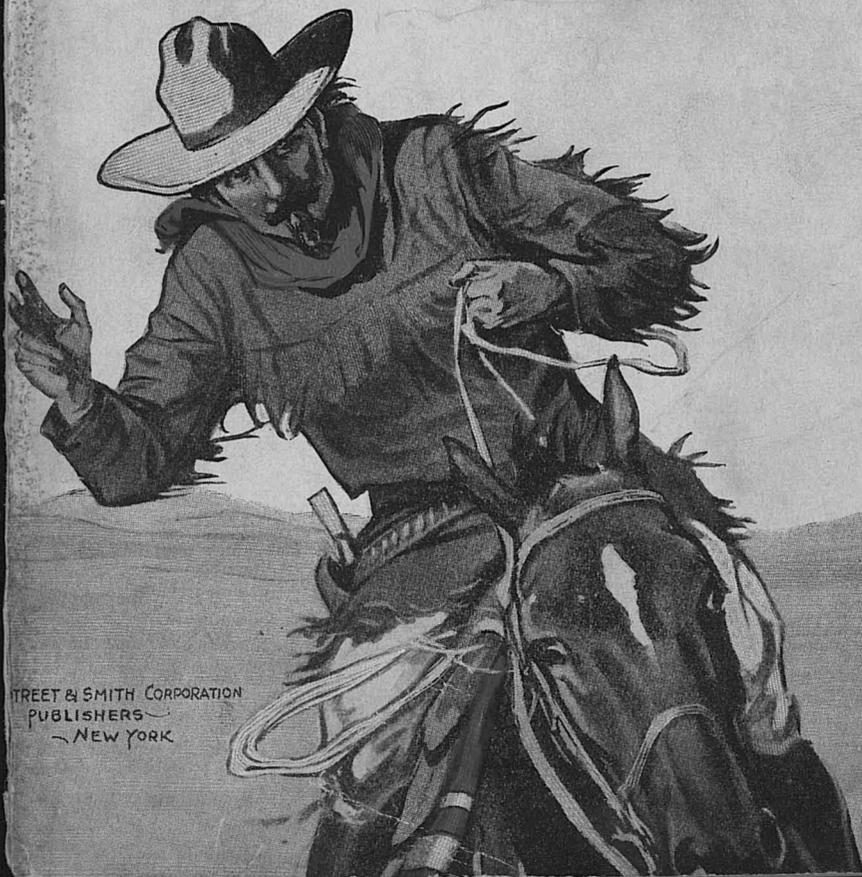


BUFFALO BILL BORDER STORIES No.37

Buffalo Bill's Outlaw Hunt

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM



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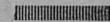
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Buffalo Bill's Outlaw Hunt;

OR,

The Terrors of Taos Baffled

BY

Colonel Prentiss Ingraham

Author of the celebrated "Buffalo Bill" stories published in the
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STREET & SMITH CORPORATION

PUBLISHERS

79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

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

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

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

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

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

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

In 1868 and for four years thereafter Colonel Cody

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Buffalo Bill's Outlaw Hunt

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including the Scandinavian.

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER I.

AN UNCONVENTIONAL CALL.

"Waugh! I reckon this hyar Seenyore Lopez is then boss hold-up gent of New Mexico!" said old Nomad, Buffalo Bill's trapper chum, as he drew the flame of a match across the tobacco he had thumbed into the bowl of his old briar.

"He is called the Wild Ox."

"Ther Wild Ox is shore preparin' ter hev his horns trimmed."

"And we are expected to do the trimming."

"A try at et would suit me, anyhow. I been plum languishin' fer a bit o' excitement. Seems like time never goes so slow anywhar as in this ole town of Santy Fé, when et's quiet. Ther ain't nuthin' ter see but sand and sunshine and yaller-bellied Mexicans, wi' now an' then a white face as conspic'us by its lonesomeness as ther one leetle oyster in thet last oyster stew we had."

"It's too bad, from your standpoint; nothing to breathe but air, nothing to eat but food!"

Buffalo Bill laughed at the long face drawn by the old trapper. Then he, too, scratched a match and smoked up.

They were in a room of the remodeled Alcatraz, an

ancient hostelry that had been so made over it scarce knew itself. The walls were adobe, and it was built around a patio, or court, after the fashion of New Mexican dwellings of the time.

Moreover, the Alcatraz had a history. Here Kit Carson had been wined and dined by the dignitaries of the old city, after his famous Across-the-Continent ride made for Fremont, away back in the "Roaring 'Forties"; later he had come to it, wounded, and had been nursed back to health, after leading a bloody foray against a warlike band of Chiricuhua Apaches under Tar-bottle, the black-faced murderer of the Upper Rio Grande. Here, also, had come old Bill Williams, who "went under" on Bill Williams Peak, in Arizona, only after he had piled round him a heap of the desperate warriors who thirsted for his blood. There were many more, as famous, whose feet had once echoed in the rooms of the Alcatraz, but who had long since gone upon the Long Trail.

Now the hotel had taken on airs, with as much damage to its appearance as when an ancient dame rigs herself out in the flowers and furbelows of gay and giggling girlhood. The innovations did not become it.

In the room occupied by Buffalo Bill and his trapper pard some of these innovations showed; the 'doby wall had been cut into at one side to admit a bay window, on the other side a window had been lengthened and enlarged; while, as if this did not admit light enough, there had been a skylight set in overhead, taking the place of the heavy wooden trapdoor which had given access to the flat roof.

"I ain't sayin' thet quietness an' peace ain't healthy ~~fer most men,~~" said Nomad, tipping his chair against

the wall for ease and comfort as he smoked. "Ef a man chooses ther quiet spots o' life, an' keeps outer ther way when bullets an' bowie knives git busy, he's li'ble ter live so long, down in this healthy climate, thet he'll be ashamed o' hisself fer hangin' on so an' cuttin' younger men out of a job. But as fer me, I never has been pinin' fer a extry long life, ef't cain't hold now and then a leetle suthin' int'restin' in et. Them's my senterments."

"About this Señor Lopez, the Wild Ox?"

"Ther thick bunch o' ignorance I harbors on thet subjec, Cody, is plum scan'lous. You'll hev ter do thet tellin'."

"Ever since they have been bringing gold dust from the tributaries of the San Juan, the Wild Ox has been troublesome."

"An' thet's how long?"

"Now more than a year. No one knows how many thousand dollars' value of the precious metal he has corralled; but he has held up and robbed the San Juan stages a number of times, has robbed foot travelers, and horseback travelers, throwing in a murder now and then for full measure. During the last three or four months he has grown ambitious; so has extended the area of his activities to other trails centring in Santa Fé. Last week he killed two miners over near the Raton Pass, and robbed their cabin. It's said he did this because they had discovered his identity and had threatened to tell on him."

"Yit no one knows who he is? Is thet it? Et's a pity, ef so, thet ther two miners didn't do a bit o' effective tongue waggin' whilst they could."

"It's been hinted that he is a man well known in Santa Fé and at the trading post at Taos. Some say he is a

merchant; others that he is a notorious gambler; still others that he is a woman in disguise."

"Et's a plum guessin' contest."

"That is about it."

"Yit you said his name was Seenyore Lopez, an' thet he is called the Wild Ox!"

"There's a dead-and-under-the-ground Lopez, who was a famous New Mexico highwayman, an' they call this fellow Lopez as a sort of remembrancer. He is never seen except when masked; sometimes, in addition to his face mask, he sports a pair of ox horns, which he probably captured from some Indian medicine man; which explains the title of the Wild Ox."

"*Hooked ther horns! Waugh!*"

Nomad cackled quietly over his little pun; then smoked again.

"But ef nobody cain't find out whar he harbors, et's goin' ter be as bad as a game of blindman's buff, ter look fer him. Might's well spend yer time twiddlin' yer thumbs er playin' penochle.

The scout sat without replying, staring at the bay window; though beyond it was the darkness of night and the poorly lighted street.

"Hyerd suthin', Buffler?"

Buffalo Bill rose softly.

"Yes, I heard something."

Then he looked upward, toward the skylight, dropping a hand to his hip holster.

As he did so there was a crash, mingled with a sound of breaking glass, and a dark object came swishing down through the crushed skylight.

Nomad's roar broke through the room heavily.

The scout tried to jump back, as the falling object was

coming down on him. He but half escaped. It struck his shoulder, almost knocking him down; then it rolled to the floor.

The next moment the scout and the trapper saw that the object was a woman, who seemed a mere girl in years, and, in spite of her flushed face and wild confusion, rather handsome. She was a Mexican, or of Spanish blood, as her dark eyes and brunette skin proclaimed.

As she tried to rise the scout put out his hand and helped her to her feet.

For an instant she stood swaying in the centre of the room; her face turning from red to white, then back to a deep red again. Suddenly tears glistened in her eyes, and she put up a tiny brown hand to dash them away. Having done that, she staggered into a chair, dropping heavily, as if stunned by what had befallen her.

Nomad was muttering a string of repressed whoops.

Buffalo Bill stood before her, a faint smile somewhere in his eyes, though his face looked grave enough.

"I beg your pardon!" he said. "I hope you are not hurt."

Then the girl laughed, a musical ripple.

She was dressed in Mexican garments. But the *mantellina* which had been about her shoulders and head had dropped away, and the fall had torn her midnight hair from its fastenings, so that it streamed in all its beauty down on her back.

"It is entirely unnecessary," she said, "that the señor should beg my pardon, as I am the offender. It is an untimely intrusion, which I hope he will overlook, as it was so unintentional. I can assure him I have no desire to be here."

Her voice was as musical as her laugh; her Spanish excellent.

Nomad edged toward the open door, putting himself so that he could command it and the windows; his eyes, taking in the girl, roved also round the room, with a glance now and then at the broken skylight. He looked, also at the glass which had tinkled to the floor, accompanying the fall of the girl and now lay about her, with some specks of it shining like jewels in her hair and clothing.

Buffalo Bill quietly helped himself to a chair, while studying the girl's face.

"You were on the roof?" he said.

"It is a question, Señor American, which scarcely needs an answer."

"And spying on us!"

"No."

"What, then?"

"Listening."

"Is it not the same?"

"Very different, señor."

"Please explain the difference."

"I wished to have a look at the Señor American before I called on him."

"Ah!"

"So you see there is a difference. His windows were blinded. Because of that I could not see him from the street; hence I climbed to the skylight."

"You intended to call on me?"

"If I liked the señor's looks, not otherwise. By which I mean that if my judgment told me that the señor is to be trusted!"

He smiled at that.

"What does your judgment tell you?"

"The American señor can be trusted."

"You have made your call, señorita, in a most unconventional and extraordinary manner, and perhaps you will be willing to say what you desired of me?"

In spite of her light manner and her musical laugh, the girl was still disconcerted, flushing and paling. Still hesitating, she glanced now at Nomad.

"My old friend and pard, Nick Nomad," said the scout, seeing the glance.

"He is to be trusted?"

"Er, waugh!" blurted the suspicious old trapper. "Mebbyso I ain't," he said in English, for the benefit of Cody. "When a han'some female peeks down on yer through er skylight, et's ter be looked on as plum disturbin', whether she make a accidental high dive into yer room er not. What I says is, 'Ware, Buffler!'"

The girl looked at him with interest.

"What does he say? I can see that he does not like me."

"You do not understand English?" the scout asked.

"Only when it is spoken very slowly, and is book English. I think the white-haired señor does not speak book English."

The scout smiled; the old trapper threw back his head and laughed. If he could not speak book English, he could understand Spanish. The girl flushed again, and bit her lips.

"I believe you have not yet related the mission which you had in mind," Buffalo Bill reminded her.

"I am Muriel," she said, hesitating, "daughter of Señor Mendoza, the governor. You have been in the palace, and have doubtless seen the relics. One is a circlet of

gold, called the Crown of Montezuma; in its centre the great ruby, called Montezuma's Eye."

"I have seen them," the scout confessed. "Aside from its association, the ruby is of immense value."

"It is gone," she said.

She bent toward the scout, her hands clasped, trembling, in her lap; her face pale again.

"That is what made me wish to see you. You are Señor Cody, the American scout, and you are here in Santa Fé to follow your calling. To-morrow the loss of the great ruby will be discovered, when my father shows the relics to the bishop, as that is the day appointed for the inspection."

"You really startle me," Buffalo Bill confessed. "The governor does not yet know that the ruby is missing?"

"He will know it to-morrow. As he is responsible for the safe-keeping of such things, it will put him to shame if the thief is not found and punished. He will then call upon you to find the thief, or take part in the search. That you will do, señor?"

"This is extraordinary," he said. "Kindly tell me how you know that the ruby is missing, when your father does not."

"It is the point I am hastening to señor. I took it."

"You? Do you mean that you stole it?"

"In the expectation of returning it, señor."

"Where is it?"

"In New York."

"Then you sold it?"

"I but obtained money on it, and it is held in New York until I can redeem it, which I mean to do soon. Two weeks hence I shall come of age, and into the inheritance which is to come to me from my grandmother;

then I shall have the money with which to redeem the ruby."

The scout sat looking at her in amazement; Nomad was rocking to and fro, muttering to himself, his pipe having gone out in his hand.

"Er, waugh!" he boomed, when the conversation seemed to have stopped.

"My plan is," the girl went on, "to return the ruby some night when no one can know, and let it be found in the crown just as before. There will be a stir, and a talk of mystery, but the wrong I have committed will then be righted, and none will be the loser save myself."

The scout twisted uneasily in his chair.

"Why do you come to me with this?" he asked.

"I thought I had told you. You will be called to help in the hunt for the thief. You are so great in that line that I feared you would find me out, and expose me, before the time came in which I could restore the ruby. But you will not do so, now that I have confessed this, and beg you to shield me for that brief time. Also, it will shield my father. If the truth were revealed and the exposure of his daughter made, he would die of shame and grief, for he is an honorable man."

"I think you are right there," said the scout slowly.

"So I confide to you my secret; to safeguard myself and my father."

"What if some one else makes the discovery you wish to avoid?"

"Poof!" She blew her cheeks out scornfully. "As for these little coyotes of Mexicans here in Santa Fé, I fear them not; they could not find a cat under a wall. The American señor is the only one I fear."

"You do me great honor!"

"I hope the señor does not sneer at me. I have trusted him. Will he protect me?"

The scout sat without answering.

"If he does not, he will bring about the destruction of my father, who is a man he holds in respect."

"I respect Señor Mendoza very highly."

"Then, for my father's sake, I know that the señor will do what I ask. If my father but guessed this, it would crush him. He could not live for the shame of it."

"You ought to have thought of that before you took the ruby."

"Youth does not think clearly, señor, until afterward. I see now what I should have done, but it is too late."

"It is strange that you needed so large a sum of money, when Señor Mendoza is a wealthy man."

"It was for a matter I could not go to him about; and I shall not speak of it now, as it brings in names I do not wish to mention. I take all the blame on myself for what has happened, and only ask a little time in which to right the wrong, so that it can be done without hurting any one. Will the American grant me this? I can see that his heart is kind."

"Waugh! Too kind!" Nomad rumbled.

"Perhaps I shall not be called into the matter at all," the scout urged.

"If you are not, all you need do is to keep your mouth closed on this thing. I have placed myself in your hands, and"—she glanced at Nomad—"in the hands of your friend."

She arose from the chair.

"That is all," she said. "Whether you promise or not, I know that you will not injure my father. To-night I leave by the stage for Raton, and then east to New York,

where I shall redeem the ruby. The legacy from my grandmother will await me in New York, and there I shall pay what I owe. As soon as I can make the long journey and return I will be back here with the ruby. My father will know nothing; I shall restore it to the crown of Montezuma, and all will be well. After that, let men think what they will; the ruby will have been restored."

As she moved near the door near which Nomad had stationed himself, he and the scout saw that she limped, showing that she had hurt herself in her tumble from the skylight.

The scout stepped to her aid.

"Your pardon, señorita," he said, "I ought to have inquired more earnestly if you were hurt by your fall."

"It is nothing," she urged; "just a twinge of pain when I put my foot down; it will pass readily, I know."

After a look at the scout, Nomad drew open the door.

The girl glanced out into the street, hesitating. It was not well lighted; yet she slipped the *mantellina* up round her head, using it as a screen as she bowed her head and stepped out.

"Adios, señors!" she called softly.

Then she flitted away.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE PALACE.

"Er, waugh!" Nomad whooped when she had gone.

He looked at the street into which she had flown, then at the clutter of broken glass and splinters, the wreck of the skylight on the floor.

Buffalo Bill had caught up a pistol, slipping it into his pocket.

"Whar away?"

"I'm going to follow her."

"Whoop! Count me in. When a seenyorita like thet plays sech a game I pass up. What d'ye make of et, pard?"

"I want to see."

The scout hurried to the street, followed by Nomad. The door was locked behind them, and they turned in the direction of the plaza. Beyond it, along its eastern boundary, lay the governor's palace. The girl hastened off in that direction.

Through the plaza they passed, looking sharply at the people seen here and there on the benches. The parklike little square is one of the chief loitering places of Santa Fé; there the military band plays each Saturday afternoon, and there the crowds gather on every occasion of excitement. In the time of this story it was even more a gathering place of interest.

Not many people were in the plaza on the particular evening in which Buffalo Bill and old Nomad passed through it.

At the Palace.

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A number of carriages were drawn up before the palace of the governor's house—in the street facing the plaza. Men and women were hurrying about.

Seeing a long-haired Mexican who looked communicative, Buffalo Bill addressed him, asking what the carriages were for.

"The governor's daughter, Señorita Muriel, departs to-night for the East," was the civil answer. "The señor did not know of it?"

"I had heard it said. You have seen her?"

"She is not to be seen until she comes down to get into her carriage. It is the one in front, drawn by four horses."

He pointed it out.

"Why does she make a night journey?"

"Ah! the señor has not heard? Her grandmother lies at the point of death in New York, and she goes thither as fast as may be; so she waits not until morning to make the commencement."

"It is a long journey, to New York."

"Si, señor; a very long journey. Prayers have been said in the church of San Miguel for the señorita's safety, and that her grandmother may live until her arrival in the great city. At Independence, on the Missouri River, she will take the boat; when still farther on her way she will have one of those wonderful wagons of fire to bear her. The señor has heard of them? They eat fire and water, go on an iron trail, and run with the speed of the wind. If my own brother, Sancho, had not himself seen one, I should not have believed the miracle."

"You mean a locomotive and train of cars. Yes, they are wonderful."

The untraveled Mexican wanted to talk about this

"miracle"; while the scout desired information concerning the journey to New York.

"My friend, I presume you have seen the governor's daughter, Muriel?" Buffalo Bill asked.

There was an affirmative answer.

"Would you be kind enough to describe her to me?"

"The señor may perchance see her when she comes down to the carriage, if he will but wait. Yet I can say that she is divinely beautiful, and as good as she is beautiful."

"Of a dark complexion?"

"Her eyes are dark and her hair abundant and like midnight in its blackness."

"Seems to be er good deescription," said Nomad, in English, for the scout's ears.

"Except that the description fits any good-looking Mexican girl," Buffalo Bill objected.

"I reckon yer right. They're all dark as tar water, 'cept when they're rale youngish. I has seen some, though, thet I thought war plum han'some."

"The girl's grandmother is, I suppose, very rich?" the scout asked the man.

"As the mines of Golconda, señor; so it is reported."

"And the girl will get the grandmother's fortune?"

"So I have understood, señor."

Buffalo Bill asked other questions, but got no further information.

He would have asked entrance to the house, and to see the governor, but that he feared if he left his post at that time he might miss seeing Señorita Muriel when she came out to enter her carriage.

So he waited—and was disappointed; for when the girl came out, attended on the right hand and on the left

by duennas and servants, she was so heavily veiled that her face could not be seen. Nor did she lift her veil, but was handed into her carriage, while the servants stood servilely, with hats off.

The scout's disappointment was great.

The driver snapped his whip, and the horses jumped against their collars; the procession moved, gaining speed at once, and swept round the corner; then out of the old city into the Santa Fé trail leading toward the northeast.

A company of horsemen appeared, dropping in behind the carriages as a guard of honor and for protection, as robbers lurked along the trail, and the deeds of the dreaded Señor Lopez, the Wild Ox, were on the lips of every one.

"Waal, she's gone!" said Nomad, breathing heavily, as the grinding wheels swept away.

Buffalo Bill turned to the palace entrance, where servants and others were still gathered, with them the head steward, or major-domo. This functionary, in gold lace and spangles, he addressed.

"Is the governor in?" he asked.

The major-domo disengaged himself from the crowd.

"Si, señor," he replied, "he is in, but engaged."

"Will you take this to him, please; and say that I desire a word with him?"

He gave the man a card.

It was passed to a servant, who in a little while reappeared, with the information, surprising to the major-domo, that the governor would see the American.

Whereupon, with a great increase in the respectfulness of their manners, the major-domo and the others at the door gave way before Buffalo Bill and Nomad, who entered now, and were conducted through a corridor to a

large, but rather close room, where they were given seats, and requested to wait a moment or two until the governor could receive them.

The old palace at Santa Fé was even then a good deal of a curiosity, and has not become less so with the passage of time. Built two hundred years or more ago, by the Spaniards who subdued and occupied the Southwest, it became the home of the Spanish governors, then American, and has never ceased to be the residence of one of those representatives of power. In the hey day and glory of the old Santa Fé trail it was the social and political centre of the Southwest. The walls are of adobe, or mud-dried brick, as are likewise the walls of that oldest of all houses now standing in America, the ancient church of San Miguel, also in Santa Fé. The palace walls are very thick, pierced with deep windows, giving to the place a prison-like aspect even on the brightest day. Buffalo Bill and Nomad had been in it a number of times, and had already met the governor, Pasquale Mendoza.*

Mendoza came into the room with a light step, which indicated that he had no knowledge of the things which had been told the scout and Nomad in their room at the Alcatraz.

*It may be of interest to state here, in addition, that it was in a room of this old Palacio at Santa Fé that Lew Wallace, then American governor of the territory, wrote the concluding half of his celebrated romance of the time of Christ, "Ben Hur." Also, it may not be out of place to say that the Palace contains a good museum of curiosities of the early days of New Mexico, and what is probably the finest collection of the stone gods, or idols, of the ancient Pueblos, to be found anywhere. Also, it has many pictures of saints and paintings of scriptural scenes, saved from the early churches established in the Southwest by the Spaniards.

He gave the scout and Nomad his hand, begged pardon in the effusive Mexican fashion for having detained them, and inquired concerning the character of their call.

Mendoza was a handsome man, of the dark Spanish type, who dressed well, and took delight in keeping his mustachios waxed to shapely ends.

It may be well to say, in this connection, for the benefit of the captious critic, that Mendoza was only acting governor, serving temporarily while the American governor was absent from his post of duty. For after the Southwest, by annexation and purchase, became American soil Santa Fé harbored American governors only, so far as the writer is aware.

Buffalo Bill gave a rather lame excuse, on the spur of the moment, for his intrusion, saying that he had heard Mendoza's daughter was starting for the East.

"Ah! But she has gone—departing only a few minutes ago!" Mendoza told him.

"I learn that her grandmother lies dangerously ill in New York. Accept our condolences, Señor Mendoza."

"It is true," said Mendoza. "My wife's mother lies there at the point of death. My wife is with her. Today we received, by overland post, news that the old lady cannot last long, and that she desired ere she passed hence to see my daughter Muriel. So my daughter set out as soon as we could get the caravan ready. I hurried a rider off this afternoon, that he might precede her and clear the way; get horses ready for the coaches, in the pass, and farther on along the trail. My daughter's journeys in haste."

"The mounted escort accompanies her?"

"Until danger is past."

"I asked, because the Wild Ox haunts the trails and has a bad reputation."

Mendoza frowned at that mention of the Wild Ox.

"What the señor says is true," he admitted.

"Cannot the Wild Ox be muzzled?"

"It has been tried, Señor Cody. And, now that it is mentioned, I was told that the work of muzzling him, as you put it, is one of the things which caused you to come now to Santa Fé. I wish you success in it."

"It will be difficult?"

"Perhaps not, if one could come on him. But where is the Wild Ox? He is seen only when he acts; then he is gone, like the shadow that flies across the valley. One day he is on the Santa Fé trail; the next on the trail to San Juan; the next on that which leads south; then on the north. If the señor can put his finger on the Wild Ox, he may be able to muzzle him. Otherwise, how is it to be done? I have myself tried; by which I mean, I have sent out rurales, and the American governor has sent out soldiers. If Kit Carson were alive, it might be done."

It was as if he challenged the scout's standing as a possible successor to the work and fame of that greatest of the early border heroes of the Far Southwest.

Buffalo Bill continued to ask questions, though they seemed somewhat rumbling and aimless.

At length he took his departure.

"Waal, what was et?" Nomad blurted, when they were alone together in the street.

"The object of my visit?"

"Yes. Yer didn't l'arn nuthin', more'n yer already knowed."

"I wanted to see what Mendoza knew."

"Did yer hive thet information."

"He knows nothing about the loss of the ruby."

"She said as much; thet he didn't know, but would ter-morrer, when ther bishop come ter look over ther treasures."

"You're right. In that she spoke truly—if she spoke truth at all."

"Waugh! What kind of a gnat is bitin' ye?"

"I can't say that any kind is."

"Yer suspects sumpin'."

"I have been troubled by the feeling that the girl we saw may not have been the governor's daughter at all."

"Waugh! Come ag'in."

"Was it like a young lady of her supposed breeding to climb on the roof of our hotel and eavesdrop at that skylight?"

"I sh'd say not. But she explained et."

"We have been in the town now several days, Nomad, and in the palace. It seems to me that she might have found an opportunity to size us up in another way. The whole thing has a most peculiar look."

"Et spells crooked, heh?"

"It don't want to go so far as that."

"Waal, yer seen her take her departyoor in ther stage fer ther East."

"Was it the same woman? Remember that she was veiled when she came out of the palace, and we failed to get a look at her face."

"Et's ther way o' these hyar Mexican seenyoritas. They cloaks themselves up jes' like ther women in a Turkish harem. Et's ther fashionable thing ter do down hyar. Er female would ruther bust her collar bone then ter be outer ther fashion."

The scout laughed. They were passing through the plaza again, to reach the street leading to their hotel.

"Your criticism of the fair sex is measurably just, Nomad. As you say, everything is regular on the surface, and the girl's story was largely confirmed by the governor; in fact, they tallied on all the points I dared to open up. Still, I have that uneasy feeling about it. It still seems to me that a girl of the supposed character and standing of the governor's daughter would never have sneaked out on that skylight for a look into our room. That was so singular that I own it has made me suspect the truth of her story."

"What yer goin' ter do about et?"

"I don't see that we can do anything but wait."

"Got any more figgers about how we're goin' ter move ag'in ther Wild Ox?"

"None."

"Ner I ain't. Et plum looks as ef we're up a stump, in this hyar New Mexican town o' Santy Fé."

"We will have to await developments."

That was their ultimate conclusion, even though they again talked the matter over, at great length, when they had gained the scout's room in the Alcatraz.

CHAPTER III.

SUSPICIONS AROUSED.

"Pard Buffler, thar's an ombray prancin' round out hyar 'et says he wants ter see yer."

This followed Nomad's heavy knock on Buffalo Bill's door.

The morning was well advanced, and the scout had breakfasted with Nomad in the hotel dining room. They expected the early coming of Wild Bill, the well-known pard of Cody, as well as Little Cayuse, an Indian assistant of the great scout, and his Apache trailers. Baron Schnitzenhausen, a comic, but none the less level-headed, friend of Cody and the others, also was expected. Buffalo Bill held at the moment in his hand a recent letter from the man from Laramie (Wild Bill), as he responded to Nomad's bellow.

Looking out, Buffalo Bill saw the man spoken of by the trapper, a smartly dressed young Mexican, who came up saluting and bowing, and held out a note.

"From Governor Mendoza," said the scout, as he snapped it open.

But he did not read it aloud, because of its contents, merely passing it to Nomad.

The brief note ran:

"The presence of Señor Cody is required at once at the palace, where a daring robbery was done during the night just past. I have also sent word to the military commander, Colonel Diamond.

"Signed: PASQUALE MENDOZA."

Nomad smothered a "woof" in his beard.

Buffalo Bill, after turning back into the room for the revolver he had carried the night before, and which he dropped into his pocket, joined Nomad and the messenger; when all took their way toward the palace.

"It is a most mysterious affair," remarked the young man as they went along.

"Ah! then you know about it? I thought, as the note was closely sealed, secrecy was commanded."

"That may be. But it is common knowledge already among the servants. Unless their tongues were cut out, they will talk."

"What say the servants?"

"That much gold and silver plate has been taken, with many jewels, some very rare, among others the great ruby from the crown of Montezuma, called Montezuma's Eye."

"And this happened last night?"

"So it is reported, señor."

When they reached the palace and met Mendoza they found him in a disturbed and furious state.

"I am ruined!" he groaned.

He repeated that much valuable plate, together with jewels, and the inestimable Montezuma's Eye, were gone, with not a trace of what had become of them.

"They were guarded closely?" the scout asked.

"They were tightly locked in the treasure room. I carried the key; there is none like it, and the lock is of such a complicated pattern, fashioned on some model of the old Moors, that no key but the original has ever been made that would fit it. But, señors, even the key is gone!"

"When did this happen?" the scout asked.

"Last night."

"What makes you sure of that?"

"It is explained easily. The bishop was to be here to-day to look at the treasure and the relics. To be prepared for him, I sought my key to the treasure room, that I might go in and be sure everything was in order. I could not find the key. For an hour I searched for it in every likely place in the palace, but it was gone. In my anxiety, I sent for José Rodriguez, the most skillful smith in the Southwest. He could not unlock the door for me; finally, it had to be lifted off its hinges, a work that required the strength of more than a dozen men. When I went in I found the things gone."

He led the scout and Nomad to the door of the treasure room, which, though it had been restored to its hinges, was not locked. Three men, heavily armed, stationed at the door now, stood aside to give them entrance.

Nomad and Buffalo Bill looked the treasure room over carefully and curiously, recalling the words of the young woman who had claimed to be Mendoza's daughter.

The scout's first question apparently surprised Mendoza:

"No one of your household had access to that key?"

"No one outside the members of my family."

"When I have explained, you will pardon me for saying that it was unwise to give the secret even to them; by which I mean that if anything befell, suspicion might most unjustly be turned against them."

Mendoza's dark face flushed a deep and angry red.

"The señor does not himself wish to suggest anything of the kind?"

"No. I suppose you have no idea how the thief got possession of the key?"

"He must have stolen it off my person, when I lay asleep; for I carry it always so, with a chain of gold round my neck, the key hidden under my clothing. Yesterday at the noon hour I slept heavily. It is always my custom to take a siesta in the room over there, which from here the señors can see; it has a couch in it, and looks out on the balcony."

The scout thought it well to inspect the room indicated, and the balcony.

In doing so he saw where one might enter by the window, and get the key from its chain of gold, if the governor slept heavily. And he said as much.

"I think it was done that way," Mendoza admitted. "How else it could have been taken I cannot fancy."

They went back into the treasure room, where the scout and Nomad looked at the circlet of gold which was reputed to have been one of the crowns of the great Montezuma, probably a fabulous claim. It was a light band of red gold, and had been set with jewels, all of which were gone, together with the central ruby called Montezuma's Eye.

Mendoza groaned as he looked at it and regarded the havoc wrought in the treasure room.

The scout and Nomad inspected everything carefully.

At one corner of the room the scout detected what seemed a scratching in some dust collected there; when he looked closely it proved to be the outline of a small shoe, of the Mexican pattern.

He quietly called the trapper's attention to it.

"The Seenyorita Muriel?" Nomad grunted. "I reckon thet she had a hand in this thing."

"What I want you to notice is that the track was made recently—I think last night. You will remember she claimed she had taken the ruby some time ago."

"Waugh! Prob'ly she thought, in'smuch as she hed turned one good trick she'd try another, an' so she come back and tuck ther rest o' ther treasure before she set out las' night. Et looks plum dollars ter doughnuts thet ther treasure, big Eye, and all, air right now in ther coach which ther young lady is swingin' along in. Anyway, I'd like ter take a peek inter thet coach wi' thet idea in view."

The scout and Nomad were about to depart from the palace, when word came to them from the military commander of the district, who desired to see the scout, and at once.

"More about this hyar case," said Nomad.

The trapper was right. Colonel Diamond, having been notified of the robbery, wished to put Buffalo Bill on the case immediately.

"Of course," he explained, "this can't be called your work, strictly speaking; you were called down here to put an end, if possible, to the hold-up work of Lopez, the Wild Ox; because in robbing the stages, he has taken money out of the government mail bags. But I thought that in running down this robbery at the palace you might come upon something concerning the Wild Ox; these outlaws are nearly always linked together."

Colonel Diamond was a military-looking man, well set-up, and natty-appearing in his trim clothing. He had received the scout and Nomad in his room at headquarters, at the Santa Fé army post, where the general government kept a strong detachment of troopers, to protect

the mails and the settlers against Indian raids and general outlawry.

"I have sent the troopers out along the stage lines at various times, always without success," he reported to the scout. "The troopers are all right in their place—that is, when fighting is to be done; but what we need is clever work somewhat along the detective order. We've got to find out first who the Wild Ox is, and where he holes up, or is most likely to be discovered. Until that is done, we are simply like a man hitting smashing blows into the dark; we don't see what we are striking at, and we don't hit anything."

Buffalo Bill suggested that it might be a wise move to send troopers in the stages, armed, but dressed like ordinary passengers.

"If such men were in a stage held up by the Wild Ox they could probably get him," he urged.

"It has been tried," said Diamond. "It ought to work, but it won't. He strikes the stages that have no guards, never those that have. The only thing to do would be to maintain guards on every stage running over these trails, and that's what I have about concluded I must do to stop the hold-ups. But I'm anxious for you to have a try at it first. If you fail, then I'll put guards in every stage. That may not get the Wild Ox, but it will make him let the stages alone."

"What you say shows that he has informants right here in Santa Fé," Buffalo Bill observed.

"Or is in Santa Fé himself," said Diamond.

"You have no suggestion as to how I'm to go to work to get track of the burglar who raided the treasure room at the palace?"

"None. I am more at sea than ever. You will have

to work it out yourself. But you understand that you are to call on me for aid, if you need it. I stand ready to supply troopers, or do anything I can."

Buffalo Bill thanked Colonel Diamond for his offer; then took his departure, with old Nomad trailing behind.

On their return they stopped again at the palace, merely to notify the governor that they had instructions from the military commander to take up the case of the stolen treasure.

Mendoza was still sputtering about, in a state of distraction and excitement.

"You have learned nothing?" he asked.

"Not a thing," the scout replied. "But we haven't really begun the work yet."

"The trouble is," said Nomad, "we don't know jes' whar ter begin. We has some quare suspicions, yit we dar'n't tell 'em."

"How is that?" asked Mendoza.

The scout gave Nomad a warning glance.

"Thar's nuthin' ter be said right now," Nomad answered.

"But what are your suspicions? You have found a clue?"

"We have really found nothing," Buffalo Bill asserted. "We shall have to turn this matter over in our minds some before we begin work. Also, I have friends whom I expect here to-day, on whose judgment I place much reliance. I shouldn't want to outline any plan of action, even if I had information, until after their arrival."

"Who are these friends?" Mendoza asked.

"J. B. Hickok, better known as Wild Bill; together with my Dutch pard, Baron von Schnitzenhauser; and

my Indian trailers. They have been at Maricopa Springs, but I expect them to reach Santa Fé to-day."

"I have heard of Hickok," the governor commented. "He is said to be a fighter. Well, I shall hope you can unearth the scoundrels who broke into the treasure room and took the jewels and plate. Unless you do, and the things are recovered, I shall feel ruined."

"Ther guvnur seems plum distracted," Nomad commented as they took their leave of him. "But ragin' round and pullin' at yer own ha'r never yit accomplished anything, I've noticed. Et's too bad, Buffler, thet yer cain't mention yer s'picious ag'inst his darter!"

"Have we any suspicions against his daughter—any well-grounded ones?"

"Tany rate, ye've p'inted out things thet looks plum strange an' sing'lar ter you, an' they likewise does ter me. Ef thet gal took ther jewels, she held good cards an' played her hand fer all it war wuth, in her leetle game with you. You're blocked complete. Even ef you war shore she's the guilty bunch thet et looks she is, you couldn't go ter her dad an' tell him so."

They were stepping into the street, when they saw a woman scudding ahead of them, whose appearance drew their attention. She was hurrying, but she had a noticeable limp, which she controlled now and then as though with an effort. She was lithe and slender, apparently young; her shoulders and head being wrapped in a shawl, however, with her face turned in the other direction, they got no good look at her.

"Waugh!" Nomad grunted. "Looks tollobly like ther han'some young wench thet dropped through ther sky-light!"

"You're right," breathed the scout, as he turned sharply in pursuit of her.

Though she did not look around, or appear to take notice of this, the young woman noticeably increased her gait, so that soon she was almost running. The limp nearly disappeared, only showing now and then when she set her right foot down on some unequal surface.

"Et's ther right foot, ye'll obsarve," commented Nomad; "an' ther gal what we had fer comp'ny last evening limped wi' ther same foot, an' said she had turned her ankle in thet high dive she made inter ther room. Yit this lass may be an Injun, f'r all we kin tell now. An' thet notion makes me think o' ther story o' ther fancy young gent thet fell in love wi' their veiled lady, until she lifted her veil an' he seen she war a coal-black nigger. Waugh!"

Nomad could talk, even though he needed all his wind for the pursuit that was now on.

The hooded young woman hurried past the plaza and into one of the narrow streets that abound near it, down which she flitted, the scout and Nomad plunging along in haste, trying to keep her in sight.

Along this way she went for some distance, ducking in and out, for the street was not straight; then she disappeared.

"Waugh! Gone inter ther ground, er up inter ther air? I didn't see thet she went inter any o' ther houses."

Nomad stopped and stared.

"She went into a house here, of course; there are no holes in the street, into which she could have vanished," said Cody.

The scout looked at the houses, on the side of the street where she had been. They were adobe structures

of the type common in Santa Fé at that time, and which may be still found there in numbers. The street itself was not merely crooked, but it was narrow and dusty, filled with sand and dirt. The bare walls of the houses were flush with the passageway, with the exception here and there of strips of stone walk not wider than a foot and a half in any place. At each side ran a gutter, now dry.

Some brown-skinned children were playing marbles in the dirt.

When he could not determine which of the houses the young woman had entered, the scout approached the tumbling children, holding out some small coins. He addressed them in Spanish, asking if they had seen the young lady who had but then come down the street.

The oldest, a boy, snatched the coins; he had rat teeth and shifting black eyes. He spoke up, before the others had a chance.

"Señor, there was no lady came here, that we saw."

He glared round at the other children; so that, seeing and hearing him, if they had observed the woman they, too, would have told the same story.

Buffalo Bill was disappointed. He knew the woman had gone into one of the houses; these New Mexican urchins knew it, and refused to give information.

"Likely a relative of theirs," was his thought; "and they suspect that we may mean harm to her."

He and Nomad marked down two of the houses, sketching them in their memories, sure that in one or the other the young woman had found refuge.

Farther up the street they came on a Mexican they knew; so they turned back with him, and the scout pointed out the houses.

"In this first one, señor," said the Mexican, "lives the gambler, Lopez Escondo; he has not occupied it long, and I do not know him by sight, as he always appears masked at the gaming tables."

"Er, waugh!" Nomad blurted when he heard that.

"How is this?" asked the scout. "He appears masked at the gambling tables?"

"Always, señors; so I am told. I have seen him but once myself; that was a week ago, at the Red Dragon."

It was the most notorious gambling resort of the town.

"He usually goes there?"

"So I am told."

"Then, perhaps we might have the pleasure of seeing him there this night, should we visit the place."

"And lose your money to him, señors, also, if you should play with him; it is said he invariably wins."

"Such a gamester will be worth seeing, at any rate," said the scout. "So we thank you for the information, and will look in at the Red Dragon soon, to get a glance at him."

"Yet keep away from him, unless, indeed, you have a long purse and care not how soon it is emptied."

"His name is Escondo?"

"Lopez Escondo, I have been told."

"He hails from where?"

The Mexican gave his shoulders the indescribable Spanish shrug.

"Who knows, señor? Those who do, if there are any, hold the knowledge as close as if it were treasure."

The scout thanked the man again; and he hurried on his way.

"You noticed there name, Buffler—Lopez?"

"Lopez Escondo."

"Ther Wild Ox is called Seenyore Lopez, Buffler."

"Very true; and I had thought of it. We may be getting, right here, where the trail is warm. By all means we shall have to seek a meeting with this gambler."

"His name's Lopez, and he goes round masked," muttered Nomad, as they returned toward the plaza; "likewise, ther gal with a twisted ankle, er ther double, come this way, an' I reckon went inter ther house whar this hyar gambler has his camp."

"It may mean nothing, and it may mean a great deal," observed the scout.

"Right-o! My guess is thet et means a heap."

CHAPTER IV.

THE WOMAN AT PAGOSA.

When Buffalo Bill and Nomad reached the Alcatraz they found that Wild Bill Hickok and the baron had arrived, together with Little Cayuse and his Apache trailers.

"We came straight through, with only a stop, at Wagon Mound," the man from Laramie reported. "The only incident worth reporting is that on the old trail, this side of Wagon Mound, we passed the governor's daughter, with a caravan, on her way East. We rode out of the trail to let 'em go by; a coach and outriders in the front, with a troop of soldiers bringin' up the rear. It was a brave sight. They were doing their clean ten miles an hour, I reckon."

"We have bumped into a mystery concerning that girl," the scout told him. "As an experienced man, Hickok, maybe you can help us out of our tangle. Nomad and I admit we're stalled."

"Waal, we're shore stacked up ag'inst some cur'us prop'sitions," the trapper admitted. "Better weave the yarn fer him, Buffler; p'r'aps ther baron, too, may have ideas ter dish out, when he hears et."

Buffalo Bill related the queer incidents that had befallen himself and Nomad, beginning with their arrival at the Alcatraz and the descent of the girl through the skylight.

Wild Bill flirted his humorous dark eyes up at the

broken skylight sash, which had been rather ineffectively repaired.

"I noticed that sash. Must have made you think that angels were flutterin' down on you, Pard Cody!" he said with a laugh. "'Tain't often a young lady makes a call in that way."

"Was it the governor's daughter, or this other young woman whom Nomad and I followed?"

"Maybe it was both."

"How do you make that out?"

"You're sure the governor's daughter went in that coach?"

"Why, of course."

"Well, if you're sure of it, then this other woman is—another woman. I get the idea that you think this other woman was spying on you at the palace, and that she skipped out ahead of you when she saw you were ready to leave there; yet she didn't get enough start in her getaway, so you caught sight of her in her limping flight, and followed. Is that it?"

"That's ther way we figgered it," said Nomad.

"You calculate, further, that this young woman with the limp is the same one, probably, who dropped through the skylight; and, still further, that she is connected with this masked gambler, who goes by the name of Lopez Segundo, and who may be the very man we want—Señor Lopez, otherwise the Wild Ox."

"Correct!" said Nomad, getting out his pipe and thumbing tobacco into the well-burned bowl.

"Does it suggest anything?" Buffalo Bill asked.

"Only that we ought to get a look at that masked gambler. The trouble is going to be that when you do,

supposing even that you tear away his mask and see his face, what good will it do you? Nobody knows how the Wild Ox looks."

"Aber I tond't know mooch," said the baron, "der whole t'ing seem to me as clear as a vatch crysdals. You see how idt iss, in my obinion. Dhis younk vomans vot fall py der skylighdt town, she iss der sistder, maype, or der vifes, uff dhis gampler vot vear der masks. Dhey findt oudt dot der gofornor's daughdter she iss going to N'y York on acgoundt uff der sickness uff her gros-mudder, who iss going to die unt leaf her some money. Sooch a t'ing couldt pe dalked all roundt, so idt iss easy vor eenypoty vot vish to findt idt oudt. Having diss misinformation, diss gambler unt his sisder, or vifes, lay a blan to sdeal der treasure unt der chewels, unt t'row Puffalo Pill off der tracks. So der voman she come sbying roundt, unt by a acksident she fall indo der room here trough der skylighdts. Idt suidt her all righdt, even uff she tvist her ankles; vor idt gif her a shance to say to Puffalo Pill vot she vandt to say—dot she is der daughter uff der gofornor, unt iss going to N'y York, and-so-fordth; she blay der game pooty goodt, unt fool Nomat unt Cody. Der gofornor's daughter she iss really going to N'y York, unt so idt vork oudt. Lader, dis odder vomans, she iss dot anxious apoudt idt, dot she has to sby roundt, to see if Puffalo Pill iss going to susbect her; unt so idt iss dot you see her, vhen she limps away from der balace. You foller; but she iss too slibbery, unt she gidts away. So, I t'ink dot she unt dis gampler maype ar-re at der pottom uff der whole pitzness uff der chewell sdealing."

"Baron, you've got a head on your fat shoulders," said Wild Bill, "if it is a cabbage head."

