and pans, a rack filled with books; another upon which hung, ready for use, rifles, shotguns, pistols, and knives of various descriptions. In the corner was a cot of bear and beaver skins.

A small door opened into the second room, which was at once noticeable for its air of neatness and comfort. The bed was tempting in its cleanliness, and around the chamber was every indication that Pearl was an ingenious and tidy housekeeper.

A curtain, hung against the back of the cabin wall, was raised. This disclosed the opening of a large cave which extended far back into the interior of the mountain.

Entering the cabin, Pearl at once laid aside her rifle and accouterments, and set about aiding the Indian woman to prepare supper, while her father continued on through the rooms into the cave beyond.

As if familiar with the dark cavern, he walked on with quick step for some hundred yards, the cave gradually descending, until he came out into a small valley on the other side of the hill. A well-worn path led across the valley. Following this, the old man skirted the base of the hill, and after a further walk of a mile suddenly came upon a rocky shelf.

The scene that now met the view of the strange old

man was a lovely valley spread out at his feet, for he was following a pathway that encircled a high hill.

Through the valley ran a winding stream, upon both banks of which were a score of Indian wigwams. Through the open peaks of the wigwams the blue smoke curled lazily upward to mingle with the clouds above.

Far above, the hilltops were painted in golden colors from the setting sun; but below, the valley was cast in shadow, for night was coming on. In the background of the scene, and close to the base of the hills upon either side of the valley, were hundreds of horses and cattle, grazing upon the rich grass that sprang up in wild luxuriance beneath their feet.

Here and there squaws were to be seen hurrying to and fro with arms full of wood brought from the forest, and lying in idleness upon the banks of the stream were lazy warriors looking upon their wives preparing the evening meal and doing all the work.

Groups of children skurried hither and thither in glee, and older ones, those youths who were aspiring to be mighty braves when their sun of manhood should rise, were swimming in the waters of the river, or practicing at targets with their bows and arrows.

It was a strange and picturesque scene, one only met with upon the frontier of our own land. Yet the old man seemed to care nothing for it, as he hurried down the steep hillside.

As he entered the camp, much respect was shown him by the Indians he met. Yet he noticed none of them, as he bent his way toward a large lodge near the center of the encampment.

In front of this wigwam lay an Indian, reclining at

length upon a bearskin. As the white man approached, he arose and greeted him. He was a warrior of striking and noble appearance, one of the noblest stripe of Indian braves, for his form was literally perfect, and his face almost handsome.

His attire was also far better than that usually seen among red men, his leggings being handsomely bordered, as was also a hunting shirt of the finest dressed deerskin.

A coronet of gorgeously dyed feathers surmounted his head, and in his belt was stuck an ivory-handled bowie knife, a tomahawk, ingeniously carved, and a revolver, while by his side lay a silver-mounted rifle.

"The White Slayer is glad to see the Gray Chief," said this Indian. "Will he enter the wigwam of his red brother?"

The young warrior spoke with a dignity and politeness that seemed natural to him.

"No; White Slayer is false to me. Why did he attempt to carry the Pearl of my heart from her cabin home?" angrily replied the white man, whom the Indians called Gray Chief.

A flush stole into the red face of the young chief at the charge. For a moment he was silent, but then said earnestly:

"The heart of the White Slayer is not here in his bosom, but with the paleface maiden on the hill. She is the dewdrop that refreshes his life, yet she turns her eyes from the White Slayer, though he is the chief of his tribe."

"All true, chief; but did you expect to win the girl by force?"

"Could the White Slayer use his arms toward the Pearl of the Hills?" indignantly said the Indian.

"Yet you sent five of your braves to take my Pearl captive."

"Would the Gray Chief trifle with White Slayer, or does he speak with a false tongue?" said the chief.

Glancing into the Indian's face, the old man read there only truth, and felt that he had not ordered the violence done to Pearl. Then in a few words he told the young chief all that had occurred. With a surprised frown White Slayer heard him through.

Then he said:

"The young men who thus acted toward the Pearl of the Hills were squaw braves, and they deserved their fate. White Slayer knows who has done this wrong to the Pearl, and he shall make his knife drink blood for it; but, Gray Chief, the palefaces must not come into our lands. They must be swept back upon the prairies."

The white man smiled, for he was well pleased with these words.

"That is my opinion, too," he declared, "and I am glad to see you are of the same mind. Now listen to me: Scouts have brought news that there are two bands of palefaces marching into our hills, and I wish you to assemble your warriors and prepare them for the warpath.

"Do not act in haste," he urged, "for those men come here to remain, take my word for it. What we want to do is to bide our time, and so lay our plans that not one paleface shall ever tread the prairie sward again."

"The Gray Chief hates his people," quietly said the chief.

"Hate! I abhor, I curse them; and, White Slayer, when the scalp of the last man of these bands hangs upon yonder war pole, I promise you that my Pearl shall gladden your wigwam with her presence.

The eyes of White Slayer glittered with joy, but he said quietly:

"It shall be as the Gray Chief says. In one moon there shall be five hundred warriors upon the warpath of the palefaces. White Slayer has said it."

"It pleases me to hear you say it, chief; and let me tell you, that a great foe to your people is in yonder valley—a man before whom your stoutest warriors tremble. I saw him."

"The Sioux warriors never fly from a foe; they know no fear," proudly returned the chief.

"And yet I have seen Sioux braves, who, when a score in number, dared not face that man."

"Who is this great brave?" asked the chief, with considerable interest.

"Buffalo Bill, the scout!"

In spite of himself the young chief flinched at the name, and his eagle eye glanced quickly around the surrounding hills, rapidly darkening before the approach of night.

"He is a great brave; but his scalp will yet be taken," replied White Slayer, with the braggadocio spirit natural to the redskin.

The old man's eyes lighted with triumph.

"See that it is. Now I will go back to my home in the hills, for I like not your lowlands, chief."

So saying, the old man walked rapidly back the way,

he had come, his thoughts too busy to bestow more than a passing glance upon the Indian village. It was now hidden in gloom, excepting here and there where a camp fire glimmered in front of some wigwam, whose lord had been late in returning to the bosom of his red family, and where the patient squaw was busy in preparing him his supper.

After a rapid walk Gray Chief reached his cabin, and found a humble but substantial supper awaiting him. After eating it, he lighted his brierwood pipe, and repaired to the ledge to smoke and think over the murderous plan he had laid for the destruction of those of his own race.

CHAPTER XXIX.

KANSAS KING, THE OUTLAW.

Pearl, the attractive girl whose home was the humble cabin in the hills, was strangely moody, after her meeting with Red Hand in the gorge, and her duties were attended to in silence, her thoughts seeming far away.

Her life at the cabin was not a lonely one. Constantly Indian runners were arriving and departing, after holding interviews with her father, and twice a day White Slayer came to the hut, always to seek her society.

Toward the young and handsome chief Pearl had a kindly feeling, for he had once saved her from a grizzly bear; but the idea of loving him, a redskin, never entered her mind, and she was determined she would never enter his wigwam as his wife, notwithstanding her father had told her she should do so.

From conversations had between White Slayer and the old hermit, Pearl soon discovered that there were two bands of whites in the Black Hills, and that the Indians were laying their plans to massacre both parties.

The thought sent a cold chill to the heart of the girl, and she at once determined to frustrate their designs. Going through the cave one morning, after White Slayer and the hermit had gone out together, Pearl reached a situation from which she could obtain a fine view of the Indian village.

With surprise she noted that there were numbers

of warriors in the camp, who, she knew, had been off for weeks on a southern trail and hunting on the prairies. A closer inspection also showed her that a perfect chain of Indian sentinels extended around the village and that sentinels were stationed upon the highest peaks of the surrounding hills.

Walking toward the council lodge on the river were her father and White Slayer, while a large body of the principal braves were gathered there to meet them.

"All this means mischief," was her conclusion. "I know my father has set the Indians up to this work of devilment, for he has sworn not to spare a pale-face who enters these hills. But they shall not be caught asleep. That man of the red hand saved my life, and I will save his. I must act soon, for the work of death will not be long delayed."

Thus muttering to herself, the girl retraced her way through the cave, and, entering the cabin, took her rifle and equipments from the rack over her cot.

"Valleolo, tell my father I will be back before sunset," she said to the Indian woman who aided her in the housework.

"There is danger in the forest and the valley," the squaw warned. "Let the Pearl of the Hills hear the words of Valleolo and remain at the wigwam."

"There is no danger I fear to meet, Valleolo. I will be back at sunset."

So saying, Pearl threw her rifle across her shoulder and rapidly descended the mountainside toward the bottom of the gorge which divided the hill. Hardly had she gone half a mile down the gorge, pondering in her own mind how she was to make her news known to the whites, and not compromise her father

and lead him into danger, when she was startled by a shadow falling across her path.

Glancing up quickly, she brought her rifle to a ready, for before her stood the form of a man. Not an Indian warrior was he, nor Red Hand, nor her father, but one she had never before seen.

He was a young man, scarcely more than twenty-five years of age, and yet with something in his face that made him appear at least thirty, for dissipation and a cruel life of crime had set their seal there.

His form was slight, but elegant, and showed to advantage in closely fitting trousers and jacket of navy blue flannel, decorated with brass buttons, and with a band of gold lace encircling each sleeve.

The bottoms of the trousers were stuck in a pair of handsomely topped cavalry boots, the heels of which were armed with silver spurs of the Mexican pattern. A red silk sash encircled his small waist, and but partially concealed a knife and pair of revolvers.

Upon his head was a large-brimmed slouch hat, looped up upon one side with an arrow pin, and half encircled by a black ostrich plume.

The face of this stylish-looking individual would have been decidedly handsome had it not been for the reckless expression resting on it, for the features were good, the eyes particularly fine, and a dark mustache and imperial, the same shade as his long, curling hair, added to his general appearance, which was that of a dashing, gay young cavalry officer.

Behind the man stood a superb black horse, richly caparisoned with a Mexican saddle and bridle. Hanging to the horn of the saddle was a cavalry saber, while, as a companion to it, upon the other side, was

a holster, from which protruded the butt of a revolver.

At sight of this man in her pathway, the first act of Pearl was to bring her rifle to her shoulder; but in quiet tones the stranger said:

"My dear girl, I beg you to lower that pretty toy, for I mean you no harm."

Struck with his splendid appearance, and feeling that from a paleface she had nothing to fear, Pearl partially lowered the weapon, and then said:

"Why are you here in these hills, sir?"

"I came for pleasure, and yet I dreamed not of beholding here one so beautiful," gallantly replied the stranger, stepping a pace nearer to her.

"Who are you, sir?" again queried Pearl, interested in spite of herself in the man.

"I am called Kansas King."

Instantly Pearl sprang back, and like a flash her rifle covered the heart of the outlaw chief.

Without the quiver of a muscle Kansas King looked at the girl who so threateningly held him at disadvantage, and his voice was unmoved as he asked:

"Why does my name thus offend you?"

"You are a vile murderer," she said, "and have laid waste the homes of your own people and the villages of the red men in wanton destruction; you are a white robber, sir."

Pearl's eyes flashed fire, for often had the Indian runners brought news to her father of the ruthless acts of Kansas King and his band.

"You paint my character in harsh tones," was the answer. "But, at any rate, I mean you no harm, but come here to see an old hermit, one who has lived

for years in the Black Hills and is a medicine man or chief of the Sioux under White Slayer."

He was looking at her earnestly.

"Do you know anything of such a man, for I take it you are some waif of an Indian camp?"

Pearl half lowered her rifle.

"If you refer to the man who is known as Gray Chief, he is my father."

"Your father! Then, indeed, he is a fortunate man. Were I the kin of one so lovely I would indeed be happy."

Pearl made no reply, for compliments she was unused to, and Kansas King continued:

"Will you guide me to your father, for I would speak with him upon a matter of interest to both of us?"

Without reply Pearl drew a small revolver from her belt and fired it three times in rapid succession, the ringing reports rattling like a volley of musketry along the cañon.

"Ha! Would you call aid?" cried Kansas King quickly, and his dark eyes flashed fire.

"I have simply called my father; he will soon be here, sir."

Still maintaining her position of defense, Pearl now replied to the question addressed her by the outlaw chief, until the sound of running feet was heard. The next moment up dashed the hermit and White Slayer, their rifles ready in hand.

At the sight of Kansas King the two halted. Seeing that their action was hostile, the outlaw cried, speaking in the Sioux tongue:

"Hold, chiefs! I sought you here, and this girl was kind enough to call you to me."

"Who are you?" cried the old hermit in English, his eyes glaring savagely upon the young man.

The latter answered bitterly:

"I am an outlaw; one branded with a curse; men call me Kansas King."

"You are the outlaw chief, then? What brings you here into these hills?"

"Mutual interest to you and me."

"I do not understand you," the old man protested.

"I will explain; I am an outlaw, and you are perhaps worse, for you dare not show your face among your fellow men."

"By the Heaven above, but you are bold to thus address me!" cried Gray Chief furiously.

"My worst foes never called me a coward," said the young man. "But I came here not to parley about courage or character, but to discuss a more important matter. You are accursed for some crime, or you would never hide in these hills like a hunted wolf. I am an outlaw, a price is upon my head, and, figuratively speaking, a noose is around my neck."

"Go on, sir," said the old man.

"Well, of late the troops have made it rather lively for me, because I have made it lively for the bordermen and emigrant trains. So I am compelled to have a stronghold that I can retreat to and where none dare follow me."

"And you come here! You are a robber by trade, and what guarantee have I that you will not murder us and plunder our homes?" said Gray Chief sneeringly.

"You have the guarantee of mutual protection, old man. Already frontiersmen are turning their eyes upon your hills, and even now two bands of miners and settlers have a foothold here, one of them fortified not five leagues from this spot.

"Now, listen to me," he continued: "One of these bands is fortified in a position that it will be hard to drive them from, and that place I need for my stronghold. I want to be on friendly terms with you and these redskins, and am willing to divide profits with you and with White Slayer and his warriors, after each one of my raids upon the settlements.

"With my band in the Black Hills, and my men on friendly terms with White Slayer and his half a thousand warriors, no man will be fool enough to attempt to come here to settle, and there are not sufficient troops on the border to attempt to follow me here, when they know they will have two forces to fight."

"You speak truly, young man," said Gray Chief.

"Of course I do, chief. My plan is to capture the miners' fort down the glen, and there establish myself at once. The booty and the scalps may all go to you and to the redskins. Then I will attack and carry Ramsey's camp, and again the spoils go to you, except three persons."

"And those are——"

"Captain Ramsey, his son, and daughter; them I claim."

"And you wish me to aid you in taking these two points?"

"Yes; but whether you do or not, I shall carry them," said the outlaw, with determination.

"Where are you now encamped?"

"Some twenty miles from here, in the lower hills."

"How many men have you with you?"

"About a hundred."

"Divide that by two, boy, and you'll be nearer right," said Gray Chief, with a sneer.

Kansas King looked at him defiantly.

"Attempt to drive us from these hills, and you'll think us double the number I named," he threatened.

"No threats, boy, for I do not like to hear them."

"One hears many things not pleasant, chief," was the retort. "But we must not quarrel. Will you become my ally?"

"That I must think over; to-morrow at this hour meet me here, and you shall know whether you can remain in these hills or must leave."

"No treachery, mind you, old man!"

"I am no snake in the grass, boy; to-morrow, at this time, remember. I will to-night hold council with White Slayer and his chiefs."

The outlaw bowed, kissed his hand gallantly to Pearl, sprang into his saddle, and dashed down the glen, while the hermit and White Slayer turned and walked up the gorge, leaving the girl standing in the spot where the meeting had taken place.

CHAPTER XXX.

PEARL'S WARNING.

For some moments after the departure of her father and White Slayer, Pearl stood in silent meditation, as though undecided what course to pursue. At length her mind seemed made up, and she started down the glen.

But she had not taken a second step before she came to a sudden halt, for not twenty paces from her she beheld a man who had stepped from behind a large boulder and advanced toward her.

At first Pearl seemed about to run, but checking this determination, she stood on the defensive, with her rifle half raised to her shoulder.

"I am a friend, miss, and the captain sent me back to give this to your father."

The man halted near her and held out his hand as if to give her something. He was a burly-looking fellow, clad half in buckskin, half in homespun, and was heavily armed with revolvers and knife. His face was wholly corrupt; in it there was not one redeeming expression. Pearl did not like his looks, and said suspiciously:

"What captain do you refer to?"

"Kansas King. I am his lieutenant, and am called Burke, miss."

"Bad Burke, is it not?" said Pearl quietly.

"Well, my enemies do call me Bad Burke, miss, but it is because I am a bad hand with the knife, and no man dare meet me with it; but my friends don't call me Bad Burke."

"Your friends? Why, I should not think a man like you had a single friend," Pearl declared boldly.

The face of Bad Burke turned livid with rage. His iron muscles seemed to swell up with suppressed emotion, while his evil eyes glittered like a snake's. But, controlling himself, he forced a laugh, and answered:

"Yes, miss, even a poor devil like me has friends; but here is the paper the captain sent to your father."

He again held forth his hand. Pearl reached forth to take what she believed to be a small scrap of paper. Her hand was seized in the iron grip of Bad Burke, who instantly drew her toward him.

Before she could offer the slightest resistance or cry out, his hard palm was over her mouth, and she was held as firmly as though in a vise. But suddenly she saw a dark object descending from a ledge of rock fifteen feet above her.

This dark object struck the burly ruffian fairly on the shoulders and knocked him to the ground. The dark object that had descended so suddenly from the rock, and lighted upon the back of Bad Burke, was a man—one who did not lose his equilibrium by his jump, but caught on his feet, and stood ready, with drawn knife and pistol, to face the outlaw lieutenant.

When released from the grasp of the ruffian, Pearl sprang backward, and again seized her rifle, which she turned upon the outlaw lieutenant.

"Hold! Do not shoot him. Let him come on and face me with his knife, for he boasted a moment since that no man dare face him."

"In Satan's name, who are you?" cried Bad Burke, his hand upon his knife hilt.

"Buffalo Bill!"

It was evident that Bad Burke had heard the name before, for his hand quickly slipped from his knife hilt toward a pistol butt.

"Just move one inch, aye, crook your finger, and I'll send your soul to perdition."

The pistol of Buffalo Bill covered the heart of the outlaw, who whined out:

"Pard, you've the advantage of a fellow and ought to let up a little."

"I will; miss, will you be kind enough to remove the pistols from that villain's belt?"

Pearl instantly stepped forward and did as directed, making a motion with the weapons as if about to murder the frightened lieutenant of bandits.

"Thank you; now, Bad Burke, we stand on an equal footing," and Buffalo Bill cast his pistols upon the ground.

With a suppressed yell of rage Bad Burke rushed upon his cool enemy, for now he believed he had it all his own way, as his boast was not an idle one regarding his prowess with a knife.

Calmly the scout met his attack. The blades clashed together with an ominous ring. Notwithstanding his skill and strength, Bad Burke was hurled backward, and seized in the powerful grip of the scout, whose keen knife gleamed in the sunlight, and then, with a crunching thud, was driven to the hilt in the outlaw's heart. A stifled groan, and Bad Burke's cruel life had ended.

With bated breath Pearl had stood and watched the deadly encounter between Buffalo Bill and Bad Burke. Notwithstanding her apparent fear, the outlaw had been in double danger, for, had there been the slight-

est sign that victory would fall to him, the girl had her rifle ready to do its deadly work.

"You are from one of the camps of the white men?" she asked.

"Yes," the scout answered.

"I was on my way to find them. Your life and the lives of your friends are in danger," simply replied the girl.

"My life is ever in danger. You were going to warn us of danger, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you expect to find us?" the scout inquired.

"At the miners' stronghold, far down the glen."

"It is miles away, and your feet would have tired with their long walk."

"I am accustomed to long walks over the hills, sir."

"Are you not afraid of danger-meeting you?" the scout questioned.

"No, sir; I have little fear."

"Yet just now you were powerless in the hands of a ruffian."

"Very true. I thank you for saving me from him."

She looked at the dead outlaw with a shudder.

"You are a brave girl and deserve a different fate from lingering here in these hills, and living the life of a hermitess."

"Oh, I would so love to go away," she declared.

"But, sir, you must not stay here, for any moment some warriors may pass, and your life would certainly be the forfeit.

"I was going to warn you of danger, because I did not wish to see you and your paleface friends

massacred, and now I have double cause for saving you."

Her expressive face showed that she was very much in earnest.

"Oh, sir, fly from these hills, you and your friends, for even now the Sioux are assembling all their braves to attack you, and he that is called Kansas King will side with the Indians in the war against you."

"From my heart I thank you," said the scout. "But I know all that you would tell me. Not ten minutes ago I was on that ledge and saw and heard all that passed between your father, the White Slayer, and Kansas King."

The girl was very much surprised, but answered:

"I am glad you heard it; but you will leave these hills?"

"No; we will show Kansas King and his Indian allies that we will not be driven from the Black Hills by fear of them," and Buffalo Bill spoke with bitter determination.

"Oh, what a terrible slaughter will follow!" she exclaimed. "How I wish I could aid you, sir."

"You can. You can aid me."

"And how? Tell me, and I will do all in my power," said Pearl earnestly.

"To-morrow is the meeting between Kansas King and your father. Yonder ledge is a secret spot where you can hide, and you can reach it from the hill above. I want to know the plans to be arranged between your father and the outlaw chief, and to-morrow night, just after sunset, I will meet you here."

"I understand, sir, and I will do as you wish me

to; but, tell me, please, are you Buffalo Bill, the scout?"

"I am so called, but why do you ask?"

"Because I have so often heard the Sioux warriors speak of you, and how terrible you were in battle; numbers have gone forth upon your trail, boasting they would return with your scalp, and though many warriors have gone, you still wear your scalp lock, and many of those braves have not returned."

"Perhaps they are looking for me in the happy hunting grounds," said Buffalo Bill. "Now I must be off; and remember—to-morrow night I will meet you; but, tell me, can I not cross this hill and strike the valley beyond?"

"Yes, sir; but, oh! Do not go through that valley," implored Pearl, with earnest manner.

"And why, child? Are the redskins numerous there?"

"Oh, no, sir; an Indian would not enter that valley for a girdle of scalp locks, and even my father dare not go there."

"Why? Is it such a terrible place?"

The girl glanced cautiously around her, slightly shuddered, then in a whisper replied:

"A spirit haunts the valley, sir."

"A spirit? Nonsense!"

"No, sir! Oh, no; it is the spirit of a woman dressed in white; she haunts it day and night, and when the moon is bright she sings wild songs——"

"Go on with your story," he urged; "tell me all you know about the haunted valley."

"What shall I tell you, sir?" innocently asked Pearl.

"When was this spirit first seen?"

"Five years ago, ever since the paleface's grave was in the valley, the spirit has been seen at times; but no warrior dare go near the valley, and those who were bold enough to go where the specter dwells have never returned."

"Do you know anything about the grave in the valley?"

"No, sir; the Indians say a man was slain there by the spirit, for the grave lies just at the entrance of the haunted valley; but my father thinks that two paleface hunters came into the hills after gold, and one killed the other and buried him there."

"I thank you, Pearl, for the warning you have given me about the haunted valley; but I am going to the Ramsey settlement, and it will save me many a mile to go through the glen, and I will risk seeing the spirit. Remember, to-morrow night I will meet you, and you had better not mention that you know anything of the death of Bad Burke here."

"No, sir, I will not speak of it," she promised; "but please do not go through the haunted valley."

"Have no fear; good-by!"

So saying, the scout turned and walked to his horse, which was hidden not far away, and then rode down the glen, while Pearl, delighted at having warned him of danger, yet dreading to have him risk his life in the spirit valley, walked with rapid steps back to her cabin, determined to discover the plans of her wicked father to bring ruin and death upon the palefaces who had invaded the Black Hills.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BAD BURKE'S TREACHERY.

Let us again go back a little. When Kansas King rode out from his camp toward the hills, he was accompanied by his lieutenant, Bad Burke, and others of his men. The sun was nearing the western skies when they halted in a gulch.

"Well, Burke," said Kansas King, "I have discovered with my glass the home of the old hermit chief, and I will go up the gorge alone and endeavor to speak with him. A girl has just left the cabin and is coming down this way, so I will head her off."

"She is the girl they call the Pearl of the Hills, and is the daughter of the old hermit. She can show her claws, so the Injuns tell me who have been in this country," said Bad Burke.

"I will have to clip her claws for her, then. You follow slowly on, and be ready to support me if you hear me call," and Kansas King tapped lightly on a small silver bugle hanging to his belt.

"I'll be on hand when you need me," answered Bad Burke, and Kansas King mounted his horse and rode on alone, leaving his companions in the gorge.

Hardly had he been gone ten minutes when Bad Burke said bluntly:

"See here, fellows; you all has sense and knows I picked you out to come with me 'cause I wanted work done. Now, if any fellow here is afraid of blood, he'd better git. Who speaks?"

Not a word of reply came from any of the men

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who had been with Kansas King. Then Bad Burke continued:

"This country—I mean the prairies and the border—is getting too hot for our business, and we've got to git; the chief wants to locate here, and have the Injuns for a support; but it won't do, and I've got a plan, and we'll divide atween us seven—what say you?"

"I'm in for any job," said one, and the others all nodded for the lieutenant to go ahead.

"Well, I'll tell you; there is a big price offered for the head of Kansas King. We'll arrange to run him right off from here and deliver him up to the officers at the fort, and that will get us a pardon. Then I know where there is a lot of gold and waluables buried, for I helped King to bury them, and we'll dig them up and just slide away from the country with enough metal to make us all rich. What say you?"