"I do mine own t'inking, eenyhow," averred the baron, pulling solemnly at his pipe.

"If the baron is right, and he may be," said the man from Larafie, "we might solve this puzzle, and even get back the jewels, by raiding that house which your Mexican friend showed you."

"If we knew which house she really went into," said the scout, "and if she remained in it after entering! That might have been just a blind; she may merely have gone through the house, or to the roof, and reached another street, or building."

"Right-o!" Wild Bill admitted. "I can't think of anything else, but to get a look at this masked gambler; even that doesn't seem to promise much. When we got your word, Cody, ordering us on here, I allowed we'd be thrown right at the Wild Ox, just like a lariat hurled out from a saddlebow."

When they had talked the subject dry, and reached no worthy conclusion, they went out into the streets of the old city, taking their way toward the plaza and palace.

The curious life of the old town, almost as Spanish even to-day as then, was always interesting.

They strolled about, surveyed the groups in the plaza, took a look at the old palace from the outside, then walked down into the narrow street where the limping and veiled woman had disappeared so mysteriously.

Several hours were consumed in this way.

As they returned toward the plaza, having gained no information, they became aware that a tumult of excitement had broken out suddenly, either in the plaza or at the palace.

Hurrying into the plaza, where they had a view of the palace, they saw troopers in the street there, with a num-

ber of coaches, together with a swarm of excited people. The doors of the palace were open, and people were running in and out in much excitement.

"Looks jes' like ther ole caravan had come back, what kerried the governor's darter," remarked Nomad.

"It is the caravan!" declared the scout, after one good look.

He began to run; the others came tumbling at his heels.

When they reached the palace they were met by a startling story.

Some distance beyond Wagon Mound, at a place called Pagosa Springs, where the coaches and the troopers had stopped that the horses might be given water and rest, had occurred the thing which had sent the caravan helterskelter back to Santa Fé.

The troopers had there dismounted, and everybody was at ease; the passengers had descended from the coaches, among them, as was supposed, the governor's daughter.

The place was in the edge of the Raton Mountains, or among the outlying spurs, within a brush-covered country which held many cedars.

While the horses and the troopers rested, the veiled woman supposed to be the governor's daughter had mounted suddenly to the back of the trooper's horse and turned the head of the animal into the hills.

The troopers laughed at first—it seemed a joke, to behold the señorita, daughter of a stately governor, mounted astride in a man's saddle; they thought she meant it as a bit of pleasantry.

So no one interfered, but permitted her to have her

way. Her way was to ride into the brush, where she put whip to the horse and galloped off.

When they heard the thunder of her horse's hoofs they thought the beast was running away with her.

So there followed a wild pursuit. One of the leading troopers gained on her, and might in the end have come up with her, as he had the speedier animal; but when he began to crowd rather close, she whirled suddenly in the deep saddle, threw up a pistol, and tumbled him to the ground with as clever a snapshot as a woman was ever likely to make.

When the other troopers reached him they found him bleeding, on the ground, his horse having galloped away; there was a bullet in his right breast, near the shoulder.

As for the woman, she had disappeared, and could not be seen again.

"Waugh!" woofed old Nomad when he heard this astonishing story, told to Buffalo Bill and his pards by one of the troopers.

"It snarls the threads of all our theories," said Wild Bill grimly. "What do you say to it, Pard Cody?"

Buffalo Bill, instead of answering, began to ask questions.

"Well, of course," said the trooper, who was an American, "it couldn't have been the governor's daughter."

"How does yer know thet?" Nomad demanded.

"The governor's daughter wouldn't have done such a thing."

"I suppose," said Wild Bill, "you have heard of the robbery here in the night? The treasure room in the palace was raided, jewels and plate taken, together with the great ruby called Montezuma's Eye."

Having just arrived, and been one of the bearers of a story so startling that it had caused all others to be temporarily forgotten, the trooper had not yet heard of the daring burglary.

"I saw a while ago that the governor was about crazy," he said; "though I thought it was all on account of his daughter. This robbery may have had something to do with his state of mind."

"Where is his daughter?" Wild Bill inquired.

"Well, I don't know, if she isn't here," the trooper answered. "We figured that she must be here—left behind in some queer way."

Buffalo Bill pushed on into the palace, inquiring for the governor, of the servants he encountered.

He found Mendoza by and by, the governor walking frenziedly about in his private office, almost literally tearing at his hair.

The scout edged in, past the scared serving man, and stood before Mendoza.

"This is a strange tale that I hear," he said; "so strange that I do not know what to think about it, or whether to believe it."

Mendoza's face was pale; his eyes red; his countenance haggard, almost wild.

"Sit down!" he commanded, his voice shaking and harsh. "You have heard the report they bring? No doubt you have heard, too, the things that are being said."

"I have heard very little."

"You have heard of the woman who sprang from the coach at Pagosa Springs and rode away, outdistancing the troopers."

"Yes; I have heard of that."

"Who she was no one knows; but she was *not my*

daughter. I know that because my daughter could not do such a thing, unless she was insane."

"There is no insanity in the family?" the scout questioned mildly.

Mendoza glared at him.

"None. Though I feel as if insanity were in my brain now."

"Your daughter is surely not here?"

"No. She set out in that coach last night. How it was juggled I do not know. But she was taken out of the coach and this other woman smuggled into it."

"What for?" the scout inquired softly.

"That is for you to tell; the solving of such problems is *your* business, not mine."

"You forget that I am here on another mission altogether."

"I forget nothing; I wish I could forget."

He walked nervously to and fro.

"I have a theory," he said, turning abruptly on the scout. "It is, that the robbery of the treasure room took place before the coaches set out; that the robbers took the loot and concealed it in that coach; and that one of them was in it when my daughter entered it. It seems far-fetched; but what else am I to think?"

The scout admitted that it was a puzzle, through which as yet he could not see even a glimmer of daylight. For a moment he was tempted to tell the governor what he had been forbidden to tell by the young woman who had claimed she was Muriel Mendoza. But he refrained. Later would serve him as well; and he might, by delaying, avoid some unpleasant disclosure. He did not wish to rouse Mendoza into further frenzy, or declare to him

that his daughter, if that were her, was little better than a self-announced thief.

Buffalo Bill tried to quiet Mendoza. Failing to accomplish much in that line, he took his departure, promising to do what he could to unravel the mystery and locate the missing daughter.

Outside he talked again with the troopers, getting all the details of that singular affair at Pagosa Springs. Nothing of value was added.

CHAPTER V.

THE BRAVO-GAMBLER OF TAOS.

Buffalo Bill and his redoubtable pards were all at sea, so far as any certain conclusions were concerned, when they took their way that night to the Red Dragon, the gambling house which it was reported had been nightly visited by the masked gambler.

They had learned, however, that he had come from Taos, and was for that reason called the Bravo-gambler of Taos. Also, that he gave as his excuse for always appearing masked at the gaming tables, that he was a Spanish nobleman, who had fled to this country because of political peril and feared that if it became known who he was he would be dragged back to Spain and imprisoned for life.

It was said he had confided this secret to a friend, from whom it had spread; yet who this friend was no one appeared to know.

"A fishy yarn," said Wild Bill, when they heard it. "He's got another reason for hiding his face; I'd be willin' to bet something fancy that he is 'wanted' somewhere."

Wild Bill, alone of Buffalo Bill's party, went separately to the Red Dragon; this, in accordance with a daring plan he had proposed for getting at the gambler's identity.

He had made a few changes in his clothing; and he went to the place masked.

The Bravo of Taos had not arrived when Wild Bill

The Bravo-gambler of Taos.

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invaded the gambling den. The hour was still early, for a place of that kind. Yet the roulette wheel was doing some business, and at the card tables several men were deep in the mysteries of a game.

These men stared hard at the masked scout, apparently thinking at first he was the bravo who had made further changes in his appearance. Wild Bill did not undertake to enlighten them. He sauntered around the gaming rooms, looking at the men at the tables and at the roulette wheel, and at the sporting pictures on the walls.

The place was almost American in some of its appointments, but Wild Bill quickly concluded that its customers were principally Mexicans. He had observed that those of the border seemed to be gamblers by nature and habit; as inveterate gamesters as Indians; and it is known that when an Indian gets bit by the gambling mania he will bet away everything he has, even his favorite squaw and pony.

When Wild Bill had killed half an hour of time he saw his friends come boldly in at the front entrance—Buffalo Bill, Nick Nomad, and the baron.

That they might not seem to be merely intruders, the baron waddied down and attacked a wheel of fortune with his customary daring, while Buffalo Bill and Nomad laid a few small bets elsewhere.

The baron soon had a crowd about him, consisting of most of the people in the house. Usually a lucky gamester, on this occasion he was at first no exception; so that the wheel of fortune was soon having a hard time of it.

"Somepoty sendt oudt unt gidt a cardt to dake away my vinnings!" he bellowed in his jubilation.

Yet half an hour afterward a mouse could have lugged off all the silver he possessed. The dealer behind the wheel of fortune—as the baron believed—had done something to his machine for gathering in the cash of the public, after which a streak of luck had gone against the German so steadily that his winnings, and then his own money, melted away.

He drew down his last silver piece.

The wheel spun again.

"Losdt!" he yelled, jumping about. "Diss pitzness iss loadedt ag'inst me, I pet you."

The manipulator of the wheel of fortune took umbrage. "Don't kick when you're the loser," he said. "You felt fine as silk when it all come your way."

He was a red-faced fellow, and an American; nearly all the other gamblers connected with the Red Dragon were Mexicans or Spaniards.

"Lendt me somet'ing, so dot I can preak dis t'ing!" the baron howled at the scout.

"Come away!" the scout whispered to him.

The baron understood, and obeyed; at that moment, at the other end of the room, the masked gambler of Taos had made his appearance, and the time for the baron's gaming was at an end.

The Red Dragon had by this time filled up almost to its nightly capacity, with as motley a crowd as could be found anywhere. To-day no such crowd could be gathered between the two oceans; there were in it mountain men and plainsmen, trappers, teamsters, miners, cowboys, and town loafers. More in numbers than all others were the Mexicans, dark-faced, gay of attire, with a continuous magpie chatter, and a shrugging of shoulders and twisting of black mustachios truly and notice-

ably Spanish. Whenever they had money they wagered it recklessly and passionately.

The man from Taos took a seat quietly at a table he had occupied nightly since his coming to Santa Fé.

He was hardly in position, with some others, slipping cards through his slim fingers, when the masked scout dropped in at the same table, suavely helping himself to a seat.

The gamester from Taos gave an observable jerk of his head and stared hard at Wild Bill, whose coming he must have regarded as unwelcome, or as foreboding evil.

"If it's permissible, I'll take a hand in this little Western game of stud poker," remarked the man from Laramie in a voice of oil. "I've got a few sawbucks in my jeans that I think I'd like to risk here. My name is Lucky Lucas, when I'm going good."

He had opened up in English, to "draw" the other.

But the fellow did not answer; he merely looked sharply at the man from Laramie, through the holes in his mask, then began to shuffle the cards with a skill and ease that was worth watching.

Even after the cards had been dealt, Wild Bill gave his attention to the man in the mask more than he did to his "hand."

"American, or Mexican?" he asked.

"I am Spanish," said the other, using that language.

"Ah! You look to be an American," Wild Bill answered, sticking to his English, fishing for a "rise."

But the play went on, the gamester from Taos confining himself to brief sentences or single words in Spanish, when he spoke at all.

He had a low, pleasant voice, under good control. But the man from Laramie knew that his presence there had

disturbed the fellow. This showed in his playing. He lost.

Men began to leave the other gaming tables, crowding round that occupied by the two masked men; apparently, they scented trouble. Also, the fact that two masked men were in the room, at the same table, was noteworthy.

The table was near the end of the room, with the rear door close by and somewhat ajar. Beyond the door was a dark area which Wild Bill supposed to be a garden. The thought was suggested to him that in choosing this table the Bravo-gambler of Taos was prepared to make a hasty exit into the garden, if it seemed at any time advisable.

To see if this were so, the American scout complained that the wind blew on him through the half-open door, and asked one of the attendants to close it.

The gamester from Taos lifted his head at that; then requested the man, in Spanish, to let the door alone.

He turned sweetly to the man from Laramie.

"I have heart trouble," he said, "and a closed room oppresses my breathing; I should have to quit the game; and I am sure the gracious señor does not wish that."

So the door remained open; but Wild Bill had gained the information sought: the masked gambler wanted the door kept open, that he might make a quick escape, if needed, into the darkness outside.

The man from Laramie threw a meaning glance toward Buffalo Bill and those with him; standing on the outer fringe of the interested throng, they had seen and heard. As a result, old Nomad and the baron worked their way out of the room, for the purpose of getting around into the garden, or where they could view the rear door.

Buffalo Bill remained in the Red Dragon, that he might assist Wild Bill if it seemed necessary.

Developments came soon enough, hastened by the man from Laramie, who accused the other of cheating.

There was the usual uproar, as the gambler tried to get out his pistol; then the table went over, with Wild Bill pitching across it at the masked man. The gambler's pistol roared, the bullet cutting a curl from Wild Bill's forehead. Wild Bill made a desperate grab for the mask. As it came away in his hand some one began to shoot out the lights. After that pandemonium reigned.

Wild Bill clutched a man he believed to be the gambler, and they whirled and rolled together out into the garden, the man striving to get away, dragging the scout along with him.

Right behind, as he was swept on, Hickok heard the encouraging shout of Buffalo Bill; then came the bel-lowing roar of Nomad and the piping notes of the baron.

"Right this way!" yelled the man from Laramie. "I reckon I've got the rascal."

The garden held a number of excited men, who had streamed out during the mêlée, but nine-tenths of those in the Red Dragon had fled by way of the front door.

Buffalo Bill flashed a match, applying it instantly to a prepared torch which he jerked out of his pocket. He turned the light on Hickok and the man he held, as the two rolled together on the ground near the door.

All were astounded to see that though Wild Bill held the mask he had torn from the gambler's face, he did not have the gambler; the man he held was dressed differently, so there could be no mistake. He was a Mexican. Roaring with rage, he rose to his feet as soon as the man from Laramie released him.

In loud tones he demanded satisfaction; he had been attacked and beaten without cause, he declared, while he merely tried to defend himself.

"Sold!" said Wild Bill, crestfallen. "Señor, I beg your pardon! If I have ruined your jacket, I am willing to purchase a new one; if you require a doctor, I will foot the bill. It was a mistake. I am the boss jackass of the Southwest."

There could be no doubt that the Bravo-gambler of Taos had gotten off safely and easily.

"The mix-up came when the light went out," said Wild Bill. "That's the only way I can explain it."

A dozen men were asking excited questions.

"There's no need of an explanation," said the irritated man from Laramie. "You saw it. I accused the man in the mask of cheating, and we came to a fight over it. Some friend of his shot out the lights. He slipped out of my hands and ran; when I got out here I was choking the wrong man, for which I owe his aching neck a thousand poultices and apologies."

"Your identity, señor!" cried the owner of the Red Dragon, appearing.

In the torchlight, Wild Bill doffed his mask.

"Ah! One of the Americans!"

"At your service, señor. I have no reason to hide my face; I but did it for the time to see its effect on the rascal who calls himself the Gambler of Taos. If I could have held him when I had him, I should now be able to produce for your inspection one of the biggest thieves and criminals in all New Mexico."

Wild Bill might have offered further explanations and apologies, if Buffalo Bill had not called him away.

Cody was at the gate which led from the garden to

the street. With him were Nomad and the baron. Boring a way through the clamorous crowd, the man from Laramie joined them.

"We're wasting time here," said the scout. "The Gambler of Taos must have taken this street. It is my opinion that he has retreated to the house viewed by Nomad and myself, into which the limping young woman ran when we followed her. I think we had better go there at once, as he may take it into his head to leave the town, now that we have scared him."

"I was a blunderer for letting him get away," the man from Laramie answered. "I admit that he was too clever for me, after the lights went out."

"Der man who shooded oop der lamps," said the baron, "vos blaying mit him unt you at dot taple; I seen him; aber he was so kvick dot I couldn't sdop him."

"I hope you pinned a good picture of his ugly mug down on your memory tablets. Which one of the fellows was it?"

"Der vun mit der tvist in his eyes."

"Wow! The cross-eyed gent that held four aces. If he shot where he looked it's a wonder he didn't smash his own top-lights, instead of the lamps; that fellow's eyes were a wonder—they were not only crossed, but white, like the eyes of a vicious horse."

"I pedt you he iss a shooder, eenyhow! When he pidched oop his rewolver—bang, bang!—idt go so kvick as dot; unt each dime a lamp flies indo bieces. I am in darkness before I know mysellef."

They had moved out into the street, where all turned sharply along it, hurrying now to get into the narrow thoroughfare which held the house suspected.

"If this is a failure," said the scout as they swung

along, "we'll hunt up the gent with the white eyes, and shadow him; he and this masked gambler are no doubt thicker than fleas. I suspect that it would have paid if one of us had followed him."

The street seemed dark—it never was well lighted; but without much trouble they located the house, finding it as gloomy as the surroundings.

A gap in the wall farther down gave them admission to the rear of the row of houses running along there.

Little Cayuse and the Apache trailers, who had been scouting around, in readiness to render aid, having appeared, were stationed in the street in front of the house, while Buffalo Bill and his pards went to the rear.

After tramping and fumbling about in the garden without success, the scout sent Nomad around to tell Little Cayuse to hammer on the front door and demand admission.

Nomad executed this; then came hurrying back.

The loud hammering of the young Piute reached even into the garden.

The effect was instantaneous. A door in a wing of the house at one side swung open, throwing out a blinding light, revealing a woman, who shouted to them to depart from the garden. At the same instant, with a crashing of glass, the masked gambler came through the window in the wing right in front of them, making a wild jump, knocking the baron down.

The door slammed shut, cutting off the bright cone of light which had momentarily dazzled the eyes of the scout and his companions; the baron went over on his back with a whoop of pain and fright; and the masked man made a dash through the darkness for safety and freedom.

Nomad swung his big revolver round and took a roaring shot at the disappearing form of the masked man, missing him completely; and the rascal disappeared, having jumped the garden wall.

Buffalo Bill dived in pursuit, followed by his friends; but all were chagrined beyond words. They had found the gambler, and let him get away again.

It did not take them a minute to know that he had escaped. After he disappeared over the wall he was neither seen nor heard.

An alley ran along there, forking in two directions a few yards beyond. Which fork he took could not be determined; both were as dark as a stack of black cats, and seemed unoccupied.

The scout lighted his torch again, and they ran down one alley; then, returning, they raced down the other. But they did not find their man.

"Sold again!" said the man from Laramie, voicing the universal disgust.

"Yes, he's gone," the scout admitted reluctantly.

They divided their party, the scout and Nomad going to the front door, the baron and the man from Laramie to the one at the rear where the woman had showed the light.

On the front door Buffalo Bill knocked, demanding admittance. Lifting his voice, he stated that he was an officer, armed with paper authorizing him to enter the house and search it; which was a fact, as he had taken care to secure papers for that purpose before going to the Red Dragon.

When no heed was given to this demand Buffalo Bill called on Nomad and the Indians to assist him. They prepared to breach the door; but the scout found it un-

necessary, as his key ring held a key which would throw the lock.

They entered with arms drawn as the door flew open, finding the hall and room into which they entered as dark as the garden at the rear.

"I reckon ther she-cat is also out o' ther trap," breathed Nomad, staring round in the gloom.

Buffalo Bill again produced and lighted his torch and flashed its light on the walls. A stairway invited to an upper room, and they climbed it. At the upper landing they came upon a woman, who faced them with a broom. She was a withered crone, sputtering vigorous Spanish, now that she had found her tongue, demanding to know what was meant by this outrage, as she called it.

"Why are there no lights in the house?" Buffalo Bill asked her.

"It is my business, not the señor's!" she snapped.

"Will you tell the name of the man who was in this room and went out of it a while ago by this window; he broke it as he jumped through?"

"That is, likewise, not the señor's business!"

The scout drew the papers he had brought. Nomad and the Indians had crowded into the room; up from the rear came now the heavy tramp of Wild Bill and the baron, ascending. The woman began to weep in her rage.

"You can tell us the name of the man," the scout urged on her.

"Lopez Escondo!" she said.

"He is the man who goes masked to the Red Dragon, and is called the Bravo-gambler of Taos?"

"If it is so, the señor knows more than I do."

"Where is the woman who opened the door and flashed

the light out, at the time Escondo jumped through this window?"

"I am the woman," was her angry declaration. "And now, if the señor has finished insulting me, will he take his men and clear out of here?"

Notwithstanding her tempestuous manner, they searched the house, without finding anything worth their attention. The woman seemed to be alone in it.

"But that wasn't the woman who flashed the light," said Wild Bill, as they departed. "I saw that other woman as she stood in the door; it was but a glimpse, I know, but I could tell she was a younger woman."

"Anodder pitzness vot iss a failure," the baron groaned, when they had reached the street.

Many people, nearly all Mexicans, had gathered before the house. They blocked the way, and asked questions, as the scout and his companions turned toward the plaza.

CHAPTER VI.

WHERE IS MISS MENDOZA?

Buffalo Bill's first action was to communicate with the Mexican marshal of the town, and get him to set guards in the highways which led out from it.

"But it is probably like locking the stable after the horse is stolen," he admitted to Colonel Diamond, at the military post, to which he and Wild Bill hastened immediately afterward. "I ought to have had it done before we made that attempt at the Red Dragon."

The man from Laramie laughed in his light way; though he knew this was not a humorous matter, and there was no laughter in his heart.

"You see, Cody is simply throwing rocks at me when he says that," he remarked. "He was so confident I would garner in our masked gambler that he did not take the precautions which otherwise he would have taken. But—I was just as confident."

"You want me to send troopers along all the roads and trails?" said Diamond.

"At once, if you are willing."

The colonel gave the command, and went out to see that the movement was hastened.

When he came back he brought an officer with him—Captain Sutcliffe. In the meantime Buffalo Bill and the man from Laramie had talked the case over, trying to sift it so that they could get at the truth.

"Do we know just where we are at?" the colonel asked now, employing the Western vernacular. "I want Cap

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tain Sutcliffe to hear the details; he may be able to help us to some sane conclusions."

"The colonel relies greatly on my wisdom," said Sutcliffe, with a smile, "since I fished him out of the muddy Rio Grande, into which he fell at the last freshet."

"It would have been a great lack of wisdom, Sutcliffe, if you had let me drown!"

"Cody had better lay the thing out for the captain," Wild Bill urged. "We seem to be up against a mystery here. I admit that it's too much for me."

"Captain Sutcliffe understands that the treasure room at the palace was robbed of jewels and plate, and the big ruby, which is called Montezuma's Eye, taken. Naturally, the thing made a stir; and the governor is distressed because he feels that he was responsible for the safety of the valuables taken.

"But that isn't all of it. The governor's daughter set out in great state, to journey East, on a visit to her grandmother, who is said to be at the point of death in New York. At Pagosa Springs, beyond Wagon Mound, where the caravan stopped to rest, a veiled woman appeared out of the coach in which the governor's daughter had started, took a trooper's horse, and rode off into the hills. When she was pursued, she shot one of the troopers, and got away."

"That could not have been the governor's daughter!" declared Sutcliffe.

"We were instructed, before that," the scout went on, "to report here and do what we could to locate the bandit who has been holding up the stages. He is said to be a man named Lopez, otherwise called the Wild Ox. Last week he murdered two men up in the Raton Hills. He has made the stage trails so dangerous, that when the

governor's daughter set out, as you know, a company of troopers was sent along to safeguard her."

Sutcliffe replied that he was aware of it.

"For several nights now a masked man, whose name we think is Lopez Escondo, has been appearing at the gaming tables in the Red Dragon. A number of circumstances, among them the fact that he always shows himself with his face covered, caused us to suspect him."

"You thought *he* might be the Wild Ox?" said Sutcliffe.

"Exactly. We wanted to get a look at his face."

"You know how the Wild Ox looks?"

"No one seems to know that. But we believed that when the mask was torn from this gambler's face he would in all probability be revealed as some criminal with whose looks we are familiar; so we undertook to unmask him."

"There is where *I* fell down!" said Wild Bill, with a grimace. "Now we get the interesting part of it."

"We went to the Red Dragon, my friend Hickok going there alone, with a mask over his face, in imitation of this gambler. He engaged him in a card game, and at a certain time charged him with cheating."

"And he *was* cheating!" Wild Bill asserted. "I didn't have to lie about that, when I made my crack at him."

"Hickok charged him with cheating; then jumped at him across the table, to tear off his mask and expose his features to the view of every one. But as he did so some friend of this gambler shot out the lights in that end of the room. The table was overturned; and in the scuffle which followed, though Hickok clutched and held to the mask, and rolled and fought his way out into the garden with a man he supposed to be the wearer of the mask,

it turned out that the rascal had slipped through his fingers, and he had another man."

The man from Laramie, with a sickly smile, took from an inner pocket of his coat a piece of black cloth, which, when opened, was seen to be a mask.

"Here it is," he said. "To the victor belongs the spoils, you know."

The colonel and the captain examined the cloth with interest.

"The man certainly got out of the Red Dragon into the garden behind it, and into the street there. As we had previously located the house he occupied, we hurried to it, surrounded it, and demanded admittance."

"And right there is where I had company—*all* of us fell down!" said Hickok.

"I think we must admit that we bungled the thing, or else that our gambler is a superior sort of fellow. A door in a wing of the house flew open, as if to give him light, or else for the purpose of flaring the light into our eyes and turning us temporarily blind. At the same moment the gambler, wearing a mask, came with a jump through the window, tearing away the sash and knocking down our friend the baron. Then the door closed, making the darkness deeper than ever; and once more our gambler got away."

"It was clever," said the captain, stroking his mustache. "Give the devil his due."

"I reckon we'll have to score that up to his credit, whether we want to or not," said the man from Laramie. "But, go on, Cody; I'm interrupting the thread of your interesting discourse."

"That is about all," said Buffalo Bill. "Except that

when we entered the house, we found only an old woman, who scolded us roundly."

"And she was *not* the woman who opened the door and threw the glare of that light out on us," Wild Bill asserted. "Or, if she was the same, she had taken some means of making herself look old and ugly, changing her appearance completely."

"I've known the like to be done," said the captain, deeply interested.

"If she did, she is as clever as the Gambler of Taos himself!" Buffalo Bill declared.

"Truly."

"What I'd like to know is," said the colonel, "did the governor know that the jewels were taken that night of the robbery? Had he seen them recently?"

"He had not looked into the treasure room for several days; but it was always locked, and he carried the key."

"The key was stolen from him?"

"It was."

"The question troubling me is," said the captain, "did the woman who rode into the hills at Pagosa Springs have anything to do with the robbery?"

"I wish you could answer that question for us!" the scout told him.

"Where is the governor's daughter, if that was another woman?" the captain demanded next.

"It is another question which I wish some one would answer for us, and save us the trouble of trying to solve it."

"The governor doesn't know where she is—if that was not his daughter," declared Wild Bill.

"It could not have been her?"

"So he declares."

"And we have no desire to dispute him," Buffalo Bill added.

When they had taken their departure, Hickok referred to the scout's noticeable omission of any reference to the woman who had dropped through the skylight and claimed to be the governor's daughter.

"I shall hold that as a secret, until I am sure that its telling will not do more harm than good," Buffalo Bill told him.

"You will withhold it for the purpose of protecting the governor?"

"Also, for the purpose of protecting the governor's daughter, until we know that she ought not to be protected. So long as the mystery is as dark as now, I think I ought to say nothing about it. You know the old adage—'The least said, the soonest mended!'"

"I reckon you're right, pard. But what do you think about the woman who left the coach at Pagosa Springs?"

"I can only counter by asking what *you* think about it?"

"It feazes me," the man from Laramie admitted. "It doesn't seem that she could have been the governor's daughter. But, if not, where is the señorita?"

"Which brings us back to the starting point—where is she? It's a thing we must try to find out."

When Buffalo Bill and Hickok reached the Alcatraz they found old Nomad in a state of much excitement.

"Whar ye been?" he demanded.

"At the palace, and the army post," the scout answered.

"Waal, I been lookin' fer ye high and low; an' I've hed the baron an' the Apaches huntin' fer ye. Look at thet."

He drew out a folded paper and gave it to the scout.

"A gal came to the hotel a while ago wi' this, inquire in' fer ye; when she found ye warn't hyar she handed et over ter the clerk, tellin' him to git et to yer. I warn't hyar, ner the baron; but Pedro an' Little Cayuse war loafin' round, an' heard what she said. So, when she goes erway, Little Cayuse he ups an' trails her, leavin' Pedro hyar ter make a report of et. When I come in, wi' the baron, the clerk asks me whar yer air, an' hands et out ter me. Et war sealed; nevertheless, as Pedro tells me about Little Cayuse, an' ther clerk he has said 'twar left by a young woman what kep' her veil on, I breaks ther seal, an' reads et."

Buffalo Bill, with Wild Bill looking over his arm, was already reading the note:

"TO BUFFALO BILL: I hold Muriel, daughter of Governor Mendoza. You are said to be in Santa Fé, looking for me. Say to Mendoza, that ten thousand dollars, sent me by the hand of one of your Indians, will bring about the release of the señorita. All you will need to do, tell him, is to give the ten thousand dollars to the Indian, and tell the Indian to walk about in the outskirts of the town, on the east, where he will meet some one who will ask him if he has the money. I will not specify a particular place, for that would give you a chance to set a trap for me there. I will know if any one follows the Indian. In that event, the man will not appear to take the money. Also, in that case the señorita will not be released. In addition to the foregoing, I want you to send from the governor a written pardon for me for all past crimes by me committed, with a promise in it that I will not be pursued by officers. When I get the ten thousand dollars, I will set the señorita at liberty; and will myself hasten to get out of the country. Thus New Mexico will be freed from the further attentions of

"THE WILD OX."

"Waugh!" Nomad exploded. "What does yer think of et?"

"It tells us where the governor's daughter is, anyway," said the man from Laramie.

"I don't see et thet way," Nomad objected. "Et tells us ther Wild Ox has got her, but not whar she is."

"What I meant," Wild Bill said, "is that it helps clear away a little of this befogging mystery."

Buffalo Bill drew Nomad away from the hotel office, as the clerk was eying them curiously, and had cocked an ear in their direction.

"That clerk may be all right," he said, "probably he is; but so long as we're not sure of it, we don't care for him to overhear us. Where is Pedro?"

Nomad stepped to the outer door and called to the Indian, who was waiting near by. Pedro followed the trapper in.

"You saw the woman who left this note, Pedro?" the scout asked him, when they were where they could talk without being overheard.

"Ai! Me see um. Little Cayuse he see um. He take trail when she go 'way. Say me stay tell you, *pronto*."

"That's good. Now tell how she looked."

"No see um face," said the Apache. "Face heap covered up. Me no like see face covered so. *Muy malo*."

"It looked bad to you?"

"All same look very bad. Little Cayuse he say tell Pa-has-ka, look bad; say he foller, see where um go; come back, tell Pa-has-ka."

"Little Cayuse is a bright and faithful fellow. You did just right, Pedro. Tell me something further about her. Did she limp?"

The scout dropped his right foot in imitation of a limp, to aid Pedro's understanding.

The black eyes of the Apache flashed.

"Ai, Pa-has-ka!" he almost shouted. "She go, so!"

He, too, imitated a limp, sinking with his right foot just a trifle as he stepped across the floor.

"That clears up so much of the mystery, anyhow," said Buffalo Bill to his pards. "We followed a woman who showed a limp, trailing her from the palace to that house where we cornered the Bravo of Taos. We didn't get to see her face, because she kept it muffled."

"And she was *not* the daughter of the governor," said Wild Bill. "That is what Pedro's revelation means."

"Exactly. Whoever she was, she could not have been the daughter of the governor. That is, if our surmise is right, that the same woman brought the note to the hotel which I now hold in my hand. *Yet she may be the woman who dropped through the skylight.*"

"Mebbyso Little Cayuse will git a look at her," remarked Nomad hopefully.

"He will be likely to find where she goes, anyway," said Wild Bill. "This seems to prove that the Gambler of Taos is the Wild Ox, or is connected with him."

"Makes me hoppin' mad, when I think o' how thet gent got away from us!"

"That was largely my fault, dear Nomad," purred Wild Bill; "don't forget to pile it on my delicate shoulders!"

The baron came stamping into the hotel.

"Call him in," ordered Buffalo Bill.

"So, you iss hiding here?" the baron grunted, when he came in and saw the scouts with Pedro. "Nomat has

findt you—huh? Vale, idt vos more as I couldt do. Where you haf been?"

They told him.

"Vot you dthink iss der meanness uff dhis note?"

"It's plain enough," said Hickok; "the Wild Ox wants ten thousand dollars."

"Uut he haf der gofornor's daughter. So soon as Nomat unt me readt idt, ve dry to findt you oudt, unt I cand't do idt. Yiminy, I haf my legs peen valking off!"

He mopped his heated face.

"We must go to the governor with this at once," said the scout. "But, first, I'd like a few words with this hotel clerk."

"Recklect, Buffler, you don't know ernough about him ter trust him!" Nomad warned.

"I'll not forget that, Nomad. All of you may go along with me, to see that I make no breaks. One thing should be remembered: Nothing is to be said to any one yet about the young woman who came through the skylight, and claimed to us afterward that she was the governor's daughter. If she was, it's a thing we have to keep to ourselves."

The clerk had moved out from behind his desk, that he might get nearer the room where they had been talking; but went back when he saw them coming. Yet they knew he had not been close enough to hear anything they had said. Now he looked at them curiously, and at the note the scout still held in his hand.

"A veiled woman left it here for you," he said, as if to open up the subject; "and I gave it to your friend there, which I suppose was all right. I didn't know where you were at the time, and she gave me to under-

stand the note concerned a matter of importance, and should be got to you as soon as possible."

"You didn't get to see her face?" the scout asked.

"No; she wore a thick veil, and kept it down."

"But you would probably know her voice again, if you should hear it?"

"I think so. She spoke in low tones, and seemed in a hurry. I think she was a young woman, judging from her walk, and her voice. Still, I saw that she limped slightly as she went out at the door there."

No important information was to be gathered from the clerk of the Alcatraz.

It could be seen by the eagerness of his eyes that he was anxious to know what the note contained, but the scout did not think it well at that time to enlighten him.

"I thought that perhaps it had something to do with the Gambler of Taos," he suggested; "that fellow you had trouble with last night in the Red Dragon!"

"You've heard a good deal of talk about that?" Wild Bill asked him.

"A number of men were in here talking about it this morning."

"Just what did they say?" Hickok inquired.

"Chiefly, they were marveling that the fellow didn't kill you, when you jumped at him over the table, after accusing him of cheating. He *did* shoot at you, I understood!"

Wild Bill touched himself lightly on the forehead.

"He shot away one of my beauty locks," he said; "but it will grow again."

The clerk looked curiously at the forehead of the man from Laramie, as the latter pushed back his big hat.

"There's no hole in the hat," Hickok explained, "simply

because it had tumbled off. He tried to put a bullet through my head, and gave me a close call. But a miss is as good as a mile, you know."

For some time they hung about, talking with the clerk, giving him no information of value, and getting little themselves, while they waited for the return of Cayuse. They hoped the young Piute would be there soon, with knowledge of value.

"You don't know anything much about this fellow that they call the Gambler of Taos?" was one of the questions put to the clerk by Wild Bill.

"Nothing at all, more than the general public knows: that he appeared here in Santa Fé not long since, and has been haunting the Red Dragon, where he came each night masked, and had uncommon luck at cards. He has been a good deal of a mystery. Some think the Red Dragon men had him come there masked simply to stir up curiosity, as that would help each night to fill up the place. It seems to me that may have been the reason."

"Der kvestion uff vot der men uff der Ret Dragon knows apoudt hjm might be petter exboxed py asking der Ret Dragon men," the baron suggested.

"Right-o!" said the man from Laramie. "So, I move we adjourn to that place and see what we can learn."

They asked the clerk to send Little Cayuse over to the Red Dragon as soon as he came back; and, that there might be no failure in this, they left Pedro at the Alcatraz, to see that Little Cayuse came promptly.

But the conductors of the Red Dragon gaming house were inclined to reticence, when the inquisitorial screws were applied to them.

They did not know anything about the Bravo of Taos,

they declared, beyond the fact that he had occupied one of the card tables on a number of evenings, and always had astonishing luck.

"We charge for the use of the tables," they explained; "any man or men willing to pay can use them. It is true the fellow wore a mask; but he was quiet, minded his own business, and never got into any trouble, until your friend here charged him with cheating, and attacked him."

"Wow!" Wild Bill rumbled. "So, I'm the gent that's wholly in the wrong!"

"It looks so, in this case," he was told.

"Who was the cross-eyed man who shot out the lights?"

They claimed not to know.

Little Cayuse did not appear while they talked with the keepers of the Red Dragon.

When they went back to the Alcatraz the Piute was still absenting himself.

"Der kvestion has been, Where iss der gofornor's daughter?" said the German; "soon idt vill pe, Where iss Liddle Cayuse? I am peginning to veel a uneasiness apoudt him."

The others were also beginning to feel uneasy.

CHAPTER VII.

BUFFALO BILL'S PLAN.

"We can't delay longer in getting this note to Governor Mendoza," declared Buffalo Bill, when the Piute still was conspicuous only by his absence.

The scout, in waiting for the return of Little Cayuse, had hoped he would be able to take to the governor some definite information concerning the woman who had delivered the note.

"But there is no use in waiting longer," said Wild Bill. "We'll get this to Mendoza; then try to find out what has happened to the Piute. I'm not willing to think anything has downed him; yet it begins to look it."

Hickok and the scout left Nomad and the baron, with Pedro, at the Alcatraz, to keep watch for the return of Little Cayuse, and hastened to the palace.

Governor Mendoza came to the door himself, to welcome them, when the name of Buffalo Bill had been taken in to him.

"I was just on the point of sending for you," he said.

"Something new, eh?" asked the scout, entering, reading Mendoza's face.

In addition to the deep marks set by worry and anxiety, there were other lines there now.

When the scouts were inside, and he had led the way to his inner sanctum, the governor told them that another mysterious thing had happened.

"You spoke to me," he said, "about seeing a young woman leaving the palace here; that you followed her,

and found that she disappeared in a house supposed to be occupied by this Gambler of Taos. It did not occur to me at the time that I might know who she was, even though you said you observed that she had a slight limp. But since one of our female servants has disappeared and cannot be located, that has come back to me. Her name is Maria Xavier, and she sometimes acted as maid to my daughter Muriel. She has vanished out of the house, and we cannot tell what has become of her."

"Ah! The woman with the limp!" said Wild Bill.

Buffalo Bill regretted the necessity he still felt himself to be under, of keeping from Mendoza information of the young woman who had tumbled so unceremoniously through the skylight; yet he hoped the time would soon come for that revelation.

"We shall have to see if we can locate this Maria Xavier," he told Mendoza. "But we have come now on a matter of great personal importance to you—something concerning your daughter."

Mendoza turned pale and trembled.

"You have discovered that she is—dead?"

"Read that," said the scout; and put in his hands the note sent by the Wild Ox.

Mendoza sank into a chair, gasping, when he grasped the character of the contents.

"The Wild Ox!" he cried, his hands shaking so that the paper rattled in them. "My daughter in the power of that outlaw! This is terrible."

"It is proof, at any rate," said the scout, "that she is not the veiled woman who rode away on the trooper's horse at Pagosa Springs."

"Who could have believed for a moment *that was my daughter?*"

"The troopers believed it, at first."

"Only at first."

"You have formed some theory concerning the identity of that woman?"

"None. It is a puzzle. I have questioned the troopers, the officers who were with them, and nearly every person who was a member of the caravan. No one has been able to explain it. There was only one other stop made—at Wagon Mound. All declare that though my daughter got out of the coach at Wagon Mound she returned to it again. It is my opinion now that she never left Santa Fé; that the woman who got out at Wagon Mound and returned again to the coach there was the same who, at Pagosa Springs, sprang out of the coach and disappeared on the trooper's horse."

"But you saw your daughter here, when she was ready to enter the coach!" Buffalo Bill objected.

"I saw her in her rooms while she was getting ready. There must have been some substitution. Since I have learned of the disappearance of Maria Xavier I have connected her with it."

Beyond that the worthy governor could not go.

"This woman who brought the note from the Wild Ox to the Alcatraz, was probably Maria Xavier," he suggested.

"I reckon we ain't going to get at the bottom of this affair until we corral the Wild Ox himself," said Wild Bill.

The governor looked at the note again.

"Ten thousand dollars," he said; "it is a large sum; yet I would raise it, and pay it, to secure the safety of my daughter."

"Can we be sure that she is in his hands?" Buffalo Bill asked.

"He says so."

"The man who would make such a demand would also lie."

"You think this is a lying demand?"

"We don't know. It may be. The Wild Ox may not have your daughter at all; he may merely have learned about this singular affair, and took this means to profit by it. You will notice the peculiar quality of his demand. The money is to be given to him; then he will release your daughter. Suppose we get the money to him, and she is not in his possession? He has the ten thousand dollars—what he wants. From all I have learned of him, it would be like the Wild Ox to play such a trick."

Mendoza was so disturbed by this that he could not sit longer in his chair; so got up and walked about the room.

"What do you gentlemen suggest?" he implored.

"There is one thing which we have not yet acquainted you with," said Buffalo Bill. "When this note came for me, at the Alcatraz, two of my Indian scouts were there. They caught on to its meaning, and while one waited to tell me, the other set out to follow the woman."

The governor stopped in his restless walking.

"You think he will locate her?"

"We thought so at first; but now it doesn't look like it. We waited for him; when we left the Alcatraz to come here he had not returned, though he had been gone a long time."

"You think, then, that the Wild Ox has captured him?"

"That may be the way of it. We are going to try to find out."

"How?"

"You stump us again, Governor Mendoza; we don't know how we are going to find that out."

"What would be the result," Mendoza asked, "if one of your Indians was sent out with a package of paper resembling money and met the man who is to receive the amount? It could be done perhaps to-night."

"I will tell you of a plan I have been revolving in my mind as we have talked here. I am good at disguising, as my friend Hickok can testify, having often made myself up as an Indian so successfully that I have even been able to deceive Indians themselves. Perhaps I could deceive this man who is to receive the money for the Wild Ox. I might disguise myself as an Indian, take a package of fake money, meet him—or rather let him come to me in the part of the town designated; and when he took the package seize and hold him. We could then probably scare him into telling us where the Wild Ox is, and whether or not he really holds your daughter."

Mendoza stepped toward the scout, his face flushed and eager.

"Just the thing!" he cried. "If you can do that it will get this messenger; and then we could get the Wild Ox himself."

"It may at least be tried," said the scout quietly.

"And if we *do* get our hands on the Wild Ox"—the governor's eyes blazed, and he caught his breath with a gasp—"if we *do* get him, woe be unto him!"

"You would shoot him?"

"No. I would not sully my soul with so foul a crime. But I should see that he was hanged high as Haman."

"I am willing to make the effort," Buffalo Bill told him.

"Nothing can be done until to-night," Wild Bill added. "If any man can carry it off, then Cody is the one. And we'll contrive—myself and the rest of our crowd—to be so close round that we can jump in to help him, if the Wild Ox has men there in addition to his messenger."

"I could send troopers," suggested the governor, nervously anxious.

"It's my opinion," Buffalo Bill told both of them, "that if the thing can be carried out at all, I shall have to go alone. You'll notice the warning in the note. The Wild Ox will probably be ready to guard against any failure of his plan; he may even be near, ready to shoot me, if he sees that his messenger is in danger of capture."

"Then your plan imperils your life!" cried Mendoza.

"I realized that well enough, when I began to think it over. Yet I am willing to take the risk."

"And if in the end," said the governor, "he has *not* my daughter?—what if your suspicion is realized, and his plan is only a means for getting the money, and my daughter is not with him?"

"We should probably be able to discover that fact when we made the messenger talk."

"I do not see how I can wait until night," said Mendoza.

"The interval might be profitably employed," the scout told him, "by having men make a search through the city for Maria Xavier. Her appearance is known; you

even know who her friends are; so, right at the start, you will have something to work on. I should undertake this myself, to occupy the time between now and night, but that I fear we shall have to fill it in looking for our Indian, Little Cayuse."

CHAPTER VIII.

LITTLE CAYUSE.

Buffalo Bill's Indian scout, Little Cayuse, was both faithful and intelligent; and he had acted with commendable promptness in setting forth to follow the woman who brought the message to the Alcatraz.

The Indian trailers had been with the scouts, it will be recalled, when the latter raided the house containing the masked gambler; so they knew as much about that mysterious individual as the scouts knew themselves. They were, also, well aware that in coming to Santa Fé, Cody's mission was to capture or destroy the murderous outlaw called the Wild Ox.

In addition, they knew a good deal about the mystery in which the scout and his pard had become involved. So, in setting forth to run down the veiled woman, Little Cayuse realized that he was likely to plunge into peril.

The chase proved to be a long one, leading him into the very borders of the old city, into the section inhabited chiefly by Mexicans of the lower class.

It came to an end before a rambling adobe house sprawled in a walled and neglected garden. Into this house he had seen the woman vanish, still veiled, and showing that slight limp which in a measure had caused him to follow her.

Little Cayuse stood off, staring with his black eyes at the house.

"*Muy malo!*" he muttered. "Little Cayuse go in house,

have head busted open, mebbly so. Better stay outside an' look. Bimeby Pa-e-has-ka come; then see."

He camped down in the dust and made a pretense of rearranging his flannel head band. Then he took off his moccasins, and pretended to dig sand out of them, working slowly, emptying them, and restoring them to his feet.

He seemed not to be observing the house; but the glances he flirted at it gave him its every detail.

It was singularly quiet, he thought, after the woman had disappeared in it; he began to fear she had gone out at the other side.

Some children appeared, riding a burro; seeing him there, they began to shout at him. Strictly speaking, they were not white children, being mixed bloods; but they considered themselves white, which they supposed gave them license to hoot at a genuine Indian wherever they saw one. They hooted at Little Cayuse, and finally began to pelt him with pebbles.

He glowered at them, yet was unwilling to try chastisement for their insults; so in this emergency he arose and went round to the other side of the adobe.

There the wall was broken; and as still he saw no one moving in the house, he fancied it would be safe if he got closer in and secured a better look.

He passed through the breach in the wall, and began to poke about in the neglected garden, as if he had lost something there and now sought it; thus he came close up to the house.

He was now out of view of the annoying urchins; also of every one else, with possibly the exception of the occupants of the house. On that side was one window, in

the second story; and one door, on the first, or ground floor. Both were closed.

Suddenly the door opened, and in it appeared a woman. She was dark-featured, but young; and Little Cayuse, though he did not see her walk, concluded this was the woman he had followed—the veiled woman with the limp.

“What are you doing here?” she asked in Spanish.

Little Cayuse was willing to retreat now, having, as he believed, made sure that the woman was really still in the house, and likely to remain. He regretted, however, that he had not brought Pedro with him; he could have sent him back now, with a message to Buffalo Bill.

The Piute made a lame excuse, in broken English, about searching for coins in the dirt of the garden, and began to retreat along the wall.

As he did so he heard the window over his head hoisted.

He glanced up quickly. Yet he was not quick enough. A rope was dropping upon him from the window, the noose flared out in a circle like a lasso loop as it flies over the head of a steer.

The Piute threw out his arm to knock the noose aside; but it dropped neatly down over his arm, pinioning it, as the man who threw it gave the rope a jerk.

Little Cayuse struggled madly; but the only result was to slip the noose round his shoulders, where it clasped him closely as the man pulled on it.

The Piute now tried to get out his knife; but he was hampered, using his left hand, while he had his knife harnessed to his side on the right. So he was compelled to reach round awkwardly with his left hand, while the

noose and the rope were tightening and dragging him from his feet.

While in this dire extremity he heard the woman exclaim, and knew that she had darted out of the door. The next instant he felt his groping left hand caught by her; the rope slipped up round his neck; in addition, she threw her weight on his body.

A moment or two after that Little Cayuse knew nothing; the weight of the woman and the cutting choke of the strangling noose reduced him to insensibility.

When he dropped over on the ground, limp and apparently lifeless, the woman seized the rope, which the man released above. She proceeded to pull on it, holding it taut until the man appeared, after he had run down the inner stairway.

The fellow was dark-faced and Mexican in appearance, but was of strong build, having square shoulders and a large body. But his hands were slender and so smooth that it could be seen at a glance he had never done any useful labor.

In truth, he was none other than the man known as the Bravo of Taos, this time without his mask.

He glanced round to see that he was unobserved; then he swung the limp body of the Piute to his shoulders and darted with it into the house.

The woman, also looking round, hastened after him, disappearing and closing the door.

Up into the second story of the squat adobe, under the flat roof, the man bore the Piute, the woman floundering excitedly up the shaky stairs at his heels.

The room into which they entered was an unattractive hole, nearly devoid of furniture, filled with remains

of half-removed cobwebs, and much dirt. It was an odorous place, scarcely more attractive than a pigsty.

Heedless of any bumps given to the Piute, the man pitched the body on the floor; then stooped and released in a measure the choking pinch of the rope, which had been drawn so tight that, as it fell away, its imprint was left in the shape of a deep crease.

"Have you killed him?" the woman asked.

She was younger than the man, being little more than a girl in years, and was not unattractive, from the Mexican standpoint. Her dark eyes showed anxiety; her speech was in Mexican.

Before answering, the man laid his hand over the Piute's faintly fluttering heart.

"His clock is still going," he said, with a brutal touch.

"Of course he followed me," she said, her voice shaking.

"He will not go back until we are ready to let him."

"If he dies?"

The rascal shrugged his shoulders.

"Pooh! It is not easy to kill the like of this fellow. He is an Indian."

"But the murder of an Indian would be punished."

He scoffed again.

"Where is that *aguardiente*?" he asked.

She vanished, but returned soon with a small bottle of the fiery Mexican liquor.

"This will bring him back to life."

The gambler pried the teeth of the Piute open with the blade of his knife, and poured some drops of the liquor between them. The result was that Little Cayuse half strangled, coughed.

"You see he is all right," he said, "or soon will be. As I told you, it is hard to kill one like this fellow."

Little Cayuse proved this assertion, apparently, by returning to consciousness shortly afterward.

He was lying on the floor, when his breathing became more regular; then his eyes slowly opened. But as soon as he saw the man kneeling by him the eyes closed again.

"Wake up, coyote!" the man called to him, and dug his thumb into the Piute's side.

Thereupon, Little Cayuse opened his eyes again. Judging that he could not play the game of "dead" very successfully now, he kept them open, staring at the man, then at the woman.

"You will know us when next you see us!" said the man, with a hard laugh.

"Question him," urged the woman.

"It might be better to kill him," said the man, as if for the purpose of testing the Piute's courage.

The gaze of Little Cayuse wandered round the room, then settled on the stairway which, from where he lay, looked like a hole in the floor. He wondered if he could reach it by a jump, if he made it quickly.

"Better not try that!" the man warned. "The door below is locked, and you could not get out; besides, I have a pistol which carries true."

The Piute's dark eyes came back from their wandering search and rested on the gambler's face.

"I do not need to ask you if you are here in Santa Fé with the American who is called Buffalo Bill; everybody knows that! Who I am does not now matter; and the same can be said for this woman. What is to the purpose seems to be the fact that we have you!"

Little Cayuse did not waste his breath in trying to answer; and it began to seem that he did not comprehend what the man was saying to him.

"You do not understand Spanish?"

The Piute shook his head.

"You cannot answer, of course, if you do not; and what your Indian language is does not matter, as I could not speak it. But you may know that we intend to hold you here. It may be worth our while. You followed this woman, but I think you came alone. By and by we may want to send word to your friend Buffalo Bill, that if he tries to locate us we will send him your scalp in payment for his trouble. That is all now."

He drew the rope with a quick jerk, tightening it again round the neck of his prisoner.

But this was only a temporary means of holding him; when he had bound the Indian with cords he threw off the choking noose.

Then he stood up.

"We may leave this house," he said. "If we do there will be nothing left in it but you and the rats. And they are hungry rascals."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN WITH THE TWISTED EYES.

The efforts of Buffalo Bill and his pards, aided by the Indian trailers, were insufficient to locate Little Cayuse. Nor could the officers do better, who were sent scouring through the town by the marshal of Santa Fé in answer to the scout's demands for local assistance.

So when night came again Little Cayuse was numbered with the missing.

In his room at the Alcatraz, Buffalo Bill prepared for the rôle he had assigned himself. He kept his Indians close about the hotel, so that the sight of Indian figures flitting about might help him in getting out of the place unnoticed. In addition, he had Pedro leave in the room his Indian blanket, his flannel head band and feathers, together with his box of pigments.

Buffalo Bill had the aid and advice of Nomad and Wild Bill, also that of the baron, as he proceeded with his "make-up." Nomad especially was familiar with the art of Indian decoration.

"Ther only trouble, Buffler," he said, "is goin' ter be thet you're too tall fer ter pass off as one of yer Injuns."

"Pedro is nearly as tall," the scout told him. "I shall wear Pedro's blanket and head band; and I think I can make it."

When he had finished and stood before the mirror in his room he had changed himself into so faithful a copy of Pedro that the resemblance was almost startling. Even Nomad admitted that he "reckoned it would do."

if he would hold up the blanket, and so hide his mustache.

It was not until eleven o'clock when the gambling and sporting fraternity of the old town were but just beginning to wake up that the scout departed from the Alcatraz, slipping by a back way out into the darkness of a side street.

There he joined two of the Apaches, Pedro having been kept out of the way; the idea being that if any one saw him leave the hotel, this fact, together with the disguise, would make the watcher think he was really Pedro.

Wild Bill came trailing out after him, with Nomad and the baron. Together they stood in the shadows, with heads together; the whole thing being carried off as naturally as possible.

At this juncture a man went by, who glanced at them. There was something familiar in his appearance. When he passed, on the other side of the street, under a dim lamp, they saw that he was the gambler who had shot out the lights in the Red Dragon.

"Der man mit der twisted eyes!" the baron breathed.

"Right-o!" whispered Wild Bill. "Eyes crossed, and white, like the eyes of a vicious horse; I recollect the rascal, for he tried to help that Gambler of Taos to cheat me. Hadn't I better follow him, Pard Cody?"

"Yes, at once. I will go out to the eastern section of the town, as planned; Nomad can follow me. You take the baron and the others, and shadow this fellow. Move quick, or he'll get a big start of you."

Wild Bill and the baron glided away, with the two Indians.

Buffalo Bill waited until they were out of sight; then he turned in the other direction, moving slowly, keeping

to the dark streets, with his blanket well up about his face; he even very cleverly imitated Pedro's Indian walk.

Behind him, at some distance, came Nomad, stealthy as an Indian himself.

"Waugh!" was the thought of the trapper. "We seem ter be jumpin' all ther game right at onct. I hope Hickok gits that devil wi' ther white eyes."

The man from Laramie was doing his best in that line.

Without seeming to do so, he kept at the heels of the cross-eyed gambler; the baron and the Indians coming on behind, close enough not to lose him, yet far enough back not to attract attention.

The sporting man did not seem to know he was being followed, which made Wild Bill's work much easier.

Now and then he stopped on meeting some one, spoke a word or two, then moved on. At these men, on passing them, Wild Bill looked, discovering that each of them was a Mexican of the sporting type.

"A regular gang of the thugs here in the old town," he mused. "It's easy to see how the Wild Ox got his tips about the stages that were sent out with armed guards in them, if these cattle are his pals, and I reckon they are."

The chase led at length to the old adobe to which Little Cayuse had trailed the woman. Though the house was dark, Wild Bill saw the man disappear into it; then he saw the flash of a lamp, after which darkness reigned again.

"Holed!" said the man from Laramie. "By gorry, Cody ought to be with me now!"

He retreated, to make sure he would not be seen, and was soon joined by the baron and the Indians.

"He is in that house off there," Wild Bill told them; "anyway, he went into it. I fell back to tell you. I reckon you'd better take one of the Indians, baron, and slide round to the other side, to see that he doesn't give us the slip; I'll take the other one, and go up on this side. If he has pals in the house, we're likely to have trouble; so look out; these fellows will shoot at the drop of a hat. Here's excitement for you, baron; likewise, a little tobasco sauce, in the shape of possible danger; the combination ought to make you happy."

"Idt iss vot suidt me," the baron acknowledged, gripping his revolver and looking at the house. "I am petting a tollar to a pologna sissage ve ar-re having some lively dimes soon. Diss veller mit der twisted eyes, he gan shoodt; I seen him vhen he pudt der lights out."

Followed by one of the Apaches, the baron slid around to the other side of the adobe; where, in the darkness, he found the broken place in the wall, which let him easily into the neglected garden. The rear of the house was as dark as the front.

Hardly were the baron and the Apache in position when the door on that side opened, and a woman blundered out of it, muttering angrily.

The baron dropped his round body down; the Apache sank beside him as softly as a falling leaf.

The woman was followed instantly by a man, who spoke to her, stopping what seemed her headlong flight; then he began to address her in a tone of argument, or entreaty.

Unfortunately, Schnitzenhauser was better acquainted with "pologna sissage" and sauerkraut than he was with the Spanish language when it fluttered and clattered along with the rapidity to which it was subjected

now by the man and woman who stood between him and the door.

The woman was apparently in a peppery temper over something, and the man was trying to calm her; that much the baron gathered more by the accents than by the words.

"Idt iss der veller mit der twisted eyes, all rightd," he thought. "Aber I gand't hardtly seen him, I gan dell dot mooch. I am petting dot der vimmins iss der olt wench vot ve see in dose odder house vare der gampler gidt avay vrom us."

The woman refused to accede to the man's request, whatever it was, and went on, plowing heavily through the old garden, disappearing beyond the wall.

The man stood looking at her as she went, muttering angrily; then he turned back to the door.

For a moment the baron was on the point of springing up and rushing upon him. At his side he felt the form of the Apache quiver, and knew the Apache had the same thought.

But the man passed through the door, pulling it shut behind him with a soft movement.

"Chabbo, you make a kvick fludder roundt to Vildt Pill, unt say he iss to come by dhis vay on der choomp," the baron ordered, with his lips close to Chappo's ear.

The Apache rose, drew up his blanket, slid with a stealthy movement across the garden, and was gone.

The baron, with revolver drawn, lay on the ground, looking at the closed door, wondering if he had not wasted an opportunity when he let the man get back into the house.

Before he had settled this matter in his mind Wild

Bill appeared, following Chappo, with Yuppah right behind him.

The baron lifted himself that they might see him, and be guided toward him and the door.

"Idt vouldt haf peem petter, maype, uff Yubbah had stayed pehindt, py der odder door," he said. "He gan go roundt again. Der twisted eyes, he iss in here. Ve seen him. A vimmins gome oudt, unt dey haf a quarrel, idt seems to me, unt she go away; while he goes pack der house insite vunce more. Der kvestion iss——"

The explanation of the baron was cut short by a sound within the house, as if a fight had started; then they heard the voice of the gambler.

"We'll just look in," said Wild Bill. "Yuppah, slide round to the front, and let nobody go out that way; down 'em if it's tried. Come on, dear baron."

He ran to the door with the baron, ready to hurl his weight against it and fling it from its hinges; but the door had not been locked when the man went inside. Perhaps, in his haste, or his anger, he had forgotten it.

"Ach!" wheezed the baron, "ve gidt in easy. Somepoty iss preaking der house town."

They were no more than inside when they heard a cry which was unmistakably made by Little Cayuse. It sounded at the head of the dark stairs before them.

Chappo threw back his head when he heard it, and the Apache war whoop broke from his lips; the next instant he was going up the stairs in great jumps.

"Wow!" Wild Bill bellowed, following him.

Crack, crack!

A heavy revolver roared in the room above, the bullets cutting through the wood of the stairs, over which

the Indian and the scout were jumping; the lead had been hurled at them, evidently.

In response to the Apache war cry, came the familiar battle yell of Little Cayuse; and they heard a sound as if a form rolled over the floor. This was followed by an oath in Spanish, and a swishing blow.

The room above, which Wild Bill and Chappo reached, was dark as night; but a smell of oil recently burning told that it had been lately lighted and that the lamp had been put out.

A man came lunging through the darkness at the stairs, going over the stretched-out hands of Wild Bill as the man from Laramie tried to seize him. The plunging form struck Chappo, hurling him backward down the steps. The man went on, diving for the rear door of the house.

At the foot of the stairs he came into violent collision with the baron; then he and the round-bodied German went to the floor together, the baron yelping for aid.

Though Wild Bill heard a scuffling, and a grunting sound, on the floor of the room, he did not stop to investigate; but flew back down the stairway to the assistance of the German.

When he reached the bottom he found Schnitzenhauser rolling over the floor, with the stranger first on top of him, and then under him, both fighting like wild cats.

Chappo, having tumbled to the foot of the stairs, had gained his feet and got out his knife, and now stood ready to jump in with it if he found he could do so without knifing the German.

Wild Bill could tell by the sounds when the stranger came uppermost. So he caught hold of him, seizing him round the throat, and tried to drag him off the baron.

When Chappo flew in, lending his strength and aid, the man was literally pulled from the baron's back, and held down by main force.

He was a lusty fellow, of immense strength; but his combined foes were too much for him.

By this time Yuppah, who had been sent to the front of the house, had come round again into the garden, and then into the house; so that now he was also ready to lend help.

"Get a light, some one," Wild Bill panted. "We've got to see who we've corralled here."

The baron rolled back out of the way, breathing heavily, sputtering German sentences.

Chappo struck a match.

"Der man mit der twisted eyes—yoost as I t'ought!" the baron cried, when the light of the match fell in the fellow's face.

Still, beyond the head of the stairs, in the room above, sounded those queer noises; now, added to them, was a call from Little Cayuse.

The two Indians went scurrying up at that.

The baron struck another match, caught from the wall a Mexican lariat of horsehair, and, flinging himself on the gambler, began to tie him with it, aided by Wild Bill.

Indian whoops came from the room above while this was going on.

The man who had been captured swore in vigorous Spanish.

"Just keep quiet, my friend, or I shall have to hammer you on the head with my revolver," Wild Bill told him.

Thereupon the fellow opened up in English, protesting

against this "outrage," declaring he did not know what this assault meant.

"You will have time to investigate, after we get these knots set well; eh, baron?"

"Uff I ain'dt miss my guessing, he vill haf seferal years in which he gan t'ink dhis ofer," the baron declared, surging on the knots.

As soon as he saw that the baron could manage the captured man, Wild Bill jumped up and started to ascend the stairs.

He, too, flashed a match, to drive away the Stygian darkness.

He saw coming down the steps Little Cayuse, with one of the Apaches on each side of him; they had him by the arms, as if they felt they ought to support him. There was blood on the Piute's dark face.

"Wow!" Wild Bill bellowed. "I thought I recognized the music of your gentle voice; and I did. So they had you corralled here!"

Little Cayuse swung on down, lurching as if he suffered from dizziness. Besides the bleeding wound in his cheek, made apparently by the rake of a knife, there were deep, dark lines round his neck.

"Hello! Did the devils try to hang you?" Wild Bill asked.

Little Cayuse reached the lower floor; then sank weakly to a seat on the bottom step.

Wild Bill flashed another match, the former having gone out, and looked again at the young Indian.

Little Cayuse began to explain.

"*Muy malo*. Me foller woman—you know, huh? She come here. Mebbyso I think she gone out other way.

Little Cayuse he go all same round—find back door. Whoosh! Rope drop down on Little Cayuse.”

He went on his queer way, telling of his capture; and how, since that time, he had been held a prisoner in the adobe.

He said the man who roped him was the gambler who had worn the mask, though at the time the man's face had not been covered; he tried to describe the man.

“Wow! Maybe he's in here yet! Scatter through this old rat hole, and find out.”

The Indians, with lighted matches, hunted about, and found some candles half used, which served their purpose; with them they went over the house, searching it from top to bottom.

While they were gone, Little Cayuse told how he had partly worked out of his bonds, and had then been attacked by the cross-eyed man; this had happened just before his friends got into the place.

Wild Bill gave the searchers aid, while the baron watched below with the bound prisoner. The revolvers the gambler had worn lay on the floor, heaped in a pile with the knives and other weapons taken from him.

“You vos going to sedt oop a hartvare sdore, hey?” said the baron. “Idt loogks idt.”

“I'd like better to fill your fat paunch with lead!” the man flung at him.

“Idt wouldt pe cruelty to animals. Vare iss diss odder veller—der man vot veard der masks?”

“Do you think I'm mixed up with him?”

“Vor shure.”

“There you're mistaken.”

“How do you know who I am sbeaking apoudt?”

“I know that easy enough—the man you fellows tried

to get in the Red Dragon; the one they're looking for upstairs. But I'm not mixed up with him.”

“Ve vill holdt you, uff idt iss so, on der sharge uff cabdivating Liddle Cayuse.”

“The Indian?”

“Yaw. It iss a benidentiary offenses.”

“I had nothin' to do with that, either.”

“Nein. Iss dot so-o? How you explain him? You knifed him yoost a vwhile ago.”

“I came to this house to see the woman who was here. The Indian was tied. When I told her she ought to let him go she got mad. We had some words over it, and she cut out. The Indian kicked me when I got back upstairs. That made me hot, and I gashed him.”

“Idt iss a inderesting sdory. Aber I tond't t'ink idt is der troodth. Who iss dhis vimmins?”

“Find out.”

“You pet me ve vill do so. Ve vill also findt oudt some odder madders. Ve vill findt oudt vare dhis masked gampler is sdaying; vare iss der Vilt Ox; vare iss der gofornor's daughter! Likewise, how mooch you know apoudt all uff dhem.”

“I don't know anything about them; you're on the wrong track, and but waste your time.”

“Meppyso. Ve tond't pelieve idt.”

Wild Bill and the Indians returned from their search of the house.

“It's empty as a last year's bird's nest,” said the man from Laramie. “It's a pity we didn't get hold of that woman. I've an idea she is the one we saw at the other house.”

“Idt iss etzackly my own obinion.”

“Did she have a limp?”

"She vos vlying too fasdt vor a limpingness when she vendt oudt uff der garden," averred the German.

"Well, we'll just take this fellow and go to that other house. Chappo can stay here, to report if any other person comes. Yuppah can go with us. I think, baron, we'll be wise to make a hasty flutter of it."

A little later they moved away from the old adobe, taking their prisoner.

The Mexicans of the near-by houses had been aroused, and could be seen gathering and whispering in the surrounding semidarkness.

* * * * *

Buffalo Bill was having an experience quite as interesting, of an entirely different kind.

Disguised with the blanket, the head band, and the Indian paint and feathers of Pedro, the Apache, he had set out for the eastern outskirts of the town, armed with a bundle of worthless papers to represent the package of money which it might be supposed the Indian would carry.

Nomad trailed along behind, keeping him within view, yet lagging enough to avert too close attention. Nomad had himself made a few changes in his personal appearance, though he had not attempted any disguise. The principal thing he had done had been to discard his old beaver-skin cap for a wide-brimmed hat: the alteration which that made was remarkable.

Having gained the outlying narrow streets on the east, the disguised scout prowled along them, peering in Indian fashion, as if looking for some one, holding the package where it could be seen.

For a time he had no success. Occasionally he saw some person, but no one came near him.

At last as he turned the corner of one of the narrow streets, he was met by a veiled woman, who stepped out of a low doorway, where evidently she had ensconced herself for this purpose, having seen him approaching.

She looked at him earnestly; then spoke.

"You are one of Buffalo Bill's Indians?" she asked, in Spanish.

The pretended Indian stared, and drew his blanket well up about his neck and face.

"Ai!" he grunted.

"You are one of his Indians?"

"Ai. No spik um Spanish."

"I spik the Inglis ver' poor," said the woman. "Hava you some-at'ing for me?"

He glanced round, to see if any foes were near. Some distance off he caught a glimpse of the sauntering form of old Nomad.

"You come git Buff Bill money?" he asked.

"Yes. It is so; the money I am come to get. You hava de money?"

The supposed Indian swung his arm toward the deep doorway out of which she had appeared.

"Give money there," he said.

She flitted into the doorway, he following her; and he observed that though she had moved quickly, she had a slight limp of the right foot. There could be no doubt this was the messenger sent by the Wild Ox to get the \$10,000 demanded of the governor for the release of his daughter.

Instead of handing her the package the pretended Indian dropped it, and pressed against her temple the cold muzzle of a revolver.

"You are caught!" came the startling declaration, in

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Spanish, which she was so supposed to understand perfectly. "Make a movement, or cry out for help, and it will bring your death. I am not an Indian; I am the American scout called Buffalo Bill. You are trapped."

She uttered a low cry and reeled against the door. In her sudden terror her knees gave way, and she would have dropped, if he had not caught and sustained her.

"I think I know who you are," he told her; "you are Maria Xavier, recently one of the servants in the governor's palace, and an attendant of the governor's daughter, Muriel."

She moaned faintly.

Then she began to plead.

"Let me go," she said; "will the kind señor not let me go?"

"Why should I let you go?"

She sobbed in answer, her whole body shaking.

"See here!" he said. "I suppose that the Wild Ox is somewhere near, waiting for you to bring the money to him!"

She still sobbed and trembled.

"Tell me if that is so."

"He waits at the house," she confessed.

"The Wild Ox?"

"Who else; he is so called."

"I have no desire to be hard with you," he urged; "but you must know that you have got yourself now where only straight dealing can help you; you will have to tell me everything. Where is Muriel Mendoza?"

She broke down at that, and began to weep again.

"She waits at the house, with the Wild Ox."

"Of her own free will?"

"No," she confessed; "she is a prisoner there."

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"I do not want to linger here, for I have an idea that this outlaw called the Wild Ox has sent men to trail you, probably to protect you, or because he does not trust you. We will walk along here, and join my friend who waits below. If you go willingly I shall not tie your hands; but if you try to get away I shall have to do that."

He stepped out of the doorway, taking away the pistol which now and then had kissed her forehead.

She came trembling after him out into the street.

"It will seem strange for you to be walking with an Indian, perhaps," he said; "but people do queer things in old Santa Fé; and right now it can't be helped. Right over there you can see my old friend, Nomad; he is here to help me; and as we walk along he will drop in behind us. So, you see what folly it will be for you to think of trying to escape."

"Where are we going?" she faltered.

"To the palace."

She shrank back.

"No—no!" she urged.

"It is a place familiar to you."

"But I—I cannot go there, now."

"It is the place we must go. You must see the governor."

"He will have me sent to prison!"

"Perhaps not, if you deal fairly and frankly with him now; if you tell him all, and what made you undertake this terrible thing."

She went along then, seeing she could do nothing else.

As they passed Nomad, he dropped in behind them; and continued to follow them as they went on toward the palace.

When they were out of the narrow streets, in one which led nearly in a straight line toward the palace, Buffalo Bill quickened his steps.

The woman did not try to escape now; she was reduced to submission by terror and her sense of guilt.

She shivered and drew back, and but for her fear would have run away, or attempted to do so, when the palace was gained.

Buffalo Bill produced the cords he had under the blanket, showing them, and she submitted to the inevitable.

His hammering knock brought a servant, who did not recognize the veiled figure of the woman and the blanketed Indian-like form of the American scout. He started and stared when the supposed Indian addressed him in Spanish.

"Say to the governor that the American scout is here and would see him at once," Buffalo Bill ordered.

The servant stared out of the door, looking for the American scout.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"He is here!" said the scout.

Thereupon the servant retreated, declaring to those he met that a crazy Indian was at the door.

But the tumult this aroused brought the governor; and the scout got into the palace with the woman.

Mendoza was astonished, as well as pleased, with the cleverness of the scout at disguising; yet he did not know who the woman was until his inner room was reached and she lifted her veil at the scout's request.

"Maria Xavier!" he said.

The woman looked at him, pale, almost defiant.

"You will make full explanation to the governor," said

the scout, discarding now his blanket and the disguising Indian feathers and head band. "That is why I have brought you here. And as you know where his daughter is, tell him about her first."

The woman sank into a chair, trembling and faint, on the border land of tears again.

"It was because I was tempted, and was jealous—of her," she urged.

"Jealous of my daughter!" said the governor.

"Jealous or envious of all the fine things she had—her jewels and fine dresses, her comforts, and her money. So, when I talked with him about it, he got me to help him carry out his plans. But there was another woman who helped."

"Who was that?" the governor demanded.

"His mother. She lives with him, in that house."

"What house?"

She gave the name of the street and the location of the house.

"It is the house occupied," said the scout, "by the Gambler of Taos."

"The Gambler of Taos is the Wild Ox?"

The woman admitted as much.

She went on to confess that she had become acquainted with the gambler, and had fallen in love with him; and that then he had tempted her to attempt what she had afterward done.

"I stole the key to the treasure room from you," she confessed to the governor. "With it he got into the room, and took the jewels and the plate."

"And Montezuma's Eye?" said Buffalo Bill.

"No! He did not take that. It was not there. And

he wanted it more than all else, for it was of greater value. Then—must I tell all?"

"Everything!" the governor thundered at her.

"Then he thought that your daughter had taken it. For it was there but that very afternoon. I saw it there, then, myself, after I had the key. He thought she had taken it in the coach, and would sell it in New York. So he planned to get that, too. He sent his mother, therefore, by a swift horse, to Wagon Mound. She had helpers; men who went with her. At Wagon Mound, where your daughter got out, they captured her, unseen; and while they blinded her with a shawl and held her so that she could make no noise, the gambler's mother took some of her clothing, put it on, and went away in the stage, wearing it, and the troopers did not know. At Pagosa Springs she got out, still veiled; then she took a horse and rode away, returning to Santa Fé."

"But she did not find the Eye of Montezuma in the coach?" said Buffalo Bill.

He almost feared to ask the question, lest the woman should confess that in the coach, or on the person of the governor's daughter, the big ruby had been found. It seemed possible, remembering all the things he knew.

"No," said the woman, to his relief, "the ruby was not there."

"What a fool this man must have been—what fools all of you—to think it possible my daughter could have taken it!" thundered the governor. "But hasten. Where is my daughter at this moment?"

"At the house of the Gambler of Taos."

"And he is there, too?" said Buffalo Bill.

"He is there, too; he waits for the money. When the ruby was not secured he was in a rage; then he de-

termined to make the governor pay ten thousand dollars for the Señorita Muriel; he said the ruby he had lost was worth that much."

"We will go there at once," said the governor.

But when he attempted to go he was seized with such weakness that he could not walk; the excitement he had been through had affected his heart.

To tell the truth, Buffalo Bill, fearing disclosures which he suspected might come, was glad that the governor could not take part in the work he now had to do—the capture of the Wild Ox, and the release of Muriel Mendoza.

CHAPTER X.

"I'LL RETURN THE RUBY."

When Buffalo Bill arrived with old Nomad, and the two men the governor insisted on sending along, they came upon Wild Bill and the baron, who had but a little while before reached the spot with their prisoner and the Apache who was with them.

But they did not waste time in many explanations; a few words were all that were needed to acquaint the scout with the fact that the cross-eyed gambler was in the toils, and to tell Wild Bill and the baron of the capture and confession of Maria Xavier.

The house was quietly surrounded.

Then Buffalo Bill demanded that the door should be opened.

Sounds were heard inside the house after this demand was made. But they subsided, and no one came to the door.

The scout then unlocked the door, as he had done once before; and with lanterns brought for the purpose a search of the house was begun, the doors at the same time being guarded.

On the top floor, as he was trying to get out upon the roof, they came upon the Gambler of Taos. He had again masked himself, and was trying to make a sneak out of the place.

Buffalo Bill caught him by the leg and dragged him down.

As he came through the trapdoor the man slipped the

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mask from his face and tossed it out on the roof; but it was not done so neatly that the thing was not seen; and after a while the mask was found there by the Apache.

Now that he had been captured, the masked Gambler of Taos tried to brazen it out; making a good bluff at first, until he knew that Maria Xavier was in the hands of the governor, and had made a confession.

After that he grew sullen.

"We have been wanting you; for we know that in addition to this crime committed by you," said the scout, "you are the outlaw called the Wild Ox. You can't squirm out of that, since you were fool enough to send that demand for money to me, and signed that name to it."

He denied that he had signed it, when he said anything, sticking to the futile lie.

"What we came for, more than you, is the governor's daughter."

"Ah! If I tell you where she is, will you let me go?"

They would not agree to that; so they searched the house again. In the lower rooms they found the woman who had glowered and grumbled at them when they were there before—the same woman who had been at the adobe house on the outskirts of the town not long before.

Maria Xavier had said this woman was the gambler's mother; yet it did not seem possible. It is not easy, though, to tell the age of some Mexicans. She was dark-faced, with withered features; but she had a panther-like springiness of movement that seemed to belie her years; and she gave ample proof that she had a peppery tongue and a fiery temper. They could believe that she was the one who had played so bold a part at Wagon Mound

and Pagosa Springs easier than they could believe that she was the gambler's mother.

She refused to tell where the governor's daughter was—denying that she had ever seen her, or knew anything about her.

But Buffalo Bill found the girl at last, when he discovered a trapdoor in the cellar, and went down into the pit.

His lantern revealed the girl lying on the stone floor, bound hand and foot, with a gag in her mouth.

He cut the cords and released her.

Nomad and Wild Bill were with him, the baron and the Indians and Mexicans being above, to keep watch over the prisoners.

The lantern light showed the scout and Nomad that the governor's daughter was truly the young woman who had dropped down on them through the skylight, and had told that story about the jewel.

She was shaking with fright now, and her nerves had given way.

"I lied about it, then," she said; "I took it afterward. But I meant to take it, when I told you that; and I thought that would keep you from following me. I relied on you to hold the secret from my father."

"We have done so, until this minute," the scout assured her.

She gasped with relief.

"Then, señors," she said, "will you still keep it a secret? If you will but trust me, this very night the Eye of Montezuma will be restored to the crown; no one but you and myself need ever know. My father will be saved the great humiliation. And I have learned my lesson."

"But why did you take it?" the scout persisted.

"Must I tell all?" she said, as Maria Xavier had said before her.

"It is advisable; then we shall know better how to act," the scout told her.

"It is simple, yet heartrending and terrible. I have a lover who is in New York; but my father will not consent that I shall marry him. I planned to take the ruby there and sell it, for he is poor. We would then have gone to Argentine to live, where he had friends. I meant to pay my grandmother that visit."

"Yet you did not intend ever to return the ruby?"

"No," she admitted. "I could not have done that."

They talked the matter over; finally they determined to ask the governor to release the servant, Maria Xavier; and that they would hold this whole matter, so far as it was necessary, a closed secret. It would harm the governor to be told of it; and the daughter was repentant.

The governor assented to this arrangement, and Maria, pleading penitence in tears, was forgiven, released, and taken back into the governor's family. The Wild Ox and such of his companions in outlawry as were caught were held for punishment.

Maria Xavier, however, was not the woman of old, though clever dissembling made her seem so. Her thoughts were of the Gambler of Taos and his pal, in prison. By stealthy bribery she contrived to communicate with them. The notes she received in return aroused in her a purpose to secure their release.

How she was to accomplish it she did not know. But one day her thoughts were given a hopeful turn through a visit to her of a blanketed Indian and the suggestions made in the note he brought.

He had come into the town of Santa Fé driving a burro loaded with firewood cut on the hills, the sale of firewood in this manner being customarily carried on by the Pueblos, as the New Mexican village Indians are called.

Maria, piously muttering a *pater noster* to hide her plotting thoughts, met the Indian seller of wood at the back entrance, where he had stopped his burro.

She was about to order him to move on, with a statement that her master, the governor, did not desire to purchase wood, when by a motion of his hand he caught her attention.

He held in it a folded paper.

"It is from Lopez Escondo," he said to her in a whisper.

She caught the folded sheet out of the brown palm, then, jumping back into the entry, she eagerly devoured the contents of the writing.

It was indeed from the gambler of Taos, and it concerned his imprisonment and this messenger.

"This man is Francisco," it said, "called by his people the Weasel. He is not only my friend, but my brother, and his people are my brothers—by which I mean his family. He is from the Indian pueblo of Taos. He will see you about getting me out of here. I have had a talk with him in the prison, under the eye of a guard, and slipped him this. If I stay in here it means my death."

This was the substance of it. It was in Spanish, more wordy, with many protestations of affection for the woman, designed to stir her to strenuous efforts in his behalf.

The Indian stood patiently by his burro, staring into the dark entry where she was reading.

When she reappeared he began a loud importuning, begging her to buy his wood.

It was a very large burro load, he cried, and it was cheap; he would sell it for "two bits," and he had been a whole day gathering it and getting it there. Could not the charming señorita, he urged, see that this was a bargain the like of which she would not meet again?

He held out his brown hand. Something in his manner made her drop the note into it, though she so much desired to retain it. It made for safety, she recognized, if she got it out of her possession. And she had the words in her mind, all that was needed.

"Bring some of the sticks from the burro load in here," she said to him sharply, so that she might be overheard; "I am sure that my master wishes no wood; yet, if it is excellent, he may perchance buy of you."

He led the burro nearer the door; then he slowly began to loose the knot of the rope holding the wood in place on its back.

It brought him close up to her; so that when she stepped a bit nearer, and bent as if to watch what he was doing, their heads were in such proximity that quick whispers could be exchanged.

"Your plans?" she asked.

"You are Señorita Maria Xavier?"

"Yes, fool! You must have known it, else you would not have been so bold. You saw him when?"

"Yesterday."

"How looked he? Changed?"

"He dies in a month, if he is not released. The lion of the mountains cannot stand life in a cage; it kills him. Such may do for dogs and coyotes."

"He has some one with him!"

"Pedro."

"Ah, yes; I know; the one the Americans call Greaser Pete."

"They would both escape. So said Escondo. He thinks that it can be done by you. He says the way is for you to get the governor to send an order to the prison for their release."

"How is such an order to be secured?" she demanded.

"He does not know. He says you see the governor daily, almost hourly; and he thinks you can do it. The governor and his daughter, they trust you again; that is what he says."

"But I am their servant; they do not what I order; I do what they order."

"He suggested wine—drugged wine. But he did not know how it could be done. He said if an order could be had from the governor that would hold good for only the time that he and Pedro were escaping it would do; for after they were out of the prison they would snap their fingers at attempts to capture them."

"And Maria Xavier?"

"Yourself?"

"What is to become of the woman who takes this risk for Lopez Escondo, when he is out of the prison? She takes the risk for him; and then he flies the country, and she sees him no more. Is that it?"

"He said, not so; he will take you with him wherever he goes."

He had the knot loosed, and began to carry sticks into the entry, where he dropped them with a clatter.

"We cannot talk here long," he warned; "your safety demands that we should not; also the safety of Escondo. I am Francisco, the Weasel—his brother, so far as an

Indian can be the brother of a white man; I am willing to risk much for him. What says the señorita that I shall tell him?"

"You will get to see him again?"

"I shall take wood to the prison to-morrow. One of the guards, when I went before, made me carry the wood through a corridor to the place where it was to be kept. Along that corridor are some cells—in one of them the white man from Taos. I shall pass by his cell when next I take wood, and that is to-morrow."

"Then can you not release him?"

"It would be impossible. I should be shot, and could do nothing at all. The place is too closely watched. What is done will have to be done by craft. He says so himself. Hence his suggestion that in some manner, by drugged wine perhaps, you can get an order for his release from the governor. If it fools the guards but an hour—if it fools them but ten minutes—it will do."

He began to beg her in loud tones to look at his "beautiful wood."

She seemed to reject it.

"No, it is not what you said; take it away."

This was for the benefit of any chance listener.

Under her breath she said:

"Tell Escondo that I think of him day and night, and that I will release him or die in the attempt; also, that I will see how I can get that order from the governor."

"The señorita will not recommend to her master my beautiful wood!" he wailed loudly.

"No! It is crooked sticks—not beautiful wood. Take it, and your burro, and see that you do not trouble me again. Begone!"

The Pueblo went away, scowling, muttering with seem-

ing anger as he pulled at the burro rope, apparently in the mood and attitude of an indignant Indian who had been kicked out of the house.

Maria Xavier turned back into the palace, her heart beating wildly, her brain in a whirl,

How she was to get Governor Mendoza's order for the release of the prisoners she did not know; yet this uncertainty did not daunt her; she had resolved to get it.

CHAPTER XI.

WHY MENDOZA GAVE THE ORDER.

The acting governor went to Agua Caliente, the hot springs resort of the territory, for rest and peace, hoping to restore his shattered nerves to their normal condition.

His daughter had gained her father's reluctant consent to her marriage to the man with whom she had schemed to elope and fly to South America.

Mendoza did not know, of course, that his daughter had planned to steal the ruby. That was a secret which Buffalo Bill and his pards had guarded. It was the daughter's headstrong willfulness only of which Mendoza was aware. That and the peril in which she had been placed was what had done the work for his nerves.

Agua Caliente was a quiet, sleepy place, the natural home of the siesta. Dusty cottonwoods, watered by the tepid overflow of the springs, furnished shade. Behind this wall of dusty green clustered the houses, with the bathing pavilions and the rooms for the mud baths. Sick Mexicans and Spaniards, with the attendants and doctors, were the only company; and, naturally, they were not a lively crowd. All day the sun beat on the sands that stretched like a desert beyond the cottonwoods, and all day the flies droned round the pavilions. If one had willed otherwise much of the time, he could have done nothing but sleep, or smoke cigarettes, or play at innocuous games, as the excitement of betting was forbidden.

"A week of this laziness and I shall be well," said Mendoza to his attendant. "Bring me that copy of 'Don

Quixote' and the two candles and leave me to myself; I shall read while I can keep my eyes open; then I shall rest there on the lounge. Do not waken me in the morning until the sun is two hours high."

The light-footed servant brought the book, and, after lighting the candles and placing them on the little table, he went away. Mendoza opened the book, yawned, and began to read.

The time was night. He had slept half the day, yet he felt stupid. When he began to feel that he should have to prop his eyes open with sticks if he read any longer, he put down the book, yawned again, and wondered if he had energy enough to get out of his clothing and into bed without calling aid.

He was on the point of summoning the servant when the door of his room, being slightly ajar, opened wider, and he heard footsteps there.

"Ah!" he said, "here he is! I shall not have to call."

But when the door had opened farther and the person who had pushed against it came into the room, the governor was given a shock that drove away every desire for slumber.

What he beheld was a ruffled and laced Spanish cavalier, somewhat of the Don Quixote type—a theatrical person, worthy to have stepped out of a Spanish play. Hiding the face of the cavalier was a crimson mask, and in the right hand of the cavalier a very business-like revolver, whose grim muzzle was pointed straight at Mendoza's breast.

Pasquale Mendoza sat as if frozen in his chair, the color receding from his face, while he stared at this figure.

When the cavalier came farther into the room Men-

doza was still sufficiently master of his faculties to notice a slight limp, but his attention was no sooner attracted to it than he was given other things to think about, for behind the masked figure came others, yet different—the stealthy figures of Indians.

As Agua Caliente was close upon the borders of the region roamed over by the Navajos, into which the more warlike Apaches made occasional raids and forays, Mendoza's natural supposition that these Indians were either Apaches or Navajos had ample warrant.

But who was the Spanish cavalier showing the limp and holding the threatening revolver?

The rather gaudy, masked figure took a seat quietly in the chair that stood by the other end of the table where Mendoza had been reading; then laid the cocked revolver on the table before him within reach of his hand.

The Indians—there were half a dozen of them—came on into the room, until they filled that end of it, and blocked the door.

"You see you cannot escape," came from behind the mask of the cavalier. "You will agree that we have taken abundant means to guard against it."

Mendoza looked curiously at the speaker. The voice, though no doubt masked quite as much as the face, sounded strangely familiar. Yet he could not place it. For that matter, he felt a queer inability to think clearly on that or any subject; he was too dazed, not to say frightened, by this threatening array. He wondered vaguely what it meant.

"I should be foolish to try to escape—under the circumstances," he admitted at length, gaining control of his voice.

The masked cavalier pointed to the inkhorn and the quill pen on the table by the closed copy of "Don Quixote." Writing paper was there, too—bearing the official letter-head used by Mendoza in much of his correspondence. In spite of the laziness of the day, that afternoon Mendoza had tried to write some letters.

"The governor sees the ink, and pen, and the paper," said the masked figure. "He is to take them up, and write what I shall now dictate."

"What is it you want me to write?" Mendoza gasped.

"That he shall know soon enough."

The trembling governor stared hard at the mask, having noted again that familiar ring in the voice.

"Who are you, anyway?" he blurted.

"Any name will do that sounds well; call me Señor Tabano."

"The Gadfly!"

"Yet the gadfly stings only when it is needed; we shall hope here it will not be needed."

He touched the revolver significantly.

"What is it you wish me to write?" Mendoza asked again.

"When he has drawn up paper before him and is ready, I shall give him the words to put down."

Mendoza pulled the paper toward him and took up the pen, dipping it into the ink horn.

"I am ready," he said grimly, steadying his hand.

"Then write:

"To Pablo Mirada, Jailer at Santa Fé:

"You are hereby commanded and authorized to release at once two prisoners now held by you—Lopez Escondo and Pedro Mogollon. This shall be your warrant

for the same. I have good reason for doing this, and you shall be held blameless if you obey without hesitation" (Signed) PASQUALE MENDOZA,
"Acting Governor of New Mexico."

But Mendoza stopped after he had written a line and understood fully the meaning of the order he was commanded to pen.

"I cannot do this!" he protested.

The slender hand of the masked cavalier took up the revolver and pointed it at Mendoza's head.

"Does the governor love his life? Then he will write and sign as I say."

"But," sputtered Mendoza, "I have no right to do this; these men are——"

"The law gives the governor the right to release prisoners for cause. Here is the cause!"

The revolver was still leveled at the governor's head.

"If he thinks," added the cavalier, "that I will not pull this trigger and send this bullet into his forehead in the event of his refusal, then the governor does not understand me; I shall do that very thing."