"When can we get the chief?" asked one.

"He is gone up the gorge to try and palaver with the Indians. When he comes back we'll bag him. Then I'll go up and talk to the old hermit chief and tell him Kansas was putting up a job on him, and get him to send his warriors down after our boys, and every one of them will get the knife and lose their hair. Now, are you ready, boys?"

"Will we be afther making tracks from these hills as soon as we have the chafe?" asked one of the men, who was an Irishman.

"Yes, we'll start to-night, for it is moonlight, and we will ride hard, and soon leave the Black Hills behind us."

"I'm in."

"And I."

"I'm yer man."

"You bet on me."

Sundry other ejaculations of consent to the treacherous plan were given by the traitor crew, the Irishman being particularly loud in his glee at the prospects ahead.

Excepting the Irishman, however, the other ruffians were sincere in their desire to betray their chief, and Bad Burke had selected the very men he knew had no love for Kansas King.

It was now arranged that Bad Burke should at once follow Kansas King, watch his meeting with the old hermit, and then go himself to Gray Chief as soon as the outlaw leader left him, and place before him a plan for surprising the band.

In the meantime, when Kansas King returned to the gorge, the six men were to throw themselves upon him, and at once make him prisoner.

Bad Burke then departed, following the trail of his chief. From a place of concealment on the side of the hill he beheld the meeting of Kansas King and Pearl, the coming of the hermit chief and White Slayer, and then the departure of his leader back to the gorge.

Still lying quiet, he saw Gray Chief and White Slayer return up the gorge and leave Pearl standing where the meeting had taken place.

"Now, Burke, you need just such a gal fer your wife, and now's your time to get her. Yes, I'll carry the gal with me, and after I have given King up to the military, I'll divide the blood money with those fellows, and then give them the slip and take the

buried treasure myself; guess I won't divide that nor the gal, either.

"No, Tom Burke, your fortune's made now, with money and a wife, and I guess you better light out for Texas and start a ranch, for this country won't be very healthy for you, I'm a-thinking."

So saying, Bad Burke, the traitor outlaw, descended to the bottom of the gorge, and, as the reader has seen, confronted Pearl. How his treacherous plans toward the maiden and his chief were frustrated, the reader has also seen, and that his crimes were rewarded by a death he had seemed little to anticipate.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SPECTER OF THE VALLEY.

Buffalo Bill was not the only man who had been in concealment near the spot where Bad Burke met his death. Scarcely was he gone from the place, when Red Hand rose into view. He stared after the retreating form of the scout, and muttered:

"I shall go through that valley, too. If there is anything to be seen there I want to see it."

But he shuddered as he spoke, and his face seemed drawn with pain. So it came about that Red Hand followed Buffalo Bill. But the scout had moved so rapidly that not once did Red Hand come in sight of him. And in a little while, so painful were the thoughts of the latter, that Red Hand almost forgot that the scout was somewhere ahead of him.

Thus Red Hand set forth upon his trip, wending his way in the direction of the Ramsey settlement, going toward the point which Pearl had urged Buffalo Bill to avoid on account of the weird stories among the Indians that a spirit haunted the valley.

As he walked along, the moon arose in brilliant beauty upon the wild scenery, and shed a bright light upon lofty hill, rocky gorge, and lovely vale.

The story of the spirit of the valley haunted Red Hand's memory with weird and bitter thoughts, for he remembered the grave made in the valley and the apparition he had seen there after he had consigned the body of Ben Talbot to its last resting place.

Often had Red Hand endeavored to convince him-

self that the sight was but a phantom of his troubled brain; but, no; it came too vividly before him in form, gesture, and song, and he felt that if he had not seen a spirit from the shadowy land, he had certainly beheld a woman.

Yet—who could this woman be who had thus been with Ben Talbot, living alone in the wild Black Hills?

He entered the narrow gorge, the inlet to the accursed valley, and the silvery light of the moon caused every tree and boulder to stand forth in phantomlike shadow. But Red Hand was not of a superstitious nature. Nerving himself for what was before him, he hurried forward at a swifter pace.

Down the valley he hastened for half a mile. Then the shadowy hill and large trees at its base, both of which were photographed upon his mind, loomed up before him. Buffalo Bill had passed on before, and was nowhere in sight. Already Red Hand had almost forgotten him.

"I'll solve this mystery if I die in the attempt," said Red Hand, and he turned once more toward the tree.

Then he halted, for, standing at the head of the grave was a woman. Nearer and nearer to the tree he drew, until the glimmer of the dark eyes were almost visible. Then he stopped short, for a strangely sad voice, striving to be firm, cried out:

"Hold! Let not the foot of any man desecrate this sacred spot!"

"Great God! Where have I heard that voice before?" was his thought. "No, it is not, it cannot be—for she is dead; yes, dead by her own hand."

Red Hand trembled with the emotion that swept over him.

"Lady," he said, his voice shaking, "I would not desecrate the resting place of the dead, yet I would know why you so jealously guard the grave of Ben Talbot!" Though he shook, he spoke in his deep, distinct tones.

As he commenced speaking a sudden change was visible in the woman; her form bent forward and her ear was turned as if to catch every word, while her right forefinger was pressed against her lips.

Then in a voice that was nothing more than a hoarse whisper she said:

"I guard his grave because I loved him. Did you know Ben Talbot?"

"Aye, did I, lady! He wrecked my life!"

"Your life! Ha, ha, ha! I know you now, Vincent Vernon; I know you now in spite of the years that have swept over your accursed soul," almost shrieked the woman, raising both hands wildly above her head.

"Good God! Grace, has the grave given you up or are you a phantom from the shadow land?" cried Red Hand, starting toward the woman.

"Back, you red-handed murderer! Back, I say, back! And do not pollute this sacred spot. No, I am not from the grave, and I lied to you when I said I would take my life. Ha, ha, ha!—no, why do I laugh? It is hollow mockery for me to laugh, and—but what do you here, thou accursed? Ha! Now I know by whose hand poor Ben fell. Away! Away! No, no, no, do not go, but stay until I tear from you your coward heart."

In wild frenzy the woman rushed toward the man, a knife gleaming in her uplifted hand, and her whole

bearing that of one gone mad. Like a statue stood Red Hand, his hands hanging listlessly by his sides, his eyes bent with fixed stare upon the woman, and his whole manner that of a man struck dumb by some startling discovery, some terrible shock that had wholly unnerved him for the slightest motion.

On rushed the madwoman, and still he stood passive, seemingly unconscious of his danger, or unmindful of her presence, for his head was lowered upon his breast and his eyes downcast.

A few rapid bounds, a frenzied laugh, and the madwoman faced the man she had accused. The arm was poised in the air, the gleaming blade threatening instant death, the glaring eyes, wild with madness; yet Red Hand did not move.

Then, with a weird cry of revengeful joy the knife began to descend, swiftly, pointed at the heart of Red Hand.

Before the keen blade was sheathed in the broad breast there came a bright flash from the dark hillside, a sharp report, and with a wild shriek the woman dropped the knife. The shot awoke Red Hand from his apathy. With a cry of alarm he sprang forward, crying: "Grace! Grace! You are hurt."

"Back, sir! Do not pollute me with your touch. Ha! Still I have hope of revenge," cried the woman.

She drew with her left hand from her belt a pistol and quickly fired it in the face of Red Hand, who staggered back, bewildered by the flash, but uninjured.

Believing that she had slain the man she seemed to hate the unhappy woman almost shrieked:

"Now I die content. Ben, you are avenged, and so is——"

The remainder of the sentence was drowned in the report of her revolver, which she had placed against her heart and fired. Too late did Red Hand spring forward to attempt to check her act. He could only catch her falling form in his strong arms and lower her gently to the ground just as a rapid foot-step was heard, and Buffalo Bill dashed up with anxious manner, crying:

"Did she wound you, comrade?"

"No, but she has killed herself," sadly said Red Hand.

"In God's name, who is she, Red Hand?"

"One whom I knew long years ago—one whom I never harmed in thought, word, or action, and yet who has turned against me," sadly replied Red Hand.

He was gazing with bitterness and sorrow into the pale, worn, yet still beautiful face—a face that possessed an almost weirdlike loveliness, and a form of wondrous grace and beauty.

The eyes were large, almond-shaped, and had been full of slumbering fire; the mouth was small, yet stern, mayhap having become so in later years, and the teeth were milky white, while a wealth of black hair hung down her back and covered her shapely shoulders.

She was dressed in a coarse garment of pure white, and moccasins incased her feet. A belt of buckskin, bead-worked, encircled her small waist and supported the scabbard and holster of the weapons she had endeavored to use against Red Hand.

Breathing heavily, she lay in his arms, and at his

words she unclosed her lustrous eyes and met his gaze.

"Grace, Grace, do you know me, or does the shadow of death lie between you and me?" softly said Red Hand.

"Yes, Vincent Vernon, I know you, and the shadow of death does rest between us," faintly replied the woman.

She spoke with evident pain and difficulty, while her left hand was held tight to her side, and through the fingers oozed a crimson tide, hastening her life away.

Resting upon the grass, and staining its green with crimson, was the right hand, which had been stunned, but not injured in the least, by the bullet from Buffalo Bill's rifle. The scout had shot at the handle of her knife and had struck it fair.

Yet, though Buffalo Bill had not injured her, and had fired only to save the life of Red Hand, as he stood there, brave man though he was, his eyes dimmed with tears as he muttered:

"I could not help it—I could not help it, for it was to save your life I fired, comrade."

"Grace," and Red Hand's voice was strangely soft and kind. "Grace, why did you leave me to a life of despair? Why did you wish to take my life?"

"Vincent, yonder is the grave of Ben Talbot. Answer me—did your hand place him there?"

"It did."

Buffalo Bill started at the reply, and the woman groaned aloud.

"Again, answer me; did you take my father's life?"

"Grace, in God's name what do you mean?"

"Answer me! Did my father fall by your hand?"

"Never, as God is my judge!"

The eyes of the woman turned full upon the man, and she asked earnestly:

"Vincent, would you lie to a dying woman?"

"No, not one unkind word ever passed between your father and me."

"Thank God! Vincent, now I understand all, and—I—believe—you. Hold—me—up—thus! Yes, the shadow of death has blinded me, and the cold chill of the grave is upon me; but I would ask you to forgive me—me, a guilty thing that has so sinned against you. Quick! Hold down your ear and catch my words, for—the papers—all—in cabin—yonder—quick! Forgive me, and—kiss me, Vincent."

"Red Hand murmured softly:

"Grace, I forgive."

Then his stern lips touched those of the woman just as her eyes closed and death laid his icy touch upon her pulse and stilled it forevermore.

"Come, comrade, old fellow, the night is creeping on, and we must not linger here."

It was Buffalo Bill who thus addressed Red Hand, who, an hour later, was still bending over the frail form of the woman he had called Grace, though two hours had passed since her spirit had winged its flight. Yet Red Hand had not let go the small hand or ceased to gaze down upon the marblelike, upturned face.

"Arouse yourself, comrade," Buffalo Bill urged. "Come, I have dug a grave yonder under the hillside, just on the mossy bank of the stream; you can see it from here; and we must lay the poor girl away."

Still Red Hand returned no answer. Again Buffalo Bill's kindly tones addressed him:

"Have you forgotten, comrade, that many lives are dependent upon you, and that there is danger in the wind?"

The scout still trusted Red Hand, though there were many things he could not yet understand.

"Buffalo Bill, dear old fellow, I remember now. Let us first bury poor Grace—yes, bury her forever from sight; but I forgave her ere she died, and she believed me when I said my hand was not stained with her father's blood. There is a stain upon it, Buffalo Bill, but not of his life. Come, let us dig a grave," and Red Hand arose to his feet.

"The grave is dug," said the scout. "See, all is in readiness over there."

"Thank you, my friend, for I would not have her rest side by side with Ben Talbot. Here is my blanket, and she shall have it for a shroud; poor, poor Grace!"

Tenderly the graceful form was enveloped in the blanket of Red Hand, who then raised it in his arms and bore it to the newly made grave which Buffalo Bill had thoughtfully filled in with poles cut from a thicket near by, which served as a rude coffin. Into her last resting place the poor woman was lowered, and the blanket drawn over the beautiful, sad face upon which Red Hand gazed with a stern, hard look that proved how deeply he suffered.

A few moments more and the soil was thrown in most tenderly by the scout, who seemed to feel to the very soul for the stricken man. Red Hand stood with uncovered head and folded arms gazing down upon

the grave which held one that he had certainly loved most dearly in bygone years, and who had so strangely crossed his path in the wilds of the Black Hills—crossed his path to die by her own hand before his very face.

"Buffalo Bill," he said, when the grave had been filled in, "I have much to thank you for; but we must not linger here. Some day I will make known to you the story of my life, in all its cruelty and sorrow; but not now—no, not now."

"But, tell me, how was it I found you here?" Buffalo Bill asked.

With an effort Red Hand seemed to bury his grief and assume his former manner.

"Things began to look squally, pard, and I started over to your layout to look you up, when I ran across Lone Dick, the scout, and he told me you had struck out in this direction. So I put after you over the hills."

In a few more words Red Hand acquainted Buffalo Bill with all the discoveries he had made since coming to the Black Hills.

"That we are going to have a hard time, Red Hand, is evident. My advice is for that other party to at once vacate their layout, and move bag and baggage to our stronghold, which we can hold against every Indian in these hills; yet to be on the safe side, I have a plan to save the women, and that is to bring them here."

"Here! How will that protect them?"

"This is the Haunted Valley of the Black Hills. And no Indian of the Sioux tribe, or outlaw, either, will ever penetrate into these wilds."

"We know now how it was haunted and why," said Red Hand sadly.

"Yes, Red Hand, you and I know now, and we also know that this place will be sacred from intrusion. Here we will bring the women and children, and you and Lone Dick and Captain Ramsey and his son must be their guard."

"You mean for the party to leave the settlement to-night, then?"

"Yes, for the Indians will begin to move soon."

Buffalo Bill continued:

"I will ride, as soon as possible, to the Ramsey camp; have the women and their party pack up at once, mount and hasten to the head of the valley, with all the necessary stores and traps for a long siege; then tell the men to move off with all due haste for the miners' camp, and, mind you, Red Hand, they must be well on their way by daylight, for we have no time to lose. I am off at once, Red Hand, but really I do not like to leave you alone in this valley," said Buffalo Bill reluctantly.

"It matters not, the dead can do no harm, and the living I have little fear of here."

"It is now about two hours to midnight. Before day I will be at the head of the valley."

So saying, Buffalo Bill mounted, and the rattle of his horse's hoofs echoed dismally through the hills as he rode rapidly on his way, leaving Red Hand alone in the Haunted Valley—alone with the dead.

CHAPTER XXXIII

TICKLISH WORK.

Instead of hastening immediately toward Ramsey's camp after leaving Red Hand, Buffalo Bill rode but a short distance in that direction. Then he brought his horse to a stop, and sat for some time in his saddle, listening and cogitating.

His sympathies had been aroused for Red Hand, and he believed in the man. Not often did Buffalo Bill go amiss in his judgment of men; yet in a few instances he had made mistakes in his opinions of certain individuals. The life of Red Hand was hidden in mystery. No one seemed to know his past or anything much about him.

"I think he is all right," thought the scout, "but it is never safe to be too sure. I think that girl is all right, too; but even there I may be mistaken. The only way to be absolutely sure is to make sure! I can't make sure of Red Hand just now, but perhaps I can find out something certain about the intentions of those Indians."

Having thus come to a conclusion, he turned the horse softly from the trail, and in a little while was shaping his course toward the Indian village. The moon still shone brilliantly, and in that clear atmosphere moonlight sometimes is marvelously bright. The scout could see for a considerable distance in every direction.

While this brightness of the night had been favorable to him in the events which had recently trans-

pired, it promised to make extremely difficult and ticklish the task to which he was now setting his energies. When the scout had ridden as far as he thought it safe to go, he dismounted, and after tying his horse to the swinging bough of a tree, he went forward softly on foot. As he approached the Indian village he heard droning sounds and the thump of drums.

"A bad sign," he said to himself. "It is queer that whenever Indians meditate war they must work themselves up to a fighting pitch by a lot of dancing and howling."

The Indian village was all astir, as he discovered when he came in sight of it. There were lights in many of the lodges, and in the council house, which was the largest lodge, and pitched in the center of the village.

The droning sound had now revealed itself as the singing and chanting of warriors and medicine men, and the thump of the drums reached the scout with great distinctness.

Because of the brightness of the moonlight, Buffalo Bill assumed a stooping posture as he crept forward, and a little later he got flat down on the ground and crept on with the liteness and softness of the panther stealing on its prey.

Not a leaf rustled under him as he thus stole forward, not a twig snapped; his advance was like the forward movement of a shadow, so silent was it. Buffalo Bill was no ordinary scout, no ordinary trailer, no ordinary Indian fighter. He could out-Indian an Indian himself in all the tricks of Indian warfare.

Now and then, when an Indian figure appeared

at an opening in a lodge or hurried along through the moonlight, the scout simply "froze" in his place; and, if seen would then have been thought to be a mere shadow or some prominence in the landscape, a stone or a bit of elevated earth.

When the Indian had disappeared, the scout wriggled on again. Thus by progress that was slow and annoying, or would have been annoying to almost any other man, Buffalo Bill drew close to the Indian village.

In a short while after reaching it he was squirming along behind the lodges, seeking concealment in their shadows. Always he headed toward the central lodge, where the drums were thumping and the braves were howling.

What Buffalo Bill feared most was that some mangy cur, of which numbers are always found in every Indian village, should scent him out and raise a clatter which would bring some of the Indians down upon him.

As if to be prepared for this, or to guard against it, when he had advanced a short distance he drew his knife from its case at his belt and held it in his teeth, ready for instant use.

Lying flat in the shadow of a lodge, and looking out into the bright moonlight which lay before him, and seeing how difficult his advance from that point would be, the scout thought of an expedient which he had more than once used on a similar errand.

The lodge was apparently deserted, the inmates having taken themselves to other lodges for purposes of talk, or to the council house. Lifting the skin flap of the lodge, Buffalo Bill peered into the dark

interior. It was perfectly silent, and believing it to be quite deserted for the time, he crawled in, dropping the skin covering into place behind him.

Having gained entrance to the lodge, the scout lay quietly for a time, listening and getting his bearings. Then he moved forward until his hands came in contact with a blanket. This he appropriated, then began to feel about for some other article that would be useful. At length his hand fell on a feathered Indian headdress.

"Just the thing," was his thought; and he took that also. "Now if I only knew where to look for this warrior's paint box, I could soon turn myself into a pretty fair specimen of redskin."

But, though the scout felt about in the gloom of the lodge for some time, his hands did not light on the coveted box of Indian paints.

They did light on something, though, that almost startled him, and that was an Indian baby. It was lying in a sort of cradle of deerskins; and, as soon as the scout's fingers touched its face, it awoke and began to screech.

"Thinks I'm some sort of wild animal," muttered the scout as the baby increased its yells. "Well, the thing for me to do is to get out of here as quick as I can."

Thereupon he "crawfished" rapidly back to the point where he had gained ingress, and again lifting the skin lodge covering, he slipped out of the tepee.

Scarcely had he done so when a squaw came running from an adjacent lodge.

Again the scout "froze" to the ground, but this time with the Indian blanket drawn about his shoul-

ders and with the feathered headdress on his head. His hat he held in one hand under the concealing folds of the blanket. In the other hand he held his knife.

The coming of the squaw quieted the child.

"I'm all right, if she doesn't start up a fire, or get a light, and so discover that the blanket and the headdress are gone," was the scout's thought as he heard the Indian mother crooning to the baby.

Then he arose softly to his feet, and with the headdress in place, but with the blanket drawn up to conceal his face, and so draped about his form that his clothing was pretty well hidden, he walked boldly out into the moonlight.

It was a daring thing to do, but safety is often assured by the very audacity of any given line of action. Stalking along with all the dignity of a painted brave, Buffalo Bill made his way, without molestation or apparent observation, almost to the door of the council lodge.

Instead of trying to enter it, however, he moved around it until he was well within its shadow; and there, after looking about to be sure he was not observed, he lay down quietly on the ground and placed an ear to the skin lodge covering.

The din within the lodge, now that he was so close to it, was well-nigh deafening. The warriors were howling and jumping in frenzied Indian fashion, and the beating of the Indian drums was something furious.

Aside from the monotonous chanting of the drum beaters, he heard no words for a while. Then one of the Indian dancers began in a bragging way, and in a high monotone, to boast of his many bloody deeds.

He had slain many white men, he said, and now he would slay many more. The white men were cowards, they were serpents, they had hearts like women, and they would run when he, this great brave, should lift the knife to strike.

Buffalo Bill smiled when he heard the words of the boaster.

"That's all right, old bragger," he muttered, "but you'll find out, when you go against them, that the white men don't run worth a beaver's skin!"

Anxious to see what was going on within the council house, for what he heard was unsatisfactory, the scout softly lifted the lower edge of the skin and peered in.

As he did so an Indian dancer whirled with jerky motion right past his face. All about, within the lodge, dancers were hopping, jumping, and gyrating.

The drum beaters were seated not far away in a group, pounding away with such energy that the sweat stood on their painted faces.

The Indian who was doing the boasting continued to tell what great things he would accomplish when he lifted his knife against the whites.

Just at this juncture, when the scout was beginning to think that, perhaps, he might now acquaint himself with something definite concerning the plans of the Indians—though the fact that they were dancing and in war paint showed that they meditated an attack on the camps of the white men—one of the dogs, whose presence Buffalo Bill had feared, came sniffing around the lodge, and discovered him lying there in the shadow.

The scout let the skin of the tent fall, and, turning

about, gripped his knife. The dog was sniffing at him with suspicion, though the odor of the Indian blanket and the sight of the familiar headdress, no doubt, somewhat lulled the animal's suspicion.

The dog could not see Buffalo Bill's face, for the blanket was pulled rather closely about it. So again the animal advanced, with nose outthrust, sniffing the scout.

The dog seemed to have an intuition that all was not well, and thrusting its sharp, wolflike nose into the air, it gave a long, whining howl, like a veritable wolf.

The scout lay as if he were dead. The howling was heard in the lodge, but seemed to excite no thought that all was not well outside. These dogs were known to be great howlers.

Ceasing its long-drawn howl of suspicion, the dog came forward again, and thrust its nose almost into the scout's face.

Discovering now that the man under the Indian blanket was not an Indian, it started to leap back, at the same time giving a short bark, like a dog that has treed game.

"Curse you!" muttered the scout.

At the same time his left hand shot out like lightning from under the blanket.

The dog was about to bark again when that hand caught it. Then it yelped, as a cur does when trodden upon. But it was the dog's last yelp, and it was cut short. The hand that held the keen-bladed knife shot out from under the blanket; and, as the dog was drawn forward by the other hand, the knife ripped its throat open.

The yelp and the flouncing of the dog had brought

some Indians out of the lodge. The scout, lying quiet again, with the bloody knife in one hand and one of his ready revolvers in the other, heard the warriors talking.

One of them, after a few words, began to walk around the lodge, in the direction of the scout.

"If I lie here I shall have to kill that Indian as I did the dog; and I'll be discovered, no doubt, after which there will be the greatest row and hubbub here any one ever heard. I guess it's time for me to sneak."

He did not "sneak," however. He was still concealed from the approaching Indian by the intervening tent wall. So he arose boldly to his feet and as boldly walked on around the council lodge, away from the advancing redskin.

Almost any other man would have jumped up and fled out through the village, trusting to his legs to carry him to a point of safety. But that would have involved risks which Buffalo Bill did not care to take.

Hence he walked straight on. As he came out into the moonlight and toward the front of the council house, he was seen by one of the Indians who had stood talking near the lodge door.

This Indian called to him, asking if he had heard the dog; for the blanket and the headdress made the Indian think the scout was another redskin.

As the scout had heard the words that were spoken before the lodge door and had noted the tones of the voice, he answered, for he understood the Sioux language perfectly, and imitated almost to perfection the voice of an Indian.

"The dog has gone off that way," he said. "I think he is after a rabbit; I will see!"

Then the scout broke into a run, as if he were hastening after the dog. He knew that now he would have to "cut sticks," as he would have expressed it; and when he had another lodge between him and the Indian he had spoken to, he ran with all his might, yet as softly as he could.

It was well for Buffalo Bill that he had moved thus promptly. For, as he ran, he heard a wild yell behind him, which told him that the body of the dog had been discovered.

The yell stopped the dancing and the drumbeating as suddenly as if a rifle shot had been fired. The Indians poured pell-mell out of the council house. The yells that now sounded seemed to arouse all the village curs at once; and some of them discovering the hurrying figure of the scout, they rushed at him like a pack of wolves chasing a deer.

But the scout was now on the edge of the village, and before him was the wild-timbered hills. Turning suddenly as the foremost of the dogs pressed him and began to snap at his heels, he cast aside the blanket and the headdress and lifted his revolver.

They were plainly to be seen in the moonlight. Two shots sent the leaders rolling in their death agonies, and so startled the others that they drew back, thus giving Buffalo Bill a clear path again before him.

Then arrows began to sing and rifles to bark as the Indians, guided by the yelping of the dogs, and knowing now that an enemy had invaded the village, began to fire in the direction of the scout's flight.

But the missiles went wild. Their singing and hurtling in the trees seemed, however, to increase the scout's speed, so that he almost flew, selecting the wildest and rockiest course for the line of his retreat.