There was such a ring of deadly determination that Mendoza lifted the pen again.

"I protest against this!" he said. "These men are outlaws; they have held up stages, murdered men, and have committed all sorts of abominable outrages. Only last week they held my daughter for ransom, after capturing her by trickery, and——"

"Does the governor write the order," came the cool inquiry, "or must I shoot him dead as he sits in his chair?"

"But it is an outrage, and——"

"We will not discuss all those unimportant things.

Say that it is an outrage. Yet the horse must go when the whip is applied. You will write what I have told you. Now, I will say it over again."

Mendoza wrote as he was bidden, the cavalier repeating word for word.

The governor finished and flung down the pen, giving it such a fling that it fell to the floor. His eyes were staring; his face was a pasty white; every overwrought nerve in his body was jumping.

"I have done what you ordered, because I must. But when it is over, you should know this is not the end of it. You will be hunted down, whoever you are, and these men, should they be released, will be captured again, or possibly killed."

"That, Señor Mendoza, does not trouble me now, nor does it trouble these men who are behind me."

"Who are they?" snapped Mendoza, "Apaches?"

"They are Indians."

"I can see that, but what is the tribe?"

"You would not know if I should tell you, but you may call it the tribe of the Red Estufa."

The cavalier rose slightly from the chair and drew the writing to his side of the table, that he might see how the work was done.

Apparently it pleased him, for he caught up a pinch of the fine white sand in the tray by the inkhorn and carefully sanded the words.

He shook off the sand, then read the thing again.

"It is very well done," he admitted, "and it satisfies me. And now"—he put it, folded, in an inner pocket of his braided, velvet *chaqueta*—"that you may not give way to some overwhelming desire to undo it, I shall surrender you into the hands of my friends, promising you,

though, that so long as you are acquiescent no harm shall come to you whatever. We but take this means to safeguard the work that has cost us so much time and danger."

The cavalier lifted the cocked revolver, pointed it quickly at the broad breast of the governor, and nodded to the masked Indians.

When they moved upon the governor, throwing him into renewed fright, he rose in his chair, as if he meant to resist, or defend himself.

"On him, dogs!" came the command.

The Indians threw themselves almost noiselessly on the governor, bearing him backward to the floor. The fall of his overturned chair was almost the only sound that rose loud enough to be heard any distance, though the governor wheezed, and gurgled, and fought ineffectively in his sudden terror.

Within a minute he was helpless as a child, with loops of buckskin about his ankles and wrists, and a larger one around his neck. They had been made ready for him, and were applied with a quickness that was astounding.

The governor of New Mexico lay on the floor in his buckskin harness, staring, white-faced, at the Indians, who had drawn back, now that this much of their work was done.

"Bear him away," said the masked cavalier, pocketing the revolver and turning toward the door. "If he so much as wags his head put the gag in his mouth. Treat him well, if he allows you; but harshly, if you must."

The gay figure stepped out of the room, showing again that slight limp; the masked Indians came silently behind, bearing Pasquale Mendoza, who was now nearly dead from fright.

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Though he wanted to call out when the room had been left behind, what he saw at the first turn drove away that desire. The attendant who had been with him that evening lay by the wall, bound and gagged; farther on, he saw another servant, trussed up in the same manner. It seemed clear that the place had been captured.

The theatrical figure wearing the crimson mask walked on in front, through the areaway that led into the formal garden back of the house. Still following, like shadows, came the Indians with their burden.

From the garden a path led to and through the cottonwoods, out to the open plain, where during the hot rays the heat waves rose and fell and human flesh exposed to the heat seemed to crinkle.

But night lay over the great plain now, and its shadows were cool.

Out onto this plain passed the silent procession, with the limping cavalier leading the way.

Governor Pasquale Mendoza had come to Agua Caliente for rest and quiet—and had received this.

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE PRISON.

The woes of the prisoners behind the thick, cold walls of the great adobe prison did not disturb Pablo Mirada, the jailer; their crimes had put them there, and his sole duty was to see that they remained.

He was a round-headed, close-cropped, clean-shaved man, his face dark, the lower part of a bluish cast, where the heavy beard had been cut away. His view of the world was extremely prosaic—to get through life without much exertion and to gain money was the chief end of man. Circumstances had made him a jailer; other circumstances would as easily have made him a prisoner. He was an honest man when not tempted. So far he had not been tempted; perhaps it would be more correct to say that none of the bribes offered him had been large enough to win him to thoughts of a loss of his position and salary, which might result from yielding.

In his little office, overlooking the outer gate of the jail, Mirada smoked reflectively, burning cigarettes with the reckless freedom of the Mexican.

From this he was aroused by a knock on the door, which he thought was made by the sentry who held the outer gate.

Mirando paused in his smoking long enough to tell the supposed sentry to enter.

The answer that came to his invitation was of a character so astonishing that the cigarette fell limply from

his fingers to the floor, where it lay unheeded, sending up a thin stream of blue smoke.

The person who came in was not the sentry, but the gay figure of a cavalier wearing a crimson mask.

Mirada would have jumped from his chair, but that the masked figure beckoned to quiet, and said pleasantly:

"Let the jailer of Santa Fé consider that I am a friend who has come as the bearer of an important message, which shall mean, also, that money goes with it."

Mirada stared with unblinking black eyes.

"How did you pass the sentinel?" he demanded.

"Do not be harsh with the poor man! He was thirsty, and at the corner, as Señor Miranda knows, there is a girl who sells a bit of *aguardiente* now and then, perhaps giving a kiss extra, if she likes the one who buys. The sentinel has gone to sample her lips and her *aguardiente*."

Mirada tried to rouse himself again and get out of his chair.

"But, stay!" said the cavalier. "Hear me! I have a bearer below in the gateway. I should like the señor's most gracious permission for him to come up."

"I do not understand this!" Mirada protested.

"Have I got the señor's consent?"

He drew a revolver, and, swinging it round, he banged it against the door behind him.

"That will bring him. When the señor sees what he bears, he will be glad that he has not ordered me to leave too suddenly."

Mirado did not know what this portended; but as he knew the walls of the jail were close enough to the street to make it possible for any one out there to hear him if he shouted, while guards were not far away, and the prison doors behind him were locked and bolted,

did not much fear harm to himself. He began to be curious, too, concerning this singular visit.

"Have a care, Señor Masker," he said, "that I do not clap you and the one you speak of in jail here for your insolence. Which reminds me that I have not heard your name, though you know mine!"

"Who does not know the name of the jailer of Santa Fé?"

"I have not yet heard yours."

"I hear the bearer on the stairs now, and you can tell that he has a burden; he stumbled then. You may call me Señor Tabano."

"The Gadfly!"

"It is a pleasant and suggestive name, Señor Jailer. Ah, here is my man!"

An Indian, masked like the speaker, came slowly into the room, carrying a gunny bag. As he placed it on the desk before the jailer, its contents ground together with the pleasing jingle of coin.

"New minted American money," said the cavalier. "Wishes the señor to see it? Then he may perhaps wish that he might have it."

The Indian began to take buckskin bags out of the depths of the larger bag and arrange them in line on the desk, each giving out that seductive clinking as he set it down.

Gold was the idol of Pablo Mirada. He stared at the buckskin bags, running with his thick hand through his close-cropped hair, with the sudden suspicion that he was but dreaming and none of these things were real.

The Indian emptied one of the buckskin bags and stacked up the contents—ten twenty-dollar gold pieces, new and shining.

"If Señor Mirada doubts that they are genuine, he has but to test them in any manner he wishes," said the cavalier. "Each bag holds that many, and there are five of them. One thousand dollars in American gold money."

"But—but," stammered Mirada, "what is it to me? You spoke as if it might be mine?"

His eyes stared with eager covetousness; his face was flushed; his fingers were twitching.

"It may all be yours, on condition."

"What is the condition?"

"Listen!"

The crimson-masked cavalier took from an inner pocket of his velvet jacket a note, which he held up.

"Will the señor but read this?"

It was the command of the governor of New Mexico, extorted from him at Agua Caliente, ordering the release of the two prisoners.

Mirada read it with undisguised amazement.

Then he looked at the masked figure, his fingers trembling.

"I think I understand," he said; "this is an attempt to bribe me!"

"Señor Mirada mistakes. It is not bribery, but a reward for doing his duty without making trouble for any one. There is the governor's order and warrant for the release of Lopez Escondo and Pedro Mogollon, held in this prison. If he obeys it, he has this order to show that he carried out the written wishes of the governor himself."

"And if I refuse?"

"Why should the señor refuse when the governor commands? Is he greater than the governor?"

"But I can see that something is wrong here!"

"Why should he see that—why think it? This is the handwriting of the governor, on his official paper; everywhere it would be accepted without question. You think it must be wrong because I have come to you in this way. I do not care what you think, if only you obey the order."

Mirada still sat staring, the muscles of his heavy face twitching; temptation was sore on him.

"I will say, further," went on the masked cavalier, "that I came in this manner, while the dusk of evening gathers, thinking if I came otherwise I might have even more trouble. These prisoners are my friends. I saw the governor, and persuaded him to write that."

"Is it the governor's writing?" demanded Mirada, clutching the paper and looking at it closely.

"The señor must see that it is; there is no doubt about it."

"If I do not obey the command?"

"The señor will lose the thousand dollars, and do himself no good."

"I can take it!" said the jailor, putting out his hand.

Instantly the revolver with which the masked cavalier had banged on the door swung round and covered the jailor, the thing being done so quickly that he slipped back in his chair with a gurgle of fright.

"You would murder me?" he gasped.

"No! But the señor shall not have the money unless he obeys this order!"

"I should be jailed myself! It is bribery."

"The señor could not possibly be held in the wrong when he has the governor's order for the release of the men; he would have but to show that to free himself even of suspicion. And he would have besides, for his

own, this American money! It would not be known—could not be known; we are here alone together; the sentinel has gone away; no one can hear what we say here. Does the señor not consider it worth while?"

Pablo Mirada took time to think this over, even though that revolver was looking in his face.

"How do I know you have so much money here?" he demanded.

The Indian emptied all the bags and stacked their contents on the desk.

"Let the jailer try the money," said the masked cavalier, "that he may know it is genuine. Then, let him keep it."

Mirada tested the money—feeling it, smelling it, biting it—then ringing each coin on the desk.

All this while he was thinking.

The cavalier sat quietly, revolver in hand. Back of him, arms folded, stood the motionless Indian.

When he had taken time for thought and had satisfied himself that the money was not counterfeit, Mirada reached his conclusion. Here was the order of the governor! Why could he not safely obey it, even though he knew that somewhere was a wrong? He wondered if the governor had been bribed to write out the order.

"It is not right that I should disobey the governor's written instructions," he said hypocritically, twisting his dark face into a meaning smile.

"Nor is it profitable," declared the cavalier.

"Always, since I have been here, I have gone according to orders; that has been my invariable rule. Why should I break away now from a rule so excellent?"

"It would be only folly."

"So it seems to me."

"You could gain nothing by it, but would lose this money. You could not get this money, otherwise, even if you tried; for I should certainly shoot if you made the attempt. It will be wise and profitable if you heed the governor's order. It must be done at once!"

Mirada sat blinking at the shining gold pieces heaped before him in tempting array.

"I think," he said again, "that it is my duty to obey the governor's orders. Will you stay here? Or are you afraid that I will not do it?"

"We are not afraid, and will stay here. But—we will keep the money here, and keep the way to the outer gate open, until you return with the released prisoners."

"Then perhaps you will try to take away the money, also? I could not risk that."

The cavalier sat looking at him steadily through the holes in the crimson mask.

"I will trust the señor, even though he does not care to trust me. I will say to him, also, that if in this he obeys, there are other shining gold pieces where these came from, and he will not be the loser. There may be other prisoners to release, or other favors I may want to ask; when it happens, there will be more of this money. So, if he plays false now, he will but gain this thousand dollars—perhaps; he may lose his life; and he will surely lose all chance of getting more of the same kind where these have come from. So I think I can in safety trust the jailer of Santa Fé to obey the governor's order."

Mirada drew the gold toward him, counted it, restored it to the buckskin bags, then placed them in the larger one. He was still thinking.

"I shall obey!" he said.

He arose and went out of the room now, taking the coins with him.

The masked cavalier stood in the door, with the lamp darkened behind him, watching; the Indian flew down to the gate, where he stood as guard.

Within ten minutes the jailer had returned, bringing the prisoners, Pedro Mogollon and Lopez Escondo.

He held in his hand the governor's warrant for their release, which he had read to them, in the presence of the guard who watched on that corridor.

"You may consider yourselves fortunate, señors, that the governor deems you innocent," he said to them; "thinking otherwise, he would not have ordered me to release you."

He conducted them to the gate, whither the masked cavalier and the masked Indian had retreated before him, they being at the moment out of sight. There he took them by the hand.

The two villains were bewildered, even though they had been hoping for their release and word had been received by them to be prepared for the governor's pardon.

"The governor knows that we are not so black as we have been painted," said one of them, as his hand was clasped in that of the jailer.

"If you come again here, it will not be my fault!" said Mirada.

Then he laughed.

They sprang through the open gate and melted into the darkness.

Mirada turned about, closing the gate, wondering why the outer guard had decamped to drink *aguardiente* on the corner; with the intention, too, of berating him for it.

But as he turned his foot scraped against clothing.

He stooped and looked down.

The guard lay by the gate, in the very shadow of the well, bound tightly, and unconscious.

For a moment Mirada was dazed and a bit frightened. But he remembered the warrant from the governor.

"Having that, I am safe," he said. "Whatever befalls. I can plead that I but obeyed orders. Is it not my duty to obey the commands of the governor of the territory? Truly, I should lose my place very shortly if I did otherwise."

He lifted the guard, after securing the gate, and bore the man into the prison office. Before laying him down on the cot by the window, the jailer made sure that the buckskin bags of gold coin had been stowed safely where they could not be seen.

He banged loudly now on the old bell of Spanish copper—a bell mounted on a low stand, like those used in New Mexican churches, which was rung by being hammered with an iron clapper, swung by hand. The notes of the bell boomed a loud alarm through the jail corridors.

A moment after, guards were running toward the office.

Pablo Mirada met them at the door.

"A strange thing has happened, which upsets and bewilders me," he reported. "I found Rial, the guard, unconscious at his post by the gate out there, just now, after I had permitted the release of the two malefactors, Lopez Escondo and Pedro Mogollon, on the governor's express order. It was strange to me that Mendoza should have sent such an order. I obeyed it, though, as was my duty; then I found Rial. He is on the cot here; and he may be dead, or dying."

The guards were amazed. One, who had been in the corridor where the cells of the released men were located, knew they had been set at liberty; the other guards had no knowledge of it.

All rushed into the office, and looked at the unconscious guard on the cot.

They bent over him, feeling for his pulse; seeing, also, if they could catch his breathing.

"He lives!" one announced.

"Then, mayhap, we shall understand this thing," said the jailer, "when we have brought him back to consciousness. I have here the governor's order for the release of the prisoners."

He was anxious to exhibit it, and took the opportunity.

While a man ran to get spirits, and another to summon a doctor, loud yells sounded from one of the streets of the city, accompanied by revolver shots.

* * * * *

Lopez Escondo straightened his muscular form as soon as he was through the prison gate and sniffed once more the air of freedom. To see again the stars above him and feel the wind of the hills on his brown cheeks made him a man again.

At his side walked the gay cavalier of the crimson mask, with Mogollon, the evil-eyed gambler. The cavalier strode on with a slight limp; Mogollon looked round, from side to side, his whitish eyes badly crossed and vicious appearing. He slunk, as if he knew he was an escaping criminal and cringed at the thought of it. The cavalier walked with head up, sprightly, almost gay, as became the gay clothing.

"We are out of that pest hole," said Escondo. "I

should have been a dead man had I stayed a week in it. Look you, I have lost twenty pounds in three days!"

Behind them came the stealthy figure of the masked Indian.

"The horses are at the corner, there," said the cavalier.

"Horses, eh?" said Escondo. "This is better even than I thought."

"I spared nothing."

"Not even yourself."

"Least of all myself."

"It shall not be forgotten, Ma——"

"For the love of Heaven, do not mention the name!"

"What, then, shall we call you?"

"I am Señor Tabano—the Gadfly!"

Escondo clapped his hands together, approvingly. He was in high spirits. He wanted to dance and sing. It was so good to breathe other air than the foul odors of the prison! He could hardly restrain his volatile desires.

"It is a good name; the gad-fly stings!" he said. "Señor Tabano, we owe you all we are, or ever can be. Eh, Mogollon?"

"It is so!" agreed the white-eyed scoundrel. "We can never repay it."

"Lopez can repay it, by keeping out of the toils hereafter."

"When I go back there it shall be as a dead man!" Escondo snarled. "I have been called the Taos Terror, among other names bestowed on me; let them but crowd me, and I shall prove myself worthy of the name now. You must have spent money like water, Señor Tabano,

to accomplish this miracle. I do not even yet understand it."

"We can enjoy it, if we do not understand it," said Mogollon. "But we are not yet safe. I am expecting every moment to hear the outcry of a pursuit."

"I won it by daring and money," said the cavalier. "Your Pueblo friends helped me; the money I stole at the palace."

"Good! You bribed the jailer?" said Escondo.

"I gave him a thousand dollars in American gold. But before that, I had secured the governor's order for your release."

"Ay! The jailer read it to us, in the presence of the guard of the corridor. But I marveled when I heard it; I could not understand it. The governor is not our friend. You bribed the governor, also—with his own money?"

"I bribed him not. I put a pistol to his head; then he wrote what I commanded. The Pablos were with me; all of us disguised."

The Taos Terror smote his hands together again, gleefully.

"Señor Tabano, you are the world's wonder! But there is one thing I could wish, before we leave this vile town behind us. You will go with us, of course?"

"Where else should I go—now?" said the cavalier. "I have outlawed myself, in helping outlaws. But what is the one thing you could wish?"

"That I might come face to face with Buffalo Bill."

"You would kill him?"

"Ay! If I but had arms to do it with. He should no longer pollute the air of Santa Fé with his vile presence."

The gay cavalier drew a revolver and passed it to Escondo.

"It is my wish, also. I wish it the more heartily, for the reason that wherever I am I shall never feel safe so long as he lives."

"He is a monster!" growled the white-eyed man.

"If I but meet him, he will not be one long," threatened the Wild Ox.

They had reached the horses, four in number, hitched to a railing on the side of the street beyond the upper corner of the prison. The animals, saddled and bridled, were tied to the railing by slipknots, easy to cast off.

The escaping prisoners rushed at the horses, unable to restrain their delight and eager anxiety. But when Escondo was about to fling his leg over the beast he had picked out for his use, he stopped.

"Your pardon, Señor Tabano," he said, with a certain gentleness. "In my great joy, I am forgetful."

He turned to the cavalier, whom he now assisted in mounting. Having done this, he stooped, and assured himself that the cinches of the cavalier's saddle were tight.

The gayly dressed cavalier laughed lightly, pleased by this attention.

"Thanks, señor! I limp; and am not used to horse-back riding. Sometimes I fear that you will weary of me before we have gone far?"

"May the curse of ingratitude lie forever on my soul if I do!" said Escondo.

The cavalier sighed; then stooped, resting a small hand for an instant on the head of the Terror of Taos.

"I hope you will never forget that, my Wild Ox."

"If we stay here, we shall land back in that jail,"

warned the white-eyed gambler. "We have no time to lose."

"Ay! We have not!" the cavalier assented. "Let Escondo lead the way."

When Lopez Escondo swung his horse about he pointed its head toward the streets of Santa Fé. and struck into a gallop.

"Is it wise?" the cavalier cried to him.

"As wise as any other," he answered; "come along swiftly."

Down toward the plaza they clattered, and soon beheld the gloomy outlines of the palace.

The cavalier looked at the old pile with keen-eyed interest, through the holes in the crimson mask. The other riders glanced at it; but gave their attention more to the plaza, and to the people in the streets by the palace walls.

Round the plaza and down the street leading to the hotel called the Alcatraz, Lopez Escondo piloted, swinging along as alertly as if he were not a fugitive escaped from prison through fraud and bribery.

His keen eyes searched the street and the crowd he saw near the hostelry. Suddenly he uttered a cry.

"Ah!" he said. "You see them, Pedro—and you, Señor Tabano? There, where the aloes flowers by the wall! The American scout and his companions. Now, if the saints be with us, and our hearts be strong, we shall do something worthy, Pedro, to celebrate our escape from prison. Follow me!"

The cavalier had given Pedro Mogollon a revolver, as well as one to the Wild Ox. A third the cavalier had retained.

Like a whirlwind the Taos Terror drove his horse

down the street by the Alcatraz; while thundering at his heels came the white-eyed gambler, the gay cavalier in the crimson mask, and the Indian.

The crowd scattered, thinking the riders were intoxicated and might ride them down. The Wild Ox gave no attention to these men. He passed them by, driving straight at the little group he had sighted by the flowering aloes.

Then his yell stabbed the night air, followed instantly by the discharge of his revolver.

The tallest of the men, the one of the group dressed most picturesquely, the Taos Terror believed to be Buffalo Bill.

As a matter of fact, the tall man was Wild Bill Hickok. With him were the pippin-bodied German, known as Baron von Schnitzenhauser; Little Cayuse, the Piute, and Chappo, the Apache.

If the Wild Ox had been well acquainted with Buffalo Bill and his friend Hickok, he possibly would not have made the mistake he did. Both dressed picturesquely; but the man from Laramie was in appearance something more of a dandy than Buffalo Bill; he ran to fringed clothing, velvet collars, stamped leather holsters, gold and silver ornamented revolvers, and other frills and weaknesses of the border.

The Wild Ox did not know this, and the light was poor. This last was a fortunate thing for our friends, as the Wild Ox began to shoot as soon as he began to yell.

At his side clattered the white-eyed gambler, who as a revolver shot had few equals.

The first shot of the Taos Terror cut through Wild

Bill's hat, without other warning than the yell which had immediately preceded it.

Wild Bill jerked his pistols—no man could do that trick quicker!—when the white-eyed gambler opened fire; and Wild Bill fell.

At the same moment the pippin-bodied German went over backward with a yell. The two Indians, Little Cayuse and Chappo, threw themselves flat to escape the bullets that were now coming like hail.

The gamblers both yelled their wildest and loudest when they saw that Wild Bill's crowd had gone down; then, driving heels into the flanks of their horses, they rode swiftly along the street, the masked cavalier and the masked Indian bobbing right behind them.

The street leading past the Alcatraz opened out toward the sandy, pifion-crowned hills surrounding the ancient City of the Holy Faith.

There were trails in those hills which the Wild Ox knew, and the memory drew him. He took the lead, forcing his horse to its highest speed. The others came as swiftly behind him.

Wild riding of this kind was not unknown in the Santa Fé of that day; in truth, it was rather common, and often followed hard on shooting in the town.

The people had learned to give such horsemen a good berth and to scamper for the security of their houses.

At the edge of the old town Escondo drew rein, pulling in his steaming horse with a jerk.

"Do they pursue?" he asked.

All halted, to listen.

There was a loud hubbub in the town, in the direction of the Alcatraz; but no sounds came of galloping horses.

"None pursue," said the cavalier, with voice that trem-

bled as a result of the excitement of the shooting and the breathless ride.

"Pedro, it will be luck if we downed them all!" cried Escondo.

"May it be so!" said the white-eyed man. "I pulled dead on the one you called Buffalo Bill, and he dropped like a steer, caught by my bullet. I am sure that I got him."

"I think I also struck him, with my first shot," said Escondo. "After that I downed that fat fellow. The Indians dropped, too. If we made a clean sweep of them, it means much."

"It means everything!" said the cavalier, breathing heavily. "They are the only men in Santa Fé that I fear."

"There is no need to tarry and take a risk," urged the white-eyed man.

"No, that is true."

Escondo turned to the cavalier.

"It will be wise, Señor Tabano, if we drop the Indian off here. I will give the order myself, with your consent. I know him as the cleverest friend I have in all the pueblo. He can reach there within a few hours after us, and bring us the latest news."

He did not wait for the cavalier's consent.

He turned his horse and joined the Indian, who had stopped some yards back and sat now listening.

"Francisco, my brother," said the Wild Ox, "I have not had chance, or time, to thank you for all that you have done. Another time will be better even than now. But I am your friend forever. Look you, now! We shall perhaps be followed—who knows? Also, if the American scout is dead, as I think and hope, there will

be a great outcry. The governor, as you know, is not in Santa Fé. But other officers are there; some of them my friends, a few of them my enemies. It is my wish, therefore, that you slip from your horse, make changes in your clothing, and go back. Learn all you can, and bring it to me.

He sat looking into the face of the Pueblo.

Suddenly the Indian spoke.

"It is as my brother commands!" he declared.

He dropped from his horse, giving the reins into the hands of the Terror of Taos.

Then he turned, glided into the pines close by the way, and was gone, turning back into the city.

"It is a fortunate thing for you, Escondo, that these Indians are so faithful to your interests," remarked the cavalier.

"It means, perhaps," said the Wild Ox, "life for all of us. We ride now for the pueblo of Taos."

Again they clattered away, heading northward when they had swung round the city, choosing a beaten main trail, and once more riding like the wind.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PANIC IN THE PALACE.

There was a panic in the palace, the famous old governor's mansion of Santa Fé. And it was in full blast at about the time the Taos Terror and Greaser Pete made their gun raid on Wild Bill and his companions and rode out of the town.

Under one of the doors a note had been thrust, which a servant had found. Signed with the Spanish name of the Gadfly, it contained startling information:

"To the Major-domo of the Palace, and All Others Who Care to Read:

"This is to tell you that I, Maria Xavier, have taken two thousand dollars of American money from the palace safe, for my own use. Also, it will inform you that I and my friends hold as a prisoner Pasquale Mendoza, governor of the territory. He has been kind enough, at my request, to write out a pardon for Lopez Escondo and Pedro Mogollon, who upon that order have been released by the jailer this night. I have long been a faithful servant here in the palace, and still have kind regard for you, and especially for my former mistress, the governor's daughter, Muriel; I pray that the saints may be kind to her and befriend her, and that sometimes she will think of me, to love me still.

"It all came about when Lopez Escondo was captured and imprisoned—my reasons for doing this. I had become his sweetheart, as you know; then had been forgiven, and taken back into service here. But I ask no longer for service in the palace, and you will see me no more. Escondo is again a free man. Where I am I may not tell; but I am with Escondo.

"I should not write this, but to let you know that we hold Mendoza; and to say to you, and the authorities of Santa Fé, with the American scouts who are here, that if pursuit of Escondo and those who go with him is made, Mendoza will be killed. This is not an idle threat. Escondo is called the Wild Ox; he is, also, called the Terror of Taos. The names have a meaning that you should heed. Beware!

"I sign myself by my new name,

"SENORA TABANO,
"Known to you hitherto as Maria Xavier."

Was it not enough to throw the palace into consternation?

The major-domo, or head steward, was a pompous Mexican, with a high opinion of himself, which was not altogether justified by the amount of his brains; for he was fat-headed, as well as fat-bodied.

The note threw him into a fury.

"It cannot be so!" he said, glowering at the servants who clustered in excitement round him. "Always this Maria Xavier was a liar. Remember you not the time, Manuel, when she stole the cake; and then lied, when I taxed her with it? As for the governor, he is at Agua Caliente, for his health."

Some one suggested that inasmuch as the major-domo was able to open the safe, they could speedily ascertain if the money mentioned had really been taken; that would go some distance in determining if Maria Xavier lied or not.

"I shall prove to you that she is a liar!" cried the major-domo pompously.

Forthwith he produced the key to the iron safe, and, at the head of the servants, marched into the treasure room where it was.

With much ceremony and hard breathing he unlocked the ponderous door, and swung it back.

"See you that she is a liar!" he cried.

But—the safe had been robbed. It had contained two thousand dollars in American gold coin when Pasquale Mendoza set out for the hot springs; now it held not a dollar of that money.

The major-domo stared, the key clattering to the stone floor out of his palsied fingers; his red face turned white as a sheet. He did not forget that he kept the key, in the absence of his master; a fact that had made him so confident.

"She stole the key from you!" they cried to him.

"Then the foul fiend must have aided her!" cried the major-domo.

"Now we know it is true that she and the Wild Ox have the governor!" they declared. "And true, also, that the outlaws have been let out of the jail. Why did we not send to the prison, to see if it were so?"

The major-domo, scared and shaking, suggested that one of the servants should run at once to the jail.

"For, see," he urged, "if this has not yet been accomplished, it may be stopped. The pardon and order for their release must have been forced from the governor; therefore, it is unlawful, and should not be obeyed."

"It was done by Maria Xavier!" they cried.

That was the astounding thing.

"I knew always that she was a serpent," declared one of the women spitefully.

Maria Xavier had once told her that she lacked in good looks, and that her skin was too black.

"But," said another, "I did not know she was so brave!"

The servant sent to the jail reappeared at length, breathless, hardly able to talk.

"It is true!" he shouted. "The Wild Ox is out; and he has been killing men down by the Alcatraz! He has a great company of men, who wear masks and are finely dressed; though some of them, I heard, were Indians. Horses have been taken from the palace stables here, with saddles and bridles. The gate guard of the prison was rapped on the head; then he was tied up like a dead fowl, and chucked under the wall. When found by the jailer he scarce breathed, and it is said he will die."

"Was there a pardon?" was screeched at him.

"Ay! The jailer has it. From our dear master, Pasquale Mendoza, with his seal and signature, written on the palace paper; one of the guards told me. The jailer could do nought else but let the men go, when that order came to him. But 'tis said it is a false order. The jailer did not know that."

The servants poured into the streets and out into the plaza.

The town was bubbling and boiling with excitement; not even at the time of a *fiesta* could old Santa Fé have experienced more thrills.

News came from the street by the Alcatraz that Buffalo Bill and his Americans had been not only attacked by the released outlaws, but that Buffalo Bill had been killed and two of his followers desperately wounded.

"There were four of the outlaws," said the report, "mounted on fast horses taken from the palace stables. One was a cavalier, like the cavaliers we see at the masques; another seemed to be an Indian. They rode like the whirlwind, shooting at every one they could see, as they hastened out of the town."

"Maria Xavier! Could she have been one of the four?" was asked.

The suggestion was enough.

Soon what they merely guessed—in this case the truth—was flying from lip to lip through Santa Fé; that Maria Xaxier was one of the riders who had attacked the Americans in front of the Alcatraz, killing the King of Scouts and badly wounding his companions.

This went out coupled with the report that this same Maria Xavier, known erstwhile as a peaceful woman servant at the palace, had captured, and also now held, the governor himself as a prisoner; and that she had forced him by threats to sign an order releasing the Taos Terror and his comrade, imprisoned for their crimes not many days before.

"There will be pursuit by the troops!" cried the gossips.

"And Maria Xavier will be killed! It is to be expected—when a woman turns outlaw."

Buffalo Bill had not been killed; he had not even been shot at. He was sitting in the smoking room of the Alcatraz, talking with some acquaintances, old Nomad at his side, when the wild horsemen swung down the street by the hotel and began their shooting.

The noted scout came to his feet with a jump as the revolver shots rang out, and started for the door on that side, drawing his revolver as he went, even though he did not at the moment understand what the shooting was about.

He did not reach the street in time to see Wild Bill fall, the baron tumble over, and the Indians pitch themselves flat on their faces; when he arrived on the scene the baron had up-ended himself, unhurt, and was bend-

ing over the prostrate form of Wild Bill. The Indians were picking themselves out of the dirt.

A dozen men surged forward with the scout; but he was first to reach the side of the man from Laramie.

The pistoling horsemen had swept on beyond a bend of the street; so that the scout did not even get sight of them. They had not wasted time in tarrying.

Blood was on the face of the man from Laramie, and at first glance it seemed that he was dead.

Buffalo Bill knelt at his side, filled with fear, and made an examination.

"He iss shooded py der headt in!" cried the German. "I vos t'inking dot I got some leadt myselluf, bit I didn't; I am too kvick vor der shooders, as I vall me town."

He had been lifting Wild Bill's head, but gave way to Buffalo Bill.

"Help me get him into the hotel," said the scout; "and have some one run for a surgeon. Lay hold here, baron."

Not only the baron but the Indians took hold, to assist in carrying the unconscious man into the hotel; others helped all they could. The street was packed with people.

"Who did the shooting?" Buffalo Bill asked, his tone ominous.

"One of them was the Gambler of Taos," came the answer from the crowd.

"He is in jail!" the scout objected.

"Not right then, he wasn't, for I saw him; I know him well enough. The man by the side of him I think was his pard, Greaser Pete."

"Then they have made an escape!"

"There was two others with 'em—one o' the two an Injun; but the gay cavalier was masked."

The man from Laramie was borne into the office, which was cleared for the bearers, and laid on a cot improvised hastily out of coats. As first apparently without a sign of life, he was now breathing stertorously.

The surgeon came soon, while Buffalo Bill was again inspecting the injury and giving the wounded man brandy.

The knight of the lancet looked at the wound, which was in the head and had bled freely.

"A close call," he said, "and he may go yet; I can't say as to that. But I don't think the skull is broken. The bullet struck and glanced, apparently, making an ugly gash. It knocked him down, of course, just as if he had been struck with an axe. I think he had better be taken at once to the hospital."

The latter was connected with the government army post, and in charge of the army surgeon there.

So an ambulance was brought, and the wounded scout was conveyed as soon as possible to the hospital, where he was placed in the hands of the post surgeon. The two surgeons consulted, while Buffalo Bill and his friends, and others, waited anxiously.

"He may live," was the announcement made finally; "we can't tell as to that; but we will do the best we can for him. He is suffering from concussion of the brain. It may amount to no more than that; nobody can tell now."

Buffalo did not need to urge the surgeons to do everything they could for Hickok; they were doing that, as he could see.

So when he could render no further service he went

away, with the baron, old Nomad, and the faithful Indian trailers.

They knew, by this time, that the Taos Terror was at liberty, with Greaser Pete; that an order, supposed to be forged, had come from the governor to the jailer; and that rumors declared the governor to be in the hands of outlaws.

To get at the truth, the scout and trapper, with the others, went to the palace, then to the jail.

At the palace they were shown the letter left by Maria Xavier. Also, they talked with the servants and the pompous major-domo.

On visiting the jail they secured an interview with the jailer, Pablo Mirada, and interviewed some of the guards. The one who had been knocked on the head and tied, by the outer gate, was recovering; but they were not permitted to see him.

They learned enough, however, to reach settled conclusions.

"The jailer is in this thing," said the scout, when they came away. "There was evidence of guilt in his speech and manner."

"When a man has been doing some guiltinesses," observed the baron, "id iss a hardt t'ing vor him to hide idt."

Old Nomad was more anxious to get into action than to talk.

"Ther pizen kyotes air hittin' et up tremenjus, an' we're lettin' 'em git too big a start," he grumbled. "I favors pikin' right out arter 'em."

"Where would you go, in the darkness, old pard?" the scout asked.

"Waal, I'd spend some time nosin' round, anyhow."

"Ve couldt pudt dem Inchuns at idt," suggested the German. "Dere iss no hoondting tog got a nose like vot iss on their faces."

They continued this talk after they had returned to the Alcatraz.

With the scout, in Santa Fé, were the four Indian trailers—Little Cayuse, Pedro, Chappo, and Yuppah. Little Cayuse, the youngest and their leader, was a Piute; the others were Apaches, from different branches of that tribe. They had been chosen by the scout from a number of army post trailers for their skill, intelligence, and faithfulness.

In his room at the Alcatraz, Buffalo Bill sent again for Little Cayuse, intending to talk with him, and perhaps outline a plan by which the trailers could get to work that night.

But before any particular talk had been made, Buffalo Bill became aware that some one was at the door, in the corridor outside, listening.

The scout had been speaking in English, as Nomad and the baron were in the room with him. Suddenly he switched to Piute, which he spoke well enough to be readily understood by Little Cayuse. As it was the language of a distant tribe, there was slight danger that it would be comprehended by the eavesdropper at the door.

"Little Cayuse," the scout asked quietly, in Piute, "did any of the Apaches follow you upstairs? I ask, for some one—and I think an Indian—is in the hall out there, and he seems to be listening. Don't look round, or make any sign."

The Piute's black orbs stared straight into the eyes of the scout; he did not turn, and he was able to repress every indication of astonishment. The light in his face

told how it pleased him to have the great Pa-has-ka address him in his own language.

"They did not follow me," he said; "I came alone. I think they did not know I was coming."

"You saw no Indian?"

"No."

"But you recall that one of the riders who did the shooting was an Indian; or that he seemed to be an Indian?"

Little Cayuse had not forgotten it.

"I am going to send you out by this other door, which will take you through the hotel office. From there get into the street; then, by the back entrance, up to the rear landing, where you can look along this corridor, and see who is by the door out there. We will pretend here that we have not heard him, and fool him."

The scout took up an empty tobacco box and gave it to the Piute.

"Bring me some tobacco," he said, "from the hotel."

But his eyes told the Piute not to trouble about the tobacco; that this was but a ruse.

The Piute took the tobacco box, and went out of the room by the opposite door, moving in the direction of the hotel office.

"Waugh!" Nomad rumbled. He had understood all that was said. "Buffer, I reckon et's goin' ter be warm weather hyar ter-morrer."

"Iss diss haf a meanningness vor me?" asked the baron, in a hoarse whisper.

He had not understood, not being up in the Indian languages.

"The meaning is, baron, that I shall invite you soon to

smoke some of the best tobacco that ever burnt your tongue."

The scout's eyelid fluttered a warning, giving the baron to understand that correct explanations just then were not in order.

"Is Hickok goin' to make a quick rekivery?" Nomad asked, for the mere sake of saying something.

"I think so."

"But ef we gits onter the fact of who done thet shoot-in', I cal'late he'll not be able ter jump inter ther game wi' us?"

"He'll be lucky if he gets out of that hospital in ten days."

"I tond't t'ink he gan make idt efen so kvick as dot," observed the baron, dropping into the game of deception. "Uff dose pullet had gone a inch lower town idt wouldt haf kilt him."

"Half an inch lower down, baron, would er got him fer keeps," averred Nomad.

He fished in his pockets, and turned to Cody.

"Buffer, yer got any good smokin', ter fill in now whilst yer Injun is gittin' thet dandy truck?"

The scout flung him a tobacco bag.

Nomad deliberately filled his old briar, got out a match, then took his time in lighting the pipe, puffing laboriously.

"Why don't you throw that thing away and get a new one?" the scout asked. "I'll make you a present, the first time I run against a pipe shop."

"Waugh! Buffer, I wouldn't part wi' this hyar ole black smoker fer good money. I has smoked et so long thet another'n would seem plum a stranger."

Buffalo Bill's eyes were fixed on the door.

He arose suddenly and stepped to it; then drew it open, and looked into the passage.

Nomad and the baron came to their feet, following him, their manner expectant.

"He has gone!" said the scout, disappointed. "I heard him move here a minute or less ago, and thought he was trying to get his head nearer the bottom of the door, to hear better; but it seems he was stepping back, to move away. He did it cleverly enough."

He hurried along the corridor toward the rear landing, judging that the retreating eavesdropper had fled in that direction.

At the bottom of the stairs, he expected at any rate to find the Piute, if the eavesdropper had gone out by the front way. But the Piute was not there.

"Vamosed!" gulped Nomad, who, with the baron, had followed. "Ther tarant'ler has vamosed."

"He iss skibt oudt!" gurgled the baron.

"Ye thought he war an Injun, Buffler?" Nomad asked.

"I am even more sure of it, now; for not many white men could have made such a cat-creeping getaway."

"Der Biute he iss seen him, maype, an' has vollered him!" the baron suggested.

"I reckon yer right, Schnitz," said Nomad. "You toddle down that path, while I goes ter ther front o' this camp house; Buffler will look round hyar."

They made the search.

When Nomad came back in a few moments he had made no discovery.

"Ef I hadn't heard that same sneaker thar by ther door, Buffler, I'd shore think this was a dream on yer part."

"I ditn't heard noddings."

"Waal, baron, yer couldn't be expected ter, with yer civilized years, unless 'twar loud as pistol shots," Nomad observed. "Ef a man lives in cities long's you has done at times various, his years gits as bad as an artillery-man's, from lissenin' ter ther continyul buzz o' things. Buffler heard steps by ther door, an' so did I—soft steps, like er moccasin's. Thet, an' ther silent gitaway, spells Injun."

He stood looking about in the dim light below the back stairs; then he addressed the scout:

"What does yer make o' et?"

"My guess is that when the rascal came down these stairs he was sighted by Little Cayuse, who followed him; which accounts for the disappearance of the Piute."

"A lot er good knowin' thet's goin' ter do us. Now we has got ter hunt up ther Piute."

"He'll run the Indian down, and bring us a report of where the fellow holed. That will simplify things."

"Der kvestion iss, Who iss diss Inchun?" the baron asked, with owlish gravity.

"To answer that, I shall have to guess again, and say it was the Indian who was with the Gambler of Taos, or else some Indian connected with him."

"Der only Inchuns vot life roundt here ar-re der Bueplos," the baron objected.

"That's right; the Rio Grande valley here is filled with the villages of Pueblo Indians. But Chiricahua Apaches are on the northwest; Navajos on the west; with San Carlos, White Mountain, and other Apaches southwest. Perhaps all but the Pueblos are too far off to be considered in this connection. The objection to believing that the fellow was a Pueblo is that they are peaceable, agricultural Indians."

"Yit they go bad sometimes," Nomad urged. "They'll fight, too, when thar's need. Reck'lect ther time some Apaches raided in through hyar, an' ther peaceable Pueblos give 'em some peaceable graves ter sleep in? Waugh! One ole peaceable Pueblo, I reck'lect, drew a knife on me, right in this town; an' would 'a' cyarved me inter fiddle strings ef I hadn't been too quick fer him. You recomembers thet, Buffler. Waugh! They're plum peaceable—at times."

They hoped for Little Cayuse's speedy return with information that might settle this question.

But the Piute disappointed their hopes.

CHAPTER XIV.

INDIAN AFTER INDIAN.

The Indian whose almost noiseless footsteps Buffalo Bill's keen ears had heard by the corridor door was Francisco, blood brother of the Wild Ox, and friend of Maria Xavier.

Having been sent back by the Gambler of Taos to discover what he could of the plans of Buffalo Bill and others, he had sneaked into the corridor, after following the scout and his companions from the prison to the hotel.

Keen as he was, Francisco was baffled when Buffalo Bill dropped into Piute in his talk with Little Cayuse. Francisco knew the words were Indian, yet they were unfamiliar. But the fact that the scout had begun the use of a language not English made the shrewd Pueblo suspicious that all was not right.

On listening further he became sure of it; the rambling talk, well conducted as it was, did not fool him; he saw that the occupants of the room were merely talking to kill time.

Having, through the crack at the bottom of the door, seen Little Cayuse leave the room with the tobacco box in his hand, the Pueblo jumped to the conclusion that it was a blind—that the Piute was being sent to cut him off when he retreated.

So he beat a premature retreat, after further short listening, and did it so cleverly that he gained the foot of

the stairs at the rear before Buffalo Bill knew he had left the door.

As Francisco plunged into the garden he caught a glimpse of Little Cayuse coming toward the rear landing. This seemed proof of the truth of his conjectures. But he did not believe that the Piute had seen him, and he hurried on.

Right here was where Francisco fell down in his calculations; for, though at the moment the Piute had not seen him, the Piute had heard him, and knew from the jumping footfalls, soft, like the padded thumps made by a jumping lion, that the Indian who had been in the corridor had descended and was now getting out by way of the garden.

That there might be no error here, the careful Piute sprang to the foot of the stairs and listened. Almost instantly he heard the door of the scout's room open, and the scout's voice, mingling with those of Nomad and the baron.

What was said told Little Cayuse that the Indian had certainly left the corridor—all the proof he wanted to convince him that the Indian had got out through the garden.

By the time Little Cayuse emerged from the garden in pursuit, the Pueblo was some distance down the street.

Little Cayuse held back, not to be seen; but when the Pueblo turned from the street into a dark alley, the Piute began the chase.

Little Cayuse considered it a fortunate thing that he had his blanket with him. He hooded it about his head and neck, and let it fall well down around his legs. In that dark alley a better disguise could not have been furnished him. That it might be more effective, he

removed his red flannel head band and the eagle feathers from his hair, and let his hair fall more freely on his shoulders, Pueblo fashion.

Francisco retreated rapidly northward by the narrow way he had chosen, apparently not looking back even once.

"Pueblo heap fool!" muttered the Piute, grumbling his thoughts in broken English; for he chose to use English much of the time, that he might improve himself in it. "All Pueblo plenty fool."

He had the hunting Indian's contempt for the agricultural redskin. He could respect the white man for being an agriculturist, for that was the white man's way; but he did not believe that the Great Spirit intended that an Indian should dig in the ground for his living. It was contrary to his idea of what was fit and proper for an Indian. Little Cayuse, having been much with white men, had dropped some of his savage notions, but this was too ingrained to be easily cast off.

From the manner in which the chase opened up it promised to be a long one. For, when the Pueblo reached the end of the narrow way, he swung out from the town, heading into the northward trail.

Still he did not look back, so far as the Piute could determine. It was a shadowy Indian, in pursuit of one as shadowy, each flitting northward through the night.

Little Cayuse, knowing that the man he followed was a Pueblo, began to think, because of previous knowledge, that his destination was the pueblo of Taos. But the chase came to an end long before that singular, pyramidal building, the home of the Taos Pueblos, was reached.

Francisco left the trail, where a pathway diverged, disappearing behind a screen of nut pines.

Little Cayuse stopped, wary as a mink. This looked like a trap for him.

"He heer—think now he git Little Cayuse. Me fool um—huh!"

Before he could determine just how he would do this he heard the unmistakable thump of an Indian drum.

The Piute turned an ear, listening.

"Council?" he muttered. "Mebbyso council lodge and village."

He was about to try to get closer to that sound, by paralleling the route taken by the vanished Pueblo; but he was checked by the coming of an Indian from the northward, at a jog-trot. This Indian did not even look down the trail, but swung off into the path taken by Francisco.

After waiting a while, still hearing that low boom of a drum, Little Cayuse resolved to learn the meaning. So he, too, entered the dim path, proceeding along it cautiously in the direction of the drumbeat.

The sound grew louder as he went on.

Fearing a trap for his feet, he moved so carefully that his progress was slow. He lost the sound of the moccasins of the Indian he was following; but soon heard others behind him.

"Plenty Injuns come council!" he thought; and slid out of the path, burying himself in the green branches of a nut pine.

The Indian who had been behind floated by without seeing him, silent almost as a shadow.

Little Cayuse dropped in after him, hurrying faster this time.

The drumbeat grew still louder, showing that he was approaching the supposed council lodge. In his experience, an Indian council lodge was always in a village, yet he saw no village. But when it seemed that the drumbeat must be in the ground before him, he beheld a small, tentlike structure of skins. It was revealed by the flash of a light and the passing into it of an Indian, as a flap was lifted.

Little Cayuse "froze," then sank to the ground, where he lay watching and listening. His thought was that within this small tepee was the drum; yet he knew better almost instantly, for the drum beating had still a far-off sound, as if it came out of the earth.

As Little Cayuse had an intense desire to know what was happening within the little tepee, he crawled up to it, hitching along. When he was near it, but at one side, the flap lifted again, and the light streamed out.

The Indian who came forth was apparently not the one who had entered. He was enveloped in a blanket that covered him all over, except his face, which was as black as soot. It was so unexpected that the Piute was for an instant at a loss to know whether it was the same Indian who had entered, or another. Then he saw that the Indian was the same, the revelation coming to him through the Indian's walk. He had changed his appearance, but he could not change his walk.

"Ugh!" grunted the Piute, deeply puzzled. "Heap plenty strange—huh! Heap pecool-yer!"

"Pecoolier" was a word he had recently heard Nomad use, and he had thought it worthy of imitation.

Then he saw something even more "pecoolier"; the Indian, after walking a dozen steps or so, dropped out of sight as suddenly as if he had stepped into a hole.

The Piute lifted his head, trying to make out the meaning. He noticed that the drum beating sounded louder; then there came to him the weird chant of an Indian dance.

"War dance, mebbysso—huh? Where um council lodge?"

He would have crawled to the point where the Indian had vanished; but just then he heard another Indian coming along the path. The Piute "froze" again, and saw this Indian lift the flap of the little tepee, and enter, his face and figure revealed for a moment by the light which came out.

Instead of exploring ahead of him, the Piute crawled now, determined to get at the heart of the mystery which seemed to dwell in the small tepee.

He circled the tepee, approaching it stealthily from the rear. Having accomplished that safely, he lay with his head against the skin covering, his ear to the crack between the earth and the lower edge of the skin, and listened.

Only one Indian was inside, apparently. He seemed to be pawing and fussing around, but what he was doing the Piute could not imagine.

Curiosity at last compelled Little Cayuse to lift the edge of the tent skin carefully and look in. He did it without attracting attention. Then he beheld the Indian sitting gravely before a small looking-glass, applying a thick coating of black to his face. The tepee had no furnishing but a block of wood, on which the Indian sat while he applied the paint, and the looking-glass. The floor was of grass, almost untrampled, showing that the tepee had been there but a short time.

The Piute watched the Indian paint his face, cover

himself with his blanket, and leave the tepee. He saw him go to the spot where the first Indian had disappeared, and there he vanished.

"Wuh! *Muy malo!* Very bad, mebbysso; very strange. Little Cayuse wish Pa-has-ka here heap plenty."

He had hardly given expression to this when another Indian came along the path from the trail and entered the tiny tepee, where at once he began that facial decoration, as Little Cayuse had already witnessed it.

Having blackened his face and blanketed himself, this Indian also left the tepee, walked out, and dropped out of sight.

"Go into ground!" said Little Cayuse, convinced now this was what they did. "Council lodge down in ground. Wuh! Drumbeat down in ground. Mebbysso very strange bizness; mebbysso very bad. *Muy malo!*"

When a third Indian came along the path and into the tepee, blacked and blanketed himself, and disappeared in the same way, the curiosity of the Piute was so much aroused that he was ready to try dangerous experiments to get at the meaning of it.

The temptation might not have assailed him in a way so irresistible if he had not been aware that on several occasions Buffalo Bill had disguised himself and entered Indian lodges and villages. Here the thing appeared simplicity itself. In the little tepee was the black paint, and round his shoulders was the blanket.

Little Cayuse felt that he was quite as great a man as Buffalo Bill himself, after he determined to try the reckless plan which had come to him, so, lifting the tent flap, he crawled inside.

He sat down on the wooden block before the mirror; then began to blacken his face with the paint, taken from

the little pot close beside him. He worked rapidly, under the impression that he had not much time, as another Indian might come at any moment.

Having blacked his face, he drew his blanket round him, and stepped from the tepee as he had seen the others do, without apparent discovery.

"Wuh! Mebbysso Little Cayuse git killed. But this way Pa-e-has-ka do. No can see in ground, how can find out? No can find out, how can tell Pa-e-has-ka?"

Little Cayuse clutched his revolver under his blanket and tried to be ready for whatever might happen.

The drumbeat guided him; but even with that, and cautious as he was, he came near tumbling into the well-like hole that yawned suddenly before him. Out of it came the drumbeat, with sounds of dancing and chanting, thrown up in his face. He stood reeling with surprise on the edge of the hole.

As there could now be no doubt that into this hole the Indians he had seen had disappeared, Little Cayuse dropped down beside it, listening and watching. Slowly he crawled round the hole, trying to determine its shape and dimensions, and if it held a ladder or stairs.

While he was doing this he became aware that still another Indian had come to the little tepee and entered; the light flared out and gave the information as the flap was lifted.

"Me can see um come here, now," thought the Piute; "mebbysso me see heap many things, now, if wait."

He decided to wait.

So he lay close by the hole, flat on the ground, covered well by his blanket, until the flap of the tepee lifted again, and the Indian who had been in there and had

blackened his face came toward the hole, swung down into it with a silent motion, and dropped out of sight.

Little Cayuse crawled up to the hole again, where he looked and listened. Then he circled round the hole, back to his starting point, where the Indian had dropped down. There he began to hunt with his hands for the ladder he was now sure existed.

He found the ladder he sought. The upper end of it rested against the sides of the hole.

For a moment he hesitated, after finding it.

"*Muy malo!*" he muttered. "Mebbysso Little Cayuse git killed."

But the chanting and drum beating drew him. He concluded that he might risk a descent and see what was down there; then make a quick exit if he found the way blocked, or dangerous, or not to his liking. Only one Indian was coming at a time. So, even if an Indian appeared above him on the ladder, he figured that he could get the benefit of a surprise, knock the Indian off, and escape after that to the top before he could be overtaken. The chief danger was that some one below might see and shoot him.

But the example of Buffalo Bill in daring to enter Indian villages and tepees disguised still sustained his courage and made him resolve to obtain a sight of what was happening below, if he got no more.

So he swung over very carefully and began to descend the well-like hole, using but one hand as he went down, gripping his revolver with the other.

When he had gone down a few feet he came to what appeared to be a hood, right in the centre of the hole. When he examined, to see what it meant, he discovered that an opening led off at one side—a round hole, in

which light glowed. The light was not in the hole, but came from below.

It was clear now that what had appeared to be a hood was really the bottom of the well, at that point. A tunnel led from it to another well, several yards off, the design being, apparently, to keep the light from reaching the surface of the ground and at the same time to furnish ventilation.

The Piute was filled with admiration of the ingenious idea, and began to crawl through the tunnel, hearing the drumbeat, the chanting, and the dancing growing much louder.

When he gained the tunnel and looked down into the well-like hole there he saw only a rosy glow of light falling on red walls. Apparently there was another bend.

The Piute hesitated, for the peril of going farther was impressed on him. Yet the fear that another Indian might come speedily, so that he could do nothing unless he hurried, drove him on, and he began to descend the second ladder, which he found here.

He could see the red walls and the bottom of the well-like hole below him, and also a dark hole, that he thought indicated another tunnel, leading to the right. He resolved to get a look into that and scramble back up the ladder as fast as he could, if he found things unfavorable.

But when he touched the bottom of the hole his legs were seized, he was jerked from his feet, and suddenly carried through the tunnel on the right, the whole thing being done so quickly that resistance was out of the question.

Considerably scared, and startled, and much jarred, he was jammed down on a red stool, beside a fiery red wall.

Looking about, when the hands were withdrawn that had borne him, he beheld the interior of a large, underground room, circular in form, colored a vivid red.

The room was filled with Indians, who wore blankets and red feathers, and whose faces were painted. Most of them were grouped before him, some shouting at him; but in the middle of the room, and beyond it, others jumped and postured in an Indian dance, while at the farther side sat two drum beaters, naked to their loins, their bodies and faces painted red. They were hammering furiously on red drums of the Indian pattern.

Little Cayuse was dazed by this sight and by the Indians howling before him. But he said nothing. Now that, apparently, he was in the toils, and helpless, his Indian stoicism came to sustain him. He looked at the Indians without trying to answer them—he could not understand a word they said!—and instinctively he clutched his revolver, though he had no present desire to use it.

Suddenly the Indians who had howled at him disappeared, as if they had run away into holes in the sides of the room; then all vanished but the drum beaters; these maintained their positions, and still hammered on their drums.

A hand came out of the wall and dragged away the red lamp which, covered with a red shade of dyed sheepskin, had given out a red light. It left the room poorly lighted, but what light remained was red.

Then suddenly the room became filled with skeletons, or what looked to be skeletons, though the Piute was not long in discovering that they were men whose bodies had been painted black, with white stripes of paint laid on in the outlines of human skeletons. It was a weird

and gruesome sight, which roused the superstitions of the Piute and made him wish himself well out of there.

He did not know what the feeling was that made him stay, for at one time, after the room seemed deserted, it appeared possible that he might have gained the ladder by quick work.

The skeletons passed before him in grotesque dances; some as they slipped by him howled fiendishly in his ears.

Then the skeletons vanished, as the blanketed Indians had done.

In their places came demons, with hideous masks for faces.

The Piute sat staring at them with unwinking eyes, scared somewhat, but wondering what it meant.

His wish was that Pa-e-has-ka were there; he wondered if, in all his experiences at disguising, the scout had ever encountered anything as strange as this.

When the demons had gone the way of the skeletons the red-faced Indians appeared again.

They came up to the Piute, howling at him. Whether they asked him questions or not, he did not know; but he was wishing now that he had tried to get out a few minutes before, when it had seemed he might accomplish it.

The red-faced Indians flung themselves on him and pulled him out into the middle of the room. When he began to resist, thinking they meant to kill him, they broke into uproarious laughter, and snatched away his blanket.

This was followed by yells of astonishment.

The drum beaters stopped their hammering work, the dancers ceased their posturing, and all clustered in mad excitement before the Piute.

He understood what it meant—his mind clearing as from a mist. Up to that time they had thought he was one of them; the black face and blanketed figure had deceived them. But now, with the blanket snatched away, and his Piute clothing revealed, they knew better; his garb was not that of a Pueblo.

They howled at him furiously, but as he did not know what they said, he answered nothing.

A change came into the situation. A man appeared out of a hole at one side of the room, followed by others. He seemed an Indian at first, being painted like the others; but when he spoke, the Piute knew that this man was the Gambler of Taos.

"Who are you—and what does this mean?" he demanded in English.

Never much of a talker, Little Cayuse hesitated to break into speech now.

"I think you must be one of Buffalo Bill's Indians, from your dress! Is that right?"

When the Piute still failed to reply, the man turned to some of the excited and clamorous Pueblos.

Little Cayuse did not understand what he said to them, but what followed needed no interpreter. They seized him, and, throwing him down, began to wash away the black paint he had put on his face.

When this had been done, he was jammed down on the wooden stool again, while the semi-circle of Indians before him threatened him with knives.

The Gambler of Taos stepped close to the Piute, looking into his face.

"One of Buffalo Bill's Indians!" he said emphatically. "I reckon I know you. What does it mean?"

The Piute refused to enlighten him.

The man turned and began to speak to the two blanketed figures that had followed him into the room.

When they answered, the Piute gave a jump of astonishment; he could not resist it, for they were revealed as the gambler's pard and the woman whom the Piute had seen and known as Maria Xavier. He had thought them Pueblos, because they were blanketed and their faces were painted.

"I suppose you know this means a killing?" said the Gambler of Taos.

But a medicine man, or one whom the Piute judged to be a medicine man, appeared. Little Cayuse was not aware that the Pueblos had no medicine men of the kind he knew, nor did he know that they considered themselves Christians. This Indian, who was taller and finer in appearance, came out of one of the holes in the side of the room and approached the prisoner.

When he had looked at the Piute steadily, he turned to the Pueblos and began to talk with them.

The change in their manner was at once manifest; they ceased their threatening and yelling at the Piute.

Then the white man spoke again.

"He says that you cannot be killed, because you are now a member of the tribe of the Red Estufa. Maybe you don't know what that means, yet it don't matter. The idea is that you are one of this crowd, because you came down here, and while they thought you was a Pueblo you was put through the secret work of this rite. You might call it Indian Free Masonry, or something of that kind; it about amounts to that. Every one who goes through this is sworn to stand by all the others so long as he lives, and even to lay down his life for any one of

them. That's the idea. So, you see, being a member, as you now are, they can't kill you."

The singularity of the thing seemed to appeal to the Gambler of Taos. He twisted his painted face as if he wanted to laugh.

"On your side, though," he went on, "you are bound by the same things as they are, by which I mean, you have got to stand by them, fight for them, maybe die for them; and you are never, never to tell anything about what you have seen and heard here.

"A short way to keep you from telling would be to slit your throat, which would be dead easy, and prevent mistakes; but they don't think so, since the old fellow there has talked with them. But they're going to turn you over to him, and—he'll fix you!"

The old Indian who had interfered in behalf of the Piute disappeared into the hole from which he had emerged.

Throughout his absence the Pueblos maintained toward Little Cayuse a respectful, but curious, attitude. They talked among themselves, in excited gutturals, concerning him. And there seemed to be two factions—one favoring the ideas of the old Indian, the other angered and revengeful against the Piute.

Lopez Escondo, the Terror of Taos, with the white-eyed gambler and the disguised woman who was with them, asked questions of Little Cayuse.

They wanted to know if Buffalo Bill had sent him.

If the woman now wore the gay cavalier clothing, the Indian blanket covering her from head to foot concealed the fact. In that red-painted face there was not a trace of the Maria Xavier of Santa Fé.

One thing the Piute learned through what they said to him and in the questions they asked:

The Indians who had gone to the little tepee and there had blacked their faces and hooded themselves were candidates for this singular ceremony of initiation in the tribe of the Red Estufa. A very natural mistake had been made when he appeared in the red estufa, blacked and blanketed. He had fooled the Pueblos as completely as Buffalo Bill, his great exemplar, had ever fooled any Indians, though not with Buffalo Bill's customary resultant success.

The Piute answered very sparingly the questions with which they plied him. When he did answer, he voiced a lie where it was possible, with the notion of deceiving them as to the great scout's intentions.

He still looked curiously at the red-walled room, the red-shaded light, and the red-faced Indians. He knew, to a certain extent, what a Pueblo estufa was—a place for secret Pueblo ceremonies. Usually the estufas were underground, or of a dugout character; but they were, also, usually within the Pueblo village—in the very heart of it.

He gathered the notion that this tribe of the Red Estufa was an organization so secret that only the Pueblos who were in it, or were invited to membership, knew about it. Estufas, as a rule, were not red; generally they were dark, with dirt and smoke; the secret ceremonies held in them demanded darkness. That this was red, and the members painted their faces red, indicated to his mind that it had to do with bloodshed.

The idea had some proof in the fact that among the members were the notorious Gambler of Taos and his scoundrelly pard, together with the white woman who

had so recently thrown her fortunes in with theirs. She had doubtless been admitted at Escondo's request; but it could be reasonably supposed that he, in the first place, had been taken in because he was a man of bloody and murderous instincts.

The Spanish word *estufa* means a stove or a hot-house. The Piute's Spanish education had not progressed far, but he knew that much. In adopting this word the Pueblos showed the influence of Spanish usage—if, indeed, they used the word among themselves; it was the gambler who had used it, in speaking to the Piute. It was a word full of meaning, in the present case; for the underground hole, into which little air came, filled as it was with dancing and sweating redskins, had come as near to being a hothouse as anything the Piute had ever been in.

When the old Indian supposed by the Piute to be the tribal medicine man reappeared out of the hole at the side of the room, he bore in his hand a black bottle.

The Pueblos fell away before him, and even the white trio dropped back.

The Piute looked curiously at the old fellow, wondering what was to happen now. The words of the gambler had been full of threatening, in reference to what the old man would do.

The old Indian came up to Little Cayuse, held up the bottle, and motioned for him to drink, extending it to him.

"He wants you to drink out of the bottle," explained the Gambler of Taos.

The bottle suggested poison, and the Piute shook his head.

Three times the old man offered him the bottle, telling him in Pueblo to drink, but each time Little Cayuse refused.

When he had made the third refusal, some of the Indians jumped on him. Though he struggled, he was but a child in their hands, and they threw him down. Then they held him until his teeth were pried apart with a knife blade, and a portion of the vile decoction was poured down his throat.

When he had been forced to swallow it, he was permitted to resume his seat on the wooden block. But he was terrified now and shaking, while his frightened imagination caused his stomach to crawl and feel faint.

"That will do you good!" said Escondo, apparently pleased.

"Little Cayuse die now!" groaned the unhappy Piute.

"It won't be so bad as that. It's wonderful stuff; a secret of the Pueblos. Whoever drinks it becomes a friend of theirs, whether he wants to be or not; so they say; I never tried it. You didn't show that you was going to be a true brother of the Red Estufa, so you have been made to drink that stuff, and they think that will fetch you. It will make you harmless as a gamboling lamblet on the hillside."

"It's a pity," said the woman, "that some of it could not be given to Buffalo Bill!"

Her tone was harsh, even vicious.

Little Cayuse looked at her keenly; though she spoke in Spanish, which he could not master enough to speak, he had understood her.

"I'd prefer to dose him with bullets!" said Escondo, answering in English.

He regarded the silent Piute. All the Indians, clustering round, were staring at him, to see the expected effect of the drug. The old man stood attentively by, holding the black bottle.

Little Cayuse forgot the imaginary pain in his stomach in a new sensation. His sight was growing hazy, so that the blanketed and painted figures before him were becoming dim shapes. They elongated, becoming taller and taller, so that soon their feet seemed to be thrust deep into the floor, while their heads went up through the room. The light of the lamp became a dull red glow, paling into faintness, then seemed to go out. After that the figures vanished into darkness.

Little Cayuse sat staring blindly, seeing nothing now; he was unconscious.

The old man stepped up to him, pinched him, asked him questions, walked round him, thumping him on the shoulders; but Little Cayuse showed no signs that he knew it.

"It is done!" said the old man in Pueblo.

Whereupon the Pueblos howled in unison, as if to show their delight.

The ladder at the bottom of the well shook, an Indian came down it, his face blacked, a blanket hooding him.

He was the Indian expected, for whom Little Cayuse had been mistaken. He was seized by the feet and dragged in. Questions were hurled at him, demanding why he had been so late.

A furious gabble of talk followed.

Then the drums began to tump-tump again, the red light glowed out, the chanting was resumed, and the dancers, hopping and posturing, went round and round.

This candidate for the rites of the Red Estufa was being put through the regular paces.

Still Little Cayuse sat by the wall—he had now been taken from the block of wood—staring, with blind eyes that saw nothing.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PURSUIT OF ESCONDO.

"Ther ombray has shore waded inter deep trouble. Buffer!"

Old Nomad had Little Cayuse in mind.

A new day had come, with an active effort to learn what had happened to the young Piute. Buffalo Bill with Nomad and the baron, aided by the Apache trailers, had thoroughly combed old Santa Fé, searching high and low for Little Cayuse, or information about him.

The net result of these efforts can be stated in a few words.

A Mexican man and woman had been found who had seen an Indian pass along Buenaventura Street hurriedly, followed shortly by another Indian, who was apparently shadowing him. A Pueblo wood seller, it was reported, had been seen talking on more than one occasion with Maria Xavier in a back area at the palace, one of the occasions being the day before she disappeared. In addition, the scout and his pards were sure that the eaves dropper heard in the hotel corridor was an Indian, and Little Cayuse had followed him. Also, a blanketed Indian had been one of the wild riders who had charged down on Wild Bill and those with him when the shooting was done.

The conclusion was irresistible, that the place to search for Little Cayuse was with Indians, or where Indians were to be found. Buenaventura Street led northward. Lopez Escondo, called the Gambler of Taos, and the

Taos Terror, had come from the trading town of that name, hard by the Taos pueblo.

With all these things as guide points, Buffalo Bill and his pards, with the Apache trailers, were searching on horseback the paths and roads leading northward and in the direction of the pueblo of Taos.

Twice they believed they had seen moccasin tracks resembling those of the Piute; but the hard trail was so beaten that they could not be sure. Along this particular trail much merchandise was carried by burro-back, pack mule, and wagon train.

Buffalo Bill, replying to Nomad's statement, admitted that the Piute must have "waded into deep trouble," or, long before the night ended, he would have returned with a report.

"Unless," the baron still insisted, "he haf gone sooch a longk vays dot idt iss impossible vor him to gidt pack kvick."

"I'm gamblin' thet Escondo an' his crowd piked along hyar, ef Little Cayuse did."

"Idt vouldt pe nadural, uff he vendt pack to Taos," said the German.

"Yet he could expect that we would look for him there," the scout objected.

"I am bedtting sauerkraut to sissage dot ven ve findt Liddle Cayuse, uff he iss a brisoner, ve vill also findt diss governor vot peen captured."

"It would certainly be singular if we should find them both in the pueblo of Taos."

"Unt dese gamplers hidting dere at der same dimes!"

Not until they were a good many miles from the old city did they see again tracks like those made by the moccasins of Little Cayuse.

The Piute had recently purchased and used new moccasins. The one worn on the right foot had a small crease near the toe; the leather, being too "full" there, had wrinkled. The mark of that wrinkle was left whenever the moccasin struck fairly in soft ground.

Buffalo Bill was the first, this time, to see the telltale moccasin track, and he called attention to it.

All gathered round it. Pedro slipped from the back of his pony and knelt over it, viewing it closely.

The singular thing about this track was that it was going south. The others seen like it had been pointed northward.

Buffalo Bill swung out of his saddle now and joined Pedro in his close inspection of the track.

"What do you make of it?" he said. "Little Cayuse's?"

"Ai!" Pedro grunted. "All same like him moccasin."

He pointed to the crease, or depression, made by the wrinkle.

"Then we've overrun him; by which I mean he seems to have been going back toward Santa Fé, and we missed finding his tracks."

"Powerful hard ter see any sort o' track whar ther trail is pounded up as this is," commented Nomad.

Buffalo Bill discovered that the tracks of another Indian were close beside those already seen, and that this second Indian had apparently been "blinding" the trail of the first.

Every one but the baron now dismounted and grouped round this suggestive find, the baron choosing to remain in his saddle and act as horse holder for the others.

"Waugh!" Nomad rumbled. "This hyar second Injun war skeered thet somebody would see ther tracks o'

ther fust; therefore, he tried ter kiver 'em up, but didn't make a complete job of et, which left things wuss'n ef he hadn't done nothing, as et tells what he war up ter."

Sand and dust had been sifted over the tracks of the creased moccasin, but the work having been done imperfectly, or perhaps hastily, here and there the creased tracks still showed.

Buffalo Bill, Nomad, and the trailers followed them along on foot, finding only here and there a track; all the others had been obliterated by the second Indian, who had taken no particular pains to conceal his own foot marks.

When this had been kept up for half a mile or more, taking the pards and trailers right back over the way they had come, a point was reached where both the blinded tracks and the plain ones vanished.

"See thet!" woofed Nomad.

"The trouble is, I don't see it," the scout answered.

"Plenty good blind—huh!" asked Pedro.

"Or they left the trail altogether," suggested the scout.

They searched the grass at each side of the dusty and sandy trail. No plain tracks showed, yet here and there they could see that the grass had been bent down, as if feet had recently pressed it.

"Gittin' warm!" said Nomad. "I wonder what they went out this way fer. Ef't war Little Cayuse, one'd think he'd be hurryin' fast as he could to git back to us, 'stid o' side-trackin' an' wastin' time."

At the end of a mile of trailing, which was much of the time little better than guesswork, they came in sight of a log-and-mud cabin of the flat-roofed variety common in New Mexico. It was in a narrow valley that was backed by dry hills, a stream breaking through the

valley. The situation was forlorn in appearance, the only vegetation being cacti and grass in coarse tufts.

"The cabin is unoccupied," said the scout.

"Yer never kin tell erbout thet in er case like ther present," Nomad declared. "These hyar two reds we has been follerin' went toward et; mebbe they stopped in et, 'stid o' goin' on."

"Idt iss a visdom," suggested the baron, "dot ve divite oursellufs now, unt go each vay aroundt. Uff de Inchuns vot ve t'ink ve voller vent indo der capin unt sday dere, dey are dere yidt; budt, oddervise, uff dey didn't."

"Words o' wisdom, baron," commented Nomad with a smile. "If they're in thar, they're thar, an' ef they ain't, why, they ain't. But I reckon, Buffler, thet Schnitz has ther right o' et. Ef we circumnavergate round ther cabin we'll find tracks, likely, on ther other side."

Buffalo Bill had been studying the cabin closely while this futile talk went on, from behind the nut pines and cactus growths.

But now he took action, dividing his force, sending Nomad and an Apache round in one direction, with the baron and an Apache round in the other. The third Apache was detailed to hold the horses and guard the backward way.

As for himself, the scout chose to advance straight upon the front door.

Lying on the flat roof, invisible to the scout and his party, lay at this moment an Indian, who watched craftily when the scout came out into view.

Up to that moment the scout had not been visible to the Indian, nor had any of the scout's party; stones and cactus growths, with nut pines, had concealed them; so

that, on seeing him, the Indian on the roof, having climbed up there to look around, thought the scout alone, and that he had come on foot, following the faint trail over the grass from the distant highway.

For a little while the Indian hesitated, thinking at first that it would be well if he made a quick descent from the room and a retreat from the cabin.

He had seen this man in Santa Fé the week before, when Lopez Escondo had been taken to jail. So he knew him as the American scout who was Escondo's enemy, and, therefore, his enemy.

He had been working in the interest of Escondo in following Little Cayuse from the hidden red estufa to this point, doing it at Escondo's bidding, as well as at the behest of other members of the so-called Red Estufa tribe of Pueblos.

They had turned the Piute adrift in the darkness of the night, not sure where he would go, yet in the belief that he would not be untrue to the new membership which had been forced on him. At the same time, they had started this Pueblo out to watch the Piute.

It was a fear that the white friends of the Piute would come out from Santa Fé hunting for his trail which had caused the Pueblo to try to "blind" the Piute's moccasin tracks. For the same reason, the Pueblo had in effect adopted a disguise, by painting and feathering himself in imitation of a warlike Apache.

His black eyes glittered as he saw the scout coming on toward the abandoned mud hut. Having decided to remain, he drew his knife, and held it ready in his hand as he watched.

He had not made up his mind what he would do, or could do; yet there was murder in the evil shine of his

black eyes. For was not Lopez Escondo, by the rites of the secret Red Estufa, his sworn brother, and this man his enemy, because he was Escondo's enemy?

No serpent lying in flattened coil behind hedge of cactus ever lay more quiet than did this Indian, as the scout came slowly up to the door.

The place was so deserted that Buffalo Bill felt sure no one was in it. And he thought he had observed the whole area of the flat roof as he came on, though he had not seen the depressed portion in which the Indian had lain hidden.

In front of the cabin door were fresh moccasin tracks. As Buffalo Bill stooped to read the tracks the crouching redskin dropped on him.

Though taken completely by surprise, the scout whirled as he heard the Indian drop. This quick motion flung the Pueblo aside as he sought to drive a knife home. So violent, too, was the swing of the scout's arm that the Indian was pitched to the ground.

But the Pueblo bounced up like a steel spring, coming at the scout before he could get out a weapon. Quick as he was, the Indian was not so speedy but that the scout got in a sidewinder.

The blow was glancing and partly warded off by the Indian's knife arm; yet it whirled the rascal round, so that the scout could get at him, when they clinched and went down together.

The paint which the Pueblo had applied to his body was mixed with oil, so that he was almost as slippery as an eel. He dropped downward with a jerk, taking advantage of this, trying to drop out of the scout's arms. He got his body free, but Cody's left hand clutched him

by the hair; then the scout's right swung for the red-skin's face.

The blow knocked the Indian backward, so that he fell up against the cabin wall, with a force that jerked his hair from the scout's left hand.

Buffalo Bill, on the point of following up his advantage, was checked by a strange figure appearing in the broken door of the mud cabin—the staring-eyed figure of Little Cayuse.

It was almost as if Little Cayuse's ghost had appeared there; the sight stopped the scout's rush.

"Little Cayuse!" Buffalo Bill gasped.

The Pueblo took advantage of this, making a diving low jump along the wall, which carried his head under the scout's hand.

With a scrambling flight, as near to the grasshopper style as anything human could be, the Indian gained the corner of the cabin wall and flung himself round it.

Buffalo Bill jerked out his revolver, and was about to follow the running redskin.

"Pa-e-has-ka!"

Something in the tone caused him to stop. Little Cayuse was still staring at him in that strange way, and seemed about to pitch forward out of the door.

Buffalo Bill permitted the running Indian to go, and turned back to Little Cayuse. As he did so he let out a yell to summon his friends to the cabin.

In much excitement and curiosity, Buffalo Bill and his companions gathered round Little Cayuse.

He looked at them with a blank expression, leaning against the wall. Only when he turned his eyes upon Buffalo Bill did they express recognition.

"Ach! Vot iss der meanness uff diss?" sputtered the

baron. "He iss haf a grazynesses py his headt, I pedt you. Somepody haf hidt him der headt on, unt deprifed him uff his sensitiveness; idt loogks idt!"

"Little Cayuse!" said the scout, addressing the Piute.

"Pa-e-has-ka!" returned the Piute.

"Don't you know me?"

"Ai."

"What has happened to you; can't you tell us?"

Little Cayuse looked too dazed to answer.

"Mebbyso plenty bad spirit trouble him," Pedro suggested.

"Great Spirit touched his head!" said Chappo.

"Er, waugh!" Nomad rumbled. "Et's a quare thing, Buffler. I'm opinin' thet ther baron is right in guessin' thet he's been cracked hard on the cranerium."

But there were no lumps on the Piute's head, no gashes or bruises. So that theory had to be abandoned.

"Keep a watch for the Indian who ran," the scout said to Yuppah. "There may be more, too, around here."

He turned back to the Piute.

"Can't you tell us what has happened to you, Little Cayuse?" he asked.

"Bottle!" said the Piute.

"Waugh!" gulped Nomad. "Hyer thet?"

"He iss vant a trink," said the baron.

The scout produced his brandy flask, and held it up. But the Piute shook his head.

"Black bottle!" he said.

"Waugh! He wants er swig outer a black bottle! But we ain't got no black bottle, Buffler."

"Red Estufa!" said Little Cayuse.

"Crazyer'n a bedbug!" snorted Nomad. "Did ye ever hear ther like?"

"No crazy!" said Little Cayuse, with something like a snap of scorn.

"Waugh! Yer ain't? Waal, consarned ef ye don't act et, anyhow. What's bitin' ye?"

"Red Estufa!"

"A red estufa's bitin' ye! Waal, I allow that's wuss'n a bedbug. I never seen no red estufas. Whar is this hyer cur'osity?"

The Piute swung out his hand.

"There!"

"I ain't seein' no red estufa thar, ner elsewhar. Yer imagination is runnin' so fast it has got a hot box, I reckon. Whar all has yer been sense last we seen yer?"

"Red Estufa!"

"Waugh! Thar he goes erg'in, Buffer!"

"Bottle!"

"Er red estufa an' er bottle—black bottle! Ef this hyar ain't a halloocination I never clapped eyes on one."

But Buffalo Bill began to get some sense out of it.

"He has been in a red estufa," he said, "and has drunk out of a black bottle."

Little Cayuse bobbed his head in approval.

"See!" he said, catching the scout by the coat, and pointing. "Over there! Me want Pa-e-has-ka join Red Estufa tribe; plenty fine tribe; him got many big warriors. All paint um face red—so!" He swept his hand over his face. "All same wear um blanket—so!" He drew his blanket round his shoulders close. "Little tepee—so high; lookin'-glass; black paint. Go down in red estufa. We want Pa-e-has-ka be big Red Estufa man."

"Waugh! Do yer hear 'im?"

"Der plack pottle vot he trink oudt uff make him loss

his prains oudt by his moudth," said the German. "Idt iss der likeness uf vot I haf nefer before seen."

But Buffalo Bill went on, gently asking questions, trying to get at the story which he knew lay behind the Piute's apparent ravings. He could see now that Little Cayuse had been drugged.

He spent half an hour or more in this; at the end of which time he began to have certain definite ideas.

"He has been held a prisoner in some place—probably in the place he keeps calling the red estufa, and while there he was made to drink out of a black bottle that held drugged liquor. It made him this way. Why he was turned loose I don't know. But, apparently, this Indian who was on the roof followed him to this point, blinding his trail. I don't know what that was for."

"But he wants yer ter jine ther tribe of the Red Estufa!" Nomad stated.

Thereupon the Piute became much excited again.

"Yes—yes!" he cried. "Me want Pa-e-has-ka be Red Estufa man—heap big Red Estufa warrior. I am now Red Estufa man!" He hammered his breast proudly. "Me want Pa-e-has-ka be same. Sabe."

He tugged at the scout's coat during this outburst.

"Er, waugh! Waugh!" Nomad roared.

"He iss vant Cody to choin diss Redt Estufa pitzness vot he haf choined," interpreted the baron; "dot iss vot he iss magke a exblanadion uff. Idt iss so clear to me now as mine face."

"I guess you're right, baron," the scout agreed.

"Yes—yes!" sputtered the Piute.

"You want me to go with you and become a Red Estufa man?"

"Yes—yes!"

"You will show me where it is?"

The Piute caught him again by the coat, as if he would drag him, and made as if to set out from the cabin.

"I think I will go with you," Buffalo Bill told him. "But, first, we must talk it over with the baron and Nomad, and with the Apaches. Don't you want them to become Red Estufa men?"

The Piute declared violently that he desired all his friends to become members of the Red Estufa tribe.

"Idt iss too much uff a buzzlemendt vor Schnitzenhauser," groaned the baron. "Idt make my headt veel like der vass vildt horses rooning roundt py der insite uff idt. I vill soon pe as grazzy myselluf as der Biute."

"Some strange kink in his brain," said the scout, "makes him want us to join what he calls the Red Estufa tribe—whatever that is; he seems to think it is a great thing. Whether it is, or isn't, doesn't much matter; I don't think it can be, to judge by his condition, if he got that there. But there is this to be said—we can go with him to this place, and be in shape to find out what he has seen."

"It's dollars ter doughnuts thet if yer does, yer will bump inter Lopez Escondo!"

"Nothing would make me go quicker."

Again the scout addressed the brain-turned Piute.

"Did you see this fellow there that they call the Wild Ox?"

Little Cayuse bobbed his head.

"Waugh!" Nomad whooped. "Yer did? Then he war thar?"

"See um Wild Ox; see um Greaser Pete; see um Santa Fé woman, Maria Xavier."

"Waugh! Hear thiet, Buffler?"

"Where was this?" demanded the scout.

Red Estufa," came the answer again.

"Who else was there?"

"Heap plenty Indian."

"Pueblos?"

"No can tell—Red Estufa men; face all paint red, blanket up so. Dance in their bones; then feet go way down, head way high. Red Estufa—red light; all same everything red."

"Wow! He's plum ravin'!" Nomad protested.

"You will show us where this red estufa is?" the scout asked again.

Once more the Piute bobbed his head in emphatic assent.

Before deciding to let the Piute lead them to the red estufa, Buffalo Bill sent the Apache trailers to follow up the Indian who had been at the cabin. And he waited there for their return with a report.

They came back within a hour.

"Him take big trail," said Yuppah. "Mebbyso go north—no can tell."

"So the fellow has got back into the beaten trail, and turned, probably, in the direction from which he came?" said the scout. "As Little Cayuse came from that direction, it's a safe gamble that if he sets out for the red estufa he will go that way. We'll try it, anyhow."

Little Cayuse showed delight when told by Buffalo Bill that if he would guide them they would go with him to the red estufa. He started up at once, ready to set forth.

In his broken way, with much puzzling circumlocution, he told them over and over, as they walked along, how he greatly desired Pa-e-has-ka to become a member of the tribe of the Red Estufa. He seemed to think it

was a great honor, even though he had admitted seeing there their enemies. Apparently he did not now regard them as *his* enemies; he seemed to consider them his friends. The black bottle held a wonderful drink, he contrived to explain; when one drank of it he became the undying friend of its owner and of all the men who belonged to the Red Estufa tribe; he became, also, a wonderful man himself, a great warrior, wise as the serpent, strong as the ox, brave as the grizzly. Besides, it made him so love those who were of the tribe of the Red Estufa that he desired all his friends to become members.

When they asked him how one became a member he went through his rigmarole about the red faces, the hooded blankets, the men who danced in their bones, and who became so long that they touched the sky and sank their feet in the ground. With their limited knowledge of the subject, of course it was incomprehensible to his auditors. They thought he was raving of things which he had seen only in his fevered imagination.

He led them to the main trail, over the way he had come; then swung into it, heading northward.

But Buffalo Bill was not willing now to trust himself during the broad light of day in that open trail, since the Indian who had fled had passed over it, and would without doubt carry warning of their presence, perhaps of their coming.

"We soon be all great Red Estufa men!" cried the Piute in crazy jubilation.

"Then yer won't be er Piute no more, whatever?" said Nomad. "Is thet et?"

"Me no Piute now—Red Estufa man, heap big warrior. Wuh!"

"Yer used ter think thet a Piute war erbout ther heftiest man thet ever war growed!"

"Me no Piute now; Red Estufa warrior—heap strong, heap wise, heap brave. Wuh!"

"Jedgin' by yer tork, yer shore took er good swig outer thet black bottle. Must er held whisky o' ther forty-rod variety. Leastways, I've heerd men talkin' loud an' feelin' too big fer their boots arter they'd tanked up a bit on thet commodity. Ther nose paint in thet black bottle war plum a brain killer."

"Uff he wouldt sdick to peer!" said the German. "No man loses his inkinsciousness when he sdicks to peer."

"But he grows inter ther shape of a bass drum—like somebody I c'd mention," was Nomad's thrust.

"Ouch! Sdop idt!"

They became silent as they pushed northward through the cactus and scrub outside the regular trail, as they did not know how soon they might run into enemies.

That is, all stopped talking except Little Cayuse. Now and then he broke forth again about the Red Estufa and its wonders, expatiating on how great an honor it was to be a member of that tribe.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE RED ESTUFA.

Lopez Escondo kept himself concealed in the red estufa with Greaser Pete and Maria Xavier. A few of the Pueblos remained with them, but the larger number by far returned to their homes in the pueblo of Taos, and to the little fields which they tilled there.

The red estufa as a hiding place was, with a single and fatal exception, admirable; there was only one way to get out of it. It was well off the line of the trail, in a secluded place, which was hemmed in with rocks and trees in such a manner that the existence of the well-like opening leading into it could not be detected until one stood on its very rim.

Even then the hole looked to be only an abandoned well, or mining shaft. It had been made purposely to have that resemblance. The ladder down which the Piute had descended had been removed, and great care had been used in obliterating all traces of what had so recently taken place. The little tent was gone, the grass showing nothing of its recent presence. Round the mouth of the hole the ground was bare; but ashes of a campfire had been cleverly sprinkled there, and charred sticks and coals so placed as to give the whole the appearance of having been the temporary camping place of wayfarers. Not one man in a hundred seeing the hole would dream of trying to get down into it, and not one in ten thousand would ever conceive what really existed there under ground.

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Of those who remained in the red estufa was the old fellow called by the Piute the medicine man. He remained there most of the time, anyway; so that his staying was natural. The few Indians he kept with him now were to guard the white fugitives.

The Pueblos knew right well that Escondo and his pal had escaped from the prison in Santa Fé and were "wanted." They judged rightly, too, that men would come searching for them. But, as they had been admitted to membership in this strange Indian Free Masonry, the Indian members felt in honor bound to give them shelter and protection.

It was this singular tie of blood-brotherhood that had induced Francisco to lend his aid to the gambler, together with the other Pueblos who had taken the great risk of attacking the governor and forcing that order from him. But the governor was not held in the red estufa; that would have invited danger, which the medicine man would not permit, even though Francisco and some of the others had favored it.

Greaser Pete bore the confinement worse than his companions.

"We might as well be in that jail as here," he told Escondo time and again peevishly.

"You do not have to stay here," Escondo answered. "I do not like this hole, but I prefer it to the jail in Santa Fé."

Greaser Pete was indulging in one of his fits of grumbling, to the annoyance of his companions, when an Indian appeared at the mouth of the hole, and shouted down in much excitement for the ladder.

When it was brought and he had scrambled down it he called for Escondo.

"I am here," said the Taos Terror, stepping forward.

The Indian was the one who had followed Little Cayuse, and then had tried to knife Buffalo Bill. The story he told was startling.

"They are on their way here?" said Escondo. "Do I understand that they are coming?"

The Pueblo assured them this was a fact. He had dropped back, and had discovered that they were advancing stealthily by paralleling the main trail, which in his retreat he had followed.

"Now is the time for you to get out, Pedro," Escondo told Greaser Pete. "But as for me, I shall stay, and see if I can't get them down into this place, when their finish will be quick."

"It is a trap for us who stay in it," said the other. "There is, you see, but one way out—by the hole. If they camp down before that, what happens?"

"They get shot; that is what happens!"

"We shall be cooped up in here like rats," said Greaser Pete.

Yet he would not leave the place, preferring its dangers to the greater evils he fancied were outside; for he knew the whole police force of the territory, perhaps aided by troopers, would be scattered about, looking for the men who had been rash enough to capture and hold the governor.

Escondo began to question the old man.

"Is there not a mistake here?" he asked. "You said that if the Indian but drank of that bottle he would never desire to harm us; and now, here he comes, leading these men against us!"

The old man would not retract.

"He is our friend, who drinks from the black bottle of

the potion I prepare," he asserted. "I would that *you* had drunk of it. Had I my way," he added, "you would have been forced to, or protection of this estufa would not have been given you."

The gambler's anger flamed in his cheeks, but got no farther; he was too wise to quarrel with this old fellow, whose influence was great.

"It puzzles me!" was what he said. "If he is our friend, would he guide enemies here?"

"Said you not," asked the old man, "that you intend to trap them? No doubt he is guiding them here for that one purpose. That is what I think; you condemn him, and me, too soon."

"I have no wish to condemn *you!*" the gambler apologized.

"It is well that you do not. Still, I forget! You are of the blood-brotherhood; though it was done against my will. I will stand with you. If it comes to that, I will die with you. Of such is the blood-brotherhood of the Red Estufa."

"Do you not think we may trap them?"

"I am ready to aid, if it can be done. Will we have them come in here?"

"That is just my idea. We can conceal ourselves down here, in the holes at the sides of the room. When they come down, poking about, we will shoot them."

A smile cracked the wrinkled face of the old fellow.

"But will they come down, unless this Indian is true to us, and leads them in?"

"You are right there; I recall all I said."

Yet in Escondo's mind was the notion that if Buffalo Bill and his party descended into the red estufa it

would not be because the Piute led them in, but because they wanted to see what it contained.

It must be Escondo's work, then, to entice them into entering.

But, first, he felt that he must have more men—more Pueblos, with guns in their hands, with which to shoot down the American scout and his companions.

After some persuasion he induced the old man to agree to send out for this help.