As soon as he was clear of the village he shaped his course toward the point where he had left his horse.

Fortunately Buffalo Bill was a good runner. Moreover, he did not wish to be captured by the Sioux. He had a due regard for his own personal safety, and besides he had important information which it was necessary to carry to the camps of the white men.

He had not heard much in the Indian village, notwithstanding the great risks he had run to gain information; but what he had heard, together with the dancing and the drumbeating and the sight of the warriors in war paint, was enough to assure him that the Sioux meditated an early, if not an immediate, attack on the whites.

The dogs still pursued him, and kept up with him, though he began to drop the Indians. Turning at bay, the scout killed two more of the leading dogs, and again ran on.

The other dogs seemed to lose heart because of this and dropped back, though they followed along his trail and continued their yelping, thus aiding the Indians in their pursuit.

The rapidity of the scout's flight brought him, after a time, to his horse.

"All safe and sound, old fellow, are you?" he said, speaking to the animal. "Well, let them catch me now if they can! I have found out enough to

show me that that girl wasn't lying to me; and, when I meet her again, she will no doubt give me particulars of the Indians' plans, as she promised. So, here we go!"

And away the scout sped through the silvery moonlight.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MEETING IN THE CANON.

Let us return again on the trail of our story.

As the moments passed and Bad Burke did not return to his companions in the gulch, they became uneasy at his long absence. Hardly daring to delay longer, they fled hastily from the scene, lest Kansas King should return, and, finding his lieutenant missing, accuse them of treachery.

Therefore, when Kansas King returned to the rendezvous, he found no sign of lieutenant or men. Swearing vengeance against Bad Burke, if he should ever lay his hands upon him or any of the treacherous crew who had deserted him, Kansas King rode on at a sweeping gallop, until mile after mile had been cast behind him and his stronghold was not far away.

Fearing treachery there also upon the principle that a "burned child dreads the fire," the chief determined to make a flank movement upon his camp and approach it from the hills. He reasoned that in case suspicions of danger to himself were aroused, he could withdraw immediately and rapidly, and returning to the cabin of the hermit chief, throw himself upon his protection, telling him frankly his men had turned traitors.

With this intention he changed his course, and, turning into a narrower cañon which he knew would lead him around toward the hills overhanging his camp, he urged his horse into a gallop.

Suddenly he reined the horse back upon its haunches

with terrible force, for the sound of hoofs rapidly approaching through the gorge startled him.

Drawing his revolver, King sat quietly awaiting the coming stranger, whoever it might be. An exclamation of surprise broke from his lips as a steed dashed around the bend, bearing upon his back—a woman!

Yes, a woman, or, rather a young girl, for she was none other than Ruth Ramsey, who, quickly discovering an unlooked-for obstacle in her path, attempted to draw rein. But she was too late; her steed was a willful animal, not easily checked, and before she could come to a halt the outlaw leader spurred alongside of her, and his left hand grasped her bridle rein.

"Leo Randolph! You here!" she demanded.

It was all she could say, and across her face swept a deathly pallor.

"Yes, sweet Ruth, your lover of lang syne is delighted to behold you once more," said the chief, with irony in his voice.

"It was proven you were an outlaw," she said, "the leader of a wild and desperate band; men called you Kansas King because you ruled the border and none dare face you. Yes, all these things were proven, and—and—I found I had loved unworthily."

Ruth spoke half aloud, her eyes downcast, as though musing with the past.

"Ruth, all these things were told against me; what was proven was that I had been brought up by a fond mother who idolized her boy, yet upon whose life a stain rested, and hence the curse fell upon the son. That mother died, Ruth, and then came the news to her son that a brand rested upon his life.

"Was it any wonder, then, that he thr— away.

the advantages bestowed upon him by his loving mother, and became a wild and reckless outcast? Oh, Ruth, you cannot know how I have suffered, and what a curse, a misery, my life has been. If you knew you would pity me—and pity begets love—'tis said. You did love me once, Ruth."

The outlaw chief laid his hand softly upon the gloved hand of the girl, who, quietly withdrawing the hand, replied kindly:

"I thought I loved you once, Leo; but I did not know my heart; and yet, had your life been different, and not a blot upon the earth, we might have been more to each other than lovers; but you have not forgotten that when my father exiled you from our home, and I told you I did not love you, you basely endeavored to carry me off."

"No, Ruth, I have not forgotten. I loved you, and that must be my excuse. I longed to have you with me, to have you my bride, and—forgive me, Ruth—I was mad enough to think that I might persuade you to become my wife."

"My consent never could have been won by force, Leo Randolph; but, this is idle, to thus stand and talk with you. Believe me, I feel for you in the evil career you have chosen. But I must hasten, for the night is coming on and I was foolish to venture thus far from the fort."

Ruth attempted to ride on, but the outlaw chief still kept his hand firmly upon her rein while he asked:

"How is it you are thus far from your camp, and alone?"

"I came out with my father and brother for a ride. They discovered traces of Indians near the fort,

and rode on to investigate, telling me to return, for I was not half a mile away. I lost my road, and only just now discovered that my way back lay through this gulch."

Again she urged her horse forward, yet the chief held him firmly in his strong grasp.

"Mr. Randolph, will you release my bridle rein?" said Ruth, in a firm voice.

"Miss Ramsey, I will not—hold! Hear me, and heed—you are in my power, and I am a desperate man. Go with me willingly; become my wife, and I will relinquish my evil life and live for you alone; refuse, and——"

"You plead in vain, Mr. Randolph; your evil life has already put out every spark of regard I ever felt for you. Again I ask you to release my rein."

"And again I say I will not. More—if you will not be a willing bride, you shall be an unwilling one."

"God have mercy upon me!" groaned poor Ruth as she reeled as if about to fall from her saddle.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE ANSWERED CRY.

The moonlight that fell weirdly upon the Haunted Valley, and lighted up the sad scene enacted there, also cast its silvery radiance upon the mountain hut of the hermit chief. Pacing to and fro in the moonlight, with quick, nervous tread, was Gray Chief, his brow dark, and his lips set stern and hard.

A few moments before White Slayer and his chiefs had left a council which had determined a deadly extermination of every paleface in the Black Hills. Gray Chief had been pleased with the decision of White Slayer, for to him all white men were enemies, and he desired that not only should the miners perish, but also the outlaws.

In that council it had been decided that they should seem to agree to Kansas King's arrangement for an alliance, and by so doing disarm suspicion, and get him and his men in their power. After that the Sioux warriors were to fall upon them and not a man should escape—no, not one, swore the hermit chief.

Having thus disposed of their would-be allies, it was believed that the Indians could arm themselves with the weapons taken from the outlaws, and then make war upon the two camps of the invaders. The old hermit chuckled gleefully as he thought over his plans, and saw how eagerly the Indians had agreed to them.

Yet, had he known, within the cabin window stood one who had heard every arrangement made, and after learning all she could, arose from her crouching atti-

tude and stole away. If the hermit had known this, he would not have walked the ledge in the moonlight, gloating over his diabolical invention to rid the Black Hills of every paleface who had invaded their unknown fastnesses.

After parting with Buffalo Bill, Pearl had returned home and learned from Valleolo, the Indian woman, that the chiefs were to assemble at once. Instantly she secreted herself in her room, and from her ambush learned their plans, after which she hurried away through the cavern, descended the hills to the Indian village, and quickly mounted a splendid horse which White Slayer had captured in battle and presented to her.

Like the wind she then rode through the valleys and over the hills, directing her course toward the Ramsey settlement, as she dared not take the lower cañon leading to the fort of the miners. At length she drew near the spot where she had been told the palefaces were encamped, and was just turning into the narrow gulch leading to the stockade fort, when she heard a loud cry for help.

"Help, help! Oh, Heaven, save me!" again rang the cry, and in a woman's voice.

With the impulsiveness of her nature, Pearl was about to dash at once to the rescue, when there came the sound of coming hoofs. The next instant, riding up the gulch, she beheld two horses bearing a man and a girl, the man holding the girl firmly in her saddle, and at the same time grasping with his other hand the bridle rein of her horse.

They were Kansas King and Ruth Ramsey. In-furiated by her refusal of his love, the outlaw chief

was bearing the girl by force to his camp, in spite of her heart-rending cries for help.

"Hold!"

The voice was that of a woman, yet it had in it a stern and determined ring that brought the robber chief and his captive to a sudden halt. Before them, seated upon her horse, with her rifle leveled at the broad breast of Kansas King, was Pearl, the Maid of the Hills. At the command Kansas King drew rein.

"Well, girl, what do you want?" he asked.

"That you ride on and leave that girl alone," firmly replied Pearl.

"Ha! a stern command from such sweet lips; but what if I refuse?"

"I will kill you."

"Harsher still, my mountain beauty; but your aim may not be true, and——"

"One wave of my hand, Kansas King, and you might find out how true is my aim. Do you think I am a fool, to come this far from my home unprotected?"

Pearl spoke as though there were a hundred warriors at her back. The outlaw chief glanced somewhat nervously around, and, doubtless believing that the rocks and trees did conceal innumerable redskins, he said:

"You hold the winning card, fair Pearl of the Hills. I yield to the command of sweet lips, which yet I may punish for their unkind words with a kiss. Ruth Ramsey, we will meet again. Fair maids, I bid you good evening."

Then, with a muttered curse, Kansas King drove

his spurs deep into the flanks of his horse, and dashed away up the gulch at a mad speed. Before the rattle of his horse's hoofs died away, there resounded through the cañon the heavy tramp of many feet. In dismay, Ruth cried:

"Come; oh, come, for the Indians are coming!"

Pearl listened an instant, and then said:

"No, those are not Indians, for I hear the iron ring against the rocks of white men's shod horses; they are your friends."

Before more could be said a long line of horsemen filed around a bend in the cañon. Whether friendly or hostile, it was then too late to fly.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

UNCLE SAM'S BOYS.

The column of horsemen that was filing at a slow trot through the cañon were, as Pearl had said, not Indians, but palefaces, and with a half cry of joy, Ruth saw that they were troopers, dressed in the uniform of United States cavalry. It was a squadron of less than a score. At their head rode a young and dashing officer of perhaps twenty-five years of age.

At a glance, womanlike, both the girls took in his superb form, splendid seat in the saddle, stylish uniform and broad shoulders, with the straps of a captain thereon. Then they saw his handsome, daring face, with its dark, earnest eyes, and firm mouth, shaded by a dark mustache.

Certainly he was an elegant-looking young officer, and into his frank, noble face the two girls, the daughter of the prairie, and the child of the hills, gazed with admiration and trust.

With surprise upon his features, a pleased surprise he did not attempt to conceal, the young officer drew rein before the two girls, whose horses stood side by side across the cañon, and, respectfully raising his plumed hat, said pleasantly:

"This is an unlooked-for pleasure—meeting ladies in these wild hills."

"And a particular pleasure, sir, to us, at least to me, for there is certainly need for you and your troopers here," replied Ruth.

Pearl remained silent, and the young captain again said:

"My instructions were to come into these hills and protect all white settlers. I expected to find here a band of rude miners—certainly not any ladies."

"I, sir, am the daughter of Captain Ramsey," said Ruth. "He is the leader of a small party of settlers who came here to establish homes and also dig for gold; this girl I never met until ten minutes ago, when she saved me from a terrible fate—a fate to which death was preferable."

Ruth Ramsey spoke with exceeding earnestness.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the young officer. "This young lady, then, does not belong to your settlement. Can there be another band of settlers in these hills?"

He asked the question with surprise, gazing with admiration upon Pearl's lovely face. Pearl flushed slightly, to find herself the object of such ardent notice, and replied:

"I was on my way to warn the palefaces of danger, when I came suddenly upon this lady and Kansas King, the outlaw, who was forcing her to accompany him."

"Warn the palefaces of danger? Are you not a paleface?" asked the astonished soldier.

"I am a paleface, yes. But I cannot say more than that I was going to tell the settlers that White Slayer and his band are to move to-morrow night upon their forts, and that there is no hope for them unless they at once leave these hills."

"And you! Are you not in danger?" said Ruth Ramsey earnestly.

"No, I am not in danger; but you must escape from the red devils, who will soon be on the warpath against every paleface who has lately come into the hills."

"You bring bad news, miss," said the officer, "and yet I fear true tidings, as I know the bitterness of the Indians to those who would settle here. To-morrow night, you say, they will commence the attack?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Major Wells will not be up before day after to-morrow, hasten as he may, and I have but fourteen men with me," was the thoughtful statement.

"You have other troops coming, then, sir?" asked Ruth anxiously.

"Yes, over a hundred troopers; I was merely an advance guard; here, Wentworth, hasten back with all dispatch and ask Major Wells to ride his horses down but that he reaches here to-morrow night."

The captain turned to a horseman who was half scout, half soldier, and a bold-looking fellow, who promptly replied:

"I'll fetch him, Captain Archer, if hoofs can make it!"

"Do so, Wentworth, and bring him to this point, do you hear?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" and away dashed the courier at full speed.

"Now, young ladies," said the officer, "there is but one thing for me to do, and that is to go secretly into camp near here and await the attack upon the fort, and then endeavor to make the redskins believe a large force of cavalry has come to the assistance of the settlers. Were the Indians to know that I had but my present force they would not fear me, so I beg that you keep my presence in the hills a secret, and in the time of need I will be on hand. My orders, Miss Ramsey, are to protect the lives of the settlers."

"I will guide you to a safe place, sir, where you could conceal a hundred men," Pearl volunteered.

Then she considerably added:

"We should first see this lady home."

"True. Miss Ramsey, we will ride with you to within a short distance of your camp," replied the young officer.

The cavalcade at once moved off, Pearl guiding, and as they rode along the two girls and the young officer chatted pleasantly together. At length the stockade was visible, and the party halted, while Ruth, after bidding adieu to the captain, kissed her new-found friend and rode on alone.

Then away dashed Pearl, side by side with the captain, and behind came the troopers riding in Indian file. A gallop of two miles brought them to one of those gorges so common in the Black Hills, and into this Pearl led the way until they came to a small glen, fertile and well watered.

"Here you can rest secure, sir. If there is any change in the plans of the Indians, I will come and let you know," said she.

Then she made known to the officer all that had transpired, with which the reader is already acquainted. In surprise and astonishment, the young man listened; and then said kindly, taking her hand:

"The settlers have much to thank you for, miss, I assure you, and it is noble of you to thus warn them of danger, at the risk of your life, for I feel that you are an inmate of the village of the Sioux to thus know their plans. This, I hope, will not be our last meeting, and in full sincerity I say, if in any way I can be-

friend you, command me. My name is Edwin Archer, and I am a captain of cavalry, now on the prairie border."

Pearl made no reply, waved her hand pleasantly, and away bounded her steed on the return to the Indian village.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FAIRY GLEN

When Ruth Ramsey returned to the stockade she found the whole settlement about to turn out in search of her. Her friends were delighted at her return, for they had believed her lost, or captured by the Indians, as her father and brother had returned some time before, and reported that she had started home.

Ruth made known her startling adventure with Kansas King, her rescue by a strange white girl; but the coming of the cavalry she kept to herself, as the officer had requested her to do. The settlers were all in a state of fermentation at the hostile position assumed by the Sioux, and the coming into the hills of Kansas King and his band.

Buffalo Bill had made known the enmity of the Indians and advised that the settlers should move over to the miners' fort until after the battle they knew must come with the Indians.

There were some who declared against the move, unwilling to leave off their gold digging, and thus a war of words was progressing, when suddenly Buffalo Bill again appeared in their midst, and at once his report settled the matter.

Two hours after, the stockade was deserted by one and all, and the men at once set off for the miners' camp, excepting those designated to go with the women and children into the Haunted Valley. A mile from the stockade the party divided, with many tears, kind wishes, and tender farewells, and Buffalo Bill

led his precious charge by the nearest route to the valley where Red Hand awaited them.

After an hour's tramp, they entered a narrow gorge, the western inlet to the valley. Ahead of them Buffalo Bill suddenly descried a tall, upright form coming toward them.

It was Red Hand. He bowed pleasantly to the party, pressed lightly the hand Ruth extended to him, and said simply:

"Come."

Leading the way through the beautiful yet strangely wild glen, Red Hand turned, after a walk of a third of a mile, into a thick piece of timber, through which ran an indistinct trail. A still farther walk through the woods of two hundred yards, and before them arose the precipitous and lofty sides of the mountain, pierced by several narrow gorges, that appeared like lanes through the massive hills.

Into one of these chasms, for they were hardly anything more, Red Hand walked, and soon it widened into a perfect bowl, with towering walls upon every side. It was a fairy spot, where one would love to dwell and dream away a lifetime, far away from the cares of the world.

And there, sheltered against the base of the lofty hills, was a neat little cabin home—a hermitage in the hills. It was a humble abode, built of stout logs, and yet around it was an air of comfort, while the interior, consisting of two rooms, certainly looked cozy and most comfortable, for the furniture, though of rude manufacture, was useful, and around the walls were many articles of use and enjoyment, from rifles,

knives, and pistols, cooking utensils, and a very fair selection of books.

"This was her home," he said simply and meaningly, speaking to Buffalo Bill. "From here to his grave is but a short distance, and her going there has marked a distinct trail. And, friend Cody, last night I made strange discoveries."

Turning to Captain Ramsey, Red Hand requested him to keep his party in the gorge. Promising to bring the anxious mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters good news, Buffalo Bill set out with Red Hand for the fort, which they knew, before many hours, would be the scene of a terrible border battle.

The scout even had his doubts as to a result in favor of the whites.

"Cody, if it comes to the worst, you can wait in the gorge until the Indians believe you escaped before the fight, and then make for the settlement with all haste."

"I will try to take care of myself," was the cheerful answer.

"Never mind me, old fellow; but, if we do go under, why, redskins' scalps will be a drug in the market," and a sad smile played upon Red Hand's face.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE WAR CRY.

Night, serenely beautiful, with its silver moon lighting up the bold scenery upon every hand, came again to the Black Hills, and the shadow of the mountains fell upon the miners' fort, where all seemed lost in deep repose. But the silence resting there was a treacherous one, for within those stockade walls were half a hundred brave men resting upon their arms and awaiting the coming of their foes, who, all knew, were to hurl themselves against them that night.

Since the day before, when he had left the valley retreat with Red Hand, Buffalo Bill had been constantly on the move, scouting about the hills, and his reconnoissance had discovered the plan of attack decided upon by the Indians.

According to promise, Pearl had met him in the gorge, and told him that from the ledge she had witnessed the coming of Kansas King, and heard all that had passed between him and her father, who had told the outlaw chief that the night following he would come to his camp with five hundred warriors, and that they would together move on the miners' stronghold.

Kansas King had agreed to Gray Chief's plans, and then took his departure, apparently satisfied with the good faith of his allies. As for the old hermit, he laughed in his sleeve at the way he had fooled the outlaw, for it was his intention that very night to hurl his whole force upon the robber camp, and, after a general massacre, to divide his warriors into two

parties and at once attack the two paleface encampments.

As soon as he learned the plans of the Indians, and also heard from Pearl about the arrival of the cavalry in the Black Hills, Buffalo Bill at once set out on his return to the stronghold.

Whether Kansas King suspected the hermit chief of bad faith, or determined to strike a blow himself against the settlements, is not known; but certain it is, that, as soon as darkness set in, he moved his men at once toward the Ramsey stockade, and after a gallant charge up to the walls, discovered that the occupants had deserted the place.

Chagrined at this discovery, the outlaw chief rode with all dispatch toward the stronghold of the miners, and arrived there about the time that Gray Chief and his red warriors reached the camping ground of the robbers, to find that they had fled.

With rage at the move of Kansas King, the Indians at once set out for the Ramsey settlement, gloating over their anticipated revel in blood. Again were they doomed to disappointment, and in fear that their enemies had escaped them they rode rapidly for the stronghold of the miners.

Before they arrived, however, they heard the rattle of firearms. Then it flashed across the hermit chief that Kansas King had outwitted him and was determined to alone take the plunder from the miners and reduce their stronghold to ashes.

The firing grew louder, and then the fort came in sight, the flashes of the rifles lighting up the dark mountainside. As the band of warriors pressed on,

Kansas King suddenly confronted the hermit chief, and, with coolness, said:

"Well, old man, you procrastinated too much, so I have begun the fight!"

Both men felt that the other was playing some deep game; yet they were anxious to receive aid, the one from the other. The outlaws had already suffered severely, and at a glance the hermit chief and White Slayer felt that the stronghold would not be easily taken.

So the outlaws and the Sioux concluded to fight together against the miners. The Indians were thrown into position, and the battle at once raged in all its fierceness. In vain the outlaws, under their reckless young leader, hurled themselves against the stockade walls; in vain the warriors resorted to every cunning artifice known to them.

The brave little garrison poured in constantly a galling fire upon their enemies, and many an outlaw and Indian bit the dust.

"Come, this will never do. We must charge in column with our whole force and throw ourselves over the walls. I will lead," cried Kansas King, almost wild with fury at the stubborn resistance of the gallant defenders.

"It is the only chance, I see. Here, White Slayer, form your men for a bold rush," replied the stern old hermit chief.

Then, with demoniacal yells, the mad column of outlaws and redskins started upon the charge. Like hail the leaden bullets fell in their midst, and terrible was the havoc; but on they pressed—Kansas King, the hermit chief, and White Slayer at their head.

On, still on, until the dark column reached the stockade. Springing upon the shoulders of the braves, the daring White Slayer was the next instant upon the top of the wall, his wild war whoop echoing defiance and triumph.

But suddenly behind the Indians came a ringing order in trumpet tones:

"Troopers to the rescue—charge!"

Then was heard the hearty cheer of regular soldiers, a rattling of sabers, a heavy tramping of many hoofs, and upon the rear of the attacking force rushed a squadron of cavalry, half a hundred strong, and at their head rode Captain Edwin Archer.

The sight that followed was a scene of terrible carnage, for in wild dismay the Indians and outlaws fled, the battle lost to them at the moment they believed victory their own. As the stampede became general, two men mounted their horses and dashed rapidly away up the gorge.

But upon their tracks rode two other men who had dashed out of the stronghold in hot pursuit. The two who were flying in advance for their lives were the hermit chief and Kansas King, both bitterly cursing their misfortune.

The two men who had ridden from the stronghold in pursuit were Red Hand and Buffalo Bill. On flew the two chiefs up the dark gorge, and like bloodhounds on the trail rode Red Hand and the famous scout.

Up the valley, over the ridges, through the cañon, up to the base of the hill, whereon stood the hermit's cabin, rushed the riders. Here the two fugitives sprang from their horses and darted up the steep ascent.

But close behind them was Red Hand and Buffalo Bill. At last the ledge was reached, and upon it the hermit turned at bay, for he saw that Red Hand was close behind him. Like an enraged beast, the hermit chief cried:

"Tracked to my lair at last—at last; but, Vincent Vernon, you shall die!"

With gleaming knife, the old hermit sprang forward, but Red Hand, with a cry of rage, as though he recognized the man before him, and had some bitter injury of the past to avenge, met him with a terrible earnestness—met him to hurl him back from him with a strength that was marvelous, and with one plunge of his blade sent its keen point deep into the broad bosom of his foe.

One stifled cry, and the hermit chief fell back his full length upon the hard rock, just as Kansas King, who had found the door of the cabin barred against him, turned also at bay, to be met by a blow from the pistol butt of Buffalo Bill, which felled him, stunned, to the earth.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

Upon the rocky ledge, in front of the cabin, the moonlight streamed with almost noonday brilliancy, and lighted up a strange scene. Lying upon the rock was the hermit chief, his long gray beard and hair shining like silver in the moonlight, and his broad chest heaving with every hard-drawn breath—for the hermit had received his death wound.

Standing near was Kansas King, a bloodstain upon his forehead, from a wound made by the butt of the scout's pistol.

The face of the hermit was pallid with pain and some inward emotion of bitterness. The face of the man whose deeds had won him the name of Kansas King was still unmoved and reckless.

In front of these men stood Buffalo Bill and Red Hand. Red Hand was slightly in advance, and he was speaking, while his deep voice was stern and almost cruel in tone. He was saying:

"Carter Bainbridge, you have but a short time to live. Before your soul takes its flight, I would have you speak, if the story I am now about to relate is not true in every word."

After a moment, the hermit replied:

"Hell has certainly aided you, Vincent Vernon, in letting your hand take my life; tell all you wish to, for I care not now—no, not now—ha! here comes Pearl."

At that moment the girl rushed from the cabin, and, beholding the strange scene and the hermit lying

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wounded upon the rock, cried: "Father, my father! Are you dying?"

Quickly Red Hand stepped forward, and, restraining her, said:

"My dear girl, this man is not your father—waste not your pity on him."

"Not my father! Oh, surely you are——"

"He tells the truth, Pearl; I am not your father. Listen and he will tell you all."

The hermit spoke with difficulty.

"Yes, I tell the truth, as you shall all hear," said Red Hand. "Many years ago, in a New England State, I was living with my widowed mother; my father, a naval officer, having died when I was a mere lad. My mother had wealth, and, being youthful and handsome, had many admirers.

"When I was fifteen years of age I first saw this man—Carter Bainbridge—known to you all as the Hermit of the Black Hills. This man became, as I believed, the husband of my mother. She loved him dearly, and so did I; but his was a black heart, for already he had a wife living in a Southern State—the mother of a son whom this man brought to our house after his marriage with my mother, and passed off as his nephew.