When the Indian messengers started the old fellow chose to go with them, but left three of his men in the place, as guards and advisers of the white men.

"I know where I can get warriors quickly," he said. "It is not far. I shall not have to go to the pueblo.

The Gambler of Taos climbed out of the hole and looked the ground over after the departure of the old man. The wind was soft, the sky blue, the world peaceful, outwardly. It was hard to think that enemies could be near.

He walked along the dim path leading to the main trail, watching and listening.

"Cody's the kind that loves the dark to do his work in," was his conclusion. "Whatever he does, he will wait until night."

He tried to look at the subject from all sides.

"If that bottle dope does what the old man claims for it, the Piute will bring them straight here. But I haven't any faith in that. The thing that will happen is this—the Piute will guide them here for the purpose of showing them the location, so that they can do us. Cody will try his old trick of getting into the place and rushing it. Then we'll have him."

Seeing nothing, and thinking it might be time for the

return of the old man and his Pueblos, the Taos Terror went back into the red estufa.

"What's the outlook?" grumbled Greaser Pete.

"Well, you'd think that we were clean surrounded with love and happiness, so far as looks go out there. Quiet as a church on week days."

"You went fur enough to get a look along the main trail?"

"Yes; and it was empty."

"That Pueblo said, you know," remarked the woman, "that they were not following the main trail, but paralleling it."

She used Spanish, as a rule; yet she understood English much better than she could speak it. All three of them now and then switched from English to Spanish, then back again, as is the custom of people who make use of both languages in conversation.

The Taos Terror got his revolvers ready, advising Greaser Pete to do the same.

"When you turn loose on them fellows you want to do sure work!" he said.

"It makes me wish that I was out of here!" the woman declared.

"Afraid, eh?" asked Escondo.

"Not so much that, though I *am* afraid; but I do not like the thought of shooting men."

"You used a revolver pretty well when we made that dash in Santa Fé; and you brought the governor round by threatening him with one!"

She still wore the red paint on her face, but the heat of the estufa had induced her to cast aside the blanket; and the men with her had done the same.

Growing impatient at the long delay of the old man,

Escondo sent the Pueblos out of the estufa, to look round.

"He ought to be coming," he told them. "And maybe you will see some of Buffalo Bill's party scouting round. But do not stay long!"

In a little while there was a sound at the top of the ladder which reached to the surface from the main well.

Escondo went himself out through the tunnel, to see what it meant.

Red-faced, blanketed Indians were coming down the ladder.

Escondo retreated into the estufa well pleased.

"The old man is coming with his men at last," he reported to Greaser Pete. "They're right here."

"How many of 'em?" Greaser Pete asked.

"I didn't count 'em."

"When we hide in these holes," said Greaser Pete, "we'll all have to get on the same side of the room. Otherwise, in shooting across we're likely to get some of our own crowd."

"That's so, too."

The red-faced Indians were coming in through the tunnel and down the second well, dropping lightly, one after the other. One of the last to come was a tall fellow.

Escondo looked past him, for a sight of the medicine man, as he has been called here.

"Even if we don't trap Cody's crowd," he said to Greaser Pete, "if we get men enough down here they can't take us out."

"They can starve us out, though!" Greaser Pete grumbled.

Escondo turned to the tall Indian, who was approaching him, and asked for the medicine man.

The answer was of a kind so unexpected that the Terror of Taos came near having a case of heart failure.

The blanket worn by the tall Indian was thrust aside and a revolver was pushed into Escondo's face; at the same time he was commanded, in very plain English, to throw up his hands and surrender.

The "tall Indian" was Buffalo Bill!

Greaser Pete, grinding an oath through his teeth, snatched at his revolver; but one of the other supposed Indians rapped him so heavily on the head with a revolver butt that the white-eyed gambler reeled dizzily and fell against the wall.

"Waugh!" was roared by the wielder of the revolver butt. "I reckon, Buffler, we has got 'em fer keeps!"

Other blankets were thrust aside, and other voices sounded—the voice of the baron, with the Apache cries of the trailers, totally unlike the cries of Pueblos.

The men who had descended into the estufa, red-faced and blanketed, were all members of Buffalo Bill's party.

"Don't let the woman get away!" the scout shouted.

His order came too late.

Maria Xavier had made a limping jump for the lower well, and was climbing up the ladder to the tunnel as the scout spoke.

Pedro flung himself at her.

He and the Apaches pursued, but the desperate woman had gained the second ladder by the time they reached the tunnel, and when they came to the outer air she had disappeared.

Close by they saw her tracks, where she had leaped away over the grass, into the concealment of the bushes

and trees which came so closely round the well-like opening.

The capture of the red estufa had been accomplished so easily and suddenly that it was some time before the astounded Terror of Taos could find his wits sufficiently to enable him to ask questions about it.

Greaser Pete was in a state of frenzied rage, which caused him to roar like a trapped wolf, as soon as he recovered a little from that tap on the head given by Nomad.

"I guess I don't understand this!" said Escondo.

"Et's so plain I don't see how ye kin miss et!" Nomad flung at him. "Hold out yer hands hyar, while I dec'rates 'em correct an' proper wi' these ropes. Ef yer don't, er go ter buckin', ther baron an' ther 'Paches has orders to turn their guns loose on ye. Thet Apache over thar, which is name is Chappo, I kin see is consumed wi' a desire to shake lead at yer out er his revolver; he's an Injun what ain't never easy in his mind when he ain't shootin' et suthin', humans preferred."

Old Nomad was a bit of a wag, in his way.

Lopez Escondo—Wild Ox and Terror of Taos—held out his wrists for decoration, but not without protest. He was still bewildered and frenzied, and still asking questions.

Buffalo Bill and the baron were tying the other prisoner, Greaser Pete, who was roaring at them like one of the famous bulls of Bashan.

"Ther hull thing war so easy thet et tickles me ter think o' et," said Nomad, as if talking to himself, rather than to the man whose wrists he was binding. "Et all come erbout through what knowledge we got outer Little Cayuse. Thet Piute war ther wu'st locoed specimen

I ever met up with, an' thet's goin' some. He had been doped in er red estufa, outer a black bottle, he said. Waugh! On account o' et, he 'maged thet he war chief o' all ther biggest waryers o' this hyar Western hemyspear. He had j'ined ther rip-roarin' tribe o' ther Red Estufa, he said, an' he wanted we all sh'd jine et; so he sot out to guide us."

He stopped and snickered.

"Waal, ef't hedn't been fer ther long-headed dis'arnment o' Buffler, I reckon thet me an' ther baron never would er made head er tail o' anything he said—he war thet crazy in his tork; but Buffler, he kep' questionin', an' questionin', ontel he got a purty good ideer o' how 'twas.

"Ther Piute he wanted ter bring us straight along ther main trail, seein' thet he had gone an' come that way hisself; but Buffler said thet war too-resky, so we shied out through ther bresh and cactus.

"Twar a lucky move. Fer, out beyond hyar a ways, we come smack agin' a cache what showed signs of havin' been made recent. When we opened et up we found thet et held skins fer a little tepee, a lookin'-glass, a box o' paints, black an' red, wi' blankets various. Soon's Little Cayuse seen et he said et war ther tepee what ther fellers blacked and red-painted tharselves in, when they went through ther estufa-j'inin' performance.

"Waal, Buffler set his question machine goin' ag'in on ther Piute; an' bimeby he got et out of him jes' what et all meant."

He finished his tying, having taken a turn of rope round the prisoner's legs, and stood back, surveying the work.

"Waal, thet's nighabout all. But arter thet Little Ca-

yuse seemed to come ter himself more, so he war able ter tell more. Ther upshot o' et all war, that we determined ter turn ourselves inter red-faced Injuns, an' come down inter this place thet way, hopin' we'd work a surprise. An' we done et."

The Terror of Taos sank to a seat by the wall. He was sweating profusely, and trembling.

"It was a low-down trick!" he snarled, unable to say anything else.

Nomad chuckled.

"Yes, 'twar purty low-down under ther ground, yer see; we hed to go down one ladder, then through er tunnel, an' down another ladder. 'Twar erbout as low down as men are likely ter git in this world, unless they air miners, er well-diggers. Onc't I grubbed out a den o' coyotes thet war——"

Escondo cut him short with an outburst of frenzied abuse.

Nomad laughed again in an irritating way.

"When I hed dug out thet den o' coyotes," he said, "one of 'em snapped at me, jes' like you, an' I plum hed ter knock ther pisen critter on ther head an' kill et."

"That's a threat?" roared Escondo.

"Oh, no! I never threatens a man what ain't able ter help hisself."

"When I meet that Piute I'll kill him!"

Nomad chuckled again.

"Said ther dog thet war chained ter ther dog thet war free, 'When I overtakes yer I'll bite yer hide clean full o' holes!' Waugh!"

The baron was "consoling" Greaser Pete:

"Aber I tond't like you, I vill kindescendt to say dot

you haf my sympady. Also, I vill ask, 'Vare iss der gofornor uf diss derridory?'"

"Just keep your hands off o' me, is all I'm asking of you!" the enraged gambler flung back in answer.

"Ach! you ar-re so madt dot you pite myselluf, heh? Dot iss a voolishness."

"It is a thing we should like to know," said the scout. "It may make matters easier for you, if you tell us where the governor is held."

"Find out!" Greaser Pete roared at him.

"I can promise you that is what we intend to do."

"Then do it! Don't ask me."

Greaser Pete turned furiously on his pal, Lopez Escondo.

"You thought you was so infernal smart!" he yelled. "And this is what come of it. You allowed that when they come down into the estufa you could fill 'em full of lead; yet we didn't pull a trigger."

"Was that my fault?" demanded Escondo angrily.

"I think it was. It was a fool plan."

"Well, you agreed to it!"

"Wow! Don't talk to me! You're an idiot; and I won't listen to you!"

"See how peautiful unt bleasandt idt is for prethren to dwell togedder in unidy,'" quoted the baron. "Der likes uff diss unidy I haf neffer seen pefore."

"Will you shut up?" Greaser Pete yelled at him. "If I could get my hands free I'd brain you. We was all fools—fools!"

"Correct!" said Nomad. "I reckon you've said et."

Buffalo Bill had no intention of delaying in the estufa and permitting an attempt at a rescue there of the prisoners. Besides, he knew that if the Pueblo friends of

these men were aroused by the woman who had escaped, and came soon in force, they might hem his party in the underground place, which would be a serious thing.

So he ordered the prisoners to be taken out of the estufa, and prepared to vacate it.

As the prisoners refused to help themselves in any manner, they were carried bodily by the Apaches up the ladders.

Little Cayuse, still somewhat dazed, had been left in concealment not far off. So the first thing was to get him and add him to the party.

His coming aroused Escondo again, and he heaped on the head of the Piute a torrent of abuse.

The Piute took it silently. He had not entirely recovered from the effects of the drink he had been given out of the black bottle. Yet he no longer considered that these gamblers and desperadoes were his blood-brothers, and that he had been given a great honor when he was conducted into the mysteries of the estufa ceremony.

* * * * *

Reference has been made to the apparent change which had taken place in the character of Maria Xavier.

Having become the sweetheart of Lopez Escondo, and an associate of criminals, she seemed to have partaken of the desperate spirit which dominated them.

Having captured the governor of the territory, and secured the release of Escondo and Greaser Pete, only to have the latter two fall again into the toils, she had no disposition to make good her own escape and leave them unaided.

She had already tested the genuineness of the blood.

brotherhood feeling of the Pueblos who belonged to the mysterious and secret band known as the Tribe of the Red Estufa; so her first thought was to fly to them for aid in rescuing the prisoners.

In spite of the shock of discovering that the red-faced men, supposed to be the Pueblo reënforcement sent for, were Buffalo Bill's party disguised, she had been quick-witted enough to make her escape; a thing she had been able to do by reason of the fact that the scout and his companions were intent first on capturing the men.

She had a slight limp of the right foot, which hampered her in running; yet, having gained the shelter of the brushes which screened the opening into the estufa, she ran at a pace which not many men could have equaled.

A mile or more away she came upon the old Indian returning with the Pueblos he had gone to secure.

She could not speak the Pueblo tongue; but, fortunately for her, they understood the sort of Spanish commonly used in the territory; so she had not much trouble in telling them what had taken place, and begging them to hurry to the relief of the trapped men.

The invasion of the estufa, though it had been planned for, threw the old man and his companions into a white rage against the intruders; they seemed to think of that even more than they did of the prisoners there.

"We will punish the dogs of white men!" the old man told her. "They are still there, polluting the sacred place with their foul presence? We will sweep them from the earth."

His followers, a score or more in number, were equally enraged.

The trembling woman accompanied them, as they hastened on toward the estufa.

But when they reached it they discovered that it was empty; the white men and their Indian allies had departed, taking the prisoners.

"Pursue them!" said the old man, shaking in his rage, as he looked round the familiar red walls and saw here and there traces of what he considered desecration. "Pursue and slay them."

Forthwith he and his Pueblos, with the woman, set out on the trail of Buffalo's party.

But now the Pueblos used craft—not rushing on with the volcanic speed they had used in approaching the estufa. Out in the open ground the white men would not be at so great a disadvantage, and it was known they were armed and would fight.

Many things had happened, so that the hours had sped swiftly, and the afternoon was by this time well advanced.

"They cannot reach Santa Fé with their prisoners tonight," said the old man, "unless they have horses, and ride swiftly."

"They have horses," he was told, by one who had talked with the Pueblo who had been in the fight with Buffalo Bill at the cabin. "They left the horses hidden out in the brush."

"Perhaps we can capture their horses," suggested Maria Xavier, known to the Pueblos as the Gadfly. "If so, we can get them at a disadvantage."

She walked with scarcely a limp now, her strength sustained by the fever of anxiety that burned through her veins.

At a bend in the trail they followed, they were amazed by coming on two Pueblos leading some horses.

The Pueblos were Francisco, whom Maria Xavier knew well, and the Pueblo with whom Buffalo Bill had had the cabin fight.

The woman clapped her hands—she could not resist it; then she laughed hysterically.

"Buffalo Bill's horses—are they not?" she cried.

Francisco and the Indian with him explained glibly.

The second Pueblo had told Francisco of the horses; and it being their desire to strike a blow at the scout and his companions, they had gone to the point where the animals were concealed, and had taken them. This they had been enabled to do, because, in his retreat from the cabin, the second Pueblo had discovered where the horses were.

"It was a great trick!" said Francisco, pleased with this action.

"There was never a greater!" the woman told him, in a rapture. "Now we have them; they are on foot, and we can use the horses."

She cast aside the blanket that had disguised her form, and appeared in the gay cavalier clothing which has been described.

Her face was still stained by the red paint; but she would not take time to remove it.

One of the horses she chose for herself; the others she assigned to the Indians she thought most worthy, Francisco and his companion being of the number, together with the old man, whose good will she wished to retain.

The Indians not mounted followed on foot as the party set forth again.

"When a woman will, she will!" she said, settling

firmly into the deep saddle. "Now, we will show this American scout a trick or two."

She had by the very force of her mind and her superior daring become at a bound the leader of the warriors of the Red Estufa.

CHAPTER XVII.

A REVERSE FOR CODY.

"Waugh!" whooped Nomad, when the spot was gained where the horses had been left in concealment, and they were seen to be missing. "What's this hyar mean?"

The answer was gained by searching the ground.

The tracks of two Indians were found, together with a cut strand of rope, which Francisco had hacked with his knife. The trail of the horses led in the direction of the red estufa, but only after swinging a little to the westward of a direct line.

Buffalo Bill was deeply chagrined.

"We were so anxious to have our whole force with us when we made our descent into the estufa that we neglected to leave a guard with the horses," he said; "that's all there is to it!"

"One Injun left as guard mightn't 'a' stopped this snarled Nomad. "Thar war two er ther whelps."

Buffalo Bill turned round at once and set out with his companions, taking the prisoners along, pursuing this new trail.

Before he had gone far he discovered that a number of Pueblos, some mounted, were near at hand; he had come to the point where the horse trail united with the trail he and his friends had made in their flight. There a horse was heard to neigh, and its neigh was recognized.

The scout and his companions stopped to consult.

"If we go on, we may get into trouble," was his warning.

"Thar's only two er ther coyotes wi' ther hosses!" Nomad protested.

"Yes, at the start; we don't know how many may be with them now."

"Der kvestion iss," said the baron, "vot iss to be dit?"

"Capture ther hoss thieves," Nomad told him.

"Unt maype ve gapture some leadt pullets!"

Nomad turned angrily upon Lopez Escondo, whom he saw twisting at his bonds.

"Drap et!" he snarled.

"I think I'd better see just what is before us," the scout suggested. "Stay right here with the prisoners, and be ready to fight. We can't afford to give them up, now that we have got them."

"How many reds do yer reckon is out thar?"

"I don't know. I'm thinking of that woman. She is a Tartar. If she could get a gang of Pueblos together she would be capable of making trouble."

He took his revolver in his hand and stole away, leaving the party bunched and expecting trouble.

But he had not gone twenty yards when there came a furious charge of Indians, mounted and on foot; they came straight at him, crashing through the brush and cactus with the effect of a hurricane.

Buffalo Bill turned to get back to his friends before the charging Indians struck them; but the horses came too fast for him, so all he could do, to save himself, was to dodge aside, and let the yelling riders and footmen go by.

On the back of his own horse, as it tore wildly past him, he saw the gay cavalier figure of Maria Xavier.

She was standing up in the stirrups, screaming hysterically, a revolver swinging in one hand while she managed the bridle with the other. She was a grotesque and startling figure in the gay clothing, with her face painted a vivid red.

By her side rode Francisco and the old man of the estufa, each yelling as wildly as the woman. It was a mad rabble, which rode with the recklessness of death.

Buffalo Bill withheld his revolver fire. Though he wanted his horse, he did not desire to shoot the woman. And he did not see that anything worth while would be accomplished by dropping any of the Indians out of the saddle. The Indians on foot were the larger number.

Following this mad charge came the popping of revolvers and the war cries of the Apaches, mingled with the yells of old Nomad and the baron.

Buffalo Bill followed the Pueblos on foot, hoping still to be in the fray, at a point where he could aid his friends.

But when he reached the spot where they had been, and where the whirlwind charge had struck them, the Pueblos had passed on, as a tornado rushes on after it has wrought destruction.

Nomad had seized Greaser Pete and thrown himself on top of him, that he might not escape; but the man most wanted was gone—the Terror of Taos.

The baron was senseless, having been knocked down by a plunging hoof; and the Apaches were following the Pueblos, in a mad and useless pursuit.

"Waugh!" Nomad whooped. "Er, waugh!"

He rolled off the body of the white-eyed gambler.

"I hung ter this hyar skunk, Buffler; but t'other'n is gone."

Buffalo Bill turned to the baron; but as he began to paw over him the baron opened his eyes and sat up.

"Ouch!" he said. "Aind't I sdill lifing?"

"I guess you're all right, baron."

"Vhen anyt'ing so heavy as a horse pudt his foodt into mine sdomach——"

He stopped and doubled up with pain.

"Well, we've lost out, after all, Nomad," the scout confessed.

"Idt vos der vomans!" cried the baron. "I haf a mighdy poor obinion uff a vomans, eenyhow, since der dime my wife she comb my headt hit a vlatiron."

The Pueblos made good their escape with Lopez Escondo. So that it was little satisfaction when Buffalo Bill got back to Santa Fé with Greaser Pete.

A force was sent to the red estufa, but it was vacant.

And the Pueblos of the village of Taos proclaimed loudly and indignantly that they knew nothing of Escondo and had no knowledge of any of the things that had happened.

Buffalo Bill and his party, however, did not relax their efforts to recapture the Wild Ox. Troopers from the army post at Santa Fé also scoured the country. But a week passed, and no trace was found of the Terror of Taos, Maria Xavier, or any of their band of outlaws.

Yet the band was intact, and the very time the pursuit of them was hottest they were preparing to hold up a wagon train. Governor Mendoza was still held a prisoner.

The band had taken up a position on the Santa Fé trail, where it came down from the Raton Pass and swung across the lip of the valley and on through Arroyo Blanco. The bed of the stream through which the trail

ran, being of white stones, was called Arroyo Blanco, and a hill over it was called Callado Negro, or, as it would be in English, Black Hill.

On the top of a tall pine on this hill one afternoon, while Buffalo Bill and the troopers were hunting the outlaws, sat the figure of a painted Indian. The gray blanket drawn tightly round his shoulders and neck was hooded far forward, so that it projected over his eyes like a bonnet, protecting them from the glare of the sun, as he stared northward along the old Santa Fé trail.

On the hillside beneath him, scattered about under the pines and cedars, were at least twenty figures, painted like himself, lying there in hiding.

Now and then he shouted something down to them; or they called up to him, asking if he saw nothing yet of the expected wagon train.

Two of the painted figures under the trees were not Indians, though they seemed so, outwardly. One was a man, the other a woman; the man was Lopez Escondo; the woman Maria Xavier.

The style of the headfeathers, and of the paint, the latter applied liberally to the body as well as the face, proclaimed the Indians to be Chiricahua Apaches. Yet they were not Apaches at all, but Pueblos.

"It begins to seem," said the woman, speaking to Escondo, "that the wagon train must have received warning and gone by another way."

"It is very true," he answered.

"Then, do you not think it would be well to send out scouts? If it has taken another course, we might cut it off. But if we wait too long it may get so far toward Santa Fé that it will escape us altogether."

"I have been thinking even so myself," said Escondo. "Yet there is a difficulty."

"Few things are without a difficulty," she told him.

"It is that if we divide our force by sending out scouts, the wagon train may appear here, and we should find ourselves weakened for the attack on it."

"But we must have the guns and the ammunition!"

"That is so true that we shall be in bad shape without them. Our Indians here have only traders' guns, with their lances and bows and arrows. Such are poor things with which to meet American troopers. We must have better arms. If the Pueblos are to fight, they must have the right kind of weapons."

The subject the woman had broached so wrought on her fears that she arose and walked back and forth under the trees, throwing a sentence now and then to the man. He was of a quieter temperament; and while he recognized the seriousness of the situation, he continued to roll and smoke cigarettes, with his back against one of the trees, seeming as calm as if everything promised all he could ask.

"If I were in command here," she said, "I feel sure I should send out the scouts at once. For, see you, we have been here now two hours and more, and the wagon train was due here at about the time we arrived and got in position."

"You mean that I am in command?" he said, taking the cigarette from his lips.

"That is just what I mean!"

He looked at her curiously, with apparent admiration, before replying.

Her hair, black as an Indian's, had been cropped off

much of its abundant length, so that it hung down on her shoulders now, like the hair of a Pueblo. Her face was painted and striped, like the faces of the warriors. And she wore a blanket. But the day being warm, even under the shade of the pines, she threw the blanket back as she walked. This showed that she wore masculine clothing—the attire of a cavalier, gay in velvet and laces; so different from the Indians' that the contrast was startling, if attractive and picturesque. A painted Indian face above that flashy clothing, and over it an Indian blanket, made the whole seem wonderfully incongruous.

The man was painted, dressed, and feathered as if he were a Chiricahua Apache; there was nothing about him to indicate otherwise, even with his blanket off, except that he had not the Indian physiognomy, with the prominent nose and the high cheek bones; but he had black hair and dark eyes. His speech and tones were not Indian; they lacked the Indian peculiarities and gutturals.

"I am not in sole command," he urged, looking at the nervous and impatient woman. "Francisco is here; and Tonopah, who has more power than any chief."

"Would it not be well, then, if you asked them about this?" she suggested. "I really begin to fear that the wagon train has been given warning, and has sheered off into some other trail, and that we shall miss it."

Lopez Escondo called to the Indians he had mentioned; and they came to him—an oldish man, Tonopah, who held much the same position as a medicine man in the wilder tribes, and Francisco, a younger man, who was quick and alert-looking.

Escondo repeated to them the fears of the woman, using Spanish, which they understood well enough for

all practical purposes. He chose it because he could use it much better than he could the tongue of the Pueblos.

"My brother knows that we are ready to risk our lives to serve him," said the old man, "and that we rely much on his wisdom and judgment in this matter; so, if he says for us to send scouts out to learn about this, it will be done at once."

Escondo was ready to give the order, when a cry from the Indian in the tree top announced that the wagon train had been sighted.

Lopez Escondo took a rope, and by using it he climbed into the tree by the side of the watcher, that he might verify the report.

The expectant Pueblos below, knowing that it was true, began to get in readiness for an attack.

Along the northeastward trail rose a dull cloud of dust, which increased in size as Escondo looked at it.

Within half an hour from the time it was sighted, the train itself was visible—a half dozen trail wagons, each drawn by six powerful mules.

It was a treasure train worth capturing; as it contained supplies of clothing and food for the army post at Santa Fé, as well as arms and ammunition.

"How many men do you make out are with it?" Escondo asked the Indian beside him.

The Pueblo strained his eyes under the hooded blanket.

"Ten, I think, besides the drivers; it makes fourteen, if I am right."

"They are mounted?"

"Mounted, and armed; they are the guard of troopers for the wagon train."

"And we have twenty-two, numbering myself and the

woman. The troopers are much better armed. But we shall have the benefit of a surprise; and that is more than half the battle. It has been reported in Santa Fé that I and my friends are far to the southward, near Agua Caliente—the news came yesterday; the troopers from the post, with the American scouts, are out in that direction. So I am hoping the troopers who guard this train will not be expecting us here."

He climbed out of the trees, the Indian following him down.

"The train is within a mile now," Escondo reported. "We must get ready for it."

The woman had belted round her slender waist a web of cartridges, with a revolver slung in its holster, together with a sheath knife. She examined the revolver, lifting the hammer and turning the cylinder to see that it worked easily.

"This may be the end, Escondo," she said seriously. "If it is, remember that I have done all that any woman could!"

"More than any other woman could!" he told her.

She dropped down at his side, under a cedar, at the end of the arroyo, which their revolvers commanded. Around them were their Indian friends, silent as so many coiled serpents that wait to strike.

Apparently the people with the wagon train had no idea of danger. The teamsters could be heard snapping their whips cheerily; some of the troopers were singing rollicking songs; now and then arose a burst of laughter.

The heavy wagons came on at a slow pace; six mules dragging a trail wagon—several wagons coupled close up, one behind the other. There were four of these six-mule teams. The wagons were hooded with white canvas.

was coverings to keep off the dust and rain, and they were piled high with goods.

The guard of troopers rode beside the wagons, carbines slung across their shoulders, army Colts in their belts and in their saddle holsters. But, though so well armed, their weapons were not ready, nor easy to get at with speed.

The wagon train wound down into the sandy arroyo, and came on under the shadows of Callado Negro, stirring up a cloud of dust, through which teamsters and horsemen could hardly be seen. Some of the teamsters broke out with oaths, lashing the mules as they toiled in the deep sand.

Then, sudden as comes the lightning, flashed forth the pot-metal guns held by the Indians, with the revolvers of the outlaw and the woman; this was followed by a whizzing flight of arrows and a shower of hurled lances.

A number of the mules dropped in their traces; some of the guards tumbled from their deep saddles; teamsters fell from their seats.

As the wild yells of the Indians arose hideously from the hillside, the loud commands of an officer were heard, as he frantically ordered the troopers to get down behind the wagons and stand off the red foe.

But the Indians were coming down the slopes, out of the evergreen cover, yelping like wolves. At their head leaped a strange figure—a gay cavalier, with face painted red and eagle feathers flying. This wild figure, swinging a pistol, limped slightly at times.

One of the troopers drew on it with his carbine; but the pistol flashed, and the trooper fell back, with a bullet through his head.

Close behind this figure ran the thick-shouldered,

heavy-limbed Terror of Taos, indistinguishable from the Indians in his Indian clothing and paint.

What followed was hand to hand, and too terrible to describe.

The fierce fight was all over within less than five minutes. The surprise had been complete, half the troopers and nearly all the drivers having fallen at the first fire. Most of the others had been slain like rabbits. A few escaped into the hills, and so got away.

The mules not slain the Indians cut out of their traces, and took. They looted the wagons of everything they could carry, not failing to get all the guns they needed, and particularly all the ammunition.

Then they burned the wagon train.

The next day the escaped troopers straggled into Santa Fé, with their terrible story.

A detachment being at once sent out from the fort found that the wagon train had been burned, and that all of its supplies not taken by the Indians had been destroyed in the fire.

The troopers who escaped reported that it was the work of Chiricahua Apaches.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CODY AND PARDS ALERT.

Colonel Diamond, in command of the army post at Santa Fé, had sent for Buffalo Bill.

"The outlook is bad, Cody!" he declared, as the great scout came into his office at headquarters. "As if we didn't have enough trouble on our hands right now, the Chiricahuas have started raising the very Old Harry. You've heard the report, of course? They attacked and burned the wagon train, at Arroyo Blanco, yesterday, and wiped out more than two-thirds of the force that was with it. It looks like the beginning of serious business."

"It is the beginning of serious business; or, rather, the continuation of it."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

The colonel had placed a chair for Buffalo Bill, and the scout sat down before replying.

"Before answering that, I'll say that I haven't been able, so far, to find a trace of Governor Mendoza."

"Nor of the Wild Ox. I heard that you had come in and reported a failure."

"I haven't given the thing up, you understand. Now I think I know where the Wild Ox is."

"That's good; if you can put your hands on him."

"I may not be able to do that, right away. But he was with the band of so-called Apaches that struck the wagon train at Arroyo Blanco."

Diamond came half out of his chair.

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"You have a reason for saying that, of course?"

"I have been talking with some of the troopers who were in that fight," said the scout. "They tell me that when the Indians charged down the hill, after their murderous fire from ambush, they were led by one who was dressed in slashed and ruffled velvet clothing. That was not an Indian, I am sure; but was a woman—Maria Xavier, the companion of the Wild Ox. The clothing is proof of it. When Escondo and his pal charged down the street in Santa Fé, and shot down Wild Bill, with them was a rider supposed to be a man, wearing that clothing. It is now known that that rider was Maria Xavier."

The colonel, intensely interested, had sunk back into his chair.

"I think you must be right, Cody. I remember about that woman. It seems to prove that this desperate woman has joined the Apaches. I suppose it can be considered as evidence, too, that the Wild Ox is with them. The troopers reported that the Apaches were Chiricahuas."

"The presence of that woman with the Indians indicates that they were not Apaches at all, but Pueblos. Escondo, as you know, is not only from Taos, but I discovered he and this woman had joined a secret organization of Taos Pueblos, all the members of which are sworn to fight for each other to the death. They needed supplies and ammunition; so they raided the supply train to get them, disguising themselves as Chiricahua Apaches, to divert suspicion from themselves. That is my confident opinion."

Buffalo Bill went on to elaborate his belief, and give what he considered all the proofs supporting it. He also

detailed the experiences of himself and his men in their unsuccessful search for the governor of the territory.

"It begins to look as if Mendoza may have been put out of the way," Diamond suggested.

"It is possible," the scout acknowledged. "Yet, when he was captured, a note was left by Maria Xavier, you will remember, in which she said that he would be held to guarantee the safety of Escondo."

"It said," Diamond corrected, "that he would be held to prevent a pursuit of Escondo. The pursuit was made, however; and it is that which makes me think Mendoza may have been killed."

"Anyway, we have failed to get track of him. But now that I know where Maria Xavier is, I hope, by trailing her, to locate the spot where the governor is held, if he be living. And I intend to recapture the Terror of Taos."

Colonel Diamond declared his willingness to put troopers at the disposal of Buffalo Bill; and asked him if he would not lead a force in pursuit of the Indians who had attacked and burned the train.

"For you see," he urged, "whether Chiricahua Apaches, or Taos Pueblos, that is an outrage that cannot go unpunished. You will agree with me in that."

Buffalo Bill desired to work alone, however; he did not want to be hampered by commanding, or guiding, troopers. And it was the colonel's intention to send troopers in pursuit of the raiders, in any event.

When the scout returned to his room in the Alcatraz Hotel, he found old Nick Nomad and Baron von Schnitzenhauser awaiting him. Little Cayuse and his Apache trailers were at the hotel, too, sitting on the benches in the *patio*.

"Der kvestion iss now," said the baron, "vot iss to pe dit?"

"We are going to ride to Arroyo Blanco," the scout told him. "What we may do after that will depend on circumstances, and what we find out there."

The Dutch Pard came to his feet with a jump.

"Whoob!" he cried. "Dos iss suidt me. I am yoost saying to Nomat, dot as ve haf failed in finting der gofornor now ve are-re hafing to sday in diss oldt town a vholes until we hear somedings. I shall gidt me my horse diss minudte!"

The baron was a contradiction; for, in spite of his fat body and slender legs, which made it seem that he would prefer a lounge in a cool room, or an easy-chair, to anything else, he was not satisfied unless he was continually moving. It gave him the name of the Flying Dutchman. If there was a lot of excitement, with a plentiful spice of danger mixed up in his peregrinations, he was that much happier.

"How soon do ve stardt?" he asked, stopping in the doorway.

"Well, baron, you may tell the Indian scouts to get their ponies ready; and if you want to busy yourself, go to the store on the corner and lay in some grub for the war bags, and some revolver ammunition."

"Whoob! I am going immetiately. Budt, dell me; did you findt oudt uff dem Inchuns vot addack der vagon drain iss Inchuns, or ar-re dey white men?"

"They are Indians—Pueblos."

"Der gurnel, he say so—heh?"

"He thought they were Chiricahua Apaches."

"You tond't know idt yourseluf, dot dey aind't? Idt iss yoost a guessing!"

"The clothing she wore—or what that person wore!"
 "Budt yoost consiter," the baron urged. "Aber ve
 ton'd't know nodding vor sure, idt mightd pe dot she haf
 peen kilt by der Abaches, unt dot van uff dem iss veering
 dose clodings now. You see, idt mightd pe so easy."

"Yes, that's so," the scout admitted.

"You ditn't t'ought uff dot—huh?"

"Yes, I had thought of it. It is possible, but I do not
 consider it likely. I know of no reason why the Chiri-
 cahuas would want to go on the warpath right now."

"Gin'ral Apache cussedness," said Nomad, "is reason
 enough, any time, for an Injun o' thet breed. They
 gits ther warpath fever inter their blood onct in so often,
 an' they has got ter go on ther red trail then, anyhow;
 they jes' cain't help et. Et's ther same as a dog has got
 ter hev meat; they hankers fer et."

The baron did not wait to hear this oracular statement
 in full, but went clattering heavily down the stairway.

A moment later they heard him in the *patio*, giving
 orders to the Indian trailers.

"Et's my opinion," said Nomad, "thet this hyar Gov-
 ernor Pasquale Mendoza is right now in ther pueblo o'
 Taos. How many rooms thet old house of a pueblo has
 got nobody knows, 'cept the Pueblos, 'an' they ain't goin'
 ter tell; ner how many secrit rooms an' underground
 sullers. Ther pueblo is piled up thar jes' like a big bee-
 hive, so thet a man outside cain't tell nothin' erbout et.
 So, what yer goin' ter do? Ef ther things war raided,
 thar wouldn't even then be no way ter know ef all ther
 rooms war found."

"And we should have to fight the Taos Pueblos, which
 wouldn't be any fun, if we tried to send troopers search-
 ing through the place."

"Right ye air. An' er Pueblo kin fight like sin, when
 he gits his mad up, peaceable as he seems ter be. They
 claim they don't know nothin' erbout ther wharabouts o'
 ther gov'ner; but as they say, at ther same time, thet
 thar ain't no secrit society thar called the Tribe o' ther
 Red Estufa, when we knows better, what's ter do? They
 lie; but they would fight wicked ter back up thet lie, ef
 they war put ter et. I been thinkin' ther hull thing over,
 Buffler; an' et seems we're up er stump."

"We will ride to Arroyo Blanco. That's as far as I
 can see right now; though I am of the opinion that after
 we have visited the scene of the fight we shall feel called
 on to take the trail of the Indians, whoever they were."

"Right-o. I'm with ye ter ther eend."

Old Nomad loved excitement and the prospect of a
 fight quite as well as the German.

When the horses and ponies had been brought up by
 the Indian trailers, and the baron arrived with a cart
 containing the food supplies and other things he had pur-
 chased, the work of getting ready was pushed so rap-
 idly that within half an hour afterward the party was
 equipped for the trail.

CHAPTER XIX.

ANOTHER SURPRISE AND DEFEAT.

Their ponies burdened by the spoil of the wagon train, the disguised Pueblos, under command of Francisco and old Tonopah, headed northwest, after leaving Arroyo Blanco, hastening in the direction of the lands of the Chiricahuas.

They knew that there would be a pursuit; and the Terror of Taos believed that Buffalo Bill and his party would take part in it.

The plan was to draw the pursuers into the country of the warlike Chiricahuas, then work to bring about a collision between those Indians and the troopers. The Chiricahuas were fearless and fierce fighters; so that the troopers would soon have their hands full, and apparent proof would be furnished that the Chiricahuas had attacked and destroyed the wagon train.

Having accomplished that, the Pueblos were to draw off to one side, in safety, and permit this Kilkenny fight to proceed.

The clever scheme was hatched in the mind of the woman, who, having thrown her lot in with an outlaw, had become even more desperate and daring than he had ever been.

That it might not fail, she and Lopez Escondo rode in advance of the retreating Pueblos. They professed a desire to pick out the way. And as the Pueblos were in this thing merely to aid them, because they were

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members of the secret, oath-bound organization, this was not objected to.

The object sought by Escondo and the woman, of drawing the Chiricahuas into the fray, was worked out as cunningly as their other plans.

A half a day's long march from Arroyo Blanco, they came upon a Chiricahua who was at the time alone. He was a hunter, and had just brought down a deer with his bow. Having discovered that troopers were coming from the south, and somewhat alarmed by that fact, which he did not understand, he was trying to load the deer on his shaggy pony, intending to hurry with it to his village. As he was thus engaged he saw two people, whom he took to be Indians, riding toward him from the southeast. The troopers were advancing from the south. The two riders were blanketed like Indians, and the Chiricahua hunter could see that their faces were painted.

As he stared at them he noticed that they wore the war paint and feathers of Chiricahua Apaches; a puzzling fact, as the Chiricahuas had not gone on the war trail, unless they had done so since he left the village, only the day before.

He let the deer's carcass fall to the ground now, and stood by his pony until the supposed Apaches came galloping up to him.

Not until they were right on him, and he hailed them, did he observe anything strange in their appearance. Then he noticed that, while they were painted like Chiricahuas, they were of the white race; a fact revealed by many little things, but chiefly by the manner in which they sat in their mounts, together with the fact that they used saddles.

Having made this discovery, he tried to spring to the back of his pony.

Then a revolver swung up, in the hands of Lopez Escondo; and when its report rolled over the cedar hills, the Chiricahua pitched to the ground. His pony bolted.

"It was a pity!" said the woman, still with something of the feminine in her which made her dislike to see bloodshed.

The Chiricahua lay dead beside the body of the deer.

"Yet it could not have happened better," the man told her. "See! His pony is flying for home; and he lies here. Back there come the troopers. All we have to do now is to get out of the way quietly, while the troopers blunder on. They are following a line which they think will intersect that of the Pueblos who are traveling in this direction. But our belief and hope is that it will now throw them into the arms of the Chiricahuas."

The troopers were not in position yet to see the outlaw and the woman. But even if they had sighted them, they would have mistaken them for Indians.

"Here we turn back," said Escondo. "Ride right behind me now; by doubling straight back on our trail we'll confuse the Americans. If they find this fellow dead they will probably think he was shot by another Indian."

They purposely rode Indian ponies.

The troopers passed more than a half mile to the westward of the scene of the murder; so did not see the dead Chiricahua at all; but rode straight on, thinking to soon find the trail of the retreating Indians, not aware that they were ahead of it.

When they had passed on, the outlaw and his companion changed their course, until they entered the troopers' trail; then they followed that.

Having accomplished this safely, they turned about in the trail, and rode in the opposite direction, not stopping until they were a long distance from the spot where the Apache had been slain.

Leaving the trail of the troopers now, they cut right across country, to rejoin their friends, the Pueblos, whose location they had nicely calculated.

After the troopers passed on, a Chiricahua hunter came upon the slain Indian.

He was the murdered man's brother, and had been out on this hunting trip with him.

His eyes blazed with fury as he saw the murdered form. He had observed the troopers passing; so he did not need to follow the trail of the two ponies to make him believe this was the work of troopers. The bullet wound said that, for it was from a white man's revolver.

When he had lifted the body of his brother to the back of his pony and lashed it there with his horsehair riata, to make sure he was not mistaken as to who had committed the crime, he followed the trail of the two ponies; and found where it entered the main trail made by the troopers.

The Chiricahua did not need to know more, or go farther. The proof against the troopers could not have been stronger, to his mind. So with his heart filled with sorrow for the dead, and a wild and vengeful rage against the men he believed had done the bloody deed, he set his pony at its best gait, and rode by a short cut to the Chiricahua village.

The troopers having failed to bisect the trail of the retreating Pueblos, because they had got in ahead of it, camped that evening, at sunset, by one of the many small branches of the upper Rio Grande.

They had their sentinels set, and a horse guard in charge of the horses by the water hole in the bed of the stream; yet they did not anticipate trouble, being sure that the supposed Apaches, wherever they were, could not be in that vicinity.

So they were frying bacon and cooking their evening meal, by some small fires which the captain in command had permitted, taking their ease.

As they were thus pleasantly engaged they were charged by Chiricahuas, who let fly a flight of arrows and bullets, then rushed the camp with lances, uttering their wild war cries.

Though the troopers were plucky fellows, and tried to rally for a defense, they were driven back by the lances; while those not killed were forced to make a retreat on foot, as the horse guard was cut down by the water hole, and the animals stampeded.

The troopers used their carbines to such advantage, however, as they slowly gave way, that the ground round the camp fire was covered with dead Chiricahuas; though a number of dead troopers lay in their midst.

After trying twice to ride down the dismounted men, each time with a bloody repulse, the Chiricahuas retreated to the camp, which they began to loot, scalping and stripping the dead troopers; after which they indulged in the scalp dance.

The beaten troopers retired in the direction of Santa Fé.

They had not gone far when they met Buffalo Bill's party. The scout and his companions had heard the firing; it had caused them to abandon the Pueblo trail they were following, and ride straight toward the scene of the fight.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HIDDEN DEATH.

"There is a thing I have tried to plan," said the woman to Escondo, as they made their way across the cedar hills, on their way to rejoin the Pueblos.

"Name it," said Escondo.

She threw back the disguising and disfiguring blanket. Then from the bosom of her ruffled jacket she produced a buckskin bag, from which she brought up a pair of gold bracelets of a quaint, Oriental design.

"Yes, I've seen them," he said; "but I didn't know you had them with you. They are not pleasant things to have around. Dangerous, too."

"Not dangerous," she said, "to those who know how to use them."

"But death to those who do not."

"Very true. It is why I have been trying to plan how to use them."

"I am all ears, as the donkey said to his mate. But it strikes me as queer that your revered father should have cared to bring those things home with him from the other side of the world!"

She frowned at that; for, though she had discovered that her father had been a French pirate in a Spanish vessel, and had come to no good end, still he had been her father, and she did not like to have him spoken of lightly.

"I found them, you know, after I had discovered that old letter which told of my father's life on the high seas.

He had sailed, it seems, to the Far East; where his vessel had attacked and destroyed many Chinese and Japanese junks; and the crew had pillaged some towns and villages. So I do not know whether this came from an Eastern vessel or from some potentate's palace on the shore. Yet that does not matter. The writing I found with them stated that each bracelet contains enough poison to kill a dozen men."

"Not pleasant things to have around, as I said; and dangerous. I should not care to handle them. Did you ever try to find out if the claim is true—that they are so deadly?"

"Once."

"Ah! I had not heard that! You had some enemy, then, at the governor's in Santa Fé, of whom I have not heard?"

"It was not an enemy, but a very good friend—a dog. I must have had a very bad heart always, or I could not have done the thing. But I put one of the bracelets round the leg of the dog, snapping it shut with a quick motion, so that the needle concealed inside drove into his leg."

Escondo laughed at that, showing his cruel nature.

"Within an hour," she said, "the dog was dead!"

He looked with even more interest at the bracelets she held in her hand; and a little shudder of fear came to him; for, after all, he was a coward.

"I don't think that I care to look at them closely," he said, with a shrug and an attempt at laughing. "I'd advise you to put them back in that bag. If they were mine I should throw them into the first bunch of sage we come to."

"Which would spoil my plan. I have kept them because of that plan; and for another reason."

"What is the other reason?"

"I may tell you, when we have talked of the plan."

"Out with it, then."

"I want Buffalo Bill to get one of them. It would end him. If he were dead, I should have not much fear for the future. The only other member of his party that I have dreaded is the man called Hickok; but he is in the hospital, with a bullet wound in his head, and may never come out of it. Those others, and the Indians, I scorn them all. So I would like you to suggest how I could get this bracelet to Buffalo Bill in a way that would induce him to put it on. I have thought if it came into his possession he would be likely to put it round his wrist, just through curiosity."

"You think he is like a woman in that, eh—judging from a woman's standpoint? Perhaps he is. I can see that it might be a temptation to any one, to gratify curiosity."

"Can you suggest a way?" she asked.

"Yes, I think I can. Make a cache."

"Would he find it?"

"He is sure to, unless some one else finds it before he gets to it; that is the only thing which would prevent. He will follow our trail sooner or later you may be sure; it is more likely to be sooner than later. When he does, he or some of his party will be certain to see the cache, if we do not blind it too well; and we need not do that. They would open it, of course; and they would find the bracelet. We might put in some writing which would help fool them."

"It is a clever plan," she agreed, looking at the brace-

let. "And as you know more about the making of a cache than I do, I shall leave the details to you. Only, I would suggest that we do the thing before we come up to the Pueblos."

As they rode along, talking the thing over, they came at length to a white stone, which stood like a monument at the foot of a blasted cedar.

"There is the place for it," Escondo suggested.

The woman regarded the white stone and the old tree curiously.

"It looks like a grave," she said.

"But isn't; it is natural."

"There are no other white stones like it around here!"

They drew rein beside the stone, and the man leaped down. Then they saw that at the foot of the stone was a small depression, as if the earth had sunk at that point. He called her attention to it.

"If the idea was not so absurd," he remarked, "I should say that a cache has been made here already."

Drawing his Indian hatchet, he began to dig into the ground with it. The soil was not hard, and he enlarged the hole rapidly. Suddenly the point of the hatchet struck against metal.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, and looked startled.

"It is a cache!" she cried.

"I am not sure but you are right," he told her. "Anyway, we shall soon see."

The hatchet ate eagerly into the ground, and in a little while the top of an iron vessel stood revealed, coated with rust, as if it had been in the ground many months.

Escondo drew it out of its bed, and pulled apart the rusted hasp of the lid. When he had done so a bag of

Spanish silver dollars was revealed, the bag so rotten that it was falling to pieces.

He looked at them greedily, and was about to empty them out on the ground, with the intention of first inspecting them and then shoveling them into his pockets.

"Stolen money, think you not?" she asked. "But I would not take it!"

"No?"

He looked up at her.

"It is but silver, and its value is not great," she urged. "To leave it there will be worth more to us than to take it. We can drop this bracelet into the box with it. It will seem then that the original maker of the cache has returned to it, and added to his hiding. Throw away the rotten buckskin, and dump all back into the iron box with the bracelet."

He counted the silver coins, remarking on their dates and value; then he did what she told him, putting the bracelet in the box with the coins. Afterward he covered the box carefully, and filled in the hole.

"If they follow our trail, as we think," he said, "they will know that we put them there, I am afraid."

"But the silver will keep them from being too suspicious about the bracelet," she urged. "You have been a road agent; and it is the current belief that gentlemen of the trail hide their takings in this way. They can suppose that at some former time you made the cache; then, passing this way, that you visited it again, and put in something else, or stopped merely to see that it was all right. It seems to me the thing could not have fallen out better."

"I guess you are right," he admitted; then he added: "And you are a wonderful woman."

The Hidden Death.

"In one way, I think that I am!" she declared, with a flash of her dark eyes. "Not many women would do what I have done, and am doing now, for any man. Yet I do not regret it. I rejoice in it."

He gave her a look of admiration.

"I shall never forget it, Maria," he told her.

Having fixed the cache to suit him, Escondo remounted his pony; and he and the woman rode away northward, intending to rejoin the disguised Pueblos now as quickly as possible.

CHAPTER XXI.

CODY'S APACHE TRAILERS.

Buffalo Bill's belief that the supposed Chiricahua Apaches were really disguised Pueblos accounted for the fact that in setting out to locate them he took with him his Apache Indian trailers.

Almost at the start the three Apaches began to show queer symptoms; which the scout observed in silence.

Nomad called his attention to it; and the trapper had already been commenting on it to the Dutchman.

"Ther three 'Paches aire gittin' white-eyed," was the way Nomad put it; "yer kin see et fer yerself. Chappo is ready ter do ther buckin' act at ther fust call, sense he's heard erbout ther Chiricahuas. All o' 'em is watchin' this hyar trail closer than a dog watches a rabbit burrow. showin' they suspects thet we're follerin' ginuine Apaches, after all. So, Buffler, keep yer eyes peeled."

"You agree with me, though," said the scout, "that the trail we are following was made by Pueblos?"

"I shore think et, Buffler. But s'pose ther Apaches thinks otherwise? They're goin' ter cut an' run at ther fust oppertunity, ter jine ther Injuns they figger aire their friends."

"Little Cayuse will stay with us."

"Yes, in course; he's er Piute, an' he don't cotton ter no Apache, outside o' these trailers. Yer kin depend on Little Cayuse, unless he sh'd run ag'inst er black bottle ag'in somewhar. Waugh!"

"I'll tell you what I've been thinking of doing," said

the scout. "Say that these Indians we are following are Pueblos, playing the Chiricahua game. If they are, wouldn't it be a good idea for us to send our Chiricahua scout, Chappo, to join them? He could claim that, seeing them, he thought they were real Chiricahuas. Then he could find out their plans and destination, and get the news to us. If he worked it right, they needn't know but that he came from the Chiricahua village off here in the northwest; he really did come from there originally."

"Et might work, Buffler."

"There's another plan," said the scout. "We could send Chappo on a swift horse to the Chiricahua village, and so get word to the Chiricahuas that the Pueblos, disguised as Chiricahuas, attacked a wagon train and killed horse soldiers, intending that the crime might be laid against that tribe. Wouldn't it stir the Chiricahuas to come out against them?"

Both the trapper and the baron agreed that it would.

Buffalo Bill put his fingers to his lips, and blew a shrill blast to summon the Indian trailers, who were well out in front.

Little Cayuse appeared first, his pony at a gallop. Some distance behind him came Pedro, riding as hard.

Little Cayuse, eagle feather upright in his trim scalplock, youthful braids of black hair dropping down alongside his ears, was an attractive figure anywhere, but never more so than when astride his favorite pony, Navi. He was a born rider, as became a member of a tribe acknowledged to be among the best of all Indian horsemen.

Pedro was taller than the Piute, even more muscular, and sat a horse well; but the Apaches are mountain In-

dians, rather than horse Indians; and Pedro, good rider that he was, was not the equal in that respect of the youthful Piute whom he called chief.

The two Indian trailers came up with faces expectant; for seldom did Pa-e-has-ka call them back without something of importance to communicate.

"Where are Chappo and Yuppah!" was the scout's first question.

Little Cayuse swung his brown hand in the direction of the forward trail.

"All same out there," he explained.

"Then, they are coming?"

"Ai. So me think. Come soon, mebbysso."

Buffalo Bill looked at Pedro, when next he spoke.

"All of you understand, I guess, that the trail we are following was made by Pueblos, who are pretending to be Chiricahua Apaches. You savvy that, Pedro?"

Pedro hesitated before he gave out a reluctant, "Ai."

Buffalo Bill looked disturbed. So did the trapper and the baron.

"Chappo all same say, 'Mebbyso him *not* Pueblo!'" Pedro explained.

"Chappo said that to you?"

"Ai. He say, 'Maybe so Pa-e-has-ka make beeg mistek; Chappo him Chiricahua; no like Pa-e-has-ka chase Chiricahua.'"

"I been fearin', Buffler, thet Chappo war gittin' plum stung up about thet," Nomad observed gravely.

"What did Yuppah think about it?" Buffalo Bill asked quietly.

"He say all same like Chappo," said Pedro.

"And what do *you* think?"

Pedro squirmed uneasily in his saddle.

"Pedro him not think," he eyed.

"You withhold your opinion; you don't know?"

"Ai. Pedro not know what to think."

"Now, listen to me! We know that this trail was made by Pueblos disguised as Chiricahuas; they're playing the Chiricahua game to get the blame laid on your people; they think that will send the horse soldiers after the Chiricahuas, and that they, the Pueblos, will go free—will not be followed."

"How Pa-e-has-ka know?" said Pedro.

"Waugh!" Nomad rumbled under his breath; for never before had he heard one of the Apaches question the judgment of Buffalo Bill to his face.

"We know from the 'sign.' The sign says to us, 'Pueblos'; more than that, all the things which have happened say that these Indians are Pueblos."

"Pa-e-has-ka mebbysso fooled," suggested Pedro.

The thing was irritating; yet the scout knew how unwise it would be to show that. He was saved from its possible exhibition by a horseman who was seen at that moment riding toward them along the backward trail. The horseman was a trooper. At the same time Yuppah came along the trail.

All the members of the party apparently forgot the subject that troubled them when they beheld the horseman. They waited anxiously until he came up. His horse was in a lather of sweat, and the rider was covered with dust. In addition, even before he came near, it could be seen that he was excited, or panic-stricken.

"This is Cody?" he said, saluting, as he drew in his dusty steed. "I struck a trail of shod horses back there, in the Indian trail, and made a blind guess that it might

be your crowd; so I followed as tight as I could. I've got bad news, Cody."

"We have been suspecting as much," the scout told him.

"Yes; the troopers sent out by Colonel Diamond to find the Pueblos, or Apaches, or whatever they were, that destroyed the wagon train at Arroyo Blanco, were attacked last evening while at supper, and just about annihilated. It was to the west of here. I got away, with some of the others boys; but we scattered, for we were pursued by the red devils; and then I got lost in the night. I was trying to get to Santa Fé; when I struck your trail, as I said, and followed it."

The scout's party had closed around the trooper. They knew all he had to tell, however, from the other troopers who had come to him.

"The attacking Indians were Pueblos?"

"Genuine Chiricahuas, I tell you!" the trooper declared. "The reason I'm sure is, that old Fire-top was leading 'em; and that old rascal is a chief I've met before. I was up against him with some boys of ours more than five years ago, in the fight near the Perdidas River; so I ain't likely to forget the cut of his jib, especially as he got close enough to me this time to swing a hatchet at my head."

"Hear that, Buffler?" roared Nomad.

"Idt iss news I am vishing dot I tond't hear," averred the baron.

Out of the tail of his eye Buffalo Bill saw that the two Apaches, Pedro and Yuppah, had drawn their ponies closer together, as if some invisible thread had pulled them. It was the thread of sympathy produced by the tribal feeling. One can understand it by imagining two

Americans so situated, say in the Philippines, or in Japan, or some other foreign land.

Without taking apparent note of this, the scout went on questioning the trooper, getting all the details of the fight.

"The Chiricahuas are supposed to be friendly," the scout told him. "So it makes this attack strange. Have you any notion what caused it?"

"My guess is that they discovered we were getting into their neighborhood, and they didn't like it."

"I guess another guess as ter ther meanin'," said Nomad, "which is ter ther effeck thet Lopez Escondo an' ther tricky Pueblos hed suthin ter do wi' et."

"I am guessing der same meanness," the baron declared.

Buffalo Bill advised the trooper to ride to Santa Fé with the report; but to take his time, as his horse was blown. He also gave the trooper food and water.

"Report to Colonel Diamond that we will follow the Pueblo trail and try to find out what this Chiricahua attack means," the scout directed.

Before the trooper rode away, Buffalo Bill asked Little Cayuse to ride out and see if he could discover Chappo.

The Piute returned at the end of fifteen minutes, saying the Chiricahua trailer could not be located.

"Looks bad, Buffler," Nomad whispered.

Buffalo Bill showed no uneasiness. Ordering Little Cayuse to take Yuppah and Pedro now and locate Chappo as soon as they could, he sent them away on their ponies.

"Waugh!" Nomad roared, when the Indians had set out. "I allow I ain't as smart as I might be sometimes,

Buffler; but that looks ter me ter be a sing'lar trick. Them Apaches ain't goin' ter come back ter us."

"Yaw! Ve haff seem der endt uff dhem," agreed the baron.

"I don't expect them to come back," the scout informed them.

"No?" said Nomad. "What does ye expect they'll do, then?"

"They will join the Chiricahuas, if the Indians who attacked the troopers were Chiricahuas; but, if those Indians were Pueblos, the trailers will return. If it turns out that the Chiricahuas are on the warpath, the Apaches would bolt sooner or later, so it is as well to get rid of them right now and before they do us any harm."

"But Little Cayuse?" exploded Nomad.

"He will return."

* * * * *

Little Cayuse, with Pedro and Yuppah, struck Chappo's trail, and stuck to it till they came in sight of him. He had not gone far. He was on his pony, having left the main trail, and was looking down at a white stone under a cedar tree when they saw him.

Hearing their approach, he whirled his beast, dropping a hand at the same time to the Colt that swung in its holster at his side. He had tied down the lower end of the holster, that he might be able to draw quickly, and the "gun" came up even as he whirled. Seeing who the riders were, he dropped the weapon; then tucked it away shamefacedly.

"What do?" asked Little Cayuse.

The only way the Piute could talk to the Apaches was in his bad English; they did not understand the Piute

language, and he made a mighty poor go when he tackled any of the Apache dialects.

"What made um foller?" asked Chappo suspiciously. "Pa-e-has-ka say 'Go foller Chappo.' Tell um go Chiricahuas; tell Chiricahuas that bad Pueblo him play Chiricahua, shoot pony soldier, burn wagons, kill caballos, rob; so um pony soldiers from Santa Fé mebbysso come kill many Chiricahuas. It heap bad; Pa-e-has-ka want Chiricahua should know how um bad Pueblo do."

It was a long speech for Little Cayuse; but as Chappo knew a good deal about the subject matter, he had no trouble in understanding it.

"All go Chiricahua village?" Chappo asked.

"All go Chiricahua village. But Chiricahuas, too, go on war trail. pony soldier say; him come tell Pa-e-has-ka. Chiricahuas fight pony soldiers; kill um, kill caballos. This pony soldier make um getaway, ride heap fast so Chiricahuas not git um; come tell Pa-e-has-ka. Grub time, yist'day; pony soldier in camp for stay all night."

Chappo's eyes opened wider with eagerness.

"Not Pueblo Chiricahuas?" he asked.

"Um sure Chiricahuas, pony soldier say."

"Where happen?"

Little Cayuse told him as nearly as he could, the other Apaches adding their guttural explanations. So that in a little while Chappo had a tolerably correct notion of what the pony soldier had reported to Buffalo Bill.

It stirred him strongly, so that he sat more erect, his eyes flashing.

"Where um Chiricahuas?" he demanded.

"Mebbyso village," said Little Cayuse; "Pa-e-has-ka say 'Find um.'"

The thoughts stirring in his tempestuous heart Chappo

did not disclose. Nor did he indicate what he proposed to do about it.

Yuppah looked at the white stone, having observed that the ground by it had been disturbed recently—apparently that very day.

He pointed to it.

"Mebbyso cache?" he said.

"Ai. Mebbysso!" agreed Chappo, as if it did not particularly engage his attention now, though he had been very much interested in it a few minutes before, having been on the point of jumping down and digging in the ground there.

He explained that he had found a trail of two ponies that had joined the big trail from this direction, and that he had investigated them and had come to this stone and the signs of a recent cache.

As it was his find, they were anxious to have him open it, to see what it contained. Or, they would open it, if he did not care to.

Chappo decided to open it.

He sprang down, and with his hatchet began to dig and scrape away the loose earth, which was no great task. When he came to the iron box he lifted it out. Then he pulled aside the lid, and saw the silver coins and the bracelet of gold.

All the Indians jumped down now, their greed excited; but Chappo motioned them back.

"Me find um cache!" he said.

He emptied the coins on the ground and counted them as well as he could, though he had no good idea of their value; then he inspected the bracelet. It was closed, and at first he did not know how to open it; but finally he

located the spring, and when it flew open he put the bracelet on his arm.

"Wuh!" he said, immensely pleased, pushing it round and round in admiration.

It scratched him as he closed it, and there was a trickle of blood; but as that was a small matter, he disregarded it entirely.

He opened the war bag, or food pouch, which he carried behind him on the pony, and rolled the coins up in that.

"Velly fine ring for arm," he said; "heap plenty money. Git Santa Fé, have um all good times."

It was his promise to treat the crowd when they got back to Santa Fé.

"What um do now?" asked Little Cayuse.

"Go find um Chiricahuas," said Chappo. "Chiricahua, Pueblo, horse soldiers, all plenty mix-up—me no savvy; so me go find um Chiricahuas. Then heap savvy."

"We go 'long," said Little Cayuse. "We no savvy mix-up. Pa-e-has-ka say 'Go find Chiricahuas.'"

That they might accomplish this they returned to the Pueblo trail, wondering if it had really been made by the Pueblos; and pursued it toward the northwest.

They rode rapidly, though warily; yet they had gone not much more than a couple of miles when Chappo, who had stopped talking some time before, complained of feeling sick, and asked to be helped to the ground.

When they complied with his demand they were startled by his condition. His right arm and hand were swelled badly, and his eyes were dull and unnatural, while even the flesh of his face seemed puffed.

"Um arm ring?" said Little Cayuse, when the Chiricahua had been placed on the ground and they looked

at the swollen member. "Mebbyso um arm ring too tight."

They tried to get the bracelet off, but could not draw it over the swollen hand. Not until Chappo roused himself enough to show them how to find the spring he had discovered in putting it on were they able to remove the bracelet.

There was a little smear of blood on Chappo's wrist, but they saw nothing else, except its frightfully swollen condition. It was as if a rattlesnake had struck the Chiricahua in the wrist.

They asked him if a snake had not bitten him.

"No," he said; "me see no snake."

Nevertheless, the symptoms were so undeniably like those of snake poison that they began to treat him for that. Yuppah dug roots that were reckoned antidotes for snakebite; and Pedro hunted up a horned toad, which he killed. Little Cayuse built a fire, and put his tin pan on it, with water. Into the water was placed the roots and the dead toad.

But there was one other thing they did, and this was of some use; they found a small water hole, and puddled a lot of mud on its edge; then they carried Chappo to it, and buried his arm to the shoulder in the mud. Also, they made mud bandages, or plasters, for his body and his neck, encasing him nearly in mud, which they kept wet continually by now and then dashing water on it.

As soon as the decoction of roots and dead toad was done they forced Chappo to drink the stuff; which he did bravely enough, though he was at the time rather far gone.

The three trailers decided they could not go on until Chappo was able to go with them; and for a time they

debated whether one of their number should not go back and communicate with Pa-e-has-ka, who had among the redskins of the Southwest a strong reputation as a healer and medicine man.

Chappo sank into what seemed to them a slumber, but was probably a stupor; which they considered an indication that he was growing better; so no one went.

They made camp by the muddy water hole, where the ponies drank; and now that they had risked one fire, to prepare the drink for Chappo, they decided to risk another, and cook themselves some meat, taking it from the war bags.

Morning came before Chappo was able to be moved. Even then, in order to ride, he had to be tied to the back of his pony. But he was on the road to recovery, due to the cool mud plaster which his faithful attendants had kept on his arm, wetting it from the water hole continually throughout all the afternoon and night.

They could not get the arm ring on Chappo's wrist again; so stowed it with the coins in his war bag behind him.

Then they set out again, following the trail of the Pueblos.

Buffalo Bill had not come so far on it, having turned aside to visit the scene of the attack of the Chiricahuas on the horse soldiers; so was far behind.

The Pueblo trail led Little Cayuse and his companions into the camp of the Chiricahuas who had made that attack.

When Chappo had been committed to the care of the Chiricahua medicine man, Little Cayuse turned to the task of getting at the truth. He went with Pedro and

Yuppah to the Chiricahua chief, Fire-top, and asked him bluntly what was the meaning of it.

Fire-top was in no mood to swap words with them; he did not even care to be civil. He was not pleased that they had come into the Chiricahua camp, though they had the good excuse of bringing in a Chiricahua whose condition was serious.

"Chappo no more good Chiricahua," Fire-top told them. "He go be Pa-e-has-ka man, horse-soldier man; he go get white man's heart."

Fire-top would give them so little consideration that they hunted up a warrior who, they heard, was Chappo's uncle.

This brave was Spotted Elk.

"Fire-top," he said, in answer to their questions, "no like um white man; no like Chappo be Pa-e-has-ka trailer; Pa-e-has-ka trailer help um horse soldier."

Little Cayuse asked Spotted Elk to explain this mystery of the presence of Pueblos with the Chiricahuas; they were there, he said, painted and feathered like Chiricahuas, and he and the two Apaches who stood with him and helped out in this interview could not understand it. Why did the Chiricahuas permit it?

"Pueblos," said Spotted Elk, "ready to fight Pa-e-has-ka and horse soldier; ready to help Chiricahuas fight um Pueblos got plenty good guns."

The Pueblos were permitted to wear the paint and feathers of Chiricahuas, because they had joined the Chiricahuas, were well armed, and were ready to make common cause with them against the white men; they were the allies now of the Chiricahuas.

It was demanded of him then by Little Cayuse why the Chiricahuas wanted to fight the white men.

This threw Spotted Elk into a rage, as it recalled the hunter slain by white men, which had been the direct cause of the attack of the Chiricahuas on the troopers.

Little Cayuse and his Apache companions had not known before that a Chiricahua hunter had been killed by white men. The effect of the information was apparent at once on Pedro and Yuppah. An Apache had been killed by white men; and they were Apaches. True, the slain man was a Chiricahua, yet he was an Apache.

Little Cayuse saw at once that, in common parlance, he was up against it. Deserted by Pedro and Yuppah, he would have to fight out his battle there in the Chiricahua camp without their aid. What he could do alone he did not know. But in his uncertainty he decided to prosecute his search further for information. If he could do no more, he could watch his chance to escape on Navi, and so bear to Buffalo Bill news that might be worth something.

When they had departed from the tepee of Spotted Elk, after having dipped friendly fingers into the pot in which his squaw was boiling sage rabbit, Little Cayuse asked the two Apaches with him what they now proposed to do.

"Me stay um Pa-e-has-ka!" he said proudly, with a ring in his voice that condemned them for not wanting to do the same. "Pa-e-has-ka good man, good soldier, great medicine. Me Piute trailer with Pa-e-has-ka—git thirteen dollar a month. No right to leave Pa-e-has-ka."

They told him that they thought as much of Pa-e-has-ka as he did; but that when it came to a question between white men and Apaches, they had to take the side of the Apaches, even though those Apaches were Chiricahuas.

"You traitor to Pa-e-has-ka, huh?" he shouted at them.

"You tek um thirteen dollars, and fight against Pa-e-has-ka. Him plenty squaw trick. Who pay you thirteen dollar, you stay with Chiricahua? Spotted Elk pay um, huh? Fire-top he pay um? Squaw trick."

They did not resent his tongue lashing; he was still their chief, and they expected abuse from a chief if they did not please him. But they argued the matter, and then grew sullen and silent when he still condemned them.

"Me tell um Pa-e-has-ka!" he said. "No git um thirteen dollar now. He say Yuppah, Pedro, no good—no git um thirteen dollar. How you like, huh?"

But even the thought of losing their thirteen dollars a month could not change them.

"You stay Fire-top's Apaches all time?" he asked. "What do when Fire-top say go?"

They did not think Fire-top would order them out of his camp.

When Little Cayuse went farther hunting for information, he came on a surprising bit of news. Lopez Escondo and Maria Xavier, who were not in camp at the time of his arrival, came riding in. At sight of them the keen-brained Piute beheld a great light; he began to shake into their proper positions the several facts which had come to him, and understand their realizations.

"Huh! Um Wild Ox and White Squaw be friend of Pueblos, belong to Red Estufa tribe! Huh!"

Though he had understood this long before, he had not known certainly that they were with the Pueblos. Now he saw that it must be due to their scheming that the Pueblos were with the Chiricahuas; and the swift suspicion leaped to his mind that the Wild Ox was the

white man who had killed the Chiricahua hunter, and roused the rage of the Chiricahuas.

Little Cayuse kept out of the way of the Wild Ox and the woman, not wanting them to see him. Yet he knew that soon they would learn that some of Pa-e-has-ka's men were in the Chiricahua camp.

He busied his mind with thinking over the situation, wondering what he could do.

Then the thought came to him like a flash, that if he could capture the Wild Ox and Maria Xavier and get them away from the Pueblos and the Chiricahuas, the whole trouble would vanish like mist. For he believed that the Pueblos were doing what they did solely in the interest of the Wild Ox.

But though Little Cayuse had arrived at this proper and shrewd conclusion, he saw no way by which he could capture the man and the woman and get them away from their Indian friends.

His indignation arose again against Pedro and Yuppah, for he fancied that if they had remained loyal to Pa-e-has-ka they might aid him. Now it was useless to ask them to do anything; and it might be dangerous; for there was no knowing that they would not repeat what he said to Spotted Elk, or even to the chief, Fire-top.

While he wandered around, thinking these things, Little Cayuse saw the woman and the Wild Ox together. Though his dress was different from that of the Chiricahuas or Pueblos, they took no notice of him, as he was an Indian. He tried to get close to them, thinking they might be saying something which it would be worth his while to hear.

What they were conversing about he did not know

even when close to them; but he saw the woman take a pouch from the bosom of the gayly ornamented cavalier jacket she wore and pull from it what the Piute at first thought was the identical gold bracelet he and the Indian scouts had found in the cache.

The thing mystified and fascinated him.

They began to speak in Spanish, which he did not understand very well, but he recognized the name of Buffalo Bill.

This was all that came to him which he could comprehend, and it was not very illuminating. But when he went away, fearing to linger longer, he turned it over and over in his mind.

Slowly it dawned on him then that there must be another arm ring—the two just alike, and that Chappo had one. One had poisoned Chappo; therefore, the other was intended to poison Buffalo Bill.

It took him a long time to work round to the conclusion that the arm ring in the cache had been placed there as a bait for Buffalo Bill, in the hope that the scout would find it there, and put it on.

As he passed from point to point, pondering, working out his slow conclusions, Little Cayuse saw that the Chiricahuas and their Pueblo allies were preparing for a fight at that point, if the horse soldiers pursued them so far. They were building brushworks in the midst of the trees at the edge of the natural grove they occupied, arranging tree boughs so that it would be difficult for the horse soldiers to charge through them; the animals would become entangled when the Indians expected to shoot down both horses and riders.

Beyond the grove the land lay open, with only cacti and sage brush, and similar growths, scattered over it.

All bushes close to the grove, or within rifle shot, the Indians chopped down with their hatchets, adding them to the brushwork.

Little Cayuse concluded that if he could do nothing else he might get out and carry this information to Pa-e-has-ka.

As they drew toward its close, the Piute's conviction that the Wild Ox was at the bottom of all the trouble became so strong that he determined to speak boldly to Fire-top about it, in spite of the probable consequences to himself; it seemed to him that Fire-top ought to be made to understand the duplicity of this white man.

When he went in search of Fire-top, going first to the other's tepee, he learned that the chief had gone to see the medicine man.

Following, Little Cayuse found both the chief and the medicine man talking with Chappo.

The Chiricahua scout had recovered, in a great measure, from the effects of the poison received from the scratch of the deadly bracelet, but he had not yet left the medicine lodge.

"You friend of Pa-e-has-ka?" the Piute demanded of him, as soon as he saw the Chiricahua.

Chappo declared that he was the friend of Pa-e-has-ka, his eyes flashing at the suggestion that he could be anything else.

"Then you hear what I say," said Little Cayuse; "you savvy all same what I savvy."

He turned to Fire-top and the medicine man, who were regarding him unfavorably.

"Chappo Chiricahua, and savvy all same what I savvy," he declared to them. "He know we find um arm ring and silver money in cache; he put on arm

ring, and it scratch; make um arm swell; make um Chappo die putty near almost."

"Ai!" Chappo agreed.

He brought out the arm ring and showed it to the chief and medicine man. They inspected it; and Chappo touched the spring, making the bracelet fly open. Inside he pointed out a sharp projection, which he believed had scratched.

"All same like rattlesnake!" he said.

The medicine man, holding it at the time, flung it from him, giving a guttural grunt. Little Cayuse picked it up and restored it to the Chiricahua scout.

He fixed his eyes on Fire-top.

"You know um squaw what come with Wild Ox?" he asked.

As the chief had no friendly feeling for Little Cayuse, the latter being a Piute and one of Buffalo Bill's trailers, he hesitated before answering, and was about to tell the Piute to be gone and cease from troubling him. But he thought better of it, sensing that the Piute must have what he considered an important statement to make.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "Me know um white squaw."

"White squaw got other poison arm ring," was the bomb that the Piute exploded.

"Ugh!" grunted both the chief and the medicine man.

"Me see um," went on the Piute. "She leave one arm ring in cache for Pa-e-has-ka. Chappo open cache, get um arm ring; it bite him heap, like rattlesnake. Other arm ring for Pa-e-has-ka; mebbysso for Fire-top, or medicine man."

It was an alarming suggestion, but they were not ready to credit it.

"Me savvy 'nother thing," said Little Cayuse firmly,

not flinching when he came to the danger point in his narrative. "Me savvy Wild Ox kill um Chiricahua deer hunter."

That startled them again; they had never thought of it as a possibility, and were not now ready to believe it.

Little Cayuse went on in his stumbling way, outlining what he considered his proof, with all the surrounding suspicious circumstances; gaining their attention, if he did not convince.

He told them that he had been within the Red Estufa of the Pueblos, and had witnessed the ceremonies by which they initiated new members; that the white man and woman were members; and that the members were sworn to stand by each other, even to death. He declared his belief that it was this Red Estufa bond which had caused the Pueblos to go out disguised as Chiricahuas, attack the wagon train, shoot the caballos and the troopers, and rob the train; that they did it for the purpose of putting the blame on the Chiricahuas, and getting guns and ammunition.

He called their attention to the new guns which the Pueblos had, and to their store of ammunition and loot.

Fire-top and the medicine man grew so interested that they began to ask questions. They had not known that when the attack on the wagon train was made the Pueblos were posing as Chiricahuas; they thought they had assumed this garb only when they came to join the Chiricahuas.

Little Cayuse was shrewd enough to see that he was making headway against the preconceived notions of the chief and the medicine man.

So he went on to remind them that ordinarily the Pueblos were not fighting men. He said they had be-

come so now merely to help the white man and woman; and that they had showed treachery to the Chiricahuas by attacking the wagon train when they were painted as Chiricahuas.

The medicine man broke forth now, speaking vehemently to the chief, in words that Little Cayuse could not understand; but, glancing at Chappo, he saw the eyes of that particular Chiricahua glittering feverishly.

The chief stepped quickly to the opening in the tepee, shouted to an Indian, and sent him hurriedly away.

Then he began to talk with the medicine man again, each gesticulating furiously.

"They send for um Wild Ox," Chappo explained.

Little Cayuse had known this must come as the *finale* of his attempt; nevertheless, he was ready to stampede when he found he would actually have to face the Terror of Taos.

But he decided that he would not back water. They could do no more than kill him; and he began to feel that the chief and the medicine man would not permit that.

"What um say?" he asked Chappo, when the loud talk continued between the medicine man and Fire-top.

"Say mebbysso Little Cayuse lie."

"Me no lie."

The runner dispatched to get the Wild Ox and his companion returned, with them at his heels.

When the Terror and the woman came into the lodge, they did not know what they had been sent for, and could not imagine. But the chief and the medicine man opened on them at once, detailing what the Piute had charged against them.

It took the Wild Ox some time to get through his head just what this meant, as the Chiricahuas used English of

the poorest quality, with many Spanish words so twisted out of their ordinary meaning that it was a guessing contest to recognize them.

When he did understand, the Terror of Taos turned like a flash and pitched at the Piute.

Little Cayuse squirmed out of his way, and by a ducking motion got out of the lodge.

When the man tried to follow, he was prevented by the chief. Then he tried to draw a revolver; but the chief and the medicine man disarmed him and pushed him into the tepee.

They began angrily to ask him questions; they wanted to know if the things stated by the Piute boy were truths or lies.

"They are lies!" yelled the Wild Ox.

Chappo had risen from the cot of skins which he had been luxuriously occupying; now he stepped to the opening, then outside.

The woman was walking toward Little Cayuse.

"Nice boy," she was purring to him in Spanish. "I want to be his friend, and he to be mine; so I will give him a present."

She was holding out the duplicate of the bracelet which Chappo had at the moment in his own possession.

Little Cayuse gave a yell and backed away from her.

Chappo's suspicions and anger having been aroused against this woman and the Wild Ox, he was willing, when it came to a contest between them and his old friend and chief, Little Cayuse, to take the side of the Piute.

So he shouted to the woman.

When she turned, he held up before her his bracelet of gold.

She stared at it as if her brain reeled; then, with a gasping cry, she jumped at Chappo to snatch it away.

He backed off, putting it behind him.

"Where did you get that?" she demanded in Spanish.

"Find um in cache!" he told her in his broken English.

"I put it there," she declared, "and it is mine; I meant to go back there and get it."

"Me savvy um arm ring in cache for Buffalo Bill!" Little Cayuse told her.

She turned on him like a tigress, her hand going down to the revolver belted to her slender waist.

But Chappo flung himself on her and wrenched it away.

Her cry of fright and rage brought the Wild Ox tumbling out of the tepee where he and the two Indians were having such an unpleasant talkfest.

The woman screamed something to him in Spanish.

The next moment the Wild Ox had thrown himself on Chappo and wrenched the woman's revolver from him. It was not a difficult feat, as the Chiricahua was still weak from the effects of the poison.

The medicine man and the chief were coming out of the medicine lodge as the Wild Ox got possession of the weapon, and threw it up for a shot at the Piute. They yelled at him, and Little Cayuse started to run.

Nevertheless, he pulled trigger. The revolver snapped on a bad cartridge; but he pulled again, and sent the lead flying. The bullet missed the Piute, and tore a hole through the skin of the tepee. A wild hubbub arose, squaws and warriors yelling. Little Cayuse ran like a deer, dodging behind tepees and out again, the Wild Ox

following him as wickedly as if he were really wild, shooting at him whenever he could get sight of him.

Behind the Wild Ox came the medicine man and the chief, with Chappo, all bent on stopping this dangerous shooting in the midst of tepees filled with Chiricahuas.

Gaining the edge of the village, the Piute flung himself into the timber and brush there, and ran for his life, with incredible speed.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE IMPRISONED GOVERNOR.

Little Cayuse was both astonished and scared by the result of his efforts to enlighten the medicine man and the chief of the Chiricahuas. He knew he had made one of the narrowest escapes of his life. And while he had thought himself prepared for any result, if thereby he might help the cause of Pa-e-has-ka, he had not expected peril to come in such fashion.

He did not stop running until he had gone at least a mile, and had dropped sounds of pursuit. Indeed, he did not know that he had been pursued at all, beyond the boundaries of the Chiricahua camp.

He was trembling as he dropped down behind a stone and lay there listening.

"Woosh!" he grunted. "Mebbyso, heap much near, git killed."

He wondered what had happened to Chappo; but reached the conclusion that, as he was a Chiricahua, his tribesmen would save him from the fury of the frenzied white man.

He speculated as to what might be the result of his charges against the Wild Ox and the white squaw; hoping they might be so serious that the pair would be expelled from the camp, if nothing more. That would impair their ability to harm Pa-e-has-ka; and Pa-e-has-ka's good was the thing Little Cayuse had at heart.

It had been near sunset when he went to the tepee and made his accusations; now the sun had set, and night

was approaching. Seeing this, his first impression was that he ought to shape his course to meet Pa-e-has-ka, and acquaint him with what had happened. Yet he did not want to leave Navi, and the faithful little pony was with the Chiricahua herd.

Taking everything into consideration, Little Cayuse decided to hang around outside the Chiricahua camp, and during the hours of darkness sneak Navi away, then rejoin Buffalo Bill.

So, when night had fully come, he approached the camp.

Among Buffalo Bill's trailers Little Cayuse was noted for his catlike stealthiness. He made his way rapidly, but silently, alert to the slightest sound. Chiricahua drums were booming, which was proof that the Chiricahuas themselves were sure no foes were near.

Little Cayuse wished he could steal into the camp and get to hear what was being said in the council lodge; for, though he could not speak Chiricahua, constant companionship with Chappo had taught him a number of words, so that he believed he could get the sense of things.

Yet it did not seem wise to try that dangerous trick; so he sidled round the village, striking for the pony herd, which the pony guard held on a strip of grass near a water hole.

Little Cayuse located the herd, and discovered that the guards were smoking and talking together under a tree. Believing the drums indicated safety, they were not very watchful.

The stealthy Piute crawled on his belly into the midst of the herd, moving from point to point, searching for Navi, but not finding him. The night was dark, and

the ponies being allowed a good deal of freedom, were scattered.

When he could not locate his pony the Piute crept out of the herd, working away from the guards.

Then he stood up in the darkness and courageously blew a shrill whistle on his fingers.

As it broke over the water hole he heard the guards jumping to their feet. But there was another sound, which pleased him; that was the answering whinny of Navi, followed by the clatter of the pony's hoofs.

Before the guards got in motion, Navi appeared out of the darkness, whinnying noisily.

"Um good caballo!" said Little Cayuse, stretching out his hand.

The brute's sense of smell guided it quite as much as sight, no doubt; it came straight up to its master. The next moment the Piute was on its back, having neither saddle nor hackamore, and was riding swiftly away, guiding Navi by pressure of the knees.

A yell of alarm rolled out from the water hole.

The Chiricahua drums ceased their 'tm-tm-mping,' and there were indications of a lively stir in the Chiricahua camp.

"Think um pony soldier come!" the Piute muttered. "Mebbyso, make um chase. Huh!"

He sniffed his disgust and contempt. Then he patted the clean neck of the pony he rode, and told the beast that he had wings, so that nothing could overtake him.

Having ridden some distance, Little Cayuse slipped to the ground, and with his hand on the muzzle of the pony he stood listening.

"No make um chase!" he said. "Think um mebbysso pony thief. Huh!"

He was still not willing to leave the camp entirely. He wanted much to know what had happened there after his flight from the revolver bullets of the Wild Ox. Had Chappo suffered? Had the medicine man and the chief turned against the white man and woman? And had the Pueblos been questioned about the charges brought against them? These were interesting and important questions; and the Piute wished he might have answers to them, to take to Pa-e-has-ka.

He stood a long time, listening, by the side of Navi. When nothing happened, he decided to seek Buffalo Bill. But before he tried to put this into action, he heard the coming of ponies.

"Mebbyso Chiricahua ponies?" he said.

He knew they were ponies, not horses; he could tell that by the light patter of their hoofs, totally unlike that of heavy horses, such as the troopers and white men usually rode.

The wary Piute put his hand over the nose of Navi, lest the beast should neigh and betray his presence.

The night was dark, and he was unseen, though the ponies passed within less than a hundred yards of him.

Their passage brought a discovery. The riders were the Wild Ox and the white squaw; the Piute heard them talking in low tones, and recognized their voices.

The departure of these people from the Chiricahua camp was so suggestive that Little Cayuse determined to know what it meant. Perhaps they had been thrust out? If so, it indicated that the Chiricahuas had broken with the Pueblos and with the Wild Ox. The result would be favorable to Pa-e-has-ka.

Mounting Navi, after the man and woman had gone on, the Piute began to follow them, guiding the pony

again with his knees, and now and then speaking to it in a whisper, to keep it from neighing to the ponies in front.

He kept well back, barely within earshot, that he might not be discovered. They were not trying to be particularly quiet, and they talked occasionally, which helped him.

There was one singular thing connected with this silent pursuit, wholly mental. As Little Cayuse did not like the darkness, it eased him to know that human beings were near, even though they were enemies. The presence of human beings, he fancied, tended to keep off the spirits that are supposed to be particularly active and vicious at night; so the sound of the clattering hoofs he followed, and of the voices now and then lifted, gave him comfort.

Apaches are notoriously afraid of the dark, and will not move about at night without a strong spur of necessity. The young Piute was not so much disturbed by the darkness as the other trailers, as a rule, yet their influence on him in that respect had been bad.

Insensibly, as Little Cayuse thought of devil birds and other foul creatures which might at any moment startle him with a flapping of their wings, he drew nearer the Wild Ox and the woman.

Still he did not lose his wariness; and they did not hear his stealthy pursuit of them.

Two or three hours were passed in this way; when the man and woman stopped, and Little Cayuse discovered that they stood before a house, or something that had a door. The man had dismounted, and was fumbling at a lock.

Not being able to see well, he risked a match.

When its light flashed out, Little Cayuse saw a door set in a face of stone, the door being stone-colored, so that he would likely have passed it by even in the daytime.

The place was in a dip, or arroya, between barren and rocky hills. He had never been there before.

Into a hole which looked as if it had been bored by a sand swallow, the Wild Ox thrust a small key, guiding his hand with the aid of the match. When he turned the key he drew his revolver, and stood in silence as the door swung outward under his heavy pull.

"You are well?" the Piute heard him ask in Spanish, understanding enough to get the meaning.

Then the match went out.

But while it was lighted, the Piute had seen the man and the woman, with their ponies, and the stone door, or a door that seemed to be made of stone, though he guessed that it was of wood, painted and sanded to a stone color.

The Piute was glad when the match went out; as he feared that if either the man or woman turned and glanced in his direction they must see him, a hundred feet nearly behind them.

It would have been a sight for a sculptor: Little Cayuse in his Indian clothing, sitting upright on the silent horse, both staring at the light; Little Cayuse with eagle feather upright, his hair at the sides of his head dropping down round his ears, his dark face keen and expectant; while the well-trained pony stood with nose stretched out, silent, as if cast in bronze, having neither saddle nor bridle.

But the man and the woman did not dream of that sight, and failed to look around.

In the darkness Little Cayuse heard them dismount and lead the ponies on. He guessed that the woman remained before the door, perhaps guarding it, while the man went to tie the ponies.

In but a little while the man was back in front of the door, and he and the woman were talking.

At that juncture there came, like a shot, the suggestion, which it would seem ought to have struck him before, that behind that door lay the captured governor of New Mexico.

There he was! So, at least, Little Cayuse believed.

The man and woman disappeared through the door which the Piute had seen.

A burning curiosity moved him to quick action. He rode Navi back a short distance, and, not being able to tie him, turned him loose. It was a perilous thing to do. Then Little Cayuse crept back with all the stealth of which he was master, and reached the door.

It had been closed, but not locked, and the key was still in it. Drawing it ajar, Little Cayuse caught the gleam of a light; when he had poked his head through, he beheld, at the farther side of a prison-like room which seemed to have been formed of the chamber of a natural cave, a bed of pine boughs and coarse grass, on which sat a man whom he recognized at a glance as Pasquale Mendoza, though the change in the man's appearance was marked. Mendoza sat hunched forward, his appearance dejected and hopeless. One hand was chained at the wrist to a pillar of stone at the head of the bed, and chains were on his ankles.

Before him was a broken box, doing duty as a table. But it held nothing except a sheet of paper, which the

Wild Ox had but placed there, together with a lighted candle-end stuck to the table with its own melted fat.

The bandit and the woman stood before their prisoner, and were speaking to him.

"We have brought you food and water, which we will place here so that you can help yourself when you want it—on condition."

The listening Indian understood the Spanish words, *alimento* and *agua*—food and water—and, looking for them, saw that at the woman's feet were a water bottle of goatskin and a bag of food.

"When do you mean to release me?" the unhappy man begged.

"When our safety is assured," the Wild Ox told him. "The thing we want you to write now may help in that, and hurry you out of here. In spite of what the people of Santa Fé know, that we have threatened to kill you if I am pursued, they still hound me everywhere. Perhaps this will stop it. We have heard that they think you are already dead, and that therefore nothing is to be gained by considering your safety. This will correct that. Are you willing to write it?"

He produced a pencil and held it out to the man.

"How can I write, with my wrist chained?" the governor asked peevishly, his tone and manner showing how he was broken; though, truly, he had been a sick man when captured, having gone to Agua Caliente for his health.

The Wild Ox told him what he was to write: a statement that he was still living, but held in a place where no amount of searching could find him; and that he would be set at liberty if the hunt for the Wild Ox was called off at once. Otherwise, his death was threatened.

Pasquale Mendoza wrote this letter with a good deal more willingness than he had penned the one forced from him at Agua Caliente. Since that time, all the combativeness had been taken out of him by his suffering and his imprisonment in the horrible blackness of this dungeon.

That he had been held in total darkness Little Cayuse could see; for the governor's eyes were hardly able to bear even the feeble light of the candle.

The governor's wrist was not unchained that he might write, but Escondo held the paper so that he could bring the pencil to bear on it.

"If it makes your hand tremble, the people of Santa Fé will be the more sorry for you," said the gambler brutally. "They will think it indicates suffering and weakness."

Mendoza groaned.

"Suffering! Weakness!" he cried. "No victim of the Inquisition ever suffered more; and as for weakness, I am like water. My hand shakes so that I can hardly hold the pencil. If there were a spark of pity in your heart you could not do this."

Escondo laughed harshly.

"When you are in your governor's chair again, in Santa Fé, you will not be so eager to get hold of me."

Mendoza straightened his bowed shoulders.

"When I am again in Santa Fé," he cried, with his old courage, "and you are in my power, I will have you hanged!"

"This is but wasting words," said the woman impatiently.

Mendoza looked at her, while Escondo, having read over the writing, was folding it, preparing to put it away.

"And you, señorita," said Mendoza, "whom I once thought an admirable woman and good servant, are a disgrace to your sex. That you stand here, clothed in that manner, as if you were a masked cavalier at a ball, your face painted like an Indian's, shows how far you have fallen from womanhood."