"From the day of that son's arrival, there began a plot for my mother's and my wealth, for the pretended nephew was as bad as his professed uncle. At length I entered the navy as a midshipman, and after an absence of three years returned to find my mother dead.

"Even then I suspected no evil, but long afterward an investigation proved that this man had cruelly taken my mother's life. Again I went to sea, and I left this

man and his son at my house, as I believed, but the son, as a common seaman, shipped on my vessel, and as I was pacing the deck one night in a hard blow, I was thrown overboard by a sailor who approached me unawares.

"The vessel went on, for none had seen the act, and I would have been lost had not a schooner picked me up not twenty minutes after I was hurled into the sea. Returning home again, I found the father and son there. Their fright at my appearance I took for surprise and joy, for all believed me lost, and the man who had thrown me into the sea had left the vessel at the first port and returned to report his success.

"Dwelling in the same town where was my home was a physician and his daughter, an only child. That girl I loved with my whole heart, and before I again went to sea she became my wife.

"With perfect trust, I left her at home with my supposed stepfather and his son, while her father, the doctor, accompanied me to sea as my guest, for his health was in a precarious condition, and he believed a sea voyage would benefit him.

"When in Spain, a year after my marriage, word came from my wife of the birth of a little daughter. Then my father-in-law, who was still with me, urged that I should resign and return home. I followed his advice, and together we were to sail for London. The night before we sailed from Spain, when my father-in-law and I were returning to the hotel late in the evening, an assassin sprang from a dark corner and struck him to the heart with a knife.

"Strange to say, I was arrested as his murderer, and sent to America for trial, for he was a man of vast

wealth, and my wife was his only heir. For nearly two years I lay in prison, and then was acquitted, for no proof could be found against me.

"And yet, in all that time my wife did not come near me, nor did my stepfather or his son. At last I left my cell, and returned to my home, to find I had no home, no wife, no child. This man, Carter Bainbridge, had sold all my property that he could lay hands on, and my wife had gone off with the son, whose name was Ben Talbot.

"My child, I was told, was dead; and I believed it, especially when I received a letter from my misguided wife, bidding me farewell, and telling me that she intended to die by her own hand. Considerable property, left me by an aunt, I still had, and, with money at my disposal, I started to hunt down Carter Bainbridge and Ben Talbot.

"It was long and tedious work, but I tracked this old man, step by step, for a long time, and discovered much of his evil life—aye, I discovered that he had deceived another woman, who believed she became his wife, and was then cast off by him, after he had robbed her of her wealth, and left her and her boy to starve.

"That woman was the mother of the man known as Kansas King."

With breathless suspense, all had listened to the story of Red Hand, and yet none were prepared for the sudden and startling assertion he made regarding the parentage of the outlaw chief.

As for Kansas King, he stood amazed and silent—for a moment—and then said bitterly:

"Red Hand, I feel that you speak the truth; tell me, old man, am I your son?"

"Is your right name Leo Randolph?" faintly asked the hermit.

"So men call me; but if my parentage was dishonorable I hold no claim to any name."

"You are, then, my son."

"Good God! Well, if I am hung by Captain Archer here, my fate will be the proper thing, I suppose, and yet I prefer hanging to acknowledging you as my father."

The outlaw spoke with terrible bitterness. Then Red Hand continued, in the same deep tones:

"At length, I tracked this man to his home, and I believed I killed him, for I drove my knife deep into his side. It was the first time my hand was stained with blood, though from my birth I have borne this mark which has given me my name upon the frontier."

Red Hand held up his hand so that the moonlight revealed its crimson hue. Again he went on:

"But I was only half avenged, for Ben Talbot still lived. What destiny ever led my footsteps into these hills, God only knows; but here, five years ago, I met Ben Talbot—and killed him."

"Tell me, Vincent Vernon, tell me—is the grave in the Haunted Valley that of my son?" said the old hermit eagerly.

"It is; I killed him, and, for the sake of the happy days we had passed together in boyhood, I buried him, and carved his name upon a tree at the head of his grave."

"I knew of the grave, but never saw it—never knew that my son lay buried there, for I thought he had gone East," muttered the old hermit.

"Tell me, Carter Bainbridge," continued Red Hand, "did Ben Talbot come here with you?"

"Yes; I fled here in fear of my life, for I have been a great sinner, and Ben and Grace came with me; but we had a quarrel, and they left, as I believed, to go East and——"

"And they settled in the Haunted Valley, and there they lived, until I killed Ben Talbot. Then poor Grace still remained, alone, to watch his grave, until last night she fell by her own hand, as this scout knows. Aye, fell by her own hand, and we two buried her there in the valley.

"Then I sought the cabin where they lived, and the papers I found there told me all; yes, that Ben Talbot had slain the father of my wife, and then placed the crime at my door to have me hung, and that, believing the story told her, Grace had fled, a guilty thing, from my love. But I have forgiven her all. Aye, more did I learn, and that is that this girl here, who has heard every word of my story, is my own daughter. Pearl, will you come to your father's heart?"

Words cannot portray the tenderness with which Red Hand spoke, and, comprehending the whole plot of crime against him, and feeling that he was indeed her father, the girl sprang forward and nestled close in the arms of the man whose life had known so much of misery.

Not a word, not a motion, marred the silent joy of that moment for those two, father and daughter, so cruelly divided through life. Finally Red Hand turned once more to the old hermit, and said:

"Carter Bainbridge, I can now, in my joy, even forgive you."

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No word of reply came, the eyes gazed straight at the moon with a fixed stare, and the voice of Buffalo Bill said quietly:

"He's gone to another trapping ground, comrade." It was indeed true; and Red Hand turned and led poor Pearl into the cabin, to prepare for the return to the stronghold of the miners.

CHAPTER XL.

TWO WEDDINGS.

In the shadow of the hill that sheltered his cabin, Carter Bainbridge, the Hermit of the Black Hills, found his last earthly hermitage—the grave. Standing by, watching the burial of the hermit, was Pearl, leaning upon the arm of her father, and so intent were Tom Sun, Lone Dick, and Buffalo Bill in digging the grave, and Edwin Archer in gazing upon the beautiful face and form of Pearl Vernon, that no one noticed the prisoner, Kansas King, quietly steal away, until all was over.

Search and pursuit were then useless, and, mounting their steeds, awaiting them in the gorge, the party started for the miners' stronghold, where they arrived just at sunrise, and were greeted with wild hurrahs from all.

Buffalo Bill then accompanied Red Hand and his daughter to the Haunted Valley, and while he went on to tell the glad tidings of victory to the anxious party in the secret retreat, the husband and the daughter halted at the grave of poor Grace, and, guilty though she was, they sorrowed for her most deeply.

During the day the whole party of miners and settlers were gathered together at the stronghold. Most warmly was Pearl welcomed by Ruth Ramsey and all, when they heard the strange story of her eventful life, and hearty congratulations were bestowed upon Red Hand in honor of his new-found happiness.

Toward evening Major Wells arrived with his

squadron. Though the settlers and gold seekers had nothing to fear while the soldiers were there to protect them, the danger from hostile Indians was still so great that the scout and the officers urged the settlers not to remain in the hills.

The greater part of the two bands were most willing to acquiesce, and the following day the entire company, accompanied by the cavalry, left the inhospitable but beautiful land, and took up their march for the boundary of civilization.

During the march, Edwin Archer and Pearl Vernon were often together, and so also were Red Hand, now known as Vincent Vernon, and Ruth Ramsey.

The result of this intimacy was that, shortly after their arrival at North Platte, there was an engagement entered into between each couple, to be consummated one year from that date.

Then were the two bands scattered to the four winds of heaven, some remaining upon the frontier, among whom was Lone Dick, who returned to trapping, and Tom Sun, who entered the army under Major Wells.

As for Captain Ramsey, he went East with his family, and purchased a home in Maryland, while Captain Edwin Archer started for New York to take possession of a fortune left him by a maiden aunt. Tired of a wild life on the border, and rejoiced to have found a beautiful daughter, Red Hand also left for New York, where he placed Pearl at school for one year.

She became the bride of Edwin Archer the same day that beheld Ruth Ramsey married to Vincent Vernon, and well I know that every reader of these lines will wish them happiness as they journey through life together.

The great scout, after solving the mystery of Red Hand, departed for military duty at Fort Hays. Notwithstanding the fact that Buffalo Bill was attached to the fort, his duties made it necessary for him to roam over the vast expanse of prairies and to aid travelers whenever he found them in distress.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE BRANDED BROTHERHOOD.

Picture to yourself a bivouac of outlaws, a wild-looking but picturesque camp scene far out in the "land of the setting sun." A "prairie sea" is upon every hand, here and there dotted with a timber island, a cool and refreshing covert from the heat of the plain.

Miles and miles of land, unfurrowed by the plowshare, untilled by human hands, stretch away in boundless expanse as far as mortal vision can sweep. Winding its silvery length along, like a huge serpent crawling across the rolling prairies, is a clear and lazy river, its waters cold and inviting, coming from the icy fountains in the hills, and its banks flower-spangled and many-hued, while here and there a motte, or growth of timber, casts fantastic shadows across the stream.

In the deep recesses and shady retreats of one of the larger of these mottes is this bivouac of bandits. The day is far spent, the sun is near its setting, and its last rays cause the tall trees to stretch their shadows far out over the waving grass, which, under the influence of a light wind, resembles the restless waves of the ocean.

Into this encampment of the outlaws I would have the reader accompany me, in imagination, for there he will behold a scene never to be met with amid the boundaries of civilization. These men formed a wild and striking assemblage of horsemen, dismounted and gathered in groups, either preparing their evening meal around the blazing camp fires, or else indifferently

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lounging around, awaiting the completion of the culinary arrangements.

A strange set of human beings they were, of many tongues and costumes, but with the buckskin leggings, flannel shirt, and slouch hat predominating. They were men outlawed from the homes of civilization; men upon whose brows rested the curse of Cain, and who were branded, far and wide, as a brotherhood of bandits.

Many of them were dashing, daring, and gallant fighters, but turned the gifts God had given them to prey upon the lives and fortunes of their fellow men. Amid that motley group might be seen the deserter from the army of the United States, the lively Frenchman, the florid Englishman, the beer-loving German, the swarthy Spaniard, the half-breed, the full-blooded Indian, and the American.

Truly they were a bold and reckless set, held in check by one man, who, half reclining before a bright fire, watched the movements of his negro cook, and ever and anon addressed some words to the three or four of his comrades around him.

Once that elegant but powerful form had been clad in the uniform of an honored cavalry officer of his country's service, and the dark and lustrous eyes had, amid the brilliant saloons of the distant cities,

Looked love to eyes
That spoke again.

But that was long ago, and time had brought many changes, and branded his once proud name with infamy. Fully six feet in height, and of supple, graceful form, the chief of the Branded Brotherhood wore

buckskin, with trousers elaborately worked with beads, and fringed down the outer seams.

Instead of moccasins, his feet were incased in high-top cavalry boots, armed with huge spurs; and a blue silk shirt and Mexican jacket, profusely adorned with silver buttons, completed his costume, excepting a gray slouch hat, with exceedingly broad brim, which was turned up on one side.

The hands and face of the outlaw were burned as brown as the sun and exposure could make them; a heavy brown beard, of a like shade, with his long, curling hair, completely hid the lower features of his face; but his nose was straight and firm, his forehead broad and intellectual, his eyes strangely fiery and savage, while within their inmost depths was an expression hard to fathom, for at times it looked like fear, again was expressive of sadness, and at others of hatred and mischief.

His men knew him only as "the chief." Along the frontier he was called "Captain Ricardo, the Bandit," but what his real name was none knew.

Nor did any one know whence he came, only it was surmised that he had once been a distinguished cavalry officer, who, having been dismissed from the service for a crime committed, had taken to the plains as a highway robber, until, in a few years he had organized the band of which he was chief, and which had spread terror far and wide along the border.

The chief's horse, a splendid-looking iron-gray, fed near by, and, serving as a resting place for his arm was a Mexican saddle, with a belt, containing two revolvers and a bowie knife, which Captain Ricardo kept near at hand.

The persons immediately surrounding the chief consisted of the negro cook, a cunning-faced, wiry fellow, black as a coal, who never, sleeping or waking, went without his revolver and knife, which he kept in a large leather belt around his waist.

It was said the negro, whom his master called Buttermilk—as a contrast to his color—knew more of the chief's life than did any one else; but, if so, he was never known to betray that knowledge.

Then there was an Indian scout, a powerful and evil-looking Sioux, who had betrayed his own people and then sought refuge in the outlaw band, and, thoroughly knowing the whole country, Captain Ricardo found him an able ally.

There were also two others, both white men; one a square-framed, brutal-faced man of forty-five, whom the chief had made his second in command, and the other a renegade trapper and hunter, who, having robbed his comrades, a few years before, had sought the band for protection.

Turning to his officer, who was impatiently watching the rather lazy preparations of the negro, Buttermilk, Captain Ricardo remarked, in a voice strangely soft and pleasant for one who led his wild life:

"I see no reason why the train should not fall easily into our hands, for they must cross the river at a point near here."

"Yes, chief; but if we wait for them to come up here the troop will have rejoined them, and now, you know, the Injun here says Captain la Clyde and his troopers are off on a scout and the train has only its own men to guard it."

This was the answer of the lieutenant, who an-

swered to the name of Red Roark, both on account of his red hair and beard and his bloody deeds, for at heart he was a perfect brute.

"The chief's right," said the renegade trapper. "You hear me talk, Red Roark. If we waits for them fellers here they'll come unsuspectinglike, right onto our trap; but ef we goes out on the prairie to fight 'em, then we'll get some hard knocks and no pay. You see, I's been in thar train, as I told the chief, and I knows what I's talkin' about."

The trapper was squatted down on the ground near the chief, who replied:

"You really went into their train, Long Dave?"

"You bet! I just tole 'em I was a hunter as was going to the forts, and I tell you they has just got a ticklish-lookin' set of fellers to tackle. They axed me 'bout you, chief, and ef I thought they'd run across you, and, of course, I tole 'em no, and they said ef they did you'd have to git up early to catch them napping."

"How many fighting men are there, Long Dave?"

"Some forty or more, big boys included; and then there's the twenty troopers under Captain la Clyde, who you might count on, for he just goes scouting around, you see, and has taken a shine to one of the gals in the train, and he's going to be on hand when it comes to a row, you bet."

"Which way did the cavalry go when they left the train last night?"

"That's jist what I was going to find out when I seed that devil of a fellow they call Buffalo Bill a-coming across the prairie, and I jest lit out for these dig-

gin's, you bet, chief, kase I knows that fellow, and don't want him near me."

"You refer to Buffalo Bill, the army scout?"

"Yes, the fellow is getting mighty bold of late."

"He is, indeed, and I would be willing to pay a round sum to take him, for he has thwarted my plans more than once. Well, we'll lie in wait for the train here, and to-night, Long Dave, you and Black Wolf must start out and bring me the exact whereabouts of both the train and the troopers, for this rich harvest must not be lost for want of reaping. Now let us have supper, Buttermilk, you lazy dog."

"You be lazy, too, if you have to cook tough ole buffalo bull a t'ousand year ole," grumbled the negro, who always had a way of answering back when addressed, and which his master appeared not to notice, but would severely punish in any one else.

Just as night set in the chief and his three comrades fell to and were soon enjoying the really delicious meal which Buttermilk had prepared. An hour or more passed away and the bandit camp was as silent as a "city of the dead," for the men had rolled themselves in their blankets and sought their rest, excepting the half a dozen sentinels who had been set to keep watch and ward.

Now and then the howl of a hungry wolf out on the prairie broke the stillness of the night, or the startled snort of a horse was heard. Then again all was quiet, until suddenly there rang forth the sharp crack of a rifle, followed by a death shriek. Instantly every man in that camp was on his feet, excepting one, and that one was a sentinel who lay dead where he had fallen beneath the aim of an unseen foe. In silence the

band awaited, the chief at his post, and all ready to meet an expected attack; but slowly the minutes passed and no other sound was heard to prove an enemy near, and the prairie looked free of danger.

But presently another sharp crack of a rifle rang out, a light flashed out upon the prairie, and momentarily a horseman was seen by its glare. Then a dozen voices cried out:

"Buffalo Bill!"

Beneath his aim another bandit had bitten the dust. In angry tones, the robber chief cried:

"Mount, and after him, men! A thousand dollars for his scalp!"

There was mounting in hot haste, and half a hundred horsemen swept out from the dark covert of a timber and spread over the starlit prairie in pursuit of a dark object, dimly visible, flying swiftly from the human bloodhounds upon his track, but so rapidly distancing them by the remarkable speed of his horse that, before long, in despair of ever capturing the daring foe, one by one the bandits returned to camp to talk over, around the replenished camp fires, the daring of the famous scout, and wonder at his marvelous escapes from death.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE RESCUE.

When the horseman who had so boldly approached the bandits' bivouac, and laid two of their number dead beneath his aim, sped across the prairie with a score of horsemen at his heels, he had urged his horse to a speed which caused him to soon draw out of range of their rifles, for he was mounted upon his famous horse Midnight, a steed that had never found an equal on the plains.

Having kept up his swift flight for a few miles, and observing that his pursuers had given up the chase, Buffalo Bill halted and dismounted to give his horse a short rest. His eye now caught a rosy light upon the eastern horizon, and then, as though rising from the ocean, the moon sailed upward.

Intently watching the rising moon, the scout suddenly started and bent his gaze more earnestly over the prairie, for across the bright face of the luminary he distinctly saw several dark objects glide.

Yes, one, two, three, four horsemen—followed by several more, glided along like specters, going at a swift pace in a southerly direction.

Instantly the scout turned and tightened his saddle girths, and then looked well to his weapons. Standing by his horse, in the clear moonlight, he was a striking-looking man.

Having at length discovered the direction taken by the horsemen, whose presence near at hand the rising moon had betrayed, Buffalo Bill sprang into his saddle.

A word to his noble animal and he was off, skimming the prairie almost as does the sea gull skim over the sea.

A rapid gallop of two miles and the tall trees of a motte loomed up before him; a few moments more placed him beneath the dark shadows of the timber. Then, turning, he glanced out over the moonlit prairie. His eyes fell upon the dark forms of half a dozen or more mounted men coming directly toward the motte.

"Well, I hold the vantage ground thus far, and I'll not yield it without a struggle, whoever they may be."

The scout pushed farther into the dense thicket, where, dismounting, he spoke a word to his horse, and the faithful animal lay down, the better to conceal him from view.

A few moments passed, and presently the horsemen entered the motte and the murmur of voices was heard; then a bright light flared through the trees.

"As I thought, they came here to camp for the night, and now I'll see who they are."

The scout arose and stealthily approached the spot where the newcomers had a bright fire blazing, around which he beheld seven people, five of whom were Sioux warriors, in all their war paint, and the other two were palefaces, a man and a woman.

Stealing still closer, the scout observed that the horses had been staked, as if for the night. The Indians were preparing their supper of buffalo meat toasted on the coals, while the whites stood listlessly by, their hands bound behind them, the expression of their faces proving them to be prisoners.

"They are certainly not residents on the border. I have it: they belong to that wagon train. I must warn

that train of the presence of the Branded Brotherhood in this neighborhood."

The scout looked intently at the female prisoner, who was a young girl, scarcely more than seventeen, with a truly lovely face, although saddened by her captivity. Her wealth of golden hair had become loosened from its confinement, and hung in wavy masses far down her back, concealing the rude bonds that held her hands behind her.

She wore a straw hat and was clad in a riding habit of neat homespun, but which was torn by the rough usage she had received at the hands of her savage captors. Her white companion was a man of perhaps twenty-five, his face bold and reckless, and with a fair amount of good looks.

He was dressed in a suit of dark-gray cloth, wore cavalry boots, and dove-colored soft hat. The scout took the whole scene in carefully, and then thought:

"Well, there are five against me; but what should I care for five Sioux braves? Those prisoners must be released, and I'll bide my time and do it; so here goes."

He quietly settled himself full length upon the ground, and with the patience of an Indian awaited until the supper had been disposed of and the Indians had prepared for the night's rest, after having securely bound the captives to a tree.

One of the warriors then shouldered his rifle and moved off to act as sentinel, while his four comrades rolled themselves in their blankets and stretched out before the fire.

The Indian sentinel first cautiously advanced toward the edge of the motte and took a careful survey of

the moonlit prairie, after which he made a rapid circuit of the timber, his eyes glancing far and near for lurking danger.

Having satisfied even his cautious self that all was quiet and safe, the Indian approached the camp fire once more, coming in a line that would lead him directly upon the hidden scout.

Slowly he approached, wholly unconscious of danger until within a few feet of his foe, then his eyes fell upon the dark object in his path. Before he could draw back or utter a cry of alarm, the scout was upon him, his iron grasp upon his throat.

One, two rapid knife thrusts, and the Indian sentinel was "off duty forever." But the almost noiseless struggle had caught the quick ears of the yet wide-awake Sioux around the camp fire.

In alarm they sprang to their feet, one to fall dead across the burning logs, a bullet in his brain, another to utter his dying war whoop as a leaden messenger from the scout's repeating rifle pierced his heart.

Bounding from his covert with a wild, prolonged, and ringing war whoop, one well known on the border, the scout rushed upon the two remaining redskins, but in dismay they had turned to flee, for their unseen foe had every advantage, and rapidly through the timber they darted to seek safety.

A long, shrill whistle then pierced the grove as the horseman sped after them. Then another shot leaped from the scout's rifle, and a fourth warrior fell to the ground in death agonies, while, brought to bay, the remaining redskin turned to meet his enemy. Raising his rifle, the savage fired hastily upon his rapidly advancing foe.

But his aim was untrue, as a wild war whoop from the pursuer at once assured him, and the next moment the two met face to face, armed with their glittering knives.

The Indian warrior, a man of herculean frame and strength, might have given Buffalo Bill a desperate encounter, but, just as their knives clashed, there came a rapid clattering of hoofs, and from the dark timber-dashed Midnight, neighing loudly, as he rushed to the side of his master.

Believing a host of horsemen were upon him, the Sioux brave uttered a whoop of terror, and, before the scout could prevent, had darted away and disappeared in the thicket.

"Old comrade, you have frightened that redskin almost to death," laughed the scout, as Midnight halted beside him.

Then he continued:

"Let him go, poor devil, but sooner or later his time will come. Now to release the prisoners."

Quickly retracing his way toward the camp fire, the scout soon stood in the presence of the prisoners, saying, in a pleasant voice:

"Cheer up, my friends, for I have charge of this ranch now."

"Oh, sir, you are very, very brave and noble, and you have saved us," cried the girl, seizing his hands, as soon as her own were released from their bonds.

"And I offer my thanks, sir, for I thought it all up with us," said the girl's companion.

Both of them gazed earnestly into the face of the splendid-looking man before them, who replied:

"No thanks for performing one's duty; but you are

not safe yet, for there may be more redskins about, so we'll get away from here at once. You are not too tired to stand a rapid gallop, miss?"

"Oh, no, sir," she answered eagerly, "and it cannot be far to the wagon train, for we only left it about an hour before sunset."

"On what trail were you, can I ask?"

"We were going toward the headwaters of the Republican River, on the trail from Fort Hays."

"Then your train is within twenty miles of here and doubtless encamped upon the river for the night. If you will aid me, we will take in the little lot of cattle the redskins have willed us and decamp."

Buffalo Bill spoke to the man. A few moments more and the scout and his new-found companions were mounted and rapidly leaving the motte, carrying with them the ponies that had been ridden by the five Indian warriors.

It was with perfect trust that the girl and her fellow captive yielded to the guidance of their brave companion, for he had informed them, in answer to a question of the young girl, that he was called Buffalo Bill, a name often heard by them around the nightly camp fires, and connected with deeds of marvelous bravery.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A TRAITOR IN CAMP.

Upon the banks of a small stream, and beneath the shelter of a few scattering trees, a large wagon train was encamped during the night on which the scenes related in the foregoing chapter transpired.

There were fully half a hundred wagons, their covers, once snow-white, now stained brown by exposure and travel; while, staked out upon the prairie, were herds of horses and cattle, enjoying the rich grass.

The wagons were encamped in a crescent form, with each end of the crescent resting upon the river bank. Within the space thus inclosed a score of bright camp fires were shedding their ruddy light far across the prairie.

Through the camp was a scene of busy life, the preparation of the evening meal being the principal duty in progress.

There appeared to rest upon all a shade of sadness, for from their number two were missing, and around their camp fires their absence was sorely felt. A few hours before, they had started forth for a gallop over the prairies, and a scout coming in reported that they had been captured by a band of Sioux Indians.

But what could be done? Night was coming rapidly on; it was camping time, and until the next day no move for their recovery could be made, for it was impossible to follow the trail of the Indians in the darkness.

The wagon train consisted of a dozen families,

their teamsters and guides, moving from the boundaries of civilization to the prairies of the Far West, there to build new homes.

With one family particularly, among these daring pioneers, we will have to become friends, for they will occupy no inferior place in this romance of life on the far frontier.

In that family were five persons, consisting of Major Austin Conrad, his wife, a sad-faced matron of forty-five, a son of twenty-two, Gerald Conrad, and a daughter of seventeen, the joyous and beautiful Sibyl.

Then there was a niece of the major, and his ward, Ruth Whitfield, a dashing, brilliant-looking brunette of twenty, who had been a belle in her native city, until financial reverses had reduced her once proud parents to want, and cast her upon the bounty of her uncle.

Major Conrad was an ex-army officer, who in early life had seen much service on the frontier, but at length married his cousin and settled down to private life and the enjoyment of his riches.

But reverses had at last befallen him and he was almost crushed beneath his sorrows and misfortunes, until his brave wife begged that he would leave the scene of his troubles and find a new home far in the Western country.

New life seemed instilled into the major at the thought, and two months after found him en route for a home on the border, accompanied by his wife, his children, and his niece.

Joining a westward moving train, they decided to accompany the emigrants, and the major, upon ac-

count of his military experience and former knowledge of the country, was made the captain of the expedition.

Without serious mishap the train had proceeded on its way for many miles, and then it came into a country where the pioneers felt that danger was upon every hand.

But, undaunted, they pressed on, well knowing that if they could once get a foothold and establish a settlement, they would be able to bid defiance to all troublesome bands of Indians as well as to the desperate band of the Branded Brotherhood, who, rumor said, warred upon all settlers on the frontier.

They had met with their first serious mishap in the capture of Sibyl Conrad and Howard Lawrence, the latter a young man who had joined the train before it departed from Kansas City, and who, by his genial manners and undisputed courage, had won the esteem of every one in the pioneer band.

Sibyl and Howard Lawrence had ridden forth to look up a good camping ground for the night.

A returning hunter had reported that they had been suddenly surrounded and captured by a band of Sioux warriors.

After witnessing their capture, the hunter had concealed himself in a motte until the Indians had disappeared with their prisoners, and then had brought to the train the startling news.

Slowly the night passed away in the camp on the stream. With the first glimmer of day in the east all were up and busy, for a band of twenty horsemen, led by Major Conrad and guided by the hunter, who had

seen the capture of Sibyl and Howard Lawrence, were preparing to start forth to the rescue.

Suddenly a cry of alarm was heard. The guards reported a body of horsemen approaching, and through the dim morning light a small cavalcade was indistinctly visible.

Nearer and nearer they came. Then the cry of alarm turned to one of joy, for the forms of Sibyl Conrad and Howard Lawrence were recognized, accompanied by one other, a tall, splendid-looking horseman, followed by a number of led animals.

Quickly the cry of the guards was taken up. Then through the entire encampment resounded the notes of joy. When the party rode up, a ringing welcome awaited them, and their friends gathered around in delight at their return.

Instantly Sibyl was folded in the arms of her parents, and warm grasps met the hand of Howard Lawrence, who, in a few words, told of their brave rescue at the hands of the army scout.

"You are, then, Buffalo Bill?" said Major Conrad, advancing quickly and gazing intently into the face of the man before him, and upon whom every eye was now turned with admiration, for his wonderful career was known far and wide.

"I am called Buffalo Bill, sir," was the quiet reply, "and I am glad to have saved your daughter, Major Conrad; but, can I ask, as I learn you are destined for the headwaters of the Republican, why I find you bearing so much out of your way to the southward?"

The scout spoke modestly, and as if anxious to turn the conversation from himself.

"We are under the guidance of an experienced plainsman, sir. Yonder he comes, now," replied Major Conrad.

The scout turned around at the words of the officer and glanced in the direction of the coming man.

It was the hunter and the guide of the train—a man of almost giant frame, attired in a suit of buckskin, and with a face scarred in such a manner by a knife cut across the nose and cheek as to give it a most forbidding expression.

One glance at the hunter, and Buffalo Bill exclaimed:

"What! That man your guide? Red Dick, do you know me?"

With a bound the scout was in front of the hunter, whose brown face turned white, and whose eyes lighted up with a malicious expression, as he said savagely:

"A man who has left a mark on me such as I bear is not soon forgotten, I'll take my Bible oath."

Instantly the giant hunter drew a long knife and stood at bay, as though expecting an attack, while the scout quickly drew his own keen blade and appeared as if about to advance upon him.

"Hold, guide! Hold, sir. There must be some mistake here, for this man has been a most faithful guide and was strongly recommended to us," and Major Conrad stepped forward between the two men.

"There is no mistake, Major Conrad," said Buffalo Bill. "This man is a renegade desperado, and we have met before, as he well knows. Stand aside, please, and let Red Dick meet me."

A step nearer the scout advanced, his eyes ablaze and fastened upon Red Dick, who somewhat nervously awaited the expected attack, which now appeared most imminent, for none present seemed called upon to interfere.

But, suddenly, a slight and graceful form glided in between the two men, and the hand of Sibyl Conrad was laid upon the arm of Buffalo Bill.

"Surely, one so brave, so noble, would not stain his hand unnecessarily with blood in the presence of women and children."

The face of the scout flushed, his knife was lowered immediately, and he replied in deep, earnest tones:

"Lady, I am glad you recalled me to myself. But you do not know the accursed life of this man, or you would hardly plead for him; but it shall be as you request."

Then, turning to his burly enemy, the scout continued sternly:

"Red Dick, this lady has prevented an encounter that should have ended in your death or mine. Now I bid you leave this camp."

The giant hunter turned an earnest look into his foe's face, and, reading there only deadly determination, said:

"I'll go now, scout, 'cause you hold the winning card; but Red Dick will be on your trail hot in the future."

So saying, he wheeled away, walked to one of the wagons, and, taking his rifle and accouterments, mounted his tall, raw-boned horse and departed, leaving Buffalo Bill master of the situation.

But hardly had the huge form of the exiled horse and rider disappeared over a roll in the prairie when suddenly he reappeared, and at his back rode over a hundred mounted Sioux warriors, who came rushing down upon the train with discordant yells and the war cries of their tribe.

CHAPTER XLIV.

RUNNING THE GANTLET.

"Every man to his post."

It was the clear and commanding voice of Buffalo Bill that gave the order. The effect upon the pioneers was electrical, for they felt that in him they had a leader who fully understood the cunning of the Indians, and whose bravery was upon every tongue on the frontier.

"Buffalo Bill, you are well accustomed to scenes like this one about to be forced upon us, and I would like you to take command," cried Major Conrad, advancing quickly to the side of the scout.

Buffalo Bill glanced out upon the prairie toward the coming Indians, as he replied:

"Fortunately the train is in corral, sir, and the men are ready for a fight. I would advise that the women and children be placed under cover of the river bank yonder. The ravine will protect the horses and cattle, while, with the wagons for the breastwork, the men can hold out splendidly."

This advice was acted upon, and in a few moments the camp was ready for action. Stationing himself upon the outer edge of the line of wagons, Buffalo Bill was seen to suddenly raise his repeating rifle; a quick aim, a shot, and a painted warrior fell from his horse.

The yell of exultation from the emigrants was answered by a series of wild war whoops from the infuriated Indians.

"Now, Major Conrad," said the scout, "you see that

I know yonder renegade guide well, for he is doubtless the leader of the approaching band of redskins, and was guiding you into a trap."

"We have much to thank you for, sir," was the earnest answer; "but the Indians have halted."

"Yes, they are too wary to charge these lines in the daytime, and——"

"And what, sir?" asked Major Conrad, as the scout paused thoughtfully.

"And by nightfall I can bring relief, for not many miles from here is a band of Pawnees hunting buffalo."

"But, sir, you can never escape from here, for see, the Indians are beginning to surround us, and two separate parties are swimming the river."

The scout took in the scene at once, and then said quietly:

"You must hold the red devils at bay. Mind, act only on the defensive, and I will run the gantlet of their fire, and bring what relief I can."

A shrill whistle followed, and Midnight trotted up to his master, and stood ready for his command. Remonstrance with the scout was useless; and after another warning to all, he sprang into the saddle and rode down to the river.

A word of encouragement to Midnight, and the noble animal bounded into the clear waters, and was soon swimming bravely toward the other shore, followed by the eyes of all the emigrants, who were wafting Godspeed to the daring man periling his life to aid them.

Before half the river was crossed the Indians discovered the scout, and with discordant yells the two

parties, one up and the other down the stream, rushed to cut him off.

The scout observed their intention, but kept bravely on, urging his horse to swim still faster. Leading one of these parties who were rushing toward the point where the scout was to land, was the traitor guide, Red Dick, who now seemed to feel assured that his revenge would be satiated, for he urged his large roan forward at a tremendous pace, quickly shooting ahead of the inferior horses ridden by the redskins.

Soon the scout reached the other shore and dismounted, while the horse shook himself like a huge Newfoundland dog. Then the girths were tightened, and the holster pistols returned to their places; after which the scout mounted as coolly as though almost certain death did not stare him in the face.

The deadly rifle was raised, and with a quick aim was fired in the direction of the band farthest off. A red brave threw up his arms and fell from his horse, to be trampled upon by those behind.

Again the rifle rang out, and the large roan ridden by Red Dick was seen to stagger, stumble, and then go heavily down, hurling his giant rider with terrible force upon the ground.

From the lips of Buffalo Bill there came then a war whoop of defiance, and away bounded Midnight, keeping an equal distance between the two lines rushing furiously upon him and hardly more than two hundred yards distant.

"On, Midnight, for you have a brave duty to perform," cried Buffalo Bill, as he turned in his saddle and glanced back toward the camp.

Seeing the action, the pioneers gave him three hearty

cheers, which the Indians answered with their discordant yells.

"But, what is the daring rider going to do? Has his courage failed him? Is he mad?"

Such were the hurried questions that burst from the lips of the astonished emigrants, as they saw Buffalo Bill suddenly come to a halt, and coolly gaze first upon one side and then upon the other.

The Indians also saw him halt, and their superstitious minds were impressed with the idea that he was laughing at their efforts to take him, and intended to escape by some supernatural means unknown to them, for, often before had they known him to elude them when in their very grasp.

With their leader dismounted, and apparently hurt, for Red Dick was seated beside his dead horse, the Indians hardly knew what to do, and, as they drew nearer and nearer to the mysterious scout, they gradually checked the speed of their horses, until the smaller party, consisting of a dozen braves, came to a halt, and with wondering eyes and wild gestures, seemed to be holding a council of war.

This was what Buffalo Bill had expected. As soon as the squadron halted, he wheeled Midnight, and, with the air ringing and echoing with his terrible war cries, and a revolver in each hand, he charged directly upon the astonished savages.

Then he added to their consternation by opening a brisk and telling fire upon them. It proved fatal in several instances. The frightened braves turned and fled, and, with the speed of an arrow, the scout rushed on toward the open prairie, having safely run the terrible gantlet.

Then, as the emigrants looked with eager eyes, they beheld the cause of the sudden movement of Buffalo Bill, for directly in his former path arose the forms of a dozen painted warriors, doubtless of the same band, who were hiding in a shallow gulch and would have sprung up in the pathway of the scout, had not his quick eye detected the plumed head of some brave too eager to catch his prey to keep wholly concealed.

The watching emigrants saw with pleasure that the Indians quickly gave up the chase, for the famous steed of the scout left them rapidly behind.

In an hour Midnight appeared as a mere speck upon the prairie.

CHAPTER XLV.

A WARNING AND A RAID.

Far from the home of his kindred, far from the home of any of his race, and in the wilds where Indians roamed without restraint, was the cabin of Alfred Carter.

Three years before the opening scenes of this story, Alfred Carter had squatted upon the banks of the Republican River, and with the aid of only his brave wife and pretty daughter Rose, and his young son Edgar, he had built a stout and comfortable cabin, half fort, half house.

The prairies around him furnished food for his small family, and his cattle roamed near at hand. A quiet, sad-looking man, ever generous and peaceable, Alfred Carter had no enemies.

Even the Sioux were friendly to him, although they were at war with the whites, for the settler had often fed them from his table, and when their great chief was severely wounded and would have died for want of care, Alfred Carter had nursed him back to life, and forever won his friendship.

Seated in the cabin door, upon the day that the scout ran the gantlet of the band of Sioux warriors, was a girl of eighteen, with large, velvety eyes, a dark complexion, and long, waving black hair.

This girl was Rose Carter. She was engaged in knitting a pair of cotton socks for her father, for she was a true frontier girl, ever industrious and brave.

Presently a shadow fell upon her, and glancing up

she saw an Indian girl of sixteen, a beautiful child of the forest, with a graceful, slender form, clothed in a handsome suit of bead-wrought buckskin, and with a crown of richly colored feathers upon her head.

"Who are you, girl, and what can I do for you?" said Rise, struck by the great beauty and grace of the Indian girl.

"I am the Red Bud of the Forest, the child of the mighty Pawnee chief, and I have come from my village beyond the prairie to tell the paleface maiden to beware of the false tongue of the paleface brave with eyes like the skies, for he would lead her from her happy home."

"Of whom do you speak, Red Bud of the Forest?" said the mystified Rose.

"Of the white brave whom the Forest Rose loves as she does the sunshine, the trees, the birds, the rivers. He has a false tongue, so let the White Rose beware. Red Bud of the Forest has spoken."

Without another word the Indian girl turned and glided away, turning no ear to the call of Rose Carter, who urged her to return.

After the departure of the Indian girl, Rose Carter sat for a long time, pondering over what she had heard, and wondering if the warning given could refer to one whom she loved most dearly, and who was then absent, and had been for months, gone to the Eastern settlements for a while before he returned to make her his wife.

Then over her face stole a look of distrust of him who had won her young heart, for the words of Red Bud had left a deep impression.

Presently her mother returned from milking the

cows, and Alfred Carter from a day's hunt, loaded down with game, while her brother, two years younger than Rose, came up from the river with a long string of fish.

The night shades fell upon the earth, and around the well-spread board gathered the settler's family—the cheerful fire, comfortable room, and pleasant faces presenting a happy and homelike scene.

Yet a feeling of dread, of coming evil, clutched at the heart of Rose Carter, and the smile upon her face was forced. A little later there was a loud bark from the watchful dog without, a shot followed, a yelp, and then heavy blows upon the door.

Springing to their feet, the father and son seized their rifles, while the mother and daughter, in considerable alarm, awaited the result.

"Who is it that thus comes to my cabin?" cried Alfred Carter, in a stern voice.

"Open your door, old man, or it will be the worse for you," replied a coarse voice outside.

"And why should I open my door to you? Had you come as a friend you would have been welcome; but as you come as a foe I will meet you as you deserve."

"The Branded Brotherhood do not parley long, old man," suddenly rang out a clear, stern voice.

Then, with a few heavy blows the door was crushed in, and one of the Brotherhood rushed across the threshold, to fall dead by a shot from Edgar's rifle through the heart.

Another shared the same fate at the hands of Alfred Carter. Then into the cabin poured a score of desperate men, and the brave old settler fell beneath a sweeping blow from the chief's fist, just as Red Roark

brought the butt of his pistol down upon the head of Edgar.

"Ha, spare the women!" the chief cried.

But the order was too late to save poor Mrs. Carter, who, with a shriek of terror and agony, met her death at the hands of one of the band, while another seized the fainting Rose around the waist, crying:

"I've got the richest prize; the gal's mine!"

One glance in the beautiful face, and the bandit chief staggered back, his hand upon his head, while he cried aloud:

"God in heaven! Who is that girl?"

"It don't make no difference, chief, who she mout be, but she's my prize," insolently replied the ruffian, who still held her in his arms.

"Release that girl instantly!" cried the bandit chief, his face strangely pale and stern.

"You bet I won't do it!" replied the man.

A quick shot followed, a cry of agony, and a stream of hot blood burst from a bullet wound in the head of the renegade, as he fell dead, still clutching in his strong arms the fainting form of Rose Carter.

"Take that girl from that hound's grasp; and see to it, Red Roark, that no harm comes to her, for if there does, there shall be weeping and wailing in this band."

Thus saying, the robber chief set to work to examine the contents of the cabin, for to gain booty had this raid been made by the Branded Brotherhood upon the quiet home of poor Alfred Carter.

It did not take long for those experienced hands to go through the cabin, and then the order was given to mount. The band departed. By his side, mounted upon her own horse, which the chief had ordered sad-

dled for her, was the weeping Rose, who had returned to consciousness to find her mother and brother slain, and herself and her father in the power of the bandit chief.

Strangely soft and kind was the chief's manner toward the sorrowing girl, but he was, nevertheless, so firm in his purpose that she had to accompany him to his stronghold.

What her fate would be she dared not think, as she rode quietly along, with the bitter, scalding tears coursing down her cheeks, and a terrible dread at her heart.

Swiftly on rode the band of the Branded Brotherhood, taking a course down the river, until the quick ear of the chief detected distant firing, and he suddenly drew rein.

"What can that mean?" he asked, striving to pierce the darkness of the prairie in the direction of the sound.

"I'll tell you, chief; it's the train being pitched into by some roving band of Injuns. Ef we wants any of the goods, we'd better ride fur it, kase you see thar's a host of redskins whar all that shootin' is going on."

"You are right, Long Dave, and the train is bearing to the southward, contrary to our expectations; so come on, and we'll drive off the redskins, and then wipe out the settlers."

A yell of joy answered the words of the chief, for the men were anxious to get a chance to make a capture of the wagon train, which Long Dave had reported to be an exceedingly rich one in supplies of all kinds and money.

Almost with the speed of the wind the cavalcade

spurred on, the leader leaving Rose and her father with a guard and the led horses bearing the booty taken in the recent foraging expeditions of the band.

After an hour's ride, the flashes of distant firing were visible. The rapid discharges proved that the battle was raging most savagely, and that the defenders of the wagon train were holding out bravely against the overwhelming numbers that were attacking them.

CHAPTER XLVI.

TREACHERY.

As Long Dave had said, the settlers' train had been attacked by the Indians—the same band that had besieged them all day, awaiting for night to come on so that they could attack with greater safety to themselves and less danger of defeat.

Red Dick was at the bottom of this attack. Having recovered partially from the effects of his severe fall, he was determined that he would be revenged upon all who witnessed his disgraceful departure from his position as guide.

Wistfully the eyes of the emigrants had scanned the prairie all that long day, in hopes of seeing the coming of the scout and reënforcements.

Night came, and no succor was visible, and with determined manner the men set to work to defend to the end of their lives their families and their riches.

The Indians commenced the attack as soon as it was dark, and charged boldly down upon the train; but during the day the emigrants had strongly fortified their position, and after a sharp and short fight the attacking party fell back.

Yet they did not dream of defeat, and their savage minds began to plot various methods of taking the settlers at a disadvantage, for the Indian never cares to fight an open battle if he can gain his ends by cunning and strategy.

Failing in one plan after the other, Red Dick at length determined to lead one desperate charge, in column, hoping to break through the line by mere weight and numbers.

He was preparing his red allies for the work, when suddenly a cry of alarm was heard in their rear, and up dashed the Branded Brotherhood, with their desperate chief at their head.

The Sioux warriors at first thought they were being attacked by a troop of soldiers, and began to scatter in all directions, when the loud voice of Red Dick recalled them, for he recognized the commanding form of Ricardo.

Riding up to Ricardo, he cried:

"Hello, chief! Have you come to aid me in a division of the spoils?"

Ricardo turned his keen look upon the renegade, and, apparently recognizing him, answered:

"You are, then, leading this attack upon my wagon train, renegade?"

"Your train, chief? Not so fast—for I guided this train from Kansas City," replied Red Dick.

"Yes, guided them into a trap, for you are backed by your band of Dog Soldier Sioux, I see."

"And they'll stick to me, too, you bet, chief. Once I owed allegiance to you, but I got tired of hard knocks and little pay, so I sided with these Injuns and they made me their chief, and they've been waiting for me to bring out this train for weeks.

"Them settlers are a leetle too strong for me, I admit, for we've tried 'em for some time; but there's honor among thieves, you know, chief, and I'll share squarely with you and the boys if you give me a lift."

"Red Dick, you are a fool, to think I would share a prize with you and your red hounds. True, there was a truce between your band of red devils and my men; but you are a deserter from my ranks, and if

you do not immediately draw off your band, I'll shoot you down as I would a dog, and then scalp every one of your gang that I can catch."

Ricardo spoke sternly, and turning to Red Roark, his lieutenant, gave an order in a low voice.

Red Dick's face flamed with anger.

"Now, look here, boss, you don't hold the ace as much as you think, 'cause my redskins ain't a-goin' to 'low no foolishness, if we has to fight for it, and as to killing a fellow like a dog, why, two kin play at that game, and no questions axed."

As Red Dick spoke, he gave a loud war whoop, and leveled his pistol at Ricardo, who, as quick as lightning, had his own weapon covering the head of the renegade.

Thus, threateningly, the two men stood at bay, while around them gathered their separate bands.

What might have been the result of this impromptu duel between the two chiefs, it would be hard to say, but just at that moment there was a terrific discharge of firearms, fired in regular order, a loud cheering and a rushing of hoofs.

Before the surprised Indians and bandits could offer any resistance, a squadron of cavalry charged through their line, firing as they rode; and, dashing swiftly toward the camp, the next moment they were safe within the fortification, while cheer after cheer rang out from the rejoicing emigrants.

"Cusses on it, chief! While we's quarreling here like two tomcats on a fence, that cussed Captain la Clyde and his troopers has gotten through our line and reinforced the emigrants."

Red Dick growled the words savagely, at the same time lowering his pistol.

"That is true, Red Dick; and, after all, we had better unite our forces and wage a common war upon the train," responded Ricardo.

It was too dark for his foe to see the evil look of mischief that flashed in his eyes.

"I'm agreed, boss, kase, you see, it's no use talking about us rooting out that nest of hornets unless we jine forces," Red Dick answered.

"Very well, Red Dick," said the chief. "Now, my plan is that you take the greater part of your redskins up the river above the camp, and, taking to the water, swim down and attack them from that quarter, while I keep up a constant fire upon them in our front.

"When you have landed and given the signal, I will charge with my men, aided by those you leave with me."

"It's a good plan, Ricardo, and we'll set out at once," replied Red Dick, and accompanied by the greater number of his savage men, the desperado strode away, leaving a small guard over his horses.

As cunning as Red Dick was, and as wicked, he was no match for Ricardo, for he had not anticipated that the chief would betray him.

But hardly had the renegade and his red allies been gone fifteen minutes, when the remaining Indians were quietly surrounded by the Branded Brotherhood, and, wholly unsuspecting treachery, were suddenly terrified by being unexpectedly set upon by those whom they believed their friends.

Without warning, the Brotherhood instantly rushed upon the Indian warriors, and before the slightest re-

sistance could be offered, a score of them lay dead upon the prairie.

And still the work of slaughter went on, until the few remaining savages crouched together in dismay, not knowing which way to turn; for, although it was the Indian method to surprise and massacre defenseless victims, they had never before had the tables turned upon them.

"Kill every cursed red heathen; leave not one to escape and warn his companions," cried Ricardo.

In vain did the terrified wretches attempt to break through the human barrier that surrounded them, but everywhere they were met by steel and bullet.

At length the slaughter ended. Then, with a grim and cruel smile, Ricardo turned to Red Roark and said:

"Roark, yonder comes the girl and her father and the led horses. I wish you to collect these Indian ponies, and with a guard of ten men, move down the river to the next motte and wait there until you hear from me."

"That will leave you only forty men, chief, with which to tackle the camp and the Injins, too," Roark responded.

"True, but I intend Red Dick and his crew shall play Kilkenny cats with the settlers. When they have about used each other up, I will be on hand to reap the spoils. Now, be off at once; and mind you, Roark, treat that girl with every respect."

"I hear you, chief."

"And see that you heed; now I will move to the river bank, and aid the settlers in driving off Red Dick and his devils."

"You wouldn't fire upon the redskins, chief?"

"Certainly; each one I slay is one out of my way to eventual success."

So saying, Ricardo called to his band to follow him, mounted his horse, and rode slowly in the direction of the camp.

Approaching within a hundred yards, under cover of a few straggling trees, he sent Long Dave and his Indian scout on abreast, to creep up the river bank, and give warning when Red Dick and his followers should attempt a landing.

He had not long to wait before the two scouts returned and reported the river black with the heads of the attacking party.

Then, lest the settlers should really be surprised, and the Indians take the camp without his aid, Ricardo gave a low order, and under cover of the bank, the Brotherhood approached until they could indistinctly see the dark mass upon the water, which they knew to be the swimming warriors.

In the encampment all was quiet as the grave, and every glimmer of light had disappeared; but, whether it was from negligence in keeping guard, or from watchfulness, none knew.

However, the chief felt that he had to be wary, for Captain la Clyde was known to be an expert and daring fighter, and might be setting some trap in which to catch his enemies.

Slowly and steadily the moving mass of heads swerved shoreward, the waters undisturbed by a single ripple, so quietly did the Indians swim, and at last several tall forms reached the shore and stood upright.

Others followed, and the braves were preparing for

the deadly rush, their hearts beating with joy at the hope of success.

"Aim true, men; let every shot tell. Fire!"

In answer to the low, stern order of the bandit chief, a terrible volley rang forth from the river bank, and a withering hail of lead was poured upon the human mass, who seemed to sink beneath the deadly assault.

Then rang the stentorian voice of Red Dick.

"At them, you red devils! Cut them into pieces."

Rallying around their brave but wicked chief, the Dog Soldier Sioux, in spite of their deadly greeting, and fully relying upon the support of the Branded Brotherhood, rushed up the embankment, to be again driven back by the terrible fire poured upon them by the settlers.

Coolly, and with a cruel smile upon his lips, and deadly hatred in the glitter of his eyes, Ricardo stood with folded arms, gazing upon the combat, unmoved by the scene of bloodshed his double treachery was causing.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed. "Did Red Dick think I, Ricardo, chief of the Branded Brotherhood, would share a prize with him and his red hounds? Little does he know me!"

For some moments the fight continued; the redskins, encouraged by Red Dick and his conspicuous courage, fighting as seldom men fight in a bad cause. Then even Indian human nature could stand no more, for half of their number had fallen.