Enraged, Escondo drew back his hand and struck Mendoza across the mouth, so that blood came.

"Keep your tongue between your teeth!" he yelled at him. "If I strike again, it will be with something worse."

"Nothing could be worse than your hand," Mendoza told him; "it's touch, even, is pollution."

Escondo might have struck the helpless man again, but the woman caught his hand, clinging to it, and said something in a whisper.

"Ah! I forgot that!" he said: "I will get it!" and moved quickly to the door.

Not until Escondo had gained the door did the Piute begin to understand the meaning of this movement—that the woman had discovered his presence, or heard him, and had told the Wild Ox of it. Even then, this was but a guess. But the suspicion deepened almost to certainty when the woman followed the man.

Little Cayuse's hesitation cost him dearly. There was a moment in which, by a leap, he might have gained the door, and perhaps could have forced, or fought, his way out; but the chance passed when the woman reached

the door; for both she and Escondo stepped outside and the door closed with a heavy bang.

"Ha, ha!" was screamed through it by the Wild Ox. "Mendoza has a friend in there now, for company. May each enjoy the society of the other. Señors, your good health, and much enjoyment. Adios!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PIUTE IMPRISONED.

The Piute was fairly paralyzed by what had happened.

Crouching out of the direct line between the outlaw and the door, that he might not be seen, as the man and woman passed him by, in his hesitation and fear of discovery he had remained there; and they had shut the trap on him as easily as if he had been but a silly and frightened mouse.

But for that "Ha, ha!" and what followed it, he might still have considered his presence undiscovered, and that he had been shut in the cave by an accident. But that cackling laugh was no illusion, nor the shouted words.

In his bewildered way he tried to explain to himself how the thing had been done; how he had been discovered by the woman. All he knew was that she had looked in his direction more than once. He had thought she had not seen him; now he knew that was a mistake. Yet she had concealed her discovery from him in a really remarkable manner. He had watched the outlaw and the governor. Now, when it was too late, he knew he ought to have watched the woman. From the very first, she had been smarter and more dangerous than the outlaw.

Yet all these thoughts and confused emotions were worthless now; she had seen him, and he was trapped!

Lying flat on his face, he listened for sounds beyond the door; and what he heard there, though he could

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not understand all that was said, made him question if the outlaw and the woman knew whom they had trapped.

He began to hope they would come back to determine that point; and to be ready for it, he moved nearer to the door, clutching his revolver.

He was seen, then, for the first time by Pasquale Mendoza.

"Ho!" said the governor. "Another prisoner? Or do I have another jailer?"

The candle guttering on the box close by the governor enabled him to see the Piute clearly, as the latter stood up and stepped toward the door.

Once more outside the voice of Escondo sounded:

"I have another hostage with which to secure my safety! Señor Indian, I can guess who you are; and if it serves my purpose I will send word to Buffalo Bill that I have you, and hold you as a club over his head. It was kind in you to make this matter easy for me. Again, señors, *adios!*"

He and the woman moved away from the door. The Piute's hope that they would return to make sure who he was fell to the ground.

"So, you are a friend, and not a foe?" he heard Mendoza saying. "You must be my friend, if they are your enemies; it cannot be otherwise. I am sorry for you. But you are not chained; and that means much. Perhaps you may be able to help me, or even find a way out of this horrid place. If I could get free of these heavy chains it would be better."

Little Cayuse did not at first pay much attention to the mutterings of Mendoza; his mind was in too pan-

icky a state to think of anything but his own hapless condition.

Rushing to the box, he caught up the candle; then hurried with it to the door and inspected the lock. The door was of wood, not stone; and he thought he might chop it down with his hatchet, if given time.

He did not begin his attack on it, however, not being sure that Escondo and the woman were not near, listening, to determine what he would do.

When he had looked the door over, he turned about and searched the room, running round the walls, carrying the dripping candle, which spilled hot grease down on his fingers unnoticed.

There was not much to discover, in the irregular room, which he had not already seen. A portion of one wall was laid up with stone and plaster, showing that the cave was in part of artificial formation. Sight of that gave another turn to the Piute's thoughts; as it suggested that if he could not hew through the door he might loosen some of the stones, and so escape.

Having completed the circuit of the room, he stopped breathlessly and looked at the governor, who had been speaking to him.

Mendoza was asking him now if he spoke Spanish.

"Speak um Inglis," said the Piute proudly.

"That is as well," said Mendoza, using a fair accent. "I think, from what I heard, that you are one of Buffalo Bill's Indians. I have been startled and puzzled, and am so still. How did you get in here?"

"Me foller um," said the Piute.

"And crept in while the door was open? From where?"

"Foller um frum Chiricahua camp."

"You are a Chiricahua?"

"Me Piute."

He set the candle on the box and cocked an ear toward the closed door.

"All same Buffalo Bill's Piute trailer," he explained. "You savvy that, huh? Wild Ox and white squaw come Chiricahua camp; me foller on pony, plenty fast; then crawl in here; git trapped. No can git out. Very bad. Wuh!"

"We are both prisoners."

Little Cayuse ran anxiously to the door again, where he listened. Then he came back. He had lost his stoicism, which usually enabled him to bear anything with apparent equanimity.

"Pa-e-has-ka now tell Piute all same him one big fool!" he declared.

"As we are in here and can't get out, we might as well take it quietly. I still believe that help will come; and still more believe it, since you found this place by following them. Others will follow them, and in that way we shall be rescued. Do you think you could do anything to these?"

He rattled the chains to emphasize his words.

The Piute knelt and ran his hands over the chains. Though they were not heavy, there was no way by which he could cut or break them; nor could he release the locks.

"No good!" he said, when he failed.

"I didn't think you could do it. Now, I suppose there is no way you might cut or dig out of here? You could go for help in that case."

The Piute ran to the door again, with the candle, and looked it over, shaking and testing it as well as he could.

It was of hard wood, and heavy, the beams showing thick and strong.

"No can tell," he said, when he had made his examination. "Mebbyso can do. But not now."

He shook his head and pointed, indicating the inadvisability of trying anything while there was a possibility that the Wild Ox was still outside.

"Sit down and we will talk it over," said Mendoza.

There was a marked change in his manner already, brought about by this companionship and a renewing hope.

"In the first place, you are to tell me all that you know, of things which have lately happened; for you understand that I have been held here a good while now. How long I do not know, as I cannot tell day from night in this hole, and weariness has forced me to sleep much of the time."

Little Cayuse tried to tell him what had happened. He made a poor stagger at it, but the net result gave the governor a fair idea of some of the principal events, so far as they were known to the Piute. One thing which he could hardly credit was the statement that the Pueblos had disguised as Chiricahuas and destroyed a wagon train, and then had joined the Chiricahuas.

"The Pueblos are peaceful!" he opposed.

Little Cayuse tried to make him understand how it had come about, and befogged the worthy governor a good deal with what he sought to impart concerning the Pueblo secret society of the Red Estufa.

One thing, however, Mendoza comprehended clearly, and that was that Buffalo Bill and some troopers were searching for him, while at the same time they were following the Indians.

"If only you could get out of this place and find Buffalo Bill; then guide him here!" cried Mendoza.

"How can do?" the Piute appealed.

"I don't know. You have weapons, and I see you have a hatchet. Perhaps you could cut a hole in the door."

"Bumby," said Little Cayuse.

"You want to wait a while?"

"Bumby Little Cayuse strike hatchet in door. Mebbyso Wild Ox outside now."

From this he would not budge until nearly an hour had passed.

The interval he spent in many inspections of the door, the walls, and the entire room, with talks with Mendoza.

Being convinced at last that the Wild Ox had gone from the vicinity, Little Cayuse attacked the door with his hatchet. As by this time the short candle had burned out, he worked in darkness and at a disadvantage. Yet he chopped away, tearing out with his fingers the splinters he loosened.

When he rested occasionally the chained prisoner spoke to him in an effort to encourage him.

"You are going to make it by and by, my fine fellow. Just keep at it. I know the door is thick and the wood is hard; yet it is but a question of time when you will eat a hole through it. All I fear now is that Escondo will return before you do it."

Roused by that fear of the Wild Ox the Piute attacked the door again.

Yet it was slow and disheartening work.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WILD BILL'S REAPPEARANCE.

A roar of delight broke from old Nomad, when, hearing hoofbeats, he looked up and saw Wild Bill Hickok coming to join Buffalo Bill's party.

Wild Bill swung his hand in answer to that roar. Then every member of the scout's party cheered.

"Idt iss like der deadt haf come pack to life!" shouted the German.

"Er, waugh! Et's a sight fer sore eyes!"

"Wild Bill, by all that's pleasant!"

The man from Laramie drew rein before them, apparently as happy as a boy out on a picnic; he was smiling, his eyes were sparkling, yet his face was pale, and under his broad hat was a bandage covering the yet unhealed wound made by the bullet of the gambler who had shot him.

"I couldn't stay in the hospital any longer," he explained; "the doctors were so good to me, and I was gaining flesh so fast, that I feared I would get fat. Nomad, you old cimiroon, how air ye? Shake, baron! Cody, give me your fist. Glee-ory, but it's good to see you all once more. Where-away air the Indians?"

Buffalo Bill had with him only Nomad and the baron. The trooper who had brought news of the Chiricahua attack on the soldiers had departed, to carry the information to Santa Fé. The Indian trailers—where were they?—Buffalo Bill did not know.

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So he told the man from Laramie, explaining rapidly the situation.

"It's the Apache failing," said Wild Bill; "you can't depend on any of the rascals, so long as ye're working against Apaches. But the Piute will show up all right, depend on it; though it may be he has got into trouble, as he is staying so thundering long."

"Hickok, ower luck vill now shange," said the baron.

"Well, I'm hopin' so, baron."

"Since you haf come, I mean. Idt iss der vun t'ing vot haf been missing."

"I'll admit that we are four mighty good men, Schnitz."

"Cody iss six men all by himselluf; so dot magkes nine, not goundting der Inchuns."

"We'll not count them till we know where they are. What you up to now, Cody?"

"I suppose you feel equal to campaigning, Hickok?" the scout asked.

"Do I? Try me."

"You look pale."

"It's a failing of the family—the thing that makes us noted for our beauty; you won't find that my heart is pale, or my trigger finger. So you can heave ahead with whatever you're up to."

"We've been trackin' round, sizin' up things," said Nomad. "We've beat out as many trails through this hyar bresh as would be made by a colony o' jack rabbits."

"Except that the long-legged critters don't live in colonies! What ye opened up?"

"Buffler has already about slung et all ter ye—all that's important. Now we're tryin' ter git clost enough up ter

ther Chiricahuas to find out what we kin do, ef any-thing?"

"No news of the governor?" Hickok asked.

"Not a word," said Cody.

"That's bad; I'm afraid the old chap has gone under. They wasn't talkin' about much of anything else, there in the hospital. It's a mighty bold hold-up game, when a bandit party ketches up as big a man as the governor of the territory and hikes for the hills with him. They've been trying to make Escondo's pal, who is in jail, give up the secret. But I reckon he don't know it. Anyway, he hasn't surrendered any information. This Escondo is a wise guy."

"The woman with him is even smarter."

"I reckon you're right there; she is sure a wonder. Think of it! A little while ago she was just a servant there in the governor's household; now she is helping to defy the troopers and the people of the whole territory."

"She was the accomplice of Escondo even then," said the scout; "but no one knew it."

"How far off do you calculate this Chiricahua camp may be?" asked the man from Laramie.

"That's what we're trying to find out; and at the same time trying to keep out of danger."

"I figgers that we'll hit et afore night, ef we keeps a-movin'," said Nomad.

"What you going to do, when you do hit it?"

"We don't know," the scout answered. "But my present idea is to get into communication with the Chiricahuas and try to convince them that they are doing a foolish thing in taking the side of the Wild Ox and the treacherous Pueblos; and that they are even more foolish

in permitting the Pueblos to commit crimes disguised as Chiricahuas, and lay it on them."

"That ought to ketch 'em, even if they've got no more sense than a fool hen."*

The trail the scout and his pards had been following was the one made by the Chiricahuas in their retreat, after their smashing attack on the camp of the troopers.

It led, plain as a pike staff, toward the Chiricahua country of northwestern New Mexico. Its openness seemed almost a defiance, as if the Chiricahuas knew they would be followed, but did not care. If read aright, it proved them to be in an angry and defiant state of mind.

"We'll find them in the mountains, or along the headwaters of the Rio," was Wild Bill's guess, when asked for his opinion. "Old Fire-top is at the head of the Chiricahuas, I think, Cody."

"Yes; and a good fighter. I met him once, over at Uncompagre; and if I could get a talk with him now I might do something."

"Ther trouble's going ter be," avowed Nomad, "that as soon as they see us they'll be jumpin' fer our ha'r; it'll be a fight, an' a tork arterwards, if anybody's left able ter tork."

They had gone on with Wild Bill for three hours or more, when they discovered Indians on foot, running toward them.

"Waugh!" Nomad rumbled. "What's et mean?"

*The "fool hen" is a grouse of the Rocky Mountains. When a flock of them takes to a tree, frightened by the hunter, he can kill them all, one at a time, if he is careful to shoot the lower one first. The shot and the fall do not alarm the others, unless one is shot at or near the top and drops down through the flock. The grouse gets its popular name from this peculiarity.

"I think they are our Apaches, and have sighted us," was the answer of Buffalo Bill.

"You haf der rightness uff idt," assured the baron.

When the Indians broke clear of the scrub through which they had been dodging there could be no longer a doubt that they were the three Apaches who had departed with Little Cayuse.

"Waugh! Et's Yuppah, Chappo, an' Pedro. An' I warn't lookin' fer Chappo ter come back et all whilst this trouble war on," said Nomad. "Et's clean proof thet suthin's gone wrong with 'em."

"I am nodd seeing der Biute!" said the baron, staring hard.

"'Cause he ain't thar."

"Dey haf lefdd him?"

"Mebbyso, baron. But soon we'll know all erbout et. They're somin' like a perairie fire."

The three Apaches came forward at a rapid Indian run now, sure they had been seen and recognized, and that the white men would not fire upon them.

To understand why the Apaches had left the camp of the Chiricahuas requires a glance backward over a few hours of the previous night and morning.

What Chappo had heard Little Cayuse declare to the chief and medicine man had taken deep root in his mind.

Little Cayuse having been driven out of the camp by the Wild Ox, who had tried to shoot him, the thing had kicked up a tremendous row in the camp, and gained the Wild Ox much ill will; as his crazy bullets, though aimed at the Piute, had gone raking through more than one of the lodges, endangering squaws and children.

Whether or not Little Cayuse had been hit by any of

the bullets Chappo did not know, but he had gotten away. Chappo's sympathies were with Little Cayuse, his chief, whom he had obeyed now a long while, and for whom he had conceived a genuine affection, even though at times in handling the trailers the Piute had been angrily rough. In a measure, the attack of the Wild Ox on the Piute was an attack on Chappo, the Piute's friend and follower.

Having left the medicine lodge, Chappo found the other Apaches who were in the Chiricahua camp, and, taking them aside, he talked with them about what had happened.

He told them what the Piute had charged against the Wild Ox.

They came to no decision, except that they were angered against the outlaw. They found, too, that many of the Chiricahuas were angered against him. The Apaches helped to spread the story, which was already being scattered, that the Wild Ox was the white man who had killed the Chiricahua hunter and brought about the present trouble.

Having been set going, the suspicion was like the rolling snowball, increasing all the time. The only thing which kept the Chiricahuas from crediting it outright was its source. They knew that the Piute was an enemy of the Wild Ox; and—he was a Piute. Might he not have lied?

But while the Chiricahuas were merely talking, the three Apaches acted. They seized the Wild Ox near the edge of the village, and made a dash with him out of the camp, aided by the darkness.

The Wild Ox had been walking round the brushwood defenses with Francisco and Tonopah, the Pueblo leaders.

The Pueblos were knocked down when the Wild Ox was assaulted and seized.

In this reckless movement the Apache scouts were stirred not so much by a desire to aid Buffalo Bill, and injure his foe, as by a wish to serve the Chiricahuas.

They realized that if what was said about the Wild Ox was true, he was an enemy of the Chiricahuas, had murdered the Chiricahua hunter, and was using both the Pueblos and the Chiricahuas for his own selfish ends. Therefore, by a short cut of reasoning, they reached the conclusion that the way to serve the Chiricahuas and stop the bloody strife that seemed coming between them and the white men was to get the outlaw out of the camp and deliver him over to Buffalo Bill.

They made a courageous and really great play for this end. And if they could have had horses they would have succeeded.

Francisco and Tonopah gave the alarm at once, bellowing lustily to the Pueblos; so that within two minutes after the desperate Apache had broken over the brushwood line with their struggling prisoner, Pueblos and Chiricahuas were in pursuit.

Some of the leaders came upon the Apaches in the darkness beyond the brushwood, where the outlaw was making a desperate struggle to keep from being bound and carried farther.

They rushed the Apaches, and scattered them, and rescued the bandit.

He was badly shaken and bruised when they got him back into the camp. The three Apaches had got away. The next day they rejoined Buffalo Bill. Though they brought no prisoner, they brought a great deal of news that promised to be valuable. But the one item of in-

formation the scout hoped for was absent—they did not know what had become of Little Cayuse.

After being taken back into the village, the Wild Ox was carried to the medicine lodge, for the ministrations of the medicine man, who had real skill in surgery and in the dressing of wounds.

Into the medicine lodge came the chief, Fire-top, after the warriors and gossips had been sent away.

Fire-top stood looking at the white man, as the medicine man gravely fingered the bumps and bruises on his head; some of the paint had been scraped away, so that Escondo presented a ridiculous appearance.

"Is it not time," said Fire-top, in his poor Spanish, "that the white man should cease to wear the paint and feathers of the Chiricahuas? Who has given him that right? If I go among white men and dress myself like them, and play white man, do I not make myself a laughing matter for even the white men's children? Indian paint and feathers for the Indian; white man's clothing for a white man."

Escondo tried to make Fire-top believe that the paint and feathers were worn as a mark of friendship for the Chiricahuas.

"Why are the Pueblos feathered and painted as Chiricahuas?"

"For the same reason," replied Escondo.

"But if Pueblos who are painted like Chiricahuas attack and burn a wagon train, then are not Chiricahuas blamed for it?"

"The Pueblos at that time were not painted as Chiricahuas," said Escondo, startled by this.

"Then some of the Pueblos tell lies, for Fire-top heard one of them say it was so this night."

"He lied!" said Escondo.

Fire-top fixed on the painted face of the white man his burning black eyes.

"Will the white man answer one question truly?"

"Yes. I will answer every one so."

"It is this: Did the white man kill the Chiricahua hunter? It is being so reported."

"It is a lie!" said Escondo. "He was killed by white troopers."

"How does my brother know that?"

"It was told me."

"The white man did not kill the deer hunter?"

"No."

"I wanted to know, for there comes at my heels the deer hunter's brother. He is to ask you that question!"

He swept aside the flap of the medicine tent, and the brother of the deer hunter killed by Escondo stepped inside, facing the outlaw.

What he said came also in questions, and covered the points canvassed already by the chief; but Escondo denied the murder as strenuously as before. He could see, however, that his words left a doubt still in the mind of this warrior.

"The faces of the Chiricahuas are turning away from the white man," said the medicine man, when the chief and the brave had departed. "I give him this warning."

"You have turned against me, also?"

"Yes, if he killed the deer hunter; no, if he did not."

Escondo was much disturbed when he left the medicine lodge. As he went forth he saw that suspicious and angry glances were cast on him by warriors standing about the camp fires. These angry looks might soon take the shape of angry deeds.

Troubled, he went to the lodge which had been assigned to the woman. She was tired, and had lain down, but had not slept. No more than an hour before Escondo had been captured by the Apaches she had returned with him from the long ride to the cave in which Little Cayuse had been left as a prisoner with Governor Mendoza. There were too many things on her mind to permit her to sleep.

"It is you?" she asked, when he shook the lodge skins and called in a low tone.

She appeared at the opening, her face still an Indian red, so that she resembled one of the braves as she peered out at him.

"I must have a talk with you," he told her.

Forthwith he proceeded to set before her what had been said to him by the chief and the brother of the slain hunter, together with comments on the looks of the Chiricahuas.

"If their suspicions but leap to certainties," she said, "then we cannot get away."

"That is what I begin to fear."

"But if we go, where shall it be? You told me that the Indians were our last refuge."

"I spoke of the Pueblos, not the Chiricahuas. But you are still safe."

"Is my danger not as great as yours?"

"No. But I wanted you to know. I will still look about, and shall get warning to you in time, if there is need. Better secure some sleep now."

"Sleep!" she cried. "Who could sleep? I have not had one good hour of sound sleep in a week."

"It is true, this is no place for a woman. I have been thinking of that."

"Yet you have just said there is no other place for me, except with the Pueblos!"

"I was about to say, that since we saw Mendoza and secured that last letter from him, which I have here, we ought to get one of another character; one that would bring us money. Could we not have him write a letter to his friends and the people of Santa Fé, saying that ten thousand dollars must be raised and paid for his release? If we received the money we could get out of this accursed country together. I know a place in Mexico—a small village, where we could be safe forever. We could remain there until the chase was over, and then go elsewhere if we liked; and the money would keep us. Besides, I have a few hundred dollars hidden away, that we could use. Think it over."

"What is the good? If we can get out of here, with money, or without, I am ready to try it."

She went back into the lodge after a while, and Escondo stole away, moving about the camp like an uneasy spirit.

Everywhere he went he saw, or thought he saw, indications of the growing feeling of distrust of him; and he felt that his stay in the Chiricahua camp must be short.

"They are like dogs now, merely snarling; in a little while I shall feel their teeth."

He was even more convinced that this was so when one of the Pueblos told him that Chiricahua scouts had been sent out, whose business it was to visit the spot where the deer hunter had been slain, and endeavor, by scanning the ground there, to determine whether the story that the hunter had been killed by him was true or false. The party which had set out was guided by the brother of the slain deer hunter.

"You can hear the squaw of the dead hunter wailing now," said the Pueblo informant. "And his body is still, with others, in the village unburied."

"They say hard things against me?" asked Escondo.

"They say that if it is true that you killed the deer hunter they will seize you and put you to the torture."

"But the Pueblos would not permit it?"

"We would fight to prevent it," said the Pueblo, "yet we are but twenty men, and the Chiricahuas number more than a hundred warriors. What could our twenty do against a hundred?"

"Where is Francisco and Tonopah?" Escondo asked.

"At the lodge which Tonopah occupies."

When Escondo saw them, and talked with them, they were not more encouraging.

"I think," said old Tonopah, "that my blood brother will do well if he gets soon out of the Chiricahua camp. We can take him to the Pueblo village at Taos."

"But I could not stay in it forever! And the woman? What is to become of her?"

"If he chooses not to go there," said Tonopah, "we could hide him in the hills somewhere. It might be well, if he chose for that purpose the cave where he holds the white governor."

Escondo did not tell them that with the governor there now was the Piute trailer, Little Cayuse.

An hour before daybreak Escondo left the Chiricahua camp, riding toward the hills swiftly through the darkness. He had removed his paint and Indian clothing, and was once more the white gambler known as the Terror of Taos.

"I will get that order for the money," he had said to the woman; "and then, if we secure the money, we will

leave this country altogether. Besides, I am uneasy, since we left that Indian in the cave with Mendoza. He was not bound. And, though the cave is strong, the rascal might find a way to get out. That would spoil everything."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PIUTE AND THE OUTLAW.

As often as Little Cayuse desisted from his attack on the door, he returned to it, after a brief rest, smashing and chipping away with his light hatchet. It was a frail weapon for such work, yet he made some progress.

Pasquale Mendoza encouraged him, calling cheering words through the Stygian darkness of the cave.

"It is too bad you have not a candle," he said; "you could get along faster, and the light would be a pleasure."

"You savvy where candle?" asked the Piute.

"I am sorry to say I do not. I think there is none here. Escondo brought that piece which was here when you came, and I fear there is no other."

None could be found, though the Piute rummaged a good deal when he was not chopping at the door.

"Little Cayuse git out, go find Buffalo Bill!" he said.

"You will get out by and by. Just keep at it."

Before daylight came Little Cayuse had chopped a hole in the door that he could get his hand through.

It let in light, as soon as that came, reviving the hopes and strength of the governor in a wonderful manner.

It also had the effect of stimulating the Piute to increased exertions, so that the blows of his little hatchet resounded now continuously. By sunrise he had a hole big enough to let his body through.

He poked out his head, and took a survey of the sandy arroyo and the near-by cliffs. He saw nothing to alarm him.

The fact that a way out of the prison was now open, which he could not use because he was chained, threw Pasquale Mendoza into a very fever of nervous excitement.

"As you cannot aid me, and I cannot aid myself, do not tarry here," he urged; "but locate the American scout as soon as possible. Failing in that, ride straight for Santa Fé, and tell Colonel Diamond and the people there."

The thing he feared was the coming of the outlaw while Little Cayuse was trying to do this. If the bandit came, and found the hole in the door, with the Indian gone, would he not change the hiding place of the governor?

"Me no see um caballo," said Little Cayuse, who had been looking for his pony.

"You left him without saddle or bridle on, and not tied, and no doubt he has wandered. We will hope that Escondo did not get him."

Little Cayuse drew his body through the hole, dropped outside, and went in search of the pony.

Half a mile or so away he saw Navi, cropping the grass as busily as if he had not had a mouthful in a week.

Little Cayuse went toward the pony, whistling.

But there came an interruption to his pleasant vision of an easy escape. A horseman rode suddenly around the arroyo bend, and seeing the Piute hurrying toward the pony he gave chase.

Little Cayuse tried to reach Navi by running, but when the man, who was Escondo, began to shoot at him, the Piute turned at bay and drew his revolver.

A lively pistol duel followed, the two shooting as fast as they could pull trigger, while the horse of the outlaw decreased the distance.

Suddenly the Piute crumpled up and slid to the ground.

"The dead Indian will make less trouble than the living one!" said Escondo, spurring his horse on.

But he approached cautiously, his revolver ready. He had known of men playing possum, only to draw the foe close within range and then shoot him down.

But the Piute never stirred.

When Escondo dropped down beside the Piute he saw that Little Cayuse was not killed, nor even seriously wounded; the bullet had raked him along the side of the head—a close call, but not a fatal one.

The outlaw stood staring down at the limp figure, hatred glaring in his eyes. He lifted his revolver, at first intending to put a bullet through the Piute's body. But a second thought stayed him.

"He may be worth more to me living than dead," he said. "There are two chains on Mendoza; one I can take off and put it on this Indian. Then it will not matter if he has gophered a way out, neither of them can use it. I can let Buffalo Bill know that I have his Piute as well as the governor; that may hurry in him the idea that it will be well if the ten thousand dollars is sent me without delay."

As the Piute was unconscious, the only way to get him back into the cave was to carry him; and to that end the outlaw loaded the senseless body on his horse, then mounted and held it before him, while he set the horse in motion.

But his dream of holding the Piute as well as the governor came to a quick and sudden end.

He had hardly set his horse in motion when around the same bend of the arroyo whence he had appeared came a body of horsemen.

They were Buffalo Bill and his pards and the three Apaches who had joined them.

Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill were well in advance of the others, and they rode straight at the astounded and frightened outlaw.

Turning his horse about, Escondo tried to make an escape. But he clung too long to the Piute; his thought in doing so being that he could still use him.

The scouts came up so rapidly that escape was not possible.

They yelled at him to surrender.

There was a short and stirring chase.

Then Buffalo Bill's lariat pulled the Taos Terror from his saddle.

Both outlaw and unconscious Indian came to the ground together.

The outlaw whipped out his revolver, which he had been drawing when the lariat noosed him; but he saw that the scout had the drop on him, and that the same was true of Wild Bill.

"Put up your hands and surrender!" the scout shouted to him.

With that lariat tightening about him, and the revolvers threatening him, there was nothing else that Escondo could do.

His hands flew above his head.

"I surrender!" he called in Spanish.

"Keep him in that healthy frame of mind, Hickok," commanded Buffalo Bill; and went out of his saddle, to the aid of the Piute.

Before Little Cayuse was brought round, and the Terror of Taos felt the tight cords on his wrists, the other

members of the party came up, arriving at a swinging gallop.

Nomad was whooping; the baron stuttering out a swarm of German ejaculations expressive of his delight. The Apaches were apparently as pleased. Though they had failed in their attempt to capture and get off with the Terror of Taos, here he was, snugly in the toils; so that what they had tried to do had been accomplished after all when Cody took a hand in the game.

Old Nomad was talking, for the benefit of the Piute, when the latter came back to himself.

"Ef't hedn't been fer findin' ther trail o' yer pony, I reckon we wouldn't been in this hyar identical spot jes' when we war. But soon's we seen them hoof marks o' Navi we reckernized 'em, and guessed that you hed been on his back. 'Twar plum bewilderin', though, ter find yer headed in this direction, with other pony tracks showin', like's ef you hed been follerin' 'em!"

Little Cayuse did not have much to say; he felt weak and sick, and looked it. But suddenly he roused himself.

"You savvy um cave?" he asked.

"Not so's ter mention et," Nomad told him.

"You no savvy um governor's cave, heh?"

"Er, waugh! Do yer mean thet ther governor is helt in a cave somewhars?"

"Me find um cave," said Little Cayuse.

"Waal, whar is et?"

Little Cayuse pointed.

"Idt iss rightd py us, heh? Ve voller our noses packward, unt ve shall see idt?"

Little Cayuse, growing excited, tried to explain more fully; but Nomad and the baron set off, and were joined by Buffalo Bill.

Wild Bill and the Apache trailers remained behind with the outlaw prisoner.

It did not take the scout and his companions long to locate the cave in the arroyo. Before them was the door, with the hole in it chopped by Little Cayuse. On the ground outside was a pile of chips and splinters.

"Waugh! Looks like a stun door, but et's wood!"

The baron began to tear up dry grass for a torch, and the scout struck a match and lighted it.

When they thrust the torch through the hole, a cry came from the governor, in Spanish, asking if they were friends.

"Waugh! Er, waugh!" whooped Nomad.

"Idt iss somepoty alife?" cried the baron.

"My guess is," said the scout, "that it is the governor."

The trapper being the slimmest and smallest man there, they helped him through the hole; then gave him a twisted grass torch to explore with.

He located the chained prisoner at once, and ran to him.

"Whoop!" he yelled. "Et's shore him; an' tied up wi' chains and junk ginral. We'll need chisels an' a blacksmith's anvil to git him loose, I'm guessin'."

"If Escondo put him here, we'll make the scoundrel free him," said Buffalo Bill.

When Escondo was brought up he was made to open the door; then was forced to unlock the shackles he had put on the governor.

Escondo was apparently a much subdued man; as he could not deny the things he stood charged with, he did not try to, but pleaded the justification of necessity.

Mendoza was almost too thankful for his release to do justice to his feelings toward the prisoner. Only once did he blaze forth upon him with vituperative energy:

at which time he assured him again that if ever he got him back to Santa Fé he would spare nothing to bring him to the gallows.

Buffalo Bill and his pards were delighted with the rescue of the governor, whom they had almost begun to think dead. And they were unsparing in their praise of the brave Piute.

Little Cayuse was hardly in a condition to rejoice with them, owing to that bullet rake along his head; he had intervals of sickness and dizziness, and some time passed before he felt strong enough to sit on the back of Navi, which animal had been captured and brought up by Nomad.

The reports which had reached Santa Fé had caused Colonel Diamond to take the field at the head of all the troopers available at the army post.

This force was encountered by Buffalo Bill's party on the same day, after the capture of Escondo and the rescue of the governor.

Diamond was moving against the Chiricahuas, having received reports of the location of their camp. He was overjoyed to meet Cody's party, and to see the governor alive and well.

He admitted that he had given the governor up as dead.

He had Little Cayuse brought before him, and praised him, thanking him, and promising him a liberal reward. The Piute's head showed a bloody bandage, and he still looked weak.

"Me Piute trailer, git thirteen dollars!" he told the governor. "Pa-e-has-ka's trailer."

He seemed to think he needed no other reward.

Diamond had an interview, in the presence of Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill, with Escondo, the outlaw.

"It is no use for me to ask mercy," the outlaw admitted; "so I am not asking it. But I do ask it for the woman who has been with me. The governor knows that until she took up with me she was a good woman. So charge all that against me; and let her go, when you have her."

But Maria Xavier was in the camp of the Chiricahuas.

Guided by the scout's party, Colonel Diamond's troopers moved now toward the Chiricahua stronghold. The Apache trailers were sent out as scouts, even though it was not known just how far they were to be trusted. Buffalo Bill was inclined to trust them fully, since their recent actions had apparently proved their fidelity.

Now and then one of them came in, with a report that Chiricahua scouts had been seen. So it was known that the Chiricahuas were receiving information of the advance of the troopers.

"Ther thing ter look out fer now," said Nomad, in warning, "is Apache trickery. A Chiricahua kin think of more traps an' tricks in a minute than a white man kin in a day."

When the Apache trailers announced that the Chiricahua camp was near, Buffalo Bill called them about him. Little Cayuse was out of the game, so he told the others he had to trust them to help him.

Then he spoke directly to Chappo.

"You are a Chiricahua," he said, "and the Indians in the camp are Chiricahuas, with Pueblos. I want you to go into the camp now, and tell Fire-top and the medicine man that we are here; but that we have not come to fight the Chiricahuas. Tell them we want the Chiricahuas to

go back to their village, and send the Pueblos to theirs; if it is done there will be no fighting. All we shall ask is that they surrender to us the white woman who is in the camp."

"It is letting the Pueblos off easy," Diamond objected.

"Indians cannot be treated like white men," the scout urged. "For instance, suppose we demand the surrender of the Pueblos who attacked the wagon train. I admit that every one of them ought to be hung, or imprisoned; for they protected Escondo, and killed white men. Yet if we take them—supposing we could do so—and carry them to Santa Fé, we should then have to fight the whole pueblo of Taos, and perhaps literally wipe it out before peace was brought. As I see it, this is a question of choosing between two evils."

Colonel Diamond agreed to this, after it had been talked over at length.

The only voices raised against it were those of Nomad and the baron, who grumbled merely, because the prospect of fighting and wild excitement seemed vanishing.

The scout demanded of Chappo if he would do this—carry the message to the Chiricahuas, and return with their answer.

"If not," he said, "I shall have to send Little Cayuse, bad as his condition is."

"Me go!" the Chiricahua told him.

"S'pose they holds 'im thar?" suggested Nomad.

"It's a risk we must take," the scout answered; "but I don't think they will do that."

Chappo flung himself on his pony and rode away.

When he came near the line of the brushwood defenses he took good care to sit very erect, that the Chiricahuas

might recognize him by his head feather and general appearance.

The plan worked. In a short time two Chiricahuas rode out to meet him.

He told them what he wanted—to see the chief and the medicine man; and that a strong force of troopers was not far off, awaiting the result of his efforts.

The Chiricahuas knew that the troopers were near.

So they took Chappo into the camp, and conducted him before old Fire-top. Then the medicine man was called, and Chappo told them the character of his errand.

A number of Chiricahuas and Pueblos had gathered round, so that what Chappo said about the capture of Escondo and the release of the governor from the cave became quickly public property.

The news created much excitement among the Pueblos.

Before Chappo could get out of the camp, Maria Xavier came up to him. She had discarded her Indian paint and blanket, and was again the cavalier. But she had lost something of the old fire that slumbered in her dark eyes. Now she was decidedly pale and anxious.

"Is it true," she asked in Spanish, "that Pedro Escondo has been captured?"

"Me no savvy," said Chappo, staring back at her.

She repeated it in English.

"Ai!" he answered. "Wild Ox all same git ketched."

"You saw him?"

"Ai. Wild Ox with Pa-e-has-ka."

Tears came to her eyes.

"I feared it," she said, as if speaking to herself; then she turned and walked away.

The chief and medicine man were preparing to go out and meet Cody and the troopers. The camp was in a

great stir of excitement and was noisy with talk. Off at one side the Pueblos were gathering together, as if to discuss what they should now do; and the Chiricahua trailer saw the woman join them.

The time was near sunset when Fire-top and the medicine man rode out of the camp on their gayly decorated ponies, accompanied by Chappo and half a dozen armed braves. Behind the brushwood defenses the other Chiricahua fighting men were gathered, ready to resist an attack, or guard against treachery.

The Pueblos were still consulting among themselves, having the woman in their midst.

Once clear of the brushwood, the Indian ponies were straightened out in a wild lope, that took them quickly over the ground intervening between the camp and the resting place of the troopers.

Chappo gave his Chiricahua halloo as they approached.

Then Buffalo Bill appeared, with Wild Bill, Colonel Diamond, Nomad, the German, and some troopers, to meet the Chiricahua delegation. With them they brought out their prisoner, Pedro Escondo, the notorious Wild Ox, that the Chiricahuas might have visible proof that he had been taken, and was now held.

As Buffalo Bill had previously met Fire-top, the talk that followed was barren of much time-consuming ceremony. The scout spoke straight from the shoulder, impressing the Chiricahuas with his earnestness and honesty.

He told them that the Pueblos had been disguised as Chiricahuas when they attacked and destroyed the wagon train; and he made plain why the thing was done, showing it was their desire to protect the Wild Ox, and to get arms and ammunition with which to defend him. The

scout also declared that the act of the Pueblos in disguising was to have the blame thrown on the innocent Chiricahuas.

Fire-top and the medicine man heard this impassively, so far as any outward show of feeling went.

But at its close they asked the privilege of questioning the prisoner.

Escondo was brought forward, and faced the Chiricahuas.

Fire-top demanded to know of him if the story that he had killed the Chiricahua deer hunter was true.

The outlaw again denied it.

The little group of Indians and white men, some distance in advance of the troopers, surrounded by brushy ground, was now suddenly, in the gathering dusk, attacked by Pueblos, who seemed, in their first rush, to be painted Chiricahuas.

The Pueblos had left the Chiricahua camp, claiming to be in a huff; then they had circled round rapidly; and, sneaking through the brush, had made their assault with the intention of rescuing Escondo from the white men.

The fight that followed was so fierce, of a hand-to-hand character, and the aroused courage of the Pueblos so energetic, that the white men were forced back.

They tried to cling to their prisoner and take him with them.

In the midst of the uproar the cheers of troopers, coming to the aid of their friends, rang through the air.

Buffalo Bill had Escondo's horse by the bridle, pulling it along; while Wild Bill, the personification of a fighting man, his hat off, showing his bandaged head, swung in behind the scout, both revolvers working, as he tried to defend this retreat.

The end came suddenly, in the fall of Escondo, by the bullet of one of his Pueblo friends, who, in trying to shoot Buffalo Bill, missed him, and killed the outlaw.

Seeing that the outlaw was dead, Buffalo Bill sounded a retreat, seconded by Diamond, and the little party fell back, being instantly supported by the troopers, who now charged.

But the Pueblos vanished as quickly as they had appeared, taking the body of Escondo.

In the wild scrimmage the Chiricahuas, with their chief and medicine man, were separated from the party of the scout, but rejoined them as soon as the fighting was over.

Some of the Pueblos had been killed, and a trooper, while several of the scout's party showed wounds. But the slain Pueblos had been dragged away by their comrades.

It being the opinion of the chief and medicine man that the Pueblos might retreat into the Chiricahua camp, they rode away now, to prevent it, their anger against the Pueblos being thoroughly aroused.

But the Pueblos did not fall back into the camp.

They scattered in the gathering darkness, those having ponies scurrying off as fast as they could ride.

The Pueblos got together after the fight, having the body of the dead outlaw, and the bodies of the Pueblos slain, and made haste in the direction of Taos.

They had lost what they had been struggling for, in the death of Escondo. But the woman was still with them, and they resolved to give her protection. From the standpoint of faithfulness, there can be much said in their praise, though they were exercising this good quality in a wrongful manner, favoring outlaws.

Maria Xavier seemed bewildered by the death of Escondo.

It was through love of this bold man that she had joined him. She had dreamed much, since his talk, of that village in Mexico, whither she might go with him, and live in security as his wife.

Now the dream was destroyed at a blow. She had thrown herself away, and the one for whom she had sacrificed everything was dead.

Her grief and bewilderment were so stunning that for a long time she said nothing, as she sat on a mount given her by the faithful Pueblos, and rode with them through the night, one of them leading the pony by a line from its hackamore.

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Even this Maria Xavier gave no heed to.

By hard riding the mounted fugitives contrived to get into the Taos pueblo on the second night following their defeat and flight. Those left to make the journey on foot came sneaking in at intervals.

The trading town of Taos knew nothing of their arrival, for the mounted Pueblos put off their feathers and paint and came in silently in the darkness. When they were admitted into the pueblo they disappeared.

Maria Xavier was given a small room apart from others, apparently underground, and she was assured by Francisco and Tonopah that she could remain there indefinitely, and she would be secure. The room could not be found, they said, even if the white men forced the pueblo and searched for it.

When the friendly Pueblos had given her this assurance and had gone, leaving food and water for her, the broken-hearted woman arose, said her prayers kneeling by the little cot in the corner; then took the gold bracelet she had kept and deliberately put it on her wrist.

She closed it with a jerk, then made it snap, driving the poisoned needle into her flesh where the throbbing pulse showed the flow of the life current.

Having done that, she got into the cot, and drew the covering up over her face.

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Buffalo Bill led the troopers to the pueblo of Taos, and with Colonel Diamond there demanded the surrender of the Pueblos who had been engaged in the recent trouble, and also that they give up the woman, Maria Xavier.

Six of the venerable Pueblos of the place came out to meet them, and hear their demands. Old Tonopah was one of the six.

"We do not understand you!" said the venerable Pueblo.

Buffalo Bill and the colonel repeated their statements and demands.

"But there is some mistake here," said the white-haired

Pueblos. "For this thing cannot be. No Pueblos have gone out with arms in their hands to fight. A few are away, trading and selling wood. The others, as you can see for yourselves, are in the fields, watering the crops, and hoeing. If you like, we will show them to you."

"But the woman?" was insisted.

"No woman not a Pueblo has been here."

"You honestly declare that?" was demanded.

"We do not need to make strong declarations, or weak ones; we simply know not what you are saying. It would not be meet for a white woman to be living with Pueblos."

"And you deny that fighting men have been out from this pueblo?"

"Go into the fields and see. The Pueblos are there, doing their work. We have not time to fight. Our crops and our herds occupy all our thoughts. The white men are mistaken."

Buffalo Bill and the colonel, with their companions, went into the little fields, finding them marvels of husbandry and efficiency in their small way. They were divided into tiny squares, each carefully tended, and as carefully irrigated from the stream which flowed near by.

As he went about among the toilers, Buffalo Bill came face to face with Francisco, who had dropped his revolver for a clumsy hoe, and had shed his warpath feathers and paint for the more sober garments of a field worker.

Buffalo Bill stopped the Pueblo's work to question him, but Francisco looked him blankly in the face.

He turned to another Pueblo standing near, pretending not to understand what the white man had said, and asked an interpretation of it.

"He does not know anything of what you say," said the interpreter.

"His name is Francisco?"

"Yes, his name is Francisco; but he is a peaceable man, and would not shed blood."

"I have seen him in Santa Fé."

"That may be; for he goes there at times to sell wood and other things."

"My Indians saw him in the camp of the Chiricahuas!"

The interpreter repeated this placidly to Francisco.

The latter lifted himself, leaning on his hoe, his face blank, his eyes wide with apparent wonder.

"He says," explained the interpreter, "that the white man has had bad dreams; it must be so, as he knows nothing of these things. Francisco has been at work in the fields all of the time you say he was elsewhere. So how can it be?"

The white men were baffled.

"Er Pueblo, when he wants ter play innercent," said Nomad, "can go some. I has hed experience."

"I think we have had experience, too—eh, Diamond?" said the scout.

"I don't see what we can do!" said Diamond.

"We might do this," Buffalo Bill suggested; "take Francisco to Santa Fé and give him a trial on the charge of murder and robbery."

"Where are you witnesses?" Diamond asked.

"I'm afraid we haven't any. The Apaches and the Piute saw him in the camp of the Chiricahuas."

"But they saw him commit no crime. And on trial, it would be hard to prove that it was this same Francisco, for there, you recollect, he was painted and dressed like a Chiricahua, while he could bring dozens of his Pueblo

friends to testify that he has not been away from the pueblo. So, you see, the case against him would fall to the ground."

"It is even worse, so far as any of the other Pueblos mixed up in the thing are concerned," the scout admitted.

"Yes; this seems to be one of those peculiar cases in which, though it is known that certain men are guilty, nothing can be proved against them."

There was much talk in Santa Fé of proceeding against the Pueblos with force, but it came to nothing.

When police officers were sent with warrants to search the pueblo for Maria Xavier they were given access to the place, and told to search everywhere; that she was not there.

It was indeed true—she was not there. But her body at that moment lay buried under the floor of one of the lower rooms.

Beside her was laid the body of the man for whom she had given up everything—the outlaw, Wild Ox.

THE END.

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