Yet no cheering cry came from the other side of the camp to show that Ricardo had attacked, as he had promised.

Suddenly a warrior glided to the side of Red Dick,

and said a few words in a hasty and excited tone, and the renegade's voice rang out loud and clear:

"Back, warriors! to the water all of you, for the Branded Brotherhood have betrayed us, and are laughing at us now."

Red Dick spoke in the Sioux tongue, and well did his dusky braves understand him. Seized with a panic of fear, they rushed headlong into the water, uttering yells of terror. Then again was heard the ringing order from Ricardo's trumpetlike voice:

"Fire upon them, men! Kill every red hound."

Again the rifles of the Brotherhood flashed forth in livid flame, and between two fires the Sioux warriors melted away, and the river was stained dark with their blood.

Only a few succeeded in reaching the other shore, and most of that number were bleeding from wounds received. Among those few was Red Dick.

The rising moon showed upon his face a look of fiendish hatred and a thirst for revenge, a revenge which he intended to devote his life to accomplish, for at last he fully understood the deep treachery of his evil ally.

"Come, braves; we are outcasts now, and must go back to our village; but the day of retribution shall come for Ricardo and his band of robbers. They have slain our young men, robbed us of the spoils of battle, betrayed us to ruin and death, and brought wailing and sorrow into our wigwams. Come, warriors of the Sioux nation; we will go to our village."

No word in reply was uttered, but silently, like grim specters, the remnant of Red Dick's band of Dog Soldiers stole away across the moonlit prairie.

CHAPTER XLVII.

IN THE CAMP.

Let us go back a little to see how the settlers had fared.

When night had settled down upon the emigrant encampment, there were a number of gloomy faces around the impromptu fortifications, and many, both men and women, were sorry that they had ever left their old homes in the Eastern country to seek new ones on the frontier.

Yet, though gloomy, and dreading evil, they were none the less determined to defend their lives and families unto the bitter end, and Major Conrad was glad to see that he could depend upon his command as brave men.

At length the Indians began the attack; and, warning to their work, the emigrants grew less and less despondent, especially after they had several times driven back their red foes with considerable loss, and with no serious result to themselves.

By and by one of the teamsters, who had once been an old hunter and trapper, crept out of the camp to reconnoiter, and returned with the evil tidings that the Indians had been reënforced by a large band that had just come up.

Then followed a long season of quiet, and the emigrants felt assured that their enemies were plotting some scheme of devilment against them.

Then, how they longed for the return of Buffalo Bill. Suddenly there was a scene of commotion in the enemy's lines, and rapid firing followed.

The emigrants believed that at last Buffalo Bill had returned and was attacking Red Dick and his villainous crew with the band of Pawnee braves for whom he had gone in search.

But they almost instantly knew that loud and ringing hello was not from Indian throats, but that it was the hearty cheer of trained soldiers; and the next moment a dark and rapidly moving mass was seen approaching, and the stern order was heard:

"We are friends; open the barrier!"

"La Clyde! Hurrah, hurrah!" went up from the delighted emigrants.

Then into the encampment dashed a score of troopers, with Captain Percy la Clyde at their head.

Warmly were the young officer and his men welcomed. Having listened to the plan of defense adopted by Major Conrad, and stationed his troopers at advantageous positions, the dragoon commander said:

"It is a mere accident I reached you, for after my leaving your train, day before yesterday, you changed your course to the southward."

"Yes; that traitor guide, Dick—or, rather, Red Dick, as he is known in these parts——"

"What! Was your guide the notorious Red Dick? Now I know why he always seemed to avoid me," said Captain la Clyde, with surprise.

"Yes, he was Red Dick, the renegade leader of the Dog Soldier Sioux, I believe."

"Yes, they made him chief of their tribe, major; but what an escape you had, for in changing your course he was doubtless leading you into his hornets' nest."

"It is just what he was doing, and would have suc-

ceeded, had not my daughter and Howard Lawrence been captured by a band of regular Sioux warriors, and rescued by Buffalo Bill, who informed us of the character of our guide."

"Major Conrad, you surprise me; Miss Sibyl captured, and also Howard Lawrence?"

"Yes, captain; they had ridden ahead to look up a camping ground, and——"

"And were captured by Sioux Indians?"

"Yes; five warriors, and four of them Buffalo Bill killed in rescuing Lawrence and Sibyl."

"Strange, indeed; and it was the noted scout who told you of the character of Red Dick?"

"Yes, he exposed him publicly; and they would have had a knife encounter in camp, had not Sibyl interfered. Then the scout drove the guide from the encampment, and an hour after Red Dick returned at the head of his Dog Soldiers."

"And what became of the scout, major?"

"He swam the river, and ran the gantlet of the Indian line most gallantly, that he might seek some friendly Indians and bring them to our aid."

"He has certainly served you well. He is always doing noble work, such as this! But how are the ladies, major?"

"Stout-hearted, as are the men; but come, we will go and see them, captain."

Leading the way, Major Conrad conducted the young officer toward the large ravine running back from the river. There a motley sight met their gaze, for the women and children were huddled together in the bottom of the gulch, around several bright fires,

and farther down were closely packed the horses and cattle belonging to the train.

"Why, they are all as snug as bugs in a rug, major," laughed Captain la Clyde; and, as the firelight fell full upon him, it displayed his handsome, graceful form, a little under six feet in height, and compactly built.

His face was exceedingly youthful, beardless, the features good, the mouth and dark-blue eyes indicating courage and determination.

Clad in the uniform of a captain of cavalry, and with his brown curling hair worn long, and a slouch hat shading his face, Captain Percy la Clyde looked just what he was, a dashing, handsome, daring soldier, generous to a fault, and ever true in both love and hatred.

The only child of wealthy parents, he had preferred to lead a military life to one of idleness and dissipation; and, after a successful career at West Point, had been ordered to the frontier, where he rapidly ascended the ladder of promotion on account of his courage and skill as an officer.

Four days before the caravan reached their encampment on the river, Captain la Clyde had joined them, by order of the commandant at Fort Hays, to serve as an escort to the emigrants, and a guard until they were securely settled in their frontier homes.

A most pleasant duty had the young officer found that he was detailed upon, for he had fallen desperately in love with Sibyl Conrad, and felt that she was the bright star that was to guard his future destiny.

As he now entered the ravine, he was given a cordial welcome; but a shade swept over his face, as he beheld Howard Lawrence by the side of the girl he loved.

Percy la Clyde had watched with jealous eye the regard of his rival for Sibyl. In spite of the many seeming noble qualities possessed by Lawrence, and his almost universal popularity, La Clyde could not like him, and felt for him a distrust he could not overcome.

But then, this might have been on account of jealousy, for jealousy always exerts an evil influence upon the person of whom it takes possession. Yet Sibyl greeted the officer now in a friendly way, and so did Ruth Whitfield, who had always exhibited warm regard for the young soldier.

After a few words of comfort and hope to those around him, Percy la Clyde said:

"Well, ladies, we must now leave you, for every man must be at his post."

He looked toward Howard Lawrence as he spoke; but that young man smiled sweetly, and replied:

"So I think, captain; and should the enemy seek to enter this ravine, I will defend it with my life, for I am stationed here to watch the river approach."

"You cannot even see the water, sir, from your present position; so I would advise that you do a sentinel's duty, as long as you represent one."

So saying, Captain la Clyde turned away, while Howard Lawrence's face flushed with anger. Sibyl felt that a storm was brewing, and that she was innocently the cause; but with a sigh, she consoled herself with the thought that she could not love everybody that loved her.

Returning to the line of fortifications, Major Conrad and Captain la Clyde were surprised and startled by the sound of conflict going on in the enemy's lines,

and for which they could not account, unless the scout had returned.

After a moment's attention to the sound, the young officer remarked:

"As I live, they are fighting among themselves—or pretending to, to put us off our guard!"

Then all was silent once more.

Slowly the moments dragged away, until Major Conrad began to nod with sleep. Then, feeling anxious about the river front, Percy la Clyde cautiously crept there and reconnoitered.

At first he believed all quiet and safe, but his quick eye soon caught sight of a dark mass upon the water. Closely he watched it, and he saw it slowly moving down upon the point near which he stood.

Bounding into the ravine, he startled Howard Lawrence, who still remained by the side of Sibyl, with the words:

"Be good enough to request Major Conrad to send me thirty men to this point; and ask him to create no alarm."

Howard Lawrence was off at once to obey the order, although he did not like the tone in which the order was given; still, he felt he had been negligent of his duty, and wished to repair it all in his power.

Before five minutes had passed, the men arrived, headed by Major Conrad.

As they came up, Captain la Clyde remarked quietly:

"We are to be attacked by water, it seems; but we have greatly the advantage; so I will only keep my troopers with me, major, and you can return with the remainder of the men, as the attack will doubtless

be made at more than this point. And, major, as there is no need of a sentinel here now, perhaps you can find some other duty for Mr. Lawrence."

Major Conrad and his men returned to their post, and Captain la Clyde was about to give the order to fire, when all were startled by the discharge of the weapons of the Branded Brotherhood, which leveled so many of the Dog Soldiers to the ground.

"By Heaven, we have friends near, when we little dreamed of it!" La Clyde exclaimed, when he heard the firing. Ha, it must be the scout, who has kept his word. Ready, men; fire!"

At the order of the young officer the troopers poured in a rapid fire with their repeating rifles. Thus Red Dick and his men found themselves under two fires, and in dismay they broke and rushed for safety into the river, as soon as the Indian warrior arrived with the news of the massacre of their companions.

Unable to account for the turn in their favor, or why, if friends had come, they did not make themselves known, Captain la Clyde was about to go outside the fortifications for the purpose of discovery, when he observed a dark form crawling toward the water.

Springing down the embankment, he seized this man in his powerful arms, and dragged him back. It was an Indian warrior, with a broken leg and otherwise wounded.

Speaking the Sioux tongue fluently, the captain soon learned of him that Ricardo and his Branded Brotherhood were surrounding his encampment, and the treachery of the outlaw chief toward his red allies was also revealed.

"Well, it is dog eat dog, that's certain. Now that

we have Ricardo and his band to fight, we must indeed defend more than our lives."

And Percy la Clyde's brow grew dark with dread, for he knew the desperate courage of the Branded Brotherhood, and the awful fate that would fall upon Sibyl and the others, if taken.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

Being now fully acquainted with the plan of Ricardo, Captain la Clyde went rapidly around the line and quietly told the men whom they were to fight as their foe, and begged them to steel their hearts against any thought of mercy, and to never yield one inch of ground, for the motto of the Branded Brotherhood was that men must die, and beauty and booty be considered lawful prizes.

Hardly had the young officer made the circuit, when a dark mass of moving horsemen was seen approaching, and a clear voice hailed.

"Well, what do you want?" answered Percy la Clyde.

"We have defeated your enemies, and would warn you that we are friends, that you may not fire upon us," replied the voice that hailed.

"We know no friends in the dark. If you are such as you represent, camp on the river until daylight; if you are enemies, we are ready for you," coolly shouted back Captain la Clyde.

"Charge!" was then yelled in the commanding voice of Ricardo, and like a fiery whirlwind his horsemen swept down upon the devoted defenders of the train.

"Throw no shots away, men! Fire!" cried Percy la Clyde.

A line of flame flashed from the wagons, and several of the Brotherhood and their horses went down. But, from some cause or other, the aim of the emigrants

had been untrue, and the outlaws pressed fiercely on, filling the air with their discordant cries, every man yelling in his native tongue, until it seemed as if the very fiends from below had burst forth for a gala night.

"Men, be cool; there are devils upon you now, and your aim must be true; you must kill, or all is lost," rang out in the clear tones of Captain la Clyde and Major Conrad.

Howard Lawrence, who had thrown off his air of indifference and nobly come to the front, also encouraged the men by voice and gesture.

Then rolled forth a ceaseless roar of firearms, the heavy rush of iron hoofs was heard, and the confused shouts of many voices filled the air, until it seemed the grove was filled with a band of devils holding high carnival.

But, unchecked, and with desperate daring and determination, the Brotherhood came on until they dashed their horses against the very line of breastworks.

Then their weapons began to tell upon the emigrants, who broke from the fierce fire and fell back, to the horror of Percy la Clyde, who called forth, in trumpet voice:

"Troopers, rally around your commander! Steady, now, charge!"

Gallantly the soldiers rallied around their officer, and dashed forward with him to recover the ground lost by the emigrants.

But already had Ricardo bounded on horseback over the barrier. Followed by a dozen of his daring horsemen, he dashed upon the dismounted troopers, who, in

a vain attempt to check his mad career, fell beneath the iron hoofs of the outlaws' horses.

"My God, it cannot be that all is lost!" cried Percy la Clyde, in dread.

Then, drawing his sword, he shouted:

"Troopers, come on! Men, they are but a handful of murdering thieves; follow me, and drive them back!"

In vain were his gallant example and clear commands. In vain sounded the orders of Major Conrad, who, in a frenzy, strove to stay the torrent of defeat.

In vain was the conspicuous courage of Howard Lawrence. Useless, too, was the discipline and bravery of the troopers; all was useless, for from some unaccountable reason a panic had seized upon the settlers, brave men though they were, and fighting for all they held dear on earth.

They gave ground rapidly, until twoscore of the outlaws had secured a footing within the inclosure, and by the light of the waning moon, which made all around visible, Ricardo was forming his men for a desperate and final charge.

Then his clear voice was again heard, giving his stern orders. Before they could be obeyed, there was heard a wild and prolonged war whoop that made the blood of all who heard it turn cold with dread.

Then upon the moonlit scene dashed a single horseman, bounding over the barrier and whirling suddenly into the very midst of the band of outlaws.

"Buffalo Bill!" was shouted.

"The scout, and alone!"

Such were the cries that were heard, as with light-

ning rapidity the daring horseman, with a revolver in each hand, made his shots ring forth with telling effect.

"No, he isn't alone!" cried a voice.

A rolling sound, like muffled thunder, was heard upon the prairie. Again the wild war whoop of the scout broke forth and was answered from twoscore of throats by three hearty cheers.

"The troopers, the troopers!" shouted the outlaws, and hastily they turned to fly, Ricardo, with a bitter curse, first spurring toward Buffalo Bill, who wheeled to meet him.

But, as if thinking better of his intention, the outlaw suddenly checked his pace, and heading his splendid horse for the barrier, took it with a flying leap, and disappeared in pursuit of his men.

Instantly Buffalo Bill followed him, and the two were soon lost to sight upon the prairie in the opposite direction to that from which the cavalry squadron was approaching. A moment more and the cavalrymen dashed up, headed by Major Belden, one of the senior officers of the fort.

"Major, I greet you; but though too late to join in the fun, you have scared off the enemy!"

Percy la Clyde stepped forward and addressed Ernest Belden, a soldierly looking man of forty, with a handsome, but dark, sinister face.

"Who were your foes, La Clyde?" asked the officer.

"We have had two sets, major; first the Dog Soldier Sioux, under that desperado, Red Dick, and then none other than Ricardo and his desperate band."

"A hard lot, indeed, and you have been most fortunate to escape them, and I am glad to see that the scout told me no more than the truth; but where has

he gone?" The major turned to look for Buffalo Bill.

"Gone like mad after the outlaw chief; but will we not give pursuit, major?"

"No, Captain la Clyde, it would be useless. Besides, I am now destined upon a raid upon the Sioux village to the northward; so will leave you as soon as day breaks, which will be soon."

When Captain la Clyde presented his superior to Major Conrad, and also to the ladies, who approached at that moment, he could but mark the start of surprised admiration that the major gave when he beheld the beauty of Sibyl Conrad.

The melancholy duty of caring for the wounded and burying the dead was begun. When the sun arose it lighted up a sad scene, rendered more mournful by the sound of the living wailing for those dear to them, who had fallen.

After a hasty breakfast, Major Belden and his troopers departed, leaving Captain la Clyde, as before, to be the escort of the train. Hardly had the forms of the squadron disappeared over a roll in the prairie, when up dashed Buffalo Bill, his horse covered with foam and showing every indication of a hard ride, as did also his rider, for his face was pale and wore a look of fatigue.

Yet his voice was calm and pleasant, as he replied, in acknowledgment to the cheers given him:

"I thank you, comrades; but I was almost too late, as I had far to ride before I could find aid for you, as the Pawnees had left their hunting grounds; fortunately I met Major Belden, and he was able to help me, and come to your succor."

Dismounting, Buffalo Bill devoted himself to the care of his horse, and then, after partaking of a hearty breakfast, which Sibyl prepared for him, he threw himself down to rest, and at once was lost in deep and refreshing slumber, while Major Conrad and Captain la Clyde set about their arrangements for continuing their way on the following morning, for they were anxious to get settled on the spot that was to be the new home of the emigrants.

CHAPTER XLIX.

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY.

With the first glimmer of light in the eastern skies, the settlers were astir, and the bugle call to the troopers pierced through the motte.

Buffalo Bill and Midnight appeared to have fully recovered from their hard work of the past few days.

Between Captain la Clyde and Buffalo Bill a warm friendship had sprung up.

Sibyl exhibited a most kindly interest in the noted scout, whose praise was on every tongue.

Howard Lawrence, being deeply in love with Sibyl, and noticing that she most kindly regarded the man who had so bravely helped the settlers, felt that he had a dangerous rival, and was determined not to yield one atom of any claim he held upon the affection of Sibyl Conrad.

Ruth Whitfield also exhibited a marked interest in the famous scout, and seemed most anxious to be ever near him.

A shadow would cross her brow whenever Buffalo Bill would turn, with one of his fascinating smiles, and address her lively cousin, for Ruth had a fierce and jealous nature, and could look only unkindly upon one who crossed her path in any manner.

Thus, unobserved by the scout, matters were taking a stormy turn and threatening squally weather.

Percy la Clyde was jealous of Howard Lawrence, who in turn hated the young officer, and was likewise jealous of the scout, in whom both Sibyl and Ruth appeared to be so deeply interested.

If these jealous hearts could have realized it, the situation held a very large element of comedy. At length the sun arose beyond the prairie, and slowly the long train of wagons filed out from the motte, with here and there a party on horseback, and took up its march farther on toward the setting sun, leaving behind, within their narrow beds of clay, those who had fallen in the battle the night before.

At the head of the train rode a small cavalcade, consisting of Buffalo Bill, Percy la Clyde, Major Conrad, and the troopers.

The scout was acting as a guide for the emigrants toward one of the most fertile districts on the plains, which was well watered, and where a settlement would have every advantage that could be found on the frontier.

When Howard Lawrence heard Buffalo Bill speak of the point he considered most favorable as a settlement, he instantly remarked that he intended riding on ahead for half a mile.

Arming himself thoroughly, and declining Gerald Conrad's offer to accompany him, the young pioneer set off, at first keeping only a short distance ahead, but gradually drawing away from the train, until, when the noonday halt was made, he was nowhere visible upon the prairie.

As if fully acquainted with the country, he put his horse at a rapid gallop, and continued on for miles, until a higher roll in the prairie gave him a view of the river through the green trees of a prairie island.

Toward this point he directed his course until he found himself upon a peninsula, made by the river making a grand curve.

On this point of land, entirely surrounded by water, excepting where it touched the open prairie, had been the home of Alfred Carter.

A more delightful place could not have been chosen for a settlement; for the point, or the peninsula, contained fully five thousand acres of land, of the richest kind of soil.

Scattered over it were large timber mottes, the river bounded it upon three sides, while to the eastward stretched the unbrokn prairie for miles, to serve as a luxuriant pasture for stock.

As Howard Lawrence rode along the trail leading toward the humble cabin home upon the river bank, his brow wore a troubled look, and he glanced nervously around him.

Nearer and nearer he drew toward the cabin; but no lazy wreath of blue smoke curled up above the treetops, and all seemed strangely desolate around him.

Presently a dark form glided from the foliage bordering the trail, and stood directly in his path.

Lawrence reined his horse back with iron grasp as his eyes fell upon this person.

"Red Bud of the Forest, what do you here near the lonely home of the paleface hunter?" he demanded, speaking in the language of the Pawnees.

"The Red Bud is a free child of the woods; she asks not the false paleface brave whither she can go," haughtily replied the Indian girl.

"Red Bud turns her eyes with anger upon me; have I offended her?" he asked, changing his tone.

"Yes; the Many Faces has spoken with false tongue to the Red Bud of the Forest. Before Many Faces came to the wigwam of the Red Bud, she sang like

a bird of the woods, and her heart was like the silvery river; her sorrows were light, only falling upon her as softly as the autumn leaves kiss the ground.

"But Many Faces took away the joy of the Red Bud, and the wind sighs nightly in her heart. The Great Spirit frowns at the child of the woods; the heart of the Indian maid is breaking, and the snow of winter will rest upon her bosom.

"Many Faces has a false tongue, and a false light in his eyes, for he told the Red Bud he loved her; he took her from the wigwam of her people, and then left her alone to die.

"But the Great Spirit would not let her die then. When she was worn down with hunger, when her feet would not press the earth, and the enemy of her people, the Sioux, would have danced around her scalp, the great white chief, who rides the prairie whirlwind, and whose eye ever looks death upon his foes, rescued her from her enemies and carried her back to her tribe."

"Was it Buffalo Bill, the scout, that saved your life, girl?" Lawrence inquired.

"Red Bud has spoken the truth; her tongue is not crooked; it was the great white scout who carried her back to the Pawnee village, and he it was that told her that Many Faces loved a maiden here by the running waters."

"Curses on that scout! Did you come here to see that girl?" Howard Lawrence demanded harshly.

"Red Bud has seen the Rose of the Woodland, and told her not to love Many Faces," was the Indian girl's brave answer.

"By Heaven, girl, you shall die for that!" cried the

aroused man, and he attempted to draw a pistol from his belt.

Before he could do so, Red Bud unslung a light rifle from her back, and covered him with deadly aim.

"Let not Many Faces seek to slay the Pawnee girl," she said, "for she would not die by his hand. Her heart is broken, but she will not harm the paleface chief who broke it. Let him go, and never cross the path of the Red Bud again. Go; the Red Bud bids him go!"

Still holding her aim upon his heart, the look of the Indian girl proved that she would kill him if he hesitated, and with a bitter curse Howard Lawrence drove the spurs into the flanks of his horse and dashed away, leaving Red Bud watching him until he was out of sight.

A rapid ride of five minutes brought Lawrence to the cabin door. Then what a scene met his gaze! Here and there were scattered numerous pieces of furniture and household effects; the strong door was broken from its hinges, desolation was over all, while bloodstains were upon the floor and ground.

There lay the body of the faithful watchdog, dead at his post.

The occupants of the cabin were nowhere to be seen. The face of Howard Lawrence turned pale as he followed the trail where some heavy objects had been dragged. A walk of a few hundred yards brought him to a thicket of small timber upon the river bank, and there he beheld two new-made graves side by side.

"My God, Alfred Carter and all his family gone! No, there are but two graves, and they numbered four.

If Rose has been killed, her death has saved me a world of trouble, for I do not wish two women as rivals in the same settlement."

Something like a smile came to his lips.

"Well, it cannot be helped, and now I am free to marry Sibyl Conrad, if that accursed scout does not interfere. If he does, I must crush him."

With a hard look upon his handsome face, Howard Lawrence returned to the cabin, glanced carefully around among the rubbish for a while, and then mounting his horse, rode rapidly away.

After making a wide circuit upon the prairie, he overtook the wagon train just as it went into camp for the night, on the edge of the peninsula.

Buffalo Bill, accompanied by both Sibyl and Ruth, had also ridden on ahead, and after a time came upon the deserted and desolate cabin home of Alfred Carter.

With a cry of alarm, Buffalo Bill sprang from his horse and entered the little hut.

"All, all gone!" he exclaimed. "In God's name, who has done this foul deed? By the blue heavens above us, I swear that they shall rue this accursed act!"

Never before had the cousins seen Buffalo Bill in any way moved by excitement; but now the look upon his face was terrible, and they almost feared him.

But controlling himself instantly, he said quietly:

"Miss Conrad, it is due to both yourself and Miss Whitfield that I make known to you the deed done here. This cabin was the home of Alfred Carter, his wife, his daughter Rose—a beautiful girl—and his son. They had not an enemy in the world that I knew of; but, see here what a hellish deed has been committed!"

Following the same trail that Howard Lawrence had, Buffalo Bill soon came to the graves.

After examining most carefully the tracks and trails around, as well as he could in the dying light of the day, he returned with the girls to the encampment, where he held a long conversation with Major Conrad and Captain la Clyde.

"Major Conrad, this is the point I have deemed most favorable for your settlement," said Buffalo Bill, at the conclusion of his talk regarding the massacre of the Carter family.

"Here you will have every advantage, and be protected by the river, as you will see in the morning. I would advise that you at once set about building a stockade fort and wall across this end of the point, and the river, being wide and deep, will protect you upon the three other sides.

"I am going away, but in a few days I will return and aid you all in my power. As soon as the moon rises, I intend to take the trail of the hell hounds who have brought ruin upon the peaceful family who dwelt here."

The scout was as good as his word.

As soon as the moon arose and lighted up the prairie, he left the sleeping camp, and struck off over the plains, slowly following the trail of Ricardo and his band, after their deadly crime against poor Alfred Carter.

CHAPTER L.

PLOTTING MISCHIEF.

Soon after the arrival of the train in the new settlement, the peninsula began to present a far different scene. The settlers had staked out their farms, chosen the sites of their cabin homes, and pitched their tents, until their houses could be built.

No contention, no envy, existed among them; and the future promised brightly, as the whole male force worked upon the stockade fort, which was to be the common center of protection for all.

One day Major Belden and his troopers dashed into the new settlement and was greeted with pleasure by all. The officer at once set his men to work to aid in building the stockade, and by many acts of kindness won the esteem of all the emigrants.

With this extra force the work went bravely on, and in a very short time the walls of the stockade were up, and the large cabin fort was complete.

Major Belden constantly haunted Sibyl Conrad with his presence. The girl's kindness toward him he construed into a reciprocity of affection, and commenced building up hopes of making her his wife.

Whether Howard Lawrence had changed his love for Sibyl none knew, as he was ever pleasant toward her; but certain it is that he appeared to relinquish in favor of the major, and suddenly became devoted to Ruth.

The desolate cabin of Alfred Carter had become the home of Howard Lawrence, with all its surround-

ings. The settlers had drawn lots for its possession, and, having been the lucky winner, he had at once installed himself in his new residence, at the same time intimating that before long he hoped to have a housekeeper to look after his affairs.

Thus passed the days at the peninsula settlement, or "Riverside," as the settlers had named it; and still Buffalo Bill was absent.

One evening, the day before the departure of Major Belden to the fort—whither he had ordered Captain la Clyde, the morning after his arrival in the settlement, that he might have no rivals in camp—the young cavalry officer suddenly rode up, followed by half a dozen dragoons.

"Well, Clyde, what news from the fort?" the major asked.

"Stirring times, major; and the general bids me tell you to report at once, as he wants you to lead an expedition to the south."

"Indeed! Well, we will depart to-night."

"Pardon me, major, but General Canton has ordered me to remain at the settlement until our friends have their cabins built and crops in, and I am to retain command of twenty of your men."

Major Belden frowned visibly at this news, and compressed his lips as though in anger; but he said nothing, and walked off in search of Sibyl Conrad. He soon found her seated upon the river bank, a book in one hand, a fishing rod in the other.

"Well, Miss Sibyl, seeking food for both body and mind, I see," he remarked pleasantly, as he walked up.

"Yes, sir; and both are the most agreeable occupations I could be engaged in."

"I thought that you might be at least glad to see me, as I leave you to-morrow, or rather to-night, having been ordered to the fort to command a most dangerous expedition."

As he said this, the officer gazed down into the beautiful face to mark the effect of his words.

But Sibyl quietly replied:

"It is the glory of a soldier's life to participate in dangerous service; so I have been told."

"True, Miss Sibyl, and it is a soldier's duty to love, and also his pleasure, as I may safely say, for dearly do I love you. Pardon me, Sibyl, for thus abruptly speaking of this, to me, most important subject; but to-night I leave you upon a service from which I may never return, and if I fall, I would have you to know that I loved you more than all else in this world. If my life is spared, then, Sibyl, I beg you promise me to one day be my wife."

Major Belden had spoken earnestly, and apparently with deep feeling; but neither his words nor manner had touched the heart of Sibyl Conrad, who, rising from the bank, replied:

"Major Belden, you surprise and pain me by your words, for I have no love to give you, and never can have, though I shall ever regard you most kindly as a friend."

"Curse your friendship, Sibyl Conrad!" said the humiliated and disappointed man.

Wheeling quickly, he strode from the spot, leaving the girl more surprised by this new phase in his character than by his declaration of love. Half an hour later Major Belden rode forth from the settlement,

his brow dark and lips compressed with internal emotion.

As he reached the edge of the prairie he came upon Howard Lawrence. Bidding his men to ride slowly on, he called to the young man, and when they halted side by side he said:

"Mr. Lawrence, can I ask, if you had a rival what would be your course with him?"

Howard looked surprised, but answered almost fiercely:

"I would overreach him by fair or foul means, even were he my brother!"

"We think alike, Mr. Lawrence," said the major. "Now, let me ask you what regard you have for that prairie rover, Buffalo Bill?"

"None whatever, sir."

"Well, he is my rival," the major declared. "I have been told that he is married, yet I am sure he has stolen the heart of the one woman I love."

"Then court-martial him for the crimes some say he has committed, and hang him to the nearest tree," was the fierce answer.

"Good advice, sir, and I will follow it; Mr. Lawrence, it will give me pleasure to see you at the fort as my guest, and I think together we can overreach this scout. Good day, sir."

"Good day, Major Belden."

Away dashed the major; and, with a strange smile upon his face, Howard Lawrence rode on, muttering to himself:

"He sees I do not like Buffalo Bill any too well. Well, my gallant major, when you have removed the scout from your path, I'll devote my attention to you

and that handsome captain, for all that cross my love trail must die. An arrow or rifle shot from the cover of a motte will easily make those two officers food for wolves.

"Now, I must go on and improve my time with the lovely Sibyl, who is the cause of so much mischief."

Putting spurs to his horse, he dashed away, to find upon his arrival at the stockade that the coast was not wholly clear, for Percy la Clyde was sitting by the side of Sibyl Conrad.

With a smothered curse, Howard Lawrence turned away, and the next moment met Ruth Whitfield with one of his sweetest smiles.

"Well, Mr. Lawrence, one of your rivals has just gone," said Ruth, with a malicious smile.

"True, and left another even more dangerous; but it is Buffalo Bill that I fear most. He has such a way of upsetting plots and schemes. If he were dead, I should feel happier and safer."

"You wouldn't harm him, would you?" she asked, noting the deadly flash of his eyes.

"Leave that to me; he shall be captured and taken to a distant tribe of Indians, whom I know well, and held there where he can't interfere with any of my plans."

He spoke as if such a matter would be easy of accomplishment.

"She will not marry you, if she hears of the trick!"

It will be seen that Ruth Whitfield had in some strange manner fallen under this man's deadly influence, which was something like that of a hypnotist.

"Well, I am playing a deep game," he answered,

"but I will win. I can lie to Sibyl, and say that an Indian killed the scout."

And then he turned away, muttering to himself.

"Yes, I'll have to play some desperate game. And all will come right; it must come right, or I am ruined, and Many Faces, as the Indians call me, will have to pass in his checks, or get out of the country."

CHAPTER LI.

● CAPTURING THE SENTINEL.

As has been stated, Buffalo Bill picked up the trail of the Branded Brotherhood, and followed hard after the human bloodhounds, who had carried Rose Carter and her father into captivity.

The scout was mounted on his splendid horse Midnight, an animal so well trained and obedient that it seemed to have almost human intelligence.

Buffalo Bill was sure that the infamous desperado, Ricardo, was the leader of the men who had committed the outrage.

Though he pressed on rapidly, night was at hand when he approached the hills, wherein he was sure the Branded Brotherhood had their secret hiding place.

Fearing discovery if he rode into the hills before nightfall, he took shelter in a great wash in the prairie, into which he and his horse descended with some difficulty, and there he remained until darkness fell.

Leaving this concealment after dark, he rode straight for the hills. He did not need to look for the outlaw trail; for, with his field glass, just before sunset, he had discovered the gap where it entered the rougher country.

He expected to find a sentinel posted in the pass. So, when, after muffling the hoofs of Midnight, he had advanced as near as he deemed prudent, he left the horse and crept forward on foot.

"Ah," he said, as, after stealing forward some dis-

tance, he lay in the shadow of a rock, listening and watching, "the sentinel is there, just as I expected! That shows another thing, too: the lair of these prairie wolves isn't so very far from here."

The sentinel seemed but a shadow himself, as he stood in that shadow. Only a trained eye could have detected his presence, or would have thought him other than a part of the rocky wall against which he stood.

But to the keen vision of the scout he was as distinct as the great rock itself.

For a full minute after locating the man Buffalo Bill lay still, thinking how best to approach or circumvent him.

Then, with knife in his teeth, and the lariat, which he had taken from the saddle, in his hands, and held ready for use, he slipped on, silent as a weasel stealing on its prey.

It was necessary to silence that sentinel. Otherwise an alarm would be given, which would arouse the outlaws and keep Buffalo Bill from carrying out the plans that he had half formed.

The unsuspecting sentinel seemed to be looking straight at the scout; but his attitude of careless ease and security showed that he did not dream that a foe was within miles of him. In truth, so perilous was the task of approaching the outlaw stronghold that even Ricardo himself did not believe any pursuit would be made. He would have laughed at the thought of one man making that pursuit, as Buffalo Bill had done.

Besides, Ricardo had been at some pains to hide his trail on the prairie, and was sure that it could not be picked up easily. The posting of the sentinel was, therefore, but a matter of camp routine.

So slowly that he seemed scarcely to move, and so quietly that he made no more noise than the falling of a leaf, the scout drew inch by inch nearer to the man he had marked for his prey.

And the sentinel, wrapped in a sense of security, thought danger so far away and his position such a sinecure that he began to roll a cigarette.

Buffalo Bill was but fifteen feet away when the sentinel struck a match.

In doing this, the sentinel turned to the wall behind him, and, as he puffed at the cigarette, he held one hand up to keep the match from being blown out.

At that moment Buffalo Bill rose silently to his feet. The lariat was given one quick swing, and the noose shot for the stooped head of the sentinel.

The match went out, as if it had been struck from his hand, as the noose fell over his head and was pulled tight by a quick jerk.

Then the sentinel was thrown from his feet, and the cry that arose to his lips was stifled.

He fell gurgling and scrambling, and the next moment Buffalo Bill was bending over him.

Some stout cords were in the scout's hand. One of these he twisted into the man's mouth as a gag, where he tightened it; then he slipped other cords over the man's waving arms and swaying legs.

It was all over in less than half a minute, and the sentinel was a helpless prisoner.

"I could have killed you just as easily," the scout whispered into the ear of the terrified man, "but I do not raise my hand against the life of any man without cause, or when I can avoid it. Now, I'll see that you are put where you can do me no harm."

Having tied him securely, Buffalo Bill lifted the helpless man in his strong arms and carried him down the slope. Here, finding a side passage—a small cañon, as it seemed—he bore the man into it for some distance.

"I'll see that you are not left here to die of starvation, old fellow," he promised, as he prepared to leave the man there. "I owe you something, you know! You were doing your work so poorly that really I had no trouble at all in crawling up on you."

Going back to the point where the sentinel had stood, the scout took possession of the man's weapons, which he concealed.

"Now, to see what is on before me!"

Then a thought came to him, which took him back to the prisoner.

"See here," he said, "I want some information, and you're just the chap to give it to me."

He pressed his revolver against the man's head. The touch of the cold steel made the rascal tremble.

"I'm going to take the gag out of your mouth, so that you can talk to me," the scout informed him. "But I want to tell you that if you call to your friends or make any disturbance whatever, I shall shoot you as if you were a wolf. Do you understand that?"

The way the man trembled showed that he understood well enough.

He was still trembling when Buffalo Bill removed the gag. Again the scout pressed the revolver muzzle to the temple of the terrified sentinel.

"Don't!" the man whined.

"Do you know who I am?"

"You must be ther devil, I guess!"

"Call me that, then. It makes no difference to you who I am. I have you in my power; and I shall shoot you if you try to call any of your pals. Now, answer my questions!"

"Put down that gun!" the fellow begged. "It might go off—yer finger might slip on the trigger, er——"

Buffalo Bill did not put down the gun.

"You're a member of the Branded Brotherhood?"

"Yes."

"And Ricardo is your captain?"

The fellow shivered again.

"Yes," he answered reluctantly; "but I'll be killed fer tellin'."

"You'll be killed, if you don't tell. Now, where is your camp? No lying; for if you deceive me in anything, I shall come back here and shoot you for it."

"Camp's back in ther hills," answered the subdued ruffian.

"Just where?"

"'Bout a half a mile back."

"The way to get there?"

"Straight up this gulch a quarter of a mile; then take the side gorge; ye can't miss it,"

"What sort of a place is it?"

"A lot of log houses. Chief's is the biggest, and the fust one ye come to."

"And where are the prisoners kept? That's what I'm after—those prisoners."

"Ain't but one here."

"Which one?"

"Ther gal."

"Where is she held?"

"In a room of Ricardo's cabin."

"And the man—her father; he was the other prisoner, wasn't he?"

"He's held in another cabin, out in ther hills."

Question after question the scout thus put to the trembling wretch, until he had pumped him dry of information.

"Thank you," said Buffalo Bill, at last. "I'm glad I fell in with you."

"Can't say thet I recipercates," the fellow grumbled.

"No, perhaps not. Now, I'm going to leave you again, but I'll call and see you later."

"Say, boss," the man called, as Buffalo Bill was about to apply the gag again, "who aire ye, anyhow? You're a good un; and you're fair, fer an enemy. If I was on your side, I'd tie to ye."

"Likely you'll know who I am later," was the answer, as the scout stole away.

Buffalo Bill now pushed on up the gulch, finding no further obstruction. Without mishap he made his way along the side gorge, until he came at length in sight of the cabins, several of which were lighted by fires that leaped and flamed in the wide-throated fireplaces, for the nights up there in the hills were cool and fires were needed.

CHAPTER LII.

BUFFALO BILL'S DARING.

In front of the cabin which he knew to be Ricardo's, and where the sentinel had said Rose Carter was held a prisoner, another sentinel paced slowly up and down, with military tread, bearing a rifle on his shoulder.

He seemed to be more alert than the sentinel whom Buffalo Bill had captured.

"Not a good outlook," thought the scout, as he lay at one side of the gorge trail and made this discovery. "But I've attempted more difficult things."

So, undaunted, he crawled on. The gorge ended a hundred yards or so from the nearest cabin, leaving the way absolutely open before him.

The camp of the outlaws had been well chosen. Apparently the only approach was through that narrow gorge, which a dozen men could have held easily against a regiment. The cabins occupied a bowllike area, that was level and of considerable extent. Behind the cabins some horses were grazing. All around tall mountain cliffs shut in the place.

"There's a way out of here—some sort of back-door passage, is my guess; Ricardo is too shrewd a rascal to coop himself in a spot that has only one exit. It seems he ought to be safe enough here. But if I had a dozen good fighting men at my back right now I'd guarantee to take the whole camp. If Ricardo was as smart as he appears to be he would have more sentries on duty, and would have every one of them reliable men. But the fox gets into the habit of sleep-

ing, when he thinks the hounds are far away, and can't by any possibility reach him."

The scout was crawling on. At the end of the gorge he crept along the right wall of the cliff, for the shadows were blackest there. But when he had reached a point opposite Ricardo's cabin he saw how difficult it would be to pass across that open space without discovery.

Just then, as if to thwart and discomfit him, some men came out of the cabin and stood talking with the sentinel.

One of them, the scout was sure, was Ricardo himself.

More than once as Buffalo Bill lay there listening and watching and trying vainly to make out what was being said, he lifted his ready revolver and pointed it at the indistinctly seen form of the outlaw chief.

But caution restrained him. The camp was full of outlaws. He could see numbers of them in the other cabins, and still others were moving about outside of the cabins, for the hour was so early that none of them had retired for the night.

"I can shoot Ricardo all right," was the scout's thought, "but what good would it do? It would simply stir up the rest of them; and though I might down half a dozen or so, they would either capture me or make it even more difficult than it might be to get that girl out of her prison."

So each time the deadly revolver came down. By and by Ricardo and those with him went back into the cabin. But the sentinel continued to pace his beat, and but a call from his lips would have been sufficient

to bring the outlaws out of the house and rally them from the other cabins.

"The moon will be up soon," thought the scout, glancing at the eastern sky, which was already beginning to redden. "I shall have to try some other plan."

Then a great thought, daring as he was himself, came into his mind. Retracing his way by crawling along the cliff wall, he reentered the side gorge.

Here he arose to his feet, and made his way into the gulch, down which he hurried at a rapid pace. He did not halt until he came near the spot where he had left Midnight.

Midnight was too well trained to even whinny when his master drew near, but when Buffalo Bill came up to the intelligent animal it showed every sign of delight at his return.

"I just want a couple of blankets, Midnight," he said.

Then he took the blankets from the roll behind the saddle, after which he patted the horse lovingly, and hurried away.

Going up the gulch again, he entered the side cañon and went on to the point where he had left the sentinel. He hurried as he walked, for the time was precious.

He found the fellow writhing and twisting at his bonds, in a vain hope to extricate himself from his unpleasant position.

"Ho, my man, I'm back sooner than you expected me!" he said, as he once more bent over the rascal. "Well, I've come to make a trade with you."

Again he showed his revolver, then took the gag from the man's mouth.

"What d'yer want?" the fellow growled, in a slow way, for his mouth was sore and stiff.

"Your clothing. I'm going to take these cords off of you—every one of them, so that you can strip. I want you to slide out of this suit as quick as you can."

The man was puzzled. He began to hope, though, that a chance of escape would now be given him. When Buffalo Bill had removed the cords he covered the man with his revolver.

"Now, my friend," he said quietly and sternly, "you'll do a lightning shift out of those garments, or I'll feel compelled to pump some lead into you. What I want with those clothes is none of your business; it's enough for you to know that I want them."

Fear of that deadly revolver caused the man to begin to strip without questioning.

"Now, you may have this blanket, in place of the clothes. It will keep you warm all right, in this summer weather, and keep the mosquitoes off of you, perhaps, if they are many up here."

Having said this, he retied the rascal and once more gagged him completely; though the man did a good deal of grumbling, and was only kept quiet by fear of instant death.

Buffalo Bill now arrayed himself in the garments of the sentinel, even to the hat, and found, fortunately, that, though he was a large man, the sentinel was about as large, and the clothing fitted fairly well.

"Not a bad-looking double of this fellow, if I keep my face concealed," was the scout's thought.

Then he left the sentinel, and left his own clothing in a niche in the rock, and, carrying the one blanket

that remained, went back into the gulch trail and on toward the camp of Ricardo.

He did not stop until he was in the gorge and once more opposite the cabins of the outlaws. The moon was rising, and its light began to illuminate the little valley holding the outlaw camp.

Within the shadow of the gorge Buffalo Bill halted, to take a full survey of all that lay before him. Not so many outlaws were to be seen. Most of them were probably eating their evening meal. But within the cabin of Ricardo, at which the scout looked longest, several men were visible through the window that looked outward toward the gorge.

Then Buffalo Bill began to work out one of the most daring plans of his daring career. Stepping boldly out of the gorge and trusting to the outlaw's clothing to deceive the sentinel, he walked slowly toward the cabin.

The sentinel saw him coming—could not help seeing him—and looked at him intently. But the scout had his rough hat pulled well down over his face, almost concealing it, and the suspicions of the sentinel were not yet aroused.

When Buffalo Bill drew near the cabin door something in his gait appeared to excite the suspicion of the guard.

"Why—that you, Ned? What in thunder ye comin'—"

He was not given time to say more, nor to lift his rifle, which he had dropped to the hollow of his arm.

With a leap as light as that of a panther Buffalo Bill was at his side, and the heavy blanket was over the sentinei's head. At the same instant the scout drove

his heavy fist into the sentinel's face with such force that he was knocked insensible.

Fortunately the muffling blanket kept the heavy blow from being heard in the cabin, but, unfortunately, as the sentinel fell, he swung backward and struck his arm against the door, making a sound somewhat like the thump of a heavy fist of a rough man who imperatively demands entrance.

The door against which the sentinel had struck his arm—there were two doors on that side of the cabin, showing that it was divided into two rooms—was swung almost instantly open, and a man stood before the scout.

Behind him was another man, and behind this man the form of a girl—the girl being, as Buffalo Bill guessed, Rose Carter.

The sentinel lay limp in Buffalo Bill's arms, his face upturned, for the scout had jerked away the hooded blanket.

"What's up?" the man asked, in a curious voice.

Without hesitation, Buffalo Bill answered:

"Things wasn't lookin' jest as they ought to outside, an' I come up ter report, and this feller was layin' right by the door—keeled over in a fit, I reckon, an' when——"

Having talked with the first sentinel he had made a prisoner, Buffalo Bill was imitating the peculiarities of the man's speech, and so clever was the imitation that the man in the doorway was for a moment deceived.

That moment was enough for Buffalo Bill's purpose. He stepped forward with his burden, as if for the purpose of bearing it into the room.

"Not in heur," the man objected. "Take it into t'other room, whar ther capt'in is."

He was not given time to say anything more, for Buffalo Bill's strong right hand shot out at this juncture and caught him by the throat in an iron grip.

As he pushed this man on into the room, holding him by the throat, the scout let the insensible form of the guard slip to the ground.

The man he had taken by the throat was not willing to be subdued without a struggle, however, and began to writhe and twist and fight with all his strength.

There was a stir in the other room, which, as the scout now saw, was connected by a door with this room.

With a quick glance around, Buffalo Bill saw that the other occupants of the room were Carter and his daughter Rose.

Fortunately, Carter, who had been held in another cabin, as the first sentinel had reported, had been brought to this cabin not long before, to be questioned by Ricardo, and was in the room with Rose when Buffalo Bill made his unexpected and spectacular appearance.

On a table at one side of the room was a kerosene lamp, whose light illumined the place.

Rose and her father were thrown into a state of much excitement by the fighting of the two men, one of whom they knew was an outlaw, whom they had no cause to love, and the identity of the other they could not even conjecture. Not for an instant did they think that he was the great scout, Buffalo Bill.

Seeing the connecting door fly open, and hearing behind it the tread and the exclamations of a number

of men, Buffalo Bill caught up the kerosene lamp, which was of glass, and hurled it straight at the head of the man who had first appeared, and whom he recognized to be Ricardo himself.

The lamp struck the outlaw chief fairly and knocked him down; then, passing on into the other room through the now open door, it fell to the floor, exploding as it fell and scattering fire and burning oil in every direction.

It was as if pandemonium had been instantly let loose, for the burning oil, striking the clothing of the men, set them on fire, and enveloped them in flames, and the oil on the floor also catching fire, shot up in red flames to the low ceiling.

"Quick!" said the scout.

The door to the outside was open before him, and beyond that door was the gorge and the gulch, the prairie and liberty.

He caught Rose Carter with one hand and her father with the other, and, before they could question or object, he had pulled them through the doorway to the outside.

"Now, run!" he said. "Run for the gorge. I am Buffalo Bill, and I have come here to rescue you. Run, and I will protect with my life if it is needed."

Men were pouring out of the other cabins, for the explosion of the lamp, the leaping flames, and the howls of the men who were burned and blinded, was rousing the whole camp.

Buffalo Bill's fighting blood was up, and, as he fell in behind the running figures of Rose Carter and her father, he was in a mood to fight the whole outlaw camp rather than let the escaping prisoners be retaken.

He heard low, hoarse commands, excited yells as some of the men in the burning cabin leaped through the doorways, their garments blazing, and also saw several men running toward the horses that were feeding in the valley behind the camp.

With his face toward the camp and a revolver ready in each hand, Buffalo Bill retreated toward the gorge. Some men, seeing him, and recognizing him as an enemy in spite of the disguising clothing, the revolvers of the scout began to rattle.

Two of the men dropped dead in their tracks, and another was severely wounded, and this caused the others to draw back.

Then there were louder yells and sharper commands, as Ricardo appeared and began to shout orders.

The outlaw chief had been knocked down by the lamp and for a few moments was in no condition for fight; but he had rallied, and as none of the burning fluid had touched him, he was now out in the open air, shrieking his wild commands.

Buffalo Bill took a shot at the outlaw chief; but another outlaw, who chanced to rush in front of the leader, got the bullet and fell.

Then the scout was himself in the mouth of the gorge, with the prisoners running on at full speed toward the gulch trail.

Buffalo Bill turned now and ran after them at his best gait, and soon overtook them.

"Run as you never ran before!" he commanded.

Taking each by the hand, he seemed to fairly lift them forward, as he sped in wild flight toward the point where he had left his horse.

Behind them rose a terrible din in the outlaw camp,

and a little later a red light shot up toward the sky, showing that the cabin they had so lately left was in flames.

"They will be after us on horses in a minute or two," said the scout, urging the fugitives on.

Near the point where the little side cañon opened which held the bound and gagged sentinel, Buffalo Bill halted for a moment, just long enough to lift Rose Carter in his strong arms, then he tore on again, leading the way, with Carter racing heavily behind him.

Fortunately, the camp was in such wild confusion that the scout and the fugitives were able to reach the spot where Midnight had been left before they were sighted by any of their pursuers.

"Down, now!" the scout whispered.

Behind them he heard the thunder of hoofs. And as the three—the scout and the fugitives—stooped to the ground, down the gulch came the horsemen riding now out into the increasing moonlight.

A dozen men on horseback swept by, riding like the wind and heading for the open prairie, to which point they naturally believed the fugitives had hurried. The scout chuckled audibly as the last horseman thundered by.

"Let them go," he said, "they will find it a wild-goose chase."

Other horsemen were heard, and they also thundered by. Back in the little valley the flames of the burning cabin mounted higher and higher until the sky was brilliantly lighted.

For an hour Buffalo Bill and his friends lay in hiding, with Midnight; and in that time the scout learned all that the prisoners had to tell of their capture, the

burning of their home, the murderous deeds and the subsequent cruelty of the outlaws.

It was a harrowing story.

"Such debts can only be paid when those devils are wiped off the face of the earth."

"Hark!" said Rose. "Some one is coming, I believe."

"Yes; one of those outlaws is coming back," said the scout. "I heard the hoofs of his horse some time ago."

He took his lariat as he said it, and stationed himself out by the side of the trail along which the outlaw rider would have to pass.

A little later he came into view, riding slowly. He was swearing volubly. The trail of the fugitives had not been struck, and because of that and of the things which had preceded he was in an ugly temper.

His words and oaths were cut short when the lasso of the scout shot out from the side of the trail, and, settling about his neck, jerked him heavily to the ground.

In an instant the scout was on him, stifling his cries.

"I've just been waiting for one of you fellows to come back," he said, "for I wanted a horse. Now I have one. You will find the sentinel, tied up and gagged, in the side cañon. You'd better see that he is released. And, to make sure that you know just where he is, I will go with you."

Then, with his revolver keeping the man silent by its threatening, he walked with his prisoner up the gulch and into the little cañon,

When Buffalo Bill again appeared he was dressed in his own clothing.

"Any more of those fellows coming back?" he asked of Carter.

"No; that is, we haven't heard anything."

"Then we'll be going. Some of them will no doubt be along soon. We can strike the prairie, and I know some gulches and some washes we can get into and which we can follow. It will baffle them to find us now."

"Now?" questioned Rose.

"Yes. We have two horses now. Midnight, my horse, will carry double, and we now have an extra horse for your father. You can be shifted from one horse to the other, as the animals tire. But come, we must be going, for we must be far from here before daylight. The moonlight is increasing, but they can't do much trailing before day comes."

Then he helped Rose Carter to a seat on Midnight, and swung up himself behind her, and, Rose's father being seated in the saddle vacated so recently by one of the outlaws, the journey was begun.

CHAPTER LIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S DEFENSE.

In his private quarters at the fort sat General Canton, the commandant of the chain of forts upon the far frontier. He was engaged in reading dispatches just arrived, and his brow was dark, his look troubled, as though the news therein contained was not pleasant.

Around the general were signs of comfort, and even luxury, for his quarters were well furnished, and books and musical instruments were there with which to while away leisure moments.

Touching a small bell, an orderly soon appeared at the door.

"See if Major Belden is sufficiently recovered from his fatiguing trip to come to me."

"Yes, sir," and the orderly vanished, to return in a few moments with the information that the major would come at once.

Soon after the major put in an appearance at the general's quarters, and was motioned to a seat.

"Major, I am really pleased with your trip, and I feel certain that those Indians on the Southern Agency will behave at least for a few months; but I have sent for you to learn what was the information you had regarding Buffalo Bill."

"I have information that should hang him, sir," the major asserted.

"You report that he has committed several murders. It is unbelievable. He may have killed men,

in the discharge of his duty, but I shall be slow to think him a murderer."

"He is a murderer, sir, high as he has stood. He shot two soldiers a year or two since, and what for Heaven only knows. He has shot down Indians by the score, and I believe he is in league with some of the hostile bands, also with the Branded Brotherhood."

"Yet you know what a number of noble deeds he has performed."

"They have had that appearance, general, but there has been some underhand reason for it, I assure you. Now, on my return from the southward, as I told you this morning, I passed by the new settlement of Riverside, to see if they longer needed the services of Captain la Clyde.

"There, all of a sudden Buffalo Bill appeared, after an absence of four weeks on some pretended trail, and demanded that I should let him have a dozen soldiers to accompany him upon some trip, which he pretended would rescue a young girl from captivity. I considered it some trap to lead my men into, and told him so, when he deliberately knocked me down. See, sir, here is the bruise on my left cheek."

"He was most impertinent and daring, major, I must admit."

"Yes, general; and I arose and rushed upon him with my sword, when, as quick as a flash, he wrested it from my grasp, broke it, and hurled me from him with a strength I believed no man capable of."

"What did you do then, major?"

"I ordered the men to seize him, but he hurled them aside, drew his revolvers and strode right through their line. I then ordered them to fire upon him, but

Captain la Clyde, half a dozen of the settlers, and Miss Conrad threw themselves in front of him, and the troopers could not obey. Then he mounted his horse and rode away. He is a coward!"

"Not a coward, major; he is certainly not that, bad as he may be," said the general.

"Yes, sir, he is a coward——"

"And you are a liar, Major Belden!"

The sudden reply, breaking into the conversation in a stern, deep voice, caused both General Canton and his officer to spring to their feet and glance toward the door.

There, just inside the portal, stood none other than Buffalo Bill, his eyes blazing and fixed upon Major Belden with a menacing light.

"What, ho, the guard, orderly!" yelled the startled officer.

Again the deep voice of the scout was heard.

"There stands one outside that door who will give up his life at my word, so you call in vain. One cry more from your lips and you are a dead man."

Then, turning to the commander, the scout continued:

"General Canton, I did not come here, sir, to bandy words with that man. Will you spare me a moment of your time?"

"You chanced to hear Major Belden's accusations?"

"Yes, I heard him; but I never have raised a hand against the United States troops on this border, who did not first attack me."

"You slew two soldiers who once attempted your arrest, I learn?"

"I slew two drunken deserters who had boasted

that they would take me alive and hang me without trial. They rushed upon me. I warned them back; they would not heed the warning, and I shot them dead. You were not in command here then, sir, and heard only a garbled account of the affair from such as yonder man, who wears a major's straps, which I will yet tear from his shoulders if he crosses my path with evil intent."

"You speak boldly, Mr. Cody."

"I know it, general; it is a habit I have. Regarding my killing of peaceable Indians, it is all a lie, though I made war upon all hostile bands. Now, sir, I desire to state why I sought you here: first, to give the lie to all assertions against me such as have been brought to your ears, and then to say that upon arriving at the new settlement, whither I guided the Conrad emigrant train, I saw with horror that a cruel enemy had been there, and left ruin and death behind.

"Alfred Carter's wife and son had been murdered, and Carter and his daughter, a beautiful girl of eighteen, had been carried off into captivity. Taking the trail of the bloodhounds, after days of tedious work, I tracked them to their kennel, and found that Ricardo, the chief of the Branded Brotherhood, had done the deed."

"Infamous!"

"Well may you say so, General Canton, but, to continue: I tracked the renegades to their den, I disguised myself, and by night entered the stronghold, and sought the cabin where the young lady was held a prisoner."

"You were most daring, sir."

The scout smiled quietly, and replied:

"I risk my life every day, general. I rescued Rose Carter and her father. Then I returned to the settlement, and, meeting there Major Belden, begged for a few men to return with me to destroy the outlaws. He refused, and insulted me, and I promptly knocked him down."

"Served him right," responded General Canton, whose sympathies had been won by Buffalo Bill's bearing and statements.

"Thank you, general."

"This girl, Rose Carter, is free, then?"

"Yes, general; she is now in this fort, whither I brought her, with her father, half an hour since, for we were hotly pursued by the Branded Brotherhood."

"The deuce you were! Well, I will lead my men at once against them," said the commandant eagerly.

"Hold, general! I have already seen Captain la Clyde, and, by this time he has a troop ready. It was through his kindness I found you here.

"The orderly outside your door is a man whose life I have twice saved, and he bade me enter and clear my character, which Major Belden was defaming. Now, general, if you will just give an order to see that Miss Carter and her father are comfortably looked after, I will guide you in pursuit of Ricardo and his men."

"Miss Carter and her father shall be well cared for, Mr. Cody, and I will at once follow you. Major Belden, you have, for some reason, I am certain, misrepresented this man's character to me, sir, for I am confident he speaks the truth. Be more careful in future, and until my return hold command of the fort. Come, Cody!"

determined to push on at once alone and reconnoiter; so, telling the general he would return if he discovered the exact whereabouts of the enemy, he rode away, and soon disappeared behind a roll in the prairie.

For a few miles the scout continued on, Midnight keeping up a sweeping and untiring gallop; then he suddenly drew rein, for the distant crack of a rifle broke on his ear. Cautiously advancing, Buffalo Bill soon reached a roll of the prairie higher than the ordinary. Knowing that he could obtain an extensive view from its summit, he dismounted, and, leaving Midnight to await him, he advanced until he could see for miles before him.

Then, quite to his surprise, he beheld a small timber island, and around it, just out of rifle range, fully two hundred Indians.

Taking a small field glass from his pocket, he soon discovered that the timber hid a number of horsemen, who had taken refuge from their Indian foes.

"Aha!" he exclaimed, as he turned his glass upon the Indian besieging party. "Aha! Ricardo; you are in a trap, and Red Dick holds the winning hand. Well, so much the better for the troops. Ah! Ricardo, your days are numbered now."

After a long examination of the motte and the surrounding band, the scout returned to his horse, mounted and rode rapidly back, arriving at the cavalry encampment just as Captain Cassidy and Lieutenant Ainslie arrived with about sixty more men.

Reporting his discovery to the general, Buffalo Bill continued:

"And now, sir, I think as soon as the horses are a little rested we had better push on. You have a hun-

dred fighting men now, and we can defeat the two forces combined."

"You do not think the two men, now enemies, will join against us, do you, Cody?"

"I do, general; the necks of both men are in the hangman's noose, and, knowing that they cannot singly meet your force, they will join their thieving bands and make common war upon us."

"Well, we'll give them a supper of cold lead and steel by dark. Come, gentlemen, we must be on the move."

On swept the cavalcade over the prairie, and when the sun was low in the horizon, they came up to the higher roll of the prairie, where a short halt was ordered.

"They are at it hot and fast," said the scout, as the sound of rapid firing reached their ears.

"Now, general, let me suggest that you divide the troops into three parties, you leading the center with about forty men, Captain la Clyde taking the right with about twenty-five men, Captain Cassidy the left with a like number, and at about a mile distant from Captain la Clyde.

"With your permission, I will then take the remaining half dozen troopers and the three hunters, and, making a circuit of four miles, will come out upon the prairie at a point far to your right, and at once advance toward the motte. When the Indians catch sight of me they will at once send out a large force to fight me, and then you had better charge with your three squadrons."

"That is splendidly planned, Cody; you should have entered the army!" cried the general.

He at once gave the necessary orders, and in ten minutes more, with the roll of the prairie still hiding them, the four parties were taking up their respective positions.

From their points of view the officers saw Buffalo Bill emerge upon the prairie. At once his presence created an excitement in the Indian besieging ranks.

Then there broke forth across the prairie the wild and thrilling war cry of the scout, and over the roll of land, from three different points, bounded the cavalry squadrons, their cheers striking terror to the dusky besiegers of the motte.

Instantly there was a cessation of hostilities between the Indians and the Branded Brotherhood.

Out from the motte bounded the iron-gray of the outlaw chief, his master upon his back. Waving a white handkerchief, the outlaw approached a central point, whence another horseman emerged to meet him.

The two met upon the plain. The parley between them was excited and brief. Then Ricardo returned to his motte, while Red Dick went back to his Indians, who at once broke in wild confusion and made for the motte.

"It is as I thought; they have joined forces," cried the scout.

Raising his voice to its highest pitch, he sent it across the prairie in one of his terrible war cries.

"Ride, men ride! Press them into their den! Press them home and the game is ours!"

A cheer answered the scout's words, and driving their spurs into their horses, the troopers bounded on in hot pursuit, closing up upon their foes in deadly earnest.

At length the band of Indians, under Red Dick, reached the motte, and, rallying around the nearest trees, turned to fire upon the advancing cavalry, the stern voice of Ricardo giving forth his orders in a cool and decided manner.

But the scout gave them no time to form a solid line, for, ahead of the other three squadrons, he dashed on with his little band right into the timber, and instantly a hot firing was heard.

Almost immediately after, the squadron of Percy la Clyde struck the timber, then followed the general and Captain Cassidy, with their troopers.

Attacked thus from four points, and without time to rally, the Indians broke and fled, in spite of the cries of Red Dick and Ricardo, who were determined to sell their lives dearly.

Through the motte like a fiery torrent swept the scout and his band, crushing down many an Indian brave and driving a mass of Indians pell-mell before their impetuous advance.

Then Buffalo Bill rode straight for the spot where Ricardo coolly sat his horse, Red Dick, Long Dave, and Red Roark upon either hand, and his disciplined outlaws around him, determined to do or die.

"Here, accursed hound, you are my game," yelled the scout, firing his revolvers right and left, and dropping a foe at every shot, as he urged his horse on toward Ricardo.

But, though the Indians had broken upon every hand, and were flying madly through the timber, shot and cut ruthlessly down by the charging troopers, the band of the Branded Brotherhood still stood as firm as a rock, and met the attack with iron nerve.

Suddenly a tall trooper fell from his horse by the side of Buffalo Bill. Instantly his saber was seized by the scout, who, with a series of wild war cries, still pressed on toward Ricardo.

But before he reached the chief, Red Dick spurred forward to meet him, crying in his hoarse tones:

"Now, you cursed scout, your time has come."

"You are mistaken, Red Dick!" the scout shouted, and with one mighty sweep of his saber he cut down the burly ruffian.

Quickly supporting the band of the scout came Percy la Clyde and his troopers, and the moment after up dashed General Canton and half a dozen men, he having dispatched the remainder of his squadron, under Lieutenant Ainslie and Captain Cassidy and his dragoons, in pursuit of the flying Indians.

The reënforcements thus received by Buffalo Bill caused the Branded Brotherhood to be outnumbered, and slowly they began to give ground.

Buffalo Bill bounded forward once more, and, his saber having been broken by coming in contact with the rifle of Long Dave, he drew his keen knife and rode on until he faced Ricardo.

"Now, Captain Carter, it is your life or mine!"

"In Satan's name, who are you that knows me?" cried the outlaw chief, his face turning ghastly pale, as he reined back his iron-gray mare upon her haunches.

"I've known you for some time," the scout shouted. "You are the fiend I crossed knives with once on the Rio Grande."

A terrible fear seemed to fall on Ricardo, his knife fell from his nerveless hand, and his horse would have

bounded away had not Buffalo Bill seized the bridle and hurled the animal back.

Then Ricardo's revolver flashed its fire. He saw he had missed the scout, and the weapon went up for another shot.

But Buffalo Bill, leaning over, gripped him by the throat and knocked the weapon aside.

"Here, La Clyde, this fellow shall not cheat the gallows," he cried, and two troopers instantly seized the ruffian, while the remainder of the outlaws broke in wild confusion and darted away to seek safety in flight.

Even as Buffalo Bill did this a bullet fired by one of the men struck the outlaw, and he fell as if dying.

The outlaws were fleeing, avenging foes were upon their track, but before darkness settled upon the scene many had fallen beneath the pistols and sabers of the troopers.

At length night came on, and the sounds of suffering were heard in the motte, for around a large camp fire the troopers had placed the wounded.

At another fire near by stood General Canton and his officers, discussing the battle, and wondering at the absence of Buffalo Bill, who, when last seen, was in hot pursuit of the flying renegades.

The night crept on, midnight rolled around, and yet the scout had not returned, and anxious fears filled the hearts of all for his safety.

CHAPTER LV.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

In that motte, there on the wild plain, few cared to seek sleep, with the dead and wounded everywhere around them. General Canton and his officers still sat around the camp fire, though midnight had come and gone.

Presently the sound of rapidly advancing hoofbeats was heard, the sentinel challenged, and the answer came in the stern, deep voice of the scout.

The next instant he dashed up to the fire, accompanied by the negro, Buttermilk, the servant of Ricardo.

Another man was with him, and this man was none other than Alfred Carter, who had followed on, hoping to be in the fight against the outlaws. Alfred Carter was wild in his rage against Ricardo and the outlaws.

"Thank God! you have come, Cody. We feared danger had befallen you," cried the general.

"No, sir; I took the trail of this negro, and I caught him. Where is the body of Ricardo?"

"Lying where he fell, I suppose."

Walking hastily away into the timber, the scout soon hailed:

"Send me a few men; the chief is not dead."

A few minutes more, and half a dozen troopers approached the fire, bearing between them the wounded form of Ricardo, the chief of the Brotherhood.

"Gently, men, gently; do you not hear his groans,

and he is no man to cry out at trifles. Lay him there," said Buffalo Bill, and around the wounded chieftain gathered General Canton, the scout, Captain la Clyde, the negro Buttermilk, Alfred Carter, and several others.

"Ricardo Carter, for that is your real name, do you know that you are dying?" suddenly asked Alfred Carter, in an earnest tone.

"Yes, my sands of life are ebbing out rapidly; but who are you that calls my name—a name that has been dead to sound for long, long years?" replied the chief, speaking with difficulty.

"I will tell you, and you must say whether I speak true or not."

"I am listening; hasten, for death keeps back at the bidding of no man."

After a moment's silence Alfred Carter began speaking in a low but distinct voice, plainly heard by all.

"Nearly thirty years ago there were two brothers, sons of wealthy parents, living on the Missouri River. One of these brothers, in his eighteenth year, left his home to serve in the army of his country."

Ricardo started up, staring; then, it seemed, for the first time he recognized in this man one whom he had known before.

As he made this discovery he fell back with a cry of terror, but still continued to stare into the face of the man before him.

"You set out to be an honest soldier, Ricardo, but, dismissed from the service, you leagued with robbers, roaming over the Western and Southwestern plains for years, until at length you became the leader of

the Branded Brotherhood. Have I truly told your life, Ricardo?"

"You know all," sadly replied the chief, "and you are my brother! And I would have killed you. How did you discover me?"

"Through some papers you were foolish enough to leave in the place where I was held a prisoner. Yes, I am your own brother, Ricardo; yet you killed my wife and son, let your fiends hold me a prisoner and carried my daughter away a captive. Now you are a prisoner, and you have received your death wound, yet I am sorry for you, for you are still my brother."

The scout, pained by this interview, had walked away from the camp fire, and only the groans of the chief broke the silence, but whether Ricardo groaned most from pain of body or mind none knew, for he never spoke again, and with his head supported in the arms of the negro Buttermilk, who had so faithfully followed his master's evil fortunes, his breath grew shorter and more labored, until, with a curse half uttered upon his lips, Ricardo, the chief of the Branded Brotherhood, was dead.

When the scout left the camp fire he mounted Midnight and rode away across the prairie. Shortly after sunrise he beheld a horseman approaching, and upon a nearer view discovered him to be none other than Howard Lawrence.

When Buffalo Bill recognized the horseman he put Midnight into a rapid gallop and started toward him.

Whether it was a guilty conscience of intending wrong to the scout, or fear, we cannot tell, but Howard Lawrence instantly turned to fly.

The scout at once urged his horse forward in pursuit.

Across the rolling prairie Howard Lawrence urged his steed, and, heading for a piece of timber, soon disappeared in its leafy recesses.

"Ha, he has taken cover and intends to fight me! So be it," said the scout.

The next instant a look of disappointment was upon his face, for he saw the fugitive dart out on the other side of the motte and continue on across the prairie.

The next moment Midnight had reached the timber and was circling around it, when, suddenly, a shrill call was heard, and, glancing into the thicket, Buffalo Bill beheld the Red Bud of the Forest just preparing to mount her white mare, which stood near.

Instantly he wheeled alongside of the Indian girl, and in surprise asked:

"What does the Red Bud here alone?"

"She came to seek the great white scout. Yonder goes the enemy of the noble scout, the man who taught the Rose of the Pawnees to love him—the Man of Many Faces."

"Yes, I am now on his trail, Red Bud, for I would take his life, for did he not try to destroy the Pawnee maiden, and was she not ever kind to me when I lay sick and wounded in her father's wigwam? The scout has a heart and has not forgotten. But why did you seek me?"

"The Red Bud came to warn the great scout that Many Faces was his enemy who would strike him in the back, for Red Bud heard the words of the wicked man and the warrior from the great fort."

"Ha! that must have been Major Belden."

"The great scout speaks straight; the two wicked braves were to kill the great white scout, and the Many Faces was to make one of the paleface maidens his squaw."

"This is news, Red Bud, and I thank you for it. Now I must be off after yonder running hound. Come!"

Away darted Midnight, and close behind followed the steed of Red Bud.

But gradually the trained and swift horse began to draw away from his less fleet companion, and once more, with tremendous strides, he was drawing nearer the magnificent animal ridden by Howard Lawrence.

Thus an hour passed, and Midnight was not a hundred feet behind the fugitive, while two miles distant upon the prairie came Red Bud, urging her white mare forward at the top of her speed.

With his repeating rifle Buffalo Bill could have brought down both horse and rider, but he cared not to do either, as that would have ended the affair too soon.

A few more tremendous bounds, and Howard Lawrence saw his pursuer almost upon him. Drawing his pistol, he opened a rapid but harmless fire.

Instantly Buffalo Bill seized his lasso, which hung at his saddle bow, and which he could throw with wondrous skill. It made a sweep around his head. With a cry of horror, Howard Lawrence saw it coming and endeavored to dodge the fatal noose.

Too late! Like a lightning flash it settled around him, and he was jerked violently from his saddle.

Instantly Buffalo Bill dismounted, and, loosening the lariat from around his enemy's waist, bade him arise.

"What means this, sir?" sternly asked Howard Lawrence as he slowly arose to his feet.

"It means, sir, that I have pursued you, and now have captured you."

"And why, may I ask?"

"Because of the wrong you have done that poor Indian girl. Once, when I was sick in her father's village, she nursed me back to health, and for that, though she is an Indian, I regard her almost as if she were my own sister. You have ruined her life, you base scoundrel and villain!"

"Is that all?" the young man asked, with a sneer.

"I know, also, that you are the son of the bandit chief, Ricardo, who is now dead."

A flush stole over the pale face of Howard Lawrence, and he was silent.

"Whether you know that Ricardo, the chief of the Branded Brotherhood, was your father," said the scout, "or whether you are ignorant of it, I am not assured, but such is the case, and you are a fit son for such a father, for under numerous disguises you have led a most villainous life.

"You have brought ruin and death upon more than one household, and were plotting the ruin of Rose Carter, and also Sibyl Conrad, after having won the affection of yonder beautiful Indian girl, only in the end to tire of her, after she had given up all for you, and cruelly desert her to her fate."

The scout turned and pointed toward Red Bud, who at that moment rode up, and in silence gazed upon the two.

"You have, then, become the champion of all the

redskin and paleface girls on the border?" sneeringly replied Howard Lawrence.

Casting aside the noose, young Lawrence flashed out a knife and attacked the scout with great fury. But Buffalo Bill met him with steel, and the blades flashed in the sunlight like a circle of fire.

Both were men of splendid physique, and were noted for their strength, agility, and courage, and therefore the duel between them was one of deadly ferocity.

For many long moments in breathless suspense Red Bud of the Forest, the poor, trusting, loving, but deserted squaw, watched the terrible encounter.

Then her eyes gleamed with joy as she saw Buffalo Bill spring within the guard of his enemy and once, twice, thrice drive his gleaming blade into his bosom.

With a half-uttered cry, Howard Lawrence sank to the ground, a dead man.

"Well, Red Bud, he will do no more harm. But I hated to do it. It was his life or mine."

"Many Faces gone to happy hunting grounds. Stranger scout is great brave, big chief."

The scout looked at her kindly.

"Now let Red Bud of the Forest return and sing in her native wigwam, where her people dwell around her; the stranger scout will always think kindly of the Pawnee maiden."

"The great scout has spoken," she answered, "and Red Bud will return to the village of her people."

Sadly the lonely Indian maiden turned away, and before the scout could prevent bounded upon her horse, and the next moment was flying across the prairie.

"It is better thus. Now I must bury this body, for

even my enemy I cannot leave for the wolf to tear in pieces."

Thus saying, with his knife the scout dug a grave in the soft soil, and, taking the body, placed it within the narrow resting place, which was soon filled up with earth.

Mounting his horse and leading the steed of his late enemy, Buffalo Bill then set off across the prairie, just as the sun was sinking from sight beyond the distant horizon.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE RETURN TO RIVERSIDE.

From the scene of his prairie duel Buffalo Bill headed in the direction of the fort. At nightfall he halted for rest, for both steed and rider sadly needed it. After looking to the comfort of the horse and rolling himself in his blanket, the scout was soon lost in slumber.

With the first glimmer of the day he was astir, and after a few hours' ride came in sight of the fort, and was shortly after welcomed by General Canton and Percy la Clyde, who had arrived the night before, bringing with them the prisoners taken and the wounded of both sides.

The rage of Major Belden was great indeed when he knew of the triumph of his enemy, and he at once offered his resignation, which the general received with satisfaction, for he was now convinced that the major had been acting an underhand part toward both himself and the scout.

The snows of winter fell upon the Western prairies, and covered the humble roofs of the Riverside settlement, which had wonderfully improved, and everywhere around presented an air of homelike comfort and prosperity.

In the months that had glided by since Major Conrad and his comrades had found new homes on the border many changes had come, and the onward march of civilization was heard around them, for new friends were daily welcomed in their midst and improvement was striding bravely forward.

La Clyde, the gallant young officer, as the reader will be glad to know, married the girl of his heart, Sibyl Conrad.

Rose Carter is now the wife of a sturdy settler, and Ruth Whitfield is also the mistress of a pleasant home in Riverside.

Riverside is now a thriving little Western City, and there Buffalo Bill, the great scout, is always sure of a warm welcome.

THE END.

No. 172 of the BUFFALO BILL BORDER STORIES, entitled, "Buffalo Bill's Blockhouse Siege," by Colonel Prentiss Ingraham, tells of a mysterious company of red riders which the intrepid scout conquers and forces forever from the plains.

La Cyste, the greatest young of the season
 he goes to know, married the girl in his
 Contad.

Rock Carter is now the hero of a story
 Rock Whitfield is also the hero of a story
 in the same.

Riverside is now a charming life. When first
 the first fair, but the first story is a very
 a very, we believe.

THE END

No. 172 of the Buffalo Bills. The story
 entitled "Buffalo Bills" blockhouse. The story
 Prentiss. In general, tells of a mysterious company
 red-headed, which the intrepid scout reported
 forty-four from the plains.

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